

OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN PEACEKEEPING: POLICY SERIES

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The Duty of Caring

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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.

This policy brief explores the issue area 4 of the MOWIP methodology, titled "Household Constraints", through the lens of care work. Its aim is to outline policy actions that security institutions in Troop and Police Contributing Countries (TPCC) should adopt as part of their duty to peacekeepers who struggle with the unequal division of care work, and which acts as a barrier to gender equality within peacekeeping.*

Introduction

In the MOWIP methodology, *Household Constraints* measures the extent to which **caring responsibilities**** are addressed by security institutions to support the meaningful participation of women in peacekeeping.

Initial findings from MOWIP reports show that Household Constraints are a recurring and significant barrier to women's meaningful participation in peacekeeping. This is unsurprising given that, globally, women assume three-quarters of the unpaid care work and on average dedicate three times as much time as men to it.¹

What is surprising is that security institutions perceive this issue to be outside their purview, particularly as it can result in instances of harm*** to the institution, to their personnel and their communities.

As this policy brief argues, **addressing caring responsibilities must be a priority for countries that, in contributing to gender equality, strive to improve women's meaningful participation in peacekeeping.** Security institutions demonstrate a duty of care towards staff with caring responsibilities by adopting policies and practices that:

- Promote an equal division of caring responsibilities among men and women
- Support staff with caring responsibilities to improve meaningful participation in peacekeeping
- Engage security institutions in advancing equitable peace and security

The investment required by such efforts carry rewards that extend far beyond supporting individual peacekeepers to advancing gender equality and more effective ways of keeping, building and sustaining peace.

BOX 1: Key concepts

Care has been increasingly acknowledged as a priority issue in Gender Equality agendas. Security sector institutions, like many other sectors, need to address care work to advance gender equality. These key concepts can provide an entry point into the discussion for the security sector.

* **CARE WORK** is a term that describes the range of activities we do for ourselves, and others, that are essential to everyday life. The term gives credence to the argument that care work is in fact labour, and not simply “help”. Care work is driven by the action of “caring” as a practice, a value, and/or an ethic.

** **CARERS** perform essential tasks, unpaid and paid, during short-, medium-, and long-term periods. These tasks include cooking, cleaning, laundry, organising community life, raising a child, caring for elderly or sick relatives, etc.

** **CARING RESPONSIBILITIES** is a term that acknowledges the essential (usually unpaid) activities that carers perform for themselves, and others, in response to a specific need.

*** **HARM** is a term that describes injury to wellbeing of individuals, communities or institutions.

1 Charmes, J., (2019). The Unpaid Care Work and the Labour Market. An analysis of time use data based on the latest World Compilation of Time-use Surveys. Available at: www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms_732791.pdf

The Problem

Security institutions have made substantive efforts to recruit women to their ranks, but efforts have been stymied due to a widely held social expectation that it is women's responsibility to provide care for others. One reason why men have been able to fully participate in peacekeeping operations is that care work was not expected of them.

MOWIP assessments show that when peacekeepers deploy, spouses or family members absorb their caring responsibilities, sometimes on top of their paid work. As a result, a specific type of harm is done to family members in the form of time poverty and reduced participation in paid work. For women who want to deploy, caring responsibilities can and do deter them from pursuing or extending deployment opportunities. This is harmful to their career – and to the institution, as it diminishes their return on staff training and recruitment, impairs a diverse workforce, and undermines institutional commitments for gender equality.

