

WOMEN PEACEKEEPING

BARRIER ASSESSMENT IN THE
RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION
OF PAKISTANI WOMEN
PEACEKEEPERS



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FOREWORD BY UN WOMEN

WOMEN IN PEACEKEEPING – Barrier Assessment in The Recruitment and Retention of Pakistani Women Peacekeepers

The world yearns for peace, but peace is not simply the absence of conflict. It is a tapestry woven with threads of equality, justice, and the full and vibrant participation of all voices, women and men alike.

For far too long, the image of the peacekeeper has been dominated by a singular narrative, one etched in khaki and heavy boots. While this narrative deserves respect, it remains incomplete. Today, we turn the lens, shining a spotlight on the under-sung heroes who bring a different face, a different voice, a different set of skills to the peacekeeping mission: women.

Pakistan has the sixth-highest number of women as staff officers and military observers in UN peacekeeping including Female Engagement Teams achieved just in less than 10-years. The country serves as an inspiration to other countries who are aspiring to ensure gender parity in peacekeeping.

Yet, the path remains riddled with obstacles. Cultural norms, institutional barriers, and the lingering perception of peacekeeping as a solely masculine domain continue to hamper progress globally and in Pakistan.

Women are proving to be invaluable assets in the complex tapestry of peacekeeping and this has been long recognized by UN and the member states. The United Nations Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy aims to reach 15% of military peacekeepers in troop contingents, 20% female police in formed police units, and 25% female military observers and staff officers by 2028. These are not mere quotas to be filled, but threads woven into the very fabric of successful missions. The evidence is irrefutable: studies show that missions with higher women's representation experience greater community engagement, reduced levels of violence against women, and improved overall peacekeeping effectiveness.

For within each woman peacekeeper lies the potential to rewrite the narrative, to reshape the face of

security, and to build a world where peace knows no gender. UN Women in Pakistan continues to support Pakistan in turn this potential into reality and works with the Government in strengthening gender-responsive peacekeeping frameworks and women in peacekeeping.

This publication is not merely quotas or statistics. It is a call for recognizing the transformative power of women in peacekeeping, not as an afterthought, but as a cornerstone of success. It delves not only into the imperative of increasing women's participation in peacekeeping, but also into the transformative impact they already have, both as armed and civilian officers through showcasing the unique perspectives, and experiences of Pakistani women peacekeepers.

This publication courageously shed light to these challenges but also offers avenues to tackle these head-on. It showcases the stories of Pakistani women who have defied expectations and proven their mettle in the most demanding environments. We hear of military officers who continue to stand for women in peacekeeping and paving the way with example and demand gender parity at the heart of peacekeeping.

Let these pages serve as a catalyst for change. Let them ignite a national and global conversation about the critical role of women in peacekeeping. Let them inspire governments, institutions, and individuals to invest in the women who are ready to weave peace, thread by thread, community by community.

The future of peacekeeping lies not just in numbers, but in the untapped potential of women.



Jacqui Vipunjit Ketunuti

Deputy Country Representative
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ABSTRACT

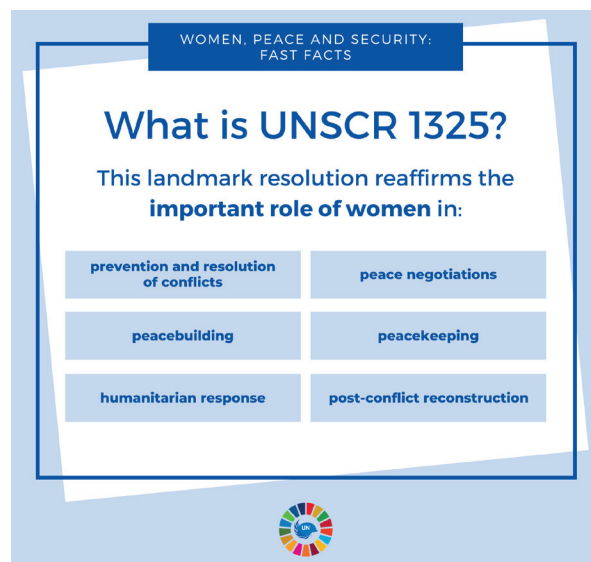
Pakistan has set a world-leading record by becoming one of the few troop-contributing countries that has achieved the goal of deploying 15% women staff in UN missions. As of 30 September 2023, Pakistan has deployed 19.1% of women as UN Experts on Mission and Staff Officers. However, only 2% gender parity has been achieved on troop deployment, and Pakistan is committed to reach 10% in gender parity in troop deployment.

