

# Gender and conflict in Ukraine

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## Question

*Provide an overview of gender roles, dynamics and impacts in the Ukraine conflict, including humanitarian impacts, social impacts, the role of women as conflict actors, and structural factors and causes of tension and conflict insofar as they relate to gender roles and dynamics.*

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## 1. Overview

The conflicts in eastern and southern Ukraine constitute a significant humanitarian crisis for the country and the region, with at least 1.7 million internally displaced persons, two-thirds of whom are women (UNOCHA 2016, p. 7; UNHCR 2015, p. 5) and approximately 1.5 million people seeking asylum or other forms of legal stay in neighbouring countries (UNHCR 2016, p. 7). Women are at risk of gender-based violence (GBV) perpetrated by armed groups, although GBV does not appear to be systematically or widely used by either side as a weapon of war (OHCHR 2017a; UNOCHA 2016; OSCE 2015). Human trafficking, including trafficking of women for sexual exploitation, is endemic and has been exacerbated by the conflict (OHCHR 2017b).

There is some limited evidence that the conflicts may have led to an increase in the prevalence of domestic violence (UNFPA 2015; UNOCHA 2015; OSCE 2015). However, domestic violence remains largely a hidden problem and incidents frequently go unreported (UNFPA 2015).

The conflicts in the country have tended to reinforce traditional conservative gender roles. There has been a tendency for women to return to more traditional gender roles and patriarchal models

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of marital relations as a survival strategy (Ukrainian Centre for Social Reforms 2016, pp. 6-7) and many women have become sole providers for their families with traditional roles as carers for children, the elderly, and the disabled, and other domestic roles, which has restricted their freedom of movement and livelihood opportunities (SIDA 2016, p. 1; UNOCHA 2015, p. 10; OSCE 2016, p. 14). On the other hand, the conflict has also opened up opportunities for some women to take up non-traditional roles (Philips 2014; Ukrainian Centre for Social Reforms 2016; WILPF 2014) including participating in the 2013-14 Maidan protests and fighting in the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Women have fought alongside men in the conflict in eastern Ukraine as members of the armed forces, volunteer battalions, and rebel groups, although they face gender discrimination and do not always receive official recognition for the roles they play (Martsenyuk et al. 2016). Women also play roles in providing humanitarian assistance to those affected by the conflict (Kapur 2016; Fellin 2015).

There has been virtually no official civil society engagement with the peace process but a small number of women activists have undertaken local outreach, confidence-building, and dialogue activities including shadow peace talks which brought together activists, civil society leaders, volunteers, journalists, public servants and women directly impacted and displaced by the fighting to discuss ways to help end the conflict (Kapur 2016; OSCE 2015).

The availability of up-to-date information for this report has been somewhat limited, particularly in relation to non-government-controlled conflict areas. Information about the conflict also carries a significant risk of bias or propaganda; in this report we have relied primarily on information from multilateral organisations such as UN agencies rather than on local sources. The prevalence of gender-based violence is difficult to determine as the issue has traditionally been rather hidden in Ukrainian society.

## 2. Humanitarian impacts

### Gender-based violence committed by security forces and/or armed groups

Gender-based violence (GBV) does not appear to be systematically or widely used by armed groups on either side as a weapon of war: the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reports that there are 'no grounds' to believe that conflict-related sexual violence<sup>1</sup> has been used 'for strategic or tactical ends' by Government forces, by armed groups in the eastern regions of Ukraine, or by the Russian Federation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (OHCHR 2017a, p. 3). However, multiple agencies do report documented cases as well as unverified allegations of gender-based violence being used by security forces and armed groups (OHCHR 2017a; UNOCHA 2016; OSCE 2015). Allegations of gender-based violence are also used as propaganda in the conflict, making the issue particularly sensitive (Ukrainian Centre for Social Reforms 2016, p. 16).

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<sup>1</sup> Incidents or patterns of rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, and other forms of sexual violence of comparable gravity, against women and men, girls and boys, including as a tactic of war or tool of political intimidation committed by the parties to the conflict, which includes State and non-State actors. Incidents included have a temporal, geographical and/or causal link with the armed conflict in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and the occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (OHCHR 2017a).

Reliable statistics on the prevalence of GBV are not readily available. This may be in part due to the lack of a clear legal framework, especially for sexual violence other than rape, such that acts of sexual violence are often recorded by law enforcement as other crimes, such as torture or bodily injury (OHCHR 2017a). Sexual violence is also often perpetrated along with other violations, such as unlawful killing, abduction, or property crimes, which also complicate documentation and investigation (OHCHR 2017a). The incidence of gender-based violence is likely to be under-reported due to stigma, shame, fear of retaliation, and weak capacity of law enforcement to investigate (OHCHR 2017a; UNOCHA 2016; OSCE 2015).

