

ACTION FOR PEACEKEEPING  
WPS CHAMPIONS EVENT SERIES

# Breaking Barriers

## Women in Peacekeeping





# In the first half of 2021, Germany, Ireland, Namibia, South Africa, Bangladesh, Kenya, Indonesia, and Canada co-hosted three panel discussions exploring the barriers to full, equal and meaningful participation faced by women peacekeepers and the means by which they might be addressed.

**The first event** focussed on barriers in the field, including the issue of gender stereotypes and their impact on women peacekeepers' roles as well as the consequences of women's needs not being factored into operational considerations. The value of women peacekeeper networks for mentorship and information-sharing was also discussed.

**The second event** considered barriers to women's participation in peacekeeping at the national level. The issue of insufficient quantitative data on women's participation in national militaries, including the roles that they perform, was raised in particular.

**The third and final discussion** related to the potential for progress on this issue in the new era of Action for Peacekeeping Plus (A4P+), including the need for a clear communication strategy to be implemented to challenge stereotypes.

The events set out clearly the range of challenges and structural and institutional barriers that persist. As a result six recommendations which aim to help address some of these have been developed. These recommendations are specific, measurable and above all are actionable and achievable now. We look forward to working with the UN and Member States on their implementation.



## Recommendation 1:

The Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Operational Support to integrate gender analysis across the planning, implementation and evaluation of operations in a way that is inclusive of all functions.

There needs to be a particular focus on examining the roles, ranks and tasks of women within all aspects of operations, including team compositions, to ensure that women are not being siloed and that the full range of their skills and experience is being respected and utilised.

In order to assist with this, it is recommended that Troop- and Police- Contributing Countries (T/PCCs) and the DPO ensure women are trained and deployed in a manner which supports their career progression, both at the national level and at the UN.

## Recommendation 2:

The Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Operational Support to mandate gender-responsive considerations in the process of planning or designing facilities and infrastructure for peacekeeping, whether refurbishing an existing facility or constructing a new facility, including the provision of and zoning for women peacekeepers' facilities within the overall camp. The UN Department of Operational Support has recently released gender-responsive engineering designs that should be fully implemented as a best practice.

*Brigadier General Maureen O'Brien inspecting Fijian troops during her time as Acting Force Commander of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), © Irish Defence Forces Press Office*



*Image Right: Indonesian women peacekeepers in Darfur (UNAMID) © Documentation Team, Indonesian FPU in UNAMID*











### **Recommendation 3:**

Actors across the UN system to strengthen the enabling environment for women peacekeepers internally by raising awareness of how gender stereotyping can undermine women's meaningful participation in peacekeeping and providing peacekeepers at all levels with the tools to address these stereotypes, and externally by making gender a key component of the strategic communications plans of missions and the DPO with a view to raising the profile of and ultimately enhancing women's participation, including in leadership.

### **Recommendation 4:**

UN and member states to facilitate and support the establishment of networks of women peacekeepers within and between missions and T/PCC to improve information-sharing and connections between women peacekeepers and uniformed women at the national level, thereby offering additional support and orientation for women seeking to deploy.

### **Recommendation 5:**

UN and member states to explore ways to incentivise national militaries and security institutions to collect detailed gender-disaggregated data on the number and roles of women serving as well as their advancement over time, including through engagement with regional organisations, in order to construct an international database which would allow progress on this issue to be measured more effectively.

### **Recommendation 6:**

UN, regional organisations and member states to consider how member states can be supported to carry out national barrier assessments and to address barriers to women's participation in peacekeeping in an evidence-based way.

In order to reach the goal of full, equal and meaningful participation of uniformed women in Peace Operations, Troop and Police Contributing Countries and the UN Secretariat need to think creatively about how to design institutions and operations that foster not only higher levels of participation from women but also their integration and advancement to all roles and at all levels. UN Security Council Resolution 2538 (2020) emphasises the importance of identifying and addressing the barriers that women peacekeepers face. To break them down the UN, member states, and other stakeholders need to take action nationally and in the field. This action needs to be informed by current policy research and analysis and, importantly, the direct experiences of women peacekeepers.



Captain Anna Endres, German Military Observer in UNMISS  
© United Nations/Suwit Kauyhomrtn

**“ We are convinced that women in peace operations enhance the operational effectiveness and legitimacy of UN missions and make them more effective in implementing their mandates. By tapping into the full available potential of talented officers and increasing the number of women deployed, the missions’ tasks can be implemented in a more sustainable and successful manner. ”**

Dr. Detlef Wächter,  
Director General for Security and Defence Policy,  
Federal Ministry of Defence





Indonesian women peacekeepers in CAR (MINUSCA)  
© Documentation Team, Indonesian FPU in MINUSCA

The UN has been attempting to increase the number of women involved in UN peacekeeping for some time, and has in place the UN Gender Parity Strategy. It is widely acknowledged however by a range of policymakers through efforts such as the *Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations* and its *Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations* methodology and by practitioners and academics that the pace of change is far too slow.

