



## Analysis of the use of Gender Perspective in the Armed Conflict in Ukraine

*The Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations (NCGM) is an international military organisation established in 2012. NCGM is an Expert Centre on the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and gender perspective in military organisations and operations, a NATO-accredited Education and Training Facility, and the NATO Department Head for the Gender in Military Operations discipline.*

### 1. Introduction

Gender inequality persists worldwide and is often exacerbated in times of crisis and armed conflict. This is clearly demonstrated in Ukraine where, following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, men, women, boys and girls are affected differently by the ongoing war. Additionally, reports indicate that gender perspectives are used intentionally and strategically in different ways, by both parties to the conflict, for military or political purposes.

#### 1.1. Background

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, NCGM has monitored and gathered observations from the conflict. In March 2022, the NCGM Steering Committee articulated the need to analyse *how both parties to the conflict utilise concepts of gender to their advantage*. The resulting document was presented during the NCGM Steering Committee Annual Meeting in November 2022. The analysis was subsequently updated in June 2023, and the current version is the third update of the report, aiming to review the observations and reflect most recent developments and trends from the conflict.

#### 1.2. Aim and purpose

The aim of this analysis is twofold. First, to examine the armed conflict, its consequences and implications from a gender perspective. Second, to draw conclusions on the conflict parties' use of gender perspective, intending to answer the question: *What trends can be observed in how parties to the conflict in Ukraine utilise concepts of gender to their advantage?*

The purpose of this analysis is to raise awareness on the relevance and prevalence of aspects of the Women, Peace and Security agenda and gender perspectives in a modern conflict in Europe. As such, it is intended as a starting point for discussions on the gendered strategies, perspectives and consequences of the war in Ukraine. The analysis provides examples illustrating the relevance of gender perspective in the ongoing conflict.

#### 1.3. Methodology, scope and limitations

The analysis is based on open-source data and information, including research, briefs, reports and articles from academics, international media and international organisations.



The analysis predominantly relies on English- and Swedish-language sources, limiting the range of sources and perspectives accounted for. Particularly, the lack of reliable information from Russian-controlled areas and Russian information channels is acknowledged. The paper does not rely on, or convey, any previously undisclosed information. Accordingly, this report is not an exhaustive or comprehensive account or analysis of the conflict, but rather an overview highlighting observations and trends on the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine from a gender perspective. The analysis intends to increase awareness on the use of gender perspective in Ukraine and beyond, and does not advocate for any particular situation-specific courses of action.

The analysis is structured in four parts; section 2 offers an overview of existing gender dynamics and inequalities in Ukraine and Russia before the full-scale invasion in 2022. Section 3 provides an overview of the implications and gendered consequences of the war. Section 4 examines the question of strategic uses of concepts of gender and identifies three key trends regarding the conflict parties' conduct in this regard. Section 5 summarizes the main conclusions of the analysis.



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## 2. Political, legal and economic contexts

### 2.1. Ukraine

Ukraine has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and has adopted three National Action Plans (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), the first covering the period from 2016-2020 and the second 2020-2025. Ukraine further updated the second NAP in 2022 to include necessary changes due to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia.<sup>1</sup> Hence, it is a unique example of a country both adopting, conducting training on, and monitoring a National Action Plan during an ongoing conflict.<sup>2</sup>

The Ukrainian constitution grants equal rights to women and men (Article 24). However, traditional gender roles are prevalent. In 2023, the country ranked 66 out of 146 on the global gender gap index, scoring high on educational attainment but low on labour force participation and gender equal political participation.<sup>3</sup> Labour force participation among men and women differs, and in 2021, 62 per cent of women and 72 per cent of men were employed in the formal sector.<sup>4</sup> The Ukrainian Labour Code prohibits discrimination based on sex (Article 22), yet some provisions are in themselves discriminatory, for example, article 175 which prohibits the hiring of women for work at night, except in the case of an emergency and as a temporary measure. Women, and Roma women in particular, are overrepresented among the poorest groups in society. Among European states, Ukraine is the main country of origin for trafficking in human beings. Internally displaced women are overrepresented among

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<sup>1</sup> Notable updates in the 2022 version of the Ukrainian NAP include an expanded list of main target groups, now covering additional groups affected in different ways by the conflict. A number of references are made to the relatives of combatants, prisoners of war and/or those missing. The NAP also identifies the target group “women or men with dependent young and minor children and other family members”, reflecting changes in social and family dynamics following the 2022 full-scale invasion. In general, the current NAP focuses on how the civilian populations is affected by the armed conflict, including the targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure by Russia, and highlighting the importance of shelter. There is also a clear understanding in the NAP that many Ukrainians have been forced to flee abroad, and tasks in the plan focus on ensuring that those abroad remain informed about the situation in Ukraine, including information about relatives and families. Further, potential risks connected to the large number of Ukrainians fleeing abroad are addressed in the NAP, including tasks regarding information to be available at border crossings to inform of the risks of human trafficking and human-rights violations. Broadly, the NAP includes considerations of effective and timely assistance to victims of gender-based violence (GBV), conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and human trafficking. There is also recognition that Russia’s full-scale invasion has made it harder to reach target groups psychically, and the NAP calls for an analysis of what communication channels work best to reach specific groups. Limitations on freedom of movement are also prominent in terms of a primary focus on online solutions for education and training of personnel, alongside information campaigns.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Manoilenko, “The Continuing Relevance of the ‘Women, Peace and Security’ Agenda in the Context of Russia’s War on Ukraine,” *Peace Research Institute Frankfurt*, October 10, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> “Global Gender Gap Report 2023,” *World Economic Forum*, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> “Labor Force Participation Rate Ukraine,” *The World Bank*, 2021.



victims of trafficking, and mainly trafficked for sexual exploitation, while men are mostly trafficked for forced labour. The ongoing conflict has exacerbated these issues.<sup>5</sup>

In 2022, the government of Ukraine ratified the Council of Europe *Convention on Preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence* (Istanbul Convention). While the convention entered into force domestically on 1 November, it is not referenced in the new WPS NAP.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Ukraine has high rates of gender based and domestic violence, where women are disproportionately affected. Annually, 1500 women in Ukraine are killed by a family member, and 3 million children witness domestic violence.<sup>7</sup> Prior to the full-scale invasion, an estimated 1.9 million Ukrainian women were subjected to domestic violence annually.<sup>8</sup>

Ukraine has been making progress in women's political participation. After the parliamentary elections in 2019, 21 per cent of parliamentarians were women. A small percentage relative to the number of men in parliament, yet a significant increase from 12 per cent after the previous election. Still, by 2024, 24 out of 25 Ukrainian governors were men.<sup>9</sup> Recent parliamentary elections have been postponed due to limitations contained in the national martial law. In November 2023, President Zelensky declared elections would not take place as long as the country remains in a state of war with Russia.<sup>10</sup> In general, Ukrainian women participate in politics through civil society organisations to a larger extent than through representational political channels. Both women and men participated in the Maidan protest movement.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2. The Russian Federation

The Russian Federation has also ratified CEDAW, but has never had a WPS National Action Plan. There is constitutional support for gender equality, but patriarchal attitudes remain strong. Labour laws remaining from the Soviet era, like in Ukraine, still prohibit women from having certain professions.<sup>12</sup> In recent years, the country has fallen in the global gender gap

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<sup>5</sup> "UKRAINA - Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer: situationen per den 31 december 2019," *Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2020; Louise Olsson et al, "Toward an enhanced analysis of human terrain in Sweden- men's and women's willingness to defend, mobilization, resilience and safety in the context of National Defence," *Uppsala University – Department of Peace and Conflict Research*, June 23, 2021, 56-70.

<sup>6</sup> "UKRAINA - Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer: situationen per den 31 december 2019," *Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2020; Louise Olsson et al, "Toward an enhanced analysis of human terrain in Sweden- men's and women's willingness to defend, mobilization, resilience and safety in the context of National Defence," *Uppsala University – Department of Peace and Conflict Research*, June 23, 2021, 56-70.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> "UKRAINA – Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer: situationen per den 31 december 2017," *Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2018, 14.

<sup>9</sup> "UKRAINA - Mänskliga rättigheter, demokrati och rättsstatens principer: situationen per den 31 december 2019," *Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Oz Katerji, "Ukraine Doesn't Want Wartime Elections," *Foreign Policy*, November 17, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Louise Olsson et al, "Toward an enhanced analysis of human terrain in Sweden- men's and women's willingness to defend, mobilization, resilience and safety in the context of National Defence," *Uppsala University – Department of Peace and Conflict Research*, June 23, 2021, 56-70.

<sup>12</sup> "Russia Opens 350 banned professions to women - stripping Soviet era restrictions," *Moscow Times*, August 16, 2019.



index, moving from place 75 to place 81 (and was omitted altogether in the latest Global Gender Gap reports from 2022 and 2023).<sup>13</sup> While the gender gap in employment is low, the gender pay-gap is 28 per cent. This is a large gap for a high-income country. Single mothers are overrepresented among the poorest in the country.<sup>14</sup> The gender care-gap in Russia is large, with women spending approximately 17.9 per cent of their time on care and domestic work, while the average for men is 8.1 per cent.<sup>15</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the existing care-gap.<sup>16</sup>

Rates of domestic violence in Russia are high and reported to be on the rise - especially since it was decriminalised in 2017. Between 2011 and 2019, more than 12,000 Russian women died as a result of domestic violence, of which 81% were killed by their partners.<sup>17</sup> During the pandemic, calls to national domestic violence helplines increased by 74 per cent.<sup>18</sup>

Gender norms are conservative, and a survey conducted in 2019 showed that the most important quality in women according to the average Russian man is being a good homemaker, followed by attractiveness. Women, especially older women, shared the same attitudes. Both men and women ranked intelligence as most important for men.<sup>19</sup> In the same 2019 survey, 71 per cent of Russians agreed that the main purpose of a woman is to be a good mother and homemaker, while 89 per cent consider that men are responsible for providing for their families.<sup>20</sup> In the summer of 2023, a law was passed banning people from officially or medically changing their gender.<sup>21</sup>

While women's political representation in Russia has been rising over the past 20 years it remains low, with only 16.2 per cent of parliament seats held by women in 2022.<sup>22</sup> Overrepresentation of men is particularly high in local governments.<sup>23</sup> With a restricted civil society, political participation through extra-representational channels is limited and women's organisations have limited political space. Between 2019 and 2022, several laws were passed to close down independent news organisations and prohibit sharing information

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<sup>13</sup> "Global Gender Gap Report 2018," *World Economic Forum*, 2018; "Global Gender Gap Report 2022," *World Economic Forum*, 2022; "Global Gender Gap Report 2023," *World Economic Forum*, 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Marina Piskaklova-Parker, "Gender Issues in Russia," *Instituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*, 2022, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Andrea Atencio and Josefina Posadas, "Gender gap in pay in the Russian Federation: Twenty years later still a concern," *World Bank*, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Marina Piskaklova-Parker, "Gender Issues in Russia," *Instituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*, 2022, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Agata Wlodkowska, "What Remains Unseen: The Russia-Ukraine War from the Gender Perspective," *Journal of International Affairs (New York)* 75, no. 2 (2023).

<sup>18</sup> Marina Piskaklova-Parker, "Gender Issues in Russia," *Instituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*, 2022, 5-9; "Russian Federation," *UN Women Database*, October 12, 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Alexei Levinson, "Who's to Blame for Gender Stereotypes in Russia? It's not as simple as you might think," *Moscow Times*, March 17, 2019.

<sup>20</sup> Marina Piskaklova-Parker, "Gender Issues in Russia," *Instituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*, 2022, 4.

<sup>21</sup> "Vladimir Putin signs law banning gender changes in Russia," *The Guardian*, July 24, 2023.

<sup>22</sup> "Russian Federation," *The World Bank Gender Data Portal*, February 28, 2024.

<sup>23</sup> "Russian Federation," *UN Women Database*, October 12, 2022.



considered “fake news” regarding the Russian Armed Forces.<sup>24</sup> So-called “foreign agent” legislation also makes it more difficult for civil society organisations, including women’s organisations, to operate.<sup>25</sup> In July 2023, further restrictions on cooperation with foreign NGOs were adopted.<sup>26</sup>

### 3. Gendered consequences of the ongoing armed conflict

While the lack of exhaustive sex-and age- disaggregated data (SADD) does not allow for a comprehensive gender analysis, broader observations examining the gendered aspects of the war can be identified.

