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Research Article

## Women, Peace, and Security Dimensions of the War in Ukraine

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**Abstract:** The ongoing war in Ukraine has evident devastating consequences. It is an urgent reminder of the relevance of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security, which calls for the meaningful inclusion of women in all areas of peacebuilding and conflict prevention. This paper highlights the involvement of Ukrainian women in the war, emphasizing their roles across politics, defense, and humanitarian response. The authors examine some critical issues to stimulate and support women's active position in peace-building and conflict resolution in the Ukrainian context.

**Keywords:** UN SCR 1325, women, peace and security agenda, refugees, war, post-war, gender, Ukraine.

### Introduction

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda is a policy framework recognizing that women must be critical actors in all efforts to achieve sustainable international peace and security. As stated in the Assessment of the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325,

The world has lost sight of some of the key demands of the women's movement while advocating for the adoption of Resolution 1325: reducing military expenditures, controlling the availability of armaments, promoting non-violent forms of conflict resolution, and fostering a culture of peace.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* (UN Women, 2015), accessed September 17, 2023, <https://wps.unwomen.org/index.html>.

Ukraine adopted its first WPS National Action Plan (NAP) in 2016, covering the period from 2016 to 2020. The NAP includes six pillars of action: peacekeeping and peace-protecting activities, women's participation in peacebuilding, the prevention of conflicts and violence, the protection of women and girls affected by conflicts, the provision of assistance and rehabilitation for people affected by conflicts, and monitoring efforts. As the document states,

The NAP approaches the implementation of the WPS agenda both domestically and internationally, with the overall goal of eliminating cultural barriers that hinder the full participation of women in all aspects of negotiations and the resolution of conflicts and/or matters of peace and security.<sup>2</sup>

Ukraine is revising its NAP for 2020-2025 in the context of the 2022 Russian invasion. During the war, Ukraine adopted the necessary national legislation on domestic violence and ratified the Istanbul Convention on July 18, 2022, which marked a significant step in implementing the WPS agenda. Currently, the WPS agenda is a focal point of strategic communication. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky and other top authorities invest significant efforts to praise the nation's male and female defenders. Gender equality is heavily emphasized across all of the country's media. Social media posts frequently feature images and videos of male soldiers cooking, female fighters, and people cuddling kittens and dogs.

Russia, whose leadership appears to embrace toxic masculinity as a core attribute of its strategic narratives, stands in stark contrast to Ukraine, which highlights its female military narrative. Researchers from the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations state that "both parties to the conflict use gender perspective to their advantage, mainly through strategic communication."<sup>3</sup> Other researchers believe that "if Kyiv matches its rhetoric with action, its military can reflect its society, honor its heroes, and serve as a shining model for the world."<sup>4</sup>

For more than 20 years, WPS academic research has been contributing to solving the problem of practical implementation of the WPS agenda. Researchers address WPS in different countries<sup>5</sup> from various security perspectives,

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<sup>2</sup> "National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security until 2025," approved by Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1544-r, dated October 28, 2020, Kyiv, accessed September 17, 2023, <http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/index.php/ukraine/>.

<sup>3</sup> "Thematic Analysis: The Use of Gender Perspective in the Conflict in Ukraine," NCGM Thematic Analysis (Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations, June 23, 2023), [www.forsvarsmakten.se/siteassets/english/swedint/engelska/swedint/nordic-centre-for-gender-in-military-operations/thematic-analysis\\_ukraine\\_ncgm\\_june23.pdf](http://www.forsvarsmakten.se/siteassets/english/swedint/engelska/swedint/nordic-centre-for-gender-in-military-operations/thematic-analysis_ukraine_ncgm_june23.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Olga Olikier, "Fighting While Female: How Gender Dynamics Are Shaping the War in Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, November 21, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/fighting-while-female>.

