

REVIEW

Environmental Security of Women and Men in the Context of Russia's War against Ukraine

Short English Version

Democracy Development Center



Photo note: the cover photo in the Ukrainian full version shows a nest made by birds from drone fiber-optic cable. Photo by Oleh Marchenko, used with permission.

2026

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1. Introduction and Methodology

Ukraine has already produced a substantial body of research on the state of the environment, the environmental consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine, climate change, loss of natural resources, and damage to ecosystems. Much less attention, however, has been paid to how environmental risks, climate change, infrastructure destruction, and pollution of water, soil, and air affect the daily lives of women and men of different ages, social positions, and places of residence.

This Review proceeds from the understanding that all regions of Ukraine are facing a combined crisis: existing environmental problems and the effects of climate change are intensified by the destructive impact of the war. The Review focuses on environmental security through the experience of women from urban and rural communities, civil society organizations, local self-government, state institutions, expert communities, activist groups, and local initiatives.

The purpose of the Review is to map organizations, institutions, laws, policies, action plans, and initiatives related to the Triple Nexus in Ukraine, assess vulnerability to climate change, and develop a specialized roadmap. Within this purpose, the Review analyzes how environmental and climate risks, intensified by the war, affect women, men, and different population groups; assesses whether international and national policies and practical measures take these differences into account; and identifies key gaps and recommendations for state authorities, local self-government, civil society, and international organizations.

The Review is based on expert interviews and consultations with participants of trainings conducted within the project "Environmental Security from a Gender Perspective," implemented by the Democracy Development Center in 2025 with the support of Oxfam in cooperation with CSO "Rural Women of Ukraine." The materials collected within the project include 40 expert interviews with women activists from women's organizations, 9 interviews and consultations with women representatives of local self-government, 4 consultations with women environmental experts, and discussions held during online and offline project events.

Quotes from participants are used as qualitative material to illustrate experiences and observations expressed during the project. They are not statistically representative data. The Review also draws on international and national legal and policy documents, analytical reports, news publications, scientific studies, and other open sources on environmental security, climate change, recovery, the Women, Peace and Security agenda, public health, pregnancy, children, rural communities, and other affected groups.

The Review is not an exhaustive study of all environmental problems in Ukraine and does not claim to represent the position of all women's, environmental, or human rights organizations. Its task is to outline the problems identified by project participants at community level and show why environmental security should be treated not only as an issue of nature protection, but also as an issue of human rights, women's rights, social justice, community security, and the quality of Ukraine's recovery.

2. Short Annotations by Section

Section 1. Introduction, Purpose, and Methodology

The first section defines the purpose, tasks, and methodology of the Review. It explains why environmental security should be analyzed through the lived experience of women and men in different communities and clarifies the use of project-based qualitative materials together with legal, policy, analytical, scientific, and open-source materials.

Section 2. International and National Policy

The second section analyzes international and national policy on environmental security through the lens of equal rights and opportunities for women and men. It reviews international standards on women's rights, climate policy, biodiversity, sustainable development, rural development, and disaster risk reduction. The section also analyzes Ukraine's legal and policy framework on equality, environmental and climate policy, strategic environmental assessment, agriculture, regional development, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Women, Peace and Security agenda. It concludes that Ukraine already has important legal and policy preconditions for integrating a gender-sensitive approach into environmental, climate, energy, agricultural, and recovery policies, but these preconditions are not yet consistently translated into concrete goals, indicators, budgets, data systems, and decision-making procedures.

Subsection 2.3. Environmental Tax and Its Use in Territorial Communities

A separate subsection explains how the environmental tax can be linked to the financing of local environmental programs and practical measures on water, waste, green spaces, energy efficiency, and other community needs. It emphasizes transparency, public participation, access to information, budget planning, and the need to consider the needs of different population groups when local environmental priorities are set.

Section 3. Participation of Women and Youth

The third section examines the participation of women and youth in environmental protection, climate policy, and the green recovery of Ukraine. It shows that women are active in environmental, energy, educational, civil society, volunteer, humanitarian, mine action, and recovery-related fields, while their contribution often remains less visible and their access to leadership and policy influence remains limited. The section also presents international and Ukrainian initiatives related to women's leadership, professional training, women's participation in energy, renewable energy, demining, green entrepreneurship, and climate adaptation.

