

Improving Gender Training in UN Peacekeeping Operations

By **Velomahanina T. Razakamaharavo, Luisa Ryan, and Leah Sherwood**

United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 expressed a global commitment to the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. Many policy statements and guidance on gender mainstreaming have followed in the 17 years since UNSCR 1325's passage, yet peace operations on the ground appear little affected. They continue to overlook the many roles women play in conflict and conflict resolution, fail to engage fully with women's organizations, and fail to include women fighters in reintegration and security sector reform programs.¹ They even perpetrate exploitation: Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) continues to be widespread within peace missions themselves, despite increased SEA and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) training for operation forces.² Further, peace operations have failed to address the more inclusive Gender, Peace and Security (GPS) agenda and the broader role gender plays in conflict dynamics. For example, while missions may seek to address the effects of conflict-related sexual violence on women and girls, they may miss similar impacts for male victims and their families.³

Improved gender training could help ameliorate this mismatch between policy rhetoric and practice. This policybrief outlines current gender training practice, identifies gaps, and recommends ways to strengthen training in order to help peace operations personnel better understand how to apply a gender lens in their missions.

Current Training Practice

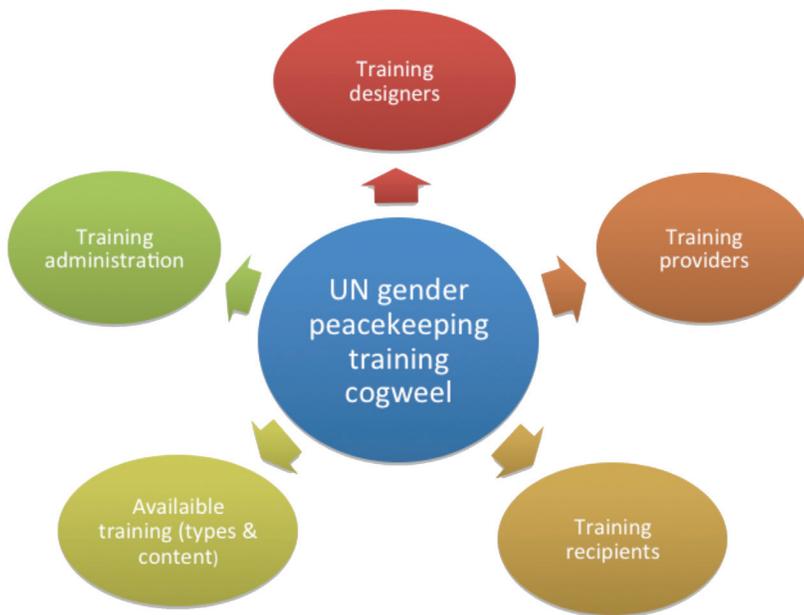
The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) aims to promote and advance gender equality through its policies on gender mainstreaming. DPKO initially sought to raise peacekeepers' awareness of conflict-related

impacts on women and girls and the need to engage local women as agents of change, and its efforts subsequently turned to influencing gender attitudes among peacekeepers themselves.⁴ Training remains one of the best mechanisms available to DPKO and the Department of Field Support (DFS) to mainstream gender perspectives in peace operations.

DPKO reiterated its commitment to gender in 2010 by issuing guidance highlighting the importance of UNSCR 1325 and gender training.⁵ In 2014, DPKO and DFS followed up with *Gender Forward Looking Strategy (2014–2018)*.⁶ The UN is attempting to integrate gender into DPKO core business areas, such as security sector reform (SSR) and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), as well as promoting an understanding of gender among the civilian, police, and military peacekeeping forces.

Despite departmental cooperation on these initiatives, gender mainstreaming in peace operations rarely rises above an "add women and stir" approach. Nor does it extend to men and boys. And its inability to curb sexual abuses and other practices inconsistent with UN ethics and directives threatens to undermine the WPS/GPS agenda altogether. To be able to identify inefficiencies in, or problems related to, gender training in peacekeeping operations, it is necessary to understand the UN gender peacekeeping training cogwheel. This cogwheel is composed of interrelated, intertwined, complementary processes and mechanisms. Figure 1 illustrates the levels at which action for better, more integrated training ought to be directed.

Figure 1: The cogwheel of UN gender peacekeeping training



Different recipients receive gender training at different phases of deployment. **Civilian staff** receive standardized predeployment training via online modules and through induction that takes place in person over several days. **Uniformed peacekeepers** receive gender training within predeployment packages provided by their home country. Additional induction is generally provided after arrival in-mission, although the time dedicated to gender and the content may vary widely. Specialized, ad hoc training may also be provided on an “as needed” basis on, for example, gender issues and protection of civilians. As most training occurs predeployment or in-mission, **headquarters staff** may only receive training on an ad hoc basis.⁷ Finally, all members of **mission leadership teams** receive preselection, predeployment, and induction on gender. DPKO offers a specific course for **emerging leaders**, preparing them to be senior staff, which includes a gender component. However, as demonstrated by the continuing challenges in mainstreaming gender across missions, the current training is not having the desired impact.

