

becoming one of the dominant national interests, as the most important object of national security, undoubtedly, is the rights and freedoms of citizens.

Let's consider the main reasons that prompt women to choose military service. Research results show that the majority of women join the service for economic reasons – they are attracted by satisfactory financial support. The opportunity for self-realization in military conditions is also essential. Along with this, military service provides women with the opportunity to acquire a profession, education for further civilian life after leaving the army: feeling of social security; stable income; material; medical provision; guaranteed paid leave.

All this contributes to the involvement of women in the Armed Forces. An important role in women's desire to enlist in military service is also played by the opportunity to arrange personal life, find friends, and continue family traditions. A feature of today is that female servicemembers master combat specialties that are not traditionally associated with women at first glance: pilot, navigator, sailor, paratrooper, machine gunner, grenadier, shooter, operator, and others. They also realize themselves in service and in traditionally «female» military positions as lawyers, medics, communicators, political scientists, psychologists, culturologists, financiers, translators. In the modern world, the role of women in military service has undergone significant changes and gradually become a recognized and necessary component of military formation. The experience and professionalism of female servicemembers confirm their ability to perform various tasks on par with men. Stereotypes regarding the role of women in the military sphere are gradually changing, which contributes to their broader involvement in various military professions and positions, including high-ranking ones. It is important to further support this process both from military structures and from society as a whole to ensure equal opportunities and the development of the potential of each servicemember regardless of their gender.

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## **WOMEN IN MILITARY SERVICE: WORLD EXPERIENCE**

Throughout history, women have played diverse roles in military endeavors. In ancient societies, women often participated in defense and combat alongside men. Iconic figures such as Joan of Arc in France and Queen Boudica in ancient Britain exemplify women's leadership and valor in battle.

However, in many cultures, societal norms restricted women from formal military service until recent centuries. During World War I and World War II, women served predominantly in supportive roles such as nursing, administration, and communication. These conflicts marked pivotal moments in recognizing women's capabilities beyond traditional gender roles, leading to increased opportunities for involvement in military service [1].

In the latter half of the 20th century, numerous nations began integrating women into their armed forces in various capacities. The United States, for instance, established the Women's Army Corps (WAC) in 1942, paving the way for women to serve in non-combat roles. Over time, this expanded to include combat-support roles, and in 2016, the U.S. Department of Defense officially opened all military positions to women without exception [4].

Similarly, other countries have made strides in gender equality within their armed forces. Israel, for example, has conscription for both men and women, with women comprising a significant portion of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Additionally, nations like Canada, Australia, and Norway have implemented policies to increase female representation in their military ranks, recognizing the value of diversity in defense operations.

Despite progress, challenges persist in achieving full gender equality in the military. Stereotypes, biases, and institutional barriers often hinder women's advancement and integration into combat roles. Issues such as sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and unequal access to promotions remain prevalent in many armed forces worldwide.

However, efforts to address these challenges are underway. Military organizations are implementing policies to combat discrimination and improve gender inclusivity. Furthermore, advocacy groups and initiatives are advocating for women's rights and opportunities in the military, pushing for systemic changes to ensure equal treatment and representation [2].

Female cadets view military training as an opportunity for personal growth, strength, and skill development. They see it as a way to escape traditional gender roles and expectations associated with femininity. Despite efforts to promote gender equality, gender bias and discrimination persist within military environments. Female cadets often feel they have to constantly prove themselves capable and face derogatory stereotypes and remarks from their peers. There is resistance among some male cadets and military personnel towards the inclusion of women in combat roles and leadership positions [3].

Since its inception, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) has undergone significant transformations in its approach to gender equality, particularly regarding the inclusion of women in various roles within the military. From the pioneering days of the Army Nursing Service to the modern era of combat deployments and frontline roles, women have made remarkable strides in shaping the ADF's landscape [2].

