



BEYOND BRICKS AND MORTAR:

Lessons from Gender-Responsive Infrastructure Projects

Supported by the Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations

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List of Acronyms

EIF	Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations
GAF	Ghana Armed Forces
GCBC	Gender Capacity Building Center
GSU	Gender Strong Unit
MOWIP	Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations
PSD	Public Security Directorate
SHEA	Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse

SNG	Senegal National Gendarmerie
SNP	Senegal National Police
SSI	Security Sector Institution
TOR	Terms of Reference
T/PCCs	Troop- and police-contributing countries
UN	United Nations
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
ZPS	Zambia Police Service

Executive Summary

The Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations (EIF) supports projects, including infrastructure components, intended to help increase the meaningful participation of uniformed women peacekeepers. Projects implemented by security sector institutions (SSIs) and United Nations peace operations aim to address barriers affecting different dimensions of uniformed women's careers, including recruitment, training, retention, promotion, and leadership opportunities.

This report is based on a comprehensive review of all available project documents, completion reports, quarterly monitoring and evaluation reports, mission reports, interview transcripts with implementing partner project focal points and beneficiaries, and interviews with EIF Secretariat members and uniformed personnel from T/PCCs that have received EIF funding.

The report provides key insights, lessons learned, and good practices for SSIs, especially armed forces, police services, as well as justice sector institutions, current and future implementing partners, and donor agencies undertaking or supporting projects to advance women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in UN peace operations. To advance infrastructure for women, security sector institutions are encouraged to implement the recommendations below.

Key Insights

- Gender-responsive infrastructure is an enabling factor impacting women's operational readiness and effectiveness.
- Insufficient childcare facilities disproportionately impact women who are more likely to miss work or leave the profession. EIF-supported projects demonstrate the potential of childcare facilities to strengthen SSIs' talent pipeline by ensuring that women can commit to their profession.
- Infrastructure investments are necessary but not sufficient; they require broader institutional reforms to enable women to train, participate, and lead in new ways. Institutional ownership and national commitment to wider gender equality reforms are essential to make progress.

Key Recommendations

Design Infrastructure Around Women's Meaningful Participation:

Recommendations for Security Sector Institutions:

- Mandate the inclusion of uniformed women throughout all project phases, from pre-design consultations to final monitoring.
- Adopt gender-responsive leadership approaches, including senior-level communication strategies that frame gender-responsive infrastructure as an institutional advantage rather than favouritism.

Recommendations for Implementing Partners & Donors:

- Require all project proposals to provide documented evidence of public consultations and focus groups with women beneficiaries.
- Ensure project budgets account for meeting workplace health and safety requirements, proper staffing, maintenance, and regular monitoring.

Strengthen Planning and Oversight:

Recommendations for Security Sector Institutions:

- Use multi-tiered supervision frameworks such as steering committees and technical working groups.
- Ensure that all contractor payments are linked to verified compliance with specifications and quality standards checked during routine site inspections.

Recommendations for Implementing Partners:

- Manage technical, procurement, and integrity risks early through mandatory baseline risk assessments, including topography, soil, and climate resiliency.
- Integrate market-volatility protections, such as price adjustment clauses and local sourcing, into vendor contracts.
- Provide mandatory ethical procurement training and establish secure whistleblower channels.

Plan for Sustainability and Learning

Recommendations for Security Sector Institutions:

- Commit to long-term maintenance, staffing, and recurrent budget planning, with identified budget responsibility and senior-level endorsement before the project starts.

- Monitor impacts through longitudinal studies. Establish internal metrics to track how facilities impact women's operational readiness, productivity, and careers (e.g. recruitment, retention, deployments, and leadership opportunities) over time.
- Measure the medium- and long-term impacts of infrastructure on institutional culture, social inclusion, and women's career trajectories.

Recommendations for the Elsie Initiative Fund Secretariat and Donors:

- Strengthen fund transfer processes by setting transparent currency requirements and ensuring all institutional focal points are copied to reduce delays and protect against staff turnover.
- Ensure that any required budget revisions trigger an automatic, formal re-scoping and updating of project results frameworks.

Why does infrastructure matter?

Gender-responsive infrastructure¹ is a necessity, not a special benefit for women. Historically SSIs, including their infrastructure, have been designed by default for men. A lack of appropriate facilities can have multiple interlocking disadvantages, including compromised operational readiness and effectiveness, limited deployment opportunities, career stagnation, and decreased retention.

Gender-responsive infrastructure accounts for the distinct needs and roles of all genders in the planning, design, construction, use, management, and maintenance.² Gender-responsive infrastructure in SSIs considers the usage patterns of uniformed women and men, enabling equal use of and access to services. The process of implementing a gender-responsive approach to infrastructure can include the design and construction of women-specific facilities that address women's requirements for safety, mobility, and caregiving. For infrastructure to address gender-based barriers requires implementing gender mainstreaming activities throughout the infrastructure lifecycle. Incorporating all genders into development and decision-making is a critical component of the process.

