

Gender policy in the defence sector

Policy paper, July 2020

Civil Council for Defense and Security

Tbilisi, Georgia

Introduction

The aim of the policy paper is to promote women's increased participation and gender equality in Georgia's defence institutions and to facilitate the implementation of activities to this end. The policy paper is based on research which studied the current situation with regards to women's participation at the Georgian Defence Ministry, assessed the latest documents on the development of the ministry's Defence Forces, examined the steps taken by the ministry to achieve gender equality, and gauged the effectiveness of the norms established in recent years. Findings of the study were examined against best practice of defence institutions in the world's leading democracies. In particular, the authors looked at how the defence sectors of the Netherlands, the UK and the USA see women's place in the defence system of a democratic state. The authors of the policy paper developed recommendations which can serve as a basis for a novel perception of the issue of women's inclusion and help improve conditions for women at the Defence Ministry. The recommendations may be reflected in the new Action Plan of the ministry's Gender Equality Strategy to be finalized in 2020.

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 strengthening diversity and inclusion, and women's rights and equality. 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.



1. About the need for creating an environment conducive to gender equality

While working on the document, the authors of the paper examined past studies on gender equality at the ministry which were conducted in 2019/2020. The researchers also used new approaches to assess current conditions for women's participation and inclusion in the ministry. Furthermore, the authors reviewed best international practice, looking at the stories of women working at the defence and security institutions of Western democratic countries, the challenges they faced, the examples of 'mental' non-acceptance etc. International experience shows that the concept of inclusive environment for women deserves special attention as it is the change of the environment in the traditionally male-dominated spheres and institutions that can signal to women that the system is ready for accepting them and offering them dignified working conditions which are equal to those of men's. It is worth noting that the policy paper applies the concept of women's inclusion to bring women's issues closer to the notion of diversity inclusion.

Interestingly, the Georgian Law on Gender Equality does not recognize the concept of inclusive environment for women. Nor is such wording used in the gender-related documents prepared by the Defence Ministry. However, the concept is widely applied by international projects in Georgia, including in the context of the Defence Forces. The notion of gender inclusion (where gender actually implies women) can be found in the Georgian government projects in the context of equal opportunities in education, where it relates to creating inclusive conditions for women in the technological field in which few or no women have participated traditionally.

Considering the above, it is pertinent that the issue of inclusive environment for women in traditionally masculine spheres, such as the defence sector and its institutions, be examined, especially as, in recent years, Georgia has been aspiring to meet the obligations under its Law on Gender Equality, namely, to ensure that the rights and freedoms of men and women are protected in all agencies and they get an equal opportunity – without discrimination and according to their professionalism, skills and qualifications – to be employed, promoted, evaluated, and to get professional development (be trained/retrained), have access to social protection and health care. Organizations are obligated to ensure equal access to information for women and men, collect data and make entries in official statistics reports on employment segregated by gender. Furthermore, under the same law, the Defence Ministry is obliged to eliminate all kinds of harassment, including sexual harassment, in employment.

2. Implementation of the Action Plan of the Gender Equality Strategy – Defence Ministry's view

The Defence Ministry's Strategy on Gender Equality, which was approved by the Georgian defence minister's Decree N 544 of 29 April of 2014, aims to ensure and facilitate gender equality among the staff of the Defence Ministry's system, prevent discrimination, and fight all forms of gender discrimination. The strategy aligns itself with the requirements of the UN Security Council's Resolution N1325 and its consequent resolutions (1820, 1888, 1889 and 1960), as well as the Georgian Law on Gender Equality (2010) and the Law on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination (2014). Furthermore, in accordance with the provisions of the UN Security Council's resolutions on women, peace and security, and the requirements of the national action plan of gender equality, the Defence Ministry developed the Action Plan on the Implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy (2016), the goals of which are also in agreement with the NATO/Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council Policy on Women, Peace and Security (2018) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Currently, the ministry is revising the 2014 Gender Equality Strategy and its corresponding Action Plan. According to the ministry's officials, the ministry has largely fulfilled the tasks set in the strategy and is prepared to define new objectives and implement them. A study on the organizational climate conducted at the ministry in 2019 identified new needs, which – according to the ministry's officials – will be reflected in the forthcoming action plan.

