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# UN Peacekeeping Operations and Gendered Threats to the Protection of Civilians

Laura Cuzzuol and Welmoet Wels

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This issue brief is part of IPI's dedicated project on the protection of civilians (POC). This project seeks to inform policy development and practice and support the UN Secretariat's efforts to enhance the delivery of protection of civilians mandates by peace operations. This issue brief is an introductory analysis on this topic, which will form the basis for more in-depth research in 2021.

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The views expressed in this publication represent those of the authors and not necessarily those of the International Peace Institute. IPI welcomes consideration of a wide range of perspectives in the pursuit of a well-informed debate on critical policies and issues in international affairs.

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## Executive Summary

The intersection between the protection of civilians (POC) and gender has been addressed in Security Council resolutions on POC and on women, peace, and security (WPS) since the late 1990s. Nonetheless, understanding how POC and gender converge, and translating this convergence into implementable action plans, are challenging tasks for peacekeeping missions.

One challenge is that neither UN policies on POC in peacekeeping nor UN policies on making peacekeeping gender-responsive focus on the intersection between POC and gender. Likewise, the language in peacekeeping mandates does not always include firm and clear language related to gendered POC threats.

At the mission level, POC strategy documents vary greatly in the extent to which they mention gender mainstreaming, and few provide concrete guidance. Accordingly, most missions do not undertake a structured, gender-sensitive analysis of threats. When they do, they often focus on sexual and gender-based violence against women, with less attention to other gendered POC threats or POC threats to men, boys, and girls. Moreover, many missions do not systematically disaggregate POC-related data by sex, age, and other relevant demographic factors.

Another challenge is the lack of coherence within the UN and between the UN and other stakeholders in conceptualizing and responding to gendered POC threats. While there are conversations on gendered POC threats within missions, and, to some extent, with interlocutors outside of missions, these usually amount to a relatively shallow form of coordination. To ensure the sustainability of their efforts to address gendered POC threats, missions also have to work with national and local actors. While there are many examples of missions grounding their POC work in local structures, it is difficult for missions to sustainably address gendered POC threats that are culturally grounded.

To address these challenges, UN peacekeeping missions could consider developing "safeguarding frameworks" on the intersection of POC and gender. These frameworks could provide more detailed guidance that challenges the conflation of "gender" and "women" and the association of gender-related protection primarily with sexual violence. They could also dictate that missions need to assess the gender aspects of every threat and could help move missions from coordinating to integrating their work on POC and gender.

## Introduction

The intersection between the protection of civilians (POC) and gender has been addressed in Security Council resolutions on POC and on women, peace, and security (WPS) since the late 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, understanding how POC and gender converge, and translating this convergence into implementable action plans, are challenging tasks for peacekeeping missions. Multiple factors complicate the integration of gender perspectives into POC activities in the field, including the conflation of “gender” and “women” and differing cultural notions about gender.<sup>2</sup> In the words of a UN gender affairs officer, “Contingents, when they arrive..., do not know what the word ‘gender’ means.... They arrive full of bias and their own knowledge based on the culture and the society in which they were born. Every context is different when it comes to gender.”<sup>3</sup> The concept of POC is also difficult for many to grasp, making it similarly challenging to mainstream across missions. Cross-pollinating gender and POC requires breaking barriers, challenging personal convictions and patterns, and redefining power dynamics, all in a context of violence, insecurity, and political turmoil.

Nevertheless, there are opportunities for integrating these concepts. Missions have dedicated staff working on both POC and gender: POC advisers and gender advisers, who are supported by human rights units, women protection advisers, focal points on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), and dedicated POC and gender focal points in missions’ substantive sections. These staff are

Understanding how the protection of civilians and gender converge, and translating this convergence into implementable action plans, are challenging tasks.

backed by system-wide policies on the importance of gendered approaches to POC, including the Gender Responsive UN Peacekeeping Operations Policy. However, implementing these policies and coordinating the work of these experts within missions requires a clear, substantive understanding of the concepts of gender and POC and of gendered threats to civilians.

This paper examines how peacekeeping missions conceptualize and define gendered threats to civilians at the field level. It is based on a desk review of policy documents from the UN Secretariat, mandates from the Security Council, and mission-level strategies, as well as interviews with UN staff from headquarters and the field.

Online seminars featuring policymakers and practitioners helped outline the broader context.<sup>4</sup>

The first part of this issue brief starts out with an analysis of key policy documents that provide substantive guidance to peacekeeping missions on POC and gender, looking particularly at how they define and discuss gendered POC threats. Next, it looks at the way the language in the mandates of peacekeeping missions provides a conceptual framework for understanding gendered POC threats. In the second part, this issue brief explores how missions understand the intersection between gender and POC in practice. It analyzes the way mission-level POC strategies frame the juncture of gender and POC, how missions identify and analyze gendered POC threats, and the coherence and sustainability of their approaches. In other words, this paper explores the substantive mainstreaming of gender in POC.

