

Gendering Europe's Security and Recovery Responses to Ukraine

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2023

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The author would like to thank to Ondřej Horký-Hlucháň, Kateřina Krulišová and Oksana Potapova for providing valuable comments to the earlier drafts of this paper.

This policy paper was produced within the Think Visegrad in Brussels Fellowship programme. In the first half of 2016, eight think-tanks from the Visegrad Group that have been cooperating in the Think Visegrad platform, agreed on the idea proposed by the EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, to create a common representation office in Brussels. The main motivation for it is the need to encourage debate on issues of common interest to the EU and the V4 and explain the positions of the V4 to a wide audience. Think Visegrad in Brussels would like to project an image of constructive partners, to explain the dynamics of the debates within our regions and to highlight our active contributions to EU policy-making. For more information about Think Visegrad and its members visit www.think.visegradfund.org.

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Summary and Key Recommendations

Russia's full-scale genocidal invasion of Ukraine has been fundamentally reshuffling the security landscape and policymaking in Europe. The European Union (EU), North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and individual governments have responded with unprecedented military, humanitarian and political support to Ukraine and the adoption of restrictive measures towards the Russian Federation. Yet, these responses to Russia's war on Ukraine have been profoundly gendered, effectively side-lining the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and other gender norms that form Europe's core democratic values and underpin various domestic and external policies. This policy paper argues that side-lining gender as a 'soft' issue for later cannot be justified because gender dynamics are at the centre of soft and hard security right now, shaping all possible aspects of the war cycle, be it military, humanitarian, economic, social, legal, informational or ideational. This paper shows that it is now urgent to centre the gender dimension and Ukrainian women's voices at all levels of Europe's engagement with Ukraine. To do so, Europe must focus on the following: 1. Respond to Russia's dangerous weaponization of gender politics and its direct impact on war violence; 2. Recognize and build upon gender progress and Ukrainian women's agency in resistance and relief; 3. Prioritize gendered intersectional approach and women's socioeconomic security in post-war reconstruction and recovery.

Recommendations to Europe and the international community:

- Recognize Russia's war on Ukraine as a fundamental attack on democratic values based on respect for gender equality and human rights. Counter anti-gender war narrative that legitimizes the invasion and the war violence and seeks to break apart European unity.
- Support international initiatives aimed at investigation and accountability of the war crimes and crimes against humanity by the Russian Federation including conflict-related sexual violence and forced transfer of Ukrainian children to the Russian Federation.
- Respond to the gendered crisis in Ukraine and Europe by prioritizing gendered and intersectional approaches to humanitarian aid, protection and needs of refugees and IDPs, their access to the care infrastructure and integration to the labour market. Prioritize WPS approach, and respond effectively to the continuum of violence in Ukraine and Europe (sexual violence and gender-based violence, violation of reproductive rights, and human trafficking). Ensure responses are locally driven through engagement with civil society.
- Support meaningful participation of women, feminist groups, LGBTQIA+ people and other minorities and disadvantaged groups in Ukraine's rebuilding and recovery and the EU accession process.

- Support rebuilding of social infrastructure among the priorities (child-care facilities, hospitals, schools etc.) including post-war prioritization of the social sphere by the government.

Introduction

Ukraine's resistance to Russia's genocidal aggression has been in the spotlight of international security debates and policy responses in Europe¹ and beyond. It is broadly acknowledged that Russia's illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 has caused the largest security crisis in Europe since World War II. What has been mostly absent in the security debates and policymaking, however, is that the war and the responses to it are profoundly gendered. In the first months after the invasion, the rapid responses of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), as well as individual Member States, have come with gendered silence, effectively sidelining the United Nations (UN) Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda,² which serves as the gender pillar of their external policies.³ Experience shows, however, that not including gender from the start is damaging to women and inclusive and sustainable post-war development.⁴ Despite such evidence and more than two decades of progress in the WPS area, including through feminist foreign policies, the full-scale war has caught these actors ill-prepared.

Against the new reality of a large-scale conventional war in Europe, the traditional hard security approaches have gained prominence. Gender agenda has been once again delegated to the margins as a 'soft' and secondary issue for later, for peacetime. This false logic ignores the fact that gender is at the centre of Russia's war efforts with very hard impacts in Ukraine and beyond. Gender dynamics are at the centre of soft and hard security right now, shaping all possible aspects of the war cycle,⁵ be it military, humanitarian, economic, social, legal, informational or ideational. European representatives have demonstrated coordination and unity in providing unprecedented military supplies and humanitarian aid to Ukraine. Russia's aggression has also prompted restrictive international measures of extraordinary scale including economic sanctions and international isolation and exclusions at various levels. Although some international attention has gradually been paid to the gender dimension of humanitarian assistance,

¹ This paper is focused primarily on European policy makers including the EU, NATO, the OSCE, Council of Europe, financial institutions and individual governments. It mentions also UN agencies given the nature of their work in Ukraine and their broader human-centred understanding of security.

² International gender norm formed by ten UN Security Council resolutions: 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), and 2493 (2019).

³ Míla O'Sullivan. 2022. [Where are the Ukrainian Women? Respecting female voices now and in post-war times](#), Heinrich Böll Stiftung Prague, 4 April 2022.

