

Breaking Barriers: The Evolving Landscape of Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination in Sustainable Development

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Abstract

This article explores the crucial role of gender equality and anti-discrimination efforts in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focusing particularly on Goal 5 of the UN's 2030 Agenda. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates quantitative and qualitative analyses, reviewing strategic documents, statistical data, and case studies. It highlights the significant impact of gender-based violence, economic disparities, and social inequalities on sustainable development. The paper examines key international frameworks, such as the Istanbul Convention and the EU's gender policies, and their implications for Ukraine. It discusses the progress and challenges Ukraine faces in promoting gender equality amidst the ongoing war and its socio-economic impacts. The article concludes with recommendations for enhancing policy implementation, fostering international cooperation, and addressing the socio-economic impacts on gender equality. This comprehensive analysis aims to contribute to the global discourse on achieving gender equality as a cornerstone of sustainable development.

Keywords: gender equality, ant-discrimination, sustainable development goals (SDG), gender-based violence.

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1. Introduction

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and, at the same time, a basic element for creating a modern, comfortable and sustainable world. Gender equality is one of the key goals without which sustainable development cannot be achieved.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, by setting a standalone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment (Sustainable Development Goal 5: 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'), emphasises the importance of gender equality as a prerequisite for achieving sustainable development and a key driver of progress, as well as a key to the successful implementation of other goals.

In the process of achieving the goals for a sustainable future, Sustainable Development Goal 5, gender equality, will be one of the crucial factors in this process. That is, taking action to achieve the goals of SDG 5 is not only crucial for the specific goal, but also contributes to the realisation of other SDGs. Due to the level of interconnectedness with other Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and the large-scale impact on professional development, education, health and economic development of individuals and nations, achieving gender equality is an urgent goal.⁶

Sustainable Development Goal 5 aims to end all forms of discrimination against women and girls, as well as to increase the value of women in society and encourage women's participation in all spheres of life. The integration of gender equality and women's empowerment have been recognised globally as critical factors in achieving sustainable development for all, and have been endorsed by the international community through a number of high-level instruments, processes and documents developed in recent years: The Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation and the Biarritz Partnership, launched by the G7 countries to promote gender equality.⁷

On 21 November 2022 in Strasbourg, the European Association for Local Democracy adopted the Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination Policy, which aims to outline values and standards, guide the strategic process aimed at promoting the gender equality programme in line with international frameworks (EU and UN). This policy is in line with the European Commission's policy priority: communicating the

⁶ UN Women. "Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda." 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-repo-rt-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=4332>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

⁷ UN Women. "Promoting Gender Equality and Empowering Women in Ukraine through Effective Cooperation for Development and Financing." Retrieved from <https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2021/4/Advancing%20gender%20equality%20and%20womens%20empowerment%20in%20Ukraine%20UKR.pdf>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

‘Equality Union: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025’ and ILO (International Labour Organisation) actions.

Implementation of the principle of equal rights and opportunities for women and men is one of the important conditions for sustainable social and economic development, positive changes in society and its well-being, realisation of human rights and personal fulfilment, a key to effective solution of existing problems, as well as Ukraine's European integration and fulfilment of international obligations under the main international treaties on human rights protection, including the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 approved by the UN General Assembly.

2. Materials and methods

The article was prepared using mixed research methods that combined quantitative and qualitative elements, along with a high-quality set of tools. Theoretical analysis and analytical review of data available from open sources (strategic documents and tools on the following topics: public memorandums, progress reports on activity implementation, presentations, cost analyses, etc.); materials from the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Agriculture of Ukraine; printed materials and internet resources on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed at achieving gender equality; and other available relevant resources were utilized. Statistical analysis of data on aid provided to Ukraine aimed at promoting gender equality activities was conducted.

The development of conclusions and recommendations focused on enhancing cooperation for development to achieve gender equality in Ukraine and improving its effectiveness. Final conclusions were developed and prepared, including a list of resources used for the research and other information obtained during the analysis.

