

**NATIONAL REPORT FROM THE NETHERLANDS  
FOR THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN IN NATO FORCES  
Ottawa, June '03**

**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 was initially comprised of 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 solid reasons for maintaining several separate female Corps, and so by January 1st, 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 childcare and enforcing the rules for the prevention of undesirable conduct.

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.

**Policy Changes**

In 2002, the Dutch Armed Forces appointed so-called 'gender-ambassadors'. These are the Deputy Commanders-in-Chief of the Army, Air Force and Marechaussee (Military Police). The Navy appointed the Deputy Director of Personnel. The gender-ambassadors fulfil an important role in addressing gender issues within their own forces and are open-minded on gender issues brought forward by their own personnel. Each ambassador has formulated and published three personal priorities for action in his role as gender-ambassador for his branch. So far the ambassadors met each other on several occasions, for example at a meeting on undesirable conduct and a symposium on gender in the Armed Forces.

In 2002 the Inspector General of the Armed Forces evaluated the Defence Equal Policy Memorandum of 1997. The results of this evaluation will be the basis input for a new Gender Policy Memorandum to be published in 2003. The new Policy Memorandum will focus on the gender awareness of commanders within the Armed Forces, the incorporation of gender in all domains of policy development (gender mainstreaming), the retention of female personnel and the career development, improvement of childcare facilities, and improving

the information on several existing measures to employees and most of all the military commanders.

In 2000, the UN Security Council approved resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. A study<sup>1</sup> was conducted by the Netherlands Institute for International Relations ‘Clingendael’ to research the implications of this resolution for several Dutch organisations, including the Dutch Armed Forces. As a consequence of the results of this study, a letter was sent to the Dutch Parliament march 2003 stating the Dutch Armed Forces’ intent of implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325. The focus will be on the training of military personnel on several gender aspects in preparation of Peace Support Operations, furthermore on gender aspects within the Operation’s Mission, finally the appointment of servicewomen in special functions within an operation.

### Organisation

The Dutch Armed Forces is 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 (2002, in persons)*

	INDEFINITE CONTRACTS			FIXED-TERM CONTRACTS			total
	Male	Female	subtotal	male	Female	subtotal	
<b>Navy</b>	7,427 (94,7%)	419 (5,3%)	7,846	3,608 (84,0%)	685 (16,0%)	4,293	12,139
<b>Army</b>	11,078 (97,6%)	275 (2,4%)	11,353	10,299 (86,9%)	1,559 (13,1%)	11,858	23,211
<b>Air Force</b>	7,072 (95,0%)	369 (5,0%)	7,441	3,708 (85,1%)	649 (14,9%)	4,357	11,798
<b>Marechaussee</b>	3,095 (94,7%)	172 (5,3%)	3,267	1,998 (86,5%)	312 (13,5%)	2,310	5,577
<b>Total</b>	28,672 (95,9%)	1,235 (4,1%)	29,907	19,613 (86,0%)	3,205 (14,0%)	22,818	52,725

*Table 2: Development of percentage female military personnel*

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
<b>Navy</b>	9,1%	9,2%	9,2%	9,1%	9,1%
<b>Army</b>	6,5%	6,9%	7,2%	7,9%	7,9%
<b>Air Force</b>	6,8%	7,5%	8,0%	8,6%	8,9%
<b>Marechaussee</b>	7,3%	8,5%	8,7%	8,7%	9,4%
<b>Average</b>	<b>7,3</b> %	<b>7,7</b> %	<b>8,0</b> %	<b>8,4</b> %	<b>8,5</b> %

<sup>1</sup> Frerks, G. and T. Bouta, *Women’s Roles in Conflict Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Literature review and institutional analysis*, Research by the Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael, Conflict Research Unit, under commission of the Dutch ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2002.

## **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. However, the Dutch Armed Forces aim to open up all posts for women in the future on the grounds of formal European legislation on equal opportunities for men and women.

Within the other Services, women serve in various positions within the Headquarters staffs, combat units and support units. However there is still a disproportionate spread 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**

Recruitment requirements, especially for personnel with fixed-term contracts, are expected to increase in the coming years. Conversely, the population in the age category between 15 and 29 years is estimated to decrease further in the Netherlands over the next few years and then stabilise. Subsequently, this means that, in the coming years, there will be a smaller pool to recruit from and consequently there will be more focus on the recruitment of women.

Regarding this problem area, the Dutch Armed Forces have implemented a program for young men and women at secondary education with a introduction program for the Armed Forces. It gives them an opportunity to witness what Military life is about and gives an advantage in terms of physical fitness and basic military knowledge. This program seems to have a positive impact on the recruitment especially of women.

