



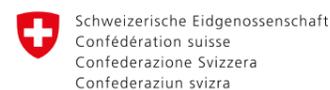
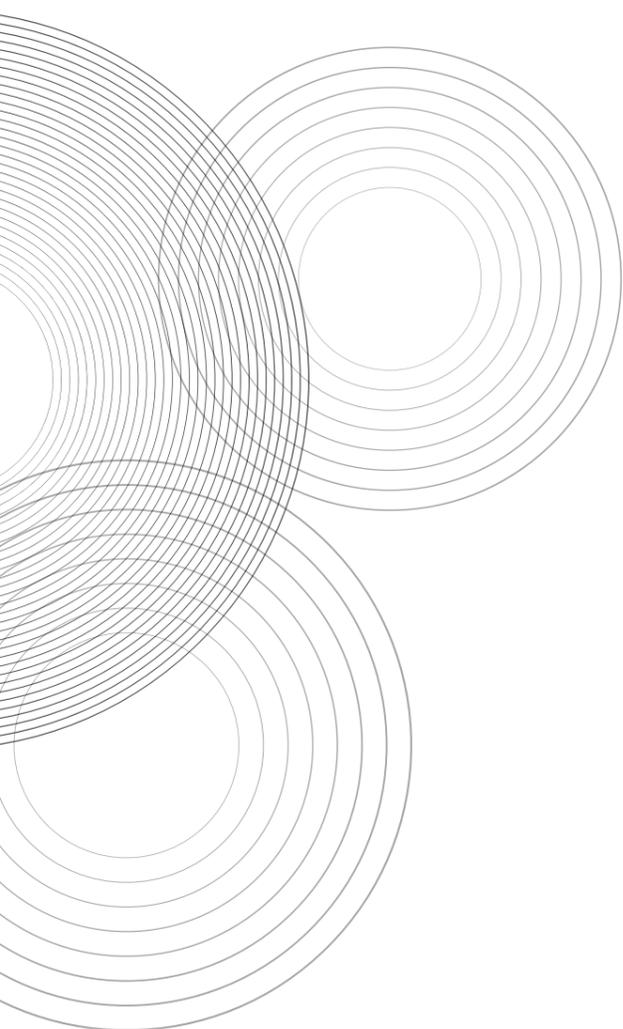
# CLEARING THE WAY FORWARD: WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY IN UKRAINE'S MINE ACTION RESPONSE



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AI</b>	artificial intelligence	<b>PwD</b>	persons with disabilities
<b>EO</b>	explosive ordnance	<b>SADDD</b>	sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data
<b>EORE</b>	explosive ordnance risk education	<b>SEAH</b>	sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment
<b>IMSMA</b>	Information Management System for Mine Action	<b>SGBV</b>	sexual and gender-based violence
<b>MHPSS</b>	mental health and psychosocial support	<b>WRO</b>	women’s rights organization
<b>NAP</b>	National Action Plan	<b>WPS</b>	UN Security Council Resolution 1325 “Women, Peace, and Security”

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mine action is not only about removing explosive ordnance (EO), it is about **restoring fundamental human rights**, including the **rights to life and security, freedom of movement, access to land and livelihoods, as well as full participation in community and public life**. Integrating Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) principles in mine action contributes to reshaping structural inequalities, building resilience, and laying the foundations for inclusive and lasting peace.<sup>1</sup>

This is the first comprehensive research on how Ukraine’s mine action sector is integrating WPS principles during ongoing armed conflict and how mine action contributes to the advancement of the WPS agenda in Ukraine. Evidence confirms that Ukraine’s mine action response contributes to the advancement of the WPS agenda across all four pillars: participation—with women now comprising nearly one-third of the workforce and increasingly assuming leadership roles; protection—through targeted explosive ordnance risk education, clearance to reduce gendered EO risks, and safeguarding to address sexual and gender-based violence; prevention—via data-driven artificial intelligence-based prioritization models that promote equitable risk reduction, and; relief and recovery—by restoring livelihoods and mobility, particularly for women assuming new economic roles.

This progress is underpinned by strong national commitments to gender equality and social inclusion. The ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), WPS National Action Plan (2022–2025), and National Mine Action Strategy for the period up to 2033 (hereinafter referred to as the National Mine Action Strategy)

provide a coherent policy foundation linking WPS and mine action. Complementary national legislation aligned with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and so forth, establish a solid foundation for rights-based, inclusive approaches in mine action. Donor foreign policy priorities further incentivize inclusive programming, while public campaigns and visible women role models are helping to shift social norms. At the institutional level, inclusive workplace practices such as equal pay for work of equal value, parental leave, ergonomically adapted personal protective equipment, and mentoring, are improving retention and professional advancement for women by addressing structural barriers.

Despite these advances, structural and contextual challenges persist. Ongoing conflict, displacement, and trauma constrain participation and reinforce inequalities. Women remain underrepresented in decision-making roles within mine action institutions, while women’s rights organizations—essential partners for community engagement and survivor assistance—operate with limited and short-term funding. Policy disconnects between the WPS and mine action frameworks limit strategic alignment, and legacy labour and disability regulations continue to restrict women’s participation to some degree. Safeguarding systems and survivor-centred referral pathways are also reportedly applied unevenly, leaving some staff without consistent protection.

The research concludes that by further systematically integrating WPS principles into mine action, Ukraine has the opportunity to transform mine action into a cornerstone of inclusive recovery and peacebuilding.

## PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

The present research examines the integration of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda within the mine action sector in Ukraine. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. **How are WPS principles reflected in Ukraine’s mine action response?**
2. **What evidence is there of mine action’s contribution to the four WPS pillars?**
3. **What factors enable or hinder successful integration, and how might these be addressed?**

## RESEARCH ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The research applies a context-specific analytical framework designed to assess the integration of WPS principles across all aspects of mine action. The following seven domains collectively assess how social, institutional, and structural inequalities enable or constrain the implementation of the WPS pillars across Ukraine’s mine action sector:

<b>Peace, security, and stability</b>	Examines the broader security and conflict environment. It assesses how stability, peacebuilding processes, and security conditions influence the integration of WPS principles in mine action.
<b>Democratic governance and rule of law</b>	Analyses the strength of democratic institutions and the rule of law as enabling conditions for inclusive mine action. It examines whether transparency, human rights protections, and civic freedoms support or create barriers to the operationalization of WPS principles.
<b>National legislation and policy frameworks</b>	Assesses the extent to which national legislation and policy frameworks promote or hinder equality and non-discrimination, and how effectively these commitments are implemented within mine action.
<b>Leadership commitment and institutional capacity</b>	Explores the leadership commitment and institutional capacity required to implement inclusive mine action. It assesses whether State institutions and operators have the expertise, structures, and financial resources necessary to integrate WPS principles.
<b>Public awareness and socio-cultural norms</b>	Examines the socio-cultural norms that shape practices and behaviours in mine action. It analyses how patriarchal systems and cultural expectations can reinforce exclusion, and how public awareness and communication campaigns can challenge stereotypes.
<b>Economic empowerment and social protections</b>	Assesses initiatives that promote women’s recruitment, retention, and professional advancement in mine action. It examines how equitable workplace policies, targeted training, mentorship, and social protections support the operationalization of WPS commitments.
<b>Local participation and community engagement</b>	Investigates the extent and quality of participation in mine action processes by affected populations, particularly that of women and girls in situations of marginalization.

For each domain, the analysis identifies key enablers and barriers, practical entry points, and recommendations for strengthening inclusion across all aspects of mine action.



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## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research methodology was adopted, combining literature review, stakeholder interviews, and participatory validation to ensure both analytical depth and stakeholder ownership.



**Literature review:** a comprehensive review of national legislative frameworks, policy frameworks, and National Mine Action Standards provided the foundation for assessing how WPS principles are reflected in Ukraine’s response. This was complemented by the analysis of reports from UN agencies, international and national NGOs, and civil society organizations, alongside quantitative data drawn from the Information Management System for Mine Action portal.



**Multi-stakeholder meeting:** on 4 November 2024, the GICHD convened a multi-stakeholder meeting to introduce the research objectives and co-develop the analytical framework. During this session, participants jointly identified seven domains that enable or hinder the application of people-centred, rights-based approaches in the mine action sector. These formed the basis of the research analytical framework. The meeting brought together 9 representatives of State institutions, 14 from certified operators, 4 from international or UN organizations, and 1 donor.



