

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 30 December 2024 from the Permanent Representatives of Sierra Leone, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Sierra Leone and Switzerland, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in Ukraine (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

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Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations

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Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



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Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting on the situation in Ukraine held on 13 December 2024

On 13 December 2024, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security convened its first meeting on the situation in Ukraine. The members heard briefings by the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Ukraine, Matthias Schmale, accompanied by colleagues from the United Nations country team. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations on conflict-related sexual violence shared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Questions from Council members

Members of the Security Council raised multiple questions about the participation of women in Ukraine in decision-making, leadership, political and diplomatic efforts in connection with the war and other critical areas, such as reconstruction and demining, and asked whether the United Nations had taken any measures to promote women's participation in those areas. Council members also asked how political parties and administrative authorities in the country could be further engaged to ensure women's participation at all levels. There were also several questions about conflict-related sexual violence, including how Member States could support the Government of Ukraine in building the expertise and capacity of the judiciary to address cases of conflict-related sexual violence, how the United Nations was addressing the needs of women and girls affected by conflict-related sexual violence and what obstacles there were to access for survivors to comprehensive services. Lastly, Council members asked what kind of gender-responsive rehabilitation services were available for women combatants and women prisoners of war, whether there were sufficient measures to ensure women's full integration and equal treatment in the armed forces, what types of businesses women led as entrepreneurs and whether the access of women and girls to education had been sustained during the war. One Council member objected to the information and selection of facts presented in the meeting.

Main points raised in the meeting

Women's participation in politics and public life

- The Government of Ukraine is committed to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment and has established a number of positions and institutions to promote these issues, including the Government Commissioner on Gender Equality Policy, the Ministry of Social Policy and a Deputy Minister in charge of gender-related matters in each Ministry.
- Women remain underrepresented in decision-making bodies at the national and local levels. Although two of the four Deputy Prime Ministers are women, women comprise fewer than 25 per cent of representatives in the Cabinet. Women hold 85 of the 401 parliamentary seats (21.2 per cent), below the 40 per

cent quota stipulated in the 2019 Electoral Code. At the local level, only one of the regional military administrations in the 24 *oblasts* of Ukraine is headed by a woman, only 9 per cent of mayors are women and between 16 and 21 per cent of *hromadas*, or local communities, are headed by women.

- The 40 per cent quota stipulated in the 2019 Electoral Code is expected to be in place during the next national elections, which were postponed due to the war. Civil society organizations are working with political parties and women activists to build women's capacity to stand for election.
- Women head 66 per cent of the councils of internally displaced persons and represent 77 per cent of their members. They engage in city council discussions to ensure that policies and programmes are inclusive and address the needs of internally displaced women and their families.
- The number of servicewomen has tripled in the past 10 years. Currently, 68,000 women are enlisted in the Armed Forces of Ukraine; 48,000 of them are servicewomen holding military positions and approximately 5,000 are deployed in combat zones. The political leadership is determined to ensure women's equal participation in the armed forces.
- Member States should ensure the equal participation of women, including in leadership positions, in any global or regional diplomatic or political efforts related to Ukraine.

Women's participation in the economy

- In April 2023, 72 per cent of people registered as unemployed in Ukraine were women. The National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine estimates that women earned 41.4 per cent less than men in 2023, compared with 18.6 per cent less in 2021. Conversely, women's unpaid care responsibilities have increased considerably.
- At the same time, Ukrainian women are increasingly engaging in the economy as entrepreneurs. In the first quarter of 2024, 59 per cent of new companies in Ukraine were established by women. Many displaced women from eastern parts of Ukraine have restarted their former businesses, for instance, in retail, agriculture and farming, while some women-owned businesses have continued to operate since the start of the full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation. Women are also entering previously male-dominated professions, such as truck driving, demining and police work. The need to support women both in terms of breaking down stereotypes and in their care work, including through adequate childcare facilities, was highlighted.

Sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence

- Between February 2022 and August 2024, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented 342 cases of sexual violence perpetrated against 236 men, 94 women, 10 girls and 2 boys in Ukraine by members of the Russian armed forces and law enforcement authorities. Most of the cases were perpetrated in detention settings against civilian detainees and prisoners of war. A total of 61 cases were perpetrated in residential areas against civilians, most of them women and girls. OHCHR also documented 34 cases perpetrated by Ukrainian forces against 26 men and 8 women. The Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine reported 326 cases of conflict-related sexual violence between 22 February 2022 and 1 November 2024, with 193 women, 116 men, 16 girls and 1 boy among the victims. Sexual violence is expected to

be vastly underreported due to stigma, shame, fear of reprisals and lack of access to justice.

- The forms of sexual violence documented by the United Nations in Ukraine include rape, gang rape, attempted rape, sexual assault, genital mutilation, electric shocks and beatings to genitals, forced nudity, forced witnessing of sexual violence and threats of rape. Cases of sexual violence have been documented in both detention settings and occupied areas.
- In November 2024, the parliament of Ukraine adopted Act No. 10132 on legal and social protection of the rights of victims of sexual violence related to the aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and urgent interim reparations. Under a pilot project administered by the Global Survivors Fund, in collaboration with the Government of Ukraine, civil society and the International Organization for Migration, survivors of conflict-related sexual violence are, for the first time, receiving compensation as a means of urgent interim reparations while a war is still ongoing. The reparation measures will require substantive financial resources, for which the Government of Ukraine is seeking additional support from Member States.
- The Ukrainian judiciary continues to identify and prosecute cases of conflict-related sexual violence while the war is ongoing. The Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, in cooperation with the United Nations on the ground, is helping to build the capacities of national authorities in Ukraine to conduct survivor-centred and trauma-informed investigations and prosecutions of cases of conflict-related sexual violence, and to enhance the response of the judiciary to trafficking in persons for the purposes of sexual exploitation.
- In May 2022, the Government of Ukraine and the United Nations signed a framework of cooperation on preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence. An inter-agency working group consisting of 150 focal points from the Government of Ukraine, civil society, survivors' networks and the United Nations was established to ensure a coordinated response to sexual violence. Furthermore, women's protection advisers are deployed in Ukraine through a multi-agency structure involving OHCHR, UN-Women and the United Nations Population Fund, and a senior women's protection adviser is embedded within the Office of the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Ukraine.
- National and international civil society organizations receive United Nations support to help survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, including by providing mental health support and support for reintegration into economic life.