The Armed Forces are also trying to modify their image of an “all male society” through information and recruitment campaigns. The aim is to make clear that women are also welcome to join the Armed Forces. Furthermore qualified female personnel are being assigned as recruiting officers and are viewed as role models for potential female recruits.

## **Retention**

Retention of women for the Armed Forces will be one of the main targets for the years to come. To retain women in the Armed Forces, barriers in career development (such as career schooling and compulsory sea duty for the Navy, both around the age of 30-35) must be identified and settled. Also facilities for possibilities to combine work and care will have to be improved by providing better child care facilities and arrangements. Formal arrangements have been made such as the right to work part time, the right to parental leave and the right to re-entry up to six years after leaving the Service. In practice military personnel do not like to be an exception and therefore find it hard to make use of these arrangements. In 2002 an Armed Forces brochure was published describing all of the current rules and regulations regarding work and care. Hopefully brochures like these will make the regulations more familiar within the organisation and more accessible to male and female military personnel. Another focus area is on the general attitude towards women and the prevention of all forms of misconduct such as (sexual) harassment, pestering, bullying, teasing and discrimination against women. The subject will be incorporated in various educational programs, and the

attention of commanders will be drawn to the subject of attitude and misconduct towards women. A policy outlining a Complaints Procedure on all forms of undesirable behaviour has been implemented. It includes the creation of a network of confidantes and a complaints committee. Both confidantes and the committee are obliged to report to the Ministry of Defence and their respective Commanders-In-Chief on a yearly basis. Finally, an automated registration system has been developed in order to register centrally which forms of undesirable conduct are occurring.

### **Training**

Although female military personnel are given the same training as their male counterparts, the Defence organisation is still looking for possibilities to conduct additional physical training for men and women who have difficulty in this area. Contacts have been made with local sports facilities at which 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 realistic functional requirements; therefore, women and men must meet the same physical standards. Currently, 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.

### **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 last mostly 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.”

*Table 3: Male and female deployment (Indefinite and fixed-term contracts, 2002)*

	<b>Navy</b>		<b>Army</b>		<b>Air Force</b>		<b>Marechaussee</b>	
	<b>male</b>	<b>female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>female</b>	<b>male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>female</b>
<b>Officers</b>	217	19	758	69	283	26	17	0
<b>NCOs</b>	612	20	1364	63	504	36	227	10
<b>Corporals / privates</b>	334	69	2337	261	203	16	23	3
<b>Total</b>	1163	108	4456	393	990	78	267	13

### **Career Development**

With regard to military personnel, the Dutch Armed Forces have chosen to pursue an integral 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 limit the

outflow of women. The promotion of women through the ranks remains limited, however, because many women leave military service at a relatively young age.

*Table 4: Distribution of male and female by service level (2002, in persons)*

	Navy		Army		Air Force		Marechaussee		Total	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	Male	female	male	female
<b>Officers</b>	2258	173	4215	248	2537	227	392	13	9402	661
<b>NCOs</b>	5203	303	7565	345	5244	385	3709	347	21721	1380
<b>Corporals</b>	3786	648	10410	1310	3033	439	1412	209	18641	2606
<b>Privates</b>										
<b>Total</b>	11247	1124	22190	1903	10814	1051	5513	569	49764	4647

### **Special Interest Items**

In 1992 a Defence Women's Network was founded on the initiative of servicewomen. The Women's Network offers the opportunity to meet other women and to exchange experiences of working in a military and male dominated environment. Defence women try to support and coach each other at network meetings and inform each other by means of a magazine. The Women's Network lobbies for women's issues at the Ministry of Defence. In March 2003, the Ministry of Defence, in cooperation with the Royal Military Academy, organised a symposium on 'Gender in the Armed Forces' for commanders. The symposium was held on the occasion of 'International Women's Day' and about 200 commanders attended this symposium. The purpose of the symposium was to increase the gender awareness of commanders and spread information on gender issues within the Defence organisation.

### **Conclusion**

Over the years, the Netherlands Ministry of Defence has taken significant steps in improving the process of full integration of women within the Dutch Armed Forces. Changes in the Defence organisation such as the abolition of conscription and the subsequent reorganisations, as well as demographic developments, necessitate the recruitment of qualified women in order for the Armed Forces to sustain its mission readiness. Regulations regarding combining work and care and the prevention of undesirable conduct are expected to have a positive influence on the recruitment, retention and thus the upward movement through the ranks (promotion) of female personnel. The gender-ambassadors and the amended Gender Policy Memorandum of 2003 are expected to give new impetus to the issue of gender within the Defence organisation.

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