

Latvia – National Report

Policy changes/ New policy affecting women in uniform

When Latvia's Constitution was renewed following the restoration of independence in 1991, one of the basic principles enshrined therein was the right of each individual to protection against gender discrimination. Latvia has signed the relevant international conventions that guarantee equal rights to men and women, and this principle is embodied in the Latvian legislation.

It, therefore, seems that Latvia has come a long way towards ensuring gender equality for its inhabitants in the relatively short time that has elapsed since the restoration of independence. However this formal equality guaranteed by signatures and promises is only the foundation - the basis - upon which true equality in everyday relations and interactions must be built. It is one thing to put pen to paper and adopt a law, it is quite another whether this law is applied throughout society and in all aspects of life: in the labor market, in schools and education and at home.

Gender inequality in Latvia mostly manifests itself in everyday interactions which involve direct or indirect discrimination of both women and men. The general economic and social status of women is inferior as compared to men's. This implies unequal possibilities in the labor market, gender segregation in the labor market, often is the case that women receive 70% of men's salary for equal work, the poverty level is high among women with children. Men, on their turn, show poor health indices. Inequality also exists in family life as working women spend twice as much time for housework as compared to working men and this difference is even more radical in families with children. Women suffer from violence, coercive exploitation and sex trafficking. A very radical difference is observed in the gender proportion among Members of Parliament, high government officials as well as general management of enterprises.

Ensuring equality of both genders is essential to avoid considerable economic and social losses due to ineffective use of human resources. The experience of other states shows that gender equality issues cannot be solved separately since they are to a great extent related to other areas, labor market, national social policy, regional development, etc. However, the existing experience reveals that most part of Latvian population are not ready to make complaints on gender discrimination, as the result, the less is the number of complaints and the smaller part of population capable to identify the consequences of the problem, the less significant seems the problem itself. The public opinion polls also reveal that the problem is seemingly non-existent: large part of respondents give a negative reply to the question whether gender inequality exists in Latvia. However, a more detailed research reveals a whole spectrum of problems consolidated in this new wording not yet understood by everyone in Latvia. The statistics show that women in Latvia receive smaller salary than men, stereotypical division in men and women professions is still existing. The perception of a man as a breadwinner and a woman as a housekeeper is still alive and perceived as the only right one, also by those who suffer from such traditional role division yet agree to play by the old rules.

The mentioned facts indicate how grave the situation is in reality — the problems exist yet the Latvian population at this stage can hardly identify them or perceives as normal and acceptable the occurrences that the Western society has been trying to eliminate for decades.

Women in uniforms face exactly the same problems as the state in general. However, through identification of problems and their possible solutions the normative documents regulating soldier, including women militaries, career path and social security are continuously and purposefully updated.

Latvian National Armed Forces have come a relatively short way in history since their establishment in August 1991 following the international recognition of the state independence which gave Latvia and the two other Baltic states the possibility to put into effect their own security policies and commence true establishment of national defense system.

At the present stage the Latvian Armed Forces experience an important period of re-organization. In order to ensure Latvia's full-fledged membership in NATO and Latvian soldier participation in NATO operations and implementation of the principle of collective defense capabilities and to ensure more efficient use of the resources allocated to national defense through establishment of professional units with modern equipment Latvia has reviewed the National Defense Concept in 2003. It has been stated that the basic principles of the national defense are participation in collective defense, establishment of professional armed forces, civilian-military cooperation and international military cooperation. Latvia has also established new structure of the National Armed Forces. Although this is a time of change in the Latvian Armed Forces, the normative documents regulating the goals and operation of the structure have from the very first day been based on the principles of equality in service between men and women in the Latvian Armed Forces.

Active service in Latvia or direct performance of military service in a soldier status includes conscript service and contract-based professional service.

The Conscript service law states that all male Latvian citizens must perform conscript service. Youth between 19 and 27 are enrolled in the service, volunteers may commence the service at the age of 18. The Conscript service lasts 12 months and is performed within National Armed Forces.

Female Latvian citizens may volunteer for conscript service. Since 1997 appr. 20 women have volunteered for the service however due to the limited possibilities to ensure appropriate household conditions in the barracks, their wish has been declined and no women have served in the Latvian conscript service.

Within the mentioned reforms for the transition to professional armed forces in Latvia it is planned to eliminate the conscript service starting 2007.