It is not unusual for senior leadership in security institutions² to regard care work as a private matter, something that should not encumber the professional sphere. However, this has profound gender implications for peacekeeping, namely:

- It perpetuates an exclusionary view of peacekeeping as “men’s work” and promotes recruitment from a narrow pool of candidates, whose eligibility is bolstered by their “unencumbered” status.
 - MOWIP survey respondents reported that only 50% of surveyed security institutions provide adequate childcare facilities or subsidies for deployed personnel. This means that “encumbered” carers often self-select out of deployment or deploy only if their extended families assume childcare.³
- It promotes a false sense of operational efficacy, suggesting an institution can settle for a less-diverse workforce, with a reduced range of competencies and skills useful to peacekeeping missions.
 - The competencies deemed most useful in peacekeeping missions by MOWIP respondents were *communication* and the *ability to work with other people*. These “soft” or “contact skills”; are care competencies that are increasingly acknowledged as essential for peace operations, but not required for deployment. This discourages men from acquiring contact skills and disadvantages women who are competent in them.⁴
- It shifts the costs of care work to others, contributing to gender inequality at home.
 - Peacekeeping missions rely on the extended family to assume unpaid care work for their staff.⁵ This contributes to care arrangements that perpetuate traditionally gendered dynamics, and can often create harm.
- It discourages men from taking on caring responsibilities and fully participating in their household and/or communities.
 - MOWIP survey respondents reported that mothers are more likely to face harsher judgement when they deploy (69%) than fathers (29%), characterized as “bad mothers”⁶ for making the same career choice as a man.
- It perpetuates a harmful institutional understanding of a *duty of care* which excludes integral wellbeing, dissuading deployees, especially men, from seeking individual care.
 - Despite growing evidence that deployees in isolated and high-risk duty stations are experiencing a higher prevalence of mental health issues than the general population, only 35% of men received mental healthcare while on a UN mission, and 41% of women.⁷

2 As part of the MOWIP methodology pilot implementation, 6 countries and 7 security institutions will be surveyed. At the time of this policy brief, five institutions had completed data analysis. Some of them had signalled or expressed that care and caring infrastructure lies outside of their institutional mandate and capacity, for a variety of reasons.

3 Data-set corresponding to pilot MOWIP country reports that have concluded their analysis at the time this policy brief was written (Zambia Police, Ghana Armed Forces, Uruguay Armed Forces, Senegal Police and Gendarmerie)

4 The Gaming for Peace (GAP) project coordinated by the School of Social Sciences and Philosophy at Trinity College Dublin, is a €2M, EU funded Horizon 2020 project that studies and documents “soft skills” and their role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Their report supports MOWIP findings.

5 Briony Jones & Eleanor Gordon (2021). Not a care in the world: an exploration of the personal–professional–political nexus of international development practitioners working in security and justice sector reform, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*.

6 The question asked was “How much stigma do [fathers]/[mothers] receive for deploying and leaving their kids?”. For mothers, 69% say there is “some” or “a lot of stigma”, while for fathers, 29% indicated “some” or “a lot of stigma”.

7 Di Razza, N. (2020). “Mental Health in UN Peace Operations: Addressing Stress, Trauma, and PTSD among Field Personnel” International Peace Institute, December 2020. Available at: <https://www.ipinst.org/2020/12/mental-health-in-un-peace-operations-addressing-distress-trauma-and-ptsd-among-field-personnel>

The Solution

When security institutions shift their perspective on care work from a household issue to a workforce issue, they become co-responsible with their staff. In establishing policies and mechanisms to institutionalise that support, they fulfill the prerequisites to having an equitable workforce.

BOX 2: Investing in care services

The US Defense Department spends 1 billion USD in childcare, deeming it essential for military readiness.

The investment funds maintenance of centres, 23,000 care workers, and subsidies for parent fees.

Source: Haridasani Gupta, A., 2021. Lessons on Child Care, From the Military. [online] Nytimes.com.

Available at: www.nytimes.com/2021/08/31/us/child-care-lessons-the-military.html

Operationally speaking, this policy brief calls for institutions to go beyond the duty of care and become *caring*.⁸ **Adopting a duty of caring means security institutions create conditions for staff to perform at their best, instead of requiring them to meet a “fitness for hardship” standard.**⁹ For example:

- The Ghana Armed Forces cross-train and rotate men and women in similar proportion across tactical tasks and other essential tasks like cooking and cleaning (which is care work for the mission). Rotation strengthens core competencies and reduces gender gaps in participation.
- The Zambia Police Service offers both maternity and paternity leave. Mandatory parental leave for both men and women enables a more equitable distribution of childcaring responsibilities.
- The Uruguay Armed Forces provide dedicated spaces and work breaks to nursing parents. Providing inclusive infrastructure normalises caring responsibilities in the workplace and promotes continuity in personnel’s careers.

