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THE INTEGRATION OF WOMEN IN ARMED FORCES



FINABEL

European Army Interoperability Center

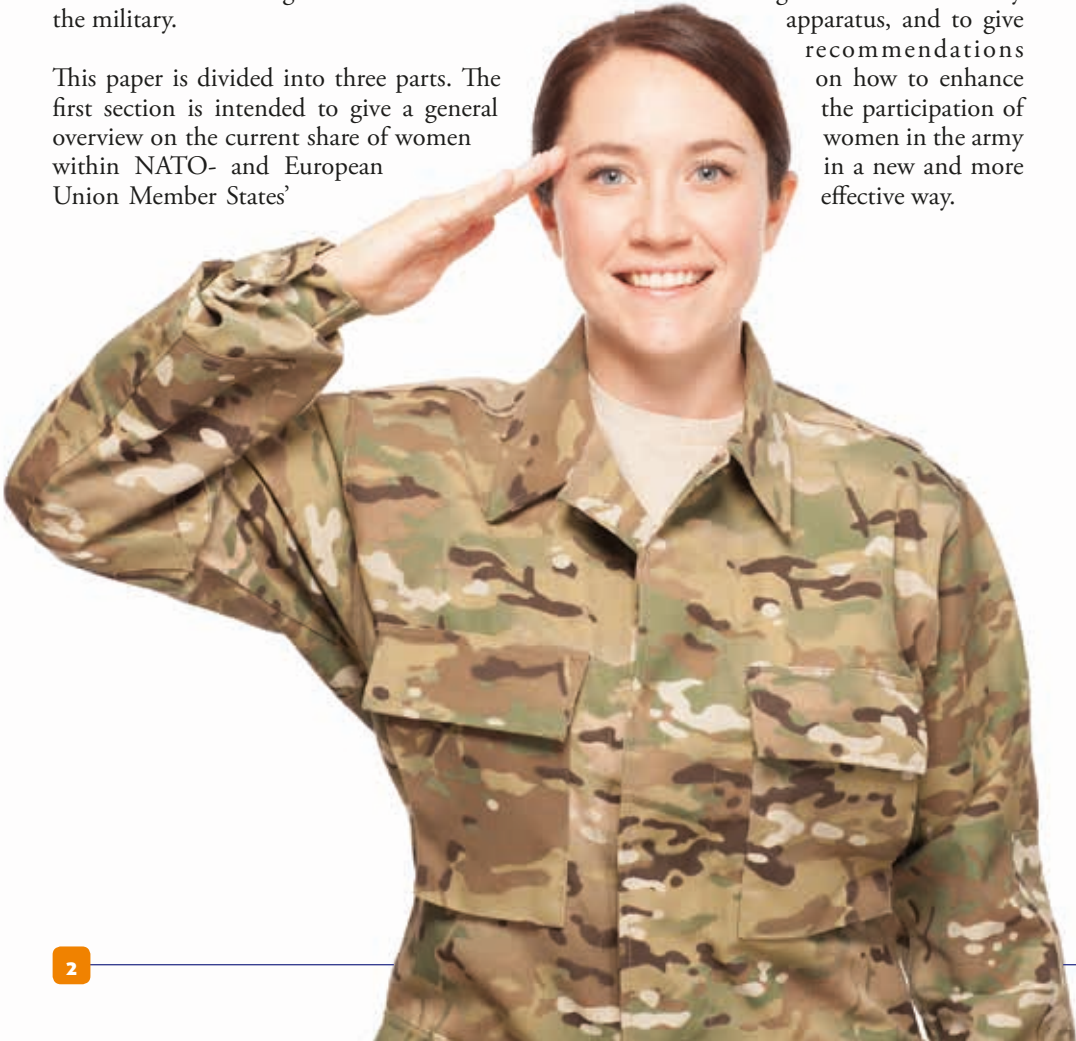
INTRODUCTION

The role of women in the armed forces (AF) changed over the last decades, especially since the suspension of conscription and the introduction of the market-army in most European countries. Nevertheless, the roles of women within the AF has not been fully investigated. This is clearly shown by the fact that, in contrast to U.S. researches and reports, studies regarding the role of female soldiers among the different European AF are limited, not to say absent. Despite this, the aim of this paper will be to clarify the current roles of women in the AF, as well as giving insights to the main issues that hinder integration of women into the military.