Contract-based professional service is established by the Military service law that entered into force July 1, 2002. This law states single soldier career path and provides identical service possibilities for both genders. Women are accepted in the professional service from 19 years of age, provided they comply with the health, education, professional and physical fitness and state language law requirements and possess required moral and psychological qualities.

In accordance with the law a woman in service is granted a fully paid prenatal and maternity leave as well as officially stated maternity allowance and is also paid the soldier rations compensation for this period.

At a request a soldier (any parent) may receive one single child care leave without the retention of the service pay until the child reaches 1.5 years. A soldier receives a child care allowance in the officially stated order and amount. This leave is included in the soldier's time in service that gives the right to service pension but is not included in the time in service that gives right to promotion. If a soldier does

not return to service after the expiration of leave s/he is retired of the active service.

Since the child care allowance is several times smaller than soldier service pay, the decision, made this year, that starting from January 2005 the child care allowance will be considerably increased to reach the amount of an average monthly salary, is of utmost importance. This is a very important step towards social support of families. For several years Latvia's demographic situation has been assessed as unfavorable. The natural growth of population became negative in 1991 and has remained the same up to now. The number of newborns has reduced more than twice since 1987 and the total birth-rate is one of the lowest in Europe.

In the case of the death of the spouse, child or dependent the professional service soldier receives an allowance amounting to his/her monthly service pay.

At the birth of a child a soldier receives an allowance amounting to 250 LVL. However, if both parents are soldiers only one parent has the right to receive the allowance.

Among other social guarantees embodied in the Latvian legislation the housing allowance must be mentioned. It is issued to soldiers who are not provided with a service lodgings.

In July 2003 the norms on the support of the families of soldiers in long-term missions were included in the Latvian legislation. The professional service soldier has the possibility to accompany his/her spouse, defense attaché or representative, to his/her service abroad thereby retaining his/her soldier status. The service pay is not retained for this period.

Organization

The following chart reflects the distribution of women soldiers of Latvian National armed forces among services:

		Officers	NCOs	Privates	Professional service total	C	ME	TOTAL
AF	Women	14	25	11	50	9	0	59
	Total	133	93	29	255	27	0	282
	%	10.5	26.9	37.9	19.6	33.3	0,0	20.9
Navy	Women	19	54	21	94	8	4	106
	Total	123	199	126	448	39	4	491
	%	15.4	27.1	16.7	21.0	20,5	100,0	21.6
TRADOC	Women	11	46	26	83	55	22	160
	Total	118	169	42	329	92	22	443
	%	9.3	27.2	61.9	25.2	59.8	100.0	36,1
LC	Women	16	48	34	98	34	44	176
	Total	80	212	101	393	76	106	575
	%	20.0	22.6	33.7	24.9	44.7	41.5	30,6

LF	Wome n	36	136	83	255	12	30	297
	Total	477	630	608	1715	35	37	1787
	%	7.5	21.6	13.7	14.9	34.3	81.1	16,6
Other	Wome n	35	61	43	139	7	26	172
	Total	336	433	139	908	118	60	1086
	%	10.4	14.1	30.9	15.3	5.9	43.3	15,8
Total	Wome n	131	370	218	719	125	126	970
	Total	1267	1736	1045	4048	387	229	4664
	%	10.3	21.3	20.9	17.8	32.3	55.0	20.8

Women soldiers constitute almost 17,8 % of the total number of LNAF soldiers and this percentage has a tendency to grow from year to year. The relatively largest proportion of women soldiers is in Logistics Command and TRADOC. Especially large percentage of women – 55 % are employed as civilian military employees on the basis of an employment contract. The lowest percentage of women soldiers – 14,9% - is observed in the Land Force.

Although the percentage of women is relatively smaller in the units of Land Force, Air Force and Navy, women successfully perform their service in the positions of navigation specialists, helmsmen (3), air space monitoring and air defense system specialists (5), weapons of mass destruction specialists (3), special transport drivers (2), radar and radio equipment specialists (2), etc.

Employment

Requirements and prerequisites for promotions and assignments are identical for both genders. A soldier in the Latvian army becomes eligible for promotion if he/she has received a positive evaluation by the attestation board and meets all requirements for promotion in general and for the specific rank in particular and has no record of punishment in his/her file. A soldier can be promoted to the next higher rank upon serving the required time in the previous rank (grade) if the position he/she is assigned to requires a higher rank, or for combat achievements. If a soldier holds a position that calls for a higher rank and has received an excellent evaluation twice while holding that position, this soldier may be promoted before the required time in grade. Assignment to position takes place upon signing the professional service contract or according to his/her evaluation results.

