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# Perceptions and Lived Realities of Women Police Officers in UN Peace Operations

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## Executive Summary

Over the past decade, the UN has undertaken several initiatives to increase the number of women police officers deployed to peace operations. Collectively, these initiatives have increased the proportion of women police officers deployed to UN missions. However, women police still face challenges deploying to missions and effectively contributing to mission mandates.

These challenges start well before women deploy. Many police-contributing countries (PCCs) lack targeted strategies for making women aware of deployment opportunities and do not provide adequate training. Family pressures and lack of adequate support systems also deter some women from deploying.

Once women police officers do deploy, they confront stereotypes that may lead to them being assigned tasks seen as more “feminine” such as community engagement. It is also assumed that their presence will help missions better prevent, respond to, and reduce sexual exploitation and abuse by male peacekeepers. These stereotypes and assumptions place an added burden on women peacekeepers.

Within missions, many women police officers also receive inadequate support. Many face barriers to reporting sexual harassment and find that facilities and supplies do not meet their needs. These problems are exacerbated by the low proportion of leadership roles held by women and the lack of in-mission support networks.

While the UN often argues for deploying more women peacekeepers because they will increase missions' operational performance, this rationale risks reinforcing some of these challenges by perpetuating stereotypes about the role of women in missions. Missions should instead focus on women police officers' right to deploy. To ensure women have this right, both PCCs and missions need to foster an enabling working environment and address structural barriers to women's participation.

## Introduction

The United Nations Security Council has repeatedly affirmed the importance of ensuring the full, effective, and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of peacekeeping. This includes UN police, whose role has become increasingly critical as missions have shifted toward a multidimensional, people-centered approach to peacekeeping. In the two decades since Resolution 1325, the council's first resolution on women, peace, and security, some progress has been made. The proportion of individual women police officers in UN missions has increased, as has the share of women in formed police units.

But while numbers matter, women police officers still face challenges to deploying to UN missions and effectively contributing to mission mandates. Many of these challenges relate to perceptions of women police. Women are still seen by both policymakers and societies as needing protection rather than as being protectors. Women's capabilities in peace operations continue to be viewed as innate, traditional, and stereotypically feminine, irrespective of their qualifications or training. These perceptions reinforce structural barriers to women accessing professional opportunities in both their home police organizations and international peace operations and affect their lived experiences during deployment.

This paper interrogates the experiences, concerns, and needs of women police officers deployed to UN peace operations. First, it analyzes progress on including more women in UN police forces. Second, it provides arguments for including more women police officers. Third, it describes the multi-

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faceted challenges that women police officers face both before and during deployment. Finally, it provides recommendations for how police-contributing countries (PCCs) and the UN can move toward a shared, sustainable approach to the full, equal, and meaningful participation of women police officers in peacekeeping. This study is based on a workshop with twenty-eight experts and police peacekeepers, six in-depth interviews with women police peacekeepers, and primary and secondary sources.<sup>1</sup>

## Progress on Including More Women in UN Police

Collective efforts to address the concerns of women in conflict gave rise to the adoption of the landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on October 31, 2000. This resolution emphasized "the importance of involving women in all peacekeeping and peacebuilding measures."<sup>2</sup> Since then, several resolutions have called for increasing women's participation in peacekeeping, and all current peacekeeping mandates include language on the participation of women peacekeepers.<sup>3</sup>

For over a decade, the UN has undertaken initiatives to increase the number of women peacekeepers, including the number of women police officers. For instance, in 2009, the UN launched its "Global Effort" to increase the number of female police officers deployed with the United Nations.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the 2014 Policy on United Nations Police in Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions recognized that the police should be representative, noting that "fair and non-discriminatory recruitment and retention policies

<sup>1</sup> The focus group workshop was held over Zoom in December 2020. Twenty-eight experts, including women and men peacekeepers, policymakers, academics, and practitioners, discussed four guiding questions: (1) Do women carry out different tasks than men?; (2) How do expectations around the roles and responsibilities of women and men differ?; (3) Do different tasks and expectations for male and female police peacekeepers affect their careers advancement?; and (4) How might the UN overcome these challenges? Participants were also divided into smaller breakout groups for more focused, candid, and open discussion. Participants provided solution-oriented inputs and were encouraged to speak from personal experience.