#### 3.1. Gender equality, roles and norms

The conflict affects gender roles and relations in Ukraine. The war has increased levels of unemployment for men and women. More men join the Ukrainian Armed Forces, which leads women to assume new roles to ensure their families’ survival. In turn, this leads to increased paid and unpaid work for women. There is also an increase in unpaid care work for men who have lost their jobs because of higher unemployment rates. Men often face social expectations to contribute to family income, and thus face added social pressure when losing their job. Increasing poverty due to lack of income likely increases the amount of workers in the informal sector, but also disproportionately affects groups who were already marginalised on the labour market, such as the Roma population, and Roma women in particular. With education being held online and/or schools being closed, the burden on women to engage in home-schooling increases, as does the lack of access to education for girls and boys - with Roma girls being at particular risk.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, conflict exacerbates existing inequalities. Female-headed households, IDPs, Roma people, LGBTQIA+ persons, the elderly and people with disabilities are more severely affected by the consequences of the war due to pre-existing inequalities. Persons with disabilities and older persons with limited mobility may lack access to shelter and evacuation routes. LGBTQIA+ persons face discrimination when looking for housing and shelter. Groups who were previously exposed to more violence in the public space, such as LGBTQIA+ persons, face increased risks when more small arms are in circulation and streetlights are not functioning. Trans-women are prohibited from crossing the borders if the gender in their passports does not correspond to their identified gender.<sup>28</sup> Same-sex couples fleeing the country face discrimination when they are not recognised as families or couples at the border

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<sup>24</sup> Bianca Ferrari, “Russian Woman Faces 10 Year Sentence after Leaving Anti-War Stickers in Supermarket,” *Vice News*, May 18, 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Marina Piskaklova-Parker, “Gender Issues in Russia,” *Instituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*, 2022, 11.

<sup>26</sup> “Russia: Bill Bans Work with Most Foreign Groups,” *Human Rights Watch*, July 25, 2023.

<sup>27</sup> “Rapid Gender Analysis of the War in Ukraine,” *UN Women and CARE International*, May 4, 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Li Cohen, “‘A war within a war’: Transgender woman says transphobia and discriminatory laws keeping her hostage in Kyiv during Russian invasion,” *CBS News*, March 1, 2022; Azadeh Moaveni and Chitra Nagarajan, “Another deeply gendered war is being waged in Ukraine,” *International Crisis Group*, March 15, 2022.





or in neighbouring countries.<sup>29</sup> Roma people tend to lack documentation, preventing them from leaving the country.<sup>30</sup> People in rural areas, particularly rural women, face increased security risks as they are forced to travel into big cities in search of electricity, water and fuel. Older women without families are particularly vulnerable to economic hardship.<sup>31</sup>

The immediate gendered consequences of the conflict in Russia relate to military conscription and mobilization, which almost exclusively affect men (sections 3.9-3.10 below). Additionally, signs of strain are increasingly apparent in Russia's economy. Three interconnected issues – labour scarcity, inflation and soaring state spending – are likely to remain challenging. As time passes, Western sanctions also become increasingly apparent. Those who are the most marginalized, including women, suffer the most. As a consequence, the participation of women in the labour market and feminist activism risks to be weakened, while the patriarchy risks being strengthened, and the level of violence risks increasing.<sup>32</sup>

Up to date, there has been no meaningful peace process between the parties to the conflict. The only publicly disclosed efforts at peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine were limited to meetings that took place six weeks into the full-scale invasion of 2022, held in Istanbul. Notably, the negotiations were almost exclusively attended by men.

### 3.2. Civilian casualties

According to the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, at least 32,100 civilian casualties, including 10,946 killed and 21,154 injured, have been recorded between 24 February 2022 and 30 April 2024 in Ukraine.<sup>33</sup>

More detailed data available for the period between 24 February 2022 and 30 April 2024 show that among those killed, 5,238 were men, 3,217 women, 322 boys and 258 girls, as well as 1,883 adults and 28 children whose sex was not immediately known. Among injured civilians, 7,206 were men, 5,062 women, 638 boys, 462 girls, and 7,206 adults and 285 children whose sex is yet unknown. Overall, the actual casualty figures are believed to be considerably higher due to difficulties in both receiving and corroborating information.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Dunja Milatovic, "LGBTI people affected by the war in Ukraine need protection," *Council of Europe*, May 17, 2022.

<sup>30</sup> "Rapid Gender Analysis of the War in Ukraine," *UN Women and CARE International*, May 4, 2022; "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 February- 31 July 2022," *OHCHR*, September 27, 2022.

<sup>31</sup> "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 February- 31 July 2022," *OHCHR*, September 27, 2022.

<sup>32</sup> Agata Wlodkowska, "What Remains Unseen: The Russia-Ukraine War from the Gender Perspective," *Journal of International Affairs (New York)* 75, no. 2 (2023); "Labour supply constraints will dampen Russian growth," *Oxford Analytica*, November 27, 2023; "Russian economy is showing signs of overheating," *Oxford Analytica*, October 26, 2023; "Strains of war are beginning to show in Russia," *Oxford Analytica*, February 5, 2024.

<sup>33</sup> "Ukraine: protection of civilians in armed conflict – April 2024 update," *OHCHR*, May 10, 2024.

<sup>34</sup> "Ukraine: protection of civilians in armed conflict – April 2024 update," *OHCHR*, May 10, 2024.





### 3.3. Targeted violence against civilian populations and infrastructure

Since February 2022, the Russian Armed Forces have been reported to use targeted violence against civilians and civilian infrastructure, shelling of civilian targets, and deliberately targeting residential areas and housing.<sup>35</sup> During the first two years of the conflict, HRMMU recorded that hostilities affected 1,072 educational facilities and 465 medical facilities. Since July 2023, dozens of attacks have damaged or destroyed facilities related to grain production and export in territory controlled by Ukraine, including port facilities, grain silos and vehicles for grain transportation.<sup>36</sup> In the siege of Mariupol alone, 58 medical infrastructure buildings and 11 power stations were destroyed or damaged.<sup>37</sup> Strikes targeting energy infrastructure impose significant hardship on the civilian population due to disruption of electricity and heating. Women are at greater risk of energy poverty than men, particularly women with low incomes and female headed households (who often count on a single income). People with lower incomes, a group where women are overrepresented, more often live in houses with poor insulation.<sup>38</sup> The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine concluded in a report to the UN Human Rights Council that the repeated waves of attacks on energy infrastructure were systematic, widespread, and a part of a policy, thus amounting to a crime against humanity.<sup>39</sup>

By November 30, 2023, OHCHR had documented 142 cases of summary executions (119 men, 18 women, 3 boys and 2 girls) in territory occupied or controlled by Russia.<sup>40</sup> In addition, Russian forces have reportedly hindered humanitarian access, blocking evacuation routes and food deliveries. Extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions, conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and use of illegal weapons, including cluster munitions and white phosphor bombs, have been reported.<sup>41</sup> In Russian-controlled territories, lack of access to communication channels and a shrinking civic space prevents residents from reporting human rights violations.<sup>42</sup> In addition, enforced disappearances and abductions of journalists, activists and politicians have been reported. Between February and July 2022, OHCHR documented 407 cases of enforced disappearances (359 men, 47 women, 1 boy). Among the

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<sup>35</sup> “Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 February- 31 July 2022,” *OHCHR*, September 27, 2022.

<sup>36</sup> “Country Report: Two-Year Update – Protection of civilians: impact of hostilities on civilians since 24 February 2022,” *OHCHR*, February 24, 2024.

<sup>37</sup> “Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine,” *Human Rights Council*, fifty-fifth session, March 5, 2024, para 16, 20.

<sup>38</sup> Joy Clancy et al., “Gender Perspective on access to energy in the EU,” *European Parliament – Directorate-General for Internal Policies, Policy Department Citizens’ Rights and Constitutional Affairs*, December 2017, 7-28.

<sup>39</sup> “Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine,” *Human Rights Council*, fifty-fifth session, March 5, 2024, para 47.

<sup>40</sup> “Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 August – 30 November 2023,” *OHCHR*, December 12, 2023.

<sup>41</sup> “Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 February- 31 July 2022,” *OHCHR*, September 27, 2022; “Women, War and Leadership,” *International Peace Institute*, May 19, 2022.

<sup>42</sup> “Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 February- 31 July 2022,” *OHCHR*, September 27, 2022.



victims, 17 men and 1 woman were subsequently killed.<sup>43</sup> During the period August 2022 – February 2023, 214 cases (185 men, 24 women and 5 boys) of enforced disappearances and arbitrary detention of civilians were documented.<sup>44</sup>

In a 2022 report by Amnesty International, the Ukrainian Armed Forces were accused of committing war crimes, mainly by using civilian buildings, such as schools and hospitals near populated areas, for military purposes. Thereby, the buildings are made targets of attacks, endangering the civilian population.<sup>45</sup> Notably, the report has been criticised by various actors and raised controversy. It is both being cited as an important source of information on war crimes and critiqued for being flawed and enabling Russian propaganda.<sup>46</sup>

### **3.4. Treatment of Prisoners of War and captured persons**

OHCHR has identified patterns of IHL and IHRL violations in relation to the treatment of prisoners of war (POWs) by both Russia and Ukraine amounting to gross violations of IHRL and serious violations of IHL constituting war crimes. For POWs in the power of Russia, such violations included the summary executions of 15 POWs, the use of POWs as human shields, the deaths of two wounded male POWs due to a lack of medical care, and torture or other ill-treatment to extract information, dire conditions of internment (quarters, food, hygiene and medical attention), exposure to public curiosity, pillage of belongings as well as denial of communications with the outside world impacting both POWs and their relatives.<sup>47</sup> The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine concluded in a report to the Human Rights Council in March 2024 that torture is widespread and systematically used by Russian authorities, both in Ukraine and the Russian Federation. For example, Russian authorities have tortured civilians they suspect of cooperating with Ukrainian armed forces, to extract information. Victims are men and women, the majority being men aged 21 to 58 years. Most victims of wilful killings are rape had also been subject to torture.<sup>48</sup> In February 2024, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment released a report following her country visit to Ukraine in September 2023. The report documents findings of several instances of mistreatment and torture of both Ukrainian civilians and POWs, indicating that reports reflect a repetitive, organized and systematic use of torture and other ill-treatment as part of a deliberate policy or official tolerance from superior State authorities. Electric charges being applied to ears and genitals were reported to the Special Rapporteur as a common form of torture. Other forms of torture and inhumane

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> “Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 August 2022 – 31 January 2023,” *OHCHR*, March 24, 2023.

<sup>45</sup> “Ukraine: Ukrainian fighting tactics endanger civilians,” *Amnesty International*, August 2, 2022.

<sup>46</sup> Lillian Posner, “Flawed Amnesty Report Risks Enabling More Russian War Crimes in Ukraine,” *Atlantic Council*, 2022.

<sup>47</sup> “Report on the Treatment of Prisoners of War and Persons Hors de Combat in the Context of the Armed Attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine – 24 February 2022 to 23 February 2023,” *OHCHR*, March 24, 2023.