1 For example, in Security Council Resolutions 1265 (1999), 1296 (2000), and 1674 (2006) on POC; and Resolution 1325 (2000), 2242 (2015), and 2493 (2019) on WPS.

2 The WPS agenda uses language that reinforces rather than deconstructs this notion. See, for example: Security Council Resolution 1325, para 17: “to include in his reporting... gender mainstreaming throughout peacekeeping missions and all other aspects relating to women and girls.” On the conflation of “gender” and “women,” see: Gretchen Baldwin and Sarah Taylor, “Uniformed Women in Peace Operations: Challenging Assumptions and Transforming Approaches,” International Peace Institute, June 2020.

3 Government of Rwanda, PAX, and Stimson Center, “Improving Gender-Sensitive Capacities for the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping Training,” virtual event, October 28, 2020, available at <https://www.stimson.org/event/improving-gender-sensitive-capacities-for-the-protection-of-civilians-in-un-peacekeeping-training/>.

4 Seven individual interviews were conducted in November 2020 (five with staff from the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO), one with a staff member of a UN agency, and one with a staff member of an international NGO). IPI also brought together ten people (POC advisers or focal points, sexual and gender-based violence advisers, gender advisers, and women protection advisers from POC-mandated missions and staff from DPO headquarters) in a virtual “field conversation” on November 9, 2020. Other seminars attended included: “We Have to Break the Silence Somehow: Preventing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence through UN Peacekeeping” (October 27, 2020) and “Improving Gender-Sensitive Capacities for the Protection of Civilians in UN Peacekeeping Training” (October 28, 2020), both organized by IPI; and “The Practical Challenges of Military and Civilian Personnel When Addressing Women, Peace and Security in the Field” (November 25, 2020), organized by the Dutch Peacekeeping Network.

## Gender and POC in Peacekeeping Policy and Missions' Mandates

Several UN policy documents provide guidance to peacekeeping missions on how to understand the connection between gender and POC. This section examines how POC is reflected in gender policies and how gender is reflected in POC policies, looking at how this might influence missions' conceptualization of gendered threats to civilians in the context of their POC mandate. It then reviews the intersection of gender and POC in those mission mandates.

### POC in Gender Policy for Peacekeeping Missions

The main peacekeeping policy dedicated to gender is the 2018 Gender Responsive UN Peacekeeping Operations Policy.<sup>5</sup> This policy states that gender equality “implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration.... Gender equality is not a women’s issue, but should concern and fully engage men as well as women.” The policy addresses some protection-related issues, including conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), which it defines as “sexual violence of comparable gravity against women, men, girls or boys.” The policy also outlines the link between POC and WPS mandates.<sup>6</sup> It includes one section specifically on POC:

Protection of civilians (PoC) initiatives shall reflect the intersectionality between gender and protection. Gender outcomes shall be included in all PoC plans, policies, analysis and reports. PoC stakeholders shall ensure that women fully participate in all decision-making processes and that the concrete integration of gender equality and the WPS mandates are included across all three tiers of the missions’ PoC initia-

tives and the PoC strategy. PoC shall ensure the collection, analysis and utilization of sex and age disaggregated data and information. Further, PoC shall ensure a holistic gender and protection analysis that identifies the specific capabilities, roles, responsibilities, risks and vulnerabilities of women... since women and girls are the main targets of conflict related sexual violence by combatants, uniformed and civilian individuals.<sup>7</sup>

However, the policy does not explain or define POC or provide conceptual clarity on gendered threats to civilians under the POC concept, and it does not touch upon the importance of power dynamics. It also reinforces a superficial understanding of gender, including when it comes to protection-related issues. Groups particularly vulnerable to sexual victimization such as boys and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people do not seem to be taken into account. Likewise, it does not explicitly account for male survivors of CRSV, even though it “is aimed at increasing the operational effectiveness and efficiency of peacekeeping operations by responding to the differentiated needs, concerns and contributions of women and men.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, sexual exploitation and abuse is conceptualized as an issue involving only women and children. The policy requires POC efforts to be based on a “holistic gender and protection analysis,” but it only calls for this analysis to identify the “specific capabilities, roles, responsibilities, risks and vulnerabilities of women.”<sup>9</sup>

### Gender in POC Policy for Peacekeeping Missions

The UN Department of Peace Operations’ (DPO) 2019 policy on the protection of civilians in peacekeeping clearly links POC with the WPS agenda.<sup>10</sup> While the term “gender” is absent from the section that defines POC and other key terms,

5 This policy “reflects the changing landscape and emerging standards for gender equality in conflict and post-conflict settings,” having incorporated the recommendations of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peacekeeping Operations report and the global study on the implementation of resolution 1325. See UN DPO, “Gender Equality and Women, Peace and Security: Resource Package,” 2020, pp. 77–82.

6 UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Field Support (DFS), “Policy: Gender Responsive United Nations Peacekeeping Operations,” February 2018, p. 12.

