

# **Women in ARMENIA**

## **Peace, Security and Democracy from a Women's Rights perspective**

### **Desk Research**

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# 1. Introduction

This desk research about women in Armenia is based on women's rights principles related to the "UN-Resolutions of the Security Council (UNSCR) 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security", the "UN-Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)" and the "Comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of the UNSCR 1325 and 1820". UNSCR 1325 underlines the importance of the equal integration of women in decision-making on all levels and areas of conflict resolution and peace-building. UNSCR 1820, however, focuses on prevention and protection of women rights violations during wartime such as sexual abuse, rape, forced prostitution, etc. and calls for ending impunity against perpetrators. While the UNSCR 1325 and 1820 refer only to conflict and post-conflict situations, CEDAW covers the entire range of women's participation in all fields of society, such as politics, labour market, education and health as well as targeting to combat all kinds of gender based discrimination. Moreover the "Comprehensive EU approach" addresses the implementation of the UNSCR by additionally incorporating the promotion and advancement of women in public life.

The aim of this desk research is to underpin the advocacy work of the "Strengthening Women's Capacity for Peace-building in the South Caucasus Region" Project financed by the European Union, the Austrian Development Agency, CARE International in Caucasus and CARE Austria and implemented by CARE International in Caucasus in partnership with the Armenian Committee of Helsinki Civil Assembly (Yerevan), the Association of Ossetian Women for Democracy and Human Rights (Tskhinval/i), the Association of Women of Abkhazia (Sukhum/i), the Centre for Civilian Initiatives (Stepanakert), the IDP Women Association 'Consent' (Tbilisi), the Women's Problems Research Union (Baku) and the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Human Rights (Vienna). It provides an analysis of women's role in conflict situations, their participation in peace-building activities and the focus on the situation of women in the newly established political system of Armenia. Special attention is also put on "domestic violence" as an expression of severe women's rights violation and strong oppression by men against women. The research on the integration of women in areas such as politics, labour market, education and health as well as cultural attitudes and behaviours demonstrates to what extent gender-democracy is achieved respectively which obstacle on the way to further development and implementation can be found.

Women in post-conflict countries such as Armenia are especially vulnerable due to various effects resulted from their difficult situation during the war and the impact of the transformation from a centrally organized communist to a market oriented decentralized system.

## 2. Background

In 1988, the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, a predominantly ethnic Armenian enclave within Azerbaijan, voted to secede and join Armenia. This act was the catalyst that led Armenia and Azerbaijan into a full-scale armed conflict that claimed the lives of over 30,000 people on both sides. Armenian support for the separatists led to an economic embargo by Azerbaijan, which has had a negative impact on Armenian's foreign trade and made imports of food and

fuel, three quarters of which previously transited Azerbaijan under Soviet rule, more expensive.

Peace talks in early 1993 were disrupted by the seizure of Azerbaijan's Kelbajar district by Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian forces and the forced evacuation of thousands of ethnic Azeris. Turkey in protest then followed with an embargo of its own against Armenia.<sup>1</sup> A cease-fire was declared between Azerbaijani and Armenian/Nagorno-Karabakh forces in 1994 and has been by both sides since then in spite of occasional shooting along the line of contact. All Armenian governments have thus far resisted domestic pressure to recognize the self-proclaimed independence of the "Nagorno-Karabakh Republic", while at the same time announcing they would not accept any peace accords that returned the enclave to Azerbaijani rule.<sup>2</sup> There is no peace agreement in next future expected.

As a result of the conflict and of a huge earthquake erupted in 1988 in Armenia there are two different groups of IDPs and refugees. One group consisting of about 100,000 persons continues to be displaced as a result of the devastating earthquake, which caused the death of over 25,000 people. The other group of 72,000 people is comprised of ethnic Armenians who fled from Azerbaijan in 1988-1992 during the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. During the war with Azerbaijan, the government evacuated approximately 65,000 households from the border region, but most have since returned to their homes or settled elsewhere. Of the remaining IDPs, almost two-thirds could not return to their villages, which were surrounded by Azerbaijani territory, and others chose not to return due to socioeconomic hardships or fear of landmines. The government afforded full citizenship rights to IDPs but did not have programs to help integrate them.<sup>3</sup> UNHCR reports that about 8,400 IDPs continue to live in Armenia and have not been able to return to their villages.<sup>4</sup>

Former refugees from Azerbaijan who have acquired Armenian citizenship have still difficult living conditions. They are commonly referred to as "naturalized former refugees" and the overwhelming majority has not fully economically and socially integrated in Armenia. They remain dependent on assistance from the Government of Armenia, UNHCR and other international organizations.<sup>5</sup>

A number of limited initiatives have taken place at the political level with regard to the promotion of informal dialogue at the grassroots level, support for the protection of human rights, encouraging civil society-governmental cooperation, the media and political participation of IDPs.

In regard to the economic situation, the conflict to Azerbaijan contributed to a severe economic decline in the early 90s. After that period Armenia was several years characterized by double-digit economic growth, however in 2009 it was faced by a severe economic recession, despite large loans from multilateral institutions. The economy began to recover in

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<sup>1</sup> In 2009 Turkey and Armenia signed normalization protocols that called for opening of the Turkey-Armenia border, establishing diplomatic relations, and the creation of a number of sub-commissions addressing bilateral issues. However, the protocols have not yet been ratified by either country.

<sup>2</sup> Background note: Armenia, U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5275.htm>. (9th September 2011)

<sup>3</sup> See 2008 Human Rights Report Armenia, U.S. Department of State, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> See Report on Human Rights Practices in Armenia – 2007, released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor US Department of State, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Armenia: Analysis of Gaps in the Protection of Refugees and Asylum Seekers, UNHCR Armenia in close cooperation with the Armenian State Migration agency and supported by the European Commission, 2008, p. 10.

2010 with nearly 5% growth. Armenia is particularly dependent on Russian commercial and governmental support and most key Armenian infrastructure is Russian owned and/or managed, especially in the energy sector. Armenia will need to pursue additional economic reforms in order to regain economic growth and improve economic competitiveness and employment opportunities, especially given its economic isolation from two of its nearest neighbours, Turkey and Azerbaijan.<sup>6</sup>

Another interesting issue concerning Armenia relates the high proportion of ethnic Armenians living abroad. Armenia has a huge Diaspora and has always experienced waves of emigration, particularly after the genocide committed against the Armenian population during the First World War. However the exodus of recent years has caused alarm. It is estimated that Armenia has lost up to a quarter of its population since independence, as young families seek what they hope will be a better life abroad.<sup>7</sup> As far as women's issues are concerned, the values of the extensive Diaspora community are not uniform. Western notions of women's open role in public life compete with more patriarchal traditions from the East (USA, France respectively Lebanon, Iran).<sup>8</sup>

### 3. International and National Human Rights Framework on Gender Equality

Armenia has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1993) and all major human rights treaties and conventions (see box below).

