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ECOSOC 3: Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

Research Report

Topic 3: Implementing and promoting the inclusion of women in armed forces.



DENIZ TARHAN & FRIDA KIRK

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Introduction

Militaries have always been one of the most fundamental parts of nations. Militaries are the reflections of countries, whether in strength, in policies, in priorities, in the sense of unity and in culture. It is also valuable to note that countries get the opportunities to meet other cultures and nations through their military forces.

Women often face prejudice in their daily life and that subconsciously limits their abilities to become a part of society, just as much as men. The ignorance towards women's rights have become a global issue since it deprives nations and the world from development. Women often do not receive the same options and opportunities men do, in education, in workplaces and in the military. Society sees the military as a group of strong men however this should not be the case. Women have repeatedly shown their abilities especially during World War 2 as cartographers, codebreakers, ship plotters etc. Most nations have started including women in their military operations however the percentages show that women do not have equal roles as men.

According to NATO's official report in 2019, with an 6% increase from 2018, the average percentage of women was 12% and men was 88% in the military for 27 of 29 member nations¹. This is an astonishingly small rate for such immense military forces. Even though the inclusion of women in military forces have almost doubled in the past two decades, it is truly unfortunate that women's roles and opportunities are still determined based on their gender rather than their abilities to do tasks.

The involvement of women is highly beneficial in military forces since, women provide new perspectives, valuable skills, operational productivity, enhanced problem-solving skills and equality. Highlighting that women face extreme challenges such as harassment, integration issues, fewer combat and leadership roles, nations must act swiftly to encourage the inclusion of women and increase their stability.

¹ "NCGP Full Report 2019." NATO, 2019, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/9/pdf/NCGP_Full_Report_2019.pdf.

Definition of Key Terms

Gender equality²: It is among the most neglected yet crucial human right for both genders. It means that all people should have the same rights, the same chances and the same responsibilities in life. To have a sustainable and peaceful world, rights should not vary depending on the individual's masculinity or femininity. This term is critical since gender inequality is the main reason why women have trouble being included in the army.

Military gender integration: It refers to implementing females in military forces ultimately changing the ideology that men are stronger than women, and that being soldiers are exclusive roles for men. This type of integration enables militaries to become more balanced and diverse. It is important since both men and women should have the same chances to participate in armed forces and benefit their nations.

Unit Cohesion: It is the bond between military members. Created by trust, cooperation and support, it creates a sense of security among soldiers and turn the military in to a place of "brotherhood". Unit Cohesion is pivotal for a successful army mostly because it encourages members to be motivated and skilful during tense situations. Women have trouble integrating in armed services because they face challenges becoming a part of the unit and bond with other soldiers. The previously mentioned "brotherhood" ideology limits the chance of women's adaptation in the army.

Cultural Barriers: Are leading factors for the challenges women face in the army. Cultural barriers are the societal norms and biases in societies. It is difficult to change cultural barriers since they become a part of the nation's identity. Gender norms are one of the most dominant cultural barriers of any country and it has been highly influential in the integration of women in militaries. Even if there is an increasing rate of women in armed forces, evidently women are not judged by their capabilities but their sex and thereby lack equal opportunity to become leaders in the field. It is also essential to address the fact that women lack the motivation to join the army since the public perception is generally against it.

Background Information

As of 2022, women make up 14% of armed forces personnel internationally³. Despite seeing a three-percent increase since 2016, this is still nowhere near proportionate to how many women there are living in the world. Traditionally, women have been excluded from military service for centuries thanks to traditional gender roles and the view of women as homemakers who were not capable of being part of the armed forces.

However, throughout the twentieth century, this attitude began to change. The change was propelled by a mixture of necessity: The two world wars caused a global insufficiency of military personnel, which led to more integration of women into the armed forces, and second-wave feminism. In World War I, the women's division of the British navy was formed – The Women's Royal Navy Service⁴ (or The Wrens,) but was disbanded in 1919 and brought back for World War Two. The "First Russian Women's Battalion of Death" was led by Maria Botchkareva into

² "Gender Equality." United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office, <https://esaro.unfpa.org/en/topics/gender-equality#:~:text=Gender%20equality%20means%20that%20the,in%20dignity%2C%20safety%20and%20security>.

