

National Report from the Netherlands For the Committee on Women in NATO Forces

The Hague, May 2007

Introduction

The participation of women in the Royal Netherlands Armed Forces began in 1944, when the Dutch Women's Corps was formed in the United Kingdom during the Second World War. The Corps initially comprised several hundred Dutch women who had fled the Netherlands during those years. Later, the Corps was divided into three separate Women's Corps, one for each branch of the Armed Forces: the MARVA (Navy), the MILVA (Army), and the LUVA (Air Force).

In January 1979, the integration policy for women within the armed forces commenced when female personnel were assigned to the various arms and branches of the three Services (Army, Navy and Air Force). The integration policy was inspired by the UN 'Committee on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women' (CEDAW). There were no longer any solid reasons for maintaining several separate female Corps, and so by 1 January 1982, the Women's Corps were disbanded.

Since 1988, the Services have been implementing various measures as part of the "Positive

Plan of Action for the Integration of Women into the Armed Forces and Equal Opportunities Memorandum". These measures include increasing female recruitment, adjusting (when possible) selection criteria, implementing career policies, providing physical training, making ergonomic adjustments, regulating part-time work, maternity leave, parental leave and child-care and enforcing the rules for the prevention of undesirable conduct. The Defence Equal Policy Memorandum of 1997 is the last approved memorandum and is still valid.

This report will outline the status of the integration of women into the Dutch armed forces. Current activities, initiatives and gender issues will be covered.

Policies

Many policy memorandums and measures in the domain of equal opportunities (and later gender policy) date from the nineteen-eighties and nineties. Although there were plenty of ideas and measures present within the Defence organisation, there were no success stories. As a consequence, a number of additional measures and initiatives were taken.

The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on 'Women, Peace and Security' in October 2000. On the one hand, the resolution calls for the role of women to be increased in the planning, preparation, decision-making and execution with regard to peace missions, and on the other hand for more attention to be paid to the effects on women of conflicts and peace operations. The resolution provides a general framework

for the integration of gender aspects into policy surrounding international peace and security. The government's point of view in respect of 'gender mainstreaming'¹ was established in 2001. Gender mainstreaming is the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes in such a way that the perspective of gender equality is integrated into all policy. Preconditions in this regard are as follows:

- commitment at the senior level;
- explicit gender policy with clear objectives and responsibilities;
- availability of gender expertise, and
- availability of resources and instruments.

UN Resolution 1325 and the government's viewpoint on gender mainstreaming ensured that equal opportunities policy was given new impetus in the form of gender policy.

Commitment at the senior level was put into practise by the appointment of 'Gender Ambassadors' at the second highest level in the Defence organisation in the autumn of 2002. Gender ambassadors are the deputy commanders-in-chief of the Services, and have the special task of keeping attention focused on the subject of gender in their Service; they act as point of contact for gender-related matters. Explicit gender policy with clear objectives (such as a target 30% female at the intake of the armed forces) and responsibilities for the gender ambassadors was drawn up in autumn 2004 by the action plan gender. So as to be able to reserve sufficient resources for the implementation of these policy objectives, a grant was applied for from the European Social Fund (ESF-EQUAL). The grant should ensure that gender policy in the Defence organisation is dealt with in a three-year project, entitled Genderforce. The application for the ESF-EQUAL grant was approved at the end of 2004.

The implementation of Resolution 1325 began to take shape. The ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence are responsible for the implementation of Resolution 1325. In 2002, A civil service working group assessed whether there was a need for new policy in order to properly implement the resolution. The working group concluded that attention was being paid in many areas to women and gender issues and that work was necessary at unit level only with a view to the further embedding of the theme of gender in foreign and Defence policy. These conclusions were submitted to the House of Representatives in a joint report on 26 March 2003; the report contained the following points for the Defence organisation:

1. gender needs to be embedded in training and instruction;
2. the gender perspective needs to be integrated in peace operations;
3. gender mainstreaming;
4. a well-balanced composition of male/female Defence employees needs to be achieved; this is to include deployments.

The above conclusions led to a change of direction. First of all, the focus was shifted from the equal opportunities process in personnel policy to gender in the core business of the Defence organisation, namely crisis management operations. The four above

¹ Government Viewpoint on Gender Mainstreaming, a strategy of quality improvement, Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, June 2001.

mentioned points became the subprojects in our policies. Another shift of focus concerned that from policy development to policy implementation.

