



DISCRIMINATION

OF VARIOUS SOCIAL GROUPS IN THE UAF:

Viewpoints of the Military Servants and Civilians



Results of a comprehensive study
March–April 2023

METHODOLOGY

Pan-Ukrainian survey:

Study method: Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) – interviews by phone using a computer. From a random sample of phone numbers.

Audience: Citizens of Ukraine from 18 years and older in all regions except for the temporarily occupied Crimea and Donbas, and territories without Ukrainian mobile connection during the survey. The results were weighed against the relevant data of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine. The sample is representative by age, sex, and type of settlement.

Sample size: 2,000 respondents

Sampling error: No more than 2.2%

Term: March 27-29, 2023

Quality study:

Study method: Focus groups and in-depth interviews.

Audience: 38 people.

- Servicewomen: 17 people (2 focus groups and 5 in-depth interviews)
- Servicemen: 16 people (2 focus groups)
- LGBT servicepersons: 5 people (1 woman, 4 men)

Term: March-April, 2023

The study was commissioned by the Independent Anti-Corruption Commission (NAKO) with support from the Ukrainian Veterans Foundation, Ministry for Veterans Affairs of Ukraine.

This document was created as part of a project financed by the United Kingdom's Sustainable Development Account (SDA). NAKO is liable for the content of this publication. It shall not be deemed to reflect the position of the UK government.

The report also presents the data obtained by the Rating Sociological Group during the pan-Ukrainian surveys "Ukraine During the War. The Image of a Veteran in Ukrainian Society" (wave I August 6-7, 2022; wave II January 14-16, 2023).

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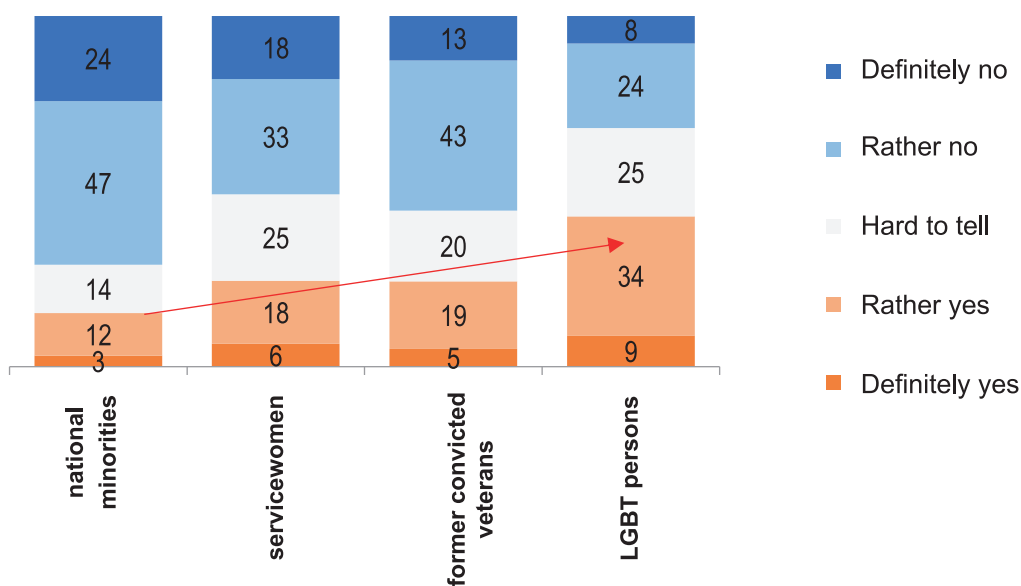
ACRONYMS

AFU	Armed Forces of Ukraine
ATO	Anti-Terrorist Operation
CATI	Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
MICV	Mechanized Infantry Combat Vehicle
NAKO	Independent Anti-Corruption Commission
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SDA	Sustainable Development Account
UK	United Kingdom

DISCRIMINATION IN THE ARMED FORCES OF UKRAINE

The results of the pan-Ukrainian survey indicate that society generally exhibits a positive attitude to all categories of persons currently serving in the Ukrainian army. There is also a prevalent idea about the absence of discrimination during service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) among the categories potentially prone to it: representatives of national minorities; women; formerly convicted veterans; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. Nevertheless, a difference is revealed when comparing the categories. While there are minimal expectations regarding possible discrimination against national minorities during service in the AFU, more than 40% of those surveyed expect some level of discrimination regarding LGBT community members. Up to one-fourth of those surveyed refer to possible discrimination against women and formerly convicted veterans.

Are the following categories subject to discrimination during service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine...?



This suggestion is also supported by the results of focus group studies and in-depth interviews where the respondents often referred to changes in attitude towards different categories that may be subject to discrimination during the last years, especially after the beginning of the full-scale invasion. The majority think that anyone may become a serviceperson, with the only limitations related to age and health. The respondents also provided arguments that those who are psychologically stable, morally willing, and truly eager should go to the military, for those “*caught off-guard near a nightclub*” are rather useless – several participants of each group provided such an explanation. Reservations regarding the military service of LGBT community members were only expressed by openly homophobic respondents (by military commanders). Sometimes, participants voiced their reservations about military service for women with two or more children, or those whose husbands are servicemen. There were one or two mentions of the convicted (for grave offenses), “*so our army does not to resemble Wagner.*” The respondents also think there should be limitations for drug and alcohol addicts (“*they are totally useless and encourage others to join them*”). Yet these ideas are rare. The national minorities were practically not mentioned.

Most often, service members in focus groups and during in-depth interviews distinguished the following groups with a high potential for discrimination: women (more often by women, rarely by men), LGBT (mentioned more often, for there is an association in the public consciousness between LGBT and discrimination, and it is a popular take), and even vegans (because “*there is nothing for them to eat, they don’t eat normal food*”). Other service members prone to discrimination were not mentioned.

There is a general impression that inequality and discrimination are getting better, especially during the last year (since February 24, 2022). There is relevant improvement concerning women, while minorities is not a very sensitive topic for the participants, who made almost no mention about them and had little to share, for they do not think national minorities are discriminated against. The same goes for the convicted, except for those guilty of grave offenses. The only group still critically sensitive to discrimination is the LGBT community. To a certain degree, it is a result of the biased and distorted image of the LGBT community’s behavior and values that is still popular in society.

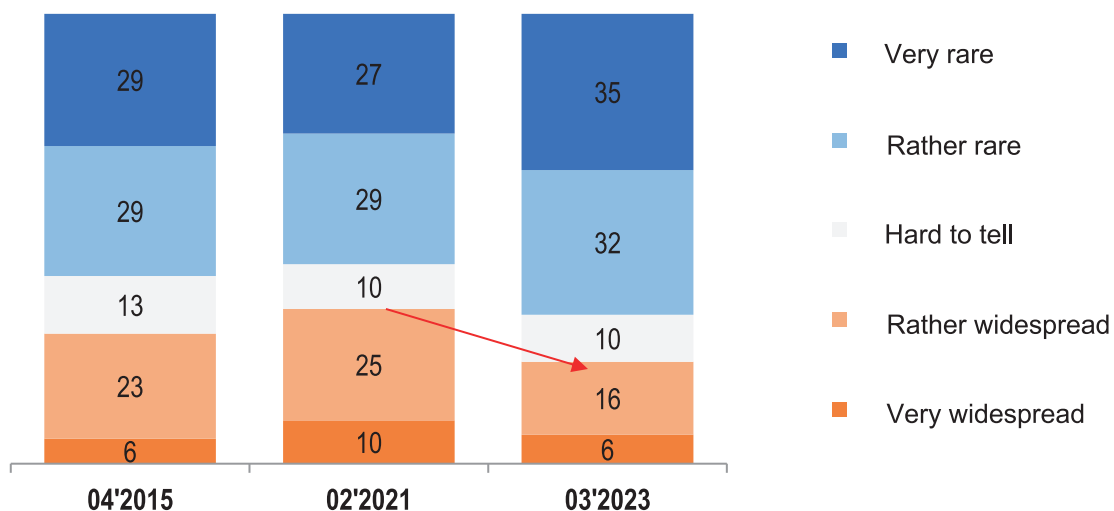
WOMEN IN THE AFU

The sociological study data show positive changes in Ukrainian public opinion about the role and place of women in society. Over the last two years, fewer people think that inequality between men and women is rare. We can also observe a smaller number of respondents adhering to the stereotype

“We become more numerous and visible.”

