



U4 REPORT 2023:1

Sabrina White  
Sara Bandali  
Monica Kirya

# Feminist policy in Ukraine's recovery and post-conflict reconstruction: A gender perspective in anti-corruption efforts

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Corruption erodes sustainable and inclusive development. It is both a political and technical challenge. The U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre (U4) works to understand and counter corruption worldwide.

U4 is part of the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), an independent development research institute in Norway.

[www.u4.no](http://www.u4.no)

[u4@cmi.no](mailto:u4@cmi.no)

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## Collaborators

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**Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, several corruption challenges that have implications for gender equality have intensified. Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction efforts will be undermined unless they are addressed. The Women, Peace, and Security Agenda provides an opportunity to integrate gender perspectives into anti-corruption strategies and ensure that women's and underrepresented groups' have a role in decision-making and negotiations.**

## **Main points**

- The conflict in Ukraine has the potential to reverse the country's progress in addressing corruption and promoting gender equality. Therefore, recovery and reconstruction efforts must include a gender perspective to mitigate the conflict's disproportionate impact on women, girls, and underrepresented groups.
- Ukraine's National Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2021–2025 does not include a gender perspective, nor does its National Action Plan 2020–2025 (NAP) refer specifically to anti-corruption efforts. Concerted efforts are needed to address the intersection of gender equality and corruption risks.
- Paying attention to gender and integrating feminist policy considerations, based on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda, into anti-corruption strategies will advance relevant groups' participation in post-conflict processes and advance integrity, accountability, and transparency.
- The exclusion of women and underrepresented groups in decision-making and the distribution and use of reconstruction aid may result in imbalances of power and destabilise the reconstruction effort. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure their fair and active involvement in reconstruction by adopting gender-responsive activities and safeguards, which will then advance gender equality.
- Stakeholders can facilitate their shared objectives through the combination of the efforts of the NAP on WPS and the National Anti-Corruption Strategy. This would inform post-conflict reconstruction planning and implementation in terms of the distribution of reconstruction resources; prevention of sexual forms of corruption; protection from corruption; and disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration processes.
- Successful strategies for international donors should include aligning their funding with the NAP on WPS and the broader WPS Agenda, and distributing funds to projects that actively encourage gender equality and tackle gendered corruption challenges. It is important to support initiatives that help institutions and civil society to incorporate a gender-sensitive approach to the anti-corruption efforts of the reconstruction and recovery process, as well as target gendered forms of corruption.

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# Abbreviations

**CSO**Civil Society Organisation

**DDR**Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration

**IDP**Internally Displaced Person

**IAWJ**International Association of Women Judges|

**LGBTIQ+** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, Asexual, and others

**NAP**Ukraine's National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security

**NGO**Non-Governmental Organisation

**OCHA**Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**OECD**Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

**OSCE**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**SEA**Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

**SGBV**Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

**SOGIESC**Sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sex characteristics

**SSR**Security Sector Reform

**TI**Transparency International

**UN**United Nations

**UNODC**United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

**WILPF**Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

**WPS**Women, Peace, and Security



# Corruption in Ukraine: Encouraging a gender- sensitive approach

Corruption – defined as the abuse of power for personal gain – ranges from minor bribery to high-level grand corruption. It is a pervasive issue worldwide, undermining human rights, development, state stability, and security responses.<sup>1</sup> It is worse in conflict-affected contexts, where corruption poses threats to peace and stability.<sup>2</sup>

Before the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2014, Ukraine grappled with endemic corruption in state institutions, notably in the defence and security sector.<sup>3</sup> The 2014 Maidan Revolution protests arose from public mistrust due to government opacity and corruption, resulting in democratic weakening. Since then, Ukraine has implemented various anti-corruption measures, including a national strategy, oversight agencies, legislative reforms, and sectoral changes in the police and judiciary.<sup>4</sup> Ukraine's open procurement system has received global recognition, and the country has prioritised transparency in public expenditure.<sup>5</sup> Although Ukraine's 2022 Corruption Perception Index scores showed improvement from previous years, public sector corruption remains a problem.<sup>6</sup>

The 2022 full-scale Russian invasion has introduced further challenges, potentially worsening corruption risks tied to the influx of recovery and reconstruction funds.<sup>7</sup> The international community has rallied to support Ukraine and has raised billions of dollars to support its recovery during the invasion, including repairing infrastructure and productive assets. Anti-corruption planning for Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction has gained global attention recently,<sup>8</sup> but, as with most anti-corruption plans, a gender perspective remains largely absent.<sup>9</sup>

A reconstruction and recovery process aims to promote peace and good governance, rebuild institutions, and enhance social services, security, justice provision, and

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1. Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015.

2. Transparency International, 2017.

3. Bullough, 2015; Kokhan, 2020.

4. Kuz and Stephenson, 2020; Kokhan, 2020; Jackson and Lough, 2022.

5. Offerman, 2017.

6. Transparency International, 2023.

7. Kos, 2022.

8. Jenkins, 2023; Peleschuk, 2023.

9. Cities Alliance et al., 2022.

infrastructure while fostering stability.<sup>10</sup> Anti-corruption measures and the promotion of gender equality<sup>11</sup> are among many important components to achieving these aims, and they are inter-related. There are concerns that the conflict could reverse Ukraine's progress in addressing corruption and promoting gender equality.<sup>12</sup>

The government of Ukraine and its supporters in the international community can enhance the effectiveness of recovery, reconstruction, and anti-corruption efforts through their attention to gender – especially the needs and contributions of women, people with disabilities, and underrepresented groups.

In light of these issues, this report addresses three questions:

1. How can a gender perspective be effectively integrated into Ukraine's anti-corruption planning for recovery and reconstruction?
2. What are the promising practices from post-conflict countries that have advanced gender-sensitive and responsive anti-corruption strategies, and how can they be adapted to Ukraine's unique context and challenges?
3. How can the integration of feminist policy considerations into anti-corruption efforts contribute to Ukraine's progress, and what are the potential implications of failing to address gender issues?

This report<sup>13</sup> outlines ways in which to integrate a gender perspective into Ukraine's anti-corruption efforts, forming the basis for the country's reconstruction and growth. It draws from desk-based research, country-based analysis, international news media, and interviews with gender and anti-corruption experts. Five interviews were conducted with actors either working in Ukraine or outside the country on providing relevant support, and they include perspectives from a former military gender advisor, an international organisation, a women's rights organisation, a donor organisation working on women's rights, and a representative working on restoration. These interviews helped us understand the extent to which gender concerns, particularly those affecting women and girls, were prioritised in anti-corruption efforts and vice versa. The study considers how gender dynamics, especially decision-making structures and socio-economic vulnerabilities, shape corruption risks in Ukraine's post-conflict reconstruction – particularly in the aid

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10. Aoláin et al., 2011; Jenkins, 2023.

11. UN Women, 2023a.

12. TI Ukraine, 2023d; Jenkins, 2023.

13. While we acknowledge that intersectionality, men, boys, and people of diverse SOGIESC groups are core to advancing a gender perspective and promoting feminist policy, this report is limited by a focus that largely centres on women. This report was also not written by Ukrainian feminists and does not include comprehensive analysis of how people of diverse SOGIESC groups are affected by corruption risks, and it thus presents a limited view of the problem space.



distribution, security, and police sectors. The reconstruction agenda has the potential to mitigate the conflict's disproportionate impact on women, girls, and underrepresented groups; advance their equal participation in conflict resolution and post-conflict processes; and thereby promote integrity, accountability, and transparency of recovery and post-conflict reconstruction processes.

The report starts with a brief introduction to gender dynamics in Ukraine, and then establishes the analytical framework based on the WPS Agenda as a foundation for the study. It then presents the findings on gendered corruption risks in reconstruction planning. Finally, it suggests opportunities and recommendations for integrating gender into anti-corruption efforts in Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction plans.