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) describes GBV as a 'significant risk' in eastern Ukraine, particularly for IDP women and adolescent girls close to the contact line<sup>2</sup> due to the high concentration of military and paramilitary groups, proliferation of weapons, weak law enforcement and impunity for perpetrators (UNOCHA 2016, p. 16). 'Women living in conflict zones as well as IDPs are at risk of increasingly resorting to trading sex as a means of providing the most basic needs for their families (survival sex)', which has far-reaching psychological implications and life-threatening health implications (UNFPA Protection Cluster GBV Sub-Cluster 2015). The majority of reported incidents of 'survival sex' are associated with military and law enforcement personnel, and women living along the contact line are taking mitigating measures, such as not going out in the evenings, to minimize the risk of GBV (Protection Cluster Ukraine 2016, p. 1).

OHCHR's most recent report (dated 31 January 2017) documents a sample of 31 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, which may not reflect the full extent of incidents but are indicative of OHCHR access to survivors and witnesses (OHCHR 2017a, p. 3). The people at highest risk of sexual violence were those detained by conflict actors, where sexual violence was used against both men and women to punish, humiliate, extract confessions, or compel people to hand over possessions or otherwise do as perpetrators demanded. These violent interrogation techniques were most often perpetrated against individuals, mainly men, detained by the SBU and volunteer battalions. The majority of these incidents date back to 2014-2015, but OHCHR continues to receive testimony indicating that such practices still occur (OHCHR 2017a, p. 3). OHCHR also identified cases of sexual abuse against civilians, mainly women, at checkpoints on the transport corridors across the contact line run by Government forces, as well as the checkpoints run by armed groups (OHCHR 2017a, p. 3). OHCHR is aware of cases in which armed groups in the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics 'investigated' and addressed cases of sexual violence committed by their own members, instead of investigations being undertaken by an independent and impartial body. In some cases, blame was placed on the survivors, especially women, and discriminatory remarks were made towards women, reinforcing negative gender stereotypes (OHCHR 2017a).

A GBV assessment commissioned by UNFPA identified access to life-saving information and services, including shelters for GBV survivors, improvement in referrals and coordination of service providers, as well as the empowerment of community-based organisations working with women, as key needs for communities living along the contact line. (UNOCHA 2016, p. 16)

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<sup>2</sup> The line separating government-controlled and non-government controlled territory in eastern Ukraine.

## Internally displaced people

The Ukrainian government has officially registered 1.7 million internally displaced persons as of October 2016 (UNOCHA 2016, p. 7). The true total number of IDPs might be higher, as many people are not able or willing to register, and the number of IDPs in non-government-controlled areas in eastern Ukraine is unknown (Spear et al. 2016, p. 21). Women make up 66% of IDPs (UNHCR 2015, p. 5). In addition, approximately 1.5 million Ukrainians have been reported as seeking asylum or other forms of legal stay in neighbouring countries (UNHCR 2016, p. 7). Many young men have left the country to escape conscription (Spear et al. 2016, p. 22).

Prior to the conflict, the number of people living in poverty had been decreasing, and for most age groups, poverty indicators for men are higher than for women (Spear et al. 2016, p. 60). However, higher levels of poverty are experienced by households with children (one in three is below the poverty line), single mothers with young children, unemployed women, women in rural areas, and women over 75 (Spear et al, 2016, p. 60). Differences in pay between men and women have led to differences in pensions later on in life, to the detriment of older women (Koriukalov, 2014, p.16). Many female-headed households depend on remittances from abroad, over half of which used to come from Ukrainians working in Russia (Spear et al, 2016, p. 60). This means the regional conflict and Russian sanctions against Ukraine and the weak Russian economy and rouble will affect women-headed households more acutely (Spear et al, 2016, p. 60).

As a result of the conflict, women and men have lost their homes, jobs, businesses and pensions as they were forced to move (Spear et al. 2016, p. 22; OSCE 2015, p. 10). Many women lost their husbands in the conflict, increasing the number of female-headed households both among IDPs and in host communities; thousands of others left their places of origin and relocated with their children while their husbands stayed behind (OSCE 2016, p. 10). Many IDPs lack a social network, income, access to housing, and opportunities for employment and professional development (OSCE 2016, p. 10). In early 2016, the Government suspended social payments and pensions for some 600,000 IDPs pending a complicated procedure to revalidate their IDP certificates, on the grounds of attempting to combat fraud (UNOCHA 2016, p. 9).