Content analysis of media materials was performed to identify key themes and issues related to gender equality and gender-based violence. Policy analysis was carried out to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of national and international policies on gender equality through comparative analysis.

The methodological approach to the research included a literature review to analyze existing scientific works and reports on gender equality and sustainable development. Documentary analysis involved studying national and international legal acts and strategies. This combined approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the state of gender equality in Ukraine and the development of well-founded recommendations for further actions.

3. Results

3.1. Gender equality as a central human dimension of the SDGs

Gender equality is arguably the most relevant human rights category in the central proposition of the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2023 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the foundation for achieving the 2030 Agenda for

Sustainable Development. The final UN analytical paper shows that women experience multiple forms of oppression across the seventeen levels of the Sustainable Development Goals.⁸ The Women's Empowerment Index (WEI) and the Global Gender Parity Index (GGPI) are clear: 'No country has achieved a high level of women's empowerment while maintaining a large gender gap. This suggests that the empowerment of women and girls will remain elusive until gender gaps are closed.'⁹

The increasing complexity and relevance of gender equality among the main pillars of the Sustainable Development Goals demonstrates the urgency of eliminating gender inequality, in particular, in relation to women. Today, the questions that are systematically raised but still remain unanswered are obvious: why does gender inequality still exist, despite the numerous efforts of the global society aimed at solving this problem? Why do we continue to observe unequal relations between men and women for many centuries from generation to generation?

The European Institute for Gender Equality in its research indicates that one in three women in Europe over the age of 15 has experienced physical and sexual violence. And every second woman has been sexually harassed.¹⁰ Apart from that, UN reports indicate that women are paid 16% less than men.¹¹

Gender equality means recognising that almost half of our global society cannot be excluded from being active in solving the world's most pressing problems. Instead, global policy should work to support the inclusion of women in a wide variety of fields so that we have many more highly skilled professionals who can address key social and environmental issues. But beyond the call to action, most SDG project interventions are rather unspecific general solutions and social innovations from government, non-profit institutions and entrepreneurs, which reduces the ability to create systemic interventions in many contexts.¹²

When discussing gender inequality, it is important to emphasize that it disproportionately affects men and women in various spheres – both private and public. On an economic level, women and girls compete in the labor market, but even when employment opportunities are available, working conditions are worse for them compared to men. According to data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, as of April 1, 2021, women make up 48% of the employed population aged 15-70 in Ukraine (7.3 million out of 15.4 million employed).¹³

⁸ UN Women. "End Violence against Women and Girls." UN Women, New York, NY, USA, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.unjobnet.org/jobs/detail/59152120>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

⁹ UN Women and UNDP. "The Paths to Equal: Twin Indices on Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality." 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/the-paths-to-equal-twin-indices-on-womens-empowerment-and-gender-equality-en.pdf>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

¹⁰ European Institute for Gender Equality. "What is Gender-Based Violence?". 2021. Retrieved from <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/what-is-gender-based-violence>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

¹¹ UN Women. "Women. Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality." 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-5-gender-equality>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

¹² Amatullo, Mariana. "Why a Design Attitude Matters in a World in Flux." In *Flourish by Design*, edited by Nick Dunn, 26-29. London: Routledge, 2023. Retrieved from <https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/75526/9781000968613.pdf?sequence=1#page=43>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

¹³ State Statistics Service of Ukraine. "Women and Men in the Labor Market." 2021. Retrieved from <https://>

A separate issue is the presence of women in politics – despite some progress in parliamentary representation, the number of countries with female heads of state remains small.¹⁴ The tools of the Women's Empowerment Index (WEI) and the Global Gender Gap Index (GGI) indicate the need to balance the distribution of power so that women have all the conditions to realize their civic positions and their lives in general.

