

# 10

## WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE UKRAINIAN ARMED FORCES

*Tamara Martsenyuk*

*The full-scale war has shown that sustainability and further post-war reconstruction and development of Ukraine require equal involvement of both women and men in all spheres of life. Besides, equal rights and opportunities are one of the key values of the EU.*

*—Olha Stefanishyna, Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine*

Since Ukrainian independence in 1991, equality and human rights have become more important values in Ukrainian society. Gender equality improved during and after the Revolution of Dignity (a.k.a. the Euromaidan Protests) of 2013–2014. During this and other historical events, Ukrainian women played an important role in fighting for freedom, equality, and dignity. Grassroots activism has a long tradition in Ukraine, and women have actively participated in bringing forth “bottom-up” changes in the country, including new ideas about gender.

Mass civilian mobilization means that all human resources, regardless of gender, are needed and considered appropriate to stem further dispossession and loss of land. Among the consequences of the full-scale Russian invasion, we see growing support for gender equality. Such egalitarian ideas are manifest in a new openness to women serving in the armed forces and even in combat positions. General attitudes toward LGBT participation in the military are also evolving (Martsenyuk 2022). Given the civilizational choice between the so-called *russkii mir* (“Russian world”), which relies on promoting traditional gender roles and inciting homophobia, and Western values that favor equality and inclusivity, politically and popularly we see institutional changes in Ukraine that favor the latter. In this war, where different groups, including women and

LGBT people, are contributing to victory by participating in different forms of resistance, expectations are growing for more inclusivity and more possibilities to fight for gender-based rights. Implementing gender equality in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), which has resulted in massive growth in opportunities for women to serve in combat and other positions in a highly male-dominated domain, is one of the major consequences of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Since 10 February 2022, shortly before the invasion began, female officers were allowed to serve in all military specialties and ranks (Ministry of Defense 2022). The radical openness that drove these swift and innovative developments in the military sector is likely to influence the continued formation of new gender-based norms, identities, and roles in a multitude of other spheres in Ukrainian society.

After Russia started the war in Donbas in 2014, and especially after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, women expressed their will to defend the country on par with men. Since the Russo-Ukrainian war began, the number of women in the AFU and military institutions of higher learning increased, giving women greater visibility in the security and defense sectors and among activists and veterans of the Russo-Ukrainian war. A democratic society should provide women and men with equal opportunities to participate in all spheres of life, including the military sector. The Ukrainian government has identified promoting gender equality as an important state policy priority (Levchenko 2020; Razumkov Center 2016).

In 2020, as part of the project "Strengthening Democratic Control of the Ukrainian Armed Forces," the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) sponsored the publication of *The Guidebook on Gender Integration in the Ukrainian Armed Forces* (OSCE 2020), intended for the top management of the Ministry of Defense, the Armed Forces, officers at all levels, and heads and officials of authorized units on gender issues. The manual presents the fundamentals of gender concepts; gender threats in armed conflict; legislative principles of gender policy; the basics of NATO's gender perspective; and the substance of the 2000 UN Security Council Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace and Security" agenda (UNSC 2000). UNSC Resolution 1325 underlines the importance of women in resolving conflicts, restoring peace, and fighting gender-based violence in conflict situations. Moreover, the resolution encourages UN member states to increase their representation of women in decision-making capacities in peace and security efforts as part of an overall effort at gender mainstreaming.

At the same time, the problem of discrimination against women in the military sphere remains, as does gender-based and sexual violence, all of which remain taboo subjects that are insufficiently studied. The results of two sociological studies, "Invisible Battalion': The Participation of Women in Military Operations in the ATO" (2015) and "Invisible Battalion 2.0': The Return of Female Veterans to a Peaceful Life" (2018–2019), document the hostility of

Ukraine's security sector to women. Despite reforms regarding gender equality and Ukraine signing of a number of treaties and accords—such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW 1979), the UN Global Sustainable Development Goals 2016–2030 (Verkhovna Rada 2019), and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSC 2000)—women in the military still face significant gender discrimination and sexual harassment.

In this chapter, I analyze the implementation of gender equality policies and how they have recently changed thanks to international accords and state policies designed to deliver equal rights and opportunities, before moving on to a discussion of the successes and ongoing challenges of women's integration into the AFU over the past ten years. I analyze statistics on women and men in the armed forces, gender equality, and what is being done to address sexual harassment based on official state statistics and public opinion surveys. This chapter posits that, in response to Russian efforts to compromise Ukrainian state sovereignty and autonomy since 2014, sweeping changes have been implemented in the AFU. These changes affect gender equality through women's integration into the military sphere. This is part of a greater response to the war that has also led to broad popular support for a professional contract army with equal conscription of men and women on a voluntary basis.

