

## Belgian National Report for 2006 (situation of the year 2005)

This report gives an overview 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 were similar for every applicant. 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 "Organizational 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 gender equal opportunities plan of action for the 2004-2008 period is an integral part of the diversity policy. In 2005 several actions, especially in the field of education and training were taken in order to implement the diversity policy.

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

Since 2005 the Belgian Armed Forces offer the possibility for day care in military quarters for children of personnel having difficulty to find child care during school holidays.

### ORGANISATION

On 1 January 2006 3249 women were in service. They represent 8,3% of the total strength. The table below shows the percentage of women in each service.

The percentage of women is the lowest in the Army (6,6%) and the highest in the Medical Service (21,4%).

	Army	Air Force	Navy	Medical Service	TOTAL	%
JAN 01	6,3%	8,4%	11,4%	19,3%	3.190	7,7
JAN 02	6,5%	8,7%	11,5%	19,7%	3.245	7,9
JAN 03	6,6%	9,0%	11,8%	19,9%	3.192	8,2
JAN 04	6.55%	8.7%	11.57%	19.71%	3.393	8.26
JAN 05	6.7%	9.0%	12.6%	20.1%	3348	8.3
JAN 06	6.6%	9.0%	12.3%	21.4%	3249	8.3

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

	JAN 02	%	JAN 03	%	JAN 04	%	JAN 05	%	JAN 06	%
<b>Officers</b>	246	5,02	273	5,69	287	5,93	306	6,3	449	8,3
<b>NCOs</b>	1.037	6,17	1.100	6,42	1.078	6,41	1083	6,5	1038	6,3
<b>Soldiers</b>	1.962	10,36	2.028	10,40	2.028	10,45	1959	10,3	1748	10,2
<b>TOTAL Women in service</b>	3.245	7,7	3.401	7,98	3.393	8,26	3348	8,3	3249	8,3

Women only represent 8,3% of the officers, but the strongest progress since 1998 was made in this category.

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.

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 Department.

## EMPLOYMENT

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 numbers are always the lowest among the officers.

Since 2000, flexible working hours have been introduced. They apply for so far as the units' operational requirements will allow.

Women are entitled to a 15- week maternity leave. This leave counts as active duty. When their spouse 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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 2005 a total of 1439 men and women were recruited. There are no quotas applied either to recruitment or to the total number of women in service.

	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Officers</b>	42	175	217	19 %
<b>NCOs</b>	19	321	340	6 %
<b>Soldiers</b>	58	824	882	7 %
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>1320</b>	<b>1439</b>	<b>8,3 %</b>

The percentage of women amongst recruited soldiers and officers remains the same. The percentage of women amongst recruited NCOs went down. Nevertheless the trend of the past years continues: the highest percentage of women is recruited in the category of the officers (19%) and more specifically those who are recruited on basis of their diploma. Selection and recruitment criteria are identical to men and women, except for the physical selection test where different standards are being applied since 2004. Since January 2004 citizens of member countries of the EU can also be recruited. In 2005 24 non-Belgian citizens were recruited, including 3 women.

## TRAINING

The training programs 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 appointments (in combat units, paratroopers, military divers, pilots...) will remain identical for both men and women.

During their career, service women can attend the same professional specialisation courses and participate in all examens required for promotion to higher ranks.

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

This means 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

Due to the fact that only a small number of women occupy functions that qualify for operational deployment, the operational deployment rate of women (20%) is lower than the one of their male colleagues (60%). They have been deployed in various operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Africa. These tour of duties can last between 1 and 6 months. In 2005 153 service women participated in operations abroad. The breakdown per category is 24 officers, 49 NCOs and 70 soldiers.

