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Action for Peacekeeping Plus (A4P+): An Update on Monitoring and Implementation after Two Years

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Executive Summary

The UN secretary-general launched Action for Peacekeeping Plus (A4P+) in March 2021, three years after introducing the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative. A4P+ was conceptualized as a two-year implementation strategy for A4P that prioritizes urgent challenges facing UN peacekeeping. To monitor progress toward achieving these priorities, the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) has developed the A4P+ Plan and A4P+ Monitoring Framework with specific results, deliverables, and indicators. To date, DPO has published two reports assessing the implementation of A4P+ and the impact of these efforts on UN peacekeeping operations.

A look at the UN's initial efforts to monitor the implementation of A4P+ reveals several benefits. First, it has incentivized DPO and field missions to place a stronger, more intentional, and more refined focus on the implementation of existing commitments. Second, it reinforces the UN's gradual embrace of data-driven approaches to peacekeeping. Third, the A4P+ Plan has pushed the Secretariat to accelerate the implementation of specific policy and operational commitments under its remit without waiting for concrete action from UN member states. Finally, the A4P+ Plan and Monitoring Framework have added to the ways DPO communicates the accomplishments and challenges of UN peacekeeping to member states.

Despite this progress, DPO faces challenges in its current approach to monitoring the implementation of A4P+. First, the progress reports provide incomplete snapshots of UN peacekeeping's performance on each of the A4P+ priorities. Second, the design of the A4P+ Plan and Monitoring Framework makes it hard for DPO to clearly identify how much progress is being made and the extent to which this progress is improving UN peacekeeping's overall impact. Third, the Secretariat has not provided clarity on how it understands the relationships between the different A4P+ priorities. Finally, DPO's efforts to champion and operationalize the A4P+ Plan have unintentionally taken the spotlight off UN member states and their obligations to deliver on the Declaration of Shared Commitments.

Moving forward, UN officials will need to balance ambitious goals for progress with realistic expectations about what peacekeeping operations can achieve and when. The UN will also have to decide whether to extend the current set of A4P+ priorities beyond 2023.

Introduction

The UN continues to grapple with how to sustain collective support for peacekeeping operations while addressing systemic hurdles that impede how well missions can achieve their objectives. The Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative, launched by the UN secretary-general in March 2018, and the Declaration of Shared Commitments, endorsed by 155 member states and four multilateral organizations six months later, are the cornerstones of this effort.¹ But while these initiatives have helped sustain political support for UN peacekeeping among member states and within the organization itself, peacekeeping missions continue to face systemic challenges that hamper their effectiveness.²

In response to this dilemma, the UN secretary-general launched Action for Peacekeeping Plus (A4P+) in March 2021, three years after introducing A4P. A4P+ was conceptualized as a two-year implementation strategy for A4P (2021–2023) that prioritizes specific areas of UN peacekeeping that require urgent attention to advance toward the broader aspirations of the Declaration of Shared Commitments. The seven priorities identified in A4P+ are: collective coherence behind a political strategy; strategic and operational integration; capabilities and mindsets; accountability to peacekeepers; accountability of peacekeepers; strategic communications; and cooperation with host countries. Two additional priorities—the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda and innovative, data-driven, and technology-enabled peacekeeping—are considered cross-cutting and are mainstreamed across the seven A4P+ priorities (see Figure 1).

The UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO)—in collaboration with the Department of

Operational Support (DOS) and the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance (DMSPC), and in coordination with peacekeeping missions and the headquarters desks that backstop them—has spearheaded efforts to elaborate these priorities into an actionable framework. The A4P+ Plan, which was published in October 2021, details specific results and deliverables for each of the seven priorities, as well as the UN entities responsible for overseeing implementation.³ DPO and its partners also created a standalone framework to monitor the implementation of A4P+. The Monitoring Framework features quantitative and qualitative indicators to measure UN peacekeeping’s impact and progress toward each priority. This approach is meant to help DPO strengthen its strategic communications with member states and UN officials through regular, evidence-based assessments: DPO has published two progress reports on the implementation of A4P+ (in August 2022 and January 2023).⁴

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As a policy agenda, A4P+ has helped the Secretariat and missions pinpoint concrete issues affecting UN peacekeeping and focus attention on resolving them. It has also

incentivized DPO to accelerate its efforts to systematize and analyze the data missions collect and to attempt to assess missions’ performance across all the A4P+ priorities. Missions have also been more involved in shaping the deliverables of A4P+ than they were with A4P and the Declaration of Shared Commitments, which were perceived to be more relevant to diplomats and officials at UN headquarters.

