

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

Final Report

Monash Global Peace and Security (Monash GPS) - Monash University

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Glossary

A4P	Action for Peacekeeping
AU	African Union
AWA	Alternative working arrangements
AWWA	Army Women Welfare Association (AWWA)
BINUCA	UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic
BRIN	National Research and Innovation Agency (Indonesia)
CAR	Central African Republic
CMP	Corps of Military Police (India)
CO	Commanding Officer
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CPTM	Core pre-deployment training materials
CSDR	Council for Strategic and Defence Research, India
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EIF	Elsie Initiative Fund (UN)
FAR	Rwandan Armed Forces
FPU	Formed Police Unit
FWA	Flexible working arrangements
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
GPS	Global Peace and Security (Monash, Monash University)
HR	Human resources
IAWP	International Association of Women Police
IPO	Individual Police Officer
KAIPTC	Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre
MHPSS	Mental health and psychosocial support
MINUSCA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic
MISCA	International Support Mission to the Central African Republic
MO	Military Observer
MONUC	UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MONUSCO	UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAP	National Action Plan
OCSS	Office of Coordination and Shared Services (UN)
PDDRC-S	Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Reintegration and Stabilization Program (DRC)
RAF	Royal Air Force (UK)
R&R	Rest and recuperation
SO	Staff Officer
SSR	Security Sector Reform
T/PCC	Troop and Police Contributing Country
UAF	Uruguay Armed Forces
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDPO	United Nations Department of Peace Operations
UNDPPA	UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA)
UNFICYP	United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNMISS	UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WAAC	Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (UK)
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

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Executive Summary

This Report presents research findings on the challenges faced by personnel with caring responsibilities in military and police organisations in troop and police contributing countries (T/PCCs) and UN peace operations, and the subsequent impact on the meaningful participation of women in UN peace operations. The project is funded by Global Affairs Canada as part of the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations.¹ It is the first of its kind to identify the causes and consequences of marginalising women with caring responsibilities from T/PCC security sector institutions and UN peace operations. The objective is to raise awareness of this marginalisation, propose ways to better support personnel with caring responsibilities and, thereby, improve the meaningful participation of women, enhance operational effectiveness and advance gender equality.

The Report draws from research conducted in 2023-25, incorporating interviews, a global survey and desk-based research. The research includes 553 research participants (257 interviewees and 296 survey respondents), representing 63 countries. Where gender and roles are known, 65% are women (35% men) and 84% are uniformed personnel (armed forces and police). Interviews were conducted online and across 7 country sites: UN HQ (New York); three T/PCCs – United Kingdom (UK), India, Indonesia; and 3 UN peace operations – UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS), UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

Key Findings

There are significant barriers to the meaningful participation of women in UN peace operations and in the armed forces and police institutions of Troop and Police Contributing Countries (T/PCCs). Chief among these barriers is the highly gendered nature of unpaid care work, with women globally spending an average of 2.5 times more hours on unpaid work than men.²

While individual circumstances and contexts may influence the extent to which challenges are faced by personnel with caring responsibilities, globally a multiplicity of reinforcing challenges are faced by most uniformed women with caring responsibilities, principally caring for children:

- **Practical challenges**, with caring responsibilities constraining flexibility, time and the ability to travel
- **Work culture challenges**, associated with presenteeism, masculinity and expectations of being constantly available
- **Gender normative challenges**, concerning assumptions about who does security and care work, and maternal bias that questions the professional capabilities and commitment of mothers
- **Organisational challenges**, including lack of supportive policies, particularly human resource policies, and leadership
- **Personal challenges**, such as stressors around work-life balance, family separation during deployment, exhaustion and guilt, and strained family relationships.

These challenges adversely impact the recruitment, retention, training, career progression and deployment of women with caring responsibilities in T/PCC security sector institutions. This has implications for women's meaningful participation in the armed forces and police and in UN peace operations, particularly in leadership roles. It also has implications for organisational and operational effectiveness, impacting the practices and outcomes of peace operations. This is because it:

- **Sustains the underrepresentation of women**, recognising the importance of women's meaningful participation in successful efforts to keep, build and sustain peace.³
- **Compromises efforts to advance gender equality** within and through peace operations – and perceptions of organisational commitment to gender equality and thus mission credibility – acknowledging the positive correlation between gender equality and peaceful societies.⁴
- **Narrows the diversity** of peacekeepers, adversely impacting efforts to engage with and enjoy the trust and confidence of diverse groups, and establish and sustain peace that is cognisant of and responsive to their needs.⁵
- **Limits the skillset, capacity, experience and knowledge** available to security institutions and peace operations to be able to address increasingly complex threats, and fails to utilise the distinctive and valuable qualities and capacities that can emerge through having caring responsibilities.⁶
- **Contributes to a loss of talent and attrition**, as personnel with caring responsibilities disengage or choose not to (re)deploy.
- **Communicates that the skills associated with care, including care for others and self-care, are not valued** in security institutions or in peace operations. This can compromise the well-being of personnel and contribute to stress, burnout and other potential safeguarding concerns, as well as incur financial costs associated with under-performance, attrition, sick leave and disability pension claims.
- **Reflects and sustains a work culture** that privileges presenteeism, readiness and limitless availability, and the “unencumbered” male⁷ which can adversely impact personnel well-being and behaviours.
- **Harms the well-being of all personnel**, with women often choosing between family and career, or suffering exhaustion and judgement (for both being a “bad mother” and “bad worker”⁸ when trying to do both. Men's well-being similarly suffers when their caring responsibilities are ignored and unsupported, and everyone's well-being suffers when the stressor of family separation on deployment is inadequately addressed. All of which carries risks for organisations and families as well as individual personnel.

Summary of Key Recommendations

Many uniformed personnel highlight support for personnel with caring responsibilities, with improved support over recent years. However, they note that it is insufficient and inconsistent across missions and among T/PCCs. Yet, improved support can positively impact well-being, performance, workplace cultures and safeguarding, as well as organisational and operational credibility and effectiveness. It can also help attract and retain talent and decrease financial costs associated with attrition and the consequences of harmful workplace cultures. Moreover, given the highly gendered nature of care work, it can improve the meaningful participation of women, especially in leadership positions and in peace operations. Recommendations are summarised below and structured by stakeholder, with full recommendations and their evidence basis detailed in the body of the Report.

United Nations

- **Lead by example to encourage T/PCC support for personnel with caring responsibilities:** appoint more women to leadership positions, increase robust support for the organisation's own civilian staff with caring responsibilities (including flexible working arrangements, on-site childcare, access to lactation rooms), support mothers (and parents) returning to work and address maternal bias.
- **Negotiate Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with T/PCCs to ensure peacekeeper well-being, including adequate living conditions on mission:** including improved and consistent living conditions, access to healthcare and psychosocial services, and increasing support and resources to provide facilities and services that help peacekeepers destress.
- **Work with T/PCCs to ensure peacekeepers are able to remain connected to their families while deployed:** provide adequate conditions and amenities and ensure personnel have regular access to stable and reliable wi-fi to remain in contact with their families.
- **Advocate for and/or support assistance for peacekeepers to travel home on Rest and Recuperation (R&R) during long deployments:** work closer with T/PCCs to reduce the stress of family separation and improve support for personnel who cannot travel home on R&R due to limited leave or financial support for travel.
- **Bolster training for peacekeepers and for leaders to better address care:** integrate care issues into training to raise awareness of the challenges facing personnel with caring responsibilities, and the subsequent impact on well-being and performance.
- **Incorporate family and care issues into delivery of and advice for pre-deployment training:** including pre-deployment training on how to prepare for and manage home life and family relationships while deployed.
- **Share lessons learned and good practices with T/PCCs, and raise awareness of the importance of supporting personnel with caring responsibilities:** consult personnel with caring responsibilities to learn lessons and identify issues to address, which can then be shared with T/PCCs.

Troop and Police Contributing Countries (T/PCCs)

- **Facilitate women's engagement in security sector institutions to increase the number of women deployed to UN peace operations, including by supporting personnel with caring responsibilities:** invest in attracting, recruiting, retaining and promoting women, provide support for personnel with caring responsibilities, address gender and maternal bias, and strengthen family-friendly policies.
- **Pay for communication services for deployed contingencies, including phone and wi-fi:** invest in access to stable internet and communication services and provide private spaces to speak with their families and friends to reduce the stress incurred among personnel by family separation and contribute to improved personnel performance and mission safeguarding.
- **Provide support to enable peacekeepers to travel home during R&R on long deployments:** address the prohibitive costs of flights when peacekeepers are deployed to remote locations or missions far from their home by covering some or all the costs for personnel to travel home when deployed for 12 months or more.
- **Offer shorter deployments:** encourage more women to deploy and provide more opportunities to deploy to peace operations by offering shorter deployments.
- **Invest in infrastructures of care:** identify, implement and monitor a budget line that improves accessible and affordable childcare and other care support infrastructures that accommodate the long and irregular hours typically demanded in the security sector.
- **Invest to retain talent and enhance performance:** reduce attrition and bolster capacity by investing in the careers of personnel with caring responsibilities to minimise the number of personnel, particularly women, leaving the sector.
- **Raise the age limit of deployment and recruitment:** increase the age limit for women to be recruited and deployed to accommodate those who take career breaks, are unable to deploy while children are young, or seek new careers when their children are older.

Armed Forces and Police

- **Conduct a Care Audit:** conduct a Care Audit to identify needs of personnel with caring responsibilities and evaluate the organisation's responsiveness to those needs
- **Review and/or reform policy to be responsive to gender and the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities, with particular consideration given to human resource policies:** consult personnel with caring responsibilities to identify and address key challenges, ensure that policies are gender-responsive and help create a safe and enabling environment for women to have equal opportunities to work and advance their careers, and increase the number of women in decision-making and policy-making processes.
- **Support flexible working arrangements:** Improve HR policies to better support personnel with caring responsibilities by providing opportunities for flexible working arrangements (FWA) to include remote or home working, job-sharing, part-time work and flexible worktimes, where feasible. Address stigma associated with uptake and discretionary application.
- **Provide or facilitate access to infrastructures of care, to include childcare facilities (or subsidies for childcare and other care) and access to private spaces for lactation:** adopt "family-friendly" policies that accommodate diverse caring responsibilities, increase access to – or subsidise - child, elderly and dependent care, where possible provide wraparound childcare in the workplace to accommodate long working hours, ensure access to private spaces for expressing milk.

- **Develop and deliver awareness-raising campaigns, to ensure personnel and leaders are aware of the challenges of managing caring responsibilities and work in the sector as well as the contribution of women and care-givers to the sector and to peace operations:** develop sensitisation and awareness raising campaigns targeted towards leaders, policymakers and decision-makers that attend to intersectional identity factors and cultural contexts and recognise the impacts of caring responsibilities on recruitment, retention, advancement and deployment of women. Also develop awareness raising for leadership and personnel more broadly to normalise care giving and encourage self-care, particularly among male personnel.
- **Create processes to ensure personnel with caring responsibilities have regular and comprehensive information on what support is available to them as well as on deployment, training, career advancement and other opportunities:** ensure personnel and supervisors are familiar with HR policies and personnel are able to avail themselves of their provisions – and support is not simply dependent on sympathetic supervisors, this includes improved training and guidance for leadership on how to support their employees with caring responsibilities.
- **Deliver training to enable access for personnel with caring responsibilities and to include care issues, such as self-care and how to manage family separation in pre-deployment training:** improve pre-deployment training to help personnel prepare for and adjust to the mission, include specific workshops for caregivers (including sharing information on what support policies are available to them prior to their deployment and how to manage caring responsibilities and family matters while deployed), and address mental health issues, self-care and stress management while deployed, as well as address stigma associated with seeking mental health support.⁹
- **Take disciplinary action against discrimination on the grounds of parental status or gender:** adhere to set policies and procedures that provide for fair and equal treatment, ensure that codes of conduct explicitly refer to non-tolerance for discrimination on the grounds of gender and parental status or other caring responsibilities, communicate these widely and take measures in the event of non-compliance.
- **Identify, address and reduce gender and maternal bias:** develop awareness raising campaigns of attitudes and bias towards personnel with caring responsibility, notably women, and address these biases through information campaigns, training and performance reviews (for instance, develop promotion criteria which considers the impacts of care on career progression).
- **Destigmatise help-seeking, self-care and men's caring responsibilities, including encouraging men to access parental, paternity and carer's leave:** enhance provisions of psychosocial support and counsellors on mission, as well as provision of structures, activities and resources that help well-being and support self-care, and train leaders to inculcate a work culture that is responsive to well-being and care.
- **Invest in peacekeepers' well-being, to include provision of adequate living conditions on mission, means of communication and assistance to travel home during R&R on long deployments:** provide personnel with a decent bed, good toilet and basic amenities; private spaces and allocated times to make calls to families and friends; support with travel home on R&R during long deployments, recognising the impact of stress on personnel and mission outcomes.
- **Establish, encourage and resource support structures for caregivers to include mentors, advocates and networks:** efforts to include establishing a network for former peacekeepers with caring responsibilities to share information, knowledge, and experiences on deployment to help support and empower other personnel who wish to deploy.
- **Support families with access to education, healthcare and accommodation, particularly for the families of deployed personnel:** assist in addressing the education, healthcare and accommodation needs of personnel's families, recognising this impacts the well-being and performance of personnel, enabling them to focus on their professional duties.
- **Extend psychosocial support to families of deployed and returning personnel:** provide psychosocial support for personnel and their families, immediately prior to, during and post-deployment.
- **Recognise the synergies between organisational duty of care, organisational support for personnel with caring responsibilities, and attentiveness to care more broadly (i.e. personnel self-care and well-being).** Utilise data to raise awareness of the connection between well-being, safeguarding and performance, and how these are impacted when organisations effectively exercise the duty of care.

Personnel with Caring Responsibilities

- **Regularly communicate with family members:** share any hopes of deploying or other opportunities, maintain open communication through long and unpredictable work schedules to preserve and enhance personal relationships. For those who are deployed, schedule regular times to call families and maintain your routine to stay connected.
- **Identify what organisational and other support is available:** including formal policies, structures and processes in the security sector organisation, and informal support networks and structures such as family members, professional networks, and affordable and accessible childcare or other care facilities.
- **Practice self-care and ask for help if needed:** be alert to signs of stress and use well-being tools or resources provided by your security sector institution or the UN, avoid reliance on negative coping strategies, and help build a positive work culture that is supportive and open to discussions around care and well-being.
- **Prepare your family and yourself for deployment:** this includes being aware of what is required of you and how your care and security work may impact each other. Ensure you have made all necessary preparations for your families while you are away, including what to do during a family emergency and organising care in your absence.
- **Have confidence in the skills you bring to security work and peace operations:** This might include empathy, attentive listening or attentiveness to the needs of others, and skills such as multitasking that can be developed through having to manage workloads and care. This can help counter maternal bias and reframe so-called ‘soft skills’ as skills essential to security work and peace operations.

Civil Society and Other Stakeholders

- **Raise awareness of barriers to women’s employment:** civil society actors and other stakeholders have a role to play in raising awareness of the gender and care norms that restrict women’s employment and participation in the security sector.
- **Recognise care work as a shared responsibility,** and not just women’s work: This should include recognition of and support for men’s caring responsibilities. This will improve well-being for all as well as address some of the barriers to women’s meaningful participation in security work and peacekeeping.
- **Adopt a whole-of-system approach:** a whole-of-system approach must be adopted to advance gender equality and women’s participation in social and economic life.

1 Introduction

This Report presents the findings of the project *Advancing the Meaningful Participation of Women in UN Peace Operations by Supporting Personnel with Caring Responsibilities*, funded by the Government of Canada (GAC) as part of the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations (2023-2026).

Globally, caring responsibilities remain highly gendered: women tend to fulfil the majority of this work and are more likely to be sole and primary carers.¹⁰ This adversely impacts women’s engagement in the workforce,¹¹ including the security sector and in peace operations.¹² It 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.¹³ This is despite increasing awareness of the importance of women’s meaningful participation in peace operations,¹⁴ underpinned by the United Nations (UN) Security Council’s Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

This project investigates the impact of caring responsibilities on the meaningful participation of uniformed women in security sector institutions of Troop and Police Contributing Countries (T/PCCs) and in UN peace operations, testing the hypothesis that caring responsibilities is a key driver of women’s marginalisation. It seeks to analyse the drivers and consequences of this marginalisation, including the impacts on women, security sector institutions, and peace operations and outcomes.

It is the first project of its kind to identify the causes and consequences of marginalising women with caring responsibilities from military and police organisations in T/PCCs and UN peace operations. The objective of this project is to propose ways to reduce this marginalisation, thereby improving the meaningful participation of women, enhancing operational effectiveness and advancing gender equality. As a result, we hope this benefits the beneficiaries of peace operations as well as those who work – or aspire to work – in tem.



UNMISS/Gregorio Cunha, 2023

1.1 Report Structure

In the opening chapters, this Report presents a brief overview of the project’s aims and the context and policy framework relevant to barriers to the meaningful participation of uniformed women in UN peace operations that arise due to caring responsibilities. The project design is also outlined, alongside an overview of the project team, case study field sites and methodology.

Subsequent chapters present research findings, beginning with a brief discussion of the changing nature of peacekeeping and the importance of women’s participation. This is followed by an analysis of the challenges faced by women with caring responsibilities in their engagement and advancement in T/PCC armed forces and police and their deployment to UN peace operations, and an analysis of the subsequent impact of these challenges on personnel, security sector institutions and UN peace operations. The following sections analyse the contributions of uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities to UN peace operations, as well as the links between organisational duty of care, organisational attentiveness to the caring responsibilities of personnel, and personnel well-being (including self-care). This is followed by a discussion of organisational duty of care, including support expected and provided for personnel with caring responsibilities by the UN, T/PCCs and other stakeholders. These findings inform the recommendations, which are detailed in the final chapter.

The focus of this Report is on uniformed personnel, unless we explicitly state otherwise. There are small sections in Chapters 8 and 11 where we discuss the engagement of and support for civilian staff with caring responsibilities in peace operations, recognising their role in influencing an enabling environment for the meaningful participation of uniformed personnel.

This Report is supplemented with other outputs including a series of op-eds and articles designed to generate discussion and raise awareness of how and why to support uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities,¹⁵ as well as a series of Early Outputs.¹⁶ It accompanies the Organisational Toolkit, which provides guidance to security sector institutions and organisations engaged in peacekeeping (principally the UN and T/PCCs), and is also summarised in the Summary Report.

Caring Responsibilities and Unpaid Care Work

Recognising that the terms “caring responsibilities” and “unpaid care work” are not universally used or understood, for the purpose of this Report, caring responsibilities refers to the essential, usually unpaid, activities that care-givers undertake for others, and themselves, in response to a specific need. These responsibilities typically involve caring for children and other family members, including family members who are ill, disabled or elderly. Activities can include cooking, housework and providing physical and personal care for someone, such as helping someone get dressed, bathe or eat. The term care work – or unpaid care work – is often used to refer to these activities and gives credence to the argument that care work is labour rather than simply “help”.

Gordon, E. and Jones, B. (March 2022) Caring for Carers in International Organisations. Opportunities for Women in Peacekeeping. Policy Series, Policy Brief 1B. Geneva: DCAF. https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Elsie_Policy_Brief_1B_FINAL.pdf; Gordon, E. and Kry, S. (2025) Peace, Gender and Care in Cambodia (English and Khmer, Full Report and 2-pager brief), Melbourne and Phnom Penh: Monash GPS and Women Peace Makers. <https://www.monash.edu/arts/global-peace-security/news-and-events/articles/2024/peace,-gender-and-care-in-cambodia>; Monash GPS et al (October 2024) Who Cares in Peacebuilding? Building Sustainable Peace and Advancing Gender Equality through Support for Peacebuilders with Caring Responsibilities. Survey Report. <https://www.monash.edu/arts/global-peace-security/news-and-events/articles/2024/who-cares-in-peacebuilding>.

1.2 Project Aim

This 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 good practice. The project aims to raise awareness of the importance of supporting personnel with caring responsibilities and proposes ways to better support them, thereby improving the meaningful participation of women in peace operations, enhancing operational effectiveness, advancing gender equality and improving peace outcomes for all.

1.3 Context

This Report was written in the context of escalating conflict, conflict events and conflict fatalities¹⁷ and the increasing complexity of conflict as global security threats intersect. It also occurs alongside rising concerns about the future of peacekeeping amid financial and political crises,¹⁸ and a global backlash against women's rights and the WPS agenda.¹⁹ These developments have a significant impact on addressing barriers to uniformed women's meaningful participation in UN peace operations. Amidst these concerning developments, however, is notable progress in recent years on women's meaningful participation in security sector institutions and peace operations (though slow and threatened by very recent events). There has also been increased public discussion and recognition of the importance of unpaid care work to the security and well-being of families, communities and societies. This greater awareness was expedited by the COVID-19 pandemic and has begun to shift assumptions about the value and gendered nature of this work as well as attitudes that it is a matter of private rather than public or political concern.

1.4 Project Design

The project began in 2023, with fieldwork conducted in 2024-25 across 7 country sites: UN HQ (New York), United Kingdom (UK), India, Indonesia, South Sudan (UNMISS), Central African Republic (CAR, MINUSCA) and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, MONUSCO). Simultaneously a global survey among peacekeepers, other uniformed personnel and other stakeholders was administered, and a desk review undertaken, which included a mapping of global good practice²⁰ and policies that support uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities, as well as a comprehensive analysis of relevant scholarly and grey literature.

1.5 Literature

There is substantial scholarly and grey literature on the importance of, yet barriers to, women's meaningful participation in the security sector and peacekeeping,²¹ and the impact of caring responsibilities on women's participation in the broader workforce.²² However, there is little research on the impact that caring responsibilities has on women's meaningful participation in security sector institutions and UN peace operations. This Report intends to fill this gap, by drawing from this literature alongside related research on gender norms in security and peacekeeping work,²³ gender norms in – and depletion through – care work,²⁴ maternal bias and the “motherhood penalty” in the workplace,²⁵ maternal praxis and care ethics.²⁶ This literature is referenced throughout this Report and also published in an earlier Literature Brief.²⁷

1.6 Team Members

Monash GPS	Partner / Support Organisations	Global Consultants (and Monash GPS Affiliates)
<p>Dr Eleanor Gordon (Project Lead), Director, Monash Global Peace and Security (Monash GPS), Monash University</p> <p>Professor Katrina Lee-Koo, Monash University Affiliate, GPS Board Member, Head of School of Political Science and International Relations, University of Queensland</p> <p>Dr Richard Fosu, Monash University</p> <p>Lauren Lowe, Monash University</p>	<p>National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), Indonesia</p> <p>Council for Strategic and Defence Research (CSDR), India</p> <p>Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC)</p> <p>International Association of Women Police (IAWP)</p>	<p>Joana Osei-Tutu, Deputy Director, Women, Youth, Peace and Security Institute, KAIPTC</p> <p>Jane Townsley, former President and Executive Director of IAWP</p> <p>Dr Irine Gayatri, Executive Director, MOST UNESCO-BRIN, BRIN (Indonesia Consultant)</p> <p>Llani Kennealy, Chair, Women Veterans Australia, International Consultant</p> <p>Tishya Khillare, Fellow, CSDR (India Consultant)</p> <p>Anushka Chavan (India Consultant)</p> <p>Jennifer Grover, Founder and Director of A.C.T. for a Better Day, Ltd.</p>

2 Methodology

A multi-method approach was adopted for this research, incorporating 180 interviews (257 interviewees), a global survey with 296 respondents, field observations, and a desk-based review of policy, personnel statistics and scholarly and grey literature (on care, gender, security sector institutions and peacekeeping, and their intersections).

There was a total of 553 research participants (257 interviewees and 296 survey respondents), representing 63 countries. Where gender and roles are known, 65% are women (35% men) and 84% are uniformed personnel (armed forces and police).

Research participants (for interviews and survey) include serving and retired uniformed women and men, with and without caring responsibilities. This was to ascertain the links between gender, caring responsibilities and participation and to investigate the gendered nature of the causes and consequences of the marginalisation of those with caring responsibilities, and determine the extent to which this marginalisation especially impacts women and compromises the meaningful participation of uniformed women in UN peace operations. To investigate how this marginalisation might be impacted by intersecting identities, research participants included people of different ages, ranks, nationalities, race, ethnicities and religion.

To access research participants, the project team utilised their professional networks, GPS website and social media platforms (LinkedIn and X), partner organisations (BRIN, CSDR, IAWP, KAIPTC) and organisations and individuals (including UN Women and the Elsie Initiative Fund (EIF), UNDPO, UN Police, UNMISS and UK Defence).

2.1 Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were held across the 7 country field sites and online, with uniformed personnel (both armed forces and police, serving and retired, with and without caring responsibilities, including women and men). Key informant interviews were held with other key stakeholders, engaging uniformed personnel outside the 7 country sites and civilians (including policy makers and other civilian staff in security sector institutions, UN HQ and peace operations as well as civil society representatives and representatives of communities where peace operations were located).

Interviewees were asked whether caring responsibilities impacted careers in the armed forces and police (in terms of their career progression, training and deployment on peace operations) and challenges facing personnel with caring responsibilities in the security sector and peace operations. They were also asked about provisions and recommendations to support personnel with caring responsibilities, and the anticipated impact on women's meaningful participation and the outcome of peace operations.

Interviews began in March 2024 and concluded in March 2025. Interviews in field sites were facilitated by CSDR (India), BRIN (Indonesia) and KAIPTC (MONUSCO and MINUSCA), with assistance received from IAWP, EIF, UNDPO, UK Defence, UNMISS, MINUSCA, MONUSCO and others enabling access to women uniformed personnel across field sites and globally.

Average interview length was 1 hour. For logistical reasons, a small number of interviews in Indonesia and the peace operations were conducted with 2 or more people together (similar to a focus group discussion), which typically lasted multiple hours. Interviews were conducted in English as well as French, Bahasa Indonesian, and Hindi, transcribed (using Otter.ai and cross-checked by team members) and translated into English (using Trint and then cross-checked by translators). In total, 257 individuals were interviewed across the 7 country sites and online:

- UNMISS 35
- MONUSCO 34
- MINUSCA 37
- UN HQ 35
- UK 17 (+ 6 UK nationals interviewed at UNHQ, UNMISS and MONUSCO)
- Indonesia 50 (+ 2 Indonesian nationals interviewed at UNHQ and MONUSCO)
- India 24 (+ 9 Indian nationals interviewed at UNHQ, UNMISS and MONUSCO)
- Online 25

Within the UN peace operations, UN HQ and online, interviewees represent 40 countries (Table 1).

Table 1: Countries represented among interviewees

UNMISS		MONUSCO		MINUSCA		Online		UNHQ		
Country	Total	Country	Total	Country	Total	Country	Total	Country	Total	
India	4	Pakistan	2	Cameroon	2	Australia	8	Norway	1	
Liberia	1	UK	1	Brazil	1	South Sudan	1	UK	4	
Kenya	2	India	2	Nigeria	2	Canada	1	France	1	
Canada	1	Ghana	4	Tunisia	1	USA	1	Japan	2	
Australia	3	Switzerland	1	Senegal	3	Bosnia & Herzegovina	1	Indonesia	1	
Norway	2	Brazil	1	Serbia	1	Switzerland	2	Australia	2	
Rwanda	3	Liberia	1	USA	1	Cambodia	3	Sweden	1	
Ghana	2	Senegal	2	Portugal	2	UK	2	Brazil	1	
Ethiopia	1	Kenya	2	Kenya	1	Germany	1	Germany	1	
Sweden	2	Canada	1	Bangladesh	2	Nigeria	1	India	3	
New Zealand	2	Norway	1	Rwanda	2			Senegal	1	
Cambodia	2	Nepal	3	Indonesia	1			Tunisia	1	
South Sudan	2	Zimbabwe	1	Niger	2			Liberia	1	
Bhutan	1	Zambia	1	Bhutan	1			Nigeria	1	
Thailand	2	South Africa	1	Nepal	1					
UK	1	Tanzania	2	Egypt	1					
		Indonesia	1	Rwanda	1					
				Liberia	1					
				CAR	1					
Unknown	4	Unknown	7	Unknown	7	Unknown	4	Unknown	17	
Total countries										40

The majority of interviewees are uniformed personnel or former uniformed personnel: 156 are serving military (MIL) and 41 are serving police (POL), 4 are former military or police, and 56 are civilians (CIVL, including representatives of civil society organisations – CSOs) (Table 2).

Table 2: Sectors represented among interviewees

	UNMISS	MONUSCO	MINUSCA	Online	UNHQ	UK	Indonesia	India	TOTAL
MIL	19	28	21	10	15	16	24	23	156
Former MIL	2			1					3
POL	1	6	8	2	4		20		41
Former POL	1								1
CIVL	10		8	2	16	1	4		41
CSO	2			10			2	1	15
TOTAL	35	34	37	25	35	17	50	24	257

Among interviewees, 147 are women and 110 are men (Table 3).

Table 3: Genders represented among interviewees

	UNMISS	MONUSCO	MINUSCA	Online	UNHQ	UK	Indonesia	India
Female	16	17	14	20	25	5	45	5
Male	19	17	23	5	10	12	5	19

Of those we interviewed and disclosed their caring responsibilities, 85% say that they have caring responsibilities (97 do, compared with 17 who said they do not).

2.2 Global Survey

An online global survey with uniformed personnel (with and without caring responsibilities, including both women and men) and key stakeholders was administered through Qualtrics from April 2024 and closed on 31 January 2025. It was circulated via the research team's professional networks as well as by UNDPO to peacekeepers globally, IAWP to women police globally as well as by UN EIF, KAIPTC, WICID and Monash GPS to their stakeholders.

The survey was circulated in English, French, Bahasa Indonesian, Hindi, Arabic and Spanish. Responses were translated into English before analysis.

Survey respondents were invited to complete the survey if they work, have worked, or wanted to work in T/PCC security sector institutions or UN peace operations and have experience or views regarding having caring responsibilities while working in such institutions or operations. They were asked about the way their career may have been affected by having caring responsibilities, and the impact they believe this may have on T/PCC security sector institutions and UN peace operations. They were also asked to share examples of good practice and recommendations. The survey included 63 questions, including 30 open-ended questions or questions that invited elaboration of answers (not all questions were available to all respondents).

Among survey respondents, 81% work in the security sector; 19% do not (Figure 1). Of those who do not work in the security sector, 38% have previously and 82% currently work alongside security sector personnel. Among respondents who work in the security sector, 90% are uniformed personnel; 10% are not, of whom 1% were previously (Figure 2). Respondents who are uniformed personnel comprise of 48% police, 38% armed forces, and the remaining are in management or oversight roles (such as in a ministry or parliamentary committee), international organisations and other parts of the sector (principally corrections) (Figure 3).

Figure 1: Do you currently work in the security sector? (n=251)

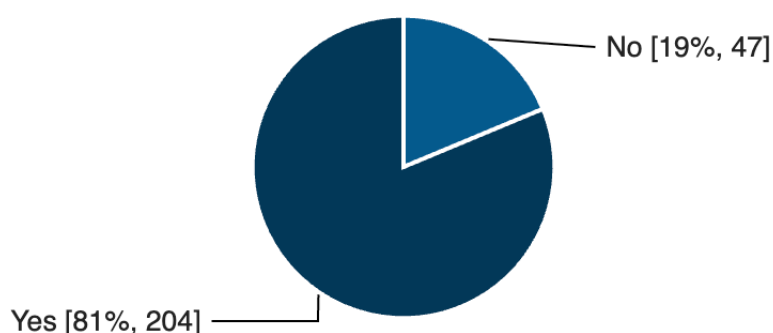


Figure 2: (If answering 'yes' to working in the security sector) Are you uniformed personnel? (n=202)

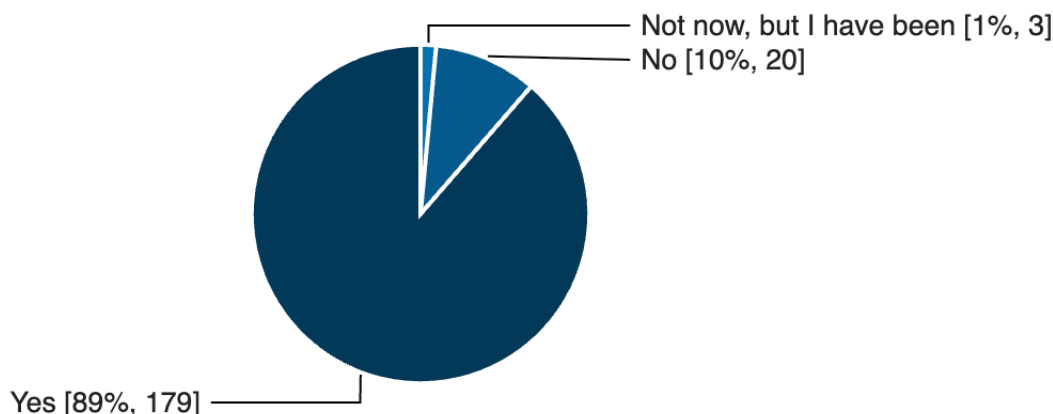
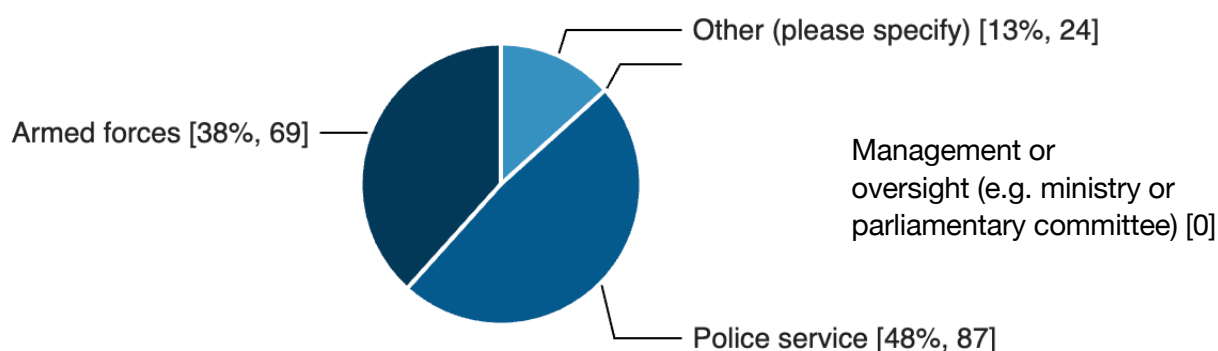


Figure 3: (If answering 'yes' to working in the security sector and being uniformed personnel) Which section of the security sector do you work? (n=180)



Of those who work in the security sector, 36% have worked for over 20 years in the sector, 43% for 10-20 years, 12% for 5-10 years and 9% for up to 5 years (Figure 4). In terms of seniority, 84% are middle or senior management (Figure 5).

Figure 4: How many years have you been working in the security sector? (n=199)

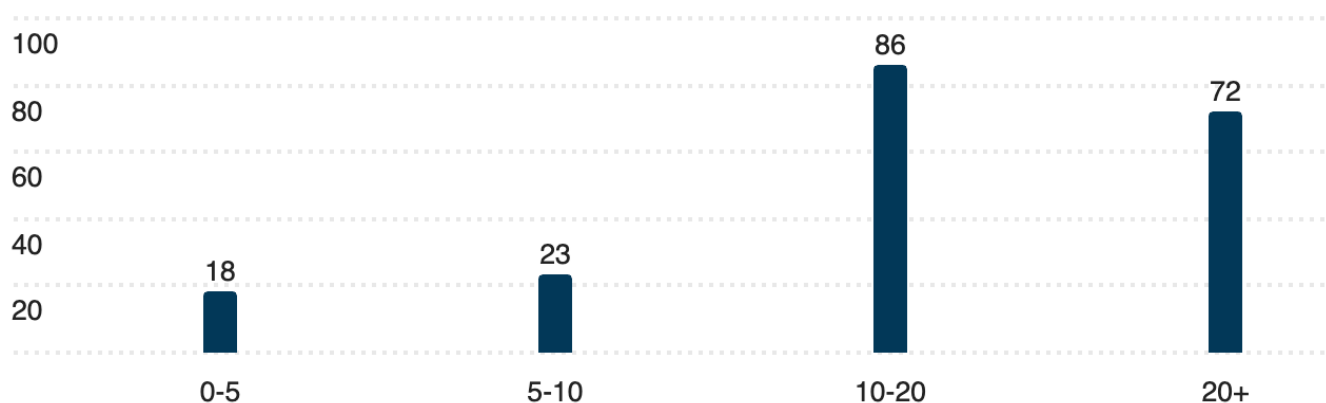
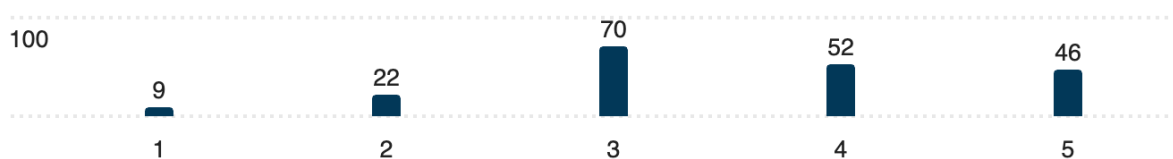
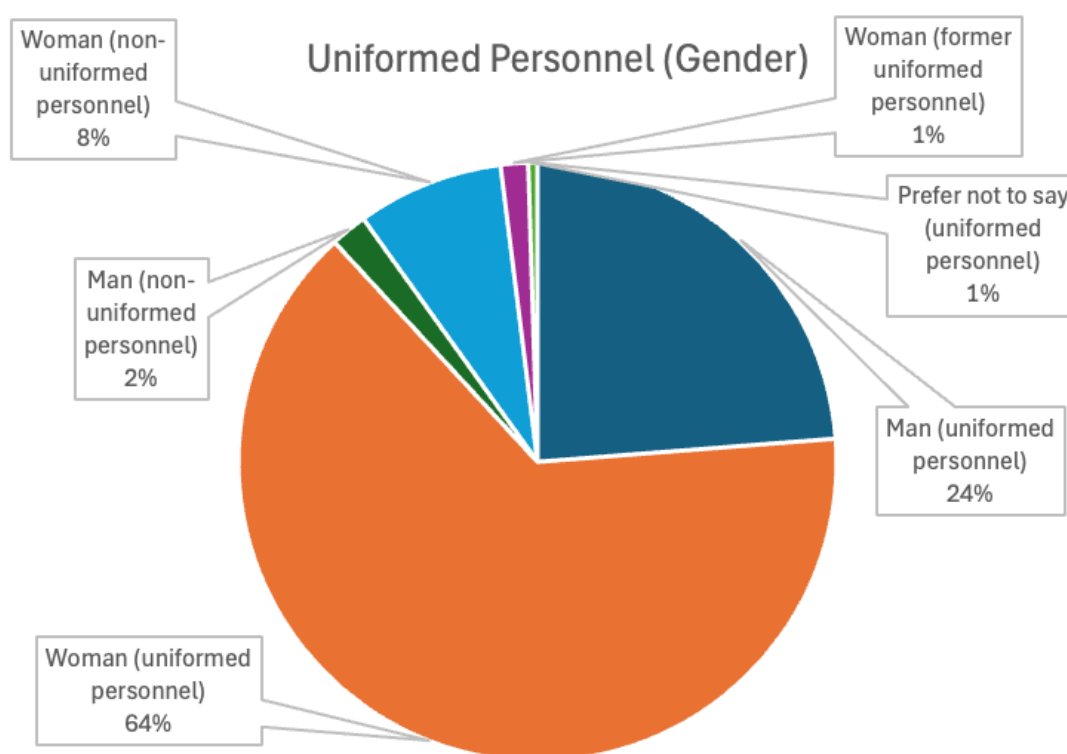


Figure 5: What level of seniority do you have (with 1 being an entry-level position and 5 being senior management)? (n=199)



Of the 296 survey respondents, 184 are women, 66 are men, 2 prefer not to say and 44 did not answer (no one said they were non-binary or transgender): a gender breakdown of uniformed personnel is shown in Figure 6. Among uniformed personnel, 73% are women (27% are men), of whom 41% are in the armed forces and 50% are in the police. 76% of respondents have caring responsibilities.

Figure 6: Respondents' gender & uniformed personnel status



Around two-thirds (67%) of respondents (160 of the 238 who answered this question) have been deployed to a UN peace operation during their career. Of those who have deployed to a peace operation, 47% (75 people) have deployed once, 43% (68 people) two or three times and 9% (15 people) four or more times.

Respondents came from 71 different countries, with the greatest proportion in CAR (n=50), DRC (n=13) and South Sudan (n=16), closely followed by the United States of America, Nigeria, Republic of the Congo, Australia, Canada, Ghana, United Republic of Tanzania, Indonesia, Philippines and Nepal (Table 4).

Table 4: Survey respondents' serving countries (n=257)

Antigua and Barbuda	1	Germany	1	Malawi	1	Sierra Leone	3
Australia	7	Ghana	6	Mali	1	South Korea	2
Austria	1	Guatemala	2	Mexico	1	South Sudan	16
Bangladesh	4	Guinea	2	Mongolia	1	Spain	2
Bolivia	1	Guyana	1	Nepal	5	Sudan	5
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1	Haiti	3	Netherlands	2	Sweden	1
Brazil	2	India	3	New Zealand	1	Timor-Leste	1
Burkina Faso	2	Indonesia	7	Niger	1	Trinidad and Tobago	2
Canada	7	Iraq	1	Nigeria	9	Tunisia	2
Central African Republic (CAR)	50	Ireland	1	Norway	1	Turkey	1
Chad	1	Italy	1	Pakistan	2	Uganda	3
Congo, Republic of the...	9	Jordan	2	Palestine	2	United Arab Emirates	1
Côte d'Ivoire	1	Kenya	2	Papua New Guinea	4	United Kingdom	2
Czech Republic	2	Kosovo	1	Peru	4	United Republic of Tanzania	6
Democratic Republic of the Congo	16	Kuwait	1	Philippines	6	United States of America	11
Ecuador	3	Lebanon	1	Rwanda	3	Zambia	1
Egypt	1	Lesotho	1	Senegal	3	Zimbabwe	1
Fiji	1	Madagascar	3	Serbia	1		
Total countries: 71							

2.3 Research Ethics

This research was granted Human Research Ethics approval by the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project ID: 41168, December 2023). Research ethics approvals were also secured in November 2023 by the Ethics Committee on Social Studies and Humanities (NRIA of the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) for research in Indonesia. In line with research ethics, all data was de-identified prior to analysis, with research participants anonymised in this Report.

2.4 Limitations

For ethical and protocol reasons, we secured the approvals of the UN and T/PCCs before interviewing uniformed personnel, including peacekeepers, with research led in Indonesia by BRIN and undertaken in India by CSDR. For protocol reasons, in India, interviews were conducted with retired uniformed personnel. This may have slightly skewed results and failed to capture the extent of the challenges facing uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities. However, this limitation was addressed in part through the survey and online interviews, which reached a broader range of serving and former uniformed personnel as well as other stakeholders.

To address limitations that can arise through positionality, the research team included both women and men and diverse cultural backgrounds, including retired uniformed women (police and armed forces) and nationals of each of the T/PCCs plus those who had direct experience and networks in UN HQ and its peace operations. UNDPO, KAIPTC, BRIN, CSDR, UK Defence, EIF and IAWP also played critical roles in facilitating access and engendering trust with research participants.

3 Case Studies

UN		Troop and Police Contributing Countries (T/PCCs)
UN HQ	UN Peace Operations	
	UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS)	United Kingdom
	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)	India
	UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)	Indonesia

3.1 UN HQ

The UN HQ typically sets policy and policy guidance for UN peace operations, plays a critical role in leadership and influence over the policies and practices of T/PCCs engaged in peacekeeping, and is driving efforts to advance women’s meaningful participation in the pursuit of peace, including through its Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy (2018-2028).

3.2 UN Peace Operations

The three UN peace operations (MINUSCA, MONUSCO and UNMISS) are among the largest UN peace operations. They are the only peace operations where more than 10,000 peacekeepers serve and where the greatest number of women peacekeepers are deployed.²⁸ They allow for challenges, opportunities and lessons learned across different peace operations to be captured.

3.2.1 UNMISS

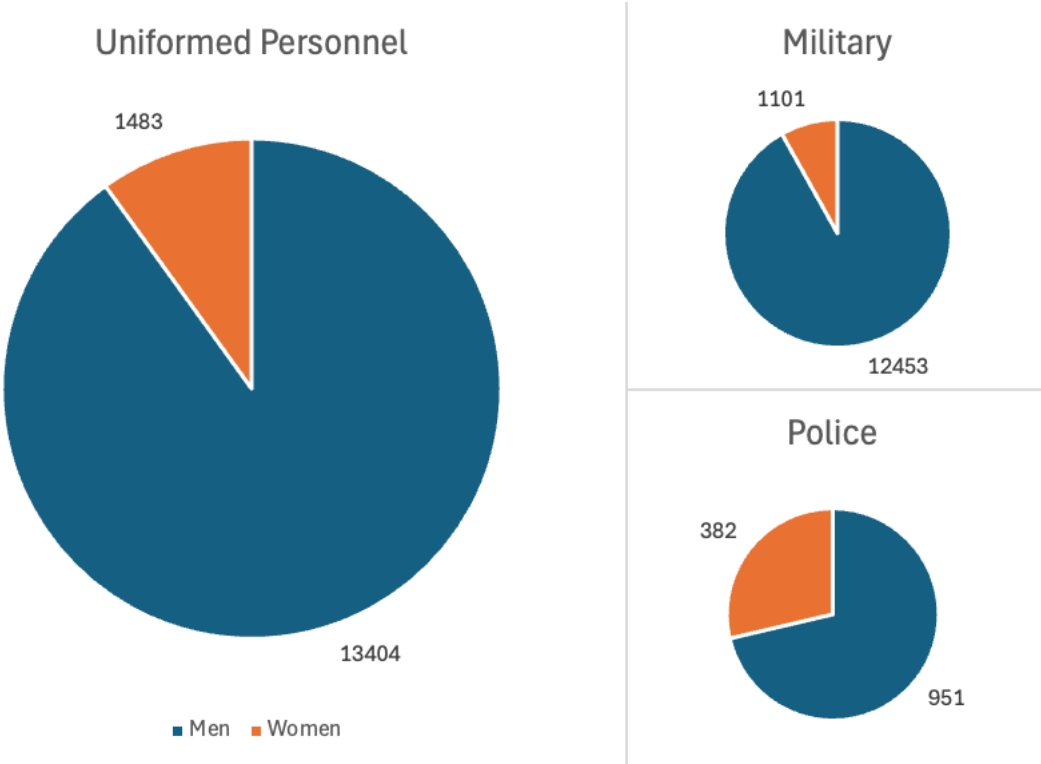
On 9 July 2011, the Republic of South Sudan became the newest country in the world. The birth of South Sudan occurred after a six-year peace process, which began with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) on 9 January 2005 between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM). The CPA was a culmination of a 64-year struggle for the secession of southern Sudan from upper/greater Sudan through two civil wars (1955-1972 and 1983-2005).²⁹

The CPA called for a referendum to determine the status of southern Sudan. The referendum was held in January 2011 where 98.83% of participants voted for the independence of South Sudan. Shortly after this referendum, the Security Council established UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) initially for a period of one year from 9 July 2011, under Security Council Resolution 1996 (2011). The mandate has been renewed consistently since then, most recently under Resolution 2779 (2025) which extends the mandate until 30 April 2026. The intervening period was marked by civil war and several breached ceasefire agreements until the signing of a Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) on 12 September 2018. This, however, was followed by intercommunal violence, armed insurgency and threats of spill-over from the conflict in neighbouring Sudan.³⁰

Under Resolution 2779 (2025), UNMISS is mandated “to advance a multiyear strategic vision to prevent a return to civil war and an escalation of violence in South Sudan, to enable the self-reliance of South Sudan and to address the critical gaps towards building durable peace at the local and national levels, to support inclusive and accountable governance, and to provide support...for and free and fair, peaceful elections in accordance with the Revitalized Agreement” (para 2). Resolution 2779 explicitly refers to the mandate of UNMISS as including the protection of women and their “full, equal, meaningful, and safe participation, and effective engagement... in the peace process” (para 3).

As of 30 November 2025, women comprise 9.96 % of uniformed personnel (1,483 of a total of 14,887): 8.12% of deployed military (1,101 of 13,557) and 28.66% police (382 of 1,333) (Figure 7).³¹

Figure 7: Women and men deployed (UNMISS)



3.2.2 MINUSCA

CAR has experienced internecine conflicts since its independence in 1960, however the high levels of violence that erupted in late 2012 has kept the country in a state of instability. The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) was established under UNSCR 2149 (2014), subsuming the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA) and transferring authority from an African Union (AU)-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA). Conflict violated the Libreville Agreement and led to the establishment of BINUCA to support the reconstruction of state institutions and deliver humanitarian aid to the population who faced violence, displacement and starvation.

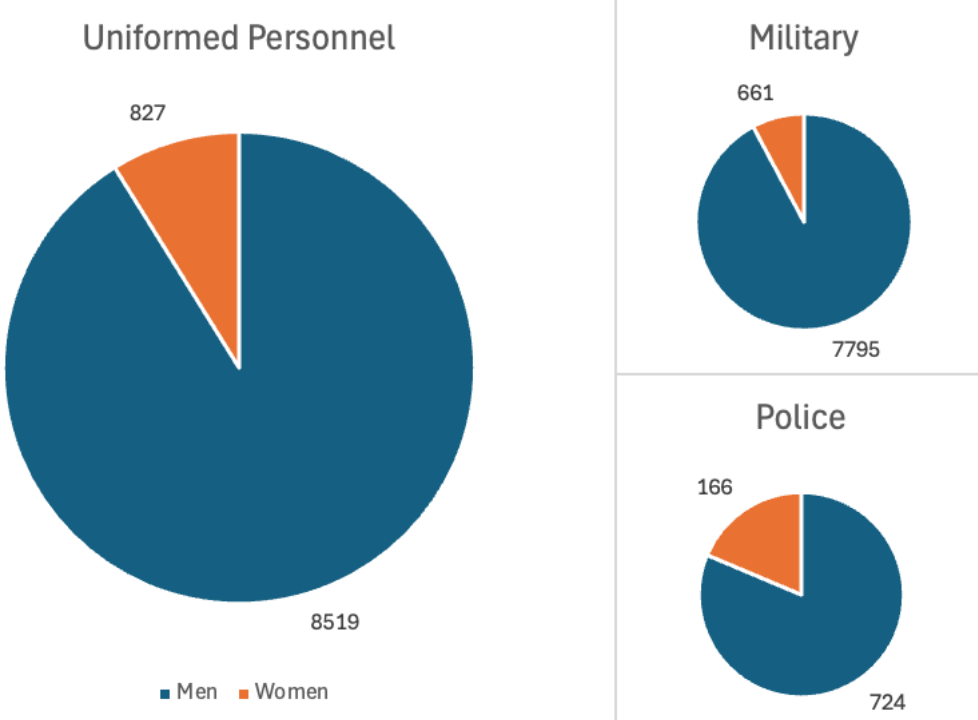
MINUSCA was established in the context of deteriorating security characterised by armed conflict and high levels of human rights violations, an intensifying humanitarian emergency and protracted political crisis that MISCA was unequipped to address.³² The country continues to be marked by political instability, with recent issues surrounding contestation on the limits on presidential terms. Violent clashes also continue between combatant groups, transhumant herders, and national and local self-defence groups, killing and displacing civilians.³³

UNSCR 2759 (2024) renewed MINUSCA’s mandate until 15 November 2025, with priority tasks including the protection of civilians, supporting the extension of state authority, the deployment of security forces, and the preservation of territorial integrity. MINUSCA supports the implementation of the ceasefire and the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation (APPR), also facilitating the immediate, full, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance.

UNSCR 2759 emphasised that a sustainable solution to the crisis in CAR should be inclusive and involve both women and men from diverse backgrounds, and that implementation of the APPR, future elections, transitional justice processes, DDRR (disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and repatriation) and Security Sector Reform (SSR) should include the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of women. It also requested T/PCCs to implement relevant provision of the resolution, as well as all other relevant resolutions, “on reducing barriers to and increasing women’s participation at all levels and in all positions in peacekeeping, including by ensuring safe, enabling and gender-sensitive working environments for women in peacekeeping operations” (para 54).

As of 30 November 2025, women comprise 10.73% of uniformed personnel (1,656 of a total of 15,438): 9.55% of deployed military (1,244 of 13,031) and 17.12% police (412 of 2,407) (Figure 8).³⁴

Figure 8: Women and men deployed (MINUSCA)



3.2.3 MONUSCO

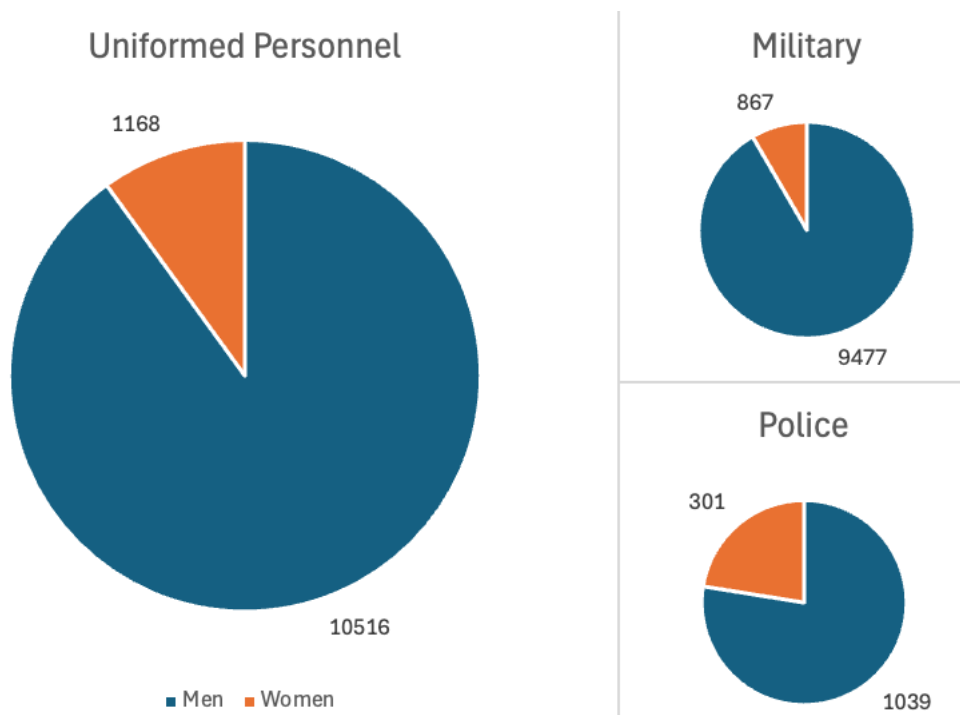
The UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) was established by UNSCR 1925 (2010), succeeding the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (MONUC), which was established by UNSCR 1279 (1999). The establishment of MONUC followed a succession of rebellions in DRC after the 1994 genocide in neighbouring Rwanda (the two Congo Wars, 1996-1997 and 1998-2002). Its initial mandate was to observe the ceasefire and the disengagement of forces, and to maintain liaison with all parties to the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement (July 1999) between the DRC and five regional States (Angola, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe). The Lusaka Agreement was followed by the Pretoria Agreement (2002) between DRC and Rwanda, formally concluding the second Congo War, the purpose of which was to facilitate the withdrawal of Rwandan forces from DRC and the dismantling of ex-FAR (Rwandan Armed Forces) and Interahamwe armed groups.

Since the signing of the Pretoria Agreement, DRC continues to experience violence, much of which has been perpetrated by the Rwandan-backed Tutsi-dominated March 23 Movement (M23). The UN established MONUSCO in 2010, recognising the “new phase of [DRC’s] transition towards peace consolidation”³⁵ and thereby transitioning to a stabilisation mission. MONUSCO is mandated to “use necessary means to protect civilians, humanitarian personnel and human rights defenders under imminent threat of physical violence and to support the Government of the DRC in its stabilization and peace consolidation efforts”.³⁶ However, a resurgence of M23 violence in 2021 has since seen high levels of sexual violence committed against civilians, killings, and displacement, committed by both rebel groups and Congolese soldiers. Conflict escalated in early 2025 when M23 forces captured Goma, a city in the eastern DRC province of North Kivu.³⁷

In 2023, the Security Council received a formal request from the DRC for the accelerated withdrawal of MONUSCO from the end of 2023, beginning with South Kivu where MONUSCO ended its mission in June 2024.³⁸ MONUSCO retains presence elsewhere and its mandate was extended for another year on 20 December 2024 under UNSCR 2765, the priorities of which are “(i) to contribute to the protection of civilians in its area of deployment and (ii) to support the stabilisation and strengthening of State institutions in the DRC and key governance and security reforms” (para 33). The Resolution reaffirmed “the important role of women and youth in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, as well as in peacebuilding and electoral processes and *stressing* the importance of their full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in all efforts for the maintenance of and promotion of peace and security in the DRC, including in regional-led processes” (Preamble). It also underscored the need to engage women in the creation of a protective environment, pay specific attention to women (and children) in the Disarmament, Demobilization, Community Reintegration and Stabilization Program (PDDRC-S), and ensure women’s full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in security and justice institutions through SSR.

As of 30 November 2025, women comprise 8.85% of uniformed personnel (827 of a total of 9,346): 7.82% of deployed military (661 of 8,456) and 18.65% police (166 of 890) (Figure 9).³⁹

Figure 9: Women and men deployed (MONUSCO)



3.3 T/PCCs

The three T/PCCs 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.

Across our country sites, as of 31 August 2025, the proportion of uniformed women deployed to UNMISS, MONUSCO and MINUSCA is around 10.44%. The picture is varied across the case study T/PCCs, with percentages not reflecting the disparity in the number of women deployed between T/PCCs.

