

ITALY

NATIONAL REPORT

1. Policy

Voluntary female military service, established in 1999 by law n. 380, is part of the important ongoing process of transformation of the Italian Armed Forces, which has led to a full volunteer-based recruitment system with pre-established service terms of different duration.

In the reformed Armed Forces, both Officers and NCOs will be volunteers.

The new personnel policy pays great attention to the female component and Italy benefits from her Allies' experiences in dealing with gender discrimination issues.

The fact of having lagged behind other nations was one of the main factors that determined the immediate opening of the military world to women without any preclusion at all.

However, in order to regulate women's "access", the above mentioned law has been supplemented with a number of delegated decrees based on the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment:

- delegated decree n. 24 dated 31st January 2000 governing recruitment, legal status and career, now included in a new decree: "Code for equal opportunities" that integrates all the existing regulations about equal opportunities;
- decree n. 114, dated 04.04.00, establishing specific fitness standards for admission to military service, with the addition of the specific pathologies that may affect women;
- decree dated 21 July 2004 establishing an Advisory Committee tasked with assisting the Defence Chief of Staff and the Commanding General of Customs & Financial Police 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 in the field of women integration in the labour world. The members include :

- 6 representatives of the Minister of Defence;
- 4 representatives of the Minister for Equal Opportunities;
- 1 representative of the Minister of Economy and Finance (the Customs & Financial Police report to this Minister).

During its first six years, the Committee has kept in touch with the "military reality" visiting various military Units (Academies, Schools, Volunteer Training Regiments and combat Units) where women were serving. The visits were aimed at checking compliance with existing laws, regulations and the military code.

It is important to point out that since 2005 female recruitment was regulated by a decree establishing, on a yearly basis, the rolls, corps, specialties and specialisations of each Service in which servicewomen are to be enlisted. Now, starting from 2006 no limitations are posed in the recruitment, all the competitions are completely opened to women.

2. Organisation

The figures of the total strength in 2006 are as follow:

ARMED FORCE	TOTAL STRENGTH	MEN	WOMEN	WOMEN %
ARMY	115.686	110.405	5.281	4,6%
NAVY	35.261	33.707	1.554	4,4%
AIR FORCE	45.879	45.387	492	1,1%
CARABINIERI	111.721	110.956	765	0,7%
TOTAL	308.547	300.455	8.092	2,6%

In particular, at present, there are 8.092 women distributed as follows:

ARMED FORCE	CATEGORIES	NUMBER	TOTAL
ARMY	OFFICERS	219	5.281
	NCO'S	35	
	TROOPS	5027	
NAVY	OFFICERS	417	1.554
	NCO'S	136	
	TROOPS	1001	
AIR FORCE	OFFICERS	135	492
	NCO'S	75	
	TROOPS	282	

CARABINIERI	OFFICERS	233	765
	NCO'S	304	
	TROOPS	228	

3. Employment

The Italian legislation enshrines the principle of non- discrimination and ensures that male and female personnel have the same opportunities in terms of career development, training, combat commitments.

Non- restriction policies are already in force in the three Services, in the Carabinieri Corps and in the Customs & Financial Police.

Women are employed in the most part of the various tasks, in logistical and operational sectors, in accordance with their skill and if possible with their wishes. So now, that the number of enlisted women has increased female personnel can be found in almost any Unit, including those at a high level of "Combat readiness". As a matter of fact, there are female paratroopers, pilots and personnel on board Naval units; the Carabinieri also recruit female personnel to be employed in operations against crime.

4. Recruitment

In the beginning, there was a plan for the gradual admission of female personnel. That limited the number of applications by women and consequently their enlistment.

Under the new regulations, women can participate in any recruitment competition and there are no differences in recruitment nor specific requirements for women. The purpose of recruitment is to enlist the best candidates, regardless of gender.

Women's recruitment is growing: in 2006 the recruited female personnel was about 10% while the applications submitted by women accounted for 24%.

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 results.

In general, the only differences between male and female personnel were in the physical performances, 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, all female personnel have been deployed to operational theatres since the end of 2001.

As a matter of fact, a considerable number of female personnel have been employed or are being employed in international operations, also on board naval units, in Kosovo, Bosnia, Albania, Afghanistan, Iraq and, as from this year, in Lebanon and their positions involve important operational activities. The lesson learned from out of area operations are: firstly, women have shown great self-denial and the ability to adapt and integrate into different environments; secondly, their performance on the field gave remarkable feed back in relation to the selection and training criteria.

Female presence has been particularly appreciated in particular tasks, especially those involving contacts with local women.

The following female personnel are presently employed in out of area operations:

MISSION	NUMBER OF WOMEN
BOSNIA	20
KOSOVO	50
AFGHANISTAN	40
LIBANO	50
TOTAL	160

Female personnel are employed successfully in this Kind of operations. They are fully integrated with their male colleagues. They live and work in the Units in the same condition as their male colleagues. Their support is considered as very important for relations 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 arisen during their training and operations, and of the applying regulations.

The admission of women to the Armed Forces has entailed two requirements:

- one is the adjustment of 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 into 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 into 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 situations.

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 it 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 admission to 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 we will confirm the policy we have adopted.

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