Despite these preliminary benefits, the current approach to monitoring and implementing A4P+ does have limitations. The Monitoring Framework’s initial design only captures portions of DPO’s broader efforts, making it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about overall

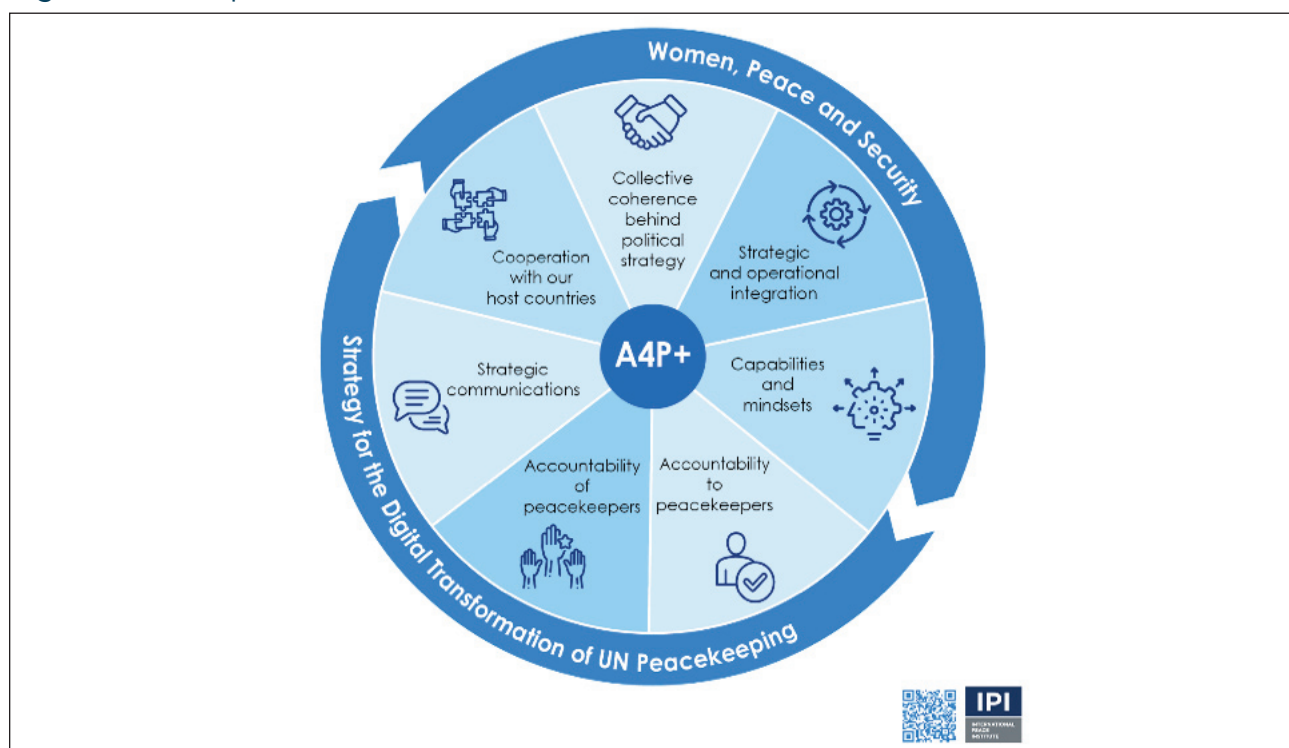
1 UN Peacekeeping, “Action for Peacekeeping: Declaration of Shared Commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations,” August 2018, available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/a4p-declaration-en.pdf>.

2 Jake Sherman, “Action for Peacekeeping: One Year into the Implementation of the Declaration of Shared Commitments,” International Peace Institute, September 2019.

3 UN Peacekeeping, “Action for Peacekeeping+ Plan,” available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/action_for_peacekeeping_plus_plan.pdf.

4 UN Peacekeeping, “Action for Peacekeeping+: Overview for November 2021–April 2022,” available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/a4p_report_-_30_jul_1747_ed.pdf; UN Peacekeeping, “Action for Peacekeeping+: Member States Report Jan 2023 (Reporting Period: 1 May–31 Oct 2022),” available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/a4p_report_022023_final.pdf.

Figure 1. A4P+ priorities



progress toward each of the priorities. The lack of transparency around the Monitoring Framework's indicators and data allows DPO to portray its performance selectively and favorably in its public reporting. And while UN member states remain broadly supportive of A4P, they are less engaged and invested in A4P+, and the rollout of the implementation plan has unintentionally diverted attention from member states' own obligations to implement the Declaration of Shared Commitments.

This issue brief takes stock of the monitoring and implementation of A4P+ over the past two years.⁵ It begins by explaining the A4P+ priorities and tracing their emergence out of the A4P initiative and Declaration of Shared Commitments. It then discusses the benefits and challenges of A4P+ from both a conceptual and an operational perspective. The issue brief then discusses highlights from the two progress reports published as of March 2023 and examines the benefits and limitations of current approaches to monitoring and implementing A4P+. The issue brief concludes with reflections on the relevance of A4P+ in the context of the contempo-

rary challenges confronting UN peacekeeping.