Women-headed households, especially those with children, are among the most likely to adopt negative coping strategies and suffer from food insecurity, which may be linked with lower income and higher dependency rates (UNOCHA 2016, p. 9). There are reports of female IDPs reverting to negative coping mechanisms such as sex work to provide for themselves and their families (SIDA 2016, p. 1). Some women and girls experiencing domestic and other forms of violence, including the disabled and elderly, are forced to remain in unsafe living environments because there are no alternatives (UNFPA Protection Cluster GBV Sub-Cluster 2015). Victims of domestic violence can have long-term placement in shelters (OHCHR 2017a), but the few shelters designed to protect these women are full of IDPs (UNFPA Protection Cluster GBV Sub-Cluster 2015) and as of 15 January 2017, six regions in Ukraine did not have any such shelters (OHCHR 2017a).

Host communities largely demonstrate understanding and solidarity towards IDPs (UNOCHA 2016, p. 10). The UNFPA GBV sub-cluster is working with the government and NGOs to provide services including psychosocial support to GBV survivors and those at risk of violence, and training for medical professionals and police (UNFPA Protection Cluster GBV Sub-Cluster 2015).

## Trafficking and sexual exploitation

Human trafficking in Ukraine is 'endemic' and has been 'further exacerbated by the armed conflict' (OHCHR 2017b). Trafficking of women for sexual exploitation has increased since the beginning of 2015, a reversal of trends of previous years where the majority of victims were men trafficked for labour exploitation (OSCE 2015, p. 12). Ukrainian victims are subjected to sex trafficking and forced labour in Ukraine as well as in Russia, Poland, Turkey, the US, and other parts of Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East (US Department of State 2016, p. 381).

Sexual exploitation is an income-generating activity for conflict actors, and Ukrainian men, women and children may be subjected to sex trafficking within the country (Home Office 2016). IDPs are the most vulnerable category (US Department of State 2016; Home Office 2016). IDPs are targeted by unscrupulous intermediaries who offer brokerage services for emigration and receiving refugee status abroad. Nineteen cases of trafficking or attempted trafficking of internally displaced persons (IDPs) were recorded by IOM in 2015-16, some involving several victims 2015 (IOM 2016).

Women and girls living in conflict zones as well as IDPs are under the risk of resorting to 'survival sex' as a means of providing basic needs for their families (Ukrainian Centre for Social Reforms 2016). Using these harmful coping mechanisms increases the risk of sexual violence and trafficking (OHCHR 2017a).

The US Department of State released a report in 2016 on Trafficking in Persons (TIP) which mentions that children aged 15 to 17 were actively being recruited to participate in Russian-separatist militarized groups where they were taught to carry and use weapons. Russian-led separatists also continued to employ children as informants and human shields during the reporting period beginning 1 April 2015, and ending 31 March 2016 (US Department of State 2016).

There is some limited evidence that sexual exploitation of male victims of trafficking also takes place. An IOM study on trafficking in men focused on labour exploitation in Ukraine, the Republic of Belarus, and the Republic of Moldova, and although the men involved did not disclose any instances of sexual abuse, in several cases signs of sexual abuse were identified among men who requested medical aid. Due to the qualitative design of this study, the results reflect only the experiences of the small number of respondents interviewed and cannot be taken as representative of general trends (Gusak 2016).

Ukrainian law prohibits all forms of trafficking, but the government has 'demonstrated weakened law enforcement efforts in pursuing trafficking cases' and 'considerable numbers of convicted traffickers are given lenient sentences or not sentenced to terms of imprisonment' (Home Office 2016, p. 5). Convictions for trafficking have been declining, especially from 2014 onwards (Home Office 2016, p. 5; IOM Mission in Ukraine 2016, p. 5). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) provides safe migration and trafficking prevention materials and activities, free consultations via a telephone service which assists over 20,000 persons annually, and awareness-raising and outreach. IOM also supports law enforcement through capacity building on the investigation and prosecution of trafficking-related crimes, networking with countries of transit and destination, and development of witness protection systems (IOM 2016).

### 3. Social impacts

#### Domestic violence

There is some evidence that the conflicts in Ukraine may have led to an increase in the prevalence of domestic violence. However, domestic violence remains largely a hidden problem in Ukraine. Although women have become less likely to justify physical violence and controlling behaviour within a marriage, they usually do not accept interventions by outsiders when dealing with spousal issues, labelling such problems as a private family matter (Ukrainian Centre for Social Reforms 2016, p. 38). This view is shared by many law enforcement officials and others in authority, so it is difficult for women to seek help (OECD 2014, p. 3). Incidents of rape often go unreported – in 2014, only 32% of victims of physical or sexual violence sought help (UNFPA 2015). Victims are often ashamed, distrust the police, do not believe that bringing charges will result in justice, or fear reprisals from the assailant (OECD 2014, p. 4; UNFPA 2015).

A 2014 survey on violence against women found that 19% of women aged 19 to 49 suffered from physical violence, while 8% suffered from sexual violence (UNFPA 2015). Husbands and other relatives are the main perpetrators, but physical and sexual violence by non-family members had increased since a similar survey in 2007 (UNFPA 2015). Sexual harassment appears to be a widespread but little understood problem in Ukraine; indeed in many sectors it is so widespread as to be considered normal (OECD 2014, p. 4).

