

# WOMEN IN THE ARMED FORCES OF REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY: EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS LEARNED

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In Hungary change has occurred not only in connection with the fact of joining NATO, but with the changing of the regime and the structural and value systems of the army, there had to enforce the principle of the equal opportunity in the army too. The majority of the military brass, leaders admitted, that the employment of the military women in certain fields has advantages, so they let the women in the traditionally masculine duties. In comparison with other NATO countries, the Hungarian Defence Forces have a relatively high proportion of professional female soldiers (officers, NCOs or contracts) in many fields. The total percentage of female professional and contract soldiers (19,6%) covers very high rates in some ranks. Although we still have no female flag officers, females serve in every other officer ranks.

Key words: Women in military, Hungary, NATO.

*“...Those who always speak well of women do not know them enough;  
those who always speak ill of them do not know them at all...”*  
(Internet graffiti)

## Historical overview

In past centuries, women's roles have often been limited by what male-dominated society expected of them or wished them to be. In most cases it wasn't based on a clear assessment of their individual abilities and capabilities. As a result of individuals and groups of women having challenged the status quo, women's roles have been expanding. Women are free to choose non-traditional occupations and professions that were once dominated by men.

Perhaps no area has been more resistant to full participation of women than the military. Here, as in no other sphere, long-standing ideas about the traits and

abilities of the two sexes have kept the military predominantly male and male-controlled until well into the 1900s.

Since historical past roles of women in the armed services have been slowly expanded. The contributions made by women not been publicized or rewarded. Historians preferred those women whose activities fitted society's model of "feminine" behavior.

If all men are created equal, why not women? The American and British suffrage movements inspired women's emancipation efforts among educated female (and sometimes male) élites worldwide. As educated women mobilized to demand the right to vote, men in all countries largely resisted, with the result that most of the world's women gained this basic right of citizenship only in the last 60 years.

Women have been gaining the right to vote and run for office since New Zealand became the first country to authorize women's suffrage in 1893. By 1920 ten countries had already granted women the franchise. Many European countries did not allow women to vote until after World War II, including France, Greece, Italy, and Switzerland. In Latin America, Ecuador was the first to recognize women's political rights, in 1929; but women could not vote in Mexico until 1953. In Asia, women voted first in Mongolia, in 1923; then after 1945, women secured the right to vote in Japan and South Korea. The former European colonies in Africa and Asia enfranchised women when they gained independence.

The background of these positive changes are the rise of women's movements worldwide has heightened women's awareness of their political potential and developed new issues for which women are ready to mobilize; a new willingness by political parties and states, which has eased women's access to politics and the post-Cold War's political environment, opportunities have opened for new styles of leadership and have reordered political priorities.

The scope of what women could be in the military has been changing through the decades, and continues to evolve as NATO countries moved into the twenty-first century. However, in many countries differences exist. There was a live debate over appropriate military roles for women. Although having women in every branch of service has changed attitudes about what female soldiers can do, several questions still remain open. Should all the military assignments be gender-free? Should women face the same risks as men taking into consideration the health issue? Should women serve in combat units or Special Forces like marines, submarines? Should women be deployed in peacekeeping operations or military operations? During the 1980s in the United States, a popular military recruitment slogan exhorted potential enlistees to "be all that you can be – in the Army". Over the past many countries have offered women the possibility of joining the military.

By 2000, women had more opportunities than ever before. Within less than a century, military women had made incredible strides, reflecting other sweeping changes in women's legal rights, political power, and access to professions and

activities that had once been closed to women. Women in every branch, service had shattered myths and attitudes about what women can and should do.

Women who were totally unsatisfied with conventional roles have fought for places in the military, as nurses, soldiers, physicians, journalists, psychologist, air-traffic controllers, or teachers at military academies and colleges.

As in many other areas of life, women's roles in the military changed slowly, as ideas about their mental and physical capabilities have changed. In some cases, change has been forced by the courts, by new laws that promote equal access to education and employment, and by new laws and policies governing the military itself.

