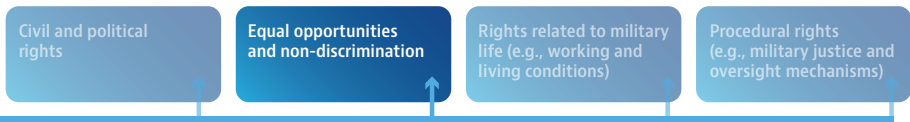


# Human Rights of Armed Forces Personnel:

COMPENDIUM OF STANDARDS, GOOD PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This is an overview of rights covered in Chapter 11 of HUMAN RIGHTS OF ARMED FORCES PERSONNEL: COMPENDIUM OF STANDARDS, GOOD PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS developed by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) together with the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF) to safeguard and strengthen the rights of people working in the armed forces. For more information, see: [osce.org/odihr/ArmedForcesRights](http://osce.org/odihr/ArmedForcesRights)



## Women in the Armed Forces

Women remain significantly underrepresented in the armed forces across the OSCE region. Women’s participation in the military goes beyond the question of representation, and encompasses recruitment, promotion and retention, working conditions,

respect for family life, and issues of discrimination and sexual violence. Above all, women’s participation in the armed forces is about full respect for their human rights while appreciating their necessary contribution to the operational demands of a modern-day military.



On average, women make up just 10 per cent of armed forces personnel in 22 OSCE participating States.

## Direct and Indirect Discrimination

In the armed forces, seemingly gender-neutral policies and practices that have been developed and implemented in a male-dominant environment can disadvantage women. Safeguarding servicewomen’s human rights may therefore require new approaches to recruitment, promotion and retention. Even in countries where women’s overall

representation in the military is increasing, their numbers are often concentrated in lower-ranking positions. Women who enter the armed forces sometimes leave because of difficulties balancing work and family, limited career opportunities and an organizational culture of disrespect. However, a number of countries have taken steps to tackle such problems.

Problems	Solutions to recruit, promote and retain service women
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Discriminatory, gender blind or biased recruitment and promotion systems</li> <li>» Institutional culture marked by gender stereotypes and bias</li> <li>» Higher attrition rate among servicewomen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Ensure women are represented in recruitment material and have servicewomen talk to potential female recruits at recruitment centres, by telephone and at events;</li> <li>» Identify and address barriers to women’s recruitment, such as adjusting recruitment strategies and employment policies to meet the potentially different motivations for women and men to apply;</li> <li>» Review eligibility, selection and promotion criteria to ensure it meets contemporary needs and avoids gender bias;</li> <li>» Give adequate advanced warning of any training courses necessary for promotion, and ensure that those on secondment or (parental) leave are informed;</li> <li>» Provide mandatory training on unconscious bias;</li> <li>» Include at least one woman on recruitment and promotion selection boards.</li> </ul>

Military equipment and clothing that do not fit servicewomen are not only potentially dangerous, but also add to an environment in which women are not treated equally. Several participating States have taken steps to ensure that female personnel have fitted clothing and equipment, such as bulletproof vests, and also include gender considerations into the commissioning,

design, testing and delivery of new defence material. Accommodation and washing facilities for servicewomen also need to be safe and of an equivalent standard as those for men, while health provisions and logistical arrangements for training or operations must accommodate any gynaecological or other specific needs.

## Maternity and Right to Family Life

Most OSCE participating States grant parental leave to service personnel. However, the length of paternity and maternity leave varies greatly. It is important that armed forces recognize the right to family life of both women and men to ensure that servicewomen are not disadvantaged in terms of professional experience and promotion opportunities.

Many armed forces provide flexible working arrangements to allow personnel to care for young or disabled children or other family members, including reduced hours, part-time work and unpaid or partially paid leave. In some cases, provisions are made for families where both parents are in the military, such as arranging postings to the same location or avoiding simultaneous deployments.

55 OSCE participating States have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, 52 have ratified the ILO conventions on discrimination in employment and occupation and on pay equity and 38 have ratified at least one of the ILO maternity conventions.

## Preventing sexual and gender-based violence

Sexual and gender-based violence disproportionately affects servicewomen. The armed forces should provide clear policies, effective accountability and complaints mechanisms, ensure victims receive confidential support and referral, and make it the responsibility of commanders to tackle abuse.

It is important to have data collection systems and to conduct anonymous surveys among personnel to ensure servicewomen feel able and safe to report discrimination, harassment or abuse. For example, Germany found that introducing a new data collection and monitoring system led to a 50 per cent increase in complaints.

## Support structures

**Networks:** Networks and support groups can provide essential support, advice and mentoring for servicewomen. They also report to and advise senior military leaders on working conditions and barriers to participation.

**Oversight structures:** Many armed forces and defence ministries have oversight bodies such as parliamentary commissioners or ombuds institutions that monitor equal opportunities for women and men in the armed forces.

Example: Spain's Military Observatory for Equality between Women and Men in the Armed Forces analyses and reports on numerous gender equality issues, including recruitment, military careers, military education and work-life balance, as well as providing training and a hotline.

### Good practices related to women in the armed forces include:

- » Removing all restrictions, both legal and organizational, to women's participation in the armed forces;
- » Developing reliable and comprehensive data collection systems and ensuring that all data are disaggregated by sex;
- » Setting key indicators to monitor progress on women's and men's employment within the military, including applications, recruitment, participation, training, promotion, retention and abuse; undertaking anonymous surveys on all of these aspects, analyze and publish the results;
- » Establishing a central monitoring unit tasked with advising military leadership on equality between men and women in the armed forces;
- » Providing parental leave and flexible working arrangements to both female and male service personnel;
- » Encouraging leaders to meet regularly with staff associations to discuss gender equality issues;
- » Providing servicewomen with multiple channels for reporting abuse and receiving advice and support;
- » Developing institutional action plans based on gender and human rights assessments;
- » Conducting surveys on attitudes to gender equality to enable a better understanding of the institutional working culture, and to identify and address any stereotypes, prejudice or intolerance.