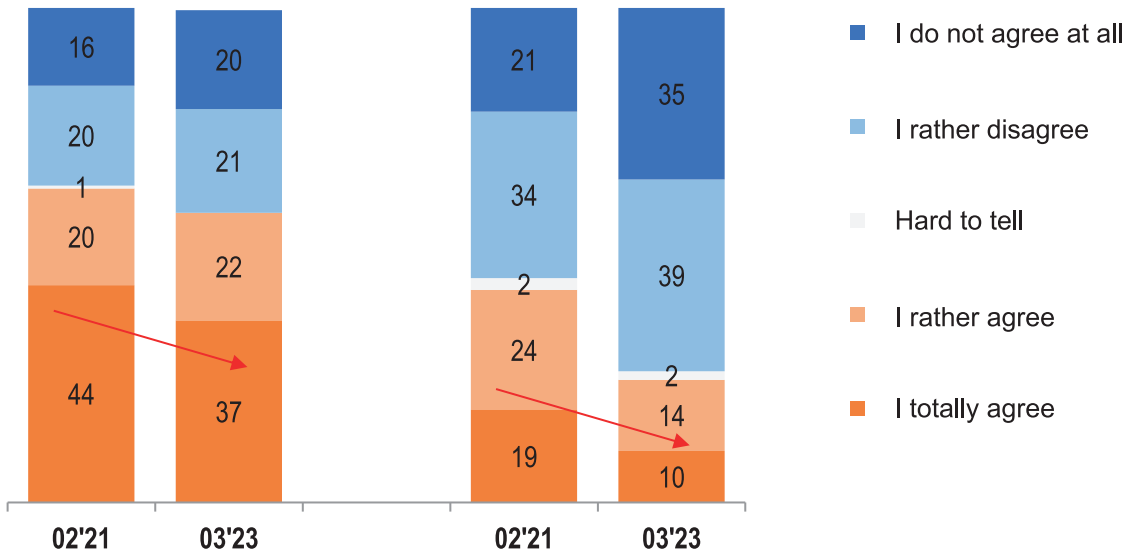
of the dominant “mother” role of women and their capacities as managers. At the same time, if the stereotype about women’s skills for managerial positions is quickly waning, the motherhood bias is slower to be eradicated. Currently, more than 40% of those surveyed think that the main task for a woman is childbirth. However, it should be noted that young women aged 18-29 face a more radical position about the inequality between different sexes, as well as the exclusive reproductive role of women. This category more often than others indicated inequalities and the motherhood stereotype.

Do you think the inequality between women and men in Ukraine now is...



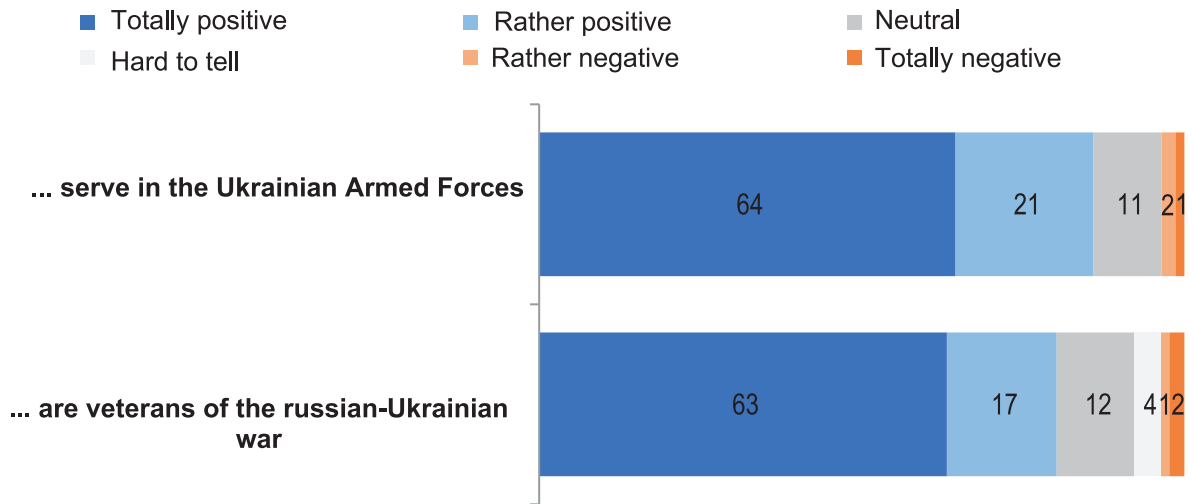
The main calling for a woman is childbirth

Men are better managers than women



However, there is a positive attitude to women serving in the AFU or female veterans of the russian-Ukrainian war (more than 80% of both categories).

How do you treat women who...?



DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN THE AFU: VIEWPOINT OF SERVICEWOMEN

Female participants of focus groups and in-depth interviews underlined that during the last years, society began to treat women in the AFU differently. The changes began in 2014, since the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO), and became even more tangible during the last year, after Russia's full-scale invasion, for it was a great threat and everyone who joined the military and took up weapons is treated more favorably. The same can relate to the attitude in the Ukrainian army, too. Almost a half of participants have been serving since 2014. They began their military service back then and returned when the full-scale invasion began.

“Of course, women are discriminated against – this is a men’s world”

“I served for two years. Then I moved abroad, but in March 2022, I returned to Ukraine to join the military again.”

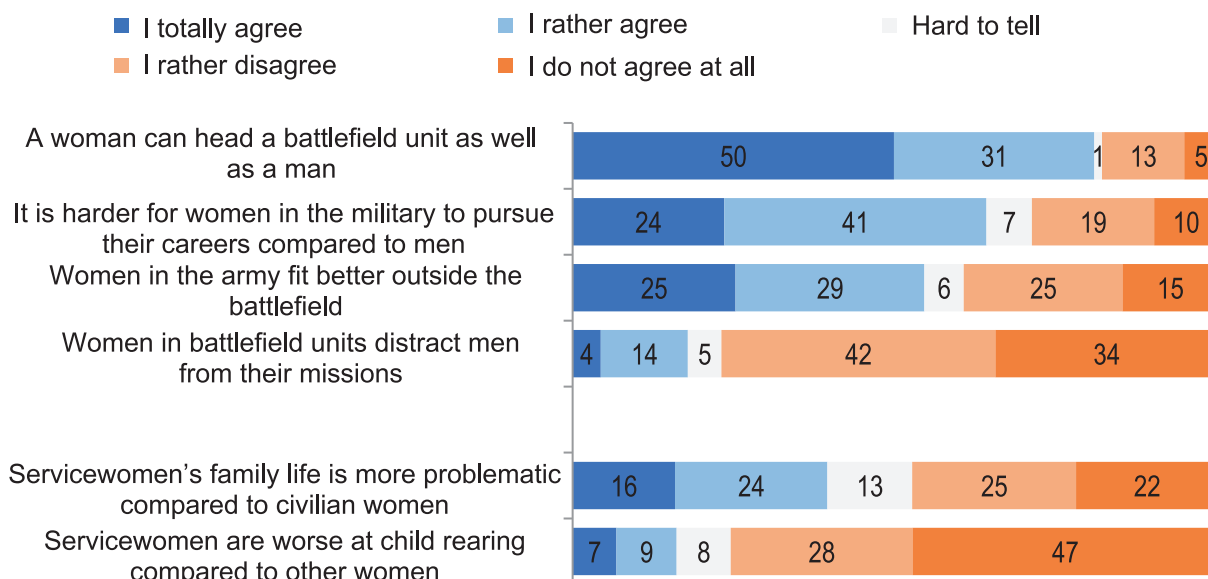
“I served, demobilized, but after February 24, 2022, I returned”; “When this war is over, and they attack again, I will have to go back to the military – I guess this is our fate now”; “Women who have been serving since 2014 contribute to the attitude becoming more positive”; “Women with battlefield experience helped improve the attitude”; “There are more and more of us, while discrimination is declining because we became visible.”

“Of course, women are discriminated against – this is a man’s world”; “Women oftentimes get positions that do not match their wishes or capabilities but reflect the ideas of the male commanders of a better place for a woman (medical units, HR, and cooks), not the battlefield positions”; “Women are by default ill-fitting, and they have to prove this wrong, while men are by default capable until they do something wrong”; “Women are discriminated against in terms of supplies (footwear, uniform, layered clothing, and hygiene supplies).”

Nevertheless, the majority of female study participants think that service in the AFU is a male domain. Women are to give birth and keep the house. Respondents claim it remains the prevailing demand for women: *“Who will give birth and rear children then?”; “I was told I would serve for two years and then go on maternity leave. I have been serving for six years now, and I don’t see a husband and kids coming my way.”* Military service demands physical and moral strength, stamina, and emotional control, which are classic male features (excessive emotionality is often viewed as a disadvantage for women). These stereotypes make it hard for women to join the military. The study participants shared their stories of refusals at military registration and enlistment offices: *“I came here eight times! It was the ninth time that broke them down, for the conscription officers realized I would persist.”* Numerous women mentioned the “Soviet approach” still to some extent prevalent in the army, which dictates that a woman should be “assigned to the kitchen” not only in civilian life but also in the military.

Stereotype assessment

The results of the national poll indicate that those who support the main stereotypical views and think that women are discriminated against in the AFU are more often than others biased regarding women’s military service. More than a half of those surveyed agree that women may head battlefield units and it is harder for them to pursue a military career compared to men. At the same time, society is still biased towards women in the AFU: more than half of the respondents agreed that women fit better outside the battlefield, and 40% share the viewpoint that servicewomen’s family life is more problematic compared to civilian women.



Focus group participants did not support the majority of negative stereotypes and claimed that they gradually fade away. The female participants claim that women do not support this idea, while individual men, especially military commanders from the Soviet times, can still maintain this view, and there are obvious sexism among them. Positive stereotypes gain support and arguments.

