

The gendered impact of the Russian full-scale invasion on the priorities of Ukrainian MPs

Executive Summary



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Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

Foreword



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The existential threat of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation has forcefully reordered and narrowed immediate national political priorities. It has also reshaped the convictions, values and visions that underpin the reconstruction and recovery processes and the future of Ukraine.

This research offers a rare window into how members of parliament (MPs) in Ukraine are navigating these impossible pressures. It captures their evolving priorities, ambitions, fears and hopes in the fourth year of the full-scale Russian aggression. Although the national defence effort has strengthened the executive under martial law, MPs have been actively holding on to a bold vision for the future. Many share a desire not just to rebuild, but to transform the country.

This research shows that gender equality, inclusive governance, and women's political leadership remain shared values among MPs. This is promising, as these areas often risk being deferred under the pressures of war and a lingering patriarchal mindset, despite the evidence that they are critical for sustainable and just recovery and reconstruction. However, MPs hold divergent ideas on what advancing them means in practice as the urgency of war overshadows both the debate and the lived experience and needs of individuals and social groups. How these priorities are implemented will reveal the extent of the systemic change Ukrainians are striving for.

As Ukraine faces one of the most consequential moments in its history, strengthening commitment to democratic standards can help the country respond to the urgent needs of its population without sacrificing long-term transformation.

Strong democratic processes improve the ability of state institutions to address social problems in a holistic way.

They provide transparent processes to weigh trade-offs in political reforms and budget allocations, whilst protecting inclusion, equality and accountability. They help prevent dominant narratives from silencing marginalised ones.

And they build political systems that strengthen social cohesion and serve the diverse needs of the population. In Ukraine right now, this means 39 million people, encompassing:

- over 2 million soldiers, including many of yesterday's civilians who also serve in the army,
- millions of civilian volunteers who support defence goals in their civilian lives,
- over 3.7 million internally displaced people,
- millions of wives, mothers, sisters and grandmothers providing unpaid care work,
- 6.9 million refugees,
- 12.7 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, including nearly 2 million children.

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) is proud to support the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and its members as they navigate these processes. We stand with Ukraine and its parliament in this moment of profound resilience and reinvention. We thank the Members of Parliament who participated in this study amid air sirens, devastation, power cuts and uncertainty. We are grateful to the research team for their dedication and conflict-responsive research approaches.

We hope the findings in this report will inform both national and international responses to recovery and reconstruction where democracy is the foundation on which the future is built.

Executive Summary

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine began on 24 February 2022. However, the Russian military aggression against Ukraine has been ongoing since 2014, when the Russian Federation annexed Crimea and orchestrated a separatist movement in the east of the country. The invasion has had a deeply traumatic impact on the Ukrainian population, including those who represent the Ukrainian people in the parliament.

In times of crisis, members of parliament (MPs) are expected to actively and effectively manage public life in response to existential risks, making decisions that impact the lives of women and men, civilians and military personnel alike. Yet MPs are not immune to the personal trauma of war and are forced to balance this with their public role as political decision-makers in a time of national emergency.

Situations of conflict and insecurity have implications for the priorities of political parties and MPs. While war causes inevitable shifts of priorities towards security and defence, long-term transformative initiatives may lose salience. This research sought to determine, among other things, the extent to which the priorities of Ukrainian MPs have changed, including with regard to gender equality and inclusion.

The full-scale Russian invasion has had a gendered impact. While it has had a devastating impact on women and girls, women have also assumed key positions in government, the number of women in the military has increased significantly, and women hold key roles in business and in the humanitarian response. This provides important opportunities for gender transformations if they can be institutionalised within the reconstruction and recovery process.

This research examined both opportunities for gendered transformation as well as barriers to greater inclusion by investigating the changing priorities of members of the Ukrainian parliament.

Approaching the research from a gendered and intersectional perspective, the objectives of the research were to examine:

How has the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine impacted the political priorities of MPs, particularly with regard to gender equality and inclusion?

What are MPs' visions for the reconstruction and recovery of Ukraine?

What barriers do MPs' anticipate in the reconstruction and recovery process with regard to achieving gender transformative outcomes?

How does engagement with civil society shape MPs' priorities?

Findings are drawn from 19 semi-structured interviews with current members of the Ukrainian parliament (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine or VRU) that were conducted in Ukrainian on the conditions of anonymity. The research was carried out during a politically turbulent time, starting a month before President Zelenskyy's February 2025 meeting with President Trump at the White House, and concluding a month later amid uncertainty around continued US' support.





Key Findings

1. Security and sovereignty dominate political agendas

MPs' political priorities have shifted toward defence, territorial integrity, and international diplomacy to build political and military alliances to secure the supply of weapons and war equipment. They also prioritised the delivery and adaptation of critical services to the context of wartime, such as education, internal displacement, or the physical and psychological impact of the invasion on the civilian population.

Long-term reforms in areas like education, decentralisation, or the environment have been deprioritised, although a long-term focus remains in policy discourses on national identity, EU integration, and sustainable recovery.

The sense of unity within the Ukrainian parliament prevailed in the initial months after the full-scale invasion, yet over time, regular political cleavages have started to re-emerge. MPs reported that this sense of unity and consensus in the days immediately after the full-scale invasion was an important morale boost.

2. Gender equality: shared value, divergent interpretations

Parliamentarians support equality between women and men. However, understandings of what this means in practice ranged from narrow equality illustrated the increased role of women in the military service, to broader structural equality and a genuine focus on equal roles in decision-making and leadership. Some women MPs stressed the importance of increasing the share of women in decision-making positions, both at the national and local levels, for a more inclusive reconstruction and recovery process.

