GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE CONTEXT OF COMPREHENSIVE DEFENCE:

Analytical Report

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Contents

Acronyms

AFU   Armed Forces of Ukraine

CIMIC   Civil-Military Cooperation

CSO   Civil Society Organization

KPI   Key Performance Indicator

NAP   National Adaptation Plan

NAP 1325   National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security for the period until 2025

SES   State Emergency Service of Ukraine

UN   United Nations

Introduction

The concept for the project "Gender Mainstreaming in the Context of Comprehensive Defence" was developed by philosopher Tamara Zlobina, head of the CSO "Expert Resource Gender in Detail". Inspired by Sweden's comprehensive defence strategy (*Sveriges totalförsvar,* a strategy that engages the entire Swedish society in overcoming security challenges), Tamara sought to study the Swedish experience, examine which elements of comprehensive defence are already being applied in Ukraine, and integrate a gender perspective into the Ukrainian context.

The relevance of comprehensive defence in Ukraine is evident: achieving victory requires defence reforms alongside innovative solutions in civilian life, which together will ensure a resilient and comprehensive security strategy. Amid constant Russian attacks on civilians, personnel shortages in the military, and overall resource asymmetry, national security cannot be limited to the military component alone.

Across the research areas selected for the project — volunteer movements, care work, women in the military, women in civil defence, the economy, local self-government, and information policy — the researchers propose solutions that synergistically bolster both rear-front resilience and frontline defence capabilities. Specifically, gender-sensitive military communications impact the rate of women joining the military. Combined with the removal of other barriers, this provides an asymmetric solution to personnel shortages. Furthermore, civil readiness efforts are sustained by volunteer organisations and critical infrastructure workers, whose capacity and output are directly influenced by the expansion of care work infrastructure. Economic empowerment of women in emerging military technologies helps address personnel shortages in traditionally male-dominated rear-front professions caused by mobilisation, while simultaneously bolstering the supply of advanced technological tools to the military. Local self-governments work alongside volunteer organisations and critical infrastructure entities to enhance local security and civil readiness in implementing National Action Plans (NAPs) for United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. Strengthening each of these components individually bolsters the rear and/or the front, but strengthening them collectively can produce a lasting and comprehensive effect on societal resilience. Taken together, applying a gender-responsive approach to comprehensive defence will enhance defence effectiveness by increasing women's contributions to national security.

The eight research studies conducted as part of this project demonstrate that comprehensive defence in Ukraine exists *de facto*, operating in a spontaneous and decentralised manner, which allows it to respond flexibly to wartime challenges. However, there is a downside: this spontaneity remains unsystematic and is resource-dependent on itself, relying on the solidarity of people who are themselves in need of solidarity. In addition to specific steps addressed to various actors at central and local levels, the research recommendations include intentions to develop a comprehensive defence strategy for Ukraine. This involves integrating spontaneous efforts into a unified system that is institutionally and resource-resilient, yet preserves flexibility and rapid response capabilities.

1. THE VOLUNTEER MOVEMENT AS AN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE DEFENCE STRATEGY

"Comprehensive Care: The Grassroots Volunteer Movement as Part of Ukraine's Defence." Anastasiia Omelianiuk, Daria Hrosul, Maryna Aleksandrovych

1.1. The Role of the Volunteer Movement as a Component of Comprehensive Defence

The volunteer movement in Ukraine simultaneously collaborates with the state and fills its institutional gaps, forming an integral part of comprehensive defence. Its spontaneous nature enhances flexibility in crisis response, yet its long-term sustainability remains limited.

Grassroots volunteer initiatives deploy mutual aid, support the Defence Forces of Ukraine, and assist vulnerable groups where the state apparatus cannot react with sufficient agility, acting as long-term "crisis administrators." The volunteer movement transforms (while also supporting) gender roles by showcasing female leadership; as gender asymmetry in mobilisation means male leadership is often channelled into military service. It also fosters civic engagement and solidarity, both among those facing shared challenges (e.g., associations of families of prisoners of war) and those requiring external support. As a crucial component of the volunteer movement involves civil defence functions — preparing the civilian population to react quickly and effectively to security threats — strengthening this movement directly impacts the security of the rear. Meanwhile, material support for the Defence Forces of Ukraine directly

influences the situation in the combat zone and the ratio between controlled and occupied territories.

