



Towards Equal Opportunity for Women in the Defence Sector

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**United
Nations**

Cover:

A soldier in the
Democratic Republic of
the Congo's Armed Forces,
during International
Women's Day parade.

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in the Defence Sector

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“Women bring unique perspectives and skills to the table, enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of our defence institutions. Their participation is crucial for the modernization and adaptation of our armed forces to contemporary challenges.”

Martha Lucía Ramírez, Former Vice President of Colombia

“The protection of our nation requires the talents and dedication of all our citizens, regardless of gender. Women have repeatedly demonstrated their capability and commitment in the military, and they should be fully integrated into all branches and roles.”

King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia

“Incorporating women into the military enhances operational effectiveness by diversifying skills, perspectives and problem-solving approaches. It’s a strategic imperative for modern armed forces.”

Dr Monde Muyangwa, Director, Africa Program, Wilson Center

“After having won the ‘Top Woman of the Year 2023’ award, I took off my tie – a symbolic act. In an inclusive organisation we should not ask women to wear men’s clothes and men’s sizes. We must recognize the diversity of our military personnel. If you want the current generation to feel attracted to the armed forces, you have to change the organisation ... Not wearing my tie is not a protest against the organisation. It’s a reminder that we need to put it on the agenda because it’s important. Some people think that I am questioning uniformity. That is not the case. I am questioning this uniformity and asking for another, a more appropriate one.”

Lt-Gen. Elanor Boekholt-O’Sullivan,
Deputy Director-General for Policy, Netherlands Ministry of Defence

“The inclusion of women in the armed forces is not just a matter of gender equality, but also a strategic necessity. Their participation enhances our operational capabilities and promotes a more inclusive military culture.”

General Qamar Javed Bajwa, former Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan

Executive summary

Governments have implemented many good practices to advance the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the defence sector.

But remaining challenges and barriers to realizing equal opportunity for women in defence need to be addressed.

KEY DATA POINTS –

Analysis of the data provided by 55 Member States to the United Nations and desk review on the current status of women in defence indicates:

- **Women's participation in defence is increasing:** In 2023, more than one in eight ministers of defence were women. Although low in absolute terms, this is a promising figure, as political leadership is essential for progress. Additionally, from 2016 to 2022, the proportion of women in armed forces increased by more than a quarter among countries that provided data. This is a significant advancement that reflects the increasing inclusion of women in defence roles across countries.
- **Women's representation in defence remains low:** Despite their growing representation, the number of women working in the defence sector is low. On average, among countries that provided data, women make up 12 per cent of personnel in the army, 15 per cent in the air force, 14 per cent in the navy and 16 per cent in the gendarmerie. To make better progress towards gender equality in defence institutions, opening up all categories to women and more effective recruitment and retention strategies are needed.
- **Few women fill leadership roles:** Women's representation is particularly low in senior leadership positions. Among the countries that provided data, more than 97 per cent of flag and star-ranked officers – generals and admirals – are men. Moreover, less than one in ten senior officers are women, and only around one in six junior officers are women.
- **Few women fill combat roles:** Women working in the armed forces are often concentrated in logistics, administration, combat support, and medical positions. They are also strongly represented in legal, personnel and public affairs roles. Where women are permitted to join combat units, their participation averages around ten per cent.
- **Physical recruitment standards vary by gender in many countries:** Few countries apply different standards for men and women when it comes to written tests, educational requirements and age at enlistment. But physical enlistment criteria do vary in many cases. For example, standards for

height, weight, fitness or Body Mass Index are often gendered. Over half of the countries that provided data use different physical fitness tests for women and men, and over a third apply different height requirements.

- **Women's participation in training and development is extremely low:** Women remain vastly excluded in higher defence education settings. For instance, across respondent countries, only 3 per cent of the air force personnel engaged in higher defence studies in 2022 were women.

FINDINGS –

Both the progress of women and the ongoing challenges they face in achieving gender equality in the defence sector were reflected in the findings, highlighting:

- **Barriers to full participation:** Women face significant barriers, including gender stereotypes, discriminatory institutional policies and practices and inadequate facilities and gear. Social and cultural norms, along with policies designed to reinforce the status quo benefitting men, hinder women's career development in defence.
- **Recruitment challenges:** Efforts have been made across the globe to recruit more women into the defence sector, but many recruitment strategies still fail to address key systemic barriers to women's pursuit of and participation in the defence sector and are not supported by or integrated into comprehensive policies.
- **Limits to career development and promotion:** Because women are excluded in higher military education and tend to be concentrated in support services rather than combat roles, they often lack the deployment and operational experience needed to enter leadership positions. Creating a military that offers truly equal opportunities requires instituting more diverse career paths to accommodate different skills and experiences.
- **Problems of retention:** It is not enough to recruit women; retaining them is equally important. Among the factors affecting the retention of women in armed forces are issues related to career advancement opportunities, work-life balance and institutional culture.
- **Sexual harassment and discrimination:** Despite efforts to address sexualized misconduct and abuse within armed forces, this remains a pervasive problem. Many countries have strengthened complaint mechanisms and accountability mechanisms, but these are only useful alongside enforcement measures as well as efforts to change institutional culture. Given that harassment and discrimination undermine the welfare of women in the military and perpetuate a culture of impunity for offences against women, more effective measures to prevent these behaviours and robust enforcement are unequivocally necessary.

GOOD PRACTICES –

The report emphasizes practices from different regions that have shown promise in promoting gender equality in the defence sector, including:

- **Assessing barriers to women's participation in armed forces:** Ghana and Germany have emphasized the importance of assessing barriers including by using tools such as the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) and other assessment methodologies that inform defence policymaking and reform processes. As of June 2024, armed forces in 11 countries¹ have completed MOWIP barrier assessments for women in peacekeeping operations, with two² more nearing completion later this year. Findings from these assessments are an important starting point for gender equality in armed forces.
- **Strengthening childcare support:** The Dominican Republic and Uruguay have each developed specific measures to support the childcare needs of service members. Uruguay offers benefits to children of deployed women and single male households, while the Dominican Republic has built dedicated childcare centres for military personnel.
- **Pre-recruitment training:** Liberia and Brazil offer pre-recruitment training to women. Liberia provides training to prepare them for both physical fitness and written tests, while Brazil focuses on physical training to help women meet recruitment standards.
- **Setting recruitment targets:** South Africa has implemented recruitment targets for women, which has served as an effective means of increasing the number of women in defence. Temporary special measures such as targets should be accompanied by deeper reforms to be truly sustainable.
- **All-women training programmes:** Jordan offers all-women training for mixed-gender platoons but also for all-women platoons. Culturally sensitive measures such as this can vastly increase opportunities for women in the armed forces.
- **Inclusive information campaigns:** Moldova has launched joint information campaigns through the National Army Women's Association and the Ministry of Defence to portray the armed forces as an inclusive service, counter gender stereotypes and promote women's diverse roles in the military.
- **Exclusion of candidates who have committed human rights violations:** Several armed forces exclude candidates with a history of human rights violations, including domestic and sexual violence. This helps prevent misconduct as well as violence against women and ensures operational integrity.

¹ Bangladesh Armed Forces, Cambodia Armed Forces, Canada Armed Forces, German Armed Forces, Ghana Armed Forces, Liberia Armed Forces, Mexico Ministry of National Defence (Army and Airforce), Mexico Ministry of the Navy, Norway Armed Forces, Sierra Leone Armed Forces, Uruguay Armed Forces.

² Togo Armed Forces, Senegal Armed Forces.



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The following United Nations “accelerators” of gender equality in defence are informed by the good practices highlighted in this report:

- 1 Assess barriers to women’s participation.
- 2 Enhance recruitment strategies to attract more women.
- 3 Improve retention rates among women.
- 4 Build a culture of diversity and inclusion.
- 5 Combat sexual discrimination, harassment, and abuse.
- 6 Facilitate career development programmes for women.
- 7 Ensure equitable promotion for women service members.

RECOMMENDATIONS –

The report’s findings informed 24 recommendations to Member States on how to implement the seven “accelerators” of gender equality in defence, including:

- **Law and policy:** Member States should ensure their defence laws, policies and practices uphold international human rights standards by promoting non-discrimination and advancing women’s equal participation. It is essential that any discriminatory laws, policies and practices hindering women’s participation are revised or repealed.

- **Leadership and accountability:** Governance mechanisms must be strengthened, and senior leadership should promote gender equality.
- **Barrier assessments:** Regular assessments should be conducted to identify and address barriers to women's recruitment, retention and promotion, and the findings should be used to guide policymaking, planning, implementation and organizational change. The United Nations should ensure that tools are in place to support countries in this area.
- **Recruitment and retention:** Recruitment and retention should be bolstered by ensuring armed forces are open and supportive workplaces for all, for example through policies that promote equal recruitment opportunities and work-life balance, address discrimination and provide facilities and equipment tailored to women.
- **Promotion:** Equal promotional opportunities for men and women must be ensured through impartial decision-making processes; equal opportunities for women to serve in combat and specialized positions as well as affirmative actions and temporary special measures.
- **Zero-tolerance for harassment and abuse:** A victim-centred, zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment and abuse must be implemented, together with robust accountability frameworks, vetting and reporting mechanisms, victim support, protection from retaliation for persons who report misconduct and appropriate penalties for perpetrators.
- **Institutional culture:** A culture of respect for diversity and inclusion should be promoted within armed forces by dismantling gender stereotypes and providing support for work-life balance.

Through security sector reform and governance, Member States can work towards the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in defence, a critical step in ensuring more accountable, inclusive and responsive institutions. This report can be used as a roadmap to help eliminate barriers and create equal opportunities for women in defence, ultimately contributing to more effective armed forces.

Foreword

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Throughout my tenure, I have consistently emphasized the critical role of women in rule of law and security institutions. It is with this conviction that I present the **first-ever global report on equal opportunity for women in the defence sector**, developed by the United Nations further to the recommendation of Secretary-General António Guterres in his latest report on strengthening security sector reform (S/2022/280).

Readers of this report will learn about the significant strides Member States have made to integrate women into defence roles worldwide. The research conducted by the United Nations and the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF) found that from 2016 to 2022, the proportion of women in armed forces increased by 27 per cent among the countries that provided data – a notable rise that reflects a growing recognition of their capabilities and important contributions to national, regional and global security. Yet, as this report also meticulously documents, there are still pervasive barriers that hinder women's full, equal and meaningful participation in defence institutions at all levels.

World leaders just adopted the Pact for the Future, which underscores that women's equal participation is crucial to achieving and sustaining peace, security and development. This assertion holds equally true within the defence sector, where gender-diverse teams have been shown to deliver better outcomes in complex tasks requiring innovation and problem-solving. Women's unique perspectives and skills are indispensable for modern armed forces, enhancing operational effectiveness and fostering a more inclusive military culture.

In line with this, the United Nations has committed to achieving gender parity in UN peacekeeping through the Department of Peace Operations Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy.³

However, to ensure that the uniformed component of United Nations peacekeeping is diverse and inclusive of women, we must first ensure that women have equal opportunities at the national level. National

³ Department of Peace Operations, *Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018–2028* (United Nations publication, 2017).

defence institutions are the foundational blocks from which international peacekeeping missions draw their personnel. If these institutions are not inclusive and representative, gender parity efforts in peacekeeping will inevitably fall short.

Despite clear international norms and national efforts, women remain underrepresented in defence roles, especially in senior leadership and combat positions. This disparity is not only a matter of equity but a strategic deficiency. Armed forces that fail to recruit, retain and promote women are neglecting a vast pool of talent essential for meeting contemporary national and human security threats.

The barriers to women's participation in defence are deeply rooted in gender stereotypes and institutional cultures that have traditionally been male dominated. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach, including legislative reforms, targeted recruitment strategies, internal accountability mechanisms to prevent and respond to misconduct, abuse and criminal offences committed against women in the military, and robust support systems. The recommendations of this report provide a clear roadmap for achieving these goals, emphasizing the need for concerted efforts from all stakeholders.

As outlined in the report, several Member States have already made significant progress by implementing gender-responsive and -sensitive policies and creating more supportive environments for women in defence. These examples demonstrate that with commitment, planning and concrete measures, real progress towards gender equality in armed forces is within reach.

To advance this agenda item, the United Nations will aim to include, once every five years, an update on the status of women in defence in its annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security. This will help maintain a continuous understanding of global progress and challenges in this critical area. I encourage all Member States to establish systems to track, report, and monitor women's participation in their defence forces at all levels. Additionally, in line with relevant Security Council resolutions calling for women's full, equal and meaningful participation within

the security sector ⁴, the United Nations system is committed to assist Member States to advance equal opportunity for women in defence, including through its specialized and deployable standing capacities which are available to conduct assessments and provide strategic advice. **I ask Member States to provide the Organisation with the financial and human resources required to attain equal opportunities for women in this important branch of government.**

Empowering women in defence enhances our collective security. I urge all Member States, international organisations and civil society to join us in this endeavour. Together, we can eliminate the barriers to women's full participation in defence and ensure that our defence forces truly reflect the diversity and strength of our societies. Let us build a future where gender equality in defence is not the exception but the norm.

Alexandre Zouev

Assistant Secretary-General
for Rule of Law and Security Institutions



⁴ United Nations Security Council resolutions 2151 (2014) and 2553 (2020).

Methodology and sources of information

In his most recent report to the Security Council on strengthening Security Sector Reform (S/2022/280), the Secretary-General committed to mainstreaming gender in all forms of United Nations support for security sector reform and made recommendations for the United Nations to strengthen its own capacity towards this end. Recommendation 17 commissioned the development of this report – the first-ever global report on equal opportunity for women in the defence sector.

This report's sources include:

- Desk research and literature review
- In-depth case study interviews on good practices conducted with 18 Member States from all regions
- A survey on the status of women in defence, circulated to all Member States with armed forces. The United Nations Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions raised awareness for the survey on several occasions, which resulted in a solid response rate of close to one-third of United Nations Member States that have a defence sector, with representation from all regional groups.

We thank the participating Member States for enabling a stocktaking of the status of women in defence across the globe.



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I. Introduction

1 The defence sector⁵ has been called “a sanctuary of hypermasculinity”.⁶ Yet, a shift is underway in the sector. As of 2023, 13 per cent of defence ministers in the world were women, something unthinkable until only recently.⁷ Many Arab countries, such as Egypt, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates now have women fighter pilots.⁸ And more than half of uniformed women peacekeepers come from Africa.⁹ Across the globe, governments have opened doors to women’s participation in the defence sector, enabling their meaningful contributions across a spectrum of roles and in all branches of the military. This can be observed in all regions, and seems to stem from intrinsic social change, not from external factors or targeted foreign pressure.

[...] barriers remain to the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in defence institutions at all levels. In many armed forces, social-cultural values, policy, institutional culture and informal practices prevent women from fully participating [...]

2 Still, barriers remain to the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in defence institutions at all levels. In many armed forces, social-cultural values, policy, institutional culture and informal practices prevent women from fully participating in training, education, promotion and deployment, and in career paths in combat and specialist services. This holds

women back from senior leadership roles. A lack of support for the responsibilities of family life, combined with cultural norms that position women as primarily responsible for the home and for childcare and eldercare, make it hard for women to join the military; and women who do join find that they lack equal opportunities in accessing assignments and advancement. Inadequate facilities and equipment leave women struggling within systems designed for men. And, though men in the armed forces do sometimes experience sexual harassment and abuse, these violations are much more prevalently directed against women, highlighting how deeply entrenched masculine culture is within the military. This institutional culture is a significant barrier to women’s equality in the defence sector.¹⁰

3 The barriers to equality women face in this sector are entwined with and reflective of gender inequalities present across society more broadly. There are many places where a role in the armed forces is considered unsuitable for women, often because women are seen as physically incapable of performing as required. This assumption stems from negative gender stereotypes that undervalue women’s contribution and potential, as well as a misunderstanding of the skills and capabilities needed in modern armed forces. Progress towards equality between women and men in defence institutions therefore depends on deconstructing gender stereotypes and normalizing new social attitudes and new institutional cultures. In doing so, defence sectors have the potential to make a positive contribution to women’s rights more broadly by breaking down institutional gender stereotypes that hinder women’s full, equal and meaningful participation in public life.

5 Generally recognized as constituting a State’s defence institutions or components, such as: the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Security or a similar body; military branches; a national defence or security council; defence committees or commissions; defence education, instruction and training centres; centres of military research, technology and development (even those that share responsibilities with national education systems); national intelligence services; and border management agencies.

6 Dalia Ghanem and Dina Arakji, *Women in the Arab Armed Forces* (Beirut, Carnegie Middle East Center and the Arab Institute for Women at the Lebanese American University, 2020).

7 “Women and peace and security”, Report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/725), para. 68.

8 “The Growing Role of Arab Women in Defence”, *Times Aerospace*, 16 January 2024. Available at <https://www.timesaerospace.aero/news/defence/the-growing-role-of-arab-women-in-defence> (accessed on 12 August 2024).

