



# FROM WORDS *to* ACTION

THE EXPERIENCE OF UN SPECIAL POLITICAL MISSIONS IN COLOMBIA  
ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY





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**2016-2020**





Festival: "Agua Bonita is Painted in Colors", where more than 70 artists get together in one of the Reintegration Areas of Caquetá.  
Photo: Laura Santamaría, UNVMC

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>AFP</b>	Agencies, Funds and Programs of the United Nations
<b>ARN</b>	Reincorporation and Normalization Agency
<b>CNR</b>	National Reincorporation Council
<b>CNGS</b>	National Commission on Security Guarantees
<b>CONPES</b>	National Council on Social and Economic Policy
<b>CPEN</b>	Presidential Counsellor for Stabilization and Consolidation
<b>CSIVI</b>	Commission for Monitoring, Promoting, and Verifying the Implementation of the Final Agreement
<b>DPA</b>	UN Department of Political Affairs
<b>DPPA</b>	UN Department of Political and Peace Affairs
<b>FARC</b>	Alternative Revolutionary Force (Political party, created August 2017)
<b>FARC-EP</b>	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (Guerrilla organization)
<b>FDIM</b>	Women’s International Democratic Federation
<b>GFP</b>	Gender Focal Point
<b>GSC</b>	Gender Sub-Commission (at the Havana negotiations)
<b>GTWG</b>	Gender Technical Working Group of the CNR
<b>HRD</b>	Human Rights Defender
<b>ITPS</b>	Tri-Partite Mechanism for Security and Protection
<b>LGBTI</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Trans-sexual and Inter-sex persons
<b>MVM</b>	Monitoring and Verification Mechanism
<b>RC</b>	Resident Coordinator, RC
<b>SGBV</b>	Sexually and Gender Based Violence
<b>SEA</b>	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
<b>SPM</b>	Special Political Mission
<b>SRSO</b>	Special Representative of the Secretary General
<b>TATR</b>	Territorial Areas for Training and Reintegration
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations Country Team
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Program
<b>UNMC</b>	United Nations Mission in Colombia
<b>UNS</b>	United Nations System
<b>UNV</b>	United Nations Volunteers
<b>UNVMC</b>	United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia
<b>UN Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment
<b>UNP</b>	National Protection Unit
<b>WHRD</b>	Women Human Rights Defender
<b>WPS</b>	Women’s Peace and Security
<b>XB</b>	Extra-budgetary



Ex-combatant women from former FARC-EP, demobilized women from previous peace agreements in Colombia and social leaders from the Urabá and Bajo Atrato regions, participated in the first Women's Encounter held at the former TATR in Brisas, Carmen del Darién (Chocó).  
Photo: Melissa Jaimes, UNVMC

# WOMEN, *PEACE* AND SECURITY:

## THE EXPERIENCE OF UN SPECIAL POLITICAL MISSIONS IN COLOMBIA

**The Colombian peace process and its 2016 Final Peace Agreement are widely held to be an international model for gender-sensitivity and the inclusion of women's rights. In many respects, that Agreement embodies the vision and principles reflected in UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS),<sup>1</sup> although it includes no explicit mention of them.**

The United Nations played an active role, together with others in the international community, in encouraging and advising key actors to advance the WPS agenda during the four years of direct negotiations (2012 – 2016) between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army, FARC-EP<sup>2</sup> (also referred to throughout as "the parties"). With the establishment of two consecutive special political missions (SPMs) in Colombia to verify specific provisions of the Agreement, the UN became much more deeply involved. The mandates centred first on the bilateral ceasefire and laying down of arms by the former *guerrilla* and then on the provisions on reintegration and security guarantees. The strong gender and women's rights content of the Agreement demanded special attention and opened an important opportunity for the UN to bring to bear its experience and develop its capacities to fulfill this ambitious and necessary agenda.

This year (2020) commemorates the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNSCR 1325 and is a timely moment to highlight and learn from the accomplishments of SPMs in supporting women's participation in peace processes and promoting the WPS agenda. To this end, this report seeks to capture and reflect on the principal ways in which the UN's SPMs for Colombia conducted gender-sensitive monitoring and verification within their mandates and supported implementation of the broader WPS agenda. It also identifies some emerging lessons from this experience<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> These are: UN Security Council Resolutions: **1325 (2000); 1820 (2009); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2010); 1960 (2011); 2106 (2013); 2122 (2013); 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), and 2493 (2019).**

<sup>2</sup> In August 2017, the FARC-EP formally disappeared, as it filed for recognition as a political party, which was granted, as was previously agreed as part of the Peace Agreement under 3.2 on Political Reintegration. It kept the acronym, FARC as the name of the new political party (see list of acronyms).

<sup>3</sup> The study was conducted and written by Marcie Mersky, who has served as a member of the DPPA's Standby Team of Senior Mediation Adviser and provided strategic advice to senior UN officials and others in Latin America, South Asia, Middle East and North Africa, as well as sub-Saharan Africa.

## Chapter 1.

# WOMEN'S participation and gender- inclusion in the Colombian peace negotiations<sup>4</sup>

The peace negotiations began with almost no direct participation of women in the negotiating teams – although there were many women in key technical support roles from the very start. By the end, women had taken on much greater protagonism and managed to shape the Agreement in many ways not imagined at the beginning.

Two years into the talks, and building on other efforts, **intensive advocacy work by strong platforms of Colombian women's organizations with many years of experience and wide political credibility led to important steps forward for women's rights in the process.**<sup>5</sup> The parties agreed to include at least two women in each of their ten-person direct negotiating teams and to create a Gender Sub-Commission (GSC) that would provide advice and propose text to the negotiators.

With five members each from the Government and the FARC-EP, the GSC worked intensively and had a major impact on the content of the Agreement. The GSC was aided in its work by expert gender advisers provided by Norway and Cuba (the two international “guarantors” to the talks), as well as support from UN Women, Sweden and other international and national experts. No less important was the GSC's continuing dialogue with national women's organizations, which helped generate a shared understanding of the issues and laid the foundation for ongoing support by women's organizations for the implementation process. At the negotiations, GSC members from both sides and women on other technical teams worked together to explain to their negotiators the importance of a gender focus and of women's participation for sustainable peace<sup>6</sup> By the negotiations' end, **the GSC had ensured language in the Final Peace Agreement committing the parties both to specific affirmative actions in all five substantive chapters of the Agreement as well as to strong mainstreaming**, resulting in a peace agreement with over 130 gender and women's rights provisions.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent overview and analysis of the negotiation model used in the Colombian peace process, see NOREF (Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution), “Designing peace: the Colombian peace process,” Dag Nylander, Rita Sandberg and Idum Tvedt, February 2018, at: <https://noref.no/Publications/Regions/Colombia/Designing-peace-the-Colombian-peace-process>.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed account of the National Summit on Women and Peace, a key event which catalyzed these changes, see: [https://humanas.org.co/archivos/Sistematizacumbre\\_mujeres\\_y\\_paz.pdf](https://humanas.org.co/archivos/Sistematizacumbre_mujeres_y_paz.pdf) (in Spanish); a brief description of the event and its impact can be found in, Virginia Bouvier, “Gender and the Role of Women in Colombia's Peace Process,” UN Women, 2016, p.20, a: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2017/women-colombia-peace-process-en.pdf?la=en&vs=17>. In addition to advocating for a greater role for women in the negotiations, the Summit produced some 800 written proposals aimed at ensuring a strong gender focus in all of the agenda items. Women had also contributed proposals in nine regional civil society consultations in 2012 and 2013. UN Women played a key role in organizing the proposals from the both the consultations and the Summit and provided them to the negotiators and the GSC.

<sup>6</sup> For a general review of women's participation in the Havana talks, see: <https://colombia.unwomen.org/es/biblioteca/publicaciones/2017/05/mujeres-en-la-habana> For a critical view of some of the challenges faced by the GSC, see Louise Winstanley, “Women's Participation in the Colombian Peace Process,” at: <https://www.abcolombia.org.uk/women-participation-colombian-peace-process-latin-news>

<sup>7</sup> The chapters in the Agreement correspond to the six-point agenda that was agreed early in the process in a Framework Agreement. The agenda included five substantive items – 1. Integrated agricultural development policy; 2. Political participation; 3. End of conflict; 4. Solution to the problem of illicit drugs; and 5. Victims.— and a sixth focused on implementation, verification and ratification of the Final Peace Agreement. The English translation of the August 2012 Framework Agreement can be found at: [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CO\\_120826\\_General%20Agreement%20for%20the%20Termination%20of%20the%20Conflict.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CO_120826_General%20Agreement%20for%20the%20Termination%20of%20the%20Conflict.pdf)



Meeting of the Gender Sub-commission of women in Havana with representatives of women's organizations. OACP / Omar Nieto

The early experience of the GSC opened the way for women's participation in another key sub-commission, this time on issues usually dominated by men. The Sub-Commission on agenda item 3, "End of Conflict," was tasked with developing proposals on matters generally referred to as demobilization, disarmament and reintegration.<sup>8</sup> In their delegations to this Sub-Commission, the FARC-EP included three women with strong military experience and the Government included two women officers. While their role was not restricted to the gender content of the proposals, in one very significant development, women members of the Sub-Commission, with strong support from the UN Delegate to the Sub-Commission (see below), ensured that **acts of gender-based violence were included in the list of actions that, if committed by either of the parties, would constitute a ceasefire violation.**

Among many other provisions, the Final Agreement includes a singular vision of a gender and women's rights approach to be mainstreamed throughout its implementation. This approach:



... means recognition of equal rights for men and women and the special circumstances of each person, especially those of women... In particular, it implies the need to guarantee affirmative measures to promote that equality, active participation by women and their organizations in peacebuilding and recognition of the victimization of women as a result of the conflict. To guarantee true equality, it is necessary to put forward affirmative measures which respond to the disproportionate impact which the armed conflict has had on women, in particular sexual violence... Moreover, differential action must be taken to enable women to access the plans and programmes contained in this Agreement on equal terms. Participation by women and their organizations and the equitable representation of women in the different areas of participation must be guaranteed. The gender-based approach must be understood and applied in a cross-cutting manner in implementing the whole of the Agreement.<sup>9</sup>



<sup>8</sup> The FARC, in particular, rejected this language, and in the Colombian accords these issues are known respectively as the "Bilateral and Definitive Ceasefire and Cessation of Hostilities," "Laying Down of Arms," and "Reincorporation."

<sup>9</sup> "Final agreement to end the armed conflict and build a stable and lasting peace," pp. 204-205, available at: <https://www.peaceagreements.org/viewmasterdocument/1845>.

## MONITORING GENDER AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS PROVISIONS

The Agreement created a complex set of mechanisms to monitor and follow-up on implementation. The umbrella structure is the Commission for the Follow-up, Promotion and Verification of the Final Peace Agreement (CSIVI), with participation of the Government and FARC.<sup>10</sup> Three ancillary entities were created to support the CSIVI specifically on the gender provisions. The first of these, the Special Forum on Gender, is made up of representatives of women's organizations, recognizing their expertise and critical role in building sustainable peace. In January 2018, the Government also established the High Level Forum on Gender, a governmental coordination body led by the Office of the Presidential Counsellor for Stabilization and Consolidation (CPEC) with support from the Presidential Office for Gender Equity. This body was to monitor the implementation of the 51 gender indicators defined in the Framework Implementation Plan and coordinate the government agencies with responsibility for each indicator.<sup>11</sup> An international component to accompany the CSIVI on gender was also created, made up of UN Women, the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Women's International Democratic Federation (FDIM) and the Government of Sweden (the "International Component").

