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EUROMIL SURVEY - GENDER EQUALITY/ WOMEN IN THE ARMED FORCES



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INTRODUCTION

Gender Equality in the Armed Forces has always been a topic of discussion, and while the value of women in the military is always praised, the real question is what actions are being taken to attract more women in joining the Armed Forces, as well as military associations. Besides, nowadays with the increased defence spending and the new capabilities through innovation and technology, it has become even more apparent that women can perform same as their male counterparts. However, and according to an [opinion](#) provided by the FEMM Committee of the European Parliament to the annual CSDP report only 5% of women participate in CSDP military missions. Hence, and following the publication of an [American study](#) that indicates that military will need to rely more on women, [EUROMIL](#) decided to conduct this survey among its member associations[1] to shed more light on women's participation in European Armed Forces and military associations and/or trade unions, as well as the necessary steps forward.

The abovementioned study also indicated that women in the military are less likely to be associated with drug issues or have a criminal record than their male counterparts, while around 44% of American women who join the military will hold a Bachelor degree, but only 1/3 of males do too.

To continue, according to a [study](#) conducted by the Conflict and Environment Observatory (CEOBS) women are having greater concern for the environment than men and are more likely to proactively engage in environmental action. Hence, the survey also investigated if the participants believe that the above considerations is also applicable in the military sector.

To summarize, the questions that this survey is trying to answer are:

- Women's participation in the Armed Forces and in military associations
- Issues that women face in the military
- Actions that governments and military associations can take to attract more women
- Educational levels of female and male military personnel
- The added value of having more women joining the Armed Forces
- The role of women in making the Armed Forces more environmental sustainable

[1] This report was conducted by using sources and data provided exclusively by EUROMIL's member associations; the results should not be viewed as official data from Ministries of Defence.

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PARTICIPANTS

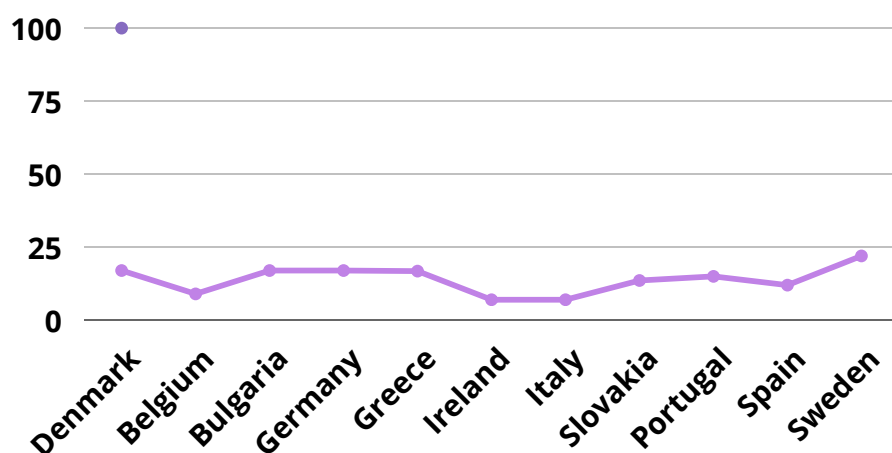
Country	Military Association
Belgium	ACMP-CGPM
Bulgaria	BUAFWA
Cyprus	N-COACA
Denmark	CS
Germany	DBwV
Greece	PFEARFU
Ireland	PDFORRA
Italy	ASSODIPRO
Portugal	FAA[2]
Slovakia	ZVSR
Spain	AUME
Sweden	SAMO

[2] Not a EUROMIL member, but member to the Portuguese association.

