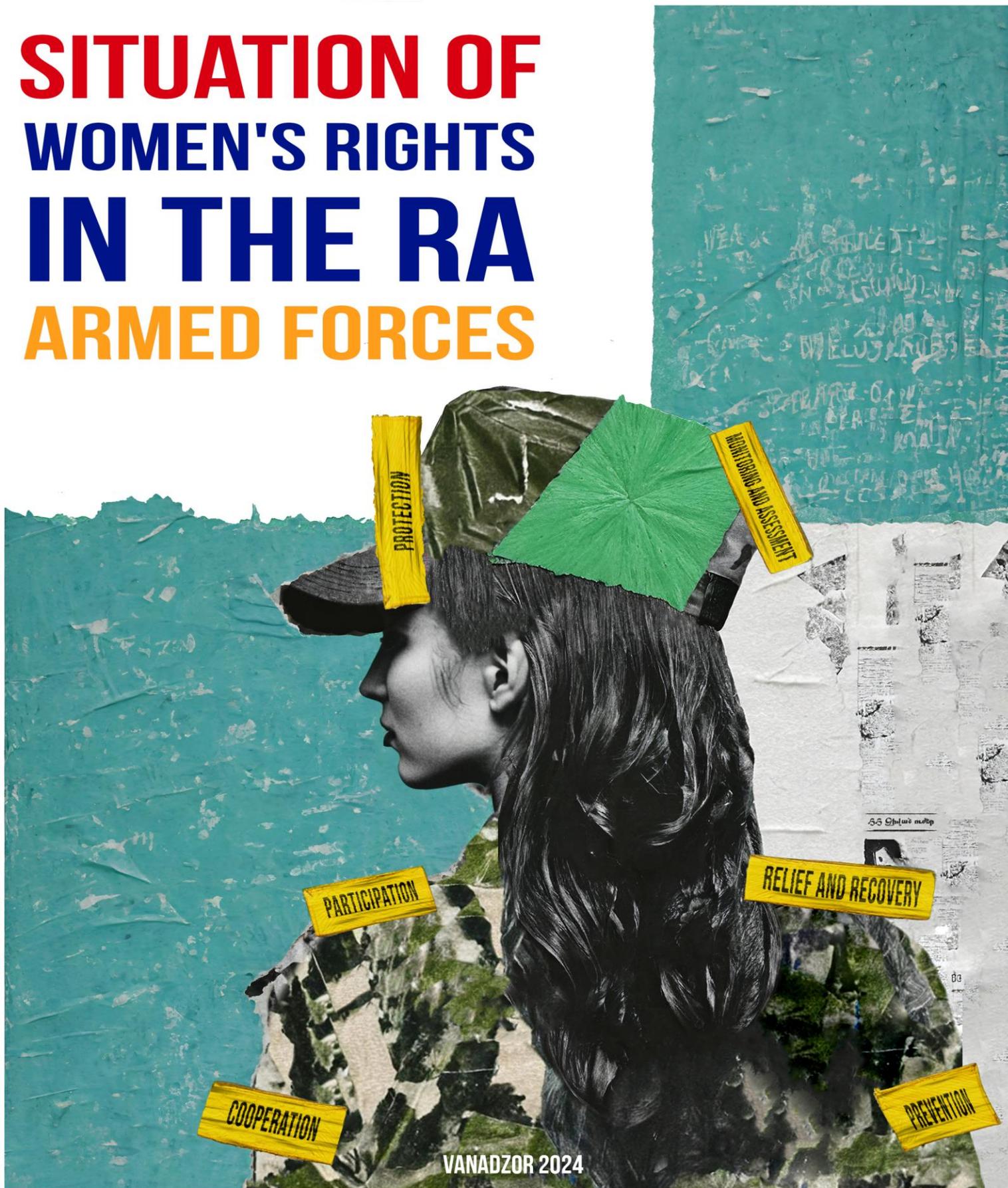


# SITUATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE RA ARMED FORCES



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## PREFACE

# LEGAL MECHANISMS, OPPORTUNITIES AND PROBLEMS IN PROTECTION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE ARMED FORCES

The United Nations (UN) Security Council (CS) Resolution [1325](#) is the key international source concerning women's involvement in armed forces. The Resolution stresses the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building and urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict.