7 Ibid., p. 9. The three tiers of POC are: tier 1, dialogue and engagement; tier 2, physical protection; and tier 3, establishment of a protective environment. See: UN DPO, “Policy: The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping,” November 2019, paras. 40–77.

8 Ibid., p. 3.

9 Ibid., p. 9.

10 Beyond the policies discussed here, other DPKO/DFS documents underlining the need to apply a gender perspective to POC include the “Gender Forward

there is a paragraph in the guiding principles for POC on “meaningfully integrating the women, peace and security (WPS) priorities.”<sup>11</sup> The policy explicitly mentions women, men, boys, and girls as target groups for a variety of POC activities, including community engagement and communication and information activities.<sup>12</sup> It requires the analysis and planning of POC to consider the needs of and threats faced by different groups of civilians, including women and men.<sup>13</sup> It calls for POC efforts to consider the needs and long-term interests of women, men, girls, and boys and for POC tools to address their different protection needs.<sup>14</sup> The policy defines CRSV as sexual violence against women, men, girls, and boys in conflict or post-conflict settings or other situations of concern. It also specifies that victims of CRSV can be targeted on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>15</sup> Overall, the POC policy takes gender and gendered threats to civilians into account rather comprehensively.

DPO’s POC handbook, published in 2020—not a policy in the strict sense, but an important guidance document—also includes a section entitled “Integrating Gender Equality and WPS in POC.” It provides guiding questions to ensure that POC efforts are gender-responsive and lists examples of gender-responsive activities under each tier of POC, including for men and boys. Interestingly, DPO’s Gender Resource Package includes almost identical guidance for gender-responsive POC but does not mention men and boys.<sup>16</sup>

While CRSV is one of the most prevalent threats to civilians under the POC concept, the 2020 Policy for UN Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to CRSV only mentions POC a few

times (when referring to POC personnel or the POC strategy). The word “gender” occurs often in the policy.<sup>17</sup> CRSV is defined as involving an assault on the rights to, among other things, sexual autonomy and gender equality.<sup>18</sup> The policy’s understanding of CRSV is highly gender-sensitive:

Women and girls continue to be those primarily affected by CRSV, not least due to patterns of gender discrimination and inequality predating the conflict. Boys and men are also victims/survivors of CRSV, with gendered stereotypes linked to masculinity, homophobia, social taboos and biased legal frameworks underlying their victimisation and stigmatisation.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the policy’s inclusive and comprehensive approach, this is not always reflected in practice. For example, according to field staff interviewed, most missions do not provide targeted support to male or LGBTI survivors of CRSV.

The 2011 Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on UN Support to Non-UN Security Forces is another document relevant to both POC and gender. However, it never mentions gender and only mentions POC once, in the context of local protection networks as a system for collating and reviewing information.<sup>20</sup> The lack of substantive inclusion of POC and gender in such a key document might be a symptom of the inadequate mainstreaming of these concepts across the UN. However, the 2011 Policy on Human Rights in UN Peace Operations and Political Missions mentions gender frequently and specifies that the different situations of women, girls, men, and boys need to be taken into account, even if it does so only once.<sup>21</sup> On POC, this policy is brief.

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Looking Strategy 2014–2018,” “Guidelines on the Role of United Nations Police in the Protection of Civilians” (2017), and “Protection of Civilians: Implementing Guidelines for Military Components of United Nations Peacekeeping Missions” (2015).

11 UN DPKO and DFS, “Policy: The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping,” February 2019, para. 38.

12 *Ibid.*, para. 53.

13 *Ibid.*, para. 37.

14 *Ibid.*, para. 77.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

16 UN DPO, “Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Handbook,” 2020, p. 156; “Gender Equality and Women, Peace and Security: Resource Package,” 2020, p. 78.

17 It occurs fifty-one times, to be exact.

18 United Nations, “Handbook for United Nations Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence,” 2020, para. 7.

19 *Ibid.*, para. 12.

20 UN General Assembly and Security Council, “Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on United Nations Support to Non-United Nations Security Forces,” UN Doc. A/67/775–S/2013/110, March 5, 2013, para. 21(d).

21 *Ibid.*, para. 50.

## Protection and Gender in Mission Mandates

While UN-wide policy provides principles and guidance on POC and gender, each peacekeeping operation is first and foremost guided by its mandate. Mission mandates set out priorities, highlight crosscutting issues, and underline responsibilities. As of January 2021, there are twelve peacekeeping operations, six of which have a POC mandate.<sup>22</sup> Given the importance the UN has placed on mainstreaming gender, one would expect to see firm and clear language related to gender in all of them.<sup>23</sup>