**Stakeholder interviews:** on 4–8 November 2024 in Kyiv and 11 November–13 December 2024 online, the GICHD conducted 17 semi-structured interviews. Participants included five representatives of State authorities, seven from certified operators, three from international or UN organizations, one from a civil society organization, and one donor. Interviews explored institutional capacities, operational practices, and policy coherence in advancing people-centred, rights-based approaches within mine action. To protect confidentiality, no identifying information is included in this report.



**Research validation workshop:** a research validation workshop was jointly organized by the GICHD and the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture of Ukraine on 18–19 February 2025. The workshop provided a platform to review and confirm the study’s findings and to refine recommendations through collective discussion. Eighteen representatives of State authorities, 14 from national certified operators, 6 from international or UN organizations, 1 from a civil society organization, and 2 donor representatives participated.



**Synthesis:** this mixed-method approach—combining literature review, stakeholder consultation, and participatory validation—ensures that the research reflects both empirical evidence and national perspectives.

## BACKGROUND

### THE WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY (WPS) AGENDA

The WPS agenda provides a globally recognized framework for promoting gender equality and social inclusion in conflict prevention, resolution, and recovery. It calls for women’s full, equal, and meaningful participation in peace and security processes, recognizing that their involvement is essential for achieving lasting and inclusive peace.<sup>2</sup> Since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, 10 additional resolutions have expanded and strengthened this agenda, which is structured around four interconnected pillars: participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery.<sup>3</sup>



**PARTICIPATION** focuses on ensuring women’s full and meaningful involvement in peace and security decision-making.



**PROTECTION** aims to uphold the rights and safety of women and girls in conflict-affected settings.



**PREVENTION** addresses the underlying causes of conflict and promotes structural change.



**RELIEF AND RECOVERY** ensures women and girls are included in recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction processes.

Importantly, the original text of UNSCR 1325 explicitly references the mine action sector, “Emphasizing the need for all parties to ensure that mine clearance and mine awareness programmes take into account the special needs of women and girls.”<sup>4</sup> This early recognition positions mine action as both a tool for risk reduction and a mechanism for advancing gender equality and peacebuilding objectives. However, previous research by both the GICHD and United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research shows that despite this recognition, the practical connections between WPS and mine action remain underexplored and inconsistently implemented.<sup>5</sup>

Over the past two decades, many conflict-affected and donor countries have developed WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) to localize and implement its principles.<sup>6</sup> Several NAPs include commitments related to disarmament and mine action, shaping funding priorities and programmatic expectations.<sup>7</sup> However, despite these policy advancements, the operationalization of WPS principles in mine action is often inconsistent, viewed as secondary or compliance-driven rather than being strategic.<sup>8</sup>

### WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY IN UKRAINE

Ukraine’s WPS NAP (2020-2025), adopted under wartime conditions, demonstrates sustained government commitment to advancing gender equality as a national peace and security priority.<sup>9</sup> The WPS NAP outlines five strategic objectives: enhancing women’s participation in decision-making and peace processes; building resilience to security challenges and conflict-related risks; advancing post-conflict recovery and transitional justice; preventing and combating gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence; and strengthening the institutional capacity of stakeholders responsible for WPS implementation.<sup>10</sup>

Monitoring is led by the Government Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy, under the authority of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine.<sup>11</sup> The WPS NAP assigns responsibilities across ministries and requires oblast administrations (regional administrative areas) to develop aligned local action plans, anchoring a decentralized model for operationalizing WPS commitments.<sup>12</sup> The WPS NAP was developed through a multi-stakeholder process coordinated by the Government Commissioner with strong participation from women’s rights organizations, civil society networks, and international partners.<sup>13</sup> The current WPS NAP’s focus on gender<sup>14</sup> offers conceptual entry points for integrating mine action, a central focus of this research.

The forthcoming WPS NAP for 2026-2030 represents an important opportunity to formalize these connections. Its draft Strategic Goal 2 establishes a gender-sensitive system for identifying and responding to security challenges, with draft Operational Objective 2.2 integrating gender-responsive approaches across risk assessment, planning, implementation, and monitoring of mine action. Draft tasks focus on strengthening institutional capacity, embedding gender and social inclusion principles in mine action planning, and building skills, especially among women, to recognize and respond to explosive ordnance-related and broader security risks.<sup>15</sup> Notably, the draft NAP also elevates the role of the Initiative Group for Gender Aspects in Mine Action, which will be formalised as an interagency working group.

## CHAPTER 1. CURRENT STATUS

This chapter examines the current status of integration of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda in Ukraine's mine action response, and presents evidence of how mine action contributes to advancing each of the WPS pillars: participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery.

### PARTICIPATION



In mine action, participation includes increasing women's professional involvement in operational and leadership roles, ensuring their inclusion in policy and multilateral forums, and strengthening their participation at the community level.<sup>16</sup>

#### Women in leadership roles

Women's representation and agency in leadership is central to advancing the WPS participation pillar, as it enables their full and meaningful involvement in peace and security decision-making. Literature review and interview findings highlighted that in Ukraine women now hold senior positions in several State institutions and certified mine action operators.<sup>17</sup> Data from 2025 show that women account for 26 per cent of all managers in the mine action sector. While this suggests a degree of gender diversity in leadership, the figure must be considered in relation to women's overall participation in the sector. Management roles constitute 15 per cent of all positions sector wide. As a result, although women make up approximately one quarter of managers, the proportion of women in management relative to all women employed in the sector closely mirrors the overall share of management positions.

Qualitative interview data suggest that as women hold more leadership positions, they are increasingly participating in key coordination and policy platforms, such as the Ukraine Mine Action Cluster. They also represent Ukrainian organizations more and more at major international events—including the International Meeting of Mine Action National Directors and United Nations Advisers, and at the Ukraine Recovery Conference—increasing women's influence in both national and global policy dialogue.

#### Women in operational roles

According to data from the Ministry of Economy, Environment, and Agriculture of Ukraine's (MoEEA's) 2024 baseline survey, women comprise 29 per cent of the mine action workforce, of which around two out of three (22 per cent) are in operational roles such as clearance, survey, and explosive ordnance risk education (EORE). This figure contrasts with women's overall representation of 48 per cent in the national labour market<sup>18</sup> and approximately 8 per cent in the Armed Forces of Ukraine as of 2024,<sup>19</sup> highlighting both progress and gaps in gender parity across security-related sectors. Ukraine's overall rate of women's representation in mine action aligns closely with the global average of 30 per cent identified by Mines Action Canada, although women remain slightly underrepresented in field operations compared with the global benchmark of 29 per cent.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Mines Advisory Group (MAG) Ukraine's research indicates that gender representation varies by institutional type; private companies in the sector employ significantly fewer women, while international operators tend to have higher women's representation.<sup>21</sup>

#### Participation of women and girls at the community level

Women's participation and community engagement are steadily increasing across Ukraine's mine action response. Data from the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) portal show that women and girls constitute a majority of EORE beneficiaries – 31 per cent women and 26 per cent girls – reflecting growing outreach targeting women and girls.<sup>22</sup> However, this pattern raises important questions about whether EORE programming is appropriately targeted, given that men and boys remain the most likely direct victims of explosive ordnance (EO) accidents and incidents.

Interviewees highlighted that gender-mixed survey and EORE teams have become standard operational practice, improving access, communication, and trust within rural and frontline communities.<sup>23</sup> Partnerships with women's rights organizations (WROs) are expanding, strengthening local participation and ensuring that survey, clearance, and EORE activities reflect the diverse needs of women and girls in affected communities.<sup>24</sup> Collectively, these developments demonstrate gradual but tangible progress towards more inclusive, community-centred mine action in Ukraine.