Women have traditionally been involved in combat operations in the spheres of support, supply, administration, nursing and medical aid, while line service with weapon has traditionally been perceived as a sphere of men's activity. Over time, there has been an observed trend towards greater involvement of women in line service within the Armed Forces. However, during line service women often encounter discriminatory policies, programs, legal norms, and customary practices.

The process of women's full involvement in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia was launched in 2013, with the establishment of a monitoring group in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution No. 1325. The activities of the group were directed towards establishment of the Armenia's NAP under the UNSCR 1325, through the development of monitoring reports, and its further advocacy.<sup>1</sup> During 2013-2019, women's inclusion in the Armed Forces was primarily addressed within the framework of broader human rights strategies. On 28 February 2019, the RA Government adopted the 2019-2021 National Action Plan for the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution No. 1325 on "Women, Peace and Security" and the NAP execution timetable. The NAP was developed based on the 2017-2019 action plan of the National Strategy of Human Rights Protection adopted by the

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<sup>1</sup> 2019 – 2021 NATIONAL ACTION PLAN OF ARMENIA FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325 ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY, Information brochure, Yerevan 2020, pages 24-25, [https://www.mfa.am/filemanager/un\\_brochure/brochure\\_arm\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.mfa.am/filemanager/un_brochure/brochure_arm_WEB.pdf)

Government of Armenia through Decree N483-N of May 4, 2017. The 76th clause of the above Decree is related to the development of NAP for the implementation of provisions of Resolution No. 1325.<sup>2</sup> Further, on 2 June 2022, through Decree No. 803-L, the RA Government approved the 2022-2024 Action Plan for implementing provisions of the UN Security Council No. 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security” and its implementation timetable. This Decree is, in essence, the second national action geared towards implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution No. 1325, and as stated in the introduction of the Decree, “*it is based on the analysis of the previous National Action Plan and is informed by its accomplishments and insights achieved*”.

***This study was initiated in order to observe progress of the work performed within the framework of the second National Action Plan for 2022-2024 aimed at implementing the UN Security Council Resolution No. 1325, as well as the situation of rights of female servicepersons engaged in the Armed Forces.***

***The study objectives are as follows:***

- ***to identify systemic problems that impede extensive involvement of women in the RA Armed Forces;***
- ***to identify gaps in the legislation safeguarding women’s rights in the RA Armed Forces;***
- ***to advocate for increased effectiveness of implementation of relevant activities by the Ministry of Defense to prevent violations of female servicepersons’ rights.***

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* pages 11-12

# STUDY METHODOLOGY

## Information collection method

HCA Vanadzor addressed information requests to the relevant state authorities, in particular, the RA Ministry of Defense, RA Ministry of Foreign Affairs, RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, the RA MoD Military Academy named after V. Sargsyan.

In addition to information requests addressed to state authorities, on 14 November 2023 HCA Vanadzor applied to the RA Ministry of Defense requesting to conduct interviews with female and male servicepersons of the RA Armed Forces, as well as cadets of the Military Academy named after V.Sargsyan in order to address issues observed in the frame of the study.

During communications between HCA Vanadzor and the RA Ministry of Defense, the defense agency informed HCA Vanadzor that theoretically they had a permission to conduct interviews with servicepersons, and it was only necessary to wait for it in written form. Yet, on 20 December 2023, HCA Vanadzor received a letter from the RA MoD, wherein it was stated that in order to receive a permission for interviews, certain questions formulated by the Organization needed to be reformulated, without specifying how to reformulate those questions. The questions noted concerned the following areas:

- ***The difference between salaries, additional payments, social security opportunities of female and male servicepersons with equal length of service, position and rank; possibility of using personal or sexual connections in this matter;***
- ***Formation of love relationships between fellow servicepersons during military service, likelihood of women being subjected to more ill-treatment, likelihood of being subjected to ill-treatment by a fellow serviceperson or a superior, ill-treatment manifestations;***
- ***Cases of female servicepersons getting pregnant during military service. Provision of appropriate conditions for pregnant servicepersons, implementation of***

***relevant medical check-ups, provision of appropriate comfortable clothes for pregnant servicepersons;***

- ***Cases of cutting positions of female servicepersons on maternity leave, possible options for solving the problem;***

- ***Privileges granted to women not availing themselves of childcare leave, the possibility to combine childcare and service. Cases of rejected appeals to the superior command on this matter;***