9 Devi Palanivelu, “African women on the frontline of peacekeeping”, *Africa Renewal*, 4 December 2023. Available at <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/december-2023/african-women-frontline-peacekeeping> (accessed on 12 August 2024).

10 Callum Watson, “Defence and Gender” (Tool 3) in *Gender and Security Toolkit* (Geneva, DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN Women, 2020).

[...] as strategic and operational demands and national defence objectives evolve, there is an increasingly clear national security rationale for advancing women's full, equal and meaningful participation

- 4 Enabling equal opportunities for women in the defence sector is not only a matter of human rights but also of sustainable development and collective security. Indeed, effective, accountable and inclusive defence institutions in which women contribute to national and human security are critical to achieving gender equality and to advancing sustainable development. And as strategic and operational demands and national defence objectives evolve, there is an increasingly clear national security rationale for advancing women's full, equal and meaningful participation. Contemporary military operations require specialized skills, including in language, information technology and engineering, and research shows that gender-diverse teams make better decisions and deliver better outcomes on complex tasks requiring innovation and problem solving.¹¹
- 5 There is also growing recognition among civilian and military leaders that women's participation in

defence improves operational effectiveness, especially in peace or stabilization operations, in part because operational readiness, effectiveness and unit cohesion are stronger when discriminatory and abusive practices are confronted and eliminated. For example, women peacekeepers in a variety of peacekeeping missions have built trust with local communities leading to improved intelligence gathering and the provision of critical support to victims of sexual violence.¹² Ensuring equal opportunities for women in the defence sector is therefore crucial to developing defence institutions and armed forces that are more accountable, inclusive and responsive; which, in turn, enhances their overall effectiveness and credibility.

- 6 Many Member States have taken steps to advance gender equality and increase women's participation in their national defence sectors, including by developing gender-specific policies and action plans, lifting restrictions on the roles and positions open to women in the military, and making armed forces employment more desirable, supportive and equitable. **This report showcases some of these national initiatives**, drawing from case study interviews on good practices conducted with 18 Member States as well as a survey on the status of women in defence that was completed by 55 Member States.¹³ Respondents include Member States from all United Nations regional groups, at various levels of development (OECD countries, Least Developed Countries, Small Island Developing States, etc.), with a range of military budgets and diverse cultural and religious

11 Clint A. Bowers, James A. Pharmer and Eduardo Salas, "When Member Homogeneity Is Needed in Work Teams: A Meta-Analysis", *Small Group Research*, vol. 31, No. 3 (June 2000); and Cristina Figueroa and others, *UNSCR 1325 Reload* (NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme, 2015), p. 33. Also see Erik Larson, "New Research: Diversity + Inclusion = Better Decision Making at Work", *Forbes*, 21 September 2017. Available at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/eriklarson/2017/09/21/new-research-diversity-inclusion-better-decision-making-at-work/> (accessed on 12 August 2024).

12 United Nations Peacekeeping, "Women in Peacekeeping". Available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping> (accessed on 10 August 2024).

13 DCAF, *Good Practices in Increasing Women's Representation and Gender Equality in Armed Forces* (Geneva and New York, DCAF and United Nations Department of Peace Operations, 2024); and United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector* (New York, United Nations Department of Peace Operations, 2023).

traditions. This includes some permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, several top Troop Contributing Countries, as well as Member States with relatively modest militaries. Though the data gathered from respondent Member States is not globally representative, merely indicative, it provides a valuable picture of the current status of women in defence forces across contexts.

7 This report will:

- i** describe the degree to which equal opportunity exists for women in the defence sector globally
- ii** identify good practices in strengthening the full, equal and meaningful participation of women
- iii** contribute to policy dialogue among Member States and the United Nations on gender-responsive security sector reform
- iv** support United Nations entities in their work with defence institutions on gender sensitization
- v** support governments in identifying good practices for use at the national level to help achieve gender-parity targets, ensure women's full, equal and meaningful participation in defence, and meet the standards of inclusion for national contributions to uniformed components of peace operations laid out in the United Nations Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy, the Action for Peacekeeping + (A4P+) commitments, and Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security (WPS) and women in peacekeeping.



Captain Rose Justin Wani, Administrative Officer with South Sudan's Civil Defence Service: "My commitment is my service. Women should be fully included and represented at all levels of governance, decision-making and politics". ©UNMISS/Gregorio Cunha

II. Progress and challenges in advancing women's participation in the defence sector

8 Despite clear international, regional and national norms and policies calling for gender equality, including in the armed forces, women have long been and remain underrepresented in the military, especially at senior levels. This contributes to institutional cultures that undervalue women's leadership, agency and decision-making. The long time it takes to reach senior officer status and the preference within militaries for advancing soldiers with combat experience, place structural and policy barriers in front of women's career development, which must be removed. Senior military men must be encouraged to act as allies, to ensure that cultural change is supported, and women's contributions are recognized. Otherwise, the perspectives informing military decision-making lack breadth and diversity, with potentially damaging impacts on the effectiveness and credibility of armed forces.

Where armed forces fail to attract, recruit and retain women, they are failing to harness the “talent pool” of their nation, leaving capacity and potential untapped

9 The low proportion of women in the armed forces means that all parts of a given society are not equally represented within the ranks of its military. Where armed forces fail to attract, recruit and retain women, they are failing to harness the “talent pool”

of their nation, leaving capacity and potential untapped. Moreover, in many parts of the world, jobs in the armed forces are attractive because they offer relatively stable salaries, as well as healthcare and other social benefits.¹⁴ Women's systemic underrepresentation in these jobs means they are not afforded equal opportunity to contribute to and benefit from employment in a public institution of profound national importance, and one that consumes a significant share of any nation's public purse. Hence, a defence sector that is largely inaccessible to women, or to any one group, contributes to the persistence of inequities.

10 It has been systematically demonstrated in diverse contexts that military interventions which contribute to human security, peace and stability are hampered by an absence of women personnel.¹⁵ A lack of gender parity in the defence sector lowers community trust, impairs intelligence gathering, negatively impacts support and redress for victims of violence, weakens the reduction of violence and disarmament initiatives, and ultimately compromises combat and decision-making capabilities.

11 The data collected for this report shows that armed forces remain far from achieving gender parity but have made strong progress in recent years with the greater integration of women in defence, in all regions. Since 2015, some nations have seen the proportion of women in their military increase by more than 15 per cent, including Argentina, Australia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Mongolia,

14 Marcela Donadio and Cecilia Mazzotta, *Women in the Armed and Police Forces: Resolution 1325 and Peace Operations in Latin America* (RESDAL, 2010), p. 45; United Nations Development Programme, *The Position of Women in the Armed Forces in the Western Balkans* (UNDP/SEESAC, 2014), p. 32; and DCAF, *Good Practices in Increasing Women's Representation and Gender Equality in Armed Forces*. Also see World Bank Group, “World Bank Open Data”. Available at <https://data.worldbank.org> (accessed on 12 August 2024).

15 Li Hammar and Annika Berg, eds., *Whose Security? Practical Examples of Gender Perspectives in Military Operations* (Kungsängen, Nordic Centre for Gender, Swedish Armed Forces, 2015); UN Women, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325* (United Nations publication, 2015); Robert Egnell, “Gender Perspectives and Military Effectiveness: Implementing UNSCR 1325 and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security”, *PRISM*, vol. 6, No. 1 (2016); Rachel Woodward and Claire Duncanson, eds., *The Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Caron E. Gentry, Laura J. Shepherd and Laura Sjöberg, *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Security* (2018); Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2019); Robert Nagel, Kate Fin and Julia Maenza, *Gendered Impacts on Operational Effectiveness of UN Peace Operations* (Washington, D.C., Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2021); and Stéfanie Von Hlatky, *Deploying Feminism: The Role of Gender in NATO Military Operations* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2022) 2015.

Nigeria, South Africa and Uruguay.¹⁶ This is evidence that significant progress towards gender equality in armed forces is possible with national leadership, ownership, commitment and planning, along with concrete measures to shift attitudes, change institutional culture and support the needs of women.

- 12 Still, in many countries, the legal and institutional frameworks for women's participation in the armed forces remain tied to patriarchal values and traditional norms that position women as responsible for reproduction and childcare and men as physical protectors and warriors. Militaries often cultivate and promote ideals of masculinity, linking the soldier to combat, and celebrating aggression. This culture, and the social beliefs and attitudes that sustain it, excludes women in intersecting and mutually reinforcing ways.¹⁷ Recruitment modalities have been significantly influenced by this culture, for instance, leading to the development of gender-biased recruitment policies and practices that further perpetuate the underrepresentation of women in military roles. Drawing upon tradition and the ethos of past heroes may help sustain values of service and discipline, but risks failing to meet the present-day mandates of militaries.

A. Evolution of the military

- 13 In close combat, physical capacity may be determinative of fighting prowess, carrying force and endurance. Yet, even in this circumstance, it would be incorrect to claim that all military men will physically outperform all military women, which is why many armed forces have opened all positions to any individual who meets the requisite standards.¹⁸ Evolutions in weaponry, platforms, communications and battle tactics have also diminished the decisive value of raw physical attributes in many present-day defence operations. And more than ever, modern defence postures incorporate significant non-kinetic support from maintenance, logistics, information technology, cyber, finance and procurement.

[Defence forces] must not only understand the different security needs of society, but they must be able to project and build trust at the community level through strong interpersonal and communication skills and the ability to work in highly diverse cultural settings

16 From 2016 to 2022, the Argentine Air Force increased women's representation from 24 per cent to 31 per cent; the Royal Australian Air Force from 19 to 26 per cent; the Dominican Air Force from 23 to 25 per cent; the Nigerian Army from 20 to 30 per cent; and the Uruguayan Air Force from 27 to 32 per cent and the Uruguayan Navy from 26 to 33 per cent. Also, by 2022, the Ghana Air Force had achieved a rate of women's participation of 28 per cent; the South African Army and Air Force a rate of 25 per cent; and the Mongolian Army a rate of 26 per cent while the Mongolian Air Force achieved 25 per cent. See United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 9 [number of respondents is indicated per question].

17 Cynthia H. Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarisation of Women's Lives* (London, Pluto, 1983), p. 12; Claire Duncanson, "Hegemonic Masculinity and the Possibility of Change in Gender Relations", *Men and Masculinities*, vol. 18, No. 2 (June 2015), p. 235; Irina Yuryevna Surkova, "Strategies for Integrating Women into the Armed Forces: Gender Taboos versus Military Tactics", *Woman in Russian Society*, No. 4 (2012); Nuray Sakallı Uğurlu and Fatih Özdemir, "Predicting Attitudes toward the Masculine Structure of the Military with Turkish Identification and Ambivalent Sexism", *Sex Roles*, vol. 76, No. 7 (April 2017); Robert Egnell and Mayesha Alam, eds., *Women and Gender Perspectives in the Military: An International Comparison* (Washington, D.C., Georgetown University Press, 2019); Nina Wilén, "Achieving a Gendered Transformation of the Post-Conflict Military through Security Sector Reform: Unpacking the Private–Public Dynamics", *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol. 22, No. 1 (January 2020); Hillary S. Schaefer and others, "But How Many Push-Ups Can She Do? The Influence of Sexism on Peer Ratings in a Military Setting", *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 177 (July 2021); Hillary S. Schaefer and others, "The Military Hypermasculine Mystique: Sex, Status, and Emotional Control at the United States Military Academy", *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, vol. 22, No. 4 (2021); Vesna Trut, Petra Sinovčić and Boris Milavić, "Initial Validation of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory in a Military Setting", *Social Sciences*, vol. 11, No. 4 (April 2022), p. 176; Camille Boutron and Claude Weber, "La féminisation des armées françaises: entre volontarisme institutionnel et résistances internes", *Travail, genre et sociétés*, vol. 47, No. 1 (2022).

18 For example, Brazil, Bulgaria, Ghana as found in DCAF. Good Practices in Increasing Women's Representation and Gender Equality in Armed Forces. Geneva and New York: DCAF and United Nations Department of Peace Operations, 2024 and all NATO members as found in Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives 2019'. NATO, 2021. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/9/pdf/NCGP_Full_Report_2019.pdf.

- 14 Defence forces fulfil diverse roles, including peace-keeping, protection of civilians, security and stability operations, disaster relief and humanitarian emergency response, requiring armed forces to retain personnel with specialized competencies in a wide range of areas. These personnel must not only understand the different security needs of society, but they must be able to project and build trust at the community level through strong interpersonal and communication skills and the ability to work in highly diverse cultural settings.

B. International laws, norms and policies

- 15 Over recent decades, a steady stream of international human rights and gender equality norms and policies have applied to women's participation in the defence sector. Full and equal opportunities for women and men in all areas of society are human rights protected under international law, including in foundational documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), as well as in, *inter alia*, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). In other words, the right of women to participate in the military is approached through three intersecting streams of international laws and norms, concerning non-discrimination on the basis of sex; full, equal and meaningful participation as a citizen; and the advancement of international peace and security.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

- 16 Article 15.1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) puts forward that all States parties "shall accord to women equality with men before the law".¹⁹ CEDAW requires States parties to take action both on a normative level, by incorporating the principle of gender equality into national legislation and abolishing all discriminatory laws, and on a procedural level, by establishing effective mechanisms to ensure the protection of women against any form of discrimination. Article 11 of the Convention contains specific provisions concerning discrimination against women in employment matters. And building upon Article 21(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guaranteeing "the right of equal access to public service", Article 7 of the Convention prescribes States parties take measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life. Article 8 stipulates further that measures are enacted to ensure women have the opportunity to represent their governments at the international level and participate in the work of international organizations, on equal terms with men and without discrimination.²⁰ Each of these provisions requires action to achieve progress towards full gender equality in the armed forces.
- 17 The CEDAW Committee has adopted two General Recommendations relating to how the rights enshrined in the Convention to hold public office and perform all public functions affect women's rights to participate in armed forces, drawing on the normative themes of citizenship and non-discrimination. General recommendation 23 of 1997 notes for example that laws excluding women from full participation in the military "discriminate against women, deny to society the advantages of their involvement and skills in these areas of the life of their communities and contravene the principles of the Convention".²¹ Indeed, taking part in the nation's defence is integral to the rights and duties associated

19 United Nations General Assembly, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 18 December 1979, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1249, p. 13.

20 Adapted from Ian Leigh and Hans Born, *Handbook on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Armed Forces Personnel* (Warsaw, OSCE/ODIHR, 2008).

21 See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/52/38/Rev.1)*.

with citizenship. Moreover, women's access to the military is important to the democratization of the armed forces, by facilitating the adequate representation of all of society. A military that is more inclusive on the basis of sex and other characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation, makes for more democratic armed forces and a more democratic society.²² The promotion of gender equality in armed forces should thus be recognized as a core element of national and global efforts to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (Goal 5) and "build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels" (Goal 16) by 2030, as enshrined in the Agenda for Sustainable Development.

- 18** There is also a normative recognition that gender equality in armed forces is critical to sustaining peace and security. In General recommendation No. 30 of 2013, for instance, the CEDAW Committee recommended that States parties ensure women's equal representation at all decision-making levels in armed forces.²³ The Committee has observed that in post-conflict and transition periods, women are often overlooked in the processes of security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, including through exclusion from positions in newly formed security sector institutions. General recommendation No. 30 therefore urged States to undertake gender-sensitive and gender-responsive security sector reform that results in representative security sector institutions which address women's different security experiences and priorities and strengthen gender expertise and the role of women in the oversight of the security sector.²⁴

Women, Peace and Security and security sector reform

- 19** In resolutions on WPS and on security sector reform, the Security Council has urged militaries to expand the roles available to women, including

by incorporating women into peacekeeping components, and has encouraged Member States to deploy greater numbers of women military personnel. Building on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), subsequent resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013) and 2467 (2019) collectively encourage Member States to ensure their security sectors enable the meaningful participation of women, protect women from violence and enable women's access to justice.

[...] the [Security] Council calls on Member States to implement reforms that remove legal and institutional barriers to women's participation within security sectors and increase their representation at all levels

- 20** Resolution 2553 (2020) on security sector governance and reform is the first and only thematic resolution to make explicit reference to women's participation in national security sectors. In it, the Council calls on Member States to implement reforms that remove legal and institutional barriers to women's participation within security sectors and increase their representation at all levels. Resolution 2553 took steps to address normative gaps left by the first Security Council resolution on security sector reform (2151 (2014)), as well as resolutions on WPS that largely link security sector reform to the "protection pillar" of the WPS agenda and do not reference the role of women as national security providers or the need to increase their participation in national security and defence institutions. This includes resolutions 1888 (2009), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015) and 2467 (2019) on WPS, each of which makes explicit reference to security sector reform.

²² Leigh and Born, *Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Armed Forces Personnel*, pp. 113 and 114.

²³ CEDAW Committee, General recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations, 1 November 2013 (CEDAW/C/GC/30), para. 46.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, paras. 66–69.