According to Art 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia<sup>9</sup> international treaties shall come into force only after being ratified or approved. The international treaties are a constituent part of the legal system of the Republic of Armenia. In addition, the state acknowledges and protects universally recognized human rights and freedoms as supreme human values. With regard to the Concluding Comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women<sup>10</sup> Armenia has undertaken several steps to establish state structures and mechanisms for gender equality.

#### **Human Rights Conventions and Resolutions, relevant in the context of this paper:**

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966
- International Covenant on Economics, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979
- European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 1950
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995
- Programme of Action of the Cairo Conference on Population and Development, 1994
- The UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008; as well as Res 1888 and 1889)
- Resolution 1544 of the Standing Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe about the situation of women in the South Caucasus, 2007
- Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals, 2000

<sup>10</sup> See Concluding Comments of the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Armenia, CEDAW Committee, C/ARM/CO/4/Rev. 1, 43<sup>rd</sup> session, 2009.

### **3.1. National Laws, Institutions and Policies related to Gender Equality**

The Armenian Constitution and State legislation forbid any kind of discrimination, including gender-based, in all spheres of public and private life. Although the laws of Armenia are gender neutral, meaning that the provisions are applicable for women and men equally, there are a few exceptions from this general rule, as a few laws offer greater protection for women, for example, protections for pregnant employees in the Labor Code and mitigating circumstances or exemptions for pregnant women or women with young children in the Criminal Code.<sup>11</sup> A gender neutral legislation is cited as an indicator of *de jure* equality between men and women.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, there remain critical gaps. Although gender-based violence is penalized under the Criminal Code and national legislation provides legal as well as civil remedies for victims, domestic violence does not constitute a specific criminal offence.<sup>13</sup> In 2009, however, a draft concerning a law combating domestic violence was submitted to the Ministry of Labor and Social Issues for circulation.<sup>14</sup> In line with this development in 2010 an Interagency Commission on Combating Gender Based Violence has been established. The goal of the Commission is to raise the effectiveness of events and elaborate certain mechanisms aiming to prevent gender based violence. Within the frame of Commission a working group was formed aiming to elaborate National Action Plan on Combating Gender Based Violence. However, the respective draft law on domestic violence is currently still under preparation. Apart from that sexual harassment in the workplace is punished under the Labor Code<sup>15</sup>, in practice although this provision is neither well known nor frequently used by Armenian women.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, the CEDAW Committee expressed its concern about the lack of comprehensive legal provisions prohibiting discrimination against women, and at the State party's preference for gender-neutral policies and programmes. According to the Committee these measures "lead to inadequate protection for women against direct as well as indirect discrimination, hinder the achievement of formal and substantive equality between women and men, and result in a fragmented approach to the recognition and enforcement of women's human rights."<sup>17</sup>

The Electoral Code has been amended in 2007. It raised the already existing quota for women in political parties from 5% to 15 %. It has to be considered negatively, that the aim of the

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<sup>11</sup> *Elisabeth Duban*, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> *Elisabeth Duban*, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p. 27

<sup>13</sup> UNFPA "Combating Gender-based violence in the South Caucasus" Project Armenia, Assessment of the Republic of Armenia national legislation from a gender-based violence perspective, p.1.

<sup>14</sup> *Elisabeth Duban*, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> Art. 221, Labor Code.

<sup>16</sup> *Elisabeth Duban*, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> Concluding Comments of the Committee on Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Armenia, CEDAW Committee, C/ARM/CO/4/Rev. 1,43<sup>rd</sup> session, 2009, p.3.

quota, namely to increase female Members of Parliament has been easily disrespected.<sup>18</sup> This illustrates that provisions regarding gender neutrality are not complemented with effective legal mechanisms and concrete measures to achieve equality. Hence, there is still a lack of implementation and enforcement of gender equality.

Hidden discrimination against women on the labor market, particularly by horizontal and vertical segregation in the field of employment<sup>19</sup>, is still a challenge for Armenia on the way to achieve gender equality. Although Armenia still misses special legislation that would guarantee equal opportunities to both sexes, it is noteworthy to recognize that a draft law had been formulated on equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women, which prohibits all forms of discrimination. This draft contains a definition of gender-based discrimination and all other legal terms stipulated in different international conventions.<sup>20</sup>

After transition the government of Armenia has particularly focused on the status of women in regard to their reproductive role, motherhood and family.<sup>21</sup> However, some attempts have been undertaken to strengthen women's opportunities in social life, e.g. through the "National Program for improving women's situation and enhancing their role in the Republic of Armenia" in 2004, which addresses the role of women in decision-making, economy, education, health, mass media and violence against women. The monitoring, however, indicates that the Action Plan is largely declarative and has not been implemented."<sup>22</sup> One obstacle for the implementation of the National Action Plan was the insufficient financial funding by the Armenian government. Of the 57 measures included in the National Action Plan, to be implemented by ministries and NGOs, four were to be financed by the State, 20 required no financial resources and the remaining 33 were to be implemented by international organizations within their budgets.<sup>23</sup> In addition, the Armenian Association of Women stated that one major disadvantage of the National Action Plan was that it did "not envision the utilization of special measures and technologies that proved successful in many developed countries and that aim at overcoming a gender imbalance in power. The amendment made to the electoral legislation to set a temporary 15% gender quota for women on political party lists in proportional representation elections merely reflects the existing realities and cannot make a considerable impact in terms of increasing the number of women in the legislative branch of government, i.e. in the Parliament."<sup>24</sup>

In 2000 the "Interagency Council on Women's Affairs" has been established by the Prime Minister of Armenia. The Council constitutes an advisory body which has the task to coordinate efforts to resolve existing problems which affect women. Additionally, the Council is tasked with ensuring women's equality. Its principle function has been to ensure women's

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<sup>18</sup> Elisabeth Duban, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p. 27: "In the 2007 election cycle, "numerous violations" of the Election Code requirement that every tenth person on election lists be a woman were present in nearly all the political parties" proportional lists. 50 Respondents to this assessment explained that the Party Chairman controls placement on party lists and women are often listed at the end. Furthermore, corruption in the system means that high payment is exacted for positions high on party lists, and therefore wealthy male candidates generally fill these spots. In reality when seats become free, women are not able to fill them; and seats once filled by female MPs are not necessarily replaced with other women politicians."