Women can play multi-dimensional roles as active agents of peace by setting examples in peacebuilding and peacekeeping operations. Nevertheless, a myriad set of challenges remain in meeting the 15% threshold that is the global target set by the UN for women serving in military contingents. This is evident by the experiences and perspectives shared by Pakistani women peacekeepers who confirm that various social norms limit their deployment and services as peacekeepers.

This study aims to investigate the challenges in the recruitment and service of Pakistani women peacekeepers in the UN peacekeeping missions, and shares reflections on how to overcome these challenges. Additionally, this research suggests that if Pakistani women can perform the role of peacekeepers in UN mission conflict zones, they can also potentially be deployed by the state to prevent violent extremism and other national security risks.

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) was passed in 2000 and emphasises the importance of full and equal participation of women in all efforts towards promotion of peace and security, including in peace operations.¹ Since then, the UN, especially UN Women, together with the broader international community have advocated gender parity to facilitate meaningful participation of women in politics, law and order, security, and in peace and conflict.



Since 2000, nine consecutive resolutions have been passed by the UN SC that underline the important role of women leaders in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding and call for greater efforts to implement WPS commitments. During an open debate of the Security Council on 11 April 2019, the UN Secretary-General highlighted that a greater number of women peacekeepers leads to more credible protection responses that contribute to the effectiveness of a mission mandate.² For

example, the presence of women peacekeepers at security checkpoints has been credited with promoting a less confrontational atmosphere in conflict zones.³

Alongside Resolution 1325, the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) Declaration of Shared Commitments calls for expanding the roles of women in peace operations including uniformed women peacekeepers.⁴ The A4P initiative views the WPS agenda as critical to enhancing peacekeeping operations' performance through supporting women's full participation in peace processes and making peacekeeping more gender-responsive, including through increasing the number of civilian and uniformed women in peacekeeping at all levels and in key positions.

The Government of Pakistan recognises the role that women play at different levels in making communities more peaceful and resilient and promotes the participation of women peacekeepers in UN peace operations. Notably, Pakistan is one of the few countries so far that has achieved 15% women Peacekeepers in the UN missions, which sets strong milestones for other troops contributing countries to emphasise women's inclusion in peace operations.

This paper will reflect on the Pakistani women peacekeepers as a case study to assess the barriers to entry and serve in their respective roles in the UN peacekeeping missions. The research paper is based on 100 qualitative in-depth key informative interviews and informal conversations. The participants include 40 Pakistani women peacekeepers as well as 60 officers working closely with the UN mission and trainers.⁵

The findings of this study will be beneficial for policymakers at the UN, academics, think tanks and researchers working on peacebuilding and peacekeeping.

1. See https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/women_in_multilateral_peace_operations_in_2021-what_is_the_state_of_play.pdf
2. See <https://press.un.org/en/2019/sc13773.doc.htm>
3. See <https://press.un.org/en/2019/sc13773.doc.htm>
4. See <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping>
5. For confidentiality purposes, the names/details of participants are not disclosed.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN PEACEKEEPERS AT THE UN MISSIONS

The criticality of women's representation in UN peacekeeping missions and their effectiveness on the ground is well acknowledged within academia. The inclusion of women peacekeepers is seen to improve the overall effectiveness of missions. Evidence shows that an increased number of female troops contributes to better protection of civilians, particularly women and children in mission zones.^{8, 9, 10}

Women are often better able to establish trust with local communities.¹¹ Ghittoni argues that women have a greater understanding of diversity of conflict drivers, which makes them better peacekeepers in conflict zones.¹² Similarly, Semic and Krause emphasize that women peacekeepers, due to their sensitivity to local issues and engagement with various local actors, including left-behind groups, are critical contributors to bring about longer lasting results in conflict situations.¹³

