



PRIO Centre on
Gender, Peace
and Security

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Breaking Down Barriers for Norway's Deployment of Military Women

Presenting data and evidence-based approaches to change

Despite international and national commitments to increase the number of female soldiers participating in peacekeeping missions, the Norwegian Armed Forces deploy relatively few women to United Nations peacekeeping operations each year. This brief presents data on Norway's inclusion of women in the military and in international deployments and describes a methodology that can map the relative importance of different barriers to women's participation. This will allow for evidence-based policy recommendations that can contribute to the Norwegian Armed Forces' ongoing efforts in advancing equal opportunities and the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda.

Brief Points

- Despite having implemented a large number of measures to increase the proportion of women in military positions in the past 40 years, Norway ranks consistently below its NATO allies when it comes to women's inclusion.
- Norway struggles to live up to both its own National Action Plan targets and international commitments to deploy more female personnel to peacekeeping missions. With Norway serving in the UN Security Council in 2021, this topic becomes an issue of international credibility.
- This brief suggests that the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations methodology (MOWIP) will serve as a useful tool for lasting change by offering a valuable link between evidence-based research and national policy.

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Introduction

Norway has deployed female military personnel to international peacekeeping operations since the 1980s. Since then, Norwegian women have consistently contributed to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping, serving in a variety of different operations. In 2014, Norwegian Major General Kristin Lund became the first female Force Commander of a UN operation, and then again in 2017, marking important milestones in the history of women's participation in peacekeeping. In March 2021, Major General Ingrid Gjerde became the second Norwegian woman and the third woman in history to be appointed UN Force Commander.

This development has taken place during a period where expectations for increased numbers of women deployed are higher, both nationally and internationally. Norway's National Action Plan 2019–2022 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) includes an explicit commitment “to ensure that international operations and missions include women” and objectives on increasing the percentage of women in Norwegian contributions to international operations and in its own Armed Forces.¹ These national targets follow the international expectations set by the UN in 2018, which called for global efforts to further increase the proportion of women participating in peacekeeping operations by 2028. As can be seen in Figure 1, however, we are far from reaching these targets. In 2020, UN Security Council Resolution 2538 was adopted in an effort to strengthen the role of women in peacekeeping.

For Norway, as a global champion of WPS, whether or not it is on-track to reaching these national and international goals is an issue of credibility and an area where research can play a role for progress. This is particularly the case now that peacekeeping research has flourished as a result of the increased availability of sex-disaggregate data. To that end, we have compiled data from the Norwegian Armed Forces, the International Peace Institute's Providing for Peacekeeping Project (PPP), and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Based on these, this brief begins by describing trends in the Norwegian Armed Forces and then presents information about Norway's contributions to UN peacekeeping operations. Finally, we present the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) methodology, which

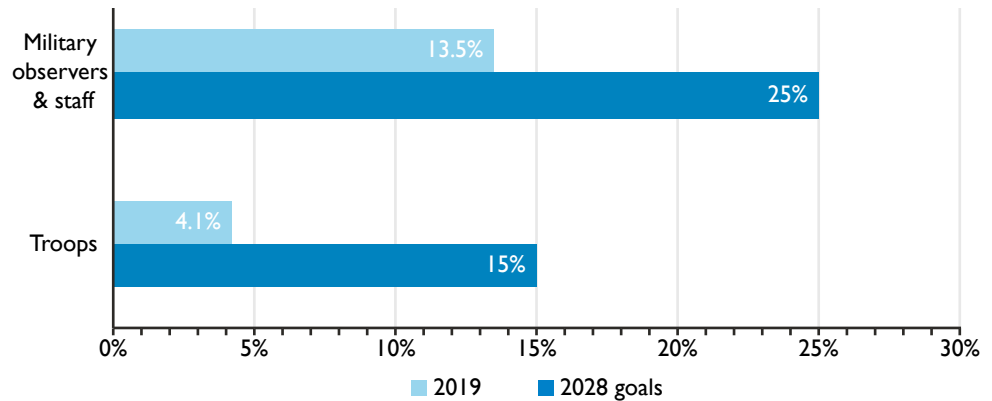


Figure 1: Proportion and goals for women in UN peacekeeping operations by personnel category. Source: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database (2019)

is part of Canada's Elsie Initiative, supported by Norway. The methodology is developed by Cornell University's Gender and Security Sector Lab and DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance. PRIO is part of the group of institutions that contributed to this methodology. We argue that implementing the MOWIP in Norway will allow us to assess the effectiveness of existing policies, and to pinpoint which practices will contribute to increasing the number of women.²

