

Integrating a gender perspective in intelligence services

WEBINAR CONCEPT NOTE

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For intelligence services operating in increasingly complex environments, and with access to ever more sophisticated technologies, gender has a decisive role to play both in terms of operational effectiveness as well as accountability to international legal norms and standards on human rights. Including gendered perspectives will ensure that intelligence services are receiving more accurate and specific information while also mitigating the risks that gender-blind approaches can have. Moreover, including women in greater numbers among intelligence personnel has its own host of benefits.

Since the ground-breaking UN resolution 1325, the importance of integrating a gender perspective in the security sector has been gaining increasing prominence. In spite of this, little attention has been paid to gender in the context of intelligence services, a key part of the modern security sector. Is a gender perspective less important for intelligence services than for other branches of the security sector? In part, this lack of analysis is due to the closed and secretive nature of intelligence, which have shielded it from public scrutiny. Precisely because of their opaque nature, successfully integrating gender into the work (external-looking) and functioning (internal-looking) of intelligence services is crucial to avoid the repetition of harmful patterns, and mistakes committed on the basis of faulty preconceptions.

To quote the 2015 report “Women in the UK Intelligence Community” by the Intelligence and Security Committee of the British Parliament, “if all intelligence professionals are cut from the same cloth, then they are likely to share ‘unacknowledged biases’ that circumscribe both the definition of problems and the search for solutions.”¹

Integrating a gender perspective into the work of intelligence services is essential to their operational effectiveness. Doing so has a number of benefits, starting with avoiding incorrect assumptions, based on lacking gender analysis, on who or what presents a security risk, who should be surveilled, what are the motivations behind certain acts or processes, etc. Another benefit is a broadening of sources of intelligence and partners on the ground. A diverse intelligence service that acts in a gender-sensitive way will have access to spaces that would be beyond the reach of the historically male-dominated structures and operations of intelligence agencies.

Regarding their internal functioning, integrating a gender perspective serves as a useful reminder that intelligence services are part of the public sector, and as such should be held to the same standards as other parts of government, including on gender equality. By ensuring gender equality within its ranks and procedures, intelligence agencies can ensure that they attract and retain the best talent and can make the best use of the unique skills and abilities that a diverse workforce brings to the table.

Technology brings an added dimension to integrating a gender perspective into the work of intelligence services. Intelligence organizations have often been at the forefront of technological advancements, with all the ensuing opportunities – and risks – this entails. Troubling phenomena

¹ [“Women in the UK Intelligence Community”](#) (2015) Intelligence and Security Committee of the British Parliament.

that have been well-researched, like the discriminatory potential of algorithms, acquire a new edge when being applied to decisions by intelligence services, with potentially dire consequences.

Legal frameworks governing the use of new technologies, notably for surveillance, need to take into account the specific needs of women, men, girls and boys, including sexual orientation and gender identity minorities. As an example, dating applications targeted to sexual minorities have been flagged as possible sources of information for foreign intelligence agencies, with the potential for blackmail and other unduly uses of personal data.

Many of these issues are tackled in [Tool 14: Intelligence & Gender](#) of the DCAF, OSCE-ODIHR, UN Women [Gender and Security Toolkit](#). Addressing intelligence services, intelligence practitioners and intelligence policy-makers, and also parliaments and civil society, it outlines a vision of what intelligence services that integrate a gender perspective into their work and advance gender equality will look like.

Join ODIHR, DCAF and UN Women and a diverse panel of experts and practitioners to discuss the different angles of integrating a gender perspective into the work of intelligence services.

Some of the questions to be addressed are:

- What are good practices when it comes to integrating gender into the work of intelligence services– their collection and analysis of information?
- How to best integrate a gender analysis into surveillance practices and intelligence strategies?
- What are the gendered risks of the use of surveillance technologies and practices by intelligence agencies?
- What role should oversight bodies, including parliaments, play in making sure that intelligence services adopt a gender perspective?

Moderation:

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Facilitation:

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