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FOREWORD

In my hands I am holding the final draft of the soon-to-be-published book Navigator 1325, and I am excited: we did it! We are now entering the twelfth year of russia's armed aggression against our country. All of us are utterly exhausted by the losses and painful wounds, by the constant sirens warning of airborne threats from the russian federation, by explosions in the middle of the night that cut off electricity and leave us without water and heat, by uncertain expectations and fragile peace guarantees, by the struggle to harvest crops in mined fields, which are then transported along railroad tracks being destroyed by russia, as well as by the numerous other trials that are the result of this war. And yet, despite all these trials, Ukraine lives on and continues to function. As a nation, we are acquiring substantial experience in endurance and resilience, experience that we are ready to share with the world, knowing that many will find such experience useful. And we write books to tell the story of our innovations and experiences that are interesting, practical, and valuable.

For precisely these reasons we wanted to, and did write, Navigator 1325! And we had every reason to do so: cooperation with government institutions, international partners, Coalitions 1325, and numerous civil society organizations, including the Ukrainian Women's Fund (UWF), which willingly supports and helps implement meaningful

and much-needed initiatives, has enabled a comprehensive, multidimensional view of pressing issues. Together with the UWF, we are preparing our third publication, a collection of author's views devoted to explaining Ukraine's positive practices in addressing the challenges of war, as well as support for those most affected. Two previous books, *Ukraine Is Not Silent: Chronicles of Fighting Against War-Related Sexual Violence (2022–2024)* and *CRSV: A War Crime with No Statute of Limitations*, have already found their readers in Ukraine and beyond. Their international visibility was also boosted by the fact that the first publication was translated into English and presented at United Nations venues in New York and Geneva, at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, at the OSCE in Vienna, and at the European Union and NATO in Brussels. We also present these publications to world leaders and to members of royal families, all who support Ukraine in its struggle, as well as to prominent political and civic figures. And we receive positive feedback: people request additional copies to distribute.

The world wants to know about Ukraine, about how Ukrainian women and men resist evil and defend their democratic choice, about who helps us fight and how they help. The world wants to assess the important work done to protect those affected by Russian aggression, assess our country in which such a system has been established through cooperation among Ukrainian government institutions, civil society, and international organizations. The first two publications mentioned above describe Ukraine's experience in addressing the consequences of horrific crimes committed by Russian military personnel against Ukrainian civilians, specifically conflict-related sexual violence, and at the same time highlight the role of those affected, both women and men, in the struggle for justice, recognize the effort to build a support

system, and the methods used to institutionalize this work.

Ukraine's experience of women's participation in overcoming the challenges of war is multifaceted: women join the security and defense sector to serve and work, master new professions previously considered to be most suitable for men, dismantle harmful social stereotypes. Ukraine's women work in diplomacy, engage in negotiation processes at various levels, and advance the interests of Ukraine thanks to active women diplomats and women politicians, as well as thanks to a united women's movement in Ukraine and worldwide.

Foremost, all these issues are related to UN Security Council Resolution 1325, Women, Peace, and Security and companion resolutions: 1820, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242, and others. Currently, this international agenda has become particularly relevant for Ukraine, especially in its practical application. For we not only use the approaches proposed in these resolutions, but we also strengthen them with our own vision and new implementation mechanisms. In recent years, Ukraine has acquired an entire portfolio of positive practices in this area, a fact about which I am very proud, and to which I feel personally connected, as I serve as the National Coordinator for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in Ukraine. Information about many of these practices can be obtained through social media. These practices are discussed during various meetings and disseminated by word of mouth. However, in such cases, the audience remains limited and valuable developments are discussed within narrow professional circles. The publication of a book is different. A book can reach a wide range of readers, including international readers. A book can preserve institutional memory, and the book's content may become especially relevant for some in the future. For these reasons we decided to tell the story of our colleagues who, during martial law, do

not fold their wings, but continue to fight, work, support, and inspire each other and others. Resolution 1325 is precisely about this topic: women's leadership and confidence in their own strength during severe trials.

This was the motivation behind Navigator 1325. This publication is our conversation with like-minded people and an expansion of the circle of those who understand gender equality issues. The book is an exchange of experience and an opportunity to advocate for all aspects of the WPS agenda. This publication is also a token of gratitude to those with whom we have been fortunate to work in this field and advance important achievements, and to those who believe that this work is critically important. I would like to note that our book was made possible thanks to the financial support of the Government of the United Kingdom, which contributes to the implementation of the UWF project Women. Peace. Security: Acting Together.

Gender equality policy in Ukraine is grounded in the political will of the state. Since 2016, coordination of this work has been the responsibility of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. This position has been held by Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze, Vadym Prystaiko, Dmytro Kuleba, and Olha Stefanishyna. In July 2025, Taras Kachka was appointed to the post. Each has their own working style, but they share a common feature: the systematic integration of European rules and values into Ukrainian realities, including equal rights and opportunities for women and men. They have supported, and continue to support, initiatives in this field originating both from state institutions and from civil society, and they have developed cooperation with international organizations to implement such activities. In 2017, Ukraine introduced the position of Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, which I have

held since 2018. This is further confirmation of Ukraine's European choice and the importance of protecting human rights. In our work, we have always found common ground and support from the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights Dmytro Lubinets, his representatives, and members of his team. We thank them all.

Staunch support for gender policy also comes from women who are Members of Parliament of Ukraine, as well as from those who belong to the Inter-Faction Association (IFA) Equal Opportunities, established in 2011. The IFA advocates for developing the necessary legislative framework for advancing gender equality, expanding women's leadership, and combating gender stereotypes, violence, and discrimination. I will name those with whom we work closely and whose efforts have already turned initiatives for change and development into a positive reality: Maryna Bardina, Lesia Vasylenko, Iryna Herashchenko, Mariia Ionova, Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze, Olena Kondratiuk, Yevheniia Kravchuk, Maria Mezentseva, Iryna Nikorak, Inna Sovsun, Iryna Friz, Olena Khomenko, Olena Shuliak, Nelli Yakovlieva, and many others. They draft and advocate bills that support equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the security and defense sector, support citizens affected by Russia's aggression, including survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, support laws for the implementation of urgent interim reparations and support for the provisions of the Istanbul Convention. They participate in international negotiations to support Ukraine's struggle against Russian aggression and serve as mentors to women leaders, supporting their participation in decision-making at various levels. Certain legislators also implement practical innovations needed during this time of war. For example, Iryna Nikorak is the founder of the social initiative Arm Women Now that pro-

duces women's military apparel and provides this apparel to women service members in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. In this area, providing military apparel appropriate for women, is a topic on which only a few countries in the world have relevant experience, and this topic is the focus of one of the chapters in this book. Reliable partnerships with international organizations, especially with UN Women in Ukraine, as well as at the regional and global levels, are a prerequisite for effective work, active communication, and Ukraine's presence on global platforms.

In this book there are twenty-five chapters. The number 25 was the basis for the concept of this book from the very beginning, because in 2025, Resolution 1325 marked its 25th anniversary. In this way, we highlight Ukraine's affinity with international practice. The provisions of Resolution 1325 become truly effective when an ever-growing number of actors implement them and when they form the basis for public policy in various countries. Ukraine is building its European path on the standards of international law. We are conscientious members of the UN and other international organizations. We value our partners' achievements and make use of them. In keeping with current European Union practice, Ukraine began to apply the Gender Equality Index. Together with international partners, we are developing the Platform for Gender Mainstreaming and Inclusion in Recovery, as well as the International Alliance for Gender-Responsive Recovery. We not only adopt solutions, but we also share those developments that were first introduced in our country. There is a strong example of this. Iryna Dovhan, founder and head of the CRSV survivors' network SEMA-Ukraine and a member of the Board of the Global Survivors Fund (GSF), has reported that GSF plans to use the procedures, documents, and approaches developed in Ukraine to pay compensation,

as part of urgent interim reparations, to CRSV survivors in Syria, where the organization also operates.

Another example is that based on the model of the national helplines developed by La Strada Ukraine, similar tools for contacting and supporting those affected by domestic violence, including gender-based violence, human trafficking, and discrimination on the grounds of sex, were established in the Republic of Moldova. In other countries, Ukraine's experience in producing military uniforms for women, as well as other noteworthy innovations, is being studied. Above lessons and others are available in Navigator 1325.

Among the topics covered in the chapters of this book include establishing a system to protect and support those affected by Russia's war crimes with the provision of urgent interim reparations that include services for survivors, the establishment of Centers for the Assistance of Rescued Persons, providing shelters, the Aurora online platform, the Assistance Platform for Rescued Persons, and the National Hotline for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, Human Trafficking, and Gender Discrimination.

Tools for implementing gender policy and the 1325 agenda include introducing the European Union Gender Equality Index in Ukraine, conducting security audits of communities and territories, the La Strada Ukraine's national networks of trainers and mediators, guidelines for integrating gender approaches into the training system for specialists in Ukraine's security and defense sector, embedding gender issues in contemporary art, expanding the work of gender analytical centers, and research into the gender profile of Ukraine's media.

Paths and formats for institutionalizing policy included preparing National Action Plans (NAPs) 1325 and localizing them in the regions through Coalitions 1325, enacting the Implementation Plan for the Cooperation Framework be-

tween the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, introducing the institution of gender advisers, building the Ukrainian Association of Women in Law Enforcement, establishing the Platform for Gender Mainstreaming and Inclusion in Recovery, and marking the 140th anniversary of the Ukrainian women's movement.

We also paid particular attention to overcoming gender barriers for women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, from producing military uniforms for women service members to the work of the SUPPORT! centers that help military families.

Three chapters became true research studies: Women in Peacemaking, Women in Diplomacy, and the World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations. We wanted to present these topics in their development, because we have been building experience in these areas for many years, and that confirms the significance of Ukrainian history. Today, we continue long-standing traditions, keep improving, and continue to make plans. This process is ongoing.

Navigator 1325 has three authors, more precisely, two women authors and one male author. Yet in fact the circle of those involved in preparation of the book is much wider. In this work, we were supported by partners from civil society and international organizations, government institutions, local authorities, and communities. Colleagues shared compelling materials, information and reflections, expert opinions, and analytical work. We are deeply grateful to everyone; we are always together with you! The most frequently used words in our publication are not only "Resolution 1325," but also "help" and "support" and this is no coincidence. This is the style of our life and our work.

Throughout the 25th anniversary year, we spoke a great deal about Resolution 1325, and naturally so. Time passes,

but the document does not lose relevance. On the contrary, the mandates of 1325 increasingly are taking shape as concrete action plans being developed in countries worldwide to strengthen the momentum of gender transformation and to ensure further progress. In Ukraine, in 2025, we developed the third National Action Plan 1325, a plan that continues through 2030. We believe that, as we plan our future, we will always keep in view issues of security, early identification of threats, and timely response. We also note this in Navigator 1325.

The cover of this book is another innovation in how we promote Resolution 1325. On the days marking the solemn anniversary of the document's adoption, an art project was launched in Kyiv to visualize the Women, Peace, and Security agenda through original paintings, each dedicated to one of the resolutions within the WPS agenda. These works of art were created by people about most of whom you will read in this book. These artworks tell the story of women's role in strengthening security and in Ukraine's recovery. When we take such ideas not only through the mind, but also through the heart, they truly become a shared legacy.

*KATERYNA LEVCHENKO,
Government Commissioner for Gender Policy,
National Coordinator for the Implementation of
UN Security Council Resolution 1325*

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, Women, Peace, and Security was adopted at the beginning of the millennium, and this fact is truly symbolic. At the time, the world was increasingly embracing new standards of democratic development, recognizing the significant role women play in the prevention of conflict and in peacebuilding. Each country pursued its own goals and distinctive approaches in implementing the provisions of UNSC Res 1325. For Ukraine, these provisions took on very practical significance after Russia seized a part of our territory in 2014. Now, with the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of our land having continued for four years, I believe that everything happening to the women of Ukraine relates to the agenda set by this vital UN decision. We must learn how to respond to today's war-driven challenges and proceed to overcome them. For this reason, mastery of the approaches of UNSC Res 1325 is important, important to make these approaches a norm of daily life, as well as a foundation for our strategic vision.

The Ukrainian Women's Fund long has been engaged with Resolution 1325. Yes, engaged, because this international document does not offer us merely models for work related to our defense and security. We are actively developing experience that is being renewed consistently in broader practice. In this way, with our experience, we can significantly influence how equal rights for women and men are incorporated

through the 1325 agenda, and how this experience can have a positive impact on preventing armed conflict and aggression across continents, as well as protecting those who suffer most from armed aggression. For this reason, the UWF was eager to launch the project Women. Peace. Security: Acting Together.¹ The Government of the United Kingdom provided financial support for this project, substantial assistance that we deeply value.

The project had several distinctive features. First, it was designed for a relatively short implementation period: from June 1, 2024, to December 31, 2025. This made our work especially intensive. In the span of 18 months, we needed to complete an entire range of important tasks. Key among them was a focus on localizing the National Action Plan (NAP) 1325 developed by the Government of Ukraine in cooperation with civil society, as well as with international organizations, and to implement the localization with the support of Coalitions 1325, another innovation initiated by the UWF to bring the provisions of UNSC Res1325 to Ukraine's regions and communities. Today, with support from the governments of the United Kingdom, Canada, and the Netherlands, Coalitions 1325 operate in all regions of Ukraine.

The next feature, or rather, the project's uniqueness, was that the project was implemented by a consortium of six of Ukraine's strongest and most experienced women's civil society organizations: the Public Health Foundation, the Women's Perspectives Center, the Women's Information Consultative Center, the Ukrainian Association of Women Lawyers Jurfem, La Strada Ukraine, and the Ukrainian Women's Fund. The effort also included a government partner without whom meeting our goals would have been difficult: the Office of the

¹ Ukrainian Women's Fund, <https://uwf.org.ua/zhinky-myr-bezpeka-diyemo-razom/>

Government Commissioner for Gender Policy. This combination of effort and clear coordination among implementers was not merely mutual support, it was the creation of a cohesive, results-oriented team that knew how to define responsibilities for each participant and unite efforts for the common good. Thanks to building such a system, we worked truly effectively.

The role of civil society is enormous. First, civil society takes on much of the service work on the ground, from general humanitarian support (which is delivered, for the most part, by civil society organizations) to direct assistance to people. At the same time, women's civil society organizations advocate, collaborate with authorities, and implement the provisions of the NAP 1325 in practice. They do this quite successfully because they know the local people, know their needs, and, crucially, which tools can be used to resolve emerging problems effectively. In wartime Ukraine, civil society organizations also preserve institutional memory remarkably well, making long-term planning possible.

The project established several objectives. Among these objectives were strengthening the resilience of Ukrainian communities, nurturing local women leaders, and expanding their opportunities and prospects, increasing women's representation in leadership positions within the security and defense sector and then using that influence to support gender-sensitive and inclusive postwar recovery and reconstruction in Ukraine.

The project's target audience was envisioned to be quite broad. The audiences included women in the security and defense sector, especially those serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, as well as those serving in the police, emergency, and border services. This audience focus is not only an essential component of the work, but also the basis around which many related tasks must be organized. In recent years,

women and girls have been joining the security services in growing numbers, and they need appropriate support, ensuring equal rights with men in professional matters and in everyday interaction, while also fostering a culture of gender equality in their workplace or unit. The project also was designed to support women affected by the war, including IDPs, women living in areas close to hostilities, older women, women with disabilities, women from national minorities, family members of women and men war veterans, and women who lost their jobs or income because of military action or displacement.

When we assessed the areas in which we worked, it became clear that we had to respond to virtually all war-related challenges affecting Ukrainian women. Today, there are no “invulnerable” groups in Ukraine, in fact, we refer to this situation as “multiple vulnerability.”

At the same time, during our process, new groups of women emerged, groups that were then included in this project and to whom we provided support. One such group is military families. This group is not homogeneous, because the group includes people in quite different circumstances. This group includes widows, women waiting for their loved ones to return from the front, as well as those whose loved ones are being held in Russian captivity. Each of these categories has distinct needs, and the legal framework for support differs, as well. The most vulnerable are the families of missing service members. Psychologists confirm that this group is the most difficult to work with because of the uncertainty they constantly face. In Ukraine, civil society organizations support these families, and our project aimed to equip them with the tools necessary for high-quality and effective work.

What has been achieved through the Women, Peace, and Security: Acting Together project? We created models

of best practices launched within the project. These include the SUPPORT! centers, gender-sensitive security audits, and strengthening the system for localizing the NAP 1325 that included bringing in new implementers, building cooperation in the regions, and supporting communities. Communications campaigns about the WPS agenda were also essential and were a major success. So, too, was the work related to Ukraine's recovery plans and ensuring that these recovery processes reflect women's interests and inclusive approaches. Ukraine is already developing relevant projects with various business partners, including international ones, so this topic is particularly visible for us. During the project, we supported the work of the Platform for Gender Mainstreaming in Recovery and the civil society advisory panel within that Platform.

The innovations tested during the project are, in fact, extremely important. They are modern, effective, and relevant. Most importantly, they have already become part of Ukraine's experience that can enrich international practice in implementing UNSC Res 1325. In truth, we have many valuable, non-standard developments across different fields, especially because Ukraine is sharing its experience on security issues and women's participation in peacebuilding during wartime, making this experience particularly meaningful.

This experience is not merely important but also must be shared. For this reason, Navigator 1325 was created. For the UWF, this effort to share has also become a tradition. We are offering readers a third publication in recent years that summarizes Ukraine's efforts to meet war-related challenges and to support those affected by such challenges. Books such as these focus on best practices in multiple areas and have become powerful advocacy tools both within the country and on international platforms.

Navigator 1325 is dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the UNSC Res 1325, Women, Peace, and Security and, therefore, brings together twenty-five chapters of successful practices of implementing the resolution's provisions. These practices include the work of the 1325 Coalitions at the local level, reforming law enforcement agencies to support equal rights for women and men, the enactment of the Implementation Plan under the Framework of Cooperation between the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations on preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence, introducing the Gender Equality Index, and numerous procedural guidelines for integrating gender approaches into the training system for specialists in Ukraine's security and defense sector. These practices also include the work of centers assisting survivors and military families, as well as gender analytical centers. Equally important is the experience of Ukrainian women in diplomacy and peace processes, as well as support for the Ukrainian women's movement in Ukraine, and beyond Ukraine's borders through the efforts of World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations (WFUWO). The book also presents other achievements that can be useful both in Ukraine and in other countries.

The book's journalistic, public-facing format is especially important for readers who are not familiar with the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. My experience with this project, and with security audits, has shown me how often our understanding of the situation we live in is limited. We may begin to think that having no shelter is normal, or that safe shelter is inaccessible simply because "that is life." However, the book explains how various situations should be. Also, the text is written in accessible language, which means the publication can appeal to a wide circle of readers.

And this accessibility applies both to individuals, as well

as to communities. These practices can be applied in personal life, at the community level, and at the national level. The stories presented in the book explain the importance of bringing the provisions of UNSC Res 1325 into our daily lives, and how this incorporation can be done.

The book summarizes the extensive work Ukraine has done to implement the provisions of UNSC Res 1325. While reading the book, the truly immense experience gained in this field by our country becomes clear. Such experience is worthy of being applied to our personal lives, so that we can move forward, and there are experiences that deserve to be shared with the world, as well. In the end, for these reasons, the book was written.

*NATALIA KARBOWSKA,
Director of Strategic Development,
Ukrainian Women's Fund*

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- AFU – Armed Forces of Ukraine
- ATC – Amalgamated Territorial Community
- ATO – Anti-Terrorist Operation (in Eastern Ukraine)
- AWN – Arm Women Now
- CRSV – Conflict-related sexual violence
- CSO – Civil society organization
- EBRD – European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
- EIB – European Investment Bank
- EIGE – European Institute for Gender Equality
- EU – European Union
- EUAM – European Union Advisory Mission
- GAC – Gender Analytical Centers (Gender Think Tanks)
- GEI – Gender Equality Index
- IACC – Independent Anti-Corruption Commission (NAKO)
- IAWP – International Association of Women Police
- ICF – International Charitable Foundation
- IDP – Internally displaced person
- ILI – International Liberty Institute
- LSG – Local self-government body

MES – Ministry of Education and Science
MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MIA – Ministry of Internal Affairs
Ministry of Economy – Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture
Ministry of Social Policy – Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity
MoD – Ministry of Defense
MoH – Ministry of Health
NAP – National Action Plan
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO – Non-governmental organization
NMN – National Mediators Network (La Strada–Ukraine)
NSSU – National Social Service of Ukraine
NTN – National Trainers Network (La Strada–Ukraine)
RAP – Regional Action Plan
RMA – Regional Military Administration
SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals
SDS – Security and Defense Sector
UAE – United Arab Emirates
UAWLE – Ukrainian Association of Women in Law Enforcement
UFPH – Ukrainian Foundation for Public Health
UIR – Urgent interim reparations
UN – United Nations

UNSC Res 1325 – United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, Women, Peace, and Security

UN Women – United Nations entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women

UNGA – United Nations General Assembly

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

URC – Ukraine Recovery Conference

UTMC – Ukrainian Training and Methodology Center

UWF – Ukrainian Women’s Fund

UWI – Ukrainian Women’s Initiative

WPS – Women, Peace, and Security

Ukraine’s National Commission for State Language Standards has ruled that writing «russia,» «moscow,» “russian federation” and related terms in lowercase is not considered a spelling error, allowing for the change as a response to russia’s ongoing war against Ukraine. In keeping with this ruling, Navigator 1325 does not use uppercase for “russia” and related terms.

With a few exceptions, the English-language translation of Navigator 1325 was edited in accordance with the Chicago Manual of Style 18th Edition.

CHAPTER 1

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN 1325 AND THE INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM FOR IMPLEMENTATION

SECTION 1. NATIONAL ACTION PLAN TO IMPLEMENT UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325 WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY

When using AI to search for information about national action plans (NAP) to implement UNSC Resolution 1325, the NAP 1325 search results were returned with an error when asked which country first adopted the resolution. The response was Ukraine. However, this reply is not completely accurate; Ukraine was the first country in the world to adopt a NAP 1325 during an armed conflict, a conflict caused by Russian aggression. Other nations developed and adopted such national action plans earlier, during times of peace. This fact alone is unique and telling. In Ukraine, on one hand, there was a clear awareness of women's growing role in overcoming conflicts and peacebuilding and of the need for their integration into the security sector. On the other hand, Ukraine planned actions in a practical way, testing new tools for implementing state policy on issues of gender equality and human rights protection, and countering military challenges that significantly harm women and girls.

As a Security Council document in the field of women's rights and gender equality, UNSC Resolution 1325 provides that UN Member States must develop a NAP for implementation. Such decisions were made more quickly by countries with developed feminist movements where gender equality issues are no longer a contentious point. In these countries, the transition from the stage of discussion to real life implementation was swifter. According to Lieutenant Colonel Rachel Grimes, lead military officer on the NAP for integration of Women, Peace, and Security in UK Defence, the first NAPs that were introduced two decades ago, in 2005, had to serve as an example of how UNSC Resolution 1325 can be implemented and how to prevent insufficient accountability. "I applaud Denmark as the first Member State to have an NAP and Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom for being close behind."²

Since then, countries on different continents have been developing and implementing their own NAPs, with many currently on their third or even fourth NAP for Resolution 1325. These strategic documents show a country's readiness to overcome security issues, as well as protect human rights and facilitate the development of democracy.

The first NAP in Canada was adopted in 2010. Currently, the country is implementing its third NAP for the years 2023–2029 that involves integrating gender principles into the planning and implementation of the country's foreign policy, as well as into peacekeeping activities. Chile approved its second NAP in 2015. Chile's NAP includes indicators and a monitoring system to assess implementation. The NAP does not contain a dedicated budget, instead stating that each coordinating institution is responsible for financing the identi-

² NATO REVIEW, October 31, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/4d46tavv>

fied activities through its annual budget. Argentina supported its first NAP in 2015 and published a second plan in 2022. Iraq adopted its first National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security in 2014 for the period until 2018, becoming the first country in the Middle East and North Africa region to adopt a NAP.³

In the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (East Timor), a country in Southeast Asia with a population of 1.4 million that became sovereign in 2002, the first NAP was adopted in 2016, and the implementation is intended for the period until 2028. The NAP is designed to draw on the lessons and experiences of women and men from the occupation of East Timor and to affirm that, although the war is over, women continue to fight for justice and equal rights today. The NAP includes specific actions to review and improve laws, policies, and programs to enhance women's active and meaningful participation in all aspects of peace and state-building.⁴

In the Netherlands, the first three NAPs were implemented in 2008–2011, 2012–2015, and 2016–2019. Today, the country is on its fourth National Action Plan designed until the end of 2025.⁵ In the Netherlands, the non-governmental organization WO=MEN (Women Equal Men) joined in the development of the plan. “We have quite a prominent example of civil society working with the government to develop plans aligned with their audiences’ needs. They jointly develop a NAP 1325, then they jointly implement it,” shared Director, Strategic Development at the Ukrainian Women’s Fund (UWF) Natalia Karbowska. “The state pays NGOs for their work. Ukraine followed in the footsteps of the Netherlands with this approach, except for the financial element.”

³ <https://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/nap-overview/>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

In the Netherlands, the main plan is a framework document, and specific activities are identified by the implementers themselves; they sign the NAP and form their own plans, which ensures flexibility and accountability during implementation. A similar model is used in Sweden, where the master plan is general, and the actual goals and actions are determined through local or departmental plans. In Ireland, a special monitoring group has been established to monitor the implementation of the NAP, and in Croatia, great attention is paid to security risks in the context of the Resolution.

«The National Action Plan is important not only as a tool to respond to security challenges. It is a strategic framework to anticipate new possible challenges and be prepared to overcome them.»

**Olesya Bondar, Director,
Ukrainian Women's Fund**

As of August 2025, NAP 1325 has been adopted in 110 countries worldwide.⁶

First NAP 1325 (2016–2020)

“In Ukraine, formally, we are on our second National Action Plan, and in reality, our fourth,” said Halyna Zhukovska, Senior Assistant, Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy in Ukraine. Both NAPs, which were adopted in 2016 and 2020, later required major updates, so they underwent significant changes and additions (in 2018 and 2022). With the war ongoing in Ukraine, new security-related challenges emerge every day that require an appropriate response, which means amendments are inevitable.

⁶ Ibid.

“Ukraine worked on NAP 1325 in a unique manner . First, all NAPs were adopted during active hostilities. The second feature is their localization. Localization at the central level occurs in the security and defense sector, where they develop and approve their action plans to implement the National Plan. There is also regional localization since oblast (regional) action plans are developed, as well, and subsequently approved by the head of the oblast (regional) military administration.”

***Halyna Zhukovska, Senior Assistant,
Office of the Government Commissioner
for Gender Policy***

When Ukraine’s first NAP 1325 was being approved in 2016,⁷ one of the biggest challenges indicated was russia’s armed attack and the resulting humanitarian crisis that exacerbated gender inequality in access to resources and decision-making processes, limiting women’s participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery. Among internally displaced persons (IDPs), the majority were women, who also were the ones who had more issues with employment and experienced socio-economic and financial difficulties. Reports of sexual violence committed by russian soldiers began to arrive from the Ukrainian territories temporarily occupied by the russian federation. The provisions of Resolution 1325 have become particularly relevant in Ukraine’s situation. “The UNSC Resolution is actually near and dear to us because it’s about our everyday life,” noted Natalia Karbowska. The preparation of the NAP was only a matter of time,

⁷ Cabinet Resolution No. 133 of February 24, 2016, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/113-2016-%D1%80#Text>

especially after civil society organizations began to actively lobby for its promotion. This particularly concerns the Women’s Information and Advisory Center and its founder and senior analyst Olena Suslova, who raised multiple questions in this area, and the NGO La Strada Ukraine. Their cooperation with state structures assumed a concrete form.

Ukraine’s first NAP focused, in particular, on the need to conduct research on the impact of russia’s armed aggression in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions on women and girls, men and boys, taking into account age and other social characteristics, in particular the risks of gender-based violence, sexual violence, as well as on the analysis of access to justice, medical and social services for women on the contact line and in territories not controlled by Ukraine (provision of free legal aid, administrative services, primarily social services). The Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, NGOs, and international organizations (with their agreement) were invited to participate in the analysis of the experience and conditions for ensuring the participation of women in international peacekeeping processes, negotiation groups, and multilateral measures to counter external and internal security threats.

Among the key implementation results of the NAP in 2016–2020 were the following:

- Law of Ukraine “On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine to Ensure Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men during Military Service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Other Military Structures” was adopted;⁸

⁸ Law of Ukraine “On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine to Ensure Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men during Military Service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Other Military Structures” of September 6, 2018, No. 2523-VIII, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/113-2016-%D1%80#Text>

- female non-commissioned officers finally were allowed to hold combat positions in the Armed Forces of Ukraine;
- enrollment to military and naval lyceums became available to girls;
- training for the security sector and awareness campaigns on gender equality were conducted;
- professional training of central and local executive bodies on issues of the “Women, Peace, and Security” agenda continued;
- the system for protecting women and girls affected by the conflict has been improved, in terms of their identification, provision of assistance, and information about available services.

Still, the implementation of the plan revealed several limitations: weak interdepartmental coordination, lack of monitoring, underestimation of new challenges, such as the increasing number of IDPs, women veterans, and cases of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).

“The first plan was very complicated,” explains Halyna Zhukovska. “Why? The plan included many tasks and activities, but most importantly, those stakeholders that implemented the plan were honestly unaware of what they truly had to do. For this reason, it was not sufficiently effective.”

The interim assessment of the National Action Plan, prepared as part of the UN Women in Ukraine project “Gender Equality at the Center of Reforms, Peace and Security” with financial support from the Government of Sweden in 2018,⁹ enabled the analysis of all the advantages and growth areas that can be used in the future, revealing ways to finance

⁹ https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2019/10/The%20Midterm%20evaluation%20of%20the%20Ukrainian%20NAP%20on%20implementation%20of%20UNSCR%201325%20WPS_UKR.pdf

this document through external and previously disregarded internal sources, and helping to find out how reliable the planned activities are and to understand methodological obstacles. The findings were meant to be used as inputs for the next NAP. Halyna Zhukovska explained: “We understood that we needed to change the approach to plan development completely.”

Second NAP 1325 (2020–2025)

In 2020, meetings of the Trilateral Contact Group for Peaceful Resolution of the Situation in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (Regions) were held. Only two women represented Ukraine as part of the delegation: Yuliia Svyrydenko, then-Deputy Minister for Economic Development, Trade, and Agriculture, and Halyna Tretiakova, who, at the time, was the chair of the Parliamentary Committee for Social Policy and Veteran Rights,¹⁰ and they only had authority on humanitarian and social issues. This fact did not go unnoticed in the expert community. This was pointed out by UN Women Program Analyst on Women, Peace, and Security Svitlana Zakrynytska, who clearly noted that the participation of Ukrainian women in conflict resolution processes was lacking, “...we do not always hear their voices and reasoning in the negotiation process. Even in the public space, they are not fully represented.”¹¹

¹⁰ Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 167/2020 “On the Delegation of Ukraine for the Participation in the Trilateral Contact Group” of May 5, 2020, <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/1672020-33561>

¹¹ Army Inform, 30 November 2020, <https://armyinform.com.ua/2020/11/30/analitikynya-oon-zhinky-svitlana-zakrynyczka-vid-rozshyrennya-mozhlyvostej-zhinok-napryamu-zalezhyt-bezpeka-ta-myr-u-derzhavi/>

These thoughts resonated with others in Ukraine, as well, an indication that society was changing its attitude to gender equality and women's participation in peacebuilding. Halyna Zhukovska emphasized that even the style of work of central and local executive bodies had changed; gradually they were paying more attention to the need to implement the mandate of Resolution 1325 into people's everyday life, understanding the importance and relevance of its provisions. The establishment of the Commission for Interagency Coordination of Executive Bodies to Ensure Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men,¹² headed by the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, also had a positive impact. "The government started using a targeted program approach in the development of various policies. We used these criteria to prepare the second NAP," noted Halyna Zhukovska.

Compared to the first version, the new document was developed under different circumstances. In 2020, there were experts who were not only knowledgeable about these issues, but also had certain practical experience. A new tool was proposed for this work: strategic sessions. These sessions were a form of brainstorming, with 60 to 80 people participating in every meeting. "Strategic sessions were held at both the central and regional levels, meaning that opinions and suggestions were gathered from all levels. Representatives of law enforcement agencies, civil society, and think tanks were also actively involved in these discussions," notes gender expert Svitlana Gerashchenko. Regional Coalitions 1325 were formed during this period, providing many suggestions of their own.

¹² Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated September 2, 2020, No. 784 "On the Establishment of the Commission on Coordination of Executive Bodies' Interaction for Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men," <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/784-2020-%D0%BF#Text>

“When I talk about the NAP, I often use the concept of ‘critical friends.’ We collaborate fruitfully, and if we criticize, it is in a friendly manner. The NAP is very much a partnership document. We developed it together with the authorities, with decision-makers, and then localized it similarly, in partnership with civil society organizations, local authorities, and other relevant entities.”

**Natalia Karbowska,
Director, Strategic Development,
Ukrainian Women’s Fund**

According to the Ministry of Social Policy, the document consolidated the efforts of fifty-six national and local authorities, international entities, and eighteen civil society organizations.¹³

Natalia Bogdanova, Head of the Expert Group at the Ministry of Social Policy stated, “During the strategic sessions, we first identified problem aspects, then discussed solutions, and only after that determined strategic goals for the relevant vectors.” Also crucial was the training of professionals to accumulate the necessary level of knowledge, skills, and expertise in this area.

The second NAP 1325 has a clear structure and includes five strategic goals, which are detailed in fifteen operational objectives, forty-three tasks and 124 activities.

Strategic Goal 1. Ensure equal participation of women and men in the decision-making process on conflict prevention, conflict resolution, post-conflict reconstruction at all levels and in all areas, in particular in the security and defense sector;

¹³ Government Portal, 28 October 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/4uwahmfc>

Strategic Goal 2. Create a gender-sensitive system for identifying security challenges, preventing such challenges, and responding to them;

Strategic Goal 3. Ensure the process of post-conflict recovery, development and implementation of the transitional justice system based on the principles of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men;

Strategic Goal 4. Ensure protection from gender-based violence and sexual violence (during the armed conflict and in peacetime);

Strategic Goal 5. Ensure the developed institutional capacity of NAP 1325 executors in accordance with international standards for effective implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.

Notably, the second NAP integrated international standards (Istanbul Protocol, Rome Statute, NATO recommendations, UN SDGs, Ukraine-EU Association Agreement).

On October 28, 2020, the new NAP was approved by order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine.¹⁴ Even though the NAP was intended for the period until 2025, it had to be updated almost immediately following Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine in 2022. This was necessary because security challenges underwent significant changes. For instance, the issues of bomb shelters, threat alerts, clean water, and air became acute for the entire population of Ukraine.

Other threats escalated, as well. In the temporarily occupied territories, the Russian military resorted to crimes such as committing conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) on a

¹⁴ Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine "On Approval of the National Action Plan to Implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 Women, Peace, Security for the Period by 2025," dated October 28, 2020, No. 1544-r, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1544-2020-%D1%80#Text>

massive scale. Survivors needed protection and assistance, and access to justice. The updated NAP significantly expanded the list of its target audiences, adding twenty-six to the previously envisaged seventeen. Among them were prisoners of war, civilian prisoners forcibly relocated to Russia, people with disabilities, and families who lost their loved ones in the war.

Combating CRSV was a crucial factor for the immediate update of the second NAP. In early May 2022, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on CRSV Pramila Patten arrived in Ukraine to sign the Framework on Cooperation between the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations on the prevention of and response to CRSV. This program included seventeen areas that had to be reflected in the Implementation Plan, as well as in the National Action Plan 1325. One positive development was that this approach expanded the range of NAP stakeholders. Previously, the NAP was implemented mostly by national and local authorities and civil society; with this version of the NAP, international entities and donors were more involved.

The 2022 NAP review in the context of the full-scale invasion included an introductory online meeting and two rounds of strategic sessions held in June 2022. They included approximately 200 representatives of governmental and non-governmental entities. Working groups studied the issues of infrastructure safety, humanitarian aid, and CRSV response. The results were taken into account in the updated version of the NAP, submitted for approval to the Ministry of Social Policy. The updated NAP was approved on December 16, 2022.¹⁵

¹⁵ Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of December 16, 2022, No. 1150-r “On Amendments to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1544 of October 28, 2020,” <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1150-2022-%D1%80#n2>

Civil society participates in the NAP not only during the planning and implementation stages but also to assist with funding. Typically, a significant part of NAP activities can be integrated into existing local social, security, and economic development programs that are covered by local budgets. However, a significant part of resources is funneled by civil society organizations through grant support from international partners. Small grants programs administered by the Ukrainian Women's Fund allow Coalitions 1325 to support local initiatives for the implementation of the NAP. In 2024, a total of UAH 836.247 million was raised to finance regional action plans. Coalitions 1325 provided 61.8% (UAH 517 million) of the funds. "In 2024, our organization provided support of UAH 72 million, which constitutes 14%," said Olena Bordiukova, a UWF project coordinator.

Civil society organizations also initiated the improvement of the NAP implementation monitoring system that provides for annual reporting, qualitative and quantitative indicators. "Together with other partners, we proposed a monitoring framework that should be the same for all regions. We developed a monitoring methodology and provided training on its use," said Natalia Karbowska.

In 2025, the UWF also analyzed NAP implementation and prepared the Assessment of the Effectiveness and Possible Improvements to Ukraine's National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN SC Resolution 1325 as part of the project "Women, Peace, and Security: Acting Together" supported by the Government of the United Kingdom.¹⁶ In particular, UWF looked at the relevance of strategic and operational goals, the logic of the plan and the effectiveness

¹⁶ EU Neighbours East, 2 May 2025, <https://euneighbourseast.eu/uk/news/publications/oczinka-efektywnosti-ta-perspektyvy-vdoskonalennya-naczionalnogo-planu-dij-ukrayiny-shhodo-rezolyucyi-rb-oon-1325/>

of activities, the WPS index, localization outcomes, the accountability and subordination mechanisms in the NAP implementation; this was followed by recommendations to improve the NAP in coming years.

Third NAP 1325 (2026–2030)

On June 12–13, 2025, Sarajevo hosted the International Conference on Women, Peace, and Security to discuss implementation mechanisms for NAPs 1325 that resulted in recommendations for how governments can update their NAPs.¹⁷ Gender expert Maria Dmitrieva, representative of the NGO “Center for Democracy Development,” who attended the conference, shared that representatives of different countries spoke a great deal about the various difficulties they confront. For instance, in Bosnia, the issue of overcoming the consequences of CRSV remains acute even 30 years after the end of the Bosnian conflict. She added, “I was the only person to say, ‘We have a war, a full-scale invasion, we suffer from attacks every day, people are dying, but we are implementing the NAP.’ The conference participants were amazed.”

“During the war, the NAP is a certain anchor for us, helping us hold up and show at the global level that we not only ask for help but also make a lot of effort to engage in the recovery processes during the full-scale aggression, without postponing it for the future.”

**Olesya Bondar, Director,
Ukrainian Women’s Fund**

¹⁷ Democracy Development Center, 13 August 2025, <https://ddc.org.ua/%D1%86%D1%80%D0%B4-%D0%BF%D1%96%D0%B4%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%B2-%D0%B7%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%BD%D1%8F-%D1%81%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%94%D0%B2%D1%81%D1%8C%D0%BA%D0%BE%D1%97/>

Natalia Karbowska also emphasizes this crucial role of the National Action Plan in representing Ukraine, supporting the subject of Ukraine in the international arena. “We are doing this in a language that is clear to other countries. Because Resolution 1325 is an international instrument.”

The second NAP expires in 2025. Considering that the process of developing and approving a new document is extraordinarily complex, this work began at the end of 2024. At the initiative and under the direction of the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, a powerful working group was created. From the beginning, the working group included eighty-six people representing national and local authorities, civil society, and international structures. The group used a tried-and-tested tool to develop the content of the future document: successive strategic sessions at the interdepartmental, interindustry, and intersectoral levels. The working group’s organization exemplifies the interaction of the Ministry of Social Policy as the main designated agency responsible for NAP implementation, along with the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, UWF, Women’s Information and Advisory Center, and UN Women. In 2025, three such events took place to date, with more than one hundred participants each.

The first strategic session brought together representatives of national executive authorities and key stakeholders. They discussed strategic and operational goals of the new plan and coordinated approaches to developing its logical structure. Deputy Minister of Social Policy for European Integration Iryna Postolovska (2022-2025) emphasized that the National Action Plan should not just be a document but a living instrument for responding to the challenges faced by the state. Thanks to interagency partnership, Ukraine is managing to

change the system to strengthen the role of women in the country's recovery.¹⁸

The second strategic planning meeting was attended by representatives of civil society, including regional Coalitions 1325. The discussion focused on regional experiences, community needs, and specific suggestions for the content of the updated plan. The participants discussed the tasks and activities to be included in the new NAP.

The third strategic session brought together representatives of line ministries and other central executive bodies to produce written proposals for the structure and content of the NAP.

Typically, the sessions were held in a facilitated format of small groups divided into key sectors (executive, security bloc, civil society, regional coalitions). This approach allowed for the combining of strategic analysis with the development of practical indicators, monitoring criteria, and effective coordination mechanisms.

The finalized version was submitted to the Ministry of Social Policy, Family, and Unity for approval.

“The third NAP 1325 is different from the previous versions in its concept of comprehensive security,” commented Olga Perunova, Deputy Head, Human Rights Monitoring Department, Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine about the new document. “Women are in danger not only when there is shooting. There are information threats, hybrid threats. There is the economic situation aggravated by the war. There are environmental challenges and many other issues. We learned this approach from our international partners.”

¹⁸ Ministry of Social Policy, Family, and Unity of Ukraine, April 1, 2025, <https://www.msp.gov.ua/press-center/news/formuvannya-maybutnoho-z-urakhuvannyam-holosu-zhinok-rozpochato-rozrobku-natsionalnoho-planu-diy-zhinky-myr-bezpeka-do-2030-roku>

“In the new NAP, scheduled until 2030, we have strongly expanded the method of identifying security challenges. Now, we are conducting territorial security audits, transportation safety audits regarding various categories of women and men, something that did not exist before. There is a separate section on the demining of territories. This is a comprehensive approach.”

**Hanna Lemeshko,
Ukrainian Public Health Foundation**

The subject of recovery is a central aspect of the new document, and for good reason. According to Natalia Karbowska, this process should focus not only on the restoration of destroyed objects and property, houses, schools, clinics, bridges, but also on the recovery of the human capital: both women and men should be confident that their needs and interests will be taken into account in the development programs. The UWF leader noted that the 2025 Ukraine Recovery Conference took place in Rome in July. “During that event, there was a great deal of positive news, particularly a new Flagship Fund for the Recovery of Ukraine that should be established by the EU. Numerous intergovernmental agreements were signed. Businesses also signed agreements. Our international partners really think about Ukraine and are ready to invest. However, it is especially important to ensure that these large funds are used in a gender inclusive way. And this is where the National Action Plan has a significant role.”

She has also shared her opinion that the NAP is a permanently innovative tool that can be used to respond to new challenges and demands. “Originally, we developed localization; we established Coalitions 1325 for local-level advocacy. Similarly, now we need to develop methodologies to include

the issues of women's rights and gender equality into national recovery plans.”

Currently, Ukraine is working to strengthen localized action plans, while still maintaining centralized planning, dedicating more attention to regional experience and voices from communities. Although the full “bottom-up” approach has not yet been formalized, unlike in some EU countries, the vector is clearly pointing towards an increased participation of communities in strategic planning and implementation of WPS policies. Today, twenty-seven territorial communities in Ukraine already have their own 1325 action plans. The result is that the positive impacts of such plans are closer to the people most affected by them than before, which is a positive change.

SECTION 2. COALITIONS 1325 AND THE LOCALIZATION OF NATIONAL ACTION PLAN 1325 IN UKRAINE'S REGIONS

In late May 2025, a delegation from Ukraine traveled to the Netherlands and Belgium to participate in the Women. Peace. Security: Local Needs – Local Solutions initiative. The project is led by the Ukrainian Women's Fund in cooperation with the international gender platform WO=MEN, based in The Hague, and supported by the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.¹⁹ Typically, when such visits are arranged, the assumption is that Ukrainian specialists will become acquainted with the experience of their foreign colleagues and upon return will adopt best practices on specific issues. However, this time, the situation was different: the achievements of Ukrainians drew considerable attention. According to Natalia Karbowska, Director, Strategic Development at the Ukrainian Women's Fund (UWF), "When in the Netherlands, we were less in the role of learning from our partners and more in the role of sharing our own experience and explained how we localize, how we approach the issue of Women. Peace. Security. in a broad manner."²⁰

Currently, Ukraine, which is defending itself against Russian aggression, is developing modern tools for implementing state policies in extremely challenging circumstances, in-

¹⁹ Media Center Ukraine, June 2, 2025, <https://mediacenter.org.ua/uk/rezolyutsiya-1325-na-mistsyah-ukrayinska-delegatsiya-predstavila-v-yes-dosvid-lokalizatsiyi-gendernoyi-politiki/>

²⁰ Ibid.

cluding policies related to Resolution 1325, the protection of women’s rights, and their involvement in post-war recovery. Among the innovative approaches is the establishment of local Coalitions 1325 and the participation of these coalitions in localizing the National Action Plan 1325 (NAP 1325).

“Our goal today is not only to present statistical data, but also to highlight the role and contribution of Coalitions 1325 in implementing gender policy at the regional level, to analyze the effectiveness of partnership models, and to identify paths for further development. In the context of full-scale war, this work takes on particular significance, as women and gender issues become critically important for recovery and for the future development of our country.”

**Kateryna Levchenko,
Government Commissioner for Gender
Policy²¹**

Coalitions 1325 are networks of regional alliances that bring together civil society organizations, government authorities, businesses, media, volunteers, and other stakeholders, including educational, medical, and social services, as well as law enforcement agencies, to support the implementation of NAP 1325 and promote the provisions and principles of UNSC Resolution 1325. Coalitions operate at the level of regions, communities, or within specific sectors, such as the security and defense sector (SDS), engaging a wide range of stakeholders. Currently, twenty-five Coalitions 1325 are active

²¹ Government Portal, August 15, 2025, <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/kateryna-levchenko-vziala-uchast-u-stratehichnii-zustrichi-oblasnykh-koalitsii-1325-zhinky-myr-bezpeka>

across Ukraine in all regions and in the city of Kyiv; none exist in the illegally occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

Implementation Mechanism, Instrument of Consolidation

In 2016, Ukraine approved its first National Action Plan 1325. Ukraine envisaged that plans would be developed in the regions with concrete tasks and measures tailored to the interests and specific features of each territory. “It was essential that those responsible had knowledge of existing international documents in the field, took into account the differences between regions, the needs and interests of local communities, and the interests of groups affected by the conflict: IDPs, male and female veterans, male and female volunteers, widows, family members of those missing or killed in combat, and others.”²² The implementation of regional action plans also required the involvement of non-governmental organizations. Thanks to their mobility and informal working styles, NGOs were often able to respond quickly and effectively to emerging security challenges. Frequently, they were the first to meet the needs of groups formed because of the conflict, to build relationships with relocated initiatives, and to advocate for the rights of internally displaced persons.

While regional action plans were prepared, their significant shortcomings soon became clear. “At the local level, often the text of the National Action Plan was simply copied, only replacing the name of the region and the list of the local implementing bodies,” explains Olena Suslova, founder of the Women’s Information and Advisory Center. “As a result,

²² Guidelines on localization and costing of local action plans on the implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on women and peace and security in Ukraine, https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2021/6/UnWomen_Localization_Digital-min.pdf

we ended up with identical copy-paste documents whose effectiveness was questionable, at best.”

Stakeholders from multiple structures involved in the implementation of local and regional plans often recalled difficulties in understanding certain provisions of the NAP, confronting unfamiliar terms and concepts. “In interviews, representatives of local governments and district administrations admitted they did not understand the definition of gender-based violence and asked about the type of actions that should be taken and who should be involved. And there were many such points in the plans. We lack knowledge and practice.”²³

A lack of understanding and support also resulted in funding problems. Local plans to implement the NAP must be signed by district or municipal leaders but had not been submitted for a vote to councils; the procedure was violated, and therefore no budget allocations were made at the local or district level. Moreover, most NGOs in the regions were not familiar with the Women, Peace, Security, agenda and did not participate in supporting or conducting activities locally.²⁴

National Action Plans are being implemented in eighty-four countries worldwide. In sixty-three of these countries (75%), civil society was assigned a defined role at various stages of NAP implementation. “In the Netherlands, many civil society organizations are involved,” says Halyna Zhukovska, Senior Advisor of the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy of Ukraine, “but they cooperate with the government through a single-entry point. All communications are through the WO=MEN gender platform, which channels their proposals and coordinates actions.”

There were also other examples of cooperation between government structures, NGOs, and initiatives, including

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

those that used localization as a tool for implementing NAPs. Analyzing this experience, Ukrainian activists identified an important aspect to the implementation process and that was that such work always began with training people on the ground.

Natalia Karbowska explains, “Particularly important is to train and unite those involved so that they jointly develop strategies tailored to the specific needs of their regions and that they jointly advocate for these strategies. If developed together, then together they are interested in ensuring implementation, in monitoring progress, and in planning next steps. In this way, the idea of local Coalitions 1325 emerged.”

According to Natalia Karbowksa, the training initiative originated with the UWF office when cooperation with the European Union began. The EU became the first donor to the project of localizing the National Action Plan 1325. Consultations with regional partners followed. At that time, not all believed that the new model of cooperation could yield positive results. For example, envisioning discussion between the National Police and civil society organizations about operational changes needed to effectively meet the NAP objectives was difficult. How could NGOs or educational institutions assist a law-enforcement body with strategic planning? In seeking answers to the question, the first Coalitions were established as an experiment and monitored. With time, localization and a “Ukrainian strategy” were the distinctive features that set Ukraine’s experience apart from that of other countries and is an approach worthy of being shared.

“Coalitions 1325 have shown that uniting is both possible and necessary in order to achieve goals.”

***Svitlana Khodakova,
Secretariat of the Vinnytsia Coalition 1325***

Coalitions 1325 Establishment Timeline

Coalitions 1325 in Ukraine were established in several stages.

- **First wave (2018):** New structures launched in Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, Khmelnytskyi, Vinnytsia, Dnipropetrovsk, and Chernivtsi regions. These were the first platforms created with the support of the UWF, laying the foundation for localizing the NAP 1325.
- **Second wave (2021–2022):** Zhytomyr, Volyn, Odesa, Kherson, Donetsk, Lviv, Zakarpattia, and Kharkiv regions. Formed in wartime conditions, with a focus on supporting IDPs and cooperating with security structures.
- **Third wave (2023):** Kirovohrad, Sumy, Chernihiv, and Rivne regions, as well as the city of Kyiv. These coalitions concentrated on youth engagement, working with de-occupied communities, and recovery efforts.
- **Fourth wave (2024–2025):** Poltava, Mykolaiv, Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Cherkasy regions. The youngest coalition was created on December 19, 2024, in the Kyiv region. These associations focus on building partnerships with regional military administrations and developing their own regional action plans. Their emergence demonstrates the sustainability of the coalition model and its scalability across the entire country.

The Ukrainian Women’s Fund assisted in the establishment of the regional Coalition 1325. “In September–October 2021, the UWF organized training sessions in Bukovyna on gender equality, coalition building, localization of the Women. Peace. Security National Action Plan and the monitoring of implementation. Participants represented the police, the State Emergency Service, various social services, the employ-

²⁵ 50%, August 16, 2023, <https://50vidsotkiv.org.ua/koalitsiyi-1325-yak-gromadskym-organizatsiyam-efektyvno-spivpratsyuvaty-z-vladoyu/>

ment center, the inter-factional Equal Opportunities associations of the Chernivtsi region and city councils, State Border Guard Service, educational institutions, and civil society organizations. After completing the training, we established the regional coalition Bukovyna 1325”, recalls Natalia Batrakova, secretary of the Bukovyna 1325 Coalition.

Anastasiia Nenka, Director of the Women’s Information Consultative Center (WICC), explained the founding of the coalition Kyiv-1325. In 2020, in partnership with UWF, WICC organized training sessions for five regions where coalitions were being established. The topic of UNSC Resolution 1325 was related to Nenka’s professional work, so she decided that Kyiv also needed such an alliance.²⁵ Already in 2021, the WICC put forward this initiative. At first, the Coalition united ten organizations;²⁶ by 2025, the Coalition included forty member organizations and eleven partners.²⁷

“Localization means you must develop a plan that corresponds to local needs and priorities. Localization is an opportunity to be closer to what matters most for people in the region. This is how the National Action Plan comes to life. The plan must be meaningful for people and lead to something very practical.”

Anastasiia Nenka,
Director of the WICC²⁸

²⁶ WICC, April 5, 2021, <https://wicc.net.ua/post/koalitsiya-kyiv-1325>

²⁷ Gender Practices of Kyiv, <https://www.geo-kyiv.com/posts/koalitsiya-1325-kiyiv>

²⁸ EUAM in Ukraine, May 2, 2024, <https://www.euam-ukraine.eu/ua/news/un-security-council-resolution-on-women-peace-and-security-1325-twenty-five-years-on-what-does-it-mean-for-ukraine/>

What was the principle behind selecting the first pilot regions for establishing Coalitions 1325? Initially, the initiative came directly from civil society organizations that put forward proposals, generated ideas, and developed approaches for effective communication with the authorities.

“There are criteria for including civil society organizations, experts, and businesses in the Coalitions,” notes Halyna Zhukovska. “Above all else, they must share values related to human rights and gender equality. Gender movements in Ukraine are not new, and today they are being revived. Other resources are also needed for coalition-building, including human resources. For example, strong leaders of organizations are needed. Beneficial, as well, is if these structures already have experience of cooperation and interaction with the authorities.”

Of particular importance was that the initiative of Coalitions 1325 received the support of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, who succeeded in strongly advancing the idea and engaging key stakeholders that help the Coalitions cooperate with regional military administrations.

Such support allowed many regions to quickly build their own expertise in these matters. Cooperation between local authorities and Coalitions 1325 proved to be effective. Over time, local government representatives began approaching the UWF with proposals to establish coalitions in their regions and this was the case in the Poltava and Kyiv regions.

“Coalitions 1325 have become a brand. I would not say that the authorities everywhere fully believed in the effectiveness of cooperation with civil society. But we believed and saw that the model works and is necessary to implement the NAP.”

***Kateryna Koltunova,
Deputy Head of the Kirovohrad
Regional Military Administration***

Memoranda of Cooperation

From May 2024 to April 2025, the number of members of the regional Coalitions 1325 increased by 52% — from 626 to 953 people. The largest share came from the civil society sector (574), followed by local authorities and council members (167), the security and defense sector (101), and others, including experts and business representatives (111). According to Halyna Zhukovska, as of 2025, Coalitions 1325 in Ukraine unite 356 civil society organizations operating at various levels.

When discussing the Coalitions, cooperation between civil society, local authorities, and the security and defense sector is usually highlighted. Their representation varies across regions, although NGOs predominate everywhere. The most balanced composition of participants can be found in Kirovohrad, Volyn, Kherson, Poltava, and Zaporizhzhia regions. In the Donetsk region, civil society shows strong activity, but the SDS is represented by only two members, while in Kyiv, the coalition includes no SDS representatives.

The composition of Coalitions 1325 members is assessed deliberately, as the composition directly affects the nature and effectiveness of work. Where the participation of local authorities is higher, more Regional Action Plan tasks are implemented. For example, in 2024, the Volyn region im-

plemented eighty-six tasks (the Coalition includes twelve government representatives and six from SDS), Kirovohrad implemented sixty-six tasks (nineteen government and four SDS representatives), and Vinnytsia also sixty-six tasks (eighteen government and eight SDS representatives). At the same time, a larger number of NGO representatives correlates with higher levels of funds raised. In the Donetsk region, UAH 109 million was raised with fifty-four NGO representatives; in Odesa region, UAH 47 million was raised with thirty-six NGO representatives; and in Lviv region, UAH 18 million was raised with thirty-eight NGO members.

Balanced composition ensures equilibrium between actions and resources. This is best illustrated by the Kherson region, where the coalition includes sixteen NGO representatives, six from local authorities, and five from SDS. In this region, twenty-eight tasks were implemented, and UAH 101 million was raised. Another positive example is the Poltava region, where the coalition includes twenty-four NGO representatives, eleven from local authorities, and four from SDS: sixteen tasks were implemented and UAH 55 million raised.

“One of the values of the Coalitions 1325, and we emphasize this as a matter of principle, is that they are not officially registered,” says Natalia Karbowska. She adds that in some regions there were indeed proposals to register the coalitions as legal entities, and although this cannot be prohibited, the UWF makes clear that it is not with recommended by UWF. “Once a Coalition registers, it becomes the coalition of the individuals who registered it.” This would undermine the logic and core value of the coalitions as platforms for equal dialogue and interaction among all members.

At the same time, donors may be concerned about the sustainability of the Coalitions. “For us, the sustainability of the Coalitions lies in preserving the approach that people learn

to work with one another laterally. And that they understand that if a pressing need arises, the Coalition can be convened, transparently agree on principles, rules, and new advocacy topics,” explains Natalia Karbowska. For example, in Khmelnytskyi, the Coalition 1325 serves as a platform for advocating women’s political participation, while another Coalition may focus on recovery. “For us, the main goal and sustainability of the Coalitions is for people to realize that this is not about competition, but about uniting and agreeing on the rules of joint work,” she added.

However, the Coalitions cannot operate without some degree of institutionalization. Halyna Zhukovska emphasizes this point: the organizations that make up the Coalitions work within specific sectors and territories. They cooperate with authorities and contribute to developing and implementing Regional Action Plans; processes must be regulated to ensure systematic work.

“That is why we decided that signing a memorandum of cooperation could serve as such a systematic approach. Since every region and every community faces its own challenges, threats, resources, and priorities in implementing the RAP, the memorandum provides a framework that regulates the directions of action, cooperation, and interaction, determines who may join the coalition, and sets the rules for organizing meetings and information exchange,” said Halyna Zhukovska. Practical directions of work can be included as annexes to the memorandum. Each NGO works in a specific area and can only implement certain tasks. A memorandum of cooperation allows for a comprehensive approach: to conduct gender analysis of territorial needs and prepare a road-map that takes all challenges into account.

“Our memorandum specifies that not only representatives of organizations may join us, but also active people. A person submits an application, which is reviewed by all Coalition members. We discuss their activities, values, and motivation since it is important for us that our principles align.”

**Oksana Luniova,
Coalition 1325 Coordinator, Luhansk Region,
Women. Peace. Security²⁹**

Coalitions 1325 Relocated

The largest coalition by membership is Coalition 1325 Donetsk Region. Another feature of this Coalition is longevity. This Coalition was established in February 2021 during the Coalitions 1325 “second wave,” making this Coalition one of the most experienced in Ukraine. In 2021, the Coalition united thirty-six participants, which included thirty-three civil society organizations and three initiative groups, all of which signed the founding Memorandum.³⁰ By February 2024, this Coalition already included close to fifty CSOs,³¹ with more than 90% of members holding IDP or refugee status.³²

²⁹ Tribune, December 17, 2024, <https://tribun.com.ua/uk/116618-zhinochij-rux-z-luganschini-jak-aktivistki-tvorjat-zmini-v-umovax-vijni>

³⁰ Anti-Crisis Media Center, May 14, 2021, <https://acmc.ua/14-travnja-10-00-pres-konferencziya-z-pryvodu-stvorennja-koalicziyi-1325-donechchyna/>

³¹ Donetsk Regional State Administration, March 27, 2024, <https://dn.gov.ua/news/oleksandr-shevchenko-privitav-uchasnic-strategichnoyi-sesiyi-koalicziyi-1325>

³² Donetsk Regional State Administration, February 18, 2025, <https://dn.gov.ua/news/zbori-koalicziyi-1325-donechchina-yednist-pidtrimka-nezlamnist>

UWF Media Specialist Natalia Pokolenko, explains, “At one time, the Donetsk region was one of the most densely populated regions of Ukraine. In 2014, many active and entrepreneurial people left the territories temporarily occupied (by Russia) and moved to (Ukrainian) government-controlled areas, bringing with them their ideas and initiatives. They wanted to become ‘visible’ in new communities, so they eagerly engaged in local life.”

At that time, many international projects, including UN initiatives, were being implemented in eastern Ukraine, fostering development and strengthening local leadership. The coordinator of Coalition 1325 Donetsk Region Liliia Kislitsyna, founder and president of the women’s NGO Smarta notes that the Donetsk Coalition is “unique” because after (the Russian invasion on) February 24, 2022, the Donetsk Coalition was scattered not only across Ukraine but also abroad. “Yet we all stay in touch. The Coalition is growing, as many new people are joining. We also signed memoranda with the Border Guard Service and the Regional State Administration, and we updated the regional action plan, introducing 130 amendments. Currently, in five communities of Donetsk region, two of which are de-occupied, we are also creating Local Action Plans and conducting focus groups together with other NGOs from the Donetsk region.”³³ Following the 2022 full-scale invasion, Coalition 1325 Donetsk Region has been based in Lviv.

“Most members of the Luhansk Coalition, like the Luhansk Regional Military Administration, are now in Dnipro. The Coalition continues to implement the Luhansk Region-

³³ Pro100media Kramatorsk, October 13, 2023, <https://pro100media.com.ua/yavolonter/volonterstvo-tse-zvyhajnyjstan-normalnoyi-lyudyny-yak-kramatorka-liliya-kislitsyna-dopomagaye-zhinkam-ta-pereselentsyam-pid-chas-vijny/>

al Acton Plan, but the coalition has been transformed and the plan localized. The plan now places greater emphasis on IDPs, a significant share of whom live in the Dnipropetrovsk region. Therefore, the Luhansk Coalition actively cooperates and coordinates with the Dnipropetrovsk Coalition,” explains Natalia Karbowska.

According to Oksana Luniova, Coordinator of the Coalition 1325 titled Luhansk Region Women. Peace. Security, the Coalition’s main area of activity is cooperation with government bodies at all levels to develop and implement Regional and Local Action Plans 1325. No less important is the communication component: raising awareness about the principles, objectives, and importance of the NAP and its localization. “In addition, we support and strengthen the role of women from various social groups in decision-making at all levels of government.”³⁴ In spring 2025, the information platform Luhansk Region in Action: Agenda 1325 was launched to support the implementation of the Women. Peace. Security agenda at the local level: <https://1325.lg.ua/>.

Relocated Coalitions 1325 face additional challenges. One challenge is the shortage of professionals and partnerships that had been built over years, then disrupted by war. The support of UWF proved crucial. UWF provided new staff training to strengthen the competence in gender-sensitive approaches and application in practice. According to Oksana Luniova, such training initiatives were in high demand, attracting more than one hundred participants and receiving positive feedback. “This is indicative of people’s desire to engage with the topic.”³⁵

³⁴ Ostrov, March 19, 2024, <https://www.ostro.org/articles/zaluchennya-zhinok-do-protsesiv-pryjnyattya-rishen-prynese-novi-perspektyvy-oksana-lunova-i465604>

³⁵ Ibid.

Thanks to the support of the partners of relocated Coalitions continue their work and develop communication on the ground.

Today, in many cities of Ukraine, many relocated government institutions, businesses, and civil society organizations, operate. In the information space, dozens of media outlets continue to position themselves with the territories they were forced to leave due to occupation.

“Yes, a certain territory may be absent. But there are people responsible for implementing that region’s policies. Therefore, they seek innovative approaches to their work,” explains Liliya Zolkina, Head of the Donetsk Regional Military Administration. The Luhansk and Donetsk Coalitions 1325 work with their people, now resettled in new communities. They provide training on how to overcome emerging challenges and on mechanisms for implementing action plans. “For example, we train people from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions on how to conduct security audits. And they carry them out in the territories where they now live. In this way, they gain knowledge and skills and improve the situation in their new communities. But the Coalitions are also working with future intent: we hope the occupied territories will be liberated, people will return, and with the knowledge and practices already acquired, they will continue this work. In fact, we are already preparing for the processes of restoring those territories.”

“A coalition means unity, support, exchange of resources, expertise, and knowledge to conduct our tasks more effectively. United voices are stronger and have a greater impact on people, and therefore more opportunities to achieve results.”

Oksana Luniova, Coalition 1325 Coordinator, Luhansk Region, Women. Peace. Security

Formats of Engagement and Motivation

The Coalitions 1325 use a wide range of adaptive formats, from security audits, self-defense schools, and crisis rooms to monitoring campaigns, retreats, and support for IDPs, female veterans, and vulnerable groups. Special attention is given to educational initiatives, economic integration, and work with youth. Each Coalition adapts to its regional context. For example:

- **Zakarpattia Region.** Focuses on security, human rights, and IDP integration. Conducts security audits, a Women's and Girls' Security School, and cybersecurity campaigns. Supports client referrals, youth accompaniment, and the establishment of hubs.
- **Luhansk Region.** Operates mainly online, supporting IDPs and educational institutions. Implements gender audits, a gender passport of the region, exhibitions, equality marches, crisis initiatives, veteran support, and remembrance activities. Promotes self-help practices and quick grants.
- **Lviv Region.** Provides support for IDPs, female veterans, and families with children with special educational needs. Conducts gender profiling of communities, women's economic empowerment programs, needs assessments, awareness-raising activities, feedback mechanisms, and referrals.
- **Kharkiv Region.** Concentrates on infrastructure recovery, integration of IDPs, veterans, and people with limited mobility. Conducts surveys, focus groups, prepares recommendations, and cooperates with the UN and local authorities. Initiates appeals on educational and economic needs.
- **Khmelnyskyi Region.** Active in gender policy advocacy, development of strategies and gender-sensitive budgets. Supports women's entrepreneurship, political participa-

tion, and the creation of gender policy advisor positions. Conducts public oversight in the security sector.

“The greatest value of the 1325 Coalitions in Ukraine is that they have significantly contributed to the localization of the global principles of UNSCR 1325 “Women. Peace. Security” at the regional and local levels. By bringing together the authorities, the public and the expert community, the Coalitions have become platforms for the implementation of Resolution 1325, through gender policy, women’s empowerment, and participation in decision-making, especially important during war. The Coalitions have transformed the goals of the Resolution into specific actions and results (through women’s participation, community security audits, security classes, measures to prevent and combat gender-based violence) at the level of regions and territorial communities.”

**Marianna Kolodiy,
Head of the Secretariat of the 1325
Coalition-Zakarpattia**

Key factors for effective work include the presence of a coordinator or a Coalition secretariat, systematic communication among members, clear positioning of the coalition in the public space (media, social networks, events), and involvement in developing or monitoring Local Action Plans (gender policy, security). Often, Coalitions 1325 succeed in drawing attention to local issues that, at first glance, might seem minor, but directly affect women’s safety and ability to live securely in communities, such as safety at bus stop facilities or having effective street lighting. Frequently, exactly these issues form the basis for Local Action Plans and the monitoring of their implementation.

Natalia Karbowska noted that she actively visits communities where Regional Action Plans are being localized. Key actors involved in these processes at the region and community levels show various levels of motivation. At the regional level, motivation is higher: CSOs, security structures, and decision-makers in regional military administrations have objective reasons to engage, often tied to their official duties related to implementing Resolution 1325. “However, when we come to local communities, the situation is entirely different. They are not formally obliged to do anything,” shares Natalia Karbowska. “How then to motivate them?”

The UWF’s Director of Strategic Development then recalls a story from Zakarpattia. A business relocated from Donetsk region to a local district, creating new jobs. Residents were pleased; new jobs were created! Women from a small village found work there. To reach the enterprise required travel by train, one journey in the morning, one return trip late at night. The train stop was literally in the middle of a field. “I learned that in Ukrzaliznytsia (administration of Ukraine’s rail service) there are two concepts: a station and a stop,” Natalia Karbowska explains. “A station has equipment, lights, benches, and staff in uniforms. An official stop also exists, but in that field it was marked only by an upturned bucket. Women had to stand on this upturned bucket both to board and exit the train. The road from the village to that bucket stop was not even paved. They had to trudge uphill in the dark.”

A safety audit was conducted. The Coalition then appealed to Ukrzaliznytsia to equip the stop but were refused on grounds of cost-effectiveness. “The town decided, within the framework of the safety audit and with our support, to build a road to the stop. Then they went back to the railway company and said, ‘support us now, we have done our part, now you do yours!’” Natalia Karbowska recounts. “We met

with that Stavne community, and through this concrete example, people understood the purpose and possibilities of the Local Action Plan 1325 and readily adopted it. For them, it became a tool to advocate for more funding for issues that directly affect women's safety."

According to Natalka Tarasenko (the secretariat of the Zhytomyr Region 1325 Coalition), when we speak about Coalitions 1325, we speak primarily about coordinating the efforts of local authorities and civil society. "We live in challenging times, and this means a shortage of human and financial resources. Everything the Coalitions do is geared towards strengthening these resources."

Another important aspect is that the Coalitions ensure the integration of a gender perspective into public policies and strategies, so that equal rights and opportunities for women and men become a cross-cutting priority. "Only when we have a culture of gender equality will we be able to demonstrate the value of this approach for each one of us, making gender equality a new normal. And this, in turn, will secure sustainable social development," summarizes Olesya Bondar, Director, UWF.

SECTION 3. NETWORK OF GENDER ADVISORS

In 2019, Ukraine's Cabinet of Minister adopted an updated version of the Ukrainian orthography, after which the use of feminine forms of professional titles, began to gain widespread acceptance. Not everyone in society welcomed this change unequivocally; for certain people, words that would indicate a profession title, position, or social status by gender seemed irregular. Tasteless jokes were made on this topic. Experts stepped in and demonstrated that feminine forms, which have always existed in the Ukrainian language, now reflect the natural evolution of social processes. According to the Constitution of Ukraine, women and men have equal rights. In today's society women increasingly assume senior management positions, run businesses, and engage in politics, therefore it is only natural that language norms should adapt accordingly.³⁶ In 2025, there is far less debate about feminine forms of nouns that are used in various spheres of professional and social life. A woman who holds a high diplomatic rank and represents the state is now referred to as a *posolka* or *ambasadorka*. These titles no longer are a subject of ridicule.

