

## The Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations Call for Letters of Interest - Fourth Programming Round

This **Call for Letters of Interest (LOI)** should be read together with the Fund's [Terms of Reference](#) and [Operations Manual](#). Where the documents differ, particularly in the case of this fourth programming round, this Call for Letters of Interest will take priority.

The EIF can only accept **one military LOI and one police LOI per country**. Each LOI can seek funding for one or more projects.

The EIF Secretariat can only accept **fully completed LOIs developed using its templates and annexes**.

### Background

Established by the United Nations, Canada, and Member States in 2019 and hosted by UN Women, the Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations (EIF) is an innovative, [multi-donor United Nations trust fund](#) that aims to accelerate progress toward achieving the United Nations gender targets in line with Security Council resolutions (SCRs) and the United Nations [Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018-2028](#) (UGPS).

By providing funding support and incentives to Troop and/or Police Contributing Countries (T/PCCs) to identify and overcome barriers to deployment, the Fund's activities also directly support the Department of Peace Operations' (DPO) [Action For Peacekeeping](#) (A4P) and [A4P+](#) initiatives – and encourage Member States to take concrete actions to increase the deployment of women in peacekeeping and advance the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

The EIF is one part of the Canadian Government's broader [Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations](#) launched in 2017. The Elsie Initiative is a 10-year, multilateral project which includes several other components, including the creation of a publicly accessible and comprehensive barrier assessment methodology—[Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations](#) (MOWIP)—developed by the [Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance](#) (DCAF) and Cornell University's [Gender and Security Sector Lab](#). It also includes work with the United Nations to create more receptive environments in peacekeeping missions, through the United Nations Department of Operational Support (DOS) [Elsie Initiative for Field Missions](#) project.

### Introduction

This is the EIF's fourth programming round. Interested **T/PCCs**—both current and prospective—and United Nations **organizations**<sup>1</sup> are invited to apply for funding using the EIF LOI template and the EIF LOI Explainer, which provides guidance on how to complete the LOI. These documents are available on the EIF website: [link](#).

### Scope and Purpose of EIF Support

1. To support current and prospective T/PCCs in:
  - i. conducting a barrier assessment to identify the nature and extent of obstacles impeding their deployment of trained and qualified women peacekeepers in their national context, and
  - ii. implementing projects to address specific obstacles identified through the assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> Other stakeholders, such as CSOs, cannot apply to the fund independently. CSOs can participate in funded activities, however, their activities must be undertaken in partnership with, and under a proposal from, a T/PCC or PUNO.

2. To allow T/PCCs to be reimbursed for certain additional financial costs related to the deployment of women, where these costs are not covered under existing United Nations' reimbursement policies.
3. To incentivize T/PCCs to increase the meaningful deployment of trained and qualified women peacekeepers by offering a 'Gender-strong unit (GSU) premium'. The focus on deploying GSUs—rather than individual women—is to ensure that women serve in a working and living environment that enables their full, equal and meaningful participation in peace operations.
4. To support, in targeted and limited manner, pilot projects within United Nations Peacekeeping Operations that aim to improve deployment and living conditions for women peacekeepers.
5. To monitor and evaluate the contributions of these measures to advancing the meaningful participation of uniformed women, and to share relevant insights, where possible.

This Fund recognizes that although the United Nations has an evolving financing system that is critical to the organization's ability to conduct peace operations, none of the existing mechanisms focus specifically on increasing the deployment of uniformed women peacekeepers. Therefore, the EIF innovates, complements and strengthens United Nations peacekeeping financing by specifically supporting the meaningful participation of uniformed women as peacekeepers.

Given its time and resource limitations, the EIF cannot address all barriers to the participation of uniformed women in United Nations peace operations. However, it aims to accelerate the pace of change towards increased meaningful participation of uniformed women in United Nations peace operations and serve as a pilot initiative that Member States may wish to build on as they pursue their stated goal of improving women's representation in United Nations peace operations.

## Funding Modalities and Proposals

The EIF can consider a proposal and provide funding for the following three funding modalities: 1) barrier assessments; 2) flexible project funding; and 3) gender-strong unit premium.

### 1. Barrier Assessment

The EIF can provide funding to carry out a barrier assessment. This is designed to identify the key factors that hinder the deployment of uniformed women peacekeepers to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. The type and impact of these barriers may differ across T/PCCs. A barrier assessment provides an empirical foundation for identifying and designing further projects to increase the meaningful participation of uniformed women in peace operations. It also serves as a baseline against which progress can be measured.