3.3.1 The United Kingdom (UK)

The UK is a key player in UN peacekeeping in three main areas: at the Security Council, providing funding, and contributing/training personnel.⁴⁰ It contributed 5.36% to the UN's budget for peacekeeping missions during the 2024-2025 period, making it the 5th largest budget contributor.⁴¹ The UK is also an important contributor of personnel to UN peace operations. It is currently deploying 224 uniformed personnel across 4 UN peace operations, with the majority deployed to UNFICYP (Table 5).⁴²

Table 5: UK’s contribution to current peacekeeping missions as of 30 November 2025

Mission	Troops	Formed Police Units	Staff Officer	Experts on Mission	Individual Police	Total
MONUSCO	0	0	3	0	0	3
UNFICYP	214	0	11	0	0	225
UNMISS	0	0	4	0	0	4
UNIFIL	0	0	2	0	0	2
Total	214	0	20	0	0	224

The UK is also a key partner and contributor to key global initiatives aimed at women’s meaningful participation in the peace and security sector. This includes the Senior Women Talent Pipeline⁴³ and the Elsie Initiative Fund, serving as co-chair for the latter in 2025 and being the second largest donor after Canada,⁴⁴ having contributed over US\$9.37 million as of August 2025, and pledged further funding at the 2025 UN Peacekeeping Ministerial summit.⁴⁵

Peacekeeping was the 2nd strategic outcome of the UK National Action Plan (NAP) on Women Peace and Security 2018-2022 where the UK expressed its commitment to ensure “a gender perspective is consistently applied in the setting and implementation of international standards and mandates for peace operations”.⁴⁶ This was to be implemented through:

- Supporting the setting and implementation of gender-sensitive mandates for UN peace operations
- Increasing the representation of women in UN peace operations
- Combating sexual misconduct by UN peace operations personnel and supporting survivors to recover and pursue justice

This is reiterated in the subsequent 2023-2027 NAP as an important way of increasing the gender-responsiveness of security and justice institutions. In the 2023-2027 NAP, the UK expresses its commitment to: “Refresh our approach with partners to strengthen WPS across UN peacekeeping including through the UNSG’s Action for Peacekeeping Initiative and advocating for the inclusion of gender advisers in peacekeeping missions”.⁴⁷

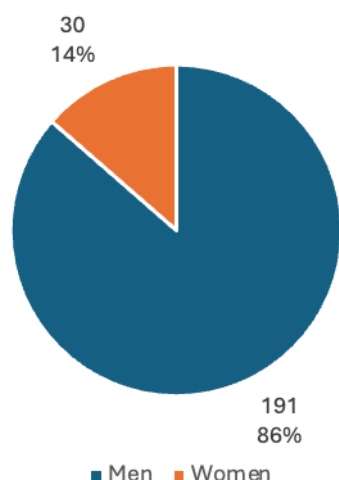
The UK has also been at the forefront of innovations to support uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities, including the British Royal Air Force receiving the 2020 Best Practice ‘Best for Mothers’ Award, by the UK charity *Working Families*, for supporting flexible work practices, among other initiatives.

3.3.1.1 Deployment of Women on UN Peace Operations

Of the 221 uniformed personnel the UK has deployed to UN peace operations (Figure 10), 30 are women (as of 30 November 2025), which constitutes 13.57%. Among women deployed, there are only (28) troops and (2) staff officers (SO); no Formed Police Units (FPU) or Individual Police Officers (IPO), so the gender parity targets for police cannot be reached.⁸

Figure 10: Men and women deployed to UN peace operations (UK)

Men and Women Deployed (UK)



- Troops: 13.57% (2025 target 12%)
- FPU: 0% (2025 target 15%)
- MOs: 0.0%, SO: 10%, (2025 target for MOs + SOs 22%)
- IPO: 0% (2025 target 25%)

3.3.1.2 Women in the British Armed Forces

Women have participated in the British Armed Forces for over a century.⁴⁹ In 1917, the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) was formed as the first all-women unit.⁵⁰ Since then, the UK has undertaken several administrative, legal and institutional mechanisms to include women in the armed forces.⁵¹ Since 2018, all roles in the armed forces have been opened to women including in combat operations.⁵² As of March 2025, women comprise 11.9% in the regular forces and 15.9% in the reserve forces. In the regular forces, the Royal Airforce has the highest number of female personnel (16.1%), followed by the Royal Navy (11.3%) and the Army (10.4%). Moreover, among the Senior and Junior Officers, women make up 9.3 percent and 15 percent respectively.⁵³

3.3.1.3 Women in UK Police

Women have participated in policing in the UK since 1883, and first appointed as sworn police officers with powers of arrest in 1919. Evolving gender norms in the UK have contributed to the improvement of women’s roles in the police force, where they now occupy all ranks across the police force. As of 31 March 2025, women represented 36.1% of police officers in England and Wales.⁵⁴ The figure is 32.70% for Northern Ireland (as of 01 October 2025)⁵⁵ and 29% Scotland (latest published figures – January 2025)⁵⁶. Despite these developments in gender norms on women’s roles in the police force, there are still reports of widespread harmful workplace cultures that hinder women’s meaningful participation.⁵⁷

3.3.2 India

India has historically been one of the largest T/PCCs to UN peacekeeping missions,⁵⁸ contributing over 280,000 peacekeepers and having served across more than 50 missions. Today, India is the third largest contributor of uniformed personnel (troops and police) to UN peace operations, contributing 5,099 personnel to 8 of the 11 current UN peace operations (as of 30 November 2025). It deploys the largest numbers of its troops to UNMISS and the largest number of its police to MONUSCO (Table 6).⁵⁹

Table 6: India's contribution to current peacekeeping missions as of 30 November 2025

Mission	Troops	Formed Police Units	Staff Officer	Experts on Mission	Individual Police	Total
UNMISS	2,302	0	52	16	20	2,390
MONUSCO	860	158	15	5	0	1,038
UNIFIL	875	0	20	0	0	895
UNISFA	570	0	12	8	0	590
UNDOF	168	0	5	0	0	173
UNTSO	0	0	0	2	0	2
UNFICYP	0	0	1	0	0	1
MINUSCA	0	0	6	0	0	6
MINURSO	0	0	0	4	0	4
Total	4,775	158	111	35	20	5,099

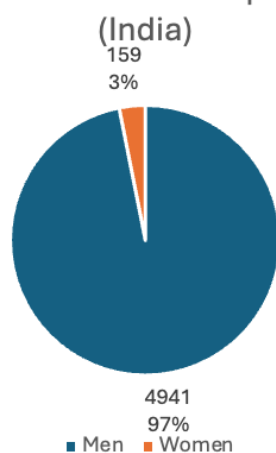
3.3.2.1 Deployment of Women in UN Peace Operations

India has a long tradition of deploying women peacekeepers. India's deployment of female officers in peace operations began in 1960 with Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS) personnel in Congo. India was the first country to deploy an all-woman contingent to a UN peace operation; the Formed Police Unit (FPU) to the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) from 2007 to 2016. The FPUs performed critical tasks including 24-hour guard duty, public order management, organising medical camps, and raising awareness about sexual violence and HIV/AIDS.⁶⁰ The FPU deployment had a transformative impact on the local community, contributing to an increase in female participation in Liberian security institutions from less than 1% to 17%.⁶¹ Subsequent peacekeeping missions have incorporated Female Engagement Teams in MONUSCO.⁶² More recently, the largest unit of women peacekeepers from India, comprising 25 women soldiers from the Corps of Military Police (CMP) and the Assam Rifles, was deployed to Sudan.⁶³

Of a total of 5,099 peacekeepers deployed, 159 are women, as of 30 November 2025 (comprising 3%) (Figure 11)⁶⁴

Figure 11: Men and women deployed to UN peace operations (India)

Men and Women Deployed



- Troops: 2.09% (2025 target 12%)
- FPU: 15.19% (2025 target 15%)
- MO+SO: 19.73% (2025 target 22%)
- IPO: 30% (2025 target 25%)

Of note is that India has the second highest ratio of women deployed as MOs and SOs among T/PCCs, deploying more than 100 personnel (as of 31 August 2025). The proportion of troops deployed is, however, the lowest among the largest T/PCCs. The low proportion of women deployed overall can be largely explained by women being unable to join Personnel Below Officer Rank (PBOR) until 2022 and still a very small pool of women in PBOR in the Indian Army, which accounts for the greatest number of personnel deployed to peace operations.

The Indian Armed Forces have implemented initiatives to promote the participation of women in UN peace operations. For instance, in 2022 the Defence Minister proposed the India-ASEAN Initiative for Women in UNPK Operations, at the inaugural India-ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting in Cambodia.⁶⁵ One initiative includes the Women Military Officers Course, providing tailor-made courses for women peacekeepers of ASEAN member-states. Another example includes Table Top Exercises for women officers to prepare them for deployment.⁶⁶

3.3.2.2 Women in the Indian Armed Forces

Until the 1990s, women's entry into the Indian Army was restricted to the Army Medical Corps, the Army Dental Corps and the Military Nursing Service. In 1992, the Army allowed short service commission for women as officers in the Corps of Signals, Engineers, Army Air Defence, Electronics and Mechanical Engineers, Army Service Corps, Army Ordnance Corps and Intelligence. Women have been granted permanent service commissions since 2021.⁶⁷

Since 2023, women officers have also been inducted into the combat support arm of Artillery and Army Aviation and in 2018 the first woman piloted a fighter jet.⁶⁸ In February 2020, the Supreme Court of India ruled on women's ability to serve as army commanders, creating equal opportunity for men and women.⁶⁹ In 2022, the Indian Army commenced the induction of women soldiers (personnel below officer ranks-PBORs), whose participation at present is limited to the Corps of Military Police. Both women and men recruited through the Agnipath scheme (the scheme that allows women to join as PBORs) are expected to be childless and unmarried, and remain so during the 4-year serving period. Additionally, women have not yet been allowed entry into the Infantry or combat arms. This means that overall, women are significantly underrepresented in the armed forces: 7,054 women in the Army; 2,513 women in the Air Force; and 1,847 women in the Navy. Excluding medical and dental corps, women comprise 1,833 in the Army; 1,809 women in the Air Force; and 1,306 women in the Navy.⁷⁰

3.3.2.3 Women in the Indian Police Service

Women's participation in policing in India goes as far back as 1938.⁷¹ However, it was not until 1972 that the Indian Police Service admitted its first woman into the officer rank – who later became the first woman to head the UN Police Division in 2003.⁷² In 1973, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi inaugurated the first women's police station in Kerala, the first of its kind in Asia,⁷³ and by January 2022 there were 745 police stations.⁷⁴

The most recent data from the 2024 report by Bureau of Police Research and Development shows 12.6% of the Indian Police Force is made of women (272,535 total), constituting a slight but sustained annual increase.⁷⁵ There are 4.4% women in the Central Armed Police Forces and Assam Rifles (as of December 2024), which are typically deployed to UN peace operations.

3.3.3 Indonesia

Indonesia has made notable strides recently to advance gender-responsiveness within its security sector. Globally, Indonesia is the seventh largest contributor of uniformed personnel to UN peace operations (as of 30 November 2025), with 2,092 personnel across 7 of the 11 active peacekeeping missions. It deploys the largest numbers of its troops to UNIFIL and MONUSCO and the largest number of its police to MINUSCA (Table 7).⁷⁶

Table 7: Indonesia’s contribution to current peacekeeping missions as of 30 November 2025

Mission	Troops	Formed Police Units	Staff Officer	Experts on Mission	Individual Police	Total
UNIFIL	868	0	17	0	0	885
MONUSCO	813	0	4	0	9	826
MINUSCA	180	140	13	2	15	350
UNMISS	0	0	1	3	15	19
UNISFA	0	0	2	0	3	5
UNFICYP	0	0	0	0	4	4
MINURSO	0	0	0	3	0	3
Total	1,861	140	37	8	46	2,092

3.3.3.1 Deployment of Women in UN Peace Operations

Indonesia has been contributing troops to UN peace operations since 1957, and has since contributed a total of 964 uniformed women to peacekeeping missions.⁷⁷ Between 2019 and 2023, Indonesian personnel deployed to the UNIFIL have been comprised of ten percent of women, in line with the UN’s gender parity targets.⁷⁸ Of the 2,092 uniformed personnel deployed to UN peace operations, 169 are women (8.08%), as of 30 November 2025⁷⁹ (Figure 12).⁸⁰ Similar to India, women are restricted from joining combat roles, which contributes to their underrepresentation in peace operations (particularly in command roles) proportional overrepresentation in support roles.

Figure 12: Men and women deployed to UN peace operations (Indonesia)

Men and Women Deployed (Indonesia)



- Troops: 6.29% (2025 target 12%)
- FPU: 17.86% (2025 target 15%)
- MOs + SOs: 15.56% (2025 target 22%)
- IPO: 43.48% (2025 target 25%)

3.3.3.2 Women in the Indonesian National Armed Forces

Women have been serving in the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) since 1961, when the Army Women's Corps (Kowad), Navy Women's Corps (Kowal) and Air Force Women (Wara) were established and the Kowad Education Centre began taking the first female cadets. In 2013, women were permitted to enter the Indonesian Military Academy, which is considered more elite than Kowad, making more women eligible for higher command roles.

In 2022, the Presidential Staff Office (KSP) provided figures on women's representation in the armed forces. Among the 444,133 TNI personnel in 2022, 8,850 were women,⁸¹ making up 2% of the TNI. Around 3,000 of that number are members of the Indonesian Navy Women's Corps (Kowal).⁸² It is worth noting that the Indonesian Army Academy (Akmlil) has not conducted any recruitment drives for female cadets in the previous two years (2018-2020).⁸³ However, the Navy Academy (AAL) and Air Force Academy (AAU) continue actively recruiting female recruits, with the Indonesia Air Force welcoming its first female fighter pilot in 2020.⁸⁴ Unofficial figures suggest that today women comprise 7% (2024 stats) of TNI personnel.⁸⁵

Law No. 34/2004 about the TNI stipulates the imperative of upholding women's rights within the broader human rights framework.⁸⁶ This legislation necessitates the professional development of the armed forces, guided by democratic ideals, respect for human rights, and compliance with relevant national and internationally recognised laws.

Caring Responsibilities and Unpaid Care Work

Recognising that the terms “caring responsibilities” and “unpaid care work” are not universally used or understood, for the purpose of this Report, caring responsibilities refers to the essential, usually unpaid, activities that care-givers undertake for others, and themselves, in response to a specific need. These responsibilities typically involve caring for children and other family members, including family members who are ill, disabled or elderly. Activities can include cooking, housework and providing physical and personal care for someone, such as helping someone get dressed, bathe or eat. The term care work – or unpaid care work – is often used to refer to these activities and gives credence to the argument that care work is labour rather than simply “help”.

Gordon, E. and Jones, B. (March 2022) Caring for Carers in International Organisations. Opportunities for Women in Peacekeeping. Policy Series, Policy Brief 1B. Geneva: DCAF. https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/Elsie_Policy_Brief_1B_FINAL.pdf; Gordon, E. and Kry, S. (2025) Peace, Gender and Care in Cambodia (English and Khmer, Full Report and 2-pager brief), Melbourne and Phnom Penh: Monash GPS and Women Peace Makers. <https://www.monash.edu/arts/global-peace-security/news-and-events/articles/2024/peace,-gender-and-care-in-cambodia>; Monash GPS et al (October 2024) Who Cares in Peacebuilding? Building Sustainable Peace and Advancing Gender Equality through Support for Peacebuilders with Caring Responsibilities. Survey Report. <https://www.monash.edu/arts/global-peace-security/news-and-events/articles/2024/who-cares-in-peacebuilding>.

3.3.3.3 Women in the Indonesian National Police

Women have been serving in the Indonesian National Police since 1948, when a female police unit (“Polisi Wanita” in Bahasa Indonesian, or Polwan) was established three years after the Indonesian National Police was founded. According to a recent address by the Indonesian National Police Chief, as of October 2024 women make up 5.6% of the total police workforce and 6% of police officers (25,700 of 436,432 police, as of April 2024), according to the National Police Commission (KOMPOLNAS/ Komisi Kepolisian Nasional):⁸⁷ an increase of approx. 0.5% from the previous year. The representation of women in the police is the lowest proportion among all member nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).⁸⁸ The majority of women are represented at the lower ranks (only 3 senior officers in 2022⁸⁹), and often assigned to administrative roles⁹⁰

Women Peace and Security Index (WPSI) & Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) UK, India and Indonesia

The Women, Peace and Security Index (WPSI) is a composite index of 13 indicators classified under three categories: inclusion (economic, social and political); justice (formal and informal discrimination) and security (at the individual, community and social levels). Among the 177 countries ranked on these dimensions in 2023, the UK was 26th, Indonesia 82nd and India 128th. In terms of economic opportunities, the percentage of women aged 25 to 64 who are employed in the formal or informal sector for the UK was 75.4%, Indonesia 58.7% and India 34.6%. With regard to absence of legal discrimination against women, with possible scores range from 0-100, with 100 indicating a fully equal legal code, UK scored 97.5, Indonesia 70.6 and India 74.4.

The Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) quantifies biases against women, capturing people's attitudes on women's roles along four key dimensions: political, educational, economic and physical integrity. According to the latest Report: "9 out of 10 men and women hold biases against women. Nearly half the world's people believe that men make better political leaders than women do, and two of five people believe that men make better business executives than women do". The percentage of the population of the UK, India and Indonesia with no bias was reported to be 70.4% (2017-2022), 0.78% (2010-2014) and 0.35% (2017-2022), respectively.

Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) (2023) Women Peace and Security Index 2023/24. <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/WPS-Index-full-report.pdf>; UNDP (2023) Breaking Down Gender Biases Shifting Social Norms Towards Gender Equality. UNDP Gender Social Norms Index. <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdp-document/gsni202303pdf.pdf>.

4 Policy Framework

There is a global policy and normative framework that supports and guides women’s meaningful participation in peace and security efforts, including peacekeeping, building on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and incorporating the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations, launched and led by the Government of Canada, and the UN’s Action for Peacekeeping and Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy.

4.1 WPS Agenda & Women’s Meaningful Participation

The WPS agenda is comprised of 10 UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) and underpinned by 4 pillars:

- 1. Prevention** of conflict and all forms of violence against women and girls in conflict-affected environments
- 2. Participation** of women in peace and security efforts, ensuring their equal participation and gender equality in decision-making processes
- 3. Protection** of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)
- 4. Relief and recovery** efforts that address the needs of – and engage – women.

The first WPS UNSCR (1325), adopted in 2000, draws attention to the unique impacts of conflict on women and girls, as well as the importance of women’s full, equal, active, effective and meaningful participation in all efforts to build and sustain peace, including peacekeeping. It encourages all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all UN peace and security efforts.

UNSCR 1325 highlights that women’s “full participation” in peace processes “can significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security” and underscores the importance of women’s participation in decision-making. Subsequent UNSCRs emphasise the importance of women’s full, active and effective participation in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security.

UNSCR 2538 (2020) is the first WPS resolution to focus exclusively on women peacekeepers and recognises “the indispensable role of women in increasing the overall performance and effectiveness of peacekeeping operations”. Of particular relevance to this project, UNSCR 2538 encourages Member States to increase uniformed women’s deployment by developing strategies and measures, to include “*Taking measures to provide support and incentives including child care and other relevant needs*” (para 2g).

Women's Meaningful Participation

Meaningful participation means that women's participation must include engagement in decision-making and leadership roles, representation in all areas (not just support roles or gender normative functions), at all levels/ranks, and at all times. It cannot be tokenistic, ad hoc, or reduced to a tick-box exercise. When women are only engaged in small numbers, in support functions or at junior levels, their ability to influence and inform decision-making is compromised. As such, women's meaningful participation must be guaranteed by institutional arrangements, funding and commitment. It often requires structural change such as legislative and policy reform as well as adjustment of workplace practices and cultures.

Recognising that women are not a homogenous group, it is important to employ an intersectional approach to engage a diversity of women across different identity groups. Such an approach also recognises that while caring responsibilities may cause challenges for uniformed women to work in the armed forces and police, and to deploy on peace operations, these challenges can be compounded by other identity markers, (including race, ethnicity, class, caste, sexuality, parental status) and vary across cultures and geographies.

Scholarly evidence underpins the importance of women's meaningful participation in successful efforts to keep, build and sustain peace.⁹¹ Recognising that women and girls are uniquely impacted by conflict and have unique needs during conflict and its aftermath, scholarship has highlighted that the participation of women in peace operations can increase the likelihood that these needs will be better known, understood and responded to.⁹² Moreover, women's meaningful participation enhances organisational and operational diversity, which can broaden the skills, knowledge and capacities that can be drawn from to address increasingly complex threats to peace and security.⁹³ Organisational and operational diversity can also enhance effectiveness by being more representative of the communities they serve or work in. They are therefore better able reach out and enjoy the trust and confidence of diverse groups in communities where peace operations occur.⁹⁴

Moreover, women's meaningful participation in peace and security efforts can help advance gender equality. This is important given the positive correlation between gender equality and peaceful societies.⁹⁵ Underrepresentation of women can also harm operational or mission credibility when, for instance, peace operations seek to advance gender equality, in recognition that it is critical to sustainable and equitable peace.

4.2 Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations

The Government of Canada announced the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations during the Vancouver UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial Conference (2017) and extended the Initiative for a further 5 years to 2027 at the Seoul UN Peacekeeping Ministerial meeting (2021). 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. The Elsie Initiative focusses on 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.

4.3 Action for Peacekeeping

The UN Secretary-General launched the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) in 2018, calling for T/PCCs and other stakeholders to renew collective engagement in peacekeeping to improve delivery and outcomes. The accompanying Declaration of Shared Commitments was signed by over 150 Member States. This was followed by the UN's 2021-2023 Action for Peacekeeping implementation strategy (A4P+) to increase momentum on A4P. One of the two core cross-cutting themes of A4P+ is the WPS agenda, with the strategy prioritising the meaningful participation of uniformed women in peace operations and the greater understanding of barriers they face (A4P+ Deliverable 3.1.1.).

4.4 UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy (2018-2028)

The UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy (2018-2028) aims to create an enabling environment for the meaningful participation of uniformed women personnel in peacekeeping.⁹⁶ The Strategy provides an overview of how the UN plans to do this as well as sets 2028 (and yearly) targets for women in peacekeeping:

- 15% female military peacekeepers in troop contingents
- 20% female police in formed police units (FPU)
- 25% female military observers (MO) and staff officers (SO)
- 30% individual police officers (IPO).

The adoption of the Strategy followed the UN's System-Wide Gender Parity Strategy,⁹⁷ which set targets for the equal representation of women and men, with specific commitments in the areas of leadership and accountability; senior management; recruitment and retention; creating an enabling environment; and field operations. The Strategy's aim is not simply to reach quantitative goals, but rather to foster an inclusive workplace and transform "the institutional culture so that the Organization can fully deliver on its mandate".⁹⁸

Despite these efforts and an increasing awareness of the importance of women's meaningful participation, women are still underrepresented in UN peace operations. This is especially the case among uniformed personnel, and particularly among troops, which constitute the greatest proportion of uniformed personnel on UN peace operations. Nonetheless, there has been notable progress since the advent of the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy and Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations, with uniformed women in peace operations doubling from 4.9% in 2018.⁹⁹

The latest statistics (as of 30 November 2025) show that women comprise 9.84% of uniformed personnel in UN peace operations.¹⁰⁰ As shown in EIF's data (Figure 13), 2025 gender parity targets have been reached for MO and SO as well as FPU and IPO, but not for troops:

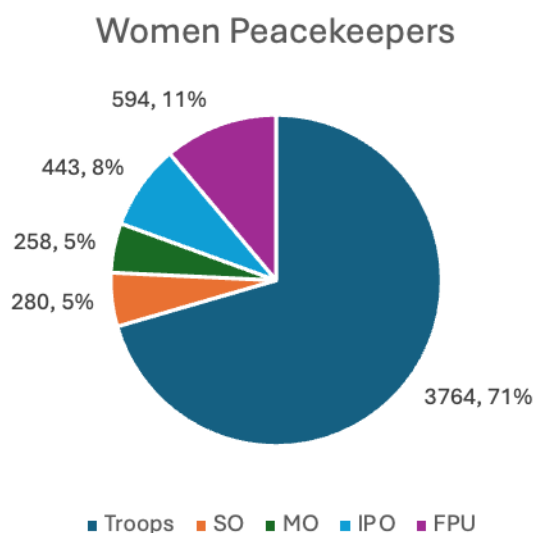
- 7.99% women in troop contingents (2025 target 12%)
- 22.75% women military observers (MO) and staff officers (SO) (2025 target 22%)
- 17.21% women in formed police units (FPU) (2025 target 15%)
- 32.22% women individual police officers (IPO) (2025 target 25%)

Figure 13: Women deployed to peace operations (30 November 2025) against gender parity targets



While the proportion of women among troops is low, women deployed as part of troop contingents comprise 71% of all uniformed women deployed to UN peace operations (as of 30 November 2025), as shown in Figure 14.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the proportion of women among troop contingents has more than doubled over the last 7.5 years, from 3.7% in February 2018 to 7.99% in November 2025.¹⁰²

Figure 14: Women deployed to UN peace operations (30 November 2025)



4.5 Targets as a Source of Motivation and Pride but an Incomplete Picture

Several of our research participants welcome the focus that gender targets offer those advocating for greater women's participation in peace operations. Many participants demonstrate notable pride that their country had hit their target. An Indonesian civil society member notes: "Indonesia have already surpassed the past the target that [is] set by the UN Police Division" (Interview #25). Similarly, a military officer from Bhutan notes: "When our first rotation was deployed, we didn't have any female peacekeepers, right. Now, in the second rotation, we have brought in 18 percent and thereby fulfilling almost 10 percent of the overall required mandate. So, in Bhutan's case, I think we don't have any issues with that." (Interview #48).

Many participants note the work that their nation's militaries and police institutions are undertaking to increase women's participation. This is particularly the case in major T/PCCs, as described by an Indonesian civil society representative: "We are already increasing female participation within the UN mission; it has been incorporated into our national policy. We've been doing a lot of campaigning, we've been doing a lot of capacity building programs to enhance their capacity, even not only during the mission, but also before the missions." (Interview #25). Another participant mentions that "our country, Bangladesh, is also trying to send more female peacekeepers here. I think that the number can be increased day by day" (Interview #69). While an Indian military commander shares of his own country: "We keep pushing them. I keep pushing them. Every job description of mine, I write that female participation will be given at an advantage and must be encouraged" (Interview #97).

Challenges of accessing quality data that "drilled down" into the details regarding women's participation in peace operations. In some cases, the need to report against National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security or other national gender targets can lead to some data analysis, but data on issues such as retention of women personnel, promotion rates for women vis-a-vis men, service histories including roles, has either not been kept or has not been collated and analysed (Interview #25).



UNMISS/Gregorio Curtha, 2023

Beyond the aggregate figures, there are observable trends in how uniformed women are participating in UN peace operations. UN missions with a higher proportion of women in the military contingent tend to have smaller deployments. Conversely, larger missions often have fewer women deployed. This is due to many reasons, including the T/PCCs engaged and the type of mission, including risk factors associated with larger missions. See Table 8 for comparison of proportion of women in the 3 largest missions by military deployment and 3 smaller missions by same indicator. This picture is visible at individual T/PCC levels. Similarly, Countries that deploy the largest numbers of peacekeepers often – but not always – have a lower proportion of women, even though they may deploy the most women; arguably presenting a skewed picture of T/PCCs meeting gender parity targets versus those deploying larger numbers of uniformed women. See Table 9 for a comparison between India and Indonesia on the one hand and the UK on the other.

Table 8: Three largest missions by military deployed vs three smaller missions

Mission	Male Military	Female Military	Total Military	% Female
MINUSCA	12,677	1,358	14,035	9.68%
MONUSCO	9,477	867	10,344	8.38%
UNMISS	12,771	1,138	13,909	8.18%
MINURSO	137	38	175	21.71%
UNTSO	121	29	150	19.3%
UNFICYP	684	105	789	13.31%

Table 9: UK, India and Indonesia - military deployments

TCC	Male Peacekeepers	Female Peacekeepers	Total Peacekeepers	% Female
UK	240	32	272	11.76%
Indonesia	2,549	213	2,762	7.71%
India	5,180	178	5,358	3.32%

4.6 Controversies Regarding Gender Targets for Women’s Participation

While many of our research participants are enthusiastic about the increased representation of women in peace operations, there are several criticisms regarding the pace and manner in which this is being pursued. Much of this critique revolves around the use of targets. Broadly, the scholarly consensus suggests that gender targets, when implemented with evidence-based training methodologies and clear performance standards, can achieve integration objectives within military organisations without compromising military effectiveness.¹⁰³ The same is the case for police organisations. This is supported across the research with many proponents arguing that — in theory — targets address both operational effectiveness and fundamental fairness. However, critics argue that the poor implementation of targets has led to perverse outcomes that have not supported the overall project of enhancing women’s participation. These participants identify pernicious outcomes such as the deployment of insufficiently trained personnel, the concentration of women in gendered roles (such as administration or nursing), insufficient scaffolding for women to achieve leadership roles, and poor recruitment processes:



The UN becomes [focused on] the numbers, and then the numbers become more important than the competence or quality (Interview #79).

Moreover, while the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy has encouraged T/PCCs to address structural barriers to ensure that women’s participation is meaningful, some participants express concern that statistical targets have diverted attention away from this. Here it is argued that moving beyond statistics ensures that women participate at all levels (including the most senior ranks), in all functions (not just gender-normative or support roles) and they are able to influence decision-making:



The whole purpose of this has to be about the meaningful participation of females, not a tick box exercise. Targets are great, and they should be in place. It’s just, no one ever wants to dig into the detail of what those targets mean, and how people are meeting them, to actually see if the meaningful participation of women is met and what is being delivered against a target (Interview #141).

As mentioned above, gender parity targets can present a skewed picture of T/PCCs meeting gender parity targets versus those deploying larger numbers of uniformed women. Similarly, participants refer to the skewed picture that can arise from deploying comparatively small numbers of uniformed women but to high-level, strategic roles.

5 Women's Participation in Peacekeeping

Overview: As demonstrated above, rates of women's participation are improving, yet they do so within a complex sector. This chapter considers the complex nature of contemporary peace operations, the persistence of gender norms and the demonstrated benefits and ongoing challenges of women's participation in peace operations as a result of this.

5.1 Changing Nature of Peacekeeping

UN peace operations have undergone substantial transformations since their inception following the end of the Second World War. What began as observer missions has evolved into complex, multidimensional operations where peacekeepers are generally empowered to address diverse security, political, and humanitarian challenges.¹⁰⁴ While UN peacekeeping remains “an effective multilateral tool for preventing and limiting armed conflict, sustaining peace, as well as responding to a broader range of threats to international peace and security”,¹⁰⁵ it faces numerous challenges. Among these are an historic high in the number of state-based conflicts,¹⁰⁶ ongoing volatility in resourcing for peace operations,¹⁰⁷ and evolving debates regarding the fundamental purpose of peace operations and the details of their mandates.¹⁰⁸ The UN has responded to these challenges through its efforts to create more effective, efficient and professional peacekeeping forces. As this Report demonstrates, supporting diversity and women's meaningful participation peacekeeping forces are central to this endeavour.



UNAMID/Albert González Farran, 2013

5.2 Gender-Responsive Peace Operations

As part of evolving debates regarding how to respond to the changing nature of conflict, the UN has developed its approach to gender-responsive peace operations. Gender considerations were largely absent from early peace operations, reflecting broader gender blindness in international security.¹⁰⁹ The gradual recognition of the extent to which peace and security politics are gendered gained momentum in the 1990s, culminating in UNSCR 1325 and the WPS agenda.

The WPS agenda, discussed in the previous Chapter, seeks to uncover and address the gendered politics of armed conflict. This requires a consideration of the presence and authority of women to shape international peace and security decision-making, the protection of women and girls from uniquely gendered forms of violence, and a gender-responsive consideration of how every aspect of peace operations may reflect, reinforce or redefine unequal gender power relations. Olsson argues that this requires contemporary peace operations to undertake at least two core activities: first, women must be recognised as *political actors* within the broader picture of peace and security; and second, mandates must be reconceptualised to “ensure that women obtain the same level of support and security from UN efforts as men.”¹¹⁰ This reconsideration of women as actors/agents and recipients of peace underpins gender-responsive approaches to peace operations.

Contemporary missions are governed by several interrelated gender-responsive policy frameworks, including the WPS agenda, the UN’s *Gender Responsive UN Peace Operations Policy (2024)* and the UN’s *Gender Parity Strategy (2018-2028)*. As a result of these frameworks, peace operations routinely have gender advisers, integrate women’s protection advisers, monitor progress towards targets for uniformed women’s representation, work with local women’s civil society on peacebuilding activities and develop protocols for ensuring women’s protection and addressing sexual and gender-based violence.

These frameworks reflect significant progress in developing gender-responsive peace operations. This progress is further reflected in the views of the majority of survey respondents (86.7%), who agree that “it is important that policy and practice in security institutions and/or peace operations are gender-responsive” (only 6.6% disagree, the rest replying ‘sometimes’ or unsure). Nonetheless, implementation of gender-responsive policies across missions remains inconsistent.¹¹¹ As this research demonstrates, there remains structural constraints, resource limitations, cultural barriers and persistent, problematic, gender norms.

5.3 Gender Norms in Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping has traditionally been male dominated. While women’s participation in military and police organisations and peace operations has increased over recent years, the persistence of these gender norms shapes expectations and behaviours and impedes women’s meaningful participation.¹¹² This is evident across the research. In most cases, these gender norms manifest in expectations around what work is appropriate for men and women, how they should behave, how they should interact with others and what is acceptable treatment for them. In some cases, these present as essentialist views about the “inherent natures” of men and women, while in other cases our research participants describe them as highly socialised and “naturalised” norms that exist across cultures. Either way, these gender norms apply to both men and women in ways that can be positive and negative. For men, gender norms reinforce their “rightful place” as leaders within the security sector and can serve to reinforce the masculinised cultures of security organisations. However, it can also generate assumptions that men are not primary carers for children and others, or that caring should not be seen as their responsibility. As a peacekeeper in UNMISS highlights, gendered assumptions about caring responsibilities mean that women are less likely to be deployed, while the caring responsibilities of male personnel are often overlooked: “yes, women are still seen as mothers first and foremost... You know, I’ve never heard in all my years anyone saying ‘he’s a father. I’m not going to put him forward, because he might be killed’” (Interview #179).

For women, gender norms position them as primary caregivers within families, less adaptable to military and police work, requiring protection during peace operations, and as having “softer” peace skills such as conciliation, relationship-building and kindness. It should be noted, however, that these are necessary skills for all peacekeepers and contribute to operational effectiveness. However, their value to peace operations is often denigrated by being referred to as “soft skills” often associated with, and reinforcing, the essentialist portrayal of women as naturally more peaceful and empathetic than men. Such stereotypes can constrain and create barriers for women’s work as deployed peacekeepers and as carers. These norms can shape the workplace culture, the policies, processes and personal experiences of women deployed to peace missions. For instance, one Australian military officer describes gender bias and attitudes towards women in the security sector:



In all our missions, women are seen as the victim, they are the ones we need to protect. You know, it’s that whole mindset about protecting the women and children versus men recognising that actually, I can hold my own and fight the men and protect the men. [But men], they got this protective nature, and then their culture is to protect women, and therefore, am I his equal? I’m not his equal (Interview #88).

For men, gender norms position them as ready soldiers and police, and not primary carers. As one interviewee argues, there is “an organisational cultural bias to conceive of the issue of caring for children to be an issue that relates to women and not to men” (Interview #129). Such stereotypes create cultural barriers for men to seek access to parental leave (where it exists). This is described by research participants as a “cultural lag” (Interview #151) or “cultural bias” (Interview #108; Interview #129) that interprets parental leave solely as maternity leave.

Gender norms about peacekeeping – and security work, more broadly – make it difficult to reconcile family life for both women and men. Involving long working hours, risky work and extended periods of separation during deployments. The expectation is that personnel are “unencumbered”¹¹³ and in a state of perpetual availability and readiness to deploy.¹¹⁴ For armed forces personnel, being deployable or battle-ready also means extended periods of training, including on weekends



and overnight field exercises. It is similar for the police. Expectations of readiness, availability and being unencumbered (with caring responsibilities) reinforce notions of the “ideal-type” peacekeeper, positioning those who may be unavailable at certain times (for maternity, paternity, parental or carers leave, for instance) as not ideal and potentially compromising readiness and organisational effectiveness. This feeds the sustenance of institutional policies, practices and norms that protect the ideal-type, helps explain high attrition rates among women with caring responsibilities and the subsequent reproduction of the gendered institutional culture.

The conception of the ideal-type security professional as “a man always available for work”¹¹⁵ leads to men and masculinities often being more valued than women and femininities (or characteristics perceived to be feminine). As a result, both material and symbolic allocation of institutional resources are gendered. Osei-Tutu and Fosu demonstrate the expectation that women may get pregnant and take maternity leave leads to decisions to invest institutional resources in male personnel—including investment in continuous training—who will always be available for work.¹¹⁶ Not fitting the ideal-type leads to other “career penalties”¹¹⁷ as “specific female conditions like pregnancy and menstruation are seen to weaken combat effectiveness”.¹¹⁸ Personnel returning from maternity leave are no longer considered the ideal security professional because they may not be in ideal physical shape¹¹⁹ and are not supported to transition back into their role. As one of our survey participants explains:



Women who return from work after off on maternity leave or family leave, are left to train themselves up to where they feel confident enough to protect themselves and others. No additional training is set out. The mindset is ‘show us you can do this’, instead of ‘welcome back, let’s get you trained up and ready to hit the streets’ (survey respondent).

Gendered cultural practices in security institutions reify gender roles in ways that lead to normative closure; in other words, ways of being and behaviour are fixed and rigid. This is due to the definition of ideal-type security professional as male, while women are perceived as non-ideal type because they get pregnant, take time off and assume caring responsibilities. This normative closure adversely impacts women’s meaningful participation in security sector institutions and UN peace operations. It may also significantly impact male parents due to the normative expectation that men are not primary carers.

5.4 Women’s Participation in Peace Operations - Benefits

Research participants generally agree that women’s participation strengthens peace operations by offering diverse identities, life experiences and, in some cases, skillsets. At the operational level, women — by virtue of their gender identity — can undertake roles that their male counterparts cannot. In particular interviewees acknowledge that women peacekeepers can establish relationships of trust with local women and children in sites where local gender norms or social contexts may prohibit men from doing so. Across all research sites there are countless examples where this enables data gathering to support humanitarian operations, better responses to sexual and gender-based violence and more appropriate treatment of women during security searches or as detainees. Participants agree that this gender-responsive behaviour enhances the overall relationship between the UN mission and local communities and in turn, improves mission outcomes.

It is also widely reported that women peacekeepers can promote gender equality within missions and to local communities to promote the mission’s values. Participants argue that women peacekeepers are important role models for local women and girls and can model a more equal practice of gender relations to a local community.¹²⁰ Women peacekeepers can also encourage women in the community to regard peacekeeping and broader security work as not exclusive to men. For instance, according to the FPU commander, the Indian all-women FPU in Liberia led to a tripling of applications from women to join the Liberian police.¹²¹ Some argue that the presence of women peacekeepers helps shape local attitudes to the mission from one of militarised aggression or hard security to one of care and assistance. A peacekeeper in MONUSCO describes the contributions of female peacekeepers to us:



... we also set examples to the local people. So, there are women here who think that it’s okay, this rape, abduction, all these are the rights of men. They used to think like that. But now, when they see us going on ground with a weapon, and the NGOs working, going out in the risky situation, now the women are understanding what are their basic human rights.... You see, the Congo has its first woman prime minister. Now they are including women in the political discussions, also leadership. Then there will be more [women] and the situation will improve. And it’s a proven fact that with more women in the peace process, there’s more stability, long term stability (Interview #62).

Most participants agree that the presence of women deployed to peace missions is likely to reduce cases of SEA perpetrated by male peacekeepers. There are a range of reasons given for this. For some, the presence of women peacekeepers has a regulatory or disciplining effect on the culture of peace missions, in ways that may make male personnel less “free” to engage in SEA. For others, women’s presence generates a more professional culture which discourages such behaviour, either through women’s active leadership or the anticipation that it would more likely be reported. It is also argued that local women are more likely to report cases to women peacekeepers, increasing accountability. While some caution that women peacekeepers can become the target of predation, others note that a better gender balance on mission can reduce SEA because women are far less likely than men to perpetrate SEA. This view is also expressed by a male police officer in UN HQ:



I can tell you as a man, if I patrol in a village with my uniform, when the villagers will see me, first thing they will do is run, yeah, they won't stay. Why? Because the atrocities that have happened were done by men in uniform... So, the approach for me of having women in the unit...the quality of the information collection, the quality of the way the UN would address, like sexual and gender-based violence, which have happened in a village...in most of these operations that I visited from Mali, Central Africa et cetera, it's just natural for the villages to wait and converse easier with women, they will open up even more. And even, I mean, sometimes you will just see, like a sort of bond. Sometimes you just see them hugging each other, crying together, you know, things like that. And for us men, it doesn't happen. So, you know, the quality, for me, it definitely makes a difference (Interview #98).

There is disquiet among some participants about aligning women's contributions primarily to their gender. Some note that this could have the unanticipated consequence of stereotyping women's contributions and limiting women's roles within missions. Others express concern that it encourages essentialist assumptions that women are "naturally" good at some things such as relationship-building. There are also suggestions that a focus upon gender can limit thinking about diversity in two ways: by marginalising the importance of other identity factors such as ethnicity, religion, language, and so forth; and disjoining gender with discussions regarding skills and training, noting that relationship-building can be a learned skill. This is reflected in comments made by a civilian SSR expert based in New York, who highlights the limitations of essentialising women:



...we're always thinking in operational terms of women's participation, it's like we're instrumentalising the women. To say, if we get more women here, they'll be able to talk to a population. But in fact, if you get more women into the military, into peacekeeping, they'll be able to do a lot more. They'll be able to, you know, influence planning... We just seem to really focus on that engagement piece (Interview #92).

5.5 Women's Participation in Peace Operations - Barriers

Women face interconnected cultural, institutional, organisational and socioeconomic barriers to their participation in peace operations. These stem from the entrenched gender norms that question women's suitability for peacekeeping roles. This has been well-documented in academic research.¹²² Peacekeeping is viewed as inherently "men's work," reflecting what Enloe describes as the "masculinisation" of military and security institutions.¹²³ Social, religious and cultural prescriptions of femininity and gender norms create additional constraints, manifesting uniquely in different organisational cultures and societies. While it is particularly pronounced in conservative societies where women's engagement in activities outside the home or, more specifically in the security sector, conflicts with societal expectations,¹²⁴ barriers persist even in communities with open commitments and claims to gender equality.

These norms facilitate discriminatory policies within organisations, reflecting what Acker terms "gendered organisations" that embed masculine norms while excluding feminine characteristics.¹²⁵ Marriage restrictions requiring single status for recruitment disproportionately affect women,¹²⁶ while age limits disadvantage women who enter security sector careers later, or whose career progression is slower due to educational or family considerations.¹²⁷ Physical standards frequently reflect male-centric norms that may not reflect actual job requirements,¹²⁸ while male-dominated command structures limit advancement opportunities and unconscious (and conscious) bias systematically excludes qualified women.¹²⁹ In addition, underlying socioeconomic inequalities may affect women's preparedness for peacekeeping roles through limited educational access, essential skills training, and economic constraints.¹³⁰



Sgt. Jennifer Sardam, 2011

The intersection of professional service with family obligations represents perhaps the most complex barrier. Women continue to bear disproportionate responsibility for childcare and domestic duties, even in dual-military and dual-police families, reflecting broader patterns of gendered care work.¹³¹ Research by Iskra demonstrates that women’s military careers are more likely to be subordinated to family needs,¹³² while spousal approval requirements affect women more significantly than men.¹³³ These two aspects can also impact women in the police (as cited elsewhere in this Report). Inadequate organisational support for childcare during deployments (as addressed elsewhere in this research) compounds these challenges. As demonstrated throughout this Report, peace operations themselves often lack infrastructure necessary to support women’s participation effectively, including appropriate facilities, equipment, and uniforms.¹³⁴ Pregnancy policies or informal norms forcing women to leave the service create career disruptions affecting only female personnel,¹³⁵ while protective policies regarding dangerous deployments can perpetuate exclusion from operational roles.¹³⁶

5.5.1 Cultural and Social Barriers

Across the research, women report gender-based cultural and social stereotyping. All women interviewed describe the presence of stereotypes that shape and often constrain their work. As one military officer notes: “There’s absolutely a gender dimension to this. I guess it goes back to women, as women. And cultural biases and a lot of that. Trying to unravel...widespread and systemic barriers that are cultural or embed[ed] in the system is a real challenge” (Interview #108). As this officer explains, the specific barriers created by this “gender dimension” manifest differently depending upon the context, who women are working with, and their own racial, national, religious and cultural identities.

5.5.1.1 Women Should Not Be Peacekeepers

Many of the participants report encountering an attitude that women simply should not be peacekeepers, or that peacekeeping is “men’s work”. A female civil society representative states that “we of course, know that peace and security operations in general are still... not considered something that women should participate in right, it is still considered like part of ‘hard politics’” (Interview #112). This is echoed by a female civilian working in UNMISS who points to negative attitudes among men when women join peace operations: “Yeah, there is a fact that men don’t like women to join peacekeeping missions. Right. They think that when they are women, they will be spoiled” (Interview #158). As “man’s work”, a peacekeeper in MINUSCA suggests that women’s deployment may negatively impact their marriage, or marriage prospects:



Very few ladies are ready to commit themselves in this job because, especially in [the] society where they’re from, they believe that [deployment] is not compatible with marriage. True or not, that it does not show marital responsibilities for the lady, or the chance to get married. Specifically for ladies who are expecting to be engaged. They believe that going to this kind of peacekeeping mission is like getting disconnected from home, meaning the person towards whom they’re expecting marital engagement. [Undertaking] this type of work will not help them marry; even some men working...in this environment don’t believe the ladies who are [deployed] are good enough (Interview #39).

In some contexts, women require men’s permission to deploy to peace operations, whether police or military. This might be permission from the woman’s husband, father, brothers or uncles. One military officer from Australia shares how she became aware “from having reviewed a range of different countries and preparing to deploy that there are many countries where issues of permission are still unfortunately, very strong, permission to join, permission to deploy, permission to have a job at all, from a spouse or from a parent” (Interview #125). There is a spectrum along which the expectation of male permission manifests, ranging from a formal requirement or social expectation. In some cases, it is a negotiated process involving the armed forces or is a personal understanding within a family.

As discussed in the next Chapter, the social and cultural positioning of women as primary caregivers in families is identified by participants as a significant barrier to their participation in peace operations. This barrier persists even where there is no formal exclusion to women’s participation. As a peacekeeper in MONUSCO argues: “the low representation of women in missions [is] because they have to do a lot more family balancing.” (Interview #75). Similarly, a survey respondent proclaims: “It is still mostly men who work in peace work since the women are ‘imprisoned’ back home to take care about the children.” A peacekeeper in MINUSCA similarly states:



... the woman does not want to leave her baby. The woman and the baby are a couple, mother child, you cannot separate them. So, women prefer to stay and take care of the children. Maybe if the child will be one year, two years, three years old, then she can entrust him [to another carer] and come to the mission zone. It reduces the attendance of women (Interview #54).

Research participants note that caring responsibilities create both socio-cultural and logistical constraints upon their capacity to deploy, where if one chooses to deploy, according to a peacekeeper in MONUSCO, “you have to know how you will manage your house, and you have to manage your husband... How you’re going to make sure that your family is not, you know, affected by your absence?” (Interview #62).

5.5.2 Organisational and Structural Barriers

Cultural and social attitudes intersect with policies and accepted practices within armed forces and the UN to complicate barriers to women's deployment. These manifest in unconscious bias among leaders socialised into an androcentric norm, formal and informal policies that discriminate against women, and gendered attitudes that deny women opportunities. Participants mention this in regards to: the imposition of age limits, career levels and experiences, policies/practices around pregnancy and care, physical standards tests and attitudes towards women's protection that can uniquely impede women's deployment.

5.5.2.1 Insufficient Career Level or Experience

Several participants speak about the challenges of matching women to appropriate roles in peace operations. A survey respondent notes:



Peace Operations recruitment is no longer for more 'generalised' policing capacity but is more focused on specific expertise related to sustainable capacity building and development knowledge and skills. Peace Operations policing is more complex than in the past. Women police have less opportunities in their national police service to build those skills and then have less opportunities.

Participants highlight two reasons for this. The first is insufficient training in core or specialised roles, particularly where women may have been sidelined in their service into administrative, support or non-operational roles, as highlighted by several peacekeepers in MONUSCO, for instance (Interview #73). Another participant argues that women may not be trained in the right fields for deployment, which:



...comes down also to it's what sort of roles are women are attracted to. In Cyprus, there was an engineering regiment that was responsible for the peacekeeping and they just didn't have the women because that apparently just hadn't recruited female engineers into this regiment. And this goes back to what subjects do women study? So, it's like the pipeline of talent coming through (Interview #122).

The second issue is experience. For instance, one participant explains that "specialised teams in police" require individuals to have "at minimum 10 years' experience", which they argue is more difficult for a woman in the police force to achieve:



... women probably deploying a little bit later because they are having their children, and it's taking longer to get to that 10 years' experience. So, then what happens when, you know, if you shift that timeline along? How many women are we missing out on taking on a senior role because they've had to start that initial experience later than their male cohort? (Interview #90)

This is also noted by a woman from Bangladesh who shares that in her country there is an upper age limit on deployment. She suggests that while older women may be more able to deploy because their children are older, and they have gained the pre-requisite experience, they may be precluded from doing so because of their age. She describes this as "this big elephant in the room that nobody really talks about" (Interview #90).



MONUSCO/Kevin Jordan 2020

5.5.2.2 Age Limits That Disproportionately Affect Women

Career disruptions due to caring responsibilities for women mean that they may only be able to deploy later in life. Yet this often collides with age restrictions for deployment, as mentioned by a military officer in the Brazilian armed forces:



...a lot of women that are now Majors and Lieutenant Colonels are 55 or 56. And they want to be deployed, but they're told now that they cannot because of their age. [These women have said to me] 'I'm the best moment of my life...my children are married. I'm just myself. I, you know, I exercise every day. I feel confident. I want to go' (Interview #93).

5.5.2.3 Different Physical Standards That May Disadvantage Women

In some armed forces, such as in Indonesia, personnel argue that outdated or androcentric physical standards requirements deter women from joining armed forces or seeking deployment. One female military officer from Australia describes the barriers that emerge from gender blind approaches to physical requirements:



Certainly, here in Australia, [there's no formal] barriers, like for example, we've opened up every role for women. So, if you can meet the physical requirements, then of course you can, you can be recruited into that role. The barrier I see that underpins that, though, is maybe that the physical criteria has not been altered since it was only for men. There's been a lot of debate around, for example, the physical requirements for certain roles in other militaries, that continue to work on the basis of a standard that was put in place by men for men (Interview #113).

This is acknowledged elsewhere with one female military officer from the UK referring to “gatekeepers” who set the physical tests. This participant refers to one country that they are aware of which “outsourced [the physical standards test] to a university... to say, ‘We want a gender free, gender fair test, and we wanted to align with what we’re doing in combat’” (Interview #80).

In response, another female military officer from the UK notes that this had also occurred in their country but they believe that an androcentric bias persists: “The Research Institute came in and asked the people in specific roles, like combat, what they were required to do, and the people at the top of the chain in those combat roles were all the men. And what we found is that they over exaggerated what they had to do on a daily basis to the point that a test was created that was almost impossible to pass, and it wasn’t reflective of what they actually do” (Interview #80).

5.5.2.4 Unconscious Bias in Selection Processes

Some participants speak about the role of unconscious bias in recruitment and deployment assessments. One participant shares an example of unconscious bias he witnessed during recruitment processes:



My recruiting officer, he was talking about diversity, but he wasn't recruiting any diverse people... some of that, I think, is, is because of unconscious bias. He didn't know how to recruit diversely as a 55-year-old white dude who's grown up in a white ghetto in Scotland. He doesn't know how to engage with other communities, and he wouldn't know how to talk to them if he did. And so that's kind of part of the cultural problem we've got, is you need someone who's quite emotionally and culturally intelligent (Interview #81).

In another case, a woman shares her experience in the deployment selection process when they were deploying junior officers. She notes that when she questioned why only a few women were taken: “They said, ‘you know, they’re having children, babies.’ So, there’s perceptions of people who have the who are the deployment authorities is there’s their own implicit bias there” (Interview #86).

5.5.2.5 Infrastructure and Accommodation Issues

The lack of suitable accommodation and facilities for women in missions creates a barrier to their deployment. In the MINUSCA mission a number of participants argue that there is insufficient housing for women (Interview #51). As is noted by a male peacekeeper, the mission is unable to accommodate further female soldiers despite – and hindering – efforts to increase the number of women deploying: “My accommodation was for 17 female soldiers. I was bringing 13 more. But I need accommodations... We can accommodate one or two, but when it comes to ten, that must be budgeted. If it was not budgeted, we cannot provide [for them] so [we’ve] been stopping them. We want people. Let’s work on the accommodation first” (Interview #59). A male civilian working in MINUSCA similarly highlights that “we need more accommodation. It means more money” (Interview #60).

5.5.2.6 Safety and Security Concerns in Certain Mission Locations

Concerns and attitudes regarding women’s safety in mission presents as a barrier for some women’s deployment. Missions that are deemed to be more dangerous are equated with those less likely to deploy women. As one female soldier highlights: “So MINUSCA was kind of one of the most dangerous mission. So that’s why the number the female deployment is really low....” (Interview #127). She continues to say that the safety and security of the mission has the most significant impact on the lack of women’s participation, believing that the “TCC doesn’t want to deploy females because they are aware of the safety and security issues” (Interview #127). This is because, according to the participant, “they have like a mindset that they don’t want to, you know, carry females in the body bag, you know, back home or something.” Similarly, personnel deployed to DRC note that while UNPOL was seeking to meet a 30 percent target for women’s representation, recruitment is difficult as it is believed personnel regard the DRC as a dangerous post, noting, of course, that women are often ready to deploy to such posts.

5.5.2.7 Pregnancy and Deployment

Pregnancy is identified as a reason that women do not deploy, with T/PCCs and the UN typically disallowing deployment during pregnancy, although formal policies do not always exist (Interview #80). Another participant recognises the value in the development of clear pregnancy policies, including creating opportunities for pregnant women to safely deploy to missions or work on mission related activities (Interview #90). Several participants acknowledge the challenges associated with the provision of quality healthcare in some missions, but agree that clear policies and the exploration of potential alternatives (such as remote or hybrid peacekeeping) should be pursued (Interview #90).

5.5.2.8 Lack of Organisational Support for Childcare

As will be discussed in the following chapters, participants point to the lack of organisational support for personnel with caring responsibilities, particularly childcare, as a factor that inhibits women’s deployment. As one female Indonesian police officer says: “Gender stereotypes and inadequate organisational policies often exacerbate this situation, resulting in individuals experiencing additional challenges in fulfilling professional obligations without sacrificing family responsibilities” (Interview #37). A British military officer comments that this is indicative of more general poor conditions in the armed forces:



... the fact that we haven’t got very good accommodation for everybody, that an engineer in the military would get paid less than an engineer in the commercial environment... I think that caring responsibilities and caring provision is just a fairly minor version of that. If everybody had loads of money, they could pay for their own childcare then it wouldn’t be a problem, and they can pay for their own therapist. But because we don’t pay people enough, then whether or not we give them a therapist, whether or not we give them childcare, whether or not we give them XYZ becomes a much more acute problem. Sometimes I worry about that we’re kind of looking at the wrong thing (Interview #81).

6 Caring Responsibilities

Overview: Most people have caring responsibilities towards others. For some – usually, but not always, women – the work involved in fulfilling these responsibilities is considerable and impacts every other aspect of their lives, including their employment. While there has been a recent shift in expectations around who should and can undertake unpaid care work, alongside a greater appreciation of its value, women still typically carry a disproportionate share of care work, with implications for their participation in the workforce, including the security sector and peacekeeping.

6.1 Caring Responsibilities of Participants

Most participants have caring responsibilities, including 74% of survey respondents (175 of 235 respondents), which includes 17% sole carers and 21% primary carers. Most respondents refer to caring responsibilities for children, while several mention caring responsibilities for elderly parents and bring attention to caring responsibilities beyond children, which – they believe – is often overlooked. Others highlight that in many cultures, caring responsibilities can also encompass large extended families and also non-blood relatives (as highlighted by a peacekeeper from UNMISS referring to the Māori culture in New Zealand and many communities in the Pacific islands, Interview #165).

Research participants refer to having both children and elderly parents and other family members to care for, including younger siblings and family members who are unwell, have special needs or otherwise need extra care. Many are also primary carers and a significant proportion are single or sole carers. Several participants draw attention to the wide variety of caring responsibilities that there are, and how this can vary (and be conceptualised differently – see Section 9.2) between different cultures, places and times and is impacted by class, race as well as gender.¹³⁷ For instance, an Australian female military officer says that “caring is so very broad” and often works “in complex ways”, underscoring that people without familial relations who they care for often form “caring networks” with friends (Interview #125). She also emphasises that when militaries consider caring responsibilities and care needs, they should not assume all personnel have “a significant other around to care for [them]” when in need and inadvertently avoid providing support to those in need (Interview #125). Others, however, caution about broadening the concept of caring responsibilities too much, which would risk the term becoming too vague, conflating different types of caring responsibilities and overlooking different impacts they have on women’s meaningful participation in security sector institutions and peace operations (Interview #123). For instance, a female civil society representative underscores that different types of caring responsibilities require different types of support and recognition.

As a separate but important issue when considering caring responsibilities and security sector institutions, it is also important to recognise that family members, often spouses or young children, themselves can become carers for the serving personnel as a result of PTSD and other injuries that arise through their work, including deployment to operations – something that occurs with greater frequency than most other professions (see Walker, Selous and Misca 2020 on recommendations to support these “hidden” carers in a report commissioned by the then UK Defence Secretary).