Humanitarian situation and the role of women-led organizations

- According to the 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for Ukraine, 14.6 million people are in a need of humanitarian assistance during the year. More than 55 per cent of them are women and girls. Women continue to lead resilience and recovery efforts in Ukraine under the harshest conditions. Women-led civil society organizations are actively addressing the most urgent humanitarian needs and preparing for post-war recovery. In 2022, they quickly pivoted to respond to the needs of waves of displaced persons and continue to offer emergency support.
- During the past two years, the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund has provided \$20 million to 132 women-led organizations in Ukraine. The funding

allows women's rights organizations to contribute to humanitarian crisis planning and response efforts and helps to ensure that women and girls have enhanced safety, security and access to rights and services. The funding also empowers women's rights activists and civil society leaders to participate in socioeconomic recovery efforts and in decision-making on humanitarian issues and recovery.

- The conflict has resulted in massive displacement both within Ukraine and to neighbouring countries. Women and girls represent the majority of the 6.8 million Ukrainians who have fled the country and 58 per cent of the 3.6 million internally displaced Ukrainians. Displaced women and girls face a heightened risk of various forms of sexual violence and exploitation.
- The United Nations, among others, provides support to women and women-headed households in Ukraine through cash assistance programmes and by providing free legal aid to restore their destroyed and lost identity and property documents.
- Women and girls in Ukraine have had access to education throughout the full-scale invasion, mostly through online platforms, including with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and others. There are also some underground schools, including in Kharkiv, where children are able to attend school in person. Genuine efforts are being made to ensure that girls are have equal access to in-person schooling. However, many children have not been able to attend school in person for five years due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the war.

National action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000)

- In 2022, Ukraine amended its second national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security (2020–2025). The amended national action plan is aimed at promoting women's participation in the political, public and private spheres and in post-conflict recovery, and includes mechanisms for preventing and responding to gender-based violence and measures to protect survivors of conflict-related sexual violence through psychosocial support, transitional justice, accountability and reparations.
- One of the strengths of the national action plan is the close partnership of the Government of Ukraine with civil society in each *oblast* through coalitions for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). The Government and civil society, with the support of the United Nations, have jointly developed regional action plans on women and peace and security, as well as 101 local action plans, representing a global best practice of localization.
- The Commissioner on Gender Equality Policy, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Policy and with the support of the United Nations, is currently developing the third national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).
- In 2024, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and UN-Women convened a regional dialogue of women's grass-roots organizations and human rights defenders across Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in Chisinau. The around 80 women participants confirmed that progress had been made at the community level, particularly in the implementation of national action plans on women and peace and security. The participants highlighted significant challenges in the current conflict environment, including a pronounced backlash against their work and the increasing exclusion of women from formal decision-making processes.

Funding for gender equality and women's empowerment in Ukraine

- While official development assistance to Ukraine jumped from \$1.3 billion in 2021 to \$18.9 billion in 2022, 90 per cent of the funding does not support any gender equality objectives. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, in 2022 only \$44 million, or 0.2 per cent, was allocated to efforts to advance gender equality as a principal objective, which is lower than the average across conflict-affected countries.
- In June 2024, the Governments of Ukraine and Germany, with the support of UN-Women, launched an alliance for gender-responsive and inclusive recovery, bringing together 15 Governments, major international financial institutions, United Nations agencies, the European Union and numerous partners from civil society and the private sector to improve funding and financing for gender equality in recovery efforts in Ukraine. The members of the alliance have committed to increasing the share of funding for projects that advance gender equality and protect women and girls, and to supporting the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and women's rights organizations in decision-making about reconstruction, including under the multi-agency donor coordination platform for Ukraine and at future Ukraine Recovery Conferences.

Recommendations¹

In their decisions and statements on Ukraine, Security Council members should:

- Urge all relevant actors to ensure women's full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in peace and security efforts related to Ukraine, including in any potential negotiations on a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in line with international law, recovery and all other areas related to peace and security.
- Express support for all international and national efforts to investigate and deliver accountability for conflict-related sexual violence, as well as all other violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, and urge all relevant actors to adopt measures to prevent such violations and ensure unimpeded access to all formal and informal detention facilities and access for survivors to comprehensive services to facilitate their reintegration.
- Urge the national authorities and international partners of Ukraine to ensure that at least 30 per cent of funding for recovery is allocated to efforts to advance gender equality as a principal or significant objective, and to significantly increase long-term and flexible funding for local women-led organizations and support for national systems to deliver survivor-centred multisectoral assistance to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine.
- Call upon humanitarian actors in Ukraine and countries in the region hosting large numbers of Ukrainian refugees to ensure that the humanitarian response includes the participation of local women's organizations and gender experts, deliberate attention to the risks of gender-based violence, trafficking and sexual exploitation and abuse, and enhanced access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and rights.

¹ These recommendations are suggestions from United Nations participants in the meeting or from the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting, and are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or from Council members.