

Unity in Goals, Diversity in Means

– and the discourse on female
peacekeepers in UN peace operations

Kari M. Osland, Jenny Nortvedt and Maria Gilen Røysamb



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Visiting address: C.J. Hambros plass 2d
Address: Postboks 7024 St. Olavs Plass
0130 OSLO
Internet: www.nupi.no
E-mail: post@nupi.no
Fax: [+ 47] 22 99 40 50
Tel: [+ 47] 22 99 40 00

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Gilen Røysamb¹

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Summary

Gender parity at all levels in the UN, as a means towards gender equality, is a two-decades old commitment, reflecting core values as old as the UN itself. Despite this, progress on increasing the number of female peacekeepers has been slow and uneven, particularly in uniformed roles – but also in peace processes. This is due to a number of reasons, but in particular a lack of political will, financing and accountability, and resistance to gender equality. We argue that a paradigm shift is needed, both on performance diversity grounds but also on normative equality grounds. To implement already agreed upon benchmarks and resolutions, the UN and its member states need to focus more on the operational value of diversity in fulfilling the tasks at hand, both for national security forces and in peace operations. Gender should be considered a central component in this required diversity. In the current situation where we witness a pushback on support to women's rights; ensuring diversity should not only be considered a key priority, but also a national and international security imperative.

Introduction

2020 marks the twentieth anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) (UNSC 2000), the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and last but not least, the seventy-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the UN.² While meetings to mark these anniversaries are currently on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this landmark year presents an opportunity to take stock of current debates and address the main challenges ahead.

In pursuit of SCR 1325 and the subsequent nine resolutions on WPS³ – as well as UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on Gender Equality (UNGA 2015) – the UN and member states have invested in greater participation, protection, prevention, and gender-responsive relief and recovery in peace operations.⁴ In particular, there has been a focus on greater gender parity, as this is seen as having the potential to enhance the effectiveness of UN peace operations, including efforts to promote the WPS agenda (UNSC 2000, 2015; UN 2006, 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2020a). Important achievements have been made (Tryggestad 2009), with policy guidelines developed⁵ and a number of policies implemented over the years. Gender advisers – most commonly in the form of civilian gender units or gender focal points – are deployed to all

² SCR 1325 was the first UN resolution to recognize the central role of women as change agents in contributing to peace and security (UN 2020b).

³ UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 (UNSC 2000), 1820 (UNSC 2008), 1888 (UNSC 2009a), 1889 (UNSC 2009b), 1960 (UNSC 2010), 2106 (UNSC 2013a), 2122 (UNSC 2013b), 2242 (UNSC 2015), 2467 (UNSC 2019a), and 2493 (UNSC 2019b). For an overview of other UN documents on WPS, see Security Council Report 2020b.

⁴ To expand on what these four WPS agenda objectives mean in this context: participation calls for women to be able to participate equally with men in peace, political and security decision-making processes at national, local, regional and international levels; protection seeks to ensure that the rights of women and girls are protected and promoted in conflict-affected situations, including protection from SGBV; prevention involves preventing all forms of violence against women and girls in conflict-affected situations, and includes fighting impunity and involving women in conflict prevention; and relief and recovery focuses on meeting the specific humanitarian needs of women and girls, as well as reinforcing women's capacities to act as leaders in relief and recovery (UN 2020b:13).

⁵ Most notably the UN's Policy on Gender Responsive UN Peace Operations (UN 2018c) and the UN's Resource Package on Gender Equality and WPS (UN 2020b).

multi-dimensional peacekeeping missions in order to guarantee gender perspectives are integrated across peacekeeping functions (UN 2020a). In addition, the mainstreaming of gender has also included ‘focal points and the establishment of gender units; the integration of gender perspectives into policies, plans, standard operating procedures and other guidance; and targeted training of peacekeeping personnel on the relevance of gender concepts and how to apply to their work in the mission’ (Caparini 2019).⁶ Notably, a majority of these are civilian – rather than military or police – tasks and achievements. There has also been movement on the protection pillar, especially related to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) (Karim and Beardsley 2017).

Despite these positive developments, progress has been slow and uneven. In the so-called Global Study of 2015, which assessed implementation of the WPS agenda after 15 years,⁷ the main explanations given for lack of progress were lack of political will; institutional resistance and attitudinal barriers to gender-equal transformation; and shortfalls in financing and accountability (Coomaraswamy 2015; Stamnes and Osland 2016; Frölich 2020:3; Tryggstad 2016). Progress has been particularly slow in terms of gender parity, which represents a means of achieving greater gender equality.⁸ Women remain significantly underrepresented in UN peace operations. In 1993, women constituted just 1% of deployed uniformed personnel, rising in 2019 to 4.4% of military personnel and 11.15% of police personnel (UN 2020a). In terms of civilian personnel, the number has been at a standstill for the past ten years (in fact decreasing from 29.8% in 2008 to 28.2% in 2018) (Smith and Tidblad-Lundholm 2018; UN Peacekeeping 2020a).⁹ Furthermore, ‘there is an inverse relationship across the system between seniority and women’s representation – the higher the grade, the larger the gap in gender parity; the gap to parity is wider in the Secretariat than the rest of the system at all levels; and the most stark and difficult to address gaps persist in peace operations’ (UN 2017:6). The UN has set ambitious goals for greater gender parity in the military and police branches of missions, with targets for 2028 including a minimum of: 25% female military observers; 15% women in military

⁶ Gender mainstreaming generally refers to the integration of gender perspectives at all levels, with the aim being gender equality (UNGA 2000). For a number of in-depth discussions on gender mainstreaming, see Chapters 7–9 in Olsson and Gizelis (2015).

