



**Advancing the Meaningful
Participation of Women in
UN Peace Operations by
Supporting Personnel with
Caring Responsibilities**

Concept Note

Eleanor Gordon

Globally, women with caring responsibilities have been — and continue to be — restricted in their ability to work in peace operations.² This is a critical factor in the continued underrepresentation of women in peace operations, particularly uniformed women, where progress towards gender parity goals has been more challenging.³ This is despite increasing awareness of the importance of women’s meaningful participation in peace operations,⁴ underpinned by the United Nations (UN) Security Council’s Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

This project is the first of its kind to identify the causes and consequences of marginalizing women with caring responsibilities⁵ from military and police organizations (security institutions) in troop and police contributing countries (T/PCCs) and UN peace operations. The objective of this project is to propose ways to reduce this marginalization, thereby improving the meaningful participation of women, enhancing operational effectiveness and advancing gender equality. As a result, the beneficiaries of peace operations as well as those who work – or aspire to work – in them will benefit.

The project builds upon global, multi-year research projects conducted by the project team on the marginalization of peacebuilding practitioners with caring responsibilities⁶ and how organisations can provide better support to them (Universities of Monash and Warwick, 2017-2021),⁷ as well as the work of military Gender Advisors (GENADs) to advance the WPS agenda (Government of Australia, Department of Defence, 2020-2022).⁸

This project is funded⁹ by the Government of Canada as part of the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations.¹⁰ Canada announced the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations during the Vancouver UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial Conference (2017)¹¹ and extended the Initiative for a further 5 years to 2027 at the Seoul UN Peacekeeping Ministerial meeting (2021).¹² The goal of the Initiative is to help increase the meaningful participation of women in UN peace operations, and is underpinned by a commitment to gender equity and to the reform of UN peace operations.

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Rationale

There are significant barriers to the meaningful participation of women in UN peace operations and in the security institutions of T/PCCs. Chief among these barriers is the lack of support, policies and structures to enable the recruitment, retention, promotion, training and deployment of personnel with primary or sole caring responsibilities, principally caring for children.¹³ Workplace cultures and gender normative assumptions about motherhood, care and security work compound these barriers.¹⁴ The marginalization of women with caring responsibilities from security institutions and UN peace operations adversely impacts organizational and operational effectiveness.¹⁵ It does so by narrowing the diversity of deployed military and police personnel, and reducing the skillset, knowledge and ways of thinking available to security institutions and peace operations. It compromises efforts to advance gender equality within and through peace operations,¹⁶ adversely impacting efforts to build sustainable peace that is representative of, and responsive to, the needs of diverse groups.¹⁷ Moreover, the marginalization of women with caring responsibilities also communicates that the skills associated with care, including care for others and self-care, are not valued in security institutions or in peace operations.



UNAMID peacekeeper. Photo: UNAMID/Albert González Farran, 2013

These impacts affect how security and peace are conceptualized, whose security is prioritized, and the type of peace that is built. Where security institutions and peace operations are less inclusive and less diverse, their operations are less likely to be responsive to a diversity of needs and less able to enjoy broad-based public confidence and trust. Where security institutions and peace operations cannot utilize a diversity of skillsets, knowledge and ways of thinking, they have less capacity to respond to a range of complex and dynamic challenges. Where security institutions and peace operations are not fully committed to gender equality, their credibility suffers when they advocate for the advancement of gender equality in peace operations. This can also compromise their efforts to advance security and build sustainable peace, given the positive correlation between gender equality and peaceful societies.¹⁸ Moreover, where security institutions and peace operations do not communicate a commitment to an ethics of care,¹⁹ including the care needs and caring responsibilities of its personnel, the well-being of all staff can suffer. This can lead to stress and burnout, and can be a contributing factor in sexual exploitation and abuse and other safeguarding scandals that have blighted the work of militaries and police organizations engaged in peace operations.²⁰

This project intends to address the causes and consequences of the marginalization of women with caring responsibilities from T/PCCs and UN peace operations and, in so doing, address key peace and security challenges: the meaningful participation of women, the effectiveness of peace operations and efforts to advance gender equality. The direct beneficiaries of this project are, therefore, uniformed women – and women who aspire to work in police and military structures and be deployed on peace operations – and also others who work in and are impacted by peace operations.



