

Country	Armenia
SIGI 2019 Category	Low
SIGI Value 2019	28%

Discrimination in the family		33%
	Legal framework on child marriage	50%
	Percentage of girls under 18 married	5%
	Legal framework on household responsibilities	50%
	Proportion of the population declaring that children will suffer if mothers are working outside home for a pay	54%
	Female to male ratio of time spent on unpaid care work	5
	Legal framework on inheritance	25%
	Legal framework on divorce	25%

Restricted physical integrity		35%
	Legal framework on violence against women	75%
	Proportion of the female population justifying domestic violence	10%
	Prevalence of domestic violence against women (lifetime)	8%
	Sex ratio at birth (natural =105)	113.4
	Legal framework on reproductive rights	0%
	Female population with unmet needs for family planning	13%

Restricted access to productive and financial resources		23%
	Legal framework on working rights	75%
	Proportion of the population declaring this is not acceptable for a woman in their family to work outside home for a pay	12%
	Share of managers (male)	71%
	Legal framework on access to non-land assets	0%
	Share of house owners (male)	74%
	Legal framework on access to land assets	25%
	Share of agricultural land holders (male)	70%
	Legal framework on access to financial services	25%
	Share of account holders (male)	54%

Restricted civil liberties		19%
	Legal framework on civil rights	0%
	Legal framework on freedom of movement	0%
	Percentage of women in the total number of persons not feeling safe walking alone at night	59%
	Legal framework on political participation	25%
	Share of the population that believes men are better political leaders than women	64%
	Percentage of male MP's	82%
	Legal framework on access to justice	25%
	Share of women declaring lack of confidence in the justice system	53%

Note: Higher values indicate higher inequality. Percentages range from 0 to 100, while legal variables are categorised as 0%, 25%, 50%, 75% or 100%. See data source [here](#).

Source: OECD (2019), Gender, Institutions and Development Database, <https://oe.cd/ds/GIDDB2019>.

Armenia

The Soviet period had a significant influence on the public position of women in Armenia. Education and work outside the home were promoted, mutual consent became a requirement for marriage, dowries were banned, and women gained rights to own and inherit property. However, in the private sphere, women were still seen as responsible for childcare and all domestic work.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Armenia has experienced a resurgence of some traditional values regarding women's status and roles in society. In May 2013, the Armenian government rejected a domestic violence bill that had been in the drafting stages since 2007. However, that same year, Armenia's Parliament adopted the law on 'Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women' (Equal Rights law). The bill was characterized by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) as a 'significant step forward in placing equal rights for women unequivocally in the law'. Armenia signed the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence in 2018. In addition, women's activism in civil society has been growing in Armenia.

In recent years, women have successfully opposed regressive reforms to maternity pay legislation and have been active in other social movements including environment and human rights issues (US Department of State, 2016).

1. Discrimination in the family

a) Overarching legal framework for marriage

Women have equal rights to men to enter into marriage, and the Constitution enshrines the right to free choice and consent in marriage (Constitution, Article 35). However, there is no specific legislation dealing with forced marriage (UNFPA, 2015). Forced marriage appears to be relatively uncommon, except among the Yezidi, where discriminatory practices drive girls into early and forced marriages. To date there has been little effort to implement measures or document the extent of this practice on the part of the government (CEDAW Shadow Report, 2016, p.18).

Only civil marriages registered at the Civic Status Registration Department are legally recognised in Armenia (Family Code, Article 1), although religious marriages are traditionally performed as well (UNFPA, 2014). Many couples prefer to marry only in the Armenian Orthodox Church, and because they do not marry in a civil ceremony, their marriages are not registered. There are no official data on the number of religious marriages and the law does not regulate informal or de-facto unions (CEDAW 2016c).

b) Child marriage

The Family Code of Armenia establishes the legal age of marriage for both women and men at age 18 (Civil Code, Article 24; Family Code, Article 10). It is, however, possible for someone aged between 16 and 17 to marry if they have permission from their parents or legal guardian (Family Code, Article 10). Although the law prohibits child marriage (Family Code, Article 20), there are no specific penalties for

authorizing or knowingly entering into child or early marriage. There are, however, criminal sanctions in cases involving sexual relations with someone under the age of 16.