<sup>48</sup> “Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine,” *Human Rights Council*, fifty-fifth session, March 5, 2024, para 58.



treatment ranging from verbal abuse and beatings to mock executions at gunpoint and simulated drownings were also reported.<sup>49</sup>

The Human Rights Council's Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine from March 2024 confirms the widespread and systematic use of torture by Russian authorities against civilians and POW and highlights the use of sexual violence as torture.<sup>50</sup> The report concluded torture was used during interrogation sessions, where detainees were questioned about the Ukrainian armed forces and their military units. According to detainees, particularly harsh treatment was inflicted on POW from Mariupol city or western Ukraine and those who were not fluent in Russian.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, OHCHR found that female POWs in the hands of the Russian Federation were treated differently to male POWs and subjected to less physical violence.<sup>52</sup>

According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ukrainian law enforcement bodies have been accused of ill-treatment of prisoners of war, arbitrary arrests, and detentions of persons suspected of assisting the Russian Armed Forces. According to the OHCHR, 47 cases of arbitrary arrests and 31 cases of enforced disappearances (28 men, 3 women) attributed to the Ukrainian Armed Forces were reported between February and July 2022. Ukrainian killings of civilian "traitors" may constitute extrajudicial executions. Additionally, 24 verified cases of CRSV were reported in territory controlled by the Government of Ukraine.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, for POWs in the power of Ukraine, violations included summary executions of 25 POWs, various forms of torture or ill-treatment, inadequate conditions of internment, exposure to public curiosity and pillage of belongings. Notably, OHCHR was provided confidential access to POWs interned by Ukraine and was able to conduct interviews in places of internment. No confidential access was provided to POWs in the hands of the Russian Federation.<sup>54</sup> The UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment reported in February 2024 that the Ukrainian authorities had made sincere efforts

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<sup>49</sup> "Visit to Ukraine - Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Alice Jill Edwards," *Human Rights Council*, fifty-fifth session, A/HRC/55/52/Add.1, February 15, 2024, para 36 and 50; "Third Interim Report on reported violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine," *OSCE-ODIHR*, July, 17 2023.

<sup>50</sup> "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine," *Human Rights Council*, fifty-fifth session, March 5, 2024, para 58-67.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, para 65.

<sup>52</sup> "Report on the Treatment of Prisoners of War and Persons Hors de Combat in the Context of the Armed Attack by the Russian Federation against Ukraine – 24 February 2022 to 23 February 2023," *OHCHR*, March 24, 2023.

<sup>53</sup> "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 August 2022 – 31 January 2023," *OHCHR*, March 24, 2023.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*



to treat Russian POW respectfully. However, a few prisoners reported instances of abusive treatment, including verbal and physical abuse.<sup>55</sup>

### 3.5. War crimes and violations of international law

Both Ukraine and Russia are bound by treaty and customary International Humanitarian Law (IHL), including the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions of 1977. Moreover, relevant domestic and international human rights law (IHRL) continues to apply during armed conflict.

According to information provided by the Ukrainian Government to the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, over 103,000 alleged war crimes proceedings had been registered in Ukraine by September 2023.<sup>56</sup>

On 17 March 2023, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Vladimir Putin and Maria Aleseyevna Lvova-Belova (Commissioner for Children's Rights in the Office of the President) for the war crimes of unlawful deportation of population (children) and unlawful transfer of population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation. Data provided by law enforcement agencies in Ukraine indicated that 19,546 children had been deported to the Russian Federation as of March 2024.<sup>57</sup> The UN Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine has however identified that the transfer of Ukrainian children, either within Ukraine or to the Russian Federation, generally affected children who lost parents or temporarily lost contact with them during hostilities; children who were separated following the detention of a parent at a filtration point; and children in institutions.<sup>58</sup> On 27 April 2023, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution suggesting that the practice of forcible transfer of children by Russia may amount to genocide.<sup>59</sup> The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine reported March 2024 to the Human Rights Council that the transfer of a group of children from the Kherson Regional Children's Home to Crimea was not temporary and hence amounted to the war crime of unlawful transfer.<sup>60</sup>

In the beginning of 2024, Ukraine initiated efforts to have a number of alleged criminals, including war criminals, extradited from ten European Union member states. About 700

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<sup>55</sup> "Visit to Ukraine - Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Alice Jill Edwards," *Human Rights Council*, fifty-fifth session, A/HRC/55/52/Add.1, February 15, 2024, para 54 and 68.

<sup>56</sup> "Visit to Ukraine - Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Alice Jill Edwards," *Human Rights Council*, fifty-fifth session, A/HRC/55/52/Add.1, February 15, 2024, para 88.

<sup>57</sup> "Children of War," Platform created by the Ministry of Reintegration and the National Information Bureau for the Office of the President of Ukraine, March 18, 2024.

<sup>58</sup> "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine," *Human Rights Council*, A/HRC/52/62, March 15, 2023.

<sup>59</sup> Resolution 2495 (2023) - Deportations and forcible transfers of Ukrainian children and other civilians to the Russian Federation or to temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories: create conditions for their safe return, stop these crimes and punish the perpetrators, *PACE*, April 27, 2023.

<sup>60</sup> "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine," *Human Rights Council*, fifty-fifth session, March 5, 2024, para 97.



extradition orders have been issued by Ukrainian courts since the war started. Several countries, including Austria, Finland and France, have however refused to send suspects back to Ukraine citing concerns over inhumane prison conditions.<sup>61</sup>

### 3.6. Internally Displaced Persons and refugees

Prior to 2022, Ukraine already had a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) because of the conflict in eastern Ukraine dating back to 2014. Before February 2022, an estimated 1.5 million Ukrainians were internally displaced (60 per cent women, 40 per cent men).<sup>62</sup> Following the full-scale Russian invasion, it was estimated that one third of the Ukrainian population (amounting to around 15 million persons) had been displaced.<sup>63</sup> According to numbers released by the IOM in December 2023, 3,689,000 IDPs and 4,455,000 returnees reside in Ukraine. The reduction in IDP's compared to earlier reports is partly due to IOM having changed their methods in calculating the number.<sup>64</sup> Significantly, IOM estimate that women and girls make up 55 per cent of IDPs and men and boys 45 per cent.<sup>65</sup> However, some men may refrain from reporting as IDP's out of fear of being conscripted.<sup>66</sup> Displaced Ukrainians, where the majority are women, girls and boys, face security threats such as lack of access to safe shelter. Among IDPs, 73 per cent indicate having at least one vulnerable member in their household, such as infants and children, people with disabilities, chronically ill, pregnant or breastfeeding and elderly. When asked about their most pressing needs, IDPs identified financial assistance and solid fuel. The need for solid fuels remained stable among IDPs of both genders, whereas female IDPs were more likely to report the need for financial assistance. Likewise, female IDPs were less likely than male IDPs to identify regular wages as the main source of income.<sup>67</sup>

Additionally, as of February 2024, the UNHCR has recorded 6,479,700 refugees from Ukraine globally.<sup>68</sup> Over 10 million border crossings have been reported since the beginning of the full-scale invasion in 2022, and as many as 4.4 million refugees have since returned to Ukraine. It is clear that the number of refugees who are women, girls and boys is larger than the number of male refugees. An estimation by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is that 90 per cent of Ukrainians fleeing the country are women. This is because most men are required to stay in the country under martial law.

Since the Russian government's decision on "partial mobilisation" on the 21st of September 2022, many international media channels have reported on Russian men awaiting, or fleeing

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<sup>61</sup> Lisa O'Carroll, "Ukraine Presses EU to Allow Extradition of War Criminals," *The Guardian*, March 5, 2024.

<sup>62</sup> "Rapid Gender Analysis of the War in Ukraine," *UN Women and CARE International*, May 4, 2022.

<sup>63</sup> Ilze Brands Kehris, "Human rights concerns related to forced displacement in Ukraine," Statement at Security Council Open Meeting on Ukraine, September 7, 2022.

<sup>64</sup> "Ukraine Internal Displacement Report," *IOM*, December 2023.

<sup>65</sup> "Ukraine Internal Displacement Report," *IOM*, December 2023.

<sup>66</sup> "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 February- 31 July 2022." *OHCHR*. September 27, 2022.

<sup>67</sup> "Ukraine Internal Displacement Report," *IOM*, January 2023.

<sup>68</sup> "Ukraine Refugee Situation," *UNHCR Data*, February 28, 2024.



from, conscription. Reports have indicated long queues at the Russian borders out of fear that, like in Ukraine, they may soon be closed for men.<sup>69</sup> In 2023, an Economist report stated that up to one million Russians had left the country fleeing conscription.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, many male residents of Crimea left the peninsula to avoid conscription into the Russian forces following the occupation.<sup>71</sup> According to surveys conducted by two different, independent pollsters, the public mood in Russia experienced a significant and rapid deterioration following the mobilization in September 2022. Among respondents, 58 per cent opposed a second round of mobilization, with 61 per cent expressing the expectation of “negative emotions” if it were to occur.<sup>72</sup>

European countries are currently considering whether the refusal to serve in the Russian Armed Forces, in the context of ongoing war crime allegations, amounts to political persecution for the purpose of granting asylum/refugee status.<sup>73</sup> In December 2023, the European Court of Human Rights rejected two requests for interim measures, whereby a Russian dissident was to be returned to the Russian Federation from Hungary, despite the risk of being drafted into military service against his will.<sup>74</sup>

### 3.7. Risks of violence against women

The risk of human trafficking for displaced persons, both IDP’s and cross-border refugees, increases. Women, particularly young women and girls, are at a higher risk of being targeted. They also constitute the majority of refugees. The risk of trafficking is imminent both in direct relation to displacement and in a long-term perspective, when personal resources such as social networks and economic resources become more scarce.<sup>75</sup>

Initially, the reporting of domestic violence in Ukraine decreased during the time-period immediately following the full-scale invasion in February 2022. However, it is unlikely that actual incidents decreased. Indeed, there was a surge in reported cases of domestic violence

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<sup>69</sup> “No to war!': Anger over troop conscription rages in Russia,” *Al Jazeera*, September 26, 2022; Jedidajah Otte, “‘We’re scared, we want to run’: the Russian men fleeing conscription,” *The Guardian*, September 27, 2022; “How Russia is conscripting men to fight in Ukraine: Vladimir Putin is taking desperate measures to avoid defeat on the battlefield,” *The Economist*, September 24, 2022.

<sup>70</sup> “Russians have Emigrated in Huge Numbers since the War in Ukraine,” *The Economist*, August 23, 2023.

<sup>71</sup> “Ten Years of Occupation by the Russian Federation: Human Rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine,” *OHCHR*, February 28, 2024.

<sup>72</sup> “Strains of war are beginning to show in Russia.” *Oxford Analytica*. February 5, 2024.

<sup>73</sup> Tom Dannenbaum, “Mobilized to Commit War Crimes? - Russian Deserters as Refugees, part II,” *Just Security*, September 27, 2022.

<sup>74</sup> Eszter Benkö et al., “Imminent risk of irreparable harm: why failure to protect Russians fleeing the Putin regime would be a serious blow to the Court’s reputation,” *Strasbourg Observers*, March 12, 2024.

<sup>75</sup> “Reports of sexual violence in Ukraine rising fast, Security Council hears,” *UN News*, June 6, 2022; Ilze Brands Kehris, “Human rights concerns related to forced displacement in Ukraine,” statement at Security Council Open Meeting on Ukraine, September 7, 2022.





in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions after the start of the conflict in 2014.<sup>76</sup> The decrease in reports during 2022 is believed to be a consequence of a decrease in functioning reporting mechanisms and access to services and shelter due to the war rather than an actual decrease in cases.<sup>77</sup> Actually, both public and private shelters for victims and survivors of domestic violence have been repurposed to house IDPs, consequently having less capacity to aid victims and survivors.<sup>78</sup>

The Ukrainian parliament has taken important steps in adopting necessary national legislation on domestic violence in the last couple of years, including the adoption of the landmark 2018 Law on Prevention and Combating Domestic Violence and ratifying the Istanbul Convention on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July 2022.<sup>79</sup> However, increased stress, trauma and displacement, less streetlights and more small arms in circulation due to the war are all factors which have likely increased the risk of gender-based violence against women in the public and private spheres.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, by 2023 findings emerged indicating a rise in reports of domestic violence across Ukraine; according to police records, calls reporting domestic violence in August 2022 peaked at nearly 50% higher than the same month the year prior.<sup>81</sup> Police data from 2023 confirms that domestic violence keep increasing in Ukraine.<sup>82</sup> Further, those offering support have expressed concerns over attitudes minimising the seriousness of domestic violence in the context of the invasion, as well as a tendency of viewing returning soldiers as heroes and therefore diminishing the likelihood that potential victims are listened to or taken seriously.<sup>83</sup> Yet, the phenomenon of traumatized combatants returning home with PTSD is highlighted in police data as one of the main causes behind increased domestic

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<sup>76</sup> “Russia: Artist detained amid clampdown on anti-war feminists,” *Amnesty International*, April 13, 2022; “Men Return Completely Changed’: Ukraine Conflict Fuelling Surge In Domestic Violence,” *RFE/RL*, April 26, 2015.