⁴ E.g., Aida A. Hozic. 2021. [Dayton, WPS and the entrenched "manliness" of ethnic powersharing peace agreements](#). LSE Blog, 15 February, 2021;

⁵ It is crucial to recognize gender dynamics of the pre-war period, wartime and post-war period.

women's role in various forms of resistance and women's civil society inside Ukraine much more is needed.

I argue in this policy paper that it is now urgent to centre the gender dimension and women's voices in all aspects of Europe's security and recovery responses to Ukraine. This concerns the EU, NATO, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) as well as individual governments including countries adhering to Feminist Foreign Policies. In gendering responses to Ukraine, European and other international actors need to focus on the following:

1. Respond to Russia's dangerous weaponization of gender politics and its direct impact on war violence.
2. Prioritize gendering of responses to resistance and relief by building on gender progress and women's active resistance.
3. Prioritize gendered intersectional approach and women's socioeconomic security in post-war reconstruction and recovery.

The policy paper illustrates that these are areas with the most serious gendered impacts and identifies the risks of gender-oblivious responses to Ukraine's peaceful and sustainable future as well as to its European integration.

This work proceeds as follows. Firstly, the paper shows that Europe must recognize the linkages of Russia's illiberal gender norms in domestic and foreign policy with its war efforts and genocidal violence in Ukraine. The second part discusses gender progress and women's active resistance in Ukraine and points to the urgent need to build on this momentum in European responses. The following part focuses on the gendered impacts of the full-scale war and highlights concerns of Ukrainian feminists about the liberalization approach to reconstruction at the expense of the social sphere which could be detrimental to sustainable post-war recovery. The final part summarizes the main arguments and outlines recommendations for international responses to Ukraine's recovery.

From Russia's Weaponization of Gender to Imperial Genocidal Violence

Recognizing the linkage between Russia's anti-gender propaganda and gendered war violence is crucial to fully understanding and respond to Russia's mass-scale war on Ukraine. Russia has used anti-gender politics as part of information operations aimed to destabilize and divide Europe and the West. Gender has thus been at the centre of Russia's pre-war and wartime efforts. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine was preceded by more than a decade of Russian anti-gender foreign policy based on the systematic spread of illiberal values under the imperial label of the "Russian World" (Russkii mir) as opposed to the 'European values' or 'Western values.' This has intensified after Russia's first invasion of Ukraine in 2014, following the country's choice of EU integration in successive elections.

Russia has strategically weaponized values of gender equality and feminism to re-claiming its Russian empire. This has manifested in opposing pro-gender equality policies and WPS agenda at the UN and the OSCE and in the spread of gendered disinformation,⁶ including efforts to re-introduce gender stereotypes in Ukraine.⁷ Russia's public diplomacy has sought to discredit the Western-based value system through homophobic and anti-feminist narratives that ridicule gender equality as 'gender ideology' and Europe as decadent 'Gayropa'.⁸ Indeed, anti-gender tendencies continue to gain strength in Europe and beyond including through extensive financing coming from Russia.⁹ Russia has emerged as a major power centre in global anti-gender mobilisation, with corresponding Russian financial backing coming from two Russian oligarchs, think tanks, and government agencies.¹⁰

The illiberal traditional value model is not only Russia's foreign policy tool but the very reality inside Russia. Years of anti-feminist 'Russian values' policies resulted in the restriction of gender studies, decriminalization of domestic violence, and prohibition of 'Gay propaganda' among many other anti-democratic steps.¹¹ This is closely tied with the widespread culture of toxic masculinity and narrative and practices of violence that are rooted at the very heart of the Russian state. Russia's homophobic laws have further spread to annexed Crimea after 2014 and to the self-proclaimed republics (DNR and LNR).¹² Importantly, Russia's traditional value narrative that is part of the so-called 'culture wars' has played a key role in legitimizing the war on Ukraine.¹³ In this sense, gender has become also Russia's hard power national security tool used to gain support from the population. Indeed, in his speech on 24 February 2022, Russian President Putin justified the invasion of Ukraine by saving traditional values against the degenerated West: "They sought to destroy our traditional values and force on us their false values that would erode us, our people, from within, the attitudes they have been aggressively imposing on their countries, attitudes that are directly leading to degradation and degeneration because they are contrary to human nature. This is not going to happen. No one has ever succeeded in doing

⁶ See the summary of a study on gendered disinformation conducted jointly by government of Canada, the European External Action Service (EEAS), Germany, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, and the United States: <https://www.state.gov/gendered-disinformation-tactics-themes-and-trends-by-foreign-malign-actors/>

⁷ See e.g., Jelena Cupač and Irem Ebetürk. 2020. The personal is global political: The antifeminist backlash in the United Nations. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 22(4) 702–714; Olena Suslova. 2017. The Gender Dimension of Conflict. *Ukraine Analytica*, Vol. 1, No. 7, 23-28.; Míla O'Sullivan. 2019. Being Strong Enough to Defend Yourself': Untangling the Women, Peace and Security Agenda amidst the Ukrainian Conflict. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 5, 746-67.; Damjan Denkovski. 2022. Disrupting the multilateral order? The impact of anti-gender actors on multilateral structures in Europe, Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy.

