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# Localisation of the UNSCR 1325 Agenda: Lessons from Post-Maidan Ukraine (2014–2020)

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**Abstract:** Ukraine adopted its first National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security whilst facing an active military conflict on its territory. The country also invested in localising the Women, Peace and Security agenda through the development of regional and local action plans. Additionally, several ministries adopted sectoral action plans. This article looks at the context in which Ukraine developed its first NAP 1325 (post-Maidan) and assesses the NAP against global high impact NAP indicators. The authors then focus on connections between the national and regional/local-level plans and conclude that Ukraine's first NAP did 'trigger' localisation initiatives in the form of Regional Action Plans (RAP) on UNSCR 1325, with Local Action Plans having been initiated via a separate track. A certain level of synergy was realised between initiatives stemming from these plans. The authors do, however, conclude untapped potential remains to further nurture, facilitate and support bottom-up Women, Peace and Security initiatives in Ukraine.

**Keywords:** UNSCR 1325, Women, Peace and Security, Ukraine, National Action Plan, localisation

## Introduction

In 2016, whilst facing an active military conflict on its territory, Ukraine adopted the country's first National Action Plan (NAP) aimed at implementing United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. In the years following, a large number of Ukrainian *oblasts* (regions) adopted regional action plans and,

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with UN Women's encouragement, also local action plans, on the level of the *hromada*<sup>1</sup> (amalgamated territorial community) were developed. Following the national-level action plan, these regional and local action plans (RAPs and LAPs) entailed interesting efforts in localising the implementation of UNSCR 1325 with localisation being considered paramount to realising a more contextual and thereby more effective realisation of Women, Peace and Security goals.

Whereas available literature<sup>2</sup> outlines the importance of localisation of UNSCR 1325 as a bottom-up process, an interesting element stemming from the Ukraine context is the country's national-level action plan tasking *oblasts* to develop RAPs as well as tasking certain ministries to develop sectoral action plans on UNSCR 1325. This formalised top-down approach is uncommon and of interest to explore to see what synergies developed between national and regional, and even local, action plans in Ukraine and whether the top-down 'trigger' did indeed support the creation of space for true bottom-up localisation.

This article, firstly, explores the context in which Ukraine's first NAP came into being and analyses the outcome of the NAP process as such against indicators linked to high impact NAPs as identified by relevant global studies. Secondly, the article assesses progress in the development and implementation of regional and local action plans meant to localise the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Ukraine. The article also reflects on certain key drivers behind the NAP and RAP development and implementation processes as well as challenges encountered in realising set goals. The article aims to assess the synergy between the national and regional/local plans and whether the NAP indeed triggered successful localisation processes in Ukraine. Studying these dimensions of the Ukrainian context could hold relevance and offer lessons-learned about localisation of the UNSCR 1325 agenda in other states. Of note, the very gendered impact of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which commenced after this article was developed, makes the UNSCR 1325 agenda all the more relevant both on the national and local level.

The article reflects the authors' personal observations by drawing on their experiences as gender experts working in Ukraine as well as is based on reports and reviews by national and international organisations.

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1 A *hromada* can be described as an amalgamated territorial community (ATC), meaning a special unit of administrative division that Ukraine introduced in 2015 and which is formed through the merging of third-level administrative units including cities, villages, urban-type settlements and rural settlements in order to form a new enlarged administrative unit with self-government functions.

2 Veneracion-Rallonza 2013; Fal-Dutra Santos and Cabrera-Balleza 2018; Singh 2019; Jones 2020.

## High Impact National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325

UN member states have been implementing the UNSCR 1325 agenda on the national level with different levels of success so far. A key tool used in translating UNSCR 1325 and related Resolutions<sup>3</sup> into national policies and programmes has been the development of national action plans. These plans aim to contextualise UNSCR 1325 and to identify effective ways to implement Women, Peace and Security objectives on the national level. Denmark was the first country in the world to develop its NAP on UNSCR 1325 in 2005, followed soon after by other European front-runners such as Sweden, Norway and the UK. As early as 2008 and 2009 several states on the African continent launched their first NAPs, including Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire, two countries that were recovering from conflict. Currently, nearly half of the UN member states have developed NAPs,<sup>4</sup> with some countries already working with a third or fourth generation action plan. Overall, the number of countries adopting a NAP continues to grow and there is an increasing repository of research available on the best practices and lessons learned with regard to NAP development and implementation.

NAPs vary considerably from state to state, although most address to some degree each of the four pillars of the UNSCR 1325: participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery.<sup>5</sup> Whereas some NAPs have a strong foreign policy and development cooperation outlook, other NAPs are more inward-looking, focusing purely on national issues and policies. Regarding the latter, as an example, a recent OSCE study concluded that NAPs on Women, Peace and Security have turned out to be an effective tool to support reform processes in national security sector institutions.<sup>6</sup> The Women's League for International Peace and Freedom (WILPF) assessed though that only a minority of NAPs include a clearly identified budget committed to its implementation.<sup>7</sup> The NGO Security Council Report, in 2020, placed the number of NAPs having been adopted together with a specific budget at a mere 24 per cent.<sup>8</sup>

According to a number of leading studies,<sup>9</sup> high impact NAPs have certain features in common. These studies point out the following success indicators: i.) the NAP 1325 being

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3 Since the landmark UNSCR 1325, adopted in 2000, the UN Security Council has adopted nine related resolutions, building upon UNSCR 1325 by further detailing and expanding on commitments with regard to key elements such as preventing conflict-related sexual violence and ensuring the meaningful participation of women in peace negotiations. These UNSCRs entail: 1820 (2009); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2010); 1960 (2011); 2106 (2013); 2122 (2013); 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019), and 2493 (2019).