This paper is divided into three parts. The first section is intended to give a general overview on the current share of women within NATO- and European Union Member States'

armies, as well several factors that obstructs female participation within the armies. The second part of this document is dealing with issues that affect participation of women in the military. Particularly, this section is divided in four subsections regarding attraction and recruitment process (2.1), functions assigned to female personnel (2.2), daily challenges that women soldiers experience in the units (2.3), and challenges related to international deployment (2.4). The last two paragraphs are devoted to draw conclusions on

the current state of female integration into the military apparatus, and to give recommendations on how to enhance the participation of women in the army in a new and more effective way.



This Food for Thought paper is a document that gives an initial reflection on the theme. The content is not reflecting the positions of the member states, but consists of elements that can initiate and feed the discussions and analyses in the domain of the theme. It was drafted by the Permanent Secretariat of Finabel.

GENERAL OVERVIEW

FIG. 1
EVOLUTION OF THE PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN ARMED FORCES IN NATO COUNTRIES IN THE LAST 15 YEARS

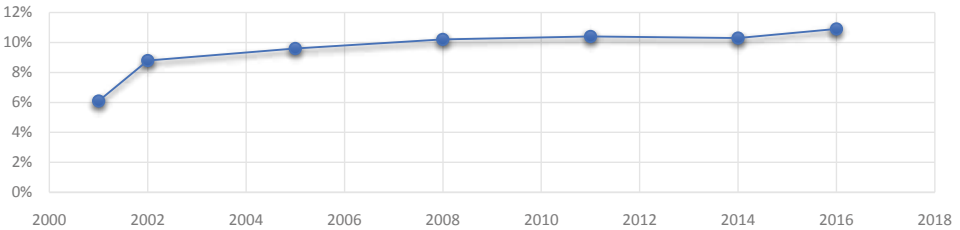


Figure 1 – Illustrates the fluctuation in percentage of female personnel in the national armies of NATO Countries. As a matter of fact, the most significant change in the percentage of women in the military happened between 2001 and 2002, when the share jumped from 6.1% to 8.8%. The cause for this could be related to the new security challenges that emerged after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and the related “rally around the flag” effect. After this date, the percentage of women in the armed forces experienced a slight but constant increase, reaching its peak in 2016 (10.9%).

FIG.2
SHARE OF WOMEN WITH ACTIVE DUTIES IN EU COUNTRIES ARMIES IN 2016

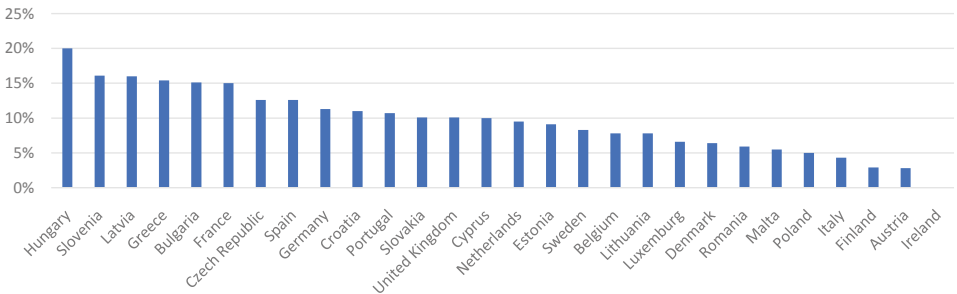


Figure 2 – Portrays the share of women among the military units with active duties in the AF of the EU Member States. As can be derived from the graph, there are considerable differences between the EU countries. In fact, the share of women varies from 2.8% and 2,9% respectively in Austria and Finland to 20% in Hungary, with the average rate being around 10%.

In the literature there are some attempts to explain the reasons behind the aforementioned differences. In fact, according to several scholars (Segal, 1978; Pinch et al., 2004; Carreiras, 2015), there are three key factors that might explain the various role have played in the military over time: social structure, military variables, and cultural factors.

Social structures include the following variables: labor-force characteristics (the greater the percentage of women in the labor force, the larger will be their representation in the AF), economic trends (high levels of male unemployment decreases the opportunities for women to enter into the army), and family responsibilities (the higher is the women's responsibility toward the family, the lower is their representation in the armed forces).

Military variables imply the national security situation. As Segal claimed: *“At the high end of*

the threat to the society, women’s military roles seem to increase. Furthermore, with low threats to national security, but within societies with a solid gender equality, women’s military participation increases. By contrast, medium threat is associated with low participation of women” (Segal, 1978).