⁷ Initiated by SCR 2122 (UNSC 2013b).

⁸ Gender equality entails ensuring the same opportunities are available to both genders to contribute to, and benefit from, all spheres of society. Gender parity is a statistical measure involving female-to-male indicators, such as income and education.

⁹ An exception is female participation in political missions, where numbers have increased in the past ten years (Smith and Tidblad-Lundholm 2018).

contingents; 30% female individual police officers; and 20% women in formed police units.

In this working paper we seek to shed light on a three-fold question. First, what are the common assumptions and debates regarding the advantages of female participation in peace operations? Second, why, despite significant efforts, does progress remain slow when it comes to achieving greater gender equality, particularly in terms of increasing the number of female peacekeepers (in uniformed roles especially)? And third, moving forward, which strategy will be most effective in terms of increasing numbers and promoting equality?

To answer these questions, we rely on March 2020 survey data, supplemented by empirical research findings from the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON).¹⁰ Survey respondents were selected based on strategic sampling followed by the snowball method (Bleich and Pekkanen 2013:87), which resulted in the survey being distributed to 229 people. Of these, 80 provided answers (a 35% response rate). We approached people from the EPON who have worked in peace operations and/or written extensively on peace operations in general, and the WPS agenda in particular. In addition, we approached a number of national armed forces personnel who have been deployed internationally, as well as military and police advisers who have worked in UN delegations in New York. The latter also provided access to relevant networks on this topic, including practitioners, policy-makers and academics. Finally, we contacted the Norwegian Police Directorate, which helped us identify relevant police officers – both men and women – who have served in UN peace operations. The gender breakdown of respondents was 49% female and 51% male. In terms of country of origin, 31% of respondents were Norwegian, with the rest coming from various other countries. 74% of respondents had experience working in a UN peace operation – when asked which category they belonged to, 37% answered military, 31% answered police, and the remaining 32% answered civil position. Of those who had not served in a UN peace operation, the majority were academics (76%), with the remainder made up of policy-makers (19%) and practitioners (5%).¹¹

In Part I, we explore the common assumptions and debates surrounding the advantages of female participation in peace operations,

¹⁰ For more info, see: <https://effectivepeaceops.net>.

¹¹ Two methodological caveats should be mentioned. First, the survey captures both assertions and experiences, making it challenging to distinguish between the two. Second, 31% of respondents were Norwegian, meaning it could be argued that the findings reflect a more Global North perspective.

before presenting relevant findings from the survey. In Part II, we take stock of assumptions regarding the challenges or barriers to female participation in UN peace operations, before again presenting the relevant survey findings. In Part III, we provide further in-depth discussion of our findings and possible ways forward, then conclude the working paper with a number of policy recommendations.

Part I: Effectiveness and the ‘added value’ of women

Several studies and policy reports have emphasised the lack of evidence supporting the presumed link between female representation and effectiveness, which has contributed to normative arguments and empirical findings becoming confused (Jennings 2011; Baez and Utas 2012; Solhjell 2014; Ghittoni et al. 2018; Nagel 2019a; Rupesinghe, et al. 2019; Wilèn 2020). Furthermore, some argue that the current discourse on demonstrating effectiveness places additional expectations and a higher burden of proof on female peacekeepers, and should be abandoned altogether (Wilèn 2020).

Assumptions on the added value of women

The most cited argument for increasing female participation in UN peace operations is that it boosts the overall effectiveness of a mission (Olsson and Tryggestad 2001; Bridges and Horsfalls 2009; Bertolazzi 2010; Sharland 2019; UN 2019). Central to this claim is that increased female participation may lead to better protection of civilians, especially women and children (UN 2017, 2019; Bigio and Vogelstein 2018; Sharland 2019). Female peacekeepers are also perceived as having better outreach to local communities, thereby contributing to more effective mandate implementation (Sharland 2019) and greater understanding of conflict drivers (Ghittoni et al. 2018). In this regard, it is claimed that in order to have a tangible effect, women should be deployed in roles involving high levels of engagement with local communities (IPI 2019a; Sharland 2019). There is growing consensus that female participation contributes to lasting peace following conflict (Simić 2013; Krause et al. 2018). This is reinforced by the literature on female participation in peace processes (and was the main conclusion of the 2015 Broadening Participation research project), which stresses that placing women in key positions – rather than merely increasing their number – is critical (Paffenholz et al. 2015; Krause et al. 2018; Council on Foreign Relations 2019). Furthermore, it is argued that female peacekeepers provide better assistance to victims of sexual violence than their male counterparts, and increase the number of instances reported of sexual and gender-based abuse (Bertolazzi 2010; Puechguirbal 2010). Finally, a female presence at checkpoints has been credited with promoting a less confrontational atmosphere (UN 2019).