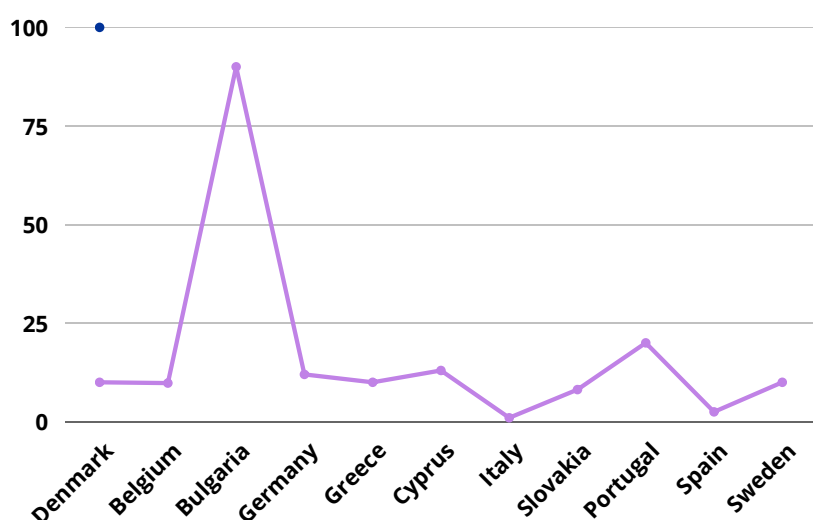
MAIN RESULTS

According to the results of the survey the overall participation of women in the Armed Forces is 13%, while the highest is recorded in Sweden (22%) and the lowest in Ireland (7%) [3]. Women soldiers are also interested in joining military associations; congruent with the participating members an average of 20% of their members are female. The highest score is in Bulgaria (90%) [4], and the lowest in Italy.

WOMEN IN THE ARMED FORCES (%)



WOMEN MEMBERS IN MILITARY ASSOCIATIONS (%)



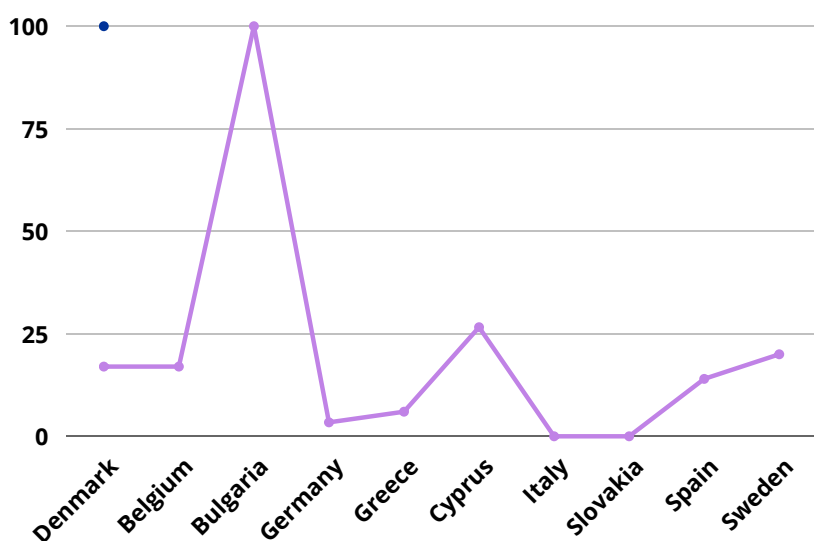
[3]No data available in Cyprus.

[4]BUAFWA, the Bulgarian military association, started as an exclusively female association.

MAIN RESULTS

Women also represent a minority in high level positions of military associations, while, EUROMIL Italian member association ASSODIPRO and the Slovak ZVSR do not have female board members. However the situation is more balanced in countries as in Cyprus, Sweden, or Denmark.

WOMEN BOARD MEMBERS (%)



To continue, according to the available data, the biggest issues that women face in the military are:

- equipment and uniforms are made towards men and it is difficult to get uniforms in female sizes
- discrimination, bullying, sexual harassment, sexual assault
- gender stereotypes and the mentality that military exclusively represents a male profession
- military and political authorities do not provide help for childcare and thus participation of female military personnel in foreign missions is very limited
- underrepresentation of women in high-ranking positions

Hence, the abovementioned figures require immediate action by the military authorities to successfully retain female soldiers but also recruit more women for the Armed Forces. Military associations have also an important role to play in dealing with the recruitment and retention of female personnel to build more gender balanced inclusive Armed Forces.

MAIN RESULTS

The participating associations indicate that they can contribute by discussing with military authorities and advocating for better equipment, continuing education to change the military culture and become a more inclusive one, provide assistance for work-life balance, improve working conditions, and raise awareness on the issue of gender equality in the Armed Forces.

To provide an example, our Slovak association, ZVSR has created a working group that continuously monitors the development of the situation regarding women in the Armed Forces. Furthermore, in Greece the Gender Equality Secretariat has an institutional framework for cooperation with political and military leadership of the Armed Forces to assist in tackling the concerns of female military personnel.

The creation of mentorship programs has also been proposed by BUAFWA in order to allow women from higher ranks the opportunity to reach out and share their knowledge and expertise by speaking with women in lower ranks.

In this regard, the participants provided also recommendations of how governments can attract more women to join the military.

