



Republic of Fiji Military Forces

2026 Report on Results of the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) Assessment



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This report uses the Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) methodology, developed by the Cornell GSS Lab and DCAF.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors from Cornell GSS Lab and Ethos CRS, and are based on the best available information.

The report does not necessarily reflect the views of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces, the Fiji Government, UN Women, the EIF, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organisations.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACCF	Accident Compensation Commission Fiji
BET	Battle Efficiency Test
CO	Commanding Officer
EIF	Elsie Initiative Fund
FFF	Fact finding form
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
FPF	Fiji Police Force
FPU	Formed police units
GSS	Gender and Security Sector
JTFC	Joint Task Force Command
MFO	Multinational Force and Observers
MoDVA	Ministry of Defence and Veteran Affairs
MOWIP	Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace
NAP	National Action Plan
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RFL	Required Fitness Level
RFMF	Republic of Fiji Military Forces
SEA	Sexual exploitation and abuse
SEAH	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Sexual Harassment
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SWN	Service Women's Network
TPCC	Troop- and police- contributing countries
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNDOF	United Nations Disengagement Observer Force
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNMISET	United Nations Mission of Support to East Timor
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UNTAET	United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor
UNTSO	United Nations Truce Supervision Organization
WaM	Wives and Mothers
WRAC	Women's Royal Army Corps
WPS	Women, peace, and security

1) Executive summary

The Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) assessment for the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) examines the RFMF ability to deploy women to and ensure their meaningful participation in United Nations (UN) peace operations through ten issue areas. It uses three data collection tools, a fact finding form (FFF), key decision-maker interviews and a survey. The project was implemented between April 2025 and June 2026. The national assessment partner, Ethos CRS, undertook the data collection for this project from June 30th to August 8th 2025. The first draft of the report was completed in March 2026 in preparation for the validation workshop.

a) Top good practices that can be shared and replicated elsewhere

- Respondents' understanding of deployment criteria was largely correct
- Men and women express confidence about physical fitness requirements thanks to accommodations
- Lack of perceived skill or rank were not factors among respondents who did not volunteer for peacekeeping selection
- Peacekeeping is part of Fiji's National Security Strategy 2025-2029
- Personnel perceive professional, social, and financial benefits from participating in peace operations
- Peacekeepers are recognised and celebrated for their service, and can receive career benefits
- Female trailblazers among RFMF personnel are celebrated among key decision-makers
- Male champions support and advance women, and senior leaders expressed an interest in gender training
- Most peacekeepers served under a female immediate supervisor while deployed
- Fiji's National Security Strategy advocates for gender mainstreaming
- Strong culture of mentorship within the RFMF
- Social cohesion formed through positive bonding in sport, music, and community outreach activities

b) Top barriers to women's meaningful participation in UN deployments

- No internal complaint system in place and minimal external complaint mechanisms for the public
- Room for improvement in awareness of official RFMF policies and procedures on sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment
- Negative bonding activities (hazing) and activities that demean women (such as adult entertainment, exchanging pictures of women or sexual bragging)
- Traditional gender-related beliefs around purity, chastity, and masculinity may exacerbate gender inequality
- Women lack breastfeeding support
- Lack of access to childcare
- Personnel feel that salary is insufficient
- Personnel feel they miss out on career opportunities while on leave
- Women with children significantly more likely to deploy than childless women, but pregnancy barriers still exist
- No formal policy for paternity leave
- No direct recruitment drives for women, and concerns about retention of women
- Underrepresentation of women in leadership positions
- Lack of access to adequate sleeping and bathroom facilities, especially for women

c) Priorities to be considered when developing follow-up activities to overcome barriers

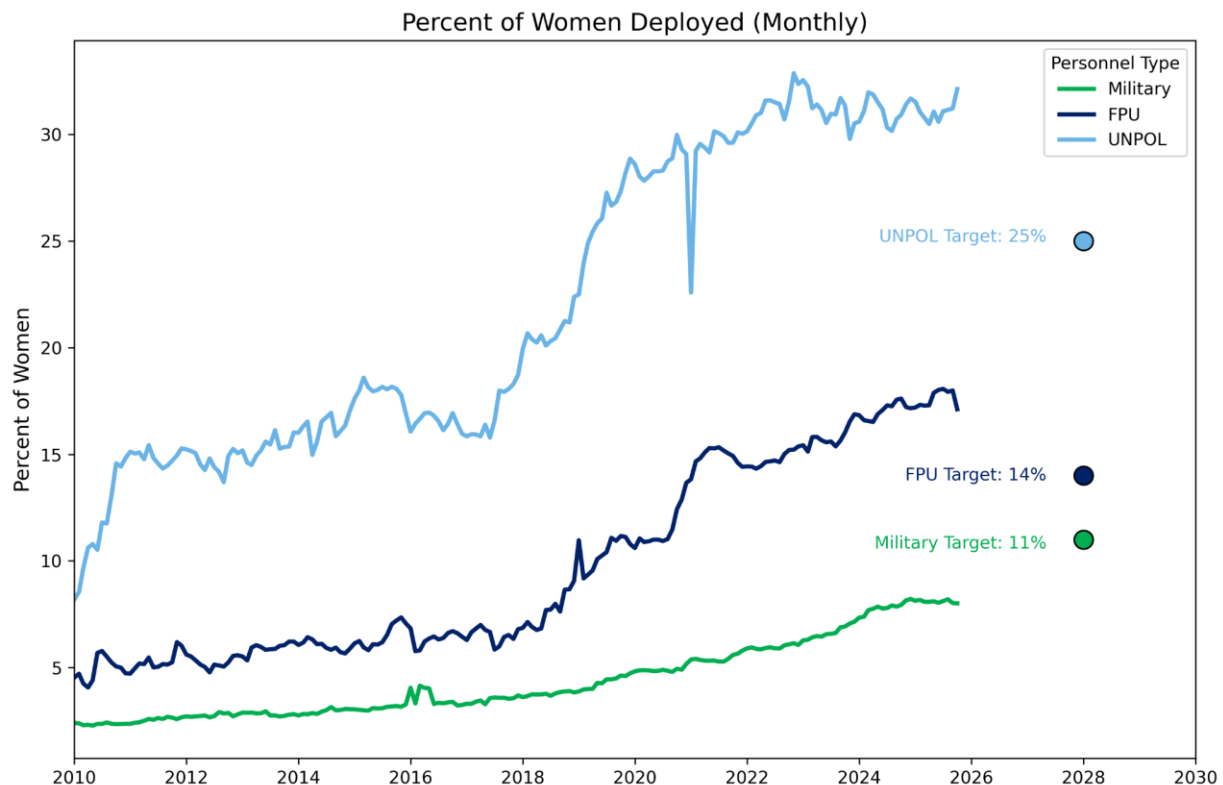
- In addition to existing complaints mechanisms, the RFMF should establish a civilian unit that is independent from the normal chain of command and addresses personnel's complaints and grievances [similar to the Inspector General system in the US military]:
 - This independent complaints office should be staffed with civilians, reporting to the Ministry of Defence and Veteran Affairs (MoDVA) and should be equipped to handle complaints from both civilians and RFMF personnel.
 - In addition to existing mechanisms to bypass superiors if personnel are uncomfortable reporting to them, RFMF complainants must have another, independent, option to file complaints outside the existing complaints system (chain of command).
 - MoDVA nominates and selects staff.
 - The complaints mechanism should also be equipped with a whistle blower policy to protect and anonymise reporters.
 - Violators of the whistleblower policy should face clear and immediate punishment up to dismissal from the RFMF pending the results of a thorough investigation.
 - Find a building to house this organisation in a designated location (not existing RFMF facilities), perhaps outside of town in a remote area.
- Provide childcare subsidies to support personnel who need childcare (especially outside of Suva).
- Look to renovate the kindergarten at Queen Elizabeth Barracks to develop a day care centre that is available to care for young children who are not yet of school age.
- The RFMF budget committee should prioritise a review of (to increase) existing pay scales and lodging allowances among personnel of all ranks in the RFMF.
- Reinstate paternity leave as its own leave policy such that paternity leave is not deducted from annual leave. Paternity leave should be a minimum of five working days to be in line with the national policy.
- Increase the representation of women in specialised positions and operational field assignments.
- Increase women's local deployment in both Naval and Land Forces.
- Enforce an initial gender quota minimum for senior leadership to consist of 20% women by 2030.
- Improve gender-specific (women's) facilities at existing bases, including Stanley Brown Naval Base and RFN Viti Togalevu Naval Base. Improvements in these facilities can be modelled on the new base in Lami Bay.
- Explore options to **renovate** and **build new** facilities (prioritising women's facility needs first, including the addition of changing rooms for women). Facilities should be prioritised according to the current need for renovation/new builds at the end of this report.
- Install bathroom facilities exclusively for women that accommodate menstruation needs. These facilities must be large enough to serve as changing rooms:
 - Sanitary bins should be available in all RFMF women's washrooms.
 - All bathroom stalls should be outfitted with sanitary napkin receptacles (bins).
- Sanitary products should be made available for free in all canteens to accommodate women's menstruation needs.

2) Introduction

a) Why do we need more meaningful participation of women in UN peace operations?

Over the past two decades, despite efforts to increase women's participation in UN peace operations, including the ten UN Security Council resolutions on women, peace, and security (WPS), the overall percentage of women deployed in peace operations has increased slowly and unevenly. (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Proportion of uniformed women deployed in peace operations as of October 2025.



As shown in Figure 1, the UN target for 2028 is for women to make up 20% of formed police units (FPUs), 30% of individual police officers (IPOs), 25% of military observers and military professional deployments, and 15% of military contributions to peace operations. However, as of October 2025, the statistics of women in uniform participating in UN peace operations indicated uneven progress: women made up 14.4% of FPUs, 30.5% of IPOs, 25.2% of experts on mission, 17.7% of staff officers, and 5.9% of troops.¹ While TPCCs are well on track to meet gender parity goals for individual deployments, efforts remain necessary to achieve parity goals when it comes to contingent or FPU deployments.

1. Women's meaningful participation is a matter of national security

The body could say something about how contributing to UN PK missions is an investment in the strength of the armed forces and security of the country. A military that recruits the best people from across the population is a more capable force. Meaningful participation of women increases the force's readiness and quality and as a result, boosts national security.

We can also say something about how an equitable force can increase trust among the public (happy to provide citations from academic research) which eventually increases government legitimacy. Then we can say how this is important for RFMF given that the institution has had a tense past in its relationship with the civil society and the government. I think this is really important to highlight in this section.

¹ United Nations, 'Gender Statistics (Contribution of Uniformed Personnel by Mission, Personnel Type, and Gender)', 30 March 2022, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/07_gender_statistics_47_february_2022.pdf

2. Operational effectiveness: promoting the interests of the United Nations and the international community

Having more women in uniform in peace operations and ensuring that they can participate in a meaningful way also contributes to the increasingly complex mandates of UN peace operations. Since 2000, almost all UN mandates have included provisions for gender equality, the promotion of women's rights, and the protection of civilians. The UN Department of Peace Operations (UN DPO) lists six reasons why it is important for women to participate in peace operations :

- i. **Improved operations and performance:** Women's meaningful participation increases the credibility of peacekeeping missions given the gendered reality of conflicts such as the effect of armed conflict on women and girls and given sexual and gender-based violence towards women in many conflicts.
- ii. **Improved access:** A greater diversity of personnel improves the ability of operations to interact with a wider range of women, men, girls and boys within the local population. This strengthens the operation's ability to gather intelligence and makes it more aware of often overlooked risks, such as gender-based violence. In some cases, civilian men prefer to talk to female soldiers because they perceive them as less threatening than their male colleagues.
- iii. **Reflect the communities we serve:** UN peace operations must convince local populations that they do not represent the interests of one group, but rather a collective commitment of the international community to peace and security. Diverse members of the local population are more likely to cooperate with the peace operation if they see that it includes people with whom they can identify.
- iv. **Building trust:** A diverse personnel in the peace operation ensures better access to the population, increased engagement, and therefore a better understanding of the different needs and security concerns of all women, men, girls, boys, and people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in the community; the local population is then more likely to trust and support them.
- v. **Help prevent and reduce conflict and confrontation:** Increased trust between the local population and peace operations personnel increases the likelihood that programs related to disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, security sector reform, peacebuilding, and sustainable development will be successful, because they will be designed more inclusively, more effectively, and with greater buy-in from national actors. In addition, peace operations that value female and male personnel equally can influence the attitudes, values, and skills used in the operation. Skills considered as stereotypically 'feminine', such as verbal de-escalation and medical assistance, are beginning to be considered as important as skills considered masculine, such as the ability to drive or use a firearm. As a result, for example, levels of confrontation between personnel and the local population are reduced in places such as checkpoints with more gender-balanced personnel.
- vi. **Inspire and create role models:** UN personnel can inspire the next generation of security sector personnel in the host country. Their behaviour and diverse representation can challenge gender roles, change attitudes towards gender equality, and show alternative models of security delivery to those that have been experienced by the population during conflict. This can help the host country promote a diverse security sector and lead to a positive change in institutional culture.

b) Justification/rationale for the selection of Fiji

The Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) have been participating in the MOWIP Assessment since 2025 as part of a joint initiative with the Ministry of Policing and Communication and the Ministry of Defence and Veterans' Affairs (MoDVA). The MOWIP Assessments of the RFMF and Fiji Police Force (FPF) examine the structural, social, and institutional barriers to women's participation in the security forces with a view to identifying feasible and meaningful strategies towards increasing inclusion across Fiji's peacekeeping operations.

Fiji's commitment to international peacekeeping

Fiji is the most significant troop-contributing country among Pacific Island Countries and maintains a long-standing commitment to international peace and security. This is reflected in over four decades of continuous participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations, including in Lebanon, Sinai, Iraq, Syria, Timor-Leste, South Sudan, Darfur, Liberia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Kuwait, Namibia, Cambodia and the Solomon Islands.²

As of September 2025, Fiji ranked as the 32nd highest contributor worldwide to UN Peacekeeping with 338 personnel, including military personnel, currently serving on six missions.³ Peacekeeping is recognised as a core component of Fiji's foreign policy and national security strategy with the Fiji Foreign Policy White Paper (2024) identifying peacekeeping contributions as central to the country's role as a 'good international citizen'.⁴ The National Security Strategy 2025–2029 similarly integrates UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security (WPS) principles across the defence and security sector, underscoring Fiji's strategic alignment with global commitments to inclusive peace operations.⁵

Fiji's commitment to an inclusive, people-centred security doctrine is further reflected through its participation in regional frameworks such as the Pacific Islands Forum's 2025 Ocean of Peace Declaration – first proposed by Fiji's Prime Minister, Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka, in 2023 – and 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security.⁶

Social cultural context

The Republic of Fiji is a multicultural South Pacific island nation with a population approaching one million, spread across more than 300 islands situated north northeast of New Zealand, east of Australia, and south southwest of Hawai'i. It has complex socio and political history spanning more than three thousand years of traditional iTaukei culture, a period of British colonial governance (1874–1970), and post-independence parliamentary democracy. A series of four military coups in 1987, 2000, and 2006 has also shaped Fiji's post-independence political landscape.

According to the 2017 census,⁷ approximately 57% of Fijian citizens are iTaukei (indigenous Fijian), 37% are Indo-Fijian, and the remaining 6% are Rotuman, part-European, Chinese, or other Pacific Islander and minority ethnic groups. Fiji's multicultural society is characterised by diverse social norms and religious traditions from indigenous chiefship and kinship systems to introduced world religions including Christianity, Hinduism and Islam – that shape expectations around leadership, authority, and public service.

Sociological research on Fiji has shown that communal obligations, religious values, and gendered expectations influence women's engagement in security roles.⁸ Studies further document how women navigate these norms through strategies of agency, resilience, and adaptation within male-dominated security environments.⁹ These societal norms and women's adaptive strategies provide important context for examining household-level constraints, social acceptance, organisational culture, and also women's voices for increasing their meaningful participation. These are key dimensions that are assessed through the MOWIP ten issue areas.

² Republic of Fiji Ministry of Finance, *Budget Estimates 2025–2026*, June 2025, <https://www.finance.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/2025-2026-Budget-Estimates.pdf>

³ UN Peacekeeping, *Troop and police contributors: September 2025 data*, 30 September 2025, retrieved from https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/02_country_ranking_90_september_2025.pdf

⁴ Republic of Fiji Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, 'Foreign Policy White Paper', 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.gov.fj/foreign-policy-white-paper-2/>

⁵ Republic of Fiji, Ministry of Home Affairs, *National Security Strategy 2025–2029*, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2025, <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/National-Security-Strategy-2025-2029.pdf>

⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Fiji, 'PM Rabuka's Ministerial Statement – The Proposal of The Ocean Of Peace', 5 August 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.gov.fj/oceans-of-peace/>; Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, 2018, <https://forumsec.org/publications/boe-declaration-regional-security>

⁷ Republic of Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 'Fiji Population Census. (1891–2017)', accessed 20 November 2025, <https://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/statistics/social-statistics/population-and-demographic-indicators/#censuses>

⁸ George, N. *Situating Women: Gender Politics and Circumstance in Fiji*, 2012, ANU E press.

⁹ Leckie, J. 'Women in post-coup Fiji: negotiating work through old and new realities' in Akram-Lodhi A. H. (Ed.), *Confronting Fiji Futures* (vol. 1, pp178–201). Australian National University.

Strengthening inclusive peacekeeping

Through its participation in MOWIP, Fiji seeks to strengthen its peacekeeping workforce, enhance gender-responsive security sector governance, and reinforce its global reputation as a committed contributor to international peace and security. The MOWIP Assessment supports Fiji's efforts to build more inclusive and effective security institutions by systematically examining the barriers and enablers affecting women's participation in peacekeeping. Findings will inform policy and practice within Fiji's security forces and contribute to international efforts towards WPS. The assessment provides an opportunity to align national priorities with international norms, deepen institutional capacity, and support pathways for women to contribute meaningfully to peace operations.

c) Republic of Fiji Military Forces: Profile and national characteristics

The Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) began as British-commanded unit and became a nationally led force after independence in 1970. While Fiji's civil–military relations have been shaped by periods of political tension, the RFMF has evolved from its colonial-era origins into a central institution responsible for national security and defence, operating under the mandate articulated in the 2013 Constitution, which states that the military must 'at all times ensure the security, defence, and wellbeing of Fiji and all Fijians'.¹⁰ This mandate frames the institutional environment of the peacekeeping and security sector today.

The RFMF operates under the oversight of the Commander RFMF and MoDVA, and is organised into:

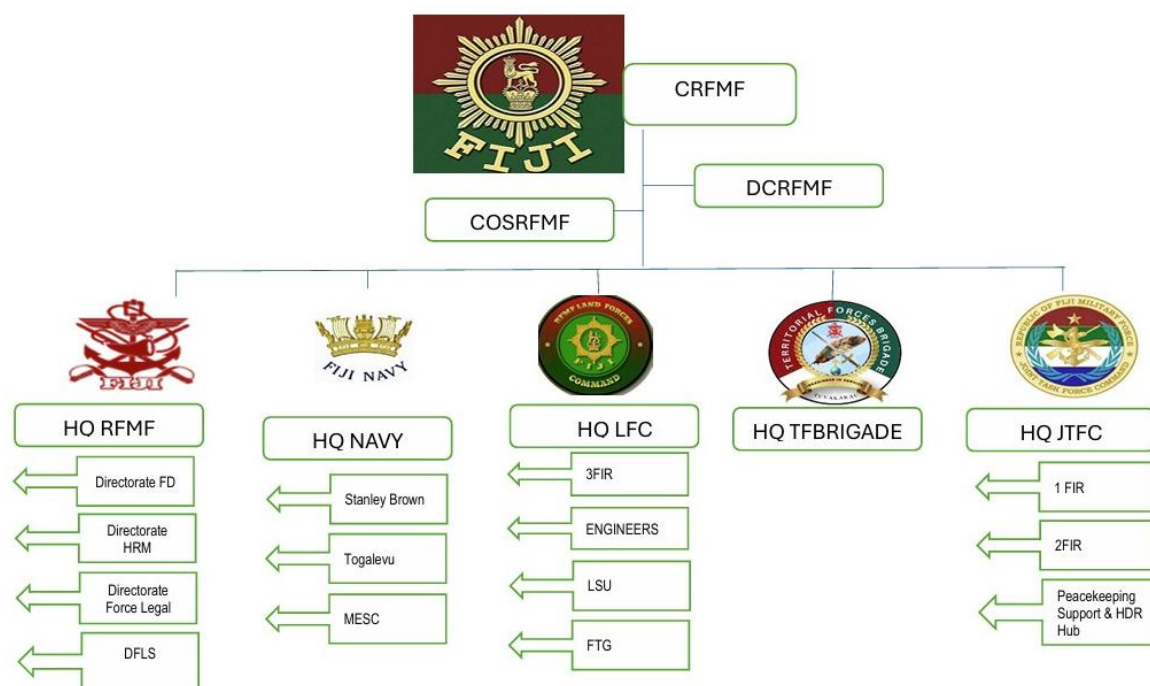
- Land Forces – including the 3rd Battalion Fiji Infantry Regiment (3FIR)
- Maritime Forces (Navy)
- Territorial forces – Fiji's volunteer reserve forces with duties such as national defence, border security and disaster relief
- Joint Task Force Command (JTFC) – responsible for managing Fiji's peacekeeping deployments
- Strategic Headquarters – responsible for operational planning and personnel management under the RFMF Chief of Staff (see Figure 2).

As Figure 2 on the next page shows, the force structure supports both domestic security responsibilities and international peacekeeping engagements. The RFMF is overseen by MoDVA and the Fijian Parliament through the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. Its operations are governed by the Republic of Fiji Military Forces Act 1949, which is scheduled for a comprehensive review in 2026 to reflect current operational oversight and strengthen parliamentary oversight.¹¹

¹⁰ Republic of Fiji Military Forces, *RFMF Strategic Plan: Beyond 2022*, 2022, <https://www.rfmf.mil.fj/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/RFMF-Strategic-Plan-.pdf>

¹¹ Chand A. 'Review of RFMF Act to pave way for new defence legislation', *The Fiji Times*, 14 December 2025, <https://www.fijitimes.com.fj/review-of-rfmf-act-to-pave-way-for-new-defence-legislation/#~:text=The%20Government%20will%20undertake%20a,oversight%20of%20the%20armed%20forces>

Figure 2. Republic of Fiji Military Forces Organisational Structure ¹²



Recruitment into the RFMF follows established eligibility criteria, including minimum educational standards, fitness requirements, and background screening, forming the basis of the institution's eligible pool for service. Applicants must complete Basic Recruit Training before being eligible for Enlistment or Appointment. If they are successful in being Enlisted or Appointed, personnel undergo core training and specialised career streams according to aptitude, institutional needs, and performance. Career progression occurs through a combination of course completion, performance evaluation, and available positions within the organisational structure. These systems shape the pathways through which individuals become eligible for deployment, leadership roles, and advanced training.¹³

The RFMF delivers a suite of foundational, specialist, and promotion-oriented training courses that prepare personnel for operational duties and peacekeeping service. Training includes basic soldier instruction, non-commissioned officer and officer development programs, and specialised qualifications in areas such as engineering, logistics, medical support, and maritime operations. Professional military education is complemented by opportunities for external training partnerships with Australia, New Zealand, the United States, the United Kingdom, and multilateral institutions, reflecting long-standing defence cooperation frameworks.¹⁴ Since 2000, the RFMF has also developed partnerships with Asian countries such as India, China, Japan and Korea that continue until the present day.

Women have served in military roles associated with Fiji for several decades, beginning with the recruitment of 12 Fijian women into the British Army Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) in 1961 and the enlistment of the first forty-one women into the RFMF in 1988. These early cohorts were primarily recruited for officer pathways, establishing the foundation for subsequent generations of female personnel entering the institution.¹⁵ Since 1998, women have joined in increasing numbers, contributing across a wider range of roles, although the overall proportion of women remains low. It is also worth noting that until 2018 women, when the Navy began admitting women into its ranks, women personnel exclusively served in the Land Forces branch of the RFMF.

¹² Organisation chart courtesy of the RFMF Directorate – Human Resources.

¹³ See Issue area 2 for more detail.

¹⁴ Vaha F., Powles A., 'The Pacific Islands and global security challenges', in *Security Cooperation in the Pacific Islands*, 2025, Routledge, pp63–78.

¹⁵ Teresia T. 'What makes Fiji Women Soldiers? Context, Context, Context', *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, no. 37 (March 2015), 1–13.

d) Fiji's contribution to peace operations

1. Historical perspective

Fiji has contributed to United Nations peace operations continuously since 1978, establishing a sustained record of service across a wide range of missions and operational environments. Fiji's early deployments were to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) (with a total of 35 Fijian Peacekeepers losing their lives while serving for peace in south Lebanon)¹⁶ and the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) in Sinai. These experiences have established the foundation for a peacekeeping identity that has remained central to the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) for more than four decades during deployments to: Lebanon, Sinai, Iraq, Syria, Timor-Leste, South Sudan, Darfur, Liberia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Kuwait, Namibia, Cambodia and the Solomon Islands.¹⁷

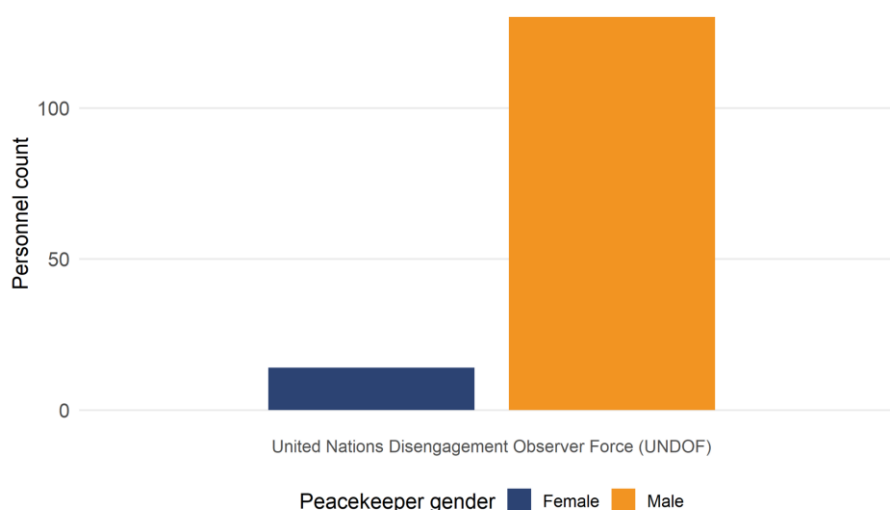
Table 3. Statistics of RFMF women's participation in peace operations:

Mission	Year of first participation of female personnel	Number of female personnel deployed prior to 2025	Number of female personnel deployed as of 2026 (ongoing participation)	Total number of female personnel having taken part in UN peace operations (currently and formerly)
Iraq (UNAMI)	2006	350		Est: 350 females
Syria (UNDOF)	2013		14	Est: 210
Lebanon (UNIFIL)	1999	30		Est: 30
Sinai (MFO)	1995	205	15	Est: 220
East Timor	2003	3		Est: 3
Total				Est: 813

¹⁶ United Nations Peacekeeping, 'Fijian troops conclude UNIFIL mission', 22 December 2018, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/news/fijian-troops-conclude-unifil-mission>

¹⁷ Republic of Fiji Ministry of Finance, *Budget Estimates 2025–2026*, June 2025, <https://www.finance.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/2025-2026-Budget-Estimates.pdf>

Figure 4. Current participation of RFMF personnel in UN peace operations, as of February 2026.¹⁸



2. UN peace operations as national priorities

Peacekeeping has been associated with a significant increase in the size, capabilities and budget of the RFMF. Peacekeeping has become a core component of Fiji's national identity and an important domestic priority.¹⁹ UN deployment is managed on the basis of a Memorandum of Understanding between Fiji and the United Nations, with selection processes, pre-deployment training and reintegration procedures managed by the JTFC. The integration of peacekeeping responsibilities into institutional planning at the national level reflects both the operational value and the reputational importance of Fiji's contributions to UN missions.

The RFMF maintains extensive training systems to prepare military personnel for peacekeeping roles, drawing on domestic programs and international partnerships to meet UN operational standards. Training includes pre-deployment courses, leadership development, weapons and protection training, engineering and logistics qualification programs, and mission-specific cultural and legal modules. Defence cooperation with Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom provides additional access to specialist instruction and peacekeeping exercises, providing capability development that contributes to Fiji's reputation for mission-readiness and interoperability with multinational forces.²⁰ Recent training partnerships have been re-affirmed with Japan,²¹ Korea,²² and China.²³

Peacekeeping also provides economic benefits for Fiji. Remittances from peacekeeping allowances have historically made substantial contributions to Fiji's share of foreign exchange earnings,²⁴ and have, at times surpassed major export sectors such as sugar exports and garment manufacturing.²⁵ The 2025-2026 Fiji National Budget allocates approximately 8% of its total expenditure to the security sector, and just over 1% specifically to RFMF peacekeeping activities, reflecting the sector's importance within national budget priorities.²⁶

¹⁸ United Nations Department of Peace Operations, 'Peace and Security Pillar: Historical Uniformed Personnel Contribution', Peace and Security Data Hub, updated 31 March 2026, <https://psdata.un.org/dataset/DPO-UCHISTORICAL>

¹⁹ Naidu, V. 'Moving Towards a More Multiethnic Fiji Military Forces', in Ratuva S., Compel R., Aguilar S. (eds), *Guns and roses: Comparative civil-military relations in the changing security environment*, 2019, Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-2008-8_7

²⁰ Vaha, F., & Powles, A. (2025). The Pacific Islands and global security challenges. In *Security cooperation in the Pacific Islands* (pp. 63–78). Routledge.

²¹ Fiji Global News, 'Fiji and Japan Strengthen Ties Through Groundbreaking Military Training Program', accessed May 2026 <https://fijiglobalnews.com/fiji-and-japan-strengthen-ties-through-groundbreaking-military-training-program/>.

²² Republic of Fiji media centre, 'Fiji and South Korea sign defence MOU', accessed June 2026, <https://fiji.gov.fj/Media-Centre/News/FIJI-AND-SOUTH-KOREA-SIGN-DEFENCE-MOU>

²³ Kumar R., 'Fiji and China reaffirm strong ties, defence cooperation and One China Policy', Fiji Village website 31 July 2025, <https://www.fijivillage.com/news/Fiji-and-China-reaffirm-strong-ties-defence-cooperation-and-One-China-Policy-f5r4x8/>

²⁴ Levin J., MacKay J., Nasirzadeh A., 'Selectorate Theory and the Democratic Peacekeeping Hypothesis: Evidence from Fiji and Bangladesh', *International Peacekeeping*, 23, no. 1, 2016, pp107–132, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2015.1108845>

²⁵ Komai, M. 'Fiji's Foreign Policy and the New Pacific Diplomacy', *The New Pacific Diplomacy*, eds. Fry, G., Tarte, S., 2015, ANU Press, pp111–22, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt19w71mc.16>

²⁶ Republic of Fiji Ministry of Finance, *Budget Estimates 2025–2026*, June 2025, <https://www.finance.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/2025-2026-Budget-Estimates.pdf>

The Fiji Foreign Policy White Paper (2024) characterises peacekeeping as a demonstration of Fiji’s commitment to collective security and its aspiration to be viewed as a constructive global actor. As a microstate, Fiji’s foreign policy relies heavily on cooperation, credibility, and trust as a way to ensure national security.²⁷ Fiji positions the Pacific as an ‘Ocean of Peace’²⁸ and prioritising its peacekeeping contributions reinforces its role as a regional leader committed to international cooperation.²⁹ Consistent with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR1325), Fiji’s National Peace and Security Strategy recognises efforts to increase women’s participation in peacekeeping as part of a commitment to global norms supporting women’s roles in peace and security.³⁰

3. Decision-making regarding UN deployments

Decisions regarding the selection and deployment of Fiji’s military and police personnel to United Nations peace operations are coordinated through established institutional processes between the UN, the RFMF, FPF, and MoDVA. Deployment decisions are overseen through formal hierarchies within the RFMF and FPF, with senior leadership responsible for approving recommended personnel lists and ensuring compliance with institutional policies and international standards. Deployment planning is shaped by mission requirements, personnel availability, and operational readiness, with contributing sub-units responsible for identifying eligible candidates. These decision-making processes directly influence the composition of the deployment pool and shape opportunities for women to participate.

Selection for UN deployment typically considers rank, trade qualifications, medical fitness, disciplinary record, and professional performance, alongside training prerequisites for specific mission roles. A variety of factors in addition to deployment policies may affect women’s participation at various points in the selection process. The MOWIP assessment examines the interaction of eligibility criteria and these factors, providing insight into where barriers may arise and identifying opportunities to strengthen gender-responsive approaches towards deployment decision-making.

3) Methodology

a) Overview of the MOWIP assessment methodology

The MOWIP methodology³¹ is a unique tool to assess and improve women’s meaningful participation in peace operations. It provides a systematic and comprehensive framework for identifying both a security institution’s existing good practices and possible improvements in each of ten issue areas identified as central to women’s meaningful participation. Factors relevant to assessing women’s meaningful participation in peace operations can also include the policies, practices, and experiences of women and men within the security institution. Thus, the MOWIP methodology can be used both to improve the meaningful participation of women in uniform in peace operations and also to improve the conditions for equal opportunities between men and women in the security institution under study. Advancing the equality and inclusion of women and men in general within the institution will help to increase the meaningful participation of women in deployments.

The ten issue areas discussed below include all the factors that shape the numbers and nature of women’s participation in peace operations from initial recruitment into the RFMF to deployment on mission. These factors can be either positive (good practices at the institutional level that contribute to women’s meaningful participation) or negative (barriers to women’s meaningful participation at the institutional level). For each issue area, the MOWIP methodology uncovers factors that constitute a barrier or an opportunity. Its main objectives are to:

²⁷ Republic of Fiji Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, ‘Foreign Policy White Paper’, 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.gov.fj/foreign-policy-white-paper-2/>

²⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Fiji, ‘PM Rabuka’s Ministerial Statement – The Proposal of The Ocean Of Peace’, 5 August 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.gov.fj/oceans-of-peace/>

²⁹ Middleby, S., Tago, L. K. T., ‘The Boe Declaration: More than reconceptualising security’, in *Security Cooperation in the Pacific Islands*, 2025, Routledge, pp30–45, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/oa-edit/10.4324/9781003613190-4/boe-declaration-solstice-middleby-leituala-kuiniselani-toelupe-tago>

³⁰ Government of the Republic of Fiji, ‘National Security Strategy 2025–2029’, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2025, <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/National-Security-Strategy-2025-2029.pdf>

³¹ Karim, Sabrina, MOWIP Methodology: Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations, 2020, https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/MOWIP_Methodology_3.pdf

- Provide a comprehensive set of issue areas within a given security institution that could be improved to increase women's meaningful participation in UN peace operations;
- Identify the good practices within the security institution that can be leveraged, scaled up, and/or disseminated more broadly;
- Apply a set of tools and a comprehensive list of indicators to measure the importance of each issue area for increasing women's meaningful participation in the security institution;
- Determine the differential impact of each issue area in the security institution.

The MOWIP methodology comprises three components, which are implemented by the national assessment team:

- The **fact finding form (FFF)** contains approximately 200 questions designed to collect qualitative and quantitative data from official sources about RFMF deployment to UN peace operations.
- **Key decision-maker interviews**, in which information on decision-making with regards to deployment in peace operations is collected in security institutions.
- A **survey** of deployed and non-deployed RFMF personnel, both male and female.

After processing and analysing the data from the three data collection tools, each issue area is **ranked based on a colour coding system**. Red indicates the issue areas that constitute the most significant barriers and green indicates areas of low priority or opportunity. The survey data is compared to the data from the FFF to look for inconsistencies between institutional reforms and policies and RFMF personnel's actual experiences and perceptions.

The analysis of the survey data takes into consideration rank, age, and past deployment(s). We identify cases where there are statistically significant differences³² between male and female respondents in the survey. This indicates that differences in responses between men and women may reflect real differences in their experiences and perceptions, rather than being due to chance or the fact that women would be over-represented in certain grades or services. The survey data is compared with the FFF data to examine gaps between institutional policies and the actual experiences and perceptions of RFMF personnel.

Box 1: Analysis of the survey data

The data was analysed in several ways. First, descriptive statistics were calculated for the full sample, for women, for men, for those previously deployed to a UN peace operation and for those never deployed to a UN peace operation. Second, t-tests – which determine whether the mean value of respondents varies between male and female personnel and between deployed and non-deployed personnel – were conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference between respondents in these subgroups (distinguished by gender and deployment status). Third, regression models were used to determine whether male and female personnel as well as deployed and non-deployed personnel responded in a statistically significant manner, taking into account other factors that may influence responses, such as age, rank, and service type.

If there was a statistically significant difference between men and women (when there was a p-value less than 0.05), we give details in this report. If we do not give details of different response proportions between male and female personnel, it indicates that there was no significant difference between male and female respondents, all other factors being constant. The regression models were run as logistic regression when the response was dichotomous (for example, when the response options were yes or no) and ordinal logistic regression when the response options were categorical or ordinal (for example, questions that asked how much the person agreed with a certain statement). For continuous variables, ordinary least squares regression was used.

³² If the survey were repeated many times, men and women would respond in a unique way from each other when considering other factors that may also influence responses (such as rank, age, deployment status, and service). Statistical significance was determined by a p-value of 0.1 or less in the regression models described in the box.

A first draft of the MOWIP report was written based on the data analysis and the ranking of the ten issue areas. The completion of the draft report marked the start of the validation process, during which the assessed security institution became engaged in providing further feedback, contextual and institutional information and additional clarifications of the data. Draft findings from the report (main opportunities and barriers) were presented to key stakeholders within the security institution during the oral report. The draft report was finalised and submitted to the security institution for review in preparation for the validation workshop. The validation workshop was an opportunity for the security institution to review the findings of the entire report in great detail, to validate the findings, and to develop evidence-based recommendations.

The MOWIP methodology therefore produces robust and evidence-based findings drawing on perspectives from within the institution, the knowledge acquired by the assessment team as well as from national and international experts who have an academic background in gender and peace operations. It provides transformative, evidence-based recommendations that effectively target the root causes that prevent uniformed personnel, particularly women, from deploying to peace operations. Using a common methodology across many TPCCs also allows for the identification of universal barriers that need to be addressed at the UN level and highlights good practices that can be shared and adapted to other contexts.

b) Information about the research partners

Ethos CRS was selected as the national research partner for the Fiji MOWIP Assessment by MoDVA. Ethos CRS is a regional partner with extensive experience in capability development, applied research, organisational analysis and gender-responsive program support across Fiji and the Pacific. An Australian-based organisation headquartered in Canberra, Ethos CRS works across governments in Australia and the Pacific region. Its expanding engagement with Pacific public sector institutions reflects a growing role as a research and institutional strengthening partner in the region.

The Ethos CRS research team included specialists with advanced qualifications and experience in mixed-method research, gender analysis and security sector engagement, including practical familiarity with defence and policing environments. This expertise supported the rigorous application of MOWIP tools and ensured that data collection and analysis reflected both international research standards and Fiji's institutional context.

For the survey component of the assessment, Ethos CRS partnered with Tebbutt Research, an established research organisation widely recognised for its experience in survey enumeration and culturally responsive fieldwork in Fiji and the Pacific. Tebbutt Research's workforce is entirely locally or nationally based across all operating countries, with more than half of its staff being Pacific Island women. Tebbutt Research maintains an office in Suva, Fiji.

An Ethos CRS team of three researchers (two women) conducted the qualitative key decision-maker interviews. Quantitative data collection was overseen by an Ethos CRS researcher (a woman) and implemented by Tebbutt Research through three Field Supervisors (two women) and 16 enumerators (eight women). This collaboration ensured strong oversight and contextually appropriate field engagement.

c) Implementing the MOWIP in the RFMF

The three components of the MOWIP assessment for the RFMF were undertaken between June and August 2025.

Key Decision-Maker Interviews: 31 key decision-maker interviews (7 women and 24 men) were conducted by Ethos Senior Researchers in two rounds (2–13 June and 29 July – 8 August). The majority of interviews were conducted with the senior command in Suva, with a further six interviews conducted in Nadi at the Joint Taskforce Command Blackrock Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Relief Camp (JTFC Blackrock). Every effort was made to conduct the interviews with as many senior ranking women as possible, however, the possibilities were limited given the available pool of women. In line with the MOWIP methodology, the interviews were conducted with

- high-ranking military officers responsible for decision-making about peacekeeping deployments and internal affairs
- high-ranking civilian staff within MoDVA
- training personnel at JTFC Blackrock.

The questions focused on the process of selection, training and deployment to UN peacekeeping missions, as well as internal decision-making processes. Given the extent of RFMF deployment to non-UN missions, some

interviewees were also asked to compare their knowledge of UN missions to non-UN missions, however, given the limited time availability for most interviews (around 30 minutes of interview time) very few of the interviews were able to cover these questions. Each interviewee was asked to rank the top three barriers faced by women. The interviews also helped to expand on and explain the internal policies and processes of the RFMF captured in the FFF.

Fact Finding Form: The FFF was used to collect basic institutional data about policies, processes and practices of the RFMF in the broader context of the Fijian government and society. It was completed by Ethos CRS researchers with grateful assistance from the RFMF Gender Advisor and staff from the Directorate of Human Resource Management at the RFMF Strategic Headquarters. This group of three men and three women also agreed to participate in two lengthy focus group discussions to fill in outstanding information. Further gaps were filled on an ongoing and iterative basis between August and October 2025, after the completion of the three formal data collection exercises. It was the first time that the RFMF had collected some of the information in the FFF for the organisation.

Survey: The MOWIP survey questions were contextualised for Fiji during a review led by GSS Lab in Suva for both the RFMF and FPF jointly, over three days in June. The survey questions were then pilot tested with recent military cadets to further refine them. The survey sampling method used was quota sampling. This method of sampling was appropriate in the context of Fiji in order to ensure an equal number of women and men were represented in the survey despite the small proportion of women in the RFMF overall and in particular the small number of women who have been deployed. A total of 410 surveys were conducted with close to equal numbers of men and women, deployed and never deployed (see Tables 5 and 6). In previous MOWIP studies the personnel were broken into 'high', 'medium' and 'low' ranking personnel. For Fiji, given the small number of high-ranking personnel the sample was only divided into 'high' (commissioned officers above Warrant Officer I) and 'low' ranks (Warrant Officer I and below).

In addition, at the beginning of the survey, respondents were also asked to self-identify as 'low', 'medium' or 'high' ranking. These rankings were not correlated with specific ranks used in the sample during the survey and were only used to interpret specific questions.

The majority of surveys were conducted over two weeks from 30 June to 11 July, 2025. Up to 16 Tebbutt Research enumerators conducted a total of around 40 interviews per day. The majority of surveys (around 88%) were conducted in Suva, with a small number also conducted in Nadi and Labasa (see Table 7). Given the high mobility of personnel across the RFMF camps, the location where individuals were interviewed often did not correspond to the location to which they were formally attached. A number of high level visits took place at the time of the survey, which meant that some personnel were not available. A small number of supplementary surveys with female personnel were conducted to meet the quota of female participants over the following two weeks at Tebbutt House in Suva.

Oral presentation: GSS Lab members conducted an oral presentation of the preliminary findings and recommendations to the RFMF on 10 December 2025.

Focus Group Discussion and Validation workshop:

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were led jointly by GSS Lab and Ethos CRS with the support of four locally based Fijian researchers. FGDs took place from 19 to 20 March 2026, with 24 women of the rank of Warrant Officer I and below, the majority of whom had previously participated in the survey. The women were invited to review the report and suggest appropriate recommendations that were then presented to senior decision-makers in the validation workshop.

The validation workshop with senior decision-makers was conducted from 31 March to 2 April. Participants included members of the RFMF Human Resources Directorate and officers from the Land Forces and JTFC Blackrock, who reviewed the recommendations and provided clarifications for the report.

Table 5. Rank Tiers by RFMF Military Branch Assigned for the Survey Sample Frame

Branch	Low Rank	High Rank
Army (LFC)	Private (PTE)	Officer Cadet (OCDT)
	Lance Corporal (LCPL)	Second Lieutenant (2LT)
	Corporal (CPL)	Lieutenant (LT)
	Sergeant (SGT)	Captain (CAPT)
	Staff Sergeant (SSGT)	Major (MAJ)
	Warrant Officer Class II (WOII)	Lieutenant Colonel (LT COL)
	Warrant Officer Class I (WOI)	Colonel (COL)
		Brigadier General (BRIG GEN)
		Major General (MAJ GEN)
Navy	Warrant Officer Class II (WOII)	Ensign (ENS)
	Chief Petty Officer (CPO)	Sub-Lieutenant (SBLT)
	Petty Officer (PO)	Lieutenant (LTEUT)
	Leading Seaman (LS)	Lieutenant Commander (LCDR)
	Able Seaman (AB)	
	Ordinary Seaman (OS)	

Table 6. Number of RFMF personnel sampled by rank, gender and deployment status³⁵

	Previously deployed		Never deployed on UN mission		Grand total
	Men	Women	Men	Women	All
High	22	13	10	8	53
Low	92	84	83	90	349
Rank not provided	2	4	1	1	8
Grand Total	116	101	94	99	410

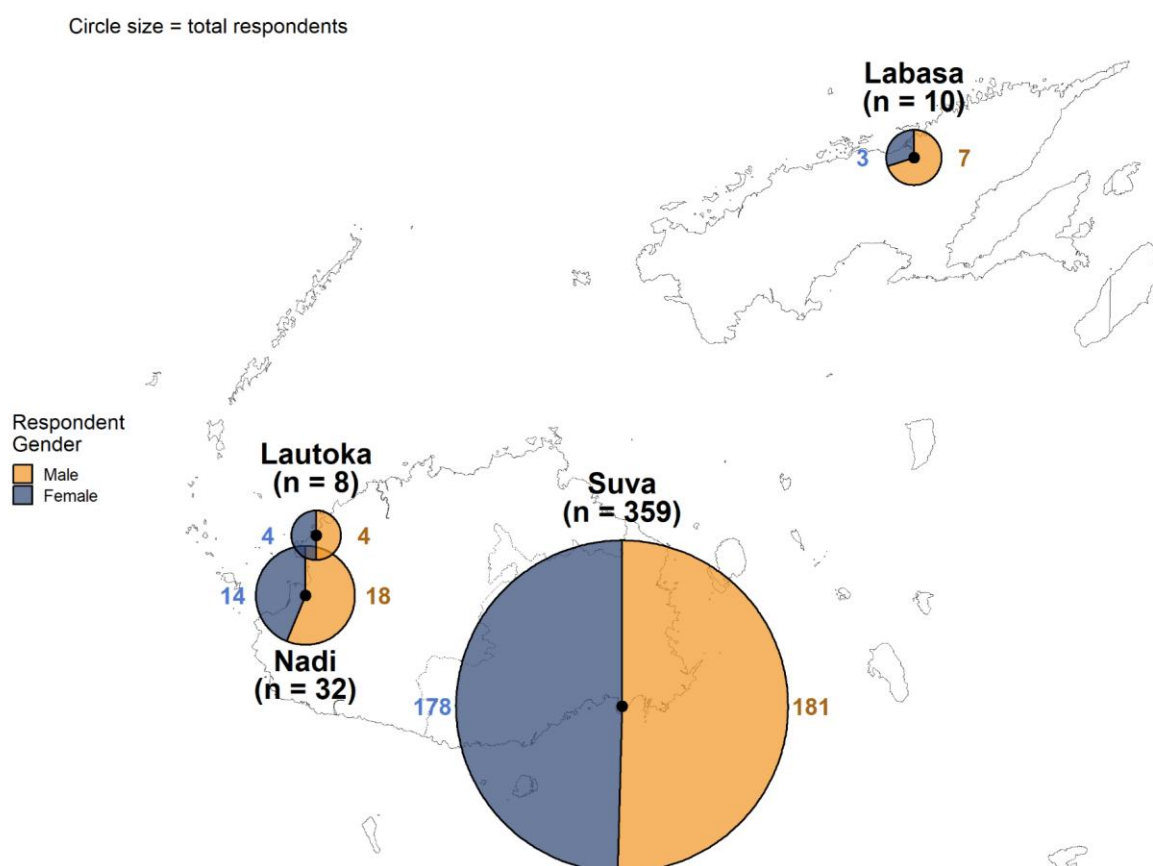
Table 7. Proportion of RFMF personnel sampled by rank, gender and deployment status³⁶

	Previously deployed		Never Deployed on UN mission		Grand total
	Men	Women	Men	Women	All
High	5%	3%	2%	2%	13%
Low	22%	20%	20%	22%	85%
Rank not provided	0%	1%	0%	0%	2%
Grand Total	28%	25%	23%	24%	100%

Table 8. RFMF sample by home base of respondent

	Women	Men	% Total
Suva	178	181	87.56%
Nadi	14	18	7.80%
Labasa	3	7	2.44%
Lautoka	4	4	1.95%
Not provided	1	0	0.24%
Total	200	210	100%

Figure 9. Distribution of MOWIP respondents by gender and location



4) Results of the MOWIP Assessment

The MOWIP methodology measures opportunities and barriers in ten issue areas. Each issue area is given a score, to highlight areas where the security institution should focus its future efforts to improve the meaningful participation of women in uniform in peace operations. Table 10 below is a summary of the findings. The following sections of the report provide more detail on the barriers and opportunities by issue area.

