



SUMMARY

Gender-based violence (GBV) is regarded among the most common human rights violations and disproportionately affects women and girls. GBV, intimate partner violence (IPV), domestic violence (DV) and sexual violence (SV) are widespread in Ukraine. Registered incidences are on the rise and are compounded by the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Socio-cultural barriers, behavioral patterns and attitudes towards GBV must be transformed through awareness-raising campaigns and gender mainstreaming.
- Effective prevention and combating GBV, IPV, DV and SV require human rights based, sustained, multi-sectoral national programs and action plans.
- Advisory and coordination councils must be created and strengthened to foster civic engagement, develop and implement strategies and policies and to ensure transparent monitoring and evaluation.
- Effective policymaking and response must be inclusive and involve all relevant rights-holders and duty bearers.
- The collection and reporting of data must be improved, ensure confidentiality and the right to privacy, and use harmonized methodologies and clearly defined and non-interchangeable terminology.
- Co-ordination between all stakeholders must be improved and linked with the commitment of state authorities to regularly monitor progress and review related legislation and policies.
- State authorities and stakeholders require capacity building in form of training, qualified personnel, technical assistance and financial and organizational resources.
- The legal and institutional framework must be strengthened and aligned with international Conventions, standards and good practices.
- Confidential, non-judgmental, easily accessible referral mechanisms must be made available across Ukraine including conflict affected areas.
- All victims/survivors of GBV must be legally empowered and be made aware of their rights and available support systems.

OVERVIEW

There is a general lack of data on GBV, IPV, DV and SV related issues and relevant data owners apply different collection and reporting methodologies. But available figures indicate that incidences in Ukraine are widespread and increasing. 115'000 reports of domestic violence (DV) recorded by the National Police in 2018 increased by almost a quarter in 2019, and by 50% in 2020. Almost 80% of them were filed by women, the vast majority victims/survivors of repeated violence by former or intimate partners. The conflict in eastern Ukraine has increased numbers of registered violent situations. Women and girls are at higher risk of SV at entry-exit crossing points and due to higher military presence in residential areas. The conflict has broken family support systems and undermined men's ability to fulfil their traditional gender roles resulting in negative coping mechanisms.

Women and girls are not only facing the risk of GBV but also associated negative health effects, psychological stress and trauma with often encompassing long-term consequences. GBV keeps and pushes victims/survivors out of employment and carries significant economic costs, estimated at more than USD 200 million per year in Ukraine and mostly borne by the victims/survivors. GBV, IPV, DV and SV take root in historically unequal power relations between women and men, are closely linked to gender-based discrimination, women's economic





vulnerability and their subordinated position in the hierarchy of family relations. Despite a gradual transformation of gender norms among younger men, Ukrainian men in general still demonstrate a relatively high tolerance towards emotional, economic and physical violence. Unemployment, limited access to livelihood, substance abuse and gambling, and now COVID-19 related lockdown measures, further drive incidence rates. Only an estimated 15% of all cases are reported. A culture of silence, a sense of impunity, lack of confidentiality, acceptance of intimate partner violence as a private matter, the belief in own coping abilities, the average higher social status of men, fear of repeated abuser aggression and of stigma and public condemnation discourage seeking for help. Referral pathways are often broken or non-existent. Trust in law enforcement bodies and authorities is still insufficient. There is only limited access to safe places, medical and psychological support and justice for victims/survivors. Authorities lack capacities to hold perpetrators accountable, but also to counsel and facilitate reintegration to prevent reoccurrence. Many women and girls are unaware of their rights and the availability of support services. In conflict affected areas, law enforcement and support services have been severely degraded and military personnel and civilians who have been subjected to conflict lack rehabilitation. More than 30% of women whose partner has participated in the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine has experienced physical or sexual abuse. Ukraine has recognized GBV, IPV, DV and SV response and prevention as a national priority. In 2020, Ukraine became member of the Biarritz Partnership for Gender Equality and the President’s Decree “On Urgent Measures to Prevent and Combat DV, GBV and Protect the Rights and Interests of Victims/Survivors of such Violence” came into force. Legislative advances have expanded the circle of people affected and the list of entities involved in prevention and combatting DV, have made provisions for launching general and specialized support services for victims/survivors. DV was criminalized in 2019. Ukraine is also signatory to the Istanbul Convention, which, however, remains unratified.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and all subsequent International Covenants and Conventions enshrine the universal application to women and men of the rights and principles of equality, security, liberty, integrity and dignity of all human beings. Preventing gender-based violence is transformational, it benefits individuals, the enjoyment of family life, communities and society at large and accelerates the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. It first and foremost advances gender-equality and the empowerment of women and girls (SDG 5). It is critical in improving the health of women and children and wellbeing of families (SDG 3) and better educational attainment (SDG 4). It reduces inequality (SDG 10), improves economic productivity and growth (SDG 8) and advances peace and justice (SDG 16).