Women MPs expressed concerns about the rollback of 2019 gains, especially concerning political representation and gender quotas, and warned against attempts to circumvent them.

3. Women's roles expanded, yet gender norms persist

Despite the devastation, it was acknowledged that the full-scale invasion was conducive to enhancing women's leadership in politics, economy, and the military sector.

At the same time, patriarchal gender roles – especially around caregiving – remained entrenched and risk being reinforced in post-war if policies are not designed in a coherent manner.

4. UNSCRs on Women, Peace and Security (WPS): fragmented awareness

Awareness and implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions on WPS were inconsistent. Some MPs were active champions of the WPS Agenda; others unaware or sceptical, citing disillusionment with the UN.

Some MPs perceived WPS as an agenda predominantly associated with peace negotiations. Women's potential participation in negotiations with the Russian Federation was perceived as counterproductive due to militarisation and toxic masculinisation of Russian politics.

5. Mixed feelings about parliament's role in recovery and reconstruction

MPs reported a sense of limited influence over reconstruction planning, with decision-making centralised in the executive. Several perceived this as a byproduct of the state of emergency and attributed it to donor preferences, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Some reported that only those close to the executive branch had the opportunity to influence the process.

Parliamentarians frequently conveyed the intention to "build back better" when discussing priorities for Ukraine's reconstruction and recovery. There was a general recognition that reconstruction should avoid a return to the status quo before the beginning of the full-scale invasion. There was active support for commencement of recovery and reconstruction efforts while Ukraine is still resisting armed aggression.

6. Veteran reintegration: a national priority with gender blind spots

MPs unanimously prioritised veteran support (housing, employment, mental health) but narratives remain male-centric, which carries a risk of reproducing patriarchal gender stereotypes, especially as women take on additional unpaid care responsibilities, including caring for injured veteran family members.

Inclusion of women veterans in policy discourse was limited and LGBTI veterans were largely invisible.

While some MPs raised LGBTI inclusion unprompted, linking it to military service and civil partnership legislation, discrimination remains an issue.

7. Mental health and social cohesion recognised as critical

MPs widely acknowledged the psychological toll of war and the need for trauma-informed recovery.

They anticipated post-war tensions and domestic, interpersonal, and criminal violence, as well as veteran reintegration challenges. MPs demonstrated support for coherent preventative measures to decrease the probability of these prognosis.

8. Women's civil society leadership is influential but underleveraged

It is felt that women-led civil society organisations (CSOs) could shape recovery debates more effectively than MPs. Their influence was strongest at the local level, but formal mechanisms for engaging CSOs remain weak.

Recommendations to support recovery and reconstruction processes in Ukraine

**For MPs, Ukrainian political parties,
the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and
the international community**

1. Strengthen inclusive and accountable recovery governance

Reinforce parliamentary oversight

Equip MPs with tools and mandates to monitor transformational impact of recovery programmes, ensure regional equity, and uphold democratic accountability.

Integrate gender-transformative indicators into all parliamentary oversight tools to monitor the transparency, equity, and effectiveness of recovery spending and planning.

Institutionalise gender-responsive recovery

Embed gender and inclusion in all recovery frameworks: laws, budgets, and donor coordination platforms.

Ensure all new laws and amendments include gender impact assessments and contribute to advancing transformational outcomes.

Advance and adequately fund reforms for gender equality

Ensure all new laws and amendments include gender impact assessments and contribute to advancing transformational outcomes.

Further enhance formal mechanisms for civil society engagement

Enhance structured and resourced platforms for dialogue and consultations between MPs and civil society, that bring the perspectives of women, grassroots organisations, IDPs, veterans, carers, volunteer and LGBTI communities into national and local recovery planning and the legislative agenda.

Use evidence from the ground to influence national and international recovery agendas.

Build coalitions to amplify the voices of diverse segments of the population so no one is left behind.

2. Advance gender equality and transformative inclusion

Support women’s political participation

Protect and expand gender quotas to ensure women’s sustained political representation at all levels.

Mainstream the WPS agenda across parliament

Build cross-party understanding of the WPS agenda as a practical tool for inclusive governance, not just high-level diplomacy.

Encourage MPs to use WPS principles in legislative debates and constituency engagement.

Use the WPS agenda as a framework for involving women in decision-making on recovery and reconstruction as well as strengthening accountability on conflict-related sexual violence committed by Russian forces.

Introduce and enhance parliamentary accountability mechanisms for the implementation of the WPS National Action Plan.

Ensure that veteran policies are holistic and transformative

Ensure that veteran legislation reflects the diversity of veterans, including women and LGBTI individuals. Relevant policies need to be holistic, transformative, and leave no one behind.

Promote inclusive narratives of service and sacrifice in public discourse and memorialisation.

3. Invest in social resilience and mental health

Scale up gender-sensitive psychosocial support

Integrate trauma-informed services into national recovery plans, tailored to the needs of veterans, MPs, and civilians.

Prevent post-war violence and social fragmentation

Support community-based dialogue, social cohesion initiatives, domestic violence prevention, and inclusive reintegration initiatives to mitigate social tensions.

4. Recognise and institutionalise wartime gains

Honour and make visible women’s contributions to national defence and recovery

Use public campaigns and debates to ensure women’s roles are visible and valued in national dialogues and the media, as well as reflected in holistic and gender transformative recovery and reconstruction plans and post-war politics.

Advance LGBTI rights through legislative reform

Support civil partnership legislation and anti-discrimination measures, particularly in the military and public service.

**Scan to read the full report
from June 2025**



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