Debates over appropriate military roles for women have often been heated ones, with both women and men on various sides of the issues. Women who disagreed with conventional stereotypes have fought for a place in the military. They have struggled for a place on the battlefield as well as for the right to lead others. In her book *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution* (1992), Major General Jeanne Holm says, "Acceptance of women as full and equal role participants in this masculine milieu is seen by many as the ultimate test of a society's willingness to compromise with long-established traditions".

Several questions remain as we moved into the twenty-first century. Should women and men serve in the military on terms that are completely gender-neutral, so that they face the same risks? How can the nation maintain an efficient, military, one that draws talented people able to handle military jobs? What standards can be used to choose the right people for the right jobs, regardless of gender?

## Women in the NATO Forces

In 1961 the first NATO Conference of Senior Women Officers of the Alliance (Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States) took place in Copenhagen. It focused on issues concerning the status, organization, and conditions of employment and career possibilities of women in the military forces of the Alliance. They unanimously expressed the hope that NATO and national authorities would consider employing women more widely within their military services.

Significant developments occurred during the conference in Brussels at NATO HQ in November 1973. They adopted a resolution agreeing that women should have the opportunity to serve in all job specialties with the exception of combat where their employment should be determined by national policy. The Military Committee (MC) endorsed formal recognition of the Committee on Women in the NATO Forces (CWINF) on 19 July 1976 in Document MC 249.

In March 1997 the MC approved the establishment of an advisory office on Women in the NATO Forces within the International Military Staff (IMS). The intention was to run the office on a trial basis for up to three years. In December 2000, the MC adopted a resolution and confirmed the permanency of the Office on Women in the NATO Forces (OWINF) within the IMS structure.

The CWINF's principal mission is to advise NATO's military leadership and member nations on critical issues and policies affecting service women in the NATO Forces. It is a consultative body that aims at promoting the most effective utilization of the capability of service women in the Armed Forces throughout the Alliance. Furthermore, it supports the Alliance nation's information requirements on gender integration, giving informed guidance on gender-related issues, specifically operations-related, based on national lessons learned from service women. Since 2002 there is an active co-operation between the Committee and the "Partnership for Peace" (PfP) nations. In 2003 the Committee contacted to the seven countries from the Mediterranean Dialogue, so they could also take part in the activities, and could join the community.

The mutual information, the flow of information, the participation at the international forums and conferences are very important. The regular participation on NATO conferences can be helpful to gain the international military experiences. Every conference, expert discussion, report, interview, article are helpful, to have a real concept about the position, role, career opportunity, work and life circumstances of women in the armed forces.

Women are clearly an inseparable part of the military. They will continue to take an active role in shaping policy, as they continue to contribute to the nation's defense.

## Hungarian experience

In the past Hungarian women's role in the army were quite limited. Though we can find heroic women in Hungary's long history – Ilona Zrínyi, women defending Eger castle – the contributions made by them was not properly recognized. Even though historians mentioned their role on the battlefield, they represented a small and unique minority. Men preferred those women whose activities fitted society's expectations of taking care of the family and the household. As in other areas of life, women's roles in the military changed slowly.

Military employment of women dates back to the revolution and independence war in 1848-49. Women served as medical nurses in the army during the wars, and in the most part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After the Second World War women, mostly officer's wives could join the army. They worked on medical, administrative, personnel or signal fields according to their civilian occupation,

without real military training, because men considered them as female employees, but not as soldiers. The post-military training for women, who have served for a long time in the army without military training, was not really effective, because their working environment and the requirements for their jobs have not changed.

In the past the military women have become professional soldier in four different ways:

1. The women having civil university and college degrees could apply for their admission to serve in the army as professional soldiers like physicians (surgeons), teachers, psychologists, engineers, lawyers, financial experts etc.