<sup>19</sup> Armenian Association of Women with University Education Center for Studies, Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Armenia, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> United Nations – Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Armenia, A/HCR/15/9 (2010), p.12.

<sup>21</sup> Elisabeth Duban, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p.3

<sup>22</sup> Elisabeth Duban, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p.3

<sup>23</sup> Elisabeth Duban, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p.16.

<sup>24</sup> Armenian Association of Women with University Education Center for Studies, Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Armenia, p. 15.

representation in governance and in the field of decision-making as well as the formulation of gender policies.<sup>25</sup> The members of the Council are representatives of governmental agencies and NGOs as well as women who are employed in the business sector and media. According to the Armenian Association of Women with University Education one disadvantage of the Council is that its members do not currently work in the field on women's rights. Hence, the Council is rather regarded as an ineffective agency for a change of the women's actual situation in Armenia as it represents through its members still the old structures of Armenia.<sup>26</sup>

While in 2002 the establishment of the "Department of Women's, Family and Children's issues" within the Ministry of Labor and Social Issues has taken place, there is still a national machinery for the advancement of women in the State Party missing.<sup>27</sup> This lack is one main obstacle to gender mainstreaming.<sup>28</sup>

Periodic reports submitted to the CEDAW Committee have highlighted a number of problematic areas<sup>29</sup> - the definition of equality, elimination of gender stereotypes, domestic violence, human trafficking, representation of women in public and political life, integration in the labour market, health and educational issues - that Armenia must address in order to improve women's rights and status.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, there have been recently positive changes in regard to gender equality in Armenia due to the approval of the "Gender Policy Concept Paper" in February 2010. The Gender Policy was drafted with the direct participation of non-governmental organizations.<sup>31</sup> Because of the Gender Policy the development of a "National Action Plan on gender equality for 2011-2015" and the adoption of the Law "On State Guarantees of equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women" is expected.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the approval of the Gender policy can be considered as a strong signal towards the effective enforcement of women's rights. Apart from that, it is noteworthy that a "National Interagency Committee to Combat Gender Violence" has been established in March 2010.

In sum, Armenia provides partly legislative as well as enforcement measures for achieving gender equality but there is still an imbalance between women's rights and opportunities to enjoy their rights in the Armenian society as the problem of elimination of discrimination against women is still not solved.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Armenian Association of Women with University Education Center for Studies, Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Armenia, p. 15

<sup>26</sup> Armenian Association of Women with University Education Center for Studies, Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Armenia, p. 15

<sup>27</sup> See Concluding Observations of the CEDAW-Committee, CEDAW/ARM/CO/4/Rev.1, 43<sup>rd</sup> session (2009), p.4.

<sup>28</sup> *Elisabeth Duban*, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p. 2

<sup>29</sup> Areas of concern: definition of equality, elimination of gender stereotypes, domestic violence, human trafficking, representation of women in public and political life, integration in the labour market, health and educational issues.

<sup>30</sup> See Concluding Observations of the CEDAW-Committee, CEDAW/ARM/CO/4/Rev.1, 43<sup>rd</sup> session (2009), p.4.

<sup>31</sup> United Nations – Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Armenia, A/HCR/15/9 (2010), p.5.

<sup>32</sup> *Elisabeth Duban*, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p.3

<sup>33</sup> Armenian Association of Women with University Education Center for Studies, Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Armenia, p. 22.



### **Overview of Key Institutions, Policies and Laws on Gender Equality**

- Department on Family, Women's and Children's Issues, Ministry of Labour and Social Issues (established 1997)
- National Program for the improvement of women's status and enhancement of their role in the society for 1998-2000
- Interagency Council of Women's Affairs (established 2000)
- National Program for improving women's situation and enhancing their role in the Republic of Armenia in 2004-2007
- Gender Policy Paper (2010)
- Law "On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal opportunities for Men and Women." (Draft)
- Establishment of a National Interagency Committee to Combat Gender-Based Violence in March 2010
- Gender Policy Action Plan (anticipated 2011-2015)

## **4. War and the earthquake**

### **4.1. War crimes and internally displaced persons (IDPs)**

According to a national report of the Republic of Armenia from 2005, over 360,000 refugees were deported to Armenia from Azerbaijan during the period from 1988 to 1992. In chronological terms, the influx of refugees virtually coincided with the Spitak Earthquake of 1988, which affected over 40% of Armenia's territory. 58 villages were fully destroyed, 21 cities and villages were seriously damaged, and over 530,000 people lost shelter. During the conflict, over 13,000 houses were seriously damaged in 170 villages near the border with Azerbaijan. 78 educational and 62 health institutions need renovation and rehabilitation.<sup>34</sup>

Information about gender related sexual war crimes committed during the armed conflict in Armenia is not available. Further research about women's involvement during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as victims as well as active participants would be necessary. The UN-Security Council Res. 1325 underlines the importance of the "need to consolidate data on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls".<sup>35</sup>

### **4.2. Women as internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees**

In regard to women's situation as IDP or female refugee almost no gender specific data is available. The Council of Europe urged the government to pay special attention to the needs

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<sup>34</sup> Republic of Armenia – National Report for the 49<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, New York 28<sup>th</sup> February – 11<sup>th</sup> March 2005, p. 27.

<sup>35</sup> Adopted by the UN-Security Council, UN Doc. S/Res/1325 from 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2000, p. 2.

of displaced women in 2007.<sup>36</sup> According to a national report of Armenia from 2005, the gender breakdown was as follows: settled refugees – 44.9% male and 55.1% female, non settled refugees – 39.4% male and 60.3% female. The survey suggested that as a consequence of the unfavourable conditions and the ‘desertion’ of some of the men (labour migration), a considerable share of the refugee and IDP women has no option but to assume the family responsibilities. Thus, the social, demographic and gender aspects of the conditions of refugees and IDPs are far more complicated than those of locals. Therefore, adequate solutions need to be incorporated in an effective state policy on refugee integration.<sup>37</sup> So far no specific IDP-women related program has been developed or carried out.

There is also little information on sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) within refugee communities, although there are indicators that many refugee women are subjected to domestic violence and other forms of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV).<sup>38</sup> Only one study carried out by UNHCR in 2008 about sexual and gender-based violence among female refugees and asylum seekers states that 4% of the respondents were subjected in Armenia to some act of violence outside the family and that 17% of the respondents who had an intimate partner had been subjected at least once to an act of physical, sexual or psychological violence by the current partner.<sup>39</sup> However, there is no proper government mechanism to address these issues.