Inadequate accommodation, ablution, and training facilities harm institutional readiness and effectiveness in two ways. First, unsafe conditions compromise women's safety and rest, decreasing their operational readiness. Second, the resulting deficit shifts an unfair burden to uniformed men, which can lead them to overextension and a secondary drop in readiness and effectiveness. Combined these factors compound to negatively impact SSIs. Furthermore, if uniformed men perceive the workload to be unfair, it can reinforce harmful gendered stereotypes and fuel opposition to women's integration.

Insufficient facilities also prevent women from accessing the same career and deployment opportunities that men have, contributing to talented uniformed women leaving the service. Household and cultural expectations that place care responsibilities on women further exacerbate these challenges. Without accessible child-care facilities, women are disproportionately more likely to miss work or leave the profession, rendering SSIs less diverse and less effective.

Ultimately, inadequate infrastructure harms the entire organization. An institution cannot work at full capacity when a substantial share of its workforce is sidelined from training, exercises, or deployments because of concerns over safety or childcare. On the other hand, investments in gender-responsive infrastructure can significantly contribute to the SSI's operational capacity and effectiveness.

Measuring Opportunities for Women in Peace Operations (MOWIP) assessments in several countries identified infrastructure-related difficulties both during deployment and domestically as key barriers to women's full and meaningful participation, limiting women's availability for training and negatively impacting the eligible pool of women for deployment.

Survey respondents in nine countries, including Bangladesh, Ghana, Jordan, and Senegal, indicated that some parts of UN peace operations infrastructure constitute key barriers, specifically the lack of safe and adequate accommodation and ablution facilities during deployment. This demonstrates that increasing the meaningful participation of uniformed women also requires UN peace operations to provide dedicated accommodation and ablution facilities that guarantee the safety and well-being of all uniformed personnel.

¹ For the purposes of this report, unless specified otherwise, I use infrastructure to mean physical or hard infrastructure, e.g. buildings, facilities, utilities, and transportation elements such as roads.

² Morgan, G., Bajpai, A., Ceppi, P., Al-Hinai, A., Christensen, T., Kumar S., Crosskey S., & O'Regan N. *Infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women*. UNOPS, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2020.

MOWIP assessments in Bangladesh, Jordan, and Senegal highlighted household and cultural constraints related to lacking infrastructure as key barriers within the countries. Care and family responsibilities affect women's availability for training and deployment, contributing to difficulties in maintaining a robust talent pipeline. Infrastructure investments such as childcare facilities and women-specific accommodation and ablutions – when accompanied by policy reforms targeting care and family responsibilities to make them more equitable – can help address these household and cultural constraints.

For women in Senegal's SSIs, balancing a demanding profession with childcare responsibilities has long been a significant challenge. Long shifts, unpredictable schedules, and operational duties often make securing reliable childcare difficult, forcing many women to choose between career progression and family obligations. Although women started serving in the Senegal National Police (SNP) in 1981, an EIF-supported 2024 gender audit of the SNP that police infrastructure does not account for women-specific needs and uniformed women underlined the need for institutional childcare.³ This designed around male personnel as the default.

Infrastructure by itself is necessary but not sufficient to increase the meaningful participation of uniformed women in peace operations. Infrastructure is an enabling factor that can have multidimensional and multiplying effects, improving women's careers by enabling them to participate more fully and effectively and mitigating the household and cultural constraints that MOWIP assessments frequently identify as a key barrier to women's opportunities. However, that requires infrastructure investments to be part of a broader institutional reform plan to enable women to train, participate, and lead in new ways.

When can infrastructure support women's meaningful participation?

EIF aims to support and incentivize efforts to increase the meaningful participation of uniformed women in UN peace operations, including through infrastructure projects. EIF support can be a catalyst for change but cannot replace national and institutional ownership. For infrastructure investments to support uniformed women's empowerment and meaningful participation requires a clearly defined end goal that reflects national ownership.

National ownership, institutional commitment, and leadership support are key to making infrastructure an enabling factor for uniformed women. All SSIs must provide appropriate facilities for their entire workforce. As more women join, train, deploy, and take on leadership roles, institutions need to plan, build, maintain, and budget for facilities that reflect this reality. Infrastructure to accommodate increased recruitment and deployment of uniformed women is only one piece of the puzzle. The value of any infrastructure depends on the extent to which it is integrated into institutional reform. Specifically, infrastructure must be integrated with policies governing care responsibilities, training curricula, training access, pathways to deployment, leadership development, as well as gender and anti-sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse (SHEA) policies.

