



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

Summary Report

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

2026

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Dr Eleanor Gordon (lead author and project lead)

Professor Katrina Lee-Koo

Lauren Lowe

Dr Richard Fosu

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Overview

This Report summarises the findings of the research project Advancing the Meaningful Participation of Women in UN Peace Operations by Supporting Personnel with Caring Responsibilities, funded by the Global Affairs Canada (GAC) as part of the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations (2023-2026).¹ The Report provides an overview of the challenges faced by uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities in troop and police contributing countries (T/PCCs). It identifies the subsequent impact on the meaningful participation of women in UN peace operations. It highlights that caring responsibilities are a key yet overlooked driver of women's underrepresentation in peace operations, which has implications for mission outcomes and efforts to advance gender equality.

Aim

The project 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.

Outputs

This Report summarises the detailed findings and recommendations of the Final Report, and accompanies the Organisational Toolkit, which provides practical guidance to security sector institutions and organisations engaged in peacekeeping to better support personnel with caring responsibilities. These resources supplement other outputs including op-eds and articles designed to generate discussion and raise awareness of how and why to support uniformed personnel with caring responsibilities,² as well as a series of policy briefs sharing global good practice and background information.³

Methodology

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. Interviews were conducted online and across seven country sites.

Where gender and roles are known, 65% of research participants are women (35% men) and 84% are uniformed personnel (armed forces and police). 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 others.

Country Site Case Studies

UN		T/PCCs
	UN Peace Operations	
UN HQ	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

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, 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</p>

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”.

Women’s Meaningful Participation in UN Peace Operations

There is a global policy and normative framework that guides the meaningful participation of uniformed women in peacekeeping. This is underpinned by the United Nations (UN) Security Council’s Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda⁴ and incorporates the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations, launched and led by the Government of Canada,⁵ and the UN’s Action for Peacekeeping (A4P and its implementation strategy A4P+)⁶ and Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy (2018-2028).⁷

Women’s Meaningful Participation

Women’s meaningful participation means that their 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 homogeneous 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.

Why Women's Meaningful Participation in Peace Operations Matters

Increasing the meaningful participation of women in UN peace operations is a strategic and operational imperative. Evidence consistently demonstrates that missions with greater gender diversity are better able to engage with local populations, understand community dynamics, enhance trust, and improve protection outcomes.⁸ Women peacekeepers play critical roles in intelligence gathering, community engagement, conflict prevention and the identification of early warning signs, particularly in contexts where access to women and girls in local communities is otherwise limited.⁹ They also play critical roles in the many other aspects of modern, complex peace operations, from strategic planning to force protection and leadership.

Women's meaningful participation also bolsters operational effectiveness by increasing the diversity of skills, experience and perspectives needed to address complex and evolving security threats. Operational effectiveness is also enhanced because diverse teams are more representative of the communities they deploy to and, therefore, better able to engage and engender trust and confidence among the diverse groups in these communities.

Recognising that women and girls are uniquely impacted by conflict and have unique needs during conflict and its aftermath, the participation of women in peace operations can increase the likelihood that these needs will be better understood and responded to.¹⁰

Women's meaningful participation can also enhance mission legitimacy and advance gender equality, which is also beneficial to peace operations given the positive correlation between gender equality and peaceful societies.¹¹



MONUSCO/Kevin Jordan 2020



UN/Gregorio Cunha, 2021

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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... it definitely makes a difference (Interview with male police officer, UNHQ New York 30/10/2024)

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... if you get more women into the military, into peacekeeping, they'll be able to do a lot more [than engagement]. They'll be able to... influence planning [lead, bolster capacity] (Interview with UN staff member, UNHQ New York 29/10/2024).

“”

... it's that whole mindset about protecting the women and children versus actually, 'I can hold my own and fight the men and protect the men' (Interview with female military officer, UNHQ New York 29/10/2024)

“”

...gender diverse teams make better decisions... I think diversity of any kind makes teams better because you just have more ideas. And I also think it creates a safer environment for everyone (Interview with UN staff member, UNHQ New York 29/10/2024)

“”

... 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 with female military peacekeeper, MONUSCO, 28/10/2024).