6.2 Institution as Family

Research participants also speak about their units and/or teams becoming their families. One UN civilian staff member in UNMISS, for instance, talks of the stress and trauma of working in peace operations sometimes harming work cultures but also leading to people “[taking] care of each other” (Interview #84). A police peacekeeper in MONUSCO refers to his Chief of Staff who encourages staff to see themselves as part of a family who can rely on each other and her support (Interview #78). Similarly, military personnel from India, Indonesia and the UK often regard their colleagues as family. Families of personnel are also frequently regarded as part of the armed forces or police family also. The army, for some, becomes a “substitute family” as well as supports the family members of personnel throughout and beyond the duration of their service (Interview #3). This language, however, may also pressure some personnel to commit to harmful work cultures that favour presenteeism, constant availability, and so on (see Section 7.2) for fear of letting their colleagues down.

Others say their care duties shift towards the host nation on deployment, with their “responsibility to take care of the host nation” taking primacy (Interview #146). Here, several emphasise that working in the armed forces or police is not just a job but is an act of service and about defending their country and, by extension, their families. It is, in effect, an act of care. Many also suggest that their career in the armed forces and police, as well as their deployments, is a practical way in which they could better care and provide for their family, because of financial remuneration as well as setting a good example of professionalism and commitment to their children, for instance.

Others, however, refer to feeling torn between their duty to their work and their country and towards their families, sometimes feeling as though care for their families is suspended or curtailed because of their care and dedication to their professional work. In a similar vein, other research refers to the military and the family as being “greedy” institutions, often competing “for a service member’s time, loyalty, and energy”,¹³⁸ with the family simultaneously regarded by militaries as “both a hindrance and an important support mechanism”¹³⁹ and, conversely, the military – and police – taking personnel away from their families.



UN/Pasqual Gorriz, 2009

6.3 The Gendered Division of Care Work: “Caring is a Women’s Game”

A significant proportion of survey respondents who have caring responsibilities are men (29%). Of the men who answered this question, 81% report that they have caring responsibilities (while 18.7% do not). Many men we interviewed also refer to their caring responsibilities. Many said they were primary carers. However, several meant they are the only or main person who financially provides for their families (Interview #154). A certain level of conceptual ambiguity around the concept of care thus emerged during research, with alternative concepts used in different contexts to clarify meaning: for example, in India, the concept of “caregiving responsibilities” is unfamiliar, with “welfare” being the more commonly used synonym (Interview #11).¹⁴⁰ Nonetheless, despite being conceptualised differently in different contexts, gender norms around care remained very similar.

The majority of participants recognise that caring responsibilities tend to fall disproportionately to women, and that expectations can vary between cultures. For instance, in the Indian Armed Forces many troops come from rural areas, where more traditional gender norms around care typically operate. Almost two-thirds of survey respondents (64%) agree that caring responsibilities are gendered, with only 17% disagreeing (the rest are undecided or did not know). Many, but not all, participants refer to a traditional division of labour in respect of caring responsibilities where women tend to take on most of these responsibilities as the primary care-giver. Many women peacekeepers agree that “females are the primary caregiver for the children... men do participate, but it’s not that much” (Interview #62), while many men agree that caring responsibilities are “a woman’s job... caring is a woman’s game” (Interview #136). Where married couples both work in the services, it is expected by several participants that “women will take the day job, take the sick days to be home with kids, will take the days off when kids are off school” (survey respondent).

Many participants highlight the additional workload thus expected of uniformed women. For instance, one Indonesian police officer refers to the unequal share of unpaid care work between men and women, even when both are working in the security sector. This reveals how women not only have an additional workload but this work also serves to subordinate them to their husbands:



... in the office, we have many subordinate staff we have but when we come home we become servant, but the husband come home and they have newspaper (Interview #33).

Several uniformed women with caring responsibilities across India, Indonesia and the UK, however, refer to supportive husbands that enable them (or enabled them, if they are retired) to advance their careers and deploy, or take it in turns with their husband to prioritise their careers or to deploy (e.g. Interview #31; Interview #73; Interview #146). Nonetheless, in some of these cases, there remains an assumption that fulfilling caring responsibilities is still women’s work. For instance, one Indonesian police officer expresses deep gratitude that her husband agreed to become a “housewife”: “My husband takes over being a mother. I become the head of the family. He stays at home, takes care of all my work. I take over his responsibilities [and] supply everything they need” (Interview #31). Another female police officer from Pakistan describes the support provided by her husband, extended family and others in caring for her children, but refers to this care work as “my gender responsibilities” (Interview #90). Scholarship also identifies how gender normative expectations around caring informs identities, whereby women “are” mothers and men “do” fathering, often “helping” with caring responsibilities.¹⁴¹

Indeed, several men similarly report that having children has not been a detriment to their career as they have supportive wives and/or extended families who can take on primary care roles. In many cases men indicate that they made a personal choice to prioritise career over caring responsibilities, though some note that it has impacts upon familial relationships and creates domestic tensions. This is described by one male British military officer, who shares his experiences of managing deployment with his family:

“““

There's been so many deployments and I've always had to put my job first. And I think it impacted my family more than it did my career ... If I was activated for ops, then there wasn't a way in which I could say no, unless it went through an official J-1 chain and there had to be a real good reason why I couldn't deploy. My wife at the time was absolutely very supportive of my career, so it wasn't really an issue (Interview #145).

Similarly, a male peacekeeper in UNMISS describes the difficult choice to deploy many serving personnel with caring responsibilities face:

“““

Yeah, sometimes it was a difficult choice [to deploy], but I took the view that we were professionals. I'd signed up to not just a job or career, but a lifestyle, a vocation, if you will that required me to go overseas and do dangerous things. So, I fully accepted that as part of the package ... But I was always fairly selfish. To be honest, the easiest thing for me to do is just accept the fact that the job required me to be in, I don't know, Bosnia or Afghanistan. So, I gladly went right, thus shelving my caring responsibilities, and effectively handing that over to my partner, right? Right, rightly or wrongly, probably wrongly, right? (Interview #17)

While many agree that caring responsibilities are gendered, with women typically fulfilling them and expected to do so, some participants argue that care work should be regarded as a shared responsibility. Some also highlight how many men miss their children while deployed and express regret for not being more available to their families. A male peacekeeper in MONUSCO shares that having younger children “a boy in the age of 15 and a daughter who will become 12 in December [makes] being on a non-family duty station is challenging” (Interview #64). Likewise, a male British military officer mentions that his career decisions “has fairly significant impact on the family ... over the last period of time, you know, I've missed birthdays, anniversaries” (Interview #133).



US Air Force/Staff Sgt Christopher Hubenthal, 2015

Some research participants also point to the resistance towards men who take on primary caring responsibilities, sometimes even from their partners who may not “trust” men can fulfil these responsibilities, and sometimes from society when they might “battle some stereotypes” (Interview #96). One participant shares an example of Nigerian peacekeepers whose husbands were caring for their children while they were deployed. who were facing difficulties at home because men looking after children “wasn't the cultural norm” (Interview #96). This is similarly echoed by another peacekeeper in UNMISS who notes that in Africa “Sometimes men who engage in caregiving [are] stigmatised as not fulfilling their traditional roles (Interview #174).

6.4 Support for Care-Giving: “Mother stayed at home, looked after the kids. Father went off adventuring with the army”

Several participants highlight the expectation that a male peacekeeper has a wife at home who is looking after his family. As articulated by a peacekeeper in UNMISS: “Mother stayed at home, looked after the kids. Father went off adventuring with the army” (Interview #180). In contrast, it is assumed that for “women in uniform, it’s unlikely that your...husband is staying home; he’ll also be working somewhere” (Interview #166). Several uniformed men refer to their wives needing to stop work or work part-time to look after children, perhaps returning to work when the children are older (Interview #131). For others, their deployments or work away made it difficult for their wives to return to work: “I have a wife who is the prime carer for my two girls, she doesn’t work and she hasn’t been able to because I’ve been away” (Interview #129).

Beyond supportive spouses, uniformed personnel across the 3 peace operations (MONUSCO, MINUSCA and UNMISS) and in India and Indonesia – but to a lesser extent the UK – often refer to the extended family as their “support system” (Interview #159). An Indonesian police officer, for example, states: “Indonesia, in all cultures, you know mothers will take care of their granddaughter or great grandchild”, making it easier for women police officers, in this instance, to deploy (Interview #85). Likewise in India, extended families provide a lot of support. A retired female officer in the Indian Armed Forces, for instance, mentions that her parents looked after her child while she was working and were “there to take care of him all the time” (Interview #24).

The presence of extended support for caring responsibilities provides a sense of “calm” on mission – as articulated by one female Indonesian peacekeeper (Interview #38), knowing children and others are being well looked after. Or, as a Thai female military officer puts it: “that’s why I don’t have to worry about anything, and I can keep on working” (Interview #127). Within this extended network, it is often women who provide support for caring responsibilities:



...a lot of the women peacekeepers that I met who had left their children behind, they also really relied on extended family, that was seen to be one of the key factors for making it work. And I would say this is also the case for civilian women going to non-family stations... There’s often a very, very strong reliance on grandmothers, you know, grandmothers of the children, aunts like the sisters (Interview #99).

More broadly, many participants mention multiple sources or a network of support that is required and utilised, including partners, parents, other family members, neighbours, paid help and “friends and colleagues who could be called upon as needed” (Interview #115).

6.5 Unpaid Care Work as a Barrier to Paid Work

Globally, women shoulder a disproportionate share of caring responsibilities, spending an average of 2.5 times more hours on unpaid work than men,¹⁴² or taking on approximately 76% of unpaid care work.¹⁴³ According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), caring responsibilities constitute the main barrier to women's participation in the labour force.¹⁴⁴ In 2023, of the 748 million people outside the labour force due to caring responsibilities globally, 708 million were women, while 45% of women outside the labour force cited caring responsibilities as the reason. By way of example, the latest data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that 59% of women in Australia who were outside the labour force and wanted to work could not because of caring responsibilities (42% due to caring for children, 17% due to caring for someone who is ill, disabled or elderly).¹⁴⁵

The barrier to work arises in large part because of the depletion of time, energy and other resources that fulfilling caring responsibilities incur. Scholarship on depletion through social reproduction (DSR) highlights that it is the highly gendered, undervalued and unsupported nature of unpaid care work that drives this and other harmful impacts.¹⁴⁶ Subsequent harms include negative impacts on the carers' mental, emotional and physical health, well-being and economic security. For instance, a recent survey among 1,400 women in Australia found that over the last year 72% of women said they have experienced burnout, of which 61% attributed this to balancing home and career life.¹⁴⁷

Marginalisation from paid work also arises because of gender norms on care work and maternal bias, as well as family and societal pressure and expectations, with participants noting that sometimes men "do not even allow the women to go and work somewhere, because of these responsibilities" (Interview #178).

In the workplace, women are stereotypically regarded as caregivers who will place their family before their profession. Therefore, they are often regarded as less committed, loyal and reliable.¹⁴⁸ This feeds maternal bias that positions mothers as "bad workers" and a "hindrance" to workplace productivity capacity.¹⁴⁹ They are thus often assigned to support roles rather than positions that align to future leadership roles, overlooked for promotions and opportunities, and financially penalised.¹⁵⁰ This is often referred to as the "motherhood penalty" because of the impacts of maternal bias and interruptions in women's participation in the workforce that adversely impact income and career trajectory.¹⁵¹ In contrast, men with families are often regarded as more committed, reliable and loyal to the organisation by their employers and, as such, sometimes receive bonuses labelled as the "fatherhood bonus" in scholarship.¹⁵² Gender norms about care work as a barrier to paid work also arise because of women's expectations that it is their work (Interview #146) and they cannot trust men to look after children or the home (Interview #52). As a peacekeeper in UNMISS comments: "does he breastfeed? No way. He doesn't even know how to pamper a baby. He can't wash a baby... You can't separate, at least for a baby of between day one and two years... the mother from her kid" (Interview #173). Gender norms about care work therefore not only harm women – contributing to a disproportionate care load and underrepresentation in the workforce – it also harms men and their ability to fulfil, and be acknowledged for having, caring responsibilities.

6.6 Normative and Cultural Change

Several participants observe that gender norms about care work, with women expected to fulfil primary caring responsibilities, is slowly changing. For instance, one civil society member observes a cultural shift in the UK:



I know that what we're trying to do, or in the UK generally, is to try and shift the culture so that the onus is not on the woman, and that it's a shared responsibility, and certainly the younger generation, they really do take that on board. And I think young men, now they enjoy being with their children, and they want to be part of their children's lives. It's not sort of 'that's women's work'. So that there definitely has been a shift in culture (Interview #122).

Many agree that there is increased awareness of the importance of unpaid care work and the amount of work involved for women and men; both brought to the fore by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁵³ Echoing the participant above, some attribute this to generational change. It is noted that across some cultures younger generations expect care to be equally distributed between carers. A female senior advisor in UN Women finds that the older generation (which she describes as people older than 40 years old) usually “keep it [caring responsibilities] private... and not discuss it”, while the younger generation are different:



I mean, I've seen colleagues between 30 and 40 from the UN Secretariat who are very proudly, you know, with their babies...there are these men who will show example. I mean, they shouldn't be given a medal for taking care of their kids, right? But...if this would have happened, let's say 10 years ago, they would have been laughed at, but now it's like, normal. I think there's a little attitudinal change going on, which is good (Interview #82).

Nonetheless, most participants identify stubbornly persistent norms that designate care as a woman's responsibility (Interview #136).

Dual Identity: Women/Wife/Mother and Uniformed Personnel

Where there were not assumptions from others that they should be at home caring for their children, many uniformed and deployed women with children say there is still an expectation – including of themselves – that they should not neglect their gendered roles. This is particularly evident in Indonesia where the importance of the family and women's responsibilities to their family is recognised by security institutions and those within them. It is repeatedly underscored that uniformed women in both the police and armed forces have a dual identity that must be balanced: both uniformed personnel and woman/wife/mother. One Indonesian female police officer, for example, refers to a “double function” that women police officers have to fulfil, and advise that any woman wishing to join the police service should also “consider [their role] also as a woman, as mother” (Interview #33). She also refers to advice she would receive from superiors about the need to “balance” their career and family: “not only focusing on the career, but remember that we have also have family that we have to take care of” (Interview #33). Likewise, a woman in the Indonesian armed forces suggests: “Even though we are military, the spirit of women's character should not be lost” and advises that to increase the participation of women in the armed forces and peace operations, training on how to balance both professional and “domestic” responsibilities should be provided (Interview #38).

7 Challenges

Overview: Uniformed women with caring responsibilities encounter a range of challenges in security sector institutions and UN peace operations. These include gender normative, work culture, practical, organisational and personal challenges. These challenges, while presented separately, are not mutually exclusive and often intersect and reinforce each other. These challenges can place additional stress on personnel, impacting the mental health and wellbeing of the individual and those they care for. These impacts are discussed later in the Report, though it is worth highlighting that it is difficult to separate the challenges and impacts experienced by personnel with caring responsibilities as they are often interrelated and reinforce a cycle of harm to mental health and wellbeing.

7.1 Gender Normative Challenges

Challenges facing uniformed women with caring responsibilities are bound with persistent gender norms that define security as a male domain and care as primarily women's responsibility. These gender norms influence recruitment, training, career progression and deployment opportunities (discussed in the next Chapter) as well as how women with caring responsibilities are regarded and treated by other personnel and their families and communities. They not only disadvantage women but also reinforce unhealthy expectations for men, creating a system in which both genders are constrained by narrow definitions of duty, strength and sacrifice.



UN/Christopher Clervig, 2008

7.1.1 Bias and Stigma

Women in peace operations face not only structural barriers but also persistent gender bias and stigma that affect their professional credibility, personal lives and long-term career prospects. These biases operate both overtly, through discriminatory practices, and subtly, through informal judgments and rumours. Stigma surrounding women's presence in security roles often reflects broader societal discomfort with women occupying spaces that are traditionally male-dominated. The consequences are significant: women can face extreme scrutiny, attack or isolation; they may be held to higher standards or their achievements undermined; and their reputations are especially vulnerable to gossip and speculation. These dynamics erode confidence, strain personal relationships and contribute to high attrition rates among female personnel. While gender norms around security work (masculine) and care work (feminine) are universally similar, they vary according to the specific institutional and societal context, and their impacts can be compounded or mitigated by cultural, social and economic structures.

Several participants highlight that women are often stigmatised and subjected to gossip and suspicion about their motivations to join security sector institutions and deploy to peace operations as well as other deployments and postings¹⁵⁴ – with such stigmas and suspicion seldom applied to men. Deployed women often face backlash or resistance from their families and communities who question their commitment to their families. Some face accusations of infidelity or inappropriate relationships, while others are deemed not to be “a good mother... [and are] sexualised...[for] deploying and being away from their husbands” (Interview #110). These assumptions not only harm professional reputations but also cause strain within marital and community relationships.¹⁵⁵ One peacekeeper in UNMISS, for instance, describes another female peacekeeper having had her family “torn apart” as her family believed “she has gone [to the mission] for prostitution” (Interview #126). Suspicion can lead to increased scrutiny of women peacekeepers, with a male peacekeeper in MONUSCO noting how male soldiers will often tell their friends to “watch my wife” (Interview #76). Several participants refer to photos, videos and texts of female peacekeepers being sent to husbands and families that can fuel baseless rumours, causing women to isolate and restrict their activities and harming their well-being.

Gender norms around security work and care work also impact women's recruitment, retention and career progression, which further contributes to the underrepresentation of women in peace operations. Participants share that women may not be selected for a position due to the perception that “she will get pregnant soon, and then she will leave, and now we will have to do everything” and the prevailing belief being that women should “stay home and have your baby” (Interview #167). A workplace culture that sometimes views motherhood as a liability and assumes mothers should be at home, can also lead to women being passed over for training, promotion and deployment opportunities. According to a peacekeeper in UNMISS, for instance, few women in the Indian Armed Forces progress to the senior ranks “because they're not a priority to get on courses. Because of those additional duties they have in the home...they will prioritise males attending promotion courses” (Interview #165). A peacekeeper in MINUSCA also believes she was not afforded opportunities to advance her career and deploy because of expectations she “should be at home with [her] kids”:



...for me, personally, throughout my career, I think my command feels like they're trying to accommodate me and feels like I should be home with my kids. I should be taking care of my kids so they're not going to present me those opportunities as much as they would with people with no kids, or with fathers...I feel like females do look they're judged if they do take opportunities to deploy and be away from their kids. Because the social norm, I feel like, in any country is that it's viewed that the mother should be home with their kids. So, it feels so it feels like people are thinking that the women that do take these opportunities are selfish, but that's just what we usually go through as females, whatever we do are judged (Interview #4).

7.1.2 The Double Burden

Mothers serving in UN peace operations often experience significant mental and emotional strain from being separated from their children. This hardship is frequently intensified by criticism for deploying from both family and colleagues, leading to self-doubt and guilt about their decision to deploy. Women report questioning their abilities as both a “good mother” and a “good worker,” a conflict well-documented in broader workplace studies.¹⁵⁶ This internal struggle is exacerbated when organisational support is lacking, forcing women to hide their personal challenges which increases feelings of isolation and stress.¹⁵⁷ Conversely, where organisational support is available it can improve mothers’ well-being as well as their “motivation and commitment”.¹⁵⁸

This dilemma is described by participants as managing “dual roles,” where professional duties conflict with traditional gender expectations of motherhood (Interview #37). Deployed mothers are often judged harshly for prioritising their careers, facing accusations of being “bad mothers” who abandon their children. Peacekeepers in MINUSCA, for instance, mention the expectation that mothers “need to stay near your baby, even if you go to make a better life for your baby, for your career, for your payments and everything” (Interview #45). This is similarly mentioned by a former peacekeeper who describes the criticism she faced when she deployed and being asked “why you have to leave your daughter when she was so young and should be taking care of the baby” (Interview #117). Others describe being told that their deployment is harmful to their children, told by their leadership, for instance, that “her kids are gonna really suffer for her being in the military, and it’s not gonna work” (Interview #138).

This criticism comes from their families, communities and even fellow peacekeepers who may suggest they are deploying for selfish reasons, like money or entitlements or to engage in sexual relationships. Such judgments are rooted in social norms that define “good mothering” as the constant prioritisation of a child’s needs, making any absence a source of guilt and criticism.¹⁵⁹ In contrast, many uniformed women we spoke with express their motivation to join the security sector and deploy is rooted in their commitment to their children. For some, this means financially supporting them: “I’m not here for trying to avoid my responsibility or caring for you, and actually because I want to earn something for you, so then you can have a better future” (Interview #117). For others it is to provide a good role model: “I want to give [my daughters] the best, the best picture of women...they have to go for their work” (Interview #102). Nonetheless, gender norms about peacekeeping and care work, and associated judgement that deployed mothers face, often feeds guilt, stress and self-doubt. This is highlighted by one interviewee who reflects on conversations she has had with female peacekeepers:



But one thing in this entire discussion that I think might be an additional burden when we speak about identity and roles...women often felt bad for not being there with their children, even though they knew that it would be very beneficial for their families in the long term. There was always this bad conscious and conflict with their identity as a mother...They were told you should be with your children, but I did feel in these conversations that this whole question around like: what I should be doing as a mother? (Interview #96)

While several note that attitudes towards uniformed women are shifting as more women join the security sector and deploy on peace operations, gender norms around care work remain relatively rigid, with women expected to be primarily responsible for care work and prioritise their caring responsibilities above other commitments. These expectations not only increase the workload and stress of mothers, but also inform assumptions about workplace loyalty, readiness and capability.¹⁶⁰ Many participants state that “women are viewed differently as mothers than men are as fathers” (Interview #113), with mothers expected to fulfil most of the caring responsibilities and subsequently face additional burdens to prove their loyalty to the institution.

Gender norms position men's roles in the security sector as "natural", and men who engage in paid work as "good fathers" for providing for their family.¹⁶¹ In contrast, mothers who work are often regarded as both "bad workers" and "bad mothers",¹⁶² particularly if they deploy:

““”

I would say absolutely, that [women] may be viewed differently...Like, don't you love your children? Like there's very strong, I think moral judgment on women on who choose to go on mission, actually... They [are] seen as not good mothers or, yeah, don't love their children...I've known actually, my friends and colleagues in the [Australian Defence Force], who have chosen to go [on mission] and people very much making judgment on them (Interview #121).

““”

I think that these women deploy and do essentially work that is, that is generally reserved for men. You know, it's work that is very difficult. That is, that we associate with masculinity. So, first of all, having a woman there is already changing somebody's perspective is already difficult. And if you add on to the fact that, then she's a mother, and then you highlight that part of her life, I feel like that is something that can be definitely seen as detracting from her professional experience. I definitely think that that's a perspective that we have that is unfortunate, that we think that, you know, if you put that label on someone, it is the predominant label. You know, that woman is a mother above other things (Interview #90).

Men can also suffer the effects of rigid gender norms around security work and care work, which may discourage some men from expressing emotions about missing their families, because "it's not always manly to say that; you might be perceived as weak..." (Interview #86). This sometimes forces men to hide their feelings or concerns: "You will never see any...man crying [on peace operations] that want to go and see my kids, no...No, men will be telling you that my wife, my wife at back home [is] taking care of the kids" (Interview #126). Moreover, as a UK military officer highlights, men's struggles can often be overlooked given the association of women with caring responsibilities, with "probably a bit more empathy with a mother who was who was away and had children...[than] a father with the same stresses... There may even be a bit of sort of positive discrimination towards women...[largely because] there's gonna be far fewer mothers" (Interview #142).



Gender norms about care work can also discourage men from taking paternity, parental or carer's leave, assuming it may adversely impact their career progression.¹⁶³ This is harmful to men who feel they are unable to spend time with their families for fear of repercussions at work, harmful to children, to their partners who need to take on additional responsibilities, and reinforces gender stereotypes on who is a carer and who provides security. Some participants, however, notice a "double standard" when men step outside traditional gender roles to fulfil caring responsibilities and are often regarded positively ("as a sign of good character"):



And then women also talk about a double standard where if a woman...is leaving early to satisfy a care responsibility, people are like, 'Oh, she's leaving early again.' Whereas if a man does it, everybody's like, 'Oh, isn't he a fantastic parent, he's going off to watch the Christmas concert, or, you know, Coach, the soccer team.' That we still have a society that sees women's care responsibilities as a distraction from work. But if men are beginning to step up and do some, they're seen as absolute heroes. And, you know, that's seen as a sign of good character, rather than a sign of, you know, being not committed and being distracted. So, I think there's a huge amount of double standards that... contributes to women feeling unsupported at work, and thus contributes to them deciding to end their careers in the security sector early, which when you look at, you know, what a huge investment there is in training in the security sector, particularly in like the first five years of people's careers. You know, there's lots of research around the economic and institutional costs of not retaining people. And I just think, you know, that has a huge impact on the efficiency of organisations (Interview #123).

This double standard means that women are seldom rewarded for acting outside of their gender roles, and are instead criticised for taking on "masculine roles". A peacekeeper in UNMISS, for instance, refers to male colleagues rebuking her when she returned from mission saying "woman, what are you doing in the mission? You are trying to prove that you are a man" (Interview #126). These expectations are shaped by and shape the work culture within security sector institutions and UN peace operations, reflecting and reinforcing gender norms around peace and security work and care work. The overall institutional bias and social pressure create a "double burden" for women: they are stigmatised as "bad mothers" for deploying while simultaneously fighting to overcome biases that question their competence and professionalism in the field. They must constantly justify their deployment to sceptical family members and colleagues, and navigate a masculinised work culture that devalues caregiving. This pervasive environment of judgment and lack of support not only causes personal distress but also risks undermining the retention and career progression of women in the security sector.

7.2 Work Culture

The security sector continues to be male-dominated and masculinised, creating a work culture that promotes a certain form of militarised masculinity that is not attentive towards care and devalues traits viewed as feminine, such as empathy and compassion. The demanding and often unpredictable nature of security work and peacekeeping has also influenced the work culture, which celebrates readiness, limitless availability, presenteeism as well as expectations of self-sacrifice and being unencumbered by family responsibilities. This work culture creates an environment in which personnel “hide” their caring responsibilities at work, in which mothers are often perceived as less committed, capable and focussed, and men’s caring responsibilities are overlooked or underestimated.

7.2.1 Masculine Work Culture

Research participants emphasise the challenges of working in a masculine work culture, impacting both men and women in security sector institutions and in UN peace operations. These discussions echo broader scholarship on the security sector which highlights the prevailing “warrior” ethos in militaries in particular, with behaviours regarded as feminine, such as empathy and compassion, often discouraged for more aggressive and dominant behaviours that privilege physical strength.¹⁶⁴ The “macho cultures” foster “...high professional expectations, isolation, stress” which leads to an “intense pressure to fit into a close-knit community”.¹⁶⁵ It can encourage attributes associated with care to be regarded as “weak” as well as encourage sacrifice and disconnection from families.¹⁶⁶ This work culture, compounded by expectations of perpetual availability and long periods of separation from families, “puts women off” joining the sector (Interview #122) and makes it particularly difficult for personnel with primary or sole caring responsibilities to “fit”, with assumptions deduced about their capabilities and commitment. It is also noted that this has an impact upon men seeking to undertake caring responsibilities. Some men in the research share that even where paternity leave or gender-neutral parental policies exist, it remains culturally difficult for men to take this leave. Evidence of the persistence of gender norms and the normative closure it produces in the military is explained by one participant as a “cultural lag” (Interview #151) where “parental leave” is interpreted “as maternity leave” (Interview #151). Others note that this further marginalises single dads, widowed dads and men with shared custody arrangements (Interview #143).

In many security and peacekeeping environments, there is a work culture that places a high emphasis on physical endurance and constant full involvement of its members. Individuals with caring responsibilities often have difficulty adjusting to these norms, which often view high levels of commitment and full availability as indicators of professional dedication. In this context, they may be viewed as less dedicated and less committed, potentially undermining their leadership judgment, particularly in cultures that associate leadership qualities with masculine values. As a result, there is a risk that leadership values associated with physical endurance and constant presence may devalue individuals with caring responsibilities within these organisational structures (Interview #37).

Several point out, however, that the changing nature of security threats has shifted assumptions about the skillsets required by armed forces, police and peace operations. Several UK military officers, for instance, discuss the increased emphasis on the “thinking soldier” (Interview #132) and a move away from “the more physical war fighting roles” which have traditionally “been dominated by men” (Interview #140). While this has contributed to the increased participation of women, including in leadership roles (Interview #140), the portrayal of men as “physical protectors and warriors” continues to be celebrated.¹⁶⁷ This reaffirms security work and peacekeeping as “a man’s job” and that women are “not supposed to go for a mission” (Interview #152; Interview #126).

7.2.2 Readiness and Limitless Availability

Research participants highlight the expectations that armed forces and police personnel will prioritise their work over their personal lives, making those who must balance or wish to prioritise their caring responsibilities “feel bad about having children and responsibilities beyond work” (survey respondent). These expectations encourage “self-sacrifice”, fed by expectations of long working hours, including weekends and evenings, and availability at short notice:¹⁶⁸



And I know from my own personal experience, this overworking is quite typical. So, mothers are very concerned that they might be regarded in a different light, so they work much more than their colleagues, for example, and they do suffer (Interview #90).

However, the demanding and unpredictable workload are justified as being expected from a career in the security sector, as “you sort of knew what you signed up for” when joining the security sector (Interview #80):



I mean, I think for the most part, is it hard? Yes, but these people joined the military, right? They didn't join something else, [such as] the corner shop down the street from their home or whatever. I mean, they did sign up to be a military person. So, I think we also have to assume that they always anticipated when they chose that career, that they would be away from their families for extended periods. That kind of comes with the territory, right? (Interview #100)

The expectation that the military and police are demanding workplaces that differ from other organisations is emphasised by research participants who explain that, in the context of the military, the “army is a 24/7 profession” making it impossible to achieve a work-life balance (Interview #7). In cases of emergencies, there is an expectation that personnel will be available to respond immediately and for long periods of time (Interview #118). Personnel may be called to respond to an emergency in the middle of the night, or they may be required to drop what they are doing and attend to work immediately, which is particularly challenging for those with children as they may be “already busy... maybe you had some doctor's appointment and now you're required somewhere else” (Interview #166). It is also a challenge for single parents who must find someone to take care of their children when called into work. One survey respondent describes being a single parent of a child with additional needs: “it is frustrating how management is reluctant to understand the levels of stress or work involved in raising the next generation - as well as adhere to strict deadlines, be constantly available etc” (survey respondent). While some who have children may not even receive the call to come into work as those without children may be prioritised given the expectation that they will be more available (Interview #165).

This “limitless availability, limitless commitment, and the difficulty of balancing that with family life” (Interview #123) causes challenges for many personnel with caring responsibilities. It also has repercussions within their families, as personnel rely on other family members to fulfil their caring responsibilities when they are called to work, creating additional burdens on their partners or family members and potentially placing stress on their relationships (Interview #132; Interview #127).

While for many this work culture creates strong bonds, referring to the military and police as “like another family” (Interview #140), for many it means choosing between their career and their family:¹⁶⁹



For care responsibilities, actually being in military, there's a choice that you make, that your mission comes first, your service come first, and then your family. So that is what is taught recently throughout our training years. So, for your care responsibilities, it always takes a back foot (Interview #74).

7.2.3 Presenteeism

Presenteeism—the expectation that staff demonstrate commitment through long hours beyond their contracts—is an entrenched cultural norm in most security organisations. This practice disproportionately disadvantages personnel with caring responsibilities, particularly mothers. For instance, those without primary care duties can stay later, creating a perception of greater dedication and loyalty to organisations, which often use physical presence as a key performance metric. Those who can be more physically present in the workplace may also utilise opportunities that may advantage their career progression. Consequently, employees who must leave on time for caregiving can be overlooked for promotion in favour of colleagues who are always available:



I've heard arguments from senior managers saying things like, well, if so and so has to go home at four o'clock, because at school pick up, but so and so is still here at midnight burning the midnight oil, how am I supposed to, you know, surely I can reward the person who still had burning the midnight oil, they're showing loyalty, they're showing extra effort, all of these things. They'll cite examples of the person who's able to stay and commit, the person is able to give everything because they have nothing else to consider in their life. And he was able to be available to the institution at all times (Interview #125)

A culture of presenteeism causes problems for mothers in particular who take time off for caring responsibilities especially during pregnancy and when nursing. Many refer to peace and security work not being conducive to (women) caring for young children, and their careers assumed to be “over” (Interview #119) when they become pregnant. Some mention expectations that after taking time off during pregnancy or for caring responsibilities, they “make up for the loss, even if there is no loss” (Interview #90). This pressure and is often “unsaid” (Interview #90) where “sometimes it’s going to be explicit, and sometimes it’s...not” (Interview #106). While mothers are more likely to face these challenges, a culture of presenteeism can also adversely impact men, who are not expected to take much – if any – paternal or parental leave. A UK military officer, for example, mentions having supportive leadership but still feeling like “a bit of a burden” (Interview #139) when applying for leave to support his wife following childbirth.



Cpl. Elizabeth Scott, 2019

While an expectation of presenteeism varies between institutions and roles, many participants argue that it causes significant pressure and guilt for caregivers. Some are disinclined to even ask “for more flexible work schedules” to help navigate the challenge of managing both work and care (Interview #82). Others are unable to express their concerns with their workload or work culture for fear of retaliation, career stagnation or stoking claims that they “can’t cope”. This leaves many feeling they need to remain silent about the challenges they face and keep their caring responsibilities to themselves:



...they've always expressed these mixed feelings between being very happy to have children or but then also being worried or already feeling they need to over perform like to feel a certain pressure...to prove something different ... They start with physical insecurities, you know, 'how do I look?' Like looking smart, looking professional, performing professionally... being able to focus. I mean, there's a lot going on when you, of course, have the sudden care responsibilities...I think, a shame at least, like in Western societies, people, they only talk about their care responsibilities, even if it's for their parents, when you're very close friends...I don't think it's because of repercussions at work, but I think care responsibility remain so undervalued...it's like, not something people are proud of, you know, which they should, I think people should be very proud of being there for their loved ones (Interview #118).

7.2.4 Attitudes Towards Carers and Maternal Bias

The dominant work culture, which demands total availability, informs a view that carers are less reliable, “less committed, less loyal... which can damage people’s careers” (Interview #125; Interview #146; Interview #127). Many female personnel we interviewed refer to this maternal bias and the difficulty in managing the way in which they are regarded in the service because of their caring responsibilities:



...trying to find that constant balance between the way in which people perceive you as a... military officer and a mother. I feel it's not the same way that they might perceive men, you know, who have families. And so, I've battled with that (Interview #113).

Personnel with caring responsibilities are often perceived as requesting time off “a bit too often” (survey respondent). Some describe the perception that it is unfair to leave early to collect children from school or childcare (Interview #37), and that they are unable to balance their work and caring responsibilities, and do not prioritise work. Other negative assumptions include that care-givers have “a lot more baggage” (Interview #142) and may be easily distracted on operations, which can put others at risk. As a peacekeeper in MONUSCO puts it: “she has lost concentrations thinking about the house, then you will be there and you can easily be ambushed” (Interview #63). Another peacekeeper in UNMISS describes women with caring responsibilities as often being distracted telling their husband how to fulfil these duties at home while they are deployed: “instead of concentrating at work, they are concentrating in the caregiving department” (Interview #174).

Some participants also mention a “low-risk appetite” among personnel with caring responsibilities, which can be read as less commitment and readiness (Interview #81). This can breed resentment, with assumptions that carers receive unfair concessions or preferential treatment, contributing to further discrimination and judgement of carers as colleagues may feel they are “covering off on that loss” (Interview #134). This is despite many reporting they work harder and often try to hide their caring responsibilities to demonstrate their commitment and competence and to avoid judgement or being penalised with fewer opportunities. Some feel they need to “go above and beyond in order to prove themselves to be worthy of being in the organisation” (Interview #80). For instance, one interviewee at UN HQ shares how her colleague “works as though the kids don’t exist”, often working late into the evening and sometimes not sleeping to ensure her work is complete “just not to give anybody the opportunity to think that [she is] not performing” (Interview #90). She observes that mothers commonly need “to work extra hard to prove yourself”, saying that she also does this “just to make sure that I’m not perceived as, you know, not being committed, not engaged” (Interview #90).

These attitudes are heavily influenced by gender stereotypes. Women, particularly those who are pregnant or mothers, are often perceived as distracted and less capable, and as a “hindrance” to workplace productivity.¹⁷⁰ Care-givers can face direct discrimination, such as not having contracts renewed due to pregnancy (Interview #119) or being negatively stereotyped when they return from maternity leave. While many say they are exhausted juggling work and caring responsibilities, it is not the case for everyone and, in any case, does not mean they cannot be present, focus or fulfil their work responsibilities:



... when they come back, people assume they're tired, they cannot focus, they cannot be... present in meetings, they cannot do the over hours, other people have to step up for them. I think these kinds of prejudice or assumptions exist, and that women and people with care responsibilities have been punished at the workplace, or let's put it the other way around, that people who don't have that have been preferably given better job opportunities, travelled, being at meetings, greater tasks, more responsibilities, despite maybe less experienced (Interview #119).

Maternal bias can also feed discrimination against women who do not have children, are not pregnant, and do not plan to have children in the future. Other studies show that the possibility of becoming pregnant can hinder women's careers in the sector, where some women are told they are not eligible for a position as a previous woman occupying the role had got pregnant.¹⁷¹ Assumptions that mothers – and potential mothers – may be a disruption, unreliable or have different priorities and are therefore less committed are not levied towards men who are – or may become – fathers. These assumptions reveal who “fits” in the security sector and reinforces the ideal worker as “...masculine, disembodied, unencumbered by pregnancy and parenthood, and without the potential for maternity”.¹⁷² These assumptions further sustain maternal bias and contribute to the “motherhood penalty” that scholarship on the adverse impact of parenthood of women's – not men's – careers points to.¹⁷³

Some personnel with caring responsibilities note that they have not experienced or witnessed any differential treatment in their security organisation (Interview #48; Interview #35; Interview #56). Others refer to a positive cultural shift in recent years that is more considerate and accommodating for carers. This is largely a result of demographic shifts, as more women join the sector and dual-income families become the norm (Interview #17; Interview #140; Interview #82); the gradual shift in the gendered distribution of care work; and the COVID-19 pandemic, which demonstrated both the critical importance of care and the ability to work hard and perform well remotely or flexibly. A UK female military officer reflects on some of the positive changes she has witnessed in the sector: “people did dismissively look at people who then go and pick up children from child-care... We have got better, but...we haven't got truly gone away from this whole concept of fully immersion into the role” (Interview #140). She emphasises the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the shifting attitudes towards personnel with caring responsibilities in the workplace:



...now you'll see people put entries on their calendar like 'school run' or, you know, 'child care'. Ten years ago, you would not have seen that, yeah, and if you did, it would have been the female proportion of the workforce putting that on their calendars, whereas now you probably see just as many men with that said, like, yeah, I've got to work from home on a particular day because it's at school inset day, the children aren't at school that day, so I need to be at home for childcare, so I'm working from home. So, I think COVID has played a big part in that of you know, previously, nobody worked from home (Interview #140).

Participants also recognise that attitudes towards carers depends on the context, as countries with higher levels of women's participation in the workforce may be less likely to discriminate against mothers and those with caring responsibilities – both female and male (Interview #165; survey respondents). Many agree, however, that the sector largely continues to favour those without caring duties, perpetuating a masculine culture that views care as a hindrance to dedication and operational effectiveness. As highlighted by an Indonesian police officer, the sector “is often oriented towards a masculine culture and physical toughness, individuals with nursing responsibilities may struggle to gain recognition or support. They may be seen as less dedicated or not tough enough” (Interview #37).

7.2.5 Devaluing Care

Assumptions that mothers can be distracted and have their loyalty, commitment and capacity questioned can lead them to hiding their caring responsibilities, over-working and feeling guilty when work or caring responsibilities need to be prioritised and the other de-prioritised. This leaves some interviewees feeling as though the sector does not value care:



And, you know, being there as a team, family, or partners or friends to be there for each other. That's something to be very proud of. To have someone who cares for you and your life, and that you are someone who cares. I think it's a great thing, but I don't think it's seen that way. So, people feel uncomfortable. I think a lot of times they don't like to talk about it... it makes a few people insecure and uncomfortable to speak about [care] in their job, like when they say 'I need to leave early' ... I feel they feel easily judged, or that they receive some form of, maybe not punishment, like not direct punishment, but that they will not be called [on] or that they [will be] seen as incompetent. Where they should be seen as more competent... You feel so sorry that you have to do this...it's so uncomfortable it shouldn't be that [way]... you are sorry that you have to take care of [someone]... I just think it's just so undervalued (Interview #119).

Several uniformed men express feeling like “a bit of a burden” (Interview #139) when applying for parental and carer’s leave, or were reluctant to “because they don’t want to feel like they’re letting their teammates down” (Interview #80). Others indicate men might be criticised for not fulfilling gender norms of security work and care work: “the sort of the insult that is like the feminising of a man because you’re doing the child related activity within the family” (Interview #106). Others considered that some men may be reluctant to exercise values and practices of care for fear of being seen as “weak” (Interview #80). These gender normative expectations imbue a work culture that undervalues care – assigning it to feminised, private spaces¹⁷⁴ – and trumps formal rules, such as policies providing for flexible working arrangements or parental leave (with men frequently assigning it to their female partners):



You can have all the policies in the world, but until you change your culture and you let it be seen that people aren't disadvantaged by it, you won't get the change. It's perception of career survival of the fittest (Interview #88).

Some participants identify the impact on women when men are reluctant to apply for leave (or flexible work arrangements), do not have policies available to them, or are denied applications for leave. One female military officer shares: “...from the perspective of having been the wife, because... if the men don’t get offered [institutional support], like any flexibility and support, the person that is directly impacted is the primary carer, usually the wife, so her ability to, you know, kind of focus on her own career [is diminished].” (Interview #114). Another participant explains that the “lack of organisational support for men can force men to put their caring responsibilities aside, particularly in high-commitment sectors such as operational and leadership roles and men then tend to delegate caregiving responsibilities to their spouses or partners in an effort to ensure that the demands of professional work can be met” (Interview #37). This has a detrimental impact on both men and women; potentially harming men and their relationships with those they care for, and contributing to women’s marginalisation in the security sector and subsequent underrepresentation on peace operations.

7.3 Practical Challenges

Several key practical challenges emerge throughout interviews and survey responses, with the lack of adequate or affordable childcare or other caring services being a significant barrier for many uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities, particularly women who are more likely to be primary or sole care-givers. While most UN peace operations are not conducive for deploying personnel to bring their families to, difficulties in accessing childcare and support for other caring responsibilities in T/PCC security sector institutions can contribute to attrition and discourage personnel from deploying. This is particularly the case where long-term 24-hour care may need to be sought. For those who deploy, many note how the isolation of UN peace operations and the resulting lack of infrastructure and services, particularly communication technologies, further contribute to their personal challenges of being separated from their families and support network. These challenges may deter those with caring responsibilities from deploying.

7.3.1 Childcare

Across many countries, security sector personnel face significant practical challenges in securing affordable and logistically feasible childcare. The core issue is a fundamental misalignment between the demanding, unpredictable nature of security work—including long shifts, irregular hours, and frequent relocations away from support networks—and the rigid operating hours of standard childcare facilities and schools, as well as the often-limited availability and high cost of childcare.



Many uniformed personnel discuss being unable to find childcare that accommodates their long working hours or shift work. These challenges are captured in previous studies, with logistical issues of managing childcare alongside demanding workloads and inflexible work schedules being a known issue for women in the security sector (and in the workforce more broadly) as they often take on more caring responsibilities.¹⁷⁵ Childcare is also raised as a key issue in submissions to a recent Defence Committee in the UK's armed forces, with respondents highlighting the challenges of managing childcare with “unsociable hours demanded by the Armed Forces”.¹⁷⁶ Finding childcare while being expected to work irregular hours is particularly an issue for single mothers, and those without support networks provided by extended families. In several countries there is little or no social support that subsidises childcare costs, which can make accessing childcare difficult, particularly for single-income families or multi-children households.

World's Direction, 2017

Alongside the practical challenges of arranging childcare within the demanding and irregular work hours of the security sector, personnel must also navigate the triple burden of managing childcare with work: balancing the costs of childcare with their income, ensuring they are available to take their children to childcare or school, while working enough to support their families. An interviewee working at UN HQ refers to the costs of childcare, with subsidies only “kicking in” when a child is five-years-old, and out-dated assumptions that UN staff have wives at home who will look after children and fulfil caring responsibilities:



... it's the financial impact, but it's also what it represents, because it represents a bias that assumes there is a wife at home taking care of the kids...the only choice you can make about having your kids in day-care or with a nanny is if you have a wife who doesn't work (Interview #99).

Likewise, the assumption that there is someone at home to fulfil caring responsibilities is alluded to by several uniformed personnel. For instance, one male British officer explains: “the working day starts at eight, finishes at five or six. Nurseries don't open till eight and close at six. But I'm expected to be in work for the start of the day. But my wife also needs to go to work...” (Interview #139).

Frequent relocations, which can be experienced by military personnel in particular, further complicate accessing childcare, often requiring families to find new childcare facilities and schools each time they move. This can be especially difficult if relocations do not coincide with the start of an academic year for school enrolments (Interview #9). Relocations at short notice, as is often the case, is also especially difficult when relocating to areas where there are lengthy waiting lists for childcare facilities and schools:



So I've had to hedge my bets, and I've put [our] name down for three nurseries and paid three non-refundable deposits just to secure a place in a place that I may not get allocated housing. So, I could lose all three of those deposits. And they're not insignificant sums of money. You know, I've probably spent towards 1000 pounds in non-refundable deposits. And because I don't know where I'm going to be, I don't know when I'm going to start, but places are competitive. You know, some nurseries wanted a full month's fees up front, which is non-refundable, which is two and a half grand... it's always difficult moving. And granted, you know, is something, you know, we all kind of accept. But the MoD could manage our career better and give us more warning and, you know, and even things like financial support, you know, having to put deposits down and then losing them because we've been sent somewhere else...I would, you know, if I get sent [elsewhere] and I lose all three of my deposits, I won't see any money back. But I've had to hedge my bets and hope that I get my home unit so, so that's not great (Interview #139).

The often unpredictability of relocations and high cost of day-care (and other support for caring responsibilities), as well as potentially finding adequate family accommodation, causes additional stress for personnel with caring responsibilities:



...the schedules, you know, sometimes, like a 12-hour workday, you know, [it's] difficult for people with caring responsibilities, when the day-care closes at the at 5pm for instance. And yeah, the lack of childcare overall...its availability and its suitability for folks who work in security organisations who have a lot of unpredictability. And, and frankly, the housing is becoming an issue, like the fact that housing is not affordable and it's difficult to find, has been another major cause of concern for military families, especially who need to, you know, let's say, find a two- like a multiple bedroom house (Interview #109).

In remote or insecure locations, when personnel relocate or deploy to peace operations, childcare may not be accessible or feasible, meaning personnel with caring responsibilities may need to separate from their families. At other times, family relocation may come with its own risks, as highlighted by a retired senior military officer in the Indian Armed Forces who cautions families being a “soft target when the unit moves to the field” and requiring guards for family accommodation and school buses at times (Interview #1). Moreover, UN family and non-family duty station classification are typically for civilians who work in peace operations. T/PCCs have their own rules about whether uniformed personnel can take families. While uniformed personnel are typically unable to deploy with their families, several participants who did mention being able to deploy to family duty stations describe how this may bring additional worries and work, while others mention how it can also help personnel mitigate any challenges that emerge from their absence from families, allowing them to fully focus on their work.

7.3.2 Other Caring Responsibilities and Support Networks

Personnel with other caring responsibilities— such as elderly parents or unwell family members - also face challenges. Access to support networks and affordable care, as just discussed, is further complicated due to long and irregular hours and frequent relocation.

These challenges leave many relying on the support of their families to help overcome the everyday practical challenges that emerge trying to align their work with their caring responsibilities. For those with partners, this may mean “your better half...invariably picks up the slack and acts as the caregiver” (Interview #3). For those whose partners also work, it may require taking it in turns to prioritise careers (or deployments) or relying on other family members. The challenge is especially pronounced for personnel without partners or extended family support networks close by, which may mean a significant financial outlay to cover the costs of care; if not offset by salary, it can contribute to attrition of personnel with caring responsibilities. Counterintuitively, in some cases it can also drive deployments as salary is typically much higher when deployed.

In India, armed forces personnel note the recent progress in addressing limited childcare support. Yet, access remains limited, with the growing number of women entering the service and the shift towards dual-career households potentially exacerbating this. With regular deployment to field stations where the family cannot reside with the serving family member, personnel rely on extended family networks for childcare. However, the support mechanism provided by extended families is not so prevalent for personnel from many other countries, including the UK.

The practical challenges around balancing work and caring responsibilities places additional stressors on personnel while, as one interviewee states, also “[contributing] to retention problems” (Interview #109) in the armed forces and police as many are placed under financial, emotional, and physical stress. This disproportionately impacts women, who often bear a greater share of caring responsibilities.

7.3.3 Deployment Duration, Notice and Information

The length of deployment differs between T/PCCs. Many countries deploy peacekeepers for 12-month tours (India, Indonesia), while others deploy for 6 months (UK). Sometimes, deployments are of a longer duration, particularly for police. Deployment length can also be longer for individuals rather than units. Longer deployments pose challenges for personnel with caring responsibilities, causing some countries to reduce deployment length (Interview #125) and the UN to pilot 6-month deployments for personnel with young children. The UN’s Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018-2028 includes guidance for measures to create an enabling environment including that Military Officers (MO) and Staff Officers (SO) may serve for 6 rather than 12 months (where deployments are 12 months) if they have children under the age of 7.¹⁷⁷ However, the “uptake is low” (Interview #80).

Deploying on short notice, as can be the case especially in emergencies or new crises, can also be a challenge for many with caring responsibilities, particularly if they need to find extra support quickly.

Lack of information on deployment opportunities, sometimes the result of assumptions that women with children in particular would not want to be deployed, is also highlighted as a challenge by some participants. Ongoing lack of information on what opportunities (deployment, training and career progression) are available continue to be a barrier for many women seeking to advance their careers in the sector (Interview #130), leading to “slow progress” in comparison to their male colleagues (Interview #111). The UN recommends that T/PCCs increase awareness of deployment opportunities among women by hosting information sessions and providing additional support for parents while they are deployed.¹⁷⁸

7.3.4 Remoteness and Isolation

The remote and often insecure locations of most peace operations (typically without family duty stations) create profound practical and psychological challenges for personnel. Serving in areas with poor infrastructure and significant geographic isolation exacerbates the difficulty of maintaining a connection with family and managing personal emergencies. For security sector personnel who are not deployed overseas, where they are stationed in their home country can also be remote and isolated, impacting personnel and their families, who may be separated or struggle to access affordable childcare, as previously discussed.

Of particular concern for many peacekeepers is the additional challenges they face taking leave and returning home when stationed in such remote locations. This adds further time and logistics to their travel and often increases the costs of returning home for their R&R, which can result in the decision to not take their leave and return home. These challenges are compounded by the personal challenges many note (discussed shortly), with one police officer describing how these challenges overlap when personnel are “...living far from family, such as on a different continent” where the “main challenges are geographic isolation and difficulties managing long-distance communication with family” (Interview #37). This combination of remoteness, difficult travel, and separation from family takes a toll on mental health:



Some of [the peacekeepers] were like, ‘we just want this mission to end. I just want my tour of duty to end’. And I was like, ‘but you’re an individual, you’re being paid’. They’re like, ‘you know, you know, do you know what it takes [for] me to go back home? Three flights, 48 hours, you know, to go back home, and I just cannot leave it. This is the desert. You cannot go anywhere...’ So, you know, even though it was just a chat, you can perceive there are some mental impacts on the person who does not want to be there (Interview #98).

The inability to easily return home during a personal crisis creates significant stress and a feeling of helplessness: “you are deployed so far off from your country, so in case of any emergency, it becomes very difficult for us to go back or fly back on time, right?” (Interview #73) This is echoed by another serving peacekeeper who argues one of the biggest challenges is: “Well, it’s the remoteness, it’s the remoteness. You can’t go to the country all the time to see the family. You can’t do that all the time...” (Interview #51).

Where families accompany personnel – on relocations or to family duty stations – isolation can also be a problem for the family as they are taken away from familiar support structures, such as other family members, friends, neighbours and schools. For this reason, many personnel decide to “to leave the family and my wife in one location” rather than move them each time they are relocated, and although “the effect is the separation” it allows the family to have some stability and support (Interview #137).

7.3.5 Mission Services and Facilities

Inadequate services and facilities on peace operations adversely impacts all peacekeepers. For personnel with caring responsibilities, they can cause additional hardship when, for instance, they have limited access to communication technologies to connect with families and oversee or arrange care in their absence. Inadequate gender-sensitive planning of mission accommodation, including gender-specific facilities and services,¹⁷⁹ may further compound the stresses suffered by women peacekeepers, including those with caring responsibilities unable to support – or receive support from – their families:¹⁸⁰



Lack of good living conditions, remote locations and deficient communication channels and long deployment periods do not facilitate the recruitment and retention of civilian and security personnel with caring responsibilities in peacekeeping operations (survey respondent).

Many peacekeepers refer to limited or sporadic access to services (water, electricity, internet) and poor living conditions on peace operations, which cause stress and undermine well-being. As mentioned by many peacekeepers across MINUSCA, MONUSCO and UNMISS, good working and living conditions not only benefit well-being but also enhance individual and operational performance.



UN/Christopher Herwig, 2008

7.3.6 Communication on Deployments

One of the key factors, beyond family separation, that causes stress for personnel with caring responsibilities is limited ability to communicate with families, often due to inadequate access to the internet or telephone network.¹⁸¹ An Australian officer explains that the “anxiousness of not being able to communicate is harder than actually being absent” (Interview #88). Similarly, other serving peacekeepers refer to not being able to communicate with families for long periods of time (Interview #152; Interview #15), or important conversations being cut-off (Interview #45), worsening “the distance between the family” (Interview #54).

Many participants share how being unable to connect with their families at home places (additional) strains on their relationships. It also impacts their mental health, where some are unable to turn to their families and friends for support while away (Interview #111) or know that those they care for are okay. One Australian female military officer recalls first being deployed: “Once I got there, oh my god, [I] was just empowered... but I needed to be able to communicate with my family. You know that was so important to my mental health to be able to do that” (Interview #88). Similarly, one serving peacekeeper in UNMISS shares the challenges he faces trying to maintain communication with his family while deployed:



And depending on where I am...sometimes we seem to be having a good day. I don't want to jinx it - our internet's working alright. But the means to communicate back home...can be pretty poor... I just got some parcels last night that were sent [four months ago]... my daughter had done some drawings. She wants to know, 'hey, did you like my painting dad?' 'Sorry, I haven't seen it yet, sweetie.' So yeah, just that, that remove from the people that you're normally caring for (Interview #151).

While technological advancements, such as the internet and particularly wi-fi, have enabled deployed peacekeepers to remain in contact with families more than previously, it is not easily accessible in many sites or for many peacekeepers. It depends on the location (and available infrastructure) of the site, investment of the T/PCC, whether personnel are deployed individually or as part of a contingent, and sometimes the contribution of the individual peacekeeper, meaning some go “...three, four months, I've not seen my baby, not even on WhatsApp” (Interview #98). In such a connected world, addressing these challenges is “critical in order for people to keep in touch with their families” (Interview #101). One interviewee from UN HQ shares how the UN is trying to address these practical challenges and the gaps that may emerge between different T/PCCs:



Something else that came up was...being able to stay in contact with their families... To ensure successful deployment, is being in regular contact with your family. In some missions that is an issue because there is a lack of internet access, and...the Wi Fi is not reliable. So, something we've been thinking of doing is maybe having designated times in the office where they can use the computer at the mission to contact their families, ensuring that they have SIM cards available when they deploy, so that they can get in touch. So that was a big concern (Interview #90).

Being able to remain in contact with families means that serving personnel can remain attentive to their caring responsibilities despite being away: “because I cannot be here without supporting them” (Interview #75), thus minimising distractions (Interview #131) and mental health issues such as anxiety and stress.

7.3.7 Health and Safety on Deployments

For personnel with caring responsibilities who have been able to arrange care and deploy, having practical challenges such as poor living conditions, uniforms and equipment not suited for their bodies, and a lack of essential services, including women's healthcare services, means they face additional challenges when deployed.¹⁸²

There are unique occupational risks to employees in security sector institutions and UN peace operations as a result of harsh working conditions.¹⁸³ Given the nature of peace operations, including the dangerous work and remote locations with limited infrastructure, there are risks to the physical health and safety of peacekeepers which are highlighted as practical challenges by research participants. Research participants share their concerns over how these risks can affect them and their families should they be injured, become ill, or die:



Well, of course, there's a risk that you'll die. And then your children are left without a parent... the risk is that you might go on deployment and not return... [but] there are circumstances in which men and women die and it's not as a result of direct combat. It's, you know, being in the wrong place at the wrong time, when something else can occur... it impacts both men and women... we've had people die in training accidents, we've had people die on mission, on operations. We've had, you know, men and women die on the service... So yeah, there's that that is the ultimate risk that your children will lose a parent. But I don't see that as being a reason for not serving (Interview #113).

The possibility of catching a disease, such as malaria, also weighs heavily on many peacekeepers. In their study on the health risks faced by peacekeepers, Yuan et al. found that nearly half of all deaths of UN peacekeepers between 2000-2017 were due to non/infectious diseases, higher than deaths caused by violence and other incidents.¹⁸⁴ Concern about contracting a disease is acute among some peacekeepers with caring responsibilities, in case they are unable to fulfil their caring responsibilities after deployment or expose those they care for to a communicable disease (Interview #31):



I have one issue, personal issue, and that is, I'm a little bit afraid of the sick, of the infectious disease here... I base my thoughts on fear. Am I [staying] healthy for my child? Am I [going] back home healthy in one piece and everything? And I think that is...[a] big challenge for the people who need to stay healthy, not just for themselves, and they need to stay healthy for someone else also. So, you need, like, double care of yourself, because you need yourself, and you need your child or mother or father, so you need to stay healthy and you need to stay safe (Interview #45).