Stereotype	Participant comments
Women in battlefield units distract men from their missions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "This is not true. People on the battlefield are not that easily distracted." - "Do those who support this viewpoint have any idea what a battlefield mission looks like?"
Women in the army fit better outside the battlefield.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Men rather support this idea." - "There are men who fit better outside the battlefield. This is not a matter of sex." - "The work prone to general romanticizing (e.g., moving to the positions in Bakhmut) is a male thing, while when it's mundane work, including physical labor, suddenly everyone is equal."
Professional servicewomen are less often subject to discrimination compared to those who joined the army with a civilian education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Yes, it is true; they get higher status, ranks, and positions." - "Sure, they are professional service members." - "You are respected if you have battlefield experience." - "Any woman can be discriminated against."
On a battlefield mission, some women tend to be more emotionally stable and cool-headed compared to men.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Yes, women are more emotionally stable than men." - "As there is no mandatory military service for women in Ukraine, only those women who realize the scope of the work join the army." - "Women possess some of the skills lacking among men."
A servicewoman's career advancement depends on her commander's attitude towards her rather than her professional strength.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "This is true, but it is rather true for everyone, both men and women." - "It is true but in the aggregate: the attitude, the professional traits, all of it."

Sexism, discrimination, and sexual harassment

Concerning sexual harassment and sexually explicit offenses, servicewomen did not share their own experience yet they heard about such cases, up to rape (the incidents did not become public, and the perpetrators were not punished, as the AFU is a closed hierarchy where men cover for each other or do not want the claims to be disclosed).

“The army is a closed system. These things do not get public.”

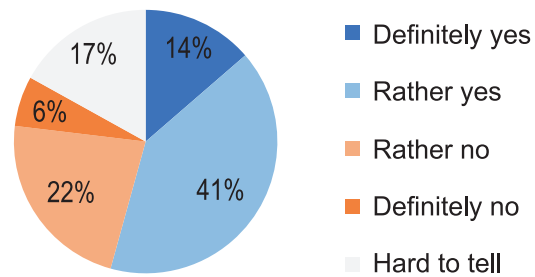
The female study participants think that the main factor preventing harassment is a woman’s confident stance (*“nip it in the bud, delineate one’s boundaries”*), when she can stand up for herself (*“a woman should build her personal boundaries”*), and appealing to the commanders if she fails to do it on her own. Other options include a gender advisor, which is not seen as a real opportunity by civic organizations.

Concerning men’s other possible actions, the study’s female participants have different experiences, so it is hard to distinguish a specific trend. The main thing is that the sex of a person is not that important, it is the commander and management who impact the situation. Generally, the female study participants think that women are still subject to biased treatment in the AFU, which sometimes takes the form of positive discrimination, overprotection, and forced care. Commanders are strongly against the issues being disclosed and are ready to take the relevant measures. However, this is the reason why the perpetrators are not punished; they are mostly simply transferred to other units or are subjected to mild discipline: *“male abusers do not suffer reputational losses or real punishment.”*

Possible actions of men	Comments of women
Improper touches, jokes, sexually explicit remarks, sexist insults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“People will tell jokes, but I explain that this is not OK.”</i> - <i>“I get some jokes, for sure.”</i> - <i>“Such conduct is more often found in the military compared to civilian life.”</i>
Coercion to sexual relations in case of material or work dependency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“It didn’t happen to me, but I’ve heard about some cases, even a rape.”</i> - <i>“I think it happens, it’s just that no one talks about it.”</i> - <i>“Women simply transfer to another unit or quit the job.”</i> - <i>“The army is a closed system; these things are not disclosed in public.”</i>
Depreciation of a role of a servicewoman’s as a full-scale battlefield staff member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“Yes, it happens a lot.”</i> - <i>“They try protecting us, so they won’t let us go to the frontline.”</i> - <i>“They think women are weaker.”</i> - <i>“Yes, it happens. People tend to think that even if a woman was deployed to the frontline, she did not do any real job there or had it done for her.”</i>
Disrespect to servicewomen’s military and battlefield experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“It does not happen if a person has battlefield experience.”</i> - <i>“On the contrary, people treat it respectfully.”</i>
Attempts of forced transfers to non-battlefield positions or to the back line	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“Yes, it happens. We are not forced but we are often offered such things.”</i> - <i>“The cases are not forceful, but we get the offers.”</i>
Refusal to consider reports on transfer, training admission, or advanced training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“On the contrary, the commanders do their best to provide it.”</i> - <i>“Yes, men are more likely to be sent.”</i> - <i>“It depends on the management; if a commander is OK, he will facilitate it.”</i>

Everyday issues during military service

According to the results of the survey, society tends to think that the current conditions of military service take into account the needs of servicewomen (55%), while 28% of respondents disagree and 17% find it hard to answer.



The female focus group members also indicated that the everyday needs of women are somewhat better taken care of now, especially thanks to volunteers and aid from different foundations (i.e., uniforms, footwear, and personal hygiene products). However, the female respondents claimed that in war, especially on the battlefield, no one's needs are particularly met, regardless of sex. Things are better at the back line. The majority of the respondents' claims related to uniforms, footwear, helmets, and tactical vests. This is a problematic issue, as a person should always carry the tactical vest and helmet provided by the army, otherwise, in case of injury or death, there will be no material compensation.

"If you earn enough, you are self-dependent and self-reliant"; "Volunteers help a lot, I got a helmet and a tactical vest"; "The uniform is laughable; some women are size XS, so every item needs to be made smaller. The same goes for shoes"; "Who are these vests for? Another woman could fit in it with me"; "If anything happens, my fellow combatants would take off this vest and put on an old one"; "Do you mean my period? Nobody in my unit knows when I have my period."

The main issues include:

- Uniforms, footwear, tactical vests, and helmets (often).
- Separate barracks, shower, and lavatory (rare; of course, these are not provided in the battlefield because the general conditions are dictated by the frontline, and men and women alike are deprived of simple amenities. The same goes for hygiene products).

The presence of issues and solving them depends on the number of women in the unit and the management. If the commanders are modern and reasonable, all the problems can be solved (*"I am the only woman in the unit, and the commander and my fellow combatants built a separate lavatory for me and even painted it"; "There are several women in the unit, and we have separate facilities"; "The shower and the lavatory are unisex, but we take turns using them"*). If it is the other way around, women face problems.

"Who are these vests for? Another woman"

The conditions are already changing, and the pace will accelerate as more women join the AFU because of the number of people in need: *"There are more of us now, and we become visible."* There is a division of women into those who hinder and those who are useful and efficient, hence, they also need decent conditions. A gradual phasing out of Soviet-style commanders (as senior ones get dismissed) and changing the approach to women in the army will contribute to this.

Medical service causes more problems, for it is specialized on men and their needs. First of all, this refers to gynecologists and battlefield medics, for women and men differ in the way they develop different conditions and recover from injuries. Hard physical work and stress also impact women's reproductive system: *"Women develop early onset stress-related menopause in their 20s and 30s"; "They face difficulties getting pregnant and later with gestation."* There are no military gynecologists: *"You have to make an appointment with civilian doctors, but, for instance, in the areas near the frontline, there are plenty of haters of the AFU and Ukraine who can not only fail to help but even harm you."* There were no female wards in military hospitals until recently.

Recommendations for improving medical services:

- Add women health experts to the medical service staff
- Add female wards to hospitals
- Introduce advanced training courses for military doctors on medical aid to servicewomen

Some women say they do physical work at the same volume as men and do not agree to be positively discriminated against (removed and kept from physical labor) because they want to feel fully equal to men. However, there are situations when the physical stamina of men is strained, let alone women's: *"I cannot drag a tank track, but in other affairs, I try to work just as hard as men do," "I dug trenches and did not let men protect me from it."* Limitations on physical labor for women do exist in the AFU, and they need to be maintained because women are naturally less physically capable than men.

Career advancement

The group and interview participants entered the AFU in the following way:

1. Mobilization;
2. Volunteered (with or without a contract);
3. Were in the military in 2014-2021 and resumed military service right after February 24, 2022;
4. Had a military education and major.

Motives: Protecting the state from the enemy (majority); professional dream; career possibilities and self-realization; joining a husband (he was in the military, and she also got the job there); a husband/son/daughter died in the war.

After victory, only some of them want to continue serving in the military (those with military education or ranks). The majority intend to get back to civilian life and work (either to previous areas or start something new, have a baby, etc.).

Career advancements are seen as an opportunity predominantly for men. Women find it harder in a military career: *"You need to work and prove yourself threefold to be adequately treated"; "Commanders treat men more favorably"; "This is a man's world, it is hard to get through."*

There is no salary discrimination at the same position as there is a staff schedule depending on the rank and number of years served. This is the reason men can be paid more, it is not that women are paid less. The salary during the war is generally not seen as nearly high enough, and the respondents do not understand how can one measure it in money:

"You need to work and prove yourself threefold to be adequately treated."

"You're giving away your life and health – how much does it cost?" Salary cuts are seen as unfair, for it is a difficult and responsible life-threatening job, and service members need to provide not only for their families but also for their own military needs: *"I often spend my salary on something I need to equip my frontline positions with."*

Advanced training

Of course, the advanced training opportunities depend on the commander; when a command is favorable about women in the AFU and the commanders are modern and not toxic, it does not hinder and even facilitates opportunities. Where women are treated badly, they are denied advanced training opportunities, with the commanders choosing only servicemen instead.