³ Facts and Figures: Women's Peace and Security (UN Women)

⁴The Vital Role of Women in The Second World War (Imperial War Museums)

combat against German forces. This was a battalion of highly disciplined military women who fought as a part of the Russian Army in 1917⁵. This, however, was not a common occurrence. For the most part, women worked in clerical positions during the war, but rarely out in the battlefield.

In World War II, though women were still, widely speaking, barred from combat roles, women-focused organisations within the military were formed, allowing for more women to enter in medical, ambulatory, and eventually communications and intelligence forces. The idea was that employing more women in supporting military roles would free up young men for frontline combat. In 1939, the United Kingdom founded the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, which reached 182,000 members within 4 years. The best-known women's unit during WWII was the Soviet Union's "Night Witches," where female pilots were hired to fly stealthily at night and bomb enemy territory.

After the wars were over, however, women had few opportunities to keep working as military personnel, as their inclusion had been mainly due to pure necessity. Women were expected to vacate military positions and return to ordinary life after the wars, and it was only in the late 1940's that that began to change again.

In 1948, the U.S. Congress passed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, granting women permanent status in the armed forces⁶. Since the establishment of The State of Israel and the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), women and men have been conscripted alike for a minimum of 24 and 36 months respectively⁷.

The Western world saw most of the major change happening years later, in the 1970's and '80's – during the third wave of feminism, which was highly focused on women's rights to equal pay and opportunities in the workplace. In 1977, '79, and '85, The Royal Australian Air Force, Army and Navy respectively started to fully integrate women⁸. In the 1980's, Norway⁹ and Canada¹⁰ allowed women to serve in all military roles, amidst heavy discussion on physical fitness tests. Since then, combat bans for women have been fully lifted in the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as the UN taking the significance of women's integration in armed forces very seriously. Still, however, there is widespread disagreement about this issue, and in many countries, women's participation in the military is still heavily restricted and ignored. Such countries include Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the Vatican, China and Afghanistan (under Taliban rule.)

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

United States of America- The army consisting of 5 main branches, these have been including women in the past 200 years. The inclusivity of the American army has gradually increased. During World War 2 women have served in bodies such as Women Army Auxiliary Corpse, the Navy WAVES and Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). Just like in most military forces, women had strictly limited roles and were not allowed to have combat positions. This situation

⁵ Roles of Women in World War 1: The Russian Battalion of Death (Warfare History Network)

⁶ Women's Armed Services Integration Act (US Navy)

⁷ Women's Service in the Israel Defence Forces (Jewish Women's Archive)

⁸ Timeline: Key milestones for women in the Australian Defence Force (Australian Broadcasting Corporation)

⁹ Conscripting Change: Norway's Case for Neutrality (Royal United Services Institute)

¹⁰ Women in the Forces (Canadian Armed Forces)

changed after the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule¹¹ was declared invalid in January 2012. Since then, women have been active participants in the army as pilots, leaders, mechanics, and nurses. There has been visible evolution in the U.S. army however women are still in minority.

Norway- The Norwegian Army has made significant changes for the inclusion of women in armed forces. The Norwegian Armed Forces, with 4 main branches, has been including women since 1976. These inclusions however did not include combat roles. Norway has been an inspiration for enhancing gender equality in the army since, the nation is the first NATO member and EU country to ever apply gender neutral conscription¹². Norway's striking engagement in the issue with creating leadership opportunities, training programs and recruitment campaigns have resulted in having 33% percent of the army females. The reason for this relatively low rate is mostly because of the cultural norms that lead to lack of participation.

Canada- The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) has made revolutionary changes in the matter of implementing women in military forces during World War 1 women were given roles in the military even though mostly for medical services. Between 1941-1942, CAF increased women in the army by creating divisions such as Canadian Women's Army Corps, Royal Canadian Air Force Women's Division and Women's Royal Canadian Naval Services. Women gradually earned combat roles as well becoming a memorable part of the unit. Canadian women have been supported by the Canadian Forces Personnel and Family Support Services. The Employment Equity and Diversity in the Department of National Defence and The Canadian Armed Forces Report¹³ has been most helpful for the understanding of the development in CAF. It is essential to note that there has been diversity training meetings, highlighting the challenges women face in the army.

