

GENDER EQUALITY AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN PUBLIC POLICY AND GOVERNANCE IN UKRAINE



Council of Europe Project
"Combating Violence against Women
in Ukraine – Phase III" (COVAW-III)

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Prepared by

Graziella Piga

International consultant

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CDADI	Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion
CEDAW	United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CoE	Council of Europe
COVAW-III	Combating Violence Against Women in Ukraine – Phase III
CRSV	Conflict-related sexual violence
CSO	Civil society organisations
DV	Domestic violence
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender- based violence
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
HELP	Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (CoE free online course platform)
IC	Istanbul Convention
Lanzarote Convention	Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse
SDGs	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
TFVAWG	Technology facilitated violence against women and girls
VAW	Violence against women
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council

Introduction

This publication has been developed to support ongoing efforts to strengthen gender equality and embed approaches for advancing gender equality across public policy and governance in Ukraine.

The publication is developed as part of the [“Combating Violence against Women in Ukraine – Phase III 2025-2026 \(COVAW-III\)”](#) which is part of the [Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2023-2026](#). It has been designed to complement the general Council of Europe [Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals \(HELP\) course on Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming](#), which is available [in Ukrainian](#) and provides comprehensive coverage of the key concepts, policy instruments and European and international standards in this field.

The publication builds on the HELP courses by covering additional areas related to gender equality, such as women, peace, and security, feminist foreign policy, and gender equality and technology, all tailored to the Ukrainian context and responding to current reform processes and the realities of post-war reconstruction.

Gender equality in Ukraine

Gender equality in Ukraine: situation and data

In the past decade, women's participation in political and public life has steadily increased in Ukraine. In October 2025, women held 21,1% of parliamentary seats¹ compared with less than 12% in 2014,² although women in 2025 held only 18.8% in ministerial positions.³ Gender equality has also been strengthened across education and health indicators.⁴ In 2021, Ukraine ranked 81st out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap index.⁵ After gaining EU candidate status in 2022, Ukraine became the first country to develop a national-level Gender Equality Index, aligned with a methodology of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), during an active war.⁶ The country stood in 2025 at 61.4 points out of 100, which was slightly below the EU average of 71 points, placing Ukraine as 20th out of 28 states (27 EU member States and Ukraine).ⁱ

Since Russia's aggression against Ukraine began in 2014 and escalated into a full-scale war of aggression in February 2022, the war has profoundly transformed social structures and, on some occasions, reversed progress on gender equality.⁷ Ukraine's population stood at around 42 million in January 2022, before declining to 35.8 million in July 2024. As of June 2025, over 3.8 million Ukrainians were internally displaced, 60% of them being women and girls.⁸ The war is expected to have a long-lasting impact on demographics with an increase of women-headed households,⁹ as well as a high number of households with persons with disabilities.¹⁰ The fertility rate has fallen from 1.16 children per woman before 2022 to 0.9 children per woman in 2024.¹¹

The war has been a catalyst for fast workforce changes, with both women and men experiencing financial insecurity. In terms of gendered impact, it has accelerated

i. The Gender Equality Index is measured in points on a scale of [1;100], where 1 means complete gender inequality and 100 means complete gender equality.

female entrepreneurship¹² and increased the recruitment of women across several sectors that were previously male-dominated, largely due to mobilisation of men.¹³ Women have volunteered to join the armed forces in unprecedented numbers, reaching the highest level recorded since the onset of the war in 2014. Yet, gender inequality persists, with higher female unemployment and an increased burden of unpaid care work, as women shoulder the majority of household and caregiving duties. In 2021, the gender pay gap stood at 18,6%. Official statistics after that period are unavailable, but two 2023 studies suggest it may have risen to around 30% in sectors such as Information Technology (IT).¹⁴ Also, the proportion of women and girls in vocational education training (VET) has declined from 38.35% in 2021 to 37.46% in 2024, with absolute numbers falling by around 10,000 over the same period.¹⁵

Ukraine already had a high rate of violence against women prior to Russia's war of aggression.¹⁶ However, a recent study illustrates how different forms of gender-based and domestic violence have surged in the past few years.¹⁷ Statistics from the Ukrainian National Police show more than 291,000 domestic-violence reports recorded in 2023, with an increase of 20% compared to the previous year.¹⁸ Conflict-related sexual violence has been documented as a war crime, with the Prosecutor General's Office registering 366 cases under Article 438 of the Criminal Code by late 2024, affecting 231 women and 134 men, including 19 children.¹⁹ In its judgement in *Ukraine and the Netherlands v. Russia* (2025), the European Court of Human Rights recognised the widespread and systemic use of sexual violence by armed separatists and Russian troops. The Court also finds that the use of rape as a weapon of war is in violation of article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) as an act of extreme atrocity that amounts to torture.²⁰

