

Gender-Sensitive Capacity-Building for Ukraine's Civilian Security Sector

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	3
Working Conditions in the Civilian Security Sector	4
Training Personnel in Professional Non-Discrimination and Soft Skills	6
Strengthening NGOs that Work with the Civilian Security Sector	8
Recommendations	9

Executive Summary

The police and emergency services play a crucial role in bolstering Ukraine’s resilience against Russian aggression, as they provide vital community services and care for people in danger. To improve their capacity in a gender-sensitive and inclusive way, it is important that international supporters provide them with resources to care for the psychological health of their employees; support the training of civil security sector personnel on issues of human rights, gender equality, and inclusion; and strengthen public organizations that cooperate with the civilian security sector and provide it with educational and legal assistance.

Introduction

The civilian security sector¹ is playing an extremely important role in responding rapidly to the challenges of the war that Russia has waged against Ukraine for the past ten years, and in the initial reconstruction of the de-occupied and affected territories. It is civilian security services who respond to reports of missile attacks at risk of so-called “double tap” strikes, fight on the front lines, evacuate the civilian population from shelling zones, clear mined areas, maintain law and order in cities where sabotage groups may operate, and collect evidence of crimes such as hate speech, domestic violence, and conflict-related sexual violence. As part of all this vital work, a feminist perspective is necessary to ensure the needs of men, women, boys, girls, and queer persons are addressed equally.

In this vein, this policy brief focuses on how capacity-building in Ukraine’s civilian security sector can transform the sector to be gender sensitive. This is especially relevant as civilian security structures are key implementers of the 1325 National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, adopted in Ukraine until 2025. This policy brief focuses on capacity-building for the State Emergency Service and the National Police in a way that enhances gender equality and inclusion, both within these structures and in their interactions with the citizens in whose interests they work. The state of affairs in these structures receives less public attention than, for example, that in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. There is very little research or advocacy on gender equality and inclusion in the Ukrainian civilian security sector. At the same time, in recent years, these structures have demonstrated significant internal initiatives and successes – for instance, by establishing internal gender assessments or preparing guidelines for making premises barrier-free. Working under extremely high-risk conditions, personnel in civil security sector structures demonstrate supreme efficiency and professional potential.² Investments in capacity-building for these institutions will support even more effective practice.

This study is based on data from available literature, one interview with an expert in community policing, one interview with an authorized official from Ukraine’s National Police, and one interview with an authorized official from the State Emergency Service. The author of the brief also has extensive experience in studying gender inequality in the military and thus draws on a depth of knowledge about the security sector. The task of this brief is to identify

¹ The term “civilian security sector” is broad and includes Ukraine’s National Police, State Emergency Service, State Border Service, Security Service, National Anti-Corruption Bureau, Special Anti-Corruption Attorney, National Corruption Prevention Agency, and related ministries. However, this brief uses it to refer specifically to the National Police and the State Emergency Service.

² National Police of Ukraine, “In 2023, the effectiveness of police detection of serious and especially serious crimes increased – Andrii Nebytov,” January 13, 2023, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.npu.gov.ua/news/u-2023-rotsi-zros-la-efektyvnist-rozkryttia-politseyskymy-tiazhkykh-ta-osoblyvo-tiazhkykh-zlochyniv-andrii-niebytov>.

capacity-building efforts in the civilian security sector. All the needs expressed in this policy brief are long term, and all initiatives to fulfill them can be implemented in all of Ukraine's regions controlled by the Ukrainian authorities.

Working Conditions in the Civilian Security Sector

As of 2024, the functions of the State Emergency Service (SES) of Ukraine include duties such as search and rescue of people in emergencies caused by the Russian Federation's attacks on the civilian population as well as providing them with first aid. The SES and special "White Angel" units of the National Police also evacuate the civilian population from war zones. In addition, the duties of the National Police and the SES include the demining of territories: according to official data, 30 percent of Ukraine's territory is potentially mined.³ The National Police is the first responder to hate crimes and other conflict situations that arise in a war-torn society, and it controls the circulation of firearms in private hands, which can potentially increase after the first wave of mass demobilization and the return home of combatants.⁴

Emergency and police workers operate under shelling, including the so-called "double tap,"⁵ which refers to situations when a second strike hits a location after rescuers respond to the initial strike. They have lighter protection than military personnel. The extreme danger of their working conditions directly affects their psychological health, and it contributes to burnout, accumulating psychological exhaustion, and unexpressed aggression. Meanwhile, emergency and police workers experience the general stress of war as well – as people at risk of losing their homes or having their homes destroyed by missile strikes, or as people who may be internally displaced, whose loved ones may be in military service or in occupied territories, dead, seriously wounded, or subjected to torture as captives. According to surveys, 77 percent of the population of Ukraine has experienced recent stress or severe nervousness, and 13 percent consider their own mental health unsatisfactory.⁶

"We all understand how heavy the load is now on rescuers. Afterward in certain cases, they have such a state of aggression; and they are supposed to be able to suppress this state of aggression, and not carry it either to their duty stations in the morning or, God forbid, take violence home in the evening. That's why we need to work at countering the burnout of the management team of rescuers, especially those who are involved in the execution of combat tasks of emergency liquidation or pyrotechnics."

