

INTEGRATING A GENDER PERSPECTIVE INTO EU CSDP MISSIONS AND OPERATIONS: DELIVERING ON THE STRATEGIC COMPASS

Event Report

INTRODUCTION

On 10 March 2023, the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) together with the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU and the European External Action Service (EEAS) welcomed researchers, policy practitioners and high-level officials from the EU institutions, Member States, NATO, and the United Nations (UN) to the timely expert seminar entitled 'Integrating a Gender Perspective into EU CSDP Missions and Operations: Delivering on the Strategic Compass'. Composed of three working group sessions in the morning, a high-level plenary in the afternoon, and insightful keynote speeches in-between, this full-day, in-person seminar shed light on the various dimensions of integrating a gender perspective into European security and defence, with special attention to military CSDP missions and operations.

How can European security and defence policies truly deliver on the EU's longstanding commitment to the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda? What does gender mainstreaming really mean in security and defence contexts, and how can respective ambitions formulated in the EU Strategic Compass be realised? What has the EU achieved so far, what best practices have been identified, and what are the obstacles still standing in the way of a truly gender-balanced and gender-responsive CSDP? These were just some of the central questions the more than 120 speakers and participants pondered over during the seminar.

ZOOMING OUT – HIGH-LEVEL KEYNOTE SPEECHES

Mainstreaming gender perspectives and implementing the WPS agenda is a long-standing priority for EU external action. The importance of delivering on respective commitments made in the Strategic Compass have driven the organisation of this expert seminar and have been substantiated by the presence and keynote remarks of all high-level officials who spoke throughout the day. Whether highlighted by the Swedish Ambassador to the Political and Security Committee Mikael Lindvall, in the morning, by the Chairman of the EU Military Committee (EUMC) General Robert Brieger and the Swedish Military Representative Rear Admiral Nykvist after lunch, or by EEAS Managing Director Benedikta von Seherr-Thoss and Sweden's Security Policy Director Johan Frisell at the end of the day, a range of common themes characterised the seminar's keynote speeches.

Both EU and national policymakers and military representatives agree that the EU has the necessary policy framework in place to enable a better integration of a gender perspective into the CSDP, as well as its missions and operations. Above all, these policy documents include the Strategic Compass, whose adoption in March 2022 manifested the commitment of all 27 Member States to further raise ambitions towards systematic gender mainstreaming. Yet, while progress has been made and certain guidelines and mechanisms have been established, the keynote speakers emphasised that more needs to be done to ensure a full-fledged implementation. Among others, they called for clear organisational mandates, for using gender analysis more systematically, for strengthening gender expertise and training, for enhancing gender-responsive leadership, and for sharing best practices with partners like NATO or the UN at all stages, including planning, fact-finding, implementation, and strategic reviews of CSDP missions and operations. Further, they highlighted the need to put a special emphasis on military CSDP structures as they have generally seen less progress than civilian CSDP.

The full-fledged implementation of the EU's gender ambitions will require a change of mindset and adoption of new working methods that recognise the importance of gender perspectives for the operational effectiveness of CSDP missions and operations. The keynote speakers remarked that gender mainstreaming must no longer be seen as the 'soft angle' of EU CSDP, but as a strong driver for more efficiency in the EU's external action.



As emphasised by EUMC Chairman General Brieger, gender inequality tends to be both a root cause and a driver for instability. Therefore, promoting gender equality is a critical component in preventing violent conflicts and increasing societies' resilience. Crisis situations impact women and men, boys, and girls in all their diversity very differently, all the while each of them can make different and useful contributions to resolving these crises. Integrating a gender perspective broadens our perception of human security and contributes to situational awareness. Whether in Brussels, in Member States' capitals, or in missions on the ground, EU actors must be aware of these realities, and lead by example. As put by the Swedish Military Representative Rear Admiral Jens Nykvist, the EU must continue to be "annoying, stubborn, and persistent" on the matter of gender mainstreaming.