A4P's Evolution and Operational Limitations

From September 2018 to March 2021, A4P and the Declaration of Shared Commitments helped reinforce member states' political support for UN peacekeeping and underline the widespread geopolitical consensus on the importance of peacekeeping. This show of support was especially important at a moment of heightened turbulence for many of the largest UN missions. Following A4P's launch, DPO quickly set up an internal "policy framework and management structure" that was meant to help better align the work of different parts of DPO on common goals.⁶

However, the Secretariat confronted multiple challenges in its efforts to sustain momentum on A4P and the Declaration of Shared Commitments. One of the pillars of A4P is the political partnership between member states and the UN Secretariat on

⁵ This research draws on over fifteen interviews with UN officials conducted between May 2022 and January 2023, as well as discussions during an IPI closed-door roundtable on A4P+ monitoring and implementation convened in November 2022.

⁶ Sherman, "Action for Peacekeeping: One Year into the Implementation of the Declaration of Shared Commitments," pp. 2–3.

strengthening UN peacekeeping. Since much of the agenda is a “shared responsibility with member states,” the UN Secretariat’s progress on implementation depended on member states maintaining (and in some cases increasing) their political, financial, and material support to UN peacekeeping.⁷

Throughout 2019, the UN Secretariat and some member states spent considerable effort to keep the broader UN membership engaged on the implementation of A4P and to nurture their political support for the initiative. In 2018 and 2019, member states had frequently asked the Secretariat to provide concrete guidance on how to implement the declaration’s collective commitments.⁸ Some of DPO’s efforts in the ensuing years were successful in the short term, while others were less so.

For example, the UN Secretariat conducted a voluntary survey of its own officials, diplomats, and civil society experts to assess the implementation of A4P and identify areas for improvement. One part of the survey focused on perceptions of implementation: UN member-state respondents had the most favorable perception of overall implementation (3.90/5.00), while the UN Secretariat (3.73/5.00) and civil society respondents (3.33/5.00) had less favorable perceptions. However, the Secretariat had a more favorable perception than member states for three of the seven priorities and for several of the specific commitments.⁹

Another part of the survey sought to identify specific actions UN member states and the Secretariat had taken to support the implementation of A4P.¹⁰ Responses varied widely, reflecting member states’ different priorities and inconsistent interpretations of how various actions contributed to the implementation of A4P: some commitments received over twenty responses (including those related to WPS and the protection of civilians), while others received fewer than ten (including

those on specialized capabilities, UN mission transitions, and host-country cooperation). Identifying these actions through a survey also positioned member states to effectively “grade their own homework” and therefore provided an incomplete and unrepresentative view of progress. DPO only conducted this voluntary survey once.

After the under-secretary-general for peace operations called on specific member states to support the initiative in May 2019, the identification of “A4P Champions” emerged as another short-term effort to sustain momentum behind specific themes. Twenty-seven member states notified DPO that they were interested in serving as an informal champion for at least one of the A4P themes (with seventeen of them hoping to champion multiple themes).¹¹ Despite a short burst of momentum behind this initiative in fall 2019, member states and DPO struggled to maintain the level of convening and operational support required to sustain the initiative following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Member states themselves found A4P to be a useful tool for policymaking on UN peacekeeping. In 2020, the General Assembly’s Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (C-34) restructured its annual substantive report to align with the eight A4P themes as a way of overcoming recurring deadlock in its negotiations.¹² This restructuring not only improved the committee’s working methods but also consolidated member states’ political support for A4P. The C-34 has formally “welcomed” A4P and urged all stakeholders to continue implementing their commitments.¹³

DPO also faced challenges in transforming A4P from an abstract idea into policy. The secretary-general first introduced A4P in his March 2018 briefing to the UN Security Council, after which DPO was left with the responsibility of making it operational.¹⁴ What emerged throughout much of

7 UN Peacekeeping, “Action for Peacekeeping,” available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/what-is-a4p.pdf>.

8 Sherman, “Action for Peacekeeping: One Year into the Implementation of the Declaration of Shared Commitments,” p. 5.

9 On the scale used by DPO, 1 = significant deterioration in progress; 2 = deterioration in progress; 3 = no change in progress; 4 = progress; and 5 = significant progress. See: UN, “Secretary-General’s Initiative on Action for Peacekeeping: Results of A4P Survey,” available at <https://www.un.org/en/A4P/dashboard.shtml>.

10 This part of the survey was limited, as only thirty-two member states, one international organization, and the UN Secretariat responded. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

11 Sherman, “Action for Peacekeeping: One Year into the Implementation of the Declaration of Shared Commitments,” pp.6–7; UN Department of Peace Operations “A4P Champions List,” as of October 9, 2019 (on file with author).

12 Lisa Sharland, “Bouncing Back from Rock Bottom: A New Era for the UN Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations?” International Peace Institute, October 14, 2020.

13 UN General Assembly, *Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations: 2021 Substantive Session*, UN Doc. A/75/19, paras. 113 and 119.

14 António Guterres, speech at the 8218th meeting of the UN Security Council, New York, UN Doc. S/PV.8218, March 28, 2018.

