

POLICY BRIEF

A FEMINIST RESPONSE TO THE RECONSTRUCTION AND RECOVERY OF UKRAINE

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------------|---|
| CSO | Civil society organisation |
| EU | European Union |
| IDP | Internally displaced person |
| IFI | International Financial Institutions |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| LGBTQI | Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex |

KVINNA TILL KVINNA

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation has defended women's rights since 1993. For every woman and girl's right to be safe and to be heard.

Today we are one of the world's leading women's rights organisations, working directly in areas affected by war and conflict to strengthen women's influence and power. We work closely together with more than 100 local partner organisations across 20 countries to end violence against women, reach lasting peace and close the gender gap once and for all.

BACKGROUND

Leading up to the Ukraine Recovery Conference in London between June 21st and 22nd, The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation has gathered knowledge, perspectives and messages from our partner Ukrainian women's rights organisations on the gendered impacts of Russia's war, and how recovery and reconstruction can be inclusive and gender-responsive. It is crucial that the guiding principles identified and adopted by the government of Ukraine and the international community, on partnership, reform focus, transparency, accountability, and rule of law; democratic participation; multi-stakeholder engagement; gender equality and inclusion; and sustainability, are put into practice in the investments into the future of Ukraine.

HINDERS TO A GENDER-SENSITIVE RECONSTRUCTION PROCESS¹

Limitations and challenges to the inclusion of gender perspectives and women's organisations in recovery and reconstruction decision-making processes

Diverse inclusion of women and women's organisations within current processes relating to recovery and reconstruction is significantly lacking. Consultations, resources, and information fail to reach regional and local levels, limiting the participation of women at the grassroots level. Larger, Kyiv-based women's organisations do not effectively engage with local organisations from across regions and rural areas. As a result, groups representing women with diverse experiences of the war and its consequences are left out of decision-making processes and are not adequately represented.

¹ *These findings are based on dialogues and consultation with Ukrainian women's organisations that The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation supports and partners with. Read more about our work in Ukraine and our previous policy briefs here: <https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/about-us/where-we-work/europe/ukraine/>*

Regrettably, local authorities exhibit a lack of gender sensitivity, perceiving women's organisations in civil society as competitors rather than partners. The absence of a gender perspective is often justified by prioritization issues. In some cases, discussions on facilitating the return of individuals after the conflict revolve around “talented men”, while women's inclusion is an afterthought. Women are only partially involved in discussions about implementation, while men dominate the decision-making processes.

“They laughed at us when we tried to talk about the inclusion of women and got aggressive when we try to mention the lack of gender perspective. They see issues regarding women or gender as something that can be discussed later when all the “serious issues” are resolved.” – Representative from a women’s organisation

Issues related to women or gender are often deemed secondary and postponed until other 'serious issues' are resolved. Many women activists have stopped attending these events due to a lack of credibility, and those with expertise in other areas hesitate to raise gender issues out of fear of exclusion from the process entirely.

Furthermore, other marginalised groups also face exclusion, including people with disabilities and LGBTQI persons. The national recovery plans lack a comprehensive discussion of inclusivity, human rights, and gender equality as foundational principles. The working groups of the recovery plan do not address human rights concerns consistently. There is a pressing need for women's organisations to be actively involved in processes that do not currently consider gender perspectives. At the moment, women’s rights and gender equality is discussed completely in parallel to the main discussions on the reconstruction of Ukraine.

“Ukraine can be a good place for women after the war but only if we put effort into it” – Representative from a women’s organisation

The situation and conditions for civil society: fragmentation, disconnection, exclusion

Government decision-making processes in Ukraine are not adequately inclusive of civil society both at the national or local level. At the national level, consultations with CSOs are often formal, last-minute exercises with no feedback from civil society taken into account. At local level,

consultations are not inclusive enough of different CSOs, and are also inaccessible for people with disabilities.

Continuing their work amid war, civil society organisations, including women's organisations, are often not coordinated among each other when it comes to advocacy demands. There is a lack of collaboration and shared demands, partly due to the parallel and disconnected processes. To ensure that CSO concerns are heard, CSOs should be supported to come together to identify common issues and advocate collectively. As policy-driven work becomes increasingly challenging because of funding priorities and overwhelming needs on the ground, many women's organisations are shifting their focus to addressing pressing needs at the local level. It is central that Ukrainian civil society is not only supported as a service deliverer, but in its monitoring functions and as the voice of marginalised groups.

There is also significant variation across different regions of Ukraine, in addition to huge variation in needs. The international and humanitarian communities should diversify their analyses to better understand regional dynamics and address local needs.

