

# Women, Peace and Security

## Gender Challenges within UN Peacekeeping Missions

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### Summary

#### Background

This policy brief analyzes the challenges confronting the UN in putting into practice its Women, Peace and Security Agenda, focusing on the growing contribution of Latin American countries. Despite the approval of seven Security Council resolutions on the matter, the UN is still struggling to implement a gender approach to peace operations – and in consequence, its protection strategies are jeopardized. Success here hinges on member-state willingness to adopt UN policies and contribute to satisfactory implementation of the UN mandate.

#### Introduction

The UN has incorporated a firm gender approach to peace operations: building a fairer and more equitable society is recognized an important component in achieving peace. A total of seven Security Council Resolutions (SCRs) on Women, Peace and Security have been adopted, setting out a gender equality strategy through which the UN combines gender mainstreaming efforts with action aimed at improving the gender balance within the organization as well as in host nations. These SCRs attempt to ensure that the special needs of all gender groups will be carefully considered in all UN actions in the field.

Although the SCRs were unanimously adopted by the Security Council, the UN faces challenges in disseminating these norms to host nations and member-states alike. A central challenge emerges when member-states themselves – responsible for carrying out the UN's mandate in the field – have not adapted their own national policies on gender norms. A further challenge is to achieve better gender equality within the actual peace operations.

Moreover, UN member-states in the industrialized world have been cutting down on their contributions to peace operations, whereas the contribution of developing states has

increased steadily in terms of troops and police. The contribution to peace operations by Latin American countries has increased by more than 783% since 2000, and participation in these missions has become a central pillar of foreign policy for some countries. This policy brief explores the spillover effects that the greater importance and contribution of peace operations may have unleashed in terms of the adoption of a gender approach to peace operations by Latin American countries. What are the main regional contributions to the advancement of this agenda?

#### A Gender Approach to UN Peacekeeping Missions

Since 2000, the United Nations has promoted a series of resolutions promoting gender mainstreaming in its peace operations as a way to achieve and sustain an enduring, true peace in conflict and post-conflict situations. It is acknowledged that as long as an inclusive society based on normalized gender relations is not established, all efforts to accomplish peace and stabilize the environment are doomed to fail. Moreover, there is recognition that women and girls are particularly vulnerable to violence of all types, including sexual and gender-based violence, and that these crimes tend to be overlooked in international community efforts aimed at securing a safe environment.

The UN's strategy for incorporating a gender approach is based on the concepts of gender balance and gender mainstreaming. This implies the UN strives for equal representation of men and women in peace operations, as well as the incorporation of gender concerns in all aspects and activities of its missions. In 2000, this led to the adoption of Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325, urging states and the Secretary-General to increase the participation of women in conflict resolution and peace processes, and to improve UN assessments of the special needs of women and girls in conflict and post-conflict scenarios. The resolution further recommends that states adopt National Action Plans (NAP) for adapting their national defense and security forces to the new challenges, particularly in regard to incorporating

women into the military and police and adopting a gender approach to peace operations. Underlining the need to incorporate gender approaches in UN peace operations, SCR 1325 was followed by six other Resolutions: SCR 1820 (2008), SCR 1888 (2009), SCR 1889 (2009), SCR 1960 (2010) and most recently SCR 2106 and SCR 2122 (both 2013). SCR 1820 in particular declares that sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

So far, NAPs have been adopted by 39 countries. Most of them are European or African states that have recently hosted peace operations and, as a result, are now including gender approaches in their national defense and security forces. Significant steps here include creating domestic laws to establish and protect women's rights, work to eradicate violence and sex discrimination, strengthening the role of women's organizations, and creating a space for women in the political arena. The UN in turn has created gender units in 10 of its missions, as well as gender focal points in all mission components, and sexual violence units in three missions. A senior gender adviser now works within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and a Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has been appointed. In addition, guidelines on the incorporation of gender approaches to the military and police work have been created, and pre-deployment and in-mission training on gender is being applied to all mission components.

### Challenges in Achieving Gender Equality and Mainstreaming

Although efforts are made to achieve gender equality and gender mainstreaming within UN peacekeeping missions, numerous challenges emerge during the process. UN policies generally have limited impact on national institutions, and member-states have been slow in adopting the provisions of "Women, Peace and Security" resolutions. This has serious implications for peacekeeping missions, as the inability of member-states to comply with certain provisions affects UN actions in the field. This is particularly the case with protection strategies, which can be severely undermined by contingents not prepared to deal with this problem, or unwilling to incorporate gender approaches in their activities.