Table 10. Summary of the MOWIP assessment results

Pre-deployment stage: including factors that affect force generation			Significance	Cross-cutting issue areas	
	1	Eligible pool Are there enough women in national institutions?	High		
	2	Deployment criteria Do criteria match the skills needed in operation?	Low		
	3	Deployment selection Does everyone have a fair chance to deploy?	Medium		
	4	Household constraints Are there arrangements for families of deployed women?	High		
Deployment stage: including difficulties for women during operations				Do preconceived attitudes about women preclude their ability to deploy?	Are women treated as equal members of the team?
	5	Peace operations infrastructure Is accommodation and equipment designed to meet women's needs?	Medium		
	6	Peace operations experiences Do positive and negative experiences in operations affect women's deployment decisions?	Medium		
Post-deployment stage: including factors that affect redeployment					
	7	Career value Do deployments advance women's careers?	Low		
All Stages					
	8	Top-down leadership Do leaders at all levels support women's deployment?	Low		

Understanding the results

In the following sections, a short summary of the results will be given for each issue area, followed by a detailed explanation of the results.

Understanding the classification of each issue area (high, medium, or low priority)³³

In classifying the issue areas, the methodology also takes into account differences in the results of the FFF, the interviews, and the survey. Specifically, it examines:

- whether the FFF and key decision-maker interview responses on policies, practices, and programs are different from the survey responses, which measure personnel experiences of these policies, practices, and programs;
- whether certain policies or practices disproportionately affect women and men (for example, requirements for a minimum height may favour men because they are taller on average than women);
- whether there is a significant difference in the way women and men answer each survey question.

The data from these three tools is used to measure a set of indicators for each issue area. The indicators are measured using the MOWIP Indicator Form, on the basis of four scores:

- The Implementation Gap Score, which indicates the extent to which there is a gap between the policies, practices, and programs, and personnel's experiences of those policies, practices, and programs.
- The Barrier Score, which indicates the extent to which the issue area is a barrier for men and women.
- The Institutional Barrier to Women Score, which indicates the extent to which the issue area affects only or disproportionately women.
- The Women's Gap in Experience Score, which indicates the extent to which this issue area is experienced or perceived as a barrier more commonly or more strongly by women than it is experienced by men.

The four scores measure different dimensions of what constitutes a barrier. The Barrier Score measures the degree to which an issue area is a barrier for men and women's meaningful participation. But to understand whether an issue area affects women it is important to understand whether particular indicators disproportionately affect women and how well the country is performing specifically on those indicators (Institutional Barrier to Women Score). Moreover, the actual experiences of the personnel might not match the stated policies, programs, and practices. Thus, it is also important to measure whether experiences match what is on paper (Implementation Gap Score), and whether women experience the issue in different ways than men do (Women's Gap in Experience Score). Each score ranges from 0 to 1, 0 being the most concerning and one indicating no barrier.

Then, all indicators within an issue area are examined together to determine whether the issue area in question is high, medium, or low priority for follow-up activities. The results thus highlight opportunities and barriers to women's meaningful participation in UN peace operations, as well as gaps in the implementation of existing policies and differences in perceptions between senior and junior personnel, and between women and men.

Additional information

The report contains the most important findings identified by GSS Lab. Further analysis can be conducted using the dataset, if required, for follow-up activities.

³³ For more details, see section 4 of the MOWIP methodology, available here: www.dcaf.ch/mowip-methodology



Issue area 1 Eligible Pool

High

Issue Area 1 – Eligible pool – examines whether there are enough women in the RFMF to meet the targets set out in the UN Department of Peace Operations’ ‘Gender Strategy for Uniformed Personnel 2018- 2028’ which outlines that by 2028, 25% of military observers and military professional deployments and 15% of military contributions to peace operations should be women.

According to the MOWIP methodology, this is an area of high priority for addressing barriers to women’s meaningful participation in peacekeeping. The RFMF should focus attention, efforts, and recourses toward dismantling the barriers identified in this issue area to increase the proportion of women serving in the force to meet the Gender Strategy for Uniformed Personnel.

Summary of findings

Women represent only a small proportion (10%) of the total RFMF strength, which means the force may struggle to meet the deployment objectives outlined in UNDP’s *Gender Strategy for Uniformed Personnel* by 2028. Although the RFMF has engaged in some notable good practices to encourage women to join and remain in the institution, such as having both women and men (at similar rates) participate in combat and operational units, there are a number of factors that may limit the enlistment and retention of servicewomen within the organization. For example, the recruitment of women into the force has been inconsistent over time and women view RFMF equipment and facilities as inadequate. The RFMF could address the indicators needing improvement to increase the number of women that are eligible to deploy to UN peace operations.

Main opportunities:

- Women first joined the RFMF in 1988
- Men and women join the RFMF for similar reasons
- Men and women participate in combat and operational units at similar rates

Main barriers:

- No direct recruitment drives for women
- Concerns about retention of women
- Underrepresentation of women in leadership positions
- Lack of access to adequate sleeping and bathroom facilities, especially for women

Gaps in perception and experience:

- Men more likely to hold a second job
- Women more likely to participate in professional associations or clubs
- Men serve an average of 14 years, compared to 8 years for women

Detailed findings

i. Opportunities

Women have served in the RFMF since 1988

Women were first enlisted in the RFMF in 1988, at which time 41 women joined. However, women personnel exclusively served in the Land Forces branch of the RFMF until 2018, at which time the Navy began admitting women into its ranks.

As of 2025, the posted strength of the RFMF was 3,274 personnel, including 324 women (10%) and 2,950 men (90%). The majority of military personnel serve in the Land Forces (about 82% of all officers), and the Navy represents about 18% of the total RFMF strength. Although women only began enlisting into the Navy about 8 years ago, women actually represent a larger proportion of personnel in the Navy (about 21% women) than in the Land Forces (about 8% women). However, neither the Army nor Navy have any all-female units.

The RFMF deploys both individuals and battalions to peace operations

The RFMF deploys formed battalions, individual military observers or staff, and sends military personnel to be seconded to UN peace operations (see Table 1.1 for 2025 statistics).

Despite its relatively small geographic and population size, Fiji has played an important role contributing peacekeepers to almost every major conflict zone since the 1970s.³⁴ In fact, Fiji has contributed more personnel per capita to UN peace operations than any other country in the world. In 2025, Fiji deployed a total of 479 RFMF personnel, including 39 (8%) women and 440 (92%) men, to five different missions, including four UN missions and one non-UN peace operation.

Established in 1974, UNDOF is a mission to maintain the ceasefire between Israeli and Syrian forces in the Golan Heights.³⁵ In 2025, Fiji deployed 144 RFMF personnel, including 14 (10%) women and 130 (90%) men, to UNDOF.

The UNAMI mission, established by Security Council resolution 1500 (2003) at the request of the Government of Iraq, is a more permanent operation that is renewed annually.³⁶ A total of 157 RFMF soldiers were deployed to UNAMI in 2025, which included 10 (6%) women and 147 (94%) men.

The MFO mission in the Sinai Peninsula is an independent (non-UN) operation that supervises the security provisions of the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. In 2025, the RFMF sent 170 personnel to MFO, including 13 (8%) women and 157 (92%) men.

The RFMF also had staff appointments in UNIFIL, including one female and three male personnel, and also sent four military observers (3 men and one woman) to United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in 2025.

Table 1.1. RFMF Personnel Contributions to Peace Operations in 2025

Mission	Total deployed (N)	% Women	% Men
United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)	144	10%	90%
United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)	157	6%	94%
United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)	4	25%	75%
United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO)	4	25%	75%
Multinational Force and Observers (MFO)	170	8%	92%

³⁴Wyeth G., 'Fiji: The Peacekeepers', *The Diplomat*, 27 September 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/09/fiji-the-peacekeepers/>

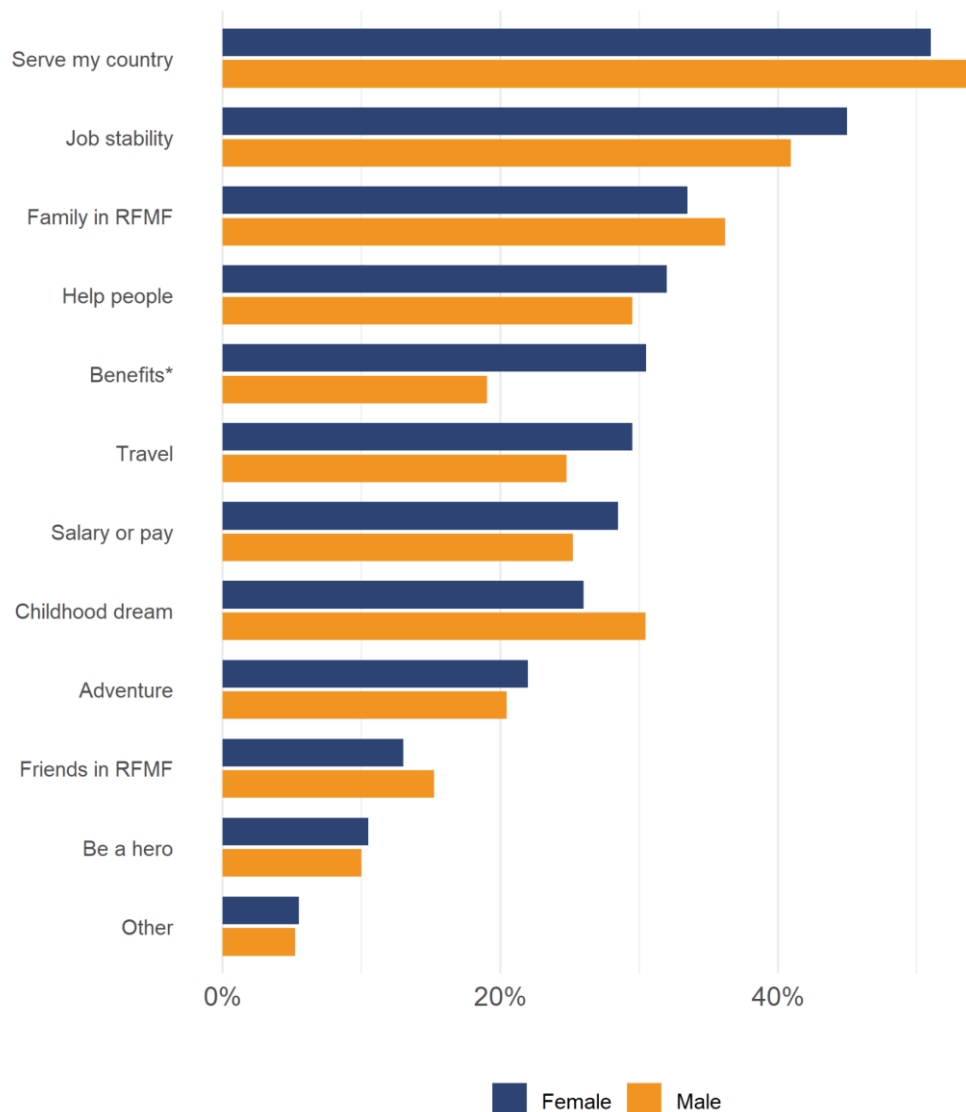
³⁵ United Nations Peacekeeping, 'UNDOF Fact Sheet', n.d., <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/factsheet/undof>

³⁶ United Nations Iraq, *United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)*, n.d., <https://iraq.un.org/en/132447-united-nations-assistance-mission-iraq-unami>

A majority of both women and men said they decided to join the RFMF to serve their country

Most women (51%) and men (53%) are motivated by a strong sense of duty to serve their country in joining the RFMF (Figure 1.2). Other top reasons for joining the RFMF included job stability and having family in the RFMF. Men and women join the RFMF for the same reasons, except women (31%) reported significantly higher interest in overall benefits compared to men (19%).

Figure 1.2. Survey responses to the question ‘why did you join the RFMF?’



Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women.

Men and women participate in combat and operational units at similar rates

Women have served in combat and operational units since 1988. In 2025, there were 107 female soldiers in combat, operational, or tactical units. Among surveyed personnel, 49% of women and 45% of men indicated that they had engaged in combat or tactical operations during their time in the RFMF, with no statistical difference between men and women. Personnel who had deployed to a UN peace operation are less likely to report they have combat or tactical experience (26%) compared to those without UN deployment experience (71%).

There are relatively low rates of RFMF personnel holding a second job

Only 15% of all respondents reported having a second job outside of the RFMF. Men (20%) were significantly more likely to have a second job compared to women (11%). Men with a second job were most likely to be employed in the transport sector (9%) or services (5%) while women were most likely to be employed in business (6%). (See Table 1.3).

Personnel who had deployed (15%) held a second job at a similar rate to personnel who had not deployed (16%), suggesting that deployment to a UN peacekeeping mission does not influence whether personnel hold a second job.

Table 1.3. Survey responses to the question 'do you have a second full-time or part-time job, other than being a soldier' and if so, 'in what sector is the job?'

Second job	% Women	% Men
No second job*	89%	80%
Business*	6%	3%
Other	3%	5%
Teacher or lecturer	2%	1%
Services	1%	4%
Government	1%	1%
Administration	1%	0%
Transportation*	0%	9%
Manual or casual labour*	0%	3%
Agriculture*	0%	1%
Private security	0%	1%
Industry	0%	1%

Note: An asterisk () denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women.*

Women are more likely than men to belong to professional associations or clubs within the RFMF

Professional organisations in the RFMF include the Service Women's Network (SWN) and the Wives and Mothers (WaM) club. One interview highlighted the importance of family and community as core institutional values of the RFMF, as evidenced by the WaM club. They described how the WaM club was set up to support female family members of deployed service people, and holds frequent events such as church meetings and birthdays, some of which are funded by a welfare fund that supports the operation of the WaM club.³⁷ Similarly, the SWN organises meetings to engage with women and discuss issues that directly affect them. The SWN also provides women servicemembers with opportunities to receive guidance and support from a commander as a form of mentorship.

³⁷ Interview with key decision-maker, 6 June 2025, 20250606RFMF_027RH.

76% of all surveyed female personnel reported that they are members of a women's association or club or had heard of one, highlighting the support network available to female servicemembers. This is in comparison to 38% of all surveyed male personnel who reported belonging to a men's association or club or had heard of one.³⁸

Other professional organisations highlighted in the survey included a veteran's association or club, which 62% of all surveyed personnel (60% of women, 64% of men) reported they either belonged to or knew of. Personnel were also highly aware of a unit or branch association, which 66% of all surveyed personnel (62% of women, 70% of men) reported belonging to or having heard of one. Only 2% of both men and women reported not belonging to or never having heard of a professional organisation within the RFMF.

Validation workshop participants noted that while SWN was formerly a registered organisation, it has since been dissolved due to allegations of misuse of funds by some committee members. Presently there is a women's network, however, this organisation is ad hoc and led by the most senior servicewoman, as the designated 'coordinator.'

ii. Barriers

Efforts to recruit women into the RFMF have been small and sporadic

The first recruitment of women was in 1988, followed by very small intakes in 1995, 1996 and 1998. The next major recruitment of women into the RFMF was in 2003/2004, which correlated to the UN requesting Fiji to provide personnel to Iraq. Targeted recruitment drives of female personnel have been sporadic and small-scale. As one key decision-maker noted, 'the first recruit was 1988. It takes us nearly 10 years again and then we bring in female recruitment...'³⁹

Other key decision-maker interviews suggested that current recruitment initiatives encompass a variety of initiatives, including via social media, through sports, and career expos at schools which reach women. One interview suggested that the role of the women's rugby team at the International Defence Rugby Competition was an important tool for empowerment and awareness of women in the armed forces.⁴⁰

The interview also referred to other recruitment tools like the use of the Public Service Commission Expo that help women and girls learn about a career in the armed forces, though they are not specifically targeted at recruiting women. Interview data detailed that visiting co-ed schools and predominantly female schools and showcasing women personnel helped to signify that the RFMF is 'not just only a male environment, but also a female environment.'⁴¹

Men and women differ in their length of service leading to concerns about retention of women

As Table 1.4 below demonstrates, men and women have different average lengths of service in the RFMF. On average, men have much higher lengths of service than women.

- Overall, men serve an average of 14 years compared to 8 years for women.
- Among high-ranking personnel, men have served an average of 22 years compared to 16 years for women.

³⁸ Interviews mention the Soqosoqovakavauna for male service members, and FGD and validation workshop participants confirmed that this group is for men to hold cava sessions together, it is not really a formal organization for men that represents men's interests in the force.

³⁹ Interview with key decision-maker, 1 August 2025, 20250801RFMF_003DR

⁴⁰ Interview with key decision-maker, 4 August 2025, 20250804RFMF_002DR

⁴¹ Interview with key decision-maker, 2 June 2025, 20250602RFMF_015RH

- Deployed women have much longer years of service than non-deployed women at each rank, but in particular deployed high-ranking women (18 years) compared to their non-deployed counterparts (8 years).
- More women (63%) than men (47%) had considered leaving the RFMF.⁴²

Several key decision-makers interviewed noted that although recruitment drives to enlist female cadets had been successful, there were challenges retaining women at the officer level.⁴³ As women serve for shorter periods of time on average, they are less likely to remain in the RFMF long enough to be part of the eligible pool for deployment or have the seniority to fill leadership roles while deployed.

Low retention rates for women or greater willingness to leave overall may reflect limited retention policies tailored to women, challenges balancing family responsibilities, or entrenched barriers to promotion. Retention may also be undermined by the gender roles in the RFMF that are discussed in Issue area 10.

Both FGD and validation workshop participants confirmed that women's uneven retention in the RFMF might be linked to a lack of adequate representation, particularly in senior ranks, and funding to provide adequate infrastructure for women. Recommendations to address these barriers were developed by FGD participants and then verified at the validation workshop.

Table 1.4. Average length of service in years, based on rank, gender and deployment.

Rank	All women	All men	Deployed women	Deployed men	Non-deployed women	Non-deployed men
Low	5	9	10	15	3	6
Medium	9	17	11	22	5	7
High	16	22	18	24	8	10

**Low, medium and high-ranking is based on the self-reported ranking of survey participants.*

Women are currently underrepresented in leadership positions in the RFMF

Women currently serve in few managerial or leadership positions in the RFMF. Only 10% of women in the armed forces are median or high rank (commissioned officer or above). While this number is relatively small compared to men, the proportion of mid to high-ranking women in the force is equal to the proportion of women in the overall RFMF (about 10%). Additionally, after joining, women have an equal likelihood (10%) of becoming commissioned officers compared to men (10%). This demonstrates a good practice of proportional representation—women advance to leadership at rates consistent with their overall presence in the force. The main limitation to women's representation in leadership, then, stems from their smaller representation in the total RFMF rather than unequal promotion practices.

Yet the small number of women in leadership has implications. For women, this may mean having less support for gender-related needs (i.e. sanitary supplies). For men, the lack of women in leadership may lead to a false sense of satisfaction with the current state of gender equality in the institution – with few having access to raise the experiences of women to higher-ranking officers, male leadership may fail to notice the needs of female personnel.

There have been varied institutional efforts to advertise RFMF recruitment opportunities amongst the general public

Most respondents heard about opportunities to join the RFMF directly through their family (45%) and friends (14%). However, public sources of information were also important. As Table 1.5 shows, 37% of respondents had heard of opportunities in the newspaper and 17% from social media, however, only 3% had heard about

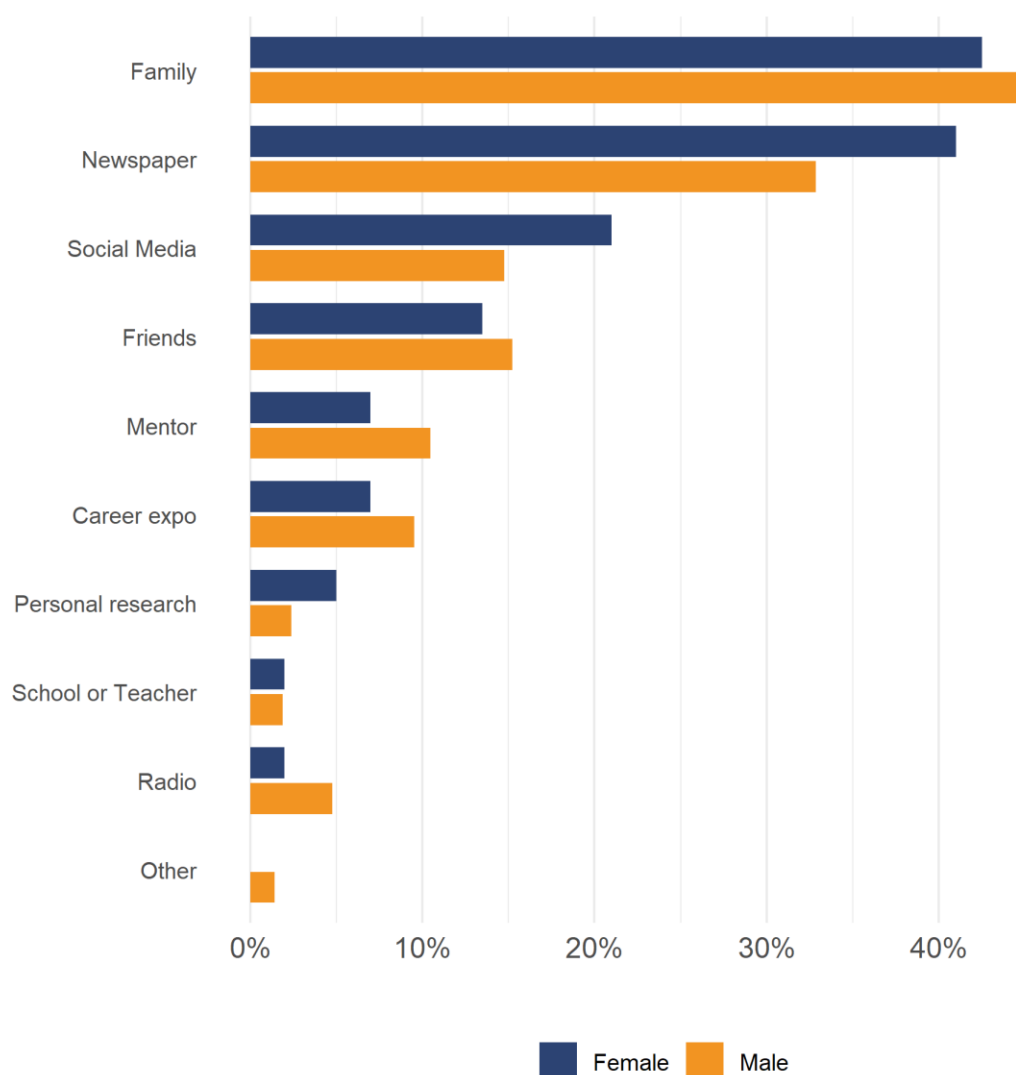
⁴² This question was only asked to 62 surveyed personnel.

⁴³ Key decision-makers interviewed June 12, 2025 (20250612RFMF_045RH), July 3, 2025 (20250703RFMF_001ES), and July 29, 2025 (20250729RFMF_004DR).

opportunities to join the RFMF through the radio. Additionally, only 8% had learned of recruitment opportunities at a career expo, 2% at school, and 9% via a mentor. Women were more likely than men to learn about joining the RFMF through public sources such as newspapers (41% of women compared to 33% of men) and social media (21% for women compared to 15% of men).

Heavy reliance on information through family and personal connections about joining the RFMF means that people outside these social networks may find it harder to learn about joining.

Figure 1.5. Survey responses to the question, ‘How did you find out about joining the RFMF?’



Note: An asterisk () denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women.*

Access to equipment is broadly equal, but suitability differs

Both men and women reported generally equitable access to the equipment required to perform their duties, with 78% of men and 69% of women indicating that they had access to equipment. As this difference is not statistically significant, the findings suggest that access to basic resources is largely gender-neutral.

Uniforms and protective gear are designed for men’s bodies

Significant gender differences emerge in the adequacy and fit of uniforms. While 97% of men stated that their uniforms ‘always’ or ‘sometimes’ fit, only 87% of women said the same. This discrepancy is statistically significant, highlighting that RFMF uniforms are better suited to men’s body types. Moreover, 51% of women and 58% of men reported that their uniforms were adequate (see Table 1.6), indicating that the remaining percentage of women (49%) and men (42%) found their uniforms to be inadequate.

Interviews add more insight: women consistently described uniforms and protective gear, including body armour and bulletproof vests, as designed for men’s bodies, resulting in discomfort or poor fit. They also reported not receiving items specifically tailored to women, such as sports bras or maternity uniforms. This reflects an institutional design bias that assumes a male body as the standard, which can result in women feeling less included in the RFMF. As stated by one interviewee:

If you look at our uniform. No, you don’t see any female ones. You get the other militaries that have the female uniform. The same uniform, but fitted. Meaning women are inclusive. The issue: All the vests are male. All the shorts are male shorts. When they are saying we are pro women, you have to action it out [...] Order more uniform for females. If there is none, create one.⁴⁴

Although the RFMF does not produce uniforms that explicitly accommodate religious or traditional dress (beyond the ceremonial skirt), nearly half of all respondents (46%) reported that their uniforms met such needs, with no significant gender difference. This suggests some informal flexibility despite the absence of official provisions.

Table 1.6. Survey responses to the question ‘What facilities/equipment did the RFMF in Fiji provide that were adequate in Fiji?’

Facility type	% Women	% Men
Recreational spaces	59%	54%
Office spaces	56%	60%
Dining facilities	54%	61%
Bathrooms*	52%	64%
Uniforms	51%	58%
Equipment	50%	50%
Sleeping facilities	48%	44%
All facilities adequate	12%	17%

Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women.

Sleeping facilities are widely seen as inadequate, especially for women

Perceptions of adequacy in RFMF facilities are low across the sample, as indicated by Table 1.6 above. Only 15% of all respondents (17% men, 12% women) indicated that all facilities were fully adequate, meaning that the vast majority (85%) identified at least some deficiencies. Less than half of respondents (46%) rated sleeping quarters as adequate, and this percentage was lower among men. Interestingly, women were less likely than men to describe sleeping quarters as inadequate, despite interviews indicating that female accommodation is particularly limited.

Interviews revealed that the number of women’s barracks in Fiji is small, constraining both recruitment and training opportunities due to the lack of available space.⁴⁵ The physical condition of women’s facilities is also concerning. Observations from the female barracks in Labasa in July 2025 (Labasa barracks are not pictured at the request of the RFMF as they reported these barracks have been demolished) showed visible deterioration posing safety hazards, including peeling paint, weathered beams, and missing floorboards. These conditions reflect ageing infrastructure and insufficient maintenance.

⁴⁴ Interview with key decision-maker, 3 July 2025. 20250703RFMF_001ES

⁴⁵ Interview with key decision-maker, 4 August 2025, 20250804RFMF_002DR; 6 June 2026, 20250606RFMF_028RH.

In late June 2026, the RFMF informed researchers that the Labasa women's barracks had been demolished and images of these barracks were removed at their request. These barracks provided inadequate accommodation. Their removal, however, raises some important questions and considerations, including what alternative women's accommodation has been provided, the adequacy of any replacement accommodation, and whether there was any coordination with servicewomen to relocate them to other barracks. Given the importance of adequate and suitable accommodation to women being able to perform at their maximum capability, the RFMF may also want to consider prioritising EIF funds to build a new women's barracks in Labasa.

Women have less consistent access to preferred and adequate bathroom facilities

Women (89%) reported lower access to preferred bathroom facilities compared to men (96%). Women (52%) compared to men (64%) were also much less likely to find the bathroom facilities adequate. Additionally, women were less likely than men to report adequate office spaces (56% women, 60% men) and dining facilities (54% women, 61% men), though the differences between genders were not statistically significant.

Newer facilities such as JTFC Blackrock included both unisex and female-specific bathroom facilities, however, women have less access to dedicated bathrooms in older facilities (including the Force Training Group barracks) and in areas which are traditionally male dominated, such as engineering and infantry units. This is problematic for women's need for privacy, including to breastfeed or to change.

These findings suggest that women's accommodation and infrastructure needs are being met to a much lower extent than the needs of men, which can contribute to women feeling less valued and comfortable in their working and living environments.

Delays in payments from the RFMF affect men more than women

Overall, 37% of respondents reported experiencing delays in payment from the RFMF. Men (47%) were more likely than women (27%) to indicate that their payments had been delayed, though the gender difference was not statistically significant.⁴⁶ Delays in payment, whether caused by administrative errors or for other reasons, can undermine financial stability and lead to lower retention and morale of personnel.

Personnel are not able to move between units easily

Only 34% of all surveyed personnel indicated that it was easy to transfer between units, including 38% of men and 30% of women, though with no statistically significant gender difference. Personnel's limited ability to change units is concerning because it means there is limited opportunity for soldiers to diversify their skillset beyond the role they currently serve in their unit.

⁴⁶ This question was only asked to 62 respondents (32 men and 30 women) due to a Qualtrics issue. The small sample size may explain the lack of statistical significance despite a seemingly large difference in percentages.



Issue area 2 Deployment Criteria

Low

The deployment criteria issue area examines whether women can meet the requirements for deployment to the same extent as men. This is an area of low priority as the MOWIP results identify several best practices the RFMF has engaged to ensure that women and men are equally capable of meeting the requirements for deployment.

Summary of results

The RFMF has implemented a number of best practices to accommodate women's ability to meet deployment requirements, such as by adapting physical fitness tests to accommodate women and equally informing women and men about deployment requirements. Additional evidence from the MOWIP results, however, highlights some important factors that may limit women's ability to meet the requirements for deployment. For example, women do not have the same access to international training opportunities as men and they (women) do not believe they have the right skills needed for deployment.

Main opportunities:

- Respondents' understanding of deployment criteria was largely correct
- Men and women express confidence about physical fitness requirements thanks to accommodations
- Lack of perceived skill or rank were not factors among respondents who did not volunteer for peacekeeping selection

Main barriers:

- Non-deployed personnel may overestimate the importance of physical fitness
- Women may be less likely to have minimum rank and years of experience to deploy
- Significant problems with obtaining a manual drivers license, especially for women and personnel stationed in remote areas

Gaps in perception and experience:

- Only 25% of women had a drivers license, compared to 44% of men
- Women expressed more interest in additional trainings

Detailed findings

The criteria for deployment are largely the same for men and women, with the exception of the physical fitness and medical exams. The requirements for the physical fitness test are different for men and women, and are modified according to personnel age.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Interview with key decision-maker, August 1, 2025, 20250801RFMF_001DR

Table 2.1. Requirements for Deployment: Battalion, Military Observers/Staff, and Secondment

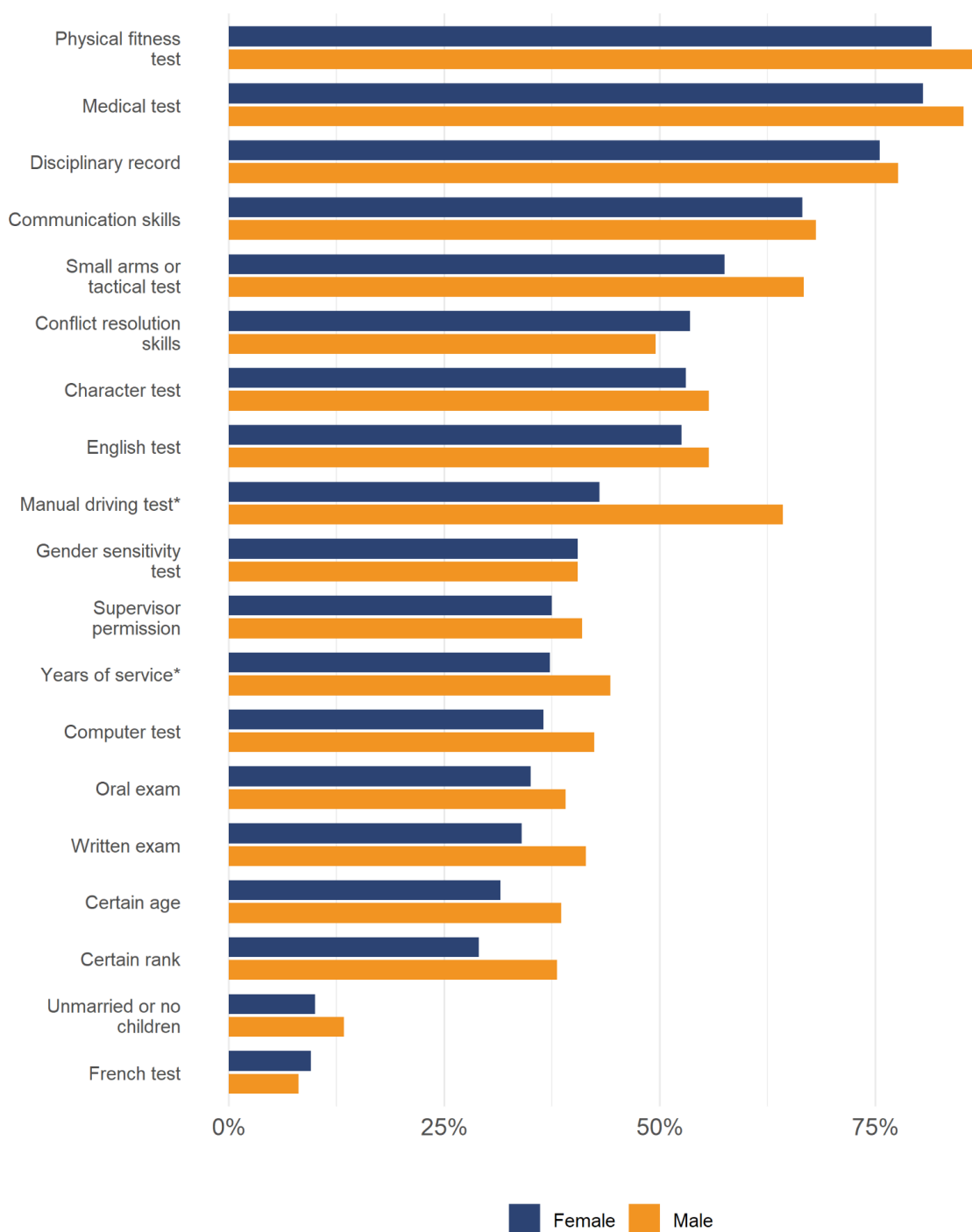
Requirement	Battalion	Military Observers/Staff	Secondment
Driver's test	Only required for unit members deploying as drivers on mission	✓	✓
Physical fitness test	✓	✓	✓
Medical test	✓	✓	✓
Written test for comprehension and report writing	✓	✓	✓
Minimum knowledge of English	✓	✓	✓
Small arms/tactical test	✓	✓	✓
Communication/listening/interpersonal skills	✓	✓	✓
Conflict resolution/negotiation skills	✓	✓	✓
Clean disciplinary record	✓	✓	✓
Minimum age 18, maximum age 55	✓	✓	✓
Questions about gender sensitivity asked in the UN test	✓	✓	✓
Questions about gender sensitivity asked in selection process	N/A	✓	✓
Years experience	N/A	Minimum 10 years experience	Minimum 10 years experience
Rank	N/A ⁴⁸	Minimum rank of Senior Captain	Minimum rank of Senior Captain
Minimum knowledge of French	N/A	N/A	N/A
Computer test	N/A	N/A	N/A

Note: A check symbol (✓) indicates that all personnel must meet the requirement to qualify for that type of deployment. An N/A denotes that there is no minimum standard requirement for that type of deployment.

⁴⁸ Interview with key decision-maker, October 8, 2025.

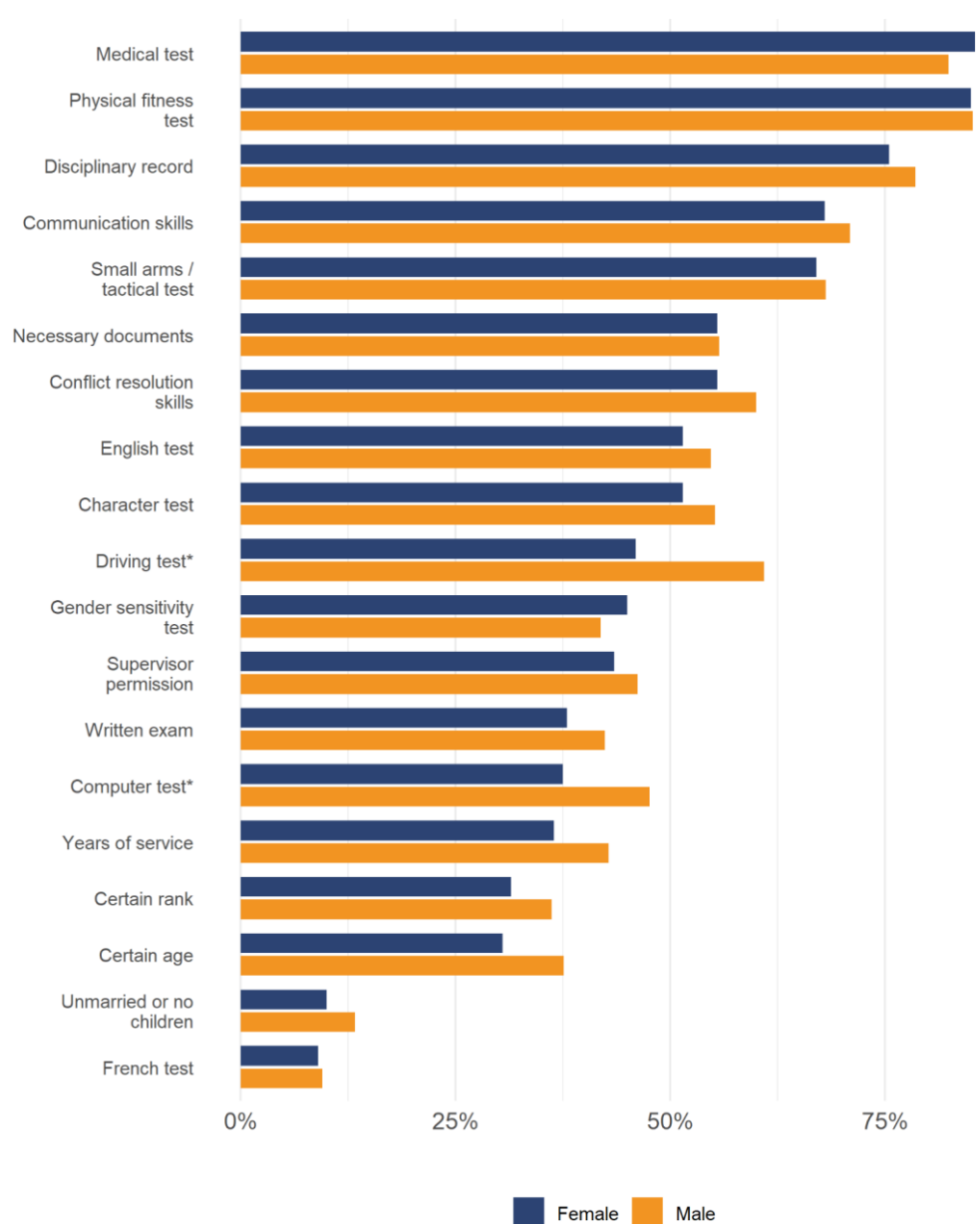
i. Opportunities

Figure 2.2. Survey responses to the question, 'Which of the following do you think are **necessary** for deployment to a UN peace operation for **military observers (UNMOB)?**' Please select all that apply.



Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women.

Figure 2.3. Survey responses to the question 'Which of the following do you think are **necessary** for deployment to a UN peace operation for **a formed unit**. Please select all that apply'



Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women.

Beliefs about deployment requirements are largely correct, though there is some misunderstanding about requirements to deploy with a battalion

Personnel have a good understanding about most of the requirements for deployment as a formed unit/battalion and as a military observer (See Figure 2.2 and Figure 2.3).

For deploying with a formed unit/battalion, 85% of those surveyed were aware of the physical fitness test, 84% were aware of the medical test and 77% were aware of the need for a clean disciplinary record.

However, more than a third of respondents (40%) mistakenly believed that a computer test was required for deployment with a formed unit/battalion. Additionally, though there is a minimum rank and minimum years of service needed to deploy as a military observer, these requirements do **not** exist for deploying with a formed battalion. 40% of respondents believed you needed a certain number of years in service to deploy as a formed battalion and 34% of respondents incorrectly indicated that a rank was required (see Figure 2.3).

Personnel also need the necessary documents to deploy internationally and 90% of all surveyed personnel had a passport, with no gender difference between men and women.

Respondents value working with personnel from other countries for the success of UN missions

Men and women had similar responses when asked the most important skills or characteristics to possess to contribute to the success of UN missions (see Table 2.4). Around a third of men and women (27% of women, 30% of men) indicated the ability to work with personnel from other countries was a top characteristic to possess.

This is an important strength of the RFMF in peacekeeping. As peacekeeping is an international enterprise, it is imperative that peacekeepers from different nations work together towards the mandate of the mission. RFMF personnel deployed to peace operations value a collaborative working environment with international colleagues. Working with peacekeepers from other countries and cultures can also bring in new ideas and perspectives on peacekeeping, including those of women.

Fiji regularly co-deploys to the same peacekeeping bases of at least 12 other troop-contributing countries: Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Finland, France, India, Ireland, Italy, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, and Poland.⁴⁹

These joint deployments have taken place across three UN peacekeeping operations:

- United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)
- United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)
- United Nations Mission of Support to East Timor (UNMISET)

Table 2.4: Top three skills or characteristics believed to be most important and least important for the success of UN missions, by deployment experience.

Three <u>Most</u> Important Skills or Characteristics	% Deployed	% Not deployed	Three <u>Least</u> Important Skills or Characteristics	% Deployed	% Not deployed
Physical fitness*	39%	54%	Ability to speak French	0%	0%
Medical fitness	45%	42%	Minimum rank	0%	1%
Ability to work with personnel from other countries	31%	26%	Appropriate age	0%	1%

Note: An asterisk () denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between deployed and non-deployed personnel.*

⁴⁹ Cil, D., Fjelde, H., Hultman, L., Nilsson, D. 'Mapping blue helmets: Introducing the Geocoded Peacekeeping Operations (Geo-PKO) dataset', *Journal of Peace Research*, 57(2), 2020, pp 360–370.

Selective gender sensitivity screening

Gender sensitivity questions are asked in the test for each different type of deployment, including battalion deployment, military observers or staff, and seconded officers. Officers who pass this exam are then eligible to be selected for deployment.

The next stage involves the selection of officers who will deploy to a UN mission, which consists of RFMF leadership selecting personnel from the pool of officers who have passed the UN exam and are eligible to be selected for deployment. Different from the exam stage in which all officers undergo a gender sensitivity screening, only those deploying as military observers/staff and seconded officers undergo an additional gender sensitivity screening during the selection process. Personnel who deploy as part of a battalion are not required to answer questions about gender sensitivity during the selection process. This means that military observers or staff and seconded officers undergo a more thorough gender sensitivity screening than personnel that deploy with a battalion.

Men and women of the RFMF express confidence towards physical fitness tests thanks to accommodations

All RFMF officers must pass two standardised physical fitness tests to be eligible to deploy to a UN mission. Both the Required Fitness Level (RFL) exam and Battle Efficiency Test (BET) are designed to accommodate gender and age differences amongst personnel. The RFL test requires a specific number of press ups, sit ups, chin ups, and a 2.4km timed run. Minimum standards to pass the RFL test vary according to personnel age (three age groups: 17-24, 25-29, and 30 and up) and gender, with threshold requirements adjusted for older personnel and women. The BET evaluation requires a timed 10km run, fireman's carry, rope climbing, and 100m target timed shoot. Like the RFL, the BET is designed to accommodate both women and older officers. Women are allotted more time to complete the run, a shorter distance for the fireman's carry, do not have to complete the rope climbing portion, and have unlimited time to complete the 100m shoot. Interviews with personnel note that in addition to the official differences in the physical fitness tests, officers may also support each other in an informal level in order to help women pass:

Women have their own fitness test level to pass, which is different from the men. [...] And everybody, we are all understanding. We all know. So we help them to try to pass. Even, [...] you can see somebody grab a pack from the female or lighten it up. They help each other.⁵⁰

The vast majority of all surveyed personnel (85%) know that a physical fitness test is required for UN deployment, with no difference between men and women. Key decision-makers remarked on the difficulties women have with fitness, saying:

And especially after having children, some women really...face difficulties in getting back [to their fitness levels]... Because fitness is a criteria for UN deployments and it's one of the reasons why a number of women in the RFMF have not been deployed ever.⁵¹

While key decision-makers perceived that physical fitness as a barrier for the deployment of women in the RFMF,⁵² survey results point to a different conclusion. 84% of RFMF personnel believe they have the necessary physical fitness skills needed to qualify for deployment. When looking at these results by gender, only slightly more men (85%) report having the necessary fitness skills than women (84%). These results suggest that women and men are equally as likely to believe they have the fitness skills needed to deploy. Taken together,

⁵⁰ Interview with key decision-maker, 12 June 2025, 20250612RFMF_044RH

⁵¹ Interview with key decision-maker, 12 June 2025, 20250612RFMF_044RH

⁵² Interviews with key decision-makers, 7 August 2025, 20250807RFMF_003DR and 2 June 2025, 20250602RFMF_016RH

personnel are both knowledgeable and confident they have the fitness skills needed to deploy to a UN mission, though the perceptions of key decision-makers may indicate otherwise.

Lack of perceived skill or rank were not factors for personnel who were not interested in deployment to a peace operation

Among those who had never expressed interest in deploying to a peace operation, none reported that it was because they did not have the right skills and only one person indicated that it was because they did not have the right rank.

For those who were not selected for deployment in a formed battalion, only 10% indicated it was because of a lack of skill and 14% indicated it was because they did not have the right rank. There was no difference between surveyed men and women. This shows that even when not selected, personnel are confident in the skills they possess to deploy for a peace operation.

ii. Barriers

Non-deployed personnel rank physical fitness as important for deployment, which may pose a barrier to their future deployment

Among individuals who did not have deployment experience, a majority (54% total; 56% women, 53% men) indicated that physical fitness was one of the three most important characteristics needed for success in a UN mission (see Table 2.4 above).

In contrast, among individuals who have deployed to a peace operation, a minority (39% total; 34% of women, 44% of men) indicated that physical fitness was one of the most important skills for mission success. The difference in responses between deployed and non-deployed personnel suggests that perceptions held by non-deployed personnel are misaligned with real experiences on mission. Responses from deployed personnel indicate that personnel learn about the utility of alternative skills on mission – such as the ability to work with personnel from other countries – which are necessary for peacekeeping effectiveness.

Because a physical fitness test is a prerequisite for deployment, such belief may act as a barrier, discouraging otherwise qualified personnel from applying. Individuals who perceive the fitness requirements to be overly stringent may self-select out of the process, particularly if they doubt their ability to meet the standard. In practice, this could limit the pool of potential peacekeepers and disproportionately affect groups who may face additional challenges in maintaining high levels of physical fitness.