A second argument for increasing the number of female peacekeepers deployed is that this results in greater attention being given to gender equality in the mission itself (Dharmapuri 2013), and may also have a positive impact on gender equality in the host country by incentivising local women to engage in the political and security sectors (IPI 2019b; Sharland 2019). Supporting this argument, emerging research has shown that the presence of women's protection advisers in a UN operation correlates with a higher probability of the host country subsequently adopting a legal framework and political strategy aimed at preventing SGBV (Karim and Beardsley 2017). Whether this is caused by an increase of female peacekeepers per se, or merely by the focus on SGBV in the mission, is unclear (Ghittoni et al. 2018). In a related manner, research indicates that peace agreements signed by women contain a higher number of provisions aimed at political reform (Krause et al. 2018), and furthermore that female participation in peace negotiation processes increases the probability of durable peace after conflict (Paffenholz et al. 2015; Council on Foreign Relations 2019).

Assessing effectiveness

When assessing the impact of female participation in UN peace operations, a number of points should be considered. First, it is difficult to distinguish between impacts resulting from the operation itself and those that are due to external factors (Osland 2014).¹² Even more problematic is measuring the isolated effect of female peacekeepers (Osland 2015) – not only do women on average constitute less than 5% of peacekeepers (UN 2018b:3), they work across different units and so constitute no coherent element. Second, postulations on women's added value rely in part on assumptions of how female peacekeepers act, as well as what they aspire to achieve in conflict contexts and peacekeeping operations (Simić 2013; Fröhlich 2020). For instance, several scholars find that some female peacekeepers – as is the case with their male counterparts – join peacekeeping forces due to career and income possibilities, rather than being motivated by the goal of liberating local women in conflict (Bertolazzi 2010:13; Sion 2019). Third, Rupesighe et al. (2019) highlight that gender may not be the determining factor in operational effectiveness, pointing to findings from Heineken (2015) that show the relationship between female peacekeepers and local communities is context-specific, and often dependent on factors other than gender – such as an ability to speak the local language and respect

¹² More overarchingly, those who focus on effectiveness in peace operations usually either look at the concept according to a narrow, functionalist reading of the mandate (and habitually, the result is more positive); or look at effectiveness more broadly, promoting stability and preventing relapse into conflict (with more mixed results) (Osland 2014).

for local culture. Fourth, absolute numbers can be misleading, as women in security forces may be serving in support positions (Solhjell 2014:12; Coomaraswamy 2015:14).

In addition, it is necessary to differentiate between the number and recruitment of civilian personnel – which is a UN responsibility – and police and military contributions from member states. In the field, military and police units are placed under the operational authority of the UN Head of Mission, but are not under UN command. All military personnel deployed as UN blue helmets are members of their own national armies who have been seconded to work in UN operations. This is also the case for all deployments to UN police (UN 2020a).

Survey findings and EPON case examples

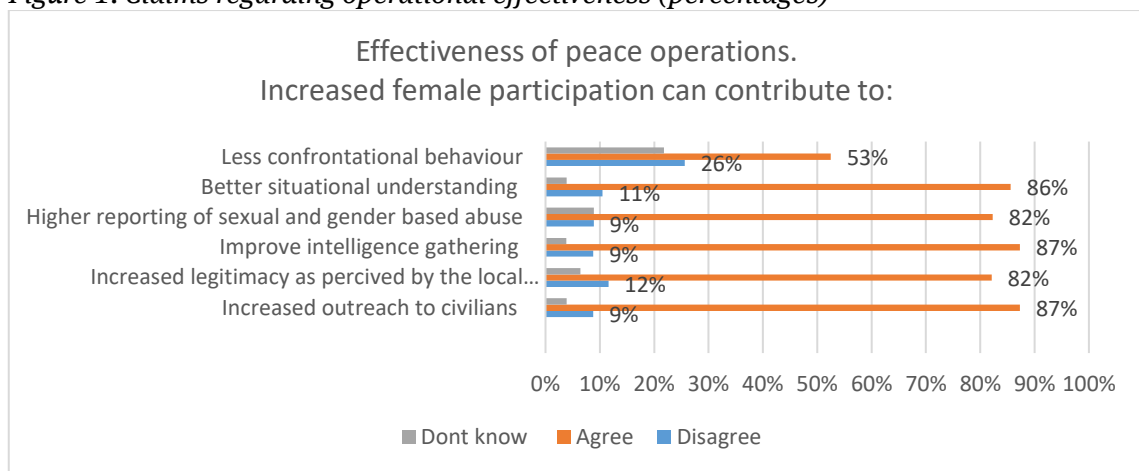
The survey reveals overwhelming support for the WPS agenda, with 91% of respondents agreeing that SCR 1325 is important.¹³ When asked why, five themes emerged, with respondents arguing that female participation: 1) contributes to the overall effectiveness of missions; 2) may empower local women; 3) contributes to a greater focus on gender equality; 4) better reflects the host population; and 5) brings different perspectives to the mission. Moreover, several respondents emphasised that meaningful participation matters more than numbers alone, and that the agenda is important in directing efforts aimed at addressing discrimination. Despite such acknowledgements, however, several respondents stressed that the WPS agenda is often poorly operationalised; that it may become a box-checking exercise rather than addressing the specific objectives at hand; and that emphasis varies considerably between missions.