Experts also emphasize that women find it difficult to obtain even basic necessities such as water, soil, and land, as well as healthcare services, which is reflected in increasing disease rates.¹⁵ Finally, the UN highlights the problem of ongoing violence against women, which has undermined their progress on many levels; a separate issue is the worsening opportunities for women in the context of the impacts of COVID-19, climate change, and the current context of international conflicts and migration.¹⁶ Since February 24, 2022, the start of Russian full-scale invasion to Ukraine, the confirmed number of civilian casualties in Ukraine has exceeded 7,000 (including 1,875 women and 177 girls), with over 11,000 people injured (including 1,764 women and 240 girls).¹⁷

In the context of this discussion, a key question arises: what cultural changes can be proposed to ensure the equality and freedom of women?

Based on the collected facts and evidence, experts provide specific recommendations that can help efforts to keep gender issues in focus to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.¹⁸

Thus, strategies and action plans should be considered from a long-term perspective; at the same time, all international community requirements and recommendations for promoting gender equality will be meaningless or ineffective if the global society does not transform the gender paradigm itself.

ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/pro_stat/Prosto/m&w/j_ch_na%20runky_praci.pdf, consulted on 1 June 2024.

¹⁴ World Economic Forum. Global Gender Gap Report 2023. Cologny, Switzerland: World Economic Forum, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

¹⁵ Pouramin, P., N. Nagabhatla, and M. Miletto. "A Systematic Review of Water and Gender Interlinkages: Assessing the Intersection with Health." *Frontiers in Water* 2 (2020): 6-14. Retrieved from <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/water/articles/10.3389/frwa.2020.00006/full>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

¹⁶ UN Women. "Tackling Violence against Women and Girls in the Context of Climate Change." 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-the-context-of-climate-change-en.pdf>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

¹⁷ Chupis, A. "Women in Military Conflicts and Post-War Peacebuilding: Global and Ukrainian Experience." *Bulletin of NU 'Yaroslav the Wise Law Academy'* 1(56) (2023). Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.21564/2663-5704.56.274023>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

¹⁸ Leal Filho W, Kovaleva M, Tsani S, Țircă DM, Shiel C, Dinis MAP, Nicolau M, Sima M, Fritzen B, Lange Salvia A, Minhas A, Kozlova V, Doni F, Spiteri J, Gupta T, Wakunuma K, Sharma M, Barbir J, Shulla K, Bhandari MP, Tripathi S. „Promoting gender equality across the sustainable development goals”. *Environ Dev Sustain*. 2022 Sep 15:1-22. doi: 10.1007/s10668-022-02656-1. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 36124160; PMCID: PMC9476407.

3.2. Gender equality and gender-based violence: nature and systemic and structural analysis

As a consequence of gender inequality, gender-based violence has its own nature, origins, and mental models, which are rooted in social, historical, and cultural characteristics. Primarily, gender-based violence affects the vast majority of women, regardless of age, class, race, or origin.

Despite the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted and proclaimed by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 217 A (III) on December 10, 1948, which guarantees equal rights regardless of gender, it is necessary to consider the issue of gender in its many dimensions, including gender identity and gender expression. In 1993, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women laid the foundation and assumed new commitments from member states; these were reaffirmed and strengthened at the 4th World Conference on Women (Beijing, China, 1995), which highlighted the existence of discrimination and violence against women and justified them as a result of the construction of social gender inequality based on differences between sexes.

It is important to address gender issues because many women experience oppression daily simply because they are women or because they live in conditions where, historically and culturally, they have been "placed" into a certain social model of behavior that prescribes subjugation to male authority.

However, there is another issue that is insufficiently addressed. In today's binary world, the prevalence of masculine and feminine attributes can exclude non-binary and transgender individuals from this human rights concept. Special attention should be given to the fact that, due to prejudiced attitudes towards transgender women in many countries, numerous instances of domestic and sexual violence are known, and this problem requires specific attention.