Both the FGD and validation workshop participants noted that the MOWIP findings showing that non-deployed personnel ranked physical fitness skills the most important for mission success is likely a product of two interlinked factors. First, the testing requirements in place mandate that personnel must pass three physical fitness exams to become eligible for deployment. Second, personnel have limited ability to change/rotate units in a way that would allow non-deployed personnel to work with and learn from personnel with deployment experience and also diversify their skillset beyond the role they currently serve in their unit. A resulting implication of these two factors is that non-deployed personnel overemphasise the importance of physical fitness skills over other soft skills that are necessary for the success of UN missions. This may lead personnel to prioritise gaining physical fitness skills over other important mission skills like gender sensitivity and civilian protection.

Disparities among perceived skills or attributes for deployment may pose barriers for women

Table 2.5. Survey responses to the question 'Indicate all skills and requirements **you think you have** to be selected for a UN peace operation.'

Criteria for deployment	% Women who believe they have skill or meet the requirement	% Men who believe they have skill or meet the requirement
Physical fitness test	84%	85%
Medical test	84%	82%
Disciplinary record	72%	72%
Communication/listening	72%	67%
Ability to work with personnel from other countries	71%	69%
English test	70%	74%
Small arms/combat/Tactical test	70%	70%
Pass a drug test	67%	70%
Appropriate personality/character	62%	58%
Ability to work with host population	60%	62%
Years of experience	56%	61%
Computer test	53%	58%
Conflict resolution/negotiation	53%	56%
Gender sensitivity	47%	50%
Supervisor permission	38%	47%
Age	36%	44%
Driving a manual car*	28%	44%
Minimum rank*	26%	39%
Speak the local language	25%	40%
No family commitments*	18%	28%
Speak French	7%	7%

Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women

Rank and years of experience

As mentioned previously, there are no required years of experience requirements for deployment with a battalion, although military observers/staff and secondment must have at least ten years of service in order to deploy. The required rank for these positions is typically that of a senior captain or above. Only 29% of the survey sample have 10 or more years of experience, indicating there may be a low number of women who qualify for such positions. This is in comparison to 57% of men in the survey sample who have 10 or more years of experience.

Women are less likely to report that they met the required rank or required years of service necessary for peacekeeping deployment. 39% of men reported having the minimum rank and 61% reported having the minimum years of experience necessary to deploy. In comparison, only 26% of women reported having the minimum rank and 56% reported having the minimum years of experience for deployment. These differences may be consequential, especially in consideration of the difference in the average length of service of men and women. These differences may have important implications, particularly when accounting for differences in men's and women's average service length.

Driver's licenses

In order to deploy with a battalion as a driver or to deploy as military observers/staff the RFMF requires a driver's test. Before deployment, all RFMF drivers must have RFMF licenses for the vehicles they would drive. Tactical driving practice is conducted during pre-deployment training at the JTFC Blackrock. Upon arrival to the mission, drivers undergo driving comprehension practice to help familiarise themselves with mission vehicles and the local terrain. Then, while on mission, personnel must have a UN license in order to drive vehicles.

For both the RFMF and the UN, drivers licenses are important for deployed personnel. However, survey results indicate that women are significantly less likely to have a driver's license and have experience driving a manual car than men. When selecting the skills they possessed for deployment, only 25% of female respondents indicated that they had a driver's license and 28% of female respondents indicated that they had driven a manual car. This is significantly less than the 44% of men who indicated that they did have a driver's license and had experience driving a manual car. Women were also significantly less likely to choose a driver's license as a requirement for deployment to a formed battalion (see Figure 2.3).

One interviewee suggested this was due to cultural reasons: 'It was not something that was common in the past to see women driving. So most of the women that came in initially into the RFMF did not have this thing of getting a driving license.'⁵³ Further, another interviewee stated that procuring a driving license may pose an economic burden 'It's lucky for those that can afford to take driving lessons because they're really expensive here'.⁵⁴

Languages

Personnel require a certain level of English in order to pass their pre-deployment training and be deployed with a battalion. English is embedded in Fiji's educational system, and all lessons at JTFC for pre-deployment training are given in English. As one interviewee noted:

⁵³ Interview with key decision-maker, 5 June 2025, 20250605RFMF_025RH

⁵⁴ Interview with key decision-maker, 5 June 2025, 20250605RFMF_026RH

Even our trainers conduct our lessons in English. So when they go to the mission, they are already equipped with [English]. Most of our training has started from when we were doing primary and secondary level education.⁵⁵

Some units in the RFMF have begun training in French, although it is not required for military observers or staff. Despite similar rates of men and women expressing knowledge of French (7% of women and 7% of men) and English proficiency (70% of women and 74% of men), women widely report an inability to speak local languages in the host country. Only 25% of women indicated that they were able to speak the host country's local language, significantly smaller compared to the 47% of men who indicated the same. Survey and interview data indicate that men and women deploy to the same missions, which means they face relatively similar needs for language skill.

Interviews with personnel provide some insight into this difference. In addition to English and French, one interviewee remarked that some personnel understand languages from the Middle East and, due to interactions with local Indian communities, Hindi.⁵⁶ This indicates some variation in command of languages among RFMF personnel due to personal background. However, interview and survey responses shed little light on what motivates this difference between men and women. Though speaking local languages is not highly ranked as an important skill for deployment among both men and women, enabling female personnel with a more diverse skill set may empower more to deploy on future missions.

Supervisor permission

In our survey, female personnel were far less likely to state that they possessed the supervisor permission necessary for deployment than male personnel. 38% of women indicated that they had the supervisor permission necessary. Almost ten percent more men indicated that they had such permissions, at 47%, though the difference between men and women was not statistically significant. This is an important barrier to note, as supervisor permissions are key in the deployment approval processes. These supervisors are responsible for selecting officers for deployment to UN peacekeeping missions, and without this selection, an officer cannot be deployed. These survey results point to a disparity in receiving these approvals from superiors between the men and women of the RFMF.

Personnel engage in some international training but with gender disparities

RFMF personnel have the opportunity to engage in international training through JTFC Blackrock and international partners. However, survey data shows clear disparities between men (57%) and women (38%) who have participated in international training.

Some personnel do not wish to take training in the areas in which they currently lack

Only 54% of personnel indicated that they would like to take further training in the areas where they currently lack skills, such as conflict resolution, driving, small arms training, or training on SEA or sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). This number was much lower among men, with 47% of men indicating they would like to train in the areas in which they have the least skills in comparison to 62% of women. This difference was statistically significant, indicating that women express a stronger desire to participate in further training than their male counterparts. This may represent a barrier as men do not express a desire to take training in areas such as SEA and SGBV, which can be crucial for deployment.

⁵⁵ Interview with key decision-maker, 8 August 2025, 20250808RFMF_001DR

⁵⁶ Interview with key decision-maker, 8 August 2025, 20250808RFMF_001DR

There are some personnel who may not agree with UN civilian protection norms

Among surveyed personnel, 69% indicated that they agreed with civilian protection norms that UN peacekeepers should use 'all necessary means' to protect the host country's civilian population. This includes 71% of men and 68% of women, with no statistically significant gender difference in their responses. When disaggregated by deployment status, 70% of deployed personnel and 68% of non-deployed personnel agreed that peacekeepers should use 'all necessary means' to protect civilians in the host country. Though this represents over two-thirds of surveyed personnel, one-third disagree with UN civilian protection norms.



Issue area 3 Deployment Selection

Medium

The deployment selection issue area explores whether women are prevented or not from deploying through a lack of information, a lack of connections to influential decision-makers and/or because their superiors decide that it is too dangerous for them to deploy. This is an issue of medium priority, which means the RFMF should monitor selection processes to ensure women and men have an equal chance of being selected for deployment.

Box 3.1. The selection process⁵⁷

Most rotations are predictable. The UN sends the request specifying the overarching numbers and capabilities required by the mission to RFMF Headquarters Land Forces, who then pass it to Joint Taskforce Command (JTFC) – which is the unit responsible for all UN deployment activities. JTFC determines the number and rank of personnel required from each unit to fill the UN request and sends the unit quota to the Commanding Officer (CO) who tasks sub-units to identify suitable individuals for deployment. Sub-units down to platoon level will recommend soldiers for deployment.

Individual units have different criteria for choosing individuals suitable for pre-departure training and deployment. Criteria taken into consideration may include how recently someone has been previously deployed, the commander's ability to backfill an existing role within the home unit, a soldier's financial needs, the skills requested in the quota, as well as the requirement for individuals to pass the mandatory physical and medical tests. Personnel can express their interest in deployments, however, their conduct record will be reviewed. The intent of commanders is to provide personnel who do not have any conduct issues recorded, that they are fit and can pass the Required Fitness Level (RFL) standard and have a good attendance record. Individuals who pass the pre-deployment training are eligible to be deployed. Some may have their departure postponed due to personal reasons or need for specific skills requirements for the deployment.

Recommendations are passed to the officer commanding the sub-unit who will endorse or not the recommendation. Details are then passed back through the chain of command to the CO who will provide the details of final nominees to HQ Land Forces and JTFC. JTFC will review and comment on the proposed list (including number of women, if needed) and check that the basic requirements for deployment are met. JTFC then finalises the recommendations for approval by Commander, Land Forces.

Summary of findings

There are some important good practices the RFMF have implemented to ensure a gender equal selection process, which is demonstrated by the finding that respondents perceive that personnel are selected for deployment because they have the right skills. Yet other concerns, such as the selection process being biased and issues with passing the UN exam, may likely impact women's deployment to UN peace operations.

Main opportunities:

- Standardised process for deployment selection
- Men and women heard about opportunities through similar channels
- Personnel perceive selection to be based on skills
- Personnel express strong desire to deploy or redeploy

⁵⁷ Directorate Human Resources Management, RFMF Strategic Headquarters, and interviews with key decision-makers including 20250709RFMF_002ES, 20250729RFMF_004DR

Main barriers:

- Majority of respondents believe that favouritism plays a role in selection
- Gaps in awareness of deployment opportunities
- Difficulty passing pre-deployment test: half of respondents failed or knew someone who failed
- Personnel spend personal money on pre-deployment costs

Gaps in perception and experience:

- Men believed women should deploy fewer times over the course of their career
- Majority of women believed that men are favoured for peacekeeping deployments

Detailed findings

i. Opportunities

There is a standardised process for selection for deployment

About 65% of personnel who had deployed reported being individually selected by their superiors for deployment in a formed unit, with no significant difference in reporting between men and women (Table 3.1). This is also in line with the significant portion of personnel who reported hearing about deployment opportunities from their immediate superiors, with 72% of men and 71% of women reporting as such. Similarly, 62% of women and 67% of men reported that they were selected by their immediate superiors to be a military observer or staff. Furthermore, 73% of surveyed personnel indicated that they would be willing to approach a superior officer about opportunities to deploy to peacekeeping operations.

There is no formal process to volunteer for deployment, personnel instead are deployed based on selection by their superiors who follow specific criteria from the UN. The initial process of nomination by the unit commander according to unit-specific criteria in addition to UN criteria opens the process to perceptions of bias and favouritism (see discussion under barriers section below, and in Issue area 6).

Discussions with the Directorate of Human Resource Management and key decision-makers suggested that, in line with UN policy, the RFMF has also recently focused on recruiting women into its ranks to meet the requirements of 10% of a deployed unit consisting of female personnel, however, this was proving difficult.⁵⁸

Table 3.1. Survey responses to the question: Select all the ways you have been able to deploy to a UN peace operation.

Factor	% Deployed Women	% Deployed Men
Selected by superiors to be a military observer or staff	62%	67%
Part of an existing platoon	47%	53%
Joined a formed unit or battalion that I was not previously part of	23%	23%
Joined a formed unit or battalion that was created to deploy	58%	57%
Nominated by government officials	2%	6%
Served as an independent consultant or seconded	5%	2%

Note: An asterisk () denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women.*

⁵⁸ Interview with key decision-maker, 4 August 2025, 20250804RFMF_003DR

Personnel also reported equally hearing about opportunities to deploy through internal memos or word of mouth

Generally, both men and women heard equally about opportunities to deploy. 63% of women and 59% of men heard about UN positions through distributed internal memos. However, the RFMF did not distribute information by mass email or organisational newsletters. 55% of personnel (61% of women, 50% of men) also reported they had heard about deployment opportunities through word of mouth, though the RFMF indicated that this is not an official method used to spread information about UN deployments.

Men and women share similar views on the number of times they should deploy to a peacekeeping mission

Men and women in the RFMF generally share similar views about the appropriate number of deployments for their own gender, but expressed different views regarding the other gender.

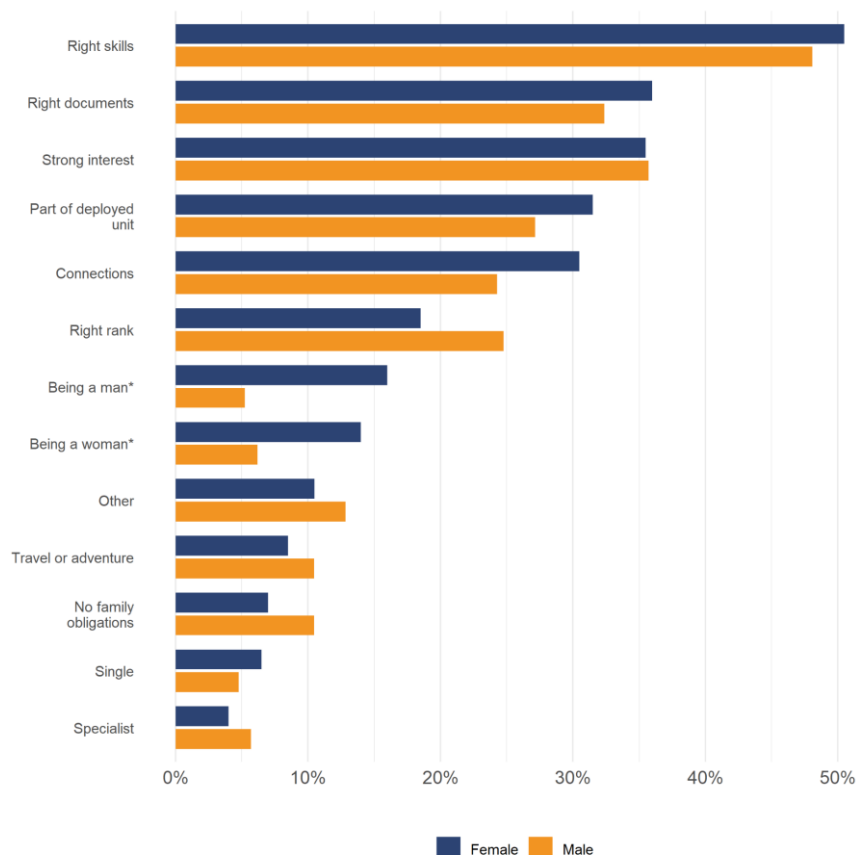
On average, male personnel reported that men should deploy about eight times over the course of their careers, and female personnel indicated that women should deploy approximately eight times as well.

However, when asked about the other gender, a disparity emerges: men believed that women should deploy fewer times, on average five times, while women believed men should deploy eight times. The findings suggest different gendered perceptions regarding women's suitability for repeated deployments.

Personnel perceived the selection of their colleagues to deploy to be based on them having the right skills

Around half of RFMF personnel believe that professional capability remains a key determinant of deployment selection. A slightly higher proportion of women (51%) than men (48%) agreed that deployments were determined on the basis of having the right skill (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2. Survey responses to the question: Why do you think your fellow colleagues who deployed to UN peace operations were chosen?.



Note: An asterisk () denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women*

Personnel who chose not to apply for deployment did so for reasons other than a lack of knowledge of information

Personnel are able to express their interest in opportunities to deploy, though commanders generally identify and recommend suitable individuals for deployment based on relevant criteria. Information for deployment for all contingent UN positions, military observer/staff positions, and secondment positions are posted via internal communications and the unit commanders and Chief of Staff are responsible for liaising with staff regarding deployment opportunities. This method of information dissemination appears to be successful as no surveyed personnel indicated that they did not apply for a UN peace operation deployment due to a lack of information. Only one surveyed person indicated that it was because they did not know about the opportunity.

Personnel express strong desire to deploy or redeploy to a UN peace operation

The survey data highlighted a strong willingness among RFMF personnel to serve in UN peace operations across both men and women. Among those who had not yet deployed, 98% expressed interest in doing so within the next two years (99% women, 97% men). This near-universal willingness underscores the high value personnel place on peacekeeping experience and the strong institutional culture that views deployment as a desirable option.

Among those who had already deployed, the motivation to redeploy remains high. 91% of previously deployed personnel (89% women, 94% men) expressed a desire to redeploy to another mission, with no statistical significance between men and women. Standard deployment for RFMF personnel consists of two consecutive six-month deployments. 47% of surveyed personnel reported that they had the opportunity to extend their deployment during one or more of the UN peace operations they had deployed to.

Together, these findings highlight the RFMF's strong institutional commitment to UN peace operations and a deeply embedded culture of readiness to serve abroad. They also suggest that any barriers to deployment are unlikely to stem from a lack of willingness among personnel, but rather structural, cultural or procedural challenges that limit who is able to deploy.

ii. Barriers

There are gaps in early awareness of deployment opportunities for personnel

The RFMF does not provide information about deployments to a UN peace operation in the military training academy, meaning that personnel, including women, may only learn about peacekeeping opportunities later in their careers. Without proactive recruitment strategies and clear information channels, there may be limited awareness of peacekeeping roles. Women may have less access to informal networks that share information about deployment opportunities, therefore without early formal mechanisms to spread information early, women are less likely to be aware or prepared for the deployment process.

A majority of personnel believe that favouritism and gender play a role in selection for deployment to peacekeeping missions

Interviews indicate that decisions like deployment can be influenced by favouritism:

It's that [you're familiar with someone] or you are related to someone who is making decisions. Because for us family is a backbone...So sometimes merit is being overlooked because you are so. You will see you are satisfying the criteria and yet someone is picked over you and you know for a fact he doesn't.⁵⁹

Survey results also point to high levels of perceived favouritism among personnel (see Table 3.2 above). 87% of the sample reported some form of favouritism in the selection process for deployment. There was also a gender gap with women (92%) more likely to believe that there was favouritism in the process than men (81%).

⁵⁹ Interview with key decision maker, 12 June 2025, 20250612RFMF_044RH

Women were significantly more likely to believe that men were favoured for peacekeeping deployments, with 53% of all female respondents indicating that they believed this was the case (compared to 34% of men). Conversely, it was less common for respondents to answer that women were favoured for peacekeeping deployments, though more men than women believed women were favoured (16% of women, 27% of men).

Open-ended responses from surveyed women indicate a common belief that biases in the selection process poses a challenge for women to deploy. Some written responses to the survey on this point mention ‘...not enough vacancies given to them [women] and majority for male’;⁶⁰ ‘unfair selection at the final stages of the selection process’;⁶¹ and ‘access to opportunity to deploy in peacekeeping operations especially as Staff Officer’.⁶²

These findings suggest that despite institutional commitments to increase women’s participation in peacekeeping, many women perceive their exclusion to be based on their gender. When asked whether they believed the selection process into a UN peace operation to be unfair, 49% of women believed the process to be unfair, compared to 29% of men. These findings suggest that women in the RFMF perceive a lack of gender equality in inviting personnel to deploy and may be discouraged by the selection process and institutional mechanisms.

Women who were not invited to deploy believe their gender played a role

Among the 188 respondents who reported not being invited to deploy to a UN peace operation (97 women and 91 men), 20% of women attributed this exclusion to their gender, compared to only one man who believed the same (see Table 3.3). Women (34%) were also significantly more likely to report that they were not invited because the gender quota had already been met, compared to men (16%).

*Table 3.3. Survey responses to the question, ‘If you were **NOT invited** to deploy, why do you think you were not asked to deploy?’*

Reason not selected	% Women	% Men
Gender quota was already met*	34%	16%
My superiors chose someone to whom they owe a favour	29%	24%
My superiors chose someone they knew personally	27%	26%
I did not meet the criteria for deployment	25%	35%
Because I am a woman*	20%	N/A
I had some family and/or legal obligations	14%	12%
My superiors thought the operation location was too dangerous for me	14%	8%
Because I was recently deployed	13%	10%

⁶⁰ Survey respondent, deployed man.

⁶¹ Survey respondent, non-deployed woman.

⁶² Survey respondent, deployed woman.

Reason not selected	% Women	% Men
I did not have the right rank	10%	18%
I did not have the right skills for the peace operation	8%	16%
I did not meet the age requirement	4%	9%
Because I am a man	N/A	1%

Note: N/A indicates not applicable. An asterisk () denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women*

Personnel have some concerns with the UN pre-deployment testing process

Personnel are required to pass a test during the UN pre-deployment phase in order to deploy. However, perceptions of bias in selection mirror views on the fairness and structure of pre-deployment testing. As shown by Table 3.4, 36% of women (compared to 52% of men) reported having no concerns about the test process, indicating that a majority of women (64%) and nearly half of men (48%) had at least one concern with pre-deployment testing.

The most frequently cited issue involved the testing environment itself, with 31% of women and 25% of men noting that tests were conducted with personnel of all ranks. Such mixed-rank settings can heighten social pressure, particularly for lower-ranking personnel who may feel anxious performing alongside more senior officers.

Table 3.4. Percentage of respondents who indicated that they had concerns while taking the UN pre-deployment tests.

Issues with pre-deployment testing	% Women	% Men
I had no concerns while taking the test*	36%	52%
Tests implemented with people of all ranks	31%	25%
Test questions were not relevant	15%	8%
Too many distractions while taking the test	11%	7%
Test instructions were not clear	9%	7%
Personal test results shared publicly	9%	4%
Not enough time to complete the test	8%	8%

Issues with pre-deployment testing	% Women	% Men
Other people taking test could see my response	6%	6%
Test results were lost	6%	5%
I was held to a different standard compared to personnel from other contingents or countries	6%	5%
Other people taking the test/the proctor disrespected me while taking the test	4%	2%
Test was too difficult	3%	8%

Note: An asterisk () denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women*

Half of respondents either failed or knew someone who failed pre-deployment testing

Pre-deployment testing is closely monitored to ensure it meets UN operational standards. One interview explained

UN assessment teams routinely come to the UN school in JTFC. That's where they do their evaluation and assessments on the standards that have been taught during pre-deployment training for UN missions. And if they are satisfied with that, then that's the tick in the box for Fiji to deploy.⁶³

However, according to survey data, over half of all personnel (53%) had either failed the pre-deployment testing themselves or knew someone who had. This rate was slightly higher among men at 54%, compared to 51% of women, though the difference was not statistically significant. The high proportion of personnel reporting direct or indirect experience with failing the test may underscore the rigour of the pre-deployment process and the challenges it presents for gaining deployment experience, or the willingness of personnel to widely share examples of those who have failed.

Personnel spend their personal money on pre-deployment costs

According to the FFF, the RFMF covers most of the costs associated with the UN pre-deployment application, selection, and training process, however, personnel must pay for their own recreational and personal needs. Despite this, the survey results indicated that 90% of personnel had to spend their personal money on pre-deployment costs.

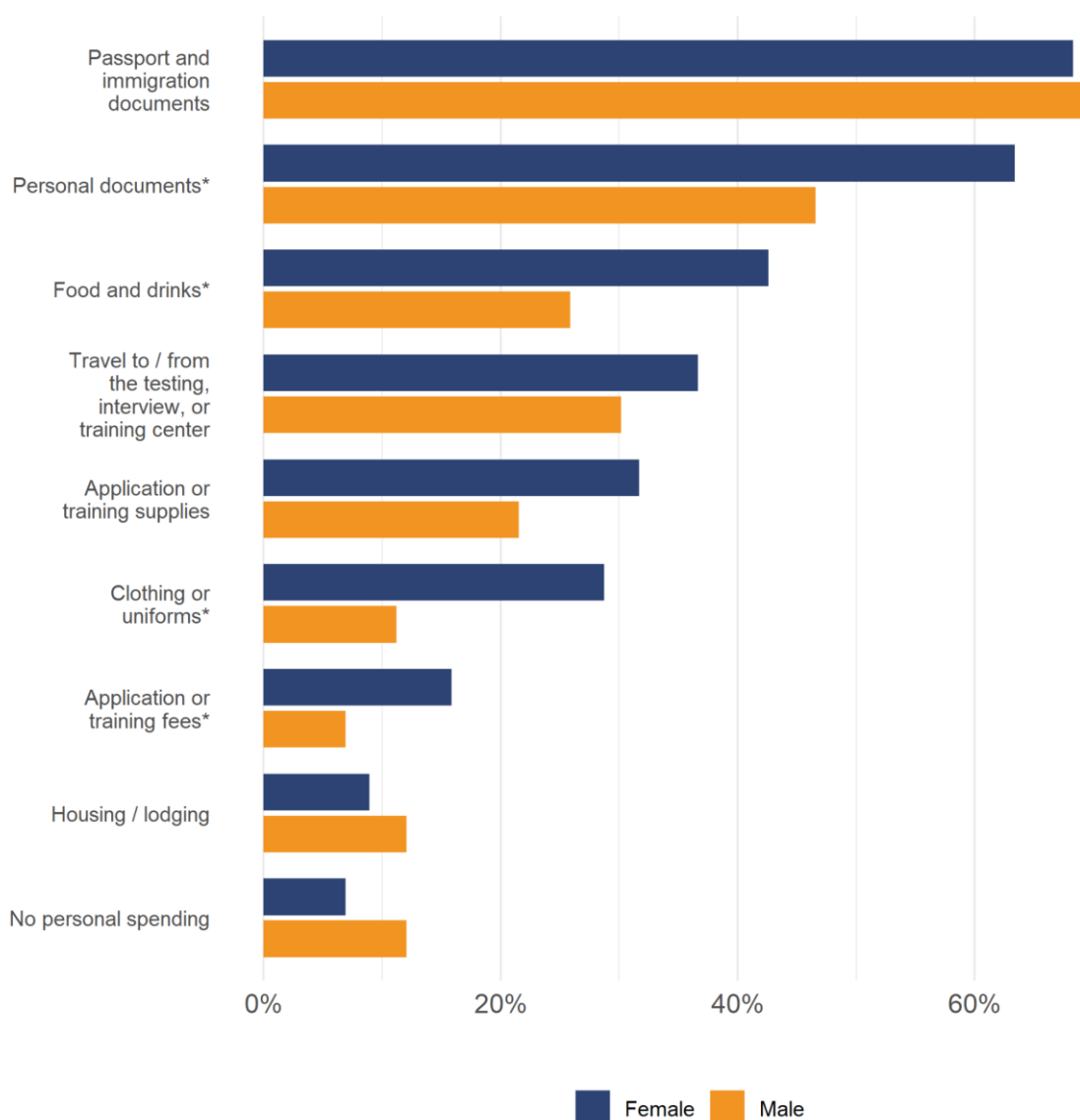
The most significant costs included obtaining passports/immigration documents and other personal documents, as well as covering general travel to and from testing, interview or training centres. Interview data highlighted that driver's licence fees also represent a key financial barrier. One noted, 'it's lucky for those that can afford to take driving lessons because they're really expensive here.'⁶⁴ Another elaborated that 'some of the missions, like those in Syria, require heavy machinery drivers. That's an issue some battalions have been

⁶³ Interview with key decision-maker, 5 June 2025, 20250605RFMF_025RH

⁶⁴ Interview with key decision-maker, 5 June 2025, 20250605RFMF_026RH

having, so the JTFC has introduced crash courses for Group 2 drivers to upgrade to heavy licences.’⁶⁵ Although the interview suggested that most women currently serving in the RFMF are able to drive, ‘it was not something that was common in the past’.⁶⁶

Figure 3.5.: Responses to the question, ‘Did you have to spend your personal money on any of the following things during the UN pre-deployment application, selection, or training process? Please select all that apply.’



Note: An asterisk () denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women*

The survey results also indicated that there was a gender difference between men and women spending their personal money during the pre-deployment process (see Figure 3.5). Women were significantly more likely than men to spend money on food and drink, application costs, clothing or uniform, and personal documents.

⁶⁵ Interview with a key decision-maker, 5 June 2025, 20250606RFMF_028RH

⁶⁶ Ibid.

This disparity suggests that while preparing for deployment may pose financial challenges for all personnel, it places a disproportionate burden on women who often face additional expenses to meet requirements.

Women also faced additional financial burdens relating to health and hygiene needs. Interviews reported that personnel must pay for personal hygiene products and reproductive healthcare out-of-pocket. One explained, 'they don't have pap smears conducted in country or on mission. This is considered a personal expense,'⁶⁷ and that women are also required to obtain pregnancy tests prior to departure. Another interview emphasised that sanitary napkins must be purchased by individual soldiers and that women are advised to bring 3 months' supply before deployment.⁶⁸ While some hygiene and health products are available through UN hospitals in mission, women must still seek out and pay for these items before and during deployment. Even if women's hygiene products are available on mission, the fact that women have to seek out and pay for them presents a burden which male soldiers do not face.

⁶⁷ Interview with key decision-maker, 3 July 2025, 20250709RFMF_002ES

⁶⁸ Interview with key decision-maker, 9 July 2025, 20250709RFMF_002ES



Issue area 4 Household constraints

High

Issue area 4 – Household constraints, recognises that most unpaid caregiving activities are performed by women.⁶⁹ As such, having young children, elderly parents or other family obligations can be a significant barrier to women’s meaningful participation and deployment in peace operations. Issue area 4 therefore examines the extent to which the security institution has policies and working conditions that allow for the meaningful participation of women, through work-life balance and a more balanced distribution of caregiving activities between men and women. Issue area 4 also assesses whether there are social pressures against women considering deployment.

This is an area of high priority, which means that family care duties are largely women’s responsibility and women face stigma surrounding deployment, which may prevent them from deploying to peace operations. The RFMF should focus their efforts on resolving the household constraints that disproportionately limit women’s deployment to UN missions.

Summary of findings

While personnel do enjoy flexible working conditions and the RFMF does commonly extend support to women who experience a miscarriage, there are many household factors that may prevent women from UN deployment. For example, women lack breastfeeding accommodations in RFMF facilities, personnel have limited institutional support for childcare, and personnel generally believe their salary is insufficient.

Main opportunities:

- Most respondents feel comfortable approaching a supervisor about family issues and flexible working conditions
- Personnel and families receive healthcare benefits
- Respondents did not list family considerations as a barrier to deployment

Main barriers:

- Women lack breastfeeding support
- Lack of access to childcare
- Personnel feel that salary is insufficient
- Personnel feel they miss out on career opportunities while on leave

Gaps in perception and experience:

- Women with children are significantly more likely to deploy than childless women, but pregnancy barriers still exist.
- No formal policy for paternity leave

⁶⁹ Worldwide, women still perform about 75% of unpaid care and domestic work. See Addati L., Cattaneo U., Esquivel, V., Valarino I., *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*, International Labour Organization report 2018, <https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/care-work-and-care-jobs-future-decent-work>

Detailed findings

i. Opportunities

Box 4.1: The example of Warrant Officer Class I (WOI) Kristle Titilia Rabuku

Warrant Officer Class I Kristle Titilia Rabuku joined the RFMF as a non-commissioned officer in 2006 after learning about an opportunity from a cousin who was serving in the force.

WO1 Rabuku has held several different ranks in the RFMF, including serving as a Pte Clerk, a Clerk with Staff Officer Compensation, and Lance Corporal (LCpl), before receiving an accelerated promotion to Sergeant with staff officer compensation. She was then promoted to Warrant Officer II while serving in the Golan Heights and was appointed as Crossing Management Administration Chief. WO1 Rabuku also served as a senior administrator in the Chief of Defence Meeting in 2022 and was promoted to WO1 and appointed as Land Forces Chief Clerk.

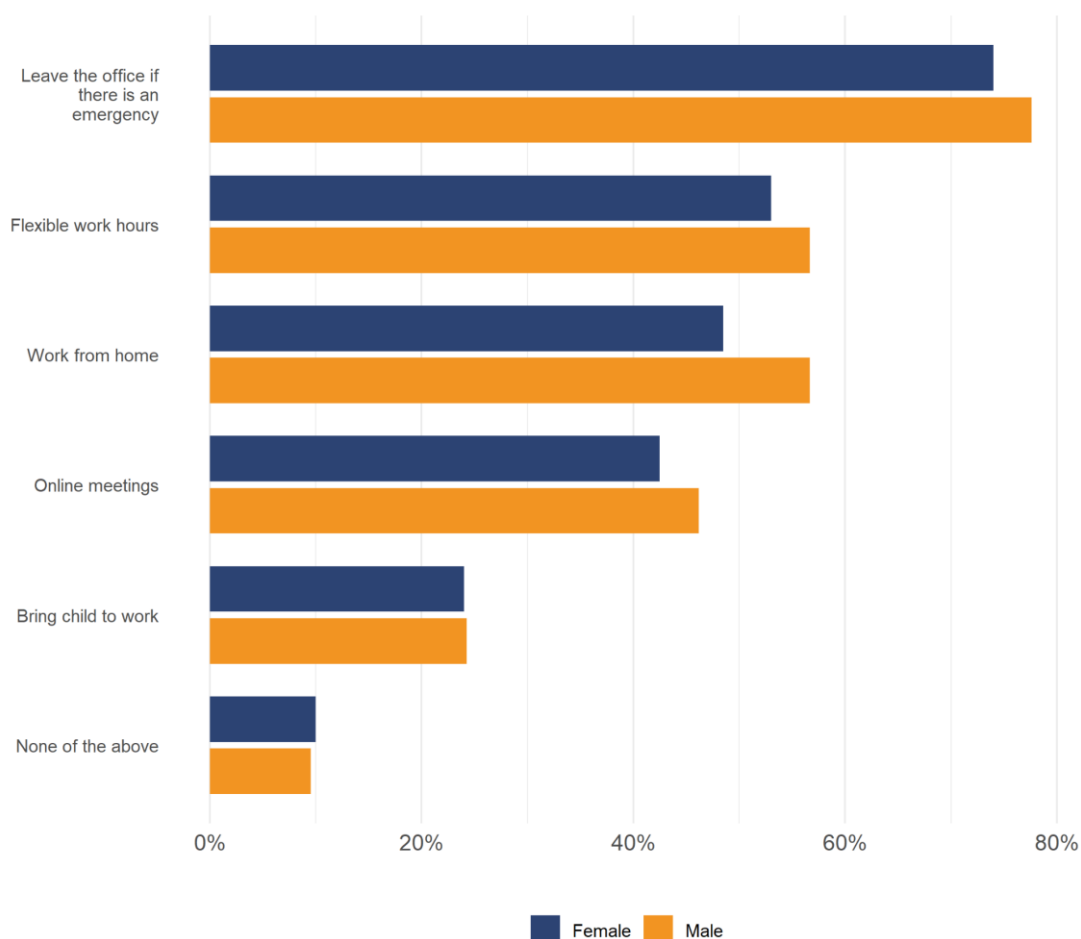
WO1 Rabuku also holds a Bachelor of Commerce, majoring in management, public administration and official statistics. She is a mother to four children, aged between 7 and 17 years old. This means that WO1 Rabuku has learned to successfully balance her RFMF career alongside deployment, educational advancement and building a family.

Her significant career milestones include two deployments to the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) in 2006 and 2013, a twelve-month deployment to the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) mission in the Sinai Peninsula, and most recently, twelve-months serving with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan Heights. For her service to the RFMF and as a peacekeeper, WO1 Rabuku has been awarded a number of medals, including the General Service Medal, the UNAMI Medal, the MFO Medal, the UNDOF Medal, and the Meritorious Service Award Medal.

WO1 Rabuku was notably empowered by two female mentors, Major Amelia Tadu and Colonel Silipa Vananalagi, who encouraged her and taught her how to navigate a traditionally male-dominated institution. WO1 Rabuku says that these mentors taught her resilience and the importance of having 'the right attitude, spiritually, physically, and mentally.'

WO1 Rabuku's commitment and dedication to the RFMF and her wide range of achievements highlight the vital role of female representation in the armed forces. She encourages other young women and girls to empower each other, quoting Serena Williams who said, 'Every woman's success should be an inspiration to another. We're the strongest when we cheer each other on.'

Figure 4.1. Survey responses to the question, 'Which of the following activities are you able to do? Please select all that apply.'



Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women.

RFMF personnel enjoy flexible working conditions, subject to permission from their supervisor

The work conditions within the RFMF are somewhat flexible. This means that there is some leeway in the RFMF around where and when personnel work, as well as accommodations around family needs or emergencies. Moreover, deployed personnel are able to take vacation for 30 days per year in accordance with UN regulations, which allows for flexibility for family needs. Most work is done within the barracks or unit environment. Individuals require approval from an immediate supervisor or commander to work elsewhere and at alternative times.

Figure 4.1 indicates that this policy of flexibility is consistent with personnel experience, with similar response rates for men and women across a variety of flexible work options. Notably, 76% of respondents (78% women, 74% men) reported that they could leave the office in the case of an emergency and around 50% of both men and women reported that their work-hours could accommodate family and personal needs, work from home or work online. Only 24% of both men and women reported being able to bring their child to work.

In addition, personnel of the rank private or corporal are entitled to 24 days of paid annual leave per year, while sergeants and above are entitled to 29 days of leave⁷⁰. Deployed personnel are able to take vacation for

⁷⁰ Republic of Fiji Military, Gazette supplement, Republic of Fiji Military Forces Act (chapter 81), Fiji Military Forces (leave) Regulations 1988

30 days per year in accordance with UN regulations. They are also able to return home from missions in the case of an emergency. Among all deployed respondents, 66% (60% women, 71% men) reported that there was 'a lot' or 'some' flexibility in returning home from a mission due to a personal emergency. The flexibility that personnel have at the RFMF and while deployed is good practice. Accommodations and flexibility provided to personnel for unique personal circumstances enables both men and women to better balance their responsibilities to their home and work.

Personnel and families receive healthcare benefits, including compensation for deceased personnel

Regular force soldiers within the RFMF are entitled to participate in the Army Medical Scheme. Medical support provided by military medical staff is free for families. In cases where families do not live in Suva, one interviewee explained:

We normally have the medical site covered. [...] The children and the husband, they can be seen at our medical centre in camp, or if they live outside of Suva, they have designated medical facilities and medical doctors where they can go.⁷¹

There are at least two ways in which the family of the deceased personnel can receive compensation. One is through members' death benefit under the RFMF Medical Insurance Scheme; and second, through the Accident Compensation Commission Fiji (ACCF) for work related deaths in addition to the death benefits under the RFMF Medical Scheme.

Care for the family of personnel extends to cases in which the force member becomes deceased. Families can receive the amount in accordance with Fiji's Accident Compensation Act (2017), at a max of FJD75,000 or FJD150,000. Families can also receive two-thirds of their regular salary for up to five years or the maximum lump sum. These payments may also be made to dependents. Moreover, Fiji Servicemen's After Care Fund also helps to support families of previous RFMF service members.

Family considerations are not a barrier to deployment for surveyed personnel

Men and women don't significantly differ in whether they identified family considerations as the reason they didn't apply for UN deployment opportunities. Among surveyed personnel, less than 2% who did *not* apply for deployment cited family considerations as the reason that they did not apply.⁷² This indicates that an overwhelming majority (98%) of surveyed personnel who did *not* apply for deployment did not believe family considerations were a barrier to deployment.

However, 11 out of 30 interviews with key decision-makers stated that they viewed household constraints as one of the biggest barriers to women's participation in peace operations. One said, 'the biggest barrier for female deployment would be their marital status and especially more important when they have children.'⁷³ Despite this, surveyed personnel did not appear to agree that family considerations are the biggest constraint.

Personnel generally feel comfortable approaching their supervisor about family issues

A majority of surveyed personnel reported that they would be willing to approach their supervisor about family issues that arise. 63% of all personnel (60% women, 66% men) indicated as such, with no statistical gender difference between men and women. This finding is encouraging as it may suggest the presence of a supportive environment where both men and women feel able to raise family-related issues with their supervisors.

⁷¹ Interview with key decision-maker, 1 August 2025, 20250801RFMF_001DR

⁷² Note that the number of personnel surveyed who **did not apply** is 15 respondents.

⁷³ Interview with key decision-maker, 29 July 2025, 20250729RFMF_001DR

Male and female personnel commonly endorse RFMF support for a pregnancy miscarriage

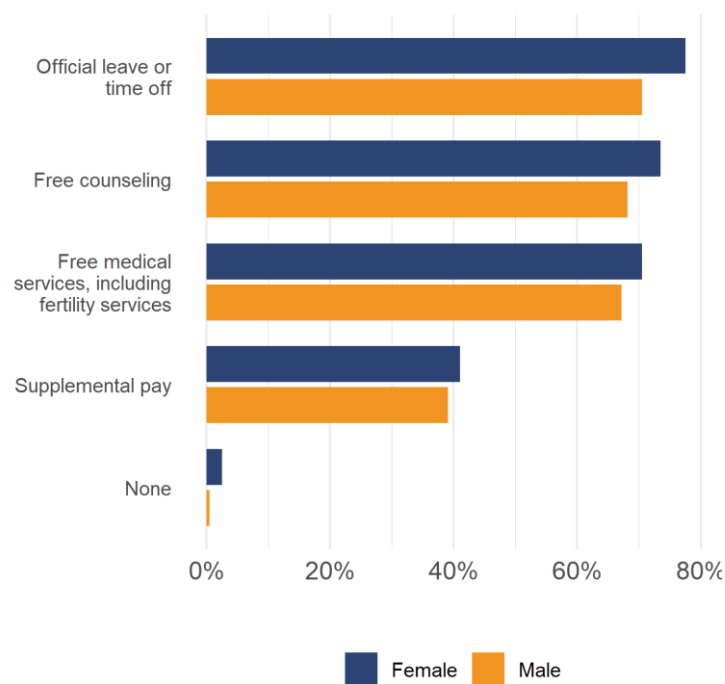
Survey responses indicate a widely-shared perception that individuals who experience miscarriage should receive support from the RFMF. Most commonly, men (71%) and women (78%) supported time off or official leave. Across all types of support (see Table 4.2), there was no statistically significant difference in the responses of men and women. This indicates a shared and widespread belief in supporting families who have lost a potential child.

Interviews indicate that this support for miscarriage exists as an informal practice in the RFMF. One interviewee mentioned that these individuals ‘are given time off work just to help them recover, but there's continuous checks that are done for them...if they need to get sent out to the main hospital.’ This support is provided on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the commanding officer. But, this need for support is enabled by the leadership and mentorship of women in the RFMF:

And because a lot of us female officers are in the Adjutant role or in the headquarter admin role, we also fight for the ladies when it comes to that [miscarriage] and say she needs to rest. Or, even if someone is missing from work, we try and organise ourselves just to go out and see that person before the official process comes through from the headquarters.⁷⁴

This informal support for individuals experiencing miscarriage is a notable best practice which can be improved upon even further by formalising this policy within the RFMF, in line with the support among personnel.

Figure 4.2. Survey responses to the question ‘What kind of support should the RFMF provide for anyone who experiences or has experienced a miscarriage? Please select all that apply.’



Note: An asterisk () denotes a statistically significant ($p<0.05$) difference between men and women.*

⁷⁴ Interview with key decision-maker, October 2025.

ii. Barriers

Men and women have different views on the age personnel and their children should be to deploy

Surveyed personnel held differing views on the ideal age for women and their children when deploying to a UN peace operation, which may represent a barrier to women's participation. When asked about the ideal age for first deployment, the average response among all surveyed personnel was 22 years. However, the actual average age of first deployment for female personnel surveyed was 25 years.

Furthermore, personnel expressed differing views on the appropriate age of children when their parents deploy. On average, respondents believed children should be older when their mother deploys, with an average response of 7.3 years. This is compared to an average ideal age of 5.8 years when their father deploys. This represents a barrier to women as it possibly reflects traditional gender norms around caregiving and may contribute to biases that women with younger children are less suitable for deployment.

If deployment timelines are based on men's preferences, this has the potential to disadvantage women because the timing is not right for them.

FGD participants confirmed that, though it is not an official RFMF policy, it is a practice that women with children younger than 12 months old do not qualify for deployment. Men, however, do not face the same restriction as they are allowed to deploy regardless of how old their children are. This informal practice discriminates against women with young children, and imposes unequal standards across personnel serving in the RFMF. Both the FGD and validation workshop participants acknowledged that this practice is intended to accommodate new mothers, as family is considered one of the most important aspects of Fijian culture. However, participants in both sessions also agreed that it should be left up to mothers in the RFMF to decide when they are ready to deploy, and they should not be restricted based on the age of their children.

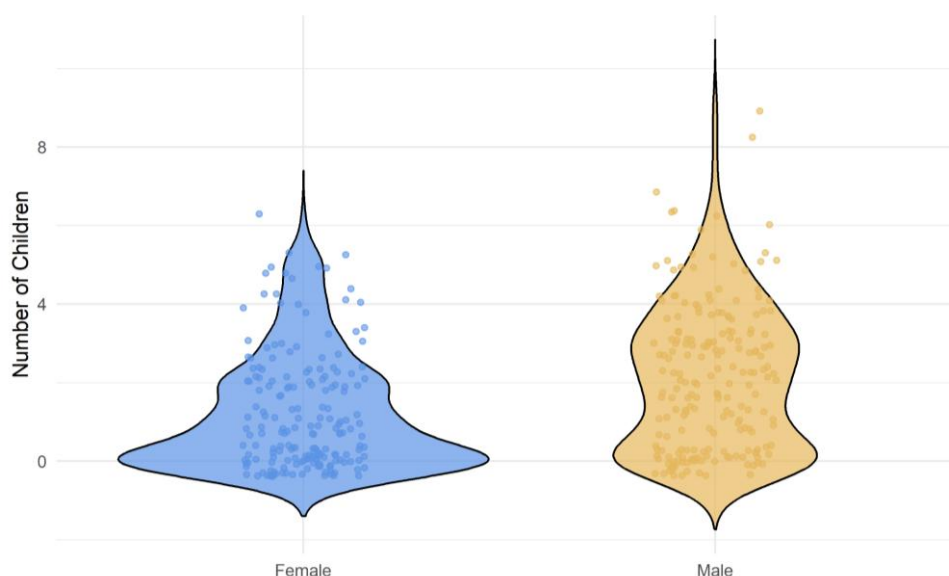
Women with children are significantly more likely to deploy on peacekeeping missions than their childless counterparts, but other factors related to pregnancy may impact deployment

60% of all RFMF personnel sampled had children. Figure 4.3 below shows the distribution of children across surveyed men and women. Women are more likely to have no children or fewer children overall, whereas men have a broader distribution, indicating larger family sizes. The figure suggests that there are gendered differences in family composition among personnel.

Women are able to remain in the RFMF when they are pregnant and women with children are allowed to deploy (though not while pregnant). Among women respondents, 52% reported having children. According to Figure 4.3, however, women in the RFMF have fewer children on average than their male counterparts. Men appear to have at least three or more children (on average), while most women have an average of only two children or less.

66% of women respondents with children have deployed while only 33% of women without children deployed to a UN mission, which is a statistically significant difference. This means that even though women with children make up only a slight majority of surveyed personnel, they are actually more likely to deploy to UN peace operations than women without children.

Figure 4.3. Distribution of number of children across surveyed personnel, by gender.



Although having a child does not appear to hinder deployment prospects for women, there are other practices related to pregnancy and childcare the RFMF engages in that may prevent women from deploying to UN missions. Before deployment, women are required to take a pregnancy test. If the test returns positive, she cannot deploy. One interviewee explained this process, saying, ‘If someone is selected, [a] woman [is] selected for deployment, and then say, in the pre-deployment period, she tests positive for pregnancy. She would be replaced. She would not deploy.’⁷⁵ Earlier in the interview, the same informant explained: ‘We don’t discriminate or don’t victimise. [...] They know we can’t afford to have someone pregnant [on mission].’

