

Women, Gender and the A4P Agenda: An Opportunity for Action?

BACKGROUND PAPER
CHALLENGES ANNUAL FORUM 2018

Action for Peacekeeping –
Strengthening the Effectiveness of
Future Peace Operations

28-29 Nov 2018, Stockholm, Sweden

Hosted by the Folke Bernadotte
Academy and the Swedish Armed
Forces.

Executive Summary

Peace operations are an important mechanism for progressing women, peace and security. The Declaration of Shared Commitments on the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative includes commitments by member states to implement the WPS agenda with a focus on supporting women's participation in peace processes, integrating gender perspectives, and increasing the number of women in peacekeeping. None of these pledges by the international community are new, however their inclusion in the Declaration serves as a reminder that further action is needed in these areas to strengthen peacekeeping and its efforts to support sustainable peace. If the A4P Declaration is to have any utility in advancing WPS in UN peace operations, then effort is needed at the political level among member states in New York, in the field by mission leadership, and in capitals where policies are put in place to deploy people. This paper examines some of the challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the A4P initiative is positioned to advance WPS and improve the effectiveness of peacekeeping.

LISA SHARLAND is the Head of the International Program at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) in Canberra, Australia, and a Non-Resident Fellow in the Protecting Civilians in Conflict Program at the Stimson Center in Washington, DC.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinion or position of the Challenges Forum Partnership.



Peace operations an important mechanism for progressing women, peace and security. In resolution 1325 – the first Security Council resolution on women and peace and security (WPS) —the Council and international community recognized the need to mainstream a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations, the importance of specialized training on the protection needs and human rights of women in conflict situations, and the need for women’s participation and involvement in peace processes, conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. These positions have been routinely reinforced and expanded in subsequent resolutions of the Security Council, as part of major reviews undertaken on peace operations, peacebuilding and WPS during the 15 year anniversary in 2015, and as part of international summits on peacekeeping. Similarly, policies and programs have been put in place to operationalize these commitments in the field as part of peace operations over the last eighteen years. There have been successes in many areas, but results in UN peace operations remain mixed.

The Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative, launched by the Secretary-General in March 2018, is intended to catalyse political will in support of peacekeeping. If harnessed effectively, it has the potential to advance WPS within the context of peacekeeping and peace operations more broadly. For instance, the Declaration of Shared Commitments on A4P reinforces the importance of WPS.¹ In that statement, more than 150 member states and regional organisations committed to implement the WPS agenda by (1) ‘ensuring full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all stages of the peace process’; (2) ‘systematically integrating a gender perspective into all stages of analysis, planning, implementation and report’; and (3) increasing the number of civilian and uniformed women in peacekeeping at all levels and in key positions’. The declaration also included a commitment to protect women and children ‘in relevant peacekeeping operations’.² None of these commitments are new, of course. They echo many of the commitments already enshrined in Security Council products and reports of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34). Nonetheless, the inclusion of these commitments serves as a reminder to member states that further action is needed if any progress is to be made in meeting these obligations.

The challenges for WPS in the context of peacekeeping are significant. Increasing women’s participation requires willingness among troop and police contributing countries to bolster the number of women serving in their own security institutions, yet this is a challenge for many countries—or in some cases—not a priority at all. Similarly, although there is political support for integrating gender perspectives into the work of peacekeeping missions, the issue is anathema to some member states that instead use budgetary processes to cut the number of gender adviser posts in missions. Even at the strategic level, the issue of women’s engagement and gender analysis of conflict situations continues to get

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¹ Action for Peacekeeping: Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations 2018, paragraph 8.

² See Action for Peacekeeping: Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations 2018, paragraph 10.

overlooked.³ All of this—combined with the challenges that exist on the ground—means that more needs to be done to strengthen WPS implementation and catalyze change. Political momentum needs to move to implementation.

This paper examines what needs to be done in order to ensure the women, peace and security agenda is comprehensively addressed as part of the A4P initiative. Rather than examine the application across the five the thematic areas of consultation—people, performance, peacebuilding, partnerships and politics—the paper instead examines key developments and issues emerging from the three priority areas identified in the declaration. It then examines the challenges and opportunities across UN peace operations when it comes to progressing WPS, concluding with some recommendations about how to address these.