Legal and strategic commitments on gender equality and gender-based violence in Ukraine

Equality and non-discrimination are enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine from 1996. Article 24 of the Constitution forbids discrimination based on race, colour of skin, political, religious and other beliefs, sex, origin and other characteristics. It ensures equal opportunities for women and men in politics, education, employment and pay, and supports women in combining motherhood and professional life.

Ukraine has a developed legal framework on gender equality,²¹ including the Law "On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men" (2005), which seeks to eliminate sex-based discrimination, ensure equal rights/opportunities, and introduce temporary measures to correct gender imbalances,²² and the

Law “On Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence” (2017), which defines domestic violence, sets prevention and sanction mechanisms and protects the rights and interests of affected persons.²³

Ukraine adopted its first National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in 2016.²⁴ This and the second plan aimed to strengthen women’s participation in peacebuilding, security, and decision-making processes.²⁵ After the beginning of Russia’s full-scale war of aggression in 2022, Ukraine recognised the urgent need to adapt its WPS framework to the evolving realities of war.²⁶ The updated NAP incorporated stronger provisions addressing, for instance, sexual and conflict-related sexual violence, ensuring more robust mechanisms for prevention, accountability, and survivor support.²⁷ The development of the third NAP for the period 2026-2030 is underway. The Government further strengthened its gender equality framework through the State Strategy for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men (2022-2030).

The Government of Ukraine is signatory to multiple international and regional commitments. These are embedded in national policies, laws, Ukraine’s framework for institutionalising the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs)²⁸ and its National Recovery Plan.²⁹ Ukraine joined the Council of Europe in 1995, becoming its 37th member State.³⁰ In July 1997, the Ukrainian Parliament ratified the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which prohibits discrimination on any ground, including sex.³¹

In July 2022, Ukraine ratified the [Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence](#) (Istanbul Convention). The convention entered into force on 1 November 2022,³² after which Ukraine has actively aligned its national legislation with its provisions. The Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine drafted a law to strengthen mechanisms for preventing and combating domestic and gender-based violence, proposing amendments to the Family Code and laws on domestic violence, gender equality, childhood protection, and mediation.³³ In late 2024, several related laws were adopted to update the Criminal Code, the Administrative Offences Code, and other acts, ensuring consistency in terminology and legal accountability under the convention.³⁴

The Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) monitors the implementation of the Istanbul Convention through independent evaluations, country visits and recommendations. GREVIO carried out its first baseline evaluation visit to Ukraine from 12 to 18 May 2025.³⁵

Ukraine has also ratified the [Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings](#) in 2010 and the [Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#) (Lanzarote Convention) in 2012. This strengthens protection frameworks on the topics covered by the conventions and underpins continued progress towards European-standards safeguards.

The Council of Europe supported the implementation of Ukraine's State Strategy for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men through the ["Promoting Gender Equality in Ukraine"](#) project, which contributed to advancing gender equality and equal rights for women and men, including during and after the conflict.³⁶

Ukraine ratified the [Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#) in 1981 and its optional protocol, which allows individuals to submit complaints about violations of the Convention, in 2003. In March 2021, Ukraine submitted its [9th periodic report to the CEDAW Committee](#), the expert body overseeing the implementation of CEDAW.ⁱⁱ In relation to CEDAW, the Government also reports on the [General Recommendation 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations](#) (GR 30).

In September 2014, Ukraine ratified the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, setting objectives also in the sphere of gender equality.³⁷ In June 2022, Ukraine was granted EU candidate status, and in December 2023, EU leaders agreed to open accession negotiations. This process requires the country to implement reform and align with EU's laws and standards, including the gender equality acquis.³⁸

ii. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw>

European and international commitments on Women, Peace, and Security

Council of Europe standards and approaches to gender equality in conflict resolution and peacebuilding

The [Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers Recommendations CM/Rec\(2010\)10 on the role of women and men in conflict prevention and resolution and in peace building](#) provides an important standard for integrating gender equality and women's rights into peace and security processes. Grounded in the recognition that peace is unattainable without gender equality, it calls on member States to ensure that women and men participate equally in conflict prevention, crisis management and building sustainable peace. The Recommendation calls for concrete legal and policy measures to promote balanced participation of women and men at all decision-making levels, including multi-track diplomacy, international mediations, humanitarian response, and post-conflict governance. It emphasises the need to address gender-related crimes through proper prosecution, survivors' protection, and safeguarding of witnesses, while advancing a human rights-based approach to security.