Besides the lack of resources and trained personnel, misguided assumptions in regard to women, gender and sexual violence bring further challenges to the implementation of an effective gender approach and protection strategies. Firstly, in terms of achieving a gender balance, the UN still struggles with low female representation, especially among the military: women comprise only 2.7% of military troops and 4.4% of military experts.<sup>1</sup> In regard to the police, the situation is better: female representation has reached 15.2% among individual police (IPO) contributions and 6.2% among formed police unit (FPU) personnel.

Secondly, inability to communicate well with local women's organizations or local women constrains the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping mission in understanding women's protection needs. Maintaining constant communication with local women's organizations has been promoted as an important

protection measure. These organizations are well-situated to explain where the UN patrols can best protect them and the kind of actions that are most needed. Unfortunately, peacekeepers often fail to connect with them, and vital information is not included in protection strategies.

Third, crimes against women are often not prosecuted. Even worse, lack of adequate training may actually put the safety of victims – who have already experienced gruesome situations – in jeopardy. For instance, improper interrogation methods may do more harm than good, and reporting procedures may reveal victims' identities, thereby endangering them.

Fourth, ignorance in regard to the nature of the crime itself may lead to unreported cases and leave victims without assistance. Despite the increasing number of sexual violence cases committed within the home, by relatives or acquaintances, there is still the assumption that "rape at home" is not to be considered a crime. As a result, not only do these crimes go unsolved – the victims must bear all the burden of what happened to them.

Fifth, some missions have planned integrated protection strategies that include multidisciplinary teams, consisting of civilians, police and the military. These teams often include women as well. However, some battalions may be unwilling to host female personnel – and that hinders joint protection strategies and effective communications with local communities.

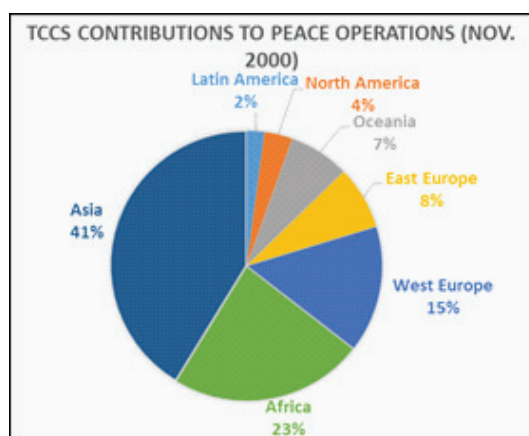
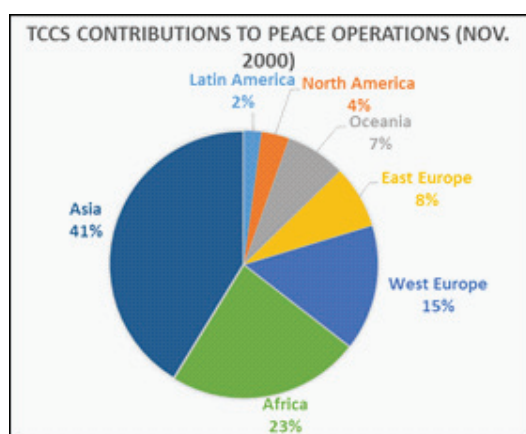
Sixth, a major difficulty confronted in the field is misbehavior by UN personnel and involvement in sexual exploitation, abuse, and violence, including rape. Such acts deal a severe blow to UN efforts against sexual violence in conflict. Moreover, they compromise the UN's image in the field, and jeopardize efforts to promote peace.

Tackling these challenges is difficult. Central factors are the capacity and willingness of member-states to improve their peacekeepers' actions in the field, which requires better training, resources and time. These are essential to an adequate protection strategy and to ensuring the successful implementation of the UN agenda. Analyzing the contributions of Latin America, a region which has increasingly become involved in peace operations, may highlight some positive experiences that can be shared further.

