

UN Peacekeeping and the Protection of Civilians from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence



Jenna Russo | May 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past two decades, the protection of civilians (POC) has become a central feature in the mandates of multidimensional peacekeeping operations. Over the same period, the development of the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda has increased focus on the protection of women, who are generally perceived to account for the “vast majority of those adversely affected” by conflict-related violence. Thus, the WPS and POC agendas have largely developed in tandem and are often linked in mandated language provided by the Security Council. The mandates of all UN multidimensional peacekeeping operations currently include language on gender (to varying degrees), and all of these operations have mandates to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).

While all UN multidimensional peacekeeping operations are mandated to prevent and respond to CRSV, some missions are also mandated to protect civilians from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). These include the missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and South Sudan (UNMISS), which are the focus of this report, as well as the mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). While SGBV is often used and understood interchangeably with CRSV, SGBV is broader in scope, as it encompasses nonsexual forms of gender-based violence and need not be connected to armed conflict.

There are a number of reasons why it is difficult for peacekeepers to protect civilians from SGBV, particularly forms of SGBV that fall outside of CRSV. Many forms of SGBV are beyond missions’ capabilities and areas of operation, and because SGBV is rooted in cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity, addressing the drivers of such violence requires a level of embeddedness in communities that peacekeeping operations lack. While DPO has provided a definition of SGBV, it is very broad, extending beyond what missions can realistically address. At the same time, policymakers and peacekeeping personnel regularly conflate SGBV with CRSV, masking the gender dimensions of nonsexual forms of violence and of violence against men and boys, as well

as sexual and gender minorities. Overall, there is a lack of conceptual clarity on what SGBV includes in the context of peacekeeping mandates and a lack of consistency in how these mandates are understood and implemented.

Despite these conceptual ambiguities, UN peacekeeping operations have various structures and processes to implement their mandates to protect civilians from SGBV. These include steps to better integrate gender throughout mandated activities, including through the development of gender strategies, trainings related to gender and CRSV, systems for monitoring and reporting on gender-related indicators, and the work of gender advisers, women’s protection advisers (WPAs), and female peacekeepers. However, structural barriers remain. Coordination between mission components that contribute to SGBV, including WPAs, gender advisers, and POC units, is ad hoc and depends on the will of individual

Lack of conceptual clarity on what SGBV entails in the context of peacekeeping mandates can mask nonsexual forms of gender-based violence that may fall within the mission’s purview, as well as forms of SGBV targeting men and boys.

personnel. Further, monitoring and reporting systems do not systematically include the types of detailed gender indicators that would inform a more strategic response to SGBV.

In spite of these challenges, there are some forms of SGBV beyond CRSV that missions can and do respond to. For example, missions can help promote women’s participation in national and local level processes, including through the provision of physical protection. Intentional barriers to women’s participation are themselves a form of SGBV that the mission can address. At the same time, increasing women’s participation helps to address the structural inequalities that perpetuate SGBV. Missions can also increase women’s access to justice mechanisms, protect individuals from forced recruitment, monitor and report on incidents of torture in detention facilities, and protect men and boys from arbitrary detention or summary execution. While missions undertake a variety of these types of activities, such measures are often not seen as part of a response to SGBV, masking the gendered drivers of such violence.

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1. Provide clear guidance on what it means to protect civilians from SGBV as part of a peacekeeping mandate.

DPO and members of the Security Council need to set clearer parameters on what forms of SGBV peacekeepers can realistically attend to. For example, domestic violence or economic violence may be beyond the scope of peacekeeping mandates. The precise scope of violence that missions can address will vary by context, depending on their capacity and reach as well as culturally specific manifestations of SGBV. Therefore, mandated language, guidance, and training must be tailored to each context. Guidance should also clarify that SGBV encompasses not only sexual violence against women and girls but also other forms of gender-based violence affecting men, women, girls, boys, and sexual and gender minorities. In particular, detailed guidance is needed on how to tailor responses to the specific needs of men, boys, and sexual and gender minorities.

2. Systematically and meaningfully integrate gender advisers and WPAs into POC planning at the strategic and operational levels:

DPO's policy on POC requires missions to integrate gender into their POC planning and activities, necessitating the involvement of gender advisers and WPAs. Yet mission structures do not automatically ensure such integration, and their participation depends on the initiative of mission leaders and individual personnel in these components. Despite this structural separation, mission leaders can take immediate action to ensure that gender analysis feeds into protection planning and activities. They should also ensure that these analyses take into account power dynamics, intersectional identities, and the gendered effects of conflict on women, men, boys, girls, and sexual and gender minorities.

3. Include gender-sensitive indicators in monitoring and reporting systems and prioritize the gathering of sex-disaggregated data.

To facilitate thorough gender analyses and continue moving toward data-driven approaches to peacekeeping, missions should prioritize monitoring and reporting on gender-sensitive indicators, including on SGBV and CRSV. Missions need to build such indicators into systems including SAGE and CPAS and to train and equip personnel to gather sex-disaggregated data that can feed into protection planning and activities. They can also train and work with partners, including CSOs, to augment their capacity to gather data where they lack access. As missions move toward mobile approaches, gender-sensitive monitoring and reporting will be particularly important to inform decisions on where to deploy peacekeepers.

4. Take a holistic approach to protecting civilians from violence, recognizing the risks of armed responses and prioritizing partnerships.

Armed approaches to civilian protection may increase the risk of SGBV, including CRSV, and fail to deal with the underlying dynamics that perpetuate such violence. Without diminishing the value of short-term physical protection, missions should respond to SGBV, as well as violence more broadly, in a holistic manner, prioritizing women's participation at all levels and addressing the cultural and legal structures that underpin SGBV. Because UN peacekeeping operations are not locally embedded, they must also build partnerships with local leaders, CSOs, and UN country teams, which are better situated to facilitate longer-term change. These partnerships should empower local communities, allowing them to define their own protection needs, and promote community-led unarmed strategies.

5. Continue to combat impunity and engage with governments and armed groups to promote accountability.

No UN body is mandated to systematically evaluate the humanitarian impact of the UN counterterrorism sanctions regime. To fill this gap, the 1267 Monitoring Team could be asked to reprioritize this part of its mandate and, in cooperation with CTED, to produce a comprehensive report on the issue. In the long term, this will require the Monitoring Team, CTED, and other relevant bodies to be given additional resources and expertise. Another option would be to reconstitute the General Working Group on Sanctions.

6. Amend language in UN counterterrorism resolutions and related sanctions regimes to facilitate humanitarian action.

Ensuring criminal and other forms of accountability can deter potential perpetrators. Moreover, providing women access to justice mechanisms is itself a way of combating SGBV, as intentionally blocking their access is a form of gender-based violence. To that end, the UN should continue to support mobile courts and build the capacity of national justice institutions to investigate and prosecute SGBV-related cases. The UN should also continue to monitor and report on violations, use these reports to spur the creation of national frameworks and agreements on CRSV and SGBV, and use these agreements to hold actors accountable.