2. The civil university and college students have got scholarship from the Hungarian Army for finishing their study. They (first of all physicians, engineers, lawyers, economists etc.) after having finished their studies, they found employment according to the conditions of their scholarship contract.

3. Women have worked as civil employees in the staff of the army, but their duty in the meantime changed for an officer's one, so they asked for the admission into the professional staff in order to preserve their jobs.

4. Women who had duties of non-commissioned officers were transferred to officer's duties. Beside their civil qualifications they passed the officer's examination, or they took a degree at a university or a college level.

As a part of the new influences and political changes, in 1994 military schools – NCO school, colleges and the Military Academy – finally opened for women, however admission for them was limited to logistics, finance, signal, radio-reconnaissance, and informatics' fields. There was a quality change in 1998 for the first time 29 female officers finished their studies at the branch of signal, finance and radio-electronic reconnaissance of the Bolyai János Military Technical College. Since 2005 all faculties and training programs are opened for women.

In military law equal rights for women in labour and employment are guaranteed, based on the rules of the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary, the Labour Law Act and related international documents. In Hungarian Defence Forces army servicemen and women have to meet equal regulations, training, tasks and responsibilities.

In Hungary change has occurred not only in connection with the fact of joining NATO, but with the changing of the regime and the structural and value systems of the army, there had to enforce the principle of the equal opportunity in the army too. The majority of the military brass, leaders admitted, that the employment of the military women in certain fields has advantages, so they let the women in the traditionally masculine duties. In this respect the most backwardness can be experienced at the most conservative thinking land forces, in the commanding duties. Acceptance of women as full and equal participants in the masculine milieu is seen as the ultimate test of a society's willingness to accept women in the army.

**Chart 1 – Percentages of Female Soldiers in NATO countries' Armed Forces**

COUNTRY	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Belgium	7,6	7,9	8,2	8,26	8,3	8,3
Bulgaria	–	–	–	4,2	6,0	6
Canada	11,4	11,8	12,4	12,3	12,6	12,8
Czech Republic	3,7	10,0	10,0	12,3	12,21	12,21
Denmark	5,0	5,0	5,0	5,0	5,0	5,3
France	8,5	10,8	11,2	12,79	12,8	13,28
Germany	2,8	3,7	4,4	5,2	6,0	6
Greece	3,8	3,8	3,8	4,2	16,0	5,4
<b>Hungary</b>	<b>9,6</b>	<b>16,0</b>	<b>10,0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14,3</b>	<b>17,56</b>
Italy	0,1	0,1	0,5	0,53	1,0	1,6
Latvia	–	–	–	13,5	20,0	–
Lithuania	–	–	–	6,04	9,07	12,5
Luxembourg	–	–	–	–	–	5,71
The Netherlands	8,0	8,4	8,5	8,65	9,0	9
Norway	3,2	3,3	5,7	6,3	6,3	7
Poland	0,1	0,3	0,3	0,47	0,47	0,52
Portugal	6,6	6,6	8,4	8,4	8,4	12
Romania	–	–	–	3,99	5,0	5
Slovakia	–	–	–	6,1	7,06	7,7
Slovenia	–	–	–	19,2	15,38	–
Spain	5,8	9,0	10,0	10,5	10,7	13,47
Turkey	0,1	0,1	0,1	3,95	3,95	3,1
United Kingdom	8,1	8,3	8,6	8,8	9,0	9,1
United States	14,0	14,0	15,0	15,0	15,5	10,49

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(Source: [http://www.nato.int/issues/women\\_nato/perc\\_fem\\_soldiers\\_2001\\_2006.pdf](http://www.nato.int/issues/women_nato/perc_fem_soldiers_2001_2006.pdf))

In comparison with other NATO countries, the Hungarian Defence Forces have a relatively high proportion of professional female soldiers (officers, NCOs or contracts) in many fields (See Chart 1). The total percentage of female professional and contract soldiers (19,6%) covers very high rates in some ranks. Although we still have no female flag officers, females serve in every other officer ranks. Among junior officers the rate of females is over 20%, moreover among contracts it is even higher, every second officer from OF-2, and every third of OF-1 is female. It shows that besides professional military education, highly educated civilian females tend to join the army, giving their special knowledge, and undertaking the circumstances living in uniform. (See Chart 2)

Chart 2 – Female personnel strength in Hungary, 2008.