Cultural factors refer to the social construction of gender, meaning that with bigger higher gaps between gender opportunities and equality, women experience more difficulties while trying to be involved into the AF. As a consequence, debates on feminization of the military are still present, especially in the European societies that are characterized by an increasing number of women into the military, but where the “ideal military image of the physically, strong, emotionally tough, masculine war hero” is persistent (Kronsell & Svedberg, 2011).



FIG. 3
**SHARE OF APPLICATION FROM WOMEN COMPARED WITH THE SHARE OF WOMEN
 AMONG THE TOTAL RECRUITS IN 21 EU COUNTRIES IN 2016**

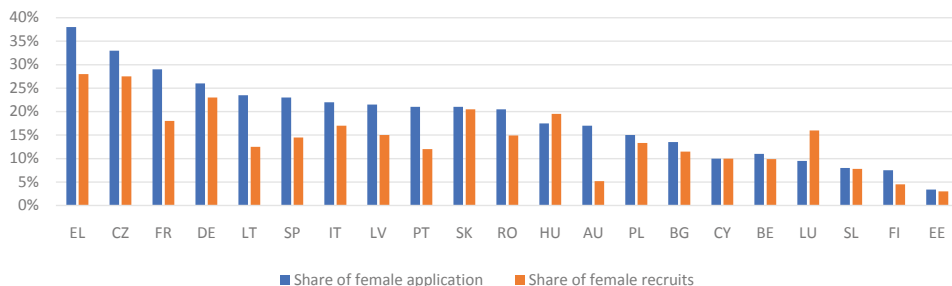
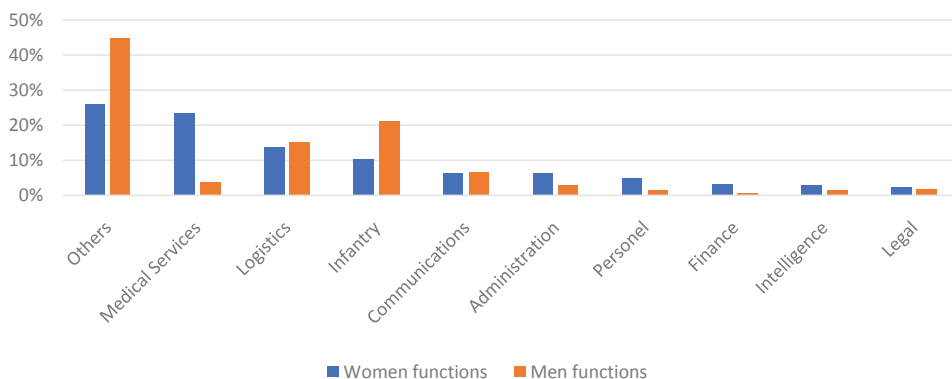


Figure 3 – States the share of application from women in 2016, and the percentage of women who were successfully recruited among the total national recruitments. As elaborated in the graph, the indicator which presents the most significant differences is the share of female applications. Indeed, it varies from 3% in Estonia to almost 40% in Greece, with the average of female applications being around 19%. Concerning the share of females among the total recruits in 2016, it is noticeable that in almost all the analysed countries this value was less than one fourth of the total (with the exceptions of Greece and the Czech Republic, both around 27%). As a matter of fact, there are considerable discrepancies between the two indicators, with the share of recruits being lower than the other one in the vast majority of the countries (with the relevant exemption of Luxemburg which present a level of women recruited 7.3% higher than the share applications coming from females). A key example of that is represented by the situation in Greece which has a negative difference of 11% between the applications received and the women who were successfully recruited among the total of the national recruitments in 2016.

FIG. 4
**WOMEN AND MEN BY FUNCTIONS IN THE MILITARY IN NATO
 COUNTRIES IN 2016**





ISSUES

2.1. Recruitment issues

The situation illustrated by the graph can be considered as the result of many different factors which influenced the presence of women into the AF upon time, starting from a moment in which they were not even allowed to apply for the military, to a situation in which the average of the yearly application coming from females is almost one fifth of the total. Historically, the army used to be characterized by a culture where men were the central subject in both recruitment and conscription. However, the call for women in the armed forces increased since the augmented suspension of conscription and the introduction of the market-army. This notwithstanding, the number of women within the army is still low, despite the fact that there is enough need for additional personnel. This tendency can be explained by the fact that – according to the existing literature – women are usually less attracted to join

the army than their male counterparts (Bachman et al., 2000). In general women are less involved and interested in the armed forces, therefore it is inherent that there are less female applications. The previous assumption seems to be in contradiction with the fact that – as empirical researches demonstrated – their job satisfaction is higher and they usually hold a higher education level during the application procedure (Firestone, 1992).

