



Religion and Gender

Ukrainian Women at War: From Women's Sotnya to Invisible Battalion

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Recent events in Ukraine connected with the Euromaidan protests of 2013-2014 and later the armed conflict in the Eastern part, brought changes into women's lives and their roles both in society and their families. On the one hand, the threat of violence makes women more vulnerable towards the socio-economic situation. For example, women are the majority among internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Eastern Ukraine responsible for children, the elderly, and disabled relatives.¹ On the other hand, during these turbulent events Ukrainian women managed to challenge traditional gender roles (as caregivers and victims of conflict) and reclaimed visibility, recognition, and respect as revolutionaries and volunteers.

One of the most well-known examples is 21-year-old volunteer Olesya Zhukovska, who, after being struck by in her neck by a metal bullet on Maidan, tweeted: "I am dying." Olesya survived and became known in Ukraine and abroad because of her dangerous situation. On November 21, 2014, in his speech commemorating the first anniversary of the Euromaidan protests, President Petro Poroshenko thanked not only the men, but also the women who died during the protests, as well as both male and female volunteers for their role in the events. Women were actively participating in all form of activities in the protest space of Maidan. Besides cooking, cleaning, and entertaining, women were fighting on barricades, negotiating and participating in peace-keeping initiatives, providing medical support, maintaining information support, participating in legislative work and logistics, and providing education for protesters and huge organizational support.

When the protests turned violent, women were excluded from much of the protest zone activities (Onuch & Martsenyuk 2014). As a reaction to this exclusion, women organized both military and non-military Women's *Sotnyas* (or hundreds). Women made efforts to make their inputs into the Euromaidan more visible (especially compared with the Orange Revolution, where in memory politics "ordinary" women are almost absent as active "makers" of revolution) (Martsenyuk 2014).

Later, when the so-called Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) started, women joined the front lines of Donbas war as volunteers, journalists, medical staff, and military. Ukrainian pilot Nadiya Savchenko became a symbol of resistance known worldwide. But female fighters, as well as women in the Ukrainian army in general, face gender discrimination, recognition and visibility problems.

1 According to UN data (October 2015), women make up over 63 per cent of the country's estimated 1.4 million IDPs. - See <http://eca.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/10/ukraine-un-tackles-gender-and-humanitarian-impacts>

Women in Ukraine before Maidan and War: Public Life and NGOs

Women's participation in EuroMaidan and its social and media representation largely reflect the social position of women in Ukrainian society. Gender segregation (both vertical and horizontal) is an evident problem of politics in Ukraine. Women have less money and fewer social networks to work with, and the stereotype of politics as dirty business further justifies patriarchal notions of blocking them out (Martsenyuk 2012). In the current economic and social situation, entrenched stereotypes of men as family breadwinners and leaders in the public sphere (particularly in politics) and stereotypes of women as mostly wives and mothers inhibit progress in gender equality in Ukrainian society. Mothers or beautiful women (girls) are two major gender-based roles for women in Ukraine (Kis, 2005).

The country boasts hundreds of women's NGOs (Phillips 2008) – local and national, but they tend more toward social issues such as women's health, childhood, and poverty than equal rights and opportunities in the political sphere or labour market. Examples include such organizations as the National Council of Ukrainian Women (*Natsional'na rada zhinok Ukraïny*), the Women's Union (*Zhinocha hromada*), and the Ukrainian Women's Association (*Soiuz zhinok Ukraïny*). In the 21st century their visibility has declined, particularly in the media and community meetings about women's empowerment. The single exception to this state of affairs is FEMEN, a group of radical grass-roots activists demonstrating for women's empowerment. Eastern Europe has not been immune to the rise of all-female radical activist groups and movements. Recent examples include the much talked about FEMEN in Ukraine and Pussy Riot in Russia. The effectiveness of FEMEN's protests is, however, a broad topic for discussion.