Paffenholz et al. highlights the importance of strategically placing women in mission zones.¹⁴ In mission zones, various issues require gender-sensitive protection of civilians; including gender-based violence, sexual violence, sexual abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, lack of hygiene awareness, killing, abduction, and physical and mental torture. Bertolazzi and Puechguirbal argue that women peacekeepers can provide better understanding and solutions to the above-mentioned issues.¹⁵

ROLE OF WOMEN IN PAKISTAN SOCIETY

Pakistan is a developing country with a population of 231 million¹⁶ (2021), of which approximately 48.54%¹⁷ are women. The country has a predominantly patriarchal society where men wield high influence. The patriarchal norms are reflected in the values and traditions of Pakistan. Moreover, religion is often convoluted

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6. Unity in Goals, Diversity in Means: – and the discourse on female peacekeepers in UN peace operations, Jan. 1, 2020, pp. 10-15
 7. Olsson, L. and Tryggstad, T. L. (2001). Introduction. In: L. Olsson and T. L. Tryggstad (eds) *Women and International Peacekeeping*. London: Frank Cass.
 8. UN (2017). *System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity*. www.un.org/gender/sites/www.un.org/gender/files/gender_parity_strategy_october_2017.pdf (accessed 24 April 2020)
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 10. Bigio, J. and Vogelstein, R. (2018). *Increasing Female Participation in Peacekeeping Operations*. Council on Foreign Relations. www.cfr.org/report/increasing-female-participation-peacekeeping-operations (accessed 18 March 2020)
 11. Sharland, L. (2019). *Women, Gender and the A4P Agenda: An Opportunity for Action? Policy Brief*. International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations. www.challengesforum.org/paper/policy-brief-20197-women-gender-and-the-a4p-agenda-an-opportunity-for-action (accessed 18 March 2020)
 12. Ghittoni, M., Lehouck, L. and Watson, C. (2018). *Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations: Baseline Study*. Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, <http://www.dcaf.ch/elsie-initiative-women-peace-operations-baseline-study>,
 13. Simic, O. (2013). *Moving Beyond the Numbers: Integrating Women into Peacekeeping Operations*. Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution. <https://noref.no/Publications/Themes/Gender-and-inclusivity/Moving-beyond-the-numbers-integrating-women-into-peacekeeping-operations> (accessed 10 March 2020)
 14. See <https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Making%20Women%20Count%20Not%20Just%20Counting%20Women.pdf>
 15. Bertolazzi, F. (2010). *Women with a Blue Helmet: The Integration of Women and Gender Issues in UN Peacekeeping Missions*. Working Paper Series. Dominican Republic: UN-INSTRAW.
 16. See <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=PK>
 17. See <https://statisticstimes.com/demographics/country/pakistan-demographics.php>



with social and cultural values, which makes it often hard to ascertain what aspects of society are based on religious ideology or on social norms and traditions.

In recent years, the efforts of the government have increased women's participation in different industries. For example, the federal government has reserved a 10% quota for the employment of women in all posts across the board in federal government services, including the Central Superior Service (CSS), to be filled through direct recruitment. Data from two departments shows that the Defence Division has the highest number of women employees at 36.86% of total employees. The second largest unit is the Federal Education & Professional Training Division with 19.74% total women employees.¹⁸

The Pakistan army has likewise increased the number of women officers. Pakistan is the one of the few Muslim countries, alongside Bangladesh, to have women officers in its military, serving in all ranks up to the rank of Major General.¹⁹ In 2020, Nigar Johar became the first woman officer

to be promoted to the rank of Three-Star General, making history in the armed forces of Pakistan. In the law enforcement sector, for example, around 100 women commandos are currently working in the elite police force of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), which is particularly significant due to the conservative nature of the Pashtuns and the decades-long high levels of militancy in KP.

Pakistan is also recognised for meeting the UN quota of 15% women representation in UN peace missions. Moreover, a 15-member women engagement team from Pakistan deployed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo received major recognition for being the first all-women group from Pakistan to serve in a UN peacekeeping mission. This group of women set another milestone for Pakistani women and women peacekeepers across the world in achieving the UN mandate.

