

Policy issues regarding the military service of woman in the Republic of Armenia:



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Experience of four centuries and lessons learnt hence

International experience and research evidence show that having women participate in the military sector is a prerequisite of modernity. Women in the military (including both compulsory and voluntary duty) of the leading countries such as the US, UK, Israel, Germany and Italy ensures effectiveness of their armed forces, and flexibility of top decision-making. It also promotes closer and more direct relations between the armed forces and society. Women in the military contribute an additional aspect of moral control over the behavior of military men. Their presence mitigates interpersonal conflicts and prevents cases of physical violence in predominantly male personnel.

To modernize and develop the RA armed forces it is essential to involve women in military service. In addition, the Armenian reality calls for more active participation of women in the sector so that everyone can equally contribute to the security of the country, and historically the Armenian woman has proved competent and willing to support the armed forces and built up its combat capacities.

Commitment for all, opportunities for volunteers

Though issues regarding the military service of women are already regulated, some provisions need further clarification. Article 46 of the RA Constitution states: "Every citizen shall be obliged to take part in the defense of the Republic of Armenia in conformity with the procedure prescribed by the law". The legal interpretation of this constitutional responsibility implies various extents of obligation, based on gender. Specifically, the RA Law on Military Duty defines all the categories of citizens liable for compulsory military service, specifically all males of pre-conscript and conscript age, and those in reserve duty. As to women, these can be only those who have either a military profession or a military record. In addition, unlike men, for women the constitutional responsibility "to take part in the defense of the Republic of Armenia" is not mandatory, but exclusively voluntary, aka contractual. Female citizens can serve in the military only voluntarily. However, a female military can serve in the armed forces if there is a vacancy appropriate for a female applicant. Whether a given position can be appropriate for a female or not is, however, a discretionary decision to be made by a relevant senior state official.

The regulatory framework changed somewhat in 2012, when a resolution of the Minister of Defense granted girls and women access to military educational institutions. Thus, according to the Law on Military Duty, graduates of military educational institutions or relevant advanced trainings for officers are obliged to sign for contractual military service after graduation. Therefore, military service is already compulsory for women studying in military educational institutions, both during and after their studies.



19 Sayat Nova
Yerevan 0001
Armenia

Tel.: +374 10 582638
Fax: +374 10 527082

mail@ichd.org
www.ichd.org

The most important in a mid-term perspective

Expanding the involvement of women in the military sector and the respective policy requires research evidence on the perception of women about their military service, analysis of advantages and risks conditioned by their military service, and understanding of their expectations and concerns. Reforms in the military sector should be designed based on the opinions, perceptions, assessment and feedback of women currently in the armed forces, which will allow policy makers to comprehensively evaluate the baseline and outline possible prospects of development.

In order to prevent different interpretations of legal provisions and resulting discrimination risks, it is necessary to clarify the list of military positions that can be taken by women, and define clear standards and a rationale for refusing certain positions to women, which should be clearly communicated in the decisions of relevant state officials. Moreover, these job descriptions should clearly identify the gender-based differences that prevent women from holding specific positions and provide evidence for relevant biological and physiological impediments. There is also a need to study career mobility of women in the military. It is essential to have clear monitoring and control mechanisms in place in order to avoid the shadow practice of career advancement of women through discrimination, corruption, sexual harassment and other impermissible behavior.

In order to mitigate the risks of sexual harassment, to quickly identify such cases and provide the necessary support to the victims, it is crucial to develop a tailored mechanism allowing special monitoring groups of women in military service with specific social-psychological training to organize regular site visits in the sector-relevant structures. This will certainly promote an environment of trust among military women and will facilitate identification of cases of sexual harassment.

To increase the role of women in the security sector and armed forces of the Republic of Armenia it is critical to study self-perceptions of women currently in the military, specifically regarding their own roles and positions in the army, as well as modes of self-expression in the society. It is vital to identify and analyze currently dominant stereotypes and subsequent positions regarding women in the military.

Another important issue is to ensure social protection of women while attempting to expand involvement of women in the sector, and the protection should extend to their service in the armed forces as well, including both compulsory and voluntary duties. Another aspect to consider is the issue of social benefits and relevant guarantees after the military service.

The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion “Mainstreaming of Gender and Promoting Gender Equality into Defense Sector Reforms: Policy and Regulatory Framework”, which took place on 9th of June, 2014. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations.

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