### **Implementing gender equality: international agreements and state reform**

In the last handful of years alone, Ukraine has ratified major international accords on ensuring equal rights and opportunities for men and women: the UN Global Sustainable Development Goals 2016–2030 and the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security (UNSC 2000). Ukraine also adopted the second National Action Plan to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 for 2021–2025. Ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men is an important area of activity for the Council of Europe (CoE), of which Ukraine is a member. Member states are expected to fulfill the six goals of the CoE's Gender Equality Strategy 2018–2023: (1) preventing and combating gender stereotypes and sexism; (2) preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence; (3) ensuring the equal access of women to justice; (4) achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making; (5) protecting the rights of migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking women and girls; and (6) achieving gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures (Council of Europe 2018, 7). In 2020, Ukraine formally became a full member of the Biarritz Partnership for Gender Equality (President of Ukraine 2020), a global coalition championed by the French government to achieve the full empowerment of girls and women around the world.

In the framework of the Partnership, Ukraine, as a full participant, undertakes commitments in five areas: (1) the development of a barrier-free public space friendly to families with children and low-mobility groups; (2) teaching children the principles of equality between women and men; (3) prevention of violence; (4) reducing the pay gap between women and men; and (5) creating greater opportunities for men to care for children. Moreover, in the summer of 2022, the 2011 Istanbul Convention, which is “the most comprehensive international instrument for combating violence against women and domestic violence in its many forms,” was finally ratified (Council of Europe 2022).

These initiatives were all a prelude to European Council granting Ukraine the status of candidate for accession to the European Union on 23 June 2002. This means that gender politics in Ukraine must continue to develop (Levchenko 2020; Martsenyuk 2016). In addition to these international agreements, some key legislative steps had already been taken. The Constitution of Ukraine (1996) and two laws of Ukraine—“On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men” (Verkhovna Rada 2005) and “On the Principles of Prevention and Counteraction of Discrimination in Ukraine” (Verkhovna Rada 2012)—had already established the principles of non-discrimination and equal rights and opportunities for men and women in various areas of public life. According to Article 24 of the Constitution of Ukraine, “There shall be no privileges or restrictions based on race, color of skin, political, religious and other beliefs, sex, ethnic and social origin, property status, place of residence, linguistic or other characteristics” (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 1996). The law of Ukraine “On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men” (Verkhovna Rada 2005) includes definitions of equal rights and opportunities for women and men, gender-based discrimination, positive action, and sexual harassment. The State Social Program on Providing Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men up to 2021 also included the creation of a Government Commissioner for Gender Policy. Finally, on 12 August 2022, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine approved the State Strategy for Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men through 2030 and an operational plan for its implementation in 2022–2024 (Service of the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine 2022).

The international community monitors equal rights and opportunities through the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report. The report tracks the gender gap in four important areas of inequality: economic participation, health, educational level, and political representation. In 2022, Ukraine was ranked 81 out of 148 countries. The lowest score that Ukraine earned, 100 out of 148, was for women’s participation in the political decision-making process (World Economic Forum 2022). Addressing gender equity and gender mainstreaming in the political sphere is an important step toward women’s empowerment. Having signed multiple international agreements, Ukraine has recognized the importance of gender equality. Now comes the difficult task of implementing processes and

procedures to achieve it, especially in those particularly challenging domains, such as the male-dominated military, and especially during wartime.

### **Women's integration and gender equality in the military sector: successes and challenges**

Gender policy in the AFU requires both gender mainstreaming and the introduction of specific measures to promote women's participation in the armed forces (Martsenyuk, Grytsenko, and Kvit 2015). Gender-based stereotypical attitudes, paternalist approaches, and even discrimination characterize women's participation in the military and the labor market in general. The introduction of outside experts to advise on policies to promote providing equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the military was an essential step. In the metaphorically titled "Invisible Battalion" study, I argued that the state ignores the interests and needs of women who have been mobilized or volunteered. The AFU, similar to the labor market, is characterized by a vertical "glass ceiling," meaning the higher the military rank, the fewer the women (which blocks women from assuming decision-making roles), as well as horizontal forms of gender segregation, meaning women are channeled into traditionally "female" non-combat positions and men into traditionally "male" combat military specialties. Although the number of women in the military is increasing, which aligns with general global trends, women mostly hold so-called "feminized" positions as medical, financial, logistics, and communications workers.