# Corruption and gender inequalities in Ukraine

During the current conflict in Ukraine, several corruption challenges have emerged, spanning areas such as military procurement,<sup>14</sup> embezzlement of oil revenue, and tax evasion.<sup>15</sup> Government officials, regional governors,<sup>16</sup> and members of the judiciary<sup>17</sup> have been implicated in corruption. Concerns also extend to corruption in military recruitment centres.<sup>18</sup> Ongoing corruption within the police and security sector, particularly in relation to organised crime, remains a pressing issue, albeit with anti-corruption institutions actively investigating and prosecuting these offences.<sup>19</sup>

Overall, the reconstruction effort poses risks for opportunistic and systemic corruption, policy subversion, implementation capture, and transnational corruption.<sup>20</sup> More recently, attention has been focused on how gender dynamics shape corruption in Ukraine.

Ukraine grapples with pre-existing structural gender inequalities,<sup>21</sup> including inequalities in access to decision-making and politics.<sup>22</sup> Corruption adversely affects women, girls, and marginalised groups.<sup>23</sup> For example, gender disparities persist in accessing services<sup>24</sup> and gender role expectations tie some women to housework and care duties, increasing their vulnerability to corruption when seeking state services.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, Ukraine has made strides in advancing gender equality and women's rights, including during the current conflict. In 2023, Ukraine ranked 66th out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index,<sup>26</sup> a slight improvement from previous years. Women have occupied a larger share of seats in the national parliament since 2010, comprising 20% of seats in 2022, though still falling short of the global average.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, Ukraine has ratified the Istanbul Convention, aimed at combating violence against women and domestic violence.<sup>28</sup> The adoption of

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14. Ben, 2023; TI Ukraine, 2023b.

15. Tucker, 2023b; Tucker, 2023a.

16. Bennetts and Moody, 2023.

17. Reuters, 2023a.

18. Stern, 2023.

19. Jackson and Lough, 2022; Beliakova and Detzner, 2023; State Bureau of Investigation, 2023.

20. Jackson and Lough, 2022.

21. Mishchenko et al., 2022.

22. Merkle, 2022; Erlich and Beauvais, 2022.

23. Gerasymenko, 2020.

24. UN Women and Care International, 2022.

25. Gerasymenko, 2020.

26. World Economic Forum, 2023.

27. The World Bank, 2023.

28. Council of Europe, 2022.

international and regional agreements on gender equality, alongside national legislation and a strategy to ensure equal rights, opportunities, and pay by 2030, are positive developments.<sup>29</sup>

Women in Ukraine have assumed pivotal roles during the Russian invasion by providing humanitarian assistance, contributing to social and economic stability, and serving as combatants.<sup>30</sup> As of 2023, more than 22% of Ukraine's armed forces comprised women, totalling 60,000 female personnel, with 42,000 in military positions.<sup>31</sup> Attitudes towards gender equality and diversity,<sup>32</sup> including within the LGBTIQ+ community in the armed forces, have reportedly improved,<sup>33</sup> although broader societal discrimination persists.<sup>34</sup>

However, the humanitarian crisis accompanying the Russian invasion has compounded gendered vulnerabilities. By mid-2023, nearly 18 million people in Ukraine required humanitarian support, with women and children constituting 68% of those in need.<sup>35</sup> Over 4 million people reside in areas in the south and east with limited humanitarian access.<sup>36</sup> Further, more than 6 million Ukrainian refugees are recorded across Europe, of whom an estimated 90% are women and children.<sup>37</sup>

There are concerns that gender issues are de-prioritised during the ongoing crisis. UN Women has reported the absence of gender equality considerations in discussions on the Ukraine crisis.<sup>38</sup> The war's gendered impacts contribute to worsening inequalities, with women often excluded from decision-making and negotiations. Women are pushed into informal economic sectors, potentially exacerbating financial insecurities – a trend that may continue in the post-war period.<sup>39</sup> Also, the current conflict has seen a rise in gender-based violence and violence against women, including intimate partner violence and conflict-related sexual violence.<sup>40</sup>

In 2020, Ukraine adopted its second National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace, and Security (2020–2025).<sup>41</sup> This plan seeks a localised approach to address the unique needs and priorities of women in various regions and local authorities.

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29. UN Women, 2023b.

30. Cities Alliance et al., 2022; Trisko Darden, 2023.

31. Cities Alliance et al., 2022; Malchevska, 2023.

32. Kvit and Mathers, 2023.

33. Martsenyuk, 2022.

34. OCHA, 2023.

35. OCHA, 2023.

36. Ibid.

37. UN Women & Care International, 2022.

38. UN Women & Care International, 2022.

39. Ibid.

40. Care International, 2023.

41. Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2020.

Additionally, the Ukrainian government has indicated its intent to update the NAP in response to the evolving context of the full-scale Russian invasion.<sup>42</sup> However, Ukraine's National Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2021–2025<sup>43</sup> does not include a gender perspective, nor does its NAP specifically refer to anti-corruption efforts.

Given the current conflict and the post-conflict reconstruction phase, as well as convergence on issues, concerted efforts are needed to address the intersection of gender inequality and corruption risks.

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42. Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2020, p. 3.

43. National Agency on Corruption Prevention, 2020.

# The Women, Peace, and Security Agenda: Principles of a feminist approach to anti-corruption strategies in reconstruction efforts

Multiple feminisms exist, but for this report, reference to feminist policy considerations implies a focus on gender dynamics that shape inequity and injustice. Women's needs, experiences, concerns, and contributions are taken seriously, as are the differences among women and girls.<sup>44</sup> It further recognises how structural inequalities drive conflict, and that gendered insecurities also affect men, boys, and people of diverse SOGIESC.<sup>45</sup> The analysis is guided by the WPS Agenda (see Annex 1) due to the conflict-affected focus of the report and Ukraine's efforts to implement its NAP.

The WPS Agenda serves as a global framework that directs state responsibilities to promote women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution. It also emphasises the integration of a gender perspective into legal and institutional reforms aimed at conflict prevention and resolution, which includes recovery and reconstruction.<sup>46</sup> Although the WPS Agenda does not explicitly mention corruption, the 2015 Global Study of the agenda highlighted the impact of criminality, the normalisation of violence, and the feminisation of poverty as threats to its implementation.<sup>47</sup> These elements are also linked to gendered experiences and the effects of corruption,<sup>48</sup> reinforcing the synergies between WPS and anti-corruption efforts.

The WPS Agenda is built on four mutually reinforcing pillars:

1. *Participation*: This pillar obliges states to enhance women's meaningful and equal involvement in all aspects of decision-making related to conflict prevention; resolution; peace processes; peacekeeping; security sector reform; disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR programmes); judicial reform;

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44. Enloe, 2023.

45. Kelly, 1987; Cockburn, 2004.

46. Coomaraswamy, 2015.

47. Coomaraswamy, 2015, pp. 20, 195.

48. Wanyana, 2023.

reconstruction; peacebuilding; and humanitarian response.

2. *Prevention*: This is aimed at conflict prevention and emphasises women's contributions in achieving this goal. It addresses gendered insecurities that exacerbate conflict risks, and its obligations encompass preventing sexual and gender-based violence, holding perpetrators accountable, and involving women in conflict-prevention efforts, including addressing the root causes of conflict, such as disarmament and exploitation.
3. *Protection*: The protection pillar entails obligations to safeguard women's rights, promote their safety and security, and protect them from gross human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence.
4. *Relief and Recovery*: This pillar focuses on actions to ensure equal access to aid and services that meet the needs of women and girls.<sup>49</sup>

These pillars are inter-related and mutually dependent, as each one relies on the implementation of the others. While the agenda tends to focus more explicitly on women and girls, the pillars are also relevant for mainstreaming gender in anti-corruption efforts, including by integrating concerns that affect men, boys, and people of diverse SOGIESC. For example, both insecurity and corruption limit the ability of women and underrepresented groups to participate meaningfully in decision-making. Yet, effective, transparent, and accountable relief and recovery efforts depend on the participation of women, girls, and underrepresented groups in identifying their needs, as well as on prevention safeguards and protection measures to ensure their safety and security in accessing aid and services. We have applied these pillars to inform both the analysis and development of recommendations.