The research identified several challenges that prevent volunteer initiatives from reaching their full potential and fully implementing this "crisis management," which, in turn, weakens overall societal resilience. These include legal uncertainty regarding not the subject of volunteering, but the activity itself, forcing the movement to fight for its very existence, alongside a lack of resource sustainability and institutional support. Volunteering and charitable activities (the study draws a clear line between the two) rely primarily on the support of local communities and one-off donations. This places the burden of maintaining societal resilience on people who are themselves in need of support. While this strengthens solidarity, the execution of each new task remains perpetually at risk.

1.2. Ways to Strengthen the Volunteer Movement as a Component of Comprehensive Defence

Since the volunteer movement is an inseparable element of national resilience and comprehensive defence, its explicit recognition as such by the state apparatus, local self-governments, and the movement itself enables a strategic vision for volunteering, paving the way for the fullest possible realisation of its potential.

In practical terms, this means that institutional support for volunteer initiatives must be expanded and diversified, while practices that have proven effective should be scaled up and projected onto the national level. As research into civil defence concurrently shows, volunteer efforts also bolster critical infrastructure; therefore, it is advisable to focus on a model of stable cooperation between state civil defence structures and civic initiatives focused on civil readiness. Collaboration between the volunteer movement and the public sector at both national and local levels will yield synergistic results, enabling the widespread application of volunteer-developed solutions.

The researchers also propose a legal distinction between volunteering and charitable activities, which would eliminate legal gaps and contradictions while enabling the development of more effective national and local policies to strengthen both categories.

Applying a gender-responsive approach to policies aimed at supporting the volunteer environment will bolster women's potential by bringing new grassroots female leaders to light and providing them with opportunities for personal growth.

2. WOMEN IN CIVIL DEFENCE

"Women in Civil Defence." Svitlana Hanaba, Daria Hapirova, Nataliya Machalina

2.1. Civilian Preparedness on the Home Front and the Role of Women

The scale and magnitude of the challenges posed by the full-scale war, where Russian attacks on Ukraine's civilian population in the rear are as daily an occurrence as the hostilities in the combat zone, mean that Ukrainian society cannot rely solely on state critical infrastructure. The state level of civil defence is overstretched and requires assistance.

Consequently, standard civil defence mechanisms require systematic supplementation by broadly engaging citizens at various levels, enabling them to provide for their own safety in ways accessible to them. In Ukraine, numerous civic civil defence practices exist, ranging from large-scale nationwide volunteering to local initiatives. As demonstrated by the study of the Ukrainian volunteer movement, these efforts have generally proven effective; however, they remain fragmented and spontaneous, lacking sufficient integration into state policy. In this context, the Swedish concept of comprehensive defence (*Sveriges totalförsvar*), characterised by broad and systematic cooperation between the state and national voluntary organisations, could serve as a solid framework for adopting best practices from Sweden's experience.

Transforming isolated civil readiness practices and emergency response infrastructure into a cohesive system of comprehensive readiness will not only prepare individuals or households for security challenges. It will also

support the State Emergency Services (SES), police, and medical services with trained, predictable, and ready-to-act voluntary initiatives at both local and national levels. This integration of state and societal resources creates the conditions for proactive crisis management, reduces chaotic responses during emergencies, and lays the foundation for the long-term resilience of the civil defence system.

Due to the gender imbalance in mobilisation for the Defence Forces of Ukraine, women primarily remain civilians; thus, the potential of women outside the military structure can be leveraged to strengthen civil defence and enhance the self-reliance of both individuals and their households during difficult and dangerous times. Therefore, applying a gender-responsive approach to civil defence reinforcement is vital, and investing resources in gender equality is timely.

2.2. Establishing a Unified Civil Defence System

Civil defence volunteering, which currently fills state gaps spontaneously, must be integrated into a comprehensive system of stable rear-front readiness. This system should be structured and aligned, with clear functions and a distribution of responsibilities, where volunteering takes its place as a predictable, trained, and resource-empowered component. The researchers recommend shifting from a "civil protection" model toward a "civil defence" or "civil readiness" approach. Instead of delegating security responses solely to specialised state agencies, this model fosters an understanding among citizens of a shared, community-oriented responsibility for both individual and collective safety. This would make defence truly comprehensive, permeating society at every level, from the individual to the highest echelons of government.