⁸ See e.g., Emil Edenborg. 2021. Anti-Gender Politics as Discourse Coalitions: Russia's Domestic and International Promotion of "Traditional Values", *Problems of Post-Communism*, 70:2, 175-184; Maryna Shevtsova. 2020. "Fighting 'Gayropa': Europeanization and Instrumentalization of LGBTI Rights in Ukrainian Public Debate." *Problem of Post-Communism* 67 (6): 500–510.

⁹ Neill Datta. 2021. *Tip of the Iceberg. Religious Extremist Funders against Human Rights for Sexuality and Reproductive Health in Europe 2009 – 2018*. European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights.

¹⁰ One of these oligarchs is Vladimir Yakunin. "Yakunin's ambition is to become the Anti-Soros, the organiser of anti-liberal politics on a global scale. He creates a communicative environment linking various directions of anti-globalism, Christian conservatism, anti-liberalism and anti-Americanism." Neill Datta. 2021. *Tip of the Iceberg*, 21.

¹¹ Leandra Bias. 2022. [The International of Antifeminists](#). *LSE Blog Engenderings*.

¹² ADC Memorial and the Centre for Civil Liberties. 2016. [Violation of LGBTI Rights in Crimea and Donbass: The Problem of Homophobia in Territories Beyond Ukraine's Control](#).

¹³ Agnieszka Graff, Elżbieta Korolczuk. 2022. [The Culture War and the Actual War](#). *Democracy Seminar, August 2*.

this, nor will they succeed now.”¹⁴ Putin’s launch of a ‘special military operation’ must be thus seen as a direct continuation of Russia’s deeply gendered illiberal development in the past decade which has served to support Russia’s imperial ambition. As Graff and Korolczuk note, official statements since the full-scale invasion such as Patriarch Kirill’s words about needing to defend the Donbas from gay pride parades or Putin’s quip about cancel culture are not accidental blunders but serve to legitimize the war in the eyes of Russians.¹⁵ This has also been confirmed in the presidential decree signed by Putin in November 2022, which state that “Russian traditional values” are a matter of national security.¹⁶

At the same time, there is compelling evidence that Russia’s traditional value discourse is closely linked to its deliberate strategy to destroy Ukraine by killing, torturing and deporting civilians, destroying civilian infrastructure as well as cultural sites. In March 2023, International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant against the Russian president, stating that Putin is “allegedly responsible for the war crime of unlawful deportation of population (children) and that of unlawful transfer of population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation.” The General Conclusions of the Report of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism’s mission of experts describe the forcible transfer and/or deportation of Ukrainian children as a possible war crime and/or crime against humanity.¹⁷ While Ukraine supports such qualification, it states that the report shall include a notion that this crime of forcible transfer or deportation of Ukrainian children may also constitute genocide.¹⁸

Furthermore, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine set up by the UN Human Rights Council has inspected the sites of destruction, graves, places of detention and torture, as well as weapon remnants, confirming that Russia has committed war crimes in Ukraine naming specifically executions, torture, sexual and gender-based violence including on children.¹⁹ Other international reports conclude similar findings of vast human rights violations including torture and rape.²⁰ It is clear that Russia’s anti-gender and homophobic norms encourage crimes of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) committed by the Russian army on Ukrainian women, men and children including

¹⁴ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-24/full-transcript-vladimir-putin-s-televised-address-to-russia-on-ukraine-feb-24>

¹⁵ Agnieszka Graff, Elżbieta Korolczuk. 2022. The Culture War and the Actual War.

¹⁶ Eto Buziashvili, Givi Gigitashvili, and Ruslan Trad. 2022. [Russian War Report: Russia Defends ‘Traditional Values, Criminalizes LGBTQ ‘Propaganda,’](#) New Atlanticist, DFRLab, Atlantic Council, November 18, 2022.

¹⁷ Veronika Bílková, Cecilie Hellestveit and Elīna Šteinerte. 2023. [Moscow Mechanism: "Report on Violations and Abuses of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity, related to the Forcible Transfer and/or Deportation of Ukrainian Children to the Russian Federation,"](#) the OSCE, May, 2023.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ UN, 2022. [UN Commission concludes that war crimes have been committed in Ukraine, expresses concern about suffering of civilians.](#) 23 September, 2022.

²⁰ See Wolfgang Benedek, Veronika Bílková and Marco Sassòli. 2022. [Report of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism’s mission of experts entitled ‘Report On Violations Of International Humanitarian And Human Rights Law, War Crimes And Crimes Against Humanity Committed In Ukraine Since 24 February 2022,’](#) OSCE. 13 April, 2022; Vadym Chovgan, Mykhailo Romanov, Vasyl Melnychuk. 2022. [“Nine Circles Of Hell”: Places Of Detention In Ukraine Under The Russian Occupation March 2022 – December 2022,](#) Dignity.