– SES employee

The National Police and the SES are large, stable employers which have the time and the desire to implement internal policies in the field of equal rights and opportunities. For example, children's spaces have been created in the SES system in departments where employees have small children; a mechanism for combating discrimination, sexism, sexual harassment, and

³ Ukrinform, "Ukraine has as much territories mined as three Croatias – Shmyhal," October 11, 2023, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3772613-v-ukraini-zaminovana-teritoria-ak-tri-plosi-horvatii-smigal.html>.

⁴ Small Arms Survey, "Russia's War: Weighing the Human Cost in Ukraine," May 15, 2023, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://smallarmssurvey.medium.com/russias-war-weighing-the-human-cost-in-ukraine-9ecc73a41987>.

⁵ BBC News Ukraine, "'Double tap' to kill rescue workers. Why is Russia increasingly doing this in Ukraine?" April 5, 2024, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/cp04gmej294o>.

⁶ Gradus, "Ukrainians' mental health and attitude to psychological aid," March 2024, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://gradus.app/uk/open-reports/mental-health-and-attitudes-ukrainians-towards-psychological-assistance-during-war>.

psychological and sexual violence has been approved;⁷ and a gender assessment is being conducted. The Ukrainian Law Enforcement Personnel Association, which includes members of different law enforcement institutions and implements projects to combat gender-based violence, began work in 2018. The Department of the Head Inspection and Human Rights Compliance of the National Police, together with civil society, implements a policy of community policing. Both organization websites support versions for the visually impaired.

All this gives reason to believe that supporting capacity-building for these organizations will contribute to the establishment of gender equality, non-discrimination, and inclusion **both within these structures and in their work with the population.**

Basic capacity-building needs for these organizations include provision of equipment such as armored police cars and video cameras – which applies first and foremost for the de-occupied territories – as well as the best protective equipment, including anatomically adapted and, if appropriate for the task, light body armor for women. For civilian security employees who work in offices, desired working conditions include renovated premises with high-quality furniture and modern equipment as well as newly created departments. “Green rooms,” used to collect statements from children and as waiting areas for the children of visitors, as well as rooms for children of employees are all necessary: under wartime conditions, some employees would like to have their children nearby rather than at home alone. Shelters should be established within workplace premises because during air raids, shelters at police stations are not only used by employees, but also by visitors, detainees (for whose safety the police take responsibility), and passers-by. In winter, during blackouts and possible energy infrastructure outages, police stations serve as “invincibility points,” providing citizens with hot tea, phone-charging points, and an internet connection. Even online school classes are sometimes conducted from these locations. This requires a supply of generators and Starlink terminals. All premises should be accessible for visitors and for employees with disabilities.

“This year, an entire department for the protection of human rights was opened; they now need some sofas, tables, chairs, so their team can gather in the office, and work well.”

– Expert in community policing

To support their psychological health, workers in the civilian security sector need retreats in relatively safe places in Ukraine or abroad. Such retreats can be combined with international exchanges and offline learning. One example for a successful best practice is the exchange of experience between Ukrainian police officers and colleagues from other countries, for example, by training them to guard mass events such as Stockholm Pride. This was implemented by the organization Gender Stream, and it was successful not only in terms of the performance of direct police functions, but also by helping to combat homophobia and transphobia among police personnel.

An important component of the work of civil security sector institutions with the population is providing information about various dangers, both war-related (e.g., mines or conflict-related sexual violence) and regular (e.g., fires or domestic violence). Such information materials need to meet accessibility requirements in digital and print form, so as to be easily read. In order to communicate with civilians who have hearing, intellectual or psychosocial impairments, adapted communication should be assisted by technology, such as tablets.

