
ISF Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk

Gender, the Environment and Security in Ukraine

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Introduction

Ukraine has had a National Action Plan (NAP) to implement the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS) since 2016, updating it in 2020, and again in 2022, to adapt it to the realities of Russia's full-scale invasion. The most recent WPS NAP is valid through 2025 and there are currently discussions and work taking place towards a new iteration, due to be published in 2025. With these plans, the Government of Ukraine has shown its commitment to the WPS Agenda's goals, which include tackling the particular insecurities faced by women during wars and facilitating the participation of women in all efforts to build peace, from prevention to recovery and reconstruction. Over recent years, the WPS community has become increasingly aware of the need to incorporate attention to climate change and other environmental crises into its work, because of the ways that ecological crises and war intersect, often compounding the insecurity of women. This report explores how climate change and other environmental challenges intersect with the war in Ukraine, exacerbating gendered insecurities, in order to help shape the next iteration of Ukraine's WPS NAP.

In addition to the terrible effects of the war in Ukraine on every part of human life, the impact on the country's natural environment has been severe. The consequences of brutal actions are observed in soil and water contamination and pollution, and the destruction of critical ecosystems, compounding existing ecological crises such as climate change and loss of biodiversity. In response, Ukraine needs to integrate attention to the environment in its resilience, recovery and reconstruction plans – as the Ukrainian Government has recognised.¹ To date, this has been formally acknowledged in government commitments and policies, such as the Peace Formula, which, on the basis that the protection and regeneration of ecosystems not only strengthens communities, but also lays the foundation for just and sustainable peace and prosperity, has made the recovery and protection of the climate and natural environment a priority.

Taking a gender lens to these issues is crucial, as both war and environmental challenges are gendered in their causes and effects. A gender-transformative approach can generate strategies to ensure recovery advances the security of women and girls at the same time as protecting the environment, through increasing the representation of women in decision-making process at all levels, to raising vital questions about the vision, priorities and shape of Ukraine's recovery model. A gender lens ensures that recovery stands the best chance of being just, inclusive and sustainable, both politically and environmentally.

While Ukraine is currently fighting to end the war and liberate its territories, environmental issues might not be the priority. However, as the conversations around post-war recovery and reconstruction are currently actively ongoing in parallel with the military actions, it is important for those concerned with the security of women and girls to endeavour to shape them. This report aims to provide insights that will inform Ukraine's updated WPS NAP and localised NAPs.² The WPS Agenda has made significant progress in addressing the gendered impacts

¹ Ackermann A, Fabbri M (2024), 'Building back better: Ukrainian reconstruction has already begun – let's make it sustainable', Euractiv (www.euractiv.com/section/circular-economy/opinion/building-back-better-ukrainian-reconstruction-has-already-begun-lets-make-it-sustainable/)

² Since the implementation of NAP is localised at the sectoral, regional and local levels in Ukraine; see: WPS Focal Points Network, Ukraine (<https://wpsfocalpointsnetwork.org/ukraine/#:~:text=The%20implementation%20of%20NAP%20is,to%20Russia's%20full%2Dscale%20invasion>)

of war and supporting women's participation in peacebuilding. This report proposes ways to further integrate efforts to tackle climate change and environmental harm into these efforts, ensuring that Ukraine's recovery is not only focused on immediate survival, but also on building a resilient, sustainable, just and equitable future.³

Methodological approach

The primary objective of this study was to explore the environmental and climate impacts of the war in Ukraine and their implications for the security, opportunities and rights of women and girls. The research also aimed to identify strategies for addressing these gendered harms in recovery processes and integrating these insights into the country's updated WPS NAP. The key research questions were:

- How have the environmental consequences of the war in Ukraine affected women and other marginalised groups?
- In what ways has climate change affected women and other vulnerable groups, particularly in conflict-affected areas?
- What are the key vulnerabilities of women and other vulnerable groups in post-conflict recovery processes, and how can both women's security and rights and attention to climate and the environment be built in early recovery efforts?
- How can attention to climate and the environment be integrated into Ukraine's WPS NAP and localised NAPs?

A mixed-methods approach was employed, encompassing desk research and semi-structured interviews. The desk research involved the collection and analysis of documents relating to the nexus of the war, environmental harms and gender inequalities, sourced from policy documents, civil society reports, academic papers and media articles. Interviews were conducted with important groups, such as government officials, civil society organisations, including women-led organisations, and international agencies, such as the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), which are engaged in women's security initiatives.

To ensure accuracy, relevance and comprehensiveness, data was triangulated where possible. There are, however, considerable limitations regarding data on the nexus of war, the environment and gender due to the ongoing war and its impacts on data accessibility and reliability. Even before the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, gender-disaggregated data was hard to obtain in Ukraine. Many sectors lack gender-disaggregated and intersectional data, making it difficult to analyse the specific impacts of environmental changes on men and women in areas like the economy, social issues, health and education. Additionally, there is almost no statistical basis for assessing how environmental policies affect the socio-economic activities

³ In a sense, it is about bringing together plans for gender-just recovery (see, for example: UN Women (2023), 'A gender responsive recovery for Ukraine: Introduction', Policy Brief (https://ukraine.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/policy_brief_recovery_long_version_sept_2023.pdf)) with plans for sustainable recovery (see, for example: Ecoaction (no date), 'Green post-war reconstruction of Ukraine' (<https://en.ecoaction.org.ua/topics/green-reconstruction>)).

of women and men, including those of different identity groups, with only limited indirect assessments or sociological surveys available.⁴

As one of the interviewees confirmed, “We are operating in an environment where data is either missing or limited to social surveys,” stressing that this lack of comprehensive data stymies an accurate understanding of gendered vulnerabilities in the face of environmental risks. While some institutions have funded studies on ‘climate injustice’ and identified women as particularly marginalised, there is still a general absence of empirical data to inform policy-making. The examples and statements presented below draw extensively on global data sourced from international organisations and surveys, and publications by multilateral institutions and non-governmental organisations, think tanks and institutes.

⁴ UN Population Fund (UNFPA) (2022), ‘Gender perspective of the environmental protection sector of Ukraine’ (https://ukraine.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/we_act_ecology_eng_report_1.pdf)

Findings

1

The environment, gender and security nexus in the Ukraine context

Both war and environmental challenges in Ukraine are gendered in their impacts, often resulting in women and girls facing compounding challenges to their security. The situation can be particularly challenging for women with disabilities, the elderly, and minorities such as the Roma community.

In terms of war, according to UN Women in 2024, 'Women in Ukraine face increased challenges in accessing security, justice, social services, mental, sexual and reproductive health services, employment, and other essential services. 72 per cent of people registered as unemployed are women. The war has also heightened the risks of gender-based violence (GBV), including conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), human trafficking, and intimate partner violence.' As the ones most often assigned the work of caring and providing for families, women have faced particular challenges when infrastructure, including energy and water supplies, healthcare facilities and food production, have been targeted and destroyed. In Mykolaiv, for example, the destruction of water infrastructure has left residents without access to clean drinking water since April 2022. This has forced families to rely on unsafe water sources, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases and complicating daily life, especially for women responsible for household chores.⁵

Women, especially those with limited mobility or from impoverished backgrounds, have faced disproportionate challenges when displaced by the war. This is in part due to the way displacement disrupts access to essential services, healthcare and support networks, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. Ukrainian women were more likely to work in low-income and/or undervalued sectors of the economy, which not only contributed to their economic hardship before the war, but placed them at greater risk of losing work as a consequence of the full-scale invasion.⁶

In terms of climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss and other environmental challenges, women have suffered in particular ways because, as the ones assigned the work of caring and providing for families, their work has become harder as a result of food and energy becoming more expensive or their livelihoods being disrupted or dangerous. The health implications of climate change have disproportionately impacted women and the elderly in Ukraine. Conditions like hypertension, heart disease and respiratory issues worsen with rapid environmental changes, and older women are particularly marginalised due to them having chronic diseases at higher rates. The increased temperatures and extreme weather events,

⁵ UNICEF (2023), 'UNICEF repairs a water supply system in Mykolaiv', 6 July (www.unicef.org/ukraine/en/stories/repair-of-water-supply-system-in-mykolaiv)