Women's Sotnyas and Euromaidan

“We ourselves have chosen our roles according to the call of the soul, as it should be. I have personally gone from sandwiches to standing on the barricades and carrying dead bodies”

Maria Berlinska, activist in the Olga Kobylianska Female Sotnya

The theoretical background of this article is feminist theory, especially the intersection of feminism and nationalism (Yuval-Davis 1997; *Bohachevsky-Chomiak* 1994; Kis 2005; Rubchak 1996; Zhurzhenko 2012). Gendered rhetoric of the nation provides a vision of a nation as a family, where men have the status of heroes and women are the “mothers of the nation” (Waetjen 2001, 125). Women serve as symbolic makers of the nation's cul-

tural identity (Peterson 1998; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989). They are seen having a supportive and nurturing role, even if they also take risks during protest events. The metaphors of nation-as-woman and woman-as-nation suggest how women (their bodies) become a battleground of national struggles (Peterson 1998, 44). The empirical basis for research were speeches on Maidan, journal articles, pictures and video materials, blogs and social networks.

Euromaidan was a space where gender roles were *reaffirmed* (expressing gender-based stereotypes) as well as *contested* (providing diverse “scenarios” of women’s participation and the possibility to choose their own role) (Martsenyuk 2014).

“A nation exists while there are males ready to fight for it” – these are words from one of the self-made Ukrainian online posters about Euromaidan. The citation illustrates the mainstream (media) perception of Euromaidan – including barricades, Molotov cocktails, fights, fire, burning tires, and the death of heroes – where the revolution is inseparable from the glorification of violence. Women were among those who, first of all, provided so-called *reproductive labor* for Maidan: cleaning, cooking or bringing food, caring about clothes, etc. Women and their achievements were less visible in public discourse than men and their accomplishments. For example, Khromeychuk (2014) criticized the fact that “the news that Michelle Obama gave Ruslana Lyzhychko, a Ukrainian pop singer and the icon of the Maidan protests, the Women of Courage award received almost no publicity.”

At Euromaidan, women *internalized* some gender-stereotypical ideals of femininity. The “beautiful women” of Maidan were also involved in a number of activities. Ukrainian women call themselves “*Muses of Revolution*.” They were making the space beautiful (painting barricades in bright colors), and performing ballet on the barricades. The so-called “Angel Squadron” (*Angelska sotnya*) of Maidan tried to turn the paramilitary space of Euromaidan into an artistic one.

According to Onuch and Martsenyuk (2014), within the protest zones, but also in social movement organizations, the divisions of protest labour were drawn along gender lines. Socially accepted patriarchal views on the role of women in Ukrainian society as “mothers,” “weak” (i.e.: daughters) and “beautiful objects,” were reproduced on the Maidan.

But despite societal and stereotypical challenges, women engaged in alternatives to “traditional” forms of participation at Euromaidan, including feminist forms (Phillips 2014). They were building barricades together with men and constantly carrying scarce resources (used tires and firewood) on their own. They organized themselves in so-called Women’s *Sotnyas*. There were formal sotnyas (the 39th Women’s Sotnya of Euromaidan Self-Defense), female platoon [*Zhinocha chota*] (of the 16th Sotnya of “Maidan Self-Defence”), and informal or non-registered sotnyas (the 1st Women’s Sotnya; the

Women's Sotnya of Zaporizhzhya; the Sisterhood Sotnya; the Olga Kobylanska Female Sotnya; and others).

On the Facebook group “Half of Maidan: Women’s Voice of Protest” (*Polovyna Maidanu: Zhinochyy holos protestu*) information connected with women during Euromaidan and after could be found and discussed. Women also organized a “Night of Women’s Solidarity,” in order to draw attention to women’s important contributions to the protests, an event that featured women marching through the Maidan playing rhythm instruments and chanting “Freedom, Equality, Women’s Solidarity!” And while the mainstream practices and discourse of the Euromaidan protests were patriarchal (the exclusion of women from protest due to the militarization and masculinization of patriotic heroism), thanks to feminist coordination, an egalitarian and inclusive discourse was promoted. And thus, it provided women with at least a possibility to question militarism, deconstruct the traditional perception of protests and participate in the protest movement on all the different levels (Onuch and Martsenyuk 2014).

Later a number of female activists joined volunteer battalions and armed forces during ATO, at war in Donbas.

Women and the Military: Theoretical Background and Empirical Material

In military sociology, discussions on women’s participation in the armed forces are based on the opportunities for women to be professional soldiers. The main dilemma in discussing gender integration is the question of what a modern army should be like. Should it be a professionally closed group, or must it also respond to social changes in society, and to the changing role of women in society, in particular?

