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Monitoring the implementation of a gender perspective within the Armed Forces

The [Military Observatory for Equality of Men and Women in the Armed Forces](#) (Military Observatory for Equality)¹ is a permanent structure, highly positioned within the Spanish Ministry of Defence. Founded by the Council of Ministers in 2005, initially as the “Observatory for Women in the Armed Forces”, it serves as an advisory body to the armed forces. It is tasked with the coordination of gender issues, including monitoring the integration and participation of women.²

In 2011, the Observatory’s mandate was expanded from focusing on women in the armed forces to gender equality. Its work thus includes actions that benefit both sexes in areas such as the reconciliation of family life and work and professional training; as well as the development of operational gender expertise. This development was driven by social and legislative changes in Spain, in particular the adoption of the 2007 *Organic Law on Gender Equality*, which tasks all state ministries to create a gender unit.

The Military Observatory for Equality enjoys high-level support within the armed forces. The Under Secretary of Defence meets with the Observatory for a day every six months. The Observatory has a permanent staff team of seven people. It seeks to achieve gender balance within the team, and to recruit staff with prior gender training or experience working on gender issues from a mix of the services. If a staff member has not yet had the opportunity to participate in gender training, they are able to take part in the week-long [ESDC Comprehensive approach to gender in operations course](#). The Observatory is moreover in the process of expanding the gender training offered to its permanent staff members to include courses delivered by the [Swedish Armed Forces International Centre](#).

The roles of the Military Observatory for Equality include the following.³

- Assisting with the implementation of military law.
- Analysing the differential impact of processes of recruitment, training, management, integration and (when appropriate) return to civilian life on women and men. To this end, each month the Observatory collects and publishes on its website detailed human resources data, including

¹ DCAF thanks staff of the Observatory for Equality between Men and Women in the Armed Forces, in particular Commander Fernando Izquierdo (interviewed 4 June 2013, Spanish Ministry of Defence, Madrid) for their support to this documentation of their work.

² Armada Española. Colección de Reglamentos. Personal Militar-Observatorio militar para la igualdad entre mujeres y hombres en las Fuerzas Armadas Denominaciones. Orden Ministerial 51/2011: July 28, 2011; Lt Col José M Mucientes Silva. Women in Spanish Armed Forces: Gender Policy and Development. NATO-OTAN. 2007.

³ Izquierdo, Fernando. “Spanish Model for Gender Equality.” Power Point Presentation. Spanish Ministry of Defence/Permanent Secretariat for Equality (undated).

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statistics as to leave taken for paternity, maternity and *lactancia* (breastfeeding or bottle feeding). Each year the Observatory presents a detailed report on the relative participation of men and women in the different branches: army, navy (including the marines), air force and joint corps (which includes military personal with technical expertise in the four domains of legal, financial accountability, health and music). Analysis is disaggregated by rank, enlisted/reservist status etc. This report also examines the deployment of service personnel on international missions and compares the percentage of men and women recruited as military and civilian personnel.

- On the basis of this monitoring and analysis, as well as its outreach activities and handling of queries (discussed below), the Observatory proposes improvements to the legal and institutional framework for gender equality in the armed forces. Gender-responsive regulations have addressed such matters as: physical testing of women (anticipating rescheduling due to pregnancy or childbirth); assignment during a period of pregnancy or breastfeeding; protections for single parents; extension of paternity leave to four weeks; child care; and support for victims of sexual harassment or sexual violence.
- The Military Observatory for Equality conducts research and analysis from which to improve the armed forces' capacity to meet the needs of servicemen and -women. For example, in 2012 the Observatory conducted a study on the impact to personal and family life of geographical changes as a result of military deployment.
- The Observatory supports the delivery of the armed forces' gender pre-deployment course (led by the army education training command) and the development of gender equality curricula. The Observatory, in collaboration with the Dutch armed forces, organises the week-long ESDC [Comprehensive approach to gender in operations course](#), open to both Spanish and international middle management civilian and military professionals.
- The Observatory reviews the integration of a gender perspective in operations through, for example, analysis of the ISAF Joint Operations Command's quarterly reports.
- The Observatory represents the Spanish Armed Forces within international organisations implementing the women, peace and security agenda. It monitors and facilitates the implementation of recommendations issued by the [NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives](#). For example, the Observatory passed on information and recommendations about Female Engagement Teams, a model developed by partner NATO states. Female Engagement Teams were later deployed by Spain as part of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan.