MONUSCO Medal Ceremony. Photo: UN/Marcelline Comlan 2017

This project directly aligns with the key areas of interest articulated in the second phase of the Government of Canada's Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations, namely expanding knowledge of uniformed women's experiences, including the barriers they face to their meaningful participation in T/PCC security institutions and UN peace operations, and identifying ways to address these barriers.

Additionally, the project aligns with the UN's 2021-2023 Action for Peacekeeping implementation strategy (A4P+),²¹ which has prioritised the meaningful participation of uniformed women in peace operations and the greater understanding of barriers they face (A4P+ Deliverable 3.1.1.). Further, the project responds to the principles and commitments contained within the WPS agenda, in particular UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2538 (2020), which:

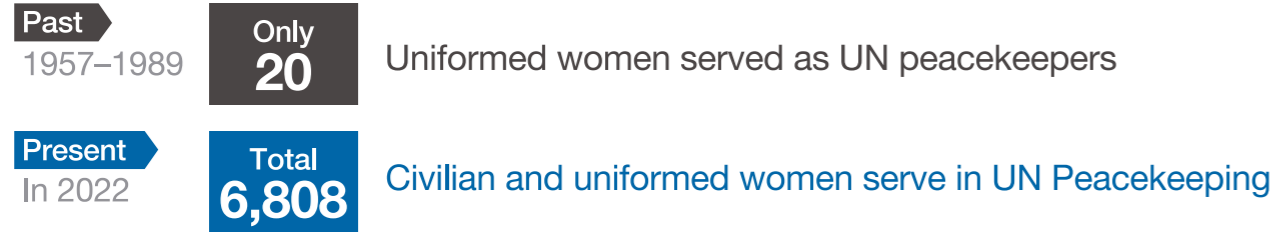
Encourages Member States to develop strategies and measures to increase the deployment of uniformed women to peacekeeping operations, including by... Taking measures to provide support and incentives including child care and other relevant needs (UNSCR 2538 (2020): para 2g)



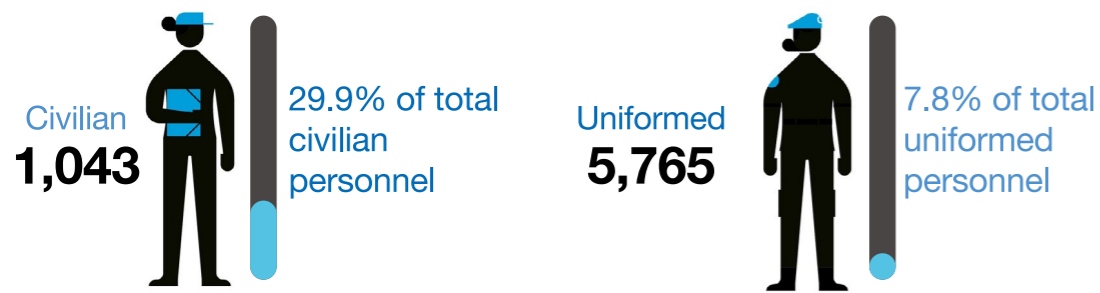
UNMIL Honours Peacekeepers. Photo: UN/ Christopher Herwig, 2008

The project is also aligned with the UN's Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy (2018-2028),²² which aims to create an enabling environment for the meaningful participation of uniformed women personnel in peacekeeping, recognised as critical to peacekeeping success but still wanting. As shown below, the latest statistics from UNDPKO reveal that women comprise only 7.8% of uniformed personnel in UN peace operations (Figure 1)