While risks affect all serving peacekeepers, they are also gendered. For instance, women peacekeepers may be at greater risk of sexual assault. In turn, their engagement in the peace operation may be limited due to assumptions about their capabilities or the need to protect them – with similar restrictions or protection not typically afforded to men.¹⁸⁵ Additionally, access to women's healthcare providers, notably reproductive healthcare providers or gynaecologists, also potentially increases certain risks faced by women, if conditions are missed or unable to be treated, and leaves several feeling that “it just looks like no one cares” (Interview #98).¹⁸⁶

The risks of working in remote, insecure and often volatile environments - where “things change very quickly” (Interview #63) – can also cause stress and anxiety among peacekeepers, and for the families of peacekeepers, which can weigh heavily on those with caring responsibilities:



I promised my family not to take unnecessary risks, like, I won't go out for a jog at 2am like, there's no reason to take any unnecessary risks because I'm planning to come home. Yeah. So, the risks are absolutely there. It's different for every mission here in Goma, there are a few ones where the city, which is absolutely closest to the act of war, which is happening here, and we'll also like, we have the volcano, as I said. So, there are a lot of risks, but I've told all of them to my people at home, and they understand and they trust me to not be stupid (Interview #72).

7.4 Organisational Challenges

Organisational challenges facing personnel with caring responsibilities include inadequate, inflexible or inaccessible human resource policies, including policies on flexible working arrangements, special leave (maternity, paternity, parental, carers, emergency) and deployments (particularly R&R and compassionate postings). Inadequate resource allocation (for investment in structures and policies that could support care-givers) and unsupportive leadership can compound these challenges. These challenges intersect with the gender normative and work culture challenges and reinforce the practical and personal challenges personnel face.

7.4.1 Flexible Working Arrangements

One of the main organisational challenges highlighted by research participants is the lack of flexible working arrangements. While commonly perceived to be unsuitable for the type of work undertaken by militaries and police institutions, such arrangements can be and increasingly are available to uniformed personnel. Access to flexible working arrangements can mean greater balancing of care and work for many. This allows caregivers to work in the evenings or over weekends, “re-structuring work to fit around family” – such as school and day-care opening hours – without hindering organisational productivity or outcomes.¹⁸⁷ Working remotely, job-sharing or working flexible working hours may not be conducive to most peace operations:



...there is a big difference there between being in an office environment and being able to do that versus being at regimental duty, for example, and then going in a mission. It's, it's harder, I would say, to be able to offer that kind of flexibility, because there's more of an expectation for you to be there doing hands on stuff, and, you know, mechanical stuff...Now there's quite rigid policies and processes (Interview #80).

However, there are many roles within the armed forces and police that can adopt flexible working arrangements, creating a pipeline for future deployments. Further, not all work in peace operations is on the frontline or in volatile environments, particularly peace operations with family duty stations. In these instances, flexible working arrangements could also be considered. This said, participants highlight a resistance to change and commitment to workplace cultures that reward presenteeism and see flexible working arrangements as a disruption to workplace productivity. Research shows that this attitude towards flexible working arrangements results in mothers being viewed as “less productive” than other workers (namely men) who may not require flexible working arrangements.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, where flexible working arrangements are accessible, they are not always linked to clear career paths, and those working remotely, part-time or on leave may be overlooked for opportunities that can advance their careers, including training and deployment.

7.4.2 Human Resource Policies

Beyond flexible working arrangements, other human resource policies, which operate in military and police organisations and can help or hinder personnel with caring responsibilities, include special leave policies, including maternity, paternity, parental, carers, emergency or compassionate leave. While many personnel agree they can access leave to enable them to fulfil their caring responsibilities, several express that policy provisions are inadequate, incoherent or inconsistent, not well known or communicated, differentially interpreted, or lacked implementation guidelines.

Participants recognise that addressing these persisting issues regarding accessibility and adequacy of parental leave, as well as increasing the leave, may allow personnel to stay in their careers for longer and thereby benefit retention in the sector (Interview #99). Here, several underscore the benefits of having access to paternity leave and being able to share this leave with their partner (Interview #109), as well as having policies for carers leave so they may support their families (Interview #151).

Many T/PCCs have introduced parental leave policies to help ease the burdens placed on mothers in the early months after childbirth. However, some participants in the UK observe that few fathers have taken advantage of this leave (Interview #122) “because they...want to show commitment to their careers” (Interview #13). This is similarly captured in a 2022 study by ILO which highlights the low up take rates of paternity leave among men.¹⁸⁹ Policies on parental leave may also reinforce gendered assumptions on who can – or should – access them:

When it comes to these types of, I guess, cultural biases...whilst there might be efforts in a micro level, to address some of those barriers in terms of additional employee benefits, to provide for childcare facilities, to assist both mothers and also fathers. In those cases, you know, there is an absence, for example, of perhaps agile human resources, policies and systems in place to be able to provide for parental leave for carers and other forms of leave. You know, even when we think about how much leave is granted by a system for women as mothers, postnatal childcare, post birth, and in the postnatal phase versus what we might grant men in terms of... the arrival of a child. And you know, then how that that might manifest a bias in and of itself around the expectation that women are those primary caregivers (Interview #108).

Other policies that influence the engagement of personnel with caring responsibilities include policies around compassionate postings (if personnel request not to deploy or to be posted where they can take - or be near - those they care for, for instance) and age limitations for recruitment and retirement. Several personnel believe that age limits risk failing to utilise available expertise and experience (Interview #122). It also misses the opportunity to engage people with caring responsibilities – typically women – who have taken a break from service or might otherwise consider joining as a second career once (typically) children are older (though many may also be caring for their parents at this stage).

Several interviewees state that human resource policies are available to support personnel with caring responsibilities but operational demands and organisational interests often trump individual needs and well-being: “The system will try and help you, but the organisational interest would always come first. Always and every time” (Interview #3). Others emphasise the availability of support and flexibility for personnel as any issues emerge, so long as it remains within the organisation’s best interests: “So organisation interest always comes first and within the organisation interest, it is the operational responsibilities of the formation and the operational challenges that you’re meeting that comes first. After that, everything else fits in” (Interview #13). For instance, access to compassionate postings may be available to personnel depending on the context and operational needs at the time the individual is applying:



I said that compassionate posting can happen but compassionate posting is not a rule, it's not a right, and at max it is an exception because the task is cut out. We got to be looking at what the operational requirements are. And if the organisation is okay with it, sparing me for those two years, I can say that I am ready to forgo my promotion or other aspects. but it should suit the organisation also (Interview #4).

Policies that support personnel with caring responsibilities can therefore be vulnerable to the discretion of the organisation or leadership, particularly if operational or organisational interests are perceived as being at stake. Here, several participants point to the challenge of managing diverse needs and individual circumstances of personnel seeking access to the support provided by such policies, especially in such large organisations with complex demands placed upon them (Interview #132). Some highlight how overly bureaucratic structures do not allow flexibility or responsiveness to individual needs – such as leave at short notice to respond to caring emergencies – and carry a heavy administrative burden.

Others refer to restrictive policies that constrain leadership where they want to provide additional supports for personnel or where policy guidelines fail to account for individual circumstances. One interviewee from the UK military describes being bound by policy guidelines on leave that operate on a case-by-case basis and was only granted two-week extensions at a time, becoming particularly problematic for those with major issues, such as long-term illnesses among themselves or family members (Interview #132). Others, however, caution there could be a risk with more flexible policies unless leadership are especially empathetic.

On deployments, differences between the policies of T/PCCs – for example on R&R – can breed resentment or enlightenment on the kinds of support that can be provided for personnel with caring responsibilities. Likewise, differences between policy guidance of the UN and individual T/PCCs can also cause confusion. UN policy guidance may influence behaviour change and policy development in the T/PCC or it may lead to rejection if it lacks cultural resonance or context specificity (Interview #138). UN policy and normative frameworks may also be accepted but not lead to the anticipated transformational change, as some suggest with the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy:



Every troop and police contributing country takes a different view full stop. While there are great ideas at New York, it depends upon the troop and police contributing country. Many reject these good ideas, some buy in - but in order to get political credibility, and sometimes because of the financial remuneration (Interview #101).

7.4.3 R&R

Policies governing deployment duration and leave on deployments can pose challenges for personnel with caring responsibilities. While leave policies, such as R&R, are designed to help deployed personnel have a break from the mission area and, for many, visit their families, significant financial and logistical barriers often prevent them from doing so, creating stress and inequality. As one survey respondent highlights: “if you are able to return home frequently, it makes it easier to leave on a deployment knowing that you won’t be gone for too long”. Many peacekeepers are unable to visit families during R&R because leave is too short to accommodate travel time, especially in peace operations in remote locations or far away from home countries. Some argue that it “might take four days to come home, right? Three or four days, depending where you are. If you’re in a remote location, you have to go for a field office to mission HQ might be five flights, so then four days” (Interview #96). A civilian staff member in MINUSCA states: “The challenge is, for example, the remoteness of these areas... if you are based, like 1000 kilometres from Bangui, and we don’t have regular flights, or daily flights, maybe sometime two flights a week, so you don’t have any other means to come immediately to Bangui” (Interview #60).

Others explain they do not visit families during R&R because of the costs it incurs, which they often must bear themselves. Flights, especially long distances and from remote places, are often very expensive. As a peacekeeper from MONUSCO highlights: “I have known many people from countries where the flight tickets are very expensive, so they did not even go home” (Interview #69). Where many peacekeepers deploy to financially benefit their families, many sacrifice travelling home “because they want to save some money at the end of their tour of duty” (Interview #98). This means many peacekeepers can spend 12 months or more away from families, with the challenge of long periods of separation compounded by frequent communication difficulties. The issues around travel costs are echoed by Karim et al. who recommend the UNDP subsidises the costs for personnel to travel from the mission to their home to “make leave policies more equitable across countries”.¹⁹⁰ Yet, it also recognised that the financial implications of the UN or T/PCCs stepping in to off-set the costs borne by peacekeepers who travel home during R&R would be significant, aside from the significant administrative and operational impacts (which also have financial implications) that this would involve.

For others, leave to travel home was not permitted during their deployment. Several mention that they had to stay on mission for the duration of the mission, or they were discouraged from taking leave because of operational demands or the lack of other personnel to cover duties while on leave. Two serving police officers highlight the challenges they face accessing leave, where one officer states “.... in my country family reunification is not respected” (Interview #50) and another shares her fear of losing her job should she take leave to return home and care for her children (Interview #53).

These logistical, financial, policy and operational constraints can sometimes adversely impact those who must travel home from deployments on emergency leave, if a family member becomes ill or dies, for instance. These constraints can place a heavy emotional burden on peacekeepers.

7.4.4 Policy Implementation

Policies that support personnel with caring responsibilities may cause division and resentment if carers are perceived as receiving favourable treatment (for instance, extra leave, flexible working arrangements, shorter deployment duration), particularly because of the perceived impacts of such on others’ workloads (Interview #140; Interview #132). As a result of perceived bias, even if supportive policies are available, many personnel express a reluctance to access these and request leave they might be entitled to. Several participants also highlight that policies may not be known or communicated, leading to inadequate support for personnel with caring responsibilities. Lack of knowledge of deployment opportunities for uniformed women more generally is also cited as an obstacle to increasing the representation of women on peace operations.¹⁹¹ Others suggest that there is often a gap between policy and practice, dictated by work culture, politics and leadership. As one participant argues, while there may be policies in place, without the adequate support among leadership it may not be meaningfully implemented. She explains: “...the gap is between translating the policy to the practice” where the issue is less about financial restrictions, although “...money helps. Yeah, but it’s the politics is the determining factor. First of whether anything gets adequate consideration, and then gets the prioritisation and the push to implement” (Interview #115).



7.4.5 Financial Resources

Policies, practices and structures that support personnel with caring responsibilities often – but not always – require significant financial resource allocation. As has been discussed, many uniformed personnel we spoke with refer to lack of financial support to cover the costs of childcare or travel home for R&R during deployments, both of which can be significant. Help to cover the costs of elder care support and relocation assistance for families can also support personnel with caring responsibilities, but are also cost intensive. Such support would typically be provided by national institutions. Extending parental and carers’ leave, providing private lactation rooms and creches, ensuring access to the internet on deployments to help peacekeepers remain connected to families, also all have significant cost implications that would need to be borne by the T/PCC – though with possible UN assistance in the case of internet connectivity on peace operations (Interview #122; Interview #101). Many personnel point out that “all of it comes down to money and prepared to invest” (Interview #134), with some suggesting that support for personnel with caring responsibilities is not considered worth the investment. Without such investment, personnel with caring responsibilities, particularly women, are less likely to be able to utilise training opportunities (if, for example, overnight and without childcare support or lactation rooms – Interview #93) or deploy, which undermines efforts to recruit and retain women.

Others consider that decisions on where to invest resources are political decisions, reflective of a workplace culture that undervalues care and expects personnel to be unencumbered and make personal sacrifices. Spending more on supporting personnel with caring responsibilities “to support families” rather than “buying more guns and tanks” (Interview #134) can bolster the capacity of militaries – and other security sector institutions – at a time when many are facing recruitment and retention challenges. Given caring responsibilities are highly gendered, it can also increase the participation of women in security sector institutions and their deployment on peace operations. This said, Werner notes that simply increasing funding for issues such as childcare alone will not address key challenges for women in the sector, including masculinist and male-dominated work cultures that are not attentive towards care.¹⁹²

7.4.6 Leadership

The quality and awareness of leadership are critical factors in whether supportive policies for personnel with caring responsibilities are effectively implemented. Leadership shapes organisational culture, and an empathetic leader can significantly mitigate personal and practical challenges that personnel with caring responsibilities face. Several participants give examples of such supportive leaders and the difference it makes to their well-being, performance and retention. They share instances of understanding and practical support, such as emergency leave, temporary flexible working arrangements, or time and access to private spaces for lactation (Interview #38; Interview #53; Interview #83; Interview #91). Others say that where leadership is not supportive or not familiar with the challenges faced by personnel with caring responsibilities, it can influence policy development and implementation as well as work cultures, which can compound these challenges:



Our policies, our practices, our structures are set by senior leaders in accordance with what they think is the best decision-making on the day. And a lot of that is done much faster than we actually might prefer, there might be consultation, but fundamentally, decisions that were there or resourcing implications often need to pass, I guess, a common-sense test at a senior leadership level. And if that senior leader does not have an awareness, is not alert to, is not exposed to, inoculated to the issues of caring, or does not really take them seriously, because they have not affected them. Or if it's not been apparent in their particular career, then they will not step up for the policy that may perhaps cost a little more but allows for a change in behaviour. They won't advocate that they won't put perhaps their reputation on the line to get the change that's needed. Because they don't really believe in that change, because they can't really see it in themselves...One doesn't have to be deliberately negligent, one can simply be naive to an issue, because you haven't lived it yourself (Interview #125).

This officer continues to note that where senior leadership has “exposure to issues” around caring responsibilities it can give them “the capacity... to even give oxygen to the ideas that allow us to aid carers to be able to proceed through a profession and deploy” (Interview #125). Without such “exposure” it can leave leaders “frustrated” that personnel with caring responsibilities do not always fit with “the business model” of militaries and police organisations (Interview #81). In turn, this can influence workplace cultures as well as how personnel can perform,¹⁹³ excel in their careers and look after their families – as a peacekeeper in UNMISS notes: “how I function...how I’m how better I’m able to do my job... how I’m working and, you know, taking care of my family” (Interview #153).

7.5 Personal Challenges

Personal challenges that people with caring responsibilities face while working on UN peace operations and in the security sector more generally include difficulties in maintaining a work-life balance and the impacts of family separation, particularly on deployments; both on themselves and their families. These challenges intersect with practical, work culture and organisational challenges and vary according to the specific context and individual circumstances of each person.

7.5.1 Work-Life Balance

Some personnel face challenges in establishing a work-life balance. Those with caring responsibilities stress the difficulties in trying to do so, juggling competing priorities in a work environment which is demanding, unpredictable and inflexible (Interview #37): “it is not easy... for a person working in [the] police or in the army and to take care of family and balancing between serving the public, providing quality service to the public and taking care of family” (Interview #160). The difficulty in balancing career and family life is particularly pronounced among women.¹⁹⁴ Many describe making a “trade off” between a career and “finding somebody in a settled environment and then settling down with them and having a family” (Interview #134). Deployments, long-irregular hours and frequent relocations make it particularly difficult to maintain a work-life balance and sustain family life.

7.5.2 Family Separation

Separation from families during deployments is a significant stressor for personnel and their families. Many research participants share how their caring responsibilities are always “at the forefront” of their minds while deployed to UN peace operations (Interview #131). As one peacekeeper in MINUSCA explains:



We came as peacekeepers to help the Central African countries, so that they can find peace, because our countries have contributed through us, because contributing countries make the United Nations available. But...when you are away from the family, there is always this distance that is a problem. But still, we are there to help these countries, we are here to help the Central African Republic, to move towards peace. But there are always these concerns (Interview #54).

Some describe how caring responsibilities do not stop when they are away. This is highlighted by one UK female military officer who describes the challenges of managing caring responsibilities while deployed:



Caring isn't just about nurturing. It's also about everything else that goes with it. And when [you're] deployed, you're separated from all of those responsibilities that are still there, you're still paying for them, you're just not seeing it in a in a big picture kind of way. You're away from it. And you're just going right we need this we need that, that money is put aside, but that's what you're doing and the bill are getting paid (Interview #143).

Other uniformed women describe the additional work required to manage or oversee their caring responsibilities while deployed, such as having to maintain the daily routines of their children at home and organise their care. For instance, one interviewee mentions having to arrange new shoes for her children while at the mission (Interview #96). Scholarship echoes women's ongoing caring responsibilities while deployed, finding that women are often assigned the duties of preparation and organisation of care prior to travelling, ensuring that meals are prepared, childcare is arranged, schedules are provided to the remaining caregiver (whether this is the other parent or another caregiver), and children are prepared for the time spent apart.¹⁹⁵ Similarly, several peacekeepers who care for their parents or older family members describe needing to continue managing their caring responsibilities while deployed, arranging doctor appointments, helping with minor and critical issues, remaining in touch to keep them company, and keeping on top of daily routines (Interview #144). One interviewee mentions how she must set herself frequent reminders to call her mother and make sure she has taken her medications (Interview #127).

Several participants feel that a woman's (particularly mother's) absence is more challenging than a man's – for both the peacekeeper and those they care for. As one peacekeeper from MINUSCA says: “the role of a mother in the family, is something different. Mothers, I think it's even more challenging to be away from home. Fathers, yes, we can be away from home, but mothers, I think it's more challenging” (Interview #58). Some suggest that men are affected by family separation but in different ways, including the pressure of being financially responsible for their families (Interview #73). Others also highlight that men miss their families and are equally missed by them, with some feeling men may not feel as able to express this. This is supported by one Australian military officer, who says the challenge of family separation “matters little if you were a man or a woman, and is more about the individual and how they respond to that” (Interview #108).

7.5.3 Stress, Anxiety and Guilt

For those who raise being separated from their families as a challenge, many describe the impacts this has on their mental health when deployed, with feelings of guilt, anxiety and stress. The stress of separation is frequently compounded by the high-pressure nature of peacekeeping work, increasing the risk of mental health issues and affecting their focus and performance in some cases (Interview #149; Interview #37; Interview #142). Police peacekeepers in MINUSCA, for instance, report that having an unwell family member can weigh heavily on their minds “...then the child is sick, you will actually not be yourself” (Interview #53) and can mean “sometimes you lost focus” (Interview #52). The unpredictable and turbulent nature of peacekeeping means that scheduling communication with family back at home can be difficult (Interview #177), leaving some feeling “a level of extra stress...like you're always trying to meet needs that you can't meet...whether that's that, like, the needs of your workplace or the needs of those you care for, because you're pulled in too many directions” (Interview #123).

Some participants report experiencing a “double guilt”: guilt for being absent from their families and guilt for being distracted at work. This is exacerbated during critical moments, such as a child's illness or a missed milestone (Interview #45; Interview #46; Interview #40) and can intensify when personnel return home: “That emotional guilt starts to kick in... Have I done the right thing, you know, on tour... am I doing the right thing staying in the army. You get this whole guilt trip going on” (Interview #143). This is supported by an earlier study by Keller et al. whose research shows that many women who were deployed in the US Air Force felt guilty for missing important milestones and feared that they would not be remembered by their young children.¹⁹⁶ Similarly, one female military officer explains the impact of her separation from her son: “When I go to Afghanistan...And for six months, [my son] grew up 20 centimetres. And I cry and cry. Oh my god, right. But...I missed 20 centimetre of him... I struggled as a mum” (Interview #111).

In extreme cases, such as the loss of a loved one while deployed, the grief and difficulties to return home compound the psychological burden (Interview #116). For some the risks of peacekeeping work and the impact incidents could have on their families also increase feelings of stress and guilt. As one female military officer recalls:



... you're worried that something would happen to you, and then what's going to happen to the children, especially if you're a single parent, you know, all those things go through your mind. And I certainly experienced those when I was in Afghanistan (Interview #113).

These aspects of balancing parenthood and military or police life are often overlooked in studies on security work. This is despite the impact of personal lives on professional work and the inability to separate personal and professional as they frequently overlap and interact in both positive and negative ways.¹⁹⁷

Although many note the negative impacts of being separated from their families and those they provide care for, many articulate the acceptance that work in the military and police, including deployment to peace operations, often requires sacrifice of personal life. Some note that the distance from their families, although challenging, means that they are able to focus on their work. This can be aided by knowing that those they care for have support, underscoring the importance of support mechanisms provided by other family members and others, so they can be “confident that your child is being looked after properly” and they can have “peace of mind” while deployed (Interview #122; survey respondents; Interview #56). It is also aided by the ability to regularly communicate with families while deployed, although several note challenges caring for older generations who may not be familiar with newer technologies or have access to them (Interview #75), as well as the frequent communication difficulties on some deployments previously discussed. Other factors that influence the impact of family separation includes the type of caring responsibilities personnel have (such as the age of the care recipient and their role), the duration of deployment (and whether travel home during R&R is possible) and the family circumstance and whether they can collectively manage separation for a period of time. Several participants emphasise the importance of mentally preparing themselves and their families for separation, not least so “you can have less mental burden” (Interview #83).

7.5.4 Impact on Families and Strained Relationships

The strain of separation also deeply affects families at home, with practical and psychological impacts. Family members may take on additional caring responsibilities, partners may feel isolated and children can become distant. This is supported by earlier studies which find separation and long working hours place strains on marriages, where partners of personnel feel isolated or “second to the service as a result of the ‘mission first’ culture”. While others experience strains post-deployment when partners and personnel need to readjust to “roles and power dynamics”.¹⁹⁸ A survey respondent, for instance, refers to “the breakdown of homes due to the absence of a spouse” (*La dislocation des foyers du l’absence du conjoint ou la conjointe*), while a peacekeeper in MONUSCO similarly observes the strains of deployment on families:



The most apparent risk is the breaking of families. Okay, the breaking of families. Probably when you get married, there are promises we make to each other and during the way no one had foreseen that you will be deployed, for example, two years away from the family. When... the rubber meets the road, when it comes to the reality that some partners might not be patient enough (Interview #71).

The impact of deployment can be particularly felt in relationships during times when family members need additional support. For example, a UK military officer recalls the impact of deployment on his partner when she was pregnant: “I was at a unit while she was pregnant, where, you know, I was deployed for nine months out of a 12-month window. So, she was used to the fact that I was away a lot. But it has definitely negatively impacted my relationship with her without shadow of a doubt” (Interview #145). It is therefore important to acknowledge that while most men report that caring responsibilities have little to no impact on their career, they acknowledge experiencing family-related stressors. These stressors include the stress of missing one’s family while away, strained family relationships post-deployment and divorce. These men acknowledge that while their careers flourished, their family lives suffered harm. Most men also talk about the impact of their career decisions on their family lives rather than family on career. Thus, for many men in the research, the impacts are felt at the personal level rather than professional.

Several retired male officers in the Indian Armed Forces refer to the “huge cost paid by the family” when they are deployed, particularly the wife who “invariably has to handle everything. She has to handle the children, she will also have to handle the parents and if there are any other, younger, or older siblings of the officer concerned or the military persons themselves” (Interview #3). One retired officer in the Indian Armed Forces acknowledges the amount of work his wife had to do when he was deployed or posted to another location, managing moving house as well as fulfilling all her caring responsibilities: “So, possibly, in such cases, your spouse needs to be as strong if not stronger” (Interview #7).

Several discuss the impact on children’s wellbeing (in being separated from the parent or being worried about what may happen to the parent) or schooling (Interview #54). For instance, several participants mention the potential impact of deployment on relationships with children, including a peacekeeper in UNMISS who highlights the long-term impacts of personnel spending time away from families:



So, it's like, you know, in some other places, you can have your family, but in this particular duty station, you cannot have [your family here], and I think the disadvantage of that is with the, for the staff member with the children, that this often these children, you know, grow up without one parent who is always in the field... And, you know, sometimes it also happened eventually when the staff member goes on retired and that kind of estranged from, from the family and from the children. And I think that's kind of the main disadvantage...when you have a family because you miss that important time with your family, which nobody can, you know, bring back or pay for or, you know, just missed it (Interview #171).

Interviewees with younger children share how they are unable to fully explain to their children why they need to be away for such a long time (Interview #117) and refer to broken bonds. A peacekeeper in MINUSCA, for instance, recalls when she returned from mission previously her child “didn’t know me” and it took a long time to rebuild their relationship (Interview #53). Other peacekeepers refer to broken relationships with children as a result of spending time away from them on deployment or other military and police work:



I just spoke to my daughter, and they don't want to speak to me anymore. They tell me, daddy, he left us (Interview #71).



I, for one, my daughter for some time now, since 2019 either I'm on course outside, personal course and military course, military school. So, she doesn't want to see me. She says, I don't have time for her. So that's one of the challenges. When...she wants something, she will call another, but she will tell you that daddy doesn't have time for me. It's not, it's not my fault (Interview #76).

A report commissioned by the UK’s then Defence Secretary in 2019 on the needs of Service families and whether current support is meeting those needs highlights that many parents in the UK Defence Force regard deployments “as being a catalyst for difficulties for their children”, with longer deployments exacerbating these difficulties, noting educational as well as emotional challenges.¹⁹⁹

Length and frequency of deployment as well as ability to communicate with home regularly on deployment can influence the magnitude of these impacts (Interview #76; Interview #51). Many point out, however, that online communication – while beneficial for maintaining relationships and keeping in touch with families - cannot replace physical contact. Peacekeepers in MINUSCA describe the “lack of body heat” and not being “by the side the children”(Interview #54) as challenging: “...you cannot bring your family, there’s no way you can give a hug to your child in the morning before going to school, or be welcomed by your spouse when you’re coming from work” (Interview #39).

Participants discuss how returning home to visit their families can also bring its own challenges. Some peacekeepers describe returning to find that families, having tried “to adapt themselves to your absence” (Interview #56) and “have learned how to live without you” (Interview #39). They refer to broken relationships, families feeling “damaged by your absence” (Interview #115) and facing difficulties in adjusting to returning peacekeepers being at home (Interview #56). Returning peacekeepers also raise finding that their friendships have frayed or no longer exist, losing their social support and networks (Interview #75). This impacts the well-being and mental health of uniformed personnel both during and after deployments.

Even when not deployed, interviewees note that their work in the military and police can put a strain on their relationships with children and other family members, whether due to their long working hours or frequent relocation. Many refer to the struggles their spouses and children face with frequent relocations and school changes, severing support networks, impacting education and eroding a sense of stability (Interview #113; Interview #14). Some mention how this impacts children’s behaviour and sense of well-being (Interview #84). Conversely, others refer to the positive impacts of their service on their children and families, including building resilience,²⁰⁰ providing a good role model and financially sustaining their families, as one female civilian working in UNMISS says: “if I don’t work, my children will not eat” (Interview #158).

8 Impacts

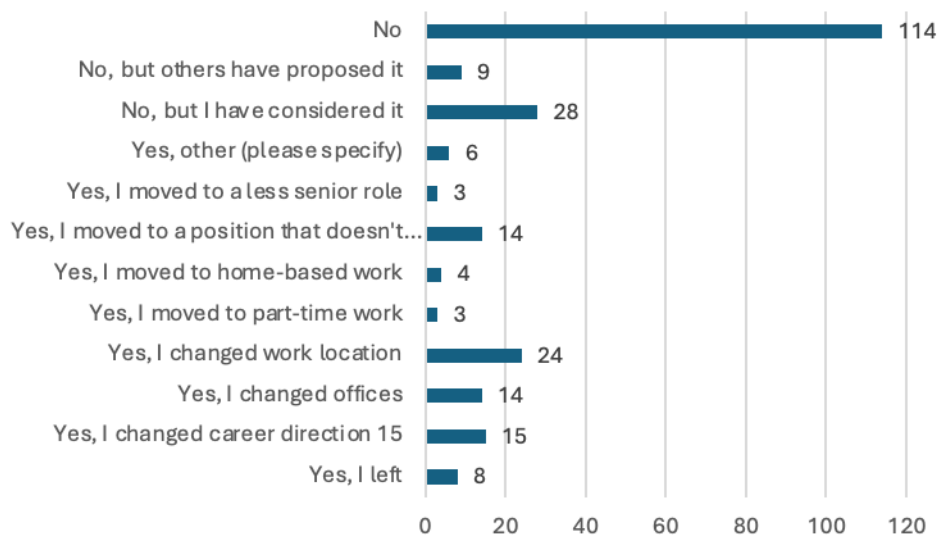
Overview: Caring responsibilities impact the recruitment, retention, training, deployment and career progression of personnel within the armed forces and police of T/PCCs. These impacts are most keenly felt by women due to the highly gendered nature of unpaid care work. These impacts arise due to practical barriers (with caring responsibilities constraining flexibility, time and the ability to travel), limited support (including organisational policies and leadership, and family support networks) and gender and maternal bias (that question the capabilities and commitment of mothers in particular). These all have implications for the meaningful participation of women in peace and security efforts, driving women’s underrepresentation in the security sector, particularly in leadership positions and in UN peace operations.

8.1 Recruitment and Retention

Attitudes about whether the security sector is a supportive work environment for people with caring responsibilities are likely to have an impact on recruitment and retention. Among survey respondents, almost a third (31%) believe it is difficult for people with caring responsibilities to work in the security sector, while the same number of respondents believe it is not difficult, and 38% said “it depends”. Women are more likely to agree that it is difficult for carers to work in the sector (30%) compared with men (25.8%). Of those who said “it depends”, most respondents note that it “depends on the person’s particular circumstances”, including their “personal priorities”, “family support”, “knowing how to manage your time” and “knowing how to balance between work and responsibilities” (survey respondents).

Caring responsibilities are a key driver of people – especially women – leaving the sector. When asked if they have had to leave or change their work in the sector because of their caring responsibilities, 43% of survey respondents (45% of women and 34% of men) say that they have (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Have you had to leave or change your work in the sector because of your caring responsibilities (tick all that apply) (n=199)



Those who report having to leave or change their work in the sector because of their caring responsibilities refer to “time management challenges”, the demanding nature of their work, and difficulties if relocation or travel is required, particularly if children are settled in childcare or schools or if elderly parents need assistance (survey respondents). Echoing this, one British military officer states that caring responsibilities are “not really compatible with moving around, service life et cetera...[and] dislocation of deployments and moving” (Interview #134). Others agree and note that heavy workloads and inflexibility also drive attrition rates of personnel with caring responsibilities who ultimately “decide to leave because their work arrangements in the military doesn’t allow them to give them the time that they want to their children” (Interview #113).

Most participants know people who have left the services “permanently or temporarily for family reasons” (Interview #77):



... some of them may decide to walk away from the institution, even though they may have no other work. But because of their caring responsibilities...there is likelihood that some...may not achieve their full potential in achieving their career goals [in the sector] (Interview #148).

Some also refer to personnel moving to periods of part-time or reserve service, particularly if they have young children (Interview #113):



I’ve got plenty of colleagues that have dropped from full time to part time service, so they can put more effort into parental responsibilities... I’ve got plenty of peers [who have] had to take a break in service (Interview #151).

Several participants also know of men who have left the service, citing a combination of their caring responsibilities and their work in the service, notably on deployment (Interview #135). However, it is broadly agreed that caring responsibilities are more likely to lead to women’s attrition. In India, for example, participants point to traditional support systems (for instance, stay-at-home spouses) which support men’s continued engagement in the security sector. Conversely, while there is a strong tradition of extended family support networks in India, because of expectations around care, uniformed women require “more skills, more effort” to manage caring responsibilities while working in the sector, especially when they are posted to different places. According to a retired senior military officer in the Indian Armed Forces, this leads to “quite a number of [uniformed women leaving] after 7 years or 10 years of time and switching to corporate mode so that they are grounded at one place” (Interview #4). Another retired senior military officer in the Indian Armed Forces, notes that limited access to childcare facilities, combined with the dual pressures of a military career and caring responsibilities, leads to some women “[giving] up the service” (Interview #8).

UK military personnel similarly mention poor retention of women in their “30s and early 40s due to childcare” (Interview #81). In the UK’s latest Armed Forces Continuous Attitudes Survey, the impact of Service on family and personal life remains the top factor influencing intentions to leave.²⁰¹ Evidence provided to the UK Defence Committee in 2023, as part of a follow up to the 2021 Women in Armed Forces inquiry, also reveals the adverse impact of caring responsibilities on retention:



I often hear of the Servicewoman leaving as they just can’t cope with the demands of childcare, full time work and a partner who is deployed. We need to look after our Service couples with young children as these years are only few and if we can properly support and adjust to help both Service people through this challenging period, we may have them for years to come.²⁰²

Elsewhere, there are similar impacts on women’s retention in security sector institutions, particularly militaries, arising from managing caring responsibilities.²⁰³ Studies on retention issues in the security sector also show that women are far more likely to leave the sector earlier than their male colleagues,²⁰⁴ leading to fewer women in senior leadership roles compared with lower ranking roles.²⁰⁵ The consequences of high attrition rates are concerning: women’s underrepresentation, particularly at senior levels, low staff morale; and losing talented staff, with organisational and operational repercussions:

“...I think there’s a definite sort of organisational loss there. Because the people who have so much knowledge and experience are then you know, outside of your management structures, and you’re just sort of bringing them in on an ad hoc basis. Yeah. So a real loss of expertise in the institutions. Yeah. So that’d be a loss in mentoring and role models and all that sort of workplace dynamics (Interview #122).

Of particular note is the UN’s Report Towards Equal Opportunity for Women in the Defence Sector,²⁰⁶ which highlights that among the 35 participating Member States, an ongoing “lack of support to parenting and family life” is the most highly cited barrier to women’s recruitment, retention and career progression in the military:

“A lack of support for the responsibilities of family life, combined with cultural norms that position women as primarily responsible for the home and for childcare and eldercare, make it hard for women to join the military; and women who do join find that they lack equal opportunities in accessing assignments and advancement.”²⁰⁷



Australian Government, Department of Defence, 2023

8.2 Training

Caring responsibilities impact uniformed personnel's ability to utilise training opportunities, particularly for sole and primary caregivers, who tend to be women. This is often due to practical challenges - particularly if training is residential or at a distance from family homes - and maternal bias, including assumptions that mothers should remain with their children when they are young or that their attention may be torn between their work and their families. Challenges utilising training opportunities can negatively impact career progression and compromise efforts to increase the meaningful participation of women in T/PCC security sector institutions and peace operations, including in leadership positions.

8.2.1 Barriers to Training for Caregivers

Among survey respondents, 36% report that having caring responsibilities impacts their training opportunities (of those who answered the question (n=199) 38% are women). As discussed further in the previous chapter, participants refer to practical, institutional and cultural barriers as well as gender norms about the mothers and their place and focus.

8.2.2 Practical Barriers

Aside from policies prohibiting engagement of personnel in training when they are pregnant and, in some cases, breastfeeding (survey respondents), practical barriers include the lack of time, including already being “over stretched” (survey respondent). The need to be on hand if “urgent matters” arise in the family (Interview #34), such as in the case of illness, further impacts the ability to engage in training opportunities, especially for those with primary or sole caring responsibilities. Other family demands also limit training opportunities. For instance, one uniformed woman chooses not to engage in certain training because of the adverse impact it would have on her daughter's schooling, while another recalls being unable to attend a course because she needed to care for her mother that week. Because families are often unable to maintain a strict, predictable plan, some uniformed personnel cannot participate in residential training opportunities for fear that something would arise in their family that requires their attention.

The time, duration and location of training opportunities also present challenges to many personnel with caring responsibilities. For instance, when training occurs during evenings or weekends or away from the usual place of work or residence, it can prohibit the engagement of those with primary or sole caring responsibilities unless they have people or resources that can cover the care support required in their absence. According to one survey respondent: “If training is out of province, then childcare can impact my ability to attend”, while another shares: “I did not apply for training that requires stay in or out of town locations” (survey respondents). Lack of childcare facilities at training facilities and the financial costs of covering extensive care is also raised by several people as the reason they did not utilise training opportunities (survey respondents; Interview #113).

8.2.3 Institutional and Cultural Barriers

Institutional and cultural barriers, such as gender norms about the place, capability and focus of mothers, also play a role in accessing training opportunities among personnel with caring responsibilities. Research participants refer to influential beliefs within their institutions or families that women should not be away from children, especially when they are young:



Sometimes it's my husband's parents who are the problem, sometimes my husband didn't want me to move away from him and the children who are very young [Dès fois c'est les parents des mon mari qui posent problème, quelques fois mon mari ne voulait pas que je m'éloigne de lui et des enfants qui sont très petits] (survey respondent).

This is especially the case when a woman is breastfeeding, with several reporting that they were not offered training because they were nursing. For instance, one survey respondent mentions that they were “Not selected for high level training due to “having young children.”” (survey respondent) In several instances shared with us, the assumption that a woman with young children should not participate in training courses was made without discussing with her whether she was able to or wanted to participate. One civilian in UNMISS who previously served in the armed forces shares an instance when she was overlooked for training due to assumptions made by her colleagues and leadership about her ability to attend:



After I had my son... I reported back to work, and I was due to go on a training... But you know, one colleague of mine, who is a male, of course, told my senior men that, because I... had just given birth, my baby was still young, it would be unfair to leave my child. And then so I missed that opportunity, because the decision was that I had just had a baby. But of course, I had put in, you know, some plans for my baby to be taken care of when, when I was away. But then the system felt that, well, you need to be home and take care of your child. Your baby is still too young. So of course, I missed that opportunity, which, you know, adds to, [impacts] my career progression (Interview #167).

Others suggest that mothers can be discriminated against and not chosen for training or deployment due to assumptions about their focus being divided between work and family “because her mind won't be on it. Because she'll be missing her children” (Interview #121).

8.2.4 Career and Gendered Impacts

Some participants argue that the barriers which impact their ability to engage in training for long periods of time subsequently impacted career prospects, though not always (Interview #41). Others feel that barriers to training arise in part because women with children are sidelined to particular roles, such as support roles, due to gender and maternal bias, which further curtails access to training and career progression opportunities and helps sustain “the Old Boys Club”:



Your placement within specialty units is what ensures maximum training opportunities. Additionally, higher ranks obtain more fulfilling courses and therefore advance even further up the chain. Administrative positions, which women are often put into, do not require additional training, nor do they assist with promotional opportunities. The less training you get, the easier it is to keep that person at lower levels of the organization - therefore not upsetting the Old Boys Club (survey respondent).

Many research participants highlight the need to strictly manage unpaid and paid work responsibilities, and the struggle and personal sacrifice that fitting in additional training often entails, particularly for women:



I had to give up foreign training, which would have enhanced my ability. During my staff college, I had [to] manage both home and studies, where gents officers completely left their home with their wives (survey respondent).

Others have faced “judgement” by colleagues because they need to occasionally leave certain training courses earlier or arrive later due to school drop off or family emergencies, and feel there is a gender dimension to this also. One military officer says the judgement often comes from men who are typically not required to “juggle” paid and care work:



There’s...a lack of understanding, which is, I think comes from the men not being the primary carer. So, they always have a wife there to go and do all those things. They have no understanding what it’s like to work and be the primary carer and that just that opinion comes from such a position of privilege (Interview #114).

However, the judgement appears to equally come from women, including those who may have struggled with managing paid and care work as well as those who may have chosen not to have families perhaps regarding it as incompatible with career advancement.

8.2.5 Support Networks and Mitigatory Factors

While it is recognised that women are disproportionately impacted by the weight of caring responsibilities and the subsequent impact on accessing training opportunities, some personnel with caring responsibilities – female and male – speak about being able to access training opportunities (Interview #31). They note, however, that it is often a choice between putting their careers or their family first at different points in their life. Some, for instance, are able to access training opportunities but choose not to in order to “prioritise time with my family” (survey respondent).

It is possible for some personnel with caring responsibilities to attend training, but only with careful scheduling as well as organisational and leadership support:



I am able to attend most trainings, events and exercises. However, to achieve this, I must carefully organise and balance my schedule to meet both family and professional obligations simultaneously. The support of the leadership in the workplace, plays a very important role in facilitating my attendance at significant training and events (Interview #37).

Others underscore the importance of supportive institutional policies. For example, training provided by UN Integrated Training Service (UNITS) provides travel tickets and allowances and considers how to deliver training to allow the participation of personnel with caring responsibilities (Interview #87).

Aside from strong leadership and supportive institutional policies, many research participants also refer to the critical importance of support networks and resources to enable their engagement in residential training. Here, many indicate having partners, parents, or other family members who are able to fulfil their caring responsibilities in their absence. Personnel with caring responsibilities also share that without support networks or financial resources to fulfil their caring responsibilities they are often unable to travel for training opportunities.

8.3 Deployment

Caring responsibilities significantly impact opportunities to deploy on peace operations, particularly for women, due to practical challenges, institutional policies, cultural norms and emotional burdens, as discussed in the previous chapter. The challenges of managing caring responsibilities while deployed are also significant, sometimes causing emotional and psychological strain. While many of these challenges vary according to cultural norms and available support systems, there is overwhelming evidence that women with caring responsibilities face significant difficulties deploying, with caring responsibilities being a key factor in the continued underrepresentation of women in peace operations. Being unable to deploy can adversely impact career advancement and also disadvantage personnel in terms of training and financial incentives. Better support systems and policy adjustments can help mitigate these impacts

8.3.1 Impact of Caring Responsibilities on Deployments

Outside the impact on retention, career progression and training opportunities, over a third of survey respondents (36.4%, and 39.3% of women who answered this question) agree that their caring responsibilities have impacted their work in other ways (for instance, recruitment, deployment on peace operations, networking). The majority of respondents who answered this question focus on deployment opportunities referring to being unable to “commit to the long duration of the operations due to child care issues” or because they do “not want to be away from my children” (survey respondents). Echoing many respondents, one explains:



Early in career [I] was led to believe that women were not suited to the work and was discouraged from applying. Later in career, when [I] had more confidence and skill in my profession, [I] had started a family and did not feel that I could leave them (survey respondent).

Many research participants refer to caring responsibilities for young children or unwell, aging parents as impacting their decisions to deploy, although some point to the needs of children regardless of their age: “no matter the kids are 10 or 20 years old, they still need parent to guide them” (Interview #117). According to some participants, many people are more willing to deploy when their child is young, noting that due to their young age they may miss the caregiver less compared with when they are older (Interview #62). While others emphasise the heightened obstacles to deployment that typically arise when personnel have children with special needs. For instance, a male military officer in the Australian Defence Force explains that there will be additional steps in the clearance process for personnel to deploy in these circumstances, and a decision may be reached that they are not suitable to be deployed: “some of that is about the organisation doing the right thing and wanting to obviously set people up for success. But also...it can mean that some people are discounted from a competitive selection process on the basis of their family circumstances” (Interview #108). Deployments are described as being especially difficult for primary or sole carers, or those without strong support networks. As one female military officer tells us: “I could never have left my children when they were younger to do a deployment or work away because I was solely responsible for them” (Interview #144).



8.3.2 Barriers to Deployment

Research participants refer to practical or logistical challenges, institutional policies, cultural norms and societal expectations, particularly gender norms about the role of mothers, as making it difficult for those with caring responsibilities to deploy on peace operations.

8.3.2.1 Practical and Logistical Challenges

As discussed in the previous chapter, peace operations are not typically conducive for taking children and other family members, and very few T/PCCs allow families to accompany personnel when deploying to missions with family duty stations. This means most peacekeepers need to leave children and others they care for in the care of someone else while deployed. Some uniformed personnel say that the work and financial cost involved in ensuring caring responsibilities are covered during their deployment, and the difficulty “to juggle work and caring responsibilities while far away from home” (survey respondent) has discouraged them from redeploying (or deploying at all).

Several uniformed personnel refer to the challenges of managing divergent work and caregiving schedules, especially if deployments coincide with critical times in their children’s education. For instance, some Indian military personnel share how they wish that deployments and new postings can take into consideration the academic year of different wards to avoid needing to move children in the middle of an academic year, which can be disruptive – or at least provide advance notice to best plan for an accommodate changes the family will need to make (Interview #6).

Many uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities feel that, although their service did not discriminate against them, it is simply more difficult to deploy because of a lack of support (such as the requisite resources or other family members who are able fulfil caring responsibilities while they are deployed) and psychological difficulties in being separated from young children, elderly parents and others they care for. Here, long deployments (for example 12 months) without travel home during R&R, compound these difficulties, alongside the often-exorbitant costs of childcare. The impacts of having caring responsibilities on deployment is discussed by one peacekeeper in UNMISS, who describes the considerations personnel must often give:



... let's take a mother who is thinking about leaving children and embark on peacekeeping. And if you don't really have enough money...or if you don't have anybody to support you, where will you leave your children? Who is going to take care of them? But if there is a package, or if there is money that maybe I can explore, take my child to boarding school, or hire somebody to come and stay and then take care of them and pay the person every month. Definitely, that will create an avenue for the women, especially the, I mean, with the younger children who don't have anybody to support them, to embark on mission (Interview #157).

8.3.2.2 Institutional Policy

Several participants refer to the lack of institutional policies and support that would enable their deployment, such as support for travel home during R&R and to offset the cost of childcare, as discussed in the previous chapter (Section 7.4). Some also refer to policies that directly restrict their ability to engage. For instance, women in the police and armed forces in Indonesia mention requiring spousal or familial consent to deploy (Interview #37), which is not always required of men or may be on an ad hoc or informal basis. Others refer to personnel with caring responsibilities being asked to provide a family support plan; even if with the best of intentions, it was not asked of men according to several participants (Interview #108). Globally, country-level policies typically prohibit women who are pregnant, nursing or with infants and young children (up to 2 years in some T/PCCs) from deploying (Interview #45).

For those who do not want to deploy because of their caring responsibilities, most speak of supportive policies that would allow them to request not to be deployed or compassionate postings. Some refer to increased awareness globally of the caring responsibilities of uniformed personnel, leading to policies where spouses are not simultaneously deployed and sole parents not forcibly deployed (Interview #83). Others, however, describe seeing little “sympathy” for personnel with caring responsibilities within specific security sector institutions, as articulated by a peacekeeper in UNMISS:



When I was in Afghanistan, I [was] seconded to the US Army... and they had no sympathy. So, we had multiple sets of parents who were deployed at the same time, and they were told to go figure it out. So, they had to find a grandparent or another family member to look after their children, and they were deployed for a year. So, there was a couple cases where the children had to be dislocated... [and] moved to a different state, going to a new school for an entire year (Interview #150).

Other participants are aware of women with caring responsibilities who have been pressured to deploy, for instance because of efforts to meet UN gender parity targets, the associated financial incentives (Interview #96) or because of expectations that deploying is “what you’re supposed to do with this job” (Interview #89) and not deploying would mean their “career would be impacted” (Interview #83):



... most of the time you do not have choice... It's almost required, if the battalion goes away, then if you were in the company that needs to go, then you normally you have to go... I know from friends who were deployed with me in UN peacekeeping operations that sometimes women are forced to be deployed. And I had a very good friend, she was very missing her children, and she was forced to be deployed, so it was very hard to her. I mean, maybe not first forced... but just that, if she didn't accept that, her career would be impacted, I think (Interview #83).

The additional remuneration for peacekeepers on UN peace operations can also lead to pressure to deploy from family members. One research participant shares an example of a pregnant woman who was encouraged by her husband to have an abortion so she could deploy because of the financial incentives: an example that traumatises the woman decades later and, according to the participant, is likely to be representative of other experiences women have suffered (Interview #90).

8.3.2.3 Gender Norms and Societal Expectations

Gender norms that care work is “women’s work” and the practical implications of disproportionate care work impede women’s ability to deploy. As a UK military officer articulates:



... the issues of caring, whether it's caring for elders or whether it's caring for children, tend to – without any one's deliberate decision – default to women in a partnership or in a family ... Single parents are more likely to be women... [or] have primary custody. And women are more likely to be looked to in a family structure to be helpful to their parents. As a result, there are a huge range of ways, given the structured nature of your average security institution, in which being a carer – or being someone capable of having a family and wanting to have a family – can cause those members to have to make really difficult decisions. If they are to balance societal expectations and the expectations that are programmed into them from childhood, whilst also meeting the gateways [and] the milestones that are required to progress in a security career, and to be even become eligible to deploy, let alone to be able to divest themselves of those responsibilities enough to deploy (Interview #125).

Across our research, peacekeepers identify these gender norms about care work as a major constraint on their participation in security sector institutions and deployment to UN peace operations, with prevailing beliefs that “women must stay home to feed the children” (Interview #46):



... a woman cannot be deployed in the rocking chair... [their] main purpose is to take care of the children. Who will cook you know, who will do all these things?” (Interview #178)

Gender norms as a barrier to deployment are also mirrored in several Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations [MOWIP] Reports²⁰⁸ and the UN Report Towards Equal Opportunity for Women in the Defence Sector, which highlights:



Gender stereotypes also play a significant role in limiting women's participation in deployments. In countries where women are considered primarily responsible for the care of families, children and households, decision-makers often view deployment as less appropriate for women than for men, and may deem deployment entirely unsuitable for women if they have young children.²⁰⁹

Many women inform us that they have been denied deployment opportunities because of gender norms that mothers should not, or would not want to, be deployed. For example, a female peacekeeper in MINUSCA shares the difficulties she has faced in the sector as a result of these gender norms and assumptions:



I find it difficult as a female in the military to progress in their career when they have kids, because it's a social norm that women are the caregivers to their kids. So, a lot of opportunities of deployments have been passed over to other people because they feel like I should be home with the kids or such. I feel that they've given more opportunities for my husband because the military believes that the kids will be fine with just their mother (Interview #45).

Several participants echo this peacekeeper and express how these biases impact their deployment prospects even when they do not have caring responsibilities, under the assumption that they do or may have in the future. As a peacekeeper in UNMISS explains:



... you tend not to get the overseas opportunities, because you've got caring responsibilities or someone perceives you to have caring responsibilities. Now, whether or not you do or don't, that's irrelevant. It's simply that that's how they perceive you and your value to the organisation is hugely limited because you're a female (Interview #165).

This maternal bias manifests in various ways. During deployment interviews, women with children, especially single mothers, can be subjected to intrusive questioning about how they will manage without their children, and how their children will manage without them, which is not typically asked of men:



I've heard from individuals who, you know, who get notification to deploy, and who, if they are women as mothers, who then get asked the question of, but you know, 'won't you miss your children?' Or 'how are your children going to respond to that' and which they might not necessarily be asking of a man who is a father... I've heard both men and also women ask those question of other women that they might not necessarily ask of other men (Interview #108).

For example, a female peacekeeper in MINUSCA shares that during her interview for deployment she was asked a lot of questions about how she would manage her caring responsibilities and whether this would affect her performance:



... at the main interview, I was asked a lot of questions about how I will handle this, this long period without my kids, without my kids, especially because I'm a single mum, is that gonna affect my work, my mental and physical status, my emotional, you know, swings or something. So, I don't think that that is fair play, because every mother, every father, every single person, wants to do something for their career, something for... financials, and for the life experience. So, every person needs to know, is it ready or not ready to be part of something like this? Because this is some specific situation. Is not like our work at home, so it's a lot of different. So, I like remember that, like bad memory, because it's not like, not was like nice questions (Interview #45).

A critical consequence of this bias is the removal of women's agency. Commanders, sometimes with good intentions, make decisions on behalf of female personnel, assuming deployment is not in their best interest if they are mothers (Interview #86; Interview #109; Interview #130). Sometimes these decisions not to deploy mothers are made, by both male and female commanders, to avoid "unnecessary risks to her family" (Interview #109) or risks to the peace operation, given common assumptions that women are more likely to miss their children and be less able to control their "sentiments" than men (Interview #46). Other times decisions are a misplaced attempt to support an individual by commanders who "feels like [uniformed women] should be home with [their] kids" (Interview #45). This "discretionary decision-making" allows informal bias to override formal equal-treatment policies, significantly disadvantaging "people with caring responsibilities, especially women" (Interview #109). Feminist Institutional scholar explains this gap between "formal frameworks and subsequent outcomes",²¹⁰ showing how informal gendered norms about appropriate roles can trump formal rules, sustaining gendered power hierarchies.²¹¹

Making decisions on behalf of female personnel on the basis of gender norms about care work and motherhood, helps to sustain gender inequities in both care work and security work. It also impacts the sense of worth and identity of individuals whose agency is usurped, and can harm their career progression:



You cannot take away agency like that... That still happens, and happens a lot, and I think this is what makes carers miss out on career opportunities... It impacts your sense of self and identity and agency. If you make that decision for yourself, it's all good, because that's your decision. You know you made it, and you live with it, and that's what you thought was best for you. But when someone else makes that call, I think it... will have an awful repercussion on your career and professional identity (Interview #179).

Many participants (both male and female) underscore that uniformed women have typically thought through the challenges that having caring responsibilities poses to deployment, so making decisions on their behalf – even with the best of intentions – is unnecessary and unhelpful:



... if someone has chosen to work for an organisation and they're aware of the demands and the risks and they want to deploy and have all the qualifications and training to deploy, then it's entirely their decision (Interview #109).

In contrast to prevailing assumptions that mothers are reluctant to deploy, most uniformed women we spoke with are highly motivated to deploy and for the same reasons as other personnel, recognising it as a duty and an exciting opportunity to contribute and do something meaningful, to be a role-model, to provide for their families, or for career progression and financial incentives.



This is actually the first time I've been away from the kids, so I kind of took that opportunity so that so that I could progress in my career and have more experience and be a good mentor to others (Interview #45).

Many uniformed women who deploy are motivated to redeploy, having been personally and professionally fulfilled. Some, however, show reluctance towards redeployment having suffered negative experiences and judgement for “leaving behind your child behind” (Interview #62) and “being a bad mother” (Interview #156). One interviewee, for instance, refers to “the stereotypes and kind of assumptions about them and them as a mother that they faced when they were deployed as peacekeepers with children at home” as deterring women from deploying again and driving women’s underrepresentation in peace operations (Interview #110). A female civil society representative argues that if a man who has children is deployed it is rarely viewed with criticism “because...his wife is with the kids”, whereas a woman is perceived as “selfish” because “she needs to care for her children”:



How is she selfish? She's providing a lot of salary for her family right now... there is a perception that I'm not here enough for my family, and there is a guilt trip much more than for men, right? So, I think there's a guilt trip from the community, from the other members of the family, of being a bad mother if you are not [with your children] or if you go to dangerous places where you may be killed... and then you have other women like myself, for instance, who are not with child, right? And people will say, 'Well, yeah, but at least you didn't have children, because that would be extremely selfish of you' (Interview #128).

She continues that normative assumptions about motherhood can even work against female peacekeepers without children:



... a woman needs to give birth and a woman is a mother before anything else, and then you have the perception of the selfish, career driven women that are childless because they have other things to offer, but do not comply with the society standard (Interview #128).

While gender norms about care work contribute to women’s underrepresentation in peace operations, they can also disadvantage men who are often not seen as needing to be present for their caring responsibilities, that they miss their children and families if deployed, or have a choice to request remaining with families when, in the case of the military, units or battalions are deployed.

8.3.3 Mitigating Factors

Aside from the location and duration of deployment, the majority of research participants refer to the critical importance of supportive institutional policies and leadership within the institution and mission, and the ability to regularly communicate home while deployed, which are discussed in the previous chapter. Additionally, participants refer to the essential importance of family support networks and other factors that can mitigate the challenges to deploy for personnel with caring responsibilities, including issues around family duty stations, shorter deployments and predictability of or notice for deployments.



UN/Gregorio Cunha, 2021

8.3.3.1 Family Support Networks

Many research participants speak of the critical importance of having strong family support networks, particularly spouses and other family members who can fulfil caring responsibilities when they are deployed, recognising not all personnel have these support structures. A peacekeeper in MONUSCA, for instance, argues that without family support she could not be deployed (Interview #41).

While many describe the pressure and stress of deploying and leaving, usually, children, in the care of others, others have “peace of mind” (Interview #54) during deployment because of the support provided by spouses or other family members for caring responsibilities. Conversely, as a retired Indian officer states: “If you do not have anyone at your house to take care of family - it will definitely upset you and it definitely affects your work” (Interview #24).

One female Brazilian military officer refers to many women in the armed forces being “uncomfortable” to deploy when they have children, expressing concern about who will look after them while they are away. The officer indicated this is partly due to – often unsubstantiated – fears about the capabilities of those who will care for their children in their absence: “they think that they the only one who needs to take care of the house” (Interview #93). This indicates a need for normative shifts around who cares and who can care – among men and women. Upon returning from a peace operation, one uniformed woman shared with a research participant: “I was so afraid of going to the mission and leaving my daughter, see, but you know what? They survived without me. Yeah, I went there. It was so good. So, I felt, I’m so happy that I that I went to the mission” (Interview #93). Nonetheless, other research participants agree that having limited confidence or trust in the person looking after your children can increase stress while deployed – or lead to decisions not to deploy: “having that trust that your other half can actually take care of your children’s [so] you’re not worrying when you’re overseas the whole time that they’re not being taken care of... sometimes a parent is not great at parenting” (Interview #114).