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21 Security Council resolutions primarily refer to women's participation in defence as it relates to expanded roles for women in military components of peacekeeping, without addressing the underrepresentation and limits on women in national defence sectors. In Resolution 2538 (2020) on women in peacekeeping, the Council encouraged governments to increase the deployment of uniformed women to peacekeeping operations, including by disseminating information about and providing access to deployment opportunities and training, and by taking measures to address barriers to the recruitment, deployment and promotion of uniformed women peacekeepers. The Council also highlighted the importance of sharing best practices in these areas. Action towards gender equality has been incorporated into several country-specific mandates on security sector reform as well.²⁵

C. National laws and policies

[...] in many countries, national laws prohibiting sex discrimination do not fully apply to the armed forces, allowing military conscription or certain areas of service to be restricted to men only

22 Generally, Member States began to open their armed forces to women in the 1980s and 1990s.²⁶ However, it remains challenging to form a complete global picture of the adoption of laws and policies on women's participation in the armed forces because detailed data are often unavailable or restricted from public view.²⁷ Most countries enshrine the rights to equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex and gender in their constitution. Yet, in some

²⁵ For example, resolutions referring to MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO, UNIFIL and UNSMIL.

²⁶ Survey questions on this topic were answered by 42–51 countries. United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 7 [number of respondents is indicated per question].

²⁷ João Reis and Sofia Menezes, "Gender Inequalities in the Military Service: A Systematic Literature Review", *Sexuality & Culture*, vol. 24, No. 3 (June 2020), p. 1008.

countries, national laws prohibiting sex discrimination do not fully apply to the armed forces, allowing military conscription or certain areas of service to be restricted to men only.²⁸ While international human rights law does permit some constraints²⁹ on the application of the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms by armed forces' personnel, these should be minimized and based on demonstrated necessity rather than historical legacy or cultural norms; and moreover, must be provided for by law, consistent with international obligations, exceptional, and applied consistently and in a non-discriminatory manner.³⁰

Combat roles and other distinctions

- 23** In many countries, laws or regulations continue to exclude women from combat roles, such as infantry, armoured branches, field artillery, combat air force, special forces and submarine posts. Where women are excluded from combat, they are subsequently excluded from most command and senior leadership roles. Some countries have also excluded women from certain assignments citing privacy concerns, for example in the tight quarters of battle tanks and submarines.³¹ However, over the past decade, several Member States have reconsidered these privacy rationales, recognizing that they could be seen as patronizing and that the opinion of women service members should lead the way on this issue. Some have also established separate all-women units.

Where women are excluded from combat, they are subsequently excluded from most command and senior leadership roles

- 24** Not every regulation specific to women in defence is, or should be seen as, a barrier to equal opportunity. Some gender-specific regulations illustrate that there can be value in acknowledging the physical differences between women and men, so long as this does not lead to or justify women's exclusion. For instance, some armed forces ensure that women are not compelled to perform roles which may pose a risk to their reproductive health, such as those involving the use of certain explosives or poisonous substances, and diving operations.³² Also, most armed forces include provisions related to maternity in their terms and conditions of service for women.³³ And some offer women a shorter compulsory length of service,³⁴ earlier access to pensions,³⁵ greater access to leave for caretaking reasons, or protective exemptions such as from night duty.³⁶

National Action Plans (NAPs) on Women, Peace and Security

- 25** Frequently, NAPs on WPS are the framework that enables defence sector engagement to increase women's participation as well as scrutiny by government, parliament and human rights bodies of gender equality in the armed forces. In fact, a United Nations analysis of 74 WPS NAPs in effect between January

28 Susan Atkins, *Women in the Armed Forces in the OSCE Region* (Warsaw, OSCE/ODIHR, 2018), pp. 9 and 10.

29 Some restrictions on the human rights of armed forces personnel include limits on freedom of expression, association, and assembly, as mandated by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) when necessary for military discipline and national security. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) also allows similar restrictions, provided they are legally justified, proportionate, and serve a legitimate aim, such as maintaining public order and safety.

30 Leigh and Born, *Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Armed Forces Personnel*, pp. 24 and 51–53.

31 Jody M. Prescott, Eiko Iwata, and Becca H. Pincus, "Gender, Law and Policy: Japan's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security", *Asian-Pacific Law & Policy Journal*, vol. 17, No. 1 (2015), p. 33; and Donadio and Mazzotta, *Women in the Armed and Police Forces*, p. 45.

32 Atkins, *Women in the Armed Forces in the OSCE Region*, p. 10.

33 Ibid., p. 2; Ghanem and Arakji, *Women in the Arab Armed Forces*, p. 12; and United Nations Development Programme, *The Position of Women in the Armed Forces in the Western Balkans*, p. 44.

34 Atkins, *Women in the Armed Forces in the OSCE Region*, p. 2; and Ghanem and Arakji, *Women in the Arab Armed Forces*, p. 7.

35 United Nations Development Programme, *The Position of Women in the Armed Forces in the Western Balkans*, p. 44.

36 Ghanem and Arakji, *Women in the Arab Armed Forces*, pp. 7 and 13.

2022 and August 2023 found that considerations related to the security and defence sector were incorporated into 95 per cent of these plans.

In many countries, the participation of armed forces and other defence institutions in the planning and monitoring process [of National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security] has helped build relationships with civil society and academia

26 In support of efforts to increase women’s representation in national security institutions, NAPs for WPS can also be used by governments as a main platform for interdepartmental experience-sharing.³⁷ In many countries, the participation of armed forces and other defence institutions in the planning and monitoring process has helped build relationships with civil society and academia. These coalitions, formed through the drafting of WPS NAPs, can play a useful advisory and oversight role after this, by supporting defence institutions in implementing their WPS commitments.

27 Several countries have developed WPS strategies specific to various ministries – including defence, interior, and foreign affairs – as well as to the armed forces.³⁸ For example, the Australian Defence Force developed a Gender, Peace and Security Mandate (2020–2030) to ensure alignment across six “lines of effort”: policy and doctrine, personnel, education and training, mission readiness and effects, international engagement, and governance and reporting. It

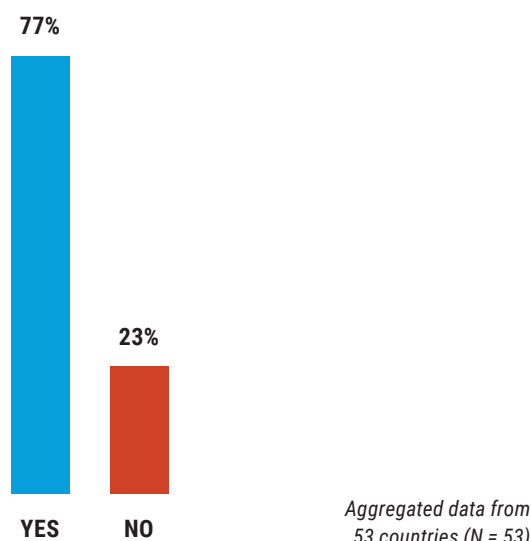
enables internal monitoring and external oversight, with progress tracked through a monitoring, evaluation and learning framework and through independent government reviews.³⁹ The development of implementation plans tailored to each branch of the military could help operationalize such a strategy.

National defence strategies

28 In many countries, gender considerations have been integrated into national defence strategies to some degree. For instance, data collected for this report through the United Nations Survey on the Status of Women in the Defence Sector indicates that 77 per cent of the 53 countries which contributed to this question had specific provisions on gender, or on women’s participation in the defence sector or armed

FIGURE I.

Share of national defence strategies, policies, plans or related documents in place in 2022 that contained at least one dedicated provision on gender or on women’s participation in defence



³⁷ Megan Bastick, *Gender and Complaints Mechanisms: A Handbook for Armed Forces and Ombuds Institutions* (Geneva, DCAF, 2015); and Watson, “Defence and Gender” (Tool 3), pp. 32, 51 and 52.

³⁸ Chantal de Jonge Oudraat and others, *Enhancing Security: Women’s Participation in the Security Forces in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Washington, D.C., Women in International Security, 2020), p. vi.

³⁹ Australian Defence Force, *Defence Gender, Peace and Security Mandate*. Available at <https://www.defence.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-11/defence-gender-peace-security-mandate-sep2021updated.pdf> (accessed 12 August 2024).



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forces, in their national defence strategy, policy, plan or equivalent, in 2022 (see Figure I, below).⁴⁰

29 Research shows that when defence strategies, laws, policies, plans and regulations are aligned with gender equality principles, they usually contain provisions that:

- i** stipulate gender parity targets for women's recruitment and for their representation in specific types of units (including through the use of temporary special measures where appropriate)
- ii** clarify funding and mechanisms of coordination, monitoring and accountability
- iii** issue clear directives on equal access for women to all armed forces position (for example, mandating that women be fully integrated into combat roles and all specialized functions)
- iv** support diverse and inclusive working environments (by prohibiting sexual harassment and other discriminatory behaviour and instituting

accountability mechanisms, by enabling parental leave and flexible working arrangements, and by offering social support to military personnel)

- v** emphasize the need to conduct a gender impact analysis for any new law or regulation affecting service personnel.⁴¹

National security policies

30 A national security policy is a formal description of how a country understands its national interests, goals, strategic environment and threats, and how it aims to protect or promote national security for the State and its people. It incorporates a vision of security developed through comprehensive dialogue with all national stakeholders, including the government, State institutions and citizens.⁴² Women make up roughly half of those citizens, and it is crucial that their interests and concerns are addressed in national security policies, to ensure their voices are amplified and their meaningful participation fostered

⁴⁰ United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 4.1 [number of respondents is indicated per question].

⁴¹ United Nations Department of Peace Operations, "Database on Gender Integration in Defence Strategies".

⁴² Security Sector Reform Integrated Technical Guidance Notes (United Nations publication, 2012).

within the security sector. For instance, the *National Security Policy of Pakistan 2022-2026* declares the commitment of the government to enabling the free and secure participation of women and transgender persons in institutions of peace, protection and security.⁴³ And in The Gambia, the 2019 *National Security Policy* directed all security institutions to reassess women's "gendered roles" within their institutions and to train personnel so as to shed entrenched attitudes and practices, further recognizing that women in the security services must be given the space to express concerns relating to institutionalized sexism without fear of retribution.⁴⁴

Monitoring progress

31 Many armed forces have created dedicated roles and entities to coordinate initiatives and track, monitor and report progress on gender equality. These include gender secretariats, observatories, directorates and units; gender advisers and gender focal points (which may have both an internal and an external operational focus); equality officers and coordinators; contact persons for gender equality; and units responsible for handling cases of sexual harassment, discrimination and abuse, or for driving overarching change in the institutional culture of defence sectors towards equality. Some of these are located within the Ministry of Defence, some within the armed forces, and some in both.⁴⁵ Data collected by the United Nations from 55 countries that contributed to this question shows that 89 per cent had an officer assigned to advance gender equality and women's participation in its national defence, in 2022.⁴⁶ Committees, organisations and networks for women military personnel are increasingly prevalent as well, to directly support servicewomen and communicate issues of concern to leadership. These operate within a range of institutional models, and in some cases have an official advisory role.

43 Pakistan, *National Security Policy of Pakistan 2022-2026* (National Security Division, Government of Pakistan, 2022).

44 The Gambia, *National Security Policy* (Banjul, Office of National Security, 2019), para. 23.3.

45 United Nations Development Programme, *The Position of Women in the Armed Forces in the Western Balkans*; Atkins, *Women in the Armed Forces in the OSCE Region*, p. 55; and de Jonge Oudraat and others, *Enhancing Security*, p. 11.

46 United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 5 [number of respondents is indicated per question].



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III. Status of women in national defence sectors

Political level

32 Women's leadership in national defence decision-making is essential to building inclusive, responsive and democratic armed forces. Yet, available data showing that the low proportion of women working at all levels of defence decision-making around the globe indicate there is still a long way to go towards achieving gender equality in the sector. Some scholarship on the under-inclusion of women in armed forces has correlated this to women's lack of equality in political life and in decision-making power.⁴⁷ Thus, it is notable that increasing numbers of women have been appointed as ministers of defence in recent decades.⁴⁸ In 2023, 13 per cent of ministers of defence were women.⁴⁹ And, in a smaller dataset of 48 countries from all regions, 38 per cent had a woman deputy minister of defence or equivalent in 2022.⁵⁰

Analysis suggests that women are entrusted as ministers of defence where perceptions of the role of defence have begun to depart from traditional models, such as in countries with an active focus on peacekeeping

33 Analysis suggests that women are entrusted as ministers of defence where perceptions of the role of defence have begun to depart from traditional models, such as in countries with an active focus on peacekeeping.⁵¹ But the presence of a woman defence minister also increases the likelihood that women are allowed to serve in frontline combat roles and, generally speaking, women defence ministers may be more likely to support women's participation in the defence domain and encourage institutional reforms towards gender equality.⁵²

Senior civilian ranks

34 Beyond ministerial roles, it is critical that women sit in senior advisory and management roles in the security sector as well, in order to model and foster a culture of inclusion and ensure that a diversity of perspectives inform decision-making. This facilitates the development of more comprehensive and inclusive security policies. However, of the 24 countries that shared data with the United Nations on the question of their most senior national security or defence adviser in 2022, just 13 per cent were women.⁵³ And, of the 20 countries that reported on the make-up of their national security council or equivalent,⁵⁴ women made up only 19 per cent of members on average.⁵⁵ The proportion of women staff is higher in ministries of defence, though, where data from 39 countries indicates an average one-third of personnel are women, with regional variations of 20–38 per cent.⁵⁶ For example, analysis from four countries in the

⁴⁷ Ghanem and Arakji, *Women in the Arab Armed Forces*, p. 21.

⁴⁸ Tiffany D. Barnes and Diana Z. O'Brien, "Defending the Realm: The Appointment of Female Defense Ministers Worldwide", *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 62, No. 2 (2018).

⁴⁹ *Report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/725)*, para. 68.

⁵⁰ United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 2 [number of respondents is indicated per question].

⁵¹ Barnes and O'Brien, "Defending the Realm".

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 2 [number of respondents is indicated per question].

⁵⁴ A national security or defence council, or equivalent, is a national coordination body responsible for decision-making on issues of national of defence, usually chaired by the head of state and comprising the heads of a country's security and defence institutions. This coordination body may be supported by a dedicated secretariat and headed by a national security advisor. In some contexts, it may also be responsible for negotiating or implementing defence sector reform provisions of ceasefires or peace agreements as well as national defence and security strategies and policies.

⁵⁵ United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 1 [number of respondents is indicated per question].

⁵⁶ United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 1 [number of respondents is indicated per question].

Western Balkans revealed that women held 32 per cent of non-uniformed managerial roles in ministries of defence, on average, but less than 3 per cent of uniformed managerial roles.⁵⁷

Oversight bodies

35 Defence oversight structures can play a critical role in monitoring the sector and steering it towards greater gender equality, and these structures should therefore be actively inclusive of women and engaged with women's civil society organisations. In numerous Member States, parliamentary committees on defence and security, special boards of inquiry, national human rights institutions, and defence ombuds institutions have investigated and reported on conditions for women military personnel or on the prevalence and handling of sexual misconduct, developing recommendations for reforms. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for instance, the Office of the Inspector General plays a pivotal role in the gender mainstreaming efforts of the armed forces, driving affirmative action measures to increase the retention and promotion of women staff.⁵⁸ While there are no comprehensive data on women's participation in defence oversight mechanisms, the Inter-Parliamentary Union reports that, in 2022, women chaired 12 per cent of parliamentary defence committees.⁵⁹ Among 26 countries that shared data with the United Nations, the rate was slightly higher, with women accounting for an average of 18 per cent of the members of their parliamentary committees on defence and security in 2022.⁶⁰

In numerous Member States, parliamentary committees on defence and security, special boards of inquiry, national human rights institutions, and defence ombuds institutions have investigated and reported on conditions for women military personnel or on the prevalence and handling of sexual misconduct, developing recommendations for reforms

Women's position in national armed forces

36 Data from 30 countries shared with the United Nations on the proportion of women in armed forces show that, on average, women made up 12 per cent of army personnel, 15 per cent of air force personnel, 14 per cent of naval personnel and 16 per cent of gendarmerie personnel in 2022 (see Figure II, below).⁶¹ As a comparison, also in 2022, women comprised 24 per cent of the personnel of police services, on average, based on data from 34 countries.⁶²

⁵⁷ United Nations Development Programme, *The Position of Women in the Armed Forces in the Western Balkans*, p. 28.

⁵⁸ See DCAF, *Good Practices in Increasing Women's Representation and Gender Equality in Armed Forces*, Bosnia and Herzegovina case study.

⁵⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in Parliament 2022: The year in review* (Geneva, IPU, 2023), p. 17.