For infrastructure projects to support women's meaningful participation also requires consistent coordination and engagement with key stakeholders, including uniformed women locally, commanding officers of the training facilities, engineering units, and ministerial experts. For example, the Senegal National Police (SNP) project team consulted with the Ministry of Women, Family, and Child Protection to obtain approval for the childcare facility plans and

3 Senegal National Police Officer, written correspondence with author, April 30, 2026.

ensure they met all requirements. Zambia Police Service (ZPS) included women engineers in the initial design phase and women police officers involved in weekly site monitoring and inspection visits to ensure facilities are safe and child friendly. Projects benefit from consistent consultations and coordination because integrating stakeholders' input can promote effectiveness. Regular engagement and good communication enhance progress monitoring, promote efficiency, foster collaboration, and help exchange good practices. It is important to involve relevant departments, experts, and stakeholders such as the engineering corps unit early in the planning process because early engagement can help with project visibility and sensitizing all levels of the organization to help secure buy-in.

Investments benefiting women can encounter resistance in male-dominated SSIs. For example, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon's (UNIFIL) construction of women-specific accommodation and ablutions facilities caused some male peacekeepers to worry about favouritism toward women. This points to the need for gender-responsive leadership approaches, early communication, leadership messaging, and engagement with both women and men, so that gender-responsive infrastructure is understood as supporting operational effectiveness and institutional readiness, not favouritism.⁴ Therefore, infrastructure investments should be accompanied by policy measures, training, and credible advocates within the institution who can explain why appropriate facilities for women are part of an effective and inclusive workplace that benefits all.

Infrastructure needs to be fit-for-purpose, functional, and operational. All buildings must meet workplace health and safety requirements and be accessible, properly staffed, maintained, funded, and regularly monitored. SSIs must choose locations carefully, analysing topography, soil, traffic, and access to utilities and sewage. Furthermore,

facilities for different purposes must meet additional task-specific requirements:

Ablution facilities: Must support women's operational readiness and well-being by meeting safety, privacy, and dignity requirements. Further, to be sustainable, facilities also must either be sufficiently large to absorb increased numbers of women or allow for the construction of additional facilities that meet the same standards.

Accommodation: Construction of new accommodations must be based on an analysis of expected occupancy that accounts for both officers and other ranks. Accommodations must have sufficient utilities, lighting, and must meet safety, privacy, and dignity requirements. Plans also need to consider proximity to ablution and training facilities, maintenance, and how the facilities integrate into strategic plans for recruitment, retention, training, promotion, and deployment.

Training facilities: When building new gender-responsive training facilities, institutions also need to design a tailored curriculum and provide a gender-balanced pool of qualified instructors, administrative and support staff. SSIs also need a strategic plan for utilisation, training throughput, and exam preparation, linking the new training facilities to deployment and leadership opportunities.

Childcare facilities: When constructing childcare facilities, institutions must consider the location in terms of both proximity to the parents' duty station and the development needs of the children, i.e. mitigating exposure to noise and pollutants. To support uniformed women, childcare facilities must have flexible opening hours, accommodate the appropriate age range, and have sufficient qualified staff members and a budget to cover recurring costs.

Successful infrastructure projects extend beyond the construction of buildings. For infrastructure to support uniformed women's equal

4 Groves-Williams, Leslie. *The Gender-Responsive Leader's Handbook*. Folke Bernadotte Academy, Sandö, 2024.

and meaningful participation, the process, design, operation, and maintenance of these facilities must reflect deliberative and consultative processes that consider the unique working conditions of uniformed women. For example, the Senegal National Gendarmerie's (SNG) childcare centre has flexible opening hours all year rather than only during the school year. Gendarmes' operational schedules and patrols contribute to unpredictable and long working hours, making it important for officers to be able to leave their children at childcare for longer. The SNG childcare also made strategic hiring decisions leading to the adoption of innovative approaches to child development. The diploma-holding staff has received extensive training enabling the childcare to offer English lessons, psychomotricity, musical education, and a blend of the national Senegalese curriculum with Montessori methods. Other Senegalese SSIs consider the SNG childcare a model to emulate, inspiring SNP to build one too. Consultations between SNG and SNP, including at the leadership level, contributed to sharing lessons learned, good practices, and knowledge exchanges. For example, after consulting with SNG, the Ministry of Early Childhood, and several childcare experts, the SNP decided to offer childcare for different age groups.

What is the supporting evidence?

EIF-supported infrastructure projects, when effectively implemented, can target multiple pathways for change, from enabling women's participation in training to improving institutional environments. In many cases it is too early to have conclusive evidence; many EIF projects are still ongoing, and others have not been operational long enough to gather sufficient data and observations. Completed projects supported by the EIF have resulted in dedicated facilities intended to support countries' capacity to recruit, retain, train, and prepare uniformed women for meaningful roles in peacekeeping. Early evidence

reported by EIF project partners suggests that infrastructure for women and childcare has multidimensional and multiplying effects, potentially improving women's operational readiness, work-life balance and well-being, facilitating access to training, enabling greater participation in operations and deployments, improving institutional environments, normalising women's presence, and increasing their impact. Accessible childcare facilities can reduce practical barriers. When available to all serving parents, they can also support a more inclusive institutional culture by recognising parenthood as a shared responsibility. Put differently, gender-responsive facilities can be an enabling factor for both women and men to train, participate, and lead in new ways.