Research commissioned by UNFPA in 2015 did not reveal significant influence of the military conflict in the Donbas on partner violence. The incidence of intimate partner violence before and after the conflict was similar: 7.9% of IDPs and 7.5% of local women reported that they faced intimate partner violence (IPV) before the conflict, while the corresponding reported rates were 6.9% and 8.2% during the study period. Some decrease in intimate partner violence rates among displaced persons may be explained by women's transition to more traditional, patriarchal models of marital relations as a survival strategy during crisis (Ukrainian Centre for Social Reforms 2016, pp. 6-7).

The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission has received reports of gender-based violence and violence against children in families of dismissed riot police and demobilised soldiers, as well as in the context of the worsening socio-economic situation and increased alcohol abuse (OSCE 2015, p. 11). De-mobilised soldiers are reported to suffer from numerous issues, including: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); depression; anxiety; problems related to loss of status, self-identification, and raised levels of aggression; obsessive compulsive disorder; sexual disorders; and sleeping disorders (OSCE 2015, p. 14). The conflict has undermined the ability of males to respond to social expectations, resulting in increasing reports of domestic violence (UNOCHA 2015, p. 10). The absence of services to treat these issues is likely to have direct and indirect effects on women and children, who may bear the consequences of the effects of PTSD and increased alcoholism and violence in the family unit (OSCE 2015, p. 15).

#### Gender norms

The conflicts in the country have generally tended to reinforce traditional gender roles, although they have also offered opportunities for some women to take up non-traditional roles (Philips 2014; Ukrainian Centre for Social Reforms 2016; WILPF 2014). "Promoting values of equality and inclusion are likely to be challenging in what most feminist observers agree is a retraditionalized national climate" since 2014 (Philips 2014, p. 422).



Gender norms in Ukraine tend to restrict women from holding positions of political power, while masculine norms include being protective of women. According to traditional gender stereotypes, Ukrainian women are supposed to fulfil two roles: 'to be beautiful and to be mothers' (Martsenyuk, 2015, p. 74). Most people associate women more than men with family life, and do not associate women with political life (NDI, 2016, p. 11). A 2012 survey showed that 9.4% of men and 2.9% of women agreed with reasons to justify beating a wife or partner, and many people believe that survivors of violence are responsible for what happened to them (Gerasymenko 2015, p. 146). Roma women, women with disabilities, internally displaced women, women from rural areas, and older women face higher levels of discrimination, vulnerability and poverty (Spear et al, 2016, p. 24; MoSP and UNFPA, 2014, p. 23-24). Other women who are vulnerable include lesbian women, transgender women, HIV-positive women, women in prison settings, and women who use drugs (Koriukalov, 2014, p. 39; MoSP and UNFPA, 2014, p. 23-25). The Ukrainian media has been criticised for reinforcing gender stereotypes (OECD 2014, p. 7; Koriukalov, 2014, p. 8), with women mainly represented as homemakers or sexualised objects (OECD 2014, p. 7; MoSP and UNFPA, 2014, p. 28). Schools also perpetuate gender stereotypes: for example, a nationalistic civic education course for 16- and 17-year-olds launched in 2014 separates male and female students, and features topics related to traditional gender roles such as military tactics for the male students and first aid for female students (OSCE 2015, p. 9).

Following the onset of the conflicts in Crimea and Donbass, a survey commissioned by UNFPA in 2015 confirmed traditional stereotypes regarding gender roles in families, and indicated that traditional stereotypes have strengthened during the military conflict and humanitarian crisis (Ukrainian Centre for Social Reforms 2016, p. 6). For women, there has been a tendency to return to more traditional gender roles and patriarchal models of marital relations as a survival strategy during crisis (Ukrainian Centre for Social Reforms 2016, pp. 6-7). The conflict has left many women as sole providers for their families but has also reinforced traditional gender roles as carers for children, the elderly, and the disabled, and other domestic roles, which has in practice restricted their freedom of movement and livelihood opportunities (SIDA 2016, p. 1; UNOCHA 2015, p. 10; OSCE 2016, p. 14).

For men, there is pressure to take up traditional roles of soldier, protector, and provider. There is a stereotype that men should be fighting, and male IDPs are not always accepted by local communities (OSCE 2016, p. 8) and may be accused of cowardice (WILPF 2014, p. 16). There is limited space for men to protest against war in the context of mobilisation and patriotism (WILPF 2014, p. 16). The conflict has at the same time undermined the ability of males to respond to social expectations, and have led to increases in harmful behaviours such as alcohol consumption, drug addiction and high-risk sexual activities, resulting in increasing reports of domestic violence (UNOCHA 2015, p. 10).