Number of Women Personnel in UN Peacekeeping Missions



The number of women peacekeepers continues to grow



Women are deployed in all areas: civilian, military, police, and justice & corrections service

Women Uniformed Personnel By Mission

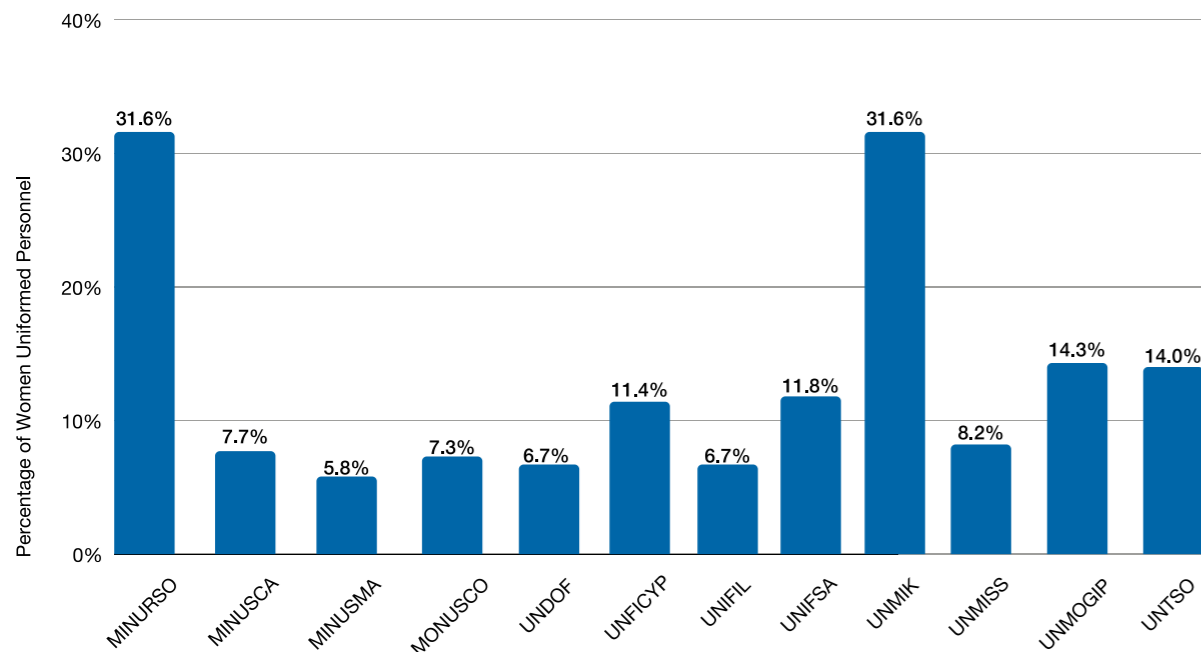


Figure 1: Uniformed Women in UN Peace Operations²³

The UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy sets targets for women in peacekeeping, with 2028 targets as follows: 15% female military peacekeepers in troop contingents, 20% female police in formed police units (FPU), 25% female military observers (MEOM) and staff officers (SO), and 30% individual police officers (IPO). The figure below shows the real numbers achieved compared with the proposed targets (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Uniformed Women in Peace Operations (actual percentage & Gender Parity Strategy targets)²⁴

Project

The project duration is 3 years (2023-26). A multi-method approach will be employed to include:

- Key informant interviews in 7 country field sites (and online) with uniformed personnel (both armed forces and police, with and without caring responsibilities, including, women, men and people of diverse gender identities) and key stakeholders (to include civilian staff in SSIs, UN HQ and peace operations as well as civil society representatives)
- An online global survey with uniformed personnel (with and without caring responsibilities, including both women and men) and key stakeholders: https://monashred.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_78lbrMli6Nql5ga
- Desk-based research to include mapping and analysis of policies, best practices and personnel statistics

Fieldwork and data gathering will occur throughout 2024. Information will be gathered about the causes and effects of the marginalization of women with caring responsibilities from T/PCC security institutions and from UN peace operations. It will also enable the identification of best practice, lessons learned and factors that impact the extent to which personnel with caring responsibilities are marginalized and the impact this has on operational effectiveness in peace operations.