The Kroc Institute of Notre Dame University was tasked with developing evidence-based monitoring tools for all of the provisions in the Agreement, including those on gender, and to provide periodic reports based on those tools. Together with the International Component, the Kroc Institute has to date issued two reports on the status of implementation of the gender provisions. While the reports provide insights into the creative ways the process moved forward, they also reflect serious challenges yet to be overcome. Indeed, the Institute's second report, issued in December 2019, indicated that there

was a serious lag in implementation of gender provisions in comparison to overall Agreement implementation. It reported no advance on 42 per cent of gender provisions, compared to 27 per cent of overall provisions showing no advance, and that only 8 per cent of gender provisions were fully implemented compared to a 25 per cent full implementation rate overall.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, the Government, through its High Level Forum on Gender, in June 2020 reported progress on 80 per cent of the 51 indicators that are relevant to gender equality in the Framework Implementation Plan, with 14 per cent completed.<sup>13</sup> Women's organizations, such as the Gender in Peace (GPaz) platform, and the Women and Peace Forum, also issue independent progress reports on the gender provisions of the Peace Agreement.<sup>14</sup>

## WORKING WITH THE PARTIES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GENDER AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS PROVISIONS

The CPEC is responsible for guiding overall implementation of the Agreement, yet the UN Mission has had no single government interlocutor. Rather **numerous government institutions, and especially their technical gender structures, play a major role in advancing the women's rights and gender content of the Agreement.** Many of these institutions are key counterparts for the UN, as is indicated in the corresponding sections of this report. Meanwhile, while the Agreement is rich in gender provisions, the relevant national architecture on gender is generally limited in its capacity and resources. The Vice-President, who in 2018 became the first woman elected to this position, has made it one of her priorities to reinforce institutional capacity on gender, including with the establishment and strengthening of the local government's Women's Offices at the municipal level.

<sup>10</sup> In addition to the parties, Cuba and Norway serve as guarantors in the CSIVI and the Mission participates as an observer.

<sup>11</sup> The Framework Implementation Plan (FIP) was defined by the CSIVI. The 51 gender indicators in the FIP do not cover all of the more than 100 gender provisions in the Agreement; this has raised concerns from women's organizations as they believe it reflects a limited view of the scope of implementation contemplated for the gender provisions of the Agreement.

<sup>12</sup> "Hacia la Paz Sostenible por el camino de la igualdad de género: El informe de seguimiento al enfoque de género en la implementación del acuerdo de paz en Colombia," (7 December, 2019) at: [https://kroc.nd.edu/assets/345128/120519\\_informe\\_genero\\_digital.pdf](https://kroc.nd.edu/assets/345128/120519_informe_genero_digital.pdf), p.22.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.portalparalapaz.gov.co/loader.php?Servicio=Tools2&ITipo=descargas&IFuncion=descargar&idFile=358>.

<sup>14</sup> See: GPAZ: <http://generopaz.co/informes/>; y Cumbre de Mujeres y Paz: <https://bit.ly/2rIW9Mh>.

The UN's primary counterpart for gender work within the FARC is its National Commission on Women, Gender and Diversity (FARC Gender Commission). At least 23 per cent of FARC-EP combatants were women, a particularly large percentage within a guerrilla organization. **The FARC Gender Commission merits special attention given how unusual it is for the UN to have such a strong women's counterpart structure on the non-state former armed group side of a peace process.** Developed in the context of the Havana process, a handful of women with long experience in the guerrilla organization, but not holding high leadership positions, began to discuss their experiences as women and develop their own proposals.

At the same time, they began to reach out to women in different FARC-EP structures and lay the foundations for what is today a strong network of women activists in the party at the local, regional and national levels. In Havana, the women got approval from the mostly male FARC-EP leadership to create the Gender Commission as a formal part of the organization, and later had the Commission recognized as part of the new FARC political party. Now an essential counterpart for the UN nationally and locally, the FARC Gender Commission plays a critical role in advancing the gender and women's rights content of the Agreement, while at the same time fighting against women's marginalization.<sup>15</sup>



Meeting of the Special Forum on Gender with Government representatives, civil society and international cooperation for the presentation of their annual report on the progress of the implementation of a gender sensitive peace agreement. (2019)

<sup>15</sup> The UN Mission's Gender Unit has accompanied and supported the FARC Gender Commission from early on. Among other actions, in 2017 and 2018, the Mission held joint national retreats that brought together Gender Focal Points from both the Mission and the FARC, creating conditions for frank dialogue about problems and aspirations, and building strong trust and mutual respect.

## Chapter 2.

# THE UN Special Political Missions in Colombia: Mandates, structures and gender focus

Responding to the request of the parties, the Security Council established two SPMs to support the peace process in Colombia. The first, known as the UN Mission in Colombia, UNMC (the “first mission”), was authorized by UN SC Resolution 2261 on 25 January 2016 and finalized its mandate on 25 September 2017. Under the leadership of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), it was a “political mission of unarmed international observers, responsible for the monitoring and verification of the laying down of arms, and a part of the tripartite mechanism that will monitor and verify the definitive bilateral ceasefire and cessation of hostilities.”<sup>16</sup>

The UN Verification Mission in Colombia, UNVMC (the “second mission”), was established on 10 July 2017 by UN SC Resolution 2366 and began its mandate on 26 September 2017, simultaneous to the end of the first mission. It is mandated to “verify implementation by the Government of Colombia and FARC-EP of sections 3.2 and 3.4 of the Final Agreement, including the process of political, economic and social reintegration of the FARC-EP; the implementation of personal and collective security guarantees; and comprehensive programmes on security and protection measures for communities and organizations in the territories...”<sup>17</sup>

### COORDINATION IN THE UN SYSTEM

UN support to Colombia’s peace process had begun well before the UNMC was established. The Resident Coordinator (RC) and UN entities such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women, among others, had already been providing important assistance, especially during the final phase of the negotiations. Contacts with the Department of Political Affairs (DPA, now the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, DPPA) in New York about a potential UN mission were ongoing. In mid-2015, the parties invited the UN Secretary-General to provide support to the Sub-Commission on End of Conflict, anticipating that they were likely to ask the UN to play a role regarding this chapter. In July of that year the Secretary-General named Jean Arnault as his Delegate to the Sub-Commission; Mr. Arnault was later named Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and head of the UNMC.

Coordination within the UN System has been a priority throughout, with the goal being to ensure coherence of approach to the peace process from UN Headquarters to the SPMs, to the Office of the Resident Coordinator and the agencies, funds and programmes (AFPs) that form part of the UN Country Team (UNCT). On gender, specifically, at the working level, coordination began in Colombia even before the negotiations were public, initially through discussions between UN Women and the Peace and Development Adviser in the office of the Resident Coordinator, who also worked closely with DPA,<sup>18</sup> to draw attention to how they could best support the WPS agenda in the peace process.

<sup>16</sup> UNSCR 2261 (2016).

<sup>17</sup> UNSCR 2366 (2017).

<sup>18</sup> Peace and Development Advisers at the time had joint reporting lines to Resident Coordinators and DPA, in the context of the Joint UNDP–DPA Programme for Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention.



A broad view when the Security Council members voted unanimously to adopt the resolution 2261. 25 January 2016. United Nations, New York. Photo: UN Photo

As it became clear that the UN would be asked to establish a mission to accompany implementation, together with others in the UNCT, UN Women participated in the DPA-led planning process for the first mission.

**The two SPMs and UN Women developed a strategic relationship rooted in a shared understanding of their different, mutually reinforcing roles and relative strengths.** The Missions had and have good first-hand knowledge of the challenges for women at all levels related to its mandate and the WPS agenda, excellent technical expertise and high-level access with authorities to use its political resources to lift barriers and push for greater progress. UN Women has strong programmatic and technical capacity, can complement Mission expertise on issues within their mandates and take on gender issues that fall outside them.

More generally, since the beginning, the SPMs participated in the thematic working groups of the UN System, including the Inter-Agency Gender Working Group and the Gender-Based Violence sub-cluster. The UNVMC co-leads the Inter-Agency Working Groups on Reintegration and Security Guarantees, within which the Gender Adviser promotes gender-responsive actions and planning. In addition to the coordination with UN Women, there is a close working relationship with UNDP and the Peacebuilding Fund, especially on support for women-led reintegration projects, as well as with the UN Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR), which maintains a stand-alone office in Colombia, on security and protections issues.

## THE UN MISSION IN COLOMBIA (UNMC) AND THE MONITORING AND VERIFICATION MECHANISM (MVM)

The UNMC consisted of a civilian component with some 260 authorized posts, including UN Volunteers (UNVs), and a larger observer component of 450 unarmed, non-uniformed, senior military and police observers, the majority from Latin America. The Mission was headquartered in Bogotá, but most of its personnel were deployed to one of the nine regional offices and 26 local teams, the latter established to correspond to the sites where FARC-EP combatants were to concentrate and lay down their arms.<sup>19</sup>

The UN observers formed the international component of the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism (MVM), a tripartite body established by the Peace Agreement that included similar components from the Government and the FARC (each with 323 members). The MVM was charged with jointly monitoring and verifying the bilateral ceasefire and end of hostilities elements in the Agreement.<sup>20</sup> During the negotiations in Havana, after considerable discussion, a tacit agreement was reached that each component of the MVM should include 20 per cent women. Influential in the decision were previous studies that showed that with greater numbers of women in UN observer structures, the incidence of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) diminished during their operations, and better relationships could be established with women, children and other marginalized groups in the population.

The 20 per cent goal proved to be challenging for all. The Agreement established that members of the MVM should be active duty members of military or police forces at the level of colonel or higher, with field experience. The Colombian component managed to incorporate just 6 per cent women (most were young

<sup>19</sup> These sites are known in Colombia as Transitional Local Zone/Point for Normalization (ZVTN/PTN); when the laying down of arms was complete, the ZVTN became known as Former Territorial Areas for Training and Reintegration (TATR or ETCRs in Spanish).

<sup>20</sup> The UN observer component also coordinated the MVM, mediated any differences that arose between the parties and had the sole responsibility for the independent monitoring and verification of the laying down of arms.



Women from the UN Mission in Colombia had a key role in the tripartite Mechanism for Monitoring and Verification, created during the laying down of weapons. Photo: Martín López

police officers), much limited by the fact that women in the military at that time lacked the opportunity to have accumulated the type of field deployment experience required; the FARC component was approximately 18 per cent women.

The UN was challenged to meet the 20 per cent goal as well. The conditions established by the parties, including that the majority of the observers be recruited from the region, were important to the negotiators for political and operational reasons, but made it difficult to meet gender goals. Thus, in addition to other efforts, the SRSG wrote directly to Member States, both in the region and outside, encouraging them to send qualified women to serve as observers.<sup>21</sup>

With these affirmative measures, the number of women observers rose to about 12 per cent.<sup>22</sup>

The Mission took robust steps to improve gender parity across its staffing table, and by March 2017 approximately 47 per cent of the Mission's civilian staff were women, with an even higher percentage among UNVs. Priority was given to increasing the number of women among UN civilians deployed to the field to create greater balance with the larger observer component. By the end of the UNMC, about half of the P5 heads of regional offices were women, although most women in the field were young UNVs.

<sup>21</sup> Several European countries also provided women observers from early on, including Norway, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

<sup>22</sup> In the Secretary-General's closing report to the Security Council on the UNMC, he noted that 49 of 428 of the observers were women at that time; S/2017/801 (Sept 2017), paragraph 65.