**“ We must build a mind-set of appreciation and respect among all peacekeepers, and ensure women can participate in all tasks and roles. Facilities and infrastructure must meet the needs of women. ”**

**Ambassador Mohammad Kurniadi Koba,  
Deputy Permanent Representative of the  
Republic of Indonesia to the UN**

Attention solely on numbers will not suffice – looking at addressing social, structural and institutional barriers is now an imperative.

In their roles as Action for Peacekeeping Champions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), Germany, Ireland, Namibia, South Africa, Bangladesh, Kenya, Indonesia, and Canada led a series of events in the first half of 2021 to discuss ways as well as means of removing barriers to women’s participation in peacekeeping. Through panel discussions expertly moderated by Dr. Sarah Taylor of Inclusive Peace and subsequent Q&A sessions the events identified and considered how to address the barriers that women peacekeepers face in the field and at the national level, as well as the potential for Action for Peacekeeping Plus (A4P+) to bring about a change in UN strategy on this issue.

Ambassador Brian Flynn, Deputy Permanent Representative of Ireland, opened the first event, outlining that WPS is a priority for Ireland during its tenure on the Security Council where Ireland will be looking for ways to support the structural and institutional change necessary to increase women’s participation in peacekeeping. Mr Felix Tughuyendere, acting Deputy Permanent Representative of Namibia, concluded the event.

**“ Ireland has long argued that the focus of our efforts on increasing women’s participation has to move beyond a consideration of numbers and really look to understand and put in place measures that will bring about the institutional and structural transformation that is necessary to achieve the goal of gender equality across the system. ”**

**Brian Flynn,  
Permanent Mission of Ireland to the UN**

The event examined experiences from UN missions and the nature of the barriers in the field to women’s participation. Concerns were raised about the limitations of a numbers-based targeting system for women’s participation which cannot take account of women’s career advancement or the degree to which women’s participation is restricted to less active roles. In particular the issue of gender stereotyping around roles in the field was raised, with women peacekeepers sometimes seen as a “natural fit” for certain roles where in fact the necessary and appropriate training may not have been given and where their expertise may not actually lie. Several speakers brought up the need to take gender into account when considering operational concerns, in particular the necessity of sufficiently sized bases that allow for facilities to be separated by gender, as well as the need for uniforms and equipment that are suitable for women’s use. The speakers discussed the capacity of women in leadership positions to provide mentorship and to function as role models for uniformed women who may otherwise struggle to access training, information and encouragement, whether through national or international women peacekeeper networks or as instructors at UN training facilities.

*In 2017, Bangladesh sent two female combat pilots to the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo © MONUSCO/Force*



**“ Barriers are not uniform across all missions. To be effective, we must identify mission-specific barriers to guide our collective approach.”**

**Mr. Thirugnana Sambandan, Permanent Mission of India to the UN**



At the second event, Dr. Detlef Wächter, Political Director at the German Ministry of Defence provided opening remarks, and the closing remarks were given by Major-General Ntsoaki More of South Africa.

This event focused on the barriers to women's full, equal and meaningful participation in peacekeeping operations at the national level. In keeping with this event's particular attention to the role of research in addressing these barriers, the speakers underlined the lack of comprehensive quantitative data on the number of women peacekeepers and the roles they take on. The question was raised of whether national militaries could be incentivised to collect more extensive data on gender and participation, especially on roles performed, and to share it through multilateral institutions. The speakers brought up the slow progress on the issue of increasing women's participation in peacekeeping despite ongoing UN initiatives, and explored the prospect of national barrier assessments as a tool to assess the effectiveness of past actions and current policy, referring in particular to the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) methodology developed by the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF) together with Cornell University. The panel discussed the nature of the institutional and cultural barriers which persist across member states, and heard from representatives from Uruguay and Germany about their experience in applying the MOWIP methodology to assess their national armed forces. A general theme of the discussion was that the issue of women's participation in peacekeeping is profoundly affected by the broader societal forces that shape women's social roles which can spill over into the organisational culture of security institutions.

**“ Creating an enabling environment in the missions is a critical factor in increasing the number of women. Persistent challenges also remain on the part of the T/PCCs that require urgent and sincere attention. ”**

