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Rural Women and Girls

EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN AND GIRLS

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Rural Women and Girls

Rural women make up over a quarter of the total world population\(^1\) and represent approximately 43% of the agricultural labour force\(^2\).

**Rural women are key agents for achieving the transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development.** They ensure food security for their communities and build climate resilience. However, when it comes to owning land and accessing agricultural inputs, financing and technologies for climate resilience, they lag far behind men. Among the many challenges they face are their limited access to credit, healthcare and education, aggravated by the global food and economic crises and climate change.

The empowerment of rural women and girls and the realisation of their human rights are key for achievement of gender equality and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Sustainable development cannot be achieved without gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. **The Sustainable Development Agenda is aimed at safeguarding the rights of rural women and girls** that are essential to their livelihoods, well-being and resilience, including the rights to:

- land and land tenure security;
- food and nutrition of adequate quality and quantity;
- a life free of all forms of violence, discrimination and harmful practices;
- the highest attainable standard of health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights;
- quality, affordable and accessible education at every stage of life\(^3\).

**Situation of rural women in Ukraine**

Every third woman in Ukraine lives in a rural area\(^4\). Rural women and girls, in addition to facing multiple forms of discrimination directed against them as women, often suffer from multiple forms of discrimination in connection with their place of residence, age, disability, displacement, ethnic background or other factors.

They are largely excluded from political and public life. Their needs and rights are neglected in the reform, recovery, and peacebuilding processes. They face discrimination in access to decision-making, employment, healthcare, education and other basic services, as these statistics show:

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\(^2\) [https://womenwatch.unwomen.org/event/international-day-rural-women](https://womenwatch.unwomen.org/event/international-day-rural-women)


Rural women are more vulnerable to gender-based violence than women living in urban areas.

For instance, the percentage of ever-married rural women who have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at their partners’ hands is 17%, while for urban women it is 14%. At the same time, 55% of rural women do not report instances of domestic violence.

Internally displaced rural women face various challenges.

For instance, the level of employment among IDP women living in villages is 17% lower than it is among IDP women living in larger cities. Furthermore, 36% of IDP rural women represent single-headed households, and they rely more heavily on pensions (42%) and social assistance (32%)10.

5 Data collected through IOM’s National Monitoring System on the Situation of Internally Displaced Persons in Ukraine.
Because of limited disaggregated statistics, it is difficult to analyse the situation of rural women and girls consistently, which makes it harder to take their needs into account in national policy-making, evidence-based planning and budgeting.

The Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in its Concluding Observations on the eighth periodic report of Ukraine, expressed concern about the disadvantaged status of women in rural areas and disappointment at the limited data available, especially with regard to the situations of rural women in conflict-affected areas, vulnerable rural women heads of households, single women, widows, women with disabilities and women belonging to minorities.

The Committee recommended that Ukraine improves infrastructure in rural areas and develops policies to combat poverty among rural women to ensure their access to justice, education, housing, formal employment, skills development and training opportunities, income-generating opportunities and microcredit, and ownership and use of land, taking into account their specific needs, with particular attention to the negative impact of the conflict on rural women. The Committee recommended studying the impact of economic and social strategies for rural development on women’s human rights and improving the collection of specific, disaggregated data on rural women. The Committee advised focusing on women not only as victims or beneficiaries but also as active participants in the formulation and implementation of such policies.