HCA Vanadzor reformulated the mentioned questions, however, on 24 January 2024, the Organization received a letter from the Ministry of Defense requesting further changes in the formulation of several other questions pertaining to the following areas:

- ***Allocation of female and male servicepersons in units, type of service they serve, their involvement in guard service, organization of duty in units comprised exclusively of women, as well as perception of women's engagement in garrison and guard services, its advantages and disadvantages;***

- ***Procedure of appointing female servicepersons to duty, and the difference in the approaches to women and men in terms of arming them in that procedure;***

- ***Details of women's inclusion in the duty, performed work, difficulties they encounter in the procedure of being included in the duty;***

- ***Conditions of places where women and men serve, namely, hygiene and health, their difference in case of women and men. Women's opportunity to choose to reside or not to reside in the military unit area, existence of essential living conditions in barracks and places of combat duty;***

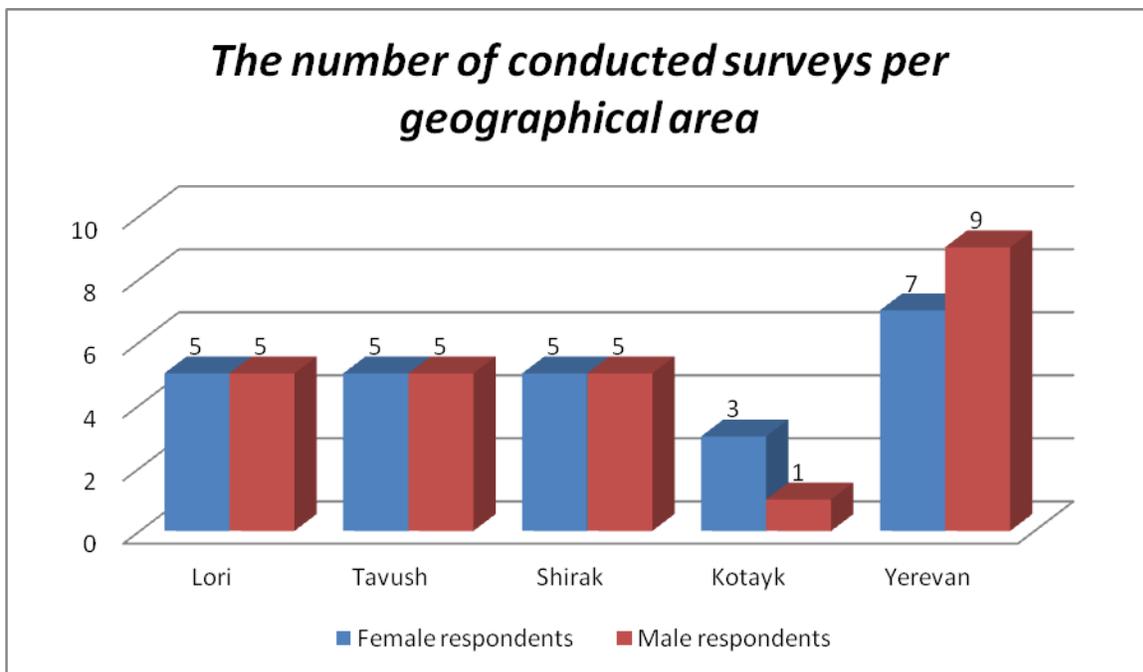
Due to the limited time available for this study and the fact that the RA MoD responded rather late, in particular, around 2 months after the request, HCA Vanadzor carried out interviews with servicepersons who had applied to the Organization and contractual servicemen within their close networks.

To collect the relevant information, interviews were conducted with 25 female and 25 male contractual servicemen of the RA Armed Forces, including those from the officer corps.

Female servicepersons presented conditions of their service, obstacles they encounter during their military service and the steps initiated by the defense agency to overcome them.

Surveys were conducted among male servicepersons to find out their opinion about problems in the RA Armed Forces that can impact the quality of women’s military service, and promotion of women’s involvement in the Armed Forces. In addition, it was also important to find out views of male serviceperson interviewees regarding involvement of women in military service. Interviews were conducted among contractual servicepersons in the RA Lori, Tavush, Shirak, Kotayk regions, as well as Yerevan city.