## 5. Peace and Security

Armenia and Azerbaijan have agreed on the basic principles for peace-negotiations, facilitated by the Minsk Group of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), headed by a Co-Chairmanship consisting of France, Russia and the United States. “Core issues are the withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces from all the occupied territories of Azerbaijan; recognition of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan; the return of the displaced Azerbaijani population to their places of origin in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region and provision of normal, secure and equal conditions of life for Armenian and Azerbaijani communities living there, which will allow an effective democratic system of self-governance to be built up in this region within Azerbaijan.”<sup>40</sup> The efforts have been supported by all four resolutions adopted by the Security Council on Nagorno-Karabakh<sup>41</sup>, expressing their “full support of the peace process being pursued within the framework of the Minsk Conference of the CSCE.” The key sticking points remain the status of Nagorno-Karabakh and the return of IDPs to the territory. Over the almost last 20 years a lot of meeting and negotiations between high representatives of Azerbaijan and Armenia have took place but a comprehensive peace agreement is not expected in the near future.

Conflict resolution is a priority area in the Armenian “European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Action Plan”. In fact, the European Union calls for both Armenia and Azerbaijan to increase

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<sup>36</sup> Republic of Armenia – National Report for the 49<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, New York 28<sup>th</sup> February – 11<sup>th</sup> March 2005, p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Republic of Armenia – National Report for the 49<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, New York 28<sup>th</sup> February – 11<sup>th</sup> March 2005, p. 29.

<sup>38</sup> Armenia: Analysis of Gaps in the Protection of Refugees and Asylum Seekers, UNHCR Armenia in close cooperation with the Armenian State Migration agency and supported by the European Commission, 2008, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Report on survey findings: sexual and gender-based violence among female refugees and asylum seekers in Armenia, UNHCR, 2008, p. 59 ff.

<sup>40</sup> Azerbaijan: Analysis of Gaps in the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), European Commission, UNHCR, 2009, p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Security Council Res. 822, 30 April 1993; Res. 853, 29 July 1993; Res. 874, 14 October 1993 and Res. 884, 12 November 1993

diplomatic efforts and political dialogue (through the European Union Special Representative, support for the OSCE Minsk Group and dialogue with the states and parties involved), to encourage people-to-people contacts, to support humanitarian and de-mining initiatives, to provide assistance to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees and to promote an active involvement of civil society.

The public debate in Armenia on the issue related to peace over Nagorno-Karabakh is limited. Whilst it publicly acknowledges that the conflict could be resolved peacefully only through compromise, there is little internal agreement on what this compromise could be. In Armenia, the compromise is considered to be the withdrawal from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan (the security belt), provided that sufficient guarantees are given for the security of the region (the corridors linking Nagorno Karabakh to Armenia and clear modalities for establishing the status of the region through a referendum). The positions of both sides, in fact, remain irreconcilable as Armenia insists on a referendum taking place only in Nagorno-Karabakh, which most probably would reconfirm the objective of the predominant Armenian population to be independent. Azerbaijan considers its territorial integrity as uncompromisable, especially since the oil boom might lead to changes in the balance of power between Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>42</sup>

Most of the initiatives for conflict resolution supported by international actors are in the field of managing the consequences of the war (humanitarian assistance for refugees and IDPs, missing persons, prisoners of war). Some initiatives have taken place with regards to the media, cooperation between NGOs, and economic research, as well as in the security field, for instance demining (non-strategic mines) and monitoring the cease-fire line.

### ***5.1. Women's involvement in peace building***

Many initiatives at peacemaking, particularly those that specifically involve women, have arisen from collaboration between local activists and international institutions. For example, in 2001 the Center for Global Peace at the American University in Washington, D.C. created a commission to promote peace between Armenians and Turks and between Armenians and Azeris. The "Trans-Caucasus Women's Dialogue", established in 1994, brought together women from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia to work on such projects as the rehabilitation of child war victims and training in peace- and democracy-building. Women for Conflict Prevention and Peace Building in the Southern Caucasus, an initiative started by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in 2001, addresses the condition of unresolved conflict known as "no-war-no-peace" in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. There are some women's NGOs engaging in peace building initiatives, for example the Armenian Association of Women with University Education (AAWUE) carrying out educational programs aim to promote a culture of peace. Moreover AAWUE campaigns for the integration of women's potential in conflict resolution and post-conflict peace-building. Strengthening Women's Capacity for Peace-building in the South Caucasus Region, a project carrying out by CARE Austria and financed by EU within this desk research is conducted, is an example of a comprehensive approach integrating women's needs in a participatory way. Within the scope of the project specific women's related areas of concern are identified and elements of advocacy and lobbying for policy makers on the local, national and international level developed in order to facilitate women's participation for peace-building processes.

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<sup>42</sup> The Armenian European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and Conflict Resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh, Crisis Management Initiative. Yerevan, 2009, p. 12.

Efforts by women in the region at peacemaking, peace-building, peacekeeping, and conflict resolution demonstrate that women do not want to remain victims, and that they can play a vital role in the struggle for peace. Armenia has accepted UNSCR 1325 which outlines the promotion of women's active participation in all operations on peaceful resolution and reconciliation on conflict. Furthermore Armenia approved also a "National Action Plan on Improving the Status of Women and Enhancing their Role in Society 2004-2010" where the significance of the integration of women in decision-making positions on all levels of conflict-resolution and peace-building activities is outlined. Despite these formal commitments women are exclusively active on an informal level and were excluded from official peace-keeping initiatives and negotiations.

## **5.2. Domestic Violence**

Very few studies were conducted in Armenia focusing on violence against women; among them four should be mentioned. One study dealt with sexual harassment of women in workplace conducted between 2002 and 2003. The findings indicate that sexual harassment of women in the workplace is not an isolated phenomenon and 78% of the surveyed women believe that women "remain oppressed, subjected to violence and sexual harassment."<sup>43</sup> The second study focused on "Domestic Violence and Abuse of Women in Armenia" which reported that 66% of the surveyed women experienced psychological abuse and 28% moderate or severe physical abuse at home. Another important finding is that 60.5% of the respondents believe that domestic violence is a widespread problem in Armenia.<sup>44</sup> Further results are also worth mentioning: nine in ten respondents believe that poverty increases the likelihood of domestic violence, while seven in ten agree that sudden financial problems or job loss are reasons for domestic violence. Moreover nine out of ten surveyed women believe that domestic violence results from unequal relationships between men and women and nine in ten women think that domestic violence can be best solved as a private matter, inside the family, instead of by police.

The third research conducted by UNHCR about sexual and gender based violence among refugees and asylum-seekers, as already mentioned above, also pointed out that 45.9% of the respondents estimate that domestic violence is a very common problem in Armenia.

A recent published nationwide survey on domestic violence against women in Armenia came to the findings that 61.0% of women were exposed to controlling behaviour and 26% of women were subjected to psychological violence or abuse. 8.9% of the respondents are exposed to physical and 3.3% to sexual violence.