Women as part of the Tripartite Monitoring and Verification Mechanism for lay down of weapons. Photo: UNMC

## 2.1. Gender work in the UNMC and the MVM

In planning for the UNMC, the staffing table included a P4 Gender Adviser. However, the post wasn't advertised until February 2017, nor on-boarded until the end of June when the mission was three-quarters into its mandated 12-month period. During this time, the role of Gender Focal Point (GFP) at Mission headquarters was assumed by the Special Assistant to the Mission's Chief of Staff.<sup>23</sup> With her support and in coordination with UN Women, the SRSB began to meet monthly with leaders of national women's organizations to discuss the peace process, share the Mission's analysis and, importantly, to listen to their concerns, criticisms and suggestions. Much appreciated by women's organizations, these regular, periodic meetings continue to date and establish the organizations as key civil society counterparts for the Mission.

As part of her role, the Mission's GFP at headquarters built the UNMC's relationships with the FARC-EP and Government GFPs in the MVM at the national level and facilitated relationships between national women's organizations and the MVM. Once civilian staff were deployed, the Mission began to identify GFPs in the field, who in some cases began building relationships with local women's organizations. Naming GFPs and building these relationships, however, was not a consistent practice and depended heavily on the decision-making discretion of the respective heads of field offices. Meanwhile, the Mission's public information team worked to ensure the visibility of the participation of women within the Mission and in the MVM, especially through social media.

In line with DPA policy at the time and UNSCR 2122 (2013), the reports on the Mission to the Security Council almost from the beginning included some information on gender issues mainstreamed throughout the text. This generally consisted of

<sup>23</sup> As a UNDP veteran in Colombia, the Special Assistant had deep knowledge of the context and civil society actors.

information on gender parity in the Mission, some data by gender on the laying down of arms process and participation in early reintegration efforts, or reports of outreach to women's groups. In June 2017, the reports began to include an additional, separate section on gender, specifically highlighting key gender issues in the implementation process. **While recognizing the important efforts to advance the gender, women, peace and security agenda in the first months of the UNMC, the arrival of the dedicated Gender Adviser brought a qualitative change to the work.** This was evidenced by rapid advances in drafting formal internal policies on gender, strengthening the network of GFPs and ensuring consistent orientation for their work, and developing strategies and guidance for implementing gender-sensitive verification.

**With regards to the MVM, despite the strong gender content of the Agreement, the tripartite body was initially designed without any internal gender structure.** At the initial training for the first group of MVM members, two women – one from the FARC-EP and one from the Government – raised the issue and were given approval to set up an internal gender group that became part of the MVM structure. **The trust and understanding built during the Havana process between the FARC-EP and the Government teams was key to a prompt resolution of the omission;** several of the principals in the MVM had worked together and taken on gender issues during the negotiations. A senior policewoman from the UN observer component was later incorporated into the internal gender group. Each component of the MVM was to name GFPs at all levels. During the laying down of arms phase, the FARC-EP had already begun to structure their network of GFPs, and it was their request to the UNMC for counterparts that led the Mission to begin to designate GFPs in its civilian component.

An initial lack of funds limited the MVM gender group's ability to conduct additional training or follow-up on compliance. Once funds were secured, however, the MVM's gender group held a round of trainings at the regional offices for the local teams. **Continuing resource restrictions and uneven levels of interest by regional MVM leadership meant that overall training was insufficient, especially given the rotation of personnel.** However, the tripartite gender group also worked with three government ministries to develop a detailed guide for MVM members on violence against women, including domestic violence, indicating the specific steps to follow in different types of cases, institutional responsibilities and rights of victims of sexual violence.<sup>24</sup> UN Women and the Mission both provided technical support. By the time the guide was published near the end of the MVM, many of the practical contents were already in use, and it has since served as the basis for new tools for responding to SGBV cases according to the Mission's mandate.

**The MVM code of conduct, among other issues, established enforceable rules on gender, including: respect for all of its members, regardless of status, rank, ethnicity or nationality, gender or creed; respect for gender equality, within and outside the MVM; and a commitment to condemn all acts or threats of sexual exploitation, violence and abuse.**<sup>25</sup> **While SEA incidents were almost non-existent, there were more challenges with the first two elements of the code, and women in the MVM and the Mission's civilian component reported various forms of daily discrimination and micro-aggression** from male colleagues in the MVM, including from UN observers. In field offices, in particular, the situation was often compounded by differences in civilian and military approaches and levels of seniority. Yet some men in the MVM were strong proponents of gender

<sup>24</sup> "Guía de respuesta para el MM&V en situaciones de violencias contra las mujeres en las ZVTN, los PTN y lugares cercanos a estos," at: <http://www.derechoshumanos.gov.co/observatorio/publicaciones/Documents/2017/171231-Guia-MMV-en-situaciones-violencia-contra-mujeres-en-ZVTN.pdf>. This publication represents the first joint product of Colombian government ministries working together with the FARC after the Peace Agreement was signed.

<sup>25</sup> See, Protocol: Code of conduct for the members of the MVM, Final Peace Agreement, pp. 251-252. In addition, the Colombian government reinforced the seriousness of these commitments, especially on SGBV and SEA issues in trainings with its senior officials, stressing that the world would be watching and that Colombia needed to set an example in its ability to maintain discipline. This emphasis in training and follow-up went beyond its MCM component to include the special police units, UNIPPEP, and the troops that would be providing perimeter and other security to the FARC demobilizations sites, especially with regards to their interactions with nearby rural communities. Some 11,000 members of Colombian security forces received gender training in this context.

equality; in those cases, **having military men as gender “champions” helped improve relations and understanding.**

On the ground, other kinds of challenges arose as well. Despite specific provisions in Chapter 3.1 of the Peace Agreement to address the health and other needs of women former combatants during the end of conflict phase, in practice, there was no effective preparation for the fact that a significant percentage of FARC-EP combatants were women, that some were pregnant and that many would have young children with them. Among the FARC-EP combatants who arrived at the sites where they would concentrate forces and lay down arms in the first two months, some 17 per cent were women.<sup>26</sup> According to an official census, by the end of the MMV some 2,267 of the 10,015 former combatants surveyed at that time were women, or approximately 23 per cent.<sup>27</sup> The number of pregnancies and births grew during this period, as did the numbers of young children, as some former combatants undertook to reunite family units, including their children who had been cared for by others.

**Meanwhile, there were initially no special provisions for women at the sites where the FARC-EP were gathering, and health and medical facilities were notoriously lacking.**

This was part of a more general problem with missed deadlines by the Government in establishing the agreed logistical and infrastructural support in the zones and sites as noted in several reports of the Secretary-General to the Security Council. UNMC teams on the ground received little guidance for responding to the situation. Rather, in some regions, **GFPs from the Mission and the MVM worked in an ad-hoc manner to identify needs and mobilize resources for pregnant women, set up systems to ensure they could get to hospitals for prenatal and other care, and press for resources to help address the emergency reproductive health and other specific needs of women.**

**A similar lack of planning for childcare facilities in some cases limited women’s participation in educational and political activities, with many women former combatants quickly falling back into a life of domestic tasks.** This situation, together with the strong cultural pull of traditional gendered roles in rural Colombia, made it difficult for many women former combatants to participate in early initiatives for economic reintegration, circumstances that continue to impede their participation today.



Female combatant of FARC-EP along with her baby reaching the a Normalization Zone (ZVTNs), territories where FARC-EP combatants laid down their arms and began transition to civilian life.

<sup>26</sup> S/2017/252 (March 2017), paragraph 35 states that 1,179 of 6,900 in the zones and points by mid-February were women.

<sup>27</sup> S/2017/801 (September 2017), paragraph 56.

## 2.2. The UN Verification Mission in Colombia (UNVMC) – the second mission: Mandate, structure and gender policies

The UNVMC began formal implementation of its mandate on 26 September 2017, although preparations had been underway for months. With the new mandate focused on verification of the provisions in the Agreement on reintegration and security guarantees, the structure of the Mission changed in important ways. In particular, the balance between the civilian and military components was inverted, with a larger civilian component and a much-reduced observer force; as of 2020, there were 446 budgeted national and international civilian staff posts, including 131 UNVs, as well as 120 international military and police observers, unarmed and non-uniformed.<sup>28</sup> A verification component was created with two major sections, corresponding to the dual nature of the mandate (reintegration and security guarantees); the MVM finalized its role and other forms of tripartite work were created; and the gender architecture was reinforced. The emphasis on territorial coverage was enhanced, with some offices relocated to ensure better access to sites with the largest presence of former FARC-EP combatants, to follow up on security guarantees, and to co-locate with UNCT field offices whenever possible. Mr. Jean Arnault continued as SRSG and Head of Mission through most of 2018; on 10 December 2018 the Secretary-General named Mr. Carlos Ruiz Massieu as his new SRSG and Head of the UNVMC.

Gender, together with two other cross-cutting issues – ethnic matters and children – would each have a single staff person at Mission headquarters and work within the verification component. The Gender Adviser position was soon moved to the Office of the Head of Mission in line with DPPA guidelines and UNSCR 2242 (2015) to allow her to better advise senior management on gender inclusion in internal processes, verification, political discussions and Mission priorities.

**The change in the nature of the mandate created much greater space and new challenges for gender work, as the sections in the Agreement on reintegration and security guarantees include both transversal and specific provisions on women's rights and gender.** Gender-sensitive analysis, reporting and verification took on a more prominent role in the UNVMC than in the first mission, and despite the many remaining challenges in this regard, in general the second mission has seen a stronger incorporation of the WPS agenda into multiple aspects of its work.

Mr. Ruiz Massieu meets bimonthly with the representatives of national women's organizations for an exchange of information and analysis on the peace process. In addition to his meetings with FARC party leadership, he also meets periodically with members of the FARC Gender Commission. The SRSG also maintains a regular dialogue with the Presidential Counselor for Stabilization and Consolidation, who leads governmental efforts to implement the Agreement, with gender issues incorporated as a part of the broad agenda for implementation.<sup>29</sup>



Carlos Ruiz Massieu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General visits productive projects of pisciculture and agriculture carried by former FARC-EP members in the municipality of Santander de Quilichao, Cauca. Photo: Daniel Sandoval, UNVMC

<sup>28</sup> According to UNVMC Human Resources data breakdown March 2019.

<sup>29</sup> As evidence of its commitment on these issues, the Government has indicated that it will unveil a National Action Plan on WPS (NAP) in October 2020 to coincide with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UNSCR 1325.

**The Secretary-General's quarterly reports to the Security Council continue to include a dedicated section on gender issues, while relevant information on women is included throughout other sections.** The latter references are most often quantitative (e.g. number of women former combatants enrolled in educational programs or involved in new productive projects), and the inclusion of this kind of data differentiated by gender is helpful for visualizing women's presence in the process. The reporting may also reflect concrete needs or initiatives involving women in reintegration processes or security guarantees. The dedicated section on gender is typically used to highlight strategic gaps or advances, especially as relates to overall government policies or to the gender structures of the institutions involved in Peace Agreement implementation.

**This section and the gender content throughout are valued by women activists within Colombia, as well as others in the international community as an important means for providing national and international visibility to the challenges of women former combatants and the role of women as peacemakers, as well as for urging full implementation of the ambitious gender-inclusive provisions of the Agreement.**

## **UNVMC INTERNAL GENDER POLICIES AND DPPA POLICY ON WPS**

The Gender Adviser who joined the UNMC with just three months left in its mandate, continued in her functions in the UNVMC, bringing much needed technical expertise and leadership to the Mission on gender issues. She began to develop the needed internal policies and tools and has been able to assemble a headquarters-based Gender Unit with two additional donor funded staff and a UNV on loan from within the Mission. This Unit addresses all gender-related issues of the Mission's work including verification, political matters and internal issues, such as gender parity. **While still challenged to meet the needs for gender expertise within the Mission, having at least this small dedicated team (now three women and a man) has been crucial for carrying forward the WPS agenda and supporting gender-sensitive implementation of the Agreement.** Despite the strong focus on women's rights and gender in the Agreement, the adviser position has remained at the P4 level, not the senior level (P5 or above) referenced in UNSCR 2242 (2015); there are no other budgeted gender positions.