While the mandates of all POC-mandated missions include the word “gender,” some apply it sparingly and superficially. The UN Interim Force for Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) each mention gender only twice, though they also mention “women” several times. UNISFA’s mandate calls on the secretary-general to “ensure that effective monitoring of violations and abuses of human rights is carried out, including of sexual and gender-based violence and other violations and abuses committed against women and children” and encourages the mission to continue integrating women into the peace process.<sup>24</sup> Both UNIFIL and UNISFA’s mandates also mention the need to mainstream gender as a crosscutting issue and to increase the number of women personnel and ensure their full participation in all aspects of the mission.<sup>25</sup>

Gender is addressed more substantively in the mandates of the four largest POC-mandated

missions: the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), and UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). These missions’ mandates strongly emphasize the need for the meaningful participation of women in all aspects of the peace process. They also list more specific POC tasks, including monitoring, investigating, and reporting; facilitating access to services for survivors of violence; supporting early-warning mechanisms; preventing and mitigating harm to civilians during operations; stopping and deterring violence by armed groups against civilians; and supporting mediation efforts.

Almost all peacekeeping mandates lump together “women and children” as victims.

However, while these mandates are more comprehensive and substantive in their approach to gender and POC as distinct issues, the link between gender

and POC remains weak, for several reasons. First, almost all of the mandates lump together “women and children” or “women and youth” as victims in phrases like “protect civilians under threat of physical violence..., with specific protection for women and children.” This reinforces the idea that women and children are victims in need of protection who lack their own agency, that “gender” equals “women,” and that women and children are a homogeneous population.<sup>26</sup>

Second, the mandates strongly emphasize the connection between gender and CRSV, with little attention to other gendered protection of civilians threats.<sup>27</sup> While sexual violence is a prevalent threat

22 The missions with a POC mandate are: the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). The African Union–United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), which ended its activities on December 31, 2020, also had a POC mandate. UNAMID documents were part of the desk review, and UNAMID staff were among the respondents to the interviews, hence the inclusion of UNAMID’s experiences in this paper. The missions without a POC mandate are: the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), and UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO).

23 For a detailed assessment of language on women, peace, and security in peacekeeping mandates, see: Lisa Sharland, “Women, Peace, and Security Mandates for UN Peacekeeping Operations: Assessing Influence and Impact,” International Peace Institute, January 2021.

24 UN Security Council Resolution 2550 (November 12, 2020), paras. 18, 26.

25 Ibid., para. 27; UN Security Council Resolution 2539 (August 28, 2020), para. 26.

26 UN Security Council Resolution 2514 (March 12, 2020), paras. 8(a)(i) and (vi). See also: Lisa Sharland, “Women, Peace, and Security Mandates for UN Peacekeeping Operations: Assessing Influence and Impact,” International Peace Institute, January 2021.

27 See, for example, para. 18 on sexual violence prevention and response in Resolution 2514 (2020) renewing the mandate of UNMISS.

with a gendered dimension, there are many other types of gendered POC threats that the mandates do not touch upon or task missions with identifying and documenting, creating the risk that these go unnoticed and unreported (see below). Moreover, gender is not substantively mentioned in the context of other mandated tasks related to the first and third pillars of POC, such as disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, security sector reform, elections support, or support to the rule of law, even if this link is often made in practice.<sup>28</sup>

Third, while the mandates stay gender-neutral in their language on sexual violence—possibly a deliberate choice to ensure inclusivity—this, combined with references to women’s organizations and women protection advisers, reinforces the misconception that men and boys are not victims of sexual violence.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, “children” are mentioned in a gender-neutral way in the context of sexual violence, without acknowledgment that the threat might vary by gender.<sup>30</sup> None of the mandates mention men, boys, or girls in the context of either gender or POC. While many POC threats bear particular consequences for women, threats such as sexual violence, arbitrary arrest, detention, summary execution, forced recruitment, child marriage, intercommunal violence, and trafficking might also entail risks specific to men, boys, and girls, who might in some cases be the main victims. The Security Council explicitly recognized men and boys as victims of sexual violence in Resolution 2467 in 2019—well before it renewed the mandates of all the POC-mandated missions—but this has not carried over into those resolutions.<sup>31</sup>

## Integration of Gender into POC Activities in Practice

Given the lack of clarity in mandates and policy documents, it is down to peacekeepers on the ground to give meaning to the concepts of gender and POC. The intersection between gender and POC can be analyzed across five dimensions: the way missions frame the juncture of gender and POC in their strategies; the gendered threats they identify; their analysis of those threats; the coherence of their approach to gendered POC, both within missions and between missions and other actors; and the sustainability of their activities on gendered threats under tiers 1 and 3 of POC.

### Framing Gendered Threats to Civilians in POC Strategies

POC-mandated peacekeeping missions have their own mission-level POC strategy documents. All of those reviewed for this brief mention the mainstreaming of gender.<sup>32</sup> However, these strategies’ content on gender-responsive POC varies significantly in quantity and quality. Most of the strategies only mention women and children in the paragraphs on risk analysis, alongside the elderly, youth, and minority groups, and the word “gender” rarely occurs.<sup>33</sup>

Where POC strategies do mention “gender,” they usually do so in one or more of three ways. First, they might state that the mission needs to “provide specific protection for women and children, and address the needs of victims of sexual and gender-based violence.”<sup>34</sup> Second, there might be a

28 The exception is Security Council Resolution 2499 (November 15, 2019) renewing the mandate of MINUSCA, which highlights the need for gender-sensitive DDR programming.