<sup>2</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (October 31, 2000), UN Doc. S/RES/1325, para. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Lisa Sharland, "Women, Peace, and Security Mandates for UN Peacekeeping Operations: Assessing Influence and Impact," International Peace Institute, January 2021.

<sup>4</sup> UN Police, "UN Police Gender Initiative," available at [https://police.un.org/en/un-police-gender-initiatives#:~:text=In%202009%2C%20the%20United%20Nations,percent%20of%2013%2C000\)%20in%202016](https://police.un.org/en/un-police-gender-initiatives#:~:text=In%202009%2C%20the%20United%20Nations,percent%20of%2013%2C000)%20in%202016).

are expected to encourage, among other goals, an adequate participation of women and minority groups.”<sup>5</sup>

Most recently, the secretary-general’s System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity, launched in 2017, aims to address unconscious bias in recruitment and create a conducive and safe working environment.<sup>6</sup> The Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy has subsequently committed the UN to recruiting women police officers in the field and at UN headquarters. The strategy’s goal is to ensure that women police officers comprise at least 30 percent of individual police officers (IPOs) and 20 percent of formed police units (FPUs) in the field, as well as 35 percent of police officers at UN headquarters by 2028 (see Box 1 on the distinction between IPOs and FPUs).<sup>7</sup> To achieve these goals, the Police Division is working on a Voluntary Gender Compact for Advancing Gender Parity in the United Nations Police to ensure that women are recruited in police institutions within police-contributing countries (PCCs).<sup>8</sup> It has also developed a cadre of over a hundred women through its talent pipeline to increase the nominations of

women police officers in leadership positions. Alongside the gender parity strategy, the secretary-general’s Action for Peacekeeping initiative, also launched in 2018, is committed “to increasing the number of civilian and uniformed women in peacekeeping at all levels and in key positions.”<sup>9</sup>

As another component of this strategy, the Police Division is giving priority to FPUs that include women. Historically, some PCCs have deployed all-female FPUs. The first all-female FPU was deployed to Liberia in 2007, and these units have subsequently been deployed to several other missions. More recently, the UN has shifted toward mixed-gender FPUs that include at least one platoon of female officers.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of capacity building, the UN Police Division has worked closely with member states to develop trainings for women to help increase the number of women police officers deployed to peace operations.<sup>11</sup> The UN Police Division also launched the Female Senior Police Officer Command Development course in 2018 to increase the number of women police in leadership positions.

### Box 1. Types of UN police

There are two main types of police deployed to peace operations: those deployed in formed police units (FPUs) and individual police officers (IPOs). Most police officers are deployed in FPUs, which are the focus of this paper. FPUs are armed and specialize in public order. They have crowd-management capabilities, as well as the ability to deal with smaller conflict situations in a less lethal manner than the military.<sup>12</sup>

IPOs, on the other hand, are generally unarmed. They often support the development of community-policing initiatives, including community fora, crime-prevention and crime-response programs that involve community members, and victim support. They also assist in bridging the gap between communities and the host-state police through community education and trust building. In this role, they contribute to information gathering, analysis, and early warning, as well as the monitoring of and follow-up on incidents.<sup>13</sup>

5 UN Police, “Policy on United Nations Police in Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions,” February 2014.

6 UN, “System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity,” October 2017.

7 UN Department of Peace Operations, “Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018–2028,” 2018.

8 UN Peacekeeping, “Women in Peacekeeping,” available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping>.

9 UN, “Action for Peacekeeping: Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations,” September 2018.

10 UN Police, “UN Police Gender Initiatives.” Some argue that these FPUs provide women police officers with all-female spaces that do not require them to adapt to male-dominated systems and that improve community engagement. However, all-female FPUs can also be relegated to certain roles seen as more “feminine.” Workshop participants felt that mixed-gender FPUs were more effective. One participant noted, “I prefer a mixed team. I think it is necessary because when you go into a culture where men talk to men and women talk to women, mixed teams will be ready to engage.” See: Catherine A. Onekalt, “Women in Peacekeeping: The Emergence of the All-Female Uniformed Units in UNMIL and MONUSCO,” Accord, 2013; and Charlotte Anderholt, “Female Participation in Formed Police Units,” Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, September 2012.