Recommendations

The national authorities should:

- Provide prompt establishments for both genders
- Ensure equal treatment in the military sector
- Cooperate more with military associations; for example, a special scientific commissions could be created – also with the participation of military unions - to properly investigate the reasons more women do not apply for military career and provide concrete solutions
- Raise awareness through campaigns and dedicated programs to inform women on the benefits of a military career and underline that a military career is no synonym to male profession
- Improve working conditions and assist in combining family life with military career (e.g. kindergarten in the camps, increased parental leave and childcare benefits)

MAIN RESULTS

On the question regarding the educational levels of male and female military personnel, the majority of the respondents answered that the situation is different than the one in the USA and there are no real data available. However, the examples of Norway and Slovakia are of most value to have a glance of how the situation may be in Europe. In Sweden, 52% of women have continued their studies after upper secondary school, compared with 39 % among men. In Slovakia a total of 56.07% of professional female soldiers have a university degree compared to 28.97% of men. Regarding the Non-commissioned officers almost 1 in 2 women have continued their education while only 15% of men.

Nowadays, gender mainstreaming is also often reflected on climate change considerations. According to a [study](#) conducted by the Conflict and Environment Observatory (CEOBS) women are having greater concern for the environment than men and are more likely to proactively engage in environmental action. Hence, 66.7% of the participants believe that more women in the Armed Forces are essential for the military to move towards climate sustainability.

More women participating in the military can provide added value for the functioning and the effectiveness of the Armed Forces. The majority of the participants underscore that more diversity in the military can also lead towards a better public image of the Armed Forces, while changing the military culture. The Armed Forces will become more robust, will gain more high skilled and educated personnel – especially in conflict resolution and peace building.

However, a minority of participants seem more sceptical on whether having more women joining the military can provide a substantial added value, as well as whether they can also contribute into the “greening’ of the military.

The Armed Forces will become more robust, will gain more high skilled and educated personnel – especially in conflict resolution and peace building.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

Belgium - ACMP-CGPM

In Belgium women in the Armed Forces count for 9%, while in the military association female members represent the 9.8%. The Board of ACMP-CGPM is 83% male and 17% female. The biggest issue that women face in the Belgian Armed Forces is harassment. In order to recruit and retain more female soldiers, the government and military associations should work towards better work-life balance for military personnel. Concerning the educational background of male and female soldiers no significant difference is observed in Belgium. Lastly, ACMP-CGPM seems sceptical on the added value of having more women joining the Armed Forces, as well as whether this can contribute into the “greening” of the military.

Bulgaria - BUAFWA

In the Bulgarian Armed Forces women represent the 17% and men 83%. The military association has 90% female members and 10% men members. This is based on BUAFWA’s Charter since it started as an exclusively female military personnel organisation. Thus, the Board of BUAFWA is composed of female servicewomen on active duty and in the Reserve.

Women in the Armed Forces continue to be underrepresented in high-ranking positions, minor participation in decision-making processes and still facing gender based stereotypes. Therefore, the role of the military associations is extremely important in providing proposals for the modification of the system for recruitment, training, education, career development, social adaptation, reintegration to civilian life. The association also aims at raising awareness in military related issues, provide guidance as well as direct support to members by organising women conferences, educate and inform women on gender equality and non-discrimination, creating mentorship programs that allow women from higher ranks to reach out and share their knowledge and expertise by speaking with women in lower ranks.

Moreover, 33.6% of Bulgarians between the ages of 25 and 34 have a higher education, according to Eurostat data. Women (40.4%) also possess a university degree compared to 26.8% of men. In recent years, the gender gap between graduates of higher education has been gradually increasing; 10 % of the total number of command positions in the Armed Forces are female, 20% of the trainees in the military universities and academies are women.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

A number of studies indicate that qualities such as discipline, observation, accuracy, internal motivation are characteristic to a greater extent for female military personnel. This contributes to their successful career development and maintenance of a favourable socio-psychological climate in the gender-mixed work environment.

By increasing women's participation in the military will offer greater opportunities to shape its culture, practices and policies. The role of women in military and military leadership could improve decision-making; effectively influencing decisions, tactics, and strategies, and contribute into making the military reducing its environmental impact.

Cyprus - N-COACA

In Cyprus there are no data available on the percentage of women and men in the Armed Forces. The organisation has 13% female members and 87% male. Of the 15-member board of N-COACA, 4 are women and 11 are men. The main issues that women face in the Cypriot Armed Forces are the difficulties in reaching high hierarchy positions, the military remains a male-dominated space as well as the stereotype that military career is only for men.