Accommodation, Ablution, and Training Facilities

Since 2019, several EIF-supported infrastructure projects have been completed. In 2022, UNIFIL finished the construction of gender-responsive accommodation, ablutions, and welfare areas. The Republic of Ghana Armed Forces (GAF) constructed two facilities to support 100 and 200 female recruits respectively. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Public Security Directorate (PSD) constructed the Gender Capacity Building Center (GCBC) a dedicated training facility, which includes accommodation for 32 women and a childcare unit. In 2025, Togo Armed Forces completed the construction and equipping of a 30-bed women's accommodation facility. Zambia Police Service (ZPS) completed the construction of a 40-bed women's accommodation and childcare facility.

The EIF provided support to UNIFIL to construct gender-responsive accommodation and ablution facilities. The added infrastructure improved the working and living conditions for GAF women peacekeepers on deployment. Ghana deployed a GSU with a substantially increased number of women (from 16 to 19 per cent), surpassing

the UN's gender parity targets.⁵ Combined with other elements of the broader EIF-supported project package, GAF's own institutional efforts, and the financial incentive provided through the GSU premium, the infrastructure supported the conditions for Ghana to accommodate and deploy a higher proportion of women. Survey results indicate that dedicated accommodation in UN missions can improve operational readiness, sense of safety, and well-being⁶ In a project closure survey of 40 GAF women peacekeepers, more than 72 per cent of women surveyed were satisfied with the new facilities. The women lauded the size of accommodations as well as having a safe space to dress privately and relax after work. The project closure report indicated that 99 per cent of surveyed women believed the improved living conditions could encourage more women peacekeepers to deploy.⁷ Importantly, the women stated that the new facilities made them feel valued as equal and important members of the unit.

Infrastructure projects are impactful when they are part of a broader reform effort. For example, in Jordan, PSD amended and developed the code of conduct for police work with a gender perspective in conjunction with the construction of the new GCBC. PSD views the GCBC as a driving force in implementing its gender mainstreaming policies, including the Gender Mainstreaming Strategy 2026-2028.⁸ Key components of the strategy, which are supported by allocated budgets, include developing training curricula, preparing qualified and trained gender-focused teams within PSD. Through the GCBC, PSD seeks

to create a comprehensive training environment that offers specialized gender-responsive training for both women and men. One long-term objective is for the GCBC to become a regional center of excellence for gender training.⁹ The GCBC offers 16 courses, nine of which are geared specifically toward gender capacity building. The offerings include courses on the potential psychological challenges of peacekeeping deployments. According to PSD, the GCBC plays an active role in shaping institutional culture as the hub for domestic and international training courses and workshops that improve knowledge about gender and culture.¹⁰ Additionally, the GCBC is developing a plan for dedicated leadership courses and training activities focused on preparing personnel to be deployment-ready. In a focus group discussion, participants described the GCBC as a "lighthouse" and a "beacon" for women's participation and specialized training.¹¹ Focus group participants highlighted the GCBC's role in creating an environment in which previously deployed women can share their experiences, expertise, and lessons learned with officers going through training.¹² Senior officers underscored the value of being able to alleviate fears about deploying and the opportunity to mentor junior officers through formal and informal channels at the center.¹³

Across the different projects emerging evidence indicates that these facilities:

- Increase SSIs' capacity to accommodate and train women.

5 A Gender Strong Unit (GSU) is defined as a unit that includes substantial representation of women overall and in positions of authority, has provided gender-equity training to all unit members, and has adequate materiel to ensure parity of deployment conditions for women and men peacekeepers. A GSU premium is an incentive the EIF can offer for T/PCCs to increase their meaningful deployment of trained and qualified uniformed women in UN peace operations.

6 Elsie Initiative Fund, *Construction of Gender-Sensitive Accommodation Infrastructure for Military Women in Support of Increased Deployment of Women Peacekeepers within Ghana Battalion*. UNIFIL Project Closure Narrative Report. December 2022.

7 Elsie Initiative Fund, *Construction of Gender-Sensitive Accommodation Infrastructure for Military Women in Support of Increased Deployment of Women Peacekeepers within Ghana Battalion*. UNIFIL Project Closure Narrative Report. December 2022.

8 Gender Unit of the Public Security Directorate, email correspondence with author, April 19, 2026.

9 Gender Unit of the Public Security Directorate, focus group discussion with the author, April 13, 2026.

10 Gender Unit of the Public Security Directorate, focus group discussion with the author, April 13, 2026.

11 Gender Unit of the Public Security Directorate, focus group discussion with the author, April 13, 2026.

12 Gender Unit of the Public Security Directorate, focus group discussion with the author, April 13, 2026.

13 Gender Unit of the Public Security Directorate, focus group discussion with the author, April 13, 2026.

- Contribute to a greater pool of uniformed women eligible to deploy as UN peacekeepers.
- Improve uniformed women's operational readiness, which in turn can improve SSIs' operational effectiveness.
- Improve women's well-being, including higher levels of satisfaction and a stronger sense of safety.
- Help normalise women's presence and increase their impact.