11 UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, “Training and Recruitment of Police Women for UN Peacekeeping,” April 15, 2016.

12 See: UN Police, “Formed Police Units,” available at <https://police.un.org/en/formed-police-units-fpus>.

13 See: UN Police, “Individual Police Officers,” available at <https://police.un.org/en/individual-police-officers>.

Collectively, these efforts have significantly increased the proportion of women police officers deployed to UN missions. In 2011, women police officers comprised 15 percent of IPOs and 5 percent of FPUs. As of March 2021, they comprised nearly 30 percent of IPOs and 15 percent of FPUs.<sup>14</sup> Further, while in 2011 there were not any missions with police components headed by women, today, women are the heads of police components in four missions: the missions in Mali, South Sudan, Cyprus, and Abyei. Women police officers are serving at senior levels in some of the most complex mission settings.

## Arguments for Including More Women Police Officers

There are two strategies commonly used to argue for the inclusion of more women in peacekeeping. The first is that women have the right to be included in security structures. The second, discussed in detail below, is that women make unique contributions to peacekeeping missions that improve their operational performance.

There are compelling arguments about the ways in which the inclusion of women police in peacekeeping could improve missions' performance. Many of these are regularly put forward by the UN (see Box 2). These arguments are grounded in evidence from both national police and from UN missions. For example, in national police forces, there is evidence that women police officers are less likely to use extreme controlling behavior, and there are fewer misconduct complaints against women police officers.<sup>15</sup> The number of women police officers in national police forces has also been found to be positively correlated with reporting of sexual assault.<sup>16</sup>

Anecdotally, several UN missions have demonstrated the benefits of including women police officers. In Liberia, for example, the UN hailed the all-female FPU as instrumental in recruiting women into the Liberian National Police and bolstering community confidence in the police and rule of law, though overall evidence was mixed.<sup>17</sup>

Beyond what women police can offer peacekeeping missions, many women find deploying to missions

### Box 2. The positive contributions of women police, according to the UN

UN policymakers argue that including more women in peacekeeping is an operational imperative. They argue that including more women has a number of benefits, including that it:

- “Empowers women in the host communities”;
- “Contributes to making the peacekeeping force approachable to women and young people in the community”;
- Helps missions interview survivors of gender-based violence and “[interact] with women in societies where women are prohibited or discouraged from speaking to men”;
- “Help[s] reduce conflict and confrontation”;
- “Improve[s] access and support for local women and youth”;
- “Provides role models in the local environment”;
- “Provide[s] a greater sense of security to local populations, including women and children”; and
- “Broaden[s] the skill set available” within a peacekeeping mission.<sup>18</sup>

14 UN Department of Peace, Operations, “Contribution of Uniformed Personnel to UN by Mission, Personnel Type, and Gender,” March 31, 2021, available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/gender>.

15 Cara Rabe-Hemp, “Female Officers and the Ethic of Care: Does Officer Gender Impact Police Behaviors,” *Journal of Criminal Justice* 36, no. 5 (2008); Linda Waugh, Andrew Ede, and Avril Alley, “Police Culture, Women Police and Attitudes towards Misconduct,” *International Journal of Police Science and Management* 1, no. 3 (December 1998).

16 UN Women, “In Pursuit of Justice: Progress of the World’s Women, 2011–2012,” 2011, p. 59.

17 “Hailed as ‘Role Models,’ All-Female Indian Police Unit Departs UN Mission in Liberia,” UN News, February 12, 2016. Beyond Monrovia, there was no added improvement in perceptions of policing among local women. Sabrina Karim, “Relational State Building in Areas of Limited Statehood: Experimental Evidence on the Attitudes of the Police,” *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 2 (2020).