4 Security Council Report 2020.

5 Myrntinen, Shepherd, and Wright 2020.

6 *Ibid.*

7 WILPF n.d.

8 Security Council Report 2020.

9 UN Women, 2015; Myrntinen *et al.* 2020; Ormhaug 2014; Lippai and Young 2017; Cordaid and the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP) 2014.

based on an inclusive design process, including the involvement of civil society; ii.) the NAP 1325 having an overall coordinator in place (strong leadership) and clear responsibilities being identified on who is to implement what; iii.) sustained political will being attached to the NAP 1325 implementation; iv.) a strong monitoring and evaluation plan being attached to the NAP 1325; v.) sufficient budget being allocated for NAP 1325 implementation, and; vi.) flexibility to adapt the NAP 1325 to emerging situations.

An additional and important element, flagged explicitly in the aforementioned OSCE study into NAPs, is the importance of a balance between the various Women, Peace and Security pillars (prevention, protection, participation, relief and recovery) being represented in a NAP.<sup>10</sup>

### **Context in Which Ukraine's First NAP 1325 Was Developed**

In November 2013, President Yanukovich's refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union triggered mass protests in Kyiv. The Maidan protest movement,<sup>11</sup> which refers to the various groups that participated in demonstrations centred on and around the Independence Square (Maidan) in the centre of the Kyiv, subsequently also spread to other regions of Ukraine.<sup>12</sup> With regard to underlying root causes of the mass demonstrations, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in its report on the human rights situation in Ukraine in 2014, referred to underlying human rights violations. Reference is made to a lack of accountability for past human rights violations committed by security forces, the lack of independence of the judiciary and a perceived denial of equal rights and protection, including through mismanagement of resources and corruption, lack of a system of checks and balances and the lack of free elections, as being among the root causes of the popular protests that took place throughout Ukraine.<sup>13</sup> The excessive use of force by the *Berkut* special police and other security forces against Maidan demonstrators was met with impunity and violence spiked around February 2014, leading to over a hundred deaths and many injuries among Ukrainian protestors.<sup>14</sup> President Yanukovich subsequently fled from Kyiv to Russia, on 22 February 2014, resulting in an end to the deadly Maidan confrontations, but with new destabilising developments following quickly.

In March 2014, Russia seized and annexed Crimea and a pro-Russian separatist rebellion in eastern Ukraine gained traction. The latter evolved into an armed conflict between Ukrainian government forces and the separatist forces who self-declared the formation of a 'Donetsk People's Republic' and a 'Luhansk People's Republic'. Neither are being recog-

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10 Myrntinen, Shepherd, and Wright 2020.

11 Also being referred to as Euromaidan.

12 Benigni 2016.

13 OHCHR 2014.

14 *Ibid.*

nised internationally. The armed conflict has been ongoing ever since in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions with the UN noting the conflict having been fuelled by the inflow of foreign fighters and weapons, including from the Russian Federation.<sup>15</sup>

Between April 2014 and September 2021, at least 3,393 civilians have been killed and more than 7,000 have been injured.<sup>16</sup> Fear of shelling, violent clashes, and the threat of landmines and explosive remnants of war became the daily reality for millions of people living on both sides of the more than 420 kilometre-long ‘contact line.’<sup>17</sup> According to the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan for Ukraine, 3.4 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance. Some 1.67 million of those in need lived in non-government-controlled areas, while 1.7 million lived in government-controlled areas, including 340,000 IDPs living in undignified conditions in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. The UN concludes that the elderly, people with disabilities, female-headed households and children were among the most vulnerable.<sup>18</sup> Cases of conflict-related sexual violence have been documented and the conflict has had worsening effects on gender-based violence prevalence and, in certain areas, on the services available for survivors.<sup>19</sup>

Whereas the conflict led to many additional challenges for Ukrainian women, including severe human rights violations, it has also led to gender barriers being broken, such as in relation to women serving in voluntary battalions and, subsequently, being integrated into Ukraine’s armed forces.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, between 2014 and 2020, the number of women active in local and national politics increased substantially, with, for example, the number of women holding a seat in Ukraine’s parliament increasing, as of 2019, from about 11 per cent to a national record-setting number of 21 per cent.<sup>21</sup> Women and their formal and informal networks continued to play an important role in ensuring people’s access to humanitarian assistance, education and healthcare facilities on both sides of the so-called contact line. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, furthermore, concluded that women played a particularly active role in local social cohesion activities and in Ukraine’s civil society, including as human rights defenders.<sup>22</sup>

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15 Human Rights Council 2017.