The Maidan protests of 2013-14 did provide opportunities for some women to take up less traditional gender roles. Men and women participated in the Maidan protests in near equal numbers, but women generally tended to perform support roles (such as providing food, cleaning, logistical and administrative support, education and information services) rather than leading the protests (Philips 2014, p. 415; Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 172; WILPF 2014, p. 3). When the protests turned violent, women were often excluded by men 'for their own protection' (Philips 2014, p. 416). However, some women did join the barricades and participate in violent

protest alongside men, and set up both military and non-military Women's *sotnias*<sup>3</sup> (Philips 2014, p. 416; Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 172). Some members of these *sotnias* subsequently joined volunteer battalions set up to support the government's conflict efforts (OSCE 2015, p. 12). To some extent, the Maidan protests 'provided women with the space and opportunity to adopt and assert new gender roles, and showcased women as political actors' (WILPF 2014, p. 3). Some women have been inspired to seek leadership roles in local and national government and in other spheres of power (Philips 2014, p. 422) and became involved in civic activism ranging from participating in demonstrations and non-violent resistance to processes of conflict mediation, dialogue, and reconciliation (Koriukalov, 2014, p. 28; Martsenyuk, 2015, p. 73; OSCE, 2015, pp. 7-16). However, some observers argue that women's involvement in the Maidan was not fully recognised and was treated in a sexist way (Martsenyuk, 2015, p. 76, 77) and note that women's inclusion in reconciliation processes at the regional level has not been matched at the national level (OSCE, 2015, p. 16).

Some women have since become directly involved in the conflicts (see 'women as conflict actors' below). For many of these women, their roles reinforce traditional notions of femininity through involvement in medical and humanitarian assistance and other support roles to soldiers and IDPs. However, some women assisting IDPs and soldiers experience experiencing a sense of agency and empowerment, reporting that they are more in charge of their lives, more able to take decisions for themselves, and have increased self-esteem. (WILPF 2014, p. 24)

Since the outbreak of conflict, soldiers' mothers and wives from the western regions have demonstrated against the conditions faced by soldiers (OSCE 2015, p. 7; WILPF 2014, p. 25). They have also collected funds to improve soldiers' conditions and asked for soldiers to be rotated or returned from the east (OSCE 2015, p. 7).

## 4. Women as conflict actors

### Women in the security forces and volunteer battalions

In response to the conflict in eastern Ukraine, women have fought alongside men, joining the security forces, volunteer battalions, and rebel groups. In general, representation of women in the armed forces has been increasing, and currently over 16,000 women serve in the military. However, Martsenyuk et al (2016, p. 175) suggest that this increase is 'not associated with the prestige of the service, but rather with the reluctance of men to hold low-paid positions', with most women in the armed forces in the so-called 'feminized' professions of nursing, finance, logistics, and communications. There is evidence of employment discrimination against women in the armed forces, with a low number of positions which women can hold in comparison to men, and sexist remarks by military commanders (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 176). One commentator suggested that it is hard for women to gain access to a military career because of the deep-rooted patriarchal culture embedded in Ukrainian society (Fellin 2015, pp. 8, 15).

When the conflict in eastern Ukraine began, women joined the frontlines as volunteers, journalists, medical staff, and military personnel in the army and in volunteer battalions (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 172). However female fighters and women in the Ukrainian army generally face gender discrimination, recognition, and visibility problems (Martsenyuk et al. 2016,

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<sup>3</sup> A military term usually translated as 'squad', occasionally as 'squadron' or 'company'.



p. 172). A fieldwork study, which included in-depth semi structured interviews with women who participated in military operations in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine (known as the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO)), was carried out in summer-autumn 2015 (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 174). The study looked at motivation for service, legal possibilities and supplies, the attitude towards them from male colleagues, the perspectives of the development of female service, and the respondents' approach to other women (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 175).

To be mobilised for the ATO women had to have a military occupational speciality, so most (40 out of 42) respondents to the study had come to the front voluntarily, at a time when the system was not ready for female service (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 179). Only around 40% of the respondents (17 of 42) managed to get a formal position, and to receive appropriate benefits, including the legal status of a combat participant (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 179). Only 15 of 42 of respondents held purely combat positions; others were medical (19 of 42) or supportive, with some women combining various responsibilities at the same time (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 179). At the time of research, military occupational specialities were very gender separated, and some women's official positions were not consistent with their actual occupations (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 179; see also Fellin 2015, p. 8). For example, one woman was listed as an accountant but actually served as a rocket operator (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 179). This restricted her access to rights and economic benefits as a soldier or veteran, as she did not have legal combat status (for example rights to free sanatorium treatment) (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 179; Fellin 2015, p. 8-9). Women's wages were also lower, and extra compensation for injuries or participation in special operations was not available to them, since officially they did not participate in combat (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 179). Many of the respondents did not receive any wages at all as they had no official position (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 179; Fellin 2015, p. 9). The legal invisibility of women was found to lead to infrastructural invisibility, with women in military service not generally supplied with uniforms, footwear, or feminine hygiene products, leaving women to buy these with their own money or accept supplies from activists and voluntary contributions from the civilian population (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 180; Fellin 2015, p. 9). Separate accommodation had to be organised by the women themselves and gender sensitive health care was not provided (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 180).