Respondents were also asked their opinion on the operational effectiveness argument. Here, a clear majority confirmed that women contribute positively to: better outreach to the local community; increased legitimacy as perceived by the local population; better intelligence gathering; higher reporting of sexual violence; and better situational understanding (for all these statements, 82–87% of respondents answered on the positive end of the scale). The same high percentage was not reflected in responses to the statement that women

¹³ A survey of Norwegian police in international peace operations from 1989 to 2016 yielded similar findings (Osland 2017), with respondents expressing that female officers get easier access to the local community, especially women, and increase the level of trust the community has in the police. Beyond arguments related to operational effectiveness, many also noted that the agenda is vital to raising awareness of gender equality and avoiding gender stereotypes.

behave less confrontationally, with only 53% answering on the positive end of the scale.¹⁴ Particular emphasis was placed on the key role of female peacekeepers in community outreach, especially towards women and children in internally displaced person (IDP) camps, who are among the most vulnerable groups in conflict-affected societies. Interaction with the local community was highlighted as a sensitive issue, as local women are not necessarily allowed to interact with male peacekeepers. This heightens the need for peacekeeping operations to reflect the host population.

Figure 1. Claims regarding operational effectiveness (percentages)¹⁵



Despite these acknowledgements, important nuances can be seen. Respondents emphasised that due to contextual differences between missions, and varying levels of attention given to the recruitment of female officers and gender mainstreaming, it can be difficult to make generalised claims. Others underlined that the questions presuppose that female peacekeepers are trained and supported by enabling systems. In this regard, several respondents stressed that they were hindered from fulfilling their tasks due to inadequate training and follow-up systems, with some noting that once in the field they were left to their own devices. Others pointed out that arguments related to operational effectiveness assume that female peacekeepers can fulfil

¹⁴ The percentages for female respondents agreeing to the statements were higher than for male respondents, the exception being the statement relating to confrontational behaviour. Notably, due to small N, significant differences are difficult to detect.

¹⁵ Respondents were asked to rate the statements on a scale of 1–6, ranging from a low to a high degree of agreement. A score of 1–3 is here reported as ‘disagree’, while a score from 4–6 is reported as ‘agree’.

tasks independent of contextual differences, which is often not the case.¹⁶

These nuances are illustrated in several case studies undertaken within the EPON in 2018 and 2019. For instance, while the study of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) finds anecdotal evidence that female peacekeepers are more effective at gathering information from conflict-affected communities, as well as negotiating in difficult situations, the ‘added’ value of female peacekeepers may not materialise due to security risks (Day et al. 2019). Similarly, in the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the highly insecure environment creates a ‘community outreach gap’ due to the risks associated with physical engagement (van der Lijn et al. 2019).¹⁷ This underlines that the impact of peacekeepers – whether male or female – is conditioned on a number of variables, including cultural restrictions, difficulties in reaching local communities, lack of mandate provisions, under-resourced gender units, and context-specific challenges (de Coning 2019; van der Lijn et al. 2019; Novosseloff et al. 2019).¹⁸

Respondents were also asked to rate statements concerning the claim that female participation in peace operations contributes to the promotion and implementation of the WPS agenda, both within the operation and in the host country. A majority of respondents (80–87%) answered on the positive end of the scale when asked if the presence of women’s protection advisers increases focus on gender-based violence, and if increased gender equality visibility in a mission has a positive impact on gender equality in the host country. Research from the EPON study of MINUSMA also points in this direction, noting that greater integration of the WPS agenda followed initial critiques of the mission’s efforts in this area (van der Lijn et al. 2019). Through its Gender Unit, in cooperation with local UN agencies, MINUSMA increased female participation in the peace process by facilitating the establishment of a separate committee composed of women. The committee helped women’s groups establish their priorities for future implementation of the Algiers Agreement. The Gender Unit also supported a platform of

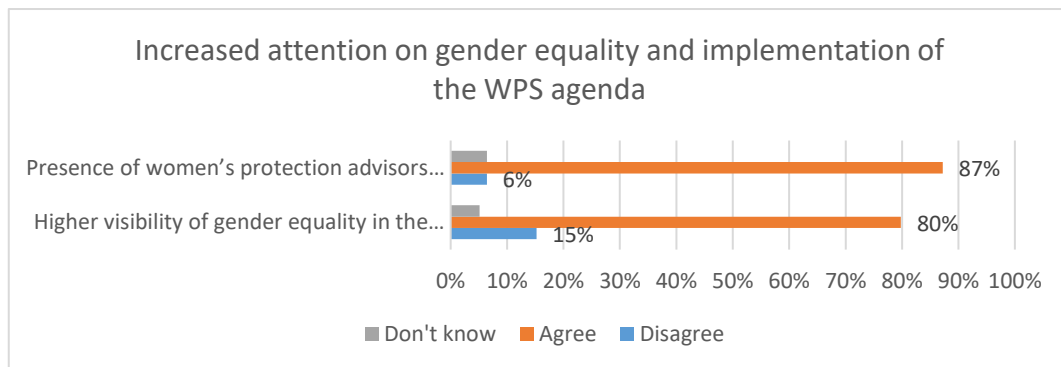
¹⁶ Alchin et al. (2017) find similar tendencies in a case study of South African women peacekeepers.