Several research participants also speak about many uniformed women being part of military or police families or married to other serving personnel. While this can create logistical challenges, particularly if both spouses are deployed simultaneously, it is considered to also increase the likelihood that women with caring responsibilities can deploy because of “that support system and understanding for what it means” (Interview #96). Peacekeepers in MONUSCO, for instance, refer to married personnel taking it in turns to deploy while the other cares for their children, with some men choosing to stay home in recognition that the woman may have previously lost deployment opportunities during pregnancy, post-partum or while nursing (Interview #63). UK military personnel also refer to efforts to avoid posting couples to insecure/non-family duty stations simultaneously, to avoid both being away from children. When deployed to family duty stations or out of peace operations, interviewees from India and elsewhere refer to efforts to deploy serving personnel couples together, where possible, noting that it is difficult to do so in certain circumstances, for instances, in the higher ranks where fewer positions are available (Interview #145).

8.3.3.2 Family Duty Stations

Peace operations with family duty stations are often easier for those with caring responsibilities to be deployed to, although as mentioned in Section 7.3.1, whether personnel can bring their families to family duty stations is dependent on T/PCC policies. For those who can bring their families, this can incur additional work for the peacekeeper as they manage both paid and care work. However, it can enable deployment of personnel with caring responsibilities, women in particular, who might otherwise be unable to deploy (Interview #110).

8.3.3.3 Shorter Deployments

The long duration of many deployments can be a barrier to deployment for personnel with caring responsibilities. Consequently, some participants recommend shortening 12-month deployments to 6 months to enable those with caring responsibilities to deploy more easily, which the UN is currently piloting. While a MOWIP assessment in the National Police of Uruguay suggests the ideal duration of deployment is 8 or 9 months.²¹² Some participants have been able to negotiate a shorter deployment to a peace operation when they were unable to find structures that would support their caring responsibilities for the full 12-months. Others share they feel disinclined to request shorter deployments because of a perceived impact on career progression (partly because of missed experience) (Interview #83), unit cohesion (if they were separated from their units or squadrons, for instance) and impact on the ground or mission outcomes (given the time it takes to get to know and be effective in the mission) (Interview #85). Some personnel are also concerned that a reduction in deployment length and thus a reduction in financial compensation would harm their ability to care for their families. Concerns are also raised about the logistical and financial implications of mobilising and training personnel to cover the remainder of shortened deployments (Interview #113). However, as one female officer highlights there is a need to decide between potential cost-savings and the value of enabling more women with caring responsibilities to deploy:



I'm only here because [the deployment] was six months. So, you're only getting a mother with that experience on the mission, because it was six months... You need to make a choice, whether you save money, or you want the diversity that you keep talking about because most primary carers wouldn't leave their kids for six months. So, you get a certain type of person as a UN peacekeeper that are dealing with the urban population that don't all have the same life experiences even close to them (Interview #114).

For longer deployments, many personnel express a wish for more support with travel home during R&R, though many also spoke of the financial and logistical costs of doing so as likely to be prohibitive (especially as home leave would need to be staggered, with some needing to take their leave soon after they arrive to accommodate everyone's leave). Some personnel also find that they return home only to leave again, describing this to be more emotionally and logistically disruptive than beneficial to all (especially given the stress that deployment to certain missions can involve) (Interview #80).

8.3.3.4 Predictability and Family Planning

Personnel highlight challenges related to the unpredictable timing of deployments, which can impact family planning, as women may delay having children due to concerns about aligning pregnancy with deployment windows a risk compounded by age-related factors (Interview #96; Interview #125). As highlighted by a peacekeeper in MONUSCO:



So, if I know that my turn is coming ahead, I cannot plan [to have a] baby [at] that time, and after traveling... Maybe my age doesn't allow or we face some medical problems like this. So, there are some problems we face regarding planning (Interview #66).

While caregiving responsibilities can affect both genders, the **biological and social pressures tied to family planning** disproportionately affect women. Where policies and practice allow for greater predictability, as well as greater flexibility, this can better support women who may plan to start families or have caring responsibilities.

8.3.4 Variables: Context, Culture and Identity

The challenges that personnel with caring responsibilities face in deploying on missions are not uniform and vary significantly across different T/PCCs. A key differentiator is culture, which shapes expectations of women as caregivers and either supports or hinders their opportunities within security institutions. In India and Indonesia, as compared with the UK, for example, there may be stronger expectations that a woman is primarily responsible for household and care duties. While this can compound deployment challenges, it can also discourage women from hiding their caring responsibilities or overwork to avoid maternal bias, and potentially ask for flexibility or support when needed, as is noted in Indonesia, for example. Additionally, these contexts also frequently feature extensive family networks which can provide support to uniformed women. For example, a female officer in the Indian Armed Forces shares that her parents look after her child while she is working and are “there to take care of him all the time” (Interview #24). However, this can be a double-edged sword, as women are often expected to provide care for a wider circle of extended family, which can intensify workload and make deployment more difficult. For example, several peacekeepers in MONUSCO refer to some women peacekeepers needing to continuously consider the needs of many people: “they have a burden of three, [more] people, Father, children, parents ... not only father, but father-in-law as well, mother-in-law as well” (Interview #49).

Financial matters are also relevant: salaries and the cost of childcare, for instance, vary between T/PCCs and impact the extent to which women can deploy as well as engage and advance in security sector institutions. The ability to deploy is also influenced by a range of other factors, underscoring the importance of context specific and intersectional analysis when determining how best to support personnel with caring responsibilities:



Women are not a monolith, and there may be differences based on the country they are from, or other issues, the type of role that they have in the mission as well, may have a little bit of a different take, or even the age at which they deploy (Interview #90).

8.3.5 Subsequent Impacts

8.3.5.1 Underrepresentation of Uniformed Women in UN Peace Operations

As has been highlighted throughout this Report, many participants recognise that decisions to not deploy due to having caring responsibilities disproportionately impacts women, because women tend to carry more caring responsibilities and are expected to do so. Some consider that caring responsibilities is “one of the primary reasons” why women are underrepresented in UN peace operations (Interview #129).²¹³ As a peacekeeper in MINUSCA argues: “Men can deploy freely; women must consider schools, accommodations, and relatives” (Interview #45). These challenges are compounded when there is little organisational support, with many participants identifying a correlation between lack of organisational support for personnel with caring responsibilities and the underrepresentation of women in UN peace operations:



if you look at the demographics of the armed forces, if you look at the demographics of who gets deployed, if you look at the published literature like it's very clear that there's huge gender-based considerations to be...looked at, and that...women tend to be overrepresented as caregivers, and then, you know, underrepresented as a part of the deployed force (Interview #109).

Many research participants also highlight that civilians with caring responsibilities are often marginalised from UN peacekeeping – both UNHQ and field operations – due to similar challenges (Interview #121). This matters to the underrepresentation of uniformed women in UN peace operations because of the role of civilian staff in developing and implementing policies and projects. Where there are fewer civilians with caring responsibilities, this is likely to influence what issues are identified, discussed and prioritised. This disproportionately affects women, as several participants say that women – uniformed and civilian – who deploy are “mainly young women, single women without children, or maybe older women who either had kids who were grown up a little bit already, or who had no kids” whereas the men had children of all ages (Interview #156).

8.3.5.2 Career Progression

In many countries, deployment is directly linked to promotions or can accelerate promotions because peacekeeping service is highly regarded and can equip personnel with invaluable experience and skills development. As highlighted by a peacekeeper in UNMISS, being deployed “definitely bolsters your career and gives you an edge over someone who perhaps has not had that opportunity”. Being unable to deploy can thus disadvantage the careers of personnel with caring responsibilities:



... the expectation is you'll deploy once in every rank doesn't always work out that way... I had a subordinate who felt that they could not deploy because of caring responsibilities and you don't get that breadth of experience through the deployment. And also on the annual merit board, you don't get the extra points. So there, there can be an impact (Interview #150).

Retired officers in the Indian Armed Forces say that while deployment is not a prerequisite to promotion, it can indirectly assist as it “looks good on your record” (Interview #8) and can be “an advantage when I am considered for my promotion... having done a UN mission gives me additional weightage (Interview #6). There are policies in the Indian Armed Forces that allow personnel to request non-deployment in certain circumstances and seek “compassionate postings” (see Section 4.4.1.2), such as for acute caring responsibilities. This would require the signing of an Adverse Career Certificate, which is intended to bring the personnel’s attention to the adverse career impact this choice may have. This Certificate also disallows certain opportunities for career advancement for a period of time (e.g. further deployments or training) and can carry a “stigma” (Interview #6). The broader impact of having caring responsibilities on career progression is discussed shortly (in Section 8.4).

8.3.5.3 Training and Financial Incentives

Aside from career progression, deployments can also provide knowledge, networks and exposure to advance careers during and after police or military service, as well as training and financial benefits that those unable to deploy because of caring responsibilities miss out on. Deployment often includes specialised UN training, which enhances professional skills and can help progress careers. In terms of financial incentives, the UN provides a standard mission allowance to national governments of T/PCCs, which then is passed on to individual peacekeepers in full or a portion of it, and some countries supplement this with additional allowances.

8.3.6 Emotional and Psychological Impacts

Those unable to deploy refer to psychological distress, feeling “torn” between family and career (Interview #140) and struggling to “juggle” or balance competing priorities (Interview #165 and survey respondents), including providing for families’ financial and emotional well-being, as one UK naval officer explains:



...the balance of trying to prioritise your family or your caring responsibilities alongside prioritising your career. Obviously, I'm very aware that I'm a single parent, so I financially provide for my children. So, I need to work as hard as I can, to get promoted, to get the pay rises, you know, so that I've got money for my family. But at the same time, I need to prioritise my children as well, because I'm concerned for their welfare... I'd love to go to sea, but I know the emotional impact that it would have on my children would be awful. So, I could never volunteer to do that job. But you know, when you join up to do a job, like being secure a job, military, you know, police, whatever it is, as it is, it's a vocation, and you do it because you're passionate about it, and you want to be involved in that sphere. And then you [are] almost torn between, I really want to do that, but, oh, I can't, because it would jeopardise the wellbeing of my family. And you know, finding that balance is very difficult (Interview #140)

For those with caring responsibilities who did deploy, as highlighted in the previous chapter, many **discuss** psychological stress **caused by separation from** family, for both men and women. Peacekeepers refer to the “mental pressure” (Interview #47) and uncomfortable feelings of “withdrawal” (Interview #68). **The stress is intensified when** they are unable to travel home during R&R or communicate regularly with families while deployed.

Peacekeepers also underscore the stress of preparing for and managing caring responsibilities while deployed, which typically falls on women. According to a peacekeeper in MINUSCA: “And even though I am here, I am still the mother of the family. Every evening, I talk to my husband. Every evening, it is my duty to talk to my children and do things, even if I am very far away” (Interview #54). Some women speak about having one foot in the mission “and the other foot outside” (Interview #54).

Psychological strain is further intensified by feelings of guilt and social stigma associated with expectations that women should be at home providing care for children or fulfilling other caring responsibilities. One Indian peacekeeper in MONUSCO argues that “the societal pressure is always there. You also feel guilty sometimes when you talk to your parents on phone and they are sick, and then you cannot go from here, because it takes time to book you in flight and takes time to plan and all that. So, you do feel guilty in your heart” (Interview #63).

Several peacekeepers draw attention to a paradox – or “dilemma” – that they found on mission, between caring for others through the peace operation and their own caring responsibilities that they are often separated from:



... we are here, involved in other people's lives, seeing how much they are missing, and then we realise that the same is also, in a way, happening to our children, even though they are getting maybe all the facilities, but the love and care that they should be getting at the prime of their age is missing. So, career wise, of course, it has been very good, and I sure am likely to progress ahead with the same choices, but the family too does get a bit there. So, it puts you in a dilemma, like, after coming going back, what should be your stance in your future choices and ambitions that you have? Should you take pause? Should you stop? Should you continue? (Interview #69)

8.4 Career Progression and Promotion

Caring responsibilities significantly impact uniformed personnel's career progression within the armed forces and police, particularly for women. This is particularly due to time and mobility constraints, which impact training, deployment and promotion opportunities. This impact is influenced by gender norms around security work and care work as well as the availability of organisational, family and other support. The impact on career progression has a subsequent impact on retention, well-being and the meaningful participation of women in security sector institutions and UN peace operations, including in leadership positions.

8.4.1 Career Progression

Lack of support for personnel with caring responsibilities appears to be a key driver of women's attrition in the sector. For those who remain in the sector, many mention having to alter their career plans and change roles to better accommodate their caring responsibilities (see Section 4.2.2). Some feel their roles are more precarious or they feel less “valued”, causing some to leave the sector (Interview #115). Many describe the challenges of balancing work and family life. Echoing many others, one female Canadian military officer says that “caring responsibilities... had a huge impact on my professional trajectory” (Interview #109). Over two-fifths (42%) of survey respondents agree that their caring responsibilities have impacted their career progression (including promotion, types of work, locations of work), with women more likely to agree (47%).

Many research participants highlight that their career progression has been impacted because their caring responsibilities make it difficult to deploy, attend residential training opportunities, or have the time to dedicate to promotion aspirations. As an Indonesian policewoman notes: “Family responsibilities often require adjustments in time management and priorities, which sometimes impacts my availability for additional responsibilities that could support career advancement” (Interview #37). It is also underscored that in a sector that expects flexibility, perpetual availability, long hours and regular travel from personnel, those with substantial caring responsibilities are less likely to progress their careers as they are less able to always meet these expectations. For one Australian uniformed woman, for instance, primary caring responsibilities “becomes something that’s difficult to manage, with a job that requires you to do things like night shift, or deploy or... all these other things that take you away from the home and from the children” (Interview #113) (see the discussion of presenteeism in Section 7.2.3).

8.4.2 Gender, Care and Career Progressio

The unequal distribution of unpaid care work, disproportionately hinders women’s career progression in many sectors.²¹⁴ This phenomenon is particular acute in the security sector, which demands long hours and in the case of the military in particular, regular travel (Interview #108; Interview #99), where “career progression is much slower... [for] a woman... [and] having caring responsibilities just adds to that: if you were to look at a male that has children versus a female that has children, the male is going to progress a whole lot faster, than the female” (Interview #165). An Australian military officer similarly



notes that her male colleagues’ careers have been less affected because “they have had someone else doing the caring responsibilities” (Interview #113). A male British military officer agrees that “there is a clear gender aspect to this”, with “far more concern amongst females and their ability to progress their careers and look after their children than there [is] for males to progress their careers and look after their children. Far more concern” (Interview #129).

Personnel with primary or sole caring responsibilities – who are also predominantly women – are especially disadvantaged, as they are less likely to have partners who can accommodate their long working hours or expectations of travel (Interview #99). The challenge is compounded for many women who belong to the “sandwich generation,” simultaneously caring for young children and elderly parents (Interview #179; Interview #90), often at the age at which their career progression might otherwise accelerate. These intense, overlapping responsibilities can span decades and become insurmountable when caring for children with special needs.

For those who have partners, many describe the constant “juggle” of coordinating careers and care, often requiring “negotiation” with some likening it to an “ongoing puzzle-piecing Tetris game” (Interview #119). This highlights that, although women are most affected, caring responsibilities also impact men and people of diverse gender identities in ways that are often less visible.

8.4.3 Promotion

Many uniformed personnel refer to the prevalence of gender and maternal bias that impact promotion prospects. A military peacekeeper in UNMISS, for instance, states:



... there's definitely I'd say a level of intentional or an unconscious bias even discrimination for those that are or thinking to have children. It's females because the same bias doesn't exist for the males, obviously (Interview #165).

Some participants point to assumptions that women with children are less able to perform than those without children or their male counterparts, and so should not be promoted. Another military peacekeeper in UNMISS recounts the type of prejudice that she has encountered:



... she has a family to take care of [so] she will not be able to perform as well as her male counterpart because she's too busy... when they start having families, you cannot be promoting them, you cannot be expecting them to work as well as the male counterparts (Interview #166).

Many participants disagree, however, and refer to fair and non-discriminatory promotion processes (e.g. Interview #45; Interview #146; Interview #155). Nonetheless, for some personnel, gender neutrality and non-discrimination on the grounds of parental status can be a disadvantage. Systems based strictly on performance and specific criteria fail to account for the extra challenges faced by personnel with caring responsibilities, putting them at a competitive disadvantage against colleagues without such responsibilities:



... back in the day, if you were looking at a female, oh well, they've obviously got kids, they've obviously got married, they're obviously not committed. So, they've removed that aspect of it... [but today] it's almost as if the lack of discrimination goes against you, because there's no consideration given to [caring responsibilities] (Interview #140).

Several other uniformed personnel, however, describe their experiences of security institutions taking into account caring responsibilities when considering promotions (Interview #165) and allow for “a degree of individual circumstance to be considered” (Interview #180). Despite varying views on whether promotion processes are non-discriminatory or blind to individual circumstances, most participants agree that it is often harder for personnel to be promoted when they have primary or sole caring responsibilities because of a range of practical challenges. For instance, while Indonesian policewomen underscore lack of discrimination and a supportive environment, they agree that their promotion opportunities can be “limited by the need to balance work and family responsibilities” (Interview #37).

These practical challenges include having less time and flexibility to deploy, engage in training or respond to short notice requests; all of which can influence promotion prospects. While deployments on peace operations are not always directly linked to promotions, deployments can equip personnel with experience, skills and knowledge that would be regarded favourably in promotion processes (Interview #157). Similarly, missing training courses due to family responsibilities can delay promotions, which often depend on completing mandatory courses (Interview #41). Those with significant caring responsibilities are also less likely to have the time for courses and the study required for such courses: “you might get nominated for a promotion course, [but] can you get away from the kids?” (Interview #106). A recent survey of 226 US women police officers has also shown that women in police promotion processes face several challenges, including gender bias and work-life balance, principally mothers struggling to balance childcare with studying for the promotions test while off duty.²¹⁵

Personnel with substantial caring responsibilities may also have taken extended periods of leave, which will “put them behind because everybody else has kept doing stuff and getting reports and progressing on courses and building their experience” (Interview #151). They may also have less time to demonstrate promotion evidence:



... promotion opportunities are often bounded on, not just whether you've done the appropriate courses at the appropriate time, but did you have the appropriate prior experiences? And if you were busy being the primary carer and needing to do school drop off, then you absolutely couldn't be doing the 24-hour watchkeeping ops job (Interview #125).

Others mention that the limited time they have for additional opportunities or to volunteer for additional tasks also impacts alignment (individual rankings among personnel of the same rank in a unit):



So, if you've got a young, 20-year-old lad who's got no responsibilities and is really keen. You know, they can volunteer for everything. They can be involved in everything. They look really good. But when you've got a 43-year-old woman with three children who the second it's closing time and, you know, I'm out the door for childcare. Got to pick kids. I've got to cook dinner, clean the house, you know, all those things, I can't volunteer for the same amount of stuff, so I automatically drop lower in the rankings purely because of my own situation (Interview #140).

Beyond practical obstacles, the perception that senior roles demand greater time, flexibility, and potentially travel (particularly for the military) can deter personnel from seeking promotion. Many participants state they chose not to apply for advancement due to anticipated relocation or increased workload, which would mean “less time for family” (survey respondent). A UK police officer notes one reason women in the service do not put themselves forward for promotion is because of the mistaken belief that higher ranks do not allow for flexible working. Having identified this misunderstanding as a factor in women's underrepresentation among higher ranks, efforts have been made to raise awareness of the flexible working policy (Interview #118).

Others argue that their careers have stalled because opportunities have not been effectively communicated to them or they have not received guidance from their institutions about how to manage their careers and their caring responsibilities.

8.4.4 Side-Lining / Marginalisation

Many participants highlight that if women with caring responsibilities do not leave the sector when they have children, they often move into part-time or reserve service (Interview #113) or non-operational or non-core roles “because the person with the childcare or the elder care responsibilities simply cannot do the high-pressure, high-tempo, long-shift jobs” (Interview #125). Several participants state that many women with children in the armed forces and police choose to move into support or administrative roles because they are better able to manage their caring responsibilities or because of “prejudices that you cannot perform” (Interview #119). Many participants also share how they are side-lined because of their caring responsibilities:



... they were not very open to this kind of 'I have to go earlier because my daughter is sick' and this kind of thing... It was very hard for them, and what happened most of the time, they couldn't deal with it anymore, and so they were just positioned to the support functions (Interview #83).

Moving to part-time or reservist work, or into non-operational or non-core roles, compromises efforts to advance the meaningful participation of women in security sector institutions and peace operations. It can also compromise career advancement for the individual personnel, further hindering efforts to increase the representation of women in senior and leadership roles. For instance, several participants note the difficulties receiving promotions and other opportunities if working part-time (survey respondents) and the types of jobs women often move into after having children limits career progression (Interview #179; Interview #119). Taking time away from work due to caring responsibilities, for example leaving work at the end of office hours to collect children from school or during maternity leave, can also lead to side-lining at work or not being chosen for specific opportunities.

8.4.5 Maternity Leave

A significant number of research participants report that taking maternity leave has negatively affected their career progression. This is primarily due to missing key opportunities like promotion courses and having less time to “evidence potential to be promoted” (Interview #81). While anti-discrimination policies in the UK and other countries sometimes grant women “extra consideration” for promotions after maternity leave, this practice is noted as potentially creating perceptions of unfairness towards “people that had stayed in the job and potentially been more productive for the organisation” (Interview #81).

Some women face overt discrimination upon their return from maternity leave, citing instances of being passed over for promotions and transfers. One police officer shares how she was told that having children is incompatible with her career and has been consistently side-lined into administrative roles following her maternity leave:



I have been informed that my maternity leave puts me further behind my counterparts that have the same years of service. I have been passed over for promotion and transfers for speaking up about female issues and the need for females at all levels of management and decision-making tables. I have been told that if I wanted to have kids, I should have never become a police officer. I am often ‘awarded’ the in-house administrative jobs, as women are not seen as qualifying for positions in under-cover units, specialty units... or leadership units. The younger generation of officers are not the issue, it is the ‘Old Boys Club’ that ensure the discrimination is fully intact, refusing to allow women movement laterally or upwards (survey respondent).

Many participants also describe a shift in how they are perceived by colleagues and supervisors after returning from maternity leave. One female military officer received unexpectedly poor performance reviews, which she links to her absence but feels unable to challenge due to her already demanding dual responsibilities at work and home. This highlights a common precarious position where women may face maternal bias but lack the time, energy, or confidence to address it. This loss of self-confidence – common after childbirth and compounded by maternal bias where mothers are perceived as a “hindrance” to workplace productivity²¹⁶ – can further hinder career progression by making women less likely to apply for promotions.

Others mention how after they returned from maternity leave, they were side-lined. A senior UN staff member explains that side-lining can easily occur as “people take the space of the person who’s on maternity leave, and then it’s hard to get them to give it back”, but it can also occur by people exploiting opportunities to advance their careers:



People would exploit [people returning from maternity leave]. I mean, that was my experience, that when I came back from having my first son, someone was actually trying to take a project away from me. They succeeded in taking [it] away from me. And that person was in a supervisory position to me, and certainly used the fact that I was leaving at 3pm which was my entitlement for my breastfeeding hours. You know, then the next day they would say, ‘oh, that person just needed a 10pm so I just did it’, you know, and definitely used that to side-line me... I’ve seen that happen multiple times (Interview #99).

Side-lining can also occur as a result of assumptions about mothers (especially new mothers) being less productive, focussed or committed (maternal bias), as well as benevolent efforts to support mothers and carers. For example, one senior UN advisor refers to a woman returning from a short period of maternity leave and being excluded even though she was keen to engage:



So, when she comes back, she’s excluded from, you know, all the meetings that she was used to be in, and then they’re like, just, you know, relax and, you know, take it. We understand. You know, you have other responsibilities. No, no, I’m all in. I miss these. I want to be, you know, I’m happy to can I? ... she was saying that it is as if she was... injured, or something that people sort of like treat her differently (Interview #82).

8.4.6 Maternal Bias

Aside from practical challenges associated with absence due to maternity leave, limited time and ability to travel or deploy due to caring responsibilities, many participants report how caring responsibilities have adversely impacted their careers because of bias or discrimination (discussed in the previous chapter). Some participants have had to leave the sector or their roles because of assumptions about their capacity and commitment when they became pregnant or had children: “I could not continue in the role I was in when I was pregnant due to how the organisation viewed the requirements of the role” (survey respondent). Others feel maternal bias – assumptions they are less productive or committed – have negatively impacted their career progression within the sector. This is mirrored in scholarship, which shows that mothers are often regarded as lacking commitment, reliability and capacity and, therefore, “bad workers” and a “hindrance” to workplace productivity, which adversely impacts their career progression.²¹⁷ As a result of perceived maternal bias, many participants share how they work extra hard to discredit this bias and avoid judgement. One female military officer from Bosnia and Herzegovina, for instance, argues mothers work hard to “prove themselves”, to battle feelings of being an imposter, because the “military profession is not for those who have [caring] responsibility” or is not regarded as a “benefit for the military” (Interview #111) (see Section 7.2.4).

8.4.7 Civilian Staff, Care and Career Progression

The enabling environment for women’s meaningful participation in UN peace operations is impacted by civilian staff working at UN HQ and in peace operations. This is seen from the drafting of policies and policy guidance, the development and delivery of training and the raising of issues in meetings and reports. The composition and capacity of civilian staff within the UN can influence the extent to which challenges to women’s meaningful participation are addressed, including challenges that arise through caring responsibilities. When civilian staff with caring responsibilities are marginalised, it is less likely that these challenges will be known and addressed (see Section 8.3.5.1).



MONUSCO/Michael Ali, 2018

Many UN civilian staff similarly share how their caring responsibilities “definitely impacted” their career progression (Interview #179). This is due to being less able to work very long hours, travel and engage in out-of-hours or last-minute work opportunities that can advance careers (such as networking events or urgent tasks). Several participants left the UN because they had children (Interview #156) or knew many people who had done so (Interview #90). According to several participants, this is reflected in a significant drop in the representation of women around the age at which women often have children. One senior advisor in the UN highlights that women outnumber men at the entry levels in the UN (P1, P2), which causes people to question why there are still efforts to advance gender parity. However, there is “a huge change” at the mid-career levels (P3 and P4): “there’s a drop of women continuing working at the UN because they feel they can’t combine private and then the work life” (Interview #82). Another senior advisor in the UN agrees and argues that however women might manage family planning to accommodate their careers they are “screwed” because of the bureaucratic constraints of the UN system: “If we have our kids late, we’re screwed going into that P5 D1 level. And if you have your kids earlier, you stay in P2 forever” (Interview #99).

These challenges impact the representation of women in the UN, especially in leadership positions. While several participants comment on the significant recent strides towards gender parity at leadership levels in the UN (Interview #106), they also highlight that senior women leaders often do not have children, unlike the majority of men in leadership roles:



... the overwhelming majority of men, were able to combine their family and their careers, whereas women are [only] a minority of those leaders, and then of that minority, there was a minority, a small minority, that actually had children. So, I think that also really demonstrates the obstacles and the kind of structural challenges for women to advance their careers (Interview #99).

The representation of women, and women with caring responsibilities, in the UN, including in leadership positions, matters when it comes to addressing barriers to the meaningful participation of women in UN peace operations. It matters because when there are fewer women with caring responsibilities, it is less likely that policies, practices and structures will be attentive to the needs of women and cognisant of the impact that caring responsibilities can have on their participation in security sector institutions and peace operations.

8.5 Personal Choice and External Drivers

When asked whether the impacts of their caring responsibilities on their career was due to personal choice or externally imposed, 60% of survey respondents say it was their own choosing (112 of 184 people who answered this question). For many, these impacts are externally imposed (20%) or due to other drivers (20%). Those who refer to other drivers report a combination of personal choice and external drivers, including “unwritten rules and expectations”, “culture and convention”, pressure from other family members and organisational barriers (survey respondents). As one female police officer shares:



With respect to positions within my police service, the choice was not mine. Childrearing female officers were not supported within the force when I raised my children, and even though policies of [equality, diversity and inclusion] are in place, there has been no change in procedure nor mentality with respect to child-rearing women as police officers. With respect to applying for overseas deployment, if I had known I was qualified to apply I would have put in prior to having my children and after [they] had passed certain ages. No women have ever been approached nor informed that their service would be useful for overseas deployment, though I have seen several men from our service complete these deployments. (survey respondent)

Many participants refer to the “choice” women need to make between advancing their career and having children: “at one point they have to make a choice, and it’s not possible for them to have both the career and to be the perfect mum” (Interview #83). Many agree that if they “choose to prioritise their caring responsibilities... [their] career definitely is less progressive” (Interview #171):



I had to choose [whether] I stayed home and was a mum or I went away weekends with my unit. And I couldn't do as many weekends as they wanted me to. So, it definitely impacted my career. That was my choice. But another part was there wasn't anyone else to watch my children at that point. So, I had to think, 'what can I do to make my children's lives better?' Because when I needed the money bit, too, they needed me. So, it's a catch 22. And sometimes my family, were able to stay and say you do this and you do that. But other times they weren't able to, and it definitely had an effect on my career. But again, it was my choice to step back (Interview #143).

While many people regard prioritising caring responsibilities or a career as a choice, it is a choice constrained by many factors. These include the level of organisational and other support provided. Leaving some feeling that “the choice wasn’t all mine” (Interview #114) and others referring to decisions as “trade-offs”:



... when we become a military [personnel...we are more collective than individual. So, we work as a collective institution, and you have two choices. One choice is [to] follow a career... Then you need to take some jobs. When you take these jobs, most of the time these jobs take your time away from the family. If you don't take those jobs, okay, you can progress in your career, but of course, you will not achieve you know certain you know ranks and even certain positions in the institution. So, this is a trade-off that you have, you know, in your life (Interview #58).

Framing decisions to leave or change work because of caring responsibilities as personal choices, “lifestyle decisions” (Interview #81) or private matters absolves organisations from certain responsibilities towards their personnel or staff. It also obscures the political dimensions of the gendered nature of unpaid care work and the subsequent marginalisation of women in the security sector and in the broader paid workforce. Feminist International Relations scholarship highlights how the demarcation of public and private spaces, and assignment of certain activities or actors to each space, sustain gender inequalities, with unpaid care work typically assigned to private, feminine spaces.²¹⁸ This scholarship further suggests that these demarcations sustain public, male-dominated societal structures and practices. For example, the undertaking of unpaid care work predominantly by women enables the productivity of those who work in the formal economy.²¹⁹ It also helps sustain the engagement and contribution of peacekeepers and other uniformed personnel, who are able to work with the knowledge or expectation that their caring responsibilities are adequately managed while they are away.

8.6 Mitigating Factors: Support Structures

Similar to the identified factors to mitigate deployment challenges, many participants refer to supportive leadership and institutional policies as well as strong family networks as critical to the ability of those with primary or sole caring responsibilities to progress their careers. In particular, participants mention the importance of supportive leaders who were receptive to requests for leave in cases of family emergencies or flexible working arrangements, for instance (Interview #37). Several say that without such leaders and without strong family support structures they would be unable to work in the sector or deploy to peace operations (Interview #41).

8.7 Subsequent Impacts

8.7.1 Women's Underrepresentation & Leadership Gaps

A consequence of caring responsibilities hindering women's career progression is the undermining of efforts to advance the meaningful participation of women in security sector institutions and UN peace operations. In other words, challenges to career progression contributes to women's attrition, side-lining or movement into less operational or frontline roles, and underrepresentation in leadership positions.

Many note that women are particularly underrepresented in senior ranks, often because they leave when they start a family, usually at the age at which they might be going forward into middle ranks, or because of the challenges associated with career progression after having children – “quite often women's careers just fall off a cliff when they have children” (Interview #122). As one male peacekeeper in UNMISS argues: “it's easier for a male to progress up... to senior ranks than it is for females... When it comes to the crunch... it's more likely to be... the female who stays at home and sacrifices a career, rather than the male” (Interview #169). An Australian military officer explains that part of the reason why women are underrepresented in senior ranks in the armed forces is because of rigid, time-bound career structures:



... it comes down to the fact that it is unavoidable that there is a time period in which giving birth to a child, or when a child or a parent has acute care responsibilities that are completely unavoidable and non-negotiable. And those things don't care whether or not an organisation has set up a career structure that says in year one, you do this... So, any organisation that sets heavily structured time bounded, career development, or broadening opportunities, will, regardless of intent, be inadvertently sectioning off people who are in their fertile years, and causing them to have to make decisions about whether or not they participate in child rearing, or whether or not they participate, or make some kind of trade off. So, we need to think about structures and security. And because we do like quite hierarchical approaches to these things, we need to think about whether or not someone who is responsible for family care can genuinely fairly participate and bring their best into the organisation or have we created a structure that was convenient but doesn't allow it (Interview #125).

Moving into non-operational or non-core roles and missing promotion opportunities because of maternity leave or caring responsibilities further contributes to the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles:



All of those things contribute to how quickly or how successfully at all, you move up the ladder and move into leadership roles. So, from my perspective, the ability to get carers into leadership is hard, until we can start to compensate for people who have had to step away for the period of time that they were doing something that only they in their partnership could perhaps do in order to be part of their family and contribute (Interview #125).

Where women, particularly with caring responsibilities, are underrepresented in leadership positions, it is less likely that policies, structure and work cultures will significantly change to better respond to the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities, thus sustaining a vicious circle of women's marginalisation.

Because of the impact on career trajectories, several participants recommend adjusting the age at which women can be recruited, promoted and deployed and are required to retire. This, they argue, can accommodate career breaks that women are often required to take during pregnancy and in the early years of their children's lives, and can help address the underrepresentation of women in senior ranks (Interview #81).²²⁰

8.7.2 Childlessness

Several participants also refer to many senior women in the services and peace operations being single and childless, compared with their male counterparts; underscoring the challenges that women with caring responsibilities face in progressing their careers in the sector (Interview #94), recognising that other factors may be at play in terms of uniformed women and childlessness. The Report on the Review into the Treatment of Women in the Australian Defence Force shows that 90% of male personnel of higher ranks had children, compared with 20% of women, similarly revealing the impact of caring responsibilities on the retention and advancement of women.²²¹

Some research participants highlight that the perceived challenges of managing a career in the sector while having caring responsibilities has led them to not having children, while others say they knew of many women in the sector “who have made either a conscious decision or an unconscious decision, because their career is progressing well, made a decision to sacrifice the chance to have children” (Interview #129). For some, caring responsibilities and work in the sector or in UN peace operations are “not compatible” (Interview #129) and there must be “sacrifice” (Interview #87) or “compromise: either it is my career, or it is my family” (Interview #166). Participants describe women choosing to leave or “give preference to their career” (Interview #87), while many underscore the importance of family planning around expectations of deployment, training or promotion (Interview #165).

8.7.3 Well-Being and Stress

Managing both caring responsibilities and their work in the sector has impacted the careers of many participants and caused them significant stress. Participants repeatedly refer to “struggles”, “sacrifice”, “suffering”, “pressure” and “guilt”. Many also discuss feeling “very tired” (Interview #113) and with “the feelings of anxiety and ... pressure and stress brought about by having to juggle both career and caring responsibilities” (Interview #129). Some women state this exhaustion is compounded because they work extra hard to avoid being “viewed as this woman who shouldn’t have been here because she has a child. Now she’s not even performing well” (Interview #159). Many also speak about the “pressure that you put upon yourself... to show that you are actually competent” (Interview #159) or the pressure of feeling guilty or fearing “backlash” and judgement when they sometimes “leave slightly earlier” to collect children from day-care, for instance (Interview #80):



... there would be that pressure to think... oh, my boss is watching me because I’m having to go and, you know, tutting and huffing because you’ve got to leave early or whatever, and that is something that is a pressure, because then the individual feels... I’m not contributing. I’m being, you know, the sort of weak link, as it were. And I think will, whether that is actually true, it’s still a perception that people feel... an internal feeling that would cause pressure on the individual, which in some cases, may cause the individual to leave and retire or do something else (Interview #136).

Several participants who state that their career is not impacted as a result of their caring responsibilities, believe it is only because they work excessively hard, or suffer the consequences of fractured family relationships (Interview #166) and stress:



When I began work in the peacekeeping mission, my children were very young. There were moments when I will cry and wonder if I made the right career choice. However, putting food on the table kept me going. And I prayed a lot (survey respondent).

Others report that their children – or their children’s education - have suffered, which causes them additional stress and concern. A peacekeeper in MONUSCO, for instance, states:



... as an officer, I am trained well to continue in any situation. There is no problem. I can do anything.... So, I am trained, but my kids are not trained... They are facing problems... they are staying away from me, and they are suffering (Interview #66).

9 Benefits of deploying carers to peace operations

Overview: Personnel with caring responsibilities can bring distinctive and valuable qualities and capacities to T/PCC security sector institutions and UN peace operations. In contrast to maternal and gender bias that positions mothers, in particular, as a liability to security and peacekeeping work, skills, perspectives and capacities derived from caring can enhance operational effectiveness and contribute to the diversity needed for successful peace operations. Utilising these opportunities requires organisations to be attentive to the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities. When they do, this further benefits security and peacekeeping work by facilitating the meaningful participation of women, given the gendered nature of care work and prevalence of maternal bias.

9.1 Carers in Peace Operations: “Having caring responsibility is not a hindrance; but it is an advantage”

This research reveals compelling testimony that personnel with caring responsibilities have valuable qualities and capacities that can be brought to UN peace operations. The data gathered demonstrates that rather than being a liability, skills and knowledge that can be developed through caring can bolster operational effectiveness and enhance the diversity needed for successful peace operations. As one survey respondent states: “Having caring responsibility is not a hindrance; but it is an advantage.” Similarly, another participant explains:



I think there are enormous benefits for people who have the experience of care responsibility, I really genuinely think it makes them better professionals and provides them with skills that are underestimated in our society. We urgently need this, especially if we think about peace and security, skills like active listening, empathy, the ability to identify diverse needs and capacities. I think when we look at armed conflict, exactly these kinds of skills are lacking. And I truly believe this is also why conflicts escalate (Interview #119).

Across the research sites participants agree that those with primary or significant caring responsibilities in their personal lives can demonstrate the qualities of empathy, maturity, emotional intelligence, patience and care for others. These qualities can translate into more refined skillsets and capacities that support effective peace operations, as discussed in greater detail below. First among these is the ability to engage with, and relate to, civilian communities. Participants note that carers may have a greater understanding of the needs of civilians (particularly families) within conflict-affected communities, it may create a common point for establishing relationships with local communities, and it could provide a different insight into civilian protection frameworks. Second, participants argue that lived experiences of caring can refine professional skills around time management, prioritisation of issues, and complex problem-solving. This, many suggest, can lead to enhanced focus and efficiency in their professional duties. Third, participants suggest that dealing with complex family dynamics as a primary carer or head of family can develop useful skills around mediation, negotiation and conciliation. Both in the workplace and in missions, it is argued that these are core inter-personal skills that demonstrate a capacity to work under pressure, self-regulate emotions and demonstrate discipline and fairness in decision-making.

Furthermore, participants generally agree that the experience of having caring responsibilities can refine crucial leadership and management capabilities. It is reported that leaders with their own experiences of care can show greater understanding and support for subordinates seeking to manage their work-life responsibilities. It is also suggested that leaders with experience of managing family dynamics can translate it into the skills needed for managing complex and diverse organisations and operations. In short, participants generally agree that the daily practice of patience, negotiation, emotional regulation and perspective required in caregiving directly benefits professional leadership performance in high-pressure situations. For many of the participants, these qualities are needed to better realise the ambitions of a human security focused approach to peace operations.

Finally, participants argue that the inclusion of personnel with caring responsibilities promotes more inclusive workplace cultures that benefit all personnel. This diversity breaks down traditional patriarchal structures and promotes gender equality within peace operations, while the presence of carers, particularly in leadership positions, creates environments where others feel comfortable discussing their own caring responsibilities. In turn, data suggests that where organisations support carers to deploy to peace operations, this diversity is celebrated, acknowledged and understood as a valuable contribution to peace operations.

These findings contradict long-held assumptions that caring responsibilities are a significant emotional barrier to the deployment of personnel to peace operations. This long-held claim suggests that carers would be distracted while on mission, would not be fully prepared, would not have the emotional capacity for the demands of peacekeeping and would not have the focus to undertake the work. In short, it is a persistent culture that the skills perceived to be associated with caring are either unwelcome or irrelevant in the harsh realities of security and peacekeeping work. However, in stark contrast to this our participants generally suggest that carers often exhibit enhanced focus, efficiency, agility and professionalism in their professional duties. Peace operations require personnel to manage multiple responsibilities, demonstrate superior time management and prioritisation skills, navigate competing interests, engage in creative decision-making, allocate finite resources, and mediate across diverse claims for attention and action. These are precisely the skills that dedicated carers can master.

Nonetheless, many participants are careful to ensure that we neither romanticise nor essentialise the work of carers, for instance, alluding to the fact that not all people with designated caring responsibilities are in fact caring or careful in their treatment of others. This is particularly referenced in the case of parents, with several noting that parents can sometimes be absent, uncaring or abusive (Interview #108). Conversely, many participants highlight that it is not only caregivers who have these skills and qualities associated with caregiving; but the marginalisation of caregivers does signify that these skills and qualities are less valued or do not “fit” into masculinised security sector work cultures, as previously discussed. Moreover, while it remains the case globally that women bear disproportionate responsibility for care work, several participants note that many men have significant and, often, increasing caring responsibilities, which are often overlooked or underestimated.

Therefore, while it is broadly acknowledged that care is a feminised concept that is largely socialised to women, women should not be assumed to be the only carers, or to be innately or naturally caring. Finally, it should be acknowledged that there is a very small number of participants who remain opposed to efforts to facilitate the deployment of carers in peace operations. From these participants, two arguments emerged: either that efforts to deploy carers is a poor use of resources with little return on investment, or that the skills that emerge from caring experience is not valuable to peacekeeping work.

9.2 Understanding Care and Carers

Participants speak about “carers” and “care work” in multiple ways. The research presented in this Report conceptualises carers as those people who have primary or shared caring responsibility for others. In most cases the research reveals these to be parents and guardians with dependent children; in some cases, they are personnel who care for elderly relatives and in a very small number of cases, participants mention caring responsibilities for people with elevated care needs due to disability or illness. In most cases interviewees speak about their own experience of caring for others though there are some discussions regarding their own observations of the behaviour of others who have caring responsibilities. In line with the project design, this research reviews the attitudes and experiences that serving personnel have as either being, or working with, carers.

Nonetheless, our participants reflect on the concept of “care” more broadly, extending their thinking on this issue to questions of who can and should provide care, what it means to be caring, and importantly, the changing place that care, caring, being careful and taking care plays in the overall and evolving ambitions of UN peace operations. This leads some participants to talk less about carers as a category of people and more about people who are caring or are careful in their professional behaviours. For example, a British male military officer talks about the need to ensure those in UN peace operations exercise care and care for people:



If you're a caring person... in general... and you're witnessing that type of thing [violence against civilians], it's just human nature for that person to want to right it: 'Can we do a little bit more? Are we doing enough?' You couldn't put somebody that doesn't care into a caring role and go: 'We'll pay you X amount in the UN to care for people', when actually, deep down, they probably can't even care for themselves (Interview #133).

Many participants distinguish between caring practices and caring qualities, and caution against the assumption that the qualities and skills associated with care are the exclusive domain of women with caring responsibilities. In other words, several participants recommend caution in terms of essentialising the characteristics of carers, or the assumption that all carers are women. Other research also cautions against the adoption of gender essentialist arguments that assign particular qualities, values or “natures” to either men or women. Such arguments may reinforce gender roles and place unfair, assumed or incorrect expectations on deployed men and women.²²² This may particularly be the case where women are assumed to be better peacekeepers because they are more likely to be primary carers and have innate caring mentalities. While women may be more likely to be primary carers and also contribute to peacekeeping in important ways, critics argue that rather than relying solely on recruiting women to improve peacekeeping practices, the UN should ensure professional cultures and training internalises principles that can be elucidated from care work and commitments to gender equality.²²³ These concerns highlight the need for balanced approaches that recognise the value of caring experiences without aligning it to biological determinism.

A few participants speak specifically about the roles of fathers, suggesting that a robust conceptualisation of fatherhood could equally benefit peace operations. For instance, a female civil society representative reflects on the need for more attentiveness towards fathers:



I think it's interesting because we talk about female engagement teams, and there's this essentialist idea that women are more able to connect with the population and connect with mothers. But who is to say that wouldn't be true with fathers, and if we really nurtured the identity of fathers, perhaps they would be more keen to connect with other fathers along those lines, or to see children as their children. I think there could be really interesting ways to hone in on that idea around fatherhood and your identity as a peacekeeper. As we've seen, ideas around fatherhood, I think have really changed in the past, like 10 or so years” (Interview #110).

Interviewees suggest that the expectation that peacekeepers are typically male and free from caring responsibilities – or “unencumbered”²²⁴ – can harm well-being, workplace cultures and operations by compartmentalising “peacekeeper” and “parent/carer” identities. One military officer from BiH argues that this assumption of the unencumbered peacekeeper is “actually military old school” thinking and that this would not align with the current emphasis on promoting human security in peace operations: “We are not robots... We are people with emotions. How can we care for others when peacekeeping if we don’t have systematic support in achieving that balance to care for those who are part of our life” (Interview #111). Others reflect on the changing nature of peacekeeping, and the increased centrality of human security, which often requires skills in community engagement:



We don’t send soldiers on peacekeeping missions to fight; we send them to do engagement with local communities, to help people to do humanitarian tasks, all these things that actually require human skills. And like I said, any parent who is intimately involved in the rearing of children definitely develops those skills. So, if you don’t have people with caring responsibilities on your mission, I don’t think you’ll get that diversity of skills and perspectives” (Interview #113).

For this reason, participants note that so-called “soft skills” are valued by security organisations in ways that they have not been previously. Moreover, the ongoing socialisation of women as being the primary holders of so-called “soft skills” means that they may be more highly sought after in peacekeeping. An Australian military officer comments:



... it’s the soft skills that are much more important now in peacekeeping. And, you know, these are soft skills that traditionally, men would say are all their feminine attributes. That’s why we want more women because they had these skills, but there were plenty of men that would have them too. So, it’s interesting that the femininity of women is something that men have sort of pushed back against for decades, hundreds of years about having women in militaries, and yet, it’s now the very attributes that they feel that are really important in working with local communities”(Interview #113).

Thus attitudes, conceptualisations and reflections on care vary across the research. For some, the notion of care is an “instinct”, for others a quality naturally ascribed to gender, and for others it is a learned skill. The purpose of this research is not to adjudicate these claims, but rather to examine the experience of being a carer as a set of practices which develop qualities, skills capacities that may be beneficial to the workplace. This becomes particularly pertinent in light of ongoing debates regarding the purpose and underlying ethic of UN peace operations.



9.3 The Qualities Developed by Carers

Many of the participants reflect upon their own lived experiences of caring as something that shapes their identities and the way that they engage with the world. This is particularly true of those who care for children. For many, parenthood – and caring more generally – has been instrumental in shaping certain qualities that they are able to translate to their work. This is not to say that non-carers cannot or do not display these qualities. Rather, that carers report their own experiences of developing these qualities became more refined and moved into sharper focus in their own lives. As discussed below, these qualities include empathy, maturity, emotional intelligence, patience and care itself. For many participants, they can directly trace the impact this has had upon their work in the security sector. Encapsulating this, a female military officer from Australia argues that:



I think you actually really do hone certain skills, like influence and negotiation and empathy and compassion. I think that women and men who are intimately involved in bringing up their children have certain skills that they bring, that are really, really important... I became a better officer actually, I became much more sensitive to people's circumstances, less judgmental, a whole range of things, I felt that I changed as a result of being a mother (Interview #113).

9.3.1 Empathy

Many participants report that their experiences of caring have given them greater empathy with others, or that they have seen how others have become more empathetic as a result of becoming carers. One female navy officer notes that: “I feel that I’m naturally quite an empathetic person anyway, but it’s just I felt that being a parent took me to the next level” (Interview #140). Similarly, another describes how “if you have care responsibility, it makes you a lot more empathetic person. Because you need to train empathy on a daily basis. No matter if the person you care for is younger or older” (Interview #119).

Overwhelmingly the connection between empathy and caring responsibilities is seen as something that all personnel can develop, regardless of gender. Among those who report this connection, it is clear that this is seen as a valuable quality for peacekeeping. This is highlighted by a male British military officer, who argues the importance of empathy in peacekeeping:



The often-quoted problem is, ‘oh well, people are distracted because they’re thinking about their families’. I don’t agree with that at all... I think that caring responsibilities gives an individual a greater awareness and greater empathy and a greater social understanding, and that makes them more suited and ideal for UN operations, peacekeeping, peace building, peace support operations (Interview #129).

This is echoed by a survey respondent who reports: “[carers] are more sensitive and understand the complexity of conflict in detail.” A female French military officer comments that: “men or women [as carers], they have a different perspective. I think when they are deployed, maybe they are more sensitive to some issues like the protection of civilians or protection of children, or fight against SEA or harassment. So, I think that it’s a good thing to deploy people with caring responsibilities” (Interview #83). Similarly, a survey respondent notes that:



People who have caregiving responsibilities often demonstrate heightened sensitivity, responsibility, and a deep understanding of the risks that conflicts pose to vulnerable groups, particularly children and women. Their unique perspective and empathy could bring valuable insights, fostering more compassionate and effective approaches in conflict resolution and humanitarian efforts.

A male peacekeeper in UNMISS agrees that having caring responsibilities positively impacts his peacekeeping work “because through caring you understand humanity” (Interview #174). This is echoed by a female peacekeeper in MONUSCO who reflects on her work in peace operations:

“““

...as far as benefits go...we're all human, [having caring responsibilities is] a very humanising thing... We have a mandate to protect civilian life here, and so it's something which, drawing on our humanity is absolutely critical, because we're not, we're not robots. Yes, we all wear uniforms, but we are all humans underneath (Interview #63).

Empathy is seen to be a valuable skill for security and peacekeeping work, in contrast to the “brute strength and size” (survey respondent) that is often assumed to be more highly valued. The importance of empathy amongst soldiers is underscored by a male peacekeeper in UNMISS who explains the benefits this can have in UN peace operations and security sector institutions:

“““

... from a carer's perspective as well...having soldiers who understand what it's like to be a parent, and the pressures that that involves makes you more empathetic, a better ambassador for your country, a better professional, a better soldier and somebody who's more well equipped. You know, it's another string to your bow...for the environment that you are operating in (Interview #169).

Similarly, another interviewee emphasises that without the deployment of people with caring responsibilities “there’s a big chunk of people who are doing the peacekeeping or the security provisions who don’t have experience of caring. There’s a big chunk of that workforce who’s lacking the skills, insights, empathy and multitasking that comes with caring” (Interview #115). Other research draws attention to increased empathy that can (but does not necessarily) arise through having caring responsibilities and the practice of sustained attentive listening, recognising and responding to the needs of others, and deep acknowledgement of interdependence and vulnerability.²²⁵

While many research participants highlight the benefits of empathy to more compassionate decision-making, some suggest that increased empathy can hinder decision-making if tough decisions need to be made in security context:

“““

Yeah, I do think [caring responsibilities are] a big benefit. I think it brings an awful lot more compassion and understanding, and I think it helps people make fairer and more compassionate decisions. I think if you are a person who has a family and can understand the impact that could be caused by the decisions that you make or the decisions that you don't make...you can be more valuable to the people that you're trying to serve and trying to help. However, on the other side of that, and I've found personally, it does also hinder decision-making. Your ability to make really tough decisions, the correct sort of military or political decision because of your consideration of the individuals that are in front of you right now, because you have a high level of compassion [and] empathy. Well, that can be a problem. So, there's pros and cons, definitely pros and cons, and that's why it's beneficial to have both people with care responsibilities and without to work together and balance of political and military decision making against the sort of moral and ethical component” (Interview #142).

9.3.2 Maturity

Some participants describe a level of maturity that is derived from their lived experiences as a carer, which can benefit security and peacekeeping work: “I think if you have ever been a parent or if you ever cared for a child, you have a different way of looking at things... Somehow you have to learn to put your ego aside and you put someone else before you” (Interview #89). Similarly, a male Indian Force Commander argues that personnel with caring responsibilities are more “mature” and “have a different perspective of a situation” in comparison to those without (Interview #97). This is also mentioned by a British military officer who suggests that:



... people with caring responsibilities, to me, make better soldiers, better operators, people to work alongside. They're more mature for a start. When I say mature, I don't mean on an age perspective, because I've seen guys in their 20s or maybe even younger, and they've got a responsibility to a family member, but they know they're not always messing around, and know how to take something serious when they have to. That's what they bring to the table. That's why, I think sometimes people with caring responsibilities make better soldiers and make better operators. It makes anybody with any responsibility in life take authority for something you know, and take ownership”(Interview #131).

Another British officer comments that having caring responsibilities can help develop the maturity needed to cope with situations that cannot be changed, as is common in peace and security work as it is when caring for others:



... it just it gives you a different insight, that when you're dealing with a situation that you've not got any control over, if it's someone who's ill or dealing with an elderly relative, you can't magically make them better. So, you just have to deal with the situation as it currently is, and I think it completely changes your mindset. And I think I improved so much more as a leader once I became a parent, particularly a parent of toddlers (Interview #140).

Having caring responsibilities, according to one civilian staff, can also develop the maturity and insight to be able to better understand, and thereby respond to, why people might be motivated to engage in armed conflict or, equally, engage in efforts to restore peace:



So, I think any woman or man who has caring or bread winning responsibilities has a very different perspective on life and understands the motivating factors and what drives people even to take up arms, you know, because of the need to defend their families and provide for their families or care for their families, depending on the different roles they have within the family. So, I think on the one hand, of course, there's a value, a tremendous value, in peacekeepers, having that lived experience and that mature understanding (Interview #99).

9.3.3 Patience

Patience is described as another quality developed through caring that many participants value. For instance, a male police officer in the MONUSCO mission notes that:



Absolutely, I think that many people who are parents, have a bit more patience. You need patience no matter where you work... I just think it's a benefit that they have care responsibilities at home, because then you're used to working with taking care of people and helping people, which we're doing a lot here (Interview #72).

9.3.4 Emotional Intelligence

Many research participants align caring experience with emotional intelligence. Participants emphasise that emotional intelligence – which requires the capacity to self-regulate emotions, build relationships of trust, and be socially aware – is an entirely different skillset to being intelligent or well-trained. It is noted that emotional intelligence is part of the necessary skillset that is required in security organisations and peace operations, because of its role in managing complex inter-personal relationships and diverse interests. A male military officer from Australia, for instance, refers to leaders who are highly intelligent but lack the social mastery that comes from emotional intelligence:



... certainly people who have children, both men and women, become more empathetic, and obviously more patient. Their experience of caring has taught them skills in patience, empathy and arguably, caring about something more than they care about themselves.... These experiences then manifest themselves into how they carry themselves into their professional lives (Interview #108).

9.4 The Skills and Capacities Developed by Carers

Participants who discuss the skills that caring responsibilities can develop, identify how these skills are relevant and valuable to the work performed in UN peace operations. These skills include conflict resolution, civilian engagement, people management, project management, complex problem-solving and empathetic leadership. A German military officer describes her experience of developing these skills:



... having children brings new skills and capabilities with it that you then can apply. [These include] the way you think, the way you approach certain challenges, the way you organise certain tasks. I see here a huge benefit, although I see the challenge for the individual as much as I see the benefit for the institution. I do understand that it's difficult, but it would be a loss not to have that [these skills] (Interview #95).

9.4.1 Time Management, Project Management and Efficiency

Time management, project management and workplace efficiency are frequently identified as a key skillset developed by carers. According to a male British military officer: “parents tend to be, by necessity, quite good at prioritising, project managing and time management, because they have to get stuff done, they have to manage a family. They have to be out of the office by a certain time in order to go and do school pickup” (Interview #81). Similarly, a German military officer observes that “[carers] are very well organised, they make a lot of the time they have, because they have to, and the institution benefits from this” (Interview #95). Likewise, a male military officer from Australia highlights the benefits of having caring responsibilities on time management skills in the workplace:



... people who have to manage multiple kids, multiple diaries for different kids doing different things, sports after school activities, friendship, groups, play dates, you know, school camps and all those other things, and synchronise all of those various parts of their family life, and then also be able to synchronise the demands of highly demanding work environments – you know, that's a great skill to be able to have, and any employer would want something like that! (Interview #108)

Some research participants describe becoming more efficient workers when they became carers, noticing how they grew to be “more organised, more focused, if they know they’ve got to go and pick up the children at the end of the day, they’re maybe get into work and say ‘Right, I need to get this all done’” (Interview #138).

9.4.2 Better Civilian Engagement

A common observation among participants is that experiences of caring gives peacekeepers the skills to better connect with local communities. A male peacekeeper in UNMISS, for instance, suggests that having caring responsibilities “makes individuals much more well-rounded, particularly when we are operating in environments where you’re dealing in complex human terrain. I think it allows soldiers to be more empathetic to the environments that they are serving in and the local people they engage with” (Interview #169). Others agree that having shared experiences through caring for others – such as being parents – can create feelings of connection and thereby strengthen mutual trust, which, in turn, can benefit peacekeeping. Participants also refer to how having caring responsibilities can help build important connections with local security sector personnel, which can be critical to successful peace outcomes.

Many note how acknowledging their roles as carers gives them a sense of legitimacy when working with others during peace operations. This is because, according to one participant, “...it adds a lot of benefit if [carers] can talk to a diverse audience, it’s easier to do the outreach if you have your own [caring] experience that you can share” (Interview #95). This is echoed by a female Canadian military officer who similarly highlights the benefits of sharing experiences of care with others: “if you were working, especially in a population centric environment, the more you have to relate to other people, including through care responsibilities, the more it makes you human, empathetic, relatable. So, if you’re trying to establish relationships and trust, that can be good” (Interview #109).