by deliberately targeting LGBTQI people.²¹ The systemic nature, scale, organization, and forms of CRSV in Ukraine prove its conscious and deliberate use by the Russian army to achieve the military-political goals of the Russian leadership.²² Although CRSV crimes have been verified by the UN Commission, the scale, which is likely much higher, will likely not be known and most of the crimes will not be prosecuted.²³ It is telling that given that more than nine months have passed since the first CRSV crimes, women’s rights organizations in Ukraine are now preparing an information leaflet specifically on children born of war rape committed by Russian soldiers.²⁴

These accounts show that the ideational side of Russia’s imperial war framed around traditional values has been long in the making, serving to justify aggression on Ukraine. There has been over a decade of early warning gendered signals coming from Russia, from building a (white/Slavic) hypermasculine authoritarian leadership, restricting civil society and political opposition, women’s and LGBTQI+ rights, to direct military aggression in Georgia and Ukraine. Even since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, there has been hardly any recognition of the key role played by Russia’s toxic hypermasculine regime in its war of aggression. The narrative of appeasing Russia and saving its face that have appeared in the West are entirely false as they support and legitimize such a regime. Likewise, side-lining gender and ignoring the role of gendered information ‘warfare’ plays in the hands of Russia’s anti-feminist propaganda as well as in the hands of anti-gender actors in Europe. It is crucial to bear in mind that even in Europe, strengthening conventional military security has empowered populist or gender-conservative actors currently in government in Poland or Italy. While Polish leaders are at the front of Europe’s military support to Ukraine, the same leaders are responsible for laws that allow the continuation of violence on Ukrainian survivors of war rape who are denied abortion rights in Poland.²⁵ More to this point, increased military spendings tend to undermine gender equality as these come along with cuts in social spheres.

President of the EU Commission Ursula von der Leyen rightly said on the day of Bucha’s anniversary that “[t]his is not only a war on Ukraine, it is also a war on human rights and it is a war on women’s rights.”²⁶ But Europe and the West must do more by prioritizing gender in their responses to Ukraine. This concern wider recognition and response to the ideational side of Russia’s aggression which is being directly translated into its war crimes. This means strengthening democracies by confronting anti-feminist movements everywhere, as military alone is not enough against Russia.²⁷ Countering Russia’s anti-

²¹ See Marta Havryshko. 2023. [Weapons of war: sexual violence of Russian military during the full-scale invasion in Ukraine](#). *Commons*.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Wartime rape has been rarely considered by international courts. See Hikmet Karcic and Tanya L. Domi. 2022. [We Need a Better Way to Prosecute Sexual Assault in Conflict](#), *Foreign Affairs*, March 2022.

²⁴ Personal interview with Ukrainian feminist, 2023.

²⁵ Míla O’Sullivan and Kateřina Krulišová. 2023. [Women, Peace and Security in Central Europe: in between the Western agenda and Russian imperialism](#). *International Affairs*, Vol. 99:2.

²⁶ <https://twitter.com/vonderleyen/status/1641748513946992642>

²⁷ Leandra Bias. 2022. *The International of Antifeminists*.

feminist forces can enable to further build on gender progress in Ukraine which is urgently needed given ever deepening gendered impacts of the ongoing war.

Building on Gender Progress and Women’s Agency in Resistance

Women have been an integral and visible part of the civilian and military struggle, leading humanitarian work in Ukraine and abroad, serving on the frontlines, organizing evacuation as local leaders, fundraising, documenting war crimes or requesting military support to Ukraine from the West, among many other roles. These are Ukrainian women volunteers, refugees, politicians, soldiers, feminist academics, artists or human rights advocates – who have all been engaging in tireless efforts to bring the world’s attention to Ukraine, to the imperial nature of the war and the war crimes including CRSV. Many have supported Ukraine while based in European cities together with local civil society and governments. Russia’s brutal unjustified war has resulted in almost 8 million refugees, 90 percent women and children.²⁸ Some international responses have gradually responded to the gendered humanitarian needs, and donors have been funding women’s civil society inside Ukraine including advocacy and organizing efforts but the gendered consequences of the war have been ever deepening at the same time.²⁹ It is now urgent to respond to these, while also building on the momentum of women’s agencies and gender progress in policies and legislature.

Ukrainian feminists have praised the enormous agency of women amidst the full-scale war, seeing it as a continuation of changing gender roles apparent since Euromaidan.³⁰ During the subsequent eight years of Russia’s first invasion, significant achievements were made toward gender equality including through Women, Peace and Security, and legislative amendments in the army. Besides removing obstacles to women’s participation, the Ukrainian army has introduced new measures such as gender advisors and audits to encourage military culture more welcoming to women.³¹ It is crucial to note that international organizations have been among the key drivers of the WPS agenda here. The pressure from international organizations, including NATO, the OSCE, and UN Women, has triggered gender-related changes, especially in the security sector.³² The WPS framework has been new to Ukraine,³³ being largely driven here by international organizations, particularly UN Women and NATO.³⁴ In a situation of ongoing armed conflict, these organizations had strong local feminist support to pursue gender equality in the military.³⁵

²⁸ UNHCR. 2023. [Ukraine Situation](#).

²⁹ Personal conversations with Ukrainian feminists, 2023.

³⁰ See e.g., discussion organized by IIR Prague and Heinrich Böll Stiftung on 4 May 2022: [Ukrainian Feminists’ Responses to the Russian Invasion](#).