16 OHCHR 2021.

17 OCHA 2021a.

18 OCHA 2021b

19 Human Rights Council 2017; OSCE SMM 2018; OSCE 2019; Ukrainian Centre for Social Reforms 2018.

20 Grytsenko *et al.* 2016; Martsenyuk 2019.

21 International Foundation for Electoral Systems 2020.

22 OSCE SMM 2018.

## Ukraine's First National Action Plan 1325 (2016–2020)

### *Inclusive Process Design*

Ukraine has been commended both at the national and international level for the fact that the country did not stall or delay its NAP development but realised the particular relevance of action to be taken on UNSCR 1325 whilst attempting to address insecurity and conflict within its own borders. Ukraine has actually been quoted to be the first country globally to adopt a NAP whilst in active conflict.<sup>23</sup> However, here the interpretation of what a conflict entails, and the politics around such a definition might play a role since Afghanistan published its first NAP in 2015. Noteworthy is that already in the Spring – Summer period of 2014, Ukrainian civil society activists started to raise awareness on the need for UNSCR 1325 implementation. Later in 2014, the international NGO WILPF got involved in supporting exchanges on NAP development in Ukraine, including by connecting women civil society representatives from other countries with Ukrainian women in order to share their experiences.<sup>24</sup> In the same vein, the OSCE supported a conference in Odesa in December 2014, bringing together international and Ukrainian experts on dialogue and mediation processes.

After the initial talks around NAP development initiated by Ukrainian women from civil society, several international organisations, most notably UN Women and the OSCE,<sup>25</sup> offered advice and support to the process. Whereas women civil society representatives from different parts of Ukraine played a role in NAP development, there was no particular focus on engaging women in non-government-controlled areas. UN Women later also concluded that although certain women's groups were consulted, many 'newer' groups of conflict-affected women (e.g., women veterans, internally displaced women, widows, mothers of missing persons, etc.) were not actively engaged in its development and thereby not able to voice their needs and priorities in the NAP.<sup>26</sup>

Eventually, it was the Ministry of Social Policy that coordinated the finalisation of Ukraine's first NAP 1325 and its launch, in February 2016. Whereas there was the involvement of international and regional organisations during the NAP development, the end product as such had been developed mainly based on concrete inputs from Ukrainian women's rights advocates and relevant civil servants and as such was not seen as a 'foreign' product.

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23 UN Women 2018, 11.

24 Benigni 2016; Zhovtko 2020.

25 Benigni 2016.

26 UN Women 2018, 45; Lamakh and Dmytriyeva 2017.

## *Focus Areas*

Ukraine's first NAP included six focus areas and ten main goals for realisation in the 2016 – 2020 time. The overarching focus areas being: 1) peacekeeping activities: analysis, coordination and capacity building for staff; 2) participation of women in peacebuilding; 3) prevention of conflict and violence; 4) protection of conflict-affected women and girls; 5) provision of assistance and rehabilitation to those affected by conflict; and 6) monitoring of the implementation of UNSCR 1325. No overarching objective or theory of change, somehow connecting these six focus areas towards a larger aim, was identified within the NAP. This also meant there was no explicit attention paid, through an introductory narrative, for example, to the societal benefits stemming from investments in the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

The six focus areas were, subsequently, divided into ten main goals, which in turn were translated into 49 concrete activities and 69 indicators to measure progress against. As an example, the focus area of “participation of women in peacebuilding” included a goal of “delivering an assessment of the impact of the conflict on national systems of ensuring human rights, including protection, providing assistance and rehabilitation to victims of gender-based violence, participation of women in peacebuilding and prevention of conflicts.” This task then was linked to an activity such as “the development of a regional monitoring card on the state of protection, provision of assistance and rehabilitation of victims of gender-based violence, participation of women in peacebuilding and prevention of conflicts” and an indicator on “the number of oblast monitoring cards having been developed.”<sup>27</sup> Clear connections between activities and impact were often lacking though in Ukraine's first NAP. Additionally, most indicators were quantitative versus qualitative in nature and, for example, focused on the number of coordination meetings held versus the impact achieved through coordination.

Generally, the NAP goals and activities centred around very protection-heavy elements versus paying more attention to enhancing women's participation in matters of peace and security. The NAP, for example, focused rather in-depth on issues pertaining to domestic violence, which also UN Women noted rather critically: “it is important to distinguish measures to ensure UNSCR 1325 implementation in the context of conflict from other gender-related programmes” and “NAP 1325 should maintain its focus on the intended objectives of the WPS agenda, avoiding the mistake of including domestic violence issues that should be covered by independent, adjacent policies.”<sup>28</sup> Another point of criticism voiced by certain women's groups related to Ukraine's NAP 1325 being focused rather in-depth on the integration of women in Ukraine's security sector whilst at the same time paying less attention to peace and dialogue initiatives.<sup>29</sup>

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27 Cabinet of Ministers 2016, 1.

28 UN Women 2018.

29 O'Sullivan 2019; Kyselova 2019.

The point about militarisation of UNSCR 1325 is part of a bigger debate on women in the military which still remains the cornerstone of various feminist viewpoints. While some feminists argue that women in the military are an important part of the equal rights approach and contribute to the acquisition of full citizenship in their countries,<sup>30</sup> others note that militarism is unlikely to bring more feminism and equality to society at large, advocating fundamentally pacifist and anti-militarist views.<sup>31</sup> On top of that, Third World feminists argue that not everyone has the privilege of being a pacifist,<sup>32</sup> as their societies may be forced to use weapons to fight oppression. Where and how to strike the right 'balance' with regards to four UNSCR 1325 pillars in developing NAP activities remains a challenge.

