



# Gender Mainstreaming in the Canadian Armed Forces: Benchmarking with NATO Allies and Partners

## Executive Summary

---



**Viviana Fernandez and Stéfanie von Hlatky**  
**November 13, 2015**

# Executive Summary from the Workshop: Gender and the Armed Forces

---

On 13 November 2015, a workshop on gender and the military was held at Queen's University to discuss recent developments in the Canadian armed forces (CAF), in reference to gender initiatives at NATO and best practices related to United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325.<sup>1</sup> The workshop gathered experts on the military and/or on gender from various sectors, including academia, the government, the CAF and the NGO community. *The discussion highlighted a number of key points:*

- ❖ There appears to be considerable variation in the CAF regarding baseline knowledge on UNSCR 1325, even if gender-based material is part of the curriculum and training. This is also the case in other NATO countries. The participants indicated that low awareness on 1325 can be explained by lack of familiarity with terms such as “gender balancing” or “gender mainstreaming” in the military and that the CAF’s high operational tempo since 2001 may have contributed to the lack of attention paid to gender, though there were efforts to include a gender perspective in operations, as demonstrated by the mixed engagement teams in Afghanistan. Since the CAF is in a position to implement 1325 in concrete terms, a thorough understanding of 1325 goals and methods of implementation is important.
  
- ❖ Professional incentives, where possible, should be introduced within the CAF to promote gender-aware leadership. This means all commanders should learn how to incorporate a gender perspective in training and operations and that this should be strengthened at different stages of the military career. Military leaders who demonstrate good practices on incorporating a gender perspective should be rewarded and promoted. Moreover, gender advisor positions should represent an attractive professional opportunity for advancement.

---

<sup>1</sup> The workshop was sponsored by the Centre for International and Defence Policy, the Defence Engagement Program and the Conference on Defence Associations Institute.

- ❖ In order to support the policies and reforms embodied by 1325, it would be beneficial to create a space within the CAF for structured discussions on gender and how it can impact the organization's core activities and tasks. This includes both an internal dimension, i.e. how the CAF works as an organization, and an external dimension, i.e. how the CAF operates abroad in the context of its international missions. Several individuals recommended that the Department of National Defence and the CAF receive guidance from outside experts to support gender training as part of professional development. NGOs and academic experts are well positioned to offer independent assessments of how the government and the CAF are performing across the spectrum of issues covered by UNSCR 1325 and follow-on resolutions. These experts can also contribute in an oversight or review capacity. Regular exchanges between members of the CAF and civilian subject matter experts would therefore be beneficial.
- ❖ A point of heated discussion during the workshop related to how gender should be framed in the CAF context. There is a tension when it comes to tying gender issues which are internal to the CAF with the goal of incorporating a gender perspective in operations and planning. For this internal dimension, gender equity and equality are already part of the narrative, but could be enhanced by stressing the core values of Canadian society. The link, therefore, is that having more women serving in the armed forces is a projection of Canadian values internationally which influences how the CAF is perceived by allies and partners. Whether we consider training, professional military education or operations abroad, the notion that there are benefits to making the CAF more diverse could be better communicated. There should be sustained attention given to make sure military institutions are as representative as possible of the society they are serving.
- ❖ Benchmarking with allies and partners is another strategy to foster greater gender awareness and a more cohesive multinational atmosphere. This can be facilitated through online courses, knowledge transfers facilitated by workshops and the promotion of more frequent interactions between the military and civilian stakeholders in multinational settings. For example, addressing gender-based discrimination across different institutions such as sports teams, police forces, university campuses and elsewhere can help foster much needed self-assessments and comparative assessments of the CAF's practices. Solutions proposed within the CAF and other organizations need to recognize the societal context within which they are situated as discriminatory behaviour can be observed in many different professional environments. Understanding the permissive conditions of unprofessional conduct should be based on broad-based and comparative data.



## Conclusions

There is merit to arguing for a comprehensive approach, whereby both institutional and operational contexts are taken into account for the implementation of best practices on incorporating the gender perspective. The challenge, then, is about striking the right balance between making gender concepts relatable (i.e. the gender perspective can enhance our understanding of the operating environment) and avoiding the trap of instrumentalizing gender (i.e. a more diverse forces will lead to more successful military outcomes), because it places unfair pressure on under-represented groups within the organization and what the gender perspective, as a framework, can deliver.

*Corresponding author:  
Dr. Stéphanie von Hlatky  
svh@queensu.ca*