2018 was an ad hoc approach, with DPO identifying which of its existing workstreams, activities, and deliverables could fall under its new work on the A4P initiative. At one point in mid-2019, DPO reported on as many as eighty-nine deliverables that it had identified as being somewhat relevant to one (or more) of the Declaration of Shared Commitments' themes.¹⁵

While this approach harmonized many of DPO's ongoing efforts under a single banner, it also emphasized the measurement of activities and outputs instead of outcomes and impact. In addition, the Secretariat did not indicate how DPO should prioritize its finite attention and resources across this range of outputs. And because A4P and the Declaration of Shared Commitments were almost entirely headquarters-centric processes, field missions did not have a prominent role in shaping how the commitments were operationalized or prioritized.

The concrete, time-bound priorities, results, and deliverables built into the A4P+ Plan are meant to offer a clearer sense of where existing commitments are progressing and where they are falling short.

Establishing the A4P+ Priorities, Plan, and Monitoring Framework

A4P+ was conceptualized to achieve multiple purposes: to provide UN headquarters and field missions with a strategy for making progress on a clearly defined set of the highest-priority issues affecting their work; to improve how DPO evaluates its achievements through a more rigorous and evidence-based performance framework; and to consolidate political backing for UN peacekeeping by communicating the Secretariat's efforts to implement the Declaration of Shared Commitments.

To implement A4P+, DPO first sought to identify the priorities it would comprise. Its intention was to

focus on persistent and concrete challenges that UN peacekeeping operations confronted as they implemented their core mandated priorities. The department undertook an extensive review of internal reports about UN peacekeeping and consulted with field missions, DOS, DMSPC, and select member states.¹⁶ An A4P+ priorities paper was formally launched by the secretary-general at a high-level virtual event in March 2021 on the third anniversary of A4P's inception.¹⁷

Clarifying the relationship between A4P and A4P+ was an early focus for DPO. The A4P+ priorities were not intended to replace or supersede the commitments made by member states or the UN Secretariat in the Declaration of Shared Commitments. Instead, the concrete, time-bound priorities, results, and deliverables built into the A4P+ Plan are meant to offer a clearer sense of where these commitments are progressing and where they are falling

short. DPO intended for the implementation of A4P+ to "enable progress on [UN peacekeeping's] broader programme of work" and specified that "each of the seven A4P+ priorities spans several, if not all, A4P commitments and [that] any effort to address any of the seven A4P+ priority areas will have positive multiplier effects across several A4P commitments."¹⁸

The development of the A4P+ Plan and Monitoring Framework were central focuses for DPO throughout 2021. Following the launch of the paper in March 2021, DPO sought to identify deliverables and actions that could fit within each of the seven A4P+ priorities. The Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, with support from a retired senior UN official (appointed as a senior A4P+ adviser), led an internal process to articulate the A4P+ Plan based on consultations across headquarters and missions from April through

15 Sherman, "Action for Peacekeeping: One Year into the Implementation of the Declaration of Shared Commitments," pp. 2–3.

16 These included the Office for the Peacekeeping Strategic Partnership's "Note to USGs LaCroix and Khare on Systemic Issues in Peacekeeping in 2020" (April 2020), El-Ghassim Wane's "Review of Peacekeeping Responses in Four Critical Missions" (November 2020), and various mission-specific reports prepared by the Office for the Peacekeeping Strategic Partnership and Policy, Evaluation and Training Division. Written feedback from external reviewers, March 2023.

17 UN Peacekeeping, "A4P+: Priorities for 2021–2023," available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/a4p_background_paper.pdf. The event was sponsored by the Netherlands as one of the A4P champions. See: UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, "Action for Peacekeeping Plus to Focus on Enhancing Impact of Missions, Secretary-General Says in Third Anniversary Message," press release, UN Doc. SG/SM/20658, March 29, 2021.

18 UN Peacekeeping, "Action for Peacekeeping+ Plan," p. 2.

October 2021. The purpose of the A4P+ Plan was to provide a coherent and unifying vision for DPO's implementation of A4P+ over the following two years and to help translate the broad A4P+ priorities into concrete and measurable initiatives within DPO (and, to a lesser extent, within DOS, DMSPC, and the DPO-Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs [DPPA] regional structure).

When the A4P+ Plan was close to finalization, DPO began to set up the Monitoring Framework and data-collection system for implementing A4P+. This process was facilitated by the senior A4P+ adviser and the DPO/DPPA Information Management Unit, which conceptualized and designed the Monitoring Framework between October 2021 and May 2022.¹⁹ Their objective was to build a relatively light reporting system that would consolidate existing data related to the A4P+ priorities from across UN peacekeeping. DPO also saw the Monitoring Framework as a tool to help succinctly communicate progress on A4P+ both internally and to member states. As part of this process, DPO attempted to identify indicators that were discrete and measurable and that could be used to assess impacts or results (not exclusively deliverables or outputs).²⁰ The framework, housed in a custom online platform and mobile application built by DPO, includes approximately sixty indicators across the seven priorities (and two cross-cutting priorities) that draw on quantitative and qualitative data collected by DPO, DOS, DMSPC, and field missions. Approximately half of the indicators were based on data that was already being collected.