⁶ UN Women (2022), 'Global gendered impacts of the Ukraine crisis on energy access and food security and nutrition' (www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Policy-paper-Global-gendered-impacts-of-the-Ukraine-crisis-en.pdf)

such as heatwaves reaching up to 50°C,⁷ have made urban life more difficult, especially for those without air conditioning or adequate housing. Meanwhile, women in rural areas have been badly affected due to limited access to information, resources and services, which are predominantly concentrated in major cities like Kyiv and Lviv.⁸

Now war and environmental challenges have combined in Ukraine, we see these gendered harms mutually reinforce each other to intensify even further the threats to women's security and well-being. We see this most clearly through 'energy poverty'⁹, healthcare challenges for women, the elderly and children, a rise in food insecurity, water contamination and scarcity, as well as loss of livelihoods. The compounding effects of war and climate-induced energy crises have increased the strain on women-run households, particularly for older women and single mothers, who have been more likely to fall into energy poverty as they manage both childcare and household chores without adequate resources.¹⁰ Widespread power outages and shortages have also disproportionately affected women. As primary caretakers, women depend on household energy for daily tasks, and their lower average incomes – which are about 75–80 per cent of men's incomes – have limited their ability to invest in energy-efficient solutions or renewable resources.¹¹ Increased cases of child injuries have been reported due to alternative heating methods during blackouts.¹²

War and climate change act together to drive food insecurity, with women-headed households experiencing significantly higher rates compared to men-headed households. Prior to the war, there were already gendered patterns of food insecurity: 37.5 per cent of women-headed households in Ukraine faced moderate or severe food insecurity compared to 20.5 per cent of men-headed households.¹³ With the Russian invasion and climate change reducing access to food and making food more expensive, food insecurity is on the rise. In Ukraine, as in other war-affected contexts, food insecurity deepens gender inequalities as women go without food to prioritise the men in their families.¹⁴ Fifty-two (52) per cent of Ukrainian women say food security is one of their biggest concerns, compared with just 29 per cent of men.¹⁵

The lack of sustained access to water, caused primarily by the war but with roots in climate change, has exacerbated health risks for women and their children. The World Health Organization's (WHO's) 2023 'Winter Risk Assessment' for Ukraine emphasises the

⁷ Boris Sreznevsky Central Geophysical Observatory (2024), 'Temperature records of the capital' (<http://cgo-sreznevskiy.kyiv.ua/uk/diialnist/21213/244-pidsumki2>)

⁸ UN Women Ukraine (2022), 'In the words of rural women's network leader Sofia Burtak: "Rural women hold the key to Ukraine's food and social security"', 29 March

(<https://ukraine.unwomen.org/en/stories/za-slovamy/2022/06/za-slovamy-sofiyi-burtak-liderky-merezh-silskykh-zhinok-silski-zhinky-tse-klyuch-do-prodovolchoyi-ta-sotsialnoyi-bezpeky-ukrayiny>)

⁹ Energy poverty occurs when a household must reduce its energy consumption to a degree that negatively impacts the inhabitants' health and well-being. See, for example: European Commission (no date), 'Energy poverty' (https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/markets-and-consumers/energy-consumers-and-prosumers/energy-poverty_en#:~:text=Energy%20poverty%20occurs%20when%20a,performance%20of%20buildings%20and%20appliances)

¹⁰ UNFPA (2022), 'Gender perspective of the environmental protection sector of Ukraine' (https://ukraine.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/we_act_ecology_eng_report_1.pdf)

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Save the Children (2023), 'Heating bricks and melting ice: Creative ways Ukraine families are surviving this winter', 26 January (www.savethechildren.net/news/heating-bricks-and-melting-ice-creative-ways-ukraine-families-are-surviving-winter)

¹³ UN Women Europe and Central Asia (2022), 'New UN policy paper shows the devastating impacts of the Ukraine war on women and girls', Press Release, 23 September (<https://eca.unwomen.org/en/stories/press-release/2022/09/press-release-new-un-policy-paper-shows-the-devastating-impacts-of-the-ukraine-war-on-women-and-girls>)

¹⁴ UN Women (2022), 'Global gendered impacts of the Ukraine crisis on energy access and food security and nutrition' (www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/09/policy-paper-global-gendered-impacts-of-the-ukraine-crisis)

¹⁵ Njuki J, Kraft C (2024), 'Op-ed: How conflict drives hunger for women and girls', UN Women, 22 March (www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/op-ed/2024/03/op-ed-how-conflict-drives-hunger-for-women-and-girls)

compounded challenges faced by older adults due to infrastructure damage and displacement, which have exacerbated their marginalisation due to climate-induced health problems.¹⁶ UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) warns that malfunctioning water systems and inadequate heating can lead to increased cases of pneumonia, seasonal influenza, waterborne diseases and Covid-19 among children, with serious implications for women's workloads and mental well-being.¹⁷

Related to and underpinning all these harms is the way that both war and climate change undermine women's livelihoods. Women played a relatively large role in agriculture before the war, one of the sectors hit the hardest by the intersecting dynamics of war and climate change. The devastation caused to agriculture has contributed to the alarming levels of unemployment and economic insecurity among women.

It is important to note that even before Russia's full-scale invasion, the natural environment in Ukraine was under considerable stress. Climate change had already impacted various sectors of its economy and environment. The country had experienced a notable increase in average annual temperatures, rising by approximately 1.2 degrees Celsius (°C) between 1991 and 2015, surpassing the global average rate of warming. This trend has led to more frequent and severe heatwaves, droughts and extreme weather events, adversely affecting agricultural productivity and food security. Agriculture, which contributes about 14 per cent to Ukraine's gross domestic product (GDP), is particularly vulnerable, with drought conditions threatening crop yields and, consequently, the livelihoods of many Ukrainians. Additionally, changes in precipitation patterns have resulted in reduced water flows in major rivers like the Dnipro, exacerbating water scarcity issues for both the residential and industrial sectors. These issues also increase the risk of flooding, posing threats to infrastructure and rural communities.¹⁸

Russia's full-scale invasion has introduced new challenges. With an understanding of how both war and ecological breakdown impact women and girls in particular, as outlined above, we can understand how this most recent wave of environmental destruction can only exacerbate gendered insecurities.

Environmental destruction from industrial damage, widespread pollution and water contamination are severely impacting both ecosystem and human well-being. The destruction of water infrastructure, including the catastrophic breach of the Kakhovka Dam (see also below), has worsened conditions for agriculture, food security and access to clean water, with all that implies for women's insecurity.¹⁹ Additionally, hazardous contamination from damaged chemical plants, oil depots and military bombardments has polluted soil, rivers and the air, posing severe health risks to local populations.²⁰ The burning of forests and green zones due to shelling, meanwhile, has not only led to loss of biodiversity, but also accelerated climate

¹⁶ WHO (2023), 'Ukraine: 2023–2024 Winter Risk Assessment' (www.who.int/docs/librariesprovider2/default-document-library/risk-assessment-winter-in-ukraine_fin.pdf)

¹⁷ UNICEF (2022), 'Almost 7 million children in Ukraine at risk as attacks on energy infrastructure cause widespread blackouts and disruption of heating and water', Press Release, 13 December (www.unicef.org/press-releases/almost-7-million-children-ukraine-risk-attacks-energy-infrastructure-cause)

¹⁸ Pillai MM, Golub ES, Lokshin MM, Rakovych O, Ha TP (2021), 'Ukraine – Building Climate Resilience in Agriculture and Forestry (English)', World Bank Group (<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/893671643276478711/Ukraine-Building-Climate-Resilience-in-Agriculture-and-Forestry>)

¹⁹ UNICEF (2023), 'UNICEF receives additional support from Government of Japan for humanitarian response to impact Kakhovka dam destruction' (www.unicef.org/ukraine/en/press-releases/additional-support-from-government-of-japan)