### *Political Will and Coordination*

Coordination in the initial year after the launch of the NAP was described by several actors as more or less non-existing. Although formally an inter-agency coordination body was set up by the Ministry of Social Policy, it did not actually convene. There were questions raised, including by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, about the Ministry of Social Policy being the right institution to lead NAP coordination and implementation. It indeed seemed that by having this particular Ministry in a leading role, at least on paper, the focus on the already strong protection angle of the NAP, including on issues relating to domestic violence, became amplified. In part also because experiences regarding peacebuilding and women's empowerment were less present in the Ministry of Social Policy's existing toolbox. In short, the Ministry of Social Policy did not necessarily have either the expertise or the access to guide and coordinate Women, Peace and Security reforms taking place in ministries such as Internal Affairs, Defence and Foreign Affairs.

Despite the inter-agency coordination lacking in the year following Ukraine's adopting its first NAP, the development of regional action plans did take off, in line with NAP requirements. There was also clear traction around the development of sectoral plans. Generally, the Ukrainian government did intensify its efforts regarding the implementation of the broader gender equality agenda, including linking the agenda with its politically prioritised Euro-Atlantic integration agenda. As an example, in March 2017, the Cabinet of Ministers appointed the Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration (Ivanna Klymush-Tsintsadze) as the Cabinet's high-level focal point and coordinator on gender equality policy. Additionally, in February 2018, the Cabinet of Ministers appointed the first-ever Government Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy, with the Commissioner (Kateryna Levchenko, a renowned women's rights activist) serving within the office of the aforementioned Vice Prime Minister. The Vice Prime Minister and the Commissioner took on active and visible roles, raising awareness on NAP-relevant issues, such as

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30 Stiehm 1982.

31 Cockburn 2007; Enloe 2007.

32 Eisenstein 2007, 20.



on the need for legislation on conflict-related sexual violence, and played an important part in the development and promotion of gender equality policies and programmes as such.<sup>33</sup>

Additional driving forces steered the attention towards the importance of UNSCR 1325 implementation, including the members of the Inter-factional Equal Opportunities Caucus in Parliament.<sup>34</sup> They proved to be strong advocates for the Women, Peace and Security agenda, including for NAP 1325 implementation, and in particular in relation to pushing forward legislation that ends discriminatory regulations preventing women to take up a large number of positions in Ukraine's Armed Forces. Moreover, the Swedish and Canadian Embassies initiated a Gender Working Group in 2017, bringing relevant governmental and non-governmental actors together as of 2017. This initiative was then transferred to the Vice Prime Minister's Office through the establishment of a Gender Policy Working Group, with high-level meetings taking place three to four times a year. The fact that one of the formal partnership goals established between Ukraine and NATO focused specifically on gender perspectives and UNSCR 1325,<sup>35</sup> also boosted political will for the agenda.

Nonetheless, despite all the positive movement on gender equality programming, legislation and other initiatives, the coordination of the NAP did remain with the Ministry of Social Policy, with the UN Women 2018 mid-term review concluding that: "so far, the authorised agency that presently leads the NAP implementation and collects the annual reports from the relevant state agencies has insufficient resources and capacities for coordinating NAP 1325 implementers. Despite the existence of a separate task in the NAP for inter-agency coordination, this coordination was mentioned by those interviewed as one of the main challenges in NAP 1325 implementation."<sup>36</sup>

### *Budget Allocation*

With regard to budget allocation, Ukraine's first NAP 1325 identified three sources of financing: i.) central government financing; ii.) local budget financing, and; iii.) other (unnamed) sources of funding. The latter presumably covered mainly external donors. Per every NAP indicator, a forecasted budget requirement was included, leading to budget commitments of the central government constituting UAH 261,000 and local budget financing constituting UAH 2,533,000. These budgets translate to roughly EUR 7,900 and EUR 78,000 respectively which is a very modest financial allocation for a five-year national action plan. Of interest to note is central versus local budget commitments which did illustrate the government's focus on a decentralised approach. However, both on the local

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33 Van Metre 2015.

34 UNDP Ukraine n.d.

35 Government Portal 2018; NATO 2021.

36 UN Women 2018.

and central level different ministries, institutions and regional administrations took their time to formally reflect NAP 1325 budget allocation in their yearly or multi-year plans.

In addition to central and local governmental budgets, other sources were expected to bring in more substantial support constituting ca. UAH 19,603,100 (about EUR 594,000). All in all, this meant a five-year budget of less than EUR 700,000, with a substantial dependency on external donors.<sup>37</sup> The latter not necessarily reflected a lack of interest on the government's side, but a decision to be seen more in a context of serious budget challenges, competing priorities and an understanding that UNSCR 1325 programming would be able to count on a number of bilateral donor countries active in Ukraine and contributing substantial importance to the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

### *Monitoring, Evaluation and Flexibility to Adapt to Emerging Issues*

With regard to monitoring and evaluation, no specific body was established for regularly reporting on the indicators set in this sphere. Moreover, a study focused on peacebuilding initiatives noted that both national and *oblast* level administrators had major issues understanding which monitoring and evaluation tools they could use for any effective monitoring of NAP 1325 objectives.<sup>38</sup>

However, in 2018, UN Women, upon the request of Vice Prime Minister Klymush-Tsintsadze, did deliver an in-depth mid-term evaluation of the NAP process design and implementation so far. The impact of that evaluation also showed flexibility to adapt to emerging situations. As an example, two Ministries which had not yet been established in early 2016 were added as responsible entities on certain deliverables (Ministry of Veteran Affairs and Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories and IDPs). The NAP was also amended in 2018 to include an intensified focus on preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence. Nonetheless, addressing the additional topics of relevance, an OSCE study into NAPs, flagged that the Ukrainian NAP could have been strengthened by including a focus on how to engage men in UNSCR 1325 implementation and how to build a better understanding of masculinity and possibilities for transforming existing norms.<sup>39</sup> This indeed seemed an important yet underexposed area of relevance to the UNSCR 1325 agenda.

