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WOMEN FOR WOMEN INTERNATIONAL

From Asking to Action:

A global consultation on Women, Peace, and Security

Country Snapshot: Ukraine

2026

"From Asking to Action" Background

In 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), formalizing its commitment to an agenda that women in conflict-affected communities had worked on for years: recognizing that conflict is inherently gendered, and that all efforts to prevent, resolve, and rebuild from conflict must address the interlinked elements of women's participation and specific gendered protection needs. Twenty-five years and nine additional UNSC resolutions on WPS later, women still face barriers to **participation** in all decision-making regarding peace and security, still face significant **protection** needs, are still under-recognized for their **prevention** work, and are still excluded from **relief and recovery** work. These four pillars of the WPS agenda served as the basis for Women for Women International's "From Asking to Action" consultations.

In 2024, Women for Women International facilitated consultations with 6,636 women in more than 14 conflict-affected countries. Women for Women International partnered with women's rights advocates and organizations to spearhead this effort – collaborating with them to define and co-design the consultation's scope and tools; conducting the consultation through surveys, interviews, workshops, and focus group discussions; and ensuring that the consultation findings and recommendations resonate authentically within their communities and relevant stakeholders. The consultation findings provide new evidence and insight, presenting the experiences, challenges, and hopes of women living in conflict, as well as recommendations on what the future should look like and how we can secure it.

Ukraine Country Context

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine began in February 2022, almost 9.6 million Ukrainians have been forced from their homes, making this one of the world's largest human displacement crises since World War II. Almost four years later, women and children make up the majority of those internally

In Ukraine, 153 women were consulted, including:

123
women consulted via survey

30
women participated in focus group discussions

1
Key informant interviews were held with representatives from one women's rights organization (WRO)

displaced and are faced with starting a new life in neighboring countries.

According to OCHA in late 2025, 36% of the population - 12.7 million people - need humanitarian assistance. Around 3.7 million people are internally displaced, and nearly 6 million are refugees. Allegations of conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine are commonplace. Women survivors of sexual violence and those who have been displaced are finding it difficult to come to terms with their trauma. They need urgent psychological and medical help, as well as vital practical support, to rebuild their lives.

Despite these challenges, Ukrainian women are at the forefront of the emergency response and are active in peacebuilding, mediation, and human rights monitoring in Ukraine. They carry out their work against a backdrop of increasing gender-based violence (GBV) of all forms, including sexual violence, domestic violence, and trafficking, resulting from the multiple and intersecting impacts of the conflict, including lack of access to services, livelihoods, increased caregiving obligations, and lack of access to adequate shelter.

Ukraine ranks 116 out of 181 countries on the WPS Index. Ukraine published a second WPS National Action Plan (NAP) for the period 2022-2025, following the end of its first NAP, which covered the period 2016-2020.

Hopes

Ukrainian women expressed mixed expectations about their future livelihoods. While 46% hope for their situation to improve over the next five years, 41% anticipate it will worsen. This division in outlook reflects both the enduring hope many women maintain despite instability and the uncertainty the ongoing conflict continues to generate. Apart from the Rohingya women surveyed in Myanmar, the Ukrainian women in Ukraine and the Ukrainian women displaced in Poland expressed the least hope about any future improvement in their situation. Contextualized by the primary obstacles they identified to a better future, this underscores the urgent need for sustained peacebuilding efforts and targeted support that directly address the drivers of insecurity in women's daily lives.

Participation

As a result of the ongoing war, women across Ukraine who were previously active in their communities now face compounded responsibilities that include caring for loved

The primary obstacles to improving women's quality of life (of the 123 women surveyed):

95% War, conflict, and insecurity

61% Loss of economic opportunities

55% Forced displacement

> **I used to participate in the life of my community, but after I had to move, I just don't have time for it: between my family and work, I need 25 hours in a day.** *(Consultation participant, Ukraine)*

Main barriers to women's participation in their community (of the 123 women surveyed):

60%
Lack of self-confidence of women to participate

54%
Lack of education and awareness about women's right to participate

50%
Women do not feel that it would be useful to participate

ones, supporting their families financially, and maintaining contact with relatives involved in active conflict. These added burdens have constrained women's participation in civic life. Ukrainian women surveyed overwhelmingly indicate that family and child-care responsibilities fall mainly on women (79%) rather than being shared equally (13%) or falling on men (1%). 60% of Ukrainian women surveyed also noted that social norms "moderately" restrict women's opportunities to participate versus "significantly" (2%), minimally (17%), or not at all (20%). These findings could suggest that social norms and practices that impact women's participation are reflected in both the domestic and public spheres in Ukraine.