**Developed to align with DPA/DPPA policy on WPS, a Mission-wide Directive on Gender, Women, Peace and Security was approved by the SRSG in December 2018.**

It identifies this work as one of the Mission's priorities, as follows from its mandate, UNSCR 1325 and subsequent WPS resolutions. Six components are defined as integral parts of that priority: active and meaningful participation of women; gender sensitive verification, and verification of gender provisions within Reintegration (3.2) and Security Guarantees (3.4); gender sensitive analysis and reporting; training and strengthening gender capacities; coordination with the Gender architecture within UN agencies, international cooperation and civil society; and gender parity within the Mission.<sup>30</sup>

**The Directive formally mandates a network of Mission GFPs, defines their principal tasks and creates a Gender Task Force, headed by the Deputy SRSG. To strengthen overall responsibility and accountability for full implementation of the Directive, a number of additional**

<sup>30</sup> See, "UNVMC Directive on Gender, Women, Peace and Security," 18 December 2018, p. 2.

**tools have been instituted and are beginning to show results.** On the individual level, every staff member must now include an action point on gender in their yearly work plans, and the annual performance review incorporates corresponding criteria on gender. Compliance is also being strengthened through implementation of an annual reporting instrument for all of the Mission's regional offices and headquarters units to demonstrate concrete progress on all elements of the Directive and identify successful practices.

**The Mission's Gender Parity Strategy covers three major areas: implementing gender sensitive hiring practices; defining specific numerical targets for all contract types; and promoting efforts to change institutional culture and attitudes to ensure an inclusive working environment that allows for parity and effective equality, irrespective of gender.**

The Mission has been particularly effective with regards to the hiring process and the numerical targets. The recruitment process has been adapted so that job announcements include gender language and encourage women to apply, especially for posts in units with deficits; indicators are used to track parity throughout the process; and the public information office produces materials that highlight the role of women in the Mission to inspire women to apply.<sup>31</sup> Regarding numerical targets, according to an end of 2019 report, **across the entire Mission, 49 per cent of personnel are women.** The substantive component leads the way with 56 per cent women staff compared to 42 per cent at the end of 2017. This includes 41 per cent of professional level field staff, with 48.5 per cent of field office teams led by women. UNVs continue to have the highest percentage of women at 55 per cent. Significant progress has been made with regard to international observers, with 33 per cent women compared to 15 per cent in 2018. There are still deficits at D1 levels and above and in the Mission Support and Security Units.

**The greatest challenge for fully implementing both the Gender Parity Strategy and the Gender Directive is still the third element: changing the internal culture.** Greater gender parity and gender trainings have not been sufficient to effect a major cultural shift. Beyond individual personalities, the cultural challenges may in part be exacerbated by the legacy of having mostly men in top leadership positions in the first mission and the lack of clear, internal prioritization of gender and WPS issues until well into the second mission. Other factors include:

- a lack of full appropriation by some at the level of heads of offices and sections to "gender work" as a collective responsibility;
- a tendency to view "mainstreaming" issues as "secondary" or the exclusive responsibility of the specific GFPs;
- an attitude of compliance because it's required, occasionally with some resentment and without a stronger commitment;
- resistance to understanding how deeply gender shapes the experience of armed conflict and the experience of combatants and former combatants, of how it shapes potential peacebuilding models and approaches to solutions, or how any of this should inform the work.

Dedicated resources have been lacking for gender-related training, and such activities have generally not been prioritized by different Mission components. While much learning happens during the actual work process, there is no regular reinforcement training for staff, except for GFPs. Gender topics may be included for training in periodic regional retreats at the discretion of the heads of regional offices. Written support materials are also available, including the Mission's Verification Manual that includes sections on gender-sensitive verification. **A "Handbook on Gender-Sensitive Verification" was also developed to provide more detailed and accessible instructions for those involved in verification** and reporting functions.<sup>32</sup> Reportedly, however, these tools are not utilized in day to day work as fully as they should be.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-8SckVjg-e3073SwTDG1V0fioLTWfU04>.

<sup>32</sup> Ana Paola Tinoco and Devanna de la Puente, "Guía práctica para la verificación con enfoque de género," UNVMC, August 2018.

## GENDER FOCAL POINTS WITHIN THE UNVMC

**Built on the experience of the first mission, especially in the field offices, the current network of GFPs is the backbone of the UNVMC's substantive gender mainstreaming effort**, in support of the mission headquarters Gender Unit. None of the GFPs were hired as gender experts, and they have multiple other responsibilities in their offices. Fourteen of the GFPs are men, including two observers. Much effort has gone into institutionalizing their role as defined in the Directive, strengthening leadership's support for that role and providing ongoing coordination from mission headquarters. As of 2019, there were 54 GFPs, with 50 in the regional, sub-regional and local offices, providing about 15-20 per cent of their time to gender issues.<sup>33</sup> The GFPs in headquarters units are generally less engaged, feel less ownership of gender issues and rely heavily on the Gender Unit.

In addition to virtual meetings between the Gender Unit and the field-based GFPs every month, all of the GFPs gather annually to share experiences, discuss challenges, set priorities and participate in follow-up training. The Gender Unit communicates frequently with the GFPs to provide guidance, discuss concrete situations and help with problem solving. Primarily focused on support to issues of reintegration and security guarantees, the Mission's GFPs have been key in building strong relationships with local women's groups and leaders, the FARC GFPs in their area and with the local authorities who play a role in implementing the gender content of the Agreement.

Civil society women and former combatants participated in a workshop on peacebuilding and prevention of violence against women. Quibdó, Colombia  
Photo: Melissa Jaimes, UNVMC

**In line with the Mission's broad commitment to strengthening women's participation, the GFPs work systematically to ensure a place at the table for women leaders – both from the FARC and the community – in local decision-making structures.** The relationships built with local women's groups are particularly noteworthy, as these groups have little access to national-level participation or representation, but often play a prominent role in their communities.

**The work with local women's organizations also provides insights for a fuller, gender-sensitive political analysis than would be possible only with national-level counterparts, as well as an understanding of the different challenges and potential of Colombian women as peacebuilders in different local contexts.**

Finally, the work of the GFPs is essential for ensuring the Mission's gender-differentiated reporting; they often play a role in the trainings the Mission provides to Colombian police and military forces at the regional and local level.



<sup>33</sup> As of March 2010, according to the Gender Advisor, the Mission has 50 GFPs in the field, 39 of them were UNVs, five police observers, five national officers and one P4 head of a sub-regional office.



The Peace Agreement has allowed encouraging constructive dialogue between former combatants and indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. Carrizal, Remedios, Antioquia. Photo: Giovanni Ferma, UNVMC

## 2.3. UNVMC: Mainstreaming gender in verification

### GENDER-SENSITIVE AND PROACTIVE VERIFICATION

Verification is the core of the Mission's mandate, and considerable effort has gone into developing methodologies that are gender-sensitive and respond to both the specific challenges of the Colombian context and the complexities of the Agreement. As part of the legacy of the first mission and the MVM, the UNVMC continues to use a general framework of "proactive verification," in which the emphasis is placed on identifying and resolving the gaps and challenges detected rather than simply reporting them. **This focus on analysis and problem-solving has allowed the Mission to play a strong role in supporting the parties in their efforts to find common ground and advance implementation.** It uses the typical channels of a mission's legitimacy and good offices at different levels to draw attention to problems, pass messages of concern and offer assistance. It has also meant finding resources, often from UNCT or international community sources, for example to complement or reinforce government efforts, support participation of women's organizations or strengthen FARC gender structures.

**Within this overall approach, the Mission has developed tools to strengthen and ensure gender-sensitive verification.** The Handbook referenced above lays out three major actions: collecting information differentiated by gender; analysis of that information; and forming a judgment as to whether the situation corresponds to the gender and women's rights provisions in the Agreement. The most important types of differentiated information are identified as: roles, use of time, access to information, control of resources, needs, risks, and impacts, as well as the factors that influence the opportunities for people of different genders. In addition, with input from the Gender Unit, the formats prepared by the Verification Division for periodic reports from the field offices provide specific instructions for gender-differentiated reporting in line with Mission-wide priorities set every three months.

While these tools have supported notable advances in gender-sensitive verification, several challenges remain. In many cases, the work still falls mostly to the Gender Unit and GFPs, rather than being shared across all personnel. In addition, even when the information is gathered and analyzed, little of that analysis may make its way into written monthly reports. **There is still considerable disparity in the priority given to women's rights and gender issues in the field offices and units at Mission headquarters.** In the field, some of this reflects differences in local contexts, but by most

accounts, it is due to variations in the level of support from each head of office. Staff in these positions have significant discretion regarding the prioritization of each office's work, how it is organized, and whether women's rights and gender issues are included in reports or in the agendas of meetings with authorities.

This formal and informal reporting is complemented by information provided to the Mission by women's organizations, the FARC Gender Commission and gender structures in the Government, UNCT partners and others. Overall, the reporting helps inform the setting of the Mission's priorities on verification related to gender; identify issues that should be brought to the attention of the parties, relevant institutions or other stakeholders; recognize innovative experiences; visualize possible solutions; and in a very synthetic form, frame the gender content of the Secretary-General's reports to the Security Council.

## NATIONAL POLICY ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION

According to the Government registry of accredited former FARC-EP members, 23 per cent are women, yet in 2019 the FARC Gender Commission puts the figure closer to one-third, of whom 18 per cent were heads of households.<sup>34</sup> Yet even as initial reintegration efforts began, **the Mission's verification work showed that women former combatants were not actively involved in decision-making on economic reintegration initiatives and that the skills trainings offered them tended to reproduce traditional gender roles.**

Early problems were related in part to the lack of an official reintegration policy. Different visions on the issue were brought to the Havana negotiations, and few details were included in the Peace Agreement.<sup>35</sup> Instead, the Agreement created the National Reincorporation Council (CNR), with two members each from the Government and the FARC,



Fariana Confecciones a productive project. Former TATR Ponderos, Fonseca, La Guajira, Colombia. Photo: UNVMC

to define the activities and timeline of the reintegration process, monitor implementation and approve productive project proposals.<sup>36</sup> A national policy, with content proposed by the CNR, was finally approved in June 2018 more than 18 months after the Peace Agreement went into effect.

When the CNR was created, however, there was (again) no gender structure in its design. Women from the FARC and the Government who had participated in the Havana process came together once more and proposed a Gender Technical Working Group (GTWG). Subsequently established as a permanent part of the CNR, the GTWG played a vital role in developing the national reintegration policy. It continues to play a critical part in implementation, and, with regard to reintegration, is one of the Mission's most important institutional counterparts on gender and women's rights issues.

As the GTWG – which is composed of five women from the Government and four from the FARC – began developing proposals for the national policy, it drew on the census data on FARC-EP former combatants, input from the Mission, and, notably, the “Comprehensive Reintegration Strategy for Women Former Combatants” that had been developed by the FARC Gender Commission during the early stages of the FARC's transition to civilian life. By the time the policy discussion intensified, the GTWG was ready with solid

<sup>34</sup> FARC Comisión Mujer, Género y Diversidades “Enfoque de Género en la Reincorporación,” PowerPoint presentation (2019), slide 4. According to that Commission's estimates, women were 33% of the former guerilla component of the FARC.