²⁰ UN Environment Programme (2023), 'The toxic legacy of the Ukraine war', 22 February (www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/toxic-legacy-ukraine-war)

vulnerabilities and disrupted carbon sinks.²¹ Moreover, damage to nuclear facilities, such as incidents involving the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, has heightened fears of radiation risks, further compounding the ecological crisis and long-term health threats for people in the affected regions.²² It is well-known that radiation has particular health implications for women and their reproductive health. Ukraine's protected areas also face severe damage and threats due to the ongoing conflict, with up to 44 per cent of the country's nature reserves, national parks and other protected lands either directly affected or under immediate risk from military activities.²³

The destruction of the Kakhovka Dam on 6 June 2023, led to extensive flooding, environmental degradation and significant human displacement, with that displacement causing particular challenges for women, as above. Approximately 620 square kilometres of territory were submerged, impacting over 100,000 residents across the Kherson, Mykolaiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhia regions. The environmental repercussions were severe, with the floodwaters contaminating ecosystems and disrupting local agriculture. The disaster inflicted nearly \$14 billion in damage and losses, with an estimated \$5.04 billion required for recovery and reconstruction efforts.²⁴

A UNICEF report from December 2023 highlighted that the water and sanitation sector in Ukraine had sustained approximately \$2.2 billion in damage as of that date, pushing systems toward collapse. This damage resulted in more than 5.4 million people across 112 communities, including more than 910,000 children, lacking access to safe water, with all that implies for women's workloads and mental health. The report emphasises that the destruction of water infrastructure has led to significant pollution and contamination, making water quality in front-line areas among the worst in the country.²⁵

Greenhouse gas emissions from the war had reached 175 million tonnes by 2024, surpassing emissions of highly industrialised nations.²⁶ The environmental consequences of these emissions are profound. Greenhouse gases released during the conflict will persist in the atmosphere for decades, exacerbating climate change and its associated impacts.

Ukraine, which encompasses 6 per cent of Europe's landmass, harbours approximately 35 per cent of the continent's biodiversity, making it a critical reservoir of European flora and fauna.²⁷ The ongoing war has inflicted severe damage on this rich biodiversity, with some regions experiencing up to 80 per cent destruction of their forests.²⁸ The environmental devastation extends beyond ecological loss, significantly impacting human health and livelihoods, especially among marginalised communities. The destruction of forests and

²¹ Reuters (2024), 'Ukraine's vast forests devastated in hellscape of war'

(www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ukraine-crisis-environment-forests/)

²² International Atomic Energy Agency (no date), 'Nuclear safety, security and safeguards in Ukraine'

(www.iaea.org/topics/response/nuclear-safety-security-and-safeguards-in-ukraine)

²³ UN Environment Programme (UNEP) (2024), 'Landmark UN report: The world's migratory species of animals are in decline, and the global extinction risk is increasing' (www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/landmark-un-report-worlds-migratory-species-animals-are-decline-and)

²⁴ United Nations Ukraine (2023), 'Kakhovka Dam destruction inflicted US\$14 billion damage and loss on Ukraine: Government of Ukraine–UN report', Press Release, 17 October (<https://ukraine.un.org/en/249742-kakhovka-dam-destruction-inflicted-us14-billion-damage-and-loss-ukraine-government-ukraine>)

²⁵ Buechner M (2024), 'UNICEF won't stop helping children in Ukraine: full-scale war hits 2-year mark', UNICEF USA, 23 February (www.unicefusa.org/stories/unicef-wont-stop-helping-children-ukraine-full-scale-war-hits-2-year-mark)

²⁶ Rescue.org (2024), 'Ukraine: reframing the narrative of climate, environmental degradation and conflict', 23 September (www.rescue.org/report/ukraine-reframing-narrative-climate-environmental-degradation-and-conflict)

²⁷ Convention on Biological Diversity (no date), 'Ukraine – Country Profile' (www.cbd.int/countries/profile?country=ua)

²⁸ Reuters (2024), 'Ukraine's vast forests devastated in hellscape of war' (www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ukraine-crisis-environment-forests/)

natural habitats has led to increased air and water pollution, adversely affecting the health of local populations. Additionally, the loss of ecosystem services, such as clean water provision and soil fertility, has disrupted agricultural activities, undermining food security and economic stability for communities that depend on these resources.²⁹

The war has also resulted in the contamination of vast areas with unexploded ordnance and landmines, rendering large tracts of land unsafe for habitation or cultivation. This contamination disproportionately affects marginalised populations, who often rely on subsistence farming and have limited means to relocate or adapt to the loss of arable land.³⁰

This environmental devastation has been layered on top of a natural environment that has been shaped by centuries of imperial domination and extractivism.³¹ As Flamm and Kroll (2024) comment, 'Ukraine's natural endowment, its richness in mineral resources, oil and gas, fertile soil, powerful rivers as well as dense forests have been at the centre of imperial ambition and violence throughout Ukraine's history. Ukrainian ecosystems have long been exploited and exhausted for the benefit of external groups, with local populations more often than not suffering from resultant costs such as resource depletion, waste, pollution or radiation.' The environmentally destructive form of warfare conducted by the Russian Federation is in many ways a continuation of historical environmental injustices.

In summary, the impacts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on women have exacerbated pre-existing gendered inequalities. The environmental impacts of the Russian invasion also intertwine with pre-existing environmental challenges, including climate change, further deepening women's insecurity. In war, not only are lives lost, but inequalities are reinforced and ecological crises intensify. However, there is hope in the interconnectedness of these issues. By adopting policies and practices that address gender equality, environmental sustainability and inclusive recovery simultaneously in WPS NAPs, it is possible to foster progress across these areas. This holistic approach, often referred to as 'building back better', offers a path forward to tackle multiple challenges at once, promoting a more equitable and sustainable future, and so enhancing women's security.

2

Engendering plans for a sustainable recovery

What does it mean to engender plans for a sustainable recovery, and why do we need to?

As the previous section suggests, achieving the ultimate goal of the WPS Agenda – women's security – means addressing both war and environmental challenges such as climate change, due to their profound, disproportionate and interconnecting harmful impacts on women and girls. As Ukraine has already embarked on recovery and reconstruction work and has declared a commitment to simultaneously restore Ukraine's natural environment, there is an opportunity

²⁹ World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) (no date), 'Assessing the environmental impacts of the war in Ukraine' (<https://wwfcee.org/our-offices/ukraine/assessing-the-environmental-impacts-of-the-war-in-ukraine>)

³⁰ Reuters (2024), 'Ukraine's vast forests devastated in hellscape of war' (www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/ukraine-crisis-environment-forests/)

³¹ Flamm P, Kroll S (2024), 'Environmental (in)security, peacebuilding and green economic recovery in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine', *Environment and Security* 2 (1), pp 21–46 (<https://doi.org/10.1177/27538796241231332>)

for the WPS NAP to try and shape Ukraine's 'green recovery' to ensure it is also a plan that progresses women's rights and security. There are three elements to engendering plans for a sustainable recovery from war:

Working to support the community-level work to rebuild and recover in ways that are inclusive of women and other marginalised groups and simultaneously focused on protecting and supporting natural ecosystems. Support for community-level women's organisations doing this work is crucial, as is the creation of alliances between women's organisations, environmental organisations and other civil society groups. It is especially important for local feminist and women-led movements to collaborate with environmental movements, as their shared goal of systemic change forms the foundation of their work. Both movements strive to address structural inequalities and promote justice, creating pathways for lasting transformation. Their intersectional approach recognises that gender justice and environmental sustainability are inherently linked. By working together, they can amplify their impact and drive inclusive, equitable progress that benefits all communities in Ukraine.

Working to ensure women and other marginalised groups shape and inform planning processes. Given that women's organisations and women more generally are often excluded from power and less well resourced, this means funding them and supporting them to participate.³² It also means developing inclusive strategies that support women and marginalised groups in environmental decision-making processes.³³ By acknowledging and addressing the intersectionality of gender and environmental issues, policies can be more effective and equitable, leading to comprehensive solutions that benefit all members of society.