As these studies prove violence against women is still a serious social problem in Armenia. In the Concluding Observations of the CEDAW Committee is outlined that "there is no dedicated governmental body or coordinating institution tasked with implementing measures to counter all forms of gender-based violence against women."<sup>45</sup> Since 2010 the "National Interagency Committee to Combat Gender Violence" has been established, but due to the short time period they are operating it is impossible to get an assessment of their work.

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<sup>43</sup> Report "Nationwide survey on domestic violence against women in Armenia", National Statistical Service of Armenia, UNFPA, Yerevan, 2011, p. 21.

<sup>44</sup> Domestic Violence and Abuse of Women in Armenia. Report on Nationwide Survey Findings, American University of Armenia, Yerevan, 2007, p. 28 ff.

<sup>45</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/4/Rev.1, 2009, p. 5.

Another grave problem is the current lack of a proper law for violence against women. In addition there is no mention of domestic violence in the country's Criminal Code. As it is not defined as crime, domestic violence is not criminalized. Neither is marital intimate partner rape defined as crime and criminalized. On the whole, the Criminal Code is not gender sensitive.<sup>46</sup>

According to a report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights from 2010, Armenia should ensure that violence against women and girls constitutes both a criminal offence and a civil wrong. Perpetrators should be prosecuted and appropriate sentences imposed that reflect the severity of this human rights violations; women and girls who are victims of violence should have access to immediate means of redress and protection, including protection orders and availability of a sufficient number of adequate shelters, and these services must address the needs of rural women, women with disabilities, refugees, minority women and women who use drugs.<sup>47</sup> Currently in Armenia, only one women's shelter for survivors of domestic violence exists. It offers accommodation for eight women and 13 children, however, there is still an enormous gap between the demand for service and what shelter can offer. Since 2002, three more NGO driven shelters had opened with the support of funding from the US Agency for International Development, but were later closed due to lack of funding.<sup>48</sup>

The "Conceptual Framework of the State Gender Policy and Its Implementation Strategy" from 2010 aims to bridge the legal gap, particularly in the proposed "Gender Equality Law", as one of its sections is devoted exclusively to the elimination of gender-based violence. The Conceptual Framework sets drafting and adopting of the "Law on Elimination of Gender-Based Violence" as a primary objective and a priority area for the State gender policies. "As evidenced by international organizations and researchers, the gap between legal provisions and national strategies to end that violence, on the one hand, and their translation into concrete action, especially into financial support, on the other hand, remains the most significant challenge", according to a study from the UN-Secretary General.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the lack of adequate legislation and implementation of policies, the societal acceptance and tolerance towards violence against women remain one of the most serious obstacles in combating against violence. "Often violence against women is seen as "family matter" and should not be solved outside. Women largely believe that abuse is a normal part of marriage and are unconvinced that a life without it can exist."<sup>50</sup> There is also strong social pressure on victims to preserve silence on domestic and sexual violence. Therefore most violent incidences are not recorded by the police and some sources suggest that the authorities discourage women from lodging complaints. Many women who do file complaints often subsequently withdraw them because of fear about breaking up their family and of not being able to survive on their own. Armenia offers little assistance for divorced women in need.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Report "Nationwide survey on domestic violence against women in Armenia", National Statistical Service of Armenia, UNFPA, Yerevan, 2011, p. 18.

<sup>47</sup> Summary prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in accordance with paragraph 15 (c) of the annex to Human Rights Council resolution 5/1, A/HRC/WG.6/8/ARM/3, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> WAVE - Country Report 2010, Realty check on European Services for women and children survivors of violence, Vienna, p. 65.

<sup>49</sup> In-depth study on all forms of violence against women. Report of the Secretary-General, UN doc. A/617122/Add.1., New York, 2006, p. 13 ff.

<sup>50</sup> Shirinian, Sanan: Domestic Violence Against Women in Armenia, United Human Rights Council, 2010; <http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/2010/05/domestic-violence-against-women-in-armenia> (1st September 2011).

<sup>51</sup> Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Armenia, SIGI, Social Institutions and Gender Index, <http://genderindex.org/country/armenia> (1st September 2011)

In recent years efforts on behalf of NGOs have developed to battle the issue of domestic violence, but Armenian officials have been particularly resistant to the campaigns working to end violence against women. These NGOs have been struggling simply to get the issue of domestic violence mentioned in newspapers, television and other media outlets.<sup>52</sup> A recent survey dealing with gender-based violence presented in the mass media shows that only 293 articles (0.4%) out of 78,408 analysed between 2009 and 2010 were devoted to the topic of gender based violence.<sup>53</sup> Lara Ahaonyan, the co-founder of the Women's Resource Centre in Armenia" stated in an article that "the mayor's office refused them permission to advertise the hotline service for victims of domestic violence in the metro and other public places. It said, that those kinds of adverts were oppressive and created psychological trauma by frightening women. After finally receiving the permission, in the next three months, hotline calls increased by 50%.<sup>54</sup> This case would lead to the assumption that when there is comprehensive information and service available, women would apply for it.

But gender-based violence, including domestic violence, is rarely an issue in public opinion and therefore strong efforts have to be taken from top-down, including legal provisions and mechanisms, but also from bottom-up such as awareness raising campaigns, educational efforts and public discussions to achieve a climate where gender-based violence is not tolerated anymore.

## 6. Peace and Gender Democracy

Peace and Gender Democracy are closely linked, for example if women are included in peace-building processes in a substantial way the likelihood is much higher that they will play also a crucial role in the rehabilitation of the society and establishment of a new democracy. The situation of women in post-conflict societies in areas such as political participation, integration in the labour market, education, health and cultural behaviours reveal to certain extent the manifestation of gender equality in democracy.

### 6.1. Women and participation

*Politics* – Women in Armenia are highly underrepresented in official authorities and public administration. Women have very little influence over policy decisions due to their lack of representation in decision-making positions. The level of women's representation in the parliament is very low with 9.2% taken into account that women constitute about half of the population.

In 2009 women form merely 10% of holders of top-level positions in the Civil Service. Women's and men's representation in political positions in the executive branch of government is not balanced either. Data for 2010 indicate that only 9.6% of Ministers and Deputy Ministers are women. Out of 18 Ministers only 2 and out of 65 Deputy Ministers only 6 are women. There is not a single female Regional Governor in the country, and only one

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<sup>52</sup> Shirinian, Sanan: Domestic Violence Against Women in Armenia, United Human Rights Council, 2010; <http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/2010/05/domestic-violence-against-women-in-armenia> (1st September 2011).