Efforts to Increase the Number of Women in the Armed Forces

In 1976, the Norwegian Armed Forces went from being an all-male organization to opening its doors to women. In 1984, women became allowed to serve in combat positions, making Norway among the first countries in the world to allow women to serve in all functions, and the very first country to allow women to serve on submarines. In 2007, the Ministry of Defense set a goal for the proportion of women in military positions to reach 20% by 2020. In 2013, the decision was made to introduce universal conscription in Norway.

According to the Norwegian Ministry of Defense, “there have been approximately 200 different measures intended to increase the number of women in the military” in the past decades. Efforts have reportedly involved “creating a network of potential female applicants, creating differentiated admissions requirements within various functions and roles, more nuanced requirements for jobs, awareness-raising, mentoring for female military staff with leadership potential, research, improved family

policies, and promotion of the military that appeals to both sexes” (cited in Dharmapuri 2013).

However, despite these efforts, women made up only 13% of military positions in 2019 (Norwegian Armed Forces Annual Report 2019). In 2020, women made up 29% of the Armed Forces' conscripts (The Norwegian Armed Forces, 2020), but relatively few of these women choose to stay and pursue a military career. In terms of the prospects for women to advance their careers, in 2016, there was only one woman out of 27 in top-level leadership positions (Bulai et al. 2016), reflecting the potential challenges for women at the highest levels of leadership.

Norwegian Contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations

Since the 1990s, Norway's personnel contributions to UN operations have decreased. After 2005, Norway began prioritizing contributions with niche capabilities. This involved, for instance, the deployment of transport aircraft to Mali (2016), and a field hospital and well-drilling engineers to Chad (2009–2010). This change reflects a shift from UN- to NATO-led international operations in accordance with Norway's long-term strategic priorities. Norway's most significant contributions to international operations since the end of the Cold War include NATO's Kosovo Force mission (KFOR), and the NATO operations in Afghanistan (ISAF), to which the Norwegian Armed Forces have deployed in total over 10,000 personnel.

Because Norway contributes relatively few personnel to UN peacekeeping missions, ensuring that UN targets for women's participation

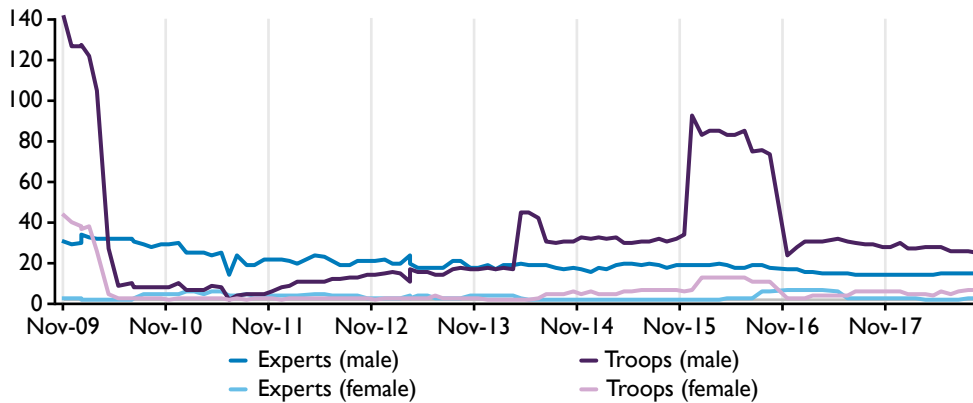


Figure 2: Norwegian personnel contributions to UN peacekeeping missions, 2009–2018.³ Source: IPI Providing for Peacekeeping Database (2020)

are met should – in theory – be more manageable compared to countries contributing several thousand troops every year. Figure 2 captures Norway’s contributions of troops and experts, such as military observers, to UN peacekeeping operations. It shows that between 2009 and 2018, contributions of female military personnel (troops) ranged from zero (in June 2014) to 42 (November 2009). These fluctuations coincide with larger changes in troop contributions, with deployments of female soldiers generally fluctuating in parallel with total deployment numbers. Norwegian women’s participation in UN peacekeeping operations was at its highest levels when Norway contributed actively to the UN mission in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT), and to the UN mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