Military associations should promote that a military career is a profession for both men and women; more women are joining the military and are succeeding in their work. The state should also provide incentives to women to join the military as benefits for children, kindergartens near the camps, medical care and overall an equal treatment between the military personnel regardless of gender. N-COACA also stresses that women are more methodical and sensitive in in the field of environmental action and can influence men in this direction as well. Thus, by having more women in the military can considerably increase climate adaptation and mitigation of the Armed Forces. In Cyprus there is no significant difference concerning the educational degrees of female and male personnel.

Lastly, N-COACA noted that before 2016 men and women non-commissioned officers in the Armed Forces of Cyprus were under separate regulations on the promotion to higher ranks and positions. A number of female military personnel took the case to the Court and to the Commissioner Administration and Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman).

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

The Ombudsman send a letter to the Ministry of Defence and called for the redress of injustices against women. Nowadays, there is equality in the regulations, obligations and rights of the two sexes but there is no equality in the employment rate of men and women; more men are hired and fewer women.

Denmark - CS

In Denmark women in the Armed Forces count for the 17%, and the military association CS has 10% female members. The Board of the organisation is consisted of 18 members, of which 3 are female. In the country women in the Armed Forces face a plethora of issues as the male-dominated work culture and the issue of equipment and uniforms, which are made for male. Besides, enlistment is only obligatory for male citizens and that makes women feel less welcome in the military. In this regard, the government is discussing enlistment for both genders. Concerning the educational level of women and men in the Armed Forces no such data are available, but overall in Denmark women are higher educated than men.

CS also underlines that by having more women in the Armed Forces, the recruitment process will become better and more diverse, while it will make the public opinion more positive towards the military. Lastly, the organisation agrees that by having more women in the Armed Forces the military could more effectively fight climate change and move towards sustainability.

Germany - DBwV

In Germany's national army serve approximately 13% women and 87% men. In the organisation around 12% of the members are female with a significant rise the past years. The organisation collects gender related data on its members since 1970 and the number of women becoming member in military association has significantly increased since the beginning of the 21st century. Moreover, the board of DBwV is consisted of 29 members of which one is female.

The biggest issue that women face in the German Armed Forces is that a military career is not as compatible with family as it should be. The military employer does not provide enough help to find childcare and children are often a reason women cannot go on foreign missions. Even though there are laws that force equal treatment of men and women in the army, women face problems in their daily lives.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

More precisely, women want to be deployed in the region of their homes for less time to travel. Basic women needs as equipment and uniforms are an important issue, since they are mostly produced for men. Military associations have an important role to play by improving the abovementioned issues for female personnel and thus attract more to join the Armed Forces and the association. The government should also take up the points women criticize about the military service and improve them, mainly the compatibility of job and family and the executed equal treatment in the national army.

Concerning the educational background of military personnel no data were available. By having more women joining the military, it could gain much more social competence since women are known to manage conflicts better and more peaceful. Additionally, foreign missions succeed more often if women are involved. Overall, the society profits from parity and women should have equal opportunities for all the workplaces. Lastly, the organisation supports the consideration that by having more women in the Armed Forces, the military can become more climate friendly.

Greece - PFEARFU

In the Greek Armed Forces serve 16.8% of women and 83.2% of men. The members of the military organisation are 90% men and 10% women. PFEARFU's board is consisted of 6% women and 94% men.

Besides, the percentage of women in leadership positions is around 5%, a fact that is mainly justified due to their delayed mass admission to military schools and combat specialties. The absence of female presence in leadership also often strengthens the public beliefs and stereotypes of the leadership abilities and skills of female soldiers. Hence, the military remains a male-dominated space and often leads to gender based violence. In other words, women in the Greek Armed Forces often face problems as sexual harassment, moral and psychological violence, while there are also reports of attempted rapes.

The absence of female presence in leadership also often strengthens the public beliefs and stereotypes of the leadership abilities and skills of female soldiers

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

In this regard, PFEARFU stresses that the absence of a mechanism for recording and managing complaints about gender and sexual violence in the military results in worsening working conditions, safety and equal treatment for women. Thus, the military trade unions should have a central Equality Secretariat with local unions that geographically cover the whole country so that it can function as a basic organization for attracting, networking and supporting women. As a result, female soldiers will be better integrated in the Armed Forces and retention will also be facilitated.

In addition, a Gender Equality Secretariat must have an institutional framework for cooperation with the political and military leadership of the Armed Forces, as a partner for the issues that concern female personnel. Frequent meetings, exchanging of views, opinions and experiences of women who serve in different positions and levels of hierarchy should also be arranged.