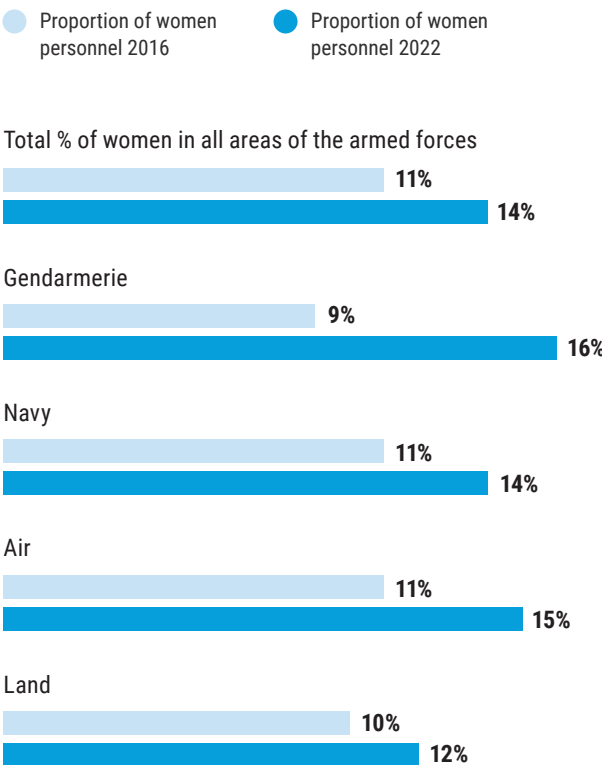
⁶⁰ United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 3 [number of respondents is indicated per question].

⁶¹ Ibid., Question 9.1. Data collected by the United Nations is broadly consistent with data collected by the OSCE in 2017, when "across 29 OSCE Participating States... the average was 10 per cent servicewomen" (Atkins, *Women in the Armed Forces in the OSCE Region*, p. 20). And NATO has published similar figures: "across 29 NATO member nations, from 1998 to 2020 the average proportion of women in armed forces increased by 21 per cent, to 12.7 per cent of personnel". See NATO, *Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives*, 2020, rev. 2 (Brussels, NATO, 2023), pp. 3, 6 and 7.

⁶² United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 9.3 [number of respondents is indicated per question].

FIGURE II.

Proportion of women personnel in all branches of national armed forces, in 2016 and in 2022



2016: Aggregated data from 26 countries (N = 26)
2022: Aggregated data from 30 countries (N = 30)

Among the countries that provided data to the United Nations, the proportion of women in the armed forces grew by an average of 27 per cent from 2016 to 2022...

37 Among the countries that provided data to the United Nations, the proportion of women in the armed forces grew by an average of 27 per cent from 2016 to 2022, rising from 11 per cent to 14 per cent overall. The gendarmerie saw an even more significant increase in women personnel over this period, with the proportion of women surging on average by 78 per cent, almost doubling from 9 per cent to 16 per cent of these forces.⁶³ These data signify strong growth in women's participation in armed forces, in many countries.

Military leadership

38 Women military leaders at the highest levels of the command structure remain a rarity. As of 2022, only Jamaica had a woman in such a position, as Chief of Defence Staff.⁶⁴ In the past two years, several countries appointed women to the position of chief of service. In 2023 in the United States of America, a woman assumed for the first time the duties as Chief of Naval Operations, becoming the first woman on the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁶⁵ The navy of Sweden is also currently led by another flag-ranked woman officer.⁶⁶ In 2024, Canada appointed its first woman as Chief of Defence.⁶⁷ The same year, New Zealand appointed its first woman Chief of the Army.⁶⁸ Women are also ascending to top-level

⁶³ Ibid., Question 9.1.

⁶⁴ Rear Admiral Antonette Wemyss Gorman was appointed on 20 January 2022. See Jamaica Defence Force, "Chief of Defence Staff". Available at <https://www.jdfweb.com/chief-of-defence-staff2/> (accessed on 12 August 2024)

⁶⁵ U.S. Department of Defense. "Admiral Lisa Franchetti Nominated as Chief of Naval Operations." Available at: <https://www.navy.mil/Leadership/Flag-Officer-Biographies/BioDisplay/Article/3148210/admiral-lisa-franchetti/> and

⁶⁶ Försvarmakten. "Ewa Skoog Haslum blir ny marinchef" Available at: <https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/sv/aktuellt/2019/12/ewa-skoog-haslum-blir-ny-marinchef/>

⁶⁷ Prime Minister of Canada, "Prime Minister announces the upcoming appointment of the new Chief of the Defence Staff", 3 July 2024. Available at <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2024/07/03/prime-minister-announces-upcoming-appointment-new-chief-defence-staff> (accessed 12 August 2024).

⁶⁸ New Zealand Defence Force. "New appointments for NZDF's senior leadership" Available at: <https://www.nzdf.mil.nz/media-centre/news/nzdf-announces-new-chiefs-of-service-vice-chief-of-defence-and-commander-joint-forces/>



In 2023, more than one in eight ministers of defence in the world were women.
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ranks such as lieutenant general and major general in the armed forces of many countries, including Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, France, Ghana, India, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, South Africa, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.⁶⁹ Still, United Nations data from 30 countries indicates that women are severely underrepresented at the flag and star-ranked officer level. On average, women represent only 2 per cent of naval officers and 3 per cent of land and air force officers at this level. While more women are represented at the senior officer level, they still account for just 10 per cent of personnel in land and naval forces and 8 per cent in air forces; though, at the junior officer level, this rises to 18 per cent in naval forces, 17 per cent in land forces and 14 per cent in air forces.⁷⁰

[...] women are severely underrepresented at the flag and star-ranked officer level. On average, women represent only 2 per cent of naval officers and 3 per cent of land and air force officers at this level

⁶⁹ United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 20 [number of respondents is indicated per question]. Also see France, Décret du 29 juillet 2022 portant nomination d'une officière générale, JORF No. 0175 of 30 July 2022 (ARMB2222469D).

⁷⁰ United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 11 [number of respondents is indicated per question].

Combat roles

Even where women are permitted by law and policy to join combat units, their participation rates are typically low

39 Women are often concentrated in support services, such as logistics, administration, and medical positions, and are strongly represented in legal, personnel and public affairs roles.⁷¹ Even where women are permitted by law and policy to join combat units, their participation rates are typically low. According to data shared by 21 countries with the United Nations, in 2022, an average of 10 per cent of personnel in combat roles or units were women (see Figure III, below).⁷² Notably, though, a considerably higher 18 per cent of the personnel who completed combat training that year were women.⁷³ Several countries have established women combat commando or special forces units (such as Israel,⁷⁴ Jordan,⁷⁵ Norway⁷⁶ and Syria⁷⁷), including to address threats posed by women associated with terrorist organizations, enabling better human intelligence and engagement with women community members in operational settings.

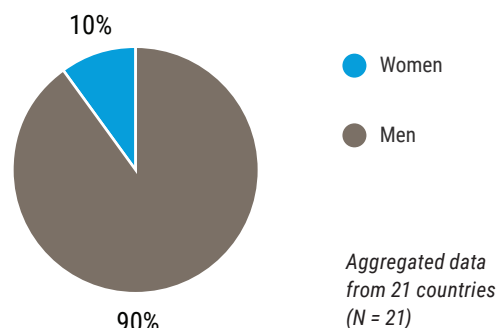
Conscription

40 Historically, in almost all countries, mandatory military conscription has been confined exclusively to men. Today, a handful of countries include women in mandatory conscription, and others have

arrangements for women to serve voluntarily.⁷⁸ Where armed forces include women in conscript service, it is clear that capabilities and qualifications matter as much as physical strength. In 2015, Norway implemented universal conscription of women and men, leading to an increase in the number of women who complete basic military training and seek officer education. While the proportion of women who completed basic military training in Norway was well under 20 per cent in the years before conscription was opened to women,⁷⁹ In Israel, both women and men are conscripted at the age of 18 under a military law, with women having a standard service period of two years.

FIGURE III.

Representation of women in combat roles and units, in 2022



⁷¹ NATO, *Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives, 2019* (Brussels, NATO, 2021), p. 75; Ghanem and Arakji, *Women in the Arab Armed Forces*, p. 21; Leigh and Born, *Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Armed Forces Personnel*, p. 113.

⁷² United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 12.2 [number of respondents is indicated per question].

⁷³ Ibid., Question 18. This is average rate for land (18 per cent), air (17 per cent), and navel (19 per cent) forces combined.

⁷⁴ Anna Ahronheim, "IDF's 'Red Unit': All-female unit challenging troops before they go to war", *The Jerusalem Post*, 10 October 2021.

⁷⁵ See DCAF, *Good Practices in Increasing Women's Representation and Gender Equality in Armed Forces*, Jordan case study.

⁷⁶ Aleks Korpela, "Jegertroppen: Norway's All-Female Special Forces Unit", NATO Association of Canada, 19 February 2016; Nina Rones and Frank Brundtland Steder, "Herregud, Skal Troppen Ha Bare Jenter?" *En Evaluering Av Jegertroppen Ved Forsvarets Spesialkommando*, FFI-Rapport 17/16485 (Norwegian Defence Research Institute, 2017).

⁷⁷ Ghanem and Arakji, *Women in the Arab Armed Forces*, p. 16.

⁷⁸ Countries enabling voluntary female conscription include Armenia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Switzerland, Turkey and Turkmenistan. See Leigh and Born, *Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Armed Forces Personnel*, p. 186; and Susan Badalian, "Armenia to Introduce Voluntary Military Service for Women", RFE/RL Armenia Service [Ազատ Շվիդական/Ազատություն ռադիոկայան], 21 April 2023.

⁷⁹ Norwegian Armed Forces, *Forsvarets årsrapport 2016*, p. 2.



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IV. Increasing equality between women and men in armed forces

41 To increase equality between women and men in armed forces, it is imperative to address systemic barriers that hinder women's participation and advancement. Some of the measures Member States have employed to foster a more inclusive and equitable military environment are highlighted below. Good practices such as these can make a concrete difference by producing lasting change and ensuring equal opportunities within defence institutions.

Leadership

42 Addressing the career limitations faced by women requires overcoming deep-rooted barriers to equal opportunity in the defence sector. The driving force must come from committed uniformed leadership at all levels, willing to serve as role models, to reshape the institutional culture. And while women

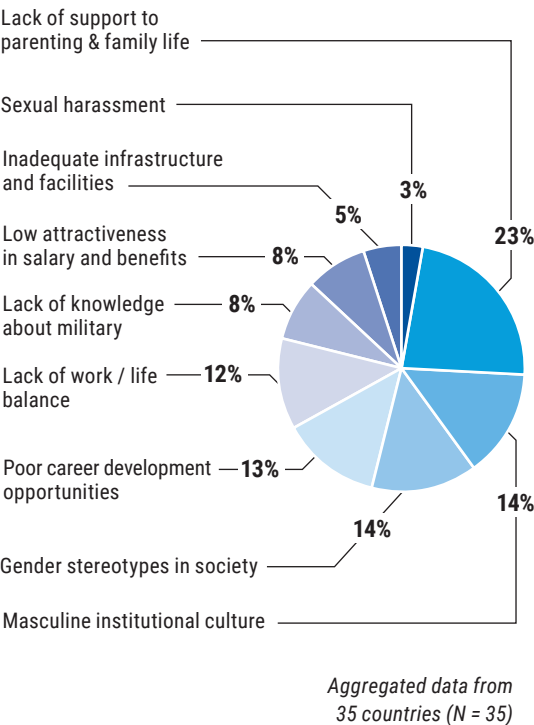
should be meaningfully engaged in this process, they themselves should not be responsible for overcoming these barriers; this is the task of institutional leadership.

Military leaders designated “champions” or “advocates” for gender can be catalytic change agents, helping shift the culture within military institutions and the military establishment, particularly in partnership with oversight bodies and experts from civil society

- 43** Military leaders designated “champions” or “advocates” for gender can be catalytic change agents, helping shift the culture within military institutions and the military establishment, particularly in partnership with oversight bodies and experts from civil society. In the armed forces of Montenegro and Sweden, for example, certain senior military staff are selected for “gender coaching” aimed at strengthening their capacity to work towards gender equality within their area of responsibility.⁸⁰
- 44** Multilateral exchange between military leaders on the subject of gender equality in armed forces has been fostered through initiatives such as the Women, Peace and Security Chiefs of Defence Network, Key Leader seminars at the Nordic Centre of Gender in Military Operations, and United Nations Peacekeeping ministerial meetings. By setting overarching targets for women's participation in defence, leaders can better focus their attention and work to unify efforts.

FIGURE IV.

Barriers to women's recruitment, retention and promotion



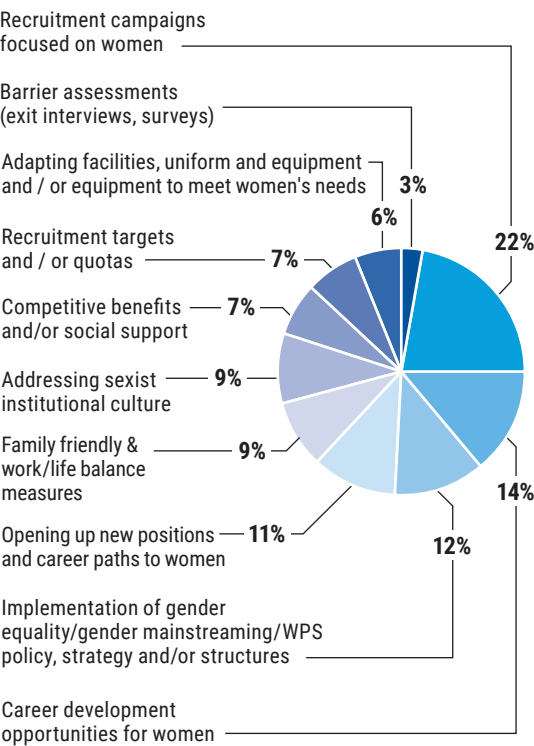
⁸⁰ Watson, “Defence and Gender” (Tool 3), p. 48.

Barriers to women's participation in the armed forces

- 45 The relatively low representation of women in armed forces reflects the significant social, cultural, legal, policy and institutional barriers to women's full, equal and meaningful participation in defence structures. Many barriers to women's participation (see Figure IV, below) extend from gender stereotypes – especially about the physical and psychological capabilities and inclinations of women and men and what sort of workplaces are suitable for women – and from the institutional culture of the military. Gender stereotypes are especially limiting in the context of military roles that require specialist skills in disciplines in which women are underrepresented, such as engineering and technology, and those with higher physical demands.
- 46 These barriers cannot be overcome merely by assisting women to adapt to the existing institutional culture and its practices, for example by encouraging women to serve in all the same roles as men but without considering women's physiology, healthcare needs and potential caretaking responsibilities. The focus should instead be on adapting the practices, training, career development, culture and ethos of the defence sector, so that it is more inclusive of women. Furthermore, such efforts should strive to transcend gender stereotypes and afford men similar considerations with regard to their physiology, healthcare needs and potential caretaking responsibilities.
- 47 In recent years, a wide range of strategies have been successfully deployed to increase women's participation in armed forces around the world (see Figure V, below). A review of good practices and an analysis of their impact in addressing barriers and increasing women's representation in the defence sector led the United Nations to identify and propose a new approach to reforms in armed forces, driven by seven "accelerators" of gender equality. These accelerators are described in the text that follows.

A review of good practices and an analysis of their impact in addressing barriers and increasing women's representation in the defence sector led the United Nations to identify and propose a new approach to reforms in armed forces, driven by seven "accelerators" of gender equality

FIGURE V.
Measures to increase the proportion of women in armed forces



Aggregated data from 39 countries (N = 39)

ACCELERATOR 1

Assess barriers to women's participation

48 The ability to assess the status quo, identify problems and develop new solutions is key if defence institutions are to make progress on gender equality. Many militaries undertake regular surveys to assess the institutional climate, equal opportunities, and the prevalence of sexual harassment,⁸¹ and a range of gender assessment tools have been developed for use by armed forces since 2010.⁸² A gender assessment is often the basis on which strategies are developed to advance gender equality and implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda. In fact, in 62 per cent of the 52 countries that supplied data to the United Nations about this, an assessment had been carried out between 2016 and 2022 to identify obstacles to women's participation in their armed forces.⁸³

Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP)

49 A significant advancement in understanding and assessing barriers to women's inclusion has come with the uptake by Member States of the rigorous and innovative Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) methodology.⁸⁴ As of June 2024, 11 armed forces had completed a MOWIP barrier assessment with two further MOWIPs nearing completion in 2024.⁸⁵

A gender assessment is often the basis on which strategies are developed to advance gender equality and implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda

50 The armed forces of three countries that were supported by the Elsie Initiative Fund (EIF) in completing a MOWIP assessment in 2022 have made significant progress in increasing the representation of uniformed military women deployed to United Nations peacekeeping missions, which rose from 9 per cent in 2018 to 17 per cent in 2022. Similarly, deployment rates for women in three EIF-funded Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) that conducted a MOWIP in 2023 increased from 4 per cent in 2018 to 10 per cent in 2023.⁸⁶

51 A MOWIP assessment led the Armed Forces of Liberia to take concrete actions such as renovating housing barracks for women and launching a targeted recruitment campaign, and prompted the Sierra Leone Armed Forces not only to develop a national strategy and action plan to address key barriers for women but to appoint the first woman battalion second-in-command and the first woman officer to

⁸¹ Samantha Cromptvoets, *Gender-Responsive Organizational Climate Assessment in Armed Forces* (Geneva, DCAF, 2019), pp. 59–61.

