

BELGIAN NATIONAL REPORT FOR 2003

This report gives an overview of the progress of women's integration in the Belgian Armed Forces over the last few years.

PERSONNEL POLICY

The first servicewomen were enrolled in the Belgian Armed Forces in 1975.

Since 1981 all discriminations have been eliminated, all positions have been open to women and men and the selection criteria have been the same for all.

In 1997, the Belgian General Staff implemented an instruction with the aim of preventing and dealing with the problems related to sexual harassment and about a hundred of persons have been trained as confidential persons and are on duty. The regulations on mobbing and sexual harassment are currently under consideration to make them coincide with the evolution initiated in the civilian legislation. Furthermore, an independent service to resolve complaints of sexual harassment, mobbing, violent or disrespectful behaviour at the workplace and discrimination has been set up and has been operational since April 02.

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, part-time work and early retirement. Out of the servicewomen, 15% choose to work part-time, the percentage is always the lowest among the officers. Since 2000 flexible working hours have been introduced. They apply as long as the units' operational requirements allow to do so.

Maternity/parental leave: Women are entitled to a 15- week maternity leave. This leave counts as active duty. Men or women are entitled to a 3- month unpaid parental leave before the child's 10th birthday.

A novelty in the field of the personnel policy is the creation of a new function within the Defence Staff Human Resources Directorate General the holder of which is entrusted with the promotion of equal opportunities within the Ministry. Equal opportunities are being looked at from different angles: the integration of servicewomen in an organisation with a male majority, the fusion of civilian into military structures,...

We also note the creation of reception structures for infants: three day nurseries are currently open for the children of the Ministry personnel, three others will be opened soon.

Within the framework of a new personnel management policy, the authorities want as much as possible to take the situation into account of couples in which both partners belong to the Ministry (situation that concerns 70 % of the servicewomen).

ORGANISATION

On 01 January 2003 there were 3192 servicewomen that is to say 8.2% of the total strength.

The table below shows the total number of women per service and the percentage of women in each of them.

The percentage of women is always the lowest in the Army (6.6 %) and the highest in the Medical Service (19.9 %).

	ARMY	%	AIR FORCE	%	NAVY	%	MEDICAL SERVICE	%	TOTAL	%
JAN 98	1,629		871		262		372		3,134	7.1
JAN 99	1,649	6.1	870	8.0	274	10.7	354	18.3	3,147	7.4
JAN 00	1,698	6.3	871	8.2	285	11.1	348	18.6	3,202	7.6
JAN 01	1,667	6.3	887	8.4	283	11.4	335	19.3	3,190	7.7
JAN 02	1,703	6.5	905	8.7	286	11.5	351	19.7	3,245	7.9
JAN 03	1,644	6.6	908	9.0	282	11.8	358	19.9	3192	8.2

As to the civilian personnel of the Ministry, there are 1,327 women out of a total of 3,134 civil servants, which amounts to 43%. However 65% of the female civilian personnel are contract agents.

The distribution among the various categories of personnel remains rather similar, as is shown in the table below:

	JAN 99	%	JAN 00	%	JAN 01	%	JAN 02	%	JAN 03	%
Officers	218	4.1	227	4.5	236	4.7	246	5.0	264	5.7
NCO's	1,030	5.6	1,021	5.7	1,021	5.9	1,037	6.1	1,017	6.6
RANKS	1,899	10.1	1,954	10.1	1,954	10.1	1,962	10.3	1,911	11.7
TOTAL	3,147	7.4	3,202	7.6	3,190	7.7	3,245	7.9	3,192	8.2

Women only represent 5.7% of the officers but it is in this category that progress has been the strongest since 1998.

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.

Nevertheless there are women who occupy positions that were reserved for men in the past. For the time being, there are indeed 3 women with a pilot's licence (two on F16, the other on A-Jet) as well as 1 student pilot on Marchetti.

The Army has 2 helicopter pilots. We can also rely on 2 female bomb disposal experts and 2 combat unit platoon commanders (one within an armoured unit, another with the combat engineers).

In the Navy, more than 10 % of the women are part of the seagoing personnel.

The command intends to encourage the presence of women in the command structures, to make sure that women are present in the very same functions, in the examination boards and in the recruitment structures as well as in the schools and training centres of the Ministry.

As to civilian personnel, women are occupying 18% of the officer equivalent positions.

Women occupy 40% of NCO equivalent positions and 36% of the volunteer equivalent positions.

EMPLOYMENT

Promotions such as pay are the same for women and men. Promotion rules are based on seniority, personal qualities and professional qualifications. More and more women meet the conditions to be promoted to higher ranks.

As stated above, all functions including in combat units are open to women.