It is also important to highlight the women who either take the lead in trade unionism, or hold important leadership and administrative roles or have excelled in their field of action and specialty, they should be an example for younger women who either just joined the military or are planning to. For example, these women could participate in seminars at schools, present their work and inform the younger generations of what women can achieve in the military.

On the other hand, governments should also set up special scientific commissions with the participation of military associations that will deal with the investigation of the phenomenon of the low rate of entry of women into the Armed Forces and the promotion of policies to increase female participation. Indicative for Greece, the admission rate to the Military Schools is 10% women and 90% men. Consequently, many actions can take place to improve this situation:

- Conduct a research on the reasons a woman chooses or rejects a military career
- Systematically record the number of women who are candidates and ultimately admitted to military schools and the institutions of professional soldiers by specialty so that targeted policies can be designed to increase the preference and finally the admission rate of women in specific fields of interest (e.g. combat special, technological and IT specialties).

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

Conduct research on the forms and rate of gender-based violence in the Armed Forces and to what extent they create a work environment disincentive for women to pursue a military career.

Adoption of more general measures to improve working conditions in the Armed Forces and provide financial benefits.

The Ministry of Defence should cooperate more with the Ministry of Education to present the military career as a scientifically competitive and interesting career, alongside the promotion of female role models.

The structure of the government concerning the Political Leadership should also become more gender balanced. For example, in Greece there has been only one female Deputy Minister of National Defence and no Minister until now.

Solid implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda

In the Greek army there are no specific percentages concerning the educational level of military personnel.

The (wo)manpower in the military grows by including more women in the Armed Forces, who tend to have better educational and training scores and thus can excel.

To continue, by having more women in joining the military the efficiency of peacekeeping operations and crisis management situations will be increased. Managing human security issues with a gender perspective and involving women in their plan and implementation represents an important pillar for the success of the mission. Besides, PFEARFU supports that the army should fully respect human rights, be closer to the civil society, have low tolerance of violence and protect women from gender-based violence.

The (wo)manpower in the military grows by including more women in the Armed Forces, who tend to have better educational and training scores and thus can excel. Lastly, the organisation stresses that also climate change can be more effectively tackled by including more female personnel.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

Ireland - PDFORRA

The Irish Armed Forces are made up of 93% men and 7% women. Concerning the military association PDFORRA, no data are available on the percentage of female and male members. Overall, in Ireland women in the Armed Forces face problems concerning allowances, housing, work-life balance – issues that equally affect their male colleagues, but also discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment. Military associations can advocate for a change by providing appropriate information and seeking insight into problems and address those problems through agreed procedures with the state. Moreover, it was underlined that women can play a vital role in security operations and enhance the capabilities of the Armed Forces when it comes to conflict zones and interaction with the local population. They can bring a female perspective to operations and normalize the participation of females in the Armed Forces. Despite the highly positive views of the association on the added value of women in the military, PDFORRA seemed more hesitant on whether more female military personnel can contribute into bringing more climate change considerations in the Armed Forces and thus moving towards sustainability.

Italy - ASSODIPRO

In Italy women in the Armed Forces represent a bit more than 7%, while in the military association ASSODIPRO only 1%. Besides, the Board of ASSODIPRO is exclusively composed by men. According to the respondents, women in the Italian Armed Forces do not face any significant issue. In order for more women to join the military and the associations, it was deemed as essential for the military associations to have frequent exchange of views with the political authorities as well as having the right to enter the barracks. Lastly, ASSODIPRO seems sceptical on the added value of having more women joining the Armed Forces, as well as whether this can contribute into promoting climate sustainability within the military.

Portugal - FAA

The Portuguese Armed Forces include 15% of women and the military associations around 20% women and 80% men. However, the biggest issues that women face in the military are gender based stereotypes that the military is perceived as a male dominant work place. Mostly women in the military face issues concerning childcare and work-life balance. Thus, military associations should assist in providing solution to this kind of problems, especially considering the issues that mono-parental families deal with.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

The government also should make sure that the public law is applied without discrimination to women in the Armed Forces.

The educational level of female and male military personnel is at the same level. By having more women in the military traditional-conservative stereotypes that want women to have a more traditional housekeeping role would drastically change. A change in culture, education and transmission of values that see men and women as equals should be a priority.

Lastly, the Portuguese association agrees with the consideration that women are having greater concern for the environment than men and are more likely to proactively engage in environmental action. Hence, having more women in the Armed Forces is essential for the military to move towards sustainability.