### Zooming in: Gender and Latin American Contributions to UN Peacekeeping Missions

The Latin American region represents a growing troop-contributing region with participation in UN peace operations at the core of its humanitarian and military actions abroad. Analyzing how the gender dimension has been incorporated by countries in the region is important for two main reasons: (1) although the pace varies, Latin American countries are increasingly improving the gender balance within their forces and thus within UN peace operations; (2) Latin American troops seem to emphasize two measures that are at the core of modern peacekeeping operations: maintaining close contact with the population, and developing projects aimed at enhancing local capacity. Both are central to enhancing protection and empowerment strategies.

The Latin American contribution to peace operations has increased eightfold since 2000. In that period, the contribution from developed countries as regards uniformed personnel to peace operations has decreased steadily, while troop-contributing countries (TCCs) from Africa, Asia and Latin America have increased their contributions. Proportionally, Latin America's contribution has increased the most – a massive 783% from 2000 to 2013 – followed by Africa (480%), and Asia (239%). These countries present important cultural, social, economic and historical differences. Often a cultural matter, gender is perceived differently in time and space. UN policies are usually created in New York and tend to have a Western orientation. In practice, however, peace operation mandates are implemented by member-states whose reality back home may not be too different from the host societies. In this context, also Latin America faces challenges and opportunities in “adapting” its national policies to UN demands.



Source: DPKO (November, 2013)

Latin American participation in peace operations has a long history. Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay have been involved ever since the first UN missions, accumulating almost 60 years of experience. Throughout the years, as much as UN peace operations have been transformed, Latin American countries have adapted to the international demands as well. They have created national peacekeeping training centers and high-standard training courses in order to meet the demands of the international community. Their long experience in peace operations is complemented by another important factor: as developing nations, Latin American countries have passed through processes of political, economic and social upheavals themselves, giving them a comparative advantage for acting in conflict and post-conflict situations. This

experience is reflected in specific tactical capabilities that can foster a safe environment through a holistic approach to security that considers development projects as key to achieving long-term stability, building relationships of trust with the local population, and thus facilitating the accomplishment of overall goals on the ground. This approach is in line with the broad, encompassing strategy that is required to address the challenges faced in the changing environments in which UN-led missions operate.

Latin American countries also confront challenges and opportunities in incorporating a gender approach to peace operations. Since 2008, the biannual Conferences of Defense Ministers of the Americas have repeatedly reaffirmed the intention to continue incorporating a gender perspective into peace operations. All the same, a regional approach to implementing SCR 1325 and 1820 has not yet been developed and this area needs to be strengthened regionally. Individually, some Latin American countries have achieved noteworthy progress. Chile adopted a National Action Plan for SCR1325 in 2009, and others, such as Argentina and Uruguay, are evaluating the possibilities of launching their own. The presence of women in Latin American forces has increased considerably, and thus their participation in peace operations. For instance, in 2012, Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff announced that within five years all military schools would allow women to join training for certain combatant positions.

There is also qualitative improvement in the presence of women in Latin American military forces: they have been allowed to join certain combat units in almost all countries of the region. Women are already allowed admission to nearly all military units and branches in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras and Uruguay.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, some countries, including Brazil, have cooperation projects aimed at strengthening local capabilities focused on combating sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings. Brazil has donated one million dollars towards efforts for improving local justice systems and accountability in work on eradicating sexual violence in the DRC; and in Haiti, important contributions have been made towards improving the training of local police forces on issues related to sexual violence.

Throughout Latin America, women make up less than 10% of military personnel, with the exception of Argentina (11.63%) and Uruguay (16.09%). Currently, 3.3% of all Latin American military personnel are women, an average slightly higher than the rest of the world (ca. 2%).<sup>3</sup> In UN peace operations, women comprise 8.4% of Latin American police forces, 3.9% of military experts and 4.3% of military troops. Although its regional average is below that of the UN for police contributions, Latin America has a slightly higher average as regards military contribution. Here it should be noted that the absence of clear policies on sending police forces to UN missions works against achieving a better gender balance.

<sup>2</sup> Most of these countries do not allow women to join the artillery, infantry or cavalry in the army, so the total access is granted in the other forces. Bolivia, Colombia and Uruguay have no restrictions. Donadio and Mazzotta, *Women in the Armed Forces and Police Forces: Resolution 1325 and Peace Operations in Latin America*. Buenos Aires, RESDAL, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> RESDAL, *Atlas de Defensa de América Latina y el Caribe*, Buenos Aires, 2010.