³¹ Jennifer Mathers and Anna Kvit. 2023. [Ukraine war: attitudes to women in the military are changing as thousands serve on front lines](#). *The Conversation*, 31 January 2023.

³² Ella Lamakh and Maria Dmytriyeva. 2017. *Mapping of Peacebuilding Initiatives in Ukraine 2017*. Kyiv: Democracy Development Center; Míla O’Sullivan. 2019. “Being strong enough to defend yourself”: untangling the Women, Peace and Security agenda amidst the Ukrainian conflict, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 21:5, 746-767; Yeliena Dudko and Yvette Langenhuizen, ‘Localisation of the UNSCR 1325 agenda: lessons from post-Maidan Ukraine (2014–2020)’, *Journal of Regional Security* 17: 1, 2022, pp. 25–48.

³³ This is largely due to Western-centrism in WPS, meaning that Central and Eastern Europe has not shaped the agenda. See O’Sullivan and Krulišová. 2023.

³⁴ O’Sullivan. 2019. “Being strong enough to defend yourself”.

³⁵ Ibid.

From the initial narrow military focus, the WPS agenda in Ukraine has gradually taken broader and localized forms through sectoral, regional and local action plans and greater bottom-up engagement.³⁶ External donor support of WPS projects has played an important role in localization³⁷ and eventually assisted in local responses to the full-scale Russian invasion.³⁸

Amid the full-scale war in 2022, the Ukrainian government updated WPS NAP drawing on the efforts and expertise of women’s organizations, who have themselves been directly affected by the war.³⁹ In reality of the war, civil society including feminists had to slightly redirect their activities to humanitarian work and focus on the profound gendered impacts of the war.⁴⁰ Other key gender norms were approved in 2022 – the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2022–2030 and the previously rejected Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). Together with UN agencies, the government drafted an implementation plan to combat and prevent conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) which gives responsibility also to international organizations including the EU Advisory Mission Ukraine (EUAM). These new policies are important achievements amidst the war and require both domestic and international support to be implemented into practice. Their implementation is urgently needed to enable more systematic responses to war-generated insecurities and mass scale gendered violence. Their implementation is at the same time crucial for Ukraine’s integration into the EU. While some gender initiatives have gradually started to be supported by international organizations and individual governments in Ukraine, insiders from the EU and NATO admit that the WPS agenda is still deprioritized now amidst the war.⁴¹ Failing to centre gender and women’s agencies now during the war, however, can lead to women’s exclusion in the aftermath of the war. There have already been growing concerns about women’s inclusion in the reconstruction and recovery process.

Gendering Responses to Ukraine’s Reconstruction and Recovery

The post-war reconstruction and recovery process has been at the centre of public discussions, governmental planning and policy-making at national level in Ukraine and at bilateral and multilateral levels in Europe and beyond. Yet, the high-level preparatory efforts have been so far rarely gender-responsive and socially inclusive, focusing primarily on reconstruction through liberalization which will likely lead to new austerities and socioeconomic inequalities as exemplified in post-Maidan Ukraine. This adds to the concerns and previous warnings by Ukrainian feminists that the war can undermine

³⁶ Dudko and Langenhuisen. 2022. Localisation of the UNSCR 1325 agenda; Hanna Manoilenko. 2022. [Gender Equality in Times of a Full-Scale War on Ukraine: A Hope for a Better Future?](#) Blog, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Personal interview with Ukrainian feminist, 2023.

³⁹ Manoilenko. 2022. [Gender Equality in Times of a Full-Scale War on Ukraine: A Hope for a Better Future?](#)

⁴⁰ See Kateryna Turenko. 2023. [March 8 in the second year of war: experiences and visions of Ukrainian feminists](#). Commons, 7 March, 2023.

⁴¹ Personal interviews, 2022, 2023.

achievements made in women's rights so far.⁴² It is therefore crucial that international responses to Ukraine are gender inclusive and prioritize women's participation in the post-war discussions and ensure their visions of Ukraine's future are reflected.

Concerns have been growing among Ukrainian feminists and women's organizations, as women have been mostly excluded from the reconstruction talks.⁴³ Looking back at the post-2014 Ukraine, there is much to be worried about. Already during the first invasion, the conflict in Eastern Ukraine along with internationally supported state reforms and peacebuilding left profound gendered impacts across the country.⁴⁴ Prioritization of the security sector in times of conflict has diverted resources away from the public sector to fulfil the conditionalities attached to international financial institutions (IFIs) and subsequent gender-oblivious austerities in the feminized sectors disproportionately affected women's socioeconomic security.⁴⁵ This has also worsened the situation of the 1.5 million internally displaced people (IDPs),⁴⁶ especially women and other economically vulnerable persons. The Covid-19 pandemic just before Russia's second invasion has further exacerbated existing inequalities and gender-based violence (GBV).⁴⁷

Since February 2022 full-out war, the number of IDPs has risen to 7,9 million people of which 90 percent are women.⁴⁸ As of April 2023, there are more than 8 million Ukrainian refugees across Europe who were forced to flee the war.⁴⁹ According to the report by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), women and children represent 87 per cent of all family members in refugee households.⁵⁰ Given the government restriction on men leaving the country, this cross-border displacement is extremely gendered and led to the phenomenon of enforced single motherhood, where the entire responsibility of reproductive labour falls on women.⁵¹ Numerous feminist discussions and reports show that as refugees and IDPs, Ukrainian women have encountered socioeconomic barriers related to the lack of care infrastructure, housing, stable income, medical services, and reproductive rights, particularly when it comes to access to contraception and abortion.⁵² Ukrainian feminists, therefore, emphasize prioritization of the care infrastructure and protection and social

⁴² The Feminist Initiative Group. 2022. [The Right to Resist: Feminist Manifesto](#).

