

## **BELGIAN NATIONAL REPORT 2008**

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

The first service women were enrolled in the Belgian Armed Forces in 1975. Nowadays, all functions are open to both women and men.

### **Policies**

Since April 2003, the subsection "Organizational Culture" within the General Directorate Human Resources is in charge of the diversity policy. In order to implement this policy, a "Steering Committee Diversity" has been established under the presidency of the Inspector-General Mediator of the Belgian Armed Forces. The gender equal opportunities policy is an integral part of the diversity policy.

On 12th January 2007 the Belgian Government promulgated a law ensuring gender mainstreaming of all government policies. (Loi du 12 janvier 2007 visant au contrôle de l'application des résolutions de la conférence mondiale ...intégrant la dimension du genre dans l'ensemble des politiques fédérales.)

On Women's Day (8<sup>th</sup> March 2007) the Minister of Defense, the Chief of Defense and three women's organizations signed a charter that makes equality for men and women and the implementation of UNSCR 1325 permanent goals of the Belgian Armed Forces. Consequently in 2007-8 the emphasis will be on gender mainstreaming, especially in operations.

On 26<sup>th</sup> October 2007 the Vice Chief of Defense received a briefing on the progress in the domain of gender mainstreaming.

In every department a POC (Point of Contact) was appointed. These persons are responsible for guiding the process of gender mainstreaming within their department.

The Department Operations and Training has developed a list of gender issues in operations. This list will serve to create an action plan for operational planning and operations.

### **Organisation**

On 1 January 2008, there are 3207 service women. They represent 8,29% of the total strength.

The table below shows the percentage of women in each service. The percentage of women remains the lowest in the Army (6,54%) and the highest in the Medical Service (22.3%).

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	<b>Men</b>	<b>% Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>% Women</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Army</b>	22775	93.5	1594	6.5	24371
<b>Air force</b>	8748	91.2	840	8.8	9588
<b>Navy</b>	1971	87.7	276	12.3	2247
<b>Medical Component</b>	1432	77.7	411	22.3	1843
<b>(Other e.g. musicians)</b>	554	86.6	(86)	(13.4)	(640)
<b>Total</b>	<b>35480</b>	<b>91.7</b>	<b>3207</b>	<b>8.29</b>	<b>38687</b>

The table below shows the distribution of women among the different categories of personnel.

	<b>1999</b>		<b>2003</b>		<b>2008</b>	
	Number of women	%	Number of women	%	Number of women	%
<b>Officers</b>	218	4.14	263	5.42	389	8.1
<b>NCOs</b>	1030	5.62	1042	6.24	1092	6.6
<b>Soldiers</b>	1899	10.09	2028	10.49	1762	9.9
<b>Total</b>	3147	7.42	3333	8.15	3207	8.3

Women represent only 8,1% of the officers, but the strongest progress since 1999 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.

### Recruitment

In 2007 a total of 1459 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>	57	228	285	20 %
<b>NCOs</b>	24	342	366	6.56%
<b>Soldiers</b>	51	757	808	6.31%
<b>TOTAL</b>	132	1327	1459	9.05 %

Due to the planned force reductions as well as budgetary restrictions, recruitment has been limited to two third of the actual needs. Furthermore, the recruitment of soldiers was – similarly to the previous years- almost completely limited to combat functions. The trend of the past years continues: the highest percentage of women is recruited in the category of officers. For the physical selection test different criteria for men and women are applied since 2004 because this test measures the physical potential. A certain level of physical potential is reflected by different results for men and women. Function related physical tests are the same for men and women.

Any person applying to become a service member within the Ministry of Defense, passes a first series of tests, intended to evaluate his/her intellectual abilities. This series of tests is eliminatory and determines if the applicant can or can not take part in the later selection tests. Because it is essential that any applicant has equal chances, the test will be screened to detect possible gender and cultural bias.