A transversal element of CM/Rec(2010)10 is its call for gender mainstreaming across all peace and security initiatives, from early warning systems and mediation efforts, to reconstruction, transitional justice and reconciliation programmes. It acknowledges the role of civil society and youth in promoting peace, advocating their inclusion in dialogue, mediation and reconstruction. It further encourages a gender perspective in recruitment, training, and budgeting within peace initiatives.

Gender equality in the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2023-2026

The Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine [“Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction”](#) (2023-2026) supports national efforts to strengthen human rights, gender equality, rule of law and democratic governance during and after the war. Developed in close partnership with the Ukrainian authorities, the plan supports Ukraine’s reform agenda in alignment with European standards. Section 1.2 prioritises the promotion of equal rights for women and men, and combating violence against women and girls, including displaced persons and returnees. It supports the implementation of the Istanbul Convention and gender mainstreaming in policy making. The Plan also focuses on building the capacity of public officials and law enforcement to address violence against women and support civil society organisations. Efforts extend to ensuring inclusiveness, non-discrimination, and protection of the rights of national and other minorities in the war and post-war reconstruction process.

A global normative framework on women, peace and security

Adopted in 2000, [United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325](#) (UNSCR 1325) marked a historic milestone as the first UN Security Council resolution to explicitly recognise the critical role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflict, peace negotiation, and post conflict recovery, as well as the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls.³⁹ UNSCR 1325, with the subsequent nine resolutions, form the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, a global framework built around four mutually reinforcing pillars: participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery.⁴⁰ This Agenda reinforces commitments to ensuring gender equality and the integration of a gender perspective in peace processes, the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence by all parties to conflict, and the inclusion of women and their views and perspectives in mediation, negotiations, security sector reform, relief and post-conflict recovery. It also promotes gender-responsive humanitarian assistance, reconstruction, and long-term peacebuilding. Together, UNSCR 1325 and CM/Rec(2010)10 represent a coherent framework for Council of Europe’s member States’ work on women, peace and security, affirming that sustainable peace depends on women’s full, equal and meaningful participation in every aspect of peace and security.

Bridging Agendas: CEDAW General Recommendations and the WPS Framework

The CEDAW Committee makes recommendations on issues affecting women to which it believes the States parties should devote more attention. [CEDAW General Recommendation No 30](#) (GR 30, 2013) interprets CEDAW in the context of conflict prevention, international and non-international armed conflicts, situations of foreign occupation and post-conflict phase, making it particularly relevant to Ukraine. CEDAW confers the legal weight to enforce the principles of UNSCR 1325⁴¹ and GR 30 provides an authoritative roadmap for implementing the WPS agenda within a legally binding human rights framework.

GR 30 guides States Parties on measures to ensure women's participation, advance gender equality, and protect women's rights before, during and after a conflict. It applies both domestically and to national contingents in international operations. It urges promoting women's involvement in peace processes and recovery, preventing and responding to gender-based violence, including sexual violence, and accountability for violations of international humanitarian, refugee and human rights law. GR 30 expands the concept of security to include education, economic and health rights, political representation, and access to resources. It calls for accountable security institutions, integrating gender-responsive disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) within security sector reform (SSR) to support women ex-combatants and women associated with armed groups with psychosocial care and sustainable reintegration. Recognising the continuum of violence between conflict and peacetime, GR 30 emphasises the enduring effect of militarisation, inequality, and patriarchal norms,⁴² calling for preventive and transformative measures to address the long-term gendered impacts of conflict and to build inclusive and sustainable peace.