Is Norway, then, reaching international targets on deploying women? As can be seen in Figure 3, Norway consistently performs better than the global average for female troop contributions. During the MINURCAT mission, Norwegian contributions exceeded UN goals, with 23% of troop contributions being women. On a mission-wide basis, women make up on average 11% of Norway’s troop contributions (2009–2018), which is slightly below the UN target of 15%. At the same time, the composition of Norwegian troops has fluctuated significantly, from 0% to 23% women in just a matter of months (as seen in 2010, and again in 2011 and 2012). Norway’s monthly contributions to UN peacekeeping operations therefore indicate that there are still challenges related to reaching the UN set targets on women’s participation.

This is particularly the case when it comes

to military experts, where reported contributions range from 0% to 28%. Between 2009 and 2018, Norway primarily deployed military experts to UN missions, yet the average number of Norwegian female expert contributions over the past ten-year period is *one*. In recent years, there have been several substantial stretches of time where there has not been a single female Norwegian expert, nor a single female Norwegian soldier deployed as part of a unit on a UN mission. These numbers are evidence of the work that remains with regard to women’s deployment to peacekeeping missions.

Yet, it is not just Norway that has struggled to increase the number of female peacekeepers in their troop contributions. Countries similar to Norway in terms of foreign policies – such as Canada, Ireland, and Sweden – deploy relatively

few female soldiers. This is in stark contrast to the countries’ national political efforts to bolster the role of women in peacekeeping. While all countries have launched several National Action Plans on WPS – wherein they affirm their commitment to increasing the number of women participating in peacekeeping missions – the results of these endeavors have varied. Based on the first date of data collection in the PPP dataset (November 2009), Canada had deployed two female soldiers, Ireland 21, Sweden zero (out of only two soldiers deployed) and Norway 42. Almost ten years later (October 2018), we see mixed results: Canada deployed 13 female soldiers, Ireland 21, Sweden 25, and Norway five. This amounts to women making up approximately 8.5% of Canada’s total troop contributions, 4.3% of Ireland’s, 10% of Sweden’s, and 18% of Norway’s total troop contributions. What the dataset shows us is that, overall, much work remains before the majority of Western countries will reach the UN’s 2028 targets regarding women peacekeepers.

How Can Research Help Break down the Barriers to Women’s Deployment?

Due to a lack of global advancement on this issue, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau launched the Elsie Initiative in 2017. As part of this Initiative, Cornell University’s Gender and Security Sector Lab and DCAF have developed the MOWIP methodology (Karim et al. 2020). This methodology consists of a survey of deployed and non-deployed personnel, a fact-finding form and elite interviews.

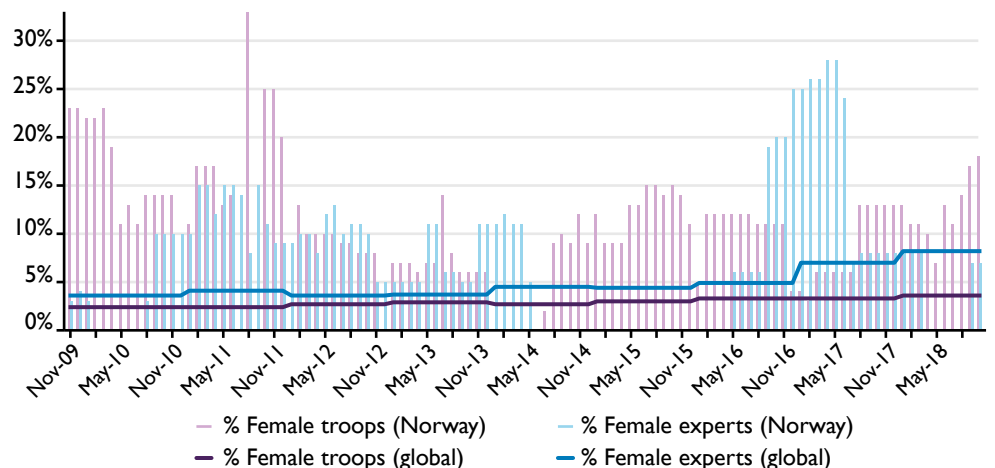


Figure 3: Percentage female personnel, 2009–2018: Norway’s average deployments of women to UN peacekeeping operations vs. global averages. Source: IPI (2020) and SIPRI (2019) databases