Despite all efforts aimed at "dismantling" these structures over generations, the numbers do not seem to be decreasing. According to the UN, one-quarter of women worldwide experience violence in private relationships; among women aged 15-49, 30% experience some form of violence during their lifetime.¹⁹ Such a condition affects their potential development and impacts them psychologically, physically, and emotionally.²⁰ Troubling instances of sexual harassment also occur in the workplace, where 75% of women have experienced sexual harassment, primarily from their bosses, colleagues, or clients (32);²¹ sexual harassment, including in the education sector and

¹⁹ UN Women. "Fact Sheet-Global." New York, NY: United Nations, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2018/SDG-report-Fact-sheet-Global-en.pdf>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

²⁰ United Nations. "Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women." New York, NY: United Nations, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/report-policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en-1.pdf>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

²¹ Shreeves, R., and M. Prpic. "Violence Against Women in the EU: State of Play." European Parliamentary Research Service. Retrieved from [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/630296/EP_RS_BRI\(2018\)630296_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/630296/EP_RS_BRI(2018)630296_EN.pdf), consulted on 1 June 2024.

cyber harassment, affects the participation of young women in public life and political activity²².

Clearly, the consequences of any act of violence can be considered both in a physical and psychological context. However, the side effects of gender-based violence extend further – they permeate various spheres, causing victims to spend money on prevention and healthcare, thus impacting the economic development of companies and countries and hindering the social development of global society. It is also worth discussing a separate set of issues related to violence against women and climate change. Recent studies indicate how climate change contributes to violence against women and girls when they are forced to leave their lands or face water shortages.²³

From a psychological perspective, violence alters women's lives, potentially lowering their self-esteem and confidence, significantly impacting their health; despite the development of psychological support methods for victims, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the fragility or ineffectiveness of intervention systems and the lack of mental support, as many women were forced to stay at home with their abusive partners, facing loneliness.²⁴

It is evident that, considering the above points, a better understanding of the multilayered structure of the dependence of gender-based violence on gender inequality requires a multifaceted study, i.e., a systemic-structural definition of factors that cause gender violence, using provisions and concepts from international law, sociology, anthropology, and psychology.

Thus, a valuable way to achieve social transformations in this area, which will promote social cohesion and synergy among other participants in this system, is the constructive mobilization of civil society actors – not only to rethink current issues of gender inequality and gender-based violence but also to clearly outline ways to overcome such phenomena.

3.3. Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Ukraine: key issues

It is clear that achieving gender equality and empowering women are key factors in accelerating global development by 2030. EU membership is one of Ukraine's main strategic goals. This means a consistent focus on the social market economy model used in leading European countries, which has the advantages of high social standards

²² Faith, B. "Tackling Online Gender-Based Violence; Understanding Gender, Development, and the Power Relations of Digital Spaces." *Gender, Technology and Development* 26 (2022): 325–340. Retrieved from <https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinions/tackling-online-gender-based-violence/>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

²³ Desai, B. H., and M. Mandal. "Role of Climate Change in Exacerbating Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Against Women: A New Challenge for International Law." *Environmental Policy and Law* 51 (2021): 137–157. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/report/role-of-climate-change-in-exacerbating-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-against-women-a-new-challenge-for-international-law/epl_2021_51-3_epl-51-3-epl210055_epl-51-epl210055.pdf.

²⁴ Buttell, F., and R.J. Ferreira. "The Hidden Disaster of COVID-19: Intimate Partner Violence." *Psychological Trauma* 12 (2020): S197–S198. Retrieved from <https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2020-43607-001.pdf>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

and humanitarian development, effective protection of employees' rights, a developed social security system, and the principle of gender equality. The issue of ensuring the principle of gender equality and the formation of the relevant national mechanism is caused by global political processes, Ukraine's international obligations, its European choice and other factors, and is of significant theoretical and practical importance for legal doctrine and state and social development.²⁵

The question remains: what progress has been made towards this goal? How close are we to achieving it, especially under the conditions of Russia's aggression against Ukraine? What specific challenges and tasks does the Ukrainian state face in the context of achieving gender equality and overcoming discrimination?

Currently, Ukraine has ratified key international documents to ensure equal rights and opportunities for men and women, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)²⁶, and the UN Millennium Development Goals²⁷, identifying gender equality as a vital component of its further development and a priority of its state policy.

