WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

National Action Plans in the UK and Ukraine

Policy Brief

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The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform (PeaceRep) is a research consortium led by the University of Edinburgh Law School. Our research is rethinking peace and transition processes in the light of changing conflict dynamics in the 21st century.

PeaceRep's Ukraine programme

PeaceRep's Ukraine programme is a multi-partner initiative that provides evidence, insight, academic research and policy analysis from Ukraine and the wider region to support Ukrainian sovereignty, territorial integrity and democracy in the face of the Russian invasion. PeaceRep's Ukraine programme is led by the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) partnering with the Kyiv School of Economics (KSE) in Ukraine, the Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (IOS) in Germany, the Institute of Human Sciences (IWM) in Austria and Jagiellonian University in Poland. Through our collaboration with KSE we work closely with researchers, educationalists and civic activists in Ukraine to ensure that policy solutions are grounded in robust evidence and are calibrated to support democratic outcomes.

Background

On 15th March 2023 PeaceRep's Ukraine team hosted a an online private seminar drawing together academics, policy-makers, civil servant and civil society activists on the topic, 'The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda and the Russian war against Ukraine'. This readout contains a non-verbatim summary of key points made by panellists in their presentations.

About the Authors

Christine Chinkin, FBA, CMG, was previously Professor of International Law and is currently Professorial Research Fellow at the Centre for Women Peace and Security at the London School of Economics and Global Law Professor at the University of Michigan. She is co-author of The Boundaries of International Law: a Feminist Analysis (2000), The Making of International Law (2007) and International Law and New Wars (2017) and author of Women, Peace and Security and International Law (2022).

Oksana Potapova previously (2014 to 2020) worked with community theatre for the rights of internally displaced women in Ukraine through the «Theatre for Dialogue» NGO. She combines her activism with research and advocacy for feminist peace and grassroots movement building in Ukraine. In 2021 she completed an MSc in Gender, Peace and Security at the London School of Economics, where she continues her journey as a PhD researcher. Since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, Oksana's research has been focused on intersectional gendered impacts of this war; emerging solidarities around new realities of peace and security in the region; and explorations of antimilitarist feminist frameworks through an embodied positionality as a Ukrainian activist and scholar.

Overview of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and UK's New National Action Plan

The Women, Peace and Security/WPS is a UN Security Council agenda which recognises that conflict, like all social interactions, is gendered and seeks to ensure the inclusion of women's experiences as well as those of men into law and policymaking. It is set out in 10 Security Council resolutions dating back to Resolution 1325 in 2000. The agenda comprises of four key pillars: 1) Participation - enhancing the participation of women and girls and their representation in decision making about conflict prevention, management and resolution; 2) Prevention of sexual violence and conflict, and, importantly, but often overlooked, prevention of conflict; 3) Protection of women and girls against conflict related sexual and gender-based violence; 4) Relief and recovery, which includes immediate humanitarian assistance and response and more long-term recovery in post conflict reconstruction. The resolutions also emphasize women's empowerment and leadership, and increasingly recognize the importance of working with women's civil society organizations at the local level.

UK's National Action Plan on Implementation of Resolution of 1325

As one of the supporters of the first resolution, the UK has been a WPS champion and has played a significant role in shaping the WPS agenda. The most recent National Action Plan was adopted in February 2023. It is the Fifth National Action Plan of the UK. The NAP sets out five key strategies relating to foreign policy. The NAP is located in the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office/FCDO, although there is some reference to domestic applicability. The first three strategies follow the four pillars of WPS: enhanced participation in decision making, protection against conflict related sexual violence and humanitarian relief and crisis response. Importantly, the National Action Plan recognises that men and boys are targeted for gender-based violence in conflict as well as women and girls, and that LGBTQ+ people are also vulnerable to gender based violence in various ways, as well as people with disabilities and those discriminated against based on race and ethnicity. In this respect, the National Action Plan goes beyond the WPS resolutions. The UK has also made prevention of sexual violence in conflict (PSVI) a particular specific focus and it championed the survivor-centred approach, especially regarding recovery and seeking justice. **The National Action Plan, like the Security Council, emphasizes prevention of sexual violence, not prevention of conflict.**