Projects of this type, for which the public sector currently lacks financing due to the state budget’s focus on immediate defense challenges, should be implemented in cooperation with international partners. Support for direct procurements (e.g., technical equipment, office

⁷ State Emergency Service of Ukraine, “Report on the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security for the period until 2025,” 2022, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://dsns.gov.ua/upload/1/6/0/3/3/6/1/zvit-za-2022-dsns-po-npd-2025-do-minsopol-ta-mvs.pdf>.

equipment, etc.) must be provided in compliance with all necessary conditions of procurement transparency. Support for personnel training should be carried out through the implementation of systematic training projects, without producing an excessive load in addition to the everyday workload, in both professional and soft skills. This can be done under the supervision of the Council of Europe or other authorized bodies.

Training Personnel in Professional Non-Discrimination and Soft Skills

“During the year, staff undergo three [to] four large training sessions on various topics. Unfortunately, we have a lot of people to train, 94 thousand people. And the State Emergency Service will definitely not collect 94 thousand people offline. We currently do not have such funds, because we use all funds to address emergencies; it is difficult to allocate any funds for training. There is a need for this.”

— SES official

It is always necessary to upgrade the skills of civil security employees, but a focus on skills related to non-discrimination, gender equality, human rights, and working with people with disabilities will facilitate **the intersectional capacity-building of these organizations**. Capacity must be built in two dimensions: how civilian security actors interact with the outside world; and how they transform their organizations to become more inclusive and less biased toward their own employees.

When interacting with the wider population, the following skills are particularly important for security personnel:

- **Sensitivity to gendered violence:** Awareness of domestic violence, gender-based violence, and conflict-related sexual violence is important in order to support gender equality when working with the civilian population. Awareness is also needed when it comes to corresponding legislative amendments carried out in adaptation of national legislation to the Istanbul Convention’s requirements.
- **Sensitivity to the needs of people with disabilities:** Interacting with people with various forms of disability also requires skills to communicate with people with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, as well as skills to correctly prepare digital and printed materials in easy-to-read formats.
- **Mediation skills:** Mediation skills including nonviolent communication, basic psychological education, and psychological self-help are important.
- **Anti-discrimination action:** Draft law No. 5488, which is under consideration in the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, provides for increased liability for hate crimes and generally brings Ukrainian legislation into line with EU legislation as part of Ukraine’s European integration process. The ability to identify hatred and discrimination is a necessary skill for National Police personnel, not only in their communication with citizens, but also as part of the professional skill of distinguishing hate crimes from regular crimes.
- **Women, peace and security agenda:** For the period leading up to 2025, the SES and the National Police are among the main implementers of the 1325 National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Training on Resolution 1325 and related resolutions are therefore important.

Regarding inclusivity and discrimination among security actors themselves, the following problems and needs are evident:

- **Glass ceilings:** In terms of women’s career growth, despite positive practices within institutional structures, a “glass ceiling” remains, so it is extremely important to develop women’s leadership skills so they do not get “stuck” in the lowest management positions. The ability to recognize sexual harassment and sexist attitudes is important for both rank-and-file officers and management. Practice shows that some people who encounter gender-charged behavior in the workplace, after which they have felt uncomfortable, do not identify it as sexism or harassment, and accordingly do not consider themselves sufferers and do not file complaints against offenders, even where effective countermeasure mechanisms are available.⁸ Management, accordingly, must have the skills to initiate countermeasures when the need arises.
- **Lack of awareness of problems:** It is also important to allocate resources for the implementation of analytical studies and repeated collection of statistical data within civilian security institutions. Such studies and repeat surveys could relate to working conditions, work needs, training needs, the effectiveness of training and the application of acquired skills, general team atmosphere, and the psychological state of employees. One analysis of understandings of masculinity that affect the work of men in the security sector and their attitude toward female colleagues is the study “Understanding masculinity and gender equality in the security sector of Ukraine,” carried out in 2019 and 2020 with the support of UN Women.⁹

Beyond the question of what kind of capacity-building needs exist, it is also relevant to interrogate whether capacity-building can be undertaken effectively. For instance, international exchanges, participation in international conferences, and work trips are an important component of the training of personnel in the civilian security sector. In order to ensure that women or single parents are not excluded from participation, programs should provide opportunities for visits with children and also ensure that childcare is provided externally so that parents suffer minimal distraction from work.

Training should begin with management and regional representatives, who would then conduct training for other employees. Trainings abroad or in other cities should be organized so that women with children as well as single parents and persons with disabilities can participate. One example of a good practice are the Council of Europe guidelines on communication between police and people with disabilities, which have been translated into Ukrainian.

“We are training 40 people, and they are working and living in their regions, and already training police personnel there. That is, we do not need to train 96 thousand police officers from the National Police. We need to train these 40 and send them to work on the ground.”

