



CONSIDERING THE FUTURE OF GENDER AND PEACE OPERATIONS: STRATEGIC DEBATES AND OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

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I. Introduction

More than 20 years after the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (WPS), almost all organizations conducting peace operations emphasize the importance of gender equality and inclusion.¹ The UN's implementation of the agenda in peace operations in particular has served as an example for other multilateral organizations, including the African Union, the European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). However, the implementation of the WPS agenda—shorthand for a raft of 10 thematic Security Council resolutions, beginning with Resolution 1325—has been intermittent, and even as the agenda's normative status has increased, a number of debates and challenges within peace operations have emerged.²

While the WPS agenda, which followed the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, was initially slow to take off, attention picked up in academic and policy worlds over time.³ A comprehensive study of WPS policy documents showed a norm-diffusion 'tipping point' in 2010, when significant amplification, mainstreaming, evolution and pluralization of the agenda occurred across international peace and security institutions.⁴ However, critics have noted that although it has become more normatively accepted, the agenda has been diluted over time, falling ever further from its radical, progressive roots.⁵

Despite normative diffusion (or perhaps because of it, as normative diffusion also increases the agenda's visibility), challenges to the WPS agenda's implementation exist at every level. The agenda has never been a singular

SUMMARY

● The women, peace and security (WPS) agenda in peace operations has had myriad successes as well as setbacks in implementation. The rise of 'gender-sensitive' or 'gender-responsive' approaches to peacekeeping signals progress in policy language, but in practice peacekeepers can struggle to comprehensively implement gender analyses or deliver on WPS tasks. Based on a review of existing academic and policy literature, this paper identifies five strategic debates central to WPS agenda implementation: participation beyond numbers, men's roles, defining 'gender', balancing gender 'inside and outside the fence', and non-traditional security challenges. It then identifies six key operational challenges to implementation: resourcing, accountability, recruitment barriers, scale, siloing versus mainstreaming, and securitization. With the approach of the 25th anniversary of the WPS agenda in 2025—possibly the most significant yet for the integration of gender and peace operations—stakeholders should step up efforts to ensure the sustainability of the agenda's implementation, in line with its most progressive reading.

¹ UN Security Council Resolution 1325, 31 Oct. 2000.

² For a list of the resolutions see UN Women, 'Peace and security', [n.d.].

³ UN Women, 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action', adopted at the Fourth World Conference for Women, Beijing, 15 Sep. 1995.

⁴ Shepherd, L. and Kirby, P., 'Women, peace, and security: Mapping the (re)production of a policy ecosystem', *Journal of Global Security Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3 (Sep. 2021).

⁵ For example, Hannah Wright notes that even Resolution 1325 was a less radical and progressive text than the 1995 Beijing commitments. See Wright, H., 'Beijing, 1325 and beyond: Taking women, peace and security back to its roots', *Saferworld*, 31 Oct. 2014.



normative framework but rather comprises discrete components implemented by diverse actors with competing ideas about gender, peace and security. At times, the agenda's strengths—for example, it has enabled a 'vibrant dialogue bridging academia, advocacy, and policymaking'—can also complicate its implementation.⁶ This contention all but ensures a cyclical debate about what the WPS agenda is and is not.⁷

In the broad field of peace operations, as in all fields, WPS agenda implementation has had myriad successes as well as setbacks. The rise of 'gender-sensitive' or 'gender-responsive' approaches to peacekeeping—which should be more substantive than gender parity efforts on their own—signals progress in policy language. In practice, this progress is questionable, and many peacekeepers and other conflict management actors struggle to comprehensively implement gender analysis or deliver on mandated WPS tasks, not least due to a lack of clear guidance.⁸ Guiding documents such as the UN's 'Our Common Agenda' and the Action for Peacekeeping(+) initiatives (A4P and A4P+) emphasize the centrality of women's 'full, equal, and meaningful participation' and of gender equality and inclusion in all stages of peacekeeping and peacebuilding.⁹ Yet these approaches to implementation remain nebulous, and even champions of gender parity and mainstreaming admit that there is no consensus as to how 'full' or 'meaningful' are actually defined.¹⁰

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Indeed, despite the commitments to gender parity and equality, women in peace operations face stereotyping, harassment, being pigeon-holed into 'gender appropriate' roles, and a host of other barriers.¹¹ Likewise, the full scope of gender mainstreaming can sometimes be lost when imbalanced

⁶ Shepherd and Kirby (note 4), p. 3.

⁷ A similar point is made in Shepherd and Kirby (note 4). See also Meger, S., 'The problematic evolution of UN resolutions on women, peace and security', *E-International Relations*, 1 Nov. 2012; Wright (note 5); Pratt, N. and Richter-Devroe, S., 'Women, peace and security: New conceptual challenges and opportunities', Norwegian Center for Conflict Resolution (NOREF) Policy Brief, Feb. 2013; Ni Aolain, F. D. and Valji, N., 'Scholarly debates and contested meanings of WPS', eds S. E. Davies and J. True, *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2019); and Newby, V. F. and O'Malley, A., 'Introduction: WPS 20 years on: Where are the women now?', *Global Studies Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 3 (23 Sep. 2021).

⁸ Sharland, L., 'Women, peace and security mandates for UN peacekeeping operations: Assessing influence and impact', International Peace Institute, 31 Jan. 2021, p. 7.

⁹ United Nations, *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General* (United Nations: New York, 10 Sep. 2021); United Nations, 'Action for peacekeeping: Declaration of shared commitments on UN peacekeeping operations', Aug. 2018; United Nations Peacekeeping, 'A4P+: Priorities for 2021–2023', Background paper, 2021. See also Council of the European Union (EU), General Secretariat, 'Council conclusions on women, peace and security', 15086/18, 10 Dec. 2018, Annex; and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), 'Action Plan for the Implementation of the NATO/EAPC Policy on Women, Peace, and Security 2021–2025', 21 Oct. 2021.

¹⁰ This point has been reiterated often across a succession of closed-door consultations and workshops held on the broad topic of women in peace operations and attended by the author between 2018 and the time of writing. For other discussion of meaningful participation, see Munch, I. and Watson, C., 'From "more" to "meaningful": Six strategies to make women's participation count in peace support operations', London School of Economics (LSE) Blog, 9 Feb. 2022.

¹¹ Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF), *Global MOWIP Report: Fit-for-the-Future Peace Operations: Advancing Gender Equality to Achieve Long-Term and Sustainable Peace* (DCAF: Geneva, June 2022); Baldwin, G. and Taylor, S., 'Uniformed women in peace operations: Challenging assumptions and transforming approaches', International Peace Institute, June 2020; Vermeij, L., 'Woman first, soldier second: Taboos and stigmas facing military women in UN peace operations', International Peace Institute, Oct. 2020; and Kumalo, L., 'Perceptions and lived realities of women police officers in UN peace operations', International Peace Institute, June 2021.



levels of responsibility for that mainstreaming and implementation of WPS priorities are held by only a few individuals at missions. Tension exists among advocates for the agenda as to how much emphasis should be placed on women as a standalone interest group versus understanding gender as a more expansive category.¹² Even when gender is understood more expansively, sexual and gender minorities are seldom mentioned even in closed-door discussions, much less in official, public-facing policies; for example, there is no mention of sexual and gender minorities in any of the 10 WPS UN resolutions.¹³ Attention to masculinities is also typically absent from formal WPS debates, and most discussion of men and boys tends to be centred on their duties as enablers of women's participation, their role as violent actors, or, more recently, their potential as victims of sexual and gender-based violence.¹⁴ This reinforces the misconception that only men do not have gender identities, thus 'gender-responsive' or 'gender-sensitive' peace operations would not need to consider men's multidimensional roles in peace and security.

This paper builds on existing academic and policy literature and analyses the WPS agenda's efficacy with regard to peace operations, with a focus on debates and challenges. In addition to a literature review, the author conducted nine in-depth semi-structured interviews with experts in WPS and peace operations to help identify, concretize and contextualize these debates and challenges. Quotes from these interviews throughout this paper are not standalone analysis but instead are used narratively to summarize, reinforce or otherwise illustrate points seen across the literature and current discourse in the WPS and peace operations fields.

The rest of this paper is in two main sections. Section II lays out five strategic debates in the gender field as they relate specifically to peace operations: the hyper-focus on participation; men's roles; competing definitions of 'gender'; balancing gender within and without peace operations; and including gender analysis in responses to non-traditional security challenges. Section III takes a closer look at six of the main operational challenges closely linked to the main debates: resourcing; accountability; recruitment

¹² Deiana, M. and McDonagh, K., "It is important, but . . .": Translating the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda into the planning of EU peacekeeping missions', *Peacebuilding*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2018).

¹³ Hagen, J. J., 'Queering women, peace and security', *International Affairs*, vol. 92, no. 2 (Mar. 2016); Trithart, A., 'A UN for all? UN policy and programming on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics', International Peace Institute, Feb. 2021; Daigle, M. and Myrntinen, H., 'Bringing diverse sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) into peacebuilding policy and practice', *Gender and Development*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2018); and Davis, L. and Stern, J., 'WPS and LGBTI rights', eds Davies and True (note 7). Shepherd and Kirby (note 4) note that, in WPS policy documents before 2011, 'there are no mentions of the applicability of the [WPS agenda] to LGBTQI people'. This changed when the United States included LGBTQI people in its first National Action Plan.

¹⁴ Baldwin, G., 'Expanding conceptions of conflict-related sexual violence among military peacekeepers', International Peace Institute, June 2022; Bahati, I., 'Masculinities, conflict-related sexual violence, and the WPS agenda', *Global Observatory*, 19 Oct. 2020; Duriesmith, D., 'Engaging men and boys in the women, peace and security agenda: Beyond the "good men" industry', LSE Women, Peace and Security Forum, 15 Dec. 2017; Trithart, A., 'The women, peace, and security agenda is not just for straight, cisgender women', *Global Observatory*, 13 Oct. 2020; and Wright, H., "'Masculinities perspectives": Advancing a radical women, peace, and security agenda?', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol. 22, no. 5 (11 Nov. 2019).



barriers; scaling gender and peace operations; siloing the agenda versus mainstreaming it; and securitization.