<sup>5</sup> Míla O'Sullivan and Kateřina Krulišová, "Women, Peace and Security in Central Europe: in Between the Western Agenda and Russian Imperialism," *International Affairs* 99, no. 2 (March 2023): 625-643, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iad021>.

namely in the context of a refugee crisis,<sup>6</sup> peacekeeping<sup>7</sup> and peacemaking,<sup>8</sup> and war,<sup>9</sup> including the war in Ukraine.<sup>10</sup>

This article aims to highlight the current wartime roles of Ukrainian women in politics, defense, and humanitarian response. The research focuses on critical issues that support women's active position in peace-building and conflict resolution within the Ukrainian context.

## Female Leadership Before and During the War

In Ukraine, women's political participation has been advancing. Following the 2019 elections, 21 % of the members of the Verkhovna Rada, the Ukrainian parliament, are female. This is a significant improvement from the 12 % representation from 2014 to 2019, indicating a clear trend toward increasing female representation. The government also reflects this positive trend, with five female ministers (23 %) overseeing important areas such as the economy, social policy, Euro-Atlantic integration, veterans' affairs, and reintegration of territories. In addition, three out of five deputy prime ministers are female, with Julia Svyrydenko serving as the first deputy. However, there are currently no female oblast governors in Ukraine; the last female governor left the position in 2021, long before Russia's full-scale aggression.

Ukrainian women are increasingly involved in politics through civil society organizations. Prior to February 24, 2022, Ukrainian women concentrated on the peace and development agenda. However, since then, female politicians, diplomats, and activists have been working tirelessly to gather protective gear, weaponry, humanitarian aid, and other resources that can help Ukraine win the military battle.

In 2022, Olena Zelenska, the First Lady of Ukraine, took on speaking engagements that extended beyond the traditional scope of her role. She addressed the U.S. Congress on behalf of her nation, as well as the UN General Assembly, the

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<sup>6</sup> Aiko Holvikivi and Audrey Reeves, "Women, Peace and Security after Europe's 'Refugee Crisis'," *European Journal of International Security* 5, no. 2 (June 2020): 135-154, <https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2020.1>

<sup>7</sup> Sabrina Karim and Kyle Beardsley, *Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Jana Krause and Louise Olsson, "Women's Participation in Peace Processes," in *Contemporary Peacemaking: Peace Processes, Peacebuilding and Conflict*, 3rd edition, ed. Roger MacGinty and Anthony Wanis-St. John (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 103-119, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82962-9\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-82962-9_6).

<sup>9</sup> Kathleen Kuehnast, Chantal de Jonge Oudraat, and Helga Hernes, eds, *Women and War: Power and Protection in the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Katharine A.M. Wright, "Where Is Women, Peace and Security? NATO's Response to the Russia-Ukraine War," *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 5, no. 2 (2022): 275-277, <https://doi.org/10.1332/251510821X16499363293389>.

World Economic Forum in Davos, and several other summits, promoting Ukraine's external strategic narrative.

During the first half of 2022, prisoner-of-war exchanges were supervised by Iryna Vereshchuk, the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine and Minister of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories. Hanna Maliar, the deputy minister of defense, was responsible for the Military Media Center, a comprehensive media platform consolidating all communication capabilities of Ukraine's security and defense forces. It is, however, premature to assess the precise impact of Ukrainian women's involvement in strategic decision-making during wartime.

The extent of female leadership during conflict is the outcome of investments made in gender equality before the full-scale hostilities. Some corresponding projects continued despite the war. One such initiative is the #politicsWITHOUTsexism mobile educational center, established in Ukraine in early 2022. It aims to cultivate a new cohort of female leaders from diverse social backgrounds who would improve the political, public, and human rights landscapes. A team of professional trainers specializing in psychology, gender equality in politics, and public speaking has already visited five regions of our country to engage with women leaders, legislators, and activists and share their expertise and experiences.<sup>11</sup> As the target audience expands, the program has evolved to address contemporary needs. The project organizers emphasize to participants that their role in the nation's reconstruction is vital and should not be underestimated. Even amidst current challenging circumstances, participants are encouraged to uphold the earlier gender-related achievements attained at local and state levels.