Command style

The majority of women have male commanders and several study participants themselves head tank, MICV units, etc. They think the command style depends on the person, professional and personal traits, intelligence, and a modern approach. However, women are more favorable towards men in command, *“Men are straight to the point, clear, and easier to communicate with”*; *“I would like a man commander because I had a woman in command and I didn’t like it”*; *“Women in command are often unfair towards women, so it’s hard to get along.”*

Communication with men

It depends on the person, not the sex. If a unit has a great atmosphere and it is your comfort zone, it is easy to communicate. Communication is usually work-related. Women do not feel like outsiders when communicating. They might find some classic men’s topics (like fishing) not very exciting, so they do not join those conversations. When you spend so much time with certain people, you tend to start communicating more often. Men even join ‘girl talks.’ This kind of communication is more like a group exercise, not tête-à-tête. Conflicts mostly arise related to work issues.

Communication with women

There are fewer opportunities to communicate with women because there are fewer women in the military. Sometimes there is only one woman in a unit. Conversations revolve predominantly around work. Sometimes women gather in female-only companies for ‘girl talk’ about make-up, clothes, and women’s problems.

Conflicts with women are also predominantly work-related. There are some differences between the way women and men communicate: women tend to gather in larger groups or groups of two, while men rather adhere to general discussions.

SUMMARY

Women’s reception and role in the army has gradually improved, especially since the beginning of Russia’s full-scale invasion. The factors contributing to this include the war, when everyone took weapon to defend their country; women with battlefield experience after 2014; the higher number of women becoming more visible; changes to women’s and men’s socialization and improved gender equality in society as a whole; entry of young modern commanders into military management who do not view women exclusively as “flowers,” “keepers of the house,” or utility staff.

However, discrimination is still an important problem that should be solved by women in the military themselves: they should be proactive regarding their rights and liabilities. In the same way, the command should instill a new corporate culture and help women find their place in the AFU. This also refers to reforms to provide women with uniforms, ammunition, and the necessary medical services, and solving social needs. This is the domain of the Ministry of Defense.

“The army as a structure is highly vertical, so when the changes are initiated from below, they are unlikely to be efficient. It should come from above, from the command who, unfortunately, live in their closed environment and have little to do with real life.”

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN IN THE AFU: VIEWPOINT OF SERVICEMEN

Men also think that the attitude towards women has changed for the better. They are largely accepted as usual service members, there are fewer cases of discrimination, and they are no longer limited to positions like records managers and cooks but are given a wide range of military specialities.

Most men usually do not notice the inequalities except for positive discrimination when women are overprotected and have more favorable and well-adapted service conditions. However, some men agree that women might be subject to discrimination, which may be exhibited in individual situations, but it is more a whim of the command than the result of a woman's actions. Private soldiers are more favorable towards women. They find the latter equal and support the presence of women in the army and their contribution to the country's defense during the war. Commanders are less favorable and may make comments like *"Women could be of hindrance. You always have to give them extra attention. Guys become more nervous when there are women in the unit."* Of course, the issue of being a housekeeper and mother pops up: *"Women give birth, so when a woman has kids, especially little ones, it is better for them to think twice before joining the military, and surely not opt for battlefield units."*

The command's attitude towards soldiers does not depend on women's sex but rather on the commander and the soldier's behavior: if both are reasonable and good at their job, there are no problems.

The service conditions for women are reportedly substandard regardless of sex, but there is a war going on, so this is the way things are. Concerning household issues, the majority try to create the following conditions for women in their units: separate premises or barracks, while separate showers/lavatory are unlikely but still possible, with men and women taking turns, and other conditions. Generally, the respondents claim that co-service demands adaptation: while the soldiers might find it uncomfortable at first, they get used to it later.

"They are equal to us despite smaller physical capabilities."

Naturally, men tend to see fewer inequalities and discrimination against women, but they are not subject to it, so it is difficult for them to project. Furthermore, they do not assess some conduct as discriminatory: *"Everyone should have opportunities"; "We treat women positively and favorably"; "They are equal to us despite smaller physical capabilities"; "Sometimes they do their job even better than men."*

Regarding stereotypes, no unanimous support or denial was observed. Mostly, men said everything depends on the person, not the sex, and not only related to discrimination. Personal traits, professional skills, and battlefield experience all prevail over gender traits. Women used to reveal the same stereotypes during in-depth interviews: there were no particular differences between the answers, yet women are somehow positive that men treat them more stereotypically and support a negative image of women, i.e., women have stereotypes among men exhibiting a negative attitude.

Stereotypes	Comments
Women in battlefield units distract men from their missions.	- <i>"And how exactly is a woman a distraction? During a battlefield mission, you think about the mission, otherwise you might not return from it."</i>
Women in the army fit better outside the battlefield.	- <i>"It is true. There is plenty of stuff they may take on."</i> - <i>"No, if she is a professional with battlefield experience, you have to make use of it."</i> - <i>"There are men who would fit better outside the battlefield, too."</i>

<p>A woman can head a battlefield unit as well as a man.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“Men are better commanders.”</i> - <i>“I’ve never had a female commander, so I can’t compare.”</i> - <i>“A woman cannot win authority among men, no matter how professional she is.”</i> - <i>“It is more difficult for women to gain affection among men, they have to try two times harder.”</i> - <i>“Some female commanders may be even more cruel than men.”</i>
<p>On a battlefield mission, some women tend to be more emotionally stable and cool-headed compared to men.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“Are you sure about that? Have you seen female snipers? They are even better shooters because they are better at focusing.”</i> - <i>“Tell that to combat medics who have to gather human bodies piece by piece. I would positively not be able to handle this job.”</i> - <i>“Women are more emotionally stable than men because they come to the army by choice. They were like that when they came, contrary to the mobilized diversity of men.”</i>
<p>Servicewomen are worse at child rearing compared to other women.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“It depends on the person, not the person’s job.”</i> - <i>“They do have less time for child rearing, but it does not mean they are bad mothers.”</i> - <i>“Yes, it might be true because children spend a lot of time unguarded, especially when both parents are in the military.”</i> - <i>“On the contrary, they instill stricter discipline.”</i>
<p>Servicewomen’s family life is more problematic compared to civilian women.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“It is so: there’s war, there’s stress, and there is a big amount of time away from spouses.”</i> - <i>“If they are both in the military, the relations become better and the bond is stronger, on the contrary.”</i> - <i>“If a wife is in the military and her husband is a civilian, there will be trouble. How can it be: she is at the battlefield, while he chills at home?”</i>

SUMMARY

Generally, men observe less discrimination and inequality between men and women in the AFU. Those prone to “traditional” values more often than others maintain stereotypes towards women, are more likely to exhibit positive discrimination and the need to keep women from the battlefield experience, and assign them to traditional female work in the army. The groups contained no outright sexists. The looking glass effect (when the differences between women and men seem to be more pronounced than they really are) still persists. However, women are treated positively better than LGBT community members in terms of discrimination.

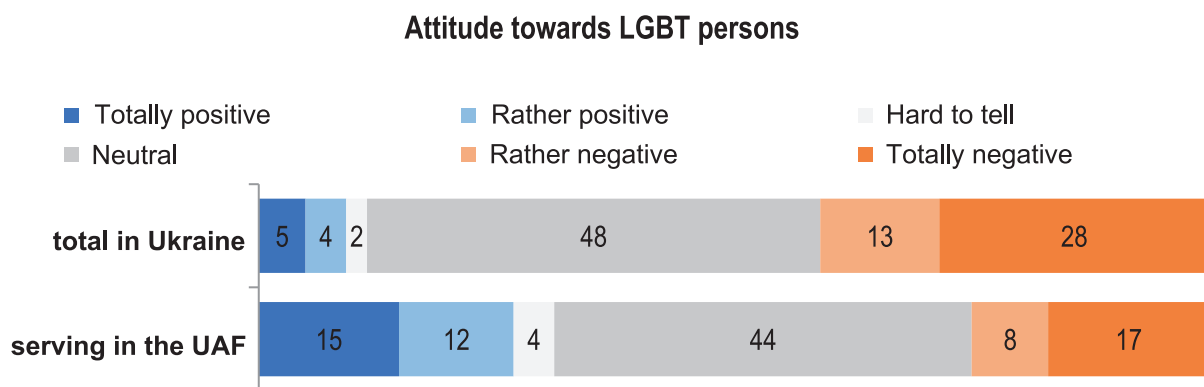
The number of women in the army, the changed societal view towards gender equality, and increased tolerance of various discriminated groups play a big role in eradicating discrimination. Commanders and the command as a whole are important factors in solving the crisis. They manifest and stand for the AFU corporate culture: they create the general attitude towards women in the military with their reasonableness, level of education, and support for gender equality and egalitarian ideas.

LGBT PEOPLE AS UKRAINIAN MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS

ATTITUDE TOWARDS LGBT PEOPLE AS UKRAINIAN MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS: VIEWPOINT OF LGBT SERVICE MEMBERS

The results of recent studies indicate that during russia's full-scale invasion, attitudes towards LGBT persons have somewhat improved (from 7% to 9%). The majority of respondents exhibit a neutral (48%) or negative (41%) attitude towards LGBT people. Those who know LGBT people personally and young women are the most tolerant towards LGBT people. LGBT persons serving in the AFU are treated better: 30% of those surveyed claimed a positive attitude, 25% of them were negative, and 44% had a neutral stance. Even the groups least tolerant towards LGBT people exhibited a 40-55% neutral/positive attitude towards LGBT AFU service members.