Overall, Ukraine has established a foundational normative, legal, and political base for promoting gender equality and protecting the rights and freedoms of women. However, this is only part of the necessary efforts – the full implementation of national and international commitments in the field of gender equality is still incomplete, particularly due to the lack of effective mechanisms for the practical enforcement of legislative acts. In Ukraine, gender equality and women's empowerment are supported at the highest political and institutional levels, especially since these issues have been included in the responsibilities of the Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, who currently coordinates government efforts in implementing gender policies. However, the lack of a more systematic and coordinated government approach in this direction, as well as insufficient clarity and communication regarding the specific roles and functions of key advocates for gender equality, have limited the pace and scope of progress.²⁸

In Ukraine, at the national level, gender equality is guaranteed by the Fundamental Law - the Constitution of Ukraine, the Labour Code of Ukraine, as well as a special separate Law of Ukraine 'On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men' of 8 September 2005 and other legislative acts. In the Law of Ukraine 'On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men', the definition of

²⁵ Iryna Hrytsai, *Mechanism for Ensuring the Principle of Gender Equality: Theory and Practice: Monograph* (Kyiv: High-Tech Press, 2018), 207-215, Retrieved from <http://er.dduvs.in.ua/handle/123456789/3750>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

²⁶ Council of Europe. "Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)." Retrieved from <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/text-of-the-convention>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

²⁷ UNDP. "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/publications/transforming-our-world-2030-agenda-sustainable-development>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

²⁸ UN Women. "Promoting Gender Equality and Empowering Women in Ukraine through Effective Cooperation for Development and Financing." Retrieved from <https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2021/4/Advancing%20gender%20equality%20and%20womens%20empowerment%20in%20Ukraine%20UKR.pdf>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

‘gender equality’ logically follows from the legal context and is related to the impact of social structures on the lives of women and men - their rights, freedoms, opportunities, needs, etc.²⁹

Ukraine's international and European commitments in the area of equal rights and opportunities motivate the state to review the existing format of women's access to politics. Since it is a given that a democratic society should provide women and men with equal opportunities to participate in all spheres of life, including access to power, it is necessary to effectively apply special mechanisms to ensure women's access to public authority and governance, one of which is gender quotas.

According to public opinion polls in Ukraine, there is a vision that quotas for women in politics should be increased, and this issue is being put on the political agenda in a responsible manner. According to the Central Election Commission, 21% of the current convocation of the Parliament is made up of women. In 2012, it was about 10%, in 2014 - more than 11%.³⁰ The gender quota is extremely important, especially for the parliament. Since the last convocation, the number of women has increased from 12% to 21%, but this is not enough.³¹

Current research clearly emphasises the problems and shortcomings of gender equality projects implemented in Ukraine: "currently, only a small number of Ukrainian civil society organisations are used as implementing partners for gender equality projects... The lack of a monitoring system to track gender-oriented funding makes it difficult to form a clear picture of the overall level of public investment aimed at achieving full equality of rights and opportunities for women and men in Ukraine".³²

One of the government's main priorities in ensuring equality in the labour market is to close the gender pay gap, so it is important that in 2023 the Ukrainian government adopted a strategy to this effect: by 2030, gender inequality in this sector is expected to decrease by 5% to 13.6%.³³ At the same time, scholars and public figures note certain positive aspects. For example, today in Ukraine, gender equality is promoted by expanding business opportunities: in 2023, 56% of newly created businesses were started by women, a record high in the history of Ukraine. Some businesses are being re-registered by women because men have joined the defense forces or have died in the war.

Separate issue is gender equality in access to military service. Research by public institutions indicates that "since the start of the full-scale war, the number of

²⁹ Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. "Law of Ukraine 'On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men.'" *Bulletin of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (VVR)*, 2005, No. 52, Article 561. Retrieved from <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2866-15#Text>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

³⁰ Sysak, Iryna. "Women in the Army, Politics, and Power: How the Gender Situation in Ukraine Has Changed." *Radio Svoboda*, November 28, 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/gender-sytuatsiya-v-ukraini-voennoho-chasu/32696907.html>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

³¹ Idem.