¹⁷ In the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), the physical bunkerisation of the mission has also created a distance between the mission and local civilians (Williams et al. 2018).

¹⁸ These findings further support the argument that, in order to have a tangible effect, women need to be deployed in roles with high levels of local community engagement (IPI 2019a; Sharland 2019).

women’s groups, which was drawn from across the country, in drafting a list of recommendations to presidential candidates prior to the 2018 elections (van der Lijn et al. 2019).

Figure 2. Claims regarding promotion and implementation of the WPS agenda (percentages)



Though the focus of this working paper is peace operations, we also included survey questions on female participation in peace processes. Despite several UN missions being mandated to support national peace processes – for example, UNMISS – there seems to be an unfortunate disconnect between peace processes and peace operations in the research literature. This was confirmed by the survey, with many respondents voicing a lack of familiarity with the role or influence that women’s organisations have in peace processes prior to or during peace operation deployment. While some among those acquainted with the topic noted that women’s organisations play a key role, others observed such organisations are simply not heard or are excluded from the strategic and national level. Answers were also mixed in response to the question of whether the presence of women or women’s organisations in a peace process (or lack thereof) affects subsequent peace-operation work related to the WPS agenda. Exploring this point, one respondent mentioned that the focus of their mission was on the protection pillar, rather than participation. Another stated that the implementation of the WPS agenda depends on resources and individually driven initiatives, again leading to women’s organisations having varying degree of involvement. The findings are supported by the EPON study of UNMISS, where inclusion of women in the peace process has been a chronic problem in the South Sudan context (Day et al. 2019).

Part II: Barriers to female participation

Assumptions on barriers

Most barriers to female participation in peace operations can be classified into four main categories: 1) eligible pool; 2) deployment criteria and training; 3) security/risks; and 4) practical barriers in the mission. These categories are based on the broad WPS peacekeeping literature, including the Barrier Assessment Methodology by the Elsie Initiative (2018–22).¹⁹ Below, we discuss these four categories in greater depth, before presenting the survey findings.²⁰

Eligible pool

Female participation in peace operations depends to a large extent on the eligible recruitment pool, which is in turn dependent on the policies and recruitment strategies of troop and police contributing countries (T/PCCs). The slow progress in increasing female uniformed personnel is, therefore, often associated with member states' forces containing low numbers of women. Karim and Beardsley (2017), for example, find a correlation between low numbers of female military personnel in member states' national forces, and corresponding low deployment rates of female military personnel to UN operations.²¹ The largest T/PCCs to UN operations are from the Global South, while uniformed personnel from developed countries – which primarily supply financial and logistical support – are often relatively few (Rupesinghe et al. 2019).

Recruitment, deployment criteria and training

General peacekeeping deployment criteria – for example, number of years of experience, possession of driving licence or weapon-handling

¹⁹ In 2017, in response to the lack of concrete knowledge on the main barriers to female participation, as well as the need for better tools and strategies to overcome such barriers, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau launched the Elsie Initiative (2018–22). As part of this initiative, a project called the Barrier Assessment Methodology was established.

²⁰ Some of the barriers are identified by DCAF and Cornell University. For more information on their upcoming research, see: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/assessing-barriers-and-opportunities-women-s-participation-peacekeeping>. This was initially based on the so-called Baseline Study, identifying 14 barriers (see Ghittoni et al. 2018).

²¹ They did not find the same correlation with police contributions.

skills – may further limit female participation due to a lack of relevant training (Coomaraswamy 2015), despite well-trained personnel being a focus area of the 2018 Action for Peacekeeping Declaration (A4P). Furthermore, anecdotal reports of corruption in UN deployment nomination and selection processes in several T/PCCs point to another potential barrier to recruitment (Pyman et al. 2013).

Security/risks

Some argue that a focus on combat skills in deployment criteria may discourage women from applying, while harsh conditions may deter TCCs from sending women on these types of missions (Beardsley and Karim 2015; Cold-Ravnkilde and Albrecht 2016; Karim and Beardsley 2013). Several of the regular TCCs have, for example, avoided deploying women to the UN mission to Mali (Cold-Ravnkilde and Albrecht 2016). Furthermore, while female military peacekeepers constitute approximately 5% of personnel assigned to operations involving ongoing conflict in the operational theatre, this proportion rises to over 10% in most non-combat operations (UN Peacekeeping 2020b).²²

Practical barriers in the mission

The working environment and practical barriers inside specific missions – particularly related to discrimination, type of work and facilities – constitute another set of barriers. There have been substantial reports of unequal and discriminatory treatment of deployed female peacekeepers, often based on gender stereotypes (Karim and Beardsley 2017; Ghittoni et al. 2018). Furthermore, women are often restricted to civilian work, administrative tasks or work related to preventing or responding to gender-based violence. For instance, despite a female police officer being an experienced investigator, she may be forced to work on sexual assault and female engagement. Such ‘access barriers’ potentially prevent female peacekeepers being given the opportunity to utilise their experience and skills in suitable roles (Dharmapuri 2013; Karim 2016). Although there have been improvements over the past 20 years, there are still practical barriers concerning facilities and equipment within specific peace operations. In addition to a lack of policies aimed at assisting those with family responsibilities, some operations lack the

²² Of the 13 currently ongoing UN operations, four have a high degree of conflict (MINUSMA, MONUSCO, MINUSCA and UNMISS). These missions are made up of between 4.84% and 5.26% female military personnel, and also have the highest total number of military personnel. Of the remaining nine UN peacekeeping missions, five contain between 11.16% and 30% female military personnel (31 January 2020). For more information see: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/gender>.

physiological and biological facilities required to better accommodate female peacekeepers (Pruitt 2016; Ghittoni et al. 2018).