The training that in-coming police or military officers receive depends on their country of origin. The only training DPKO HQ is responsible for is the gender component of the Core Predeployment Training Materials (CPTM).⁸ It covers issues such as the differences between women and men (gender versus sex), the differentiated impacts of conflict on women and girls, the importance of the WPS/GPS agenda, the Women in Peacekeeping Legal Framework, gender equality, and other conceptual issues. These materials are available to member states, troop contributing countries (TCCs), police contributing countries (PCCs), gender units working for the missions, or any entity providing training to peacekeepers. However, how these units and states choose to use the

materials is up to their training institutions and therefore may vary widely. These institutions may also design and implement their own training modules.

Other training packages delivered in-mission may also include gender elements. Missionwide sessions on civilian protection and on conduct and discipline regularly touch on gender issues. For instance, new civilian recruits must complete web-based modules on sexual harassment and SEA, which falls under the purview of conduct and discipline but also has a gender dimension due to associated power dynamics, gender roles, and gender-based violence. However, Civil Affairs, which may be responsible for civilian protection, and Conduct and Discipline, which incorporates gender elements, largely operate independently. These areas in reality significantly overlap. Yet they are compartmentalized in training, when they

ought to be addressed at multiple levels through cross-cutting and intersectional lenses. Integrated training can help solve this problem.

Key Challenges

There are numerous challenges associated with gender training in peace operations. Table 1 offers an overview of the nature of these challenges. First, it categorizes the root causes of poor gender training outcomes. Second, it breaks gender training down into the main stages it is offered: before and during. Lastly, the table shows challenges at training design, trainer and recipient selection, and training administration. The table shows where challenges cluster and reveals opportunity for change by identifying possible synergies. The conceptual approach taken is an adaptation of conflict diagnostic approaches commonly used in the peacebuilding field.⁹

Predeployment Gender Training

There are four main challenges for training at the predeployment stage: compliance, relevance, quality, and access.

First, although UN-developed gender training material is provided to them, its use by TCCs and PCCs during predeployment training is voluntary. Though the DPKO has declared gender training mandatory for member states, it has no authority to enforce compliance. As a result, the quality and comprehensiveness of the training varies widely, and personnel enter UNPKO service with differing levels of gender knowledge and exposure to the WPS/GPS agenda.¹⁰

Table 1. Gender Training Problems: (Q) (I) (P) (T) (C)

	Designers	Providers	Recipients	Administration
Predeployment	(Q), (C)	(I), (Q), (C), (P)	(Q), (C), (P)	(Q), (I), (C), (T)
In-mission	(Q), (T), (C), (P)	(I), (Q), (P), (T)	(Q), (C), (P)	(Q), (T), (I), (P)

Categories:
 (Q) *Quality* Varied level of excellence, consistency, and fragmentation (of units, departments, and trainers)
 (P) *People* Mission leadership teams, gender advisors, future leaders
 (T) *Time* Physical time to complete task within budget and with resources allotted
 (C) *Cultural* Biases, lack of information and awareness, stereotypes, prejudices
 (I) *Institutional* HQ, UN

Second, TCCs and PCCs bring their own varied cultural interpretations of gender to their missions. In some cases, contributing countries may not prioritize gender issues within their domestic military and police establishments. In this environment, the trainer’s and the recipient’s existing opinions and practices related to gender relations may therefore go largely unchallenged.

Third, there is room for improvement in the quality of gender training content. For both civilians and uniformed personnel, the predeployment gender module’s generalized nature makes it a poor-quality tool for recipients. Gender training is short and presented in passive learning environments, neither of which is conducive to developing understanding of complex ideas.

Finally, the training given to existing leadership or emerging leaders before deployment is not gender training per se; it is leadership training with a gender component. This difference is subtle but significant because gender training ought to generate comprehension of the WPS/GPS agenda. In practice, leadership training tends to outline UNSCR 1325 and provide checklists to implement it. Largely generic, non-mission-specific training on gender does not support mission leadership of gender mainstreaming or present a gender lens for understanding the conflict to which they are deployed. In addition, UN volunteers (nationally and internationally engaged) and national staff, who are vital to peace operations, often are overlooked in predeployment training.

In-Mission Gender Training

In-mission training challenges are present in training design, provision, accountability, and prioritization.