### PROTECTION



In mine action, protection involves reducing immediate threats from EO, ensuring robust safeguarding and duty-of-care measures that prevent sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and other forms of harm, and upholding women's socio-economic rights.<sup>25</sup>

#### Addressing immediate threats from explosive ordnance

EO contamination remains one of the most significant protection challenges in Ukraine. According to IMSMA, more than 3,907 hazardous areas covering over 420,860,228 square metres have been recorded nationwide.<sup>26</sup> The widespread presence of EO exposes civilians to constant danger, and also restricts access to homes, farmland, and essential services, undermining the right to safety and security and perpetuating fear, displacement, and vulnerability across affected communities.<sup>27</sup>

As of August 2025, IMSMA recorded 1,277 EO casualties resulting from 897 EO-related accidents. Of the total casualties, 80 per cent were men, 9 per cent women, 9 per cent boys and 3 per cent girls.<sup>28</sup> Data analysis confirms that men are more at risk than women, largely due to their engagement in professions and livelihood activities such as agriculture, construction, and recovery work in contaminated areas.<sup>29</sup> According to recent research, one in four Ukrainians (25 per cent) consider themselves at high risk of being affected by EO—rising to 30 per cent in the south of the country and 28 per cent in the east. Moreover, 13 per cent of respondents have personally encountered explosive devices, and 9 per cent have entered or visited mined areas since 2024.<sup>30</sup> These findings underscore the scale of the threat and the urgent need to remove EO hazards and expand targeted EORE, particularly for those whose livelihoods or daily activities expose them to continued danger.

Ukraine's long-established civil protection and preparedness (CPP) system plays a vital role in anticipating and reducing the diverse protection risks faced by civilians. CPP structures must continuously adapt emergency response plans to a volatile environment.<sup>31</sup> Within this system, demining, explosive ordnance disposal, and EORE have become critical to reducing the immediate threats faced by civilians from EO. Integrated within both national mine action and civil protection frameworks, these activities protect lives while upholding the rights to safety and security, including for women and girls, who face heightened risks during displacement, evacuation, and recovery.<sup>32</sup>

IMSMA data demonstrate that EORE reaches women and girls more frequently,<sup>33</sup> safeguarding their rights to safety, mobility, and information in conflict-affected areas. However, considering that men and boys constitute the majority of direct victims, this mismatch points to a protection gap and

underscores the need to adjust engagement efforts to better reach those at highest risk.

#### Protection from SGBV and sexual violence related to the full-scale invasion

Literature review shows that conflict and displacement have intensified exposure to SGBV and sexual violence related to the full-scale invasion in Ukraine. According to Ukraine's 2020–2024 National Beijing+25 Review, two out of three women in Ukraine have experienced psychological, physical, or sexual violence in their lifetime.<sup>34</sup> Studies highlight heightened risks of sexual violence related to the full-scale invasion, domestic abuse, and exploitation, particularly among displaced women, widows, and those in frontline or de-occupied areas. Economic dependence and insecurity limit access to justice and survivor services, while stigma and fear of retaliation deter reporting.<sup>35</sup>

These heightened protection risks intersect with the broader impacts of EO contamination. While data indicate that men are most likely to be directly involved in EO accidents and incidents, the secondary impacts on women and girls are far-reaching.<sup>36</sup> Interviewees noted that as women assume new caregiving, household management, and income-generating responsibilities, they experience additional physical and emotional strain, particularly in areas with limited access to livelihoods, services, and social protection.<sup>37</sup> Shifting household roles reportedly heighten exposure to SGBV when caring for injured or traumatized family members.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, for women employed in mine action, the risks of SGBV can extend to the workplace itself. For example, recent research found that 12 per cent of women interviewees reported experiencing gender-based verbal harassment, such as sexist jokes, teasing, or humorous remarks. Smaller proportions experienced manipulation (4 per cent) or verbal insults (3 per cent) explicitly linked to their gender.<sup>39</sup> While these findings are indicative rather than statistically representative, they nonetheless highlight the persistence of gender-based discrimination and harassment within mine action. The presence of such practices—alongside broader gender inequalities and limited awareness or mechanisms to safeguard one's rights—reflects systemic challenges that continue to undermine women's safety, dignity, and economic security in the sector.<sup>40</sup>

#### Protection of women's and girls' socio-economic rights

In Ukraine, the full-scale invasion has dramatically reshaped socio-economic roles. Women's socio-economic security has been heavily affected by displacement and the collapse of local labour markets. Many displaced women report sharp declines in household income, with over one-third now living on less than UAH 5,000 per month (USD 118.00), and a significant proportion reporting no income at all.<sup>41</sup> At the

same time, the closure of schools, limited childcare options, and increased responsibility for older persons and persons with disabilities have greatly expanded women's unpaid care burden, restricting their ability to seek employment, vocational training, or stable livelihoods, heightening their vulnerability to poverty and dependency.<sup>42</sup>

Despite these challenges, there are emerging signs of progress. Data from the MoEEA show that over one-third of mine action personnel are now women, suggesting increased inclusion within the sector. The Law on Amending Certain Legislative Acts regarding Military Service and Mobilization (2024)<sup>43</sup> has required large-scale mobilization of men, requiring women to step into sectors previously dominated by men. Coupled with the adoption of the National Mine Action Strategy, which embeds commitments to socio-economic recovery, non-discrimination, and gender equality, these developments indicate a tangible move towards strengthening the protection of women's socio-economic rights through Ukraine's mine action response.



## PREVENTION

The prevention pillar addresses the underlying causes of conflict and promotes structural change. In mine action, prevention means both anticipating and reducing future EO harm by transforming the underlying social and economic inequalities that shape vulnerability before, during, and after conflict.

### Reducing EO risks through anticipatory, data-driven mine action

Ukraine's mine action response is progressively transitioning from reactive to anticipatory EO risk reduction. Interview evidence suggests that the artificial intelligence- (AI-)based clearance prioritization system, currently being piloted with the support of international partners, offers a significant opportunity to advance the WPS prevention pillar.<sup>44</sup>

In a prevention context, the value of the model lies in its ability to forecast and minimize future risk. When grounded in representative data – combining sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data (SADDD) with socio-economic and vulnerability indicators – the model can guide clearance towards areas where clearance will prevent the greatest future harm. Integration of this data and indicators also help to reduce bias, ensuring that the needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls, especially those in situations of marginalization, inform anticipatory decision-making.<sup>45</sup>

Efforts to reduce EO risks in Ukraine are increasingly focused on prevention by integrating mine action into national education, health, and civil protection systems. The United Nations Children's fund (UNICEF), in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Science, has developed and rolled

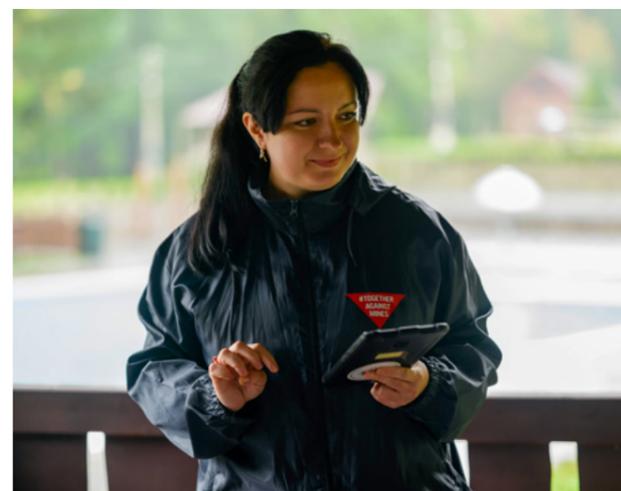
out teacher training programmes across Ukrainian schools, ensuring EORE is incorporated into the national school safety curriculum.<sup>46</sup> These initiatives equip children and educators with life-saving knowledge, reducing risks from long-term exposure to EO and fostering a culture of safety and preparedness.

### Enhancing resilience through women's inclusion in the workforce

In the context of protracted conflict and large-scale displacement, women's employment in Ukraine is a critical driver of resilience as it transforms the underlying social and economic inequalities that shape vulnerability. Paid work strengthens women's economic security and reduces household vulnerability to income shocks caused by job losses, displacement, or the mobilization of male household members.<sup>47</sup> In this way, efforts to diversify the mine action workforce described under the participation pillar, also contribute directly to the prevention pillar by addressing one of the most persistent root causes of insecurity: economic dependency and exclusion.

With women comprising 29 per cent of the mine action workforce, their employment contributes to household income diversification, increasing families' ability to absorb economic and conflict-related shocks. While comprehensive household-level income data are not available, qualitative evidence indicates that employment in mine action provides women – particularly those from rural, displaced, or conflict-affected communities – with stable income and increased economic agency, and greater decision-making power.<sup>48</sup>

Beyond income effects, findings show that women report high levels of job satisfaction, a strong sense of purpose, and access to skills development, all of which contribute to longer-term psychosocial resilience.<sup>49</sup> Interviewees also highlighted that workplace reforms by operators – such as improved working conditions and inclusive recruitment practices – help reduce structural barriers to women's sustained employment in the sector.<sup>50</sup>



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## RELIEF AND RECOVERY



In mine action, relief and recovery are operationalized through providing access to safe land, victim and survivor assistance, as well as socio-economic reintegration.