While on mission, leadership discourages personnel from engaging in sexual acts: ‘we also don’t support fraternisation, we don’t want them to be pregnant up there.’⁷⁶ Nonetheless, cases occur in which women become pregnant while on mission or accidentally deploy while pregnant. In this case, one interviewee mentioned that a ‘commanding officer would need to decide if the doctor conducted the pregnancy test on mission and what was done if positive.’⁷⁷

Following a decision from a commanding officer, personnel face repercussions, including dismissal from the force, for pregnancy on mission. Another interviewee describes this process in more detail, saying:

They will conduct their own investigation, preliminary or board of inquiry, and then they will send it to us for, and definitely we’ll have to pull [personnel]. And if we see fraternisation from the board of inquiry or from the premium investigation, then both of them will come out.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Interview with key decision-maker, 29 July 2025, 20250729RFMF_004DR

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Interview with key decision maker, 9 July 2025, 20250709RFMF_002ES

⁷⁸ Interview with key decision maker, 29 July 2025, 20250729RFMF_004DR

This judgement process poses a significant barrier for women alone. When a woman becomes pregnant, she is necessarily implicated in the judgement process. However, in order to implicate a man for the same case of pregnancy on mission, the investigative team must effectively find evidence of his involvement. To restate: women always suffer the repercussions of pregnancy when on mission, while men can possibly avoid being implicated for the same pregnancy. A review of existing reproductive policies and practices may help to ensure women feel that the RFMF is equitable.

This finding poses that informal and formal policies around pregnancy, age of children and fraternisation may represent a much more significant barrier for the deployment of female RFMF personnel to peacekeeping compared to men. Because a majority of women have children, this group must contend with systematic barriers which bar them from deployment. Women play an important role as caregivers and caretakers, which they must be able to pursue in addition to career-related objectives, such as deploying on UN peacekeeping missions.

While survey evidence does not identify children as a barrier to women's deployment, the interviews and also FGD participants confirmed that children and childcare do disrupt their deployment prospects. FGD participants confirmed that caregiving responsibilities, especially young children, was a barrier to women's deployment. Several women without deployment experience cited this as the main reason they have not yet deployed.

It is the norm for extended families to take care of the household while personnel deploy to a peace operation

A majority of surveyed personnel (89%) indicated that it is common for extended families to take care of the household while personnel deploy to a UN peace operation. Low-ranking personnel also indicated low rates of having external household help compared to high-ranking individuals. Only 20% of low-ranking personnel reported that they employ someone to help in the house (cook, babysitter, security guard, caretaker etc.), compared to 37% of high-ranking personnel in the sample. For example, only 4% of low-ranking surveyed personnel reported that they had a housemaid, in comparison to 18% of high-ranking personnel.

This may pose a barrier to low-ranking personnel who either have to deploy or wish to deploy but do not have extended families who can fulfil this role and do not have the financial means to hire help.

Women lack breastfeeding support in the RFMF

Women with young children in the RFMF are provided with little breastfeeding support. A majority of women (88%) reported that the RFMF's breastfeeding and pumping facilities are inadequate. Further, only 20% of female personnel thought that women felt comfortable breastfeeding or pumping at work.

Interviews also indicated that breastfeeding facilities are likely inaccessible within the RFMF, as one interviewee suggested: 'They should have a breastfeeding station in the offices.'⁷⁹

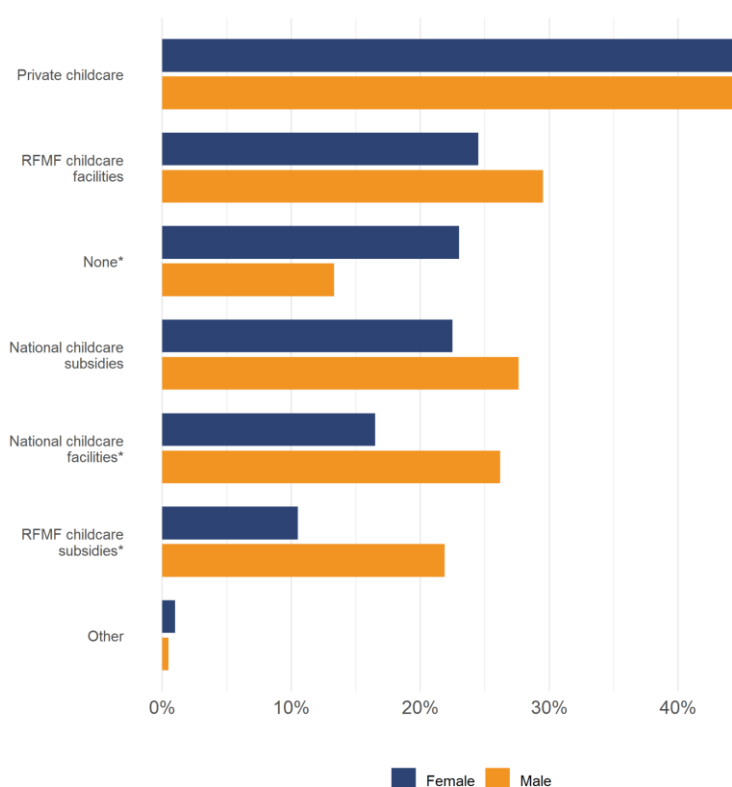
⁷⁹ Interview with key decision-maker, 3 July 2025, 20250703RFMF_001ES

Personnel mostly rely on private childcare due to limited options from the RFMF

The RFMF provides a kindergarten for personnel at the main barracks in Suva and a room for young children at the Lami Bay naval base, however, the RFMF does not provide any direct subsidies for childcare despite 16% of personnel believing they do. The majority of personnel were aware that RFMF childcare subsidies do *not* exist, however, women (89%) were more aware than men (78%).

Survey responses (Figure 4.4) show relatively low rates of awareness for childcare provided by the RFMF. 27% of personnel indicated that they were aware of such facilities, though the low rate of awareness may be due to the fact that the facilities are dedicated to specific age groups (for example, 5+ years for the kindergarten). Respondents were most likely to indicate that they were aware of private childcare (46%), for which personnel would need to pay out-of-pocket. Only a quarter (27%) of personnel were aware of the national childcare subsidies available to them.

Figure 4.4. Survey responses to the question, 'What types of family or child care are available in Fiji? Please select all that apply.'



Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women.

Women (23%) when compared to men (13%) were significantly more likely to report that no types of childcare were available in Fiji. This points to an important barrier for women, who often shoulder childcare responsibilities. Without knowledge of, access to, or support for childcare, female personnel can face significant limitations on their abilities to leave their families in order to deploy on peacekeeping missions.

The differences among responses from men and women point to a gendered barrier, where women are more highly attuned to the lack of child care support due to their cultural roles as familial caregivers. As a result, the RFMF should seek to intentionally support RFMF personnel with families in order to lower this barrier for women's deployment to peacekeeping missions.

One interviewee highlighted the need for support for childcare by suggesting that support from the UN in this capacity would support women soldiers:

More support will come from the UN just to upgrade and uplift the facilities being needed by the women. Like some of the women coming to work, they need to bring their child and have daycare or childcare in the military, like someone to look after the kids, and that will be very helpful.⁸⁰

RFMF personnel believe that their salary is insufficient

Though a majority of deployed personnel indicated that they felt the UN allowance for deployments to a peace operation was sufficient, only 20% of the total surveyed sample indicated that payment from the RFMF was sufficient. This is compared to 60% of surveyed personnel who found it was insufficient. The remainder of the sample (19%) indicated that they felt neutral or unsure. There was a slight gender difference between men and women, with women believing their salary to be sufficient at a rate of 18% compared to 23% of men, though the difference was not statistically significant.

Respondents' perception that their RFMF salary is insufficient may be driving personnel to deploy to supplement their household income. Many personnel see deployment as a financial opportunity to provide them with additional salary or allowances, as discussed in Issue area 7. Additionally, most FGD participants confirmed that, along with gaining skills, the financial compensation from deployment was a key incentive for them to deploy.

Validation workshop participants confirmed that the RFMF is currently undergoing a Job Evaluation Exercise, which consists of a full review of the current salary pay for servicemembers of all ranks.

Personnel differ in their understanding of paid leave policies

The RFMF provides several official leave options, which is a good practice because it means the force accommodates personnel's needs. The survey inquired about eight different types of leave, of which the RFMF offers five official leave types including sick leave, disability leave, bereavement leave, annual leave, and maternity leave (see Table 4.5 below). During the validation workshop, participants confirmed that the RFMF also provides sporting leave for personnel playing on behalf of an official RFMF team sport.

Currently, there is no official RFMF policy for paid family leave, however, a majority of personnel (57%, 53% of women and 60% of men) reported they could take paid family leave despite no explicit policy existing. Validation workshop participants confirmed that the RFMF did have family leave in the past, but due to changes in national legislation, namely the removal of paid family leave for government employees, family leave is no longer paid. Similarly, surveyed personnel (30% in total, including 35% women and 25% men) believed they had access to paid eldercare leave, even though eldercare leave was not specified in the RFMF paid leave policy (see Table 4.5 below). Both FGD and validation workshop participants confirmed that,

⁸⁰ Interview with key decision-maker, 4 August 2025, 20250804RFMF_001DR

although it is not paid, family and eldercare leave are granted informally (without pay or as part of annual leave) and it is typical for personnel to take leave for these types of care responsibilities.

An important area for improvement, however, is the gender knowledge gap about official RFMF leave policies. Although more women (80%) reported knowing about paid bereavement leave compared to men (75%), more men (85%) reported knowing about paid sick leave than women (80%). Additionally, only a minority of personnel knew about disability leave, 31% of men believed that they had paid disability leave, compared to 20% of women, which is a significant difference in understanding. As a consequence, women may face additional disadvantages compared to their male counterparts. For example, the knowledge of paid time leave can enable female personnel to better balance their familial responsibilities in conjunction with their role in the RFMF, but fear of loss of payment for taking time off may prevent women from doing so. Additionally, if men are ill, they may be more likely to take time off and recover fully, while women will be hesitant to rest, resulting in a prolonged recovery period.

Table 4.5. Responses to the survey question, 'For which of these options can you take an official leave that is paid or unpaid in your country. Please select all that apply.'

Knowledge of leave policy	Official RFMF leave policy	% Women	% Men
Eldercare leave*	—	35%	25%
Family leave	—	53%	60%
Sick leave	✓	80%	85%
Disability leave*	✓	20%	31%
Bereavement leave	✓	80%	75%
Annual leave	✓	81%	83%
Maternity leave*	✓	78%	63%
Paternity leave*	—	37%	52%

Note: An asterisk () denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women.*

The RFMF has an official maternal leave policy but no formal policy for paternal leave

The RFMF has a maternal leave policy in place which includes 98 days of paid leave for the first three children and half that time for any additional children: 'the policy is you're only given maternity leave with full pay on your first three kids. The fourth child, they give you half the allowances.'⁸¹ RFMF policy also stipulates that women return to the same or equivalent position held before taking leave. Women are also entitled to the same salary, wage, benefit, and seniority as they were prior to maternity leave. Survey responses indicate that most women (78%) were aware of this policy. In comparison, only 63% of male respondents were aware of the maternity leave policy, significantly less than women. This disparity in awareness may reflect a broader perception that parental leave policies are primarily relevant to women. However, given that women have

⁸¹ Interview with key decision-maker, 13 June 2025, 20250613RFMF_048RH.

colleagues who are men and supervisors who are also responsible for leave arrangements for their staff, it is equally important for men and women to know about and understand these policies.

There is no standing policy in the RFMF which permits fathers to take paternity leave. However, 47% of respondents (37% of women, 52% of men) believed that men were entitled to paternity leave. Moreover, over a third of respondents (37%, 31% of women, 44% of men) indicated that this paternity leave was paid. One interviewee clarified that men take paternity leave as part of their annual paid leave,⁸² which suggests that there are options for fathers to take leave when a child is born, although not formal dedicated leave arrangements.

This indicates that paternity leave is not a formally recognised practice in the RFMF, although male personnel do take time off following the birth of a child. Validation workshop participants said the force 'got rid of' paternity leave because 'men were taking advantage of this leave', spending time doing other things instead of being at home with their newborn. Currently, new fathers in the RFMF have the option of taking time from their annual leave to substitute for time needed for paternal leave. Validation participants also confirmed that the Fijian national government is currently considering reinstating family leave to offer paid time off for any type of family leave, which the force could extend to male personnel for paternity leave.

Personnel are able to access training while on leave, though some are not aware of these opportunities

According to the FFF and the survey data, personnel are able to attend in-service training while on leave with approval from their commander, including attending courses and conferences. 44% of surveyed personnel reported that they had the option to attend training courses, modules or programs while on leave and a further 8% indicated that they knew of the opportunities but did not participate.

There was no gendered difference between respondents indicating that they had access to such training, however, there was a statistically significant difference between those with and without deployment experience. Those who had deployed previously indicated that they had access to training while on leave at significantly higher rates (58%) than non-deployed personnel (46%).

However, 45% of surveyed personnel reported that training while on leave was *not* offered, suggesting that personnel may not be aware of the training opportunities that they have access to, which signifies a knowledge gap in personnel's understanding of this policy. Indeed, validation workshop participants confirmed that personnel are allowed to engage in training while on leave, however, they are required to adequately prepare for these opportunities and must be approved to temporarily pause their leave to participate in career building opportunities.

Some personnel feel like they miss out on career opportunities while on leave

Though a majority of personnel indicated that they had taken leave, many also felt that they had missed out on opportunities that may advance their career while on leave, such as training. 93% of all surveyed personnel reported taking at least one form of leave, however, 56% of reported that they felt like they missed out on opportunities while on that leave. Though the RFMF offers training opportunities that are available while personnel are on leave, the survey responses may reflect a lack of information, awareness, or willingness to participate in the opportunities available to personnel.

⁸² Interview with Key decision maker, October 2025.

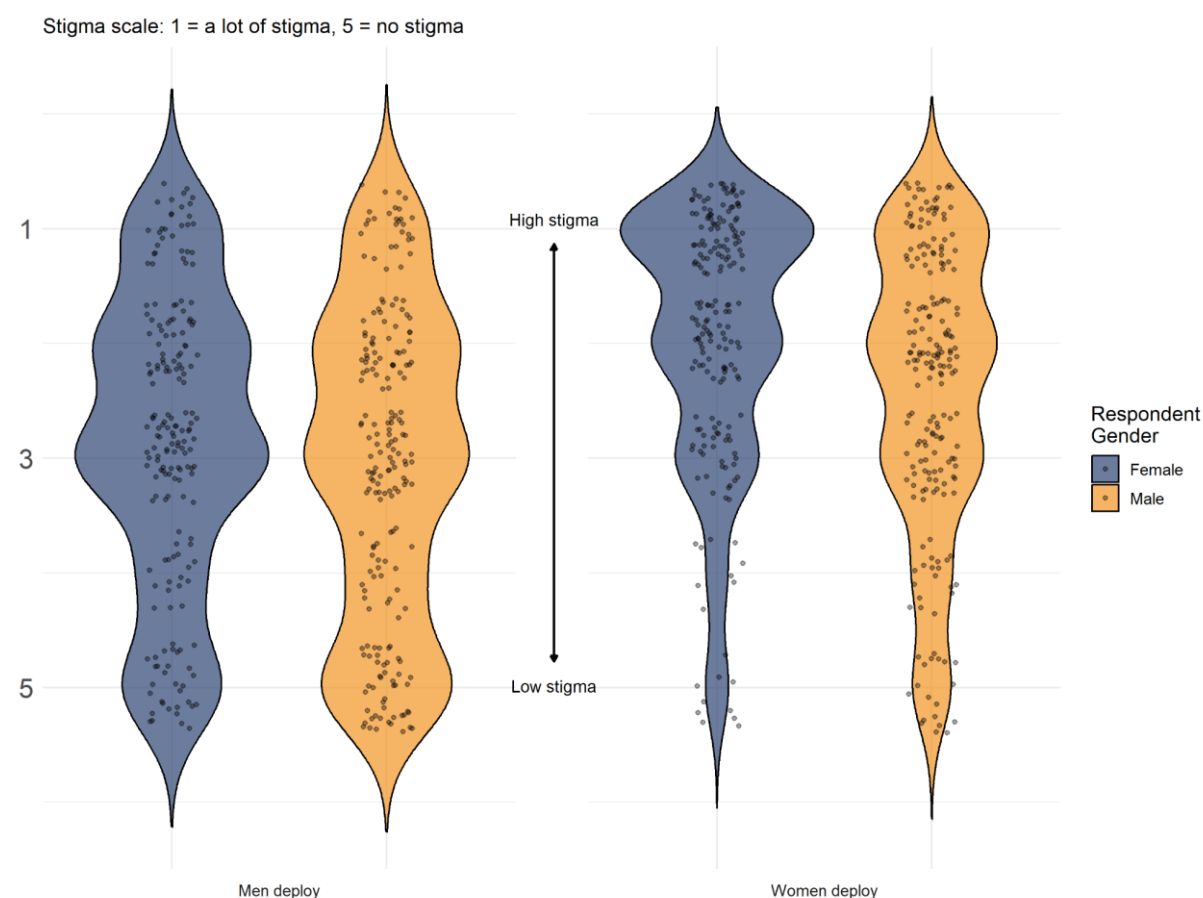
Men and women face social stigmatisation for deployment to UN peace operations

Both men and women stated that men faced stigma for deploying to a UN peacekeeping mission: 40% of women and 38% of men said that men faced a lot or some stigma. However, survey results reveal that women struggle more acutely with community and family acceptance over deployment to UN peacekeeping missions.

Figure 4.6 below shows the distribution of survey responses among men and women who were asked how much stigma personnel face for deploying to a UN peace operation. The figure shows that respondents perceive substantially higher social stigma associated with women deploying to UN peace operations than men, with responses clustering towards the high-stigma end of the scale for women. The distribution shown in the right panel of Figure 4.6 shows that a majority of respondents (63%) believe that women faced at least some stigma for deployment to a UN peace operation. It also highlights that women respondents believed they were stigmatised for deployment at higher rates (71%) than men believed women were stigmatised for deployment (38%).

In contrast, perceptions of stigma for men's deployment are more dispersed and centred closer to the midpoint, suggesting that deployment is viewed as more socially acceptable or at least less stigmatised for men across both men and women respondents.

Figure 4.6. Responses to the question, 'How much social stigma do you think there is for [women/men] to deploy to a UN peace operation?', by gender.



This gap highlights gendered differences in the social perception of deployment which may be addressed through a multi-faceted approach by the RFMF. While men may encounter limited criticism for leaving their families, women appear to face heightened scrutiny rooted in traditional gender expectations surrounding caregiving and domestic responsibilities. The RFMF could increase their community recognition programs to highlight peacekeepers' contributions. For instance, the force could engage religious and traditional leaders to publicly endorse peacekeeping as an honourable sacrifice and develop peer testimonial programs where respected community members share how their family thrived during deployment. The RFMF could also more widely (and consistently, perhaps monthly) disseminate the stories of male and female peacekeepers and their contribution to global peace and stability to share both internally (amongst RFMF personnel) and publicly on all RFMF social media pages.



Issue area 5 Peace operations infrastructure

Medium

The peace operations infrastructure issue area assesses whether the lack of adequate equipment and infrastructure prevents women from deploying to peace operations. The sample in this section includes all personnel unless otherwise stated.

This is an issue area of medium priority, and survey data suggest that women lack access to some healthcare on mission.

Summary of findings

Women and men personnel both participate in pre-deployment gender training and also reported similar levels of satisfaction with mission resources and amenities. Women, however, did report that some health products and services were lacking.

Main opportunities:

- Pre-deployment training is available and viewed positively by respondents
- Personnel receive training in Fiji
- Men and women are similarly satisfied with resources and amenities on mission

Main barriers:

- Low uptake of peacekeeping training
- Lack of access to mental healthcare and reproductive healthcare while on mission

Gaps in perception and experience:

- Awareness of access to women's health products

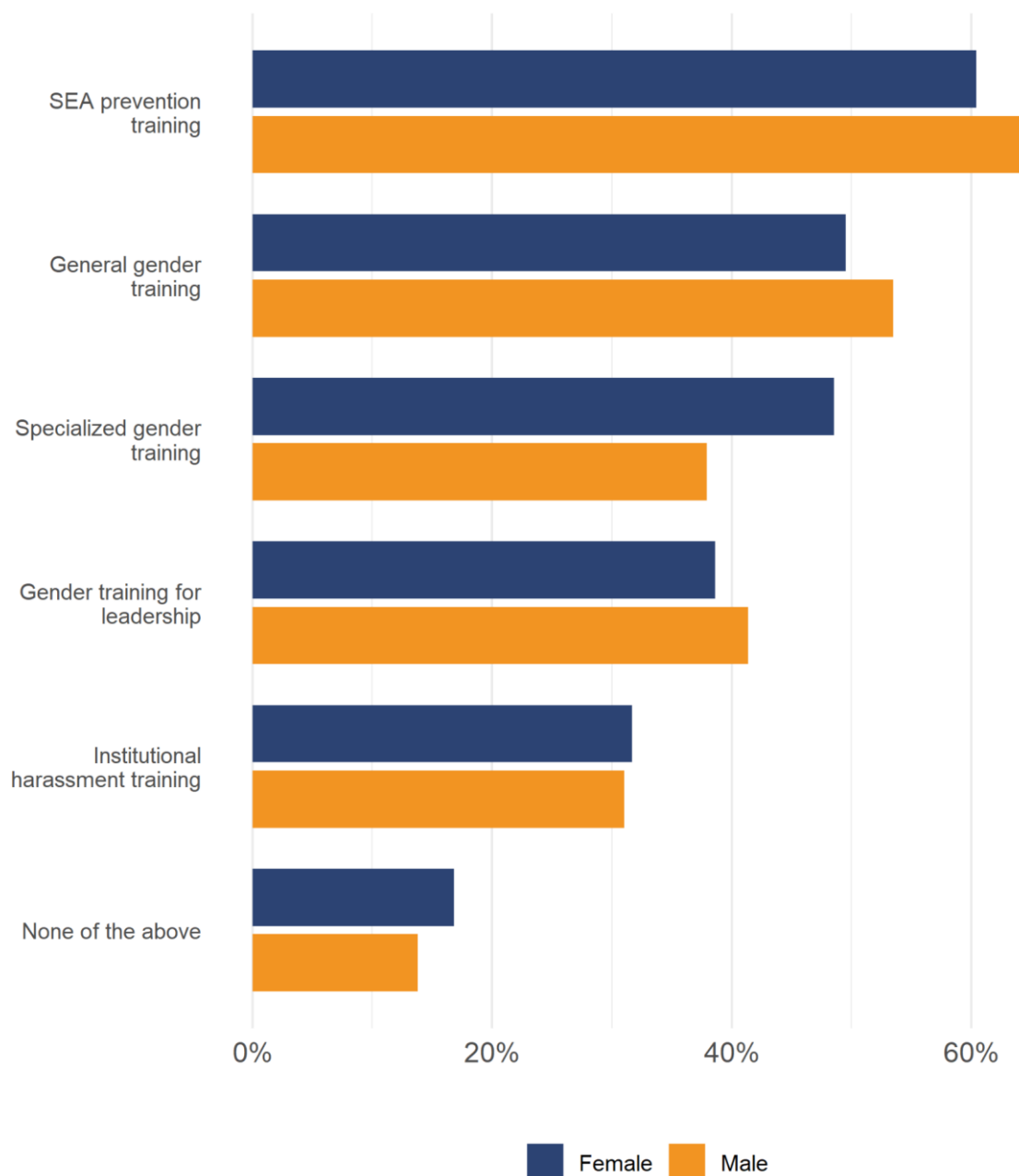
Detailed findings

i. Opportunities

Both men and women participate in pre-deployment gender training

A majority of sampled personnel had taken at least one form of pre-deployment training, though it is much more common among deployed personnel (85%) compared to non-deployed personnel (56%), which is understandable given that pre-deployment training is only provided once personnel have passed initial selection for deployment. Training on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) was the most frequently reported form of gender training among both deployed women (60%) and deployed men (65%), followed by general gender training courses (50% deployed women, 53% deployed men). There were no significant gender disparities across any form of pre-deployment gender training between surveyed men and women.

Figure 5.1. Survey responses to the question, ‘Have you had any of the following types of training **during pre-deployment training** before deployment to a UN peace operation?’



Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women.

Pre-deployment peacekeeping training is available in Fiji and is well-regarded by personnel

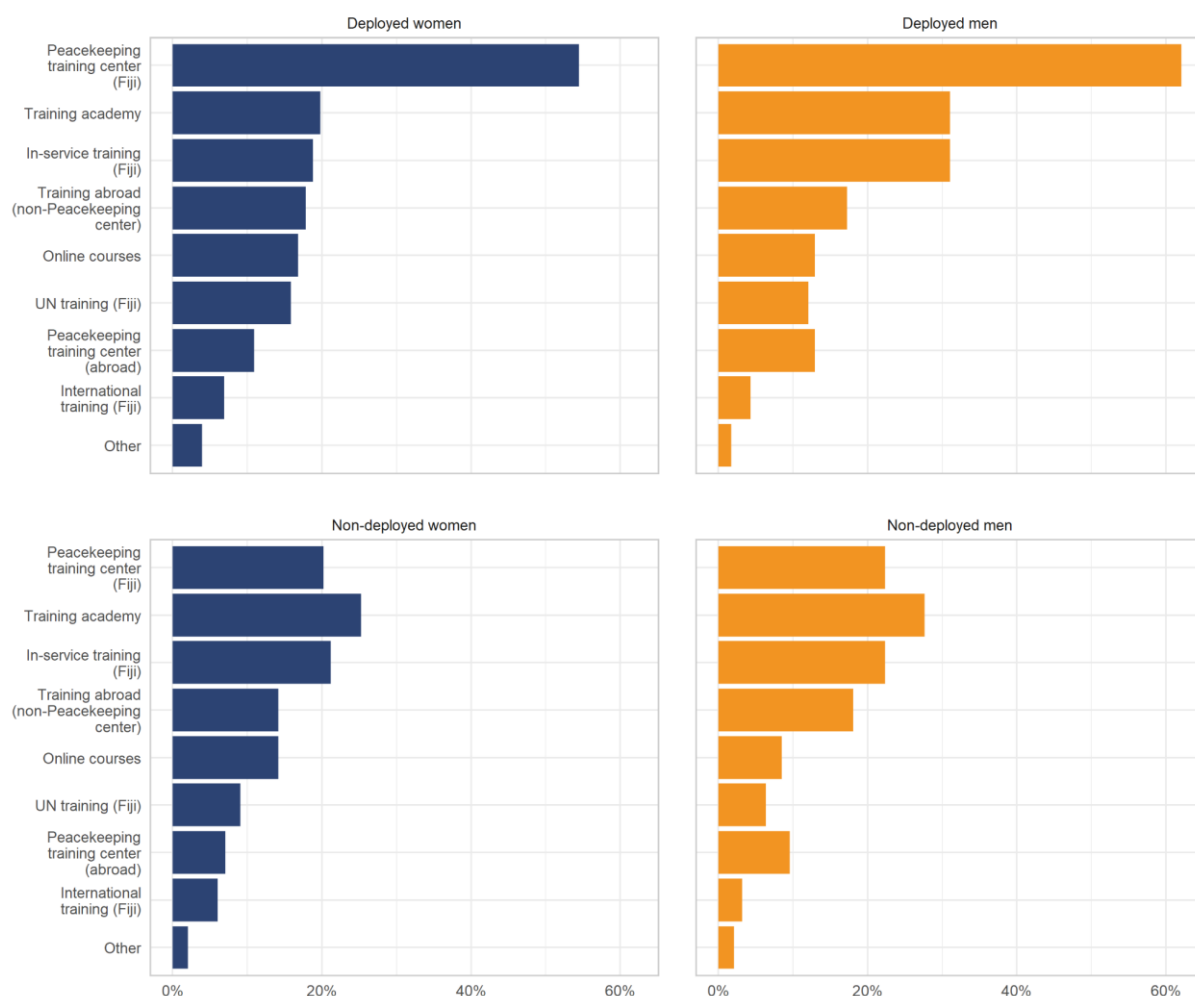
The RFMF provides a wide range of pre-deployment training in a variety of locations (see Figure 5.2). This includes internal training and additional programs delivered by international partners, such as the Australian Defence Force Peace Operations Training Centre (ADF POTC), the UN, the Australian Defence force, the New Zealand Defence Force, the French armed forces, the US Global Peace Operations Initiative, and the Peace Operation Training Institute. Pre-deployment training content varies by mission, but commonly covers professional conduct, technical and tactical training, weapons training, joint force training, and in some cases,

financial literacy courses. Personnel reported receiving training on child and civilian protection through ADF POTC, and training on gender and SEA through the RFMF Legal Directorate.

Pre-deployment training is a requirement for deployment readiness. Similar response rates from deployed men and women suggest no major barriers to access this training.

Overall, 88% of personnel agreed that the pre-deployment training provided the skills needed to deploy to a UN peace operation, with similar responses from women (89%) and men (88%).

Figure 5.2: Survey responses to the question, 'In which of the following locations did you get peacekeeping training (other than pre-deployment training)?'



Personnel most commonly receive peacekeeping training within Fiji

There are a number of RFMF training facilities in Fiji. Table 5.3 below identifies domestic facilities where RFMF personnel receive training. Peacekeeping training is conducted at one of these facilities (see Table 5.3). The other facilities are dedicated to training personnel from specific branches/ranks/skills, namely the Officer Training Centre, TF Brigade HQ, Force Training Group, Engineers Regiment Trade Training School, Togalevu Training Base, Maritime Essential Services Centre, and Stanley Brown Base.

Table 5.3. Domestic RFMF Training Facilities and Select Types of Training Courses Offered

Training Facility	Location	Peacekeeping Training	Other Notable Trainings
Queen Elizabeth Barracks	Suva	—	Logistic Support Unit Training; Corps Training; Military Medics Training
Force Training Group	Suva	—	Basic Recruit Training Course; Officer Cadet Training Course and other courses
Joint Task Force Command Training Centre (JTFC) Blackrock	Nadi	✓	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, pre-deployment and UN peacekeeping training
Officer Training Centre	Suva	—	Officer Training
Engineers Regiment Trade Training School (TTS)	Nabuni	—	Basic Recruit Course for RFMF Corps of Engineers
Togalevu Training Base	Suva	—	Navy Training
Maritime Essential Services Centre	Lami Bay	—	Navy Training
Stanley Brown Base	Suva	—	Navy Training
TF Brigade Headquarters	Nasinu	—	Induction Trainings for New Recruits, Officers Bridging Course, Annual Camps, Reserves PDT and other courses

Note: A check symbol (✓) indicates that peacekeeping training is held at the training facility.

RFMF personnel receive peacekeeping training both domestically and internationally as shown in Table 5.2. Within the training centres displayed in Table 5.3 above, JTFC Blackrock is the only training centre to provide training for UN peacekeeping.

Personnel can also access a range of international training opportunities. Interviewees frequently mentioned the Peace Operations Training Centre (ADF POTC) in Canberra, Australia. Text responses from our survey indicate a range of additional international centres to which personnel may travel for training:

- Puckapunyal Military Base (Australia)
- Royal Australian Air Force Base (RAAF Williams, Australia)
- Royal Australian Navy Base (HMAS Harman, Australia)
- New Delhi Naval Base (India)
- Singapore Naval Base (Singapore)
- Sandhurst Academy (United Kingdom)
- Cairo University (Egypt)

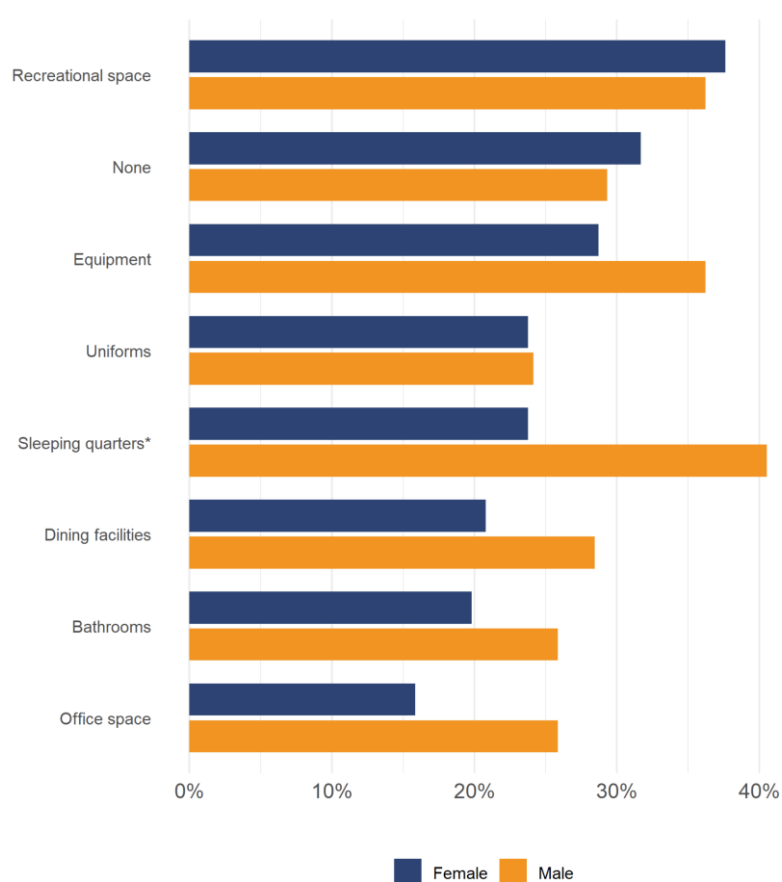
The mix of domestic and international training demonstrates that Fiji has both an internal training system and strong international partnerships that support peacekeeping capabilities.

Men and women reported similar levels of satisfaction with provided resources and amenities on mission, despite lacking gender accommodations

- 61% of personnel reported that they had access to all of the equipment they needed while deployed on their most recent UN peace operation.
- A majority also reported that the equipment and facilities were adequate.

These findings are consistent with Fiji's broader capability to supply the core equipment and facilities required for deployment.

Figure 5.4. Survey answers to the question, 'What facilities/equipment provided did you find **inadequate** in the recent peace operation?'.



Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women

Figure 5.4 suggests that, for most personnel, basic operational needs were met, however, there are opportunities for improvement in facilities and equipment. It should also be noted that in addition, equipment such as UN vehicles, are not designed for shorter people. This may disproportionately affect women as it may limit their ability to use certain equipment safely and effectively. As there has not yet been a formal assessment to understand the needs of women, these limitations are largely undocumented.

Despite this, as shown in Figure 5.4, the survey shows that while on mission, men reported a higher level of dissatisfaction with facilities and equipment than women, including equipment, sleeping quarters, bathrooms, dining facilities and office spaces.

Uniforms

Most deployed personnel (83%) reported that the uniforms they received for UN peacekeeping missions fit their bodies adequately. While the uniforms are issued in male sizing, and therefore not designed to accommodate women's bodies, women reported similar levels of satisfaction (81%) as men (85%).

Accommodations exist for pregnant women (who may wear civilian clothing) while in Fiji, however, those who become pregnant during deployment are repatriated home. Regarding religious or traditional clothing, less than half of deployed personnel (40% women, 46% men) reported that the uniforms *always* accommodated religious or traditional clothing, while approximately one-third (33% women, 30% men) reported that the uniforms *sometimes* accommodated religious or traditional clothing. This suggests that there is some variability in how cultural or faith-based needs are managed during deployment.

Women's reliance on male-sized uniforms places them at a functional disadvantage to some extent, even if they report that the 'overall' fit is adequate. Women's sizing and fit may improve comfort, safety and performance; and standardising procedures for religious and traditional clothing would support inclusivity.

Bathrooms

Specific bathroom facilities did not cater to women on peacekeeping missions, however, men and women report similar satisfaction with access to their preferred facilities.

Interviews and survey data presented two different perspectives on bathroom facilities during peacekeeping deployments. Interviews commonly reported that separate bathrooms for men and women were not consistently available in peacekeeping missions to which RFMF personnel deploy, with some interviewees describing uncomfortable or awkward situations where individuals ran into others of the opposing gender while using shared facilities. Several interviews linked this discomfort to Fijian cultural values which emphasise respect for women and can make shared bathroom use feel inappropriate. One interviewee described this experience:

I had difficulty in South Sudan using the same bathroom, using the same toilet with female officers. Maybe Fiji's perspective as a Fijian officer, it's very traditional. We have high regard for our females and we separate them.⁸³

However, survey respondents tell a different story. A majority of deployed men (92%) and a high percentage of women (79%) reported separate male and female bathrooms at their most recent UN peacekeeping deployment. In addition, the majority of deployed respondents – 91% of men and 94% of women – reported having access to their preferred bathroom while on mission.

This indicates a possible perception gap or an improvement in facilities over time. While some interviewees (mostly key decision-makers who may have participated in peacekeeping missions at an earlier date) indicated discomfort with mixed-gender facilities, the broader survey sample indicated that most deployed personnel encountered gender-appropriate options.

Survey responses also indicate that unisex or gender-neutral bathrooms were largely unavailable while on mission. A small number reported that unisex or gender-neutral bathrooms were available (13% of women and 3% of men). The unavailability of unisex bathrooms can negatively affect personnel who do not identify with

⁸³ Interview with key decision-maker, 29 July 2025, 20250729RFMF_001DR

their assigned sex at birth. Without gender-neutral facilities, these personnel must use gender-assigned bathrooms which may expose them to discomfort or safety concerns.

The 2013 Fiji Constitutional Amendment bans discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, which is in part violated on mission without the accessibility of unisex bathrooms. Providing both unisex and gender-neutral restrooms on mission ensures that personnel of all genders feel accommodated and comfortable in their work setting.

Sleeping arrangements

Most RFMF personnel reported that they had access to same-sex sleeping accommodation while on mission. 80% of deployed respondents (85% of women, 76% of men) indicated that only same-sex sleeping facilities were available. This aligns with the personal preferences of the majority of respondents from both genders (77% of women, 70% of men) who preferred same-sex sleeping quarters.

Sleeping quarters were described as being secure on mission. The majority of deployed personnel reported being able to lock the door to their sleeping quarters while on a peacekeeping mission (92% of women, 82% of men). This suggests that, in general, the safety of both deployed men and women is taken seriously while on mission.

RFMF personnel are able to receive general and reproductive healthcare while on peacekeeping missions

A majority of respondents (98%) reported that they were able to access general healthcare during their peacekeeping missions, either from the RFMF, the UN, or both. Interviews indicate that UN medical services subsidise healthcare costs.

The RFMF typically deploys a doctor with battalions, however, it is not standard policy for the RFMF to deploy a female doctor when women are part of the battalion. When female doctors do deploy, it is done in coordination with the Ministry of Health. Despite this, while on mission, the RFMF makes efforts to meet UN quotas for female medical staff. As a result, 65% of women reported being able to receive care from a female doctor during their last deployment.

ii. Barriers

There are discrepancies between institutional policies and knowledge among respondents regarding training opportunities for peacekeeping missions

Despite the availability of peacekeeping training, there appears to be low uptake among personnel, as indicated in Figure 5.3.

Peacekeeping training in the country is primarily offered at the JTFC Blackrock in Nadi, with 41% of respondents having participated in training at the JTFC. While in-service training at JTFC is not indicated on an individual's HR record, record of training attendance is manually kept at JTFC. Although JTFC maintains manual attendance logs, if attendance is not recorded in HR files, this may limit institutional awareness of the completion of relevant training. Implications for this include that training may not be considered in promotion decisions, and it also makes it more challenging to monitor gender equity in training. The RFMF should digitise and integrate all personnel training records into internal HR system logs. The force should also establish a minimum training threshold that would require personnel to participate in a certain number of training sessions each year, including at least one gender training course, to qualify for promotion. Personnel participation in training courses, particularly those concerning gender themes, should be considered in promotion and deployment selection decisions. The force should also work to improve monitoring of gender equity in training and strengthen alignment between training and deployment decisions. In addition to course completion records,

the force should also incorporate an annual review of personnel who have been nominated to attend in-service training.

Despite the availability of both online and in-person peacekeeping training, only 25% of respondents (19% of women, 31% of men) indicated that they had attended in-service training in Fiji, while only 15% of respondents (17% of women, 13% of men) participated in online courses. Interviews conducted by the research team indicate that most peacekeeping training is conducted at the JTFC, which may explain the low participation in online training courses.

Although RFMF personnel have access to a wide range of international training locations, the majority of RFMF personnel receive peacekeeping training in Fiji. Only 10% of respondents (9% of women, 11% of men) attended training opportunities in a peacekeeping training centre outside of Fiji and only 17% (18% of men, 16% of women) had participated in training delivered internationally but not at a dedicated peacekeeping training centre. This reflects that most personnel complete their training through the domestic training system, which includes established facilities that are generally more accessible for personnel.

Women's health products and services are limited while on mission

Feminine hygiene kits are provided as a part of the UN peace operations deployment kit. However, women do not receive sanitary napkins until they reach the mission area, at which time the UN provides five packets of sanitary pads per month for each woman peacekeeper in the mission. However, this is inconsistent with survey responses from deployed women. Only 41% of women said that they were provided with feminine hygiene kits by either the RFMF or the UN when deploying. Interviews conducted with RFMF personnel report that it is the responsibility of women to prepare these products themselves before deployment. During pre-deployment training, female personnel are advised to take three months' worth of supply of feminine hygiene materials.⁸⁴ In addition to bringing their own hygiene products from Fiji, deployed RFMF female personnel may access these resources through the UN:

And my understanding is that just on that subject then, that a lot of the hygiene and women's health products are available through the UN hospital in mission and obviously they would take what they need from Fiji as well.⁸⁵

While on mission, there may be no sanitary bins available which means that women dispose of used sanitary products in plastic bags that are then transferred to the large compound bins in the evening.⁸⁶ The lack of sanitary bins adds an additional burden for women who are deployed on peace operations – not only must they provide sanitary materials themselves, they are tasked with the management of sanitary waste.

Deployed RFMF personnel lack access to formal psychological healthcare while on mission

58% of all respondents (53% of women, 61% of men) said that they were able to access psychological health care on mission from the RFMF, UN or both. While survey results indicate that most deployed personnel had access to mental healthcare, interviews conducted with key decision-makers provide more insight into what this mental healthcare looked like.

Interviews indicate that all mental healthcare is diverted to the chaplain. One interviewee who supported the chaplaincy described how counselling was the unique responsibility of the chaplain, saying, 'from the start

⁸⁴ Interview with key decision-maker, 9 July 2025. 20250709RFMF_002ES

⁸⁵ Interview with key decision-maker, 8 August 2025, 20250808RFMF_001DR

⁸⁶ Interview with key decision-maker, July 9, 2025. 20250709RFMF_002ES

when the RFMF was deployed to duty there's no other to do the counselling and it's only the chaplain who's been doing that 'till now...' ⁸⁷

This includes handling issues of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Sexual Harassment (SEAH), which one welfare officer indicates occurs frequently:

Yes, I do [deal with SEAH issues] ... This is something that we encounter nearly daily... It also deals with the families and we have violence and child protection issues... The stuff that we have received so far from last year... we had like 30 cases. ⁸⁸

Though the chaplain's department may handle a number of SEAH cases, they may not be the best resource for some personnel. One interviewee mentioned feeling unsafe after reporting a case of sexual harassment. This same individual also said that counselling is not available on mission or available to schedule post-deployment. ⁸⁹ So, while chaplains may address the needs of some individuals on mission, their availability and capacities need to be supplemented by additional and more diverse mental health resources.

Interviews indicate that the chaplains play such a large role due to the capacity of the RFMF and the predominant religion of the force:

It's [the chaplain's department] more a counselling role because a majority of the armed forces, you know, they are Christians, and the faith-based approach towards counselling and support is quite significant within our military as we understand, you know, we are limited in capabilities. ⁹⁰

Another interviewee highlighted how there was a gap in counselling both before and after deployment. In particular, the interviewee noted that soldiers returning from the Middle East needed help with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), while the padre (chaplain) only provided support from a religious perspective. ⁹¹ Chaplains are therefore the only mental healthcare resource for personnel on mission and on return. While the faith-based approach taken by chaplains may be sufficient for some personnel, interviews indicate that they may be ineffective for others and for different types of issues. This may be due to genuine differences in belief systems. In other cases, chaplains may be a poor fit to help those whose previous experiences leave them feeling ostracised by the tenets of certain belief systems.

Personnel do not have access to free reproductive healthcare while on mission

The RFMF does provide deployed personnel with access to reproductive healthcare while on mission, however, interviews indicate that this is not subsidised by the RFMF. The availability varies depending on each mission, but generally includes contraception, cervical screening tests and counselling. 64% of respondents (61% of women, 68% of men) reported that they were able to access reproductive healthcare from either the RFMF or the UN while on mission.

⁸⁷ Interview with key decision-maker, 4 August 2025, 20250804RFMF_001DR

⁸⁸ Interview with key decision-maker, 4 August 2025, 20250804RFMF_002DR

⁸⁹ Interview with key decision-maker, 9 July 2025, 20250709_002ES

⁹⁰ Interview with key decision-maker, 6 June 2025, 20250606RFMF_027RH

⁹¹ Interview with key decision-maker, 9 July 2025, 20250709RFMF_002ES

While these services appear to be mostly available, personnel were expected to pay out-of-pocket to receive them. One interviewee mentioned this directly, saying, 'They don't have pap smears conducted in country or on mission. This is considered a personal expense.'⁹²

Reproductive healthcare is an important and necessary part of ensuring the health and wellbeing of personnel, both deployed and not. By providing both regular and free access to this service, the RFMF can better service men and women with such concerns. Women with families or young children might particularly benefit from free reproductive healthcare on mission. These women, who may have concerns about recovery from pregnancy, family planning, or on other reproductive-related issues may be reassured and have their health supported even while they are deployed.

Personnel do not always have access to consulates in the countries to which they deploy

Fiji has consulates in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, India, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, the United States, China, Japan, and the United Arab Emirates. This means that Fijian peacekeepers are almost always deployed to countries that do not have a Fijian consulate.⁹³

Validation workshop participants, however, confirmed that Fijian peacekeepers do have access to their government through consulates of other countries, notably through their regional partners.

⁹² Interview with key decision-maker, 9 July 2025, 20250709RFMF_002ES

⁹³ Republic of Fiji Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, 'Ocean and Americas region', accessed June 2026, <https://www.foreignaffairs.gov.fj/oceania-americas-region/#>



Issue area 6 Peace Operations Experiences

Medium

The peace operations experiences issue area assesses the impact of (positive and negative) experiences during deployment, including experiences of meaningful participation, on women's decision to redeploy or not, and to encourage or discourage others from deploying.

This is an issue area of medium priority, and MOWIP results show that women struggle with some negative experiences on mission more than men.

Summary of findings

There were a number of good mission experiences personnel identified, such as most personnel reporting that they engage in social activities on mission. However, there were also several issues women struggled with, such as homesickness, negative interactions with colleagues, and concerns about favouritism during deployment. These factors may negatively impact women's deployment decisions, including the decision to redeploy.

Main opportunities:

- Personnel infrequently report problems on deployment
- Personnel felt that they contributed positively to improving peace and security
- Men and women have frequent contact with civilian population while deployed
- Most personnel report feeling prepared to respond to sexual and gender-based violence

Main barriers:

- Personnel commonly hear complaints about deployment experiences
- Personnel report engaging in activities beyond core operational duties, distinguished by gender: women were more likely to do cooking, while men were more likely to do driving, mentoring, and community outreach
- Most personnel face at least one problem transitioning home from deployment and do not receive institutional support

Gaps in perception and experience:

- Women were more likely than men to say they felt prepared to respond to sexual and gender-based violence
- Women were significantly more likely to experience homesickness due to communication problems
- Women were more likely to report negative experiences such as unwanted messages, pet names, or sexual remarks while deployed
- Women were more likely to report witnessing favouritism on deployment

Detailed findings

i. Opportunities

A majority of deployed personnel engage in social activities on mission

Most men and women in the RFMF reported taking part in social activities while deployed on UN peace operations. Interviewees described common activities such as touch rugby, volleyball, and soccer. Some

deployments have included a 'Fiji House,' which serves as a gathering place where Fijian peacekeepers can socialise and host guests from other nations. One interview detailed how women also participate in cultural entertainment and has been used to inform 'other countries about ourselves and Fiji.'⁹⁴

Men and women have similar interactions with the local population while deployed

Most men and women reported frequent contact with the local population while deployed, with more than three quarters of respondents (80% of women, 75% of men) indicating that they interacted with local people every day. These interactions took place in both operational and social settings. Many personnel (65% of women, 67% of men) reported engaging with local staff working on the UN base, while others noted regular participation in community or local events (29% of women, 18% of men). A further group (19% of women, 22% of men) indicated that they provided services to local communities as part of their deployment.