18 Bintou Keita, “Women in Peacekeeping: An Operational Imperative,” *Medium*, October 14, 2018.

to be personally enriching. Many workshop participants noted that they were exposed to and offered opportunities that they would not have had if they had not deployed. Many felt that deployment helped build their capacities. One highlighted that “you benefit from the experiences you have with people from different nationalities, training, and backgrounds. Peacekeeping is a place where you get training on a wide variety of issues—[in particular] human rights.”<sup>19</sup>

In line with the arguments outlined above, most women police officers participating in interviews and the workshop stated that they had something unique to contribute. However, focusing on the argument that women have a “unique value as peacekeepers” has also created an extra burden on women, who are often expected to go above and beyond their existing duties. Not all women deploy because they want to work on women’s issues or engage with the local people; in the same way as men, some may be seeking professional advancement or pursuing other goals.

“[Deployment opportunities are] not disseminated equally; men tend to get information much more quickly than women do.”

stereotypes about the contributions of women police peacekeepers; sexual harassment and sexualized behavior within missions; inadequate facilities and supplies in missions; lack of women in leadership roles in missions; and inadequate support structures during deployment.

## Pre-deployment Challenges in Police-Contributing Countries

The first challenge is at the member-state level: national police services are perceived and constructed as highly masculine organizations. For example, training for new recruits often emphasizes masculine traits.<sup>21</sup> Women are expected to integrate into these existing masculine systems rather than the systems transforming or adapting. While many police organizations have sought to increase “diversity,” few have pursued systemic change.<sup>22</sup>

While women are underrepresented in national police forces, they are even more underrepresented in police deployed to UN peace operations. This speaks to member states’ policies on and processes for recruiting women police for deployment.<sup>23</sup> There is no uniformity in how PCCs communicate opportunities to women. Due to a lack of targeted communication strategies, women are often not aware of these opportunities.<sup>24</sup> One participant noted that “it’s advertised equally, so you know where to go or where to look, but it’s not disseminated equally; men tend to get information much more quickly than women do.”<sup>25</sup> More research is required to shed light on whether the language and imagery are inclusive and whether the staff appointed to disseminate opportunities are gender-balanced.<sup>26</sup>

## Challenges Facing Women Police Officers in Peace Operations

Despite progress in including more women in UN police, women police officers continue to face cultural, structural, and personal challenges.<sup>20</sup> These challenges start prior to deployment. Workshop participants highlighted numerous factors that make it difficult for women police officers to successfully complete their work. These include PCCs’ internal policies and processes;

<sup>19</sup> Participant in December 2020 workshop.

<sup>20</sup> On challenges for women deploying to the military component of UN missions, see: Lotte Vermeij, “Woman First, Soldier Second: Taboos and Stigmas Facing Military Women in UN Peace Operations,” International Peace Institute, October 2020.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example: Abena Asefuaba Yalley and Molatokunbo Seunfunmi Olutayo, “Gender, Masculinity and Policing: An Analysis of the Implications of Police Masculinised Culture on Policing Domestic Violence in Southern Ghana and Lagos, Nigeria,” *Social Sciences and Humanities Open* 2, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>22</sup> Werner Soontiens and Mary Anthony, “Promoting Police Women: A Conceptual Framework,” Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Sabrina Karim et al., “MOWIP Methodology: Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations,” DCAF, August 2019.

<sup>24</sup> UN Department of Peace Operations, “Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018–2028,” 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Participant in December 2020 workshop.

<sup>26</sup> Marta Ghittoni, Léa Lehoucq, and Callum Watson, “Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations: Baseline Study,” Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, July 2018.

PCCs' deployment requirements can also have a disproportionate impact on women. For example, the UN requires at least five years of experience for police to serve in peacekeeping missions. This can be different at the national level, however. For example, some PCCs have an eight-year minimum. Because there is evidence that women tend to stay in the police service for a shorter period of time than men, this requirement can make fewer women eligible to deploy.<sup>27</sup>

Another challenge is the lack of standardized pre-deployment training among PCCs. One study found that most IPOs in UNAMID had not received the necessary pre-deployment training, and some FPU only received two weeks of training instead of the required four weeks.<sup>28</sup> Workshop participants explained that this lack of adequate training means that many women police officers do not feel ready to deploy or to perform their mandated tasks. This can harm not only perceptions of women police officers' competence but also their self-confidence.

