

Women at the frontline of social and climate justice in wartime Ukraine

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There is nothing discouraging human rights more than a war. The martial law was introduced in Ukraine on February 24, 2022 when Russia re-invaded Ukraine. It has limited number of rights we used to consider as given for granted, like right to public gatherings and protests, access to free communications and independent media, non-censorship, freedom of movement, etc. Moreover, basic rights like right to life, right for security or living in safe environment are regularly violated because of hostilities. As of September 10th, in accordance with [OHCHR report](#) there are 27,149 documented victims of Russian aggression among Ukrainian civilian population, with indication that real figures are higher because of the lack of data from occupied territories or intense hostilities areas.

People lose their accommodation, property, and jobs. Access to qualitative education is limited, as well as to childcare and medical services. One of the [studies](#) say that number of children that are not included to a pre-school (kindergarden) education grew in Ukraine since the full-scale war has begun. School and university education is conducted mostly in online mode, making parents, predominantly mothers, to assist their children in remote education.

Many Ukrainians needed to relocate. There is almost 5 mln internally displaced people in Ukraine registered as of August 2023. Among them nearly 60% are women. There are 6,197,200 Ukrainian refugees [recorded](#) abroad among which 5,828,000 in Europe. Women and children together comprise 80-90% of this figure. While men being not allowed to leave Ukraine in majority cases, women had no choice as to displace together with children and to face challenges of integration to foreign communities in addition to care burden, risks of exploitation, the breakdown of family units and uncertainties about the length of stay, that may deter their integration as well. Past research has shown that refugee women may suffer from a "[triple disadvantage](#)" as the challenges related to gender, immigrant status and forced migration add up and mutually reinforce each other.

The Russian war in Ukraine influences not only human rights, but has severe implications for climate change and environment. A team of experts from the Initiative on GHG accounting of war has evaluated the climate impact of the first year of hostilities. They found that a total of [120 million](#) metric tons of planet-heating pollution can be attributed to the first 12 months of the war. That is equivalent to the annual emissions of Belgium, whose per capita emissions in 2019 were the seventh highest in the European Union. The group analyzed multiple sectors including emissions from fires that destroy infrastructure and the environment, the degradation

of carbon sinks, post-conflict reconstruction, and the movement of refugees. According to the report, a total of 64% of warfare emissions were generated by Russian fossil fuel use alone in the first year of the conflict.

Moreover, the Russian invasion to Ukraine reasoned the world energy crisis forcing many countries to diversify their energy supplies from the Russian sources to alternatives. And when some efforts were done to unlock energy efficiency and renewables development as a crisis response, [some countries](#) started to explore new fossil extraction options or substituted Russian supplies with fossil imports from other countries, even when some of them are questionably democratic and when human (and especially women rights) are regularly violated there. This, for sure, will have implications for global climate as contradicts to the “keep it in the ground” approach on new extractions and likely to contribute to global carbon budget overuse, as well as will strengthen fossil-dictatorships globally. Moreover, women not only stronger exposed to climate change consequences, but they are also pressured by economic inequalities and poverty. Global energy crisis, caused by the Russian war in Ukraine, high-rocketed energy and utility prices in 2022, as well as drove inflation, heating vulnerably households first, among which many are female-led.

Negative implications of the war for climate as well as for equality are multiplied in Ukraine. There are many examples of how hostilities exaugurated existing negative climate change consequences. One of them is observed at the South of Ukraine, agricultural region which suffered a lot in recent years from above normal temperatures in summer and droughts. Blowing up of the Khahovka Dam on the 6th of June, 2023 by Russian troops made watering in the region, which was organized though a system of channels connected to Khahovka water reservoir, impossible and thus threatens agriculture. Those involved in household agricultural activities are often dependent on crops for nutrition, what becomes challenging in absence of water and increasing temperatures. Many of them in rural areas of the South of Ukraine are women and elderly. Also, the dam destruction has led to absence of or interrupted water supply in many settlements and cities of the region, while we know that within households women are more dependent on water supply.

While patriarchal societal patterns and right movements have expectably activated in wartime Ukraine, women remain to be a driving force of many societal changes, including climate action. Women compose majority of the civil climate movement in Ukraine, which continues its work for decarbonization. There is a window of opportunity connected to Ukraine’s recovery planning which potentially allows to reach decarbonization and justice objectives in process of Ukraine’s reconstruction and modernization. The decarbonization of economy and transition to renewables have potential to promote development of women's leadership, create new jobs, mitigate climate and energy crisis, ensure fair access to resources for various population groups, in particular women, if properly designed and implemented.