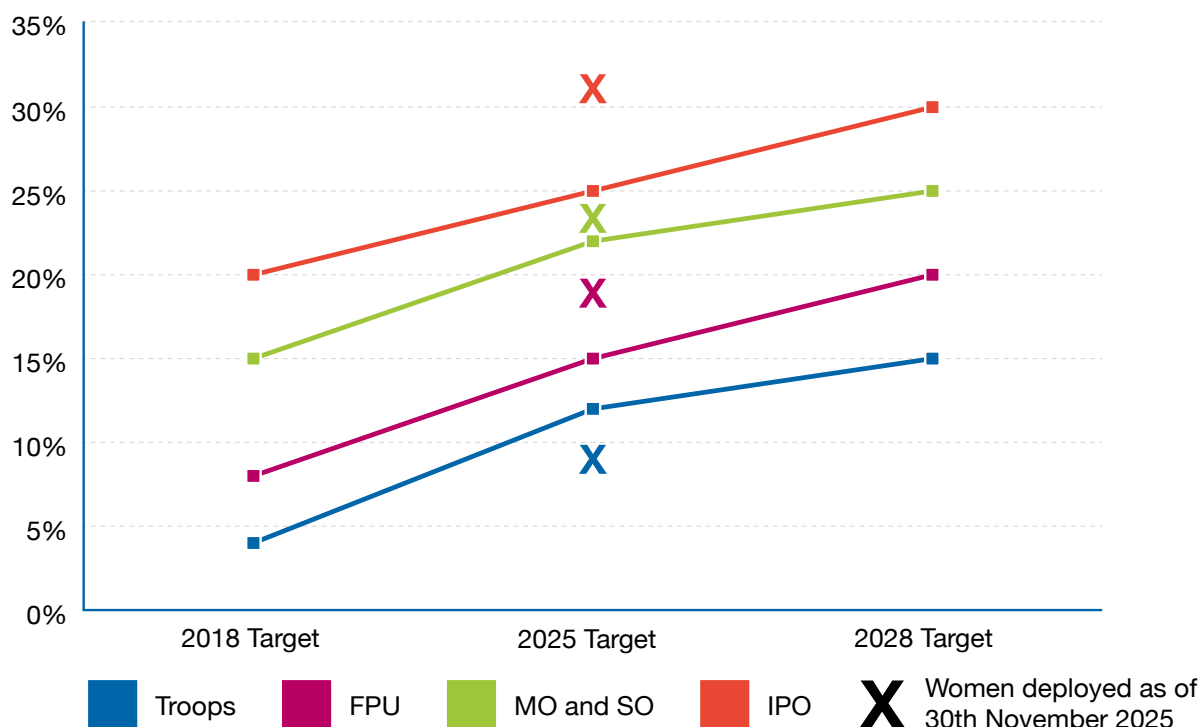
Women’s Underrepresentation in UN Peace Operations: From Policy Intent to Operational Reality

Despite sustained policy commitments and an increasing awareness of the importance of women’s meaningful participation,¹² women remain 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.

While progress has been made since the launch of the UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy and the Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations, with uniformed women in peace operations more than doubling from 4.9% in 2018,¹³ this progress is slow and uneven. By 30 November 2025, women comprised 9.84% of uniformed personnel in UN peace operations.¹⁴ Annual gender parity targets have been met in some categories, including military observers, staff officers and police, but troop contributions – which comprise the greatest proportion of peacekeepers – continue to lag behind targets (Figure 1):

- 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%)¹⁵

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



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 (Interview with female military officer, UNHQ New York 29/10/2024).

Caring Responsibilities as a Driver of Women's Underrepresentation

Globally, caring responsibilities remain highly gendered: women spend an average of 2.5 times more hours on unpaid work than men and are more likely to be sole and primary carers.¹⁶ This adversely impacts women's engagement in the workforce,¹⁷ including the security sector and in peace operations.¹⁸ It is a critical – yet overlooked – factor in the continued underrepresentation of women in peace operations, particularly uniformed women, where progress towards gender parity goals has been more challenging.¹⁹

The research shows that caring responsibilities are one of the most persistent, structural barriers to women's meaningful participation in UN peace operations. They shape who can deploy, who can progress, and who remains in uniform.



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 with female military officer, online, 04/10/2024).