Childcare Facilities

Supported by the EIF, three SSIs – SNG, PSD, and ZPS – built childcare facilities. Interviews and project monitoring reports indicate women's highly positive perception of these facilities. Emerging evidence indicates that these childcare centres have manifold benefits including helping recruitment of women, improving women's work-life balance and well-being, facilitating access to training, enabling greater participation in operations and deployments, and improving institutional environments.

The Republic of Senegal National Gendarmerie (SNG) constructed a childcare centre (crèche) to support work-life balance. According to SNG, the new crèche shows positive impacts on women's attendance, participation in training and exercises, well-being, and productivity.¹⁴ SNG reports that the new crèche has enabled women to focus more effectively on work.¹⁵ In line with this, mothers serving in the SNG reported in interviews that the crèche has reduced requests for leave and increased their productivity because

it reduces mental fatigue.¹⁶ Childcare effectively lightens mothers' psychological and cognitive loads, thereby enabling them to be more present and productive. The reassurance that their children are well cared for enables mothers to participate in training and workshops without worrying about childcare, giving them "peace of mind" - a sentiment shared by uniformed women at PSD.¹⁷ Many women see the provision of childcare as an active show of institutional support.¹⁸

“ [The crèche] serves as a key tool for supporting the institution's gender policy and promoting equity. ”

- Commander Elisabeth Gandoul, Senegal National Gendarmerie¹⁹

The SNG saw an increase in the recruitment of women from 4.3 per cent in 2021 to 10 per cent in 2024. SNG officials believed that the crèche, which became operational in 2024, played a role in the increase since then.²⁰ However, they also underscored the importance of strong political will, strategic directives regarding workforce diversification, targeted recruitment campaigns and awareness raising initiatives, international partnerships (notably with the Elsie Initiative), and the implementation of a gender policy that has removed several institutional obstacles.²¹ During an EIF monitoring visit in 2025, the SNG Gender Division and senior leadership reported that the crèche is seen as “the best in the country” and that other barracks and SSIs like the SNP want to replicate it. According to the SNG, the crèche is an appealing argument for new female recruits,

14 Elsie Initiative Fund Secretariat, *Senegal Projects Mission Monitoring Report*. August 2025.

15 Senegal National Gendarmerie Officer, written correspondence with author, April 28, 2026.

16 Elsie Initiative Fund Secretariat, *Senegal Projects Mission Monitoring Report*. August 2025.

17 Senegal National Gendarmerie Officer, written correspondence with author, April 28, 2026.

18 Elsie Initiative Fund Secretariat, *Senegal Projects Mission Monitoring Report*. August 2025.

19 Senegal National Gendarmerie Officer, written correspondence with EIF Secretariat, April 28, 2026.

20 Senegal National Gendarmerie Officer, written correspondence with EIF Secretariat, April 28, 2026.

21 Senegal National Gendarmerie Officer, written correspondence with EIF Secretariat, April 28, 2026.

helping to diversify the pool of female candidates by reducing barriers associated with motherhood.

Besides recruitment, SNG also believes that the childcare facility positively impacts retention and opportunities for deployment and promotion.²² While it is too early for personnel statistics to reflect these changes, SNG maintains that the provision of childcare enables women to participate more regularly in specialized training, operational exercises, and international courses. Units report better continuity and reduced interruptions leading to improved operational efficiency.²³ SNG also reports a decrease in the number of career dropouts linked to family constraints among female staff, a reduction in career interruptions, and an increase in retention of women because of a more favourable institutional environment that normalises women's presence.²⁴ Women's ability to fully engage in their duties knowing that childcare is institutionally supported benefits their careers, opening opportunities for more operational duties, peace operation deployments, promotions, and leadership positions. However, it is important to note that it is too early for retention numbers to reflect the impact of the crèche and further monitoring will be required.

In the SNG, the introduction of workplace childcare has contributed to a positive institutional culture change. A SNG official reported that the nursery promotes a more inclusive perception of parenthood, helping to reduce stereotypes and normalise the idea that parenthood is a shared responsibility.²⁵ According to an officer, many men see the crèche as a step forward that improves the working climate for everyone, showing that support services are not just for women.²⁶ However, it should be noted that, for the moment, the crèche is only available to children whose mother serves in the gendarmerie

because of capacity constraints. Currently, that means a single father or a gendarme married to a civilian woman cannot place his children in the crèche. SNG - facing both infrastructure and human resource constraints - wants to increase the crèche's capacity and open it to children of all personnel in a gradual way that continues to provide excellent care for the children. Opening the crèche to children of all SNG personnel is important because while the current arrangement provides short-term relief to mothers, it also upholds childcare as women's responsibility thereby entrenching household and cultural barriers to gender equality. To avoid inadvertently entrenching cultural barriers related to gendered divisions of care work, SSIs should make childcare facilities accessible to all serving parents.