These strategic debates and their associated challenges do not encompass the entirety of the WPS agenda and the struggle for its full implementation. However, as increasing attention is paid to gender and peace operations—most often through the lens of the WPS agenda—it is important for advocates, policymakers and practitioners alike to make progress on implementing mandated WPS tasks and gender mainstreaming. The continuous, sometimes tedious, work of evaluating broad progress on the agenda (commonly undertaken approximately every five years) is important for keeping the agenda on track and pointing to opportunities for improvement, coalescence around common goals, and strategies to tackle inevitable setbacks and disagreements. This is particularly critical leading up to the 25th anniversary of the WPS agenda, when SIPRI will hold a series of dialogue meetings in 2023 and 2024 that build on the paper’s findings to guide subsequent research and the agenda’s implementation in peace operations beyond the next landmark anniversary.

II. Strategic debates in gender and peace operations

A number of strategic-level debates come to the fore in discussions of WPS agenda implementation and peace operations. Because there is no single, overarching ‘truth’ about gender or the WPS agenda more specifically, some contention is to be expected, but these debates are not innately negative.

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However, at times contested debate and pushes to compromise can delay implementation of critical components of the agenda, cause peace operations to be inconsistent in their approaches to mandate delivery (an issue at the heart of peacekeeping), and dilute the potential for using a gender lens in peace operations and conflict management.¹⁵ Debate can also spur progress and challenge critical actors in the peace and security space to think transformatively about the positive role gender can play in peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Accordingly, this section gives a broad overview of the conceptual debates within gender, peace and security that recur in the UN Security Council, among member states involved in peace operations, and in policy drafting and implementation.

Strategic debate 1: The participation dilemma—beyond numbers

Of the WPS agenda’s four pillars—participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery—with regard to peace operations participation has received the most attention in the last five years or so, but participation alone is not the best or only goal for WPS implementation in the long term. Progress on increasing the numbers of women in peace operations has improved measurably since about 2020—a pleasant surprise for advocates, after assessments around the 15th anniversary of Resolution 1325 (in 2015)

¹⁵ Paradoxically, progress on the WPS agenda’s goals thus far has required compromise, which cannot be overcome in the name of radical transformations but rather ‘can only be navigated’. Kirby, P. and Shepherd, L. J., ‘The futures past of the women, peace, and security agenda’, *International Affairs*, vol. 92, no. 2 (2016).



pointed to stagnation.¹⁶ Since 2015, both the UN (including its Department of Peace Operations, DPO) and the OSCE have instituted gender parity strategies that have, at least in the short term, boosted the absolute numbers of women deploying to all sectors of peace operations. The EU has also instituted a ‘Strategy and Action’ plan to enhance women’s participation in civilian Common Security and Defence Policy missions from 2021 to 2024, which sets out short- and medium-term targets in EU crisis management missions. Stopping short of parity strategies as such (meaning they do not have distinct percentage goals for increased women’s participation), other expansive gender equality and ‘gender perspectives integration’ policies include the African Union’s strategy for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment instituted in 2018, and NATO’s Action Plan on WPS instituted in 2021.¹⁷

Setting quotas through policies like gender parity strategies can be an important way to move towards widespread institutional change (e.g. increasing representation and visibility of diversity). While some institutions dedicated to gender parity policies tend to highlight their importance in achieving equality, others argue that ‘feminist goals are endangered if gender equality is conflated with gender balance’.¹⁸ Research has also shown that quota strategies can have a variety of unintended negative effects, even as they increase participation and visibility.¹⁹ An outsized focus on numbers over transformative institutional change, particularly in highly masculine environments like peacekeeping institutions, can be counterproductive and an oversimplification of a much broader issue of inclusion.²⁰

While this strategy of looking to numbers as an indication of progress can be useful in motivating an increase in representation of minority groups in peace operations, from senior management at headquarters to their staff in the field, the numbers are only one part of the story. Often, these statistics are taken at face value or even as ‘an end in itself’; but, as many have pointed out, the truth is much more complex.²¹ Some of these complexities are set out below.

¹⁶ Kirby and Shepherd (note 15); van der Lijn, J. and Smit, T., ‘Women in multilateral peace operations in 2020: What is the state of play?’, SIPRI, Oct. 2020; Pfeifer, C., Smit, T., and van der Lijn, J., ‘Women in multilateral peace operations in 2021: What is the state of play?’, SIPRI, Nov. 2021; and Pfeifer, C., ‘Women in multilateral peace operations in 2022: What is the state of play?’, SIPRI, Oct. 2022.

¹⁷ United Nations, ‘System-wide strategy on gender parity’, 6 Oct. 2017; European External Action Service (EEAS), ‘Strategy and action plan to enhance women’s participation in civilian CSDP missions 2021–2024’, Working document, EEAS(2021)1325, 9 Dec. 2021; African Union, *AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: 2018–2028* (African Union: Addis Ababa, 2018); and NATO (note 9).

¹⁸ Simić, O., ‘Increasing women’s presence in peacekeeping operations: The rationales and realities of “gender balance”’, eds G. Heathcote and D. Otto, *Rethinking Peacekeeping, Gender Equality and Collective Security* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2014), p. 186. For examples of institutional linkages between gender parity and gender equality, see e.g. NATO (note 9); and United Nations, Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UN DPO), ‘Gender responsive United Nations peacekeeping operations’, Policy no. 2018.01, 1 Feb. 2018.

¹⁹ See e.g. Berry, M., Bouka, Y. and Kamuru, M. M., ‘Implementing inclusion: Gender quotas, inequality, and backlash in Kenya’, *Politics and Gender*, vol. 17, no. 4 (2021); and Meier, P., ‘Paradoxes in the meaning of quotas in Belgium’, eds S. Franceschet, M. L. Krook and J. M. Piscopo, *The Impact of Gender Quotas* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2012).

²⁰ See e.g. Simić (note 18).

²¹ Baldwin and Taylor (note 11); Nagel, R. U., Fin, K. and Maenza, J., *Gendered Impacts on Operational Effectiveness of UN Peace Operations* (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security: Washington, DC, May 2021); and Krook, M. L. and True, J., ‘Rethinking the life cycles of



Diversity beyond binary, proportional representation

Gender tends to be a fairly easy indicator of diversity because it is most commonly understood in binary terms—men and women. However, analysing gender in a silo ignores a host of other identity factors such as race, ethnicity, rank, age, sexual orientation (both perceived and actual), and nationality. Additionally, some point out that deployment numbers to peace operations are contingent on the numbers of women in security institutions at the national level, which can make proportional representation across peace operations deployments quite difficult and can be detrimental to achieving or retaining adequate representation of women at the national level.²² While proportional representation should be generally easier for civilian deployments, this difficulty may be especially pronounced for uniformed deployments by countries that have only recently begun allowing women into their armed forces or police. Others point out, however, that simply increasing the ‘eligible pool’ of women is, on its own, not adequate for significantly increasing the numbers of women deployed to peace operations.²³

Institutional reforms

Many have pointed out that because security institutions, including peace operations, are highly masculine, often hostile environments, pushes to increase women’s participation should go hand in hand with various institutional reforms at both national and international levels. For example, studies show that sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and harassment are widespread across institutions such as the UN.²⁴ Other types of necessary institutional reforms can include reframing the prioritization of certain deployment criteria (e.g. balancing between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ security conceptions) to better incorporate diverse identities and abilities.²⁵

Gendered homogeneity, stereotyping and role assignment

In a multinational, multicultural context such as peace operations (perhaps starkest in the UN, but relevant to any multilateral institution), assumptions about a baseline, neutral femininity or type of woman can be nearly as detrimental as the assumptions that masculinity is the neutral political baseline of gender. Some arguments used to support women’s participation in peace operations and increase their numbers assume a gendered homogeneity—as in, all women must innately share certain values, have each other’s best interests at heart, and be positive forces for balance and mission effectiveness by moving institutions away from the highly masculinist

international norms: The United Nations and the global promotion of gender equality’, *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2012).

²² United Nations, Security Council, ‘Report of the Secretary-General on women, peace and security’, S/2016/822, 29 Sep. 2016, para. 24; and Interview with UN member state peace operations expert from a top-10 troop and police contributing country (TPCC), July 2022.

²³ Karim, S. et al., *MOWIP Methodology: Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations* (DCAF and Cornell University: Geneva, Oct. 2020); and Karim, S. and Beardsley, K., *Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-conflict States* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2017).

²⁴ Deloitte, *Safe Space Survey*, Report prepared for the UN (Deloitte: Jan. 2019); Vermeij (note 11); and Donnelly, P., Mazurana, D. and Papworth, E., ‘Blue on blue: Investigating sexual abuse of peacekeepers’, International Peace Institute, Apr. 2022.

²⁵ DCAF (note 11).



or hostile traits mentioned above. As some research shows, there is indeed evidence that women's presence in peace operations has positive effects on operational effectiveness.²⁶ While some see this as a common-sense conclusion, it is nevertheless important to collect and analyse actual evidence, not least to avoid over-reliance on gendered stereotypes (see Strategic debate 3: What gender is or is not). Likewise, assumptions without evidence about the specific contributions of women in peace operations may create a blind spot for other improvement opportunities within mission dynamics and hierarchies. It can result in women being pigeon-holed into certain 'gender-conforming' roles (e.g. administrative, base-bound work) for 'less dangerous' missions, rather than 'addressing the concrete dynamics of gendered power' which reinforces one-dimensional stereotypes about women (and, by extension, about men).²⁷ This, in turn, places an 'added burden' on women in peace operations.²⁸ When those broader dynamics go unconsidered, decision makers fail to recognize that *all* peacekeepers, regardless of gender, can contribute to 'mission failure and cultures of impunity' as well as exploitation, just as much as all peacekeepers can positively contribute to mandate delivery.²⁹

Assumptions without evidence about the specific contributions of women in peace operations may create a blind spot for other improvement opportunities

Often, pushes for full and meaningful participation focus on roles traditionally closed off to women (e.g. combat positions), but in those efforts, advocates should be cautious not to deride certain other roles (e.g. administrative, base-bound work) in the push for inclusion. Peace operations are ecosystems, and every role matters. Feminist readings of the WPS agenda should argue for inclusion outside of traditional gender roles, but not with the goal of creating a hierarchy that places traditionally masculine roles at the top, as the ultimate aspiration for participation. Rather, such feminist readings can emphasize that women (and men alike) should have the opportunity to take on whatever role they choose and are best suited for. The push to not only increase participation but also challenge the exclusive foundations of these institutions and move away from coding certain roles as 'feminine' and others as 'masculine' are likely more effective when they occur simultaneously.³⁰

Limitations of quota systems

Some argue that the punitive elements of some quota systems—such as the UN's threats that personnel-contributing member states which do not meet certain parity goals will not be allowed to deploy their personnel at all—can backfire.³¹ Particularly in national-level security institutions that have significant gender imbalances or have only recently begun allowing

²⁶ Nagel, Fin and Maenza (note 21).

