

OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN PEACEKEEPING: POLICY SERIES

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Old Expectations, New Challenges:

What we look for in a peacekeeper and why it matters

BY SARA FOX, ROYA IZADI, CAMERON MAILHOT, PRISCILLA TORRES
AND CALLUM WATSON *Editors* | INGRID MUNCH, SOLÈNE BRABANT

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 issue area 2 of the MOWIP methodology, titled "Deployment Criteria", while also examining the effect of the two cross-cutting issue areas 9 (Gender Roles) and 10 (Social Exclusion). It aims to outline policy actions that security institutions in Troop and Police Contributing Countries (TPCC), such as armed forces, gendarmeries, and police, and the United Nations Department of Peace Operations (UN DPO) should adopt to ensure that the criteria used to select women and men for peace operations maximize the operational effectiveness of the mission and ensure an institutional culture where women and men with diverse knowledge, skills and experience are valued and respected.

What is an “average peacekeeper” and why does this need to change?

“Can we create a new soldier identity that is available to both women and men? A soldier who is seen as, is expected to be, and feels on the one hand assertive, competent and courageous and on the other hand relational, responsive and caring?” Cynthia Enloe¹

Since the 1990s the UN’s approach to analysing security risks has increasingly encompassed threats to both state and human security. It has also sought to integrate the nexus between security and development.² Consequently, modern UN peace operations’ mandates go beyond protection from physical violence, requesting missions to:

- “mitigate the risk to civilians before, during and after any military or police operation” (MINUSCA)
- “[enhance] interaction with civilians, to strengthen its early warning mechanism” (MINUSCA)
- “increase its efforts to monitor and document violations of international humanitarian law” (MINUSCA)
- “strengthen local community engagement and empowerment” (MINUSCA)
- “[provide] support to the resolution of local and intercommunal conflicts” (MINUSMA)
- “anticipate, prevent, mitigate and resolve conflict, including by enhancing negotiation capacity and promoting the participation of civil society, including women’s organizations” (MINUSMA)
- “[protect] from attack ... cultural and historical sites” (MINUSMA)
- “support national and international efforts towards rebuilding...the rule of law” (MINUSMA)
- “deter, prevent, and respond to sexual and gender-based violence” (UNMISS)
- “facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid” (UNISFA)

Box 1: Profile of an average peacekeeper according to data collected in MOWIP Assessments

The “average” peacekeeper is a 29-year old man in a military contingent. He is from a low-income background in a developing country, is a father and has a medium-low rank.

According to MOWIP surveys, peacekeepers (and especially those deployed as contingent troops) confirm that they are selected based on physical, driving, language, firearms and vision assessments, which is the current UN Standard Criteria and forms the basis of pre-deployment training.

Deployment criteria, however, have not evolved to properly match these new mandates. Peacekeepers today are selected based on historical notions of what makes a good combat soldier (even if they are deploying as police). The peacekeepers of today and tomorrow need to have a combination of combat and tactical skills, knowledge of the cultural context and the language and communication skills to gain this knowledge, and attitudes that align with peacebuilding such as a commitment to the rule of law and human rights, including gender equality.

¹ Enloe, Cynthia, *The morning after: sexual politics at the end of the Cold War*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p.35.

² See, for example, then-UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s landmark 1992 report, *An Agenda for Peace*.

Main findings from the MOWIP Pilot Countries

An analysis of the data collected for MOWIP assessments in four pilot institutions uncovered the following findings.

- 1. UN and TPCC deployment criteria do not reflect the skills that both men and women with peacekeeping experience deem as important.** When asked to rank what skills were most important for carrying out their assigned tasks in mission, former peacekeepers consistently placed communication/interpersonal skills and the ability to work with peacekeepers from other cultures at the top of the list. They rank combat skills in fourth place, lower than never deployed personnel (See Box 2). This reflects the increasing importance of building trust and respect with the local population, including groups in vulnerable situations, and collaborating with peacekeepers from other contingents in order to fulfil mission mandates.
- 2. The UN DPO, and national authorities involved in deployment selection, need to better consult those who have previously deployed when setting selection criteria that reflect mission mandates.** This includes lower-ranking, non-commissioned officers and police, who make up the majority of peacekeepers in contingents and formed police units. MOWIP data points to the importance that these personnel give to communication skills, the ability to work with personnel from other countries and to not having sex with civilians in mission areas – all skills and attributes which are not currently reflected in minimum criteria for deployment.