These childcare facilities demonstrate the potential to strengthen SSIs' talent pipeline by ensuring that women can commit to their profession. Located at duty stations and with flexible operating hours these facilities meet the needs of uniformed women navigating long shifts, unpredictable schedules, and operational duties. Early evidence from project reporting, interviews, and stakeholder feedback suggests that childcare facilities may help:

- Recruit women, thereby contributing to a more diverse and talented workforce.
- Lower stress and anxiety, providing greater "peace of mind."
- Enable women to be more present and more productive.
- Enable women to participate in training and work more effectively.
- Reduce commuting times and costs.
- Mitigate women's unpaid care work.

22 Senegal National Gendarmerie Officer, written correspondence with EIF Secretariat, April 28, 2026.

23 Senegal National Gendarmerie Officer, written correspondence with EIF Secretariat, April 28, 2026.

24 Senegal National Gendarmerie Officer, written correspondence with EIF Secretariat, April 28, 2026.

25 Senegal National Gendarmerie Officer, written correspondence with EIF Secretariat, April 28, 2026.

26 Senegal National Gendarmerie Officer, written correspondence with EIF Secretariat, April 28, 2026.

- Enable women to access more professional opportunities.
- Enable women to balance family obligation and career progression.

“ This crèche has changed my life. I hope more mothers in our profession will have access to the same support. It’s not just about making our lives easier—it ensures we can fully contribute to our work while knowing our children are safe. ”

- Gendarme Ndiaye.²⁷

What has made implementation difficult?

Infrastructure projects consistently took longer to implement than expected, exhibiting clear signs of the planning fallacy – the tendency to create forecasts and plans that are “best-case” scenarios rather than realistic estimates. This led projects to systematically underestimate time, costs, and potential barriers. Moreover, different challenges emerged at different times for projects, underscoring the importance of initial project planning efforts, quarterly monitoring and evaluation reports, monitoring visits, and contingency plans to respond with agility and purpose. Across projects, three key areas presented challenges: A lack of institutional ownership, adverse environmental conditions, and bureaucratic processes. In encountering these challenges, implementing partners and the EIF learned valuable lessons and identified several good practices.

Institutional ownership

The absence of leadership support and institutional ownership negatively affected projects,

resulting in personnel shortages, weak oversight, and compromised accountability. Without outspoken leadership support, opposition to gender-responsive infrastructure can fester and disrupt projects. During GAF’s UNIFIL deployment uniformed men voiced concerns about favouritism toward women because of newly built women-specific facilities. Such concerns from men reflect insufficient buy-in and institutional support, highlighting the importance of leadership communication. Frequent personnel rotations and high staff turnover created an unstable operational environment for multiple projects. These disruptions were exacerbated by a critical gap: SSI personnel often lack a professional background in technical project management, financial budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation. The expertise gap, compounded by fragmented communication across internal and external stakeholders, disrupted project implementation.

Insufficient proactive monitoring and dedicated oversight contributed to delays. Projects frequently stalled because lead agencies did not deploy technical supervisors to enforce design specifications, quality standards, and timelines. Without routine site inspections that include comprehensive documentation, clear progress review reports, and milestone-based approvals, SSIs were limited in their supervision of contractors.

For multiple projects, inadequate reviews of TORs and deliverables at the approval stage compromised accountability. Some projects operated without sufficient inclusion of uniformed women’s perspectives and without institutionally supported governance structures, such as steering committees, dedicated project management teams, and civil engineering experts. The lack of institutional ownership and governance led to poor coordination between implementing entities, contractors, and donors. Inconsistent communication with UN country offices and the EIF Secretariat delayed issue resolution and

27 Elsie Initiative Fund Secretariat, *Annual Report 2024*, May 2025.

prevented the timely synchronization of budget revisions with formal re-scoping and updated results frameworks.

Environmental and climate conditions

Construction projects encountered various environmental challenges that caused delays. For multiple projects, the initial location's topography and soil conditions proved to be suboptimal either requiring a relocation or unplanned excavation and the construction of retaining walls leading to delays. Inclement weather and onset of winter or rainy seasons also caused delays for multiple projects. To mitigate against climate and environmental challenges, it is important to conduct early site assessments, including topography and soil assessments, create a realistic schedule that includes detailed activity programming and contingency planning, and consider climate risks.

Another important lesson learned is to maintain contingency funds and resources to address unexpected transport disruptions or additional logistics needs caused by precarious weather conditions. Another good practice is to coordinate with local authorities and communities to identify safe access points and receive timely updates on road and transport conditions. More broadly, it is critical for the construction, operational use, and long-term sustainability of infrastructure projects to consider the current and future impacts of climate change on the buildings, their utilities, accessibility, and their usage, including droughts, flash floods, and the potential for increased frequency and severity of storms.