The findings of the study on the organizational culture indicate that over the past years a number of steps have been taken to meet the requirements of the national and institutional policies and the corresponding action plans.

To meet the goals set in the 2014 Action Plan, the Gender Equality Monitoring Team was set up at the ministry. The unit coordinates the implementation of the Action Plan and the country's national and international commitments, and oversees the development of new policy documents. Furthermore, the team provides consultations on gender issues and coordinates the activities of gender advisers. The team also participates in the development of measures to prevent domestic violence on the part of members of the ministry's Defence Forces and the creation of educational modules and their implementation.

Along with the monitoring team, there are also gender advisers working at the ministry and in the brigade subunits of the Defence Forces. The position of gender advisers has been introduced since 2014 in line with the requirements of the Action Plan. The advisers are assigned special functions, such as: to facilitate the implementation of the ministry's strategy on gender equality; to disseminate information on the protection of gender equality principles and offer consultations; to facilitate training and research on gender equality-related issues; and to ensure appropriate response to the cases of gender discrimination and gender and sexual violence in the structural units. In 2014, two gender advisers were allocated to each brigade subunit – one woman and one man. Of the two, one was nominated by the head of the subunit and the other was elected by the unit's female and civilian staff. Since 2014, however, some gender advisers have been redeployed to other subunits as part of the rotation of the military personnel, which has resulted in compromising the principle of two representatives.

For the purpose of institutionalizing gender advisers, at the initiative of the monitoring team, gender adviser functions were added to the job description of a brigade's human resource officer and a special qualification code was attached to gender issues. Officers who are appointed to positions with such codes are automatically assigned gender adviser functions. Accordingly, officers require codes that correspond to their position grade codes, which raises the issue of training of the officers on gender equality issues and their certification. According to the ministry's officials, the ministry has sufficient internal resources to train gender advisers for their responsibilities. Over the past years, the ministry, with the help of its partners, namely, the UN Women and the Swedish Government, has trained its staff as trainers on gender issues.

Furthermore, the ministry has been carrying out other gender-related activities such as organizing awareness-raising training sessions at the Defence Institution Building (DIB) School and integrating gender equality modules in the curricula of career courses for officers and sergeants. The ministry also conducts training for the personnel of international peacebuilding missions on gender equality and other issues that are dealt with in the UN Security Council's resolutions on women, peace and security. The training sessions have been ongoing since 2015 and, by now, according to the ministry, have trained around 6,000 military personnel. Modules on domestic violence have been incorporated in pre-deployment training, in view of high stress environments in the peace missions and high risks for the personnel to develop a post-traumatic stress syndrome.

In addition, the Defence Ministry has developed a Guide for Civil Servants for the ministry's civilian office, which also serves as an awareness-raising resource and aims to familiarize the ministry's staff with the agency's mission, objectives, structure, priorities and activities as well as the rights and responsibilities of civil servants and the terms of social protection. The guide underscores the ministry's gender equality policy which declares the allegiance to the principle of creating equal opportunities for professional development and career management.

Furthermore, for interested parties the ministry has translated and posted on its website a guidance note Integrating a Gender Perspective into Internal Oversight within Armed Forces prepared through the ministry's collaboration with the OSCE and ODIHR.

The defence minister's decree of 2018 has made it mandatory to complete an e-course on "Sexual harassments at workplace" which the ministry believes will facilitate awareness raising on sexual harassment and discrimination and help prevent the cases of these. In addition, specific steps have been taken to institutionalize the prevention and elimination of discrimination and violence. Amendments have been made to the disciplinary charter of military personnel by adding special articles. Cases of sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination can be taken up to the ministry's General Inspectorate through the involvement of gender advisers and gender equality monitoring team members. Such cases can also be reported on a hotline which is accessible at all times and operates on the basis of anonymity.

A new electronic system of data management, which has been operating partially since 2018 and fully since 2019, can segregate all data (appointments, release, participation in professional development programmes, leaves, business trips, maternity/paternity leaves etc.) by gender.