<sup>35</sup> The Government favored a model focused on individual reintegration, while the FARC was committed to a collective model, as a matter of principle and because they believed this would be key to in building organizational unity. The Agreement finally recognized both collective and individual options, but provides little additional guidance, which was later developed through the CNR and the National Council for Social and Economic Policy (CONPES).

<sup>36</sup> The Colombian government has a complex institutional structure, in general and specifically related to the peace process. The government component of the CNR initially included representatives from the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace; the latter was eventually replaced by the Presidential Council for Stabilization and Consolidation.

proposals. **The final reintegration policy includes 18 strategic components to ensure gender equality as well as an overarching commitment to women's economic empowerment "guaranteeing their access, control and administration of resources" in the reintegration process.**<sup>37</sup>

For the Mission, the national policy provided a more specific framework for its verification of gender and reintegration than the Agreement had offered. To aid in implementation, with the GTWG in the lead, UN Women, UNDP and the Mission together supported the development of "Tools for the Inclusion of a Gender Focus in Economic Reintegration."<sup>38</sup> Directed to government institutions, local authorities and civil society groups, this publication explains the policy's gender contents and suggests concrete steps for implementation.

## GENDER-SENSITIVE AND PROACTIVE VERIFICATION OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION

The Mission's work on socio-economic reintegration of women former combatants relies on strong relationships with the gender architecture of the Government and the FARC in order to share and confirm information, identify gaps and strategize on actions to overcome the obstacles women face. This is mostly led by the Gender Unit at the national level and the GFPs in the field. Periodic high-level informal dialogue sessions on gender and reintegration, between the SRSG, government heads of agencies, the FARC leadership, UN Women and others from the international community were also important for building common analysis and priorities at the senior-most political level, where almost all positions were held by men.

In addition to the CNR/GTWG the gender technical structures in the Agency for Reintegration and Normalization (ARN) and the Presidential Council on Stabilization and Consolidation (CPEC) are important counterparts for the Mission with the Government.



Female ex-combatants and women from the communities learn bakery. La Montañita, Caquetá, Colombia

**Significant progress has been made in developing a strong set of gender-sensitive norms, procedures and indicators, yet converting those into effective action in line with the national policy on women's economic empowerment has been slower and remains challenging.** A lack of specific resources for gender components, difficulties in translating agreements made nationally into local actions, pressures to implement productive projects regardless of gender considerations and traditional views on women and the family are some of the deepest obstacles.

**The strong relationship with the FARC Gender Commission has been especially important for the Mission's work on reintegration.**

The women former combatants' aspirations for reintegration tend to be more aligned with a high standard of meaningful participation and empowerment than most government models. These have, in practical terms, continued to focus on men or envision women mostly in traditional or ancillary roles.

The Mission's work has covered all aspects of women's socio-economic reintegration in the Agreement, including relating to equal access to education and general health

<sup>37</sup> National Council for Social and Economic Policy (CONPES) 3931(2018), p. 104; in Spanish: [http://www.reincorporacion.gov.co/es/Documents/conpes\\_fin-lal\\_web.pdf](http://www.reincorporacion.gov.co/es/Documents/conpes_fin-lal_web.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> Available in Spanish at: <https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20colombia/documentos/publicaciones/2019/08/herramientas%20para%20la%20inclusin%20del%20enfoco%20de%20gnero%20en%20procesos%20de%20reincorporacin%20economica.pdf?la=es&vs=5733>

care, as well as sexual and reproductive health. In addition, **childcare issues continue to be a barrier, limiting women's participation in vocational training, formal education, productive projects and political activities. The Mission, together with UN Women and other UN agencies, has therefore worked closely with the FARC Gender Commission to support the FARC's model for community care giving** and has advocated with the Government that day care facilities be created to respond to their needs. Nine such facilities had been set up by the end of 2019; many more are still needed in areas where groups of former combatants have settled and are trying to create new lives. A project supported by the UN Peacebuilding Fund, working with the Government, FARC and the UN, has been critical to establishing day care facilities adapted to the “economy of care” model developed by the FARC Gender Commission.

## A FOCUS ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND ITS CHALLENGES

**The Mission's engagement in this area has focused on supporting the economic empowerment of women through their leadership and meaningful participation in collective and community productive projects.** This work faces many challenges. Like women in many places, women former combatants in Colombia face multiple obstacles to such participation, including conflicting domestic responsibilities, transportation issues, spouses who don't want them to participate or a less tangible tendency for men to ignore their voices. For single mothers the situation can be even more difficult.

**For women former combatants in Colombia, as in other conflict contexts, the relative equality they believed they had achieved as combatants quickly dissipated as they returned to civilian life.** Especially for those at the base level, their lives often increasingly resemble those of other poor rural women in a deeply male-dominated cultural context. In many cases, they face greater stigma in their communities than male former combatants because they broke with social norms; in the popular consciousness they may be viewed as



In the former Territorial Space for Training and Reintegration of Santa Lucía, Ituango, women played a key role in the development of productive projects such as bakery. Santa Lucía, Ituango, Antioquia. Photo: Elizabeth Yarce, UNVMC

“bad mothers” who abandoned their children or “loose women” who ran off with the guerrillas. Moreover, without the military discipline of the guerrilla fronts, some women have faced a new threat of domestic violence, with its debilitating effect on their dignity and possibilities for participation. Meanwhile, **within the FARC political party, women still have limited presence in top leadership roles.** Only two women from the FARC hold seats in Colombia's Congress,<sup>39</sup> while men sit on virtually all of the bipartite bodies established to follow-up on different aspects of Agreement implementation, including for reintegration.

The Mission consistently draws attention to and builds collaborative dialogues with relevant actors on these continuing challenges. **In combination with its sustained field presence, the Mission has used its access and influence in national policy and implementation structures to identify problems and suggest solutions, while accompanying women former combatants as they build new lives and clarify their goals.**

<sup>39</sup> Both women are Senators. The Final Peace Agreement guarantees the FARC ten seats in Congress (five in the Senate and five in the House of Representatives) during two electoral periods; see, Final Agreement, Chapter 3.2.1.2.a.

## MOBILIZATION OF RESOURCES AND UN ENGAGEMENT WITH DONORS

To address some of these issues, and in parallel to its work with the national policy process, from an early stage the Mission took practical steps to address the critical lack of livelihood options for former combatants and overall delays in the project approval process. In a concrete application of its proactive verification model, in 2018 the UNVMC began to build partnerships to support income generating micro-projects for former combatants, both men and women. With strong leadership from the Deputy SRSG and backing from the SRSG, the Mission used extra-budgetary (XB) funds from DPPA and other funds mobilized from the international community for this initiative. Priority sites were selected jointly with the FARC and the Government. Working with UNDP as the implementing agency, in a first round, the Mission supported nine women-led project (about 20 per cent of the total) and ensured that all projects had gender dimensions.<sup>40</sup>

It soon became clear, however, that **even when one or two women held a formal leadership position in a typical productive project, there was no guarantee of a meaningful role in decision-making or advances toward their economic empowerment. Thus, in a second phase, the Mission decided to support projects exclusively designed and led by women and has encouraged others in the international community to do so as well.**<sup>41</sup> This led to priorities that did not always coincide with those proposed by the FARC political leadership, particularly at the local level. **The donor earmarking of some XB funds for supporting WPS issues and new DPPA gender guidelines were essential for moving the plan forward.** The Mission's field staff worked closely with women former combatants as they developed their proposals, assisting them to open relationships with local authorities and organizations when needed. With more funds for each project and a stronger focus on community insertion and sustainability, implementation of the first five projects began in late 2018, mostly in rural areas. Five new projects were approved for women in urban settings in early 2019,

where the challenges are particularly complex due to greater isolation and stigma. Some of the earlier projects have been more successful than others, and follow-up is ongoing. A third phase is under way focused on community-based projects, all of which have gender components. In the more successful experiences, women are beginning to create new models for reintegration, injecting new energy into the difficult process of transitioning to civilian life.

The Mission also supports efforts by FARC women to work with local women's groups and in partnerships with communities. **Based on a recognition of common challenges and a desire to help rebuild the social fabric in their communities, while advancing the women's rights agenda, these relationships are beginning to shape potentially innovative reintegration proposals that include non-FARC women as well. The Mission has been active in seeking technical and financial support for many of these efforts.** In one instance, strong coordination with the Peacebuilding Fund has allowed the Mission to provide input for a large reintegration effort being implemented by UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women to support productive projects and social impact initiatives to improve the living conditions of women former combatants and their children in several regions.

**Multiple pressures, including the slow pace of overall implementation of reintegration projects, have meant that gender inclusion has not always been a determining factor for support.** Thus, the Mission has worked with the European Union and others in the international community who are providing funds and other support to the reintegration process to help ensure that gender-inclusive guidelines are followed in the projects they support. In addition, GFPs in several regions are working closely with the local Joint UN Working Groups to coordinate efforts and promote greater support for women in the reintegration process.

<sup>40</sup> S/2018/874 (September), paragraph 28.

<sup>41</sup> By mid-2019, only one such project had been submitted directly to the CNR for consideration. The international community has supported some similar, women-led projects in different parts of the country, but there is little coordination or joint prioritization regarding these types of projects.

## GENDER-SENSITIVE VERIFICATION OF POLITICAL REINTEGRATION

In line with the focus in the Agreement on the formal electoral process, **the Mission gave considerable priority to the October 2019 local and departmental elections. These were the first elections at this level in which candidates from the new FARC party participated or former FARC-EP members participated with other political parties.** In its verification, the Mission gave particular attention to the participation of women former combatants and other FARC party members in their first opportunity to run for local public office. Out of some 300 FARC party candidates, or candidates running in coalitions including FARC, 38 per cent were women. While these women fared less well than their male counterparts – they won just two of the twelve elections carried by FARC candidates – they set an example and acquired important leadership experience that will be carried forward in their work.

**The Mission worked with the Public Ministry and the National Electoral Committee to ensure that the women had equal access to resources as other candidates, including protection measures.** The Mission's gender structures ensured that the situation of the FARC women candidates was monitored. This process led to important insights into the prevalence of security risks for them, as well as for other women. The fact that women candidates received threats at the same rates as men established the importance for the Mission to collect gender-differentiated data on security issues (see next section). Many of the women candidates requested forms of protection; the Mission worked with the responsible authorities to ensure that individual and collective measures were created for them.

**With the framework provided by UNSCR 1325, verification of the political reintegration of women former combatants is not exclusively focused on electoral participation. In practice, the Mission's work has also meant examining the degree and quality of women's participation in various decision-making spaces,** whether these be in productive



National Meeting of Women of FARC in June 2019. Gathering more than 300 women former combatants to review the progress and challenges of their social, economic and political reintegration.

projects, in local councils on development or service provision, about security issues and protection arrangements, or at the national level, for example, in the institutions most involved in Agreement implementation or in other consultative processes. The Mission's work in this regard has been important for improving access to decision-making spaces for women former combatants and supporting them in their efforts when needed.