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The Belgian Armed Forces have recruitment centres all over the country. These centres provide information on a job in the armed forces. In every recruitment centre works at least one female consultant to show that women are represented in the Armed Forces.

Women are represented in recruitment campaigns, brochures, leaflets etc. By showing women in publicity campaigns, women on the labor market can see that a job in the armed forces is not a male privilege.

### **Training**

In 2003 a new annual fitness test, no longer gender neutral, has been introduced for active service members. Since October 2006 this test, applying a different score (but a same standard) for men and women, is also applicable for all trainees.

The training programs for women are identical to those of their male colleagues and are organized in the same schools and training centres.

All personnel have access to a diversity education. This education lasts 3 days. Gender is a subject treated during this education.

### **Deployments**

Service women are deployed in various operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan, Africa and Lebanon. These tours of duty can last between 1 and 6 months. In 2007, 225 service women participated in operations abroad. This means that 4,9% of all participants in operations abroad are women! This is a considerable amount, regarding the overall percentage of women in the Belgian Armed Forces (8,29%), the positions they occupy and the limited participation of women in the past. Between 2004 and the first operation abroad in 1992, only 2,3% of the participants were women.

### **Career Development**

Today we have 36 senior officers and among them 1 Brigadier, 6 Colonels, 18 Lieutenant Colonels and 11 Majors.

	Jan 02	Jan 03	Jan 04	Jan 06	Jan 07	Jan 08
<b>OF3 (Major)</b>	20	15	12	9	7	11
<b>OF4 (Lt Col)</b>	10	12	19	23	21	18
<b>OF5 (Col)</b>	0	1	1	1	3	6
<b>OF6</b>	0	0	0	1	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	30	28	32	34	32	36

Among NCOs, 64 women reached the rank of Chief Warrant Officer.

### **Special Interest Items/Events**

#### Concerns and successes regarding gender initiatives

The commitment to gender mainstreaming by the top officials within the Defense organization is critical to the success for the further implementation.

It is a concern that all gender issues still create resistance in the organization.

### Maternity/Paternity leave

Women are entitled to a 15 weeks maternity leave. This leave counts as active duty. Men or women are entitled to a 3 months unpaid parental leave before the child's 10th birthday (also in case of adoption).

### Initiatives to improve the work-balance

A series of measures are available for the members of the Belgian Defense (male and female personnel) to improve their work-life balance:

- The Belgian Defense has 6 day-care centres for its personnel. This measure improves the conciliation of private and professional life. It is mostly women who take care of small children or who give up their job to do so. Providing this benefit gives the Defense Forces the profile of an attractive employer. Furthermore, it improves the retention of both male and female personnel.
- Military personnel (except officers) have a 38 Hr working week. A week consists of five working days of 7Hr36 each (average). A working day has to start between 7 and 9 AM and end between 3 and 6 PM (flexi-time). The unit commander is free to decide what will be applicable in his or her unit. This measure improves the conciliation of private and professional life. It will enable parents to start later or leave earlier to bring their children to school or to pick them up after school. Providing this possibility removes this barrier and increases the number of female applicants in the Armed Forces.
- Except for certain critical posts (command...), it is possible for members of the Belgian Armed Forces to work part time (4 days out of five). If one of the partners of a military couple participates in an operation abroad, the other partner can ask to work 4 days a week during the operation.
- Members of the Belgian Defense are entitled to take a temporary discharge for family reasons.
- Members of the Belgian Defense are entitled to take a maximum leave of two months for taking care of a relative who is terminally ill.
- A leave from 3 up to 36 months can be taken as a career break.

### **Conclusion**

After 33 years of presence in the Armed Forces, the representation of women is stagnating the last four years. The main reasons are the restrictions on recruitment and the limitation of soldier's vacancies to combat functions.

The fact that a law exists that ensures the implementation of gender mainstreaming in all government policies is certainly a factor of success. Nevertheless, improving the gender sensitivity remains an important challenge in the near future, especially when aiming the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and for the gender mainstreaming of the full operational process is aimed at.