²⁷ Interview with gender parity expert at the UN DPO, June 2022. See also Karim and Beardsley, *Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping* (note 23); Baldwin, G., 'From female engagement teams to engagement platoons: The evolution of gendered community engagement in UN peace operations', International Peace Institute, Nov. 2021; and Biskupski-Mujanovic, S., 'Smart peacekeeping: Deploying Canadian women for a better peace?', *International Journal*, vol. 74, no. 3 (2019).

²⁸ Wilén, N., 'Female peacekeepers' added burden', *International Affairs*, vol. 96, no. 6 (Sep. 2020).

²⁹ Kirby and Shepherd (note 15).

³⁰ Nagel, Fin and Maenza (note 21); Simić (note 18); Baldwin (note 27); and Johnson, D., 'Women as the essential protectors of children? Gender and child protection in UN peacekeeping', *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2022).

³¹ Interview with member state peace operations expert from a top-10 TPCC, July 2022.



women to join, such requirements can result in underqualified women being nominated or deployed, effectively setting them up for failure. Some experts in the peace operations field have indicated that, in their experience, contributing states will sometimes nominate random women just to meet the 50–50 nomination requirement, knowing they will not actually be chosen.³² Others point out that not having these requirements in place allows states for which gender equity and inclusion is not a priority to simply make no effort at all.³³

Differing conceptions of key aspects of parity goals

Definitions of progress differ widely, as do conceptions of safety, comfort and responsibility. As parity strategies become an increasingly popular (and relatively politically safe) approach to security institutions' WPS agenda efforts, many argue that policymakers must look 'beyond the numbers' and consider the positions that women hold, as well as the values of these institutions themselves.³⁴

Privileging a political understanding of gender that aligns with dominant norms or existing hierarchies can be alienating

Privileging only a political understanding of gender that aligns with dominant (typically Western) norms or continues to align with existing hierarchies is ill-advised, as it can alienate a wide range of peacekeepers themselves. In peace operations, gender mainstreaming efforts and pushes for women's participation alike can unconsciously position the so-called Global North against the Global South, privileging the former and marginalizing people from the latter (both peacekeepers and host communities) as 'contexts and sites without agency and lacking in any "progressive" gender discourse'.³⁵ Indeed, scholars have pointed out that Global South actors are frequently treated as norm 'recipients' rather than active players in norm creation, transformation, and diffusion; this can limit the agenda's potential.³⁶

Evaluating success

All of the above arguments are delicate, as gender can be a contentious topic, and pointing to weaknesses of gender parity goals can also fuel pushback against those initiatives. Equally difficult is the task of evaluating the success, shortcomings or long-term effects of quotas or parity and equality policies. Multilateral institutions pursuing these goals in peace operations are controlling about what data they share and how they share it. They are also often under-staffed, and either may not have the capacity to collect a wide range of data or, even if they are collecting data, may not have the capacity

³² Interview with former peace operations expert of a UN member state and top-10 TPCC, July 2022; Interview with member of the UN DPO Gender Unit, June 2022; and Interview with gender and peace operations expert at the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations (NCGM), Aug. 2022.

³³ Interview with gender and peace operations expert at the NCGM, Aug. 2022; and Interview with gender parity expert at the UN DPO, June 2022.

³⁴ Nagel, Fin and Maenza (note 21); Taylor, S. and Baldwin, G., 'Focus on 2020: Opportunities for the twentieth anniversary of Resolution 1325', International Peace Institute, 28 Oct. 2019; and Simić, O., 'Moving beyond the numbers: Integrating women into peacekeeping operations', NOREF Policy Brief, Feb. 2013.

³⁵ Parashar, S., 'The WPS agenda: A postcolonial critique', eds Davies and True (note 7), p. 830.

³⁶ Parashar (note 35); and Basu, S., 'The Global South writes 1325 (too)', *International Political Science Review*, vol. 37, no. 3 (2016).



to clean, analyse and publish that data.³⁷ At the national level, sharing sex- or gender-disaggregated data that may reflect poorly on an institution may be considered a politically sensitive issue.³⁸ However, data sharing can be a show of good faith efforts, even if goals are going unmet. When institutions refuse to share data, speculation from outsiders tends to be that ‘the situation is not good’ (i.e. low numbers of women participating in a limited number of roles).³⁹ That some institutions or states may find this politically embarrassing can, for example, make it difficult to convince states to participate in barrier assessments.⁴⁰

Hypocrisy is rife throughout calls for progress on WPS implementation and gender parity, with wealthy countries calling for less-wealthy countries (often former colonies in the Global South) to meet calls for parity without holding themselves accountable first. Some emphasize that the reason for this is a normative idea that donor states are above critique, but that personnel contributors—those contributing labour rather than funds—are acceptable targets; they argue that any critique should apply to all.⁴¹ Member states providing money but very few personnel (and those typically only for senior roles) have been characterized as hypocritical by the states that do provide the majority of ‘boots on the ground’, a tension which plays out in key Security Council debates on peacekeeping. Still others, in contrast, say that states and multilateral coalitions alike fear that transparency about their shortcomings can weaken their leadership or moral standing on issues like gender parity.⁴²

As the 25th anniversary of Resolution 1325 approaches, so too do the midpoints of many parity and equality strategies, making this an important time for reflection to revisit these strategies, assess what may be working and identify areas for improvement, and to analyse the efficacy of parity in making peace operations more gender sensitive. This applies not only to the absolute numbers but also to the types of roles that women hold in peace operations.

Strategic debate 2: Where do men fit in?

Men and masculinity are not always intuitively included in gender-responsive peace operations, given that ‘gender’ is often taken to implicitly refer to a focus on ‘women’. While the Beijing platform of 1995 laid out explicit encouragement for men, aiming to engage them in the fight for gender equality and resist stereotypically masculine roles, the UN WPS resolutions that followed Beijing rarely mention men. Those that have are rhetorically limited and not as substantive as those drafted in the Beijing vocabulary.⁴³ Since basic WPS concepts have solidified in peace and security language,

³⁷ Interview with member of the UN DPO Gender Unit, June 2022; and Nagel, Fin and Maenza (note 21).

³⁸ Interview with member of the UN DPO Gender Unit, June 2022; and Interview with gender parity expert from the UN DPO, June 2022.

³⁹ Interview with gender parity expert from the UN DPO, June 2022.

⁴⁰ Interview with gender parity expert from UN Women, May 2022.

⁴¹ Interview with member state gender expert from a Level B financial contributor to UN peacekeeping operations, May 2022.

⁴² Interview with member state peace operations expert from a top-10 TPCC, June 2022; and Interview with member of the UN DPO Gender Unit, June 2022.

⁴³ Watson, C., ‘Begging the question: What would a Men, Peace and Security agenda look like?’, *Connections*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2015).



some have suggested that a ‘men, peace and security’ agenda could be a complementary addition to gender, peace and security policy discussions; others problematize such framing and argue that it instead divides the WPS community.⁴⁴ There is a tendency in debates around the WPS agenda, as in many broader feminist debates, to characterize the ongoing fight for equality as men against women and to ignore class, race and other identity vectors. Additionally, these debates can overlook the fact that men also suffer from rigid gender roles. While some argue vehemently for a simplified, ‘women’s issues’-centric agenda, others argue that drawing a line down the middle of the global population obscures the very real stratification that exists within the enormous categories of ‘men’ and ‘women’.⁴⁵

Often, men’s place within or alongside the WPS agenda is understood to be either as women’s allies or enablers of women’s empowerment (or, on the negative side, as perpetrators of violence or impediments to full gender equality). More recently, men and boys have been sometimes included in victim/survivor groups (e.g. in policies relating to protection of civilians),

Victimhood, allyship and exclusion alone fail to illuminate the spectrum of men’s gendered experiences and extent that masculinities shape institutions

but even that small change remains contentious (either because it is seen to divert attention and resources from women and girls, or because of a misconception that men and boys are far less likely to be victims). Indeed, typically when this happens, ‘men and boys’ are mentioned as an add-on, and concrete recommendations about gendered needs still focus entirely on women and girls.⁴⁶ Victimhood, allyship and exclusion, at any rate, still fail to illuminate the full spectrum of men’s gendered experiences and the extent to which masculinities shape institutions. Some see this as a distraction from the fight for women’s rights, while others see it as an essential component of the transformative change that the agenda’s original architects called for.⁴⁷

In peace operations, there are two approaches to recognizing where men and masculinity fit into gender debates, although both are limited. These approaches are pushes for allyship and men’s engagement on the WPS agenda (which typically include demands to eradicate patriarchy and misogyny) and the acknowledgement of men’s gendered protection needs in host communities. In both approaches, two key components of men’s roles should be brought more to the fore: men’s own gendered experiences (i.e. the literal acknowledgement that men have gender identities) and analysis of institutional and individual masculinities (explained in more detail below).

Acknowledgement that men also have gender identities takes the sole burden of gender expertise and mainstreaming off women. Men traditionally hold more power in hypermasculine environments such as peace operations.

⁴⁴ Watson (note 43); and Duriesmith, D., ‘Engaging or changing men? Understandings of masculinity and change in the new “men, peace and security” agenda’, *Peacebuilding*, vol. 8, no. 4 (2019).

⁴⁵ hooks, b., ‘Men: Comrades in struggle’, eds. M. S. Kimmel and M. A. Messner, *Men’s Lives*, 3rd edn (Ally and Bacon: Boston, MA, 1995); Watson (note 43); and Henry, M., ‘Problematizing military masculinity, intersectionality, and male vulnerability in feminist critical military studies’, *Critical Military Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2 (June 2017).

⁴⁶ Baldwin (note 14).