[CEDAW General Recommendation 32 on the gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women](#) (GR 32, 2014) interprets the Convention in the context of displacement, asylum, and nationality, stressing that gender-based violence and discrimination can constitute persecution under the 1951 Refugee Convention, and requires states to recognise gender-specific grounds for asylum. GR 32 addresses the intersection between statelessness, sex, and gender-based discrimination in nationality laws, further reinforcing provisions to this end in GR 30.⁴³ From a WPS perspective, GR 32 strengthens displaced women's rights not only as victims, but as agents of recovery and resilience, calling for gender perspectives in asylum systems, participation of refugee women in decision-making, and safeguards against detention or deportation that increase vulnerability.

Together, GR 30 and GR 32 bridge the gap between human rights law and peace and security policy, offering a legally binding foundation for gender-responsive conflict prevention, recovery and the protection of displaced women.

European Union Policy Framework on Women, Peace and Security

The European Union (EU) has established a comprehensive framework for implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, aligning closely with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions.⁴⁴ The [EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security \(2018\)](#), the [EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security \(2019–2024\)](#) and the [2022 Council Conclusions on Women, Peace and Security](#) provide the current policy basis. The [EU Gender Action Plan III \(2021-2025- extended to 2027\)](#) further reinforces WPS commitments linking them with broader goals of inclusive governance, digital transformation, and climate resilience. This integrated approach affirms WPS as a core element of the EU's geopolitical and security strategy.

The EU's WPS Framework rests on the four pillars of participation, prevention, protection, and relief and recovery; additionally, participation is an overarching and cross-cutting principle together with gender mainstreaming and leading by example. It emphasises women's leadership across all areas of peace and security. It promotes their inclusion in peace negotiations, security sector reform, humanitarian response and post-conflict governance. It promotes gender-responsive budgeting, accountability for sexual and gender-based violence, and partnership with women's organisations in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The 2022 Council Conclusions on Women, Peace and Security refer specifically to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, stressing the need for full accountability for sexual and gender-based crimes.

Women in governance, diplomacy and transitional justice

The [Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2024–2029](#), adopted in March 2024, contains a specific objective on “balanced participation of women and men in political, public, social, and economic life”, directly speaking to women’s roles in governance and diplomacy. Women’s equal participation in governance and diplomacy is a key element to a well-functioning democracy and to achieving the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#). This aligns with the [Council of Europe Recommendation \(2003\)3](#), which underscores the need to remove persistent barriers to women’s participation and to embed gender equality as a cornerstone to democratic systems. Over time, women have assumed leadership roles across local, national and international spheres, within diplomatic endeavours and governance institutions.⁴⁵ Yet, in many of these crucial settings, the decision-making table remains largely occupied by men.⁴⁶ For instance in peace and security efforts, women’s participation and leadership remain low and has in recent years declined. In 2024, women made up only 7% of negotiators, and nearly 9 out of 10 negotiations tracks had no women.⁴⁷ Despite a wealth of evidence demonstrating the positive effects of women’s participation, women continue to face entrenched structural obstacles due to gender inequalities, including reduced access to resources, exclusion from key discussions, limited access to influential networks, and enduring cultural expectations about who is deemed suitable to lead.⁴⁸ Ensuring women’s equal and meaningful participation is not a matter of representation alone. Where women are more equally engaged in politics, diplomacy and public administration, especially in leadership roles, the direction and quality of policy often shift towards more inclusive, sustainable and resilient outcomes.⁴⁹

In Ukraine, women are playing an increasingly prominent role in shaping the country’s domestic governance (e.g. 21,1% of parliamentarians were women in 2025, as mentioned above in section 2.1)⁵⁰ and international diplomatic

presence (22% heads of missions in 2024, with an increase of 8% since 2019),⁵¹ encouraged by targeted initiatives designed to enhance their influence.⁵² Amid Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, women leaders have built alliances, negotiated humanitarian corridors, coordinated international aid, and spoken extensively about Ukraine's challenges and aspirations. Their impact extends beyond formal diplomatic channels, drawing strength from civil society networks, humanitarian coordination, and public engagement. A notable example is Oleksandra Matviichuk, a Human Rights Lawyer and 2022 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who continues to bring forward Ukrainians' voices and fights for accountability, access to justice, peace, and democracy at a number of international fora including the Council of Europe, EU, OSCE, the UN human rights system and the International Criminal Court. The perspectives of women are proving central to Ukraine's defence,⁵³ and to its recovery and reconstruction efforts, as well as to the pursuit of a just and enduring peace.⁵⁴ Women's growing influence reflects not only a shift in representation, but a decisive move towards a more inclusive and democratic approach to governance and foreign policy.

