

# Diversity and Inclusion in the Defence Sector

Policy paper, August 2020

Civil Council for Defense and Security

Tbilisi, Georgia

## 1. Introduction

The present paper examines Georgia's defence and security sector reform policies and their implementation and attempts to assess whether the reform applies the international standards on diversity and inclusion that Georgia has pledged to meet under the UN's conventions and the EU Association Agreement. The policy paper assesses the degree to which contemporary diversity and inclusion concepts have been integrated into Georgian law and the level of relevant knowledge in the defence and security agencies and in wider society. And finally, the paper identifies challenges with respect to diversity and inclusion in Georgia's defence sector and offers recommendations.

During the study, the authors examined the prevailing attitudes and practices related to various types of diversity and their inclusion, based on assessments by the agency's staff as well as the opinions of non-governmental organizations and academics. The premise was that these respondents had access to alternative facts, personal feelings of minority representatives and the hidden cases of discrimination.

The analysis of the study findings focused on identifying both – positive and problematic (discrimination, exclusion) – practice in the area of equality and inclusion of diversity groups and their members in the sector.

The analysis showed differences in the assessments of the national-level state policies as well as the activities carried out by the Defence Ministry with a view of introducing the principles of diversity/difference, inclusion and equality for minorities.

The recommendations in the paper were prepared on the basis of the best international practice and can help enhance the level of diversity/difference and inclusion in the defence sector and create conditions conducive to equal opportunities for the staff's professional and career development.

*The policy paper has been prepared in the framework of the project supported by the Embassy of the Netherlands in Georgia and serves the goal of developing management strategies in the defence and security institutions on diversity, inclusion and women's issues through participatory approaches. The views and conclusions in the document are solely those of the authors and may not reflect the position of the Embassy of the Netherlands.*

## 2. Diversity and equality in the defence management sector – international norms, national legislation and practice

In a democratic state, a state institution, on the one hand, is responsible for providing effective, equal and inclusive services to citizens, and on the other hand, represents the diversity existing in the country and is a driving force in terms of tolerance and inclusion. Diversity and inclusion in management and decision making is a key parameter in Western democracies, especially in the defence and security institutions. Therefore, placing diversity and inclusion issues on the agenda of the reform of defence and security institutions is a priority not only in the countries transitioning to democracy but also in well-established democracies such as the USA, Germany, the Netherlands and other EU member states.

Diversity, inclusion and social security are the values that should be enjoyed by everyone regardless of their difference. This area is being regulated by many international conventions and agreements of which Georgia has been part for a number of years. Accordingly, Georgia has pledged to share the values recognized in more than one international document, including the Association Agreement concluded with the EU in 2014.<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary approaches to state governance are based on diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Academic literature describes the challenges and needs that modern life has set for governance. In particular, it has been widely recognized that the modern workplace is diverse, people employed in organizations differ according to their different origin, interests and needs. In order for state institutions to operate effectively, it is of vital importance that such diversity be acknowledged and appropriate policies be developed so as to prevent tensions and conflict in the workplace.<sup>2</sup> Maintaining harmony in the workplace defines productivity of organizations. This new reality has created a need for state institutions to manage diversity and develop policies of equality.

It is worth noting that diversity management and equality are two different concepts. Equality implies tolerant rights-based policies that are governed by relevant legal norms, whose ultimate purpose is to increase the share of minorities and women in an organization.<sup>3</sup> Diversity management is a different concept. The organization focuses on the recognition, respect and valuing of existing diversity. In addition to non-discriminating approaches, it values each individual regardless of their background, origin, race and gender.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, an effective management of diversity implies creating an environment which values teamwork, participation and cohesion (interconnection) among the staff.