In Western democracies, the feminist movement is typically associated with peace,<sup>12</sup> supporting anti-militarist theories, advocating for the peaceful and diplomatic resolution of international disputes as a means to preserve global peace and security, working to prevent new wars on a global scale, and raising awareness of the negative impacts of war on women, girls, boys, and men. Ukrainian feminists refute this approach by referencing a different historical experience. They argue that Western analyses often lack a post-colonial or decolonial perspective, fail to generate knowledge from local contexts due to a lack of focus, and exclude the voices and visions of colonized countries regarding their definitions of "peace" and "freedom."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Iryna Tishchenko, "Iryna Tyshko: 'Society Should Get Used to the Fact That Women Can Be Leaders'," *Gender in Details*, November 16, 2022, <https://genderindetail.org.ua/library/politika/iryna-tyshko-suspilstvo-mae-zvyknuty-do-toho-scho-zhinky-mozhut-but-y-liderkamy.html>. – in Ukrainian

<sup>12</sup> See Tarja Väyrynen, Swati Parashar, Élise Féron, and Catia Cecilia Confortini, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Feminist Peace Research*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429024160>.

<sup>13</sup> Iryna Dedusheva and Oksana Potapova, "Five Theses on Feminism and Militarism," *Gender in Detail*, January 30, 2023, <https://genderindetail.org.ua/season-topic/dosvidy-viyny/pyat-tez-pro-feminizm-i-militaryzm.html>.

War is often based on rigid binary concepts of masculinity (the strong defend the weak from the enemy) and femininity (the need for protection, vulnerability, and passivity). Ukrainian feminist organizations work to increase the visibility of the diverse roles of women, men, and non-binary individuals in war, moving beyond the binary view of women's roles as solely victims or soldiers. Notably, this has been a significant priority for NATO for many years.

Currently, financial support is needed for feminist and women's rights organizations working to prevent and respond to trafficking and gender-based violence, as well as providing healthcare, childcare, and education in Ukraine. Psychological support and rehabilitation should be available to women and children affected by the war, especially those from vulnerable groups, regardless of their location – be it abroad, in zones of intensive combat, or liberated territories.

## **Women in the Armed Forces**

Since 2016, the number of women serving in the armed forces has drastically increased. Women engage in combat roles alongside men on the front lines. According to Ukrainian officials, women comprise 15% of the armed forces, or approximately 50,000 individuals. However, as more men enlist, the proportion of women in the Armed Forces has realistically declined to around 8%. Presently, 5,000 women are either fighting on the front lines or working in positions that might place them there. In Ukraine, women are eligible to apply for all military jobs, including roles as tankers, UAV pilots, gunners, company and platoon commanders, and others.

Since 2014, women have been serving in the Ukrainian Armed Forces, Security Sector Agencies, and volunteer battalions. Despite their contributions, many issues persist, including sexual harassment, discrimination, and the lack of proper uniforms and body armor designed for women. As Olga Oliker points out,

Before the February invasion, activists including Invisible Battalion and some of Ukraine's foreign partners had convinced Ukrainian military officials to establish a network of over 400 advisers on gender-related issues. Now, however, according to one of those advisers, who spoke with me on the condition of anonymity, these individuals have been removed or sidelined.<sup>14</sup>

Through various initiatives, NGOs, and government agencies, women actively fight for their rights and gender equality in the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The Invisible Battalion, a prominent Ukrainian advocacy campaign for gender equality in the armed forces, is renowned both in Ukraine and abroad for its commitment to the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. This organization engages in advocacy, conducts sociological research, and promotes civil rights, making significant contributions to advancing gender equality in the military.

According to new legislation from 2021, women between the ages of 18 and 60 who work in certain professions are required to register for military service.

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<sup>14</sup> Oliker, "Fighting While Female: How Gender Dynamics."

During wartime, this expanded reserve of women would be mobilized as part of the national reserve to serve in a broad range of military specialties, including as librarians, journalists, musicians, veterinarians, translators, and psychologists. So far, registration for mobilization has been voluntary for women. The government has postponed mandatory registration for women by a year, until October 2023, and has limited the professions required to register to medical doctors, nurses, and pharmacists. In contrast, men have been required to register for military service all along, meaning that mobilization affects eligible men and women very differently.