³² UN Women. "Promoting Gender Equality and Empowering Women in Ukraine through Effective Cooperation for Development and Financing." Retrieved from <https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2021/4/Advancing%20gender%20equality%20and%20womens%20empowerment%20in%20Ukraine%20UKR.pdf>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

³³ Dumanska, Vita. "Gender Equality during the War: Achievements and Necessary Changes." CHESNO, February 20, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.chesno.org/post/5879/>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

female servicemembers has increased by almost 2.5 times compared to 2014; as of March 2023, the number of women in the Armed Forces of Ukraine has grown to 60,538, of which approximately 42,898 are servicemembers, whereas in 2014 these figures were 49,926 and 16,557 respectively".³⁴ Ukraine has made some progress in this direction and significantly expanded the possibility of women's participation in the country's defense, in particular, by removing restrictions on access to military education, including higher military educational institutions, and amending the list of positions that women servicemembers can hold.

In the context of national implementation of key international documents and normative-legal frameworks and standards, and the political and social empowerment of women, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention by Ukraine on November 1, 2022, is crucial. The ratification of the Istanbul Convention by Ukraine was a long-awaited and extremely important step towards strengthening the fight against gender-based violence in Ukraine. The Russian aggression against Ukraine has significantly worsened the situation of Ukrainian women and girls, leading to numerous cynical violations of women's rights, including various forms of violence. Regarding the key problems of gender equality in Ukraine, it is worth noting that the European Parliament, in its Resolution of May 5, 2022, strongly condemned Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and noted the enormous impact of the war on women in Ukraine, as well as highlighting the negative legal consequences. As R. Ivanyuk rightly notes, "it is important that the European Parliament pointed out that the war simultaneously led to the violation of the rights of both women who arrived in EU countries as refugees and those who remained in Ukraine during Russia's full-scale invasion".³⁵

The Istanbul Convention is an extremely important international legal document that establishes international standards for the protection of women from all forms of violence. In particular, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention allows Council of Europe experts to monitor Ukraine's compliance with its obligations. The explanatory note emphasizes that the ratification of the Convention "will impact the interests of the State of Ukraine in terms of fulfilling international obligations in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms."³⁶

The position of the EU Advisory Mission on supporting Ukraine in promoting gender equality and protecting Ukrainian women from violence is indicative. For example, the EUAM Gender Advisor, Anne Mäki-Rahkola, noted: "The ratification of the Istanbul Convention brings Ukraine closer to European standards in combating gender-based violence... We provide support to Ukrainian partners through strategic consultations and other forms of assistance to ensure that the Convention significantly changes the situation."³⁷

³⁴ Idem.

³⁵ Ivanyuk, R. V. "Problems of Protecting the Rights of Women and Children from Violence in the Context of Armed Conflict: Legal Aspects." *Legal Scientific Electronic Journal* 3 (2024): 40-43. Retrieved from http://www.lsej.org.ua/3_2024/8.pdf, consulted on 1 June 2024.

³⁶ Army Inform. "How the Istanbul Convention Brings Ukraine Closer to the EU." June 21, 2022. Retrieved from <https://armyinform.com.ua/2022/06/21/yak-stambul'ska-konvencziya-nablyzhaye-ukrayinu-do-yes/>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

³⁷ European Union Advisory Mission. "Violence Against Women: Implementing the Istanbul Convention

Despite progress in Ukraine's EU accession process and the fact that the Constitution of Ukraine and national legislation guarantee women full social, economic, and political rights, the assessment of progress in the direction of gender equality remains quite restrained. This is not only due to traditional gender stereotypes, which lead to relatively slow policy implementation, and the lack of financial support for relevant state institutions, but also the martial law imposed in Ukraine following the start of Russia's full-scale invasion.