PCCs also often assume that women police officers already know how to integrate gender perspectives in the mission. But as one participant noted during the workshop, "We shouldn't assume that every female officer understands gender roles."<sup>29</sup> Not all women wish to engage in gender-related tasks or have the expertise to do so. Workshop participants consistently highlighted that all police officers, whether men or women, require gender training.

Family pressures and obligations are another recurring challenge, though these are socially constructed and vary among countries. Whether or not they are mother or wives, many women police officers who are considering deploying face stigmatization from their families for stepping outside of their expected gender roles. For example, in some contexts, family members may use statements such as "You are a terrible mother" to discourage women with children from deploying. This same stigma is attached to women deploying as military

officers.<sup>30</sup> These family obligations are culturally constructed.

Beyond these cultural constraints, women police officers who are mothers have indicated that leaving their children behind for a year may be daunting. This issue is exacerbated by the lack of childcare support systems in many PCCs. However, some countries have taken steps to address this issue. For instance, Canada allows women IPOs to deploy for three months at a time so they can return home more often.<sup>31</sup>

## Stereotypes about the Contributions of Women Police Peacekeepers

Peacekeeping mandates make no distinction between the responsibilities of male and female police officers, and men and women are deployed to the same roles. Therefore, as one participant noted, "The expectation should be that [men and women] have the same work."<sup>32</sup>

In practice, however, there is often a distinction between the tasks assigned to men and women based on their gender rather than their qualifications or performance. Men are often put in positions of frontline action or riot control. Due to gendered social norms and behaviors, men may also act as de facto leaders even if they are not in charge of operations, and some try to protect their female colleagues.

Women, on the other hand, are often put in support units, and leaders tend to be less inclined to assign them more dangerous tasks. Even when women express an interest in these roles or a willingness to take them on, they are often not given the chance. Instead, they are often assigned to traditionally "feminine" roles such as community engagement. In many cases, they are assigned these roles on top of their existing tasks and without being trained in how to undertake them. As one interviewee noted, "The mandate gives [men and

27 See, for example: National Center for Women and Policing, "Recruiting and Retaining Women: A Self-Assessment Guide for Law Enforcement," 2000.

28 Marina Caparini et al., "The Role of Police in UNAMID," Institute for Security Studies, p. 17.

29 Participant in December 2020 workshop.

30 Vermeij, "Woman First, Soldier Second."

31 Participant in December 2020 workshop.

32 Participant in December 2020 workshop.

women] similar tasks, but women go the extra mile to do extra roles, [and] not all women police officers understand what to do.”<sup>33</sup> While some women do wish to fill such roles and feel that they excel at them, they should not be expected to do so.

The call for more women peacekeepers is also partly centered on the premise that they will be able to better prevent, respond to, and reduce sexual exploitation and abuse by other peacekeepers.<sup>34</sup> This assumption places an unfair burden on women peacekeepers to police their male counterparts. A workshop participant noted that “there is the idea that women can prevent male peacekeepers from sexually abusing the local population. This is an additional... stereotype... placed on women peacekeepers.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, simply adding more women to peacekeeping forces may not reduce sexual exploitation and abuse. For instance, although South Africa deploys more women peacekeepers than most countries, its peacekeepers have still been highly represented in cases of sexual exploitation and abuse.<sup>36</sup>

## Sexual Harassment and Sexualized Behavior within Missions

Although much has been written on sexual exploitation and abuse committed by peacekeepers against host communities, research on the safety of women police officers in missions is scarce.<sup>37</sup> For example, the 2017 UN report on improving the security of UN peacekeepers does not consider

internal gender-specific threats to women and men.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, several participants raised this as a major challenge. One workshop participant described the experience of a policewoman in-mission whose superior officer tried to pursue a sexual relationship with her. When she refused, the superior officer would not allow her to leave work or take leave, reporting that she had not completed her assignments.<sup>39</sup> In other cases, women police officers reported being mocked and perceived as sexually available.<sup>40</sup> As one woman described,

“The mandate gives [men and women] similar tasks, but women go the extra mile to do extra roles.”