<sup>53</sup> Report on the issue of gender-based violence as presented by Armenian Mass Media prepared by UNFPA within the framework of the Project "Combating Gender-Based Violence in the South Caucasus, 2010, p. 40.

<sup>54</sup> Aharonyan, Lara: Standing Up for Women's Rights in Armenia, Institute for War & Peace Reporting, <http://iwpr.net/print/report-news/standing-womens-rights-armenia>, (2<sup>nd</sup> September 2011)

Deputy Regional Governor is a woman. There are no women among 48 Majors and there is only one woman among Deputy Mayors. Women constitute 6.2% of Council members in local government.<sup>55</sup>

Most significant obstacles for women pursuing a political career, inter alia, are gender stereotypes such as “Politics is not a proper occupation for women” or “Women’s emotionality prevents them from making correct decisions” as a recent survey demonstrates. Moreover “burden of family concerns” (34.7%) and “limited financial resources” (24.4%) were mentioned by women as barriers for political activism.<sup>56</sup>

To increase the proportion of women in parliament the Electoral Code, as already mentioned, was amended by raising an existing quota for women on political party lists from 5% to 15%. As a result the number of women grew by 4.1% in 2007 compared to 2003 (from 5.3% to 9.2%), which is a step forward, but far away from an effective measure in regard to equality. In the “Conceptual Framework of the State Gender Policy and Its Implementation Strategy” from 2010 is outlined: “In order to ensure balanced representation of women and men at decision making levels in legislative and executive government bodies under Armenia’s commitment: amend the Electoral Code to set a 30% quota, considering the European Council recommendation of about a 40% and 60% ratio of ‘balanced Threshold’, and make measures for the gradual expansion of women representation in the highest and chief positions at all levels of the executive branch.”<sup>57</sup> The implementation of such a political commitment would be a milestone in the field of enhancing women in political participation.

The CEDAW-Committee raised concern in its Concluding Observations about the “incidents of violence against women journalists and particularly women who are active during electoral campaigns, especially as such violence discourages women from participating actively in public life.”<sup>58</sup> In the area of women’s representation in politics the public and official support still remains very low.

**Civil Society** – In contrast to women’s absence from public office, Armenian women have a more significant role as leaders of non-governmental organizations. While there is a common perception that women dominate the third sector, in fact, of the about 4,500 NGOs officially registered in Armenia, experts estimates that there are about 700 active organizations, 60 of which could be considered “women’s NGO”. However, women’s contribution to civil society in Armenia is one of their most visible roles and this may explain the overestimation of their numbers and influence. Four major fields of operation of women’s organization have been identified: “socio-political issues and protection of women’s rights and interests”, “promotion of women’s business and professional activities”, provision of social services and charity” and “elimination of violence against women”.<sup>59</sup> To name a few NGOs: The gender education and gender research by the “Armenian Association of Women with University Education” emphasize the importance of education to reach equality. To empower rural women has been

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<sup>55</sup> Report on findings of the sociological study: Gender dimension of civic and political participation in Armenia, UNFPA, OSCE, Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Yerevan, 2011, p. 31 f.

<sup>56</sup> Report on findings of the sociological study: Gender dimension of civic and political participation in Armenia, UNFPA, OSCE, Norwegian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Yerevan, 2011, p. 32 f.

<sup>57</sup> *Elisabeth Duban*, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p.25

<sup>58</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/4/Rev.1, 2009, p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Armenia n 2002-2007, Alternative Report, Armenian Association of Women with University Education, Yerevan, 2007, p. 41.

a major activity of “Democracy Today”, while the “Women’s Rights Centre” has among others published a study on domestic violence and abuse in Armenia.

In its Concluding Observation, the CEDAW-Committee expressed its concern over the fact that the cooperation between the State party and NGOs in the implementation of the CEDAW-Convention has been limited. There are yet some examples of partnership with the Government in the implementation of social programs and there has been little progress in cooperation but the partnership has not been institutionalized so far. NGOs cannot rely on State supports for its developments and implements the majority of its initiatives within the framework of international grants programs.<sup>60</sup> This has created sometimes a situation where there is a competition for grants instead of a competition for cooperation and results. Some studies made by women-NGOs are not even disseminated to women outside the organization.<sup>61</sup>

Civil society as a whole and particularly women’s NGOs shows some weakness. Several experts noted that women’s groups in Armenia have been unable to consolidate and form a movement but work in isolation and in some cases are even uncooperative. Because of this situation, women’s NGOs have not formed a united body, or critical mass, as a prerequisite for change and advancing common agenda.<sup>62</sup>

## **6.2. Women and employment**

Women are less active in the formal workforce than men. Considering the entire population of working age men and women, 73.9% of men are economically active in comparison to only 50.4% of women. Women make up a larger share of students and pensioners, and as a reflection of prevailing gender norms, are more likely to be engaged in unpaid work, such as caring for the home and children. Studies show that women spend about five times more time on unpaid work than men. Women are often working in the informal or unregulated economy, in such jobs as cleaners or babysitters.<sup>63</sup>

The Armenian labour market is characterized by a strong horizontal and vertical segregation in the field of employment. Women are predominant in the areas of “hotels and restaurants (64.9%)”, “education (80.9%)”, “health and social service (83.4%)” and “households with employed persons (71%)”. Men are mainly active in the fields of “mining and quarrying (77.9%)”, “energy, gas and water supply (85.6%)”, “Construction (97.9%)” and “transport and communication (83.8%)”. Women are mostly integrated in sectors with low wages.<sup>64</sup>

Due to vertical segregation, women are less likely to occupy managerial positions in their professional lives. Discriminatory practices also decrease the opportunities for promotion and career advancement. As noted above, in the section on political participation, widespread stereotypes persist that women for example are not skilled in leadership, but are better suited for administrative positions. According to a World Bank survey from 2009, 21% of small

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<sup>60</sup> See Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Armenia n 2002-2007, Alternative Report, Armenian Association of Women with University Education, Yerevan, 2007, p. 41 f.

<sup>61</sup> Wistrand, Birgitta: Women empowerment and cooperation in Armenia with a focus on the Syunik region, OSCE, Yerevan, 2007, p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> Wistrand, Birgitta: Women empowerment and cooperation in Armenia with a focus on the Syunik region, OSCE, Yerevan, 2007, p. 10.

<sup>63</sup> *Elisabeth Duban*, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p. 29.