⁸² Megan Bastick, *Gender Self-Assessment Guide for the Police, Armed Forces and Justice Sector* (Geneva, DCAF, 2011); Chantal de Jonge Oudraat and others, *The 1325 Scorecard, Preliminary Findings – Gender Mainstreaming: Indicators for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 and Its Related Resolutions* (Brussels, NATO, 2015); Sabrina Karim and others, *MOWIP Methodology: Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations* (DCAF, Cornell University, Elsie Initiative, 2020).

⁸³ United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 13 [number of respondents is indicated per question].

⁸⁴ Karim and others, *MOWIP Methodology: Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations*.

⁸⁵ Elsie Initiative Fund, "MOWIP Reports", 31 March 2024. Available at <https://elsiefund.org/resources/mowip-reports/> (accessed on 12 August 2024).

⁸⁶ Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations, *Annual Report 2023*, p. 30.



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the Ministry of Defence.⁸⁷ Additionally, two important TCCs to United Nations peace operations, the armed forces of Ghana and Uruguay, have received EIF grants to implement MOWIP recommendations. These follow-up actions highlight the commitment of countries to put these recommendations into practice, to meaningfully advance gender equality in their armed forces.

- 52 While conducting and implementing a MOWIP (or another credible assessment of gender equality) contributes to building evidence of barriers to women's full, equal and meaningful participation, it is the gender assessment process that has been demonstrated to bring wider benefits. Where there is institutional buy-in, this process engages staff across an institution, including senior leadership, and is transformative in and of itself by laying a foundation for sustainable change in attitudes, behaviours and

culture.⁸⁸ For example, when Germany conducted a MOWIP barrier assessment in 2019, it uncovered gender issues across the armed forces and Ministry of Defence but also provided a credible evidence base to inform new strategies and actions to promote gender equality. The findings are being used in training and leadership courses to raise awareness about gender concepts, barriers to equality and the cultural-institutional factors that underlie women's exclusion.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations, *Annual Report 2022*, pp. 42 and 58.

⁸⁸ Karin Carlsson, *Implementing a MOWIP Assessment: Practitioners' Insights*, Learning Brief (Geneva, DCAF, 2023).

⁸⁹ See DCAF, *Good Practices in Increasing Women's Representation and Gender Equality in Armed Forces*, Germany case study.

ACCELERATOR 2

Enhance recruitment strategies to attract more women

53 In general, better results in recruiting a diverse workforce are achieved by:

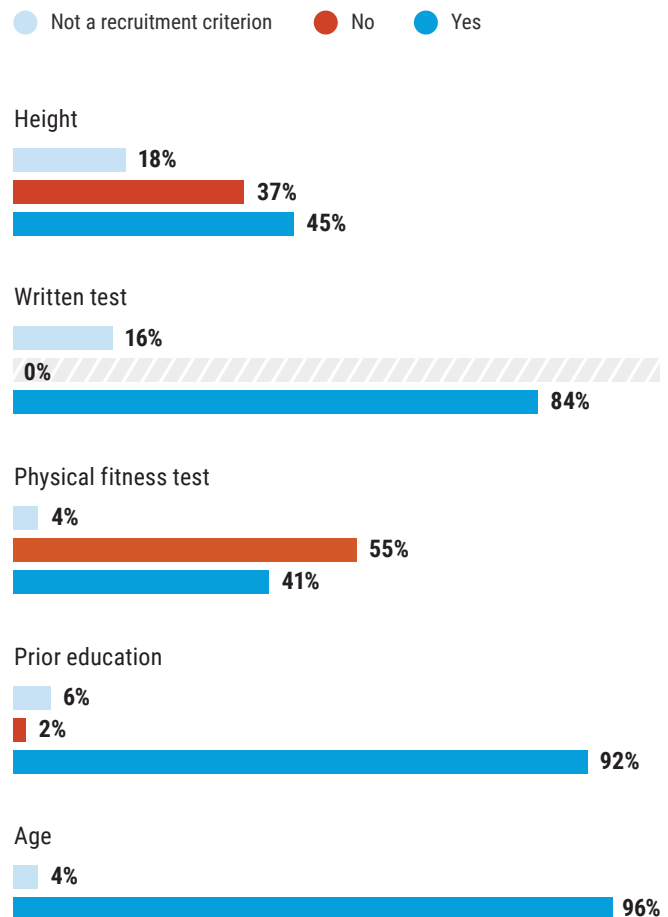
- ensuring diversity among the people responsible for hiring;
- targeting outreach to diverse groups of potential candidates;
- hiring based on skills, knowledge and competencies, versus degree requirements;⁹⁰
- changing legal frameworks and rules of recruitment to promote diversity; and
- creating incentives for diverse categories of recruits.

54 Globally, militaries struggle to attract women as recruits, even when they strive to do so.⁹¹ In some cases, this is due to selection criteria that, while appearing neutral, disproportionately exclude women. For instance, some armed forces do not permit married persons to join, which may disproportionately impact women in contexts where it is common for women to marry younger than men.⁹²

55 Most militaries have different enlistment requirements for women and men, usually related to their physiological differences and thus affecting standards in physical fitness tests and (less commonly) height, weight or Body Mass Index.⁹³ This is meant to equalize opportunities. Data shared with the United Nations by 51 countries shows that 55 per cent of their armed forces use different physical fitness tests

FIGURE VI.

Whether recruitment criteria were applied equally to women and men in 2022 (No or Yes), as a share of respondent States



Aggregated data from 51 countries (N = 51)

⁹⁰ Patrick Kline, Evan Rose and Christopher Walters, *A Discrimination Report Card*, NBER Working Paper Series, No. 32313 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2024).

⁹¹ NATO, *Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives, 2019*, p. 47.

⁹² Sabrina Karim and others, *Ghana Armed Forces MOWIP Report 2020* (Geneva, DCAF, 2020), p. 26.

⁹³ NATO, *Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives, 2019*, p. 43; and Ghanem and Arakji, *Women in the Arab Armed Forces*.

for women and men, and 37 per cent apply different height requirements (see Figure VI, below).⁹⁴

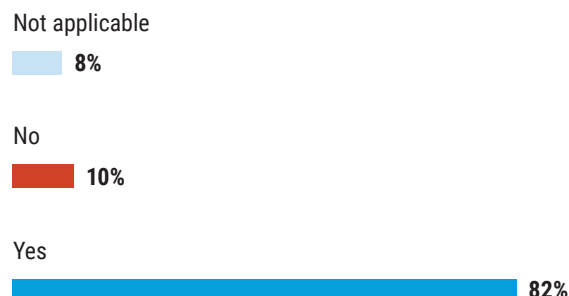
- 56** It is noteworthy that many armed forces exclude candidates who have a history of human rights violations, including violence against women or domestic violence. Of 51 countries that provided data to the United Nations, 42 of them prohibit these candidates from enlisting (see Figure VII, below).⁹⁵

Physical fitness

- 57** The practices of militaries vis-à-vis physical fitness assessments vary, but fall into two main categories. Some countries take a gender-neutral approach, applying the same standards for men and women.⁹⁶ However, most countries use a gender-adjusted approach, requiring men to complete certain physical tasks at greater speed or in greater quantity.⁹⁷ There are also several countries that combine gender-neutral and gender-adjusted approaches, depending on the type of assessment or function.⁹⁸
- 58** Physical fitness standards are a barrier to women's recruitment in some armed forces,⁹⁹ as well as to their deployment, particularly in the aftermath of pregnancy or a caesarean section.¹⁰⁰ To counter this, some militaries offer early or pre-recruitment physical training to women, tailored to specific needs.¹⁰¹ In Liberia, where it was observed that women from urban areas tended to do poorly on physical fitness tests and well on the written exam while women from rural areas tended to do well on the fitness tests and poorly on the written exam, the armed forces began

FIGURE VII.

Share of States which have laws or regulations restricting persons convicted of violence against women or domestic violence from joining or remaining active within the armed forces, as of 31 December 2022



Aggregated data from 51 countries (N = 51)

holding pre-recruitment “training” events in 2022 that allow urban women to prepare for the physical fitness tests and rural women to take a practice written exam.¹⁰² And in Brazil, the army cadet school monitors and reviews the physical standards for combat roles against the needs of posts and, where needed, offers additional training to women recruits to build their capacity to meet those standards.

- 59** The character of armed forces is evolving, as new tasks emerge in response to climate emergencies, cyber threats or people-centred security challenges. A re-examination of fitness tests can help adapt armed forces to these new tasks. For example, the upper-body strength often associated with men has

⁹⁴ United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 8 [number of respondents is indicated per question].

⁹⁵ Ibid., Question 16. Also see United Nations Development Programme, *The Position of Women in the Armed Forces in the Western Balkans*, p. 35.

⁹⁶ This includes Belgium, Liberia and Canada. See Atkins, *Women in the Armed Forces in the OSCE Region*, p. 11; Sabrina Karim and others, *Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL): 2022 Report on Results of the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) Assessment* (Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation, University of Liberia, 2022); and Ayanna Williams and others, *Foreign Military Physical Fitness Assessments: Response to DACOWITS June 2020 RFI 13* (Arlington, Virginia, Insight Policy Research, 2020).

⁹⁷ Atkins, *Women in the Armed Forces in the OSCE Region*, p. 11.

⁹⁸ This includes Australia, Lebanon, Norway and Spain. See Williams and others, *Foreign Military Physical Fitness Assessments*; Ghanem and Arakji, *Women in the Arab Armed Forces*; and Atkins, *Women in the Armed Forces in the OSCE Region*, p. 12.

⁹⁹ Karim and others, *Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL): 2022 Report on Results of the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) Assessment*.

¹⁰⁰ Karim and others, *Ghana Armed Forces MOWIP Report 2020*.

¹⁰¹ United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 15.1 [number of respondents is indicated per question].

¹⁰² Karim and others, *Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) 2022 Report on Results of the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) Assessment*, pp. 5 and 22.

less impact on combat effectiveness in the modern context. Moreover, women can claim certain advantages in combat, including a greater resistance to fatigue and hunger as well as to the centrifugal force generated by modern combat aircraft.¹⁰³ Experience shows that adjusting fitness standards to facilitate more diverse participation does not lower performance standards in the military, it simply results in standards that are more appropriate to operational needs.¹⁰⁴

- 60** Taking a broader view, the increasing complexity of military operations demands personnel with specialized skills in a wide range of technical areas and disciplines. Armed forces increasingly seek to attract candidates who may not have considered a military career in the past, competing for personnel with other government entities and the private sector. New and emerging challenges – whether in civilian-military coordination, information operations, cyber, peace-keeping, civilian security or disaster response – are leading many armed forces to undertake a comprehensive review of their recruitment and selection criteria. To achieve equality between men and women, this should involve a re-examination of the talents, skills and values necessary to defence forces, and the recognition that women offer these equal to men. Recruitment and selection criteria should be updated accordingly.

Special measures to increase women's recruitment into the armed forces

- 61** Many nations have special measures in place to increase women's recruitment into the armed forces.¹⁰⁵ The most common are communications campaigns targeting women, and outreach events where civilian women can engage with servicewomen. Indeed, research shows that women recruits

prefer women recruiters as well as women-specific events.¹⁰⁶ Increasingly, States are also setting quotas and targets for the recruitment of women into their armed forces. Of 34 Member States that shared data with the United Nations, 20 have taken this step, with seven establishing quotas and 13 establishing targets for women's recruitment (see Figure VIII, below).¹⁰⁷ This can motivate institutional change at a rapid pace, as the onus is shifted onto military leaders to achieve a goal set by the ministry of defence, the government or parliament. Other forms of affirmative action have been used to increase women's representation as well, such as by requiring a candidate of each gender to be considered for any vacancy, or by prioritizing the underrepresented gender where multiple candidates fulfil the selection criteria. At the same time, women personnel may oppose gender quotas, fearing this implies that women's advancement is not merit-based.¹⁰⁸ These measures should only be used on a temporary basis, and within wider programmes designed to improve working conditions and create opportunities for women by changing policies, infrastructure and attitudes within defence institutions.

[Special measures like recruitment quotas can be effective but] should only be used on a temporary basis, and within wider programmes designed to improve working conditions and create opportunities for women by changing policies, infrastructure and attitudes within defence institutions

¹⁰³ Boutron and Weber, "La féminisation des armées françaises".

¹⁰⁴ Micah Ables, "Women Aren't the Problem. Standards Are", *Modern War Institute at West Point* (blog), 5 February 2019.

¹⁰⁵ This was true for two-thirds (67 per cent) of the 51 countries that shared data with the United Nations. See United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 15 [number of respondents is indicated per question].

¹⁰⁶ Douglas Yeung and others, *Recruiting Policies and Practices for Women in the Military: Views from the Field* (Santa Monica, California, RAND Corporation, 2017).

¹⁰⁷ United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 15.1 [number of respondents is indicated per question]. Also see Atkins, *Women in the Armed Forces in the OSCE Region*, pp. 16 and 17.

¹⁰⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission, *Review into the Treatment of Women in the Australian Defence Force: Audit Report, 2014*, chapter 3.

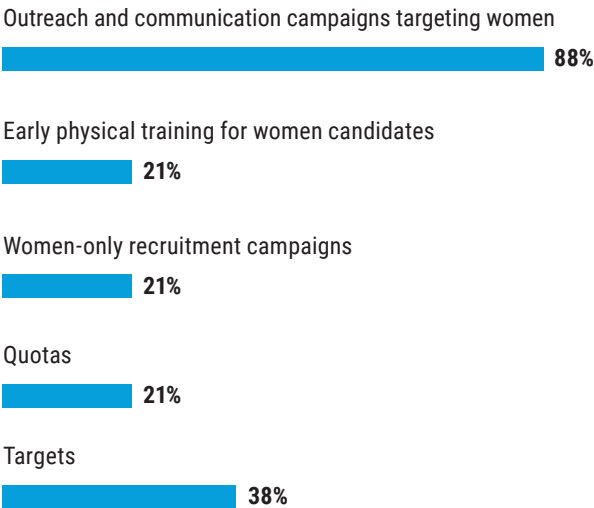
62 To achieve greater diversity in the armed forces, it is necessary to challenge the informal barriers that keep men from working in roles traditionally dominated by women and keep women from working in roles traditionally dominated by men. Thus, in South Africa – an important troop contributor to United Nations peacekeeping that has an entry-level recruitment target of 40 per cent women – recruitment drives emphasize the positive, purposeful representation of women in military disciplines that are conventionally regarded as the domain of men. These are accompanied by actions to increase the number of men in traditionally women-dominated roles, such as military nursing.¹⁰⁹ Several armed forces also offer training on gender and unconscious bias to personnel involved in recruitment and selection, and some require the composition of recruitment boards is mixed-gender.¹¹⁰ Recruitment measures such as these should be supported by systemic changes that ensure women applicants have an equal chance not only of being selected but of finding fulfilment in a military career.

63 Some countries are tailoring their efforts to attract more women conscripts, often through information campaigns on both social and traditional media. The Finnish government sends individual letters encouraging young women to consider a career in the military, for instance, and those who volunteer for service benefit from a 90-day window during which they may opt out should it not meet their expectations.¹¹¹ The Swedish Armed Forces connect potential women recruits with women in active service through direct telephone communication, so that they can gain insights into concrete aspects of military life, including housing, schedules and benefits.¹¹² The approach of Switzerland includes offering financial incentives for post-service educational activities to both men and women, and emphasizing the opportunities for early leadership experience presented by the military. Other initiatives to boost women's representation

in armed forces have been centred on highlighting women role models, increasing the visibility for women pursuing military careers, providing care allowances, and collaborating with universities and employers to better coordinate with the demands of military service. Additional efforts have been made to accommodate family commitments by offering part-time roles and ensuring paid leave for maternity, paternity and adoption.¹¹³

FIGURE VIII.

Special measures used by respondent States to increase women's recruitment to armed forces



Aggregated data from 34 countries (N = 34)

¹⁰⁹ See DCAF, *Good Practices in Increasing Women's Representation and Gender Equality in Armed Forces*, South Africa case study; and T. Rakoma, "SAMHS appoints its first male Matron", *South African Soldier*, vol. 18, No. 3(2011), p. 26, as cited in Watson, "Defence and Gender" (Tool 3), p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Atkins, *Women in the Armed Forces in the OSCE Region*, p. 16.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 17 and 18.

¹¹² Leigh and Born, *Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Armed Forces Personnel*, chapter 11.

¹¹³ Megan Bastick and Matteo Polizzi, exchange on women's conscription, 8 December 2023.