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49. UN Secretary-General, 2007, para. 43.



# Gender dynamics of corruption risks in Ukraine

Numerous gender dynamics influence corruption risks and consequences in Ukraine's recovery and post-conflict reconstruction. Gender dynamics, in this context, refer to how gender-based societal norms and inequalities contribute to vulnerability, experiences, and repercussions of corruption.<sup>50</sup> The influx of external actors and donors, combined with vulnerable state institutions, security provisions, and justice systems, as well as the proliferation of illicit arms and exclusionary post-conflict processes, all contribute to corruption risks that can exacerbate gender and other inequalities.<sup>51</sup>

Post-conflict environments provide fertile ground for emerging forms of criminality and corruption.<sup>52</sup> Sexual corruption; corruption linked to human trafficking; DDR processes; misappropriation of reconstruction resources; and the exclusion of women and underrepresented groups from decision-making are all significant corruption risk areas in post-conflict settings.

Predatory economies arising from the conflict can persist – and even expand – during the post-conflict phase, increasing the risks of sexual corruption, sexual exploitation, abuse, and human trafficking.<sup>53</sup> Post-conflict periods present new opportunities for corruption, with those who profited from the conflict often seeking to consolidate their control over assets or expand into other illicit economies during that phase.<sup>54</sup> Corruption in reconstruction efforts has been rampant in other post-conflict contexts,<sup>55</sup> with the misallocation of reconstruction resources exacerbating gender-based inequalities and insecurities.<sup>56</sup> These insecurities can become deeply rooted in reconstruction efforts that fail to consider women's and underrepresented groups' socio-economic needs, particularly their access to secure employment.<sup>57</sup>

These gender dynamics within post-conflict corruption contribute to a destructive cycle of gendered insecurities, driven by the normalisation of sexual and gender-based violence. Coupled with increased barriers to women's and underrepresented groups' full and equal participation in decision-making at all levels within post-

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50. Gerasymenko, 2020.

51. Puechguirbal, 2012; Transparency International, 2017.

52. Bhatia, 2005; Jennings, 2014; Palifka and Rose-Ackerman, 2016; Balint et al., 2017.

53. True, 2012; Feigenblatt, 2020.

54. Bhatia, 2005; Lindberg and Orjuela, 2011; Jennings, 2014.

55. Cheng and Zaum, 2011; Chêne, 2012; Palifka and Rose-Ackerman, 2016.

56. Orjuela et al., 2016.

57. True, 2012; True, 2019.

conflict contexts and a rise in gender inequalities, corruption risks are amplified.<sup>58</sup> Systemic corruption, including sexual corruption, and the prevalence of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) as well as sexual and gender-based violence, can create environments conducive to human trafficking and other criminal activities that particularly undermine gender equality, anti-corruption measures, and reconstruction efforts. These issues not only threaten Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction efforts but also hinder the promotion of gender equality and the fulfilment of all obligations outlined in the WPS Agenda. These corruption risks undermine WPS-related action across all four pillars: participation, prevention, protection, and relief and recovery.

Unfortunately, integrating a gender perspective may be de-prioritised during conflict periods, with gender policies and strategies treated as mere formalities.<sup>59</sup> According to key informants, efforts to mainstream a gender perspective and fulfil obligations under the WPS Agenda have been marginalised during the conflict, including in recovery and reconstruction planning, local governance, and the armed forces. Women's rights organisations (WROs) and civil society groups – crucial partners in implementation efforts – have found that gender issues and WPS commitments are sometimes considered less important amid the backdrop of the conflict. This oversight limits Ukraine's capacity to address the various gender-related aspects of corruption risks and responses.

## Sexual corruption and socio-economic insecurities

Sexual forms of corruption, sexual abuse, and sexual and gender-based violence are particularly pervasive in conflict and post-conflict contexts and are inherently gendered. The concept of 'sexual extortion' (sextortion), introduced by the International Association of Women Judges in 2012, refers to forms of extortion where sex serves as the currency in corrupt transactions.<sup>60</sup> Sextortion typically commodifies women's and girls' bodies.<sup>61</sup> However, the concept of sexual extortion lacks a firm conceptual foundation and empirical data<sup>62</sup> and faces an inadequate legal framework.<sup>63</sup> The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) proposes the term 'sexual corruption' to emphasise the element of power abuse and distinguish it from other types of sex-based extortion that occur mainly in cyberspace.<sup>64</sup>

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58. Wanyana, 2023.

59. Ukrainian Women's Fund, 2023, p. 8.

60. IAWJ, 2012.

61. Caga-anan, 2018.

62. Sundström and Wängnerud, 2021.

63. Thomson Reuters Foundation et al., 2015.

64. UNODC, 2020.

For this report, we adopt a narrow definition of sexual corruption, encompassing three sexually extortive behaviours: the exchange of sex (1) for essential goods and services, (2) against the threat of detention, and (3) as a precondition for employment or salary receipt. In post-conflict settings, sexual corruption is prevalent in the distribution of aid,<sup>65</sup> border crossings, and employment or salary disbursement. Perpetrators often include police, security personnel, humanitarian workers, and civilians.<sup>66</sup> Both corruption within the police force and the judiciary, as well as socio-economic inequalities, perpetuate conditions conducive to gender-based violence and SEA, including sexual corruption.<sup>67</sup>

Socio-economic insecurities are a risk factor for exposure to sexual corruption, SEA, and other forms of gender-based violence. Informal and unpaid care economies in conflict and post-conflict settings are often gendered and contribute to exacerbating women's insecurities.<sup>68</sup> Displacement-related vulnerabilities, including socio-economic insecurities and predatory economies, primarily affect women and girls, although men and boys are also affected.<sup>69</sup>

In Ukraine, existing legislation does not classify sexual corruption as a criminal offence, and there is limited awareness of this issue as a corruption problem and a violation of human rights. Key informants working on women's rights reported widespread instances of the exchange of sex for access to essential resources and job opportunities in conflict-affected Ukraine. Internally displaced individuals (IDPs), particularly women, are identified as the most vulnerable population.<sup>70</sup> There have also been reports of young women exchanging sex for jobs in conflict-affected Donetsk in the years leading up to the full-scale invasion. Sexual corruption is known to occur in small towns with limited economic opportunities, and cities where rural women migrate in search of secure employment.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, many refugees fleeing the country, primarily women and children,<sup>72</sup> are likely to face exposure to corruption during their flight.<sup>73</sup> Reports have documented conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by Russian forces<sup>74</sup> – including acts against men – as a form of torture.<sup>75</sup>

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65. Maxwell et al., 2012; Donli, 2020.

