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**Defence
Monitor**

Women in defence system



BCSP
Belgrade Centre
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WOMEN IN THE DEFENCE SYSTEM

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

In the area of women, peace, and security, Montenegro has recently renewed its strategic documents, while North Macedonia still has a valid action plan. However, in other countries of the region, the WPS documents have expired, and some countries, like Serbia, are working on creating new plans.

According to available data, Albania and Croatia have the highest percentage of women among uniformed personnel, while Montenegro leads in the percentage of women working as civilians in the defence sector. Serbia and Montenegro have the highest participation of women among enlisted personnel, while Albania and North Macedonia have the highest percentage of female officers. The participation of women non-commissioned officers is generally low throughout the region, but Albania and North Macedonia are examples of good practice. Due to the relatively late admission to military schools and the still present glass ceiling in the army, women have a slow career development. Albania and Croatia are the only countries that have appointed women to the rank of brigadier general, while many women in other countries are waiting for higher appointments. Lastly, Serbia has the highest participation of women in multinational operations/missions, while Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia has the lowest participation of women in missions abroad.

	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Croatia	Montenegro	North Macedonia	Serbia
Valid WPS action plan	No data	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
% of women civilians	37	45	51	66	29	55
% of women uniformed personnel of total number in the AF	15	9	14	11.5	10	11
% of women officers	21	8	No data	17	20	12
% of women NCOs	13.5	6	No data	6	12	4
% of women enlisted personnel	11	12	No data	16	6	18
The highest rank for women in the military	Brigadier General	Colonel	Brigadier General	Major	Colonel	Colonel
% of women in command and leadership positions	44 women	68 women	12 in CAF	51 in MoD and 8 in AF	19	25 in MoD and 7 in SAF
% of women in military operations	5	None	9	7	4	13



National Action Plan 1325: In 2018, Albania adopted its first two-year action plan on women, peace and security. The date of adoption of the Albanian government's second plan remain unclear. However, the Ministry of Defence officially said that it has submitted its findings to the Ministry of Health and Social Protection responsible for compiling a comprehensive summary report on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in Albania.



Participation of women in the MoDs and the Armed Forces: Albania has achieved the **NATO standard of 15% of female uniformed personnel in the army**. However, Albania is the only country in the region with the quota for women in the army (15%) that can affect their further admission. In 2023, **Albania had the highest percentage of women officers and non-commissioned officers in the Western Balkans**, comprising 21% of officers and 13.5% of NCOs. Still, the percentage of female enlisted personnel (11%) remains lower than other countries in the region. The MoD has a civil employee representation rate of 37% women.



Representation of women in command and leadership positions: The current representation of women in leadership positions is approximately 10%, which equates to 44 women. Manushaqe Shehu, the first female Deputy Chief of General Staff, holds the highest rank of Major General in the Albanian Armed Forces since 2018. In addition, Albania had two women as its defence ministers until 2020.



Participation of women in peacekeeping operations: The percentage of women participating in missions abroad remains at 5%.



The National Action Plan 1325: The third national action plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda expired in 2022 and new is not yet developed. However, the new Gender Action plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2023-2027 includes a chapter on Gender and Security, which states the goals to be achieved in the area by 2027.¹ In addition, the key topics of the third local action plan on 1325 are mainstreamed in other strategic documents dealing with migration and asylum seeking, prevention of terrorism and control of small arms and light weapons.



Participation of women in the MoDs and the Armed Forces: Compared to the previous research, the total number of professional military personnel and civil servants shows an increase in the representation of women by one percent, but women stagnate in the ranks of officers, non-commissioned officers and enlisted personnel. According to data from the Ministry of Defence of BiH, the Armed Forces had about 8734, soldiers and 791 civilian employees in 2023. Among them, there are 758 women as uniformed personnel or 9 percent of the total number, while 107 women or 45 percent work as civilians.² Women make up a quarter of the civilian employees of the Ministry of Defence. In the Armed Forces, about 143 women, or 8 percent of the total number, are officers in the ranks of brigadier, colonel, major, captain, lieutenant, and second lieutenant. A positive development is that in 2023, the Armed Forces received their first female pilot, Draženka Panić.³ Furthermore, there are 148 female non-commissioned officers, or about 6 percent of their total number. These are the ranks of sergeant, senior sergeant, sergeant first class, staff sergeant and chief sergeant. Finally, around 12 percent constitute female enlisted personnel.