The low level of familiarity with the AF among women leads to a smaller amount of applications, motivated by the fact that the AF are not attractive to women. There are three important aspects for the attractiveness of an organisation: employer familiarity, employer image, and employer reputation. The more a person is familiarised with the armed forces, the higher the self-identification and the attractiveness towards the AF is.

Women seem to have the same reasons for being attracted to the army but cannot always

identify themselves with the organisation. In 2004 the main reason for females to enlist in the armed forces was faithfulness to the goals of the organisation (Smith and Rosenstein, 2017). In 2001, just after the attack on the Twin Towers and Pentagon, the most important aspects for women joining the AF were dignity and adventure. Dignity refers to equality of gender and race at the workplace, this is both the self- and perception by others (Eighmey, 2006). The terrorist attacks of September 2001 could explain why the adventurous element has an increased value.

Women's physical characteristics such as lack of (upper body) strength, menstruation and pregnancy have always been seen as limiting women's capabilities to perform military tasks, especially those related to combat. This issue has grown over time and continues to evoke strong emotional reactions, partially because of the perceived injustice of gender-norming the physical fitness and training standards. Few would deny that physical attributes are essential to the soldier or marine in ground combat. This is often used to justify the exclusion of women from front-line ground combat through their lesser physical capabilities (Tuten, 1982). The acceptance of women in the combat positions is also a matter of "citizenship", the recognition for women to be able to enlist for combat positions is mostly a matter of principle (Murphy, 1996). Another approach is the one of Segal, who claimed that the growing integration of women in "masculine" professions is boosting gender equality (Segal, 1983).

Gender-specific physical tests and differences between male and female requirements in the recruitment process could be interpreted as a lowering of equal standards. In the military, women are expected to be able to perform in the same manner during combat situations as men do. The physical performance of women is an important source of perception of inequity and inequality.

As a result, women have to prove themselves in a male oriented organisation more due to gender related prejudices. If a woman can pass a test with a performance for which a man would fail, many male soldiers believe that women are given unfair advantages. Since military physical tests are – in general – aimed to measure the capabilities of a male candidate, most women are physically not able to perform properly but are evaluated on the same basis (Segal, 1983; 1999).

2.2. Roles

The armed forces are often viewed as a male-dominated organisation where there is only room for women in the supporting branches (Moore and Webb, 2000). Despite of the amount of attrition within the armed forces, for all branches and ranks, the occupational segregation is less than within the civilian workforce. For example, the salary and social benefits in the military are more equal than within civilian sector.

In spite of the better condition of women within the AF than in most of the civilian sector, occupational segregation of women is still present. Figure 4 illustrates the different functions carried out by women and men in the military in NATO countries in 2016. As shown in the bar chart, there are significant differences in the roles attributed to women and men. Notably, women are mostly employed in Medical Services (23.5% of the total, while only 3.8% of men are enrolled in this sector). The aforementioned category is the one who presents the most significant divergence between the two genders. Another example that gives insights on the different roles played by men and women is the one concerning the category named "Others", which includes various positions such as employment at the various Ministries of Defence, instructors, military police, environment protection units, and land and

naval combat. The vagueness of this category makes it difficult to derive trustworthy information and to form a more specific assumption. Combat positions are also included in the category named “Infantry”, and – as it is evident – there is a consistent difference in the share of men and women assigned to these tasks. The smaller role that women have in combat position might derive from a de jure or de facto exclusion of female personnel from specific posts in combat. In fact, only 11 EU countries allow women to be enlisted in every combat positions (with relevant exceptions for special forces positions), namely Romania, France, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, and the United Kingdom.

The scarce involvement of female personnel in combat position also affects their chances for promotions. Even if examples of women reaching high ranks can be found in many

European countries, the overall percentage of women is still very low (UNSC, 2015). This is partially caused by the fact that in most NATO countries promotions require the performance of specific roles, also combat ones, from which women are formally or informally excluded.