When asked how safe women feel participating in community activities, half of the women surveyed said they "never" or "rarely" feel safe doing so, while the other half varied between "sometimes" feeling safe (7%), "often" feeling safe (37%), or "always" feeling safe (6%). Interestingly, when asked whether women and girls move around freely in their community, most women said that women and girls "always" (10%) or "mostly" (65%) do so. Thus, despite the ongoing presence of armed actors and occurrence of attacks, and 95% of women identifying war and conflict as a barrier to their improved quality of life, Ukrainian women feel a unique danger in speaking up or participating in community activities as opposed to being out and about moving in their communities. Women's rights organizations (WROs) identified several challenges to women's participation, including the wartime suspension of certain laws that restrict women's mobility, particularly their ability to leave the country. Relatedly, there has been a closing of civic space and a rising pressure against speaking out about domestic issues or peace and human rights on social media.

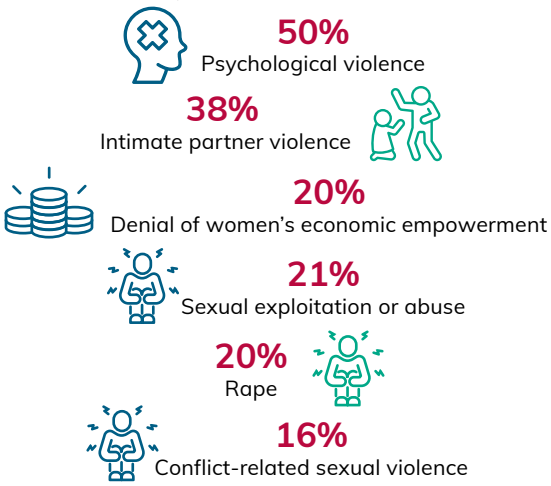
> **"I used to be active in our village, I organized a women's club and attended village meetings, but now I just don't have the time or psychological strength to do it.**
> *(Consultation participant, Ukraine)*

To feel more confident and able to participate in their communities, 85% of women surveyed stated that increased financial resources would positively influence their civic engagement. This is unsurprising given the financial challenges and humanitarian needs for Ukrainian women, especially those experiencing internal displacement. Further, 57% of Ukrainian women indicated that economic factors affect women's participation and influence in their communities by increasing women's financial dependency on others. Beyond financial support, 68% also highlighted the need for legal support and protection to support women's civic participation.

Protection

When surveyed, consultation participants identified a range of forms of violence affecting the women in their communities and the drivers of that violence. This variation in experiences highlights the complexity of women's safety and security amid ongoing armed conflict and uncertainty in Ukraine and underscores the need for nuanced, context-specific responses to addressing and preventing violence and mobility concerns.

What forms of violence affect women most in your community (of the 123 women surveyed)?

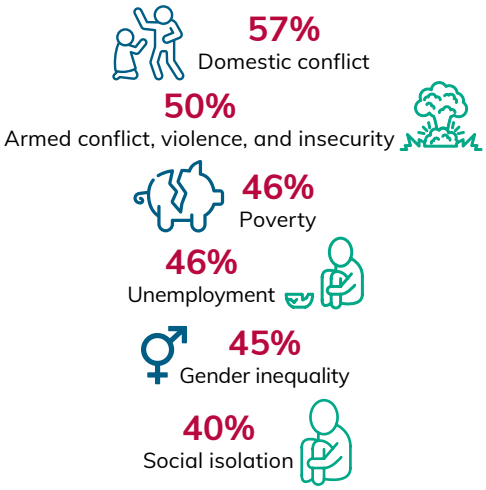


A lack of trust in institutions was the most cited reason Ukrainian women did not seek institutional support in cases of assault, with 76% identifying it as a major barrier to protection. Additionally, 60% of women felt that cases of violence against women and girls were handled ineffectively within their communities. Relatedly, 72% of Ukrainian women emphasized that strengthening legal frameworks and enforcement is the most important step toward ensuring their protection and safety.