More than 40% of those surveyed think that LGBT people are discriminated against during service in the AFU, and one-third maintain the opposite viewpoint. More than half of respondents who know LGBT people claimed that the latter are discriminated against.



Participants of the in-depth interviews indicated that the attitude towards the LGBT community has improved recently, especially after 2014. Some people think discontinuing connections with russia contributed to it, the latter being a homophobic state with criminal punishment for homosexuality propaganda, etc. So, those surveyed shared that society has become more knowledgeable about the homosexuality: *“Society now understands us more and sees we’re just like others.”*

“They cannot get into the Azov regiment, air assault, or intelligence. They have to hide their orientation.”

There were also thoughts that the AFU has gradually changed its attitude towards the LGBT community since 2014, especially since 2022, when the support of defenders of Ukraine reached an all-time high. However, there were claims of homophobes among the military. The attitude was essentially dependent on the command: *“The commander plays a huge role. If he is reasonable, the unit will also exhibit a reasonable attitude.”* There are some units and military branches where LGBT people are unwelcome: *“They cannot get into the Azov regiment, air assault, or intelligence. They have to hide their orientation.”*

Discrimination against LGBT people in the AFU

Only service members who came out are subject to discrimination, as reported by them or other LGBT service members.

- Remuneration is equal for everyone and does not depend on the attitude of the commander and others.
- Career advancement: the majority of those surveyed do not see any hindrances in their career advancement.
- Trying to be transferred to another unit: no one is transferred by force, it is a consensual decision.
- Medical aid is rendered to everyone despite identity and orientation. There were cases of poor attitudes among psychologists who think homosexuality is an illness, yet the psychological service is generally deemed to be underqualified by almost all the study participants, regardless of identity.
- Difficult conditions are created by those who do not accept LGBT people, including the commanders: *“They load us with physical work, like digging trenches, they threaten and bully us”; “When I wanted to report on my commander, he told he would shoot me dead if I dared.”*

Coming out

It is often accidental or a consequence of being outed (when the person is forced to admit it): *“My ex-boyfriend told about it. He called my military unit”; “My ex did it to get to me”; “I was in an interview, and when my subscribers on Instagram saw the stories, they began mailing them out, so everybody found out.”*

The reasonability of a conscious coming out depends on a range of variables:

- Psychological stability and ability to protect oneself and the LGBT service member;
- Support of the closest circle, friends, family, and community;
- Reasonable commander and tolerance towards LGBT people in the unit in general.

Colleagues, commanders, and fellow combatants may exhibit various reactions, yet even those who were disapproving at the beginning gradually adapt: *“My unit is 70% homophobic. It was hard for them at first, but then they got used to it”; “The initial reaction was negative, but then they were calmer”; “It was OK, I have a reasonable commander.”* LGBT service members often deny their orientation at first, afraid of the consequences of coming out, yet later they declare the truth and try to hold on to it, protecting themselves and reaching a common ground with their fellow combatants.

Discrimination against LGBT service members

The most widespread cases include jokes and sexually explicit remarks; almost everybody had encountered them. Some people could become defensive and offended, while others treat it with humor and might respond in the same way: *“They make jokes about me, and I mock them in response.”* Sexually explicit offenses also happen but are rare; they are expressed by homophobes and in conflicts when people get personal. There are rare reported cases of unwanted sexually explicit calls and texts. There are almost no obscene sexual invitations (*“I got those from women but not from men”*). LGBT persons may receive threats to disclose their sexual orientation or other personal data in conflicts, but there are no threats to those who came out. People hiding their identity or orientation are also forced to come out because of this or resort to coming out as a result of being outed.

Factors for protecting from and preventing sexually explicit offenses: a person's psychological stability, support of their close ones, support of the LGBT community, and support of the commander and fellow combatants (if the latter are reasonable). People think it is better to deal with problems right away and not involve upper management, because if a commander is homophobic, he may later resort to physical abuse or threats. A gender advisor is seen as a nominal figure. LGBT persons do not mention it and do not find it to be an efficient mechanism, although they know it exists.

Communication and psychological support

Psycho-emotional state is assessed at 7 or 8 out of 10, on average. Although people may need psychological help, they either do not seek it or realize the request itself may be harmful due to unreasonableness and the low qualification of a psychologist. They do not turn to NAZVA as they find the structure inefficient.

Communication with servicemen and servicewomen differs: it is easier to communicate with women as they are less conflicting. Conflicts with men are more widespread – one participant reported several cases a day compared to once in a couple of months with women. Some people feel more included in conversations, others feel distanced; it depends on the attitude of fellow combatants, the general psychological state of the service member, and a person's self-appraisal and self-confidence.

SUMMARY

In general, attitudes towards the LGBT community have become better, there is no formal discrimination (in terms of salaries, medical services, career opportunities, social and military supplies; transfers to other units) or it exists only in separate branches of the military. There is a psychological and emotional attitude (non-acceptance, threats, inappropriate jokes, and bullying) and separate actions (more physical labor, yet the absence of physical violence).

LBT women are treated more favorably than GBT men: male company is more threatening for GBT men due to both latent homosexuals (due to ardent homophobia) and toxic masculinity (machismo, sexism, and objectification of women). Coming out is often accidental or forced, with common cases of being outed. Coming out is possible with the support of others and in an appropriate environment. However, the latter can rarely be found in the AFU. The interviewed LGBT service members shared that in many cases they are not subject to discrimination and abuse because they conceal their identity and orientation in fear of experiencing the former. Thus, conclusions about discrimination against LGBT service members refers only to those who revealed their orientation, as many people obviously refrained from doing so.

The changes in attitude towards LGBT service members in the army often occur against the backdrop of societal treatment: society gradually becomes more tolerant and knowledgeable, hence, the same happens in the AFU. The exceptions include separate homophobic communities and units (like the Azov regiment), where there might be LGBT soldiers who are not out.

The role of the commander and command in general is significant in terms of preventing discrimination and abuse against LGBT people in the military. If the commander is reasonable and accepting, it makes a tremendous difference throughout the unit. Similarly, an understanding commander may extend support or protection. However, if the command is homophobic, LGBT service members find themselves under tremendous stress. Hence, there is a demand for training and enlightenment regarding the LGBT community, attitudes, and interaction, especially for commanders and the command. Actually, not only LGBT people but all the discriminated groups demand such measures to be taken.

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LGBT PEOPLE IN THE AFU: VIEWPOINT OF SERVICEMEN

Discrimination against LGBT people is reducing and tolerance is somewhat higher now; there is a general societal trend towards it. However, homophobia and LGBT discrimination is far more common among men. Women are more tolerant and do not treat orientation and identity as a problem. Yet the army is still a man's world, where such elements as romanticizing masculinity, toxic masculinity, and outright fear and bias against losing this masculinity due to "wrong men" continue to be found. LBT women in the AFU have more favorable or neutral treatment. GBT men are subject to abuse and threats.

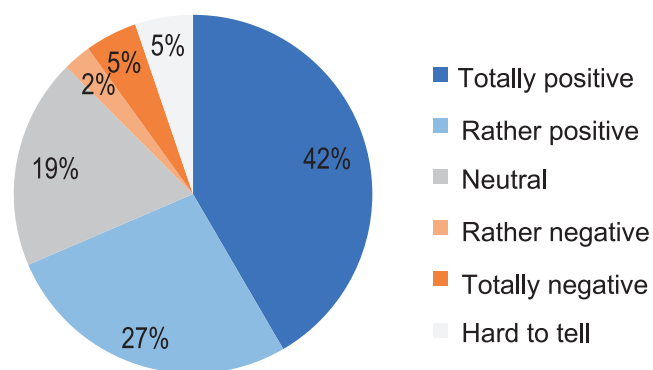
Private soldiers are more tolerant of the LGBT community than the commanders. They think everyone can serve the country, and orientation and identity are a private matter. There was one outright homophobe among the commanders, and two others were hostile towards LGBT service members: *“Let them create a separate battalion and serve there”*; *“They will corrupt my entire unit”*; *“We don’t need this here. Let them practice it at home”*; *“They may serve alright, but they should conceal their orientation.”* These respondents treated all the questions in an openly negative way, and they completely deny the right of a person to any sexual orientation and identity.

Still, some commanders adhered to the opposite position in line with that of private soldiers: *“It is their personal life, and no one is in charge to prohibit things for these people”*; *“Everyone in the military, everyone defending our country is entitled to it and deserves to be respected”*; *“I have never had any troubles with the LGBT service members; they’re just the same as everybody else.”* People know a few openly LGBT service members because there are really not very many, and some of them have not come out.

People treat the possibility of an LGBT commander with caution; they are tolerant and think that the main thing is for a person to be an experienced professional with the relevant values, able to interact, while *“whatever he does in his spare time is none of our business.”* Of course, the homophobes do not even want to imagine an LGBT commander, let alone the possibility of serving under one. However, some of them underlined that they do not violate any laws with their attitude towards LGBT people, yet cannot bear them at an emotional level.