## Women and Children at War

Prior to the war, Ukraine had an imbalance in sex representation within the population: 54 % women to 46 % men, with a pronounced skew toward women in those over the age of 45.

From February 24, 2022, to September 11, 2023, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) recorded 27,149 civilian casualties in the country: 9,614 killed and 17,535 injured, including<sup>15</sup>:

- a total of 9,614 killed (4,461 men, 2,672 women, 236 girls, and 289 boys, as well as 29 children and 1,927 adults whose sex is yet unknown)
- a total of 17,535 injured (5,231 men, 3,625 women, 378 girls, and 516 boys, as well as 286 children and 7,499 adults whose sex is yet unknown)

The Small Arms Survey estimates “that about 88,000 Ukrainians lost their lives during the first year of the conflict,”<sup>16</sup> and “three-quarters of these fatalities were combatants.”<sup>17</sup> Overall, 94 % of Ukrainians killed were men, and about one in five civilian deaths (22 %) were women.

According to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,<sup>18</sup> as of September 12, 2023, there are 5,830,500 refugees from Ukraine in Europe and 369,200 Ukrainian refugees recorded beyond Europe. Positive trends have been observed in the first half of 2023 concerning the rising number of returnees. On January 24, 2023, there were 7,996,573 Ukrainian refugees in Europe (making up 20 % of the country’s total population), and 4,952,938 Ukrainian refugees were registered for Temporary Protection or other national protection programs in Europe.

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<sup>15</sup> UN, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Ukraine: Civilian Casualty Update 11 September 2023,” September 11, 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/09/ukraine-civilian-casualty-update-11-september-2023>.

<sup>16</sup> Gergely Hideg and Callum Watson, “Russia’s War: Weighing the Human Cost in Ukraine,” *Small Arms Survey*, May 15, 2023, <https://smallarmssurvey.medium.com/russias-war-weighing-the-human-cost-in-ukraine-9ecc73a41987>.

<sup>17</sup> Hideg and Watson, “Russia’s War: Weighing the Human Cost in Ukraine.”

<sup>18</sup> “Ukraine Refugee Situation,” *Operational Data Portal*, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, September 15, 2023, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>.

However, every second refugee living abroad has no intention of returning to Ukraine after the war.<sup>19</sup> This is alarming, particularly because women with children constitute the great majority of refugees. They continue to be among the most vulnerable groups, facing risks such as human trafficking, financial difficulties, and mental health issues. As part of its ongoing support to Ukraine, ODIHR surveyed nearly 1,000 Ukrainian refugee women to ensure their experiences and vulnerabilities were considered in policy responses and assistance efforts. According to ODIHR's latest report<sup>20</sup> published on January 20, 2023, various challenges impact the safety and security of refugees. These challenges include insufficient proficiency in the local language, a lack of financial resources, difficulty in renting housing, inadequate healthcare, a lack of social networks and community, domestic violence, and prejudice. Additionally, some respondents reported encountering instances of sexual harassment, domestic violence, requests for sexual favors, offers to work in the sex industry (including surrogacy), proposals to create pornographic materials, and instances of sexual violence since leaving Ukraine. Some respondents revealed that their own children or children under their care had experienced domestic violence, sexual harassment, requests for sexual favors, and proposals to create pornographic materials, along with instances of bullying, discrimination, and harassment in schools, universities, or the local community. Nearly half of the respondents stated that they had not received any information regarding human trafficking or how to stay safe, while two out of every five indicated that they were concerned about it. One in five respondents emphasized the need for more action to prevent the trafficking of women and girls, stressing the necessity of gender-sensitive approaches to address the problem of human trafficking of female refugees and the lack of control over refugees' movements once they have crossed the border. Many Ukrainian women and children participate in various gatherings and protests abroad to raise awareness of the war in Ukraine and solicit support for the country.