Empowering rural women and girls and the realisation of their human rights and gender equality is key not only to the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but also to overall economic productivity, given women’s large presence in Ukraine’s agricultural workforce.
The United National Partnership Framework for Ukraine (2018–2022) recognises that rural women represent a population group often left behind and missing from development, recovery and humanitarian efforts. Therefore, the UN system prioritises rural women as one of the key target groups for its interventions, and, building on the complementarity of the mandates of different UN agencies, works to address the challenges faced by rural women in Ukraine.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) in Ukraine

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works to eliminate discrimination against all women and girls and to empower them, focusing on the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups. Mobilising rural women in the communities of the eastern conflict-affected oblasts, we build their human rights awareness, as well as their capacity to effectively advocate for their needs in local recovery, development planning and budgeting. Diverse rural women’s groups benefit from our small-grants projects in support of their community leadership, activism and economic and social development initiatives. Also, UN Women involves rural women in the implementation of the CEDAW Concluding Observations by bringing them together with the Parliament, the Ministry of Agriculture and other state institutions to search for policy and legislative solutions together.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

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The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

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works to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person’s potential is fulfilled. UNFPA leads the coordination and response to gender-based violence and delivers essential drugs and medical supplies to ensure that women have access to safe delivery care and other reproductive health services, especially in rural areas. To learn more about the personal stories of gender-based violence survivors assisted by our mobile teams in Eastern Ukraine, please refer to the publication ‘Believing in a Better Future’ available at http://www.unfpa.org.ua/eng/publications/757.html. In its more than 20 years in Ukraine, UNFPA has been at the forefront of advocating women’s rights, promoting legal and policy reforms and gender-sensitive data collection and supporting projects that improve women’s health and increase their choices in life.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)

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continues to provide response in the most conflict-affected areas by providing life skills education and psycho-social support to children and their caregivers, raising awareness on gender-based violence (GBV) and improving response to survivors of GBV and children affected by violence.

Through a network of teenaged volunteers, UNICEF supports peer-to-peer training on gender-responsive adolescent health and the prevention of risky behavior. Boys and girls residing in rural areas lead such programs as volunteers and beneficiaries.

UNICEF also strongly emphasises training community professionals to identify and respond to key child protection issues. The gender aspect in mainstreamed through all UNICEF projects, ensuring boys’ and girls’ equal access to the services provided. UNICEF also aims to support the improvement of water systems in villages and small towns in order to build the resilience of communities. It focuses on children, especially with regard to improving school attendance, and on women, to diminish the risk of violence and empower them to make decisions in their communities.
The International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Ukraine

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provides integration support to individuals in conflict-affected communities, including rural and displaced women throughout Ukraine, through livelihood assistance and involvement in social cohesion activities. Additionally, through IOM’s National Monitoring System (NMS), information is gathered on the situation of internally displaced persons in different settlements and shared with the Government and international community to inform strategic interventions.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

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promotes economic prosperity and supports development of social infrastructure especially of the marginalized and rural areas giving equal possibilities for men and women.

Through creation of agriculture service cooperatives and support to small business initiatives in rural areas, including those close to contact line, UNDP actively encourages women leadership and helps creating new jobs for rural women. Within its recovery efforts UNDP contributes to rehabilitation of critical social and public infrastructure in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

UNDP provides policy advice and technical assistance to law enforcement agencies, local governments, and CSOs to improve community security and social cohesion in rural areas and strengthen the resilience of IDPs, vulnerable population and host communities. Specific support is ensured to the CSOs that provide free legal, administrative and psychosocial aid to conflict-affected populations, including rural women.

UNDP assisted the network of women’s and human rights CSOs in preparation of the alternative report on Ukraine’s Implementation of the CEDAW which highlighted gender issues, including those pertinent to rural women’s rights, not covered by the official government report.
The United Nations Gender Theme Group (UN GTG) in Ukraine comprised of 17 UN agencies, has developed a social media campaign to raise awareness about issues that rural women face in Ukraine. The campaign will start around International Women’s Day and continue until 23 March 2018, the end date of the 62 Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62). Please follow https://www.facebook.com/UnitedNationsUkraine/ to learn more.

The CSW62, the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, will take place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 12 to 23 March 2018 under the theme “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”.

Complementing the priority theme of the upcoming CSW62 session, International Women’s Day draws attention to the rights and activism of rural women, boosting the work of the UN system and its partners from the Government, Parliament, civil society and international organisations as they discuss and commit to taking action to transform women’s lives for the better.