Working to ensure that the overall aims and shape of the economic recovery progress the security of women and girls, as well as support the recovery of nature. For genuinely just, inclusive and sustainable peace, recovery and reconstruction models need to be geared towards meeting human needs and regenerating ecosystems.³⁴ The focus should be less on securing GDP growth at all costs but rather on promoting the well-being of both people and nature.³⁵ Such an economy prioritises the provision of decent, well-rewarded, environmentally friendly job opportunities for men, women and other marginalised groups. This means *both* supporting women into jobs in the traditionally men-dominated sectors associated with green recovery models, such as renewable energy, sustainable infrastructure building and public transport, *and* investing in sectors that are traditionally women dominated, essential for societal recovery and already relatively green, such as health, education, childcare and social care. An economy that is geared to advance women's security as well as environmental sustainability also prioritises gender-responsive basic services, including access to affordable energy and clean water. Finally, but crucially, it prioritises protecting and regenerating ecosystems, and the job opportunities provided in this work.

³² UN Women (2023) 'A gender responsive recovery for Ukraine: Introduction', Policy Brief (<https://ukraine.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/09/policy-brief-a-gender-responsive-recovery-for-ukraine-introduction>)

³³ UN Development Programme (UNDP) (2022), 'Gender equality: A cornerstone for environmental and climate justice', Blog, 29 March (www.undp.org/blog/gender-equality-cornerstone-environmental-and-climate-justice)

³⁴ See: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2024), 'Feminist approach as the basis of fair reconstruction of Ukraine' 22 February (<https://ukraine.fes.de/en/e/feministisch-nii-pidkhd-jak-osnova-spravedlivoji-vidbudovi-ukrajini.html>); and Yurchenko Y (2023), 'Rebuilding Ukraine will require radical economic change', Open Democracy, 15 June (www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/rebuilding-ukraine-rethinking-global-economy-marshall-plan/)

³⁵ Feminist and ecological economists provide numerous roadmaps to such alternative economic models, ones that address the root causes of both conflict and environmental degradation. See, for example: Feminist Economic Justice for People & Planet (2021), 'A feminist and decolonial global green new deal: principles, paradigms and systemic transformations', Issue Brief (https://wedo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/FemEconClimate-ActionNexus_Brief_FemGND-1.pdf)

3

Review of existing programming and initiatives

This section surveys the initiatives already underway in Ukraine to address reconstruction and recovery in ways that are both equality promoting *and* climate and nature friendly. It structures this discussion by taking each of the elements or components required to engender a sustainable recovery listed above, starting with initiatives at the community level, moving on to consider whether women are meaningfully included in policy- and decision-making, and finishing with a brief discussion on the overall aims and shape of the recovery model. Before we discuss the various initiatives, however, we set out Ukraine's formal obligations and commitments to advancing both gender equality and environmental sustainability, which can help bolster the case for stepping up activity across all three levels of engendering recovery.

Ukraine's commitments at the national and international levels on gender and the environment

The Government of Ukraine is a signatory to various international conventions and resolutions on both gender equality and the environment, so has certain legal obligations to progress gender equality and protect the environment. It has also, despite the war, enacted several pieces of domestic legislation in support of both, building up an impressive policy framework. The challenge is to live up to these obligations and aspirations. A selection of the obligations is presented in Box 1.

Box 1: Ukraine's obligations and commitments to gender equality and environmental protection

Gender equality and women's empowerment

Ukraine has joined and adopted most of the important international and regional treaties and has integrated these commitments into several national laws and policies. This commitment is notably enshrined in its adoption or ratification of:

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979)
- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) (1995)
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325)
- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015)
- The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence ('the Istanbul Convention') (2022)

Environmental protection

Under the Paris Climate Accord and its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), Ukraine is currently committed to reducing its carbon emissions by 65 per cent from 1990 levels by 2030.

Ukraine is a legally committed contracting party to the European Union (EU) Energy Community legal framework, including its Decarbonisation Roadmap.

Despite the ongoing conflict, Ukraine has consistently strengthened its climate policy framework, as evidenced by:

- 2023 legislation to boost renewable energy investment and modernise the energy system
- 2024 climate legislation, which legally enshrined Ukraine's goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050, aligning with European Union timelines
- its 2024 National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP), which harmonises environmental, energy and economic policies for Ukraine's sustainable development

Ukraine is also one of a small number of states to have included ecocide as a crime in domestic legislation and to advocate for the international recognition of ecocide in international law.³⁶

Component One: Initiatives at the community level to engender environmental protection

There are many community-led initiatives in Ukraine that demonstrate the potential to achieve multiple goals – recovery from war, women's security and environmental sustainability – simultaneously.

Despite numerous challenges, women have emerged as leaders in environmental protection and climate adaptation in Ukraine in various ways. Women-headed households have adapted to crises by forming informal networks that facilitate resource sharing, mutual aid and community protection. These networks often bridge the gap where formal systems are limited or absent, helping to build strength at the community level. They also lead local initiatives to restore ecosystems and promote sustainable energy solutions. Women's organisations have implemented community-based adaptation strategies and eco-friendly technologies, addressing the unique vulnerabilities women face. This activity is essential for fostering long-term resilience, equitable climate action and sustainable development in Ukraine's recovery.

One example that were mentioned at the interviews with Ukrainian representatives of civil society was the 'Green Road', a network of Ukrainian ecovillage and permaculture communities involved in ongoing emergency support for people fleeing the war. This network mobilised its members to host people from the cities. At first the idea was just emergency shelter, but the initiative has developed to focus on collaborative efforts to grow food in sustainable ways, and to provide work opportunities as well as support and education to people forced to flee. Women have been at the heart of this initiative and have been able to demonstrate the success of both their leadership skills and agro-ecological work at scale.³⁷

Other initiatives that were also highlighted at the interviews, such as EcoHubs and other local environmental groups, often led by women, focus on waste management, biodiversity conservation and community resilience.³⁸ Women have engaged in the creation of recycling systems, urban greening projects and conservation of natural parks.³⁹ Another important project is the Rozsadnyk community garden initiative in Lviv, where people come together to grow vegetables for restaurants that provide free meals to those in need, including internally

³⁶ Ecocide Law (2023), 'Ecocide law in national jurisdictions' (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/27538796241231332#bibr21-27538796241231332>)

³⁷ See: GEN Ukraine, Homepage (<https://genukraine.com.ua/index.php/en/>)

³⁸ Yves Rocher (no date), 'Women who create a new tomorrow' (www.yves-rocher.ua/actbeautiful/women-who-create-new-tomorrow)

³⁹ UNFPA (2022), 'Gender perspective of the environmental protection sector of Ukraine' (https://ukraine.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/we_act_ecology_eng_report_1.pdf)

displaced populations. This initiative serves as a hub for environmental education, promoting sustainable practices such as composting, water conservation and using native plant species. These are just a few but very prominent and known examples of projects that are already taking place in Ukraine. Additionally, women in communities play vital roles in restoring a sense of connection to nature and fostering intergenerational knowledge exchange.

Community environmental initiatives are supported by a new 'Climate Index'.⁴⁰ This initiative aims to support municipalities and local authorities to evaluate their progress on climate action, identify areas for improvement, and ensure alignment with national and international climate commitments. It is too early to assess whether this initiative has made a difference, but it has provided a promising framework for ensuring that environmental policies are inclusive, resilient and community driven.

There are many good examples of work at the local level that advance both gender equality and environmental sustainability simultaneously, often led by women. Women face considerable barriers and obstacles in this work, however, due to lack of access to resources and institutional support. New barriers have also arisen as a result of the war. Women constitute about 46 per cent of Ukraine's environmental workforce, playing pivotal roles in biodiversity preservation and ecological research,⁴¹ but the war has forced many women to prioritise family safety over other work. Addressing these challenges requires targeted support for women in the environmental sector, ensuring their safety and enabling their continued participation in conservation and ecological restoration initiatives.