The present chapter of the document describes specific traits of Georgia's defence sector and the challenges the sector faces. The issue is topical and the evidence is the fact that over the recent years the Georgian authorities have been working on setting up legal, political and institutional mechanisms for the protection of human rights. More than one partner has supported Georgia in this, the EU among them, which signed the Association Agreement with Georgia in 2014. (The agreement entered into force in 2016.) Under the latter agreement, various programmes aimed at Georgia's social and economic development are being implemented. In 2014, Georgian parliament passed the "Law on elimination of all forms of discrimination".<sup>5</sup> The law explains how the Georgian legal system sees diversity and equality. In particular, the Georgian legislation provides for equality for all regardless of their race, colour, language, sex, age, citizenship, origin, place of birth, place of residence, property or rank, religion or faith, nationality, ethnicity, social class, profession, marital status, health status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, political or other opinion or any other sign.

In the years following the signing of the agreement, Georgia developed an anti-discrimination policy and its corresponding strategies and action plans (such as the Strategy of Georgia on civil equality and civil integration for 2015-2020). Furthermore, the new "Law on public service" came into force in January 2017 to regulate equal opportunities and access for all citizens.

Against this background, experts have expressed specific concerns that the Georgian legislation does not recognize the term 'diversity' whereas Georgia's partner Western countries have developed special norms and strategies on diversity and inclusion, including in the defence and security institutions. Moreover, there have been more than one example in recent past of the Georgian authorities failing to execute the acting law which provides for effective protection of the principles of equality of citizens, especially the rights of diversity groups/minorities.

In order to ensure the citizens' right to equal participation and freedom of faith and worship as well as the implementation of the policy on equality and anti-discrimination, Georgia's governance system should be sensitive to members of diversity groups/minorities as defined by the legislation. It is also important that the state administration system is open to these groups and continuous work is carried out to refine the election system and the public service to ensure participation of diversity/minority groups in the country's political life through election, their recruitment into the civil service on the basis of the principles of fair and transparent competition and meritocracy; and to eliminate all conditions that encourage discrimination on the basis of any sign.

According to the ministry's staff, the ministry, with support from its international partners, has taken steps to respond to new challenges in relation to human resources by introducing and implementing the modern culture of personnel management. All strategic documents developed by the ministry, including the minister's vision of 2020, underline the importance of effective human resource management, recruiting and maintaining competent personnel, their professional and career development and the role of these in organizational development. With a view to improving its HR management system, the ministry, with support from partner states, carried out the HR system reform in 2018, setting up separate units in the ministry's civilian office and the Defence Forces: the ministry's HR department, the personnel department at the General Staff of the Georgian Defence Forces and the personnel management centre at the General Staff are all independent units that make independent decisions on planning, management and development of the career of each of their staff – be that military staff or professional civil servants.

As part of the reform, the responsibilities for the needs analysis and the administration of the military personnel were divided. Furthermore, policies on military and civilian staff were developed through setting up corresponding services, which helped bring closer the military and civilian elements of HR and ensured continuous communication between these. The J-1 personnel department was tasked with analysing the needs of the military personnel and developing appropriate recommendations; the military staff management centre has been assigned the task of implementing the recommendations developed by the J-1 personnel department and managing the entire administration cycle; the ministry's HR department meanwhile was assigned a responsibility – in accordance with Georgian law on public service – to manage professional civil servants and the civilian personnel employed on the basis of labour and administrative agreements.

Yet, diversity is still a relatively new concept for the Georgian state governance system and the role of diversity in the management of state agencies – including the defence agencies – has not been explored to the full. Although state agencies generate statistics on ethnicity of the employed staff and their religious affiliation, this information is not sufficient to assess attitudes towards diversity. Moreover, the existing data is not publicly available. Experts and independent researchers interviewed during the study converge on the opinion that, on the basis of the acting legislation and policies, inclusive approaches to diversity need to be implemented more proactively and a more inclusive environment needs to be created for diversity groups and persons.

### 3. Diversity inclusion in the defence sector: conducive and hindering factors

International practice of diversity and inclusion in the defence and security institutions draws on personal experience and knowledge of being part of a minority. Four main strategies are used with regard to diversity groups/minorities: integration or multiculturalism, assimilation, separation and marginalization<sup>6</sup>.