The final two strategies of the UK National Action Plan relate to security and justice. They address the accountability of security sector actors and access to justice for women and girls responding to transnational threats in gender sensitive ways. Importantly, the NAP considers women and girls in all their diversity in its policy and programs, by recognizing "the multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, class, religion or belief and disability, which can create unique challenges in conflict contexts". **This emphasis on context specificity, both with respect to the conflict and with respect to the various survivors of forms of violence in conflict, reflects an intersectional approach,** which again goes beyond the WPS resolutions. It would have been even more helpful if it had been emphasized throughout, rather than reference to this fifth strategy.

The National Action Plan also sets out 12 focus countries that it defines as "fragile and conflict affected countries with significant levels of gender inequality, and where the UK is well placed to offer policy, programmatic and diplomatic expertise, as well as defence and humanitarian support where appropriate, to improve stability and thereby to strengthen UK security". **Ukraine is listed as one of the 12 focused countries**.

Overview of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Ukraine

The Government of Ukraine adopted its first National Action Plan in 2016, two years after the beginning of (what was referred to as) the armed conflict in Donbas. It was achieved largely thanks to the initiative of women's civil society, with support of, the then recently established office of the Government Commissioner for Gender Policy. The connection of strong civil society and the recently created institutional home for gender equality in the Government allowed for this, with support of international partners like UN Women. **Importantly, while in many countries (especially in the Global North) the NAP is developed as part of foreign policy and is a tool of external assistance, In Ukraine this agenda continues to focus domestically.**

The first NAP, operational from 2016 to 2020, focused mostly on the role and the rights of women in the army. Since in 2014 official employment and structural opportunities in the Ukrainian army were not open to women in the same way as they were to men, Ukrainian women were volunteering to join battalions in the armed conflict as invisible fighters. Even though women were playing diverse roles, they were mostly registered in low paid positions, and thus were not seen, nor properly compensated. Career opportunities for women within the military were also limited. **Many gains have since been made through active grassroots advocacy of the women's movement through the "Invisible Battalion" initiative.** Between 2016 and nowadays the Invisible Battalion and the Women Veterans' movement have been able to achieve access to many professions for women, both within the military and in other fields where women were previously prohibited to serve and to work. They were able to fight for access to education for girls and young women in the security and defence sectors, as well as to gain access for positions for women in the military. Despite the ongoing advocacy and progress, many needs of women in the military remain unmet and continue to be in the centre of attention.

The agenda relating to integration of internally displaced women, which were one of the groups that was very present and visible between 2014 and 2022, was less present in the first NAP, as well as broader human security issues. Civil society groups that engaged with civilian populations displaced by the conflict, alongside those living in communities affected by armed violence, insisted on broadening the definition of security to be more holistic. This was later reflected in the second NAP, adopted in 2020. Again, civil society was instrumental in designing this NAP and in joining in its implementation. The focus was much stronger on localization in different regions. At the time the armed conflict was centred mostly in the East, but women's vulnerabilities and insecurities were shared throughout the country. A need for regional action plans and localization of the WPS agenda in every part of the country was seen as a priority, and this continues to be the case.

It is also important to note that in 2022, only two months after Russia's full-scale invasion, a revision of the second NAP was initiated. Through consultation with over 200 participants the document was updated and includes more issues and tasks as well as being applicable to groups of women and men who have been made vulnerable through the full-scale invasion. Localization remains a priority, and currently established local coalitions of organizations in different regions are now working on regional plans. **This is important also as we think forward about the status of democracy in Ukraine, particularly at the local level**. We need to make sure that structures are in place to ensure participation of civil society more broadly and of women more specifically in decision making that is happening at the national level and especially at the local level.