Survey findings on barriers

Based on a list of barriers to female participation in peace operations commonly cited in the literature, respondents were asked to mark the three they considered the most critical.²³ The following were given most emphasis:

1. Lack of gender equality in the country they come from.
2. Stereotypical gender roles.
3. Eligible pool: low number of women available for combat roles.

Respondents stressed the importance of attitudes and cultural perceptions – one, for example, claimed that in some contributing states there is a ‘lack of acceptance per se’ for female peacekeepers. Another observed that overcoming such barriers must start with enhancing enabling systems back home, and in order to do so ‘the country’s leadership must see the added value of deploying more women’. Another theme emphasised by several respondents was a need for better outreach – encouraging, assisting and motivating competent women to apply. Finally, respondents highlighted that the obstacles at hand vary between contributing countries and mission contexts. While establishing enabling conditions back home was seen by many as a prerequisite to increasing the number of female peacekeepers, measures are not necessarily ‘one fit for all’. Here, it should be noted that prioritisation of key barriers differs between women and men, with 73% of male respondent marking ‘eligible pool’ as a key barrier, compared to just 42% of female respondents. Moreover, 31% of female respondents marked ‘protective measures aimed at shielding women from hardship positions’ as a key barrier, compared to only 17% of male respondents. Based on the key barriers identified, respondents were also asked to provide recommendations for achieving greater female participation in UN operations.

²³ The list was as follows: eligible pool; deployment criteria; household constraints; inadequate accommodation and equipment; stereotypical gender roles; social exclusion; lack of gender equality in the country they come from; lack of female participation in the recruitment process; lack of female participation in the making of the mandate; lack of female participation in the peace process preceding deployment of a UN operation; protective measures aimed at shielding women from hardship positions.

The recommendations presented include the following:

1. Conditions in the field must improve.
2. Obstacles at the national level must be addressed.
3. Deployment criteria should be reconsidered.
4. Recruitment processes must reflect the diversity of tasks.
5. Look at the announcement text with a gender equality lens.
6. Recruiting female officers for leader positions is essential.
7. Incentives (financial or other) for countries to deploy female peacekeepers.
8. Create a network for women to exchange experiences.
9. Focus more on equal/unequal participation instead of female/male.

Part III: Discussion of findings and way forward

Twenty years have passed since the unanimous adoption of SCR 1325, with the WPS agenda contributing to a global commitment to gender equality – at least on paper. While it has been subject to criticism (Solhjell 2014; Väyrynen 2004; Frölich 2020), it was the first resolution ‘to explicitly acknowledge the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and girls and the undervalued contributions of women in international peace and security’ (Caparini 2019).

Our study has aimed to shed light on the debate surrounding the advantages of female participation in UN peace operations, as well as why – despite significant efforts – progress continues to be slow in achieving gender equality (and, as part of this, gender parity), particularly in uniformed roles. Furthermore, we asked about strategies for tackling these obstacles and moving forward. While a survey of this kind cannot prove the added value of female peacekeepers, it does show that the WPS agenda is regarded as vital among peacekeepers and practitioners, for reasons both of improving effectiveness and enhancing visibility of the WPS agenda. This is an important observation in itself, as it narrows the gap between commonly repeated assumptions in the literature and the assertions of those who have actually served in UN operations.

The survey findings also stress that investing in enabling systems allows both women and men to perform better as peacekeepers. Also noteworthy from the survey and empirical evidence is the suggestion that greater gender parity and gender mainstreaming in a mission can contribute to promoting the WPS agenda in the host country. This includes increasing the number of women in the peace negotiation process, as seen in Mali. While female participation in peace negotiation processes and in peace operations are commonly treated as two separate knowledge fields, the findings denote that – when context allows – greater emphasis should be placed on their interconnectedness.

A paradigm shift is needed. More women in UN peace operations are needed, both on grounds of normative equality and diversity performance. Achieving this will require both ongoing political will and long-term financial commitment. Furthermore, the discourse must shift

from a focus on proving the added value of women, to instead emphasising the operational value of diversity.

Changing the discourse from ‘added value’ to diversity

As mentioned above, the discourse of having to prove the added value of female peacekeepers is problematic for several reasons. First, it is simply not possible to methodologically prove this ‘added value’. Second, it places an additional burden of expectation on female peacekeepers. Third, despite dominating the discourse for a long time, it has led nowhere. Fourth, it serves as a useful tool for those opposing change. What, then, are the arguments for focusing on diversity?