The authors of the study assessed the degree of inclusion of diversity groups/minorities by looking at the following elements: equal participation (representation, career progress, education and professional development); attitudes, discrimination, communication among the diversity groups, internal institutional measures (awareness raising, policies, code of conduct, organizational structure). During the analysis, the following factors were observed to be of special importance for improving diversity and inclusion in Georgia: knowledge of the Georgian language, tolerance towards religion, need for communication, trust and stereotypes, employment opportunities.

## 1. Georgian language and inclusion

Experts interviewed during the study almost invariably agree that in order to improve the level of inclusion of the members of different ethnicities employed in the defence sphere it is necessary for them to learn the Georgian language. Accordingly, the experts believe that the problems these people encounter are due their lack of knowledge of the language.

According to these experts, the fault is with the flawed state policy and the state's inefficiency in ensuring that the minorities learn the dominant group's language, at the same time maintaining their own. Conversely, some minority group members find fault in their fellow members not learning the language either by choice or due to inability. However, both sides agree that the state policy in the predominantly minority-populated regions should focus on overcoming the language barriers by reinforcing Georgian language programmes. The experts' opinion can be interpreted as a demand that a multiculturalist approach be applied while the position taken by the above minority members has the elements of the assimilation strategy.

Thus, it can be reasoned that the lack of Georgian language skills is the first-line barrier for ethnic minority group members on their career paths in the defence sector, whereas the knowledge of the language, or even better – the Georgian language education – is a factor conducive to career success in the defence sector.

Defence Ministry representatives have corroborated this, adding that the language issue is only relevant in the case of ethnic/language diversity group members in the conscription army, because these groups are not present in the contractual army at all as they are denied service due to their failure to speak Georgian. Interestingly, none of the respondents could cite a case of an ethnic minority group member having been denied career advancement or professional development in the defence sector based on their belonging to a specific group. However, the analysis of the study findings has demonstrated the presence of such cases, e.g. it can be argued that language minority members have failed to get as much benefit as their peers from the training sessions that the ministry offers its employees because the sessions are held in Georgian.

Furthermore, several respondents have mentioned communication issues arising from the failure to speak the language, which, for its part, can trigger a conflict, e.g. residents of Marneuli or Akhalkalaki have encountered communication problems in military service due to the lack of language skills. By way of example, a conflict sparked between two ethnic minority groups (Armenian and Azeri servicemen) because of the failure of the parties to communicate properly.

In general, all success stories of integration of ethnic minorities have been linked to a good or full knowledge of the Georgian language. A programme called 4+1 is considered a positive measure in the inclusion of ethnic minorities: under this programme, ethnic minorities are offered an intensive Georgian language course following which they can fully participate in the Georgian-language training sessions.

Thus, due to the language barrier, ethnic minorities do not see career prospects in the Georgian army, However, some ethnic minority group members believe that integration is not an issue in the Georgian army for ethnic minority representatives who have received Georgian language education.

It can be concluded that the state should set an objective of further enhancing its inclusion policy through language-training programmes and ensuring a more efficient use of human resources available in ethnic minorities. The process is gaining further importance considering that the Georgian Defence Forces are also deployed in the regions populated with minorities – Akhaltsikhe and Marneuli.

## 2. Religion and inclusion

Independent experts interviewed in the study believe that the factor of religion has been overemphasized in the process of inclusion of minority representatives in the defence and security. According to one interviewee, “such an environment weighs down on ethnic/religious minority members and creates an ineffective working environment for them”. Defence sector staff say that Orthodox Christians somewhat “patronize” minorities and their religious

affiliation. Accordingly, being Christian puts them in a superior position in terms of their professional and career development. In regard to the issue of religion, there are signs of the assimilation approach as it is obvious that Orthodox Christianity gets excessive attention at the Defence Ministry. The same can be observed when units are being sent on international missions. An independent expert from a minority group believes that Christian blessing for a non-Christian military may be (and is) a huge discomfort. The issue may become even more sensitive in the process of carrying out a task while in the international mission, namely, at a critical moment for a soldier, when they try “to connect with their own God”. At such times, chaplain-led Christian rituals may depress the soldier of a different faith. Another representative of the ministry cited the case of the Ajarian Muslims’ minority group for whom the Orthodox chaplain’s blessing (with no alternative) is also unacceptable.<sup>7</sup>

A number of respondents thought otherwise, though. In particular, an ethnic Armenian respondent who serves in the army, does not see this (the assimilation strategy) so offensive and says that “even if Mullah were to bless them, it wouldn’t be offensive as blessing is a kindly act and it will help them keep their morale high regardless of who the blessing is coming from”.