Ensuring women’s full and meaningful participation in peace processes

Women’s full and meaningful participation in peace processes has most relevance to the politics and peacebuilding pillars of the A4P agenda. Peace operations are inherently political tools with a focus on conflict prevention and resolution. The international community has numerous options available to it to ensure that these processes include the participation of women. For instance, this might include engaging women mediators in early efforts to resolve conflict. Or it might mean ensuring that the Security Council engages with women’s civil society groups in New York as part of briefings and consultations,⁴ or as part of field visits to missions and conflict situations.

Equally, the Secretariat has an important leadership role in modelling the importance of women’s participation in peace processes. Visits by senior leadership which are focused on engaging women draw attention to the importance of their voices and act as enablers when matters are brought to the Security Council. The recent joint visit by the Under-Secretary-General of Peacekeeping, Jean Pierre Lacroix, the Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, and the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smail Chergui, to South Sudan in October 2018 provides a good example. The findings of that high-level visit were raised directly with the Security Council during a November briefing on the situation.⁵ Yet this type of combined and focused visit, like so many steps forward regarding women’s participation, was a first. More often than not, initiatives to include women in peace processes have historically focused on ‘ticking-the-box’ on woman’s participation at the peace table or including them as ‘tokens’ rather than facilitating their substantive engagement.

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³ For analysis, see Lisa Sharland, ‘Security of UN peacekeepers: the minefield of politics, people and principles’, *The Strategist*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2 February 2018, available here: <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/security-un-peacekeepers-minefield-politics-people-principles/>

⁴ See Louise Allen, ‘Why the United Nations Security Council must let women speak freely’, *Open Democracy*, 22 October 2018, available here: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/louise-allen/united-nations-security-council-must-let-women-speak-freely>

⁵ UN News, ‘South Sudan’s women caught up in ‘futile man’s war’ UN gender equality chief’, 16 November 2018, available here: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/11/1025921>

Women's participation in peace processes has been shown to bring a critical shift in dynamics to negotiations. This was noted by the Global Study on the Implementation of UN Security Council 1325 three years ago, which also pointed to evidence of the positive correlation between women's participation in peace negotiations and their implementation. But this requires efforts to go beyond the traditional 'masculine' constructs of what has historically formed part of 'peace processes'. To start with, the Security Council needs to move beyond considering women's participation as an issue only during formal negotiations or discussions. As the Secretary-General recently noted, efforts to resolve conflict not only include peace processes, but also humanitarian access agreements, ceasefires, and development plans.⁶ Initiatives to ensure the inclusion of women need to begin as soon as the situation arises on the Security Council's agenda, if not before, and particularly if it is likely to require the deployment of a peace operation.

Indeed, efforts to ensure women's full and meaningful participation as part of peace processes starts long before a peace operation deploys into the country. The Council and Secretariat-led mission planning teams need to ensure they are engaging with women across society when assessing the needs for the deployment of a peace operation on the ground. Similarly, the Council needs to substantively draw on a range of mechanisms, including the Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security, to comprehensively assess the obstacles that are likely to impede the effective and meaningful participation of women in any peace processes—broadly defined—that might be underway.

Similarly, on the ground, peace operations need to consider how women are engaged across these efforts as part of their implementation of the mission mandate. The engagement of local women and their networks is critical to these efforts. It means understanding the 'drivers of peace' and unleashing women's leadership potential in society.⁷ It requires plans by the mission leadership, political affairs and civil affairs to ensure they are working not only with the host government (if that option is available), but also civil society groups and local communities to overcome some of the technical barriers to women's participation, which might include care duties or funding to cover travel expenses. It also requires integrating a gender perspective into the mission's analysis of the drivers of conflict and peace, to ensure efforts to resolve conflict are comprehensive and address any barriers to women's involvement. Importantly, women's participation across society needs to be 'meaningful', that is, mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that women are afforded an 'opportunity to influence outcomes'.⁸

Peace will only be sustainable long after a peace operation has departed if women are included, they feel secure and their human rights are upheld and protected. This requires not only women's participation in peace processes, but also their engagement from the earliest stages of a

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⁶ United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security*, UN Doc S/2018/900, 9 October 2018, p8.

⁷ Youssef Mahmoud, 'Without Prioritization of Peace and Women's Leadership, WPS in Peril', *Global Observatory*, 25 October 2018, available here <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2018/10/without-prioritization-peace-womens-leadership-wps-in-peril/>

⁸ *Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security*, UN Doc S/2018/900, p9.