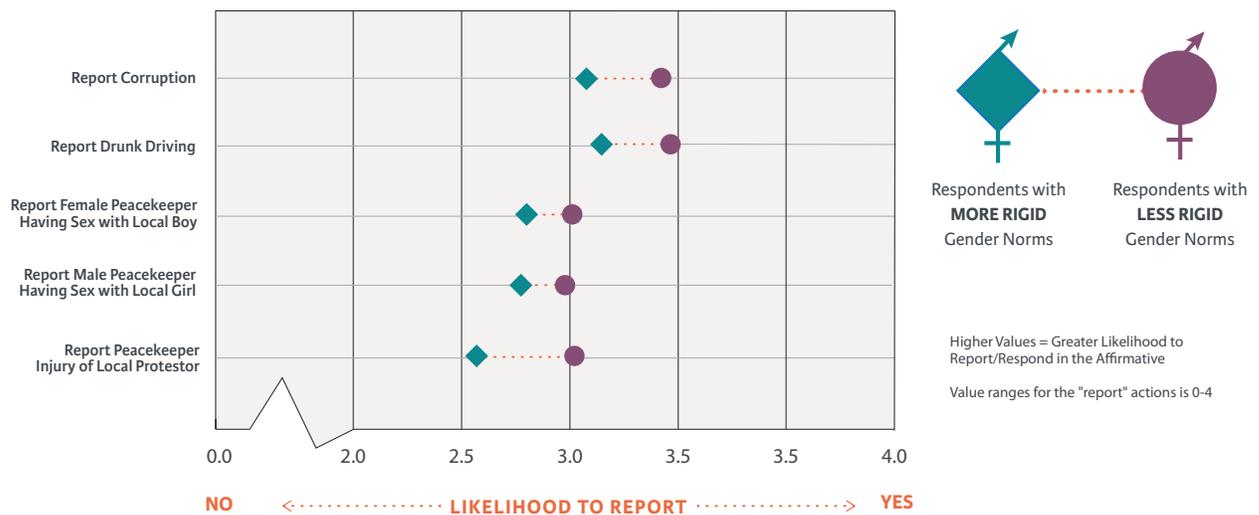
Box 2: Reported Skills, Attributes and Abilities for Success of Peace Operations among Never-Deployed Personnel (Police and Military) and Former Peacekeepers (Police and Military), all ranks included.

Skills and attributes ranking	Never Deployed Personnel (Police and Military)	Former Peacekeepers (Police and Military)
1	Communication/listening/interpersonal skills	Not having sex with civilians in mission area
2	Ability to work with personnel from other countries	Communication/listening/interpersonal skills
3	Combat	Ability to work with personnel from other countries
4	Not having sex with civilians in mission area	Combat
5	Ability to speak the local and/or host country's language	Ability to speak English

- 3. Prioritizing militarized “hard” skills during the selection of peacekeepers means that more men are likely to meet the criteria, while many women with relevant skills are overlooked.** To be effective, peacekeepers need to have both what is traditionally considered to be “masculine” and “feminine” skills, ranging from competence with weapons and combat tactics to listening and communication skills. Currently, the focus on more militarized skills during the selection process often means that selection criteria are skewed in favour of the kinds of skillsets more often associated with men. Peacekeepers who excel in communication, interpersonal and intercultural skills as well as having adequate competencies in “hard” skills, a large proportion of whom likely are women, risk being passed over for peacekeeping opportunities.
- 4. Where women are deployed, they take on stereotypical roles (which may not match their training).** Where women are deployed, they often do stereotypically feminine tasks related to medical care, administration, catering, cleaning and engagement with civilian women and children.³ Sometimes this reflects the skills and competencies they were trained in prior to deployment, but often they are simply allocated these roles based on their gender. This, coupled with the lack of training opportunities for non-stereotypical roles, can prevent women – and men – from contributing meaningfully across all peacekeeping roles and functions.