29 Interestingly, there is a difference between the different language versions of MINUSMA’s most recent mandate in Resolution 2531 (June 29, 2020). The English, Arabic, Spanish, Russian, and Chinese versions use a gender-neutral term for “survivors” in the context of sexual violence. However, the French version uses “rescapé(e)s,” instead of the officially gender-neutral form “rescapés,” underlining that victims can be both male and female.

30 UN Security Council Resolution 2531 (June 29, 2020), para. 55.

31 UN Security Council Resolution 2467 (April 23, 2019), para. 32: “Notes that sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations disproportionately affects woman and girls, recognizes also that men and boys are also targets of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings, including in the context of detention settings and those associated with armed groups; urges Member States to protect victims who are men and boys through the strengthening of policies that offer appropriate responses to male survivors and challenge cultural assumptions about male invulnerability to such violence; requests further that the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence focus more consistently on the gender specific nature of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations against all affected populations in all situations of concern, including men and boys.”

32 POC strategies reviewed for this research are: MINUSMA, “Strategy for the Protection of Civilians in Mali,” 2017; UNAMID, “Refined Protection of Civilians Strategy,” 2017; MINUSCA, “Mission-wide Protection of Civilians Strategy (Revised),” 2018; UNMISS, “Strategic Approach (2018–19),” and UNIFIL, “Mission-wide Strategy on the Protection of Civilians (POC),” 2020.

33 MINUSCA, “Mission-wide Protection of Civilians Strategy (Revised),” 2018, para. 40(i).

34 MINUSMA, “Strategy for the Protection of Civilians in Mali,” 2017, para. 5.

statement that the mission is obligated to include gender in all POC activities: “Strategies, actions, activities and tasks must include a gender marker and a gender perspective.”<sup>35</sup> Lastly, several of the POC strategies call for analysis of sexual and gender-based violence or CRSV.<sup>36</sup> All of these are critical points that reflect UN-wide policies on gender and POC in peacekeeping. However, the strategies provide little concrete guidance on what a gendered approach to POC entails. Concepts like “gender markers” are not elaborated on, and the term “gender” itself is not explained or distinguished from “sex.” As a result, the way missions approach the intersection of gender and POC and the amount of attention they give it “depend on the people in the strategic control rooms,” as one interviewee put it.

MINUSMA is the one exception. Its POC strategy separates out gender as a distinct security issue, underlining that it applies to men, women, boys, and girls. It also communicates the meaning of gender-related terms: “In peacekeeping operations, a gender perspective—intended as the process of exposing gender-based differences in status and power, and considering how such differences shape the immediate needs, as well as the long-term interests, of women and men—is to be included into all plans, policies, activities, analysis and reports.”<sup>37</sup> It is the only POC strategy reviewed for this research that provides mission staff with constructive, practical insight into the meaning of gender.

## Identifying Gendered POC Threats

In the field, mission staff face the task of identifying POC threats and analyzing their gendered aspects. However, most missions do not seem to undertake

a structured, gender-sensitive analysis of threats that account for gendered power dynamics and vulnerabilities.<sup>38</sup> A report by the Center for Civilians in Conflict concluded that missions rely on gender and CRSV experts to make sure gender considerations are taken into account, with no gender mainstreaming across staff involved in POC.<sup>39</sup>

Despite these limited directives, UN staff interviewed for this paper enumerated many examples of gender-related POC threats that they face in their missions. Many of these reflect local political and conflict dynamics. For example, MINUSCA sought to ensure the safety of women in the run-up to the Central African presidential elections in December 2020. The African Union–UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) would monitor gendered threats during the cattle migration season. UNMISS has identified fetching water as a particularly risky activity for women, pointing to the gendered nature of drought and other climate-related threats. UNMISS has also noted the dropout rate of girls from school (making them more vulnerable to forced marriage or abduction), robberies associated with sexual violence, and the high suicide rate of young people in POC sites as gendered POC threats.

The vast majority of the examples that interviewees gave related to sexual violence, including CRSV and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence such as forced marriage and abduction, sexual exploitation, forced prostitution, and early marriage.<sup>40</sup> While sexual violence is one of the most prevalent POC threats in peacekeeping contexts, the focus on these threats confirms that missions might benefit from broader guidance. Nonetheless, some also mentioned gendered POC threats not

Gendered threats to the protection of civilians remain largely associated with sexual violence against women.