*Chart 1. The number of conducted surveys per geographical area*



We employed the quantitative interview method to collect information in the frame of the study, and as a result, the sector’s problems and topics were identified and pointed out.

*Through the quantitative method, the study provided insights into the situation of women's rights, the challenges they face, and the attitudes of both female and male*

*servicepersons to women's rights. This means that by using this method we did not measure the situation in the quantitative sense, rather, we tried to understand the method. The aim of this method is to understand the respondents' analyses of the situation, the meanings attributed to the situation, the respondents' values. That is, the method helps get insights into the respondents' view, interpretation and perception of the surrounding reality. Quantitative methods do not aim to "measure" in a numerical sense, rather, they aim to "understand" the phenomenon.*

*Table 1 presents military ranks of female and male respondent servicepersons, Table 2 presents their length of military service, Table 3 presents marital status of respondents, while Table 4 presents presence of children in the families of servicemen by age groups of children.*

*Table 1. Interviewees by military ranks*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
Sergeant	24%	20%
Lieutenant colonel	-	8%
Major	-	8%
Captain	-	12%
Senior lieutenant	4%	4%
Lieutenant	8%	8%
Senior warrant officer	4%	4%
Warrant officer	20%	12%
Senior sergeant	8%	4%
Junior sergeant	4%	4%
Private	16%	12%
Not mentioned	12%	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Table 2. Military service period*

<b>Military service period</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
Up to 1 year	8 %	4%
1-5 years	36%	20%
5-10 years	24%	28%

10-15 years	20%	20%
15-20 years	8%	24%
20 years and more	4%	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Noteworthy, among the interview participants, only male servicepersons have high officer ranks, whereas almost half of both male and female interviewees have 5-15 years of length of service (see table 2).**

**These data already show the evident disparity in the approach to female and male servicepersons.**

*Table 3. Marital status*

<b>Marital status of respondents</b>	<b>Wome n</b>	<b>Men</b>
Married	52 %	76%
Single	36%	24%
Widow	12%	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Table 4. Presents presence of children in the families of servicemen by age groups of children*

<b>Presents presence of children in the families of servicemen by age groups of children</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
Preschool age	8 %	26%
School age	16%	39%
Student	36%	7%

Has no child	40%	28%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

### **Study obstacles**

The main obstacle was the lack of a final approval by the RA Ministry of Defense for conducting interviews with servicepersons in the Armed Forces. At the same time, other obstacles were encountered during the interviews.

In particular, fearing that the command might learn about their negative opinion about the army, some servicepersons immediately refused to participate in the interview.

Some male interviewees, especially those holding high officer positions, refused to participate in the interview, fearing that their identity could be disclosed.

Most believed that nothing would change in the army and it was meaningless to identify problems and try to solve them through such interviews.

We recorded a number of other obstacles while conducting interviews.

Although initially interviews were conducted strictly adhering to the principle of excluding identification of interviewees, nearly all participants manifested caution by refraining from presenting any data that could disclose their identity, especially when they were expressing opinions that they perceived as contradicting the generally accepted opinion about the army, since they believe that one should only express positive opinions about the army. For instance, when presenting grounds for promotions, some interviewees sarcastically mentioned "devotion to work and patriotism". At the same time, they found that promotions were possible through corruption mechanisms, namely "through connections and money".

Some male interviewees were trying to hide their discriminatory attitude towards women. They sarcastically answered some questions about female servicepersons' rights and equality in the Armed Forces, showing their marked discriminatory attitude to female servicepersons (this conclusion is evidenced by their evasive conduct when they were asked to elaborate on those questions).

The general impression from responses of interviewed male servicepersons is that they were trying to hide their true opinion, while interviewed female servicepersons were cautious, concerned about losing their job.

Some interviewees avoided answering questions, suggesting that the interviewers should seek clarifications from the RA Ministry of Defense.

## **Study spheres**

Four spheres were chosen to be studied.

### **1. Line service**

We studied the legal regulations (legislative, sub legislative, internal legal acts and other normative documents) that prohibit or impede involvement of women in **line service** of the Armed Forces. At the same time, through interviews we identified the problems that women encounter during military service in practice.

### **2. Prohibition of discrimination**

We studied manifestations of systemic discrimination towards servicepersons that are expressed in normative legal acts, administrative acts, practice, formed customs, etc. As a result of conducted interviews we also recorded some instances of manifestations of discrimination.