The Defence Ministry has volunteered to take part since 2014 in the NATO and Allied Countries' Initiative to prepare and publish national reports for the Gender Perspectives Committee. The reports show distribution of gender across services, recruitment and retaining (reserve, work-life balance), as well as ranks, types and participation in peace operations. Overviews of annual reports can be accessed on NATO's official website. Currently, the standard for collecting information by gender, its processing and statistical analysis is being developed.

Against the background of the above-said measures, the study conducted by internal and external researchers has identified the following areas that will benefit from further improvement:

- 1) Women's participation at the decision-making level in the defence sector remains limited, in terms of both – numbers and quality. Women play an insignificant role in the process of decision making, which indicates that the environment is not yet favourable for increasing women's participation.
- 2) The institution of gender adviser has proved to be not so effective which may be caused by the fact that the adviser's functions have been set as additional functions rather than a separate position. Also, there is no additional remuneration for performing this function.
- 3) Military personnel have limited gender sensitivity and low awareness of gender equality and gender-based discrimination, which has resulted in women's limited participation and their insignificant role.

3. An inclusive environment for women: challenges identified by the independent study

Based on the findings of past studies, in November-December of 2019 and March-April 2020, the authors of the present paper assessed the process of the implementation of the gender equality policy at the Defence Ministry. During the study, the authors focused on identifying the areas in the ministry's efforts to create the inclusive environment for women that required further enhancement and developing specific measures to improve them (to be integrated in the future action plan).

The authors of the study believe that the biggest challenge for the ministry's women personnel is not the legislation or the institution's declared policy or the posts created to uphold gender equality (gender advisers and the monitoring team) but, rather, mental and cultural resistance. Consequently, the study has identified the following elements that help perpetuate the non-inclusive environment for women at the ministry:

- 1) traditional conscious or unconscious exclusion elements (exclusion vs inclusion) which existed in the past and may still be at work despite extensive gender training undertaken by the agency.

One of such elements can be described as **inertia**, which implies that the behavioural models of the past – paternalistic and sexist attitudes towards women – still prevail. An example of the protectionist attitude is the case of mandatory night patrols. As a rule, these patrols are to be conducted by everyone. However, women have been protected from carrying out this activity and have often been substituted for by men (based on unwritten regulations). This has resulted in men being displeased because of overexertion and the so-called “positive discrimination” practice. (They feel they are discriminated against.) On the other hand, as a result of such practice, women miss their chance to get much-needed experience, improve their qualifications and get promoted whereas men find themselves in a more favourable position in this regard.

- 2) Another element is **norms and standards**. The norms and standards developed in the defence institutions in the past were **traditionally tailored for men** and targeted male servicemen and – in general – male personnel in the system. By way of example, women's sizes and body shapes are not taken into consideration when ordering uniforms and footwear. Similarly, in other circumstances too, norms in the defence system

have been established according to men's capabilities, interests and characteristics. This is known as a male-centrism or andro-centrism and can be encountered even in "less masculinized" systems. It's worth noting in this context that the standards for training of servicepersons are tailored for men and, therefore, women are forced to meet the physical standards set for men. This is a difficult task which effectively hampers women's career progress. As a result, women who decide to remain in the system are forced to leave the active military service and move to administrative work.

- 3) One of the elements contributing to the non-inclusive environment for women is **invisible unconscious bias**. In the spheres in which women traditionally didn't participate and, at times, were even unacceptable, strong attitudes established themselves that explained the situation by women's lack of capability, their weakness, lack of interest, and incompatibility with their roles. Today these attitudes may exist as unconscious gender bias which may be manifested in the process of decision making, e.g. when a male candidate is preferred for a position in the army or operative service over a woman candidate despite the lack or absence of distinctive merits. Unconscious gender bias gives preference to men in male spheres and to women – in female spheres, but it is hard to notice and is often neglected.
- 4) The **division of gender roles into separate spheres** can also be observed inside the Defence Ministry. The situation in the ministry is similar to the established division of the spheres in a wider society into male and female businesses. The above examples confirm that women's participation is limited to their work in the ministry's civilian office where women largely perform administrative duties. In these services, women are observed to be holding sufficiently high positions, but, by and large, their numbers are considerably low, especially in the highest ranks. Conversely, women are represented in small numbers in the Defence Forces and their career progress in this system is problematic due to non-inclusive tendencies/barriers.