UN/Christopher Herwig, 2008

Challenges

While individual circumstances and contexts may vary, most uniformed women with caring responsibilities, principally caring for children, face intersecting and mutually reinforcing challenges in security institutions and UN peace operations:

- **Practical challenges**, with caring responsibilities constraining flexibility, time and the ability to travel, particularly for sole and primary caregivers, who tend to be women. These challenges are compounded by long working hours, limited access to affordable childcare and family separation, particularly on long deployments with insufficient means for regular communication or travel home on Rest and Recuperation (R&R).
- **Work culture challenges**, associated with presenteeism, masculinity and expectations of being perpetually available or unencumbered. Notions of the 'ideal-type' uniformed personnel can mean that those who may be unavailable at certain times (for parental leave, for instance) are not seen as ideal and potentially compromising readiness and organisational effectiveness.
- **Organisational challenges**, including lack of supportive policies, particularly human resource policies such as inadequate leave provisions and limited flexible working options, weak leadership support and insufficient resources to support personnel with caring responsibilities.
- **Personal challenges**, such as stressors around work-life balance, family separation during deployment, exhaustion and guilt, and strained family relationships.
- **Gender normative challenges**, concerning assumptions about who does security and care work, and maternal bias that questions the professional capabilities and commitment of mothers. This disadvantages both women and men, with women expected to shoulder disproportionate care work and their careers suffering, while men's caring responsibilities are ignored and unsupported, constraining both genders through narrow definitions of duty, strength and sacrifice.



In male-dominated institutions such as security sector institutions, traditional gender norms often position care as incompatible with operational or leadership roles. Women—particularly mothers—may be perceived as less available, less committed, or less suitable for advancement. These perceptions frequently translate into indirect career penalties for women, such as reduced access to training, specialist roles, deployments, or promotion opportunities. They also contribute to stress, exhaustion and reduced morale, as women feel undervalued or overwork to counter stereotypes.

Meanwhile men’s well-being can suffer when their caring responsibilities are unrecognised and unsupported and they are expected to spend extended periods of time away from families without sufficient support to remain connected, while reinforcing expectations of constant availability and uninterrupted service. Recognising and supporting men’s caring responsibilities is a critical element of supporting the meaningful participation of women and advancing the well-being of all personnel.



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...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 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 with female military officer, online, 04/10/2024).

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...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 with female military officer, online, 12/04/2024).

“““

... 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 with female peacekeeper recounting the type of prejudice she has faced, UNMISS, 24/06/2024).

Impacts

These challenges directly and negatively impact the recruitment, retention, training, career progression and deployment of women with caring responsibilities in T/PCC security sector institutions.

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 almost half (43%) of all respondents (45% of women and 34% of men) said they have had to leave or change their work in the sector because of their caring responsibilities.²⁰

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... 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 with male police peacekeeper, UNMISS, 02/07/2024).

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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 with male military peacekeeper, UNMISS, 05/07/2024).



Cpl. Elizabeth Scott, 2019



UN/ Christopher Herwig, 2008

Training and Career Progression

Over a third (36%) of survey respondents report that having caring responsibilities impacts their ability to undertake training opportunities. This is due to time and mobility constraints, and practical challenges - particularly if training is residential or at a distance from family homes. Maternal bias also plays a role in limiting training opportunities for women with caring responsibilities, such as 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 in utilising training opportunities can negatively impact career progression. Those with significant caring responsibilities are also less likely to have the time to participate in or study for mandatory courses for promotion. If they leave work on time for caregiving, they might be overlooked for promotion in favour of colleagues who are always available. Breaks in career due to care –due to maternity or parental leave, for instance – can disrupt and stall career progression, including because of overt discrimination when personnel return to work. These impacts are most keenly felt by women due to the gendered nature of care work. Nearly half of women surveyed (47%) reported that caring responsibilities had negatively affected their career progression.

Challenges to career progression contribute to women's attrition, side-lining or movement into less operational or frontline roles, and underrepresentation in leadership positions. Where women, particularly with caring responsibilities, are underrepresented in leadership positions, research participants report that 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.

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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 ... in order to be part of their family. (Interview with female military officer, online, 29/04/2024).

“““

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 (survey respondent).

“““

... 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 with female military officer, online, 29/04/2024).