A diversified infrastructure for emergency response and national resistance training must function as a centre of gravity for volunteer initiatives and individual citizens. It should ensure the widespread dissemination of skills for survival, resilience, and functionality during security challenges and crises, while enabling the rapid mobilisation of trained citizens in cases of emergency. The researchers also recommend strengthening civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) mechanisms, developing volunteer networks, and improving public early warning systems.

3. CARE WORK AMONG WOMEN EMPLOYEES IN CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

"Care Work in the Context of Comprehensive Defence." Tetiana Konovalova, Daryna Korkach, Tetiana Medina

3.1. The Challenges of Balancing Critical Work and Care Labour

The efficiency of balancing employment in critical infrastructure with domestic care work directly affects societal resilience, as the full potential of human resources cannot be realised without a supporting care infrastructure. This is especially true for critical sectors, such as the SES, police, healthcare, and education, where women often work while simultaneously serving as primary caregivers at home, looking after children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. As shown in the study on women's roles in civil defence, the magnitude of security challenges during full-scale war often prevents critical response and resilience infrastructures from coping fully, necessitating support from civil society. However, there is also significant room for strengthening this infrastructure itself.

A significant challenge for female critical infrastructure workers who also perform domestic care work is the lack of predictability in their daily schedules when balancing these two roles. The double burden on women and the need to "juggle" their time and resources ultimately result in a reduction of paid labour, as the additional household load cuts into system hours, forcing women to switch to part-time work or resign. When reducing the total workload is not an option, the quality of work suffers due

to fatigue and burnout. Consequently, without predictable care, critical infrastructure loses labour hours, shifts, and personnel, while comprehensive defence is weakened in the most vital sectors.

A dedicated state policy, encompassing both short-term and long-term measures, must be directed toward integrating care work and employment in critical sectors, complemented by similar policies at the local level. The key objective of such policies should be to shift the balancing of domestic labour and essential work from the realm of individual extraordinary efforts, supported haphazardly by immediate social circles or more flexible colleagues, into a realm of predictable, as much as possible, workloads and support. Integrating care work into the planning of critical functions will empower female infrastructure workers and enhance the quality of the work they perform. Making the invisible "second shift" visible will allow for more flexible planning of critical public functions. This will result in additional working hours, lower staff turnover, and greater psychological endurance within communities.

3.2. Supporting Critical Infrastructure Employees with Domestic Care Responsibilities

The horizontal self-organisation that currently sustains female critical infrastructure workers must be shifted from the realm of private mutual aid into the realm of formal policies. The outcome of such policies should be the availability of short-term and overnight care options close to home, funded personnel reserves for temporary substitution, and more predictable yet fragmented schedules.

The pathway for obtaining caregiver status, accessing benefits, or reaching other support resources must be optimised.

Line ministries must establish care infrastructure and flexibility systems, including shelters with designated child-friendly spaces, extended or emergency operating hours, care centres within hospitals and anchor institutions, and regular psychological support for staff. Leadership key performance indicators (KPIs) must be expanded to include metrics focused on staff retention and employee well-being.

The researchers suggest that local self-government bodies should optimise community-based care services and expand their scope.

CSOs, businesses, and international partners should also pay more attention to supporting caregivers at both the community and national levels.

4. WOMEN AND MILITARY SERVICE

"Barriers Preventing Women from Entering Military Service and Institutional Solutions to Overcome Them." Daryna Zavhorodnia, Mariia Zviahintseva, Anna Pashkina

4.1. Barriers Deterring Women from Joining the Military

Despite the positive changes in Ukraine's defence sector since 2014, the issue of equal opportunities for women in the military remains highly relevant, not only as a matter of fulfilling the rights and opportunities of women eager to serve but also as an asymmetric response to the vast mobilisation resources deployed by the enemy. The potential of women who are theoretically ready to serve, but have not yet enlisted due to certain obstacles, remains untapped. Women are acutely aware that in the service they will encounter both the general systemic issues of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) faced by men, as well as additional hardships specific to them as women. At the same time, women are not "by definition" obligated to defend the state as men are, and they join the AFU on a voluntary basis. This makes it all the more critical not to stifle this motivation when it arises.

Currently, the recruitment of women into the AFU is hindered by institutional, legal, social, and informational gaps, as well as by stereotypes. Women considering military service lack accessible information regarding service conditions, expectations, and procedures, as well as general information campaigns tailored specifically to them.