It can be assumed that LGBT service members face discrimination due to biased attitudes, yet they (private soldiers and commanders) have not discriminated against anyone, except for the homophobic commanders who *“would not let one of their kind join my unit”* and will try to get rid of such a soldier.

According to the pan-Ukrainian survey, in spite of the predominant negative attitude towards the LGBT community, the public approves of the initiative for the partner of a deceased LGBT service member to be entitled to receive the body from the morgue (69% of respondents). Even half of those who had a negative attitude towards the LGBT community support such legislative changes.



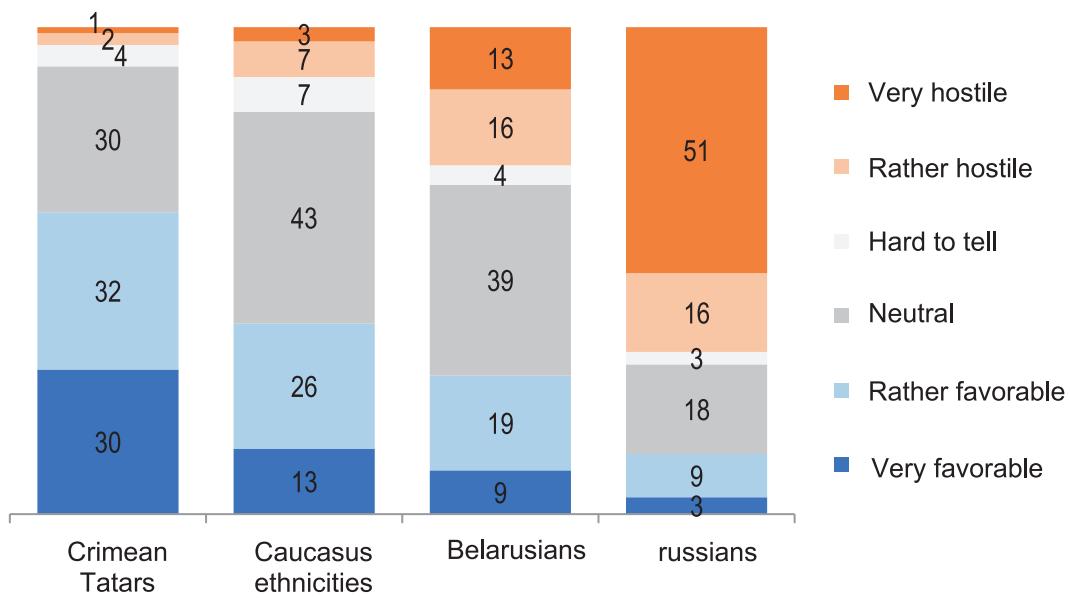
The focus group members hesitated about the possibility of the same rights for LGBT people as service members’ families: *“Let the law be adopted, then we’ll talk again.”* But personally, private soldiers and some commanders support the initiative of receiving the body of the deceased service member, but not material compensation. In this case, they believe the family of the deceased service member (parents) should get the money. The most tolerant respondents support the opportunity for LGBT people to get married and, hence, have all the same rights.

Generally, tolerant men (private soldiers and some commanders) think that professional skills define a person, while orientation is a personal matter. Homophobes see orientation as the defining feature overriding everything else, both professional skills and battlefield experience. They only accept that LGBT military men do not come out and they do not really understand the essence of coming out (*“So I’m a hetero, but I don’t go around informing everyone I see about it”*).

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST NATIONAL MINORITIES IN THE AFU

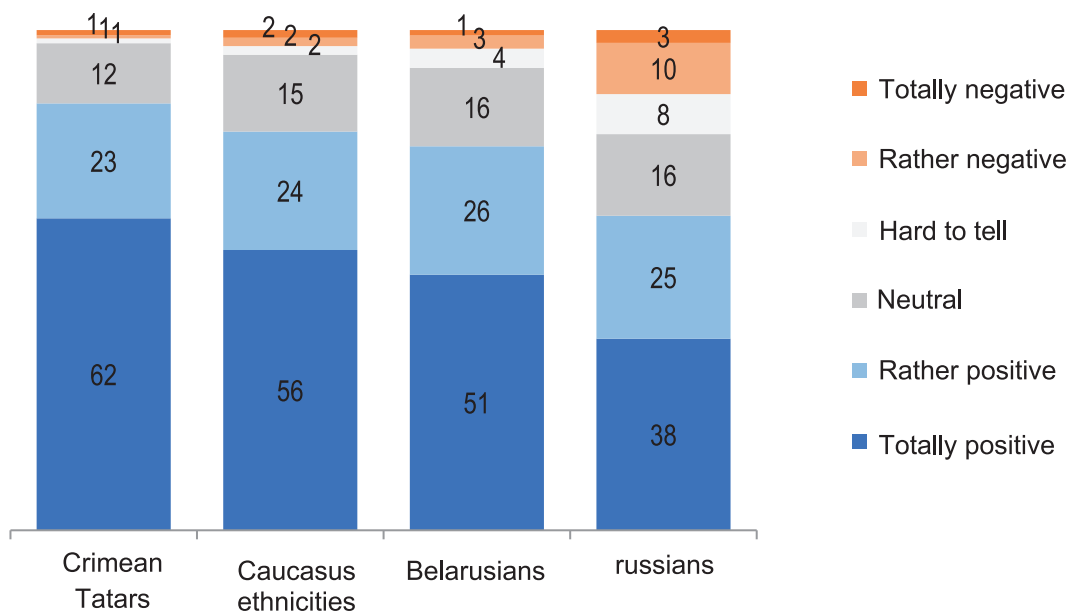
The results of the pan-Ukrainian survey indicate that there are differences in the treatment of civilian representatives of national minorities and those currently serving in the AFU. Generally, people treat representatives of other nationalities (except for russians) either rather positively or neutrally.

How would you assess your attitude towards representatives of national minorities?



On the other hand, the level of positive attitude soars in relation to foreign legions within the AFU. People even treat russians in the AFU positively (only 13% view them negatively).

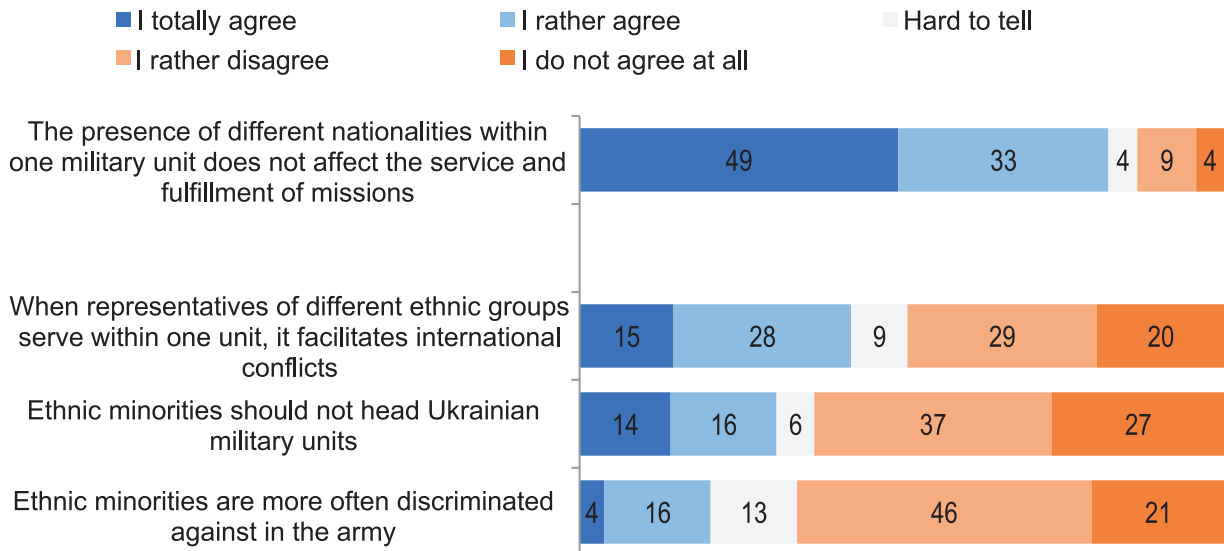
How do you treat foreign legions with representatives of the following nationalities serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine?



Nevertheless, some statements about national minorities serving in the AFU were somewhat controversial. While the majority (82%) agreed that the presence of different nationalities within one unit does not impact

the service, there were polar responses to the question about possible aggravation of international conflicts within one unit with representatives of different nations (44% agreed it was possible and 49% did not agree), while 30% of those surveyed supported the idea that ethnic minorities should not head Ukrainian units. The negative statements about ethnic minorities serving in the AFU were relatively more eagerly supported by residents of the western and central regions of Ukraine whose relatives currently serve in the AFU.

To what extent do you agree with the statement about national minorities serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine?



Nevertheless, the survey results evidenced low expectations about possible discrimination against national minorities serving in the AFU. The majority of focus group members also did not mention national minorities as a group that can be discriminated against. When asked directly, they said they have not come across this. The main argument of all the social groups is, *“If a person joined the AFU and defends our country with weapons, we are one of a kind.”* There were also a couple suggestions that Crimean Tatars are Muslims, which can lead to misunderstandings, yet it was rather a hypothesis. In terms of russians and Belarusians, *“They should be checked more thoroughly, but generally they are OK.”* None of the offered stereotypes was supported. Generally, the topic had small sensitivity potential and did not interest the respondents, who do not see why it is a problem.

