

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN PEACEKEEPING: POLICY SERIES

POLICY BRIEF 1B | MARCH 2022

## Caring for Carers in International Organisations:

Ensuring Inclusive, Responsive and  
Effective Peacebuilding

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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 builds on a survey carried out in 2020 by Monash University and the University of Warwick<sup>1</sup>, on 'Building Success in Development and Peacebuilding by Caring for the Carers'. The complementarity of WICID findings with those of pilot MOWIP reports<sup>2</sup> strengthens an overarching policy argument to address caring responsibilities as part of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. This Policy Brief focuses on what international organisations engaged in peacebuilding can do to care for carers working within these organisations. As such, it should be read in conjunction with Policy Brief 1A, The Duty of Caring, which lays out corresponding findings from MOWIP assessments with a focus on security sector institutions at the national level.

## Introduction

The “ecosystem” of peacebuilding often involves actors other than uniformed personnel from peace support missions. Civilian observers, advisers, and employees of **international organisations**\* fulfil a key role as the multidimensional mandates of peacebuilding evolve. They promote human rights and support political processes, conflict resolution, security and justice sector institutions and peace missions<sup>3</sup>. They also frequently provide essential services and bolster local civil society.

A 2020 survey carried out by Monash University and the University of Warwick surveyed 105 current peacebuilding practitioners across 50 countries and found that international organisations fail to respond to the needs of staff with caring responsibilities<sup>4</sup>. The consequences of this failure negatively impact their work, incentivise early departure from the sector, and **marginalises**\* them from the professional community participating in peacebuilding efforts.

More importantly, the marginalisation of international organisation employees with **caring responsibilities**\* has a direct and significant negative impact **on the type of peace and security being built in conflict affected environments**: one that **harms**\* individuals who have caring responsibilities by excluding them, and by extension harms the operational effectiveness of a peacebuilding engagement by:

- Narrowing the diversity of actors engaged in peacebuilding efforts
- Reducing the skillset, knowledge, and ways of thinking available to an intervention
- Undermining efforts to achieve gender equality within and through peacebuilding actors
- Communicating that care, including care for others and self-care, is not a priority in peacebuilding

## KEY CONCEPTS

- \* **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. The term gives credence to the argument that care work is in fact labour, and not simply “help”.
- \* **International organisations** are established by political agreement between member states and govern the behaviour of states in the international system. In this policy brief we are concerned with international organisations supporting peacebuilding, including but not limited to the United Nations (notably the Department of Peace Operations), African Union (Peace Support Operations Division), the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as well as international instruments such as the European Peace Facility.
- \* **Harms** are injuries to the wellbeing of a person, group, or an institution.
- \* **Marginalisation** in this brief refers to the impact of caring responsibilities on career progression, influence, and engagement.

1 Gordon, E. and Jones, B. (2021) *Building Success in Development and Peacebuilding by Caring for the Carers: A Guide to Research, Policy and Practice to Ensure Effective, Inclusive and Responsive Interventions*, Warwick Interdisciplinary Research Centre for International Development Methods Lab Toolkit. [publishing.warwick.ac.uk/index.php/uwp/catalog/book/10](https://publishing.warwick.ac.uk/index.php/uwp/catalog/book/10).

2 As of 3 March 2022, the Ghana Armed Forces MOWIP report and the Uruguay Armed Forces report are available online at: [www.dcaf.ch/elsie-initiative](http://www.dcaf.ch/elsie-initiative). More pilot MOWIP reports will be published in the coming months.

3 UN (2021) 'Civilians', United Nations Peacekeeping website, accessed on 04 November. [peacekeeping.un.org/en/civilians](https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/civilians). See also: [www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/peacebuilding\\_orientation.pdf](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/peacebuilding_orientation.pdf)

4 Gordon and Jones, *Building Success in Development and Peacebuilding by Caring for the Carers*.

Beyond operational effectiveness, failing to care for carers also has an impact on how peacebuilding organisations understand and promote an understanding of peace and security, including whose peace and security matters, and how it should be built.

**This policy brief argues that addressing the needs of employees with caring responsibilities must be a priority for international organisations overseeing and otherwise engaged in peacebuilding efforts,** in a commitment to gender equality and to prevent causing harms to employees, organisations, and peace interventions.