According to the media reports, about 270 women in the Armed Forces identify themselves as Bosniaks regardless of their religion.⁴ Until recently, wearing hijab in the military was not allowed by the rules of service. The policy changed after Emela Mujanović, one of the hijab-wearing soldiers, sued the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina for discrimination. To solve the problem, Defence Minister Zukan Helez recently proposed changes to allow the wearing of headscarves of the same material and colour as the uniform.⁵

1 Gender action plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2023-2027, February 2023, <https://arsbih.gov.ba/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/GAP-BiH-2023-2027-Bosanski-jezik-1.pdf>

2 Radio Slobodna Evropa, „U Oružanim snaga BiH sve više žena, nijedna sa činom generala,“ [There are more and more women in the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina, none with the rank of general], 16 May 2023, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/bosna-hercegovina-zene-vojska/32413772.html>

3 Hercegovina info, „JEDINA ŽENA PILOT U ORUŽANIM SNAGAMA BiH Draženka je savladala sve prepreke i sada ruši tabue,“ [THE ONLY WOMAN PILOT IN THE ARMED FORCES OF BIH Draženka has overcome all obstacles and is now breaking taboos], 10 December 2023, <https://www.hercegovina.info/vijesti/bih/jedina-zena-pilot-u-oruzanim-snagama-bih-drazenka-je-savladala-sve-prepreke-i-sada-rusi-tabue/219633/>

4 Radio Slobodna Evropa, „Uposlenice sa hidžabom ‘problem’ za pravosuđe BiH,“ [Female employees with hijab a ‘problem’ for the judiciary of Bosnia and Herzegovina], 29 August 2023, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/bih-sudovi-pravosudje-hidzab/32569534.html>

5 Ibid.



Representation of women in command and leadership positions: There are 69 women appointed to leadership positions in the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces. The highest rank held by women in the Armed Forces of BiH is still that of Colonel. Nevertheless, two women and 36 men, who hold the rank of brigadier, are awaiting appointments to the rank of general.



Participation of women in peacekeeping operations: After an institutional deadlock in decision-making, the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina made a decision in 2023 to deploy two members of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the UN in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and three members of the Armed Forces to the European Union (EU) Training Mission in the Central African Republic (EUTMRCA).⁶

⁶ Preporod info, „OSBiH angažirane u dvije mirovne misije: BH. put od konzumenta do aktera kolektivne sigurnosti,“ [Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina engaged in two peacekeeping missions: BH. the path from the consumer to the actor of collective security], 25 December 2023, <https://preporod.info/bs/article/48457/osbih-angazirane-u-dvije-mirovne-misije-bh-put-od-konzumenta-do-aktera-kolektivne-sigurnosti>



The National Action Plan 1325: Croatia's second Action Plan 1325 on women, peace and security expired in 2023. In June 2023, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs published the latest report on the implementation of the National Action Plan 1325 for the period of 2021 and 2022.⁷



Participation of women in the MoDs and the Armed Forces: The number and share of women among the personnel employed in the Ministry of Defence and the Croatian Army slightly increased in the last year. According to the annual defence report (2022), out of 14,562 active military personnel, on December 31, 2022, there were 2,046 women or 14%.⁸ In the category of civil servants and employees, out of 1,872 employees on December 31, 2022, there were 957 women or 51%.⁹ The data on the proportion of women among officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and enlisted personnel are not available. In the academic year 2022/2023, out of 417 students enrolled in the Croatian Military Academy, 93 are women, of which six women and 34 men from abroad. In 2022, 22 women out of 71 cadets graduated from the Military Academy.



Representation of women in command and leadership positions: The share of women in command and leadership positions remains unchanged (12%), while 13% of women were promoted to a higher rank in 2022.



Participation of women in peacekeeping operations: During 2022, a total of 29 members of the Croatian Army participated in three United Nations missions (UNMOGIP – India and Pakistan, MINURSO – Western Sahara, UNIFIL – Lebanon), including seven female members. However, in all peace support operations and missions abroad, the share of women was 9%.

7 Republika Hrvatska, Ministarstvo vanjskih i europskih poslova, Nacionalni akcijski plan provedbe Rezolucije Vijeća sigurnosti Ujedinjenih naroda 1325 (2000) o ženama, miru i sigurnosti, te srodnih rezolucija, za razdoblje od 2019. do 2023. godine, [National action plan for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, and related resolutions, for the period from 2019 to 2023] <https://mvep.gov.hr/informacije-za-gradjane-244593/ugovori-dokumenti-i-obraci/dokumenti/nap-ii/27171> <https://mvep.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/2023/datoteke/Izvje%C5%A1%C4%87e-NAPII-2021-2022.pdf>

8 Data on the representation of women among NCOs and enlisted personnel are not available in the annual defence report for 2022. For this reason, it is not possible to make a comparison with other countries in the region.