Once in the service, women encounter various forms of discrimination, stereotypes, gaps and inconsistent regulations regarding service conditions, a lack of logistical readiness, and an ineffective system for reporting rights violations. A distinct issue is the topic of reproductive health and the experience of pregnancy while on active duty, as well as the overall accessibility of specialised medical services for female service members.

Removing the informational, socio-cultural, logistical, and other barriers identified in the study will empower women already in service and encourage voluntary enlistment among those not currently obligated to serve. This, in turn, will significantly bolster the human resources of the Defence Forces of Ukraine amidst a shortage of male personnel. A top-level priority must be creating an institutional culture based on respect for human dignity and diversity. This should allow women to focus solely on their duties without the distraction of resisting stereotypes, discrimination, harassment, double standards, or inadequate service conditions.

4.2. Recommendations for Overcoming Barriers to Women Entering Military Service

Having already granted the formal right to serve, the focus must now shift toward removing practical obstacles and addressing the unequal treatment of women on the ground. A proactive stance by individual unit commanders, the Ministry of Defence, and other entities involved in addressing these issues will empower women already defending Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, while sending a positive signal to those who are still hesitant.

The comprehensive recommendations provided by the researchers to the Verkhovna Rada, Cabinet of Ministers, Ministry of Defence, and other stakeholders highlight key priorities: creating a safe, non-discriminatory environment; updating the regulatory framework; implementing effective grievance and anti-harassment mechanisms; and improving social guarantees and logistical support. According to the researchers, special attention should be paid to the issues of medical support and reproductive health.

The general recommendation to overcome gender stereotypes aligns with a similar proposal put forward by researchers of gender sensitivity in state defence communications, who focused on this narrower topic.

5. GENDER SENSITIVITY IN GOVERNMENT DEFENCE COMMUNICATIONS

"Gender Sensitivity of Government Communications in the Defence Sector." Ada Krasenko, Olena Poburko, Anna Romandash.

5.1. The Portrayal of Women in State Defence Communications

Defence-related communications have already made women visible, but they have yet to make them equal. While feminitives are used more frequently, media stories highlight the real successes and struggles of servicewomen, and Defenders' Day has been renamed to include female defenders, all of this remains insufficient for achieving practical gender equality.

Currently, representations of women in state defence communications lack substance, while the topic of equal rights and opportunities for women and men lacks adequate representation. What is most lacking is operational specificity: job titles and specialties, descriptions of functions, authorities, and service conditions, presented symmetrically for both women and men. Communication materials often include women in a complimentary and symbolic manner as "berehynias" (guardians) who protect (read: serve) the warriors. This fails to focus on what women actually do in the military and, instead of partnership and comradeship, reinforces the patriarchal dichotomy of "guardian vs. warrior." In some cases, even recruitment centres show reluctance to enlist women, signalling a limited demand for female personnel only in rear-echelon roles

or specific brigades. This may be regarded as a violation of labour laws. Military communications are sometimes directly addressed to a male audience, portraying women only as the civilian partners of male service members. Collectively, this approach reinforces the informational and socio-cultural barriers to women's enlistment mentioned in another project study on barriers to female military service, creating the impression that women are not welcome in the military. In the face of a pronounced shortage of male personnel, neglecting the potential of highly motivated women, or those who are still hesitant, is unjustifiable.

5.2. Enhancing Gender Sensitivity in State Defence and Military Recruitment Communications

State communications in defence and military recruitment must operate within unified standards that codify the principles of gender equality and provide communication teams in brigades, recruitment centres, and other defence entities with specific instructions on how to comply with them. Such communications should go beyond formal markers of visibility, such as feminitives and abstract symbolic imagery of women as "guardians." Instead, they must actively highlight the lived experiences of servicewomen, their roles, and achievements, while emphasizing the importance of upholding their rights and fulfilling their potential.

The researchers recommend using public holidays, significant dates, and other media opportunities for institutions and officials to report on their progress in addressing equality and discrimination issues. Furthermore, it is essential that communications devote specific attention to recruiting women by proactively addressing questions of particular interest to a female audience.

Overcoming the barriers of uncertainty and ambiguity, while reducing the risks of discrimination during service, will positively impact the number of women volunteering for duty. This finding is independently corroborated by researchers who studied the barriers to female military service. In turn, this will enable the realisation of these women's potential and reduce the human resource imbalance between the Defence Forces of Ukraine and the armed forces of the aggressor state.

6. LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT AS A COMPONENT OF COMPREHENSIVE DEFENCE

"Comprehensive Defence in the Context of Local Self-Government and Public Administration." Yuliia Dziuba.
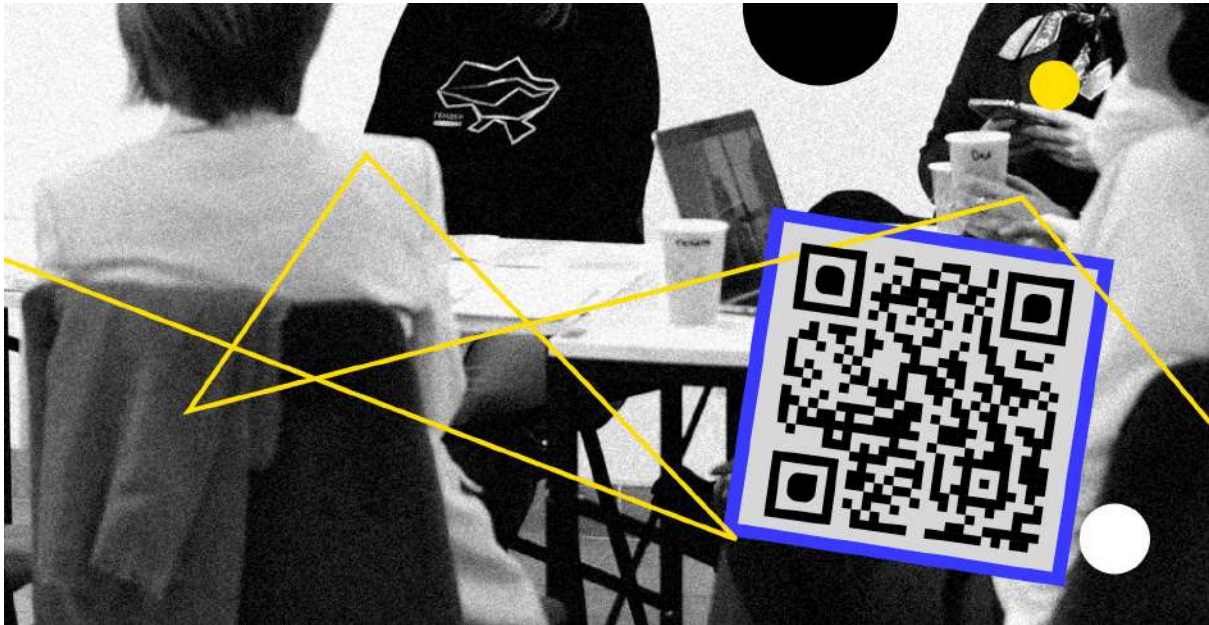
6.1. The Role of Local Self-Government in Executing Comprehensive Defence Functions

While Ukrainian legislation defines the concept and components of comprehensive defence, the role of local self-government remains fragmented. The overlapping and unclear powers of local authorities and military administrations reduce the efficiency of defence planning, complicate defence management, and delay the implementation of defence measures. This specifically affects the implementation of the 1325 Agenda at the local level, which remains unsystematic in nature. There is a lack of coordination mechanisms both between different branches of government and across various levels of decision-making. Altogether, this results in a significant waste of resources on "friction" between different elements of the system.

In practice, at the local level, comprehensive defence is implemented largely through informal practices. Local councils and administrations are taking significant initiative in responding to wartime challenges without waiting for top-down instructions, thereby becoming the backbone of national resilience on the ground. Thus, in a climate of general uncertainty, local initiative proves to be the most effective response to wartime challenges. Societal resilience is formed from the bottom up, rooted in

self-organisation and interaction at the local level. Therefore, local initiatives must be supported institutionally and with adequate resources in a way that does not compromise their flexibility in responding to challenges.

In all the processes mentioned above, women take an active part as grassroots leaders, including local government employees, civil society activists, and members of crisis task forces or community defence councils. Supporting measures aimed at achieving gender equality will help better realise the potential of female leadership. This, in turn, will bolster community resilience and the overall resilience of the state as a collective of communities.

6.2. Defining the Specific Role of Local Self-Government in Comprehensive Defence

Comprehensive defence must be enshrined in the state's strategic documents, which should formally establish the institutional role of local self-government in the national security system. Local self-government bodies and military administrations must be provided with a clear understanding and a distinct separation of their respective competencies, powers, and duties. Communities actively participating in comprehensive defence measures must receive resource support, both through financial backing and the strengthening of their human capital.