Mady Segal (1995, 760) singled out three groups of factors that promote women’s integration in the army: changes in the armed forces, in the social structure of society, and in culture. She understands changes in the armed forces as the changing concepts of national security, military technology, organizational structure of the army, purpose of the armed forces, and military recruitment policy. A change in the social structure lies in the fact that women have actively entered the labor market and the public sphere in recent decades. Segal defines cultural factors as changing cultural values in relation to the role of women in Western societies and increasing support in the liberal principle of equal rights and opportunities.

The concept of women’s participation in the military evolves theoretically from the field of gender in organizations and feminist (political science) studies (Carreiras 2006,

19-20). According to different feminist approaches, there are two major views towards women's integration into armed forces. Liberal feminists claim that women's involvement in military service is an important part of equal rights and, ultimately, leads to obtaining full citizenship in their countries; radical feminists see women's service as a reification of martial citizenship and cooperation with hierarchical and sexist institutions (Sasson-Levy 2003, 440).

The empirical part of the study, which concerns the actual study of women's situation in the armed forces of Ukraine fighting in the ATO, consisted of two parts: the desk and field studies. The desk study included a review of previous professional studies and available media information on the issue. Formal requests to government bodies for the appropriate statistical information were sent, and their results analyzed. The field study part of the research was inspired by Nobel laureate's Svetlana Aleksiyevich journalist work "War Does Not Have a Woman's Face" (2015), dealing with the role of women in the Soviet Army during World War II.

The field study was done with the usage of qualitative sociological methods: in-depth semi-structured interviews with women who participated in the ATO; interviews with men and women experts in military and/or gender equality spheres; observation (in the form of participation in several academic events); and content analysis of publications in Ukrainian media.

In this article, only results of interviews with female soldiers and with gender experts are presented. The research was conducted in the summer and autumn of 2015. Forty-two women in a military service at the front of the ATO zone in Ukraine, and one woman activist providing self-imposed unpaid supply work for the army, gave in-depth semi-structured interviews on all aspects of women service.² We used the "snowball sampling" technique to recruit the respondents, which were aged between 20 and 47. The questions were grouped into three units: legal aspect of participating in the ATO; living conditions of service; and the behavioral and psychological aspects of their stay on the front. The interview guide included topics of motivation for service, of legal possibilities and supplies, on attitude towards them from male colleagues, on the perspectives of the development of female service, and also on the respondent's approach to other women.

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2 The interviews were organized and conducted by project coordinator Maria Berlinska.

Women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine

Dubchak (2008, 187-188) stated that the Armed Forces of Ukraine used to be the most conservative social institution on the issue of women joining the military whereas, currently, almost 10% of Ukrainian military personnel are women. The representation of women in the defense sector has been increasing in a proportion which is consistent with global development trends. However, the growing number of female soldiers, especially those under contract, is not associated with the prestige of the service, but rather with the reluctance of men to hold low-paid positions. In fact, women mostly have so-called “feminized” professions like nurses, finance, logistics and communications.

In early October 2015, Oksana Havrylyuk, the head of Agency of Communications and Press at the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, reported at a briefing in Kyiv that 938 women had participated in the ATO (UNIAN 2015). In summer 2015 the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine indicated that the total number of the National Guard of Ukraine is about 14,000 people, including 21 women (positions: doctor, nurse), since the beginning of the ATO. In 2014-2015, about 22,000 National Guard of Ukraine troops, including 500 women (0.023%) stayed in the zone of hostilities (Martsenyuk et al 2016).

According to a report on discrimination and gender inequality in Ukraine, there is employment discrimination against women, particularly, in the armed forces (The Equal Rights Trust 2015, 53). The number of positions that women can occupy in the Ukrainian army is small. In addition, there is evidence of prevalent sexist remarks by the military commanders.

Gender Politics in Ukraine in General and in the Armed Forces Particularly

The issue of equal rights and opportunities for women and men in Ukrainian society is governed by both general and special legislation. Discrimination on the basis of gender is prohibited both by the Constitution of Ukraine and the 2012 Law of Ukraine “On Principles of Prevention and Combating Discrimination in Ukraine.” Ukraine also has a specific legislation designed to promote gender equality: the 2005 Law of Ukraine “On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men.” Ukrainian legislation (such as the Code of Labor Laws of Ukraine), in its effort to become gender specific still tries to protect women, family and children, thus perpetuating traditional gender roles (Martsenyuk 2016).

