

Gender Mainstreaming in Peacebuilding

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This brief outlines the key challenges to the operational implementation of gender mainstreaming in operational contexts through interviews with peacebuilders deployed to EU and UN missions in Mali, the Central African Republic, Niger, Kosovo, and Georgia and makes policy recommendations to help overcome these obstacles for successful implementation.

Introduction

The concept of gender mainstreaming was first introduced during the Nairobi World Conference on Women in 1985 and formulated as an international gender equality policy by the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Significantly, in 2000, the UNDP's seminar on "Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations" in Windhoek, Namibia, built upon previous initiatives and explicitly called for the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in peace operations and peace processes. Hosted by the Namibian Government, the seminar resulted in two pioneering documents: the strategic Windhoek declaration, and the operational Namibia Plan of Action. Both had a significant impact on furthering the UN's policy making on gender mainstreaming.

Gender mainstreaming is now a central component to the United Nations Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. WPS is "the most significant and wide-reaching global framework for advancing gender equality in military affairs, conflict resolution, and security governance."¹ Although gender mainstreaming has officially been part of UN policies since 1997, the first WPS Resolution – UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) – represents a watershed moment for the global gender agenda. It highlights the changing nature of warfare and the unique impact this has on women and girls, as well as their often under-valued and unrecognised contributions to conflict resolution. Importantly, it calls for the integration of a gender perspective in all peace and security efforts. The following nine WPS resolutions further expand on the need of women's active participation in peacekeeping and peacebuilding and also focus on sexual violence in armed conflicts.

1. Basu, Soumita, Kirby, Paul and Laura Shepherd. "Women, Peace and Security: A Critical Cartography" in *New Directions in Women, Peace and Security* eds Soumita Basu, Paul C. Kirby, and Laura C. Shepherd (Bristol University Press, 2020): 1.

Over the past two decades, gender mainstreaming has gained global attention and has been integrated in a number of policy areas. Despite its wide use and political traction, scholars studying gender mainstreaming note that the concept lacks clarity and is contested both in theory and practice. In its simplest form, “gender mainstreaming is a process to promote gender equality” and is intended to make “visible the gendered nature of assumptions, processes and outcomes.”² The incorporation of the gender equality perspective “in all policies at all levels and at all stages”³ makes the concept at the same time potentially revolutionary and challenging to implement. Laura Shepherd notes that there are two key issues with gender mainstreaming: firstly, there is “fuzziness around what it would/should look like when gender has been ‘mainstreamed’ through a particular programme or policy process.”⁴ A second challenge is accountability: “if paying attention to gender is everyone’s responsibility, it is too easy for it to become no one’s responsibility.”⁵

Gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding-related activities is not immune to these challenges. In 2020, WPS celebrated 20 years of its existence which, in theory, should mean gender issues are now firmly at the forefront of the global security agenda, both in policy and practice. Yet despite its transformative potential, the impact of the WPS agenda on security practices continues to be disputed. A handful of scholars have analysed the ways peacebuilders ‘do’ gender mainstreaming. For example, Rachel Kunz provides an in-depth discussion on gender mainstreaming in Liberia⁶; Maria-Adriana Deiana and Kenneth McDonagh analyse EULEX Kosovo.⁷ Our research contributes to the debates on the practices of gender mainstreaming in different operational contexts and examines the gap between declared commitments to gender mainstreaming on the one hand, and its operationalisation on the other.

2. Walby, Sylvia. “Gender mainstreaming: Productive tensions in theory and practice.” *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 12 (3) (2005): 321-343, p. 321.

3. Council of Europe. Gender Mainstreaming, Conceptual framework, methodology and presentation of good practices. Final report of Activities of the Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming (EG-S-MS), Strasbourg 1998.

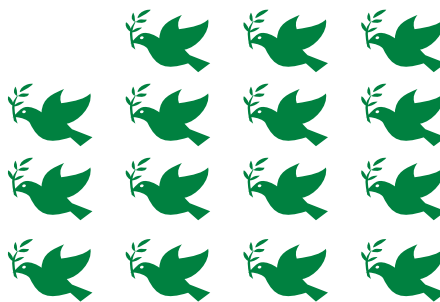
4. Shepherd, Laura J. “Victims of violence or agents of change? Representations of women in UN peacebuilding discourse.” *Peacebuilding* 4, (2) (2016): 121-135, p. 130.

5. Ibid.

6. Kunz, Rachel. “Messy feminist knowledge politics: a double reading of post-conflict gender mainstreaming in Liberia.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 22 (1) (2020): 63-85.

7. Deiana, Maria-Adriana, and Kenneth McDonagh. “Translating the Women, Peace and Security Agenda into EU Common Security and Defence Policy: Reflections from EU Peacebuilding.” *Global Society* 32 (4) (2018): 415-435.