As of June 24, 2023, there are 4,8 million officially recognized internally displaced persons, mostly women and children.<sup>21</sup> The government of Ukraine, in collaboration with several international organizations, has implemented several programs for additional social support measures for internally displaced and affected persons. However, many internally displaced people suffer from psycho-

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<sup>19</sup> Maria Horban, "The Life of Ukrainian Refugees in Numbers: The Results of a Study Based on a Survey of Ukrainians in Different Countries," *Radio Svoboda*, September 19, 2023, <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/zhyttya-bizhentsiv-u-tyfrakh-doslidzhen-nya/32599058.html>. – in Ukrainian

<sup>20</sup> "ODIHR Survey on the Safety and Security of Women Refugees from Ukraine," *Reliefweb*, February 1, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/poland/odihhr-survey-safety-and-security-women-refugees-ukraine>.

<sup>21</sup> "Vereshchuk Named the Number of Registered and Unregistered Migrants in Ukraine," *Ukrinform*, June 24, 2023, <http://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3727098-veresuk-nazvala-kilkist-zareestrovanih-i-nezareestrovanih-pereselenciv-v-ukraini.html>. – in Ukrainian

logical stress due to temporary housing rentals, a lack of resources, discrimination, unemployment, worries about their loved ones, and domestic violence, which is on the rise. The situation is exacerbated by former combatants who have suffered psychological trauma.

Thirteen million Ukrainians remain in zones of intensive combat. In addition to the challenges of raising children under shelling and missile attacks, often in basements and on occupied territories, the majority of workers in the medical and nursing fields are women. They also work as social workers, postal workers, shop assistants, and train conductors for evacuations. Amid chronic stress, women provide children with emotional support, give birth in bomb shelters, and conduct lessons between air strikes to help them cope with the difficulties of war. It is important to note that the majority of schools operate online in areas of intense warfare, with municipal kindergartens closed. Many females, including single mothers, wives of military personnel, and mobilized individuals, face a difficult choice between caring for their children or continuing to work and earn money.

Although the common belief is that men are more affected by unemployment than women during the war, the Employment Center reports that 69 % of the registered unemployed are female. Women typically work in the budget sector of the economy, which has proven to be far more resilient to layoffs or compensation reductions.<sup>22</sup>

Ukrainian women often encounter significant financial, social, and psychological hardships both at home and abroad. However, they demonstrate exceptional fortitude as they continue to serve as role models for their families and children. Many women take on active social roles and participate in movements that support the civilian population. In general, men tend to volunteer more in the security and defense sector, while women are more likely to volunteer in humanitarian work, aiding vulnerable populations and providing civilian logistical support for the armed forces. Support can manifest in many different forms, from financial donations to the organization of supply networks for food and medicine, as well as assistance to enterprises. Women frequently engage in activities such as producing candles, sawing camouflage nets, and preparing food for the defenders, and often involve children in these efforts.

## **WPS Agenda in Ukraine after the War**

The WPS agenda prioritizes ending conflicts rather than solely making conflicts safer for women.<sup>23</sup> As such, it encompasses participation, conflict prevention,

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<sup>22</sup> Yaroslav Vinokurov, "Millions of Ukrainians Lost Their Jobs Because of the War. Where Do They Get the Money to Live?" *Ekonomichna Pravda (Economic Truth)*, December 8, 2022, <https://www.epravda.com.ua/publications/2022/12/8/694732/>. – in Ukrainian

<sup>23</sup> "Preventing Conflict: The Origins of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda," in *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace*, accessed September 22, 2023, <https://wps.unwomen.org/preventing/>.



protection, relief, and recovery. The WPS agenda aligns with the UN concept of human security, which advocates for both government and international community protection of individuals, along with the empowerment of people and communities to address various challenges, such as poverty, violence, and diseases.

This war cannot endure indefinitely. At the same time, the duration of the conflict will determine its impact on the WPS agenda and how the WPS agenda, in turn, affects the conflict. Presently, the prevailing strategic narrative promoted in Ukraine revolves around achieving ultimate victory at any cost.

Prior experience in post-war societies shows that there should be a synergy between the WPS agenda and post-war priorities in several key areas:

- Demographic losses
- Return of the refugees
- Healthcare
- Mental health and psychological support networks
- Gender-related violence
- Education
- Childcare
- Unemployment
- Women in the Armed Forces
- Landmines and contaminated farmland
- Women and youth empowerment
- Sports and entertainment
- Culture.