Component Two: Women's representation in decision- and policy-making, helping to shape the green recovery

The second element of engendering recovery is working to make sure that women are participating in decision- and policy-making. In the face of ongoing security challenges, women have not only adapted to new roles, but are actively shaping the environmental security agenda in Ukraine. For example, as shared by one of the interviewees, the Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group (UNCG) has implemented contracts with protected areas that include gender equality standards. UNCG has mandated equitable participation, leadership opportunities and resource access for women and other marginalised groups in all their work, from fieldwork to policy formulation. Such standards help to dismantle barriers to gender equity, fostering an inclusive and balanced approach to environmental conservation that benefits all members of society. Through these measures, UNCG exemplifies how gender considerations can be integrated into environmental policy and practice, strengthening both outcomes and community cohesion. The Women's Energy Club of Ukraine (WECU), a professional association of more than 150 women in energy-related fields, also shapes policy and practice. WECU members include energy experts, representatives from Ukrainian and international organisations, and members of the Ukrainian Parliament's Committee on Energy and Utility Services. The organisation actively promotes women's representation in energy policy and renewable energy projects, contributing to the sector's reform and development.

Women-led initiatives have shaped the approach towards rebuilding critical infrastructure, helping to ensure sustainable energy solutions. The Energy Act for Ukraine Foundation, established by Yuliana Onishchuk, focuses on rebuilding critical infrastructure like schools and

⁴⁰ UNDP (2024), 'Blooming hope: Reconnecting with nature for resilience and climate action in Ukraine', 21 October (www.undp.org/stories/blooming-hope-reconnecting-nature-resilience-and-climate-action-ukraine)

⁴¹ UNFPA (2022), 'Gender perspective of the environmental protection sector of Ukraine', 20 June (<https://ukraine.unfpa.org/en/publications/gender-perspective-environmental-protection-sector-ukraine>)

hospitals with solar panels, ensuring not only more reliable power supplies but cutting carbon emissions.

Interviewees underscored the way women-led organisations have evolved in recent years from traditional activism into meaningful legislative engagement. This shift reflects a broader transformation in Ukrainian activism, as organisations now focus on policy reforms and legislative processes rather than only on advocacy campaigns. “Activism has moved from protest signs to legislative work”, interviewees said, noting that many women in the environmental sector now work on drafting amendments and submitting proposals to ensure that environmental reforms consider gendered impacts.

However, these efforts are often hindered by a lack of institutional support. Women remain marginalised from formal decision-making spaces. They lack access to the resources and opportunities necessary to influence policies and strategies at the national and local levels. The absence of gender perspectives in environmental governance has left women’s issues underrepresented in crucial areas like resource distribution, disaster preparedness and community resilience. This structural exclusion exacerbates women’s marginalisation, particularly in rural and conflict-affected regions.

As interviewees also mentioned, funding opportunities for women-focused environmental advocacy are limited, with many organisations struggling to maintain sustainable operations. The embassies of some EU member states have been supporting environmental civil society organisations in Ukraine. Despite these efforts, funding for gender-focused environmental projects remains limited. A 2023 report by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) highlights that lack of financial support has created significant barriers to women’s effective participation in environmental governance.⁴²

A major critique is the limited transparency and accessibility of existing platforms and alliances. For instance, while networks such as the Alliance for Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Recovery⁴³ was launched at the Ukraine Recovery Conference on 12 June 2024 in Berlin, Germany, access to participate remains restricted or unclear for many interested partners (such as civil society and women-led organisations). Lack of transparency and absence of established working groups further exacerbate the disconnect between high-level initiatives and the communities they aim to support. Platforms often focus on reporting within ministries without offering actionable avenues for wider participation and meaningful engagement.

Interviewees frequently commented that much of Ukraine’s environmental policy is simply “stamped” from EU models without being tailored to local realities. When work is driven by donor funding or corporate sponsorship, the outcome is often patchy implementation and lack of integration into government- or locally-led recovery frameworks. Civil society, including women’s groups, need to be resourced and supported to drive green recovery, if it is to be inclusive and foster women’s security.

New barriers have also arisen as a result of the war. As observed above, the conflict has forced many women to prioritise family safety over professional commitments, leading to a significant reduction in skilled personnel shaping the environmental sector, as noted by one of

⁴² UNDP (2024), ‘Partners launch Alliance for Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Recovery in Ukraine’, 12 June (www.undp.org/ukraine/press-releases/partners-launch-alliance-gender-responsive-and-inclusive-recovery-ukraine)

⁴³ United Nations Ukraine (2024) ‘Alliance for Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Recovery in Ukraine launched with strong support of governments, UN agencies, private sector and civil society’, Press Release, 12 June (<https://ukraine.un.org/en/271438-alliance-gender-responsive-and-inclusive-recovery-ukraine-launched-strong-support>)

the interviewees. Many of the women who step up to fill these roles now face additional challenges, as public expectations of traditional gender roles still dominate, despite the high demands and risks often involved in environmental policy and security work. Addressing these challenges requires targeted support for women who are trying to shape environmental policy. As one of the interviewees shared, “Where women are in leadership, they bring a more inclusive approach, one that is attentive to community needs and resilience-building.”

Component Three: engendering Ukrainian national recovery plans at the macro level

As noted above, the Government of Ukraine, supported by the EU and other significant donors, has committed to prioritising the environment in its recovery and reconstruction plans. Together, they have pledged to embark on a ‘green recovery’. This green recovery focuses on reducing carbon emissions by transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable forms of energy, but this is a relatively narrow conceptualisation of sustainability. If economic recovery is to be truly sustainable and simultaneously able to contribute to women’s security, gender experts argue that we need a more fundamental transition: from an extractivist model of development to a regenerative one.⁴⁴

In this regard, the picture is concerning. Ukraine’s significant biodiversity and rich natural resources make it a prime target for extractive industries, both domestically and involving external organisations. Economies based on the extraction and export of natural resources tend not to contribute to women’s security or environmental sustainability.⁴⁵ This is because they rarely provide plentiful decent, well-rewarded jobs, especially for women, and tend to degrade the natural environment. Interviewees underscored the view that Ukraine is often seen internationally as an agricultural territory, likening it to a plantation. “They see us as an agrarian country”, one interviewee said, pointing to the risk of Ukraine being reduced to a resource provider without considering the costs to its people and land. The private sector’s involvement in agriculture often prioritises profit over ecological or social recovery. This concern is heightened by the threat of weakened institutions and regulatory gaps that can emerge in post-war recovery, creating vulnerabilities to exploitation.

Large sections of Ukrainian civil society demand that Ukraine must ‘build back better’.⁴⁶ They argue that for genuinely just, inclusive and sustainable peace, recovery and reconstruction, models need to be geared towards meeting human needs and regenerating ecosystems.⁴⁷ The focus should be less on securing GDP growth at all costs but rather on promoting the well-being of both people and nature.⁴⁸ Given that decent jobs are a crucial part of enabling people to recover, and that the prioritisation of ‘green jobs’ is critical for the restoration of the natural

⁴⁴ See, for example: Feminist Economic Justice for People & Planet (2021), ‘A feminist and decolonial global green new deal: principles, paradigms and systemic transformations’, Issue Brief (https://wedo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/FemEconClimate-ActionNexus_Brief_FemGND-1.pdf)

⁴⁵ See, for example: Cohn C, Duncanson C (2020), ‘Whose recovery? IFI prescriptions for postwar states’, *Review of International Political Economy* 27 (6), pp 1214–1234 (<https://doi.org/eux.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/09692290.2019.1677743>); True J, Rees M, Chinkin C, Isaković NP, Mlinarević G, Svedberg B (2018), ‘A feminist perspective on post-conflict restructuring and recovery: the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina’ (<https://doi.org/10.26180/5ba9ca9f08a20>)

⁴⁶ Build Ukraine Back Better, Homepage (<https://buildukrainebackbetter.org/>)

⁴⁷ See: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2024), ‘Feminist approach as the basis of fair reconstruction of Ukraine’ 22 February (<https://ukraine.fes.de/en/e/feministichnii-pidkhd-jak-osnova-spravedlivoji-vidbudovi-ukrajini.html>); and Yurchenko Y (2023), ‘Rebuilding Ukraine will require radical economic change’, Open Democracy, 15 June (www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/rebuilding-ukraine-rethinking-global-economy-marshall-plan/)

⁴⁸ Feminist and ecological economists provide numerous roadmaps to such alternative economic models, ones that address the root causes of both conflict and environmental degradation. See, for example: Feminist Economic Justice for People & Planet (2021), ‘A feminist and decolonial global green new deal: principles, paradigms and systemic transformations’, Issue Brief (https://wedo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/FemEconClimate-ActionNexus_Brief_FemGND-1.pdf)

environment, it is important that these green employment opportunities are plentiful, well-rewarded and accessible to women. As explained above, this means *both* supporting women into jobs in the traditionally men-dominated sectors associated with green recovery models, such as renewable energy, sustainable infrastructure building and public transport, *and* investing in sectors that are traditionally women dominated, essential for societal recovery and already relatively green, such as health, education, childcare and social care.⁴⁹ An economy geared to advance women's security as well as environmental sustainability also prioritises gender-responsive basic services, including access to affordable energy and clean water.⁵⁰ Finally but significantly, it prioritises protecting and regenerating ecosystems, and the job opportunities provided in this work.⁵¹ Practical ways to take steps towards these just, inclusive and sustainable economic models exist and are set out in our recommendations.

