# PROMOTING GENDER AWARNESS – EFFECTS ON NATO'S STRATEGIC SECURITY

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**Abstract**

As the terrorist threat and the race for power continues, the most successful alliance is still facing undoubtable risks in its endeavor of maintaining stability – economically, political and most of all, socially. This paper intends to address the gender awareness phenomenon and study its effects on redesigning NATO's security strategy architecture and reshaping the international relations among political actors. Furthermore, as the NATO 2030 analysis identified several risks and shortcomings of the alliance it is believed that strategically using the Women, Peace and Security Agenda can mitigate and favorably exploit these 'loose ends'.

**Keywords:** inclusiveness; gender flexibility; integration; integrity; empowerment.

## INTRODUCTION

When facing so diverse and innovative threats one must exploit all the assets in hand, probably one of the most important but in the same time overlooked is changing the way in which a wide range of issues are approached. North Atlantic Treaty Organization is no exception from this tactic and it comes naturally that talking more often about gender awareness has become ordinary busines. But what is in fact 'gender awareness'? Even though dedicated literature emphasizes this concept as the knowledge and understanding of the differences in roles and relations between women and men, especially in the workplace (Cambridge Dictionary 2021), when talking about foreign policies, international relations and moreover international conflicts and security we find ourselves forced to expand the gender concept and take into consideration the impact of conflict, especially on women, children and vulnerable peers. In addition to what it has been stated before, as NATO developed a Women Peace and Security Policy having as a starting point the UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women and peace and security  (UN 2000), "integration" means integrating gender perspectives in everything that NATO does. On one hand NATO has made a lot of progress in gender mainstreaming, including the development of Gender Advisers, gender training (SHAPE 2020), and institutional and operational structures but on the other, there are easily identified areas where this concept is not intensely discussed, for example in the NATO 2030 Initiative based on the report to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on how to make NATO an even stronger Alliance put together by an independent group, co-chaired by Dr. Thomas de Maizière and Dr. Wess Mitchell, the gender awareness concept as well as the WPS policy are not exploited at the level where a difference can be made.

This article intends to provide a different perspective for the gender awareness concept and by utilizing qualitative analysis methods to ultimately prove that efficiently usage of the aforementioned concept would generate beneficial effects.

In developing NATO 2030, NATO has already committed to consulting civil society, the private sector, and young leaders. NATO 2030 is an opportunity to do something radically different: to go beyond NATO's customary circles of security think-tanks and make use of unconventional means of dealing with conflict, instability and external threats.

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## WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY – UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT WITHIN THE ALLIANCE

Gender is an issue because of the fundamental differences and inequalities between women and men these differences and inequalities may manifest themselves in different ways in specific sectors but there are some broad patterns that always should be taken into consideration. When setting the strategy for conflict prevention the main areas on which NATO should focus refer to: inequalities in political power (access to decision – making and representation), inequalities within households, violence against women and discriminatory attitudes.

For the past two decades considerable efforts have been made within the alliance with regards to the WPS, the first formal NATO/EAPC Policy on Women, Peace and Security was held in December 2007. Its focus was on how gender perspectives apply in operational contexts. A first Action Plan to support the implementation of this Policy was endorsed at the Lisbon Summit in 2010 on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of UNSCR 1325. The Policy has been updated several times, most recently in 2018, with new plans to guide the implementation of each revision. The updates account for changes in the security environment as well as the continued evolution of NATO's understanding of how best to integrate gender across all of its work. Furthermore, in 2019, NATO adopted its first policy on Preventing and Responding to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in support of its work on WPS.

NATO's work on WPS is guided by three principles: integration, inclusiveness and integrity. Integration, referring to the fact that gender equality must be considered as an integral part of NATO policies, programmes and projects guided by effective gender mainstreaming practices. To achieve gender equality, it must be acknowledged that each policy, programme, and project affects both women and men. Inclusiveness meaning that representation of women across NATO and in national forces is necessary to enhance operational effectiveness and success. NATO seeks to increase the participation of women in all tasks throughout the International Military Staff and International Staff at all levels. Integrity, focusing on systemic inequalities is addressed to ensure fair and equal treatment of women and men Alliance-wide. Accountability on all efforts to increase awareness and implementation of the WPS agenda will be made a priority in accordance with international frameworks.