## GENDER-SENSITIVE VERIFICATION OF SECURITY GUARANTEES

Reports to the Security Council frequently identify the security situation in conflict-affected areas as the gravest overall risk to the peace process. Men have been more frequent targets than women. However, according to the 2019 report on Colombia by OHCHR, between 2018 and 2019 there was a 50 per cent increase in killings of women human rights defenders (WHRDs) and social leaders, and in one 15-month period alone (March 2018 to May 2019), the human rights ombudsperson's office (*Defensoría del Pueblo*) documented 447 threats against women HRDs (WHRDs), most with sexist content, sexual insinuations and/or threats against their families.<sup>42</sup> Some sources also reported a more rapid increase of threats and killings of WHRDs than of men.<sup>43</sup> **These security incidents have a chilling effect and directly impact**

<sup>42</sup> Defensoría del Pueblo.

<sup>43</sup> See report on the presentation of Diana Rodríguez, Gender Delegate of the Defensoría del Pueblo, Conclusiones III Encuentro Puntos Focales de Género, UNVMC, 4-5 de julio de 2019.



The ethnic approach in the Peace Agreement has been one of the topics addressed during the strategic dialogues organized by the Dabeiba Cabildo Mayor. Dabeiba, Antioquia. Photo: Camille Risler

**on women's possibilities to participate actively in peace process implementation and within their communities.**

Killings of former FARC-EP men have also created further isolation, stigma, risk and economic hardship for the women and children they leave behind, an issue the Mission has begun to highlight through its good offices.

Chapter (3.4) on security guarantees in the Agreement reflects the overall complexity and seriousness of this situation. The chapter identifies the categories of people for whom security will be guaranteed, which include former combatants and their families, members of the new FARC political party, human rights defenders (HRDs), social leaders and communities.<sup>44</sup> It also identifies the specific types of groups that should be prosecuted and disbanded for their role in perpetrating threats and attacks on the above categories of people, and it defines the roles for multiple state institutions, both existing and several to be created, in combating those groups and/or providing protection to those who have received threats or are at risk. This intricate framework poses many challenges for verification. **From a gender perspective,**

**both for the parties and within the Mission, the main challenges have been ensuring adequate attention to women's security issues and developing an effective, differentiated approach on the measures and procedures for prevention, protection and investigation regarding security threats for women and LGBTI persons.**

**WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, COMMUNITY LEADERS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES**

In its work on security guarantees for WHRDs, social leaders and their communities, the Mission maintains strong relationships with the multiple national institutions that play a role in the prevention, protection and investigation of security threats and attacks. These include the National Commission on Security Guarantees (NCSG), headed by the country's president and tasked with ensuring the security of at-risk communities and coordinating state efforts through a public policy to dismantle the illegal armed groups behind the vast majority of attacks. After much effort by the Mission

<sup>44</sup> Chapter 3.4 on Security Guarantees of the Final Peace Agreement: [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CO\\_120826\\_General%20Agreement%20for%20the%20Termination%20of%20the%20Conflict.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CO_120826_General%20Agreement%20for%20the%20Termination%20of%20the%20Conflict.pdf)

and advocacy by women's organizations, representatives of WHRDs and community peacebuilders were granted a seat as non-voting participants in the Commission in early 2019. It is hoped that this civil society participation will lead to greater attention to women's security guarantees and that their participation is formalized as part of the new regulations of the NCSG. In another positive step, the NCSG's internal Sub-Group on Gender has been reactivated recently.

The Mission also works closely with women's organizations at all levels on these security issues. With years of hard-won experience, these organizations are very much in the lead. The Mission has supported them in their advocacy with the Government, leading to **an important achievement in early 2020 when the Ministry of the Interior launched the action plan for the Comprehensive Programme of Safeguards for Women Leaders and Human Rights Defenders, based in large part on proposals from women's organizations.**<sup>45</sup> Together with UN Women, the Ombudsperson's Office, the Minister of Interior, and others, the Mission has helped mobilize resources and undertake advocacy efforts to support the establishment of the regional forums defined in the action plan, with a pilot in two regions where women leaders and WHRDs have been most at risk.<sup>46</sup> In the Mission's field presence, staff work closely with women's organizations and the relevant authorities to promote effective implementation.

## **FORMER COMBATANTS AND FARC PARTY MEMBERS**

Most public attention has focused on women social leaders and WHRDs. However, the Mission has also worked to strengthen efforts to address the risks and security guarantees for women former combatants, as a key part of its mandate. While the particular risks for women former combatants have been less visible, as most killings have affected men, nonetheless, women and men may receive threats in similar proportions as was made evident during

the local elections. In addition, **security risks and protection needs for women former combatants occur across a wider spectrum than for men, ranging from forms of domestic violence to the threats they might face due to other criminal or political factors.**

On these specific security challenges, the Mission collaborates closely with the FARC Gender Commission. It also works with structures established by the Peace Agreement such as the Technical Group on Protection and Security for former combatants, former combatants' families, and members of the FARC political party. The Sub-directorate of the National Protection Unit (SESP/UNP, see p.22) and the Tri-Partite Mechanism for Security and Protection (ITPS) are also key interlocutors, as they facilitate coordination of the respective security measures for these groups. Drawing on the experience of the MVM, the ITPS includes representatives of the country's public security forces, the ARN, the FARC (through the SESP) and the Mission (generally represented by an observer).<sup>47</sup> As part of its work with the ITPS, the Mission early on supported the development of a gender strategy agreed by all of its members. As one result, FARC GFPs now participate in most ITPS monthly meetings (as do the Mission's GFPs). **Through their participation, there is now a defined course of action regarding security risks and attacks against women. Nonetheless, especially at the regional and local levels, there is considerable variation in attention given to women's security concerns and the specific risks they confront.** Many women former combatants have proposed different types of protection schemes, yet they often report that these requests are not prioritized, leaving them to face growing risks with little support and limiting their possibilities for active participation. To address knowledge and experience gaps for ITPS members, the Mission's Gender Unit recently developed a "clinic" case methodology for training, focused on the practical, concrete steps to be taken in cases of security threats against women.

<sup>45</sup> See, S/2020/239 (March). This report also mentions that early progress has been made with the National Protection Unit (UNP, which provides close protection to political figures and others at risk) implementing a new protocol to strengthen risk assessments for women leaders and HRDs.

<sup>46</sup> The Mission also works on this project with IOM, OHCHR, the Ministry of the Interior, the Inspector General's Office and women's organizations.

<sup>47</sup> Created several months before the 2018 national elections for president and the legislature, the ITPS was initially set up in response to security concerns regarding FARC members who were candidates and their campaign activities. Initially two state entities participated: the National Protection Unit (UNP), which provided close protection for persons at risk, and the Special Police Unit for Peacebuilding (UNIPAZ). More recently, they have been joined by the national police, the army and the ARN.



Indigenous communities of Santa María, Riosucio (Chocó)  
Carmen del Darién, Colombia. Photo: Melissa Jaimes, UNVMC



Women FARC-EP former combatants shared their experiences in a gathering to verify the Gender Perspective in the Peace Agreement. Tierra Grata, Manauare, Cesar. Photo: Jorge Quintero, UNVMC

## CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is a critical security issue in Colombia, primarily affecting women and girls. The armed conflict left more than 30,000 registered victims of sexual violence committed by all actors. Given this history, the Peace Agreement and subsequent implementing policies included provisions for the prevention and response to SGBV in conflict-affected areas, as related to the specific populations identified.<sup>48</sup> **The Mission has observed a growing risk of SGBV as a tactic for territorial and social control by illegal armed groups and other structures that control illegal economies, as they reconfigure their operations.** Official data cites some 365 cases of conflict-related sexual violence in 2019, an increase of more than one-third from the previous year, and under-reporting is likely. Risks are especially high for women and girls from indigenous and afro-descendant communities, due in large measure to long-term structural deficits in State presence and high levels of activity by illegal armed groups in their territories. Members of the military have allegedly been involved in several recent cases of sexual abuse in communities.

The Mission has also observed an increased risk of domestic violence and other SGBV in areas of reintegration. While the Agreement directly addresses attacks and threats perpetrated by specific illegal armed groups identified in Chapter 3.4, **SGBV within the domestic or community context are, of course, similarly destructive to that committed by illegal armed groups and seriously impede women's participation and full enjoyment of their rights, when they are targeted.**

The Mission works closely with UN Women, IOM, ARN, FARC Gender Commission, women's organizations, and the Ombudsperson's Office among other key actors to support strong preventive measures and responses for SGBV and CRSV. It developed specific guidance for addressing SGBV as part of its verification work and in good offices efforts,

<sup>48</sup> On security guarantees, see, ONU Mujeres, "Cien medidas que incorporan la perspectiva de género en el Acuerdo de Paz entre el gobierno de Colombia y el FARC-EP para terminar el conflicto y construir una paz estable y duradera," pp. 25-27; for situations related to the reintegration process, see CONPES 3931 (2018).

included both in its verification manual and in the gender-sensitive verification handbook. However, in practice, attention to these incidents still varies according to the criteria of each head of office, who might consider them to be part of the mandate for verification, or not. Meanwhile addressing Gender Based Violence issues in reintegration areas has also been challenging. Further guidance is being developed to ensure more consistent attention to these issues at all levels in the Mission.

## GENDER AND STATE SECURITY INSTITUTIONS

The security chapter of the Agreement also mandated the creation of a sub-directorate of close protection specialists within the National Protection Unit (UNP), the official body that provides security to political figures, social leaders, and other persons with special security needs. The new sub-directorate, the SESP, focuses on the security and protection of FARC-EP former combatants, their families and members of the FARC political party. The Mission strongly promoted the inclusion of women former combatants as part of the bodyguard component of the SESP. The initial group selected included roughly 20 per cent women. By the beginning of 2020, the SESP had grown to include 164 women, 146 of whom are former combatants, about 12 per cent of the total number of bodyguards and 20 per cent of all former combatants in this role.

**This is the first time in Colombia that women have been trained to serve as state-provided bodyguards; it affords an important example of women's potential to contribute in new professional roles.**

Building on relations established in the MVM, the UNVMC works closely with national police and military in its work on security guarantees. This includes providing training on gender, often with civil society or government partners, to members of the military and police forces, especially those involved in providing security in the areas where former FARC-EP members remain in large numbers. **The Mission has also undertaken to raise the level of understanding of the important roles that women in the military and police can play and to encourage these forces to deploy women in strategic functions to field operations.** Unfortunately, much of the positive MVM experience – when women and men from the three components worked together and played such an important role in the field – has been lost over time. In this respect, the Mission continues to encourage implementation of the gender mainstreaming policy of the Ministry of Defence and to collaborate with other actors promoting this agenda.

A woman ex-combatant graduates as body guard as part of the close protection body created for former combatants under the National Protection Unit. The diploma given by the Chief of the UN component of the Tripartite Mechanism. Photo: Renata Ruiz, UNVMC



## Chapter 3.

# EMERGING LESSONS and recommendations

**The Colombian peace process and Final Peace Agreement were ground-breaking in incorporating women's participation in peace talks and strong women's rights and gender provisions. The experience of successive UN Special Political Missions in supporting Colombia's parties and society in the verification and implementation of the Agreement has similarly broken new ground and provides lessons for the UN and broader international community on how to support the gender-inclusive implementation of peace agreements. The breadth and depth of the experience in Colombia offers valuable lessons for other contexts in advancing the WPS agenda, particularly where the UN is involved.**

The following are the principle lessons that have emerged from the experience to date, together with some recommendations that build on the experience:

### 3.1. Mission strengths for advancing the WPS agenda in the peace process and gender-sensitive verification

#### **Strong UN leadership, both political and technical, is unquestionably the most important factor for advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda.**

The SRSGs who have led the SPMs in Colombia have provided essential political leadership for advancing the WPS agenda through the work of the Missions, through their own good offices and through other personal gestures, large and small, that demonstrate respect for women's leadership and contributions in the peace process. This leading by example has taken many forms, including regular political meetings, together with senior staff, with the leadership of national women's organizations and the FARC Gender Commission; using their good offices to encourage greater support for the gender structures of both parties; ensuring that gender and the role of women has consistent visibility in reporting and in the Mission's public information efforts; and insistently seeking support from the international community for the Mission's gender work and for that of others. More consistent efforts to include discussion of gender issues in high-level political meetings with government authorities and FARC leadership, as well as international UN partners, including in specific meetings on reintegration or security guarantees would be helpful. It would be important to ensure that substantive senior management and heads of regional offices adopt this regular practice as well.