These shifts in focus was given shape in the project Genderforce. Genderforce is an important project because it connects gender with the core task of the Defence organisation: making a contribution to national and international peace and security. The Defence organisation is convinced that an effective gender policy contributes to an improved fulfilment of these core tasks. The Defence organisation's gender policy aims to achieve a more balanced and more diverse workforce and the optimal use of individuals' different qualities. The enforcement of peace and security in an unstable environment sometimes requires aggressive and unequivocal action, but at other times requires lending a sympathetic ear to local groups. Experience has shown that mixed units are better at dealing with complex situations and possess greater mental strength. The Defence organisation needs to have a good gender balance not only for dealing with crisis-management operations but also, in a more general sense, to remain an attractive employer. Fifty percent of the labour market consists of female potential and the Defence organisation would be foolish not to try to utilise that potential talent. Finally, the various international agreements on the subject of gender, particularly UN Security Council resolution 1325 make Genderforce important.

Organisation

The Dutch armed forces are an all-volunteer professional organisation. Dutch servicewomen are integrated in the units and serve under the same rules and regulations as men. Requirements in terms of training standards, performance levels and discipline are equal. Servicemen and women have the same obligation to serve in the event of mobilisation.

Table 1: Distribution of male and female military personnel in each Service (2006, in persons)

	Male	Female	Total
Navy	9,386 (90%)	1,049 (10%)	10,435
Army	20,981 (92%)	1,783 (8%)	22,764
Air Force	9,236 (92%)	854 (8%)	10,090
Marechaussee	5,371 (89%)	685 (11%)	6,056
Total	44,974 (91%)	4,371 (9%)	49,345

Employment

With the exception of the Marine Corps and the Submarine Service, all posts are available to women. These two Services have remained closed to women for reasons of combat effectiveness and practicality.

Within the other Services, women serve in various positions within the Headquarters staffs, combat units and support units. However there are still a disproportionate number of women in certain branches, which might be considered traditionally “female”, such as the medical services, military administration units, logistics and communications units. On the other hand there are hardly any women in branches, which might be considered traditionally “male”, such as combat units, technical services and maintenance units.

Recruitment

The Defence organisation has vast recruiting requirements. In order to realise those requirements, a number of additional measures are necessary. An important measure in this regard is to ensure that job requirements are properly in line with the selection requirements. At present, the selection requirements are often set higher than those set for the ability to do the job. Making the job requirements in line with the selection requirements is expected to lead to there being more candidates found suitable for a job in the Defence organisation.

The recruitment objective is actually achieved by specific recruitment among target groups that do not traditionally apply for a job with the armed forces. Consequently, special recruitment campaigns are being set up specifically to recruit young women. On the other hand, ways are being looked at of designing the current campaigns so that they appeal to both men and women. The recruitment target for females is set at 30% for the armed forces in total. The percentage of females entering the armed forces was 11% in 2005 and 13% in 2006. All though the marechaussee (military police) has an intake percentage of 35% in 2005 and 2006.

Retention and Career Development

The retention of women is one of the points for attention if a more even balance in the proportion of male/female Defence personnel is to be achieved. In order to make sure that women stay in the organisation, a number of projects are developed. One project is a mentor-programme for women. Under this programme, women are matched with a more senior, often male colleague in a management position, and the two undergo a career-supporting programme as a ‘pair’. An evaluation shows that the mentor programme has a positive effect on women; their network is expanded and they have the opportunity to ‘spar’ with commanders from the organisation. The effect on commanders who act as mentors is that the women in the organisation become more visible to them, and they gain greater insight into working in the Defence organisation from a minority position. Providing more female role models in visible and influential positions is another project aimed at improving the retention of women. Examples of influential positions are those of instructor, senior staff NCO or head of a division. The underlying thought is that young women new to the organisation will be able to identify with women in the senior NCOs’ and officers’ ranks.

With regard to military personnel, the Dutch armed forces have chosen to pursue an integrated career policy for men and women. However, the individual needs of female military personnel, especially with regard to their careers in the short and long term, are being brought into focus with a view to taking them into consideration, and thus trying to promote the careers of females and limit the outflow of women. In 2005 the first female general was appointed, and in 2007 the second female general will be a fact. One can call this a success of our gender policies.