9 Vlada Republike Hrvatske, Godišnje izvješće o obrani za 2022. Godinu, [Annual Defense Report for 2022], 2 November 2023, https://www.sabor.hr/sites/default/files/uploads/sabor/2023-11-03/095806/GOD_IZVJ_OBRANA_2022.pdf



The National Action Plan 1325: In late 2023, the Government of Montenegro adopted the Strategy for the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 - Women, Peace and Security and accompanying resolutions for the period 2024-2027, with the Action Plan for 2024-2025.¹⁰ This is the third strategic document that includes the goals of the UNSC Resolution 1325 in Montenegro. The Ministry of Defence has created a special section on women in the defence on its official website, which ensures greater transparency and facilitates access to information on gender equality in the defence sector.¹¹



Participation of women in the MoD and the Armed Forces: More than two thirds of the employees in the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces are women (66%), which is the highest percentage in the region. Still, the representation of women among professional military personnel has not significantly changed (11.55%). Among the professional military personnel, there are the most women in officer ranks, that is 17%. On the other hand, the representation of women is the lowest among non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and amounts to 6%. The highest rank held by women in the Army of Montenegro is still the rank of major, and in the coming period some women should be promoted to the ranks of lieutenant colonel/frigate captain and colonel/captain of battleships. Finally, 16% of women serve in the army as enlisted personnel.



Representation of women in command and leadership positions: Due to frequent changes of government, the first Minister of Defence of Montenegro, Prof. Dr. Olivera Injac remained in office for less than a year and a half (December 4, 2020 to April 28, 2022). Nonetheless, the percentage of women in managerial positions in the Ministry of Defence is quite high and amounts to 51%, while percentage of women in command positions in Montenegro's Armed Forces is 8%.¹² Until 2022, Major Sanja Pejović worked as a gender advisor in the NATO command structure SHAPE, that is, the country's first position in the NATO command structure.¹³



Participation of women in peacekeeping operations: According to the Strategy, Montenegro significantly increased participation of women in international missions and operations. So far, 28 women members of the MoD and AF have participated in missions in Afghanistan, Somalia (ATALANTA), Western Sahara (MINURSO) and in Kosovo (KFOR). In 2022 alone, six women were engaged, which is 11% of the total number of military personnel, while in 2023, 7% of women were engaged in multinational missions and operations.

10 Vlada Crne Gore, Strategija implementacije R SBUN 1325 - Žene, mir i bezbjednost i njoj pratećih rezolucija za period 2024-2027, sa AP za 2024-2025. godinu, [Strategy for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 - Women, peace and security and accompanying resolutions for the period 2024-2027, with AP for 2024-2025], 15 December 2023, <https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/a8a5a5ef-a812-4097-a34c-3175d58eb871>

11 Vlada Crne Gore, Strategija implementacije Rezolucije Savjeta bezbjednosti Ujedinjenih nacija 1325, [Strategy for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325], 15 December 2023, <https://www.gov.me/mod/saradnja-sa-nvo>

12 The Strategy for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 - WPS and accompanying resolutions for the period 2024-2027, page 15.

13 Ibid.



The National Action Plan 1325: North Macedonia is in the fourth year of implementing its second Action Plan 1325 on Women, Peace and Security for the period 2020-2025.¹⁴ In early 2023, the Ministry of Defence, with the help of the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF), took the first steps to prepare a gender self-assessment.¹⁵



Participation of women in the MoDs and the Armed Forces: According to Minister Slavjanka Petrovska, the results of the Ministry's work in promoting gender equality are visible, because in the last competition for the admission of cadets at the Military Academy, 14 of the 35 accepted cadets were women.¹⁶ The long-term effects of gender policies are yet to be seen, but as of 2023, women make up 10 percent of the active personnel in the Army, of which 20% are officers, 13% non-commissioned officers and 6% enlisted personnel. Compared to the official statistics from 2022,¹⁷ there is a decline in female civilians as less than one third of women (29%) work as civilian personnel in the army.

There is a veiled criticism in the Albanian media that the North Macedonian Army does not fully reflect the diversity in the society. According to the Euronews Albania reports, "Albanian women in the Army of North Macedonia are located mainly in the unit of professional soldiers, where out of 5.8% of women in total, only 1.6% are Albanian".¹⁸



Representation of women in command and leadership positions: North Macedonia is currently the only country in the region that has appointed a woman the Minister of Defence. Still, the share of women in command and management positions in the Ministry of Defence and the Army is 19%. According to the Army officials, the trend of enhancing the representation of women in the Army structure continues, especially in the officer ranks, since there are 3 colonels and 33 lieutenant-colonels in the Army.¹⁹ In addition, the number of female majors, captains and lieutenants is considered satisfactory by the Army officials.