ACCELERATOR 3

Improve retention rates among women

64 Data on career satisfaction for men and women in the armed forces show a great deal of variance from country to country.¹¹⁴ In some, women are better retained than men.¹¹⁵ However, overall, more women than men leave the armed forces citing poor work-life balance.¹¹⁶ In some countries, women are also more likely to cite the organizational culture, a lack of respect and scant career prospects as reasons for separating from the military.¹¹⁷ Women consistently raise the issue that equipment and field and combat uniforms are designed for male bodies, for example, hampering women's comfort and performance, and in some cases their safety. Poor health care for women, including reproductive and mental health care, further undermines retention in some armed forces, and can pose particular challenges in the context of deployment.¹¹⁸ Additionally, research examining the experience of ethnic minorities in the armed forces of several OECD member countries found they suffer at higher rates from physical and mental health disorders, and it appears that women from ethnic minority groups face particular barriers to mental health treatment.¹¹⁹

65 Setting targets for the retention of women can help to guide monitoring and inform specific action. For

instance, South Africa has set a recruitment target for its armed forces of 40 per cent women, followed by a retention target of at least 30 per cent women after basic military training.¹²⁰ As of 2021, the South Africa National Defence Force was comprised of 31 per cent women, reflecting this mandate to increase their representation, but issues remain with their participation at senior management levels, suggesting that efforts to improve gender equality must still be better mainstreamed across all levels of the institution.¹²¹

Many countries are working to adapt facilities, uniforms and equipment for women. The United Nations collected data from 52 countries on this topic, and nearly all had taken measures to adapt military uniforms and facilities for women, while more than half had adapted equipment

114 Atkins, *Women in the Armed Forces in the OSCE Region*, pp. 49 and 50.

115 Dainzú López de Lara Espinosa and others, *Secretary of Navy Mexico MOWIP Report 2021* (Universidad de las Américas Puebla, 2023), p. 42; NATO, *Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives*, 2019, p. 63.

116 NATO, *Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives*, 2019, pp. 64–66.

117 Atkins, *Women in the Armed Forces in the OSCE Region*, p. 31.

118 Karim and others, *Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) 2022 Report on Results of the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) Assessment*, p. 5; Dainzú López de Lara Espinosa and others, *Secretary of Navy Mexico MOWIP Report 2021*, p. 78; Sabrina Karim and others, *The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces: 2022 Report on Results of the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) Assessment* (Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces, 2022), p. 3.

119 Kate Salem and others, "Experiences of ethnic minority personnel in the armed forces: A systematic review", *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health*, vol. 9, No. 1 (February 2023).

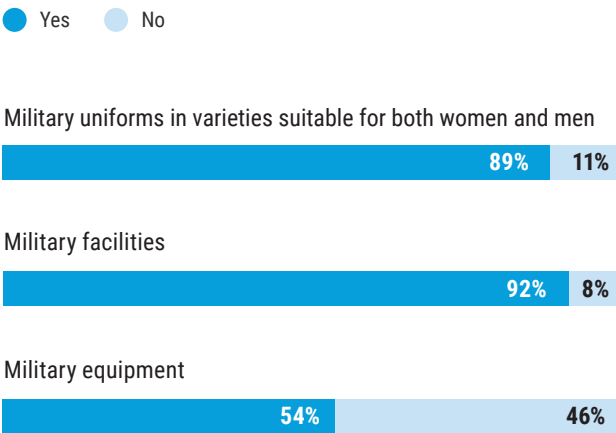
120 United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 15.1 [number of respondents is indicated per question].

121 Knightingale Lulu Mmakola and Sello Levy Sithole, "Women Representation in the Military: The Case of the South Africa National Defence Force, Limpopo Province", *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review*, vol. 6, No. 9 (September 2023), 68.

66 Many countries are working to adapt facilities, uniforms and equipment for women. The United Nations collected data from 52 countries on this topic, and nearly all had taken measures to adapt military uniforms and facilities for women, while more than half had adapted equipment (see Figure IX, below).¹²² Some armed forces have developed maternity uniforms and have established breastfeeding rooms.¹²³ Importantly, some have also introduced systems to ensure that new military equipment – including bulletproof vests, weapons systems, vehicles and aircraft – is designed and procured based on ergonomic data that accounts for both women and men.

FIGURE IX.

Types of measures taken to ensure that militaries meet the needs of both women and men



Military equipment:
Aggregated data from 52 countries (N = 52)

Military facilities:
Aggregated data from 52 countries (N = 52)

Military uniforms suitable for both women and men:
Aggregated data from 53 countries (N = 53)

¹²² United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 19 [number of respondents is indicated per question].

¹²³ See DCAF, *Good Practices in Increasing Women's Representation and Gender Equality in Armed Forces*, Uruguay case study.

ACCELERATOR 4

Build a culture of diversity and inclusion

67 In most countries, military personnel receive the same maternity and parental leave benefits as other public sector employees. However, some armed forces have additional protections for pregnant service members against health risks and restrictions on the deployment of pregnant women or new mothers, and offer the explicit right to breastfeeding breaks.¹²⁴ For example, the Armed Forces of Bangladesh introduced enhanced maternity leave (which is longer than that offered in other public sector institutions) and a variety of measures to support mothers, including flexible workday start times, breastfeeding breaks and access to day-care.¹²⁵ Likewise, the Indian Army, an important contributor of troops to United Nations peacekeeping, has provisioned a special family leave for women service members.¹²⁶

Men and women personnel alike should be supported by management to look after any children or other dependants, without sacrificing career development or advancement

68 In some armed forces, provisions ensure that military spouses serve in the same location. Men and women personnel alike should be supported by

management to look after any children or other dependants, without sacrificing career development or advancement. While all armed forces should develop family-friendly and other inclusive human resources policies, the specific provisions of these policies will vary based on cultural norms and the nature of the tasks undertaken by a given military. Some countries have had good experience with establishing childcare facilities within military establishments, such as in the Dominican Republic, where the armed forces expanded access to childcare centres, including for children with disabilities, and introduced new housing benefits for military families. These measures seem to have contributed to strengthening the recruitment and retention of women, and have enhanced the image of the armed forces as an attractive employer and inclusive institution in the Dominican Republic.¹²⁷ In Uruguay, recognizing the importance of culture and leadership, the armed forces have sought to instil an institutional culture wherein staff feel safe to talk about family issues with their superiors and use the caretaking leave to which they are entitled, with no fear of missing out on career opportunities.¹²⁸

69 Staff associations and networks within armed forces and other defence institutions can promote the well-being and retention of women by providing information, moral support, social connection, and opportunities for mentoring and professional networking. These associations can also provide input regarding the institutional policies and practices of the military to help ensure they respond to the changing needs

¹²⁴ Atkins, *Women in the Armed Forces in the OSCE Region*, p. 34; and DCAF, *Good Practices in Increasing Women's Representation and Gender Equality in Armed Forces*.

¹²⁵ See DCAF, *Good Practices in Increasing Women's Representation and Gender Equality in Armed Forces*, Bangladesh case study.

¹²⁶ Ibid., India case study.

¹²⁷ Ibid., Dominican Republic case study.

¹²⁸ Ibid., Uruguay case study.



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of personnel. The Bulgarian Armed Forces Women Association is a good example of this. After successfully advocating for legislative amendments to the Defence Act to open military academies, universities and colleges to women, it then worked to improve women's retention by establishing a career mentoring programme, promoting child- and family-friendly arrangements, and giving men and women alternative paths for filing complaints of sexual harassment, abuse or assault, with psychological support and procedural advice.¹²⁹ Similarly, in Moldova, the National Army Women's Association has been a key ally in Ministry of Defence efforts to promote gender equality by contributing to legal and policy drafting, sharing new gender-sensitive provisions among service personnel and engaging in joint public information campaigns. In fact, the Moldovan Ministry of Defence credits the Women's Association as instrumental in improving the image of the armed forces among the broader public.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Ibid., Bulgaria case study.

¹³⁰ Ibid., Moldova case study.

ACCELERATOR 5

Combat sexual discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual abuse

70 Most armed forces struggle with problems of internal sexual discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual abuse, although these are often under-reported.¹³¹ In recent years, several countries have conducted large-scale inquiries into sexual misconduct in the military, and have found that women personnel experience and report more of these abuses than men, but that they are directed at both women and men. Often, victim-survivors, women or men, are reluctant to complain; and this is especially true of those from certain racial and ethnic minority groups in some countries.¹³² Commonly, this is due in part to a lack of confidence that the organizational mechanisms meant for handling gender-related complaints of sexual discrimination, harassment and abuse can do so fairly and confidentially, especially when complaints go through a service member's chain of command.¹³³ Any tolerance, or appearance of tolerance, for harassment, discrimination or abuse within armed forces damages effectiveness and morale, lowers retention and undermines public trust.

Any tolerance, or appearance of tolerance, for harassment, discrimination or abuse within armed forces damages effectiveness and morale, lowers retention and undermines public trust

71 Over the last decade, several armed forces have taken concrete steps to address harassment and abuse by strengthening complaints mechanisms, chain-of-command accountability, and internal and external oversight, as well as by improving sex-disaggregated monitoring. The United States military also delivers bystander intervention training, aimed at empowering peers to intervene to prevent sexual assault.¹³⁴ Still, while most armed forces have accountability mechanisms in place to address sexual harassment, intimidation and violence against their personnel in the workplace, this mechanism often lacks independence from the military hierarchy by leaving investigation and prosecution in the hands of military, rather than civilian, authorities.¹³⁵ Anonymous workplace climate assessments, surveys

¹³¹ NATO, *Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives*, 2019, p. 103; Ghanem and Arakji, *Women in the Arab Armed Forces*, p. 18; OSCE/ODIHR, *Addressing Sexual Violence in the Armed Forces: A Practical Guide* (Warsaw, 2022), p. 43.

¹³² Salem and others, "Experiences of Ethnic Minority Personnel in the Armed Forces".

¹³³ Bastick, *Gender and Complaints Mechanisms*.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹³⁵ Data was shared with the United Nations by 53 countries on this question, and only one indicated that they had no such mechanism in place; but in 44 per cent of countries, this mechanism was not independent from the military hierarchy. See United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 17 [number of respondents is indicated per question]; and Atkins, *Women in the Armed Forces in the OSCE Region*, pp. 39, 40, 48 and 49.



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or third-party research can therefore be helpful in understanding the prevalence of these abuses within armed forces.

- 72** It is good practice to have a range of internal and external complaint mechanisms available to military personnel, providing multiple avenues by which they can raise and resolve concerns and violations and prompt an investigation, including some that exist outside a complainant's chain of command. In Bulgaria, for example, informal complaints can be made through the Bulgarian Armed Forces Women Association, which offers support to victims and actively monitors the progress of official complaints.¹³⁶ The Canadian Armed Forces have created a dedicated website to provide resources to anyone who suspects or reports incidents of sexual assault or sexual harassment.¹³⁷ Complaints mechanisms should be developed to ensure their accessibility to

victims of gender-related discrimination and harassment generally and to minority groups within the military particularly. In all cases, complainants should be referred to appropriate medical and support services, and complaints should be dealt with swiftly and transparently, in a process that is victim-focused and trauma-informed from start to finish.¹³⁸ This requires that staff working within military justice and disciplinary mechanisms are trained to handle gender bias and gender-based crimes. Additionally, anonymized statistics on the frequency, nature and outcomes of different types of complaints should be made available to external oversight actors and used to determine priorities for prevention, education and awareness-raising activities.¹³⁹

- 73** Research has found that laws, policies and training to prevent sexual misconduct and bullying in armed forces are insufficient if they are not coupled with

¹³⁶ Bastick, *Gender and Complaints Mechanisms*, p. 50.

¹³⁷ OSCE/ODIHR, *Addressing Sexual Violence in the Armed Forces*, p. 47. Also see Government of Canada, "Sexual misconduct". Available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/benefits-military/conflict-misconduct/sexual-misconduct.html> (accessed on 12 August 2024).

¹³⁸ OSCE/ODIHR, *Addressing Sexual Violence in the Armed Forces*.

¹³⁹ Bastick, *Gender and Complaints Mechanisms*; and Watson, "Defence and Gender" (Tool 3), p. 39.

comprehensive programmes to confront institutional cultures, from the top down.¹⁴⁰ Canada is modelling this approach through the establishment of a unit under the Chief of Professional Conduct and Culture, who reports directly to the Deputy Minister and the Chief of Defence Staff, with the remit to foster an inclusive and psychologically safe military culture underpinned by respect for the dignity of all people. Canada's whole-of-defence strategy for cultural transformation includes greater support for victims and survivors of sexual misconduct as well as a leadership coaching programme.¹⁴¹

- 74** Some armed forces have strengthened their response and support in cases where personnel face gender-based violence (GBV) committed by persons outside the institution, acknowledging this as an important part of supporting service members more broadly, in particular women. In Argentina, the armed forces have instituted a mechanism whereby personnel who experience GBV can access a designated category of leave, with specific protections and support. This has helped challenge the stigma associated with GBV victimization and ensure that victims do not suffer negative career repercussions.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Atkins, *Women in the Armed Forces in the OSCE Region*, p. 5.

¹⁴¹ See DCAF, *Good Practices in Increasing Women's Representation and Gender Equality in Armed Forces*, Canada case study.

¹⁴² Ibid., Argentina case study.

ACCELERATOR 6

Facilitate career development programmes for women

75 It is common in armed forces for women to be over-represented in jobs related to healthcare, legal affairs, personnel, public affairs, training and logistics.¹⁴³ Yet, career paths leading to higher-level educational opportunities and senior leadership are often tied to combat roles, in which women are underrepresented. Data submitted to the United Nations by 18 countries reflects this, showing the stark underrepresentation of women in advanced military education programmes. For example, in 2022, women accounted for only 3 per cent of the air force personnel engaged in higher defence studies in these countries (see Figure X, below).¹⁴⁴

Career development and advancement in armed forces tend to rest upon progress through a series of key benchmarks at which service members become eligible for education, training, promotion or deployment. At each, women are likely to face gender-specific hurdles

FIGURE X.

Participation rates of women in different types of military training and education, in 2022

| TYPE OF TRAINING/EDUCATION | Proportion of women | | |
|---|---------------------|-----|------|
| | LAND | AIR | NAVY |
| Combat training or equivalent | 18% | 17% | 19% |
| Junior Staff College, Defence College or equivalent | 10% | 15% | 13% |
| Staff College, Command College or equivalent | 5% | 8% | 7% |
| High defence studies or equivalent | 5% | 3% | 4% |

Land – Combat training or equivalent: N = 19; Junior Staff College, Defence College or equivalent: N = 17; Staff College, Command College or equivalent: N = 18; High defence studies or equivalent: N = 12

Air – Combat training or equivalent: N = 15; Junior Staff College, Defence College or equivalent: N = 13; Staff College, Command College or equivalent: N = 15; High defence studies or equivalent: N = 9

Navy – Combat training or equivalent: N = 15; Junior Staff College, Defence College or equivalent: N = 13; Staff College, Command College or equivalent: N = 15; High defence studies or equivalent: N = 12

¹⁴³ NATO, *Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives*, 2019, p. 75.

¹⁴⁴ United Nations Department of Peace Operations and DCAF, *UN Dataset on Gender Equality and the Status of Women in the Defence Sector*, Question 18 [number of respondents is indicated per question].



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76 Career development and advancement in armed forces tend to rest upon progress through a series of key benchmarks at which service members become eligible for education, training, promotion or deployment. At each, women are likely to face gender-specific hurdles. In some armed forces, for instance, there are no dormitories, changing rooms or sanitary facilities for women in some units or education centres, and there is rarely an allowance for women to bring their children or support for alternative child-care. The greater caretaking and household responsibilities women typically shoulder may therefore make it difficult for them to complete training or education courses that take them away from home for long periods. Moreover, access to pre-promotion courses and exams is often age-limited, so that a woman who takes maternity leave may find herself excluded, having advanced past the prescribed age by the time she returns to service.¹⁴⁵ And even where they

are eligible for career development, women in some countries describe being passed over by the senior officers who select candidates, due to gender bias.¹⁴⁶

77 Integrating women into combat roles and units may require special efforts to overcome resistance within these units, as well as reluctance from women themselves. The Brazilian Armed Forces have successfully implemented a multidisciplinary, cross-departmental project to integrate women personnel into education and training for combat roles, which addresses planning, documentation, infrastructure, health, human resources, uniforms, weapons, equipment, physical training and evaluation. Early outcomes of the project included women cadets achieving higher academic and technical performance than men, and reaching parity with men cadets on all physical tests (swimming and strength tests) except for running.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Niloy Ranjan Biswas and others, *Armed Forces of Bangladesh MOWIP Report 2022* (Geneva, DCAF, 2022), p. 37.