⁴⁷ Chowdhury, A. K., ‘20th Anniversary of UNSCR 1325: Much remains to be done’, Inter Press Service, 30 Oct. 2020; Duriesmith (note 44); Wright (note 14); and Slim, H., ‘Masculinity and war—Let’s talk about it’, Humanitarian Law and Policy Blog, 15 Mar. 2018.



However, the international nature of many peace operations does not make for a neat hierarchy in which every man stands above every woman. Racial and national dynamics in particular play a significant role in how masculinity is understood and constructed in peace operations.⁴⁸

A masculinities analysis opens up space not only to better understand conflict dynamics but also to better interrogate the power dynamics at the centre of peace and security processes and institutions. Analysing masculinities means taking stock of how certain roles and behaviour are typically coded as masculine at an individual level, as well as extrapolating to the ways that those typically masculine traits pervade institutions like peace operations. Such analysis is ultimately beneficial to the WPS agenda goals. While there does not seem to be much literature actively arguing *against* giving more attention to masculinities in peace operations, the concept is rarely brought up in broad forums or literature such as Security Council debates or gender equity strategies. Incorporating masculinities into policy discussions has received increasing attention at the international level, though this incorporation is slow. Many peacebuilding practitioners have been ‘ahead of the game’ on masculinities analysis, particularly compared to policymakers. Civil society organizations like Equipundo, MenEngage, ABAAD—Resource Center for Gender Equality, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, and the United States Institute for Peace have engaged on this polarizing topic in practice for many years.

This analytical shift does not have to diminish work on women’s rights, participation or security.⁴⁹ When the central goal of an initiative is on reducing violence against women and enhancing their rights, then ‘men as partners or allies’ is an intuitive, important part of that effort. However, if gender—particularly the gender dynamics of multilateral institutions as well as of conflict generally—is understood more broadly and recognized as essential to the peace operations ecosystem and mandate delivery, then men’s experiences must also be understood as distinctly gendered.⁵⁰

Strategic debate 3: What gender is or is not

This subsection considers the value, risks and limitations of focusing solely or primarily on women in the implementation of the WPS agenda and in gender mainstreaming, against the value of a more holistic gender analysis that does not revolve around a binary understanding of men and women. Often, when asked, member states emphasize the added value that women peacekeepers bring to peace operations, particularly around community engagement, and almost always compare them directly against their men

⁴⁸ Henry (note 45).

⁴⁹ The concern that considering men as anything but allies in the fight for women’s rights will revert attention and resources away from women’s issues has been raised in numerous consultations and workshops the author has attended between 2018 and 2022. It is particularly prevalent in discussions of conflict-related sexual violence.

⁵⁰ Bardall, G., Bjarnegard, E. and Piscopo, J. M., ‘How is political violence gendered? Disentangling motives, forms, and impact’, *Political Studies*, vol. 68, no. 4 (2020); Brun, D., ‘A failure to address the vulnerability of men and boys’, Norwegian Refugee Council, 30 Mar. 2021; Duriesmith (note 14); Wright (note 14); Touquet, H. and Schultz, P., ‘Navigating vulnerabilities and masculinities: How gendered contexts shape the agency of male sexual violence survivors’, *Security Dialogue*, vol. 52, no. 3 (2020); and Cockburn, C., ‘Gender relations as causal in militarization and war’, *International Journal of Feminist Politics*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2010).



colleagues.⁵¹ Research has shown, however, that this added value is often based on stereotypes or anecdotal evidence, hence the focus on numbers over substance.⁵²

Some advocates continue to argue for a rights-based approach to gender mainstreaming and the fight for equality in peace operations, which typically focuses on women and their right to deploy and fully participate at all levels. Indeed, the very name of the WPS agenda automatically skews discourse toward a women-centric model. Arguments to move beyond this, towards a more inclusively named ‘gender, peace and security’ agenda, have taken various forms over the years.⁵³

Among practitioners advocating for gender-sensitive or gender-responsive approaches to peace and security, it is now generally recognized that, rhetorically, ‘gender’ does not equal ‘women’. This recognition has made its way into civil society and advocacy statements, policy documents and academic analysis alike, though the WPS resolutions themselves, which make up the symbolic heart of the agenda, do not meaningfully distinguish between the two terms.⁵⁴ All too often, peacekeepers or policymakers will make an explicit statement to the effect of ‘gender does not equal women’, only to follow it up with analysis or recommendations which are entirely focused on women, often in essentializing language. This happens in policies as well; for example, the UN DPO’s handbook on protection of civilians acknowledges that men and boys in conflict-affected areas have gendered protection needs that deserve attention, and even goes so far as to name some of those unique needs. However, the handbook’s concluding recommendations are entirely focused on women and girls.⁵⁵ A peacekeeping expert from a top UN troop- and police-contributing country (TPCC) pointed out in an interview that gender has become ‘so superficial’.⁵⁶ It has become ‘fashionable,’ politically popular, and even expected to talk about these things—for example, Security Council meetings today always mention WPS at some point—but very little is understood about how to translate that language to on-the-ground improvement of people’s lives through peace operations.⁵⁷

In most cases, thinking critically about gender beyond just women has meant discussing ‘engaging men and boys’ on a women’s participation agenda, which frequently reinforces the falsehood that only women and girls have gender identities. This false understanding can exclude LGBTQIA+ people, preclude masculinities analyses of security institutions and conflict alike, and stifle attempts to seriously improve effectiveness, inclusion and intersectionality in multilateral peace operations.⁵⁸ Likewise, over-reliance

⁵¹ This point reflects the author’s experience.

⁵² Baldwin (note 27); and Johnson (note 30).

⁵³ For an overview of pushes to expand the content of the WPS agenda, see Kirby and Shepherd (note 15).

⁵⁴ Gender Associations, ‘20 years of women, peace and security: Eight steps forward for the future’, 25 Oct. 2020; and Baldwin and Taylor (note 11).

⁵⁵ UN DPO, *The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping* (UN: New York, 2020).

⁵⁶ Interview with member state peace operations expert from a top-10 TPCC, June 2022. See also Kirby and Shepherd (note 15).

⁵⁷ Interview with member state peace operations expert from a top-10 TPCC, June 2022.

⁵⁸ Intersectionality, introduced as a concept by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, refers to the different ways that race, class, gender, sexual orientation and other individual characteristics overlap and intersect under systems of inequality, oppression or privilege. The term disrupts straightforward ‘hierarchies of oppression’ (e.g. all women are oppressed by all men) in the interest of more



on binary gender stereotypes can promote essentialism; sideline, vilify and de-politicize non-Western conceptions of gender; and limit the effectiveness of certain mandated tasks (e.g. child protection or community engagement).⁵⁹

Moving the debate away from ‘men versus women’ and into a broader understanding of gender can open up space for an ‘inclusion versus exclusion’ discussion that allows for an understanding of the ways in which other identities (e.g. sexuality, race, age) interact with gender identity. This can, by many measures, be a politically fraught topic for multilateral institutions to engage with; a gender parity expert in the UN DPO summarized this issue: ‘We don’t talk about intersectionality very much in the UN because we don’t know what to do with it, but we *can’t* separate gender from race, sexuality, nationality, all these overlapping issues and identities.’⁶⁰

Integrating a more holistic understanding of gender—at its most basic level, ensuring that policies addressing gender look at the whole of a community or institution rather than only women and girls—could also help to advance implementation of the WPS agenda in peace operations, by diminishing the hyper-focus on a limited issue. Critiques of the agenda’s outsized attention to the protection pillar and, within that, responses to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) have become increasingly common in recent years.⁶¹ Some speculate that decision makers in highly masculine environments prefer to focus on women’s victimization because it precludes women’s power and agency (and therefore precludes meaningful pursuits of radical transformation and progress, maintaining the status quo).⁶² Attending to a broader understanding of gender in WPS implementation, while not foolproof as a strategy, opens up the possibility for more radical institutional and systemic change, because it necessarily questions all identities across structures of power rather than accepting a simplistic gender binary.⁶³

Overreliance on gender stereotypes can promote essentialism, sideline non-Western conceptions of gender and limit the effectiveness of mandated tasks

complex understandings of human experiences, both individual and institutional. While widely acknowledged as important by advocates for WPS agenda implementation, it remains rare to see, at the policy level, a truly intersectional analysis of peace and security. Many argue that the concept’s complexity is the reason for this, though some characterize that argument as an excuse to avoid questioning systems of power at their source.

⁵⁹ For more on expansive, non-hegemonic understandings of femininity and gender mainstreaming, see e.g. Daulatzai, A., ‘Imperial salaams’, *Adi Magazine*, Spring 2022; Cronin-Furman, K., Gowrinathan, N. and Zakaria, R., ‘Emissaries of empowerment’, City College of New York, Colin Powell School for Civic and Global Leadership, Sep. 2017; Ahmed-Ghosh, H., ‘A history of women in Afghanistan: Lessons learnt for the future or yesterdays and tomorrow: Women in Afghanistan’, *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2003); and Parashar (note 35). On over-reliance on gender stereotypes, see e.g. Baldwin (note 27); Johnson (note 30); and Westendorf, J., ‘Sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping: Connecting the dots’, *The Interpreter*, 8 Mar. 2022.

⁶⁰ Interview with gender parity expert at the UN DPO, June 2022.

⁶¹ Meger (note 7); and Reilly, N., ‘How ending impunity for conflict-related sexual violence overwhelmed the UN women, peace, and security agenda: A discursive genealogy’, *Violence Against Women*, vol. 24, no. 6 (2018). Others point to the potential positive aspects of this, including Newby and O’Malley (note 7); and Westendorf, J., ‘WPS, CRSV and sexual exploitation and abuse in peace operations: Making sense of the missing links’, LSE Women, Peace and Security Working Paper no 9/2017, 5 Oct. 2017.

⁶² Enloe, C., ‘Masculinities and international affairs’, Elliot School of International Affairs, YouTube, 5 Nov. 2020. See also Watson (note 43).