We frequently speak about the need to implement gender policy in Ukraine, yet often there is a lack of understanding that such transformations take time. Guidance from professionals is necessary, to clarify and persuade, propose appro-

³⁶ 1 Woman Marketer, Woman Driver, and Woman Entrepreneur: What Feminine Job Titles Are and Why We Use Them, The Village, May 29, 2019, <https://www.village.com.ua/village/city/talk/285571-marketologinya-vodiykata-pidpriemnitsya-scho-take-feminitivi-ta-chomu-mi-yih-vzhivaemo>

priate approaches, and, in certain instances, provide direct support through their own actions. Precisely for this purpose the institution of gender advisors was introduced in Ukraine formally, specialists who soon formed their own Network of Gender Advisors to share and spread experience, as well as develop common approaches to ensuring equal rights for women and men.

Establishment of the Network of Gender Advisors

The national mechanism for ensuring gender equality in Ukraine, as a systemic factor, was introduced following the adoption in 2005 of the Law of Ukraine on “Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men.”³⁷ Despite active development in subsequent years of the regulatory and legal framework to implement state policy in this area, numerous practical issues that affected the law’s effectiveness remained. One such issue was the professional training of specialists within government bodies, within the defense sector, and within businesses. Many managers lacked a clear understanding of how to account for the equal interests and needs of their employees in the work of their institutions and agencies; how to conduct gender audits and plan gender budgeting; how to respond to complaints about gender-based discrimination, and other concerns. To respond effectively to such challenges, the introduction of the institution of gender advisors proved to be a favorable solution.

Officially, this development was driven by the adoption of the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No.

³⁷ Law of Ukraine No. 2866-IV On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men of September 8, 2005, <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/2866-iv-3177>

930³⁸ of October 9, 2020, which provided for the creation of dedicated units responsible for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men, and approved the “Model Regulation on the Advisor for Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men, and for Preventing and Combating Gender-Based Violence.” Gender advisors serve as important “indicators” who are intended to consult with, and make recommendations to, the head of a given institution on how to uphold gender parity in operations, analyze the state of equality between women and men, and contribute to the development of work plans and other documents to ensure these plans reflect an appropriate gender balance. Among other important tasks, gender advisors prepare briefings and reports on strategies to improve an entity’s work environment through a “gender lens,” as well as organize educational activities (seminars, trainings) for staff to raise overall the level of awareness and sensitivity to gender issues. However, the inclusion of an advisor was not mandatory, merely recommended. Therefore, effectiveness depended entirely on the leadership’s position and on how convincingly advisors could demonstrate their relevance.

³⁸ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 930 of October 9, 2020, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/930-2020-%D0%BF#Text>

“..Often it is very obvious which institutions do not have such a position [as Advisor]. The Ministry for Family, Youth and Sports announced family competitions under the slogan “Daddy, Mommy, Me — an Active Family,” inviting only “complete” families, mother, father, child, to participate. In doing so, the Ministry immediately discriminated against children whose fathers are serving in the military, who have died, who are missing, or are otherwise absent and the same applies to mothers. Instead of supporting such children, this decision created an artificial barrier to their participation. And this ministry does not have a gender advisor. If there were one, this situation likely would not have occurred, because that person would have reviewed every program, initiative, decision, and order through a gender perspective.”

Nataliia Baidiuk, Gender Advisor to the Head of the Cherkasy Regional State Administration, lecturer at Cherkasy National University specialist in preventing gender-based violence at the NGO Tenth of April.³⁹

Most advisors came from the civil society sector, and they were people with an active civic stance and a strong drive to accomplish. The majority did not hold formal qualifications in gender studies, as this had not been part of an academic curriculum. However, they were experienced journalists, lawyers, psychologists, sociologists. Most obtained their un-

³⁹ 1800, July 15, 2024, <https://18000.com.ua/trichka-novin/gendernaradnicya-golovi-cherkaskoyi-oda-rozpovila-pro-vazhlyvist-rivnosti-pidchas-vijni/>

derstanding of gender equality through practical experience, knew how to stand their ground and how to advocate for their positions.

“Eighty-three percent of advisors have no prior work experience in the gender field because such specialists have never been formally trained in our country. Most gender experts come from the civil society sector. I was a civil society activist myself until 2017, when I took a staff position as a gender advisor in the National Guard, then at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and now — in the Armed Forces of Ukraine.”

***Viktoriia Arnautova,
Gender Advisor to the Commander-in-Chief
of the Armed Forces of Ukraine
(at the time of publication)⁴⁰***

Generally, gender advisors serve on a voluntary basis. For example, in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, 96% held unpaid, non-staff positions similar to the NATO model.⁴¹ This allowed them to maintain a degree of independence in their work, acting not so much from a position of corporate loyalty but in the interests of the cause itself. Finding themselves in unfamiliar working conditions, each gender advisor had to overcome individual challenges and navigate various tests to achieve positive results. In this way, gender advisors acquired valuable personal experience.

⁴⁰ 50% 50 vidsotriv.org.ua, December 3, 2021 <https://50vidsotriv.org.ua/yak-u-zsu-nalagodzhuyut-merezhu-radnykiv-ta-radnyts-iz-gendernyh-pytan/>

⁴¹ Ibid.

However, a personal experience is limited in scope and loses significance if the experience is not shared more broadly. Over time, it became clear that gender advisors needed to move towards systematic collaboration and experience-sharing. On October 12–13, 2021, the first joint meeting of gender advisors in Ukraine was held and, with the support of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), established the Network of Gender Advisors (NGA) to strengthen the institutional capacity of their work.

Purpose of the Network of Gender Advisors

Professional associations are among the most in-demand forms of collaboration in Ukraine. The reason is simple: quite often, practical skills in a given field develop faster than the theoretical frameworks that define the field, so the initiative to establish an association emerges voluntarily in response to real needs, not because the association is imposed or required. This is a crucial point.

The mission of the Network of Gender Advisors has been defined around priorities that are relevant to most of members. Specifically: to consolidate efforts to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men in all spheres of public life; to exchange experience; to uphold human rights; and to promote the principles of gender equality. By joining forces, gender advisors have far better opportunities to share information, practical skills, and working solutions, as well as to learn together and adopt best practices from international partners in this field.

The composition of the NGA is constantly evolving, as new advisors are appointed to ministries, regional military

administrations, territorial communities, and educational institutions. Each person contributes their own perspective to the common cause. The network of gender advisors in the security and defense sector is especially active. For example, within the Armed Forces of Ukraine alone, 220 advisors are engaged (the vast majority of them are women).

“The importance of an advisor lies precisely in the practical resolution of specific issues related to discrimination or violence in helping an individual who has faced difficulties, especially now, during russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine.”

**Oksana Hryhorieva,
Gender Advisor to the General Staff of Armed
Forces of Ukraine (at time of publication)
Gender Advisor to Commander of the
Ukrainian Ground Forces⁴²**

Fifty applications from gender advisors have been submitted at the level of central executive bodies, regional and local administrations, along with seventeen applications from experts. Of these, twenty-seven completed a training course for gender advisors organized by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in June–July 2021.

Since then, the NGA has managed to “build muscle.” To strengthen the organization’s work, the NGA cooperates with state and local government bodies and their structural units, free secondary legal aid centers, civil society organizations, educational institutions, research institutes, trade unions and employers’ organizations, international organizations,

⁴² Operational Command East, September 25, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/story.php/?story_fbid=554657487086646&id=100076271976598

charitable foundations, and other stakeholders within the framework of current legislation. This means the association is gaining a certain reputation and becoming recognized in its field. In 2024, the NGA joined the Gender Mainstreaming Platform. This provides not only institutional support for the strategic period ahead but is also a clear signal of its commitment to contributing to Ukraine's post-war recovery efforts.

Particularly important is that gender advisors actively participate in developing gender-sensitive strategies and policies at various decision-making levels. Gender equality is enshrined in Ukraine's strategic documents, for example, in the Strategy for Implementing Gender Equality in Education Until 2030 and the 2022–2024 operational action plan,⁴³ the Human Capital Development Strategy in the Defense Forces Until 2027⁴⁴ (that specifically provides for fostering women's leadership to increase recruitment and retention of women in military service), as well as in recovery plans, updates to existing strategies, and the development of targeted programs in territorial communities. There is also ongoing advocacy in Ukraine for updating the Law of Ukraine on “Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men.” Another important focus is the development is the localization of plans for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Representatives of the NGA actively contribute to these processes, as well.

⁴³ Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1163-r of December 20, 2022, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1163-2022-%D1%80>

⁴⁴ Strategy for the Engagement, Development and Retention of Human Capital in the Defense Forces of Ukraine until 2027, <https://mod.gov.ua/diyalnist/normativno-pravova-baza/nakaz-ministerstva-oboroni-ukrayini-vid-vid-29-12-2024-862-nm-prozatverdzhennya-strategiyi-zaluchennya-rozvitku-ta-utrimannya-lyudskogo-kapitalu-v-silah-oboroni-ukrayini-na-period-do-2027-roku>

During Russia's aggression, the work of the security and defense sector has come under particular scrutiny, especially given the growing number of women serving in both combat and civilian positions. Therefore, one of NGA's key activities in this sector is to ensure guarantees of equal rights and opportunities for all service members, regardless of gender. This includes promoting women's career advancement, providing professional training, upskilling, and creating conditions that allow military personnel with children to balance their professional and family responsibilities.

Civil society activist, volunteer, volunteer, with doctorates in physics and mathematics, and Gender Advisor to the Commander of the Ukrainian Ground Forces, Oksana Hryhorieva, in early March 2025 was appointed Gender Advisor for the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Her first priority in this role is to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all military personnel, which she considers the core mission for which the position Gender Advisor was created.

“The principle of gender equality is upheld in all the world's armies, including in NATO member states. So, for us, it is equally important to ensure that gender equality in the military exists not only on paper and in laws, but that the standards set out are actually implemented in practice.”

**Oksana Hryhorieva,
Gender Advisor, Armed Forces of Ukraine⁴⁵**

Among her priorities is “enabling women to obtain higher officer education at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels,

⁴⁵ NV, April 27, 2025, <https://nv.ua/ukr/socium/mobilizaciya-zhinokchim-zaymayetsya-genderna-radnicya-vikliki-problemi-v-zsu-novini-ukrajini-50509118.html>

and creating real opportunities for career advancement within the military. We have already acknowledged that women fight well. They have proven themselves to be fully capable combat units. However, if we look at the command staff of any unit, we still see that the leadership is predominantly male. There are still very few women in command positions in the army.”

She also pointed out that since 2014, many men and women voluntarily joined the Ukrainian Army, and male volunteers became company and brigade commanders. “Meanwhile, women often remain in the same positions. This is in part because, at the time they joined the military, according to law, they were not allowed to hold combat positions or study combat specialties at military academies. Yet, they have been fighting alongside men all this time, anyway.”

Oksana Hryhorieva also emphasized another key focus of her work: “combating discrimination, gender-based violence, sexual harassment, bias, and stereotypes. These have no place in the army. Unfortunately, they still exist, and we are working to change that.”⁴⁶

“Today, gender advisors serve in all branches of the Armed Forces. Of course, there are far fewer of them in the Air Force or Navy. It is an interdisciplinary role that requires knowledge in various areas, for example, psychology, social work, law, and medicine. Communication skills also must be highly developed. There is no separate specialty through which one can obtain a higher education degree and diploma specifically as a gender advisor, so such professionals require specialized training.”

Oksana Hryhorieva, Gender Advisor in the Armed Forces of Ukraine⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Gender advisors are actively involved in conducting monitoring, analyzing the state of equal rights and opportunities for women and men in their respective fields (or territories), conducting gender audits, organizing training activities, and leading information and awareness-raising efforts.

Guide for Gender Advisors

“Have you been appointed to be a gender advisor? Then this book is for you!”

This is the introductory sentence in the *Guide for Gender Advisors*,⁴⁸ a publication developed to help newly appointed advisors gain the essential knowledge and skills needed for this role as unique “guides” in the field of gender equality. Even if new appointees have higher education, they may not yet fully understand the specifics of the work, so it is vital to support and train them as much as possible. The best resource for this information is the *Guide for Gender Advisors*, prepared in 2023 with the support of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, with contributions from the Network of Gender Advisors, and with financial support from the OSCE/ODIHR. The publication does not focus only on the theoretical foundations of gender issues or offer legislative backing for this area, however, also provides practical, concrete tips about what to do, how to do it, and under what conditions. So, if, a gender advisor wants to know what to do in a given situation, the *Guide* offers insights drawn from the hard-won experience of their predecessors, many of whom developed solutions “on the go” and are now ready to share their approaches and advice.

Preparing the *Guide for Gender Advisors* was a timely idea that, to a large degree brought together the collective experience of the NGA’s members.

⁴⁸ *Guide for Gender Advisors*, Kyiv, 2023, <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/1/ind-57-gender-policy/poradnik-dlya-radnikiv-1-1.pdf>

“One of the most significant achievements in the development of gender policy has been the understanding and the practical realization, that this policy is not confined to the social sphere alone but is a cross-cutting element present in all areas of public administration. To a great degree, effectiveness depends on the extent to which gender equality issues are integrated into institutional policy, the internal organizational culture, and the everyday activities of executive bodies and local self-government, as well as into the national mechanism for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men, of which the institution of gender advisors is an important part.”

***Kateryna Levchenko,
Government Commissioner for Gender Policy***⁴⁹

The Guide also explains the importance of the new position of gender advisor: “Gender advisors are the key to effective internal and external policy, as well as national security policy. Gender advisors are an essential link to what is happening on the ground, they drive change in the processes of policy development and implementation, as well as support institutions and organizations in fulfilling their mandates with gender aspects and with the Women, Peace, and Security agenda in mind.”⁵⁰

As Natalka Ryabushenko, advisor to the head of the Volyn Regional Military Administration, secretary of the network and co-author of the Guide, notes, “The Guide provides answers to key questions such as who can apply for the position of gender advisor; what key competencies are necessary; how

⁴⁹ Ibid., page 2.

⁵⁰ Ibid., page 6.

to apply gender policy legislation in practice; what coordination tools exist for gender policy at the national, regional, and local levels, and provides an overview of the gender approach in public administration and how approaches to gender policy have evolved over time.”

“Every unit of a local self-government body or administration, when planning its activities, works with indicators that reflect gender gaps and inequalities which their work aims to address. At the same time, there are indicators that are essential for shaping and achieving the community’s strategic goals. That is why a gender advisor, in cooperation with the economics department or division, can accumulate information and initiate its collection and consolidation.”

Guide for Gender Advisors⁵¹

The Guide’s greatest value lies in the practical focus of the text. “For example, the Guide outlines the procedure for appealing gender-based discrimination, discusses opportunities for building cooperation with free legal aid centers and bureaus, and provides the phone numbers of specialized services that offer such assistance,” stated Oleksandr Ostapenko, consultant to the Government Commissioner’s Office, co-author of the Guide.

“A positive practice for preventing gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment has been the development of the Code of Ethical Conduct and instructions for responding to such incidents. If your organization does not yet have such codes and instructions in place, it is an important initiative

⁵¹ Ibid., page 22.

to develop and formally approve these documents by order of the head of the organization,” the authors of the Guide recommend.

Another piece of advice for gender advisors is to establish contacts with hotlines that deal with gender-based violence and provide counseling to survivors. “It is advisable for advisors to connect with these hotlines, refer citizens to them when needed, and disseminate information about the support they offer.”⁵²

A separate section of the publication is devoted to gender tools for driving change. The Guide explains in detail gender analysis, gender monitoring of policies and programs, the specifics of gender budgeting, and gender auditing as an analytical tool, as well as the preparation of a gender profile for a region, community, or organization. In particular, it states that, “A gender advisor has the right to provide consultation on incorporating the principle of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men when drafting legal regulations, including territorial development strategies, regional programs, and plans, taking into account the results of gender analysis and defining indicators for their assessment (in line with the authority’s competencies).” To this end, a gender advisor can cooperate with local executive bodies, local self-government bodies, trade unions, employers and their organizations or associations, and submit requests for documents, materials, and information in line with legal limitations. Monitoring and evaluation make it possible to track changes in advancing gender equality policy at any level and measure progress in closing gender gaps.⁵³

The Guide devotes a separate section to effective communications to achieve gender equality. The work of any institu-

⁵² Ibid., page 29.

⁵³ Ibid., pages 34 and 35.

tion or organization is not possible without a well-planned and well-executed communication strategy, all the more so when matters include sensitive issues such as gender policy, combating gender-based discrimination, and addressing the stigmatization of this topic in society. “Gender advisors must organize information and awareness campaigns to broaden understanding, build knowledge, and secure support for these issues. The Guide explains how this can be done effectively,” noted Anzhela Litvinenko, an author of the Guide, who unfortunately passed away prematurely, emphasized at one of the events.

Another important aspect is highlighted in the Guide: gender advisors may encounter many challenges, manipulations, and myths in their work, many of which are a product of the hybrid information warfare launched by Russia against Ukraine as part of a deliberate propaganda campaign aimed at halting European integration efforts and related activities. “If such manipulative arguments arise, it is important to immediately refer to Ukraine’s legal framework and cite definitions set out in international standards and Ukrainian legislation, as analyzed in the first section of this publication.”⁵⁴

The Guide includes documents that regulate the activities of the Network of Gender Advisors. These serve not only as references for the legal framework under which this civic initiative operates but also serves as an invitation to become involved in the work of the NGA. After all, the experience of each member is a significant contribution to the NGA’s social media is also another valuable tool in the work of the NGA. The NGA Facebook page is updated regularly with current topics that may be useful for gender advisors in their daily work. For example, on June 18, 2025, the page featured a post on how to

⁵⁴ Ibid., page 42.

survive under rubble after an attack by russian terrorist missiles or UAVs. This is surely no coincidence: the page's followers need to be well-informed on all relevant matters.

“The Network of Gender Advisors includes not only those who currently hold this position, but also former advisors. We have built a community where we can draw on each other’s expertise and seek advice from those who have long worked in this field. This kind of expertise is often priceless. The role of gender advisors is not new. But the work to advance gender equality, to push for relevant legislation, strategies, and policies, including the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, has been ongoing in Ukraine since the declaration of independence. In fact, it goes back even further: this year marks 140 years of the women’s movement. And the people who have worked for years and decades to reach today’s level of gender equality are eager to share their knowledge, tools, and experience.”

**Nataliia Baidiuk,
Gender Advisor to the Head of the Cherkasy
Regional State Administration⁵⁵**

Today, the practical experience accumulated by the Network of Gender Advisors can be used not only by its current members but also by their colleagues in civil society organizations working on these issues. This experience may also be of interest to other countries for whom gender policy implementation is one of the key state priorities.

⁵⁵ 18000, July 15, 2024, <https://18000.com.ua/trichka-novin/gendernaradnitsya-golovi-cherkaskoyi-oda-rozpovila-pro-vazhlyvist-rivnosti-pidchas-vijni/>

The NGA is open to collaborating with new advisors who wish to join its ranks, because each person brings their own experience and ideas that will benefit the shared mission. To become part of the community, an applicant must send a written application to the NGA Secretariat (email: gender.adviser.network@gmail.com) and include the following information: full name, date of birth, position (with the full name of the institution), contact details, and information about the document confirming your appointment as a gender advisor.

CHAPTER 2
COUNTERING CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO SURVIVORS ACCORDING TO THE AGENDA OF UNSCR 1325 WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY

SECTION 4. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR THE FRAMEWORK ON COOPERATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT OF UKRAINE AND THE UNITED NATIONS ON THE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE TO CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Quickly, coherently, and effectively were the guiding principles behind Ukraine's efforts to build a system of support for survivors of war crimes committed by the Russian Federation, including conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). Soon after the full-scale invasion in February 2022, numerous cases of such abuse and cruelty against Ukrainian civilians, and later, Ukrainian prisoners of war, came to light. At the time, survivors received humanitarian aid, and law enforcement agencies began taking action to restore justice and hold perpetrators accountable. However, broader expe-

rience in this area was lacking, including the necessary development of legislation, coordination of healthcare and social protection services, the involvement of psychologists, the training of judges, and other concerns. Also, there was the sense that it was critically important that the world learn of the atrocities committed by the Russian aggressor and support Ukraine's position. To that end, the Government of Ukraine turned to international partners for assistance, including the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten. The Office of the UN Special Representative has a key role in shaping the response of global community's response to CRSV and in developing effective policies. Therefore, Ukraine's cooperation with the Office of the UN Special Representative is essential.

In early May 2022, Pramila Patten arrived in Kyiv for an official visit. She stated during her meetings that she could not stand by in the face of the suffering of the people of Ukraine.⁵⁶ Later, in an interview with Voice of America, Patten explained that she did not wait for her office to receive data on the number of CRSV cases before leaving New York for Ukraine since "It is very difficult to obtain accurate statistics, but what matters to me is ensuring prevention, protection [of survivors], and the delivery of services. I can also say with certainty that every warning light is flashing red when it comes to sexual violence."⁵⁷

⁵⁶ The UN Secretary-General will devote special attention in his report to sexual crimes committed by Russians in Ukraine, the MFA says, Ukrinform, May 4, 2022 <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3474383-gensekoon-u-dopovidi-pridilit-osoblivu-uvagu-seksualnim-zlocinam-rosianv-ukraini-mzs.html>

⁵⁷ Why is sexual violence used? Because the perpetrator knows it is a cheap and effective weapon, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative says, Voice of America, June 22, 2022, https://www.holosameryky.com/a/oon_seksualne_nasylstv_ukraina/6627362.html

On 3 May 2022, during the high-level visit, the *Framework on cooperation between the Government of Ukraine and the UN on prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV)*⁵⁸ (Framework on Cooperation) was signed. Pramila Patten signed on behalf of the United Nations, and Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, Olha Stefanishyna, signed on behalf of Ukraine. This marked the beginning of a serious international partnership in addressing and preventing CRSV, as well as supporting Ukrainian women, men, and children who have suffered from it.

Program Elements

The Framework on Cooperation is a wartime document developed swiftly in response to the urgent challenges that face Ukrainian society. The document outlined shared strategic goals requiring coordinated action. The document states that the goal of the Framework on Cooperation is to enhance protection and response mechanisms to CRSV, particularly in the context of military operations by Russian forces in Ukraine. To achieve this goal, it is essential to reinforce the capacity of national mechanisms and institutions in this field and the Framework on Cooperation outlines sixteen priority tasks across five key areas:

- monitoring trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation in conflict settings;
- providing support to individuals affected by CRSV;
- ensuring access to justice and accountability;

⁵⁸ Framework Programme of Cooperation between the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations on the Prevention of and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence. - <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/1/ind-57-gender-policy/ramkova-programa-spivotnitctva.pdf>

- strengthening the capacity of the security and defense sector to prevent CRSV;
- reparations and compensation.⁵⁹

The Framework on Cooperation calls for the development and reinforcement of national policies for preventing and responding to CRSV, as well as for implementing measures to reduce the risks of trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation and prostitution in conflict settings; strengthening protections for internally displaced persons against sexual violence; enhancing the protection, within applicable international frameworks, of all civilians forced to flee abroad, by supporting survivors, particularly women and children, with shelter, integration, access to the labor market and education, as well as access to comprehensive services including medical care, psychological support, and legal assistance; strengthen national healthcare and social service systems to ensure survivors of sexual violence, along with their children, family members, and other witnesses, have free, timely, and survivor-centered access to necessary services; reinforce the rule of law and enhance accountability for sexual violence crimes by supporting the justice sector and undertaking legislative reforms in line with international standards; foresee measures for monitoring, analysis, and reporting on CRSV, as well as supporting the collection of evidence and the preparation of cases for submission to national or international tribunals.

One of the provisions of the Framework on Cooperation includes the development and strengthening of a “zero tolerance” policy for sexual violence, the issuance of command orders explicitly prohibiting such crimes, and the establishment of accompanying executive and disciplinary procedures.

⁵⁹ Ukraine Is Not Silent, FOLIO, Kharkiv, 2024, page 46

Implementation of the Framework on Cooperation

The preparation and adoption of strategic documents such as the Framework on Cooperation typically are a statement of intent, a demonstration of commitment to fulfill obligations. However, such initiatives take concrete form only after the development of a subsequent action plan that outlines specific measures, timelines, responsible parties, and expected outcomes. To implement the goals of the Framework on Cooperation, a corresponding Implementation Plan had to be developed.⁶⁰ What made this situation unique was that the plan was not only expected to define the next steps in the field of CRSV prevention and response but also serve as a unifying document, one that could coordinate and align the efforts of numerous actors providing support to survivors of this war crime. Another defining aspect of the moment was the urgency: there was no time to delay, all issues had to be addressed within a very short period of time.

On May 25, 2022, an Interdepartmental Working Group (IWG) was established on the prevention of, and response, to sexual violence related to Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine, as well as for providing support to survivors. The IWG was chaired by Kateryna Levchenko, Government Commissioner for Gender Policy. The group brought together experts from government institutions, international and civil society organizations, academia, and analytical and educational institutions working in this field. Participants included Members of Parliament, representatives from the Office

⁶⁰ Implementation Plan for the Framework Programme of Cooperation between the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations on the Prevention of and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/1/ind-57-gender-policy/plan-realizaciyi-ramkovoyi-programi-spivrobotnictva-miz-uriadom-ukrayinita-organizacijeu-objednanix-nacii-2022-2025rr.pdf>

of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, and central executive authorities. Particular attention was given to involving security and law enforcement agencies, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the National Police, the State Emergency Service, the State Migration Service, the Ministry of Defense, the Prosecutor General's Office, and the Security Service of Ukraine, all of which are engaged in documenting and investigating CRSV cases, preparing them for court proceedings, and ensuring accountability. Representatives of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Policy, the National Social Service of Ukraine, as well as civil society and international organizations such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Women, the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Council of Europe, the European Union Advisory Mission, the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation and the Global Survivors Fund, Information and Consulting Women's Center, the Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association JurFem, La Strada Ukraine, Ukrainian Women's Fund, PACT Ukraine, Centre for Economic Recovery, Innovative Social Solutions, SEMA Ukraine, Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, program PROTECT, and others, participated in the work of the IWG, as well.

At the July 2022 meeting of the IWG, the decision was made that the Implementation Plan should be prepared in time for the United Nations General Assembly session in September 2022. These were highly ambitious plans, as the task involved developing a comprehensive and serious document with the engagement of numerous stakeholders, while the actual dead-

line allowed for the work was only six weeks. Such deadlines could have seemed entirely unrealistic. However, the project was successfully completed. On September 23, 2022, during the public event “Protection and Justice for Survivors of Sexual Violence: Building a Comprehensive and Effective System for Investigation, Documentation, and Accountability,” co-organized by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine and the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine within the framework of the 77th session of the UN General Assembly, Deputy Prime Minister Olha Stefanishyna presented to the international community the “Implementation Plan for the Framework on Cooperation between the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations on the Prevention and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence.”

“The Joint Action Plan is the foundation for building a coordinated, transparent, and effective system for combating CRSV and providing comprehensive support to survivors, and one that will enable the Government to act more effectively and in a more structured manner.”⁶¹

Olha Stefanishyna, Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and Minister of Justice of Ukraine (2020-2025)

⁶¹ Ukraine presented the Action Plan to Combat Sexual Violence and Support Survivors on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, Government Portal, September 25, 2022, , <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/ukraina-prezentovala-plan-dii-z-protydii-seksualnomu-nasyilstvu-ta-dopomohy-postrazhdalym-na-poliakh-henasamblei-oon>

Preparation of the Implementation Plan: Experience and Innovation

The Secretary of the IWG, consultant to the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, Anatolii Dosych, noted that although international partners were eager to see the final document as soon as possible, there was concern that document could not be completed within the established timeframe since the amount of work that needed to be completed was simply too large. Proposals for the Implementation Plan came from a wide range of institutions and organizations and involved numerous implementing parties and required review.

“We brought together everyone who could potentially be involved in implementing such a plan and in responding to CRSV. The key was to coordinate the work properly for the common good. And we succeeded.”

Anatolii Dosych, IWG Secretary

The most valuable asset was the already gained experience: the coordination of efforts among numerous stakeholders had been practiced during the update of the National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security for the period up to 2025. The previous version of the document, developed in 2020, required urgent revisions after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. The revision process had already been well organized, so by December 2022, the necessary updates were prepared and adopted. The ability to accelerate the process at that time was made possible by the use of many tools, in particular, digital technologies and online communication formats, and then these same tools were

used in developing the Implementation Plan. Strategic sessions and online events were widely employed allowing many participants to engage simultaneously, facilitating broad discussions, identifying urgent tasks, and formulating strategic goals. Online meetings were held frequently, sometimes several times per week. Proposals voiced during these sessions were promptly reviewed by the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, where they were refined and aligned with international standards and requirements. In peacetime, such a pace might not have been in demand, but war and its daily challenges dictated a different rhythm of work: results were needed here and now.

Civil society organizations provided significant support in preparing the Implementation Plan. Many of them have direct experience working with CRSV survivors and understand their needs, so they were ready with practical proposals to improve the overall support system and to implement specific actions in this area. These issues were well-considered and deliberate for them, and NGO activists were prepared to justify their importance and advocate for their inclusion in the final text.

Equally important was the inclusion of CRSV survivors themselves in the development of the Implementation Plan. This approach is rooted in one of the guiding principles of CRSV response systems: “Nothing about us without us.” Ultimately, involving survivors in collaborative efforts is, in itself, a form of support. Many of them contribute to the common cause, feel valued, gain new skills and opportunities for personal growth, become civil society activists, and help others. Their insights serve as a strong indicator of the document’s effectiveness and future relevance.

The quality and efficiency of the Implementation Plan were also greatly influenced by cooperation with the Pramila Patten. Her staff regularly advised their Ukrainian counter-

parts, shared their expertise, and helped refine both strategic and operational goals, tasks, and actions. They supported the drafting process; since this is a significant document aligned with UN processes, accurate and appropriate language was needed. “Experts from the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, who were involved in developing each part of the Implementation Plan, guided us and helped define the key priorities and directions we needed to include to ensure an effective response to CRSV, quality support for survivors, and the creation of a legal framework — which, at that time, did not yet exist in Ukraine. They had the knowledge that we lacked,” stated Anatolii Dosych. According to Mr. Dosych, communication with Ms. Patten’s team occurred regularly, once or twice per week.

“Cooperation with the Office of Pramila Patten demonstrated not only the Ukrainian Government’s political will to respond to CRSV and seek meaningful tools to do so — we showed our readiness to work transparently and in coordination with international bodies. We welcome all international missions and organizations monitoring the situation, including the treatment of russian prisoners of war, something the russian federation does not allow. We do not want to be like them, and that is why the democratic world supports us.”

***Kateryna Levchenko,
Government Commissioner for Gender Policy***

The development of the Implementation Plan helped the Government demonstrate its willingness to be both accountable and transparent to international actors, a crucial stance for Ukraine today.

Implementation and Monitoring

One of the defining features of the Implementation Plan is that it functions as a “living” document. Most of the activities included are grounded in actual needs, remain relevant, and are in demand. However, circumstances evolve, new challenges emerge, and new needs arise. For example, as early as November 2022, proposals from the Office of the UN Special Representative Pramila Patten were integrated into the strategic document. Later, in February–March 2023, in preparation for the participation of the participation of the official delegation of Ukraine to the 67th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York City, and the organization of high-level events about providing assistance to CRSV survivors, those implementing the Plan provided updates on its execution. After several months of work, they had already gained practical experience worthy of sharing.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine reported that the Department of Migration Police of the National Police, together with the Lviv State University of Internal Affairs, approved a *Comprehensive Preventive Program for Interagency Cooperation in Combating Human Trafficking*. A lecture course was delivered for migration police staff on the use of OSINT tools in documenting and investigating human trafficking crimes, in cooperation with the EU Advisory Mission in Ukraine. The Ministry of Social Policy launched <https://safewomen.com.ua>, a website containing critical information for women and girls crossing the border, including safety guidance, red flags to watch for, and emergency contact points in cases of human trafficking. The National Social Service, in collaboration with the Ukrainian School of Governance of the National Agency of Ukraine for Civil Service (NAUCS), developed a short-term specialized training program titled “Combating Human Trafficking.” A total of 118

individuals completed the training. Both government and non-governmental organizations reported intensified outreach, trainings, and other activities.

At the same time, the assessment of the Implementation Plan's progress also highlighted several challenges requiring further attention and resources. These included: the need to align the legal framework for preventing and responding to CRSV with international standards; the development and adoption of the Law of Ukraine "On Amendments to Certain Laws and Regulatory Acts in Connection with the Ratification of the Istanbul Convention;" the formulation and approval of assistance standards for CRSV survivors according to specific categories, including women, men, boys, girls, and persons with disabilities; the restoration of buildings and property of specialized gender-based and CRSV survivor support services damaged or destroyed during the full-scale war; and the resumption and decentralization of medical, social, psychological, and other essential services, bringing them closer to survivors. These issues were raised by stakeholders working directly with CRSV survivors.

During the March 2023–March 2024 reporting period on the Implementation Plan's progress, new priorities emerged. Within each IWG subgroup, the educational component and the harmonization of CRSV training approaches gained significant importance. This led to the creation of two new bodies: the Working Group on Harmonizing CRSV Training Approaches and the CRSV Survivors' Consultation Platform. Among the main achievements were improved access for residents of de-occupied territories to CRSV documentation opportunities; enhanced professional training within law enforcement agencies regarding CRSV investigations and comprehensive survivor protection; and increased capacity of lawyers and attorneys involved in providing free secondary

legal aid to CRSV survivors. Judicial awareness was strengthened regarding CRSV case adjudication and accountability; a standard professional development program was developed for civil servants and local government officials titled “Identifying and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Assisting Survivors;” and a strategy was adopted to implement a survivor-centered approach to CRSV investigations; legislative and departmental documentation concerning CRSV response was also improved. Additionally, a map of organizations for consulting with CRSV survivors was created, forming the basis for an official list of institutions responsible for operating the consultation mechanism and coordinating the consultation process; work also began on establishing a referral mechanism for delivering reparations among government, civil society, and UN agencies. Special attention was devoted to vulnerable populations at risk of human trafficking: since the full-scale invasion, 1,390 internally displaced persons were employed in Poltava region. Forty-eight IDPs received microgrants to launch or grow their businesses under the government’s eRobota program, totaling over UAH 11 million. In Sumy region, 2,833 new jobs were created.

The execution of the Implementation Plan also involves coordinating cooperation with international entities operating in Ukraine. Such partners often emphasize that strategic planning is a strong asset that signals commitment, the state’s obligation to uphold the standards of international instruments, and, accordingly, enhances its predictability and credibility. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the Ukrainian side works not only with the Office of Special Representative Pramila Patten in implementing the Plan, but also with other UN agencies, including UNFPA, UN Women, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and the International Organization for Migration. Furthermore, the docu-

ment has become a powerful fundraising tool, one on which donors rely when determining funding priorities. Implementation Plan has been renewed for 2026-2027.⁶²

Localizing Tasks

At the end of March 2025, a new phase of the Implementation Plan's rollout began, specifically, the localization of tasks with the purpose of ensuring close coordination of the relevant work with Ukraine's regions. To develop effective procedures and identify key elements that must align with the needs and capacities of each region, two-day strategic sessions were scheduled.

“We are holding the sessions at the beginning of the year to ensure the highest quality implementation of the Plan throughout 2025, as it serves as an important and powerful source of coordination and information, results of which we present on the international stage. That is why the work of regional administrations is visible not only in Ukraine, but also across all possible UN platforms, including the Commission on the Status of Women and the General Assembly.”⁶³

**Kateryna Levchenko,
Government Commissioner for Gender Policy**

⁶² Implementation Plan for 2026–2027 for the Framework Programme of Cooperation between the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations on the Prevention of and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence. - <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/1/ind-57-gender-policy/plan-realizaciyi-ramkovoyi-programi-spivrobotnictva-2026-2027.pdf>

⁶³ A series of strategic sessions on localizing the implementation of the Implementation Plan for the Framework Programme has been launched, Government Portal, April 1, 2025, <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/rozpochato-provedennia-serii-stratehichnykh-sesii-shchodo-lokalizatsii-vprovadzhennia-implementatsiinoho-planu-z-realizatsii-ramkovoii-prohramy>

The sessions aim to address a number of tasks, including analyzing the work already carried out in response to CRSV at the regional level, identifying next steps for execution of the Implementation Plan locally, developing roadmaps for each region, and discussing the most pressing locally relevant issues that should be added to the Plan.

The key actors responsible for enacting the Implementation Plan on the ground are the regional military administrations and their structural units, which gives significant weight to this work in the regions.

Civil society organizations have also joined the localization process. In particular, the Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association JurFem, in cooperation with the Secretariat of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy and with support from the Government of the United Kingdom under the project “Women. Peace. Security: Acting Together,” implemented by the Ukrainian Women’s Fund, conducted facilitated sessions in the regions. These sessions helped local stakeholders develop measures tailored to their region’s specific needs and priorities. Specialists from Kyiv city, Kyiv, Chernihiv, Zhytomyr, Vinnytsia, Poltava, Cherkasy, Lviv, Zakarpattia, Chernivtsi, Rivne, Volyn, and Kirovohrad regions have already taken part in these two-day regional sessions.⁶⁴

These approaches demonstrate that the Implementation Plan remains a “living” document, designed for long-term cooperation among a wide range of stakeholders.

Key Achievements of IWG Efforts

1. Legislative breakthrough: the adoption of Law of Ukraine No. 4067-IX “On the legal and social protection of persons affected by sexual violence related to the armed ag-

⁶⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/ypkjsjfb2>

gression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, and the provision of urgent interim reparations”⁶⁵ was a fundamental shift in the national legal system.

This step is a direct implementation of Article VII of the Framework Cooperation Program (FCP) and the fifth direction of the Implementation Plan. For the first time in Ukraine’s history, the law establishes a clear legislative framework, defining the status of persons affected by conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and establishing an effective mechanism for providing urgent interim reparations.

2. Comprehensive rehabilitation: Throughout 2024, UNFPA, with the support of the UN Action Against Sexual Violence initiative, implemented a unique rehabilitation program based at the Center for Holistic Women’s Recovery (NGO Neyamiya). The program, which included psychotherapy, medical support, and case management, proved highly effective: screening of participants showed a reduction in PTSD levels from 54–75% to 7.7–36%, as well as a significant reduction in symptoms of depression.

The Blue Bird NGO developed a concept for specialized assistance to men and boys who have survived sexual violence. This comprehensive approach, combining legal and psychosocial support with economic integration, is based on consultations with the survivors themselves.

Additional rehabilitation capacity is provided by the IOM Medical Rehabilitation Center and the St. Olga Shelter.

3. The voice of civil society: as of December 2025, a powerful movement of organizations uniting survivors has formed

⁶⁵ LAW OF UKRAINE

On the Legal and Social Protection of Persons Affected by Sexual Violence Related to the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, and the Provision of Urgent Interim Reparations to Them
<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/4067-20#Text>

in Ukraine. Eight key organizations have become the voice of survivors: SEMA Ukraine and Numo, Sisters! – women’s associations; the women’s association Graduates, and December 29, the November 11 Charitable Foundation, the community organizations Civil Prisoners, and Live Free and the NGO Path of the Free – an organizations of men who survived captivity.

4. Communication and advocacy: the publication of the book *Ukraine Is Not Silent: Chronicle of Countering CRSV (2022–2024)* was a landmark event. The publication contains 25 interviews with experts and survivors, documenting Ukraine’s unique experience of building a support system during the war.

The Ukrainian Women’s Fund, in cooperation with the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, implemented a large-scale information and awareness campaign in fourteen regions to raise public awareness of CRSV. A total of 81,000 copies of materials were printed, and a series of educational videos was created for both specialists and the general public.

5. Institutional transparency: An important step in the implementation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) was the preparation of the first Voluntary Report by the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine.⁶⁶ The document contains a separate section devoted to CRSV as a prohibited method of warfare, and also highlights the policy of gender equality and zero tolerance for violence in the armed forces.

6. Sustainability: In 2025, the IWG developed an updated Implementation Plan for the Framework Program for 2026–2027. It places a clear emphasis on regional implementation;

⁶⁶ Voluntary Report in the Field of International Humanitarian Law. - <https://mfa.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/1/dobrovilnij-zvit-u-sferi-mgp-14-11-24-a99f628e0a.pdf>

provides for new measures for social, psychological, and family rehabilitation; and proposes comprehensive rehabilitation services for children affected by CRSV, as well as comprehensive support for children born as a result of CRSV.

SECTION 5. SURVIVORS RELIEF CENTERS, AURORA ONLINE PLATFORM, SURVIVORS RELIEF PLATFORM

In Ukraine, many civilians suffer from russia's continuing aggression. Some endure life in temporarily occupied territories, where they are subjected to bullying, torture, humiliation, conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), illegal detention, and other serious human rights violations. Survivors also include those who lost their health or property due to the war, as well as those forced to flee their homes in search of safety. As of January 5, 2026, 209,223 crimes of aggression and war crimes committed by russian military personnel have been registered in Ukraine since February 24, 2022. Survivors of these crimes require comprehensive support, a responsibility to be shared by state entities in cooperation with international and civil society organizations. Therefore, it is worthwhile identifying the most effective and successful social services provided.

Survivors Relief Centers

Emergence of the Relief Centers

Ukrainians face multiple and harsh challenges of war and compounding the difficulty is that often they cannot find an answer to even a simple question such as “where can I find the help I need and who can I trust?” Numerous offers of help appear online, but which offers are legitimate? Which professionals should be consulted in crisis situations? Who can provide long-term psychological support to help overcome

trauma? Who can assist in finding temporary shelters or free housing? And, in general, to whom or where does one turn if in a foreign city with children and pets, and often numerous questions, problems and misunderstandings.

These multiple needs and concerns came into sharp focus almost immediately after the beginning of Russia's full-scale aggression. Almost immediately the number internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine increased dramatically, psychologically traumatized, and disoriented civilians. This was Ukraine's reality in spring 2022. At the initiative of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, and with the support of the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, a decision was made to create a state-run network to support those affected by the war: Survivors Relief Centers (SRCs). These SRCs were to serve as hubs for people to receive answers to "war-related questions," to receive help, consultations, and assistance. The primary focus of the SRCs was on assistance to IDPs as one of the most vulnerable population groups. However, SRCs were also intended to support other affected individuals, as well as residents in the regions where they were established, since these other vulnerable groups also required protection and support.

The implementation of this government initiative was made possible through the support of international partners, such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), as well as with financial assistance from the governments of Austria, Belgium, Spain, and Sweden. Local authorities and civil society organizations also played a crucial role, holding primary responsibility for the on-the-ground operations. A distinctive feature of launching these SRCs was the extraordinary speed of deployment: the first hub was set up and opened in Zaporizhzhia in June 2022, within a matter of weeks of proj-

ect initiation. Zaporizhzhia was chosen deliberately to serve as a direct response to the Russian occupation of Mariupol and surrounding settlements from which Ukrainian citizens were evacuated. IDPs were transported to Zaporizhzhia by bus, as well as by other means, and there, at a humanitarian aid hub, were offered the services of the newly established state institution, the Survivors Relief Center.

Subsequent internal migration flows in Ukraine led to the opening of additional SRCs in Lviv, Dnipro, Kyiv, Mukachevo, Chernivtsi, Kherson, Kharkiv, Poltava, Kropyvnytskyi, Odesa, and Sumy. In most of these cities, permanent SRCs were established; in Kharkiv and Kherson mobile units were deployed initially, focusing on the needs of survivors from the de-occupied territories.

Currently, fifteen Survivors Relief Centers operate across Ukraine: twelve permanent centers and three mobile units. The mobile centers operate in Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, and Kherson regions. They were established to ensure a rapid response to the needs of survivors.

Support Provided

“The main task is to identify the problem a person is facing because of the war. It is often psychological in nature. But sometimes it is just confusion. A person simply does not know where to begin or how to navigate their situation. This is where the SRC team can help: they gently ask what has happened and explain how to move forward.”

**Pavlo Zamostian, Assistant Representative,
UNFPA in Ukraine**⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Ukraine Is Not Silent, FOLIO, Kharkiv, 2024, page 85.

Clients of the SRCs can access four types of services: social, psychological, legal, and medical. The SRC teams include social workers, case managers, psychologists for adults and children, lawyers, and other specialists. The work of the teams is based on these principles: unconditional support, free-of-charge services, confidentiality, and anonymity, seeking help voluntarily and barrier-free access. SRCs prioritize creating a trusting atmosphere for communication, considering survivors' interests and needs and avoiding re-traumatization.

Not all services are provided at all the SRCs. Some services are available from, and delivered, by the state and other institutions. However, all SRCs are integrated into national and local referral systems and can promptly assist in accessing such services. The SRCs collaborate with numerous organizations, as well as both public and private sector representatives to provide comprehensive support to survivors. Partners include Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration; Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy; Office of the Prosecutor General; Coordination Center for Support to Victims and Witnesses; Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War; Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine; Ministry of National Unity of Ukraine; Office of the Ombudsman; Free Legal Aid System; regional military administrations; city councils, and other local authorities; international organizations such as UN High Commissioner for Refugees, International Office for Migration, and UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission-Ukraine, and numerous civil society organizations, including Rokada, the NGOs Successful Woman, Association of Women Ambassadors of Ukraine, Culture of Democracy, Nehemiah, and others.

The specific support provided by SRCs depends on the

region. Support is guided by the needs of users. “At first, a displaced person thinks primarily about safety. Only at later stages do they begin to focus on social reintegration. So, we clearly observe how internally displaced Ukrainians move from the eastern to the western parts of the country. Near Zaporizhzhia or Dnipro, they seek crisis psychological support, while closer to Lviv or in western regions, they start to address strategic issues about rebuilding their future lives,” explained Nina Lompart, UNFPA Project Coordinator. Specialists at the SRCs provide both one-time consultations and long-term assistance. Qualifications are upgraded on a regular basis through supervision, interventions, courses, training, and work methods in keeping with modern standards. In the first year alone, fifty SRCs professionals completed specialized training on supporting survivors of sexual violence. These trainings covered various aspects of assistance, including identification, trauma work, balancing therapy with psychological support, crisis interventions, and more.

Results

From the launch of the SRCs in June 2022 through the end of 2024, a total of 52,404 individuals received support through this social service network. The majority (79%) of recipients were women, 21% were men. During this period, 87,746 services were provided, with 70% of them received by internally displaced persons. The most requested were social services at 45.3% of all requests, followed by psychological services for adults (20.5%), case management for gender-based violence (13.2%), legal services (11.5%), and psychological services for children (9.5%).

**Client reviews about the work of
the Survivors Relief Centers**

“Right now, I have neither a past nor a future. All I want is to stop being afraid. That is why I turned to the Survivors Relief Center to see a psychologist. Gradually, I started talking. Not about the past – I do not remember it. Not about the future – I have not seen it. But about the present, and what I feel in it.

The women at the center welcomed me warmly and with understanding. They gave me all the necessary information and help, which I desperately needed in this new place. I felt that I was not alone. When they offered me a session with a psychologist, I immediately accepted. I knew I could not cope on my own.

The psychologist helped me manage the anxiety that constantly haunted me. I realized that while I could not solve all my problems at the center, I could find support here – so the problems would no longer control me.”

SRC client

“I did not know where to go. I had just spent the last of my money on a place to sleep. At the Survivors Relief Center, they helped me find shelter. They also supported me psychologically because at that moment I was in despair. I knew things would be difficult, but I had not imagined how difficult. I felt completely lost inside... The people there treated me with such care. You feel protected. In those moments, trust was everything – and I trusted them.”

SRC client

Given the importance of the work of SRCs, on November 19, 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted Resolution No. 1321, which approved the “Model Regulation on the Survivors Relief Centers.”⁶⁸ This document defines the key principles, objectives, functions, and procedures for establishing and organizing the activities of the SRCs. The model is expected to be expanded and replicated.

Will the Survivors Relief Centers continue operating after the end of the Russia-Ukraine War? According to Pavlo Zamostian, Assistant Representative, UNFPA in Ukraine, this is a matter of long-term support. Over time, new challenges will emerge that require continued professional assistance, for example, the reintegration of war veterans into society, and the prevention of domestic violence. “All of Ukrainian society has been traumatized by the war. Ukrainian society needs rehabilitation. And that will take a great deal of time,” noted Mr. Zamostian.⁶⁹

Aurora Online Platform Establishment of the Platform

The launch of the Aurora online platform was primarily driven by the urgent need to support CRSV survivors, the scale of which became known in the spring of 2022. Most of the women and men who experienced such violence required psychological assistance, as the trauma they endured was profound. Providing immediate access to professional support was essential.

⁶⁸ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1321 of November 19, 2024, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1321-2024-%D0%BF#Text>

⁶⁹ Ukraine Is Not Silent, FOLIO, Kharkiv, 2024, page 90.

“We understood that CRSV survivors would not be ready to communicate face-to-face right away. Moreover, many of them were likely to change their place of residence or leave for other regions, including abroad. Also, the demand for psychotherapists in Ukraine increased sharply, and there are very few here. So, to combine professional support with accessible, confidential, and safe communication from any location, we concluded that the best solution was an online format.”⁷⁰

**Pavlo Zamostian, Assistant Representative,
UNFPA in Ukraine**

The Aurora online platform was launched on May 31, 2022, with the support of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, and the Government of the United Kingdom. Volunteers from SoftServe, one of the world’s largest IT companies and headquartered in Lviv, developed the platform’s website as part of the company’s pro bono corporate initiative, Open Tech.

Support Provided

The main goal of the Aurora platform is to offer specialized psychotherapeutic support to survivors of war-related violence. While this social service was initially focused on CRSV survivors, the scope has since expanded both in terms of the clients served and the services offered. Today, people who have experienced various forms of war-related trauma and engage with Aurora can also receive assistance with legal and medical matters and even receive help finding

⁷⁰ Ibid., page 80.

a safe shelter. The team includes a psychiatrist and a gynecologist who can conduct examinations and prescribe necessary treatment. These services reflect not only the platform's growing experience, but also the high level of trust between the platform's team and survivors.

Support is provided by professional psychologists with experience in trauma cases, who apply effective therapeutic tools, including EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) therapy, which have shown positive outcomes. Potential clients can view photos and read the profiles of psychotherapists on the platform's website, learn about their areas of expertise, and choose the specialist they prefer.

The process for accessing individual services is streamlined: a person registers on the Aurora website, completes an initial testing to determine needs and nature of the trauma, selects a specialist, and chooses the mode of communication, whether by phone or online. Each client is eligible for fifteen no-fee psychotherapy sessions. This strategy offers a solid foundation for processing trauma, restoring emotional balance, and developing a personal recovery plan to rebuild a normal life. The assistance is delivered with strict confidentiality: only the selected specialist has access to the client's information.

Thanks to the online format, Aurora can provide support even to clients in temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine or those who were forced to flee abroad because of the war.

Results

During the first year of operation, the Aurora online platform provided assistance to 175 survivors.⁷¹ Behind each

⁷¹ "An online psychotherapy support platform for survivors of conflict-related violence Aurora operates in Ukraine," UNFPA, May 22, 2023, https://ukraine.unfpa.org/en/aurora_eng

number is a unique story, a unique life, and a shared hope for healing, for human dignity, and for Ukraine's victory.

“Tackling gender-based violence has always been a top priority for the UK, and the British Embassy is proud to be able to support Ukraine to address violence and to provide assistance to all who seek it. ...The importance and timeliness of the Aurora app cannot be underestimated. This platform is already helping Ukrainian women and men seek and receive quality support to overcome traumatic experiences and make society stronger.”⁷²

**Dame Melinda Simmons,
British Ambassador to Ukraine (2019-2023)**

The Aurora platform is actively promoted across Ukrainian regions, and because they trust the service, survivors continue to seek help. This trust is one of the platform's significant achievements.

“Trauma cannot be cured; it can only be integrated. And that requires work. They say time heals, but that is not true. Time gives us the opportunity to heal ourselves. It is not time that heals us, we heal ourselves, with the help of professionals.”

**Oleksii Geliukh,
psychotherapist on the Aurora platform⁷³**

⁷² «SoftServe спільно з UNFPA запустили онлайн-платформу психотерапевтичної підтримки «Аврора», SoftServe, May 30, 2023, <https://www.softserveinc.com/uk-ua/news/softserve-and-unfpa-launched-aurora>

⁷³ “We help heal wings or grow new ones” — psychotherapist on the Aurora platform,” UNFPA, August 11, 2023, https://ukraine.unfpa.org/en/geliukh_eng

Survivors Relief Platform

Emergence of the Survivors Relief Platform

Providing timely and accurate information is one of the most vital forms of assistance provided to survivors of Russia's aggression in Ukraine. Many of them require timely and specific guidance on various issues. Some need a referral to a hotline that supports survivors of gender-based violence or CRSV; others seek contact information of service providers or online profiles of specialists in particular fields, medical facilities offering 24/7 services, or legal advisors with expertise in the rights of survivors. Recognizing this diversity of needs, the Government of Ukraine proposed the creation of a dedicated service platform. This initiative also came from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, in cooperation with the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, who coordinate the platform's operation with the support of the United Nations Population Fund and technical expertise from the UN Women representation in Ukraine.

The core goal was to create an online space for delivering clear and verified information to survivors. Many of them, especially those in temporarily occupied territories or abroad, cannot rely on in-person meetings with professionals or even on phone calls. In such cases, online communication becomes essential, and survivors can find the necessary contacts and resources via the Survivors Relief Platform.

The Platform is useful not only for survivors of war-related violence, but for their loved ones to help them understand how to interact with a traumatized person. The Platform is also useful for professionals who work with survivors.

Support Provided

The Platform's staff describe their main task as explain-

ing, in simple and accessible language, why professional help is important and why help should be accessed. Staff provide information about available services that users can access whenever and as needed. Another crucial goal is to build an environment of trust between survivors and service providers. This sense of trust often helps traumatized people take the next steps in their journey toward justice, such as cooperating with law enforcement to hold perpetrators accountable.

“The launch of the Platform is another building block in the foundation of an effective response mechanism to cases of violence. Every user of the Platform is guaranteed to receive the necessary and professional support. Once a person has stabilized their psycho-emotional state and worked through their trauma, they may be ready to testify against the perpetrators. Therefore, the Survivors Relief Platform also represents a meaningful contribution to restoring justice and holding all perpetrators accountable.”

**Olha Stefanishyna,
Deputy Prime Minister for European and
Euro-Atlantic Integration (2020-2025)**⁷⁴

The Platform provides information not only about government programs, but also about initiatives created in partnership with civil society and international organizations. The website includes a variety of brochures and informational materials, including psychological resources, to help users recognize the effects of violence and respond in a timely manner.

⁷⁴ Ukraine Is Not Silent, FOLIO, Kharkiv, 2024, page 31.

The Platform offers not only contact details and information about accessing immediate support but also highlights educational and economic opportunities for survivors of war and violence. This approach helps them access comprehensive support for their further development. An interactive map of Survivors Relief Centers is also available on the website. A dedicated feedback section has been developed for collaboration and inquiries from the media and for the public.

Results

The services of the Survivors Relief Platform continue to be in high demand. In 2024 alone, more than 140,000 people in Ukraine and abroad received vital information about available support through the service. Thanks to an awareness campaign supported by TCA (USAID), the number of unique website visitors quadrupled monthly. The campaign targeted residents of frontline regions and those affected by war and violence, encouraging them to seek help. In addition to users from within Ukraine, Ukrainians in Indonesia, Germany, Poland, the United States, and France actively visited the Platform's website. There were also visits from temporarily occupied territories, including Donetsk City and Donetsk region. The information campaign also contributed to a broader public dialogue about violence and war crimes. The overall level of discussion on these topics has increased 2.5 times.

SECTION 6. PAYMENT OF URGENT INTERIM REPARATIONS TO SURVIVORS OF CRSV

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) has become one of the challenges Ukraine faces because of russia's armed aggression. As of December 2, 2025, prosecutors in Ukraine have registered 389 cases of CRSV since the beginning of the full-scale military aggression of the russian federation, and among the survivors were 145 men, 244 women, including twenty-two underage girls and one boy. These figures offer only a limited picture of the scale of the problem that has emerged from the russia-Ukraine War. Ukrainian and international experts believe that the actual number of survivors to be many times higher, as nine out of ten survivors typically do not seek help. Moreover, there is currently no reliable data on CRSV in the temporarily occupied territories; after such information is obtained, the overall understanding of the situation could be significantly altered.

“We know that there are many victims of the CRSV in Ukraine. And we also know that we are currently working with the tip of the iceberg, because such people do not always seek help, it is unspeakably difficult for them. But various state structures, non-governmental organizations, for example, SEMA-Ukraine, are working to help the victims, many of whom remain in the occupied territories or in captivity. This is also a feature of Ukraine.”

**Catherine Coppens,
Executive Director
of the Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation ⁷⁵**

Women and men who have been victims of war crimes have the right to be compensated for the harm (monetary, physical, psychological) they have endured from the aggressor. These compensations are referred to as reparations, for gross human rights violations and serious violations of international law, typically provided after armed conflicts have ended. After formalities are settled, calculations completed, and survivors identified, final decisions are then made only years or even decades after the fact. Until now, this method has been the global norm.

Ukraine changed its approach to providing reparations for women, men and children who have suffered from CRSV. Despite the ongoing active armed resistance against russian forces, survivors of conflict-related sexual violence have begun receiving urgent interim compensations in the amount of €3,000. This became possible through the Pilot Project on Urgent Interim Reparations (UIR) for survivors of sexual violence related to the armed aggression of the russian federa-

⁷⁵ Ukraine Is Not Silent, FOLIO, Kharkiv, 2024, pg. 191

tion against Ukraine. The Pilot Project's first payments were made in March 2024. Over the course of 2024, the Project's implementation period, such compensations were expected to be given to up to 500 CRSV survivors.

Why Has the Issue of Urgent Interim Reparations Gained Such Importance for Ukraine

Reparations are a critical step to support survivors of war crimes. Generally, the nature of reparations and amounts of compensations are determined typically during negotiations and the subsequent signing of peace agreements or other relevant international treaties; payments are to be made by the aggressor state to the country that was attacked. From the beginning of the war, Russia has identified the invasion of Ukraine, as a "special military operation" that, from Russia's perspective, Russia should not consider future compensations. Therefore, these actions should not require subsequent reparations and compensation. Negotiating reparations may take many years unless a coalition of democratic states develops alternative mechanisms for securing funds from Russia for this purpose.

Women, men, and children who have suffered conflict-related sexual violence often were victims of other violations of human rights, as well; as a result, they have lost their health, employment, property, and prospects for the future. Many lack the means to support their families. For most, financial assistance is an urgent need, one that must be met here and now. Without adequate and timely support for their recovery, return to normal life may be indefinitely delayed and even worse, will lead to irreparable harm.

“The essence of reparations involves two essential elements. The first is recognition. Victims need to be officially recognized as such. That status confirms that they are not to blame, that they did not bring this tragedy upon themselves, that they are still human beings. Their dignity is restored. The second is giving people a chance to piece together what is left of their former lives, to stand on their feet again. Because in the wake of such horrific events, people leave their studies, lose their jobs, lose their families, sometimes even their loved ones turn away from them. Helping these people return to a normal life and rebuild a healthy sense of self-worth is the most important part of our work.”

*Esther Dingemans,
Executive Director, Global Survivors Fund*⁷⁶

How Did the Idea of Urgent Interim Reparations Develop?

Soon after Russia launched its full-scale aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Ukrainian and international legal experts began to develop guarantees for different forms of reparative measures: restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition. In one way or another, these forms already are being implemented in Ukraine. Survivors receive medical, legal, and psychological assistance, and humanitarian support. National legislation was developed to define the status of CRSV survivors, and mechanisms are being determined to provide them with reparation measures to overcome the consequences of the damage caused.

⁷⁶ Ukrainian Is Not Silent, FOLIO, Kharkiv 2024, page 138.

For support, Ukraine turned to international institutions that are actively engaged in addressing conflict-related sexual violence, as well as defending the rights and supporting survivors in various regions throughout the world. A core organization in this effort is the Global Survivors Fund (GSF). The GSF responded quickly to the request made by the government of Ukraine. In July 2022, a Framework Agreement was signed between the GSF and Ukraine's Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, as well as the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy. In 2022, GSF published a Global Reparations Study that confirmed the urgent need for comprehensive reparative measures in Ukraine that would address survivors' critical needs and contribute to their long-term recovery. The idea of the Pilot Project began to be developed.

What Was the Purpose of the Pilot Project?

Identifying several key objectives, in September 2023, the Pilot Project was initiated. First, among the objectives was to ensure that survivors had access to the urgent interim reparations (UIR).

Under the Pilot Project, survivors received fixed compensation based not on an assessment of the harm caused, but on the fact of the violation of human rights. Survivors were also provided with other reparations, including rehabilitation, through referral to service providers.

In addition, women, men, and children who were found eligible for compensation under the Project are entitled to receive payments from other structures, as well as full reparations.

Another, no less important task of the Project is to evaluate the pilot system for identifying and recognizing victims, both for Ukraine, and for use in other countries. This effort reflected a unique approach to topic of reparations, as it re-

quired thorough development of every phase of a complex process: communicating with survivors, conducting interviews with them to collect testimonies, determining whether recorded cases of sexual violence meet the Project criteria, making coordinated decisions, and, in the event of a positive conclusion, making payments.

A significant component of the Project was the preparation of conditions and tools for the further transformation of the pilot system into a full-fledged state program of urgent interim reparations to survivors of the CRSV. This system also can serve as a model for providing reparations to victims of other war crimes committed by the Russian Federation during aggression against Ukraine. Therefore, such a project is a clear approach to the principles of post-war reconstruction of Ukraine and socio-economic reintegration of the affected population, and, as First Lady Olena Zelenska noted, “a step towards restoring justice to the victims.”⁷⁷

Who Implemented the Pilot Project?

As Fedir Dunebabin, joint representative in Ukraine of the Mukwege Foundation and of the Global Survivors Fund, explained, “We were able to implement the Pilot Project only through joint efforts. Guaranteeing access to reparations requires a condition that a government acknowledges responsibility to protect the rights of survivors. In our case, we received essential support from the Ukrainian authorities, from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy.”

⁷⁷ Reparations to be paid to survivors of wartime sexual violence in Ukraine. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/apr/26/reparations-survivors-wartime-sexual-violence-by-russian-soldiers-ukraine-war-olena-zelenska>

An Oversight Board was established to coordinate and supervise the work of the Pilot Project. Members of the board were selected to bring together not only professionally qualified experts in survivor support but also those individuals respected both within Ukrainian and international communities. These criteria strengthened the Pilot Project. Ukraine's Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy chaired the Oversight Board. Other members included representatives from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, the National Social Service of Ukraine, the Office of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, the Mukwege Foundation, the International Organization for Migration, the Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association JurFem, UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, as well as NGOs uniting survivors of CRSV (SEMA-Ukraine and Numo Sisters) and a network of men who survived captivity and torture by Russian occupiers (Alumni). The Pilot Project's effectiveness depended on strong collaboration among government institutions, international bodies, and civil society. For example, since they were those who were in direct contact with survivors and were responsible for collecting survivor testimonies, psychologists from different NGOs working in various regions of Ukraine served as case managers for the Pilot Project.

Implementation partners involved in launching and running the Pilot Project included the Survivor Support Centers, the Government Contact Center, CSOs that included La Strada Ukraine, the Women's Information Consultative Center, Blue Bird, Eleos-Ukraine, Andreiev Family Foundation, and the Ukrainian NGO Truth Hounds, which specializes in documenting and investigating war crimes.

The charitable organization Andreiev Family Foundation directly managed the reparation payments. The support of the Governments of France and Belgium made this Project possible.

Pilot Project Criteria to Identify and Recognize Victims

The Pilot Project provides support to women and men, girls and boys who have experienced sexual violence because of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine. International law, in particular, the UN Guidance Note of the Secretary-General: Reparations for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence⁷⁸ establishes that conflict-related sexual violence takes multiple forms such as, inter alia, rape, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization, forced abortion, forced prostitution, sexual exploitation, trafficking, sexual enslavement, forced circumcision, castration, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity. This broad definition of CRSV served as the working basis for the Pilot Project's eligibility criteria and goes beyond the commonly held understanding of CRSV only as rape. However, due to lack of awareness of this broader definition and criteria, many survivors of conflict-related sexual violence are unable to self-identify as such.

The Pilot Project issued payments of urgent interim reparations to individuals who experienced CRSV beginning with February 2014, the moment from which Russian military forces began to occupy and began to commit war crimes on Ukrainian territory. This is a crucial aspect, since prior to the full-scale invasion in February 2022, the international community had not formally recognized Russia's aggression, and the issue of reparations remained unresolved. Many survivors had already lost hope that their rights would ever be protected. Now, they can say: we have not been forgotten.

⁷⁸ https://wicc.net.ua/media/Reparation_CRSV.pdf

Under the criteria of the Pilot Project, children born because of CRSV are also recognized as survivors.

From the beginning, the Project did not cover prisoners of war who were members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and were captured while performing tasks related to protecting security and deterring armed aggression. However, this rule was later revised and servicemen who had suffered CRSV in Russian captivity also received the right to access the UIR within the framework of the Project.

The Project provided assistance to survivors regardless of whether they had contacted law enforcement agencies regarding the recording of CRSV cases that had occurred to them or even if they did not do so. The primary protection of the interests of the survivor determined the nature of the Project's work.

All services of the Project were provided confidentially and free of charge.

Pilot Project Structure

From the initial application by a survivor to the actual payment of reparations, the Pilot Project was structured in several stages.

The first stage involved establishing contact with CRSV survivors who were willing to cooperate with the Pilot Project. Given the pilot nature of the initiative and limited resources, communication with survivors was conducted primarily through service providers who already had a relationship with these individuals and had earned their trust. For example, Survivor Support Centers were familiar to both male and female survivors of CRSV and could offer them participation in the Pilot Project. Similar outreach was conducted through both formal and informal networks, as well as civil society organizations uniting survivors themselves. This process often involved working with individuals who

were not only ready to speak about what they had endured and then participate in rehabilitation programs but were even willing to reach out and support others in coping with the consequences of traumatic experiences.

Information about the Pilot Project was shared on social media and through “word of mouth.”

To participate in the Pilot Project, survivors could apply by contacting uir@globalsurvivorsfund.org; by contacting the case manager coordinator at 093 505 75 42, or via hotlines at 1547, 0 800 500 335, and 116 123.

The next stage involved collaborating with the Pilot Project case managers who conducted interviews with survivors. At the start of the interview, the applicant filled out and signed an application, an Informed Consent Form, for participation in the Pilot Project, and a Consent to the Processing of Personal Data form. Applicants could attach various documents, or other evidence to support their testimonies, but doing so was not mandatory.

After this step, the authentication of survivor identification began. “We assess the likelihood factor,” explained Fedir Dunebabin. According to Dunebabin, “If a person provides documents, we verify their authenticity. We compare the materials with our database that already includes a substantial number of documented crimes. For example, we know that many documented cases of CRSV of specific forms relate to torture chambers in Kherson. If someone describes similar incidents, that appears credible. We operate on the principle of integrity. Although at times unfortunately we do encounter cases that appear to be fabricated.”

“We assess the probability factor,” explained Fedir Dunebabin. “We compare the collected evidence with our database, which already has many documented crimes. Let us say, conditionally, we know that regarding the Kherson torture chambers, there are a lot of documented cases of CRSV of

certain forms. If a person talks about similar cases, it looks credible. We operate on the principle of integrity. Although sometimes we discover facts that may indicate that a person, unfortunately, fabricated them.”

The duration of the identification process depends on the form of sexual violence involved, but overall, it is not a lengthy procedure.

Once the steps of evaluation and analysis of the information were completed, the Technical Secretariat prepared all required documents for submission to the Identification Review Board.

If a positive decision regarding UIR was made, the information was forwarded for compensation payment processing through the Pilot Project’s implementation partner.

Reparations were not subject to taxation, although tax authorities were notified of the charitable assistance received.

On average, the time between an applicant’s initial request and the positive decision followed by payment of urgent interim reparations was six weeks.

“The questionnaire is not short, however, it is designed to tell, as best as possible, what happened to the victims.”

“I believe that the time spent describing the situation during the interview is appropriate. Each prisoner has his own story; everyone has something to tell. There were no inappropriate questions in the questionnaire.”

“The questionnaire seemed appropriate to me. Although there was a feeling of discomfort that the experience had to be put into words.”

“Everything in the Project is well thought out, the case managers also do everything to adapt to the lives of the victims and to make everyone comfortable.”

Survivor Feedback on the Pilot Project

Confidentiality Requirements in Processing Testimonies

For individuals who have experienced CRSV, safeguarding information that they do not want to disclose publicly is of critical importance. The Pilot Project established a clear system to ensure the confidentiality of all collected testimonies. Statements, facts, documents, and supporting materials submitted by survivors were entered into a secure, encrypted database by case managers. Each case was assigned a unique code, and the survivor's personal data remained hidden.

The encrypted database was accessible only to members of the Technical Secretariat; case managers were only able to create entries in the survivor file. Even the tax office was only provided with information about the recipient and the amount of assistance received as a person who suffered damage because of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation.

Is it possible to exchange the Project database with other registries that also deal with issues of reparations payment, specifically the International Register of Damages for Ukraine that operates in The Hague? In fact, such an exchange of information may be very necessary to support the processes of justice and establish the truth, and it can also protect survivors from re-traumatization if they apply for compensation within the framework of international or national mechanisms. However, Project guidelines state clearly that such an exchange is possible only with the informed consent of the survivor.

Pilot Project Implementation Challenges

Fedir Dunebabin identified three main factors that complicated Pilot Project implementation.

The first factor is subjective. Many people who applied to participate in the Project did not understand that CRSV manifests itself in many forms, and some of them also ap-

plied to receive compensation for other types of crimes they had experienced that did not fall under the Project criteria.

The second factor is that the implementation of the Project involved a rather tight deadline and a lack of sufficient financial resources. Accordingly, employees were burdened with the inability to effectively inform and identify women and girls who suffered during the occupation.

Another complicating factor was the current shortage in Ukraine of professionals, particularly psychologists, who are qualified to work as case managers. In total, nine such specialists worked on the Pilot Project in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kher-son, Lviv, Dnipro, and Ivano-Frankivsk and were available to travel to other regions, as needed. Referral mechanisms also proved to be a challenge: this refers to the tools and systems used to direct survivors toward other state or non-governmental services that could offer them appropriate forms of support.

Results Obtained

As of December 19, 2025, 1,208 individuals applied to the Pilot Project. Of these, 1,080 were found eligible for compensation, including 726 men, 331 women, four boys, and nineteen girls; 704 individuals have already received compensation. The remaining identified survivors will receive compensation in 2026. Sixty-two were found ineligible, with some of these cases referred to the Project Appeals Committee.