WROs supporting Ukrainian women advocate for establishing more shelters for domestic violence victims and pursuing survivor-centered accountability that goes beyond merely issuing monetary fines as punitive measures to perpetrators of domestic violence. They use advocacy and art therapy to support GBV survivors, providing a safe space for survivors to carefully and sensitively respond to their pain at their own pace.

> **Many women who are faced with this violence they decide not to talk about it because if they talk about it they are faced with huge stigma, 'How dare you speak about this, he is a hero and he has come back from war, you must understand that you cannot speak about this.** *(Consultation participant, Ukraine)*

Key factors driving violence against women (of the 123 women surveyed)?



The focus on the many basic needs of Ukrainians in the context of the conflict has meant that work on women's protection and preventing GBV has been deprioritized. Short-term funding to address long-term problems is not fit for purpose. As WROs noted, women survivors need considerable time to begin speaking about their problems, let alone to

> **Most of the assistance programs have already ended, and many projects are not designed for long-term support.** *(Consultation participant, Ukraine)*

Most effective measures for preventing and responding to conflict and insecurity (of the 123 women surveyed):

66%
Economic development programs

54%
Promotion of gender equality and women's rights

43%
Improving education and job opportunities

40%
Enhancing legal and justice systems

40%
Promoting social cohesion

solve them and move towards solutions. When programs end too quickly, GBV survivors feel 'abandoned' and like 'nobody cares', silencing them further and compounding the health, economic, and participation challenges they face.

Prevention

When asked about the role women play in preventing conflict, 87% of women agreed they have a role in conflict prevention. Various obstacles limit that work, however. The ongoing conflict has disrupted or destroyed critical infrastructure, limiting women's mobility and safety.

Beyond infrastructure, the lack of resources and funding, and inadequate legal frameworks and protections emerged as major concerns. An overwhelming 87% of Ukrainian women surveyed cited resources and funding as the primary barrier their communities face in preventing and responding to conflict and insecurity. Financial resources were also identified by 88% of women as essential to effectively advocating against violence against women and girls.

Of the women surveyed, 51% cited inadequate legal frameworks as a primary challenge in preventing and responding to conflict and insecurity in their communities. 82% identified legal assistance as another crucial form of support to prevent violence against women, while 85% of respondents called for legal support to strengthen efforts in preventing conflict.

Common problems women face or have faced during outbreaks of conflict in their community (of the 123 women surveyed)?

84%
Psychological trauma or stress

80%
Displacement from their homes

78%
Separation from family members

WROs working to support Ukrainian women describe using awareness-raising activities as a method to prevent gender-based violence. They point to the importance of organizing trauma-informed training on women's rights and access to services to better support women living through the war, who often don't recognize gender-based violence as a violation of their rights or, if they do, they consider it an inevitable situation of the war.

> **Unfortunately, everything ends at the talking stage. I have not seen any real results over the years.** *(Consultation participant, Ukraine)*

Relief and Recovery

Women we consulted in Ukraine expressed frustration with the international response to the war, noting that language barriers and limited access have prevented their voices and expertise from being fully recognized. These challenges are compounded by the realities of war, particularly displacement, cited by 80% of survey participants as one of the most pressing issues affecting women. Separation from family members (78%) and psychological trauma and stress (84%) were also identified as major concerns.

Participants offered clear recommendations for addressing the needs of displaced women and girls in Ukrainian refugee camps. Among the most cited were the provision of separate and secure living spaces (80%) and the establishment of dedicated support services for survivors of violence (70%).