In general, cases of discrimination on the basis of religion go unobserved as no respondent could recall a single case of this. However, some recalled the case of a Sergeants School student who in one-to-one interview dared to share his concerns, revealing that he belonged to a different (Baptist) church and that at the training sessions on dealing with suicidal thoughts the trainees were advised to approach orthodox priests if need be. Such an approach will probably cause the alienation of non-Orthodox Christian, Muslim and Judaist servicemen and will leave them facing psychological problems. This indicates that marginalization of certain religious groups does occur but precisely because these groups are in the minority the issue is neglected, resulting in these people either pretending to have been assimilated or staying marginalized.

The Defence Ministry staff interviewed during the study cite as an illustration of diversity integration and positive outlook certain concessions made towards ethnic Azeri and Ajarian Muslims during Ramadan and other religious holidays, such as granting leaves to them (the Ramadan Open Day is the term used by them). One respondent cited an example of an ethnic Kist servicemen who “set up a personal prayer site and this was not a problem for anyone”. The same respondent recalls that “during the fasting period, special meals were made and the fact that the Muslims do not eat pork was also considered.” However, the analysis of the study results has shown that the multicultural approach in the Defence Forces lacks cohesion and these approaches are applied only towards the Muslim religion and Muslim servicemen, ignoring other confessions and the presence of non-devout military persons. Two respondents representing the Defence Ministry and an NGO have noted this.

It is important that the ministry’s management assess duly cultural and religious peculiarities of minorities and increase their participation through maintaining continuous communication with them.

### *3. The factor of trust: Perceiving ethnic and religious minorities through the prism of state security*

A number of respondents have noted that the current Georgian defence and security policy perceives ethnic and religious minorities through the prism of state security. The presence of such attitudes means that minorities, especially those residing in the minority-populated regions, are perceived as threats and are associated with policy interests of foreign states. Such attitudes and such mistrust towards ethnic, religious and other minorities create huge discomfort to the latter and hamper the process of their integration in society. Accordingly, ethnic minority group members “have to continuously prove that they pose no threat to the Georgians, but rather, they love the country as much as ethnic Georgians.”

On the other hand, reason can be found in the arguments of another set of respondents who claim that the minorities residing in compact communities in the regions fail to comprehend what it means to be a citizen of Georgia, what rights, freedoms and obligations they have and why it is important for them to identify with Georgia. Therefore, these minorities often distance themselves from the Defence Forces as they believe that they should not get involved in the defence of the country and that Georgians should take care of that.

Experts on minority issues note that in the past the Defence Ministry appeared to exhibit friendlier attitudes towards ethnic minorities and often stated publicly its positive stance towards them. These experts recall the cases of the ministry congratulating them on birthdays, national and religious holidays in the Azerbaijani language, which helped build trust within the minority communities. Although the messages were sent out only electronically, they were still valued by their recipients.

#### *4. Stereotypes, harassment*

The presence of stereotypes about diversity groups in an institution describes organizational culture towards diversity and is used as a measurement for inclusivity. Accordingly, the authors have studied how explicit the stereotypes about minorities and other diversity groups are and assessed how the minorities have been affected by these stereotypes.<sup>8</sup>

The study findings have indicated that ethnic stereotypes still exist and that minority representatives apply various strategies to tackle or overcome them. However, the study has also observed that there is not sufficient data to prove that the presence of stereotypes in the defence institutions have been grounds for direct discrimination. At any rate, minority group members who have managed to advance in their careers maintain that they personally have not experienced it.