The Centre for International Peace and Stability (CIPS), at the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) in Pakistan, provides training for Pakistani UN Peacekeepers. Along

20. See <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2346969/pakistan-sees-growing-presence-of-women-in-bureaucracy-and-armed-forces>

21. See Hilal website for details: <https://www.hilal.gov.pk/her-article/detail/NDQ3MQ==.html>

22. See CIPS website for details: <https://www.cips.org>

with Pakistani Peacekeepers, CIPS offers UN peacekeeping training courses to various allied forces as well. From 2013 to 2023, CIPS conducted around 172 UN-approved courses and has trained around 582 women including 260 non-Pakistani nationals.²⁰

Amid many success stories of Pakistani women breaking stereotypes and serving in high-ranking positions, many challenges remain for women in the sector. According to the Global Gender Gap report 2022, Pakistan still has one of the lowest women labour-force participation rates in Asia. Additionally, prevalent social norms influence the type of tasks assigned to women. As long as social norms and expectations continue to restrict Pakistani women's roles in the private and public sphere, the increase in the numbers of women in peacekeeping and UN missions will remain slow.

BARRIERS FACED BY WOMEN PEACEKEEPERS TO ENTRY AND SERVE IN PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS

In Pakistan, as in other societies, social and cultural norms intermix with religious and other ideologies to define gender roles. A Pakistani uniformed woman interviewee shared that, “our system is designed to keep women dependent on men. This is what is reflected in all walks of life, from home to work and in public spaces. Women are made to believe that they can't go alone and do their work outside of homes without their male counterparts.”

This has direct consequences on the employment opportunities of women. In law enforcement careers, the role of women is still largely limited to desk jobs and administrative support, while combat roles are significantly assigned to men. Similarly, Pakistani women peacekeepers concur

that their home country assignments are mostly limited to administrative tasks.

In UN peacekeeping missions, however, women peacekeepers have access to broader opportunities to take up different roles. Pakistani women peacekeepers have taken on roles of supply chain managers, civil, electrical, and mechanical engineers, computer and software engineers, legal experts, and medical officers. Although Pakistani female troops might have limited combat training, they have served as staff and support officers in mission zones and have excelled in supporting UN missions. For example, in women engagement teams of 15-20 officers, Pakistani women serve in communities in the mission zones and have been recognised for their critical support to UN Peacekeeping missions.

However, this is not without challenges. Interviews with 40 Pakistani women peacekeepers highlighted certain socio-cultural barriers that impact their work. The uniformed women mentioned that they were sometimes uncomfortable with sharing living accommodation with their male counterparts. Additionally, they also shared that they might prefer to stand, rather than sit, next to their male colleagues when using UN transport buses to travel between their office and lodging in mission zones. These observations reflect the deep socio-cultural gender norms that are hard to overcome even in an enabling environment.

“In the mission zone, we simply do our job and do not face discriminatory remarks”,

Pakistani women peacekeeper

At the same time, over 37% of the interviewed women peacekeepers mentioned that their male colleagues were supportive and stressed gender equality. For example, their male colleagues would question why the women felt uncomfortable sharing seats when they were part of the same UN mission and would extend support for women to excel in their various roles.

For many interviewed Pakistani women peacekeepers, the UN missions are, in fact a neutral environment where they felt not being in competition with their male colleagues but rather treated equally as officers on duty. One of the interviewees stated that “usually, back home there are stereotypes or pre-conceived notions associated with women at work. Some say that women cannot handle their responsibilities and easily get emotional. However, in the mission zone, we simply do our job and do not face discriminatory remarks.”

According to a senior military officer, it is these socio-cultural limitations that mostly prevent the entry of women as women combat officers in the armed forces of Pakistan. Most Pakistani women peacekeepers shared that while serving in a UN mission, they are very aware of the social and cultural barriers and implications of the same in different contexts. According to one of the women peacekeepers who served in UN missions, ‘unfortunately, our home country system discourages us from taking risks and doing work outside the domain of our allocated role. While on the UN mission, we have observed that the UN encourages us to do all that we can offer and does not draw lines for us.’