Challenges and Recommendations

Challenge: Gaps in funding and lack of accountability for implementation

Recommendation: Funding and accountability for NAP implementation is key to ensuring that the agenda is effective and works.

The new U.K NAP points out that the major challenge to women, peace and security is non-implementation. It speaks to the failure by states to budget for implementation and the lack of accountability for lack of implementation. That lack of accountability relates both to the national level and within the Security Council. The Security Council fails to make any response when it receives reports, for example, that do not mention application of WPS principles. Allocated Governmental funding has not been included in Ukraine's NAPs which have been mostly implemented with the support of international organisations and civil society. Governments must be held accountable for funding the commitments made in their NAPs and for their full and proper implementation.

Challenge: multiple needs of women in the security and defence sector continue to be unmet

Recommendation: continue to mainstream gender perspective in the security and defence sectors, engage with women's civil society to identify and address pertinent needs

Women have served in the Ukrainian military since 1991, but reforms related to their role and visibility only begun in 2016, to a large degree through the pressure of civil society and the Invisible Batallion initiative. The legislative changes aimed at officially recognizing equality of men and women in the military and allowed to appoint women to combat positions. In the summer of 2022, more than 50,000 women were employed by the armed forces. They are also now serving on the front lines. Renaming of the National Defender's Day into the Day of Men and Women Defenders of Ukraine in 2021 was one of the important indicators that highlighted societal recognition of women's role in the military. However, Ukrainian servicewomen still face barriers in their work – from scepticism about their abilities, obstacles to promotion, to difficulties with basic yet vital matters such as proper uniforms and body armour. Women in the military are also at risk of sexual violence. These and other challenges are constantly voiced by the Women's Veteran Movement. The situation of women in defence and security sectors is one of government's priorities as part of the WPS NAP.

Challenge: Linear temporality of the WPS agenda needs to be revised

Recommendation: Planning of post-war recovery policies needs to start during the ongoing conflict

The WPS agenda has a linear temporal logic: it envisages pre-conflict, during conflict and post-conflict, assuming that there is a "post-conflict" space, rather than considering a continuity of violence that occurs at different stages of conflict. This logic also assumes that reconstruction is particularly focused in the post-conflict stage. In many instances, this logic is disrupted. In the case of Ukraine, specifically, it's important that planning of policy programs around reconstruction starts from the outset of conflict and continues throughout. It is also crucial that meaningful participation of women's civil society is ensured at all stages. Experience of other conflict settings has shown that if a gender perspective is not taken on board from the outset, it's very hard to get it in later.

Challenge: Women's perspectives and gender aspects are not considered in policies

Recommendation: Ensure meaningful participation of women's civil society during and after the war

Significant gains in women's access to structures of power have been made prior to the full-scale invasion, both on the national level (through introduction of party quotas) and at the local level (through decentralisation). This had led to more women joining politics, and for local civil society (including women) to have more influence on local policies and resource management. It is important not to lose these gains, even though the preconditions for that unfortunately are present. They have to do with the extreme migration and displacement inside Ukraine, which is also heavily gendered. Women's rights organizations on the ground are working to make sure that women who have been displaced remain active or have chances to channel their opinions and views into local politics and to local programs. This work needs to be supported and highlighted. In addition, women's rights organisations are actively involved in developing suggestions for a gendered post-war recovery. Their voices must be included in planning and implementation of recovery plans in all sectors.

Challenge: Economic and social rights are not reflected in the WPS agenda

Recommendation: Consider WPS as part of broader human rights framework, include socioeconomic rights

In all conflict settings, women consistently seek the same thing during and after conflict: priorities relating to access to livelihoods, health, education, housing, food security – what is known broadly as "holistic security". This entails in a commitment to economic and social rights that are not explicitly included in the women, peace and security agenda. It's important, however, that the WPS is seen as women's human rights agenda. It must be read and applied in conjunction with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women/CEDAW, which includes economic and social rights. CEDAW continues to be applicable throughout conflict and has extra territorial applicability. So, the WPS agenda should be read in conjunction with that women's human rights agenda.