“What I wasn’t prepared for was the number of propositions from local guards, or the subtle things that happen that make you uncomfortable in a mission.”<sup>41</sup>

The UN has a policy against harassment, and UN Security Council Resolution 2518 calls on the UN and member states “to ensure safe, enabling and gender-sensitive working environments for women in peacekeeping operations and to address threats and violence against them.”<sup>42</sup> However, reporting these threats is often challenging. According to one interviewee, “In the mission, they were very clear from the beginning that there was no toleration of sexual harassment and that there were avenues for reporting. But with reporting, there is a stigma that can come out of it.”<sup>43</sup>

A similar problem is the power and monetary imbalance among mission components, which often takes on a gendered dimension. A workshop participant described the issue:

The salaries of those in uniform are much less than those with civilian positions, and deploy-

33 Online interview with police officer, February 2021.

34 Brianna Nicole Hernandez, “Sexual Abuse in UN Peacekeeping: The Problem of Viewing Women as a ‘Quick Fix,’” E-International Relations, February 2020.

35 Participant in December 2020 workshop.

36 Around 16 percent of South Africa’s peacekeepers were women, as of February 2021. UN Department of Peace Operations, “Troop and Police Contributions,” available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/data-troop-and-police-contributions>; Sherwin Bryce-Pease, “SA Commits to Root Out Sexual Abuse by UN Peacekeepers,” *SABC News*, September 26, 2018.

37 On sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers against host communities see, for example: Jeni Whalan, “Dealing with Disgrace: Addressing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in UN Peacekeeping,” International Peace Institute, August 2017.

38 UN, “Improving Security of United Nations Peacekeepers: We Need to Change the Way We Are Doing Business,” December 19, 2017.

39 Participant in December 2020 workshop.

40 Participant in December 2020 workshop.

41 Online interview with police officer, February 2021.

42 UN Secretariat, “Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, Including Sexual Harassment, and Abuse of Authority,” February 10, 2008; UN Security Council Resolution 2518 (March 30, 2020), UN Doc. S/RES/2518.

43 Online interview with police officer, February 2021.

ment terms are much shorter. Relationships start between the women police officers and civilian staff, and they are taken on trips and given gifts, and for these women, these relationships are very serious. And then when the women go back home, the civilian staff find new women to start dating—and that is abusive. There was a perception of women police officers as prostitutes.<sup>44</sup>

Stigmas around sexualized behavior are greater for women than for men. As a workshop participant described,

I came back from fieldwork and had discussions with male peacekeepers. They spoke about women colleagues acting inappropriately, and how they should not be flirting. Women are expected to avoid flirtatious behavior, but there was no discussion or expectation that men need to decline the flirtations of women. The expectations are still biased.<sup>45</sup>

“Women are expected to avoid flirtatious behavior, but there was no... expectation that men need to decline the flirtations of women.”

This stigma may follow women police officers home, with some facing similar reactions from their family and colleagues. In certain instances, women police officers’ husbands or parents have discouraged them from deploying due to this stigma.

## Inadequate Facilities and Supplies in Missions

Another challenge women police officers face is that the facilities and supplies available during deployment often do not meet their needs. As one woman shared,

In my first mission I had a very bad experience. I was... in a very remote area; there were no

stores or anything nearby. I was a young officer, and I was the only woman among seven men. My menstrual cycle came, and I had nobody I could send to the capital to get me sanitary products. I had nobody telling me that I had to bring these things before going to a remote area.<sup>46</sup>

Women mentioned during interviews that they could not carry a year’s worth of sanitary pads, as this would exceed their allocated luggage. As a result, they were forced to find alternative ways to address the issue, such as asking male colleagues to carry their sanitary products. Another challenge is that ablution facilities available to women are sometimes not secure and are shared with men. This may happen in part because women are often not included in the planning or technical teams that prepare for deployments.

## Lack of Women in Leadership Roles in Missions

Currently, there is momentum to increase the number of women in leadership roles in missions, and efforts to achieve gender parity in senior police appointments have yielded results. By November 2020, the UN police had achieved their intermediate gender parity targets.<sup>47</sup>

However, the UN focuses much of its attention on women in the most senior positions. In middle management, where operational and tactical decisions are taken, women are not well represented.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, women in leadership positions are often placed in supportive or behind-the-scenes roles. As a result, these women have less ability to influence operations or have close interactions with communities.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, even if official policies remove discrim-

44 Participant in December 2020 workshop.

45 Participant in December 2020 workshop.

46 Participant in December 2020 workshop.

47 UN Security Council, “Calling for More Women Officers in Peacekeeping Operations, Force Leaders Briefing Security Council Stress Gender Balance Key for Effective Policing, Building Trust,” Press Release, UN Doc. SC/14346, November 4, 2020.