When the Anti-Terrorist Operation started in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, the majority of combat positions were closed to women. There is a similar phenomenon in certain civilian spheres. For example, according to a decree of the Ministry of Health (Ministry of Health 1993b), women in Ukraine did not have the right to work in around 450 positions that involved "heavy manual labor" or to work in "harmful and dangerous conditions." In 2017, this decree was overturned, although some prohibitions against women working in mines remained (Ministry of Health 2017). According to labor protection rules, there are still limits prohibiting women from lifting and moving heavy objects that weigh seven to ten kilograms (depending on the frequency of lifting) (Ministry of Health 1993a).

The 2015 "Invisible Battalion" study revealed the non-fulfillment of the 2000 UNSC Resolution 1325, which emphasizes the importance of viewing women as equal and active participants in processes of conflict resolution and peacebuilding activities. The current war has historical parallels with the Second World War concerning women's involvement and participation in combat positions. Women's war stories are not excluded entirely, but as in the current war, they take a subordinate place to the narratives of male soldiers (Khromeychuk 2018). The "Invisible Battalion" campaign provided an opportunity to recognize the

role of women in the war, resulting in the granting of more labor rights to women working in the AFU (Martsenyuk et al. 2019). As a result of joint efforts by the women veterans' movement, women's activist groups, and female parliamentary members of the Parliamentary Equal Opportunities Caucus, the law "On amendments to certain legislative acts of Ukraine on ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and other military formations" was adopted (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2018).<sup>1</sup> This law enables women to serve equally with men through enlistment by contract on a voluntary basis or military draft, in active and reserve service, as long as military registration rules are followed.

In the summer of 2018, a founding meeting of the women veterans' movement was held near Kyiv. The participants explained the need for grassroots organizing that would include the creation of a female veteran "block." As women are in the minority in the army, at meetings of (mostly male) veterans, it is difficult for individual women to voice problems and achieve solutions (Martsenyuk et al. 2019). The Ukrainian Women Veterans Movement aims to increase the opportunities to advocate and protect the rights of women veterans and active women military personnel by promoting equal rights and opportunities through lawmaking and advocating for a professional and prestigious security sector. Since 2019, over 100 women veterans have joined the Ukrainian Women Veterans Movement (UN in Ukraine 2020a).

Women's access to military education is an important component of building equal rights and opportunities in the military sphere. Ukraine's implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security provides equal access to women and men in educational institutions of all levels of the security and defense sectors and inclusion of a gender component in the educational process (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2020). After girls were admitted to study in military lyceums in 2019, the visibility of women in the fields of security and defense increased significantly (Martsenyuk et al. 2023). In the period 2021–2022, the number of girls in the most prestigious military educational institution, the Ivan Bohun Kyiv Military Lyceum, doubled to 50 from two years earlier.

At the same time, the Ninth Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women report, submitted by Ukraine in 2021, noted that two women participated in negotiations within the Trilateral Contact Group on the peaceful settlement of the situation in Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine in the period 2014–2019. The report outlined a number of significant systemic changes that had been adopted by 2021: access of women to military occupations (including combat positions); recognition of female veterans; gender equality in military legislation; improved protection of women from gender-based violence; access to military education at all levels for girls and women; gender-sensitivity training and education for staff; and sociological research on different aspects of gender equality implementation (Ukraine CEDAW 2021, 5–6).

Nonetheless, lingering problems remain. Some leaders of the security and defense sector do not see gender equality as a necessary part of reform; security institutions lack the necessary capacities and experience for advancing gender equality at strategic, operational, and tactical levels; women have little or no support in developing their capacities and leadership skills; and discrimination and sexual harassment against women are widespread in the security and defense sector. To meet these challenges, in 2020, UN Women in Ukraine launched the “Women Are Key to Peace” campaign to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the UNSC Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security (UN in Ukraine 2020b). After the full-scale invasion, the issues of women’s uniforms and hygiene products became more relevant. By March 2023, NGOs and private initiatives provided women with anatomically comfortable uniforms, even though the development of women’s uniforms was announced by the Ministry of Defense in 2022, with the goal of putting comfortable uniforms into circulation by the end of 2023.