Hungary	Total %	Flag Officer %	Senior Officer %	junior Officer %	NCO %	Lower rank than NCO %
JFC	15	–	3	14	22	10
MoD	32	–	11	41	74	–
Defense Staff units	27	–	9	29	38	17
Total	20	–	8	21	29	11

(Source: National Report – Hungary 2008  
<http://www.nato.int/ims/2008/win/reports/hungary-2008.pdf>)

The female NCOs' rate from OR-6 to OR-9 is between 22-42%, which is very high. One reason is, that those women who joined the army earlier, whether as a soldier, or rather as civilian employee, by now reached higher ranks.

Also female employees have at least secondary school degree and professions before they join the army, the vast majority come to serve in combat support and combat service support branches. In combat positions male soldiers are highly over-represented, and due to the army structure, this number determines the total higher percentages of males, and totally lower rate of female soldiers.

There are special fields and jobs, in which female personnel are in majority. The female employees' rate is over 60% in the fields of medical, administrative and human management and welfare. (See Chart 3) The opposite tendency can be seen in jobs and positions related to combat, and in traditionally male positions. There is no female among parade soldiers, armours, and in field chaplain service.

Chart 3 – The highest representation of female personnel in the HDF, 2008

Organization	Female personnel (%)
State Medical Center	63
Dr. Radó György Military Medical Center	58
MOD Economic and Financial Agency	47
Logistic Support Center	30
MOD Infrastructural Agency	29
HDF JFC	21
HDF Peace support Training Center	20

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## Recruitment

New contracted military personnel may only join the army after a basic military training. Requirements are the same for men and women in all levels, without discrimination. The minimum requirements are: completion of eight (8) classes of primary school, age limit of 18-47 years, appropriate physical fitness.

Professional career begins with military schools. Entrance criteria is age 18-24, Hungarian citizenship, secondary school graduation, mental, physical health and physical fitness. Since 1997 all professional and contracted soldiers have to undergo a screening process before joining the army. Women, just like men, have to pass a complex test to be allowed to become professional soldiers. The test consists of three parts; a medical test, a physical test and a complex psychological test. Female cadets have the same military training as male ones during their education. For those who become officers – previously civilians – a 3-month long military training is obligatory.

Besides the work of the Recruiting Commands, communication and CIMIC branches, where one can get information about every day practices, the so-called “Open days” or “Military road shows” have high importance in career orientation. These kinds of programs give opportunity to the military educational institutes, and military organizations to introduce themselves, the units, their jobs, every day life, activities and operations. There are initiatives to get higher publicity in the society by media coverage (TV, radio programs) to make the Hungarian Defense Forces popular and more attractive for civilians.

In Hungary women are interested and motivated by military service for several reasons: unemployment in civilian life, better financial and social benefits, challenge and adventure, positive experiences of friends already in military service, desire to belong to a group, and the will to prove that they are capable.

The motivation of female soldiers is extremely high. Women try to compensate their lack of physical strength by their stamina, higher diligence, flexibility, tolerance and perseverance to solve problems.

## Training and career development

Servicewomen may attend the same specialization courses and participate in all trainings and schools required for promotion to higher rank. There are no limits restricting access of women to military schools. The Zrínyi Miklós National Defense University, Kinizsi Pál NCO School and Szentendre Central Training Center has been set up to provide training for men and women by chosen fields. At the university faculties (Bolyai János Military Technical, Kossuth Lajos Military Science) are open to both women and men, without discrimination in entrance or in studies.



