

ITALY - NATIONAL REPORT

1. Policy

Voluntary female military service, established by Law N° 380 of 20 October 1999, is part of the important ongoing process of transformation of the Italian Armed Forces, which has brought about an all-professional system as approved by Law N° 226 of 23 August 2004 concerning early abolition of conscription and discipline of pre-established-term volunteers. Therefore, the whole system will be no longer based on the conscript, but on the volunteer.

In the light of the above, we cannot but draw on the important human resource represented by the female component. The steps to reach an almost equal situation include also considering the experiences of our major *partner* nations, with which co-operation in the different multinational contexts is increasingly frequent. And we cannot rule out the fact that it was this lagging behind other nations itself that made it possible to “open” the military world to women immediately with no preclusion at all.

However, in order to allow and govern women’s “access”, the law has been supplemented with a number of delegated decrees that are based on the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment:

- delegated decree n. 24 dated 31st January 2000 governing recruitment, legal status and career;
- decree n. 114, dated 04.04.00, establishing specific fitness standards for admission to military service, with the addition of the specific illnesses that may affect women;
- a decree establishing annually, within the existing overall strength, rolls, corps, specialties and specialisations of each Service in which servicewomen will be enlisted.
- the decree of 21 July 2004 establishing an Advisory Committee tasked with assisting the Defence Chief of Staff and the Commanding General of Guardia di Finanza in directing, co-ordinating and assessing the integration of female volunteer personnel into the Armed Forces.

The above-mentioned Committee is made up of 11 members (mostly women) with adequate experience and expertise as regards the integration of women in working environments. These 11 members include:

- 6 members representing the Minister of Defense;
- 4 members representing the Minister for Equal Opportunities;
- 1 member representing the Minister of Economy and Finance;

During the first four years of work the Committee kept in touch with the “military reality” through a number of visits to the facilities that had admitted women first (Academies, Schools and Volunteer Training Regiments) and subsequently to the operational units employing them, carrying out various in-depth studies and verifying the compliance with existing laws on discipline and service regulations.

2. Organisation

The number of total strength in 2004 are as follow:

ARMED FORCE	TOTAL STRENGTH	MEN	WOMEN	WOMEN %
ARMY	119.837	118.082	1.755	1,5 %
NAVY	35.453	34.817	636	1,8 %
AIR FORCE	47.383	47.049	334	0,7 %
CARABINIERI	111.951	111.653	298	0,3 %
TOTAL	314.624	311.601	3.023	1 %

3. Employment

The existing legislation highlighted the complete absence of preclusions, which made it possible to decide equal employment opportunities for the female and for the male components and allowed women's unrestricted admission to the categories of Officers, NCOs and Other Ranks as well as to all corps/rolls in the strength of the three Services, of the Carabinieri Corps and of the Corps of Guardia di Finanza.

The first lessons we can draw from the employment of female volunteers in real operations outside the national territory are: first, women have shown great self-denial and the capability to adjust themselves to the context and be integrated in it; second, their operational performance has shown that the training they received and the selection criteria were correct.

In particular, the presence of female personnel made some actions possible, such as search of the person of local women.

4. Recruitment

The manning planning was developed based on the need to have programmed and gradual admission of female personnel starting with officers and ending with troops so that, by the time of regular recruiting, female instructors would be available and ready to ensure the appropriate teaching capabilities accompanied by a command exercise closer to women's psycho-physical characteristics as well as to provide advise. In the beginning plans were made to admit female Officers only as a first step and then recruit female NCOs and volunteers at a later date. Some circumstances, however, led to an extraordinary competition, opened by the Army, which provided the opportunity to recruit female troop personnel.

The recruited female personnel were soon employed in operations on the field, as troop training is shorter than that of officers and NCOs. That was a clear sign of women's participation in the Armed Forces operations.

It is to be said that at present female personnel includes 3.023 women distributed as follows:

- 302 academy cadet officers;

- 321 cadet warrant officers;
 - 5 non regular pilot cadet officers, still receiving training;
- 148 officers enrolled by “direct commission”, 54 officers of “special rolls”, 176 officers on pre-established term, 119 NCOs and 1.898 volunteers having completed their training and already assigned to the various units (in 2004 it has been opened the ordinary recruitment for volunteers permanent service and short enlistment term volunteers in all the Armed Forces).

A considerable number of the above-mentioned personnel have been employed or are being employed in international operations, also on board naval units, in Kosovo, Bosnia, Albania, Afghanistan and Iraq, mainly in remarkably operational positions.

5. Training

Training has been and is being carried out normally and basically in the same way as before women’s admission to the Armed Forces. Ultimately, military schools are like any other school with the exception of a greater emphasis on discipline. As for learning skills, no differences have appeared between male and female personnel; score lists at the end of the academic year showed no difference between male and female performances.

In general, the only differences between male and female personnel were in meeting the physical standards required, but that is obviously due to biological differences.

In that respect, volunteers have asked to increase physical training and recommended that female candidates be made aware of the importance of prior physical training.

6. Deployment

Excluding cadets, Female personnel (officers recruited by direct appointment and troops) have been deployed in operational environment since the end of 2001.

Actually the following female personnel is employed abroad in operations:

MISSION	WOMEN
BOSNIA (Joint Endeavour)	5
KOSOVO (Joint Guardian)	40
AFGHANISTAN (Isaf)	20
IRAQ (Antica Babilonia)	53
TOTAL	118

This experience of female employment in international operations is favourable. They are fully integrated with their malemates. They have lived and worked in the Units in the same condition as the men, without differences. Their support has been considered very important for the relationships with the local women and children.

7. Conclusion

It is now possible to make an assessment of women's integration in the military environment, of any problem during their training and operations and of regulations issued.

The admission of women to the Armed Forces has entailed two requirements: One is the adjustment of all units' infrastructure to ensure untroubled cohabitation of male and female personnel, this process is still ongoing;

The other is the acceptance of female personnel by their male colleagues and the integration of women in a traditionally male environment.

The experience gained so far by those who have briefed, trained and employed female personnel shows that there is a high level of acceptance and that women have been easily integrated in the military context. Perhaps, in the very beginning, there was some embarrassment on the women's side and thoughtfulness on the men's side, due to the novelty of the situation. Those attitudes, however, disappeared as attention was focussed on professional qualifications and skills and especially on employment in real situation.

The high degree of integration is due to the sound criteria established for selection and employment. The happy combination of those two elements made women's integration and professional training proceed gradually and in parallel with those of their male colleagues.

Obviously, we do not believe that all problems have been solved. As a matter of fact, based on the experience gained and with the aim to stress the importance of ethics and irreproachable conduct, we have felt the need to revitalise the main features of military ethics and update them. Therefore a directive, drafted by the Defence General Staff, was issued which is a sort of ethics and behaviour handbook providing guidelines to be followed within the military environment regardless of gender and any other type of difference.

In conclusion, we can express favourable comments on women's introduction into the Armed Forces as they easily identify themselves with the military environment. The good performance of women on the operational theatres has helped overcoming some initial prejudices and has proved that the employment of women in operational activities is a good choice.

Therefore we are satisfied with the work we have done so far and have reasons to believe we have to confirm the policy we have adopted.

However more reliable and consolidated data will be available only after additional periods of employment.