On the other hand, respondents mentioned the following stereotypes in their interviews:

- Religious ethnic minorities pose a threat to the country
- Minorities cannot be trusted in the army
- Minority members will be subjected to harassment in the army
- In order for a minority member to achieve success in military service they should become like the majority
- The only requirement for making a career in the army is to be Georgian and Orthodox
- Armenians fought against Georgians in Abkhazia and that is why the former are identified as traitors.

Based on these and other stereotypes voiced by the respondents the authors of the study argue that the state approach to diversity in society can be described as ‘blind’ – not too different from a discriminating attitude. The state does recognize the existing ethnic, religious, language and other types of diversity, is not hostile to them, declares that it is proud of such heterogeneity but it is not interested in and does not recognize the current discriminating attitudes and problems.

One example of such ‘blindness’ to diversity is the erection of crosses on the common grave of the soldiers who fell in the 2008 Russia-Georgia war. Furthermore, until 2011, the law on military reserve service made it mandatory for all Georgian citizens to serve in the reserve army and did not make any concessions for conscientious objectors who wanted to opt for an alternative service.

#### *5. Flawed communication strategy*

Experts interviewed in the study underscore the problems in the Defence Ministry’s communication strategy. They believe the inadequate publicizing and media coverage of the minorities’ role and participation gives rise to their alienation. For example, some respondents note that a number of ethnic and religious minority representatives were killed in the 2008 war but the ministry failed to publicize their stories. There is no doubt that publicizing these stories would have promoted the idea of “inclusive citizenship”.

Given this, there is a need for accurately-planned PR campaigns to be carried out on the topic of ethnic minorities and for information about successful ethnic and religious minority members to be communicated to the population. Interestingly, some of the ministry’s ethnic Georgian staff believe that military service is attractive for the minorities even without such public campaigns. According to them, serving in the army is still popular among the minorities due to information dissemination that happens through word of mouth. These examples prove that publicity work with ethnic and religious minorities does not have a systemic or strategic nature.

## 6. Employment opportunities and career progression

The Defence Ministry's staff evaluate the ministry's approach to ethnic minorities much more positively and believe that minority members have perfect opportunities to build their careers in the defence sphere. According to them, they are personally acquainted with many ethnic minority members who serve in the Defence Forces on management positions – as service heads or battalion chiefs. An interviewed minority member serviceman underscored that for them ethnic belonging had never been a hindering factor for their professional and career development and that their ethnicity was not even considered when they were promoted or sent on a training course. In this regard, the ministry's recruitment mechanism is worthy of attention which serves as the grounds for fair selection of candidates for jobs or training abroad. (It has been functioning since 2015.)

Interestingly, even independent experts could not name a specific case of a minority representative in the security sector having been denied career advancement or professional development on the basis of their belonging to a particular group.

Apart from that, interviews have brought to the fore additional topics and groups that raised new aspects of diversity inclusion with regard to those interested in employment at defence institutions. For example, along with traditional minority groups (ethnic, religious), additional categories have been identified such as: servicemen wounded / injured in the peace operations, veterans, parents of autistic children, servicemen with autistic spectrum disorder, atheists and minority religions, language minorities, gender-based diversity groups, women with children who want to keep qualifications, vegetarians, pacifists in the army, veteran women, people with disabilities employed in the sector etc.

Psychological conditions also became a subject of interest in the study. It has been concluded that psycho-social services can play a special role for diversity and inclusion in the system.

## 4. Recommendations for the Defence Ministry

A number of key recommendations have been made with a view to improving diversity and inclusion in the Defence Ministry.

First of all, it is important that the Defence Ministry develop a policy and action plan the goal of which will be to promote diversity/minority and inclusion. It is advisable that the process be carried out according to a scheme similar to the one that was used in the case of the gender equality policy: extensive education and awareness-raising initiatives, international support, development of sectoral strategies and detailed action plans.

Furthermore, the diversity and equality support policy should encompass the following activities: improving Georgian language learning among the ethnic minorities, eliminating stereotypes and increasing the level of tolerance towards distinct religions and cultures, taking steps to improve communication, and supporting persons with disabilities to find appropriate working conditions in the ministry which will enable them to fully employ their abilities and at the same time meet the professional requirements set by the ministry.