⁶³ Pratt and Richter-Devroe (note 7); Matfess, H., ‘Dangerous blind spots in the women, peace, and security agenda’, *Inkstick Media*, 6 Oct. 2021; Henry, M., ‘Peaceexploitation? Interrogating labor hierarchies and global sisterhood among Indian and Uruguayan female peacekeepers’,



Gender is an entry point for understanding peace and conflict; it is not the only relevant identity marker

Gender is an entry point for understanding peace and conflict; it is not the only relevant identity marker or vector of analysis. Similarly, when gender is siloed as a standalone issue for analysis, rather than being recognized as one vector that interacts at all times with other vectors such as race, class, ethnicity, rank, sexual orientation, age, nationality and so on (i.e. the analysis is *intersectional*), it inevitably becomes a tool for exclusion even as its wielders work to the best of their ability to break down exclusionary structures. In current policy and practice, gender is not only being siloed, but collapsed and stripped back to a very minimal interpretation of what it is and how it works in relation to other structures of power.

Strategic debate 4: Balancing gender ‘inside the fence’ and ‘outside the fence’

The debates laid out in the preceding subsections all have implications for the ways that gender mainstreaming and mandated tasks related to the WPS agenda are carried out at the mission level in peace operations. In particular, there is debate regarding how attention should be divided between implementation ‘inside the fence’, referring to internal strategies, policies, and activities (e.g. gender parity strategies, professional networks and permissive environments), and ‘outside the fence’, referring to strategies, competencies, policies, and operational activities external to the mission (e.g. gendered analysis of conflict, host community engagement, and accountability for and eradication of SEA). While gender must be mainstreamed across both of these broad categories, the line between the two is sometimes blurry.⁶⁴

Inside the fence

The broad consensus is that internal goals regarding gender are at least more easily defined. Experts point out that parity, equality and equity are all clearly, universally defined, as is the question of ‘which office is responsible for what’.⁶⁵ The push towards gender parity goals—many of which are not on track to be achieved within their current timelines—and attention to the participation pillar of the WPS agenda are straightforward, tangible efforts easily understood by non-gender experts.⁶⁶

When it comes to the broader WPS agenda, however, confusion is more common. Not all teams or institutions within peace operations have substantive WPS strategies, much to the frustration of advocates.⁶⁷ Even for

Globalizations, vol. 9, no. 1 (2012); Haastrup, T., ‘Racial hierarchies of knowledge production in the Women, Peace and Security agenda’, *Critical Studies on Security*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Mar. 2021); and Mason, S., ‘Why queering the agenda should be the next step for Women, Peace and Security’, Centre for Youth and International Studies, 9 Dec. 2020.

⁶⁴ Interview with gender expert in the UN DPO Gender Unit, June 2022; Interview with NATO peacekeeping trainer and gender expert, Aug. 2022; and Interview with gender parity expert at the UN DPO, June 2022.

⁶⁵ Interview with gender parity expert at the UN DPO, June 2022.

⁶⁶ ‘OSCE’s gender passionista—Amplifying women’s voices for peace’, Interview with Lara Scarpitta, Senior Gender Adviser, OSCE Secretariat, OSCE News, 16 June 2022.

⁶⁷ Interview with gender parity expert at the UN DPO, June 2022; Interview with gender expert in the UN DPO Gender Unit, June 2022; and Interview with NATO peacekeeping trainer and gender expert, Aug. 2022.



those that do not have substance-oriented strategies, it can be difficult to identify goals and guidelines (unlike the straightforward, quantifiable question of gender parity) to ensure accountability for implementation.⁶⁸ The deployment of gender expertise has increased in the years since Resolution 1325 was adopted, typically in the form of gender advisers and gender focal points. While these bring much-needed expertise to the field, they are often over-worked and under-resourced and do not have full teams to assist with implementation, nor are they always deployed at ‘appropriate levels of seniority’.⁶⁹ Such roles are also often combined with other areas such as child protection, prevention of SEA and protection of civilians. Because gender expertise is siloed into these few roles, some point out that this perpetuates a notion that gender mainstreaming is only the responsibility of those silos rather than being part of a whole-of-mission approach to the WPS agenda.⁷⁰

Some link these issues to the fact that, despite a concerted effort towards gender parity in the lower ranks of peace operations as well as top leadership positions, there are few women in middle management roles as well as many factors that preclude women from advancing through the hierarchy.⁷¹ As a result, middle management roles tend to still be very male-dominated.⁷² While most institutions deploying personnel to peace operations share sex- or gender- disaggregated data on the absolute numbers of women and men deployed, they do not share data on ranks or roles, which makes it difficult to evaluate the extent to which these pushes for participation are meaningful.

Likewise, internal goals, even when clearly defined, are more difficult for some states to meet than others, and success depends a great deal on the type of personnel deploying. For example, if a small contributor like Ireland gives 10 total peacekeepers to observer positions, then including two or three qualified women among them is not particularly difficult. For a larger contributor of troops, such as China, Ethiopia or Pakistan, it becomes significantly more difficult to reach parity goals of similar representation for every hundred troops.⁷³ This can result in a (frequently hypocritical) pile-on to post-colonial, poorer nations by Western countries that feel they have achieved gender equity already, when in fact to expect a rushed process for inclusion is unrealistic. Nevertheless, while Western countries often get credit for being more ‘advanced’ on gender issues, they are too often simply

⁶⁸ Interview with gender parity expert at the UN DPO, June 2022; Interview with gender expert in the UN DPO Gender Unit, June 2022; Interview with NATO peacekeeping trainer and gender expert, Aug. 2022.

⁶⁹ Sharland, L., ‘Sustaining the women, peace, and security agenda: The role of UN peacekeeping in Africa’, eds T. McNamee and M. Muyangwa, *The State of Peacebuilding in Africa: Lessons Learned for Policymakers and Practitioners* (Palgrave MacMillan: Cham, 2020), p. 116. See also Bastick, M. and Duncanson, C., ‘Agents of change? Gender advisers in NATO militaries’, *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 25, no. 4 (2018); and Athie, A. and Taylor, S., ‘UN peacekeeping: Where is the gender expertise?’, *Global Observatory*, 27 Oct. 2017.

⁷⁰ Smith, S., ‘Gender-responsive leadership in UN peace operations: The path to a transformative approach?’, International Peace Institute, 16 Feb. 2022.

⁷¹ Interview with member state gender expert in New York, May 2022; see also Newby, V. F. and Sebag, C., ‘Gender sidestreaming? Analysing gender mainstreaming in national militaries and international peacekeeping’, *European Journal of International Security*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2021).

⁷² Interview with member state gender expert in New York, May 2022.

⁷³ The author thanks an interviewee (a peace operations expert from a major TPCC in a New York mission) for this illustrative example.



paying lip service to the agenda rather than taking concrete steps towards resource dedication and full implementation of the WPS agenda.⁷⁴

Finally, there is a disconnect between inside the fence and outside the fence in the ways that abuse and exploitation are considered. Some argue that SEA is better understood as a form of behaviour (rather than as a standalone issue) ‘that occurs along a spectrum of other acceptable and unacceptable behaviours’ related to root causes of gender inequity and violence.⁷⁵ This shift in perspective points to the interconnectedness of these issues, blurring the line between internal and external issues for peace operations. Researchers have argued that SEA of host communities *by* peacekeepers and sexual abuse *of* peacekeepers by other peacekeepers are inextricably linked; while the research on this topic is currently limited, a normalized culture of impunity in militarized institutions along with existing reported rates of sexual abuse inside peacekeeping missions support this theory.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the two categories are kept separate in most cases, and sexual abuse of peacekeepers is rarely raised.⁷⁷ Internal mechanisms to address either issue are fraught, and the overarching assumption is that all sexual abuse is happening by men against women, even though institutions with highly masculine environments see sexual misconduct perpetrated by men against men, as well as by women against their peers.⁷⁸

Outside the fence

In addressing the needs of host communities, peace operations have come under fire for focusing on the protection pillar of the WPS agenda, and by extension addressing CRSV response, to the detriment of other priority areas.⁷⁹ Over-reliance on gender stereotypes—such as women as protectors of children, men as perpetrators of violence, women as soft security actors and men as hard security actors—limits the potential of a full gender analysis of conflict and gendered host community needs.⁸⁰ In discussions about gendered community engagement, many in peace operations draw a link between the push to increase numbers of women peacekeepers and improving operational effectiveness of community engagement, due to ‘feminine’ characteristics assumed to be inherent in all women.⁸¹ At the same time, although neither women nor men peacekeepers have more or less innate knowledge about gender issues than their colleagues, when dealing with sensitive issues like CRSV or when operating in socially conservative contexts, interactions with host populations may be better carried out along gender lines (i.e. women speaking to women and men speaking to men).⁸²

⁷⁴ Interview with NATO peacekeeping trainer and gender expert, Aug. 2022.

⁷⁵ Westendorf, J-K. and Searles, L., ‘Sexual exploitation and abuse in peace operations: Trends, policy responses and future directions’, *International Affairs*, vol. 93, no. 2 (2017), p. 383.

⁷⁶ Donnelly, Mazurana and Papworth (note 24); and Vermeij (note 11).

⁷⁷ See e.g. Donnelly, Mazurana, and Papworth (note 24).

⁷⁸ See e.g. Donnelly, Mazurana and Papworth (note 24); and Nichols, M., ‘One in three UN workers sexually harassed in past two years, report finds’, Reuters, 16 Jan. 2019.

⁷⁹ Baldwin (note 14); Meger (note 7); and Kirby and Shepherd (note 15).

⁸⁰ See e.g. Johnson (note 30); and Baldwin (note 27).

⁸¹ Nagel, Fin, and Maenza (note 21); and Baldwin (note 27).

⁸² Spink, L., ‘*We Have to Try to Break the Silence Somehow: Preventing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Through UN Peacekeeping* (Center for Civilians in Conflict: Washington, DC, Oct. 2020); Holmes, G., ‘Female peacekeepers left feeling overwhelmed after inadequate training’, *The Conversation*, 29 May 2019; and Wilén (note 28).



One-sided assumptions about gendered ‘added value’ in military peacekeeping (and the expectations they generate) are ‘based on research conducted on only 4% of all peacekeepers, making it difficult to generalize from the findings’.⁸³

In addition to an over-reliance on stereotypes, guidance for gender-sensitive peacekeeping also focuses on women’s participation in local or national peace or political processes, as well as capacity building. As in other areas of WPS agenda implementation, in guiding policy documents and mandates the term ‘gender’ is used as a stand-in for ‘women’, and instrumentalist arguments for women’s participation can win out over examination of more complex gender dynamics. This is likely to impede the full potential of a gender-responsive approach to peacekeeping.