Zooming In – Follow-up Baseline Study & Expert Working Group Sessions

To set the stage, Tiina Vahtras, Policy Officer for Human Rights and Gender at the EEAS, presented key findings of the EEAS' follow-up Baseline Study on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality into the EU's CSDP. Published in May 2022, the study noted significant progress in the institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming in CSDP missions and operations since 2016, when the first study was issued. The report highlighted increased availability of expertise, resources, operational guidance, and more systematic collection of sex-disaggregated data. One tangible achievement mentioned was the establishment of a network of gender advisors and gender focal points.

Yet, more work needs to be done to ensure gender equality and the full and meaningful participation of women especially in military CSDP missions and operations. Concretely, the report recommends including it more systematically into all missions' mandates and planning documents. For successful gender mainstreaming, everybody has an obligation to include gender in their regular tasks, managers must have the overall responsibility to ensure the implementation of gender equality objectives, while gender advisors need to be tasked with providing subject matter expertise. The report further recommends carrying out regular, context-specific gender analyses, increasing the availabilities of trainings to all staff categories, and fostering gender-responsive leadership to create an environment for the promotion of gender equality.

Terhi Lehtinen, Head of Division for Horizontal Coordination at the EU Military Staff (EUMS), noted that the EU Strategic Compass offers a strategic and accountable framework for action and provided examples of how the EUMS works to strengthen gender mainstreaming. Among others, the EUMS developed a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on Gender Expertise and Coordination, its own Gender Action Plan for the GAP III implementation, as well as Operational Guidance on Gender Mainstreaming in the military CSDP. In addition, it has set up two formal gender networks to support these efforts.

Leadership and Institutional Culture

Moderated by EUISS Associate Analyst Viola Fee Dreikhausen, the first working group, including Kenneth McDonagh, Associate Professor at Dublin City University, Lina Andéer, Gender-responsive Leadership Expert at the EEAS, Rory Keane, Head of the UN Liaison Office for Peace and Security, and Matilda Lidström Dougnac, Senior Gender Advisor within the Swedish Armed Forces as main speakers, focused on ways to improve gender-responsive leadership in CSDP missions and operations and aimed to lay out a path towards establishing an institutional culture that fosters the full and equal participation of women and men, while also promoting gender mainstreaming more systematically.

The working group came to three main conclusions: first, it remains key to keep in mind that the concepts of leadership and culture are enormously broad and require to be properly unpacked in order to translate into actionable plans. Accordingly, second, the broad notions surrounding gender mainstreaming need to be broken down into operational tasks that are so embedded into CSDP mandates and planning that they do not fall off the radar when unexpected crises unfold. Third, leadership and institutional culture are tightly linked; gender-responsive leadership shapes institutional culture, and vice versa, an enabling institutional culture encourages people to take on leadership roles. Accordingly, there is a need to combine top-down and bottom-up approaches, of putting the right policy frameworks and regulations in place and at the same time nurturing knowledge and awareness at all levels involved in EU CSDP missions and operations, including at Headquarters.

Gender Expertise, Capacity Building and Training

The second parallel-running working group session, moderated by EUISS Director Gustav Lindstrom, dealt with the question of how to ensure adequate gender expertise in the analysis, planning, implementation, and evaluation of CSDP missions and operations. As main speakers, Agata Szymanska, Senior Project Officer at the Folke Bernadotte Academy, Colonel Juan Lucero, Leader for Gender in Military CSDP at the Spanish Defence Ministry, Taina Järvinen,

Senior Advisor at the European Centre of Excellence for Civilian Crisis Management, and Terhi Lehtinen, Head of Division for Horizontal Coordination at the EUMS, set the stage for a vibrant discussion within this working group.