De jure gender equality is supported by national institutional mechanisms and legislation. International and national NGOs monitor the results of state and regional programs, and propose issues for improvement. At the same time, *de facto*, it could be argued that despite different legislative attempts not much has been implemented in terms of tangible policies (Martsenyuk 2016).

The Ukrainian labour market is characterized by a high rate of female participation and regulations that are relatively gender neutral, apart from some protective regulation for women workers in mines and other parts of the heavy industry (Martsenyuk 2016). According to the Labor Code of Ukraine, women may not be employed for hard work or dangerous jobs, and may not be involved in lifting and moving items, whose weight exceeds specially established limits. Indeed, over 500 professions are prohibited by law for women in Ukraine today. Women don't have the right to work in the professions included on the "List of Heavy Jobs and Work in Harmful/Dangerous Conditions," approved by the Ministry of Health in 1993. Also, women may not be involved in work at night, except for certain sectors and types of occupation assigned a maximum night hours for women and approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. These paternalist regulations also do not allow official employment of women in a majority of professions in the military sector (Martsenyuk et al. 2016, 2.4.2. Prohibition of certain military occupations).

Gender policy in the Ukrainian army is part of the overall gender policy, the function of military administration bodies, which regulates the processes of social interaction between military men and women in the army, and the improvement and development of their social status and relationships, taking into account military cultural traditions and stereotypes.

Natalya Dubchak, a gender expert with 18 years of experience with the army, also occupied a special position, called Gender Policy Officer, introduced by Minister of Defense in 2008. The position, however, lasted only for two years. Member of Parliament (Rada) Maria Ionova, co-chairman of Inter-Fractional Caucus "Equal Opportunities," said that the problem of improving the status of women in the military was part of a broader issue, namely, the poor representation of women in the decision-making process. In the Rada, women constitute only 12% of all 450 deputies.

Formally, the Armed Forces of Ukraine have developed a gender policy that meets the national gender policy and provides for efficient support to create guarantees of equal rights for all persons, regardless of their sex in military life. However, there is a problem of resistance of realistic implementation of the declared policy of equal rights and opportunities for women and men.

Voices of Women Fighting in ATO

Since, as was noted above, men are primarily mobilized for the ATO, and women must have a military profession (military occupational specialty, as it is named in the documents) to be mobilized, the respondents mainly (40 of 42) came to the front voluntarily, and the system was unprepared for female service. The grounds for this state of things are not studied deeply in this research, but we can mention the gender stereotypes on the division of labour - service and care work is generally unprestigious and paid less, and associated with women, while men are expected to do something heroic. This labour division is reflected in a number of legal documents related not only to the Ministry of Defense, but to the Ministry of Social Policy and the Ministry of Health as well. The detailed explanation of this issue was provided in the desk part of the study.

Our empirical results show that women are mostly not employed in official positions, since the law allows few military positions for women. Most of them are service work, in line with the traditions of a gendered division of labour. Lists of assigned military occupational specialties are gender-separated and strongly tied to positions. Thus, a woman cannot officially be employed in the armed forces as a marksman or a drone operator, but she can be a cook or be put in charge of a bathhouse. In practice, however, the position she is assigned to in her official papers may not be always consistent with her actual occupation. For example, one of the respondents said she was an accountant on paper, but actually served as a rocket operator. This leads to the situation where she cannot have the legal status of a combatant and thereby have access to privileges provided by the Law of Ukraine “On Status of War Veterans, Guarantees of their Social Protection” - such as free treatment in sanitariums, discounts of 75 percent for the payment of utility services, and so on. Their official wages are smaller according to the official position (a large part of our respondents have no position at all, and receive no wages), and special fares for wounded combatants or participants in special operations are not available to them, since officially they do not participate in combat.

“What benefits are you talking about, if there is no information. I was there. Well, maybe there is somewhere, but not in the right places” (Female respondent # 8).

Only one third of the respondents (17 of 42) managed to get a formal position, and subsequently, to receive appropriate benefits, including the legal status of combat participant. In fact, only 15 of 42 our respondents hold purely combat positions; the other ones are medical (19 of 42) or other supportive ones. Some women combine various responsibilities at the same time.

The legal invisibility of women leads to infrastructural problems: women on military service are generally not supplied with a uniform, footwear, female hygiene products,

and so on. They have to buy it with their own money or get it from supply activists, but no one among our respondents told us that it was officially supplied.