WROs shared that IDPs in new and unusual communities do not have access to participation in local social life because of differences in language, religion, and culture that make it difficult for women to be active in social life and new communities. Many women called for holistic support that addresses intersecting needs such as comprehensive health services, trauma counseling and psychological support, legal aid and protection, economic empowerment programs, education and vocational training, safe housing and infrastructure, and support for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

Despite the extensive expertise and experience that WROs have in supporting Ukrainian women, including IDPs, and the fact that WROs were most cited by women as providing services to women affected by conflict, they remain underfunded and excluded from decision-making spaces about relief and recovery.

Recommendations

Building on the key actions that international donors, policymakers, and stakeholders can take to advance WPS in conflict-affected contexts, women and WROs in Ukraine offer additional context-specific recommendations:

Participation

- Guarantee meaningful representation and decision-making roles for Ukrainian WROs in conflict response and post-conflict recovery processes.
- Ensure meaningful safeguarding and support for participation. This includes resourcing protected venues with reliable power and early-warning systems, and providing secure hybrid and online meeting options so women can participate without fear of reprisals.
- Protect civic space and invest in digital safety. Support measures to reduce intimidation and online harassment and to safeguard women's freedom of expression amid the closing of civic space and increasing pressure against speaking about domestic issues, peace, and human rights.
- Ensure that adequate support is provided to enable caregivers' participation. Integrate childcare and care for the elderly into civic processes (forums, councils, consultations), recognizing that caregiving falls on women and reduces time and capacity for participation.
- Lower economic barriers to participation. This includes providing funding for transport and data costs for public meetings, dialogues, or events.
- Ensure displaced women have formal representation in local recovery planning bodies, including those tied to the Ukraine Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA5) and the Ukraine Recovery Conference commitments.

Protection

- Promote, fund, and ensure provisions in conflict response and recovery for survivor-centred justice and accountability measures including:
  - Rebuilding trust for legal and security institutions by increasing technical capacity for effective case handling.
  - Funding trauma-informed referral pathways for additional services and support.
  - Developing and scaling safe reporting pathways and stigma-reduction strategies, especially for cases where alleged perpetrators are serving military personnel, who are often protected by the existing justice systems.
  - Providing long-term funding for shelters and safe spaces.
- Address discrimination and stigma that deter women and girls' access to services and justice mechanisms by tackling language and displacement-based stigma that undermines safety and engagement, ensuring women have the support to engage in all decision-making processes and community spaces.
- Invest in independent monitoring and accountability mechanisms for handling of GBV cases - especially where cases are being dismissed, minimized, or not recorded.

Prevention

- Ensure that awareness-raising work is accompanied by legal support and enforceable protection. This includes WRO-led awareness and trauma-informed training, legal assistance, and improved coordination between institutions, so women know where to go for support.
- Strengthen community-level GBV early-warning and prevention systems by integrating women-led organizations into the UN Protection Cluster and into the ongoing development of Ukraine's next WPS National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 (2026–2030).
- Fund and support awareness-raising activities and community sensitization work as a method to prevent gender-based violence and broader conflict and insecurity.
- Shift from short-term humanitarian project cycles to multi-year, sustainable programming, recognizing that women consistently identified short funding cycles as a major barrier to effective conflict prevention, protection, and recovery.

Relief and Recovery

- Strengthen institutional coordination and service-navigation support by investing in WROs and local authorities to help women access available state services, including social protection, pensions, and legal processes.
- Improve safety in displacement settings. In camps and other displacement contexts, provide separate and secure living spaces and dedicated services for survivors of violence.
- Invest in service providers women already trust. Women most frequently cite WROs and INGOs as service providers – ensure multi-year, flexible funding for WROs and strengthen their role in coordination and referrals, to reduce access barriers such as language and limited access to decision-makers.
- Ensure that economic recovery centers the roles of caregivers. Design livelihoods and reskilling with childcare and flexible modalities from the outset, so economic recovery is feasible for women bearing the majority of care responsibilities.

- Fund holistic, integrated support that meets women's intersecting needs. Ensure recovery programs bring together the essential services women identified as priorities, including comprehensive health services; long-term trauma counseling and psychological support; legal aid and protection; economic empowerment opportunities; education and vocational training; safe housing and infrastructure; and dedicated support for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

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To find out more about our global consultation and to access both our global and country specific findings, visit https://shedares.womenforwomen.org/

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