The only exception was the issue of national minority commanders in Ukrainian units. Only one focus group participant (a commander) was strongly against the option: *“Why should a person outside Ukraine head a team of Ukrainians?”* At the same time, other commanders did not remark on it.

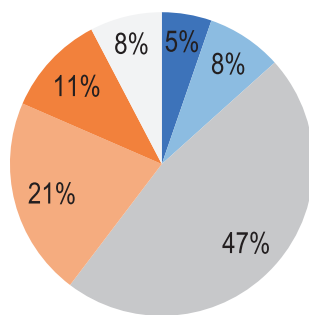
“If a person joined the AFU and defends our country with weapons, we are one of a kind.”

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CONVICTED MALE AND FEMALE AFU VETERANS

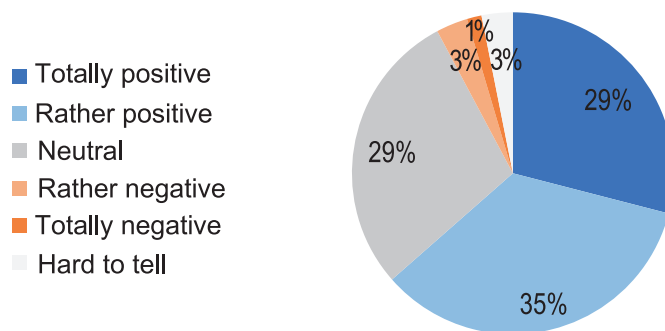
Most respondents of the pan-Ukrainian survey have a neutral/negative attitude towards the formerly convicted in the military. However, the attitude is much better concerning convicted male and female veterans who were pardoned after February 24, 2022, and are now serving in the AFU: more than 60% exhibit a positive attitude, while about 30% have a neutral position.

Expectations of possible discrimination against formerly convicted male and female veterans while serving in the AFU is somewhat higher compared to national minorities or women, with 24% claiming they might be discriminated against during military service.

How do you treat the formerly convicted?



How do you treat convicted male and female veterans pardoned after February 24, 2022, and now serving in the Ukrainian Armed Forces?



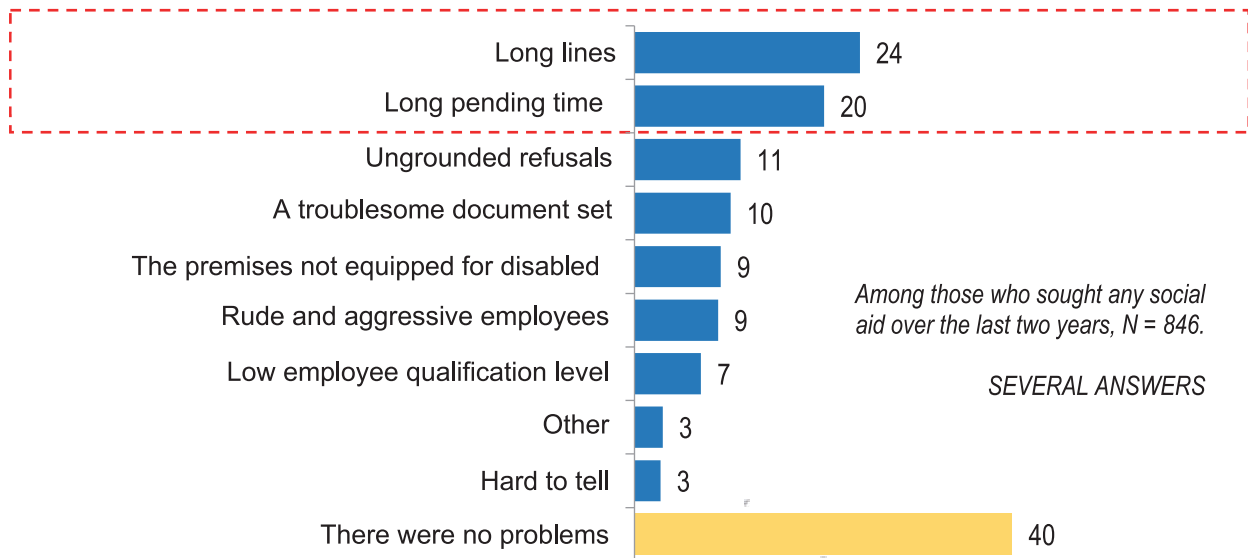
The majority of focus group participants also confirmed that anyone who is ready to fight against the enemy should be entitled to it. However, they delineate exceptions grave offenses (murder, rape, etc.). They also mentioned that military registration and enlistment offices refuse to draft these people and they are unlikely to be pardoned. The convicted who were pardoned should undergo a thorough check prior to being admitted to the army and there should be follow-up for some time (a month or two) to test their resilience towards illicit behavior and make sure they will not go back to old ways.

Focus group participants expressed concerns that formerly convicted people might create a negative moral and psychological atmosphere, encourage other soldiers into illegal conduct, and abuse alcohol and drugs more than other service members. However, these concerns generally do not impact the attitude towards formerly convicted male and female veterans who took up defending the country and were permitted to do it.

SOCIAL ISSUES

The pan-Ukrainian survey suggests that 42% of those surveyed sought social aid over the last two years. The majority of them reside in eastern Ukraine, are internally displaced persons (IDPs), or have relatives in the AFU. The most serious problems encountered when registering for social aid were long lines and pending time.

Have you or your close ones encountered the following problems when registering for social aid?



The focus group members who are service members and their relatives applied for various certificates less often. The injured ones were most likely to seek aid. The focus group participants also wanted to get combatant status certificates, utility bill benefits, and to register children in kindergartens/schools.

Problems:

- Huge bureaucracy and chaos, even if you have all the papers with you, they constantly demand more: *“If it were not for volunteers, I could not register so quickly”; “It is unreal, rushing the applicant from one entity to the other, demanding some fantastic documents: for example, a certificate from a unit that was eliminated”; “You pay for a service and have it done for you – this is the easiest way, as it is impossible to bear the procedure on your own”; “I managed to register everything I needed quickly and trouble-free on the first attempt, but I had done thorough preparatory work.”*
- Inhumane treatment towards the injured, especially severely injured: *“Is it OK, treating people like this? What about the medical commissions? Do they want to make sure a new leg has not grown?”; “The waiting is horrible. These are often people feeling very sick – are they supposed to sit on the floor for five hours?”*
- The civilian and military units that interact with service members who need to get documents: they hinder the process, demand documents are hard or impossible to get, send them from one entity to another, are very slow, do not work according to the schedule, etc.

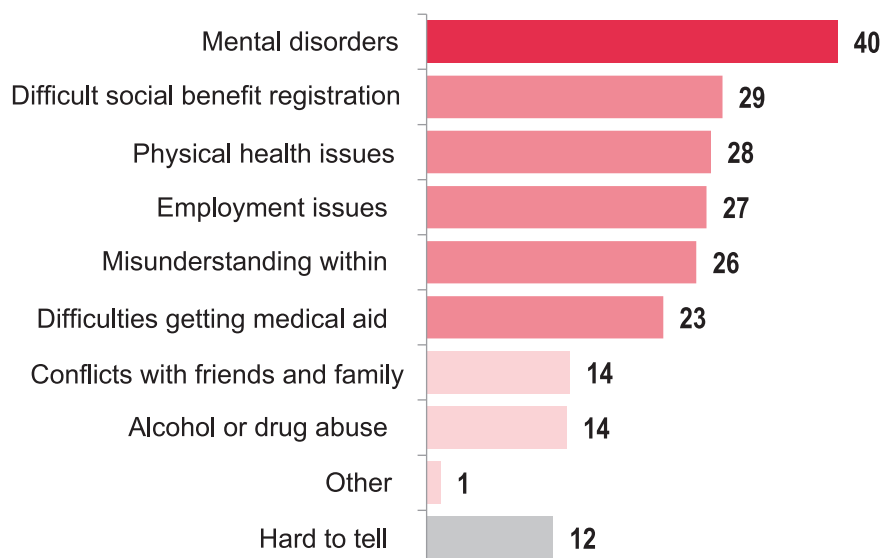
Suggestions for improvement:

- Electronic document flow like Diia (every group and interview participant mentioned it): *“Enough with paper! You go to some kind of app like Diia and have all the documents you need in your profile”*;
- Less bureaucracy and papers;
- Change the medical commission processes and the need to confirm the disability annually (e.g., due to amputation);
- Coordination between various structures that provide certificates;
- Special clarifications and accompanying service members to make the procedure faster and more understandable;
- Train the staff in charge of providing certificates in terms of working with service members and being responsible about their work.

MENTAL ISSUES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL AID

According to the 20th Pan-Ukrainian Survey “Ukraine During the War. The Image of a Veteran in Ukrainian Society” (January 14-16, 2023), mental disorders are one of the main issues the veterans of the Russian-Ukrainian war may encounter (40%). 23-29% report the main issues are difficulty registering for benefits, employment, medical aid, and misunderstanding within society. 14% of those surveyed mentioned conflicts with friends and family or alcohol and drug abuse as veterans’ issues.