Since the pilot effort that was evaluated was intended to form the basis for the preparation of a state program for paying urgent interim reparations to survivors of CRSV, the implementation of the Pilot Project was also reenforced by additional technical assistance and advocacy from the Global Survivors Fund.

Representatives of the GSF contributed to the drafting of relevant national legislation, including the Law of Ukraine “On the Legal and Social Protection of Persons Who Suffered from Sexual Violence Related to the Armed Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and the Provision to Them of Urgent Interim Reparations” (Law No. 4067), and advocated for expedited adoption of the legislation. The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the law in November 2024. Future steps include the development of necessary by-laws, regulations, and protocols to establish an institutional framework, and to train personnel.

An equally important result is the development of Ukrainian experience in the rapid implementation of an urgent interim reparations program. This experience can be adapted to the local conditions of countries that are also facing the consequences of armed conflicts in their territories.

International media has covered the work of the Pilot Project work. An article published in *The Guardian* newspaper had an unexpected effect: a survivor from Vietnam responded, expressing hope that Ukraine’s progress in reparations could inspire similar initiatives in her own country where people also suffered CRSV because of armed conflict.

CHAPTER 3

IMPLEMENTATION INSTRUMENTS OF THE NATIONAL ACTION PLAN 1325 WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY

SECTION 7. GENDER EQUALITY INDEX IN UKRAINE

In fall of 2024, 25-year-old Anastasia Mazurkova began to work for the subway system in the city of Kharkiv as Ukraine's first electric train conductor.⁷⁹ Previously, this position would have been inaccessible to women; however, the situation is changing. Women are gaining access to professions that traditionally were considered suitable "only for men." Women drive public transport, master agricultural machinery, occupy senior management positions in various institutions, and establish their own businesses. According to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, at the end of 2024, from among the 21 ministerial positions in the Government of Ukraine, five were held by women. Women also headed 22% of Ukraine's diplomatic missions. At the municipal level, women hold about 35% of the leadership positions, and in small communities, 41.3%. The share of women entrepreneurs in Ukraine increased from 46.4% (in 2021) to 47.5%

⁷⁹ Suspilne Kharkiv, September 20, 2024, <https://suspilne.media/kharkiv/803929-ak-pracue-persa-zinka-masinistka-u-metro-harkova/>

(in 2024). In the same year, 72% of state education vouchers were used by women.⁸⁰

Ukraine's accession to the EU involves achieving European standards in matters of equal rights for women and men. How does Ukraine assess the processes happening in this field, and how are government policies amended to bridge gaps in outcomes and information disseminated about existing accomplishments? Europe's experience offers a modern approach: use of the Gender Equality Index, which offers real options for public development in this area, as well as for prospects for further implementation of democratic values in everyday life. Progress in this area is important for Ukraine: 91% of Ukrainians believe that equal opportunities for women and men are an integral part of human rights standards in the European Union.⁸¹ The situation was analyzed by means of the Gender Equality Index of Ukraine,⁸² presented in early 2025.

Prerequisites and Conducting Research

The Gender Equality Index (GEI) was introduced in 2010. At that time, the GEI was presented in Geneva by the Secretariat of the World Economic Forum, after which the United Nations began to take GEI information into account in their status reports on the topic of human development.

Why is this tool considered to be important? This tool aids in the monitoring of life in the public sphere, which should help women and men fulfill their potential in key areas of

⁸⁰ 24 December 2024, <https://zmina.info/news/v-ukrayini-zrostaye-kilkist-zhinok-v-upravlinni-ta-sektori-bezpeky/>

⁸¹ Ukrainian Women's Fund. 25.06.2024. URL: <https://uwf.org.ua/rivnist-cze-mozhlyvosti-91-ukrayincziv-ok-vvazhayut-rivni-mozhlyvosti-nevidyemnoyu-chastynoyu-standartiv-prav-lyudyny-yes/>

⁸² Gender Equality Index in Ukraine, 2025, https://uwf.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/gender_index_ukr_web.pdf

life, particularly, reproductive health, expansion of rights and opportunities, and labor market characteristics. If gender issues are represented with clear indicators, the standards according to which society develops become evident, along with the values people hold, predict probable impacts on the development of human resources, and the effective use of strategies in the present, as well as in the future. Such positive approaches have caused significant interest in the GEI. In Europe, the GEI is calculated annually. The GEI shows the situation regarding the implementation of the gender equality policy in the EU, overall, and in each member state, in particular. The work is conducted by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) that operates in Vilnius, Lithuania.

Implementing European standards has been a specific objective for Ukraine since 2014, when the European Union–Ukraine Association Agreement was signed. Since 1996, the National Statistical System of Ukraine (NSSU) has published gender indicators every two years in the statistical collection *Women and Men in Ukraine*. In 2020, the Government of Ukraine approved a list of 226 indicators used by the NNSU to collect data on gender equality.⁸³ However, it is now critical to use specialized data selection and analysis in line with European standards that will help Ukraine not only understand the level of gender equality in the country, but to have data available to compare with other European countries, as well. For example, in order to identify the actual gap in wages and pensions between Ukrainian men and women, and to identify opportunities to achieve gender balance in leading areas of the economy and public life, use of the GEI is necessary.

Since this is a new practice for Ukraine, a decision was made to prepare the GEI as a pilot project within the EU-fund-

⁸³ Ibid., page 45.

ed project “Network of Gender Think Tanks: Strengthening Capacity for Advanced Policy Development, Impact Assessment, Strategic Advocacy and Targeted Policy Communications” implemented by the Ukrainian Women’s Fund together with the NSSU and with the support of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, with the methodological support from EIGE.

The development of GEI had its specificities. Ukraine became the first country in the world to conduct such work in wartime, with due regard for the resulting limitations for data collection. In addition, Ukraine currently lacks certain equivalents to European statistics, but the expert team managed to collect and calculate data for 30 out of 31 indicators of the GEI, using only one proxy indicator. Crucially, the methodological basis of the Ukrainian GEI is aligned with the EIGE methodology,⁸⁴ which enables the comparison of scores in Ukraine with that of EU countries.⁸⁵

The GEI development team, consisting of representatives of the NSSU and independent experts, worked for a year and a half on this effort. The first step was to develop a methodology to collect data and to consult with European experts to ensure alignment to the EU methodology. The GEI is calculated as a score on a scale from 1 to 100, with “1” indicating that there is total inequality in the rights and opportunities of women and men in the country, while “100” means that the situation is perfect. However, neither the EU overall nor

⁸⁴ Gender Equality Index 2017: Methodological Report. (2017). European Institute for Gender Equality. Retrieved from https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/gender-equality-index-2017-methodologicalreport?language_content_entity=en

⁸⁵ Gender Equality Index in Ukraine, 2025, https://uwf.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/gender_index_ukr_web.pdf

its individual member states have yet achieved the highest score. Today, the EU average is 71 points, although progress on these issues is evident: the 2010 GEI was 61.4 points.

The team calculated the GEI in three stages. At the first stage, data were collected from the available sources. The main information for calculating the GEI in Ukraine came from state statistical observations, demographic statistics, administrative data from ministries, departments, companies, organizations, other sources. Then gender gaps between scores for women and men were calculated to form the GEI. At the third stage, the numbers were generalized to obtain the total GEI.

According to experts, the first stage was the most difficult and of longest duration. The war complicated the collection of certain data, other data were unavailable, which necessitated the search for alternative solutions or proxy scores. In certain cases, the indicators were calculated using complex formulas that required consultations with EIGE specialists.

Domains for Calculating the GEI

The Gender Equality Index is calculated across six main domains: Work, Money, Knowledge, Time, Power, and Health. There was also an additional domain of Violence.

Work. This domain considered women's and men's access to the labor market to assess their employment prospects. Indicators included employment levels, duration of employment, possibility of working part-time and determined the share of those employed in the fields of education, healthcare, and social assistance.

“Labor market activity in Ukraine is traditionally lower for women and close to the average European level. This indicates that women face greater barriers to entering the labor market and maintaining continuous employment. In 2021, for the population aged 15+, the full-time equivalent employment rate was 42.9% for women versus 56.9% for men. The average values for EU member states are 42.5% for women and 57.4% for men. Women are most economically active in Lithuania (54.1%) and Sweden (52.8%).”⁸⁶

In Ukraine, the score for the Work domain overall is 65.6, while the average European score is 73.8. Compared to other EU countries, Ukraine occupies the 25th place in the participation of men and women in the labor market (although ranks ahead of Romania, Greece, and Italy).

Money. This domain measured indicators related to the economic situation of women and men and their access to financial resources. For this purpose, the researchers looked at the average monthly wages, the level of equivalent annual income, as well as indicators of poverty risk among women and men. For comparison with other European countries, calculations were made in euros.

⁸⁶ Ibid., page 19.

“Ukraine is a country with low wages. In 2020, the average monthly wage based on PPP for the working population was €1,516 for women and €1,895 for men. However, in 2020, the level of wages based on PPP in Ukraine was higher than in Bulgaria, Slovakia, Lithuania, Portugal, Latvia, Hungary, Estonia, and the Czech Republic. Ukraine is closest to Greece, where the wage level based on PPP is €1,524 and €1,802, respectively. The average values for EU member states are €2,321 for women and €2,818 for men, with the highest salaries in Luxembourg at €3,497 and €3,625 per month, respectively. The gap in the incomes of working women and men may be related to several factors, including horizontal and vertical segregation in the labor market.”⁸⁷

According to experts, gender wage gap is affected by, among other things, the factor that women spend more time on unpaid labor. This includes caring for children and the elderly or for other family members. While, as a result, they may have a reduced workday at a paid job, but then their pay level is lower.

The score for the Money domain in Ukraine is 76.6 points, while the average score for the EU is 82.6 points.

Knowledge. In this domain, the GEI assessed the level of access to educational services and enrollment of women and men. These indicators are particularly valuable because it is often the level of education that allows for more opportunities for better employment, personal fulfillment, and general wellbeing. The domain considered the share of HEI graduates, the share of the population involved in formal and non-formal education, and the share of students in HEI in the areas of education, health care, and social assistance.

⁸⁷ Ibid., page 22.

“In Ukraine, in 2021, the share of graduates of higher education institutions (HEI) was 39.9% among men and 49.0% among women of ages 15+. The situation where women are more likely than men to obtain higher education is widespread in the EU. The average values for EU member states are 27.7% for women and 25.9% for men. There are more male than female graduates of higher education establishments only in Denmark, Greece, the Netherlands, and Austria. The most noticeable gender gap exists in Estonia (41.7% among women and 27.1% among men), and the least noticeable one is observed in Luxembourg (41.4% among women and 40.9% among men). Compared to EU countries, the rate of 49.0% for women in Ukraine is the highest. The next countries by activity of women in higher education are Ireland (44.0%) and Sweden (43.6%).”⁸⁸

When women in Ukraine pursue higher education, they tend to choose humanities, medical or teaching specialties, which still are considered more suitable for women because they allow for flexible hours.

The value of the Knowledge domain in Ukraine is 55, while the EU average is 63.6 points.

Time. This domain is designed to assess the balance of professional and homelife obligations for men and women, the factor that most strongly affects gender inequality. Another objective is to determine the structure of time allocated for work and leisure. The domain indicators include the proportion of the population engaged in family care and housework, the proportion of the population regularly engaged in

⁸⁸ Ibid., page 25.

sports and cultural activities outside the home, as well as several types of volunteer or charitable work.

“The share of the population that cares for and instructs their children or grandchildren, the elderly, or people with special needs daily in Ukraine is 33.4% among women and 19.1% among men. Even though the gap is also present in the EU, in the EU men tend to engage in caregiving more often than they do in Ukraine. The average values for EU member states are 33.5% for women and 24.6% for men. The least noticeable difference in the frequency of involvement of women and men in caregiving is observed in Sweden (24.7% for women and 25% for men), Estonia (16.9% and 17.7% respectively), Finland (23.7% and 21.5%), and Slovenia (26.3% and 23.8%). Only in three EU countries — Sweden, Estonia, and Denmark — are men involved in care more often than women.”⁸⁹

Several domain indicators are related directly to the ongoing war in Ukraine: the share of unpaid work has increased, as well as the number of those who have joined fundraising and volunteer activities and those who are looking for additional income.

The score for the Time domain in Ukraine is 78.1 points, exceeding the average score for the EU at 68.5 points. In this domain, Ukraine is a leader among European countries.

Influence. This domain is quite important for Ukraine, as it determines the access of women and men to leadership positions in state political, economic, and civic structures. Until recently, such positions were predominantly “male,” with

⁸⁹ Ibid., page 28.

women frequently occupying mid- and junior-level positions; despite their high level of education and professional capabilities, for women the glass ceiling still impedes progress. This domain estimates the gender breakdown among political figures, heads of large companies and financial institutions, research institutions, media, and Olympic sports organizations.

“The representation of women and men at the ministerial level in Ukraine is quite unbalanced — 18.8% are women and 81.2% are men. The average values for EU member states are 33.4% for women and 66.6% for men. Only a few countries have worse scores compared to Ukraine — Romania (women account for 9.7%), Malta (12.3%), Greece (14%), and Hungary (15.4%). The leaders in terms of balanced representation of women and men are France (women account for 50%), Austria (49.3%) and Sweden (51.4%), and the largest number of women head ministries in Finland (54.6%).”⁹⁰

In Ukraine, numerous factors still influence the low representation of women in top management, and these are mentioned in the research. Therefore, the score for this domain remains quite low — 38.7 points, compared to the European average of 59.1 points. However, in this domain, Ukraine scores higher than several EU countries: Poland, Estonia, Slovakia, Romania, Greece, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, and Hungary.

Health. To calculate the GEI in the domain of Health, the self-assessment of health among women and men, adherence to a healthy lifestyle, and accessibility of medical services are

⁹⁰ Ibid., page 31.

all crucial considerations. This domain assesses the share of the population that does not smoke or drink alcohol, maintains a healthy lifestyle, does not have unmet needs for medical evaluation, other.

“In Ukraine, health and lifestyle scores are high overall, but lower compared to EU countries. Men have a significantly lower life expectancy, which is caused by high mortality rates due to cardiovascular disease, alcohol dependency, and smoking.”⁹¹

At present, this score is also significantly affected by the wartime challenges that lead to a deterioration in the state of health, insufficient access to medical services, and economic instability. Due to this, the Health score in Ukraine is 82.8, compared with the European average of 88.5 points. According to these indicators, Ukraine only scores higher than Latvia, Bulgaria, and Romania.

Results of GEI Assessment Findings

The Gender Equality Index, which was calculated in Ukraine for the first time, already has proven its value. The EIGE methodology, which the expert group followed, has been adapted successfully into national practice. At the same time, certain specifics of data collection and the calculation scheme were taken into consideration, necessitated by unique circumstances. The findings provide an idea of the progress in gender equality issues that make it possible to compare them with the average European indicators, as well as with the indicators of individual EU countries. Based on these values, an assessment can be made as to which policy

⁹¹ Ibid., page 34.

decisions may have the biggest impact on state gender policy in Ukraine, directing efforts towards those sectors requiring additional attention.

“The Index clearly indicates the provision of equality at the level of implementation of state policies, provides a full picture of the existing problems and challenges, as well as the strengths that Ukraine has in key aspects of life,” noted Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Olha Stefanishyna (2020-2025).⁹²

Conducting regular GEI assessments is essential. Annual studies can show the development of equality between women and men in all spheres of public life in Ukraine, give Ukraine an understanding of where it ranks compared to international partners. Work on the GEI also strengthens international cooperation in Europe and facilitates the openness of Ukrainian society to democratic transformations.

“The European Institute for Gender Equality has confirmed the correctness of our calculations and compliance with standards, so we hope to continue using this tool in the future and approve it at the state level.”

Olesya Bondar,
Director, Ukrainian Women’s Fund⁹³

The institutionalization of research also indicates the need to train qualified specialists for such work. Preparation takes resources and time; therefore, this evaluation should not be considered as a one-time event. To ensure sustainability of

⁹² Zmina, 5 March 2025, <https://zmina.info/news/u-kyyevi-prezentuvaly-indeks-gendernoyi-rivnosti-za-standartamy-yes-v-yakyh-sferah-vidstaye-ukrayina/>

⁹³ Ibid.

such work, there is a need to codify the GEI in regulatory documents, identify the responsible government structures and implementation mechanisms.

According to calculations, the overall 2023 Gender Equality Index in Ukraine was 61.4 points. This is 8.8 points lower than the average for the 27 EU member states. Among 28 countries (EU+Ukraine), Ukraine ranks 20th, ahead of Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Slovakia, Greece, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania. These results indicate good prospects for Ukraine's accession to the European community.⁹⁴

The Ukrainian Women's Fund, together with the Government of Ukraine and in partnership with EIGE, is prepared to continue the work that has begun.

⁹⁴ Ibid., page 17.

SECTION 8. GENDER ANALYTICAL CENTERS

Analytical centers, often referred to as “think tanks” can be described as “factories of ideas” or “brain hubs.” Think tank research can provide effective tools for informed decision-making at the levels of government institutions, businesses, academia, international organizations, and civil society institutions. These analytical centers, or think tanks, have become an integral part not only of intellectual life but of the socio-political landscape in many countries. In Ukraine, think tanks began to emerge in the 1990s. Many of them contributed to shaping independent expertise in the areas of domestic and foreign policy, national security and defense, energy, and other fields. Tetyana Stroiko, science editor of ILI, Doctor of Economic Sciences, professor at the Makarov National University of Shipbuilding (in Mykolaiv), notes “...from the first years of independence, Ukraine began to form the foundation for the emergence of independent analytical institutions capable of shaping strategies, concepts, and promoting ideas different from that of the government. After all, the purpose of think tanks is precisely to broaden our worldview, conduct research, and substantiate various alternatives and conceptual approaches.”⁹⁵

Most Ukrainian think tanks position themselves as independent structures. This independence enhances trust in their outputs, such as scientific analysis, advocacy strategies, and educational campaigns. At the same time, many think

⁹⁵ International Liberty Institute (ILI), June 25, 2025, <https://www.ilibertyinstitute.org/articles/shho-take-think-tank>

tanks confront significant challenges, including lack of commissions, as a result, funding, shortage of authoritative and qualified personnel, and limited influence. Due to the absence of proper regulations in national legislation, a significant share of think tanks are registered as civil society organizations. Such conditions complicate the development of research institutions. One of the key issues for think tanks remains strengthening institutional capacity.

The implementation of gender policy principles in Ukraine, as one of the drivers of European integration, has led to the establishment of gender analytical centers (GAC) or “gender think tanks.” Each operates with a different purpose. Some deal with a wide range of issues but systematically integrate gender approaches into their work and can conduct research with a gender focus. Others function as women’s or feminist civil society organizations that, alongside core activities, establish analytical units and conduct research. A third model includes organizations conducting gender equality research and analysis solely within their thematic focus areas.

In 1995, at the initiative of Olena Suslova, the Women’s Information Consultative Center (WICC)⁹⁶ was established, and defines its mission as collecting, systematizing, and disseminating information on women’s organizations and initiatives in Ukraine and beyond. WICC employs three main strategies in its activities: research, education, and advocacy. Notably, in 2012, this center undertook an unofficial translation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. In 1997, WICC established the Gender Information and Analytical Center KRONA in Kharkiv.⁹⁷ The mission was

⁹⁶ <https://wicc.net.ua/>,

https://www.facebook.com/WICC.NET.UA/?locale=ru_RU

⁹⁷ <http://krona.org.ua/>, <https://www.facebook.com/krona.org.ua/>

educational and awareness-raising work focused on increasing gender awareness among educators, youth, media professionals, and public officials.

Other GACs operate in Kyiv and throughout Ukraine's regions. Today, these are organizations that systematically generate specialized information to influence policies in the fields of equality, security, recovery, human rights protection, and European integration. At the regional level, GACs provide analytical outputs tailored to the local context, target group needs, and provide practical recommendations for decision-making by local authorities. GACs perform several key functions:

- policy and program analysis through a lens of gender equality;
- collection and systematization of data to assess the needs of women, internally displaced persons (IDPs), female veterans, persons with disabilities, and other groups;
- participation in the development, monitoring, and evaluation of policies related to WPS;
- dissemination of analytical results through advocacy, partnerships, and public communication.

In 2022, several GACs came together to establish the Gender Analytical Centers Network. This initiative became part of the project “Network of gender analytical centers: capacity development for advanced policy design, impact assessment, strategic advocacy, and specialized policy communications,”⁹⁸ implemented by Ukrainian Women's Fund (UWF) with financial support from the European Union and in cooperation with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for European

⁹⁸ <https://uwf.org.ua/merezha-gendernyh-analitychnyh-czentriv-posylennya-spromozhnosti-zadlya-rozrobky-peredovyh-polityk-oczinky-vplyvu-strategichnoyi-advokacziyi-ta-sfokusovanyh-komunikacij-shhodo-polityk/>

and Euro-Atlantic Integration and the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy.

Emergence of the Gender Analytical Centers Network

Before the full-scale Russian invasion, Ukraine had made progress on gender equality and combating discrimination across many areas. However, active hostilities in various regions altered the situation. “Gender equality remains one of the key priorities of the Government of Ukraine. Yet the war has brought numerous challenges that have deepened existing gender inequalities in Ukrainian society, including an increase in gender-based violence and reduced access to essential services for diverse groups of women. Therefore, it is critically important to expand government and civil society support to ensure the sustainability of gender transformation, equal participation of women and men in post-war recovery and development of Ukraine, and equitable access to the benefits of these processes,”⁹⁹ the study *Ukraine Country Gender Profile* highlights.

The Ukrainian Women’s Fund explains that the establishment of the Gender Analytical Center Network was, in many ways, a response to the structural shortage of high-quality gender analysis at the national and regional levels, particularly under martial law, in the face of the need to adapt policies to community realities, and amid challenges connected with recovery, displacement, the growing number of female veterans, and new security threats.

⁹⁹ Country Gender Profile Ukraine, Updated, July 2023, https://euneighbourseast.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/eu4genderhelpdesk_ukrainegenderprofile_2023-cgp_ukr_v5.pdf

“During wartime, women face a great many challenges that require systemic solutions. To propose such solutions, we need proper statistics, data, and analysis. That is why we turned to supporting think tanks — their research is now both relevant and essential. This idea emerged as a response to a demand from both the government and the women’s movement.”

***Natalia Karbowska,
Director, Strategic Development,
Ukrainian Women’s Fund***

UWF Project Coordinator Milena Horiachkovska added that policy influence requires valid data, sound analysis supported by conclusions and evidence, as well as expert recommendations. All of this, she emphasized, can be delivered comprehensively by a think tank. “The goal is to ensure more systematic integration of the gender perspective into policies related to European integration and Ukraine’s recovery from the consequences of the war. If the capacity of think tanks is strengthened, they will be able to exert such influence.” Project support was also intended to motivate specific research structures to orient themselves toward gender-related topics and refine such approaches.

Preconditions to establish the GAC Network included:

- the need to introduce a systemic approach to data collection and evidence-based public policymaking;
- the demand for local expertise in implementing the National Action Plan 1325, humanitarian aid programs, and recovery efforts;
- the necessity of strengthening the role of civil society organizations in developing decisions that integrate gender perspectives;

- lack of stable institutions able to combine analytical, advocacy, and communication functions.

International experience also inspired the Network's creation. Natalia Karbowska recalled meeting representatives of the Norwegian Network of Gender Analytical Centers working on Resolution 1325 issues. Ukrainian activists were interested in the formats of think tanks that they supported and the models of cooperation that they fostered. "But the most relevant example for us proved to be the work of the Center for Partnership Development (CPD) in Moldova. They have been actively and very effectively working with the Moldovan government on policy development, and the government trusts them. That is why we invited this institution to join our project." Another valuable contributor was the Center for Equality Advancement (CEA) in Lithuania, an international partner supporting the project's implementation.

When the idea of establishing the Network was announced, thirty-four applicants responded. To start, UWF, as the donor, conducted an assessment of which organizations were already active in this field, their areas of work, and their potential for growth and teamwork. "We decided that since this is a pilot project, we would support various models of gender analytical centers and not focus exclusively on women's organizations," explained Natalia Karbowska.

One of the selection criteria was regional representation. Currently, most think tanks are located, therefore concentrated, in the capital. However, those operating in the regions generally have a deeper understanding of the local context and stronger experience collaborating with local authorities and regional policymakers. This expertise enriches the GAC Network and the products released. Moreover, the participation of regional analytical centers contributes both to more effective localization of the UNSC Resolution 1325 National

Action Plan in the regions, and to the work of Coalitions 1325.

“We also applied thematic criteria,” noted Milena Horiachkovska. “Our goal was to select organizations with diverse areas of expertise, so that collectively they could cover the full spectrum of issues related to European integration, which is a very broad framework.” She also stressed the importance of feminist values. “To develop gender analysis, one must believe in women’s rights and gender equality. If an organization does not have this value embedded in its structure, among its key team members, it is unlikely to evolve into a gender think tank.”

Following the selection process, eight organizations joined the GAC Network: Bureau of Gender Strategies and Budgeting (Gender Bureau),¹⁰⁰ Analytical Center of the Association of Women Lawyers of Ukraine JurFem,¹⁰¹ Intellect of Sumy Civic Initiative Center,¹⁰² Women’s Information Consultative Center (WICC), Women in Media,¹⁰³ Center for Social Research (Cedos),¹⁰⁴ VoxUkraine,¹⁰⁵ and Legal Hundred.¹⁰⁶

“We achieved solid regional representation,” explained Milena Horiachkovska. “This includes Intellect of Sumy in Sumy region; JurFem, based in Lviv; and the Bureau of Gender Strategies and Budgeting, headquartered in Poltava, which coordinates a network of gender experts also working in Lutsk and Kyiv. We are pleased that we managed to include in the Network both an organization from western Ukraine

¹⁰⁰ <https://genderburo.info/>

¹⁰¹ <https://jurfem.com.ua/analitychnyi-tsentri/>

¹⁰² <https://intellect.sumdu.edu.ua/>

¹⁰³ <https://wim.org.ua/>

¹⁰⁴ <https://cedos.org.ua/>

¹⁰⁵ <https://voxukraine.org/>

¹⁰⁶ <https://legal100.org.ua/>

—currently hosting many internally displaced persons — and an organization from the Sumy region, a frontline region with substantial experience in crisis response and recovery from war impacts.”

Capacity-Building Program for Gender Analytical Centers

As the Ukrainian Women’s Fund has repeatedly emphasized, the establishment of the Gender Analytical Centers Network was intended to strengthen capacity. This is one of the essential prerequisites for further development. For a “classic” think tank, UWF support was intended to help ensure the integration of gender approaches into the think tank’s work. For a women’s civil society organization, funding assistance focuses on developing the unit specifically dedicated to systematic research.

The comprehensive capacity-building program for analytical centers was conducted in several stages and combined different support mechanisms. “We conducted an initial assessment of organizational capacity in policy analysis, communications, partnership-building, strategic management, and other areas for each organization,” explained Milena Horiachkovska. “Based on this assessment and interviews with the analytical centers, we developed individualized action plans covering management, fundraising, research, and communications activities, which we proposed to them.”

The capacity-building program included co-grants to support organizational sustainability. The next component is training and mentoring, including a cycle of workshops on research methodology, policy analysis, data visualization, advocacy, as well as facilitation and expert support. Thematic trainings covered EU gender equality legislation and practical approaches to advocacy campaign planning. The third

component was a mini-grants program to support individual studies on gender equality in various processes. The fourth component was mentoring support in developing analytical materials, implementing communication campaigns, and planning strategic development. The fifth was supporting the analytical centers in gender equality communications.

Another essential element of the program was fostering partnerships, engagement in diverse interaction platforms, and providing strategic consultations to the government on gender policy development. “We always asked our government partners to include analytical centers in such platforms of cooperation, which is why documents of various working groups and strategic sessions already contain contributions from analytical centers,” emphasized Milena Horiachkovska. Representatives of GACs participate in working groups established by the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, ministries, and local administrations, particularly in areas such as implementation of the Resolution 1325 National Action Plan, demographic policy, and veteran reintegration policy. They provide expert assessments, proposals for strategies, and analytical briefs for specialized state bodies, and engage in monitoring the implementation of policies, including at the local level, through budget, program, and regulatory analysis.

Today, cooperation with both central and local authorities has become quite significant. Gender analytical centers played an active role in defining the directions of work and implementing the tasks of the Platform for Gender Mainstreaming and Inclusion in Recovery. Think tank representatives joined the working group on drafting the third NAP to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 Women, Peace, and Security; the development of Methodological Guidelines for integrating gender approaches into the training of security and

defense sector personnel; the Alliance for Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Recovery, launched by Ukraine and international partners at the Ukraine Recovery Conference (URC-2024) in Berlin. Also included is participation in the Interagency Working Group on measures to overcome the gender pay gap at the Ministry of Economy; the working group on drafting Ukraine's Demographic Development Strategy until 2040 at the Ministry of Social Policy; interagency working groups on combating conflict-related sexual violence linked to Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine; the Expert Council on Equal Rights, Non-Discrimination, Domestic Violence, and Human Trafficking at the Office of the Commissioner for Equal Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, Political and Religious Beliefs; the Expert Group on Societal and Public Accessibility as part of developing the Action Plan for the implementation of the National Strategy for 2025–2026; the expert team Human Capital for updating the State Strategy for Regional Development 2021–2027 at the Ministry of Regional Development; the working group on veteran policy implementation in Sumy Region; the working group on drafting the National Strategy on Veterans and Family Members, as well as other working and expert groups. Representatives of three analytical centers (Bureau of Gender Strategies and Budgeting, Cedos, and Women in Media) were included in eight working groups preparing Ukraine's negotiation positions for EU accession talks.

“Of course, the war has created security and logistical challenges for the work of think tanks and for implementing our capacity-building program. For months, we lacked stable communication. Electricity outages disrupted entire regions, and even the ability to meet for coordination or training was difficult. Once, we held a training session in Poland to ensure safety,” said Milena Horiachkovska. Nevertheless, a flexible

approach to project management allowed the planned pace to be maintained. Based on the initial assessment, the eight analytical centers increased their organizational capacity by an average of 21%, enhancing the professional skills of their staff, improving strategic and fiscal management, as well as identifying prospects in external communications.

Communication Campaigns

The struggle for audience attention is a critical factor in the success of think tanks. Even the best research has negligible impact if it remains unknown, unread, or unused. “Today it is hard to imagine a Ukrainian think tank without at least one social media page, without expert audio and video commentary, or without infographics,” note Yuriy Yakymenko, President of the Razumkov Centre, and Anatolii Rachok, CEO of the Razumkov Centre (2001–2020).¹⁰⁷

One of the objectives of the comprehensive capacity-building program for gender analytical centers was to increase their “visibility.” This component was implemented with the support of another project partner, StratCom Ukraine,¹⁰⁸ a nongovernmental organization active in reforming state communications, conducting media research, and running communication campaigns.

“The project began with a three-day communication camp, where think tank representatives worked on core messages, effective communication formats and channels, studied successful cases, and explored approaches to covering gen-

¹⁰⁷ Think Tanks Today and Tomorrow: A View from Ukraine, Razumkov Centre, July 1, 2021

<https://razumkov.org.ua/statti/analychni-tsentry-sogodni-i-zavtrapogliad-z-ukrainy>

¹⁰⁸ <https://stratcomua.org/ua>

der-sensitive issues. They examined the elements of a communication strategy, why a strategy is implemented, and how to formulate objectives and goals for their think tanks,” explained StratCom Ukraine Project Manager Mariia Volodina.

During individual mentoring sessions, tailored communication development plans were prepared for each think tank. Their media presence was analyzed, the effectiveness of communication channels and expert visibility in the media was evaluated, and journalist accessibility was assessed. This provided a strong impetus for systematic work in this field and boosted team confidence.

“While developing communication plans, we recommended creating expert maps with profiles of specialists. These steps proved particularly useful: think tanks began to consistently apply these recommendations, significantly raising the visibility of experts. Cross-sector cooperation expanded, and communication with government structures and media improved. Think tanks realized the importance of continuous dialogue with the media rather than only ad hoc contacts,” said Mariia Volodina.

With StratCom Ukraine’s support, the Gender Analytical Centers Network conducted twenty independent regional communication campaigns that reached more than ten million Ukrainians. These campaigns highlighted how gender equality is linked to European integration and how it affects everyday life. They not only allowed gender analytical centers to sharpen their practical skills but also raised broader awareness among the public, government representatives, and key stakeholders about gender issues and related topics. For the analytical centers, this effort was also vital in that the campaigns enabled them to promote their own research products, further strengthening their credibility and influence.

Andrii Smirnov, head of the Cedoss communications de-

partment, emphasized the importance of a “talking heads” document, an organizational list of female experts with their profiles and contact details. Having such a resource at hand enables media outlets to directly approach experts for commentary. He also highlighted the usefulness of developing a Database of Legislative and Executive Contacts and a Media Map, both of which help update Cedos’s communication strategy.

“StratCom consultations became good ‘home-work’ for us: all the above-mentioned documents are best practices we may have contemplated but lacked a strong real-life example to implement.”

Andrii Smirnov,
Head of Communications, Cedos

Thanks to strengthened communication capacity, representatives of gender analytical centers began to work more actively with the media: they are invited more frequently to television broadcasts; their publications and expert commentary are in demand in regional and national outlets. The centers have been able to set up their own information platforms, including social media pages, thematic websites, and stakeholder digests.

Positive Practices

Within the project, gender analytical centers prepared sixty-nine outputs that included policy briefs, legislative analyses, and studies to advance a gender perspective in policies and in areas of European integration and recovery.

Gender Equality in Media

In 2023, Women in Media developed *Guidelines on Media*

Coverage of Gender Equality: Prevention of Violence, Sexism, and Gender Stereotypes.

“At that time, there were no state documents regulating how to cover these topics. Everything relied on self-regulation. We formulated clear guidelines about how to report on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), on domestic and gender-based violence. This was a grassroots initiative that gained support at all levels,” said Liza Kuzmenko, Head of Women in Media.

According to Liza Kuzmenko, for the first time in Ukraine, national indicators of gender equality in the media appeared at the level of a legal regulation. The analysis examined the share of women owners of media companies, the number of women who hold managerial positions in media, and whether there is a dedicated budget for anti-sexism measures. A dedicated section of the Methodological Recommendations provides practical advice on appropriately covering sensitive topics: CRSV; domestic and gender-based violence; combating sexism; and the portrayal of women and men in content.

The importance of this development is underscored by the fact that the Guidelines were approved by Order No. 333 of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine as of June 16, 2023.

Within the GAC network, the civil society organization Women in Media prepared a series of studies, including the study Gender Profile of Ukrainian Media, editions 2023¹⁰⁹ and 2025,¹¹⁰ done in cooperation with the National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine, with the ac-

¹⁰⁹ https://webportal.nrada.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Hendernyi-profil-ukrainskykh-media-ukr_versiya.pdf

¹¹⁰ https://wim.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/HENDERNYY-PROFIL-UKRAYINSKYKH-MEDIA_2024.pdf

tive support of Olha Herasymiuk, Council Chair, and other Council members, as well as the study *Media Experience in Covering Gender-Sensitive Recovery in Ukraine*.¹¹¹

Rapid Assessment Tool for the Integration of Gender Approaches in Recovery Program Documents

In autumn 2023, Yuliia Malko, a representative of the Bureau of Gender Strategies and Budgeting, participated in the training *Organizational Capacity for Gender Analytical Centers* delivered by experts from the Center for Partnership Development (CPD) in Moldova. The exchange visit took place as an element of the UWF project. During the event, Moldovan colleagues presented a *Tool for Assessing the Level of Gender Mainstreaming in Public Policies*. “It is officially used by state bodies, which turn to civil society organizations for assessments of their policies. They also have a procedure for ranking public policies in terms of gender mainstreaming and are proud that government and civil society are achieving progress. At the training, we had the idea to develop a similar mechanism for Ukraine and use it to analyze documents,” explained Yuliia Malko.

Consultations with Moldovan colleagues and Ukrainian experts helped the Bureau implement this initiative. The *Rapid Assessment Tool for Gender Mainstreaming in Recovery Program Documents* was validated with representatives of local self-government and in active cooperation with the Association of Amalgamated Territorial Communities (ATCs). According to the Bureau’s experts, the *Rapid Assessment Tool* not only identifies problems, but also helps identify opportunities to strengthen the gender sensitivity of document con-

¹¹¹ <https://wim.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Vysvitlennia-temy-hendernochutlyvoho-vidnovlennia-Ukrainy.pdf>

tent. Many community recovery plans across regions either lack a gender approach or factor it in only partially.

Yuliia Savelieva, representing the Association of ATCs, reported that approximately thirty communities in Odesa, Khmelnytskyi, and Dnipropetrovsk regions have already expressed interest in the Rapid Assessment Tool, and some have begun to use it.

Gender Equality Index

A study visit to Lithuania, organized under the UWF project, enabled Ksenia Alekankina, Senior Analyst and lead for Vox Ukraine's Reform Index, to become acquainted with the work of the European Institute for Gender Equality. One of the project partners, the Center for Equality Advancement (CEA), invited the Ukrainian colleague to share experience. She explored the methodology for calculating a gender index and approaches used by ministries, municipalities, and other institutions. An especially interesting example was a voluntary gender audit for businesses. "Companies apply on their own, undergo an audit on compliance with equality principles, and publish it as a positive story. Demand is so high that organizers cannot process all applications," she noted.

This experience proved important for the planning of a study, the results of which were incorporated into Ukraine's Gender Equality Index. VoxUkraine experts joined a working group of the Ukrainian Women's Fund, the State Statistics Service, and the Ptukha Institute for Demography and Social Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine to adapt European methodology to Ukraine in order to collect data. Drawing on its strong background in economic research, VoxUkraine helped establish one of the Index's indicators: the percentage of women within a company's leadership.

According to the data obtained, only 21.3% of leadership

positions in Ukrainian companies are held by women. In thirteen companies, women are not at all represented in leadership positions. These figures are significantly lower than the EU average (34%).

“For me, equal representation is not only about formal equality. Communities are home to people of different ages, genders, and social statuses. They all should be represented in decision-making bodies. Otherwise, policy is shaped, say, for a hypothetical car-owning resident of Kyiv, not for an older person with a bicycle in a village,” summarized Ksenia Alekankina.

The analytical center study¹¹² was the first in Ukraine to assess readiness to implement the EU Directive on gender balance among company directors.

Preparing a Community Gender Profile

Representatives of Intellect of Sumy Region also took part in a study visit to Lithuania. At the European Institute for Gender Equality and the Office of the Lithuanian Ombudswoman they examined practices for developing municipal gender profiles. This knowledge soon came in handy when representatives of the Lebedyn community asked the NGO to prepare a community gender profile.

“Sumy Region is under constant shelling, and community budgets are limited. But thanks to previous cooperation, the community knew that high-quality analysis would help attract additional resources and support and most importantly, make it possible to understand how the war has affected the population. That is how the need for a community gender profile arose,” explained Andriana Kostenko, a board member of the Intellect of Sumy Civic Initiative Center.

¹¹² <https://voxukraine.org/kvotuvannya-chy-m-yaki-zahody-shhobyraie-ukrayina-shhob-zbilshyty-chyslo-zhinok-u-naglyadovyh-radah>

Data collection engaged various ATC structures, local activists, civil society organizations, and volunteers. Information was gathered across 121 localities of the Lebedyn ATC. The gender profile contains detailed data on population categories remaining in the community and on new social groups that have emerged due to the full-scale invasion. Recorded is the gender and age structure among internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities affected by hostilities, persons who lost housing or whose homes were damaged. The profile counts families that include combatants, men, and women veterans. Additional vulnerable categories were single mothers, low-income households, persons with disabilities, and older persons, with sex- and age-disaggregated data for each category.

Lebedyn community is already actively using the gender profile in its work with donors, local businesses, and for managerial decision-making, for example, in developing the community's recovery plan. Intellect of Sumy has also applied this methodology in Mykolaiv, Romny, and Bilopillia communities, where gender profiles are likewise being used to design recovery plans.

European Standards for Ukrainian Legislation

Within the project, the Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association JurFem analyzed Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support, and protection for survivors of crime.

“The EU Directive sets minimum standards that must be guaranteed, while additional elements are left to the discretion of each state,” explained Yaryna Voloshyn, Communications Manager at JurFem.

The need to study and implement this document stemmed from several factors, including aligning national legislation with EU standards, strengthening the protection of survivors’

rights, and accounting for specific needs during interactions between legal professionals and survivors. Key aspects of the EU Directive include same-gender interviewing, the creation of a safe environment, confidentiality, and comprehensive assistance (medical, psychological, and legal).

Based on research, the JurFem team, together with law enforcement, developed minimum standards for investigating sexual violence crimes. Later, they organized a national conference on survivor-centered justice in cases of gender-based violence, where they presented draft standards for pre-trial investigation of domestic violence-related criminal cases. JurFem experts also contributed to Draft Law No. 12297 amending Ukraine's Criminal and Criminal Procedure Codes to ensure full implementation of international law provisions on combating domestic and other forms of violence, including against children. This draft law incorporates EU Directive standards.

Strengthening Support for Veterans

In early 2024, the organization Legal Hundred conducted the study “Social Protection of Women and Men Veterans: Analysis of Existing Standards, Overview of European Practices, and Policy Recommendations” that focused on integrating a gender-sensitive approach into Ukrainian legislation and regulations on veterans’ rights and guarantees.

“The idea is that all medical, psychological guarantees and material support should take into account gender-specific needs of women and men. The study highlighted the necessity of a unified and comprehensive policy for veterans, including social protection, payments, educational benefits, and more. Some recommendations also addressed housing, employment, and medical guarantees,” explained Mariia Zviahintseva, a lawyer at Legal Hundred.

The study laid the groundwork for developing unified standards of veteran policy within the national plan Concept of Support for Veterans and Their Families. Some of its findings were later incorporated into the Veteran Policy Strategy through 2030, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine.

Another Legal Hundred report, developed with UWF support, addressed the human rights of people in de facto marriages with missing or captured service members. Based on hotline cases, it underscored the urgency of protecting the rights of families of prisoners of war and the missing, now a key organizational priority.

Raising Awareness of Tenants' Rights and Responsibilities

The think tank Cedos addresses housing issues. With UWF support, in 2024 Cedos launched communication campaigns on fair housing rental in three cities: Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Chernivtsi. These cities host large numbers of internally displaced persons, many of whom rely on rental housing and often encounter discriminatory practices, particularly women raising children alone, who face greater challenges in securing accommodation. Therefore, enhancing tenant protections directly contributes to greater housing security for women.

“In our campaigns, we emphasized the importance of transparent, fair, and nondiscriminatory condition, especially free from gender bias. The main goal was to deliver essential information to tenants, landlords, and vulnerable groups on their rights and the rules governing rental housing in the context of European integration,” said Anastasiia Bobrova, Cedos Director.

The information was disseminated via Facebook, ad-

vertisements on public transportation, online media publications, and the Cedos website, including a dedicated presentation and blog on housing rental. The three campaigns reached nearly three million people.

The Ukrainian Women's Fund believes that the gender analytical center model can be applied even in communities with limited human resources, provided that the core principles of professionalism, independence, openness, and policy impact are upheld. According to Natalia Karbowska, UWF will continue to support gender analytical centers. "We care deeply about the future of research and of these think tanks. That is why we are seeking opportunities for them to continue conducting gender analysis across different topics, especially the most pressing for Ukraine: recovery and economic development."

SECTION 9. PLATFORM FOR ENSURING GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND INCLUSION IN RECOVERY

The term “war-affected” has become quite commonplace in Ukraine. The term refers to people who, because of hostilities caused by the aggressor state Russia, suffered and continue to suffer; the term refers to those who lost their health, their homes and other property, their jobs. As of mid-March 2025, there were 4,601,146 internally displaced persons (IDPs) registered in Ukraine.¹¹³ According to the estimates provided by the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine there were 5,859,890 Ukrainian refugees registered in the world.¹¹⁴ The most horrible consequence is the loss of life. According to the data released by the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, in November 2025, since the beginning of the full-scale invasion in February 2022, the UN has documented and confirmed information about 14,796 civilians killed and 39,543 wounded civilians in Ukraine, including 758 children killed and 2,445 wounded.¹¹⁵ And these figures do not include the numbers from among the defense forces of those killed and wounded. Besides the reality of death,

¹¹³ How Many? 18 March 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/yya3nfsu>

¹¹⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/nmkmhe8w>

¹¹⁵ https://ukraine.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2025-12/Ukraine%20-%20protection%20of%20civilians%20in%20armed%20conflict%20%28November%202025%29_UKR.pdf

Ukrainian citizens experience constant shelling by Russia and spend nights in shelters, go through blackouts, water and heating outages because of infrastructure destruction by Russia's attacks and cannot receive necessary medical services. Children attend schools in the underground in the city of Kharkiv and in Mykolaiv region; similar schools are being constructed in Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Dnipro, Chernihiv, and Sumy regions, with 139 planned to be completed by September 1, 2025.¹¹⁶ The concept of war-affected also includes those who lost loved ones during Russia's aggression since 2014. "According to expert estimates, at least 15 million people in Ukraine will require psychological aid after the end of the Russia-Ukraine War," stated Yana Terleieva, Director, Department for Managing and Combating Tuberculosis at the Public Health Center of the Ukrainian Ministry of Health.¹¹⁷ Other experts insist that the entire Ukrainian society is being affected by the war, that the war impacts the human capital of the entire country. People will need major recovery assistance, and this is an essential element for post-war recovery.

Ukraine's recovery is not an effort to be undertaken solely by the nation's authorities and citizens; recovery will be a major project of long-term international cooperation. Implementation of recovery should focus not only on overcoming the consequences of the war and ensuring Ukraine's sustainable development but also recognize the changes in labor resources. The war has resulted in a significant increase in the share of both women and of individuals with disabilities in the workforce. This needs to be considered by the government, businesses, and non-governmental structures that will

¹¹⁶ 24 Channel — Education, 13 February 2025, https://24tv.ua/education/pidzemni-shkoli-ukrayini-de-trivaye-budivnitstvo-koli-zavershitsya_n2751723

¹¹⁷ Ukrinform, 6 December 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/jbe2p5kk>

work on recovery projects. The Platform for Ensuring Gender Mainstreaming and Inclusion in Recovery was established precisely to coordinate this work.¹¹⁸

Impetus for the Establishment of the Platform

On July 4-5, 2022, the Ukraine Recovery Conference was held in the Swiss city of Lugano attended by 1,000 participants from 40 countries,¹¹⁹ as well as representatives from approximately twenty international organizations.¹²⁰ Ukraine presented its own recovery plan, designed for the period until 2032 that includes 850 projects with the implementation cost reaching USD 750 billion. The conference participants approved the guiding principles for Ukraine's recovery (the Lugano Principles): partnership; focus on reforms; transparency, accountability, and rule of law; democratic participation; multi-stakeholder engagement; gender equality and inclusion; sustainable development.

Notably, gender equality and accessibility have become key issues of discussion. The resolution of these issues is long overdue. Even before the war, the participation of women in the country's economy was lower than the participation of men. According to data from 2021, the level of economic activity of women was 56.8%, men - 69%; the level of full and productive employment of women was 45.4% of men - 59.3%. Women held 40% of managerial positions in the private sector. The difference in wages between women and men was significant; according to the State Statistics Service, in the 2021 the

¹¹⁸ Government Portal, 19 September 2023, <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/rozpochala-robotu-platforma-zabezpechennia-hendernohomeinstryminhu-ta-inkliuzii-u-vidnovlenni>

¹¹⁹ UkraineInvest, 15 July 2022, <https://ukraineinvest.gov.ua/news/15-07-22-2/>

¹²⁰ Suspilne News, 5 July 2022, <https://suspilne.media/257340-plan-vidnovlenna-ukraini-so-prezentuvali-v-lugano/>

difference was 18.6%. According to the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine stated, “In practice, this means that women must work more to make as much money as men do. On average, this adds up to 6.5 years of additional labor over a lifetime.”¹²¹

UN Women Ukraine representative Sabine Fraser Gunesh notes, “...there are certain areas where Ukraine still needs to make progress. For instance, only 21% of Ukrainian MPs are women, so gender imbalance in women’s representation persists. Therefore, implementing effective quotas, certain interim measures to increase women’s representation in public authorities and in political party lists will yield a better gender balance in decision-making.”¹²²

Large-scale aggression by Russia has exacerbated certain gender imbalances. Many Ukrainian women were forced into internal displacement or had to go abroad as refugees. For many, this meant the loss of employment. After the move, compared to men, women had decreased chances of finding new employment. Often, women needed to care for children and the elderly or work remotely for less money. The study “Registered Unemployment in Ukraine” conducted at the end of 2024 as the joint initiative of the State Employment Service of Ukraine and HELVETAS Swiss intercooperation found that women made up 82% of the unemployed.¹²³ At the same time, women have the expectation of receiving a 25% lower salary than men; in 2024, men expected an average monthly paycheck of UAH 28,307, women UAH 22,663. The difference

¹²¹ Reducing gender wage gap from 18.6% to 13.6% and the start of the Yes You Can national campaign — how is Ukraine moving towards women’s economic empowerment during the full-scale war? Government Portal, Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, 18 September 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/bdhss3jc>

¹²² Ukraine Is Not Silent, FOLIO, Kharkiv, 2024, p. 209.

¹²³ Interfax-Ukraine, 12 May 2025, <https://interfax.com.ua/news/general/1071165.html>

in salary expectations is UAH 5,644 (\$135) per month in favor of men.¹²⁴ In early 2022, the wage expectation gap was 15% and recently, notably higher.

Due to large numbers of men drafted into the military, the number of women mastering professions that in the past typically were for men is increasing. This includes jobs in construction, in agriculture, in public transportation, at industrial and utility companies and in the IT sector. Women are even engaged in demining. This trend indicates that increasingly, women will be a driving force behind the country's post-war reconstruction. Therefore, ensuring their equal rights with men, both in working conditions and wages, as well as in social and cultural development, is of particular importance. Also, these equitable conditions would be a significant factor for encouraging Ukrainian women and their families to return to from Europe and other countries.

“We should already start planning and coordinating our future. An equal, inclusive recovery of our country without any prejudice and with opportunities for everyone to fulfill their potential is a key element of this process.”

***Olha Stefanishyna,
Deputy Prime Minister for European and
Euro-Atlantic Integration (2020-2025)***¹²⁵

Gender-responsive approaches and principles of equali-

¹²⁴ Budni, 7 March 2025, <https://budni.robota.ua/career/zarplatni-ochikovannya-zhinok-na-25-nizhchi-porivnyano-z-cholovikami-tsifri-fakti-rezultati-doslidzhennya-robotu-ua>

¹²⁵ Platform for Ensuring Gender Mainstreaming and Inclusion in Recovery Now Live, Government Portal, 19 September 2023, <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/rozpochala-robotu-platforma-zabezpechennia-hendernoho-meinstryminhu-ta-inkliuzii-u-vidnovlenni>

ty and inclusivity are already used in specific programs and projects. This takes place on a variety of levels, at the national, regional, and international levels that should be consistent and mutually complementary and should be defined by which options of their implementation are most appropriate in various contexts. The need for coordination led to the establishment of the Platform for Ensuring Gender Mainstreaming and Inclusion in Recovery.

New Advisory Body

On June 21-22, 2023, the second Ukraine Recovery Conference was held in London, the next annual event in the URC series after Lugano. The second event not only expanded the scope of international support for Ukraine, but also promoted further implementation of responsible recovery principles, including ones that had to do with gender equality and inclusion. This event was the basis for the establishment on September 13, 2023, of the Platform for Ensuring Gender Mainstreaming and Inclusion in Recovery (Platform) by the Commission for Interagency Coordination of Executive Bodies to Ensure Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men. The Platform's membership includes MPs, representatives of government agencies that develop and implement national policies of gender equality and inclusion, business representatives, development partners, international and civil society organizations. The Platform Coordinator is the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and the Deputy Coordinator is Government Commissioner for Gender Policy. The new structure was presented by September 18.

The main tasks of the Platform are to:

- ensure coordination between government bodies and other actors involved in the gender-responsive reconstruction of Ukraine;

- prepare of proposals for ensuring gender equality and inclusion in Ukraine's recovery;
- identify process, mechanisms, and methods for implementing gender-responsive recovery;
- interact with international organizations, funds and structures in the field of gender-responsive recovery, participate in thematic events to exchange experience.

The next step was the creation of the Platform Coordination Council to contribute to the consolidation of decision-making regarding the Platform's activities and planning. The composition of the Platform Coordination Council indicated that it was prepared to work with purpose. Included were deputy ministers in the identified recovery sectors: Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Infrastructure, Ministry of Agrarian Policy, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Digital Transformation, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Social Policy, Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Veterans, Ministry of Youth and Sports; heads of the National Agency for Civil Service and the National Social Service, Representative of the Parliament Commissioner of Ukraine for Human Rights, Director General of the Government Office for Coordination of European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, Head of the State Agency for Infrastructure Restoration and Development, Commissioner of the President of Ukraine for Accessibility, representative of the Office of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, representatives of interested embassies, international and civil society organizations dealing with issues of ensuring gender equality and inclusion.

Civil Society Advisory Panel

Civil society organizations in Ukraine are actively engaged in issues of gender equality and prevention of various forms of discrimination. Many of them are experienced with such

work, have their own vision for solving complex problems with these issues, and can offer solid suggestions of how to improve and resolve situations in which sexism and prejudice is manifested. Such CSOs have established broad international contacts and garnered major support; these networks provide access to groundwork done by colleagues from other countries and helps them promote the accomplishments of Ukrainian activists.

*“Working on the ground and in various fields, civil society organizations should inform the government if something is wrong. this is the purpose of joint platforms, task forces, and advisory groups.”*¹²⁶

**Kateryna Levchenko,
Government Commissioner for Gender Policy**

Since its inception, the Platform has placed special emphasis on cooperation with CSOs. On February 12, 2024, this resulted in the establishment of the Civil Society Advisory Panel, a union of representatives of those CSOs that are part of the Platform. This step helped unite these CSOs to amplify the voice of civil society organizations in support of gender-responsive recovery and engage them in joint work more broadly. In this way, they will have more opportunities to participate in the development and coordination of solutions to ensure gender mainstreaming and inclusion, and to directly participate in the implementation of specific tasks.

¹²⁶ Government Commissioner Kateryna Levchenko: Recovery Should Be Based on the Build Back Better Principle and Take into Account the Needs of all Groups, Women in Media, May 27, 2024, <https://wim.org.ua/stories/levchenko-recovery/>

Participation in the Advisory Panel offers certain advantages for representatives of civil society organizations. They can impact strategic development, taking part in the creation of gender-responsive policies forming the recovery process. They can focus on the promotion of social infrastructure development including gender and accessibility issues. At the same time, civil society organizations gain access to up-to-date information, new data, and research that contributes to effective project planning. Networking and partnership are also significant factors in the form of cooperation with other organizations to share experience and resources. This interaction creates a synergy that strengthens advocacy and can make campaigns more effective. Civil society organizations that participate in recovery processes can influence the implementation of projects and consider the needs of different social groups. Collaboration increases the level of expertise in gender equality and inclusion. With new accomplishments, civil society organizations strengthen their reputation on the national and international levels.¹²⁷

All participants who apply for membership in the Platform working group automatically become members of the Advisory Panel.

The Civil Society Advisory Panel has developed recommendations titled *Ten Steps for Gender Inclusive Recovery of Ukraine* to be used by governmental structures and donor organizations while planning recovery programs. In particular, they emphasize the need to prepare recovery and development plans at the national and local levels based on the needs and capabilities of different groups of women and men, and to involve women's human rights organizations in their development, implementation and monitoring; creation of

¹²⁷ Ukrainian Women's Fund, <https://tinyurl.com/mv2tshy8>

barrier-free, accessible and inclusive workplaces, transportation, facilities and services; eradication of gender stereotypes regarding family roles, education, professions, business and decision-making; day care services and facilities for people from different vulnerable groups and age categories who need external care; comprehensive services and opportunities for survivors of gender-based violence, in line with Council of Europe standards, and survivors of war-related sexual violence; programs for (re)training women in professions in which they are underrepresented, STEM education for women and girls; support for female entrepreneurship; support for women's human rights organizations in gender-sensitive and inclusive recovery processes by international partners.¹²⁸

“The Ten Steps is a framework that helps keep the focus on what really matters in recovery: equal access, participation, and outcomes for all. They are the result of practical experience, errors, and dialogue, not just theoretical ideas. Every step is a challenge, but it also has the potential to change the approach: from superficial engagement to real impact of women and those whose voices were often underrepresented in the recovery process. If the recovery is not inclusive, it will simply recreate old barriers and exclusions behind new facades.”

**Mykhailo Koriukalov, Advisor,
Office of the Government Commissioner for
Gender Policy**

¹²⁸ 10 Steps Toward Gender-Inclusive Recovery in Ukraine,
https://uwf.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/uwf_flyer_10steps_2024_ukr_printe.pdf

Monitoring, Analysis, Learning

Occasionally the question arises of why gender issues should be considered in recovery. What can be changed? Should a new medical facility, for instance, treat women better, rather than men? Of course not. However, healthcare should consider the special needs of women and men, which may differ. This perspective is crucial to keep in mind for those who design rooms in medical facilities, stairs, ramps, and even bathrooms. This is a simple example, but it may be convincing for a certain doubting professional or representative of public authorities.

*“There can be a lot of talk about how this component should be included in various spheres, but experts should be taught to include it first. This includes developing a methodology, teaching gender analysis, creation of documents, planning with the engagement of all groups and civil society organizations. There are also many problems here, such as lack of understanding, interest, and, accordingly, lack of competence.”*¹²⁹

***Kateryna Levchenko,
Government Commissioner for Gender Policy***

In 2023-2024, as part of the Platform’s activities, the National Agency of Ukraine for Civil Service and the Higher School of Public Administration developed 15 programs for advanced training of civil servants.

At the same time, think tanks prepared checklists of issues for assessing recovery plans for compliance with equal rights

¹²⁹ Women in Media, 27 May 2024,
<https://wim.org.ua/stories/levchenko-recovery/>

and opportunities for women and men, developed analytical reports on the implementation of gender equality and inclusion principles in comprehensive region recovery programs, and analyzed current official building codes regarding their regard for gender-specific needs and accessibility requirements. Thus, the analytical department at the Intellect of Sumy Region Center for Civic Initiatives prepared an analytical report “Implementation of Gender Equality and Inclusion Principles in the Programs for the Comprehensive Recovery of Regions” (using the example of border regions: Sumy, Kharkiv, Chernihiv, Kherson, Dnipro, Odesa, Mykolaiv); the analytical center Cedos provided a report “Gender Segregation in Professional Pre-Higher and Higher Education,” and Vox Ukraine conducted the “Gender-Focused Legal Analysis of Regulatory Acts in the Field of Human Capital.”

To implement the program of work of the Platform, the participants carried out mapping of international organizations, foundations, and technical assistance projects that work with gender-responsive recovery. They include entities representing the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Norway, France, Switzerland, and Japan.

Gender-responsive approaches are included in the Ukraine Facility Plan, in the section on human capital, as well as in the sections on regional development, entrepreneurship, agriculture, food, and energy sectors. The gender component is considered in the updated State Strategy for Regional Development for 2021–2027.

“In conditions of limited resources and a growing need for reconstruction due to war-related destruction, high-quality planning and monitoring will help effectively respond to damage done to infrastructure, as well as services needed by a community and its residents. The state is taking important steps to create mechanisms and tools for a systematic approach to reconstruction, for example, the DREAM platform contains information on investment projects for the reconstruction of facilities. To take into account the gender approach, including indicators on how a planned reconstruction project will affect the needs of women and men, boys and girls, and representatives of vulnerable groups would be helpful. For example, if the reconstruction of a village club is planned, indicating that a room will be provided for psychological recovery services, for training in new skills, along with cultural services for a specified number of people, with distinctions for gender, age, and other categories would be helpful. Such an approach will help to not bypass the needs of both elderly and young residents of the community.”

Maryna Rudenko, gender expert

The Association of Women Lawyers of Ukraine JurFem is developing a “Glossary of Gender-Sensitive Recovery” (Glossary)¹³⁰ compiled by representatives of the JurFem Analytical Center led by Kateryna Shunevych, who holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Law; legal analysts Darya Rosokhata and Yaryna Bushchak, as well as legal assistants Kateryna Pylypenko

¹³⁰ Glossary of Gender-Sensitive Recovery pg. 49. -

<https://www.kmu.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/1/ind-57-gender-policy/glosarii.pdf>

and Maria Hrytsyshyn. The purpose of the Glossary is to standardize terms used frequently in documents pertaining to recovery efforts, such as recovery plans, analytical studies, media materials, and strategies, but do not always have a clearly established or legal interpretation. Having validated, verified language to avoid misunderstandings is essential, which means that terms should be understood and applied identically by all recovery participants. During the development of the Glossary the organizers relied on the principles of simplicity and logic, taking into account Ukrainian legislation and groundwork done by international and Ukrainian institutions and organizations.

International Cooperation

On June 11-12, 2024, the third Ukraine Recovery Conference was held in Berlin. The conference slogan was “United in Defense. United in Recovery. Stronger Together.” The Alliance for Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Recovery (Alliance), launched by the Government of Ukraine, the Government of Germany, and UN Women, was officially presented at the Conference. This can be considered as a logical follow-up to the Platform and a manifestation of the experience gained in promoting the participation of women in recovery since 2022. As of December 2025, the Alliance unites more than 100 participants from governments, international organizations, and civil society. Among them are the governments of Germany, Canada, Belgium, Denmark, Japan, Estonia, Latvia, France, and the United Kingdom, Spain, as well as the European Union, the World Bank, the EIB, the EBRD, UN agencies, and representatives of Ukrainian business.¹³¹

¹³¹ Gender Alliance for Ukraine - <https://ukraine.unwomen.org/uk/partnery/alyans-z-hendernovidpovidalnoho-ta-inklyuzyvnoho-vidnovlennya-v-ukrayini-0>

“Alliance members commit to working together to integrate a gender-responsive perspective into the financing of and resources for recovery, to ensure the effective participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels for recovery and reconstruction, and to help identify and address the priority needs of women and girls,” is information available on the Government portal.¹³²

The Alliance coordinates and aligns partners’ activities, directs resources to critical areas of recovery, and enhances the role of women in decision-making. Members’ initiatives cover the sectors of legislation, humanitarian activities, energy, education, as well as support for women veterans and IDPs. UN Women provides expert support, and the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy is a public ambassador of the initiative.

The Alliance cooperates with various structures in Ukraine at the national and regional levels. This includes regional military organizations, communities, and local initiatives. Among them are the humanitarian organization CARE Ukraine, the international charitable foundation East SOS, the Association of Women Lawyers of Ukraine JurFem, and the civil society organization SMARTA.

Alliance participants include the Women’s Energy Club of Ukraine (WECU), the Ukrainian Women’s Fund, the CSOs Divchata, JurFem, Right to Protection, the Roma Women’s Fund Chirikli, media partners, business structures (DTEK, Ferrexpo), and others.

In July 2025, the fourth Ukraine Recovery Conference was held in Rome. Gender issues were discussed not only at a dedicated panel but also highlighted at other events. The dia-

¹³² Government portal, June 12, 2024 -

<https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/ukraina-spilno-z-partneramy-zapochatkuvalyans-za-henderno-chutlyve-ta-inkliuzyvne-vidnovlennia-na-poliakh-urc-2024>

logue and program also included topics of youth working in the areas of recovery, local development, innovation, and inclusion. The conference panels on services, employment, and infrastructure addressed the needs of people with disabilities, the elderly, IDPs, single parents, and ethnic minorities.

In this manner, initiatives to rebuild Ukraine based on gender equality and inclusive approaches are gaining more support and increased dissemination.

SECTION 10. MILITARY UNIFORMS FOR WOMEN

In order to view the uniforms for women who serve in Ukraine's military, the volunteers who make and deliver them open a small room for us, where the camouflage outfits are stacked on shelves. The first thing that catches our eye is the pair of small army boots that resemble children's shoes. Not only surprised but also amazed, we inquired about the size, and the answer was even more surprising. "This is a size 34, but we also have a size 33," was the reply.

"My son is a size 33, and he is only seven years old," added one of the volunteers.

Military clothing for women is available in eight sizes, but the most requests come for the size XS (extra small). This is the size listed first in the international system with a waist measurement of approximately 59-62cm, length of 159cm; other measurements are also more suitable for teenagers than for adults.

"Likely there are not very many large size 56 women on the front lines," a volunteer explained. "Nonetheless, it is still a bit odd to see some girls who come to our hub for a set of military clothing, and they are extremely short and very thin."

However, regarding military uniforms for women, shape matters more than size. Only a few militaries in the world need such uniforms, although the number of females serving in militaries worldwide is growing rapidly. In the armies of NATO countries, the number of servicewomen during the

past 40 years has increased tenfold. The total number has exceeded 300,000.¹³³

The US Army, especially, is attentive to women's military clothing. In the middle of the 20th century, the US Army began to develop samples of clothing, although their design remained gender neutral. Only in 2009 did they approach this matter more seriously and began to produce special combat equipment for women.

Today, the US Armed Forces have a database that has ninety-three parameters of measurements and 3D scans of the male body and the female body. With the guidance of these parameters, the US Army has managed to achieve an ideal level of comfort not only for uniforms, but also in the design of body armor, backpacks, and even car seats.¹³⁴

In 2018, the US Army approved a new body armor system, the Modular Scalable Vest (MSV) that is more lightweight than earlier models and can be adjusted to fit any size and body type.¹³⁵

In the Israeli military, women and men wear a universal uniform, and the size is adjusted with buttons. The only difference is that women are provided with women's undergarments.¹³⁶

In Switzerland, for many years, military personnel, both men and women, had been provided with a standard uniform set that included only men's underwear. Only in 2021 were there media reports about the testing of a new set of

¹³³ Channel 24, December 20, 2019, https://24tv.ua/skilki_zhinok_sluzhat_v_armiyah_nato_vrazhayuchi_dani_n1251750

¹³⁴ BBC News Ukraine, July 18, 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/4z7ky2w6>

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

military clothing for women that included appropriate undergarments.¹³⁷

In Ukraine, the importance of providing appropriate military clothing for women increased with the beginning of Russian aggression. The number of Ukrainian female defenders who directly participate in hostilities has significantly increased. Therefore, the need to consider their needs and comfort, as well as security issues, became obvious.

“In civilian life, we decide every morning what to wear. We choose clothes for an event, choose for appropriate context, clothes that will fit and be comfortable. We do not prefer or choose uncomfortable clothing. So, combat activities require the same degree of comfort.”

Combat medic, call sign Jazz

Among those addressing the issue of military clothing for women is the social initiative Arm Women Now (AWN), launched by civil society organizations in partnership with government agencies, including the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, as well as international institutions. The initiative is a bright example of how the needs of female military personnel have become a driver of systemic change at the national level.

Uniforms: Men’s Fasteners on Women’s Jackets

Iryna Nikorak, founder of Arm Women Now, a program being implemented by the civil society organization Brave Ukraine, explained that three girlfriends, along with their fe-

¹³⁷ BBC News Ukraine, March 30, 2021,

<https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/news-56580787#:~:text=%D0%97%D0%B0%20%D1%87%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B8%20%D0%BD>

male colleagues, responded to the challenge and the idea of creating women's military uniforms was born by chance. While providing support for a military unit in the Kharkiv region, one of the women fighters asked to be given "a small-sized men's uniform." Iryna Nikorak was surprised at the request for men's uniform. She began to search for a women's military uniform among Ukrainian women's clothing designers and manufacturers. This was a futile endeavor: none of the Ukrainian manufacturers made such a uniform; foreign companies did not supply such uniforms either. Women who joined the armed forces had to wear military uniforms designed for men.

This situation was the result of security forces for a long time having been considered a "male environment." Clothing for men was constantly being improved, upgraded, being made more comfortable, security issues addressed, clothing design modernized. The current Ukrainian male camouflage outfit looks modern and can be used for a long time. As for women, some representatives of the command at various levels generally did not see this as a problem. The frequent reply was that since these women had decided to do "men's business," let them adapt to the existing conditions. According to Iryna Nikorak, one of the commanders explained to her that they did not place orders for women's uniforms, because "only" 200 women and girls served in their brigade, so why all the unnecessary trouble?!

As a result, servicewomen need to resolve these problems. In civilian life, no store sells identically styled clothing for women and men. Women's pants and jeans have a higher rise because anatomically, a woman's waist is located higher than a man's waist. Men have broader shoulders, and their jackets are not fitted, so these jackets are too loose on a woman's figure or bunch up into folds. This may not seem like such a noticeable problem until the need arises to put on a bulletproof vest on top of ill-fitting clothes; all the folds of extra fabric immediately become

noticeable and rub the skin. Furthermore, men's shirts or jackets are often uncomfortable for woman with large breasts. There are unique features of each physique and functional needs of each sex, and these differences must be considered.

Besides the issues of size and design, there are other problems. Men's uniforms often need to be tailored to fit women's needs. For example, a jacket is a size medium, and pants are a size large. In a typical store, problems such as this can be resolved by choice. However, when serving in the armed forces where uniforms are simply issued, such adjustments are not possible.

"A woman remains a woman; she wants to like herself even in military uniform. And here you put on men's pants and that is it — you look like a sack of potatoes."

Combat medic, call sign Jazz

Servicewomen had to adjust sets of men's military uniforms: reduced droop by reducing fabric and raising the shoulders, narrowing the area around the waist, and hem pants that were too long. According to a combat medic with the call sign Jazz, a female soldier should not spend time worrying that her too-wide pants will cause her to fall during a mission or that poor-quality clothing will come apart at the seams if she has to squat down or lie down on the ground. A comfortable and appropriately fitting uniform is a matter of respect for a woman's dignity, health, and life. And as easy as it is to alter clothing in a peaceful environment, finding a seamstress on the front line is unlikely. The need for them was not anticipated and they are not found among members of military units. Often women order uniforms from abroad through various online resources. Then waiting several months for them to arrive entails another set of issues and logistics.

Iryna Nikorak recalls how she began to seriously study the matter of women's uniforms: samples of women's military uniforms were requested from abroad in order to better understand their unique features, different patterns were acquired, details that required attention were studied. Samples arrived from acquaintances and from strangers, including a uniform from the US Army. Ukrainian manufacturers that have been working in the military clothing market for years and have relevant experience were approached. The right designers, pattern makers, technologists, and others who helped design patterns for women's military uniforms were found. A great deal of attention was paid to technical details. For example, fabrics that specifically met the Ministry of Defense's requirements for military clothing were chosen. This is a ripstop fabric that is woven with the inclusion of a reinforcing thread in such a manner that the fabric remains resistant to holes and tears; the fabric was even examined with night vision devices to ensure that there was no glare.