<sup>77</sup> Khrystyna Semeryn, “Russian Invasion Overshadows Domestic Violence in Ukraine,” *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, July 11, 2022.

<sup>78</sup> Layli Forodi, “Rising domestic violence is a hidden front in Ukraine’s war,” *Reuters*, August 3, 2023; “The increase of gender-based violence in Ukraine amidst Russia’s full-scale invasion,” *Kvinna till Kvinna*, December 14, 2023.

<sup>79</sup> Hillary Margolis, “In Ukraine, Women Should Be Protected from Violence in War and Peace,” *Human Rights Watch*, June 21, 2022; “Combatting Violence against Women in Ukraine (COVAW),” *Council of Europe*, July 26, 2022.

<sup>80</sup> “Rapid Gender Analysis of the War in Ukraine,” *UN Women and CARE International*, May 4, 2022; Charli Carpenter, “Civilian Men Are Trapped in Ukraine - Human rights and humanitarian NGOs should pay attention to Kyiv’s sex-selective martial law,” *Foreign Policy*, July 15, 2022; Maria Perotta Berlin and Pamela Campa, “Gender Based Violence in Conflict,” *Free Network*, June 2022.

<sup>81</sup> Jesse Williams, “‘This War Made Him a Monster’ Ukrainian Women Fear the Return of Their Partners,” *The Fuller Project*, March 13, 2023.

<sup>82</sup> Jesse Williams, “‘This War Made Him a Monster’ Ukrainian Women Fear the Return of Their Partners,” *The Fuller Project*, March 13, 2023; Layli Forodi, “Rising domestic violence is a hidden front in Ukraine’s war,” *Reuters*, August 3, 2023.

<sup>83</sup> “Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 August 2022 – 31 January 2023,” *OHCHR*, March 24, 2023.





violence.<sup>84</sup> The government of Ukraine appears to have recognized the problem to some extent by launching new initiatives in the absence of traditional support services, including a mobile application ‘panic button’.<sup>85</sup> However, some of the state budget allocated for gender-based violence has been redirected to defence spending.<sup>86</sup>

It is important to recognize that while data regarding the prevalence of domestic violence in Russia is more difficult to obtain, there is a high likelihood that the war effort results in similar, concerning trends as soldiers return from the frontline.

Finally, witnessing domestic violence is a form of abuse in itself. Living in an unsafe environment and exposure to domestic violence leads to a variety of challenges for children, including mental health problems and difficulty in school. Children and youth often suffer from depression, anxiety, or aggressive behaviours, if they see such behaviour at home and perceive it as normal.<sup>87</sup>

### **3.8. Freedom of movement**

All countries have a right to conscript their citizens in wartime. In Ukraine, men between 18 and 60, regardless of whether they have a civilian or military background, are bound by martial law and not permitted to leave the country. Since October 2023, female medical personnel ages 18 to 60 are requested to register for military service. Unlike men, the order does not however prevent women from leaving Ukraine, and registering for military service does not mean women will be mobilized. On the other hand, civilian men who are not yet part of the military forces and not military trained find themselves restricted in their freedom of movement, often estranged from their families. Ukrainian men who have not yet been conscripted and remain unemployed face increased vulnerability as they lack access to both financial resources and social networks. As women and children are prioritised in shelters, men’s access to shelter is limited.

Between February 2022 and 31 August 2023, data of illegal border crossings from Ukraine to neighbouring countries indicates that 19,740 men have fled to avoid being drafted. Some have crossed dangerous rivers, others have walked out under the cover of darkness to leave the country. Additionally, 21,113 men have attempted to flee but were caught by the Ukrainian authorities. There are also reports of men being shamed if they do not want to fight. Moreover, reports claim that in some instances, men are expected to fight without proper training.<sup>88</sup> In

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<sup>84</sup> Jesse Williams, “‘This War Made Him a Monster’ Ukrainian Women Fear the Return of Their Partners,” *The Fuller Project*, March 13, 2023; Layli Forodi, “Rising domestic violence is a hidden front in Ukraine’s war,” *Reuters*, August 3, 2023.

<sup>85</sup> “Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 August 2022 – 31 January 2023,” *OHCHR*, March 24, 2023.

<sup>86</sup> Layli Forodi, “Rising domestic violence is a hidden front in Ukraine’s war,” *Reuters*, August 3, 2023.

<sup>87</sup> “Ukrainian refugees provide a lifeline to people affected by domestic violence,” *UNICEF*, January 5, 2024.

<sup>88</sup> Charli Carpenter, “Civilian Men Are Trapped in Ukraine - Human rights and humanitarian NGOs should pay attention to Kyiv’s sex-selective martial law,” *Foreign Policy*, July 15, 2022; “Women, War



April 2024, the Ukrainian government signed a bill lowering the mobilisation age for combat duty from 27 to 25 years, against the backdrop of personnel shortages and decline in warfighting morale. Despite ongoing discussions whether mobilisation would be extended to include women, the bill made no changes in this regard.<sup>89</sup>

All men in Russia are required to do a year-long military service from the age of 18. In July 2023, the maximum age of conscription was extended from 27 to 30 years.<sup>90</sup> Russian women are by law not allowed to fight in combat, however may serve in the army as volunteer.<sup>91</sup> Women may be conscripted, particularly women working in fields such as cartography and medicine, but men are the primary subjects. Women are allowed to be exempted from mobilisation if they have children under 16 years of age while there are no similar exemptions for men. Further, the status of conscription for transgender people is unknown, as they have previously been deemed “unfit” to serve in the Russian Armed Forces.<sup>92</sup> A new law implemented during the spring of 2023 made it very difficult for men, but also women with specialized skills, to avoid conscription. It bans draftees from leaving the country and puts civil restrictions on those who do not show.<sup>93</sup>

### 3.9. Resistance and resilience in Ukraine

Following the full-scale invasion in February 2022, both women and men have participated in the Ukrainian conflict response and resistance. They serve in the armed forces, organise protests, participate in diplomacy and act as frontline health care workers and humanitarians. In general, men have tended to volunteer more in the security and defence sector, while women volunteer more in assistance to vulnerable populations and humanitarian work.<sup>94</sup> In severely affected areas, women’s grassroots organisations have played an important role in distributing humanitarian aid, hygiene products and emergency birth control.<sup>95</sup> In addition, 80 per cent of health care workers in Ukraine are women.<sup>96</sup>

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and Leadership,” *International Peace Institute*, May 19, 2022; Kristin Skare Ogeret and Bruce Mutsvairo, “Ukraine coverage shows gender roles are changing on the battlefield and in the newsroom,” *The Conversation*, February 22, 2022; Azadeh Moaveni and Chitra Nagarajan, “Another deeply gendered war is being waged in Ukraine,” *International Crisis Group*, March 15, 2022; Nathan Rott and Claire Harbage, “As Ukraine seeks to replenish its depleted army, a divide grows among its civilians,” *NPR*, January 31, 2024; Oana Marocico and Kevin Brown, “Swimming rivers and faking illness to escape Ukraine’s draft,” *BBC News*, November 17, 2023.

<sup>89</sup> Pjotr Sauer, “Ukraine military draft age lowered to boost fighting force,” *The Guardian*, April 3, 2024.

<sup>90</sup> “Putin signs decree on spring military conscription,” *Reuters*, March 31, 2024.

<sup>91</sup> Agata Wlodkowska, “What Remains Unseen: The Russia-Ukraine War from the Gender Perspective,” *Journal of International Affairs (New York)* 75, no. 2 (2023).

<sup>92</sup> “‘The only good thing is that they won’t grab me off the street’ How Russia’s mobilization affects women and transgender people,” *Meduza (Feminist Anti-War Resistance)*, September 24, 2022.

<sup>93</sup> Charles Maynes, “Putin signs a tough new military draft law, banning conscripts from fleeing Russia,” *NPR*, March 14, 2023.

<sup>94</sup> “Rapid Gender Analysis of the War in Ukraine,” *UN Women and CARE International*, May 4, 2022.

<sup>95</sup> Maria Manoilenko, “The Continuing Relevance of the ‘Women, Peace and Security’ Agenda in the Context of Russia’s War on Ukraine,” *Peace Research Institute Frankfurt*, October 10, 2022.

<sup>96</sup> “Women, War and Leadership,” *International Peace Institute*, May 19, 2022.



While the majority of those serving in the Ukrainian Armed Forces are men, women also serve in combat roles. Prior legislation prohibiting women's participation has been revised to enable increased participation in the armed forces, largely following advocacy efforts such as the Invisible Battalion.<sup>97</sup> In 2020, approximately 31 000 women served in the Ukrainian Armed Forces (16 per cent), out of which 12 were Company Commanders and 109 were Commanders of Platoons.<sup>98</sup> Two years into the full-scale conflict, the number of women serving has almost doubled. According to the Defence Ministry of Ukraine, roughly 60,000 women have combat roles which amounts to 20 per cent of the state's total force. However, the lack of women in leadership position is still evident, with only 8.9 per cent of all officers being female.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, Ukrainian sources also report that the Ukrainian Armed Forces have appointed numerous Gender Advisors and Gender Focal Points. Notably, as women are not included in the mandatory national mobilization, the women who have joined the country's defence have done so on a voluntary basis.

### 3.10. Forced conscription by the Russian Federation

In accordance with IHL, an occupying power may not compel persons living in occupied territory to serve in its armed forces. However, authorities of the Russian Federation have conscripted male residents of Crimea, including a large number of protected persons, into the Russian armed forces. As of 31 December 2023, at least 30,000 Crimean men had been conscripted since 2015. Furthermore, the occupied parts of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts were included in the Russian mobilization efforts in the fall of 2023.<sup>100</sup> In addition, international media sources have also reported that Russian mobilisation efforts disproportionately target men from minority groups and in rural areas. In April 2023, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concerns that forced mobilisation and conscription for the armed conflict disproportionately affected specific ethnic groups or indigenous peoples, including Crimean Tatars and migrants, and could amount to racial discrimination by the Russian state.<sup>101</sup> In addition, anti-war protesters are claimed to be arrested and subsequently drafted.<sup>102</sup> Further, reports emerged in early 2024 of Indian and Nepali men travelling to Russia for work, and instead ending up on the frontlines. While numbers remain unclear, it is understood that between dozens and hundreds of men had their passports taken away upon arrival in Russia and had been coerced into signing

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<sup>97</sup> Maria Manoilenko, "The Continuing Relevance of the 'Women, Peace and Security' Agenda in the Context of Russia's War on Ukraine," *Peace Research Institute Frankfurt*, October 10, 2022; Ragnhild Nordaas et al., "Ukrainian women engage in resistance and should be in the peace talks," *Science Norway*, April 29, 2022.

<sup>98</sup> Erik Melander, "Fascism and Masculine Ideals – Thoughts on the Russian War in Ukraine," *PRIO Blog*, March 12, 2022.

<sup>99</sup> Daria Shulzhenko, "'She needs armor.' Female Ukrainian soldiers call for equality," *Kyiv Independent*, October 13, 2013.

<sup>100</sup> "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 August – 30 November 2023," *OHCHR*, December 12, 2023; "Ten Years of Occupation by the Russian Federation: Human Rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine," *OHCHR*, February 28, 2024.

<sup>101</sup> "UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination publishes findings on Argentina, Niger, Philippines, Portugal, Russia and Tajikistan," *OHCHR*, April 23, 2023.