Operationally, men and women reported similar levels across most tasks. Comparable proportions of both groups took part in patrols (62% of men, 55% of women), and similar numbers (38% of men, 48% of women) reported monitoring local activities for situation reports. Engagement in civilian protection activities also showed no significant gender differences (19% of men, 21% of women).

The only significant difference between men and women was that a higher proportion of men than women indicated that they collected intelligence from the local population (24% of men, 11% of women).

Personnel know how to address sexual and gender-based violence on mission, but women more so than men

61% of all surveyed peacekeepers reported feeling prepared to respond to a situation where a victim was raped by her husband on mission. Women (68%) were significantly more likely than men (54%) to feel prepared to handle a situation of spousal rape.

Similarly, 64% of deployed personnel in the sample (61% of men and 67% of women) reported they felt prepared to handle a situation involving a victim where rape was committed by a local police officer. The small difference between men and women was not statistically significant.

Preparedness was highest for cases involving rape by a peacekeeper. The vast majority of deployed respondents (85%) reported that they felt equipped to handle such a situation, with a statistically significant difference between men (83%) and women (87%). Although women were significantly more likely to report preparedness in this category, the findings do not indicate a strong gendered norm whereby women are expected to gather detailed information in rape cases while men handle other tasks like driving.

Personnel see deployment as a positive opportunity

Although more than half of the surveyed personnel reported hearing complaints about peacekeeping missions, only one person in the full sample indicated that they did not see any advantages to being deployed. This suggests that the perceived benefits of deployment remain strong, even when individuals are aware of negative experiences shared by male or female colleagues.

Among those who had heard complaints from women, only 26% of men and 31% of women reported that these stories affected their decisions or desire to deploy. A similar pattern is shown for those who had heard about complaints from men, with 24% of men and 28% of women reporting that these stories affected their decision or desire to deploy.

Despite this, overall perceptions of deployment among RFMF personnel remain strongly positive. These findings indicate that most personnel continue to view deployment as valuable, even when exposed to negative accounts by others. This resilience suggests that the perceived benefits of deployment are well-established across both genders.

Deployment as a beneficial opportunity should continue to be emphasised and promoted within the RFMF. Underlining the benefits of deployment can encourage personnel of both genders to opt-in to peacekeeping operations, continuing to counteract negative stories about deployment.

⁹⁴ Interview with key decision maker, 5 June 2025, 20250605RFMF_025RH

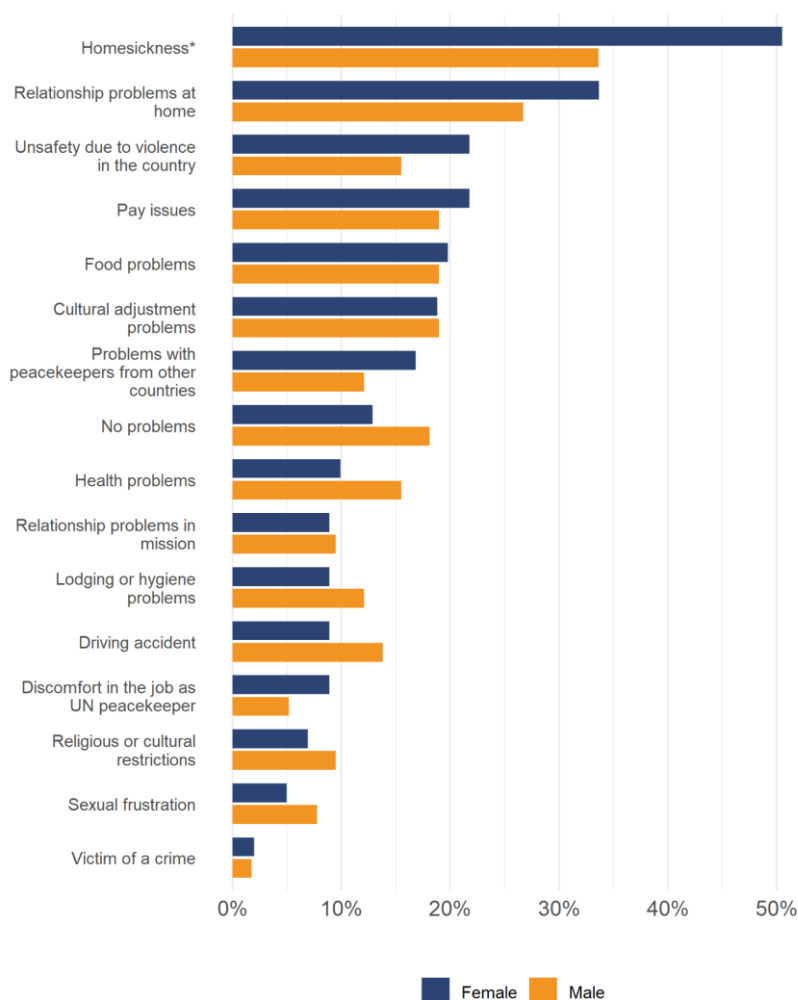
Personnel infrequently report experiencing problems while on deployment

About one-third of all deployed respondents (32%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: 'Peacekeepers from other countries create problems for peacekeepers from my own country.' Women (32%) and men (33%) reported this at similar rates, indicating a shared perception of the challenges posed by working alongside multinational contingents.

Survey responses (in Table 6.1) showed generally low rates of problems experienced during deployment. However, women were statistically significantly more likely to report experiencing homesickness than men (51% of women compared to 34% of men). Other commonly mentioned issues, such as difficulties with food and adjusting to the local culture (19% of personnel) and concerns with payments (20% of personnel) showed no significant difference between men and women.

All remaining problems as indicated in Table 6.1 had no significant gender difference and were reported at low rates among personnel.

Figure 6.1. Survey responses to the question, 'What problems did you face during a deployment?'



Note: An asterisk () denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women*

A majority of deployed personnel return from mission financially stable

Survey results show that personnel who return from deployment enjoy financial stability. Only 7% of respondents (5% of women, 9% of men) reported having financial problems upon return from peacekeeping missions, suggesting that over 90% of surveyed personnel had no financial trouble of note upon return.

This may be related to extra allowances or salary (see Issue area 7) received by personnel during their tenure as a peacekeeper.

Overall, this finding suggests that personnel generally receive sufficient financial support during their peacekeeping service, and/or upon their return from deployment. These positive outcomes may help sustain interest in future deployments, even when individuals anticipate other challenges or have heard negative stories about deployment from previously deployed colleagues.

Both women and men peacekeepers felt they contributed to the peace and security in the host country

The vast majority of deployed respondents (87%) reported that they had contributed to improving peace and security in the mission host country. Women (86%) and men (88%) reported this at about similar rates, indicating a shared sense of positive impact across genders.

ii. Barriers

Personnel commonly hear complaints about deployment experiences

More than half of surveyed personnel reported hearing complaints from deployed personnel about their deployment experiences. Of the overall sample, 58% of personnel (51% of men, 65% of women) heard complaints from women and 54% (49% of men, 59% of women) heard complaints from men. Interestingly, women were significantly more likely than men to hear these complaints from both genders. This suggests that women may be more frequently approached by colleagues to discuss concerns or negative experiences on mission.

Communication about experiences is important for personnel to share knowledge about deployment with colleagues. Hearing complaints from others may influence how personnel perceive deployment, even if their own experience is positive. While informal peer support is valuable, these findings show that women may be carrying a greater social-emotional responsibility within the contingent.

Sharing negative experiences at such high rates may also indicate that personnel experience unexpected difficulties or hardships on mission. Indeed, FGD participants relayed one experience when all women who were preparing to deploy to a mission were injected with a birth control shot to prevent them from getting pregnant in the mission. Some women had bad side effects and bleeding. Hearing experiences like this could have negative implications for women who may be interested in joining the force and deploying.

Women struggle with homesickness while deployed, possibly due to communication difficulties while on mission

Women were significantly more likely than men to report homesickness during deployment. Half of deployed women (50%) indicated experiencing homesickness, compared with 34% of men. Interview findings support this pattern: several women described the lengths of deployment and separation from their families as a major

challenge when deciding to deploy: '12 months deployment is really a long period, especially for women who are married. They don't want to be away from home for such a long period of time.'⁹⁵

Survey text responses (where surveyed personnel can expand upon their chosen answers) also highlighted that women face particular difficulties when leaving their family behind, and as a result, may avoid deployment entirely: 'Many women have the mentality of not trying to go to UN peace operations and leave their loved ones behind.'⁹⁶ One male respondent acknowledged this as well, noting that separation from family can be a barrier for women, writing: 'The main challenge is they miss their kids and families and kids miss the motherly love.'⁹⁷

Interview and survey open-ended responses suggest that family responsibilities play a role in the higher rates of homesickness reported by deployed women, and it is possible that communication difficulties may intensify these pressures. One respondent described this as: 'network problem[s] that affected their communication with loved ones back home.'⁹⁸

A large majority (90%) of all deployed respondents reported experiencing at least one issue with communicating with family or friends while deployed, including unstable internet, bad mobile phone service, time difference, limited privacy, limited free time, or lack of funds. Women reported communication difficulties at significantly higher rates than men (96% of women, 85% of men).

Communication with family is a key coping mechanism for all deployed personnel. Due to the especially high rate at which female personnel report both communication difficulties and homesickness, it is plausible that such issues are related to greater feelings of homesickness while on mission and may reduce women's interest in redeployment. The link between communication and homesickness may also reflect gender norms and cultural expectations around family roles. When access to consistent and reliable communication with home is limited, these pressures may compound, potentially reducing women's interest in participating in peacekeeping missions.

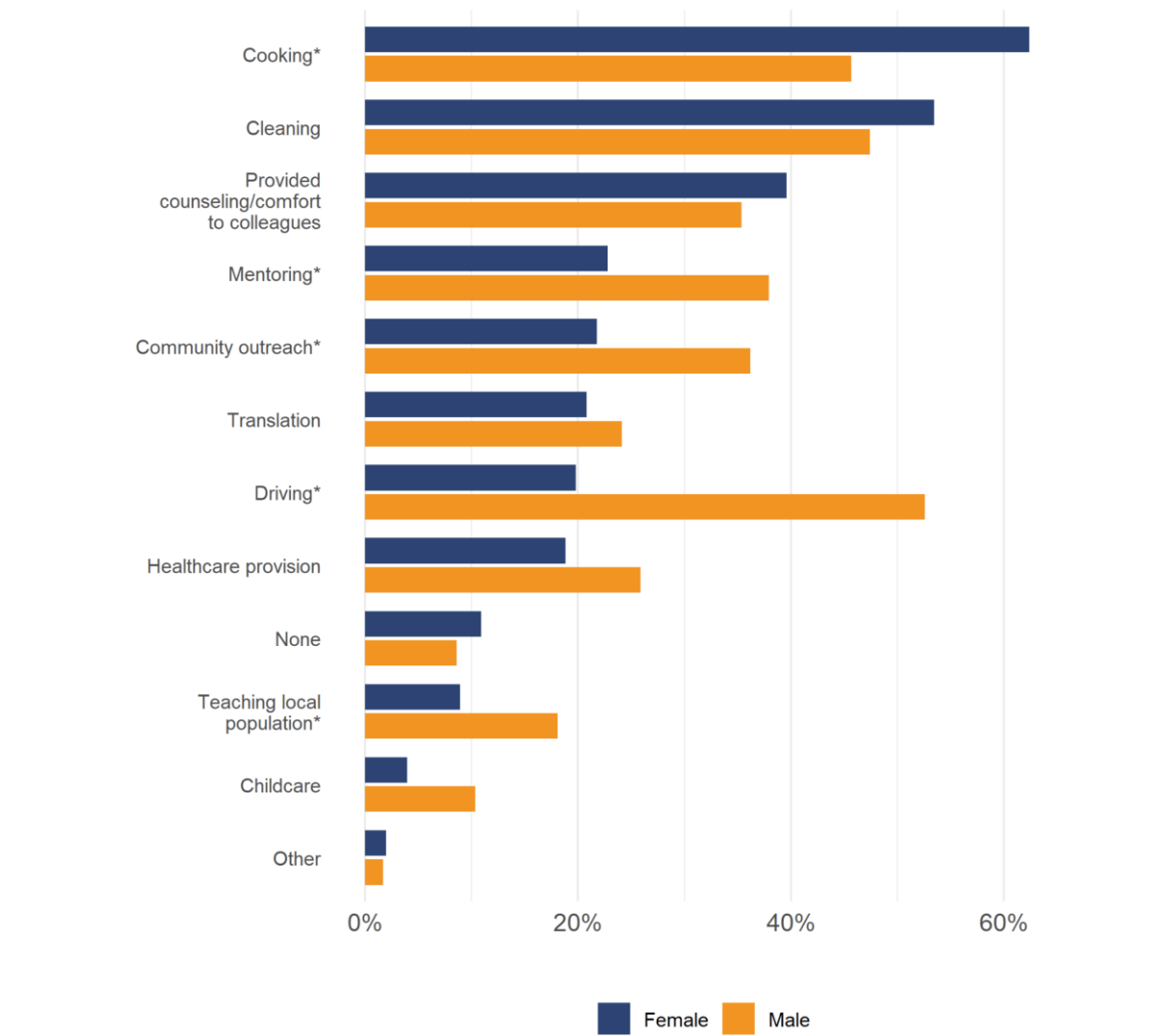
⁹⁵ Interview with key decision-maker, 5 June 2025, 20250605RFBMF_025RH

⁹⁶ Survey text response, deployed woman.

⁹⁷ Survey text response, deployed man.

⁹⁸ Survey text response, non-deployed woman.

Figure 6.2. Survey responses to the question, ‘While serving in any of the UN peace operations to which you were deployed, did you engage in any of the following activities in addition to your regular tasks?’



Please select all that apply.’ Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant ($p<0.05$) difference between men and women

Additional tasks on mission are often distributed based on perceived gender-related capabilities

Deployed personnel reported engaging in a wide range of activities in addition to their core operational duties, contributing to both mission success and community engagement. However, the survey data indicates notable gender differences in the types of additional tasks performed. Figure 6.2 above shows the percentage of deployed men and deployed women who reported participating in additional tasks alongside their regular duties.

Women were significantly more likely than men to report involvement in cooking (62% of women, 47% of men), and were also slightly more likely to provide counselling or comfort to colleagues (40% of women, 35% of men). In contrast, men were significantly more likely to report driving duties (20% of women, 53% of men),

mentoring others (23% of women, 38% of men), and participating in community outreach (22% of women, 36% of men). Men also reported higher engagement in teaching the local population (18%), at a rate twice that of women (9%)., and contributing to healthcare support (19% of women, 26% of men).

These patterns suggest that even within deployed environments, women's roles may still align with traditional gendered expectations. Women report being more engaged in support, caregiving, or domestic-type tasks, while men more frequently report tasks associated with outward-facing or leadership-oriented responsibilities, such as driving, mentoring, and community outreach.

Although both men and women contribute to essential aspects of mission operations, such patterns may influence how skills are developed on mission or future opportunities are shaped. This is consistent with findings in Issue area 9, which point to gendered allocations of tasks among men and women on mission.

There is only moderate participation in gender training while deployed

Gender training plays a critical role in preparing personnel to navigate complex operational environments and directly aligns to UN standards and WPS commitments. Survey results (Table 6.3) indicate that a substantial proportion of deployed RFMF personnel received some form of gender-related training while deployed, though participation levels differed by training type. The most common was on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), with higher participation among men (69%) than women (56%). This may reflect differences in access to certain institutional training for women.

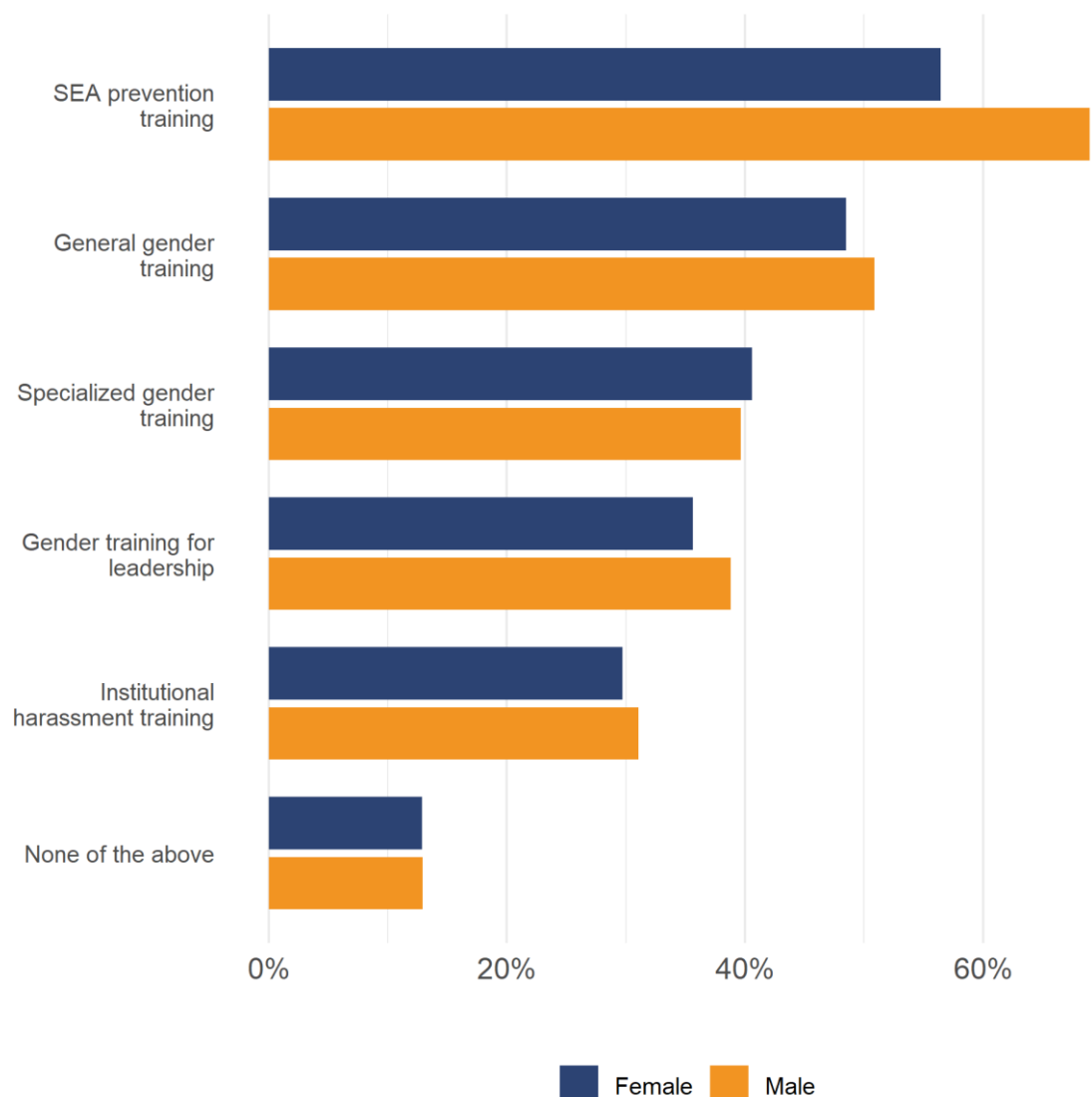
Participation in other forms of training, including general gender training, leadership training, and specialised gender training, such as the prevention of sexual violence or civilian protection, was similar across men and women. However, overall participation in these forms of training was modest, which may suggest that gender training frameworks are not yet systematically embedded across all personnel or ranks. Notably, institutional harassment training was completed by only around one-third of men and women (30%), indicating a potential gap in training relating to workplace culture and misconduct prevention.

These findings are important because existing scholarship confirms that an essential element of gender training delivered on UN missions is the ability to tailor information to the specific mission context.⁹⁹ If RFMF personnel do not have access to gender training on mission, then they miss out on important capacity building opportunities that can help them better adapt to their mission role.

Both FGD and validation workshop participants confirmed that all missions have one generic gender training session that is required during mission entrance training when peacekeepers arrive to UN peace operations. The availability of other types of gender training in missions, however, depends on the mission mandate, as personnel cannot access the same gender training from one mission to the next. This is concerning because it means there is an uneven understanding of gender dynamics across different mission contexts, which makes it difficult to diffuse gender knowledge and norms uniformly across all peacekeeper personnel in all missions around the world.

⁹⁹ Anania J., Mendes A., Nagel R.U., 'Preventing sexual exploitation and abuse by male peacekeepers', *Special Report*, United States Institute of Peace Washington D.C., no.478 September 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep26023?seq=1>

Figure 6.3. Survey responses to the question, 'Did you have any of the following gender training during any of your deployments to a UN peace operation? Please select all that apply.'



Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women

Women report negative experiences from colleagues while deployed at significantly higher rates than men

Survey data indicated that forms of harassment on deployment are not experienced equally. 39% of surveyed respondents (45% of women, 33% of men) with deployment experience reported witnessing or experiencing at least one form of harassment as outlined in Table 6.4.

Women were significantly more likely than men to witness/experience 8 out of the 10 examples of harassment. This points to a discrepancy between the experiences of men and women while deployed, particularly in their interactions with their colleagues. In particular, women frequently reported receiving unwanted texts from colleagues (63% of women compared to 18% of men), receiving unwanted flirtatious remarks that made them feel uncomfortable (54% of women compared to 23% of men), and unwanted jokes of a sexual nature (52% of women, 34% of men).

Table 6.4. Responses to the question, 'Select any of the following options that you have witnessed or experienced while deployed to ANY UN peace operation.'

Experience	% Deployed women	% Deployed men
Unwanted texts or messages from any colleagues*	63%	18%
Unwanted flirtatious remarks that make you or other personnel feel uncomfortable*	54%	23%
Unwanted jokes of a sexual nature that made you or other personnel feel uncomfortable*	52%	34%
A colleague refer to someone by something other than their name or title*	51%	34%
Discomfort in being watched, stared at, followed repeatedly making you or other personnel uncomfortable*	45%	16%
Unwelcome physical contact like pinching, touching, groping, fondling*	39%	17%
Unwanted attempts to establish romantic relationship*	37%	14%
Invasion of private space that made you or other personnel feel uncomfortable*	36%	15%
Pictures of you or a colleague shared or posted on the internet by colleagues when you or the colleague did not want them to be shared	29%	25%
Other behaviour that made you feel uncomfortable	1%	0%

Note: An asterisk () denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women*

Interview insights help to contextualise why this disproportionately occurs to women. Interviewees mention a norm of 'traditional rivalry,' in which personnel freely joke and tease with one another.

One element of this rivalry may include what could be considered verbal and sexual harassment:

Here's a lot of traditional relationships where I can joke with you, I can take anything that belongs to you... We can call them sexual harassment. You know, touching, unnecessary touching...touching all the buttocks, touching all the breasts'¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Interview with key decision-maker, 29 July 2025, 20250729RFMF_003DR

One interviewee noted that these jokes can become excessive or inappropriate:

And we have these traditional rivals where we joke and the joke is sometimes very bad, meaning very bad sexually... That's a norm in our culture. I was telling them just a few months back. Later on, these traditional rivalries will be counted as harassment. If I'm a female and you are male and we are traditional rivals, and you joke to me, and if I can't take it, then I [am] gonna report. So that is when it changes and it becomes a disciplinary issue.¹⁰¹

Another interviewee remarked on how these jokes can easily lead to sexual harassment: 'Language, the way we joke, you know, can amount to sexual harassment easily.'¹⁰²

One interviewee described the result of reporting sexual harassment for herself and a colleague:

We know we're being bullied. The approach that they are giving is threatening to me. I would like to be in a work environment where I feel safe, without eyes and ears around.

These reported behaviours are in clear contravention of the RFMF Gender Policy which explicitly rejects harassment in the RFMF: 'No RFMF personnel shall subject any other individual to unwelcome behaviour that has the effect of violating that individual's dignity or creating intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment.'¹⁰³

Though these results do not make up the majority of the total sample, these findings indicate behaviours which could undermine an institution-wide culture of respect. Sending unwanted messages or name-calling may inhibit mutual respect among colleagues. Without a foundation of respect among colleagues, women may feel disempowered to deploy to foreign countries as peacekeepers, and risk dealing with the aggressive and unwanted sexual nature of these relationships in an unfamiliar environment.

One interviewee suggested that strengthening solidarity among women could help address this issue:

For the past three years I have [had] women from the band...They come and they complain to me about harassment. They complain to their boss and their boss laugh[s] about it. It will be good to have a female task force within just to deal with all these issues.¹⁰⁴

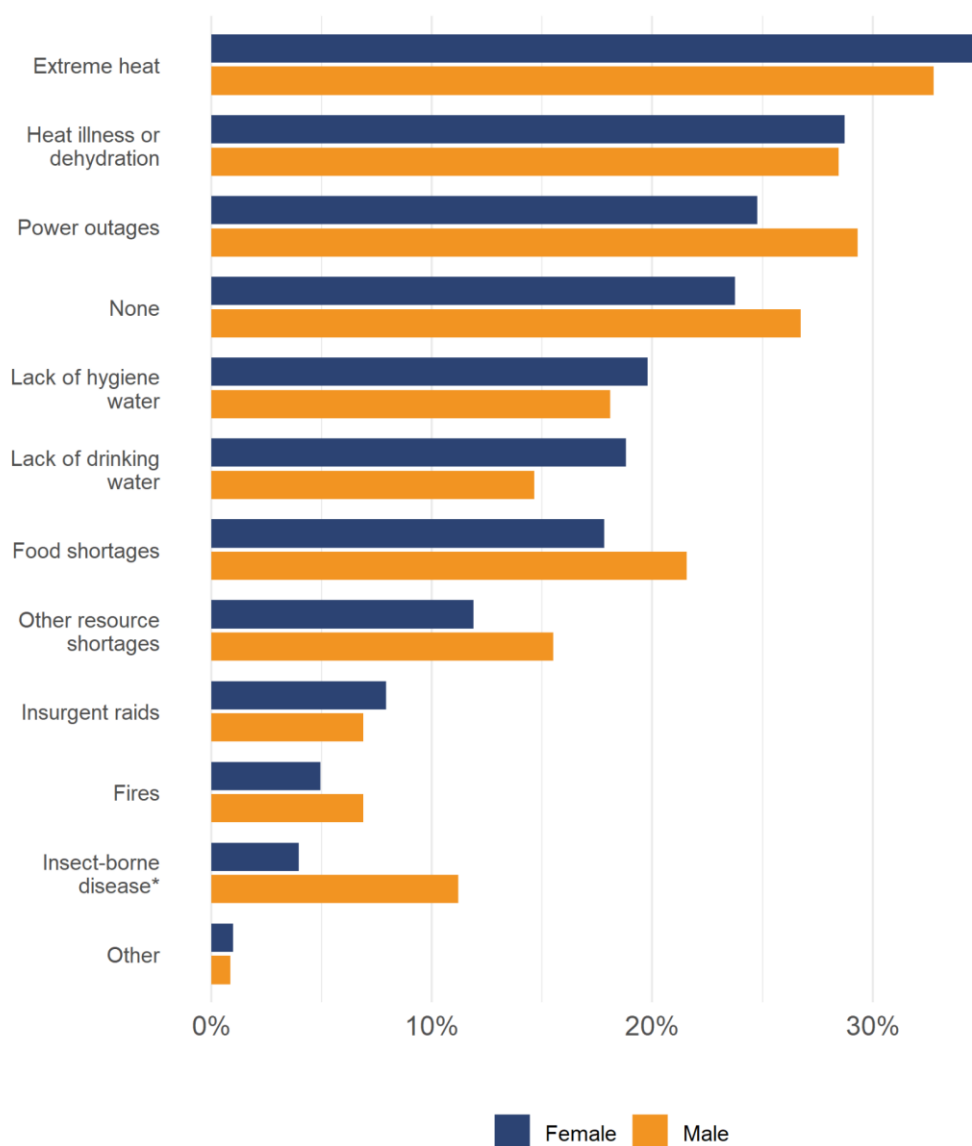
¹⁰¹ Interview with key decision-maker, 1 August 2025, 20250801RFMF_001DR

¹⁰² Interview with key decision-maker, 29 July 2025, 20250729RFMF_003DR

¹⁰³ Administrative Instruction No. 82 - Gender Policy, Article No. 36.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with key decision-maker, 3 July 2025, 20250703RFMF_001ES

Figure 6.5. Responses to the question, 'Have you ever experienced any of the following weather-related problems while deployed on a UN peace operation? Please select all that apply.'



Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women

Surveyed peacekeepers reported experiencing some environment-related problems while deployed

Survey findings in Table 6.5 above show that a sizeable minority of peacekeepers in the sample, both women and men at about equal rates, experienced environment-related issues while deployed. These included: discomfort from extreme heat (36% of women and 33% of men), dehydration or heat-related illness (29% of women and 22% of men), power outages (25% of women and 29% of men), shortage of water for hygiene (20% of women and 18% of men), shortage of filtered water (19% of women and 15% of men), and food shortages (18% of women and 22% of men). Around one-quarter of deployed respondents (24% of women, 27% of men) and men (27%) reported that they did not experience any environment-related problems during their UN peacekeeping mission.

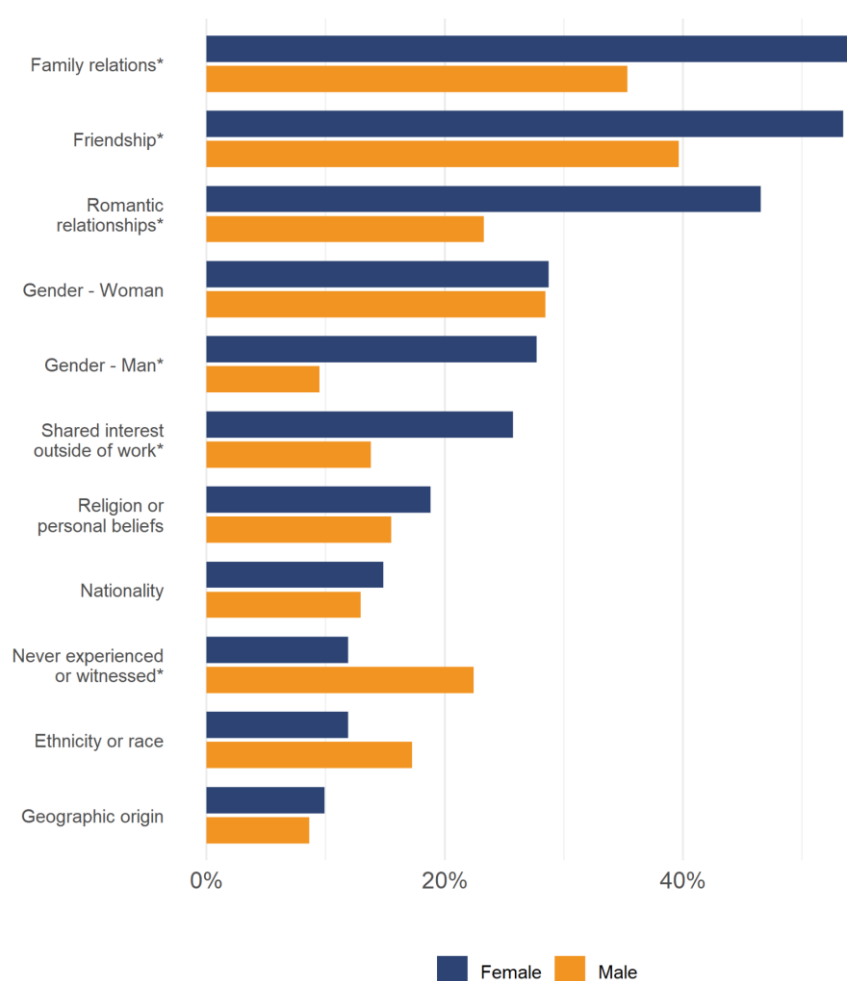
Personnel treat different groups with varying levels of respect

Survey responses indicate that experiences of respect during UN peacekeeping deployments are not uniform across personnel. Only one-quarter of deployed respondents (25%) reported that everyone was treated with respect on mission. Men were significantly more likely to report universal respect, with 32% of men and 18% of women reporting that all personnel were treated respectfully.

Women were also significantly more likely to respond that other women were treated with less respect, with 53% of deployed female personnel reporting this compared to only 20% of men. Fewer respondents perceived men as receiving less respect, with 9% of men and 8% of women indicating this.

These differences represent a barrier to women, as a greater likelihood of reporting disrespect towards other women suggests that women may encounter or observe behaviours that undermine a sense of inclusion or professional value. The perception that women are treated with less respect may contribute to feelings of exclusion or reduced morale and may affect the willingness of women to pursue future deployments.

Figure 6.6. Survey responses to the question, 'Have you personally experienced or had an experience where a colleague was favoured while deployed to a UN peace operation due to any of the following factors?'



Note: An asterisk () denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women*

Women are significantly more likely to perceive colleagues being favoured because of their relationships or gender while deployed

Survey data in Figure 6.6 shows that women are significantly more likely than men to perceive favouritism occurring during deployment. Women were also significantly more likely to report having personally experienced or observed a colleague experiencing preferential treatment based on personal relationships, such as gender, family ties, friendships, shared interests, or romantic involvement. Such perceptions and experiences of favouritism can reinforce gender hierarchies and undermine women's sense of professional legitimacy and fairness in deployment contexts.

As described in Issue area 3, the discretionary process within each unit to recommend individuals for deployment and the value placed on deployment by personnel can open the process up to the perception and potential reality of favouritism. As stated by one interviewee:

...each unit is not like a standard selection procedure. For every unit, if you ask a different unit, there will be different ways. Some will say, oh, if that person knows me or I do a lot of good things, then I'm selected. Or maybe it depends on who is doing the selection. If he or she likes me, then I go, go get selected.¹⁰⁵

Other interviews reinforce this belief. Several women described gendered assumptions or biases, including: 'You look at the credentials, you know, because of the Fijian society. This is what I think. I think always the system will favour the man.'¹⁰⁶ One survey text response similarly noted, '...men are more likely to be favoured while on development.'¹⁰⁷ Together, these findings indicate that, underlying gender norms can shape perceptions about who is valued, trusted, or recognised in deployed environments.

Women also reported higher awareness of favouritism linked to romantic relationships. Around half of all surveyed women (47%) indicated that such dynamics existed, although survey text responses and interviews did not provide detailed explanations. This warrants further investigation as it poses a barrier to women – this may foster feelings of resentment towards women who are in romantic relationships with senior colleagues, while others may feel pressured to enter such relationships in order to advance their careers.

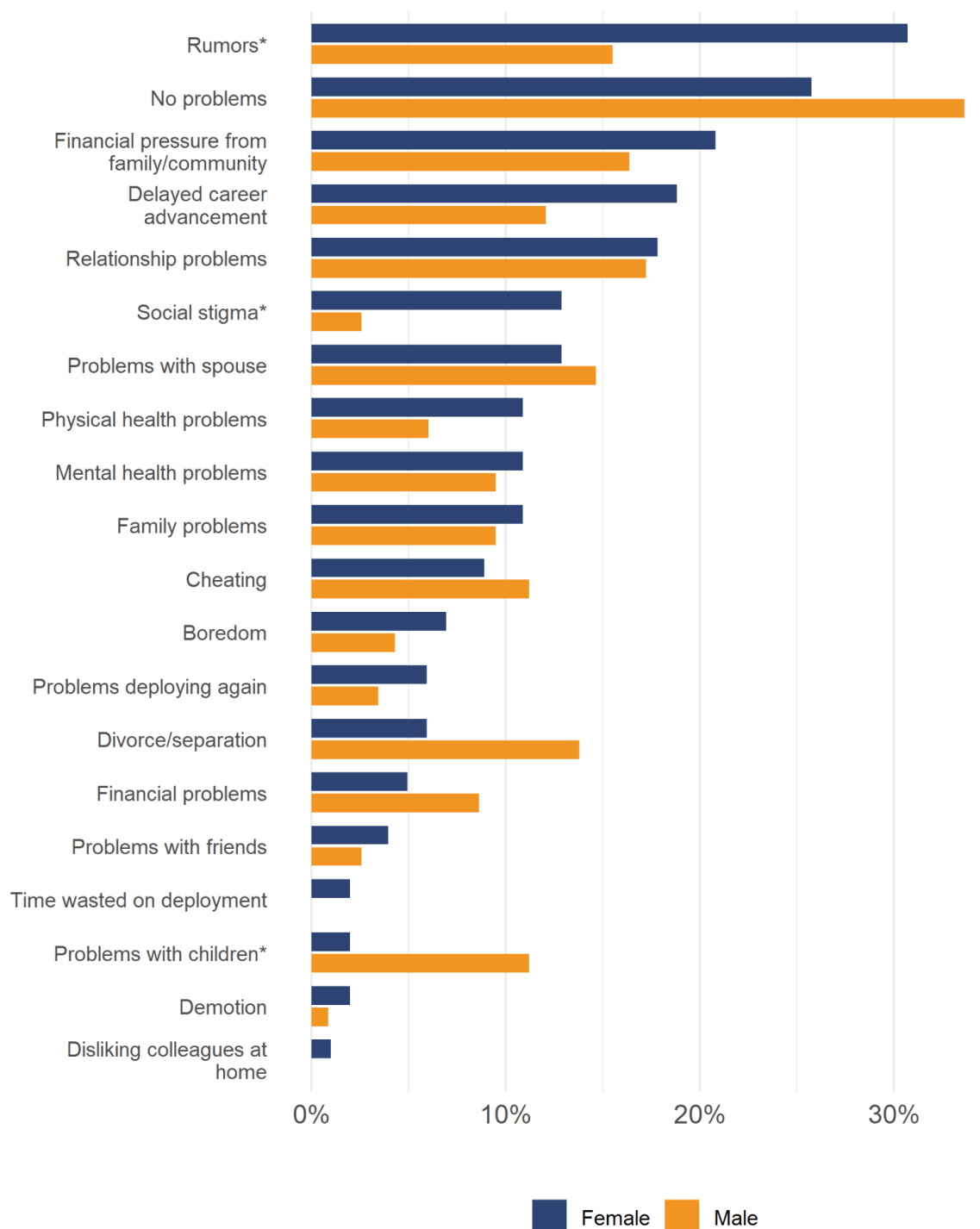
This finding suggests that informal relationships may be perceived to affect career opportunities. It could create discomfort or reduced morale within teams if professional recognition is linked to personal connections rather than performance. When career advancement or professional recognition appears tied to personal or informal relationships, it can discourage women's participation, limit trust in leadership, and contribute to exclusionary workplace cultures that disadvantage women.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with key decision-maker, 3 July 2025, 20250703RFMF_001ES

¹⁰⁶ Interview with key decision maker, 29 July 2025, 20250729RFMF_003DR

¹⁰⁷ Survey respondent, non-deployed woman.

Figure 6.7. Survey responses to the question, 'What problems did you face upon returning home after a deployment?'



Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women

A majority of personnel face at least one issue with transitioning back from deployment upon their return home

Survey data in Figure 6.7 show that returning from deployment presents challenges for many RFMF personnel. Only about one-third of deployed respondents (30%) reported no difficulties transitioning back, meaning that the majority (70%) encountered at least one challenge after returning from a UN peacekeeping operation. The specific issues raised differ by gender, with women more likely than men to report certain reintegration concerns.

The most frequently reported challenge among women was being the subject of rumours upon their return. Over one-third of women (31%) reported that they had rumours about them spread by others, double the rate reported by men (16%). Such findings suggest that female personnel face heightened scrutiny upon reintegration that may be tied to gender norms and expectations. These findings also suggest that deployment may make women more vulnerable to judgement or speculation which can undermine their reintegration following deployment.

Women also reported concerns about missing out on opportunities for career advancement during deployment (19% of women compared to 12% of men), though the difference between these groups was not statistically significant. This perception nonetheless suggests that some personnel, particularly women, perceive tension between deployment and professional progression, particularly for women who may already experience structural barriers to career advancement.

Problems in personal relationships were another commonly reported challenge (18% of both men and women). This reflects a shared challenge of reintegration across genders, however, when viewed alongside women's experience of rumour-spreading and perceived career setbacks, it indicates that post-deployment experiences of women are shaped by both personal adjustments and gender-specific pressures.

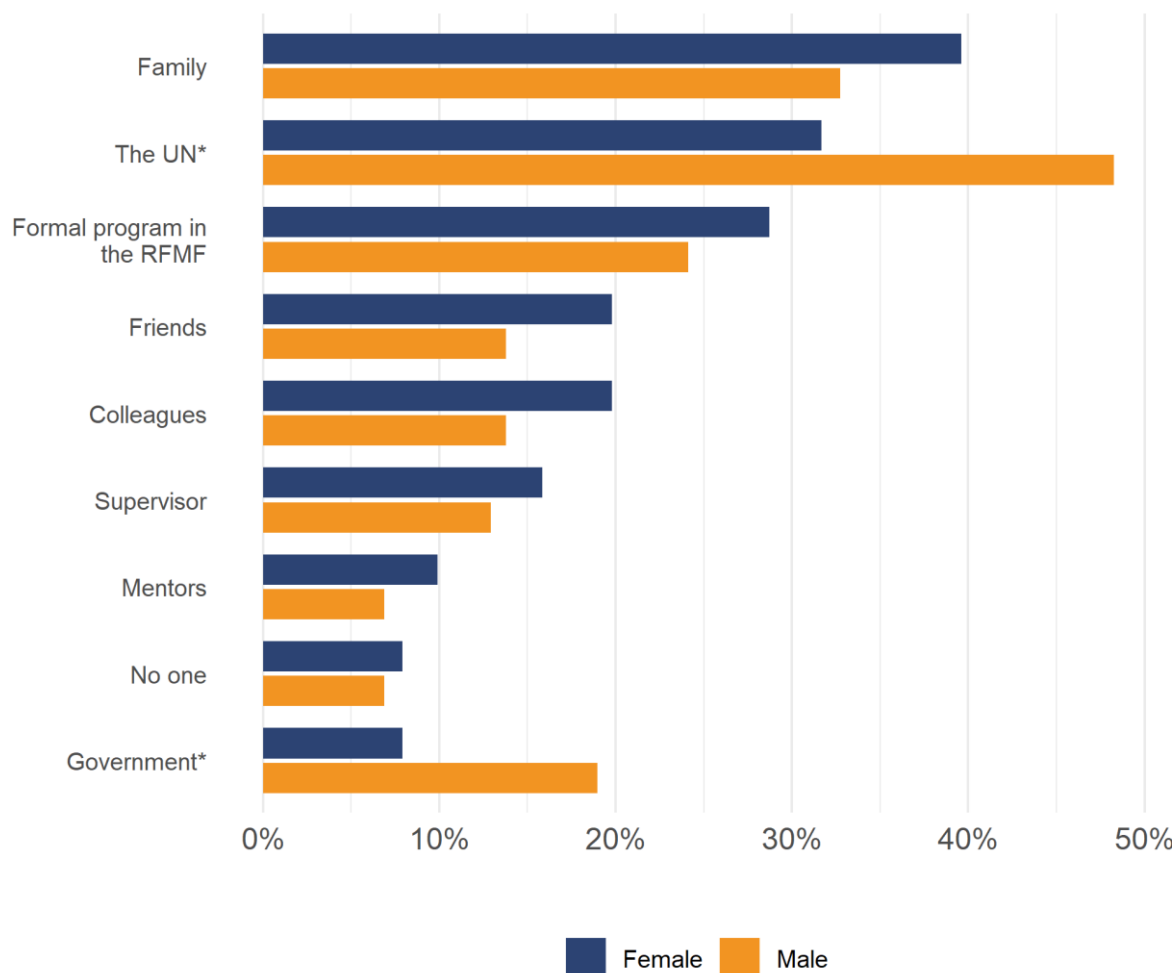
There is little institutional support for personnel returning home after deployment to a peace operation

Survey data in Figure 6.8 suggests that institutional support (from the UN or the RFMF) for personnel returning from UN peacekeeping missions is limited. Only 40% of personnel received transition support from the UN, and 26% of personnel received formal support from the RFMF. Interviews noted that the interventions such as psychological counselling or decompression support are offered on a case-by-case basis, rather than as a standard practice. This could create a barrier for personnel who may not actively seek support when struggling with their mental health following a deployment.

Although men and women report receiving similar levels of support from the RFMF, women were significantly less likely to report receiving reintegration support from the UN. These findings suggest a potential gender disparity in the support available at the mission level. Several interviewees commented that the RFMF does not currently have formal support for reintegration, and expressed the view that the RFMF should take a more proactive role in supporting personnel returning from deployment. One senior person interviewed specifically outlined that men returning from peacekeeping need more training to help them adjust to society and reunite with their family.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Interview with key decision-maker, 2 June 2025, 20250602RFMF_01RH

Figure 6.8. Survey responses to the question, 'Who helped you to transition back into your country after your return from the last peace operation?'



Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women



Issue area 7 Career Value

Low

The career value issue area measures whether peace operations help the careers of deployed personnel. This, in turn, affects whether or not men and women are likely to deploy and redeploy. Women who have deployed may choose not to redeploy if it is not advantageous to their career prospects.

This is an issue area of low priority, indicating the presence of several best practices that confirm peacekeeping is beneficial to women's career advancement in the RFMF.

Summary of findings

The RFMF have a demonstrated commitment to ensuring that peacekeeping is beneficial to personnel's career prospects. Personnel said they gained professional and social benefits from deployment. Deployment offers extra allowances and skills gained while peacekeeping can informally advance personnel's career. Importantly, however, deployment may disproportionately impact women's career advancement in the RFMF as compared to men.

Main opportunities:

- Peacekeeping is part of Fiji's National Security Strategy 2025-2029
- Personnel perceive professional, social, and financial benefits from participating in peace operations
- Peacekeepers are recognised and celebrated for their service, and can receive career benefits

Main barriers:

- Little flexibility to return home for emergencies or elections

Gaps in perception and experience:

- Women slightly more likely to report that deployment disrupted career advancement

Detailed findings

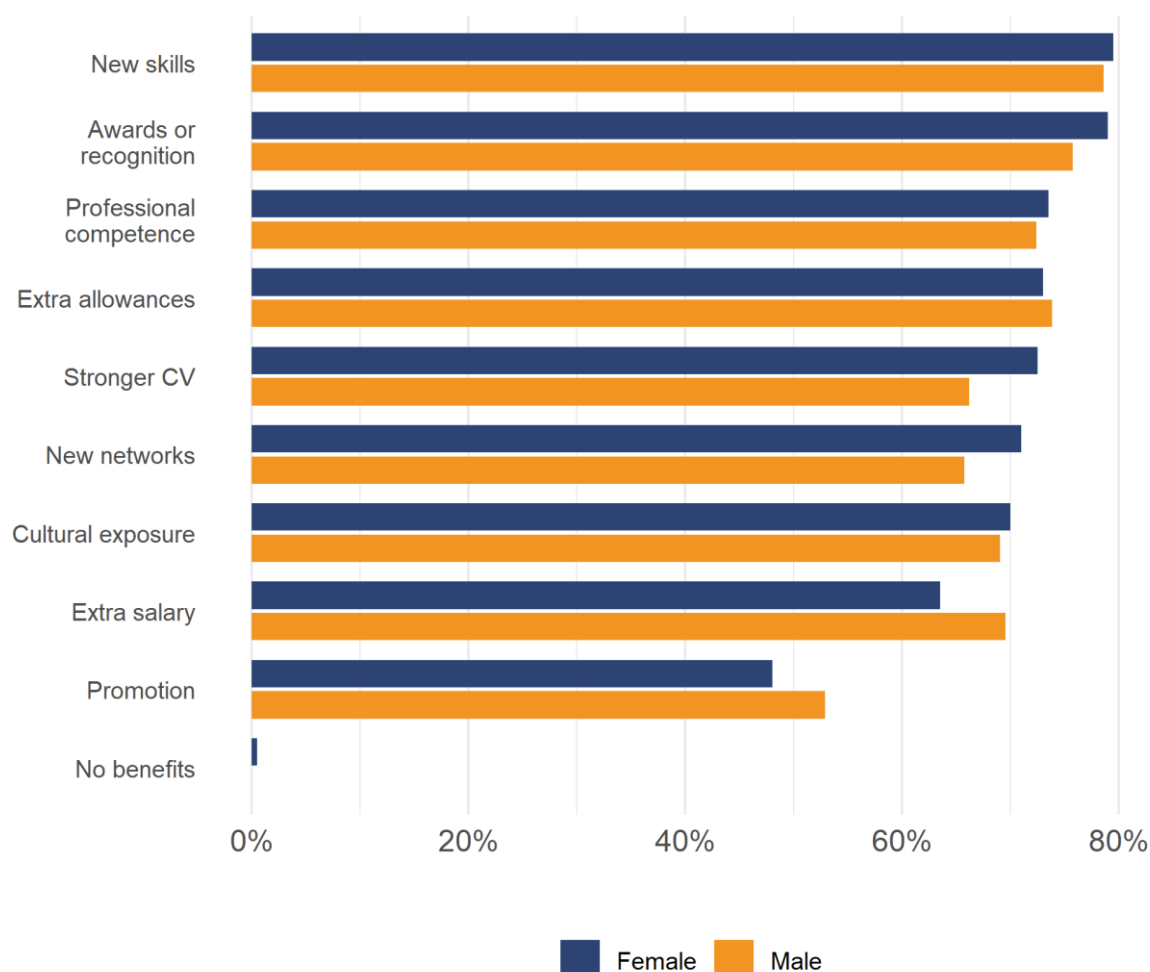
i. Opportunities

Peacekeeping mentioned in Fiji's National Security Strategy

Fiji's National Security Strategy 2025-2029 was launched on 12 August 2025¹⁰⁹, highlighting the importance placed on peacekeeping for national security, regional stability, and Fiji's international reputation in helping to maintain global peace and security.

