

# Expanding Opportunities for Women to Serve in Defense Sector



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## **Demand for Diversity of Skills and Competences**

Historically, military service and defense sector have been associated with power and men. However, in the modern defense sector discipline and physical fitness of military servants are not sufficient for ensuring its overall combat efficiency anymore. Securing the necessary number of servants and technical modernization under the defense sector reforms are crucial for any nation to improve its security. Still, reforms in the modern defense sector are largely conditioned by the structural modernization of its personnel. Liaising the defense sector with other segments in the society, conflict management, as well as the success of military operations require complexity of skills and competences. In parallel with technological modernization and the subsequent requirements for efficient use of new technologies, the demand for highly qualified personnel is also increasing. At the same time, quick and balanced decision making in crises is another invaluable competence needed in the defense sector institutions. The presence of highly qualified professionals in the sector ensures the necessary diversity of skills and competences, as well as provides an opportunity for solving issues pertaining to interdependency and complementarity between defense infrastructures and divisions. Therefore, in order to foster defense sector reforms and address emerging challenges, it is important to initiate structural reforms of the personnel and ensure diversity of skills and capacities.

Effective screening and recruitment of professionals requires the government to expand the potential pool of candidates in order to engage the best. One of such opportunities can be the extending opportunities for women to serve in defense sector, as their involvement in this sector will dramatically increase the selection pool. In this context, compulsory military service does not necessarily imply that all women of a certain age should be compelled to serve in the defense sector. It is rather an opportunity for the state to attract the best professionals to the sector.

## **Women's Potential for the Defense Sector and Opportunities for the Women**

Nowadays, while a number of countries seriously consider the possibility of abolishing compulsory military service, some others, facing immediate security challenges, are gradually considering expanding the opportunities for women to serve in the defense sector, as a necessity measure for ensuring efficiency of the defense institutions. For instance, the Norwegian government has started the process of restructuring and modernizing its armed forces since 2009, and one of the first steps was introduction of voluntary service for women. Four years later, in June 2013, Norway became the first and so far the only EU and NATO member-country, where military service is compulsory for women. The Norwegian approach was mostly conditioned by the necessity to engage new capabilities, as well as to ensure the diversity of required skills and competences in the army. Women currently make up about 9% in the Norwegian armed forces, however, Norway aims for 30% of its military to be female by 2020.



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Gender neutral conscription and equal conditions for involvement of men and women in the defense sector will significantly strengthen the constitutional principle of equal rights and equal principles in the country. The extended opportunities for women to build their careers in the defense sector, along with ensuring the effectiveness within the sector, also will provide an opportunity for strengthening the ties and mutual respect between the society and the defense sector, as well as for increasing the level of trust towards the institutions in the sector at large. Women enrolled in the defense sector service are a remarkable asset for reaching out to the society and initiating a constructive dialogue between people, civil society and the defense institutions.

There is no doubt that the modern defense sector as a whole should become a better alternative for employment and service in order to attract women's talents and skills. One can neither neglect nor deny that there are specific requirements, standards and qualities for both women and men, hence the clear distinction is of great importance for the further development and efficiency of the defense institutions. A fundamentally new approach is necessary for the development of the staffing in defense sector, as well as for the recruitment of the best professionals and efficient use of their capacities across the sector. It is necessary to extend the knowledge of the causes and practices preventing women's involvement across the defense sector, which will enable policy makers to develop evidence-based solutions. To reform the defense sector it is critical to develop mechanisms that will foster team spirit and teamwork, since a modern security institutions should be an integrated power of highly qualified professionals in general.

*The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion "Presentation of the key findings of the research on the military service of women in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia", which took place on 23rd of September, 2014. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations. The round table was organized with the support of the UNFPA.*