35 MINUSCA, “Mission-wide Protection of Civilians Strategy (Revised),” 2018, para. 9.

36 Ibid., para. 17.

37 MINUSMA, “Strategy for the Protection of Civilians in Mali,” 2017, para 22.

38 UNISFA, UNIFIL, MINUSCA, MONUSCO, UNMISS, and UNAMID. “Gender analysis refers to the variety of methods used to understand the relationships between men and women, their access to resources, their activities and the constraints they face relative to each other. Gender analysis of a context and situation on the ground is part of any gender responsive action or programme. A gender-responsive conflict analysis integrates a gender perspective into conflict analysis. In addition to exploring the actors, causes and dynamics of a conflict, a gender-responsive conflict analysis also considers how gender shapes, and is shaped by, conflict.” UN DPO, “Gender Equality and Women, Peace and Security: Resource Package,” 2020, p. 9.

39 Center for Civilians in Conflict, “‘We Have to Break the Silence Somehow’: Preventing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence through UN Peacekeeping,” virtual event, October 27, 2020.

40 IPI field conversation, November 9, 2020.



directly pertaining to sexual violence, including women's lack of access to electoral processes or justice mechanisms, girls' lack of access to education, and women's general lack of representation in community-level institutions. Beyond what was mentioned, such threats might also include threats and attacks against politically active persons, the media, and human rights defenders; restrictions on movement and enforcement of dress codes; abduction or forced recruitment into armed forces or armed groups; living conditions and treatment in detention; living conditions and threats in displacement situations; and threats emanating from arbitrary justice. In fact, all POC threats may have gendered aspects, but interviewees mentioned few threats not related to sexual violence.<sup>41</sup>

Men and boys were also conspicuously absent from interviewees' responses. None of the interviewees mentioned threats specific to boys or men until prompted to do so. Nonetheless, they provided a few examples of threats particular to men and boys, including forced recruitment by armed groups. Notably, UNAMID tried to address the societal taboo of sexual violence against boys, even referencing it subtly in its POC strategy.<sup>42</sup> Overall, however, gendered POC threats remain largely associated with sexual violence against women.

## Analyzing Gendered POC Threats

To undertake activities at the intersection of gender and POC, missions need to understand the roles of the different sexes in society at large, in affected communities, and as victims or agents. This requires conducting gender analyses to gain insight into the gendered nature of threats to civilians in the context of POC. Many POC strategies stipulate the need for threat assessments, scenario planning, or contingency planning—and in some cases that

these should be gender-specific. For example, UNAMID's integrated field protection teams were required to produce joint gender-sensitive analytical protection assessment reports after field missions, and UNIFIL's scenario planning is meant to include threat assessments that pay particular attention to the protection of women and children.<sup>43</sup>

However, the strategies do not indicate how to undertake these assessments, and they are not always conducted systematically. An interviewee framed the problem succinctly: "Our work should be grounded in gendered political analysis, gendered conflict analysis, gendered POC analysis. There are efforts, but there is also a lot of copy-paste." No interviewees mentioned qualitative analyses of social roles, power structures, or cultural norms as part of what should inform the analysis of threats to civilians. Most missions also view gender through the lens of the male-female binary and do not look at the LGBTI community.

Disaggregation of data by sex, age, and other relevant demographic factors is also crucial.<sup>44</sup> Some missions, such as MONUSCO and UNMISS, systematically disaggregate their POC data, and most seem to be aware of the value of doing so, but not all missions have a systematized approach. Most missions' POC strategies do not mention disaggregation, if they mention data collection at all. Some encourage data collection from a wide range of sources, especially at the community level, and acknowledge that informants from particular groups can enhance the data. However, they provide little clarity on how this data should be used in developing POC activities. "It is considered more of a background issue, not as one of the goals," explained one interviewee about his mission's approach to data disaggregation and analysis.

41 See: UN DPO, "Gender Equality and Women, Peace and Security: Resource Package," 2020; UN DPKO and DFS, "Gender Forward Looking Strategy 2014–2018," 2014; DPO, "Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Handbook," 2020.

42 UNAMID's strategy mentions boys and girls as vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence and that mainly women and girls are victims of CRSV. UNAMID, "Refined Protection of Civilians Strategy," 2017, paras. 50, 89.

43 For example, UNAMID's integrated field protection teams must produce joint gender-sensitive analytical protection assessment reports after field missions. *Ibid.*, Annex 5. UNIFIL's scenario planning should include a threat assessment with particular attention to the protection of women and children. UNIFIL, "Mission-wide Strategy on the Protection of Civilians (POC)," 2020, para. 27.

44 "Sex-Disaggregated Data is data that is broken down by sex in order to aid comparison. In peacekeeping all data, statistics and information that is collected should be available as numbers of women and men. All data for budgets, training, political participation etc. should provide numbers broken down by women and men." UN DPKO and DFS, "Gender Forward Looking Strategy 2014–2018," 2014, p. 22.

## Adopting a Coherent Approach to Gendered POC Threats

Another challenge is the lack of coherence within the UN and between the UN and other stakeholders in conceptualizing and responding to gendered threats to civilians in the context of POC mandates. Within missions, the classic UN stovepiping has taken hold over work on gender and POC.