<sup>102</sup> Robin Olin et al, "Putins mobilisering inifrån," *Konflikt, Sveriges Radio*, September 30, 2022.



military contracts. Several have since been either killed in combat or taken as prisoners of war by Ukraine.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, the extent of Russia's mobilization efforts (both formal and informal) was reflected in reports emerging in early 2024 that a number of prisons and penal colonies in Siberia were planned to shut down following a drastic decrease in the numbers of prisoners/internees.<sup>104</sup>

### 3.11. Resistance within Russia

In Russia, feminist organisations play a key role in the country's anti-war movement but face great risks of reprisals and arrest.<sup>105</sup> One of the fastest growing anti-war campaigns is the Feminist Anti-War resistance (FAR). Protesters from the movement have been met with reprisals, detentions, arrests and violence from the security sector.<sup>106</sup> In addition, Russian soldiers' mothers, cooperating with FAR, have played a prominent role in opposing the war, for example by launching a petition against the war on Mothers' day, participating in protests, and posting videos with critique against the war and the government. In international media, the soldiers' mothers are portrayed as playing a central role in the resistance.<sup>107</sup>

As the war drags on, female-led protests continue with increasing strength carrying the message to bring home their men from Ukraine. In efforts to have their husbands and sons returned home, women have appealed to the Defence Ministry, written letters to the President, met with officials, protested publicly and initiated various communication campaigns. The women's protesting movement presents Russian leaders with a dilemma regarding repression. Actively suppressing the wives and mothers of soldiers at the front could have negative repercussions, yet permitting the spread of their demands might cast doubt on the entire war effort. Furthermore, reports suggest Russian authorities have been threatening soldiers whose wives are involved to be sent into front-line assault operations, unless they silence their wives.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Hanna Ellis-Petersen et al., "He had no idea he was being sent to a war zone: the Indian and Nepali men on frontlines in Ukraine," *The Guardian*, March 7, 2024.

<sup>104</sup> Marit Sandberg, "Ryska fångelser stängs – fångar skickade till kriget," *Dagens Nyheter*, March 22, 2024.

<sup>105</sup> "Russia: Artist detained amid clampdown on anti-war feminists," *Amnesty International*, April 13, 2022; Anastasiia Kruope, "Feminist and LGBT Rights Activist on Trial in Russia," *Human Rights Watch*, June 16, 2022; Bianca Ferrari, "Russian Woman Faces 10 Year Sentence after Leaving Anti-War Stickers in Supermarket," *Vice News*, May 18 2022.

<sup>106</sup> "The Feminist Face of Russian Protests - More and more women in Russia are taking to the streets in protests," *Moscow Times*, March 29, 2022; Marina Piskaklova-Parker, "Gender Issues in Russia," *Instituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*, 2022, 10.

<sup>107</sup> Matt Meyer and Mark Hayes, "November 27, 2022, Russia-Ukraine News," *CNN*, November 27, 2022; Jaroslav Lukiv, "Ukraine war: Putin tells Russian soldiers' mothers he shares their pain," *BBC News*, November 26, 2022; Susanne Nyström, "Blir de ryska soldatmödrarna början på Putins fall?" *Dagens Nyheter*, March 21, 2022.

<sup>108</sup> Robyn Dixon and Natalia Abbakumova, "Russia's military wives emerge as wild card to Putin's triumphal mood," *Washington Post*, December 28, 2023; Alexey Strelnikov, "Russia: Are soldiers' protesting wives a threat to Kremlin?" *DW*, February 18, 2024; "Strains of war are beginning to show in Russia." *Oxford Analytica*. February 5, 2024.



### 3.12. Access to health care and humanitarian assistance

Lack of access to health care, including menstrual health needs, lack of access to sexual and reproductive health (such as maternal health and child health) negatively affects displaced women and girls in particular. In addition, refugee women fleeing to Poland struggle to access safe abortions. Groups of men, on the other hand, are disproportionately affected by lack of medication in Ukraine. For example, more men in Ukraine are HIV patients (52 per cent are men) and in need of treatment for drug abuse (80 per cent are men), but access to medical treatment is severely impacted by the war, particularly in Russian-occupied territories.<sup>109</sup> The current lack of access to health care also disproportionately affects LGBTQIA+ persons, for example, trans-persons who are not able to access hormone therapy.<sup>110</sup> When asked about their most pressing needs, female IDPs were more likely to need medicines and health services.<sup>111</sup>

There are reported differences in the access to humanitarian assistance for the population in Ukraine. For example, older women and men tend to find it physically difficult to access humanitarian aid. Roma women, in particular, have reported discrimination when trying to access humanitarian aid, and lack of information regarding when and how aid is distributed.<sup>112</sup>

### 3.13. The situation in Crimea

While the United Nations have documented numerous types of human rights violations during the ten years of occupation of Crimea, a number have distinctive, gendered dimensions.<sup>113</sup> In addition to suppressing expressions of Ukrainian identity and culture and severely restricting religious freedom, the Russian authorities have also banned expressions of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. The annexation of Crimea effectively denied LGBTQ+ individuals in Crimea right to personal autonomy and right to express themselves freely, consistent with their identity. Russian occupying authorities have refused to authorise assemblies for the recognition of the human rights of LGBTQ+ individuals. Virtually all LGBTQ+ initiatives that existed in Crimea before 2014 had disappeared from the peninsula by 2018. The last public gathering conducted by LGBTQ+ activists in Crimea of which HRMMU is aware took place in 2013.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, among reports of repressive tactics, OHCHR has documented 55 cases of torture or ill-treatment allegedly carried out by officers of the FSB in Crimea against individuals in their custody. Occupying authorities in Crimea used torture and ill-treatment against persons charged with extremism, affiliation with groups banned in the Russian Federation, sabotage, or 'anti-Russian' activities. Victims, mainly men, were subjected to mock executions, beatings, electric shocks, and sexual violence, to coerce them to confess their alleged engagement in unlawful activities or to elicit incriminating

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<sup>109</sup> "Rapid Gender Analysis of the War in Ukraine," *UN Women and CARE International*, May 4, 2022.

<sup>110</sup> Dunja Milatovic, "LGBTI people affected by the war in Ukraine need protection," *Council of Europe*, May 17, 2022.

<sup>111</sup> "Ukraine Internal Displacement Report," *IOM*, January 2023.

<sup>112</sup> "Rapid Gender Analysis of the War in Ukraine," *UN Women and CARE International*, May 4, 2022, 21.

<sup>113</sup> "Ten Years of Occupation by the Russian Federation: Human Rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine," *OHCHR*, February 28, 2024.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*



information about others. Further, in contravention of IHL norms and the laws of occupation, the Russian Federation has moved to conscript the male residents of Crimea, contributing to internal displacement (see also section 3.10 above).<sup>115</sup>

## 4. Trends

### 4.1. Conflict-related sexual violence

CRSV refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict.<sup>116</sup>

Before the Russian invasion in February 2022, CRSV was reported to occur in both Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. It was believed to be opportunistic, rather than strategic.<sup>117</sup> Between 2014 and 2024, the OHCHR documented 55 cases of torture or ill-treatment in Crimea against individuals in Russian custody charged with extremism, affiliation with groups banned in Russia, sabotage, or ‘anti-Russian’ activities. Victims, mainly men, were subjected to mock executions, beatings, electrical shocks, and sexual violence, to coerce them to confess their alleged engagement in unlawful activities or to elicit incriminating information about others.<sup>118</sup>

After the invasion in 2022, more and more reports indicate that sexual violence is used systematically in the conflict. Sexual violence is committed in private homes and in public spaces, reportedly common at checkpoints and detention facilities, and used as a form of torture.<sup>119</sup> Information about sexual violence committed by Russian forces is widespread among Ukrainians. Ukrainian media reports that Russian soldiers threaten civilians to “keep their girls at home” to avoid rape.<sup>120</sup> According to a survey conducted in April 2022, 93 per cent of Ukrainians reported they knew of CRSV committed by Russian forces, and 20 per cent reported they personally knew someone who had been subjected to sexual violence committed by Russian troops since February 2022.<sup>121</sup> According to reports by the OHCHR, the Russian Armed forces are the main perpetrators of CRSV. However, there are also cases

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence – Report to the United Nations Secretary General,” *Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict*, S/2023/413, July 6, 2023, 3.

<sup>117</sup> Louise Olsson et al., “Toward an enhanced analysis of human terrain in Sweden- men’s and women’s willingness to defend, mobilization, resilience and safety in the context of National Defence,” *Uppsala University – Department of Peace and Conflict Research*, June 23, 2021.

<sup>118</sup> “Ten Years of Occupation by the Russian Federation: Human Rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine,” *OHCHR*, February 28, 2024.

<sup>119</sup> Anna Myroniuk, “‘Hide the girls’: How Russian soldiers rape and torture Ukrainians,” *Kyiv Independent*, April 20, 2022; “Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 February- 31 July 2022,” *OHCHR*, September 27, 2022.

<sup>120</sup> Anna Myroniuk, “‘Hide the girls’: How Russian soldiers rape and torture Ukrainians,” *Kyiv Independent*, April 20, 2022.

<sup>121</sup> Ragnhild Nordaas et al., “Ukrainian women engage in resistance and should be in the peace talks,” *Science Norway*, April 29, 2022.





where the Ukrainian Armed Forces, law enforcement and territorial defence groups have been perpetrators.

While initial reports indicated women and girls were mainly affected<sup>122</sup> subsequent reports from UNHCR presenting verified cases indicate that the majority of victims of CRSV are men.<sup>123</sup> Before 2022, reports of sexual violence from detention camps concerned both women and men, while women were more often subjected to sexual violence in public spaces, for example at checkpoints.<sup>124</sup> Since the escalation of the conflict, there is no doubt that sexual violence is used by the Russian Armed Forces with the purpose of humiliation and intimidation.<sup>125</sup>

Women and girls tend to be subjected to CRSV in populated areas in Russian controlled territories close to military positions, while men and boys are typically subjected to CRSV as a form of torture during detention.<sup>126</sup> Cases of CRSV as torture have been reported since 2014, and include sexual harassment and humiliation, forced nudity for both women and men, sexual slavery and enforced prostitution for women and castration of men.<sup>127</sup> In 2022, female prisoners of war have reported being forced to undress, squat, and shave their heads. According to the OHCHR, 33 out of 38 civilians (34 men, 4 women) who had been detained by the Russian Armed Forces between February and July 2022 reported being subjected to torture and ill-treatment.<sup>128</sup>

The verification of cases remains difficult, however, between 24 February 2022 and 30 November 2023 the OHCHR documented 169 cases of sexual violence (101 men, 63 women, 4 girls, 1 boy) perpetrated by members of the Russian Armed Forces, law enforcement officials

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<sup>122</sup> Emma Graham-Harrison, “Men and boys among alleged rape victims of Russian soldiers in Ukraine,” *The Guardian*, May 3, 2022.

<sup>123</sup> “Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 August 2022 – 31 January 2023,” *OHCHR*, March 24 p 2, 2023; “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence – Report to the United Nations Secretary General,” *Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict*, S/2023/413, July 6, 2023, p 23.

<sup>124</sup> Louise Olsson et al., “Toward an enhanced analysis of human terrain in Sweden- men’s and women’s willingness to defend, mobilization, resilience and safety in the context of National Defence,” *Uppsala University – Department of Peace and Conflict Research*, June 23, 2021.

<sup>125</sup> Ilze Brands Kehris, “Human rights concerns related to forced displacement in Ukraine,” Statement at Security Council Open Meeting on Ukraine, September 7, 2022; “Sexual Violence ‘Most Hidden Crime’ Being Committed against Ukrainians, Civil Society Representative Tells Security Council,” *UNSC, SC/14926*, June 6, 2022; “In the words of Larysa Denysenko, Ukrainian legal expert: ‘Sexual violence is a tactic of intimidation, torture and humiliation,’” *UN Women*, June 17, 2022; Bethan McKernan, “Rape as a weapon: huge scale of sexual violence inflicted in Ukraine emerges,” *The Guardian*, April 4, 2022.

<sup>126</sup> “Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 February- 31 July 2022,” *OHCHR*, September 27, 2022.

<sup>127</sup> Kateryna Busol, “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Ukraine: An Opportunity for Gender-Sensitive Policymaking? Meaningful change is needed in Ukraine’s response to the conflict-related sexual violence, which affects both women and men,” *Chatham House*, August 18, 2020.