## The Problem

Employees with caring responsibilities often leave or are otherwise marginalised from international organisations engaged in peacebuilding because of normative assumptions about care work. For example, there is a persisting assumption that people with caring responsibilities have less capacity and will not prioritise organisational needs. Peacebuilding work cultures also tend to encourage sacrifice and single-mindedness, expect long hours and employee flexibility, and assume employees are ‘unencumbered’<sup>5</sup>. This deters those with caring responsibilities, and harms other employees and those they work with and for. It can lead to stress, burnout and, if unaddressed, to the types of safeguarding scandals that continue to blight the sector.

Marginalisation and barriers to meaningful participation in peacebuilding are also a product of policies and practices that do not support employees with caring responsibilities (e.g. movement to part-time, lower ranking or less pivotal positions e.g. that require less time and/or travel). The “Building Success in Development and Peacebuilding by Caring for the Carers” survey, conducted by Monash University and the University of Warwick in 2020, gives an indication of the extent to which employees with caring responsibilities are marginalised from the sector:

- 90% said their caring responsibilities had impacted their work in the sector.
- 97% had to leave or change their career due to their caring responsibilities.
- 99% said that it is difficult for people with caring responsibilities to work in the sector.
- Only 1% said that the organisations do enough to enable people with caring responsibilities to work in this sector.
- 79% of all survey respondents (82% women; 50% men) said that COVID-19 had impacted their ability to manage their caring responsibilities and their paid employment responsibilities.

Personnel statistics of international organisations engaged in peacebuilding efforts, including the UN<sup>6</sup>, and academic research<sup>7 8</sup> indicate that a large number of women leave these organisations when they have children, that working in such organisations may not be conducive to family life, and that significant inequalities persist between men and women in their career progression.

Women are disproportionately affected by these barriers because women are much more likely to assume caring responsibilities and because **less diverse organisations will be less responsive to the needs and priorities of carers**. Even more concerning is the reality that as those with caring responsibilities are excluded from, or leave, **peacebuilding becomes less diverse and inclusive**.

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5 Heathershaw, J. (2016) ‘Who are the ‘international community’? Development professionals and liminal subjectivity.’ *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 10 (1): 77-96.

6 United Nations (2020) ‘Personnel Statistics.’ Data as of 31 December 2019, Chief Executives Board for Coordination, CEB/2020/HLCM/HR/12. New York: UN; United Nations (2018b) ‘Composition of the Secretariat: gratis personnel, retired staff and consultants and individual contractors.’ Report of the Secretary-General, A/73/79/Add.1. New York: UN. [undocs.org/A/73/79/Add.1?fbclid=IwARo6BZG7lwGwJNGL1jNvR7QYsE9fpcMmgY3oswFEQ3aRI\\_8G2jcooniZHVI](https://undocs.org/A/73/79/Add.1?fbclid=IwARo6BZG7lwGwJNGL1jNvR7QYsE9fpcMmgY3oswFEQ3aRI_8G2jcooniZHVI).

7 Gordon and Jones, Building Success in Development and Peacebuilding by Caring for the Carers.

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

The departure or marginalisation of employees with caring responsibilities affects the kind of peace being built in two ways:

1. **It renders efforts and actors less responsive to a diversity of needs.** The type of people international organisations will reach out to, consult, and engage with in peacebuilding are likely to reflect the demographic composition of those employed by them. Those not reflected in the narrow demographic of peacebuilders may be less visible (or less accessible to them) resulting in their security and other needs being less likely to be known and consequently less likely to be attended to. *As a result, the peace being built is less likely to be inclusive, equitable or, ultimately, sustainable.* Moreover, where peacebuilding is not inclusive and responsive to a broad sector of the community, public trust and confidence can also be undermined which can compromise peacebuilding effectiveness<sup>9</sup>.
2. **It curtails a diversity of knowledge, experience, and skills within organisations,** which can compromise organisational effectiveness and adversely impact the outcomes of peacebuilding efforts. It can also negatively impact on the way in which organisations, and their commitment to gender equality, are perceived, compromising organisational credibility and, thus effectiveness.

## The Solution

In a recent report, the Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding argued that that care work is itself a form of peacebuilding in how care-workers “*keep the tissues of society together and promote peace daily*”<sup>10</sup>.

For this reason, addressing the marginalisation of those with caring responsibilities is a necessary commitment to gender equality, one that can avoid harms to the individual, the organisation, and to peacebuilding. The benefits of these advances will not only be enjoyed by women. Men and people with diverse gender identities also have primary or sole parental and other caring responsibilities.