The CEDAW committee has raised concerns over the persisting option to defer from this rule on cultural, ethnic, or other grounds (CEDAW 2016c, p.12). While rates of early marriage are thought to be relatively low, they are reportedly more common among ethnic communities such as the Yezidi and Molokan (CEDAW, 2016c, p.12; Asian Development Bank, 2015). Yezidi girls usually marry at 13-14 years of age; a girl who does not marry until 17 is considered 'late and not worthy of respect', according to a focus group conducted by the UNFPA (UNFPA, 2014). Yezidi boys usually marry when they are aged 17-20. In most cases, parents arrange marriages (*idem*). There are no awareness raising or education programmes on the legal age of marriage, or specific budgets dedicated to this issue.

c) Household responsibilities

Women have the same rights as men to be recognized as head of the household and there is no law requiring a married woman to obey her husband. Article 49 of the Family Code provides that parents have equal rights and responsibilities with regard to their children. In addition, article 24 of the Family Code establishes the equality of both spouses in regard to 'the issues of maternity, paternity, rearing and education of a child, as well as other issues of family life'. Spouses also share joint legal responsibility for managing the household's finances (Family Code, Article 24) and married and unmarried women have equal rights to men in terms of choosing where to live. Customary and religious laws are not considered valid sources of law under the constitution, in regard to parental authority or any other matter (Constitution, Article 6).

According to prevailing custom and tradition, however, women and men in Armenia are often seen as having distinct gender roles, with women taking primary responsibility for the household and child care, and men engaging in income-earning activities outside of the home, as the main bread winner and 'head of the household' (ADB, 2015; FAO, 2017). Historically, a couple will reside with the groom's family after marriage, with the eldest woman managing the family's finances, household duties, and child rearing. The bride is often expected to serve the entire family—not just her husband and children—in food preparation, chores, and laundry. This tradition is still common, although couples with resources are starting to form their own households and not reside with the groom's family (FAO, 2017, p.15).

d) Divorce

Article 13 of the Family Code establishes that either spouse may initiate divorce. Divorce carries high stigma, however, especially for women, who may consequently be tentative about leaving an abusive or unhappy marriage. Since a period of reconciliation is often mandated, women may be sent back to abuse, which can escalate due to divorce proceedings (UNFPA, 2014; UNFPA 2016). If the couple was not married in a civil ceremony or the woman agreed, or was pressured, to give up her property rights, divorce can leave her in a difficult financial situation (CEDAW, 2015; CEDAW shadow report, 2016, p.44).

The Family Code stipulates that spouses have equal decision-making authority over children following divorce. In cases where no consensus can be reached, the court takes the decision. When a divorce is

granted, the law provides that a couple's assets are to be divided equally. In many cases, however, the law is not followed either because a registrar did not record the marriage or because the woman signed a prenuptial agreement nullifying certain provisions of the law (CEDAW shadow report, 2016, p.44).

e) Inheritance

Female surviving spouses and daughters have equal inheritance rights as male ones to inherit land and non-land assets under Armenia's Civil Code (Civil Code, Articles, 1216, 1222). Women also have equal rights to men to make a will (Civil Code, Article, 1199). Inheritance is governed by civil law only. However, cultural norms dictate that property is usually inherited by and registered to male family members (ADB, 2015, p. xiv). Parents usually give their sons' house and property, as inheritance, as male descendants often remain in the household and are expected to manage the family holding. Daughters, on the other hand, are expected to get married and leave the parents' home (FAO, 2017, p.15, 27).

2. Restricted Physical integrity

a) Violence against women

Armenia signed the Council of Europe 'Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence' in 2018. There is no law addressing violence against women in Armenia (CEDAW, 2016a, p.2), although the Law on Social Assistance introduced, in 2014, definitions of violence, gender-based violence against women in the domestic sphere, and prior identification measures (CEDAW, 2016c, p.1). A draft law in 2012 on domestic violence was rejected, but an inter-ministerial Working group was established in 2016 to develop a new draft on different forms of gender-based violence against women in the domestic sphere.