The first batch of 30 sets of uniforms was sent to women at the front in late August 2022. These sets were used, tested, and suggestions for improvements were received through feedback. In November 2022, 50 sets, including female-specific undergarments, of assorted sizes were transferred. These sets were tested along with specialists at the Ministry of Defense, and technical documentation was developed to make necessary changes for future orders. A year later, on August 3, 2023, the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine approved a standard sample of a summer field uniform for servicewomen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The women's summer field uniform was officially put into service¹³⁸ and at the beginning

¹³⁸ Ukrinform, August 5, 2023, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3744642-u-zsu-zavilasa-polova-forma-dla-zinok-na-cerzi-zinoci-bronezileti.html>

of 2024, the uniform was already purchased and supplied, with appropriate distribution to military units. This issue originally raised by a social initiative was eventually supported by the state and systemically implemented.

Summer Field Uniform and a Bulletproof Vest

The project website of Arm Women Now¹³⁹ loads quite slowly and a message appears on the monitor about the need to check if the connection is secure. The reason for this message is soon clear: the project is related directly to meeting the needs of the defense sector, therefore may be considered to be in the security zone for communications. The content of the site is specific and practical, and through this site one can find examples of military clothing for women.

The first matter was the summer field suit (SFS) that includes trousers and a jacket, as well as undergarments. The Ministry of Defense has approved this set. Unfortunately, out of 42 standardized samples of military clothing, only two still apply to women. However, activists also sew and provide women with Ubacs combat shirts, thermal underwear, transitional and winter clothing, and a set of a full winter uniform that includes trousers and a jacket. The Ukrainian women's camouflage outfit fully corresponds to that of the men: identical pockets, fasteners, stand-up collar. The final design also accounts for the female form, therefore requires completely different patterns. Imported fabric is used for the body of the uniform, but the fittings and tailoring are domestic.

Especially important is the issue of a bulletproof vest. A bulletproof vest is essential on the front. For women, the model designed for men is difficult to wear. Even those who have a small bra size suffer seriously due to the compression of the breasts. According to experts, including Natalia Leli-

¹³⁹ <https://armwomennow.com/>

ukh, a gynecologist with more than 20 years of experience, and who volunteers in the de-occupied territories, excessive loads can seriously affect women's health (especially if a significant part of them on the front line are women with size XS), affects the condition of their spine and joints, and prolonged wearing of heavy armor can also cause muscle tension and physical exhaustion. The constant pressure of body armor and plates on the chest can cause not only chronic pain, but also inflammatory processes and the appearance of neoplasms (cysts, cancerous tumors) in the mammary glands. In an effort to make an ill-fitting bulletproof vest more comfortable, female soldiers are inventive, placing various cushioning inserts under the vest.¹⁴⁰

Ksenia Drahaniuk, initiator of the project “Zemliachky-Ukrainian Front” has been providing the servicewomen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine with high-quality basic equipment since March 2022; she explains the requests received from girls about protective armor. Some requests may seem to be unusual; however, everyone has their own needs, and many needs must be considered. For example, there was this request: “I wear size XS, but my breasts are a size five. I need a plate carrier so that it does not bounce around in the lower part yet is not too tight in the upper part.” People who could sew plate carriers for a specific physiology had to be found since the standard ones designed for men do not fit properly. (For women) they need to be secured in different places.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Hromadske Radio, March 19, 2024,

<https://hromadske.radio/news/2024/03/19/yiy-potribna-bronia-chomuzhinocha-amunitsiia-tse-vazhlyvo>

¹⁴¹ Rubryka, November 2, 2022,

https://rubryka.com/article/women-military-uniform/?fbclid=IwAR0z9RPHvXyIZ9cRtHiRfERY5He7dg_fPPgK_HbctywoKGhutNRqEqSxSiM

One of the samples of the bulletproof vest can be seen in the AWN hub. Upon lifting, the weight is not too heavy. Yevheniya Velyka, the project manager, clarifies that the weight is approximately 4.5 kg. Information from one servicewoman in the Israeli army immediately comes to mind; she reported that her backpack with ammunition weighs about 50 kg.¹⁴²

“We are cooperating with the Ukrainian manufacturer Balistyka, which is the developer with the corresponding patent for a women’s plate carrier. A bulletproof vest is available in one size but is adjustable for women of assorted sizes. It differs in that it has special shock-absorbing inserts on the inside that minimize pressure on the chest,” explains Iryna Nikorak. “When we order and buy bulletproof vests to give to women at the front for free, we use plates produced in Israel.”

In bulletproof vests, different plates are usually used, depending on the protection class. In these vests, the third class is used, the plate protects against shrapnel wounds. And now, at the front, according to Iryna Nikorak, 96% of wounds are shrapnel wounds. “Our plate is made of special industrial polyethylene, it is exceptionally light, one unit weighs one and a half kilograms. Two plates plus a plate holder, that’s 4.5-5 kg.”

She explains that the Ministry of Defense provides bulletproof vests, classified in the sixth protection class, with large ceramic plates. However, the design of this class of vest is not suitable for female bodies because of women’s breasts and because the weight of such equipment is 10-12 kilograms. Women most definitely can feel the difference of this extra weight, however, of course, every person can make their own choice of class for vests.

¹⁴² BBC News Ukraine, July 18, 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/4z7ky2w6>.

Military Uniforms for Pregnant Women

Military clothing for pregnant women is not yet standardized, but is already in demand. The availability of such clothing within the range of AWN offerings is not accidental; life goes on, women give birth to children, their needs must be considered. When pregnant, women are transferred from combat units, however, according to law, they remain on duty in headquarters or in administrative departments until the seventh or ninth month of pregnancy, for as long as their health allows. Therefore, they must be dressed accordingly. Throughout the world, such practices have long become the norm. In 2008, attorney Carme Chacón, in her seventh month of pregnancy, was appointed Minister of Defense of Spain.¹⁴³ In the United States, in 1970, the rule according to which women were dismissed from the army in the event of pregnancy was abolished, and now women are provided, free of charge, with three sets of appropriate uniforms, special T-shirts for breastfeeding and fitness clothes.¹⁴⁴ Military uniforms for pregnant women are also provided in Germany. In Ukraine, the first such military uniform was provided by the organization Zemliachky for the sniper and officer of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Yevheniya Emerald.

“...we sew the uniform individually for pregnant women, as its dimensions depend on the stage of pregnancy and changes in body volume.”¹⁴⁵

**Ksenia Drahaniuk,
Co-founder, Zemliachky**

¹⁴³ UNIAN, April 13, 2008, <https://www.unian.ua/world/109621-upershev-istoriji-ministrom-oboroni-priznachenovagitnu-jinku.html>

¹⁴⁴ BBC News Ukraine, July 18, 2022. <https://tinyurl.com/4z7ky2w6>

¹⁴⁵ Free Radio, August 31, 2024,

<https://freeradio.com.ua/vid-zhinochoi-formy-ta-sporiadzhennia-doppsykholohichnoi-pidtrymky-iak-orhanizatsiia-zemliachky-dopomahaie-zhinkam-na-fronti-interv-iu/>

By the summer of 2025, Arm Women Now had already provided 200 pregnant servicewomen with appropriate sets of clothing. Iryna Nikorak displays military trousers from this kit, a special insert is provided on the front that supports the belly of the expectant mother. Provided with a special fastener, the shape can be adjusted as the pregnancy advances.

Some military commanders are reluctant to respond to offers to order uniforms for pregnant women assigned to their unit; they find the circumstance too unusual. One commander told a pregnant subordinate that she should come dressed in civilian clothes, even in a sundress, but that he will not indulge her “whims.” Therefore, in general, pregnant women themselves must resolve the problem of appropriate clothing. They look for comfortable clothes on the Internet, contact various suppliers, and willingly come to the AWN hub.

“Female defenders who have already given birth to children and have gone on maternity leave also visit us. Likely that I have become a godmother to a dozen children,” Iryna Nikorak said happily.

Volunteers at the AWN hub display another item of military clothing that is offered to women, balaclavas.

“We sew the balaclavas using merino wool, a natural fabric,” notes Yevheniya Velyka, “because fleece can cause irritation and skin problems in some women. Furthermore, our balaclavas can be used in a variety of circumstances.”

To demonstrate the balaclavas design, Yevgeniya Velyka accurately folds the knitted product into a neat cap, places atop her head, then lowers the fabric over her face for protection. For women there is also an interesting possibility that Velyka demonstrated. She folds the balaclava, rotates it around, so that the eye cutout is at the back of the head, and a ponytail or braid can be pulled out through the cutout, a very convenient possibility. Even in such small things, cloth-

ing developers try to be attentive to the comfort of women serving at the front.

Acquisition and Cost of a Women's Military Uniform

As of July 2025, Arm Women Now has provided 12,000+ sets of uniforms and tactical underwear, and 1,000+ bullet-proof vests to Ukrainian servicewomen.

The cost of a set of a summer field suit is 2,800 UAH. Activists explain that for a long time, they managed to keep the price lower, because both manufacturers and suppliers of raw materials understood that in this case, it was not about business. But inflationary processes and other factors have taken a toll, therefore the cost of the products have increased.

“For servicewomen who are in the combat zone, we provide uniforms for free,” emphasizes Iryna Nikorak. “Often we receive requests from those who serve in other units and are not on the front lines. But we have developed a program where these women can buy uniforms themselves or, often with someone else’s help, at cost.”

She also explains that her organization is a non-profit and does not conduct any commercial activities. “We do not have our own production. We contact manufacturers under a cooperation agreement. But we do not want to refuse those women who, for example, are serving in Lviv or in western part of Ukraine and also want to receive such a suit. But I hope that soon enough there will be no such need, because the state will provide uniforms.”

The activists reported that memorandums have already been signed with the Ministry of Defense, the National Guard, and the State Border Service. Within the framework of these memorandums, the entire unit is systematically provided with clothing; often brigades contact the agency directly with relevant requests and official letters.

“We fully provide the Azov brigade with uniforms, other brigades of the National Guard, such as Rubizh, Chervona Kalyna, Burevii. Currently, we cooperate with all branches of the armed forces without exception. We provide both spot requests specifically from women, and we also cooperate with units and brigades.

***Iryna Nikorak,
Founder, Arm Women Now,
Member, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine***

Donations are being collected to provide women with military clothing free of charge. Donations to provide items free of charge is now common practice for Ukraine, but most volunteers focus on campaigns to purchase weapons, transport, drones, and other equipment, and in such cases, the needs are quickly met. AWN is appealing for support from entertainers, bloggers, and other famous people to help raise funds for women’s uniforms.

“For example, over the past year and a half, Ukrainian TV presenter and public figure such as Masha Efrosynina have raised millions for army boots, winter uniforms, and bulletproof vests. Stand-up comedian Lera Mandziuk also raised funds and transferred them to buy bulletproof vests and army boots during her all-Ukrainian and foreign tours,” stated Iryna Nikorak, who also mentions famous Ukrainian singers Oleksandr Ponomariov and Dzidzio (Mykhailo Khoma), who held various lotteries and raffles during their tours to ensure the purchase of women’s military uniforms. “From each such tour, they provided funds to cover 100 sets of women’s uniforms. Vakarchuk, Dorofeyeva, and other stars also support us. There is also a socially responsible business, for example, the Epicenter Company, which has developed

entire lines of products to provide combat medics with uniforms, underwear, and army boots.”

To support Ukrainian female defenders, the Olena Pinchuk Foundation donated backpacks that had been developed in collaboration with the Have a Rest brand. According to Yevheniya Velyka, the backpacks are filled with many items useful for women, even pregnancy tests, AIDS tests, and necessary medications.

The social activities of famous people not only contribute to the collection of donations, but also to inform about Arm Women Now capabilities and activities. People also learn about AWN from mainstream media, social media and through word-of-mouth. Information is shared by those who have already relied on the support of volunteers. Servicewomen willingly visit the AWN hub. Someone needs a full set of uniforms and underwear, while someone needs only something specific. The main element is interaction and support, thanks to which the social initiative is successfully implemented. The AWN hub also hosts various lectures, trainings, and events on a systematic basis for servicewomen and women veterans.

The Strong Women of a Strong Country

For a donation to Arm Women Now to go towards military uniforms, one can obtain a unique publication that was prepared by the organization at the end of 2024. The publication *The Strong Women of a Strong Country* was written by Iryna Nikorak and published in two languages, Ukrainian and English, with the support of NATO. General Valerii Zaluzhnyi, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (2021-2024) and Irene Felin, NATO Secretary General’s Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security wrote forwards to the book.

In 2023, the idea arose to meet with Ukrainian female defenders and interview them in the combat zone, where they carry out combat missions. To share their stories, that same year volunteers launched an Arm Women Now channel on YouTube. According to the organization website, “Our goal is not only to tell these stories, but to build a community of support around the world. We believe that every story deserves to be told, and we strive to raise awareness of the lives and achievements of our defenders.”¹⁴⁵

The founder of the initiative recalls how her small team, plus a two-female camera crew and a driver traveled around the front line. Often, interviews were conducted under Russian shelling. They spoke with female fighters in Donbas, both in Chasiv Yar and in Pokrovsk, which was still a town in an area of conflict at the time. Fifty interviews were prepared. The statistics about the number of views on YouTube were interesting: Ukraine was first with the highest number of views, followed by Russia, then European countries, the United States, Israel, even Australia was on the list. This list of countries covers a broad range of geography and there was strong interest worldwide in these stories.

In the end, 30 stories formed the basis of the book. “Of course, we would like to publish more stories. We chose women who held various combat positions, who had different life stories. There are those who joined the army after university, and those who were in captivity. Unfortunately, a few months before the publication of the book, two women died,” shared Iryna Nikorak. For her, the publication is “a manifesto of the invincibility of Ukrainian women.” She is gifting the publication to the presidents of different countries, recently, to the President of the Czech Republic, Petr Pavel. “We

¹⁴⁶ <https://armwomennow.com/#youtube>

have already presented the book in the Netherlands, Sweden, and held a special exhibit at NATO Headquarters in Brussels. We shared our experience, because almost all countries from the European community that are members of NATO do not have such progressive reforms of material support as those now in Ukraine. Therefore, we share this experience with great pleasure.”

“60,000 women serve in the Ukrainian army, many of them on the front lines. The Arm Women Now initiative has developed a specialized uniform for servicewomen. The exhibition at the Kromhut base in the Netherlands absolutely rightly pays tribute to these heroines. Even in the Netherlands, there is still much to learn.”

**Ruben Brekelmans,
Minister of Defense of the Netherlands**

“After decades of efforts to implement gender-responsive approaches in militaries, the lack of uniforms and equipment specifically designed for women is still a serious problem in many countries. This exhibition confirms our commitment to translating the principles of the WPS agenda into real action — removing barriers to women’s full participation in security and defense.”

**Irene Fellin,
Special Representative of the NATO Secretary
General for Women, Peace and Security**

The Arm Women Now initiative is generating interest among defense structures of NATO member states and partners who are looking for effective models for integrating women into the security sector.

AWN is seen as an example of a systemic, practical and visible approach to gender transformation with the potential for:

- implementation in countries modernizing their armed forces;
- launching national programs for adapted uniforms and equipment;
- creation of psychological and leadership support hubs for women in and after service;
- development of veteran leadership programs with the transformation of combat experience into civic leadership.

“We began with the uniform. Now we have many more projects. We are trying to implement those that will help advocate for women’s rights in the security and defense sector, as well as the all-Ukrainian and international recognition of women’s leadership,” emphasizes Iryna Nikorak. In these issues, AWN actively cooperates with the public sector and state structures. In early 2024, Brave Ukraine received grant support within the framework of the rapid response grant program from the Ukrainian Women’s Fund to hold the first international forum *Protection and Respect: The Role of Women in Achieving Peace*. Among the participants were military personnel and veterans, leading experts in the field, representatives of non-governmental and international organizations, and government bodies. During the forum, topics included immediately relevant issues such as the combat experience of Ukrainian women, as well as their vision of the new veteran policy; adapting society to the needs of veterans; gender-sensitive reform of the security and defense sector; women’s economic empowerment as a driving force for Ukraine’s post-war recovery.

The organization of such meetings has become a tradition: at the end of November 2025, the second International

Forum¹⁴⁷ *The Role of Women in Achieving Peace. From Words to Decisions, from Ideas to Actions* was held in Kyiv. Representatives of state authorities, the security and defense sector, public and international organizations took part in it. The participants discussed practical tools for empowering women in the armed forces and their inclusion in decision-making processes at all levels. According to the servicewomen who met for the discussion, such measures introduce changes that make the Ukrainian army stronger.

¹⁴⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1575877760264420>

SECTION 11. SAFETY AUDITS DEVELOPED BY UPHF

The underground shelters in which we all now take cover from russia's dangerous missile attacks were built several decades ago, during the Cold War. With all the intimidation instilled by Soviet propaganda, the structures were built to last and located far underground, intricate mazes of rooms with thick walls and strong doors that no sounds can penetrate. People who hide here scatter to different corners, making it almost impossible to track who goes where. But a young student named Vlada comes into "our" room, where our family, dog included, had settled; she awkwardly asked if she could stay there with us. Then she came a second time, a third time, and then she would come running first and call us, will you be here, in this room? Eventually, we asked, jokingly, "why are you following us if you can take any free room? There are many available here." Her response was serious. She was scared! What if someone grabbed her? Nobody would hear her pleas for help. Moreover, since russia tends to attack at night, this tactic worsens various risks.

Safety is a basic human need. It is particularly acutely perceived by women and girls, considering various risks they may encounter. They can face gender-based violence even in public spaces, such as in the streets and in parks, in transport and they cannot always count on the help of others. After russia's full-scale invasion against Ukraine, civilians faced new security-related challenges: missile shelling, landmines, destroyed houses, damaged roads, blackouts, lack of heating, lack of access to shelters, deteriorating water and air quality

due to the destruction of infrastructure and industrial enterprises. Safety issues have forced many people to leave their homeland, which increases migration flows and may result in a severe demographic crisis. Creating a safe environment is not just about comfort; it is about surviving and persevering. Therefore, it is no coincidence that tools are that offer the capability of identifying and assessing problems related to safety in various territories and offer means to confront and overcome threats.

The international charitable foundation Ukrainian Public Health Foundation¹⁴⁸ (UPHF) participated in the development of such tools, offering recommendations to conduct a safety audit and the need to draw the attention of the public to this issue.

Safe Cities and Public Spaces

In 2010, UN Women launched the Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for Women and Girls Global Flagship Initiative with the purpose to implement models for responding to, and preventing gender-based violence, in public spaces. This initiative has been widely supported in different countries, and as of 2020, more than fifty cities around the world had launched comprehensive programs dedicated to this goal.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.healthright.org.ua/>

¹⁴⁹ Rubizhne Is the First City in Ukraine to Adopt Safe Cities and Public Spaces for Women and Girls Local Program, UNDP, June 3, 2020, <https://www.undp.org/uk/ukraine/press-releases/rubizhne-pershe-misto-v-ukrayini-shcho-pryynyalo-mistsevu-prohramu-bezpechni-mista-ta-hromadski-prostory-dlya-zhinok-ta>

“A safety audit is much more than just a physical assessment of a community space. It is a tool that allows you to see the environment and community, its needs, through the eyes of those who live there, and face risks every day, primarily women and girls. Audits help identify barriers to access, potential threats of violence, discrimination, or stigmatization, and find areas for improvement in infrastructure and services in the community. In the context of war, such work takes on even greater importance, as it is not only about physical safety, but also about fundamental rights: to protection, dignity, assistance, and recovery.”

Halyna Skipalska, Executive Director, UPHF

In 2018, Ukraine joined the initiative, and non-governmental organizations, particularly the Ukrainian Public Health Foundation, proved to be the most flexible. Together with UN Women Ukraine, UPHF undertook the implementation of the pilot program “Rubizhne as a Safe City,” in the city of Rubizhne, Luhansk region.

“Choosing Rubizhne in 2019 was strategic and symbolic at the same time. We deliberately chose an area that was experiencing protracted conflict, high social tension, and limited access to services. These communities are the ones that require priority attention, despite the risks. Rubizhne was chosen as a pilot city thanks to the support from the Rubizhne City Council and Luhansk Oblast (Regional) Military Civil Administration, as well as due to a prominent level of engagement of the local community, both women and men. Conducting the first audit in such conditions was not only a professional challenge, but also an act of solidarity with people living in a high-risk area. We sought to demonstrate that even under the most dangerous conditions, the safety of

women and girls must remain a priority,” said UPHF Deputy Director for GBV and Mental Health Anna Saienko.

A survey study was conducted to determine the prevalence of sexual violence and sexual harassment against women and girls in public spaces, study risk factors, consequences, and response strategies of women to such situations. The study included an analysis of local practices, administrative data, interviews with local council members, heads, and specialists of its executive agencies, medical and social establishments, the National Police, representatives of the media and local civil society organizations, as well as ten focus group discussions with representatives of the local community (eighty-three participants in total) and four interviews with women who may have a particular risk of sexual harassment and other types of violence, namely, HIV positive women and women with disabilities. A safety audit was conducted on ten routes in the city, covering over 80% of the total area of public spaces.¹⁵⁰ This thorough work eventually enabled the Rubizhne local council to adopt a local program to combat sexual violence in June 2020, the first such program in Ukraine aimed at creating safe and sustainable cities.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Survey Study “Rubizhne as a City Safe for Women and Girls,” SocioConsulting,

<https://sociocon.org/doslidzhennia/vyvchennia-hromadskoi-dumky/ohliadove-doslidzhennia-rubizhne-misto-bezpechne-dlia-zhinok-ta-divchat/>

¹⁵¹ Rubizhne Is the First City in Ukraine to Adopt Safe Cities and Public Spaces for Women and Girls Local Program, UNDP, June 3, 2020,

<https://www.undp.org/uk/ukraine/press-releases/rubizhne-pershe-misto-v-ukrayini-shcho-pryynyalo-mistsevu-prohramu-bezpechni-mista-ta-hromadski-prostory-dlya-zhinok-ta>

Development of Methodological Recommendations

The cooperation between the UPHF and UN Women continued in 2021 with the development of *Methodological Recommendations for Conducting a Safety Audit and the Implementation of the Global Flagship Initiative*.¹⁵² This document, with a broad overview, also had practical recommendations that could be used by communities for further work in this important sector of safety. The UPHF organized workshops, seminars, webinars to study the safety audit methodology on the local level for representatives of local authorities, communities, social and psychological services, survivors of gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), shelter workers, the National Police, self-help groups, activists, and others. Safety audits were conducted in sixteen target communities (nine in Luhansk region, six in Donetsk region, and one in Zaporizhzhia region), resulting in the adoption of targeted programs in eleven communities to prevent and combat sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence against women and girls in public spaces.

An important aspect of safety audits is active participation of the local communities. This helped the researchers to hear their voices and consider their needs in further programming. These approaches became particularly crucial after the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion, addressing security issues became an important activity for locals, especially women and girls, strengthening their role in communities.

¹⁵² <http://safecityprogram.tilda.ws/>

“The greatest difficulty is to see and interpret the ‘invisible’ danger correctly. Often, a physical space may look familiar or ‘normal,’ but an in-depth analysis reveals critical threats: a lack of lighting, isolated routes, destroyed buildings and environments inaccessible for people with disabilities. At the same time, the greatest value is meeting with community residents, particularly women, who openly share their experiences. Their voices are at the heart of the audit. They are the ones who help us understand what is truly safe and what only seems so. With this kind of community participation, the audit becomes not just a tool of assessment, but a tool of change.”

Hanna Lemeshko
UPHF Project Coordinator

Since the idea is to share positive experiences, UPHF also focused on this aspect. Over the course of two months, in September–November 2023, the UPHF conducted fourteen two-day workshops on the topic “Creating a Safe Space in the Community: Safety Audit Methodology,” with participants representing twenty-eight communities in Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, Donetsk, Zaporizhia, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Khmelnytskyi, Lviv, Zakarpattia, Volyn, Odesa, Chernivtsi, Kherson regions. In total, more than 350 participants took part in the event, receiving tools and practical skills for conducting safety audits of community territories.

Entities in various regions of Ukraine have begun to show interest in the methodology for conducting safety audits. Initially, this issue was mostly addressed by civil society organizations with assistance from international structures, but soon, local authorities began to pay attention, as well, since they are the ones tasked with issuing the necessary decisions

to protect and support the interests and needs of their residents. Conducting a safety audit is not just a sprint, not simply a one-time isolated attempt to manage all relevant problems and stop there. The functioning of territories is a process of development, diversification, promptly responding to new concerns, and planning significant processes for the future. Therefore, the safety situation must be constantly monitored. With time, new dangers or challenges may emerge, or additional risks may come into play. This will require subsequent safety audits. Also, of benefit will be the engagement of new participants in different communities who were not involved in this work earlier. So, how best to help establish a method of strategic planning of such activities, to make them systematic?

Educating Students, Helping Communities

In 2023, the Ukrainian Public Health Foundation developed a *Methodological Guide on Safety Audits: Creating a Safe Public Space: Safety Audit and Recommendations*¹⁵³ as part of the project Women. Peace. Security: Responding to Wartime Challenges. The development of this guide was recommended by the Academic Council of the Department of Psychology, Social Work and Special Education, Borys Hrinchenko Kyiv University, which grants the guide the status of an official teaching manual with possible further use in the educational process. Notably, the guide was developed under current conditions, accounting for the challenges of Russia's full-scale aggression and new safety risks. The material is presented in a simple and accessible style in order to help local communities conduct their own safety audits.

¹⁵³ <https://www.healthright.org.ua/ab-ua-2023>

To promote the guide and the idea of safety audits overall, UPHF conducted a broad information campaign. The national TV channel ESPRESO developed a news story “28 Communities Implement the Project ‘Women. Peace. Security: Responding to the Challenges of War.’”¹⁵⁴ (the audience estimate is 286,700 live viewers and 12,000 views on YouTube). An educational video with graphics/animation elements and sign language was also created based on the guide¹⁵⁵. Several Facebook posts have been prepared.

Three videos have been filmed on the experience of safety audits in Bibrka territorial community of Lviv region,¹⁵⁶ Zhytomyr territorial community,¹⁵⁷ and Valky territorial community of Kharkiv region.¹⁵⁸

Generalizing and Replicating the Experience

The idea of conducting territorial safety audits, which originated as an initiative of NGOs and international organizations, has evolved over the years into an interesting experience worth replicating. In 2024–2025, workshops were held for representatives of thirty-eight territorial communities from nineteen regions of Ukraine as part of the project “Women. Peace. Security: Acting Together,” followed by expert support in conducting security audit. As of early 2025, thirty-four out of thirty-nine target communities have already conducted safety audits and prepared reports for further advocacy for necessary changes.

¹⁵⁴ <https://m.youtube.com/watch?t=822&v=1gPP7v9oXNE&feature=youtu.be>

¹⁵⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/3GbyazxKFdRLKjWn/?mibextid=WC7FNe>

¹⁵⁶ https://youtu.be/01_vZYAhhR8?t=3614

¹⁵⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WbuuFDQIjQ&t=6053s>

¹⁵⁸ <https://youtu.be/AczAUzsm9-o?t=913>

During this period, a need emerged to develop a single manual that would generalize the methodology of safety audits of various key elements in a safe space and propose a course of action for different stakeholders, such as housing unions, local authorities, territorial communities, civil society organizations, international entities, as well as representatives of the population, whose opinion should absolutely be considered when public space is organized and transformed. Therefore, as part of the aforementioned project, the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, with expert support from the Ministry of Social Policy, together with UPHF and with funding provided by the Government of the United Kingdom, a working group was created that generalized the previously developed relevant materials, proposals, national regulations and approaches in the National Action Plan 1325, international experience, concepts of territorial development and transport infrastructure, considerations to mitigate the consequences of Russia's warfare against Ukraine, and published the *Practical Guide for Safety Audit of Territories, Shelters, Transport, and Responding to Safety Challenges with Regard to the Needs of Different Groups of Women and Men*¹⁵⁹ in Ukrainian and in English.

This guide is intended for a wide range of readers and includes information from representatives of national authorities, local governments, representatives of the security and defense sector, civil society organizations, experts, activists who make efforts to ensure public safety and human rights. The issue of community safety united many agents of change that push for the necessary changes to make localities and

¹⁵⁹ Practical Guide for Safety Audit of Territories, Shelters, Transport, and Responding to Safety Challenges with Regard to the Needs of Different Groups of Women and Men, 2025 (no link available)

territorial communities safer and more modern. The manual contains detailed step-by-step guidelines to assess safety, questionnaires, checklists, and other practical tools for safety audit in communities.¹⁶⁰

Conducting a safety audit is an important process that helps identify social and structural problems affecting the safety of various groups, particularly vulnerable ones. The methodology proposed in the guide divides the audit process into several stages:

1. Preliminary analysis of safety challenges: collecting data on infrastructure, existing problems, and complaints of the population.

2. Conducting the safety audit: assessing territories, shelters, and transport based on dedicated checklists and surveys of the population.

3. Developing recommendations: preparing specific suggestions to improve security considering gender sensitivity and inclusiveness.

4. Advocacy for change: presenting and explaining the audit findings to local authorities, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders for further implementation of solutions.¹⁶¹

Key Elements of a Safe Space

The guide indicates that critical elements of a safe space must be found in community areas, the transportation system, and shelters. These spaces must comply with modern approaches and ensure equal access for all citizens: “Territorial safety includes high-quality infrastructure, proper lighting, safe routes, and availability of shelters in critical areas.”¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

Safety of transportation becomes particularly important during the ongoing war. At issue is not standard traffic safety and related factors, but also the reality that during this war, transport is used not only for regular travel, but also for evacuation of people and for delivery and distribution of humanitarian aid. This becomes a critical challenge, as Russian troops deliberately target critical infrastructure facilities and destroy them. For instance, on April 13, 2025, during the Christian holiday of Palm Sunday, one of two Russian ballistic missiles launched at Sumy hit a trolleybus with passengers. This act of terror resulted in thirty-four casualties among civilians, including two children,¹⁶³ and 117 people, including fifteen children, sustained injuries. Therefore, ensuring the functioning of public transport and its safety have become a major task for the authorities.

Of no less importance is the safety of shelters where civilians take cover during missile threats from Russia. The quality of such shelters does not always meet modern or basic needs. Some do not consider the special needs of women and children, some do not have an Internet connection, some do not provide basic necessities, some are not equipped for a stay of longer duration, other. As the war continues, the issue of this type of safety remains highly urgent, and the guide does focus on these issues.

International initiatives and methodologies from the United Nations and other international organizations provide important guidelines for creating safety standards in public spaces, focusing on the needs of women and vulnerable

¹⁶³ “Trolleybus of Death,” Dozens of Victims, and Response to Ballistic Terror in Sumy: Main Facts, RBC Ukraine, 13 April 2025, <https://www.rbc.ua/rus/news/trolleybus-smerti-desyatki-zhertv-i-reaktsiya-1744566345.html>

groups. In its infrastructure development projects, the World Bank develops security standards for public spaces that include not only physical security, but also an assessment of the impact on public morale, social integration, and equality of access to security for different groups.¹⁶⁴ The guide proposes adapting the best practices to the current Ukrainian context, including comprehensive approaches to safety monitoring of public spaces.

The guide also includes practical examples of the use of safety audits in different countries worldwide. For instance, in the Brazilian cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, the level of safety in parks, streets, and at transport stops is assessed with the participation of women, which provides for a better insight into how they envision their safety and what guarantees they require. As a result, additional surveillance cameras were installed on many streets, and information panels appeared at public transport stops, reminding people of women's rights and how to act in cases of violence.¹⁶⁵

In Sweden, safety audits have contributed to improving street lighting, proper monitoring of the condition of buildings and areas, and ensuring equal access to safe areas. This country is actively developing a transport safety monitoring system that allows for a prompt response to any threats or changes in the situation.¹⁶⁶

The guide also identifies risks that may emerge during the safety audit itself. This includes a lack of coordinated action

¹⁶⁴ The World Bank. Environmental, Health, and Safety General Guidelines. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/zh/157871484635724258/pdf/112110-WP-Final-General-EHS-Guidelines.pdf>

¹⁶⁵ Practical Guide for Safety Audit of Territories, Shelters, Transport, and Responding to Safety Challenges with Regard to the Needs of Different Groups of Women and Men, 2025

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

between different national and local authorities: different regions may have their own approaches to ensuring safety that differ from the approaches of other regions, which makes for suboptimal use of resources. Another risk is underestimating the participation of civil society organizations in safety audit processes. Government structures tend to zero in on their own capacities and approaches, though civil society organizations are absolutely equipped to make safety audits more effective during data collection, identifying genuine needs of the community. Risks also include potential psychological consequences of the safety audit for participants. For example, interviewing survivors of violence in various forms can cause repeated trauma, which may prompt survivors to refuse to engage in such conversations or participate in audit activities, reducing the overall effectiveness of the audit.

Another serious obstacle to integrating safety audit results may be the lack of dedicated funding. In the absence of funds, local authorities may postpone the implementation of necessary measures, which not only reduces effectiveness, but also generally causes disappointment and skepticism towards changes among community members.

The guide recommends ensuring the continuous involvement of civil society organizations, activists, and representatives of vulnerable groups in all stages of the safety audit and recommends the establishment of feedback platforms where communities can report security concerns in their areas, as well as implementing regular consultations with vulnerable groups.¹⁶⁷

Other recommendations include the development of standardized procedures for integrating audit results in the planning of local infrastructure projects and safety policies, the creation of road maps with clear execution deadlines and

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

designated officials. To monitor the safety system, the use of modern tools, such as video surveillance systems, mobile applications for reporting security breaches, platforms for real-time data collection have been proposed.¹⁶⁸ This approach would enable prompt response to safety risks and active improvement of the safety situation.

The guide includes regulatory documents that ensure the organization and conduct of safety audits on the territory of Ukraine. This will also be useful to those structures that will be directly involved in such work. It describes all the details of preparing for an audit and conducting it: planning, formation of working groups, coordinating cooperation with different structures and public authorities, preparing documents, identifying priority goals, conducting observations, social discussions, and various other measures.

“Initially, the attitude towards audits was wary, as if they were another inspection. But when local government representatives understand that this is about working together, not criticism, that this is about improving conditions for their citizens, they actively engage in the process. For many communities, the audit becomes the first step towards a more profound dialogue with women, youth, and people with disabilities. And, most importantly, after conducting an audit, communities initiate positive changes. This indicates that the process works.”

***Olha Lopushanska,
Deputy Director for Programming, UPHF***

For a long time, safety audits in Ukraine remained the initiative of civil society organizations. For the authorities, par-

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

icipation in such events was entirely voluntary, thus making it impossible to replicate this practice throughout the country. Today, safety issues are prominent, and increasingly national and local government entities are willing to engage in this work, considering the interests and needs of the population, especially vulnerable groups. Therefore, there is a plan to formalize the practical use of methodological guidelines for safety audits of community territories, shelters, and public transport. This is a significant step towards implementing and further development of modern standards for a safe environment.

Our constant cooperation with the National Public Service Agency of Ukraine and its head Nataliia Aliushyna and with the Higher School of Public Administration (director Yuliia Lykhach) ensured the institutionalization of safety audits. The Guide resulted in an approval of the “General Short-Term Training Program” (order of the Higher School of Public Administration No. 78-OD/25 dated May 27, 2025) and the online course “Safety Audit (of Territories, Shelters, Transportation): A Practical Online Course,” which will ensure sustainable training of experts in communities. The online course is available on the “Study and I” platform: <https://study.hs.gov.ua/courses/audyt-bezpeky/>.

According to the order of the National Public Service Agency dated November 11, 2025, No. 151-25 “On Approval of Professional Development Programs,” the curriculum for “Implementing Safety Audits of Territories, Shelters, Transportation with Regard to the Needs of Various Groups of Women and Men”¹⁶⁹ has been approved.

¹⁶⁹ Order of the National Public Service Agency dated November 11, 2025, No. 151-25 “On Approval of Professional Development Programs, <https://nads.gov.ua/npas/pro-pohodzhennia-prohram-pidvyshchennia-kvalifikatsii-35>

SECTION 12. GUIDELINES FOR INTEGRATING GENDER- CONSCIOUS APPROACHES INTO THE TRAINING SYSTEM FOR SECURITY AND DEFENSE SECTOR EXPERTS

The Security and Defense Sector (SDS) of Ukraine is actively implementing gender equality approaches in its activities, and this is no coincidence. More women are joining the ranks of the SDS. Now, it is no longer unusual to see women police officers patrolling streets, women first responders in fire departments, women tracking radiation safety and women being K9 handlers during emergencies. After the onset of the Russia-Ukraine War, an increasing number of women joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine. As of January 1, 2025, more than 70,000 women are enlisted in the military, with 5,500 women serving on the front line.¹⁷⁰

While statistically, these are positive developments, are these developments systemic? Are we now able to avoid stereotypes and prejudices that security and defending peace are “matters for men?” To date, not entirely. Transforming attitudes is not a swift process; a great deal depends on the understanding of the problem, knowledge of the regulatory framework, successful practices for achieving gender equality, formation of a gender-sensitive culture and awareness. In the security and defense sector, these issues, specifically, have

¹⁷⁰ Suspilne, News, 8 March 2025, <https://suspilne.media/965741-u-minoboroni-rozpovili-skilki-zinok-sluzat-v-zsu/>

become the responsibility of the educational training process. At present, the system is being significantly modernized: gender-sensitive approaches are used in the training of instructors and in the development of systemic tools to organize the educational process. This work largely relies on *Guidelines on Integrating Gender Approaches in Training Specialists for the Security and Defense Sector of Ukraine*,¹⁷¹ a text developed by Ukrainian specialists based on international standards.

Development of the Guidelines

An increasing number of young women are enrolling in higher education establishments of the Security and Defense Sector of Ukraine. The Ivan Bohun Kyiv Military Lyceum accepted its first twenty female cadets in 2019, with the number increasing to thirty-eight in both 2020 and 2021 and slightly dipping to thirty-two in 2022 and 2023. Such trends can also be observed in other educational establishments in the sector. Therefore, the question arises: how are the curricula being adapted to these changes? How gender-sensitive is the educational content itself?

The teaching of gender-related topics in security and defense institutions began a while ago. In general, these efforts included specialized courses and electives introduced on a trial basis. For the most part, they were initiated and developed in cooperation with civil society organizations (CSOs), such as La Strada Ukraine, Women's Information and Advisory Center, and other CSOs promoting the idea of equal rights and opportunities for men and women, and non-discrimination that established partnerships with specific educational institutions to accomplish this goal. However, often, due to a lack of gender competencies, instructors have an inaccurate or superficial view both of this

¹⁷¹ GUIDELINES on Integrating Gender Approaches in Training Specialists for the Security and Defence Sector of Ukraine, https://ukraine.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2021/10/HEI%20eng_web.pdf

topic, as well as of the goals and tools for the implementation of gender policies into the SDS. Despite a clear social demand for such instruction, gender-sensitive approaches were not always considered in curricula. The situation called for a profound change: support was needed to develop and expand curricula on gender-related topics and to coordinate teaching standards.

In 2017, the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration conducted the Gender Impact Assessment of the Security and Defense Sector in Ukraine¹⁷² with support from UN Women and the Government of Sweden. This report became an indicator regarding the importance of the topic for the prospects of SDS development, the need to recognize importance of training staff of the sector's institutions to "gender modernize" the educational process and identify the gaps that needed to be filled in such work.

In the same year, 2017, a group of authors prepared the first information and training manual for security sector experts with the support of the OSCE Project Coordinator in Ukraine¹⁷³ that established the basis for training and methodological support for the development of gender competencies of SDS professionals and experts in the social sector (who also had a relevant manual developed for them).¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Gender Impact Assessment of the security and defense sector in Ukraine 2017, https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2018/Gender%20Impact%20Assessment%20Ukraine%202017_EN_fin.pdf

¹⁷³ Women. Peace. Security, an Information and Training Manual for Security Sector Professionals, Kyiv, 2017, <https://www.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/5/3/386423.pdf>

¹⁷⁴ Women. Peace. Security, an Information and Training Manual for Social Sector Professionals, Kyiv, 2017, <https://www.genderculturecentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/ZHINKI.-MIR.-BEZPEKA.-Informaciyno-navchalnyy-posibnik-dlya-fakhivciv-socialnoi-sferi-1.pdf>

The information-training manual was developed for those employed within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, primarily the National Police. The manual provides information, and explains general concepts, regarding current international and national legislation, highlights gender issues that exist in Ukraine at present, and serves as a reference on how to aid victims of gender-based violence, especially conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). The publication focuses on the description of gender equality policies in the security and defense sector and covers the means of appealing and investigating cases of gender discrimination, providing examples of positive practices in a democratic development of the security sector and in promotion of gender equality.

Soon, instructors from eleven higher education institutions in the sector (National Academy of the National Guard of Ukraine; National Academy of the Security Service of Ukraine; S. Koroliov Zhytomyr Military Institute; National Academy of Internal Affairs; National Academy of the State Border Service of Ukraine; Military Institute of Tank Troops of the National Technical University of the Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute, I. Cherniakhivskyi National Defense University; Petro Sahaidachnyi National Academy of Land Forces; Kharkiv National University of Internal Affairs; Military Institute of Taras Shevchenko National University; Odesa Military Academy) began implementing a pilot project to unify approaches to teaching gender-related topics. During this period, the idea to develop the later-titled *Guidelines on Integrating Gender Approaches in Training Specialists for the Security and Defense Sector of Ukraine Guidelines* originated. The effort began with additional training for the authors. To expand expertise on this topic and to align international standards and best practices, the authors attended several special seminars and trainings. The authors also participated

in a study tour to the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations (NCGM, Sweden) to learn about the relevant experience of certain NATO countries. This specialized preparation was valuable, and the findings developed by the authors gained special importance.

Among the authors of the Guidelines are Olena Volobuieva, Alla Viatkina, Svitlana Hanaba, Olha Honcharenko, Oleh Hushchyn, Halyna Zhukovska, Valentyn Ziolka, Nataliia Kaminska, Hanna Karakurkchi, Larysa Kompantseva, Liudmyla Krymets, Oksana Krytenko, Kateryna Levchenko, Valentyna Miroschnichenko, Ruslan Musevych, Oksana Orel, Iryna Saienko, Iryna Sevruk, Nataliia Semeniuk, Yuliia Sokolovska, Olena Suslova, Hryhorii Sukhorada, Mariia Chekhovska, Nataliia Chuprinova, Larysa Shevchenko.

The work regarding the preparation of the Guidelines was coordinated by the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Olha Stefanishyna, supported by the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy Kateryna Levchenko. Technical support was provided by UN Women with the financial assistance of the Government of Sweden. The finalized Guidelines were supported by the academic councils of higher education institutions in the security and defense sector for further use in their educational and training processes. In July 2021, two-day online training sessions were held for approximately one hundred instructors of higher education institutions in the security and defense sector.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Government Portal, Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, August 31, 2021, <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/pidgotovleno-metodichni-rekomendaciyi-z-integraciyi-gendernih-pidhodiv-u-sistemu-pidgotovki-fahivciv-dlya-sektoru-bezpeki-i-oboroni-ukrayini>

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The published Guidelines serve a specific purpose. They do not replace the curricula of the security and defense sector institutions of Ukraine, rather offer a direction for the modernization of the courses and methods of instruction, accounting for gender-responsive approaches. The Guidelines are an element of a larger scope of work the goal of which is to change the outdated approach to the educational process, eradicate prejudices, and stereotypes, and establish equality-based relationships between men and women.

The Guidelines combine gender-related theoretical basics, and the methods used to teach these basics in higher education establishments of the security and defense sector, as well as practical approaches to the organization of the educational process. Teachers are offered the necessary materials that reveal the essence and purpose of introducing gender-responsive approaches into everyday activities. Instructors learn about the importance of such approaches in the modern world, the impact of these approaches on the development and use of human resources, on the protection of democratic values, and for combating discrimination. This is supported by practical advice on how to implement and promote the topic more effectively, followed by specific examples of good practices. The document generalized interesting and useful experience from Ukraine and other countries.

The Guidelines consist of five units, each unit with unique content and assignments.

Unit 1 is titled “Gender Equality in the Security and Defense Sector: Situation and Prospects” and serves as an introduction. This section describes the increased demand for gender equality in various aspects of public life and provides examples of noteworthy international experience. In Unit 1, the current changes to be considered in the security and de-

fense sector of Ukraine, especially in the educational process for training personnel, are identified.

“Gender equality contributes to the security of life and well-being of people, regardless of their gender, ethnic and social origin, religious and other beliefs, and other characteristics. This is an undervalued resource of humanity, and this statement applies to all countries and democratic communities regardless of cultural factors or geography,”¹⁷⁶ is the key principle that is emphasized.

Unit 2 is titled “Theoretical and Legal Foundations of Ensuring Gender Equality in the Security and Defense Sector.” The purpose of Unit 2 is to explain the fundamental concepts of gender policy. Rooted in confusion around terminology, many misconceptions continue to exist. For example, “gender” frequently is confused with the word “sex.” Unit 2 analyzes the use of “gender” as a concept and its derivatives in philosophical and historical discourses, provides information on international and national legal provisions for equal rights and opportunities for women and men, the role of international organizations in promoting gender equality issues, with practical aspects presented, as well.

Unit 2 also includes the text, “In Ukrainian legislation, the notion of ‘gender equality’ was first introduced in the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of May 6, 2001, ‘On the National Action Plan to Improve the Situation of Women and Promote the Implementation of Gender Equality in Society for 2001–2005.’” A key role in the legislative formalization of gender equality was the previously mentioned Law of Ukraine

¹⁷⁶ Methodological Recommendations for Integrating Gender-Conscious Approaches into the Training System for Security and Defense Sector Experts, page 17,

<https://vaodesa.mil.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Metodychni-rekomendatsii-z-intehratsii-gendernykh-pidkhodiv.pdf>

“On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men,” adopted by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on September 8, 2005. According to the Recommendations from the parliamentary hearing “Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities in Ukraine: Situation and Prospects,” which took place on June 27, 2007, this Law and the cited Order “defined the institutional and legal framework for gender relations in society.”¹⁷⁷

Unit 3 is titled “Practical Issues of Ensuring Gender Equality in Defense and Security” provides tools to ensure gender equality and their practical application in institutions of the security and defense sector. Unit 3 covers gender analysis, gender audit, gender budgeting, training on gender equality, assessment of gender impact, and gender monitoring. Answers are provided to questions that often arise during studies at higher education establishments in the security and defense sector, for example, to what end were the positions of gender advisors introduced in the sector, why female military service personnel are not appointed to officer positions, and other questions. A separate section in Unit 2 is dedicated to gender-sensitive communications of security and defense sector institutions and sources for the maintenance of such:

“...at the strategic level, it is important to integrate the issue of gender-sensitive communications into the doctrines, policies, and regulations of security and defense institutions; to plan and coordinate gender-sensitive communications both at the state and interagency levels, taking into account aspects of gender sensitivity; to amend the constituent documents of security institutions establishing the official use of feminine forms of nouns to designate professions, positions, and military ranks.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., page 53.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., page 112.

In Unit 3 the conditions for protecting civilians during armed conflict, focusing on the need to avoid or minimize harm, with women and girls accounting for the majority of the affected, is reviewed. This is especially relevant for Ukraine in the context of Russia's aggression and its negative impact on civilians.

Unit 4 is titled "Gender Integration in Management Practices of the Security and Defense Sector." The authors of the manual posit that in order to make the mechanisms of ensuring equal rights of women and men in management practices in the security and defense sector as effective as possible, there needs to be a strong focus on the interaction of the three main levels of subsystems in the sector: the level of the organization overall, the level of an individual team (a structural unit) and the third, that of an individual military service personnel or law enforcement officer. These levels are all interconnected.

"...logically structured, systematic work carried out through the interconnection and interaction of management procedures can significantly increase the effectiveness of implementing the requirements of modern documents in the field of gender equality."¹⁷⁹

Unit 4 analyzes the role of management/command in the security and defense sector in ensuring equal rights for women and men and provides specific success stories.

Unit 5 is titled "Gender-Sensitive Approaches in Educational Practices of the Security and Defense Sector" and clarifies the requirements for gender competence of specialists who teach gender-related topics in higher education institutions in the security and defense sector of Ukraine, as well as the planning and development of methods to improve such competence. The authors of the Guidelines noted the lack of gender competence regarding educational programs in the

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., page 128.

requirements of higher education standards in the National Qualifications Framework.

Unit 5, the final unit, “Gender-Sensitive Approaches in Educational Practices of the Security and Defense Sector” addresses methods of training on gender issues, proposes innovative approaches, including situational drills, role play, psychological workshops, as well as modernization of traditional forms of instruction, including lectures. Often-repeated mistakes in teaching about gender issues that need to be addressed are identified. In this unit there is emphasis on the need for gender expert review of educational materials.

“A professional approach to developing curricula is most important objective. The goal is not only to convey certain information to the cadet (student, listener, manager), but also to develop (form) a certain worldview regarding the perception of the policy of equal rights and opportunities for women and men, to instill gender awareness, culture, gender-sensitive behavior, focus on equality in relations with women; promote the development of gender democracy and gender culture in society in general, and in the security and defense sector in particular.”¹⁸⁰

The Guidelines provide a list of sources used and other materials that can be referenced for an in-depth study of this topic.

Implementation Mechanisms and Working Tools

Analyzing the existing features of the educational process in the higher education establishments in the security and defense sector, the authors of the *Guidelines* propose several mechanisms and methods that can be used to introduce the gender component into training and instruction. Proposals include:

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., page 213.

- analysis of curricula that involves assessing the curricula that are already used to identify opportunities for modernization and integration of gender aspects;
- development of special courses and workshops to create educational modules aimed at raising awareness of gender issues;
- enhanced training of instructors, whose competence in the field of gender equality should be increased. They are to be provided with special seminars and workshops to expand knowledge;
- monitoring and evaluation that involves the implementation of a regular system of assessment to discern if gender approaches are effectively integrated into the learning process. This process will help with understanding the pace of integration and, if necessary, consideration of how it can be improved.

The opinion of the authors is that such approaches may be replicated by other organizations, including international partners, to implement gender aspects into their curricula.

Using the Guidelines: Success Stories

The *Guidelines* were developed in 2020. Since then, they have proven to be highly effective. Gender-sensitive approaches have a positive impact on the training of modern military and law enforcement personnel and the formation of a gender-sensitive environment in the security and defense sector.

Success stories regarding the implementation of gender-sensitive approaches include:

- gender-sensitive training programs in military universities;
- courses on combating conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), implemented in partnership with international organizations;

- an increase in the number of female officers in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which became possible thanks to the elimination of discriminatory norms regarding access to military service. According to the Head of the Humanitarian Support Office of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine Diana Kopanytsia, as of December 2024, there are more than 10,000 officers and more than 13,000 sergeants among women serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. More than 1,000 women in the military have received state awards.¹⁸¹

Challenges remain, that include the resistance of traditional military culture, the overall need for a change in perspective, and the need to raise awareness about gender equality among personnel. However, the Guidelines are only one element in an initiative focused on finding solutions to existing problems. Their development was a crucial step in the implementation of the National Action Plan 1325. Ukraine's experience with the application of these *Guidelines* can be shared with other countries and adapted by them for use in their national contexts.

¹⁸¹ Army Inform, December 5, 2024, <https://armyinform.com.ua/2024/12/05/chy-ye-genderna-rivnist-u-vijsku-pro-kilkist-zhinok-v-armiyi-odnostrij-po-figuri-ta-standarty-nato/>

SECTION 13. NATIONAL TRAINER AND MEDIATOR NETWORK OF LA STRADA UKRAINE

NGOs and international organizations are the primary entities that actively engage in the training of professional personnel who work on implementing gender equality in all spheres of public life. This is due to their capabilities, competencies, ability to respond to existing and emerging challenges quickly and flexibly; this includes difficulties resulting from the Russia-Ukraine War, helping those affected by this war, peacebuilding that should result in the termination of hostilities on fair terms. Training specialists is a challenging task, but one that is necessary and one with promising outcomes; specialists train those who will shape our future and forge our national development. Importantly and increasingly, women are becoming involved as trainers.

Among the most successful projects for training personnel is the National Coaching Network (NCN) and the National Mediation Network (NMN), launched by the NGO La Strada Ukraine.

Establishment of the National Coaching Network

The National Coaching Network (NCN) was established in 2000, at the cusp of the new millennium. This period was a trying time for Ukraine with the tumultuous 1990s, with challenges and chaotic attempts to find vectors of development, were over and a clearer vision of plans and steps to implement these plans took shape. Among the acute problems

identified was the lack of professional personnel who could resolve current problems such as promoting gender equality, human rights, and the development of a comfortable, favorable environment for self-identification of various groups in society. La Strada Ukraine was actively involved in combating such phenomena as human trafficking, gender-based violence, gender-based discrimination and violations of human rights, particularly those of women and girls. There was a limited number of professionals with the necessary training and experience, who were guided by international standards in their work. At the same time, the need for trained experts grew exponentially. To bridge this gap, a new structure emerged on the professional and educational arena: a voluntary association of coaches who had undergone relevant training and had the required certification, shared the values of La Strada Ukraine and were ready to not only disseminate the strategy of gender equality in society, strengthening social cohesion and awareness, but also teach other activists about the culture of modern relations.

“When we started this work in the late 90s, we did not know we were creating one of the strongest educational and protective platforms in this country. There were no methodologies, ready-to-use scenarios, grant cycles, or HR competence models. There was awareness of the problem, the inner moral imperative, and an intense sense of a joint mission: to create a culture where respect, safety, human rights, and gender equality are the norm, not an exception.

The main challenges of that time were as follows: an almost complete lack of ready-to-use educational materials in Ukrainian; social silence and stigma surrounding topics related to violence, discrimination, and children’s rights; insufficient teaching skills among most candidates, since the profession of a coach was only emerging; the absence of national scaling mechanisms — everything was essentially built from scratch.

But we had what today’s HR directors would call strategic soft power assets: a joint value and vision, readiness to learn faster than the world changed, high trust within the team, leadership without positions and hierarchies.

This was what helped us turn the first workshops into an ecosystem and the group of active specialists into a national coaching network which, back then, met the principles of what today’s business calls a learning community and horizontal leadership infrastructure.”

**Liliia Savych,
Member of La Strada Ukraine council,
Vice President of the Organization (1999–2003)**

NCN Focus

The work of the National Coaching Network has a pyramid structure. The issues that are relevant to society are processed and conceptualized at the top, by coaches, who then share their ideas with a broader circle of people. Their training is based on the affirmation of certain principles and views that are later offered to the public.

The key objective of the NCN's activity is the creation of an inclusive environment where women and girls play a key role in peacebuilding and promoting security, therefore the instruction received in preparation for such activities becomes more important. Also, it is no coincidence that educators with a professional audience actively join the coaching network. During the Russia-Ukraine War, a lot of attention is dedicated to educational events and workshops for experts working with internally displaced persons (IDPs). In addition to psychological support of women and girls, an essential aspect here is integrating IDPs into the community, which facilitates their social adaptation and active involvement in society, while considering the needs of individuals affected by the war.

Valeriia Bondar, NCN co-coordinator, says that “the topics of training programs at the National Coaching Network currently include the following: combating human trafficking during the war in Ukraine; preventing and combating gender-based violence, including domestic violence; preventing and combating violence against children; gender equality and non-discrimination; activity of the National Hotline for Children and Youth and the National Hotline for Prevention of Domestic Violence, Human Trafficking and Gender Discrimination; critical analysis of information in the media environment; creation of a safe educational space; overcoming gender stereotypes.”

NCN also actively works to identify and assist CRSV survivors through specialized support programs and training for professionals.

La Strada Ukraine employees develop the curricula and include numerous professionals experienced in academic work with the necessary academic credentials. Among them are Professor Mykola Lehenkyi, LLD, Olha Shved, PhD in Sociology, Maryna Lehenka, LLD, Yuliia Anosova, LLD, Tetiana Kharkivska, PhD in Social Work, and others. This work also includes monitoring relevant issues by conducting surveys among the potential audience and the preparation of analytical reports with findings subsequently used for communicating with the audience. In 2024, La Strada Ukraine, along with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, prepared the analytical report “Strategy for the Implementation of Gender Equality in Education in Action: Gender Competencies of Teaching Staff in Secondary Educational Establishments.”¹⁸²

“The educational process still faces many challenges, including gender stereotypes that limit girls’ professional choices, particularly in STEM fields. Today, encouraging girls to study mathematics, physics, and natural sciences is not only the need of the hour, but also the key to the future fulfillment of their potential and the prosperity of our nation.”

**Kateryna Levchenko,
Government Commissioner for Gender Policy**

¹⁸² <https://la-strada.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/analitychnyj-zvit-za-rezultatamy-doslidzhennya.pdf>

Activities of the National Mediation Network (NMN) and Focus Areas

The desire for peace, dialogue, and mutual understanding that arose in response to the beginning of Russian aggression in 2014 led to the creation of the National Mediation Network by the La Strada Ukraine NGO. This initiative brought together professionals capable of preventing conflicts and promoting their peaceful resolution, developing a culture of restorative communication, and viewing peacebuilding as a continuous professional process that requires specialized knowledge, practical skills, and humanity.

“The establishment of the National Mediation Network in 2015 was a key step in responding to the challenges, particularly those identified by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 ‘Women, peace, security.’ Its establishment was aimed at providing expert support in the implementation of principles enshrined in the Resolution on the national and local levels.”

**Veronika Andrieienkova,
Director of the Scientific and Methodological
Work and Mediation Department
La Strada Ukraine NGO (2015–2025)**

The network’s practical activities began in 2015 and are associated with the implementation of the project “Peacebuilding, Conflict Prevention and Resolution through Mediation in Groups and Communities Affected by Conflict”, which was implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Educational and Methodological Center (UEMC) of Practical Psychology and Social Work under the National Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine with the support of the UK Embassy.

At this stage, professional training of mediators was initiated, alongside developing models to implement mediation in the educational and social environments, which later led to the formation of a holistic system of social and pedagogical mediation in Ukraine.

Particular importance is given to women and their involvement in peacebuilding issues, as mediators not only offer progressive ideas, but are also capable of implementing them.

“Women should be actively involved in conflict resolution at various stages, especially in communities, where their participation is key. This requires mastering the skills of dialogue and mediation, which is an effective dispute resolution tool.”

***Tetiana Kharkivska,
Social Manager, La Strada Ukraine***

La Strada’s requirements for mediators were as follows: it is a voluntary union of mediators who underwent basic training at a program with a total duration of over ninety hours, with at least forty-five hours of practical training, and/or underwent basic mediation training and obtained the certification.

The activities of the NMN are aimed at developing a culture of peaceful conflict resolution by improving the professional qualifications of specialists and introducing mediation in the field of education and public life. The network’s activities include systematic training of mediators, development and implementation of curricula, methodological materials, and models for the use of mediation in secondary, professional, extracurricular, and higher education establishments. This approach helps form sustainable practices of restorative response to conflicts and strengthen the capacity of the edu-

cational and social environment for conflict-free interaction. A key area of activity of the NMN is the development and support of mediation services, particularly the implementation of peer-to-peer mediation. The network focuses on building skills of dialogue, responsibility, and mutual respect among children and youth, while strengthening the role of women and girls in peacebuilding and social cohesion processes. By combining professional training, practical activities, and institutional development, the NMN contributes to the establishment of mediation as an effective tool for supporting peace, trust, and humanity in Ukrainian society.

To improve the educational level of NCN participants and their professional qualifications, the La Strada team developed several teaching aids and programs. They include:

- “Peacebuilding. Conflict Prevention and Resolution with the Use of Mediation: Social and Pedagogical Aspect;”¹⁸³
- “Creating a System of Reconciliation Services to Implement Peer-to-Peer Mediation and Peaceful Conflict Resolution in Educational Establishments;”¹⁸⁴
- “Resolving Conflicts and Building Peace Around Me. Basic Peer Mediation Skills;”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Peacebuilding. Conflict Prevention and Resolution through Mediation: The Socio-Pedagogical Aspect: Teaching and Methodological Manual / V. Andreienkova et al.; edited by K. Levchenko et al.; compiled by K. Cherepakha, N. Lunchenko, V. Andreienkova. Kyiv: Individual Entrepreneur Stetsenko V. V., 2016. 192 pp.

¹⁸⁴ Establishing a System of Reconciliation Services for the Implementation of Peer-to-Peer Mediation and the Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts in Educational Institutions: Teaching and Methodological Manual / V. Andreienkova et al.; compiled by V. Haiduk, N. Lunchenko, M. Matviichuk, T. Kharkivska, K. Chernets. Kyiv: Individual Entrepreneur Nichoha S.O., 2018. 174 pp.

¹⁸⁵ I Resolve Conflicts and Build Peace Around Me. Basic Peer Mediation Skills: Teaching and Methodological Manual / V. Andreienkova et al. Kyiv: Individual Entrepreneur Nichoha S. O., 2020. 200 pp.

- “Implementing a Restorative Approach, Mediation, and Practice of Reconciliation Service Functioning in Educational Establishments;”¹⁸⁶
- “Resolving Conflicts in the Educational Environment with the Use of Reconciliation Procedures in an Online Format;”¹⁸⁷
- The curriculum of a special professional training course for managers and teaching staff of educational establishments “Training Professionals for Implementing a Restorative Approach, Mediation, and Practice of Reconciliatory Service Functioning in Educational Establishments;”¹⁸⁸
- Curriculum of the elective course “Resolving Conflicts and Building Peace Around Me;”
- Extracurricular club curriculum: “Peaceful Conflict Resolution. Basic Peer Mediation Skills;”
- Educational training program for learners “Basic Peer Mediation Skills in the Reconciliation Service of the Educational Establishment;”¹⁸⁹
- Electronic educational course “Resolving Conflicts and Building Peace Around Me.”

¹⁸⁶ Implementing the Restorative Approach, Facilitation, Mediation, and the Practice of Reconciliation Services in Educational Institutions: Teaching and Methodological Manual / V. Andreienkova et al. Kyiv: Ukraine Agency LLC, 2023. 186 pp.

¹⁸⁷ Conflict Resolution in the Educational Environment through the Use of Conciliation Procedures in an Online Format / V. Andreienkova, M. Motyliuk. Kyiv, 2023. 44 pp.

¹⁸⁸ Implementing the Restorative Approach, Facilitation, Mediation, and the Practice of Reconciliation Services in Educational Institutions: Teaching and Methodological Manual / V. Andreienkova et al. Kyiv: Ukraine Agency LLC, 2023. 186 pp.

¹⁸⁹ I Resolve Conflicts and Build Peace Around Me. Basic Peer Mediation Skills: Teaching and Methodological Manual / V. Andreienkova et al. Kyiv: Individual Entrepreneur Nichoha S. O., 2020. 200 pp.

During the training of coaches and mediators, special attention is paid to the analysis of conflicts and to stereotypes, including gender stereotypes, which may have caused or exacerbated them. Such approaches allow not only to assess the root cause of disputes, but also to prevent their recurrence. The mediator regulates the conflict resolution process in such a way that each party can freely express their thoughts and feelings, gradually taking steps towards each other.

The key vectors of educational activities within NMN include the following topics: implementation of a restorative approach, peaceful conflict resolution in educational establishments and communities, social cohesion, reducing the level of aggression in society, alternative methods of conflict resolution, protecting women's rights and their participation in peacebuilding processes, formation of a peace and gender equality culture.

Achievements

Over the twenty-five years of operation of the National Coaching Network, more than 450 certified coaches have been involved in NCN activities.

To date, the National Coaching and Mediation Network is represented by fifty-three trainers and thirty-eight mediators from twenty regions (Vinnytsia, Volyn, Zakarpattia, Zaporizhzhia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Donetsk, Zhytomyr, Khmelnytskyi, Kirovohrad, Sumy, Poltava, Kharkiv, Kherson, Cherkasy, Chernihiv, Chernivtsi, Odesa, Lviv, Dnipropetrovsk, Kyiv oblasts, and the city of Kyiv).

The activities of trainers are currently focused mostly on educational and other institutions, with the majority of participants being representatives of the educational sector and public figures. Since its establishment, more than 560 professionals from all over Ukraine have joined the coaching fam-

ily, further engaging even more like-minded people at the local level. Currently, the network is actively expanding its activities, reaching new levels of interaction, and representing the organization's work on regional, national, and international platforms, strengthening the impact and scale of its educational work.

Over the course of twenty-five years of its activities (2000-2025), the coaching team conducted 31,556 educational events, reaching 838,914 participants. Among them, 38% are representatives of civil society and communities, and 62% are participants in the educational process. By gender distribution, the activities reached: among children and youth, 56% were girls and 44% boys; among teachers, community specialists, and parents, 72% were women and 28% men.

Over the ten years of activity (2015-2025), mediators held 35,797 events, including 13,533 mediations and alternative conflict resolution events, 11,538 educational events, and 10,726 recovery circles. The activities reached 394,146 participants, of whom 62% were students, 30% were professionals and community representatives. Gender distribution: 73% were women, 27% — men, 55% — girls, 45% — boys. The total number of resolved conflicts exceeds 32,000. More than 1,000 mediators have been trained.

During a press conference dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the NCN and the 10th anniversary of the NMN, when answering the question, “What does the future hold for the networks?” Liliia Savych replied, “Now networks are no longer just an educational structure; they are Ukraine’s strategic intellectual asset. I see three vectors of development. Modernization of content and methodologies (integration of digital platforms, gamification, adaptive learning; inclusion of topics of mental health, information security, media literacy, gender equality in the digital space). Inter-sectoral partner-

ships (ministries, schools, higher education institutions, businesses, military structures, tech companies; creation of train-the-trainers accelerators). Professionalization and branding of the network at the international level (international certifications; participation in global alliances and EU learning networks). However, most important is to preserve the soul and develop a new generation of those who will continue this mission.” She also emphasized, “We started as a small group of people who believed that education could change lives. Today, we see that not only has education changed lives, but education has also changed the general culture. And there is work yet to be done.”

SECTION 14. THE ROLE OF ART IN VISUALIZING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

These days, in all Ukrainian theaters, before each performance, a stark warning is given: in the event of an air raid siren, the performance will stop, and the audience will be asked to take shelter. When the alert is over, the actors will return to the stage. This is the reality of wartime Ukraine. Fans of the performing arts are not put off by these extreme conditions and happily continue to attend cultural events. Theater performances are sold out, art exhibitions, music festivals, and book fairs draw long lines of visitors.

For example, tickets for the play *The Witch of Konotop* performed in Kyiv's Ivan Franko Theater sold out in minutes. According to the theater, the demand still exceeds the supply by a multiple of 60.¹⁹⁰

In 2023, during two and half months, more than 50,000 people visited the Maria Prymachenko's exhibit *Maria Draws* at the Ukrainian House.¹⁹¹ The exhibit *Alla Horska. Boryviter*

¹⁹⁰ Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theater, 22 May 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/frankotheatre/posts/pfbid02P4xrLct44PQvfk5dSGGKKYGSFgMCqZfNahuqcrwhW5v39DQLDWmUkpfbyMayBeKcl>

¹⁹¹ Forbes, 18 September 2023, <https://forbes.ua/lifestyle/rekordni-rezultati-zakinchilas-vistavka-kartin-primachenko-mariya-malyue-skilki-gostey-pobachilo-kartini-naydorozhchoi-khudozhnitsi-kraini-ta-zarobiv-ukrainskiy-dim-18092023-16075>

drew 51,000 visitors¹⁹² over six weeks in 2024.

The Ivano-Frankivsk Drama Theater resumed operation in March 2022, only weeks after the start of russia's full-scale aggression.¹⁹³ Adapting to wartime conditions and for the safety of visitors, the performances were held in the shelter. The first to be announced were the drama-requiem *Nation* by Maria Matios and the drama per musica *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare.

russia's aggression did not silence the Odesa Opera. In 2022, even with doors closed, the theater worked online¹⁹⁴ and held concerts such as Ukrainian Dimension, Ballet Extravaganza, and an online campaign dedicated to Ukraine's Constitution Day.

The Kharkiv Art Museum demonstrated extraordinary resilience. Despite severe damage from shelling, the museum continued to operate in a limited mode. The museum offered online programs virtually. Moreover, in May 2025, the museum announced an open international festival and competition of creative works by school students *Kharkiv, the City of Good Hopes*¹⁹⁵ demonstrating indomitable spirit and desire for development.

¹⁹² Olha Viieru, director of the Ukrainian House National Center, 30 April 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/100002893366207/posts/pfbid0wiLdB8z6i6tapQCZgQ3yML6d47ioAd8LEeXftsFkTvYWWReCjsRej6Mj6k4jRbWWl/?app=fbl>

¹⁹³ Ivano-Frankivsk Drama Theater, 15 March 2022, <https://www.genderculturecentre.org/legendarniy-zhinochiy-almanakh-pershiiy>

¹⁹⁴ Odesa Opera, 12 July 2022, <https://operahouse.od.ua/press-releases/odeska-opera-u-voyennyj-chas/>

¹⁹⁵ Kharkiv Art Museum, 18 May 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/artmuseum.kharkiv/posts/pfbid0UXEiQmVY3uL8zZubZKhNTZV9PwkyJ3XFBtdau51yE2p6zT5h3ZNXBbTJFBhtKwtl>

The premiere of the updated ballet *Chopiniana* was held at the end of April in the basement of the Kharkiv National Academic Opera and Ballet Theater, “OPERA East.” A stage was set up in the basement. The hall can accommodate up to 400 spectators.¹⁹⁶

Art in Ukraine not only gives people hope and positivity but art is multifaceted and fulfills an important social mission. Through visualization, art draws attention to pressing issues in society and is a tool for communicating with the public, raising crucial issues, and encouraging reflection.

Among such topics is gender equality. Art has brought the concept closer to the public, helping the public understand the importance and urgency of this matter. Cultural spaces break down outdated stereotypes, depict new models of interaction, and become a platform for dialogue about social change. Such approaches help actively shape a more inclusive and just future.

The Play *Talisman (Sniper)*

The Babylon Theater was established as a student-run theater at the M. Drahomanov Ukrainian State University in Kyiv. A theater initiated by students, well, this is not an everyday occurrence! The goal of the effort is to promote the best works of Ukrainian drama and thereby give young people the opportunity to fulfill their creative potential. The first production was held more than 20 years ago, in 2001. Later, the theater gained popularity and expanded its artistic range: productions unfolded that drew attention to serious and urgent problems, to significant social changes. One could say

¹⁹⁶ NV, 30 May 2025, <https://nv.ua/ukr/kultura/vistava-shopeniana-u-harkovi-proyshla-persha-povnocinna-baletna-vistava-z-pochatku-fotoreportazh-50518222.html>

that the productions genuinely not only touched people's hearts but also raised a new generation of viewers and actors.

