

Belgian National Report for 2004

(Situation of the year 2003)

This report gives an overview of the progress of women's integration in the Belgian Armed Forces over the last few years.

PERSONNEL POLICY

The first servicewomen were enrolled in the Belgian Armed Forces in 1975.

Since 1981 all discriminations have been eliminated, all positions have been opened to women and men and the selection criteria have been the same for all.

In 1997, the Belgian General Staff implemented an instruction with the aim of preventing and dealing with the problems related to sexual harassment. The national legislation on mobbing and sexual harassment has recently been changed. Since January 2003, in accordance with the new laws, an independent central monitoring service has been created to resolve complaints of sexual harassment, mobbing, violent or disrespectful behaviour at the workplace and discrimination. This service was extended with local mediators who are receiving specific training. A policy in this domain has been created according to the new evolutions in the national legislation and will be distributed very soon.

In 2002 an analytical report made it possible to elaborate an equal opportunities policy for the next 5 years (2004-2008). Since April 2003, the Subsection "organisational culture", within the Defence Staff Human Resources Directorate General, is in charge for the implementation of a diversity policy.

To ensure a better integration of Belgians of foreign origin and of the citizens recruited in EU member-states (what is possible since January 2004), the decision was made to turn the equal opportunities policy into a diversity policy. This diversity policy takes over the entire equal opportunities policy. The diversity policy will also contain a policy related to non-discrimination and racism, as well as a code of conduct.

The equal opportunities policy contained different issues: integration of female soldiers into a male organisation, integration of the existing military and civilian structures, integration of Belgians of foreign origin, better registration of data of service man and service women, better career accompaniment for women, gender based examination of the evaluation systems and function descriptions, ensure the posting of the local mediators in each unit, elaboration of the policy about sexual harassment, mobbing, violent or disrespectful behaviour at the workplace, discrimination and racism, as well as the implementation of a campaign on diversity.

Related to child welfare during the college holidays, a study about the organisation of playgrounds for the children of the personnel is in progress. 7 day-nurseries were open in 2003. Another day-nursery will open in 2005 after the decision of the Minister of Defence.

Within the framework of a new personnel management policy, the authorities want as much as possible to take into account the situation of couples of which both partners belong to the Ministry (a situation that concerns 70 % of the servicewomen).

ORGANISATION

On 1 January 2004, there were 3393 servicewomen that is to say 8.26% of the total strength.

The table below shows the total number of women per service and the percentage of women in each of them.

The percentage of women is always the lowest in the Army (6.55 %) and the highest in the Medical Service (19.7 %).

	Army	%	Air Force	%	Navy	%	Medical Service	%	TOTAL	%
JAN 01	1.667	6,3	887	8,4	283	11,4	335	19,3	3.190	7,7
JAN 02	1.703	6,5	905	8,7	286	11,5	351	19,7	3.245	7,9
JAN 03	1.644	6,6	908	9,0	282	11,8	358	19,9	3.192	8,2
JAN 04	1.758	6.55	947	8,7	301	11.57	387	19.71	3.393	8.26

As to the civilian personnel of the Ministry, there are 989 women out of a total of 1827 civilian personnel, which amounts to 53.4%. However 36% of the female civilian personnel are contract agents.

The distribution among the various categories of military personnel remains rather similar, as is shown in the table below:

	JAN 01	%	JAN 02	%	JAN 03	%	JAN 04	%
Officers	236	5	246	5,02	273	5,69	287	5,93
NCO	1.017	6	1.037	6,17	1.100	6,42	1.078	6,41
Volunteers	1.937	10	1.962	10,36	2.028	10,40	2.028	10,45
TOTAL	3.190	7,6	3.245	7,7	3.401	7,98	3.393	8,26
Female Mil								
TOTAL							989	53,4
Female Civilians								

Women only represent 5.93% of the officers but it is in this category that the strongest progress has been made since 1998.

Although all functions, including those in combat branches, are open to both male and female personnel, the majority of women occupy administrative and logistic positions.

Nevertheless, there are women who occupy positions that were reserved for men in the past. For the time being, there are indeed 4 women with a pilot's licence. The Army has 2 helicopter pilots and there is 1 female bomb disposal expert. In the Navy, 28 women are part of the seagoing personnel. (about 10 % of the women in the Navy).

For having women in example role, the command intends to encourage the presence of women in the command structures, in the examination boards and in the recruitment structures as well as in the schools and training centres of the Ministry.

As to the civilian personnel, women are occupying 20,9% of the officer equivalent positions. Women occupy 46,6% of NCO equivalent positions and 48,6% of the volunteer equivalent positions.

EMPLOYMENT

Promotion systems and payroll are the same for women and men. Promotion rules are based on seniority, personal qualities and professional qualifications. More and more women meet the conditions to be promoted to higher ranks. As stated above, all functions including those in combat units are open to women.

As part of a reduction in force and to enhance compatibility between professional and family life, the Belgian Armed Forces introduced a part-time work policy in October 1997. This includes a 4-day working week, part-time work five years before retiring and early retirement. Out of all servicewomen, 18% choose to work a 4-day working week, the percentage is always the lowest among the officers.