While recognising the contested nature of promoting normative global standards, and notwithstanding contextual differences, it is clear that – with equal training – both men and women can fulfil tasks equally well. Furthermore, they may even complement each other in a number of roles. Diversity is the keyword, and offers a means of highlighting the full range of skills at the disposal of women and men, irrespective of their sex. While diversity may refer to a geographic region, it also encompasses other identity markers, such as ethnicity, religious orientation and linguistics – particularly when it comes to underrepresented groups (UN 2017:8). Due to their underrepresentation in peace operations and peace processes, women are often talked about as a minority. Even Security Council resolutions often mention women and children simultaneously, as if they were without agency – implicitly assuming all men are potential aggressors (Frölich 2020:5–6). We believe this confuses the debate, and so we want to be clear: women should *not* be conceptualised as constituting a minority group or a special interest group.

Research show that diversity – in general terms – is an advantage, and that people from different backgrounds bring new information and provide alternative viewpoints, leading to better decision-making and problem-solving (Phillips 2014). Moreover, research has demonstrated that diversity in any organisation is an asset, and that gender-diverse teams make better decisions (Larson 2017). Diversity has also been proven to have a significant effect in the context of peace operations. In their study, Bove and Ruggeri (2015) conclude that ‘the level of diversity in the composition of a peacekeeping operation makes a substantial impact on the protection of civilian lives’. As emphasised in the UN’s System-wide Gender Parity Strategy: ‘Greater diversity is directly correlated in both public and private sectors with significant gains in operational effectiveness and efficiency. This is particularly important as the UN is being asked to do more with less while increasing impact’

(UN 2017:5). More research is needed on how gender diversity improves effectiveness – in particular through comparing organisations and sectors where workforce diversity is present with those where diversity is absent.

In most countries, the security sector – in particular the military – tends to be one of the most conservative when it comes to gender diversity (Woodward and Duncanson 2017). While exceptions exist, most countries' military recruitment campaigns involve traditional depictions of the soldier as war fighter, rather than focusing on the diversity of skills needed.²⁴ Yet, while combat operations may indeed represent the military *raison d'être*, few of those who become professional soldiers will ever perform warfighting. – the exception being those deployed in international interventions, most notably non-UN operations.²⁵ Of the 13 current UN peacekeeping operations, only four involve ongoing conflict within the mission's operational theatre (MINUSMA in Mali, MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MINUSCA in the Central African Republic, and UNMISS in South Sudan).²⁶ Even here, a combination of factors – including a strong emphasis on the safety of the personnel – means that many peacekeepers rarely if ever perform war-like operations.²⁷ This relates to the 'Christmas tree' discussion, where the mandates and therefore number of tasks to be performed have expanded (Security Council Report 2019). While the tasks carried out in a peace operation used to be relatively clear-cut, with a mostly homogeneous group of soldiers

²⁴ For examples from Sweden, Australia, Switzerland, Germany, Vietnam, Chile, France and other countries, see:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNPD56qAh48&list=RDCMUC4sN86UmKt7pFu_NaiJ7ZdA&index=2. Canada serves as a prominent example, see: <https://forces.ca/en/careers>.

Norway's latest campaign seems to fall between the two extremes:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=YNPD56qAh48&list=RDCMUC4sN86UmKt7pFu_NaiJ7ZdA&index=2. See also: www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0TC-Zrybng.

²⁵ There is an inherent paradox here. Though at a national level, the more 'traditional' image of a soldier is the 'combat soldier', the opposite is true for UN peacekeeping, where being a 'traditional peacekeeper' implies monitoring rather than enforcing (i.e. Cyprus rather than Mali). This is, though, not the case for other international deployments that Norway, for instance, has been involved in, which in recent decades has been through NATO or ad hoc coalitions.

²⁶ For an overview, see: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/where-we-operate>.

²⁷ Furthermore, there is an extremely uneven distribution of such responsibilities/restrictions between Western and non-Western T/PCCs. This is the reason why in some missions, such as MINUSMA in Mali, people speak of the 'skiers' (those who are mostly inside the camp, coming from the Global North) and the 'bare footers' (those who put themselves at risk by performing more dangerous parts of the mandate, coming from the Global South).

performing similar tasks, this is no longer the case. Instead, the mandates and tasks involved in multi-dimensional peace operations are beyond complex, requiring diverse backgrounds and skillsets.²⁸ Gender is a part of this required diversity. Hence, in attempting to achieve gender parity, UN member states should place greater emphasis on the range of tasks and responsibilities inherent to peace operations – and national security forces – and the operational value of diversity in fulfilling these tasks.²⁹

As illustrated by the survey findings, some female officers are hindered in fulfilling their tasks either due to conflict dynamics or insufficient training and follow-up systems. Several female officers reported being left to their own devices once in the field. Thus, while we argue that diversity represents a strength in means, it also requires enabling systems that take diversity into account. As noted by the UN's System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity: 'messaging and outreach are also factors – external women appear to not apply for peace operations missions because they understand them as military rather than civilian spaces. This is reinforced by UN messaging and policies which treat the field as an all-male location. However, mission contexts in fact provide important opportunities and attractive benefits for all staff ... Addressing both objective factors of working conditions being scaled up and targeted outreach and recruitment along with better messaging, will need to address the challenges of parity in missions' (UN 2017:38). In focusing on the commonly prescribed arguments in favour of increasing the number of female peacekeepers, we have not emphasised the costs associated with greater gender parity. Changing recruitment strategies in order to increase the number of female peacekeepers; putting in place enabling systems for both women and men in the field; ensuring toilet facilities and gynaecologists are in place within mission units – all these are investments that demand political backing and financial support.³⁰

²⁸ See, for instance, the Handbook on United Nations Multidimensional Peacekeeping Operations (UN Peacekeeping 2003); UN Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines (UN Peacekeeping 2008); Oxford Handbook on UN Peacekeeping Operations (Koops et al. 2015).