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Complaints and queries

The Military Observatory for Equality staffs a “hotline” which is open to all members of the armed forces, as well as civilian employees. The Observatory is able to receive complaints or queries from service personnel related to gender issues. The queries received fall into two broad categories:

- concerns over the reconciliation of work and family life (which comprise the largest part of complaints)⁴; and
- claims of discrimination on the basis of sex (e.g. regarding promotion, physical fitness testing) or sexual harassment.

Whilst the Military Observatory for Equality does not provide a formal mediation function, on receiving a query, it:

- considers the complaint or query against the relevant regulations;
- writes an advisory report addressed to the complainant and their relevant commanding officer(s); and
- if appropriate, recommends changes to regulations.

The recommendations and conclusions of the Observatory’s advisory reports are not binding upon the commanding officer. However, in an overwhelming majority of cases this process resolves the complainant’s concern, without proceeding to a more formal hearing.

Outreach

The Military Observatory for Equality promotes its mandate and services to armed forces personnel through an ongoing programme of activities, such as conferences and awareness raising events. This outreach also allows the Observatory to collect information on the needs of men and women in the different services.

The Observatory’s web pages, within the Ministry of Defence website, share interviews with servicemen and -women on topics including the implementation and impact of the gender policy. The website is also a platform for individuals to make anonymous enquires. In 2012, the Observatory answered over 1,500 email and telephone questions. Since outreach activities

were increased in 2012, there has been a 100% increase in questions to the Observatory.⁵ Part of this strengthened outreach was the appointment of 16 “vocals” of the Observatory, representing the Chiefs of Defence, Army, Navy and Air Force, as well as the Directorates of the Spanish Ministry of Defence.

⁴ A commanding officer must consider all requests related to for work/life balance. In cases in which they wish to refuse the request, they have to look for a solution and demonstrate that one cannot be found.

⁵ Spain’s National Report to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspective-2013. Enclosure 1 to IMSM-0033-2013

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Impact

The Military Observatory for Equality's success is a result of sustained political support. Besides the services it provides to service personnel, the Observatory has played a key role in the development of policies and the legal framework related to gender equality in the military - such as the *Military Career Law*, adopted in November 2007, which defines gender equality as one of five main principles of the military.

Women's recruitment into the Spanish military has increased only modestly from 11.5% in 2005 to 12.3% in 2012.⁶ While it remains difficult to draw any clear conclusions as to the impact of the Military Observatory for Equality on female recruitment, interviews with service women demonstrate that, although challenges to reconcile family life with the mobility of military service remain, "... childcare facilities on bases and the increase in maternity, paternity and lactation leaves help the family environment".⁷ Valentina Fernández Vargas, a researcher at the Spanish National Research Council who has been recognised for a long career dedicated to gender issues in the armed forces and support for equality and the rights of military women in Spain, observes that the Observatory has sped up the integration of a gender perspective and women's participation in the Spanish armed forces: "...Would that there were such watchdog bodies in all spheres of professional life. They are still needed, because reality does not change on foot of a Royal Decree."⁸

⁶ Website of the Spanish Ministry of Defence-Military Observatory for Gender Equality: *2012 Annual Report on the Evolution of Women and Man in the AF*: <http://www.defensa.gob.es/en/areasTematicas/observatorio/estadisticas-enlaces/>.

⁷ Website of the Spanish Ministry of Defence-Military Observatory for Gender Equality: <http://www.defensa.gob.es/en/areasTematicas/observatorio/figuras-destacadas/entrevistas/MujeresenlaPAPEA.html> (accessed 17 March 2014).

⁸ Website of the Spanish Ministry of Defence-Military Observatory for Gender Equality: <http://www.defensa.gob.es/en/areasTematicas/observatorio/figuras-destacadas/entrevistas/ValentinaFernandez.html> (accessed 17 March 2014).