### **3. Private life**

The report covers all private life spheres that women encounter during their service in the Armed Forces. These include issues related to everyday life, motherhood, women's biological characteristics, which can create obstacles for female servicepersons while serving in the Armed Forces.

### **4. Education and awareness**

Covers study of programs and activities aimed at continuous awareness raising and education.

*The study can be useful for a wider range of researchers, as well as specialists in various fields, who are interested in the topic of women's military service in the Armed Forces.*

# CONCLUSIONS

## A. WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN LINE SERVICE

1. The implementation of the National Action Plan for UN Security Council Resolution 1325 has led to the establishment of a voluntary option for female citizens to undergo a mandatory six-month military service. However, the package of legislative changes fails to incorporate military training programs for the six-month service for female servicepersons and the legal regulations for organizing military service. Moreover, the provision of hygiene items for female servicepersons is not addressed.

2. The majority of servicepersons undergo military training in order to solve their financial problems.

3. Military service-related documents lack regulations related to prohibition of discrimination against women. On the other hand, there appears to be a prevalent discriminatory mindset and stereotypes regarding female servicepersons, including among female servicepersons, due to which women are perceived as representatives of "the weaker sex" and "personnel" not suitable for military service.

5. Since institutional mechanisms of women's involvement in military service are being formed, overcoming discriminatory approaches and stereotypes is now of a particular importance in terms of ensuring women's promotions and appointment in high military positions (currently, the level of women's appointment in majors and high rank positions is very low). For example, the current code of internal service of the RA Armed Forces separates female servicepersons from those holding military ranks, in particular, the code specifies "officers, warrant officers, servicepersons serving based on a contract, and female servicepersons...", which is itself a discriminatory approach established at the legislative level.

6. No legal safeguards are in place to guarantee respect for female servicepersons' dignity. In particular, in the conditions of lack of strict adherence to integrity rules, there are manifestations of corruption risks, patronage, and problems in commander-subordinate relations in the Armed Forces.

## B. PROHIBITION OF DISCRIMINATION

1. The lack of legal regulations ensuring the prevention of discriminatory practices within key legal acts concerning military service not only impedes the career promotions of female servicepersons but also results in reduced participation of women in decision-making

processes., since crucial decisions within the Armed Forces are only made at the highest levels of military positions.

2. Existence of the stereotype that family obligations are women's primary obligation also negatively impacts women's equal participation in military service which leads to the inevitable difficulties of combining them with the fulfillment of military obligations. Male servicepersons also find that the primary obligation of female servicepersons is to fulfill family/domestic obligations. The fact that female servicepersons also record the difficulty of combining these two obligations evidences the need for the formation of safeguards necessary for service obligations in the Armed Forces for all servicepersons, regardless of their sex. In particular, equal opportunities should be guaranteed and assured for both male and female servicepersons to participate in military education, training courses, and have career promotions.

7. 3. Salary of servicepersons also depends on promotion opportunities. Actually, in the conditions of lack of such promotions, women are also deprived of the opportunity to receive a high salary.

8. 4. Establishment and launch of effective mechanisms of appeal for cases of discrimination is of key importance in terms of ensuring legal equality of female servicepersons in the Armed Forces. However, those manifesting discrimination in the Armed Forces are not punished, moreover, servicepersons prefer not to voice such cases, as they fear losing their job.

## **C. THE RIGHT OF FEMALE SERVICEPERSONS TO RESPECT FOR THEIR PRIVATE LIFE**

1. Childcare leave period has a restrictive impact in terms of attaining a regular military rank granted to female servicepersons and is not counted in the length of military service according to the RA Law on Military Service and Status of a Serviceperson.

2. Cases when female servicepersons do not return to military service after pregnancy and childbirth leave is yet another problem evidencing stereotypical attitudes towards women.

3. Barracks are not provided with fundamental conditions for decent military service, in particular, for female servicepersons.

9. Discriminatory attitude is manifested even in matters of providing a military uniform. However, male servicepersons also have problems in this matter.

## D. EDUCATION AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

1. The RA Ministry of Defense organizes training courses and events, discussions and awareness-raising training courses for the Armed Forces personnel on the UN SC Resolution 1325 and the relevant RA NAP. However, in practice, five years after adoption of the NAP, the majority of both male and female servicepersons of the Armed Forces are not informed about them. Therefore, this means that the performed awareness-raising action cannot be considered sufficient.