### Restoring women's livelihoods through survey and clearance

Extensive EO contamination in Ukraine directly affects the safety, mobility, and livelihoods of over one million civilians.<sup>51</sup> Literature review shows that EO contamination limits access to agricultural land, infrastructure, and humanitarian assistance, undermining food security, livelihoods, and recovery efforts.<sup>52</sup> It is estimated that Ukraine loses more than USD 11 billion annually in gross domestic product due to EO contamination.<sup>53</sup> It also delays the safe return of displaced families and increases the vulnerability of rural households and small-scale producers, many of whom depend on subsistence farming.<sup>54</sup>

Pre-war studies further reveal gendered divisions of labour in agriculture, with men typically responsible for operating machinery and women performing lower-paid manual and processing tasks.<sup>55</sup> Interview evidence suggests that as men are mobilized, women increasingly lead household and agricultural activities. This shift makes land clearance and access restoration central to women's economic recovery and the continuity of local food systems.<sup>56</sup> In this context, addressing inequalities becomes essential to ensuring that mine action contributes to inclusive and sustainable recovery.<sup>57</sup>

Interviews indicate that local authorities play a defined role in clearance prioritization. Each autumn, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) requests the Heads of Oblasts to submit lists of priority contaminated *hromadas* (local communities or municipalities) requiring clearance. These submissions are consolidated into a national annual clearance plan, which is then shared with mine action operators who indicate their interest in specific tasks based on their geographic presence and capacity, after which the MoD grants final approval through tasking orders. Operators reportedly work closely with local authorities to integrate community perspectives into clearance prioritization, where appropriate.<sup>58</sup>

While the AI-based clearance prioritization model contributes to prevention by forecasting future EO harm, its application within relief and recovery is conceptually distinct. In the recovery context, the model can guide clearance towards areas where decontamination will have the greatest humanitarian and economic impact, for example, by restoring agricultural land, reopening access routes, and enabling safe returns.<sup>59</sup> If applied using SADDD and socio-economic indicators, the model could enhance evidence-based decision-making that directly supports women's and girls' safe return, livelihood recovery, and access to essential services.

At the same time, Ukraine's broader efforts to collect and analyse data relevant to the socio-economic outcomes of mine action – consistent with International Mine Action Standard 05.10 on information management for mine action – are highly relevant. Reliable and disaggregated data not only underpin effective prioritization but also enable tracking of how clearance activities contribute to inclusive relief and recovery efforts. Notably, previous research indicates that in several oblasts, clearance of agricultural land has directly enabled women-led households to resume production and re-enter local markets.<sup>60</sup>

### Creating employment opportunities for women

Beyond restoring access to land and livelihoods, mine action also plays a critical role in advancing the relief and recovery pillar by expanding employment opportunities for women, advancing both economic recovery and gender equality. To enhance women's employment potential in mine action, many operators have conducted trainings exclusively for women. Furthermore, by addressing barriers such as limited childcare, pay disparities, and restrictive labour provisions, the sector promotes economic independence and strengthens community resilience. One interviewee also noted specific efforts to employ widows, recognizing the dual social and economic benefits of such initiatives.<sup>61</sup> Studies also show that employing the family members of veterans now living with disabilities can strengthen social cohesion, promote dignity, and reduce the intergenerational impacts of conflict.<sup>62</sup> Progress described under the participation and prevention pillars thus directly reinforce the relief and recovery pillar, by accelerating socio-economic recovery.

### Expanding women's and girls' access to victim assistance

Victim assistance is a cornerstone of the relief and recovery pillar, providing essential medical, psychosocial, and socio-economic support to survivors of EO accidents and their families. Since February 2022, thousands of civilians have suffered injuries or trauma from EO.<sup>63</sup> However, while men and boys account for most direct victims due to their involvement in high-risk professions or livelihood activities<sup>64</sup>, women and girls often face indirect and longer-term impacts, including caregiving burdens, loss of household income, and limited access to health and rehabilitation services.<sup>65</sup>

To address these challenges, the UN Development Programme, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and the State Emergency Service of Ukraine, is strengthening victim assistance and referral pathways, ensuring that survivors access timely medical, psychosocial, and rehabilitation services while enhancing institutional readiness to respond to future incidents.<sup>66</sup> Yet, evidence reveals that in practice referral and rehabilitation systems remain fragmented, with survivors often struggling to access trauma care, prosthetics, or mental health and psychosocial support services, particularly in rural and frontline areas.<sup>67</sup> Interviews confirm that the situation is particularly acute for the elderly or those living with disabilities.<sup>68</sup>

## CHAPTER 2. ENABLERS

This chapter explores how each of the domains in the research analytical framework enables the integration of Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) principles in Ukraine's mine action response. It highlights how progress across these domains strengthens the application of the WPS pillars and contributes to rights-based, inclusive mine action.

### PEACE, SECURITY, AND STABILITY

Ukraine has demonstrated a sustained commitment to gender equality during wartime, maintaining it as a national priority even amid ongoing conflict. This is made evident by the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in July 2022<sup>69</sup>, and the revision of Ukraine's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2022–2025).<sup>70</sup> These measures reaffirm the State's dedication to advancing women's rights and ensuring that gender equality remains central to peace and recovery efforts.

At the same time, Ukraine has integrated mine action into its national and recovery and peacebuilding priorities, recognizing clearance as fundamental to safe return, livelihoods, and resilience-building.<sup>71</sup> The National Mine Action Strategy for the period up to 2033 (hereinafter referred to as the National Mine Action Strategy)<sup>72</sup> and its accompanying Operational Plan for the Implementation of the National Mine Action Strategy of Ukraine for the period 2024–2026 (hereinafter referred to as the Operational Plan)<sup>73</sup> explicitly link mine action to agricultural renewal, livelihood restoration, and community reconstruction. This integration situates mine action not only as a humanitarian imperative but also as a strategic driver of inclusive recovery.

Interview evidence confirms that the Ukrainian government's prioritization of mine action, safe return, and reconstruction has created strong political momentum for linking mine action with broader recovery and development objectives.<sup>74</sup> This coherence between national and international priorities—reinforced through platforms such as the Ukraine Recovery Conference which puts a strong emphasis on inclusion<sup>75</sup>—ensures that mine action contributes directly to the WPS relief and recovery pillar.

### DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND RULE OF LAW

Ongoing decentralization reforms have strengthened local governance and community-based decision-making, creating opportunities for women's participation and leadership in public life.<sup>76</sup> By transferring authority to local levels, these reforms have made governance structures more inclusive and responsive to diverse community needs. This localization of decision-making ensures that prevention and recovery processes are socially embedded, community-driven, and accountable—key conditions for effective integration of WPS principles.

In mine action, this is plainly reflected in the Operational Plan, which clearly defines responsibilities for local self-government bodies—institutions elected by residents to manage community affairs independent from the central government. Their defined roles include marking (with consent) contaminated areas, awareness raising (with consent) and providing social services for individuals affected by explosive ordnance.<sup>77</sup>

A defining feature of Ukraine's governance landscape is the sophisticated activism and coordination of women's rights organizations (WROs), which have played a pivotal role in advancing gender equality policy and accountability.<sup>78</sup> WROs are active partners in shaping national and regional priorities, providing expertise in gender analysis, conflict prevention, and recovery planning. Their engagement has been instrumental in bridging national frameworks and local realities, ensuring that the WPS agenda reflects the lived experiences of women, displaced persons, and conflict-affected communities.<sup>79</sup> Literature and interview evidence also shows that WROs are actively shaping inclusivity in Ukraine's mine action response.<sup>80</sup>

### Operational efficiency

Interviewees noted that in Ukraine the recruitment and career development of women in operational roles keeps mine action teams fully staffed despite mobilization pressures. A diversified workforce is recognized as key to ensuring clearance operations continue seamlessly even in high-demand or resource-constrained environments.