The estimated losses of population for Ukraine vary widely, ranging from 500,000 to 600,000 to as high as five to six million. The final figure will largely depend on the duration of the war. The longer the war continues, the less likely it becomes for Ukrainian women and children to return as they become more settled and adapted to life abroad. Sociological studies conducted in Poland and Germany indicate that over 70 % of Ukrainian refugee women residing there hold a college degree. Consequently, Ukraine is losing some of its most intelligent, business-minded, and independent women, who took the risk of leaving their homeland with their children, often without external assistance. The fertility rate in Ukraine is currently 1.1 and is projected to drop to 0.7 by 2023. As the protracted war draws to an end and bans on men to leave the country are lifted, Ukrainian families may reunite, but they are likely to do so outside of Ukraine.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “Only About 1.5 Million Ukrainians Left Through the Western Border, but the Biggest Demographic Losses Will Be after the War – Demographer,” *TEXTY.ORG.UA*, December 22, 2022, <https://texty.org.ua/fragments/108541/za-kordon-vyyihalo-lyshe>

To ensure that both Ukrainian refugees return to the country and citizens remain, providing good prospects, including housing, employment opportunities, access to healthcare, children's education, and other necessities, is imperative. A concise action plan must be developed now to address these challenges effectively after the war. It is crucial to prioritize the inclusion and empowerment of women and girls. This emphasis should not wait until the end of the war. The WPS agenda can be implemented partly through state initiatives to foster the growth of new industries, construct new civilian infrastructure, and implement educational and support programs for children, seniors, members of specific communities, and vulnerable populations.

Societal progress relies heavily on the healthcare system, which is significantly affected by the ongoing conflict. As civilian casualties continue to rise, the number of individuals with disabilities in need of rehabilitation, extensive therapy, and prosthetics is difficult to determine. Due to widespread damage to hospitals and the departure of many healthcare professionals from the country, access to healthcare in Ukraine will be severely restricted. In Ukraine's post-war WPS agenda, establishing a system of psychological support and rehabilitation for women and children is imperative. This should involve the creation of a network of women's centers, engagement with local communities, and the involvement of school psychologists. Additionally, the healthcare system should provide special assistance programs for women and girls who are victims of gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence.

Gender-related violence, including domestic violence and sexual harassment, needs to be effectively addressed through proper investigation by the police and prosecution of perpetrators. Special initiatives should be implemented to dispel the myth that "she is to blame." Given the sharp increase in war-related violence across society, women will require increased protection from their abusers and clear legal procedures after the war ends. Additionally, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive system of support for victims of gender-based violence.

Education is another critical area requiring attention. Ukrainian schoolchildren, regardless of their location, have experienced significant educational setbacks due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences of full-scale war. According to Serhiy Horbachov, the educational Ombudsman for Ukraine, "Topics missed by schoolchildren, and consequently, non-acquired knowledge and skills, need to be identified and compensated for. Representatives from the Education Sector of the World Bank believe that these educational losses in Ukraine may equate to more than one year of schooling."<sup>25</sup> The extent of educational losses, strategies for their compensation, and established follow-up procedures at the state level are still to be defined. In the medium term, Ukraine's economic

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<sup>25</sup> "Ukrainian Schoolchildren Are a Year Behind Schedule Because of the War," *Konkurent Information Agency*, January 27, 2023, <https://konkurent.ua/publication/110854/ukrainski-shkolaryi-vidstaut-na-rik-vid-programi-cherez-viynu/>. – in Ukrainian

growth will require significant investments in human capital, particularly in restoring the system of providing high-quality education. It is worth mentioning that nearly 90 % of school teachers in Ukraine are women, according to the latest available data from 2019.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, women play a significant role in overseeing their children's online education balancing family responsibilities and work. Thus, education is integral to the WPS agenda for post-war Ukraine. Systemic reforms in education represent one approach to addressing difficulties in education. Throughout the conflict, numerous kindergartens and schools were destroyed, significantly impacting both pre-school and school education systems and reducing institutional resources for childcare, the latter of which is crucial in achieving the WPS goal.