Perspectives from Council of Europe member States: The case of France

Among the Council of Europe's member States, France offers a case of an explicit policy framework for making gender equality and women's participation central to its internal and foreign policy. [France's International Strategy for a Feminist Foreign Policy 2025-2030](#) rests upon five key pillars: protecting fundamental rights and freedoms, securing genuine participation and representation in all spheres of decision-making, addressing gender-based inequalities, preventing and responding to gender-based violence, and directing strong and sustained financing to advance meaningful progress towards gender equality.⁵⁵ France sees feminist diplomacy as integral to its international posture, where participation and representation are core, and gender-based violence is a matter of security and justice.

Gender-responsive transitional justice in Ukraine

Transitional justice is the process through which societies confront grave past abuses whilst laying foundations to prevent their recurrence. In Ukraine, it is vital to address the ongoing consequences of the war and ensure accountability.⁵⁶ The war in Ukraine has underscored with outstanding clarity the necessity of gender-responsive approaches within transitional justice and diplomatic strategy.⁵⁷

Ukraine has taken significant steps in this direction. For instance, within the Office of the Prosecutor General, a dedicated unit on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) has been established to support the investigation and prosecution of acts of sexual violence committed in the context of the armed conflict.⁵⁸ This development shows that transitional justice must be firmly grounded in gender awareness and justice.

The creation of the specialised CRSV Unit marks a significant move towards institutional expertise and a survivor-centred approach. It ensures that investigations and responses to gendered crimes of war are carried out with sensitivity, professional competence, and dedicated focus. Ukraine's strategy therefore brings together criminal justice measures with broader support for survivors such as psychological assistance, legal aid and access to reparations.⁵⁹ This approach aligns with the Rome Statute⁶⁰ and with [Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe \(PACE\) Resolution 2476 \(2023\)](#), which explicitly calls for transitional justice measures, reparation, rehabilitation and survivor-centred responses to CRSV. It is critical that women's participation goes beyond formal inclusion and enables them to shape policies and practices in transitional justice. In the Ukrainian context, this requires civil society organisations including women's organisations and networks, and women in public office to play an active role in designing mechanisms for accountability, reparations, and post war reconstruction.⁶¹

Colombia: Lessons learnt on gender equality and transitional justice

During the Havana peace talks, Colombia established a dedicated Gender Sub-commission as a formal body within the negotiation framework, to ensure that gender and intersecting factors that lead to (in)equality were not treated as marginal issues, but an integral part of the [Peace Agreement](#) itself. The Sub-Commission systematically reviewed each section of the draft text, working alongside negotiators and civil society to reflect the differentiated impacts of the conflict on women, LGBTQ+ persons, and ethnic communities.⁶² Following the 2016 Peace Agreement, Colombia translated its gender equality commitments into institutional practice through the Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition, particularly the [Special Jurisdiction for Peace \(JEP\)](#), which has a dedicated gender equality portal. Gender equality was treated not as a policy add-on, but as a guiding principle shaping investigations, victim participation at the negotiation table, and sanctions. Dedicated gender equality bodies and tailored procedures were created to ensure that sexual and gender-

based violence, as well as the differentiated harms experienced by women, LGBTQ+ people, and ethnic communities, were recognised as central to understanding the conflict and delivering justice. By integrating gender equality and women's participation from the outset, transitional justice became a victim-centred, restorative process; it improved access to justice for groups historically marginalised or silenced; strengthened the credibility and legitimacy of post-conflict institutions and laid foundations for long-term guarantees of non-repetition through institutional reform.

The [first rulings by the JEP represent a major milestone for transitional justice](#), but in the long term the process faces significant challenges as women leaders, victims and survivors, and former combatants remain exposed to persistent security risks, and the long-term effectiveness of gender-responsive justice depends heavily on sustained political will, institutional capacity, and stable funding.

Gender equality, artificial intelligence and technology

Advancing gender equality in technology governance

Advancing gender equality in technology governance, especially in the field of artificial intelligence (AI), is essential for ensuring that innovation develops responsibly, benefits society as a whole, and promotes gender equality. It is vital in addressing the persistent under-representation of women in digital and AI jobs and decision-making roles, which limits women's access to emerging economic opportunities and reduces the diversity of perspectives shaping technology. Technology governance that explicitly incorporates gender perspectives and advances gender equality helps balance progress with the protection of human rights, fairness, and accountability, while preventing bias and discrimination, including gender-based inequalities.

