

CIVIC Contribution to the Secretary-General’s review on the future of all forms of UN peace operations

CIVIC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Secretary-General’s review on the “future of all forms of United Nations peace operations.” Future UN peace operations—whether large multidimensional missions or small, modular deployments—will remain among the most important tools in the international toolkit for civilian protection, deterring violence, enabling humanitarian access, and strengthening national protection capacities.

CIVIC’s field research in contexts from CAR and DRC to South Sudan and Mali, along with our programmatic engagement with UN presences and [AU peace support operations](#) in other contexts, has examined mission [transitions](#), budgets and capacities, [early warning systems](#), and civilian harm mitigation. Through the [POC@25 dialogue series](#) and sustained policy engagement, CIVIC has advanced reforms to make protection more effective and sustained in transition settings. As a member organization of the [Global Alliance for Peace Operations](#), CIVIC supports the recommendations of the GAPO [Policy Paper](#) on protection.

Protection threats will persist in future conflicts, and the UN will continue to be called upon to respond directly or support others in doing so. Even missions with limited mandates must integrate protection from the outset. This review is a chance to embed system-wide prioritization of protection, strengthen coordination across the UN system, and build stronger partnerships with regional organizations, civil society, and other non-UN actors.

Prioritization of protection regardless of mission mandate, configuration, or model

- 1. Prioritizing protection is a Charter responsibility. It is also necessary to maintain UN’s legitimacy.** Prioritizing the protection of civilians is a legal and moral obligation under the UN Charter and the Agenda for Protection. Field mission legitimacy rests heavily on local and international perceptions that the UN can credibly meet core protection responsibilities, even under political and financial strain. Failing to deliver on this commitment risks eroding trust, weakening consent, and diminishing the UN’s convening power at precisely the moment when geopolitical polarization makes it most vital.
- 2. Missions must engage with national authorities and other key actors on protection.** Effective political engagement with national authorities, security institutions, and other influential actors is essential to open the space for protection

work and to ensure operational access in volatile environments. The use of missions' good offices role as well as local-level dialogue, and backed by coordinated diplomatic support from Member States, can secure agreements on protection priorities, mitigate harmful conduct by national forces, and create community protection mechanisms that endure beyond a mission's presence.

3. **Member states must provide diplomatic and financial support to missions and align their political strategies with UN or region-led protection approaches.** Too often, Member States have failed to align their diplomatic messaging with protection priorities or to match mandates with the resources required to deliver them. CIVIC's research on peacekeeping budgets, mandate renewals, and field practice shows that these gaps undermine mission leverage, dilute political strategies, and leave critical protection capacities under-resourced or absent altogether.
4. **The UN's convening power is one comparative advantage. Missions need to use their political capital and legitimacy to ensure international actors are supporting national protection capacities.** A mission's convening authority can be one of its most important tools, enabling it to bring together national institutions, civil society, and a diverse range of international partners behind a coherent protection agenda. By applying the New Agenda for Peace concept of "networked multilateralism," missions should actively use this critical advantage to align and coordinate disparate actors toward strengthening national protection systems and reduce duplication or contradictory approaches.

Civilian-centered peace operations and inclusion

5. **Communities play a central role in their own protection, but need support.** Communities are often the best-placed to address the protection threats they face, yet their capacities remain under-recognized and under-supported. CIVIC's research across missions consistently finds that investing in local protection committees, early warning networks, and dialogue platforms not only improves responsiveness but also builds resilience that endures beyond the mission's lifespan.
6. **Missions should engage not just in strategic communication, but two-way communication with communities.**
 - a. **Two-way communication between missions and communities is essential to understand evolving threats, dispel misinformation, and ensure protection strategies reflect community priorities.** When missions create regular, accessible channels for dialogue, like community liaison networks, mission strategies and plans are better informed by ground realities.

- b. **Peacekeepers need to be able to engage with the people they are trying to protect.** One of CIVIC’s consistent findings from field research has been the need to prioritize the deployment of uniformed and civilian personnel, including troop contingents, with the right language capabilities. Interacting constructively with communities is absolutely vital, and should be a top concern alongside other important considerations when deploying contingents.
- 7. **Future peace operations must support national actors to be more inclusive of civil society, and work to transfer community engagement and early warning capabilities (while mitigating risks).** For protection to be sustainable, national authorities need to engage meaningfully with civil society and adopt, to the extent possible, proven community engagement and early warning practices from missions. In transition contexts, deliberate transfers of these approaches and capabilities are needed to increase national responsiveness to protection threats.
- 8. **Regional deployments face challenges but offer outstanding opportunities to be more civilian-centered and improve community engagement.** Regional forces can face significant barriers to community engagement, from limited civilian staffing to language and cultural gaps, yet they also bring proximity and political leverage that can be harnessed for protection. Often regional deployments have narrower, security-focused mandates than UN peace operations, limiting the extent of civilian-centered approaches, including community engagement, strategic communications, or partnering with local civil society. Given the likelihood of future UN missions partnering with or supporting regional or subregional deployments, this is an opportunity to bolster regional approaches to civilian-centered protection.

Professional capacities and integrated approaches

- 9. **Peace operations need dedicated civilian capacities to understand protection threats, develop integrated strategies, and implement unarmed approaches to protection.** Dedicated civilian expertise is critical for analyzing protection threats and designing context-specific, comprehensive protection strategies, including those that rely on unarmed approaches to protection. Civilian peacekeepers like protection advisors, civil affairs officers, strategic planners, and operations or information coordinators (deployed at the [field office level](#) as well as mission headquarters) are instrumental in delivering on protection mandates.
- 10. **Missions need civilian and uniformed personnel who understand new technologies, how new technical applications are being deployed in warfare,**

and how they can be used by peace operations. The UN needs to deploy personnel with specific expertise and skillsets that evolve to match the changing nature of war. The use of drones, and communications technologies that enable the wide and rapid spread of mis- and disinformation are primary examples.

11. Integration leverages the comparative advantages of various components.

Integrated approaches allow missions to draw on the distinct strengths of military, police, and civilian components in a mutually reinforcing way, at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Future UN peace operations—whether structurally integrated or not—need to build on this synergy by pulling in expertise from various sources to ensure tailored protection strategies and responses.

12. Protection capacities are too important not to share.

- a. The UN needs early exit strategies and planning for what will happen to POC capabilities.** CIVIC’s [research](#) in transitions contexts shows that missions can struggle to plan early for reduced protection capabilities in the event of drawdowns or phased withdrawals. Coordinating protection capacities across UN entities can help mitigate gaps when missions draw down. Embedding these arrangements in early exit strategies ensures POC capabilities are sustained and transferred before a mission’s departure, reducing the sharp drop in protection observed in recent transitions.
- b. The UN should develop mechanisms for transferring the multi-dimensional capacity of UN missions to other types of peace operations.** These could include the secondment of UN personnel to regional missions or support with surge capacities or other arrangements.