Others suggest that the experience of caring can assist peacekeepers in better understanding the needs of the local communities, especially women and children (survey respondent). In one example, a female civil society representative speaks of her own experience of pregnancy and childbirth enabling empathy for women in conflict-affected areas:



I do think the mere fact that someone has given birth, understands what it means to give birth, or understands what it means to her to care for someone 24/7, that’s a capacity. That’s so important for a peacekeeper to understand, and can you imagine doing that in a refugee camp, or imagine you have to walk that distance with a baby and a kid, or to queue for humanitarian aid for two hours being eight months pregnant, because you know how it feels. It’s a skill set! We don’t recognise it as competence, which I think we should. You’re there to provide peace and you’re there to provide security for different people so those who know what it means to take care of someone that’s dependent on you – I think that’s where we should start saying ‘that’s a competence’ (Interview #119).

The skillset that being a parent can bring in engaging with communities, particularly in tense environments, is raised by one serving peacekeeper in UNMISS, who describes peacekeeping as being “about how you interact with people... [and so] it’s actually a positive thing to be a carer, or to have been a carer” (Interview #180). A British military officer recalls how parents “had a very different approach to dealing with any situation than the ones who weren’t parents in terms of their empathy and understanding, the patience they had in dealing with people, being able to keep their cool and not get angry when they’re getting wound up,” recognising however that it is of course “very personality led” (Interview #140).

The value of being able to easily engage with local children, is considered to come more easily to many parents (Interview #164) with some speaking of this directly in terms of using experiences of parenting in engaging child protection frameworks and issues (Interview #106). One participant warns that if opportunities are not created for people with caring responsibilities to deploy: “That means that we will have peacekeepers on the ground dealing with child protection issues, dealing with sexual exploitation and abuse issues, whose only interaction with children will have been as being an uncle or as a child themselves” (Interview #125). This, she suggests, is a missed opportunity to introduce a different perspective or approach to dealing with trauma affected children. Similarly, having experiences and skills from caring responsibilities is believed to help peacekeepers respond to “domestic/ familial violence calls” (survey respondent) as it allows peacekeepers to further “understand the challenges facing parents who are seeking to protect their children in conflict, and therefore they bring the experience, the family experience, on how to handle these issues” (Interview #34).

While noting the skillsets care-givers bring, many participants are quick to point out that a peacekeeper without children can be effective and emotionally invested in a child protection role. As a male British military officer points out:



I mean, you don't need to have caring responsibilities to have an appreciation of any situation you're in. I don't need to have children to understand how children are affected by armed conflict, but it does draw immediate reference to your own experiences, and it shapes you, who you are. And you know, have I changed since I've become a parent? Yes, in many respects, for the positive... It also adds diversity beyond parenting, you know, people with responsibilities where there is caring for someone with a disability or an elderly parent, or whatever it looks like. I think just anything that brings diversity has got to be good for an organisation (Interview #136).

9.4.3 Role Model

Several participants argue that not only can women peacekeepers who are mothers sometimes establish connections with and better engage with local communities, but they can also be very effective and influential role models for women in host communities, demonstrating that women can be both mothers and work in the security sector.²²⁶ An excellent example of this is the Indian all-woman FPU deployed to Liberia, which contributed to a tripling of applications from women to join the Liberian police²²⁷ and an increase in female participation in Liberian security institutions from less than 1% to 17%²²⁸ (see Sections 3.3.2.1 and 5.4) One survey respondent shares her experience of serving as a peacekeeper, reflecting on the impacts women can have in the local community:



...in a community where women are seen to be only in the house because they have kids, I can show them, as a mother and a police officer myself, that women are not only for child rearing but also we can be at par with men in terms of job and responsibilities. People with caring responsibilities can still work in the security sector as long as they can manage their time and priorities.

In turn, this can positively contribute to advancing women's meaningful participation in security sector institutions in places emerging from conflict and elsewhere – recognising the peacekeeper will also be a role model to other units and battalions. This can also contribute to potentially increasing the deployment of women on future peace operations. Over time, this can improve women's safety and gender equality.



UN/Eskinder Debebe, 2017

9.4.4 Conflict Resolution

Participants suggest that carers — particularly those caring for several people or managing contested family dynamics — develop skills in negotiation, de-escalation and conflict resolution that can be valuable in peace operations. These skills are described as the ability to listen, be calm, fair-minded, balance competing interests and undertake mature decision-making. For instance, scholarship on maternal thinking and being refers to “attentive listening” as a common skill developed through maternal practices, which is defined as “...a method for engaging in your own personhood, the silence within yourself, in order to hold someone else in personhood”.²²⁹ A British military officer describes it this way:

““”

I’ve observed that people I’ve worked with who are parents have quite good language and communication skills because they have to explain to a child why that they need to do something and broker it in a very in a very diplomatic way. They can quite often be quite good at taking people on a journey, and they explain to people why they need to do something, whereas someone (I’m oversimplifying) who’s not a parent might forget to do that (Interview #81).

The view that mothers particularly can have a pacifying effect in peace operations is considered by some to be a natural ability that mothers have. Others refer to a “maternal instinct” and the value that they believe it can bring to peace operations, particularly in being attentive to “the needs of people who suffer, of vulnerable people in general” (survey respondent). This is echoed in scholarship on maternal thinking and being which illuminates the skills and experiences that emerge from care-giving and how these may benefit peace and security. For instance, different ways of thinking often derive from relational practices that require reflection, attentiveness and awareness of the needs of others.²³⁰ However, some participants caution against perceived innate connection between mothers and conflict resolution as a problematic gender stereotype. A female British military officer argues that assuming mothers – or women more broadly – are natural peacemakers places “unreasonable and potentially dangerous expectations” on them, noting that these are skills which can be derived from and practiced through caring, but also require formal training and professional development (Interview #140).

9.4.5 People Management

Many research participants argue that the skills developed through having caring responsibilities can lead to improved leadership and management abilities. Leaders with caring responsibilities are described as demonstrating a greater level of empathy, emotional intelligence and understanding for staff seeking to manage deployment and caring responsibilities:



I think [caring responsibilities] makes them better leaders. I think it makes them better managers, and I think it makes them more empathetic to the needs of the people that they're working with... That is not to say at all that those that don't have caring responsibilities are in any way different. I'm not criticising them. What I'm saying is that someone with caring responsibility for children or parents that is coping with those pressures and those stresses, is much more open to conversations with their colleagues about their pressures and stresses, and therefore that makes them a more emotionally intelligent individual to have on a team (Interview #129).

Several participants note that being a carer can assist in developing the skills needed for leadership roles. A male civilian working in peace operations argues that:



I think being a parent gives you an extra edge, in comparison with other colleagues, mainly because you develop leadership skills, you develop a collaborative approach, because when you have a family, you don't see yourself as an individual, you see yourself as a collective. And I think it gives you also an edge you are in leadership positions (Interview #116).

9.4.6 Leadership

Several participants speak to the value of having people with caring responsibilities in leadership roles. One mentions that her country's armed forces had recently appointed women who have caring responsibilities to several senior commander positions, which is likely to influence the extent to which the institution is “aware of the conflicts and the trade-offs that successful people [with caring responsibilities] might need to be making, and... aware of the idea that people may be opting out because of these conflicts and trade-offs” (Interview #125). Caring responsibilities can also shape leadership styles, with some drawing from their caring experience to be more attentive and responsive to competing needs. It is also noted that leaders who are carers can positively shape the internal cultures of security sector organisations. One male civilian observes how commanders with caring responsibilities can bring that responsibility of care into the workplace:



I think they bring unique perspectives on care, which is taking care of your team – accepting that your team needs time to relax, accepting that your team should not be called on the weekends to work, accepting that your team needs a break, accepting that your team members may need to go and visit the family after a very bad spell in the field. So, I'm not saying that people who don't have children don't have this mentality, they may have, but not to extent to what a mother or father has (Interview #116).

9.4.7 Diverse Perspectives

Having personnel with diverse life experiences on deployment is suggested by several participants to be of value to UN peace operations and to security sector institutions:



At the bluntest level, most of the issues that we are facing in a peacekeeping environment is to do with the destruction of communities. And if we only deployed people who did not have family responsibilities, we would get this uniquely uninformed position. The diversity that is created by having people who are aware of what it means to be responsible for a family when dealing with a destroyed nation, a nation that is trying to rebuild itself can't be replaced in any other way... But ultimately, if we were to stop ourselves from deploying people with caring responsibilities... I cannot see how we could do our job. I can't see how we could have the balance, the experience, the depth of understanding that we would need to perform our roles (Interview #125).

A British military officer agrees: “If everybody out there is a steely killer who’s trained in aggressive offensive operation and so on, then obviously that’s [a problem]. You need a diverse force” (Interview #134). Similarly, a retired Indian military officer points to the diversity of roles in a UN peace operation which requires a breadth of skills and experiences: “It is not that everybody who is in the services has to just pick a rifle and go to the border and fight... There is way more to running a system or running an organisation – it requires people from varied backgrounds [with various skills]” (Interview #18). The benefits of diverse teams and the correlation between organisational diversity and effectiveness is similarly raised by participants, who argue that increasing diversity among peacekeepers leads to better outcomes for peace operations:



I think, also, having diverse perspectives, having people who have different lived experiences, having people who have diversity in terms of their gender, race, ethnicity, you know, cultural linguistic backgrounds, and so on and so forth, is important. All the research shows that diverse teams that come together are high functioning (Interview #108).

Another puts it more simply: “Caring responsibilities are part of the natural way of life that should be embraced everywhere. They provide a unique and diverse experience and perspective. Often situations we are placed in involve children and families, so it is important who may have lived that experience or at least understand the unique challenges of having caring responsibilities may respond to a situation in a different way” (survey respondent). The view that care and caring is a “part of life” is shared by others:



Well, of course, there's, you know, people would say, 'Oh, well, we shouldn't have people with caring responsibilities, because it just gets in the way of them achieving the mission.' But it's a reality of life. I think we have to think of this maybe from a different angle, there's value in having the diversity that they're looking for in peacekeeping operations, which is, you know, more women, men, and hopefully, in time, they'll come to sort of more specifically focus on the value of others as well, too. But if we don't do that, then we're not going to have the diversity of skills and experience that we need, that they've identified as being much more important now (Interview #113).

Other participants underscore the importance of not having a monolithic peacekeeping force of young, unencumbered men as well as the importance of having diverse teams that can perhaps reach out to and build relationships with diverse members of the communities where peacekeeping occurs. By sidelining people with caring responsibilities, UN peace operations “[miss] out on a lot of expertise that could make a mission succeed” (Interview #121). Rather, an Australian military officer underscores why engaging personnel with caring responsibilities is essential in the security sector and in peace operations:



In any security institutions, we are fundamentally dealing with people, with the community that we’re trying to help. Whether we’re talking about policing, whether we’re talking about armed forces. We need people from a range of different perspectives. We need people from different cultural perspectives, we also need people who actually understand life. And life inherently includes family and family life. If we only have people in security institutions whose lives [have] been untouched by family responsibilities, not only do we have an incredibly [small] recruiting pool, but we have an incredibly limited viewpoint of the world and we will make bad decisions. We will make bad decisions in recruiting, we’ll make bad decisions in planning, we will make bad decisions in deciding how to structure our force, we will make bad decisions in considering how to approach strategic problems (Interview #125).

One female civil society representative notes that her caring responsibilities help her understand the diversity of needs in others. She argues that this is critical in terms of the provision of security – where you should not assume what a population’s security needs or priorities are. In reflection on the needs of the person she cares for, she notes that her caring experiences:



... makes me much more sensitive to intersectional issues, different security needs, and therefore makes me more competent in my job. For example, with the provision of security, she [the person she cares for] reminds me that we’re not all the same, that we don’t have the same abilities, the same perspective on life, that she interprets the information differently (Interview #119).

UNDPO identifies the importance of diverse teams with broader skillsets to improve mandate delivery by reflecting the communities they serve.²³¹ Likewise, other research points to the correlation between organisational diversity and effectiveness,²³² whereby increasing organisational diversity contributes to more successful operational outcomes. For instance, by increasing the variety of “perspectives and experiences”, an organisation can draw from more skills to “[lead] to more innovative problem-solving” – in turn, this increases trust in the security institution or mission and increases productivity and better performance outcomes.²³³ Although managing such diversity also requires effective leadership,²³⁴ and, as pointed out by one police officer, requires personnel to respect each other and respect the diversity of cultures within the work environment (Interview #78).

10 Linking Organisational Attentiveness to Caring Responsibilities and Well-Being

Overview: Challenges associated with managing both caring responsibilities and work in security sector institutions, including when deployed on UN peace operations, can cause significant levels of stress and exhaustion, which are intensified when there is limited support. This demonstrates a link between organisational support to personnel with caring responsibilities and their well-being. Moreover, many research participants agree that when organisations are attentive to the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities, they are more likely to be attentive to care more broadly, including the well-being of all personnel. Furthermore, when organisations are attentive to caring responsibilities and well-being (or 'care needs'), it can improve self-care and help-seeking, reduce stress and reliance on negative coping mechanisms, lower burnout and attrition rates, and help avoid safeguarding issues, including self-harm and harm to others (as well as reduce negative impacts on families). Subsequently, it can contribute positively to individual performance, workplace cultures and operational outcomes.



MONUSCO, 2018

10.1 Organisational Support for Care-Givers and Well-Being

This research identifies a direct and positive correlation between the level of organisational support to personnel with caring responsibilities and their well-being. The majority of survey respondents (71% - 117 of 164 respondents) agree that there is a connection between attentiveness to caring responsibilities and responsiveness to staff well-being. Only 5% disagree, while the rest report that it depends or they are unsure. Of those who see a connection, the improvements of staff well-being are mentioned when organisations provide support to balance their caring responsibilities and paid work responsibilities: “the better the understanding/support of the employer towards an employee with caring responsibilities the higher the staff wellbeing (reduced stress in terms of organization of private and working life)” (survey respondent).

This correlation can be especially pronounced on peace operations, which can be typically characterised as high-stress operational environments, with the potential to adversely impact well-being without sufficient supports in place while, paradoxically, demanding high-levels of well-being to manage the challenges of a complex, dynamic and often insecure environment. As discussed in Chapter 7 (Section 7.5.2), separation from families is often a key stressor in UN peace operations and for some can compromise well-being (Interview #37). This can be intensified when there is limited access to the internet to enable regular communication with families, infrequent travel home on R&R on long deployments, inadequate training (including pre-deployment training) and resources on how to manage family separation, and insufficient support mechanisms to manage stress and trauma, such as mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).

Adverse impacts on well-being can be further compromised by feelings of guilt and worry about the well-being of family members while deployed.²³⁵ A peacekeeper in UNMISS, for instance, refers to several people with caring responsibilities on peace operations “falling into depression because of the fear of balancing or the fear of losing one...over the other” (Interview #149). While another peacekeeping in UNMISS recalls a colleague who was “crying everyday” because she had left her children at home and was unable to afford a flight ticket to visit them (Interview #126). When organisations are attentive to the caring responsibilities of personnel, some of these negative impacts on well-being can be mitigated.

Aside from the direct impacts on staff well-being when organisations are attentive to and supportive of their caring responsibilities, many research participants also suggest that organisations that are attentive to the caring responsibilities of staff are more likely to be attentive to care more broadly, including the well-being of all staff. Many underscore the importance of attending to the well-being and care of all those who serve in peace operations, not least because of the challenges of working in such environments and the need to protect mental health “to be able to protect people who are in some of the most vulnerable circumstances out of people in the world (Interview #108).

10.2 Impacts of Inattentiveness to Care and Well-Being

Research participants highlight the negative consequences for personnel, organisations and operations when caring responsibilities and well-being are inadequately attended to. Such consequences include the impact on self-care and caring relationships, such as reliance on negative coping mechanisms and fracturing of family relationships, due to high levels of stress, exhaustion and trauma and inadequate support (refer back to Section 8.7.3 for an overview of the impacts on well-being due to the challenges faced by personnel with caring responsibilities). Subsequent impacts include high-rates of burn-out and attrition as well as serious safeguarding issues, such as self-harm and harm to others. These impacts have consequences for work cultures, individual performance and peace outcomes. Mental health challenges and a reluctance to seek help, because of cultural stigma and masculine norms in the security sector and peacekeeping, exacerbate these impacts.²³⁶

10.2.1 Negative Coping Mechanisms

Negative mental health impacts (including extreme stress and trauma) that can arise from work in the armed forces and police (largely due to the nature of the work and heavy workloads), are particularly felt when deployed to missions because of separation from families and working in high-risk environments with poor living conditions. When insufficient support to deal with these mental health impacts is provided or accessed, this can lead to a reliance on negative coping mechanisms to manage stress, exhaustion or trauma, such as alcohol or drugs, or overworking.²³⁷ Some participants point out that reliance on negative coping mechanisms is also fed by a work culture in militaries, police and peace operations that does not always encourage self-care or support-seeking.

Other research highlights how trauma and extreme stress can negatively impact mental and physical health outcomes for individuals, increase reliance on negative coping mechanisms, contribute to burnout or depression, as well as increase the risk of suicidal ideation and behaviour change that may harm others.²³⁸ A civil society representative underscores the links between lack of attentiveness to care, and harmful behaviours and outcomes:



... high levels of stress, bad culture, alcohol use, substance abuse and then bad behaviour... better self-care, better attention to caring responsibilities would mean less like maladaptive coping practices, which would then lead to less kind of internal abuse and probably external harassment as well (Interview #110).

Reliance on negative coping mechanisms can have a subsequent impact on performance, work cultures and operational outcomes, as well as private lives and family relationships. It can also increase the likelihood of burnout, attrition and other risks.

10.2.2 Burnout and Attrition

Many research participants know of people who had suffered “burnout” because of exhaustion, stress and lack of “work-life balance” in peacekeeping and broader security work:



... you already have a physically or emotionally demanding home, you know, personal environment, and then on top... a physically and emotionally demanding environment. At work, 100% of your life is filled with stress. And so, if you don't find ways to decompress, you're going to implode... the challenge is to look after yourself before, you know, constantly, and having the capacity and the support system to do that, otherwise, it's very easy to just burn out (Interview #179).

Because of the challenges in balancing a high-demanding workload with a personal life, a peacekeeper in MINUSCA suggests there is a short life-expectancy of retired peacekeepers due to sustained exhaustion and stress:



You enter in your office at eight o'clock, yeah, you don't know exactly at what time you're going back home. And when you go back home, you are completely tired... more than 80% of the person retired don't live more than five years... every day I feel tired, yeah, every day I feel tired, yeah, sure, stress, no more stress (Interview #61).

Many uniformed personnel know of people who have left the service because of mental health issues associated with lack of work-life balance and the strain on family relationships, with some saying these are the biggest factor in people leaving the armed forces outside of traumatic events (Interview #109).

10.2.3 Safeguarding: Self-Harm and Suicide

Several research participants refer to the consequences of burnout and other serious harms that can arise from exhaustion, stress, trauma and lack of care or self-care. Several participants know or have heard about suicides (often multiple) in the armed forces, police and UN missions, highlighting the critical need for better treatment of personnel in national security institutions and while deployed, MHPSS and stigma reduction. Statistical data also points to a higher rate of suicide among serving and former military personnel than among the general population in several countries, including Australia²³⁹ and the US.²⁴⁰ Several research participants believe that the risk of suicide is relatively high among peacekeepers, with one noting that poor living conditions are likely to exacerbate that risk, referring to one mission where peacekeepers slept on the floor, had no separate spaces for bathing and eating, and a lack of appropriate equipment let alone amenities for welfare (Interviews #84 and #39).

10.2.4 Safeguarding: Harm to Others

Participants also referred to other safeguarding concerns when organisations are insufficiently attentive to well-being. Particular reference is made to the prevalence of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH) across multiple peace operations, which is sustained by and, in turn, sustain harmful workplace cultures and compromise peace outcomes, mission legitimacy, and efforts to increase the meaningful participation of women.²⁴¹ Research participants link the prevalence to high levels of stress or sense of insecurity, harmful workplace cultures, the exceptional nature of UN peace operations, the relatively small number of deployed women, and long periods of separation from families (as well as from forms of social control that might otherwise constrain behaviour).²⁴² Alongside these are other factors related to power imbalances, hypermasculinity and misogyny, trauma and desensitisation to violence.²⁴³

10.2.5 Performance and Operational Outcomes

This research suggests that inadequate self-care and organisational inattentiveness to care, combined with high levels of stress and trauma on mission, contribute to harmful coping mechanisms and behaviour change. This includes increased levels of aggression, frustration, detachment and hyper-vigilance, which have implications for individual and organisational performance (Interview #84).²⁴⁴ Several participants suggest that peace operations with “extremely challenging” living conditions (Interview #60), without the ability for peacekeepers to regularly communicate with families, displays organisational inattentiveness to care with consequences for well-being and performance:



... they are treated really badly. They're fed badly. They... live in a slum. They don't get resupplied for months on end because they are 1000 miles into a rainforest with no adequate supplies... And then they don't have Wi Fi, so they can't speak to their families. So, the only woman they've spoken to in the last three months is a lady in the local village who may or may not be offering them sex for money... So, I think we put people into incredibly difficult like dystopian situations, and then expect them to behave like an angel (Interview #81).

Many participants mention that the inability to communicate with families and the stress this causes can have a direct impact on peacekeepers' performance: "I can't reach them. I don't know what's going on. All of these things [are] super stressful and impacts your ability to do the work effectively" (Interview #96). As a female peacekeeper in UNMISS states: "if my back of the mind is clear and out of the stress, then obviously I'm going to be more efficient in my work, so we all should be attentive about [supporting personnel with caring responsibilities]" (Interview #153). More broadly, many participants suggest that without adequate support and self-care, family separation "can negatively impact an individual's mental health and work performance" (Interview #37; Interview #153; Interview #90). This does not imply that those with caring responsibilities are necessarily going to suffer more from mental health concerns than those without, recognising most personnel having caring responsibilities and also noting previous research that has indicated spousal support can aid well-being and performance.²⁴⁵ It does, however, highlight the performance and operational outcomes that are associated with organisational responsiveness to the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities and the well-being of personnel.²⁴⁶ As one survey respondent argues, when organisational policies recognise and support the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities, it can "contribute to their overall well-being, which in turn positively impacts their performance, commitment, and job satisfaction". As another survey respondent puts it: "happy staff, better results":



This is a vital part of management responsibilities and without providing good staff wellbeing and care needs we are not doing our job. If we provide good wellbeing and care, we have more effective staff who are able to manage their caring duties as well (survey respondent).

11 Organisational Duty of Care

Overview: Organisational duty of care entails an obligation to take reasonable steps to protect the safety and well-being of personnel, including personnel with caring responsibilities. Exercising duty of care not only benefits staff and other persons, but also positively benefits productivity and effectiveness, enhances organisational credibility and can improve retention and attract top talent. Particularly in the context of peace operations, duty of care can save lives as well as reduce financial costs associated with under-performance, attrition, sick leave and disability pension claims.

Participants agree that both the UN and Member States have a duty of care for uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities. Many highlight a good level of support and improved support over recent years, while many consider that support is not uniform across missions and among T/PCCs and much more needs to be done. (Interview #159; Interview #131).

This chapter outlines what support is provided to personnel with caring responsibilities by the UN and T/PCC security sector institutions, and what further support is required. The policies, programmes and structures mentioned in this chapter reflect those identified through a comprehensive desk review as well as shared by research participants. They do not necessarily reflect all available or extant policies, programmes and structures. They do, however, reflect what is perceived and presented to be available at the point of data collection (2024-25).

Where there is a gap between what is required to support personnel with caring responsibilities and what is realised, the reader is advised to read the accompanying Toolkit for guidance on how to close the gap. The following chapter (Recommendations) further details how to better support personnel with caring responsibilities.

The focus throughout is on uniformed personnel, though a section in this chapter (11.2.6) considers the adequacy of support provided to civilians with caring responsibilities engaged in peace operations, recognising their role in influencing an enabling environment for the meaningful participation of uniformed personnel.

11.1 A Hierarchy of Responsibility

There are multiple actors that have a duty of care for uniformed personnel in peace operations, with some participants suggesting that there is “a hierarchy of responsibility” including the UN and T/PCCs and within peace operations, the SRSG as the civilian lead who heads up the mission and the force commander of the of the military component (Interview #81). This hierarchy of responsibility can potentially lead to gaps in provision and support, which can also be compromised as a result of “tension between the ambition of the mission and the mandate, and the ambition of the leadership on the mission, and the realities of what you can practically achieve with the resources that are available” (Interview #81).

11.2 The Responsibilities of the UN

Most participants recognise that the UN’s responsibility extends beyond setting standards to ensuring practical support (infrastructure, policies) and cultural change (leadership accountability, gender sensitivity). While constrained by budgets and national sovereignty, many participants argue that further support by the UN for uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities is needed – to advance gender parity, retain talent, build capacity, support well-being and enhance operational effectiveness.

11.2.1 Responsibilities towards Personnel with Caring Responsibilities

While recognising that support for peacekeepers, including those with caring responsibilities, is primarily the responsibility of their respective Member States, many research participants consider that the UN can do more to communicate expectations, set standards or provide support and encouragement to T/PCCs. While beyond the mandate of peacekeeping, some suggest that the UN can provide financial assistance to establish childcare facilities, for example, for “lower socio-economic countries” (survey respondent). Others argue that the UN could do more to ensure Member States adequately provide for the safety and well-being of deployed personnel, including women, such as investment in infrastructure that enables those with caring responsibilities to connect with families while deployed, and physical infrastructure that ensures the safety of women.

While some advocate for more involvement of the UN in supporting and advocating for provisions that better support women peacekeepers and respond to the needs of peacekeepers with caring responsibilities, others caution that this should not undermine “national ownership” (survey respondent). T/PCCs should retain primary responsibility, recognising that the level of this support will vary between countries, depending upon cultural norms and attitudes towards gender and care (Interview #180). Others urge for more advocacy or the setting of good examples in supporting personnel with caring responsibilities.

11.2.2 Deployment Duration

The UN’s *Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018-2028* includes guidance for measures to create an enabling environment to increase the meaningful participation of women in UN peace operations, including that Military Officers (MO) and Staff Officers (SO) may serve for 6 rather than 12 months (where deployments are 12 months) if they have children under the age of 7. It also highlights that 12-month deployments without the prospect to travel home and see families can present a challenge to women’s deployment.²⁴⁷

11.2.3 Training

The UN typically sets standards for pre-deployment training, with the UN Integrated Training Service (ITS) responsible for developing training materials and providing guidance and assistance to Member States, which have primary responsibility for training peacekeepers (as outlined in UN General Resolution A/RES/49/37). This is in part to ensure the training is culturally specific and because “there’s only so much the UN can do” (Interview #87). Sometimes core pre-deployment training materials (CPTM) include information on the importance of self-care, such as taking breaks and connecting with families (Interview #87). However, typically, participants report that both T/PCCs and the UN can better train personnel prior to deployment on issues beyond the mission mandate, including stress management courses (Interview #160) or pre-deployment briefings that include discussions about managing home life and family relationships while deployed (Interview #53; Interview #76). According to a military peacekeeper in MONUSCO, aside from the technical knowledge required, “the social aspect” must be integrated into this training as “the most important thing [is] that the peacekeeper is... mentally ready to be deployed” (Interview #64), noting that UNSCR 2668 (2022) urges T/PCC to mentally prepare personnel in pre-deployment training. Participants also refer to the need for post-deployment training, support and guidance to facilitate reconnection, including with families, improve mental health and best utilise skills and knowledge developed while deployed (Interview #87).²⁴⁸

11.2.4 Internet

As highlighted previously, peacekeepers emphasise that inadequate access to the internet poses significant challenges for personnel with caring responsibilities in remaining connected to their families. Provision of internet access is primarily the responsibility of the Member State, as articulated within Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) between individual Member States (that contribute personnel, equipment and services to peace operations) and the UN (which provides financial reimbursement for these contributions). However, some participants suggest that the UN can do more to ensure better support, including ensuring T/PCCs provide adequate internet access for their personnel while deployed, or assisting with provision as a last resort when T/PCCs cannot do it. For instance, civilian staff members in MINUSCA recommend more negotiation between the UN and Member State prior to signing the MOU, to ensure the protection of the interests of the individual peacekeepers while they are deployed (Interview #60), suggesting that “critical issues” are often ignored during this negotiation phase, leaving problems for the mission (Interview #59). However, others express concern that extending negotiations and expectations of T/PCCs might deter them – especially the largest contributors – from deploying personnel. A military officer from Australia, for example, regards this as a wicked problem, needing to manage the interests of personnel with the need for T/PCCs to continuing deploying, ultimately thinking about what is best in terms of mission outcomes (Interview #108).

Many argue, however, that the UN can engage more with T/PCCs to ensure the provision of internet access, in recognition of the impact it has on peacekeepers’ well-being, not least in enabling them to connect with families while deployed. As UN staff member at UN HQ explains: “It’s a big welfare issue, whether you have children or not, and really untenable that we have people deployed in remote locations” (Interview #100). Others suggest that the UN should step in especially where the location of the mission makes provision of internet access more complex and costly, especially for the least developed T/PCCs (which typically deploy the most peacekeepers) (Interview #98). However, it is recognised that some T/PCCs provide internet access even in difficult locations, and for the UN to step in and provide internet access where T/PCCs do not would incur a significant cost.

11.2.5 R&R

Many peacekeepers highlight the prohibitive cost of travelling home during mission, and the subsequent adverse impacts of long deployments without travel home. Consequently, many recommend that for deployments of longer than 6 months, the costs for personnel to travel home should be borne by the UN or T/PCC, rather than the individual peacekeeper, as is often the case, given it “is an organisational interest for both - for the troop contributing countries, that is the TCC, as well as for the UN” for personnel to be in the “best mindset” and be able to “discharge [their] duties” (Interview #3). As a retired senior officer in the Indian Armed Forces argues:



My view is that if the deployment is for more than six months... the UN must fund at least one leave if not more. At least once in six months a person must get a chance to get out of the mission area and come back home, get rid of the stress, and go back. The family support is required, even if there is an emergency or not. Even from an organisational point of view you want the guy to have a break, so that he is in a better mind space to discharge his duties. After all it is a very tense environment, and, for the troops and these officers the UN does not pay for their leave. So that they should pay (Interview #3).

Interviewees at UN HQ, however, underscore the prohibitive costs of supporting T/PCCs to cover the costs of peacekeepers travelling home during long deployments or during R&R:



There’s absolutely no way that that would become part of our budgets. No way and for us to organise that for contingent members, you would have to create like a whole new travel office in our missions. There’s no way that [would] ever happen (Interview #100).

11.2.6 UN Staff with Caring Responsibilities

This section briefly considers support provided to civilian staff in the UN system engaged in peace operations, whether in UNHQ (New York) or in the missions. This is important to the study of the impact of having caring responsibilities on the meaningful participation of uniformed personnel in peace operations because of the role of civilian staff in influencing an enabling environment. This is seen in the drafting of policies and policy guidance, the development and implementation of projects, the development and delivery of training, and the raising of issues in meetings and reports. Where the UN provides support to its staff with caring responsibilities, this is likely to result in attracting and retaining such staff and, in turn, likely to influence what issues are identified, discussed and prioritised (see Sections 8.3.5.1 and 8.4.7). Moreover, the UN's attentiveness towards the needs of its civilian staff with caring responsibilities can influence the extent to which the needs of uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities are supported, because of the normative influence of the UN.

Many participants refer to a generous education allowance as well as parental and family leave for UN staff. Of note are General Assembly Resolution 77/256 (2022), which standardises parental leave (replacing maternity, paternity and adoption leave), UN Administrative Instruction (ST/AI/2023/2) extending the period of parental leave to 26 weeks for birthing parents and 16 weeks for the non-birthing parent, and most UN entities providing designated spaces for lactation and about a third providing on-site childcare facilities; though the provision of such support structures and policies is less common in field-based entities.²⁴⁹ There are policies allowing for flexible working arrangements (FWA) or alternative working arrangements (AWA), and enabling mothers to take time off to breastfeed or express milk, as well as travel with their breastfed infant on official business (except to non-family duty stations). There is also coverage for staff seeking infertility treatment in the UN Medical Insurance Plan (Interview #92), although some hope it expands to also cover elective egg freezing to prevent women choosing between career and family given “the growth of a woman’s career is in parallel with her fertile years” (Interview #179). For missions and other field settings, guidance to support caregivers – as part of broader efforts to advance gender parity – is provided by *Make Parity a Reality: Field-specific Enabling Environment Guidelines for the United Nations System*.²⁵⁰

These Guidelines recognise that “strong family-friendly policies contribute to the organization’s competitiveness and ability to function efficiently”.²⁵¹ More broadly, developments to support caregivers in the UN “are driving measurable progress on gender equality, staff well-being and retention... have helped to retain talented personnel... [and] positioned the United Nations as a more inclusive and supportive employer”.²⁵² Critically, as highlighted by the latest Report of the UN Secretary-General on

Improvement in the status of women in the United Nations System, policies around flexible leave and shared caregiving “have helped to shift cultural norms... reinforcing gender parity at work and at home”²⁵³. In this Report, the UN Secretary-General underscores that “family-friendly policies are vital to retention, inclusivity and an effective enabling environment”.²⁵⁴



UN/Kevin Jordan, 2020

However, some participants mention that while these supportive policies were “amazing”, policies allowing FWA or time off to breastfeed did not help if workloads were not reduced: “nobody’s gonna adjust your workload to make that happen for you either. So, it’s like, it’s hard, it’s really hard... for me, I had to stop breastfeeding to manage my workload, and because I didn’t have a place to pump” (Interview #91). Other participants highlight concerns with access to childcare (with a number of participants expressing particular concern about closure of the creche at UN HQ), very few lactation booths (while a ground-breaking addition at UN HQ, they have yet to be located in many other offices) and inadequate access to FWA (often dependent upon sympathetic supervisors). The latest Report on Improvement in the status of women in the United Nations System also highlights that challenges persist regarding “childcare access, care and support for older persons and dependants with special needs, spousal employment and mobility in non-family duty stations”.²⁵⁵

Concerns are raised about inadequate financial support for children under 5 years of age, for whom childcare can be the most exorbitant: “I think is very unfair, very gendered... it’s basically from like the 60s, when all diplomats and UN staff were men that if they had someone at home to take care of their under-five year olds” (Interview #92). Others worry the length of parental leave is inadequate if based in a peace operation with inadequate access to facilities and support networks. Highlighting other barriers to the engagement of civilian staff with caring responsibilities in working in peace operations, some participants also question the classification of some non-family duty stations (Interview #121).

11.3 The Responsibilities of T/PCC Security Sector Institutions

Among survey respondents (n=296), about a third (32%) believe UN peace operations are attentive to caring responsibilities; 19% believe they are sometimes; 11% do not believe they are attentive; and 30% are unsure. Recognising that the provision of support for peacekeepers is the primary responsibility of Member States, respondents were asked about the duty of care towards personnel with caring responsibilities exercised by security sector institutions. Most respondents (82%) agree that it is important that women with caring responsibilities are supported in security institutions; only 4% disagree (of 164 respondents who answered this question). The majority of survey respondents say that all or some security sector institutions in their country are attentive to caring responsibilities: 34% say some security sector institutions in their countries are attentive to caring responsibilities; 20% believe all security sector institutions in their countries are; 7% respond that all security sector institutions they know of are; 17% say they are not attentive to care; and 17% do not know.

11.3.1 Support for Personnel with Caring Responsibilities

Many uniformed personnel interviewed for this research express satisfaction with the level of support their institution provides to personnel with caring responsibilities. Subsidised or free childcare have helped many manage their caring responsibilities while at work or helped those that supported them with their caring responsibilities while they were deployed. For instance, a Swedish peacekeeper refers to free day-care and schools and other social support services in Sweden that made it easier for those who remain at home to fulfil caring responsibilities (Interview #163). Several also describe the support they receive from their state, their service and organisations affiliated to their service. This includes, for instance, leave provisions, flexible working hours and supportive leaders, as well as educational, housing, healthcare and welfare packages for family members.

Several mention the benefits for their family members who have greater access to education and healthcare because they were employed in the security sector. Nepalese peacekeepers in MINUSCA and MONUSCO, for instance, refer to military families being able to access education and healthcare, which many other Nepalese citizens cannot enjoy (Interview #73; Interview #46). Indian Armed Forces personnel also discuss military hospitals attached to stations, with most units also having medical rooms, which are available to personnel and their dependents and families (Interview #2). Many also receive an additional allowance if they have children and help with family accommodation (Interview #147; Interview #45), which, when not available, personnel can “opt to stay in the civil area and you will be provided money for rent - they call it House Rent Allowance” (Interview #2). A male British officer shares how his institution accommodates family needs: “for example, if you have a family, you’re entitled to apply for a bigger house, with various different benefits (Interview #142). Many participants across the three peace operations also emphasise that the additional financial benefits they receive while on deployment is significant and essential to fulfilling their caring responsibilities.

Policies and structures are in place across many T/PCC security sector institutions to support personnel with caring responsibilities, however many recognise that these vary within and between T/PCCs. Many participants believe that more can be done to address insufficient support or understanding of the challenges that women with caring responsibilities, in particular, face while working in the armed forces and police. For example, a male military officer deployed to UNMISS states that there “are not enough structures and policies to support, for example, child-care, elder care. Most of our organisations... lack that idea about the woman leaders and even child-friendly initiatives to support those women who will need to be both in security organs and [fulfil their caring responsibilities]” (Interview #174).

As discussed in Chapter 7, many cite inadequate access to childcare and inflexible work practices to accommodate the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities. Many state that their salary is not enough to cover childcare in countries where costs are exorbitant. Others refer to the limited hours of formal childcare support, which typically does not accommodate the long and flexible hours of work in the armed forces and police. For instance, in the 2023 Australian Defence Force census,²⁵⁶ only 57.7% of respondents (and only 11.8% of women) report that their childcare needs are met. Consequently, several research participants recommend the security sector institutions invest further in wrap-around care. As a retired male officer from the Indian Armed Forces states:



That can be built into all the existing schools which are there. A little bit funding, some more support system, some more aayas (nannies) or whatever it is or one more teacher to supervise and that itself will look after a lot of other hassles so I fully agree with you that it requires to be streamlined, regularised, and made on a permanent basis because this is not some issue which will just go away (Interview #15).

As highlighted in the Report Towards Equal Opportunity for Women in the Defence Sector,²⁵⁷ some countries have demonstrated success in providing childcare facilities within military institutions, for instance the Dominican Republic which “seem to have contributed to strengthening the recruitment and retention of women, and have enhanced the image of the armed forces as an attractive employer and inclusive institution in the Dominican Republic.”

Research participants advocate for more “agile human resources, policies and systems in place to be able to provide for parental leave for carers... and other forms of leave” that would better support personnel with caring responsibilities (Interview #108). This might mean expanding the timeframe or criteria to enable personnel with caring responsibilities to complete a staff course, for example. Similarly, some participants recommend that criteria for promotions can include a broader set of “skills, qualities and experiences policies” to accommodate constraints personnel with caring responsibilities may face, thus avoiding indirect discrimination (Interview #108).

With regard to parental leave, some participants suggest that moving away from distinct maternity and paternity leave can help shift the unequal gendered distribution of care work and the subsequent disparate impacts on women and men on their careers and deployment prospects. In India, for instance, where maternity leave is 180 days and paternity leave is 15 days, this disparity discourages men from taking on more of the weight of caring responsibilities and has logical consequences for women's career progression. Moving towards parental leave can potentially also help recognise and support the care work that men do, as well as encourage a more equal distribution of care work. A military officer from Australia, for instance, underscores that societal and organisational expectations around who performs unpaid care work can disadvantage all personnel:



... if organisations are not receptive to the idea that men need to also take on family responsibilities, then men feel and find that they simply cannot step forward and take on more of their responsibilities. Because their organisation is asking them 'Why can't your wife do that?' and is placing a different expectation on them... If we think about the way that maternity and paternity leave is structured, at the moment, it is structured to make the woman the primary carer and that may suit many people, but it does not provide very much time for a man to step forward and move into that space (Interview #125).

Elsewhere, where parental leave has replaced maternity and paternity leave (such as the UN system), there are, however, concerns that women still do most of the work involved in caring responsibilities but risk having less time off work to manage those responsibilities. Others argue that gender neutral policies (for instance around parental leave) appear to be equitable, but ignoring the different needs of women and men and adopting "a one size fits all approach" can cause more harm (Interview #114).

Other policies participants raise include dual-serving couple policies, which aim to post military couples together to retain the family unit (including India) or endeavour to ensure couples are not simultaneously deployed to overseas operations in insecure environments to avoid both parents being separated from children and at risk (UK).

Some participants consider human resource policies typically assume there is someone at home helping with caring responsibilities, not appreciating that the partner may also be working or there may be no partner. A female officer from Japan, for instance, refers to a lack of frameworks to support single parents, causing one of her colleagues to leave the service when her husband died (Interview #94). A female officer from Australia adds:



Even though we have not said so, we've relied on the idea that the person who has volunteered for the security institution has someone else at home, who will take care of those responsibilities. We don't say so upfront. However, most of our supporting structures, most of our pay and conditions, most of the things that we have around supporting family are built up around the idea that there is someone else who can sacrifice their career opportunities so that the serving member can serve and we have not yet addressed that (Interview #125).

Policies on flexible working practices are also highlighted by several uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities as enabling them to better manage their family and professional work. Flexible working practices might include flexibility around hours or location of work. As noted by the UN:



Men and women personnel alike should be supported by management to look after any children or other dependants, without sacrificing career development or advancement. While all armed forces should develop family-friendly and other inclusive human resources policies, the specific provisions of these policies will vary based on cultural norms and the nature of the tasks undertaken by a given military.²⁵⁸

As mentioned in the Chapter 8, the perceived challenges of managing a career in the sector while having caring responsibilities had led many personnel to not having children. Organisational support for individuals with caring responsibilities has a significant influence on the decisions women and men make about starting and managing families. Without such support in the form of policies that support work-family balance, including parental leave and work flexibility, individuals may feel pressured to delay or avoid starting families, which can impact their well-being (Interview #37).

Many participants refer to supportive policies that are not properly implemented or not adequately effective because of underlying cultural norms and attitudes towards women, mothers in particular:



... the [Australian Defence Force] has been a prime example of over the last 20 years bringing in place, you know, really great policies [to support personnel with caring responsibilities]... all sorts of different ways in which we can try and accommodate... working and having a family, I think that's all great. The problem is I think you said something about implementation. It's, I think the problem is still we're not cracking the nut about people's attitudes towards women (Interview #113).

These prevailing attitudes towards women and, especially, mothers – within the armed forces in particular – constrain progress on policy but also often dictate the type of policies that are developed, as indicated in evidence submitted to the UK Defence Committee:



...there is deep rooted sexism in our organisation, and I have witnessed it more as I have gone up the ranks. Locker room chat sadly still exists. Some males in powerful positions do not support women in the Army or value us as equals and they are supposed to be positive role models. This is prevalent in the language used, the military reporting system, opportunities given and attitudes towards pregnancy, post-partum and childcare. Things are improving but we have a long way to go.²⁵⁹

11.3.2 T/PCC Support on Deployments

Several peacekeepers interviewed for this research believe that the quality of facilities and well-being support they receive on UN peace operations is adequate, with peacekeepers in MONUSCO, for instance, referring to recreational facilities on the weekend and a mental health day (Interview #68). Others refer to access to the internet even in remote areas, the availability of psychological counsellors, good pay (that helps cover the financial costs of caring responsibilities while they are deployed) as well as satisfactory pre-deployment training and sufficient notice (to prepare family) prior to deployment, all of which aided their well-being. Many, though, recognised disparities between missions and contingents. Different levels of support are cited when formed units were deployed, compared with individuals, who may only be able to receive limited provisions. Several peacekeepers highlight very poor conditions and minimal investment to provide for basic amenities, a good toilet, and a suitable sleeping bed, essential for well-being, rest and destressing after long working hours:



Instead of sending just young man like here, you know, in the middle of nowhere, they are not giving them internet. They're not giving them possibility to visit a family. Nothing for one year is extremely challenging, difficult, and I have seen some contingents living in difficult conditions in the middle of nowhere. No [air conditioning], no good toilet, nothing (Interview #60).

Greater access to the internet and the provision of more regular R&R (or shorter deployments, for some people) or, particularly, covering the costs of travel home during R&R, is also underscored as important for personnel with caring responsibilities and the well-being of all personnel. As discussed in Chapter 7, inadequate access to the internet – due to remote locations or inadequate T/PCC investment disrupts personnel's ability to communicate with families, and thus harms their well-being. Likewise, leave and financial support to travel home for R&R on deployments varies between T/PCCs, leaving some personnel not able to see their families for a year or more.

11.3.3 Pre-Deployment

Several refer to pre-deployment screening where personnel with caring responsibilities are asked to share a family care plan “to ensure your family is well looked after” which is followed by discussions with a social worker about this plan and the anticipated impact on the family of their deployment (Interview #150; Interview #70). While some participants regard this as due care and support for the challenges that personnel with caring responsibilities and their families may face, others feel that it is intrusive and exposed gender bias given it is more-often-than-not women who are asked these questions rather than men.

Many participants suggest that pre-deployment training (see Section 4.3.3) and guidance needs to be more comprehensive, including accommodating preparing for and managing family separation, and provision of information early to personnel with caring responsibilities about facilities available (if families can accompany them) to ensure informed decision-making and adequate time to plan for relocation.

Others suggest that gender training – how to think and operate with a gender perspective (Interview #88) - needs to begin before pre-deployment preparations and early in a career to avoid learned behaviours and attitudes (including gender and maternal bias) that can cause challenges for personnel with caring responsibilities and for women on deployment.

11.3.4 Post-Deployment

There are different levels of post-deployment support between T/PCCs. While many mention receiving little support in transitioning back to life in their home country, others refer to comprehensive support. A peacekeeper in MONUSCO, for instance, describes receiving no counselling upon return and being unable to take accrued leave to see his family (Interview #76), while several British peacekeepers point to high levels of psychological support after deployment to facilitate well-being and transition to civilian and family life (Interview #132).



UN/Pasqual Gorriz, 2012

11.3.5 T/PCC Case Studies

Across the UK, India and Indonesia, uniformed personnel refer to the provision of policies and structures that support those with caring responsibilities, including policies regarding dual postings for couples, provision of or support with costs of accommodation for personnel and their families, generous education allowances and support, and human resource policies that respond to the specific needs of personnel with caring responsibilities (such as parental leave).

11.3.5.1 United Kingdom

In the British Armed Forces, UK officers cite many examples of policies and practices in place both to support mental health and to more specifically address the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities, including a generous education allowance (which can, for example, cover the majority of boarding school fees).

In terms of accommodation for UK Defence Force personnel and their families, Service Family Accommodation (SFA) is provided, offering housing near their duty station. However, sometimes this accommodation is not in the best condition, with delays in repairs and maintenance, for instance.²⁶⁰ The UK's Strategic Defence Review 2025: armed forces housing and subsequent Defence Housing Strategy 2025 have led to substantial investment in housing as well as increased freedoms for families.²⁶¹ Families can also choose to rent privately and receive an allowance towards the rental costs, as part of the Future Accommodation Model (FAM) programme, providing more flexibility to personnel and their families in terms of where to live. Military bases also include family centres and hubs, although these vary in terms of accessibility, condition and facilities.²⁶²

According to UK Defence Force personnel, significant work has been undertaken in recent years to ascertain whether they are providing the best support for women postpartum. This includes how physical training requirements are structured, whether women have time and space to breastfeed or pump, are able to access to childcare, have adequate leave, and are able to access flexible working practices, where possible:



And part of that was obviously flexible working and part time working so that women could transition back to work in a measured way, rather than a big bang... I've had my maternity leave [or parental leave], and now I'm back to work full time and nothing in between. We recognise that that could be really quite psychologically damaging, and lots of people would consider that a strain on the relationship with their newborn child, particularly if it's a first. And so, we had to do something about that... it's not just about, you know, retaining people to make sure they're, they're aspirational role models. It's about genuinely retaining talent. You know, as you said, incredibly high performing people who then go and start a family are still incredibly high performing people, and it's in the organisation's interest to retain them (Interview #81).

The RAF and Navy also have special fitness training for ante- and post-natal personnel, support women in accessing specific healthcare services, and provide resources to commanders to support pregnant women and those returning from maternity leave.²⁶³

Other forms of support include parent networks among British Army and Royal Navy personnel, a Defence Breastfeeding Network for the wider defence force and a Defence Child Bereavement Network.²⁶⁴

A recently piloted and rolled-out scheme is mentioned by some participants, where military personnel based in the UK can access funds to support caring responsibilities, as well as various support networks to advocate for and support personnel with caring responsibilities – in part to address retention issues (Interview #81). Funds for childcare is part of a wraparound childcare scheme, which provides financial support for personnel with children aged 4-11 who are required to be in school. However, there remain gaps in provision, including for early years and holiday care and for personnel who are overseas. As noted by Sarah Atherton, Chair of the Sub-Committee on Women in the Armed Forces:



*... there are still gaps in provision for early years and holiday care, funding disparities across the devolved administrations, and a lack of support for those overseas and reservists, who are not eligible. Childcare will continue to be an obstacle for women in particular, as they are more likely to take on the role of caring for young children, until it is available and affordable for every armed forces family, regardless of where they are based.*²⁶⁵

Uniformed personnel have expressed that wraparound care is arguably needed even more-so overseas, where they are less likely to have family and friend support networks.²⁶⁶ Financial support can also only be provided to providers who accept payments from Tax Free Childcare Accounts, which means it is not accessible to everyone, especially in parts of the UK (notably rural Scotland).²⁶⁷ In evidence submitted to the Defence Committee the Royal British Legion argues that “This lack of childcare support could be detrimental to women’s careers as serving women often provide the majority of the childcare or are single parents.”²⁶⁸

Noting sub-optimal access to childcare and other barriers to career advancement that arise through caring responsibilities, the UK Government stated in 2021 that:



*The Ministry of Defence must put in place a clear Tri-Service policy on foreign deployment for personnel with pre-school aged children, to give serving parents (male and female) more say over their career paths when they have young children and provide them with flexible working options, whilst not disadvantaging their prospects from promotion. There should be an emphasis on easing the situation of dual-serving couples.*²⁶⁹

The UK Defence Force has several policies to accommodate flexible working options, including Remote Working, Variable Start and Finish Times, and Compressed Working and Leave policies. Defence also has a remote (home) working policy, and has been encouraged by the Government to assess the costs and benefits of home working with a view to making home working options available to personnel where possible.²⁷⁰ The Haythornthwaite Review of armed forces incentivisation surveyed 9,000 serving personnel and found: “Women were three times more likely to select flexible working and twice as likely to choose less frequent moving of work location as their most preferred option than men”.²⁷¹ Particularly recognising the changing workforce of the armed forces, the Review recommends “giving the flexibility that increasing caring demands”.²⁷² Similarly, in evidence submitted to the Defence Committee in October 2023, the Royal British Legion states:



*The unsociable hours demanded by the Armed Forces and the lack of support provided to personnel with younger children may compound the challenges faced by women in the Armed Forces as most childcare providers do not provide services for these irregular hours.*²⁷³

In a Report commissioned by then Defence Secretary in 2019 on the needs of Service families and whether current support is meeting those needs,²⁷⁴ the challenges with accessing affordable childcare are found to be intensified for armed forces personnel who often work very long and unsociable hours and frequently relocate. Recognising demand for childcare places is high, many childcare facilities have waiting lists, sometimes with children on it from or before birth: this is problematic for Service personnel who may not know where they will be in a few months' time.²⁷⁵ This Report also underscores that the duty of care of the Armed Forces includes a moral responsibility towards personnel's families and can enhance performance and reduce attrition rates:



*... the incompatibility of military life and family life is a key driver in decisions to leave the military earlier than might otherwise have been the case... looking after and providing support to military families and ensuring their wellbeing are essential if the Armed Forces are to meet their objectives and mission.*²⁷⁶

The Armed Forces Families' Strategy 2022 to 2032 aims “to offer choice and flexibility to allow personnel to serve their nation and raise a family at the same time” and provide support to families in recognition this helps attract and retain talent and improve well-being.²⁷⁷

11.3.5.2 Overseas Deployments

In terms of support for personnel with caring responsibilities who are deployed to UN peace operations, the UK is in a unique situation being the top military contributor to the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) under Operation TOSCA (Indonesia also deploys a small number of police to the mission. Many British Armed Forces officers we spoke to who were based in Cyprus as part of this mission or British Forces Cyprus, were able to bring their families to Cyprus, and because of this, barriers to the deployment of personnel with caring responsibilities are slightly different.²⁷⁸ UK military personnel refer to welfare houses and other support mechanisms in place in the mission, as well as deployments being of a short (6-month) duration: “So, I think we do a reasonable job looking after our people.” (Interview #145). For personnel who can bring their families, the UK provides housing and several schools are also available to send their children, including nurseries, primary and secondary schools, with some participants noting the positive experiences their children had attending diverse schools with local and other children of peacekeepers. Others mention the childcare facilities available for their younger children, including wraparound childcare, though for single parents who may get called out during the night or on weekends, finding childcare on short notice remains a challenge.

For those whose families remained at home while they deployed to Cyprus, they mention the support mechanisms in place to remain connected with their families and manage their caring responsibilities. This includes access to telephones and Wi-Fi and providing welfare houses for family members to travel to Cyprus and visit serving personnel. A welfare centre is also available for peacekeepers which includes gaming consoles, providing not only a way to unwind but also another means of communicating and connecting with family and friends at home who can play online. To improve further, one participant suggests that the UK brief personnel on what it is like to take families to the mission, to encourage greater representation of women and others with caring responsibilities (Interview #130).

When deployed to other peace operations, personnel mention that the ability to return home in the event of a family emergency generally comes down to whether the chain of command is empathic and whether their absence will impact operational effectiveness (Interview #133). Other UK military personnel report that sometimes special allowances are given to personnel with caring responsibilities when making decisions, for example, about rotations on mission or operations (Interview #142).

To support families posted overseas, Defence Children Services (DCS, part of Regional Command) and the Armed Forces Families and Safeguarding (AFFS) provides information about overseas childcare and education provision when a family accompanies the serving personnel, which can inform personnel's decision-making on overseas postings.²⁷⁹ When servicewomen are provided with information that they may not have the same rights as they enjoy in the UK, they have the opportunity not to accept such a posting, in which case they must be offered an alternative assignment which offers similar opportunities for career advancements.²⁸⁰ There are other support mechanisms and practices to support personnel with caring responsibilities, including a common practice to not delay dual-serving couples simultaneously.

UK Armed Forces: Challenges and Changes

The UK Armed Forces have been making efforts to be an “employer of choice” and addressing barriers that many face in the security sector, investing in diversity and inclusion, recognising the impacts of caring responsibilities on military careers, and improving institutional culture to support recruitment, retention, and progression among women in the armed forces. The Armed Forces has also recognised the persisting issues around gender pay gaps, monitoring and reporting on its efforts to reduce the pay gaps between men and women serving, which continues to favour male personnel especially given their overrepresentation in higher ranks.

However, the workplace culture in the UK Armed Forces continues to be masculinised and male-dominated. A 2021 report by the UK House of Commons cites a persisting culture of bullying, harassment, and discrimination, disproportionately impacting women. The report finds six out of ten women who experience some form of bullying, harassment, or discrimination do not report it, largely due to low confidence in reporting mechanisms and fears that reporting will harm their careers.

Despite efforts to introduce more paternity leave to male personnel, uptake remains low due to social norms on who is a carer which often stigmatises men who take on more caring responsibilities, and fears that taking time off will impact their career prospects. Yet, women in the armed forces have little choice when taking maternity leave following childbirth and must typically manage both work and primary caring responsibilities, often having a negative impact on their careers in the sector. For instance, in 2021 ninety percent of men in mid-ranking Officer roles had children in comparison to ten percent of women in this rank.

UK Ministry of Defence (March 2024) UK Armed Forces Gender Pay Gap: Reporting Year 2022/2023. London: Ministry of Defence, 21 March 2024. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65fac6ed703c42001a58f055/UK_Armed_Forces_gender_pay_gap_reports_2023.pdf; UK Parliament (July 2021) Report: Protecting Those Who Protect Us: Women in the Armed Forces from Recruitment to Civilian Life. 25 July 2021. <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/24/defence-committee/news/156892/report-protecting-those-who-protect-us-women-in-the-armed-forces-from-recruitment-to-civilian-life/>; UK Defence Committee (July 2021) Protecting Those Who Protect Us: Women in the Armed Forces from Recruitment to Civilian Life, Second Report of Session 2021-22. London: UK House of Commons, 12 July 2021. <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/6959/documents/72771/default/>: 4.

11.3.5.3 India

Many Indian Armed Forces personnel refer to the extensive support they are provided in terms of access to healthcare, education for their children, adequate leave and, in many cases, family accommodation. Additional remuneration is also mentioned when deployed to the field and, particularly, UN peace operations, which can help financially sustain their families. One retired female officer in the Indian armed forces, for instance, describes the institution as “caring a lot” (Interview #5). The many policies and structures that support personnel with caring responsibilities in the armed forces and, more broadly, support the well-being of all personnel include:

- **Leave provisions:**
 - **Annual Leave:** Officers and personnel are entitled to 60 days of annual leave and 30 days of casual leave annually. This can be carried forward to the next year if personnel cannot use it due to deployment on peace operations.
 - **Maternity and Paternity Leave:** 180 days of maternity leave and 15 days of paternity leave.
 - **Childcare Leave (CCL):** Permanently Commissioned women officers are entitled to 360 days of CCL, and Short Service Commission women officers are entitled to 180 days of CCL during the entire service period to take care of the 2 eldest children below 18 years of age, including rearing them and looking after their needs, such as examination, sickness and so forth. Adoptee mothers are also entitled to CCL.
 - **Furlough:** 60 days
 - **Medical Termination of Pregnancy Leave:** 30 Days leave to women service officers and personnel. Male officers whose wives undergo tubectomy/salpingectomy operation after Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) will be entitled to seven days of special casual leave.
 - **Child Adoption Leave:** In line with maternity leave admissible to natural mothers (180 days).
- **Compassionate Postings:**
 - In cases where military personnel require to be posted in a specific city due to medical reasons (including for undergoing IVF treatments) or for critical caregiving needs like attending to ill family members or a child with special needs, the Indian Armed Forces allow compassionate posting to requested locations, where possible (Interview #21)
 - Temporary attachments up to a maximum of 180 days are also permitted to fulfil caregiving responsibilities. This also includes relocation to areas with better communication networks that can help personnel remain connected to their families.
- **Spouse Co-location:** Efforts to post both spouses (if both serve in the armed forces) to the same location. Fulfilling requests is becoming more challenging due to an increase in women entering the armed forces, and thus an increase in marriages within the services, as well as difficulties due to variations in work schedules, regional and skillset requirements.
- **Separated Family Accommodation (SFA):** Housing provided for families when personnel are deployed to field areas or UN missions, ensuring families have secure living arrangements in or close to cantonment areas.
- **Medical Support:** Extensive network of military hospitals (over 140 across India) with specialists available. These offer free-of-cost medical care to all personnel and their dependents. Additionally, if personnel are undergoing medical treatment in another city, their families are permitted to reside with them and are provided free accommodation. For former personnel, the Ex-servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS) responds to their medical care needs by providing no- or low-cost accommodation in private hospitals.