The level of unemployment can be reduced by investing in education. Ukraine will require qualified employees, especially in the fields of industry, construction, and energy. Implementing dual education programs in higher education could help meet the state's needs and decrease unemployment. As reconstruction efforts begin after the war, job openings are expected to increase significantly. Ukraine's path toward European integration will also contribute to job creation.

Under such circumstances, it is crucial that Ukrainians are well-prepared for employment. As the fighting continues, more individuals may become unable to work, and their skills may be affected. Finding normal jobs, as before the war, may become more challenging.<sup>27</sup>

According to the Ministry of Economy, there are 2.6 million unemployed people in Ukraine, although individuals who are abroad or in temporarily occupied territories are not included in this figure. The International Labour Organization projects a more pessimistic unemployment rate of 28.3 % for 2022. After the war, it will be crucial for the government and businesses to collaborate in creating new jobs to prevent the deterioration of labor relations. High poverty rates and low economic activity among women pose additional challenges for the WPS agenda, particularly when unemployment rates are high.

A robust operational system of gender advisers at all levels can empower women in the Ukrainian Armed Forces and other defense and security agencies. Drawing from the lessons learned during this war, institutional adjustments should be made regarding structures, functions, and organizational culture. To ensure that women's voices are heard, reform boards should include female officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers. The military must mainstream gender within their organization and integrate a gender perspective into all decision-making processes, policies, and programs, ensuring that these efforts are not merely theoretical but serve as operational mechanisms.

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<sup>26</sup> Olga Golovina, "Education – Purely a Woman's Business? Or Why Are Men in School," *NUSH – New Ukrainian School*, March 9, 2019, <https://nus.org.ua/articles/osvita-sutozhinocha-sprava-abo-navishho-choloviky-u-shkoli/>. – in Ukrainian

<sup>27</sup> Vinokurov, "Millions of Ukrainians Lost Their Jobs Because of the War."

To ensure the gender balance necessary for decision-making at all levels and in all aspects of human life, it is essential to empower women across all economic spheres. Women's organizations require financial support from both the state and international organizations. Their training initiatives will contribute to increased representation of women in leadership positions, thereby effectively protecting women's rights and interests and implementing human-centered and inclusive policies. Gender equality and the equal participation of men and women in leadership roles are vital for the reconstruction of the country. Engaging in a dialogue with states and organizations willing to participate in the reconstruction of Ukraine is crucial, emphasizing the importance of cooperation with women's organizations. It is also important to develop a feminist analysis of the key spheres of life that will be affected by the reconstruction, including the economy, infrastructure, social services, education, and healthcare. The history of other nations demonstrates that, often, women's participation in reconstruction efforts is limited to "women's only" subjects, such as combating gender-based violence or providing assistance for survivors of sexual assault resulting from conflict. While these issues are undeniably important, women must be involved in the recovery process holistically, influencing decisions in all significant areas.

Women will face increased risks from landmines and contaminated land in rural regions of Ukraine. The contamination levels are severe, leading to an ongoing burden on Ukrainian demining agencies like the State Emergency Service. According to international demining specialists, the proportion of unexploded Russian munitions is between 10 and 30 percent, leaving a significant amount in the ground for years.<sup>28</sup> Currently, 10-20 percent of the country's farmland is contaminated by explosive hazards. The presence of unexploded ordnance, landmines, and other explosive remnants of war will negatively impact Ukraine's food production and supply chain. It will also hinder aid workers' access to the country's worst-affected regions and complicate the reconstruction of vital civilian infrastructure. Furthermore, areas contaminated by explosive relics of war will face an influx of returning refugees to the country. Ukraine will need assistance from the international community to remove the explosive war remnants and ensure the safety and security of affected populations, particularly women and children.

After the war, youth will be a group that requires special attention, as they are both vulnerable and strategically significant. In terms of societal growth, social, leadership, educational, and vocational initiatives should focus on young people, with a particular emphasis on young women. Empowering young people is crucial for the multifaceted restoration and sustainable growth of Ukraine, as well as for preventing the rapid deterioration of the situation of women.