The traditional division of services, spheres and themes across male and female domains have been linked to the stereotyping of women's and men's skills (e.g. "women lack skills in technology, "women lack strength, men cannot be sufficiently organized", "women cannot take quick decisions" etc.).

There is also a **newly established association** in this area, which sees gender equality issues (and structures/positions) belonging to women's domain. The result is that training sessions on gender-related issues are mainly attended by women.

Western experience demonstrates that overcoming the said non-inclusive mental/cultural tendencies requires developing and conducting focused training on the so-called conscious and unconscious bias.

Participation – its quality and quantity – is widely accepted as a key indicator of inclusion. Therefore, when considering the system's inclusiveness to women it is imperative that the barriers to their participation are taken into account, such as three types of invisible hampering tendencies, which are known as the "**leaky pipeline**" (women study at the military academy, receive professional education but do not reach the top steps of the career ladder); the "**sticky floor**" (women remain in the low-level and supporting posts during their entire career and cannot progress). An example of a combination of the leaky pipeline and the sticky floor is a story of a woman with a military rank, who was not approved for a commander course study abroad, being told "she wasn't going to be a commander anyway". The interviewees themselves say that such examples create precedents for women to vanish on their career paths and remain at lower positions. The third concept is the "**glass ceiling**" whereby women are unable to reach high management and decision-making posts due to the existence of invisible barriers. This is most conspicuous in the Defence Forces where there are no women in decision-making roles. Although there are no laws banning them from taking such positions, there are unwritten regulations, agreements and the above-mentioned inertia in action.

Since all the barriers and elements of non-inclusion imply certain attitudes to women, the diagnostics of this "attitudinal" aspect of the present situation requires applying a typology of sexism types. The examples given above may relate to the following types of sexism:

Traditional sexism: recognition/acceptance of the traditional roles of women and men; justification for a difference in treatment of men and women; belief that women are less competent than men; openly diminishes the value of the woman.

Contemporary sexism: does not sympathize with women's problems and facilitates unequal treatment; overestimates women's numbers in male domains and positions; is associated with the use of the sexist language, cannot or is unable to notice sexism.

Hostile sexism: focuses on social domination; places blame on women for violence against them.

Benevolent sexism: appears pro-social; resembles help, respect for privileges, but is based on the idea of women being inferior.

Although traditional sexism can also be observed in the defence institutions, currently the most pertinent is the phenomenon of contemporary sexism, which implies negation of complexities, when it comes to women working in the areas traditionally dominated by men. It is characterized by steps to equalize women's conditions (e.g. quotas) and its representation as "positive discrimination" as well as criticizing this as unfair and diminishing. Contemporary sexism may manifest itself in a trend which overestimates numbers of women who hold "men's" jobs and positions. The authors of the study confirmed the presence of this phenomenon in the system during their meetings and discussions. One participant revealed in the process of self-reflection that "women have no problem," and noted that "her being a woman may even be helping her career" in the system. A similar attitude was demonstrated when a high-ranking officer commented on the appointment of a female officer that "too many women have amassed".

The study also focused its attention on an element contributing to increasing inclusiveness – the recognition of inclusion in the institutions' political documents and public declarations by highest-ranking public officials that the system is willing to attract women to all positions and that it pledges to do so by all possible means. A good example of this is the gender policy of the Dutch Armed Forces which states that "The Dutch Armed Forces are willing to employ women in all service functions and in all spheres".

Interestingly, Georgian public officials have in recent months made statements with regards to women's participation in the military service. A statement by one public official said nothing about the system being ready and willing for women to participate in. Instead, it focused on the need for women to become proactive. Nor was the wording of the statement an example of an inclusive speech, as it read: "As women assert – and this is indeed true – no difference should be made... ..such as love of homeland and fulfilling their share of duty before the country, I believe that in this regard, too, women should become more proactive, be more willing to serve in the army". Using correct and inclusive wording in officials' public speeches is highly important. In the above speech, the use of the word "ladies" by the official has made women's wish to join the army look flippant. Thus, the use of inclusive language is an issue to be considered in order to increase participation of women in the defence and security institutions. Training on conscious and unconscious bias is likely to help the personnel of the Defence Forces to overcome the language-related issue.