The evidence available suggests limited progress in terms of engendering Ukraine's green recovery plans at the macro level. Estimates suggest that women account for approximately 27 per cent of the energy workforce in Ukraine.⁵² Other sources indicate women make up only 22 per cent of the workforce in traditional energy industries and about 31 per cent in renewable energy, and that women in the energy sector tend to face slower career progression and lower pay than men.⁵³ There is clearly much work that could be done to ensure the green recovery progresses women's security by ensuring there are decent, well-rewarded jobs in these sectors and supporting women into them.

In addition to supporting women into traditionally male-dominated fields, creating an economic recovery that fosters women's security requires investment in the care sector, which is broadly defined to include health and education as well as childcare and social care. Jobs in these sectors are already relatively green and tend to be dominated by women. Investment here can contribute to women's economic security and also support societal recovery from war.⁵⁴ Investment in nature restoration and regeneration can also support plentiful and rewarding jobs, including opportunities for women.⁵⁵ Yet, available evidence suggests that the opposite is happening, with cuts to the care economy being enacted – so exacerbating women's insecurity.⁵⁶

Of crucial importance, this vision of a just, inclusive and sustainable recovery, one that can advance women's security and environment goals simultaneously, is not possible if that recovery is funded by loans, rather than grants, and by foreign private sector investment with

⁴⁹ UN Women (2021), 'Beyond Covid-19: A feminist plan for sustainability and social justice' (<https://wrd.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Feminist-plan-for-sustainability-and-social-justice-en.pdf>).

⁵⁰ See, for example, Action Aid's report and recommendations on the importance of inclusive public services for women's security: Action Aid (2023), 'Stand up for inclusive public services' (www.actionaid.org.uk/publications/stand-inclusive-public-services)

⁵¹ See, for example, WWF's report on the potential of this sector for job creation: WWF (2020), 'Nature hires: how nature-based solutions can power a green jobs recovery' (https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?943816/Nature-based-solutions-jobs-report)

⁵² The German-Ukrainian Energy Partnership, Homepage (<https://energypartnership-ukraine.org/>)

⁵³ Povaha (2020), 'Why does climate change affect women and men differently and how can this be changed?', 29 December (<https://povaha.org.ua/chomu-zmina-klimatu-po-riznomu-vplyvaje-na-zhinok-i-cholovikiv-ta-yak-tse-zminyty/?fbclid=IwAR1gq0FtUxBES90svJmVkCzGPEX4dBbmeI9W6hyTSMaZhC5SIBHrw8df5oo>)

⁵⁴ Yurchenko Y (2023), 'Rebuilding Ukraine will require radical economic change', June (www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/rebuilding-ukraine-rethinking-global-economy-marshall-plan/)

⁵⁵ WWF (2020), 'Nature hires: how nature-based solutions can power a green jobs recovery' (https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?943816/Nature-based-solutions-jobs-report)

⁵⁶ Farbar K, Rowley T (2023), 'Ukraine is reforming its welfare system as the cost of war rises', Open Democracy, April; Cooper L, Kaldor M (2022), 'In Europe's gift: How to avoid a Ukraine "forever war"', Blog, September (<https://ecfr.eu/article/in-europes-gift-how-to-avoid-a-ukraine-forever-war/>); Cooper L (2022), 'Market economics in an all-out-war? Assessing economic and political risks to the Ukrainian war effort', Conflict and Civiness Research Group, The London School of Economics, December (<https://peacerep.org/publication/market-economics-ukraine/>)

its demand for generous financial returns.⁵⁷ Loans and private sector investment tend to trap war-affected countries in debt and so force them to prioritise export-led extractivist economic development, which drives inequalities, including gender inequalities, and ecological degradation.⁵⁸ There are indications that this is already happening in Ukraine.⁵⁹

All that said, any meaningful recovery effort must begin with an end to the war itself. The ongoing conflict continues to undermine recovery prospects, exacerbate inequalities and drive further ecological destruction, making peace a prerequisite for effective reconstruction.

4

Learning from other contexts

There are no contexts in which recovery from war has been comprehensively just, inclusive and environmentally sustainable. In most contexts, countries emerging from war are severely indebted and in need of external finance; as indicated above, this forces them into a position of prioritising extractivist export-led development, which, as we have seen, tends to drive gender inequalities and ecological degradation. There are, however, promising initiatives from other contexts where we can see elements of an alternative path, one that can enable war-affected countries to rebuild and recover in ways that simultaneously progress gender equality and environmental sustainability.

- In 2000, South Africa's Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act (PPPFA) was established to enact preferential treatment to individuals and groups who suffered discrimination under apartheid. It aimed to enhance the participation of historically disadvantaged groups in the economy through the allocation of contracts to South African-owned enterprises, the creation of new jobs at the local level, and by supporting micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) owned by Black people. It used targets and quotas to reach businesses owned by women in particular. The adoption of a socially inclusive public procurement policy also worked as an amplifier, fostering targeted action toward disadvantaged groups and individuals historically excluded from participating in the economy.⁶⁰
- An important part of protecting the environment in Colombia's recovery from war has been the granting of legal rights to ecosystems and species through court rulings. As with other legal mechanisms, such as laws against ecocide and laws safeguarding a healthy, safe and sustainable environment, granting rights of nature helps secure safe and clean water. This is essential for women's security and well-being, given their roles in caring and

⁵⁷ Lyubchenko O (2022), 'Neoliberal reconstruction of Ukraine: a social reproduction analysis', in *Gender Studies* special issue, May [also see shorter version: <https://lefteast.org/frontiers-of-whiteness-expropriation-war-social-reproduction-in-ukraine/>]; Yurchenko Y (2023), 'Rebuilding Ukraine will require radical economic change', June (www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/rebuilding-ukraine-rethinking-global-economy-marshall-plan/)

⁵⁸ See, for example, Cohn C, Duncanson C (2020), 'Whose recovery? IFI prescriptions for postwar states', *Review of International Political Economy* 27 (6), pp 1214–1234 (<https://doi.org.eux.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/09692290.2019.1677743>); True J, Rees M, Chinkin C, Isaković NP, Mlinarević G, Svedberg B (2018), 'A feminist perspective on post-conflict restructuring and recovery: the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina' (<https://doi.org/10.26180/5ba9ca9f08a20>)

⁵⁹ Yurchenko Y (2023), 'Rebuilding Ukraine will require radical economic change' (www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/rebuilding-ukraine-rethinking-global-economy-marshall-plan/)

⁶⁰ See: International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) (2023), 'Gender equality at the heart of recovery: Advocating for gender-responsive procurement in Ukraine', 28 June (www.iisd.org/articles/deep-dive/gender-equality-heart-recovery-advocating-gender-responsive-procurement-ukraine)

providing for families and communities, their specific health needs, and their livelihoods. Granting legal rights to ecosystems acts as a curb on abuses of power by extractive industries. Due to the way these rights tend to be hard-fought for by communities, often led by women and other marginalised groups, they also contribute to the building of community strength and flexibility after war.⁶¹

Lessons can also be drawn from countries recovering not from war, but from the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the harms were not nearly as severe as the harms of war, the pandemic also exacerbated women's insecurities. Some countries have prioritised investment in the care economy as an important plank of recovery from Covid-19.