Recruitment

Also prerequisites for joining professional military service are identical for both genders (except physical training tests, which are differentiated by age and gender). A person must meet certain age, health, educational, professional, physical training and Latvian language skill requirements and possess certain moral and psychological qualities in order to join military service. After joining military service personnel with no prior training must complete a military training course required by the particular position. Taking into consideration the reorganization processes in the Latvian armed forces recruitment of new personnel is currently very limited.

For example, 3 officers and 13 NCOs, one of them female, were enrolled in the 2nd Infantry Battalion, Land Forces, in 2004.

Training

All training requirements and programs in the Latvian armed forces are based on identical principles for males and females.

First females received basic officer education in the National Defense Academy in 1997.

In the last two years a considerable number of females have received a basic officer education:

Year	Total	Females	%
2003	52	21	40,3
2004	58	16	27,6

2 females (from 24 students) graduated from the Company Commander's Course at the National Defense Academy in 2003.

From year 2000 to this moment only one female from Latvia has graduated from the senior staff officer's course in the BALTDEFCOL.

Situation in the NCO military education is similar.

Number of NAF NCO School graduates in the last two years:

Course	2003			2004		
	Total	Females	%	Total	Females	%
Junior NCO Course	124	26	20,9	34	10	29,4
NCO Course	21	4	19,0	26	3	11,5
Senior NCO Course	8	1	12,5	-	-	-

Deployments (i.e. peace Support operations, peacekeeping operations)

In order to confirm Latvia's decision to be not only a consumer of security but also actively participate in maintaining security in other countries Latvia's armed forces personnel has been participating in peacekeeping operations in the Balkans region on a regular basis since 1996. In May 2003 a unit from Latvia's National Armed Forces was also deployed to a peacekeeping operation in the Persian Gulf region.

Only professional service soldiers – men and women – can be sent to missions abroad, and requirements are the same for both genders. Criteria for assessing a soldier's suitability for a mission include physical training, health condition, professional skills and experience, character reference from his/her unit and English language skills.

Efforts of Latvian Military Police, Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), Service Support and Military Medics units as well as activities of international observers in peacekeeping missions are highly valued by their counterparts and Latvian female soldiers have greatly contributed to accomplishing this work successfully.

Currently Latvia is participating in 5 international peacekeeping missions: Afghanistan (since February of 2003); Bosnia-Herzegovina (since April 1996), Iraq (since May 2003), Georgia (since 2000), Kosovo (since 2000). At the present moment there are 2 females serving in Iraq (Physician Assistant and medical NCO), 3 in Kosovo (accountant, personnel officer and medical NCO), 3 Physician Assistants in Afghanistan.

Career development

In order to meet the needs of the Latvian armed forces there are unified career models for each category of soldiers describing training requirements, professional experience and career self development goals as well as qualifications required by each rank and position, which are equally accessible for both genders.

Increasing number of females are assigned to higher positions because of their training and abilities; however, currently, the density of females among the higher ranks is relatively small:

Rank	Total	Females	%
OF-3	128	3	2,3
OF-4	72	1	1,4
OF-5	16	-	-

Special Interest Items/Events (Recent and Projected Developments)

Within the framework of reorganizing Latvian armed forces the military pay system will be changed in principle starting 1 July 2004 (new pay regulations will also affect civilians working in the armed forces). The current pay-by-position system will be replaced by a new pay-by-rank system. Simultaneously the amount of pay for all categories of soldiers will increase.

A significant amount of work has been accomplished during the process of reorganizing Latvian army personnel position and rank structure. In order to continue improvement of military legislation a number of amendments to documents regulating military careers in the armed forces to include legal acts that regulate social guarantees for soldiers have been prepared and submitted to the Saeima (Latvian Parliament). Special amendments pertain also to soldiers, who are on child care leave.

The Family Support Club has been established in the end of 2003 to provide support to families of soldiers deployed on missions; it provides psychological assistance to soldiers' family members and cooperates with various non-governmental organizations.

Conclusion

After Latvia regained independence and established its military the density of females in the armed forces has reached 17,8 %. Currently the percentage of female NCOs in the armed forces is two times larger than that of officers; however, the number of female officers increases each year, taking into account the percentage of females among the graduates of National Defense Academy.

Women in Latvian Army are actively involved in pursuing career and qualification improvement goals; they participate in international peace operations and successfully serve in positions at all levels.

Integration of women in the Latvian armed forces has been successful and a gradual positive progress is observed in this area.