Maintaining human rights, inclusivity and gender equality priorities in recovery and reconstruction

Both the demographic and political landscape has changed fundamentally with Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine. Women's rights CSOs express a growing concern that political developments may become more conservative and militarised, with increased representation of veterans and military personnel in future elections, resulting in a less gender-balanced parliament. Public trust in soldiers remains high, and there is apprehension that such a shift in representation could undermine efforts for women's rights, LGBTQI rights, and inclusivity of marginalised groups.

It is crucial that women's political representation is ensured in order to increase the chance of gender issues being prioritised.

A prevailing narrative on recovery and reconstruction focuses on the need to restore the economy post-war, attracting business through lower taxes, deregulation, and simplified labour legislation. However,

limited attention is given to holding businesses, both international and local, accountable for human rights obligations.

The labour code and social services system requires substantial reform and improvements, and while efforts are being made to align certain aspects of legislation with EU requirements, cosmetic changes alone are insufficient.

"There needs to be support for the IDPs and serious discussions on the topic as many IDPs are still homeless. I feel like the issue will not be taken seriously until we are all on the streets." – Representative from a women's organisation

It is crucial to anticipate and prepare for a rise in disability post-war and undertake comprehensive reforms to address rehabilitation issues. Many of those who fled Ukraine were also people with disabilities, as their safety was jeopardised due to lack of accessible shelters. All groups, including those affected by the conflict, require a reform of social services, as the quality of existing services was already inadequate prior to the war. Investments that will be made into the rebuilding of Ukraine should not aim to rebuild as it was before but aim to make services accessible for all people. This also relates to political participation, for example with non-accessible polling station, making equal electoral participation impossible for people with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure that the intersectional gendered impacts of war and infrastructure losses are considered, and that Ukrainian women are equally represented in the decision-making on the rebuilding, recovery and reconstruction of their country.

- Addressing intersectional gender inequalities will be crucial to ensure a sustainable recovery of Ukraine. All reconstruction efforts should adhere to principles of gender-responsive budgeting, including consultations with different population groups that inform the reconstruction priorities, that needs of

minorities and marginalised groups are met, and that gender-disaggregated data is collected and analysed.²

- Women’s use of infrastructure is different than men’s, and inclusive reconstruction needs to consider gendered aspects of economic priorities, mobility, and social roles.³ Infrastructure needs also depend on socio-economic factors, age, education, sexuality and disability, all of which need to be integrated into gender-responsive infrastructure decision-making.⁴
- Ukraine’s “human capital” has gendered dimensions. Women have different roles in the labour market as well as different needs in terms of housing, healthcare, education and childcare, and can also make substantial contributions to the Ukrainian economic recovery. It is however crucial for a sustainable recovery of Ukraine that the inclusion of and support to the population is not merely seen as an investment in human capital. Support to IDPs, returning refugees and migrants, to war veterans and their families and to other victims of the war including of conflict-related sexual violence, is not necessarily a profitable endeavour, but should be prioritised as fundamental to the building of a resilient Ukraine.

Promote women’s political participation, and participation from representatives from other marginalised groups.

- Support women’s organisations beyond service provision, in their work with policy, advocacy, and monitoring.

² “Rebuilding Ukraine: The Gender Dimension of the Reconstruction Process”, [Hanna Anisimova, Maria Berlin, Maja Bosnic, Pamela Campa, Yuliya Markuts, Michal Myck, Monika Oczkowska, Nataliia Shapova.](https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/rebuilding-ukraine-gender-dimension-reconstruction-process) | Vox/CEPR, (2022) <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/rebuilding-ukraine-gender-dimension-reconstruction-process>

³ <https://www.iisd.org/articles/insight/including-women-sustainable-reconstruction-ukraine>

⁴ “Rebuilding With Women: Amplifying Their Voices in Ukraine’s Recovery”, Cities Alliance, WIEGO, StreetNet International (2022) https://www.citiesalliance.org/sites/default/files/2023--1/cities_alliance_ukraine_rebuilding_with_women_december_2022.pdf

- Support women's organisations that work with political engagement, including efforts to increase political and electoral inclusion.
- The EU should recommend greater civil society inclusion and consultation by the government at national and local level, including women's, feminist, LGBTQI and disability rights organisations.
- The EU should ensure that all reconstruction and recovery processes are developed with the full inclusion of civil society, are gender-sensitive, and are in full respect of fundamental rights.
- The enforcement of gender quotas in the Ukrainian electoral system should be enhanced to ensure their effectiveness. This can be achieved through the implementation of gender-alternate electoral lists and the exclusion of lists that fail to adhere to the established quota requirements.⁵

The push for private sector investments must not be made on the expense of labour rights, social protection and social services, and accountability regarding women's human rights and gender equality.