The creation of A4P+ workplans within DPO was another part of the department's overall approach to monitoring the implementation of A4P+. Each entity in DPO headquarters developed its own workplan to prioritize how it would implement its obligations within the A4P+ Plan.²¹ The twelve UN peacekeeping missions were not asked to develop stand-alone workplans on A4P+ but were instead encouraged to incorporate the A4P+ Plan into their existing mission planning processes. These

workplans have helped different parts of the department better understand their own responsibilities for and contributions to the implementation of A4P+. They have also provided departmental leadership with a clearer picture of timing, resources, and prioritization within DPO.

The A4P+ Monitoring Framework's rollout presented various operational hurdles. While DPO tried to make the system clear and streamlined to minimize the operational burden it would impose, it still presented mission and headquarters personnel with additional reporting requirements. These were especially burdensome in under-capacitated mission planning units or offices of the chief of staff, which already oversee missions' reporting for the annual budget and mission-wide planning processes like the Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS).

At the headquarters level, capacity shortfalls within the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations also presented unexpected hurdles for operationalizing and maintaining the A4P+ Monitoring Framework. These shortfalls arose due to personnel changes throughout 2022 and challenges recruiting staff with specialized skills. Recognizing the need for more capacity to both maintain and adapt the Monitoring Framework, DPO has begun recruiting a data engineer and monitoring and evaluation specialist to complement the political affairs officers who have traditionally staffed the under-secretary-general's office.

Observations from the A4P+ Monitoring Reports

The first two A4P+ reports (covering November 2021–April 2022 and May–October 2022, respectively) provide a public-facing view of progress across the A4P+ priorities.²² The first report provides a baseline of data available for an initial six-month interval. Subsequent reports are intended to provide time-series analysis based on data collected during subsequent reporting

¹⁹ The Information Management Unit is an expert team within the Office of the Director for Coordination and Shared Services jointly overseen by the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and DPO.

²⁰ Written feedback from external reviewer, March 2023.

²¹ The following entities created A4P+ specific workplans: the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations; the Office of Military Affairs; the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions; the Policy, Evaluation and Training Division; and the Office for the Peacekeeping Strategic Partnership.

²² Some of the data DPO uses in the progress report extends through December 2022.

periods, although the second report was a shorter interim report due to capacity limitations within DPO.²³

The reports present snapshots of both quantitative and qualitative data collected in each of the seven A4P+ priority areas. Indicators that fall under the two cross-cutting priorities—WPS and innovative, data-driven, and technology-enabled peacekeeping—are covered across the other priority areas.²⁴

The progress reports do not appear to provide updates on all available indicators. This is partially due to the wide variation in indicators used: some indicators are based on time-series data (mostly at six-month intervals, though some data is monthly, quarterly, annual, or multiyear), while others are simple yes-or-no indicators (like whether mission plans have been developed). This variation, combined with DPO's prioritization of indicators measuring impact instead of implementation, means the reports do not provide comprehensive updates on all the results and deliverables in the A4P+ Plan.

While it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions about the full breadth of progress on the implementation of A4P+ solely from the progress reports, these documents shed light on a few trends in the Secretariat's approach.

Some A4P+ issue areas appear to be better suited for systematic quantitative data analysis than others. For example, for Priority 1 (collective coherence behind a political strategy) and Priority 7 (host-State cooperation), the reports contain no quantitative data, only qualitative analysis. While these mission-specific updates highlight recent activities related to dialogue, good offices, and regional engagement, they do not systematically demonstrate the impact of A4P+ on peacekeeping operations' efforts in these areas.

In contrast, the monitoring reports provide quantitative updates on Priorities 4 (accountability to peacekeepers) and 5 (accountability of peace-

keepers). Because many of the results and deliverables for these priorities lend themselves to quantifiable indicators, DPO can more easily demonstrate trends in performance over time, both historically and from one reporting period to the next.

Under Priority 4 (accountability to peacekeepers), the first progress report features both quantitative and qualitative data on uniformed fatalities due to malicious acts, explosive threats in peacekeeping missions, casualty-evacuation policies, and crimes against peacekeepers. For example, the baseline report presents data on uniformed fatalities from 2016 to mid-2022, highlighting the gradual decline in fatalities from 2017 through 2021 followed by a rise in fatalities the past two years; the progress report uses both quantitative and qualitative analysis to examine the data for 2022 in more detail. In another example, both reports examine how the UN missions in Mali (MINUSMA), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) are impacted by explosive threats: the baseline report lays the foundation by sharing raw data on the total number of incidents and clearances in each mission, while the progress report provides more detail on incidents, casualties, and response measures in each mission between 2017 and 2022. This demonstrates the reporting system's potential both to show data trends over time and to explore specific issues or data points in greater detail.

On Priority 5 (accountability of peacekeepers), the two reports provide updates on contingent performance for several of the missions.²⁵ The two reports highlight, for example, that the military units of the UN mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the UN mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL), and MONUSCO were evaluated in the previous four quarters and that all the evaluated units in UNIFIL exceeded standards. The progress report also highlights that most police units in the four biggest peacekeeping missions were evaluated as "satisfactory," though small percentages of units in MINUSMA and MINUSCA were considered to "need improvement."

²³ The next report is expected to be published in the third quarter of 2023 and should cover the period from November 2022 to April 2023. Written feedback from external reviewer, March 2023.