Although the ministry's high- and mid-level staff have knowledge as to how to respond to the cases of human rights abuses, the practice is not systemic yet and, therefore, the issues of diversity and inclusion need to be internalized and institutionalized. The issues need to be reflected in the internal policy as well. For example, while executing the diversity policy it is advisable that the ministry also set up relevant structures similar to the gender equality structures (advisers, council, response teams etc.) which will be tasked with promotion of diversity and inclusion.

The team working on diversity and inclusion in the ministry should have sufficient credibility and qualifications to be able to serve all employees who are interested in these issues or have been affected by a related problem – be that military or civilian staff. Given that the social affairs and psychological support department partly covers the functions of such a group, e.g. in the case of people with disabilities, it supports their selection/recruitment in

the ministry, reintegration and redeployment of wounded and injured servicemen, etc. The above-said group can be set up on the basis of this department and/or the department's mandate can expand and its members can get training in diversity and inclusion.

Furthermore, it is important that the codes of conduct applied in the defence sector (for the Defence Forces and the civilian office) include issues that will help the ministry consider diversity and inclusion approaches in its employment relations with ethnic, religious, gender, diverse-ability and other groups. It is also possible that a separate code of conduct be developed establishing its own professional standards.

Candidate selection boards at the Defence Ministry need to pay special attention to publicizing positive examples of minority participation. It is advisable that the selection process become more systemic and focused on inclusion. Accordingly, the boards should be equipped with regulations and relevant training, which will help them carry out selection processes free of discrimination and bias against certain diversity group members.

When planning strategic communications, the ministry should focus on real-life success stories of ethnic minority members and publicize their services to the public.

Likewise, it is important that cooperation with Georgia's partner countries continues and is further reinforced with a view to creating a more inclusive environment in the Defence Ministry. This encompasses already implemented measures as part of this partnership that include considering the needs of people with disabilities, wounded and injured servicemen, war veterans and people with autistic spectrum disorders, their rehabilitation, socialization, and the establishment of the approaches tailored for their employment.

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1 See the EU-Georgia Association Agreement at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2014:261:FULL&from=EN>

See the full list of international legislation on human rights at: <http://democraticoversight.ge/en/topics/human-rights-and-security-sector/international-hr-legislation>

2 Hills, Stephens and Smiths 2003 ??????????

3 Greene and Kerton 2002

4 Cornelius, Gooch and Todd, 2000

5 The law on Georgia on Elimination of all form of discrimination, 02/05/2014; Article 3

6 For diversity integration, integration /multiculturalism is the most productive strategy, as it expresses the minority's wish to adapt to the dominant culture/group and at the same time maintain its ethnic and cultural identity and characteristics. Assimilation reflects the majority's wish to absorb the minority which will shed its own cultural identity and characteristics. Separation implies that the minority does not wish to adapt to the dominant culture and wishes to hold on to its cultural identity. In the case of marginalization, the minority does not have interest in either – in its own cultural identity and in adapting to the dominant culture. Berry, J.W. (2005). Acculturation: living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29, 697-712.

7 An example of a discriminatory policy is the process as well as the result of setting up an institution of chaplain in the military units, prisons and the places of confinement. Talks about the creation of such an institution had been on for a long while before that. In 2002, British military experts were invited to Georgia to share their experience in this matter. Without doubt, the institution was supposed to be inclusive and reflecting the diversity of the country's society. At a later stage, the institution was indeed established, albeit based on a completely different concept. An interesting example of a discriminatory approach and equipping one specific religious institution with immense privileges is the practice of prisoners serving a prison term in the monasteries – a practice supported by the law.

8 Edited by Franklin C. Pinch, Allister T. MacIntyre, Phyllis Browne, and Alan C. Okros CHALLENGE AND CHANGE IN THE MILITARY: GENDER AND DIVERSITY ISSUES Gender\_Diversity.qxd 10/30/06 2:24 PM Page a Canadian Forces Leadership Institute Canadian Defence Academy Press PO Box 17000 Stn Forces Kingston, Ontario K7K 7B4