Participation of women in peacekeeping operations: The participation of women in military operations is 4% of female personnel assigned to UN, EU and NATO-led missions, which is a slight decrease compared to the last year research.²⁰

14 <https://www.globalwps.org/data/MKD/files/2020-2025.pdf>

15 Ministry of Defence, Gender self-assessment in the Ministry of Defence and the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia, 17 February 2023, <https://mod.gov.mk/gender-self-assessment-in-the-ministry-of-defense-and-the-army-of-the-republic-of-north-macedonia/>

16 Republic of North Macedonia, Ministry of Defence, „Petrovska at the conference on gender equality and the OSCE perspective: women in security are not just numbers, they are value and quality,” 6 September 2023, <https://mod.gov.mk/petrovska-nakonferencija-rodova-ednakvost-osce-06-09-2023/>

17 Army of the Republic of North Macedonia, „Brave Macedonian women for whom the Army is a guarantee of peace and security of the state,” 8 March 2023, <https://mil.mk/military-stories/hrabri-makedonki-armijata-za-niv-e-garantiranje-na-mirot-i-sigurnosta-na-drzhavata/?lang=en>

18 Euronews Albania, “The only Albanian female soldier in N. Macedonia, part of the army for more than 15 years,” 9 March 2023, <https://euronews.al/en/the-only-albanian-female-soldier-in-n-macedonia-part-of-the-army-for-more-than-15-years/>

19 Army of the Republic of North Macedonia, „Brave Macedonian women for whom the Army is a guarantee of peace and security of the state,” 8 March 2023, <https://mil.mk/military-stories/hrabri-makedonki-armijata-za-niv-e-garantiranje-na-mirot-i-sigurnosta-na-drzhavata/?lang=en>

20 Balkan Defence Monitor, Women in Defence System, North Macedonia, 2023, <https://balkandefencemonitor.com/women-in-defence-system-north-macedonia-2023/>



The National Action Plan 1325: In late 2022, the Ministry of Defence began the process of developing the third action plan with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia. However, the first meeting of the government Working Group for the preparation of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council was held in August 2023²¹ without presenting a new draft that is publicly available. Considering the dynamics, it can be concluded that the process of evaluating the previous plan and creating a new plan lasted for four years, which is longer than the implementation of the second plan (2017-2020) and may be an indicator of the lack of genuine political commitment to prioritise the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.



Participation of women in the MoDs and the Armed Forces: Despite the fact that military service in Serbia is more popular among women than among men, the high turnout of women in military schools and academies has not yet translated into their overall representation in the defence sector. This means that the share of women among **non-uniformed personnel (civilians) and uniform personnel in the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and in the Serbian Armed Forces (SAF) remains almost unchanged compared to 2022.** Currently, around 55% of women perform civilian duties, while 11% of women work as professional military personnel. Nonetheless, **Serbia is among the top countries in the region with 18% of women serving as enlisted personnel.** However, a similar progress is not visible among officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs), as only 12% of women serve as officers and 4% of women are NCOs. Still, a slight increase has been noted in all the categories compared to 2022.

In the previous period, there have been changes to the uniforms for female officers, non-commissioned officers and cadets which reflects efforts to improve the position of women in the military.²²



Representation of women in command and leadership positions: Little has changed in the representation of women in leadership positions, as **25% of women hold managerial positions in the MoD, while 7% of women hold command positions in the Serbian Armed Forces.** The highest rank held by women in the Serbian Armed Forces is still that of colonel, and not a single woman has been promoted or appointed to a higher rank in the SAF and MoD based on the Decree passed at the beginning of 2023.²³



Participation of women in peacekeeping operations: In 2023, Serbia contributed to eight peacekeeping missions, while women from the Army and police participated in two UN operations (UNFIL and MINUSCA) and two EU operations (EUTM Somalia and EUTM RCA). Compared to 2022, the participation of women in peacekeeping missions slightly decreased, and out of 295 members of peacekeeping forces, 38 women were sent abroad.

21 Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Defence, Meeting of Working Group responsible for drafting National Action Plan, 31 August 2023, <https://www.mod.gov.rs/eng/20432/sastanak-radne-grupe-za-izradu-nacionalnog-akcionog-plana20432>

22 Balkan Investigative Network, "Žene vojnici u Srbiji dobijaju poseban donji veš," [Female soldiers in Serbia receive special underwear], 18 September 2023, <https://www.balkansec.net/post/%C5%BEene-vojnici-u-srbiji-dobijaju-poseban-donji-ve%C5%A1>

23 Republic of Serbia, Ministry of Defence, "Ministar Vučević presents decrees on promotions and appointments," 9 March 2023, <https://www.mod.gov.rs/eng/19831/ministar-vucevic-urucio-ukaze-o-unapredjenjima-i-postavljenjima19831>