A 2023 Council of Europe study⁶³ illustrates how algorithmic systems are often built and sustained by historic data and models that reproduce human biases, stereotypes and false assumptions about gender,ⁱⁱⁱ sexual orientation, ability, class, age, religion or belief, geography, and other socio-cultural and demographic factors. Moreover, the representation of women in image search results are biased, often reinforcing sexist, racist, and intersectional discriminatory stereotypes. Without deliberate intervention, algorithmic technologies risk perpetuating and amplifying gender inequalities and harmful stereotypes.⁶⁴

The [Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law](#) is the first legally binding international treaty in this field. It represents a crucial step towards advancing gender equality in technology governance. Opened for signature on 5 September

iii. Since all human beings belong to the same species, the Committee of Ministers rejects, as does the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), theories based on the existence of different "races". However, in this document, the term "race" is used in order to ensure that those persons who are generally and erroneously perceived as "belonging to another race" are not excluded from the protection provided for by the legislation and the implementation of policies to promote gender equality.

2024, the convention was signed by Ukraine in May 2025. It prescribes that all AI activities throughout their lifecycle fully align with human rights, democratic principles, and the rule of law, while supporting technological progress and innovation. The convention applies to both public authorities and private actors acting on their behalf. It underscores risks of discrimination in digital settings, particularly in artificial intelligence systems, which can create or aggravate inequalities, affecting women and individuals in vulnerable situations. It sets out key principles to guarantee accountability (Article 9), requiring action when AI harms human rights or democratic processes, including equality and non-discrimination (Article 10), and it protects privacy and personal data (Article 11).⁶⁵ It calls for robust measures to ensure prevention, transparency and accountability in AI development and use. Once ratified, members States will be required to conduct discrimination risk and equality impact assessment throughout the algorithmic lifecycle, strengthen transparency and ensure access to justice for victims of algorithm bias, in line with article 14 of the ECHR. The convention further promotes diversity and inclusion in AI development, legal obligations for equality strategies, and initiatives to enhance digital literacy and democratic participation.⁶⁶

Advancing gender equality in technology governance through national equality bodies

Belgium, together with **Portugal** and **Finland**, provides an example of how Council of Europe member States are tackling gender and intersectional discrimination in AI by building capacity within its national equality institution to monitor and regulate discriminatory effects of AI. The [Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism \(Unia\)](#), Belgium's independent equality body, has integrated AI and discrimination into its strategic agenda, recognising that automated systems can generate or amplify bias, including gender based discrimination. In 2023, it promoted AI literacy through certified online training on AI and discrimination, delivered with the Council of Europe and federal partners for policymakers, supervisory bodies and civil society. In light of the Framework Convention on AI, since 2024, [Unia has worked with the Council of Europe, the European Commission](#) and equality bodies in Finland and Portugal to strengthen monitoring of AI use in public administrations and improve access to redress, including through an internal non-discrimination tool and continuation of online training on AI and discrimination. This joint project illustrates how institutional capacity and cross national cooperation can complement legislative mechanisms and contribute to advancing gender equality in AI governance.

Furthermore, the Committee of Ministers adopted [Recommendation Rec/CM\(2026\)1 on equality and artificial intelligence](#). The Recommendation aligns with the Framework Convention but stands as an independent instrument.⁶⁷ Both instruments demonstrate the Council of Europe commitment to ensuring that AI technologies uphold human rights.

Closing the digital gender gap

Closing the digital gender gap is essential to prevent deepening inequalities, particularly for some groups of women, for example older women who often face greater barrier in accessing digital tools and training. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's Resolution 2510 (2023) [Closing the digital divide: promoting equal access to digital technologies](#) stresses that the digital transition can either foster inclusion or entrench exclusion. It urges States to prioritise equal digital access and ensure that technologies and public services are affordable, inclusive and designed so that no one is left behind. Targeted investments in digital skills across all ages, alongside accessible infrastructure, is crucial to enable full participation in an increasingly digital society.