<sup>64</sup> Women and Men in Armenia. National Statistical Service Republic of Armenia, 2010, p. 101 ff.



firms have women in top management as compared to 4% for medium, 7% for large firms and no female top managers in enterprises with government ownership.<sup>65</sup>

According to Sona Harutyunyan, director of the Armenian State Employment Service “99,300 unemployed were registered during 2009 (up from 74,700 registered in 2008, thus showing a 7.1 percent increase during the crisis year), and 72 percent of them are women, while 21 percent are young adults.”<sup>66</sup> True unemployment figures are hard to determine in Armenia, where anyone who owns land is considered to be “employed”.

**Gender pay gap** - In Armenia the gender pay gap is significantly high. In 2009, women on average earned 77,127 drams (€ 146.52) per month compared to male earnings of 126,765 drams (€ 240.82); women earn about 40% less than men.<sup>67</sup> Such pay inequalities are explained by the fact that women are underrepresented in profitable and high paying sectors, whereas fields in which women dominate, such as education and healthcare, have the lowest salaries.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, even in these particular sectors, women’s monthly wages are lower than those of men. For example, in 2009 women’s monthly salary in health and social services was 27.8% lower than men. In working areas as in financial activities, where the gender balance is quite equal (women 52.8% / men 47.2%) women’s income is even significantly lower (- 55.8% than men).<sup>69</sup>

**Poverty** – According to the latest available official statistics, a third of Armenians lived below the poverty line in 2009. The official poverty line is calculated at an income of 30,920 drams (€ 58.74), while “extreme poverty” is defined as an income of less than 17,483 drams (€ 33.21). Leili Moshibi-Jilani, head of UNICEF Armenia, said that the global financial collapse of 2008 has a very serious impact on families. According to the minister of economy 45% of government expenditure goes on welfare payments and officials stated that without these social supports about 50% of the population has to live in poverty. The Central Bank of Armenia calculated that the money transfer from Armenians who emigrated abroad, mostly to Russia, was 37% higher in 2010 compared with 2009.<sup>70</sup>

In regard to the gender dimension women are more affected by poverty as men (54.5% respectively 45.5%). Female-headed households are more likely to be poor as compared to male-headed households (36.9% respectively 33.1%) in 2009. The large share of female-headed households could be explained by peculiarities of emigration, as normally it is the father who heads abroad in search of better employment opportunities. High poverty incidence among female-headed households might be also explained by a number of factors including low wages, lack of employment opportunities, as well as inability or unwillingness of the departed spouse to support the family etc.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Elisabeth Duban, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p. 31.

<sup>66</sup> Popular vacancies and unpopular jobs, unemployment on the rise in Armenia: Online newspaper: Armenia Now.com, [http://www.armenianow.com/social/20479/armenian\\_unemployment](http://www.armenianow.com/social/20479/armenian_unemployment) (2nd September 2011)

<sup>67</sup> Women and Men in Armenia. National Statistical Service Republic of Armenia, 2010, p. 120.

<sup>68</sup> Elisabeth Duban, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p. 29 f.

<sup>69</sup> Women and Men in Armenia. National Statistical Service Republic of Armenia, 2010, p. 120.

<sup>70</sup> Social snapshots and poverty in Armenia, Part 3., National Statistical Service of Armenia, 2010, p. 139 f, <http://www.armstat.am/en/?nid=80&id=1202> (2<sup>nd</sup> September 2011); and see Armenia sinking into poverty, Institute for war & peace reporting, <http://iwpr.net/print/report-news/armenia-sinking-poverty> (2nd September 2011)

<sup>71</sup> Social snapshots and poverty in Armenia, Part 1., National Statistical Service of Armenia, 2010, p. 43 ff, <http://www.armstat.am/en/?nid=80&id=1202> (2<sup>nd</sup> September 2011)

### **6.3. Women and education**

The Armenian Constitution guarantees basic mandatory education for free. In 2009-10 academic year, girls made up 48.1% of the total number of elementary grade students and 53.5% of students in senior higher schools. On the level of Master degree holders 63.4% are female, however, only 17.6% women are Doctors of Science.<sup>72</sup> According to the educational subjects, chosen by students, there is striking high gender segregation. Areas such as “Informatics and computer engineering” and “Natural sciences” are male dominated (58.2% respectively 70.1%), whereas “Social sciences” and “Education and pedagogy” are mostly preferred by women (100% respectively 97.4%).<sup>73</sup> In regard to a vertical segregation women are highly underrepresented in educational top positions. Under the scientific-pedagogical staff of higher state education only 4 out of 41 (10%) are female rectors. The proportion of female professors is also low, 85 out of 467 (18.2%). On the opposite, women make up 84.2% of the teaching staff.<sup>74</sup>

According to 2004 data, 104 government –run preschool institutions were closed. While the staff of preschool educations consists of 100% women, these job loss had an enormous bad impact on women. On the one hand they lost their income, and on the other hand a widespread lack of child care facilities arises, which exacerbates reconciling work and family life.<sup>75</sup>

School textbooks contain still material and pictures depicting gender stereotypes, while there is no promotion on the formation of an egalitarian gender culture.<sup>76</sup> Apart from that the CEDAW Committee stated its concern about a relatively high dropout rate especially of rural girls of ethnic minorities.<sup>77</sup>

### **6.4. Women and health**

The issue of public health is rather problematic due to the absence of mandatory health insurance, timely and age-risk-based medical treatment using costly medical technologies, as well as the absence of preventive measures for men’s (prostate diseases) and women’s (breast cancer, etc.) diseases.<sup>78</sup>

In regard to women’s health the Government of Armenia has prioritized the provision of maternal services, which has undoubtedly contributed to improvements in the maternal mortality rate. But challenges remain, e.g. abortion rates are high, which is generally attributed to unplanned pregnancies.<sup>79</sup> The total abortion rate is 1.8 abortions per women in Armenia. It is being argued that one of the most significant causes, why women have an

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<sup>72</sup> Women and Men in Armenia. National Statistical Service Republic of Armenia, 2010, p. 73 ff.

<sup>73</sup> Women and Men in Armenia. National Statistical Service Republic of Armenia, 2010, p. 87.

<sup>74</sup> Women and Men in Armenia. National Statistical Service Republic of Armenia, 2010, p. 78.

<sup>75</sup> See Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Armenia n 2002-2007, Alternative Report, Armenian Association of Women with University Education, Yerevan, 2007, p. 44.

<sup>76</sup> Concept Paper Gender Policy, Excerpt from the Protocol of the RA Government Session No. 5, 11 February 2010, p.11.

<sup>77</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/4/Rev.1, 2009, p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> Concept Paper Gender Policy, Excerpt from the Protocol of the RA Government Session No. 5, 11 February 2010, p.20.