- Canada, for instance, in its 2021 budget, recognised women and the care economy as central to economic recovery. It created a nationwide affordable childcare system, with the goal of cutting childcare costs for families by half by 2022. Specific allocations are earmarked to improve service quality and accessibility, including for children with disabilities and families in Indigenous communities. Estimates suggest that the creation of a universal childcare system could create over 300,000 jobs over the next decade and enable up to 725,000 women to join the labour force. The combined effect would raise additional government revenue of between CA\$17 billion and CA\$29 billion per year, demonstrating the ways that investment in care should not be seen as expenditure but an investment with multiple rewards.⁶²
- These three examples can provide inspiration for initiatives to contribute to women's security and environmental sustainability simultaneously in Ukraine and could be incorporated into the next WPS NAP.

⁶¹ UNDP (2024), 'Five women at the forefront of climate action in Colombia', Photo Stories, 14 October (<https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/five-women-forefront-climate-action-colombia>)

⁶² For the Canadian and multiple other examples, see: UN Women (2021), 'Beyond Covid-19: A feminist plan for sustainability and social justice' (<https://wrd.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/Feminist-plan-for-sustainability-and-social-justice-en.pdf>). For the ways in which investment in the care economy leads to multiple benefits, see: Seguino S (2016), 'Financing for gender equality in the context of Sustainable Development Goals', 18 December, Political Economy Research Institute (<https://peri.umass.edu/?view=article&id=930:financing-for-gender-equality-in-the-context-of-sdgs&catid=151>)

Recommendations

Given the mutually reinforcing harmful impacts of war and environmental crises on women and girls, achieving the goals of the WPS Agenda requires working to ensure that Ukraine's recovery plans foster the security of women and girls and environmental sustainability together. In the WPS NAP, the Government of Ukraine could usefully consider actions relating to the three components of engendering recovery outlined in this report: supporting women's work to protect and regenerate nature; ensuring women's participation in policymaking; and orienting the economic recovery model to the meeting of human needs and ecosystem regeneration. The final component is admittedly high level, but the evidence in this report indicates that without efforts to orient the economy towards more just, inclusive and sustainable models at the macro level, initiatives to support women's participation in policymaking and inclusive environmental actions in their communities will be significantly undermined. By including high-level commitments to orient the economy, the NAP can set the stage for sustainable and gender-sensitive recovery. Many NAPs worldwide have adopted similar approaches, embedding overarching objectives that guide local and national actions to create coherent, impactful responses to gendered and environmental challenges. This alignment ensures that efforts at all levels reinforce one another, driving holistic and lasting change.

For the Government of Ukraine to include in its WPS NAP:

1. Broaden the green recovery, from a focus on reducing carbon emissions to the creation of a just, inclusive and sustainable economy, by adopting the measures outlined in this report. Most important among these are:
 - A. Moving beyond GDP growth as the only goal and measure of success and instead prioritise meeting people's needs, tackling inequalities, and protecting and restoring nature. Measure progress against these goals.
 - B. Following the feminist principle 'divest from harm and invest in care'. Instead of prioritising sectors of the economy that contribute to environmental harm and gender-inequality, invest in the sectors that promote gender equality and environmental restoration. These include social infrastructure (for example, childcare, social care, health and education); gender-responsive public services, including the provision of affordable, accessible, renewable energy and clean water; and the protection, restoration and regeneration of nature.
 - C. Focusing on creating decent, well-paid and rewarded, environmentally friendly 'green jobs', and ensuring equal access to these employment opportunities so as to simultaneously progress gender equality. Provide support for workers in agriculture and in rural areas more generally, especially women. Adopt a gender-sensitive approach to public procurement.⁶³

⁶³ IISD (2023) 'Gender equality at the heart of recovery: Advocating for gender-responsive procurement in Ukraine', 28 June (www.iisd.org/articles/deep-dive/gender-equality-heart-recovery-advocating-gender-responsive-procurement-ukraine)

- D. Ensuring the full suite of tools to guarantee recovery advances gender equality, as recommended by UN Women.⁶⁴ This includes comprehensive gender impact assessments to gauge the differential effects of recovery measures, gender needs assessments that capture the diverse needs of women and marginalised groups, and gender-responsive budgeting to ensure resource allocation aligns with equality goals. These tools should be applied across national, regional and local recovery plans, informed by robust gender-disaggregated data and community-driven processes.
 - E. Adopting and utilising the necessary laws and regulations to ensure that corporations respect human rights, minimise pollution, and pay sufficient tax and royalties to contribute to a just, inclusive and sustainable recovery. Incorporate into domestic law the UN right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and Rights of Nature (RoN) to complement Ukraine's already-existing law on Ecocide. The proposed UN Treaty on Transnational Corporations and Human Rights⁶⁵ could help hold multinational corporations accountable for environmental damage and human rights violations, addressing potential exploitation during Ukraine's reconstruction. Reforms to limit the use of investor–state dispute settlement (ISDS) courts could protect Ukraine's regulatory sovereignty in rebuilding sustainably.
2. Ensure women and other marginalised groups participate in decision-making on and policy-making for recovery plans and environmental policies. This can be achieved by, for example:
- A. Creating inclusive governance structures to ensure local-level women's groups play a role in decision-making processes. Establish forums at the local and national levels where women can shape climate adaptation, environmental protection and green recovery policies. For example, invite women-led organisations and civil society representatives to the Alliance for Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Recovery in Ukraine, and to similar initiatives that are mainly aimed at governments, major international financial institutions (IFIs), UN agencies, the EU, numerous partners from civil society and the private sector, but lack connections at the local level.
 - B. Providing targeted funding, technical support and training for women-led initiatives in environmental sustainability, green technology and community resilience. Ensure these efforts are designed to enable women's active participation and influence in decision- and policy-making processes. Special emphasis should be placed on marginalised women, including those in rural and conflict-affected areas, so they have the resources, skills and platforms necessary to lead and shape recovery strategies, ensuring their unique needs and contributions are reflected in local and national policies.
 - C. Formalising women's leadership in policy. Implement mechanisms, such as quotas or mandatory participation requirements, to guarantee women's leadership roles in high-level decision-making bodies related to recovery and environmental policy, such as the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, the Committee of the Verkhovna Rada on Environmental Policy and Nature Management, the National Recovery Council, the State Environmental Inspectorate, the Ministry for

⁶⁴ UN Women (2023), 'A gender responsive recovery for Ukraine: Introduction', Policy Brief (https://ukraine.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/policy_brief_recovery_long_version_sept_2023.pdf)

⁶⁵ See <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/big-issues/governing-business-human-rights/un-binding-treaty/>

Communities and Territories Development, the State Agency of Water Resources, the State Forest Resources Agency, etc.

D. Working to remove the barriers to women's participation in policy and decision-making regarding a just, inclusive and sustainable economy, which include poverty, unequal caring responsibilities, unequal healthcare provision and GBV. Some examples on how to overcome these barriers can include:

- initiatives that provide financial support, training and resources to women, particularly those in poverty, to improve economic independence and increase their ability to participate in policy and decision-making forums
- initiatives that provide accessible, affordable childcare and eldercare services, reducing unequal caring responsibilities that often fall on women, so freeing up time and energy for their involvement in decision-making
- policies and programmes that guarantee equitable healthcare provision for women, including reproductive health services, mental health support and services tailored to survivors of violence
- prevention and response mechanisms for GBV through increased funding for shelters, legal assistance and rehabilitation programmes, alongside strong enforcement of laws against GBV
- leadership and advocacy training for women, particularly marginalised groups, to build the skills and confidence necessary to engage in policy processes and decision-making roles
- inclusive forums and policy platforms to amplify the voices of women and other marginalised groups in decision-making processes, ensuring their perspectives shape economic planning at every level
- temporary special measures such as quotas to guarantee a minimum representation of women in decision-making bodies, ensuring they have influence over policy directions

3. Support community-led initiatives that are aimed at tackling, simultaneously, all three elements of the nexus: gender inequalities, environmental harms and the impacts of war. This can be done, for example, by:

- A.** Expanding financial and technical backing for women-led or otherwise inclusive recovery projects that involve nature restoration, biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture and waste management. Adopt the principles of feminist funding – flexible, long-term support, without onerous application and reporting procedures.⁶⁶
- B.** Establishing and supporting national and regional frameworks to enable effective local-level action. Facilitate cooperation between women's organisations, environmental organisations, trade unions and other civil society groups.