<sup>128</sup> “Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 February- 31 July 2022,” *OHCHR*, September 27, 2022.





or penitentiary staff.<sup>129</sup> Additionally, between 24 February 2022 and 31 July 2023, OHCHR documented 24 cases (18 men, 6 women) in territory controlled by the government of Ukraine, perpetrated by Ukrainian Armed Forces, law enforcement or territorial defence groups predominantly in detention contexts.<sup>130</sup>

An OHCHR report from 2023 specifies that most documented cases occurred in a context of deprivation of liberty or in villages and communities controlled by Russian Armed Forces, and was used as a form of torture or ill-treatment. Such violence included rape, electrocution, burning, tying up and beating of genitals, forced nudity, forcing someone to watch or conduct sexual violence against another person, unjustified cavity or strip searches, homophobic insults, and threats of sexual violence towards victims or their loved ones. Notably, these types of sexual violence were directed mostly against men POWs, but also against detained civilian men.<sup>131</sup> Former male detainees have reported threats of rape, objectionable touching during invasive body searches, and torture on the genitals. A victim recounted perpetrators' attempts to cut his penis, in order to "prevent him from having more children."<sup>132</sup> Among civilians, women and girls are mainly affected by CRSV, including rape and other forms of sexual violence.<sup>133</sup> For example, members of Russian authorities have committed rapes and other sexual violence during house searches.<sup>134</sup> Notably, the UN Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment reported in February 2024 an increased demand for the emergency morning-after pill in territories over which Ukraine regained control.<sup>135</sup>

In 2023, the UN Secretary General's Office on Sexual Violence in Conflict included, for the first time, a section dedicated to Ukraine in its annual report to the Security Council, covering the period of 2022.<sup>136</sup> Relying on UN-data cited above, the report highlights verified cases of sexual violence committed by Russian armed forces or affiliated forces, as well as Ukrainian armed forces or affiliated forces. The report underlines links between the largescale

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<sup>129</sup> "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 August – 30 November 2023," *OHCHR*, December 12, 2023.

<sup>130</sup> "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 August 2022 – 31 January 2023," *OHCHR*, March 24, 2023; "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 February – 31 July 2023," *OHCHR*, October 4, 2023.

<sup>131</sup> "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 August 2022 – 31 January 2023," *OHCHR*, March 24, 2023.

<sup>132</sup> "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine," *United Nations Human Rights Council*, A/HRC/52/62, March 15, 2023, para 67.

<sup>133</sup> "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 August 2022 – 31 January 2023," *OHCHR*, March 24, 2023.

<sup>134</sup> "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine," *United Nations Human Rights Council*, A/HRC/52/62, March 15, 2023, para 85.

<sup>135</sup> "Visit to Ukraine - Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Alice Jill Edwards," *Human Rights Council*, fifty-fifth session, A/HRC/55/52/Add.1, February 15, 2024, para 44.

<sup>136</sup> "Conflict-Related Sexual Violence – Report to the United Nations Secretary General," *Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict*, S/2023/413, July 6, 2023.



displacement in Ukraine and heightened risks of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. It also notes the impact of attacks on Ukrainian healthcare infrastructure and the related constraints on access to emergency contraceptives as well as clinical management of rape. However, the report stops short of blacklisting either side in its notorious annex, which lists parties credibly suspected of committing (or being responsible for) patterns of rape or other forms of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. Likewise, the Secretary General's report released in April 2024, covering the period of 2023, reiterates findings by the UN HRMMU as to continued reports of CRSV. The majority of UN-verified cases were attributed to Russian Armed Forces and law enforcement authorities and affected men in detention settings.<sup>137</sup>

Furthermore, civilians in Russian controlled territories are subjected to so-called "filtration procedures". Reports from 2022 indicate that in addition to detailed interrogations about political affiliations, personal and family background, the filtration procedures involve forced nudity and body searches. There are concerns that filtration procedures also include sexual abuse, particularly of women and girls.<sup>138</sup> Reports from 2022 include coercion, assaults at gunpoint, rape, gang rape and family members being forced to watch their partners, parents or children being subjected to sexual violence.<sup>139</sup>

Victims of CRSV are left with serious physical and mental health challenges, long-lasting trauma, stigmatization and feelings of shame, including towards their own families.<sup>140</sup> Yet, cases of CRSV are in general under-reported.<sup>141</sup> Because of greater stigma, cases of CRSV against men are likely reported to an even lesser extent.<sup>142</sup> In addition, the Ukrainian prosecutor's office reports that the number of prosecuted cases is low because the system requires direct access to witnesses or, alternatively, evidence of the crimes if prosecution is to be possible.<sup>143</sup> The amount of individuals, mainly women but also men, calling hotlines with

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<sup>137</sup> "Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: Report of the Secretary General," *UN Secretary General*, S/2024/292, April 4, 2024.

<sup>138</sup> Ilze Brands Kehris, "Human rights concerns related to forced displacement in Ukraine," Statement at Security Council Open Meeting on Ukraine, September 7, 2022; "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 February- 31 July 2022," *OHCHR*, September 27, 2022.

<sup>139</sup> Bethan McKernan, "Rape as a weapon: huge scale of sexual violence inflicted in Ukraine emerges," *The Guardian*, April 4, 2022; "Reports of sexual violence in Ukraine rising fast, Security Council hears," *UN News*, June 6, 2022; "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 February- 31 July 2022," *OHCHR*, September 27, 2022.

<sup>140</sup> "Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine," *United Nations Human Rights Council*, A/HRC/52/62, March 15, 2023, para 93.

<sup>141</sup> "Reports of sexual violence in Ukraine rising fast, Security Council hears," *UN News*, June 6, 2022; "In the words of Larysa Denysenko, Ukrainian legal expert: 'Sexual violence is a tactic of intimidation, torture and humiliation,'" *UN Women*, June 17, 2022; "Women, War and Leadership," *International Peace Institute*, May 19, 2022; "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 February- 31 July 2022," *OHCHR*, September 27, 2022.

<sup>142</sup> Emma Graham-Harrison, "Men and boys among alleged rape victims of Russian soldiers in Ukraine," *The Guardian*, May 3, 2022.

<sup>143</sup> "The situation with Mariupol is not war crimes, it is genocide, says Iryna Venediktova," *TSN*, March 28, 2022.



allegations of CRSV have increased since February 2022, but the possibilities to receive treatment and assistance are insufficient.<sup>144</sup> The conflict has reduced access to service and reporting mechanisms for victims of CRSV.<sup>145</sup> The updated Ukrainian WPS National Action Plan from December 2022 includes provisions which aim to ensure effective and timely assistance to victims of gender-based violence, CRSV and human trafficking.<sup>146</sup> Ukraine has established eleven “survivor relief centres” offering various services, including psycho-social counselling, that have been set up with the support of the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA) for survivors of sexual violence.<sup>147</sup> Additionally, in April 2024, the office of Olena Zelenska, in cooperation with the Global Survivors Fund, announced that reparation payments for survivors of wartime rape by Russian soldiers would be shortly forthcoming – a unique case of reparations being awarded during an ongoing conflict.<sup>148</sup>

After the invasion in February 2022, statements on CRSV being used as a weapon of war have been made in the European Parliament, with the FEMM committee chair Robert Biedroń stating that “Mass rapes, sexual and gender-based violence, torture and genocide are being used as a weapon of war.”<sup>149</sup> Likewise, Sima Bahous, Executive Director of UN Women, referred to allegations of sexual violence committed by the Russian Armed Forces after February 2022 in her address to the UN Security Council, stating that it raises “all the red flags.”<sup>150</sup> An investigative article in the New York Times states that there are similar patterns of CRSV in Russian-occupied territories and that there are indications of commanders either ordering or condoning sexual violence.<sup>151</sup> While analyses differ, this indicates that the international community is increasingly considering the occurrence of CRSV in Ukraine to be systematic.<sup>152</sup>

In May 2022, a Framework for Cooperation was signed between the government of Ukraine and UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in

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<sup>144</sup> “Women, War and Leadership,” *International Peace Institute*, May 19, 2022.

<sup>145</sup> “Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 February- 31 July 2022,” *OHCHR*, September 27, 2022.

<sup>146</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, *On the Approval of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security for the period until 2025*, No 1150-2022-p, Kyiv: December 16, 2022, note 2 *supra*, Strategic Goal 4.

<sup>147</sup> Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Alece Jill Edwards, “Visit to Ukraine”, A/HRC/55/52/Add.1 (15 February 2024), para 96.

<sup>148</sup> Weronika Strzyzowska, “Reparations to be paid to survivors of wartime sexual violence in Ukraine,” *The Guardian*, April 26, 2024.

<sup>149</sup> “War in Ukraine: protecting women refugees from violence and sexual exploitation,” *EU Parliament Press*, May 5, 2022.

<sup>150</sup> “Mounting Reports of Crimes against Women, Children in Ukraine Raising ‘Red Flags’ over Potential Protection Crisis, Executive Director Tells Security Council,” *UNSC, SC/14857*, April 11, 2022.

<sup>151</sup> Charlotta Gall, “‘Fear Still Remains’: Ukraine Finds Sexual Crimes Where Russian Troops Ruled,” *The New York Times*, January 5, 2023.

<sup>152</sup> Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, *Framework of Cooperation between the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations on the Prevention and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*, Kyiv: May 3, 2022.



Conflict, with a view to support national prevention, protection and response programmes, as well as to strengthen rule of law and accountability for sexual violence crimes.

## 4.2. Strategic Communication

### 4.2.1. Russian Strategic Communication

Since the start of the conflict in eastern Ukraine in 2014, disinformation and misinformation have been prevalent in news, media and social media, particularly in eastern and southern Ukraine, which can be reached by Russian media.<sup>153</sup> Olsson et al. state that: “Such disinformation campaigns have played on men’s responsibilities for their families and on women’s roles in society as well as targeting the norm of gender equality.”<sup>154</sup>

Further, Olsson et al. conclude that threats targeting male fighters and their families, and smear campaigns against female politicians, are common. This includes sending messages to male soldiers targeting their families and orchestrating smear campaigns online that target individual female politicians. Targeting women and LGBTQ activists in particular, and the gender concept in general, is believed to be a strategy employing gender perspective while undermining democratic movements. In general, Russian disinformation in eastern Ukraine tends to portray women as either vulnerable victims in need of protection or aggressors going against traditional gender norms.<sup>155</sup>

Regularly, the regime pushes the portrayal of mothers who support the war and their sons and husbands at the front. For example, in November 2022, Kremlin televised a meeting between President Putin and mothers whose sons had fought and died in Ukraine.<sup>156</sup> Furthermore, in his speech on International Women’s Day 2024, Putin expressed motherhood as a woman’s greatest gift: “Dear, women, you certainly have the power to improve this world with your beauty, wisdom and generosity, but above all, thanks to the greatest gift that nature has endowed you with – the bearing of children.” Additionally, Putin emphasized that “[f]amily remains the most important thing for any women.”<sup>157</sup>

The trend of referring to “gender ideology” as a threat to the traditional family structure, connecting it with hate campaigns against the LGBTQ community and labelling it as “anti-

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<sup>153</sup> In the context of this analysis, disinformation is “knowingly manipulated information with a political agenda.” In accordance with the Oxford English Dictionary, disinformation is spread with the purpose to mislead, in contrast to misinformation, which is false information without malicious intent.

<sup>154</sup> Louise Olsson, “Toward an enhanced analysis of human terrain in Sweden- men’s and women’s willingness to defend, mobilization, resilience and safety in the context of National Defence,” *Uppsala University – Department of Peace and Conflict Research*, June 23, 2021, 61.

<sup>155</sup> Louise Olsson, “Toward an enhanced analysis of human terrain in Sweden- men’s and women’s willingness to defend, mobilization, resilience and safety in the context of National Defence,” *Uppsala University – Department of Peace and Conflict Research*, June 23, 2021.

<sup>156</sup> Agata Wlodkowska, “What Remains Unseen: The Russia-Ukraine War from the Gender Perspective,” *Journal of International Affairs (New York)* 75, no. 2 (2023); Jaroslav Lukiv, “Ukraine war: Putin tells Russian soldiers’ mothers he shares their pain,” *BBC News*, November 26, 2022.