¹⁴⁶ For example, see Karim and others, *The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces: 2022 Report on Results of the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) Assessment*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁷ See DCAF, *Good Practices in Increasing Women's Representation and Gender Equality in Armed Forces*, Brazil case study; and Natália Diniz Schwether, "Inovação em defesa e participação feminina nas forças armadas: uma relação de ganhos mútuos?", 11th National Meeting of the Brazilian Association of Defense Studies (ABED), João Pessoa, 8–10 September 2021, p. 17. Available at https://www.enabed2021.abedef.org/resources/anais/15/enabed2020/1626182199_ARQUIVO_5b0089a4ad0883d76779be9994c47693.pdf (accessed on 12 August 2024).

All-women units continue to be viewed as useful in some countries, to attract women recruits, enable selection and training that is fully adapted to women's physiology, and provide opportunity for women where cultural barriers exist to their cohabitation with men in close quarters

78 All-women military colleges and military units have been established by many armed forces, and there is a long history of women-organized combat groups around the world. In some cases, this practice has paved the path to women's full integration. All-women units continue to be viewed as useful in some countries, to attract women recruits, enable selection and training that is fully adapted to women's physiology, and provide opportunity for women where cultural barriers exist to their cohabitation with men in close quarters. From an operational standpoint, all-women special units can also maximize the operational capacity of women's engagement with other women, including to collect intelligence, build trust, and interact with potential women criminals or terrorists. Notably,

an analysis by Norway of its all-men and all-women special forces has demonstrated that when women undergo physical training exclusively with other women they achieve higher performance levels, and that both women and men benefit from segregated training of this kind in tasks that are non-traditional for their gender.¹⁴⁸ In the Jordanian Armed Forces, the development of entities and infrastructure to offer women-only training and education has proved successful in increasing women's integration. At its Military Women's Training Centre, a staff made up exclusively of women teaches the same curricula as other military training centres, so that women and men who are trained separately work together under the same standards afterwards. Recently, the Jordanian Armed Forces have also introduced all-women infantry platoons trained to confront drug trafficking at the border, facilitating the capacity to conduct full body searches of women while respecting cultural norms.¹⁴⁹

79 Quotas set in relation to women's access to training and educational opportunities and promotions can play a transformative role in advancing gender equality in armed forces. To that end, the South African National Defence Force has introduced a 30 per cent quota for women's participation in all senior staff and management courses at military training institutions.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Rones and Brundtland Steder, "Herregud, Skal Troppe Ha Bare Jenter?"

¹⁴⁹ See DCAF, *Good Practices in Increasing Women's Representation and Gender Equality in Armed Forces*, Jordan case study.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., South Africa case study.

ACCELERATOR 7

Ensure equitable promotion for women service members

80 Military promotions tend to be determined in whole or in part by time served in rank, meaning that the relative rate of promotion for women and men is influenced by factors such as the date that a service or branch was opened to women and the numbers of women recruited into it, as well as by individual performance.¹⁵¹ Some armed forces are successfully using special measures, both to strengthen the gender balance across their forces generally and to ensure better gender balance in promotions. For instance, the rulebook on professional development and career management of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina requires at least one candidate of each gender to be shortlisted for a vacancy, and if two candidates score the same number of points against the selection criteria, the candidate of the less represented gender is given preference.¹⁵²

Mentoring can increase the retention and promotion of underrepresented groups more generally, and helps ensure greater diversity at the senior levels of institutions

81 Mentoring and coaching programmes can support women in navigating the culture of masculinity that continues to dominate the military.¹⁵³ Mentoring can increase the retention and promotion of underrepresented groups more generally, and helps ensure greater diversity at the senior levels of institutions.¹⁵⁴ Finding mentors can be difficult for women service members, as well as for men from groups that are traditionally underrepresented in the armed forces, so dedicated mentoring programmes are particularly valuable. But mentoring or coaching can also help men in leadership positions understand how they can best promote equality between women and men. In South Africa, mentoring, coaching and leadership training for both women and men in the armed forces is delivered in support of efforts to achieve quotas of women in the forces at large as well as in specific ranks.¹⁵⁵ And in Sweden, a gender coaching programme for senior military staff helps these staff develop and implement individual action plans to promote gender equality within their area of responsibility. This has been replicated in Montenegro and could potentially be adapted for other armed forces and senior leaders, such as those serving in United Nations peace operations.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Atkins, *Women in the Armed Forces in the OSCE Region*, p. 28; Ghanem and Arakji, *Women in the Arab Armed Forces*, p. 8.

¹⁵² See DCAF, *Good Practices in Increasing Women's Representation and Gender Equality in Armed Forces*, Bosnia and Herzegovina case study.

¹⁵³ Linna Tam-Seto, "Role of Mentoring for Women in the Canadian Armed Forces", *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health*, vol. 8, No. s1 (April 2022).

¹⁵⁴ PfPC SSR WG and EDWG, *Teaching Gender in the Military: A Handbook* (Geneva, DCAF and PfPC, 2016), pp. 202 and 203.

¹⁵⁵ See DCAF, *Good Practices in Increasing Women's Representation and Gender Equality in Armed Forces*, South Africa case study.

¹⁵⁶ Watson, "Defence and Gender" (Tool 3), p. 48. Also see "Two High-Ranking Officials of Ministry of Defence of Montenegro Complete Gender Coach Programme", SEESAC, 27 June 2022. Available at https://www.seesac.org/News_1/two-high-ranking-officials-of-ministry-of-defence-of-montenegro-complete-gender-coach-programme/ (accessed on 12 August 2024).

Barriers to women's participation in international missions, including United Nations peace operations

82 Addressing barriers to women's participation in national militaries is the precondition to enabling their deployment to international operations. In line with core United Nations values and shared commitments, it is the responsibility of the United Nations and its Member States to enable equal opportunities for women and men to participate in peacekeeping missions. There is also a clear operational need for gender balance among peacekeepers, to better reflect the communities in which they serve. When peacekeepers are both women and men, they gain greater access to and build more trust with the populations they are mandated to protect, which improves security, analysis and information gathering. This allows for the development of more effective protection responses and mission coverage. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUSCO Engagement Teams comprised of at least 50 per cent women significantly enhanced situational analysis and threat mitigation by gathering inputs from hundreds of women in Loda and Roe IDP camps in the Djugu territory, leading to more and better targeted patrols in areas of insecurity where women work. This enhanced protection, strengthened early warning mechanisms and helped prevent conflict-related sexual violence.¹⁵⁷

83 The increased presence of women peacekeepers can also promote women's meaningful participation in peace and political processes. In the context of UNISFA in the Abyei Area, for instance, the 2022 Military Gender Advocate of the Year, Captain Erzuah from Ghana, has helped encourage the

increased participation of women in local Community Protection Committees by bolstering community engagement. Mixed-gender teams of peacekeepers can also serve as powerful role models that serve to promote more inclusive security institutions in host countries.

When peacekeepers are both women and men, they gain greater access to and build more trust with the populations they are mandated to protect, which improves security, analysis and information gathering. This allows for the development of more effective protection responses and mission coverage

84 In 2018, the United Nations Department of Peace Operations (DPO) adopted a Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy, 2018–2028, to ensure that the uniformed components of United Nations peacekeeping are diverse and inclusive of women.¹⁵⁸ Progress has been made towards achieving the targets laid out in the Strategy for all categories of uniformed personnel, with the number of military women engaged globally in United Nations peacekeeping trending steadily upwards as of January 2024. In fact, this rate doubled over just four years, rising from 4.2 per cent in 2018¹⁵⁹ to 8.5 per cent in 2024.¹⁶⁰ This increase has been more prevalent among deployments of individual military personnel (with women accounting for 24 per cent of military experts on mission and

¹⁵⁷ Department of Peace Operations, *United Nations Engagement Platoon Handbook*, 1st ed. (United Nations publication, 2022), p. 5. Also see Annalysse Mason, "Action for Peacekeeping: Engagement Platoons champion gender parity in peacekeeping and beyond", United Nations Peacekeeping, 24 March 2023. Available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/action-peacekeeping-engagement-platoons-champion-gender-parity-peacekeeping-and-beyond> (accessed on 12 August 2024). For more on Female Engagement Teams and Engagement Teams that build upon the successful experience of all-female Formed Police Units in peacekeeping, see Charlotte Anderholt, *Female Participation in Formed Police Units: A Report on the Integration of Women in Formed Police Units of Peacekeeping Operations*, PKSOI Paper (Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2012); and Lesley J. Pruitt, "All-Female Police Contingents: Feminism and the Discourse of Armed Protection", *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 20, No. 1 (February 2013).

¹⁵⁸ Department of Peace Operations, *Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018–2028*.

¹⁵⁹ United Nations Peacekeeping, "Summary of Troop Contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations by Mission, Post and Gender". Available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/7_gender_report_9.pdf (accessed on 12 August 2024).

¹⁶⁰ United Nations Peacekeeping, "Contributions of Uniformed Personnel to UN by Mission, Personnel Type, and Gender April 2024". Available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/07_gender_statistics_73_april_2024.pdf (accessed 12 August 2024). Also see Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations, *Annual Report 2022*, p. 13.



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staff officers as of June 2024) but is occurring at a significantly slower pace in military contingents, where women still represent less than 8 per cent of total troops.¹⁶¹

85 In addition to strengthening the deployment of uniformed women in United Nations peacekeeping, it is a priority of the Secretariat to strengthen enabling environments for women both by working to create a more inclusive work culture and by promoting gender-sensitive infrastructure, facilities, equipment and services.¹⁶² In 2023, for example, structured feedback mechanisms such as exit surveys and interviews were implemented in missions, while the number of support mechanisms like women's networks and Gender Focal Points was increased. DPO also launched a new pilot network for women military, police, justice and corrections personnel in UNMISS in November 2023 to explore how such a network

can help improve women's deployment experience. Early lessons indicate that the network has:

- i** strengthened peer support among women peacekeepers across components and field locations
- ii** served as a platform for the exchange of experiences
- iii** strengthened the understanding of leadership as to how best support the full, equal and meaningful participation of uniformed women in peacekeeping. Awareness-raising and guidance texts, such as the innovative *United Nations Case Study Handbook on Gender, Peace and Security*, are available as well, to support the promotion of gender-responsive leadership and operations.¹⁶³

86 Women are also underrepresented in non-United Nations multinational missions. Data from the African Union Mission to Somalia in 2019 indicates

¹⁶¹ United Nations Peacekeeping, "Gender Statistics June 2024" Available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/07_gender_statistics_75_june_2024.pdf (accessed on 19 August 2024) and United Nations Peacekeeping, "Troop-Contributing Countries Achieving Gender Parity Targets", 30 June 2024. Available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/gender> (accessed on 12 August 2024).

¹⁶² Department of Peace Operations, *Navigating Challenges and Driving Change: Women, Peace and Security Highlights of UN Peacekeeping in 2023* (United Nations publication, 2024).

¹⁶³ Department of Peace Operations, *United Nations Case Study Handbook on Gender, Peace and Security* (United Nations publication, 2023).



Establishment of South Sudan's National Security Sector Women's Network (2022). ©UNMISS/Isaac Billy

that women comprised approximately 3 per cent of the military contingent.¹⁶⁴ In European Union Common Security and Defence Policy military missions, women form 5 per cent of personnel overall, and 6 per cent of personnel in military operations; as of 2022, there were no women commanders of European Union military missions.¹⁶⁵

87 Women's exclusion from deployment opportunities is a consequence of broader inequities in their access to training opportunities and other career development, as well as their limited presence in leadership and poor representation in the roles and units that commonly deploy (particularly infantry, armoured and other combat units).¹⁶⁶

88 Gender stereotypes also play a significant role in limiting women's participation in deployments. In countries where women are considered primarily responsible for the care of families, children and households, decision-makers often view deployment as less appropriate for women than for men, and may deem deployment entirely unsuitable for women if they have young children.¹⁶⁷ Women in some European and African militaries also cite a lack of support for childcare arrangements as a barrier to deploying.¹⁶⁸ And although it seems that family members are better able to provide this care in other countries,¹⁶⁹ there is a perception in many places that women will face social and family disapproval

¹⁶⁴ African Union Commission, *Report on the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa* (Addis Ababa, 2019), p. 53.

¹⁶⁵ European Parliament, Opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality for the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the implementation of the common security and defence policy – annual report 2022 (2022/2050(INI)), 8 November 2022, pp. 3 and 5.

¹⁶⁶ Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations, *Annual Report 2022*, pp. 43 and 46; Karim and others, *Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL): 2022 Report on Results of the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) Assessment*, p. 5; Dainzú López de Lara Espinosa and others, *Secretary of National Defense Mexico MOWIP Report 2021* (Universidad de las Américas Puebla, 2023); Karim and others, *The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces: 2022 Report on Results of the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) Assessment*, p. 26; Ranjan Biswas and others, *Armed Forces of Bangladesh MOWIP Report 2022*. N.B., In the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces, foreign language skills are also identified as a barrier. See DCAF, *Good Practices in Increasing Women's Representation and Gender Equality in Armed Forces*, Cambodia case study.

¹⁶⁷ Dainzú López de Lara Espinosa and others, *Secretary of National Defense Mexico MOWIP Report 2021*, p. 79; Dainzú López de Lara Espinosa and others, *Secretary of Navy Mexico MOWIP Report 2021*, p. 60; and Ranjan Biswas and others, *Armed Forces of Bangladesh MOWIP Report 2022*.

¹⁶⁸ Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations, *Annual Report 2022*; and European Organisation of Military Associations and Trade Unions, *2023 EUROMIL Survey – Gender Equality/Women in the Armed Forces* (Brussels, 2023), p. 6.

¹⁶⁹ Dainzú López de Lara Espinosa and others, *Secretary of National Defense Mexico MOWIP Report 2021*; Ranjan Biswas and others, *Armed Forces of Bangladesh MOWIP Report 2022*.

or stigma for deploying.¹⁷⁰ Additionally, social norms that women, over men, should be protected from danger can influence leaders not to deploy women,¹⁷¹ or may leave women constrained to tasks such as community support if they are deployed.¹⁷²

Women [...] also cite a lack of support for childcare arrangements as a barrier to deploying

89 Some armed forces have set quotas for women's peacekeeping training and deployment.¹⁷³ For instance, the government of Cambodia, a troop contributor to United Nations peacekeeping, has committed to increase the participation of women peacekeepers to more than 20 per cent. The country's National Center for Peacekeeping Forces, Mine and ERW Clearance (NPMEC) also has a target of 30 training places to be filled by women peacekeepers, and organizes forums in which women peacekeepers share their experiences with other servicewomen, to encourage women to apply. This is proving to be a simple yet effective approach; when women can "see themselves" across different levels and roles in peacekeeping, they are more likely to consider deployment a realistic prospect. Thus, it is important that a woman at the rank of colonel led Cambodia's 2024 deployment to UNIFIL (the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon).¹⁷⁴ The Nepal Army, another important contributor to United Nations peacekeeping, has similarly implemented guidelines for the professional development, transfer and promotion of women officers and has set out processes to steer women recruits towards participation in peace operations.¹⁷⁵

90 The EIF supports actions to increase the pool of uniformed women eligible for deployment as United Nations peacekeepers, including: roster creation, sensitization, awareness raising and capacity building, women-focused recruitment campaigns, the provision of childcare assistance to women and single-parent households, and the construction of gender-sensitive infrastructure.¹⁷⁶ From 2019 to 2023, the EIF provided financial support to ten troop-contributing countries. For example, in Uruguay, to address a lack of knowledge about peacekeeping opportunities and better understand how to improve women's readiness for deployment, the armed forces developed mobile information and education teams that conducted 12 information sessions across the country in 2023 to inform service members about opportunities to deploy and to assess skills and training gaps. Half the women who attended these sessions expressed an interest in peacekeeping deployment, but many highlighted the need for more combat training. Recognizing that household constraints are often key barriers to the deployment of uniformed women to United Nations peacekeeping, the Armed Forces of Uruguay, with EIF support, are also piloting a programme that provides benefits for children of both women and single fathers who deploy to peacekeeping missions. These benefits cover transportation and school costs to ensure children have full access to education while a parent is deployed.

91 Ultimately, creating equal opportunities for women to serve in national armed forces is an essential step in achieving the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in peacekeeping.

170 Dainzú López de Lara Espinosa and others, *Secretary of Navy Mexico MOWIP Report 2021*, p. 60; Karim and others, *Ghana Armed Forces MOWIP Report 2020*, p. 14; Sabrina Karim and others, *Armed Forces of Uruguay MOWIP Report 2020* (Geneva, DCAF, 2021), p. 49; Ranjan Biswas and others, *Armed Forces of Bangladesh MOWIP Report 2022*, p. 40.

171 Karim and others, *The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces: 2022 Report on Results of the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) Assessment*, p. 73; Ranjan Biswas and others, *Armed Forces of Bangladesh MOWIP Report 2022*, p. 57.

172 Dainzú López de Lara Espinosa and others, *Secretary of Navy Mexico MOWIP Report 2021*, p. 114; de Jonge Oudraat and others, *Enhancing Security*, p. 7.