¹⁰⁹ Republic of Fiji, Ministry of Home Affairs, *National Security Strategy 2025-2029*, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2025, <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/National-Security-Strategy-2025-2029.pdf>

Figure 7.1. Survey responses to question, 'In your opinion, what are the benefits you have obtained/will obtain by participating in a UN peacekeeping mission?'



Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women

Personnel perceived professional and social benefits from deployment to a peacekeeping operation

More than two-thirds of all men and women surveyed considered new skills, an improved CV, and an opportunity to advance their career to be benefits of deployment (see Figure 7.1). Women were slightly more likely than men to value the benefits of new skills (80% of women, 78% of men) and an improved CV (72% of women, 66% of men), suggesting that deployment offers even more valued opportunities for professional development to women compared to their male counterparts.

One interviewee even described how they were able to pursue higher education while on mission: 'I was given two years of study leave with full pay and I managed to complete my last unit while I was on tour in the Golan Heights in 2022.'¹¹⁰ This experience demonstrates how deployment does not necessarily interfere with continuing study opportunities that may lead to career advancement.

¹¹⁰ Interview with key decision-maker, 13 June 2025, 20250613RFMF_048RH

Around two-thirds of both deployed and non-deployed men and women also recognised deployment to a peacekeeping operation as an opportunity to make new friends and develop social networks, as well as increase their cultural awareness. Those with deployment experience were even more positive overall, with 71% indicating that their social network grew compared to 65% of non-deployed personnel, suggesting that the social benefits of deployment are even higher in reality than anticipated by those who are yet to deploy.

Across the board, peacekeeping deployment is valued by RFMF personnel. Deployment provides opportunities for personnel to expand their professional horizons, and these benefits are equally valued by male and female deployed personnel.

Peacekeeping deployment provided personnel with extra allowances

As of 2018, the UN paid governments a standard reimbursement rate of \$1,428 USD (\$3,247 FJD) per peacekeeper per month to cover salaries, allowances, and other costs for every soldier contributed to a peace operation.¹¹¹ TPCC governments get to decide how much of the UN's reimbursement will be used to compensate each deployed soldier according to their national rank and salary scale. Unlike most developing TPCCs, Fiji allocates most of the UN reimbursement to compensate peacekeepers for their mission service. This makes UN deployment a financially rewarding endeavour for many RFMF personnel.

Survey respondents overall confirmed that the extra allowance (73%) and extra salary (67%) received by deployed personnel was perceived as an important financial benefit of deployment. As Figure 7.1 above shows, this perceived benefit is generally shared among deployed personnel and non-deployed personnel, indicating that RFMF personnel are aware of the financial benefit of deploying to a peace operation. This is reflected in the survey data, as 66% of deployed personnel (66% of men and 65% of women) believed that payment for peacekeeping deployment was sufficient.

This perception was also reflected in interviews which described how personnel are interested in UN missions due to the allowances received: 'One of the biggest factor[s] for RFMF is that soldiers, irrespective of rank, will raise their hand up for deployment because of the remuneration benefit.'¹¹²

More deployed personnel (76%) indicated that these allowances were a benefit of deployment, as compared to 70% of non-deployed respondents who indicated the same. This response is consistent among men and women.

Peacekeeping deployment can advance personnel's careers, though it is not a formal criterion for advancement or promotion

Deployment to peace operations is not an official qualification or criterion for promotion or advancement. When personnel are deployed, they remain on the personnel list for their own unit. Upon return, they continue to work in the same unit unless transferred through an HR rotation. The majority of both male (88%) and female (83%) deployed personnel who were surveyed indicated that they had returned to their same job.

However, the skills gained on deployment and Tour of Duty report may be considered in assigning the returnee to a new role. As stated by one interviewee

¹¹¹ Wyeth G., 'Fiji: The Peacekeepers', *The Diplomat*, 27 September 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/09/fiji-the-peacekeepers/>

¹¹² Interview with key decision-maker, 29 July 2025, 20250729RFMF_001DR

...it might be decided that let's say you have had a stellar operation. Very good report. You have five new skills as a result of your deployment which could be used to greater effect in another unit or another command within the RFMF.... Then they say, okay, we're not going to put you back to your battalion, we're going to put you to this staff position.¹¹³

This is reflected in results from the survey. 50% of all respondents felt that a UN peace operation would benefit their career by helping them rise in rank within the RFMF. Men (53%) were more likely to indicate that rising in rank was a benefit of deployment, compared to women (48%).

Peacekeepers are recognised and celebrated for their service both internally and publicly

Although there are no physical statues dedicated to peacekeepers in Fiji, peacekeepers are honoured and memorialised in other ways by the government, military and in the media. Peacekeepers are honoured annually during the National Armistice Day on 11 November, as well as on UN International Peacekeeping Day which is celebrated each year on 29 May.

Fijian peacekeepers from the RFMF are consistently recognised for their key contributions to UN peacekeeping publicly, through national and international media platforms. Fiji is consistently recognised as a significant contributor to UN peacekeeping missions, sending more troops and police per capita to UN peace operations than any other country in the world. For example, Fiji TV has recently highlighted Fijian peacekeepers' contributions to the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan Heights.¹¹⁴ Approximately 20% of surveyed personnel felt that recognition on social media or public media was important and 29% felt that recognition by the general public was important (see Figure 7.2).

Peacekeepers also receive military colours for each mission served, as well as RFMF General Service Medals and medals from the UN for specific missions. These awards are described by one interviewee as follows:

We have [a] general service medal which recognises your participation in missions...that one [is] given locally for that recognition. And then you have earned medals for peacekeeping either at UNIFIL in Lebanon. Or whatever missions that you go to in country.¹¹⁵

In 2024, 62 RFMF personnel were honoured for their service to the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and awarded peacekeeping medals by the UNAMI Chief of Staff during a ceremony in Baghdad, Iraq.¹¹⁶ Interviews with senior RFMF personnel indicate that specific roles, such as commanding officers, can also receive medals for their service. Surveyed personnel see recognition in the form of medals and awards as a significant benefit of deployment to a UN peacekeeping mission. 77% of respondents answered that awards, medals, or recognition from the RFMF was a benefit of deployment. In fact, 70% of respondents indicated that recognition from the RFMF was the most important form of recognition. These survey results point to a shared perception among personnel that receiving medals for their service to peacekeeping missions is seen as a key benefit of deployment.

Women are also recognised publicly and by the Fijian government for their contributions to peacekeeping. In 2025, Fiji's celebrations for International Women's Day included an RFMF event commemorating women

¹¹³ Interview with key decision-maker, 1 August 2025, 20250801RFMF_001DR

¹¹⁴ Fiji TV live broadcast, 9 July 2025.

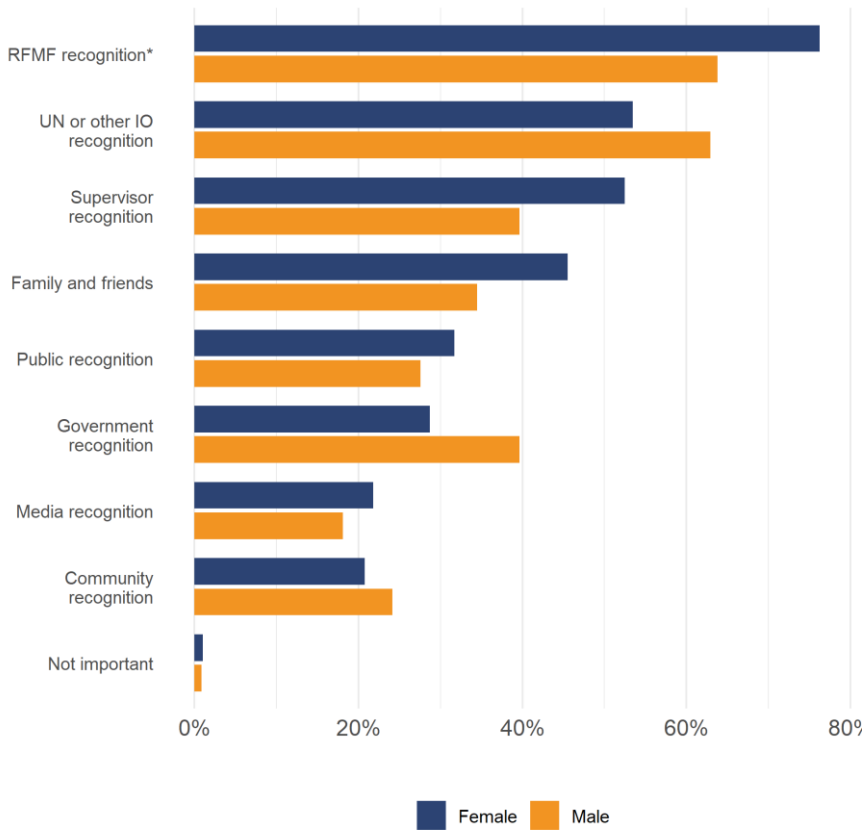
¹¹⁵ Interview with key decision-maker, 29 July 2025, 20250729RFMF_002DR

¹¹⁶ Kumar R., Fijian peacekeepers honoured with medals for service in Iraq, 22 June 2024, *Fiji village*, <https://www.fijivillage.com/news/62-Fijian-peacekeepers-honoured-with-medals-for-service-in-Iraq-xfr845/>

within Fiji’s defence workforce and specifically their service to peacekeeping.¹¹⁷ 22% of female respondents indicated that recognition on social media or public media was important to them. This shows the significance of celebrating women’s contributions.

Moreover, the public recognition of women’s service in peacekeeping and the RFMF may impact how civilian audiences perceive the role of women widely. One such example is of a female Warrant Officer, who is the first company sergeant major in 3 FIR. A special Facebook page was made to recognise her, featuring a video interview. The interview became popular and drew positive attention from female audiences. One key decision-maker remarked, ‘Some females were just inspired by how she was sharing her experience and getting to know her achievement. Like they were saying they were gonna try and get recruited in the next intake.’¹¹⁸ Examples like this one show how recognising women in the RFMF for their service within and outside of peacekeeping is important for female personnel and for female civilians possibly interested in service.

Figure 7.2. Survey responses to question, ‘What form of recognition of your peacekeeping deployment is most important to you? Please select all that apply.’



¹¹⁷ Republic of Fiji Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, ‘Hon. Qereqeretabua officiates at the RFMF International Women’s Day event’, blog post, 6 March 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.gov.fj/hon-qereqeretabua-officiates-at-the-rfmf-international-womens-day-event/>

¹¹⁸ Interview with key decision-maker, 4 August 2025, 20250804RFMF_003DR

ii. Barriers

Deployment may pose a disruption to the career advancement of women

Deployment to UN peacekeeping operations is not officially part of the criteria for promotion and some personnel indicated that their deployment meant that they missed out on or delayed opportunities for career advancement. As mentioned in Issue area 6, this was higher among women than men, with 19% of women who had deployed responding they had missed out on career advancement in comparison to 12% of deployed men.

This might be for practical reasons. For example, deployed personnel do not undergo examinations for promotion while on deployment. In this case, an officer who is eligible for promotion because of their years of service, but is currently deployed, would not be able to sit for their promotion exams resulting in a delay in their promotion.

There is little flexibility to return home while deployed during national emergencies or elections

When peacekeepers are deployed to a UN mission, the expectation is that personnel remain in the host country during national emergencies and elections and to date, personnel on peacekeeping missions have never been recalled for these reasons. However, election officials from Fiji do go overseas to the host country to allow personnel to vote in national elections. This may represent a barrier for personnel who may want or need to return home in the event of an emergency.



Issue area 8 Top-down leadership

Low

The top-down leadership issue area explores the impact of political will among those in influential positions (or lack thereof) on women's deployment and meaningful participation in peace operations.

This is an issue area of low priority, and MOWIP findings confirm the existence of several best practices that demonstrate women are well supported by leadership in both government and the RFMF.

Summary of findings

Both RFMF and government leadership have demonstrated their commitment to supporting female service members. This leadership support is recognised through the preserved memory of several well-known female trailblazers and also male champions that mentor, support and advance women and women's rights. There are some areas for improvement, however, such as personnel lacking a clear understanding of UNSCR 1325.

Main opportunities:

- Female trailblazers among RFMF personnel are celebrated among key decision-makers
- Male champions support and advance women, and senior leaders expressed an interest in gender training
- Most peacekeepers served under a female immediate supervisor while deployed
- Fiji's National Security Strategy advocates for gender mainstreaming
- Strong culture of mentorship in the RFMF

Main barriers:

- Mixed availability of gender resources such as mainstreaming policy, gender advisors
- Gender training is insufficient
- No gender toolkit, report, or needs assessment

Gaps in perception and experience:

- Low awareness of UNSCR, especially among lower-ranked personnel. Among high rank personnel, men had lower awareness than women.

Detailed findings

i. Opportunities

There are a number of female trailblazers among RFMF personnel

The RFMF boasts a number of trailblazers who have paved the way for women in the Fijian military. In 1988, Fiji deployed women as a part of one of its earliest UN peacekeeping missions. These women were recognised in several interviews as pioneers in raising awareness among women and men about the needs of women in the Army and during peacekeeping missions. One interviewee stated:

And Fiji, since 1988, when we first took in women, because of the cultural and traditional paternalistic society that we are, you know, it took time for us to fully understand and to fully grasp what the gender rights, you know, the gender issues.¹¹⁹

Yet, these women persevered. As one interviewee recounted:

...we had women start coming in when we had women recruits way back in 1988-89... and then they were not prominently represented out in the UN peacekeeping missions... we deployed there without much support in terms of engineering to be doing... [private] ablution blocks.¹²⁰

Prominent examples of trailblazers include Major Amelia Tadu, one of the original seven female RFMF officers commissioned in 1988, whose impact and presence in the RFMF continued into the 2010s.¹²¹ Another trailblazer, Colonel Litea Vulakoro Seruiratu, was the first female officer in the RFMF to attain the rank of Colonel and serve as Chief of Staff,¹²² while Colonel Silipa Druavesi Vananalagi was the second female officer in the RFMF promoted to Colonel. In 2023, Colonel Vananalagi was appointed as the Military and Police Advisor at Fiji's Mission to the UN in New York and became the first woman to occupy this position.¹²³ Prior to this role, Colonel Vananalagi served as the RFMF Officers Training School Commandant. These women received prominent media coverage, demonstrating their capabilities and positioning them as role models for women in the military. The role of female trailblazers in the RFMF highlights the important role of female leadership in expanding opportunities for and demonstrating the capabilities of female personnel.

Most peacekeepers have served under a female supervisor while deployed

A majority of surveyed peacekeepers (61%) reported serving under a female immediate supervisor while deployed to a UN mission. However, women (70%) were significantly more likely than men (53%) to have served under a female supervisor on a peace operation. This is high compared to the low numbers of women in leadership positions in the RFMF overall. UN peacekeeping deployment may increase opportunities to learn from and be mentored by female supervisors.

¹¹⁹ Interview with key decision-maker, 29 July 2025, 20250729RFMF_003DR

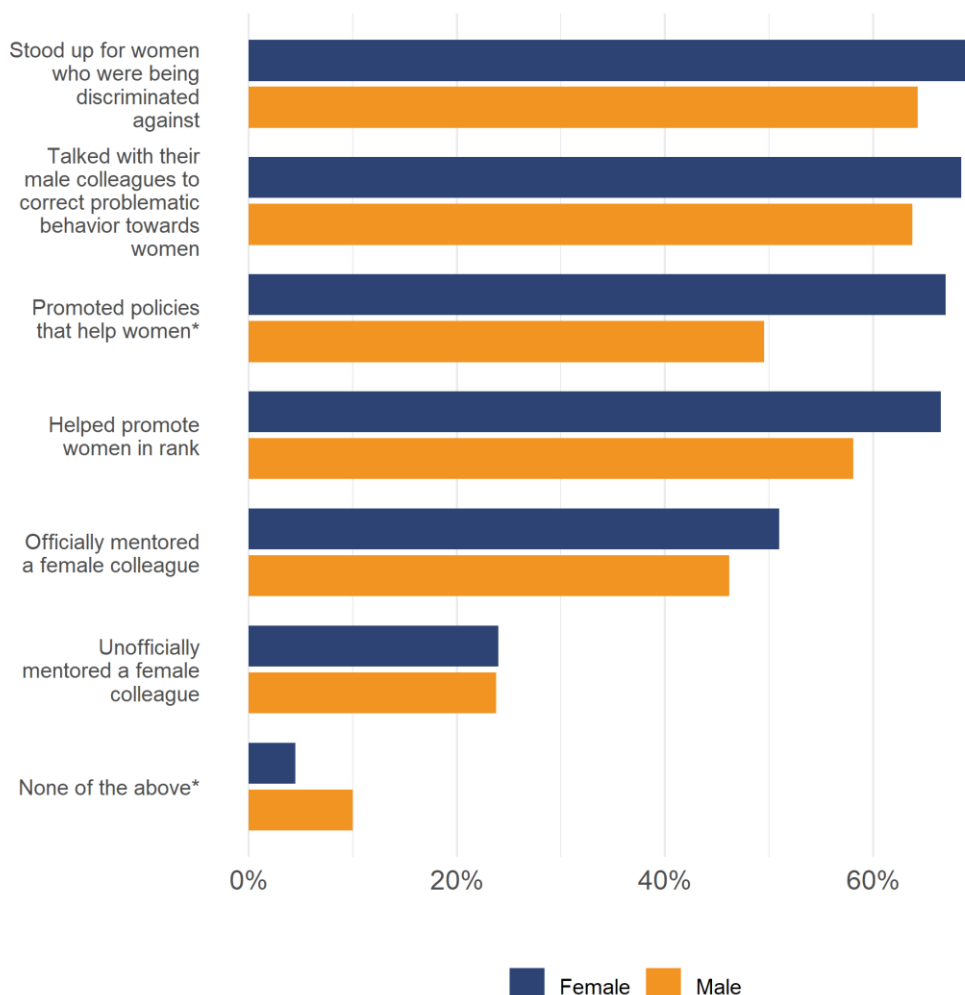
¹²⁰ Interview with key decision-maker, 29 July, 2025, 20250729RFMF_002DR

¹²¹ Koningisor, J. 'Women, Peace, and Security – A Night With The Women of RFMF', Navy Live Blog, 7 July 2015, https://web.archive.org/web/20150906233803/http://dacowits.defense.gov/Portals/48/Documents/News%20Articles/2015%20Weekly%20Articles/News%20Articles_31JUL2015.pdf

¹²² Pasifika Women's Alliance, 'Meet Litea Vulakoro Seruiratu, the first female officer...', Facebook post, 10 February 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/pasifikawomensalliance/posts/meet-litea-vulakoro-seruiratu-the-first-female-officer-in-the-republic-of-fiji-m/542985789197635/>

¹²³ Staff Writer, 'Silipa is Fiji's first Female MPA to the United Nations', Fiji Sun, November 4, 2023, <https://fijisun.com.fj/news/nation/silipa-is-fijis-first-female-mpa-to-the-united-nations>

Figure 8.1. Survey responses to question ‘Do you know of men in your organisation who have done any of the following?’



There are male champions in the RFMF who advance and support women and women’s rights

A majority of respondents knew of men in the RFMF who have helped advance female personnel and gender issues through various forms of allyship. One interviewee noted that male senior leadership advocate for women because they want to expand female representation in the military and they themselves ‘want to be trailblazers’ in promoting women’s representation.¹²⁴ Among surveyed personnel, high proportions of both men and women reported that they had witnessed a variety of actions from male champions, including mentoring female colleagues, standing up for women, and promoting institutional policies that benefit women (Figure 8.1).

Interviews with male key decision-makers provided examples of how men in the RFMF actively support the inclusion of women in the institution. One interviewee mentioned how women are important contributors to the RFMF, and how he advocated for the advancement of women as a part of his own career development, saying:

¹²⁴ Interview with key decision-maker, 29 July 2025, 20250729RFMF_002DR

...the only issue that I see needs to be addressed is our mindset, especially Fijian, for us to change our mindset. Females can be good soldiers. When I was interviewed for the UN for the first Provost Martial post, this is what I told the people in the UN...¹²⁵

Another male interviewee mentioned how he actively reminds his personnel of the importance of women in the unit:

I always talk to my boys, to our men and women during my parade every month. So that's the time I always nail it to them. The importance of females who are working with us.¹²⁶

Male champions supporting women also fills gaps that male leadership cannot fill themselves:

...I have designated one senior female to be their point of contact directly with me and my other gender [advisor] because there are certain issues that they can share with other people.¹²⁷

Both survey results and interviews reflect that male allyship in the RFMF is strong and is poised to grow further in the future. Men in the RFMF have advanced women through their active and intentional support of women's inclusion and unique support of their needs. Continuing to support men in their advocacy for women in the institution will encourage this positive culture of cooperation and mutual support currently seen in the RFMF.

Senior leaders express interest in taking gender training in the future

Survey results indicate that RFMF leaders have a strong interest in participating in future gender-related training. Among high-ranking personnel, 59% expressed interest in both leadership-focused and specialised gender training, 57% in training on the prevention of SEA, 55% in general gender training, and 47% in institutional harassment training.

When disaggregated by gender, high-ranking men reported greater interest than women in SEA training (43% of women, 68% of men) and general gender training (48% of women, 61% of men), while high-ranking women showed slightly higher interest in leadership gender training (62% of women, 57% of men) and specialised gender training (67% of women, 54% of men). Interest in institutional harassment training was 52% among high-ranking women and 43% among high-ranking men. None of these differences were statistically significant.

High-ranking leaders' demonstrated willingness to engage in gender-focused training presents a significant opportunity for the RFMF to strengthen its institutional knowledge, promote gender-responsive leadership, and build support for the implementation of further gender initiatives. By actively participating in such training, senior leaders can model inclusive behaviour and help to address some of the structural and cultural barriers that female personnel face.

Across interviewees, a desire for gender training and workshops to improve gender awareness was a common theme. In interviews, key decision-makers reported a number of motivations for advocating gender training, centring on the overall benefits that such programs would have for the RFMF.

¹²⁵ Interview with key decision maker, 7 August 2025, 20250807RFMF_002DR

¹²⁶ Interview with key decision maker, 7 August 2025, 20250807RFMF_002DR

¹²⁷ Interview with key decision maker, 4 August 2025, 20250804RFMF_004DR

One interviewee mentioned how training would be useful to mobilise women in the RFMF to advocate for themselves and raise cases of misconduct or harassment:

I am at a very improved position to protect myself [compared to] someone who's right at the bottom. That's how I've seen things unfold. However, it hasn't stopped me advocating for more training so that these women can actually stand up for themselves and improve their working conditions and not wait for someone to come and do it for them.¹²⁸

For another decision-maker, gender training can help male personnel see women as more than just girls – men will come to see women in the RFMF as soldiers first.

I feel there's a lot of trainings, but I know I've made a difference in the way that females, how men see females in the different places that I've worked. Because at most times we start off at the beginning, like especially during trainings...I could tell that their perceptions and the way that they see us as soft human beings...It challenged me that by the end of this, I'm speaking to that person, and that person sees me and my girls as soldiers first and as females later when it comes to the different contexts that we're involved in, the different dresses that we come in.¹²⁹

When finishing interviews with the site research team, one interviewee specifically requested more gender training and awareness.

...at the different unit levels we'd want to know more about it [women in peacekeeping]...It broadens the understanding of how things in the world operates, the security and also it helps the mission with the different thinking, the different mentality, and the advantages of supporting it. So if we could have more training or even if it's a workshop or something just to broaden our understanding on the UN perspective of women in peacekeeping and also RFMF viewpoint to it too.¹³⁰

Within the RFMF, leaders clearly see the benefit of having women in the institution, and view gender training as advancing gender equality in the RFMF. Shared support and advocacy for gender training is an important source of momentum for the implementation of other gender initiatives. Such support for gender training is a key best practice. RFMF leadership should continue to share these opinions with one another and with their subordinates.

National commitments enable women to join the RFMF and deploy in peacekeeping operations

The efforts by both female trailblazers and male allies in the RFMF to encourage women's participation in peacekeeping is aided by policies at the national level. The RFMF's Gender Policy (2025) directly addresses women's involvement in the armed forces and in peacekeeping. This policy aims to increase the number of women in the RFMF, with the objective of bringing about a gender-balanced RFMF and meeting gender quotas in UN peacekeeping. Further, the policy includes a five year strategy for nationwide recruitment which emphasises gender inclusivity.¹³¹ Another five year strategy will also be established in order to meet the UN and MFO gender quota. These commitments demonstrate a national-level commitment to proactively reducing barriers to greater women's engagement in peacekeeping.

¹²⁸ Interview with key decision maker, 12 June 2025. 20250612RFMF_044RH

¹²⁹ Interview with key decision maker, June 13, 2025. 20250613RFMF_048RH

¹³⁰ Interview with key decision maker, 5 June 2025. 20250605RFMF_024RH

¹³¹ Republic of Fiji Military Forces Administrative Instruction No. 82 (2025) – Gender Policy.

Fiji's National Security Strategy advocates for gender mainstreaming

Fiji's National Security Strategy defines national security objectives and priorities, strengthens civil–military relations, guides government-wide coordination, and reaffirms democratic oversight in the security sector.¹³² It recognises gender as a mechanism of human rights essential to security sector reform in Fiji's National Security Strategy.¹³³ The strategy advocates for mainstreaming gender equity within security spaces, and outlines that effective implementation 'will include integration of the gender equity and Women, Peace and Security principles, including through the WPS action plan for security forces.'¹³⁴

National Action Plans in place for SEA, in progress for UNSCR 1325

Fiji does not currently have a UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan (NAP), though NAPs are in place to address SEA. A draft UNSCR 1325 NAP is currently under consideration by the Fiji Cabinet. However, Fiji has adopted a 'Fiji NAP to Prevent Violence against All Women and Girls,' which is in place from 2023 to 2028. This NAP addresses SEA and other types of violence against women and was spearheaded by the Ministry of Women, Children, and Poverty Alleviation with the support of UN Women.¹³⁵ This NAP recognises the importance of these agendas in Fiji, and serves as an optimistic sign for the future adoption of a UNSCR 1325 NAP. Demonstrated commitment to the WPS agenda through other NAPs is an important foreground to enable related policies at the national level.

Gender-responsive leadership can be strengthened through the strong culture of mentorship in the RFMF

Survey respondents indicated that there is a strong culture of mentorship within the RFMF, with 90% of respondents indicating that they have a mentor within the organisation. Over half of surveyed personnel (51%) reported that leadership actively promotes gender training, demonstrating the efficacy of strong gender-responsive leadership. This includes male senior leaders, such as Commodore Humphrey Tawake, who publicly promoted the advancements of the RFMF's gender-related initiatives at the RFMF's International Women's Day Celebration in July 2025.¹³⁶ When reviewing responses from high-ranking officials in the RFMF, this pattern of gender-responsive leadership becomes evident. Of the 49 high-ranking personnel surveyed, all indicated that they were interested in some form of gender training. Gender-responsive leaders and mentors within the RFMF have a unique opportunity to use their connections to promote gender-related competencies to individuals of lower rank.

Male and female personnel are willing to approach their leaders

Surveyed personnel indicated that they would be willing to approach a superior officer to discuss a variety of issues that might affect their work, including inappropriate behaviour from a colleague (78% of women and 73% of men) or family issues, such as marital problems or childcare issues (60% of women and 73% of men). 84% of women and 87% of men also reported that they would be willing to approach a superior officer to ask for more training so that they are better able to fulfil their stated duties. Notably, there is no significant

¹³² Kumar N.A., 'Security strategy to shake up national defense', FBC News, 8 August 2025, <https://www.fbcnews.com.fj/news/security-strategy-to-shake-up-national-defense/>.

¹³³ Republic of Fiji, Ministry of Home Affairs, *National Security Strategy 2025-2029*, Ministry of Home Affairs, 2025, <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/National-Security-Strategy-2025-2029.pdf>

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Fiji Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation, *Fiji National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against All Women and Girls 2023-2028* (Suva: Government of Fiji and UN Women, 2023), https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/fiji_nap_2023-2028-digital-final.pdf

¹³⁶ Liga M., 'Increase in servicewomen within RFMF from 3% to 10% a major milestone – Commodore Tawake', Fiji Village, 7 March 2025, <https://www.fijivillage.com/news/increase-in-servicewomen-within-RFMF-from-3-to-10-a-major-milestone--Commodore-Tawake-f4rx85/>

difference between male or female respondents to any of these questions. This means that personnel of both genders are equally willing to consult senior officers for a range of concerns and have similar levels of confidence that they will receive the necessary support from the superiors. Overall, these findings demonstrate the willingness of RFMF personnel to report problems and highlights a culture of respect and understanding among superior officers.

ii. Barriers

Table 8.2. Survey responses to the question, 'Which of the following, if any, are you aware of in the RFMF? Please select all that apply.'

Knowledge of gender-initiative	Official RFMF policy	% Women	% Men
Gender advisor	✓	57%	56%
Gender equality policy or plan ¹³⁷	✓	52%	52%
Gender focal point	✓	46%	42%
Gender coach	—	37%	40%
Gender mainstreaming policy	✓	24%	24%
Gender division	—	21%	21%
Gender toolkit	—	16%	14%
UNSCR 1325	✓	14%	14%

Note: An asterisk () denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women*

Mixed availability and understanding of gender-related opportunities and resources within the RFMF

The RFMF has demonstrated progress towards institutionalising gender inclusion, yet awareness and access to gender-related resources remain uneven across the force. The lack of awareness of gender-related resources is demonstrated by the fact that only 24% of surveyed personnel were aware of the RFMF's gender mainstreaming policy.

The RFMF's first gender adviser was appointed in early 2025 and made responsible for developing and advising senior leadership on effective gender mainstreaming, action plans, and policies.¹³⁸ The Gender Adviser position was formalised by the introduction of the RFMF's first gender policy in February 2025, which articulates the RFMF's commitment to gender mainstreaming and outlines clear gender equality policies and plans.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ A gender equality policy differs from other gender policies as it puts forward a pathway for gender quotas and other threshold specifications for a gender balance within leadership and other roles.

¹³⁸ Administrative Instruction No. 82 (2025) – Gender Policy.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

According to the FFF, there is no gender division or unit within the RFMF, however, a gender advisor and gender focal point officers have been appointed. Validation workshop participants confirmed the gender advisor position is housed within a 'gender cell' that the force would like to expand and develop into a gender division.¹⁴⁰ The gender advisor position is assigned to a mid- or senior-level leader that advises on issues related to gender. The gender advisor is supported by gender focal point officers, one of which is appointed to each unit. The role of gender focal points includes aiding the gender advisor on a number of gender-related institutional issues, including identifying gender barriers, obtaining gender data, and acting as points of contact for inequality and discrimination reports.¹⁴¹

The survey results noted in Table 8.2 indicate that, despite the relatively recent introduction of the gender advisor and gender policy (less than six months at the time of the survey), more than half of all men and women surveyed were aware of the gender advisor (56%) and a quarter of all men and women surveyed were aware of the Gender Mainstreaming Policy (24%). This suggests that informational channels exist through which information about gender awareness efforts can be shared, but there continues to be room for improvement. By contrast, although the force first appointed all Second in Command unit officers in all RFMF units as gender focal point officers in 2018, as part of efforts to put in place structures to prevent violence against women and children,¹⁴² only 44% of those surveyed were aware of gender focal point officers. This limited awareness highlights a key disconnect between institutional commitments and everyday practice.

Interviews with senior leaders reflect both the progress made by the RFMF and the challenges that remain. One key decision-maker interview noted that while gender structures and policies have expanded in recent years, they still need fine-tuning. The interviewee stated that when women were first accepted into the RFMF in 1988, 'it took time for us to fully understand and grasp what the gender rights and gender issues are.' Last year, a full-time gender advisor was appointed, and now 'things are moving forward.'¹⁴³ He further emphasised the importance of internal education and changing attitudes, saying 'I usually stress that we need to have lectures on gender issues, especially on our females, on how we need to respect females.'¹⁴⁴ This progress reflects an evolving, but incomplete, gender mainstreaming process.

Despite this institutional momentum, several interviews highlight that gender issues remain sensitive and sometimes taboo. One key decision-maker observed that discussions around diversity, civil rights, and women's issues are: 'something that... in the Fiji culture, [is] a taboo. It's not been said. It's something that is confidential.'¹⁴⁵ This cultural barrier continues to shape how gender equality is understood and discussed within the RFMF.

¹⁴⁰ The gender advisor is currently the only position within the gender cell.

¹⁴¹ Administrative Instruction 77 (2018) – Violence Against Women and Children in the Forces. The full range of responsibilities as detailed in Admin Instruction 82 Gender Policy 25: 1) identifying gender barriers, 2) obtaining gender disaggregated data, 3) act as points of contact for reports of inequality and discrimination, 4) advise unit commander, 5) attend gender training and conduct gender training, 6) prepare and submit gender reports 7) and preparing gender unit budgets, gender unit reports and initiate investigation into gender related complaints to support the gender advisor.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Interview with key decision-maker, 20250729RFMF_003DR

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

¹⁴⁵ Interview with key decision-maker, 1 August 2025, 20250801RFMF_004DR

Figure 8.3. Survey responses to the question, 'Did you get any of the following in-service training in the Republic of Fiji Military Forces that was not at the training academy?' by **rank**.

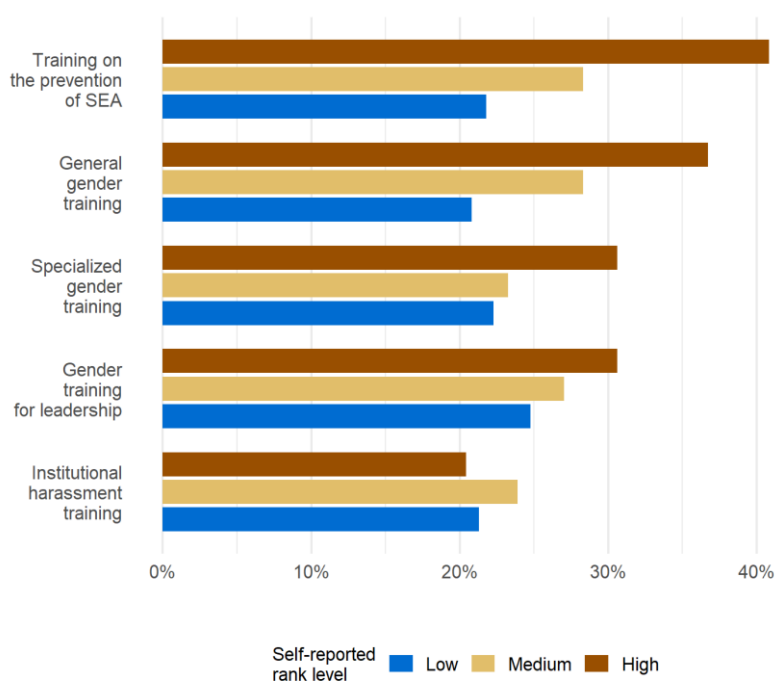
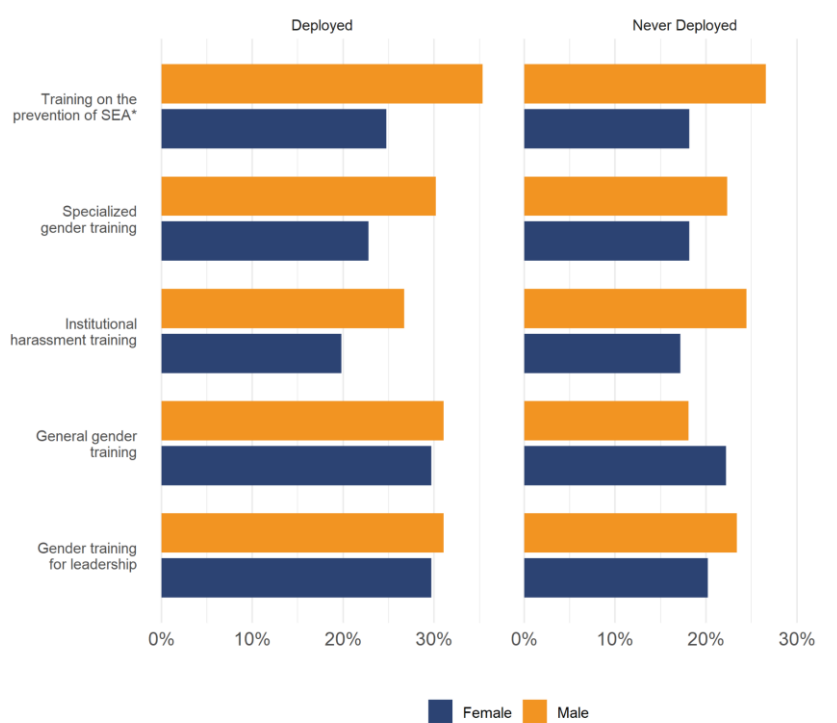


Figure 8.4. Survey responses to the question, 'Did you get any of the following in-service training in the Republic of Fiji Military Forces that was not at the training academy?' by **deployment and gender**.



Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between all men and women in the sample.

Training on gender is insufficient while in the training academy and in-service

Basic training does not provide mandated gender training, though the FFF indicated that individuals are selected to receive gender training based on their relevant roles. According to one interviewee, gender training has existed within the RFMF for some time, with the first gender training session introduced in 2003, though its implementation has been inconsistent.¹⁴⁶

Interviews detailed gender courses at JTFC Blackrock that include lessons from the RFMF legal team on sexual exploitation and abuse and conflict-related sexual violence, as well as gender courses at JTFC Blackrock that include representatives from the Ministry of Women and women's rights groups.¹⁴⁷ However, the survey data highlighted in Tables 8.3 and 8.4 show that only a minority of personnel reported having taken such training at the training academy and as in-service training, supporting interview findings that gender training has mainly been conducted as part of pre-deployment training at JTFC Blackrock.

Among the surveyed personnel, 44% of personnel reported that they had taken training on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) while in the RFMF training academy. Additionally, while at the training academy, 41% of surveyed personnel indicated that they had taken general gender training, 35% had taken gender training for leadership, 34% had taken specialised gender training, and 28% had taken institutional harassment training. Men were significantly more likely to report that they had taken institutional harassment training while at the training academy, though no other forms of training had a gender difference.

As of 2025, with the arrival of the gender advisor, the RFMF has introduced a new in-service gender training system.¹⁴⁸ While priority for training has been given to 2IC gender focal points and individuals selected to participate in the training, the program will expand in line with the 2025 gender policy, which requires that this training be incorporated into basic recruitment, all officer courses, and pre-deployment training.¹⁴⁹

Prior to this, an in-service gender training program was not present. As a result, there are relatively low rates of personnel (25%) indicating that they have taken in-service gender training. There were no significant differences in training between men and women, with the exception of training on the prevention of SEA, which men were significantly more likely to take (63% of women and 89% of men). However, only 28% of deployed personnel indicated that their commanders spoke to them about SEA monthly or frequently, indicating that personnel may not be reminded of the importance of preventing SEA on a regular basis.

As Table 8.3 shows, high-ranking individuals were most likely to have taken gender training, with the exception of institutional harassment training. However, the percentages for all ranks are still low and a continued effort to make all types of gender-related training available to personnel of all ranks is important to advance the goals outlined in the RFMF's Gender Policy.

Low and middle rank personnel need training on gender-related topics. A general gender training course should be created and incorporated into the core RFMF curriculum that new recruits receive in training academy. This will ensure personnel are informed about gender dynamics and policies within the RFMF. Additionally, continued effort to make all types of gender-related training available to personnel of all ranks, especially low and middle ranked personnel, is important to advance the goals outlined in the RFMF's Gender Policy.

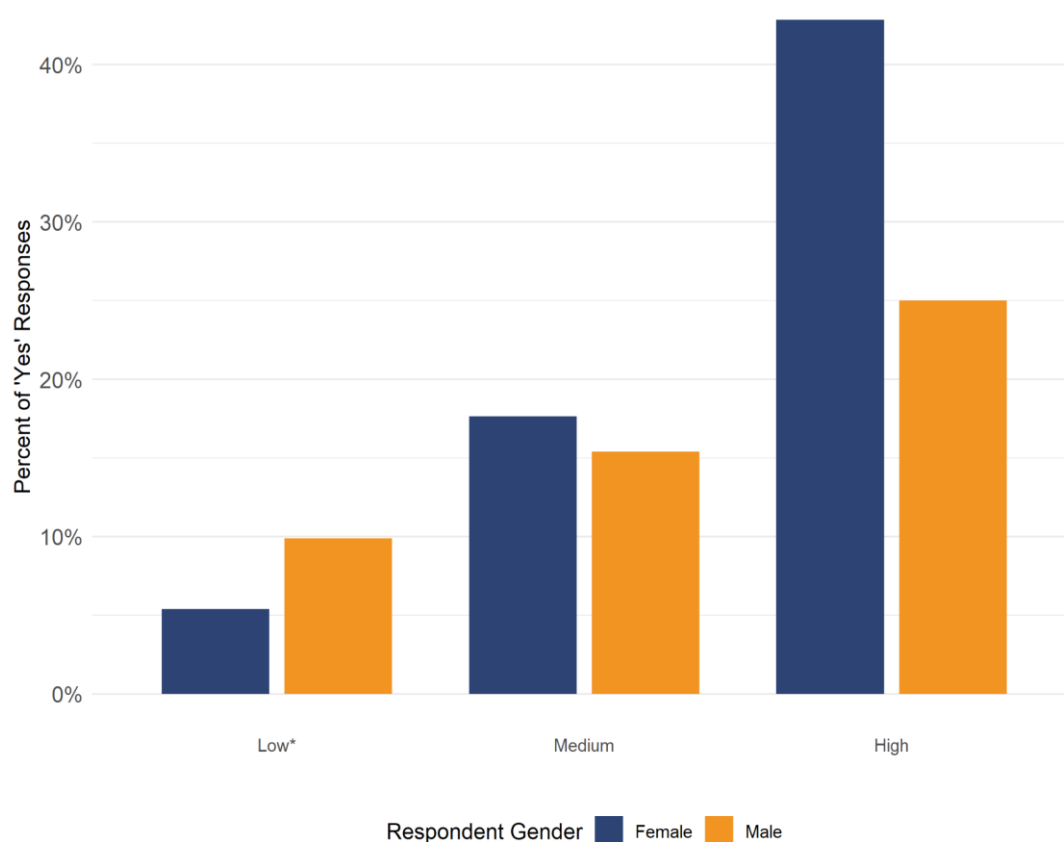
¹⁴⁶ Interview with key decision-maker, 1 August 2025, 20250801RFMF_003DR

¹⁴⁷ Interviews with key decision-makers, 8 August 2025, 20250808RFMF_001DR; 7 August 2025, 20250807RFMF_002DR

¹⁴⁸ Admin Instruction 82 Gender Policy 2025

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Figure 8.5. Knowledge of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 by gender and rank.



Note: An asterisk (*) denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women

Most personnel do not have a clear understanding of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325

UNSCR 1325 is a vital resolution underscoring the importance of gender mainstreaming in peace and conflict processes. However, training on and knowledge of UNSCR 1325 and its importance is not widely available in the RFMF. According to the FFF, invitations to participate in training on UNSCR 1325 are based on suitability rather than rank. The low availability of such training is reflected in the low rate of personnel with knowledge of UNSCR 1325. As Figure 8.5 shows, only 7% of low-ranking personnel, 16% of medium-ranking personnel, and 33% of high-ranking personnel indicated in the survey that they had heard of UNSCR 1325. Moreover, there is an 18% difference between high-ranking women and high-ranking men and their understanding of UNSCR 1325, though this difference is not statistically significant.

There is no gender toolkit, report, or needs assessment

Further, the RFMF does not have a gender toolkit or report available. A gender toolkit aids in the institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming by acting as a resource for individuals of all ranks. It houses relevant information for personnel on advancing gender mainstreaming as outlined by the RFMF's gender mainstreaming policy. As the RFMF continues to advance gender equality through gender mainstreaming policies and related initiatives, a gender toolkit would serve as an important tool for personnel. A one-stop resource such as the toolkit allows individuals to have a point of reference for themselves and others.

Leadership commitment alone may not lead to change on the ground

While senior leaders may express a commitment to gender equality and support for women's empowerment, this does not always translate into meaningful change at lower levels of the RFMF. In mid-2025, one interviewee observed that despite appointing a gender advisor and introducing a gender policy in 2025, 'I have yet to see work on the ground.' They proceeded to say that policies and leaders are important, but if they are not properly enacted and followed, then 'that is just a policy by name.'¹⁵⁰ This interview illustrates that support from top leaders at the RFMF is necessary but insufficient on its own. Without consistent implementation and enforcement, supportive leadership and formal policies remain symbolic.

Most personnel reported that senior leaders/high-ranking personnel refuse to listen to lower-ranking soldiers

Most personnel (69%) reported that senior leaders do not listen to low-ranking personnel. Both women (72%) and men (66%) reported, at comparably high rates, that high-ranking personnel refuse to listen to lower-ranking soldiers. Such a finding is concerning because it means that lower-ranked personnel do not feel (and likely are not in practice) listened to or heard by their superiors.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with key decision-maker, 12 June 2025, 20250612RFMF_044RH



Issue area 9 Gender roles

Medium

The gender roles cross-cutting issue area explores whether the prevalence of gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes influences the number of women deploying and their ability to meaningfully participate in peace operations. We assess this by looking at the degree to which women and men hold traditional roles and views about the roles that men and women play in society. We also assess the degree to which a gender protection norm exists in the institution. This means we assess whether men and women continue to feel that women must be protected from danger.

This is an issue area of medium priority, and evidence suggests that women are often assigned to stereotypical gender roles on mission.

Summary of findings

The RFMF have engaged in many best practices to reduce stereotypical gendered views and role assignments within the force. For example, women typically deploy to the same peace operations as men and both women and men serve in combat and operational roles and are perceived to be equally capable in these roles. Yet some obstacles remain, such as: traditional beliefs about gender roles, mission tasks often being stereotypically assigned based on gender capabilities, and men being less likely to serve as a gender advisor or focal point while deployed.

Main opportunities:

- Men and women are deployed to the same missions
- Men and women both serve in combat and operational roles and are perceived as competent

Main barriers:

- Traditional beliefs about gender roles persist
- Tasks on mission are assigned based on gender
- Little freedom of movement while deployed

Gaps in perception and experience:

- Men are less likely to serve as gender advisor or gender focal point while deployed

Detailed findings

i. Opportunities

Men and women usually deploy to the same peace operations

With the exception of the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) where 14 men from the RFMF deployed, men and women have deployed to the same peace operations. In 2024, both men and women personnel deployed to UNDOF, UNAMI, MFO, UNIFIL, and UNTSO in various capacities. There are occasionally instances where the threat environment may be considered too high risk to send women, but if the UN requests women, the RFMF will make efforts to meet the demand. Moreover, women who did not apply to deploy on a peace operation indicated that safety was a concern at very low rates, with only 17%

saying that a peacekeeping operation was too dangerous. This indicates that the majority of women in the RFMF do not consider deployment to peace operations as a safety concern.