### Overcoming gender segregation

As the war ground on, by January 2023 the adviser on gender issues to the commander of the Ground Forces, Oksana Grygorieva, announced:

About 5,000 women are fighting on the front lines ... Currently, 60,000 Ukrainian women are serving, including 40,000 in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Prior to 24 February 2022, 16–17 percent of the Ukrainian Army was female. After the mobilization of mostly men and women volunteering, the percentage of women in the total army decreased. Currently, it is 8 percent with plans to recruit up to 20 percent women into the army to achieve gender equality.

*(Slavins'ka 2023)*

Vertical gender segregation in the military is gradually being overcome as more women hold higher military ranks (Invisible Battalion 5.0 2023). As Table 10.1 shows, according to the data of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine (MoD), since 2013 and the intensifying armed combat with Russia, the number of women in military service in the AFU almost doubled from 16,000 to 31,000. Moreover, the number of female officers has more than tripled from 1,633 in 2013 to 5,112 in 2022. The number of sergeants has almost tripled from 4,784 in 2013 to 13,747 in 2022.

On 24 August 2021, the President of Ukraine awarded the military rank of Brigadier General of the Medical Service to Colonel Tetiana Ostashchenko, the commander of the Medical Forces of the AFU (UkrInform 2021). This is the first time in the history of Ukraine that a female representative of the Armed

**TABLE 10.1** The number of women in military service in the AFU by year

<i>Year</i>	<i>Officers</i>	<i>Sergeants</i>	<i>Soldiers</i>	<i>Total</i>
2013	1,633	4,784	9,797	16,214
2014	1,633	4,784	9,797	16,214
2015	1,582	3,898	8,490	13,970
2016	2,204	3,946	10,405	16,555
2017	2,553	4,434	12,599	19,586
2018	3,068	5,316	15,703	24,087
2019	3,574	6,125	16,004	25,703
2020	4,244	6,973	17,438	28,655
2021	4,810	6,112	19,673	30,595
2022	5,112	13,747	12,402	31,261

*Source:* Data supplied by the MoD upon request, 16 January 2023.

Forces received the rank of general. The head of the Military Medical Department of the Security Service of Ukraine (SSU), Liudmyla Shugalei, became the first Ukrainian woman to receive the rank of major general of the medical service (Hrytsenko 2022). Yulia Laputina, Minister of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine, received the second general rank in the SSU (Zubkova 2020). Other women in top positions in the security and defense sector include Hanna Maliar, Deputy Minister of Defense of Ukraine; Yulia Laputina, Minister of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine; and Iryna Vereshchuk, Deputy Minister and Minister for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine.

According to the Ministry of Veterans Affairs, as of 1 January 2023, about 455,000 people had registered as veterans of the Russo-Ukrainian war since 2014 (Invisible Battalion 5.0 2023). Among them are more than 26,000 women (5.8 percent). Five years ago, there were almost 12,000 female veterans, revealing a sharp increase. Since the summer of 2018, the number of female veterans of combat operations has more than doubled (Martsenyuk et al. 2019). The largest share of female veteran combatants is in the National Police (15.8 percent), followed by the SSU (8.3 percent), the State Emergency Service (6.0 percent), and the Administration of the State Border Service (5.0 percent). The Ministry of Defense of Ukraine has the largest number of women veterans with 18,922 (6.0 percent). Among the volunteers, the share of female veterans is almost 10 percent. Regionally, the largest number of veterans were from Donetsk (4,253 or 17.6 percent of all veterans), followed by Luhansk (2,155 or 14.2 percent), Lviv (1,679 or 6.0 percent), Dnipropetrovsk (1,499 or 4.3 percent), Odesa (1,350 or 7.3 percent), Zhytomyr (1312 or 5.7 percent), Kyiv (1,172 or 4.1 percent), and Kharkiv (1,165 or 5.3 percent) regions.

According to the Ministry of Veterans Affairs of Ukraine, as of 1 January 2023, the number of persons having the status of a person with a disability due to the war was 101,153, of whom 8,534 (8.4 percent) were women (Invisible



Battalion 5.0 2023). According to the most recent available open sources, such as the Book of Remembrance of the Fallen for Ukraine, as of 1 December 2021, 23 women had died in the Russo-Ukrainian war.<sup>2</sup> A number of them received awards posthumously, including markswoman Alesia Baklanova, sanitary instructor Alla Vovk, senior nurse Sabina Halyts'ka, sniper Yaroslava Nikonenko, senior telephone operator Kateryna Noskova, senior combat medic Klavdia Sytnyk, sanitary instructor Natalia Horuzha, and sanitary instructor of the battalion medical post-Iryna Shevchenko, who was posthumously awarded the order “For Courage” III degree. Olena Kulish, a volunteer who was killed for providing support to Ukrainian soldiers, was posthumously given the “National Hero of Ukraine” award.

