

LATVIA - NATIONAL REPORT 2005

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. Gender equality is officially ensured by Latvian legislation, international and European legislation, that serve as basis to create a real gender equality in all life spheres. It is one thing to sign 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 equality means that the roles of a man and a woman are recognized as equal in society development, they have equal rights and equal responsibilities, they have provided with equal access to resources and its utilization facilities. We still have the stereotypes about women's and men's role. 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. Gender inequality we can see 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 less salary than men for equal work, the poverty level is high among women with children, despite that sometimes women have higher education than men.

Latvia like many other countries have a relatively low representation of women in politics compared to the European countries. Women's lack of political experiences, lack of public acceptance of women taking part in politics and resistance among representatives within the existing power structures are common reasons in many countries for the uneven distribution of political power between women and men.

Generally the problems still exist in this area but women in uniforms face with it a little bit less than women in civil society. From the point of legislation there are no problems in the Latvian Armed Forces, the normative documents regulating all procedures have been based on the principles of equality in service between men and women.

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. The Government accepted the professionalization plan for the National Armed Forces. It means that by the end 2006 Latvian National Armed forces will consist only from professionals. The Military service law that entered into force July 1, 2002 establishes contract-based professional service. 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. The soldiers' salary depends from rank and position and there is no gender influence. 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 childcare leave without the retention of the service pay until the child reaches 1.5 years. A soldier receives a childcare 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 she is retired of the active service. From the January 2005 the childcare allowance was considerably increased to reach the amount of an average monthly salary. It was a very important step to improve the demographic situation. 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 (facts on 1 April 2005):

		Officers	NCOs	Privates	Professional service total	C	ME	TOTAL
AF	Women	14	26	13	53	1	7	61
	Total	130	98	26	254	1	19	274
	%	10,8	26,5	50,0	20,9	100,0	0	22,3
Navy	Women	20	54	18	92	10	14	116
	Total	130	194	125	449	18	32	499
	%	15,4	27,8	14,4	20,5	55,6	43,8	23,2
TRADOC	Women	14	62	21	97	22	54	173
	Total	135	191	30	356	54	63	473
	%	10,4	32,5	70,0	27,2	40,7	85,7	36,6
LC	Women	26	90	78	194	28	74	296
	Total	121	302	164	587	138	170	895
	%	21,5	29,8	47,6	33,0	20,3	43,5	33,1
LF	Women	40	109	70	219	0	5	224
	Total	459	684	768	1911	0	13	1924

	%	8,7	15,9	9,1	11,5	0	38,5	11,6
Other	Women	24	45	43	112	79	50	241
	Total	368	451	215	1034	126	93	1253
	%	6,5	10,0	20,0	10,8	62,7	53,8	19,2
Total	Women	138	386	243	767	140	204	1111
	Total	1343	1920	1328	4591	337	390	5318
	%	10,3	20,1	18,3	16,7	41,5	52,3	20,9

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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.

Year	Number of civilians who wants to join professional military service	Number of women who wants to join professional military service	Number of women who joins professional military service
2004.	307	47	19
till April 2005.	140	22	11

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

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

Situation in the NCO military education is similar.

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 4 international peacekeeping missions: Afghanistan (since February of 2003); Bosnia-Herzegovina (since April 1996), Iraq (since May 2003), Kosovo (since 2000). At the present moment there are 3 females serving in Iraq (Liaison officer and 2 medical NCO), 1 in Kosovo (operational officer).

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:

SPECIAL INTEREST ITEMS/EVENTS (RECENT AND PROJECTED DEVELOPMENTS)

Within the framework of reorganizing Latvian armed forces the military pay system was changed in principle from 1 July 2004 (new pay regulations will also affect civilians working in the armed forces). The current pay-by-position system was replaced by a new pay-by-rank system. 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 childcare 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 16,7 %. 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.