Caring for carers has the potential to transform working conditions and more effective, inclusive, and responsive peace initiatives. It also has the potential to transform work cultures and practices, by acknowledging that care is critical to the well-being of individuals and societies, and therefore not a private matter. In fact, it is a political matter, and it is incumbent upon organisations to respond to the care needs of its staff. In doing so, individuals, organisations, and peace operations benefit.

9 Gordon, E. (2014) ‘Security Sector Reform, Statebuilding and Local Ownership: Securing the State or *Its People?*’ *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 8 (2–3): 126–148.

10 Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding (2021) No Care, No Peace! Available at: [koff.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user\\_upload/210916\\_Leporello\\_RZ\\_E\\_online.pdf](http://koff.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/210916_Leporello_RZ_E_online.pdf).

# Recommendations

## PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

We argue that international organisations can meet the needs of employees with caring responsibilities through policies which provide:

1. More and better human resource policies and practices to support carers
2. Organisational care assessments and care strategies
3. Implementation of structures of support

International organisations working towards peacebuilding can meet the needs of employees with caring responsibilities through policies which provide:

### **1 More and better human resource policies and practices to support carers, for example:**

- job-sharing
- home-based or remote working
- enabling part-time work
- flexible worktime
- adequate paternity and maternity leave
- caretaker paid and unpaid leave
- longer contracts to support stable family lives
- enabling spouses to join deployed personnel

### **2 Organisational care assessments and care strategies**

International organisations should regularly undertake an organisational care assessment to determine the care needs of employees, which will vary between employees and over time. Such organisational care assessments have been recommended by UNICEF, the ILO, and UN Women among others<sup>11</sup>.

They should also develop and communicate carer strategies, which ensure carers are treated fairly and consistently across an organisation. Unpaid care work can also be included in broader diversity and inclusion policies, as well as mid-career reviews.

### **3 Implementation of structures of support**

International organisations can respond to the needs of their employees with caring responsibilities by offering support through the provision of childcare or through subsidising costs for childcare. Other structures should include safe spaces for nursing parents, such as private spaces for lactation.

Introducing and supporting role models, mentoring schemes, peer support mechanisms and support networks can also all help provide the information and support carers might need as well as raise awareness of and advocacy for the rights of employees with care responsibilities.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), International Labour Organization & UN Women (2020) Family-Friendly Policies and Other Good Workplace Practices in the context of COVID-19: Key steps employers can take. New York: UN. [www.unicef.org/media/66351/file/Family-friendly-policies-covid-19-guidance-2020.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/media/66351/file/Family-friendly-policies-covid-19-guidance-2020.pdf); Australian Human Rights Commission (2013) Supporting carers in the workplace: a toolkit. Sydney: Australian Human Rights Commission. [humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/UnpaidCaringToolkit\\_2013.pdf](http://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/UnpaidCaringToolkit_2013.pdf); Carers UK (2019) Juggling work and unpaid care: A growing issue. Carers UK. [www.carersuk.org/images/News\\_and\\_campaigns/Juggling\\_work\\_and\\_unpaid\\_care\\_report\\_final\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.carersuk.org/images/News_and_campaigns/Juggling_work_and_unpaid_care_report_final_WEB.pdf)

#### 4 Work life balance messaging and practice

Work-life balance messaging and practice responds to the needs of employees with caring responsibilities and so enables them to return to or remain within the sector. Critically, it can also contribute to improving a healthy work environment for all, helping to reduce stress and exhaustion which can result in individual and sectoral harms, from burnout to safeguarding scandals.

#### 5 Training, education and awareness raising

International organisations should operate carer-friendly training programs as well as implement policies and actions to raise awareness of the issues facing staff with caring responsibilities. This can foster and communicate sensitisation to issues of care, including care work, caring for carers, and self-care. Specific recommendations include:

- reducing residential training events and prioritising online training where possible
- retraining staff returning from parental leave
- introducing internal and external communication and education campaigns to promote awareness of the benefits of hiring women and men with care responsibilities and the understanding of the challenges facing employees with caring responsibilities
- provision of career guidance for staff with caring responsibilities
- training for all managers on organisational care strategies

All of these recommendations should be underpinned by commitment to accountability and continual evaluation of efforts to respond to the needs of employees with caring responsibilities, as well as transparent disciplinary procedures to guard against discrimination based on gender and parental status or other care responsibilities.



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.



DCAF acknowledges the financial support of Global Affairs Canada and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the production of this Policy Brief.



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Graphic design by Stephanie Pierce-Conway