At the local government level, local security policies and security action plans must be developed, based on the coordination and interaction of local authorities, military administrations, central executive bodies, locally stationed military units, critical infrastructure services, and veteran organisations. Researchers who have studied the local-level implementation of the 1325 Agenda also agree that actors in this field lack coordination and that it must be strengthened.

All local policies and action plans must actively include women and women's organisations as actors who already demonstrate leadership and implement resilience measures. Documenting and disseminating information about the role of women in resilience-building processes will help scale best practices, inspire women in other communities, and provide a clearer understanding of how to integrate gender tools into security processes.

7. THE 1325 AGENDA AS A COMPONENT OF COMPREHENSIVE DEFENCE

"Perspectives on Implementing the Comprehensive Defence Concept at the Local Level: A Case Study of 1325 National Action Plan Localisation." Nataliya Vyshnevetska, Mariia Ushakova.

7.1. Challenges in Implementing the 1325 Agenda at the Local Level

The National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security for the period until 2025 (NAP 1325), which offers a cross-cutting interagency set of security measures, can become an element of a broader comprehensive defence system. Its objective, among others, is to integrate into the security and defence processes a demographic that has been historically excluded from them: women.

The study revealed that implementing NAP 1325 at the local level suffers from systemic gaps. Local implementers of the plan lack the necessary capacities (funding, competent and available staff), performance indicators, feedback mechanisms, and coordination. The Ukrainian NAP is an extensive document with a low level of specificity, which complicates implementing it. This is because the vision for specific activities and the mutual expectations of implementers across different levels can vary significantly. Consequently, both the planning and implementation of activities may be carried out superficially and formally, as a "box-ticking" exercise.

At the same time, the integration of civil society into localising and implementing the NAP at the local level remains limited, despite the maturity of Ukraine's civil society and the presence of local 1325 coalitions in all government-controlled regions. Civil society, while performing extensive work on the plan's themes de facto, acts rather spontaneously, flexibly responding to security challenges, yet often remains excluded from developing both the national plan and local action plans. Local authorities often perceive involving activists as an added burden rather than a partnership. A parallel problem is that involving women and considering the needs of vulnerable groups are still perceived as secondary tasks in security response efforts, even though integrating a gender perspective could enhance the cumulative level of security. Overall, the state security hierarchy, local plan implementers, and civil society, particularly women's organisations, operate in isolation, and they fail to "meet" effectively.

7.2. Strengthening the Localisation of NAP 1325

The 1325 Agenda, along with gender mainstreaming, must be more broadly integrated into the work of central executive bodies. Furthermore, within the wider scope of comprehensive defence, proactive strategizing and interagency coordination must be established, including creating platforms to coordinate NAP implementation. Implementing the 1325 Agenda, as well as related gender programs, must be properly funded. Local implementers of NAP 1325 must also be properly coordinated (as corroborated by other research on local self-government), adequately funded, and equipped with the necessary capacities.

The focus of planning and implementing national and local action plans must shift from the practice of adopting "declarative" and "prescriptive" plans (lacking resources and top-down understanding) towards a collaborative search for solutions that are genuinely needed and realistically achievable at both levels. The foundation for such problem-solving should be strategic planning and the broad participation of communities in identifying their specific security challenges and needs. The term "community" encompasses not only the responsible local self-government body but also the local civil society, particularly women's organisations.

8. THE TECHNOLOGIZATION OF WARFARE AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

"The Technologization of War: Expanding Opportunities for Women's Economic Participation." Mariia Krymova, Maryna Rudenko, Snizhana Shevchenko

8.1. Opportunities for Women in Emerging Military Technologies

Due to the specific nature of technological warfare and the constant race to implement cutting-edge military technologies, the corresponding sector of the economy is experiencing rapid growth and development. The advanced military technology sector is supported by state contracts, private clients, and international investment. Companies developing and manufacturing high-tech military products are eager to recruit women, providing an outlet for their patriotic values and offering them a place in a promising industry.

However, a number of barriers prevent women from fully realising their potential in this field, which, in turn, limits the industry's aggregate potential. Involving women in stereotypically male-dominated professions, including high-tech fields, will allow them to realise their potential and compensate for the shortage of men who have left "male" industries for military service. This will foster the sustainable development of the defence sector and create a personnel reserve for voluntary military service. Conversely, ignoring gender barriers is strategically harmful: it erodes human resources, stifles innovation potential, and undermines the overall resilience of the national security system.