⁴³ E.g., Olga Gheorghiev. 2022. [Transnational Feminist Solidarity with Ukraine for Sustainable, Inclusive and Fair Post-War Reconstruction](#). *Gender a výzkum*, Vol 23: 2.

⁴⁴ Dutchak, Oksana. 2018. Crisis, War and Austerity: Devaluation of Female Labor and Retreating of the State.; Mila O'Sullivan. 2020. The Forgotten Lives: Connecting Gender, Security and Everyday Livelihoods in Ukraine's Conflict. *Politics & Gender*, Vol. 16 (3); Jennifer Mathers. 2020. Women, war and austerity: IFIs and the construction of gendered economic insecurities in Ukraine. *Review of International Political Economy*, 27(6), 1235-1256; Olena Lyubchenko. 2022. Neoliberal Reconstruction of Ukraine: A Social Reproduction Analysis, *Gender Studies* 26 (1): 21-48. 2022

⁴⁵ O'Sullivan. 2020. The Forgotten Lives; See also Dutchak 2018. Crisis, War and Austerity.

⁴⁶ O'Sullivan. 2019. "Being strong enough to defend yourself".

⁴⁷ UN Women and Care International. 2022. [Rapid Gender Analysis Of Ukraine](#), 4 May, 2022.

⁴⁸ UNHCR. 2023. Ukraine Refugee Situation.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ UNHCR. 2022. [Lives on Hold: Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees from Ukraine #2](#). 23 September, 2022.

⁵¹ Oksana Dutchak. 2023. [Women and children represent 87 per cent of all family members in the refugee households](#). *Commons*, 18 January, 2023.

⁵² E.g. discussion organized by IIR Prague and Heinrich Böll Stiftung on 4 May 2022: [Ukrainian Feminists' Responses to the Russian Invasion](#); UN Women and Care International. 2022. [Rapid Gender Analysis Of Ukraine](#), 4 May, 2022.

security for refugees and IDPs both during and after the war.⁵³ The absence of these hinders women’s integration into the labour market which adds a socioeconomic burden to the already difficult refugee or IDP war experience.

Russia’s brutal war has impacted the social infrastructure also in terms of its physical damage, causing enormous destruction of critical and civilian sites including people’s homes, schools and hospitals. A report by Save the Children shows that since the start of the academic year last September, one school has been destroyed every other day in Ukraine.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the Russian invasion resulted in Ukraine’s economic downturn which occurs against the backdrop of increasing debt obligations to IFIs and other institutions such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Commission (EC).⁵⁵ Feminists in Ukraine therefore call for the cancellation of Ukraine’s foreign debt for post-war reconstruction and the prevention of further austerity policies.⁵⁶ Indeed, there are concerns among feminists that Ukraine’s Recovery Plan and the planning and discussions over rebuilding Ukraine are similar to post-Maidan or even worse.⁵⁷

Ukraine’s Recovery Plan was presented at an international conference in Lugano without any gender perspective.⁵⁸ Although the Recovery Plan is envisioned as gender inclusive, the subsequent brief produced by the Ukrainian government “A need for gender mainstreaming and women’s participation in the development and implementation of Ukraine’s war recovery programmes” does not go beyond ‘adding women’, emphasizing greater representation of women in entrepreneurship, company leadership, military service.^{59,60} Importantly, the brief also removes any socioeconomic content from gender inequality, stating that gender mainstreaming “does not require significant resources and does not slow down the overall process of planning and implementing the post-war recovery and development” plan.⁶¹ The sphere of education, healthcare and social policy are listed in the Plan among the last items.⁶² This reflects the expectations of IFIs that the Ukrainian government will focus on ‘a prosperous market economy’ by primarily protecting private businesses and stabilising macroeconomic parameters, while the crucial aspects of health, care, safety, and material needs of the Ukrainian people are left out.⁶³ The new anti-worker Labour Code passed in Ukraine in 2022, represents one such example

⁵³ The Feminist Initiative Group. 2022. [“The Right to Resist.” A feminist manifesto](#), 7. 7. 2022.

⁵⁴ OCHA. 2023. [Ukraine: One school destroyed every other day since September](#), 24 January 2023.

⁵⁵ Olga Gheorghiev. 2022. [Transnational Feminist Solidarity with Ukraine for Sustainable, Inclusive and Fair Post-War Reconstruction](#). *Gender a výzkum*, Vol 23: 2.

⁵⁶ The Feminist Initiative Group. 2022. [“The Right to Resist.” A feminist manifesto](#), 7. 7. 2022.