"We select material for our productions based on two parameters," shared Iryna Savchenko, director of the Babylon Theater and Associate Professor, Department of Ukrainian Literature, M. Drahomanov Ukrainian State University. "First, we consider how this production can benefit the actors. These are young people, students, so it is important to understand what working on the role can teach them. The second consideration is whether the material is in demand in each situation. For example, there are several plays that we performed five or six years ago and have now revived because the plots have again become relevant for actors and audiences."

In almost every play, she states, gender issues are present, however, usually within a broad context. The theme of a woman at war, women in a war, a woman next to a man while at war is primarily explored in two plays authored by Oleh Honcharenko, *Sad Angel* and *Talisman (Sniper)*.

Talisman (Sniper) is a one-woman show. The theater presented the show in June 2023 at the national forum "Implementation of Resolution 1325 in Wartime" at the invitation of the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy. This production is a reflection on the challenges of the Russia-Ukraine War that changed the fates of many Ukrainian women and girls, forcing them to make complex decisions and to cross the line of the inviolability of human life. A young woman comes onto the stage; due to the circumstances, she has taken up arms to defend her homeland. Her story appeared to happen by chance, but the most important message is that this woman has something in which she wholeheartedly believes. The heroine was played by Anna Tkachenko, a student at the Department of Ukrainian Philol-

ogy and Creative Writing, who managed to convey the state of mind, doubts, and pain of a Ukrainian female sniper. The play is not about heroism but about everyday work that helps us endure, about mutual support, about hope, and faith, the elements that continue to keep us motivated in the difficult circumstances of war. The fictional story is rooted in current reality that evokes emotions such as sympathy and trepidation in viewers. For many, the play is a reminder of what can happen to their loved ones but also shows the strength of those who have taken upon themselves responsibility for the country's future. The play is a performance of one, but she embodies the image of women serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

“This is a story about choice, and it is always something personal, sometimes painful, but sincere. This is a story of a fictional life, but it was told so that the art would live on and inspire the viewer with the same endurance and strength as the heroine of Talisman.”

***Iryna Savchenko, Director, Babylon Theater,
Associate Professor, Department of Ukrainian
Literature, M. Drahomanov
Ukrainian State University***

We have read about a woman sniper such as this on a news website or on social media. The story could be interesting or touching. However, when told from a stage, the story acquires an entirely new significance. Theatrical art provides special tools for perceiving and understanding certain events, actions, and thoughts. Theater is a language that can be used to talk about complex matters; it has become an effective means of advocating important ideas; it helps the viewer better understand what usually remains abstract, such as statistics, news,

reports, and facts. The importance of this tool is that it not only informs, but also draws attention, educates, and motivates.

After the performance, the audience is actively engaged in a discussion. Babylon welcomes this interaction; viewers are provided with an opportunity not only to discuss the story they just saw on stage, but also because critical issues are raised that allows for audience reflections about these issues in daily life.

“Theatrical art can cover current, painful topics and give the viewer an opportunity to feel like a participant in the events, not just a distant witness. Playwrights, actors, and directors become the voices of those who are not heard. Through images and conflicts, they translate the smallest social shifts into art, preventing them from disappearing into silence.”

**Olha Dunebabina,
Strategic Communications Manager,
La Strada Ukraine, Actress, Babylon Theater**

The audience for each play at the theater is approximately 400 viewers,¹⁹⁷ who afterwards often share what they saw and disseminate the ideas and positions heard from the stage. Since the theater operates not only in Kyiv but in other cities, as well, access to performances is enjoyed by a wide audience. Performances are often accompanied by charitable events such as fundraisers for the Armed Forces of Ukraine, for renovations to the Chernihiv Military Hospital. Between autumn 2022 and spring 2023, books were collected at each performance that then were donated to the M. Kotsiubynskyi Chernihiv Library that had been damaged at the beginning

¹⁹⁷ M. Drahomanov National Pedagogical University, Culture and Arts Center, <https://ckm.npu.edu.ua/index.php/khudozhni-kolektyvy/vavylon>

of the full-scale russian invasion. Approximately 500 copies of various books were delivered to the library.

The play *Talisman (Sniper)* was produced to commemorate Anton Prasolenko, once an actor with the theater, who died. This was a landmark moment that included actors who do not just act out the lives of other, but combined the ideas onstage with their own reality, beliefs, and actions. Nine actors have joined the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and two of them have been killed in action. Friends and theater spectators remember Anton, as well as another Babylon actor, Yaroslav Savchenko, who lost his life on the frontline: their photos hang at the entrance to the hall where the magic art of performance takes place.

The Play *Insect*

Throughout this period of russian aggression, gender-based violence is escalating. Experts provide an entire host of reasons for this phenomenon, such as socioeconomic instability, trauma of the population, mental disorders, and limited access to help. What if there were non-conventional measures that could help understand the significance of the problem and provide ideas of strategies to overcome this problem?

“One of the most common misconceptions in today’s world is the claim that ‘now is not the right time’ to fight against violence. Frankly, this claim is untrue. It is always the right time, whenever and wherever it takes place. And today, during the war, this issue becomes even more acute and extremely relevant.”

***Halyna Skipalska, Executive Director,
Ukrainian Public Health Foundation*** ¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ <https://tinyurl.com/5hfhny34>

The international charitable foundation Ukrainian Public Health Foundation (UPHF) initiated an advocacy campaign against gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence. As part of the campaign, in cooperation with Babylon Theater, the play titled *Insect* was produced and immediately became an innovative form of human rights activism. The play effectively communicated complex topics via an art form and was an example of a fruitful partnership between civil society organizations and government institutions in fighting against violence. Given the importance of the subject matter, the performance was supported by the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, as well as the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, the National Social Service of Ukraine, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, the National Police of Ukraine, as well as local government bodies, in particular the Kyiv City State Administration, Solomianska District State Administration (Kyiv), and the communities of Kharkiv and Chernihiv regions. This coordination enabled the art project to become part of a comprehensive national program for combating gender-based violence, which combines prevention, advocacy, and strengthening methods of response.

The play, written by Ukrainian playwright Liena Kudaieva, is based on the true story of a woman and her children who experienced domestic violence. The goal of *Insect* is to draw public attention to the long-term consequences of violence, particularly the way it affects children who experience or witness first-hand. The play serves as a reminder that war is no justification for the perpetrators. There should be zero tolerance to manifestations of domestic violence, regardless of the external circumstances.

“In my opinion, understanding that violence must be counteracted can come in two instances. When you experience such a situation yourself, you understand that it is bad, and you do not want these situations to happen to other people. Or a less painful way is to become aware of the problem through art, when we experience emotions and become part of the lives of people who have been caught up in situations of violence.”

*Kateryna Levchenko,
Government Commissioner for Gender Policy¹⁹⁹*

The play *Insect* harmoniously combines artistic influence, psychological support, and human rights activism by means of documentary drama, in which actual stories of survivors are skillfully woven into the script. The play delivers emotional impact through the comprehensive use of theatrical production, which allow the audience to fully immerse themselves in this issue.

Another successful practice was the introduction of post-play discussions with GBV experts, psychologists, lawyers, and social workers. This is more than an opportunity to discuss an artistic performance, rather it is a safe space for sincere conversations, where some survivors finally found the courage to share their experience of violence for the first time. Such discussions became a kind of crisis intervention mechanism and prompted many to seek support from specialized services.

Insect also prompted the media to pay more attention to this problem. Additionally, it raised awareness of the issues raised among students who attended the play and par-

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

anticipated in the subsequent discussions. This helps inform the younger generation, which believes in equality between women and men and does not tolerate discrimination in any form, does not believe in force as a tool to resolve conflict. This educational component contributed to the work of universities and youth initiatives in the field of gender equality and human rights.

All these practices demonstrate that *Insect* is not just a performance, rather an effective social tool that combines art, advocacy, and psychosocial support, engendering social responsibility and shaping response mechanisms for gender-based violence. The emotional impact of the theatrical format helps viewers to better understand the realities of domestic violence and the devastating consequences, especially for children. *Insect* has effectively dispelled widespread myths and stereotypes, creating a public demand for stronger measures of violence prevention and response.

A significant achievement was also the expansion of women's and children's access to assistance services: during the post-performance discussions, the audience received complete information about crisis rooms, mobile teams, and free legal and psychological consultations.

Reproduction of The First Wreath Almanac

The end of 2024 marked the 140th anniversary of the women's movement in Ukraine. The movement began with an exceptional intellectual achievement, publication of *The First Wreath*, an almanac edited by Natalia Kobrynska and Olena Pchilka. The book was the first literary and journalistic publication prepared exclusively by women, a truly extraordinary event at the time. The almanac raised issues of national identity and supported humanistic values. To mark the 140th anniversary, the almanac is being reprinted and there-

by show that the fight for women's rights is not only history but remains relevant today and requires our active participation. This was done by the Ukrainian civil society organization Territory of Women on the initiative of its leader Liliia Shevchenko with the support of the international charitable foundation Ukrainian Women's Fund. The facsimile reprint fully preserves the spirit and style of the original.

This almanac is a preservation of cultural memory, but also a symbol of indomitability, unity, and inspiration for new generations of women.

The highlight of the presentation of *The First Wreath* as part of the project "Wreath of Inspiration: Renaissance of the Ukrainian Feminist Literature" was the play inspired by the almanac prepared by the Sharzh Theater.

The script is based on the lives of the women who created *The First Wreath* — its founders and editors Nataliia Kobrynska and Olena Pchilka, the most prominent authors, such as Lesia Ukrainka, Uliana Kravchenko, Hanna Barvynok, Dniprova Chaika, Liudmyla Starytska-Cherniakhivska, Olha Franko, and others. Viewers are immersed in the world of the Ukrainian women's movement of the late 19th century, when fighting for women's rights was an extraordinary challenge in society. Every moment of the play is permeated with the spirit of freedom, thirst for knowledge and equality. However, the performance itself is more than a stage production, it is a living, breathing dialogue between the past and the present, where the voices of Ukrainian women come to life and call for a rethinking of the role of women in society.

The play not only immerses one in history, but also makes one think: what has changed, and what remains a challenge? The play inspires, motivates, and reminds us of the power of female unity that has been and remains a driving force for change.

Attendees become not just witnesses, but co-participants in this theatrical performance because every word, every look, and every scene carries an important message about the value of the female voice in the history and the present of Ukraine. This is a performance born from a love of culture, history, and the fight for equality.

Photo Exhibit *Border Guards: Family and War*

The year 1839 is the time when photography emerged as an art form. Ever since, photos have helped us enjoy the beauty of the moment, dynamics and sensations, preserves history, impacts our perceptions, and gives events and learning materials meaning through visualization. Photography captures a moment, but its artistic content encourages reflection and evaluation about emotional experiences, and the understanding of the things we learn. During the Russia-Ukraine War, as we seek answers to many important questions, this imagery has become particularly necessary. Among the issues addressed through photography is the advocacy for gender equality.

In May 2023, on the occasion of the Border Guard Day, as well as on international Mother's Day and Father's Day, the State Border Service of Ukraine (SBSU) and the civil society organization Women's Information and Advisory Center displayed a photo exhibit *Border Guards: Family and War*.²⁰⁰ The exhibit featured images of ten women and ten men who fought against Russian aggression alongside with the Armed Forces of Ukraine and other military servants in combat zones. They defend their homeland, as well as their families, their children who are in safer territories of Ukraine, as well

²⁰⁰ (Video) Photo Project "Border Guards: Family and War" presented in Kyiv, May 10, 2023, <https://dpsu.gov.ua/news/37174-%20VIDEO%20-U-Kivi-prezentuvali-fotoprokt-Prikordonniki-i-prikordonnici-simya-i-viyna>

as abroad. They combine their missions as parents with their service and civic duty. What better way to show this than to depict Ukrainian military servants with their children?

Border guard Alla and her team arrived at their unit location on February 24, 2022, at 5am, awaiting further instruction. Her son Dmytro stayed with her husband, and then, together with his grandmother, they left Ukraine. The woman had never imagined being at war, but when the enemy came to the Ukrainian land, it was her duty to defend it. “My biggest dream is for the war to end, for our Victory, for everyone to be well, and to go on vacation, all together as a family,” says Alla.

Border guard Andrii has been serving in the SBSU for twenty-three years. For him, the war started in Luhansk region many years before Russia’s full-scale invasion, a conflict that forced him to be separated from his daughter for eighteen months. “My daughter, from the age of five, has known what war is. Now she is fourteen, and she understands and continues to see more than she should,” shares Andrii.

Speaking at the presentation, Assistance Head of the State Border Guard Service Olesia Klymenko emphasized that “the photo exhibit depicts twenty stories about struggle, endless love, loyalty, and hope. Fathers and mothers fight for their children to live in a free and happy country. The goal of the photo exhibit is to draw attention to the important social role of parents in the life of every person.” However, the exhibit also casts light on a key component of state policy to ensure equal rights and opportunities of women and men, namely the work-life balance in the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine. It debunks gender stereotypes on the role and place of a woman and a man in child-rearing and defense of the homeland, highlighting problems that are relevant both for women and men who serve in the military and who at the same time care for their families, children, care of their safety and peace.

Photo Exhibit *Unconquered Women of Donetsk Oblast* (Region)

The photo exhibit *Unconquered Women of Donetsk Oblast* opened on August 23, 2024, in commemoration of Ukraine's Independence Day.²⁰¹ The exhibit was organized by the Department of Veteran Policy of the Donetsk Oblast (Region) State Administration and displayed on the premises of the L. Kohan Dnipropetrovsk Philharmonic. The exhibit presented portraits of twelve women from different cities of the Donetsk region whose husbands died defending Ukraine and included stories of their husbands.

Serhii Iliencko was born in Kramatorsk, and from 2010 to 2016 he worked as the head of the television tower on Mount Karachun near the city of Sloviansk. When Russian terrorists seized the television station in 2014, he managed to evacuate people and turn off the electricity. In 2023, he voluntarily joined the army. He died during a combat mission near Klishchiivka in September 2023. He was awarded (posthumously) the "Order for Courage of the 3rd Degree."

"My husband and I were like one. He gave me a lot of attention, affection, and care, and I always felt protected. We never had any misunderstandings. We were the meaning of each other's life. In the fall, we loved going to the forest to pick mushrooms and then drink herbal tea in the comfort of nature. We lived together for 29 years, and they passed like a single day."

Viktoriiia Iliencko

²⁰¹ Photo exhibition "Unconquered Women of Donetsk Oblast" on the occasion of Independence Day of Ukraine, August 24, 2024, <https://dn.gov.ua/news/fotovistavka-do-dnya-nezalezhnosti-ukrayini-neskoreni-zhinki-donechchini>

For most of his life, Serhii Neskreba lived in Volnovakha. In 2014, he joined the 37th Volunteer Battalion. He fought near Avdiivka, around Donetsk airport, and then near Mariupol. His daughter was born while her father was at war. After the full-scale invasion, he returned to the military and was killed on the front line by enemy artillery in 2022. He was awarded (posthumously) the “Order for Courage of the 3rd Degree.”

“Serhii could not stand by as russian military forces invaded the territory of Ukraine. He had someone to protect; we had a son, and I was expecting a second child, my mother lived near Dokuchaievsk, and we had to endure the horror of shelling.”

**Yana Neskreba,
Spouse of Serhii Neskreba**

Yurii Poliakov came from the city of Pokrovsk, Donetsk region. In April 2020, he joined the ranks of volunteer fighters of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and went on a combat journey from Mariinka through Vuhledar to Bakhmut. He died near Kodema holding Ukraine’s defensive positions. He was awarded (posthumously) the “Order For Courage of the 3rd degree.”

“We went fishing every weekend. My husband was a kind, responsible, family man. He always helped everyone who asked for help. He loved driving and riding his bicycle. He would dedicate every free moment to his family, play soccer with his son. A very sincere patriot. He dreamed of having a house near the river where he could grow old with his family and raise our grandchildren.”

**Viktoriia Poliakova,
Spouse of Yurii Poliakov**

War ruined the lives of these and other women in the photo exhibit. Yet their portraits glow with optimism and radiate faith in a happy future. They went through pain and despair but learned to feel the joy of life again. The photo exhibit was organized with the goal to provide psychological support to the wives of fallen defenders of Ukraine. The exhibit, however, played another significant role by showing the strength of Ukrainian women and the resilience that helps them become an example of courage for others.

Photo exhibits dedicated to women at war are held regularly in Ukraine. The exhibits display women who fight in the Armed Forces to defend their land, who are combat medics, volunteers, those who tirelessly work in the rear to bring our victory closer, and civil society organizations supporting those affected by the war. The photographs also show the stories of women who were traumatized, went through captivity, and managed to recover. Photography allows the public to better understand the role of women during the ordeals of war, to understand their feelings and aspirations. This preserves the documentary memory of the war. While the themes of the exhibits may vary, between all there is one common factor: they provide the image of the modern Ukrainian woman, one who can be characterized as “unbreakable.”

CHAPTER 4

DEVELOPMENT OF SUPPORT SERVICES FOR UKRAINIAN WOMEN AND MEN AFFECTED BY THE ARMED AGGRESSION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AGAINST UKRAINE

SECTION 15. PIDTRYMAI SUPPORT CENTERS FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Vira, a maintenance worker, sweeps the courtyard of a building in downtown Kyiv where she lives in a basement apartment. Her son Andrii volunteered to join the military almost immediately after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine; soon, he was missing in action in the Donbas. Vira has no other family, so she turns to her neighbors with all her problems: one helped obtain financial aid from the state, while others help with everyday concerns. Recently, Vira confronted a difficult problem: her former husband, who abandoned her years ago and did not contribute to raising their child in any way, became aware that she was now receiving her son's salary and, in court, began to demand to receive part of the funds. The soldier's mother had been collecting her son's paychecks because she was confident that he would return. She was unsure how to proceed. Again, the residents of her building supported her, found a good attorney who volunteered to help her pro bono after hearing her story. Vira be-

lieves she is genuinely lucky to have neighbors such as these.

Vira's story is typical, with thousands of similar stories to be found throughout Ukraine. One day, a husband or a wife, a son or a daughter, or a sibling goes to war, and their family members are confronted with a new life with previously unknown obstacles and troubles, fears, and despair, often unable to manage even simple tasks if previously they were done by someone else. Many civilian families had their lifestyles and social circles change completely, and the constant stress, phobias, intrusive thoughts, anxiety, and regular insomnia have taken a toll on personal health. Expert commentary about supporting mental health during the war, published by Ukraine's National Institute for Strategic Studies, indicates that the safety of loved ones is the biggest factor (63%) of stress or strong discomfort among all the aspects of the war.²⁰² Therefore, even if a military family is living in a relatively safe area, they nonetheless should be a target audience to receive systematic, effective assistance from the state and society.

Worldwide, support for military families is a critical factor in both social justice policies, as well as ensuring national security and stability. "State support for veteran families (including free education for their children, hot meals in schools, access to higher education), has a positive impact on morale in the military, reduces the financial burden on their families, and builds soldiers' confidence in the state," said Artem Honcharenko, head of the Institute for Veteran Reintegration, Rehabilitation, and Professional Development "Resilience Architecture."²⁰³ In the United States, mil-

²⁰² National Institute for Strategic Studies, June 27, 2023, <https://niss.gov.ua/news/komentari-ekspertiv/pidtrymka-mentalnoh-zdorovya-v-chasy-viyny>

²⁰³ EnableMe, <https://www.enableme.com.ua/ua/article/sistemna-pidtrimka-simej-veteraniv-klucovij-faktor-stijkosti-ta-bezpeki-derzavi-12560>

itary families can obtain preferential mortgages rates, and there are short-term financial assistance programs for those families who find themselves in difficult circumstances. All family members of active military personnel are covered by the TRICARE government health insurance system that provides free or discounted medical care. For veterans with serious injuries, the CHAMPVA program covers the medical expenses of their families. Family Centers that offer psychological support, counseling, and assistance with employment for spouses operate at military bases.²⁰⁴

In Canada, military families have access to the Military Family Services program that provides counseling, mental health support, and special activities for children (camps, clubs). “In 2018, Canada adopted a Strategic Plan for Military Families, which explicitly states that the well-being of families is critical to the operational readiness of the military.”²⁰⁵ In the United Kingdom, numerous charitable foundations that collect donations to help military families play a major role in the support of military families. These organizations fund rehabilitation centers, provide microgrants to families in need, and take care of the children of the deceased (cover educational expenses, organize celebrations). The state coordinates and supports such activities through the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, which provides grants for projects dedicated to veterans and their families.²⁰⁶

These countries had a chance to develop their assistance system over an extended period and during times of peace. In contrast, the situation in Ukraine is unique. Support for families of veterans and active-duty soldiers is provided during ongoing hostilities; novel approaches must be devel-

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

oped and tested rapidly under challenging conditions. After the full-scale invasion, most such families often found themselves facing new challenges alone.

As reported in the Study of the Experiences and Needs of Missing Soldiers' Families (2024),²⁰⁷ one respondent shared that her friends and acquaintances had started to avoid her since learning of her husband's fate. They were unsure how to act with her, what to say, and how to support her. Other respondents began to start looking on their own for family members who went missing during hostilities, communicate with their loved ones' fellow soldiers, turn to hospitals, post information on social media, and even send requests for information to Russia and occupation administrations. They did this outreach often because they were unaware of other options, were unsure which Ukrainian government structures to approach, or which non-governmental organizations could provide information. Later, they began to contact the families of other military personnel, to create their own communities: According to research about families of missing military "...family members of the missing said they would often unite to look for their loved ones. They support one another and find it easier to establish communication with other organizations involved in the search."²⁰⁸

Today, families of Ukrainian military personnel can turn to the Ministry of Defense²⁰⁹ and to the territorial recruitment and social support centers, as well as to local authorities, the Office of the Ombudsman of Ukraine,²¹⁰ and social

²⁰⁷ https://cedos.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024_cedos_doslidzhennya-dosvidu-ta-potreb-rodyn-znyklyh-bezvisty-vijskovosluzhbovcziv.pdf

²⁰⁸ Ibid., page 25.

²⁰⁹ <https://mod.gov.ua/>

²¹⁰ <https://ombudsman.gov.ua/>

services, to obtain needed help and consulting. The website of the Ministry of Social Policy, Family, and Unity provides information about several types of state support available for Ukraine's defenders, as well as for their family members.²¹¹ Similar information is available on the website of the Ministry of Veteran Affairs.²¹² This constituency is also supported by non-governmental organizations and charitable foundations, such as The Legal Hundred,²¹³ Come Back Alive,²¹⁴ Blue Bird,²¹⁵ the Psychosocial Support Service for Military Families,²¹⁶ and others, with information about their activities freely available online. Some of these services focus on psychological support, others can provide material assistance, humanitarian aid, while some offer comprehensive support.

And the PidTrymai Centers for Military Families (Centers) that operate in Khmelnytskyi and Lviv, with the support of the Ukrainian Women's Fund,²¹⁷ have become highly popular.

Your People Always Beside You

Natalia Karbowska, Director, Strategic Development at the Ukrainian Women's Fund (UWF), explains how the idea of the PidTrymai Centers emerged in 2023. To a large degree the Centers were a way to respond to a social need that had already emerged. Increasingly, among target audiences in the regions were many women from military families. They

²¹¹ <https://www.msp.gov.ua/otrymuvacham-soc-pidtrymky/veteranam-viyskovosluzhbovtysam-ta-simyam>

²¹² <https://mva.gov.ua/veteranam>

²¹³ <https://legal100.org.ua/>

²¹⁴ <https://savelifeline.in.ua/>

²¹⁵ <https://bluebird.com.ua/>

²¹⁶ <https://pidtrymka.in.ua/>

²¹⁷ <https://uwf.org.ua/>

were wives of prisoners of war, widows, and those whose husbands were missing in action. Each of them had their own experience, pain, and needs. The number of such women in Ukraine was growing rapidly.

“They came to us and to our partners, spoke about their situations, and, sadly, we had no methods with which to support them,” explains the UWF leader. “This is why we began to study Ukraine’s experience with these issues. At the very beginning, we analyzed the government programs that were available to support veterans and their families.”

Several such programs were already in development or in operation. Almost all programs indicated that they offer support to veterans and to veteran families, and specific amounts of funds were allocated for each purpose. “We tried to learn how much money was spent on supporting veterans, and how much was being spent on their families,” said Natalia Karbowska, “and we learned that this assistance to families is not calculated. Almost all funds go to programs for assistance to veterans. The families get the remainder, which is almost nothing.”

An effective system needed to be established to ensure gender-equitable service delivery and access to resources for women veterans and family members of military personnel. The system had to include not only equal access to social support, medical services, and professional adaptation, but also dedicated programs focused on women veterans and women from military families, taking into account to their special mental health needs and social integration needs.

For the deployment of the pilot project, two regions appeared to be the most favorable: Khmelnytskyi and Lviv. Statistics indicated that these regions had many soldiers, volunteer and drafted, who had gone to the front, leaving their families. In addition, many IDPs moved to these regions, including wives and children of Ukrainian defenders. Notably,

these regions are distinguished by significant engagement from non-governmental organizations dedicated to supporting individuals affected by the conflict, and the established regional organizations possessed both the experience and resources required.

“We realized that Khmelnytskyi had the ZAKHYST Association of (Military) Volunteers that was founded by a demobilized woman veteran, who knew the challenges faced by military families. She had started to work in this sector already, so we offered her a partnership,” said Natalia Karbowska. “In Lviv, we decided to work with the Military Family Support Office backed by the non-governmental organization Opportunities for the Strong. Both structures are also led by women from military families. We proposed to join efforts in the establishment of the PidTrymai Centers and based on that experience, to develop an assistance methodology that later could be replicated in other regions. In this manner, all was set in motion.”

For the new entity to not get lost among numerous already existing aid structures, UWF sought an appropriate name for these new centers and consulted with a communications agency. UWF considered this to be the proper professional approach to do further work in other regions with demand for such services, and where authorities were ready to support such initiatives.

“In Ukrainian the word PidTrymai (Uphold) can be divided into two words, because it is not just about supporting someone(Trymai), but is also about military families that bring up the rear (Pid). The soldier is on the front line, and in the rear are those that uphold, support him. The initiative also has a slogan: ‘Your People Always Beside You.’ We support families, and they are always with those dear to them, their loved ones serving in the military.”

***Kateryna Lutsyk,
Veteran, Head of the PidTrymai Support Center in Khmelnytskyi, Head of the ZAKHYST Association of (Military) Volunteers***

Natalia Karbowska adds that the Centers are a major source of support for many women, helps them keep strong. The ability to support each other, to hold onto their unity, is of utmost importance for them. The name PidTrymai reflects a multitude of meanings, all of which are important.

The UWF leader shared the story of a woman from Khmelnytskyi whose husband was killed even before the full-scale invasion began. To keep calm, using thick yarn, she knits cats, rabbits, and other toys with the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) logo and brings the toys to the Center. She does this as a tribute to her late husband. The Center uses these toys for fundraising. Organizing charitable auctions, they sell the toys and use the funds for the AFU. For the woman, this means both providing support, as well as transformation of her personal grief into helping others.

“I received a cat such as this as a gift. I brought it to my seven-year-old grandson, and he called the cat Zaluzhnyi and sleeps with the toy all the time. In this way this woman gave a part of herself to my little one. These are important symbolic gestures,” shared Natalia Karbowska.

A New Comprehensive Support Model

The establishment of the PidTrymai Centers is an initiative to provide comprehensive support to veterans, and to families of servicemen and servicewomen launched by the UWF with the support of the Government of the United Kingdom, facilitated by the Government of Ukraine Commissioner for Gender Policy. Civil society organizations from various regions that were already helping military families also joined the initiative.

The UWF considers establishment of this initiative to be unique among the many projects they manage and fund. UWF works with a variety of projects and for some of these efforts simply provides essential funding. However, with the PidTrymai Centers for Military Families, UWF participates in the full process, the initiation, emergence, and development of a new model.

“We are learning together,” said Natalia Karbowska about the UWF’s cooperation with colleagues from Khmelnytskyi and Lviv. “We did not launch these Centers from scratch; we relied on organizations already working in this area. At the same time, the UWF has its own vision based on our research findings, from meetings with other organizations or after speaking with women who are part of the Centers’ target audience. We coordinate the work; we see, for example, that some tools maybe work better in Khmelnytskyi. That is why we organize study trips so that the Lviv Center can determine what to use.”

The model of PidTrymai Centers for Military Families provides an established list of focus areas:

- psychological support;
- legal aid and consultations;
- career advice and business support;
- group classes and workshops;

- creating a safe space for communication and mutual support.

Each of the Centers fulfills these tasks based on local needs and opportunities. An especially important consideration is the team of specialists who work at the Center, a team that includes case managers, psychologists, child psychologists, as well as art therapists, attorneys, career and employment consultants, and social workers.

One of the innovations is mobile legal aid brigades. These brigades regularly travel to various communities in their regions; over the course of their work, they have already visited almost every part of their respective regions. In addition to an attorney, the mobile brigade of the Khmelnytskyi Center includes a psychologist and invites various other experts, based on community needs, who hold meetings with local audiences to explain the goals of the Center, the services, and available opportunities. Then the attorney individually consults with those who need assistance. Attorneys can continue case management and communication with clients online. If necessary, they revisit the community multiple times until the issue is resolved.

Online communication is an advantage of the Center, since this allows for a large audience to be contacted. Nonetheless, experts believe that for clients to meet in person is beneficial as they gather for a coffee, organize singing retreats, share ideas, and thereby recover more quickly. People often develop leadership skills through such joint efforts, and the UWF considers this aspect to be crucial to recovery, as well.

“Next to the Mariinsky Park in Kyiv, there are women who stand with posters to remind the authorities of their loved ones who went missing or are held in Russian captivity. This takes courage. This takes leadership. Perhaps, they do not call themselves leaders, but they are,” according to

Natalia Karbowska. “To support such activities, the Centers are implementing the Women’s Leadership Academy, where women are taught how to contribute to human rights movements and to women’s NGOs.”

“Women are provided with effective tools to start their leadership path in civil society,” shares Uliana Surmai. “After three days of our workshop, the participants identified issues they wanted to work on and started writing action plans. Those were then used for a small grant competition. Out of 51 participants, 11 projects were submitted.”

“Women often join NGOs because they believe in the power of those who come together. Particularly important is not to lose faith. Because even after the war, there will be many challenges that a mature civil society can overcome.”

**Natalia Karbowska,
Director, Strategic Development,
Ukrainian Women’s Fund**

Uliana Surmai provided an example of how the Women’s Leadership Academy program was attended by a wife of a soldier who was killed-in-action when she was more than twenty weeks pregnant. At first, she just sat at the training, listening, and barely spoke to anyone. Then she successfully completed her studies, developed her own project aimed at supporting pregnant wives of military personnel, received a grant, and joined a civil society organization. Ever since, she has been implementing her project.”

“We also use Centers as a vehicle to implement economic programs. There is a program for women dedicated to retraining and to acquiring new professions. There is also one for those who want to develop a business. Usually, these are

self-employed women or microbusinesses. We train them how to begin their business and help them to do so,” said Natalia Karbowska.

PidTrymai Support Center in Khmelnytskyi

When staff of UWF, all residents of the capital city Kyiv, found themselves in Khmelnytskyi for several days at the beginning of the full-scale invasion, they went to a secondary school to participate in the weaving of camouflage nets for Ukrainian defenders where they met local activists helping military personnel. In those days, UWF was still acquiring experience; today, they are ready to replicate the most successful practices in other regions of Ukraine.

Head of the Khmelnytskyi PidTrymai Center Kateryna Lutsyk also remembers those times, the long lines at military recruitment centers for those who were volunteering to join the army. She noted, “We started working with those who joined the service, helping them, and then we started receiving requests from their families, who were looking for support, who didn’t know what to do when their loved ones were not in touch, how to react, where to look for them.” She understood their problems because she had experienced them firsthand. After serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Lutsyk returned to her relatively small community, where no consultations or support options were available to those who served the military. Her path to reintegration was quite difficult.

“After that, I understood there were thousands of veterans who return home and had nowhere to turn. And their families have their own issues, not knowing how to respond to certain situations, how to help their loved ones, and how to avoid issues that might trigger them. I became involved in the work we do now because of my own painful experience,”

said Lutsyk. Under her leadership the ZAKHYST Association of (Military) Volunteers was established.

Even though the organization focused on working with veterans, 80% of requests come from veteran families. Among them were families of active military personnel, as well as the families of those missing in action, being held as prisoners of war, or killed in action. There are different target audiences that need different experts and approaches since each face their own issues. “We had a small team, and we had to engage specialists, particularly psychologists, train case managers, provide them with adequate pay,” shares Kateryna Lutsyk. The organization was also approached by an enormous number of people not only from the city of Khmelnytskyi, but also from remote communities due to a lack of qualified experts in their area. The organization had to evolve swiftly. This led to further cooperation with the Ukrainian Women’s Fund and to the establishment of the PidTrymai Support Center for Military Families in Khmelnytski.

The UWF helped renovate the premises, purchased necessary equipment, set up offices for individual consultations and for group classes. The UWF also provided training for the Center’s multidisciplinary team and pays for salaries and consulting fees.

Today, the team is composed of thirty-five strong experts. There is an administrative unit with six psychologists, attorneys, social workers, career consultants, case managers, and specialists in supporting veterans. Also, the team includes four individuals who provide training for various structures and units on the topic of communication with veterans.

The Center makes a point of supporting cases from start to finish. “For example, the mother of a fallen hero approaches us to get help with arranging compensation. She communicates with a manager or a specific expert. Their main task is

not just to help with this specific request, but also to conduct monitoring, screening, and identify all the hidden needs of which the beneficiary may be unaware. We work comprehensively,” shares Kateryna Lutsyk.

With specific issues, employees of the Center can refer clients to government structures or social security agencies but do it responsibly: when the client approaches them, they are already aware of the issue and are ready to help. Case managers monitor the resolution of cases, then clients return to the Center and can join in a support group, various other groups, retreats, trips; there is a community where they can meet other people, feel less alone with their issues, and have an easier process through various stages of adaptation.

The most difficult category is the families of missing persons, since without a fact of death or captivity, people are completely lost, and specialists do not know exactly with what issue they are working. They can neither overcome the loss nor give up hope that the missing person is alive: they simply must wait. In this instance there is no specific limit of time needed to provide psychological support

“According to our analytics, we have 10-20 calls every day. On average that is fifteen requests per day.”

***Kateryna Lutsyk,
Veteran, Head of the PidTrymai Support Center in Khmelnytskyi, Head of the ZAKHYST Association of (Military) Volunteers***

All case managers, as well as a psychologist and the attorney on duty, are constantly present in the Center in case their support is urgently needed. Kateryna Lutsyk remembered a situation when the mother of a missing defender came to the Center

for legal assistance with certain paperwork. At that very moment, the woman received a call informing her that her son had died. And she was directed immediately to a crisis psychologist.

Specialists have individualized work plans and tightly scheduled appointments each day. Although psychologists, social workers, and attorneys can conduct group sessions, they mostly focus on work with individual clients.

“Previously, the highest number of requests was for a psychologist, followed by an attorney. In 2025, however, the trend changed, and now, legal aid is in more demand,” said Kateryna Lutsyk.

The position of career consultant is interesting. This is a person who constantly communicates with the employment center and various businesses regarding vacancies since many companies are now developing a veteran support system at their enterprises. The Center has up-to-date information about obtaining various grants, offers from the state, from the Ukrainian Veterans Fund, from international partners, as well as updates about local job vacancies.

The activists managed to establish good cooperation with the authorities in the region and in the city. They regularly invite representatives of the authorities to their events and establish business relationships. They also conduct training for various units about working with veterans and their families since usually they have the only training team in the region with official state certification. While previously, they engaged mostly with community leaders on this issue, now they are asked to work with veterans in the communities to help them adapt and understand that their experience is an advantage, not a stigma, and that they can apply their military experience in civilian life, becoming community activists. The Center calls this new practice the creation of a “communication bridge between veterans and local authori-

ties” and believes that this educational component should be expanded.

“You know what we call success stories?” asked Kateryna Lutsyk at the end of our conversation. “These are families with which we worked who were waiting for and then saw their loved ones return. And now these returned servicemen and servicewomen also join us. Our community is growing.”

PidTrymai Support Center in Lviv

Personal experience also prompted Lviv volunteers to begin providing assistance to military families. One of them, Anna Kuziuta, remembers how her husband enlisted at the beginning of the full-scale invasion and went to the east of Ukraine, and soon they lost contact. The family experienced unfathomable worry. Fortunately, the story ended well, and her husband contacted her as soon as he could, but Anna had an important realization: in a demanding situation, one can cry and feel nervous, or one can act. Together with her friend Olha Tsap, head of Pershyi Zakhidnyi TV and Radio Company, she met with the head of the Lviv Oblast (Region) Military Administration, Maksym Kozytskyi. They spoke about the need to create a space for military families to turn to for support so they would not have to face all the challenges alone. In this manner, the Office to Support Military Families (OSMF) was established.²¹⁸ “At Kozytskyi’s initiative a delegation of Land Forces Academy representatives was dispatched to enable rapid communication with military units, so we could swiftly verify information, including efforts with social protection workers. On the other hand, we had public representatives, volunteers, and families, that is, attorneys, psychologists, and consultants from the public. This became a

²¹⁸ <https://tinyurl.com/yfhmbwnm>

synergy of the state, of the families, and of volunteers,” shares Anna Kuziuta, who became the OSMF coordinator.

The OSMF went into operation on June 8, 2022. The organization Opportunities for the Strong supported systematic work of this entity. Their main activities included legal aid and psychological counseling. Over time, they realized that to help with recovery for those whose family members were taken prisoner, went missing or were killed, comprehensive assistance with highly qualified specialists needed to be provided.

This was done with the help of the Ukrainian Women’s Fund; in January 2025, the PidTrymai Center in Lviv was established, taking local work to a new level.

“The OSMF is the space where we work, and the PidTrymai Center is a team that implements important initiatives.”

***Anna Kuziuta,
Communications Manager of the PidTrymai
Center, Coordinator of the Military Family
Support Office***

Uliana Surmai, the head of the Lviv PidTrymai Center, emphasizes that now, they can provide many more high-quality services to military families. “Thanks to support from UWF, we were able to engage fantastic attorneys and psychologists at our Center, to offer the needed programs for our clients, particularly for children of military personnel. We also formed communities of families whom we regularly support. Our assistance has become comprehensive and multifaceted. We can be approached by a military wife with a request for legal assistance, and we will also suggest that her children participate in our recreational events. All family members of

military personnel and veterans can use our full variety of services.”

The Center’s office is in a historic neighborhood of the city, at 21 Sichovykh Striltsiv Street. The premises were provided by a private company, and cooperation with the UWF allowed the Center to set up several comfortable rooms in which clients can meet with experts. There are conference halls and a coworking space for joint events. Experts share information about their work through social media (to their Facebook and Telegram followers, particularly young people from military families), they work consistently with conventional media, hand out booklets, leaflets, and posters when legal aid mobile brigades work in communities. They also have a hotline: 068 260 68 15. “It works from 10a.m. to 4 p.m. But when a person calls after hours, our employee will call back the next day and provide the necessary assistance,” said Uliana Surmai.

On the hotline, a social worker provides initial consultations. For further work, she can refer the client to a case manager or to a specialist. The Center also has an agreement with an attorney’s association. There is a psychotherapist who works with sleep disorders, PTSD, and various complex cases.

“We also have a speech therapist,” adds the head of the Center. “We added this service due to popular demand. It happens that children have certain speech disorders due to the war with its air raids and shelling. Our speech therapist helps children and already has had good results. ”

Another distinctive feature of the Center is singing retreats. Women get together and sing in a circle. The Center’s psychotherapist even noted that singing retreats had an effect comparable to six months of therapy. These women in pain undergo changes, and they start enjoying life again. “There

are women who wore a color other than black to our retreats for the first time in a while. There are women who brought flowers to their friends at these retreats for the first time. These were the first flowers they did not bring to a grave,” said Uliana Surmai.

The educational component, which was expanded with UWF support, is also crucial, believe the Center’s employees. “Even though business training for women with a subsequent grant competition took place fairly recently, we already have some success stories,” shares case manager Khrystyna Bosakovska. “One woman was an entrepreneur but stopped her business when her husband died at war. Our training helped her find the strength to recover. The woman opened a flower shop in Stryi, and she was even interviewed by journalists from the Inter TV channel.”

Another example concerns training at the Women’s Leadership Academy. A military wife, who is on maternity leave, decided to create a community for women whose husbands are at war. “This was her motivation to study, where she received not only the necessary knowledge, but also grant support, becoming one of the three grantees from the Lviv region. Now she is engaged in her own non-governmental organization,” explained Khrystyna Bosakovska.

The Lviv PidTrymai Center helps women from military families acquire new professions. After coursework, one woman now wants to buy an agricultural drone and start working in an agricultural company. Others became interested in car diagnostics to deliver humanitarian aid on their own and then know not only how to drive a car but also how to fix malfunctions if they occur on the road. Women also join the beauty industry, becoming hairdressers, manicurists, and similar. “With every course, we also offer assistance with employment. We want the women to apply this knowledge.

We try to monitor this aspect diligently,” shares the case manager.

Uliana Surmai believes that their endeavor is more than just work; it is a mission. “It is really valuable for us that as part of our cooperation with the Ukrainian Women’s Fund, we can share experience, that the work model developed by the Lviv Center will be used for further scaling and will be helpful for communities all across Ukraine, so they can also create similar spaces and take care of our defenders’ families.”

Natalia Karbowska said that information about the operation of the two PidTrymai Centers has begun already to make inroads in other regions. Their representatives contact UWF and ask that such Centers be opened in their regions. “There is a great deal of demand from the Mykolaiv region,” she said. “There are entire areas there around military units, with a lot of drafted servicemen and multiple specific challenges. The Centers could work with families of military personnel who return with injuries, traumas, and disorders. There are already statistics showing that the number of police calls for domestic violence from these areas is now growing significantly.”

“Today, we work with military families, and after the war, we will work with veterans and their families, as well,” shares Uliana Surmai. “Such Centers should operate across the country and become part of gender-focused recovery and inclusion.”

SECTION 16. SERVICES FOR SURVIVORS CREATED BY THE UKRAINIAN PUBLIC HEALTH FOUNDATION

On February 24, 2022, the first explosions of russian missiles hit Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities, marking the beginning of the full-scale aggression by the russian federation against Ukraine. Quickly there was no doubt that the situation was escalating and that brutal fighting on Ukrainian territory was imminent. In Ukraine, all major roads heading west were soon flooded with tens of thousands of cars; people were fleeing their homes in eastern regions and from the capital city of Kyiv to escape the threat of attack. Most evacuees were women with children. The drive to Zhytomyr, a city only 130 kilometers west of Kyiv took 10 hours, and then those fleeing moved on toward Khmelnytskyi, Lviv, and Uzhhorod in Ukraine's western regions. By February 25, the Zhytomyr highway was completely impassable, as russian soldiers began firing at civilian vehicles.

According to research by the Razumkov Center, between February 27 and March 9, 2022, in ten days, 1,649,088 people crossed Ukraine's border. More than 150,000 people had been leaving the country each day. On March 6 alone, 210,526 people crossed the border, the highest daily figure recorded. Final figures of those who left Ukraine, 1.4 million, 18.8%, were children.²¹⁹

²¹⁹ Socio-Economic and Humanitarian Consequences of Russian Aggression for Ukrainian Society, Kyiv, 2022, https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/article/2022_Gum.pdf

The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) was rising rapidly. As of 23 August, 2022 the figure had reached 6.9 million.²²⁰ Nearly half of working-age IDPs (44%) at that time had no source of income.²²¹ Most IDPs could not access collective accommodation centers and were forced to rent housing or stay with relatives, often in temporary structures or summer homes. As winter 2022-23 approached, it became clear that these arrangements would not suffice, and there were no funds for repairs or retrofitting. Women faced greater challenges in securing employment, with many also caring for children or elderly relatives. Access to medical services had become significantly restricted (in 2023, 22% of Ukrainians faced such limitations).²²² A substantial portion of the population required psychological support due to war-related trauma and stress.

These factors highlighted the worsening humanitarian situation in the country. Other serious challenges also emerged: since the start of the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation in February 2022, recorded gender-based violence in Ukraine had increased by 36%.²²³

²²⁰ The Number of Internally Displaced Persons in Ukraine Is Rising Again, IOM Data Show, September 1, 2022, IOM, <https://ukraine.iom.int/uk/news/killist-vnutrishno-peremishchenykh-osib-v-ukrayini-znovu-zrostaye-dani-mom>

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² After the war, about 15 million Ukrainians will need psychological support, Ukrinform, December 6, 2023, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-health/3796563-pisla-vijni-blizko-15-miljoniv-ukrainciv-potrebuvatimut-psihologicnoi-dopomogi.html>

²²³ UN: 6.7 Million Women in Ukraine Need Humanitarian Assistance, Voice of America, February 19, 2025, <https://www.holosameryky.com/a/henderni-prava-zhinky-ukrajina-vijna/7980854.html>

These difficulties could be addressed only through coordinated efforts among various actors, including governmental, non-governmental, and international. Numerous services were established by state, municipalities, and communities in cooperation with international and civil society organizations. In 2023, 875 such services were operating across Ukraine, including eighty-three in frontline areas. That same year, funds were allocated to support service in seventy-two communities.²²⁴ In 2024, the number of specialized services increased by 249, with ninety-eight services launched in communities, more twenty-six than originally planned for 2023. As of early 2025, a total of 1,124 services were functioning across the country.²²⁵

In many areas, civil society organizations took the lead in introducing innovations, especially those with experience in humanitarian aid, combating gender-based violence, and providing comprehensive social and psychological support. Among the standout examples are the successful practices of the international charitable foundation Ukrainian Public Health Foundation²²⁶ (UPHF), which responded swiftly to the challenges of war and proposed its own vision for addressing crisis situations. “Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, our team has supported 1,058,747 people across the country, including 705,123 women. In total, we have provided 4,860,077 integrated services in the areas of mental health, protection, support for survivors of violence, reproductive health, and humanitarian response. We were among the first to start working with the population

²²⁴ <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/1/ind-57-gender-policy/stan-realizaciyi-politiki-2023.pdf>

²²⁵ <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/1/ind-57-gender-policy/2025-genderna-politika-v4-1.pdf>

²²⁶ <https://www.healthright.org.ua/>

across the country, from east to west, from north to south, immediately after the invasion,” said UPHF Executive Director Halyna Skipalska in May 2025.

Social Apartments

UPHF established its first Social Apartment in 2013 to support the most vulnerable women, particularly pregnant women, and mothers with children, who had experienced gender-based violence and found themselves in difficult life circumstances. The decision to expand this model came after the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion, when the demand for such support became particularly acute. In 2024, UPHF launched a project aimed at supporting women with young children who were affected by the war and face a heightened risk of gender-based violence, individuals in urgent need not only of safe shelter but also of professional psychosocial assistance, including improvements to their physical and mental health. The initiative focuses on ensuring equitable access to basic healthcare services for internally displaced persons, returnees, and vulnerable local populations in Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Mykolaiv, Poltava, and Zaporizhzhia regions.

“Since the beginning of the war, we have been systematically expanding the network of Social Apartments, safe temporary spaces for women and children in crisis situations. The first apartments were opened in Kyiv, Lviv, and Uzhhorod, and later new centers joined the network in Kharkiv, Poltava, Dnipro, and Lutsk. During this period, hundreds of women and children have received not only safe shelter but also comprehensive support: psychological, social, and legal.”

Halyna Skipalska, Executive Director, UPHF

A Social Apartment offers a safe space for living and psychological stability for those affected. Women with children in vulnerable situations are provided with housing equipped with all necessary items, along with access to medication and food; young mothers receive guidance on childcare, informal education is offered for children, and beneficiaries are provided with psychological, social, and legal support, as well as assistance in restoring their social status. This is a multifaceted approach aimed at empowering survivors to make positive changes in their lives. At the same time, the project pursues broader goals: to identify and analyze the causes of women's social maladaptation, determine the objective factors contributing to such situations and work toward minimizing their societal consequences. Each survivor receives an individual support plan tailored to her needs and interests, designed to address harmful circumstances and promote socialization and community reintegration.

All services in Social Apartments are provided free of charge. Moreover, these apartments are among the few facilities where women are accepted even without documents. A woman with a child who stays in a Social Apartment feels protected, capable of restoring emotional balance, and able to plan. According to UPHF, under the organization's standard operating procedures, the maximum length of stay in a Social Apartment is six months, although this period may be extended depending on individual circumstances. "During the war, we introduced a flexible approach that allows us to adapt the length of stay to the real needs of the woman and child, ensuring safety, recovery, and preparation for the next stage of life," said Anna Saienko, UPHF Deputy Director for Programming.

The project's implementing partners include the international organization Humedica e.V. (with support from the

German Federal Foreign Office) and the national charitable organization 100% Life Dnipro. Regional support is critically important for the project's operations, and this includes cooperation with local authorities, as well as with other civil society organizations with experience in this field. Social Apartments receive support from mobile teams and charitable organizations such as Foundation for the Future and Light of Hope. These partners hold joint events, provide legal and humanitarian assistance, help solve technical issues, and support beneficiaries in their adaptation process. The joint efforts of various actors make it possible to deliver comprehensive assistance, which proves to be effective.

Many women and children affected by the war in Ukraine have received support through the Social Apartments. As of February 2025, thirteen clients had already used their services, gaining a chance to build a successful future.

Safe Spaces in Ukraine

The successful cooperation of the UPHF with international organizations and local authorities resulted in the launch of Protect Her. Implemented since May 2024, the project supports women and girls in Kharkiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy regions affected by Russia's aggression. These areas are commonly referred to as "frontline" locations; some were temporarily occupied by Russian forces, others endure ongoing shelling and destruction due to their proximity to active combat zones. The lives of many local women are marked by sheltering in basements, fear and anxiety, anticipation of unwelcome news, and strained family relationships, as their loved ones also suffer from the horrors of war that results in lack of proper sleep, stress, psychological imbalance, exacerbation of chronic illnesses, and other issues. Such a situation is far from normal, and those who endure it daily must have

access to tools for restoring psychological balance and a sense of calm.

To help safeguard the physical and mental well-being of those affected, offer relief from ongoing distress, and create a welcoming and supportive environment, along with opportunities for personal and professional development, four Safe Spaces for women and girls were established in the Iziurm and Lozova urban communities, both in the Kharkiv region, and in the Mena and Koriukivka urban communities in the Chernihiv region. These are places where women and girls can seek support in addressing personal challenges and discuss topics that are often too difficult to navigate alone, such as how to resist gender-based violence, cope with the emotional toll of war, and find a path toward stability and growth. The Safe Spaces are staffed by trained social workers and psychologists who know how to lead recovery activities, organize awareness campaigns, assist in moments of psychological crisis, and plan long-term strategies for healing and community reintegration. They offer professional psychological assistance and access to consultations with specialized doctors such as gynecologists, dermatologists, and others. Visitors can improve their digital literacy and learn how to navigate systems for restoring lost documents, applying for child support, or accessing social assistance. Crucially, these centers also provide essential education on the forms of gender-based violence women and girls may face, how to recognize and respond to them, and where to turn for support.

The Ukrainian Public Health Foundation has been implementing this vital area of work in partnership with the international organization Corus International and the League of Modern Women NGO with financial support from Ukraine Humanitarian Fund. Additional support has come from a network of municipal social assistance centers, which host

the Safe Spaces and whose specialists have joined the initiative. Between May 1, 2024, and February 1, 2025, a total of 5,687 people participated in various activities at the Safe Spaces: 5,168 of them women and girls, and 519 men and boys. Across these visits, 14,912 services were provided. Participants engaged in various creative activities, art therapy, individual and group psychosocial support sessions, cybersecurity training, workshops, master classes, and literary readings.

“These Safe Spaces are a necessity in times of war, and our specialists know exactly how to respond to all the challenges. Local-level professionals must actively cooperate with all state institutions; only through collaboration and partnership can we strengthen our support for those who need it most.”

**Yurii Stalnichenko, Secretary,
Mena City Council**

Safe Spaces have proven to be an effective tool for front-line communities working to protect their residents, especially women and girls, from the pressures of war and to help them return to full lives.

Day Centers

“I feel completely useless and exhausted by all these problems,” said a woman from Mariupol during a hotline call. In the summer of 2022, she found herself in western Ukraine. “The doctor who had been helping me manage my HIV was killed, and I lost all my documents and medical records. I have been left alone with war, illness, and despair. I sit in an empty rented apartment all day feeling sorry for myself.”

russia's full-scale aggression has pushed many people living with chronic illnesses to the brink. In Ukraine, the HIV epidemic has long been a painful and acute issue, especially in the eastern and southern regions, but one that was being managed by a support and protection system. After the full-scale invasion, those same regions came under heavy attack, forcing residents to flee their homes and move to safer areas, losing the system that had helped them fight disease and stay focused on recovery. In its place came new challenges: the loss of loved ones, trauma from displacement, economic hardship, difficulty finding work or basic living arrangements, and the need to redefine life priorities. In unfamiliar places, people felt disoriented and isolated, while their health conditions worsened.

UPHF decided to focus one of its support areas specifically on people facing these challenges. In 2022, they opened Day Centers in Uzhhorod and Lviv. "In addition, in 2024, we launched the Resilience Center in Mykolaiv, an innovative, inclusive, and welcoming space where women, children, veterans, and other vulnerable groups can access support through trainings, peer support groups, mental health programs, art therapy, and other integrated services," said UPHF Executive Director Halyna Skipalska. In November 2024, a Mental Health Center was established on Kyiv's Left Bank. These facilities respond directly to the needs of women who have experienced psychological and physical trauma because of the war, who face economic hardship or violence, live with HIV or other conditions, and cannot manage their situations alone. However, others from vulnerable groups who are overwhelmed by the hardships of wartime life and struggling with emotional instability are also welcome to access these services free of charge. For many, a Day Center is an opportunity to receive essential professional help, such as

individual and group psychotherapy, as well as consultations with social workers and legal experts. Medical support is also a vital component: at the Day Center, women can undergo rapid testing for HIV, hepatitis B and C, and syphilis, and arrange for treatment and recovery of their psycho-emotional well-being.

Survivors are provided with information about available support services, protection, and recovery mechanisms. They also receive assistance with specific issues, such as referrals to healthcare facilities, help registering with a family doctor, and, if needed, support with employment. Day Centers host various events and sessions for their visitors, offering guidance on how to recognize different risks, including gender-based violence, discrimination, human trafficking, and cybercrime. Women also receive training in leadership, advocacy for their rights, and engagement in decision-making processes, empowering their professional and career development in the long term.

"I felt lonely and abandoned because I was displaced from Kherson. Thanks to psychologist Svitlana and social worker Yaroslava, I was able to resolve my issues and met other girls who, like me, are also displaced. I am very grateful!"

Alina, 25, Kyiv Day Center client

Many projects are implemented in partnership with various state, international, and civil society organizations. For example, together with TEENERGIZER, a referral system was developed for beneficiaries seeking support at the Day Centers. Center specialists help establish contacts with patrons who assist in purchasing costly medications and facilitate support from local authorities.

The Day Centers consistently conduct monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of their interventions and collect client feedback. The results speak for themselves: overall client satisfaction stands at 93%.

SafeWomenHUB Platform

Preserving the mental health of Ukrainians is one of the key areas of assistance provided to those affected by Russia's aggression. UPHF has considerable experience in this field. Since 2014, the organization has delivered critically needed services to internally displaced persons, veterans, and victims of torture, often with a strong focus on psychosocial support. The full-scale invasion has drastically increased the demand for such services, as most of Ukraine's population has experienced the traumatic impact of war, along with social and economic stress. Experts note that by the end of the war, approximately 15 million people will require psychological assistance, including 1.8 million service members and veterans, seven million older adults, and about four million children and adolescents. According to WHO estimates, one in five people currently living in conflict-affected areas already suffers from some form of mental health disorder.²²⁷

Recognizing the urgency of this issue, in April 2022, UPHF launched a new service: the SafeWomenHUB²²⁸ online platform for psychosocial and legal counseling of women and girls affected by the war. The platform was created with the financial support of the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) and technical assistance from UN Women in

²²⁷ NISS, March 19, 2025 poky,

<https://niss.gov.ua/doslidzhennya/sotsialna-polityka/polipshennya-psykhologichnoho-stanu-naselennya-v-umovakh>

²²⁸ <https://www.healthright.org.ua/proekti/safewomenhub/>

Ukraine. The platform serves as a method of rapid response to the atrocities committed by Russian troops against Ukrainian civilians, including conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and serves as an educational resource for vulnerable groups at risk of gender-based violence, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation during the war.

SafeWomenHUB positions its support toward women whose crisis situations have been exacerbated by the war in Ukraine: those who have been directly affected by the war, internally displaced, living under temporary occupation, or who have survived sexual and other forms of violence during the occupation.

The choice of online counseling (via chat and phone) is intentional. It ensures speed, confidentiality, and safety. Survivors can contact consultants from a safe location, without disclosing personal data and can receive a prompt response, critical in moments of distress. The service is also accessible to women in temporarily occupied territories and abroad. Also, the platform offers comprehensive services based on gender-sensitive approaches and case management. Platform professionals are trained in methods that help build trust and prevent re-traumatization. Consultants can provide psychological support over a specific period, tailored to individual's needs. The exact support methods are chosen only after establishing a trusting relationship and collecting preliminary information.

“I can talk to men again without fear.”

“A large man sat next to me on the bus, and I was surprised that I did not panic.”

“I’m exploring myself, and now I’m no longer afraid to fall asleep; those terrifying nightmares are gone.”

“When I visited my father at the military hospital, I stopped reacting to men in uniform. Before, just seeing them would make my heart freeze.”

***Statements from women who survived CRSV
and received psychological support
from SafeWomenHUB.***

The services provided by the online platform are complemented by coordinated, comprehensive assistance and case management, delivered in collaboration with other UPHF projects, namely, the Day Centers and Social Apartments in Kyiv, Lviv, Uzhhorod, Dnipro, and Kharkiv.

The professionalism of the platform’s staff, their respectful approach to clients, and the integrated methods they apply have made their services highly sought after. Between April 1, 2022, and January 31, 2025, the SafeWomenHUB’s psychologists, social workers, and legal expert provided 49,364 consultations and services, which included 18,246 psychological and 31,118 social and legal, for 20,332 women and girls, including women with children. Among them, 2,859 were IDPs. During this period, the platform received 1,535 requests from survivors of gender-based violence, including 1,192 related to domestic violence, and 118 from women who experienced conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).

Mobile Teams for Psychological and Social Assistance

In implementing a range of projects in response to the challenges of russia’s aggression, UPHF employs various for-

mats of assistance tailored to both the needs of affected individuals and the capacities of specific regions, as well as in coordination with state institutions and local authorities. For example, Day Centers and Social Apartments are in major cities, where large numbers of IDPs are concentrated, and many local women and girls have been impacted by the war. At the same time, there is growing demand for services in remote areas and communities that lack local specialists in medical and psychological support, have no stationary assistance centers, and whose residents, due to limited mobility, are often unable to access support elsewhere. To address this gap and ensure compliance with international standards for accessible care, the Foundation launched mobile teams of psychosocial support in Poltava, Dnipropetrovsk, and Kharkiv regions. These teams travel to affected areas to deliver urgent psychological assistance and case management services, collaborating with survivors in both individual and group formats.

This initiative was launched as part of a project that began in September 2024 and will run through June 2026. Implementation partners include the international organization Humedica e.V. and the national charity 100% Life Dnipro.

The work of the mobile teams is grounded in three core principles: rapid response, mobility, and multidisciplinary approaches. During their short stays in various communities, the teams must quickly assess the challenges faced by survivors and identify the type of support needed. They rely on established professional methods and a clear sequence of actions drawing on pre-developed models that facilitate quick information gathering and decision-making. The mobile teams offer psychosocial assistance, including initial needs assessments, crisis intervention techniques, and psychological consultations. A crucial element of their work is referral

to specialized services such as Social Apartments, shelters, crisis rooms, and counseling centers. The teams also provide detailed information about nearby support centers, including the scope of services, access requirements, and working hours. In addition, they conduct awareness-raising sessions and training to help women recognize and respond to various forms of violence and advocate for their rights.

“Thanks to these teams, thousands of people in frontline, newly liberated, and remote areas have gained access to critically important services. We are preserving our expertise, methodology, and readiness to scale up this model in response to new challenges.”

Halyna Skipalska, Executive Director, UPHF

Working in partnership with local authorities, regional and municipal administrations, social services, and law enforcement agencies, the mobile teams can quickly adapt to the specific contexts of different regions, identify local needs, and find effective ways to coordinate assistance. These comprehensive approaches not only enable the teams to respond swiftly to crisis situations, but also contribute to building modern, long-term protection mechanisms for those affected by the consequences of the war.

SECTION 17. SHELTERS FOR WAR-AFFECTED WOMEN

Since the beginning of russia's full-scale aggression in 2022, the number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Ukraine has increased significantly. In 2022 alone, the number of NGOs increased by 6.1%, while from 2021 to 2023 the number of charitable organizations showed a "record-breaking surge" of 43%. The regions that registered the largest number of such organizations included Kyiv City and Kyiv region, as well as Dnipropetrovsk, Lviv, Kharkiv, and Odesa regions. In 2023, Kherson region demonstrated the largest increase in newly registered NGOs, 112 in total.²²⁹ Experts noted that one of the reasons that prompted Kherson residents to act was the destruction of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant by russian forces on June 6, 2023, and the subsequent catastrophic consequences. Civil society responded to the urgent need to assist those affected by the disaster and those most affected by the war.

Assistance to those affected became a priority for many non-governmental organizations, which responded swiftly to the challenges of wartime and to the shift in societal priorities that required protecting the most vulnerable groups. Among those most at risk were internally displaced persons (IDPs), residents of frontline areas, families of military personnel and veterans, as well as women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Life became significantly more

²²⁹ Ukrainian Civil Society in Wartime: Report on a Comprehensive Sociological Study, February 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/484yjcy6>

difficult for many after February 24, 2022, when Russia began its full-scale invasion, forcing people to rapidly make difficult decisions to survive and plan ahead. Their cooperation with civil society organizations took on a new and vital form.

Non-governmental organizations in the west of Ukraine faced particularly demanding challenges since this region became a key migration route for displaced persons fleeing their homes due to brutal hostilities in Ukraine's eastern regions. One of the organizations that successfully managed the crisis was the NGO Women's Perspectives Center.²³⁰ Just days after the full-scale invasion by the aggressor state Russia, the organization opened a shelter for IDPs in Lviv.

Experience and a New Initiative

According to Liubov Maksymovych, director of the Women's Perspectives Center (Center), the organization had never previously dealt with humanitarian aid. Established in 1998, the Center's focus was on protecting women's rights and ensuring equal opportunities for women and men in all aspects of life. Center staff had experience with issues such as combating human trafficking and this experience most prompted the organization to act decisively and provide urgent assistance to those affected by the war. Many IDPs were vulnerable and at substantial risk of being victims of such crimes. With the war, there was now a need to protect not only people's rights but their lives, as well.

On February 24, 2022, the head of the organization was in Kyiv, returning to Lviv. In Kyiv she had participated in an event dedicated to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. However, explosions from Russian missiles were already shaking the city, and the central rail-

²³⁰ <http://www.women.lviv.ua/>

way station was overcrowded with confused and frightened people, mostly women and children. Her mobile phone rang throughout the night. Acquaintances asked her for help locating shelter for themselves, for friends, and for strangers; they asked for advice and guidance on how to act in such difficult and utterly unfamiliar circumstances. The train station in Lviv was just as chaotic as the station in Kyiv. People stood, sat, or lay on the floor, fed their children, cried, stared at train timetables heading abroad, searched through their bags for documents, talked to other displaced persons such as themselves with hopes of hearing sound advice or helpful tips. Many would spend the night in the station, and probably more than just one.

“The first night of the war shifted the focus of our work. Like many women’s organizations, we had to respond quickly — not only to continue our core activities, but also to provide basic support: shelter, safety, logistics, and coordination.”

***Liubov Maksymovych, Director,
Women’s Perspectives Center***

At first, Center members and staff made calls to acquaintances, looking for places where people arriving from other regions could stay. Women’s Perspectives Center is a respected and well-known organization in Lviv, so many responded to staff requests. However, quickly it became apparent that the problem needed to be addressed more systematically and on a broader scale. A shelter had to be established for the temporary accommodation of people who had been forced to find themselves in an unfamiliar city, without a roof over their heads, without contacts, without the necessary information, and often even without money or documents. The facility also

needed to be located near the railway station, as many internally displaced persons planned to continue their journey abroad and were tied to this logistical hub. City transport was barely functioning, and a curfew limited movement at night.

Liubov Maksymovych called a friend who owned a construction company. A space was found at the company's office near the railroad station. "The office had two floors. My friend kept the upper floor for work but allowed us to use the kitchen and the conference room to accommodate IDPs. I posted in various Lviv groups that I was setting up a shelter and needed mattresses, blankets, pillows, whatever people could spare. By evening, I already had seventeen mattresses. We bought some food, and seventeen women with children spent the night in that conference room."²³¹ The shelter was set up through their own efforts and besides mattresses, many other essentials were donated and brought in. The shelter opened on the third day of the war. People slept on mattresses on the floor, but they had a roof over their heads. Not only the Center's staff volunteered at the shelter, but colleagues from other NGOs and friends and acquaintances, as well. The same construction company that had provided the premises also rented warehouse space and soon aid deliveries began to arrive.

A distinctive feature was that the shelter accepted people with pets. Dogs and cats could stay side by side, and they even followed a sort of routine: when the dogs went out for walks, the cats came out "for a snack." The war had disciplined everyone.

²³¹ Life Goes On Even in a Temporary Home, Wonder Ukraine, September 20, 2022, <https://www.wonderzine.me/wonderzine/life/life/12589-zhittya-trivae-navit-u-timchasovomu-domi-lyubov-maksimovich-pro-robotu-tsentru-zhinochi-perspektivi>

“Throughout the entire time, there was not a single theft. Not one! People kept their belongings next to them — there were no lockers or locked rooms. And no one stole anything. And one more thing: not a single person became ill.”

***Liubov Maksymovych, Director,
Women’s Perspectives Center***

What funds supported this effort? When the Center began to purchase food for the shelter, they reached out to the donors they had already been working with and explained the situation; donors did not object to using program funds for supporting the shelter. One of the shelters, located in Morshyn, still receives support from the humanitarian organization Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA). This allows them to provide two meals a day for close to 40 residents and to organize training sessions, seminars, art therapy activities, and other activities.

“In collaboration with our Ukrainian partner organizations, NPA’s program provides specialized protection services in some of the regions most affected by conflict and with unmet protection needs such as Kharkiv, Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, and Lviv regions. These regions have been identified because of the high levels of existing and anticipated protection needs, with some of the highest numbers of internally displaced and returnees in Ukraine. Both Lviv and especially Dnipropetrovsk are key transit hubs for internally displaced.”²³²

***Humanitarian organization Norwegian
People’s Aid***

²³² Norwegian People’s Aid, Україна,
<https://www.npaid.org/development/where-we-work/ukraine>

Psychological Support and Assistance with Travel Abroad

During the initial phase, there was a steep learning curve. No one at Women's Perspectives Center had experience in rapidly opening and establishing shelters, keeping records, or providing a full range of assistance to those affected, including psychological, legal, and social support. Everything was learned "on the job." Before long, they were able to share their insights with colleagues from other NGOs and advise them on how to address the most difficult issues related to supporting war-affected people.

When the first shelter opened in the office space, the plan was to operate for one month. In the end, the shelter remained open for eight months. During that period, the shelter hosted 800 women and children. Another shelter followed, and a third was opened in the dormitory of a local college. Work was coordinated with donors and repairs were completed. In total, during the first six months of the full-scale invasion, the Center established seven shelters; two still operate today.

People arrived from many areas of Ukraine, from Kharkiv, Sloviansk, Irpin, Bucha, Mariupol. One case involved a woman who arrived with a five-month-old baby and was not met at the train station. Although late, late, staff from the organization that had agreed to provide her shelter space set out to find the young mother and then they accompanied her and helped her, even though they were stopped by the police along the way, as the war-time curfew was already in effect. These were difficult, yet deeply humane moments.

Another shelter resident, an elderly woman with a broken arm, was taken to the hospital. There too, she received support; whatever people could offer, they gave. Those who found themselves in the shelter quickly got to know one another, began to recover emotionally, and often joined in

helping; they volunteered and took newcomers under their wing. The women staying at the shelters came from diverse backgrounds. Some stayed for one or two nights before heading abroad. Liubov Maksymovych recalled a resident who arrived from Sloviansk, in Donetsk region, with her two children and was planning to leave Ukraine. Her only experience of being abroad was a holiday in Turkey, and she did not speak any foreign languages. There were many others like her, all in need of guidance, detailed information on their options, on the risks, and on how to protect themselves. When the shelters conducted surveys, it became clear that 80% of those affected did not speak any foreign language, and 70% had never been abroad.²³³ Another major issue was that many women fleeing the war did not have international passports and were travelling only with internal passports. If a woman had an international passport, her data would be recorded in a European database; without it, there was no information about her at all. “Lacking even basic knowledge in this area and being under severe stress, people could easily fall into the trap of human trafficking,” the Center’s director explained. In such cases, the Center advised women to travel in groups and stay together afterward, as well.

Support with Employment

Some who stayed in the shelters hoped to settle in a safer region of Ukraine, find employment, or even start a business. Women’s Perspectives Center supported such efforts and

²³³ Life Goes On Even in a Temporary Home, Wonder Ukraine, September 20, 2022,

<https://www.wonderzine.me/wonderzine/life/life/12589-zhittya-trivae-navit-u-timchasovomu-domi-lyubov-maksimovich-pro-robotu-tsentru-zhinochi-perspektivi>

helped such individuals find jobs. The goal was not only to provide a roof over the heads of IDPs, but also to offer prospects for those affected by the war.

The typical profile of a woman who has become an IDP is often painted in dark tones. She may be confused, frightened, lacking confidence, in despair, and willing to make risky decisions. Liubov Maksymovych recalled that many shelter residents who had previously run their own businesses but no longer had the courage to restart them. Some needed time to recover from traumatic experiences. Others could not find their footing in a new region. Many had loved ones serving on the front lines, and anxiety overwhelmed their thoughts. Many received psychological support in the shelters, not just hope, but a genuine belief in their future.