66. Feigenblatt, 2020.

67. Kovatch, 2016.

68. Rai et al., 2019; True, 2012.

69. True, 2012; Jennings, 2014; Feigenblatt, 2020.

70. Interviews 1, 2, and 3, 2023.

71. Interview 2, 2023.

72. Andrews et al., 2023.

73. Merkle et al., 2017.

74. McKernan, 2022; Pejčinović Burić, 2022; OCHA, 2023.

75. Deutsch, 2023; Oppenheim, 2023.

Accountability for sexual and gender-based violence, including SEA and human trafficking, is particularly complex in transitional and post-conflict contexts.<sup>76</sup> Local authorities have been hesitant to address sexual violence issues, citing lengthy processes as a deterrent.<sup>77</sup> In cases of known sexual corruption, prosecutors have reportedly been reluctant to pursue legal action due to legislative gaps.<sup>78</sup>

## Human trafficking and corruption

Evidence suggests that human trafficking and criminal networks thrive in conflict-affected contexts, disproportionately affecting women and girls – especially displaced ones.<sup>79</sup> Conflict and political violence drive migration, and those fleeing conflict and political violence face exploitation risks by corrupt officials, security forces, and organised crime groups.<sup>80</sup> Human trafficking activity increased in the conflict-affected Donbas region and Crimea following the 2014 Russian occupation, and there have been reports of a dramatic increase in trafficking risks following the full-scale invasion.<sup>81</sup>

In the current context, certain groups – including undocumented Ukrainians; displaced people; unaccompanied minors; the chronically ill; disabled and elderly individuals; non-Ukrainian nationals; stateless people; Roma populations; LGBTIQ+ individuals; sex workers; and victims of conflict-related sexual violence – face a particularly high risk of human trafficking.<sup>82</sup> As insecurity intensifies conditions for displacement and hinders access to services and livelihoods, human trafficking activity is likely to escalate.<sup>83</sup>

Human trafficking often relies on a degree of corruption within security and police forces, who benefit from criminal activities and exploitation.<sup>84</sup> Reports of corruption among border police in Ukraine have surfaced.<sup>85</sup> Ukrainian immigration officials have been implicated in trafficking women within and outside of Ukraine,<sup>86</sup> and refugees in Europe are susceptible to exploitation by sex traffickers.<sup>87</sup> Corruption within security and police forces in post-conflict contexts can also lead to impunity

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76. Aroussi, 2011; Anania, 2022.

77. Interview 3, 2023.

78. Ibid.

79. Boucher et al., 2007; Godec, 2010; Smith and Miller-de la Cuesta, 2011; Bell et al., 2018; Jespersen, 2019.

80. Jespersen, 2019.

81. Horbunova, 2022.

82. Hoff and de Volder, 2022.

83. Hoff and de Volder, 2022.

84. Gounev and Bezlov, 2010; Jonsson, 2019.

85. Hoff and de Volder, 2022.

86. Reuters, 2023b.

87. Taylor, 2023.

for various forms of sexual violence.<sup>88</sup> Further, enormous profits linked to human trafficking can lead to increased illicit financial flows, often prevalent in conflict-affected settings.<sup>89</sup>

## Implications of judicial corruption for gender equality

Judicial corruption hinders responses to sexual and gender-based violence, especially when security forces are implicated as perpetrators.<sup>90</sup> The fear of retaliation and lack of protection often deter women from reporting corruption.<sup>91</sup> This reluctance can undermine the ability of local authorities, police, and government officials to identify and address corruption risks.

In the Donbas region, before the current full-scale invasion, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence cited distrust of law enforcement and fear of retaliation as reasons for not reporting crimes against them.<sup>92</sup> Ukraine has grappled with corruption in its courts.<sup>93</sup> In June 2023, endeavours were made to revive previous reform efforts through the appointment of members to the High Council of Justice, yet civil society organizations have criticised the selection process for these appointments.<sup>94</sup> More recently, the European Commission commended the resilience of Ukrainian institutions in continuing integrity reforms and justice provision during the conflict.<sup>95</sup> Sustaining anti-corruption efforts in the security, police, and justice sectors is of utmost importance to safeguard the integrity and effectiveness of the reconstruction endeavour.

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88. Mobekk, 2010.

89. Grondona et al., 2016; OECD, 2018.

90. Bastick, 2018; Puechguirbal et al., 2009.

91. Sim et al., 2017; UNODC, 2020; Chêne, 2021.

92. Capasso, Skipalska, Chakrabarti, et al., 2022.

93. Makarenko, 2021.

94. Shandra, 2023.

95. European Commission, 2023.

# Corruption risks in reconstruction and recovery aid

Corruption in the distribution and utilisation of recovery and reconstruction aid can exacerbate gender inequalities, particularly when women are excluded from decision-making processes related to post-war priorities. The distribution of power and decision-making concerning recovery and reconstruction efforts can either alleviate or worsen gender inequalities and corruption risks.

After the 2014 revolution, several decentralisation reforms were implemented to enhance local-level resource coordination, thereby improving the delivery of public services.<sup>96</sup> Implementation of Ukraine's NAP on WPS also partly adopts a localised approach through regional action plans tailored to specific contexts of women's vulnerabilities and insecurities.<sup>97</sup> Regrettably, the war has led to an increase in power re-centralisation within the executive branch, likely to persist in the post-war era.<sup>98</sup> This centralisation of power may hamper effective oversight efforts aimed at mitigating the risks of state capture. State capture involves private institutions and individuals engaging in corruption to influence and shape a country's policies, legal environment, and economy for their own interests.<sup>99</sup> It can manifest in both decentralised and centralised power structures, significantly impacting social, economic, and political institutions.<sup>100</sup> State capture can disproportionately affect women, impacting their access to public services and political participation.<sup>101</sup>

Representatives from women's rights organisations have claimed that they were intentionally excluded from collaborating with local authorities, often due to corruption and conflicts of interest involving individuals – including oligarchs – who register as non-profit organisations to gain influence within local authorities and access budgetary funds, including those designated for gender-related matters.<sup>102</sup> This exclusion persists despite government efforts to curtail oligarchs' political influence since 2022.<sup>103</sup>

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96. Jackson and Lough, 2022.

97. Chinkin and Potapova, 2023.

98. Jenkins, 2023.

99. Transparency International, 2009, p. 43.

100. Hellman and Kaufmann, 2001.

101. UNODC, 2020.

102. Interview 2, 2023.

103. Koshiw, 2022; Tucker, 2023b.



Moreover, the influx of recovery and reconstruction aid presents significant risks of money laundering and embezzlement, particularly by individuals who have benefited from access to positions of power during the conflict.<sup>104</sup> Organised crime groups, corporations, and other elites exploit opportunities for money laundering due to the inflow of reconstruction aid,<sup>105</sup> potentially reinforcing systems of corruption and patronage networks that jeopardise Ukraine's stability. Patronage networks tend to be male-dominated and can perpetuate women's exclusion from decision-making processes.<sup>106</sup> Public procurement, which involves the acquisition of public goods and services, is especially susceptible to corruption.<sup>107</sup> Corruption in procurement can lead to exorbitant reconstruction costs<sup>108</sup> and limit resources available for the reconstruction of essential institutions and social services. Lack of transparency in procurement information can further impede the oversight capacities of civil society, media, and other organisations.<sup>109</sup> Further, the corrupt diversion of humanitarian aid and corruption in aid distribution are often linked to sexual corruption and exploitation.<sup>110</sup>

Reconstruction faces significant challenges, partly due to limited capacity to manage large sums of aid<sup>111</sup> and an array of corruption risks associated with the distribution of over US\$410 billion in estimated reconstruction funds.<sup>112</sup> Prioritising restoration needs amid the ongoing conflict complicates reconstruction planning,<sup>113</sup> particularly in wealthier regions that have not been affected by fighting yet have claimed a larger share of reconstruction resources.<sup>114</sup> The war effort initially affected the capacity of anti-corruption institutions in Ukraine<sup>115</sup> but the situation is improving.<sup>116</sup>

Ensuring the application of a gender perspective in needs assessments and facilitating the equal and full participation of women and underrepresented groups in decision-making processes regarding the distribution and use of reconstruction aid is crucial; excluding such groups from decision-making regarding the priorities and the distribution of reconstruction funding may foster power imbalances that will further fuel corruption and undermine the reconstruction effort.

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104. Jackson and Lough, 2022.

