

BELGIUM – NATIONAL REPORT 2005

(Situation of the year 2004)

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 service women were enrolled in the Belgian Armed Forces in 1975. In 1981 all forms of discrimination are eliminated. All positions are opened to both women and men. Until 2004 all selection criteria have been the same for everyone. Since then, a different standard is being applied for men and women during the physical selection test.

In 1997, the Belgian General Staff implemented a first instruction with the aim of preventing and dealing with the problems related to sexual harassment. Since January 2003, in accordance with the new national legislation, 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 can count on a network of local mediators, all of which received specific training. A new policy has been developed and communicated to all personnel.

Since April 2003, the Subsection "organisational culture", within the Human Resources Directorate General, is in charge of the implementation of a diversity policy. The will to ensure a better integration of Belgians of foreign origin and of citizens recruited in EU member-states (which is possible since January 2004), lead to the decision to turn the equal opportunities policy focused on gender issues into a diversity policy. The diversity policy will also contain a policy related to non-discrimination and racism, organisational culture as well as a code of conduct. The gender equal opportunities plan of action for the 2004-2008 period will be an integral part of the diversity policy. The action plan addresses several issues, such as the integration of female soldiers into a male organisation, the possibility to look up all personnel information on a male/female basis, better career accompaniment for women, gender based screening of the evaluation systems and function descriptions, the posting of local mediators in each unit, evaluation of the policy on sexual harassment, mobbing, violent or disrespectful behaviour at the workplace, discrimination and racism, as well as the development of an information campaign on diversity and of a diversity training policy.

The Defence Department currently has 7-day nurseries. Another two will open in 2006 and in 2007.

ORGANISATION

On 1 January 2005, there were 3348 service women they represent 8.3% 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 (6.5 %) and the highest in the Medical Service (19.8 %).

	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	11.5 7	387	19.7 1	3.393	8.26
JAN 05	1.716	6.5	912	8.6	285	11.6	394	19.8	3.348	8.3

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

	JAN 02	%	JAN 03	%	JAN 04	%	JAN 05	%
Officers	246	5,0 2	273	5,69	287	5,93	306	6,3
NCO	1.037	6,1 7	1.100	6,42	1.078	6,41	1083	6,5
Volunteers	1.962	10, 36	2.028	10,4 0	2.028	10,45	1959	10,3
TOTAL Female Mil	3.245	7,7	3.401	7,98	3.393	8,26	3348	8,3

Women only represent 6,3% 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 that occupy positions formerly reserved for men. For the time being, we have 2 women fighter pilots. 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).

To increase the number of female role models, the command actively encourages the presence of women in command structures, in examination boards and in recruitment structures as well as in the schools and training centres of the Ministry.

As to the civilian personnel, women are occupying 21% of the officer equivalent positions 40% of NCO equivalent positions and 36% of the volunteer equivalent positions.

EMPLOYMENT

Promotion systems and payroll are the same for women and men. Promotion is based on seniority, personal qualities, professional qualifications and merit. 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 service women, 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 will allow.

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. Both men and women are entitled to a 3- month unpaid parental leave before the child's 10th birthday.

As of 2004, 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 service men 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 2004, a total of 143 women and 1256 men were recruited. There are no quota applied either to recruitment or to the total number of women.

	Women	Men	Total	%
Officers	59	250	309	19 %
NCO	28	281	309	9 %
Volunteers	56	725	781	7 %
TOTAL	143	1256	1399	10.1 %

For selection and recruitment identical criteria apply to women and men, except for the physical selection test where different standards are being applied since 2004.

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 citizens of member countries of the EU can also be recruited. So far, we have recruited 17 European citizens, 2 of which are women.

TRAINING

The training programmes for women are identical to those of their male colleagues and are organised in the same schools and training centres. Since 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, pilots,...) will remain identical for both men and women.

During their career, service women 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, 5

female officers have obtained a staff course certificate and 9 female officers have obtained an administration course certificate.

It is therefore safe to say that among the 32 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 2004, 99 women participated in a mission. Per category this amounts to 42 volunteers, 47 NCO's and 10 officers. About 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. Today we have 32 senior officers and among them 1 colonel, 19 lieutenant colonels and 12 majors. The first colonel was promoted in December 2003 in the medical service. A first promotion to major general will not be possible until 2007.

	1 Jan 00	1 Jan 01	1 Jan 02	1 Jan 03	1 Jan 04	1 Jan 05
OF3 (major)	23	22	20	14	15	12
OF4 (LtCol)	2	6	10	19	12	19
OF5 (Col)	0	0	0	0	1	1
TOTAL	25	28	30	33	28	32

Among NCOs, 51 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

- To create a platform for diversity several articles were published in our Defence magazine. Furthermore a DVD on diversity in the Armed Forces was created. It will be used for training purposes.
- In order to put diversity into practice, specific "diversity checklists" were created for three target groups namely HR policy makers, personnel in charge of internal and external communication and personnel of our recruitment information centres.
- The Defence Centre for Human Resources Development organised for the first time a series of three-day courses on gender and on discrimination. These courses were given to the local mediators but as of 2005 they will be open to all Defence personnel.
- Since January 2004, different standards are applied for the physical selection tests of male and female recruits.
- Belgian Defence is currently working on the implementation of Skills Management and is introducing a new evaluation system. All general skills, skills required for each personnel category and the behaviour indicators linked to these skills have been screened for gender bias.
- One of the officers attending the Superior Staff officers' training course has written a research paper on "Women in operations in the Belgian Armed Forces". The conclusions and recommendations in this study will serve to evaluate and adapt the current policy regarding preparation, execution and lessons learned on missions abroad.
- A protocol establishing the collaboration between Belgian Defence and the Belgian Federal Police Force concerning the fight against trafficking and exploitation of human beings will officially be signed later this year. Briefings on this issue by Federal Police for all detachments deploying abroad is one of the actions described in the protocol.

CONCLUSION

After 27 years of presence in the Armed Forces, service women represent 8.3% 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.