In addition, the CEDAW committee has noted the recruitment of female police officers, the provision of training on gender based violence for civil servants, social workers and police recruits, and the creation of a specialized police department to prevent and investigate cases of gender based violence (CEDAW, 2016c, p.5)

b) Domestic violence

At the time of the writing, there is no specific legislation addressing domestic violence in Armenia. The Criminal Code does not define domestic violence as a separate crime, and does not criminalize it as such. Domestic assault cases are generally charged under Article 117 (causing intentional light injury) and Article 118 (deliberate striking or beating as well as other violent acts that result in physical pain, intentionally hitting or beating, or systematic beating) of the Criminal Code.

In its recent Concluding Observations, the CEDAW committee noted the under-reporting of acts of gender based violence against women and the resulting lack of data, as well as persistent attitudes of police officers accepting and justifying gender based violence against women and perceptions that this type of violence, particularly in the domestic sphere, is a private matter (CEDAW, 2016c). Many women who do file complaints with the police often withdraw them, because of family or spousal

pressure, fears about breaking up the family, and concerns about their ability to survive without their spouses' material support. Women may prefer not to bring criminal charges against their husbands, such that divorce appears to be a common alternative solution in cases of abuse. Other women remain married even though they may be subjected to conflict or domestic violence (ADB, 2015). The majority of the domestic violence cases are charged under the criminal provisions that carry the lightest punishment (2 months of imprisonment or fine). In practice, judges rarely impose jail sentences on first-time offenders (*idem*).

The Strategic Programme for Legal and Judicial Reforms (2012 - 2016) encloses reforms introducing different forms of domestic violence and practical mechanisms for responding to and preventing them in legislation. However, there is currently no policy or national action plan addressing domestic violence. A hotline number has been established for women victims of gender based violence (CEDAW 2016b, p.2; CEDAW 2016c, p.4), however a national 24-hour free hotline covering all regions of Armenia staffed by sufficiently trained personnel, is not available (CEDAW shadow report, 2016). The CEDAW commission has urged Armenia to ensure a sufficient number of adequate shelters in all regions (CEDAW, 2016c, p.4). At present, temporary shelters and, on occasion, safe alternative housing, are offered only by NGOs (CEDAW shadow report, 2016, p.25).

c) Rape

In 2013, the Armenian Parliament passed amendments to Articles 138-142 of the Criminal Code on Sexual Violence. Certain indicators were added such that specific sexual violations constitute serious crimes, especially in the case of sexual crimes perpetrated against minors, and the subsequent punishment for perpetrators was made more stringent. More specifically, rape is a criminal offence under Armenia's Criminal Code (Article 138), defined as 'sexual intercourse of a man with a woman against her will, using violence against the latter or some other person, with threat thereof, or taking advantage of the woman's helpless situation'. The law provides for increased penalties for aggravated forms of rape and sexual violence.

The definition of rape in the Criminal Code does not criminalise marital or spousal rape, although a wife can file a complaint. Marital rape appears to be a serious problem in Armenia; one NGO reported that all clients it assisted through its hotline and shelter services reported rape by their spouse (Stop Violence Against Women, 2015). A lack of gender sensitivity on the part of police officers, victim blaming and accusation in false denunciation is common practice (CEDAW shadow report, 2016). The latter, combined with a fear of reprisal from partners and lack of protection by the State are major barriers for women to report cases and take perpetrators to court (*idem*). Rape is punishable by 3-6 years imprisonment or by 8-15 years imprisonment if the victim is under the age of 14 (Criminal Code, Article 138). There are no clauses included in the Criminal Code to indicate that a rapist can escape punishment by marrying his victim.