Since 2000, flexible working hours have been introduced. They apply as long as the units' operational requirements allow to do so.

Women are entitled to a 15- week maternity leave. This leave counts as active duty. When their wife or partner gives birth, men are entitled to a 10-day leave. If the mother should die in childbirth, the maternity leave passes on to the father. Men or women are entitled to a 3- month unpaid parental leave before the child's 10th birthday.

As of this year, women are entitled to breast feeding breaks until the baby is seven months old. For every four hours work, they get a half hour break.

Furthermore, paid parental leave is also possible when adopting a child. The duration of the leave depends on the child's age.

All servicemen and women have the right to a maximum of six months leave to take care of a relative or even a friend that is terminally ill. This leave is unpaid.

RECRUITMENT

In 2003, a total of 195 women and 1887 men were recruited. There are no quota applied either to recruitment or to the total number of women.

	Women	Men	Total	%
Officers	66	278	344	19 %
NCO	35	523	558	6 %
Volunteers	94	1086	1180	8 %
TOTAL	195	1887	2082	9,4 %

Recruitment requirements are the same for women and men. There is no gender discrimination. Identical criteria apply to women and men, particularly regarding fitness and selection tests.

Age at entry ranges from 16 years old to a maximum of 34 years old depending on the category of personnel recruited. Minimum educational, moral, physical, medical and mental standards are required for each personnel category. The percentage of female officers is high among the recruits and women represent 17 % of the totality of students of the Royal Military Academy.

Since January 2004 also citizens of member countries of the EU can be recruited.

TRAINING

The training programmes for women are identical to those of their male colleagues and are organised in the same schools and training centres. An interservice task force has examined the policy related to the annual fitness tests that have been gender neutral up to now. From 2003 a new annual fitness test, no longer gender neutral, has been introduced. However, physical tests related to specific functions (in combat units, paratroopers, military divers,...) will remain identical for both men and women.

During their career, servicewomen can attend the same specialisation courses and participate in all examinations required for promotion to higher ranks.

More and more women participate in the Staff officers' training courses. At this time, 6 female officers have obtained a staff course certificate and 8 female officers have obtained an administration course certificate.

It is therefore safe to say that among the 28 female senior officers currently employed by the Belgian Armed Forces, one out of two has participated in senior officers' training.

DEPLOYMENTS

The participation of women in humanitarian operations is still topical. They have participated in various operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Africa. These missions can last between 1 and 6 months, but usually last 4 months. In 2003, 96 women participated in a mission. Per category this amounts to 45 volunteers, 43 NCO's and 8 officers. At least 40 % of them are mothers. Participation on these missions is rarely based on personal request. In the Navy, 28 women are part of the seagoing personnel and regularly serve aboard the ships.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

An ever-growing number of women pass on to higher ranks especially among the officers.

The first female senior officer was promoted in 1991; there are now 28 of them and among them 1 colonel, 12 lieutenant colonels and 15 majors. Since December 2003 the first colonel was promoted in the medical service. A first promotion to major general will be possible from the year 2007.

	1 Jan 00	1 Jan 01	1 Jan 02	1 Jan 03	1 Jan 04
OF3 (major)	23	22	20	14	15
OF4 (LtCol)	2	6	10	19	12
OF5 (Col)	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	25	28	30	33	28

Among NCOs, 36 women reached the rank of Chief Warrant Officer.

Among civil servants, 24 women have a rank equivalent to that of senior officer.

PARTICULAR ITEMS, EVENTS OF INTEREST

- The Sub section "organisational culture" which is responsible for managing diversity and for the equal opportunities policy within Defence has, together with the Ministry of Employment and Work, started a project to create a platform for diversity. This project has the purpose to motivate the personnel of Defence in handling differences, ensuring equal opportunities male/female, ensure non-discrimination and racism.
- Underneath "diversity" the positive actions that are mentioned in the equal opportunities plan M/F are further carried out. This with the purpose to follow and to improve the situation of women at the Ministry of Defence.
- A proposal of a general policy concerning the managing of diversity has been presented to the authorities.
- Since January 2004, citizens of member countries of the EU can also be recruited by Defence. Taking care of their integration is a part of the diversity policy.
- To improve the integration of civilian personnel in the chain of command, recently a female civilian has been promoted to chief of the Division of preparation of personnel policy in the Human Resources Directorate General Staff
- As a first step towards a permanent communication around diversity a website has been created within the Staff Human Resources Directorate General.

CONCLUSION

After 26 years of presence in the Armed Forces, servicewomen represent 8.26% of the total strength.

Their percentage is higher among the volunteers than among the officers but this proportion tends to change with an ever-growing number of young girls arriving in the officers training course.

Servicewomen take an active part in the missions abroad and in the Staff training and other promotion courses.

The integration of women in the Belgian Armed Forces is making constant progress and with Equal Opportunities now officially on the agenda of the Human Resources Directorate General, it will continue to make progress in the years to come.