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<sup>28</sup> Karen Chandler, Panel: "The Evolving Crisis in Ukraine – How Different Parts of the USG Are Reacting in Real Time," Remarks at The Society for International Development Washington Chapter Annual Conference, *U.S. Department of State*, May 26, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/panel-the-evolving-crisis-in-ukraine-how-different-parts-of-the-usg-are-reacting-in-real-time/>.

In Ukraine, there has been extensive damage to or destruction of sports infrastructure due to the conflict. While restoring it will require time and resources, it is necessary because sports infrastructure is interconnected with healthcare and education. Engaging in sports and leisure activities can help alleviate the weight of tension and hardships experienced by individuals. Therefore, people need to have access to activities that allow them to unwind mentally and feel alive. This includes options such as attending theater performances, ballet shows, stand-up comedy, or participating in sports activities.

Utilizing current societal perspectives, Ukraine should aim to eliminate political and cultural conservatism, patriarchal gender norms, and gender stereotypes that suppress women's voices and hinder their equal participation in decision-making processes. In 2021, 56 % of Ukrainians believed that gender inequality in Ukraine was rare.<sup>29</sup> However, the majority of gender stereotypes are being challenged by the realities of war, highlighting their artificial and imposed nature on society. In Ukrainian culture, entrenched stereotypes regarding women's weakness and beauty persist. Rather than perpetuating these stereotypes in the media, efforts should focus on eradicating them through education, starting in the classroom. As refugees return, Ukraine's culture should be open to foreign influences, recognizing that certain cultural concepts may gain prominence over time. Ukrainian culture must be further infused with principles of gender equality to foster a sustainable and inclusive society.

Hatred, reconciliation, and forgiveness remain controversial topics. Drawing from the experience of World War II's devastating effects on Ukraine, Ukrainians have learned the importance of establishing friendly ties, even with former adversaries. For instance, now, 77 years after the war, Germans generously support the country and its people. Achieving peace after the war will require a strategy to address these complex issues and promote societal friendship and harmony in the absence of hostility and violence. Family and family values can play a crucial role in such efforts, with women making significant contributions to security, prosperity, and stability. However, navigating these issues remains a painful challenge in Ukraine at present.

## **Conclusion**

The war in Ukraine has brought to light numerous gaps in the implementation of the WPS agenda. While elements of the WPS agenda have been integrated into Ukrainian society for some time, there are still areas where progress is needed. Nevertheless, Ukraine demonstrates effective narratives of equity and equality, with a society that is open to progressive liberal viewpoints and shares European values. The war has served as a form of shock treatment that assisted in eradicating gender preconceptions from society. Bravery is exhibited on all fronts, regardless of gender, with both men and women displaying remarkable courage in

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<sup>29</sup> "Gender Roles and Stereotypes," *Rating Group*, March 4, 2021, [https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/gendernye\\_rol\\_i\\_stereotipy.html](https://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/gendernye_rol_i_stereotipy.html). – in Ukrainian

various aspects of life, including social, informational, and economic spheres. The significant contribution to the victory should be recognized in order to construct the legitimacy and power of voices in post-war Ukraine. Individuals with combat experience, often men, may carry more political and symbolic weight. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the impact of the war extends beyond the frontlines, affecting the daily lives of people and society as a whole.

In the aftermath of the war, the Ukrainian women's movement will face a range of institutional and structural issues in addition to communication and discursive challenges. Drawing from the lessons learned, several concrete measures can be implemented to encourage and support women's active participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution in the Ukrainian context:

- Ensure gender balance in decision-making across all sectors, with a particular focus on key areas such as the economy, defense, and healthcare
- Implement constant monitoring of gender perspectives
- Develop a compelling strategic narrative of equality and equity
- Initiate leadership programs to empower women and young people
- Provide support and resources for women's organizations.

## Disclaimer

The views expressed are solely those of the authors and do not represent official views of the PfP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes, participating organizations, or the Consortium's editors.

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