At present, there is no national action plan or policy to support legislation on sexual violence, although clinical guidelines for health care professionals "On the procedure of organisation and provision of medical aid to persons subjected to sexual violence" were approved and introduced into practical health care by the Order of the Minister of Health of the Republic of Armenia No 2344-A of 26 August 2013 (CEDAW, 2015, p.33). The CEDAW Committee has noted its concern at the absence of a

dedicated government body or coordinating institution to implement measures aimed at tackling violence against women, including sexual violence (CEDAW, 2016c).

d) Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is covered under the Labour Code, where it is considered to be a 'gross violation of labour discipline' (Labour Code, Article 221). The provisions relating to sexual harassment in the Labour Code only cover sexual harassment in the work place. Under the Labour Code, someone found to have sexually harassed a colleague or employee can be dismissed from their post (Article 222).

Sexual harassment is not specifically addressed under the Criminal Code. However, exploiting a position of dependency in order to coerce someone into a sexual act is a criminal offence (Criminal Code, Article 140). The maximum criminal penalty for exploiting a position of dependency in order to coerce someone into a sexual act is a fine in the amount of 200 to 300 minimal salaries, or correctional labour for up to two years, or imprisonment for up to one year (*idem*). In addition, Article 6 of the Equal Rights Act of 2013 prohibits sexual harassment as a form of direct discrimination. This prohibition applies to all areas of public life, including employment, but does not specifically mention educational establishments, sporting establishments, cyber harassment or cyber stalking. Sexual harassment is defined under Article 3 as: 'verbal or physical act, or any situation of sexual acts that are aimed at humiliating the dignity of the person, intimidation, hostility, humiliation, or similar situations'.

In its Concluding Observations, the CEDAW committee noted an absence of legislation on sexual harassment and therefore of disaggregated data on sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as related support for implementation (CEDAW, 2016c, p.8). Information compiled by NGOs and reported by the Asian Development Bank indicate that victims of sexual harassment rarely file formal complaints or report incidents to the police or women's organizations, but instead they attempt to resolve the situation themselves, often by resigning, or by asking male relatives to 'talk to employers, managers or even customers' (ADB, 2015, p.43).

e) Female genital mutilation

There is no evidence that female genital mutilation is practiced in Armenia.

f) Abortion

Abortion is available on demand in Armenia for the first 12 weeks of a pregnancy. After the 12 weeks, abortion is available under certain circumstances including health and social grounds with the consent of a doctor. Abortion rates in Armenia are high and abortion is used as a family planning method (CEDAW, 2016c). In addition, sex-selective abortions are prevalent in Armenia, a country with a skewed sex ratio at birth. Sex-selective abortion is often perceived as normal in Armenian society and many view the phenomenon as preserving tradition. Numerous studies have provided evidence that women possess low decision-making power in this regard and are pressured by their husbands and mothers-in-law to abort female fetuses. Among the reasons for son preference in Armenia is a patriarchal culture, based on a patrilineal kinship system, where sons are seen as continuing the family lineage (ADB, 2015, p.47; CEDAW shadow report, p.37).

In August 2016, Armenia introduced an amendment of the Law on Human Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights, prohibiting sex-selective abortions, introducing counselling, as well as a three day period of reflection before the final decision for women who applied for abortion and defining procedures for medical staff acting against this legislation. Some women's groups have raised concerns that the waiting period might be used to discourage women from having abortions and result in increased corruption, unsafe abortions and, consequently, an increase in maternal mortality (Amnesty International, 2017, p.71). Although Armenia has seen a recent decrease in the bias of the sex ratio, sex-selective abortions remain widespread and notions about sons' greater social mobility and societal value remain deeply entrenched (CEDAW, 2016c, p.10).

3. Restricted Access to productive and financial resources

a) Secure access to land and assets

Married and unmarried women enjoy the same rights as men in the ownership, use, decision-making power and use as collateral over land and non-land assets in Armenia under the Constitution, the Civil Code, and the Family Code (Constitution, Article 31; Civil Code, Article 163, Family Code, Article 1). Customary and religious laws are not considered valid sources of law under the constitution, in regard to land rights or any other matter. Spouses have equal property rights, and any property purchased during the marriage is owned jointly (Family Code, Articles 1 and 26). Both spouses must agree on the administration of marital property (Family Code, Article 1; Civil Code, Articles 191, 192). Any property that the wife owns before marriage remains hers alone as does any property that she is given or inherits once she is married (Civil Code, Article 201).