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### NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Ukraine's robust political and legal commitment to equality and non-discrimination provides a solid foundation for integrating WPS principles in mine action. The ratification of international instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Istanbul Convention, as well as the update of Ukraine's WPS National Action Plan (NAP) in 2022, demonstrate sustained government commitment to gender equality as a national peace and security priority. Collectively, these frameworks establish an enabling environment for the integration of mine action and all four WPS pillars in Ukraine's mine action response.

At the national level, Ukraine's Constitution and several core laws—including the Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men, the Law on Prevention and Combating Discrimination, and the Law on the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons<sup>81</sup>—enshrine equality and non-discrimination as State obligations. Together, they establish a rights-based legal foundation for mine action, strengthening the participation and protection pillars of the WPS agenda. The Law on the Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities also helps to ensure equal access to rehabilitation, reconstruction, and livelihood support, directly contributing to the relief and recovery pillar.

Complementary strategies reinforce this legislative base. The National Strategy for Creating Barrier-Free Space in Ukraine by 2030 and its Action Plan for 2025–2026,<sup>82</sup> State Strategy on Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men for the Period Until 2030, and State Strategy on Protection and Integration of the Roma National Minority<sup>83</sup> each advance social inclusion, accessibility, and equal opportunity. Together, they embed WPS principles across governance and recovery systems, reinforcing all four WPS pillars. When implemented

in accordance with these legislative and policy frameworks, mine action becomes a rights-based endeavour, one that promotes social justice, equality, and inclusion.

Recent legislative developments have further shaped the landscape of Ukraine's mine action response. The Law on Amending Certain Legislative Acts regarding Military Service and Mobilization (2024)<sup>84</sup> has required the large-scale mobilization of men, requiring women to step into sectors previously dominated by men. In response, the National Mine Action Strategy explicitly identifies women as a 'state special interest group' for professional involvement in mine action. Its Operational Plan<sup>85</sup> introduces a number of initiatives to increase women's participation, strengthen their professional integration, and institutionalize inclusive approaches to risk reduction, such as unified explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) tailored to different social and age groups.<sup>86</sup> These measures help to operationalize the participation, protection, and relief and recovery pillars within the mine action sector.

Evidence also points to emerging convergence between the WPS and mine action policy frameworks. The National Mine Action Strategy's focus on women's professional involvement in the sector creates an operational alignment with the WPS NAP's objective on women's participation in decision-making and resilience-building. The forthcoming WPS NAP therefore represents a critical opportunity to strengthen linkages with mine action across the four WPS pillars.

Finally, interview evidence underlines the need to align workplace safeguarding mechanisms with national legal frameworks, such as the Law of Ukraine On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men and the WPS NAP.<sup>87</sup> Strengthening this alignment could significantly enhance the integration of the protection pillar by ensuring that safeguarding, accountability, and duty-of-care standards are consistent with national legislation and international commitments.



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## LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Institutional leadership and coordination mechanisms, particularly the Initiative Group on Gender Aspects in Mine Action in Ukraine (hereinafter the Initiative Group), are central to advancing the integration of WPS principles in mine action. The Initiative Group was established by the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture of Ukraine, with initial co-chairs from the Embassy of Canada and the Danish Refugee Council. Created to implement gender equality commitments in the National Mine Action Strategy and initiatives in the Operational Plan, it serves as a collaborative platform uniting government, international, and civil society actors. Interview evidence confirms that the Initiative Group directly advances the WPS participation pillar by enhancing women's professional involvement in mine action.<sup>88</sup>

More broadly, interview evidence shows that coordination and information-sharing mechanisms, including the Mine Action Cluster, EORE and victim assistance working groups, and the Initiative Group, have played a critical role in strengthening coherence, collaboration, and accountability in mine action.<sup>89</sup> Cross-sector engagement between the Initiative Group, the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group, and the WPS NAP Working Group has created stronger institutional linkages between WPS and mine action.<sup>90</sup> These mechanisms have strong potential to advance participation by amplifying women's voices, strengthen protection through improved safeguarding coordination, and support prevention and relief and recovery by enabling more inclusive and context-driven responses.

With Ukrainian women now holding senior positions in several State institutions and in certified mine action operators,<sup>91</sup> this progress reflects the practical realization of the participation pillar. Interviews clearly revealed women's leadership in mine action, challenging long-standing perceptions of the sector as a male domain and demonstrating how inclusive decision-making strengthens the effectiveness and sustainability of peace and security efforts.<sup>92</sup>

Dedicated human resources have further contributed to embedding WPS principles in Ukraine's mine action response, with several State institutions designating gender equality and social inclusion focal points, and most certified operators establishing gender-focused roles through full- or part-time appointments or consultancy arrangements.<sup>93</sup>

A supportive donor environment has further catalysed progress towards mine action's integration with the four WPS pillars.<sup>94</sup> Donors such as the Government of Canada have adopted feminist and gender-responsive aid strategies that explicitly link funding to progress on gender equality outcomes.<sup>95</sup> These approaches set expectations for the involvement of women in all aspects of mine action and also provide targeted financial and technical support to make this possible. Interview evidence confirms that such donor conditionalities have incentivized operators to expand recruitment, training, and leadership opportunities for women, embedding WPS principles as a core component of Ukraine's mine action relief and recovery efforts.<sup>96</sup>

## PUBLIC AWARENESS AND SOCIO-CULTURAL NORMS

Evolving social and cultural norms are gradually broadening perceptions of women's roles in Ukraine's peace and security sectors.<sup>97</sup> Interview evidence indicates that the increased visibility of women in non-traditional professions, such as emergency response and in the Ukrainian Air Force, is contributing to a more inclusive understanding of competence and leadership. National campaigns targeting women led by the Ministry of Economy, Environment, and Agriculture of Ukraine, and UN Women, have further reinforced this shift by showcasing the experiences of Ukrainian women working in mine action and related fields. By challenging stereotypes and promoting women role models, these initiatives not only reshape public attitudes but also strengthen women's confidence and interest in pursuing leadership and operational careers.<sup>98</sup> In doing so, they directly advance the WPS participation pillar by expanding women's agency, visibility, and representation in sectors where they have historically been underrepresented.<sup>99</sup>

At the same time, challenging gender stereotypes also contributes directly to the WPS prevention pillar. Literature review and interview findings confirm that public awareness efforts address one of the root causes of insecurity—social tolerance for gender inequality and violence—by fostering more equitable norms and reducing acceptance of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).<sup>100</sup> Such initiatives advance both the WPS protection and prevention pillars, by helping to build more inclusive and resilient societies and institutions.

## ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIAL PROTECTIONS

Ukraine's economic reform agenda has incorporated several measures that advance gender equality and inclusive labour participation, enabling the integration of WPS principles in mine action. The Gender Wage Gap Reduction Strategy promotes pay equity and accountability for fair labour practices.<sup>101</sup> At the same time, Ukraine has seen a steady increase in women's participation in the labour force, reaching 48 per cent in 2024.<sup>102</sup> These measures advance the participation pillar by ensuring that women and men have equitable access to employment opportunities across all sectors, including those traditionally dominated by men.

Civil society, particularly women-led organizations, has been instrumental in embedding WPS within the mine action sector. Organizations such as the Women's Information and Consultative Centre and NGO Girls, in collaboration with partners including UN Women, and the Fondation suisse de déminage, as well as the Danish Refugee Council, have conducted research to identify barriers to women's participation and promote inclusive workplace practices. These efforts have translated WPS and gender equality commitments

into operational practice, reinforcing the participation pillar through advocacy and institutional reform.<sup>103</sup>

There are signs of progress in terms of increasing women's representation in operational roles. Interviews reveal that recruitment practices have been reformed to remove barriers that historically limited women's entry into the sector. Several operators reported eliminating requirements for previous military experience, broadening eligibility, and offering comprehensive training to all new recruits.<sup>104</sup> These inclusive recruitment measures strengthen the participation pillar by increasing women's entry into operational and technical positions, while also contributing to the prevention pillar by addressing structural gender inequalities in the workforce.

### Operational safety

Evidence from Ukraine shows that ergonomically adapted PPE, as well as mental health and psychosocial support measures improve workforce well-being and reduce risks during clearance operations, boosting operational safety and performance.

Beyond recruitment, increasing attention is being paid to women's career advancement. Mentoring schemes, targeted leadership training, and participation in international exchanges have emerged as practical tools for supporting women's progression into leadership roles. Respondents highlighted that these initiatives are helping to shift internal workplace cultures by normalizing women's visibility in operational and leadership positions.<sup>105</sup> Such initiatives reinforce the participation pillar by promoting women's leadership in mine action and contribute to the prevention pillar by cultivating gender-balanced institutions that are more inclusive and resilient.