105. Ibid.

106. Merkle, 2022.

107. Jenkins, 2023.

108. Abdou et al., 2022.

109. TI Ukraine, 2023a.

110. Maxwell et al., 2012.

111. Wintour, 2023.

112. The New Voice of Ukraine, 2023; Briancon, 2023.

113. Mance, 2023.

114. Wintour, 2023.

115. Kos, 2022.

116. TI Ukraine, 2023e.

# Security sector reform corruption risks

Security sector reform (SSR) constitutes a pivotal component of post-conflict reconstruction efforts, as it aims to promote the rule of law and build trust in security provision.<sup>117</sup> DDR processes are an integral part of SSR, and several UN Security Council WPS resolutions entail obligations for SSR processes.<sup>118</sup> Yet DDR frequently lacks gender sensitivity or is disconnected from broader SSR initiatives, undermining efforts to enhance security sector governance, address structural inequalities, and promote anti-corruption measures.<sup>119</sup>

Discrimination against women in the military can heighten the risk of their exclusion from DDR programmes, and DDR processes can serve as hotspots for corruption – potentially restricting access to essential services and socio-economic security for women and minority combatants and veterans.

DDR involves disarming combatants to reduce the number of weapons in the country, demobilising them as the demand for military personnel decreases, and reintegrating them into society with various socio-economic resources and support services. Corruption has been observed in DDR processes in other post-conflict contexts, occasionally leading to the deliberate exclusion of women combatants from accessing DDR resources.<sup>120</sup> Post-conflict demobilisation processes often prioritise the employment of demobilised men over women in the formal sector, resulting in socio-economic insecurity for demobilised women.<sup>121</sup>

Economic reintegration of former combatants is a pivotal aspect of DDR processes, making them a focal point for corruption risks.<sup>122</sup> Corruption within such processes has led to the deliberate exclusion of women combatants from participation in DDR programmes in Liberia, a situation compounded by gendered social expectations.<sup>123</sup> Women who took on non-traditional roles during the conflict period are often pressured to revert to traditional gender roles in the post-conflict context, negatively impacting their ability to secure employment and economic stability.<sup>124</sup> As observed in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Kosovo, and Colombia, men are often prioritised for security

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117. Bastick, 2018.

118. Resolutions [1820 \(2008\)](#), [1888 \(2009\)](#), [2106 \(2013\)](#), [2122 \(2013\)](#), and [2467\(2019\)](#).

119. Denov and Maclure, 2009; Basini, 2013; Kilroy and Basini, 2018.

120. Denov and Maclure, 2009; Yeung, 2009; Stites and Akabwai, 2010; Mazurana et al., 2018.

121. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2013.

122. Yeung, 2009; Stites and Akabwai, 2010; Mazurana et al., 2018.

123. Kilroy and Basini, 2018.

124. Lopera-Arbeláez, 2023.

sector jobs over former female combatants in post-conflict contexts.<sup>125</sup> The exclusion of women combatants from DDR programmes can heighten their exposure to corruption and exploitation and undermine their socio-economic security, as seen in Sierra Leone.<sup>126</sup>

Corruption in DDR processes can also disincentivise armed combatants from disarming, potentially leading to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in post-conflict contexts. This, in turn, undermines state security and generates risks of sexual and gender-based violence.<sup>127</sup> In Donbas, armed men, including demobilised individuals, have been significant perpetrators of sexual violence against displaced women.<sup>128</sup>

Reports have indicated instances of sexual harassment and discrimination against women in the Ukrainian army, including during the current conflict.<sup>129</sup> Some women in the armed forces have faced retaliation for reporting sexual harassment by their colleagues.<sup>130</sup> Additionally, the lack of gender sensitivity in assessing the needs of women combatants has resulted in ill-fitting body armour and uniforms and limited access to sexual and reproductive health services. However, recent efforts are being made to provide gender-specific clothing and body armour.<sup>131</sup>

These issues often arise because the obligation to incorporate a gender perspective into DDR processes is sometimes seen as an inconvenience rather than a core element of mission objectives and responsibilities in post-conflict contexts.<sup>132</sup> One gender expert emphasised that the integration of a gender perspective in the Ukrainian military occurs in an ad hoc manner and relies on the individual officers' commitment. In some cases, efforts to institutionalise gender mainstreaming were reversed by leaders, and gender advisors faced substantial resistance from security and defence sector managers.<sup>133</sup> Although there is sporadic collaboration with CSOs within some ministries, challenges persist in institutionalising gender mainstreaming. These problems are further exacerbated by insufficient funding for gender mainstreaming.

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125. Gordon, 2019.

126. Abdullah et al., 2010.

127. Farr et al., 2009.

128. Capasso et al., 2022.

129. Boffey, 2023.

130. Ibid.

131. Kramer and Varenikova, 2023.

132. Jacobs and Krulisova, 2021.

133. Interview 1, 2023; Olikier, 2022.

# Prioritising implementation of Ukraine's NAP to enhance anti-corruption efforts in recovery and reconstruction

Ukraine's 2020–2025 NAP identified ten areas of need for implementing the WPS Agenda (see Table 1), which broadly pertain to the representation of women, responding to gender-specific needs, and enhancing institutional capacity. These needs translated into five strategic goals (see Annex 1) that seek to enhance women's participation, devise gender-sensitive protection systems, promote equal rights and opportunities for men and women in post-conflict recovery and transitional justice, protect against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and enhance institutional capacity to implement the NAP. Mainstreaming implementation of Ukraine's NAP in all aspects of recovery and reconstruction efforts can help support the achievement of these aims as well as identify, mitigate the risks of, and develop appropriate responses to corruption.

Such responses could include monitoring the distribution of recovery and reconstruction resources, using gender-responsive budgeting and participation, and implementing gender-sensitive policies and safeguards – all of which are valuable anti-corruption strategies<sup>134</sup> that also reflect provisions of the WPS Agenda. During and following the conflict, the NAP should inform post-war recovery and reconstruction planning.<sup>135</sup> All this can be achieved with the support of a range of partners, including civil society.

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134. Jackson and Lough, 2022.

135. Chinkin and Potapova, 2023.

**Table 1: Needs identified in Ukraine's 2020–2025 NAP**

Representation of women	Gender-specific needs	Institutional capacity
Gender inequality in access to decision-making processes and resources that affect the representation of women in public and political life	Insufficient consideration of the needs of different groups of men and women in transitional and restorative justice	Ineffective mechanisms for gender mainstreaming in national security
Underrepresentation of women in conflict resolution as part of official negotiations and security and defence structures	The adverse impacts of armed aggression on women	Limited human and financial resources for implementation of WPS
Lack of access to some special forces positions	Ongoing incidence of gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence	
Underrepresentation of women in post-conflict recovery processes	Socio-economic and health inequalities resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic	

Source: Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2020, pp. 3–4

## The role of civil society and women's rights organisations

Civil society, including WROs and LGBTIQ+ rights organisations, have a vital role in supporting the implementation of Ukraine's NAP and National Anti-Corruption Strategy.<sup>136</sup> They can serve as critical friends in developing supportive and inclusive policies and strategies.<sup>137</sup> They can also assist local authorities and other stakeholders in identifying and responding to corruption risks while also addressing the root causes of corruption by actively participating in decision-making related to recovery and reconstruction plans.

During the 2014 Maidan revolution, women's organisations played a significant role in mobilising protesters, advocating for greater governance accountability, promoting inclusivity in decision-making processes, offering logistical support and resources, and championing gender, social, and political reforms.<sup>138</sup> Amid the

136. Ukrainian Women's Fund, 2023.

137. Karbowska, 2023.

138. Phillips, 2014.

current conflict, WROs are providing a wide range of services, support, and advocacy on behalf of marginalised individuals. Many organisations have relocated their activities from western to eastern Ukraine to assist women in areas near the Ukrainian counter-offensive and Russian-occupied territories,<sup>139</sup> positioning them well to share information and influence anti-corruption strategies. Some have stressed the pivotal role civil society should play in supporting and overseeing reconstruction, especially at the local level.<sup>140</sup> For example, to enhance transparency in reconstruction projects and establish clear priorities, CSOs have proposed the creation of a project bank.<sup>141</sup> This initiative can be supplemented by local-level monitoring of recovery and reconstruction within local governments, facilitated by active participation from local communities and CSOs, including women, underrepresented groups, and WROs.