One of the greatest impediments to credibility and thus successful mandate delivery in peace operations (particularly the UN as the biggest provider of peacekeepers globally, but no institution is exempt) is the erosion of trust between peacekeepers and host community members due to widespread SEA.⁸⁴ Though SEA policies were developed outside of the WPS agenda, the need to reduce SEA has been explicitly linked with calls within the agenda to increase women’s participation in peacekeeping.⁸⁵ However, one study from 2016 on the possible correlations between women’s participation in peace operations and SEA reduction did not find a robust connection between them at most points of analysis.⁸⁶ Researchers have argued thoroughly that such justifications for increasing women’s participation are instrumentalizing and place an undue burden on a minority group without addressing SEA’s myriad root causes.⁸⁷

Integrated approaches

Progress on internal and external gender work in peace operations is intrinsically linked. Successes and challenges are often parallel on the two sides of the fence, and both require serious attention to the root causes of inequitable power dynamics in order to achieve meaningful change. The overall lack of consensus on the meaning of ‘gender-responsive’ or ‘gender-sensitive’ peacekeeping—despite the increasing frequency with which these terms are used—and the continued conflation of ‘gender’ and ‘women’, can make it difficult to analyse commitments to or progress on any

Progress on internal and external gender work in peace operations is intrinsically linked

⁸³ Wilén (note 28).

⁸⁴ Stern, J., ‘Reducing sexual exploitation and abuse in African Union peacekeeping’, Stimson Center, 21 Oct. 2014; Westendorf and Searles (note 75); and Karim, S. and Beardsley, K., ‘Explaining sexual abuse and exploitation in peacekeeping missions: The role of female peacekeepers and gender equality in contributing countries’, *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 53, no. 1 (2016).

⁸⁵ UN DPO (note 18, para. 52; Raashed, M., ‘Role of women in UN peacekeeping missions’, Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research, 13 Feb. 2020; Bridges, D. and Horsfall, D., ‘Increasing operational effectiveness in UN peacekeeping: Toward a gender-balanced force’, *Armed Forces and Society*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2009); and International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) and Association of War Affected Women (AWAW), ‘10 steps to increase women’s participation in peacekeeping and reduce sexual exploitation and abuse’, 4 Apr. 2019.

⁸⁶ Karim and Beardsley (note 84).

⁸⁷ Karim and Beardsley (note 84); Westendorf and Searles (note 75); Simić, O., ‘Does the presence of women really matter? Towards combating male sexual violence in peacekeeping operations’, *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2010); and Jennings, K., ‘Women’s participation in UN peacekeeping operations: Agents of change or stranded symbols?’, NOREF Report, 1 Sep. 2011.



WPS-related goals.⁸⁸ Without common definitions of ‘gender-sensitive’ and ‘gender-responsive’ (and ‘gender-transformative’, an even more recent term) as well as practical guidance for how to put them into practice, integrating a ‘gender perspective’ (another largely undefined term that most often stands in for women’s inclusion) into peace operations will continue to be an uphill battle. Issues that too often fall through the cracks as a result of this imbalance include early warning mechanisms and engagement with women’s groups; assessing the gendered impacts of environmental degradation; gender analysis of conflict writ large; and myriad non-traditional security challenges, the responses to which may benefit from a gender lens.

Strategic debate 5: Gender and non-traditional security challenges

Across peace and security contexts, some issue areas are more commonly correlated with gender analysis than others. This subsection differs from those preceding it in that many non-traditional security challenges are either directly or secondarily relevant to peace operations’ mandated tasks, such that the gendered aspects of those issues are either not discussed thoroughly or not discussed at all. However, gender mainstreaming must extend to analysis and understanding of these non-traditional challenges.⁸⁹ As the foci of peace operations change to meet a shifting peace and security landscape, much can be done to better include a gender analysis as it relates to these issues. For example, efforts to address violent extremism frequently centre on ‘disillusioned young men’ and other masculinities analyses (though these are not always recognized explicitly as being gendered), as well as on the roles women often play in deradicalization.⁹⁰ In addition, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has illuminated imbalances in caregiving and medical assistance in pandemic and epidemic contexts—with women making up the majority of global health workers, and evidence suggesting that men tend to die at higher rates in much of the world—while domestic violence rates increased globally during pandemic lockdowns.⁹¹

Analysing other ‘non-traditional’ security challenges, however, is not always straightforward, and the relevance of a gender analysis may be more difficult to argue when garnering political will or making the case to policy-

⁸⁸ See e.g. UN DPO (note 18), para. 52; EEAS EEAS(2021)1325 (note 17); EEAS, ‘EUMS launches its missions and operations gender management team (MOGMT)’, 16 Feb. 2022; ‘UN Lebanon mission becomes pioneer in gender-sensitive peacekeeping’, *UN News*, 31 Jan. 2022; Centre for International Peace Operations (ZIF), ‘Women, peace and security reloaded: Gender-sensitive approaches in peace missions’, ZIF training course, [n.d.]; and Smith (note 70).

⁸⁹ See e.g. SIPRI, ‘New geopolitics of peace operations: Non-traditional security challenges’, [n.d.].

⁹⁰ United Nations, Security Council, ‘Preventing terrorism and violent extremism through tackling gender stereotypes, masculinities, and structural gender inequality’, UN Security Council Open Arrria Formula meeting, *UN Web TV*, 28 July 2021; Brown, K. E. et al., *Conflicting Identities: The Nexus Between Masculinities, Femininities, and Violent Extremism in Asia* (United Nations Development Programme and UN Women: New York, 2020); and Dier, A. and Baldwin, G., *Masculinities and Violent Extremism* (International Peace Institute and UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate: New York, June 2022).

⁹¹ UN Women, ‘From insights to action: Gender equality in the wake of Covid-19’, Sep. 2020; Rahmaty, M. and Jaghab, J., ‘Peacebuilding during a pandemic: Keeping the focus on women’s inclusion’, International Peace Institute, 15 Sep. 2020; and Dehingia, N. and Raj, A., ‘Sex difference in COVID-19 case fatality: Do we know enough?’, *The Lancet*, 5 Nov. 2020.

Gender mainstreaming must extend to analysis and understanding of non-traditional security challenges



makers. For example, organized crime, environmental degradation and climate change, irregular migration, humanitarian aid and disaster response, arms trade and expenditure, and artificial intelligence are all issues that peace operations engage with, yet do not usually consider with a gender lens. Often, gender is siloed in analysis of these phenomena, or mandates and national action plans (NAPs) do not directly address linkages.⁹² For example, the WPS Focal Points Network recently came together to recommend stronger collaboration between gender and small arms technical experts when drafting NAPs on each topic, in order to ensure overlapping priorities (e.g. small arms NAPs should mention WPS priorities and WPS NAPs should mention small arms).⁹³ Similarly, climate is not typically a top mention in WPS policy documents, despite the accelerating crisis being recognized as distinctly gendered and one of the most critical issues of the current political moment.⁹⁴ This remains the case even though the WPS agenda has made slow progress towards encompassing more issues than simply armed conflict.⁹⁵

Violent extremism is one challenge which peace operations increasingly grapple with while at least somewhat acknowledging the gender dimensions of that challenge. Since 2016, anti-terrorism rhetoric has become increasingly common in WPS policy language, particularly NAPs.⁹⁶ While gender may not always be the primary motivation for political violence (although it sometimes is), the form and impact of violence may be gendered.⁹⁷ Emphasizing women's experiences, as most policies have up to this point, is only one part of the necessary analysis. For example, understanding how essentialist ideas about masculinity and femininity create hierarchies that place powerful men above everyone else (including women, non-powerful men and non-heteronormative individuals)—as well as placing that understanding in conversation with other intersectional identities—is likely to improve peace operations' overall mandate delivery as it relates to these issues.⁹⁸ If these non-traditional security challenges are examined solely by analysing, for example, women's participation or women's victimhood, or if gender is left out entirely, a great deal goes unaddressed. Strong recent work has brought a gender analysis more prominently to arms control and disarmament processes, humanitarian action, and borders and migration, showing how this is possible, but much is yet to be done before this level of analysis is well integrated across policy and practice on these issues.⁹⁹

⁹² National action plans (NAPs) are a tool at the state level outlining WPS priorities and monitoring progress on governance, funding and monitoring. For more information about which states have adopted NAPs, see Biddolph, C. and Shepherd, L. J. 'WPS national action plans: Content analysis and data visualisation', version 3, 2022.

⁹³ WPS Focal Points Network, '4th Capital-level meeting: Joint communique', 18–19 May 2022.

⁹⁴ Shepherd and Kirby (note 4); Smith, E. S., 'Climate change in women, peace and security national action plans', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2020/7, June 2020; and Hynes, T. and Yadav, P., 'Dissolving interagency silos: The WPS agenda on the disaster–conflict continuum', *Global Observatory*, 15 Oct. 2020.

⁹⁵ de Jonge Oudraat, C. and Kuenast, K., 'The Women, Peace, and Security agenda at 20: Setbacks, progress, and the way forward', *Just Security*, 30 Oct. 2020.

⁹⁶ Shepherd and Kirby (note 4).

⁹⁷ Bardall, Bjarnegard and Piscopo (note 50).

⁹⁸ Bardall, Bjarnegard and Piscopo (note 50).

⁹⁹ United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), 'Bringing gender analysis into arms control and disarmament processes', UNIDIR Current Research, [n.d.]; Daigle, M., *Gender, Power and Principles in Humanitarian Action*, HPG Report (Overseas Development Institute:



III. Operational challenges stemming from the strategic debates

While the strategic debates discussed above will not be easily resolved, the operational challenges linked to them have very real consequences for any successful implementation of the WPS agenda. Despite the agenda's surface-level political popularity, which means that advocates and experts are consulted in policy drafting and WPS talking points are cited regularly, pessimism abounds. Virtue-signalling and 'genderwashing'—projecting an unsubstantiated or exaggerated image of gender equity and progressiveness in order to garner public support—is widespread. Where 'the rubber hits the road', real material commitments are rare, 'particularly in budgets'.¹⁰⁰ Without these material commitments, progress in all areas of the WPS agenda could stagnate. Resource competition is a perpetual challenge, and scarcity may force actors in peace operations to double down on the current ways of doing WPS work rather than branching out or working across silos. This is even more reason to strengthen gender mainstreaming or include gender-related provisions and requirements with all funding released for peace operations.

