

**Պտղի սեռի խտրական ընտրության դեմ պայքար**  
**“Combating Gender-Biased Sex Selection in Armenia”**

# Համառոտագիր Policy Brief



Ծրագիրը ֆինանսավորվում է  
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# Harmonizing Various Dimensions of Public Policy on Combating Gender-Biased Sex Selection



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a Think Tank

As the international experience of the past three decades shows, the inventory of effective policies to prevent non-medical gender-biased sex selection should consist not only of various legislative restrictions, bans and subsequent liability for bypassing them, but also of an extensive awareness raising campaign to inform of such practices, their causes and the risks of consequences. Another large component should include projects and measures promoting appreciation of female children and generally the equal rights and opportunities of women and men in the society. Furthermore, it is essential not only to ensure the availability of such tools in the arsenal of public policy, but also to ensure harmonious and balanced introduction and application of various tools. The public policy pursued should possibly avoid contradictions, as a policy in one sector or a promulgated priority direction may weaken the impact of a policy in another sector or direction.

Of course, policies implemented in different sectors often compete with each other and do not always "hit the same nail"; nevertheless, there is no need to re-invent principles and approaches of coordination, as these are well known. While competing, policies should ensure long-term sustainable development and contribute to the exercise of fundamental human rights and expansion of opportunities. In this regard, the preferred policy tools are those that are able to simultaneously serve several priorities and contribute to the development of non-discriminatory practices and instilled values in the society.

## Non-discriminatory elements in specific sectors

Development of non-discriminatory practices in the society should start with the earliest stage of formation of an individual and a citizen. In this regard, stipulating the priority of combating discrimination in state programs aimed at ensuring guarantees for the protection of children's rights is critical. It is therefore necessary to set out in the RA Law on the Rights of the Child a provision ensuring equal appreciation of girls and boys in the government's annual programs and the principles underlying the development of these programs (Article 34).

Another crucial instrument of public policy, the National Program on Reproductive Health Improvement should also include the non-discrimination principle, should recognize gender-biased sex selection as a challenge, and should set objectives, strategic provisions, actions and measures to respond to it, including the strategic directions of safe motherhood, contraception and safe abortions.

The medium-term and annual programs on gender policy constitute another tool aimed at ensuring non-discrimination and gender equality in our country. These policy tools also need to include provisions on excluding gender-biased sex-selection and preventing sex-selective abortions, i.e. principles, goals, objectives, priorities and measures.

The national program, mid-term strategy and annual action plans to combat gender-based violence should include provisions on recognizing sex-selective abortions as the worst manifestation of gender-based violence, as well as on eradicating gender-biased sex selection, and ensuring continuity of the state programs to prevent sex-selective abortions and provisions on the sources of funds and guarantees necessary for implementation of the above-mentioned programs.

The National Strategy on Child and Adolescent Health and Development and its mid-term Action Plan should set the non-discrimination principle as well as state support mechanisms and measures for



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child care and education aimed at ensuring enhanced opportunities for working mothers to combine jobs and care of children.

Within the past 2.5 decades, the insufficient pension guarantees and issues related to introduction of the universal mandatory funded component of retirement insurance have turned into another factor promoting son preference in Armenia, since the care of elderly parents has been traditionally considered to be the role and responsibility of male children. In this regard, the consistent implementation of pension reforms in Armenia is of great importance.

### **Preventing discrimination as a benchmark**

The public policy of non-discrimination and equal opportunities for women and men should permeate all the sectors of the country and society. In particular, the security and defense system traditionally offering opportunities of self-realization and professional development predominantly to men should consistently pursue the policy of non-discrimination and provision of equal opportunities for both sexes. Thus, it is necessary to refer to legal regulation of issues related to assessment of health, provision of medical expert examination, as well as medical aid and services for female citizens of pre-conscript and conscript age by prioritizing involvement of women and men in the RA armed forces and their equal appreciation in the security and protection of the country.

Moreover, the scope of social benefits, such as state-guaranteed free medical care, services and funding for the military, individuals granted an equated status, and their family members, as well as rescuers and their families, private and junior non-commissioned servicemen of conscript military service, should expand to include a list of medical services based on the right to enjoy assisted reproductive technologies. Given the dangers associated with the military service, the state should also ensure cryoconservation and storage of the sex cells, particularly the sperm of the beneficiaries mentioned above.

### **Control mechanisms**

The policy of combating discrimination and particularly effective prevention of non-medical sex selection should highlight not only development and introduction of new policy tools, but also their consistent application and supervision over the fulfillment of legal requirements.

Thus, to prevent sex-selective abortions, the list of actions ensuring implementation of the government program on state control in healthcare and on drug policy should include stringent control over circulation of certain medicines containing mifepristone and all medicine containing misoprostol registered in RA. Hence, it will ensure control over how relevant requirements are met, such as the requirement for the availability and publicity of medical use of a medicine (general characteristics of the medicine) and instructions of their use /a package insert/ in Armenian, which should be provided using a universal technical template. In addition, control over unregistered and expired medication inducing medical abortion should be prioritized.

### **Practices and guidelines**

The legal guarantees and actions aimed at carrying out programs to eliminate discrimination in the health sector and control the implementation of such programs will not ensure the desired outcome if relevant procedures and practices are not in place. In this regard, it is of great importance to include issues of prevention of sex-selective abortions in concept papers, relevant guidelines and standards on funding state-guaranteed free and preferential medical care and services.

*The paper is elaborated based on the analysis of Armenian and international practices of sex selection and relevant policies to address the issue, and the opinions of independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of international organizations who participated in working meetings and round tables, organised in 2015–2016 within the framework of the project “Combating Gender-Biased Sex Selection in Armenia”, funded by the European Union.*