As was mentioned before, in order to increase the upward mobility, the target figures for 2010 for servicewomen in higher ranks have been revised to 6% from the rank of major and to 3% from the rank of colonel.

Table 2: Distribution of male and female personnel by service level (2006, in persons)

	Male	Female	Total
Officers	8,971 (92%)	808 (8%)	9,779
NCOs	19,548 (93%)	1,467 (7%)	21,015
Corporals/ Privates	16,455 (89%)	2,096 (11%)	18,551
Total	44,974 (91%)	4,371 (9%)	49,345

Training

Although female military personnel are given the same training as their male counterparts, the Defence organisation has additional physical training programmes for men and women who have difficulty in this area. Contacts have been made with local sports facilities where young people are given the opportunity to upgrade their physical status in the pre-recruitment phase. These courses seem to have a positive result on the recruitment of women.

Training is related to functional requirements; therefore, women and men must meet the same physical standards. Several studies are being conducted to find a better solution to optimise training efforts in relation to functional requirements. One major step taken in this area is the introduction of new ergonomic designs of tasks and equipment to reduce physical requirements without diminishing operational readiness.

Gender in training courses

In 2007 we start with the developing of gender training packages which will be implemented in the training courses for the military personell at all levels. The main aim is to enhance expertise on gender aspects amongst military personell. During the project, programmes will be drawn up in cooperation with the training centres of the several units of the Dutch armed forces. In addition to the programme, the training environment is of great importance. Therefore, trainers and instructors will follow a gender programme.

Deployments

Female military personnel have the same opportunities to develop their career as male military personnel (except in the Marine Corps and the Submarine Service). Dutch servicewomen have participated in various mission areas all over the world in support of Peace Support Operations and other humanitarian operations. The operations mostly last 4 to 6 months. According to regulations, “the military personnel of the armed forces, both men and women, are serving under the obligation to be fit for duty abroad. Deployment is not on a voluntary basis. Women with one or more children under the age of five are not deployed abroad, unless operational reasons make it absolutely necessary.” This year, one of our actions from the action plan gender is to put together a comprehensive plan for improving the possibilities to combine work with care responsibilities.

When assessing the objective of deployments, the gender perspective is emphatically included in the considerations. This means that attention is paid to the effects of a Dutch deployment on women and men in the unit to be deployed, as well as on local women and men. Attention is also paid to involving women in the process of peace-promoting activities and reconstruction, and to ensuring that women and girls are protected from sexual violence and acts of war.

In order to properly harmonise policy and the practical situation, various working conferences have been organised, involving military personnel from the operational staffs of all armed forces units, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. One of the aims of such conferences has been to give concrete form to Resolution 1325 in respect of the deployment to Iraq, by consciously employing female military personnel in, for example, house-to-house searches and roadblocks. In practice, this would appear to have an extremely favourable influence on relations with the local population.

During the reconnaissance mission for the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) operation in Afghanistan, gender aspects were included as an item, and a specific briefing on gender was given during the formation and activation orders. The conclusions of the above findings must be disseminated within the organisation. There is a need for a (standard) checklist that can be used during the reconnaissance mission and preparations for an operation.

In order to give further shape to this checklist, ‘Genderforce’ proposes to set up a pilot project in which a gender-expert looks at the issue of crisis management operations, by actually joining such an operation on a temporary basis. The gender expert must come up with concrete advice indicating how the integration of gender aspects can improve the quality and effectiveness of an operation.

Conclusion

Genderforce is a beneficial project because it offers the possibility of propagating the subject of gender in different – cultural and structural – ways, both inside and outside the Defence organisation. The commitment to gender by the top officials - they are responsible for the results of Genderforce - within the Defence organisation will allow Genderforce to establish a structural and permanent embedding of gender policy. There is a willingness to propagate the benefits and necessity of gender policy and to direct management decisions towards it. These aspects and the arrangement of regular meetings make it possible to both broaden the support base and shape international cooperation on gender issues. Genderforce is a large project because Genderforce will generate the employment of specialised personnel and the financial means to realise the gender objectives set by the Defence organisation. The Defence organisation will make the necessary personnel available to carry through the Genderforce project.

National coordination office on Gender

Ltcdr drs. P.N. van den Heuvel (Ella)
Ministry of Defence
Directorate of Personnel
P.O. Box 20703
2500 ES The Hague
Netherlands

Tel.: +31.70.339 6784
E-mail: PN.vd.Heuvel@mindef.nl