During a workshop held in January 2021,<sup>40</sup> the Deputy Minister for Social Policy (Olga Revuk), reflected on the first NAP and concluded that the main accomplishments were: the consolidation of governmental agencies' support around UNSCR 1325 implementa-

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37 Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2016.

38 Lamakh and Dmytriyeva 2017.

39 Myrntinen, Shepherd, and Wright 2020.

40 Conference "Lessons learnt and prospects from localization of the National Action Plan 'Women, Peace, Security' in Ukraine", 27 January 2021. Available at: <https://www.msp.gov.ua/news/19597.html>.

tion through training and better coordination; the widening of opportunities for women in the security sector, and; the conclusion of a sociological survey on the impact of conflict on women and men.<sup>41</sup> Regarding shortcomings, she noted the lack of a strong monitoring concept and reporting and evaluation mechanisms. She also stated that the NAP had targeted only limited groups of women.

## **Sectoral Action Plans**

The Ukrainian NAP directly tasked the Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Social Policy, Ministry for Temporarily Occupied Territories, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Information Policy, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Regional Development to develop action plans on the implementation of NAP on UNSCR 1325.<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, among the Ministries involved, security and defence-related institutions were the most responsive to this NAP 1325 tasking. For example, already in May 2016, the Ministry of Defence (MoD), adopted its Action Plan for 2016 on implementing NAP 1325 and created a working group in the Ministry to coordinate this work.<sup>43</sup> This Ministry also intensified its cooperation with NATO regarding the Women, Peace and Security agenda, based on the established partnership goals aimed at gender mainstreaming by and within the security and defence sector.<sup>44</sup>

The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA) developed its own Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 for the years 2017–2020 which the aim to establish a platform for advocacy to monitor and strengthen the status of women across MoIA agencies, including through the introduction of a network of gender focal points.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the institutions that the MoIA coordinates (e.g., State Emergency Service of Ukraine, the National Guard, National Police, and State Border Guard Service) developed their subsequent action plans. For example, the State Border Guard Services' Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (2016–2020) focused on increasing its gender balance, including setting a target of recruiting and retaining 30 percent women in the State Border Guard Services. The National Police adopted its Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security with a focus on effective support to survivors of gender-based violence; prevention of gender-based violence; training for personnel on Women, Peace and Security objectives; women's participation in peacebuilding and the promotion of a culture of peace.<sup>46</sup>

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41 UN Women 2017b.

42 Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2016.

43 Government Portal 2017a.

44 President of Ukraine 2018.

45 Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine 2017.

46 UN Women 2017a.

Achievements with regard to the Women, Peace, Security agenda in the defence sector, realised over the first NAP period, have been noted to include: the opening up of all operational military posts to women; the opening of military school institutions to women so that the percentage of women increased from 10 per cent to 24 per cent between 2016 and 2017.<sup>47</sup> This also included the incorporation of gender mainstreaming into the curricula; introducing amendments to parental leave policies, including allowing years of parental leave count as years of service; introducing positions of gender advisors and/or gender focal points in defence institutions.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, experts note that progress made has mainly been in the form of gender mainstreaming on the personnel side. However, with regard to integrating a gender perspective in operations, investments have not been that clear as of yet (at least for the external public).<sup>49</sup>

Sectoral Action Plans 1325 can clearly be an effective tool to implement changes in support of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. They are implemented within one institution and rely on respective structures and human resources which can benefit from enhanced coordination and understanding. Interesting to note is that in the case of Ukraine the most substantial progress in developing and implementing sectoral plans on UNSCR 1325 was observed to be taken place within the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior as well as state agencies related to them. This tendency can be explained by the simultaneous security sector reforms that mainly addressed the police and armed forces. These reforms were supported by donor countries and agencies that also promoted the Women, Peace and Security agenda, including in relation to mainstreaming the agenda in reforms. For instance, the NATO – Ukraine partnership goals included a particular commitment with regard to UNSCR 1325 implementation within the security sector. The fact that the UNSCR 1325 goal was formalised as part of a partnership process given high political importance most certainly played a role in triggering activity in this sphere within the Ministry of Defence. Other ministries-implementers of the NAP (e.g., Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc.) have not developed their sectoral plans under the NAP 2016–2020. This is so despite the fact that Ukraine's first NAP 1325 tasked ministries to this extent and despite the fact that implementing this objective by more ministries could have strengthened the overall implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Ukraine.

As flagged under the NAP section (focus areas), a number of women did share concerns with regard to a strong focus on women's empowerment in the Ukrainian Armed Forces, and other security institutions, referring to the risks of militarisation of UNSCR 1325. Such an asymmetry, however, can be observed only in case other institutions (e.g. dealing with health, foreign affairs, education etc.) are not implementing the WPS agenda in their respective spheres. Therefore, it might be useful for partners and donors to not overlook

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47 UN Women 2017a.