For the combat support roles there is more female involvement. The benefits women can bring in a foreign environment consistently contribute to the relations between soldiers and the local population during missions (Marlowe, 1983). Originally the concerns about women in the army were related to their individual characteristics like their physical strength and psychological features which were supposed to make them less combative. Also, women were assumed to have a negative effect on the cohesion and motivation of military units. The last argument was associated to cost-effectiveness problems related to var-

FIG. 5
**SHARE OF WOMEN THAT QUIT THE ARMY IN EU COUNTRIES IN 2016
 OUT OF THE TOTAL DROP-OUTS**

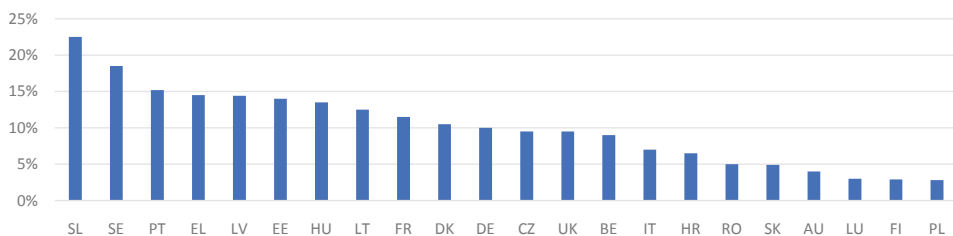


Figure 5 – Points out the share of women that left the military in EU countries in 2016 out of the total exits registered in that year. For the vast majority of states, the small percentage of women appears to be congruent with the values in figure 5. Particularly, all the analysed countries – except for Slovenia, Sweden, and Portugal – present approximately the same amount for the active female personnel and the share of women that decided to quit their military career. Regarding the three countries mentioned above, it is necessary to address the fact that the women drop-out rate is considerably higher than the share of females with active duties (reported in fig. 5). Most notably, Sweden has a women drop-out rate which is 10,7% higher than the percentage of active female personnel. Similarly, the former rate is 6,1% and 4,6 % larger the latter one in Slovenia and Portugal respectively.

ious factors such as attrition, job migration, lost duty time, and lost personnel selection costs.

When it comes to the military debate, the approach is often between democratic values and equality at one side, and military necessity (especially readiness) on the other. These factors are often incompatible, and it can be a paradox which makes the discussion difficult. The perception of the role of the military is usually the one to provide security, and therefore is not always portraying equality for “effectiveness” purposes.

The idea that the military should be a reflection of society is opposite of the argument that the military should not become a social gender experimentation because it can undermine security (Lundquist, 2008). The confronting normative views are opposing, and therefore a trade-off has to be made between military efficiency and social diversity (Binkin and Bach, 1977).

2.3. Daily life in the units

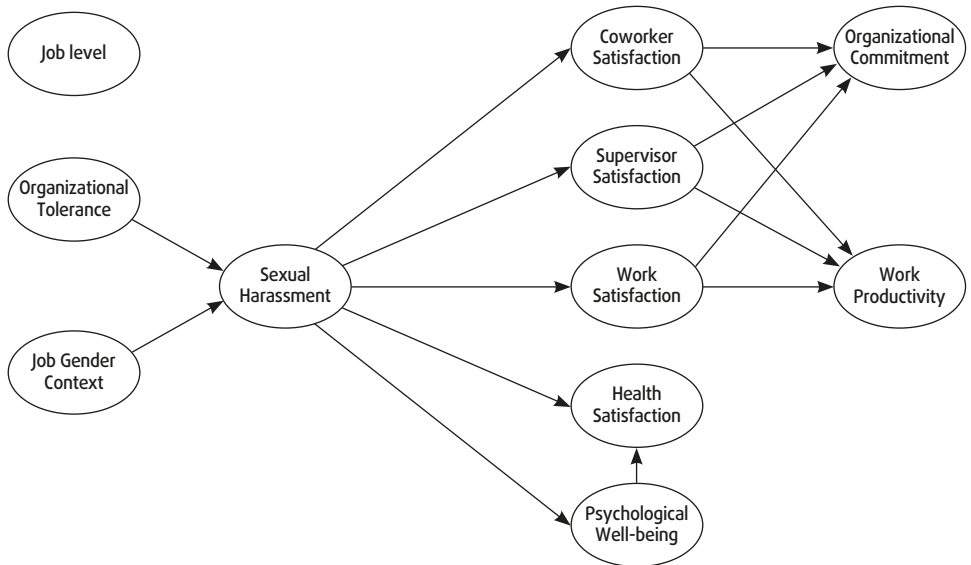
Firestone (1992) describes that despite the amount of attrition within the armed forces, for all branches and ranks, the occupational segregation is less than within the civilian workforce. The salary and social benefits in the military are more equal than within civilian sector which is assumed to be more gender balanced. By contrast, women in a primarily male oriented occupation generally have a lower job satisfaction level than women working in a more gender balanced organisation (Hakim, 1996). Despite the fact that the military is perceived as a strongly male oriented organization, women seem to be able to withstand the amount of pressure they are subject to in a better way than men. In fact, the percentage of women quitting the army, compared to male counterparts, is not that large. For instance, in the US men are more