Fieldwork will be followed in 2025 by online Validation Workshops with research participants and in-country Dissemination / Awareness Raising Workshops in which project findings will be shared and discussed.

The project is comprised of a large team of Monash GPS researchers with expertise in gender, peace and security, and global consultants with extensive experience and expertise in peace operations, policing and the armed forces.



Team Members

Monash GPS

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Case Studies

Fieldwork will be conducted in seven field sites: three T/PCCs (Indonesia, India and the United Kingdom), UN HQ and three UN peace operations (UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS)).

UN HQ has been chosen as it sets peacekeeping policy and practice, plays a critical leadership and influencing role over the policies and practices of T/PCCs, and is driving efforts to advance women's meaningful participation in the pursuit of peace, including through its Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy (2018-2028).

The three UN peace operations (MINUSCA, MONUSCO and UNMISS) have been chosen as they are among the largest peace operations currently. The 3 sites allow for lessons learned across different peace operations to be captured. These peace operations also include troops and police from the T/PCC case studies.

The three T/PCCs have been chosen as they each have valuable lessons to share – and build upon – regarding how to facilitate the meaningful participation of women in peace operations and how to support uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities. While these T/PCCs have yet to meet the current UN gender parity targets, they each have important contributions and lessons to share:

- India has a long tradition of deploying women peacekeepers and, in 2007, was the first country to deploy an all-woman contingent to a UN peace operation (the Formed Police Unit in Liberia). Today, India is the second largest contributor of uniformed personnel (troops and police) to UN peace operations.
- Indonesia has made notable strides recently to advance gender-responsiveness within its security sector. Globally, Indonesia is the eighth largest contributor of uniformed personnel to UN peace operations, but also fell below the UN gender parity target for 2022 at 4.5%.
- The United Kingdom (UK) has been at the forefront of innovations to support uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities, including the British Royal Air Force receiving the 2020 Best Practice 'Best for Mothers' Award, by the UK charity Working Families, for supporting flexible work practices, among other initiatives. The UK is also a donor country to the Elsie Initiative Fund and a significant contributor of troops to UN peace operations.