A barrier assessment methodology has been developed by DCAF and Cornell University, known as the [Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations](#) (MOWIP). The following resources are available:

- An overview of the MOWIP methodology is on the [EIF website](#).
- The [MOWIP Methodology Handbook](#) is available on the [DCAF webpage](#) in English, French and Spanish.
- The MOWIP toolbox—including explainers and templates—is also on the [DCAF webpage](#), with downloadable ZIP folders English, French and Spanish.
- Existing published MOWIP barrier assessments can be found on the [EIF webpage](#).

Applicants wishing to apply for barrier assessment funding may choose to:

- Use the MOWIP methodology (recommended), or
- Identify and apply a methodology comparable in scope to the MOWIP methodology, and in line with the Barrier Assessment Criteria in the EIF [TOR](#) (Appendix 1). In this case, the EIF Secretariat must be satisfied that the proposed methodology meets the requirements outlined in Appendix 1.

- Importantly, any barrier assessment must include both primary and secondary data collection and analysis. This includes, but is not limited to:
  - relevant legislation,
  - the distribution of women and men in national military and police institutions,
  - institutional policies and practices regarding peacekeeping
  - Perception-based indicators that capture the attitudes and experiences of *both women and men*, to better understand the barriers.

## 2. Flexible project funding

The EIF can finance—in whole or in part—projects that directly increase the meaningful participation of uniformed women peacekeepers in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, or that take a longer-term approach to increase the number of women in the national pipeline for deployment. To encourage innovation, the EIF does not prescribe the exact nature of projects or activities.

**For its fourth programming cycle, a completed credible barrier assessment is a requirement to apply for and receive project funding.** Proposals must use the findings of the barrier assessment to identify and prioritise activities, and to propose innovative, targeted and sustainable solutions to the barriers identified.

## 3. Gender Strong Unit (GSU) premium

The EIF can provide a premium to a T/PCC for the deployment of a GSU. Only T/PCCs are eligible to apply for this [funding modality](#).

### **What is a GSU? <sup>2</sup>**

*A gender-strong unit is a unit that includes substantial representation of women overall and in positions of authority, has provided gender-equity training to all unit members, and has adequate materiel to ensure parity of deployment conditions (including equipment, facilities, accommodation etc.) for women and men peacekeepers.<sup>3</sup>*

## Proposal Specific Guidelines

In keeping with the Elsie Initiative’s aim to promote innovation and encourage transformational change in women’s meaningful participation in peace operations, the criteria for proposals for incentive payments are not prescriptive. Instead, it is for applicants to identify the nature, scope, and value of their proposal, taking into account the following guidelines:

The proposal must:

- Clearly and significantly increase the number—and proportion—of uniformed women in a formed unit that will deploy to a peacekeeping operation (military unit or formed police unit). At a minimum, the percentage of women must exceed the targets set out in the [Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018-2028](#) by 5 full percentage points.<sup>4</sup>
- Demonstrate that the women deployed will be fully integrated into the unit and contribute to its mandate and all unit assigned tasks, including patrolling, security tasks, engagement, and incidence response. This includes confirming and providing evidence, that all women are fully trained for the roles they perform in the unit and have participated in all pre-deployment training and preparation.

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘GSU’ relates only to the Elsie Initiative Fund. It should not be confused with the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) Police Division’s (DP) gender-integrated Formed Police Unit (FPU). A gender integrated FPU is a mixed gender-integrated unit, in which at least 32 women are represented across all functions including command, have more operational impact, and as *such should be prioritized for deployment*.

<sup>3</sup> [EIF TOR](#) – Page 16.

<sup>4</sup> The 2023 target stated for FPU is 13%; therefore, the FPU must be at least 18%. Similarly, for troops, the stated target is 10%, therefore troops must be at least 15%.

- Demonstrate that there are adequate procedures in place to address instances of sexual harassment and assault, as well as sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). See the [United Nations Standards of Conduct](#).
- Demonstrate that appropriate contingent-owned (COE) equipment will be provided for both men and women peacekeepers, in accordance with the [COE Manual](#).<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, all unit members must meet, and ideally exceed, existing DPO requirements for pre-deployment training on gender in the military/police, sexual and gender-based violence, conflict-related sexual violence, sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse. See the [United Nations Peacekeeping Resource Hub](#) for information on the United Nations Peacekeeping Core Pre-Deployment Training Materials (CPTM).

Proposals for a GSU should also strive to demonstrate:

- A commitment to employing women across all ranks and across all sub-units. Ideally, women would be proportionally represented at all ranks in the unit.
- A clear plan on how the increased representation of women in peacekeeping will be sustained over time, including after project ends.

The proposal should cover the full deployment period of the unit (usually 12 months), and for two subsequent deployment periods (usually 12 months each) – a total of three years. The second-year premium would represent a 25% increase on the first-year; and the third-year premium would represent a 50% increase on the first-year amount. The EIF [GSU calculator](#), available on the EIF website, can be used to calculate the premium.