It is clear that the full-scale war by Russia against Ukraine has only exacerbated the problem. Already under martial law, in 2022, according to official data from the National Police of Ukraine, there were 244,381 reports of domestic violence, 40% more than the previous year (144,394), 15% more than in 2020 (208,748), and 41% more than in 2019 (141,814).³⁸ The Association of Women Lawyers of Ukraine "JurFem" provides data that during this period "only 3,037 criminal cases were opened by the prosecution."³⁹

The principle of gender equality and non-discrimination is enshrined in national legislation (Article 2 of the Labour Code of Ukraine), the Law of Ukraine 'On Employment', the Law of Ukraine 'On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men' of 8 September 2005, and the Law of Ukraine 'On Principles of Preventing and Combating Discrimination in Ukraine' of 6 September 2012). However, today we can confidently speak of obvious problems in the context of combating domestic and gender-based violence, primarily in terms of the response to domestic and gender-based violence by law enforcement agencies and social services, access to quality legal aid and fair and effective justice for women victims of domestic or sexual violence, as well as problems of discrimination against women in the area of the right to work (the amount of remuneration, reduction of the gender pay gap).

A separate set of issues in the policy is the development of a legal and institutional framework to ensure legal protection and the introduction of a support system for victims of domestic violence, as well as strengthening a multisectoral approach to combating violence against women and domestic violence. Statistics show that domestic violence during martial law in Ukraine has not lost its relevance, and moreover, the new living conditions under war have transformed into factors that give rise to new forms of domestic violence. Massive cases of violence committed by Russian military personnel against civilians on the territory of Ukraine require appropriate legal qualification, the impossibility of exemption from liability in cases of sexual violence and the prosecution of perpetrators. Therefore, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention is an important signal of Ukraine's readiness to assume

Saves Lives." November 03, 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.euam-ukraine.eu/ua/news/violence-against-women-implementing-the-istanbul-convention-saves-lives/>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

³⁸ Zmysla, Marta. "Has Domestic Violence Lost Its Relevance under Martial Law?" *Yurydychna Gazeta Online*, March 14, 2023. Retrieved from <https://yur-gazeta.com/dumka-eksperta/chi-vtratile-domashne-nasilstvo-svoyu-aktualnist-v-umovah-voennogo-stanu-.html>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

³⁹ Kit, Khrystyna. "Is it Possible to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals without Gender Equality?" *Yurydychna Gazeta Online*, January 21, 2022. Retrieved from <https://yur-gazeta.com/publications/practice/inshe/chi-mozhna-dosyagti-ciley-stalogo-rozvitku-bez-gendernoyi-rivnosti.html>, consulted on 1 June 2024.

responsibility for the detection, investigation and prevention of sexual violence and domestic violence.

4. Conclusions

Thus, achieving gender equality and women's empowerment are key factors for accelerating global development by 2030. Therefore, it is crucial to include gender equality as a cross-cutting theme in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals so that gender-related issues are central to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals:

At the same time, there are obvious strategic tasks that will make it possible to effectively promote gender equality and empower women. First of all, these are: 1) global awareness of gender issues; 2) active and targeted development of gender projects related to the Sustainable Development Goals; 3) systematic attention to women's opinions and views on policies related to the Sustainable Development Goals; 4) analysis of progressive practices in integrating gender issues into local development initiatives; 5) strengthening cooperation (including increasing development funding provided by donors to achieve gender equality goals and implementing a monitoring system to control funding allocated to promote gender equality); 6) enhancing communication between government agencies and civil society organisations on gender issues; 7) eliminating discriminatory stereotypes; 8) forming a mentally new gender paradigm.

Ukraine is moving towards gender equality, combating discrimination and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Ukraine is taking real steps to promote gender equality and combat violence against women. However, it is also important to update the application of the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and international treaties of Ukraine related to the protection of victims of gender discrimination.

Even in the context of the current Russian aggression, Ukraine is working its way out to implement the principle of gender equality and bring national legislation on gender issues in line with European standards.

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