Women's motivations for their voluntary participation ranged from private (for example following friends or family) to a sense of civilian duty (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 179-180). In a number of cases women began by providing supplies to troops as a volunteer before deciding to directly participate in the hostilities (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 180).

The women mentioned that they faced stereotypical attitudes from male colleagues, who were protective or underestimated them or pushed them towards gendered tasks, meaning they had to prove they could serve equally to men (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 180-181; Fellin 2015, p. 16). However, most of the respondents reported that men changed their attitude to a more egalitarian one over time (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 181). Male soldiers who were interviewed claimed to not see cases of discrimination against female soldiers (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 181).

A female soldier on a panel on the role of Ukrainian women in conflict mentioned how her presence in her unit was important for connecting with the female portion of the local population (Fellin 2015, p. 9). She suggested that women are more likely to approach the army and share their concerns, including over sexual assault and rape perpetrated by soldiers, if there is a woman they can talk to (Fellin 2015, p. 9).

As a result of the 2016 National Action Plan on Women's Peace and Security, the Ministry of Defence, 'extended the list of military positions available for women, conducted an assessment of women's infrastructural needs in the Armed Forces, introduced gender-sensitivity training for military personnel in the zone of the Anti-Terrorist Operation, developed a new code of conduct for military personnel, which will have special provisions on gender-based violence and will allow for administrative and criminal liability for its violation, and plans to revise the curriculum of military education institutions' (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 182). This means women can now formally register in combat positions such as gunner and commander. However, two-thirds of military positions remain inaccessible to women in Ukraine (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 183). Anecdotal information suggests that discrimination in access to military education limits the possibilities for women to hold officer positions (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 181). The National Action Plan on Women's Peace and Security also acknowledges the need to provide rehabilitation and reintegration of female ex-combatants and their families (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 182).

Women volunteers also play an important role in supporting troops, by collecting and sewing uniforms and providing funds and other items needed by soldiers and combatants on both sides of the conflict (Fellin 2015, p. 10; OSCE 2015, p. 13). Some women, on both sides of the conflict, have also played a role by encouraging men to fight (WILPF 2014, p. 25).

Much less information is available about women involved in fighting for the armed rebel groups but there are reports of their involvement (WILPF 2014, p. 25).

## **Women as humanitarian responders**

Since the beginning of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, women activists, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and volunteer movements have played a key role in providing humanitarian assistance to those affected by the conflict (Kapur 2016, p. 6; Fellin 2015, p. 10). Civil society organisations working to support IDPs and Ukrainian service personnel are often run by women (OSCE 2015, p. 7). Grassroots civil initiatives, often led by women, have focused on restoring normal life for the population in Donetsk and Luhansk through activities that have included, for example, art exhibitions and debates (Fellin 2015, p. 5).

However, many of these actors are overstretched due to the nature of the crisis and have little capacity to increase or broaden the scope of their work (Kapur 2016, p. 6). In addition, WILPF (2014, pp. 3, 33) argues that women's humanitarian activities 'reinforce the gender role of women as supporters of 'their men' in defending the country', and serves to undermine their agency and the gains from the Maidan experience. On the other hand, they also note that some civil society activists supporting IDPs and soldiers have experienced a sense of agency and empowerment (WILPF 2014, p. 24).

Some female MPs have also worked on the frontline providing assistance to soldiers and volunteers, and supplied hospitals with medical equipment (Fellin 2015, p. 5). They have also mobilised communities to raise funds to support internally displaced persons by building playgrounds and cultural centres (Fellin 2015, p. 5).

## **5. Women in conflict resolution and peacebuilding**

There has been virtually no civil society engagement with the peace process, 'due to overstretch and capacity constraints as well as the lack of opportunities for participation' (Kapur 2016, p. 6;

WILPF 2014, P. 28). However, despite the lack of opportunity for formal participation in the peace process, 'a small number of women activists living close to the frontline and in the eastern regions continue to undertake local outreach and confidence building activities' (Kapur 2016, p. 6). Women's civil society organisations have been found to be very interested in engaging in dialogue processes between people from western and eastern Ukraine and in re-establishing former relations with women's groups in the Russian Federation, including soldiers' mothers (OSCE 2015, p. 8). A number of initiatives were documented at the beginning of 2015, including the initiative of the Union of Ukrainian women to encourage women to be appointed to senior positions in conflict regions; and initiatives by prominent female singers and politicians to highlight the situation in the conflict areas (Zakharova 2015, p. 25). Women have also engaged in shadow peace talks, like those in 2015, organised by the Union of Women of Ukraine, which brought together activists, civil society leaders, volunteers, journalists, public servants and women directly impacted and displaced by the fighting to discuss ways to help end the conflict. The participation of women in politics and peace-making at the local level is slowly increasing (Fellin 2015, p. 5-6). WILPF (2014, p. 23) have also noted that there is little public space for Ukrainian men to adopt a non-violent position in opposition to war.