Youth, Education, and Change in Environmental Behavior

The Review pays particular attention to youth, education, and behavioral change. Young people can be important actors in environmental change at community level, but they are often excluded from real decision-making mechanisms. Environmental education should therefore combine knowledge about climate, water, waste, and energy with practical skills in civic participation, local programs, budgets, consultations, advocacy, public speaking, and monitoring. Special attention should be given to supporting girls and young women in STEM, environmental work, energy, agricultural innovation, green entrepreneurship, and local leadership.

Section 4. Environmental Problems and Their Impacts

The fourth section analyzes key environmental problems and their consequences for different groups of women and men in the context of the war. It covers the environmental consequences of hostilities; rising temperatures and heat waves; drought, desertification, water scarcity, and unpaid care work; food security, rural communities, and rural women; floods and damaged water infrastructure; fires, forest destruction, soil degradation, and biodiversity loss; waste, spontaneous dumpsites, medical and military waste; industrial and agricultural pollution; air pollution, noise, and public health; and radiation and nuclear safety. The section shows that these risks have environmental, social, security, public health, and gender dimensions.

Children, Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Early Motherhood

Within Section 4, the Review separately examines children, pregnancy, childbirth, early motherhood, women who have recently given birth, mothers of infants, and newborns in the context of combined climate and war-related risks. War, heat, air pollution, lack of safe water, blackouts, disrupted transport, damaged medical infrastructure, and limited access to services can reinforce one another. For pregnant women and mothers of infants, the relevant issues include not only access to medical care, but also safe infant care, breastfeeding support, safe preparation of infant formula, access to water, sanitation, heating or cooling, and reliable information.

Mobility, Frontline and De-occupied Communities, and Violence Risks

Section 4 also examines population mobility and the situation of frontline, de-occupied, and host communities, as well as the links between environmental crises and risks of male violence against women. The Review does not claim an automatic direct causal link between environmental crisis and violence. It shows, however, that infrastructure destruction, displacement, poverty, dependence on humanitarian assistance, isolation, overburdened support services, and limited access to safe housing can intensify risk conditions for women and girls.

Section 5. Main Gaps

The fifth section summarizes the main gaps identified by the Review. These include insufficient data disaggregated by sex, age, place of residence, disability, IDP status, and other relevant characteristics; formal or uneven use of gender-sensitive approaches in environmental and climate policy; weak links between training and institutional change; insufficient involvement of women in decision-making; fragmentation between environmental, climate, social, security, and recovery policies; limited local capacity; lack of sustainability of donor-funded projects; unsystematic environmental education; and insufficient integration between environmental security and prevention of violence against women.

Section 6. Recommendations for Stakeholders

The sixth section provides recommendations for the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, relevant ministries, oblast military administrations, rayon state administrations, local self-government bodies, environmental control bodies, the public health system, services supporting women affected by violence, educational institutions, civil society organizations, international organizations, and donors. Cross-cutting recommendations include the collection and use of sex-disaggregated and other relevant data, gender analysis of environmental and climate documents, consultations with women and women's organizations before decisions are taken, gender-responsive budgeting, intersectoral coordination, monitoring of policy impacts on different population groups, and public reporting on results.

Section 7. Conclusions

The final section concludes that environmental security in wartime Ukraine should not be understood only as nature protection or technical regulation. It is also a matter of human rights, women's rights, public health, social

justice, community security, humanitarian response, recovery, and the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Integrating a gender-sensitive approach into environmental policy is a condition for ensuring that decisions on recovery, climate adaptation, natural resources, infrastructure, and local development respond to the real needs of different population groups.

Annexes

The annexes complement the analytical part of the Review with practical tools. Annex 1 compares the integration of a gender-sensitive approach in Ukrainian strategic documents on agriculture, gender equality, and regional development. Annex 2 offers a gender-inclusive environmental roadmap for territorial communities. Annex 3 describes the main stages of developing and implementing a local environmental program with an integrated gender-sensitive approach.