⁶⁶ Enriquez-Enriquez M, de Vries T (2024), 'Embedding feminist principles in grant-making: A win-win for donors and grantees', Alliance, 17 October (www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/embedding-feminist-principles-in-grant-making-a-win-win-for-donors-and-grantees/)

- C. Supporting community initiatives to tackle energy poverty by providing subsidies for renewable energy technologies, support for democratising control over energy, and training for women to increase their leadership of these initiatives.
- D. Providing training and resources to support women-led organisations and local authorities to integrate gender and environmental dimensions into recovery projects. This includes support for eco-friendly agricultural practices, water resource management and disaster risk reduction strategies.
- E. Working to remove barriers to women's participation and leadership of community-level recovery and rebuilding initiatives.

For the UK Government

To support the Government of Ukraine to prioritise a just, inclusive and sustainable recovery in its WPS NAP, the UK Government can do a range of things, some involving international diplomacy and advocacy for structural reforms and others involving more direct support.

In terms of international advocacy, given the fact that Ukraine will not be able to achieve a just, inclusive and sustainable recovery if it is trapped in debt, and beholden to private investors, the UK Government should:

- **Advocate for debt relief and aid mechanisms.** Ensure that aid to Ukraine primarily takes the form of grants rather than loans, reducing long-term debt dependency. Promote international frameworks for debt relief to free up resources for inclusive recovery efforts.⁶⁷
- **Push for the seizure of assets and ensure corporate accountability.** Encourage the seizure of Russian Federation assets to fund recovery and advocate for strong international mechanisms that hold corporations accountable for taxes, royalties, and adherence to environmental and human rights laws.⁶⁸
- **Push for 'polluter pays principle' implementation.** Work with international partners to ensure polluting organisations, including corporations, bear financial responsibility for environmental damage, reinforcing Ukraine's capacity for sustainable recovery.

In terms of direct support to the Government of Ukraine, the UK Government can fund and provide technical assistance for many of the measures outlined above. These can be categorised according to support for the four main elements to engendering a sustainable recovery.

⁶⁷ As called for by the Jubilee Debt campaign (see: Chow H (2022), 'Cancel Ukraine's debt', Debt Justice, 21 March (<https://debtjustice.org.uk/news/cancel-ukraines-debt/>)); Ukrainian feminist economists, such as Yuliya Yurchenko (see: Yurchenko Y (2023), 'Rebuilding Ukraine will require radical economic change', June (www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/rebuilding-ukraine-rethinking-global-economy-marshall-plan/)); and feminist experts from Bosnia-Herzegovina, who witnessed the impact of debt on the prospects for just and sustainable recovery in their country (see, for example: Porobić N (2023), 'Commodifying war: the political economy of disaster capitalism in Ukraine and beyond', Women's International League for Peace & Freedom, 14 February (www.wilpf.org/commodifying-war-the-political-economy-of-disaster-capitalism-in-ukraine-and-beyond/)).

⁶⁸ See the work of, for example, Anna Vlasjuk, Legal Research Fellow, Kyiv School of Economics (KSE) Institute; Dr Thomas Grant, Fellow, Lauterpacht Centre for International Law, Cambridge University; Yuliya Ziskina, Senior Legal Fellow, Razom for Ukraine; and Nigel Gould-Davies, Senior Fellow for Russia and Eurasia, International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS).

1. Support for broadening the green recovery from a focus on reducing carbon emissions to the creation of a just, inclusive and sustainable economy:
 - A. Prioritise investments in the care economy and ecosystem restoration, with targeted training for women and marginalised groups, ensuring equitable access to opportunities in traditionally men-dominated green recovery sectors.
 - B. Provide targeted support to women-led agricultural projects, offering training, grants and resources to enhance sustainable practices and resilience.
 - C. Offer technical assistance for tools such as gender-impact assessments, ensuring their effective integration into recovery planning and policy-making processes.
 - D. Collaborate with Ukraine to develop robust legal and regulatory frameworks to hold corporations accountable, prioritise environmental justice and advance gender equality.
2. Support for enhancing the participation of women and other marginalised groups:
 - A. Support women's meaningful participation in green recovery planning at all levels, especially areas impacted by the war's damage and pollution, through training and developing skills.
 - B. Support gender-responsive budgeting, at the local, regional and national levels, integrating a focus on how budgets can also support the regeneration of nature, by providing training and resources.
 - C. Support work to remove the barriers to women's participation in decision-making on and policy-making for a just, inclusive and sustainable economy, which include poverty, unequal caring responsibilities, unequal healthcare provision and GBV.
3. Support for community-led initiatives that endeavour to recover and rebuild in inclusive, pro-equality and environmentally friendly ways. Here the UK Government can do precisely the same things as the Government of Ukraine:
 - A. Expand financial and technical backing for women-led or otherwise inclusive recovery projects that involve nature restoration, biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture and waste management. Adopt the principles of feminist funding – flexible, long-term support, without onerous application and reporting procedures.⁶⁹
 - B. Establish and support national and regional frameworks to enable effective local-level action. Facilitate cooperation between women's organisations, environmental organisations, trade unions and other civil society groups.
 - C. Support community initiatives to tackle energy poverty by providing subsidies for renewable energy technologies, support for democratising control over energy and training for women to increase women's leadership of these initiatives.
 - D. Provide training and resources to support women-led organisations and local authorities to integrate gender and environmental dimensions into recovery projects.

⁶⁹ Enriquez-Enriquez M, de Vries T (2024), 'Embedding feminist principles in grant-making: A win-win for donors and grantees', Alliance, 17 October (www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/embedding-feminist-principles-in-grant-making-a-win-win-for-donors-and-grantees/)

This includes support for eco-friendly agricultural practices, water resource management and disaster risk reduction strategies.

- E. Work to remove barriers to women's participation and leadership of community-level recovery and rebuilding initiatives.
4. Support to ensure the integration of climate and environmental issues into the current UK Government WPS programming in Ukraine:
 - A. Integrate climate resilience and environmental sustainability into the WPS coalitions by establishing dedicated working groups focused on environmental justice, natural resource management and green recovery planning. This could involve training and developing skills for women leaders to engage in climate adaptation initiatives.
 - B. Expand economic support programmes to include green skills training and environmental project management, supporting women-led environmental enterprises and fostering leadership roles in the green economy.
 - C. Incorporate environmental impact assessments and nature-based solutions into WPS sectoral initiatives, emphasising the role of women in mitigating environmental degradation and promoting sustainable livelihoods.
 - D. Recognise and address the intersection between environmental degradation and heightened vulnerabilities to GBV. This can include creating safe, eco-friendly spaces for GBV survivors and integrating climate-related risk factors into the response and prevention strategies for CRSV.
 - E. Include environmental sustainability in the reintegration plans for veterans, emphasising green employment opportunities, sustainable agriculture training and participation in environmental restoration projects.
 - F. In the Civil Society Dialogue Platform for Gender and Inclusive Recovery project, ensure environmental justice and climate security are additional topics included in the dialogue platform, creating spaces where women-led and environmental organisations can collaborate on recovery plans. Provide resources and technical support to facilitate cross-sectoral initiatives that address both gender and environmental priorities.
 - G. Establish a network that bridges women-led, feminist and environmental organisations in Ukraine to collaborate on initiatives that address systemic change, environmental justice and gender equality. Support them in the following activities:
 - Networking and training. Host workshops and forums to foster collaboration, share knowledge and develop joint strategies.
 - Joint advocacy campaigns. Promote policies that integrate gender equality and environmental sustainability, highlighting the interconnectedness of these goals in recovery and resilience efforts.
 - Funding and technical support. Provide grants and training for projects that simultaneously address environmental degradation and gender inequality, ensuring long-term impact and community strength and flexibility.