likely to have a desire to leave the army than women, despite of women enduring more attrition than men (Firestone, 1992).

However, there are other issues that negatively affect the life of women in the military, and they are recognisable since the first stages of their career. In fact, The combination of aspects such as the difficult balance between working and family life, pregnancy and parental leaves, working environments that are not women friendly, and sexual harassment cause problems in the everyday life of women in the units. Eventually, this can result in numerous cases of drop-out from the military structure.

One of the problems is that of balancing between private and professional life: career plans are often not flexible as it should be. (CoE, 2016) Although this applies to both men and women, this is particularly true for





the latter. In fact, the cultural and social heritage generally puts more pressure on women regarding family matters, and parental leave policies does not result in reversing this tendency (Carreiras, 2004). Mothers have to experience more often than their male counterparts comments and criticism during their deployment, as if their choice to be active in the military is supposed to clash in every occasion with their family duties (CoE, 2016). This tendency, summed up with the fact that the decisive stages in the development of a career in the army often occurs in parallel with those of family life ends up in putting a huge pressure on women. They not only often decide to refrain from obtaining a higher military rank, but also, sometimes, to quit their job to better address their family duties.

Turning to parental leave, nowadays it is still, in most countries, very unbalanced for men and women, giving more space to maternal leave. The flexible scheme that is currently offered to soldiers discourage fathers to take care of family duties encouraging mothers to do so: transferability of parental leave could be

good in a gender equal society but fails to balance the role of men and women in the army. As the civil sector is trying to avoid gender discriminations by supporting the existence of non-transferable leaves, the army should use the same expedient to reduce gender discrimination (Shand, 2018). A good example in this sense is the parental leave scheme of the Dutch army, which is one of the few to give military personnel non-transferable parental leaves, with an allowance of 13 weeks given to either parent, to be taken before the child is 8 years old (NATO, 2016). In this way parents can share the burden of family life without one of them forced to renounce their career.

Apart from that, the issue of pregnancy is often undervalued by many. Generally speaking, the army is designed to keep women safe during pregnancy, preventing them to work on the field and giving the possibility of pregnancy leaves. On the other hand, some practical problems still remain non-resolved: for example military uniforms are not designed to fit the body of a pregnant women. Even if

this could seem as a small issue, if pregnant soldiers are forced to wear civil clothes, they lose authority vis-à-vis lower rank colleagues, as their rank becomes invisible.

Another issue that should be addressed is the need for the working environment in the army to be adapted to the needs of both genders. Indeed, facilities and spaces should be adjusted to maintain a good balance between privacy of women and their fraternization with the male counterparts. As an example, the issue of separate dormitories for women, which was assumed to be good both for their privacy and for the working environment, sometimes resulting in exclusion within the platoon: otherwise, mixed dormitories increase buddyship relations between men and women and desexualize their relations (CoE, 2016).

2.4. International Deployment

Despite the fact of a lack of data, this section develops two opposite issues that are still preventing a more gender-balanced military workgroups. On the one hand, the essential role of female soldiers as peacekeepers during international operations, which emphasizes the urgency for a real inclusiveness of women within all levels of the armed forces. On the other hand, the persistent experiences of sexual harassment and discrimination of women within the army, who often decide to quit the service, undermining the already existing crisis within the military structure.

Women in the armed forces, especially in combat situations and international operations, could jeopardize the effectiveness and the cohesion of the forces. Furthermore, their different psychological and physical features are considered a risk for the achievement of established goals during missions abroad, wherein the adaptation to harsh environmental conditions could be problematic re-

garding, for instance, “feminine hygiene” and “physical privacy”.