In reality, however, men—typically the woman's father, brother, or husband—often manage the couple's property and women have limited access to land assets. The latter can be explained by a number of customary and traditional practices that discriminate against women's rights to own, use, and make decisions regarding land and non-land assets. First, the government of Armenia privatised land in 1992 by splitting it amongst households. Land ownership was awarded to the 'head of the family', usually identified as a man (Law on Rural and Collective Rural Economies, article 2). This means that women generally only gain ownership of land in the absence of a male head of the family. However, women are often responsible for managing land, even if they do not own it, partly as a result of high levels of male out-migration in rural areas (FAO, 2017, pgs. viii and 15). Second, patrilocal marriages, more common in rural areas, see brides go live with their husbands' families. Within this traditional form of marriage, women usually do not claim their ownership rights over land either within their own families or within their new step-families, due to a fear that this might be seen as confrontational (FAO, 2017, pgs. ix and 15). Third, traditional inheritance practices persist, where land is primarily given to male descendants, and fourth, there is a general lack of knowledge about women's rights over land among rural population, land professional and civil servants. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation notes the significant gap between legislation and implementation to this regard (FAO, 2017), as well as a lack of sex-disaggregated data on land registration (ARMSTAT, 2015). Very few measures have been implemented, although an exception to this is the 'Community Agricultural Resource Management and Competitiveness project' (CEDAW,

2016c, p.21), aimed, in part, at ensuring women's participation in cooperatives, producer organizations, and rural committees.

b) Secure access to formal financial resources

Married and unmarried women have the same rights as men to open a bank account, and there do not appear to be any legal restrictions on women's access to financial services. Married and unmarried women also have equal rights as men to obtain credit. There are, however, no specific laws prohibiting discrimination by creditors on the basis of gender or marital status in access to credit (*idem*).

In practice, women face discrimination in accessing credit, especially in rural areas. A report by the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations notes additional obstacles women in Armenia have to overcome before entering into business, including 'feelings of uncertainty and risk aversion; limited self-confidence in areas that are not socially or stereotypically attributed to women; a lack of business contacts; and entrenched and perpetuated stereotypes about women's roles and their participation in the economy, and in business in particular' (FAO, 2017, pgs. ix, x, and 16).

Women also have limited access to monetary funds and property for collateral, burdensome interest rates, and gendered dimensions of social interaction and networking that make entrepreneurial endeavours more difficult (FAO, 2017). With a view to enhancing women's entrepreneurial capacity and increasing the accessibility of financial resources, Armenia has implemented some programmes within the scope of partnerships with international donor organisations. For example, Armenia is currently implementing "Women's Entrepreneurship Support Sector Development" Loan and Technical Assistance Programmes with the support of the Asian Development Bank (CEDAW, 2015, p.42)

c) Workplace rights

Armenia has ratified ILO Conventions 100 and 111, but not 156, 183, or 189. The 2013 Law on Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women prohibits direct and indirect discrimination 'in all areas of public life' (Article 6). It specifically prohibits unequal pay or working conditions as a form of direct discrimination (Law on Equal Rights, Article 6). Additionally, the law states that it guarantees equality of opportunity and equal treatment before the law, with an emphasis on the public sector, labour, employment, health, education and voting rights (*idem*, Article 1 and 2). The Labour Code also mandates equal remuneration for work of equal value (Labour Code, Article 178), although the gender wage-gap remains significant (CEDAW Shadow Report, 2016, p.37; MDG National Progress Report Armenia 2015; CEDAW 2016a, p.3).