²⁴ DPO not only mainstreamed WPS across the seven priorities but also added a dedicated subsection on WPS in the baseline report.

²⁵ The reports provide data on evaluations of the police components of MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO, and UNMISS and of the military components of these four missions plus UNIFIL and the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP).

The reports' section on strategic communications demonstrates how A4P+ monitoring could have added value by using data to lay out the scope of a problem and then reporting on specific actions the UN has taken in response. For example, the first progress report shares survey data on peacekeepers' perceptions of the extent to which missions are confronting misinformation and disinformation. The second progress report then details proactive measures missions have put in place to address these threats, including the establishment of working groups, cooperation with social media companies, and engagement with national media through trainings and other fora.

In addition, the two reports reflect DPO's preliminary efforts to integrate the cross-cutting themes of WPS and innovation, data, and technology across the A4P+ priorities and throughout the A4P+ Plan. Drawing on WPS-related data collected by DPO, the baseline and progress reports highlight engagement on WPS under Priorities 1 through 4. These include breakdowns of gender-and WPS-specific considerations in missions' political strategies (Priority 1); the incorporation of gender analysis in 91 out of 126 mission-planning frameworks (Priority 2); the number of early-warning systems that comprise at least 30 percent women and progress toward the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy's targets (Priority 3); and brief allusions to efforts to improve the working and living conditions of female peacekeepers (Priority 4).

Similarly, DPO's growing focus on data and technology is reflected across several A4P+ priorities. These include discussion of improved mission-wide integration through CPAS (Priority 2); the use of data in mandate implementation and field operations (Priority 3); missions' environmental footprint (Priority 5); and missions' ability to monitor the sentiments of host populations (Priority 6). These are only a few examples drawn from DPO's multi-pronged programmatic approach to implementing its Strategy for the Digital Transformation of UN Peacekeeping.

Benefits of DPO's Current Approach to A4P+ Monitoring

A4P+ complements A4P and the Declaration of Shared Commitments in multiple ways. First, it has incentivized DPO and field missions to place a stronger, more intentional, and more refined focus on the implementation of existing commitments to deal with systemic problems affecting UN peacekeeping. By identifying concrete priorities and deliverables, the A4P+ Plan helped DPO align its priorities and workstreams under a unifying framework. According to one analyst, these priorities and deliverables were selected not only because they broadly aligned with A4P but also because DPO could chart a realistic pathway for making progress on each of them.²⁶ Another individual explained that "the single, coherent A4P+ framework makes it easier to manage progress monitoring across missions and to identify common challenges when implementing mission mandates."²⁷ This institutional progress has helped the Secretariat improve how it organizes its work and demonstrate progress to member states.

Second, this approach to monitoring the implementation of A4P+ reinforces the UN's gradual embrace of data-driven approaches to peacekeeping. Prior to the creation of A4P+, DPO did not have a standardized set of quantifiable metrics to evaluate performance, let alone department-wide systems to regularly consolidate the large amounts of data collected by missions and different headquarters entities.²⁸ The A4P+ Monitoring Framework helps fill this gap. It has helped DPO begin to break down departmental silos by drawing data from various parts of the Secretariat to report on a nascent set of "global indicators" without replacing or superseding the mission-specific results frameworks developed for CPAS.²⁹ The broader process of setting up the A4P+ Monitoring Framework and recruiting experts within DPO also demonstrates the department's gradual embrace of

²⁶ Interview with external analyst, November 2021.

²⁷ IPI workshop, "UN Peacekeeping and A4P+: A Closed-Door Workshop on Progress, Challenges, and the Way Forward," November 10, 2022.

²⁸ Some Security Council mandates include benchmarks relevant only to that mission, often in the context of a mission drawdown or transition; mission budget reports feature output-based performance metrics that are aligned to each mission's mandate and structure; and each mission's CPAS framework is highly customized to that mission and cannot be easily standardized or replicated across all missions.

²⁹ Daniel Forti, "UN Peacekeeping and CPAS: An Experiment in Performance Assessment and Mission Planning," International Peace Institute, October 2022.

a more data-driven approach, as also reflected in DPO's Strategy for the Digital Transformation of UN Peacekeeping and the secretary-general's Data Strategy for the UN System.

Third, the A4P+ Plan has pushed the Secretariat to accelerate the implementation of specific policy and operational commitments under its remit without waiting for concrete action from UN member states. By placing the Secretariat at the center of this phase of A4P's implementation, DPO implicitly acknowledged that progress on the systemic issues reflected in the Declaration of Shared Commitments was constrained by its dependence in part (or wholly) on the political will of UN member states.³⁰ By initiating A4P+ and demonstrating progress on some of its priorities, the Secretariat could also better show how it is contributing to the declaration and why it needs stronger support from member states.

A4P+ has also empowered field missions (and mission leadership) to engage more directly in designing and operationalizing these priorities in their daily work. While the themes captured within the Declaration of Shared Commitments resonated with missions, mission officials were unclear as to how they should incorporate these themes into their day-to-day work beyond using them as communication tools. By contrast, the A4P+ Plan identifies mission leadership as critical implementors of its priorities and delineates which tasks missions are responsible for spearheading.