WE INTERVIEWED 15 peacebuilders for this report



In this brief, we present preliminary findings of an ongoing research project that focuses on the implementation of gender mainstreaming in operational contexts. To date, we have interviewed 15 peacebuilders deployed to EU and UN missions in Mali, the Central African Republic, Niger, Kosovo, and Georgia. Interviewees are/were deployed in their respective missions between 2014 and 2021 and worked both as gender specialists as well as other subject matter experts. Our initial findings uncover three key challenges to the operational implementation of gender mainstreaming: the gap between institutionalisation and ‘internalisation’ of gender issues in peacebuilding, the ‘add women and stir’ problem, and the connotations some peacebuilders associate with terms such as ‘gender’ and ‘feminism’. Our findings lead to four policy recommendations, to help overcome these obstacles to the successful implementation of gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding.

THE THREE CHALLENGES TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING IDENTIFIED ARE

1	The gap between institutionalisation and ‘internalisation’ of gender issues in peacebuilding
2	The ‘add women and stir’ problem
3	The connotations some peacebuilders associate with terms such as ‘gender’ and ‘feminism’.

CHALLENGE 1: INSTITUTIONALISED NOT INTERNALISED

Despite ongoing discussions and policy developments, gender mainstreaming progresses at the institutional level while the operational level is lagging behind. Since the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325 in 2000, a lot of effort has been put into setting up appropriate institutional structures and providing policy guidance to support the implementation of the agenda. In the UN, for example, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs established a Gender, Peace and Security Unit (GPS), which is responsible for the Department's implementation of the WPS agenda and develops WPS-related policy and guidance. The WPS architecture further includes the UN Peacebuilding Commission (UNPBC) which highlights the need for a gender perspective. In 2010, the UN Secretary-General outlined the Seven Point Action Plan on Gender-Responsive Peacebuilding containing concrete targets.⁸ In a similar way, the EU has produced a range of documents to guide WPS implementation, including the 2018 strategic approach to WPS⁹ and the 2019 Action Plan.¹⁰ The strategic approach underscores the importance of women's agency in all areas related to peace and security. Other international organisations like the African Union, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe have all developed frameworks, policies and strategies centred around the WPS agenda in general and gender mainstreaming in particular. Operationally, this has led to an increased amount of gender advisors and the appointment of in-mission gender focal points.



Despite the many resolutions, policies, and principles, the practical implementation and operationalisation of gender mainstreaming on the ground too often depends on personalities and personal interests and can therefore be ad hoc or hit-and-miss.

8. United Nations Security Council. Women's Participation in Peacebuilding: Report of the Secretary-General. A/65/354-S/2010/466/2010. Available at: https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2010/466.

9. Council of the European Union. Women, Peace and Security – Council Conclusions. 14942/18. 2018. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/37412/st15086-en18.pdf>

10. Council of the European Union. Gender Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) 2019-2024. EEAS(2019) 747. 2019. EEAS(2019)747. Available at: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11031-2019-INIT/en/pdf>



Due to the lack of internalisation, gender is never a priority, and when the gender agenda is pushed operationally, it can meet with resistance within the mission.

However, despite the many resolutions, policies, and principles, the practical implementation and operationalisation of gender mainstreaming on the ground too often depends on personalities and personal interests and can therefore be ad hoc or hit-and-miss. One gender expert we interviewed noted that “gender mainstreaming needs to be more structural and not based on personal convictions.” Gender advisors are, unsurprisingly, the key operational drivers behind the agenda, alongside the gender focal points. To push for the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the mission they seek support from like-minded colleagues. However, apart from gender specialists, many subject matter experts deployed to peacebuilding missions still consider gender as an ‘add on’, a box to be ticked. This results in continued resistance to recognise gender equality as integral to peace. The buy-in from senior management is particularly key for gender mainstreaming success. But despite a lot of progress on paper, such as mission mandates and job descriptions referencing gender mainstreaming, our interviews found that meaningful support from senior mission management varies. As a result, successful gender mainstreaming implementation is also dependent on the convictions of mission management.

In short, beyond gender advisers, subject matter experts deployed to conflict-affected environments rarely think of gender as a core part of their work. This is still considered to be the role of the gender adviser in the mission, rather than a collective responsibility. Buy-in from the most senior level of the mission can help raise awareness of the importance of collective ownership. Due to the lack of internalisation, gender is never a priority, and when the gender agenda is pushed operationally, it can meet with resistance within the mission.

CHALLENGE 2: A TARGET- FOCUSSED APPROACH

The WPS agenda reflects four core pillars: prevention, protection, participation and relief and recovery. While participation is considered the most important pillar for gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding mandates, there appears to be a very narrow view of what meaningful ‘participation’ really entails. It generally refers to an increased involvement of women at all levels of decision-making in conflict prevention, management, and resolution, as well as in peace operations.



other characteristics such as race, age, ethnicity, sexuality, class, or religious identity appear not to be central to peacebuilding efforts. The concept of intersectionality, reflecting more diverse and complex social categories, is rarely considered in both policies and practice.