Besides implementing policies, efforts have been in other areas as well, for example the Office of NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security issued the NATO Gender Inclusive Language Manual, as gendered language is important as it frames the understanding of equality. Gendered language shapes views on women's roles and directly impacts women's participation in all aspects of society. Research highlights that gendered language can contribute to the marginalization of women in the labour market, impede educational attainment, reinforce traditional gender roles, and support harmful traditional practices. It can also empower, advance and promote equality between women and men.

Gender is a primary marker of social and economic stratification and, as a result, of exclusion. Regardless of one's socioeconomic class, there are systematic gender differences in material well-being, although the degree of inequality varies across countries and over time. As a result, gender inequality is a characteristic of most societies, with males on average better positioned in social, economic, and political hierarchies. (Boyer, et al. 2020)

## FORGING RELATIONS AND STRENGTHEN SECURITY IN NATO

The principle of consensus decision-making is applied throughout the Alliance, reflecting the fact that it is the member countries that decide and each one of them is involved in the decision-making process. This principle is applied at every level of the Alliance, including policymaking.

NATO decisions are taken on the basis of consensus, after discussion and consultation among member countries. A decision reached by consensus is an agreement reached by common consent and supported by each member country. This implies that when a NATO decision is taken, it is the expression of the collective will of the sovereign states that are members of the Alliance. It is this decision-making process that gives NATO both its strength and its credibility.

But what lies behind this decision? Are any consultative bodies able to provide advice from a gender awareness point of view? Denying the reality and existence of this issue does nothing else but altering the whole process of decision making.

**Tackle the gender differences, exploiting strong points of women contribution**

In most societies, men and women differ in the activities they undertake, in access to and control over resources, and in participation in decision – making. Realizing these differences enhances the awareness of possible inequalities between women and men, which can form a constraint to development because they may limit the ability of men, but more often of women, to develop and exercise their full capabilities, for their own benefit and for society as a whole.

What is mandatory to be taken into consideration when having set as a goal the good governance as well as peace and stability is the unquestioned effect on development which the inequalities have on it.

Gender Inequality Index from the Human Development Report, 2015

This index covers three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and economic status. Scores are between 0-1 and higher values indicate higher inequalities.
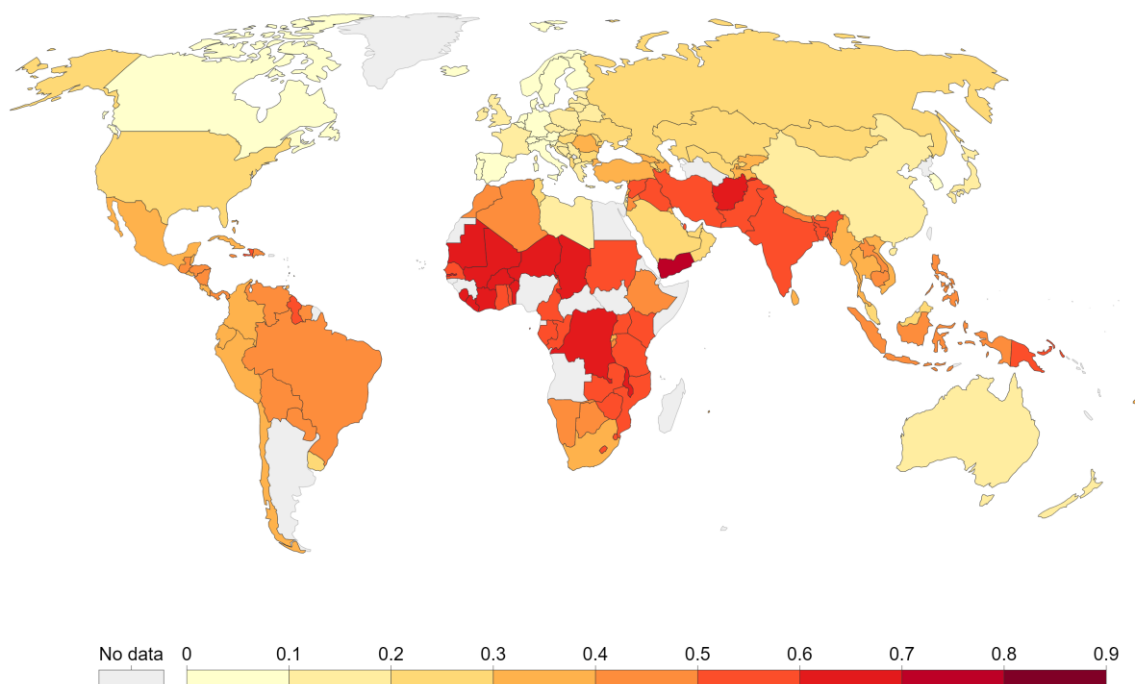