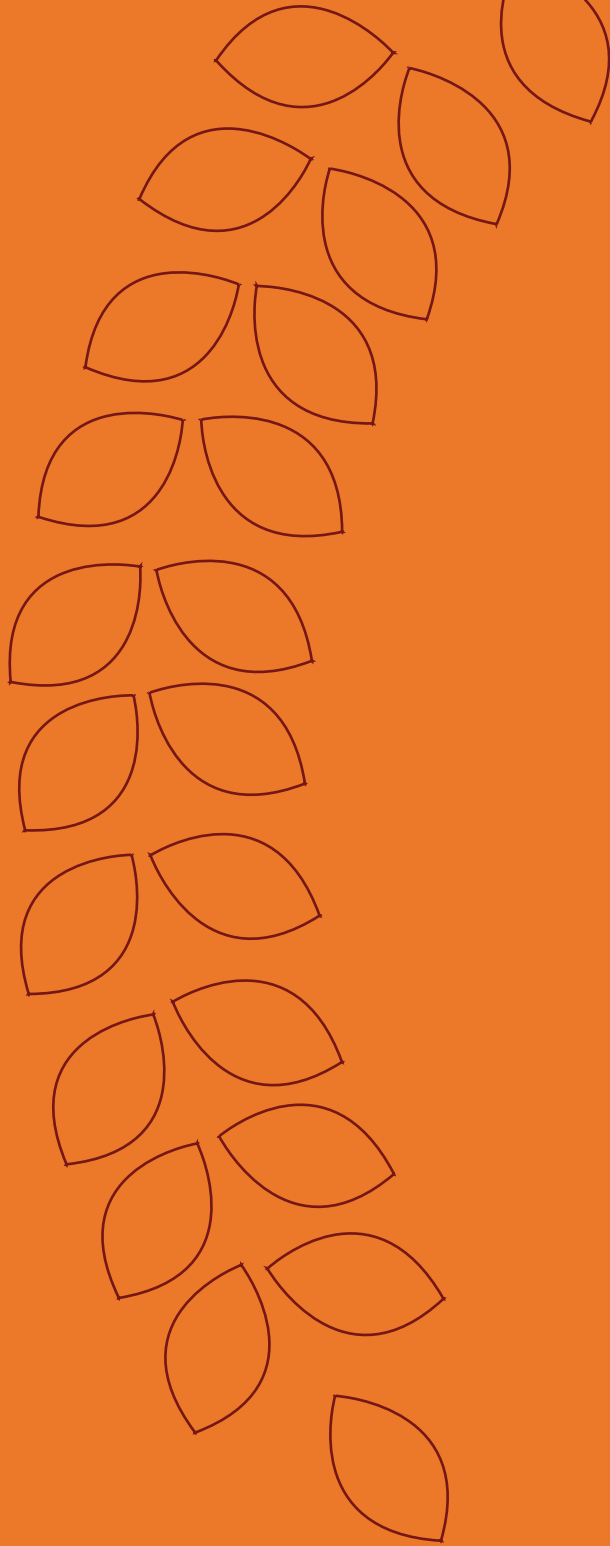
**H.E. Rabab Fatima, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN**

At the third event, H.E. Rabab Fatima, the Permanent Representative from Bangladesh, gave the opening remarks, and the closing remarks were given by H.E. Mohammad Koba, Chargé d'Affaires a.i. at the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Indonesia.

**“ The use of mixed patrols has proven to be extremely important for our work as military observers. It has allowed us to contact the various groups within the local population, thus permitting us to gain a comprehensive understanding of both the local humanitarian as well as the security situations. ”**

**Anna Endres, German military observer at UNMISS**

This third and final event explored the transformative potential in the recently launched A4P+ for women in peacekeeping. The speakers touched on the value of mainstreaming WPS issues, as is done in A4P+, because it allows gender to be systematically incorporated across issue areas. Policies that can enhance the enabling environment were outlined, including engagement platoons which mandate a gender mix. The discussion also touched on how these policies can at times reproduce a gendered division of labour, an issue that was also raised in the first event around the assumption that women peacekeeper's skills lie in community engagement. The need for a clear communication strategy to challenge stereotypes was noted, and panellists shared their own experiences of fighting assumptions about their capabilities. Finally, the A4P+ priority of accountability to and of peacekeepers was emphasised given that women peacekeepers report widespread harassment both in the field and from other peacekeepers on the base.



## Acknowledgements

We would like to sincerely thank our panellists for their insightful contributions to our discussions on women in peacekeeping. In the first event we were joined by UNDOF Deputy Force Commander Brigadier-General Maureen O'Brien, Chief Director Responsible for Transformation Management at RSA Defence HQ Major-General Ntsoaki More, Logistics Officer from the South African National Defence Force Lt. Col. Tiisetso Sekgobela, German Military Observer at UNMISS Captain Anna Endres, and Ms. Rania Dagash-Kamara, the Chief of the Policy and Best Practices Service at DPO.

In the second event our speakers were Dr. Vanessa F. Newby of Leiden University, Deputy Head of Gender and Security at DCAF Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance Ann Blomberg, Sebastian Scholz of Sopra Steria and Dr. Carina de los Santos from the Ministry of Defense of Uruguay.

In the third and final event, the panel comprised Colonel Syed Motaheer Hossain, Senior Instructor at the Bangladesh Institute for Peace Support Operation Training, Lieutenant Colonel Herly Sinaga of the Indonesian Peacekeeping Centre and former woman peacekeeper at MONUSCO, Gretchen Baldwin, Senior Policy Analyst at the International Peace Institute, Rania Dagash, the Head of Policy & Best Practices at DPET, and Claudia Banz, Chief of Staff at MINUSMA.