3. Conclusions

Environmental security in Ukraine in the context of war and climate change is not only a matter of nature protection, technical regulation, or implementation of international climate commitments. It is also a matter of human rights, women's rights, health, access to water, land, energy, housing, safe infrastructure, social services, and participation in decision-making.

Ukraine is facing a combined crisis in which the consequences of climate change overlap with the destructive effects of Russia's war against Ukraine. Droughts, heat, water scarcity, fires, flooding, industrial pollution, waste, damaged energy and water infrastructure, landmine contamination, and forced displacement together create a new level of risk for communities.

These risks affect the whole population, but their consequences depend on sex, age, health status, place of residence, income, household composition, disability, IDP status, access to transport, safe housing, water, land, energy, information, and services. Environmental policy therefore needs to analyze not only territories and infrastructure, but also the people who live with the daily consequences of environmental and climate risks.

Women are not only affected by environmental crises. They already respond to them by organizing mutual aid, supporting communities, promoting environmental practices, and working in green energy, mine action, education, social, medical, municipal, and civil society sectors. Their participation, however, should move from participation in activities to real influence over priorities, budgets, programs, monitoring, and evaluation.

Ukraine already has international commitments, national legislation, and methodological tools that make it possible to integrate equal rights and opportunities for women and men into environmental, climate, energy, water, agricultural, and recovery policies. The main problem is not the absence of a policy framework, but the fact that it does not always translate into data, indicators, budgeting, participation procedures, institutional responsibility, and regular reporting.

Ukraine's recovery will be more resilient if environmental security, climate adaptation, social policy, public health, prevention of violence against women, and the Women, Peace and Security agenda are treated as interconnected areas. This requires systematic data collection, participation of women and different population groups in decision-making, gender-responsive budgeting, practical tools for communities, and a shift from isolated projects to sustainable policies.

Without such an approach, environmental policy may see temperature, water, waste, emissions, destruction, and infrastructure, but fail to see the people who live with the consequences of these problems. When the experience of women, local communities, and different population groups is taken into account, environmental policy can become more accurate, fair, and effective, and Ukraine's recovery can become safer, more sustainable, and more human-centered.

4. Recommendations

The recommendations aim to ensure that environmental security, climate change, green recovery, and response to the consequences of the war are treated not only as technical, infrastructural, or environmental issues, but also as part of human rights, equal rights and opportunities for women and men, public health, social justice, community security, and sustainable recovery.

Cross-cutting recommendations for all stakeholders

- collect and use data disaggregated by sex, age, place of residence, disability, IDP status, household type, and other characteristics relevant to a specific policy area;
- consult women and women's organizations before decisions are made, not after policy documents have already been prepared;
- apply gender analysis, gender impact assessment, and, where required by law, gender legal expertise to environmental, climate, recovery, and related policy documents;
- apply gender-responsive budgeting to environmental, climate, recovery, and local development programs;
- ensure coordination between environmental, climate, agricultural, energy, social, health, security, and recovery policies;
- monitor the effects of policies on different groups of women and men and publicly report not only on activities implemented, but also on results, budgets, indicators, and changes achieved.

Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

- Integrate practical mechanisms for equal rights and opportunities of women and men into environmental, climate, energy, agricultural, water, labor, recovery, and territorial development legislation.
- Strengthen parliamentary oversight of implementation of state strategies and plans related to environmental security, climate change, recovery, gender equality, and the Women, Peace and Security agenda.
- Hold thematic committee hearings on the impact of climate change, environmental damage caused by the war, and infrastructure destruction on different population groups, with participation of women's, environmental, human rights, youth, veteran, disability, and local community organizations.
- Ensure that legislation on labor, employment, vocational education, and occupational safety removes discriminatory barriers to women's participation in technical and green professions and provides safe working conditions and social protection.

Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine

- Coordinate environmental, climate, economic, social, security, and recovery policies so that they address combined risks rather than separate sectors only.
- Review statistical and administrative reporting systems to identify the data needed to assess the impacts of environmental and climate risks on different population groups.
- Ensure that government reporting on climate policy and recovery reflects results, beneficiaries, barriers identified, funding, and indicators, not only lists of activities.
- Ensure that state programs, public investment projects, and international assistance projects in green recovery, water, energy, waste management, reconstruction, and war response include analysis of impacts on different population groups and measurable indicators.
- Coordinate green skills, retraining, and employment programs, including women's access to professions in energy efficiency, renewable energy, waste management, water management, environmental monitoring, climate adaptation, agricultural innovation, nature-based solutions, spatial planning, and energy-efficient construction.

Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture of Ukraine

- Develop practical tools for integrating equal rights and opportunities of women and men into environmental, climate, agricultural, water, and recovery policies, including templates for data collection, indicators, community consultations, and monitoring.
- Review key strategies and programs on environment, climate change, water, waste, agriculture, energy, and green recovery to identify whether they contain concrete goals, indicators, and measures for different groups of women and men.
- Ensure systematic gender-sensitive implementation and monitoring of the Strategy for the Development of Agriculture and Rural Areas, including analysis of women's and men's access to land, state support, finance, technologies, training, markets, and decision-making.
- Collect and publish data disaggregated by sex and other relevant characteristics on farm owners and managers, recipients of state support, participants in development programs, access to finance, technologies, and training.
- Ensure meaningful participation of women in working groups, advisory bodies, public consultations, climate adaptation plans, water supply programs, waste management, agricultural policy, and community recovery.
- Develop practical solutions for rural communities where wells dry up, water quality deteriorates, the cost of drinking water increases, and women's unpaid household and care work grows.
- Make green business, farming, cooperative, energy efficiency, and entrepreneurship support programs accessible to women, including rural women, internally displaced women, women veterans, and women from frontline communities.

Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine and the National Mechanism for Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men

- Include environmental and climate security in systematic gender mainstreaming work and provide methodological support to central authorities, oblast administrations, communities, and sectoral institutions.
- Monitor the environmental, climate, natural resource, energy, green skills, and green recovery measures included in the State Strategy for Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men until 2030.
- Support training for women's organizations on participation in environmental policy, local programs, budgets, climate plans, consultations, and monitoring.
- Link environmental and climate risks with social protection policy, especially for families with children, older people, people with disabilities, IDPs, single mothers, and women providing unpaid care.
- Integrate environmental and climate risk factors into the policy of preventing violence against women and supporting women affected by violence.

Oblast Military Administrations, Rayon State Administrations, and Local Self-Government Bodies

- Include gender-sensitive analysis in local strategies, recovery plans, water supply programs, waste management, greening, public transport, energy efficiency, emergency response, and heat adaptation.
- Identify groups with increased vulnerability to specific local risks, including children, pregnant women, older people, people with chronic diseases, people with disabilities, IDPs, and households with care responsibilities.
- Conduct regular consultations with women of different ages and backgrounds, including rural women, women with children, older women, women with disabilities, IDPs, women veterans, local women's organizations, and workers in social, medical, educational, and municipal sectors.
- Assess access to drinking water in villages and small settlements and include the results in local programs and budgets.
- Develop or update local waste management programs that combine infrastructure, information, incentives, hazardous waste collection, alternatives to burning waste, and transparency on what happens to collected waste.

- Adapt urban, settlement, and rural infrastructure to heat, droughts, heavy rains, and flooding through shading, drinking water, public toilets, cooling and ventilation of shelters and public facilities, green corridors, trees, protective forest belts, wetlands, rain gardens, permeable surfaces, and rainwater collection systems.
- Protect workers from heat, air pollution, smoke, flooding, and other hazardous environmental conditions, especially people working outdoors.
- Support women's cooperatives, local green initiatives, green entrepreneurship, small environmental projects, waste recycling, energy efficiency, sustainable agriculture, and stewardship of natural resources.
- Ensure that recovery plans after shelling, flooding, fires, destruction, or environmental accidents take into account access to water, transport, shelters, health care, social protection, safe housing, information, and protection from violence.

State Environmental Inspectorate and Other Control Bodies

- Strengthen risk-based control over compliance with environmental legislation, especially in areas with industrial, agricultural, or war-related pollution and in communities where several environmental risks overlap.
- Develop information exchange with public health authorities, local authorities, and other institutions that have relevant data and mandates.
- Provide public access to understandable information on inspections, violations, response measures, implementation of orders, and legal mechanisms for reporting environmental violations.
- Train inspectors in communication with communities, handling citizens' complaints, working with local CSOs, and informing the public about environmental risks and control results.