### **Public opinion on equal rights and opportunities for women in the military**

Even though the political will is crucial for implementing gender equality at an institutional level, societal attitudes toward diversity and dignity are also important factors (Martsenyuk 2022).

As part of the sociological study “Invisible Battalion 2.0: The Return of Female Veterans to a Peaceful Life” (2019), a survey was conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology during the period 8–23 September 2018 in 109 localities in all oblasts of Ukraine under Ukrainian control. In the field survey stage, 2,026 questionnaires were collected, 915 from men and 1,111 from women. The results of this survey demonstrate support for the idea of equal rights and opportunities in the Armed Forces (Martsenyuk et al. 2019, 144–149). Almost five years later in 2023, and almost one year after the invasion, to assess attitudes toward gender equality in the AFU, three questions were asked again (Invisible Battalion 5.0 2023). The field stage in January 2023 was conducted by the research agency Info Sapiens on different samples of the population that were nevertheless representative of Ukraine (except for the non-controlled territories).

While in 2018 more than half agreed that women in Ukraine should be given equal opportunities to work in the AFU and other military branches, in 2023, this opinion was held more strongly (see Table 10.2). In fact, nearly a year after the full-scale invasion, half of the respondents still strongly agree with this statement. Full support for equal rights and opportunities for women and men to work in the Armed Forces and other military formations has doubled over the past four and a half years of the war that began in 2014. Table 10.2 shows that, in 2018, slightly more than one-third of Ukrainians disagreed with this statement, and 15 percent found it difficult to answer. By 2023, the situation has changed significantly. We have half as many respondents (6 percent versus 12 percent) who completely disagree with the fact that women should be given

**TABLE 10.2** Women should be granted equal opportunities with men to work in the armed forces of Ukraine and other military formations. Please say whether you agree or disagree with the following statements

<i>Variants of answers</i>	<i>KIIS, N = 2,026, September 2018 (%)</i>	<i>Info Sapiens, N = 1,000, January 2023 (%)</i>
I agree completely	24.0	50.1
I rather agree than disagree	29.3	33.8
I rather disagree than agree	18.9	8.4
I completely disagree	12.2	5.8
Difficult to say	14.3	1.6
Refusal to answer	1.4	0.4
<b>Total</b>	100	100

**TABLE 10.3** Attitudes to the statement that the army should be a professional field where both women and men can fulfill their potential on a voluntary basis (of their own free will)

<i>Variants of answers</i>	<i>KIIS, N = 2,026, September 2018 (%)</i>	<i>Info Sapiens, N = 1,000, January 2023 (%)</i>
I agree completely	32.9	78.0
I rather agree than disagree	36.2	17.1
I rather disagree than agree	9.6	2.2
I completely disagree	6.8	1.6
Difficult to say	13.1	0.7
Refusal to answer	1.4	0.3
<b>Total</b>	100	100

equal opportunities with men to work in the AFU and other military branches. The share of those who rather disagree has more than halved in those years. By January 2023, only about 2 percent of Ukrainians were undecided on this issue, demonstrating new attitudes toward gender equality in the armed forces.

Similarly, support for the statement that the army should be a professional force where both women and men can serve on a voluntary basis has increased significantly (see Table 10.3). While in 2018 only 33 percent fully agreed with this statement, by 2023, two and a half times more did (78 percent). In fact, a year after the invasion, we have almost unanimous support for a professional army with both men and women serving.