The involvement of women in the Australian armed forces traces back to 1899 with the establishment of the Army Nursing Service, marking the beginning of women's formal participation in military activities. Over the years, their presence has grown, with women accounting for 16.5% of the ADF by June 2017, representing significant progress towards gender inclusivity [4].

Historically, certain roles within the ADF were restricted to men, reflecting prevailing societal norms and gender biases. However, as attitudes evolved, barriers began to crumble. In June 1998, Australia made history by becoming the fourth nation globally to permit women to serve on submarines, a significant milestone in gender integration within the navy.

Notably, Australia's commitment to gender equality extended to combat operations. In the midst of the 1991 Gulf War, female sailors made their debut in a combat zone aboard HMAS Westralia, demonstrating their capabilities and paving the way for future generations of women in the ADF. Despite these advancements, challenges persisted, including incidents of sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination within the ranks. Allegations of misconduct, such as those investigated aboard HMAS Swan in 1992 and at the Australian Defence Force Academy in 1998, underscored the need for cultural reforms and enhanced measures to ensure a safe and inclusive environment for all personnel [1].

In a significant policy shift, Defence Minister Stephen Smith announced in September 2011 that women would be permitted to serve in frontline combat roles by 2016. This decision marked a decisive step towards gender equality, affirming the ADF's commitment to leveraging the talents and capabilities of all its members, regardless of gender. As the ADF continues to evolve, the contributions of women remain integral to its success. Their resilience, dedication, and expertise serve as pillars of strength within the military, enriching its diversity and enhancing its effectiveness in safeguarding Australia's security interests at home and abroad.

The presence and contributions of women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine signify a significant stride towards gender equality and representation within the military landscape. Despite facing challenges, Ukrainian women have emerged as integral members of the armed forces, demonstrating resilience, dedication, and proficiency in various roles [2].

As of the latest statistics, women on active duty constitute nearly 15.6 % of the total personnel in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, with approximately 31,757 individuals serving actively.

Among these, around 7 % hold officer positions, reflecting a growing presence of women in leadership roles within the military hierarchy. Notably, these figures align closely with NATO armies' statistics, underscoring Ukraine's commitment to fostering gender diversity and inclusivity within its armed forces.

Remarkably, Ukraine surpasses several NATO member states in terms of military gender equality, with better representation compared to countries such as Norway (7 %) and the United Kingdom (9 %). While the number of female high-ranking officers remains relatively low, comprising 2.9% of the total, recent milestones signify progress. In October 2018, Ukraine achieved a historic moment with the appointment of its first female general, marking a significant milestone in breaking gender barriers within the military leadership.

In 2018, Ukraine took a decisive step towards promoting gender equality in the military by enacting legislation that grants military women equal rights with their male counterparts. This legislative reform underscores the government's commitment to addressing gender disparities and ensuring equitable opportunities for all service members, irrespective of gender [4].

Contractual military service represents a significant portion of women in the Ukrainian armed forces, accounting for almost 44% of female personnel. However, this trend is closely linked to the socioeconomic factors, including the comparatively low salary associated with such positions. Despite the challenges, women continue to accept and fulfill contractual military roles, highlighting their dedication and sense of duty towards national defense.

To support servicewomen, initiatives such as providing woman-only apartments near military bases and offering extended maternity leave demonstrate Ukraine's commitment to accommodating the unique needs of female personnel. The provision of extended maternity leave, allowing female officers to take up to three years off without losing their position, reflects a progressive approach to supporting work-life balance and family responsibilities among military women.

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## WOMEN IN ARMED FORCES: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Women have served in the military in various roles and jurisdictions throughout human history. With the expansion of women's rights, their presence in the armed forces of countries worldwide is growing, and access to military positions is being legalized. Women volunteers for military service were often forced to resort to cross-dressing, cutting their hair, and adopting male pseudonyms (making it difficult to historically assess their actual numbers). Exposed volunteers (most often through hospitalization due to injuries) were punished by dismissal from the military and repatriation home, sometimes with honors [1].