WROs face various barriers that affect their development, capacity, and active involvement in their communities. They often receive less funding and lack the influence or capacity of other CSOs.<sup>142</sup> WROs also face obstacles in terms of representation and access to budgetary resources within local authorities, partly due to limited consultations on fund allocation. In some instances, they have encountered challenges in engaging with local authorities, which could negatively impact their ability to shape recovery and reconstruction priorities. The stress and trauma experienced by CSO and WRO staff may threaten their oversight capabilities.<sup>143</sup> Efforts focused on enabling their meaningful and full participation in recovery and reconstruction decision-making and oversight can help overcome these obstacles.

Despite the challenges, some progress has been made towards enhancing women's participation in political parties, increasing women's representation in defence and security institutions, and monitoring local election processes.<sup>144</sup> Anti-corruption-focused CSOs in Ukraine are highly capable<sup>145</sup> and could benefit from closer collaboration with WROs to promote anti-corruption norms and share knowledge to bolster oversight and accountability. For example, emphasising gender-responsive budgeting is crucial in these collaborative efforts, as it can enhance anti-corruption measures and shape social and economic outcomes.<sup>146</sup> It can enhance the economic efficiency of reconstruction and ensure that the diverse needs of women, men, girls, boys, and people of diverse SOGIESC from various social and demographic

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139. Martirosyan, 2023.

140. Jenkins, 2023; TI Ukraine, 2023c.

141. IZI 2022; Rise Coalition 2022.

142. Ukrainian Women's Fund, 2023; the same can also likely be said of LGBTIQ+ organisations.

143. Martirosyan, 2023; Jenkins, 2023.

144. Interview 3, 2023.

145. Jackson and Lough, 2022; Lutsevych, 2023.

146. Gizelis and Pierre, 2013.



backgrounds are met.<sup>147</sup> Elevating the gender dimensions of corruption within recovery and reconstruction through NAP implementation can foster transparency, accountability, and gender equality.

## Participation of women and underrepresented groups in anti-corruption strategies

The first strategic goal of Ukraine's NAP is to ensure the equal participation of women and men in decision-making, encompassing conflict resolution and post-conflict recovery across all levels and sectors, including security and defence. Women's representation in political, economic, and other decision-making forums is essential for democracy, ensuring that policies and priorities are determined with input from a representative population. Promoting equal access to decision-making is fundamental to advancing anti-corruption efforts in recovery and reconstruction.

Progress has been made in enhancing women's representation in various areas, presenting clear opportunities to further women's roles in decision-making, and building on their resistance and humanitarian aid efforts.<sup>148</sup> Women's representation in political office can support anti-corruption efforts, with evidence suggesting that their participation in local councils reduces both minor and major forms of corruption while improving public service delivery.<sup>149</sup> Implementing gender quotas in decision-making related to reconstruction at local and national levels can facilitate this goal.<sup>150</sup> Strategies should extend beyond mere metrics counting the number of women in various sectors and forums and should address gendered power dynamics that perpetuate women's exclusion.<sup>151</sup>

There is a need to explore 'how and under what conditions gender is likely to have an impact on corruption.'<sup>152</sup> In conflict-affected Aceh, Indonesia, the late and limited incorporation of a gender perspective into anti-corruption measures during reconstruction following the 2004 tsunami exacerbated gender-based insecurities.<sup>153</sup> These shortcomings were attributed in part to narrow interpretations of intersectionality and gender mainstreaming, excluding women's experiences, perspectives, and opportunities to contribute to reconstruction efforts.<sup>154</sup> The representation and meaningful participation of women have long been advocated as

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147. Gerasymenko, 2020.

148. Phillips and Martsenyuk, 2023.

149. Bauhr et al., 2019.

150. Gerasymenko, 2020.

151. Colella and Cin, 2022.

152. Stensöta et al., 2015, p. 476.

153. UNODC, 2020, p. 107.

154. Ibid.

promising anti-corruption strategies.<sup>155</sup> Still, their effective representation is constrained by gendered power structures that perpetuate their exclusion.<sup>156</sup> While women may not inherently be less corrupt than men,<sup>157</sup> their exclusion and that of underrepresented groups detrimentally affects the ability to identify gender-specific security needs, priorities, corruption risks, and appropriate responses that exacerbate gender inequalities and insecurities.

The representation of women, particularly from WROs and other civil society groups, is critical to mitigating corruption risks and promoting gender equality in Ukraine's reconstruction. These groups are valuable partners in shaping reconstruction decision-making priorities and supporting data collection that informs these priorities (especially gender-integrated needs assessments). These groups should therefore be supported with flexible funding.<sup>158</sup> Collaborative dialogue and co-creation of recovery and reconstruction projects with donors, CSOs, WROs, and local authorities can enhance opportunities for gender-responsive solutions to corruption challenges.<sup>159</sup> Ensuring women (including refugees returning to Ukraine), WROs, and underrepresented groups have regular access to decision-making at all stages is key to fostering gender-responsive accountability, legitimacy, and responsiveness of reconstruction. This approach will also promote gender-sensitive transitional justice capable of providing accountability, redress, and support for crimes committed during the conflict that disproportionately affect women, girls, and underrepresented groups.<sup>160</sup>

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155. Swamy et al., 2001; Sung, 2003.

156. Goetz, 2007; Stensöta et al., 2015; Bauhr et al., 2019.

157. Goetz, 2007; Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer, 2018.

158. UN Women & Care International, 2022.

159. WILPF, 2022.

160. Horne, 2023.

# Gender-responsive anti-corruption approaches in conflict settings

Ukraine's NAP aims to create gender-sensitive systems that address security challenges and protect against gender-based and sexual violence during both armed conflict and peacetime. This report highlights gendered corruption risks that negatively impact women, girls, and underrepresented groups. Corruption during reconstruction places heavier burdens on women and can perpetuate socio-economic conditions encouraging gender-based violence and exploitation.<sup>161</sup> Ensuring security is vital for facilitating the meaningful political participation of women and minority groups and their fair and active involvement in reconstruction.<sup>162</sup> Adopting gender-responsive activities and safeguards in such contexts advances gender equality.<sup>163</sup>

Countering corruption involves understanding how gender dynamics shape vulnerability to and perpetration of corruption. Women's socio-economic insecurities, including livelihoods, are core to this understanding. Collaborative gender analyses, including feminist political economy analysis, can better guide decision-making priorities.<sup>164</sup>

Ukraine's Gender Equality Commissioner stresses prioritising women's economic inclusion and empowerment in recovery plans. In other contexts, an increase in the participation of the female labour force in the formal sector correlates with reduced corruption.<sup>165</sup> However, the focus should not be solely on employment; it is also essential to safeguard women's and minorities' socio-economic security, especially regarding access to social services.

Recovery initiatives that consider regional and local corruption risks can help build safeguards.<sup>166</sup> For instance, areas under extensive Russian occupation might have higher trafficking-related corruption risks. Towns with many IDPs might have distinct priorities, necessitating unique mitigation strategies. Localised accounting and compliance systems supported by donors can meet these needs.<sup>167</sup> Work on

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161. Jackson and Lough, 2022.

162. WILPF, 2022.

163. Jackson and Lough, 2022.

164. UN Women and Care International, 2022; WILPF, 2022.

165. Neudorfer, 2016.

166. Jackson and Lough, 2022.

167. Ibid.

masculinities and psycho-social support, including for post-traumatic stress disorder, can also serve as valuable safeguards. Gender-informed needs assessments are crucial, and centralised reconstruction can overlook nuanced gender concerns across locations and identities.<sup>168</sup> Budgetary planning should also account for local capabilities in managing corruption risks.