Ensuring that staff with caring responsibilities can meaningfully participate in peacekeeping operations also carries an effectiveness bonus. By *caring*, institutions can improve recruitment and retention of personnel, expand the range of operational competencies, and improve the legitimacy and delivery of the mission’s mandate. They can also expand the pathways in which women can participate in peacebuilding throughout their career, while enabling men to participate in care work.

BOX 3: Care in peacebuilding

The project “Civil Society Contribution to the implementation of the Swiss National Action Plan NAP 1325” produced a report with critical recommendations for peacebuilding from a care perspective, including the acknowledgement of care workers as “essential peacebuilding and security actors”. It argues that to achieve “a gender just form of peace, we therefore have to acknowledge care-work as peacebuilding and transform the conditions under which it is performed”.

The report also encourages actors supporting the WPS agenda to support care work “financially and politically to remove barriers and ensure that care workers, who most often are women, can participate in peace and all political processes”.

Report: (2021). “No Care, No Peace! Contributions from civil society on Switzerland’s implementation of the UN Women, Peace and Security Agenda”.

Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding (KOFF), cfd / The feminist peace organisation, Swisspeace, Peacewomen Across the Globe.

Available at: koff.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/210916_Leporello_RZ_E_online.pdf

8 This policy brief draws from the thinking of Jane Tronto, Virginia Held, Carol Cohn, and other feminist and gender theorists to propose what a caring institution can look like.

9 In the 2020 report “Mental Health in UN Peace Operations”, IPI denounces “fitness for hardship” as an operating standard and calls on the UN system and member states to “uphold their duty of care for personnel in missions by fostering a culture of care”.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Care work is an essential, collective, social good – one that allows for the development of peaceful societies, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 5 and 16). As such, care work should be enjoyed and shared fairly – between men and women, as well as between security institutions and their personnel.

Taking the recommended steps below will allow security institutions to uphold a duty of *caring*:

1 POLICY

- Member States should advocate for flexibility in UN deployment selection and criteria, for example in age and rank eligibility requirements, to ensure that staff with caring responsibilities can participate in peace operations.
- Security institutions should institutionalise their support for carers through policies, resources, and affirmative actions for staff recruitment and retention, inclusive infrastructure, care services through the deployment cycle, etc.
- Security institutions should guarantee, expand, and promote the use of paid leave schemes, including parental (maternal, paternal, adoption, miscarriage), health, and compassionate leave.

2 PRACTICE

- Member States should prioritise and devote resources to extend institutions' duty of care, and strengthening administrative services for carers, through for example: human resources, career services, social welfare, gender units, staff associations, etc.
- Administrative services must then:
 - Ensure the provision of integral care for all deployed personnel before, during and after deployment.
 - Advocate for staff wellbeing as a core institutional priority.
 - Provide or expand care infrastructure (including subsidies) to increase access to external care services.
 - Extend care services to families of deployed personnel, from health services, to support networks, to family counseling.

3 TRAINING

- Security institutions should promote and increase access to in-service training opportunities, particularly for staff with caring responsibilities, including pregnant women, seeking to advance their skills and capacities.

4 CULTURE

- Leadership at all levels in security institutions should embrace and model caring responsibilities in professional life.
- Security institutions should take stock of the (paid and unpaid) care work that sustains their organisation, through a time survey or a care assessment, to adopt policies that allow staff with caring responsibilities to meaningfully participate in the institution.
- Security institutions should establish a *caring* workplace culture that models and promotes care competencies and behaviours.
 - Leadership should participate in awareness campaigns, promote task sharing and rotation, support staff access to care services, etc.



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.

Canada



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