Regardless of the survey year, the majority of people believe conscription of both men and women should be only on a voluntary, contract basis (see Table 10.4). More than 60 percent of Ukrainians chose this option in both 2018 and 2023. By 2023, the share of those polled who were inclined to support

**TABLE 10.4** In your opinion, what kind of army should Ukraine introduce?

<i>Variants of answers</i>	<i>KIIS, N = 2,026, September 2018 (%)</i>	<i>Info Sapiens, N = 1,000, January 2023 (%)</i>
Enlistment of both men and women only voluntarily (enlistment by contract)	62.0	65.9
Conscription of all men and only of some women	10.6	12.8
Conscription only of men	17.0	12.0
Conscription of all men and all women	1.6	3.3
Other	0.4	4.0
Difficult to say	7.3	1.9
Refusal to answer	1.1	0.1
<b>Total</b>	100	100

the conscription of only men decreased to 12 percent from 17 percent. Few support the draft of all men and only some women. The least popular option in both periods is the total conscription of all men and all women. In 2018, only 1.6 percent of Ukrainians supported it. In 2023, it rose only to 3.3 percent. In other words, support remains robust for enlistment over conscription and for equal opportunity for women and men to enlist.

There are different factors to explain why Ukrainians, especially after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, support equal opportunities for women and men in the AFU. The presence and positive image of women soldiers have become common. Moreover, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the necessity to mobilize more people for armed resistance have encouraged people to see women as potential soldiers. Finally, Ukrainian women have long been an active part of a tradition of resistance in the fight for Ukrainian independence (Channell-Justice et al. 2021).

An additional survey to gauge the readiness of men and women to engage in armed resistance to Russian occupation was conducted by the research agency Info Sapiens in the period 11–23 January by the computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) method. It was based on a random sample of 1,000 mobile phone numbers, representative of the population of Ukraine aged 16+ by gender, age, region, and size of settlement. The survey excludes the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Luhansk Oblast, as well as some temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv, and Kharkiv Oblasts, where there is no telephone connection (see Table 10.5). The majority of Ukrainians, 70.2 percent, both men and women, are ready to do this, if we combine the responses “fully ready” and “rather ready.” Of course, men chose these options to a greater extent: 77.4 percent of men and 64.3 percent of

**TABLE 10.5** Are you personally ready or not ready to put up armed resistance to stop the Russian occupation of Ukraine? (Info Sapiens,  $N = 1000$ , January 2023)

<i>Variants of answers</i>	<i>Men (%)</i>	<i>Women (%)</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
Completely ready	44.32	29.59	36.26
Rather ready	33.09	34.70	33.97
Rather not ready	8.55	16.58	12.95
Completely not ready	7.23	13.45	10.64
I am already resisting	5.00	0.12	2.33
I don't know/It's hard to say	1.82	5.54	3.86
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100

*Source:* Data provided to the author by Inna Volosevych, Info Sapiens.

women are ready to offer armed resistance, that is, the majority of Ukrainian men and women. We see that 2.3 percent of the population is already resisting, according to the results of this survey.

To summarize the results of public opinion polls, egalitarian tendencies toward equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the military have intensified after the invasion.

### **The problem of sexual harassment in the armed forces and the fight against it**

The topic of combating sexual violence in Ukrainian society in general, and in the military sphere in particular, is relevant and requires careful attention. A systematic strategy and policy for preventing and countering sexual harassment in the security and defense sector has not yet been formed. Psychologists and others responsible for moral and psychological support lack appropriate qualifications and job instructions for interacting with survivors of sexual harassment and offenders. There is a lack of clear, established terminology, an effective mechanism for responding to sexual harassment, systematic information on the inadmissibility of behavior that can be considered sexual harassment, and accountability for violating these new norms of behavior. To understand the scale of the problem, one must consider the reluctance of survivors of sexual harassment to report such cases, the complexity of the process of reporting, and the taboo nature of the subject of sexual violence. Survivors often refuse to ask for help because they face victim-blaming from those around them.

Non-governmental organizations, such as the Ukrainian NGO Legal Hundred,<sup>3</sup> the Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association (JurFem),<sup>4</sup> and La Strada-Ukraine,<sup>5</sup> collect statistical information about cases of sexual harassment in the military. The Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association provides free legal aid for survivors of sexual violence and all forms of gender discrimination. As of 7 February 2023, the JurFem support hotline had received about 200 complaints.

Of these, ten were from women who served in the military, mostly regarding sexual violence and discrimination. Four cases were related to sexual violence committed against military women. According to data from La Strada–Ukraine, in 2022, the national hotline for the prevention of domestic violence, human trafficking, and gender discrimination received 38,472 calls. Regarding sexual harassment and sexual violence, 147 appeals for help were received, including 88 for rape consultations and 59 for sexual harassment. Among them, two were related to sexual violence in the military. One appeal concerned the rape of a female soldier during military service and the other related to sexual harassment by a commander during military service.