The interviews showcase how Pakistani women peacekeepers are navigating a complex environment marked by social and cultural norms that continue to follow them abroad in mission settings. It is noteworthy that despite these challenges, there is an impressive number of Pakistani women peacekeepers in UN missions. For them, serving in UN missions, is an opportunity to showcase their expertise, strengths and capabilities.

WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO BREAK THE BARRIERS TO INCREASE WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN PEACEKEEPING AND CONFLICT SETTINGS?

Barriers to entry into the military and peacekeeping sector for women in Pakistan are closely linked to socio-cultural norms as the noted in the previous chapter. These limit the roles and decision-making power of women in peacekeeping and security sectors in Pakistan.

However, the roles of women in these forces are expanding, albeit slowly. In the 1960s, women in the armed forces of Pakistan served only as doctors, whereas now, female troops have taken on roles in communication, aviation, signals, and engineering departments, etc. This implies that socio-cultural barriers are changing, and the opportunities for women in the armed forces are gradually growing. Today, in the Armed Forces General Headquarters, women operate communication systems and serve in the officers’ mess.

Breaking the social and cultural barriers that impede the entry and service of women in mission and conflict zones is a complex challenge that requires a multifaceted approach. To achieve this, various factors and strategies may be considered:

1. Training and role expansion:

Women peacekeepers in Pakistan have historically demonstrated competence in administrative roles, such as staff officers and military observers. However, there is a noticeable gap in their combat and field training. To address this, comprehensive training programs can be initiated for women peacekeepers to equip them to handle volatile security threats. While increasing women's representation in active combat roles may take time, women can still contribute effectively to non-combat duties such as providing medical support to troops.

2. Challenging gender norms:

In many parts of Pakistan, traditional gender norms that limit women's mobility in public spaces and concepts related to the gendered protection of women are deeply entrenched. Additionally, socio-cultural practices of gender segregation restrict the interaction of women with unrelated men in some communities. Thus, challenging gendered stereotypes and norms that limit women's roles in peacekeeping is a long-term and multidimensional endeavour. Encouraging societal acceptance and recognizing the value of women's contributions will require concerted efforts through education, awareness campaigns, and policy changes to bring about change.

3. Inclusion and representation:

In Pakistan, there remains significant gender disparity in decision-making related to the security and peace-keeping apparatus. The participation of women in these discussions is critical to ensuring that security dialogues are balanced and representative of the entire population through considering quotas and special seats for women in various platforms.

4. Learning from the UN missions:

The UN mission peacekeepers represent diverse global communities, and they offer an environment where restrictions on the mobility and accessibility of women are not as pronounced. This provides an opportunity to observe the advantages of having women peacekeepers in conflict zones from a community perspective, especially concerning the protection and empowerment of women and girls. The lessons learned from the UN missions can be applied locally to sensitize and empower local women and other community members.

In conclusion, challenging social and cultural barriers to women peacekeepers in conflict zones is a gradual process that demands a combination of training, awareness, and changes in societal norms. As we address these challenges, we can move toward a more inclusive and gender-balanced approach to peace and security, ultimately benefiting the entire country.

UN Women advocates for gender-responsive peacekeeping and champions women peacekeepers in UN missions and beyond. Through partnerships with NUST, UN Women supports awareness-raising and capacity building initiatives of the Peacekeeping Department of NUST, particularly supporting gender courses as part of the pre-deployment training of the peacekeepers.



Photo Credits: Dr. Farah Naz

Dr. Farah Naz has a doctorate in Gender Security and serves as an Assistant Professor at the Department of Government and Public Policy at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST). She is a gender trainer at the Peacekeeping Training Department of NUST.

Driven by her personal experiences as a Pakistani Pashtun woman navigating the complexities of patriarchal society in a conflict-affected region, Dr. Naz's research and advocacy revolves around women, peace and security.

Her recent publications include 'Call to action: Job of the UN Peacekeeper' (2023), The NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability; COVID-19 and the Pakhtun pregnant women (2022), Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research; and UN Female Peacekeepers: An Analysis in Terms of their Services (2021).

UN Women collaborates with Dr. Farah and NUST on supporting gender-responsive peacekeeping and championing women peacekeepers.