— Expert on community policing

Another effective one-time and long-term investment in the soft and professional skills of personnel is the development of online courses that personnel and cadets of specialized educational institutions will be required to complete. One example of an online course developed with the technical and financial support of international partners – which is

⁸ Gender Stream, “Gender Problems in the Security Sector,” 2019, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BuX8jgTZ6SF-UdgjzWIZa22lCFC7cXm/view>.

⁹ UN Women in Ukraine, “Understanding masculinity and gender equality in the security sector of Ukraine,” 2020, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://mvs.gov.ua/upload/1/1/5/9/1/2/fyYQrerOOpY7VVU3tuaqOxfuGvwS3kMoLF0huMkC.pdf>.

currently used for training by the SES – is the “Women, Peace, Security Agenda” course¹⁰ on the EdEra platform.¹¹ Often, no developed training programs or coaching staff exist within the structures of civilian security institutions to regularly conduct this type of training. The civil security sector therefore has to “order” such training from NGOs, and civil security budgets do not always have resources for this kind of personnel training. Three-sided cooperation with international partners could provide for payment of specialists from NGOs.

Strengthening NGOs That Work with the Civilian Security Sector

All of the aforementioned capacity-building activities in the civilian security sector are impossible without cooperation with NGOs in Ukraine. Ukraine’s third sector is large and vibrant, the number of registered organizations is constantly growing, and the first priority in the work of NGOs and charitable associations is to support the defense and victims of Russia’s aggression. At least half of Ukrainian NGOs are taking part or plan to participate in post-war reconstruction.¹² For instance, the destroyed premises of the SES in Makariv in Kyiv region were rebuilt precisely at the expense of the volunteer organization Building Ukraine Together.¹³ In addition, local organizations use funds raised much more efficiently than international organizations, respond to challenges significantly more quickly, and have better knowledge of local contexts than international organizations that apply the same generalized approaches to different contexts and require excessive reporting.¹⁴ The third sector contains in-depth expertise across many areas of life, which is obtained from both practical social work with certain population groups and from conducting research. In general, specialist training in the third sector is stronger than in civilian security institutions.

“If any complaints from citizens about the police or about violations of rights by civilians are received, they are sent to the Department of the Head Inspection and Human Rights Compliance, and they deal with it. The police may simply not be keeping up with the changes. By the way, the criminal code is also going to change now. They are not keeping up with all the changes, and they turn to human rights organizations. [...] In other words, in fact it turns out that the police rely heavily on NGOs, specifically in matters of human rights.”

– Expert on community policing

Sometimes NGOs provide technical assistance for state bodies. For example, the National Police has no sign language interpreters and relies on professionals from NGOs.

“We understand that such a need will not arise every day. But such moments present themselves. It is not always possible to make contact, especially at night. Therefore, I wish you could provide some possibility, since there are no sign language interpreters on the

¹⁰ DCAF, “Women, Peace, Security Agenda,” accessed August 13, 2024, <https://study.ed-era.com/uk/courses/course/4074>.

¹¹ EdEra is an online platform aimed at providing education for state, business and NGOs.

¹² Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, “Ukrainian Civil Society Under the War – 2022,” 2023, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://ednannia.ua/attachments/article/12447/Ukrainian%20civil%20society%20under%20the%20war.pdf>.

¹³ Gazeta.ua, “‘The woman’s tears are flowing. The car was shot from behind’ – How schools and houses are being rebuilt for free in Ukraine,” February 18, 2023, accessed August 13, 2024, https://gazeta.ua/articles/reportage/_u-zhinochki-techut-slozi-mashinu-zzadu-rozstrilyali-yak-v-ukrayini-bezkoshtovno-vidnovlyuyut-shkoli-i-budinki/1133575.

¹⁴ Corinne Redfern, “One year on, Ukraine exposes the limits of well-funded international aid,” *The New Humanitarian*, February 14, 2023, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2023/02/14/Why-international-aid-is-not-reaching-Ukraine>.

National Police staff. We have the possibility of communication on the site with an interpreter, who is provided by an NGO. But this works as long as they have funding. This is a temporary solution.”