In 2005, a research was conducted on the participation of service women, more specifically officers and NCOs, in operations abroad. Although the analysis was rather limited in size, it clearly revealed a number of women's motivations as well as obstacles for deployment. Women's participation offers an added value to the mission, but there are inevitably some pitfalls one must try to avoid. The possibility to gain practical experience, the professional enrichment, contact with other people and the adventure appeared to be the most important professional motivations for operational deployment. Personal motivations are the increase of self-assurance, the support one receives from relatives and close friends and the financial reward. Professional obstacles for participation are fear of the unknown, the lack of experience, an unclear policy of deployment, the region of deployment and its culture and existing prejudices about the deployment of women. The care for children and/or family and feelings of guilt are considered to be the main personal obstacles. The majority of interviewees agrees about the added value of female operational deployment to the mission success. Their social skills, communication skill, their direct though diplomatic approach of problems and their practical sense of organisation make the difference. Male colleagues appreciate their listening skill and the moral support they offer. Service men find it easier to talk openly with their female colleagues about emotions, relational problems or problems with their children. Women communicate more easily inside the contingent as well as with the local population. They have more easily access to women in a Muslim society and they set an example to these women. Service women are appreciated because of their empathy.

However the research also revealed some negative experiences. A first possible problem is the conflict in role perception. Women must be aware that their male colleagues can see them in different roles: colleague, friend, woman, daughter, sister, competitor... A professional attitude is required to avoid such kind of conflicts. A second possible pitfall results from the high expectations that exist for role models, especially for female officers and NCOs. Role models are important, but it also can lead to very high performance expectations. Together with the increased exposure media pay to service women, this can induce jealous reactions among male colleagues. Consciously or even unconsciously, more attention is given to minorities.

This reveals itself in the attitude of the local commander and in preferential treatment, e.g. separate accommodations. This might provoke negative reactions from the majority, the male colleagues. Finally, women start shaping their attitudes to the behaviour of their male colleagues. They start behaving in a more masculine way, which results in a fading away of the advantages of the female presence within the deployed troops.

### CAREER DEVELOPMENT

An ever-growing number of women passes on to higher. The first female senior officer was promoted in 1991. Today we have 34 female senior officers and among them 1 brigadier, 1 colonel, 23 lieutenant colonels and 9 majors. In December 2005, the first female brigadier was appointed as commander of the Medical Component. For the first time too, a service woman will be appointed as military attaché in China.

	1 Jan 00	1 Jan 01	1 Jan 02	1 Jan 03	1 Jan 04	1 Jan 06
<b>OF3 (major)</b>	23	22	20	15	12	9
<b>OF4 (Lt Col)</b>	2	6	10	12	19	23
<b>OF5 (Col)</b>	0	0	0	1	1	1
<b>Brigadier</b>	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	25	28	30	28	32	34

Among NCOs, 69 women reached the rank of Chief Warrant Officer.

### WAY AHEAD

- In 2006, diversity education (more specifically interactive diversity “theatres”) has been integrated in basic education and training. This will enhance the awareness for diversity and gender related issues.
- From 2006 on, best practices related to diversity will be tracked actively and will be rewarded.
- Objectives of the gender opportunities plan for 2006:
  - To raise the number of women in the higher categories and ranks
  - To raise the number of women in non-administrative functions
  - To pay extra attention to basic training and education
  - To optimize the participation of women in deployment quantitatively and qualitatively.
- The Department of Defence will actively participate in a joint working group, together with different federal public services and the Belgian Institute for Equality of Men and Women. The objective of this cooperation is to develop a toolkit and an action plan to integrate the gender perspective in every aspect of policy, guidances and actions.

## CONCLUSION

After 30 years of presence in the Armed Forces, service women represent 8,3% of the total strength. Their presence is more elevated within the lower ranks, but this proportion tends to change with an ever-growing number of young girls arriving in the officers training course.

Due to the fact that only a small number of women occupy functions that qualify for operational deployment, the operational deployment rate of women is lower than the one of their male colleagues.

The presence of service women in staff training and other promotion courses is ever increasing. Service women take active part in the missions abroad and in the Staff training and other promotion courses.

Efforts in the field of equal opportunities for men and women are now integrated in the diversity policy of the Belgian Armed Forces.