UN Women: This UN body aims to spread gender equality and empower the roles women have in all areas including military. Members of UN Women have demonstrated significant efforts on including women in militaries. The Women, Peace and Security agenda (WPS) has been substantial for promoting female participation in security forces. UN women have worked on several resolutions for the matter which has been influential in the global scope. UN Women activities include promoting equal policies, efforts for increased participation of women, providing economic and political autonomy, women peacekeeper training programs, performing interventions for nations, shaping several frameworks, spreading knowledge and showing development with reports, organising campaigns such as *#Heforshe* and sex-based violence

¹¹ "Department of Defense Directive 5144.02: The Role of the Department of Defense in the Security of United States." U.S. Department of Defense, 2015, <https://dod.defense.gov/portals/1/documents/pubs/osd014303-15.pdf>.

¹² . "A look at Norway's Approach to Gender-Neutral Conscription" SecurityWomen, 2023, <https://www.securitywomen.org/post/a-look-at-norways-approach-to-gender-neutral-conscription>

¹³ "Employment Equity and Diversity Report." *Office of the Ombudsman, National Defence and Canadian Forces*, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/ombudsman-national-defence-forces/reports-news-statistics/investigative-reports/employment-equity-diversity/employment-equity-diversity-report.html#toc8>.

defence.

Relevant UN Resolutions

[Resolution 1325 \(2000\)](#) – Security Council

1. *Urges* Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict;
2. *Encourages* the Secretary-General to implement his strategic plan of action (A/49/587) calling for an increase in the participation of women at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes;
4. *Further urges* the Secretary-General to seek to expand the role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based operations, and especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel;

[Resolution 1960 \(2010\)](#) – Security Council

15. *Encourages* Member States to deploy greater numbers of female military and police personnel to United Nations peacekeeping operations, and to provide all military and police personnel with adequate training on sexual and gender-based violence, inter alia, to carry out their responsibilities;

[Resolution 2122 \(2013\)](#) – Security Council

4. *Reiterates* its intention when establishing and renewing the mandates of United Nations missions, to include provisions on the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women in conflict and post-conflict situations, including through the appointment of gender advisers as appropriate, and further expresses its intention to include provisions to facilitate women's full participation and protection in: Election preparation and political processes, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programs, security sector and judicial reforms, and wider post-conflict reconstruction processes where these are mandated tasks within the mission;
9. *Encourages* troop- and police-contributing countries to increase the percentage of women military and police in deployments to United Nations peacekeeping operations, and further encourages troop- and police-contributing countries to provide all military and police personnel with adequate training to carry out their responsibilities, and relevant United Nations entities to make available appropriate guidance or training modules, including in particular the United Nations pre-deployment scenario-based training on prevention of sexual and gender-based violence;

Previous Attempts to Address the Issue

NOTE: Some of these resolutions are listed in the “Relevant UN Resolutions” section of this report.

Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)

This resolution lays the groundwork for a lot of other resolutions on the inclusion of women in armed forces. It encourages all member states, as well as the Secretary General, to focus heavily

on including and facilitating women in the Forces.

[Security Council Resolution 1820 \(2008\)](#)

This resolution focuses on establishing a framework for sexual violence in conflict, and the importance of women in the armed forces dealing with this issue.

Note: There have been many other resolutions attempting to solve this issue such as resolution 2242 (2015), but most are based on (and reference) Resolution 1325.

Proposed Solutions

- Recognising gender-specific issues within the military in a way that does not ostracise women's issues such as, but not limited to
 - Menstrual health, maternity leave, physical strength, etc;
- Creating a reliable framework to report sexual assault within the forces;
 - Establishing a point of contact for all military personnel in the case of sexual assault or abuse (especially in the case of assault/abuse by superior officers);
- Change laws that ban women from participation in armed forces, allowing them to hold any and all active combat roles (inter alia);
- Targeting possible pay gaps between men and women in armed forces to encourage women to join ;
- Changing conscription mandates and laws to include women.

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