...‘the reality in our peace operations is that the number of women at all levels has stagnated, and is at risk of decreasing in the coming years through the imminent downsizing of several missions.’

mission as participants in efforts to build institutions across society. For peace operations, it means ensuring women’s meaningful inclusion in the security sector, governance and rule of law institutions. These efforts also extend beyond the field to the UN headquarters in New York. Institutions such as the Peacebuilding Commission and the Security Council need to work to work in partnership to consistently include women’s participation as a provision in peacebuilding processes, particularly as missions prepare to transition and drawdown.

As the Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on ‘sustaining peace’ have underscored, ‘women’s full and meaningful involvement in efforts to prevent, resolve and rebuild from conflict’ is linked to the long-term sustainability of those efforts.⁹ Peace operations—including peacekeeping missions—have an essential role in facilitating that process.

Increasing the number of women in peacekeeping

Upon taking the oath of office as Secretary-General in December 2016, Guterres made clear that achieving gender was a top priority during his term in office. Among the early milestones, gender balance was achieved among the Secretary-General’s Senior Management Group in January 2018, and parity was attained among UN resident coordinators in the field in May 2018.¹⁰ Yet gender parity in UN peace operations remains an aspirational goal, with women making-up approximately 28% of international civilian peacekeepers, and 10% of the police and 4% of the military as part of the uniformed components.¹¹ As the Secretary-General noted in his most recent annual report on women and peace and security, ‘the reality in our peace operations is that the number of women at all levels has stagnated, and is at risk of decreasing in the coming years through the imminent downsizing of several missions.’¹²

However, women’s participation in peace operations has benefits beyond simply meeting the requirement of gender parity. Increasing women’s participation is critical to the overall effectiveness of peace operations. Women serving in peace operations enable missions to have greater scope to engage in community outreach, supporting more effective mandate implementation, and ‘decrease incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse’.

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Furthermore, the participation of women sets an important example to war-ravaged communities about the importance of empowering women and supporting their engagement across society—in politics, peace processes and the security sector. This is the rationale that has underpinned repeated calls to increase the number of women serving in peace operations.

⁹ UN Security Council Resolution 2282 (2016) and UN General Assembly Resolution 70/262 (2016)

¹⁰ But some critics have rightly pointed out that there needs to be caution in celebrating these achievements as markers of success. See Laura Sheperd, ‘Gender parity at the UN: promises to keep’, *Lowy Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 8 March 2018, available here: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/gender-parity-un-promises-keep>

¹¹ Timo Smit and Kajsa Tidblad-Lundholm, *Trends in Women’s Participation in UN, EU and OSCE Peace Operations*, SIPRI Policy Paper No 47, October 2018, p3.

¹² *Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security*, UN Doc S/2018/900, p3

¹³ United Nations General Assembly, *Report of the Secretary-General, Implementation of the recommendations of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations*, UN Doc A/72/573, 3 November 2017, p22.

Increasing the number of women serving in uniformed components deployed to peace operations is a significant challenge. Unlike civilian posts, where the Secretariat is able to put in place initiatives such as the women's talent pipeline or temporary special measures that are likely to generate direct results in recruitment, efforts to generate more uniformed personnel need to encourage reform and commitment within the domestic security institutions of member states. And the appointment of only the second woman as Force Commander in early November this year, showed that there is an even more acute challenge in appointing women to uniformed leadership posts.

Targets and incentives have been put in place to encourage member states to increase the number of women they are deploying to peace operations. For example, the Security Council has called on the Secretary-General to develop a strategy to double the number of uniformed personnel serving in missions by 2020. Similarly, the Secretariat is encouraging member states to: ensure that 15% of their staff officers and military observers are female; include female engagement teams in infantry battalions and police units; and increase the representation of female police to 20% or in the same proportion as women serving in their national police services.

Some reforms have been put in place to expedite these efforts. This includes enabling female warrant officers and lieutenants to deploy as military observers and allowing women with young families to deploy for six months.¹⁴ Different incentives have been put forward for member states to actively consider putting forward female candidates, including reassigning positions to troop and police contributors (T/PCCs) that reach some of these targets.