Participatory monitoring in reconstruction planning, informed by those affected by corruption, can expose and counteract corruption risks.<sup>169</sup> Examples from Northern Nigeria, Lebanon, and Uganda reveal that such approaches, especially when including women's and girls' perspectives, enhance risk identification for sexual corruption, exploitation, abuse, and human trafficking.<sup>170</sup> In other situations, participatory methods help produce evidence to decrease SEA risks in humanitarian crises. Projects in Uganda and Lebanon recorded prevalent SEA across all aid distribution points.<sup>171</sup> Recommendations from these projects informed toolkits adaptable to various contexts. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, collaborations between female cross-border traders and numerous partners led to strategies for counteracting extortion, abuse, and harassment at borders by officials.<sup>172</sup>

Raising awareness about women's rights, including addressing sexual corruption, as well as general education on corruption, has proven valuable elsewhere. For instance, the *Saya Perempuan Anti-Korupsi* initiative in Aceh, Indonesia, bolstered women's anti-corruption knowledge and rallied communities against corruption.<sup>173</sup> Training should also enlighten officials on anti-discrimination laws, corruption's gender dynamics, and how empowering women promotes transparency.<sup>174</sup>

Mitigating corruption vulnerabilities among refugees, especially women, girls, unaccompanied children, and people of diverse SOGIESC, is essential. This can be achieved through fair aid distribution, monitoring, and specialised support.<sup>175</sup> Implementing anti-trafficking structures, enhancing preventive systems, and allocating resources for victim support are crucial steps.<sup>176</sup> Support services are essential to help monitor trafficking activity and anticipate trafficking risks. Enhancing early warning and prevention systems at borders, reception centres, and other locations are also crucial measures, as are anti-trafficking training – and

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168. *Ibid.*

169. *Ibid.*

170. Donli, 2020; Potts et al., 2022.

171. Potts et al., 2022, p. 325.

172. Myrntinen, 2019, p. 32.

173. UNODC, 2020, p. 110.

174. Feigenblatt, 2020; Gerasymenko, 2020.

175. Hoff and de Volder, 2022.

176. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

earmarking resources for monitoring the trafficking – access to justice, and legal advice for victims.<sup>177</sup>

Lastly, the Ukrainian government's upcoming whistleblower platform could benefit from gender sensitivity and responsiveness.<sup>178</sup> Adopting survivor-centred methods for gathering information and aiding victims of sexual crimes is imperative.<sup>179</sup>

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177. Ibid.

178. National Agency on Corruption Protection, 2022; UNODC, 2020.

179. Institute for International Criminal Investigations et al., 2022.

# Ukraine's post-conflict future: Overcoming gender inequalities and enhancing anti-corruption efforts

While Ukraine has made strides towards gender equality, the current conflict with Russia has highlighted and sometimes exacerbated existing gender inequalities. Additionally, corruption poses significant challenges for the country, and the intersection of gender inequality and corruption risks presents a unique set of challenges that need dedicated solutions, because gender dynamics not only exacerbate corruption, but are also shaped by it.

Specifically, the report found that the conflict situation has weakened institutions and led to an influx of external actors, providing fertile ground for new forms of corruption that can further escalate gender inequalities. Sexual forms of corruption are pervasive in post-conflict contexts such as Ukraine. It can manifest in areas such as aid distribution, border crossings, and employment processes in post-conflict settings. Sexual corruption in such settings can be difficult to detect and respond to because it is often perpetrated by authoritative figures such as police and security personnel. Moreover, corruption, especially when combined with sexual and gender-based violence, creates an environment conducive to human trafficking and other illicit activities. Displaced women and girls are at a heightened risk of being trafficked.

In conflict and post-conflict processes, DDR programmes – crucial for post-conflict reconstruction – are often compromised by corruption. Women, despite their active roles in combat and other activities, are frequently marginalised in these processes, exacerbating their vulnerabilities and pushing them back into traditional gender roles. Thus, if not managed properly, the post-conflict phase can cause reversals back to traditional gender norms and compromise the gains women may have achieved during the conflict. If they are pushed back into such roles, women and minority groups stand to benefit little from reconstruction efforts. Moreover, post-conflict reconstruction often presents new opportunities for corruption. Those who profited during conflict might consolidate their gains post-conflict, often at the cost of gender and social equality.

Overall, the findings reiterate the importance of gender-sensitive and responsive interventions in post-conflict contexts. Women and underrepresented groups face several challenges in conflict and post-conflict settings, and these are exacerbated by

deeply entrenched corruption systems that are intrinsically tied to pre-existing forms of gender discrimination. To break the cycle of gendered insecurities both during peacetime and conflict, it is vital to tackle the intertwined challenges of corruption and gender inequality dynamics concurrently.

# Next steps for stakeholders: Integrating gender into anti- corruption efforts

The promotion of gender-sensitive and responsive anti-corruption strategies in Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction is essential to Ukraine's future stability. Recommendations to achieve this aim fall under three broad areas:

1. Combine the efforts of Ukraine's NAP on WPS with those of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy, uniting stakeholders across these strategies to accelerate shared objectives.
2. Capitalise on opportunities emerging from the decentralisation agenda and reconstruction processes for promoting women's and underrepresented people's full and equal participation in all aspects of decision-making on post-conflict reconstruction.
3. Enhance protection obligations by consistently incorporating gendered corruption risks into anti-corruption plans, with the support of WROs, and formally acknowledging and implementing prevention and response initiatives to address sexual forms of corruption and corruption related to human trafficking.

Using this broad overview as guidance, a specific subset of recommendations under key thematic areas emerging from this report is proposed. These pertain to a range of stakeholders involved in Ukraine's reconstruction and recovery, including the Ukrainian government, the defence and security sector, local authorities, CSOs and WROs, donors, humanitarian actors, and international non-governmental organisations.

## Overarching policy

- Connect corruption risks to gendered security risks, SGBV, and barriers to meaningful participation of women and underrepresented groups in all aspects of decision-making.
- Ensure that post-conflict reconstruction planning and implementation is informed by Ukraine's NAP on WPS.
- Propose that a gender perspective is regularly provided by gender experts in anti-corruption strategies and planning.
- Enhance laws and policies to protect women's rights (including protecting them



from sexual forms of corruption), and establish clear accountability measures for violations of women's rights.

## Distribution of reconstruction resources

- Prioritise gender-sensitive anti-corruption risk assessments and response measures in all aspects of the distribution of aid resources – including procurement and project design, monitoring, and implementation.
- Ensure transparent and accountable gender-responsive budgeting – particularly for local authorities – as well as adequate monitoring and oversight.
- Focus on gender-responsive budgeting for social services and WROs working at the local level; organisations representing Roma women and LGBTIQ+ groups; and those collaborating with women veterans, wives of veterans, and veterans with new forms of disabilities.
- Give precedence to the funding of women's rights and feminist organisations and encourage cross-fertilisation with CSOs working on anti-corruption measures.
- Prioritise reconstruction projects on economic activities that support women's and underrepresented groups' socio-economic security, especially their access to secure employment.
- Ensure regular and transparent consultations with women, underrepresented groups, and WROs in establishing priorities for the distribution of reconstruction resources, and that they participate in all stages of reconstruction projects, including design and corruption monitoring.
- Through collaboration with WROs, engage in consultations, especially in rural communities and with internally displaced and marginalised women and other marginalised groups, on security and reconstruction needs.
- Champion women's role in decision-making and oversight of public procurement.

## Prevention of sexual forms of corruption

- Ensure all codes of conduct explicitly include attention to sexual forms of corruption, SEA, sexual harassment, and sexual and gender-based violence, and other forms of sexual violence, and that clear policies and accountability processes are in place for addressing such misconduct.
- Introduce and enforce transparent and meritocratic hiring and promotion processes.
- Ensure that complaints mechanisms are gender-sensitive and informed by community consultations (including with WROs), and that staff receiving

complaints are adequately trained in gender-sensitivity and survivor-centred approaches, as set out in the Murad Code<sup>180</sup> principles, and have minimum standards on ethical collection of information from survivors of sexual violence.