5. **Deploying personnel who maintain rigid gender roles and show discriminatory attitudes carries a cost to operational effectiveness.** Beyond inclusive gender practices at the institutional level, individual peacekeepers' attitudes towards gender are also important in improving operational effectiveness. Data from the MOWIP assessments (see Box 3) show a consistent correlation between those who hold more rigid gender roles and their behaviour in mission. For example, peacekeepers who believe that a wife should always obey her husband, or that men have a duty to protect the purity of their female family members, tend to be less likely to report offences, such as corruption, drunk driving, child sexual abuse, and the physical abuse of civilians. Such peacekeepers, who often join security institutions to perform stereotypical masculine roles associated with the use of force, feel less motivated – and sometimes feel emasculated – to complete all the tasks that contribute to the fulfilment of the mission mandate.⁴ These same peacekeepers report feeling that they make less of a positive impact on peace and security in the host country according to MOWIP surveys.

Box 3. Relationship between Rigid Gender Roles, Professionalism and Operational Performance⁵



6. **Personnel that have already deployed are more likely to use restraint when working with civilians in peace operations and their home country.** MOWIP data shows that both military and police personnel that are or have been deployed are more likely to exercise restraint to using force in the exercise of their functions in peace operations and back in their home country than their counterparts who have never been deployed.⁶ Several factors contribute to these differences in personnel behaviour: deployed personnel undertake pre-deployment and in-mission training that emphasizes the appropriate use of force, they benefit from additional exposure by interacting with personnel from other countries that allow for diffusion of professional conduct and they accumulate experiences where de-escalation is favoured rather than violence. In addition, MOWIP survey data suggests that women are more likely to show restraint when interacting with civilians.⁷ This is likely explained by the fact that although women are equally capable of confronting violent suspects, they have a comparative advantage in using non-violent methods when the suspect is physically stronger than them. Similarly women are more likely to report misconduct and to consider misconduct as problematic than their male counterparts⁸, probably because they are already socially excluded from groups whose members are more likely to engage in misconduct, and thus it is not in their interest to protect perpetrators. The gendered socialization processes that lead to these differentiated attitudes towards restraint and use of force warrant further investigation, which could inform pre-deployment and in-mission training approaches.

4 Goldsmith, Andrew, "It wasn't like normal policing': voices of Australian police peacekeepers in Operation Serene, Timor-Leste 2006", *Policing and Society* vol. 19, no. 2 (June 2009), pg. 119-133.

5 Any sexual activity involving a minor is rape. (In UN peacekeeping missions, any person under the age of 18 years is considered as a minor when it comes to sexual exploitation and abuse.) The survey, however, used the terminology "having sex with a local boy/girl" in order to measure whether peacekeepers correctly perceived the gravity of these acts in line with what they would have been taught in their pre-deployment training.

6 Izadi, Roya, Lindsey Pruett, Cameron Mailhot, Michael Kriner, Laura Huber, and Sabrina Karim. "Bringing Peace Home: Peace Operations as a Socializing Factor for Restraint".

7 Brooks, Rosa. "One reason for police violence? Too many men with badges". *Washington Post*, 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/06/18/women-police-officers-violence/

8 Izadi Roya, Lindsey Pruett, Cameron Mailhot, Michael Kriner, Laura Huber, and Sabrina Karim. "Bringing Peace Home: Peace Operations as a Socializing Factor for Restraint".

Solutions and Policy Recommendations

Peace operations have increasingly become more complex and seek to address a variety of human security concerns in addition to physical security threats. However, the current deployment criteria for UN peacekeeping prioritize physical and technical skills which, taken alone, are not sufficient for achieving contemporary mission mandates. Peacekeepers themselves highlight this disconnect (Box 1, Box 2 and Box 3). Consequently, deployment criteria should be reformed to consider the non-combat/tactical skills of potential peacekeepers. Updated criteria should be established through consultations with formerly deployed women and men, including lower-ranking personnel in contingents and formed police units, noting that they make up the majority of peacekeepers. Updating the deployment criteria should also involve host population consultations to assess their needs, as well as the mandate of the individual mission.⁹

- 1 The UN DPO and TPCC authorities responsible for the recruitment, selection and training of UN peacekeeping personnel should revisit deployment criteria to ensure a better match with what formerly deployed peacekeepers identified as necessary for mission success, and place a greater value on skills, such as the ability to communicate effectively with civilians, that may be perceived as “feminine”.
- 2 The UN DPO and TPCC authorities responsible for the recruitment, selection and training of UN peacekeeping personnel should leverage insights and experiences from former peacekeepers, including lower-ranking personnel, as well as representatives of civilians from areas that are current or recent recipients of UN peace operations, by consulting with them to identify adequate deployment criteria and by involving them in peacekeeper selection panels for UN missions.