For GSU premium proposals, preference will be given to submissions that specify a T/PCC's intentions to reinvest the premium in activities that further advance the EIF's objectives.

Proposals for GSU premiums must be approved by the EIF before the unit deploys. The GSU premium is a direct payment to the T/PCC, made after the unit has completed deployment and the EIF has verified that it met the guidelines for a GSU<sup>6</sup>. The EIF will not pay the premium for a fraction of a unit (a company or platoon in an infantry battalion) – the unit must be stand-alone.

**Note: The amount of a GSU premium is an amount separate to project funding and is calculated on the size of the deployed unit. Refer to the [EIF GSU calculator](#) to calculate the GSU reimbursement amount.**

## Letter of Interest

Each LOI can request funding for one or more of the activities and funding modalities described above, as follows:

- Barrier assessment only
- Project funding only – **available only if a credible barrier assessment has already been conducted**
- Project funding and GSU premium combined – **must be accompanied by a completed and credible barrier assessment.**
- Barrier assessment and GSU premium combined
- GSU premium only – it is **strongly recommended** that a credible barrier assessment be conducted if one has not already been completed.

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<sup>5</sup> The COE Manual is subject to review every three years by the [COE Working Group](#). 2023 Issue Papers to note: [Secretariat Issue Paper #23: Implementation of Recommendations by the Elsie Initiative for Field Missions' Facilities and Infrastructure](#); and Member State Issue Papers (i) [Gender-Responsive Improvements to the COE Manual](#) (inclusion of women's medical requirements) and (ii) [Gender-Responsive Improvements to the COE Manual](#) (inclusion of UGPS, abuse of authority, harassment and sexual harassment). 2026 Issue Papers pending: [link](#)

<sup>6</sup> [EIF TOR](#) – Pages 16-17.

## Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible for funding, a proposal and application to the EIF must contribute to at least one of the four outcomes in the EIF's [Monitoring and Evaluation Framework](#),<sup>7</sup> and must include at least one indicator for the selected outcome(s).

### EIF Monitoring and Evaluation Framework outcomes

1. Expanded country-specific knowledge of barriers to deployment of uniformed women peacekeepers to United Nations peace operations
2. Increased meaningful deployment of uniformed women peacekeepers to United Nations peace operations
3. Increased pool of uniformed women eligible to deploy as United Nations peacekeepers
4. Improved working or/and living conditions for uniformed women peacekeepers in United Nations peace operations

### Additional Eligibility Criteria for National Governments

National Governments must also meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Be a United Nations T/PCC, or demonstrate a serious intention<sup>8</sup> to become one, as reflected in the LOI
- Demonstrate high-level commitment, with the LOI signed by a Minister or Chief of Defense, Minister of Interior or Police Commissioner, or equivalent authority
- Provide a clear and detailed rationale for the proposed project in the LOI
- Meet the requirements of the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy ([HRDDP](#)) and the Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers ([HACT](#)) assessment, and remain eligible for United Nations support following a risk assessment and the application of any required mitigating measures.

These mandatory processes (HRDDP and HACT) will be conducted by the EIF Secretariat after receipt of a detailed proposal, during Step 5 of the Programming Cycle. They are not required for submission of the LOI. However, T/PCCs should be aware of these requirements and be prepared to actively support and facilitate them.

National governments are also required to report in accordance with the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) categories. Guidance will be provided to projects approved for the development of a detailed proposal.

### Additional Eligibility Criteria for Participating United Nations Organizations (PUNOs)

The EIF may support projects submitted by PUNOs that are designed to implement and test innovative approaches to enhance the meaningful participation of uniformed women deployed in United Nations peace operations. These projects are expected to address gaps not normally covered by existing budgetary and extra-budgetary resources. The PUNO must commit to any further scaling of projects—to be undertaken with other resources—as well as to cover any ongoing and sustainment costs beyond the end of the project.

As a guideline, the allocation of EIF funds to UN-led projects should not normally exceed 20% of total available funding.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> [EIF MEF](#) - Section 4.2.2.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Ministerial commitments made at high-level / international peace and security forums

<sup>9</sup> Projects where PUNOs receive funds in coordination with a T/PCC are not included in the 20 per cent of United Nations-led projects.

## Prioritisation Criteria

In addition to meeting the eligibility criteria described above, all LOI and detailed proposals will be assessed against the following established prioritisation criteria. Applicants must include information in the LOI on how the proposal addresses each of these.

*Innovation:* The proposal must demonstrate **innovative solutions and new approaches** to overcoming barriers in the national context or field mission environment.

*Risk assessment:* The proposal must identify the risks associated **with project implementation**, along with strategies to mitigate them.