“People like me need custom tailoring. First, I’m a woman, second, my figure is not standard. I need an individual approach.” (Female respondent # 13)

Separate accommodation for women is also unavailable now, as to be organized by the combatants themselves. Gender-sensitive health care is not provided, though our respondents did not complain about health care in general, since many of them are themselves front-line physicians or paramedics. One of the respondents even told us that she established a comprehensive medical service unit in her military unit. However, the army medical service can seldom provide specific gynecological support, and our respondents could only rely on the national medical system, if possible in proximity to the military unit location.

Speaking about psychological aspects of the female service, we can confirm assumptions of previous researchers that the war emphasizes the stereotypes and gender roles. This is best seen from the media-analytical part of our study that men perceive war as a serious, male business, while women are perceived as unworthy to participate in it. They are believed to be there only to serve men. But still the reality confronts the stereotypes, and our respondents do reject that position. As for relationships with male colleagues, our respondents stated that they face stereotypical attitude, protective and underestimating, and they should prove that they can serve equally to men.

“Well, there were some narcissistic penguins, who believed that “a woman has no place in the war, too weak creatures.” After that, I proved to them that those weak creatures are head and shoulders above them.” (Female respondent # 28)

Nevertheless, most of them say that men change this attitude to a more egalitarian one with time. The research collective finds some optimism in this fact and believes this to be a positive impact in combating gender discrimination, though not measured yet.

When asked on the strategic vision of the Ukrainian army, respondents generally claimed they would like to see gender equality in it, similar to the Israel Defense Forces, where, as they believe, parity and justice is already achieved. One of our respondents even expressed her wish to become a Minister of Defense, as she believes she has a vision to implement some reforms.

To summarize, we can say that Ukrainian combatant women, participating in ATO, are strongly motivated to serve and to fight discrimination they face during their service.

The research included also 9 interviews of male combatants, whom we asked how they can evaluate the possibilities for women to serve, and, in comparison - questions on their own legal possibilities to serve. As expected, men had no obstacles to serve on wanted positions, easily received combatant status and so on. Moreover, they showed little awareness about the troubles women face.

Men mostly agree that women may face problems with service in the army, but consider it necessary for women themselves to combat them, since they say that they personally have never seen any discrimination cases. Sometimes they express stereotypes themselves: for example, one respondent believes that military women are privileged, and the other one considers female physiology to be better for document checking.

When this article was being written, we already knew that a larger number of positions had become available to women as a result of a public campaign started after the presentation of results. Yet this applied not to all branches of the armed forces (landing forces are still officially all-male), and discrimination in access to military education, not studied yet but expressed in informal talks with the stakeholders, limit the possibilities to hold officer positions. Nonetheless, this is the first campaign result.

Changes after the “Invisible Battalion” Project

The issue of women’s integration into the security and defense sector lies within the broader framework of the women peace and security agenda promoted by the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 “Women Peace and Security” (UNSCR 1325) and subsequent resolutions since 2000. The resolution claims the important role of women in conflict resolution, prevention, peacebuilding and peace keeping. The document calls for the integration of women into the security and defense sector and their involvement into the peace processes as women’s integration into the military is not only the matter of gender equality but also an issue of security at a country and global levels.

Ukraine has adopted the National Action Plan on the implementation of the UNSCR 1325 Women Peace and Security in February 2016. The country has signed the resolution in 2000 but the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine since 2014 has prompted the government to undertake measures to protect women from the negative consequences of the conflict and to promote their participation in the peace process 15 years after the resolution was signed. The National Action Plan (NAP) on Women Peace and Security (WPS) serves as a legal commitment of the state to implement the recommendation of the UNSCR 1325 and provide a framework for the national and local government, civil society and international organizations activity within the WPS agenda in Ukraine.

Two goals of the Ukraine's NAP on WPS targeted women in the military directly. The National Action Plan aims to increase the participation of women in peace building: to improve infrastructure and legal environment for women's participation in international peacekeeping operations, for their service in administrative and combat positions in the Armed Forces and other national security and defense institutions, conduct assessment of gendered aspects of conflict prevention and resolution and promote women's role in peacebuilding, peacekeeping and negotiation processes in the media; and to provide assistance and rehabilitation to population affected by the conflict, including rehabilitation and reintegration of female ex-combatants and their families, social and medical assistance to the victims of gender-based violence (GBV).