There were also those who overcame hardship by diving headfirst into change. The Center offered support also in these instances. The Center placed special focus on helping women gain new professions, a need that emerged among many IDPs. Women's Perspectives Center organized training courses for those affected by the war, including IDPs and veterans' families, helping them learn new skills. These included courses for seamstresses and drivers, hairdressers, computer diagnostics of vehicle malfunctions, and drone operation (currently used to assist the front, and in the future, these trained professionals could serve in the field of agriculture). "We are not stopping here, we are already planning to launch courses in gas and electric welding, operating excavators, and other construction machinery. Women can master these professions without any problem, and we are proving this in practice. I believe that in a renewed Ukraine, there will be more women builders, women plumbers, and even women driving large trucks or trolleybuses," explained Liubov Maksymovych.

The Center's overall approach is to focus on the long term. However, the war continues, so the Center now also concentrates on the efforts that can help bring it to an end.

Stories of the Displaced

In Lviv, the shelters for displaced persons are, in many ways, a cross-section of Ukraine's history. To fully realize how many lives, outlooks, and worldviews intersected at these shelters can be difficult to fully understand. Most of the women who came through were not quick to complain or shift responsibility onto others; mostly they looked ahead and tried to find the most reasonable paths to move forward, to avoid stumbles and missteps. They rarely spoke about past hardships, except perhaps while gathered in the communal kitchen during brief moments of calm. During those moments, from the pockets of memory, they would retrieve difficult stories, recall the pain they had endured.

One woman at the Center, 58 years old, was displaced from Mariupol. All her life, she had worked hard and eventually achieved what she wanted and that included an apartment, a summer house, a car, and the hope of a peaceful retirement. The war shattered these plans. Now, all she had left were the keys to her apartment in her pocket with no hope that they would ever unlock the door to her home again. She warmed tea in the shelter's kitchen and reflected on the past.

There were countless such stories. The staff of the Center made the decision to begin to document these stories, not only to preserve them on paper as a matter of memory, though that, too, is critically important, but also to not lose a single fact or lose any testimony that can record what has happened and still continues to unfold during Russia's aggression. And just as important is the need to inform the world. Women's Perspectives Center was among the first NGOs to

undertake an effort to systemically record the stories of the IDPs.

“Just two weeks after the start of the full-scale invasion, I addressed 250 participants of Zonta International, a global women’s organization of which I am a member. Similar to the Rotary Club, but an all-women network with chapters in more than 60 countries,” said Liubov Maksymovych.

Thanks to that online seminar, the NGO was able to share with the world the reality Ukrainian women were facing. Their stories began to be translated into English, Spanish, and German.

“At that moment, we did not need money as much as we needed visibility. We wanted as many people as possible to know what was happening in Ukraine — right then, not later. And it paid off. Financial assistance came later, but more than anything else, we received human, moral, and international support.”

**Liubov Maksymovych, Director,
Women’s Perspectives Center**

Over time, other non-governmental organizations and journalists also joined in documenting the stories of those affected. While this is long-term work, it has already produced positive outcomes. People who share their stories feel stronger and believe that their testimonies will help overcome evil and bring perpetrators to justice.

Support for the Future

Since being established in 1998, the Women’s Perspectives Center has not stopped work towards its mission for a single day. Over time, the focus has shifted. The war demanded that urgent, crisis decisions be made. During the first six

months of the full-scale invasion, the organization focused on humanitarian assistance. In August 2022, came a turning point. For a variety of reasons, more IDPs began return from abroad than to leave. At that point, the Center returned to its core programmatic work. Still, support for war-affected people remains a priority, although now through a variety of approaches, aspects, and projects. To do this, the Center works in cooperation with various civil society organizations, each offering different capacities and ideas and together achieve meaningful results.

The Center supports mobile teams that respond to calls in Lviv, Khmelnytskyi, and Ternopil regions, providing psychological and legal assistance and help with social support for those in need. The Center also began to work with communities to assist with the adaptation of people in new living conditions. The organization initiates and helps develop joint initiatives for communities, recognizing their need for new strategies and safe spaces for women, and in this field, Women's Perspectives Center has proven experience.

The Center also implemented several projects supporting small and medium-sized businesses, which included grant funding. This work was widely promoted, particularly among shelter residents. Few residents responded; most still intended to return home and resume their previous work there. However, approximately a dozen displaced women started businesses in Ukraine's western region with the Center's support. As of May 2025, the Center has provided a total of 80 micro-grants, not only for shelter residents and IDPs, but also for veterans and their families. This initiative is a partnership between the NGO, local government, and the international organization People in Need.

“The number of vulnerable population categories has grown significantly,” notes Liubov Maksymovych. “Previ-

ously, we referred to specific groups of vulnerable individuals, but now this category has expanded to include mothers who have lost sons, women who have lost husbands, as well as female service members and the challenges they face. Women's organizations, more than any other organizations, serve as a buffer between people and the authorities, advocate for necessary legislative changes based on real needs. In the world there is little such experience, and Ukraine will be an innovator."

SECTION 18. LA STRADA UKRAINE HOTLINE

Gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence, remains a significant issue in Ukraine. In 2024, 125,000 people were reported to have experienced such violence, 85% of whom were women.²³⁴ The number of victims has been increasing year over year, with the situation aggravated by the Russia-Ukraine War. The risks of violence are particularly high for internally displaced persons, for individuals who were, or remain, under Russian occupation, as well as the relatives and friends of those who participated in active hostilities and subsequently suffered physical or psychological trauma. Often victims do not know how to respond properly in dangerous situations, how to prevent escalation, or where to seek needed support.

Answers to the question of how to best respond, and to other questions, are provided by the National Toll-Free Hotline (National Hotline) on the prevention of domestic violence, human trafficking, and gender-based discrimination. The National Hotline operates under the auspices of the human rights civil society organization La Strada Ukraine. It has been in operation for almost three decades and is distinguished not only by extensive experience but also by the organization's ability to respond swiftly and effectively to modern challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine. Under current

²³⁴ Hlavkom, January 28, 2025, <https://glavcom.ua/country/criminal/v-ukrajini-pochastishali-vipadki-domashnoho-nasilstva-tsfri-shokujut-1042334.html>

circumstances, the number of requests from survivors continues to grow.

The National Hotline operates through the following channels:

Tel.: **0 800 500-335** or **116-123**; no cost on all mobile operators.

E-mail: **hotline@la-strada.org.ua**

Skype: **@lastrada-ukraine**

Facebook: **lastradaukraine**

Instagram: **lastradaukraine**

Telegram: **NHL116123**

Support is available 24/7, confidential, and free of charge. Consultants follow a survivor-centered approach that gives priority to the interests of those who contact the National Hotline and takes into considerations the views and perspectives of the caller. Consultants provide professional advice on how to act in a particular crisis, but all final decisions about any further course of action is made by the survivor.

Another function of the National Toll-Free Hotline is to monitor and support the needs of representatives of the key target groups of Ukraine's National Action Plan 1325.

Establishment of the National Hotline

According to Aliona Kryvuliak, Director, Department of National Hotline and Social Assistance at La Strada Ukraine, the history of this advisory tool dates to 1997, when the first call was received seeking help in a case of human trafficking. At that time, the risk of such cases had significantly increased, and non-governmental organizations began looking for options to support survivors and combat the shameful phenomenon of modern slavery. The most accessible form of support was professional advice from psychologists, legal counsel, and informational assistance from other experts.

The initiative to create the National Hotline came from then La Strada Ukraine representatives Kateryna Levchenko, Olha Shved, and Oksana Horbunova. They were guided by the experience of similar initiatives within the framework of the European network La Strada International and where hotlines are also operated by La Strada offices in the Netherlands, Poland, the Czech Republic, Moldova, Bulgaria, and other countries.

Soon, the scope of the hotline's work was expanded from human trafficking to include the prevention of domestic violence and then this hotline was granted the status of a National Hotline. Since 2016, the National Hotline has operated 24/7, and in 2017, the National Hotline was connected to the pan-European assistance number 116 123, aligning the work of Ukraine's National Hotline with European standards.

Key donors currently supporting the National Hotline include the United Nations Population Fund, the German organization Bread for the World (Brot für die Welt), and the international charitable foundation Ukrainian Women's Fund with support from the British Embassy Kyiv.

Operation of the National Hotline

The National Hotline is focused on providing prompt responses tailored to the needs of survivors. Staff offer guidance on how to act in specific situations, where to find solutions, and identifies specialists who can provide the most effective support. As a result, callers gain clarity on necessary next steps and to understand on whom they can rely. Consultants explain in detail what to do: stay calm, find a safe place, seek help from trusted close people, and, if necessary, contact law enforcement. If National Hotline specialists do not have the necessary tools to fully support a survivor, they can refer the survivor to other institutions through a well-established re-

ferral system. For this purpose, the National Hotline maintains an extensive database that includes contacts of government agencies, civil society organizations across all regions of Ukraine, as well as relevant international organizations.

One of the key factors behind the successful operation of the National Hotline is accessibility. Today, most requests are received in electronic format, a result not only of modern communication trends but also of practical considerations. For many users, sending a text message is safer and more convenient than speaking on a phone. As a result, text-based communication now accounts for 80% of all requests, and only 20% come through phone consultations.²³⁵

The National Hotline is clearly focused on its target audience. Women and girls account for most interactions. In 2024, women and girls made up 75.3% of all requests, while the remaining 24.7% requests came from men. This gender distribution has led to a higher number of female consultants than male consultants.

“Since the onset of hostilities in Ukraine in 2014, the National Hotline has continued to operate not only in areas of active combat but also in temporarily occupied territories (TOTs), as well as providing services to Ukrainian women who have gone abroad,” said Maryna Lehenka, President, La Strada Ukraine. “In the TOTs, the situation is extremely difficult. Ukrainian mobile operators are disabled, and we rely solely on internet access. We also face challenges in responding to cases of violence in territories under russian control. It is important to understand that domestic violence has effectively been decriminalized in the russian federation. It is neither treated as a crime nor recognized as a serious social issue. Despite these limitations, we record such reports and strive to provide psychological support to survivors. Main-

²³⁵ Ukraine Is Not Silent, FOLIO, Kharkiv, 2024, page 111.

taining contact with them is of utmost importance. At the same time, we always remind those who contact us to delete any evidence of our communication from their devices to avoid putting their safety at risk if checked by members from the occupying forces. The National Hotline receives few requests from the TOTs, but it is important to maintain both the connection and trust in the Ukrainian state and in non-governmental institutions.”

Another key to the National Hotline’s success is the ability to respond quickly and flexibly to the evolving challenges that drive survivors to seek support. Internally displaced persons are among one of the most vulnerable groups in Ukraine. IDPs often face difficulties with housing, employment, education, and integration into new communities while being at heightened risk of gender-based violence and human trafficking. Many are unfamiliar with the legal protections available to them and struggle to communicate with authorities. Hotline consultants help them navigate these issues more effectively and with greater confidence.

New groups have also begun turning to the National Hotline, including military personnel and their families, as well as individuals who have experienced conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). La Strada Ukraine has already developed guides that examine and explain the root causes of such trauma, outline key communication strategies, and offer practical options for an appropriate response. The National Hotline is also testing innovative approaches to working with war-affected populations, with the understanding that these new methods may be critical not only for individual families, but now, during the war, for entire communities, as well as throughout the post-war recovery period and the return to normal life.

Becoming a National Hotline Consultant

The National Hotline currently employs nineteen female consultants and two male consultants. Inna Kolisnyk, National Hotline coordinator, explained that specialized education in fields such as psychology, law, or social work is essential when selecting personnel. Prior experience working with survivors of gender-based violence is a significant advantage. “At the same time, we are student-friendly,” she noted, “so third year and higher students pursuing relevant degrees may also be involved in providing consultations on the hotline.” Prospective consultants must pass an interview, complete a week-long training program, and successfully pass a final assessment. Successful applicants then undergo a one-month internship at the National Hotline. Only those who demonstrate positive results at each stage are allowed to begin direct consultations.

Age is not a determining factor for consultants. The National Hotline includes both 20-year-olds and individuals in their 50s, with the current average age being approximately 25.

Continuous skill development among consultants is also key to ensuring high-quality service on the National Hotline. “We regularly organize training sessions for our staff in various formats,” shared Kateryna Cherepakha, La Strada Ukraine President (2020–2025). “We also encourage consultants to participate in training programs offered by our partners in both the state and non-governmental sectors. Today, there are many high-quality online courses available. For example, on platforms such as EdEra and Prometheus, as well as scientific and methodological literature developed by La Strada and other organizations. Members of our staff consistently make the effort to stay current.”

Strategies to Prevent Professional Exhaustion

National Hotline consultants face certain occupational risks, some of which are related to security. Among callers, there may be individuals who are psychologically traumatized and are not always able to control their behavior. For this reason, consultants never disclose the address of their office and do not agree to face-to-face meetings with callers.

Another important aspect is preserving the emotional well-being of the consultants themselves. They cannot remain indifferent to the grief of others and are expected to show empathy toward survivors. Due to the emotional and psychological intensity of this work, counseling shifts are limited to four hours to prevent burnout. The only exception is the night shift, which lasts eight hours, as the length of the shift cannot be divided because of the curfew.

To prevent professional burnout, consultants regularly participate in interviews, group and individual supervision, therapeutic groups, sessions with psychotherapists, art therapy, and retreats. They are also encouraged to practice various self-help methods such as meditation, breathing exercises, spending time outdoors, getting enough sleep, going to the cinema or theater, and meeting with friends. For many, working on the National Hotline is a valuable experience that contributes to their personal growth and prepares them for further stages of professional development.

Cooperation with Government Agencies

The National Hotline is an integral part of the nationwide system for supporting survivors of gender-based violence. This system is built on a three-part partnership between state institutions, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations. Within this framework, standard practice is to not only promote the work of partners, but also to support and contribute to their success.

Every year, during the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign in late autumn, experts from state institutions such as the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, the National Police of Ukraine, the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, the Office of the Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman), and others, as well as representatives from the public sector, join the National Hotline to provide consultations. These government officials are placed on the “front lines of communication” with the very people for whom they design policies and develop strategic programs. These consultations serve as a “litmus test” for government officials, while service users gain valuable insight into best practices that may shape future government decisions.

“In addition, the Government Commissioner and her staff regularly provide training for our consultants, particularly on how the state supports CRSV survivors and what forms of assistance are available to them. It is critical that representatives of government agencies share professional information and expert insights. This ensures that our consultants are well-informed not only about how the public sector operates, but also about the mechanisms and responsibilities of the state in this area.”

***Aliona Kryvuliak,
Director of the National Hotlines Department***²³⁶

As part of large-scale information campaigns on support for survivors of domestic violence, initiated or joined by government agencies, organizers actively promote the contact

²³⁶ Ukraine Is Not Silent, FOLIO, Kharkiv, 2024, pages 110-111.

details of the National Hotline and the services it provides. Each partner contributes to service delivery, enriching and strengthening the overall support system.

Assistance to CRSV Survivors

One of the key priorities promoted by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is support for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). The National Hotline began receiving requests from CRSV survivors in 2014, during the initial stages of russia's invasion. After the full-scale invasion by the russian federation in 2022, the number of calls and emails related to CRSV increased dramatically. Between February 24, 2022, and early 2025, the National Hotline received 109 reports of CRSV from both women and men. National Hotline consultants were prepared for such conversations, recognizing that the number of cases would increase as military operations continued. Survivors received necessary consultations and were referred to for medical, psychological, humanitarian, or financial assistance. The core message conveyed to each survivor was clear: they are not to blame for what happened. Responsibility lies solely with the russian invaders who committed war crimes on Ukrainian lands. Repeatedly, survivors have shared that understanding this claim significantly helped them come to terms with their experiences and to better envision their future.

National Hotline consultants also inform survivors that a project to provide urgent interim reparations for CRSV survivors has been implemented in Ukraine since 2024. The National Hotline serves as one of the key channels for identifying eligible individuals to receive this compensation.

“Our experts also provide training on CRSV for other civil society organizations and representatives of state institutions. If a hotline consultant encounters a complex issue related to CRSV, they can always reach out to our experts for additional guidance.”

Aliona Kryvuliak

Director of the National Hotlines Department²³⁷

Key Achievements

One of the National Hotline’s most significant achievements is the trust and credibility earned from among those who seek support, many of whom go on to recommend the service to other survivors. Consultants often communicate with the same individuals multiple times, allowing them to develop a profound understanding of their emotional state, challenges, and needs. As a result, they are always careful to choose the right words to offer support, encouragement, and optimism.

The effectiveness of the National Hotline is reflected in statistics; increasingly Ukrainians request the services of support offered by the National Hotline and the numbers speak for themselves:

2022 – 38,472 requests;

2023 – 39,753 requests;

2024 – 44,805 requests;

2025 – 48,442 requests.

While it is encouraging that individuals reach out for such support, these figures also indicate a concurrent rise in cases of gender-based violence. This situation is deeply troubling but an unsurprising consequence of war, with all associated

²³⁷ Ibid., page 108

challenges and trauma. The increasing number of requests also indicate that survivors are more willing to speak about their experiences and to seek professional support in challenging times. This demonstrates that the support system is having a positive impact.

La Strada Ukraine serves as a key center for developing and standardizing telephone counseling services for survivors of gender-based violence and human trafficking. The organization's methodologies and practices have been instrumental in supporting the operation of several other hotlines, including the government hotline for combating human trafficking, preventing and responding to domestic violence, gender-based violence, and violence against children (Tel. 1547); the Kyiv hotline for survivors of domestic violence (Tel. 1500); the ombudsman's hotline (Tel. 0800 501 720, 044 299 74 08); mobile teams that provide social and psychological assistance, and several hotlines run by civil society organizations.

The original National Hotline also serves as a valuable resource for collecting statistical and analytical data from individuals experiencing gender-based violence across different regions of Ukraine. The operations of National Hotlines help identify the challenges survivors face and allows for the collection of suggestions to improve the support system. As a result, the National Hotline has become a foundation for the frequent advocacy and information campaigns implemented by La Strada Ukraine and partner organizations.

CHAPTER 5 THE WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY AGENDA AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

SECTION 19. 140 YEARS OF THE UKRAINIAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

On December 8, 1884, the first women's rights organization in Ukraine with an activist civic purpose was registered in the city of Stanislav (now Ivano-Frankivsk). This date is considered as the official beginning of the modern women's movement in Ukraine. During the final months of 2024, many events were held to commemorate this date in which not only women's and human rights organizations participated, but also representatives of local communities, international structures, educational and academic institutions. Media extensively covered the 140th anniversary.

Why celebrate anniversaries? To not lose historical memory is the first reason. If we forget our own history, foreigners can take it and call it their own. Without roots, one is vulnerable, can be broken easily. This Ukrainians understand all too well because of Russia's recent aggression. When the Ukrainian nation is united by history, we know what land we are protecting, what single family we are defending.

The commemoration of the 140th anniversary of the women's movement in Ukraine provided a good occasion to communicate with the society-at-large about gender issues,

to evaluate experience gained and lessons learned, and better understand how ideas and paths of development proposed all those years ago now fit into our modern context and answer questions such as which ideas remain relevant and essential to better determine the next steps that should be taken? During such an anniversary, the crucial issues of ensuring the equal rights of women and men and the further development of society without violence and discrimination can be highlighted. Now, gender issues are actively discussed in society and are gaining support.

These are among the reasons why it is important to celebrate such anniversaries.

Historical Connection

Nowadays, the history of the Ukrainian women's movement is readily available in popular literature and in academic papers. The women's movement in Ukraine developed almost simultaneously with feminist movements in Europe and America. These movements rose to prominence in the late 19th century. Political reforms and socio-economic transformations underway in many countries in the 19th centuries barely affected the position of women. In most societies, women continued to not have equal rights with men, including the right to vote. Women sought public activism for the abolition of discriminatory and outdated customs and laws concerning employment, cultural development, and their role in the family. During the early years, women united in organizations mostly for joint educational, literary, and charitable activities. The first women's organization in Ukraine, the Society for Promoting Higher Education for Women, appeared in Kharkiv in 1840 as a spin-off of civil society organizations fighting for women's right to access higher education.

(permission for which was granted only in 1860).²³⁸

Writer and public activist Natalya Kobrynska also collected signatures to promote women's right to study in gymnasiums (high schools) and universities. She came from a family that supported pro-Ukrainian ideas: her grandfather Ivan Ozarkevych founded the Kolomyya Theater, the first Ukrainian theater in Halychyna (then Galicia) the western region of Ukraine, and promoted the works of Ukrainian playwrights Ivan Kotliarevskyi, H. Kvitka-Osnovianenko, S. Pysarevskyi others; her father, also named Ivan Ozarkevych, was a priest and simultaneously a political figure, a member of the territorial parliament (Estates of the Sejm) and of the Imperial Council (parliament of Austria). In 1884, when Kobrynska established the feminist organization The Society of Ukrainian Women, (Society) she was only twenty-nine years old.²³⁹ The original name of the organization was *Tovarystvo Rus'kykh Zhenshchyn*. The use of "Rus'kykh" may create confusion as to why original members, Ukrainian women and not Russian, chose this name. Rus'kykh is an ethnonym from Old Slavonic that originates from the word "Rusyn" that means "one who came from Rus." Rus' was a large medieval country on the territory of modern Ukraine with its capital in Kyiv (the same capital city as today). Later, the women's organization was renamed to reflect a change in the ethnonym of Ukrainians.

Approximately a hundred women from all areas of Halychyna came to the first general meeting of the Society. There is

²³⁸ Bohachevsky-Chomiak, Martha, Veselova, Oleksandra, 2005, Institute of the History of Ukraine of the NASU, <https://tinyurl.com/48uuvaxb>

²³⁹ Ukrainian Institute of National Memory, <https://uinp.gov.ua/istorychnyy-kalendar/cherven/8/1855-narodylasya-natalya-kobrynska-zasnovnycya-zhinochogo-ruhu-v-galychyni>

information that men also attended but sat in another room to listen to the discussions to ensure an opportunity for all women to speak their mind freely.²⁴⁰ Prominent Ukrainian men, such as Ivan Franko, Mykhailo Hrushevskiy, Mykhailo Pavlyk and others, supported the Society. Ivan Franko delivered a speech at the founding meeting of the new organization. The organization provided charitable assistance and conducted educational activities. Society members believed that women should be independent and have the same rights as men.

In June 1887, at her own expense, Natalya Kobrynska edited and published the almanac *First Wreath (Pershyi Vinok)* that contained prose, poetry, and essays by 17 Ukrainian women authors.²⁴¹ Authors included Liudmyla Starytska-Chernyakhivska, Olena Pchilka, Lesia Ukrainka, Dniprova Chaika and others. Among the issues raised were domestic and sexual violence, childcare to support women who work. Almanac contributions were prepared by women from the western region of Ukraine that, at the time, was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as well as from the eastern region of Ukraine that was enslaved by the Russian Empire. The almanac became a precedent of uniting women of the then-divided Ukraine, establishing a tradition of active cooperation among Ukrainian women without regard to location, raising the issue of Ukrainian national identity, activating nation-building and cultural processes.

²⁴⁰ Wikipedia, <https://tinyurl.com/3r4wy5ey>.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

“In a situation where Ukraine was divided between two empires, and the Ukrainian language was subjected to cruel linguocide, 17 women writers from Galicia and the Dnipro region united under one book over.”

Tetiana Chernetska
Gender Culture Center²⁴²

Why is it important to focus on events of the distant past when we celebrate the 140th anniversary of the Ukrainian women’s movement?

“Here, history is presented only from the perspective of men’s contributions. Women in that history seem to stand somewhere on the sidelines—“little women” who are there to serve their husbands. But those women were incredibly strong. Read, for example, about Yelyzaveta Myloradovych. A remarkable woman—yet what do encyclopedias say about her? That she was someone’s aunt, someone’s wife. And once you start reading, you see how much she did for people, for the movement, for the country’s history... And who knows that Olena Pchilka was an academician? These are role models for our girls. That is why I believe it is extremely important to know history—to present it properly and to record it properly.”

Tetiana Isaieva
Director, Museum of Women’s and Gender History (Kharkiv) and the Gender Culture Centre²⁴³

²⁴² Gender Culture Center, 1 August 2024,
<https://www.genderculturecentre.org/legendarniy-zhinochiy-almanakh-pershiy>

²⁴³ Povaha, April 10, 2024,
<https://povaha.org.ua/tetyana-isayeva-pro-140-richchya-zhinochogo-ruhu-ne-mozhu-nadyvuvatysya-yakymy-nejmovirnymy-buly-tsi-ukrayinky/>

Many historical facts provide answers to questions that concern Ukrainian society today, ones that are used by those who wish us ill to devalue our achievements and manipulate us. There is a common stereotype that the ideas of gender parity, equal rights and freedoms of women and men, non-discrimination are not part of the narrative of Ukrainian history, rather that these concepts, allegedly, are Western imports. Most often, such narratives are promoted by apologists for, and supporters, of the “russian world” (russkiy mir) to promote Ukraine’s inferiority on the path of modern development, thereby linking Ukraine to their perverted imperialistic sense of reality. However, our history shows that Ukrainians have always supported European democratic values and that the Ukrainian nation belongs to the larger community of European nations. According to Olha Dunebabina, strategic communications manager at the NGO La Strada Ukraine and a postgraduate student at the National Academy of the Security Service of Ukraine, “emphasizing the historic difference between Ukraine and Muscovia is an important component of strategic communications in modern politics.” Attention to prominent Ukrainians reinforces our national identity and obviously we should be proud of our accomplishments when we evaluate the role of women throughout the history of Ukraine. Besides Nataliya Kobrynska, other prominent women participated in the establishment and work of the Society, such as Anna Pavlyk, Liudmyla Drahomanova, Adelia Zheliakhivska, Sofia Buchynska, Kateryna Vynnytska, Emilia Nychai-Kumanovska and many more. The 1884 membership list includes 94 names. The use of such approaches in practical work on gender mainstreaming should yield positive results.

“Since the establishment of the first women’s organization in 1884, which marked the formation of the Ukrainian women’s movement, encouraged women to unite around common values — access to education, intellectual work, mutual assistance, social equality, the right to vote, and these things remain crucial in Ukrainian society even today, celebrating this date emphasizes the continuity of the Ukrainian women’s movement and of the national policy of ensuring women’s rights and its profound historic, social, and cultural roots.”

***Olha Dunebabina,
Strategic Communications Manager at
La Strada Ukraine and postgraduate student at
the National Academy of
the Secret Service of Ukraine***

While working on this chapter, historical parallels appeared. In 1880, the population of the city of Stanislav (now Ivano-Frankivsk) was 18,626 people. On April 12, 2022, soon after the start of the full-scale Russian aggression, 45,000 people in danger were relocated to Ivano-Frankivsk and the region from all the territories of Ukraine.²⁴⁴ They were supported by many non-governmental organizations, including women’s organizations. Together, people would weave masking nets for the army, engage in volunteer work, and start businesses.

In eastern Ukraine, another prominent historical figure is often remembered, teacher, educator and activist Khrystyna Alchevska, wife of the famous entrepreneur and philanthropist Oleksii Alchevskyi. In 1862, she was the founder of the first free women’s Sunday school in Ukraine, providing wom-

²⁴⁴ Frankivchany, 12 April 2022, <https://frankivchany.if.ua/116297-ivano-frankivsk-gotovyj-pryjnyaty-shhe-100-tys-pereselencziv/>

en of all social backgrounds with the opportunity to receive an education. Today, the city named after this famous Ukrainian family is under Russian occupation, with Russia imposing its “Russian world” ideology on residents, an ideology that does not recognize human rights, women’s rights, gender equality, or Ukrainian education. Today, many Ukrainian women in the territories occupied by Russians must defend their freedom, equal rights and opportunities with men, and the right to speak their native language, similarly to the distant 19th century when Ukraine was also under Russian occupation. We need to learn the lessons of history more carefully; these lessons can offer a great deal of insight into the present, as well. It is no coincidence that, in 2008, with support from the Ukrainian Women’s Fund, the Global Fund for Women, and the Equal Rights and Opportunities Programme in Ukraine, a project titled “Let’s Create a Museum About Ourselves!” was launched in Kharkiv. The project established the Museum of Women’s and Gender History (Gendermuseum), whose collection now includes more than 4,000 exhibits of various kinds. Ukrainian gender researcher Tetiana Isaieva founded the museum. In 2015, the Gender Culture Centre was created on the museum’s basis.

Support for CSOs

The celebration of this anniversary provided an opportunity to not only become immersed in historical content and look at its continuation today, but also to diversify the work of multiple civil society organizations, strengthening their communication with society. The Resistanta Facebook community, which united for feminist (self-)education, feminist events and discussions, translations of feminist literature, legislative analysis, proposed a public campaign “140 Steps Before 140

Years.”²⁴⁵ The idea was that everyone interested could take their own “step” to protect women’s rights and share it. The most crucial step was to be involved.

“Today, it is important not only to remember, but also to honor, speak, and share their stories so that the world knows: the power of the example established by women can inspire and change lives. Let their names ring loud, reminding us that strength of spirit and self-confidence can change history.”

**Nataliia Batrakova,
Advisor on Gender Issues to the Head of the
Chernivtsi Oblast (Region) Military Administration
Representative of the “Synergy” Community
Activism Center**

The non-governmental organization Age of Opportunities supported the initiative to collect 140 stories of women from Kharkiv who, regardless of where they are, bring Ukraine’s victory closer. This is about women who help themselves and others. This is about those who stayed home, and those who left, saving their children from war, but retaining a connection with their beloved city.²⁴⁶

The project “Woman for Woman: Supporting IDP Leadership and Strengthening Their Influence on Decision-Making,” implemented by non-governmental organization Gender Strategies and Budgeting Bureau together with the Gender Culture Center, included the launch of the women’s

²⁴⁵ Resistanta, https://www.facebook.com/events/7161561127262572/?acontext=%7B%22action_history%22%3A%22null%22%7D&ref_source=newsfeed&ref_mechanism=feed_attachment&rdr

²⁴⁶ Gender Culture Center, 25 March 2024, <https://www.genderculturecentre.org/legendarniy-zhinochiy-almanakh-pershiy>

information and communication platform Gender Culture Space (GCS). The mission of the GCS platform is to provide a safe space for women to come together to work together to create a more inclusive and just society, as well as empower women's voices. GCS functions as a catalyst for positive change to ensure a just future for all women in Ukraine. For women and girls, GCS offers an opportunity to be informed about the history of the women of Ukraine, to connect and exchange ideas and experiences, to provide mentoring support, and to develop individual peacebuilding initiatives in their communities. At the same time, women's NGOs had the opportunity to participate in workshops on organizational development, organize joint activities to analyze the local conditions for peace and security, and to receive a grant to create a safe space for women in their own community.²⁴⁷

On the 140th anniversary of the Ukrainian women's movement, Gender Culture Center prepared numerous projects, among them "Woman for Woman: Supporting IDP Leadership and Strengthening Influence on Decision-Making," a mentorship program "Woman for Woman," an exhibit *The Incredibles* organized by the Museum of Women's and Gender History. The exhibit became an opportunity to visualize the place and role of women in the history of Ukraine. Ukrainian artists created art objects in various techniques (graphics, painting, electronic installation, electronic painting, vector graphics, photography, video) and each was dedicated to a specific Ukrainian woman who made a significant contribution to the development of the women's movement, contributions to culture, science, and sports.²⁴⁸ Coincidentally, it was on December 8, 2024, that the Ukrainian Women's Initiative in the UAE held this exhibition

²⁴⁷ Gender Culture Space, <https://www.genderculture.space/>

²⁴⁸ Gender Culture Space, <https://tinyurl.com/mu5ueck7>

in the Canvas art space in Dubai. The exhibition featured 78 works, six of which were created by Ukrainian artists in the UAE. “Natalia Kobrynska, Olena Pchilka, Khrystya Alchevska, Sofia Yablonska, Kateryna Bilokur, Mary Beck, Jamala, Lina Kostenko are just a few names of those whose portraits were included in the digital exhibition.”²⁴⁹ The exhibit opening was attended by more than 100 Ukrainian and foreign guests, who had the opportunity to see the animated show *Ukrainian Mosaics: Threads of Heritage*, dedicated to the history of Ukraine.²⁵⁰ On December 10, the Embassy of Ukraine in the UAE supported the grand opening of the exhibit in Abu Dhabi, with representatives of more than 15 international diplomatic missions in the UAE in attendance that included representatives from the United States, France, Austria, Italy, The Czech Republic, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, others. According to Mariana Yevsyukova, co-founder and coordinator of UWI in the UAE, “the organization and presentation of “The Incredibles” exhibit is a good example of women’s solidarity across borders and cooperation between different organizations — civil society, business, government institutions.”

Another interesting event was the All-Ukrainian Dictation on the anniversary of the Ukrainian women’s movement. The text, “Her Story,” was provided by Slava Svitova, a writer and co-founder of the feminist publishing house Creative Women Publishing, as well as of Creative Women Space. At the center of the event was special guest and prominent Ukrainian theater and film actor, producer, public figure and philanthropist, the Honored Artist of Ukraine Irma Vitovska.

In the Khotyn district of Bukovyna, on the eve of the 140th

²⁴⁹ Ukrinform, 12 December 2024, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-diaspora/3937341-u-dubai-projsla-vistavka-nejmovirni-z-nagodi-140ricca-ukrainskogo-zinocogo-ruhu.html>

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

anniversary, a public discussion was held for women from the territorial communities of the Dniester district as part of the project “Bukovyna Women’s Movement: A Memory of the Past, A View Toward the Future.” Retrospectives offer perspective; the panels brought together representatives of local governments, executive bodies, businesswomen, IDPs, and public activists in a discourse. Topics included the challenges and prospects of strengthening the role of women in local government; women’s political participation and their prospects in future elections; expanding opportunities for women in entrepreneurship and economic development of territories; establish partnerships for protection by joining efforts to combat gender-based violence and create gender safe spaces.²⁵¹ A similar meeting was held in the Vyzhnytsia district.

“In order to honor the Ukrainian women’s movement, draw attention to its significance in the history of Ukraine, promote the Ukrainian language, and generate interest in the achievements of outstanding Ukrainian women, on December 2, 2024, 8th grade students and their Ukrainian Language and Literature teacher M. Karakonstantyn joined the All-Ukraine Dictation ‘Her Story’ in honor of the 140th anniversary of women’s movement. The dictation became a symbolic support for this significant historical date.”

**Malvina Karakonstantyn,
Instructor, Ukrainian Language and Literature
Safiansk Secondary School**²⁵²

²⁵¹ 5 December 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/nataliya.batrakova/posts/pfbid02DBsF6d71Vc2ms1D1GjckpYyZm1nnvbPxTa48x6Xd53s3aXNYvaN6B79xhURECiQw?rdid=xJWFljSDpXPrWA30#>

²⁵² Facebook, 2 December 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/187878466031442/posts/938134347672513/>

Safiansk Secondary School is in the Izmail district, Odesa Oblast. During the Russia-Ukraine War, the interest of students in the Ukrainian history and culture has markedly increased, a truly remarkable shift. The anniversary of the Ukrainian women's movement also became the driver for interest in all things Ukrainian. Today, there is a commonly accepted truth that the current war is a war between two worldviews, between two languages; as prominent Ukrainian writer and public figure Serhii Zhadan stated, "this war is a war of Pushkin against Shevchenko."²⁵³ To add a gender nuance to this statement, we could say that it's not just Taras Shevchenko, but also Lesia Ukrainka fighting this war ... But no Russian women classics come to mind. So, Lesya defends Ukraine against Tolstoy, Gorky, and Nekrasov. This cultural aspect of the Ukrainian women's movement in the history of Ukraine is not an infrequent occurrence.

December 8: A Day to Celebrate the Ukrainian Women's Movement

The history of the of the Ukrainian women's movement is extensive, a multifaceted process that was influenced factors both inside and outside the country. An important page of this story is the national liberation struggle, an entirely separate subject. However, certain important points should be acknowledged..

On June 23-27, 1934, the first Ukrainian Women's Congress (Congress) was held in Stanislav. The purpose of the Congress "...was to highlight the historical achievements and make conclusion about the Ukrainian women's movement on its the 50th anniversary; to consolidate all the Ukrainian

²⁵³ Ukrainska Pravda, 25 April 2023, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2023/04/25/7399252/>

women's civil society organizations throughout the world around the national idea; define guidelines for women's activism into the future. Under conditions of political occupation and the lack of statehood, the Congress was a demand in a turbulent era and the manifestation of solidarity between Ukrainian women. The Congress held major significance for Ukrainian women of the diaspora, who were able to meet in their homeland for the first time in the history of the women's movement."²⁵⁴ The Congress was attended by 959 delegates representing 188 Ukrainian women's organizations from Halychyna, Volyn, Bukovyna, Polissia, Bessarabia, Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland, the United States, and Canada. The honored guests of the Congress were members of the first Ukrainian Women's Society, the authors of *The First Wreath*, Secretary General of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Mary Sheepshanks, Ukrainian ambassadors, and representatives of civil society institutions and banks. The Congress received approximately 180 official greetings and letters of congratulations from Ukrainian and foreign organizations and prominent individuals.²⁵⁵

The number of Ukrainian women's organizations grows each year. They have different areas of focus, organizational structures, political views, however, they are united by the common ideas of gender equality and women's rights. Such organizations work not only in Ukraine, but around the world, such as the World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations (WFUWO), established in 1948 in the city of Philadelphia (United States) by women's organizations from six countries by 1953 and included twelve organizations from ten countries. Now based in Toronto (Canada), WFUWO

²⁵⁴ Online lecture of Alla Shvets, 1 July 2024, <https://ua.boell.org/uk>

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

unites forty-six full and associate member organizations in thirty countries on six continents. The constituent organizations of WFUWO work in various arenas, public, religious, cultural, educational, immigration, humanitarian. WFUWO supports the activities of local Ukrainian communities worldwide and includes a representation at the United Nations.

In an independent Ukraine, women's organizations have become a powerful force. They shape women's leadership, influence legislative, and decision-making processes, and actively participate in the development and implementation of public policies. At the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the decision of men traveling outside Ukraine, including those who held high positions in government, was still in flux. Therefore, at that time, Ukrainian delegations traveling abroad consisted exclusively of women, who assumed the responsibility of seeking international support, organizing assistance, and making important decisions in favor of Ukraine.

Women's non-governmental organizations are also involved in lawmaking, offering initiatives and proposals. Women's organizations have initiated and participated in the development of laws, strategies, programs and action plans aimed at overcoming gender inequality, in particular such laws as "On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men" (2005) and "On Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence" (2017); "State Strategy for Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men for the Period Until 2030 and the Operational Plan for Implementation for 2022–2024" (2022); "National Action Plans for the Implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 'Women, Peace, Security' for the Period Until 2020 and Then 2025" (adoption and updates — 2016, 2018 2020, 2022); "Concept of Communication in the Field of Gender Equali-

ty and an Action Plan for Implementation” (2020 and 2023), and others. One of the greatest achievements of the women’s movement in Ukraine is the inclusion of Article 24 in the Constitution of Ukraine, the inclusion of which was actively lobbied for by civil society organizations; the article affirms equal rights and opportunities for women and men.

More than fifty Ukrainian civil society organizations, most women-led, united into the coalition “For the Istanbul Convention.” This yielded a positive outcome: in June 2022, the Law of Ukraine on “The Ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence” was finally adopted.

During the russia-Ukraine War, the women’s movement carries the responsibility of tightly of uniting Ukrainian women. Gender equality issues remain important and relevant.

On April 8-9, 2024, the IV Feminist Forum “Women’s Movement: Strengthening Influence” took place as part of the project “Women’s Voice and Leadership — Ukraine” implemented by the Ukrainian Women’s Fund in cooperation with the International Renaissance Foundation and La Strada Ukraine, and with the support of the government of Canada. The forum covered issues connected with the celebration of the 140th anniversary and the participation of governmental and non-governmental organizations in this process. Forum participants adopted an appeal to the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy regarding the official celebration of December 8 as the Day of the Ukrainian Women’s Movement. An answer has not yet been received to this request, but Ukrainian activists of the women’s movement have proven that they can truly achieve positive outcomes.

SECTION 20. INVISIBLE BATTALION BECOMES VISIBLE

During the Russia-Ukraine War, the phenomena of watching Ukrainian servicewomen hunt enemy drones in the sky is no longer a surprise. The establishment of the first all-women crew to intercept Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) was announced in the summer of 2025 by the 427th Separate Unmanned Systems Regiment “Raroh.”²⁵⁶ The establishment of this regiment once again proves that military service is not just for men.

In many countries, women serve both on the front lines, as well as in the rear. In the US Army, women make up 27.4% of personnel. In 2013, then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta lifted the ban on participation of women in combat operations. Women were allowed into artillery, infantry, and armored units.²⁵⁷ In Canada, women gained access to military positions in 1989, except for submarine service, but that ban was also lifted in 2001.²⁵⁸

Norway was the first NATO country to introduce conscription for women supported by a decision of parliament

²⁵⁶ RBC Ukraine, 20 June 2025, <https://www.rbc.ua/rus/news/zsu-formuyut-pershiiy-zhinochiiy-ekipazhperehoplyuvachiv-1750418947.html>

²⁵⁷ NAKO, <https://nako.org.ua/news/zinki-v-armiyi-ssa-vid-viini-zanezaleznist-do-syogodennya>

²⁵⁸ Women in the Royal Canadian Navy: Breaking Barriers and Paving the Way, <https://www.navalassoc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/St.Jacques-Women-in-the-RCN.pdf>

in 2013.²⁵⁹ In Sweden, universal military service for both men and women was reinstated in 2018 due to the threat from Russia.²⁶⁰ Germany granted women access to military positions, including combat positions, in 2001.²⁶¹ In the United Kingdom, all positions in the Armed Forces became available to women in 2018.²⁶² In Israel, military service for women has been compulsory since 1949.²⁶³ Women effectively participate in combat operations.

In Ukraine, women have been able to serve on equal terms with men in combat positions since 2016. They serve as snipers, serve in artillery positions and in reconnaissance positions.²⁶⁴ Women, represented in various branches of the military, increasingly are becoming commanders. Their contribution has become particularly visible since the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine, which began in 2014 and became a full-scale aggression in 2022.

However, not all gender barriers have been overcome. Women defenders still face prejudice, unequal opportunities for career growth, lack of accommodations and lack of psychological support. Their contributions are often less visible, and this affects the quality of their lives.

²⁵⁹ Reuters,

<https://www.reuters.com/article/world/norway-becomes-first-nato-country-to-draft-women-into-military-idUSBRE95D0NB/>

²⁶⁰ SBSNews, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/sweden-brings-back-conscription-amid-russia-fears/fb2a07bu7>

²⁶¹ Global Policy Forum,

<https://archive.globalpolicy.org/soecon/inequal/gender/2001/0103pf.htm>

²⁶² House of Commons Library, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/representation-of-women-in-the-armed-forces/>

²⁶³ Jewish Virtual Library,

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/history-of-women-in-idf-combat-units>

²⁶⁴ Hromadske Radio,

<https://hromadske.radio/podcasts/rankova-hvylya/zhinky-u-zsu-zmozhut-sluzhyty-snayperkamy-rozvidnycyamy-ta-komandyramy-bmp>

The situation demands urgent change. There are several efforts that are being undertaken to enact such change. One of these efforts is the Invisible Battalion advocacy project.²⁶⁵ The project was launched in 2015 by the NGO Institute for Gender Programs and publicly raised the issue of women's rights in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The organization conducted five surveys to identify the problems that servicewomen encounter in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, how they respond, and what support they need. The research findings offer a contemporary view for managing gender issues in the Armed Forces and for the better protection of servicewomen's rights, making conditions of their service less stressful.

The Invisible Battalion project was a grassroots initiative developed by servicewomen and women veterans. Subsequently, the Ukrainian Women's Fund, UN Women Ukraine, the Equal Opportunities Caucus, and other NGOs joined the advocacy of gender equality in the defense and security sector.

Invisible Battalion 1.0

The first sociological study was conducted as part of the project "Invisible Battalion: Women's Participation in ATO (Anti-Terrorist Operation) Military Operations" that took place from 2015 to 2017. The study began from the position of asking the question of why we know so little about women who fight in war. Women participated in the ATO from the very beginning, but their contribution was often overlooked; the media mentioned heroes yet rarely mentioned heroines.

The research was conducted by Maria Berlinska, Ukrainian civic activist, the head of the Institute of Gender Programs, initiator of Women Veterans Movement, the head of the volunteer organization Aerial Intelligence Support Center,

²⁶⁵ <https://invisiblebattalion.org/invisbat/>

together with Tamara Martseniuk, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, PhD in Sociology, and researchers of gender issues Anna Kvit and Hanna Hrytsenko.

The team interviewed forty-two women who participated in the ATO and spoke with nine men among military personnel to learn about attitudes toward women defenders.

“I know a girl who was pulling out the wounded in Ilovaisk under shelling, when most of the men were sitting in the basement. If a woman, be it mother, sister, or daughter, wants to defend our values and our territory, no one can stop her from doing so.”

**Sociological Study
“Invisible Battalion 1.0: Women’s Participation
in ATO Military Operations”²⁶⁶**

The authors did not just collect oral histories but also documented legal conflicts, living conditions and psychological aspects of women’s service, gender division of labor, and medical problems faced by women. According to the authors, “there can be two scenarios with women joining the Armed Forces: women adapt to existing norms and customs, masculine in their nature, or women change the structure and nature of the Armed Forces by their participation, making it a gender-neutral structure.”²⁶⁷ According to the report published in 2016, in total, as of early October 2015, approximately 14,500 women in military service and approximately

²⁶⁶ Sociological study Invisible Battalion: Women’s Participation in ATO Military Operations, Kyiv, 2016, https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1zB8gsXYsQr_bwZ4hw4tpNU1pdUCdoyUG

²⁶⁷ Ibid., page 8.

30,500 non-combat women employees were enlisted in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Almost 2,000 were officers, and thirty-five service women held leadership positions in the Ministry of Defense.²⁶⁸ At the same time, the report noted evidence of discrimination against women in the military, with a ban remaining on certain military professions. According to many respondents, being a woman could be the main reason for dismissal or transfer to another unit.

The study also identified another issue: women in the armed forces systematically were denied official formalization of their service, which deprived them of the status of participants in military activities and corresponding benefits. Many women initially interacted with the Army as volunteers, helping or raising funds, and later became service-women themselves.

“What kind of benefits can I have if there is no information that I was there at all? Somebody does have this information, but it is not available where it matters,” shared Respondent 8.²⁶⁹

“My service went undocumented for six months. I received my first certificate that I was in the ATO zone on August 20, but my service was only formalized on January 20. That is, officially, I was not part of the ATO during that time, though I was in Shchastia under shelling. But the biggest paradox was how they called me on January 28 and said they registered me. I had already been living in Kyiv for eight days, I thought I was a civilian, that I no longer had anything to do with [voluntary unit name] or the war, but they called me, told me they were waiting, that I am registered and was currently considered AWOL,” says Respondent 21.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, page 9.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, page 14.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, page 14.

At the same time, the authors of the study pointed out that women and men are equal, but not identical. The infrastructure in the armed forces is designed to meet the needs of men; therefore, service women have issues with adapted military clothing, accommodations, and other elements of service. Since neither military leadership, nor authorities, nor society in general paid much attention to most of these problems, women in the army were referred to as an Invisible Battalion.

Released in 2017, the documentary *Invisible Battalion* by Ukrainian directors Iryna Tsilyk, Svitlana Lishchynska, and Alina Horlova, aims to highlight the experience of military women during the Russia-Ukraine War and lessen gender stereotypes. The film shows the stories of six servicewomen united by the ATO: Olena Bilozerska, Oksana Yakubova, Andriana Susak, Daria Zubenko, Yuliia Paievska, and Yuliia Matviienko. The film was shown in more than 100 cities in Ukraine and in ten countries worldwide.

To make the subject of the Invisible Battalion more prominent, the production team also created a photo exhibit and calendar. Images of women in military uniforms were now represented in public spaces, leading to a broader discussion. The initiative also included training for press officers and development of practical advice for the media.

As a result of the “Invisible Battalion” sociological study, the order of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine No. 292 of June 3, 2016, amended the Temporary List of Regular Positions for Private, Sergeant, and Sergeant Major Levels. This list was expanded to add more than 100 combat military specialties.”

Sociological Study
“Invisible Battalion 2.0: Return of Women Veterans to Civilian Life.”

The study “Invisible Battalion 1.0” became one of the factors to cause genuine change. Swiftly, the list of combat positions of women was expanded so that their documents could reflect the actual positions they held and where they worked in the ATO. In 2018, the Law of Ukraine “On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine to Ensure Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men During Military Service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Other Military Structures,”²⁷¹ was adopted, a law that emphasized the equality of women and men in military duty that included equal access to positions, ranks, and equal scope of responsibility during service.

The project not only raised a critical issue but also initiated a broad discussion on ways to resolve existing problems.

Invisible Battalion 2.0

After returning from war, civilian life presents its own challenges, in particular for women who face lack of understanding and support having returned from military service. Women defenders face difficulties in rehabilitation, reintegration, and adaptation. These concerns were topics included in the subsequent sociological study “Invisible Battalion 2.0: Return of Women Veterans to Civilian Life,”²⁷² conducted during 2018-2020 by the Institute for Gender Programs with the support of UN Women.

²⁷¹ Law of Ukraine “On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine to Ensure Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men during Military Service in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Other Military Structures” of September 6, 2018, No. 2523-VIII, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2523-19#Text>

²⁷² “Invisible Battalion 2.0: Return of Women Veterans to Civilian Life,” <https://ukraine.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/invisible%20battalion%2020uk.pdf>

Experts interviewed twenty-two veterans (fourteen women and eight men), organized a focus group, surveyed more than 2,000 respondents, and analyzed media. This data provided a comprehensive overview that helped identify multiple systemic problems.

One finding was that despite the government providing a reintegration system, the system was quite difficult to use. Women veterans encounter corruption, difficulties with recognition of their combat participant status, and lack of coordination between institutions. Some women were denied services altogether for bureaucratic reasons, such as not providing proper documents, approaching the wrong agency.

Other challenges include the low quality of medical services and the lack of a feedback system. Women respondents complained that civilian doctors do not always understand the nature of military injuries. Rehabilitation and reintegration programs are often gender-blind and therefore remain neutral rather than sensitive to women's needs.

“Access to military education is a problematic issue for women in the military. For example, Polina Kravchenko, press officer of a motorized infantry brigade was denied admission to the officer training program of the Sahaidachnyi National Academy of Land Forces because she was a woman.”

Sociological Study
“Invisible Battalion 2.0: Return of Women Veterans to Civilian Life.”²⁷³

Return to civilian employment is an additional challenge. Women veterans encounter bias in employment centers, lack

²⁷³ Ibid., page 28.

of suitable job offers, low salaries, and insufficient opportunities to start their own businesses. Even if they return to their previous workplace, they face issues such as inadequate understanding and support from colleagues.

Occasionally, veterans were unaware of their rights and available services. Some require legal assistance. Others encounter social stigma, prejudice, and disrespect. All these findings resulted in the development of a roadmap with practical recommendations for public authorities who were collaborating with veterans.

“A significant shortcoming is the lack of an effective mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the existing system for the reintegration of veterans. The services provided to ATO veterans by the government are assessed based on quantitative indicators, such as the amount of money spent and the number of veterans who received services, and the total number of services. No information about the effectiveness of the services is collected,” according to the study. Study results indicate that while there is a legislative system for the reintegration of veterans in Ukraine, gender-sensitive programming is notably lacking. The absence of a comprehensive assessment of veterans needs inhibits the development of targeted services and effective distribution and use of government-allocated funds, thereby preventing veterans from effective reintegration into civilian life.²⁷⁴

The study proposes immediate actions that can be taken by various institutions and organizations to overcome problems with veteran reintegration.

The project was not limited only to research but also marked the establishment of the Women Veterans Movement. In 2018, the documentary *No Overt Manifestations*,

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, page. 156.

directed by Alina Horlova, was released. The documentary depicted deputy battalion commander of the 54th Separate Mechanized Brigade Oksana Yakubova returning to civilian life. The film received several international awards, including one at the Docudays film festival.

The results of the study “Invisible Battalion 2.0” showed that going to war is not just about service to country but is also about what comes next. For women who are defending the country to feel respected, the government must protect them after their service ends, without any conditions or obstacles.

Invisible Battalion 3.0

The topic of sexual harassment in the military has long been taboo. However, a safe environment is a key condition for effective service. Therefore, during the third stage of the Invisible Battalion project, researchers decided to consider this problem more deeply, through the testimonies of those who experienced such harassment.

The advocacy campaign “Invisible Battalion 3.0: Sexual Harassment in the Ukrainian Military”²⁷⁵ was implemented by the Institute for Gender Programs in 2020-2021 with the support of the Democracy Fund at the Embassy of the United States in Ukraine.

The goal was to collect facts, to demonstrate the scale of the problem, and to propose solutions, taking into consideration the experience of NATO countries. The initiative included a study conducted using several methods: surveys, anonymous questionnaires, in-depth interviews, media analysis, official statistics, and international practices.

²⁷⁵ “Invisible Battalion 3.0: Sexual Harassment in the Ukrainian Military,” https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1a3gs-Nv6bnlsTQAJg1bNUsNM6HujIp_

“Sexual harassment is a fairly common phenomenon in the military in armies around the world. In some countries, this is recognized as a problem at the political level. There are attempts to resolve this issue using the anti-harassment mechanism within the institution of the army itself, as well as using the help of international donors and decisions of international organizations.”

**Sociological Study “Invisible Battalion 3.0:
Sexual Harassment in the Ukrainian Military”²⁷⁶**

The results were alarming. Almost half the women who completed the online questionnaire reported encountering issues related to sexual harassment during their service. The most common forms of harassment are unwanted touches, leering and uninvited attempts to talk about sex. Most often, the incidents occurred without witnesses and were committed by higher-ranking individuals. This claim also was confirmed by in-depth interviews.

“Current countermeasures are ineffective and not anonymous. People are afraid to use them. The qualifications of psychologists and those responsible for moral and psychological support are usually insufficient, and they may also blame the survivor,” research indicates.

In some instances, women resorted to informal protection and built relationships with colleagues to feel safe. Many remained silent, transferred to other units, or resigned from service altogether.

An analysis of legislation also found several shortcomings, therefore experts from the study recommended that the Ukraine’s Parliament make certain changes better define

²⁷⁶ Ibid., page 9.

the notions of “sexual harassment” and “sexual assault” in Ukrainian legislation, as well as in the Statute of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Internal Affairs received the recommendation to ensure proper investigation of every case of sexual harassment by having them reviewed by an independent commission.

In addition to the study, this phase of the initiative also included a public campaign “SpeakingNotSilence.” With the permission of the respondents, their stories were published on the Invisible Battalion Facebook page. And the hashtag #DefendTheDefender, launched by Amnesty International Ukraine, became a gesture of support for Lieutenant Valeria Sikal and other servicewomen who had been sexually harassed.

Another outcome of this phase was the online course “Gender Equality and Combating Sexual Harassment in the Military” on the Prometheus platform,²⁷⁷ which proposes effective strategies to combat violence.

A Memorandum of Cooperation was signed with the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine as an element of the project. This memorandum enabled the project team to join the working group that is currently refining mechanisms for preventing and responding to gender-based discrimination and harassment in the military.

Invisible Battalion 4.0

Military lyceums and academies train people who will later command units and make decisions, a crucial reason why access to such education should be equal for everyone. Access to education became the topic of the next study, “In-

²⁷⁷ Prometheus,

<https://prometheus.org.ua/prometheus-free/gender-equality-anti-harassment-military/>

visible Battalion 4.0: Women's Access to Military Education in Ukraine.”²⁷⁸ The study was conducted in 2021–2022 as part of the NAKO (Independent Defense Anti-Corruption Committee) initiative “Promoting Gender Equality in the Armed Forces of Ukraine.”

The project included a sociological study based on an anonymous online survey taken by seventy-two women and thirteen men, as well as interviews with students of military institutions and experts.

According to survey results, 60% of the respondents supported the idea of women's access to military education, while 25% opposed. Women participants in the online survey had mostly positive feedback about their experience of enrollment and studying. They are motivated to serve, care about their careers and are unafraid of challenges.

At the same time, the study found several issues. They include condescending or dismissive attitudes from men, as well as individual cases of discrimination or harassment.

“Discrimination and sexism are among the most common difficulties encountered during the learning process that were mentioned by the respondents, but also a fear of humiliating treatment and a personal lack of confidence,” state the authors.

Those interviewed also mentioned insufficient availability of women's military clothing, excessive requirements for women's appearances, and discrimination in recruitment after their education had been completed. An additional problem is the limited number of women among the teaching staff and few examples of women with successful military careers. This creates barriers for those just entering this field.

²⁷⁸ Sociological study “Invisible Battalion 4.0. : Women's Access to Military Education in Ukraine,”

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1y1EJort3YzQHiQf6jvkjTLRtgV8jsG8H>

The experts developed recommendations for ministries and educational institutions. For example, the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Internal Affairs were advised to develop a culture of respect, rather than of condescension, towards women. Military academies received the recommendation to introduce anti-discrimination policies, ensure equal conditions for learning, and guarantee responses in cases of harassment.

Invisible Battalion 5.0

The fifth project of the Invisible Battalion initiative served as a summary of the work conducted from 2015 to 2021. The team of sociologists, human rights defenders, and gender experts made the decision to chart the changes that had occurred during this period, and which issues remain a challenge.

“Servicewomen have become more visible and recognized. The Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the President of Ukraine officially recognize the contribution of Ukrainian women, particularly servicewomen, to the defense of the country, and the national Defenders’ Day has been renamed to reflect the inclusion of both genders.”

***Interdisciplinary study
“Invisible Battalion 5.0:
Monitoring Recommendations and Study
Results from the Invisible Battalion Cycle.”***

The interdisciplinary study “Invisible Battalion 5.0: Monitoring Recommendations and Study Results from the Invisi-

ble Battalion Cycle”²⁷⁹ was conducted in 2022–2023. It was authored by Hanna Hrytsenko, Anna Kvit, Tamara Martsenyuk, Mariia Zviahintseva, Viktoriia-Nataliia Fatsiievych, and Alla Bieloshenko. The study combined several focus areas: analysis of statistics, expert interviews, the assessment of the regulatory framework, and a representative survey. The researchers focused on three key topics: the status of women and gender equality in military service, the lives of women veterans in society, and the problem of sexual harassment in the military.

The first focus was women in the military. According to the Ministry of Defense, in ten year the number of women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine has almost doubled, from 16,200 in 2013 to more than 31,000 in 2023. The largest increase was seen among female sergeants (from 4.8 thousand to 13.7 thousand) and female officers (from 1.6 thousand to 5.1 thousand). Women were receiving more opportunities for professional growth and were increasingly occupying command positions.

Public opinion has also undergone significant changes. In 2023, more than 50% of Ukrainians agreed that women should receive equal opportunities with men to serve in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and other military formations. In 2018, this opinion was less popular and only supported by 24% of respondents.

The second focus of the study was the situation of women veterans. According to the Ministry of Veteran Affairs, in early 2023, more than 26,000 women in Ukraine had the sta-

²⁷⁹ Interdisciplinary study “Invisible Battalion 5.0: Monitoring Recommendations and Study Results from the Invisible Battalion Cycle,” <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/11dwu5MT-MT41DKf4oGNECJ9N8h4UVlzp>

tus of participants in combat. This is an increase more than double from 12,000 in 2018. Among other positive changes was the simplification of the procedure for women to obtain the certificate of status of veteran, which means easier access to medical, psychological, and social services. However, despite positive changes, the system is not yet fully responsive to the needs of women veterans.

Another element of the study was dedicated to the issue of sexual harassment in the military. The authors emphasized that the number of official reports is just a small number of total cases, since most cases go unreported. Women are often reluctant to seek help due to fear of judgment, punishment, or because they have distrust of the system. Given these factors, assessing the full scope of the problem may be a challenge.

Based on study results, project experts developed recommendations for key public authorities, the public, and the media. Recommendations include the improvement of the regulatory framework, providing high-quality assistance and gender-sensitive rehabilitation programs, improving the qualifications of civilian medics and psychologists, among others.

The study “Invisible Battalion 5.0” proved that tangible results require not one-off decisions, but consistent effort. And this consistency of effort is the strategy of the initiative, not as separate projects, but as a single platform fighting to change the military sector. The Invisible Battalion effort works to reduce the number of “invisible” issues and to expand the space for equality and dignity.

In collaboration with the Veteranius project, Invisible Battalion has also developed an app to help combat sexual violence (for those in military service) that is available on the initiative website in the form of a chatbot. Alongside other public organizations, the initiative developed a draft

mechanism for responding to, preventing, and combating manifestations of discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace among military personnel. The organization is currently participating in a working group under the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, where this mechanism is in its final stages of development.

Before 2019, military (naval) lyceums accepted only young men as suitable for military service. With the adoption of Resolution No. 486 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of May 15, 2019,²⁸⁰ educational institutions of the security and defense sector were allowed to admit both young men and women, in accordance with the Regulation on a Military (Naval) Lyceum.

The wording of the Regulation on the Military Lyceum, prior to the amendments, specified that the military lyceum is a general educational institution of the Third Degree with an orientation on military-professional education and pre-professional training that provides for in-depth pre-conscription and enhanced physical training and education of young men's readiness for military service. In Resolution 486, the discriminatory phrasing "young men" is replaced by the broader wording "youth."

March 2024 saw the adoption of the Law of Ukraine No. 3621²⁸¹ that amended the Law of Ukraine "On the Disciplinary Statute of the Armed Forces of Ukraine." The chang-

²⁸⁰ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine "On Amendments to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1087 of July 17, 2003," No. 486 of May 15, 2019, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/486-2019-%D0%BF#Text>

²⁸¹ Law of Ukraine "On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Regarding the Rights of Military Servants and Police Officers for Social Protection" No. 3621-IX of March 21, 2024, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3621-IX#Text>

es concern disciplinary liability and the procedure for legal response to facts of discrimination, sexual harassment, and offenses against gender freedom and integrity in military teams.

From now on, official investigations into cases related to gender discrimination, sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and offenses against gender freedom and integrity are conducted by a commission composed of both men and women, as well as a psychologist from the military administration to study psychological aspects and organize psychological assistance to victims.

On April 30, 2025, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted as a basis the draft Law on Amendments to the Disciplinary Statute of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the Statute of the Internal Service of the Armed Forces of Ukraine regarding the improvement of mechanisms for ensuring military discipline, preventing and combating manifestations of discrimination and sexual harassment.²⁸² The document proposes to improve the mechanism for prevention of, prompt response to, and countermeasures to sexual harassment, manifestations of gender-based discrimination among military personnel, gender-based violence, and offenses against gender freedom and integrity. Approaches that are used in the Armed Forces of partner countries, in particular NATO countries, are being integrated into Ukraine's legislation. The draft law provides for changes to the concept of military discipline and implementation includes compliance with legislation on ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men, and preventing and combating discrimination, for all military personnel.

²⁸² Parliament, 30 April 2025, <https://www.rada.gov.ua/news/razom/261530.html>

Every member of the military service is obliged to refrain from contemptible actions (verbal or non-verbal) connected with discrimination based on gender, religious or other beliefs, with sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and violations against gender freedom and gender integrity.

This document also introduces a new reason for removing a member of the military service from duty if non-performance (or improper performance) of duty at service led to a violation of gender freedom and integrity.

This area requires further work. However, thanks to Invisible Battalion, such work is underway. What lies ahead is not only legislative change but the development and conduct of services, the transformation of internal organizational structure and, most critically, the rejection of stereotypes.

During the past four years, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine has amended several legal regulations to regulate the conduct of internal investigations within civil protection bodies and units, the National Police of Ukraine, the National Guard of Ukraine, and the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine. Under these amendments, incidents of sexual harassment and discrimination on the grounds of sex have been defined as separate grounds for initiating internal investigations within these bodies. In addition, the role of designated units on gender equality has been strengthened, by including representatives of such units on commissions conducting internal investigations into the above-mentioned incidents.

In addition, on December 26, 2025, an inter-agency meeting was held on the implementation of the Comprehensive Strategic Plan for Reforming Law Enforcement Agencies and the Prosecutor's Office as part of Ukraine's security and defense sector. The meeting involved the leadership of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, the Prosecutor General's Office, the Security Service of Ukraine, the Economic Secu-

rity Bureau of Ukraine, and the State Bureau of Investigation. At this meeting, Methodological Recommendations on Preventing and Countering Potential Gender-Based Discrimination and Sexual Harassment in Law Enforcement Bodies and the Prosecutor's Office were approved²⁸³ (endorsed by the Inter-agency Working Group, Minutes No. 2 of December 18, 2025).

These Methodological Recommendations are proposed for use in the activities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine; the National Police of Ukraine; the State Emergency Service of Ukraine; the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine; the State Migration Service of Ukraine; the National Guard of Ukraine; the prosecution bodies; the State Bureau of Investigation; the Security Service of Ukraine; the Economic Security Bureau of Ukraine; and the State Customs Service of Ukraine.

²⁸³ <https://mvs.gov.ua/upload/2/2/3/9/4/4/metodicni-rekomendaciyi.pdf>

SECTION 21. WOMEN IN DIPLOMACY

For state institutions, international partners, and civil society, ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men in Ukraine's diplomatic service is a matter that continues to receive consistent attention. In advancing plans for European and Euro-Atlantic integration, Ukraine has assumed commitments to strengthen gender equality across all areas of public administration, including foreign policy.

Women are actively involved in the defense of Ukraine, play a significant role in shaping foreign policy decisions, participate in international negotiations, as well as peacebuilding processes, and are designing plans for post-war recovery. Diplomatic service is becoming more accessible to Ukrainian women; in institutions of higher education that specialize in international relations, women make up a substantial number of students, and the number of women in the mid-level ranks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is steadily increasing.

The Women's Diplomatic Club operates under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and promotes the professional development of women diplomats and facilitates experience exchange. The process of appointing women to senior diplomatic positions is ongoing, although the need for acceleration remains.

Nevertheless, significant advances in the number of women holding senior diplomatic positions have only emerged in recent decades. In practice, until the beginning of the twenty-first century, senior diplomatic service remained either closed or significantly restricted for women.

According to the study “Gender Aspects of the Diplomatic Service in Ukraine and Worldwide,” there were no women leading diplomatic missions during Ukraine’s early independence years (1991–1994). During the period 1994–2005, the figure remained minimal, approximately 1.9%.

Between 2005 and 2010, the proportion of women leading foreign diplomatic missions grew to 3.7%. However, during the period 2010–2014, this figure again declined to 1.8%.

Between 2014 and 2019, growth became steadier, with the proportion of female ambassadors rising to 6.1%. Further progress was observed, with women making up 22% of ambassadors and heads of missions in 2024, although this figure decreased to 18% in 2025.

According to UN data, current figures are comparable to global trends: women hold approximately 21% of ambassadorial positions worldwide.²⁸⁴

These data demonstrate the gradual implementation of the MFA’s Strategy for Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men in the Diplomatic Service (Strategy).

At the close of 2025, seventeen women representing Ukraine serve as ambassadors and head diplomatic missions in Jordan, Singapore, Ireland, North Macedonia, Switzerland and Liechtenstein, Bulgaria, Portugal, Lithuania, the Philippines, Oman, Sweden, the United States of America, Spain, Malta, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador. Also, four women are *chargés d’affaires ad interim* in Greece, Indonesia, Italy, and Mexico.

The MFA has introduced policies to support a family-friendly workplace culture, flexible work arrangements,

²⁸⁴ Heinrich Boll Stiftung, June 19, 2025, <https://ua.boell.org/uk/2025/06/19/30-rokiv-pislya-pekinskoyi-deklaratsiyi-rozdumy-nad-69-yu-sesiyeyu-komisiyi-zi-statusu>

and organizational measures focused on strengthening women's leadership.

Ukraine also considers the experience of countries that adopted feminist foreign policy approaches, including Sweden, Canada, France, Spain, Mexico, and Germany, others.

Ukraine's diplomatic service integrates gender approaches through the development of strategies, training programs, audits, and internal policies aimed at increasing women's representation and incorporating their experience into decision-making processes.

In the coming years, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine will continue to implement equal rights and opportunities policies, including through the development of a new Strategy through 2030, further strengthening institutional capacity, and integrating gender equality across all aspects of foreign policy.

The representation of women among heads of diplomatic missions in Ukraine is comparable to average international indicators. Statistics remain a sensitive matter. The average numbers are derived from data collected in multiple countries, covering both places where women participate actively in the diplomatic corps, as well as those where women are not involved at all. In 2010, the Nordic Gender Institute conducted a study that showed that by 2010, 30% of Norway's ambassadors in Europe were women, while the number ambassadors from both Finland and Sweden was 27%. In 2015, "in the United Kingdom, women held approximately 21% of positions of ambassador and 19% of high commissioners were women, while approximately 22% of senior diplomatic positions in the UK Foreign Office were held by women diplomats."²⁸⁵ At that time, women accounted for approximately

²⁸⁵ Gender Dimensions of the Diplomatic Service in Ukraine and Worldwide, ICPS, Kyiv, 2015, https://icps.com.ua/assets/uploads/images/images/eu/gendern_osoblivost.pdf

40% of heads of diplomatic missions in the Philippines, while in Australia the figure was 29%. In Panama, every fourth appointed ambassador was a woman. In Grenada, women held four out of seven positions as heads of diplomatic missions, including in London, Washington, New York, and Beijing.²⁸⁶ “In African countries, particularly in South Africa and Rwanda, approximately a quarter of heads of diplomatic missions are women, which is well above the global average.”²⁸⁷

Additional evaluations regarding the present condition of gender equality in diplomacy have been conducted. Daria Kolodiazna’s publication: “*Gender Distribution in Ukraine’s Diplomacy: The Path to Equality*”²⁸⁸ prepared within the framework of the project Network of Gender Think Tanks: Capacity Development for Advanced Policy Design, Impact Assessment, Strategic Advocacy, and Specialized Policy Communications,²⁸⁹ implemented by the Ukrainian Women’s Fund, presents data from the Women in Democracy Index for 2023. According to these data, women were 28% of ambassadors in European countries. “Among ambassadors from countries of the Americas to other nations, 25% are women. The highest percentages are in Canada and the United States, where, due to the implementation of gender equality policies in diplomatic services, women hold 51% and 41% of positions, respectively.”²⁹⁰

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Vox Ukraine, November 29, 2024, <https://voxukraine.org/gendernyj-rozpodil-u-dyplomatiyi-ukrayiny-shlyah-do-rivnosti>

²⁸⁹ UWF,

<https://uwf.org.ua/merezha-gendernyh-analitychnyh-czentriv-posylennya-spromozhnosti-zadlya-rozrobky-peredovyh-polityk-oczinky-vplyvu-strategichnoyi-advokaciyi-ta-sfokusovanyh-komunikacij-shhodo-polityk-2/>

²⁹⁰ Vox Ukraine, November 29, 2024,

<https://voxukraine.org/gendernyj-rozpodil-u-dyplomatiyi-ukrayiny-shlyah-do-rivnosti>

Ukraine is currently undergoing a comprehensive process of European and Euro-Atlantic integration that envisions the establishment of genuine gender equality across various areas, including the development of a feminist foreign policy. Diplomats emphasize that their work is the voice of the state in the world, and today the international community finds it particularly important to hear what Ukrainian women, senior officials, members of parliament, civil society leaders, and heads of diplomatic missions abroad, have to say. They convey their perspective on the war that Ukraine endures, emphasize the need for international support and practical assistance to the country whose peace and territorial integrity has been violated by Russia, the aggressor state, and speak truth about the war crimes committed by Russia. They strive to achieve sustainable and just peace.