This is reflected in the approach of non-gender specialist staff to gender mainstreaming, who tend to understand participation simply as ‘add women and stir’, where a certain percentage of women is sought to take part in the mission activities to meet the required gender quota. Such an approach is not a unique challenge to gender mainstreaming initiatives. Shepherd notes that an “integrationist approach ... focuses solely on the number of women, for example, in political office in the post-conflict state.”¹¹ This mindset undermines the impact of gender mainstreaming initiatives as it misses the focus on transforming gender power relations.

This in turn leads to issues with reporting and evaluation. Mission reporting on gender mainstreaming is largely dominated by quantitative analysis and a presentation of percentages of women working in the mission or women participating in mission activities. Mission qualitative analyses are rare, we lack a more holistic picture of how gender mainstreaming is implemented in peacebuilding operations, and what the long-term impact is.

Interviewees also made specific references to women, men, boys and girls, which reflects the language used in official documentation. Yet, other characteristics such as race, age, ethnicity, sexuality, class, or religious identity appear not to be central to peacebuilding efforts. The concept of intersectionality, reflecting more diverse and complex social categories, is rarely considered in both policies and practice. Upon being asked about intersectionality, one gender adviser clearly understood the importance of intersectionality but noted that operationally, intersectional thinking simply “makes things too complicated” and that “there is only so much a mission can do.” In effect, gender mainstreaming is often translated into simply adding only some women into existing structures.

11. Shepherd, Laura J. *Gender, UN peacebuilding, and the politics of space: Locating legitimacy* (Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 74).

CHALLENGE 3: CONNOTATIONS

Related to the 'add women and stir' attitudes are the connotations frequently associated with words like 'gender' and 'feminist'. We have observed two types of problematic associations within our group of interviewees. A first one concerns an incorrect or simplistic understanding of the term gender, which in turn impacts thinking about gender mainstreaming. Gender is often understood as a synonym for women and girls, especially by experts who are not gender specialists. When asked about gender mainstreaming, one interviewee noted "we need to bring more ladies into the mission." They then talked about how this is "not an issue for me... I have two daughters, so I care about women." When misunderstood in this way, gender mainstreaming can reinforce gender stereotypes instead of challenging them.

Other participants had a much more comprehensive understanding of gender mainstreaming. One gender specialist defined it as "gender [being] included in all activities of the mission, which means every phase – planning, implementation, evaluation, assessment." Another interviewee, not a gender specialist, linked gender mainstreaming to peace in the following way: "we cannot talk about culture and a society in peace in which discriminatory behaviour is normal." However, such views are in the minority and consequently the dominant mission narrative on gender is too often "gender equals women equals victims." The large discrepancies in understanding gender mainstreaming among staff in turn negatively impact the operationalisation of gender mainstreaming in theatre. Combined with the view that gender mainstreaming is the last priority of the mission and a box to be ticked, gender specialist staff can often find themselves overwhelmed and undervalued.

Secondly, we have also observed negative connotations associated with the terms 'gender' and 'feminism'. When asking our interviewees whether they considered themselves a feminist, only a small minority of the non-gender specialist staff responded positively, with most of them showing some reluctance to be labelled as such. It also became clear that 'gender' is an often-unwelcome topic, which should be avoided if possible. Although non-gender-related subject matter experts did agree to be interviewed on the topic, their body language and responses often indicated a dismissal of the subject.



Mission cultures often places gender issues relatively low in the ranking, rather than mainstreaming it as an integral theme within the mission. Consequently, gender mainstreaming can be considered a nuisance, as can the gender advisor.

Gender advisors are considered an unfortunate necessity to get boxes ticked for headquarters, but in the hierarchy of mission implementation objectives, gender mainstreaming continues to score relatively low. The interviewed gender advisers, as well as other subject matter experts, indicated that more specific, less cross-cutting objectives such as police training, counter-terrorism strategies, and legislative changes in the criminal justice sector (to name but a few) generally take priority. Mission cultures often places gender issues relatively low in the ranking, rather than mainstreaming it as an integral theme within the mission. Consequently, gender mainstreaming can be considered a nuisance, as can the gender advisor.

Policy Recommendations

1

Better integration of gender mainstreaming during pre-deployment training

While pre-deployment training usually does cover gender mainstreaming and the broader WPS agenda, gender issues are too often taught as a separate topic, a supplement to other aspects of the pre-deployment training. Integrating gender across other aspects of training rather than presenting it as a standalone gender module will emphasise its cross-cutting nature and enhance personal ownership for all those deployed to a peacebuilding mission. It underscores the idea that it is everyone's responsibility to take gender issues into account. Linking gender with issues such as peacebuilding activities, health, human rights, protection of civilians, and peace and security activities – all core aspects to the UN pre-deployment training – will set the tone for an integrated approach to gender mainstreaming from the onset.