<sup>157</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Video address on International Women’s Day,” *President of Russia*, March 8, 2024.



life”, is prevalent in the Russian propaganda.<sup>158</sup> The focus on traditional gender norms is often connected to campaigns against immigrants and exacerbated by white extremist and far-right groups.<sup>159</sup> “Gender ideology”, a term that increasingly appears in Russian media, academia and political spheres since 2010, is quickly spreading as a backlash to gender equality across Europe. “Gender ideology” is portrayed as “a covert political strategy, a sort of conspiracy aimed at seizing power and imposing deviant and minority values to average people.”<sup>160</sup>

Furthermore, Europe is sometimes referred to as “Gayropa” and democracy portrayed as “Homocracy”, building on homophobia to emphasize the threat of “gender ideology” and equate European values with moral decay and cultural imperialism.<sup>161</sup> In his speech following the annexation of occupied territories in Ukraine in September 2022, President Putin referred to western gender values as “dictatorship of the western elites” and “outright Satanism”:

[...] do we want to have, here, in our country, in Russia, parent number one, number two, number three instead of mom and dad – have they gone made out there? Do we really want perversions that lead to degradation and extinction to be imposed on children in our schools from the primary grades? To be drummed into them that there are various supposed genders besides women and men, and to be offered a sex change operation? Do we want all this for our country and our children? For us, all this is unacceptable, we have a different future, our own future. I repeat, the dictatorship of the Western elites is directed against all societies, including the peoples of the Western countries themselves. This is a challenge for everyone.<sup>162</sup>

This sentiment was repeated during the President’s speech on the occasion of the 2023 Victory Parade in May, when the West was accused of “Russophobia, aggressive nationalism, [destroying] family and traditional values which make us human.”<sup>163</sup> Framing gender equality as a threat to culture and traditional values is utilised by Russia project not only NATO and the

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<sup>158</sup> Kevin Moss, “Russia as the Saviour of Europe’s civilization: Gender and the Geopolitics of Traditional Values,” in *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, ed. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017).

<sup>159</sup> Louise Olsson, “Toward an enhanced analysis of human terrain in Sweden- men’s and women’s willingness to defend, mobilization, resilience and safety in the context of National Defence,” *Uppsala University – Department of Peace and Conflict Research*, June 23, 2021; Kevin Moss, “Russia as the Saviour of Europe’s civilization: Gender and the Geopolitics of Traditional Values,” in *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, ed. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017); Cori Fleaser, “Beyond munitions: A gender analysis for Ukrainian security assistance,” *The Atlantic Council*, August 15, 2022.

<sup>160</sup> Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, “‘Gender Ideology’ in movement: Introduction,” in *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, ed. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 6.

<sup>161</sup> Leandra Bias, “The (Im)Possibility of Feminist Critique in Authoritarianism: Revisiting Western Knowledge Transfer in Russia and Serbia,” PhD Thesis, *University of Oxford*, 2020, 42-43.

<sup>162</sup> Anna-Lena Laurén, “Putins svavelosande anklagelser är en spegelbild av sig själv,” *Dagens Nyheter*, September 30, 2022.

<sup>163</sup> Vladimir Putin, “Victory Parade on Red Square,” Official transcript, *President of Russia*, May 9, 2023.





EU as political and military threats, but a democratic world order in itself as a threat to Russian interests.<sup>164</sup>

Men, women, boys and girls are all targeted by Russian disinformation. However, women and minority groups tend to be used as content in targeting misinformation, while the targeting is directed towards people who are already questioning these groups - mainly men. The purpose is to polarise societies.<sup>165</sup> For example, Russian disinformation campaigns send out the message that entry into NATO will entail the loss of traditional values and forced acceptance of “western gender norms” and the “decay of western civilization.”<sup>166</sup>

Furthermore, Russian disinformation campaigns and promotion of “true” European values is seen as a strategy used to de-stabilise the EU, where Europe is portrayed as a continent “in chaos and decline”, and “gender ideology” increasingly appears in connection with Europe and is allowed to symbolise “a stand-in for Western geopolitical strategy.”<sup>167</sup> Russian traditional values are presented as an alternative to the decaying morals of the west.<sup>168</sup> In contrast to NATO and the EU, Russia is portrayed as “a bulwark against wokeism and political correctness.”<sup>169</sup> Unlike in most states experiencing a state-influenced wave of resistance to gender equality, the universities in Russia are not resisting the Russian state narrative of “gender ideology”, but rather supporting and promoting it.<sup>170</sup>

As stated by Fleaser in an issue brief for the Atlantic Council: “The Kremlin has intentionally targeted and exploited societal gender fault lines through hybrid warfare as a reliable tactic for destabilizing cohesion and unity among populations throughout Europe.”<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Cori Fleaser, “Beyond munitions: A gender analysis for Ukrainian security assistance,” *The Atlantic Council*, August 15, 2022.

<sup>165</sup> Gunhild Hoogensen Gjør, “Hybrid Threats and the Integration of Gender Perspective,” panel discussion during the Open Conference at the 46<sup>th</sup> NCGP Annual Conference in Brussels, October 3, 2022.

<sup>166</sup> Azadeh Moaveni and Chitra Nagarajan, “Another deeply gendered war is being waged in Ukraine,” *International Crisis Group*, March 15, 2022; “Russia’s Top Five Persistent Disinformation Narratives,” *US Department of State*, January 20, 2022; Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, “‘Gender Ideology’ in movement: Introduction,” in *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, ed. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017).

<sup>167</sup> Kevin Moss, “Russia as the Saviour of Europe’s civilization: Gender and the Geopolitics of Traditional Values,” in *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, ed. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 203.

<sup>168</sup> Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, “‘Gender Ideology’ in movement: Introduction,” in *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, ed. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 8.

<sup>169</sup> Emil Edenborg, “Putin’s Anti-Gay War on Ukraine- A pervasive ideology of ‘traditional values’ has taken hold in Russia, portraying LGBT rights as existential threats to the nation,” *Boston Review*, March 14, 2022.

<sup>170</sup> Kevin Moss, “Russia as the Saviour of Europe’s civilization: Gender and the Geopolitics of Traditional Values,” in *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, ed. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017).

<sup>171</sup> Cori Fleaser, “Beyond munitions: A gender analysis for Ukrainian security assistance,” *The Atlantic Council*, August 15, 2022.



Anti-gender rhetoric has increased throughout the 2010's, but is strategically used to gain advantages and cause tensions in connection with the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The defence of Russian "values" and "traditions" has been a recurring rhetoric to justify the invasions in both 2014 and 2022.<sup>172</sup> It is estimated that the Kremlin budget allocated to disinformation campaigns in 2021 was 1,5 billion USD.<sup>173</sup>

Obradovic and Neathery-Castro explore other examples on the place of gender in Russian communication, and highlight "(...) that gender has become a tool to maintain the legitimacy of President Putin's power and to shape Russian national identity and its perceptions of allies and foes. This 'Putin-based national rebuilding scheme' [Johnson, 2014, 584] has resulted in actions and policies against feminism and anti-gender equality both at home and abroad". There are gendered aspects to the creation of Russian national identity as well as in Russian strategic communication aimed at sowing division amongst the West. This is in turn underpinned by the understanding that division is a weakness and unity is a strength.<sup>174</sup>

#### 4.2.2. Ukrainian Strategic Communication

In an article in *Foreign Affairs*, International Crisis Group's Olga Oliker states that "If there is a feminist way to wage war, Ukraine wants everyone to know that this is how it is fighting its battle against Russia."<sup>175</sup> The Ukrainian side has, like the Russian Federation, emphasized gender in external communication, but in the opposite sense. Arguably, Ukraine has utilized gender strategically by placing focus on allegations of CRSV, emphasized bombings of maternity wards, portrayed mothers as victims in the media narratives, and, at the start of the full-scale invasion, inflated the number of women fighting on their side.<sup>176</sup> Oliker further states that "Prominent Ukrainian feminists have travelled to Washington, D.C., to lobby for weapons", indicating that emphasizing women's participation seems to be a strategy to gain support from western actors.<sup>177</sup>

Narratives of CRSV committed by Russian soldiers have been prevalent among Ukrainian politicians and activists to attract attention from international media and other nations, especially during the initial months of the full-scale invasion. In May 2022, this sparked scandal when the Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada) commissioner for human rights was

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid; Lana Obradovic & Jody Neathery-Castro "Integrating Gender Perspective in Cognitive Warfare", 2023, p 17.

<sup>173</sup> Annie Geisow, "Hybrid Threats and the Integration of Gender Perspectives," panel discussion during the Open Conference at the 46<sup>th</sup> NCGP Annual Conference in Brussels, October 3, 2022.

<sup>174</sup> Mr Benjamin Patterson, panel discussion "Strategic Communications: The Gender Dimensions of the Fight for Influence and Advantage in the Information Environment" during the 2024 Annual Conference of the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives, 7 May 2024.

<sup>175</sup> Olga Oliker, "Fighting While Female, How Gender Dynamics Are Shaping the War in Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, November 21, 2022.

<sup>176</sup> Olga Oliker, "Fighting While Female, How Gender Dynamics Are Shaping the War in Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, November 21, 2022; Eric Deggans and Olga Oliker, "Writer says gender dynamics are shaping the war in Ukraine," *All Things Considered*, *NPR*, November 26, 2022, 5:16 PM ET.

<sup>177</sup> Olga Oliker, "Fighting While Female, How Gender Dynamics Are Shaping the War in Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, November 21, 2022.





fired after a no-confidence motion. She was accused of publishing detailed reports of CRSV on social media to gain support from the outside world. Accusations mainly referred to the parliamentarian's use of excessively detailed accounts of rape of children to stir up emotions, which was considered unethical. She was further accused of using examples of cases that had not been verified.<sup>178</sup> President Zelenskyj's administration called the parliamentarian's actions "an attempt to switch attention from real achievements and problems to some kind of conspiracy theories."<sup>179</sup> Notably, narratives of CRSV communicated externally have generally focused on female victims and survivors, while UN reports repetitively indicate that men constitute a majority of those who have been subjected to violations. This could be indicative of prevailing stigma and perceptions as to who can be a victim of CRSV, and which victim will attract more sympathy.

Moreover, the Ukrainian side has used gender relations strategically to gain direct military advantages by tasking women to reach out to Russian men on online dating apps. The strategic use of online dating apps from the Ukrainian side, not only to locate Russian troops and gather intelligence, but also to spread counter-narratives about the invasion, is one example of this strategy.<sup>180</sup> Using the role of mothers, Ukrainians have resorted to making phone calls to mothers of Russian soldiers, asking them to come to Ukraine and pick up their sons. Another example is a popular Ukrainian YouTube channel which broadcasts calls between Russian soldiers and their mothers.<sup>181</sup> The videos mainly feature soldiers who claim they were tricked into going to war. In addition, the Ministry of Interior of Ukraine has established a hotline where Russian families can call to try to locate lost soldiers. There is also a Ukrainian Telegram channel, "Find your Missing", dedicated to the same purpose.<sup>182</sup> The channels mainly target mothers and relations between mothers and sons.

#### **4.3. Gendered mobilisation narratives and participation of women in defence forces**

In Ukrainian mobilisation efforts following the outbreak of conflict in 2014, women were rejected when applying for participation in the armed resistance based on assumptions about their gender. This resulted in the creation of separate "Women Squads" and women's participation through other means, such as conflict mediation and civil society. The Ukrainian Armed Forces' mobilisation only targeted men, and before 2016 women were banned from combat roles. Discrimination against women in the Ukrainian Armed Forces has been

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<sup>178</sup> Adam Staten, "Ukraine Official Fired Over Handling of Russian Sexual Assault Claims," *Newsweek*, May 31, 2022; Matthew Roscoe, "UPDATE: Sacked Ukraine official "exaggerated" reports of sexual crimes by Russian soldiers," *EuroWeekly News*, June 10, 2022.

<sup>179</sup> "Rada dismisses human rights commissioner, but why?" *New Voice of Ukraine*, May 31, 2022.

<sup>180</sup> Perieira, Joana (Dr), "Hybrid Threats and the Integration of Gender Perspective," panel discussion during the Open Conference at the 46<sup>th</sup> NCGP Annual Conference in Brussels, October 3, 2022.

<sup>181</sup> Volodin Zolkyr, *YouTube*, accessed November 29, 2022.