48 Annette Leijenaar and Liezelle Kumalo, “Women, Peace and Security: Minding the Mid-management Gap,” Institute for Security Studies, March 2019.

49 Online interview with police officer, February 2021.

inatory policies and practices, individual discriminatory attitudes may remain.<sup>50</sup> There is evidence from national police forces that men are often appointed to senior positions ahead of women. As one study found, “There is a continuous struggle with the perception that women are... insufficiently equipped for leadership roles despite the fact that women match their male colleagues in both effectiveness and competitiveness.”<sup>51</sup> One woman in a leadership position in a UN mission highlighted that at times she felt that she was not respected and had to justify her commands.<sup>52</sup> This behavior stems not only from men who are opposed to taking orders from women but also from women with internal biases. Many member states do not prepare their police to be led by women. Even when women do act as leaders in missions, they may not occupy the same leadership positions when they return to their home countries.<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, having more women in leadership positions does not automatically improve the conditions for women police. Female leaders are not necessarily more sensitive to gender issues, and male leaders can also be champions of gender equality and women’s empowerment. In addition, women who are not in formal leadership positions can also take on leadership roles in certain areas, pointing to the importance of looking at leadership as a process.

## Inadequate Support Structures during Deployment

It is important not just to deploy more women police to peacekeeping missions but also to provide these women the support they need during deployment, including mental health services. Due to exposure to traumatic events, many peacekeepers experience psychiatric disorders such as post-

traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety.<sup>54</sup> More research is required to understand the psychological needs of police peacekeepers specifically, as well as the gendered nature of these needs. However, a 2015–2016 survey on mental health across the UN system found that men had a 1.2 times lower risk of mental health issues than women.<sup>55</sup>

Little research is available on formal mechanisms for providing support to women while they are in missions. Some missions have taken steps to provide support to women police officers. For example, UNAMID created a peer-counsellor program to provide psychological and emotional support to women. This support was eventually also expanded to cover male officers. Such support is particularly important for women who are placed as individuals at team sites. To avoid isolating women in male-dominated environments, some missions have developed the policy of placing at least two women in any given location.

In many missions, women’s networks have also been established. These networks allow female police officers to support each other in navigating challenges, network with women from other components, and reach out to women in local police services and in the community. Despite the existence of these networks, interviewees indicated that women in missions often compete for recognition instead of supporting each other.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, some missions have formalized women’s networks to steer them from a senior level. Another challenge is that the activities of these networks are often not mandated as mission tasks, meaning that women must engage in them outside of regular working hours.<sup>57</sup> In some missions, however, the police leadership has allowed women to participate in such networks as part of official activities.

50 Riana Paneras, “Gender Equality,” in *Police Management beyond 2000*, eds. Erik Reynecke and Marius Fourie (Landsdowne: Juta & Co., 2001).

51 Sahana Dharmapuri, “Not Just a Numbers Game: Increasing Women’s Participation in UN Peacekeeping,” International Peace Institute, July 2012.

52 Online interview with police officer, February 2021.

53 Sahana Dharmapuri, “Not Just a Numbers Game: Increasing Women’s Participation in UN Peacekeeping,” International Peace Institute, July 2012.

54 David Forbes et al., “The Long-Term Mental Health Impact of Peacekeeping: Prevalence and Predictors of Psychiatric Disorder,” *British Journal of Psychiatry* 2, no. 1 (January 2016).

55 UN Secretariat, “Staff Well-Being Survey Data Report,” 2017.

56 Online interview with police officer, February 2021.

57 Online interview with police officer, February 2021.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

While increasing the number of women peacekeepers is important in its own right, it cannot necessarily change entrenched patriarchal and discriminatory attitudes. Numbers alone do not guarantee a substantive shift away from gender inequality.