We need to highlight the fact that these debates are inconsistent with the majority of prior empirical researches, which have shown that during operational, close-to-combat areas, or during deployments the presence of women does not have any adverse impact on the team cohesion and mission effectiveness. Rather, the real threat to harmony and gender homogeneity is the lack of equity within the group, emphasizing the in-group and out-group differences.

One of the most important and essential roles of female soldiers during international operations is Peace Support, which includes peacekeeping, peace-building, humanitarian response, and post-conflict reconstruction. As recent women’s deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated, female soldiers have positively impacted peacekeeping operations, especially in building more confidence and trust among local women and children, who are the main victims of a male-dominated society as well as male violence and abuse during wars and conflicts. Moreover, the ability of female soldiers as mediators is considered a vital component for collecting valuable information from the local communities and carrying out the mission successfully. For instance, female peacekeepers in Afghanistan could be able to have access to secret information regarding the locations where the Taliban were recruited (Carreiras, 2015). However, gender equality in peacekeeping activities is unlikely to be fulfilled in the near future if nothing will change and improve within the military system.

Regrettably, there is one element that jeopardizes a more gender balanced society and military structure: sexual harassment against women. Finding data on this topic within the European Union framework is challenging for



two main reasons. Firstly, only few women report this crime due to a lack of trust in the official complaints process and fear of repercussions or adverse impacts on their career. Secondly, the European Union political focus and academic researches on sexual harassment within the armed forces are not yet fully developed compared to, for instance, the USA where sexual violence has been recognised as a top political priority, especially through studies on what is called “Military Sexual Trauma” (MST).

According to the Service Women’s Action Network (SWAN), sexual assault (and not deployment) is the number one factor that negatively affects the female well-being and health conditions. Consequences of sexual harassment can be, for instance, stress-related symptoms (such as depression and an increase of anxiety, which might lead to alcohol abuse) and physical health problems (like chronic headache, gastrointestinal disorders, sleep disturbance, etc).

At the same time, sexual violence within the armed forces influences the organisation as a whole since, most of the time, victims decide to quit the army, deteriorating the already existing crisis in the army. As the following diagram shows, sexual harassment can result in negative job attitudes, lowered satisfaction

with co-workers and supervisors, as well as weakened organisational commitment.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper depicts the main roles and perceptions of the integration of women in the army. Based on analysed literature, four conclusions have been drawn.

The overall percentage of female personnel in the armed forces seems to be imbalanced, since female participation had an average of only 10% in 2016 within the EU countries. However, it has to be considered that in most Member States, women have been accepted in the army only in recent time. Therefore, as the trend has constantly increased after the 2000s, it is possible to expect that in a matter of years the share of women in the military will be more balanced.

The applications and attraction of women towards the AF is dependent on the military awareness within this group. The knowledge about the military influences the applications of women and increases parallelly. Women are less likely to consider a military career than men due to the traditional image the military has. Additionally, the physical requirements have an influential role for women in the

army, especially for combat positions. Different requirements create a tension between the genders since women are expected to compete with their male counterparts.

For what concerns roles, there is a general tendency to prevent women from enrolling in combat positions. Instead, they are mostly participating in supportive (administrative) roles, and this also affects their chances to reach the highest military ranks. As a consequence, the lack of career opportunity remains an important cause behind female dropouts, even if not the most important one. Indeed, balancing between private and working life remains the factor which influences this tendency the most. This mostly derives from the still existing socio-cultural heritage which gives women a primary role in family life.

Also the everyday life of females with active duties presents many “uncomfortable” situations, which can influence their integration in the armed forces.

Concerning international missions, although the participation of female soldiers have proven to be beneficial and essential for peacekeeping operations, humanitarian response and post-conflict resolution, still gender equality in peacekeeping missions is a desideratum the European countries are unlikely to fulfill in the next future if a new strategic vision and effort will not be endorsed. Furthermore, not only within international operations, but within the whole military system, female soldiers are still threatened and unprotected by sexual harassment and discrimination experiences. Of the few cases reported and investigated, one can notice how sexual harassment incidents are still a taboo and not a political and academic top-priority. Consequently, new strategies have to be enforced in order to tackle physical and psychological traumas, which are not only affecting the victim's

well-being and health conditions, but also the military organisation as a whole.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been formulated based on the derived theory from the data and the theoretical framework obtained during the research for this paper.