In the process of the study, discussions were also held on creating inclusive physical environments for women. The topic has been extensively covered in the DCAF publication Gender Self-Assessment Guide for the Police, Armed Forces and Justice Sector.¹

According to the guide, if an institution is willing to implement a gender-sensitive policy, it should pay attention to its infrastructure and resources as "women may be excluded from security sector institutions in practice, or discouraged from staying, by inadequate facilities". The guide presents questions to be answered as a test of inclusiveness:

- „Are there separate and secure washing and changing areas for female and male staff in all of the institution's facilities?
- Are there appropriate uniforms for female personnel, including pregnant women, at every rank/ level and in every role?
- Is there appropriate and secure accommodation for women in all training establishments, barracks, etc.?"

There are specific questions for the defence forces:

- "When on operations, what provision is made for women's sanitary and toilet requirements?"

- Is all equipment needed by female personnel appropriate for female personnel (e.g. flak jackets, vehicle seat adjustability)?”

Tackling these questions in itself can be a step towards inclusiveness. Therefore, it would be advisable that the questions be reviewed by the Defence Forces as an exercise at their gender training.

4. International standards, problems and recommendations

The defence forces of many countries have benefited from the development and implementation of special gender-related policies, strategies or action plans and/or directives.²

Currently, the Georgian Defence Ministry is working on the development of a new Action Plan of its Gender Equality Strategy, which will come into force as of 2020. The effort provides an opportunity to assess the experience gained over the past years and integrate gender aspects more proactively so as to ensure a better use of the potential of women and men in the defence sector and increase the security and effectiveness of the defence forces.³

It is advisable that the ministry’s professional staff familiarize themselves with the findings of the study on gender inclusion and consider its recommendations in the process of developing the action plan for the next stage.

Discussions held during the study have demonstrated that the defence system is not yet sufficiently inclusive to women and that the main reason behind this is partly conscious and largely unconscious bias on the part of the institutions’ personnel. The problem stemming from this is an unwritten practice which sees women in stereotyped women’s roles and activities while women’s ambitions to build military careers encounter all sorts of barriers.

- It is advisable that the above attitudes, types of bias and the ensuing unwritten practice be acknowledged and become a subject of systematic training. One example of this is training on “conscious and unconscious gender bias”.
- Also, it is advisable that the ministry’s Defence Forces complete the questionnaire presented in this publication as an exercise.
- There is apprehension in the defence institutions that the entrance of women into the system will reduce the standards of military training and thus weaken the army. It is advisable that the ministry continue focusing its attention on the issue of standards, but also take decisions that include women’s needs too, at the same time ensuring that there is no discrimination and no sense of unfairness in the servicemen. The ministry needs to strike the balance between the gender-inclusive/sensitive approaches and the mandatory standards the meeting of which is obligatory in the military career.
- Furthermore, in the spheres where differences stem only from traditional/stereotyped views there should be no differentiation between men and women servicepersons; (The same applies to operative teams of the police, e.g. patrols, field practice etc..) and it is advisable that women do not remain beyond the physical training and qualification requirements due to protectionist attitudes.

1 Megan Bastick (ed.), Gender Self-Assessment Guide for the Police, Armed Forces and Justice Sector, (DCAF, 2011), <https://www.dcaf.ch/gender-self-assessment-guide-police-armed-forces-and-justice-sector>

2 Megan Bastick, Integrating a Gender Perspective into Internal Oversight within Armed Forces, (DCAF & OSCE ODIHR, 2014). <https://www.dcaf.ch/integrating-gender-perspective-internal-oversight-within-armed-forces>

3 Megan Bastick, Integrating a Gender Perspective into Internal Oversight within Armed Forces, (DCAF & OSCE ODIHR, 2014). <https://www.dcaf.ch/integrating-gender-perspective-internal-oversight-within-armed-forces>