The limited capacity for gender training means that it often does not extend beyond the generic level. A lack of facilitators ensures that brief, superficial, siloed gender training will continue.¹¹ Additionally, the staff who are available for designing and delivering training have varying degrees of expertise in gender issues and teaching skills. The difficulty

in translating concepts like gender into practical training was identified by the Integrated Training Service (ITS), which is responsible for periodic needs assessments to identify training required to implement UNSCR mandates, including UNSCR 1325. ITS’s 2013 report identified gender training as a priority, stating that more “understanding [is needed] of how to integrate cross-cutting issues like gender into work” and that gender concepts need to be “broken down into components so individual staff members understand the meaning of protection of civilians and how it relates to his or her job function.”¹²

The development of training materials and training itself have to compete with enormous workload demands that many staff face in-mission in difficult contexts. Uniformed staff may be deployed for only six-month periods, so there is limited time to learn new ways of analyzing social contexts and turnover is incredibly high. Yet gender training recipients need time to internalize and apply concepts. The 30- to 60-minute induction sessions are inadequate, for example, to explain that gender is not synonymous with “women’s issues.” It is also not enough time to internalize how to apply the gender lens, especially when other messaging, such as acknowledging that male staff may engage sex workers, contradicts it. As personnel arrive in-mission with varying levels of knowledge, effective gender training in-mission is essential.

Mission Leadership Teams (MLTs) have myriad competing demands to contend with, and gender issues may not seem to be the most pressing. Especially in ongoing conflicts, stopping active fighting and bringing the main parties to the negotiation table understandably are likely to receive highest priority. A comprehensive understanding of gender as an analytical tool has progressed but slowly, further hampered by those who perceive it as a development issue that can be taken up once the immediate crisis has passed.

However, a gender lens strengthens and complements the traditional security lens, by ensuring, for example, that women participate in peace processes or that appropriate

provision is made for understanding how the conflict may be affecting women/girls and men/boys differently. Fostering an understanding of gender and the use of gender as a lens for analyzing unfolding conflicts would help UN peacekeeping staff identify vulnerabilities and opportunities in conflict and postconflict contexts. Highly specialized, context-specific training should be provided to the MLT so they can incorporate gender into their own management strategies and ensure that gender training is a mission priority. In the context of recent cuts to mission budgets for dedicated gender activities and staff, this is particularly important.

Ways Forward

1. General recommendations to improve UNPKO gender training:

- Gender training must be more responsive to the educational background, experience, and cultural backgrounds of recipients but also better reflect the cultural sensitivities of countries where the missions operate. Although gender training must meet requirements set by the UN, it should be presented in culturally relevant ways.
- Experiential learning ought to be applied in gender training. The use of scenarios, role-plays, and opportunities for discussion and debate will foster applicable, practical understandings of gender. It is vital to leverage new tools and pedagogy to convey concepts in digestible and useful ways. A Behavior Change Communication (BCC) approach could strengthen internalization of the GPS framework among UN staff.¹³ BCC envisages social change and individual change as two sides of the same coin.¹⁴ A BCC approach can support gender training as it focuses on the implementation of advocacy programs, communication techniques, and similar areas of best practice. Modifying recipients' behavior is also a goal of gender training, so linking them could be helpful.
- Opportunities for those leading gender training in-mission to participate in academic conferences and other settings should be encouraged so that trainers stay abreast of the latest thinking on applying gender in conflict and postconflict contexts.
- Training must also address the experiences of men and boys so that gender is more robustly understood and not confined to "women's issues."
- The WPS/GPS agenda must be translated into accessible, practical knowledge that highlights its importance. Much of current training is conceptual.

2. Recommendations to improve in-mission gender training:

- Context-specific gender training should be developed that encompasses gender dynamics in the host country, gendered aspects of the conflict, and how to apply an analytical lens to appropriate, real scenarios.
- The silos that surround UN units for the protection of civilians and conduct and discipline should be broken down during training to emphasize gender's cross-sectional nature. While civilian protection training should be conducted by content experts, gender teams could contribute to discussions on the utility of a gender lens when assessing threats to civilians or opportunities for peacebuilding, for instance.
- Targeted training should be developed for all categories of actors and should be cross-cutting, covering all aspects of gender (e.g., SEA, gender equality, SGBV).
- Military and civilian training should be combined so that both share an understanding of challenges and opportunities related to gender across the spectrum of mission activities.
- Training evaluation should be central to the UN, member states, and training institutions.¹⁵ Such evaluation will help determine training effectiveness but also identify opportunities to strengthen training and determine best practice.
- Senior mission leadership, and the MLT in particular, should be given context-specific gender briefs before deployment. These briefs should be interactive and generate actionable plans on how to integrate a gender perspective into their team's workstream.

Gender is a vital analytical tool for UN peacekeepers. Broader, more adept employment of a gender lens would contribute to better understanding of conflict dynamics in their areas of operation. It would enable them to identify vulnerabilities and challenges in early warning, protection of civilians, and peacebuilding. Currently, gender is still underused and poorly understood in missions, where personnel may see it as a lesser priority in the face of active conflict or as a development issue that other UN agencies and partners can take up at a later date. More effective training can deepen peacekeepers' understanding of gender and how to use it as a tool in their everyday work. This brief has recommended improvements to gender training at the staff level and at the mission leadership level in order to ensure that a gender lens becomes an entrenched, critical element of the peacekeeping skill set.

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WIIS Policy Roundtables and its Policybriefs are supported by the Embassy of Liechtenstein in Washington, D.C. The WIIS WPS+GPS Next Generation Initiative is supported by Carnegie Corporation of New York and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

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