However, more information is needed on the trends and different factors that influence whether uniformed women deploy to peace operations. For instance, analysis of the trends of female military personnel deployed to UN peace operations between 2008 and 2017 found that if the proportion of women increased through a mission life-cycle, that was more likely to take place when a mission was expanding, and progress even quicker when there was a reduction or drawdown in the mission.¹⁵ Similarly, that same analysis found that the representation of women was often below average in some of the largest peace operations. While these trends could suggest that there is a potential correlation between member states decisions to deploy women to peace operations and the security environment of those missions, there has been little analysis into the complex array of factors that limit the number of uniformed women deploying to missions.¹⁶

Nevertheless, it will be important that in working towards any targets to increase the deployment of female uniformed personnel that the UN and member states don't lose sight of the importance of their role in strengthening capability and operational effectiveness. Member States

14 Notably, while this may encourage more women to serve from some member states, it may slow overall gender parity initiatives that are focused on encouraging men to take on caring responsibilities as well.

15 Timo Smit and Kajsa Tidblad-Lundholm, *Trends in Women's Participation in UN, EU and OSCE Peace Operations*, SIPRI Policy Paper No 47, October 2018, p5.

16 Some analysis has been done by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), but there is scope for much more work to be undertaken. See, for example, Marta Ghittoni, Léa Lehoucq and Callum Watson, *Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations – Baseline Study*, July 2018.

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therefore need to be nominating and deploying women that are trained military and police personnel to serve in peace operations, while also reviewing their own national efforts to recruit and promote women within their national military and police institutions. For many member states, including a number of major T/PCCs, that requires a significant transformation of their own institutions and the way they engage with the UN. That's why member state commitment to increase women's participation as part of the A4P declaration will be critical, particularly if major T/PCCs are going to remain preferred contributors. Partnerships such as the Elsie Initiative, launched by the Canadians, as well as targeted training support for female peacekeepers, generate potential moving forward to address some of these gaps and build the capacity of T/PCCs to deploy more women to peace operations.

Integrating a gender perspective at all stages

Without a gender perspective across the work of UN peace operations, missions only have part of the picture about the drivers of peace and conflict, the threat environment, the risks to civilians and the opportunities for sustainable peace. This is why the inclusion of gender advisers within peace operations (and similarly, women's protection advisers) have become a vital tool for successful peace operations. Gender expertise within the mission is essential to ensuring that peacekeeping activities are responsive to the different needs of women and men, and that resources are allocated effectively to support WPS requirements within the mission.

However, despite the centrality of gender-responsive analysis to the implementation of mission mandates, there have been ongoing efforts to reduce the number of posts being included in peacekeeping missions, largely through budget cuts in the UN General Assembly's Fifth Committee.¹⁷ Similarly, gender posts have also been downgraded in some cases, with only four peacekeeping missions currently having senior gender advisers, despite the recommendation across the peace and security reviews in 2015 for gender expertise to have seniority and access to senior mission leadership.¹⁸ Without access and influence among mission leadership, gender advisers will have less influence and impact across the mission, limiting the effectiveness of peace operations.

While gender advisers are critical resources to ensure that gender perspectives are considered in peace operations, integrating gender perspectives is not just their responsibility: it is a commitment across the mission. This approach is essential when you consider the need to include a gender perspective across all stages of a peace operation. For instance, a gender-responsive analysis that incorporates the needs of women, as well as men, and considers power dynamics in society, can identify indicators that serve as early warning signs for violence or potential threats to the mission. This is particularly important for missions that have protection

17 See Aissata Athie and Sarah Taylor, 'UN Peacekeeping: Where is the Gender Expertise?', *Global Observatory*, International Peace Institute, 27 October 2018, available here: <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/10/un-peacekeeping-where-is-the-gender-expertise/>

18 *Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security*, UN Doc S/2018/900, p6

of civilians as part of their mission mandate, as it can enable the mission to assess threats and respond more effectively. On the other hand, failure to undertake analysis with a gender lens isn't complete 'which can have a detrimental and long-term impact on the whole of society'.¹⁹ This could consequently set back future peace processes and peacebuilding efforts.

Applying a gender-lens is also essential to the decisions made by the Security Council and reports emerging from the Secretariat, yet even these institutions, which have committed to integrating gender advice, have overlooked the need at times. For instance, an analysis undertaken by Security Council Report found that the Council has historically taken a gender-blind approach when there is a deteriorating situation on its agenda.²⁰ Similarly, the report 'Improving the Security of UN Peacekeepers', which was commissioned by the Secretary-General upon coming into office, includes no references at all to women's participation or gender-responsive analysis as a tool to improve the security of peacekeepers. Fortunately the Action Plans that have been put in place to implement the report, including plans to develop 'gender-responsive and protection oriented analysis that identify specific security vulnerabilities, threats and risks to women and men', among other tasks.²¹ But this doesn't negate the oversight. It serves as a reminder that integrating a gender perspective across all stages of peace operations can be easily overlooked if it isn't a priority, or there are gaps in leadership and accountability.