Nine ministries are responsible for the implementation of the NAP on WPS, and the Ministry of Defense (MoD) has demonstrated considerable achievements in the implementation of the NAP on WPS compared to others. MoD has developed an internal plan on the NAP on WPS implementation and established a working group for coordination of activities on the women peace and security agenda. Ministry of Defense has also appointed an internal gender focal point and hired an external gender expert, who work closely with the ministry representatives in different structures.

In less than a year since the adoption of NAP, MoD has extended the list of military positions available for women, conducted an assessment of women's infrastructural needs in the Armed Forces and in the zone of anti-terrorist operation, introduced gender-sensitivity trainings for military personnel, developed a new code of conduct for military personnel, which will have special provisions on gender-based violence, and made it possible to bring violators administratively and criminally liable. Plans to revise the curriculum of military education institutions are also under way.

However, there is still place for improvement. The Decree 292, issued in June 2016, opened 63 staff positions for private, sergeant and sergeant-major positions to women undergoing military service under contract (Ministry of Defence 2016). Among them are combat positions: bomb aimer, assistant to bomb aimer and senior bomb aimer, commander of military vehicle, driver and senior driver, gunner, scout, including special forces units, shooter, sniper and others. This constitutes not only a horizontal but also a vertical empowerment of women in the Armed Forces.

Regardless the recent changes, the total number of positions recently opened for women in the Armed Forces is only 63. Thus, since June 2016, the total number of staff positions allowed for women on private, sergeant and sergeant-major positions, in the Armed Forces has increased to 290. Two-thirds of all military positions remain inaccessible for women in Ukraine. Moreover, no amendments to the regulations on the positions available for officer women had been made. The list of available officer positions for women is censored. Experts claim that it is not more liberal than the policy on pri-

vate, sergeant and sergeant-major positions opened for women. No official statistics on the (re)appointment of female military personnel to the combat positions allowed by the 292 Decree is available yet.

Ukraine is by now open to integration of international experience in defense and security sector and takes a stand on NATO membership. Over the past two years the country has adopted four important decrees: a Sustainable Development Strategy 2020 (Decree of the President 2015b), a National Security Strategy (Decree of the President 2015a), and a Concept of the Development of the Defense and Security Sector of Ukraine (Decree of the President 2016). The overall reform of the security and defense sector is oriented towards the harmonization of the security and defense standards and principles with the ones of NATO and EU and NATO membership. For example, the 2015 National Security Strategy claims that the state's priority is "to achieve full compatibility of the security and defense sector of Ukraine with those of the NATO member states, which should ensure the future possibility of membership at the North Atlantic Alliance for Ukraine..." (Decree of the President 2015a). It foresees changes to the education system, military and special trainings for the defense sector agencies, maximization of compatibility of the armed forces of Ukraine with the armed forces of NATO members by introducing NATO standards, strengthening of the military discipline and other interventions that imply changes favorable to women's integration in to the defense and security sector.

Given Ukraine's commitments to the WPS agenda, its declared intentions to reform the defense and security system and available achievements, there is a chance in the near future for reforms of the national defense and security system more inclusive and favorable for women.

Conclusions

The issue of ensuring gender equality in Ukrainian society is governed by both fundamental (Constitution of Ukraine) and special legislation (Law of Ukraine "On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men"). However, though the equal rights and opportunities for women and men are supported at the declarative level, they are not always enforced in practice.

Security Council Resolution #1325 (2000) emphasizes the importance of changing the vision of the women's role from a victim of conflict to a participant of conflict resolution and peacekeeping on an equal basis with men. Ukraine ratified this document and is expected to follow its major expectations towards women's integration into armed forces.

Religion and Gender

The phenomenon of vertical and horizontal gender segregation is as inherent in the Armed Forces of Ukraine as in the general labor market. The number of women in the military gradually increases following the global trends of nation development.

Women in ATO expressed strong hope for gender equality and are establishing it by facing and breaking the stereotypes themselves. Most of their problems come from an archaic vision of female service by Ukrainian government bodies, but currently the situation changes for the better. These include legal and infrastructural invisibility, which means the suppression of their right to hold combat and officer positions, to get the appropriate payment and privileges, and to have appropriate conditions to serve. The stereotypes and unequal attitude from male combatants is also a problem now.

The “Invisible Battalion” project is continuing its activities and searching for new possibilities to provide women in armed forces equal rights and opportunities together with men.

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