- Train officials and personnel on the relationship between WPS, gender, and anti-corruption efforts, and integrate gender across all aspects of training.
- Raise awareness of the gendered forms and impacts of corruption, women's rights, and Ukraine's NAP on WPS.
- Adequately resource SGBV services, which can also identify corruption risks in the justice system, and put in place regularly updated referral systems so that complainants can seek assistance and support.
- Establish early warning mechanisms and ensure the appropriate responses are in place with respect to IDPs – especially women, girls, and refugees – including those returning to Ukraine, Roma women, stateless or undocumented women, people of diverse SOGIESC, and marginalised groups.

## Protection from corruption

- Conduct gender analysis and respond to the unique vulnerabilities of specific groups when planning SGBV response, and include sexual corruption in planning.
- Increase protections against sexual corruption at humanitarian corridors, checkpoints, and border crossings.
- Address women's socio-economic security, particularly livelihood support.
- Ensure that women and people of diverse SOGIESC are involved in protection planning.
- Conduct due diligence vetting of security and aid provision personnel.
- Strengthen referral networks, especially for SEA, sexual corruption, and human trafficking.
- Invest in CSOs, including WROs and LGBTIQ+ organisations.
- Investigate sexual forms of corruption and SEA thoroughly and promptly in accordance with the Murad Code.
- Ensure adequate and gender-responsive whistleblower protection.
- Enhance partnerships and cooperations with CSOs working on anti-corruption efforts and WROs, who are valuable partners in supporting such efforts.

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180. Murad Code.

## DDR processes

- Ensure gender-responsiveness in the design and implementation of DDR programmes, paying special attention to women veterans with disabilities, and that there is transparent and accountable oversight of the programmes.
- Arrange early integration of gender-responsive anti-corruption strategies into DDR programmes, and ensure diverse women participate in decision-making at all levels in their design and implementation.
- Use DDR processes as an opportunity to promote gender sensitivity and responsiveness in SSR by ensuring equal access to jobs for female ex-combatants in the security sector.

## Specific recommendations for international development actors

*Align funding with Ukraine's NAP on WPS:* International donors, especially those that explicitly embrace a feminist foreign policy, should align their funding priorities with the objectives of Ukraine's NAP on WPS and the broader WPS Agenda. This will ensure that funds are allocated to projects that actively promote gender equality and address gendered corruption challenges. For example, given the risk of centralisation, donors can support localised reconstruction projects that cater to the diverse needs of women, men, girls, boys, and people of diverse SOGIESC. They can also find ways to create incentive mechanisms for reconstruction projects that actively integrate a gender perspective and demonstrate effective gender-sensitive, responsive, and transformative approaches. Crucially, donors should fund women-led organisations and push for women's participation in decision-making roles related to reconstruction and recovery.

*Strengthen capacity and collaboration:* Donors can provide funding for training and capacity-building initiatives to strengthen the capabilities of institutions and civil society in Ukraine to integrate a gender perspective in anti-corruption efforts as part of the reconstruction and recovery efforts. They can also fund public education efforts on the NAP to educate the public about the gendered implications of corruption and the importance of addressing these issues for a more stable, secure, and prosperous Ukraine.

*Target gendered forms of corruption:* Donors should support initiatives that specifically target forms of corruption related to gender-based violence which disproportionately affect women and underrepresented groups, such as sexual corruption and human trafficking-related corruption.

## Interviews

Conducted in 2023.

Interview 1: Former gender advisor in the Ukrainian military

Interview 2: Head of an international organisation working on gender in Ukraine

Interview 3: Head of a CSO that focuses on gender and anti-corruption efforts

Interview 4: Representative of a donor organisation that supports WROs in Ukraine

Interview 5: Representative working on restoration in Ukraine

## Annex 1: Ukraine's 2020 NAP: Strategic and Operational Goals

Strategic Goals	Operational Goals
<p>1. Ensuring equal participation of women and men in decision-making on conflict prevention, conflict resolution, post-conflict recovery at all levels, and all areas, including the security and defence sector</p>	<p>1.1. Creating regulatory conditions and opportunities for equal participation of women and men in peace negotiations and decision-making on conflict prevention, conflict resolution, provision of assistance to victims, and post-conflict recovery</p> <hr/> <p>1.2. Ensuring equal representation of women and men in decision-making in the security and defence sector</p> <hr/> <p>1.3. Involvement of civil society institutions in decision-making in the area of supporting and promoting a culture of peace, peacebuilding, post-conflict recovery and assistance to victims of conflict</p>
<p>2. Creation of a gender-sensitive system to detect, prevent and respond to security challenges</p>	<p>2.1. Availability of an effective mechanism of interaction of state bodies, public associations, enterprises, institutions and organizations to detect, prevent and respond to security challenges (wars, pandemics, human-made disasters, etc.) with consideration to the needs of different groups of girls and boys, women and men</p> <hr/> <p>2.2. Ensuring the ability of the population of Ukraine, in particular women and girls, to detect, prevent and respond to security challenges in accordance with existing instructions, legislation, the level of security of challenges and their own needs</p>
<p>3. Ensuring the process of post-conflict recovery, development and implementation of the transitional justice system based on the principles of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men</p>	<p>3.1. Definition of social and political dialogue regarding post-conflict recovery and the development of recovery/transition women's justice sensitive to the needs of women and men (girls and boys) affected by the conflict</p> <hr/> <p>3.2. Identifying the specific needs of conflict-affected persons, in particular women, taking into account gender perspective in the provision of administrative, health and social services</p> <hr/> <p>3.3. Identification of appropriate mechanisms for documenting, assessing and compensating losses of victims of conflict-related violence using gender-sensitive approach and bringing perpetrators to justice</p> <hr/> <p>3.4. Ensuring compliance of transitional justice legislation with international standards, its application and access to justice for affected women and men, girls and boys</p>

Strategic Goals	Operational Goals
<p>4. Providing protection against gender-based violence, sexual violence (in situations of armed conflict and peacetime)</p>	<p>4.1. Establishment of an interagency detection and response system that provides conditions for comprehensive, timely protection and access to justice for victims of gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence in situations of armed conflict</p>
	<p>4.2. Establishment of a system of interagency detection and response to ensure comprehensive, timely protection and access to justice for victims of gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence in peacetime</p>
	<p>4.3. Providing comprehensive assistance to victims of gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence, taking into account the specific needs of those affected during the situations of armed conflict and in peacetime</p>
	<p>4.4. Ensure that effective mechanisms are in place to prevent gender-based violence, sexual harassment and conflict-related sexual violence</p>
<p>5. Ensuring the developed institutional capacity of the National Action Plan actors for the effective implementation of the Women, Peace, Security Agenda in accordance with the international standards</p>	<p>5.1. Ensuring sufficient knowledge and skills of the National Plan actors for effective implementation of the tasks identified in the Women, Peace, Security Agenda in accordance with the international standards</p>
	<p>5.2. Implementation of an effective system of interdepartmental cooperation at the local, regional and national levels as well as institutional mechanisms, including in the security and defence sector, for the development, implementation and monitoring of the implementation of the National Plan</p>

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# About the authors

## **Sabrina White**

Dr Sabrina White is a gender specialist for Transparency International Defence and Security and an academic who researches gender, militaries, and conflict. She has also taught at the University of Leeds, Regent's University London, Srinakharinwirot University, and the University of Sierra Leone.

## **Sara Bandali**

Dr Sarah Bandali is Director of International Engagement at Transparency International UK and oversees global programmes addressing corruption in the Global Health and Defence and Security sectors. Her expertise on evidence use, adaptive programming and multi-stakeholder engagement are used to strengthen corruption prevention and increase shared impact.

## **Monica Kirya**

Monica Kirya is Deputy Director at the U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre and a lawyer. Kirya coordinates the themes on mainstreaming anti-corruption in public service delivery and integrating gender in anti-corruption programming.



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