

Belgian National report 2007
(situation of the year 2006)

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 opened to both women and men.

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. In 2006 all units were invited to report good practices related to diversity. Four units worked out a project. The purpose is to stimulate actions improving mutual respect among service members and to promote and announce these actions. This procedure will be repeated every year.

In 2006 the Belgian Government started the implementation of gender mainstreaming of its policy. The Belgian Armed Forces are involved in this process. The first step was the establishment of a counseling committee. The Belgian Armed Forces are represented in this committee. Its mission is to develop a toolkit that facilitates gender mainstreaming. The developed tools are meant to use in six domains: budget and finance, policy development, public purchases, policy implementation, policy evaluation and gender statistics. These tools will contribute to gender mainstreaming of governmental and Belgian Armed Forces activities.

ORGANISATION

On 1 January 2007, there are 3242 service women. They represent 8,25% 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 (21,7%).

	Men	% Men	Women	% Women	Total
Army	23094	93.4	1631	6.6	24725
Air force	8921	91.4	856	8.6	9777
Navy	2025	87.8	281	12.2	2306
Medical Component	1452	78.3	403	21.7	1855
(Other e.g. musicians)	(555)	(90.2)	(71)	(9.8)	(626)
Total	36047	91.75	3242	8.25	39289

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

	1999		2003		2007	
	Number of women	%	Number of women	%	Number of women	%
Officers	218	4.14	263	5.42	361	7.44
NCOs	1030	5.62	1042	6.24	1103	6.6
Soldiers	1899	10.09	2028	10.49	1778	10.04
Total	3147	7.42	3333	8.15	3242	8.25

Women represent only 7,44% 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.

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 and part-time work five years before retiring. Out of all service women 18.1% choose to work in a 4-day working week. Among male service members only 3.2% work in a 4-day working week. The numbers are always the lowest among officers.

RECRUITMENT

In 2006 a total of 1421 men and women were recruited. There are no quotas applied either to recruitment or to the total number of women in service.

	Women	Men	Total	%
Officers	55	210	265	21 %
NCOs	25	327	352	7 %
Soldiers	47	757	804	6 %
TOTAL	127	1294	1421	8,9 %

The percentage of recruited women increased 1% among NCOs, and 2% among officers. The percentage of women among recruited soldiers decreased 1%. The trend of the past years continues: the highest percentage of women is recruited in the category of officers. Selection and recruitment tests are identical for men and women. 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.

In 2006 recruitment brochures have been adapted. The number of women shown in previous editions was disproportionately high.

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 different standards for men and women, is also applicable for candidate service members during their education.

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

In January 2006, so called "diversity theatre" has become a part of the basic education of all service members. The purpose is to make participants aware of diversity and stereotypes. These sessions make diversity a subject of discussion. Moreover they incite the participants to consider their own behavior and attitude.

A proper attitude towards others and towards sexual harassment, mobbing, violent or disrespectful behavior is one of the joint individual common core skills (JICCS) related to rules of behavior and values. JICCS are skills that all personnel must master. Training is provided every year in order to maintain these skills. PowerPoint presentations supporting this training have been developed and are available on the intranet of the Belgian Armed Forces.

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 2006 199 service women participated in operations abroad. This means that 4,8% of all participants in operations abroad are women! This is a considerable amount, regarding the overall percentage of women in the Belgian Armed Forces (8,25%) 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 32 senior officers and among them 1 brigadier, 3 colonels, 21 lieutenant colonels and 7 majors.

	1 Jan 01	1 Jan 02	1 Jan 03	1 Jan 04	1 Jan 06	1 Jan 07
OF3 (Major)	22	20	15	12	9	7
OF4 (Lt Col)	6	10	12	19	23	21
OF5 (Col)	0	0	1	1	1	3
OF6	0	0	0	0	1	1
TOTAL	28	30	28	32	34	32

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

WAY AHEAD

On 12th January 2007 the Belgian Government promulgated a law ensuring gender mainstreaming of all government policies. On Women's Day 2007, MOD, CHOD 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 the emphasis will be on gender mainstreaming, especially in operations.

- The opportunity of promulgating guidelines on deployment of service personnel, especially "military couples", service members with young children and single parents in operations abroad will be investigated.
- The gender dimension will be integrated in the fact finding, operational planning, force generation, the conduct of operations and lessons identified/learned.

CONCLUSION

After 32 years of presence in the Armed Forces, the representation of women is stagnating the last three years. There is a growing number of women participating in operations abroad. Improving gender sensitivity will be an important challenge in the near future, especially when the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and gender mainstreaming of the whole operational process is aimed at.