*Sustainability and extension:* The proposal must show how the increased deployment and representation of women in peacekeeping will be sustained over time, including after the project and associated funding ends. Preference will be given to projects that are likely to contribute to a **sustained increase** in the deployment of uniformed women by a T/PCC. This includes projects that demonstrate **clear national ownership** and are likely to yield insights and lessons that can be shared with other T/PCCs.

*Engagement:* Applicants must demonstrate how women—**particularly uniformed women**—will play integral roles throughout the project cycle including in the project design and implementation.

*Targets:* The proposal must include **clear and specific targets** (numbers and percentages) for increasing the participation of women peacekeepers and the roles they would deploy into (if applicable), within the project timeframe.

*Baseline Data:* The proposal must include the **current percentage of women in the national armed forces and/or police service**, and at what levels. This provides the baseline against which progress can be measured and helps to substantiate the project's objectives.

*Impact and strategic relevance:* Preference will be given to projects that

- contribute to multiple outcomes
- include baseline data and realistic targets
- are likely to result in the deployment of a **significant number of uniformed women**, including in strategic and leadership roles
- Are proposed by T/PCCs, especially those that eligible for Official Development Assistance (ODA)

*Cost effectiveness:* Applications must include **reasonable and well justified costs** and demonstrate an **economical use of resources**. Financial and in-kind contributions from other sources are encouraged and should be clearly stated in the LOI.

*Project Management, Monitoring and Reporting:* The proposal's approach to project management, monitoring and reporting—including how key risks and mitigation strategies are addressed—will be assessed. All recipient organizations and implementing partners must ensure that **robust monitoring and reporting** mechanisms are established and included as part of the detailed project document. Attention should be paid to alignment with the **EIF Monitoring and Evaluation Framework** - [link](#).

## Proposal size

For Project Funding proposals, the maximum amount for each proposal for the fourth programming round is USD1,500,000. The minimum amount is USD 100,000.

GSU proposals are separate from this project funding ceiling. A T/PCC may request a GSU premium, in addition to project funding of up to USD 1,500,000 USD, within a single LOI.

## Duration

The implementation period for project funding will normally not exceed two years. The expected duration for a barrier assessment is approximately 12 months. For the GSU premium proposals only, the duration is up to three years.

## Governance

**Due Diligence.** Adequate due diligence of all proposals is essential to managing programmatic risks to the Fund. As part of Step 5 of the Programming Cycle, the EIF Secretariat is responsible for conducting due diligence on all proposals. This includes a review of the project proposal and its risk management strategy, the conduct of the [HACT](#) micro assessment, the [HRDDP](#), and application of the Fund-level risk management strategy to that proposal. The EIF Secretariat will contract international consultants to support these assessments.

**Project Specific Risk Management.** As part of Step 5 of the Programming Cycle, applicants must develop a specific risk management strategy for their proposal. The strategy should outline the identification, monitoring, tolerance levels, and responses to relevant risks.

Each proposal must **explicitly address the safety and security of all women military, or police personnel** involved or supported in the proposal. After applying mitigating measures, women personnel must not be subject to greater residual risks—to their physical safety, psychosocial well-being, and reputation—than their male counterparts.

## 4th Programming Round Dates:

|        |  |                                |
|--------|--|--------------------------------|
| Step 1 | Launch of the Call for LOI   | Thursday, 9 October 2025       |
| Step 2 | Deadline to submit LOIs to the EIF   | Wednesday, 31 January 2026     |
| Step 3 | Review of LOIs   | February – March 2026          |
| Step 4 | Notification of selected proposals for full submission   | April 2026                     |
| Step 5 | Development and submission of detailed proposals and budgets   | May – October 2026             |
| Step 6 | Technical review of proposals <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Review by EIF Secretariat; feedback addressed by T/PCCs and/or PUNOs</li><li>Review by Technical Committee, feedback addressed by T/PCC and/or PUNO</li></ul>  | October 2026 - July 2027       |
| Step 7 | Steering Committee approval and fund disbursement<br>Subject to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>EIF and Technical Committee feedback addressed</li><li>Final PRODOC signed by relevant signatories (T/PCCs and PUNOs)</li><li>Required agreements signed and in place, as applicable<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Data Use Agreement (DUA) for MOWIP</li><li>Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) if T/PCC is the fund recipient</li><li>Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) if PUNO is the fund recipient</li></ul></li></ul> | November 2026 – September 2027 |

**How to Apply:** T/PCCs and United Nations organizations are invited to complete the LOI template and email it—in both MS Word and signed PDF formats—to the EIF Secretariat at [elsie.mptf@unwomen.org](mailto:elsie.mptf@unwomen.org) no later than Wednesday, **31 January 2026**.

**Selection and Notification.** After the review process, the EIF Secretariat will notify all applicants of the outcome of their LOI submission.