— National Police official

It is often the third sector that initiates and advocates changes to legislation and policies and provides the necessary advisory and training assistance to state and local governments. The latter, in turn, rely heavily on the expertise of the former in matters of human rights, gender equality, and inclusion. NGOs can significantly impact the efficiency and reformation of the public sector. For instance, the “Invisible Battalion” initiative from the NGO Institute of Gender Programs has made several achievements. Based on a study of women’s participation in the war in the east of Ukraine since 2014 and a subsequent advocacy campaign, the Invisible Battalion achieved the opening of combat positions for women in the Armed Forces; the adoption of amendments to the Law of Ukraine “on military duty and military service” concerning women undergoing military service on equal terms with men; the improvement of media representation of female military personnel; as well as other changes that have affected a paradigm shift in the perception of gender issues in the Armed Forces.¹⁵

International partners can support Ukraine’s third sector and civil security institutions through support for research and project implementation, as well as through institutional support for organizations that prove their integrity, qualifications and efficiency. The NGO Gender Stream from Dnipro is one example of an organization that systematically works with the National Police at the local and national levels.

When supporting the third sector, the comparability of fees in the third sector with similar positions in the commercial sector is worth considering. This may enable people performing such work to not feel “punished” for contributing to socially important processes, and it may allow them to continue their work without the risks of significant impoverishment or overload from multiple ongoing projects.

Recommendations

The National Police and the State Emergency Service of Ukraine work in extremely difficult conditions, performing dangerous tasks amid wartime conditions and with inadequate resources. However, these institutions are also large, stable employers who are taking the initiative to develop internal non-discrimination policies among their staff and seeking to normalize non-discriminatory practice in their work with the wider population of Ukraine.

Providing Ukraine with high-precision weapons will help to avoid more destruction and human casualties, since at least 123 police officers¹⁶ and 91 members of the SES¹⁷ have been killed since the beginning of the all-out aggression. Moreover, administrative buildings have also been destroyed. In addition, high-precision weapons will protect international partners who have already invested resources in reconstruction as the potential for repeated destruction reduces the effectiveness of such investments. Severe damage to energy

¹⁵ Tamara Martsenyuk et al., *An interdisciplinary study IB 5.0 monitoring of recommendations and research results from the ‘Invisible battalion’ cycle* (Kyiv: NAKO, 2023), <https://drive.google.com/file/d/152lKOpFM6edRTyphhY4XXEJBishf2nZ6/view>.

¹⁶ Volyn Region National Police Department, “Police officers who died during the armed aggression of the Russian Federation,” June 20, 2023, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://vl.npu.gov.ua/nazavzhdy-v-stroiu/pratsivnyky-politsii-iki-zahynuly-pid-chas-zbroinoi-ahresii-ri>.

¹⁷ Ukrinform, “During the all-out war 91 SES employee have been killed,” April 6, 2024, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-society/3849109-za-cas-povnomasstabnoi-vijni-zagynuv-91-pracivnik-dsns.html>.

infrastructure, for instance, leads to significant power outages¹⁸ and produces costs for backup power, which slows down the work of institutions and strains their budgets. The reconstruction of destroyed communities and the prevention of further destruction by providing Ukraine with better means for self-defense should be parallel processes.

In addition, specific recommendations for capacity-building are as follows:

- **Improve the material working conditions of employees of the SES and the National Police.** This may include providing the necessary and personal protective equipment, such as armored police cars and bulletproof vests (for those who work “in the field”), as well as rebuilding destroyed National Police and SES premises, establishing bomb shelters and children’s rooms, supporting premises with generators and Starlink terminals, and providing furniture and equipment for newly created departments.
- **Care for the mental health of employees of the SES and the National Police.** This may include supporting retreats combined with sharing experiences and training. The biggest needs are for relaxation and opportunities to “switch off” from the war, and for mental self-help skills to reduce anxiety and aggression.
- **Improve the qualifications of employees of the SES and the National Police, with a focus on skills related to non-discrimination.** Training should include knowledge and skills related to gender equality, human rights, and working with people with disabilities. It should also improve awareness and understandings of gender discrimination and combating sexual harassment, human rights, the differences between regular crime and hate crime, and communication with people with learning disabilities.
- **Support NGOs cooperating with the State Emergency Service and the National Police.** This may include the development of trilateral cooperation as well as the payment of specialists from NGOs to conduct training and providing technical aid for civil security institutions, such as trainers on non-discrimination and sign language interpreters.

Conclusion

This policy brief emphasizes the importance of bolstering the capacity of the State Emergency Service and the National Police of Ukraine by strengthening gender equality and inclusion for people with disabilities, both within internal structures and in these institutions’ work with the population. The recommendations focus on improving the working conditions of male, female, and queer employees, training them in professional non-discrimination skills and soft skills, and strengthening the third sector as the main partner and driver of change in the civil security sector.

¹⁸ Ukrinform, “The winter in terms of electricity will be difficult, but without a blackout – an expert,” July 1, 2024, accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-economy/3880890-zima-sodo-elektroenergii-bude-vazkou-ale-bez-blekautu-ekspert.html>.



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