Compared to A4P and the Declaration of Shared Commitments, A4P+ also reduces the number of UN entities responsible for implementation. Under A4P+, DPO, DOS, DMSPC, and field missions are responsible for implementing the vast majority of the deliverables, while the Declaration of Shared Commitments requires more engagement from other parts of the UN system.³¹

Fourth, the A4P+ Plan and Monitoring Framework give DPO another tool to improve how it commu-

nicates to member states about peacekeeping's successes and challenges. Since 2017, member states on the Security Council and C-34 have encouraged DPO to embrace the systematic and widespread use of data throughout missions. Missions have gradually incorporated data into various mission-planning and reporting processes (including their CPAS frameworks and their regular reporting to the Security Council and General Assembly). However, many of these existing processes were mission- or entity-specific and therefore did not lend themselves to easy comparisons between missions or broader assessments across all peacekeeping operations.³²

DPO's A4P+ infrastructure now gives the department a fledgling tool to begin systematically collecting department-wide data and sharing some of it with external audiences. The initial thinking behind the reports was that they would be succinct, flexible, and engaging communication tools that summarize concrete evidence about UN peacekeeping's performance while also complementing the array of existing reports and briefings member states receive. The reports were also designed to be flexible in both structure and focus so that DPO can highlight specific priorities and data points depending on its priorities for the upcoming period.

Limitations to DPO's Current Approach to A4P+ Monitoring

Despite this progress, DPO still faces several substantive, methodological, and operational challenges in monitoring the implementation of A4P+. First, the baseline and progress reports provide incomplete snapshots of UN peacekeeping's performance on each of the A4P+ priorities. DPO has not shared the indicators and data sources comprising the Monitoring Framework

DPO's approach to monitoring the implementation of A4P+ reinforces the UN's gradual embrace of data-driven approaches to peacekeeping.

³⁰ Sherman, "Action for Peacekeeping: One Year into the Implementation of the Declaration of Shared Commitments," p. 3.

³¹ Ibid., p. 2.

³² One exception is the A4P+ Monitoring Framework's use of WPS indicators: these are drawn from the fifteen core indicators set out in DPO's WPS Accountability Framework and are standardized across all peacekeeping missions. For more information, see: Forti, "UN Peacekeeping and CPAS," pp. 20–21.

publicly. While this approach allows DPO to remain flexible and prioritize how it communicates externally about various aspects of the A4P+ priorities, it also undermines the credibility and transparency of the reports, as DPO can selectively choose what data it presents to create a positive narrative.

This challenge is also reflected in how data is presented throughout the two reports. Each report only presents data on a handful of issues and a select group of missions within each A4P+ priority and a select group of missions for each indicator. While this partially reflects limitations on data quality, it has also allowed DPO to be selective in which issues and missions are included in the report, and which are accompanied by supplemental qualitative analysis.³³ It is not clear how many of the approximately sixty indicators in the overall framework are left out of the reports, and the data that is provided is not accompanied by numerical targets against which to measure progress (or lack thereof). Some of the indicators and data presented in the reports also lack necessary context or are not broken down by year.³⁴ Absent the full list of indicators and data, it is hard for external audiences to independently assess the quality of the reports' information and analyses or to use the reports to meaningfully assess the impact of UN peacekeeping across these priority areas.

Second, the design of the A4P+ Plan and Monitoring Framework makes it hard for DPO to clearly identify how much progress UN peacekeeping is making across each of the A4P+ priorities and the extent to which these developments are improving UN peacekeeping's overall impact. Providing such answers is inherently difficult, as DPO is attempting to measure systemic changes that are highly contextual, nonlinear, often hard to measure with quantitative data, and shaped by many entities within and outside of the UN. Relatedly, DPO has had to strike a difficult balance in designing a monitoring framework that is both

operationally light and broad enough to cover UN peacekeeping's diverse areas of work. Nonetheless, the data and analyses presented in the reports do not present a clear narrative about UN peacekeeping's recent impact and limitations.

Third, the Secretariat has not provided clarity on how it understands the relationships between the different A4P+ priorities. While many results and deliverables described in the A4P+ Plan are discrete and measurable, articulating progress on any one of them requires nuanced qualitative and quantitative analysis that cuts across multiple issue areas. Efforts to clearly demonstrate broader progress thus encounter a difficult challenge: How can DPO articulate the extent to which progress on any one priority, result, or deliverable contributes to the overall A4P+ priorities and the Declaration of Shared Commitments? Similarly, does success in one priority area affect success in another? While A4P+ does establish a set of short-term priorities among the larger commitments set out in A4P and the Declaration of Shared Commitments, it has not yet clearly linked these priorities to the overall impact of UN peacekeeping.

Not sharing the indicators and data sources has allowed DPO to remain flexible, but it also undermines the credibility and transparency of its reports.