Bureaucratic processes

Several projects experienced delays associated with procurement, vendor management, financial processing, and approval of technical documentation. In some cases, vendor verification, financial clearances, revisions to technical drawings, and approval processes took significantly longer than anticipated. These experiences highlight the importance of realistic implementation planning, clear approval pathways, regular risk reviews, and contingency measures to address delays when they arise.

Implementation often stalled because of opaque procurement procedures, reliance on untested policies, and poorly documented bidding and evaluation processes. A lack of mandatory conflict-of-interest disclosures and insufficient vendor due diligence created compliance risks. Without mandatory ethical training, fraud awareness, or robust whistleblower mechanisms, identifying and resolving procurement irregularities became a slow process.

Delayed fund transfers disrupted project timelines. Administrative omissions, such as transfer requests missing SWIFT codes, exact dates, or dual-currency specifications (USD and local currency) constrained financial flows. Personnel turnover compounded delays; because fund transfer communications did not include all relevant organisational focal points, critical financial information was lost. Additionally, financial oversight suffered because not all projects shared internal audit and spot-check results.

SSIs lacked the contractual mechanisms necessary to hold vendors accountable for delays. In some projects - because payment approvals were not strictly linked to verified compliance - SSIs struggled to maintain schedules and construction quality, leading to the disbursement of funds without guaranteed progress. The absence of financial penalty triggers in vendor contracts further reduced SSIs' leverage to mitigate delays or enforce implementation timelines.

What remains uncertain, and what should be monitored?

Career impacts

It is too early to assess the projects' impacts on the lifecycle of women's careers in uniformed services. Early evidence shows that investment in women-specific accommodation and training facilities paired with policy reforms has the potential to positively impact women's careers, including recruitment, participation in operational duties and exercises. However, it is too soon to measure the effects on women's retention, promotion, access to leadership positions, and participation in UN peace operations deployment. SSIs need to develop and implement strategic plans for the full utilisation of new facilities to ensure they achieve their potential. Continued monitoring and future research are needed to document and examine the medium and long-term impacts on women's careers including recruitment, retention, promotion, and opportunities for training, workshops, exercises, and deployments to UN peace operations, as well as their contributions when deployed.

Operational readiness

Emerging evidence suggests that accommodation, ablution, and childcare facilities reduce women's absences, positively impact women's operational readiness, well-being, ability to focus on work, and productivity. As of now, SSIs do not have adequate measures and indicators to rigorously evaluate these effects. Accordingly, SSIs should identify and monitor indicators that measure these potential infrastructure-related impacts. These positive changes can pave the way for a new generation of diverse leaders by increasing women's retention, promotions, and leadership opportunities. Accordingly, SSIs should track the career progression of women who benefited from these investments in accommodation, ablution, and childcare.

Institutional culture

Gender-responsive infrastructure sends explicit and implicit signals that both men and women are full and equal members of their respective SSIs. By enabling all service members' full, equal, and meaningful participation in training, workshops, and all other professional activities, the built environment can contribute to the normalisation of women's presence, the reduction of social exclusionary practices, and a change in institutional culture. To monitor and examine infrastructure projects' medium- and long-term impacts on social exclusionary practices and institutional culture, SSIs should develop indicators and implement (bi-)annual surveys to measure institutional culture and men and women's workplace experiences.

Sustainability

Sustaining the EIF-supported projects and their impacts in the future is a key priority. In consecutive programming rounds, the EIF Secretariat placed greater emphasis on sustainability measures. Applicants are now required to submit detailed sustainability plans that address identified barriers and ensure long-term benefits. Applications also require signature of a Memorandum of Agreement by senior leadership to reinforce institutional support, active involvement, and projects' sustainability. Sustainability plans should include clear definitions of impact and criteria for sustainability tailored to the project. These metrics should be used when evaluating how projects will continue to create positive outcomes over time, ensuring that their impacts are resilient, endure beyond the project implementation, and remain relevant and beneficial in the medium- and long-term. Sustainability plans should establish how infrastructure projects are supported by utilisation, maintenance, staffing, and budget plans, new training programs and curricula, and new or revised policies that promote gender equality. It is critical to integrate these sustainability measures into the design and implementation of the projects from the start to demonstrate institutional ownership and enable SSIs and the EIF to communicate projects' sustainability to current and potential donors.

What are the implications for future project designs?

Buildings are a means to an end, not the end goal itself. Constructing the facility is not enough. Updating and improving facilities will not automatically shift institutional outcomes. Improving infrastructural conditions for women will have little impact without supporting policy frameworks to address institutional obstacles related to nominations for training, deployment selection, leadership opportunities, workplace culture, gender, and SHEA. Accordingly, SSIs should design infrastructure projects around the desired institutional outcome.