An emphasis on a human rights approach, particularly economic and social rights in reconstruction and recovery, can act as a counterbalance both to the war economy and to a dominant free market economics, which often is insisted upon, for example, by the international financial institutions and which tend to demand privatization, deregulation and under investment in public services - all of which have significant gender impact. In the case of Ukraine, specifically, there is a risk of significant feminisation of poverty as women shift towards the unpaid care labour, as is already the case. This will be compounded, as severe attacks on civilian infrastructure, hospitals, schools and kindergartens In Ukraine continue. The emphasis on economic and social rights can counterbalance the adverse effects of neoliberal post-war recovery and women's unpaid care burden.

Challenge: Narrow perception of justice and justice mechanisms

Recommendation: Implement justice in line with local needs and capacities

There is an assumption throughout the WPS resolutions that justice entails primarily criminal justice, and attention tends to focus on the mechanisms for the prosecution of war crimes and crimes against humanity in international tribunals. National tribunals are also a very important part of the justice mechanism. Ukraine has an operative and functional criminal justice system and it's important that attention is paid to supporting

and assisting those national systems and not solely to focus on the international. Considering the nature of gender-based violence on women and girls, men and boys, LGBTI persons, these crimes can be collectively understood as a form of gender-based persecution. Currently there is an emphasis within the International Criminal framework to focus on gender-based persecution as a crime against humanity, and this might be a useful framing notion in the context of Ukraine.

Challenge: WPS mostly seen as an agenda for protection of women

Recommendation: See the agenda as a broader peace and women's rights framework, centre civil society actors

The WPS originated from women's civil society arguing before the Security Council for the need of a peace agenda and a women's human rights agenda. However, the agenda has become bureaucratized and tamed by the Security Council, turning into a top down, state-oriented agenda. It is important to remember and return to that civil society orientation and that civil society, women's organizations in conflict zones have consistently assessed, responded to, identified and created strategies to respond to the needs and circumstances of the civilian population. In the context of Ukraine. they have done this throughout occupation, throughout conflict and in the diaspora. It is vital that any such policy and programs are introduced and operated in conjunction with local civil society organizations: to take the lead from them; to integrate a gender perspective into the work of those organizations, as they are already doing; and to emphasise flexible funding that allows those civil society bodies to determine their priorities, recognizing that priorities shift and so not to become locked into a specific program that may cease to be a priority.

Challenge: Ukrainians outside of the country are not seen as subjects in post-war recovery

Recommendation: Engage with Ukrainian communities across borders, including with refugees and migrants

Ukraine is talking about recovery as at the same time as it's fighting the war. The Ukrainian Government is also expressing its ambition for the return of its citizens after the war. However, there is no systemic effort to include the voices and the perceptions of those who are now temporarily outside of Ukraine about their views and needs on what kind of country they want to come back to. There are studies emerging about the experiences of migration and integration, looking at the policies of different countries, in terms of how well they're able to host the inflow of refugees. And here, of course, gendered issues are coming up as well. Risks of unemployment vulnerabilities, trafficking, sexual violence, access to reproductive health and rights in some countries, for instance Poland. What hasn't yet been tackled is the issue of political subjectivation of millions of mostly women from Ukraine who are now in Europe and seen only as refugees. This is a potential as well for the WPS agenda to become cross-border and to become more transnational than just the borders of a state like Ukraine or a state like the UK.

Further Reading

[Who will stay and who will return? Divergent Trajectories of Ukrainian War Refugees in the EU.](#)

[A Series of Publications and Analytical Reports](#) by UN Women Ukraine.

[Gender inequality in Ukraine during war – from personal stories to demographic analysis.](#)

[Analytical Reports on Conflict-related Sexual Violence in Ukraine.](#)

[LSE and OSCE Joint Report](#) on Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in the OSCE region.