48 Lamakh and Dmytriyeva 2017; Benigni 2016; UN Women 2017a.

49 UN Women 2017, 74.

those institutions from the beginning of advocating for localisation of UNSCR 1325 on a national level.

## **UNSCR 1325 Localisation in the Context of Ukraine's Decentralisation Process**

Already in April 2014, a process of decentralisation was introduced in Ukraine, aimed at instituting major changes to local self-government and the territorial structure of power in the country. In the political climate at the time, decentralisation reforms served as a tool aimed at lowering tensions between local and central government as well as providing more autonomy to local municipalities in managing the everyday life of the respective communities. At the same time, it was a response that provided alternatives to the discussions about federalisation of Ukraine.

With the decentralisation reforms, certain (smaller) communities were amalgamated into a new level of self-government called an Amalgamated Territorial Community (ATC). When communities formed an ATC, they elected their own new local government, were granted more power to make executive decisions on their own and collect a higher share of the taxes paid locally. Not only was this to ensure that income accrued within the community stays in this community, but it mostly aimed for public goods and services to be provided much more efficiently. The state policy of Ukraine in local self-government was based, primarily, on the interests of residents of territorial communities and provided for drastic changes and systemic reforms, decentralisation of power – that is, transfer of a significant part of powers, resources, and responsibility from the executive branch of the government to the bodies of local self-government. The rationale for the government's decentralisation strategy is set out in two central documents, the Concept of Reforming Local Self-Government and Territorial Structure of Power, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers in April 2014,<sup>50</sup> and the State Strategy for Regional Development 2015–2020, approved in August 2014.<sup>51</sup>

With the popularisation of UNSCR 1325, a number of scholars and practitioners<sup>52</sup> have been highlighting the importance of localising the agenda in order to transmit global Women, Peace and Security aspirations into concrete local commitments that are contextually realistic and appropriate. As concluded by the OSCE study,<sup>53</sup> localisation leads to more impact-oriented plans that address regional differences and are more contextual to address diverse human security needs. The Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), for example, has been playing an important role in raising awareness on the 'localisation of UNSCR 1325' and provided expertise on this subject to a range of countries

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50 Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2014a.

51 Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2014b.

52 Fal-Dutra Santos and Cabrera-Balleza 2018; Jones 2020.

53 Myrntinen, Shepherd, and Wright 2020.

(e.g., Nepal, Columbia, Democratic Republic of Congo), including Ukraine. What is more, with the process of decentralisation high on the agenda in Ukraine it was in a way easier to localise the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Ukraine by linking up this process with the already ongoing decentralisation process.<sup>54</sup>

## Regional and Local Action Plans

In Ukraine, the localisation of the NAP 1325 derived directly from the NAP itself since it tasked Regional State Administrations to develop and implement Regional Action Plans (RAPs) on UNSCR 1325. This task was implemented to a varying degree of success across Ukraine's regions. Some regions adopted RAPs (such as the conflict-affected Luhansk region), others integrated Women, Peace and Security commitments into other existing strategies and programs (e.g., Donetsk region initially integrated Women, Peace and Security commitments into its Family, Youth and Sports program). Taking stock of progress on RAPs in 2018, UN Women concluded that 21 (out of 24) regions either adopted RAPs or integrated Women, Peace and Security objectives into their regional programmes.<sup>55</sup> UN Women did not further specify the number of RAPs adopted versus integration of WPS commitments in regional programs.

Some cities and settlements went further and adopted Local Action Plans (LAPs). While the development of RAPs came as a direct tasking from the NAP, LAPs remained more a voluntary initiative, not guided by any formal governmental requirements or taskers. Taking into consideration the earlier identified NAP success criteria, the following sections will focus on the development and implementation of RAPs and LAPs.

### *Inclusive Process Design*

There has been a varying degree of involvement of civil society in the development of regional and/or local action plans across the regions. Thus, for instance, in Odesa, Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, and Lviv regions, several women's NGOs were involved in the development of RAPs. The Zolotonosha city (Cherkasy region) Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, for example, was also adopted with local female council members and women's groups being key drivers behind the plan.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, most of the ATCs often did not have well-established NGOs with a capacity and expertise on gender issues in general and experience on Women, Peace, and Security agenda in particular.<sup>57</sup> Because of that, UN Women, for instance, involved Zaporizhzhya-based NGO "Unity for the Future" for input into the development of LAPs in Donetsk and Luhansk region as part of a project implemented by UN Women, without it being a truly 'local' NGO in this case (being based in a neighbour-

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54 UN Women 2018, 33.

55 *Ibid.*

56 OSCE SMM 2018.

57 Lamakh and Dmytriyeva 2017, 14–15.

ing *oblast* instead). Donetsk and Luhansk conflict-affected regions of Ukraine turned out to be frontrunners in developing LAPs in newly formed ATCs with at least 24 LAPs being developed in these regions. This seemed, however, not so much due to an active civil society or local governmental initiative, but mainly due to a heavier donor focus on the East of Ukraine and more support to projects being available for implementation there. For example, a heavy concentration of LAPs stemmed from *hromadas*, in which the UN Reconciliation and Peacebuilding Project (UNRPP) was being run.<sup>58</sup>

As for the focus areas, the RAPs and LAPs often remained almost exact copies of Ukraine's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 and several RAPs were almost exclusively focused on protection issues, especially domestic violence, and less focused on peace, security and participation.