This method allows us to study the relative importance of ten different issue-areas.⁴ These areas have been highlighted by previous research and have emerged as critical in shaping the opportunities and eliminating the barriers for women on international peace operations. These include the issue of having an *eligible pool* of female military personnel, from which they can recruit. Other examples include *deployment selection*, which allows us to examine if, and how, the processes related to selection and deployment affect women's participation. More specifically, do men and women have equal opportunities to fulfill existing criteria? In addition to these practical barriers, the method includes the opportunity to study broader factors. On February 22, 2021, the Chief of the Norwegian Armed Forces presented the results of the latest personnel survey, revealing that a substantial proportion of female personnel experience sexual harassment.⁵ Such behavior in mission and at home can constitute a significant barrier to women's deployment to international missions. Notably, the two cross-cutting issue areas, *gender roles* and *social exclusion* explore how expectations and gender roles, as well as institutional culture, affect the ability of men and women to perform their tasks. Through a comprehensive study of all these areas, it is possible to obtain a 360-degree view of the conditions which currently affect men and women's deployment to international missions.

Conclusions

As this brief has demonstrated, despite Norway's long history of promoting women in the military, it has struggled to live up to national and international targets on women's participation. As Norway assumed a seat in the UN Security Council in January 2021, such failures can affect Norway's international credibility as a vocal advocate for gender equality.

Still, it is central to understand that research has

found that increasing the number of women in peacekeeping is complex, as barriers to women's participation are multi-faceted and manifest before, during, and after deployment. Such knowledge and improved data collection can be used to identify new ways forward and help promote lasting change. This brief has presented a methodological framework which aims to provide policy recommendations and practical information relevant to the Norwegian Armed Forces' ongoing efforts.⁶ Although this method has been developed for UN operations, it can also be applied to barriers affecting the deployment of women in NATO operations. The results of such systematic research would not only highlight successful efforts already in place in Norway, but also contribute to the advancement of equal opportunities and the WPS Agenda in NATO and the UN. ■

Notes

1. For an overview of the expected outcomes and indicators, see: Norwegian Ministries (2019) 'Implementing Norway's National Action Plan 2019-2022: Women, peace and security', *Annual report 2019*.
2. PRIO's work on developing and implementing the MOWIP methodology is part of the DCAF-led project 'Reducing Barriers for Uniformed Women in UN Peace Operations', which is financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Global Affairs Canada.
3. For months where data is missing (11/2016, 05/2017) a Last Observation Carried Forward (LOCF) method is applied.
4. The ten MOWIP issue-areas are an eligible pool; deployment criteria; deployment selection; household constraints; peace operations infrastructure; peace operations experiences; career value; top-down leadership; gender roles; and social exclusion.

5. See Andrea Vasholmen Mostue (2021) '[Flest trakasseringstilfeller blant de yngste](#)', *Forsvarets Forum*, 22 February.

6. See, for example, Lena Kvarving's 2019 thesis, 'Gender Perspectives in the Armed Forces and Military Operations: An uphill battle', University of Oslo.

Further Reading

Lund, Kristin (2020) 'Reflections from the First Female Force Commander in UN History: Opening Doors in the Cyprus Peace Operation', *GPS Policy Brief*, 1. Oslo: PRIO.

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THE AUTHORS

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THE PROJECT

The 'Reducing Barriers for Women in the Norwegian Armed Forces' Peacekeeping Contributions' project seeks to aid Norway's efforts to increase the number of women participating in Norway's contributions to UN and NATO operations. It will result in policy recommendations to the Armed Forces in their work on women's inclusion.

PRIO

The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) is a non-profit peace research institute (established in 1959) whose overarching purpose is to conduct research on the conditions for peaceful relations between states, groups and people. The institute is independent, international and interdisciplinary, and explores issues related to all facets of peace and conflict.