“““

So, if you’ve got a young, 20-year-old lad who’s got no responsibilities and is really keen...[and] 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...[they’re] out the door for childcare – ‘got to pick up 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 with female military peacekeeper, MONUSCO, 28/10/2024)

Deployment

Caring responsibilities are a significant and often overlooked factor shaping who is able to deploy. Barriers arise not only at the point of deployment, but earlier in the workforce lifecycle, including recruitment, retention, training and career progression. Practical challenges, institutional policies, cultural norms and emotional burdens also make deployment difficult for women, particularly those with caring responsibilities. Without supportive partners or other networks of support, uniformed women with caring responsibilities find it difficult to deploy. Long deployments without travel home during R&R or the ability to regularly communicate with home, compound these difficulties, alongside the costs of childcare.

Deployment processes are also often shaped by maternal bias. Mothers can be asked intrusive questions during deployment interviews about childcare arrangements and their ability to cope when separated from their children. In some cases, decisions not to deploy mothers are made on their behalf as it is assumed they would not want to – or should not – leave their children. Men’s caring roles, in contrast, are frequently overlooked or treated as irrelevant to operational decision-making.

When deployed, mothers can face judgement and stigma for being a ‘bad mother’ and selfish, while mothers who don’t deploy often face maternal bias and assumptions that they lack commitment and capability. Family separation is also a significant, yet often overlooked, psychological stressor on deployments, which can contribute to both women and men choosing not to redeploy without sufficient supports in place to remain connected to families while away.



MONUSCO/Kevin Jordan, 2020



UNMISS/Gregorio Cunha, 2023

Being unable to deploy can disadvantage personnel in terms of training and financial incentives, and can also adversely impact career advancement. While deployments are not always directly linked to promotions, deployments can equip personnel with experience, skills and knowledge that would be regarded favourably in promotion processes. Better support systems and policy adjustments can help mitigate these impacts.

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... 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 with female military peacekeeper, UNMISS, 24/6/2024)

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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 with male military officer, online, 03/10/2024).

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...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 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 with female military peacekeeper, MINUSCA, 22/10/2024).

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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 with female peacekeeper, MINUSCA, 22/10/2024).

““”

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)



UN/Isaac Billy 2020

Subsequent Impact on Peace Operations

Lack of sufficient support for personnel with caring responsibilities and the subsequent underrepresentation of women in security sector institutions and peace operations 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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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.
- **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” male 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”²¹ 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.

Conversely, when organisations support personnel with caring responsibilities it can benefit peace operations in three significant ways:

- Critically, it helps address some of the barriers to women’s recruitment, retention, training, career advancement and deployment, thereby advancing the meaningful participation of women in peace operations.
- Secondly, it can benefit the well-being of all personnel (71% of survey respondents agree), which improves performance and bolsters capability.
- Thirdly, personnel with caring responsibilities can bring distinctive and valuable skills, knowledge and perspectives to security work and peace operations.



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 with female military officer, online, 12/04/2024).



... 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 with male military peacekeeper, UNMISS, 25/09/2024).



... 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 (Interview with female military officer, UK, 23/10/2024).



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 with male military officer, UK, 4/09/2024)



In any security institution, 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 with female military officer, online, 29/04/2024).



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... 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 with female military officer, online, 29/04/2024).

Summary of Key Recommendations

Many uniformed personnel highlight support for personnel with caring responsibilities, with greater 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.



UNMISS/Gregorio Cunha, 2023

Moreover, given the highly gendered nature of care work, it can improve the meaningful participation of women, including in leadership positions and in peace operations. Over two-thirds (67%) of survey respondents agree that there is a connection between lack of organisational support for personnel with caring responsibilities and women's underrepresentation in peacekeeping, while the vast majority (82%) said that it is important that security sector institutions support women with caring responsibilities, with many identifying tangible ways in which this can be done.

Recommendations are summarised below and structured by stakeholder, with full recommendations and their evidence basis detailed in the Final 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 de-stress.
- **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 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.²²
- **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.
- **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.

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22 The Peace Operations Training Institute (POTI) will launch a training course on Family Responsibilities and Care for peacekeepers in Spring 2026. It will be freely available globally in multiple languages from their website: <https://www.peaceopstraining.org/courses/>. It was developed by Monash GPS, drawing from analysis for this project (*Advancing the Meaningful Participation of Women in UN Peace Operations by Supporting Personnel with Caring Responsibilities*), and funded by Global Affairs Canada.