### *Political Will and Coordination*

Coordination of the RAPs 1325 on the regional level was, generally, placed in the hands of the Deputy Head of the Regional State Administration (RSA) and the RSA's Head of Department of Social Protection as well as saw the involvement of the Gender Focal Point in the RSA (in cases such a – often voluntary – focal point had actually been appointed). Similarly, on the ATC level, the LAP was coordinated by the Deputy Head of ATC and Gender Focal Point (if there was one, typically only in bigger ATCs). Coordination was executed mostly via existing councils, pre-dating 2014, dealing with gender equality, combatting domestic violence and trafficking in human beings – in most cases led by Departments of Social Protection. However, in some places (for example, Lviv) such councils were no longer actively convening, which meant there was basically no coordination format in place.

Generally, regional and local authorities had not been consulted in any structural manner regarding the development of Ukraine's first NAP, which hindered the process of boosting their understanding of the process and its benefits, as well as potentially getting 'buy-in' on the regional and local level for the subsequent development of action plans. This was taken into consideration while Ukraine started to develop its second NAP, when nine regions took part in regional consultations on NAP development.<sup>59</sup>

In addition, due to a number of important reforms taking place simultaneously (de-centralisation reform, reform of the healthcare sector, security sector reform etc.) local authorities are often indicated to be somewhat overwhelmed with learning new legal frameworks, policies, and adjusting to new practices on the ground. Therefore, human resources at the regional and local level were limited and 'gender issues' and Women, Peace and Security activities easily became de-prioritised or overlooked in such a context.

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58 UNDP n.d.

59 On 28 October 2020, Ukraine has adopted second NAP on implementation of UNSCR 1325 for the period until 2025. Available at: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1544-2020-p#Text>.

Although capacity issues did negatively impact the ability for the NAP to be truly translated to Regional and Local Action Plans in certain regions, it deserves to be highlighted that local gender champions played a key role in local and regional success stories. For example, the Deputy Governor of the Luhansk region on social and humanitarian issues (the only woman of five Deputies) provided political support and visibility to the agenda with the Luhansk region being one of the most active regions with regard to the implementation of the Women, Peace, Security agenda. Another example was the mayor of Rubizhne city (Luhansk region) who proactively supported the adoption targeted program “Rubizhne – Safe City for Women and Girls”<sup>60</sup> on preventing and combating sexual violence and sexual harassment against women and girls in public spaces of this conflict-affected city. Rubizhne subsequently also opened a shelter for survivors of gender-based violence in line with RAP commitments in the sphere of prevention and protection.

In addition, a number of training and other capacity-building initiatives did take place, enhancing awareness and capacity of the regional and local authorities, as well as the civil society representatives on how to design, finance, cost and monitor action plans on UNSCR 1325. The results, however, might be more visible in subsequent action plans.

### *Budget Allocation*

As with Ukraine’s NAP, RAPs and LAPs also heavily depended on “other sources” of financing. For example, Luhansk RAP for the period 2016–2017 had a total budget of UAH 1,906,422 (around EUR 57,800), of which only UAH 5,102 (approx. EUR 155) was covered via the regional state budget and UAH 1,320 (approx. EUR 40) – from the local budget (of the Markivska ATC), while the rest – UAH 1,900,000 (approx. EUR 57,600) were covered via “other sources.”<sup>61</sup> This resembled the NAP set-up that similarly had very little governmental budget allocation. Dependency on the external (donor) budget sent a signal to the regional and local level that the issue was not prioritised by the central government, as “true” government priorities were often more seen through actual financial commitments rather than declarative statements. Basically, heavy dependency on donor funding risked jeopardising local ownership of the agenda and the process itself. However, even without budget allocation, some settlements (e.g., Popasna, Kreminna, Velyka Novosilka) could still plan and organise a number of activities that did not require funding (e.g., awareness-raising activities, updating settlement-level gender profiles, strengthening cooperation between state agencies, public hearings on Women, Peace and Security issues).

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60 UNDP Ukraine 2020.

61 Luhansk Regional State Administration 2016.



### *Monitoring, Evaluation and Flexibility to Adapt to Emerging Issues*

Based on NAP 1325 guidance, reports on progress on the RAP and LAP implementation were prepared by the Departments of Social Protection and sent to the Head of Regional State Administration and the Ministry of Social Policy on an annual basis. As with Ukraine's NAP, RAPs were heavily focused on UNSCR 1325 protection pillar, and local authorities often used the same reporting lines on domestic violence, as already established by other frameworks developed by the Ministry of Social Policy, raising the question of the added value of RAPs in this instance. At the same time, issues such as conflict-related sexual violence (more directly related to Women, Peace and Security agenda and unelaborated in any of the existing national frameworks) remained overlooked and unaddressed in reports which were put forward by the regional level for national consideration.

There were also discrepancies in the time of implementation of LAPs, with a number of LAPs being developed for the period 2019–2020 or even 2020–2022 on the implementation of the NAP (2016–2020). Such time discrepancies also demonstrate that at times more focus (including attention from civil society and donors) is on the development of the document rather than on its actual interconnectivity, leading to limited results on the ground as an outcome of these policies.

