

Resolution 2120 (2016)¹

Women in the armed forces: promoting equality, putting an end to gender-based violence

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The missions assigned to today's armed forces are increasingly wide-ranging and extend beyond national defence to include participation in peacekeeping operations abroad and in internal operations in the context of combating terrorism. At the same time, the professionalisation of armies and increased competition with other employers mean that it is increasingly in the armed forces' interest to capitalise on a diversity of professional experience and interpersonal skills.
2. Recruiting and retaining a larger number of women among their personnel have therefore become important issues for the armed forces. However, although Europe's armies have gradually become more receptive to the recruitment of women in recent decades, women are still very much in the minority in military roles, especially among the higher ranks.
3. Women who join the armed forces are faced with an environment designed by and for men. They face many forms of discrimination and are confronted with rigid career plans and mentalities that are still rooted in a purely male approach to the armed forces.
4. The Parliamentary Assembly deplores the fact that sexual harassment and assaults against women are still frequent within the armed forces. Whereas conforming to the existing internal culture is often regarded as a factor of cohesion, the armed forces should instead recognise that diversity strengthens operational capacities. It is vital to change mentalities, step up efforts to prevent such violence and establish mechanisms for dealing effectively with complaints.
5. With reference to its [Recommendation 1742 \(2006\)](#) and to Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)4 on the human rights of members of the armed forces, the Assembly underlines that members of the armed forces cannot be expected to respect human rights in their operations unless respect for these rights is guaranteed within the armed forces themselves. The Assembly also points out that the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210) covers all types of violence and applies both in peacetime and during situations of armed conflict.
6. In the light of the above, the Assembly calls on the Council of Europe member States:
 - 6.1. with regard to recruitment and career management for members of the armed forces, to:
 - 6.1.1. adapt recruitment campaigns so as to eliminate stereotypes and attract more women into the armed forces, including in operational roles;
 - 6.1.2. place an emphasis in recruitment and career management policies on identifying the skills needed to fulfil the missions that are assigned to today's armed forces;
 - 6.1.3. open all positions in all corps of the armed forces to women;

1. *Assembly debate* on 21 June 2016 (22nd Sitting) (see [Doc. 14073](#), report of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, rapporteur: Ms Maryvonne Blondin). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 21 June 2016 (22nd Sitting).



- 6.1.4. put in place proactive policies for recruiting women and including them in roles from which they have previously been excluded; look at the physical criteria applied in recruitment to these professions and the advisability of running pilot projects to promote the recruitment of women in these professions;
- 6.1.5. work actively to promote the assignment of women to overseas deployments, including in operational roles; include gender advisors in each overseas deployment by an armed force, at all stages of preparation and deployment;
- 6.1.6. develop more flexible career opportunities in order to increase the number of pathways providing access to the most senior ranks;
- 6.1.7. introduce comprehensive and consistent measures to help balance work and private and family life for all members of the armed forces;
- 6.1.8. systematically incorporate the gender dimension in all deliberations on the introduction, continuation or abolition of military service;
- 6.1.9. carry out research into the reasons for the difficulties encountered in recruiting greater numbers of women for military duties, the reasons why the military careers of women are often shorter than those of their male counterparts and the reasons why women and men leave the armed forces before retirement age or the end of their contracts;
- 6.2. with regard to the creation of a climate more conducive to gender equality within the armed forces, to:
 - 6.2.1. make an active commitment at all levels of the chain of command to change mentalities and the internal culture in the armed forces so that all differences are positively accepted and turned to account;
 - 6.2.2. include teaching on the gender dimension in all stages of military training and make sure that both women and men teach in military academies;
 - 6.2.3. include gender advisors in all bodies so that gender is taken into account systematically and as an integral part of everyday work;
 - 6.2.4. establish and support the functioning of networks of military women;
 - 6.2.5. ensure that equipment and uniforms are suitable for women's bodies and that living quarters are adapted for accommodating both men and women;
- 6.3. with regard to combating gender-based violence in the armed forces, to:
 - 6.3.1. ensure that the legislation applicable to members of the armed forces, including the criminal law where appropriate, explicitly prohibits all forms of gender-based violence and is both comprehensive and effectively implemented; also ensure that internal codes of conduct include strict provisions in this connection, which are widely known and applied at all levels;
 - 6.3.2. adopt and ensure the systematic application of a zero-tolerance policy vis-à-vis gender-based violence and send the message to all military personnel that such behaviour will not be accepted in the armed forces;
 - 6.3.3. make all levels in the chain of command aware of the need for such a policy;
 - 6.3.4. establish mechanisms, for instance free hotlines, to enable victims to make informal complaints confidentially and anonymously and obtain impartial advice about their situation;
 - 6.3.5. facilitate access by victims to formal complaint mechanisms and set up whistle-blowing mechanisms independent of the chain of command to which victims belong;
 - 6.3.6. provide support to victims when they report abuse;
 - 6.3.7. define effective penalties and apply them to the perpetrators of violence, as simply transferring the victim of a sexual assault is not an appropriate response;
 - 6.3.8. sign and/or ratify, if they have not yet done so, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.
- 7. Considering the significant role that parliaments can play in the democratic scrutiny of the armed forces, the Assembly calls on the national parliaments of member States to:
 - 7.1. actively seek gender balance in the parliamentary bodies dealing with the armed forces;

7.2. actively follow, through parliamentary debates, questions and reports, the implementation by their country of Resolution 1325 (2000) and other United Nations resolutions on the theme of “women, peace and security”, in particular concerning the situation of women in the armed forces, and take legislative initiatives to achieve the relevant objectives;

7.3. conduct parliamentary inquiries into the situation of women in their country’s armed forces, in particular concerning the treatment by the armed forces of complaints of harassment and other forms of gender-based violence;

7.4. encourage independent bodies, such as parliamentary commissioners, ombudspersons and equality committees, which have the requisite powers in relation to the armed forces, to conduct inquiries into these matters.