Expert technical leadership within the Mission, in the form of the Gender Adviser, has also been essential and complements the political leadership provided by the SRSG. The guidance provided to the Mission's senior managers as well as the support given to the gender architecture of the parties have been crucial in enabling the Mission to advance the gender contents of the Agreement and the WPS agenda more generally.



The Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and Head of the UN Verification Mission in Colombia holding his regular meeting with representatives of women's organisations, accompanied by the country representative of UN Women. Photo: UNVMC

### **Coherence at all levels within the UN and coordination on the WPS agenda in the peace process are essential.**

Coordination within the UN System has been a priority throughout Colombia's peace process. It has been built from the bottom up, at the working level, and from the top down and is reflected in strong political and programmatic coordination. It applies to efforts to advance the women's rights contents of the Agreement and the WPS agenda, as well as to the UN's work on the peace process overall. UN reform has provided a positive framework, and the personal commitment of the SRSGs and Resident Coordinators (RCs) who have served during the peace process, has provided strong leadership for this approach. Clear policies from the Secretary-General and the USG DPPA also provided a critical framework for the SPMs in advancing the WPS agenda. With the UNCT, and especially in the Mission's relationship with UN Women, the mutually respectful strategy of building a shared vision, combined with a clear division of roles, has made for an exemplary and fruitful partnership.

The Security Council also demonstrated strong commitment to the WPS agenda in Colombia. In its two country visits, the Council raised the WPS agenda with the Government, engaged with women leaders in civil society meetings and encouraged reinforcement of safeguards for women. The strength of the Council's support and concern was further emphasized by it twice inviting Colombian women leaders to brief its sessions on Colombia, inviting Colombian women to brief the Council at other thematic debates and meetings, issuing press statements that encourage stronger efforts on women's reintegration and security guarantees, and by holding a meeting of its Informal Experts Group on WPS on Colombia.

**SPMs can benefit from an extensive field presence, a well-coordinated network of gender focal points and high-level access when these are integrated as strategic resources for advancing the gender and women's rights contents of peace agreements and the WPS agenda.**

The emphasis on deploying personnel to field offices in close proximity to where former combatants are establishing their civilian lives allowed the SPMs to develop direct knowledge of the multiple challenges that women face in reintegration and for their security. This daily proximity and knowledge is especially important for conducting strong gender-differentiated verification and for supporting women former combatants in their process of transition. Much of the direct contact with women's everyday realities, as well as with that of other women in the communities, falls to the GFPs. They play an essential role in the Mission's ability to support the gender content of the Agreement within its mandate. The strong articulation of the gender architecture between the field and Mission headquarters has meant that the Mission can present well-documented examples of specific gender challenges in its high-level meetings with national authorities to substantiate the need for more concerted efforts to turn policies into effective action. This strategic combination of direct field knowledge, strong gendered analysis and high-level political access has been the foundation for success in supporting implementation of the gender and women's rights content of the Agreement and the WPS agenda.

**Highlighting progress and challenges in gender-sensitive implementation of peace agreements in the Secretary-General's reports to the Security Council, together with a strong Mission communications strategy, is an effective means for raising awareness and advancing the process.**

With the political weight and credibility of the Secretary-General and the Security Council behind them, the reports on the SPMs in Colombia have become important tools for advocacy work by national organizations and for efforts by the international community to encourage and support stronger efforts by the parties to advance the women's rights agenda in the Agreement. The quarterly nature of the reports also keeps the analysis timely and provides momentum for the process. The Mission's communication strategy, with its strong focus on social media, has helped amplify the impact of these reports as well as other aspects of the Mission's gender work.

The reports to the Security Council could be even more effective if they incorporated more elements of gender-sensitive conflict analysis and included consistent references to its qualitative elements, for example, to the factors that differentiate the experience of the reintegration process for men and women or that present unique security risks for women's participation. Including such elements could increase understanding of the need for resources specifically directed to women or of why it makes a difference that there be women-led reintegration projects. In general, more emphasis on women's rights and gender concerns in these reports would be important both to better reflect the very strong emphasis in the Peace Agreement on issues related to the WPS agenda – and the challenges for implementation – and to set a bar for other UN missions.



The UN Verification Mission official, Isabel Kawka, reviews the list of elements delivered to the former combatants for the fish farming project. Carmen del Darién, Colombia. Photo: Melissa Jaimes, UNVMC

**Extra-budgetary funds are valuable for supporting strategic gender work, and the Colombia experience may provide an example for other missions in this regard.**

Access to extra-budgetary funds from DPPA has been important for the Mission to be able to respond to gaps identified through its work. In addition to supporting locally-led initiatives to prevent SGBV and promote gender equality and reconciliation, these funds have been directed to women-led reintegration projects with a clear emphasis on women's economic empowerment. Gender earmarking and other gender requirements for the funds facilitate this focus. While the funds are sufficient only for a few productive projects, their example may well generate greater support for the model under development and serve as a catalyst for other innovative women-led initiatives. Strong UN System coordination has been essential for this aspect of the Mission's work and should continue. At the same time, given the challenges identified for women in other productive projects, it is important to seek greater engagement from related government agencies and other actors working on women's economic empowerment to accompany and support these initiatives towards sustainability.

## 3.2. Advancing the WPS agenda with internal Mission policies and practices

**Mission-wide internal gender policies are essential and are supported by the strong alignment within the UN and new tools for accountability; the greatest challenges are often concentrated in aspects of internal culture.**

Strong alignment within the UN, starting with the Secretary-General and the USG DPPA, has provided a robust framework and important support for the Mission's internal policies on gender, including the mission's Gender Directive to orient its substantive work and the Gender Parity Strategy, focused on personnel and the internal work climate. The DPPA Gender, Women, Peace and Security Policy (2019) has been essential for establishing the main parameters for the Mission's policies and the DPPA WPS 'commitments' and indicators for setting strong monitoring and reporting requirements to support accountability.<sup>49</sup> Yet the internal culture still presents challenges, as it is not always conducive to ensuring an inclusive work environment and effective equality. Continued strong political leadership is needed to counter persistent patriarchal attitudes and to advance to a next level of full assimilation of these policies. Some possible measures in this regard include:

- addressing up front the need to change mission culture so that it aligns more fully with UN policy goals on internal gender equality;
- ensuring that heads of field offices and substantive sections fully internalize the Gender Directive and act in consonance with the priorities and responsibilities it establishes, given that the Mission's practical priorities are effectively set at this level; and
- taking further steps to recruit and empower women in senior positions within the Mission.

**The ambitious gender content of a peace agreement requires that an SPM have commensurate resources and specialized capacity to support implementation.**

The specific gender and women's rights provisions of the Colombian Peace Agreement that fall within the UNVMC mandate, the need for gender-responsive implementation, and the UN's increased knowledge of the challenges it faces in supporting that work, have not had a significant impact on the resources budgeted to ensure strong gender-sensitive verification throughout the Mission. Even as the scope of gender work expanded greatly under the second mandate, there was and is only a single budgeted gender post, with an ad-hoc arrangement using surge funding and an internal loan to create a small Gender Unit at mission headquarters. While the network of GFPs provides important additional human resources, often they do not have prior gender expertise, or they may not be fully empowered by their respective heads of office or unit. Budgets reflect priorities, and a single budgeted P4 gender post could be interpreted by those involved as a lack of priority by the UN. Going forward, in Colombia and in similarly tasked missions, a single senior Gender Adviser should be considered an absolute minimum, and further budgeted specialized gender posts and other resources should be contemplated, in line with DPPA policy and relevant Security Council WPS resolutions, and based on an analysis of the mandate and the specific challenges of the context. Additional expert staff would not be intended to replace the shared responsibility across all Mission staff for the WPS agenda, but rather to support it. Finally, a senior Gender Adviser should be part of a mission advance team to ensure gender-sensitive analysis, planning and mandate implementation from the very beginning.

<sup>49</sup> UNVMC Gender Directive (2018) and Reporting tool for UNVMC Gender Directive (2019).

### **More systematic internal training on gender can help mainstream a high level of gender-sensitive analysis, reporting and verification.**

Internal gender training is a component of the Mission's annual gender work plans. However, limited human and financial resources have constrained capacity to implement training activities in a systematic manner for staff, with the exception of the GFPs. Greater priority to internal training, especially on strategic issues such as gender-sensitive political and conflict analysis, how to use the handbook on gender-sensitive verification, and best practices for including gender in reporting could help reach a higher and more consistent standard of reporting across the Mission. The DPPA WPS Policy establishes clear requirements and guidelines to ensure such coverage, and any remaining deficits in its implementation should be addressed. Some experiences also suggest that it could be helpful to include more positive elements in trainings, such as a focus on the benefits for the work of a gender-sensitive approach or more emphasis on understanding harmful masculinities.

### **The experience of the Monitoring and Verification Mechanism during the first SPM demonstrated the multiple benefits of including women in such operations and underscores the importance of including gender criteria in the selection and posting of UN observers, especially for leadership roles.**

The tripartite MVM was a unique and successful experience for the monitoring of the definitive bilateral ceasefire and laying down of arms at the end of the armed conflict. The UN, the Colombian Government and the FARC-EP all committed to include a significant percentage of women as senior military and police officers in their MVM components. The experience demonstrated the importance of having women involved in these types of operations. In addition to contributing to low levels of SGBV and SEA, women in the MVM ensured strong attention to the emergent needs and concerns of women former combatants embarking on a transition to civilian life, facilitated stronger relationships with women in surrounding communities, and demonstrated the clear capacity of women to contribute equally with men and lead in complex field operations.

The experience also suggests measures that could strengthen a gender-responsive environment in future UN observer components in peace missions:<sup>50</sup>

- *Use the Colombia experience to generate greater awareness and acceptance of the positive role of women in military and police field deployments.* The capacity of women in the MVM provided an important example for Colombia to encourage further deployments of women in strategic police and military operations; documenting the experience would provide a resource to promote greater gender inclusion by other Member States in field deployments of their own military and police forces as well as in observer contingents.
- *Allow greater flexibility on rank and field experience and encourage Member States to include gender-sensitive criteria and, if possible, more diverse experience, in recruitment of observers for UN missions.* This would help increase women's participation as observers, reduce internal issues with discrimination and allow all observers to contribute equally with their experience.

<sup>50</sup> It should be noted that the UN observer component in the UNMC was relatively small compared to many UN missions, did not play a typical peacekeeping role, did not include troops, and were unarmed and non-uniformed. These significant differences may make it difficult to incorporate some of the experience in Colombia in other contexts.



ASOMIC Association signs agreement for the fishing project in Former Reintegration Area La Pradera. Puerto Asís, Putumayo, Colombia. Photo: Laura Santamaría, UNVMC

- *Incorporate gender criteria for observer leadership positions in UN missions:* Especially at the national and regional levels, this would help ensure greater compliance on non-discrimination and create a more conducive work environment for women observers.
- *Identify male “gender champions” among observers and ensure they are distributed throughout a mission structure.* They are often able to communicate ideas in ways that other military men understand more easily. Committed “gender champions” can help create a more conducive environment for gender equality, when working in the context of strong mission gender policy and coordination.