Two key take-aways could be derived from the discussions: first, political will, strong institutional commitment, and organisational culture, as well as accountability mechanisms are the foundations for improving gender expertise within any organisation and especially within the CSDP missions and operations. A ‘few strong spirits’ do not suffice to bring about organisational change; instead, a ubiquitous sense of responsibility, backed by reliable data, analysis, and attention to detail, is indispensable. Second, building adequate gender competency is a long-term effort that has to be broken up into multiple smaller steps, including the continuous development of training modules and involvement of respective training curricula in the field and higher up in the institutions. After all, a commitment to lifelong learning, constantly adapted to new geopolitical and societal realities, will be needed.

Gender and Operational Effectiveness

The third working group session was moderated by EUISS Senior Analyst Jan Joel Andersson, and with Megan Bastick, Gender and Security Fellow at DCAF, Matthew Hurley, Senior Lecturer at Sheffield, Hallam University, Brigadier General Katrien D’Hert, Director of Logistics at the EUMS, and Lieutenant Colonel Katherine Prudhoe, Gender Advisor for the NATO International Military Staff as main speakers, it focused on how to integrate gender equality into all stages of CSDP and missions and operations, thus leading to more effective interventions.

This working group departed from the observation that the remilitarisation of our times makes the integration of gender perspectives into security and defence more salient than ever before. The correlation between equal treatment and involvement in military missions and operations and increased operational effectiveness has been identified long time ago, and hence, a sense of disappointment about the rather limited progress on the matter characterised the discussion. Three main aspects to bring about lasting change were highlighted: first, the process of awareness building, which includes a standardised terminology that avoids the mixing of terms like equality and diversity, the breaking of stereotypes and the clear association of gender equality and military objectives through strategic communication; second, the need for accountability through key performance indicators and comprehensive operational evaluations; and third, the seizing of opportunities at strategic, operational and tactical levels, bridging the gap between leadership and boots on the ground and attributing the necessary resources to do so, also in collaboration with partners like NATO and the UN.

BEYOND THE WHY – HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY

In the afternoon, the seminar convened a high-level plenary discussion between Vice Admiral Hervé Bléjean, Director General of the EUMS, Benedikta von Seherr-Thoss, Managing Director for CSDP at the EEAS, Ambassador Stella Ronner-Grubačić, EU Ambassador for Gender and Diversity, Irene Fellin, the NATO Secretary General’s Special Representative for Women, Peace, and Security, as well as Major General Johan Pekkari, Chief of the Directorate of Strategic Plans and Policy at the Swedish Armed Forces.

From their interventions, four central points could be derived: first, whether within the EUMS, the EEAS, NATO, or the Swedish Armed Forces, it is clear that gender mainstreaming is not ‘a nice-to-have’, but one of the vital ‘moral factors for warfighting capability’ and thus indispensable for each organisation’s relevance, credibility, and authority in the world. Second, all speakers recognised that the EU has gotten the conceptual basis right, i.e., that it has succeeded in putting the necessary policy frameworks and guidelines in place. Yet, it now has to move beyond those strategic and operational documents as well as the tendency of ‘ticking boxes’ and instead, face the many challenges still preventing proper implementation from taking place. Integrating a gender perspective requires a change in the mindset and a new way of working, which includes ensuring a diversity of views in the military CSDP planning, implementation, and reviews. Third, for this, gender mainstreaming should finally rise to the top of security and defence agendas both at the national and EU-level, thus fostering joint ownership and leadership, including through role models. A stronger institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming would help preventing gender from dropping off the table as it is still too often the case. Fourth, and closely related to the points raised in the working group sessions, the keynote speakers emphasised the importance of improving research and analysis on gender equality and the implementation of WPS commitments in the military sector. This would not only help taking stock of current realities and future progress but would also allow for establishing more targeted accountability mechanisms, and guide policy interventions. As put by Managing Director von Seherr-Thoss, achieving gender mainstreaming in the EU’s CSDP is a ‘hard core security issue’ and requires pragmatism and stamina that starts at home and ends with effectiveness and excellence on the ground.