Source: Human Development Report (2015)

*Figure 1. Gender Inequality Index* (Human Development Report 2015)

It is to be observed that areas where the level of inequality among gender is higher coincides with the regions where political and military stability is frail and so conflicts are more prone to occur, escalating towards full crisis.

Besides differences in position between women and men, positions and roles among women differ. Although in conflict situations the victim role and the vulnerable positions of women are often emphasized, the multifaced role of women is increasingly recognized. Women can be mothers, breadwinners, combatants, peace activist at the same time, women's role are not given by nature but are negotiable. The underlying notions of femininity and masculinity are negotiated interpretations of what it means it means to be a man or a woman. Masculinity is often linked to aspects of aggression, militarization, dominance, hierarchy and competition, feeding into the organization of war. Femininity

is regularly associated with motherhood, care, non – violence and potential capacities for peace. The interpretation of masculinity and femininity shaped by the gender culture in which women and men live and by the nature of the conflict, in the end determine male and female actions, behavior, perceptions, rationality, positions and roles. (Bolasco Sergio 1990)

### Strengthening the roles and positions of women in conflict

The Alliance's Strategic Concept of 2010 identifies crisis management as one of NATO's fundamental security tasks. It commits the Alliance to stand ready to contribute to effective conflict prevention and to engage actively in crisis management, including crisis response operations. This requirement is fulfilled through a combination of effective consultation procedures, crisis management arrangements, military capabilities, and civil emergency planning preparations.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned aspects there are several action items that are to be approached by NATO in facilitating strengthening the roles and positions of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post – conflict reconstruction. These include to: 1) gather additional data on the accurate roles of women in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post – conflict resolution; 2) collect best practices and lessons learned of how women's role in the field have been addressed so far; 3) further translate existing policies into practice by setting specific objectives and developing concrete guidelines; 4) monitor/evaluate/review the activities undertaken and outputs achieved so far in order to assess whether and how women's role have been strengthened; 5) increase the number of women and gender – sensitive men at all levels of the alliance and particularly in the field of conflict – related interventions; 6) increase the participation of local women in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all field activities focusing on women's roles in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post – conflict reconstruction; 7) enhance the commitment among all staff that deal with the issue of women in armed conflict; 8) enhance expertise in this field by providing staff training, but also training for local women and women's organization. Training must be adapted to the specific mandate and activities of the alliance, to the specific conflict situation; 9) increasingly incorporate gender and conflict issues into the alliance's activities, instruments and tools; 10) further link the fields of, experts in, and information on women, gender and armed conflict. (Sweidan 2016)

As a natural step in the process of empowering women and actively engage them in the decision-making process, the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) – together with UN, government and civil society partners – launched a new financing mechanism to urgently accelerate women's influence and participation in peace processes across the globe. The new WPHF Rapid Response Window (RRW) on Women's Participation in Peace Processes and the Implementation of Peace Agreements addresses the countless technical and logistical barriers that women and local civil society organizations often face to participate meaningfully in peace processes at all levels – such as travel, childcare, translation, advocacy, and capacity building support.

