

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN UN PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS AS AN EXPRESSION OF GENDER EQUALITY VALUES IN THE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ERA

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes women's participation in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions as one of the practical manifestations of the idea of gender equality within the contemporary security system. Particular attention is paid to how women peacekeepers help strengthen trust in missions, establish contact with the local population, and better take into account the needs of groups that often remain less protected in conflict conditions. In addition, the article examines the impact of digital technologies on peacekeeping activities. It is shown that digital tools open up new opportunities for monitoring, communication, and support for peacebuilding initiatives, but at the same time may reinforce already existing forms of inequality, including women's limited access to technology, online harassment, and digital vulnerability.

KEYWORDS: UN peacekeeping missions, gender equality, women, peace and security, digital technologies, ICT, Resolution 1325, digital transformation.

Introduction. Gender equality is one of the values that the UN not only proclaims in its official documents but also gradually seeks to apply in practice. This is particularly evident in the sphere of international security. Today, peacekeeping operations have long ceased to be limited to military observation or ceasefire monitoring. They include the protection of civilians, engagement with local communities, prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, and the restoration of trust after conflict. Under these conditions, women's participation in missions cannot be regarded as a mere formal addition. It becomes one of the conditions for more sustainable and locally accepted peacekeeping [1].

The normative basis for this approach was formed by the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The adoption of UN Security Council Resolution No. 1325 became an important milestone, as it explicitly identified the need for women's participation in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, peacekeeping operations, and post-conflict reconstruction. This idea was later developed further in UN Women documents, the Beijing Platform for Action, and other international mechanisms for assessing progress on gender equality [1; 2]. As a result, the issue of women's participation came to be seen not as a private initiative of individual states, but as part of a broader institutional responsibility in the field of security.

The practical role of women in peacekeeping is confirmed not only by official statements but also by research findings. Women peacekeepers often gain access to groups of the population who, for cultural, religious, or psychological reasons, may avoid direct contact with male service members. This is particularly important when working with women, children, displaced persons, and survivors of gender-based violence. Through this kind of engagement, a mission can gain a more accurate understanding of the situation on the ground, obtain more information, and respond more quickly to the needs of the civilian population [3]. For example, women's police units in UN missions have been involved in patrolling, counseling local women, and

creating a safer environment for reporting violence. Such cases show that equality in peacekeeping is linked not only to principles but also to the everyday safety of people.

At the same time, it is important not to reduce women's participation solely to their “usefulness” for operations. Such an approach may appear progressive, but in practice it sometimes reinforces the stereotype that women are, by their nature, supposedly more peace-loving, patient, or better suited to working with affected groups. Feminist critique rightly draws attention to this problem [4]. Gender parity should therefore mean not merely an increase in the number of women in uniform, but their genuine inclusion in operational planning, decision-making, and leadership positions. This requires transparent selection procedures, safe infrastructure, equal career opportunities, and an organizational culture in which women are regarded as full professional participants in the mission.

The experience of states seeking to adapt the Women, Peace and Security agenda to national conditions deserves particular attention. In Uzbekistan, a National Action Plan for the implementation of Resolution 1325 was developed in 2023 with the support of UN Women. Its significance lies in the fact that it links international norms to issues of conflict prevention, women's participation in decision-making, and recovery processes within the country [5]. Moreover, the 2018 Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan demonstrated that Uzbekistan seeks to incorporate issues of peace, security, and women's participation into the regional agenda [6]. These examples are significant because they demonstrate a shift from general international principles to national mechanisms for their implementation.

At the institutional level, the advancement of gender equality in Uzbekistan is also linked to parliamentary representation and the development of structures supporting women. Legislative measures aimed at expanding women's participation in political life create a foundation for their more active presence in decision-making processes [7]. At the local level, the institution of the mahalla can also play a certain role. Women in mahallas often help resolve social issues, support vulnerable families,

and act as mediators in everyday conflicts [8]. Of course, the mahalla is not a UN peacekeeping mission. However, this example shows that women's participation in maintaining social harmony can manifest not only at the international level but also at the local one.

For Central Asia, this issue also carries regional significance. The UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia conducts activities related to conflict prevention, training government officials, and promoting gender-sensitive approaches [9]. Such initiatives help bring together official diplomacy, expert knowledge, and practical training. At the same time, studies of national contingents show that implementing a gender-sensitive approach remains a complex process. Formal recognition of equality does not yet mean that cultural stereotypes, organizational constraints, or career barriers disappear [10].

Digital transformation makes the issue of women's participation even more relevant. The UN's Strategy for the Digital Transformation of Peacekeeping emphasizes the role of data analysis, satellite monitoring, digital communication, and information awareness in improving the effectiveness of operations [11]. Such tools can genuinely help detect threats more quickly, track population movements, document cases of violence, and coordinate humanitarian assistance. However, digitalization is not a neutral process. If women have more limited access to technology or face online violence, digital solutions may not reduce but rather reinforce existing inequality.

The connection between digital technologies and the Women, Peace and Security agenda is particularly evident at the level of local peacebuilding. Research shows that ICTs help women build networks of mutual support, exchange information, and promote peace initiatives, including in countries of the Global South [12]. In Cameroon, for example, women used digital channels for solidarity and to promote peacebuilding practices during the Anglophone crisis [13]. Such examples do not replace women's participation in official UN missions, but complement it with a civic

dimension. They show that peacekeeping today develops not only through formal institutions, but also through horizontal networks, local initiatives, and digital forms of interaction.

Conclusion. Women's participation in UN peacekeeping missions can be regarded as a genuine expression of the values of gender equality. It helps strengthen trust in missions, improves contact with the population, and allows the interests of groups that often remain less visible in traditional security policy to be taken into account. However, genuine equality is not limited to increasing the number of women within missions. It requires changes to institutions, selection procedures, career opportunities, and the very culture of peacekeeping. In the digital era, this task becomes even more complex, yet at the same time more promising. Technology can expand women's participation and amplify their voice if used responsibly, safely, and with attention to gender-related risks.

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