“We are deeply convinced that embedding the principles of equality between women and men in the diplomatic service is not only a matter of justice and compliance with European norms, but also the key to an effective and modern foreign policy.”

Mariana Betsa,
Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine²⁹¹

Ukraine’s MFA has made notable progress in promoting gender equality in recent years, emerging as a leader among other Ukrainian ministries. Nonetheless, the advancement of women in diplomacy depends upon coordinated efforts by

²⁹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, October 15, 2025, <https://mfa.gov.ua/news/maryana-beca-vzyala-uchast-u-konferenciyi-z-pitan-gendernoyi-rivnosti>

government agencies, civil society groups, and international organizations operating within this domain. Today, well-known Ukrainian athletes, cultural figures, women serving in the armed forces, and women veterans have also become ambassadors in Ukraine's diplomatic efforts, shaping and defending the image of a country that is fighting and striving for victory.

“Because this is the way it has always been.”

This phrase is still a common response when people ask why so few women hold top diplomatic positions in Ukraine. Although such an explanation is highly debatable, the response does reflect certain approaches that have dominated society at different periods and stages of development.

Historians of diplomacy observe that, for many decades, women in diplomatic service were mainly present as spouses of ambassadors or as heads of missions. At the beginning of the twentieth century, women became part of the administrative and technical staffs at diplomatic missions. Their increased participation was due largely to the rise of typewriters and a growing need for stenographer-translators. Only in the 1930s did women begin to be appointed to diplomatic posts in their own right.²⁹² However, in certain countries, which included the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, until the 1970s, there was a standard that a woman diplomat had to be unmarried and upon marriage was required to leave diplomatic service.²⁹³ Therefore, up until almost the

²⁹² Academic Bulletin of the International Humanitarian University. Series: Jurisprudence. 2024, No. 69, <https://www.vestnik-pravo.mgu.od.ua/archive/juspradenc69/35.pdf>

²⁹³ Gender Dimensions of the Diplomatic Service in Ukraine and Worldwide, ICPS, Kyiv, 2015, https://icps.com.ua/assets/uploads/images/images/eu/gendern_osoblivost.pdf

1990s, there were few women ambassadors and permanent representatives worldwide, even after accounting for heads of state and government, politicians, and civil society leaders engaged in diplomatic work, as well.

Among the most prominent figures in the history of women in diplomacy was Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady of the United States (1933–1945) and the “first lady of international diplomacy in the field of human rights” and women’s equal rights. She chaired the UN Commission on Human Rights and was chair of the committee that drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Margaret Thatcher, known as The Iron Lady, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (1979–1990), was the first woman to head the government of a European nation. During the 1980s, she was regarded as the world’s most influential woman. Madeleine Albright of the United States was the first woman to serve as US Secretary of State (1997–2001) and was a staunch supporter of NATO enlargement. Condoleezza Rice of the United States, also was US Secretary of State (2005–2009), an expert on Russia and Eastern Europe, focused on US policy in the context of the “Global War on Terror.” Gro Harlem Brundtland, who served three terms as Prime Minister of Norway between 1981 and 1996, and later as a UN Special Envoy on Climate Change, headed the World Commission on Environment and Development that, in 1987, laid the foundations for the concept of sustainable development. Federica Mogherini of Italy, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2014–2019), led EU foreign policy, including negotiations on the Iran nuclear deal.²⁹⁴ “The former president of Taiwan Tsai Ing-wen believes that Ukraine has a

²⁹⁴ Holos Ukrainy, June 24, 2025, <https://www.golos.com.ua/article/384845>

greater need for American weapons than does her own country, despite the threat from the People's Republic of China. Politico reports on this.²⁹⁵ Elected in 2016, Tsai was the first woman leader of Taiwan and the first unmarried president.²⁹⁶ In 2024, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, for the second consecutive time, topped the Forbes' list of the 100 most powerful women in the world. The top ten also included Giorgia Meloni, Italy's first woman prime minister, and US Vice President Kamala Harris. Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has held office since 2019. As early as April 2022, she visited Kyiv to express Denmark's support for the people of Ukraine. At the 60th Munich Security Conference (2024), she announced that her country had decided to transfer all the country's artillery to Ukraine. In the summer of 2024, former Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas became the EU's top diplomat as High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. "There may have been a time when time was on Russia's side, but now it is starting to work in Ukraine's favor," she said at a press conference in Kyiv in October 2025.²⁹⁷ On October 21, 2025, Sanae Takaichi, a prominent Japanese politician, became the first woman prime minister in the history of Japan.

These facts show that women are actively entering global diplomacy. However, as of June 2024, women headed only twenty-six nations worldwide, and in 113 countries a woman

²⁹⁵ Liga.net., November 25, 2024, <https://news.liga.net/ua/politics/news/eksprezydentka-taivaniu-amerykanska-zbroia-ukraini-potribna-bilshe-nizh-nam>

²⁹⁶ Forbes Ukraine, December 9, 2021, <https://forbes.ua/ratings/nayvplivovishi-zhinki-svitu-2021-08122021-2930>

²⁹⁷ Korrespondent.net, October 13, 2025, <https://ua.korrespondent.net/ukraine/4823350-teper-chas-hraie-na-koryst-ukrainy-kallas>

had never held the position of head of state or of government.²⁹⁸ “As of January 1, 2024, women held just 23.3% of ministerial portfolios, and in 141 countries they accounted for less than one-third of cabinet members. In seven countries, Azerbaijan, Hungary, Papua New Guinea, Saudi Arabia, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Yemen, women were not represented among ministers at all.”²⁹⁹ As of that date, women also did not enjoy equal standing as diplomats at United Nations Permanent Missions; women accounted for 25% of permanent representatives in New York, 35% in Geneva, and 33.5% in Vienna.

The first woman in the highest diplomatic rank in independent Ukraine, the first woman to hold the highest diplomatic rank was Nina Kovalska, in 1998, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Swiss Confederation, the Principality of Liechtenstein, and the Holy See. She began her career in 1964 as a stenographer in New York City at the United Nations Permanent Mission of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Later, she participated in international forums, conferences, and sessions of the UN General Assembly and served as Ukraine’s representative on the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

However, her work does not mark the beginning of the history of women in the ranks of Ukrainian diplomacy. In 2017, Ukraine celebrated the centenary of its diplomatic service. “The first woman to hold a managerial position at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Ukrainian People’s Republic was Nadiia Surovtsova. She came to the diplomatic service by chance, yet she not only became the first woman to head

²⁹⁸ DIVOCHE.MEDIA, June 25, 2024, <https://divoche.media/2024/06/25/zhinky-ocholiuiut-lyshe-26-krain-svitu-ta-obiymaiut-23-ministerskykh-posad-zvit-oon/>

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

a structural unit of the ministry, but also the first spokesperson of the MFA. She began using tools that are now well established in public diplomacy: she prepared an exhibition of Ukrainian embroidery and a library of Ukrainian books for the diplomatic mission at the Paris Peace Conference, and later used charity concerts and Ukrainian fashion shows to raise funds in support of those in Ukraine who were starving,” notes Professor Iryna Matiash, Chair of the Board of the Scholars Society for the History of Diplomacy and International Relations,³⁰⁰ who has devoted substantial attention to researching the role of women in the history of Ukrainian diplomacy.

In July 1918, Nadiia Surovtsova graduated from the Consular Academy courses at Kyiv University, organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Society of Economists to train professionals for the diplomatic service. “She was one of two women among 30 candidates who, upon completing the courses, obtained the right to serve at diplomatic posts.”³⁰¹ Literally the next day after finishing her studies, she was appointed Head of the Press Department of the Department of Foreign Relations of the MFA of the Ukrainian State. During the Hetmanate period, Nadiia Surovtsova headed the Diplomatic Department, and during the Directorate she joined the Ukrainian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in France.³⁰²

³⁰⁰ Sestry, November 26, 2024, <https://www.sestry.eu/statti/irina-matyash-nashi-zhinki-diplomatki-lyudi-z-tridcyatma-rukami-y-golovami-vonivmiyut-i-znayut-use>

³⁰¹ Person, Society, and the State: A Gender Perspective, Collective Monograph, National Aviation University, La Strada-Ukraine NGO, Kyiv, 2024, <https://la-strada.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/monography.pdf>

³⁰² Ibid.

The diplomatic mission to that conference also included Oksana Drahomanova-Khrapko. Between 1918 and 1920, together with her husband Ivan Khrapko, she worked at the diplomatic mission of the Ukrainian State and the Ukrainian People's Republic in Petrograd, in the Legal Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kyiv, and in the diplomatic corps in Vienna. Another woman serving in the diplomatic service was Oksana Tokarzhevskya-Karashevych; in 1919–1920, she was secretary of the Ukrainian People's Republic's diplomatic mission in Istanbul, headed by her father, Oleksandr Lototskyi.³⁰³

Hanna Chykalenko-Keller also contributed a significant chapter to the development of Ukrainian diplomacy. The daughter of prominent public figure, diplomat and philanthropist Yevhen Chykalenko, she was well-educated and fluent in several European languages. In 1918, she was employed at the embassy in Bern.

“In June 1920, Hanna Chykalenko-Keller delivered a speech in English at the International Congress of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in Geneva, becoming the first Ukrainian woman to speak from the high rostrum of a major global forum about the problems of the Ukrainian people.”

Collective monograph “Human, Society, State: A Gender Perspective.”³⁰⁴

At that time, Ukrainian women diplomats took part in the creation of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Ukrainian Section in Bern. This step was

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

purposeful since it was an excellent opportunity to promote Ukraine's image on the international stage. "This was a new form of public diplomacy through which Ukrainian women sought to convey the truth about Ukraine to the world. The organization made a substantial contribution to developing the toolkit characteristic of public diplomacy," emphasizes Iryna Matiash.³⁰⁵

Among well-known diplomats and political leaders of Ukrainian origin, one should also recall former Prime Minister of Israel (1969–1974) Golda Meir, who was born in Kyiv. "We can negotiate with our neighbors. As soon as they want it, we can agree instantly. But we cannot negotiate with terrorists who simply want to destroy us."³⁰⁶ Ukrainians often reference her statement when discussing Russia's present aggression.

Historically, the first convocation of the modern Ukrainian parliament (1990) included only twelve women from among 475 members of parliament (2.5%); the second convocation (1994) included eighteen women among 436 MPs (4.1%). However, by then, Ukrainian society had recognized the critical role of women in public authority, including in diplomatic posts. From one perspective, a more responsible approach was being taken toward gender equality. However, there were other, practical, considerations: in Europe, women were often engaged in "soft power" diplomacy, aimed at achieving foreign policy goals not through pressure and coercion but through shaping a positive image of the country.

³⁰⁵ Ukrainian Week, December 16, 2024, <https://tyzhden.ua/zhinka-v-ukrainskyj-dyplomatii-chas-borotby-za-derzhavnist/>

³⁰⁶ Radio Lux, May 3, 2025, https://lux.fm/golda-meyir-pro-vibir-vidpovidalnist-i-svobodu-slova-shcho-vidgukuyutsya-v-serci-kozhnogo-ukrayincy_a_n181282

Among the first women ambassadors of independent Ukraine were: Siuzanna Stanik (Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the Council of Europe, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the Swiss Confederation), Natalia Zarudna (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Denmark and later to Germany), Oksana Sliusarenko (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Montenegro), Tetiana Izhevskaya (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See), Tetiana Saienko (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Republic of Cuba), Natalia Halibarenko (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the United Kingdom and Head of Ukraine's Mission to NATO), Inna Ohnievets (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Portugal), Mariana Betsa (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Estonia), Yevheniia Filipenko (Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations Office at Geneva), and others. All of them are part of the history of the modern Ukrainian state and of global diplomacy. However, the ratio of appointments of women and men to positions as heads of embassies and missions remains highly uneven. As of autumn 2025, women headed seventeen of Ukraine's embassies abroad, and ninety-one were headed by men.³⁰⁷

Feminist Foreign Policy

In the twenty-first century, it is impossible to envisage the implementation of foreign policy objectives without taking gender equality into account in interstate relations, in setting priorities for achieving peace and security, and in shaping prospects for stable and democratic development. These

³⁰⁷ MFA, <https://mfa.gov.ua/diplomatichni-ustanovi/inozemni-diplomatichni-ustanovi-v-ukrayini>

approaches have driven the development of feminist foreign policy, anchoring the values of gender equality and human rights in international relations. There is, in fact, no single standard that would set clear requirements for its design and the tools for its implementation: states develop their own gender strategies, which then influence the areas of security and defense, trade, international assistance, as well as the nature of the diplomatic service.

Sweden has proven leadership in this field. In 2014, it announced the creation of a feminist government, and shortly thereafter, the newly appointed Minister for Foreign Affairs Margot Wallström declared a feminist foreign policy built on three Rs and based on a fourth R: “Rights, Representation and Resources, based on Reality.”³⁰⁸ She explained that “this framework was created so that Sweden’s embassies and diplomatic missions would have criteria for assessing the performance of other countries in multilateral and bilateral negotiations that would be easy to apply.” Margot Wallström succeeded in convincing domestic opponents of the merit of this approach and in strengthening the position of feminist foreign policy. As a result, other countries began to develop their own concepts of such policy: Canada (2017), France (2019), Mexico (2020), Spain (2021), Luxembourg (2021), Germany (2021), Chile (2022), Colombia (2022), and Liberia (2022), as well as the European Union. An increasing number of countries now place “conditions of gender equality and feminist approaches in public administration and governance among the priorities of their foreign policies and development and assistance programs. For example, Norway and Australia have adopted their gender strategies for for-

³⁰⁸ Gender in detail, September 4, 2021, <https://genderindetail.org.ua/season-topic/feminism-in-detail/shvetsiya-feministichna-zovnishnya-politika-feministichnogo-uryadu.html>

eign policy.”³⁰⁹ In 2021, seven countries established the Global Partner Network on Feminist Foreign Policy.

The activities of Ukraine’s diplomatic service reflect global trends in feminist foreign policy. Today, noticeable changes are taking place in the work environment, culture and in staff perceptions of gender issues. In 2018, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs became the first Ukrainian government institution to join the global HeForShe solidarity movement for gender equality in cooperation with UN Women. With the technical support of UN Women and financial assistance from Sweden, in 2019 the Ministry took a bold step and conducted a gender audit, an initiative unprecedented in Ukraine. This effort became part of a broader partnership between UN Women, and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration aimed at integrating gender equality and human rights commitments into national reforms, peacebuilding, and security processes, and at establishing mechanisms for adequate financing, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The MFA audit sought to assess the real state of gender equality within Ukraine’s diplomatic service, analyze the national legal and regulatory framework governing the diplomatic service, and identify factors that may hinder the advancement of gender equality and non-discrimination in the institution.

Interviews and written surveys among staff of the foreign ministry clearly illustrated the relevance of the topic: 90% of women and 71% of men employed at the MFA consider the implementation of gender policy a key factor in the work of the diplomatic service. However, only 38% of women staff believe they have equal opportunities for career advancement. Not a single man, by contrast, reported facing gender-based

³⁰⁹ Ukrainian Prism, February 24, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/y8za45uf>

restrictions.³¹⁰ The audit therefore recommended strengthening efforts to overcome gender stereotypes, supporting the creation and development of a women’s professional association or network, as well as additional organizational opportunities to promote women’s leadership, self-efficacy, and mentoring; formalizing internal work on adherence to equality principles; introducing flexible working arrangements; paying particular attention to gender-responsive budgeting, and other measures.³¹¹

The audit’s recommendations provided genuine momentum for further gender equality initiatives in the diplomatic sphere. First, a Commission on Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men was established. With the expert support from the UN Women, the Commission produced a program (Strategy) and the publication *Strategy for Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men in Ukraine’s Diplomatic Service* that established goals and measures through 2025, along with corresponding action plans to ensure implementation.

The implementation of the Strategy quickly delivered results. A second gender audit, conducted in Q4 2023–Q1 2024 with support from UN Women in Ukraine and funding from Sweden, showed the progress achieved. Audit findings showed that “within the system of the diplomatic service, women’s access to decision-making has increased compared to 2019:

- the share of women in managerial positions (at the MFA – auth.) grew by 6% and now stands at 30%;

³¹⁰ 50%, June 12, 2020, <https://50vidsotkiv.org.ua/ministerstvo-zakordonnyh-sprav-zavershylo-provedennya-gendernogo-audytu/>

³¹¹ MFA, June 10, 2020, <https://mfa.gov.ua/news/dmitro-kuleba-cholovikita-zhinki-na-diplomatichnij-sluzhbi-povinni-mati-rivni-prava-ta-mozhlyvosti?fbclid=IwAR3Aw9SETHPVKM6cAo0p7VQUxxbLX2Edgc-5-84SWzZVSvuejOi2VmQj0fl>

- the share of women holding category B positions in Ukraine's foreign diplomatic missions increased by 10% and has reached 23%;

- women's representation among ambassadors and heads of missions increased by 8%, with women now holding 22% of these posts.”³¹²

Based on the results of the gender audits, the MFA has:

- established the Commission on Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men;
- adopted the Procedure for Preventing and Responding to Discrimination and Sexual Harassment (Order No. 22 of 14 January 2022).

Also, various initiatives were implemented, aimed at strengthening women's leadership, adopting internal policies to prevent discrimination and sexual harassment, and supporting staff in reconciling professional and family responsibilities. The MFA, in collaboration with UNICEF and UN Women, established a childcare room in 2022. Since then, it has been utilized by 104 children from 77 staff families, with participation comprising 55% women and 45% men. By 2030, the MFA aims to become an inclusive workplace that meets the professional development needs of all employees and systematically applies gender-responsive approaches in operations.

The MFA has been a key government partner advancing the women, peace, and security agenda in 2025 when the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is being celebrated.”

Sabine Freizer Gunes,
UN Women Representative in Ukraine

³¹² MFA, June 25, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/yc8t9ucd>

Given the need to develop leadership skills among women diplomats and enable them to gain the requisite experience, in 2024 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs implemented a program that served as a platform for sharing experience, exploring new opportunities, mentoring, and support. Various activities, such as seminars and meetings, fostered a setting that encouraged dialogue, collaboration, and peer learning. The program focused on helping participants grow both personally and professionally, giving them the skills to handle their work responsibilities more successfully.

The program consisted of four seminars held over the year and aimed at strengthening key competences in leadership, negotiation, public speaking, strategic vision, and crisis management. The training, designed to address the challenges faced by women diplomats, combined theoretical knowledge with practical decision-making exercises. The seminars were notable for their high quality due to both a strong curriculum and guidance from renowned experts in their fields, who contributed personal insights and experience. Similarly, the program aimed to create a diplomatic community that is more diverse and inclusive, ensuring women have equal opportunities for leadership and achievement. In total, seventy-four women diplomats took part in the seminars.

A week-long training session was held in Berlin as part of the program. This intensive course aimed to help senior-level women diplomats strengthen their expertise and skills. The training sought to strengthen participants' negotiation and leadership abilities through the Harvard Negotiation model and to familiarize them with German diplomatic practice. Twelve Ukrainian diplomats participated in this course.

Another important milestone that year was the resumption of the Women's Diplomatic Club, which currently brings together one hundred members, including women diplomats

from MFA headquarters, as well as Ukraine's diplomatic missions abroad. The Club's activities include informal meetings, participation in cultural events, and training sessions for professional and personal development. Notably, club members also received first aid training and acquired basic skills for responding to emergency situations.

In 2024, the revival of the mentoring program at the MFA is equally significant. Ten mentor-mentee pairs were initially established based on compatibility in professional experience, expertise, and personal preferences. The practice proved remarkably successful and was later expanded. The program currently includes twelve mentors and eighteen motivated mentees.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with UN Women and with financial support from Sweden, marked the International Day of Women in Diplomacy in 2024 and 2025.

At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, not only has a Public Council on Human Rights, Gender Equality, and Diversity been established, but close cooperation with civil society organizations has also been developed. Olha Nikitchenko, Ukraine's Ambassador to the Republic of Lithuania, played an active role in organizing a visit by Ukrainian women and men experts to the European Institute for Gender Equality, conducted with support from the Ukrainian Women's Fund. Thanks to Myroslava Shcherbatiuk, Ukraine's Ambassador to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, La Strada Ukraine was able to assist in the return to Ukraine the child of a Ukrainian citizen, in implementation of a decision of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

As the term of the existing Strategy was due to end in 2025, the MFA planned to develop a new plan to continue until 2030. The expectation is that the new Strategy will define clear objectives and practical measures for integrating gender equality into all aspects of the MFA's work; ensure

that gender equality is embedded in broader foreign policy objectives, such as conflict resolution, diplomacy, and peacebuilding; and mainstream gender considerations into policy projects, training materials, and day-to-day operations. Research on feminist foreign policy as implemented by countries like Germany, Canada, and France should inform the Strategy, ensuring that these experiences help shape a uniquely Ukrainian approach. Another goal is to collect data and analyze best practices of foreign diplomatic services in implementing gender approaches and in creating a work environment that is supportive of families and children.

Official Structures and People's Diplomacy

Diplomacy serves both as a tool of foreign policy and as a process where negotiation skills come into play, important decisions are made, and agreements are reached. This process uses cultural and informational tools to shape a positive image of a nation. As a result, the circle of participants can be broad and diverse. Women in diplomacy may represent not only official structures but also engage in informal activities through so-called “people’s” or “public” diplomacy.

Ukraine’s First Lady, Olena Zelenska, plays an active role in this sphere. Back in 2020, at her initiative, Ukraine joined the Biarritz Partnership for Gender Equality, an international initiative launched by the leaders of the G7 countries at their summit in France. The Partnership was created to promote global cooperation and shared responsibility for guaranteeing equal rights for both women and men.³¹³

³¹³ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine Order No. 505-r of May 6, 2020, “On Approval of the Draft Letter from the Government of Ukraine to the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of the French Republic Regarding the Participation of the Government of Ukraine in the Biarritz Partnership International Initiative for the Promotion of Gender Equality.” <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/505-2020-%D1%80#Text>

The First Summit of First Ladies and Gentlemen took place on August 23, 2021, at the Saint Sophia Cathedral National Sanctuary Complex in Kyiv, a site of special significance to Ukrainians. The Summit of First Ladies and Gentlemen is an international initiative of First Lady of Ukraine Olena Zelenska. The purpose of the initiative is to establish a dialogue platform to facilitate effective responses to humanitarian challenges worldwide. The theme of the First Summit was “Soft Power in a New Reality.”

“The soft power of first ladies, who do not possess political authority, can nonetheless change the surrounding reality. They achieve goals and obtain desired results not by participating directly in politics, but through humanitarian projects and social connections, Olena Zelenska told the participants.³¹⁴ In this new reality, making strong decisions through soft power will help the world.

These summits became annual events. After demonstrating their success, in 2023, the initiative was transformed into the Global Platform for the Summit of First Ladies and Gentlemen. The Fifth Summit of First Ladies and Gentlemen took place in September 2025, focusing on the theme “Education That Shapes the World.” Despite the ongoing war in Ukraine and the constant bombing of Ukraine’s territory, including the city of Kyiv, participants in the initiative gathered in the Ukrainian capital for a major diplomatic event, demonstrating their support for Ukraine.

³¹⁴ First Ladies and Gentlemen Global Platform, August 23, 2021, <https://2021.summitflg.org/>

I know many women who now work in the diplomatic service and we collaborate on various projects that support Ukraine, ranging from medical evacuations to cultural diplomacy events. I know them as dependable partners and professionals who make Ukraine's voice heard. And I also know how hard it is for them. Because in times of defense, diplomacy is an inseparable aspect."

Olena Zelenska, First Lady of Ukraine³¹⁵

The efforts of Ukrainian women athletes offer striking examples of grassroots diplomacy. Olympic champion, world champion, and two-time European champion in track and field, Yaroslava Mahuchikh, consistently calls on the international community to support Ukraine in resisting Russian aggression. "Ukraine is being destroyed every day, every minute, and we need constant support from everyone who wants to live in a world without war," she wrote on her Instagram page after Russian shelling of the sports school in Dnipro where she had studied.³¹⁶ Well-known Ukrainian tennis player Elina Svitolina established her own foundation in 2019 to support young tennis talents. However, in 2022, following the start of the full-scale invasion, the foundation launched a new line of work: providing emergency assistance to young athletes and their families fleeing the war. A charity auction held in December of that year raised EUR 240,000 in aid for Ukraine. "My goal is to bring together those who support Ukraine. Together with the entire team, we believe in our vic-

³¹⁵ Ukrinform, June 26, 2024, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3878882-zinki-ocoluut-22-ukrainskih-dipmisij-zelenska.html>

³¹⁶ Suspilne Sports, April 2, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/mr7zk368>

tory and are already thinking about the post-war restoration of sports infrastructure,”³¹⁷ she emphasized.

*“The Ukrainian Women’s Fund supported the publication of the book *Ukraine Is Not Silent* about the crimes of Russian aggressors on our territory and about how the state, civil society, and international organizations joined forces to support the survivors. We are now presenting this book at UN venues in New York, at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, and at the EU and NATO in Brussels. Civil society organizations speak at various international forums to defend Ukraine’s interests. This is the type of people’s diplomacy that is extremely important.”*

**Natalia Karbowska,
Director, Strategic Development,
Ukrainian Women’s Fund**

All these efforts indicate that Ukraine pursues its own path in promoting gender equality in the sphere of diplomacy. To a certain extent, understandably, these processes have accelerated during the war as a response to the challenges war, to advance Ukraine’s experience, and to bring Ukraine closer to Victory. Such efforts will remain crucial during the post-war recovery of the country and Ukraine’s further integration into the European community.

³¹⁷ Svitolina Foundation, December 2, 2022, <https://www.elinasvitolinafoundation.org/ua/news/gala2022>

SECTION 22. SUSTAINABLE AND JUST PEACE: WOMEN'S VISION AND PARTICIPATION

To write on the topic of peacebuilding is difficult when smartphones constantly blare air raid alerts announcing incoming russian bombs. Both national and international media report that during the summer of 2025, because of relentless bombardment, Ukraine had no quiet nights. According to The Washington Post, the number of russian attacks since the beginning of 2025 has increased more than fivefold. In just June and July, the aggressor launched 11,739 drones, a record since the start of the full-scale war. Over those two months, russia also attacked Ukraine with 433 cruise and ballistic missiles. “In June and July, russian airstrikes killed 518 civilians and injured more than 1,500 others. According to the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, June and July became the deadliest months for civilians in the country over the past three years.”³¹⁸

According to a poll conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology on September 2–14, 2025, despite these grim figures, 76% of Ukrainians still believe in their country's victory over russia. Survey results also indicated that 82% of respondents view negotiations as a realistic path to ending the war.³¹⁹ Therefore it is not a surprise that the prospects for

³¹⁸ UNIAN, September 8, 2025, <https://www.unian.ua/war/udari-poukrajini-rosiya-pochala-atakuvati-v-p-yat-raziv-chastishe-13123767.html>

³¹⁹ Radio Liberty, September 16, 2025, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-kmis-opytuvannia-viyna-myr/33531840.html>

a peace agreement are being discussed increasingly often, not only among experts but also across broader public forums shaping societal opinion. These discussions involve government representatives and civil society, including women's and human rights organizations. Women's participation in peacebuilding processes is not only a matter of Ukraine's European integration and social consensus, but also an opportunity to strengthen women's influence in shaping gender-sensitive and inclusive decisions at all levels, to achieve more effective negotiation outcomes, and to ensure a sustainable and just peace.

“During armed conflicts, women are more often subjected to genocide, human trafficking, slavery, and sexual violence, all carrying severe health risks and psychological trauma. This alone gives them the right to participate in peace processes. Yet women are not merely passive victims of conflict. Ukraine's example shows that in wartime, their contribution is enormous: on the battlefield, in civil society, and in peacebuilding,” notes Carolyn Chisadza, Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Pretoria.³²⁰ During wartime, women learn to make important decisions independently. However, their influence on official negotiations and post-conflict governance remains limited; men still dominate in these processes. As a result, women's role in achieving peace still is often invisible and undervalued.

At the same time, many Ukrainian women politicians, government officials, diplomats, scholars, and civil society leaders have already gained recognition as skilled communicators in peacebuilding, capable of advocating their positions

³²⁰ Women at War and the Cause of Peace, IPG, May 22, 2025, <https://www.ipg-journal.io/ua/rubriki/demokratichne-suspilstvo/zhinki-na-viini-ta-sprava-miru-2546/>

across various levels, including internationally. On October 1, 2025, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has adopted a resolution entitled “Journalists Matter: the need to step up efforts for the release of Ukrainian journalists held captive by the Russian Federation.” The resolution calls for the release of twenty-six Ukrainian journalists unlawfully held by the Russian Federation and condemns more than 800 crimes committed by Russia against media professionals since the start of its full-scale aggression. The resolution was authored by Yevheniia Kravchuk, a member of Ukraine’s permanent delegation to PACE, a Member of Parliament, and Deputy Chair of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Humanitarian and Information Policy. In 2023, Kateryna Cherepakh, President of La Strada Ukraine, and Natalia Karbowska, Director of Strategic Development, Ukrainian Women’s Fund, addressed the UN Security Council online.³²¹ In March 2025, for the first time, members from Ukraine’s delegation chaired several sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York, while Kateryna Levchenko, the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, moderated an interactive dialogue with youth.³²² “We spoke about Russia’s war crimes against Ukraine, the crimes of genocide, aggression, and crimes against humanity. We raised the issues of killings, torture, sexual violence, rape, and the inhumane treatment of our women, girls, and men by Russian occupiers,” said Mariana Betsa, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, and deputy head of the delegation. “It is important to share our experience, to share that which we are doing now to pro-

³²¹ Ukraine Is No Silent, FOLIO, Kharkiv, page 54.

³²² Ukrinform, March 18, 2025,

<https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3971703-ukraina-v-komisii-oon-zi-stanovisa-zinok-prosuvaie-vlasnij-poradok-dennij-levchenko.html>

tect women, promote gender equality, and, of course, to learn best practices from other countries.”³²³

“Let us recall that at the beginning of russia’s full-scale aggression, Ukraine’s delegations to the European Parliament and the Council of Europe were composed mostly of women — under the law at that time, men of mobilization age were not allowed to leave the country. Our women politicians were those who helped ensure that all the pro-Ukrainian resolutions were adopted.”

Kateryna Levchenko,
Government Commissioner for Gender Policy³²⁴

What should modern approaches to the equal inclusion of women in peacebuilding look like? How can we strengthen the significance of their work at the negotiation table and enhance the necessary skills for participation? These questions have gained particular relevance in Ukrainian society; therefore, these questions were at the center of the expert discussion “Enhancing Women’s Participation in Achieving Sustainable and Just Peace,” organized by the Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association JurFem, the Ukrainian Women’s Fund (UWF), and the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy and held on June 24, 2025. Among the participants were members of parliament, representatives of government institutions, diplomatic missions, and many civil society organizations — Arm Women Now, the Ukrainian Women’s Congress, Numo, Sestry!, SEMA Ukraine, The Day

³²³ Ukrinform, March 15, 2025, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3970819-ukraina-v-komisii-oon-zi-stanovisa-zinok-rozpovidae-pro-zlocini-rosii-zastupnica-glavi-mzs.html>

³²⁴ Ukraine Is Not Silent, FOLIO, Kharkiv, page 54.

After, La Strada Ukraine, Divchata, the Women's Information Consultative Center, the Women's Political Action Community Alliance, and others. This powerful representation underscored the importance of the topics raised for discussion. Participants were invited to present expert perspectives on the key elements of sustainable and just peace, including justice, institutional reforms, inclusivity, recovery, European integration, national unity, and reintegration of veterans.

Following the meeting, an analytical brief "Women's Participation in Achieving Sustainable and Just Peace: Challenges and Recommendations,"³²⁵ was prepared by Kateryna Shunevych, Head of the Analytical Center JurFem, and consultants Mariia Hrytsyshyn, Maria Zheltukha, and Kateryna Pylypenko. The brief serves as an agreement between parties ready to cooperate, defining the characteristics of such collaboration. The document establishes reasons, requirements, and objectives for developing future projects. According to its authors, the analytical brief is intended to form the basis for developing political frameworks and guidelines on ensuring Ukrainian women's participation in peace negotiations and peacebuilding processes. It should also serve as a reference point for future strategies and public policies.

According to the text in the brief, "In the twelfth year of the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine and the fourth year of full-scale invasion, amid significant humanitarian challenges, the continued occupation of parts of (Ukraine's) territory, constant Russian attacks, and the unwavering resistance of the Ukrainian people, the issue of establishing the foundations of a just and sustainable peace based on democratic values, human rights, security guarantees, and Ukraine's membership in the European Union becomes de-

³²⁵ <https://jurfem.com.ua/uchast-zhinok-analitychnyy-bryf/>

cisive. Achieving this goal requires the inclusion of women in international negotiations and peacebuilding processes to ensure that their needs and interests are adequately represented at all levels.”

Social Consensus on Peace

Structurally, the analytical brief is divided into sections reflecting the agenda of the expert discussion and the key themes in the peacebuilding process:

- What are the elements of achieving sustainable and just peace, and how are these interconnected?
- The European integration process and gender-sensitive recovery: how to integrate European equality standards?
- Women as actors in achieving sustainable and just peace, their visibility and presence in this process, including in negotiations: what barriers exist and where are changes observed?
- How can women be represented in areas where they remain less visible or engaged? Which political, legal, or institutional tools can facilitate this?
- Which specific areas of the peacebuilding process require women’s involvement most urgently?
- What level of women leaders and what competencies should be engaged in achieving sustainable and just peace in Ukraine?
- What issues reflecting the interests and needs of diverse groups of women and men should be included in the negotiation process, and how can their advocacy be ensured?

At the top of this list is identifying the formula and key components for peace. The brief outlines two fundamental elements: any peace concluded after the end of conflict must be both sustainable and just.

The goal of sustainable peace is to prevent a renewed es-

calation of conflict and to create conditions for restoring public trust. The authors of the document emphasize that it is a “long-term process based on addressing the causes of conflict, building resilient institutions, restoring the economy, strengthening the rule of law, fostering a culture of non-violence, and ensuring equality.” Meanwhile, “just peace is founded on the restoration of violated rights, access to justice, accountability, both individual and state, for human rights violations and international crimes, and guarantees of reparations for those affected.” Under conditions of just peace, victims receive needed assistance and protection, society evolves based on mutual trust, while the logic of a sustainable peace ensures the continuity of such processes. Both concepts are interconnected and cannot be viewed separately.

Ukraine’s official strategy for defining the conditions of a sustainable and just peace was set out in President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s Peace Formula, presented at the G20 Summit in Indonesia in November 2022.³²⁶ However, there is still no unified understanding within Ukrainian society as to “red lines” that cannot be breached and acceptable terms for effective negotiations. These issues have yet to become part of public discussion or structured communication between state institutions and the public. The lack of shared positions, including gender-sensitive ones, is often explained by emerging divides among different social groups. For example, many internally displaced persons, mostly women, remain “outsiders” in local communities that do not address their rehabilitation needs or specific vulnerabilities, which leads to repeated traumatization. For them, the issue of peace means restoring life balance, receiving compensation for lost or abandoned

³²⁶ https://www.president.gov.ua/storage/j-files-storage/01/19/45/a0284f6fdc92f8e4bd595d4026734bba_1691475944.pdf

property, and holding accountable those responsible for their suffering. Yet these women often lack platforms for dialogue with other groups, where they could express their views and defend their positions.

The analytical brief notes that similar misunderstandings may arise in other contexts “Between those who stayed in Ukraine and those for whom it was necessary to go abroad; between military personnel and those who did not take part in combat; between those who survived captivity or unlawful detention and those who did not; between citizens who lost homes, property, or loved ones and those who suffered no comparable losses; between those who endured war crimes and those who did not. Such differences in experience create potential grounds for conflict, hindering civic unity and social cohesion.” A substantial number of Ukrainian women were forced to leave the country because of Russian aggression and remain abroad. On one hand, the state faces difficulties ensuring their rights and needs in foreign countries; on the other, it lacks mechanisms to encourage their return and full participation in peacebuilding and recovery. Some may dismiss this as a secondary issue, “they went abroad, so they’ll stay there.” Yet we are speaking of millions of Ukrainian women and youth who also have the right to define their country’s peaceful future.

The authors of the analytical brief presented recommendations to address current challenges in this area. Experts emphasize that establishing a just peace must include such crucial components as justice, accountability for war crimes and other violations, including CRSV, reparations for victims (restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of non-repetition). Forgetting these principles would mean undermining social consensus and mutual understanding. After all, a woman or girl who has survived

sexual violence by russian servicemen is unlikely to accept “reconciliation” or “forgiveness” as normal. At the same time, sustainable peace must rest on social and economic reintegration, support for affected communities, rebuilding quality infrastructure and public services, institutional and democratic reforms, reforms in the security and justice sectors, inclusivity, full participation of women and youth in decision-making, and the development of a culture of dialogue. The concepts of a sustainable and just peace must be aligned with Ukrainian society to form the foundation for a unified national policy and coherent external communication with international partners. Also, clear “red lines” must be defined and formally established regarding issues unacceptable for Ukraine in future peace agreements (for example, impunity for war crimes, including CRSV, or any renunciation of territory). These positions must be consistently communicated both domestically and internationally. And women must be part of these transformations. The war has drawn a line that must prevent long-standing gender inequalities from being carried over into a post-conflict future.

The Multifaceted Nature of Peacemaking

In global practice, women’s involvement in peacemaking is viewed as a multifaceted process. To build peace, women can participate in political negotiations, peacekeeping operations, humanitarian aid for conflict-affected populations, and a wide range of civic initiatives.

In 2025, there was much discussion about the possibility that US President Donald Trump could receive the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in mediating conflicts across in various parts of the world. According to reports from The White House, his nomination was supported by the leaders of several countries, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Israel, Cam-

bodia, Rwanda, Gabon, and the government of Pakistan.³²⁷ However, the prestigious award was granted to María Corina Machado, the leader of Venezuela's democratic opposition, "for her tireless work promoting democratic rights for the people of Venezuela and for her struggle to achieve a just and peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy."³²⁸ This decision became yet another recognition by the international community of the critical role of women in peacebuilding.

The Nobel Peace Prize, first awarded in 1901, was created according to the final will of Alfred Nobel, who stipulated that it should be given to people who have "done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses."³²⁹ As early as 1905, the laureate was a woman, Bertha von Suttner, an Austrian novelist, radical pacifist, author of *Lay Down Your Arms!* and who served as honorary president of the International Peace Bureau in Bern. She was recognized "for her efforts to promote peace in Europe." During the subsequent 124 years, the Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to twenty women and to ninety-two men, including prominent human rights defenders, missionaries, diplomats, journalists, professional politicians, and activists.³³⁰ The youngest laureate was also a woman, Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani human rights advocate, received the prize in 2014 when she was just seventeen years old. In 2018,

³²⁷ TSN, August 13, 2025, <https://tsn.ua/svit/bilyy-dim-vysunuv-trampa-na-nobelivsku-premiu-khto-vvazaye-yoho-prezydentom-myr-2890034.html>

³²⁸ Sudovo-Yurydychna Hazeta, October 10, 2025, <https://sud.ua/uk/news/abroad/343276-lider-venesuelskoy-oppozitsii-mariya-machado-poluchila-nobelevskuyu-premiyu-mira>

³²⁹ Gendermuseum, <https://tinyurl.com/ysuh9pm2>

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

Nadia Murad, an Iraqi human rights activist, received the Nobel Peace Prize “for her efforts to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict.” She developed global standard for effectively and ethically documenting conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and for working with survivors, standards known as the “Murad Code.” “The Code is rooted in international law, including “the fundamental human rights of survivors, such as the rights to dignity, privacy, health, security, access to justice, truth, and an effective remedy,” states the preamble of the document.³³¹ The principles of the Murad Code are now applied by Ukrainian law enforcement officers when recording and investigating Russia’s war crimes in Ukraine and in developing an effective support system for survivors of CRSV, as part of broader peacebuilding efforts.

In 2022, the Ukrainian human rights organization Center for Civil Liberties, led by activist Oleksandra Matviichuk, also received the Nobel Peace Prize. “The people of Ukraine want peace more than anyone else. But there will be no peace if a country whose territories have been seized stops its resistance. That will not be peace, but occupation,” she emphasized during the award ceremony.

This statement reflects a crucial truth: peace often must be defended, even with weapons in hand, and women have also taken up this mission. The Ministry of Defense of Ukraine reported an increase in the number of women applying to join the Armed Forces through recruitment centers. The highest numbers were recorded in Chernivtsi (43%), Khmelnytskyi (42%), and Ternopil (37%) regions. “The share of women among candidates joining the Defense Forces has grown to

³³¹ SEMA Ukraine, <https://semaukraine.org.ua/menu/view?slug=kodeks-nadiyi-murat>

21%.” The most in-demand positions among women include UAV operators, drivers, and rifle specialists.

Many women who joined the well-known mobile fire unit “Bucha Witches” did so out of a desire to protect their families and restore peace to their homeland. The volunteer unit, members of which are 90% women, patrols territories, guards critical infrastructure, and, most importantly, detects and destroys enemy drones, including Iranian Shahed-136 and Gerbera kamikaze drones, during air threats.³³² The women work in shifts, one day on duty, three days in civilian life. Their peaceful professions include teachers, kindergarten educators, and even a veterinary doctor. “I dedicated my entire life to children and family. When the war began, I picked up a weapon. It seemed terribly heavy. I did not know how to hold it or handle it... But they taught me,” said a fighter with the call sign Valkyrie. The unit’s commander added that if volunteers are given man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), the women will also be trained to shoot down missiles.³³³

One Ukrainian feminist posted on Facebook: “People ask me, ‘What do you need in the army as a woman?’ My answer: I need a weapon.” This stance contrasts sharply with the views of some Western feminists, who at the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion insisted that Ukraine should not be provided with weapons, arguing that this would only escalate the conflict. Traditional feminist foreign policy often promotes disarmament and encourages women to engage in peaceful activism. Ukrainian feminists, however, hold a different view of peace-making. As researcher Daria Tsymbalyuk and artist and writer Iryna Zamuruieva explain, “Our understanding of feminism is

³³² THEBUCHACITY, March 14, 2025, <https://thebuchacity.com/bojovividmy-buchi-zhinky-yaki-staly-na-zahyst-gromady/>

³³³ Vechirnyy Kyiv, October 6, 2025, <https://vechirniy.kyiv.ua/news/118183/>

active, intersectional struggle with the goal of eliminating all forms of oppression. It is about helping the oppressed survive. The war in Ukraine is a specific form of oppression; russian imperialism poses an existential threat to our homeland. For us, overcoming russian oppression begins with resistance.”³³⁴ They further note, “As feminists, we are critical of militarization. We do not support the military-industrial complex or the global arms trade. But in russia’s war against Ukraine, for us the only ethical feminist position is to advocate for more weapons for our country since russia’s war crimes have left us with no choice other than to campaign for additional military aid so that we can defend ourselves and survive. Why do we need more weapons? Because our home is in danger.”³³⁵ The activism and determination of Ukrainian women in the war against russian aggression are already influencing global feminism and reshaping modern approaches to peacebuilding.

“As a feminist, I say #ArmUkraineNow. And then I will develop a feminist international policy rooted in our reality as it is and not fantasies about pink unicorns. A policy that recognizes existing problems and threats, is sensitive to wars of liberation, and pushes governments to give immediate aid to those who defend themselves, those who fight for freedom.”

**Tamara Zlobina,
philosopher, cultural studies scholar,
and editor-in-chief of *Gender in Detail***³³⁶

³³⁴ Gender in Detail, May 13, 2022,

<https://genderindetail.org.ua/season-topic/dosvidy-viyny/chomu-miyak-feministky-povynni-lobiyuvati-zbroyu-dlya-ukraini.html>

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Texty.org.ua, December 5, 2025,

<https://texty.org.ua/fragments/106662/zahidni-feministky-zaklykayut-ne-davaty-ukrayini-zbroyu-chomu-ce-slipa-ta-hanebna-pozyciya-pohlyad/>

Facts indicate the growing role of women in the security and defense sector. At the same time, the analytical brief underscores that their participation in formal decision-making at all levels remains limited and unsystematic. Women are insufficiently represented in key leadership positions across fifteen security and defense institutions (in Ukraine). Among servicewomen, despite their large numbers in the security and defense forces, high military ranks are rarely conferred. “This indicates structural barriers that constrain women’s advancement to leadership roles in defense and security.”³³⁷ This, in turn, narrows their influence on the effectiveness of peacebuilding.

Since 1992, Ukraine has been participating in UN peacekeeping missions. “Ukrainian peacekeepers have served under the auspices of the UN and NATO in the former Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Eastern Slavonia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, Croatia), on the African continent (Angola, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Liberia, and Côte d’Ivoire), in the Middle East and Central Asia (Lebanon, Tajikistan, Kuwait, Iraq), and other regions of the world.”³³⁸ Over the span of twenty-seven years, 45,000 Armed Forces of Ukraine personnel have participated, with very few women among them. For example, in 2019 “...only three women servicemembers were on peacekeeping assignments: as UN observers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Republic of South Sudan, and as a staff officer in the Joint Peacekeeping Forces in the Security Zone of the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova.”³³⁹

³³⁷ <https://jurfem.com.ua/uchast-zhinok-analitychnyy-bryf/>, page 15-16.

³³⁸ Army Inform, July 9, 2019, <https://armyinform.com.ua/2019/07/09/u-lavah-ukrayinskyh-myrotvorcziv-sluzh/>

³³⁹ Ibid.

Major Inna Zavorotko has served since January 2021 as a member of Ukraine's national contingent in a UN Mission, as a staff officer with (the UN peacekeeping mission) MONUSCO. She participated in the evacuation of civilians during the eruption of Nyiragongo volcano near the city of Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo.³⁴⁰ According to her, "the previous rotation of the 18th Separate Helicopter Detachment of the Armed Forces of Ukraine was the first time since Ukraine had participated in the Congo mission that a woman was part of the personnel." Her position was as a signals operator responsible for sending coded military messages. "In the current rotation there are two such women, and both are officers. Of course, two out of 250 is absolutely insufficient," the peacekeeper emphasized. "Representatives of other nations in mission headquarters say this all the time. For example, inspection teams visiting the contingent stress that this share is unacceptable. And Ukraine is not the only country in MONUSCO. We have Uruguayans and Indians, and their share of women is much higher." Other facts support this: in 2018, Vietnam sent its first woman peacekeeper to the UN mission in South Sudan. "As of May 2023, of the 529 soldiers deployed in UN peacekeeping mission, eighty-one were women, including twelve women officers deployed individually, twenty-one women soldiers in Engineer Team No. 1, and forty-eight women soldiers in the Level 2 field hospitals of Vietnam."³⁴¹

Ukraine's participation in international peacekeeping operations was seen mainly as an opportunity to gain modern experience in organizing an army and conducting combat. Today, Ukraine is sharing tactical and strategic wartime experience

³⁴⁰ NAKO, December 10, 2021, <https://nako.org.ua/news/eksklyuzivne-intervyu-z-odnijeyu-z-ukrayinskix-mirotvoric>

³⁴¹ Vietnam.vn, December 5, 2023, <https://www.vietnam.vn/uk/cac-nu-quan-nhan-viet-nam-tich-cuc-tham-gia-gin-giu-hoa-binh>

with other countries, such as training Polish and Danish personnel to shoot down drones, as unidentified objects increasingly appear in the skies over Western Europe. However, peacekeeping is also about forging cooperation with foreign colleagues, and this form of peacemaking remains highly relevant, as does involving Ukrainian women in these missions. During the Russia-Ukraine War, women have rapidly gained combat-operations skills and honed the ability to defend state interests for future negotiations. In the postwar period, they could become a significant talent pool for international peacekeeping.

How to Become a Negotiator

According to the annual Global Peace Index (GPI),³⁴² there were fifty-nine active armed conflicts worldwide in 2025, the highest number since World War II. “All of them result in significant loss of life; GPI 2024 estimates that around 152,000 people were killed in wars last year.”³⁴³ While women and men are among those killed, at the same time, research also shows that men continue to dominate peace talks; in recent years, women have accounted for only 9.6% of negotiators, 13.7% of mediators, and 26.6% of signatories.³⁴⁴ In Ukraine, during twelve years of Russian aggression, women were included only once in an official delegation to talks on settling the conflict. A paradox emerges: gender stereotypes have been overcome in mobilizing women, in combat participation, and in military specialties (there are women tank operators, snipers, intelligence officers, UAV operators, and deminers), but not when it comes to making peace and drafting gender-sensitive peace documents.

³⁴² <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/GPI-2025-web.pdf>

³⁴³ Chas.News, September 18, 2025, <https://chas.news/current/den-mirupid-chas-viini-skilki-zbroiniv-konfliktiv-trivae-u-sviti>

³⁴⁴ Gender in Detail, May 21, 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/mcmv52y4>

Why is women's participation in negotiations crucial? Above all, because together with men, women can make the negotiation agenda and outcomes completer and more multidimensional, reflecting the interests and needs of diverse population groups, especially those harmed by the aggressor's crimes, which often include women, children, and the elderly. Women often have broader access to communities, can better convey local sentiments and aspirations, and are more focused on community recovery and compensation for conflict-related harms. Their community authority strengthens their influence on the social reintegration of servicewomen and servicemen. Women's participation broadens the scope of issues discussed and improves the prospects for effective implementation of decisions. According to the Peace Research Institute Oslo (2015), peace agreements concluded with women's participation are 35% more likely to remain in force for more than fifteen years.

While global practice offers only a limited number of examples of women at the negotiation table, these examples demonstrate the success of such approaches. In the final phase of the 2003 peace talks that aimed to end the war in the DRC, forty women (about 11% of all delegates) were admitted. They secured concrete gender provisions in the agreement: creation of rehabilitation centers for women and girls affected by the war; a 30% quota for women in all state bodies; changes to laws that discriminated against women; and raising the minimum marriage age for girls up to age 18.³⁴⁵ In the Philippines, Miriam Coronel-Ferrer, leading the government team, in 2013 became the first woman to head peace talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and signed a peace deal with the insurgent group. Women insisted on important provisions in that agreement to

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

safeguard women's political rights and establishing protections for women in a post-conflict society.³⁴⁶

Ukraine is studying other practices while, at the same time is developing its own vision for women's participation in negotiation-based peacemaking. The analytical brief emphasizes, "Public aspiration lies in ensuring the direct and genuine participation of Ukrainian women leaders in peace processes at regional, national, and international levels, including as negotiators, and in strengthening the competencies they need for this role." The most important step forward is structured cooperation on these issues among government, civil society, and international organizations.

"I had an extremely difficult experience in peace talks with the russians. And I want to say... that a woman may be more attentive to detail, and when choosing between herself and the country, she will always choose the country. When choosing between one's own 'ego' and a decision that must deliver results for those on whose behalf you are negotiating, she will choose the latter, forgetting about herself."

Iryna Herashchenko,
"Women in Local Self-Government: Role and Impact on Policy" panel,
Ukrainian Women's Congress,
Cherkasy, March 28, 2025³⁴⁷

In spring 2025, Anastasiia Nenka, Director, Women's Information Consultative Center, addressed a letter to the President of Ukraine regarding the inclusion of women in the negotia-

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=643115395243788>

tion process (Office of the President Letter No. 43-01/140 dated March 20, 2025). The initiative was not coincidental: the prospects and formats for a potential Ukrainian-russian peace meeting were being actively discussed, and civil society was eager to contribute. The Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy supported the proposal, and soon afterward, potential female candidates for participation in peace talks were considered during the expert discussion “Women’s Participation in Achieving Sustainable and Just Peace.”

Criteria for Selecting Women Negotiators

According to experts, the primary selection criterion for any negotiators should be professional competence. Candidates must have experience in human rights advocacy, law, public administration or self-governance, or service and work in the security sector. Equally important are key competencies, including crisis management, gender and legal expertise, knowledge of international law and justice, analytical thinking skills, and fluency in English, essential for international communication. Additional assets include skills in mediation, dialogue, and communication, as well as psychological resilience. Based on these criteria, participants of the expert discussion compiled a list of potential women negotiators, and the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy sent formal proposals in a letter to Rustem Umerov, Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine.

Among the suggested candidates were: Olha Aivazovska, international expert in electoral processes, human rights, and legislative development, and chair of OPORA, and who participated in the Trilateral Contact Group on Donbas conflict settlement in 2016–2018; Larysa Denysenko, writer and human rights defender, one of the lawyers representing Ukrainian citizens before the European Court of Human Rights (Strasbourg); Khry-

styna Kit, Chair of the Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association JurFem, Lesia Ohryzko, specialist in international relations and security, co-founder and director, Sahaidachnyi Security Center, Tetiana Pechonchuk, chair of the ZMINA Human Rights Center; Olena Sotnyk, Director of Rasmussen Global Ukraine and adviser to the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. “Involving women is not just a manifestation of equality, but a strategic necessity for our state, which seeks to build a sustainable future based on the principles of democracy, inclusivity, and dignity,” stated the invitation letter.

“There has already been prior experience of including women in negotiation formats in Ukraine. For example, Presidential Decree No. 167/2020 of May 19, 2020, included Yuliia Svyrydenko, then Deputy Minister for Economic Development, Trade, and Agriculture, as a representative in the working group on social and economic issues, and Halyna Tretiakova, Chair of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Social Policy and Veterans’ Rights, as a representative in the humanitarian working group of the Trilateral Contact Group. However, since 2022, this positive practice has not been continued. Presidential Decrees No. 306/2025 (May 15, 2025), No. 359/2025 (June 1, 2025), and No. 539/2025 (July 22, 2025) “On the Delegation of Ukraine for Participation in Negotiations with International Partners and Representatives of the Russian Federation on Achieving a Just and Sustainable Peace revealed a complete absence of women among delegation members.”

***Kateryna Levchenko,
Government Commissioner for Gender Policy***

Although none of the proposed candidates were included in the official delegation in 2025, there are now grounds for

optimism that this situation may change. Ukrainian society is evolving, and Russian aggression has significantly accelerated its modernization and embrace of European values. The involvement of women in peacebuilding processes has become an urgent social demand, and women leaders and activists are ready to take on this responsibility. Women's and human rights organizations are actively discussing the agenda for peace negotiations, submitting their own proposals, and advocating for gender-sensitive approaches to a sustainable and just peace. They are also engaging in consultative and training initiatives to enhance the competencies of women negotiators and to help shape Ukraine's negotiation position in future peace talks with Russia and other international efforts aimed at safeguarding Ukraine's national interests.

A partner for Ukraine is the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS), established at Georgetown University (Washington, DC, USA) and led now for many years by Melanne Verbeke, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues (2009–2013) and OSCE Special Representative for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (2015–2020). In cooperation with leaders of Ukrainian civil society within "Women Leaders. Coalition for the Future of Ukraine Summit," the GIWPS developed an analytical paper titled "Ten-Point Compact for Ukraine's Just and Sustainable Peace."³⁴⁸ The document outlines ten critically important actions the international community should take to secure a sustainable and just peace in Ukraine. These include support for Ukraine's sovereignty over the occupied territories; concrete and comprehensive security guarantees; ensuring

³⁴⁸ 10-Point Compact for Ukraine's Just and Sustainable Peace
https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/10-Point-Compact_Ukraine_4Page_Ukrainian.pdf

Ukraine's full participation in political negotiations; protection of civilians; holding the Russian Federation legally and financially accountable for war crimes; recognizing women's participation in peace processes; ensuring a just, inclusive, and gender-responsive recovery; and countering disinformation while strengthening independent media.

The need for principled global action has never been more urgent, and the proposed approaches can serve as guiding principles for the international community in achieving a just, durable, and inclusive peace in Ukraine.

SECTION 23. WORLD FEDERATION OF UKRAINIAN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

The World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations (WFUWO) is often described as the voice of Ukrainian women and a representative of Ukrainian interests worldwide. Holding senior positions in governments and parliaments of their countries, working in business and media, dedicating themselves to academic research, and realizing their potential in many other fields, Ukrainian women abroad help shape a positive image of Ukraine, strengthen international support for its position, especially during the Russia-Ukraine war, and influence consequential decisions of the global political community in Ukraine's favor. Their role in peacebuilding processes is also significant.

In the early years of Ukraine's independence, the first people to return to their ancestral homeland were Ukrainian women from the diaspora. American and Canadian journalists and civic activists were accredited in Kyiv. They could be seen in the press gallery of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, and at the weekly press conferences organized by the Popular Movement of Ukraine Rukh, preparing materials for their media outlets and reporting on the ideas and debates unfolding in the young independent state. At the same time, they actively engaged with Ukrainian journalists, members of parliament, and civil society leaders, helping to build bridges to the free world.

Among them were Marta Kolomayets, Christine Lapichak, Marta Dychok, Mary Mycio, Chrystia Freeland and her moth-

er Halyna Chomiak Freeland, Natalka Feduschak, Christine Demkovych, Irene Jarosewich, and Nadia Diuk.

Most of these women lived and continue to live with a deep love for Ukraine in their hearts. Marta Kolomayets, representing the US-based newspaper *The Ukrainian Weekly* in Ukraine, and recorded testimonies of Holodomor survivors. These testimonies were later transferred to the US Library of Congress and, in 2018, played an critical role providing information for the adoption of a US Congressional Resolution on the Holodomor. Staying in Ukraine, she served as director of the Fulbright Program in Ukraine, became a co-founder and chair of the board of the Ukrainian Women's Fund, led educational initiatives, supported the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity. In 2002, she presented the documentary chronicle *Patriarch Josyf Slipyj*, for which she was one of the producers. "Later, Marta Kolomayets would acknowledge that Patriarch Josyf seemed to have articulated her own life credo: 'Evil cannot exist for long; good will always prevail.'"³⁴⁹

In Kyiv, Irene Jarosewich served as Director of Public Relations for the American-German-Dutch-Ukrainian Joint Venture UTEL where she directed a multi-year campaign with the goal of promoting the change of Ukraine's international country code from 07 to 380. As a result of this change, all international phone calls to and from Ukraine no longer were routed through Moscow, which became an important symbolic and financial step along the path of Ukraine's independence.

Chrystia Freeland went on to serve as Canada's Minister of International Trade and later as Minister of Foreign Affairs. When taking the oath of office, she placed her hand on

³⁴⁹ Ukrainian Catholic University, August 17, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/cyf6x9z2>

a Ukrainian Gospel and concluded her remarks in Ukrainian with the words “Diakuii! (Thank you).” In November 2019, she was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs of Canada. In November 2025, she visited Kyiv as Canada’s Special Representative for Ukraine’s Reconstruction, holding meetings with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and other senior officials to discuss support for frontline regions and the rehabilitation of veterans. On 5 January 2026, Chrystia Freeland was appointed a non-staff adviser to the President of Ukraine on economic development.³⁵⁰

Other representatives of the diaspora also demonstrated influence not only on the development of political processes in Ukraine but also on the advancement of its positions internationally. “I first came to Ukraine in 1992, when my mother, sister, and I visited our relatives,” recalled Marta Kichorowska Kebalo, a member of the Ukrainian National Women’s League of America and a doctor of anthropology. “In 1998, I had the opportunity to come to Ukraine for an oral history conference in Cherkasy, and that was when the idea for a study I wanted to conduct based on materials from the Cherkasy region was born. In 2000, I lived in Cherkasy, traveled to villages, district centers, and towns, and interviewed women who were actively engaged in women’s initiatives. In my dissertation, I sought to describe how the women’s movement developed during that period.” (In 2011, Marta Kebalo defended her dissertation, “Personal Narratives of Women’s Leadership and Community Activism in Cherkasy Oblast” at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York—

³⁵⁰ Presidential Decree No. 15/2026 dated January 5, 2026, https://president.gov.ua/documents/152026-57925?fbclid=IwY2xjawPIZcdleHRuA2FlbQIxMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZAEwAAEeR6YfinZW6KCBHvu8_0wCjoFBKk7Jo5VE8iqLQZ1T3YsYIFgZ-d4NHQ3ZW7Y_aem_HgHfRucUCeGYgsAYBxT0GQ

ed.) “After that, unfortunately, I did not visit Ukraine often, but I am glad that I still maintain strong connections with the women who were active participants in the women’s and even feminist movement at the time, and whom I had the opportunity to meet then.”³⁵¹

Marta Kebalo continues to nurture these ties and relationships in her current role as WFUWO’s principal representative to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). She is also the author of the centennial history of the Ukrainian National Women’s League of America, recently published in English (*A Century of Commitment: The UNWLA Story 1925–2025*).³⁵²

Founded in 1925, the Ukrainian National Women’s League of America, the largest Ukrainian women’s organization in the United States, today brings together more than 1,700 members across the country. More than a century ago, the UNWLA united women immigrants who sought not only to support members of the community abroad, but also to preserve cultural traditions and national identity more broadly. Similar Ukrainian women’s organizations were established in other countries where Ukrainians, for various social, economic, or political reasons, found themselves far from their homeland.

As early as 1948, these organizations created a new, powerful structure—the World Federation of Ukrainian Women’s Organizations³⁵³ (WFUWO) that has worked for decades to advance Ukraine’s independence and continues to find its place within a changing historical context. WFUWO sup-

³⁵¹ Gender in Detail, May 31, 2019, <https://genderindetail.org.ua/spetsialni-rubriki/bezstrashni/interv-yu-z-martoyu-kebalo-pro-feministichniy-aktivizm-v-ukrainskiy-diaspori-1341066.html>

³⁵² *A Century of Commitment: The UNWLA Story, 1925–2025* by Martha Kichorowska Kebalo, 2025. See UNWLA.org.

³⁵³ <https://tinyurl.com/3469zxwf>

ports the development of the women's movement in Ukraine, fosters women leaders in the civic sector, develops mechanisms of influence to advance Ukrainian interests through the governments of host countries, and coordinates joint efforts on these issues with Ukrainian governmental institutions and colleagues abroad.

Today, WFUWO is a strong and influential voice of Ukrainian women beyond Ukraine's borders. On September 19–21, 2025, WFUWO held its International European Conference in Málaga, Spain, under the slogan “The Voice of Ukrainian Women Worldwide for Ukraine: Advocacy, Truth, Unity,” bringing together Ukrainian women from more than 20 countries. “The potential for our cooperation with Ukrainian women's organizations, and for partnerships with WFUWO and the Ukrainian diaspora, is high. Women's organizations in Ukraine are ready for this,” noted one of the conference participants, Olesia Bondar, Director of the Ukrainian Women's Fund. Today, such cooperation among Ukrainian women worldwide carries tremendous significance in the context of Ukraine's future.

A Representative of Ukrainian Women Worldwide

The World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations became the first international association of Ukrainian women outside Ukraine.

“What motivates us to unite? When we unite, we are a force. Then we are hard to destroy, you understand? By uniting, Ukrainian women want to be involved in great causes—not only in their own country, but in large-scale, global ones.”

**Jaroslava Hartanyi,
President of WFUWO**

Accordingly, as a global association of Ukrainian women, WFUWO became one of the founding members of the Ukrainian World Congress (UWC) in 1967. Today, the UWC is the most powerful structure representing the interests of more than 20 million Ukrainians in the diaspora. Moreover, a representative of WFUWO has the right to hold the position of Second Vice President of the UWC without election.

“WFUWO was an ambitious vision and a unique structure, the first international network of the Ukrainian global diaspora.”

***Maria Finiw,
Second Vice President of WFUWO,
United Kingdom***

The establishment of WFUWO at the World Congress of Ukrainian Women in 1948 in Philadelphia (United States) was truly an extraordinary event. Humanity was recovering from the tragedies of World War II, and millions of migrants were seeking new lives in other countries. One could assume that Ukrainians abroad would have been primarily concerned with survival and adaptation, finding work, and supporting their families. Instead, they focused on mutual support and on Ukraine. They sought to stay together and help one another so as not to “dissolve” into other societies, to preserve national traditions and faith, and not to forget their native language. As a result, Ukrainian schools, cooperatives, community groups, literary clubs, and civic organizations were established, with women showing initiative in all these endeavors. “After World War II, the women’s movement gained such momentum that for a long time it outpaced men’s initiatives,” notes Jaroslava Hartyanyi.³⁵⁴

³⁵⁴ Rfi , September 20, 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/2hd7sd6w>

Organizations of Ukrainian women advocated for women's rights and raised issues such as protection from excessive labor. Initially, they operated mainly within individual countries and lacked systematic coordination with similar organizations abroad. Over time, this changed: WFUWO became a hub capable of coordinating joint efforts, responding to current challenges, facilitating the exchange of experience, and influencing policies both in their countries of residence and on the international stage. The founders of WFUWO were ten women's organizations representing not only different countries, but different continents: the Ukrainian National Women's League of America; the Ukrainian Gold Cross (United States); the Olha Basarab Ukrainian Women's Organization of Canada; the Ukrainian Catholic Women's League of Canada; the Association of Ukrainian Women in Germany; the Union of Ukrainian Women in France; the Ukrainian Women's Organization of Great Britain; the Association of Ukrainian Women in Belgium; the Union of Ukrainian Women in Argentina; and the Ukrainian Women's Organization of Brazil. Today, WFUWO brings together 47 Ukrainian women's organizations on all continents—25 full member organizations and 22 supporting organizations. The magazine *Ukrainian Woman in the World* («Українка в світі»), published by WFUWO since 1963, features a map³⁵⁵ showing WFUWO's current member organizations: from the United States (two organizations), Canada (four), the United Kingdom, France, Australia, Germany, Italy (three), Argentina (three), Belgium, Brazil, Estonia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Turkey, and Sweden; as well as supporting organizations from Moldova, the United Arab Emirates, South Africa, Romania, Slovenia, Turkey, Hungary, Switzerland, Azerbai-

³⁵⁵ *Ukrainka v Sviti*, Nos 216-217, 2024.

jan, India, Israel, Spain, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, and Lebanon. In 1983, the Executive Board WFUWO's governing body, chose to relocate the organization to Canada and WFUWO home office is in Toronto.

WFUWO represents and consolidates the activities of local Ukrainian women's communities worldwide and presents them within the most influential international structure—the United Nations.

The President of WFUWO is Jaroslava Hartyanyi, a native of the Ternopil region. She served for four years as a representative of Ukrainians in the Hungarian Parliament, led the State Self-Government of Ukrainians in Hungary for fifteen years, and was head of European Congress of Ukrainians. She is currently the President of the Ukrainian Cultural Association in Hungary and the Second Vice President of the change to Ukrainian World Congress. “In 2016, I succeeded in securing a hearing for the Ternopil region in the Hungarian Parliament. No Hungarian region had ever been presented there before, yet everything was organized at the highest level for us,”³⁵⁶ she recalls.

Marta Kolomayets, who was born in Chicago, recalled that at one time her relatives and friends deeply envied representatives of other diasporas with their own independent nations that “had their backs,” while the Ukrainian state did not yet exist. Independence for Ukraine was not merely a dream, independence was a goal toward which Ukrainians abroad directed their efforts through their civic organizations, including WFUWO.

³⁵⁶ ProTe.UA, February 12, 2025, <https://pro.te.ua/2025/02/12/svitovu-federatsiyu-ukrayinskyh-zhinochyh-organizatsij-ocholyuye-urodhenka-ternopilshhyny-yaroslava-hortyani/>

“...Olena Kysilewska, the first President of WFUWO, wrote that the newly established Federation ‘firmly holds the threads of women’s work and strengthens them in service of our greatest idea—the liberation of the Ukrainian nation and securing a rightful place for Ukrainian women in our lives!’”

**Yevheniia Petrova,
Honorary President of WFUWO,
PhD in Philology (Canada)**³⁵⁷

WFUWO initiated and supported a wide range of international activities, including commemorations of key dates related to Ukrainian history and culture, as well as the feminist movement. WFUWO conveyed the truth about the 1932-1933 Holodomor in Ukraine and took part in the work of international organizations as an active hub of global Ukrainian life. WFUWO used diverse media platforms to ensure that the voices of Ukrainian women were heard worldwide. Notably, in 1957, it published a concise history of the Ukrainian women’s movement, *On the Path of Civic Engagement* («На громадський шлях»), by Iryna Pavlykovska.

The establishment of ties with and support for the women’s movement in Ukraine began after the country gained independence. In 1992, Atena Pashko, head of the Union of Ukrainian Women, the first women’s organization revived in independent Ukraine, took part in the Sixth Congress of WFUWO. Subsequently, cooperation was established with the National Council of Women of Ukraine and its President, Doctor of Medical Sciences and Professor Liudmyla Porokhniak-Hanovska, who participated in WFUWO events for many years. This mutual understanding and coordination

³⁵⁷ Ukrainka v Sviti, Nos 216-217, 2024.

of efforts were not accidental: both organizations consider it essential to advance gender equality on a global scale, involve women in peacebuilding and development processes, and expand women's participation in public administration and decision-making.