### *National-Level Guidance and Synergy*

The tasking to develop RAPs that derived from the NAP was rather vague and did not provide enough guidance (nor, for example, a sample format), resulting in some of the local authorities viewing the UNSCR 1325 localisation process as an unnecessary burden on them without understanding its full importance and benefits to their local communities. For instance, the OSCE SMM in its 2018 Gender Thematic Report outlined that interlocutors had noted to the Mission a low understanding of UNSCR 1325 within Regional State Administrations and stipulated the heavy workload that the Departments of Social Protection were facing.<sup>62</sup> Practical guidance from the central to local level, preferably supplemented with concrete examples of what actual benefits the Women, Peace and Security agenda brings locally, would have been useful.

On the other hand, national drivers had a positive influence on the regional level, including Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze, who chaired a number of regional meetings<sup>63</sup> on gender policy priorities that gathered specialists from the regions, as well as deputies of profile ministries and representatives of local authorities. Such meetings were aimed at taking stock of progress and boosting the implementation of gender equality policies and the Women, Peace and Security agenda in Ukraine's regions. The Government Commissioner on Gender Equal-

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<sup>62</sup> OSCE SMM 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Government Portal 2017b.

ity joined some of these visits as well as took part in a number of regional conferences in order to highlight the government's priorities on gender equality at the local level. The Annual Ukrainian Women's Congress,<sup>64</sup> organised from 2017 onwards, also included a strong UNSCR 1325 focus and brought key regional and national level players together. These gatherings, where local and national-level civil society and women's rights activists, as well as regional civil servants and politicians, could engage were oft-quoted by attendees to be helpful for creating visibility, understanding and support for the UNSCR 1325 agenda.

## Conclusion

Women civil society representatives had a strong impact on getting the discussions going around the need for a NAP 1325 in Ukraine. The conflict did not lead to putting these ideas on the backburner but, on the contrary, prioritised attention to the Women, Peace and Security issues. The actual development process of Ukraine's first NAP could, nonetheless, have been more inclusive, especially with regard to including groups such as internally displaced women, although it did include Ukrainian civil society voices that were shaping the discussion in besides governmental representatives.

Ukraine's first NAP as such was rather heavily protection-focused and could have benefitted from a stronger participation angle. As in-depth reviews also outlined, indicators of the first plan were rather weak and connections between activities and impact could have been stronger and more effective. Based on the 2018 mid-term NAP review, new elements were introduced (showing flexibility to adapt), but a useful emphasis on, for example, involving men and focusing on masculinities, remained absent. On the budget, contradictory views exist, but generally, the high dependency on external funding might have hindered a feeling of ownership and sustainability at certain levels of government, which seemed more of an issue on the regional and local than the national level. Whereas the political will to support Women, Peace and Security priorities was present at the top-level of government, as well as linked to Ukraine's focus on the Euro-Atlantic integration agenda, the Ministry of Social Policy might not have been the best-placed Ministry to coordinate the NAP 1325 implementation very effectively.

Ukraine's first NAP did directly trigger the development of both sectoral and regional action plans, as both relevant Ministries and Regional State Administrations were explicitly tasked to develop their own plans based on the national-level plan. Regarding sectoral action plans, the defence and security ministries took on an especially active role, which led to some criticism of UNSCR 1325 efforts being too 'militarised'. The decentralisation reforms nationwide ripened the environment for localisation initiatives in the form of Regional and Local Action Plans on UNSCR 1325. With regard to the Local Action Plans, these were not triggered by the National Action Plan as such but by either active local

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64 Ukrainian Women's Congress. n.d.

civil society and/or local government or based on the specific Women, Peace and Security projects already being implemented locally based on external donor support.

Despite admirable activities and results achieved with regard to RAPs and LAPs, true localisation did not fully materialise. RAPs were too often copy/paste style documents based on Ukraine's national-level action plan, without true focus on the regional dynamics, needs and stakeholders. Regarding the local plans, not all ATCs had active civil society and women's groups present in the area, and in the case of their presence, their capacity was not always sufficient to ensure meaningful participation in design processes which seemingly came into being triggered more by external than local (bottom-up) factors. The capacity and expertise available within regional and local level authorities was often deemed insufficient to realise high-quality plans or to effectively coordinate the subsequent implementation of localised action plans. Nonetheless, on synergy, high-level gender champions, active on the national-level, did inspire implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda regionally, including through regional visits focused on advocacy around the topic. The impact of local gender champions on localisation processes was also substantial and efforts with regard to local action plans did boost local understanding of the UNSCR 1325 agenda. Political will on the national and regional levels did translate to concrete impact although there is clearly more untapped potential to nurture, facilitate and support bottom-up Women, Peace and Security initiatives.

Finally, this article was written throughout 2020–21. Since 24 February 2022, the situation in Ukraine has changed dramatically due to Russia's full-scale invasion targeting Ukraine and its people. A number of ATCs mentioned in this article are now occupied by Russian forces with numerous reports of human rights violations, including sexual violence, surfacing. Many women civil society representatives and local administrators, so important to some of the processes described in this article, face displacement or have sought refuge outside of Ukraine. Nonetheless, many women and men continue to advocate and work for UNSCR 1325 goals in Ukraine despite the massive challenges. Whilst this article fixated the situation pre-full-scale war, it remains important to reflect on the path Ukraine has travelled and contribute to documenting achievements in terms of promoting and localising UNSCR 1325, also with the aim of informing future endeavours. Of note, the very gendered impact, and one could even argue roots, of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which commenced after this article was developed, makes the UNSCR 1325 agenda all the more relevant both on the national and local level.

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