<sup>182</sup> Martin Aagård, "Vi ringer deras mammor: Telefonsamtalen till ryska soldatmödrar har blivit ett fenomen i Ukraina," *Aftonbladet*, May 5, 2022; Sebastian Shukla et al., "'He said he was going towards Kyiv.' Russian families turn to Ukrainian hotline in desperate search for lost soldiers," *CNN*, March 7, 2022.



prevalent.<sup>183</sup> Since 2016, when women were allowed to join the army, the number has steadily grown. In 2020, approximately 31 000 women served in the Ukrainian Armed Forces (16 per cent), out of which 12 were Company Commanders and 109 were Commanders of Platoons.<sup>184</sup> In 2024, the number of women serving has almost doubled. According to the Defence Ministry of Ukraine, roughly 60,000 women have combat roles which amounts to 20 per cent of the state's total force. However, the lack of women in leadership position is still evident, with only 8.9 per cent of all officers being female.<sup>185</sup> Still, women have had to fight for equal rights within the organisation.<sup>186</sup> This background is connected to the current Ukrainian narrative regarding mobilisation and defence.

Since the invasion in 2022, the Ukrainian narrative of masculine protectors and brave Ukrainian female warriors is used to mobilise support and repel the enemy. Protecting the family and community is associated with being “a good man”, and men who do not want to fight are often mocked and shamed for it.<sup>187</sup> In contrast to the context before 2022, women are now encouraged to take part in the armed response, and media coverage of women making Molotov cocktails, confronting Russian soldiers, and bearing arms are spread in Ukrainian and international media and by Ukrainians in social media channels.<sup>188</sup> Simultaneously, messaging to the outside world has contained pictures of women and children as victims, playing on stereotypes where “women do the caring and men do the protecting”. In cases where women are also portrayed as fighters, it connects to stereotypes of “the vengeful mother protecting the nation.”<sup>189</sup>

In the months following the full-scale invasion, tens of thousands of Ukrainians volunteered to join the armed forces. However, after two years of fighting, more men are avoiding military service. A decline in recruits have prompted military recruiters to shift to more aggressive

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<sup>183</sup> Louise Olsson et al., “Toward an enhanced analysis of human terrain in Sweden- men’s and women’s willingness to defend, mobilization, resilience and safety in the context of National Defence,” *Uppsala University – Department of Peace and Conflict Research*, June 23, 2021.

<sup>184</sup> Erik Melander, “Fascism and Masculine Ideals – Thoughts on the Russian War in Ukraine,” *PRIO Blog*, March 12, 2022.

<sup>185</sup> Daria Shulzhenko, “‘She needs armor.’ Female Ukrainian soldiers call for equality,” *Kyiv Independent*, October 13, 2013.

<sup>186</sup> Philip Verwimp, “Forced displacement, gender identity norms, and marital stability in the wake of the war in Ukraine,” *VOXEU*, July 5, 2022; “Our Story,” *Invisible Battalion*, accessed October 12, 2022.

<sup>187</sup> Kristin Skare Ogeret and Bruce Mutsvairo, “Ukraine coverage shows gender roles are changing on the battlefield and in the newsroom,” *The Conversation*, February 22, 2022; Azadeh Moaveni and Chitra Nagarajan, “Another deeply gendered war is being waged in Ukraine,” *International Crisis Group*, March 15, 2022.

<sup>188</sup> “Ukraine: Woman confronts armed Russian Soldier,” *BBC*, February 25, 2022; John Hughes et al., “Ukraine conflict: The women making Molotov cocktails to defend their city,” *BBC*, February 26, 2022; Kristin Skare Ogeret and Bruce Mutsvairo, “Ukraine coverage shows gender roles are changing on the battlefield and in the newsroom,” *The Conversation*, February 22, 2022; Azadeh Moaveni and Chitra Nagarajan, “Another deeply gendered war is being waged in Ukraine,” *International Crisis Group*, March 15, 2022; Jessie Tu, “‘Surreal’: How women of Ukraine are taking on the invading forces,” *Women’s Agenda*, February 28, 2022.

<sup>189</sup> Andrea Ellner, “Gender stereotypes in the media: Are Ukrainian women really only helpless victims?” *Kings College London*, March 17, 2022.



tactics, forcing men into conscription offices, detaining them, sometimes illegally, and forcing them to enlist.<sup>190</sup>

The Russian mobilisation narrative uses a patriotic and nationalistic rhetoric, appealing to far-right groups and shifting public focus to military activities and pride, while at the same time referring to Russian history of confronting Nazism and fascism. There is a clear connection to a masculine ideal, connecting to war heroes of the past. A video circulating on Telegram ridicules Russian men who flee conscription. The video shows two women who state that “the boys have left but the men have stayed.”<sup>191</sup> OHCHR has documented pressure on men in occupied territory to enlist in the Russian armed forces. In cases when men did not wish to sign contracts, their masculinity was questioned and they were threatened to be assigned to frontline assault units.<sup>192</sup>

Also, President Putin is portrayed as an undisputed leader, playing on traditional masculine norms.<sup>193</sup> The same trends as in external disinformation campaigns can be seen internally, where civil society, activists and international actors are portrayed as threats to Russian traditions and culture, with reference to the need to defend Russia against non-traditional values (such as gender equality norms).<sup>194</sup> There is also a growing emphasis on patriotic education in schools, which are simultaneously forbidden to educate on LGBTQ rights (in this context, notably Federal Law No. 135-FZ of June 29, 2013, which bans the distribution of information about LGBT people’s lives to minors).<sup>195</sup>

Furthermore, to counter the resistance of Russian soldiers’ mothers (section 3.11 above), the Russian government has also started using a narrative that puts mothers at the centre. Leading up to the Russian Mothers’ Day in 2022, President Putin called a meeting with selected soldiers’ mothers at the Kremlin and addressed their loss directly, stating that their pain is shared by the Russian government. The meeting was televised.<sup>196</sup> In international

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<sup>190</sup> Méheut Constant and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, “After Two Years of Bloody Fighting, Ukraine Wrestles With Conscription,” *New York Times*, January 28, 2024.

<sup>191</sup> Isabel Van Brugen, “Russian Men Who Fled Mobilization Mocked in Ad: ‘The Boys Have Left,’” *Newsweek*, December 9, 2022.

<sup>192</sup> “Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine: 1 August – 30 November 2023,” *OHCHR*, December 12, 2023.

<sup>193</sup> Erik Melander, “Fascism and Masculine Ideals – Thoughts on the Russian War in Ukraine,” *PRIO Blog*, March 12, 2022.

<sup>194</sup> “Patriotic Mobilisation in Russia,” *International Crisis Group*, July 4, 2018.

<sup>195</sup> “No Support – Russia’s ‘Gay Propaganda’ Law Imperils LGBT Youth,” *Human Rights Watch*, December 11, 2018; “Patriotic Mobilisation in Russia,” *International Crisis Group*, July 4, 2018;

<sup>196</sup> “Putin Meets with Carefully Selected Group of Soldiers’ Mothers,” *Moscow Times*, November 25, 2022; Ivan Nechepurenko, “Putin holds a highly choreographed meeting with mothers of Russian servicemen,” *New York Times*, November 25, 2022.



media, the meeting is referred to as a clear example of staged propaganda, and that the claimed mothers were actually government officials.<sup>197</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

The analysis presented above and the sources it is based on demonstrate that there are gender-specific consequences and implications of the war in Ukraine. Three main observations can be made.

**Women, men, girls and boys affect and are affected differently by the armed conflict.** This is connected to the gendered political, legal and economic context prior to, and during, an armed conflict. Existing gendered dimensions and dynamics in a society affect how women, men, girls and boys affect and are affected during the conflict. In Russia, men are disproportionately impacted by the direct consequences of the war due to the gendered nature of conscription and national mobilization. Reverberating effects of the conflict, including those related to sanctions and economic consequences, may negatively impact less privileged groups in Russian society, including women. While some men have fled the country to avoid conscription, women – including mothers – are more visible in domestic resistance movements.

**The conflict has affected gender roles and relations in Ukraine,** for example in relation to how women assume new roles to secure the livelihood of their families, and with regard to the increased number of women volunteering to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Further, **the conflict has exacerbated existing inequalities,** for example economically in relation to how those who are the most marginalized, in which women are particularly negatively affected. The analysis particularly observes that there are gendered aspects to the armed conflict in relation to civilian casualties, targeted violence against the civilian population, treatment of prisoners of war and captured persons, war crimes and other violations of international law, internally displaced persons and refugees, risks of violence against women, freedom of movement, resistance and resilience, forced conscription, access to health care and humanitarian assistance, and the situation in Crimea.

Additionally, the analysis concludes that both parties to the conflict use gender perspective to their advantage. In this regard, three trends have been identified.

Both **parties to the conflict utilise concepts of gender intentionally in their strategic communication.** Russian disinformation campaigns use gender norms and dynamics to undermine democratic movements and create tensions domestically and in occupied territories, but also to achieve communication objectives outside Ukraine and Russia. By

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<sup>197</sup> Andrew Roth and Pjotr Sauer, “Putin talks to mothers of soldiers fighting in Ukraine in a staged meeting,” *The Guardian*, November 25, 2022; Benoit Vitkine, “Putin’s handpicked meeting with the mothers of Russian soldiers,” *Le Monde*, November 26, 2022; Ivan Nechepurenko, “Putin holds a highly choreographed meeting with mothers of Russian servicemen,” *New York Times*, November 25, 2022; “Everything Show? Putin’s fake soldier mothers exposed,” *Switzerland Times*, November 26, 2022.



framing “gender ideology” as a threat to traditional, Russian values and ways of living, the Russian Federation demonstrates how a gender perspective can be utilized for political objectives.

**CRSV and threats of CRSV** are used in the war in Ukraine, where men, women boys and girls are all targeted, albeit under different circumstances. From being used opportunistically at checkpoints and in detention centres in the early years of occupation in eastern Ukraine, it seems that the invasion in February 2022 has resulted in an increased occurrence of sexual violence committed by both parties to the conflict, but predominantly by Russian troops in occupied territories. While the extent of the issue is likely underreported, the different contexts and situations in which men and women are targeted indicate that gender perspective is needed to holistically understand the occurrence and implications of CRSV. Further, the way in which CRSV has been reported externally and in media, with a focus on female victims while the majority of victims appear to be male, also indicates prevailing attitudes and stigma related to existing gender dynamics. The ongoing conflict poses challenges to accurately report on the occurrence of CRSV, including in regard to the full scale and extent of violations, and continuously monitoring the situation remains necessary.

**There are gender perspectives to the mobilisation narratives in both Russia and Ukraine.** Ukraine uses both traditional and progressive gender roles as motivators for mobilisation, for example in pushing the narrative of masculine protectors and brave Ukrainian female warriors in order to mobilise support and repel the enemy. They also emphasize women’s participation in the conflict response, as well as the commission of CRSV by the opposing side in their external communication. In Russia, conversely, the narrative largely appeals to conservative values and role models past war heroes, required to protect the motherland and core family.

Overall, two years into the conflict, observations regarding the gendered dynamics and gendered consequences remain largely true. New and additional data support the observations made earlier in this document by the NCGM. Additionally, there are indications of new “trends” related to the prolonged nature of the conflict, including the increased participation of women in the armed defence of Ukraine, the rise in domestic violence related to men returning from the frontlines, as well as aspects related to the pursuit of justice efforts.

In conclusion, **the war in Ukraine demonstrates that there are gendered aspects to conflict, which are the result of intentional strategies or due to pre-existing norms and roles related to gender.** It offers an example of how gender dynamics play out, as well as how gender perspective can be used strategically, in a current conflict, on European territory.

This thematic analysis provides a non-exhaustive overview of the behaviours of the parties to the conflict in Ukraine, as of June 2024, for the purposes of a gender analysis. It is, however, important to continuously evaluate and update all gender analyses throughout all phases of the conflict. A gender analysis should remain an integral part of the conflict response as well as in a future peace process. Further, given the clearly gendered impacts, it would be advisable to continue monitoring, as well as considering, the long-term implications for



Ukrainian society. Finally, hostile strategic communication framing “gender ideology” as a threat and appealing to far-right groups, mainly in Europe, is arguably an issue of increasing relevance to European security.





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