What problems do you think veterans encounter most frequently?



Possible psychological issues in families

“The army is ideal for people who don’t have children and material or moral liabilities towards others, but the war affects everyone.” All the focus group participants (servicewomen, wives of servicemen, and servicemen) agree that the service in the AFU affects relationships between spouses and time spent on kids, especially when both spouses are in the military. Marriages between servicewomen and civilian men are the most problematic. Women who had civilian husbands divorced them specifically due to service in the AFU. Men, naturally, have it easier: their wives are often their reliable back line, offering emotional support, yet conflicts and divorces due to serving in the military do happen. Oftentimes, wives join their husbands in the military. These spouses tend to be more understanding and their relationships are better. *“They are concerned about their children who have no parental attention, especially their mothers”*; *“No one can replace a mom, and a child, especially a little one, misses the mother more.”*

Wives of servicemen report that their relationships got better because they began cherishing what is truly important: time together and life in general, and they got over petty issues. They support their husbands' choice (the volunteers). They have limited communication opportunities: *"I make videos with our kids for him. He watches them when he has internet connection"; "I see two checks indicating the read message and it is like communicating with me."* They are afraid for their husbands and experience constant anxiety and huge stress: *"When he doesn't call for several days, I am very nervous, I can't sleep."* The family, neighbors, and even strangers who find out the husband is in the military offer their help. They rather demand psychological support because household issues can easily be taken care of in the modern world: *"There is no need to split logs."* People may be misunderstood, especially in the eastern regions where there are residents who do not support Ukraine and still claim it is not so obvious. Yet they do not state their attitude out loud: *"They are aggressively silent."* However, generally both at work and in social life, service members are treated with understanding and support.

Psychological aid is a problematic area of the AFU for several reasons: low quality; low qualification of experts; lack of experts; and stereotypes and bias against psychologists, especially among men. Some respondents expressed negative reviews about the testing system (Adaptivity 200), which is morally outdated.

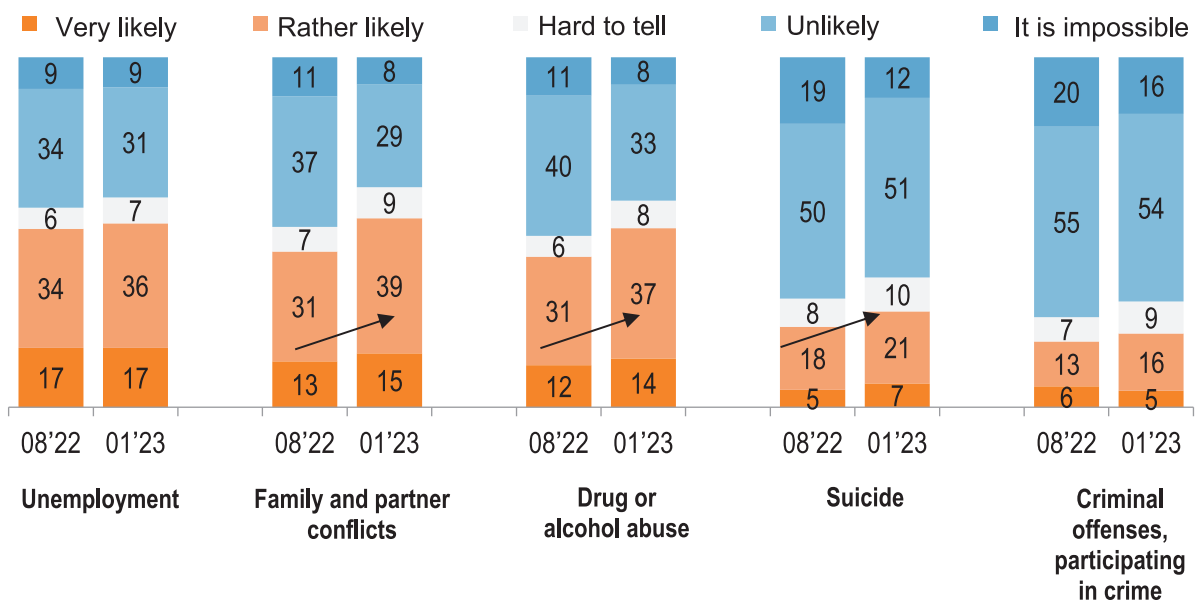
The majority assessed their psycho-emotional state with 5 points out of 10 (on average). Some offered 6 or 7, or even 8 or 9 points. At the same time, there were people who assessed their state as 2 and 3 out of 10. These conditions are usually occasional: *"When we lose our fellow combatants"; "I am 25, so when guys younger than me die, it is hard to comprehend."* Yet the majority of those surveyed try to cope on their own or with their family's support. However, men often referred to the support of their wives, while the wives do not have this experience: their husbands are often also in the military and in need of support, or men simply do not know how to be supportive, as they have not likely been brought up to be like that.

Service members usually do not seek help even if they feel they need it or they seek civilian psychologists. People who had a positive experience with psychologists report it was useful and necessary. Those with negative experience say that the skill level of AFU psychologists is really low and that they work for the command, not for the sake of the patient. The same goes for moral and psychological support commanders. Yet all the respondents agree that they need highly qualified and efficient psychological services in the AFU, as service members do have a lot of mental issues and disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, family problems, partner problems, high levels of stress, and grief related to loss of fellow combatants. This service will be especially in high demand after returning from the war for adaptation and resocialization purposes. Groups such as families of service members, families of the deceased, and service members with severe injuries and disabilities also need psychological aid. Both individual and group work will be useful. Women (wives of service members) who attended groups gave positive reviews about some of them.

EXPECTATIONS FOR RETURNING TO CIVILIAN LIFE: PROBLEMS

Family and partner conflicts, unemployment, and alcohol or drug abuse are the main issues the veterans of the Russian-Ukrainian war are highly likely to encounter when they return home, according to more than half of those surveyed for the 20th Pan-Ukrainian Survey “Ukraine During the War. The Image of a Veteran in Ukrainian Society” (January 14-16, 2023). The vast majority (at least two-thirds) think it the risk of suicide and criminal offenses is unlikely to happen to veterans. Compared to the August 2022 survey, more people expect the risk of family conflicts or alcohol and drug abuse, which are also the most burning problems reported by those close to ATO veterans who were and are in the military, while unemployment concerns are expressed by the families of the demobilized. Women more often than men mentioned the risks of family conflicts and unemployment for veterans. Men more often than women referred to the issues of drug abuse or criminal offenses.

Assess the level of risk of the following for the veterans who will return from the Russian-Ukrainian war



The majority of focus group participants indicated that returning will be accompanied by numerous problems, yet the specifics will depend on the time and outcome of the war. For instance, another year will yield a milder aftermath, but if the war lasts longer, all the issues mentioned will be aggravated due to greater losses, more damage, longer times on the battlefield, and lower chances to recover and adapt quickly. Women, men, and wives of the service members referred to a similar scope of problems.

- Social and psychological adaptation to peaceful times: mental trauma, stress, PTSD, depression, and mental disorders.
- Resocialization: the ability to re-learn to live in peaceful times as civilians.
- Looking for work due to loss of a job or professional degradation during 2-3 years of war: *“I will forget everything I knew,” “I got a new profession in the army, but will it be in demand in civilian life?”*
- Salary: *“My family is used to a high salary and a certain way of life – will I be able to keep it when I return?”*
- Health issues that many people will face: injuries, loss of extremities, and disabilities.
- Barrier-free environment in cities: *“There will be a lot of people with limited physical capabilities; they will need transportation, ramps, elevators, etc.”*

- Society's attitude and its ingratitude and short memory: *"While the rockets are falling and there is a threat, people are afraid and grateful, but as soon as the threat is over, they forget about the war and about us"; "We did not send you there."*
- Payments and social benefits for the war veterans, of whom there will be many.
- Problems with family and friends, searching for a new partner (for women): *"My civilian friends became very distant: there is not much to talk about"; "I argue with my spouse because of my mental state"; "I don't know whether I, a servicewoman, will interest civilian men, and vice versa."*
- Women's reproductive issues: *"Will I be able to give birth after this? How will war impact my health? A lot of women returning from the war cannot get pregnant."*

Dominant problems and engaging the state

The majority see the dominant problems are social and psychological adaptation, employment, and physical recovery (including prostheses).

- Respondents see this mainly as the responsibility of the state: *"We went to the war to protect our state, so later it will have to protect us."*
- The state, international organizations, foundations, volunteers, and society as a whole should take responsibility: *"The state does not have enough resources, a lot of people will need aid."*
- Service members will need to engage: *"I am also responsible for the way my life will be"; "I don't want to simply wait for the benefits or retirement, I want to have some opportunities, grab them, be active."*
- Ukrainian foundations, international foundations, and civil society organizations will be appealed to: *"We will accept anyone's help"; "We should be in this together: the state, us, society, and various organizations."*

"We went to the war to protect our state, so later it will have to protect us."

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DISCRIMINATION

OF VARIOUS SOCIAL GROUPS IN THE UAF:

Viewpoints of the Military Servants and Civilians

Results of a comprehensive study
March–April 2023