Broader skills-based selection criteria, and assessments of the ability to work with people of a wide range of backgrounds, would result in more diverse personnel being deployed, including in leadership levels. This can be achieved through task-based assessments with mixed teams and by ensuring that women, for example, are involved in selection panels. Deployment criteria should also exclude any individual with a record of perpetrating discriminatory acts such as sexual exploitation and abuse, domestic violence and sexual and gender-based harassment. Not only is this likely to increase the number of qualified women who deploy, it would also result in more well-rounded peacekeepers overall. Irrespective of gender, selection criteria would favour women and men who can simultaneously demonstrate both “masculine” hard skills and “feminine” soft skills over those who adhere to rigid gender roles. This is likely to have a positive impact on the institutional culture¹⁰ and thus operational effectiveness.

- 3 The UN DPO and TPCC authorities responsible for deployment selection should place greater value on assessing whether peacekeepers have the requisite knowledge, attitudes and skills to work in multinational, multi-ethnic and mixed-gender teams, and with host communities from considerably different backgrounds in a productive, meaningful and respectful manner. This includes a commitment to gender equality, human rights, and the ability to work in mixed-gender teams.

9 Fircchow, Pamina, *Reclaiming Everyday Peace*, 2018

10 See policy brief 3 of this series, “Institutional Culture Reboot”.

4 The UN DPO and TPCCs should vet peacekeepers to avoid deploying anyone with a record of sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual and gender-based harassment, domestic violence, or other disciplinary or legal offences related to gender and other forms of discrimination or gross human rights violations.¹¹

Training, exposure to diversity, and experience equip (formerly) deployed personnel with a greater ability to interact with civilians in a non-violent manner, both in peace operation settings and in their home countries. To avoid situations where former peacekeepers would be continuously redeployed, and prevent other security personnel, including younger and female personnel, from being deployed, former peacekeepers could continue contributing meaningfully to the success of peace operations by helping to prepare the future peacekeepers. This could be achieved by inviting former peacekeepers to participate in the design (and facilitation) of pre- and on-deployment training, by creating mentoring programmes connecting former peacekeepers with future peacekeepers and by setting up discussion spaces between former, current and future peacekeepers to manage peacekeepers' expectations, foster support networks, advise on appropriate behaviours in mission, and circulate accurate information regarding peace operation deployment.

The cost to operational effectiveness of deploying personnel who hold rigid beliefs on gender roles should be addressed by applying gender-transformative approaches to pre-deployment and in-mission training with a focus on attitudes and beliefs, rather than focusing exclusively on gender in external operations.¹²

5 The UN DPO and TPCCs should further address (non-)stereotypical roles and the appropriate use of force and use of restraint in basic training, pre- deployment and in-mission training. They should invite former peacekeepers to contribute to such training to share their acquired knowledge and experiences with current and future peacekeepers.

11 As defined in domestic human rights law as well as in the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (UN Document number A/67/775-S/2013/110), 5 March 2013, paragraph 12.

12 See policy brief 5 of this series, "Saving the world, one gender training at a time".



Launched by Canada in 2017, the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations is an innovative multilateral pilot project that is developing and testing a combination of approaches to help overcome barriers and increase the meaningful participation of uniformed women in UN peace operations, with a focus on police and military roles.



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DCAF Geneva Centre
for Security Sector
Governance



Maison de la Paix
Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2E
CH-1202 Geneva
Switzerland



+41 22 730 94 00



elsie@dcaf.ch



@dcafgender | @DCAF_Geneva



www.dcaf.ch/elsie-initiative

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