Women's groups engaged in conflict resolution and peacebuilding argue that they need more training for mediators and peer-to-peer training programmes for those involved in dialogues on women, peace and security, as well as regular meeting and exchanges of experiences and resources. A number of initiatives have supported women's participation in peacebuilding activities. They include a project with the Women's Information Consultative Center aimed at 'increasing the capacity of women – especially internally displaced women and rural women – to protect themselves, increase women's empowerment and participation in decision-making processes, and build and raise awareness about international documents on women's peace and security and mechanisms to secure and protect women during war conflict and political, economic and social crises among decision-makers in Ukraine' (Hanssen 2016, p. 59). Another initiative, implemented by La Strada in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and relevant local authorities, aimed to build capacity in peace-building and conflict resolution and mediation efforts among conflict-affected groups and communities with a focus on women and IDP girls (Hanssen 2016, p. 79).

Ukrainian women working towards peace have also engaged in a solidarity dialogue with women activists from Bosnia and Herzegovina in June 2016 to share experiences and gain a better understanding of women's contribution to conflict and post-conflict transition (Kapur, 2016). The Ukrainian activists would like to professionalise their organisations and strengthen the Ukrainian feminist movement to help make women's voices in Ukraine stronger (Kapur 2016, p. 8). They feel that 'women must actively participate in the peace process to ensure inclusion of their voice, experience and perspective across all issues' (Kapur 2016, p. 8). It was suggested that women's organisations could help build local peace by working to create dialogue between host communities and IDPs, as well as reaching out to women in Donetsk and Luhansk, which could then link in with national, regional and international initiatives for peace (Kapur 2016, p. 23).

At a formal level, Ukraine's 2016 National Action Plan on Women's Peace and Security aims to increase the participation of women in peacebuilding by improving the infrastructure and legal environment for women's participation in international peacekeeping operations, and for their service in administrative and combat positions in the Armed Forces and other national security and defence institutions (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 182). In addition it plans to conduct an assessment of gendered aspects of conflict prevention and resolution and promote the women's

role in peacebuilding, peacekeeping and negotiation processes in the media (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, p. 182).

## 6. Women's political and economic empowerment

In 2016, Ukraine ranked 69<sup>th</sup> out of 144 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap report, having dropped from 48<sup>th</sup> place a decade earlier. The country scores slightly better than average on economic participation, educational attainment, and health outcomes for women, but lags on indicators of political empowerment (World Economic Forum 2016).

For a more complete discussion of women's political and economic empowerment in Ukraine, see GSDRC helpdesk report 1372e (<http://www.gsdrc.org/publications/priority-gender-issues-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina-georgia-moldova-serbia-and-ukraine-with-consideration-to-gender-and-governance/>).

Information in this section of the report refers to Ukraine as a whole; we have not been able to locate appropriate data specifically for the conflict areas.

### Political empowerment

Women's representation in social and public life is low, which means women have limited opportunities to influence the decisions that concern their lives, their communities and the country (Koriukalov, 2014, p. 8; NDI, 2016, p. 2). The government has not yet created effective mechanisms for improving women's access to power and decision making (Koriukalov, 2014, p. 8, 33). There are complaints that political parties do not adequately address gender equality issues and make insufficient efforts to engage women in their organisational structure and programmes (OSCE, 2015, p. 8).

At the national level, 12% of seats in the national parliament are held by women (World Bank, 2015, p. 2; OSCE, 2015, p. 8), placing Ukraine 127<sup>th</sup> out of 190 countries with regard to the number of women MPs (Martsenyuk, 2015, p. 74). The proportion of women in ministerial level positions is 14% (World Bank, 2015, p. 2). Women have been better represented in lower level bodies: in 2013, "women comprised 12% of the members of regional councils, 23% of the members of district councils, 28% of the members of city councils, 51% of the members of village councils and 46% of the members of small village settlements" (Koriukalov, 2014, p. 33). In 2013 women made up 76.8% of civil servants, yet only 13.5% of those responsible for making decisions of national importance were women (Koriukalov, 2014, p. 33).

