

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

# Opinion – Gender, Ukraine and Imagining a Just, Sustainable Peace

<https://www.e-ir.info/2025/07/20/opinion-gender-ukraine-and-imagining-a-just-sustainable-peace/>

KESHAB GIRI, JUL 20 2025

The last few summer months of 2025 have offered a rare ray of cautious hope in an otherwise bleak contemporary global political landscape. Despite being beset by stalled discourse, backlash and turbulence, to say the least, Russia and Ukraine have engaged in preliminary talks in the hope of ending the destructive war that Russia imposed upon Ukraine. Beyond Europe, The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) announced on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May that it shall lay down its arms and disband after more than four decades of armed conflict against Türkiye. Similarly, the Trump administration has announced its plan to lift sanctions on Syria, which have been in place for over 45 years. In each case, it is significant to document that the wars in Ukraine, Türkiye, and Syria saw a significant participation of women in various forms – including combat roles.

This short article seeks to highlight gender blind spots and discuss ways to address them in the context of peace negotiation in bringing the war in Ukraine to a close. This shall be achieved specifically by focusing on women's experiences during the war, in peace negotiation and mediation to argue that women's experiences and voices matter for a just and sustainable peace in Ukraine. Moreover, different women combatants have different needs and priorities, especially as it is significant to recall that the positionality and experience of women in war is never monolithic. This involves reckoning with the gendered silences, ideas, and practices that undergird the peace negotiation, peace process, and post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding – dimensions that, so far, have been missing from the conversation about peace.

Gender is central to peace negotiations, conflict resolution, and peace processes. Therefore, this article aims to highlight gender blind spots and discuss ways to address them in the context of the peace negotiation in Ukraine. By focusing on women's experiences during the war, in peace negotiation and mediation, and after the war, it is important to argue that women's experiences and voices matter for just and sustainable peace in Ukraine.

While many Ukrainian women and girls are experiencing life as refugees, around 63 percent of externally displaced and 60 percent of internally displaced constitute women and girls, Ukrainian women have also fought along with men at the frontline. There were 68,000 women enlisted in the Armed Forces of Ukraine as of late 2024. Women now compose a significant percentage of Ukraine's reformed police force. Beyond the battlefield and policing, nonetheless, women-led organisations provide services to Ukraine's internally displaced population and have also worked to document Russian war crimes. The Ukrainian Center for Civil Liberties, led by Oleksandra Matviichuk, was awarded the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize for such work.

Prior to the emergence of the conflict, women were core part of Euromaidan protests by peacefully marching, providing care and legal support to those on the barricades, and fighting back against the repression. 'Women's Squads' organised marches, Facebook groups for collective action, and self-defense classes. Yet, ongoing front-channel negotiation (FCN) and back-channel negotiation (BCN) to end war in Ukraine leave a little space to be sanguine about the gender-sensitive peace negotiations, peace process, and post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding.

Between 2014 and 2019, Ukraine sent at least ten men but only two women to peace talks as delegates; Russia sent

## Opinion – Gender, Ukraine and Imagining a Just, Sustainable Peace

Written by Keshab Giri

precisely none. Despite Ukraine adopting two Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda National Action Plans (NAPs) with the aim of ensuring the training and selection of women for participation in peace negotiations, women seem to be absent from the peace negotiations so far. Unfortunately, the Ukrainian case is not an exception. Descriptively, the Council on Foreign Relations (2022) reports that between 1992 and 2019, only 13 percent of negotiators, 6 percent of mediators, and 6 percent of signatories in “major” peace processes were women. As of 2015, only 27 percent of 504 agreements peace agreements contained specific language referencing women.

This is baffling as existing research suggests that even when holding a conservative understanding of gender as synonym for women, that where women are included in peace processes they create more sustainable agreements. Gender-sensitive peace mediation and negotiation has been the focus of the UN, nonetheless. We are indeed approaching the silver jubilee of the UN Security Council’s Resolution 1325 laying out the WPS agenda, which aimed to increase the participation of women in conflict resolution and peace process; the 2012 UN Guidance for Effective Mediation that focuses on inclusivity; the UN Secretary-General Report A/66/811 in 2012 suggesting a dedicated gender expert in all peacemaking efforts; the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2122 in 2013 creating stronger measures to include women in peace processes; and the UN Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Strategies in 2017.

This is not to imply that women’s participation automatically makes peace just and sustainable. Even when women substantively participate, peace mediation cannot alone disrupt gendered power relations unless we deconstruct and challenge the masculinized and militarized norms and institutions to address the structural causes of conflict.

Reintegration of war veterans into civilian life is a core component of just and sustainable peace in Ukraine. Yet reintegration is a highly gendered process that reenacts the gendered institutions of society in the name of order and stability. In Ukraine, women are experiencing the greatest burden of social care, supporting their families, rehabilitating wounded husbands or partners, and caring for young children and elderly relatives. The war has profoundly reshaped women’s social roles, however, harnessing women’s diverse experiences of war into transforming the future of Ukraine remains a formidable challenge. For Ukraine’s recovery to be effective and sustainable, social infrastructure must be adaptable and responsive to the needs of women.

This is easier said than done. My book, *War through Intersectional Lens: Experiences of Women Combatants in the Maoist Insurgency in Nepal*, offers three valuable findings when it comes to reintegrating women soldiers back into society after the war, and it is with these findings

Firstly, women combatants are not homogenous group, their experiences are diverse, complex and, subsequently, have different experiences, needs, and priorities. It also finds that the intersectional framework can help us to explain why many female combatants do not experience ‘peace’ despite the official conclusion of war, and how they negotiate their ‘agency’ across different spaces. For female combatants, and particularly those at the margin, there is often no ‘post-war’ period – meaning the temporal compartmentalisation of war into clearly defined linear categories of ‘pre-war’, ‘during’ and ‘post-war’ is highly problematic because it does not reflect the lived experience of female combatants.

Secondly, women’s complex experiences in public sphere are often inextricably linked to their experiences in the private sphere and vice versa. One cannot discuss women’s experiences in the public without multi-tiered institutions, structures, values, and norms shaping their experiences in the private sphere. Therefore, a sole focus on female combatants’ experiences in the public sphere limits a holistic understanding of their experiences during and after the war.

Finally, multi-faceted and complex experiences of female combatants in the public sphere are connected to their diverse experiences in the private sphere as conditioned by their multiple intersecting social subjectivities and identities. To be empowered in the public space, their private sphere needs to be safe and secure. Furthermore, such private/public divide produces and reproduces gendered forms of insecurity and marginalisation, particularly for those women combatants at the intersection of multiple oppressions such as gender, class, ethnicity, age, and disability.

## Opinion – Gender, Ukraine and Imagining a Just, Sustainable Peace

Written by Keshab Giri

Building sustainable and just peace rests on the inclusive recollection of painful events shaping the collective memory. Therefore, women's and women combatants' experience of war and 'post-war peace,' both in public and private, must be accounted for the holistic picture of war documenting its deleterious impact on marginalised people.

---

### About the author:

**Keshab Giri** (he/him) is a Lecturer in International Relations at the University of St. Andrews. He was previously a Fellow at the Women and Public Policy Program, Harvard Kennedy School. His research focuses on intersectionality, intimacy and political violence, rebel governance, and feminist approaches to International Relations, with work published in leading journals and a recent book, *War through an Intersectional Lens* (Oxford University Press, 2025). He can be found @KeshabGiri\_.