Training programs (basic, advanced military, etc.) for women are identical with the ones for their male counterparts, and are organized in the same institutes and training centers.

Contracted service personnel can become professional, if they are OR7-OR8 NCOs, have a recommendation of their commander, work experience, and pass the physical fitness test. They can also become officers after getting a college or university diploma.

All personnel in the basic training must fulfill the same requirements. There is no significant difference in basic training for men or women, but the physical fitness standards alter by sex, counting the given physical parameters and abilities of genders, age and future post.

Physical fitness is tested for all personnel annually. Each soldier must meet those requirements in order to be suitable for military service. The fitness test consists of the same elements (3200 m running, push-ups, sit-ups), but differs by gender and age.

The annual physical test is scaled by age and types of physical work. There are four categories for identifying the physical demands and stress of jobs: T1: Basic fitness for sedentary occupation, T2: Medium level of fitness for light physical jobs, T3: Advanced level of fitness for medium physical work, and T4: Enhanced level of fitness for heavy physical work.

## Deployments

The importance of female personnel has become enhanced in recent deployments abroad in the last couple of years, especially in areas where gender differences can influence the outcome of the mission. In Muslim countries there are certain cultural and religious rules of engagement to be followed. In CIMIC operations and programs, public relations where units have to interact with local people or organizations it can be very useful having female soldiers in operations, the outcome may depend on it.

All positions in missions are open to women, but it shows similarity to tendencies of the whole organization, as most of the women serve in medical field, public information, communication, administration or logistical branches, and only a few women serve in infantry squads or other combat positions. The participation of Hungarian female soldiers in multinational operations is successful. We have officers, NCO's and contracts in every mission the HDF participating. They have to meet the same requirements, and live under the same conditions as men.

Although the service law ensures the right for the commander to send his subordinates (servicemen, servicewomen) for six month missions abroad without their agreement, there are enough volunteer personnel for these missions, so in practice service in missions abroad is based on a voluntary basis.

Main motivation for servicemen and women is the financials benefits, because the difference between the peacetime salary and salary in mission is big. Secondary motivation is the evaluation system; it is an advantage to have mission experiences for getting a higher position. The third motivation is the challenge they face in missions working in multinational, multicultural, multiservice, civil-military environment, dealing with local inhabitants and organizations, and cooperating with other nations.

Steps were taken to build up the family support system. If married couples with children serve in the army, and one of them is in mission abroad, the other family member with younger child than 6 years old is exempt from 24 hours duty.

The army adopted the civilian law on maternal leave, according to which servicewomen are entitled to 6 months of maternity leave. After this period they can be assigned to personnel reserve status for one more year. However, continuation of their military carrier is more complicated when the units they have served have been disbanded during their absence due to the defence reform. Women reporting back to work after giving birth are entitled to breast feeding breaks until their babies' 6 months age. As part of child care support single mothers (or fathers) can not be obligated to be on 24 hours duty until the child is 6 years old.

## Lessons learned

Since we look back on a history of women in the Hungarian Armed Forces the opportunities of the military women have widened, today they can have not only the traditional woman career in the army. The harmonisation of the maternal and military roles of the military women causes challenge, especially from social care point of view.

Hungarian Defense Forces guarantee the same opportunities and rights for servicewomen and servicemen, set the same standards and requirements. To serve in the Defense Forces is attractive for women in the Hungarian society. In one respect the unit cohesion and teamwork, as one of the essential elements of the moral condition of the army, can not be suffer with the employment of women in the combat units. On the other hand the organisation have to make sure, that the maternal rights of the military women can not suffer because of the special features of the military career.

The resolution of the possible conflicts require a bilateral compromise, since the women have to be part of it with empathy in a positive way, in order to resolve the organisational conflicts, which are representing masculine values.

The measure of the acceptance of women is possible only on the basis of equal performance and treatment. In other words the women expect rightfully the objective evaluation on the basis of their performance, but they required to accept the results of it.

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