Women and men serve in both combat and operational roles and are perceived to be equally capable in these roles

There are currently no restrictions on the types of roles women can engage in within the RFMF and there were no differences between respondents reporting the frequency of their combat or operational activities while deployed on a peacekeeping mission.

In addition, surveyed personnel hold few gender biases in their evaluations of the capabilities of men and women in certain roles. The survey asks a range of hypothetical questions to personnel asking them to evaluate the capabilities of a male or female peacekeeper in conducting various tasks (see Figure 9.1). These include typically classed 'women's jobs,' such as typing situation reports and helping local women and children. Other prompts include more 'masculine' tasks, such as training the local police or responding to a terrorist attack. Across a number of different hypothetical situations shown in Figure 9.1 below, there was no significant difference in responses for the male and female peacekeeper. Re-stated, surveyed personnel in the RFMF did not significantly differ in their evaluation of the capabilities of male and female peacekeepers across different tasks. Impressively, this suggests that RFMF personnel have mitigated gendered biases as it relates to official peacekeeping responsibilities.

Willingness to overcome traditional beliefs about the capabilities of women were evident where one interviewee remarked,

I acknowledge there are always emotional challenges that comes with women, physical challenges in terms of the whole female physique but that shouldn't be a limitation.¹⁵¹

Another interviewee noted the positive contributions women make in diverse situations on mission:

'I've seen your work is much easier when you're sending out women to talk to women leaders. You know, they get things done. They understand the situation they're in.'¹⁵²

The perception of equal capability across genders is a strong foundation for ensuring that men and women are both considered for deployment and developed equally to different peacekeeping roles, and should be highlighted as a clear opportunity for women in the RFMF. It is imperative that the RFMF continue to operationalise this belief by actively integrating women into different roles throughout mission settings. As a later discussion of barriers in this issue area will show, women are nonetheless given gendered roles while deployed. However, the RFMF can begin to combat this gender bias in task assignment by taking advantage of this strong belief shared by RFMF personnel in the equal capabilities of male and female peacekeepers.

UN policies about leaving the base are equally experienced by men and women

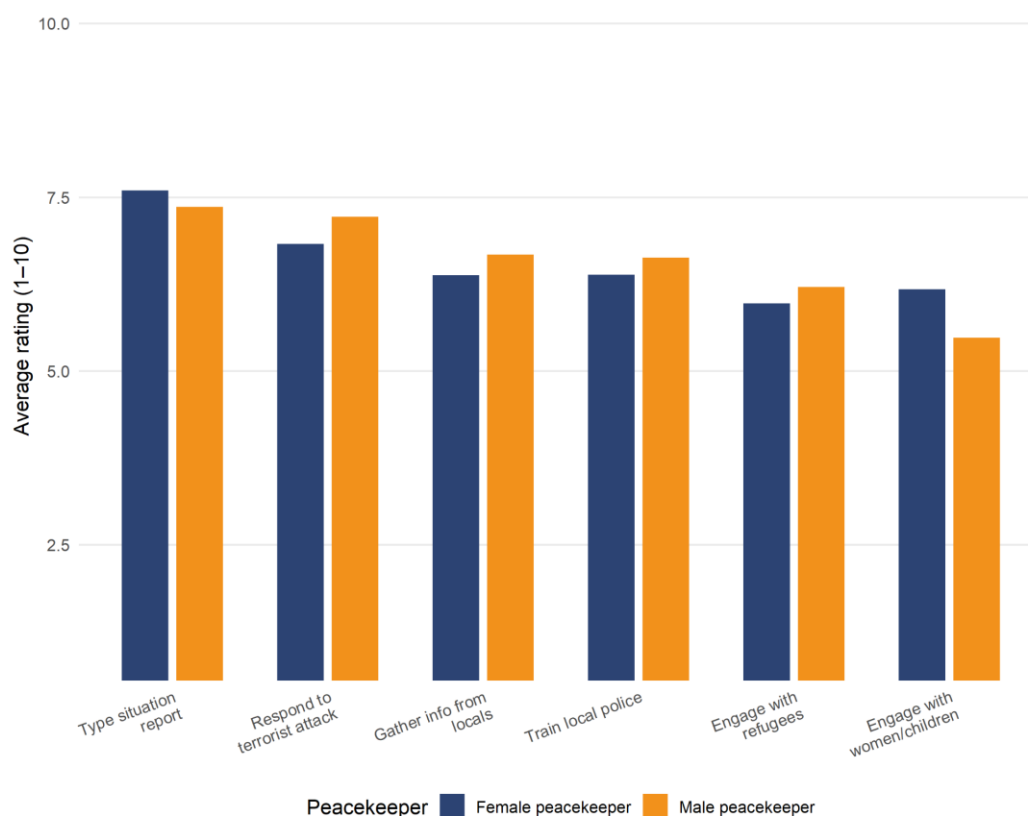
Interviews and survey data indicate personnel have limited autonomy while deployed, noting restricted access to vehicles and difficulty leaving the compound without an escort. While 53% of respondents (47% of women, 58% of men with no statistically significant difference) were able to access a vehicle when they wanted, only 21% of respondents (14% of women, 27% of men with no statistically significant difference) were able to leave the compound when they wished. This suggests that even with permission to freely use vehicles, the majority

¹⁵¹ Interview with key decision-maker, 6 June 2025, 20250606RFMF_027RH

¹⁵² Interview with key decision-maker, 12 June 2025, 20250612RFMF_045RH

of personnel are not granted permission to take those vehicles outside of the compound. Furthermore, 85% of personnel (89% of women, 82% of men) reported needing an escort to leave the compound. This suggests that while movement outside the compound is difficult, it is equally difficult for both men and women.

Figure 9.1. Survey responses to the question, 'On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being the least competent and 10 being the most competent, please rate how competent you believe the following peacekeeper would be in performing each task.'



ii. Barriers

Traditional beliefs about gender roles persist in the RFMF

In general, RFMF personnel maintain traditional beliefs about gender roles (see Figure 9.2 below). This trend appears across responses to a number of prompts on the role of men and women across personal, work, and political settings:

- About one-quarter (19%) of survey participants disagreed that men should have the final say in their home. Women (25%) were much more likely to disagree than men (12%) indicating a significant gender difference in attitudes towards authority in the home.
- Less than half of the people in the survey (47%) said that men make better political leaders than women. More women (46%) than men (25%) disagreed with this idea, which means that men are more likely to think people of their own gender make better leaders.

- More than half of respondents surveyed (54%) agreed that a 'good wife should listen to her husband despite disagreeing with him'. This statistically significant view was supported much more strongly by men (63%) than women (44%) highlighting gendered views of authority within a family.
- The majority of those surveyed agreed that male officers should protect female officers when facing danger. Only a minority (20%) of respondents (7% of men) disagree or strongly disagree with this gendered expectation of protective behaviour.

Interviews highlight that 'the Fijian culture' or 'traditional culture' plays a significant role in determining how women are perceived in the context of a security institution:

For Fiji particularly, its first barrier is culture. Culture in Fiji is such that women are not readily accepted in such roles. So that is a big barrier for us. The cultural acceptance of having females in the Army and then the cultural acceptance of having females deployed with male...And now we are trying slowly to break down those barriers to be accepted by the people of Fiji. Slowly. It's now been accepted, but you can still feel that there's still this cultural barrier of women being deployed ...¹⁵³

Though beliefs about the role of gender can be closely tied to traditional practices, these societal practices may bleed into institutional practices. In describing how Fijian beliefs affect the RFMF, one interviewee said the following:

...Fiji is very much a paternalistic society where culturally and traditionally we separate. We do things separate, in a way. Men are more on the upper side, more first class citizens than, than women...So that's how Fiji is. And of course the military is like that.¹⁵⁴

Interviewees said that traditional attitudes in Fiji have made it harder for women to advance in significant ways. For example, one interviewee stated that people did not support women deploying on peacekeeping missions due to traditional beliefs about a woman's role in the home and that these beliefs, also restricted women from participating in every day activities, such as traditionally male-dominated sports like rugby.¹⁵⁵ However, Fiji has begun to make important advancements on this front. The same interviewee remarked,

So this mindset has to change. And it's starting to change, its been a long while. You know, it's maybe taken us what, 10, 15 years for leaders to understand and accept that women do play an important role in any of the deployments we have.¹⁵⁶

Underlying beliefs about gender roles can influence how the RFMF operates, placing expectations on men and women based on their gender, instead of their experience and qualifications. This may also have implications for male officers. For example, if male officers are expected to protect female soldiers in dangerous settings, this prevents women from developing tactical and combat experience and also puts greater pressure on male soldiers. Strong traditional beliefs in an institution with gendered inequalities that are deeply rooted may limit the effectiveness of the security institution overall. Correcting traditional gender beliefs within the setting of the RFMF is important for both men and women, and for the RFMF as a whole.

RFMF leadership should challenge assumptions about gendered roles and responsibilities by assigning women and men to non-traditional roles based on skills and experience.

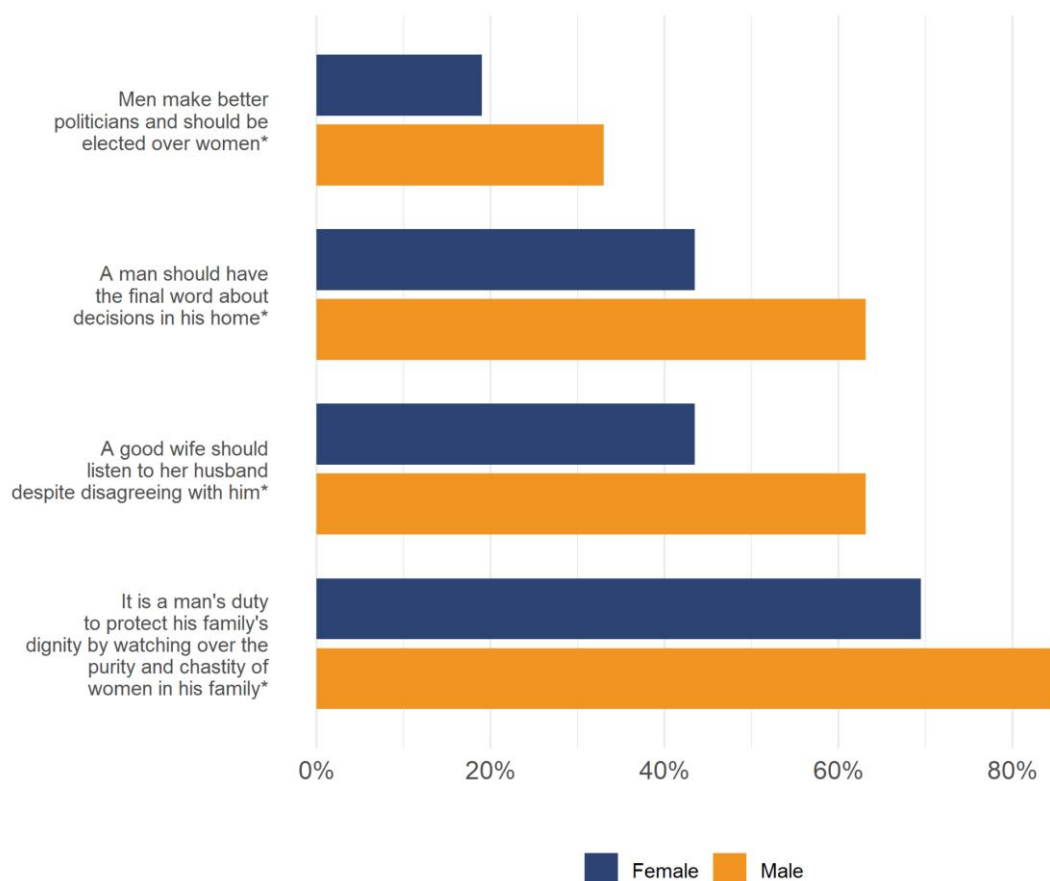
¹⁵³ Interview with key decision-maker, 5 June 2025, 20250605RFMF_025RH

¹⁵⁴ Interview with key decision-maker, 29 July 2025, 20250729RFMF_003DR

¹⁵⁵ Interview with key decision-maker, 12 June 2025, 20250612RFMF_045RH

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Figure 9.2. Survey responses to various statements regarding perceptions on gender. The figure shows the percentage of male and female respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the four statements presented during the survey.



Tasks on mission are often assigned by perceived gender-related capabilities

While both men and women recognise that men and women are equally as capable of completing combat tasks, in practice, interviews suggest that women are often assigned to domestic or administrative tasks through subtle forms of gendered discrimination while deployed:

'These females are just the same as those males. We are all covering the same things. But then it also came up to a point where they were not allowing [us to do other roles]. Because our primary role was female searching [...] we were not placed on guards at night.'¹⁵⁷

In interviews, RFMF leadership justified assigning tasks on the basis of gender:

... I have to have women around because especially for me in senior leadership like this there are certain places in which I know that women can do much better [than] a man, for example women, they [pay] much more attention to details than men...On the physical side they [women] tend to drag us back but on other things like what I just explained [...] they are the ones that are doing the pushing rather than taking the people back.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Interview with key decision-maker, 13 June 2025, 20250613RFMF_048RH

¹⁵⁸ Interview with key decision-maker, 4 August 2025, 20250804RFMF_004DR

Less explicitly, another interviewee mentioned women's unique capacities when compared to men, 'I think women bring with them, you know, different, you can say capacity, capability to work in peacekeeping. They are a little bit different from men.'¹⁵⁹ Survey data support the finding that women are perceived to be less suited to certain roles, particularly by men. For example, only 68% of men agreed that women are capable of tactical operations compared to 90% of women. By contrast, almost all of those surveyed agreed that men are capable of tactical operations, with no significant difference between men (95%) and women (91%).

These examples show that basic beliefs about differences between men and women influence how tasks are assigned on mission. Such beliefs point to shared beliefs about the common abilities or capabilities women uniquely have when compared to men. Such beliefs can also create limit on the range of opportunities for men and women to develop their skills by assigning roles by assumed gender-related abilities. Assigning roles and responsibilities based on gender can also reinforce the belief that one gender is superior to another in certain areas, further increasing inequality. The RFMF can challenge these assumptions by encouraging leadership to assign roles more equitably so that both male and female personnel can grow professionally and expand their skill set.

Men were less likely to serve as a gender advisor or focal point while deployed to a UN peace operation

A significantly smaller portion of men (25%) had served as a gender advisor or focal point compared to women (40%) during deployment to a UN peace operation, a statistically significant difference. The gender advisor or focal point role can help women to expand networks and professional relationships but it can also be a potential barrier requiring women to take on additional responsibilities alongside their stated duties.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with key decision-maker, 6 June 2025, 20250606RFMF_028RH



Issue area 10 Social exclusion

High

The social exclusion issue area explores whether in-group / out-group mentalities cause women to be marginalised, ostracised, denigrated, harassed or attacked thus preventing them from deploying or participating meaningfully in peace operations. It also explores the ways in which male group cohesion forms. We assess this by looking at the levels of harassment and violence in the institutions and sanctions against them, as well as healthy and unhealthy ways of creating cohesion.

This is an issue area of high priority, and findings show that women struggle with social exclusion in the RFMF, such as being witness or targets of sexual harassment.

Summary of findings

The RFMF have some notable best practices to promote women's treatment as equal members of the force, such as by engaging in positive bonding activities through sport that encourages social cohesion and camaraderie amongst women and men servicemembers. Yet, results also suggest that negative bonding activities in the RFMF are common and that women regularly experience romantic advances and sexual harassment in the force. These negative behaviors are linked to the absence or weakness of RFMF policies to protect personnel, especially women, from harassment. The lack of an independent ombudsman office and whistleblower policy to address internal misconduct, particularly sexual offenses, means women (more than men) are vulnerable to retaliation for reporting a colleague for misconduct due to their high exposure to sexual harassment.

Main opportunities:

- Zero tolerance policy for violence against women and children
- Significant majority of personnel reported knowledge of official misconduct policies, viewed misconduct as serious, and indicated willingness to report misconduct
- Majority of respondents support zero tolerance policy
- Social cohesion formed through positive bonding in sports and music activities
- Strong cohesion among RFMF personnel as men and women train and work together

Main barriers:

- No internal complaints system in place, and minimal external complaint mechanisms for the public.
- Room for improvement in awareness of official RFMF policies and procedures on sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment.
- Negative bonding activities (hazing) and activities that demean women.
- Traditional gender-related beliefs around purity, chastity, and masculinity may exacerbate gender inequality.

Gaps in perception and experience:

- Women were more likely to report fear of retaliation for reporting misconduct
- Men reported being worried about being reported for sexual harassment
- Men perceive women as favoured

Detailed findings

i. Opportunities

RFMF has a zero tolerance policy for acts of violence and abuse against women and children

The RFMF has a zero tolerance policy in place for any acts of violence committed by RFMF personnel against women and children in the family, community, or workplace.¹⁶⁰ This commitment was publicly re-stated in early 2025 by Brigadier General Sapenafa Motufaga, the RFMF Chief of Staff, who reiterated the RFMF's commitment to creating a professional and safe environment for all staff.¹⁶¹

The RFMF zero tolerance policy covers sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), financial abuse, and domestic violence against women and children. The policy outlines a three-pronged approach to prevent, investigate, and discipline SEA cases. All instances of SEA (such as rape or sexual assault) must be reported within 24 hours to the Military Police Unit, Gender Focal Point, or Unit HQ for investigation. Following investigation, individuals found guilty of SEA are recommended for immediate discharge from service. The RFMF's sexual harassment policy also requires personnel to prevent and intervene to prevent sexual harassment in order to ensure work environment that supports respect for human dignity.¹⁶² Violations of these policies are taken into consideration when considering personnel for deployment (see Issue area 3).

Training and awareness have been integral to implementing the policy with personnel receiving dedicated training on SEA, sexual harassment, and related legal standards during pre-deployment and ongoing training sessions. Interviews supported survey results that personnel were aware of the zero tolerance nature of the policy: 'Our policy also states that it's zero tolerance. If it's something on sexual harassment or anything. So everybody is aware.'¹⁶³

Key decision-maker interviews also highlighted the consequences of violating these policies:

Yes, we do have a domestic violence policy. We issued this policy in 2018, if my recollection is correct. And it is... a zero tolerance against RFMF. [...] If there is a de facto relationship or if there is a marital relationship, it's zero tolerance. So they will definitely be kicked out, whether it's in the civilian court or in the RFMF. [...] When they are repatriated, the misconduct is part of the UN or part of a policy in the RFMF that has zero tolerance, automatic dismissal, and it is called service no longer required.¹⁶⁴

The vast majority of personnel know about RFMF misconduct policies, view misconduct behaviour as serious, and said they would report a colleague for various conduct violations

Survey respondents were asked a series of questions about four distinct hypothetical scenarios that can occur on UN peacekeeping missions. Each hypothetical scenario involved a colleague and a distinct type of misconduct behaviour and respondents were asked four questions about each misconduct scenario (represented in Figures 10.1-3 and 10.7):

1. RFMF misconduct policy violations
2. The seriousness of the misconduct violation

¹⁶⁰ Admin Instruction 77 Violence against women and children in the forces, 2018

¹⁶¹ Boila S., 'RFMF has zero tolerance policy on domestic violence', FBC News, 31 January 2025, <https://www.fbcnews.com.fj/news/rfmf-has-zero-tolerance-policy-on-domestic-violence/>

¹⁶² Administrative Instruction No.79 (2025) – Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Policy

¹⁶³ Interview with key decision-maker, 29 July 2025, 20250729RFMF_003DR

¹⁶⁴ Interview with key decision-maker, 29 July 2025, 20250729RFMF_001DR

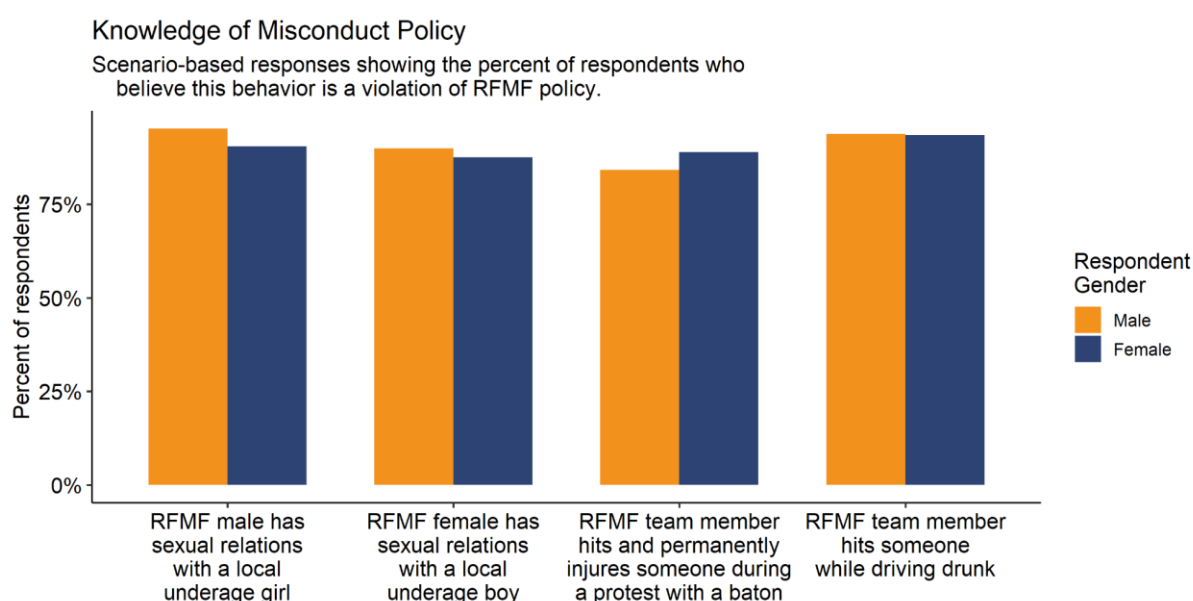
3. Whether they would report a colleague for such behaviour
4. Whether they would fear retaliation for reporting such behaviour (discussed in Barriers section)

The majority of personnel were aware of behaviours that constitute RFMF misconduct, viewed various forms of misconduct as serious, and said they would report misconduct at high rates. There are slight differences in personnel's policy knowledge and SEA tolerance attitudes across the different scenarios.

The vast majority of surveyed personnel believed the scenarios presented behaviours that would violate the RFMF code of conduct (see Figure 10.1):

- 94% of respondents believed that hitting someone while driving drunk (94% of women and 94% of men) violated the RFMF code of conduct
- 93% of respondents believed that engaging in a sexual relationship with a local underage girl (91% of women and 95% of men) constituted a violation of the code of conduct.
- Slightly fewer respondents (89%) believed that having a sexual relationship with a local boy (88% of women and 90% of men) or hitting a protester with a baton and permanently injuring them (87%, with 89% of women and 84% of men) would also be a violation of official policy.

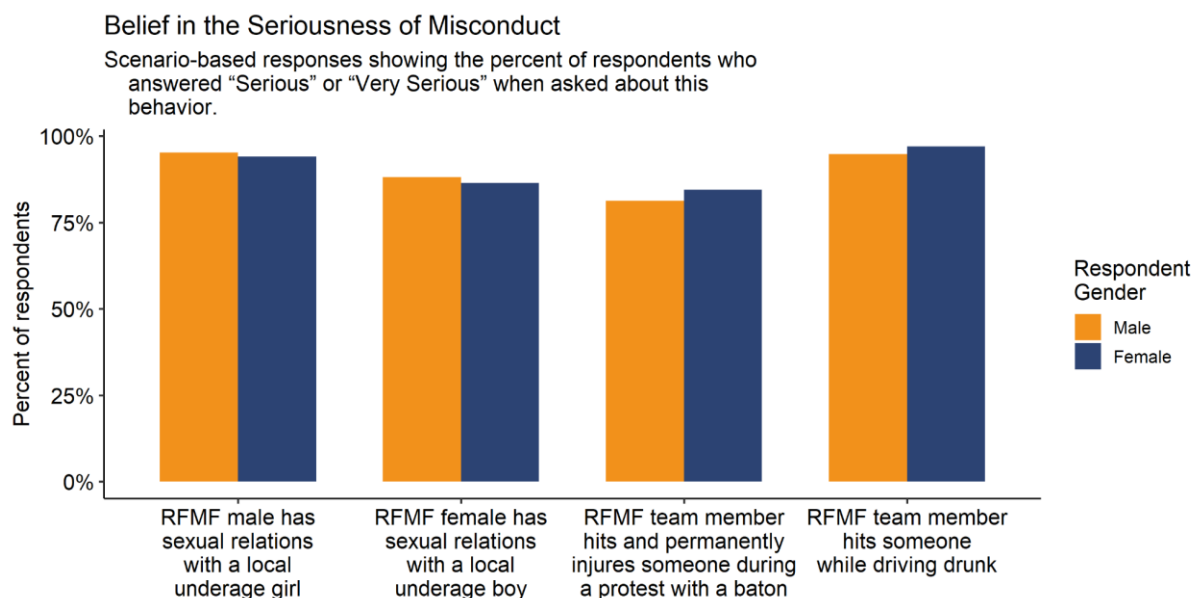
*Figure 10.1. Percentage of respondents who said that the activity would be regarded as **a violation of official policy for the RFMF**.*



Most people surveyed believed the examples of misconduct were senior or very serious, though opinions varied depending on the scenario (see Figure 10.2):

- The vast majority of respondents (96%) believed that drunk driving that resulted in hitting someone was serious, with similar views among women (97%) and men (95%).
- A male colleague engaging in a relationship with an underage girl was seen as serious or very serious by 95% of respondents (94% of women and 95% of men).
- Fewer people (87%) thought a female colleague having a relationship with an underage boy was very serious (87% of women and 88% of men) or that a colleague injuring a protester with a baton was serious (83% total, including 85% of women and 81% of men).

Figure 10.2. Percentage of respondents who said that the activity is a **serious or very serious violation of misconduct**.

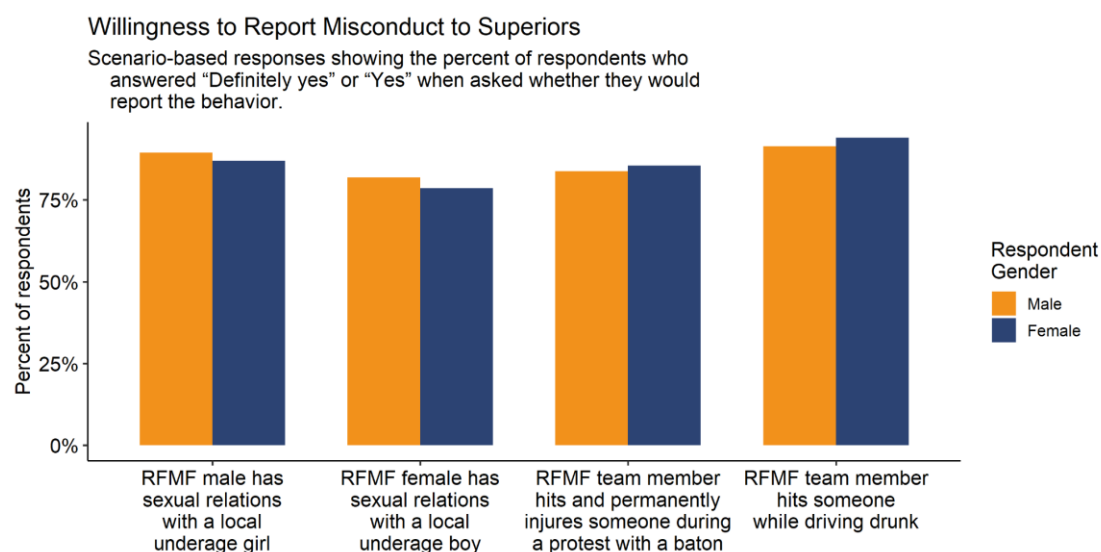


When asked about reporting on the same scenarios, most people said they would report a colleague for different types of misconduct, with no major differences between women and men, but the likelihood of reporting varied depending on the situation (see Figure 10.3):

- Most respondents (93%) said they would report a colleague for driving drunk and hitting someone (94% of women and 91% of men) and for having a sexual relationship with an underage girl (88% of those surveyed, with 87% of women and 89% of men).
- More respondents (85%) said they were willing to report a colleague for hitting a protester with their baton and permanently injuring them (85% of women and 84% of men) than reporting a female colleague for having a sexual relationship with an underage boy (80%, with 79% of women and 82% of men).

This means that, even though more respondents viewed having a sexual relationship with an underage boy as more serious than permanently injuring a protester, they were more willing to report someone for excessive force with a baton than having a sexual relationship with an underage boy. Such a finding suggests the RFMF should emphasise the importance of reporting female colleagues for sexual relationships with underage boys, especially through training and awareness campaigns.

Figure 10.3. Percentage of respondents who said they **would or definitely would report** the activity.



A majority of respondents support SEAH policies, and most deployed personnel endorse the UN’s zero tolerance policy

Most surveyed personnel supported the UN policies that prohibit sexual exploitation and abuse or sexual harassment.

- The majority believed that sexual abuse (72%), sexual harassment (68%), sexual exploitation (64%), sexual and gender-based violence (64%), and transactional sex (58%) should all be included in the UN’s zero tolerance policy for peacekeepers (see Table 10.4).
- Almost all previously deployed personnel (89%) supported the ban on peacekeepers having sexual relationships with local people (see Table 10.5).
- The survey also asked all participants if the policy should be relaxed to allow peacekeepers to have relationships with other peacekeepers or local civilians, as long as it is disclosed to the UN first. About a quarter of those surveyed (26%) agreed with this proposal (see Table 10.6).

Table 10.4. Survey responses to the question, ‘What should be included in a United Nations zero tolerance policy for uniformed personnel on peacekeeping operations? Select all that apply. The zero tolerance policy is specifically related to sexual relationships.’

Response option	% Total sample	% Women	% Men
Sexual abuse	72%	74%	70%
Sexual harassment between UN colleagues	68%	68%	68%
Sexual exploitation	64%	67%	61%
Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)	64%	67%	61%
Transactional sex between locals and peacekeepers	58%	60%	57%
None of these or there should be no zero tolerance policy	2%	2%	2%

Table 10.5. Survey responses to the question, 'How much do you support the following policy: zero tolerance for any uniformed peacekeeper to engage in sexual activity with any local person. DEFINITION: Zero tolerance policy means NO acceptance of sexual exploitation or abuse by UN personnel.'

Response Option	All Personnel (Total N: 195) %	Women (Total N: 95) %	Men (Total N: 101) %
Somewhat oppose	3%	2%	3%
Strongly oppose	2%	1%	2%
Somewhat support	11%	6%	16%
Strongly support	77%	83%	72%

Table 10.6. Survey responses to the question, 'How much do you support the following policy: Sexual activity is allowed between uniformed peacekeepers and locals with prior disclosure of relationships to the organisation. DEFINITION: Prior disclosure means the reporting or registering of your relationship with the organisation or request for approval.'

Response Option	All Personnel (Total N: 214) %	Women (Total N: 106) %	Men (Total N: 108) %
Somewhat oppose	12%	10%	13%
Strongly oppose	36%	38%	35%
Somewhat support	9%	9%	8%
Strongly support	17%	15%	19%

Positive bonding experiences and social cohesion in sport and music

The RFMF offers a wide range of recreational activities for personnel, including sports like rugby, volleyball, netball, cricket, and soccer, with women competing actively in rugby, volleyball, and netball in particular. Interviews indicated that RFMF personnel regularly play sports on Wednesday afternoons against other Fijian organisations, while Friday afternoons are reserved for other social activities. The vast majority of surveyed personnel (94%) reported participating in team sports organised by the RFMF, with similar rates for women (95%) and men (94%). Survey respondents (92%) confirmed that the RFMF organises co-ed team sports among units or divisions. Sports acts as an equaliser in the RFMF, with men and women participating equally in sporting events.

Notably unique to the RFMF is the existence of sports teams, specifically volleyball and netball, for service members' wives. Involving personnels' family members in the RFMF's sports program is a best practice to facilitate a stronger, more integrated military community. It fosters relationships not only among the spouses themselves but also between families and the broader institution. This sense of inclusion can enhance overall unit cohesion and reinforce the idea that military service involves collective commitment and mutual support.

The RFMF participate extensively in sporting events at the district, national, and international levels. For example, the RFMF women's rugby team finished second in the 2025 International Defence Rugby Competition and there is an ongoing weekly netball tournament as part of the Suva Netball Association. The annual highlight is the national Ratu Sukuna Bowl, that brings together men and women in the RFMF and the FPF to compete in various sporting events. There is a prize for the winners of the men's rugby competition. All players from the winning team get to deploy to a mission in the Middle East, which pays higher allowances than other UN missions.

The Ratu Sukuna Bowl has evolved into a multi-day community festival, bringing together military and police, as well as their families and friends, and the broader community. This national tournament also serves as an opportunity for the RFMF and FPF to demonstrate unity in the face of national challenges. In 2025, the theme was 'United for Victory – Stronger Together Against Drugs and HIV',¹⁶⁵ to raise awareness against drugs and HIV through the love of rugby.¹⁶⁶ Soccer and rugby finals for both men and women are broadcast live.¹⁶⁷

Beyond sport, men and women can join community service activities, including cleaning homes and painting or other social activities such as participating in bands or RFMF choirs. Units compete in an internal choir competition with the winning team representing the RFMF at the national level. The Navy has a jazz band, and the engineers also have their own band.

Disciplinary board rulings cannot be superseded

According to RFMF Act 1985, the commanding officer is ultimately responsible for the discipline of his/her unit. Offending officers may provide evidence before a body external to the unit, such as a board of inquiry, Regimental Inquiry, or Court martial. In these cases, the RFMF Act '[...] does not supersede prosecution through ordinary tribunals for offences against Fijian Law.'¹⁶⁸

Appeals by offending officers can be raised through the Redress of Wrongs process. This process is subject to review by legal teams and may not necessarily lead to the overturn of the initial hearing's findings.

However, rulings which take place at the unit level may be superseded by the decisions of commanding officers. If the initial order contravenes the law or is found to be excessively severe, this warrants intervention by the commanding officer to overturn punishments or awards provided by officers. Moreover, interviews with personnel suggest that the Commander has ultimate decision-making authority over misdemeanours. This could result in inconsistency in implementation: though the RFMF should ultimately defer to rulings under Fijian Law for civilian matters, intervention by the Commander may undermine the authority of military tribunals.

¹⁶⁵ Republic of Fiji Military Forces, "2025 Vodafone Ratu Sukuna Bowl Challenge Launched..." [Facebook post] October 3, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/plugins/post.php?href=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2FRfmfMedia%2Fposts%2Fpfbid02u1hZT1TPx9bsBpZFt3SCvLWf2ocyLd2CTmq4FW8cPD6uDZrwTCo5xbcW4unwUyQMI&show>

¹⁶⁶ Republic of Fiji Military Forces, 'Territorial Force Pre-Draft Training', accessed 4 June 2026, <https://www.rfmf.mil.fj/territorial-force-pre-draft-training/>

¹⁶⁷ Fiji Police Force, 'Ratu Sukuna Bowl Launching', 4 October 2025, <https://www.police.gov.fj/view/3472>

¹⁶⁸ Republic of Fiji Military Force Act Review 1985, https://www.pacii.org/fj/legis/consol_act_OK/rfmfa276/

Protections and practices in place for LGBTQ+ communities

The RFMF extends protections to individuals of all genders and sexual orientation. At the national level, the 2013 Constitutional Amendment bans discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The Admin 82 Gender Policy 2025 states that no RFMF personnel shall discriminate against any individual on the basis of ‘...gender, whether it be male or female... sexual orientation’.

Men and women train and work together

The men and women of the RFMF consistently work and train together, although they do not share barracks. Women are included in multinational training activities, such as joint military exercises with Australian forces.¹⁶⁹ Men and women train together in basic infantry training,¹⁷⁰ as well as pre-draft training before pre-deployment training.¹⁷¹ 93% of survey respondents (96% of women and 91% of men) indicated that they work with members of the opposite sex every day. Socially, 73% of survey respondents (77% of women and 70% of men) indicated they socialise with members of the opposite sex every day and a further 19% (16% of women and 21% of men) said they do so once or more a week. There was no gender difference between male and female personnel responses regarding the frequency of working and socialising with members of the opposite sex.

There is strong cohesion among RFMF personnel

Most personnel have friends within their unit they can rely on at work and it is common for soldiers to socialise with each other outside of work. A majority of surveyed respondents (63% overall, 60% of women and 66% of men) agreed or strongly agreed that most of their friends are in their armed forces unit. It is also typical for personnel to get together outside of work. 88% of respondents said that they personally socialise with other members of the RFMF outside of work, with women (88%) and men (89%) reporting comparable rates of socialising with fellow soldiers in their free time.

In addition to being friends and socialising with RFMF teammates outside of work, personnel also reported that they could rely on fellow RFMF soldiers to help them with difficult tasks at work. 81% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that if they had trouble fulfilling a difficult task, other members of their unit would be willing to help them. Statistical models confirm that men (89%) were significantly more likely than women (74%) to report that they could rely on a colleague to help them with a difficult task. These findings reveal that while cohesion within the RFMF is strong, there are still differences between men’s and women’s experiences.

¹⁶⁹ Narawa A., ‘RFMF to participate in largest ever multinational military exercise Talisman Sabre 2025,’ Fiji Village, 15 May 2025, <https://www.fijivillage.com/news/RFMF-to-participate-in-largest-ever-multinational-military-exercise-Talisman-Sabre-2025-f48x5r/#~:text=The%20Republic%20of%20Fiji%20Military%20Forces%20will%20once,Australia,%20from%2013th%20July%20to%204th%20August%202025>.

¹⁷⁰ Narayan, V., ‘RFMF carries out infantry course at QEB which includes gun shooting practices and exploding some ordnances’, Fiji Village, 24 October 2023, <https://www.fijivillage.com/news/RFMF-carries-out-infantry-course-at-QEB-which-includes-gun-shooting-practices-and-exploding-some-ordinances-r5f48x/>

¹⁷¹ Republic of Fiji Military Forces, ‘Territorial Force Pre-Draft Training’, accessed 6 June 2026, <https://www.rfmf.mil.fj/territorial-force-pre-draft-training/>

Sexual consent is important to both men and women RFMF personnel

While most survey questions about masculinity indicated that a sizeable portion of personnel, particularly men, hold traditional views about masculinity (outlined in the barriers section below), few personnel (8%, including 6% of women and 10% of men) reported that it was okay for a husband to have sex with his wife if she does not want to have sex. This suggests that traditional views about masculinity in the household, such as gender protection norms, may not translate to beliefs about consent and husbands having ownership over their wife's body.

ii. Barriers

Lack of defined internal and external complaint systems for the RFMF

The National Ombudsman was established in 1970 and became a constitutional body in 1997, however, it was disbanded in 1997 when the constitution was abrogated. The ombudsman's role as an external body fielding complaints against the RFMF and institutional oversight is filled by:

- Auditor General's office and Public Accounts Committee for financial matters.
- Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for overall organisational matters.
- Standing Orders Committee of the Parliament of the Republic of Fiji for matters related to gender. This Committee is required to give full consideration to the principle of gender equality so as to ensure all matters are considered with regard to the impact and benefit on both men and women equally.¹⁷²

These measures are in addition to the military and civil legal processes described above.

Additionally, the RFMF does not have a formal office to receive, investigate, and refer complaints about internal personnel misconduct for legal case review. Cases of gender-related misconduct, such as sexual harassment, can be referred straight to the RFMF Gender Advisor.¹⁷³

There is no official whistleblower policy within the RFMF. In early 2025 Brigadier General Motufaga noted the potential benefits of a whistleblower policy while also acknowledging that the fear of victimisation by superiors can discourage reporting overall.¹⁷⁴

Fear of retaliation from colleagues may impair the reporting of misconduct

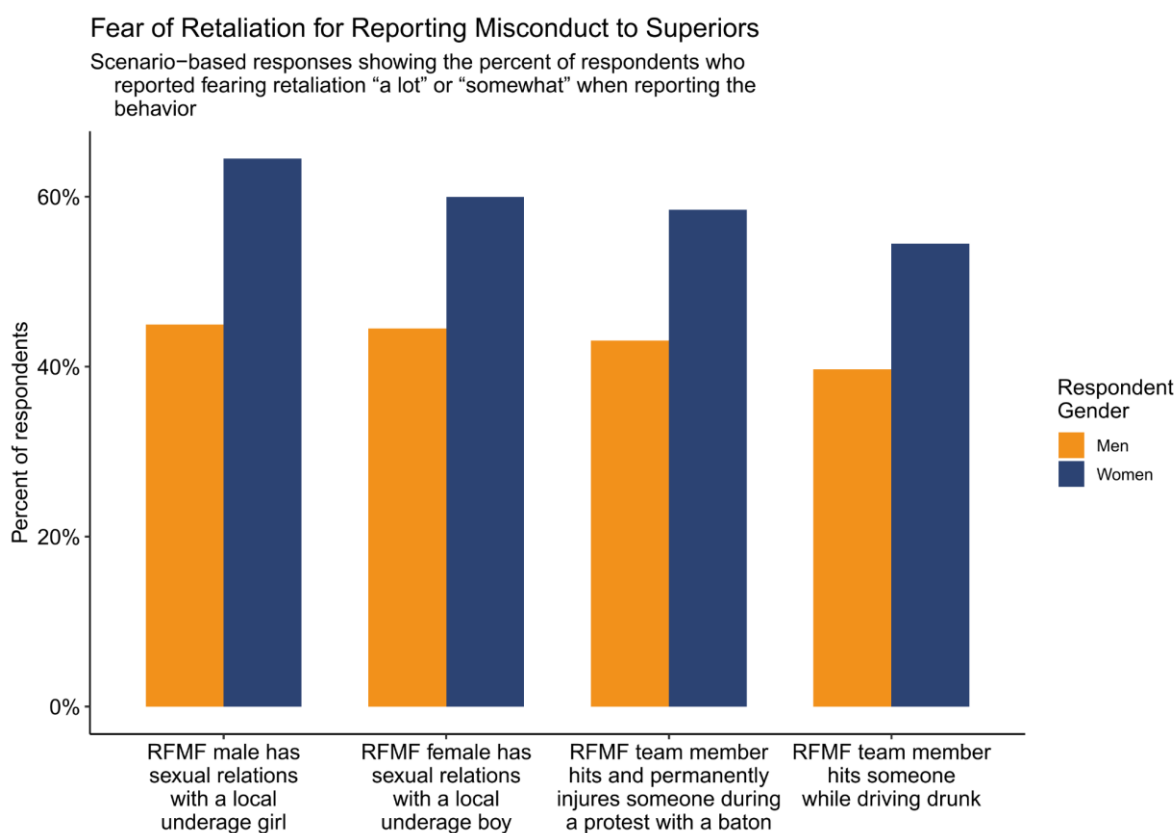
Despite the vast majority of respondents indicating a strong willingness to report instances of misdemeanours and violations of official policy, in practice a substantial number of respondents said they would fear retaliation if they were to report a colleague for a serious misdemeanour (see Figure 10.7).

¹⁷² Parliament of the Republic of Fiji, 'Consolidated Review Report of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces 2019-2020, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 Annual Reports', March 2025, <https://www.parliament.gov.fj/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Consolidated-Review-Report-of-the-Republic-of-Fiji-Military-Forces-2019-2020-2020-2021-and-2021-2022-Annual-Reports.pdf>

¹⁷³ Administrative Instruction No. 82 (2025) Gender Policy.

¹⁷⁴ Boila S., 'RFMF has zero tolerance policy on domestic violence', FBC News, 31 January 2025, <https://www.fbcnews.com.fj/news/rfmf-has-zero-tolerance-policy-on-domestic-violence/>

Figure 10.7. Percentage of respondents who said they **would fear retaliation somewhat or a lot for reporting the activity to their superiors.**



Women were significantly more fearful of retaliation than men across all misconduct scenarios. Most personnel were fearful they would face retaliation for reporting sexual misconduct:

- 55% of respondents (65% of women and 45% of men) said they would fear retaliation for reporting a male colleague engaging in a sexual relationship with an underage girl
- 52% of those surveyed (60% of women and 44% of men) said they would fear retaliation for reporting a female colleague's sexual relationship with an underage boy
- Slightly more than half of all surveyed personnel 51% (59% of women and 43% of men) said they would fear retaliation somewhat or a lot for reporting a colleague for hitting and permanently injuring a protester with a baton
- Fewer respondents, 47%, (55% of women and 40% of men), said they would fear retaliation for reporting a fellow soldier for driving drunk and hitting someone

These findings suggest a wariness around reporting is common to personnel of both genders in the RFMF, but more so for women. They also suggest that reports of misconduct to this point may not represent the true number of instances of misconduct, especially sexual misconduct. Fear over retaliation may substantively demotivate personnel from reporting, leading to a false number of cases based on reporting alone. In order to responsibly minimise violations of the code of conduct, and hold those who infringe on the code of conduct responsible, it is imperative that personnel can report violations without fear of retaliation.

Statistical tests confirmed women were more fearful of retaliation for reporting than men, and this is true for each type of misconduct. The fact that women were consistently more likely to say they would fear retaliation for reporting a colleague for misconduct suggests that women likely avoid reporting misconduct in general because they believe they will face retaliation for reporting any violation, regardless of the severity. However, women were especially fearful they would face retaliation for reporting a male soldier for engaging in a sexual relationship with an underage girl.

Room for improvement remains for personnel to be aware of RFMF policies and procedures on SEAH

Most personnel were aware of official RFMF policies and procedures on SEAH but there is still room for improvement. Around 80% of respondents were aware of an official harassment policy and also knew that domestic violence is a violation of disciplinary conduct. Only 66% of respondents were aware of an internal complaint system, including 68% of men and 63% of women, with no statistically significant difference between men and women's reported awareness. Less than half of those surveyed (45%, 43% of men and 48% of women) were aware of a whistleblower policy. This result is surprising, however, given that there is no whistleblower policy in the RFMF.

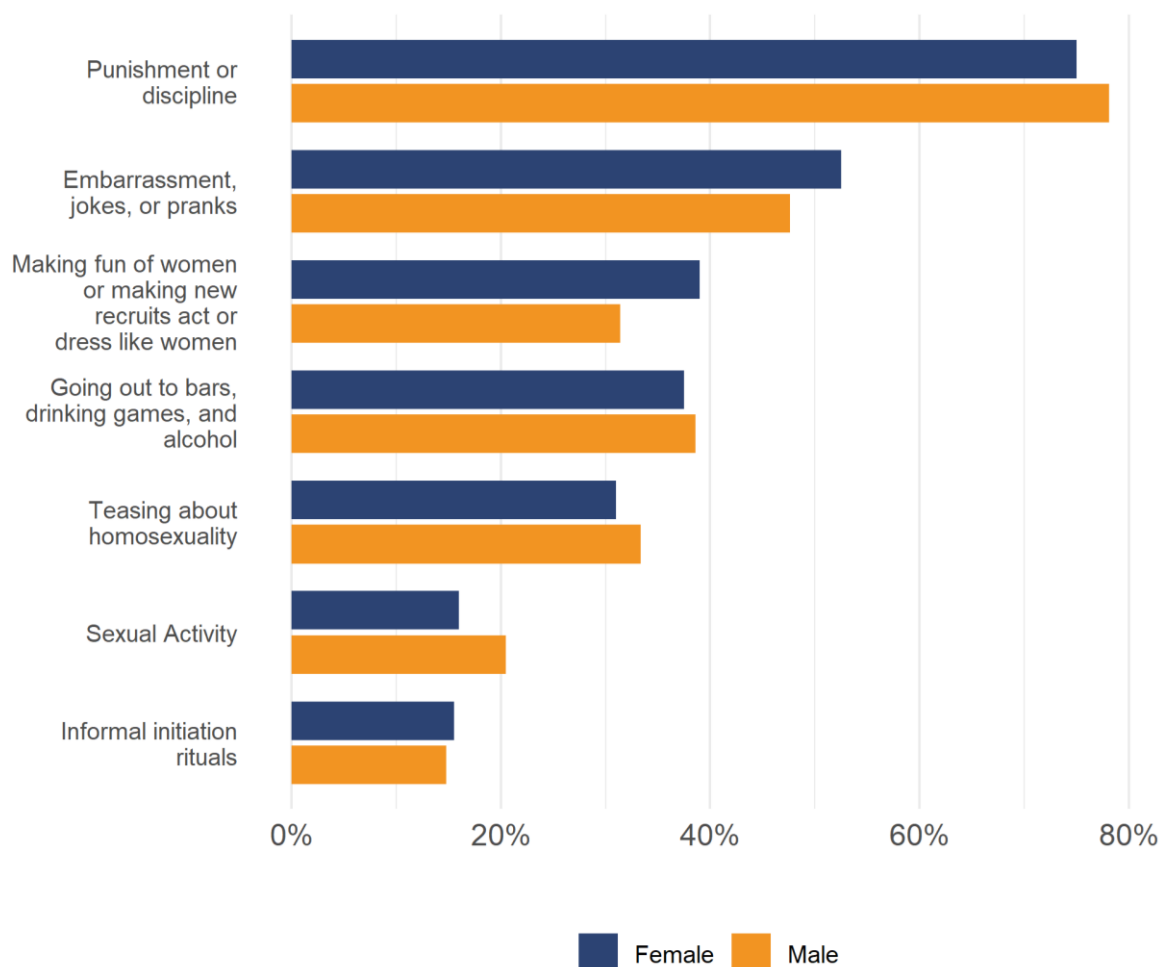
While two-thirds of respondents were aware of internal complaint mechanisms, more than 30% of personnel were not aware of these reporting options. This is problematic because studies show that without the knowledge of where to report misconduct, SEAH cases go undocumented.¹⁷⁵

Negative experiences are used to encourage bonding and unity among RFMF personnel

RFMF personnel reported the existence of informal bonding practices which use negative experiences to encourage unity (see Figure 10.8), such as: embarrassment; making fun of women; punishment or discipline; sexual activity; teasing about homosexuality; and other informal rituals. 77% of respondents said they had experienced punishment or discipline as part of their integration into the RFMF. Moreover, 50% of personnel experienced embarrassment, and 35% made fun of women due to this informal bonding culture.