## Latin American contributions to UN peace operations

Country	Police			Military Experts				Troops				Total	
	M	F	% F	M	F	Total	% F	M	F	Total	% F		
Argentina	29	1	3.3%	7	0	7	0.0%	788	49	837	5.9%	874	
Bolivia			0.0%	19	4	23	17.4%	198	12	210	5.7%	233	
Brazil	8	3	27.3%	23	1	24	4.2%	1456	18	1474	1.2%	1509	
Chile	12	2	14.3%	5	0	5	0.0%	460	16	476	3.4%	495	
Colombia	32	2	34	5.9%			0.0%				0.0%	34	
Dominican Republic			0.0%				0.0%	1	0	1	0.0%		
Ecuador			0.0%	11	0	11	0.0%	69	1	70	1.4%	81	
El Salvador	7	0	7	0.0%	10	0	10	0.0%	87	0	87	0.0%	104
Guatemala			0.0%	8	0	8	0.0%	262	29	291	10.0%	299	
Honduras			0.0%	12	0	12	0.0%	1	0	1	0.0%	13	
Paraguay			0.0%	35	1	36	2.8%	174	6	180	3.3%	216	
Peru			0.0%	23	1	24	4.2%	368	10	378	2.6%	402	
Uruguay	10	1	11	9.1%	21	0	21	0.0%	2011	123	2134	5.8%	2166
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>8.4%</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>3.9%</b>	<b>5875</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>6139</b>	<b>4.3%</b>	<b>6426</b>

Source: DPKO, November 2013.

However, the majority of the women deployed come from the professional corps, in administrative and/or health worker positions, such as doctors, translators, lawyers; their presence is thus often limited to the barracks, with very little contact with the local population. It is combat personnel who have the most frequent contact with the civilian population through their daily patrols and checkpoints. Besides dealing with victims of wartime abuses – most often women and children – they are needed to perform security and search duties on women.

Very few women have graduated from command-corps military academies in Latin America. Most academies in the region began accepting female cadets only after 2000, so few women have yet attained the ranks required for serving as military observers in peacekeeping missions. The notable exception is Bolivia, which first granted women access to professional corps from 1979 to 1985. Access later remained closed for almost 20 years, but in 2003 women were once again allowed to join the military academies. Bolivian women have frequently been deployed to UN missions as military observers, most with the rank of colonel.

Finally, in an era where sexual violence has become a recognized weapon of war, addressing the issue with all available tools is essential if positive results are to be achieved. Such tools include close contact with local women's organizations,

women's empowerment, protection and a strong judiciary system. In the field, Latin American troops are widely recognized as performing protection actions in close contact with local women, including patrols and the provision of medical services. Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) have been designed to benefit local women, providing yet another way of empowering local women and advancing their possibilities of participating in the social, economic and political life of the state. There are some other areas where Latin American countries could contribute more: for example there may be lessons learned concerning stronger legislation against gender-based violence. Brazil's law on domestic violence has been widely recognized as a reference, although some implementation challenges still remain. Here and in other cases there may be lessons to be shared in fragile settings or with other TCCs.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

UN peacekeeping operations face many challenges regarding gender equality and gender mainstreaming. As a result protection strategies are often jeopardized and an improvement of the situation hinges on member-state willingness to adopt UN policies and contribute to satisfactory implementation of the UN mandate. To further put the UN Women, Peace and Security Agenda into practice and implement a gender approach to peace operations, it is recommended that:

- Best practices should be shared among countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa. Since these regions are major contributors to peace operations, improving communication channels between them, as regards shared best practices in particular, could promote wider dissemination of gender approaches to peace operations.
- Consideration should be given to the cultural and historical backgrounds when determining areas of responsibility in peace missions, to facilitate the incorporation of a gender approach in the routine activities of peacekeepers.
- Tackling sexual violence must be a shared responsibility involving local government, the international community and TCCs. Above all, this must be a joint and comprehensive effort that goes beyond the physical protection of local women and addresses their structural vulnerability as well. Improving the social, economic and political conditions of women should be an integral part of protection strategies.

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