Slovakia - ZVSR

In the Slovak Armed Forces 86.41 % are men and 13.59 % women. 8.15% of ZVSR members are female, but none a board member. As there are no official data by the human resources section of the Slovak Ministry of Defence concerning the biggest issues that female personnel face, an expert estimation indicates that the problems are:

- Work-life/family balance
- Language education
- Career growth
- Different forms of discrimination

ZVSR pays special attention to the issue of the status of women in the Armed Forces and hence it has created a working group that continuously monitors the development of the situation. Besides, when organizing an international conference, one panel will always be dedicated to the position of women in the sector. Summarizing, ZVSR noted that it strongly supports all positive measures of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic that lead to the strengthening of the position of women in the units.

RESULTS BY COUNTRY

Concerning the educational levels of men and women in the military, ZVSR provided the following data:

- Professional soldiers with a university degree(I., II., III. level): 56.07% of female soldiers compared to 28.97% of men
- Non-commissioned officers (grade I, II, III): women 43.99%, men 15.22%
- All officers must have at least II. University level of education.

By having more women joining the military, the Armed Forces will gain more qualified personnel, greater diversity that will lead to a more efficient performance of tasks and improve the state of gender equality in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. However, the organisation stresses that in order to determine if the necessity of more women in the military will improve environmental sustainability, a more in depth analysis is required.

Spain - AUME

In Spain female military personnel are 12%, while members in the military association are only 2.5%. Besides, the Board of AUME is consisted of 7 men and 1 woman. Hence, military associations can work towards fostering recruitment of female personnel, by having military affairs to be dealt with gender equality considerations and raising awareness of the importance of professional military associations. On the other hand, the government should provide realistic information and organise specific campaigns for the recruitment of women in the military. In Spain, male and female military personnel do not have many differences on their academic qualifications, women are just slightly more higher educated. AUME also stressed out that men and women share life equally, the military role should not be an exception. On the last question, concerning climate change, the association perceives the role that women have to play in the “greening” of the military positively.

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RESULTS BY COUNTRY

Sweden - SAMO

In Sweden 22% women are part of the Armed Forces and the organisation has 10% of female members. The board of SAMO is consisted of 20% women. The biggest issues that women face in the Swedish military, which should be addressed both by the government and the military association are:

- Personal equipment
- Retention of female personnel
- Tackle victimisation
- Providing equal opportunities to men and women to reach higher ranks

It is also important to note that in Sweden 52% of women have continued their studies after upper secondary school, compared with 39% among men. By having more women joining the military the organisation of the Armed Forces will become more robust and increase the defences of the country. SAMO also believes that by having more women in the military, it could move towards climate sustainability easier and quicker.

CONCLUSION

Following the results of the survey, the military profession is still considered as a male dominant one, while gender based stereotypes suggest that women are not suitable for the military. At the same time women soldiers face a plenty of issues from sexual assault and harassment to not having women measured made uniforms. The change must be drastically through cooperation between the government, the military authorities and the military associations. The actions should focus on tackling gender based violence and unequal opportunities for promotion in the Armed Forces, while also changing the mentality around the role the women can play in such a sector. By having more women joining the military, the Armed Forces will become more robust and inclusive while also increasing efficiency of operations as in crisis management situations and peacekeeping missions. The solid implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda should become a cornerstone of national policies alongside international cooperation within NATO, the EU and the UN. To provide an example, the EU under the [Strategic Compass](#), pledges to increase gender equality in the defence sector and strengthen the role and network of gender advisors to its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations.

Cooperation among international organisations, civil society and other stakeholders is essential to move towards a more gender equal society. EUROMIL remains committed in promoting gender equality, safe working conditions and equal opportunities to the members of the Armed Forces in Europe, and thus further cooperate with partners at national and international level. To provide a few examples, EUROMIL closely works with the European Institutions for the promotion of the European defence integration and for equal rights for military personnel. On the light of the next European Elections in 2024, [EUROMIL Project on European Elections](#) was launched, which – among other points – strongly advocates for a more inclusive, gender balanced, with equal opportunities society for military personnel. Cooperation with NATO bodies as the NATO PA, or the NATO NCGP has always been at the heart of EUROMIL. Today's world requires a polyphony of opinions, recommendations, and policies for achieving gender mainstreaming and increasing collaboration between like-minded partners. We, EUROMIL, are looking forward to increase collaboration with partners to better, quicker and more efficient tackle the issues presented on this report.



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