<sup>79</sup> *Elisabeth Duban*, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p.33.

abortion, is the lack of modern contraception. “While slightly under half of married women were not using contraception, 34% were using a traditional method of contraception (usually withdrawal) and only 19% were using modern methods (most commonly intrauterine devices-IUD-and male condoms.”<sup>80</sup> In recent years sex selective abortions have increased to an alarming extent.<sup>81</sup> A representative of UNFPA, currently conducting a study about the causes, stated that the sex ratio of newborns has been 115 boys per 100 girls in Armenia; this is 10% more than the international average.<sup>82</sup>

In addition there is a serious problem with health care provisions in rural areas since not all villages are equipped with medical aid posts and the overwhelming majority of the population cannot afford paying the transportation costs. Women do not go to see a doctor, in particular a gynaecologist; as a result, women are not taken proper care of during pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period. The problem is further aggravated by the fact that gynaecologists and obstetricians work only in district centers and in urban medical institutions.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, in general reproductive health services for mothers and children are free, however, rampant corruption in the health care system, widely spread “unofficial payments” that are extorted from women in childbirth put those women and their families in a predicament, according to a alternative report from the Armenian Association for Women.<sup>84</sup>

## **6.5. Women and gender roles and cultural attitudes**

The CEDAW-Committee expressed its concern about the deeply rooted patriarchal attitudes subordinating women and the strong stereotypes regarding their roles and responsibilities in the family and society, which have in particular a negative impact on rural women. The Committee calls upon the Armenian State to initiate specific measures including awareness-raising and educational campaigns targeting, inter alia, community leaders, parents, teachers, officials and young girls and boys.<sup>85</sup>

While patriarchal traditions doubtless widely persist within society, which impede to a large extent equality and gender justice, the perception about the different roles between men and women, however, differs from those born after the independence. There are notions that youth exhibit more conservative behaviour, others contended that young people view gender roles less rigidly than their parents and grandparents. In that context a gap between urban and rural areas can be considered, where in villages traditional patterns have still stronger impact on the lives of women. Masculine identity in Armenia is mostly linked to public perception of status and power, whereas women are often considered as weak, sociable and therefore qualified for household and child care activities.

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<sup>80</sup> *Elisabeth Duban*, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p.33.

<sup>81</sup> Abortion rates in the South Caucasus among the highest in the world, Caucasus Research Centers, 2010, <http://csrc-caucasus.blogspot.com/2010/04/abortion-rates-in-south-caucasus-among.htm> (7th September 2011)

<sup>82</sup> See UNFPA Assistant Representative Interview on Sex Selective Abortion, <http://inthenews.unfpa.org/?p=10483> (7<sup>th</sup> September 2011)

<sup>83</sup> See Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Armenia n 2002-2007, Alternative Report, Armenian Association of Women with University Education, Yerevan, 2007, p. 51.

<sup>84</sup> See Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the Republic of Armenia n 2002-2007, Alternative Report, Armenian Association of Women with University Education, Yerevan, 2007, p. 51.

<sup>85</sup> Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/4/Rev.1, 2009, p. 4.

In regard to women's participation in politics and labour market stereotypes often serve as explanation and justification for under representation and exclusion, e.g. "women have less self-confidence in their leadership abilities" and "they are not socialized and prepared for powerful positions". "In addition, even women regard themselves as dependent on men in politics and the economic sphere and rely little on other women in public life."<sup>86</sup>

Cultural attitudes also play a role in the determining the sexual relations of men and women. It is not acceptable for young women to engage in pre-marital sex, but it is considered normal for young men to have sexual relations with commercial sex workers before marriage. This pattern continues into marriage where women are expected have one partner and be faithful to their husbands while men are allowed and even sometimes encouraged by the society to have sexual contacts with other women."<sup>87</sup> In a survey of societal attitudes, 36% of respondents agreed with the statement "it is a wife's obligation to have sex with her husband even if she does not feel like it", rural residents most often agreed with this statement (48%).<sup>88</sup>

Another critical issue refers to the discriminatory practice of "property rights" of women. In the constitution, the property rights are equal for women and men, but women continuously indicated that in reality the father, the brother and then the husband take care of the property which by law is owned by the women/life. Having no property for women it is impossible to take a loan or start your own business without permission of your father or husband. As research shows one of the most important steps to empower women is their economic independence. "When bringing up this circumstance in conversations with women, they often referred to 'the Armenian mentality' and something they could not change, only obey to the family/husband traditions" the report stated.<sup>89</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

There has been certain positive dynamics in Armenia on the whole range of issues related to the advancement of women, to the protection of their rights and to their empowerment. Steps have been undertaken on legislation; however, while certain legal provisions are adopted to promote gender equality, there is so far no specific law to combat domestic violence (only a draft version). "Despite of these achievements there is still a lack of genuine national machinery for equality. The Government's central policy-coordination unit would be tasked with mainstreaming a gender- equality perspective in all policy areas and would have to take effective measures to promote the advancement of women."<sup>90</sup>

Apart from that in practical terms inequality, discrimination, abuse and multiple burdens determine still women's daily lives. This gap between rhetoric and reality is most vividly demonstrated in most acute problems such as women's disempowerment, particularly in terms of participation in political and economic decision-making, the feminization of poverty and higher rates of women in low-paid jobs, which further undermine their status and leverage on the labour market. Gender-based discrimination is reinforced by entrenched patriarchal

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<sup>86</sup> See *Elisabeth Duban*, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p. 19.

<sup>87</sup> *Elisabeth Duban*, Gender Assessment USAID Armenia 2010, p. 34.

<sup>88</sup> Domestic Violence and Abuse of Women in Armenia. Report on Nationwide Survey Findings, American University of Armenia, Yerevan, 2007, p. 28.

<sup>89</sup> Wistrand, Birgitta: Women empowerment and cooperation in Armenia with a focus on the Syunik region, OSCE, Yerevan, 2007, p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> Report "Nationwide survey on domestic violence against women in Armenia", National Statistical Service of Armenia, UNFPA, Yerevan, 2011, p. 17.

stereotypes and attitudes, which can be eliminated only through consistent and comprehensive policy measures, including education, media and other public awareness-raising campaigns and other interventions.

In regard to the implementation of UNSCR 1325 a huge gap can be considered between the demands outlined in the resolution concerning equal participation in all decision-making in conflict resolution and peace processes and the real situation, where de facto almost no women is formally integrated in peace negotiations. However, women are very active in civil society, although they are sometimes exposed to pressure by Government bodies that want to impede any form of reconciliation among NGOs of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh. In addition, a lack of data in regard of the prevalence of violence against women during the armed conflicts can also be considered. According to the “Comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of the UNSCR 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security”<sup>91</sup> women have to be equally integrated in society as a whole to establish a sustainable and stable gender democracy.

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