Fourth, DPO's efforts to champion and operationalize the A4P+ Plan have unintentionally taken the spotlight off UN member states and their obligations to deliver on the Declaration of Shared Commitments. Although member states are broadly supportive of the A4P+ priorities, they are less politically invested in them than they were in A4P and the Declaration of Shared Commitments. This has led DPO to pursue creative ways of securing member states' consistent support for A4P+. Most prominently, at the 2021 UN Peacekeeping Ministerial in Seoul, DPO structured its pledging guide for member states according to the A4P+ priorities. Under-Secretary-General Jean-Pierre LaCroix's statement at the ministerial similarly reinforced the clear linkages between member states' pledges and their potential contributions to the implementation of A4P+. However,

³³ For example, the baseline report provides data on how uniformed contingents in eight peacekeeping missions have been evaluated, while the progress report provides data from only six missions. Similarly, DPO provides qualitative analysis of several missions under Priorities 1 and 7 across the two reports.

³⁴ For example, in the progress report, data on the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of crimes against peacekeepers covers the period from 2013 to 2022 without analyzing changes or patterns within that period.

DPO has not followed up or communicated externally on how the final pledges aligned (or did not align) with specific A4P+ priorities.³⁵ Moreover, DPO has channeled much of its own efforts since 2021 toward accelerating progress on A4P+, with the unintended consequence of minimizing its active role in advancing the Declaration of Shared Commitments.

Conclusion: Sustaining Progress on A4P+ in the Short Term and Long Term

A4P+ was designed to help the UN prioritize urgent, systemic issues that have impacted peacekeeping missions' mandate implementation and hindered progress toward the aspirations of the Declaration of Shared Commitments. While A4P+ is a short-term implementation strategy for the broader A4P agenda, in some ways it is a more ambitious undertaking: it directs attention and resources to tangible challenges and advances efforts to provide evidence-based assessments of progress and shortcomings. These efforts have unfolded at a time when many multidimensional peacekeeping operations confront challenges related to their strategic relevance, effectiveness, and popular legitimacy in the countries where they operate.

Moving forward, UN officials will need to balance ambitious goals for progress with realistic expectations about what peacekeeping operations can achieve and when. While many components of the A4P+ Plan are discrete and measurable, progress on each (and broader improvements across the priorities) is nonlinear and context-specific and requires different time frames and measures of success. The provision of consistent, evidence-based updates is a welcome step in the UN's efforts to assess the progress of UN peacekeeping in addressing each of these priorities.

However, the lack of transparency around how

DPO presents the indicators and data it uses to assess progress on the A4P+ priorities is a limitation. Providing data more transparently and better contextualizing assessments of progress (or lack thereof) would strengthen the evidence base supporting A4P+. Considering that DPO sees the Monitoring Framework and progress reports as iterative products that can be improved over time, there are expectations that future reports will provide a more systematic overview of progress.

Sustaining the current approach to monitoring A4P+ will also depend on DPO's ability to spearhead the digital transformation of UN peacekeeping. The creation of the A4P+ Monitoring Framework has unfolded while UN peacekeeping, and the UN system more broadly, are undergoing massive shifts in how they integrate technology and data throughout their work. However, changes in

programming, operations, data quality, and personnel and skills are gradual, and the UN is still in the early stages of integrating data into all aspects of peacekeeping.

Another unanswered question is whether DPO will extend the current set of A4P+ priorities beyond 2023.

The A4P+ Plan and priorities were initially framed as time-bound to focus on clear progress on specific priorities within UN peacekeeping. However, with a lengthy start-up period and substantial up-front investment in the A4P+ Monitoring Framework, a longer time horizon may be needed for A4P+ to have its intended impact; DPO will only have completed four data-collection periods by the end of the 2023 time frame. Many of the A4P+ priorities relate to systemic challenges in UN peacekeeping, even if DPO is aiming toward gradual improvements in the short term. At the end of 2023, DPO will need to consider multiple questions, including whether or not to extend A4P+ and, if it does extend it, whether to extend it for a specific period of time or indefinitely, whether to make slight adjustments or to reprioritize some of the specific parts of the plan, and whether to expand or narrow its focus.

While A4P+ can help grease the machinery of UN peacekeeping, its long-term impact will depend on member states delivering on their existing political, operational, and financial commitments.

³⁵ Jean-Pierre Lacroix, remarks on the protection of civilians and safety and security at the 2021 Seoul UN Peacekeeping Ministerial, Seoul, December 8, 2021, available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/un_dpo_session_4.pdf; UN Peacekeeping, "2021 Seoul UN Peacekeeping Ministerial Pledging Guide," available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/210816_pkmin_pledging_guidepotential_list_of_pledges.pdf.

While A4P+ can help grease the machinery of UN peacekeeping, its long-term impact will depend on member states delivering on their existing political, operational, and financial commitments. As an overarching vision of peacekeeping reform, A4P was underpinned by the notion of a collective partnership between member states, the UN, and

the people who UN peacekeeping operations serve. With greater geopolitical divides among member states and missions confronting significant challenges in implementing their mandates, progress on A4P+ is only one part of the equation for strengthening peacekeeping operations.

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