Military women are afraid to report acts of violence to their commander or make a statement to law enforcement agencies. They are wary of negative consequences that might arise from fellow male comrades in their unit. Internal investigations take place under the guise of “covering their own” in compliance with “male solidarity.” The true scale of the problem of sexual harassment in the military is difficult to assess, which makes it difficult to address. Conclusions from statistical data from a study conducted two years ago remain relevant in 2023. Considering the increase in the number of women in the defense and security sector of Ukraine who are more likely to be survivors of sexual harassment, there is an urgent need to establish effective mechanisms for monitoring cases of sexual harassment and combating sexual violence.

In 2021, an online course titled “Gender Equality and Combating Sexual Harassment in the Military” was introduced on the Prometheus platform.<sup>6</sup> The course was developed by the NGO “Institute of Gender Programs” as part of the “Invisible Battalion 3.0” information campaign (Invisible Battalion 3.0 2021). It is intended for employees of the security and defense sector, veterans, military journalists, and employees of military educational institutions, as well as for all those interested in the topic of ensuring gender equality in the military. As of 11 January 2023, 23,365 students had taken the course and 21,105 (or 90 percent) received certificates. The average age of the listener was 34 years, and the vast majority, 83 percent, were men.

## Conclusion

Since the beginning of the hybrid war in 2014, the number of women working in the security and defense sector has grown significantly, and increasing women’s access to the Armed Forces has become part of the current political agenda. A combination of dynamics is driving these developments: a “top-down” approach regarding the regulation of gender equality via policies on the official level and a “bottom-up” approach driven by NGOs, grassroots activism, and women themselves. The Invisible Battalion advocacy campaign, which began in 2015, initiated positive changes within the security and defense sector and helped change

the public perception of women defenders. As the war dragged on, so did efforts to expand the possibilities for women in the military. Newfound openness to gender equality in the midst of war has led to sweeping changes. Combat positions were gradually opened to women; women were admitted to military lyceums and higher institutions of military education; there has been greater acknowledgment and condemnation of gender-based violence leading to gender training and education for staff; female veterans are now recognized; and the general principles of gender equality have been legally approved.

Although the issue of horizontal and vertical segregation of women in the Armed Forces remains problematic, the situation is gradually improving. Providing equal rights and opportunities for women in the military mandates preventing and combating sexual harassment. The number of appeals from military survivors of sexual harassment is increasing. This indicates a growing level of awareness of this problem. However, the topic of sexual violence still remains rather hushed and taboo, which allows perpetrators to go unpunished, especially during the active phase of war.

Given the very real military threat Ukraine faces, military and political leaders have had to use radical openness to find new ways to strengthen defensive capacities to gain a decisive edge. Support for egalitarian ideas regarding the involvement of women and LGBT people in the armed forces is growing as a solution. Not only are all resources needed, but also there is a broad tendency among Ukrainians to distance themselves from all things Russian (see Pavlenko, this volume). This includes the traditional gender roles and identities encapsulated in the civilizational choice of the “Russian world” versus more tolerant and inclusive European gender-based ideals. As women and LGBT people continue to contribute to victory by participating in different forms of resistance, including militarily, radical openness to new gender-based norms of equality might well continue to spread to other spheres of Ukrainian society even long after this war is over.

## Notes

- 1 This legislation also affects service in the Border Guards of Ukraine, the Security Service of Ukraine, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, the Civil Defense Forces of Ukraine, and other military formations, created in accordance with the laws of Ukraine, as well as relevant law enforcement agencies (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2000).
- 2 The Book of Remembrance of the Fallen for Ukraine: <https://memorybook.org.ua> (accessed 28 June 2023).
- 3 The Ukrainian NGO Legal Hundred: <https://legal100.org.ua/en/> (accessed 28 June 2023).
- 4 The Ukrainian Women Lawyers Association “JurFem”: <https://jurfem.com.ua/en/homepage-2/> (accessed 28 June 2023).
- 5 La Strada–Ukraine: <https://la-strada.org.ua/en/> (accessed 28 June 2023).
- 6 “*Henderna rivnist’ ta protydiia seksual’nym domahanniam u viis’kovii sferi*,” course on the Prometheus platform: [https://courses.prometheus.org.ua/courses/course-v1:Prometheus+GE101+2021\\_T2/about](https://courses.prometheus.org.ua/courses/course-v1:Prometheus+GE101+2021_T2/about) (accessed 28 June 2023).

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