The consultation process for the drafting of POC strategies is opaque.<sup>45</sup> Ideally, a gendered approach to identifying, analyzing, and responding to threats to civilians should be written in from the start, drawing on the expertise of all mission components. However, only the POC strategies of MINUSMA and UNMISS mention consultations with other mission personnel, and none mention substantive exchanges on gender issues.<sup>46</sup> While such exchanges may in fact have taken place, they are not formally written into the process design.

Another indicator of a coherent approach is the level of coordination. On paper, each mission has coordination mechanisms for POC. For example, MINUSMA's POC strategy lists extensive platforms where POC is coordinated, including with women protection advisers, gender units, and child protection units at mission headquarters and in the field. There are also fora to coordinate with non-UN organizations.<sup>47</sup> UNAMID had a gender focal point in every substantive section and a gender task force uniting all gender focal points, including from the mission's uniformed components.

In practice, however, these mechanisms are not always effective. In MINUSCA, the weekly meeting of the protection working group is the only forum for those working on POC to work with the gender

advisory unit. UNIFIL only has ad hoc meetings to coordinate POC, though this is partly because it only has POC focal points rather than dedicated POC units, which limits its capacity. Coordination is particularly challenging considering the compartmentalization of those working on POC and gender. POC advisers, gender advisers, women protection advisers, and heads of CRSV units all operate in different divisions or act as separate entities, making it difficult to address the intersection of gender and POC. Moreover, according to one interviewee, "In addition to the 'black' UN, there is the 'blue' UN, [which] also does protection and gender and uses different guidance documents and strategies."<sup>48</sup> While the compartmentalization of responsibilities is not necessarily problematic, it appears that communication is often inadequate and does not lead to the full integration of gender into POC activities or of POC into work focused on gender. Both in the field and at UN headquarters, the relationship between gender and POC is more one of good neighbors than close friends.

Missions' approaches to gendered threats to the protection of civilians are at most coordinated rather than substantively coherent.

Externally, mission-level planning for gender and POC should involve UN and non-UN stakeholders external to the mission. It is essential that missions engage with the host

state and communities in order to ensure that POC strategies respond to local protection needs, including these needs' gendered dimensions. However, the extent to which external stakeholders are involved in the drafting and follow-up of mission-level POC strategies remains unclear and varies by mission. MINUSCA has a mechanism for coordinating on POC with the government, but this is not the case everywhere.<sup>49</sup> UNMISS's POC strategy, for example, states that the mission should more strongly emphasize the responsibility of host-state authorities, but follow-up and interaction with host-state stakeholders is limited, according to

<sup>45</sup> The POC policy states that each mission should have a POC strategy but does not provide guidance on the consultation process required. UN DPKO and DFS, "Policy: Protection of Civilians United Nations Peacekeeping," February 2019, para. 79.

<sup>46</sup> MINUSMA, "Strategy for the Protection of Civilians in Mali," 2017, para. 9.

<sup>47</sup> MINUSCA's strategy has similar provisions. "Mission-wide Protection of Civilians Strategy (Revised)," 2018, paras. 46–62. UNAMID's strategy also had an extensive description of coordination and planning mechanisms on POC, with roles and responsibilities. "Refined Protection of Civilians Strategy," 2017, Annex 3.3.

<sup>48</sup> "Black UN" refers to the peacekeeping operations, while "blue UN" refers to agencies, funds, and programs. The respondent referred to the humanitarian-oriented protection implemented by the "blue UN" as opposed to peacekeeping operations' focus on the physical protection of civilians.

<sup>49</sup> MINUSCA, "Mission-wide Protection of Civilians Strategy (Revised)," 2018, Paras. 59–62.

interviewees.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, UNMISS's strategy affirms that its POC activities fit within a system-wide approach to POC developed by the mission, the UN country team, the humanitarian country team, and the South Sudan NGO Forum.<sup>51</sup> However, there is no information on whether there were stakeholder consultations on the gendered aspects of POC, including with groups that are often excluded from consultation processes. MONUSCO-based interviewees reported engaging with national security forces to combat sexual violence, but engagement on other gendered POC issues and with other stakeholders appears to be limited.

Overall, while there are conversations on POC within missions, including on gendered POC threats, and, to some extent, with a limited group of interlocutors outside of missions, the missions' approaches to gendered threats to civilians in the context of POC are at most coordinated rather than substantively coherent.