²⁹ It should, however, be noted that nowhere are people recruited into the armed forces via peacekeeping. People make a career within a military or police force, and one option some may be given in the course of their career is to serve in a UN mission. This is a privilege and an opportunity offered to a very small percentage.

³⁰ Survey respondents were asked to identify the main barriers to female participation and provide recommendations in order to increase numbers. Several stressed that conditions in the field (e.g. gynaecologists) had to be improved.

The need for political will and financial backing

A growing number of UN member states are starting to question established standards of women's rights and the global commitment to gender equality. This is also happening within the UN Security Council, where the permanent members have recently struggled to find common ground on the agenda. In April 2019, UN SCR 2467 on conflict-related sexual violence became the first WPS resolution not adopted unanimously (Taylor and Baldwin 2019; Security Council Report 2020a). Adding to this is the COVID-19 pandemic. While it is too early to take stock of the full ramifications of the outbreak and the inevitable global economic recession that will follow, it is likely to shape aid budgets, the UN peacekeeping budget and the priorities of member states. The total number of uniformed peacekeepers is currently down to 80,000 and likely to drop further in the coming years due to financial and political pressures on peace operations.

This may have negative consequences in terms of the WPS agenda, with gender equality potentially regarded as a second-tier issue when set against other pressing issues (Osland et al. 2020). However, if the UN insists that all units have a minimum percentage of women, or provides incentives to those that meet such targets, then countries contributing to UN peace operations will be motivated to recruit more women domestically and in doing so may apply affirmative action instruments. Thus, in the short-to-medium term, the focus should be on implementing the WPS objectives not yet achieved, while defending existing accomplishments against further pushbacks. In the long term, work must continue on removing the various barriers to female participation.

To conclude and reiterate: we need more women in UN peace operations, both on grounds of normative equality and performance diversity. In increasing the number and seniority of women, it must be clear this is a means towards greater equality and diversity, which in turn leads to better performance and enhanced effectiveness. Furthermore, while diversity represents strength in means³¹ – referring to the multiple tasks men and women alike perform in modern peace operations – a simultaneous and ongoing emphasis on the UN delivering better as 'one UN' is needed. This requires more coherent and system-wide, yet context-sensitive, approaches in the field. Finally, the

³¹ On 19 April 2019, in an open debate in the UN Security Council on Women Peacekeepers, the German Federal Minister of Defense, Ursula von der Leyen, said that 'women are no better peacekeepers than men, but they are different – and this diversity is strength' (UN 2019).

discourse on gender equality and diversity should be refocused, in order that the ‘added value’ argument no longer dominates discussion.

Recommendations for the UN and member states

General recommendations:

- In order to avoid further pushback, implement the WPS objectives not yet achieved and defend the accomplishments made.
- Stress that gender parity is a means to achieve gender equality and diversity, which in turn enhances operational effectiveness.
- Make greater efforts to link peace processes and peace operations – with a strong gender focus in both.
- Be more assertive in insisting on a higher percentage of women in all categories, with T/PCCs that meet such targets getting the first choice of deployments.
- Shift the discourse away from having to prove the added value of women, and instead focus on diversity as a means of improving mandate implementation.

Recommendations regarding recruitment and enabling factors:

- Focus on the diverse skillsets needed to fulfil mandates.
- Ensure that messaging and outreach make military or police positions attractive for all.
- Recruit leaders who value diversity and inclusion.
- Increase the number of female leaders in military and police services.
- If needed, apply incentive structures and affirmative action in order to ensure diversity.
- Facilitate greater diversity through improving conditions in the field, thereby ensuring an enabling environment.

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Kari M. Osland, Senior Research Fellow at NUPI, heads the Peace, Conflict and Development Group. Osland's work focuses predominantly on conflict dynamics, insurgencies, peace operations and peace building. Her geographical focus areas are the Balkans and the Sahel.

Maria Gilen Røysamb, Junior Researcher in the Peace, Conflict and Development Research Group at NUPI. Røysamb holds a master's degree in Political Science from the University of Oslo. She wrote her thesis on state repression and civil conflict prevention.

NUPI

Norwegian Institute of International Affairs
C.J. Hambros plass 2D
PB 7024 St. Olavs Plass, 0130 OSLO, Norway
www.nupi.no | post@nupi.no

Jenny Nortvedt, Junior Research Fellow in the Peace, Conflict and Development Research Group at NUPI. Nortvedt has a master's degree in Political Science from the University of Oslo and wrote her thesis on small states' influence in the UN Security Council.

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