Women police still face challenges in deploying to UN missions and effectively contributing to mission mandates. Many of these challenges relate to perceptions of women police. Women are still seen by many policymakers and members of the public as needing protection rather than as being protectors. Women's capabilities in peace operations continue to be viewed as innate, traditional, and stereotypically feminine, irrespective of their qualifications or training. These perceptions reinforce structural barriers to women accessing professional opportunities in their home police organizations and international peace operations and affect their lived experiences during deployment.

Arguing for deploying more women peacekeepers because they will increase missions' operational performance may reinforce some of these barriers. Such arguments are

often rooted in stereotypes about women's innate traits, including that they are inherently better at tasks like community engagement. This can place a double burden on women police who are expected to take on these tasks in addition to their other responsibilities. Arguments related to operational performance should instead speak to women's diverse perspectives and experiences. Better yet, missions should focus on women's right to deploy.

To ensure women have this right, PCCs and missions need to foster an enabling working environment and address structural barriers to women's participation. Toward this end, the following recommendations are made to PCCs and the UN:

- **Identify and address obstacles in national police structures:** PCCs should identify

barriers to the recruitment, retention, and promotion of women in their police services. Based on these findings, they should develop gender-responsive police reform strategies, policies, and plans, including concrete measures and targets to promote gender equality at all levels and functions of the police services. To be sustainable, these strategies should be linked and coordinated with broader rule of law and security sector governance and reform processes.

- **Make sure women police are aware of deployment opportunities:** PCCs should also identify barriers to women's access to opportunities to deploy to peace operations. Based on this assessment, they should undertake targeted efforts to make women police officers aware of deployment opportunities, including through informal networks of women police in PCCs.
- **Train both men and women on gender mainstreaming:** PCCs and the UN should provide gender-awareness training for all police, both men and women. This training should make it clear that gender mainstreaming is the responsibility of all UN peacekeepers and is not a burden that should fall to women alone.
- **Assign men and women police the same roles and provide them the same skills training:** Tasks traditionally coded as feminine (e.g., community engagement) or masculine (e.g., riot control) should be assigned equally to both men and women, and all police should receive training in these areas. Likewise, skills that are often seen as feminine (e.g., de-escalating tension) should be encouraged among both men and women and established as core to effective policing.
- **Appoint more women to leadership positions:** Deploying more women to leadership positions within UN police can normalize women's leadership. More women leaders are particularly needed in middle-management positions. Using more women police officers as

Arguing for deploying more women peacekeepers because they will increase missions' operational performance can place a double burden on women police.

training facilitators could also help overcome gender biases and prepare police for having women leaders during deployment. At the same time, the UN should cultivate leadership qualities among all women, regardless of whether they occupy official leadership roles.

- **Create flexible, family-friendly deployment arrangements:** A one-year deployment can be hard for many women who do not want to leave their families or who lack adequate child-care support. Breaking deployments into three- or four-month chunks, as Canada has done, could make it easier for women to be away and encourage more to deploy. However, shorter deployments can reduce the effectiveness of tasks such as capacity building and mentoring, so a balance will be needed.
- **Deploy gender-balanced formed police units:** Mixed-gender formed police units will likely perform better than all-female—or predominantly male—units by incorporating more diverse perspectives and experiences. This approach will also avoid relegating tasks like community engagement to all-female units, which can perpetuate the idea that such tasks are better-suited to women.
- **Ensure that women have adequate support**

**services and facilities in-mission:** Missions should ensure that facilities cater to the needs of women, especially their biological needs. Missions should also consider changing luggage allowances to allow women to bring adequate hygiene products or should have adequate stocks of these products at team sites. Mental health support before and after deployment should be offered to all police officers to prepare them for the challenges they will face.

- **Strengthen sexual harassment measures and facilitate reporting:** Although the UN has a sexual harassment policy, more should be done to create a safe and conducive working environment. Ultimately, sexual harassment is not a problem of policy but of command and control. Missions should also strive to eliminate stigma around reporting sexual harassment and should make reporting easier.
- **Provide adequate financial resources to deploy and support women police:** Member states should allocate the necessary financial resources to ensure that the UN has the capacity not only to increase the number of women police officers but also to take the measures needed to foster supportive working environments.

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