Resourcing is likely the top operational challenge to any meaningful WPS agenda implementation, in peace operations or otherwise

Frustratingly, many of these operational challenges are familiar across myriad multilateral systems: material resources stretched thin, personality-driven implementation processes, lack of institutional memory, and reporting that is inconsistent or disorganized. The subsections below briefly discuss how these challenges are considered in the context of gender and peace operations and aim to set the stage for substantive solutions in the lead-up to the 25th anniversary of Resolution 1325—which is sure to be a pivot point, for better or worse, for the way the agenda is considered and implemented across the multilateral system.

Operational challenge 1: Resourcing

Resourcing is likely the top operational challenge to any meaningful WPS agenda implementation, in peace operations or otherwise. Resources in this context include staffing, finances, gender expertise capacity, training availability and limitations, and, in the case of the UN, political dynamics in the Fifth Committee.¹⁰¹

One peace operations expert has noted that the limited number of people with gender expertise exacerbates burnout, which can, for example, preclude effective mobilization of mission leadership to meet mandate goals.¹⁰² In a similar vein, a UN official commented that, in their experience, gender

London, Mar. 2022); and Kirby, P., 'Sexual violence in the border zone: The EU, the Women, Peace, and Security agenda and carceral humanitarianism in Libya', *International Affairs*, vol. 96, no. 5 (2020).

¹⁰⁰ George, N., Remarks at 'Women, peace, and security across the Pacific: Meanings, agency, and actions', ANU Gender Institute Webinar, 30 Nov. 2021, 0:20:30.

¹⁰¹ Interview with member state gender expert, May 2022. See also Sharland (note 69); Taylor and Baldwin (note 34); and Gizelis, T-I., 'Women, peace and security: UN peacekeeping operations and peacekeeping dividends', Folke Bernadotte Academy, PRIO and UN Women, New insights on women, peace and security (WPS) for the next decade, Joint brief, Nov. 2020.

¹⁰² Interview with peace operations expert from the UN Policy, Evaluation and Training Division (DPET), Sep. 2022.



advisers have often been doing ‘gender work’ for a very long time, and the toll of an often unpopular or misunderstood mandate can leave them disillusioned and exhausted. This in turn can negatively affect how gender advisers are perceived by colleagues and thus their influence in their mission or department.¹⁰³

Lack of staffing and insufficient financial resources have also been cited as reasons more initiative has not been taken at UN headquarters to investigate the underlying causes of gender imbalances in peacekeeping at all levels.¹⁰⁴ Gender experts are often expected to ‘mainstream in their off hours’, putting in extra work time for no extra pay or recognition.¹⁰⁵ Several interviewees pointed out that because gender is not typically seen as an analytical competence, gender mainstreaming or WPS agenda implementation are not understood to require resources, funding, expertise or time.¹⁰⁶

Operational challenge 2: Accountability

Accountability for WPS agenda implementation, including in security institutions, has been a concern for advocates since the agenda’s inception and is still lacking at all levels.¹⁰⁷ Because the UN secretary-general’s reports must mainstream gender, when reporting deadlines come up for UN missions, staff tend to pull the strongest examples of WPS integration they can find at the last minute rather than mainstreaming inclusion of gender analysis and WPS targets across internal processes and reporting all along.¹⁰⁸ One former representative of a member state went so far as to say that, in this respect, reports are ‘trivial and not substantive’.¹⁰⁹ Another interviewee, speaking about NATO operations, diplomatically called reports ‘creative’ and pointed out that armed forces can get away with such ‘creative reporting’ by saying that the systems for improving reporting and WPS mandate delivery are perpetually ‘in progress’.¹¹⁰ There is also a sense that peacekeepers are ‘only doing certain things because they are mandated to’, which can preclude the transformative institutional change called for in the WPS agenda.¹¹¹ Voiced as concern, this point speaks to two realities. On the one hand, in the spirit the speaker intended, a lack of commitment to systematic cultural change can mean that mandated WPS tasks are a box-ticking exercise to peacekeepers. On the other hand, however, some argue that—much like the

¹⁰³ Interview with UN DPET peace operations expert, Sep. 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with UN DPET peace operations expert, Sep. 2022.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with NATO gender training expert, Aug. 2022.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with NATO gender training expert, Aug. 2022; Interview with UN DPO gender expert, June 2022; and Interview with former peace operations expert of a UN member state, July 2022.

¹⁰⁷ UN Women, ‘The global study on 1325: Key messages, findings, and recommendations’, Fact sheet, 2015; Newby and O’Malley (note 7); Ghittoni, M., Lehouck, L., and Bastick, M., ‘A security sector governance approach to women, peace and security’, Policy brief, 2019, in DCAF, OSCE/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and UN Women, *Gender and Security Toolkit*, [n.d.]; and Office of NATO Secretary General’s Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security, *NATO/EAPTC Women, Peace and Security: Policy and Action Plan 1028* (NATO: Brussels, 2018).

¹⁰⁸ Interview with UN DPO gender expert, June 2022.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with former peace operations expert from a member state, July 2022.

¹¹⁰ Interview with NATO peace operations and gender training expert, Aug. 2022.

¹¹¹ Interview with former peace operations expert from a member state, July 2022.

parity goals—mandating these tasks is an essential first step to better gender mainstreaming over time.

As one interviewee pointed out, states rarely face consequences for not achieving parity or equity goals, whereas meeting those commitments can enhance a state's reputation and even stamp that state as a leader.¹¹² This can be motivating for states that care about projecting a progressive image.

Formal and informal networks can be useful for raising awareness of peace operations roles and the processes for obtaining those positions

However, in many instances, achieving gender goals where women enter previously male-dominated spaces can also create a 'patriarchal backlash'.¹¹³ In the instances where punitive measures for not achieving gender goals could conceivably be leveraged (e.g. if troop-contributing countries fail to deploy military engagement platoons with 50 per cent women, they will be barred from deploying at all), accountability structures on a global scale can follow familiar hierarchies, where wealthy countries hold power over countries that have been colonized, exploited and occupied.¹¹⁴ This hierarchy remains largely rhetorical, however, as such punitive measures are rarely, if ever, taken to their end.

Civil society oversight for peace operations—particularly uniformed contingents—is also essential if peacekeepers and leaders are to hold to their commitments. One interviewee pointed out, however, that 'civil society actors are either wooed by the armed forces or are *extremely* critical; it's been an uphill battle [to find a middle ground] for years'.¹¹⁵

Calls for accountability can unintentionally narrow the WPS agenda and its implementation. To hold actors accountable reduces the 'diverse and wide-ranging' principles of the WPS agenda, as 'substantive evaluation' of those principles is incredibly complex.¹¹⁶ Yet a lack of accountability often implies little meaningful engagement with the agenda at all. It is far easier to check a 'women: yes or no' box than it is to meaningfully reflect on a holistic and intersectional lens on the world.¹¹⁷

Operational challenge 3: Barriers to recruitment

Identifying the global talent pool of people with gender expertise is difficult, as is identifying women for deployment as military and civilian personnel to peace operations more generally (though some areas are more difficult than others). Formal and informal networks can be useful for raising awareness of peace operations roles and the processes for obtaining those positions.¹¹⁸ Because individuals have to go through typically male-dominated government nomination processes, governments themselves often act as barriers to participation. Networks can help to demystify these processes, and even though nominees still have to go through national hierarchies, this can 'create demand from the bottom up'.¹¹⁹ In the case of the UN Justice and

¹¹² Interview with member state gender expert, May 2022.

¹¹³ See e.g. Berry, Bouka and Kamuru (note 19).

¹¹⁴ Interview with member state peace operations expert, July 2022.

¹¹⁵ Interview with NATO peace operations trainer and gender expert, Aug. 2022. A similar sentiment was expressed in an earlier interview with a WPS civil society actor in June 2022.

¹¹⁶ Interview with UN DPO gender parity expert, June 2022.

¹¹⁷ Interview with UN DPO gender parity expert, June 2022.

¹¹⁸ See e.g. Vermeij (note 11).

¹¹⁹ Interview with UN DPO gender parity expert, June 2022.



Corrections Service (JCS), the UN headquarters has received ‘overwhelmingly positive’ feedback from members of the Global Women Corrections Officers Network who are closing the information gap about deployment opportunities and experiences; this point aligns with early findings related to other network efforts. For example, women’s networks have been notably successful in other areas of peace and security, such as mediation, and women peacekeepers frequently note in research interviews and convenings that they rely heavily on both informal and formal networks for information sharing.¹²⁰ Establishing these networks is an important step forward in efforts towards gender parity that are otherwise stalling.¹²¹

Additionally, to increase diversity across all levels (not just lower ranks and upper management) and to recruit those who fall outside the traditional profile of a ‘good fit’ that security institutions tend to have, these institutions must be fundamentally transformed. This includes, most urgently, addressing barriers to all under-represented groups’ participation. Notably, focusing on participation at the lower levels and retention thereafter is especially important, because existing barriers often mean that those women and other minorities leave before they can make their way into leadership positions.¹²²

Operational challenge 4: Scaling gender and peace operations

Similar to the debate around the role of gender in non-traditional security challenges, the value of a gender perspective in different types of peace operations (mission type) and mandated tasks is not always agreed upon. In large, multidimensional missions, for example, the mainstreaming of the WPS agenda is taken as a given these days (to varying degrees of success).¹²³ In contrast, in observer missions or special political missions, the role of gender is less clear: parity goals may not signal long-term, systemic change because overall staff numbers are lower, while the immediate benefit of integrating gendered analyses of conflict, for example, may be less apparent where there are fewer direct engagements with the host community or a lack of protection mandate. Despite this, when staffing missions, ‘research has shown that women are much more likely to be deployed to observer or political missions than to the situations of significant conflict that are arguably most in need of gender expertise’.¹²⁴

Paralleling this, departmental differences matter as well. For example, only a few hundred uniformed personnel are deployed to the UN JCS, rather than thousands. This means the JCS is a more agile office, which is an advantage for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. Hierarchies are also

¹²⁰ Interview with UN DPO gender parity expert, June 2022; Vermeij (note 11); and Uzodimma, N. E., Remarks at panel discussion ‘When we know better, we do better: The Elsie Initiative and improving mission environments’, International Peace Institute in partnership with the permanent missions of Germany, Mongolia, Uruguay and Zambia to the UN, New York, 9 Nov. 2022.