173 Ranjan Biswas and others, *Armed Forces of Bangladesh MOWIP Report 2022*, p. 26.

174 DCAF, *Good Practices in Increasing Women's Representation and Gender Equality in Armed Forces*, Cambodia case study. Also see Som Sotheary, "Woman Leads New Batch of Blue Helmets to Lebanon", *Khmer Times*, 11 February 2024. Available at <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501438234/woman-leads-new-batch-of-blue-helmets-to-lebanon/> (accessed on 12 August 2024).

175 Mihaela Racovita, "Women in State Security Provision in Nepal: Meaningful Participation?", Briefing Paper, Small Arms Survey, 15 March 2018, p. 5.

176 Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations, *Annual Report 2022*, pp. 18 and 39.



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V. Other United Nations support to strengthen equality between women and men in the defence sector

United Nations advisory support aimed at strengthening equal opportunity in the defence sector includes: [conducting] barrier assessments [...], [providing] policy advice [...] for temporary special measures [...], [establishing] vetting mechanisms to exclude perpetrators of sexual violence [...], capacity building for oversight and accountability mechanisms [...], gender-sensitive public expenditure reviews [...], and efforts to foster the early inclusion of women in [...] national security bodies

92 The United Nations assists Member States in making reforms of their security sectors, to advance gender equality and achieve effective, responsive and accountable security for these States and their citizens. Support is provided in peace operations and in non-mission settings in response to national requests. In the context of peace operations and special political missions, some country-specific mandates of the Security Council on security sector reform also include gender provisions (5 out of 11 as of 2023).¹⁷⁷

93 United Nations advisory support aimed at strengthening equal opportunity in the defence sector includes:

- barrier assessments to identify obstacles to women's participation in national defence institutions, particularly in decision-making positions;
- policy advice during the development of temporary special measures to increase women's

representation, such as gender-parity quotas, affirmative actions and reviews of gender-discriminatory laws and human resources policies;

- support for the establishment of vetting mechanisms to exclude perpetrators of sexual violence from the security sector;
- capacity building for oversight and accountability mechanisms to end impunity for all forms of violence against women serving within security institutions;
- gender-sensitive public expenditure reviews of the security sector that inform gender-responsive budgets for security institutions;
- efforts to foster the early inclusion of women in negotiations in the national security bodies responsible for developing national security policies, strategies, plans and military or internal security laws, as well as in parliamentary oversight mechanisms (for instance, in the Central African Republic, the United Nations has organized simulated disciplinary control boards and boards of inquiry with the General Inspectorate of the armed forces).

94 In Iraq, ministerial barrier assessments supported by the United Nations have identified impediments to women's participation. Additionally, during the drafting process for the country's national security strategy, the United Nations supported Iraq's Office of the National Security Advisor holding comprehensive consultations with women from civil society organisations and experts from academic institutions. The United Nations also provided recommendations to make the national security strategy and draft security sector reform strategy more gender responsive.

95 In South Sudan, the United Nations has supported the government in mainstreaming gender across the defence sector, to make progress towards a guarantee of 35 per cent participation by women in the Executive, as agreed in the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. This support has facilitated: the formation of a network of women military personnel who

¹⁷⁷ In resolutions referencing MINUSCA, MINUSMA, MONUSCO, UNIFIL and UNSMIL.

receive training from women-led South Sudanese civil society organizations; the inclusion of gender considerations in key national security strategies and policies; the development of a sectoral *NAP on Gender and Security Sector Reform (2023–2027)*; ¹⁷⁸ the implementation of a joint *Action Plan for the Armed Forces on Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in South Sudan*, to hold military personnel accountable; and the strengthening of parliamentary oversight of the defence sector. In 2023, support provided by UNMISS also led to the adoption of legally binding standing orders to promote accountability for serious crimes, including conflict-related sexual violence, by the Military Justice Department.

- 96 In Georgia, where the United Nations assisted the Ministry of Defence in carrying out a “participatory gender audit” and also developed targeted interventions, including to dispel gender stereotypes within the defence sector and society at large, the Ministry subsequently adopted more gender-responsive internal policies and mechanisms. For instance, a “gender-equality concept” was introduced, incorporating a leadership and mentorship programme for women in the sector, as well as workshops and webinars.
- 97 The United Nations has also developed a multi-year Programme of Action on Security Sector Reform and Governance, which provides research, knowledge, guidance, education, training and advocacy on gender responsiveness. Through the Security Sector Reform Standing Capacity in Brindisi (SSuRGe Team), the United Nations can be dispatched at short notice to provide expert support to Member States on security sector reform and governance.

¹⁷⁸ See United Nations MPTF Office Partners Gateway, “PBF/SSD/A-6: Women in South Sudan’s Security Sector: A Path to Inclusive and Transformative Leadership”. Available at <https://mptf.undp.org/project/00140762> (accessed on 12 August 2024).



"To me, peace means the absence of hostility and violence. Peace is when people feel free from coercion in a place where they have the freedom to live, move, work and study",
Cambodian Lieutenant-Colonel Chea Yaren. ©UN Women/Mech Sereyrath

VI.

Recommendations to strengthen equal opportunities for women in defence

RECOMMENDATION 1: Governments are encouraged to **advance the seven United Nations accelerators of gender equality in the defence sector**. This may include undertaking a barrier assessment; developing gender equality strategies; implementing measures to change social attitudes, institutional culture and informal practices; and establishing clear targets for the recruitment, retention, training, promotion and career development of women in defence.

A. Policy Development and Legal Frameworks

RECOMMENDATION 2: Member States may wish to ensure that the laws, regulations and practices governing their defence sector, including national defence strategies and national security policies, uphold and promote international human rights and humanitarian law, guaranteeing non-discrimination on the basis of sex and therefore advancing women's rights to full and meaningful participation as citizens on an equal basis with men. This requires reviewing and repealing discriminatory normative provisions that inhibit women's access to military posts and units, and enacting laws that codify equality between women and men in defence. Moreover, the values and norms of the United Nations Women, Peace and Security agenda, which are critical to the effective promotion of international peace and security, should be integrated across armed forces and the defence sector to realize women's full, equal and meaningful participation at all levels.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Governments may wish to conduct gender impact analyses on new laws or regulations affecting defence sector personnel to ensure equal opportunities, utilizing temporary special measures where appropriate and putting in place robust reporting, monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

RECOMMENDATION 4: Governments are encouraged to develop defence-specific WPS and gender equality implementation plans, with clear targets for women's recruitment or representation in particular types of units. Affirmative action strategies should be deployed to overcome structural barriers to gender parity. Such plans

should be embedded with other relevant frameworks and policies on gender, including NAPs on WPS. They should be costed and budgeted, allocate responsibilities for implementation, outline mechanisms to ensure cross-departmental coordination and collaboration as well as robust systems for monitoring and accountability.

RECOMMENDATION 5: To overcome both formal and informal barriers to gender equality, laws, regulations, and policies are effective instruments. Addressing a formal barrier, for example, could include repealing legal restrictions excluding women from combat and specialized roles, while informal barriers, such as cultural biases can be addressed through targeted policies.

B. Governance, Institutions and Accountability

RECOMMENDATION 6: It shows particular engagement and ownership when a government commits to collect data, monitor and make public the rates at which women and men participate in their defence sector in all roles and levels, particularly in senior leadership and decision-making positions of the armed forces. This data should be disaggregated by sex, and as far as possible by other indicators of diversity that are relevant to the national context. Collecting such data is key to assessing progress towards gender equality in national defence, while also informing United Nations reports and exchange of good practices.

RECOMMENDATION 7: Member States could further strengthen governance mechanisms of the defence sector, including by formalizing by law and regulations the role and accountability of the country leadership and armed forces commanders in promoting equality between women and men in defence. Additionally, leadership training programmes emphasizing the importance of diversity and inclusion should be developed and implemented, with defence leadership and personnel at all levels receiving training on gender-responsive service delivery, unconscious bias and the value of diverse teams.

RECOMMENDATION 8: Governments may wish to **allocate a commensurate proportion of the defence budget to strengthening equality between women and men in the defence sector, enabling gender-responsive security sector reform, and mandate reporting by national defence institutions on this expenditure.** The implementation of gender-responsive budgeting can help ensure resources are allocated in a way that supports gender equality initiatives. The impact of this spending on women's participation and advancement in the defence sector should be monitored, evaluated and reported on.

RECOMMENDATION 9: Member States may wish to **create and reinforce specialist posts or functions in the defence sector tasked with coordinating and monitoring work on gender equality.** To be most effective, institutional mechanisms to drive WPS and gender equality should have dedicated funding and staff with gender expertise, should be strategically located under the minister of defence (or related body) and the armed forces leadership to benefit from their support and engagement.

RECOMMENDATION 10: Member State defence sectors and armed forces should **continue to recognize and leverage strategic partnerships and collaborative approaches with associations and existing networks that represent women military personnel as well as with women and youth-led organizations, including at community level, and research and academic institutions.** Formal support and resources for these associations and networks should be established by the defence sector as central step to strengthen community trust in defence institutions

C. Recruitment, Retention, Promotion and Career Development

RECOMMENDATION 11: It helps to regularly **undertake an assessment of the barriers to women's recruitment, retention and promotion in defence institutions, particularly armed forces, including those embedded in social attitudes, institutional culture and informal practices.** The United Nations should develop a barrier assessment tool building on good practices identified in this report that any country can use to assess obstacles to women's

inclusion in national defence while contributing to organization's ongoing global collection of data in this area. By collecting data on the career satisfaction of women and men, and the reasons they both cite for leaving the military, measures can be developed to improve the organisational climate and human resources management

RECOMMENDATION 12: Ministries of Defence and other relevant state organs **actively promoting education and outreach initiatives at national and community levels to foster positive attitudes towards the capability and value of women as military professionals is an essential part of societal change.** Awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes and promote women's participation in the defence sector can highlight success stories of women's contributions to national security. The impact of these campaigns should be monitored and evaluated.

RECOMMENDATION 13: **Analysing recruitment data of armed forces to identify barriers to and opportunities for attracting and selecting women, including whether eligibility criteria are gender biased, is a sound practice.** Such criteria should be defined according to the skill sets required to meet diverse operational needs. The analysis should inform communications and outreach recruitment campaigns targeting women, including young women at the start of their professional careers.

RECOMMENDATION 14: National armed forces can **strengthen the retention of women, by making the armed forces a more fair, supportive and satisfying workplace for both women and men, of diverse backgrounds and characteristics.** Additionally, uniforms, equipment and facilities should be adapted to ensure they are equally fit for women, and policies to promote work-life balance should be introduced and expanded for both sexes, including the option of flexible work schedules for parents and carers and family support for deployed personnel.

RECOMMENDATION 15: Governments should **promote women into leadership roles in the defence sector and ensure that opportunities for advancement in the armed forces are equally available to women and men.** To that end, the decision makers who shape training, education, promotion, deployment and other key career

opportunities in armed forces must be diverse, representing both women and men. Promotional criteria in the armed forces should also be assessed for gender bias, to ensure they do not disproportionately emphasize traits or skills stereotypically associated with masculinity and are inclusive of competencies often associated with femininity. By designing flexible career pathways that account for life events such as pregnancy, maternity and paternity leave, as well as family responsibilities and other personal circumstances, armed forces can ensure that women return to their military careers without penalty and with opportunities for advancement.

RECOMMENDATION 16: Member States should **implement a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation by and within armed forces and ensure commitment and accountability from political leadership. Clear reporting mechanisms and complaint processes** that are transparent, rapid and easily accessible to victims and subject to strong internal and external oversight must be established. Bystander intervention training should be mandatory for all defence and armed forces personnel. A victim-centred approach should be undertaken, one that puts the rights and dignity of victims, including their well-being, at the forefront. Individuals who report misconduct must be protected against organisational and individual forms of retaliation. Perpetrators must face appropriate penalties, including demotion and termination. Screening databases and vetting mechanisms should be maintained by armed forces to track reported offences and avoid hiring or rehiring perpetrators. This will help promote a culture of respect, trust and accountability in defence.

RECOMMENDATION 17: Member States may wish to **provide support for women veterans, including career transition services, mental health support and acknowledgement of their contributions.** It is vital that veterans' programmes are inclusive of women and address their specific needs.

D. International Cooperation and United Nations support

RECOMMENDATION 18: Member States could more consistently **share information and good practices on equal opportunity for women in the defence sector with each other.** This can be facilitated via meetings of regional organisations, the Women, Peace and Security Chiefs of Defence Network, as well as the Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network and the Security Council Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security.

RECOMMENDATION 19: Member States in a position to do so are encouraged to **provide extrabudgetary resources to facilitate United Nations support to countries willing to strengthen equal opportunities for women in defence** and consider providing gratis personnel and seconded military personnel dedicated to this issue to the United Nations Secretariat. These commitments will ensure the financial and human resources needed to make sustained progress.

RECOMMENDATION 20: Member States may wish to **commit to including a standing item on equal opportunity for women in defence and women's participation in peacekeeping at every biennial peacekeeping ministerial and the Chiefs of Defence conference.** This should also be a key topic in preparatory meetings, to ensure strategies for gender equality in national defence sectors align with international peacekeeping goals, in particular goals related to women's participation. It is through national progress that gender parity in peacekeeping will be achieved, and this regular focus will therefore foster a more inclusive and effective peacekeeping force.

RECOMMENDATION 21: Member States should champion equal opportunity for women in defence through security sector reform. Depending on available resources, **the United Nations stands ready to offer further security sector reform support to Member States requesting assistance, including to implement the seven accelerators of gender equality in the defence sector.** This may include technical assistance, capacity building, guidance development, the convening of policy discussions, and the coordination of networks and exchanges between

Member States, as well as support in identifying legal, institutional and regulatory barriers and integrating gender into national defence strategies, laws, policies, plans and regulations, and into the defence priorities of WPS national actions plans. Such support should be coordinated through the United Nations Inter-Agency SSR Task Force (IASSRTF).

RECOMMENDATION 22: United Nations General Assembly, ECOSOC and Security Council should strengthen norms and policies on women's participation in the defence sector. Provisions regarding gender-responsive national security and defence should also be incorporated into Security Council thematic resolutions on WPS to address existing gaps as well as in country-specific resolutions and reports of the Secretary-General. Through the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, the Secretary-General should advise the organisation's legislative bodies on options to address existing normative and policy gaps on this matter.

RECOMMENDATION 23: The IASSRTF should provide advisory support to the United Nations Group of Friends of SSR, the Group of Friends on Gender Equality, and the Group of Friends on Women, Peace and Security, allowing the Member States that participate in these platforms to champion this crucial topic at the global level.

RECOMMENDATION 24: To advance this agenda item, the United Nations can include, e.g. once every five years, an update on the status of women in defence in its annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security, using select data categories collected for this report as a baseline. This will allow Member States at the United Nations to capture and better understand trends, challenges and opportunities as they evolve.



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VII. Concluding observations

98 Generally, the number of women in the defence sector is low but steadily rising. Member States have strengthened equal opportunity for women in defence through a range of good practices and measures including on recruitment, retention, career development and promotion. Often, low-cost adjustments and adaptations in defence management and governance can go a long way towards better meeting the needs of women in armed forces and building more inclusive and responsive defence services, including changes to recruitment processes and procedures, the implementation of codes of conduct, improvements to accountability mechanisms and upgrades to existing facilities. Even where necessary adaptations carry a higher price tag, they tend to result in considerable efficiencies, improve effectiveness and savings in the longer term, for example by improving staff retention and satisfaction. In any case, working towards equal opportunities is a moral endeavour that should not be governed by financial considerations.

99 As this report has shown, national political commitment towards assessing barriers to women's inclusion is often the first step towards evidence-based change in armed forces. This is because the success of reforms can depend on whether an overarching assessment and inclusive consultations guides the

development of strategy and action plans, including their targets, monitoring mechanisms, timeframes and accountability structures. Approaches that empower women in both process and outcome have been particularly promising, such as through the engagement of women's associations and networks, which give servicewomen a voice. This can be especially important to ensuring that reforms to strengthen equal opportunity for women in defence are fully implemented, but must be accompanied by changes in institutional culture, led by leaders who are committed to advancing gender equality. Indeed, effective gender-responsive leadership is essential to driving and sustaining these reforms.

100 It is through security sector reform and governance that Member States can realize the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in defence. Gender equality is a critical step towards more accountable, inclusive and responsive defence institutions. The United Nations therefore stands ready to support Member States in implementing the recommendations put forth in this report, including by helping to identify legal, institutional and regulatory barriers and by building the capacity of national authorities to strengthen women's full, equal and meaningful participation in the defence sector.

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BREAKING BARRIERS, BUILDING PEACE

“Breaking Barriers, Building Peace” is a landmark advocacy campaign on gender equality and women’s participation in national security and defence sectors. The campaign honours women’s journeys by telling powerful stories of how they are preventing conflict and sustaining peace by delivering effective and responsive security services. It also spotlights countries’ good practices in promoting equal opportunities for women to serve in the national security and defence services.

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