- **Educational Support:**

- Army Public Schools are available at most stations (around 140 schools across the country for over 250,000 wards). Priority admission is given to personnel's children, and the Army provides transportation, taking care of safe pick-ups and drop-offs. These schools ensure continued education for army wards, even in remote areas, without disruption due to mid-term relocation.
- Special Needs Support: Dedicated "Asha Schools" for differently abled children are run by Army Women Welfare Association (AWWA), and special housing designed to accommodate their needs is also provided in cantonment areas.
- In addition, the Army also provides Child Educational Allowance (CEA) and subsidised hostel facilities at certain locations for the wards of Army officers and personnel.
- Day-care centres and creches are slowly being established at AWWA stations where more than 50% of spouses are employed.

- **Pensions:** To enhance the financial security of personnel and their dependents, the Armed Forces provide a pension for unmarried/divorced daughters after her parents' death.

In terms of compassionate postings, due to high demand, accommodating all such requests is administratively challenging. Participants recognise the challenges of responding to all requests provided by these policies, given the demands required of the armed forces, but also share instances where the Indian Armed Forces has been flexible in balancing the needs of the services and the needs of its personnel. Although these posting may cause personnel to voluntarily miss out on professional opportunities, there are no restrictions on the number of requests made for such postings and these are granted without any impact on the individual's service assessment and evaluation.

Several Indian military officers refer to the provision of good schools, although some hope for improved quality in some cases and wish for more effort to be made to schedule rotations or deployments in line with the academic calendar to avoid too much disruption for children. In contrast to the number of Army Public Schools, institutional support for childcare remains very limited, with only 2 stations in India that provide childcare support facilitated by AWWA. In terms of educational and childcare support, some military officers state that further roll out of facilities would be helpful, though noting the organisation is committed to this. The need for additional childcare support is increasingly important as more women join the Indian Armed Forces and as the number of dual serving couples increases.

The cantonment living system of the Indian Army, in particular, provides support for personnel with caring responsibilities. Aligned to the notion of the army being a big family, many Indian military personnel claim that living in cantonments is very safe (heavily guarded) and provides easy access to essential services, such as schools, healthcare facilities, and sports and entertainment facilities, as well as to a trusted community network. This is regarded as especially valuable for those with caring responsibilities. For example, a retired female military officer reports: "it is a safe place. I can leave my son. He can go and play anywhere" (Interview #24). However, she echoes other participants who express needing more creches and play areas for children (Interview #24).

Several women officers in the Indian Armed Forces discuss being able to continue working once they had children because of the policies and structures provided. As a retired female officer said: "there has never been an instance like my kids can't accompany me even if I'm serving" (Interview #9). Some do, however, express concern about remote locations to which they are sometimes deployed which make it more difficult to fulfil their caring responsibilities (if there are limited means of communication or commuting is problematic) and due to safety concerns associated with long commutes of a woman in uniform (Interview #9).

Referring to the comprehensive array of policies of the Indian Armed Forces that support personnel with caring responsibilities, most Indian military personnel describe the organisation as “very sensitive” (Interview #20) or “compassionate” (Interview #11), and especially supportive and empathetic when someone faces challenges in their private life. As a senior military officer explains, there are both formal and informal mechanisms to ensure that the organisation remains compassionate and attentive to the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities (Interview #21). However, most also recognise that there are times when there may be tension between “professional needs and compassion”, or between the needs of the organisation and needs of the individual (Interview #21). Due to practical, administrative and logistical reasons, not every request for a compassionate posting, for instance, can be granted, and that requests for co-location of spouses are only granted infrequently. Others recognise that responsibility between the institution and the individual is a two-way thing: “if you have serious caregiving responsibilities, we can accommodate but you should do justice to the work and then it’s a dual relationship” (Interview #9).

Assumptions that policies which respond to the needs of women with caring responsibilities are unfair and go against the principle of equal treatment, also hinder efforts to create an enabling environment for their recruitment, advancement and deployment. Paradoxically, the argument of non-discrimination and equal treatment helped sustain disparities in opportunities afforded to those with and without caring responsibilities, impacting women due to the highly gendered nature of care work. As a retired senior officer in the Indian Armed Forces states:



The Indian Armed Forces, as you would realise we need to be gender neutral because officers’ responsibilities and perks will remain the same. You cannot really change. That is true in almost any organisation, except for the - difference lies when the woman officer is actually undergoing childbearing, that time you get that 8 months or whatever maternity leave and then you couple it with your annual leave. all that is given (Interview #10).

Unfortunately, when policies are gender neutral, they are not gender responsive and so may not respond to the different needs of men and women. Reluctance to advance gender responsive policies that respond to the needs of women with caring responsibilities also appears to be driven by a concern about the “backlash” it might cause, citing concerns about reactions to any significant or sudden change. Another retired senior officer in the Indian Armed Forces explains:



I think there is an understanding that female officers have greater caring responsibilities as compared to their male counterparts and so therefore some consideration needs to be given. How much in what way? It shouldn’t create a backlash as to why you are giving greater privileges to women. On one side you say there should be equal participants and on the other side you’re saying there needs to be some special privileges etc. I’m just saying we need to balance this out (Interview #8).

To avoid the backlash, which “could sometimes be counterproductive”, this interviewee recommends “a greater sort of sensitisation among policy makers, those in charge of postings et cetera” (Interview #8).

Other challenges facing women with caring responsibilities include the lack of an informal support network that men enjoy. This network includes spouses (wives typically fulfil the majority of unpaid care work) and AWWA, which has traditionally supported male personnel and their families (see Sections 4.7 and 4.7.1). They also appear to lack an informal network with each other to provides support and share information.

Nari Shakti

India has introduced several significant initiatives and policies in recent years to support personnel with caring responsibilities and advance gender parity in the armed forces and police, and helps to advance the meaningful participation of women in UN peace operations. For instance, in 2023, the provision of generous maternity leave (180 days), childcare leave (360 days) and child adoption leave (180 days) was made available to all women in the military irrespective of their rank, not just officers.

In 2019, the Indian Army enabled Permanent Commissions for women where previously female officers were recruited on a Short Service Commission permitting them to serve for only 14 years. Additionally, women have recently been deployed for the first time in combat roles and commanding posts: although female officers in the Indian Army are not permitted to be deployed in the Infantry and Armoured regiments, 10 women officers were commissioned in the regiment of Artillery for the first time in 2023. Uniformed women have also been deployed to frontline posts in recent years, including the deployment of female commandos in Naxal-affected areas, counterinsurgency operations in the North-east and for anti-militancy and search operations in the state of Manipur and UT of Jammu and Kashmir in 2021.

Additionally, there have been several recent high-level appointments within the Indian Armed Forces. Moreover, in 2022, the Indian Army opened the doors of the National Defence Academy to female cadets, and in 2024, the Defence Minister inaugurated the first all-girls Sainik (military) School with over 800 student enrolments.

These policy shifts revitalise India's historic and cultural ethos of woman power - Nari Shakti. They also help support the retention of women with caring responsibilities, pave the way for women attaining high-level posts, and advance the meaningful participation of women in UN peace operations.

NDTV (July 2021) 'Women Soldiers of Assam Rifles Deployed in Kashmir for Security Operations,' NDTV, 1 July 2021. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/women-soldiers-of-assam-rifles-deployed-in-kashmir-to-help-in-security-operations-2477212>; India Ministry of Defence (January 2024) 'Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh Inaugurates First All-Girls Sainik School at Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh,' Press Release, 01 January 2024. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseframePage.aspx?PRID=1992125#:~:text=Terms%20it%20as%20a%20beacon,Armed%20Forces%20%26%20protect%20the%20motherland&text=Raksha%20Mantri%20Shri%20Rajnath%20Singh%20inaugurated%20Samvid%20Gurukulam%20Girls%20Sainik,with%20a%20strength%20of%20approx.>

11.3.5.4 Indonesia

In Indonesia, there is comprehensive legislation that provides childcare and responds to the broader needs of care-givers. However, considerable research on the broad public sector demonstrates that there remains a gap between these provisions and their realisation, which compromises efforts to increase women's participation in the workforce.²⁸¹ However, the Indonesian National Armed Forces and the National Police have instituted many initiatives to better respond to the needs of women and personnel with caring responsibilities. These initiatives include both formal policies and informal practices, an empathetic response among many leaders towards the challenges that primary care-givers can face. For instance, several uniformed women from Indonesia provide examples of supportive commanders and supervisors who allow them to take time off for family emergencies, flexible hours at work to accommodate caring responsibilities and, on occasion, bring children to work. Formal policies include provisions for maternity and additional leave. Moreover, in 2021, the Ministry of Defence issued a regulation (#14 on the leave of Ministry of Defence employees), stating that soldiers have the right to leave for personal and urgent reasons, such as following or accompanying husbands or wives in their duties, working, obtaining offspring, accompanying children with special needs, providing exceptional care, and caring for sick or aging parents. The regulation requires a letter of assignment or order for leave approval, providing up to three years of leave with a one-year extension if required. Participants also share examples of support available for personnel with caring responsibilities in the Indonesia National Police, including "child allowance that covers everything for the child's growth" and "private rooms where you can breastfeed or [lactate] in every police place" (Interview #31).

While these accommodations are significant, they sit alongside gender normative assumptions and expectations that women personnel "balance" their career and family (Interview #33), not lose their "women's character" (Interview #38) and preserve their "feminine qualities".²⁸² Participants also share that women receive a "lipstick allowance"; a small amount of money each month to go towards makeup. This is to ensure that women continue to look feminine as they serve in the military. Men also receive a small allowance to go towards products, such as razors or hair gel.

While Indonesia is one of the most significant contributors of female peacekeepers globally, there remain formal and informal barriers to women's full and equal participation in the armed forces and police, including the need for spousal consent for women – not men – to deploy (or parental approval in the absence of a spouse). Nonetheless, most research participants express satisfaction with the commitment of the armed forces and police towards gender equality and refer to processes being strictly regulated by procedures and policies that enabled equitable access to promotion, for instance. Many informed women we spoke with in Indonesia also expressed satisfaction with the opportunities, fair treatment and respect they had received, with many having been deployed to UN peace operations multiple times and many having achieved high rank. The Government, the armed forces and police also demonstrate commitment to enhancing opportunities to advance the meaningful participation of women in the security sector and UN peace operations, demonstrated in several initiatives. Notably, Indonesia advocated for improvements to support the meaningful participation of women in peacekeeping during presidency of the UN Security Council (UNSC), which led to the Security Council passing Resolution 2538 (2020) on women and peacekeeping. UNSCR 2538 is the first resolution on peacekeeping devoted in full to women, and the first resolution in the history of Indonesian diplomacy in the UNSC.²⁸³

Virginity tests were part of the recruitment process for the armed forces and police until they were officially abolished in 2022 and 2014, respectively. The tests were assumed to ascertain the moral integrity and "purity" of women and ensure they had the correct "personality and mentality" as befits uniformed personnel.²⁸⁴ Some of our participants suggest that aside from ascertaining the moral integrity of women, the tests were done because basic training would have been too tough for women if they had given birth. These tests have been widely criticised as abusive, invasive and discriminatory.²⁸⁵

Virginity Testing in Indonesian Security Sector Institutions

The thorniest issue in the history of the Indonesian military and police force is the virginity test, which was used as part of the recruitment process for female soldiers and was used to ascertain morality. Virginity testing is a form of gender-based violence and is a practice that widely undermines honour. The test involves the invasive technique of inserting two fingers into the vagina to assess whether a woman has previously had sex.

After public pressure, the Indonesian National Army (TNI) ended the virginity test, with the Head of the TNI Health Center, Major General TNI Budiman, announcing in April 2022 that all three TNI units – Army, Navy and Air Force – had “effectively ended virginity tests” for recruits.

While the police stopped the tests in 2014, it took until 2021 for the armed forces to do so. In June 2021, then Chief of Army Staff (KASAD) General TNI Andika Perkasa issued an order that the recruitment of female soldiers should only be assessed based on their ability to take part in training. He also ordered that the fiancés of male soldiers who applied for a marriage permit no longer needed to undergo medical examinations, including “virginity tests”. There have subsequently been unofficial reports, however, that the practice has continued in some places.

Perdani, Y. and Jong, H.N. (November 2014) ‘Virginity Test to Confirm Cadets’ Morality: Police,’ The Jakarta Post, 20 November 2014. <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/11/20/virginity-test-confirm-cadets-morality-police.html>; Harsono, A. (April 2022) ‘TNI Akhirnya Mengakhiri ‘Tes Keperawanan’ yang Kejam Itu’ [‘The Indonesian National Armed Forces Finally Ends the Cruel ‘Virginity Test’], Human Rights Watch, 19 April 2022. <https://www.hrw.org/id/news/2022/04/19/indonesia-military-finally-ends-abusive-virginity-test>; Harsono, A. (August 2021) ‘KASAD Menghentikan ‘Tes Keperawanan’ Karena Tidak Ilmiah’ [Army Chief of Staff Halts Virginity Tests Due to Unscientific Basis], Human Rights Watch, 3 August 2021. <https://www.hrw.org/id/news/2021/08/03/379442>.

11.3.6 Shifting Attentiveness to Care

Compared with 5 years ago, 55% of survey respondents believe that there is an increased understanding in the value of supporting women with caring responsibilities in UN peace operations, compared with 10% who disagree (35% do not know). Interviewees agree that there has been progress over the last 2 decades in the armed forces and police in regard to recognising and responding to the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities. According to one British military officer, for example: “We’re talking a huge gap in how we’ve progressed over those 25 years... We didn’t have the duty of care to our soldiers that we do today” (Interview #145). This officer refers to developments in training, work practices and awareness-raising that builds leadership and management skills and creates a more conducive environment for personnel to raise questions and seek support, for example, if they have caring responsibilities. Other British military officers agree, recognising shifts in acceptable working practices as better enabling personnel with caring responsibilities to work in the armed forces:

“““

... in my 25 years, I’ve seen a shift, a big shift, in supporting, for example, flexible working, hybrid working, giving people bespoke, you know, bespoke sort of start and finish times in order to allow them to have the childcare responsibilities, or indeed, their older parent responsibilities. So, I’ve definitely seen a shift and a change in mindset around that (Interview #80).

“““

... caring responsibilities and supporting families [are] more in mind than it was. It used to be, dogmatically – needs of the service, needs of the individual – in that order. Now I think they recognise that needs of the service are often supported well. If we look after the needs of the individual... the culture being driven from the top is important... there is an improving tri service approach to this (Interview #81).

Personnel from various T/PCCs highlight changes in human resources management in security sector institutions where, for instance, caring for the welfare and individual circumstances of personnel is now recognised as a critical element of leadership and organisational cohesion and effectiveness. A male military officer from Australia, for instance, suggests that “social mastery” is now “a key component of our own individual performance appraisal” and enables the Australian Defence Force to better manage and retain talent as well as enhance work culture, unit cohesion and performance. Others suggest increased responsiveness to the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities and, more broadly to issues around care and well-being, is the result of recruitment crises facing many militaries, in particular. This has led to initiatives to improve the “attractiveness” of the institutions in order to attract and retain people. A military officer from Canada explains efforts within the Canadian Armed Forces to improve recruitment and retention by focussing on caring responsibilities as a key barrier:



From a military personnel standpoint, I know the chief of Military Personnel right now in Canada, for example, has been looking at that and trying to increase childcare capacity and its availability, not only just in terms of spots, but in terms of hours of service that are provided. But yeah, I do think that in terms of the organisational culture of militaries, certainly it's been an afterthought. It's been an inconvenience, and it's only now, I think, where, across the board, organisations are struggling with recruitment and they want to maybe make it more attractive for people to stay in the military, that they're looking a bit more closely at work life balance and paying attention to the caring responsibilities of their members or the people that they want to recruit who value that (Interview #109).

Others suggest that improved responsiveness has occurred because of increased awareness of the need to diversify skills in light of the changing nature of the work of the armed forces, brought on in part by societal shifts and the changing nature of armed conflict, peacekeeping and defence.

In contrast to what many participants regard as progress over the last two decades, a British military officer believes that things have changed for the worse due to funding cuts, referring to on-site creche and other facilities for families at military academies a generation ago that no longer existed. Similarly, while some suggest change in the discourse around mental health and well-being has been a positive development, he identifies a contrary move away from “a more holistic view of people’s lives as service persons” towards a focus on cost effectiveness and “defence outputs, rather than actually caring” (Interview #134). As a result, people are leaving the armed forces: “they want to be more with their families, where they find other forms of employment [and] support” (Interview #134).

11.4 The Responsibilities of Leaders

Many participants underscore the importance of strong, caring leadership, to effect a change in work culture that encourages help-seeking and well-being, and that is responsive and empathic towards the needs of others, including personnel with caring responsibilities (Interview #80).

Many uniformed personnel across the 3 T/PCCs share examples of supportive leaders who enable them to manage their caring responsibilities, such as supporting their requests for absences or repatriation on compassionate grounds in the case of family emergencies. One retired female officer from the Indian Armed Forces, for instance, compares this support favourably to what she could expect in the corporate sector (Interview #24). However, others share stories of unsupportive leadership, with some being disinclined to seek support from leadership or disclose that they had caring responsibilities or family emergencies because it had been made clear that “personal stuff” should not be brought to work (Interview #159).

Several uniformed personnel we interviewed advocate for leadership models that are about “looking after your people” and are attentive to the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities (Interview #109). This is reflected in the comments of a retired General within the Indian Armed Forces, who says that part of his role as a commander is to care for the well-being of personnel, ensuring personnel take regular leave, particularly if deployed on hardship missions, and help ensure any family issues they are facing are addressed. He emphasises that this level of care towards his personnel extends to their families which he regards as part of his duty of care as a commander:

“““

... if I got an infantry unit of 800 people and I am a [commanding officer] and I have got 300 odd jawans [soldier] keeping families. Those 300 families and the children are my responsibility as a commanding officer, and I do discharge my responsibilities with total gusto. It is the difference between civil and army. While you talk about caregiving, we give care with a heart and soul. That caregiving is not there outside. You cannot compare us with civilian welfare (Interview #16).

Being attentive to the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities means leaders need greater awareness of “the pressures” of managing caring responsibilities, and the impact it can have on retention, participation, advancement and deployment (Interview #129). Several participants argue that leaders and managers do not take the issue of caring responsibilities seriously enough:

“““

[They] don't think through what it must be like for, for example, a 30 something or a 40 something male or female that is the sole carer for a child or children and still trying to maintain their career. I don't think that that side of the leadership and management training is good enough at the moment, and there should be a much better package for the leaders and managers to consider this in their daily business (Interview #129).

One Canadian female military officer shares that leaders need to acknowledge that families impact the well-being and performance of personnel, and so leaders must:

“““

... pay attention to military families because...it's the right thing to do [and] if you're not embedding that in your in your leadership philosophy, then I think that [you're] probably failing as a leader... That ability to care for your people, and what they hold dear, and what their day-to-day stressors are then that's a really important leadership trait, too (Interview #109).

This Canadian military officer recommends that this ethos of leadership should be embedded into training and evaluation, delivered by Member States and supported by the UN. Many argue that without such supportive leadership, operational effectiveness will be compromised because “if people feel like they not [supported] or understood in the workplace [they will] just go work somewhere else”, and this will have a subsequent impact on organisational capabilities and diversity (Interview #114).

To enhance awareness and empathy among leaders in security sector institutions and the UN, several participants recommend that the UN take the lead on bolstering training for leaders “to be more tolerant of the caring responsibilities, particularly for females, and the pressures that puts them under” (Interview #129).

Connecting the importance of organisational and individual responsibility, and the contribution that attentiveness to care can make to peace and security efforts, one participant underscores that investment in support for personnel with caring responsibilities can help create more effective leaders and operations:

“““

... we need to invest more in [and] value more care responsibilities... because who do we want as leaders in our security? We want empathetic people. We want people who can listen, who can understand... who can negotiate and communicate well, who are sensitive. I actually want these kinds of people, to provide and decide on our security... we want people who are strong and enduring and patient, decisive [and] also in the caring function (Interview #119).

11.5 The Responsibilities of Individual Personnel

Participants also recognise the responsibility of the individual with caring responsibilities – to manage their time and stress, have support networks in place for when deployed (Interview #133), have a “plan B” in case emergencies happen at home while on deployment (Interview #127), and make informed decisions about the work and commitment required in security sector institutions and deployments:

“““

... when you are in security sector and institutions, you are being responsible for other people's lives, it's not only work... So, it demands something extra out of an individual... And that extra will come only if you're able to dedicate yourself completely to the organisation and completely to the people who are serving... If you're not attentive enough, if you're not paying attention to the things, if you're not able to perform well, if you're not able to do your best, you're risking someone else's life (Interview #166).

Several participants also emphasise that personnel must be open about any struggles they are facing with managing caring responsibilities and work or deployment, in order to get the support needed, as highlighted by a female peacekeeper in MONUSCO:

“““

There have been times when I've had to step up caring for family members. And work has been able to support me, but they were only able to support me because they understood what I was going through, what my family was going through. So, there's the whole stoic keeping things bottled up...[it] doesn't work really, for anyone, in any circumstance. So, if, the team around you understands what your commitments are, because we in a working military environment, you come very close. You become like a family to each other, and you can support them if you understand what they're going through (Interview #63).

While uniformed personnel recognise that they have a responsibility to manage their home life and professional life, and have made informed decisions about their career path, many argue that it is still incumbent upon organisations to support them – as part of their duty of care and to ensure optimum performance and retention of talent. What they often find, however, is that caring responsibilities are regarded as a private matter by the institution, thus relinquishing responsibility on the part of their organisation to provide additional support. Many uniformed personnel feel that it is solely their responsibility to balance work (or deployment and other opportunities) and their family and feel they are often forced to choose between the two.



Si Longworth Photography, 2013

11.6 The Responsibilities of Other Stakeholders

A critical support mechanism for personnel with caring responsibilities are members of the families for whom they care; in the first instance spouses and then extended families, which tend to be more prevalent in countries in the Global South. For instance, a male officer recalls one of the first women from the Rwandan Defence Force to reach the rank of full Colonel and reiterates the importance of spousal and communal support for the career development of carers:



... during [her] significant time away...including deployments...it was a whole of community effort to ensure, you know, that support was provided to her son while she was away and she also attributed that to having a having an awesome and supportive husband. But I don't think that's like a systematic, deliberate decision by a military or by an organisation so much as it is as just luck of the draw of whether or not you actually have somebody who is going to be supportive of you and a family and a community around (Interview #108).

It is important to note, however, that while extended families can benefit women from the Global South who want to work in the security sector and deploy, these extended families can also increase the women's care labour.

Beyond individual personnel and their families, and the UN and security sector institutions, many participants point to other stakeholders that can help ensure better support for people with caring responsibilities, including governments (aside from ministries of defence and interior, respondents highlight ministries of health, welfare, labour, children, women) civil society (including NGOs, human rights organisations, religious and educational institutions, including higher education and research institutes), and the private sector. Some participants refer to the role of unions, financial institutions and insurance companies, as well as stakeholders engaged in delivering psychosocial support, providing childcare or developing camp infrastructure.

Many participants also discuss the important role played by networks and professional bodies, such as the UN's Network for Uniformed Women Peacekeepers (launched first in UNMISS in 2023)²⁸⁶ and the International Association of Women Police (IAWP). Informal networks also play a critical role (including Facebook groups, such as the UK's Army Servicewomen's Network) as well as associations within or affiliated to their service, an exemplar is the Army Women Welfare Association (AWWA) in India. These associations and networks can provide moral support and advice, including around managing caring responsibilities and service life, as well as opportunities to connect, network and access information. This can positively improve well-being, performance and retention.²⁸⁷ Others refer to the appreciated role that a "batman" (Pakistan) or "buddy system" – referred to as sahayak system (India) plays in providing informal support, whereby junior personnel assist officers with their caregiving and other responsibilities.

AWWA operates through a structured hierarchy that parallels the army command structure. Senior army officers' wives hold official positions and oversee the welfare of army families, and maintains awareness of local needs through its network of regional and local chapters. AWWA represents a comprehensive welfare model that has evolved from providing basic educational support to a sophisticated network addressing diverse family needs across the military community. The organisation's commitment to lifetime care for army families reflects its fundamental ethos. Amongst various aspects of welfare and caregiving addressed by AWWA, some important ones include:

11.7 Risks, Limitations and Benefits

Few people disagree that attentiveness to the well-being of personnel is important and can enhance mission and operational effectiveness. However, some raise concerns about expanding support for personnel with caring responsibilities, including the risks of blanket policies that fail to meet the needs of everyone as well as citing the cost implications.

While several uniformed personnel recommend embracing a case-by-case approach (adopted in many T/PCCs) in order to accommodate the diversity of needs, others believe there needs to be specific policies to respond to the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities in order to avoid favouritism and reliance on “having a good boss” (Interview #114). Bespoke policies would also best enable responsiveness to the large number of personnel concerned, thereby reducing the work involved to assess and respond to individual needs, and ensure no gaps. However, as one UK military officer asks: “if there was a standardised policy, would that work? Is my real question, because everyone has families, everyone has responsibilities” (Interview #81). Others caution that policies which support personnel with caring responsibilities would be “unfair” if the same entitlements are not afforded to all (Interview #145). As such, policies should be there to guide, but not constrain. Others agree and advocated for systems and processes to be more “empathetic” and open to “dialogue” (Interview #3).

Several military personnel across the three case study T/PCCs (UK, India, Indonesia) also emphasise that “the needs of the service must come first” (Interview #142) over the needs of the individual. Some suggest that attending to the needs of carers could compromise the ability of the service to “deliver

its task and then you put a lot more things at risk, and you put other people at risk” (Interview #142). However, it is also mentioned that being more attentive to the needs of carers does not mean reducing the workload, expectations or standards of those personnel, but involves responding to the needs of the individual so that they can give their best and the organisation can, in turn, benefit.

Many also recognise the significant cost implications of, for instance, increasing efforts to provide childcare, access to the internet in peace operations, and support to cover the costs of trips home during long deployments, especially given other competing priorities and limited resources. A British military officer, for example, believes: “...the provision has never been brilliant, but that brilliant is unaffordable” (Interview #81). However, others argue that these costs would be offset by the rewards of enhanced organisational and operational effectiveness (Interview #128), largely because of the diversification of skills and capabilities as well as the greater representation of women. As another British military officer says, excluding people with caring responsibilities from serving “would be massively a step back in terms of inclusivity, and – not only from a personal perspective, but from an operational output – [the service] couldn’t function without people with [caring] responsibilities” (Interview #136).



UN/Gregorio Cunha, 2021

Others highlight that support for personnel with caring responsibilities can enhance organisational effectiveness by attracting and retaining talent (Interview #108) and reducing attrition. This means, according to a Canadian female military officer, that “if you want the best talent...which links to your capability...you have to invest in these things” (Interview #109). Likewise, according to a retired General in the Indian Armed Forces, it is in the organisation’s interest to provide support for personnel with caring responsibilities as “you want the person who is deployed in the best mindset; to be able to discharge his duties” (Interview #3).

This research also points to the positive impact on staff well-being that is critical to organisational and operational effectiveness, and which can be enhanced with better support for personnel with caring responsibilities, as well as more comprehensive support for the safety and well-being of personnel:



If people are the most important asset to drive the capability, then the welfare of them, and the welfare of their families, and those they care most about is a fundamental input to capability, because people won't perform at their best unless they know, particularly if you're asking them to deploy and do arduous, dangerous and demanding situations in overseas operations, including in peacekeeping operations. How can we expect them to perform at their best if they're not having those aspects of their life, are not necessarily a certain and stable and cared for (Interview #108).

Here, participants allude to a relationship between duty of care, organisational attentiveness to the care responsibilities of personnel, and self-care, whereby organisational duty of care encompasses attentiveness to care, including personnel’s caring responsibilities and self-care.

In sum, while concerns are raised about cost implications, fairness and equality, and potential backlash of policies and practices that better respond to the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities, many participants underscore that greater attentiveness to care can positively impact well-being, performance, workplace cultures and safeguarding, as well as organisational and operational credibility and effectiveness. It can also help retain talent and decrease financial costs associated with attrition and the consequences of harmful workplace cultures. Moreover, it can help attract, retain, and facilitate the career advancement and deployment of women, who disproportionately fulfil caring responsibilities, thus helping to advance the meaningful participation of women in UN peace operations as well as T/PCC armed forces and police.

12 Recommendations

This chapter details the many recommendations shared by research participants and derived from analysis of the data, presented in the previous chapters. A brief summary of the recommendations is included in the Executive Summary. The recommendations below are structured by stakeholder, beginning with individuals – people who want to join security sector institutions, uniformed personnel and peacekeepers. Recommendations for the UN, T/PCCs and armed forces and police are then detailed, before concluding with recommendations for civil society and other stakeholders.



UNMISS (Nepalese FPU), 2017

12.1 People Who Want to Join Security Sector Institutions

Research participants offer guidance for individuals considering careers in security sector institutions, emphasising the value of entry pathways that provide opportunities to gain new skills, experience, and exposure to the sector. At the same time, interviewees stress the importance of critically considering the realities of security work, including its inherently high-risk nature, exposure to conflict-affected environments, physical danger, moral injury, and prolonged instability. Participants emphasise that entering the sector requires genuine commitment, passion for the work, and a clear understanding of the risks involved. Furthermore, interviewees give specific recommendations for individuals with caring responsibilities, or those likely to develop them over the course of their careers. They note that caring responsibilities can intersect with the security environment in complex ways, including challenges associated with separation from family, managing work–care balance, and navigating organisational cultures that may not be designed with caregiving in mind. Participants recommend that individuals carefully assess these factors prior to entry, including gaining a clear understanding of available policies, support mechanisms, and organisational flexibility. Finally, while acknowledging these challenges, some interviewees also underscore the positive aspects of security sector employment. These include the sense of purpose derived from the work, opportunities for professional growth, meaningful contribution to peace and security outcomes, and the development of highly transferable skills. Participants argue that these benefits should be weighed alongside the risks when making informed decisions about entering the security sector.

Consider how caring responsibilities and security work might impact each other

Existing or potential caring responsibilities should be considered before joining the sector or applying to UN peace operations and how this may influence a career in the security sector. This includes ensuring that there is sufficient support available for lengthy deployments and time spent away from families (Interview #41; Interview #71; Interview #113; Interview #148), and mentally preparing for separation from an individual’s family (Interview #146). It is recommended that individuals consider the risks of working in security institutions and how this may impact those they care for (Interview #174). The lifestyle that comes with working in the security sector (long periods of separation, unpredictable hours, frequently relocating) should be discussed with, and supported by, family members as this will influence the individual’s career and which opportunities they can take (Interview #70; Interview #71; Interview #76; Interview #150).

It is also important to know what policies are available in security institutions that can support people with caring responsibilities, including access to childcare, leave policies, benefits, and flexibilities in work schedules (Interview #119; Interview #123; Interview #137). Speaking with serving personnel about their experiences of working in a security institution with caring responsibilities is a helpful way of learning what they can expect in the sector before joining (Interview #109). It is also important to assess whether there are many women in senior leadership roles, whether the institution portrays itself as “being welcoming of families” (Interview #123), and for women to feel motivated and capable to join the military or police force (Interview #160).

Respondents also encourage people who want to join security sector institutions to not feel held back by their caring responsibilities:



Nobody has ever been free of care... [it] never ceases. It is either today you are caring for your mother. Tomorrow you care for your daughter. You care so if you are going to ever be free of care before you do anything, then you will never do it, But choose what you can somehow... (Interview #63).

Utilise opportunities to build a career in the security sector but be aware of what is involved

Interviewees urge people considering joining the security sector to take advantage of the opportunity to build a career and gain new experiences (Interview #50; Interview #155). They should also be fully aware of “what you are signing up for” (Interview #68), consider different viewpoints and “ask yourself...before you even join, do I really need this job” (Interview #178). People joining the security sector should “go into the organisation with eyes wide open” and prepare to join an organisation “who is there to...defend the country” which requires “personal sacrifice” (Interview #169; Interview #48) and following orders (Interview #44).

Consider the risks and challenges of working in the security sector

Individuals entering the sector should be open to an unpredictable lifestyle where, in the case of the military, they must be prepared to deploy at short notice (Interview #78) and anticipate high levels of travel, which can become more difficult for those who have families (Interview #68; Interview #71). They should also be aware of the challenging work environment in the security sector (Interview #169), which can involve working in “very high-risk situations” (Interview #119) and being exposed to “traumatising incidents” (Interview #160; Interview #72).

Consider the benefits of working in the security sector

Alongside some of the challenges some must consider before joining the security sector, there are benefits also highlighted by interviewees. This can include financial remuneration (Interview #42); education and health benefits, including for family members (Interview #33); strong bonds with colleagues (Interview #48), the opportunity to “honour your country” (Interview #42) and serve your community, and the potential to contribute towards justice and protecting people from harm (Interview #52).

12.2 Uniformed Personnel

Recommendations for those already working in security institutions include actively taking advantage of opportunities to advance their careers, particularly for personnel with caring responsibilities, as a way to mitigate the constraints these responsibilities can create over time. Participants specifically encourage individuals to front-load training, qualifications, and professional development early in their careers, and, where possible, to plan proactively around family formation and caring responsibilities.

Participants also emphasise the importance of clear and ongoing communication with families to build shared understanding, realistic expectations, and mutual support around the demands of security sector work. They further recommend that personnel engage early and constructively with their workplaces by proposing practical solutions for managing caring responsibilities alongside career progression, including flexible arrangements and policy-based supports. Finally, participants stress the critical role of men in the sector in actively advocating for, supporting, and enabling the advancement of women within security institutions.

Take every opportunity to learn and advance your career

For people already working in security sector institutions, participants recommend that individuals take every opportunity to advance their career and expand their skills, experiences and knowledge. This is especially recommended for women, where interviewees stress the importance of being “professional”, and to never “[refuse] a task just because you’re a woman” or because “[you] have children” (Interview #26). They also recommend women take the chance to learn from others and “if you get the chance [to deploy], grab it” (Interview #27).

Ensure you have clear communication with your family and work together to support each other

Research participants recommend that people working in security sector institutions maintain clear communication with their families, sharing any hopes or opportunities to deploy, as a “relationship is collaboration” and it is important to “be very open about [possible deployment] and discuss it with all of your loved ones” (Interview #72). It is also important to maintain open communication with families to avoid conflicts as long and unpredictable work schedules mean “you might miss some stuff...you might miss the school recital which your daughter really wanted you to go” (Interview #72). And while it is important to accept that some important events will be missed, “...it’s not worth it to jeopardise what you think might be your soulmate to go on a mission” (Interview #72). Therefore, while it is important to gain experience and take any opportunity to develop skills, “working as a team” with loved ones and maintaining personal relationships is equally important according to research participants (Interview #72).

Identify what support is available

To effectively work in the security sector and take advantage of opportunities for training, career advancement and deployment, personnel must proactively identify and engage with formal organisational policies, structures and processes that support those with caring responsibilities. This includes early and ongoing engagement with supervisors and the chain of command to discuss career planning, operational requirements and available flexibility.

Participants also emphasise the value of speaking with colleagues who have experience deploying or undertaking roles that require extended separation from family, to understand how they managed caring responsibilities in practice and to learn from peer strategies. In parallel, personnel should identify and strengthen external and informal support networks, including family members, professional networks and accessible childcare or other care arrangements. The availability, affordability, and flexibility of these supports, particularly during irregular and extended working hours typical of the security sector, were highlighted as critical enablers of sustained participation and career progression.

Ask for help if needed

Personnel with caring responsibilities express that there is a disinclination to ask for help when needed – if balancing work with caring responsibilities is challenging, for example – as it is regarded as a sign of weakness, is feared as corroborating maternal bias that mothers and care-givers “can’t cope”, or is simply regarded as a private matter that they should resolve themselves. Several participants underscore the importance of asking for help when needed in order to protect well-being and performance, avoid reliance on negative coping strategies, and help build a positive work culture that is supportive and open to discussions around care and well-being. This also has the opportunity for second order affects in helping leadership understand the challenges of the workforce with regards to work-life balance.

Men can be advocates for gender equality in security sector institutions and caregiving

For men in security sector institutions and UN peace operations, becoming more vocal advocates for gender equality in the workplace can effect change. Similarly, men can become advocates for caregivers that they work with, take on more caring responsibilities themselves or being more open and vocal about their care work. Doing so can shift the gender norms on care and security work within the sector (Interview #121).

12.3 Peacekeepers

Participants recommend personnel reflect deeply on whether deployment is right for them, and ensure they find out what support is available. Should the opportunity to deploy become available, individuals should mentally prepare for deployment and make adequate preparations for their families while away. Participants also stated that when deployed peacekeepers should commit fully to the peace operation, gain as much experience as possible, and draw from their experiences as caregivers to contribute to the operation.

Decide whether deployment is right for you and your family before you deploy

Research participants stress the importance of taking time to consider whether deploying to a UN peace operation is the right choice for the individual's current circumstances: "think before coming to this operation, they should know the commitments, the kind of lifestyle...because when you are here, you are cut off from everything" (Interview #153). Individuals should ensure they have the necessary information to make an "informed decision" about deployment "because that decision is going to help impact you in the long run" (Interview #171). This includes also considering "the post mission life" and how deployment will benefit their careers and their personal circumstances - including their families (Interview #39).

Mentally prepare for deployment

One of the key recommendations made by participants is to prepare mentally for deployment to UN peace operations and the challenges that might arise when working in a stressful and volatile environment (Interview #34; Interview #175; Interview #159). Mentally preparing for deployment also includes preparing to spend significant time away from families which "may impact an individual's ability to fulfill [caring] responsibilities" (Interview #37).

Prepare your family for your time away

In addition to preparing themselves mentally for deployment, individuals with caring responsibilities should ensure that they have made all necessary preparations for their families while they are away, including what to do in the case of a family emergency (Interview #175; Interview #146; Interview #37; Interview #41). They should also ensure that "the family you leave here will be safe" and that they have organised care and support so that the "family does not suffer too much from the absence" (Interview #54). Making sure the family understands why they are deploying and are prepared for their absence reduces the stress of being apart and the impact this can have on the individual's work (Interview #120), including minimising distractions while deployed (Interview #62; Interview #164). One interviewee recommends checking for family-duty stations so that a family can deploy together if given the option, but if this is not possible then "...the advice that I can give [is] to talk to someone...talk to your family" which is key to making adequate preparations and ensuring a "smooth" process (Interview #65).

Research participants also recommend that individuals take the opportunity to spend time with family before leaving for deployment given the long period of time they will be separated (Interview #43).

Sustain communication while deployed

Communication and spending time with family should continue while the individual is deployed as much as possible, with research participants recommending deployed individuals schedule frequent contact with their families (Interview #64). However, they should also prepare themselves and their families for the possibility that regular communication in some missions may not be possible due to problems with internet access. Participants recommend that personnel plan for and, where possible, request a regular time to communicate with families to stay part of routines. They also recommend identifying different ways of communicating with families to stay connected, such as gaming with children. For instance, one British military officer shares the way he connects with his son while deployed:



...probably two or three times a week, me and my son will game, not that I'm madly into gaming, but it's something that we have in common. Yeah, that we can share. And he will talk to me about different things while things are happening, you know, on screen or whatever we will have, because his mind is set on a game that will speak more freely to me than if we were just on the phone, for example, and I'm trying to force a conversation out of a 13 year old kid, you know (Interview #145).

Ensure you are aware of policies to support you and your caring responsibilities while deployed

Alongside mentally preparing for deployment and preparing families for long periods of separation, personnel should also look into what policies are available that may support them and their caring responsibilities while deployed (Interview #159). This includes being aware of policies ranging from allowances to “parental leave, emergency leave, and flexibility in deployment” (Interview #37; Interview #149). It is also recommended that personnel reach out to individuals who have previously deployed and who may be in similar situations to gain as much knowledge on what support is available and learn from others’ experiences (Interview #114).

Checking whether family packages for deployment are available is suggested by some research participants, however they also encourage individuals to consider costs of childcare - particularly for single parents deploying - and of housing and relocation (Interview #118; Interview #138).

Participants also recommend that individuals ensure they know what informal support is available to them should they deploy, including how their families and support networks can help while they are away, including how they can support in the event of an emergency, such as a family emergency or in the event they are injured or killed while deployed (Interview #163).

Practice self-care while deployed

Participants recognise that peace operations are stressful environments and family separation can be a key stressor on deployments, with implications for well-being, performance and safeguarding. Participants thus emphasise the need for peacekeepers to exercise self-care, be alert to signs of stress, and use well-being tools and resources provided by the UN or T/PCCs, including speaking to counsellors or using well-being apps. Participants also encourage being open to connecting with others deployed to the mission (Interview #146).

12.4 UN

Participants recommend that the UN encourage greater support by T/PCCs for personnel with caring responsibilities and the deployment of uniformed women with caring responsibilities, in leading by example, including providing robust support for its own civilian staff with caring responsibilities. There is also broad consensus that the UN has a key role to play in raising awareness of women's critical role in security work and peacekeeping, as well as sharing lessons learned and good practices regarding efforts to support personnel with caring responsibilities. Doing so will thereby address one of the key drivers to women's meaningful participation in security work and peacekeeping. Participants also consider that the UN could use its influence to encourage T/PCCs to ensure adequate living conditions and amenities are provided on mission, not least access to the internet to enable peacekeepers to keep in touch with families and support networks at home. Where T/PCCs have inadequate resources, some participants recommend the UN should directly support the provision of internet access. Likewise, participants recommend that the UN use its influence to encourage T/PCCs to enable peacekeepers to travel home during R&R on long deployments. Finally, participants suggest bolstering training for peacekeepers and for leaders to better address the impacts of caring responsibilities on the meaningful participation of personnel, and improved monitoring mechanisms of gender parity strategies.

Lead by example

One civilian interviewee from South Sudan argues that the meaningful participation of women needs to start at the top level, recommending that the UN appoints a female Secretary-General to promote institutional change (Interview #107). This is echoed by others who explain that culture and behavioural change requires change at the leadership level.

To inculcate systemic change, the UN can strengthen its own policies and practices to better support its civilian staff with caring responsibilities. This includes promoting and implementing flexible working arrangements, providing on-site childcare where feasible (or support for childcare costs for children under five-years-old), access to lactation rooms (including private spaces and accommodate time to lactate) and more frequent R&R for parents of newborns and young children in duty stations.

It is also recommended that more attention be given to mothers who return from maternity leave, recognising that all parents (regardless of gender) require additional support as they now must manage both employment and caring responsibilities – as well as navigate maternal bias. This should include more flexibility rather than “treating people as one size fits all”, providing training opportunities to help retain carers in the sector as well as learning from their experiences and sharing knowledge in the organisation to help support other carers (Interview #116).

Allow more flexible working arrangements for new parents

Interviewees recommend that the UN implement more flexible working arrangements for staff in missions and in headquarters wherever possible. This is particularly emphasised for civilian staff who have younger children and are able to conduct some of their work remotely (Interview #39). Though others argue that it can be applied to peacekeepers, where remote and flexible working arrangements can become more normalised due to the changing nature of peacekeeping which increasingly includes remote or online components (Interview #101). Allowing more flexibility in working hours, schedules, and arrangements can also help address the work culture of the mission which is “suited to usually a male without children” (Interview #114). This can be done by “[revitalising] the policies that guide the peacekeeping operation”, such as job-sharing and improving the scheduling of staff to accommodate more flexibility in working hours and ensuring no additional burdens or responsibilities are placed on some while others are on leave (Interview #120).

Consult with peacekeepers and T/PCCs to learn lessons

Several participants call for more engagement between the UN and peacekeeping personnel, both serving and former, to learn about good practices and identify issues to address. This can be done through a “survey with [troop and police] contributing countries, security personnel consultation, and workshops” (survey respondent). By identifying what problems emerge during deployment, the UN can make informed decisions on how to address issues as “once you start talking about something, I think you start finding a solution about it” (Interview #90).

Share lessons learned and good practice

The UN can play an important role in facilitating “exchange reflections” with and between Member States as well as share lessons and good practice on how to better support uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities and, thereby increase the meaningful participation of women in security sector institutions and UN peace operations. However, it should remain up to the Member State to integrate lessons and approaches that best respond to the specific context of the country and its institutions (Interview #102; Interview #88).

Raise awareness of women’s critical role in security and peacekeeping

Alongside T/PCCs and other stakeholders, the UN can play a key role in sharing information and raising awareness of women’s roles in the security sector to facilitate attitudinal change. By increasing awareness and exposure to women in security roles, it will “allow the person to think what you see” and lead to more men “empowering their daughters or empowering women” to enter the security sector (Interview #178). The UN can also play a critical role in raising awareness of how and why to support the meaningful participation of women and personnel with caring responsibilities in peace operations.

More careful negotiation of MOUs between UN and T/PCC

Some participants recommend more negotiation between the UN and the Member State prior to signing the MOU, to ensure protection of peacekeepers’ well-being and provision of basic amenities and conditions on mission (Interview #60) and said that “critical issues” are often ignored during this negotiation phase, leaving problems for the mission (Interview #59). However, others recognise such negotiations and extending support might discourage T/PCCs from deploying personnel (Interview #108). Irrespective, a gendered lens should be applied to negotiating MOUs.

Work with T/PCCs to develop and support gender-responsive policies and practice on mission

According to some participants, more efforts can be made by the UN and T/PCCs to work closer together to develop more effective and consistent gender-sensitive policies for peace operations, to encourage women’s deployment (Interview #51; Interview #53). This should include efforts – and resources – to have separate, safe and gender-responsive accommodation and facilities on mission where they do not currently exist (Interview #50; Interview #102).

Improve monitoring mechanisms to ensure gender parity strategies are being met

To ensure gender parity strategies are being met and upheld, participants encourage the UN to improve the monitoring mechanisms to shift beyond measuring numbers of women being deployed to instead focus on measuring operational impacts (Interview #88). As one Australian officer argues, the focus on numbers results in women being deployed to roles so the mission “can say they’ve had a female”. But rather gender should be integrated throughout all of mission planning, across all activities, logistics, communications, and operations to normalise women’s participation “so they are thinking about it intuitively, versus ‘oh, now I add on the gender’” (Interview #88). This also includes monitoring women’s participation in civilian roles in the mission (Interview #107; Interview #151).

Participants also suggest including job satisfaction in monitoring mechanisms, including the satisfaction levels among staff and likelihood of redeploying (Interview #151). The UN should appoint a role to monitor deployment processes to UN peace operations, ensuring that “all measures are in place” and that personnel are aware of support available to them and have access to these policies (Interview #60).

Improve facilities and resources to protect peacekeeper well-being and safety

To support peacekeepers’ well-being, recognising the stress of working in peace operations, which can be compounded by family separation – particularly with limited means to communicate with them or travel home during long deployments – several participants recommend the UN does more to ensure access to healthcare and psychosocial services on mission. One Indonesian police officer suggests that providing support to “maintain the physical and mental health of staff in peace operations is essential” (Interview #37). This includes increasing the number of available counsellors, providing “medical [checkups]” and “stress management training” (Interview #49; Interview #116). In addition to provision of services and resources, the UN should ensure leaders are equipped with information to support the well-being and self-care of peacekeepers (Interview #39) and make efforts to destigmatise help-seeking and mental health issues (Interview #69). Other recommendations include advice, support and resources to provide facilities and activities (such as sports or social activities) that help peacekeepers destress on mission (Interview #39; Interview #41; Interview #49).

Provide more support for carers on mission, including working with T/PCCs to ensure peacekeepers are able to remain connected to their families while deployed

Some participants consider that the UN could do more to ensure better support for peacekeepers, including ensuring T/PCCs provide adequate conditions and amenities, such as means of communication between peacekeepers and family and friends. Many suggest the UN work closer with T/PCCs to ensure that staff have access to stable and reliable wi-fi to remain in contact with their families, including providing staff with private spaces to make calls and making sure staff have time aside each day to contact their families and friends (Interview #48; Interview #90; Interview #116; Interview #147; Interview #102). Several highlight, though, that assisting with provision of wi-fi should be a last resort when T/PCCs cannot do it due to limited resources or mission remoteness.

Advocate for and/or support assistance for peacekeepers to travel home on R&R during long deployments

The stress of family separation is exacerbated on long deployments in which the peacekeeper cannot travel home on R&R due to limited leave or financial support for travel. The UN could advocate for or help support travel home on R&R during deployments of 12-months or longer.

Establish clear and consistent guidelines for leadership to follow across the mission

Some participants mention the role that leadership plays in shifting the work culture to be more inclusive (Interview #38). Here, several recommend the UN establish clear and consistent guidelines for leadership in peace operations. Doing so will ensure “a sense of predictability” and to “take some of the stress away from ad hoc decisions” by providing clear operating procedures for leadership to draw from (Interview #69; Interview #114). Participants also call for more accountability among leadership to ensure that operational effectiveness includes the active participation of women in planning and decision-making processes (Interview #88).

Review Duty Station classifications

Several participants recommend reviewing the classification of non-family duty stations, as some are considered to be safe enough for family members. Review and reclassification may enable more personnel with caring responsibilities to deploy.

Lead on Bolstering Training for Leaders

Several participants recommend the UN takes the lead on bolstering training for leaders “to be more tolerant of the caring responsibilities, particularly for females, and the pressures that puts them under” (Interview #129).

Incorporate Family and care Issues into delivery of and advice for Pre-Deployment Training

The UN typically sets standards for training, and should therefore ensure pre-deployment training includes items on how to prepare for and manage home life and family relationships while deployed (Interview #53), as well as stress management (Interview #160).²⁸⁸

Establish a network for carers to support each other on mission

Alongside recommendations for increased formal support for people with caring responsibilities in UN peace operations, some also call for more informal support. For instance, the UN could support a network for personnel with caring responsibilities to support one another while on the mission, perhaps connected to other established networks such as the UN’s Network for Uniformed Women Peacekeepers (Interview #101). This can also include a buddy system to help newer personnel adjust to the mission (Interview #49).

Address the masculinist work culture in peace operations

Research participants argue that addressing the masculinist work culture in peace operations should be a priority for the UN to support its efforts to increase women’s participation in peacekeeping. This means creating a work environment that is “female friendly” (Interview #76; Interview #88) and “motivating and encouraging” for everyone deployed (Interview #107). One interviewee emphasises the importance of establishing a work environment that is “conducive...motivating and encouraging” for carers as this will encourage greater participation of women in peace operations (Interview #107).

12.5 T/PCCs

UN Member States provide the overarching policy guidance and strategic direction for security sector institutions and can ensure the availability of funds to address strategic priorities. They therefore play a critical role in efforts to address the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities and advance the meaningful participation of women in security sector institutions and in UN peace operations. Many participants recommend key policies to be developed or reviewed around the age of recruitment and deployment, and duration of deployment, as well as investment in care infrastructure (or support to subsidise the costs of care for personnel), travel home during R&R on long deployments, and means of communication with families and support networks while deployed.

Facilitate women's engagement in security sector institutions to increase the number of women deployed to UN peace operations

Recognising that the meaningful participation of women in peace operations is hampered by women's underrepresentation in T/PCC armed forces and police, particularly among troops and in combat roles, T/PCCs and other stakeholders need to invest in attracting, recruiting, retaining and promoting women. This includes providing support for personnel with caring responsibilities, addressing gender and maternal bias, and strengthening family-friendly policies and work-life balance. As a female police officer from Indonesia highlights, unless this occurs, women will continue to be underrepresented in the sector and on peace operations:



... care responsibilities can contribute significantly to the under-representation of women in a range of careers, including managerial positions and international placements. Difficulties in balancing work demands with family responsibilities, combined with a lack of adequate organizational support, can exacerbate these inequalities. To increase women's representation, it is important for organizations to implement policies that support work-family balance and provide the necessary support to facilitate women's participation in all career levels and placements (Interview #37).

Pay for communication services for deployed contingencies, including phone and wi-fi

Remaining in contact with families on deployment is critical to reducing the stress incurred by family separation. Investment in access to stable internet and communication services is thus a priority to ensure peacekeepers' well-being and, in turn, ensure the deployed individual can remain focussed on the mission, enhance performance and improve safeguarding. Moreover, personnel should be provided with more private spaces to speak with their families and friends (Interview #46; Interview #144).

Provide support to enable peacekeepers to travel home during R&R on long deployments

Many participants recommend peacekeepers on deployment for 12 months or more should receive financial assistance to cover the costs to travel home on R&R during deployment. This recognises the impact of family separation on peacekeepers' well-being and the difficulty of managing caring responsibilities remotely for long periods of time. This also addresses the prohibitive costs of flights which is a barrier for peacekeepers who are deployed to remote locations or missions far from their home (survey respondents; Interview #57; Interview #100).

Offer shorter deployments

While some peacekeepers are resistant towards shorter deployment periods because of the adverse impact it could have on the mission, unit cohesion, remuneration to support families and career progression, several participants recommend offering six-month deployments to enable more women and other personnel with caring responsibilities to deploy. Although some challenges may emerge as a result of shorter deployments, including the costs of repatriation and the need to train and deploy new contingencies in shorter periods of time (Interview #83; Interview #99), many argue that six-month deployments will increase the number of women in peacekeeping (Interview #83). By ensuring more women are able to access opportunities to deploy, it will encourage others to follow suit as more will feel encouraged to deploy and learn from the experiences of other female personnel (Interview #102).

Invest in infrastructures of care

Governments of T/PCCs should invest in accessible and affordable childcare and broader care-support infrastructure to enable women's full participation in the workforce, including within security sector institutions. Care infrastructure must be designed to accommodate the long, irregular and unpredictable hours commonly required in the security sector. Dedicated budget lines should be established, with clear implementation responsibilities and monitoring mechanisms to ensure accountability and impact.

Invest to retain talent and enhance performance

Many recommendations aimed at better supporting personnel with caring responsibilities involve significant costs, including the provision of childcare, extending paid parental and carers leave, reliable access to internet connectivity and travel home on deployments. These financial implications often deter Member States from fully and meaningfully adopting such measures. However, "if you want the best talent... which links to your capability... you have to invest in these things" (Interview #109). Similarly, many argue that if you want people to perform well, including on deployments, and reduce attrition, investment is necessary (Interview #3; Interview #19).

Raise the age limit of deployment and recruitment

To address some of the barriers to women's meaningful participation in peacekeeping, the age limit of deployment can be raised. This will accommodate those who take career breaks or are unable to deploy while children are young, for instance (Interview #93).

Raising the recruitment age could also help attract those women who leave the security sector due to caring responsibilities and are seeking to return or looking for a second career. This could also help address the recruitment challenge facing many militaries due to demographic shifts in many countries²⁸⁹ and the decline in the attractiveness of the armed forces as an employer of choice.²⁹⁰



Like a lot of countries, birth rates are dropping. The military is not necessarily an employer of choice. Maybe to tackle the limitations, we have to look at care through a different lens, or the career model through a different lens (Interview #86).

Increasing the recruitment age to militaries among women is also recommended by a retired senior Indian military officer:



... a lot of militaries are finding it hard at the moment, globally, in the western military's and the notion of perhaps attracting a bit of an older workforce, like women who've had their children young, and they're bringing to service a little bit older, you know, kind of breaking away from that traditional 18 to 24 year old target group that recruit (Interview #97).

A UK male military officer agrees with taking more bold, innovative steps to increase the representation of women:



... we need to probably do some fairly aggressive management interventions to improve representation of women at all levels. I think the, I think the bottom-up approach is probably a little bit too simplistic, and we need to think about bringing in senior women laterally. And some of them may have had career break, some of them may have had kids (Interview #81).

Dialogue between T/PCCs to advance gender parity

Some participants recommend that T/PCCs commit to implementing gender parity strategies by holding frequent meetings among leadership to report implementation status and updates, and share lessons and challenges with other members (Interview #82). Ongoing dialogue ensures greater transparency and collaboration between T/PCCs and can help move implementation beyond “checking the boxes” (Interview #167). Moreover, it provides an opportunity for T/PCCs to identify and communicate what further support they may need from the UN.

12.6 Armed Forces and Police

Research participants make a number of recommendations for the armed forces and police to support personnel with caring responsibilities and thereby advance women's meaningful participation in the security sector and in UN peace operations. Recommendations include:

- **Policy** review or reform, including to ensure policies are responsive to gender and the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities, with particular consideration given to human resource policies;
- **Infrastructure** audit, to provide childcare facilities (or subsidies for childcare and other care) and access to private spaces for lactation;
- **Awareness-raising**, to ensure personnel and leaders are aware of the challenges of managing caring responsibilities and work in the sector as well as the contribution of women and care-givers to the sector and to peace operations;
- **Information-sharing**, to ensure personnel with caring responsibilities have information on what support is available to them as well as on deployment and other opportunities;
- **Training** review to ensure personnel with caring responsibilities can access it and to ensure it includes care issues, such as self-care and how to manage family separation in pre-deployment training;
- **Take disciplinary action** against discrimination on the grounds of parental status or gender, and address gender and maternal bias;
- **Investment in peacekeepers' well-being**, to include provision of adequate living conditions on mission, means of communication and assistance to travel home during R&R on long deployments;
- **Support structures** for caregivers to include mentors, advocates and networks;
- **Support families** with access to education, healthcare and accommodation, particularly for the families of deployed personnel.