Several operators reported that they are introducing equitable employment conditions and benefits, including flexible schedules, parental leave, on-site childcare, and equal pay for work of equal value, to help women balance work and family responsibilities and remain in the sector.<sup>106</sup> These measures, supported by national standards which codify gender-responsive workplace practices, including separate facilities, and ergonomically adapted personal protective equipment (PPE),<sup>107</sup> support women's retention in the sector. These initiatives support the participation pillar by improving retention and advancement opportunities for women, while also promoting the protection pillar by ensuring safe, dignified, and equitable working environments.

Encouragingly, multi-stakeholder initiatives are emerging. A workshop held in February 2025 underscored the value of partnerships between mine action operators and civil



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society organizations in developing survivor-centred and contextually relevant safeguarding, and protection from sexual exploitation, assault and harassment frameworks.<sup>108</sup> Participants highlighted that these collaborations ensure that safeguarding systems are grounded in local realities, informed by survivor-centred principles, and linked to established community referral pathways.<sup>109</sup> Interviewees also noted that trauma-informed supervision and mental health and psychosocial support, especially for frontline staff, are becoming standard in some operators, signalling a shift towards comprehensive duty of care.<sup>110</sup>

These developments directly advance the WPS protection pillar by ensuring that mine action prioritizes the safety, dignity, and well-being of both staff and affected communities. Finally, by expanding employment opportunities and enhancing financial independence, these measures reduce women's economic dependency, a key driver of vulnerability and insecurity. In doing so, they reinforce the prevention pillar by mitigating the economic and social conditions that perpetuate vulnerability and conflict risk.

### LOCAL PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Literature review and interview evidence confirm that WROs play a pivotal role in operationalizing WPS principles within Ukraine's mine action response. Interviewees emphasized that as trusted community actors, WROs serve as critical bridges between national frameworks and local realities, ensuring that mine action reflects the differentiated needs, priorities, and experiences of women and girls.<sup>111</sup> Interviewees emphasized that where WROs are engaged, mine action interventions are more inclusive, context-specific, and trusted by communities.<sup>112</sup> Their involvement strengthens accountability and local ownership, advancing the participation and protection pillars by giving women a voice in decision-making and ensuring their safety concerns are systematically addressed.

Evidence from interviews indicates that operators increasingly use sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data (SADDD) to target EORE interventions, which reflects diverse exposure and vulnerability patterns, for instance, tailoring messages for men engaged in agriculture and construction.<sup>113</sup> Interview findings also highlight protection efforts, including targeted EORE for children, youth, humanitarian workers, farmers, and persons with disabilities, particularly in frontline and newly de-occupied areas.<sup>114</sup>

The standardized use of SADDD, reinforced through the National Mine Action Standards,<sup>115</sup> makes it possible to monitor who participates in and benefits from mine action activities. This helps to strengthen the evidence base for protection outcomes. The collection and use of SADDD also enables more precise identification and protection of high-risk groups while supporting anticipatory, data-driven prevention. These practices directly advance the prevention pillar by addressing structural inequalities that shape vulnerability and by ensuring risk reduction efforts are informed by and are accountable to affected populations.

Interview evidence also highlights that inclusive planning and local consultation significantly enhance recovery outcomes. Where WROs are actively engaged, survey and clearance contribute not only to restore safety but also support women's livelihoods, and participation in reconstruction efforts.<sup>116</sup> Such approaches ensure that mine action contributes to both economic recovery and long-term community resilience.

#### Operational effectiveness

The use of SADDD to tailor EORE interventions helps optimize resources, improve message retention, and reduce risk-taking behaviours among high-risk populations. This data-driven approach ensures that mine action contributes not only to social and behavioural change but also to broader protection outcomes.

## CHAPTER 3. BARRIERS

This chapter examines how each of the domains in the research analytical framework constrain the integration of Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) principles within Ukraine's mine action response. It identifies key factors that limit the effective application of the WPS pillars and assesses how these constraints hinder progress towards a more rights-based, inclusive mine action.

### PEACE, SECURITY, AND STABILITY

The ongoing war continues to exacerbate risks of exclusion and rights violations, especially for internally displaced persons, persons under temporary protection status, and people in situations of marginalization. As of early 2025, more than 3.5 million Ukrainians remain displaced within the country and more than six million abroad.<sup>117</sup> Women under temporary protection status often face precarious legal status and limited access to employment, childcare, and language support, heightening economic dependency and social vulnerability.<sup>118</sup> Widespread displacement, economic insecurity, and the collapse of social support systems have also increased women's exposure to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).<sup>119</sup> These barriers directly affect displaced women's ability to participate in and benefit from mine action activities.

Intersectional vulnerabilities further constrain the reach and inclusiveness of mine action. Older adults, persons with disabilities, and minority groups—especially Roma women—face multiple layers of exclusion resulting from physical inaccessibility, persistent discrimination, and restricted access to essential social services.<sup>120</sup> Interviewees also noted that men of fighting age remain difficult to reach through explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) due to mobility restrictions and military service, reducing its effectiveness and leaving specific groups insufficiently protected.<sup>121</sup> Such gaps underscore the need to better align mine action with the WPS protection pillar, ensuring high-risk populations have equitable access to EORE.

The traumas of war also present significant challenges for mine action-WPS integration. Interview evidence shows that the cumulative trauma of displacement, loss, and prolonged insecurity has increased demand for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) among both explosive

ordnance (EO) survivors and mine action staff, many of whom are veterans.<sup>122</sup> Literature review shows that veterans report stigma, social isolation, and limited access to MHPSS, factors that complicate their reintegration into civilian and professional life,<sup>123</sup> including employment in mine action. Addressing these gaps through trauma-informed workplace policies and referral mechanisms is therefore critical to ensuring an inclusive, resilient mine action workforce.

These intersecting dynamics engage multiple WPS pillars. Strengthening MHPSS under the protection pillar safeguards staff and communities from trauma, while inclusive rehabilitation and reintegration efforts advance the relief and recovery pillar by supporting sustainable livelihoods. At the same time, addressing trauma, stigma, and harmful masculinities contributes to the prevention pillar, helping to break cycles of violence and foster social cohesion essential for lasting peace and resilience.

### DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND RULE OF LAW

Women's underrepresentation in political and institutional leadership—21 per cent in parliament<sup>124</sup> and 30 per cent of executive positions<sup>125</sup>—continues to restrict their influence over decisions shaping security, recovery, and resource allocation. This imbalance constrains mine action outcomes by narrowing the range of perspectives that inform national and local priorities, budget allocations, and post-clearance recovery planning. In the context of mine action, this exclusion risks overlooking critical community needs such as equitable land restitution,<sup>126</sup> livelihood restoration, and survivor support.

While the efforts of State actors and civil society organizations are commendable, considerable challenges persist. Local authorities often face barriers in implementing gender-responsive policies, and women's organizations remain critically underfunded. The most profound constraint lies in the lack of sustainable financial support towards grassroots women's groups, particularly from international donors. These local actors, who operate in high-risk, EO-affected areas and possess deep contextual understanding, continue to face disproportionate funding scarcity despite being best positioned to drive transformative and locally grounded change.<sup>127</sup>



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## NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

The Law on Amending Certain Legislative Acts regarding Military Service and Mobilization (2024)<sup>128</sup> has prompted large-scale mobilization of men, creating operational gaps across sectors, including mine action. Although Ukraine maintains a comparatively robust legal foundation for gender equality, legacy provisions, such as restrictions in the Labour Code<sup>129</sup> on women’s work hours or travel, unintentionally reinforce gendered divisions of labour and limit equal participation in security-related sectors. Several respondents also noted that narrow interpretations of the World Health Organization International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health<sup>130</sup> have restricted opportunities for persons with disabilities (PwD), including women, by reinforcing assumptions about physical capability.

At the policy level, recent analyses by Mines Advisory Group Ukraine and the Heinrich Böll Stiftung<sup>131</sup> suggest that WPS and mine action remain largely disconnected. Research conducted with women’s rights organizations noted that the WPS National Action Plan “does not incorporate mine action despite its critical role in post-conflict recovery and women’s security”.<sup>132</sup> The same reportedly applies to mine action, which often lacks formal and consistent integration of WPS considerations.<sup>133</sup> This finding is supported by varying perspectives shared during interviews and the research validation workshop.