Ministry of Health, Public Health Institutions, and Health Care Facilities

- Strengthen monitoring and analysis of the impacts of climate and environmental risks on public health.
- Develop accessible information materials for the public on heat, polluted water, smoke from fires, flooding, intestinal infection risks, air pollution, noise, and radiation risks.
- Provide primary health care workers with guidance on climate and environmental risks for pregnant women, children, older people, people with cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, people with disabilities, and people with chronic illnesses.
- Ensure backup power, safe water supplies, and continuity plans for maternity wards, perinatal centers, children's hospitals, and primary health care facilities during blackouts, heat, water disruptions, and other crises.
- Include climate change, environmental pollution, water safety, heat, blackouts, and war-related health risks in training programs for health workers.
- Ensure safe handling of medical waste, especially in wartime, mobile medicine, humanitarian response, and overburdened hospitals.
- Include breastfeeding support, access to safe water, and clear information on safe preparation of infant formula in humanitarian response and local emergency plans.

Services Preventing Violence against Women and Supporting Affected Women

- Include environmental and climate risks in vulnerability assessments and assistance planning.
- Prepare mobile teams, social services, police, health facilities, child protection services, survivor support centers, humanitarian programs, and referral mechanisms to operate during heat, blackouts, water scarcity, infrastructure destruction, transport disruption, and displacement.
- Prepare information materials for women in rural, frontline, de-occupied, and crisis-affected communities on access to assistance, safe movement, social support, legal aid, and protection from violence.

- Ensure that response plans for blackouts, heat, flooding, evacuation, infrastructure destruction, and humanitarian crises include the safety of women and children, risks of isolation, access to communication, transport, safe housing, and confidential assistance.

Educational Institutions, Higher Education Institutions, and Youth Organizations

- Combine environmental education with training on participation in decision-making, local programs, budgets, consultations, complaints, public speaking, advocacy, and community monitoring.
- Support girls and young women in STEM, environmental work, energy, agricultural innovation, water management, spatial planning, green entrepreneurship, and technical professions.
- Conduct joint training for youth, educators, local authorities, local council members, parents, and older generations to build shared understanding of environmental problems and practical local solutions.
- Create spaces for real youth participation, including youth councils, working groups, small grants, consultations on local programs, partnerships with schools, CSOs, municipal services, and local authorities.

Civil Society Organizations

- Move from isolated training activities to longer-term community support programs that include problem analysis, consultations with women, preparation of local action plans, budget advocacy, monitoring, and public reporting.
- Build coalitions among women's, environmental, youth, veteran, human rights, disability, and local organizations to influence recovery and climate adaptation policies.
- Document local evidence from women about water access, waste, droughts, flooding, industrial pollution, shelling consequences, health risks, increased care work, transport, safe housing, and access to medical and social services, with informed consent and protection of personal data and safety.
- Monitor implementation of environmental, climate, and gender-related commitments at national, oblast, and local levels, focusing not only on documents, but also on budgets, implementers, timelines, indicators, and real results.
- Support the participation of women from communities in consultations, working groups, budget hearings, recovery planning, water supply programs, waste management, greening, and safety programs.

International Organizations and Donors

- Support long-term institutional change programs, not only short-term trainings, in communities, oblast military administrations, central authorities, environmental inspectorates, and civil society organizations.
- Ensure that projects on environment, climate, energy, water, waste, recovery, and war response include analysis of impacts on women and men, consultations with local women's organizations, budgets for participation, and measurable indicators.
- Treat local women's organizations as full partners in green recovery, not only as beneficiaries or consultation participants.
- Fund applied research on the impact of climate change, war-related pollution, and environmental risks on women and men of different ages, especially in rural, frontline, de-occupied, and host communities.
- Support women's access to green professions, technical education, energy efficiency, renewable energy, waste management, environmental monitoring, green entrepreneurship, and local leadership.
- Define from the beginning which project results should continue after funding ends, who will own them institutionally, how they will be financed, and how they will be integrated into state or local programs, budgets, regulations, education, monitoring, and public reporting.