Ensure all organisational policies are gender-responsive and promote women's meaningful participation

The majority of survey respondents recommend that security sector institutions establish or improve existing strategies and policies aimed at advancing gender equality and women's meaningful participation. Such processes should identify and seek to address key challenges facing caregivers by speaking directly to them, as well as draw from global good practice (survey respondents).

Participants also recommend a review of all organisational policies – particularly, but not limited, to HR policies, such as recruitment, promotion and leave policies – to ensure they are gender-responsive and help create a safe and enabling environment for women to have equal opportunities to work and advance their careers. This review process should engage gender experts and be undertaken for all future policies that are developed or amended (survey respondents).

Several participants recommend increasing the number of women involved in policy-making and decision-making processes, while others underscore the importance of moving away from the concept of policies needing to be gender blind or gender neutral, recognising that this can inadvertently discriminate against women or men if their experiences and needs are overlooked (Interview #88; Interview #102).

Collect gender-disaggregated data to inform operational decision-making

Several participants recommend that security organisations conduct regular “gender analysis, gender data and gender perspectives [to] inform and...[be] integrated in the standard operating procedures, situational awareness and early warning” (survey respondent). Ensuring data collection is gender-responsive will further strengthen monitoring mechanisms to measure women’s meaningful participation, resource allocation, and strengthen gender informed policy- and decision-making.

Establish structures and processes to ensure implementation of policies that support caregivers and women in the sector

Participants consistently identify a gap between policy and practice, noting that policies intended to support caregivers are not always implemented due to limited awareness or a lack of leadership support. To address this, participants recommend a care audit to identify needs and gaps in support. They also recommend the development of clear implementation plans and roadmaps for policies aimed at advancing women’s meaningful participation and supporting personnel with caring responsibilities.

Suggested measures include establishing dedicated monitoring units or roles to oversee implementation, which would help structure and support delivery while strengthening accountability. Several survey respondents also propose the introduction of formal complaint mechanisms to enhance accountability and “provide channels for employee feedback on support received,” enabling organisations to “regularly evaluate the effectiveness of support measures” (survey respondents). In addition, respondents recommend regular assessments of policies related to gender equality and caregiving support to ensure commitments are being upheld and progress systematically tracked (survey respondents).

Move beyond box-ticking

Gender quotas, for some participants, are an important and necessary policy to move towards equal participation of men and women (Interview #120). Others argue policies must move beyond increasing numbers to creating conditions that provide equal opportunities for women and men to work, train, advance and deploy (survey respondents).

Many participants also advocate that efforts to advance gender parity should move beyond a box-ticking exercise or tokenism (Interview #88) and towards more meaningful efforts to advance gender equality. Part of this requires effort to ensure women have opportunities to work across security institution structures, including at leadership levels and beyond gender normative roles, in what are perceived to be “female jobs” such as administrative or other support roles (Interview #88; Interview #101). It also involves shifting the narrative away from positive discrimination towards recognising the skills, capabilities and contributions of women. Security sector institutions must also ensure they represent the communities they serve and recognise the need for diverse perspectives, and therefore meaningful and systemic efforts are required to address attraction and retention issues to achieve greater diversity and representation (Interview #88). Moreover, participants encourage more open discussions within security sector institutions about gender norms – including around security and care work – and how these can impact women’s engagement in the sector as well as work culture, well-being and performance indicators (Interview #90).

Develop carer-sensitive promotion procedures

To ensure personnel with caring responsibilities are able to advance their careers and secure leadership positions, some participants recommend that criteria for promotions could include a broader set of “skills, qualities and experiences policies” to accommodate constraints they may face, thus avoiding indirect discrimination (Interview #108). Others recommend provisions are made to accommodate career breaks due to pregnancy or caring responsibilities, and which may impact demonstrating promotion credentials, deploying or training.

Provide information on deployment opportunities to women with caring responsibilities

Alongside policies that support women’s careers in the sector, institutions should empower women. This includes ensuring female personnel have adequate information on what training and deployment opportunities are available to advance their careers and so women are better able to make decisions for themselves and “[allows] them to grow” (Interview #86). Institutions and individuals should refrain from assuming women with caring responsibilities do not want to deploy or cannot make informed decisions about deploying or how their caring responsibilities should be managed in their absence.

One interviewee from Indonesia suggests leadership raise awareness on “life in the mission” to quell fears women may have about their personal safety when deploying to UN peace operations. This may also help increase the number of women deploying as many women do not have the support of their husbands to deploy for fear “it’s too dangerous” (Interview #27).

Raise awareness of the impact of caring responsibilities on personnel

In being able to support personnel with care responsibilities, many participants recommend a need for deeper appreciation among personnel and leaders of what it means to have significant caring responsibilities, in practical, financial, emotional and other respects: “I don’t think we understand it structurally, systemically, what carrying the entirety of what caring involves, it’s not just I pick up the kids... I need flexibility and (certain) hours so I can shuttle the kids between things...” (Interview #115). Specifically, participants recommend awareness among leaders of how caring responsibilities can impact careers, what support is available and “what else can be done to support parents” (Interview #113; Interview #47). Others recommend that career managers identify barriers and viable alternatives for personnel with caring responsibilities (Interview #113). Some participants emphasise that lack of organisational support and negative assumptions about caregivers compounds these challenges, which also need to be given greater attention.

Through sensitisation campaigns among leaders, policymakers, and decision-makers about the specific needs and challenges of personnel with caring responsibilities, underlying barriers, such as attitudes towards women and mothers in the workplace, can be more meaningfully addressed. Though these campaigns, along with other awareness raising and training, security sector institutions must attend to intersectional identity factors and cultural contexts, recognising that care work and the impacts of caring responsibilities on recruitment, retention, advancement and deployment of women varies across contexts and are influenced by the socio-cultural background of women (Interview #112; survey respondents).

Of course, efforts should not only be directed towards leadership but across personnel more broadly, normalising care giving and encouraging self-care, particularly among male personnel. Shifting norms through awareness raising is argued by many participants to contribute towards perceptions that care work is a shared responsibility and that organisations should provide requisite support to enable personnel – regardless of their gender identity - to work in the sector and be able to fulfil their care responsibilities.

Identify and address maternal and gender bias

Similarly, participants argue that more robust efforts are required to draw attention to and address maternal bias and broader attitudes towards women in the armed forces and the police, including when deployed to peace operations:



I think the problem is still we're not cracking the nut about people's attitudes towards women... the UN is, you know, trying to put in place all these policies, they've got the Elsie initiative, you know, to try and... address some of those barriers that some countries still have in place that impact women's ability to qualify and then deploy for peacekeeping... You can do all of that, but if you don't actually change the culture of the peace missions themselves... in which women are harassed, bullied, intimidated, discriminated against, sexually assaulted, raped, and all these other things that happen, then, you know, you're never going to achieve what you're seeking to achieve, which is a greater balance of women in peacekeeping operations (Interview #113).

In the first instance, raising awareness of these attitudes and bias is required. Thereafter, efforts to address bias through information campaigns, training and performance reviews is required.

Take action to address discrimination

Several participants underscore the importance of efforts to challenge maternal bias and raise awareness of the impact it can have on women's deployment and career progression opportunities. They also mention the need to adhere to set policies and procedures that provide for fair and equal treatment. Codes of conduct should explicitly refer to non-tolerance for discrimination on the grounds of parental status or other caring responsibilities, as well as gender, and the measures that will be taken in the event of non-compliance. This should be communicated widely to ensure compliance and help address and reduce maternal bias.

Ensure equal access to opportunities

To accommodate challenges to accessing opportunities for training, career progression and deployment, several participants recommend that caring responsibilities are taken into account in training schedules and promotion procedures. Some recommend "frontloading" women from recruitment, to give women a boost early in their careers to accommodate for potential career breaks and missed opportunities when they may have caring responsibilities later. This might also help advance more women into senior roles (Interview #81).

Advancing gender equality requires giving special attention to the different ways that security and care work impact men and women and ensuring women have information on what opportunities are available and are empowered to apply for them (survey respondents). This is especially important considering women are often assigned the bulk of care work alongside their employment, while also facing additional barriers in education, training, and promotion throughout their lives (survey respondent).

However, several participants recommend that men and women should be treated equally, while noting that equal treatment does not necessarily equate to equal access to training, career advancement and deployment opportunities (Interview #85; survey respondents).

Improve human resource policies and implementation

Security sector institutions should improve human resource (HR) policies and management to better support personnel with caring responsibilities, such as the provision of adequate leave for caregivers, including parental (or maternity and paternity) leave, carers leave and emergency leave (Interview #37; Interview #45; Interview #47; survey respondents).

Policies should also be reviewed to ensure they accommodate diverse caring responsibilities. This means avoiding the assumption that all caring responsibilities refer to children, and all caregivers have a spouse at home who is taking the lead on care. Several uniformed personnel state that policies appear to assume there is someone at home helping with caring responsibilities, not appreciating that the partner may also be working or there may be no partner (Interview #94).

Dual-serving spousal policies should also be reviewed to identify where spouses can be deployed or posted together (if a family duty station, to keep families together where possible and where sought by personnel) and where they should not be deployed simultaneously (for instance where the mission is dangerous, to ensure there is always one parent with the children and avoid both parents' lives being at risk) (Interview #81).

Policies concerning compassionate postings should also be reviewed to ensure they do not unnecessarily hinder the careers of those who request such postings due to family emergencies or having caring responsibilities.

Efforts should also be made to ensure personnel and supervisors are familiar with HR policies and personnel are able to avail themselves of their provisions – and support is not simply dependent on sympathetic supervisors. Civilians working in the UN note that there can be strong and supportive policies, but their supervisors sometimes do not allow them to access these. Conversely, many participants refer to supportive leaders that respond to their needs even in the absence of policy. Supportive policies and oversight to ensure implementation would ensure support and equal treatment.

Some survey respondents recommend officers are designated to support personnel with caring responsibilities, providing information and support when needed.

Provide for and encourage uptake of parental and paternity leave

Women's meaningful participation in the security sector and on peace operations can be advanced by promoting the equal division of caring responsibilities among men and women. This can be done by providing parental and paternity leave and encouraging uptake by men (including by addressing stigma and potential impact on careers).

Support flexible working arrangements

HR policies can also be improved to better support personnel with caring responsibilities by providing opportunities for flexible working arrangements (FWA) to include remote or home working, job-sharing, part-time work and flexible worktimes, where feasible²⁹¹ (Interview #111; Interview #164; survey respondents; Interview #37). This includes making flexibility a part of policy “so we don't leave it to bargaining” and making support immediately available for people who meet certain criteria, rather than relying on personnel to reach out and request support (Interview #90).

Allowing FWA can help mitigate attrition of uniformed women with caring responsibilities and avoid women needing to choose between their career and family (survey respondent). It can also move workplace cultures away from presenteeism mindsets and shift bias that personnel who have caring responsibilities and sometimes leave work early to respond to family emergencies are a hindrance to workplace productivity (Interview #83). Policies should also include mechanisms which ensure that flexible working arrangements “don't act as a tool to blame and discriminate those who chose that option” (survey respondent).

Improved knowledge of FWA policies and better communication from leadership is also needed. Leadership should also be provided with more training and guidance to support their employees with caring responsibilities who require FWA, and how to effectively manage teams with diverse needs and working hours (Interview #83). For instance, one survey respondent suggests a “care taking guide” for leadership and personnel to know what support mechanisms are available (survey respondent).

Provide or support access to infrastructures of care and support for caregivers

Several recommend adopting “family-friendly” policies that increase access to childcare, including provision of wraparound childcare in the workplace, to accommodate long working hours, reduce travel time and ensure provision is readily available. This is particularly important given personnel can be posted to new areas at short notice, where waiting lists for nurseries or schools can be long and often expect parents to sign up many months or years in advance at considerable cost.

In the absence of the direct provision of care facilities, several participants recommend subsidising the costs of childcare, recognising that childcare is often provided from the informal as well as formal sector, and the costs for elderly or dependent care (Interview #45; Interview #122; Interview #118; Interview #37; survey respondents). This also means being attentive to the different needs of parents and children and providing adequate support for all personnel and their families, for instance ensuring care is available for differently abled children.

Prioritising personnel with families for housing is also recommended for the armed forces (Interview #109), while others suggest prioritising children of serving members in private school allocations, or providing education assistance for children. Providing leeway for children of uniformed personnel to transfer schools mid-term can help ease the caregiving burden for many parents who need to relocate in the middle of school terms. Alternatively, some participants suggest that the armed forces revise their policies to align their postings with academic calendars for personnel with families, where possible.

Provide private spaces and time to lactate

Security sector institutions should provide lactation rooms or safe, private spaces for women to express milk. They should also be given a scheduled time to express milk, which is considered in workloads (Interview #45; Interview #122; survey respondents).

Support for personnel returning from extended care-related leave and career breaks

Invest in supporting personnel returning from maternity leave or long periods of parental and carers’ leave, as well as personnel returning from career breaks due to caring responsibilities. This can include career guidance prior to departure and upon return, and will help mitigate the challenges to meaningful participation that arise through having caring responsibilities, and ensure personnel well-being,

Give greater attention to men and people with diverse gender identities in policies for caregivers

More attention should be given to the caring responsibilities of men and people of diverse gender identities, as they are often overlooked or underestimated. Greater attention recognises the shared responsibility of care work and can help advance a more equal distribution of care work and, thus, greater gender equality in the security sector. This can also help advance the greater representation of women in peace operations (Interview #127; survey respondent).

Ensure training is held at times that do not exclude caregivers

Participants refer to residential training as often excluding personnel with caring responsibilities. It is important that training is scheduled at times and places that does not inadvertently marginalise caregivers, for instance requiring travel, or delivered over a weekend or for extended periods. Consideration should also be given for the development of modular training which can mitigate the need for personnel to attend residential training for extended periods, instead being away from home in 'blocks' of time.

Expand pre-deployment training

Several participants recommend improving the pre-deployment training to help staff prepare for and adjust to the mission and have “knowledge of what it’s like in the field” (Interview #101). Some suggest that pre-deployment training should include specific workshops for caregivers, including sharing information on what support policies are available to them prior to their deployment and how to manage caring responsibilities and family matters while deployed (Interview #160; Interview #151). Pre-deployment training should also ensure it addresses mental health issues, self-care and stress management while deployed, as well as address stigma associated with seeking mental health support (Interview #160).

Provide pre-deployment counselling

Prior to deployment, some participants suggest that the armed forces and police provide counselling and guidance to help personnel prepare for the mission and to help them adjust to the work environment of a UN peace operation. This helps personnel gain a “clear picture and understanding of what is ahead” and helps them prepare for the time spent on the mission and away from their families (survey respondent; Interview #76).

Invest in peacekeeper well-being and self-care

Many participants advocate for better care for peacekeepers well-being on mission, noting varying levels of support and living conditions. One male peacekeeper in MONUSCO, for instance, calls for more investment in well-being for deployed personnel, including stress management training that helps peacekeepers manage separation from their families (Interview #76). Others recommend greater provision of psychosocial support or counsellors on mission, as well as provision of structures, activities and resources that help well-being and support self-care. Many emphasise the importance of improving living conditions and amenities in many missions, recognising this is primarily the responsibility of T/PCCs. Others call for further effort to destigmatise mental health in order to promote help-seeking and self-care, emphasising the role of leaders to inculcate a work culture that is responsive to well-being and care (Interview #80).

Improve post-deployment support

Participants refer to the need for post-deployment training, support and guidance to facilitate reintegration and reconnection, including with families, improve mental health and best utilise skills and knowledge developed while deployed (Interview #87).

Support women's leadership

Research participants advocate for greater representation of women and greater diversity in leadership in the armed forces, police and UN peacekeeping. This would set an example, shift mindsets and work cultures, and encourage the development and implementation of policies that better support personnel with caring responsibilities and advance the meaningful participation of women. To effect change and better support caregivers in the sector, participants recommend more people in leadership positions who have caring responsibilities, especially women as they are often “not being promoted” due to the impacts of their caring responsibilities on their career progression (Interview #91).

Many participants underscore the links between investment in supporting personnel with caring responsibilities and workforce retention and more significant diversity in leadership roles.

Establish a pool of female personnel to support and share information on deployment and leadership positions

If one does not yet exist in the country's institution, military and police personnel recommend their institutions establish a pool of female personnel who wish to deploy for the first time or deploy again, as well as similar pools for “future leaders”, ensuring they are provided with all necessary information for deployment or career advancement, respectively (Interview #83; Interview #101; Interview #37). It is recommended that this be taken on by HR to improve the number of women being deployed, promoted and progressing in their careers (Interview #83). These “pools” can also potentially operate as an informal support network with members sharing information with each other and providing mutual support, advice and encouragement.

Establish a network of peacekeepers within and between security sector institutions and T/PCCs

Others recommend establishing a network for former peacekeepers with caring responsibilities to share information, knowledge, and experiences on deployment to help support and empower other personnel who wish to deploy (Interview #34). This network can be established within each T/PCC and within each service, with connections across services and T/PCCs, as well as to existing global support networks (such as the IAWP and UN's Network for Uniformed Women Peacekeepers).

Encourage and support mentors and advocates

Mentors and advocates are considered by many personnel to be critical to creating supportive environments in the security sector and peace operations for uniformed women with caring responsibilities. They should therefore be encouraged and supported in the security sector.

Undertake organisational care assessment and work with carers to inform care-responsive policies

Security sector institutions should consult with personnel with caring responsibilities to “identify their challenges and understand how to better support them” (survey respondent). Doing so will capture “new ideas” to help meaningfully address the challenges (survey respondent). It will also avoid unsubstantiated assumptions about the needs of caregivers and avoid homogenising their experiences (survey respondents; Interview #123). A formal organisational care assessment can also be undertaken to determine the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities.²⁹²

This can be complemented by gender-disaggregated research on the take-up of parental leave and analysis of data from exit interviews on whether caring responsibilities was a factor in departure, to ascertain how to further support personnel with caring responsibilities.

Recognise the contributions of caregivers and the diversity of roles in peacekeeping and security work

Many participants draw attention to the skills, capacities and perspectives they have developed through their caregiving work, and highlight how these can benefit and be better utilised by peace operations and security sector institutions. Others underscore the importance of supporting personnel with caring responsibilities to retain and broaden a diversity of skills, capacities and perspectives that can be utilised to better respond to the needs and motivations of diverse communities as well as better respond to the complexity of threats. Efforts are needed to raise awareness of these additional and diverse capacities – in part to challenge maternal bias that often positions mothers as a hindrance to productivity and effectiveness, and in part to improve mission outcomes. Others urge that not all roles in peacekeeping require long-term deployment or even deployment, pointing to remote and support roles, including planning, strategic development and oversight that can utilise talent unable to deploy due to caring responsibilities. Others suggest uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities can be “repositioned” to civilian roles – but still play a critical role in peace operations – such as policymaking or government liaison (Interview #116).

Acknowledge that caring responsibilities do not stop during deployment

There is often a prevailing assumption that those engaged in peace operations are “unencumbered”.²⁹³ Many emphasise that most peacekeepers have caring responsibilities, if not primary or sole caring responsibilities. Participants urge greater recognition of this and acknowledgement that, while peacekeepers are typically physically separate from families while on deployment to peace operations, this does not mean caring responsibilities stop or the private/family life does not impact peacekeepers while deployed, and so demand attention not least because of the impact on well-being and performance. As one survey respondent states: “The private life has a big impact on the wellbeing, even if you are on a mission, your private life is not on a pause. So, if your private life is well functioning, you will have better opportunities to contribute to the work you are doing in the mission” (survey respondent).

Address masculine work cultures and shift attitudes towards women and carers

To advance the meaningful participation of women, participants advise institutions address the prevailing masculinist work culture that poses a barrier for many women. This means introducing efforts to change the “culture” and the “mindset” of the security sector to ensure that women “have the same chances” as men and are given “responsibilities and command positions” (Interview #102).

It is also recommended that security sector organisations adopt inclusive language, providing ongoing training and awareness raising workshops, and “[put] in place policies and practices” that aim to shift the perception towards care and promote a more inclusive, responsive and caring work culture (survey respondents).

Provide support for families of deployed personnel, including childcare, education, healthcare and psychosocial support

In addition to increased support for personnel with caring responsibilities, participants also make recommendations for increased support for families of personnel, particularly in the instance where the serving family member is deployed. This includes offering “psychological support for family members who [stay] behind”, especially when deployment is for a longer duration (Interview #45). It can also include establishing a “fund or [setting] up a team to support employees’ families in their absence” (survey respondent) and providing opportunities for “networking amongst the spouses” to establish informal support networks (Interview #163).

Others suggest that in addition to providing financial support to cover the costs of childcare, education allowances for children be provided (they often are) to help with education costs such as “schooling, bus, pickup, food and all that, all in one”, as this would ease the stress placed on the parent or caregiver remaining at home (Interview #117; Interview #46).

Additionally, adequate healthcare should be provided for family members (it often is) should medical assistance be required while a family member is deployed, and “health insurance or social [workers]” to visit elderly family members under the care of personnel while they are deployed (Interview #117; Interview #46).

For those who deploy to family-duty stations with their family members, establishing and maintaining liaison among these families and with local authorities is emphasised by some to ensure reliable support for families during an emergency.

Finally, interviewees recommend that the security services give special attention to families during the post-deployment reintegration process, providing additional support for families to help them adjust (Interview #109; Interview #83).

Integrate an ethics of care

Beyond attending to the impacts of having caring responsibilities on the engagement, training, advancement and deployment of uniformed personnel, several participants recommend that the armed forces and police adopt a care lens in their policies and practices. This approach centres the well-being and welfare of personnel – and those they serve. It includes paying more attention to PTSD, for instance, and making the workplace a supportive and empowering environment (Interview #132; Interview #81).

Integrating care into operational policies, practices, and procedures also means that security sector institutions are more sensitive and responsive to the needs of those they serve. It can mean privileging connectedness, relationality and empathy – capabilities many highlight which are central to care work and critical to peacekeeping work. As one survey respondent explains, it can mean adopting an approach that is attentive to the “care needs” of those they serve to allow personnel to “truly connect and feel with others” (survey respondent).

Duty of care

Exercise organisational duty of care for the safety and well-being of personnel to include supporting personnel with caring responsibilities, recognising the links between well-being and attentiveness to caring responsibilities.

12.7 Civil Society and Other Stakeholders

Beyond the UN and T/PCCs and those who work – or aspire to work – in them, support for personnel with caring responsibilities and, relatedly, for the meaningful participation of women in peace operations, requires a whole-of-society approach.

Adopt a whole of system approach

Advancing women’s meaningful participation in UN peace operations should be a whole of system approach that includes all international, governmental, and non-government organisations to change cultural norms. Efforts should be made across the whole humanitarian, development and security system to increase the meaningful participation of women in peace operations, and should not rely solely on T/PCCs and the UN. Rather, approaches should include “agencies, funds, and programs”, promoting women’s and girls’ participation in education and increasing access to schools and addressing gender-based violence and other harmful gendered barriers. This will contribute to changing gender norms, attitudes and biases across broader social and cultural structures and enhance women’s meaningful participation in security sector institutions (Interview #98).

Raise awareness of barriers to women’s employment

Civil society organisations and other stakeholders should raise awareness of the gender and care norms that restrict women’s employment and participation in the security sector. This awareness raising should include how and why to address these restrictions (Interview #107).

Recognise care work as a shared responsibility

Recognise and communicate that care work is a shared responsibility. This would help acknowledge the caring responsibilities of men and people of diverse gender identities, whose care work is often overlooked or underestimated, as well as reduce the expectation placed upon women that care work is their responsibility. This is incumbent on multiple stakeholders. One interviewee recommends that parents ensure they teach their young children the importance of gender equality and respect for one another regardless of gender identities, including having conversations that unpack stereotypes on who performs what roles (Interview #111)



13 Good Practices

Good Practice: Canada

The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has implemented a number of policies to help support personnel with caring responsibilities. For instance, personnel are provided a maximum combined 1 year of maternity or parental leave, including 16 weeks of maternity leave and 37 weeks of parental leave. Personnel are also given medical support throughout this period.

For personnel who deploy to UN peace operations, the Home Leave Travel Assistance (HTLA) reimburses peacekeepers for travel expenses incurred while taking leave to visit family members. The CAF also provides compassionate status, which allows for geographic postings for reasons such as family related issues.

Members of the CAF are also given 3 days post-deployment debriefing sessions in Brussels, Belgium. Here, they are given appointments “with social workers” and “time to relax” and decompress between the mission and returning home (Interview #70).

Additionally, the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services provides support to members and their families. Bases and wings have Military Family Resource Centres which work with military families to achieve work-life balance, providing support through childcare, peer support networks, counselling and emergency services. One Canadian peacekeeper explains:



...[the Military Family Resource Centre] is a place to support your family while you're deployed or away, or even if you're away for two weeks, on course, and it, and it doesn't matter if it's for the primary caregiving or secondary, for want of a better term, if, if someone's away, and it provides emergency services, provides child care, it provides peer support networks, it provides counselling. So, it's extremely good practice, and it's a really good institution, and it's something that's grown over the past 25 years to provide that level of support (Interview #150).

Good Practice: British Armed Forces

The British Armed Forces have a number of good practices to support personnel with caring responsibilities. For instance, flexible maternity leave arrangements include shared parental leave that extends up to 52 weeks. Apart from 2 weeks of mandatory leave that a mother must take, the balance of leave, up to 50 weeks, can be converted into shared parental leave and also covers adopting parents.

The British Armed Forces also have several policies to accommodate flexible working options, including Remote Working, Variable Start and Finish Times, and Compressed Working and Leave policies. The Armed Forces (Flexible Working) Act 2018 also allows personnel to request part-time work and limit the days away from their home base to 35 (Flexible Service) to improve work-life balance and enable personnel with families to balance demands. For these policies, the Royal Airforce won the Working Families' Best for Mothers Award in 2020, and the Army was a finalist for the same award in 2023. The Army was also commended by Working Families in 2022 under the Best for Fathers Award category for initiatives introduced within its flexible working policies.

In 2022, the UK Ministry of Defence adopted a breastfeeding policy which ensures access to private and suitable spaces for breastfeeding and pregnant personnel. It provides guidance for leadership on how to manage personnel who are breastfeeding, including information on how to best support their staff, including physical activities and daily tasks. The British Army's Guide to Creating Breastfeeding & Wellness Room provides information on setting up lactation/breastfeeding rooms and what facilities are required, including a fridge, comfortable chairs and storage.

The Continuity of Education Allowance provides up to 90% of boarding school tuition fees for children of serving personnel who are expected to move over 50 miles within the next 4 years. It is designed to support families to ensure that their children's education is not interrupted as they would otherwise normally be required to move with their parents. We heard from serving men and women how this policy supports their careers in the armed forces as it ensures continued access to opportunities, such as training and deployment.

The Royal Air Force won the 2020 Working Families' award Best for Mothers due to the measures in place to support women in the service retain and advance their careers after having or adopting children. Some good practices include giving advice and support to both mothers as well as their line managers as they take leave and return to work, flexible working arrangements, no deployment for the first 18 months after having their child, and in some cases affordable childcare was set up where local providers were too costly.

The armed forces also have special fitness training for ante- and post-natal personnel, support women in accessing specific healthcare services, and provide resources to commanders to support pregnant women and those returning from maternity leave. Other forms of support include parent networks among British Army and Royal Navy personnel, a Defence Breastfeeding Network for the wider defence force and a Defence Child Bereavement Network.

MoD (UK) (2023) Flexible Working and You: A Guide for Serving Personnel. London: MoD. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6448f450814c66000c8d0680/Flexible_Working_and_You_Apr_2023.pdf.

UK Defence Committee (December 2021) Protecting Those Who Protect Us: Women in the Armed Forces from Recruitment to Civilian Life: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report, Fourth Special Report of Session 2021-22. London: UK House of Commons, 2 December 2021. https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/8060/documents/82952/default/?_gl=1*1iyr2xm*_up*MQ.*_ga*MTAwNDY4NTY0Mi4xNzI0MTEyMDcy*_ga_9684J19FT4*MTcyNDExNjk2MS4yLjAuMTcyNDExNjk2MS4wLjAuMA.

Day, N. (December 2024) 'Supporting Infant Feeding in the Armed Forces: The Defence Breastfeeding Network,' Maternity & Midwifery Forum. <https://maternityandmidwifery.co.uk/supporting-infant-feeding-in-the-armed-voices-the-defence-breastfeeding-network/>.

Good Practice: UK Carer's Passport

In 2024, the UK introduced a Carer's Passport for Defence personnel with caring responsibilities to help manage both work and care. The passport is intended to create consistency for personnel, particularly when changing roles or managers, and to inform planning of assignments by taking into consideration the circumstances of employees. By introducing a Carer's Passport, personnel who have negotiated flexible working arrangements no longer need to renegotiate these arrangements from scratch when changing roles or managers, reducing disruptions and stress.

Good Practice: UK Policing

Since 2017, police institutions in the UK have partnered with the UN on the HeForShe Campaign. Each police institution in the UK has signed up for the initiative. Since 2019, UK Policing have released 7 *Gender Equality in UK Policing* reports. These reports contain events, initiatives, programmes and good practices on eradicating misogyny and sexual harassment in the workplace. Examples include workshops, listening circles and internal communications campaigns aimed at shifting attitudes and normalising respectful behaviour; development with the HeForShe Alliance of a 'Male Allyship Toolkit', training of personnel to actively support gender equality and model inclusive behaviours; introduction of flexible working advocacy programmes; dialogue and other initiatives to address maternal bias and promote acceptance of maternity and care within police culture. One example of many instances of good practice highlighted in these reports was the Maternity Evidence Café conducted in June 2024 by the Lancashire Constabulary, with the HeForShe Alliance, Women in Policing Network and the Open University. The purpose was to exchange knowledge on organisational policies and procedures in place to support police who are pregnant, on maternity leave and returning to work after maternity leave, as well as discuss lived experience and gaps in support. This information subsequently informed recommendations for policing on how to improve support. While challenges persist, the campaign has improved women workplace safety and participation in police institutions across the UK.

Additionally, UK police institutions have supported flexible working practices, including part-time working, job sharing, school term time working, compressed and staggered hours, flexitime, and remote or home working. This has led to working part-time becoming an established norm and supporting the engagement and career advancement of women in the police, recognising the gendered nature of care work and the challenges of managing family and professional life.

Gender Equality in UK Policing reports available on the HeForShe website: <https://www.heforshe.org>.

UK Policing (2024) Gender Equality in UK Policing. Sixth Annual Report 2024. <https://www.heforshe.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/HeForShe%20Annual%20Report%20-%202024.pdf>.

Gender Equality in UK Policing: [First Annual Report, 2019](#); [Second Annual Report, 2020](#); [Third Annual Report, 2021](#); [Fourth Annual Report, 2022](#); [Fifth Annual Report 2023](#), [Sixth Annual Report 2024](#), [Seventh Annual Report 2025](#).

UK Policing (2024) Gender Equality in UK Policing. Sixth Annual Report 2024. <https://www.heforshe.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/HeForShe%20Annual%20Report%20-%202024.pdf>.

College of Policing (2013). Flexible Working in the Police Services. https://assets.college.police.uk/s3fs-public/2021-02/flexible_working_in_the_police_service.pdf. Srivastava, Devyani and Kapoor, Roshni (2023). Strengthening the role of women in policing: Compendium of Institutional Policies, Programs and Initiatives Across the Globe. National Law School of India University, Bengaluru and Hanns Seidel Foundation, India.

Good Practice: Indian Armed Forces

Indian Armed Forces provide an array of policies that support personnel with caring responsibilities, including:

- **Generous leave provisions** – Annual Leave, Maternity and Paternity Leave, Childcare Leave (CCL), Medical Termination of Pregnancy Leave, Child Adoption Leave
- **Compassionate postings** – to enable personnel to attend to critical caregiving needs, and temporary attachments for caregiving purposes, such as relocation to areas with reliable communication networks to help personnel remain connected with families – not always possible due to high demand and may become less possible as more women enlist.
- **Spouse co-location:** to support dual serving couples be located to the same location, where feasible
- **Separated Family Accommodation (SFA):** Housing provided for families when personnel are deployed to field areas or UN missions, ensuring families have secure living arrangements in or close to cantonment areas.
- **Medical support:** Extensive network of military hospitals that provide free-of-cost medical care to all personnel and their dependents, with support for families' accommodation costs if relocating to support personnel at medical facilities
- **Educational support** – availability of Army Public Schools at most stations with priority admission for personnel's children and provision of transport to-and-from school, plus provision of Child Educational Allowance (CEA). AWWA also provides support for children with additional needs and is gradually introducing day-care centres and creches, and area where greater provision is needed to encourage recruitment and retention of women
- **Pensions:** A pension is provided for unmarried or divorced daughters of personnel after their death.

Good Practice: New Zealand Police

In 2016, the New Zealand Police established the Police Women's Advisory Network (WAN) to support the recruitment and advancement of women in the police. It provides advice to the Police Commissioner and Police Executive on strategies to recruit, retain and advance women within the police, and has been engaged in initiatives including mentoring programmes and leadership forums.

Another supportive network is the Mums in Blue Facebook group, which was established in 2021 by New Zealand Police Constable Shayna Tapusoa. The group connects hundreds of women police who are balancing their work with being a mum. It provides a safe, peer-led space for support, advice and sharing information. It has led to initiatives within the New Zealand Police to convene senior leaders and subject matter experts to address challenges facing women police with children.

In 2025, the Mums in Blue Network received the Excellence in Law Enforcement Initiative for Women in the Community Award from the Australasian Council of Women and Policing (ACWP).

Srivastava, Devyani and Kapoor, Roshni (2023). Strengthening the role of women in policing: Compendium of Institutional Policies, Programs and Initiatives Across the Globe. National Law School of India University, Bengaluru and Hanns Seidel Foundation, India.

Government Women's Network (GWN) (New Zealand) (2022) Annual Report. December 2022. <https://gwn.govt.nz/assets/Resources/GWN-documents/GWN-Annual-Report-2022.pdf>.

ACWAP (2025) 2025 ACWAP Award Recipients. <https://acwap.com.au/news/2025-acwap-award-recipients/>.

Good Practice: Norway

To address low uptake of parental leave among men, Norway introduced a father's quota which - since 2018 - provides 15 weeks of paid non-transferable leave. This has seen an increase in men accessing parental leave and has since been adopted in other Nordic countries, including Sweden and Iceland. The father's quota encourages greater sharing of caring responsibilities between men and women, with one interviewee explaining that the quota ensures "fathers [can] be with their kids" and making it "very natural for the male parent to stay home with the kids as [it is] for the female" (Interview #79).

Ellingsæter, A.L. (2021) 'Conflicting Policy Feedback: Enduring Tensions over Father Quotas in Norway,' *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 28(4): 999-1024. doi: 10.1093/sp/jxaa027; DCAF (2022) Norwegian Armed Forces MOWIP Report. Geneva: DCAF, 19 December 2022. <https://www.dcaf.ch/norwegian-armed-forces-mowip-report>.

Good Practice: Uruguay

In a project supported by the Elsie Initiative, the Uruguay Armed Forces (UAF) are trialling six-month deployments to encourage more women to participate in peacekeeping. The shorter rotations include job-sharing arrangements, assigning two women to a position where each deploy for six months, with both personnel receiving their pre-deployment training up front (Interview #86). The shorter rotations intend to encourage "more women with caring responsibilities [to] deploy because they would be gone for shorter periods from home" (Interview #87).

Alongside this pilot project, the UAF, with the support of the Elsie Initiative Fund, also provide support for personnel with caring responsibilities while they are deployed to help facilitate their meaningful participation and representation. This includes financial support for child and elderly care to help eliminate some barriers to deployment.

The UAF also recognises the important role of leadership and acknowledges the influence of workplace culture in shifting biases and stereotypes towards caring responsibilities. Efforts are being made to build an enabling work environment where personnel with caring responsibilities feel able to speak with management about any issues related to their caring responsibilities and have access to entitled leave without impacting their career progression.

EIF (November 2025) 'Peacekeeping and Parenting: How Uruguay's Women in Uniform Balance Duty and Family,' EIF, 5 November 2025. <https://elsiefund.org/2025/11/05/peacekeeping-and-parenting-how-uruguays-women-in-uniform-balance-duty-and-family/>; Gbeily, E. (October 2024) '4 Ways Countries are Strengthening Women's Participation in Security Efforts,' UN Peacekeeping, 18 October 2024. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/4-ways-countries-are-strengthening-womens-participation-security-efforts>; EIF (n.d.) Uruguay Armed Forces, Elsie Initiative Fund – Project Profiles. <https://elsiefund.org/projects-profiles/uruguay-armed-forces/>; UN (2024) Towards Equal Opportunity for Women in the Defence Sector. New York: UN. https://www.un.org/ssr/sites/www.un.org.ssr/files/general/dpo_women_in_defence_web.pdf: 45.

Good Practice: Ghana

The Ghana Armed Forces have implemented a number of policies and projects to support women in the security sector and carers in the armed forces. For instance, apart from three months maternity leave entitlements, mothers can negotiate flexible work arrangements which allow them to work half days upon returning to work (Interview #63).

Ghana is also implementing a Gender Strong Unit (GSU) program supported by the Elsie Initiative, which requires battalions and police units to deploy a higher number of women than is outlined in the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy (by at least 5 percent). As part of the program, Ghana has deployed a GSU to UNIFIL, where efforts to accommodate higher numbers of women have included increasing the number of separate accommodation and facilities, improving their wellbeing and capacity to fulfil their peacekeeping duties (Interview #86).

Good Practice: Indonesia

Indonesia is one of the most significant contributors of female peacekeepers globally. Many uniformed women we spoke with in Indonesia expressed satisfaction with the opportunities, fair treatment and respect they had received, with many having been deployed to UN peace operations multiple times and many having achieved high rank. The Government, the armed forces and police also demonstrate commitment to enhancing opportunities to advance the meaningful participation of women in the security sector and UN peace operations, demonstrated in several initiatives. Notably, Indonesia advocated for improvements to support the meaningful participation of women in peacekeeping during presidency of the UN Security Council (UNSC), which led to the Security Council passing Resolution 2538 (2020) on women and peacekeeping. UNSCR 2538 is the first resolution on peacekeeping devoted in full to women, and the first resolution in the history of Indonesian diplomacy in the UNSC.²⁹⁴

With specific regard to supporting personnel with caring responsibilities, Indonesia has comprehensive legislation that provides childcare and responds to the broader needs of care-givers. The Indonesian National Armed Forces and the National Police have instituted many initiatives to better respond to the needs of personnel with caring responsibilities. These initiatives include both formal policies and informal practices, an empathetic response among many leaders towards the challenges that primary care-givers can face. For instance, several uniformed women from Indonesia provide examples of supportive commanders and supervisors who allow them to take time off for family emergencies, flexible hours at work to accommodate caring responsibilities and, on occasion, bring children to work. Formal policies include provisions for maternity, emergency and other forms of leave to support care-givers.

Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia (August 2020) UN Security Council Passes Indonesia's Resolution on Female Peacekeepers. Jakarta: Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, 29 August 2020. https://setkab.go.id/en/un-security-council-passes-indonesias-resolution-on-female-peacekeepers/?TSPD_101_R0=086c094b6eab200014a21239db6ae25f1b553316bd124b075bee7699a0ea4feddf0b277edcb4b7f208931fbb001430006ecae19bdeed89c080404c3ef034fd5a33961b1f5eb14bba20b241c2bc1facef994b0ead9408bd44a0603ec28da787688; UN Women Indonesia (2024) Women, Peace and Security in Indonesia. Country Brief, Jakarta: UN Women Indonesia. https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/wps_country_brief_indonesia_20240403.pdf.

Good Practice: Pakistan

Military and police officers from Pakistan highlight the support provided by a “batman” to help with their caring responsibilities. A female peacekeeper in MONUSCO shares she has arranged for a batman to help care for her elderly parents (Interview #62), while a senior police officer explains that she introduced the concept and role of a batman in her service in order to increase the recruitment of women:



And as a chief, I've introduced the culture of having women you know, you know the concept of a person that's built in the structure of both army and police, where you have a personal, you know, kind of a batman you say, or you say personal you who dresses you up, cares for your uniform and everything. So I have introduced it every place, we had cooks, we had gardeners, we did so we had structured them to be able to hire women (Interview #90).

Good Practice: Staff Association and Networks

Many participants refer to formal networks, such as the UN's Network for Uniformed Women Peacekeepers; informal networks and Facebook groups, such as the UK's Army Servicewomen's Network; international associations, such as the International Association of Women Police (IAWP); and associations affiliated to their service, such as the Army Women Welfare Association (AWWA) in India. Such networks and associations provide invaluable professional networks, moral support, information and mentoring to them as parents and women in the armed forces or police.

Good Practice: Network for Uniformed Women Peacekeepers

The Network for Uniformed Women Peacekeepers is a UN initiative launched in 2023 to connect and empower women in military, police, justice, and corrections roles within peacekeeping missions. It aims to connect women peacekeepers to share experiences, enable peer support, and provide a platform to elevate women peacekeepers' unique challenges and contributions, thereby improving mission effectiveness and fostering a more inclusive, supportive environment for women peacekeepers. The Network is coordinated by the DPPA-Department of Peace Operations (DPO) Office for Coordination and Shared Services (OCSS), in partnership with the Office of Military Affairs (OMA), the Police Division, and the Justice and Corrections Service, with support from Germany.

The **Network** provides an important example of how UN-led, peer-based, mission-level networks can support care, wellbeing, and inclusion within peace operations.

A core function of the Network is creating **safe and trusted spaces** where women peacekeepers can discuss challenges related to deployment, caring responsibilities, wellbeing, and workplace culture. These forums help reduce isolation, particularly for women deployed in male-dominated units or remote locations, and enable collective problem-solving around care-related issues that are often treated as private or invisible.

The Network also plays a key role in **information-sharing and peer support**, helping members navigate organisational systems, understand available welfare and family-related policies, and access support services. By connecting women across contingents, ranks, and components, the Network facilitates the exchange of practical strategies for managing care, stress, and professional demands during deployment.

Importantly, the UN Network of Women Peacekeepers contributes to **institutional learning and advocacy** within missions. Through engagement with mission leadership and UN structures, Network members raise awareness of gendered and care-related barriers to participation, retention, and performance. This includes advocating for improved duty of care, psychosocial support, flexible arrangements, and safer, more inclusive work environments.

In peacekeeping contexts where operational pressures are high and support systems are uneven, the Network demonstrates the value of **relational, care-centred approaches**. By strengthening connection, visibility, and voice, the Network supports individual wellbeing while contributing to more inclusive, resilient, and effective peace operations.

The Network can be reached via dpo-womenpknetwork@un.org.

Good Practice: International Association of Women Police (IAWP)

The **International Association of Women Police (IAWP)** is a global organisation for women police. It provides a global example of how professional networks can support care, wellbeing, retention and career advancement within policing and peace operations. Established in 1915, IAWP is a non-profit organisation dedicated to providing women police with a range of resources, and opportunities for networking, training, collaboration and mentoring to advance women in policing. Members represent more than 70 countries and 30 affiliate organisations.

IAWP creates safe and inclusive spaces where women police officers—many of whom balance demanding operational roles with caring responsibilities—can share experiences, access mentoring, seek support, help others, and advance their careers. Through its international conferences, regional chapters, and online platforms, IAWP connects women across ranks and career stages, helping to reduce isolation, build capacity and address challenges, including normalising discussions about care, wellbeing, and work–life integration in policing.

A core strength of IAWP lies in its emphasis on **peer networks and mentoring**. These networks enable women officers to exchange practical strategies to address challenges, including managing caregiving responsibilities alongside operational demands, deployments, and leadership roles.

IAWP also plays an important role in **advocacy and organisational change**, promoting policies and practices that support women’s engagement and advancement in policing.

In peacekeeping and international policing contexts, IAWP’s global reach enables cross-cultural learning. By fostering connection, sharing good practice, and amplifying women’s voices, IAWP contributes to more inclusive policing cultures that recognise and value care and help advance the meaningful participation and advancement of women.

Overall, IAWP demonstrates how **network-based, relational approaches** can complement formal institutional policies, supporting women police, including personnel with caring responsibilities, while strengthening leadership, retention, and organisational capacity.

More about IAWP can be found on their website: <https://www.iawp.org>

Good Practice: India – Army Women Welfare Association (AWWA)

The Army Women Welfare Association (AWWA) is regarded as “a fundamental pillar of the Army system” by participants (Interview #22). AWWA is a registered NGO that functions as a welfare organisation dedicated to supporting army personnel and their families, particularly when they are on active duty. It was established in 1966 by wives of senior male officers to support the wives of junior personnel, in the aftermath of the war between India and Pakistan when a lot of the spouses of personnel were widowed. This support also helps deployed personnel, as recognised by one representative of the Association:



... if they know that somebody is supporting the family or my family is being looked after, I think they will be able to deliver much more, you know, with peace of mind that somebody is there to take care of my family, look after them. So, this was a felt need then that we need to have some support system within us, within the organisation who will look after the families once, and because they'll be far away, communication those days was not so easy (Interview #23).

AWWA operates through a structured hierarchy that parallels the army command structure. Senior army officers' wives hold official positions and oversee the welfare of army families, and maintains awareness of local needs through its network of regional and local chapters. AWWA represents a comprehensive welfare model that has evolved from providing basic educational support to a sophisticated network addressing diverse family needs across the military community. The organisation's commitment to lifetime care for army families reflects its fundamental ethos. Amongst various aspects of welfare and caregiving addressed by AWWA, some important ones include:

Educational Benefits

- AWWA provides certificate courses in collaboration with the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (Prime Minister's Skill Development Scheme) to wives and dependents of Army members to promote economic empowerment and financial independence.
- Pre-primary schools under AWWA's initial aegis.
- 32 Asha schools across India for differently-abled children.
- AWWA hostels for girls and boys in major cities (Mumbai, Pune, Kolkata, Delhi).
- Education Grant made available by AWWA to wards of martyred service members.

Healthcare Support

- Early intervention centres in 7 hospitals for detecting disabilities at birth, established on AWWA's recommendation.
- Perna Patient Welfare Committee: Provide social and emotional support to patients suffering from cancer and their caretakers, through counselling sessions by trained volunteers.
- Ex-Serviceman Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS), or Sparsh (meaning 'caring touch') program to assist elderly with navigating digital healthcare systems.
- While initially focusing on emotional support through volunteers, AWWA has recognised the need for professional counselling services, as evidenced by the establishment of dedicated counselling cells in Army hospitals.

Financial and Legal Empowerment

- Guidance on entitlements and benefits and providing support for filing paper-work and legal work through a 24-hour helpline.
- Collaboration with micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) for financial independence training and small business development.
- Ex Gratia Grant: immediate financial relief from AWWA to the next of kin of all ranks of the Army who died on duty.

Childcare Services

- Subsidised creches/daycare in cantonments at some stations introduced in 2024, recognising the changing demographics of army families, with more women joining the armed forces (typically wives of serving personnel). AWWA is in the process of establishing subsidised childcare facilities specifically targeting stations where more than 50% of army families are dual career households. These childcare services also operate long hours to accommodate the long working hours of military personnel.

Social and Emotional Support

- 24-hour helplines for various issues including marital discord.
- Virangana Seva Kendra: Single Window facility for paperwork, pension, and grievance redressal of any other army-related issues for widows of servicemen who were killed in service.

Care-giving support is also provided on overseas deployment, when senior AWWA members accompany their Commanding Officer (CO) spouses on duty and engage with families of personnel posted there to address their issues and help develop solutions to domestic concerns, allowing the CO to focus on security affairs.

In addition to providing physical, emotional and financial support to Army spouses, some AWWA members also act as a liaison between COs, their soldiers and the soldiers' spouses. Communication between spouses and AWWA members is carried forward to the latter's high-ranking officer spouses for resolution, and by addressing these domestic challenges effectively boosting morale and operational efficiency of personnel. Thus, AWWA provides support for domestic challenges even in a professional environment, to the personnel on duty and his/her dependents back at home.

14 Annex 1: List of Interviews

Interview	Date	Gender	Sector	Country Site
Interview #1	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #2	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #3	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #4	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #5	19/3/2025	Female	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #6	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #7	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #8	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #9	19/3/2025	Female	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #10	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #11	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #12	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #13	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #14	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #15	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #16	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #17	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #18	19/3/2025	Female	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #19	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #20	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #21	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #22	19/3/2025	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #23	19/3/2025	Female	Civil Society	India
Interview #24	19/3/2025	Female	Armed Forces (retired)	India
Interview #25	4/3/2024	Female	Civil Society	Indonesia
Interview #26	5/3/2024	Female (2) Male (1)	Armed Forces	Indonesia
Interview #27	6/3/2024	Female	Armed Forces	Indonesia
Interview #28	6/3/2024	Male (1) Female (6)	Police (1 male, 2 female) Civil Society (4 female)	Indonesia

Interview #29	7/3/2024	Male	Civil Society	Indonesia
Interview #30	7/3/2024	Male	Armed Forces	Indonesia
Interview #31	7/10/2024	Female (12)	Police	Indonesia
Interview #32	8/3/2024	Female	Armed Forces	Indonesia
Interview #33	8/3/2024	Female	Police	Indonesia
Interview #34	16/8/2024	Female	Police	Indonesia
Interview #35	16/8/2024	Female	Police	Indonesia
Interview #36	16/8/2024	Female	Police	Indonesia
Interview #37	16/8/2024	Female	Police	Indonesia
Interview #38	16/8/2024	Female (18)	Armed Forces	Indonesia
Interview #39	18/2/2024	Male	Civilian	MINUSCA
Interview #40	22/10/2024	Female	Armed Forces	MINUSCA
Interview #41	22/10/2024	Female	Armed Forces	MINUSCA
Interview #42	22/10/2024	Female	Armed Forces	MINUSCA
Interview #43	22/10/2024	Female	Armed Forces	MINUSCA
Interview #44	22/10/2024	Female	Armed Forces	MINUSCA
Interview #45	22/10/2024	Female (4) Male (3)	Armed Forces	MINUSCA
Interview #46	22/10/2024	Male (2)	Armed Forces	MINUSCA
Interview #47	22/10/2024	Male	Armed Forces	MINUSCA
Interview #48	22/10/2024	Male	Armed Forces	MINUSCA
Interview #49	22/10/2024	Male (2)	Armed Forces	MINUSCA
Interview #50	23/10/2024	Female	Police	MINUSCA
Interview #51	23/10/2024	Female	Police	MINUSCA
Interview #52	23/10/2024	Female	Police	MINUSCA
Interview #53	23/10/2024	Female	Police	MINUSCA
Interview #54	23/10/2024	Female (1) Male (1)	Police	MINUSCA
Interview #55	23/10/2024	Male	Police	MINUSCA
Interview #56	23/10/2024	Male	Police	MINUSCA
Interview #57	24/10/2024	Male (3)	Civilian (2) Armed Forces (1)	MINUSCA
Interview #58	24/10/2024	Male (2)	Armed Forces	MINUSCA
Interview #59	24/10/2024	Male (3)	Civilian	MINUSCA

Interview #60	24/10/2024	Male	Civilian	MINUSCA
Interview #61	31/7/2024	Male	Civilian	MINUSCA
Interview #62	28/10/2024	Female (2)	Armed Forces	MONUSCO
Interview #63	28/10/2024	Female (3)	Armed Forces	MONUSCO
Interview #64	28/10/2024	Male	Armed Forces	MONUSCO
Interview #65	28/10/2024	Male	Armed Forces	MONUSCO
Interview #66	29/10/2024	Female (2) Male (2)	Armed Forces	MONUSCO
Interview #67	30/10/2024	Female	Police	MONUSCO
Interview #68	30/10/2024	Female	Armed Forces	MONUSCO
Interview #69	30/10/2024	Female (1) Male (1)	Armed Forces	MONUSCO
Interview #70	30/10/2024	Male	Armed Forces	MONUSCO
Interview #71	30/10/2024	Male	Police	MONUSCO
Interview #72	30/10/2024	Male	Police	MONUSCO
Interview #73	30/10/2024	Female (5) Male (4)	Armed Forces	MONUSCO
Interview #74	31/10/2024	Female (1) Male (1)	Armed Forces	MONUSCO
Interview #75	31/10/2024	Female (1) Male (1)	Police	MONUSCO
Interview #76	31/10/2024	Male	Armed Forces	MONUSCO
Interview #77	31/10/2024	Male	Armed Forces	MONUSCO
Interview #78	31/10/2024	Male	Police	MONUSCO
Interview #79	5/11/2024	Male	Armed Forces	New York
Interview #80	21/10/2024	Female	Armed Forces	New York
Interview #81	21/10/2024	Male (2)	Armed Forces	New York
Interview #82	23/10/2024	Female	Civilian	New York
Interview #83	23/10/2024	Female	Armed Forces	New York
Interview #84	24/10/2024	Female	Civilian	New York
Interview #85	25/10/2024	Male	Police	New York
Interview #86	25/10/2024	Female	Civilian	New York
Interview #87	28/10/2024	Female (1) Male (1)	Civilian	New York
Interview #88	28/10/2024	Female	Armed Forces	New York

Interview #89	28/10/2024	Female	Civilian (formerly armed forces)	New York
Interview #90	28/10/2024	Female (5)	Civilian (3) Police (2)	New York
Interview #91	29/10/2024	Female	Civilian	New York
Interview #92	29/10/2024	Female	Civilian	New York
Interview #93	29/10/2024	Female	Armed Forces	New York
Interview #94	29/10/2024	Female	Armed Forces	New York
Interview #95	30/10/2024	Female	Armed Forces	New York
Interview #96	30/10/2024	Female (3)	Civilian	New York
Interview #97	30/10/2024	Male	Armed Forces	New York
Interview #98	30/10/2024	Male	Police	New York
Interview #99	30/10/2024	Female	Civilian	New York
Interview #100	31/10/2024	Male	Civilian	New York
Interview #101	31/10/2024	Male	Armed Forces	New York
Interview #102	31/10/2024	Female	Armed Forces	New York
Interview #103	25/10/2024	Female	Armed Forces	New York
Interview #104	25/10/2024	Male	Armed Forces	New York
Interview #105	25/10/2024	Female	Armed Forces	New York
Interview #106	1/5/2024	Female	Armed Forces (retired)	Online
Interview #107	3/7/2024	Male	Civil Society	Online
Interview #108	3/10/2024	Male	Armed Forces	Online
Interview #109	4/10/2024	Female	Armed Forces	Online
Interview #110	6/12/2024	Female	Civil Society	Online
Interview #111	10/5/2024	Female	Armed Forces	Online
Interview #112	11/4/2024	Female	Civil Society	Online
Interview #113	12/4/2024	Female	Armed Forces	Online
Interview #114	13/3/2024	Female	Armed Forces	Online
Interview #115	14/3/2024	Female	Civilian	Online
Interview #116	16/4/2024	Male	Civilian	Online
Interview #117	16/12/2024	Female (3)	Armed Forces	Online
Interview #118	17/4/2024	Female	Police	Online
Interview #119	17/4/2024	Female	Civil Society	Online
Interview #120	21/10/2024	Male	Civil Society	Online

Interview #121	25/3/2024	Female	Civil Society	Online
Interview #122	26/3/2024	Female	Civil Society	Online
Interview #123	26/3/2024	Female	Civil Society	Online
Interview #124	26/12/2024	Male	Civil Society	Online
Interview #125	29/4/2024	Female	Armed Forces	Online
Interview #126	29/10/2024	Female	Police	Online
Interview #127	30/4/2024	Female	Armed Forces	Online
Interview #128	21/3/2025	Female	Civil Society	Online
Interview #129	4/9/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UK
Interview #130	6/12/2024	Female	Civilian	UK
Interview #131	8/8/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UK
Interview #132	8/8/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UK
Interview #133	8/8/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UK
Interview #134	11/12/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UK
Interview #135	12/7/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UK
Interview #136	15/10/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UK
Interview #137	20/8/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UK
Interview #138	22/8/2024	Female	Armed Forces	UK
Interview #139	22/10/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UK
Interview #140	23/10/2024	Female	Armed Forces	UK
Interview #141	25/10/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UK
Interview #142	26/11/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UK
Interview #143	27/5/2024	Female	Armed Forces	UK
Interview #144	27/5/2024	Female	Armed Forces	UK
Interview #145	27/5/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UK
Interview #146	1/7/2024	Female	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #147	2/7/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #148	2/7/2024	Male	Police	UNMISS
Interview #149	4/7/2024	Female	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #150	4/9/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #151	5/7/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #152	6/5/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #153	6/7/2024	Female	Armed Forces	UNMISS

Interview #154	12/3/2024	Male	Civilian	UNMISS
Interview #155	15/7/2024	Female	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #156	17/4/2024	Female	Civilian	UNMISS
Interview #157	18/8/2024	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	UNMISS
Interview #158	21/3/2024	Female	Civilian	UNMISS
Interview #159	21/6/2024	Female	Civilian	UNMISS
Interview #160	22/8/2024	Male	Police (retired)	UNMISS
Interview #161	22/11/2024	Female	Civilian	UNMISS
Interview #162	23/7/2024	Male	Civilian	UNMISS
Interview #163	23/8/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #164	23/8/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #165	24/6/2024	Female	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #166	24/6/2024	Female	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #167	24/7/2024	Female	Civilian	UNMISS
Interview #168	25/6/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #169	25/9/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #170	26/3/2024	Male	Civil Society	UNMISS
Interview #171	26/6/2024	Female	Civilian	UNMISS
Interview #172	26/6/2024	Female	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #173	26/6/2024	Female	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #174	26/6/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #175	26/8/2024	Male	Civilian	UNMISS
Interview #176	28/6/2024	Female	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #177	28/6/2024	Male	Armed Forces	UNMISS
Interview #178	29/4/2024	Male	Civil Society	UNMISS
Interview #179	29/7/2024	Female	Civilian	UNMISS
Interview #180	30/8/2024	Male	Armed Forces (retired)	UNMISS

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