### 3.3. Addressing some challenges of implementation

**Even with significant national ownership of the women's rights and gender provisions in the Agreement and strong national institutions and organizations, implementation is challenging and requires dedicated resources; at the same time early gender-sensitive analysis to identify contextual obstacles and suggest mitigating strategies could be helpful to pave the way.**

An overview of gender issues within the UNVMC mandate suggests that, in general, progress has been especially significant in developing needed policies, normative frameworks, decision-making procedures and coordinating bodies. Yet making these function to produce the conditions and generate the changes envisioned in the Agreement is still a work in progress. The most obvious constraint has been limited government financing and technical capacity in the institutions responsible for their implementation, especially at the regional and local level. This has been a persistent problem, frequently highlighted in reports to the Security Council;<sup>51</sup> continued efforts to support the Government to address these issues are essential.

There are other contextual and structural challenges for implementation that may be more complex, reflecting countervailing cultural and political dynamics. In other contexts, early efforts to identify and begin to address some of the contextual challenges during the initial stages of implementation, when energy typically runs higher, could be helpful. While such efforts may be beyond the scope of a SPM, a coordinated effort with the UNCT and other stakeholders could be feasible. Drawing on the Colombian experience, strategic analysis and actions could include:

- *Identification of the specific needs of women former combatants during a demobilization process.*
- *Gender-sensitive analysis of contextual or structural obstacles and identification of mitigation strategies, which could be conducted as a UN System exercise, with close engagement with women's organizations and others with experience on different conflict-related issues with similar challenges for implementation.<sup>52</sup>*
- *Analysis of the women's rights and gender provisions in a peace agreement to define a "strategic path."* Conducted jointly with stakeholders, such an exercise could identify those provisions that open the way for others, could have the greatest impact, or face the greatest obstacles. In Colombia, early on, the Mission and the UNCT divided responsibilities for the gender provisions in line with their respective mandates, yet no deeper strategic analysis appears to have been done, including to ensure gender-responsive implementation of broader (non-gender specific) provisions within the UN's mandate. It could still be useful to conduct such an analysis, with several years of accumulated experience to enrich it.
- *Early trainings with local authorities and decision-makers as well as with male former combatants, to address the fact that in state institutions, local governments and among former combatants patriarchal attitudes can persist, and understanding and technical capacity on gender and women's rights diminishes down the ranks and in rural contexts. Such trainings could address the benefits of the gender provisions and gender-responsive implementation of peace agreements and identify specific respective roles for turning the commitment into reality.*

<sup>51</sup> See for example, S/2018/874 (September), paragraph 58; and S/2019/265 (March), paragraph 84.

<sup>52</sup> In Colombia, this could have included experience from the work on reparations for women victims or with families of the disappeared.



Women former combatants on their way to the high school graduation ceremony of the “Arando la Educación” program of the Ministry of Education. Former Reintegration Area, Georgina Ortiz, Vista Hermosa, Meta, Colombia. Photo: Bibiana Moreno, UNVMC.

### 3.4. Specific thematic work in Colombia: Challenges for reintegration and security guarantees

#### **Economic empowerment is a key focus for the reintegration of women former combatants; the Colombian experience also suggests a need for a broader rethinking of reintegration models for women.**

The Mission’s work, and that of others, to promote women’s leadership in economic reintegration through women-led productive projects and other actions aimed at their economic empowerment has been essential. While implementation has been slow, new initiatives, designed by women former combatants and shaped by a desire to help rebuild the social fabric of their communities, are beginning to generate innovative proposals and experiences.

In the course of this study, several other issues emerged that suggest the need for a broader rethinking of reintegration models for women. The large numbers of women former combatants in Colombia, their significant degree of organization and the framework provided by the Peace Agreement meant that the Colombian experience can contribute to such a rethinking of approaches to reintegration for women. International experiences on reintegration, as well as previous Colombian experiences, were mostly designed with the assumption that former combatants are men. This has generally led to a singular focus on income-generation, especially so that men will not be tempted to return to arms.<sup>53</sup> Yet in addition to their economic challenges, many women face other challenges as well, as they try to remake their lives and find meaning in new forms of work, education, activism and/or in domestic life. Many of the women want to develop the type of strong family life they could not have during their years in the guerrilla fronts, but often imagine that life on different terms, with domestic and care-giving responsibilities shared so they can develop other aspects of their lives and other capacities not predetermined by traditional gender roles.

<sup>53</sup> For an excellent review of literature on women and reintegration experiences, see: Wenche Iren Hauge (2020), “Gender dimensions of DDR – beyond victimization and dehumanization: tracking the thematic;” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 22:2, 206-226.

Experience to date in Colombia merits further study both to enrich the ongoing process and as a possible means to develop new concepts of reintegration, especially for women. While well beyond the scope of this study, some questions emerged that merit further examination, including:

- If reintegration is understood to mean building a new life project, where does economic empowerment fit in and what other issues are important for women?
- How do economic needs, and different approaches to fulfilling them, relate to other needs and aspirations women may have, for example, as political actors, mothers, homemakers or peacemakers, or for constructing their identity as part of a new community?
- Are there ways to integrate these different elements or aspirations into multi-dimensional programmes rather than solely livelihood projects?

**Security and protections for women are essential for their ability to participate meaningfully in the implementation of a peace agreement and should be a priority; women's direct participation in the official structures that define protection and security policies aid in ensuring attention and a differential approach to their risks and needs.**

The Mission has made important contributions with its support for women's direct participation in the key institutions and national decision-making bodies responsible for the security guarantees for former combatants, social leaders and HRDs. This seat at the table, especially at the national level, has allowed women to advance their concerns and proposals from the inside and ensure strong differentiated policies, protocols and guidelines. Nonetheless, at the regional level, women's participation in these structures is not always guaranteed and women's security problems are not always on the agenda. Greater internal coordination within the Mission on security issues and more consistent efforts at the regional level would be important. When heads of offices and UN observers give priority to protection issues for women and LGBTI persons, they can be very effective, with both their Colombian police and military counterparts and with the FARC leadership.

**Careful consideration should be given to addressing CRSV and SGBV in a systematic fashion, as well as to the limiting effects of domestic violence on the possibilities for participation and reintegration by women former combatants.**

The changing context in Colombia poses increasing risks for CRSV and SGBV, as well as the exposure of women to a complex continuum of violence, including domestic violence. The mission's technical guidance developed to address these incidents should be followed consistently in the field offices to ensure an adequate and appropriate response. These tools can potentially be built upon for other contexts. In line with UNSC resolutions and DPPA policies on WPS and CRSV, and given the deep, lifelong and sometimes intergenerational, impacts of these forms of violence on survivors and their families, these issues merit a fuller policy discussion within Missions to define a context-specific strategy to address them systematically, including fully incorporating SGBV and CRSV into a mission's verification and other work.

### 3.5. Strong partners and gender architecture for implementation

**SPMs are strengthened through strong relationships with national women's organizations, whose efforts can lay the foundations for strong national ownership of gender and women's rights content in peace agreements and their gender-responsive implementation.**

Colombian women's organizations bring a level of knowledge, technical expertise and sophistication on the issues as well as a degree of recognition as political actors that is rare in conflict-affected contexts. Together with the exemplary work of the Gender Sub-Commission in the negotiations, women's organizations ensured the inclusion in the Peace Agreement of women's rights and gender language that echoes UNSCR 1325 and made the Colombia Agreement an international model. Their strengths have made them essential partners for the SPMs in developing priorities and strategies to advance implementation of the gender provisions in the Agreement. At the same time, their work has formed the basis for a degree of national ownership of gender-sensitive peace accord implementation missing from many contexts where UN missions are established. Having clear provisions on gender and women's rights in a peace agreement, as well as strong national actors who recognize that content as their own, also creates an additional layer of motivation and resolve for a Mission to mainstream the WPS agenda, beyond the UN's institutional commitment to that agenda.

Specialized and well-resourced gender architecture is essential for peace agreement implementation and is a strategic partner for UN missions; such gender structures merit all technical and political support to enhance their role.

The Colombian experience demonstrates once again that specialized gender technical architecture, with decision-making power and resources, is crucial for advancing women's rights and enhancing their role in a peace process. Yet even after strong gender and women's rights content was included in the Colombian Peace Agreement, with one exception (for monitoring and follow-up), no such specialized structures were part of the original, highly-developed institutional design for implementation. In future experiences, given the strong guidance in Security Council resolutions on WPS, the UN and Member States should play a more proactive role in ensuring that such structures are included in the design and planning stages. The gender architecture of both parties has now become the key counterpart and strategic partner for the Mission's work. Sharing analysis and jointly strategizing with them has led to important advances. Nonetheless, these structures lack consistent support, decision-making power or sufficient resources within their own institutions. Continuing efforts by the Mission, together with others in the UNCT and the international community, to enhance their role will be critical for moving to a next stage of implementation that effectively empowers women as envisioned in the Peace Agreement.

**Women former combatants play an exceptional role in Colombia; their experience can be helpful for women in other contexts who face many of the same challenges in transitioning to civilian life.**

Rarely in international experience has the UN had such a strong women's counterpart from a non-state former armed group as in Colombia. Members of the FARC Gender Commission have collectively constructed a vision for their civilian lives, and for their families and their communities, which provides a foundation for a new and meaningful life project. Their capacity has greatly facilitated the Mission's gender work and enriched the Mission's understanding of the resilience and leadership of women former combatants as peacemakers and the multiple ways they can contribute to their communities. In parallel, the Mission's understanding of women former combatants' vision as well as its consistent technical support and accompaniment, are greatly valued by the FARC Gender Commission and local gender committees and have been essential for building trust and advancing the process. This close accompaniment has been important in less tangible ways as well, in setting an example in contrast to the stigma women face and helping lessen the isolation that many of them feel.

**The critical support for the WPS agenda by members of the international community can complement and magnify the work of SPMs on gender and women's rights; it represents an essential partnership.**

International community support for the WPS agenda in Colombia pre-dates the establishment of the SPMs by many years, and the Colombian experience demonstrates the importance of long-term international support to women's organizing efforts in conflict contexts. Germany, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom have played an especially important role in this respect. Whether directly through their cooperation agencies or via their support for UN Women, funding for women's civil society has been a critical factor in enabling organizations to develop their expertise and capacity. Support for international training programmes and exchanges of experiences on women in peace processes, such as the UN High-level Seminar on Gender and Inclusive Mediation, the UN DPPA Ceasefire Mediation Course, and the meeting between the GSC and women former combatants from around the world, which was facilitated by UN women during the Havana Peace talks. Almost every woman interviewed for this study from the Government, the FARC-EP and NGOs mentioned the importance of their participation in such events.

Decisions by the international community to earmark specific percentages of funds to be used for gender-specific activities are increasingly important for Peace Agreement implementation. At the working level, participation by the Gender Adviser in the established spaces for donor coordination has been key for building a strong partnership. The Mission's detailed knowledge of local conditions and insights into the situation of critical government agencies provides essential guidance for shaping funding priorities. Finally, there has been significant political synergy as well, as the Mission's reports create opportunities for the diplomatic missions of Member States to encourage greater support by the parties for gender-sensitive implementation of the Agreement.



In the department of Meta, organizations of women victims of the armed conflict and the organization of former female combatants in this department have united to raise their voices against all forms of violence against women. This photograph was taken in Villavicencio, Meta, in 2019. Photo: Carlos Lesser, UNVMC



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