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- Effective response to GBV, IPV, DV and SV requires a human rights-based National Gender Equality Action Plan and a Program and Action Plan on prevention and response. They must ensure a sustained approach of national, regional and local government, and between the Legislature and Judiciary towards zero-tolerance policy at all levels.
- Subnational advisory and coordination councils together with partnerships in GBV prevention and mitigation must be created and strengthened where in place. They must include human rights organizations, local NGOs/CSOs, women’s and community activists, where feasible, and should ideally involve business membership organizations and trade unions.
- Policy must give special attention to vulnerable women, men, boys and girls including persons with disabilities, women and girls facing multiple forms of discrimination, elderly persons, single-headed households in particular with children, minorities, persons living in





poverty, persons in closed facilities, conflict-affected IDPs, asylum seekers and refugees, and returnees and NGCA residents.

- The collection and reporting of data must be improved, ensure confidentiality and the right to privacy, and include information concerning gender norms, male identity, stereotypes of masculinity and acceptability of violence. The Ministry of Social Policy, the Ministry of Interior, the Prosecutor’s General Office and the Court System must harmonize their collecting and reporting methodologies with clearly defined and non-interchangeable terminology to this effect.
- The legal and institutional framework must be strengthened. This includes ratification of the Istanbul Convention, the definition of sexual harassment provided in art.1 of the Law of Ukraine No. 2866-IV “On ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men” to cover horizontal and vertical sexual harassment, and the ratification of the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No.190) to address work-related GBV and the nexus between DV and access to decent work.
- Coordination of the designated duty bearers must be implemented in accordance with the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers No.658 of 2018, and other relevant legislation. This must be linked with the commitment on the part of the authorities to regularly monitor progress and review the efficacy of laws and policies.
- Confidential, non-judgmental non-discriminatory and an easily available national, subnational and local referral mechanism for victims/survivors, including those in conflict areas must be available. They are critical to effectively respond to GBV under conditions of decentralization and legislative changes on social service provision and reduce further traumatization and victimization.
- Referral mechanisms must include operational hotlines, remotely accessible and safe support and reporting mechanisms, the provision of safe spaces for GBV victims/survivors (sexual GBV in particular) and those at risk, medical assistance from doctors with relevant training and guidelines, shelters and social housing, health services including sexual and reproductive health, specialized counselling, psychological support services, longer-term rehabilitation and livelihood support.
- Victims/survivors must be legally empowered through information about their rights, legal procedures and protection mechanisms. They must have access to government provided free and timely legal aid, reparation, mechanisms to resolve violence-inducing disputes and access to human-rights based and survivor-centered justice that places the burden of proof on the perpetrators in civic cases.
- Women, men, girls and boys must be made better aware about available support services, including ways to enter / re-enter the labour market where applicable, through easily accessible websites and long-term public information campaigns that also reach those with limited or no internet connection.
- Support services for perpetrators must be made available and improved together with rehabilitation mechanisms for military personnel and civilians having experienced conflict.
- The Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior must ensure soldiers are trained on the issue of sexual exploitation and abuse and apply zero tolerance for soldiers who commit crimes of a sexual nature.
- Relevant state authorities and stakeholders require capacity building in form of qualified personnel, including first responder and law enforcement training that facilitates early detection and intervention, and financial resources to conduct their key role in implementing and monitoring GBV, IPV, DV and SV policy and legal frameworks.
- Well-targeted, long-term information and awareness campaigns targeting both rights holders and duty bearers are needed to promote gender equality throughout society and state





institutions, to eliminate discriminatory policies and practices, discriminatory beliefs and the negative effects of socially constructed gender roles, and to promote zero-tolerance attitudes and practices.

- Information about gender equality and violence against women and girls needs to be mainstreamed into the education system and training programs for teachers and other education professionals. This needs to be complimented by community-based awareness activities that encourage public response to incidences, and actions dedicated to empowering women and girls.
- GBV should be taken into consideration in economic development policies. For example, Land Reform policies in relation to control over productive resources, in this case access to agricultural land, is one of the causes for increased violence.