Finally, literature review demonstrates that land and resource governance—a core component of both national legislation and recovery policy—remains constrained by weak data systems and gendered inequities. Reliable sex-disaggregated data on land ownership and use remains limited, while unregistered plots and unclear property titles restrict women’s ability to benefit from land clearance, restitution, and post-clearance livelihoods.<sup>134</sup> Without targeted policy reforms to address these structural barriers, mine action risks reinforcing pre-existing inequalities—clearing land without enabling women to access, own, or benefit from it—thereby undermining both recovery and the transformative aims of the WPS agenda.

## LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Despite strong policy commitments, some stakeholders reported that gender mainstreaming in Ukraine’s mine action sector is often approached as procedural compliance rather than a strategic priority.<sup>135</sup> Interviews revealed that the Initiative Group on Gender Aspects in Mine Action, while an important coordination mechanism, remains insufficiently integrated into broader operational and strategic planning processes, limiting its influence on decision-making.<sup>136</sup> This constrains the full application of WPS principles in Ukraine’s mine action response.

Interviewees also emphasized that resource constraints and funding volatility continue to threaten the sustainability of gender equality initiatives in mine action. Competing humanitarian priorities and reduced international funding leave these initiatives vulnerable to budget cuts. Interviewees also noted that gender equality programmes often rely on short-term donor funding, and without sustained institutional financing or long-term workforce planning, gains in women’s participation risk regression once donor project cycles conclude.<sup>137</sup> Respondents also noted that without institutionalized gender advisory roles and predictable resources, leadership commitment risks remained symbolic rather than transformative.<sup>138</sup>

## PUBLIC AWARENESS AND SOCIO-CULTURAL NORMS

Social and cultural perceptions continue to influence how women engage in mine action. Across multiple studies, mine action continues to be viewed as ‘men’s work’, associated with strength and risk-taking.<sup>139</sup> These perceptions, alongside women’s own safety concerns, household responsibilities, and varying levels of institutional support, shape participation choices and career trajectories.<sup>140</sup> Similar attitudes affect PwD, including women, whose professional capacities are sometimes undervalued despite their contextual expertise.<sup>141</sup> Such dynamics restrict the WPS participation pillar by limiting women’s influence over decision-making and employment in the sector.

Cultural attitudes also shape protection outcomes. Literature review indicates survivors of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH) may hesitate to report incidents due to fear of stigma, social exclusion, or breaches of confidentiality.<sup>142</sup> A study by the United Nations Population Fund highlights that limited awareness of rights and procedures further undermines trust in safeguarding systems and weakens accountability.<sup>143</sup> These factors not only silence survivors but

also inhibit the prevention pillar, as they perpetuate social conditions that normalize exclusion and SGBV. Leveraging partnerships with women’s rights organizations (WROs) to enhance awareness of rights, and promote survivor-centred, community-led safeguarding approaches, is therefore critical to strengthening protection and building safer organizational cultures within mine action.

## ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIAL PROTECTIONS

Persistent gender inequality in the labour market, including an 19 per cent gender wage gap,<sup>144</sup> continues to limit women’s economic autonomy and reinforces structural dependency, heightening vulnerability to insecurity and exclusion. Within mine action, these inequalities translate into women’s continued underrepresentation in operational and leadership roles,<sup>145</sup> despite concerted efforts by many stakeholders to advance the professional involvement of women in the sector. Economic dependency and inadequate social protections constrain women’s agency and decision-making power, leaving many at greater risk of exploitation and financial precarity. These conditions undermine the transformative intent of the WPS agenda, which seeks not only equality of access but also equality of outcomes across all stages of recovery.

Workplace safeguarding and organizational culture also remain weak points in the protection landscape. Interviewees reported gaps in safeguarding expertise, inconsistent enforcement of policies, and absence of survivor-centred referral mechanisms.<sup>146</sup> Ensuring robust safeguarding systems that address SEAH is therefore central to operationalizing the protection pillar of WPS and upholding the rights, dignity, and well-being of all women affected by or employed in mine action. Protection responses remain critical to address these immediate risks, including through survivor-centred services and psychosocial support.



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Strategy review workshop, May 2025 © Valentyna Naumenko

## LOCAL PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Efforts to localize mine action and strengthen the WPS agenda face persistent barriers related to community participation, inclusion, and data use. Literature review and interview findings reveal that many communities—particularly those in frontline and de-occupied areas—remain underrepresented in decision-making processes that shape risk reduction and recovery activities.

Despite their critical role in community outreach, data collection, and social reintegration, WROs remain underfunded and not systematically included in formal mine action coordination mechanisms.<sup>147</sup> This underinvestment limits the participation of women as decision-makers and implementers, weakens accountability to affected populations, and hinders the integration of the perspectives of women and girls in operational planning.<sup>148</sup> Insufficient funding for grassroots organizations thus constrains progress under the participation and relief and recovery pillars.

Although most operators now collect sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data, the data are often under-analysed and underutilized by many operators, limiting their potential to identify gendered patterns of exposure and vulnerability.<sup>149</sup>

Operators also reported challenges in integrating and analysing these data across sectors.<sup>150</sup> Without stronger analytical capacity, prevention efforts risk overlooking the underlying social and economic inequalities that shape vulnerabilities—and may fail to ensure that clearance and EORE prioritization effectively prevents future harm to women and girls—undermining the prevention pillar and perpetuating structural inequalities.

Limited data sharing also constrains the ability to assess who benefits from mine action outcomes. The Information Management System for Mine Action records over one million expected direct beneficiaries of land release,<sup>151</sup> although sex- and age-disaggregated data are not publicly available due to martial law.<sup>152</sup> Whilst disaggregated data is available, without transparent reporting, it remains difficult to evaluate whether protection, clearance, and EORE interventions reach the most at-risk populations, limiting accountability for equitable progress under the protection pillar.

Institutional systems for data management and evidence-based planning also constrain preventive action. Interview evidence suggests that the emerging AI-based prioritization model risks reproducing bias if not grounded in inclusive, representative data.<sup>153</sup> Without inclusive data governance and community validation, such tools may inadvertently replicate existing inequalities in access to land, safety, and livelihoods, contradicting the relief and recovery pillar.

## CONCLUSION

Ukraine's mine action response has made measurable progress in integrating the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) pillars. Women's leadership is increasingly visible in State institutions and certified operators and gender-mixed teams are standard in survey and explosive ordnance risk education (EORE). Meanwhile, partnerships with women's rights organizations (WROs) have strengthened outreach and trust, especially in rural and frontline areas. Yet parity in operational and leadership roles remains uneven, and socio-cultural norms continue to limit women's full and meaningful participation.

Protection outcomes have expanded through the use of sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data (SADDD) to target EORE. Clearance and survey activities reduce immediate risks and advance the rights to safety, mobility, and information for women and girls. At the same time, conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence and workplace sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment require stronger, survivor-centred safeguarding systems, alignment with national legal standards, and consistent implementation across operators.

Prevention is advancing as Ukraine transitions from reactive to anticipatory, data-driven mine action. AI-enabled prioritization, when grounded in representative SADDD and socio-economic indicators, can steer resources towards the greatest humanitarian and economic impact and reduce bias. Employment pathways for women in mine action are also mitigating structural drivers of insecurity by increasing income, stability, and decision-making power. However, under-analysis of SADDD, fragmentation across data systems, and limited, short-term funding for WROs constrain preventive impact.

Relief and recovery efforts increasingly link land release to livelihoods, safe return, and local reconstruction. Inclusive planning with WROs, local authorities, and veteran associations

improves relevance and uptake. Nonetheless, transparency gaps persist—publicly available, disaggregated beneficiary data on land release remains limited, hampering assessment of equitable outcomes and progress against WPS objectives.

An enabling environment—anchored in constitutional guarantees, equality legislation, ratified international instruments, decentralization, and donor support—has catalysed integration of WPS principles. National strategies now connect mine action to agricultural renewal and community reconstruction. Yet women remain underrepresented in political and institutional leadership; gender initiatives face funding volatility, and institutional mechanisms (including the Initiative Group) require deeper integration in operational planning to move beyond procedural compliance.