In Ukraine, a 2020 study revealed a widening digital divide across several groups, including women and men, older and younger people, and those living in urban versus rural areas. This digital divide related to disparities in access to technology, basic media literacy, digital inclusion, digital participation and digital skills. The findings showed that 15.1% of Ukrainians had no digital skills.⁶⁸ This percentage decreased by 4% in 2021 and by another 4% in 2023, showing progress and willingness to address the digital gap.⁶⁹ Ukraine provides a compelling example of leveraging technology to advance gender equality. Initiatives such as the "Dream and Achieve" programme have supported women entrepreneurs in their business transformation journey.⁷⁰ Ukraine's Diia digital services and Diia Education platform have enhanced access to e-government services, business registration, and digital skills training, enabling women to maintain professional and entrepreneurial activities even during the war.⁷¹ Networks like WTech Ukraine⁷² and Women in Tech Ukraine⁷³ provide mentoring, professional development, and international connections, strengthening women's leadership and innovation capacity.

Despite these initiatives demonstrating progress, a recent study uncovers persistent challenges, notably limited access to resources and lack of experience in digitalising business processes among women entrepreneurs in Ukraine.⁷⁴ The digital transformation presents unprecedented opportunities for economic growth and social inclusion, yet, gender and age gaps in digital literacy and

access to technology persist across Europe and globally.⁷⁵ Also, in Ukraine, women are critically underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, comprising only 14% of graduates,⁷⁶ and 28% of individual registered entrepreneurs in IT.⁷⁷ The risk is that digital progress may widen rather than narrow existing inequalities if access, skills and participation do not improve for all, particularly in relation to gender, age, location and disability. Policy measures must ensure equal access to digital skills, support lifelong learning that can enhance women's competitiveness, while promoting gender equality, alongside increasing digital literacy to recognise and prevent technology-facilitated violence against women and girls (TFVAWG) among users, investigation officers and support groups.

Technology-facilitated violence against women and girls

Technological advancements introduce new risks by enabling abuse and violence to occur with alarming ease and often limited consequences for perpetrators. TFVAWG is an ever-growing form of gender-based violence that uses digital technology to harm, harass, or exploit.⁷⁸ As online spaces increasingly shape social and personal interactions, such violence has become a growing concern. Online and technology-facilitated hate speech, gender-based violence and harassment are pressing issues at the international and European level.⁷⁹

The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2026\)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on accountability for technology-facilitated violence against women and girls](#) provides the following definition: "technology-facilitated violence against women and girls is understood as any act of gender-based violence that is committed, assisted, aggravated or amplified through or by technology and that impacts women or girls."

In 2021, the [Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence \(GREVIO\)](#), in its [General Recommendations No. 1](#) on the digital dimension of violence against women clarifies that technology-facilitated violence, such as non-consensual image or video sharing, coercion and threats, including rape threats, online harassment or stalking, falls under the definition of violence against women set out in Article 3a of the Istanbul Convention.⁸⁰ Already in 2017, the Lanzarote Committee had released an [Interpretative Opinion on the applicability of the Lanzarote Convention to sexual offences against children facilitated through the use of information and communication technologies](#).

Increasingly, states and institutions are recognising the seriousness of these digital threats and developing legal and policy frameworks to prevent and address them.⁸¹ Within the European context, Romania was the first country to introduce a specific legislation for cyberviolence,⁸² while other states address it by expanding existing laws on offline violence⁸³ or introducing laws covering specific forms of online violence. The French Penal Code ([Art 222-33-2-2](#)) punishes cyberviolence, such as dissemination of harmful material, threats and invasion of privacy. The law recognises pregnancy of the victim as an aggravating circumstance, along with other factors such as age and disability.

Technology-facilitated violence is part of a continuum of violence experienced by women and girls offline, rooted in structural gender inequality.⁸⁴ This inequality, and the violence it sustains, is further compounded by emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence. AI systems can be misused to create digital forgeries^{iv} and image-based abuse, amplify biases, and enable automated harassment or bot to spread abuse and misogyny.⁸⁵ Recently, the independent media Texty.org.ua analysed 595 AI-generated videos that use the faces of famous Ukrainian women journalists with the aim to manipulate audience against them.⁸⁶ The opacity of AI systems makes it difficult to trace responsibility, leaving victims with little recourse for justice.