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2

Make gender training more practical

While it is important to highlight the wider context and backdrop to gender issues during both pre-deployment and in-mission induction training, participants are often presented with key policies and related institutional frameworks, and less with a more practical approach to operationalisation. For example, missions launched under the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) dedicate time to discuss the key EU documents during pre-deployment training, such as the Comprehensive Approach on the EU's implementation of UNSC Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. However, there is generally less focus and attention on how to integrate and operationalise the objectives of these key documents in mission implementation. This creates distance between gender as a subject and the roles and responsibilities of experts in peacebuilding missions.

Providing practical tools to facilitate the operationalisation of gender mainstreaming across roles and responsibilities and everyday tasks in the mission would provide a useful starting point for implementation. One way to improve gender mainstreaming could be to offer staff training on how to conduct gender analysis. Peacebuilders that can conduct a basic gender analysis of their specific operational responsibilities are likely to feel greater ownership of gender mainstreaming and a better understand how to integrate it in their everyday work. Practical handbooks and guides tailored to peacebuilding environments can also help improve the understanding of gender mainstreaming and therefore make it more achievable. A good example of championing this approach is the OSCE, which has published a manual 'Gender in military operations: guidance for military personnel working at tactical level in Peace Support Operations'.¹² Rather than leaving the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the hands of personal convictions, pre-deployment training can enhance the general awareness of the importance of gender mainstreaming in relation to the mission's mandate.

Gender-specific pre-deployment training should be followed up throughout deployment. Some of our interviewees have been invited for further training, either in person or online, others have not. It is critical that peacebuilders have more time to learn and reflect on gendered aspects of their work when deployed. Missions are comprised of individuals with different backgrounds, and such training can enable the exchange of best practices and result in more effective operationalisation. As with any activity, unequivocal support of the mission management is key. If management underscores the importance of gender mainstreaming as a key element of the mission, there will be more buy-in from staff.

12. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Gender in military operations: Guidance for military personnel working at tactical level in Peace Support Operations, 2018. Available at: https://www.osce.org/secretariat/401705?fbclid=IwAR0T4bcmcuBJW0dyj2WF_4PO-ytkfN54zGINAoQAocqAT92tTHhBnm9LPs

3

Tackle the negative connotations often associated with the word gender

The third recommendation follows on from recommendations one and two. As gender and gender mainstreaming is often presented as an unintegrated supplement to mission implementation and something that exists more in policy documents than in operational realities, gender as a topic has failed to generate the necessary support. Worse yet, in often male-dominant operational environments, it has acquired negative connotations from other subject matter experts.

One way of enhancing participants' buy-in is by going back to the essence and approaching the issue of gender by starting with the concepts of peace and peacebuilding. One interviewee noted that "peace is an open concept" and reflected on what it means for a society to be peaceful. They added "for example, if we cannot disclose our sexual orientation or if women cannot talk about politics simply because they are women, we cannot talk about a peaceful society." Therefore, allowing peacebuilders to reflect on what is it that makes a particular society more 'peaceful' might be a productive start of conversations on gender and gender mainstreaming.

Peacebuilders will more likely acknowledge that to support the development of peaceful societies, all members of those societies need to be considered equal members. In the words of one interviewee: "We cannot talk about a society in peace if discriminatory behaviour is normal." This broader context of peace and peacebuilding can then be linked to WPS more specifically to better contextualise its relevance in an operational context and achieve more buy-in from deployed personnel.

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“We cannot talk about a society in peace if discriminatory behaviour is normal.”

4

Improve data gathering and evaluation to enhance our understanding of what works

Our final recommendation relates to the knowledge and understanding we have of the implementation of gender mainstreaming. Mission evaluation reports and implementation plans focus predominantly on numerical evaluations of the implementation of gender mainstreaming. For example, missions report on how many women work in the mission, how many times the gender training has taken place, and how many women attended the training. A lot less is known about how training is perceived and what impact it has within and beyond the mission.

A reporting focus complementary to numbers would therefore improve our understanding of what works in the world of gender mainstreaming, and how we can improve implementation. Qualitative data to complement existing data could be conducted through a range of methods, including for example ethnographic research, reflective work from those deployed, and data collection through interviews and questionnaires. In short, more longitudinal data are needed. Allowing time and resources for reporting officers and gender advisers to deliver qualitative data in addition to numbers and percentages will generate a wealth of information. This will allow missions to better understand the successes and failures of gender mainstreaming implementation, compare across missions, and implement lessons learned and best practices.

About the Author

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