The law does not mandate non-discrimination based on gender in hiring (The World Bank, 2016), nor does the law specifically cover job advertisements, selection criteria, recruitment, terms and conditions, promotions, training, assignments, or termination. A non-governmental organization's shadow report to the CEDAW committee notes the existing model of the 'Armenian family', where childcare and household duties are placed entirely on women, limits women's employment opportunities. They also express concern that women are often judged by their appearance over their professional abilities and vacancy announcements widely use discriminatory requirements such as being "young and attractive" and of age from 20/25-40 as criteria for hiring women (Shadow Report

CEDAW, 2016, p.36; US Department of State 2016). Moreover, female labour force participation is very low and there is persistent vertical and horizontal gender segregation in the labour market. The most recent CEDAW report mentions that the number of unemployed women comprised 73.4% of the total number of the unemployed (CEDAW, 2015, p.27). In part a response to this figure, the Armenia government introduced the 2013 – 2018 Employment Strategy in 2012, providing assistance to the unemployed and counselling for entrepreneurial activities (CEDAW, 2016c, p.2).

There are no laws prohibiting women from entering certain professions, and women may work the same night hours as men. A recent CEDAW report raised concerns, however, over the existence of a list of professions declared dangerous for women contained in Decision N 2308-N of December 29 2005 (CEDAW, 2016c, p.8). This list, is not, however, specifically included in the Labour Code.

The law mandates paid maternity leave (100% of wages), of 140 days (Labour Code, Article 172; Law on Benefits for Temporary Disability, Arts. 6 and 24). The Labour Code also mandates unpaid paternity leave (Article 176) and unpaid parental leave (Article 173), of respectively 60 and 1025 days. While it is not prohibited for prospective employers to ask about family status, the law does prohibit the dismissal of pregnant workers (Labour Code, Article 117) and mothers are guaranteed an equivalent position after maternity leave (Labour Code, Article 173). The law does not require women to have the permission of her husband or legal guardian to choose a profession or register a business (Family Code, Article 24).

CEDAW (2015, p.13) declares that a 'system of indicators for assessing and monitoring the improvement of gender situation has been developed. Currently, its introduction is underway'. However, no further information is given on what specifically this entails (CEDAW Shadow Report 2016, p.19). Customary and traditional practices continue to see women's primary role as in the home, as mother and caretaker and gender disparity in relation to wages persists (*idem*). Enforcement and implementation of laws and regulations that prohibit discrimination in employment are lacking (US Department of State). According to the 2015 Asian Development Bank's *Armenia: Country Gender Assessment*, many women were engaged in informal work, leaving them without the protection of labour legislation.

4. Restricted Civil liberties

a) Citizenship rights

Married and unmarried women have the same rights as men to acquire, change, or retain their nationality or to confer their nationality to their spouse (Citizenship Law, Articles, 1, 3, and 6). Married and unmarried women also have equal rights to men to confer nationality to their children (Citizenship Law, Article 11) and to register the birth of their children.

According to Armenian legislation, however, a child's birth cannot be registered if his/her parents lack valid identity documents (Decree N 3144-N of RA Minister of Health). There are no established mechanisms for identifying children whose birth is not registered. The law stipulates the obligation of 'Custody and Guardianship Commissions' to find non-registered children, but the latter do not always have the required resources and capacities to carry out this function (UNHCR, 2013). Birth registration

is more difficult in rural areas given inadequate transportation, but generally rates of registration are high (Odekon, 2015; Child Rights Connect, 2013). There are measures for late or double provision of a medical certificate on birth and late registrations are exempt from any fees (Law on Civil Status Acts), but awareness-raising campaigns are not often carried out (UNHCR, 2013).

Married and unmarried women have the same rights as men to apply for identity cards (Law on Identification Cards, Article 4) and passports (Passport Law, Article 9), and have the same rights to travel outside the country (no restrictions found). Women's legal right to choose their place of residency (including after marriage) is protected by the Constitution and the Family Code (Constitution, Article 25; Family Code, Article 24).

b) Voting

The law provides women with the same rights as men to vote irrespective of marital status (Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, Article 30) and women and men enjoy equal rights to hold public and political office in legislature, executive and judiciary (*idem*). However, there are a variety of social and practical factors that limit the actual ability of women to be elected in Armenian society. These include entrenched stereotypes of women's roles; socialization of girls/women against political participation; lack of access to campaign finance, publicity and political connections; and limited opportunity for leadership/political skills development. Women are generally politically passive in rural areas. And it has been reported that a woman's vote is often decided by her husband (ADB, 2015; CEDW Shadow Report, 2016).