Female peacekeepers serving UNMISS. Photo: UN/Gregorio Cunha, 2021

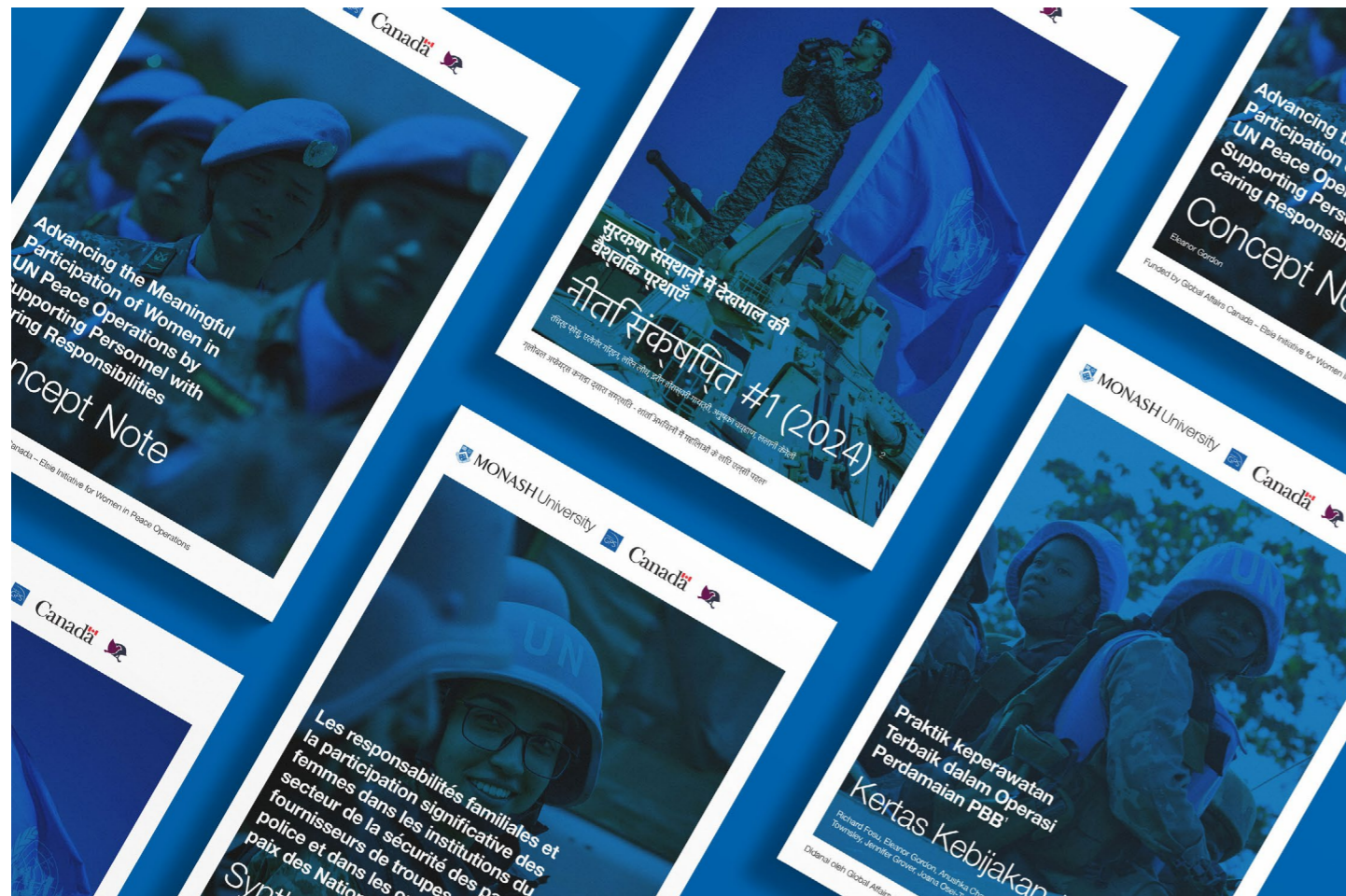


MONUSCO UNPOL and SENFPU Medal Ceremony. Photo: UN/Kevin Jordan, 2020

Outputs

Findings will inform a Report with a series of comprehensive recommendations, an Organizational Toolkit (to include an Organizational Checklist and a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning framework), public information and advocacy materials, and peer-reviewed journal articles. Outputs will be designed to better support the recruitment, retention, promotion, training and deployment on peace operations of women in military and police organizations.

Outputs will be disseminated across military, policing and peacekeeping sectors, including with policy makers and leadership within UN HQ and the 3 T/PCCs through the Dissemination and Awareness Raising workshops at UN HQ and the 3 T/PCCs. An online dissemination and awareness raising event will also be held for all stakeholders, including research participants. Simultaneously, a public information campaign will be launched to raise the profile of the project and help facilitate the achievement of the project aims.



Aims

The research aims to identify and help address barriers to the engagement, advancement and deployment of personnel with caring responsibilities, as well as communicate lessons learned and best practice. The project aims to raise awareness of the importance of supporting personnel with caring responsibilities and will propose ways to better support personnel with caring responsibilities, thereby improving the meaningful participation of women in peace operations, enhancing operational effectiveness and advancing gender equality. As a result, the beneficiaries of peace operations as well as those who work – or aspire to work – in them will benefit.



Female peacekeepers serving MINUSCA. Photo: Marinha do Brasil, 2023

Notes

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