The notion that politics is a dirty business strengthens patriarchal notions which keep women out of the political space (Martsenyuk, 2015, p. 74). Prominent politicians, including the President of Ukraine and the Prime Minister of Ukraine, have made discriminatory remarks about women, especially about their capabilities to take part in public life (Koriukalov, 2014, p. 34; NDI, 2016, p. 2). However, at least one party has introduced an internal gender quota of 20% (Koriukalov, 2014, p. 34).

### Economic empowerment

The labour force participation rate for women lags behind that for men, at 62% compared with 74% (World Economic Forum 2016), although this is above the global average of 50% (Spear et al, 2016, p. 23). 67% of employed women and 45% of employed men work in the service sector,

which made up 55% of total employment in 2013 (Spear et al, 2016, p. 57). Women are well-represented particularly in social services (health, education, welfare), public service, commerce (wholesale/retail), beauty salons, design/tailoring, cleaning, hospitality, catering, tourism, translation, accounting and bookkeeping, consulting, and real estate (Spear et al, 2016, p. 56). There are laws which restrict women from working in mining, construction, metalworking, factories, jobs requiring lifting weights above a threshold, and jobs deemed hazardous or arduous (World Bank, 2015, p. 2; Koriukalov, 2014, p. 9).

In 2013 the average economy-wide gender wage gap was 23% (Spear et al, 2016, p. 56). The gap can be partly explained by the concentration of women in low paid sectors, and that men tend to occupy higher positions than women (Spear et al, 2016, p. 55). In addition, the traditional division of domestic responsibilities makes career development more challenging for women (Spear et al, 2016, p. 55).

In 2014, nearly 3 million people were in informal employment, of whom 42% were women (Spear et al, 2016, p. 55). In the informal economy, women face more discrimination and exploitation, they do not have access to social protection packages such as maternity leave (Spear et al, 2016, p. 55), and the gender pay gap is higher than in formal employment (Koriukalov, 2014, p. 31).

Female entrepreneurs are most present in the services sector, especially in tourism, hospitality, retail trade, real estate, tailoring, beauty/hairdressing, education and arts translation, consulting, accounting, research, child-and-elderly care services, housecleaning, and international donor/NGO projects (Spear et al, 2016, p. 57). Only 31% of firms had female participation in ownership, up from 22% in 2014 (World Bank, 2015, p. 2; Spear et al, 2016, p. 56; Koriukalov, 2014, p. 32). Women's motivations for becoming entrepreneurs include a lack of employment opportunities, the desire for independent employment and escape from discrimination, and balancing work and family responsibilities (Spear et al, 2016, p. 57). Women's businesses tend to be smaller than those run by men, and they face similar challenges in a generally difficult enabling environment for business (Spear et al, 2016, pp. 57-64). Women particularly struggle to access business and trade networks, knowledge, training and further education (Spear et al, 2016, p. 60). Women experience difficulties accessing credit (OECD 2014, p. 6) because they typically earn less than men and are less likely to own property or other assets to act as collateral (OECD 2014, p. 6; Koriukalov, 2014, p. 16). New regulations associated with the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) agreement with the EC may particularly challenge female entrepreneurs due to increased costs of complying with stricter food hygiene and other product standards, especially as women have less leverage in terms of access to finance, technology, infrastructure, and expertise (Spear et al, 2016, p. 61).

## **Legal framework**

The constitution of Ukraine guarantees equality for men and women (World Bank, 2015, p. 2) and the country has ratified international legal instruments on gender equality, including the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Platform of Action (Klatzer and Ivanina, 2015, p. 7). It is in the process of ratifying the Istanbul Convention, the most comprehensive global legal framework covering violence against women and domestic violence (Hanssen, 2016, p. 59), with support from the Council of Europe and Sweden (Hanssen, 2016, p. 59). Men and women have equal ownership and inheritance rights to property (World Bank, 2015, p. 2).



The principal domestic legislation for gender equality is the 2005 Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men (Klatzer and Ivanina, 2015, p. 6). However, it took eight attempts to pass the law, and it passed only after removing all provisions for positive action (Koriukalov, 2014, p. 6). Since then other laws have been amended to bring them in line with the gender equality law and more state programmes on gender equality have been developed, although not all amendments have been adopted (Koriukalov, 2014, p. 6, 11). In September 2013, the State Programme on Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men up to 2016 was finally adopted, and it received its first funding in 2014 (Koriukalov, 2014, p. 10).

The main problems with ensuring gender equality concern the implementation of national legislation rather than its provisions (Koriukalov, 2014, p. 11). In addition, despite most legislation being gender neutral, it does not promote the levelling of women in areas where they are being discriminated against (Koriukalov, 2014, p. 38). At the level of heads of legislative, executive authorities, and local bodies, there is a lack of political will to advance gender transformations (Koriukalov, 2014, p. 8; MoSP and UNFPA, 2014, p. 9).

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