WFUWO also succeeded in developing close cooperation with the International Institute of Education, Culture, and Diaspora Relations (IIECDR) at Lviv Polytechnic National University. The partners implement joint projects and exchange experience. WFUWO's Annual Meetings have been held repeatedly at Lviv Polytechnic—an acknowledgment of the strong ties between the women's movement in Ukraine and abroad. According to IIECDR representatives, Director Iryna Kliuchkovska and leading philologist Olha Rusnak, the global Ukrainian women's movement absorbed the core principles of the international feminist movement, while prioritizing national liberation, enlightenment, and a comprehensive educational agenda: "This is a unique world that has operated throughout history by its own rules: whenever repression on the native land targeted people, their ideas, causes, and even institutions emigrated abroad with those who survived, taking root in new environments. Yet at all stages, WFUWO was guided by two constants—God and Ukraine—which sustained and inspired it, whether in times of statelessness, during the building of the Ukrainian state, in the years of COVID-19, or today amid the extremely difficult war waged by russia against Ukraine."³⁵⁸

In March 2015, the 59th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women was held in New York. A delegation from Ukraine participated, including government officials, members of parliament, diplomats, and civil society

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

representatives. A side event was held on Ukrainian women's right to peace and protection amid Russia's aggression and the occupation of parts of Ukraine's territory. The Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the UN, the Ukrainian human rights organizations La Strada Ukraine and the Women's Information and Consultative Center, together with WFUWO organized the event. Hosted at UN Headquarters, the event drew such interest that there were not enough seats; participants even sat on the floor. The personal contacts established and strengthened at that time paved the way for further active cooperation between WFUWO and the women's movement in Ukraine: both sides intensified communication, provided mutual expert support, and organized joint initiatives.

Contacts with Ukrainian government institutions also grew stronger, particularly with the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy. WFUWO monitors developments in gender policy in Ukraine and interprets, within its own context, the National Action Plans for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 developed by the Ukrainian government, both the first plan adopted in 2016 and the second adopted in 2020.

“Ukrainian women and men abroad are a target group of the new, third National Action Plan 1325 through 2030. Working with them should involve not only diplomatic and consular institutions but also civil society organizations such as WFUWO.”

***Kateryna Levchenko,
Government Commissioner
of Ukraine for Gender Policy***

WFUWO's support for Ukraine's ratification of the Istanbul Convention was also significant; its positive position be-

came an additional argument in favor of adopting the decision in 2022.

On the International Stage

The contemporary Ukrainian women's movement worldwide is highly diverse. In the United States and Canada, it is grounded in experience and tradition, while in Europe many new structures have emerged in recent years. In Jaroslava Hartyanyi's view, WFUWO, together with the Ukrainian World Congress, is not only the voice of Ukrainians abroad, but also a consolidating force. "The mobilization wave of the Ukrainian diaspora that has formed during the years of the full-scale war is unprecedented, neither the world nor Ukraine has seen anything like it."³⁵⁹

One of the key tasks before WFUWO is advocacy of Ukrainian interests on the international stage and communicating the truth about Ukraine. To this end, WFUWO actively cooperates with the United Nations, where it has representatives in New York and Geneva. In December 1990, WFUWO received accreditation with the UN Department of Public Information; then, in March 1993, the organization obtained consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC); and in 1997, it became affiliated with UNICEF. Since 2014, WFUWO has renewed its activities at the UN Geneva. Beginning with the end of 2025, a representation at UNESCO was established. ECOSOC is the principal body coordinating the economic activities of the UN system and its affiliated institutions, accounting for 70 percent of the UN's budgetary resources and staff. Participation in these

³⁵⁹ ProTe.UA, February 12, 2025, <https://pro.te.ua/2025/02/12/svitovu-federatsiyu-ukrayinskyh-zhinochyh-organizatsij-ocholyuye-urodzenka-ternopilshhyny-yaroslava-hortyani/>

structures not only enhances WFUWO’s standing but also opens significant opportunities. Through its representatives, WFUWO can raise humanitarian issues, advocate for human rights, combat human trafficking and violence, and promote gender equality. During the Russia–Ukraine war, WFUWO has also brought attention at the UN to Russia’s war crimes in Ukraine, including abductions, the forced deportation of children, and the creation of humanitarian catastrophes.

“Thanks to its consultative status with ECOSOC, WFUWO can participate in the work of various UN bodies and platforms—the Commission on the Status of Women, the UN Human Rights Council, and others, where we can convey the truth about the situation in Ukraine and thereby influence decision-making processes.”

**Dr. Marta Kichorowska Kebalo,
WFUWO Main Representative to UN
ECOSOC since 2013**

In March 2025, the Ukrainian Institute of America in New York City hosted the presentation of the book “Ukraine Is Not Silent: Chronicles of Fighting Against War-Related Sexual Violence (2022–2024)” that had been recently published in Kharkiv. Participants discussed a difficult topic: conflict-related sexual violence is used by aggressors as a brutal weapon of war, and the civilized world must counter such crimes, draw public attention to supporting survivors, most of whom are women, and ensure accountability for perpetrators. The event was moderated by Irene Jarosewich, WFUWO’s Main Representative to the UN Department of Global Communications, who emphasized that previously, survivors of conflict-related sexual violence received reparations only after the conclusions of an international war crimes tribu-

nal. Ukraine has taken a different approach: interim, urgent reparations for survivors have already begun. This is a new and noteworthy practice, and it is that women's organizations working with the UN publicize this development. Their support is especially needed at a time when the Ukrainian delegation, at the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, raised the issue of placing russia on the UN's "List of Shame" for committing conflict-related sexual violence.³⁶⁰

As part of the same session, an event in support of gender-responsive recovery for Ukraine was held at UN Headquarters, organized by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the UN and UN Women in partnership with WFUWO. Representatives of governments, the international diplomatic corps, civil society, and experts were invited. In her opening remarks, the moderator Marta Kebalo, Main Representative of WFUWO to UN ECOSOC underscored, "As we gather here at the United Nations, Ukraine continues to fight not only for its sovereignty, but also for the right to rebuild a just, inclusive, and resilient society."³⁶¹ Today, Ukraine is defending its independence through military resistance to russia's aggression and is receiving support from the democratic world. The same level of support will be needed going forward to ensure systematic recovery that incorporates principles of equality and shared interests. WFUWO Vice President Marianna Zajac commented on the discussion's outcomes, "During this war, Ukrainian women have demonstrated an outstanding capacity for leadership. Ukrainian women, both in Ukraine and abroad, will be

³⁶⁰ Detector Media, March 21, 2025,

<https://detector.media/infospace/article/239271/2025-03-21-ukrainska-delegatsiya-v-oon-zaklykaie-vnesty-rosiyu-do-spysku-ganby-za-seksualni-voienni-zlochyny-gerasymyuk/>

³⁶¹ Ukrainiskyi Pohliad, March 21, 2025,

<https://ukrpohliad.org/ukrayintsi-v-sviti/v-shtab-kvartyri-oon-u-nyu-jorku-10-bereznya-vidbuvsya-vysokorivnevij-zahid-building-back-better.html>

essential to Ukraine's recovery. Our organization, WFUWO, is ready to take part in postwar reconstruction."³⁶²

In September 2025, Irene Jarosewich received a special distinction from the HUCUS Foundation (Help Ukraine Center US), *For Loyalty to Ukraine*, in recognition of her many years of professional and volunteer work in support of Ukraine. Another WFUWO representative to the UN and Head of the WFUWO Culture Committee, Sofika Zielyk, was also honored several days earlier by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.³⁶³

Equally active are WFUWO representatives at UN Geneva, Dr. Kateryna Bondar, Mariana Yevsyukova and Kateryna Dashevskya. On October 3, 2025, WFUWO delivered a statement during an interactive dialogue on the updated report of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on Ukraine at the UN Human Rights Council, firmly condemning Russia's crimes against Ukrainian children. Kateryna Dashevskya recalled the findings of international experts indicating that Russia is implementing a program involving the forced transfer, "re-education," and militarization of Ukrainian children; at least 210 institutions have been identified where such children are held. "The report concludes that this system of re-education is aimed at erasing Ukrainian identity and 'Russifying' tens of thousands of children," WFUWO's representative emphasized. "The crime of abducting children and forced Russification must be stopped. Those responsible for stealing the bodies and souls of Ukrainian children must be held accountable, and all Ukrainian children must be returned home."³⁶⁴

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Homin Ukrainy, October 3, 2025, <https://www.homin.ca/dvi-predstavnyczy-sfuzho-pry-oon-otrymaly-nagorody/>

³⁶⁴ Ukrainian Women in Switzerland association, October 3, 2025, info@femmes-ukrainiennes.ch

The Main Representative of WFUWO to UN Geneva, Dr. Kateryna Bondar, also used the UN platform to draw attention to the illegal detention and torture of Ukrainian civilians in russia-occupied territories of Ukraine. She reminded the international community that 37,000 Ukrainians are currently registered as missing, and that 16,000 Ukrainian civilians are being held by russia—often without trial, in inhumane conditions, and subjected to abuse. “We emphasize that civilians must not be included in prisoner exchanges. They must be released immediately and unconditionally,”³⁶⁵ she stated.

Among other issues raised by WFUWO UN Geneva Representatives are ensuring justice for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, holding russia accountable for war crimes against Ukrainian civilians and prisoners of war, as well as for ecocide, forced deportation, and the illegal adoption of Ukrainian children.

“The main casualty of any war are the children. Even swift victories do not change the fact that it is children who suffer—and through them, society.”³⁶⁶

Sergiy Kyslytsya
Ambassador Extraordinary and
Plenipotentiary; Permanent Representative of
Ukraine to the United Nations (2020–2025)

All statements and initiatives of WFUWO’s team of representatives at the UN Geneva since January 1, 2022, are pub-

³⁶⁵ Ukrainian Women in Switzerland association, July 3, 2025, info@femmes-ukrainingiennes.ch

³⁶⁶ Iryna Slavinska, Irynka Hromotska. The Language of Diplomacy and Victory: Sergiy Kyslytsya, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the UN, on the logical and at times revolutionary development of Ukrainian diplomacy The Ukrainians. August 21, 2023. <https://theukrainians.org/sergiy-kyslytsya/>

lished on the website of the Association of Ukrainian Women of Switzerland, which became an associate member of WFUWO in 2020 and joined WFUWO as a full member organization in July 2025. By documenting WFUWO's work at UN Geneva, the Association contributes to strengthening the international standing of Ukrainian women and to advancing and protecting the rights of Ukrainian women worldwide, an important factor for the global Ukrainian women's movement.

Active cooperation has also been established with Ukraine's Permanent Mission in Geneva, including with Permanent Representatives Yevheniia Filipenko (2020–2025) and Yevhen Tsymbaliuk. As commented Yevheniia Filipenko, “Our weapon is the word, the ability to persuade, to make the case, and to defend the State's interests through diplomatic means. And all women who work in embassies or international missions do this daily.”³⁶⁷

Mariana Yevsyukova initiated a Ukrainian women's initiative in the United Arab Emirates. In Ukraine, she worked for many years with the women's human rights organization La Strada Ukraine, advocating for the rights of women and children. With her husband's career move to the UAE, she decided to apply her experience for the benefit of Ukrainians living there. “People who moved there often faced difficulties related to adaptation and a lack of understanding of the laws, religion, traditions, and culture. There was a clear need for community education. I understood that it would be better to do this collectively, as there are many women who have lived in the Emirates for many years and can help newcomers learn about the country and adapt more easily.” In her view, sisterhood, friend-

³⁶⁷ Gender Revolution in Ukrainian Diplomacy: Change, Progress, and Shifts. 50%, March 29, 2019

ship, and mutual support are critically important for women living abroad. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the circle of like-minded women in the UAE initiative soon expanded and that they established contacts with other Ukrainian women's organizations around the world, not only to share experience, but also to work together in support of Ukraine, promote its culture, and preserve traditions and language.

Mariana Yevsyukova also joined WFUWO Commission on Combating Violence, which has been chaired since its establishment in 2020 by Oleksandra Faryma, a former Vice President of WFUWO. The Commission brings together representatives of member and supporting organizations from various countries and regions. "At the outset, the Commission's work focused on informing our fellow citizens abroad about the risks of violence and on prevention. To that end, we began producing video materials," Oleksandra Faryma explains. The first video, *The Silent Signal for Help*,³⁶⁸ addressed domestic violence, was translated into nearly 20 languages, among them European languages, Arabic languages, and Hindi. The video explained a simple gesture a woman can use to signal that she is in danger. Such safe signals can help reduce the level of violence in society and strengthen women's confidence in their own ability to seek help. At the same time, these videos serve as a message to those around survivors, underscoring how vital external support can be.

WFUWO's Commission then prepared two videos addressing human trafficking: *Trap: Don't Become Human Merchandise!*³⁶⁹ and *Markers: Signs of Modern Slavery*.³⁷⁰ These

³⁶⁸ WFUWO, July 10, 2021,

https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=embed_video&v=354163466252328

³⁶⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukVBJXfNwjo>

³⁷⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEvxZdqu8-A>

issues are critically important today, especially in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion. The risk of human trafficking has increased significantly since the start of the war, when women, unfortunately, became vulnerable to traffickers. Criminal networks exploited this situation skillfully, which is why these videos remain quite relevant. Such educational content continues to be in strong demand during international campaigns dedicated to combating violence. WFUWO also encourages member organizations to share the videos on their information platforms and to indicate where people can seek help in their respective countries.

However, the Commission draws attention not only to domestic violence, but also to other forms of abuse, including violence against women in armed conflict. After joining the Commission, Mariana Yevsyukova helped establish contacts with the Nakypilo! Media Group in Kharkiv. Together, they now record interviews with Ukrainian women who were held as prisoners of war and suffered violence, humiliation, and torture in Russian captivity. "This type of informational product is a very powerful advocacy tool that conveys the truth about the war in Ukraine because we have the opportunity to work at the UN level, internationally, and at the level of individual countries," she emphasizes.

When the full-scale invasion began, the Commission was joined by additional experts who had direct experience collaborating with women in Ukraine but were forced to relocate abroad due to the war. They can offer contemporary perspectives and innovative approaches to the work of Ukrainian civil society organizations worldwide.

For WFUWO, the fall of 2025 was marked by an intensive schedule of international events. On September 23, WFUWO UN Representatives Irene Jarosewicz and Zoryana Golovata participated in the organization of the UN event "Learning to

Stay Strong: Education as Ukraine’s Backbone of Resilience” that effectively summarized Ukraine’s current philosophy and approach to children’s education. On September 24, representatives of the organization to the UN were among the participants of the Fifth Crimea Platform Summit, The Future of Freedom, held on the sidelines of the 80th session of the UN General Assembly in New York. The meeting brought together nineteen leaders of state, ministers, and representatives of thirty-four countries, as well as many international organizations. This high level of engagement reaffirmed global solidarity with Ukraine as it continues to fight for the restoration of its territorial integrity.

From November 4 to 6, 2025, WFUWO also participated in the Second UN World Summit for Social Development, held in Doha, the capital of Qatar. WFUWO was represented at the event by Mariana Yevsyukova, who participated in the plenary session and a high-level event Education as the Foundation of a New Social Contract under the patronage of Sheikha Moza. The seminar “She Builds: Women Creating Social Solutions for an Inclusive Future,” and the high-level roundtable “Strengthening the Three Pillars of Social Development: Poverty Eradication, Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work for All, and Social Inclusion.” Prior to the summit, she also met with women civic activists from Qatar, who expressed interest in joining the Ukrainian women’s movement. Such engagement motivates women’s communities not only to address practical issues in organizing their initiatives and specific activities, but also to unite for joint efforts with women’s organizations worldwide, enrich one another through shared experience, and amplify the voice of Ukrainian women across continents.

Supporting Language, Culture, and Identity

Throughout world history, military conflicts have been accompanied by powerful migration processes. The same is occurring today: according to the UN, as of November 2025, 6.53 million refugees from Ukraine were residing in Europe. Jaroslava Hartyanyi notes that 80 percent of them are women, “Since the start of the full-scale war, most people who sought refuge abroad were women with children. And the first to help them were also women, our sisters. We had information that everywhere, at train stations and in assistance centers, they met Ukrainians, helped find housing, accompanied them to doctors, and raised funds. And they continue to do so today.”³⁷¹

The very fact that Ukrainian women took the decisive step of leaving their homes demonstrates their initiative and resilience. Many of them found employment and adapted to new living conditions. At the same time, they began to establish new Ukrainian women’s organizations to support Ukraine and to preserve their native language, culture, and traditions in new communities. Many such organizations have already emerged in Poland, the Czech Republic, and other countries. While it is too early to tell if there is cooperation with WFU-WO, however interest in broader consolidation is emerging. During the UN summit in Qatar, Mariana Yevsiykova met with representatives of a women’s organization that helps Ukrainian women working in Italy obtain Italian pensions. Support often begins with addressing practical needs; later, as Ukrainian women gain confidence, they find ways to apply their abilities and interests for the common good.

What issues does the Ukrainian women’s movement face today, particularly in the context of a new wave of migration?

³⁷¹ Rfi, September 20, 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/4ymatxbj>

For WFUWO, defending Ukraine's independence remains a top priority. WFUWO and member organizations continue to work toward Victory. They raise funds for humanitarian assistance to those most in need, people who have lost their homes, health, or jobs due to Russian aggression. They support service members, veterans, and the families of fallen heroes and those missing in action. Often, such assistance brings warmth and hope to those affected. They provide medicines to medical facilities and award scholarships to Ukrainian female students. It is important that such support is known and appreciated in Ukraine.

Equally important is collaboration with Ukrainian women who are currently abroad. In May 2024, WFUWO held the European Conference "Forced Migration of Ukrainian Women: Trends and Prospects" in Budapest. The conference addressed issues of rights protection, social support, employment of displaced Ukrainian women, and opportunities for their engagement in the women's movement. Many displaced women came from eastern and southern regions of Ukraine that had long been exposed to Russian propaganda and were predominantly Russian-speaking. To help them feel Ukrainian and maintain Ukrainian identity abroad, attention and care are essential. WFUWO's efforts in this area are yielding results: some women abroad begin to study Ukrainian more deeply and observe national traditions. Many find their own motivation to engage in the work of Ukrainian communities.

As of early 2024, approximately 81,000 Ukrainian citizens were officially registered in Austria, two-thirds of them women.³⁷² Svitlana Savelieva, head of the Ukrainian Women's Union in Austria and a resident of the country for fifteen years, saw a unique opportunity to introduce women arriving

³⁷² RBC-Ukraine, September 4, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/2hd7sd6w>

from eastern Ukraine to Ukrainian culture. She calls herself a “Ukrainian Austrian nutritionist,” teaching people healthy eating. She became interested in traditional Ukrainian cuisine and discovered that prominent Ukrainian women activists wrote many such books. For example, the culinary publication *Nova Knyha Vitamynova* (New Vitamin Cookbook) by Osypa Zaklynska, printed in Lviv in 1928, introduces readers to the gastronomic culture of Ukraine of that time, combining it with the finest traditions of European cuisine. “She was a teacher, writer, and civic activist,” Savelieva explains. “She wrote that her book would preserve the Ukrainian word. Today, I pass it on even to our schoolchildren because many Ukrainian culinary terms were forgotten.” She also became interested in the work of other activists in the Ukrainian women’s movement and, while helping displaced persons in need of support in Austria, came to realize that “in essence, we are doing the same things Ukrainian women activists were doing 100 years ago, finding people housing, assistance, and work. After all, there were pregnant women among the displaced as well.” This level of engagement also helped revive the women’s organization itself in Austria.

WFUWO encourages Ukrainian children abroad to attend Saturday and Sunday Ukrainian schools, the number of which is steadily growing. “Before the war, the Ukrainian school in Austria had thirty children; today we have four schools with about 600 students, a 20-fold increase,” Savelieva reported. The International Institute of Education, Culture, and Diaspora Relations (IIECDR), a WFUWO partner, maintains the “Ukrainian Educational Universe”³⁷³ portal to support teachers at weekend schools abroad. It features an interactive online map of Ukrainian studies institutions world-

³⁷³ <https://miok.lviv.ua/projects/portal-ukrayinskyj-osvitnij-vsesvit/>

wide³⁷⁴ of those 271 in Europe and ninety in the United States and Canada. IIECDR³⁷⁵ research shows that more than 84 percent of students enrolled after the full-scale invasion are children from Ukraine; for the same reason, the number of teachers has increased by more than half. These schools face challenges related to facilities, curricula, teaching materials, and financing—areas where women’s organizations provide crucial support.

In cooperation with the IIECDR and with sponsorship from the shipping business Meest, WFUWO established the Anna Kisil Scholarship for young Ukrainian women from the diaspora. Anna Kisil, a former President of WFUWO and Vice President of the WCU, was the founder of Meest Corporation Inc. and a philanthropist in Toronto who supported numerous projects in Ukraine and the diaspora. The scholarship supports online courses offered by the International School of Ukrainian Studies “Step Toward Ukraine,” organized by the IIECDR.

“The Ukrainian language in the world today is a necessity—a demand of the times. The more people choose to learn it, the more will come to know our true history and our rich, ancient, and modern culture. This is another way to open ourselves to the world.”

***Iryna Kliuchkovska,
Director of the IIECDR and Founder of the
“Step Toward Ukraine” School***

³⁷⁴ <https://vsesvit.miok.lviv.ua/schools#0.2/0.000000/21.154175>

³⁷⁵ <https://miok.lviv.ua/events/ukrayinske-shkilnyctvo-za-kordonom-yak-vplynula-vijna-v-ukrayini/>

“Cultural diplomacy” is another key area of WFUWO’s work. Artist and WFUWO UN Representative Sofika Zelyk, who serves as WFUWO Chair, Cultural Commission, inaugurated the “Pysanky of Hope” installation at the Ukrainian Institute of America in New York, where hundreds of diplomats and people from around the world have already placed a pysanka indicating faith in Ukraine’s future. She has also curated a series of exhibitions highlighting the lives and creative legacies of prominent Ukrainian women such as Solomiya Krushelnytska and Sofia Yablonska.

In 2024, WFUWO, in cooperation with the IIECDR and with sponsorship support from the Ukrainian National Women’s League of America, held the 33rd Marusia Beck Literary Competition. The competition is named after Marusia Beck, a Ukrainian American, women’s movement activist, the first woman to serve on the Detroit (Michigan) City Council and as Mayor of Detroit, and the founder of this creative initiative. Held under the slogan “United by Love for Ukraine—for Victory and Recovery!” the competition brought together Ukrainian women from Norway, Kazakhstan, the UAE, Poland, Australia, the United States, Belgium, Canada, and various regions of Ukraine. In total, there were 131 entries submitted. Many of the entries addressed the ongoing war in Ukraine, personal experiences shaped by the conflict, Ukrainian culture, and prominent Ukrainian women.³⁷⁶ Members of the competition jury included Nataliya Poshyvaylo-Towler, Head of WFUWO Education Committee, Vice President of the Ukrainian World Congress for South and Southeast Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Turkey, and Lebanon, and Head of the Ukrainian Women’s Association of Victoria (Australia). Descended from the renowned

³⁷⁶ *Ukrainka v Sviti*, Nos 216-217, 2024.

Poshyvaylo family of potters from the Poltava region, she is today an ambassador of Ukrainian culture worldwide. In August 2025, Nataliya Poshyvaylo-Towler implemented a major initiative with the establishment of the First Ukrainian Australian Literary Festival in Melbourne. This event was truly special, as it had a charitable purpose: supporting the Armed Forces of Ukraine. As the festival organizer noted, “Even before official registration opened, writers had already begun purchasing tickets. This testifies to the tremendous interest in the event.”³⁷⁷

According to Marta Kebalo, WFUWO is a federation, an “umbrella organization.” Each member organization plays a significant role in the collective effort. In Australia, members actively assist newly arrived Ukrainian women, organizing housing, providing legal and psychological support, and helping with employment and integration. For over a century, the Ukrainian National Women’s League of America has worked in humanitarian, educational, cultural, and human rights areas and, during the war, has played a vital role in peacebuilding through diplomatic engagement, humanitarian aid, and public outreach. Specifically, the UNWLA provides assistance to hospitals, displaced persons, and to children and women affected by the war. Between 2022 and 2025, the UNWLA raised more than \$10 million to support Ukraine, while also conveying the truth about the war to American society.

³⁷⁷ IIECDR, July 24, 2025, <https://miok.lviv.ua/events/z-ukrayinoyu-v-serczi-zustrich-iz-nataliyeyu-poshyvajlo-tauler/>

“Ukraine is wherever a Ukrainian heart beats. Today, around the world, Ukrainian hearts are united in the struggle for Ukraine, bringing closer our long-awaited victory—UKRAINIAN VICTORY.”

***Liubov Liubchyk,
Member of WFUWO Executive Board; Head
of the Cultural and Educational Office of the
Union of Ukrainian Women in France; Head
of the UWC Coordinating Council in France³⁷⁸***

WFUWO is preparing to launch new projects and initiatives for the benefit of Ukraine and Ukrainians worldwide, and for the continued development of the global Ukrainian women’s movement. Additional critical issues are also under discussion, including the possible appointment of a WFUWO representative in Ukraine and the signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Government Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy. Both sides view these initiatives as promising and forward-looking.

³⁷⁸ Ukrainka v Sviti, Nos 216-217, 2024

SECTION 24. WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

In Ukraine, the viewing of news feeds on smartphones, even late at night, has become the norm. With the ongoing war, going to sleep is not possible without first having the latest information. Media is an essential guide in daily life and media must be available around the clock. And few people realize that these days in Ukraine women prepare most editorial materials. Journalism has become a predominantly female profession. In 2024, the non-governmental organization Women in Media conducted a study *Gender Profile of Ukrainian Media*³⁷⁹ together with the National Council on Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine and the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy. The study was conducted within the framework of the project *Network of Gender Think Tanks: Strengthening Capacity for Developing Advanced Policies, Impact Assessment, Strategic Advocacy and Focused Policy Communications* that is being implemented by the international charitable foundation Ukrainian Women's Fund with the support from the European Union. According to results from the period of the study, current editorial teams were 58% women and 42% men. Among the creative teams, the numbers are even more indicative of change: 62% of freelancers are women, 69% of broadcasters are women, and up to 75% of reporters are women (imagine the change: three female reporters for each male reporter). Women now significantly influence the course of social processes and the formation of public opinion.

³⁷⁹ <https://wim.org.ua/materials/gender-profile-2024/>

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is not limited to military or diplomatic processes, rather covers the full spectrum of women's participation in conflict prevention, resolution, peacebuilding, and democratic state-building. In this context, members of the media are not just informers, but shapers of social order, values, and norms. Through the media, society sees (or does not see) women as participants in recovery, security, and political processes.

Female media specialists are responding to the challenges of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. They accompany the military to the front lines, work in frontline towns and villages, communicate with the eyewitnesses to attacks, and report on humanitarian crises. Often they report in conditions that include enemy strikes, lack of communication, and minimal protection, even reporting from among the rubble and smoke as explosions are still heard.

“Once we were driving to Mykolaiv through Voznesensk, and a missile had just struck. We filmed the aftermath of the shelling and immediately went on air. We film scenes in Mykolaiv and then go to the frontline.”

**Natalia Nahorna, Special correspondent,
TSN 1+1³⁸⁰**

Each of these journalistic responsibilities involves a risk to life and the need to make quick decisions in dangerous conditions. At the same time, there is a professional responsibility: to be where the most major events occur. The reports provided by many journalists become a source of information

³⁸⁰ Online media Ukrainky (Ukrainian women), <https://ukrainky.com.ua/lyudyna-vijny-intervyu-z-voyennoyukorespondentkoyu-nataliyeyu-nagornoyu/>

not only for Ukrainians but also for international audiences. Their reports inform daily about the reality that Russia's war in Ukraine continues.

According to the Institute of Mass Information (IMI),³⁸¹ during the three and a half years of the full-scale invasion, Russia has killed 108 media workers, including 10 women. They died because of Russian shelling or torture, or as participants in hostilities while conducting reporting journalistic assignments.

Among such members of the media is Oleksandra Ku-vshynova, a fixer and journalist who died on March 14, 2022, along with Fox News cameraman Pierre Zakrzewski during artillery shelling in the village of Horenka, Kyiv region.³⁸² Iryna Tsybukh, a reporter for Hromadske Radio and a manager at the public broadcasting radio station Suspilne was serving as a paramedic in the Hospitaliers medical battalion; she died on May 29, 2024, during a rotation in the Kharkiv vicinity.³⁸³ Tetiana Kulyk, a journalist with the news service Ukrinform, died on the night of February 26, 2025, from a drone attack in the Kyiv region.³⁸⁴

Besides death, journalists also are injured while performing their professional duties. On April 5, 2024, TSN journalist Kira Oves³⁸⁵ and Ukrinform's correspondent in Zaporizhzhia,

³⁸¹ IMI, <https://imi.org.ua/infographics/spysok-zagyblyh-zhurnalistiv-i45958>

³⁸² Vechirniy Kyiv, March 15, 2022, <https://vechirniy.kyiv.ua/news/62942/>

³⁸³ Social News, May 30, 2024, <https://suspilne.media/757281-na-vejni-zaginula-zurnalistka-suspilnogo-ta-paramedikina-irina-cibuh/>

³⁸⁴ Ukrinform, February 26, 2025, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3964633-cerez-rosijsku-ataku-droniv-na-kiivsini-zaginula-nasa-kolega-zurnalistka-ukrinformu-tetana-kulik.html>

³⁸⁵ TSN, April 5, 2024, <https://tsn.ua/ukrayina/zhurnalistka-tsn-otrimala-poranennya-pid-chas-zniman-u-zaporizhzhzi-2551336.html>

Olha Zvonariova,³⁸⁶ were injured while filming in Zaporizhzhia. On July 19, 2024, Kharkiv journalist Olha Kovaliova and her team came under fire near the front line in the Toretsk direction.³⁸⁷ The journalist sustained shrapnel wounds and suffered a fractured chest.

These stories are part of a larger picture in which the work of women journalists means daily risk and is accompanied by additional challenges. Women in the media often face distrust, devaluation, prejudice, both from colleagues and from members of their audience. On social networks, they are subjected to attacks, discreditation, and threats. Some are forced to block comments, limit their online presence, even change the subject of their materials.

Civil society organizations that work at the intersection of media and women's rights perform a unique function: they not only document violations but also form communities of support, develop policies, conduct training, and advocate for change. Among them, Women in Media occupies a prominent place. The organization positions its mission as "Empowering each other, countering sexism in editorial offices and content."

Women Journalists Covering War

Viktoria Roshchyna, Hromadske journalist and a freelance writer for *Ukrainska Pravda*,³⁸⁸ was captured in March

³⁸⁶ Detector Media, April 5, 2024,

<https://detector.media/community/article/225126/2024-04-05-pid-chas-obstrilu-zaporizhzhya-otrymaly-poranennya-zhurnalistka-ukrinformu-olga-zvonarova-ta-zhurnalistka-11-kira-oves/>

³⁸⁷ NUJU, July 26, 2024,

<https://nsju.org/novini/olga-kovalova-poranena-harkivska-zhurnalistka-hoche-znovu-praczyuvaty-ale-poky-poranennya-ne-daye-vzyaty-do-ruk-fotoaparat/>

³⁸⁸ *Ukrainska Pravda*, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2024/10/11/7479270/>

2022. The russian occupiers then held her in Berdiansk for ten days. After her release, she did not stop and again went to the temporarily occupied territory to prepare a new report. In August 2023, Viktoria disappeared. In April 2024, it became known that she was again in russian captivity. On October 10, she was murdered.

This is not just a tragedy. These are the limitations of reality that journalists confront in wartime. At the same time, it is an example of how women in the media take on the most dangerous assignments, working in an environment where any question can be grounds for arrest, and any recording can be evidence of “hostile activity.” For many Ukrainian journalists, this type of threat is not the exception, but an element of daily life.

Women media specialists travel to the war zone, work in de-occupied territories, and report on the evacuation of civilians. Their reports document losses, survival, and resistance. At the same time, they attempt to preserve the human face of war.

What is it like to be a female war correspondent during a full-scale russian invasion? Three of them spoke about this in a series of interviews with the Women in Media.

“After completion of the program (in the United States), the requirement was for me to return to Ukraine. When the full-scale invasion began, some of the students who studied with me applied for refugee visas. So, in principle, there were ways to stay in the United States. I watched what was happening in Ukraine, and I thought it strange to be a journalist and to be in America. I wanted to cover the war; I wanted to experience historical moments together with the country. I wanted to be here, see everything with my own eyes, to write my own history,” said Diana Butsko, a reporter for Hromadske.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁹ NGO Women in Media, <https://wim.org.ua/stories/diana-butsko/>

She recalls criminal prosecution by the Russian FSB for her work in Kursk, as well as distinct gender bias, such as the time she was denied access to a higher position, was called a “little girl,” or a co-host’s remark made during a report, “What are you doing here, you should be having children.”

Aliona Yatsyna,³⁸⁸ co-founder of the online publication Kordon (Border) Media in Sumy Oblast (Region), works in a region under constant shelling and says something similar.

“For a long time, the Civil-Military Cooperation Liaison Service in Sumy had a very terrible chief. He would say, ‘You are girls, you should be cooking dinner for your men at home, not going to film the consequences [of shelling]’. And he really would not let us in. We even filed a police report against him, but that did not change his attitude. Later, we talked to the commander, and that chief was removed from the department of communication with journalists.”

Her experience of working with the military has shown that there is no leniency towards women working in combat positions. On the contrary, there is respect, understanding, cooperation and fraternity. In 2025, on the Day of the Journalist, Aliona Yatsyna was awarded the “Order of Merit of the 3rd Degree” for her work in the most dangerous conditions and perseverance in covering the war on the border.

A journalist with the online media platform Butusov Plus and chief news editor of Hromadske Radio Iryna Sampan³⁸⁹ produces news reports and she also is not shy about looking attractive while on broadcasting even as some consider such an approach to be inappropriate. She has faced repeated online attacks. Russian propaganda has called her an “escort,” a “Nazi” and “Zaluzhnyi’s mistress.”

³⁹⁰ NGO Women in Media, <https://wim.org.ua/stories/alyona-yatsyna/>

³⁹¹ NGO Women in Media, <https://wim.org.ua/stories/sampan/>

“When you type my name and surname into Google, these types of results appear first. My Facebook page, then something else, and then the “awards” given to me by russian propaganda. So, because of this, I ask people to Google not me, but rather my reports,” stated Iryna Sampan.

The full-scale invasion changed the fate of not only individual women journalists but of entire newsrooms.³⁹⁰ Entire teams were evacuated, and it was the women who took on the responsibility of maintaining the teams.

Editor-in-chief of 0629.com.ua Anna Murlykina left Mariupol on February 25, 2022. The entire team evacuated within three days. The office was then looted, the equipment destroyed. Journalist Oleksandr Hudilin immediately joined the army, and in April 2022, he was captured. Another colleague, Marina Moloshna, also signed a contract [with the Armed Forces of Ukraine] after leaving Mariupol.

At the end of 2023, the 0629.com.ua team, for the first time since the beginning of the russian full-scale invasion, was able to strategize and set goals for the next year. This is how the idea emerged of becoming a platform that unites Mariupol residents scattered around the world.

Yana Chumachenko, editor-in-chief of Severodonetsk Online, is one of those people who has lost her home for the second time since the start of the war. After 2014, she moved from Luhansk to Severskodonetsk, and after 2022, to Ivano-Frankivsk. Now her team works for an audience from occupied Lysychansk, Rubizhne, and Severskodonetsk.

“These days women try to take on everything. Maybe this is easier from the point of view that a woman understands another woman better, but in general, of course, I would strive for gender balance,” she said.

³⁹² NGO “Women in Media”, <https://wim.org.ua/stories/occupation/>

Severodonetsk Online focuses on topics relevant to IDPs that include articles about new businesses, organizations to help with housing, social benefits, and basic needs. A separate section has a focus on historical memory and recording experiences.

K. is an editor and journalist from a village in the Kherson region. She was unable to leave immediately after the occupation, so she tried to convey information about the occupation to the territories controlled by Ukraine; later, she evacuated to Kyiv. The focus of her work is on people who remain under occupation, on those who became IDPs, and those who went abroad.

“People should not feel abandoned to their fate, even if they are under occupation, or even if they have left. How can I abandon people? I know that no one else will do this job. People wait for news every day,” writes journalist K.

On August 28, 2024, Hromadske Radio began broadcasting in Pokrovsk, Donetsk region, shortly after Russian forces launched an active offensive against the city. According to Hromadske Radio journalist and host Anastasia Bahalika, the motivation was that, for people in frontline areas, radio often becomes the only way to get news. “We were guided by people’s need for reliable information...” she emphasizes. In her view, “in the context of an ongoing war, we must always pay attention to the price we are constantly paying for this “rebirth of the nation.” We cannot avoid talking about victory, because why are we fighting this war? To survive—and to survive not merely as individual people, but as a community, as a country, Ukrainian media must not “dig a pit of despair” for the audience to fall into. The challenge for editors today is finding a balance: avoiding hopelessness, maintaining a

sober view of reality, and still holding on to a vision of the future.”³⁹³

These stories show how women journalists influence our understanding of this war. Their stories are filled with experience, emotion, and memory of the everyday lives of front-line villages and towns, their inhabitants, and of those who protect us. The presence of women in this field is not just a matter of visibility, but also of participation and influence.

“If women are not visible in the media, they are not in the vision of recovery. If they are only present as victims, society does not imagine them as creators of solutions.”

Liza Kuzmenko, Head, Women in Media

Silencing Women in Media

The struggle in Ukraine continues not only on the front lines but also encompasses the overall information space, where women journalists face new forms of violence every day. As public figures, they are often subjected to online attacks, defamation, threats, sexualized harassment, all of which has become part of their professional reality. And although harassment occurs mostly in a digital environment, the consequences are quite physical: anxiety, self-censorship, emotional burnout.

According to the study *Her Voice is a Target for Them: Gender-Based Online Violence Against Ukrainian Journalists*,³⁹⁴

³⁹³ Detector Media, September 25, 2024,

<https://detector.media/community/article/232596/2024-09-25-anastasiya-bagalika-gromadske-radio-mozhe-v-ukraini-shche-zaprovadyat-voienno-tsenzuru-ale-poky-tsogo-ne-stalosya-my-vsi-v-media-trokhy-shybanulysya/>

³⁹⁴ NGO Women in Media,

<https://wim.org.ua/materials/study-online-violence/>

conducted in 2024 by Women in Media, with support from UNESCO, 81% of Ukrainian women media specialists have faced online violence. However, only 19% have contacted law enforcement, and 14% reported that digital threats have escalated to physical violence.

“They steal our identity, hack our pages and passwords, set our doors on fire, throw rocks wrapped in threatening notes, through our windows. That will not stop me, although my mother is very worried that my situation might turn out to be like the case of Gongadze,” answered one of the respondents.

“The more visible a woman journalist is on social media and in her specific media, the greater the risk of her being a constant target of online violence,” shared another media specialist.

The most common forms of attacks on women working in the media are misogynistic comments, denigration of their appearance, and devaluation of their professional reputation. The importance of their work is openly belittled, and their professionalism itself is questioned.

In August 2024, Hromadske reporter Diana Butsko published a story from the Russian city of Sudzha that had been taken under the control by the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Dozens of offensive comments appeared under the report, and she began to receive outright threats of reprisals. Military policewoman Andriana Kucher also became the target of attacks after reporting on the Armed Forces of Ukraine’s offensive on Kursk. Her appearance was ridiculed, sexualized, and death threats were made. After reporting from Sudzha, Ukrainska Pravda journalist Olha Kyrilenko was accused of self-promotion devaluing both the report she prepared and the author herself.

Frequently such attacks are part of well-developed strategy of the Russian propaganda machine. The 2024 Russian state

budget allocated 58 billion rubles (\$500 million) for propaganda projects, and in 2025, the appetite for propaganda increased to over 137 billion rubles (\$1.4 billion).³⁹⁵ Russian state-funded media focus on discrediting Ukrainians. In the Russian information space, a negative attitude towards the ideas of feminism and gender equality is increasingly exacerbated. For example, Russian media are negatively reinforcing linkages between associative terms, such as feminism equals sexual perversions, pro-Ukrainian views (nationalism) equals terrorism. “Information *domostroy*” (reinforcing domestic order) is flourishing in Russian media. To invalidate the authority and influence of Ukrainian women media specialists, political strategists of Russia are purposefully exploiting gender biases. This is stated in the study *Underestimated Threat: Gendered Disinformation about Ukrainian Women Journalists*,³⁹⁶ conducted by Women in Media as part of the Voices of Ukraine project, with contributions from, among others, Liza Kuzmenko and Larysa Kompantseva, Doctor of Philological Sciences; Professor; Head of the Department of Strategic Communications and Applied Linguistics, National Academy of the Security Service of Ukraine, that draws links between fakes against women in the media and Russian propaganda. Russia uses a strategy of gender disinformation in Ukraine to silence women journalists and form a certain negative perception of gender equality and the role of women in democratic societies. Content analysis of the informational space of Ukraine and Russia for the period from February

³⁹⁵ IMI, December 2, 2024,

<https://imi.org.ua/monitorings/demonizatsiya-prostytutsiya-ta-genotsydnarytoryka-yak-propagandysty-stvoryuyut-obraz-ukrayintiv-v-i65195>

³⁹⁶ Gender in Detail, December 13, 2023,

<https://genderindetail.org.ua/library/ukraina/genderna-dezinformatsiyaschodo-ukrainskyh-zhurnalistok.html>

2022 to August 2023, conducted through the Attack Index service, developed by Ellina Shnurko-Tabakova, an experienced specialist in information technology and telecommunications and a journalist, revealed systemic campaigns against Ukrainian media women.

Women in Media considers it important that all entities (government, law enforcement, media editorial staff, civil society organizations) take care to create an atmosphere and system in which women journalists can identify facts of gender disinformation and report incidents without fear of being removed from future assignments, as well as be assured that they will be able to receive necessary help and support.

Dialogue with Civil Society

There are other challenges that accompany the work of Ukrainian women media specialists. For example, the study Gender Profile of Ukrainian Media reports that career advancement can still be difficult; despite the greater number of women in editorial teams, a smaller number of them reach senior management positions and influence decision-making. Not all teams have editorial policies focused on supporting the families of defenders and veterans, or IDPs among their colleagues. Only 17% of editorial offices reported that assistance was provided with help in finding housing for colleagues who were forced to move due to the war and 11% of editorial offices support employees in training, advanced training, or retraining, which contributes to the adaptation and professional development of forcibly displaced persons.³⁹⁷

On the other hand, the Institute of Mass Information (IMI) traces a persistent trend of low representation of wom-

³⁹⁷ Gender Profile of Ukrainian Media, <https://wim.org.ua/materials/gender-profile-2024/> , p. 34.

en as experts and key figures in news materials.. According to the results of the IMI's annual monitoring, in 2025, women as experts appeared in 21% of materials, and as key figures in 16.5%. These are significantly lower percentages than in 2021 (prior to the full-scale invasion), when women appeared as experts appeared in 30% of materials, and key figures in 22%.³⁹⁸ Women most often become key figures in materials on topics about entertainment where their private lives, appearance, clothing are often discussed, as well as the topic of crime, where women are depicted as victims. After these two topics, follow reports on the topics of society, international politics, and war (show business accounts for a high of 31.5%, and war for a low figure of 6%). These numbers are indicative of the current attitude in Ukrainian society towards the role of women.

To change such approaches, Women in Media is actively engaging in a dialogue with civil society. The Women in Media initiative was launched in April 2019 by Liza Kuzmenko and Viktoriia Yermolaeva, both of whom worked at Hromadske Radio at the time. The organization Women in Media was officially registered in September 2019. Initially, a small group of like-minded women connected on Facebook, however, Women in Media later formed a powerful community that brought together over 1,700 women journalists, editors, producers, and other media professionals from all regions of Ukraine and diverse types of media.³⁹⁹

They needed the mutual support to advocate for equality in editorial teams, where internal policies should ensure equal opportunities, access to leadership positions, and fair

³⁹⁸ IMI, March 7, 2025,

<https://imi.org.ua/monitorings/try-roky-stagnatsiyi-yak-ukrayinski-media-zberigayut-gendernyj-dysbalans-doslidzhennya-imi-i67060>

³⁹⁹ Women in Media, <https://wim.org.ua/>

salaries for women and men. They also need to ensure equality in media content and combat sexism, support women's leadership, and develop resources to protect women's rights.⁴⁰⁰

The organization conducts research focused on the role and participation of women in the media in promoting gender equality in society; the external influences directed against the full professional self-realization and development of Ukrainian women journalists, and increasing their visibility in democratic processes. The results of the research help further promote gender-sensitive policies in the state, to involve women in the media in the programs of restoration of Ukraine. The non-governmental structure is tasked with conducting such work by cooperating with other public sector organizations, in particular with the Ukrainian Women's Fund (UWF), which consistently supports the development of feminist activities. Women in Media has joined the Network of Gender Analytical Centers, the establishment of which was initiated by the UWF.

“For newly established and small public organizations, such as the NGO Women in Media, UWF support has become a source of resources, as well as a platform for growth, networking, and influence. The Foundation provides not only financial, but also institutional support, shares expertise, strengthens the global vision of local actions, and helps implement policies, in particular in the area of Women. Peace. Security.”

Liza Kuzmenko, Head, Women in Media

The activities of the civic organization are also focused on providing organizational, psychological, and financial sup-

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

port to women in the media. One form of support is combating online violence against female journalists. The organization conducted a large-scale study *Her Voice is a Target for Them* (2025) that analyzed more than 180 questionnaires and documented cases of targeted attacks on women journalists, including doxing, defamation, threats of sexual violence, de-personalization. These actions not only violate women's right to safe work but are also aimed at suppressing women's voice in the public space.

The organization's website has a map of attacks⁴⁰¹ made online against women media specialists. Attacks are marked in distinct colors, depending on the level of danger. The website displays information about the recorded cases of such attacks, and as of July 30, 2025, there are 68. Response occurs in several stages: monitoring of online attacks - verification - classification of the attack - analysis and recording in the database - provision of assistance.

Another area of work is providing support groups for women in the media. According to Viktoriia Yermolaeva, "Journalists go through a lot of pain, difficult stories, and losses every day. During the war, it became much more difficult, because the number of losses around them exceeds a person's ability to cope on their own. A support group allows listening to like-minded people and being heard in return. Journalists must remind themselves that they are not alone, and that there are those who will understand and offer support. Such a group is a safe space for feelings that no one judges, on the contrary, will find the right words for you." A professional psychotherapist, who gives effective advice, calls these groups "a breath of air during suffocation" and a unique opportunity for women media specialists.⁴⁰²

⁴⁰¹ <https://wim.org.ua/attack-map/>

⁴⁰² <https://wim.org.ua/projects/groups/>

Women in Media also helps editorial offices form internal policies that consider gender aspects and the principle of “do no harm.” Together with the Commission on Journalistic Ethics and the OSCE Representation in Ukraine, the organization has developed a model Policy on Gender Equality in Media Content.⁴⁰³ Recommendations include balanced representation of men and women in materials, avoiding re-traumatization and ethical coverage of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). This policy has already been integrated in many editorial offices, including *Ukrainska Pravda*, *Left Bank*, *Espresso*, *Hromadske Radio*, *Kyiv24*, *Channel 5* and others.

“The updated gender policies thoroughly respond to today’s challenges. We do not chase after sensations, because we first consider the impact that the publication will have. One of the key standards for us is ‘do no harm,’” notes editor-in-chief of *Hromadske Radio* Viktoriia Yermolaeva.

Women in Media is an active participant in key platforms and advisory bodies in the field of gender policy and freedom of speech in Ukraine. The organization is a member of the Equal Rights and Opportunities Platform in communication with the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy; the Public Council under the Committee of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on Freedom of Speech; the Alliance for Gender-Responsible and Inclusive Recovery in Ukraine, and others.

In 2024, Women in Media, with the support of IMI, initiated the creation of the Coalition on Gender Equality in Ukrainian Media to promote gender equality, inclusiveness, and non-stereotypical coverage of topics in journalism. The coalition works to strengthen gender mainstreaming in the media emphasizing the importance of sensitive coverage of

⁴⁰³ <https://wim.org.ua/materials/gender-policy-for-media/>

conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and attention to vulnerable groups: people with disabilities, older people, internally displaced persons (who are mostly women), and residents of frontline areas with low mobility.

The initiators also included public media and human rights organizations among them the Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association JurFem, the Human Rights Center ZMINA, the Regional Press Development Institute (the Respect campaign), and the Center for Democratic Reforms and Media. Also included were independent media such as Hromadske Radio, Rubryka, Skhidnyi Variant, Detector Media, the media group Nakypilo, Divoche Media, Ukrinform, Ukrainska Pravda, and various broadcast media. From government, the Office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy and the Ministry of Culture and Strategic Communications of Ukraine became members of the coalition.

In 2024, Women in Media was shortlisted for the prestigious international IPI-IMS Free Media Pioneer Award that recognizes organizations that protect press freedom and innovate in the media sphere.

Engaging the Media in Gender-Sensitive Recovery

Will Ukraine's post-war reconstruction programs sufficiently consider gender-inclusive approaches? Currently, this issue is relevant for society and promotion of this issue relies a great deal on exposure through media. "At the stage of post-war reconstruction, public trust is especially important, both in state institutions and in the ongoing processes. Media can either strengthen this trust or undermine it. A gender-sensitive approach in journalism is a guarantee that women will not only be mentioned in the news as victims, but will also be presented as experts, activists, and participants in decision-making processes," states Liza Kuzmenko, who heads

Women in Media. “Women do not just survive the war, they create change. And the media is a tool that either reinforces these changes or makes them invisible.”

She says that in 2025, the organization prepared a study *Engaging the Media in a Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Approach in Ukraine’s Recovery Programs* that emphasizes that in the context of a full-scale war, the media in Ukraine play a critically important role not only as a source of information, but also as active participants in the processes of documentation, monitoring, protection of the interests of communities, and building trust in state and international institutions. In this context, special attention should be paid to supporting content that promotes gender equality and inclusiveness.

The analytical document includes practical recommendations for international organizations and donors on how to effectively interact with Ukrainian media in the field of reconstruction of the country. Key recommendations include:

- integrate the media into the recovery strategy for Ukraine, and provide for the participation of journalists in URC2025 (Ukraine Recovery Conference 2025) as full participants, not only as observers;
- promote a gender-responsive and inclusive approach in media projects, supporting initiatives that include the voices of women, veterans, IDPs, LGBTIQ+ and people with disabilities;
- provide media access to systematic information about reconstruction – create open platforms with data on budgets, contractors, and implemented projects;
- invest in sustainable educational formats, including mentoring programs and thematic editorial hubs;
- simplify bureaucratic procedures in grant competitions and provide flexibility to cover the basic needs of editorial offices, from insurance to parenting support;

- support partnership projects between media and organizations working with vulnerable groups, formalizing such cooperation;
- support the development of analytical journalism that covers recovery processes in depth and critically. Fund media initiatives that work “shoulder-to-shoulder” with communities in the context of reconstruction;
- strengthen the internal consistency of editorial offices on issues of gender equality, equal representation, and inclusion.

On July 10-11, the 2025 Ukraine Recovery Conference (URC2025) was the fifth in a series of international conferences on the recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine was held in Rome. As part of this conference, a side event was held, titled “Strong Media, Transparent Restoration: How Journalism Builds the Future of Ukraine.”⁴⁰⁴ During the meeting, Oksana Romaniuk, Director, Institute of Mass Information, announced the launch of a media partnership for restoration, the Media Recovery Partnership Track. The initiative will launch a systemic dialogue on both media recovery and the role of media in Ukraine’s recovery. According to First Deputy Minister of Culture and Strategic Communications of Ukraine Halyna Hryhorenko, “...supporting sustainable and ethical media is the foundation of our recovery. We must provide our journalists with the resources, training, and protection they need to continue their mission.”

⁴⁰⁴ IMI, July 11, 2025,

<https://imi.org.ua/news/media-vidigrayut-strategichnu-rol-u-vidnovlenni-ukrayiny-yak-projshla-rozмова-pro-media-na-urc-2025-i69297>

SECTION 25. UKRAINIAN ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN IN LAW ENFORCEMENT (UAWLE)

The reform of Ukraine's law enforcement agencies has led to a significant increase in the number of women taking positions in this sector and advancing in their careers. Numerous legal restrictions, previously rooted in the specific nature of the service and reinforcing a "male monopoly" have been lifted. However, how easy is it to be a woman police officer or a representative of another security unit? Can these women fully realize their potential for further professional development? Unfortunately, many still must fight for genuine equality of rights, and face prevailing societal stereotypes, misunderstanding from male colleagues, a lack of necessary professionalism and skills, and excessive workloads, especially since usually women combine official duties with caring for their families. Some struggle to build good relationships with management, as women subordinates are often seen as weaker staff members, while others remain fearful of sexual harassment in the workplace, unsure of how to act in such difficult situations.

To overcome such difficulties and receive the necessary support in their work environment, women in law enforcement united in a civil society organization, the Ukrainian Association of Women in Law Enforcement (UAWLE).⁴⁰⁵ This professional association can be considered to be a platform for finding important solutions, exchanging experience, re-

⁴⁰⁵ <https://uawle.org/>

ceiving training and psychological support, as well as for adapting the best practices of EU countries, the United States, and Canada on promoting gender equality within Ukraine's law enforcement agencies.

Background and History of Establishment

The idea of a new platform emerged in 2015, when reforms of security institutions began, in particular with the National Police. Women began to seek support for self-realization within an unfamiliar professional environment. However, more serious discussions about the establishment of a professional association began in March 2017 during a seminar on gender aspects in police work, organized under the Police Training Assistance Project (PTAP), implemented with the support of the Government of Canada. The issue had already become particularly relevant by that time, quickly resonating with both activists and donors. A working group of fifteen representatives from various units in the Ministry of Internal Affairs was formed to propose the concept for a new NGO and define goals and objectives in promoting gender equality in law enforcement.

The model selected was the International Association of Women Police (IAWP), founded in Los Angeles in 1915 with the purpose of uniting and developing the potential of women in the city police force. In the United States, women began to work in the law enforcement sector as early as 1845, but the initiative did not initially receive widespread support. Therefore, an initial goal of IAWP simply was to encourage women's involvement in law enforcement. Over time, new objectives emerged. Since 1963, the IAWP began to hold three-day seminars on topics relevant to the profession. "The next stage was the realization that professionalism and communication must exist not only among women, but also be-

tween women and men across all areas of law enforcement.”⁴⁰⁶ Today, women make up 9.5% of police officers in the United States. In some states, however, their representation is significantly higher. In Miami Beach (Florida) women account for 28% of officers, 26% in Madison (Wisconsin), 22% in Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania), and 19% in Birmingham (Alabama).⁴⁰⁷

The experience of such work in the United States, Canada, EU nations, and other countries seemed interesting and positive to the women in Ukraine’s working group. They studied the experiences carefully, held consultations with experts, and even met with then-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada Chrystia Freeland. Participation in the 7th Annual Women in Policing Conference in Tbilisi (Georgia) in 2018, which brought together 250 women police officers from around the world, was also highly beneficial.

In March 2018, UAWLE was registered in Ukraine as a non-profit civil society organization and began active work. The Government of Canada provided comprehensive support to the organization from the outset and throughout all stages of its development. In 2018, UAWLE adopted its first strategic plan for 2018–2020.

Kateryna Pavlichenko, then Deputy Head of the Patrol Police Department and is now the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, was elected Chair of UAWLE’s Board and continues to lead the organization to this day.

In 2019, UAWLE representatives participated in the International Association of Women Police conference in the United States, and the organization was granted affiliated membership in the IAWP.

⁴⁰⁶ Women in the Internal Affairs Bodies of Ukraine, Kyiv, 2008, page 13, https://gender.org.ua/images/lib/zhinky_v_organah_vnutrishni.pdf

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., page 12.

Relevant Practices

UAWLE is a unique civil society organization that helps introduce gender principles into the security sector. Typically, such matters are managed by women's groups, based on the assumption that they not only understand the issues, but also grasp nuances thanks to relevant experience and challenges. However, within the first year of UAWLE attracted nine male members. This was a positive development: men helped women work and feel “on equal footing,” “he works for her.” This situation also reflected modern approaches to implementing gender equality, which is equally important for both women and men. A “women-only” framing of the issue can create other issues and difficulties, therefore essential to seek parity-based solutions. UAWLE launched the HeForShe initiative within the police force network. This campaign, organized by UN Women, was launched in 2014 by then-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and UN Goodwill Ambassador — British actor Emma Watson (known for her role as Hermione Granger in Harry Potter), encouraging men to support gender equality. Notably, in 2020, the HeForShe award was given to a UAWLE member, First Deputy Head of the Patrol Police Department, Oleksii Biloshytskyi.⁴⁰⁸

UAWLE has focused its efforts on areas relevant to the implementation and advocacy of gender approaches in law enforcement, with the potential to improve not only the work environment but also the overall performance of the security sector. This includes legislative initiatives.

After consultations with the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy and in cooperation with Member of Parliament Maryna Bardina, UAWLE initiated the renaming of the

⁴⁰⁸ Patrol Police of Ukraine, July 10, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2645535352381649&id=1605714813030380&set=a.1606117876323407&locale=uk_UA

state holiday “Defender of Ukraine Day” to reflect the equal role of women defending the homeland alongside men. On August 3, 2021, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed Law No. 1643-IX⁴⁰⁹ “On Amending Article 73 of the Labor Code of Ukraine,” which had been passed by Parliament on July 14, 2021. As a result, since October 1, Ukraine celebrates a holiday that equally symbolizes the roles of both male and female defenders of the country.

UAWLE also devoted significant attention to developing strategies for implementing the Istanbul Convention⁴¹⁰ and adapting national legislation to support provisions on combating gender-based violence. Given the importance of this document, the organization participated in an information campaign from 2022 to 2024 aimed at clarifying the Convention’s standards, countering manipulations of individual provisions and terminology, and dispelling myths that stirred public unrest and were used as propaganda tools by conservative forces.

Other information and educational campaigns were designed to explain the role of women serving in law enforcement agencies and increase their value in society. UAWLE has implemented several communication initiatives, including the project “Eyes of War”⁴¹¹ — a video about the courage of female law enforcement officers during the period of Russian aggression against Ukraine. Another example is the podcast “UAWLE. Voices”⁴¹² - a series of audio materials in which women in the security sector share their experiences and thoughts about the lessons of history that are important

⁴⁰⁹ <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1643-20#Text>

⁴¹⁰ https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/994_001-11#Text

⁴¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YiYRXz94DLw>

⁴¹² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_uNKN2Zn13Y

for educating future generations, about Ukrainian Independence and a free present and future life that is worthy of protection. free life in the present.

A key priority of UAWLE's is to promote the professional growth of women in the security sector and to deepen their knowledge of gender-related issues. This awareness is essential in both daily life and service, for asserting one's rights, understanding the importance of personal identity, and realizing one's potential. Many women entered law enforcement during the Russia-Ukraine War and often lack thorough training and experience in the force. Much of the necessary knowledge and skills are learned "on the go," and there is often a shortage of both theoretical grounding and practical competence. Service also brings new challenges. For example, female officers are part of specialized mobile teams working to identify cases of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and assist survivors of such crimes. "Two-thirds of each team are women police officers. This is intentional to ensure effective communication with survivors, who are mostly women and children. They usually do not want to share their stories with male officers," said Ivan Vyhivskiy, Head of the National Police of Ukraine and Police General of the Third Rank.⁴¹³ Interacting with trauma survivors requires special approaches, guidance from specialists, and psychological expertise. To support this work, UAWLE has organized specialized training sessions on identifying, documenting, and investigating CRSV crimes, as well as a series of inter-agency meetings on responses to domestic and sexual violence during wartime.

UAWLE conducts training, seminars, and roundtables on gender equality, tactical medicine, leadership, and self-defense. The organization also contributes to the development

⁴¹³ Ukraine Is Not Silent, FOLIO, Kharkiv 2024, page 200.

of internal instructions and training materials and monitors how effectively gender policy is being implemented in the work of specific units. In cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine and the Canada-Ukraine Police Development Project (CUPDP), UAWLE participated in the development of the “Memo on Preventing Discrimination.”⁴¹⁴ The organization also initiated the study “Sexual Harassment in the Police: Prevention and Response” that includes an analysis of international experience and the development of mechanisms to counter such cases in Ukraine’s law enforcement system.

One of the organization’s distinct areas of focus is mentorship for women in law enforcement. UAWLE supports the development of mentoring systems, open communication, and experience sharing.

Psychosocial support is not simply a modern trend but is a vital necessity for women in law enforcement. Constantly responding to others’ pain, problems, misfortunes, despair, and anger, many women in law enforcement experience professional burnout. This affects not only their long-term work effectiveness but also their everyday lives. Together with the International Association of Women Police, UAWLE is implementing a Psychological Support Program for Law Enforcement Officers During the War, which includes counseling and collaboration with foreign colleagues.

⁴¹⁴ https://hsc.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/inf_pamiatka_descr.pdf

“What holds special significance for me is the fact that even during the war, we are not witnessing any rollback on gender equality. On the contrary, women are actively joining the police, border guard service, National Guard, and the State Emergency Service, taking on various positions and fulfilling key responsibilities in these challenging times.”

***Kateryna Pavlichenko,
Chair of the UAWLE Board***⁴¹⁵

During the Russia-Ukraine War, UAWLE began to actively develop another area of work: humanitarian and crisis assistance. At the onset of the full-scale invasion, the organization helped evacuate the families of law enforcement officers to safe locations within Ukraine and abroad (to Estonia, Germany, Finland, the Netherlands, and Ireland). UAWLE participated in providing humanitarian aid to military personnel, internally displaced persons, and other vulnerable populations, and also coordinates the delivery of protective gear, medications, and other critical supplies to law enforcement staff.

Cooperation with Government Institutions, Civil Society, and International Organizations

Information about UAWLE’s activities can be found on the website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, and this is understandable since the organization was created both to support state gender policy and to improve the performance of the security sector. Therefore, cooperation with public authorities, particularly with the Office of the Govern-

⁴¹⁵ Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, December 14, 2024, <https://mvs.gov.ua/news/katerina-pavlicenko-vziala-ucast-u-zaxodishhodo-dosiagnen-gendernoyi-rivnosti-v-sektori-bezpeki-i-oboroni>

ment Commissioner for Gender Policy, is a defining feature of the organization's work. These partnerships have specific, practical outcomes.

For example, together with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, UAWLE participates in the development of measures to implement Ukraine's National Action Plan under UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

In cooperation with the National Police of Ukraine, UAWLE introduces psychological support mechanisms for women police officers serving in the National Police.

Through collaboration with the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine and the State Border Guard Service Academy, UAWLE contributes to mentorship and support programs for women border officers with the participation of gender advisors Olesia Klymenko and Olena Volobuiieva. Cooperation with the National Guard of Ukraine focuses on preparing women service members for leadership roles within the security sector. Gender training sessions are conducted jointly with the State Emergency Service of Ukraine, and women rescuers receive multi-faceted support.

Equally important is UAWLE's cooperation with the non-governmental sector. UAWLE works with more than 20 Ukrainian civil society organizations, including: La Strada Ukraine (advocacy against domestic violence and sexual harassment); Ukrainian Women Lawyers' Association JurFem (legal protection for women in law enforcement); Ukrainian Women's Fund (support for educational initiatives for women in the security sector).

UAWLE has also established productive cooperation with international partners, such as UNOPS, UN Women, the EU Advisory Mission, the Canadian Police Arrangement, and others. Representatives of the organization take part in international conferences and other events where they present

Ukraine's experience in implementing gender policies, expanding women's rights, and preventing discrimination in law enforcement. They also speak about the role of Ukrainian women officers in resisting the russia's invasion.

Transformations Achieved

The presence of women in Ukraine's security sector is becoming commonplace and male colleagues acknowledge that, in some instances, it is precisely the involvement of women that helps resolve complex problems and defuse tense situations. This is especially true in cases of domestic violence, as well as instances of sexual violence committed by russia's military personnel during russia's armed aggression against Ukraine. Female police officers assist in identifying and documenting such crimes, as these officers tend to be more trusted by women survivors. Women in uniform are generally less inclined to use force and more likely to rely on negotiation and de-escalation when interacting with civilians. Compared to men, they are also less likely to impose their own vision of conflict resolution, often seeking to listen to all parties and find compromise solutions.

Much of the development of these approaches is thanks to UAWLE's efforts. The organization remains open to new members and is eager to share its experience. Today, UAWLE has 613 members: 559 women and 49 men of various ranks, titles, and positions. All of them uphold the organization's values and actively apply UAWLE practices in their work.

UAWLE's annual conferences have become a tradition not only as a venue for reporting results, but also for sharing best practices at the national and regional levels. Regional conferences titled "Law Enforcement of Ukraine – Strength in Unity" held in Poltava, Dnipro, and Rivne have improved the qualifications of more than 700 security sector representatives regarding gender

equality and the empowerment of women in law enforcement. A total of 96 events have been held, with 2,553 participants. Thanks to these efforts, the implementation of gender equality policies in law enforcement is progressing much more effectively.

As of March 2024, women made up about 25% of the patrol police force. According to Oleksii Biloshytskyi, First Deputy Head of the Patrol Police Department of Ukraine, which is more than 4,000 officers from across all positions of police personnel. “They wear uniforms, bear arms, do their jobs and loyally serve for the benefit of our Ukraine and its people!”⁴¹⁶

Meanwhile, the Head of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine Andrii Danyk reported that more than 12,000 women are employed in the State Emergency Service system.⁴¹⁷

Iryna Zaliialova, Head of the Department for Monitoring Gender Equality and Coordinating the Response to Domestic Violence at the Human Rights Directorate of the National Police, also shared that more than 16% of leadership positions in the National Police are held by women. According to her, “The Human Rights Directorate of the National Police of Ukraine includes a department for monitoring gender equality and coordinating the response to domestic violence. We are the main implementers of government initiatives in this area. We also co-implement the National Action Plan for UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. We took an active role in updating this plan. We have our own internal departmental order with assigned tasks, actions, strategic and operational goals.”⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁶ Ukrinform, March 8, 2024,

<https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3837125-zinki-stanovlat-cvert-osobovogo-skladu-patrulnoi-policii-bilosickij.html>

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Ukraine Media Center, April 20, 2023,

<https://mediacenter.org.ua/uk/27-zhinok-politsejskih-sluzhat-v-lavah-natspolitsiyi-ukrayini-irina-zalyalova/>

At the end of 2023, with support from the Embassies of the United States and Canada in Ukraine, a new resource center for law enforcement officers, UAWLE Hub, was launched in Kyiv. This informal space serves to develop officers from various agencies and strengthen cooperation between police and civil society, as well as with the public.⁴¹⁹

“The UAWLE Hub is not just a space, it is an opportunity for holding various trainings, consultations, and advancing professional development. We are launching this center as a platform for experience exchange and the growth of police officers.”

Kateryna Pavlichenko,
Chair of the UAWLE Board⁴²⁰

In 2024, Ukraine assumed leadership of the 15th region of the International Association of Women Police, which also includes Moldova, Serbia, and Kosovo.⁴²¹ This demonstrates that Ukraine’s experience in advancing gender equality within law enforcement has been recognized internationally and can serve as a model for other countries.

⁴¹⁹ Ukrinform, December 14, 2023,

<https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-kyiv/3799852-u-kievi-vidkrivsa-resursnij-centr-dla-pravoohoronciv-hub-uappo.html>

⁴²⁰ UAWLE,

<https://www.uawle.org/project/u-kievi-rozpocav-robotu-resursnij-centr-dla-pravoohoronciv-hab-uappo>

⁴²¹ Zmina, September 10, 2024,

<https://zmina.info/news/ukrayina-ocholyla-15-j-region-mizhnarodnoyi-asocziacziyi-zhinok-u-policziyi/>

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en, Peace, and Security” agenda are not only part of strategies and regulatory documents, but also part of our lives: a goal to pursue, one that informs our daily work, and is a pathway to justice. The authors express their sincere gratitude to everyone for meaningful communication, interviews, insights, and materials provided. We know that many of you set aside other work to respond quickly to our requests, using various means of communication, even while abroad, to answer, share, and advise. In our view, this is precisely the type of cooperation that makes positive results possible.

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We also developed successful cooperation with our translator Natalia Slipenko. Thanks to her skillful translation, En-

glish-speaking readers will have the opportunity to discover *Navigator 1325*. The world will obtain truthful and accurate information about events in Ukraine during the Russian Federation's armed aggression, as well as learn about the challenges women and men of Ukraine must overcome, not merely to survive, but to become stronger for victory and for future development. With her translation, she has expanded our horizons, our circle of readers, and our circle of friends. We express our deep gratitude to her. We also extend our most heartfelt thanks to our colleague in the United States, Irene Jarosewich, for assisting with the final edit of the English-language translation of *Navigator 1325*.

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This is not the first time Andrii Dunebabin has supported the efforts of our author's group. He is often our first reader and reviewer; his ideas on how to best develop topics provide creative inspiration, his expert assessments help us better understand many of the issues with which we work. We thank him for his patience and for the expertise that gave the publication more substance.

We present *Navigator 1325* as a collective endeavor by a broad team of like-minded colleagues and believe this publication will find numerous readers - in Ukraine, as well as abroad.

Kateryna Levchenko
Olena Hubina
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In 2025, UN Security Council Resolution 1325, Women, Peace, and Security marked its 25th anniversary. For Ukraine, the resolution has become especially relevant since the beginning of Russia's aggression: new war-driven circumstances have posed severe challenges for most women and girls now who seek various methods to meet them. Women actively enter the security and defense sector; by August 2025, approximately 100,000 women were serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, with 5,500 on the frontline. Women operate drones, take part in demining operations, serve in the National Police and the State Emergency Service, and study at military higher education institutions. They participate in creating the conditions for a sustainable and just peace, participate in negotiation processes, along with people-to-people diplomacy, to mobilize broader international support for Ukraine. Many also focus on assisting those affected by the war and on shaping prospects for the country's recovery and future development.

Through innovative approaches, Ukraine has already gained substantial experience in implementing UNSC Res 1325. The book *Navigator 1325* brings these achievements together and tells the story of the positive practices that have driven this progress. The book's protagonists are women and men who develop and implement Ukraine's state policy on gender equality as an element of a modern civilizational framework: they volunteer, support the families of women and men in military service, sew uniforms for women serving in the AFU, conduct gender-sensitive security audits of communities and territories. They develop the legislative framework to support those affected by war, including the payment of urgent interim reparations, implement compensation projects for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, and defend "Ukraine's interests" internationally. This book consists of twenty-five success stories that together portray contemporary Ukraine and the significant role of women in shaping this modern reality. The stories attest to Ukraine's modernity and effectiveness as a European state and to Ukraine's capacity to be part of a developed European community.

This publication reconstructs the methodology behind these successful stories. Reading the book will help many activists and leaders apply this experience not only in Ukraine, but also for the benefit of other countries that are experiencing armed conflict by helping to recognize the importance of women's participation in security, peacebuilding, and post-conflict development.

The audiences for this publication are professionals working on the design and implementation of gender policy; politicians; civil servants; researchers; representatives of civil society organizations; local authorities, as well as members of an international audience interested in the actual situation in Ukraine and those supportive of Ukraine's ongoing fight for independence.

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