## NATO 2030 – WPS AGENDA AND CURRENT THREATS

Artificial intelligence is increasingly influencing the opinions and behavior of people in everyday life. However, the over-representation of men in the design of these technologies could quietly undo decades of advances in gender equality. Over centuries, humans developed critical theory to inform decisions and avoid basing them solely on personal experience. However, machine intelligence learns primarily from observing data that it is presented with. While a machine's ability to process large volumes of data may address this in part, if that data is laden with stereotypical concepts of gender, the resulting application of the technology will perpetuate this bias. While some recent studies sought to remove bias from learned algorithms, they largely ignore decades of research on how gender ideology is embedded in language. Awareness of this re-search and incorporating it into approaches to machine learning from text would help prevent the generation of biased algorithms. Leading thinkers in the emerging field addressing bias in artificial intelligence are also primarily female, suggesting that those who are potentially affected by bias are more likely to

see, understand and attempt to resolve it. Gender balance in machine learning is therefore crucial to prevent algorithms from perpetuating gender ideologies that disadvantage women.

Emerging technologies are innovative technologies that have been recently developed, are under development or will be developed within the next few years. Disruptive technologies, however, are innovations that drastically change the way organizations and industries function. They force businesses to alter the way they manage operations, so they do not lose market shares or fall into irrelevancy. Emerging and disruptive technologies are a challenge but also opportunity for NATO. Competing with the efforts underway by large authoritarian states to achieve dominance in key EDTs must be a strategic priority for the Alliance and its members. (NATO 2030 - United fro a New Era 2020) NATO should serve as a crucial coordinating institution for information-sharing and collaboration between Allies on all aspects of EDTs that have a bearing on their security. NATO should hold a digital summit of governments and private sector with the aim of identifying gaps in collective defence cooperation in security-related AI strategies, norms, and research and development (R&D), and safeguarding against the malign and aggressive use of AI.

Climate change will continue to shape NATO's security environment. While modulating emissions is primarily a national competency, NATO has a role to play in increasing situational awareness, early warning, and information sharing, including by considering the establishment of Centre of Excellence on Climate and Security. It should build on efforts to include climate change and other non-military threats such as pandemics in NATO planning on resilience and crisis management, with an emphasis on making energy and telecommunications grids better able to withstand weather events. NATO should revise its 2014 Green Defence framework and make more strategic use of the Science for Peace and Security programme in order to develop and implement better green military technology,

Climate change is already forcing millions of people from their homes, and future storms, droughts, rising seas and other impacts of climate change will further exacerbate people's vulnerabilities. Due to socially constructed roles and responsibilities, climate-related disasters have different impacts on men, women, girls and boys. The most recent research found climate impacts will exacerbate violence against women. Therefor the next phase for the WPS agenda must deal with more sophisticated and intersectional threat assessments, risk analysis and gender analysis that is fit for purpose to deal with the intersection of gender, climate and conflict. There is increasing evidence that violence against women and human rights abuses generally may be important indicators of conflict, including in countries that otherwise appear stable, and that this information might contribute to identifying where to focus international alliance's efforts on conflict prevention.

## CONCLUSIONS

Probably the most important aspect which arises from de aforementioned discussions is that gender equality for women's economic empowerment and sustainable progress requires measures to compensate for existing disadvantages that prevent equal opportunities. If we take into consideration the most known conflicts the de conflict key areas would go around equitable access to resources and opportunities for both women and men.

Gender inequalities are not only economic, but are also reflected in other ways that are difficult to measure and change. Ideas about appropriate behavior, independence, and aptitudes are often grounded in gender stereotypes and vary for women and men. Ideas and practices tend to reflect and reinforce each other which contribute to the complexity of achieving change.

Reducing inequality strengthens economies and builds stable, resilient societies that give all individuals the opportunity to fulfil their potential, witch on the long run, will definitely have effects on development, socially, politically, financially, effects that will ensure maintain healthy relationships among all allies.

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