While manufacturers do recruit women into the military technology sector, women still encounter both overt barriers and gender "blindness." The number of women in leadership positions is disproportionately low compared to their overall representation in the industry; furthermore, no measures are being taken at the state policy level to expand women's participation. Women face the pressure of stereotypes, encounter limited training opportunities, possess (or perceive themselves to have) insufficient baseline preparation due to the nuances of female socialisation, and carry the additional burden of care work.

8.2. Economic Empowerment of Women in Emerging Military Technologies

As one of the most strategically vital sectors, the advanced military technology industry must proactively eliminate even the smallest barriers to women's recruitment and professional growth.

The researchers recommend that the state integrate international equality principles into defence industry policies and develop a high-level national strategy for engaging women in this sector. The issue of women's employment in the advanced military technology sector must be included in national strategic security planning; specifically, the component of women's economic empowerment in this field should be integrated into the 1325 Agenda. Among the lower-level recommendations, it is worth noting the need to develop technical education for women and provide tax incentives for gender-sensitive businesses.

Employers should implement inclusive and flexible workplace policies and cultivate their own workforce by investing in training women in emerging technologies. Civil society and international partners are recommended to facilitate the reskilling of women for the military technology sector and to increase the visibility of women already working in this field.

9. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the eight studies conducted, it was found that comprehensive defence in Ukraine exists in a spontaneous manner and is represented across various levels, from individual initiatives to national action plans. This spontaneity is both a strength and a weakness: while flexibility allows for rapid responses to wartime challenges without waiting for "top-down" approval or predefined frameworks, many excellent point-based practices lack institutionalisation, sustainability, scaling, and reliable sources of support.

Research shows that a gender-responsive approach is vital to comprehensive defence, as women are both beneficiaries and architects of social resilience. Advancing gender equality enables the full realisation of women's potential while strengthening collective capacity and resilience — on the front lines, in the rear, and in civilian life.

Ukrainian legislation defines comprehensive defence in the Military Security Strategy of Ukraine (2021), though the framework requires updating in line with hybrid warfare realities. In 2026, it is crucial to unite civil society, the state, and international partners to turn fragmented practices into a coherent, institutionalised, and sustainable security strategy.

The comprehensive solutions proposed by the researchers in the spheres of military and civil defence, the labour market, and governance will strengthen social resilience by maintaining agile responses to wartime challenges while supporting those who execute these responses.

The project covered only certain areas related to the practical implementation of comprehensive defence in Ukraine. There are other important resilience factors and directions for research. Further work within the framework of the project may include research on the following topics:

- Food security;
- Healthcare, pre-hospital care (first aid), and blood donation;
- Energy security;
- Environmental security;
- Safety of domestic and farm animals and their owners;
- Cognitive warfare and countering disinformation;
- Cybersecurity and the physical protection of information;
- Firearms control;
- Veteran policy.

Overall, the spontaneity with which Ukrainian society responds to wartime challenges must evolve into sustainability, without compromising flexibility or speed of response. Above all, it is necessary to think strategically and comprehensively: all spheres of social life examined in the research conducted within the "Gender Mainstreaming in the Context of Comprehensive Defence" project, as well as those that remained outside its scope, form a spontaneously emerged system of societal resilience. This system must evolve into a stable strategy where central and local authorities, volunteers, charities, businesses, international partners, and other actors work synergistically, supporting one another and removing barriers that hinder greater efficiency.

Finding solutions that enable society to become more resilient and allow spontaneous comprehensive defence to transition toward stability must become a task for Ukrainian society at all levels. In this context, a gender approach should be viewed not as a matter of social fashion, but as unlocking the potential of half of society, which remains insufficiently realised due to prejudice, discriminatory practices, or other barriers.

Comprehensive defence will become truly "comprehensive" and truly "defence" only when each of its elements strengthens its own resilience and interacts with the others. The civil preparedness of individuals and households evolves into the civil preparedness of communities. Civic initiative, in the form of volunteering or charitable activity, strengthens the Defence Forces, local communities, vulnerable populations, and ultimately, the participants themselves. Fully unlocking the potential of women in critical and/or stereotypically male professions is relevant in both civilian and military life. All this together will create an active, protected, and solidary society, resilient to security challenges.

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