## Ensuring a Sustainable Approach to Gendered POC Threats

The sustainability of POC activities is achieved through tier 1 (engagement and dialogue) and tier 3 (the creation of a protective environment). The main responsibility for POC lies with national governments, and all missions' POC strategies underscore the government's responsibility. As mentioned above, some missions, like MINUSCA, have set up mechanisms to coordinate POC with the government under tier 1 of POC. However, host states may require further support before they can fully assume their responsibility for POC. As one MINUSCA staff member said, "Obviously the state should take over everything, but so far, we are still in the deployment phase of state authorities across the national territory. They do not have the

capacity to take ownership."<sup>52</sup> This becomes a particular challenge during peacekeeping transitions. For example, UNAMID's exit strategy listed protection tasks to be handed over to the government, including efforts to address sexual and gender-based violence and CRSV, but it did not mention any other gendered threats.<sup>53</sup>

Nonetheless, there are many examples of missions working to ground their gendered POC work in local structures to achieve durable change under tier 3 of POC. For example, the UN police in MINUSCA recently created a helpline for victims of sexual and gender-based violence across the country. Though the helpline was established by MINUSCA, the mission cooperated with the national police, which was especially helpful for overcoming language barriers. The mission is also working on getting the political parties to set quotas for women candidates to achieve gender parity in the long term and strives to include displaced women in local peace committees. As part of its work on gendered POC threats, UNMISS has built a network of survivors of violence (not only sexual violence).<sup>54</sup> UNIFIL is working to create "safe spaces" for survivors of violence through local social development centers to work around taboos on sexual violence. MONUSCO is building capacity to address POC threats, including gendered threats, among several groups, including women in parliament and civil society organizations at the grassroots level. The mission also supports community-level protection networks and one-stop centers for victims of sexual violence in remote locations.

Despite these efforts, it is difficult for missions to sustainably address gendered POC threats that are culturally grounded (e.g., genital mutilation, domestic violence) or that are part of coping strategies (e.g., child marriage among internally displaced persons).

50 On POC and host-state support, see: Patryk Labuda, "With or Against the State? Reconciling the Protection of Civilians and Host-State Support in UN Peacekeeping," International Peace Institute, May 2020.

51 UNMISS, "Strategic Approach (2018–19)," p. 3.

52 Virtual interview, November 2020.

53 UNAMID, "Protection of Civilians Vision, November 2019–March 2020," para. 13.

54 Center for Civilians in Conflict, "We Have to Break the Silence Somehow."

## Conclusion: Challenges and Opportunities

While POC and gender, on their own, have become well-developed, crosscutting issues in UN peacekeeping, there has not been enough cross-pollination between them. Two misconceptions make it especially hard to develop a productive relationship between the two concepts: the conflation of “gender” and “women” and the association of gender-related protection primarily with sexual violence. Mission mandates and system-wide policies reinforce the problem by not mentioning gender, using confusing language, or mentioning the connection between gender and POC only at a superficial level. Missions are therefore left to their own interpretation of gendered protection needs, leading most of them to focus on sexual violence against women. Men, boys, girls, and LGBTI people are largely absent from missions’ POC strategies, and gender is not mainstreamed across all POC tasks.

Missions should consciously, consistently, and increasingly study how the impacts of threats to the protection of civilians differ based on gender.

At the same time, missions have had some success addressing gendered POC threats at the local level, such as by supporting protection networks and other community-led initiatives. Some have also begun taking a broader approach to gender. The inclusion of “men and boys” in recent WPS resolutions may present an opportunity to further nuance the understanding of gender at the mission level.

Within missions, new “safeguarding frameworks” on the intersection of POC and gender might help move things forward.<sup>55</sup> These could include mission-specific documents on gendered POC threats, as well as mission-level POC strategies that more robustly address gender. Safeguarding frameworks on POC and gender could dictate that missions need to assess the gender aspects of every

POC threat in terms of both the perpetrators and the victims and determine the different impact of threats on every group. They could also explicitly emphasize that adopting a gender lens entails looking at all sexes and genders—not only women and not only adults.

Such frameworks could help mainstream the intersection between gender and POC across missions. The approach until now seems to have been that work on gender and POC needs to be *coordinated*. However, coordination alone is insufficient. Work on gender and POC ought to be *integrated*. Working on POC entails working on gender because people are gendered. All mission staff working on POC—not just gender experts—need to consider the gender perspective at every step: in the threat and risk assessment, analysis of victims and perpetrators, analysis of power dynamics, and design of responses across all three tiers of POC. Questions about who is responding to threats (e.g., military, civilian, or police teams; men or women) and how they will interact with different parts of the civilian population should be second nature.

The UN Charter commits the UN to “promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.”<sup>56</sup> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights echoes this: “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind.”<sup>57</sup> Paradoxically, missions should consciously, consistently, and increasingly make distinctions in their analysis and planning of POC activities. They should differentiate more between different groups in communities and study how the impacts of POC threats differ based on gender. This will allow the UN to work toward true gender equality.

<sup>55</sup> Safeguarding is about protecting vulnerable people from harm. A “safeguarding framework” refers to a set of mutually reinforcing policy documents, operating principles, and procedures that set the standards for ethical and respectful behavior.

<sup>56</sup> UN Charter, Art. 1(3), June 26, 1945.

<sup>57</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 217(A) (December 10, 1948), Art. 2.

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