c) Political voice

Article 108 of the Electoral Code stipulates that representatives of the same sex in the voter list (applies to national, not sub-national level) cannot exceed 80% (Quota Project, 2014; CEDAW Shadow Report, 2016). This quota does not, however, actually ensure women's participation in the National Assembly or the Council of Elders in the event that a party wins, as it refers only to the voter list and not to the actual number of elected deputies (CEDAW Shadow Report, 2016, p.32). It is the duty of the Central Electoral Commission to ensure that the quota is met and to reject the registration of the electoral list of a political party, or an alliance of political parties, if the electoral list does not meet the requirements defined by Article 108. An amendment to the Electoral Code in 2016 increased the minimum quota for women's representation to 25% for the 2017 elections and to 30% for subsequent national elections.

A 2016 CEDAW Shadow report notes that politics in Armenia is male-dominated, not only in the very low number of women who hold political office but also in the psychology of political institutions (CEDAW 2016c, p.7). A number of barriers discriminate against women's rights to hold office, including rooted stereotypes about women's role in society, the absence of transparency and equal opportunities, women's participation in state administration bodies as a mere formality when in fact they are deprived of the opportunity of having any impact on policy making, an ineffectiveness of state events that are aimed at increasing women's participation in elective posts, and the lack of necessary financial and political resources (CEDAW Shadow report, 2016, p.32).

In addition, the CEDAW committee notes a lack of awareness raising campaigns on the importance of women's participation in political and public life and engagement of women for such campaigns. They also highlight the need to ensure the safety of women in political life (CEDAW, 2016c, p.7). The Office of the Human Rights Defender (the ombudsman) in Armenia has a mandate to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms from abuse at all levels of government. While the office serves as an advocate, publishing issue-specific and routine reports on human rights problems (e.g. human rights violations, illegal detentions, and missteps during the forceful dispersal of protesters by police, etc.), resource constraints at times limit the Office's effectiveness (US Department of State 2015 and 2016).

d) Access to justice

In terms of access to justice, married and unmarried women have equal capacity to men to sue and be sued. In addition, a woman's testimony carries the same evidentiary weight in court as a man's in all types of court. The principles of right to judicial protection and equality before the law and the court are also reflected in the Judicial Code of the Republic of Armenia adopted in February 2007 (Articles 7 and 15).

Free legal services are provided to women by the Office of the Public Defender, on matters such as family issues, heritage, property, mediation and arbitration. Financial resources are, however, low, and implementation on the part of the Compulsory Enforcement Service of the Ministry of Justice in enforcing court decisions on child custody, and stigmatization and discrimination faced by women claiming violations of their rights, including when they file complaints with the police and public prosecutors, is limited (CEDAW, 2016c, p.3). Within the staff of the Human Rights Defender, there is a specific position of Adviser on Women's Issues, who assists in protecting human rights and freedoms, especially as they pertain to women (CEDAW, 2016b, p.3). In addition, an action plan to promote gender equality and gender balance in the judiciary was adopted by the judicial self-governance body (the Armenian Council of Court Chairpersons) in 2015. It includes measures such as the development of gender equality training materials and thematic training programmes (Council of Europe, 2015)

Law on "provision of equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men" in May of 2013 defines the guarantees for ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities of men and women in political, social, economic, cultural and other fields. In particular, Article 10 refers to legislative basis and highlights a commitment to gender statistics. The Article also includes the commitment of all bodies and organizations in Armenia to providing gender-based data to the National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia (NSSRA), where possible. The law does not, however, establish a specialized body tasked with monitoring gender equality. There is currently no strategy or action plan for improving gender statistics, no budget for the compilation of gender statistics (Women and Men in Armenia is published with donor support), and there no staff member fully dedicated to mainstreaming gender (ADB, 2015, p.10).

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