The growing recognition of technology-facilitated violence and the risk of digital technologies reinforcing gender inequality has prompted a strong international response. In March 2026, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers adopted [CM/Rec\(2026\)2 Recommendation on accountability for technology-facilitated violence against women and girls](#).⁸⁷ The Recommendation provides guidance for member States on enhancing legal, institutional and regulatory responses to strengthen accountability for technology-facilitated violence against women and girls, including prevention measures to foster an environment of accountability where such violence is neither facilitated, condoned, accepted nor ignored. It also affirms its applicability in times of peace and in situations of armed conflict, post-conflict, emergency, and other crises. Furthermore, its Explanatory Memorandum notes that conflict and crisis settings may exacerbate the risks and impacts of technology-facilitated violence against women and girls by amplifying existing inequalities, weakening institutional protections, and increasing dependence on technology.

iv. Sexual digital forgery refers to what is also commonly known as "deepfake pornography." Due to the inaccuracy of the reference to "pornography", the fact that the term "deepfake" was coined by a perpetrator, and thus due to the potential for the use of related terminology to cause further harm to victims, this Explanatory Memorandum uses the term sexual digital forgery, not deepfake pornography.

The commitment to tackling technology-facilitated violence is further demonstrated by the [EU Directive \(2024/1385\) on combating violence against women, domestic violence](#), and cyber violence;⁸⁸ and the [UN Resolution 79/152 on Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: the digital environment](#). Together with the Council of Europe's recommendations on accountability for technology-facilitated violence against women and girls and on equality and AI, these international instruments create a coherent and reinforcing framework that binds states to prevent and combat technology-facilitated gender-based violence while ensuring equality, accountability, and human rights in the digital age.

Collection of gender equality statistics and data

Effective gender-responsive and social inclusion policies rely on robust data collection on issues related to gender equality including on sexism, gender stereotypes and sex- and gender-based discrimination, as well as data disaggregated by sex and other intersecting factors.⁸⁹ Ukraine has taken notable steps in this regard. In 2020 the Government approved 226 gender equality indicators, grouped in 12 thematic sections, in line with the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA).⁹⁰ In May 2024, Ukraine submitted its [National Report on the BPfA for the period 2020-2024](#), highlighting progress across 12 critical areas of concern, based on systematic data collection disaggregated by sex and other parameters, such as age, region and size settlement. Other protected characteristics, such as disability, race and sexual orientation are only captured in specific surveys. The report also includes a dedicated section on data collection and statistics improvements and priorities. The State Statistics Service hosts a dedicated “Women and Men” portal with data on education, health, income, working condition and more.⁹¹

These developments support informed policy and international comparability even under the pressure of Russia’s full-scale war of aggression. However, a recent report by EU Neighbours East notes significant gaps in the quality, standardisation and usability of sex-disaggregated and open-data sets,⁹² particularly where data collection has been disrupted by the war. Strengthening national gender equality statistics, in line with European standards remains a priority, particularly through the introduction of gender-based violence and sex-disaggregated time-use surveys, alongside monitoring of adult participation in lifelong learning.⁹³ Advancing intersectional data collection, disaggregated by sex, ethnicity, age, disability, location and other forms of social exclusion is essential to identify which groups are most affected by the war and to design evidence-based targeted response in recovery, economic empowerment, governance and digital security.

Conclusion and looking ahead

Progress towards gender equality and the realisation of women's rights in Ukraine is visible in strengthened legislation, policy commitments and institutional reforms aligned with Council of Europe and international standards. Women are significantly contributing to governance, diplomacy, and social cohesion. They play a central role in fostering an inclusive and peaceful national recovery and reconstruction but remain less visible in formal international arenas.

Despite increased political participation and advances in the collection of gender equality statistics and data and modernised statistical systems that support informed decision-making, structural challenges related to economic gender inequality and violence against women persist. Meanwhile, rapid technological change and the rise of artificial intelligence bring both opportunities and risks, highlighting the need for continued action in all areas and an inclusive and human rights-based approach to digital governance.

Leadership, political will, resourcing and systematic advancement of gender equality and gender mainstreaming across all stages of policy development are essential. Support from international partners, including the Council of Europe, which continues to work closely with Ukraine to advance democratic governance and human rights, will remain critical in sustaining momentum and driving reform.

Looking ahead, Ukraine has the opportunity to rebuild stronger and serve as an example in gender-responsive transitional justice, governance and diplomacy, including and beyond stages of peacebuilding and recovery. Progress will depend on strong cooperation between the government, civil society, and international partners, and on ensuring that women's perspectives, participation and leadership remain central to shaping the country's direction. As Ukraine rebuilds, placing gender equality at the core of national recovery and reconstruction lays a foundation for a fairer, stronger and more resilient society.

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