2. There are not enough publications visible on the official webpage of the RA Ministry of Defense covering involvement of female servicepersons in order to increase attractiveness of military service and, in particular, to promote the involvement of female servicepersons in military service

3. In practice, there is no regular training on human rights, legal equality of women and men, anti-discrimination, and the prevention of violence against women in the RA Armed Forces. As for training courses, female servicepersons are involved in them less than male servicepersons, which is not only a manifestation of discriminatory attitude, but also directly limits promotion opportunities for female servicepersons.

4. In addition, rights of servicepersons are often violated as a result of their lack of knowledge about human rights and military regulations. In case of serving military service beyond the specified period, lack of awareness regarding the law on entitlement to rest days often results in prolonged work without having sufficient rest days as stipulated by law.

5. At the same time, the initiative of introducing an IT application for anonymously reporting human rights violations and instances of corruption within the Armed Forces is highly regarded. The majority of servicepersons think that this initiative could contribute to identifying and addressing issues within the Armed Forces.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop military preparation programs necessary for six-month military service of female servicepersons, ensure direct participation of the sector's female professionals in the development of the package of legislative amendments and legislative regulations ensuring organization of military service, and put draft legislative amendments for public discussion.

2. Considering that the majority of servicepersons join the military to solve their financial problems, the Government should take necessary efforts to promote other motives for undergoing military service, in particular by enhancing attractiveness of the military profession and respect for the military profession within society.

3. Military service organization regulations must be amended to exclude possibility of manifestations of discrimination at the legislative level (regarding the restriction on types of weapons provided to women, the process of appointing on duty, the differentiated approach to the application of penalties). Make necessary efforts to combat obviously discriminatory mindset and stereotypes against female servicepersons through educational and regular training programs. Make necessary amendments in the wording of legislative regulations in order not to separate "female servicepersons" among servicepersons holding military ranks.

4. Establish legal safeguards ensuring protection of rights and dignity of female servicepersons in the Armed Forces both during women's involvement in military service and during military service itself. In this regard, introduction of integrity rules in the Armed Forces is essential. Their absence negatively affects military service of male servicepersons and their performance of military obligations, and has an even more negative impact on guaranteeing rights of female servicepersons and performance of their military obligations. In particular, strict adherence to integrity rules is significant to exclude existing problems in subordinate-commander relations, manifestations of corruption risks, and patronage.

5. Establish effective mechanisms for appeals in cases of discrimination, while encouraging servicepersons to apply such mechanisms in practice in order to promote legal equality. In particular, prior to the launch of the IT application for anonymously reporting human rights violations and instances of corruption in the Armed Forces, ensure thorough awareness among servicepersons to facilitate its effective use.

6. By promoting opportunities for female servicepersons, contribute to increasing the level of involvement of female servicepersons in the decision-making process in systemic and strategic areas.

7. Ensure establishment of equal opportunities for all servicepersons, irrespective of sex, to participate in military education, professional skills development training courses, and promotion in service ranks.

8. Enact legislation specifying that childcare leave periods be considered when granting regular military ranks, thus contributing the promotion of female servicepersons and enhancing their representation in high-ranking positions.

9. Exclude cases that currently exist in practice, when commanders persuade female servicepersons on pregnancy and childbirth leave not to return to the service.

10. Provide all servicepersons with fundamental conditions for decent service, including in the context of building, facilities, and hygiene items.

11. Make efforts to provide comfortable and high-quality military uniforms to all servicepersons, including pregnant servicepersons.

12. Considering the inadequate awareness among servicepersons regarding the UN SC Resolution 1325 and RA NAP developed based on it, guarantee the regular participation of all servicepersons in awareness training sessions, events, and discussions.

13. Implement training courses in the Armed Forces on topics such as human rights, legal equality of men and women, anti-discrimination, and prohibition of violence against women, which will empower servicepersons to protect their rights across various aspects of military service.

14. Ensure visibility of content, including photos, videos, articles, and press releases, covering the participation of female servicepersons in the Armed Forces on the official website of the RA Ministry of Defense and other online platforms, which will enhance the attractiveness of military service among both female and male servicepersons.