Moving forward, consolidating gains will require the following: (i) institutionalizing gender advisory capacity and predictable financing for equality and safeguarding; (ii) formal linkages between the WPS National Action Plan and the National Mine Action Strategy and Operational Plan; (iii) systematized collection, analysis, and public reporting of SADDD across mine action and recovery datasets; (iv) survivor-centred protection from sexual exploitation, assault and harassment frameworks with clear referral pathways; and (v) sustained partnerships with WROs to co-design EORE, prioritization, and post-clearance recovery.

Without decisive action on these priorities, progress risks stalling and pre-existing inequalities may be reinforced through recovery. With coordinated leadership at national, regional, and community levels—and with data-driven, survivor-centred practice—Ukraine can translate mine action into durable gains for safety, economic recovery, and gender equality, advancing WPS commitments amid ongoing conflict and into reconstruction.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations outline practical actions for key stakeholders engaged in Ukraine’s mine action sector. Recommendations co-created during the research validation workshop in February 2025 aim to support a rights-based, inclusive approach in all aspects of mine action, from policy and planning to implementation and monitoring. They are designed to ensure that mine action not only addresses the immediate physical threat of explosive ordnance but also contributes to inclusive peace, recovery, and sustainable development.

### STATE ENTITIES RESPONSIBLE FOR WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY (WPS)

#### Participation

- ▶ Embed mine action in the next WPS National Action Plan (NAP), building on evidence that clearance, explosive ordnance risk education (EORE), and survivor assistance directly advance the participation pillar.
- ▶ Ensure that the WPS NAP reinforces the Mine Action Strategy’s inclusion goals for women’s professional involvement in mine action.
- ▶ Formalize mine action representation in the WPS Inter-Ministerial Coordination Group to close current policy disconnects noted between WPS and mine action frameworks.

#### Protection

- ▶ Integrate explicit language on protection from explosive ordnance (EO) in the next WPS NAP and national WPS coordination mechanisms, ensuring that EO risk reduction is recognized as a central protection priority.
- ▶ Provide targeted financial and institutional support to women human rights defenders and women-led organizations in contaminated or de-occupied areas, enabling them to participate meaningfully in mine action.
- ▶ Establish a formal coordination mechanism linking mine action, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)/sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH), and child protection systems to ensure coherent survivor-centred response and referral pathways.

#### Prevention

- ▶ Collaborate with the Ministry of Economy, Environment, and Agriculture to embed gender equality and protection criteria within the AI-based clearance prioritization model currently under development.

#### Relief and recovery

- ▶ Establish inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms between mine action, agriculture, and recovery authorities—particularly in heavily contaminated oblasts—to ensure clearance directly supports inclusive land use and livelihood restoration.
- ▶ Institutionalize mine action as a core component of national and oblast-level recovery and reconstruction strategies.
- ▶ Establish dedicated WPS-linked financing mechanisms—such as budget lines or multi-year trust funds, for inclusive land recovery, livelihood restoration, and workforce reintegration in EO-affected regions.



Non-technical survey training in Ukraine, October 2023 © GICHD

### STATE ENTITIES RESPONSIBLE FOR MINE ACTION

#### Participation

- ▶ Institutionalize annual, sector-wide data collection on the participation of women across mine action institutions, roles, and levels of responsibility. Use findings to establish measurable, time-bound inclusion targets.
- ▶ Embed the Initiative Group on Gender in Mine Action as a permanent advisory mechanism within technical working groups and regulatory drafting committees.
- ▶ Institutionalize gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) focal points in all mine action State entities with defined authority, budget lines, and participation in management decisions.

#### Protection

- ▶ Verify that certified operators analyse and use sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data (SADDD) for EORE targeting.
- ▶ Develop national data ethics and do-no-harm guidelines for all mine action data collection, ensuring disability information is gathered and stored in ways that respect privacy and avoid stigma. Require compliance as part of accreditation and monitoring processes.
- ▶ Make the existence of safeguarding and survivor referral systems a prerequisite for operator accreditation and contracting.

#### Prevention

- ▶ Integrate SADDD and socio-economic vulnerability indicators into all AI-based and data-driven clearance prioritization tools.
- ▶ Conduct targeted research on the socioeconomic benefits of women’s employment in mine action to strengthen the evidence base on resilience and prevention outcomes

#### Relief and recovery

- ▶ Align clearance tasking and scheduling with national and oblast recovery plans, particularly in areas prioritized for infrastructure repair, agricultural revival, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) return.
- ▶ Strengthen coordination with veteran and disability support services to enhance mine victim assistance, rehabilitation, and socio-economic reintegration.



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## CERTIFIED OPERATORS

- |                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Participation</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Develop formal partnerships with vocational and technical education institutions to establish training pipelines for women, IDPs, and veterans in mine action careers.</li> <li>▶ Institutionalize inclusive human resource practices by removing criteria that exclude women and offering wraparound supports, such as mentorship, childcare referrals, and ergonomically adapted personal protective equipment.</li> <li>▶ Partner with local governments or private service providers to create affordable, flexible childcare options for women employed in mine action.</li> <li>▶ Institutionalize GESI focal points in all mine action operators with defined authority, budget lines, and participation in management decisions.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Protection</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Tailor EORE delivery for distinct high-risk groups, using SADDD and local consultation to inform design.</li> <li>▶ Require gender-balanced community liaison and EORE teams trained in SGBV referral, survivor-centred communication, and socio-economic risk assessment.</li> <li>▶ Partner with women’s rights organizations (WROs) to co-develop survivor-centred, context-specific safeguarding and reporting mechanisms, and to deliver regular trainings for employees.</li> <li>▶ Implement and operationalize safeguarding and survivor referral systems, aligned with national equality and non-discrimination legislation.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Prevention</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Adopt standardized ethical data protocols across all operators, ensuring disability and vulnerability data are collected only for protective purposes, with informed consent and anonymization.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Relief and recovery</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Coordinate land handover processes with local authorities, WROs, and service providers to ensure cleared land is used for inclusive recovery.</li> <li>▶ Include protection and inclusion outcomes in monitoring and evaluation, and share findings with affected communities and donors.</li> <li>▶ Standardize inclusive employment policies across all certified operators, including equal pay for work of equal value, parental leave, flexible schedules, and workplace accessibility for persons with disabilities.</li> </ul>   |

## CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

- |                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Participation</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Lead participatory needs assessments in EO-contaminated and de-occupied areas.</li> <li>▶ Partner with certified operators to co-design and deliver employment training in mine action for women.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Protection</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Expand mobile outreach and mental health and psychosocial support services to survivors and frontline responders.</li> <li>▶ Partner with mine action operators to co-develop survivor-centred, context-specific safeguarding and reporting mechanisms, and to deliver regular trainings for employees.</li> <li>▶ Advocate for inclusive, survivor-centred mine victim assistance, ensuring compliance with national disability and social protection laws.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Prevention</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Participate in national and oblast-level recovery coordination platforms, contributing grassroots gender and protection analysis to inform clearance and recovery priorities.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Relief and recovery</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Systematically document barriers to accessing land and services after clearance and report findings to oblast and national coordination platforms to inform recovery planning.</li> <li>▶ Expand civil society organizations-led community-based rehabilitation and legal/ psychosocial support services to assist survivors and their families.</li> </ul>   |

## DONORS

- |                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>Participation</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Expand donor participation in the Initiative Group for Gender Aspects in Mine Action in Ukraine by proactively identifying and engaging a broader range of relevant donors.</li> <li>▶ Integrate measurable inclusion targets in all donor funding agreements and performance frameworks considering gender equality principles.</li> <li>▶ Prioritize funding for long-term, gender-transformative approaches such as mentorship programmes, leadership pipelines for women and PwD, workplace policy reform (e.g. flexible work, anti-harassment).</li> <li>▶ Require narrative reporting on WPS-linked outcomes, such as women’s leadership influence, veteran-led risk education impacts, or changes in gender norms through community engagement.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Protection</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Strengthen direct and sustained funding for WROs in EO-affected areas.</li> <li>▶ Provide multi-year, core funding for the development and institutionalization of safeguarding systems, including hiring protection experts, establishing survivor feedback mechanisms, and ensuring independent oversight of SEAH reporting.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Prevention</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Prioritize long-term investment in enhancing in-country gender and WPS technical expertise.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Relief and recovery</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide multi-year, flexible funding for integrated programmes that link mine action with livelihood recovery and socio-economic reintegration.</li> </ul>  |

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