Economic recovery is a gendered issue. Unequal distribution of care responsibilities, augmented by war, limits women's opportunities for education and employment. Women are more likely to depend on social protection systems due to various factors such as lower wages, limited access to formal employment, and caregiving responsibilities. Social protection programs, including social security, pension schemes, and welfare benefits, are crucial for providing support and stability. However, gender biases and gaps in these systems often disadvantage women, leaving them with inadequate coverage, lower benefits, and reduced access to essential services and resources. As large-scale investments in Ukraine are now being planned by International Financial

⁵ Rebuilding Ukraine: The Gender Dimension of the Reconstruction Process", [Hanna Anisimova](#), [Maria Berlin](#), [Maja Bosnic](#), [Pamela Campa](#), [Yuliya Markuts](#), [Michal Myck](#), [Monika Oczkowska](#), Nataliia Shapova. Vox/CEPR (2022) <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/rebuilding-ukraine-gender-dimension-reconstruction-process>

Institutions, including the World Bank and IMF, and by private corporations, it is crucial that principles of “inclusive growth” are put into practice.

Addressing economic inequalities requires comprehensive measures that promote gender equality, such as:

- Reducing the gendered division of unpaid care work by encouraging shared responsibilities within households and providing support structures such as affordable childcare facilities.
- Ensuring that social protection systems are gender-responsive, offering equal access to benefits, addressing the specific needs of women, and addressing gender-based discrimination within these programs.
- Promoting gender equality and diversity in public sector employment through targeted policies, anti-discrimination measures, and initiatives that encourage women’s representation in leadership positions.
- IFIs must ensure that women are meaningfully included in economic decision-making processes at community, regional and national levels, as well as in economic reforms, post-conflict recovery plans and infrastructure reconstruction.
- IFIs should include a gender-transformative approach in the design of recovery plans, programmes, loans, and policies to avoid cementing old injustices and locking women into continued economic marginalisation for decades to come. As the World Bank develops its new Gender Strategy, it should apply transformative approach where structural barriers are addressed on a macroeconomic level.⁶

⁶ <https://kvinnaatillkvinna.org/publications/world-bank-gender-strategy-recommendations-from-womens-rights-organisations/>

Support Ukrainian civil society, including organisations representing women and other marginalised groups, to co-ordinate and advocate together for inclusive reconstruction.⁷

- Ensure secure and safe spaces for women’s rights activists for networking, communication, and experience exchanges.
- Support civil society, including women’s organisations’, work to monitor fulfilment on commitments for inclusion, diversity, and human rights.

International organisations and actors working on supporting gender equality and gender perspectives in reconstruction efforts, need to do more to include a wide range of voices, with an intersectional approach (rural, LGBTQI, disabled, elderly, IDPs, youth).

- Support platforms and networks that can coordinate a diversity of voices.
- Support women’s organisations on all levels to participate in advocacy and monitoring work to mainstream a gender perspective in reconstruction plans and budgets.
- Go beyond the “usual suspects” in dialogue and consultations with Ukrainian civil society, to also reach grassroots organisations and activists.
- Ensure that long-term, flexible funding and support for women’s organisations is available and accessible.

“The humanitarian players and international community need to see the diversity in issues and needs and not view Ukrainians as a homogenous group” – Representative from women’s organisation

Align recovery and reconstruction processes with relevant commitments pertaining to women’s rights and gender equality, including the Istanbul Convention and the Women, Peace and

⁷ <https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/The-Kvinna-till-Kvinna-Foundation-A-feminist-response-to-Russias-war-in-Ukraine-Recommendations-to-the-International-Community.pdf>

Security agenda.⁸

- Reconstruction and recovery plans should also clearly integrate these commitments in the EU accession process.
- EU should insist on the implementation of the national legislation connected to the Istanbul Convention, and that the minimum standards of the Istanbul Convention are reached in practice. Feminist organisations should be able to fulfil their role as partners and watchdogs for the implementation of the Convention.

Contact information:

Klara Backman, advocacy advisor at The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation
klara.backman@kvinnatillkvinna.se

⁸ <https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/The-Kvinna-till-Kvinna-Foundation-A-feminist-response-to-Russias-war-in-Ukraine-Recommendations-to-the-International-Community.pdf>

For all women's rights, in every corner of the world.
Visit kvinnatillkvinna.org to find out more about our work.