¹²¹ Interview with UN DPET peace operations expert, Sep. 2022.

¹²² See further Vermeij (note 11); and Karim et al. (note 23).

¹²³ Interview with UN DPO gender parity expert, June 2022.

¹²⁴ Kirby and Shepherd (note 15), citing Karim, S. and Beardsley, K., ‘Female peacekeepers and gender balancing: Token gestures or informed policymaking?’, *International Interactions*, vol. 39, no. 4 (2013); van der Lijn and Smit (note 16); Pfeifer, Smit and van der Lijn (note 16); and Pfeifer (note 16).



flatter than, say, the military, due to differences in organizational culture.¹²⁵ In offices like the JCS, accomplishing WPS goals in a meaningful way can be much more reasonable than in other larger, more unwieldy organizations or departments.¹²⁶ And while there may be important and significant lessons to be learned from these successes, it is unclear whether they are scalable or transferable.

Operational challenge 5: To silo or mainstream?

Over the years since the adoption of Resolution 1325, the question of whether to keep gender/WPS expertise siloed or to mainstream it has persisted. This debate can create confusion in policy and implementation; notably, it happened recently with the UN's A4P+ initiative. In A4P+, gender is introduced as a cross-cutting theme; this is a deviation from the parent policy, A4P, in which the WPS agenda was one of eight standalone issue areas in the original A4P architecture. This change happened without clear guidance for how to mainstream gender across the remaining seven priorities, despite seemingly good intentions.¹²⁷

Relegating issues to a 'cross-cutting' designation can seem like a good idea but in practice can dull the effects and political power of the issue in question. This happened in the early years of the WPS agenda itself—12 areas for action became five 'pillars', which then became four pillars when 'the "normative" pillar was deemed to "cut across" the four remaining pillars' (prevention, participation, protection, and relief and recovery).¹²⁸ At the same time, when clear accountability mechanisms are in place, framing gender as a cross-cutting issue is simply equivalent to gender mainstreaming. However, without guidance, those with the power to implement this kind of mainstreaming can claim that they do not understand how to do so. One interviewee pointed out that, in the absence of additional WPS resolutions in recent years (which, notably, is overwhelmingly popular with civil society advocates and other WPS champions who emphasize the importance of implementing existing resolutions over writing new language into the agenda), UN Security Council members try to 'put WPS language in various other documents and policies'—in other words, they mainstream. However, this is controversial and has received pushback from those who believe that WPS topics should remain their own distinct category saying, for example, 'we should not go beyond the text itself; this is about strategic communications, not WPS'.¹²⁹

In summary, keeping WPS and gender analysis as a standalone issue area in peace operations may ensure that it is not forgotten in implementation but

¹²⁵ Interview with UN DPO gender parity expert, June 2022.

¹²⁶ Interview with UN DPO gender parity expert, June 2022; and Interview with member of the UN DPO Gender Unit, May 2022.

¹²⁷ One UN DPO gender expert interviewed in June 2020 stated bluntly that 'A4P+ has made our lives hell', as it has put gender requirements in place without actual accountability mechanisms, mainstreaming guidance, or tools required to do it well. See also Baldwin, G. and Sherman, J., 'Peace operations still exclude women, but A4P+ can change that', DCAF Opportunities for Women in Peacekeeping Policy Brief no 6, Oct. 2021.

¹²⁸ Kirby and Shepherd (note 15).

¹²⁹ Interview with former peace operations expert from a member state, July 2022.

When gender is framed as cross-cutting, it may be easier to deprioritize, including due to lack of clarity on responsibility for implementation



may also reinforce the misconception that gender is not a whole-of-mission responsibility. In contrast, framing WPS and gender as a cross-cutting issue can ensure that it is mainstreamed, thus potentially freeing up implementation from the participation trap. A downside, however, is that when gender is framed as cross-cutting, it may be easier to deprioritize for myriad reasons, including a lack of clarity on where the responsibility for implementation lies.

Operational challenge 6: Securitization of peace operations

One common refrain, particularly from civil society activists, in the years following Resolution 1325's adoption, is that the WPS agenda has been co-opted by militarization and securitization.¹³⁰ Some argue that to push for an increase in women's participation in uniformed peace operations without addressing broader concerns around militarism, securitization, and states' abuse of armed forces against their own populations or as part of foreign occupation, can actually serve as a shield for uniformed forces' bad behaviour. This is 'gender-washing'—adding women into hostile or problematic institutions as a superficial show of commitment to progressivism without addressing underlying hostilities or problems. Feminism can also be instrumentalized in a way that depoliticizes it as a concept and gender-washes security institutions' bad behaviour or introduces concepts or practices popular with oppressive, authoritarian or occupying state forces.¹³¹

Militarization of peacekeeping can undermine non-violent peacebuilding

This issue links back, at least in part, to what advocates mean when they say that transformational change is needed instead of just adding women into institutions with existing hyper-masculine or conservative environments. Critiques about militarization are especially poignant in the cases of stabilization missions, as the case of MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo illustrates.¹³² Militarization of *peacekeeping* can undermine non-violent *peacebuilding*.¹³³

IV. Conclusions

The upcoming 25th anniversary of the WPS agenda may be the most significant yet for the integration of gender and peace operations. Many gender parity strategies will be reaching their first mid- or end-points, while the annual Peacekeeping Ministerial, to be held in Ghana in 2023, is expected to foreground women's participation. The momentum behind increasing women's participation, full implementation of the WPS agenda,

¹³⁰ Baldwin, G. and Hynes, T., 'The securitization of gender: A primer', *Global Observatory*, Oct. 2022; Watson, C., 'Militarizing gender or humanizing small arms control?', *Global Observatory*, Oct. 2022; and Attai, Z. and Karim, S., 'When militarism meets gender reform: Fixing the contradictory legacy of the women, peace, and security agenda in Afghanistan', *Global Observatory*, Oct. 2021.

¹³¹ See e.g. Razavi, N., 'NatSec Feminism: Women security experts and the US counterterror state', *Signs*, vol. 46, no. 2 (2021).

¹³² See e.g. Russo, J., 'Protests against UN in Eastern Congo highlight peace mission's crisis of legitimacy', *The Conversation*, 31 July 2022.

¹³³ See e.g. Stamnes, E. and Osland, K., 'The Synthesis Report: Reviewing UN Peace Operations, the UN Peacebuilding Architecture and the Implementation of UNSCR 1325', Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) Report no. 2, 2016; and Julian, R., 'The transformative impact of unarmed civilian peacekeeping', *Global Society*, vol. 34, no. 1 (2020).



and improved gender mainstreaming and gendered analysis across peace operations is not guaranteed to continue, despite some progress. Backlash against progressive gender politics and policies has increased, and it can be easy for advocates to ignore (or simply fail to notice) the insidious gains made by those who argue against ‘gender ideology’ or claim that progress has already been achieved.¹³⁴ On the one hand, support for increasing uniformed women’s participation in peace operations has proved to be very politically popular—for example, Resolution 2538 on women’s participation in peace operations (the first of its kind) was so popular that it was adopted as one of just seven ‘presidential texts’ in the Security Council’s history.¹³⁵ On the other hand, intentional pushback and lack of knowledge have eroded support for other progressive measures around the WPS agenda and holistic application of gendered analysis, causing concern among advocates who are not confident that early gains are well enough established to withstand political contention.¹³⁶ Backlash against democratic institutions in many parts of the world is also likely to affect the future of gender and peace operations.

Globally, states, including major peacekeeping contributor countries and donor countries, have been quick to develop NAPs but slow to implement them, and the plans are often much more rhetorical than material.¹³⁷ Material commitments and follow-through are essential to moving gender mainstreaming and full implementation forwards. This starts with writing WPS language into the operative contents of policies, resolutions and mandates, rather than just in preambles or framing language.¹³⁸ It likewise requires understanding gender holistically and intersectionally in order to actively address fundamental inequalities and root causes of violence, as well as attending more deliberately to the blind spots of the prevention and relief and recovery pillars of the WPS agenda in the strongest terms rather than continuing a hyper-focus on participation and protection. Finally, clearer and more detailed guidance on what it actually means to implement ‘gender-responsive peace operations’ is needed if an integrated gender perspective is to be mainstreamed across the multilateral institutions that carry out those operations.

As the international community looks forward to the 25th anniversary of Resolution 1325, more attention than ever will be paid to gender and peace operations. Practitioners, policymakers, researchers and advocates should not become complacent based on the ostensible popularity of the agenda; rather, they should step up efforts to ensure the long-term sustainability of the WPS agenda’s implementation, in line with its most progressive reading.

¹³⁴ See e.g. Taylor, S. and Baldwin, G., ‘The global pushback on women’s rights: The state of the women, peace, and security agenda’, International Peace Institute, Sep. 2019; and Butler, J., ‘Why is the idea of “gender” provoking backlash the world over?’, *The Guardian*, 23 Oct. 2021.

¹³⁵ UN Security Council Resolution 2538, 28 Aug. 2020. See Johnson, D. and Baldwin, G., ‘Women in peacekeeping: Signs of change at the UN?’, *Global Observatory*, 17 Sep. 2020.

¹³⁶ For more see O’Rourke, C. and Swaine, A., ‘Heading to twenty: Perils and promises of WPS Resolution 2493’, LSE Women, Peace and Security Forum, 12 Nov. 2019; and Taylor and Baldwin (note 134).

¹³⁷ See e.g. Kirby and Shepherd (note 15).

¹³⁸ A similar point is made in Kirby and Shepherd (note 15).



Abbreviations

| | |
|------|--|
| A4P | Action for Peacekeeping |
| A4P+ | Action for Peacekeeping+ |
| CRSV | Conflict-related sexual violence |
| DEI | Diversity, equity and inclusion |
| DPO | UN Department of Peace Operations |
| EU | European Union |
| JCS | UN Justice and Corrections Service |
| NAP | National Action Plan |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| OSCE | Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe |
| SEA | Sexual exploitation and abuse |
| TPCC | Troop- and police-contributing country |
| UN | United Nations |
| WPS | Women, peace and security |

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CONSIDERING THE FUTURE OF GENDER AND PEACE OPERATIONS: STRATEGIC DEBATES AND OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

GRETCHEN BALDWIN

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