Firstly, male and female physical structure and capabilities are, in general, different. Most physical application tests are male focused, imbalancing the performance results of women. Incorporating tests where, for example, climbing is part of the physical requirements, would balance the differences between men and women since they are more flexible than men. Balanced physical requirements would give a clearer and more creditable view of the applicants regardless of their gender. If the physical strength is required for a particular job, then there should be a physical job-related requirement. Rather than assuming that all women are incapable of performing at the same level as men, specific requirements should serve as the selection criteria, not gender.

Secondly, it is advisable to increase the amount of women in peacekeeping missions, integrating them in both in negotiations and contact with the population. Furthermore, a priority for both the political and military agenda could be to tackle the “labyrinth” and “glass ceiling” metaphors, meaning the various challenges, difficulties and obstacles that face women in attempting to penetrate into male-dominated work environment reaching high-level leadership.

Thirdly, another point to be promoted is the need to achieve more gender equality, also in the army, regarding the roles of women and men in family and working life. The European

Parliament encourages men's uptake of leave and equal participation in care work in the civilian sector, through a non-transferable parental leave scheme, a similar solution should be created regarding military personnel, in order to boost the equal distribution of family responsibilities between the two parents. Moreover, career schemes should be more flexible and allow any parent – male or female – to proceed with his working path without interfering with the family household.

Fourthly, to determine the costs of male and female differences, AF personnel could be analysed via a cost-benefit analysis. With this approach the financial impact of men and women can be brought into perspective. An hypothetical example: men are more likely to have long lasting burnouts versus the expenses of female parental leave (multiple variables are needed to provide a comprehensive answer). The goal of the analysis would be to give spe-

cific branch related insights for recruitment offices so they can better allocate their efforts and increase the succesment rates of recruits.

Fifthly, facilities and equipment should be adapted to female needs: facilities should have a balance between privacy and inclusion in the military environment, and equipment should be designed to be women friendly. Also in the case of pregnancy, the dignity of the soldier should be preserved, during the whole period, by providing pregnancy uniforms on which the ranks are clearly visible.

Finally, it is essential to mention the fact that it is very difficult to find reliable sources and comprehensive data on the integration of women in the military within – but not only – the EU framework. Consequently, this lack of data (with the only reliable source being the Summary of the National Reports of NATO Member and Partner Nations to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives) represents an important issue that affects the entirety of every analysis on this topic. In addition to that, as it can be derived from table 4, the data included in this report are not always specific enough to draw proper conclusions and establish proper links between the variables. In fact, since the category “Others” in the aforementioned table contains many different roles (from position in the various Ministry of Defence to combat positions), it is not possible to give a clear view on the position of women in the military. Therefore, this topic should be researched on at European level, especially as a part of a more comprehensive project on EU common defence and security policy. In order to achieve this task, diverse actors should be involved: the Member States should be willing to share information, a devoted EU driven research centre (such as the European Institute for Security Studies) should be able to collect those data and use them in the creation of an annual “European Military Interoperability Report”.



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- Contributing to a common European understanding of land defence issues. Finabel focuses on doctrines, trainings, and the joint environment.

Finabel aims to be a multinational-, independent-, and apolitical actor for the European Armies of the EU Member States. The Finabel informal forum is based on consensus and equality of member states. Finabel favours fruitful contact among member states' officers and Chiefs of Staff in a spirit of open and mutual understanding via annual meetings.

Finabel contributes to reinforce interoperability among its member states in the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the EU, and *ad hoc* coalition; Finabel neither competes nor duplicates NATO or EU military structures but contributes to these organisations in its unique way. Initially focused on cooperation in armament's programmes, Finabel quickly shifted to the harmonisation of land doctrines. Consequently, before hoping to reach a shared capability approach and common equipment, a shared vision of force-engagement on the terrain should be obtained.

In the current setting, Finabel allows its member states to form Expert Task Groups for situations that require short-term solutions. In addition, Finabel is also a think tank that elaborates on current events concerning the operations of the land forces and provides comments by creating "Food for Thought papers" to address the topics. Finabel studies and Food for Thoughts are recommendations freely applied by its member, whose aim is to facilitate interoperability and improve the daily tasks of preparation, training, exercises, and engagement.



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