RECRUITMENT

The current trend is still a reduction in force and recruitment is consequently limited. In 2002, 2229 men and women were nevertheless enrolled and we can see that the proportion of women in the category of officers (20 %) has been developing positively. There is not any quota applied either to recruitment or to the total number of women .

	Women	Men	Total	%
Officers	75	307	382	20%
NCOs	50	550	600	8%
Volunteers	120	1127	1247	10%
TOTAL	245	1984	2229	11%

Recruitment requirements are the same for women and men. There is no gender discrimination. Identical criteria apply to women and men, particularly regarding fitness and selection tests. Age at entry ranges from 16 years old to a maximum of 33 years old depending on the category of personnel recruited. Minimum educational standards are required for each personnel category. The percentage of officers is high among the recruits and women represent 17 % of the totality of students of the Royal Military Academy. To favour integration and to make the most of the fact that women will be in a majority position on the labour market in the years to come, we follow the example of some NATO partners with the organisation of targeted recruitment campaigns for young women.

TRAINING

The training programmes for women are identical to those of their male colleagues and are organised in the same schools and training centres.

From this year, a new annual fitness test, no longer gender neutral, has been introduced.

During their career, the servicewomen can attend the same specialisation courses and participate in all examinations required for promotion to higher ranks.

More and more women participate in the Staff officers' training courses. At this time, two female officers have obtained a staff certificate and eight officers have an administration course certificate.

It is therefore safe to say that among the 30 female senior officers currently employed by the Belgian Armed Forces, one out of two has participated in a senior officers' training .

DEPLOYMENTS

The participation of women in humanitarian operations is still topical. They have participated in various operations in the Balkans, in Italy and in Africa. These missions can last between 1 and 6 months, but usually last 4 months.

In 2002, there were 144 of them to participate in a mission. Per category this amounts to 84 volunteers, 46 NCOs and 14 officers..

In the Navy, 30 women are part of the seagoing personnel and go therefore regularly aboard the ships.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

An ever-growing number of women go over to higher ranks especially among the officers. The first female senior officer was promoted in 1991, there are now 30 of them and among them 10 lieutenant colonels.

	1 Jan 98	1 Jan 99	1 Jan 00	1 Jan 01	1 Jan 02	2003
OF3 (major)	13	18	23	22	20	14
OF4 (Lt Col)	1	2	2	6	10	18
OF5 (Col)	0	0	0	0	0	1
TOTAL	14	20	25	28	30	33

Among NCOs, 2 women reached the rank of Chief Warrant Officer.

Among civil servants, 6 women have a rank equivalent to that of senior officer.

PARTICULAR ITEMS, EVENTS OF INTEREST

- The Belgian Armed Forces have undergone a thorough restructuring. Since 2 January 2002 there has been one single Defence Staff. The different Services are now components under one single operational command. Existing civilian and military structures have been fully integrated.
- The year 2000 has been marked by the first General Meeting of female personnel of the Ministry following a survey carried out among all servicewomen by the General Staff on how integration was perceived by them and which problems should be solved. The conclusions of this survey turned out to be very positive even if some problems were highlighted. In March 2001, a second General Meeting was organised to announce the first concrete measures that complied with the wishes expressed previously. Since many of these measures and wishes were also related to the male colleagues, a first General Meeting for all personnel of the Ministry took place on 20 December 2001. Integration, equal opportunities and quality of life continued to be important topics.
- An interservice task force has examined the policy related to the annual fitness tests that have been gender neutral up to now. From this year a new annual fitness test, no longer gender neutral, has been introduced. However, fitness tests related to specific functions

(in combat units, paratroopers, military divers,...) will remain identical for both men and women.

- An independent equal opportunities and confidential service has been operational since April 02 . It consists of 6 people, military and civilians, men and women, belonging to the different personnel categories. Their primary task is to resolve complaints of sexual harassment, mobbing, violent or disrespectful behaviour and discrimination. They analyse the types of complaints and periodically report to the Minister and the Defence Staff authorities to permit policy changes if necessary. This service supports and advises the defence staff as well as the “confidential persons” that work in the different garrisons and units.
- To improve and facilitate the integration of civil servants in the ministry, newly recruited civilians with a rank equivalent to that of officer will receive a basic instruction programme in the near future. It will consist of information sessions on military structures, rules and regulations, security,...and of visits to several units of the different components to get acquainted with the specificity of the Armed Forces.

CONCLUSION

After 28 years of presence in the Armed Forces, servicewomen represent 8.2% of the strength.

Their percentage is higher among the volunteers than among the officers but this proportion tends to change with an ever-growing number of young girls arriving in the Royal Military Academy.

Servicewomen take an active part in the missions abroad and in the Staff training and other promotion courses.

The integration of women in the Belgian Armed Forces is making constant progress and with Equal Opportunities now officially on the agenda of the Human Resources Directorate General , it will continue to make progress in the years to come.