Deploying military gender advisers, in particular, is more likely to secure engagement and support from the military component on the issues, which unfortunately may be less likely to engage with the civilian gender adviser.

Challenges, opportunities and recommendations

In 2020 the international community will mark twenty years since the inclusion of women, peace and security on the agenda of the Security Council. There are laudable successes that can be pointed to in the last two decades, particularly when it comes to the efforts by peace operations to ensure that women's participation is strengthened, that their protection is more comprehensively prioritized and that gender perspectives are included across the life-cycle of missions. Yet in many cases, that progress has been incremental, with consequences, particularly for women in conflict-affected settings on the ground, but also the potential effectiveness of peace operations. In this context, it is useful to point to some key challenges that need to be considered in the context of the A4P agenda.

First, member states need to ensure that they follow through on their commitment to support the integration of gender perspectives across all stages of peace operations by providing political and funding support. For example, this includes supporting efforts to strengthen and elevate the position of gender advisers in peace operations where necessary through negotiations in the Fifth Committee, and for those countries serving on the Council, ensuring the inclusion of language that supports the

¹⁹ Ibid, p.5.

²⁰ Security Council Report, *Women, Peace and Security: Closing the Security Council's Implementation Gap*, February 2017, available here: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7b65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7d/research_report_women_peace_and_security_2017.pdf

²¹ United Nations, *Improving Security of United Nations Peacekeepers Action Plan for Implementation of Fatalities Report*, 9 April 2018, available here: https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/180406_action_plan_revised.pdf

...efforts to increase the women's participation within the uniformed component of peace operations needs to include a more concerted focus on women's contribution to capability and operational effectiveness in missions as a core component of peacekeeping missions, rather than placing too much emphasis on the numbers and targets.

integration of gender perspectives as part of the mission mandate.

In the case of T/PCCs, it also includes preparing and training military and police personnel—male and female—to serve as gender advisers within peace operations. Deploying military gender advisers, in particular, is more likely to secure engagement and support from the military component on the issues, which unfortunately may be less likely to engage with the civilian gender adviser.

Second, efforts to advance WPS within peace operations will only be successful with concerted leadership and accountability across all levels of peace operations. While that may be a primary responsibility of the gender adviser in the mission, responsibility does not only rest with them. Senior mission leaders have a key responsibility to ensure that gender perspectives are being integrated across the functions of the mission—and that there are efforts underway within the mission to increase the participation of women. But there is also a need for peacekeeping personnel across the mission to be held accountable for integrating gender considerations into the work they do. There are welcome moves underway within the UN Secretariat to strengthen accountability within peace operations when it comes to WPS.

Those efforts need to be supported by member states and effectively implemented, including as part of the A4P agenda.

Third, efforts to increase the women's participation within the uniformed component of peace operations needs to include a more concerted focus on women's contribution to capability and operational effectiveness in missions as a core component of peacekeeping missions, rather than placing too much emphasis on the numbers and targets. Offering incentives for member states to deploy more women are important, but caution is required to ensure that these incentives don't have adverse impacts on overall efforts to strengthen women's participation within their defence and police services. Women's participation in peace operations is most effective when women are deployed into roles where they engage with the community and enhance the diversity of thinking on operations.

While efforts need to continue at speed to increase the numbers, they need to do so in a manner that enables sustainable reform in support of the wider women, peace and security agenda. Partnerships such as the Elsie Initiative represent an important step forward in focusing on some of the impediments that are likely to prevent some countries from deploying more women – and ensuring they overcome them. More research examining the potential barriers to uniformed women deploying to UN peace operations will be essential if effective reforms and partnerships are to be put in place.

The A4P agenda identifies key areas where peacekeeping needs to re-commit when it comes to progressing women, peace and security. However, without concerted efforts to put WPS at the forefront of peacekeeping reforms, the A4P declaration risks serving as no more than a statement that will gather dust if the political commitments that have been visibly made by member states aren't supported by action, reforms

and funding. This is particularly the case if peace operations are to be an effective vehicle for strengthening women's participation and their equality within the societies where peacekeepers serve—and ultimately, the sustainability of peace long after a peace operation departs.