⁵⁷ Lyubchenko. 2022. Neoliberal Reconstruction of Ukraine; Gheorghiev 2022. Transnational Feminist Solidarity with Ukraine.

⁵⁸ Personal interview with Ukrainian feminist, 2023.

⁵⁹ Lyubchenko. 2022. Neoliberal Reconstruction of Ukraine.

⁶⁰ This reflects approach by IFIs. For instance, the IMF adopted its first Strategy Toward Mainstreaming Gender in 2022, but initial findings show that engagement has been minimal brought little change. See Oxfam. 2023. [IMF Social Spending Floors: A fig leaf for austerity? Briefing Paper](#). 13 April, 2023. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/imf-social-spending-floors-a-fig-leaf-for-austerity-621495/>

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Lyubchenko. 2022. Neoliberal Reconstruction of Ukraine.

⁶³ Olga Gheorghiev, 2022. Transnational Feminist Solidarity with Ukraine.

of Wester-driven liberalization. This means fewer working rights which will push more Ukrainians to work under unequal conditions in European countries.

Overall, these policies will shift more burden of the social sphere on women, especially women and people with multiple vulnerabilities at the expense of gender equality. This will further add to the gendered costs of the war and limit women's access to economic and political spheres and thus their participation in post-war reconstruction and recovery. Next to the threat of feminization of poverty due to cuts in the public sphere, there are also socioeconomic risks to many women that are small business owners and lost income as a result of the war.⁶⁴ Most women are small business owners and their income generation is affected by the shocks to the economy, as the COVID pandemic has shown.⁶⁵ Given the economic downturn due to the war, this necessitates more gender-sensitive approach. To conclude, a shift towards care provision in post-war economy is therefore necessary but it is incompatible with the business-as-usual liberal plans.

Conclusion: Countering Anti-gender War Propaganda and Making Ukraine's Recovery Inclusive

Europe and the international community must urgently prioritize gender perspective and the WPS agenda in their support to Ukraine's resistance, relief, reconstruction and recovery. This policy paper showed that gender is not a secondary issue for peacetime but shapes all aspects of this profoundly gendered war.

Next to military support to Ukraine, Europe and the international community must recognize as a threat and respond to Russia's anti-gender politics which drive this genocidal war and directly translate into war crimes. They must see Russia's war as a fundamental attack on democratic values based on respect for gender equality and human rights. There is therefore no time for sidelining gender and WPS agenda. On the contrary, while supporting Ukraine, Europe must counter anti-gender narratives and practices of violence on all fronts otherwise these will continue to polarize societies in Europe and beyond and have far-reaching geopolitical consequences. Failing to understand it can result in further undermining prospects of an inclusive and sustainable future in Ukraine and Europe in general.

Responses to Ukraine must elevate the voices and agencies of Ukrainian women and build on their active roles in myriad forms of resistance. It is also clear that under full-scale war and in its aftermath, the gendered impacts of the war if followed by austerity-driven economic policies would be colossal and potentially detrimental to sustainable and inclusive peace and post-war development. International actors ought to avoid repeating the same liberal peacebuilding faults which have failed women globally from the Middle

⁶⁴ UN Women and Care International. 2022. *Rapid Gender Analysis Of Ukraine*, 4 May, 2022.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

East to the Balkans or post-Maidan Ukraine.⁶⁶ These imposed ideas of peace, reconstruction and recovery always disregard local women's voices and deepen intersectional inequalities. The international community from the EU to NATO and individual governments now still has the opportunity to do it better.

Recommendations to the EU, NATO, the OSCE, UN, Council of Europe, IFIs and governments:^{67 68}

Responding to anti-gender propaganda and war violence in Russian aggression against Ukraine:

- Bring political attention to Russia's weaponization of gender and LGBTQIA+ agenda and the close links of authoritarianism, imperialism, anti-gender politics and genocidal war violence.
- Counter gendered disinformation⁶⁹ and raise awareness about the threat of violent gendered regimes and gender-conservative orders to women's rights, democracy and sustainable peace and security.
- Support ratification and implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) in European countries as part of anti-war efforts in countering gendered disinformation.
- Demand the setting up of a special international criminal tribunal to prosecute and punish crimes of aggression against Ukraine including conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).
- Support international initiatives aimed at investigation and accountability for the war crimes and crimes against humanity by the Russian Federation (Joint Investigation Team supported by Eurojust) including CRSV. Support complex training of investigators in and outside of Ukraine in a survivors-centred approach to CRSV.
- Provide financial support specifically for the investigation of crimes of CRSV. Provide medical, psychological and legal support to CRSV survivors in Ukraine and other countries in Europe. Ensure their access to sexual and reproductive health

⁶⁶ See e.g. Aida A. Hozic. 2021. [Dayton, WPS and the entrenched "manliness" of ethnic powersharing peace agreements](#). LSE Blog, 15 February, 2021; Mila O'Sullivan. 2020. *Forgotten Lives*.

⁶⁷ The recommendations are intended especially for institutions in Europe, including the EU, NATO, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, IFIs and individual governments.