¹⁷⁵ McDonald, P., 'Workplace sexual harassment 30 years on: A review of the literature', *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 14(1), 2012, pp1–17, DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-2370.2011.00300.x

Figure 10.8. Survey responses to the question, 'Please select all of the bonding activities you have heard of taking place in the RFMF.'



Concerningly, these practices appear to be deeply embedded in the institutional culture of the RFMF. Most personnel believed that negative bonding experiences were necessary in order to: put new recruits in place (49%), ensure unit cohesion (42%), or to remove weakness (52%). Interview responses suggest that punishment includes physical activities, such as lifting tank barriers and running. Interviewees also indicated that these instances occur as immediate forms of punishment in training.

These results align with reports of criticism that individual personnel received first or secondhand. Most commonly, personnel were criticised for their beliefs about the role of women (30%), their physical strength (34%), their knowledge about a certain subject (36%), and their dress (30%). Women were significantly more likely to have experienced each of these forms of criticism.

Teasing and jokes were also notably widespread. 51% of surveyed personnel had been called names or had heard others called names. Jokes of this nature were most often directed towards individuals of certain groups or characteristics: 56% had heard jokes about women; 61% about physical appearance, and 53% about sexual orientation.

These practices reinforce a negative cycle in which bonding practices, criticism, teasing and joking are passed through to new officers as a way to promote unit cohesion, but in reality they effectively create a less inclusive environment, especially for women. For example, one woman interviewed described how as a result of bullying, she hid herself in her office during the day because she did not feel safe in her work environment.¹⁷⁶ This is problematic for cohesion building amongst men and women personnel because, when treated as the object of criticism or jokes, women may come to see the institution as an unsafe space, while other personnel come to associate female personnel with negative attributes.

During the FGD and validation workshop, iTaukei (indigenous Fijian) participants shared insight into how native customs involving traditional social relationships impact the ways iTaukei engage with one another in Fijian society, and this influences how indigenous servicemembers interact in the RFMF too. Researchers were informed that iTaukei may engage in joking and teasing behaviours not in a negative tone, but rather as a means of cultural bonding to strengthen social cohesion amongst indigenous Fijians.¹⁷⁷ In the iTaukei culture, *veitauvu* and *veitabani* are traditional, sacred kinship relationships based on ancestral ties, mutual respect, and reciprocal obligations.

- *veitauvu* (shared ancestry) – literally means ‘sharing the same root’ or ancestral spirit (*vu*).¹⁷⁸ This relationship represents a bond between tribes, clans, villages, or islands that share a common ancestral origin or god. While historically allied, a *veitauvu* relationship is characterised by deep respect and kinship. While playful teasing happens, it is often misused; true *tauvu* share a deep DNA-like bond built on helping and protecting each other.
- *veitabani* (cousinhood and rivalry) – literally translates to mean ‘branch or side of a family’, describing ancestors who were traditional cross-cousins (*tavale*). This relationship involves a formalised joking relationship that denotes balanced reciprocity between two groups.¹⁷⁹ The bond is facilitated by groups engaging in fiercely competitive, playful banter, witty remarks, and even forceful insults. Because of this, members of *veitabani* groups frequently refer to each other as *naita* (short for *naitabani*, meaning friend or relative).

Both of these social relationship systems are foundational to Fijian society, helping to maintain alliances, trade, and social harmony through communal exchange and kinship ties. These relationships are based on mutual respect and not intended to cause offense or harm. However, this has been misused and abused. For this reason, these relationships are not a defence to sexual harassment in Fiji laws nor under RFMF Administrative Instruction 79 on sexual harassment. These relationships are relevant to the findings because they impact how personnel socialise and behave towards one another within the RFMF, which may explain why joke making and teasing is common amongst personnel.

Women in the RFMF experience harassment at higher levels than their male counterparts

Practices around sex and sexuality may undermine the value of women in the armed forces. Figure 10.9 shows the survey results for personnel reporting they have witnessed or experienced various forms of harassment. In total, 81% of surveyed respondents (89% of women, 74% of men) had witnessed or experienced at least one form of harassment listed in Figure 10.9.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with key decision-maker, 9 July 2025, 20250709RFMF_002ES

¹⁷⁷ Nation, J., *Customs of respect: the traditional basis of Fijian communal politics*, 1978, Australian National University, Canberra. Development Studies Centre, Monograph.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p47.

¹⁷⁹ Toren, C., ‘All things go in pairs, or the sharks will bite: the antithetical nature of Fijian chiefship’, *Oceania*, 64(3), 1994, pp197-216.

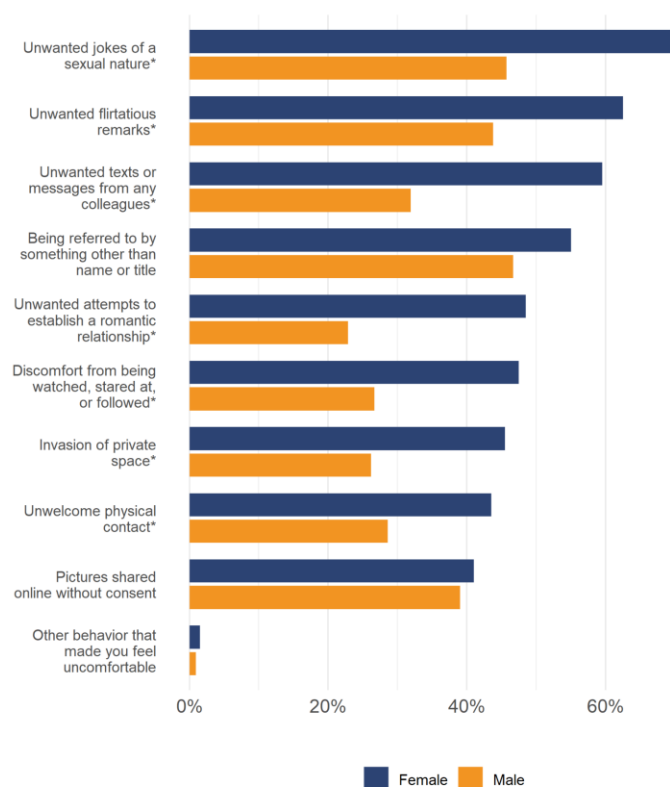
It points to a large and statistically significant discrepancy between male and female respondents across seven out of ten types of harassment:

1. Unwanted jokes of a sexual nature; 72% of women, 46% of men
2. Unwanted flirtatious remarks; 63% of women, 44% of men
3. Unwanted texts or messages from colleagues; 60% of women, 32% of men
4. Unwanted attempts to establish a romantic relationship; 49% of women, 23% of men
5. Discomfort from being watched, stared at, or followed; 48% of women, 27% of men
6. Invasion of private space; 46% of women, 26% of men
7. Unwanted physical contact; 44% of women, 29% of men

Separately, survey respondents were asked whether RFMF personnel exchange videos or pictures of attractive women with each other. 45% of respondents (55% of women, 36% of men) reported that members of the RFMF exchange such media.

Talking about sex is a norm in the RFMF. 39% of respondents reported that colleagues brag to each other about having sex. Statistical models confirm that women (45%) were more likely than men (34%) to report the occurrence of sexual bragging amongst colleagues. Women were also significantly more likely to report hearing jokes about women and over physical appearance.

Figure 10.9. Survey responses to the question, ‘Which of the following options have you witnessed or experienced in the RFMF? Please select all that apply.’



Note: An asterisk () denotes a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) difference between men and women.*

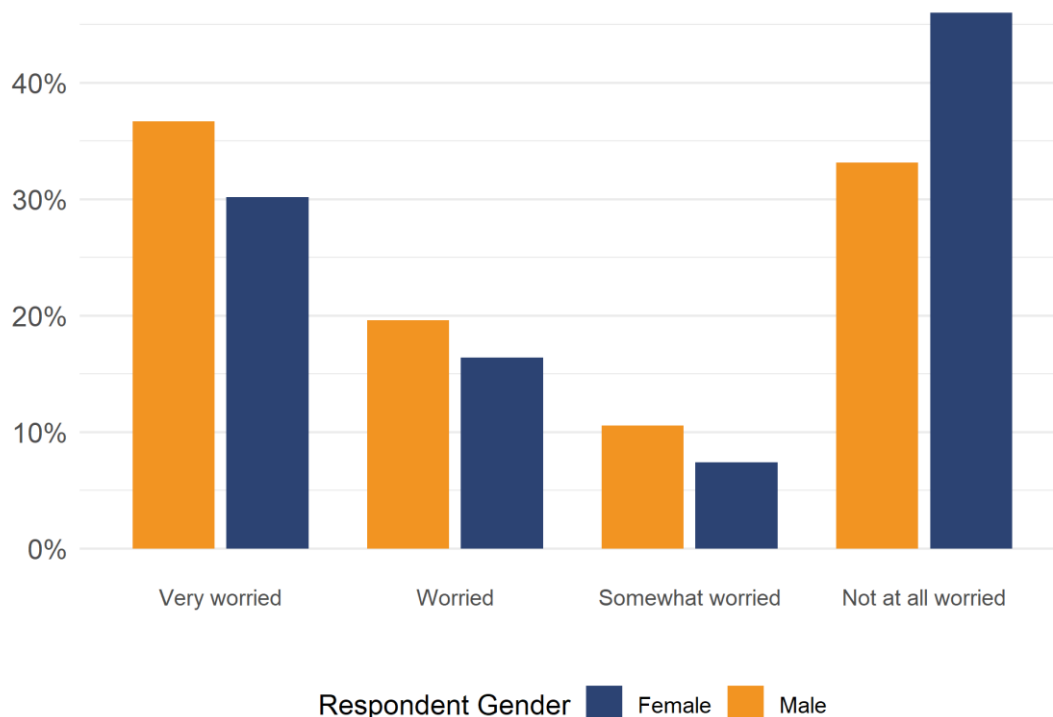
These practices can objectify and demean women, making it harder for them to be seen and treated as equals. Such practices can also increase tensions between men and women, creating an uncomfortable working environment and making women feel less included.

Most men personnel worry that colleagues will accuse them of sexual harassment

The data in Figure 10.10 confirm that slightly less than half of all surveyed personnel (49%) said they were worried or very worried about being accused of sexual harassment by a fellow soldier. More men respondents (54%) than women (45%) reported that they were worried or very worried that a colleague would accuse them of sexual harassment. Though there was no statistically significant difference between men and women's reported fear over sexual harassment accusations, it is concerning that the majority of surveyed men seem convinced that a colleague will accuse them of sexual harassment. Men's fear of being accused may create interpersonal tension and reluctance to engage with female colleagues, which can inadvertently strain professional relationships and teamwork.

These results build on the findings from the above section that demonstrates that women more frequently experienced or witnessed various forms of sexual harassment by RFMF personnel. Taken together, they imply men are fearful of being accused of sexual harassment because certain behaviours (as outlined in Figure 10.9) are occurring.

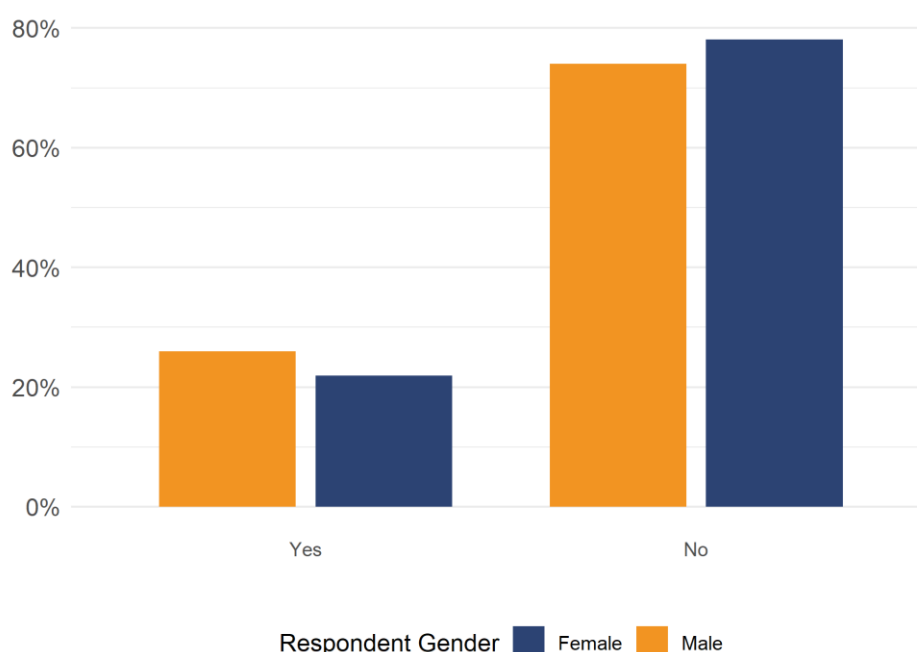
Figure 10.10. Survey responses to the question, 'How worried are you about being accused of sexual harassment by a fellow soldier?'



Men avoid socialising with their female colleagues because they fear complaints being filed against them

76% of surveyed personnel indicated that they frequent bars, house parties and other forms of adult entertainment. However, Figure 10.11 shows that one-fourth of male respondents (25%) avoid socialising with the opposite sex due to fear of sexual harassment complaints. Fear over sexual harassment complaints may be indirectly related to the sexualisation of women within the armed forces; common practices among personnel which objectify women may blur the limits of appropriate treatment of the opposite sex. Enabling a culture which frowns upon the sexualisation of women may help alleviate these concerns, as personnel re-evaluate what constitutes appropriate behaviour towards women both directly and indirectly.

Figure 10.11. Survey responses to the question, 'Do you avoid socialising with the opposite sex because you are worried about sexual harassment complaints being filed against you?'



Purity and chastity are an object of concern for personnel, further reinforcing traditional gender-related beliefs

Many personnel in the RFMF hold traditional beliefs about gender, especially regarding women's virtue. Most respondents (78%), believe that men should protect the purity and chastity of women in their family. Men (85%) were significantly more likely than women (70%) to strongly agree with this idea. This finding suggests that women's virtue is valued highly in Fijian culture, particularly by men—sometimes more than supporting victims of SEAH. If a woman is thought to have lost her virtue, her voice may be taken less seriously. This belief in protecting women's virtue may also influence other gender-related attitudes. For example:

- 36% of respondents (31% of women and 42% of men) believe that women lie about being raped, and only 28% (36% of women and 20% of men) do not believe women lie about rape.
- 33% of respondents agreed that women are raped because they dress indecently or inappropriately, with men (38%) more likely than women (29%) to hold this view.
- 27% of respondents agreed that women should tolerate violence to keep their family together. Again, men (30%) were significantly more likely to support this belief than women (24%).

These differences between men and women suggest that women are more likely to reject traditional gendered beliefs. The results also suggest that women face an uphill battle to resist gender inequalities within the RFMF. In UN peacekeeping missions, these beliefs may mean women become the main advocates for victims of SEAH. Having to constantly defend their gender and advocate for themselves can discourage women from joining the armed forces or peacekeeping operations.

Beliefs about gender roles which are widespread within the armed forces, as previously noted, can put a strain on the institution overall. As discussed in Issue area 9, traditional views about masculinity may make it difficult for women to engage in the RFMF and should be publicly discouraged, especially by male soldiers and RFMF leadership to ensure a more inclusive environment.

Traditional views about masculinity may make it difficult for women to engage in the RFMF

Statistical models confirm that men were significantly more likely than women to hold traditional views about masculinity, which may make it difficult for women to engage in the RFMF. 26% of all respondents, including 33% of men and 19% of women, reported that men make better political leaders than women and should be elected rather than women. Additionally a majority of all surveyed personnel (54%), including a minority of women (44%) and a majority of men (63%), agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'A man should have the final word about decisions in his home.' These social dynamics can contribute to masculine beliefs that need to be denounced by the RFMF, especially male soldiers.

Men perceive women as favoured and believe this unfairly disadvantages men

Among surveyed personnel, 60% of men and 54% of women believed that women are sometimes favoured for opportunities, such as jobs and promotions, just because they are women. However, 87% of men and only 54% of women indicated that the favouring of women for some opportunities unfairly disadvantages men. Despite the differing percentages, there was no statistical significance in the different responses between men and women.

5) Conclusions: Gaps between MOWIP ranking, perceptions of personnel and key decision-makers

Table 11.1. Comparison across different data sources (MOWIP indicator scores, survey responses, and key decision-maker interviews)

Issue Area	What do you think are the THREE main challenges to increasing WOMEN'S participation in UN peace operations in your country?	MOWIP Ranking (Indicator score based on survey and FFF)	N (%) stating this was a main challenge N=410 (survey)	N (%) of MEN N=210 (survey)	N (%) of WOMEN N=200 (survey)	Mentions in interviews with key decision-makers	Mentions in open-ended questions (survey)
1	There are not enough eligible women in the armed forces	2	25%	30%	19%	13 mentions 21 points	13
2	Many women don't have the right skills required to deploy	8	17%	26%	8%	10 mentions 23 points	10
3	The selection process is not fair and/or is biased against women	7	38%	24%	53%	4 mentions 7 points	4
4	Women have too many obligations at home or with their families	3	24%	30%	19%	11 mentions 21 points	11
5	There are not adequate equipment and facilities for women in peace operations	4	18%	20%	17%	7 mentions 14 points	7
6	There are stories of women having negative experiences during deployment	5	42%	45%	39%	4 mentions 5 points	4
7	UN peace operations deployments	10	7%	10%	4%	0 mentions 0 points	0

Issue Area	What do you think are the THREE main challenges to increasing WOMEN'S participation in UN peace operations in your country?	MOWIP Ranking (Indicator score based on survey and FFF)	N (%) stating this was a main challenge N=410 (survey)	N (%) of MEN N=210 (survey)	N (%) of WOMEN N=200 (survey)	Mentions in interviews with key decision-makers	Mentions in open-ended questions (survey)
	aren't helpful for career advancement						
8	Leadership or supervisors don't support increasing women's deployment	9	24%	15%	34%	11 mentions 24 points	11
9	Cultural attitudes make people doubt women's ability to deploy	6	50%	54%	47%	17 mentions 41 points	17
10	Women are not treated as equal members of the armed forces	1	42%	33%	51%	7 mentions 17 points	7

Table 11.1 above identifies information about the main barriers to RFMF women's meaningful participation in UN peace operations according to three different data sources: 1) MOWIP indicator scores, 2) survey responses, and 3) key decision-maker interviews. In this section, we compare results from the three sources to identify the main challenges to RFMF women's deployment to UN peacekeeping operations.

The first data source is the MOWIP Indicator Scores from the MOWIP methodology, which scores a security institution's performance on indicators that correspond to the 10 issue areas. This scoring process produces a ranking of the 10 issue areas as either low, medium, or high priority for addressing recommendations to improve women's deployment to UN Peace Operations. According to the triangulated data from the RFMF MOWIP methodology, the three main barriers to women's meaningful participation in peace operations were issue areas:

1. Social Exclusion (Issue area 10)
2. Eligible Pool of Personnel (Issue area 1)
3. Household Constraints (Issue area 4)

These are the areas where the MOWIP results show that women face the most serious obstacles to meaningful participation as UN peacekeepers. Additionally, Peace Operations Infrastructure (Issue area 5) and Peace Operations Experiences (Issue area 6) are 'medium priority' issue areas that also pose challenges to women's participation in UN peacekeeping.

a) Views of surveyed personnel

Another data source that identifies the top barriers to women's deployment to UN missions is from the survey data. Respondents were asked 'What do you think are the THREE main challenges to increasing WOMEN'S participation in UN peace operations in your country?' There are three different columns in Table 11.1 that correspond to this survey question: 1) Percent of **all** respondents that said the issue area was a main challenge, 2) Percent of **men** respondents that said the issue area was a main challenge, and 3) Percent of **women** respondents that said the issue area was a main challenge.

The top three barriers to women's deployment identified by surveyed **women** RFMF personnel were:

1. Deployment Selection Process (Issue area 3) – 53% of women
2. Social Exclusion (Issue area 10) – 51% of women
3. Stereotypical Gender Roles (Issue area 9) – 47% of women

Surveyed men indicated that both institutional and societal constraints impact women's deployment to UN peace operations. The top three barriers to women's meaningful deployment to UN missions identified by **men** personnel largely overlapped with the main barriers identified by women respondents, but there are important differences between these survey results:

1. Stereotypical Gender Roles (Issue area 9) – 54% of men
2. Negative Experiences on Peace Operations (Issue area 6) – 45% of men
3. Social Exclusion (Issue area 10) – 33% of men

Surveyed women and men both recognised that stereotypical gender roles (Issue area 9) and Social Exclusion (Issue area 10) were among the top barriers to women's deployment, however, there was a gender difference in the third top barrier recognised by men and women respondents. While women viewed the deployment selection process (Issue area 3) as among the top three barriers to women's deployment, men believed that negative experiences on peace operations (Issue area 6) as a top concern for women. Additionally, men were statistically significantly more likely to identify the following areas as barriers to women's deployment: eligible pool of personnel (Issue area 1), deployment criteria (Issue area 2), household constraints (Issue area 4), and career value (Issue area 7). Women, on the other hand, were more likely to identify the selection process (Issue area 3), top-down leadership (Issue area 8), and social exclusion (Issue area 10) as key challenges compared to men. This finding indicates that men are slightly misinformed about the top barriers preventing women from meaningfully participating in UN peace operations.

Only one issue area, 10 regarding women's social exclusion, consistently ranked amongst the top barriers to women's participation in UN peacekeeping amongst both the MOWIP methodology and surveyed women and men. These robust findings signal that women are not (and do not feel) treated as equal members of the RFMF, emphasising the urgency of addressing social and cultural barriers impacting women's ability to be treated as equal team members.

Although women and men respondents both recognised issue area 9 gender roles as a top barrier to women's meaningful participation, this area was not amongst the top three barriers per the MOWIP scores.

There were notable differences amongst the top three barriers identified by the MOWIP results and those recognised by surveyed personnel, with women and men each recognising distinct areas as the most important areas for improvement. Although the MOWIP results ranked both Issue Areas 1 (the eligible pool of personnel) and 4 (household constraints) amongst the top three barriers to women's participation in UN peacekeeping, these areas were not amongst the top three barriers cited by women and men respondents. Rather, women respondents uniquely identified issue area 3, the selection process, and men listed issue area 6, women's negative experiences, as the most notable obstacles to women's participation in UN peace operations. The only slight overlap here is that the MOWIP assessment ranked issue area 6 as a 'medium priority' area that also posed challenges to women's meaningful participation in UN peacekeeping.

b) Key decision-maker Interviews

Researchers interviewed 31 key decision-makers (7 women and 24 men) and asked them to identify the top three barriers to women's participation in peacekeeping operations. These responses were transcribed and matched to the associated issue areas in the MOWIP assessment. The most frequently cited barrier that interviewees mentioned was traditional gender roles (issue area 9, with 17 mentions) and the limited eligible pool of potential women peacekeepers (issue area 1, mentioned 13 times). The next most frequently mentioned barriers were household constraints and top-down leadership (Issue Areas 4 and 8 respectively, both mentioned 11 times), followed by the difficulty of meeting deployment criteria (Issue area 3, mentioned 10 times).

However, when we look at how the key decision-makers interviewed ranked the importance of these issues areas, the results change slightly. In Table 11.1, we present both the number of mentions of each issue area and the number of points assigned to each issue area based on interviewees' rankings. For example, if the interviewee described an issue as the first most important barrier, we assigned it three points; if it was the second most important, 2 points; and if it was the third most important, 1 point. This allowed us to create a more informed ranking based on how interviewees perceived the issues.

Similar to both women and men surveyed personnel, the key decision-maker interviews with elite stakeholders ranked issue area 9 gender roles (41 points) as amongst the three most prominent barriers to women's participation in UN peace operations. Gender roles (issue area 9), however, was not a top barrier in the MOWIP results. Rather, the MOWIP ranked this issue area as 'medium priority' and flagged some notable best practices amongst the gender roles indicators.

Different from both the MOWIP results and the survey respondents, the KDMIs indicated that top-down leadership (issue area 8, with 24 points) was a top barrier. The fact that the interviews with RFMF leadership identified top-down leadership (issue area 8) as a top barrier, but not the MOWIP results or surveyed respondents, suggests that leaders likely underestimate their own ability to help support increasing women's deployment. Indeed, the MOWIP results ranked top-down leadership amongst the top three opportunity areas for best practices; and it was a medium-ranked area amongst surveyed personnel. Taken together, these results suggest there are good practices amongst leadership that need diffusing throughout the broader RFMF leadership. It could be that leadership support of women's participation in UN peace operations is limited, but those who do support women are diligent allies.

The third top barrier identified by the KDMI results was issue area 2 deployment criteria (23 points). However, both the MOWIP ranking and survey results consistently show that deployment criteria is among the top three opportunity areas to improve women's participation in UN peacekeeping. It appears that leadership is misinformed that deployment criteria is a significant hindrance on women in the RFMF. This suggests that leadership underestimates women's capabilities with respect to deployment, when in reality women are both well-informed about deployment and have the skills needed to deploy. This is concerning because it suggests that RFMF leaders do not recognise the true obstacles to increasing women's meaningful participation in UN peace operations, and discount women's capabilities instead. It is important that leaders recognise, as both the MOWIP result and respondents confirm, that women in the RFMF are vastly capable stewards of peacekeeping and possess the knowledge and skills needed to deploy to UN missions.

Another notable takeaway here is that the KDMIs do not rank women's social exclusion (issue area 10) as a top barrier. Yet this issue area was ranked a top barrier to women's participation by both the MOWIP methodology and surveyed personnel (both women and men). This is an important disconnect between what RFMF leaders think the top barriers are and the actual obstacles that personnel and the MOWIP methodology identified as top barriers preventing women's meaningful participation.

6) Conclusions: recommendations to leverage opportunities and overcome barriers

a) Main recommendations to overcome the barriers:

POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

- Review and revise selection criteria for female recruitment into the RFMF. Instate a strategy to increase the percentage of female personnel into the regular forces of the RFMF annually.
- Consider a quota of minimum 40% female recruitment into the RFMF by 2030.
- Include a quota of minimum 25% female personnel to participate in leadership courses currently offered by the RFMF.
- Increase the representation of women in specialised positions and operational field assignments.
- Increase women's local deployment in both Naval and Land Forces.
- In line with the Gender Policy, enforce an initial gender quota minimum for senior leadership to consist of 20% women by 2030.
- Adopt a standard quota system for women's participation in all training, including international training.
- Ensure that all cases of SEAH are handled according to UN and RFMF regulations.
- Work with the Force psychologist to ensure that the Mental Health Policy includes a clear definition of 'mental health' that goes beyond physical fitness.
- Enforce the existing policy that allows peacekeepers to be promoted while on mission.
- Review and reconsider policy about intimate relations that result in immediate dismissal.
- Consider reviewing and reconsider policy about the termination of service due to pregnancy during missions [this is a recurring problem in the RFMF]. Affected peacekeepers should be treated with respect.
- Review and reconsider policy about intimate relations that result in immediate dismissal.
- RFMF leadership should amend the no alcohol policy on mission to allow responsible drinking. Additionally, leadership should grant discretion to decision-makers at Blackrock (those responsible for peacekeeping) to oversee and handle any issues with alcohol consumption on a case-by-case basis.
- Consider amending the Command Directive of 2018 regarding personnel being repatriated from missions on disciplinary grounds to make the directive more specific, especially in areas regarding the use of illicit drugs and alcohol consumption.

RECRUITMENT AND STRATEGIC TARGETING

- Strategic targeted recruitment for women to encourage more women to be recruited. This could be reinstating the 2013 effort to recruit women into the RFMF and continue the effort on an annual basis.
- Representatives from different divisions and units should target girls in all schools, in particular all-girls schools.
 - Target rural areas, send personnel to villages and islands for awareness

- Utilise the existing government stations and resources in different locations to get the word out and recruit women. Look to the same recruitment process (school cadet training) conducted at schools for men and women.
- Increase support for rugby as a tool for recruiting women in the same way as for men. Look to the Navy as an example of this.
- Implement a policy for women who become pregnant and are discharged from basic recruit training that ensures they are invited to re-apply and prioritised in a subsequent round.
- Early planning for recruitment of women and more frequent posting of advertisements across all media platforms, including both newspapers and social media. Career expos should also be held to advertise about joining the force.
- Consider leveraging existing regional partnerships to create a scholarship for females in specialist roles, for example, engineers.

INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES AND COMMUNICATION

- Create better internal, centralised systems of communication about deployment opportunities, training opportunities, policies (e.g. leave policies), and about advertising the benefits of deployment.
- Monitor and enforce participation in all gender training. The gender training should be continuous and at all levels.
- Create RFMF awareness materials such as videos, posters, pamphlets, etc., that can feature the focal points and their contact information.
- Leadership to empower and provide support to the existing gender focal points to increase awareness around gender mainstreaming policy in all RFMF establishments and units.
- Work to transform the existing gender cell into a gender division by identifying and appointing additional gender focal points so that they can collaborate on forming the prospective gender division.
- More widely disseminate the role of gender focal points, the gender policy and gender adviser in reducing the barriers to women's participation in the RFMF and peacekeeping efforts. To ensure widespread dissemination, this information should be shared on the forthcoming mass internal communication system and shared on all RFMF platforms and social media where applicable.
- Leverage existing regional partnerships to expand training and expertise of RFMF psychologists.
- Permit and encourage staff rotation across different departments/units, especially personnel at lower ranks. There should be opportunities for changing department/unit and this information should be disseminated to personnel, especially women, across all existing branches, departments, and units so they are aware of opportunities and encouraged to participate.
- Better clarify training pathways. Increase personnel awareness about available online and in-service training opportunities (including international training) through a more formalised and transparent system that is accessible to all personnel, including those stationed in remote areas of Fiji.
- Unit commanders to provide non-commissioned personnel with the opportunity to participate in all training and the training should be available fairly for both male and female personnel.
- Ensure that units are delivering information about both official leave policies, especially disability leave, and unofficial leave practices to remind personnel of the different types of leave that are available to them.
- Career management and planning at the unit level should be improved to ensure personnel are aware of training they need to take while they are on leave.

- RFMF to increase awareness about why personnel should plan early (at least 3 months) for their leave and any training they need to take during that leave time.
- Continue to invest in the electronic Human Resource Management System to track personnel leave timelines.
- Ensure enforcement of tracking leave, and increase understanding at the unit level regarding personnel leave and individuals should plan early (3 months early) if they want to participate in training opportunities while on leave.
- Ensure fairness, transparency and gender balance within the nomination and application process where women are considered for the specialised units they've trained for.
- The RFMF should design and implement a multifaceted approach to combat social stigma surrounding women and men's deployment:
 - Establish more visible community recognition programs to highlight peacekeepers. The force could engage religious and traditional leaders to publicly endorse peacekeeping as an honourable sacrifice and develop peer testimonial programs where respected community members share how their family thrived during deployment.
 - Train the RFMF media team, including unit-level media stakeholders, on how to portray women in the force.
 - More widely and consistently (perhaps monthly) disseminate the stories of male and female peacekeepers and their contribution to global peace and stability to share both internally (amongst RFMF personnel) and publicly on all RFMF social media pages.
 - Reinstate 'family open day/school visits' that take families through what is done in the mission. This is an excellent best practice.
- Ensure the best practice of prioritising personnel for promotion that may have missed out on a promotion opportunity due to deployment. In these cases, personnel may have missed out on training needed for promotion because they were deployed, but these personnel should be prioritised for the next available promotion once they return from mission.

WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION AND NETWORKS

- Establish a formal decision-making committee for women that can make decisions and represent women's views, experiences and recommendations to more senior decision-making committee/s;
 - This committee could be part of the Service Women's Network, but formal creation and expansion of this organisation would be required;
 - Committee membership made up of 50:50 women of junior and senior ranks;
 - The committee should be required to directly report back to all women after each meeting (quarterly at a minimum) in the form of minutes that are directly disseminated through emails.
- In line with the Gender Policy, the Service Women's Network should be adequately resourced, with its support extending beyond sporting activities. Greater attention should be given to logistics and infrastructure, including transportation to and from training venues, as well as the provision of meals and accommodation.
 - Need a reporting mechanism to ensure the issues raised with this network get shared with the RFMF Headquarters/leadership.
 - The Service Women's Network should be prioritised for financial resources to support their activities, including rugby.

- Women should be released in the same capacity as men for sporting events, at national and club level.
- The Wives and Mothers club just contributed \$1000 Fijian to the Ratu Sakuna Bowl. Ensure the contributions from this club are more widely advertised and recognised on social media or a newsletter.
 - Request this information be shared per the unit-level welfare policy.

GENDER AWARENESS, TRAINING, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- A general gender training course should be created and incorporated into the core RFMF curriculum that new recruits receive in training academy.
- Review existing basic recruit training curriculum to embed gender frameworks and sensitivity in all training modules.
- Expand RFMF efforts to make all types of gender-related training available to personnel of all ranks, especially low and middle ranked personnel, to advance the goals outlined in the RFMF's Gender Policy.
- In line with the Gender Policy, require all men to attend gender awareness training to help reduce women leaving because of unwanted remarks about women and their role on a daily basis.
 - Require evidence of gender training for promotion.
- All Veiliutaki courses should include gender sensitisation.
 - The existing gender cell should cooperate with the Veiliutaki framework so that gender advisors can disseminate the gender issue concepts to all levels.
 - The gender cell should advise how to incorporate gender ideology and sensitivity into training modules.
- Expand and make gender training courses mandatory, ideally on an annual basis. Training should be conducted in groups (perhaps held in respective messes officer's mess, warrant officer/senior non-commissioned officer's mess, other ranks by unit). Male leaders in particular should be required to participate in gender training.
- Include gender training in all relevant mandatory courses.
 - Ideally, the participants should attend the training in civilian clothing.
- Design and implement a comprehensive and recurring gender training course that is available and mandatory for ALL RFMF personnel, regardless of rank and gender.
- Provide all service personnel, especially non-commissioned officers, with the opportunity to participate in the SEA training and the training should be for both male and female personnel.
 - Ideally, the participants should attend the training in civilian clothing.
- The sexual harassment training should be scenario-based so they are comprehended by all personnel, especially male colleagues.
 - Because of the education gaps among the RFMF personnel, the training doesn't reach the lower ranks. The training packet should be tailored to all personnel regardless of their education level.
 - Can use examples from the mission area to develop real-world scenarios to teach personnel what is (and is not) appropriate behaviour.
- Adapt monthly parades and leadership messaging in a way that conveys gender messaging.
- Include UNSCR 1325+ and the WPS agenda in all existing gender training.

- Draw on the expertise of officers who have engaged in UNSCR 1325+ and the WPS training with the UN and other international and regional partners to help adapt training for the RFMF.
- Building on the barrier regarding supervisor permission to deploy outlined in Issue area 2, mandate that all supervisors undergo gender bias and sensitivity training.
- The RFMF should design a comprehensive gender training course of its own as part of the pre-deployment training.
- Mandate all supervisors undergo gender bias and sensitivity training.
 - Look to positively engage mentorship networks and continue to emphasise how gender biases may impact how supervisors select officers for deployment.

RFMF INFRASTRUCTURE AND EQUIPMENT

- Adopt a gender equal opportunity policy for infrastructure and resources to ensure women have equitable access to adequate infrastructure.
- Perform a gender needs assessment to determine equipment needs for both men and women in the RFMF.
- Allocate funding to design and distribute uniforms and personal protective equipment.
- Improve gender-specific (women's) facilities at existing bases, including Stanley Brown Naval Base and RFN Viti Togalevu Naval Base. Improvements in these facilities can be based on the new base in Lami Bay.
- Current dining and office spaces are insufficient and sleeping quarters and related facilities require expansion and significant renovation:
 - All RFMF women should have equitable access to workstations. Currently, workstations are first come first serve in some facilities.
 - Explore options to **renovate** the following existing sleeping facilities, including the addition of changing rooms for women - facilities ordered according to the current priority need for renovation:
 1. Sukanaivalu Army Barracks, Labasa
 2. Delta Company, Nadi
 3. Echo Company, Duke of Edinburgh Barracks, Lautoka
 - **Build new** facilities in locations where existing infrastructure is needed - facilities ordered according to the current priority need for new infrastructure:
 1. Queen Elizabeth Barracks (including LFC, LSU, 3FIR, and ENGRS)
 2. Force Training Group (FTG)
 3. Togalevu Naval Base
 4. Delta Company
 5. Joint Task Force Command (JTFC)
 6. Echo Company, Duke of Edinburgh Barracks, Lautoka
 7. Officers Training Centre (OTC)
 8. Sukanaivalu Army Barracks, Labasa
- Development of infrastructure for women across the entire RFMF, including sleeping barracks, toilets, bathrooms, and locker rooms.
- Install bathroom facilities exclusively for women (within all RFMF facilities) that accommodate menstruation needs; these facilities and must be large enough to serve as changing rooms:

- Sanitary bins should be available in all RFMF women's washrooms.
 - All bathroom stalls should be outfitted with sanitary napkin receptacles (bins).
- Sanitary products should be made available for free in all canteens to accommodate women's menstruation needs.

FAMILY SUPPORT AND CHILDCARE

- Ensure that the age of personnel's children is not a hindrance to women's deployment, see clause 8 and section 35 of the Gender Policy.
- Expand the Gender Policy to include a clause that ensures that women are not informally prevented from being nominated by supervisors for deployment if her child is 1 year old or younger.
- RFMF/UN should consider childcare subsidies for deployed personnel.
- Allow more flexible work arrangements so that breastfeeding mothers can leave work and work from home when needed.
- Assign multipurpose rooms in all RFMF facilities that can be used for quiet time, prayer, and breastfeeding mothers.
 - These spaces and their appropriate use should be advertised to all personnel so that they are aware of the usefulness of these spaces.
- Provide childcare subsidies to support personnel who need childcare (especially outside of Suva).
- Look to renovate the currently operating kindergarten at QEB to develop a day care centre that is available to care for young children that are not yet school age. It is important to consider the budget for the renovation, ongoing maintenance costs, and funding salary for qualified daycare workers.
 - The force should ensure that women have access to breastfeeding accommodations in the daycare centre and at QEB so that women can visit the daycare during the workday to breastfeed their infant child.

COMPENSATION, BENEFITS, AND LEAVE POLICIES

- The RFMF budget committee should prioritise a review of existing pay scales and lodging allowances among personnel of all ranks in the RFMF.
- Increases in pay should start with the lowest ranked personnel (soldiers) because these are the servicemembers being paid the least and thus they are the ones that need raises as soon as possible.
- Look to the recent increase in FPF pay as a model to adopt for the RFMF.
- Salary pay should reflect the work done and accommodate annual increases in the cost of living.
- Reinstate paternity leave to where it is its own leave policy that does not deduct from annual leave. Paternity leave should be a minimum of five working days to be in line with the national policy.
- Currently, the RFMF only offers maternity leave with full pay for the first three children. In the future, the national government should consider repealing this policy to ensure that women who have more than three children are not financially disenfranchised by having to take half pay during maternity leave.
- The RFMF should accommodate personnel on leave, especially women on maternity leave, to encourage personnel to take part in available training opportunities. Provide and promote both in-person and online training opportunities to ensure flexibility.

DEPLOYMENT READINESS AND SELECTION

- Encourage and provide individuals without prior deployment experience with additional training which would open an honest dialogue about differences in expectations by age and gender and the diversity of skills that are valued beyond physical fitness alone.
- Better communicate and advertise criteria required for deployment at the unit level, specifically regarding the minimum rank and years experience needed. Ensure transparency of nomination against the unit selection criteria.
 - Deployment requirements should outline all requirements for each different type of deployment, i.e., battalion, individual, and secondment.
- Commanders should take the lead in disseminating information about peacekeeping requirements in their weekly Monday meetings.
- Facilitate driving training for all women in the force and work with relevant stakeholders to assist with the license acquisition process.
- Ensure improved advertisement of existing driving courses to train women for UN deployments.
- Develop and widely advertise an information awareness campaign to inform personnel about deployment requirements. These advertisements should also highlight mission-specific information, such as local language requirements (or not) needed to deploy.
- Review the policy and practice of selecting personnel for training, promotion, and deployment. Institute an independent set of criteria that are not dependent on the recommendation of a supervisor, to enable equitable access to training, promotion, and deployment within the Land Force and Navy.
 - Consider re-instituting a board similar to the promotion board, which is for selecting deployment for training, deployment, and selection into UN Peacekeeping.
- Include graduates and non-commissioned officers to be given the same equal opportunities to participate in international training.
- Men do not express a desire to take training in areas such as SEA and SGBV, which can be crucial for deployment. As per the gender policy, the RFMF should require all personnel (especially men, both commissioned and non-commissioned) to participate in the existing in-service (not part of the pre-deployment) SEA and SGBV training.
- Require mandatory training on civilian protection for all personnel; this should be included as a module in the curriculum for all new recruits.
- Consider designing and implementing rank-segregated testing options, possibly by assigning rank-specific testing timeslots, for personnel taking the pre-deployment test.
- Introduce a mentorship program whereby personnel who have successfully passed the pre-deployment test are assigned to tutor and mentor personnel who are preparing for this exam.
- Ensure that travel, lodging, and meals are provided for all personnel attending pre-deployment training. Also make sure this information is widely available to all personnel.
- Create and nominate an Inspector General who is independent from the force to help provide oversight regarding the selection process for deployment.
- Ensure that women at the rank of sergeant and above are represented (ideally gender equal representation) in unit-level boards that make deployment selection decisions, as stipulated in the RFMF Gender Policy.
- Ensure more transparency in the selection process for officers for deployment. The RFMF should be transparent about the deployment selection process for all, specifically for Territorial Forces and recruits.
- Active soldiers do not get an equal chance to redeploy compared to the Territorial Force soldiers. The RFMF should provide an equal opportunity for redeployment to active soldiers.

- Further expand and diversify the teaching methods used in pre-deployment exercises to include real-world scenarios and simulations.

UN MISSION CONDITIONS, INFRASTRUCTURE, EQUIPMENT, AND SERVICES

- The UN should subsidise hygiene and sanitary products for female peacekeepers who have sanitary needs beyond what is already provided by the UN.
- For battalions, consider removing Strategic Airlift Operation requirements that minimise the items peacekeepers can bring to missions.
 - This may require re-evaluating the strategic agreement with regional partners to include gender considerations, like sanitary products.
 - Broaden the criteria for welfare stores, so that they can include goods that are needed for women's menstruation needs.
- The RFMF was perceived by some to be given the lowest standard facilities compared to international staff and other contingents. The UN should review the criteria for allocation of facilities and end the favouritism around resource allocation in missions.
- All recreational facilities on mission should be open and accessible to all peacekeepers, and not necessarily a certain group (e.g, international staff).
 - All peacekeepers should be recognised and treated like international staff, including having access to international staff facilities, including dining areas.
 - This should also include facility costs, that are deducted from peacekeepers allowances. All mission personnel should be required the same payment for their facilities.
- The UN should ensure that sanitary bins are provided in all facilities in all missions.
- The UN should provide free reproductive healthcare in all missions.
- The UN/RFMF should seek to provide counselling services in addition, or instead of, existing religious based support. Specialist non-denominational counselling service providers from Fiji should accompany peacekeepers on missions.
- Ensure gender focal points are deployed on missions and that all counselling services remain confidential.
 - Ensure gender focal points receive appropriate training
- Increase the number of counsellors so that each RFMF unit has access to that support. Include recruitment of specialised counsellors. The counsellor is responsible for family liaison.
- UN/RFMF should investigate the feasibility of providing 24/7 access to telehealth counselling services, like Empower Pacific.
- The UN should ensure that all mission services, i.e., psychological services, are available to all mission personnel, not just a select group.
- The UN should look to replicate the Sentinel Program for psychological health that is conducted in Sinai, in all missions.
- Identify countries with access to Fijian consular services through either high commissions, embassies or through another nation's mission. The force should also provide information and instructions for deployed Fijian citizens to access the closest consulate if consular support is needed.
- The UN should introduce a reintegration program helping personnel with transitioning back home three months prior to departure from the mission.
- The UN should introduce two weeks of Rest & Recuperation program prior to departure.

RFMF DEPLOYMENT SUPPORT PROGRAMS

- The RFMF should expand the financial literacy program for personnel and their families conducted both prior and upon return from deployment.
- Formally integrate training for spouses of peacekeepers to prepare them for their wife/husband to deploy.
- Continue to encourage units to engage in special programs that bring families of peacekeepers together for collective support.
- Building on the recommendation in issue area 6, with prior approval (from family), all RFMF units should conduct welfare checks on families of deployed personnel while they are away on a mission in order to provide them with any psycho-social support they need. They could reinstate the family visitation program for deployed personnel.
- Introduce a quarterly visit program to the families of peacekeepers while they are away on a mission in order to provide them with any psycho-social support they need. The RFMF could reinstate the family visitation program for deployed personnel.
- Implement a reintegration program (consisting of at least 7 days) to support RFMF personnel transition home after mission:
 - Look to the FPF's Post Deployment Reintegration Program (PDRIP)
 - Introduce a one-week decompression program after missions for both men and women, ideally conducted in Lami Bay or Denarau, not at RFMF facilities. This would help officers mentally transition from the stress of deployment to home life, allowing a healthier reintegration into family roles and daily responsibilities.
 - Develop an exit survey to understand personnel's perception of the program's quality, including the adequacy (or not) of existing counselling services available before, during, and after mission deployment.
- Ensure that transitions from mission include mandatory mental health/relationship/financial counselling, and physical health checks (e.g. sexually transmitted infections for both men and women) conducted in a way that does not further stigmatise women.
- Introduce a post-deployment psychological and social support program.

b) Future research/topics for further investigation:

- Further investigate the reasons why personnel report delays in payments to determine opportunities to overcome this barrier.
- Investigate ways to better support personnel with children, especially those that do not have extended family to help with children.
- Investigate innovative ways to maintain a balance between military culture and gender sensitisation to ensure the force preserves core aspects of its military framework alongside integrating gender ideology into its professionalisation mechanisms.
- Better understand where RFMF personnel struggle while deployed on peacekeeping missions.
- Further investigate women's preferences for deployment timelines, such as shorter deployment rotations.

Republic of Fiji Military Forces

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