To improve women's meaningful participation in UN peace operations, any infrastructure

investments must go hand in hand with broader institutional reform efforts. SSIs need to develop plans for and report on staffing, facility usage, maintenance, gender-responsive budgeting, number of personnel benefitting, participation of women in training, and impact on deployment of women. Institutions should monitor and report on the recruitment, retention, career development, and deployment of women who benefit from the new facilities whether that is by attending training, having access to new accommodation, or obtaining institutional childcare. Institutional commitment and leadership support must accompany infrastructure investments to facilitate institutional culture change and ensure projects' sustainability.

Table 1. Proposal Requirements

ACCOMMODATION, ABLUTION, AND TRAINING FACILITIES	CHILDCARE FACILITIES	INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS
• Explain how the expected usage of facilities – number of beds, expected recruits, and trainees – is calculated. • Explain the expected usage by officers, non-commissioned personnel, and gender. • Show how facilities will shape training throughput and deployment preparation. • Show that institutions have training programs, training curricula, and qualified instructors to prepare personnel for the specific tasks, roles, and responsibilities associated with UN peace operations.	• Explain whom the facility will serve, i.e. what age groups, is the facility open to all uniformed personnel with children, only to mothers, mothers and single fathers, or couples in which both parents are in the uniformed services. • Include details on safeguarding standards, educational approaches, staffing plans and requirements for diplomas and certificates, as well as operating hours and how these will meet the scheduling needs for uniformed personnel participating in training, exercises, and operations. • Show how SSIs plan to pair childcare centres with corresponding training programs, instructors, certified care personnel, and supporting policy frameworks.	• Show how the infrastructure project is linked to broader institutional reform efforts. • Identify the policies, plans and budgets needed for the facility to be used and maintained effectively. • Explain how related household and cultural barriers, including care responsibilities and institutional culture, will be addressed. • Show how the facility will be staffed, maintained, and used beyond EIF funding.

To ensure the integration of infrastructure and institutional reforms, all future infrastructure proposals need to explain:

- Who will use the facilities and how?
- Who benefits and how?
- How will the facilities be maintained and with which funds?
- How will the facilities contribute to women's access to training, deployment preparation, career development, and leadership opportunities?
- How will the facilities contribute to women's operational readiness (e.g. sense of safety, well-being, productivity)?
- How will the SSIs monitor, evaluate, and report on these proposed impacts over the short-, medium- and long-term?

Conclusion

This report identified emerging evidence of the benefits of EIF-supported infrastructure projects. The early evidence from fully operational facilities is encouraging. Findings from completed projects indicate the strong potential for gender-responsive infrastructure to be an enabling factor impacting women's operational readiness, women's careers, and broader institutional culture. However, several infrastructure projects are either ongoing or have not been operational long enough to produce conclusive results. The impact of new facilities on women's operational readiness, women's careers (e.g. recruitment, retention, promotion), and institutional culture will manifest over longer time horizons than this initial research could capture. Ensuring projects' success in enabling women's participation in UN peace operations will require continued institutional and financial support.

The report underscores the importance of integrating infrastructure and policy frameworks. Increasing women's meaningful participation in UN peace operations requires SSIs to integrate infrastructure investments with existing, revised, and new policies. New facilities must be supported

by institutional frameworks that govern access to training, deployment, and leadership opportunities as well as care responsibilities, gender, and SHEA. As part of that integration effort, SSIs must seek consistent coordination and engagement with key stakeholders, including uniformed women, throughout all project stages.

The report also stresses that investment in infrastructure does not end with the completion of construction; it requires careful planning and budgeting to ensure proper utilisation, staffing, and maintenance. While the EIF can support the initial infrastructure investment, it is each SSI's responsibility to ensure its sustainability. Key lessons learned from EIF-supported infrastructure projects underline that SSIs must assume greater ownership, improve project planning, and refine bureaucratic processes to increase facilities' impact and sustainability. Gender-responsive infrastructure will be insufficient to prompt sustainable institutional change without institutional ownership, leadership support, political will, and national commitment to broader gender equality reforms.

By embarking on EIF-supported infrastructure projects, the different SSIs demonstrate that they share the fundamental goal of increasing the meaningful participation of uniformed women peacekeepers. While united in that goal, SSIs differ in their policies, organisational structure, and institutional processes. Some SSIs might have Civil Works Divisions; others might have Engineering Units instead; and not every SSI has a Gender Division. Similarly, the exact name and responsibilities of offices charged with financial and ethical oversight might differ. However, that does not negate SSIs' responsibility to act on the lessons learned and recommendations. SSIs must adapt these recommendations to their respective organisational structure and processes to meet the overarching imperative: genuine institutional commitment must complement gender-responsive infrastructure to create the diverse, effective, and inclusive institutions that enable uniformed women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in UN peace operations.



The **Elsie Initiative Fund for Uniformed Women in Peace Operations** supports and incentivises efforts to increase the full, equal and meaningful participation of uniformed women in United Nations peace operations. The Fund supports troop- and police-contributing countries, United Nations peace operations and partners to identify and address barriers to women's meaningful participation.



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