⁶⁸ The recommendations draw on local discussions including materials produced by or in cooperation with Ukrainian feminists such as The Feminist Initiative Group. 2022. ["The Right to Resist." A feminist manifesto](#), 7. 7. 2022 or the discussion on Transnational Feminist Solidarity with Ukraine summarized in: Olga Gheorghiev. 2022.

⁶⁹ Follow the example of the study conducted jointly by government of Canada, the European External Action Service (EEAS), Germany, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The summary of the study is available at: <https://www.state.gov/gendered-disinformation-tactics-themes-and-trends-by-foreign-malign-actors/>

rights (SRHR) including safe abortion and support their long-term resilience building and access to sustainable livelihood.⁷⁰

- Support recognition of the rights of children born of CRSV crimes as an especially vulnerable group in relevant responses and post-war justice to prevent further violation of their rights (stigmatization, marginalization etc.).
- Support inclusion of CRSV and other forms of gendered violence into reparations for war-time violence.
- Provide urgent assistance to Ukraine's efforts at tracing and reunification of the missing Ukrainian children as a result of forced transfer and/or deportation to the Russia federation (logistical, know-how, financial and medical assistance).⁷¹

Gendering responses to resistance and relief:

- Build on local feminist knowledge and demands of Ukrainian feminists and civil society for gendered and intersectional responses to the security needs in Ukraine. Support a holistic approach to security that incorporates physical, social, economic, emotional, health and environmental security, among others.
- Respond to the gendered crisis in Ukraine and Europe by prioritizing gendered and intersectional approaches to humanitarian aid, protection and needs of refugees and IDPs.
- Provide protection and social security to Ukrainian refugees in Europe and support their access to the labour market and childcare facilities.
- Update the Women, Peace and Security and other gender policies to reflect these. Focus specifically on the prevention of a continuum of violence in and outside of Ukraine (sexual violence and gender-based violence, violation of reproductive rights, human trafficking). Engage with local civil society and academia while updating and implementing these policies.
- Provide short-term and long-term financial support to local WPS agenda in Ukraine focusing especially on funding women's socioeconomic empowerment.

Gendering responses to reconstruction and recovery processes:

- Support Ukraine's self-determination, the right to self-defence, security guarantees and just peace and recognize and elevate women's role in this struggle.
- Support meaningful participation of women, feminist groups, LGBTQIA+ people and other minorities and disadvantaged groups in discussions and decision-making

⁷⁰ See Janine Natalya Clark 2022. Reframing 'Survivor-Centred' Approaches to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence. University of Birmingham. <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-artslaw/law/research/clark/reframing-survivor-centred-approaches-to-conflict-related-sexual-violence.pdf>

⁷¹ See recommendations to international community in the Report of the OSCE Moscow Mechanism's mission of experts: Veronika Bílková, Cecilie Hellestveit and Elīna Šteinerte. 2023. Moscow Mechanism: "Report on Violations and Abuses of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity, related to the Forcible Transfer and/or Deportation of Ukrainian Children to the Russian Federation," the OSCE, May, 2023. <https://www.osce.org/files/t/documents/7/7/542751.pdf>

on Ukraine's rebuilding and recovery and the EU accession process. Ensure their voices are heard and recognized. Support socially inclusive recovery reflective of the different needs with regard to gender, race, age, sexual identity etc.

- Support meaningful participation of Ukrainian women and minority groups in the Ukraine Recovery Conference in the United Kingdom in June 2023. Prioritize the WPS agenda and gender perspective as a cross-cutting issue of the conference.⁷²
- Support rebuilding of social infrastructure among the priorities (child-care facilities, hospitals, schools etc.). Support post-war prioritization of the social sphere by the government.
- Ensure IFIs support to Ukraine is based on in-depth intersectional gender analysis that is locally informed and accounts for multiple vulnerabilities of women and disadvantaged groups in the war cycle (prior, during and after the war).
- Support the effective implementation of the Istanbul Convention in Ukraine to respond to and prevent GBV and domestic violence. Provide financial support to local civil society including those working on men and masculinities in relation to war.
- Use diverse channels including public diplomacy, and multilateral and bilateral meetings to elevate the visibility and voices of Ukrainian women in the anti-imperial struggle and in rebuilding the country. Avoid diplomatic visits with all-male representations.
- Support activist organising of Ukrainian refugees in EU states, consider them as agents, ensure mechanisms for consultation, engagement and meaningful dialogue with decision makers of host countries. Consider implementation of the WPS agenda in conjunction with the CEDAW⁷³ framework, which is a rights-based document with integrated accountability mechanisms. Focus and integrate socioeconomic rights as part of CEDAW implementation, as well as in the framework of comprehensive security under the WPS agenda.

⁷² <https://www.urc-international.com/>

⁷³ Legally binding UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

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EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy is a non-profit, non-partisan, and independent think-tank focusing on European integration and cohesion. EUROPEUM contributes to democracy, security, stability, freedom, and solidarity across Europe as well as to active engagement of the Czech Republic in the European Union. EUROPEUM undertakes original research, organizes public events and educational activities, and formulates new ideas and recommendations to improve European and Czech policy making. We are the recipient of institutional funding from the European Commission under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme.



Co-funded by the
Citizens, Equality, Rights and
Values Programme (CERV)