

# THE PROBLEM OF GENDER BALANCE AND WOMEN'S VISIBILITY IN MEDIA DURING THE WAR

## O PROBLEMA DO EQUILÍBRIO DE GÊNERO E DA VISIBILIDADE DAS MULHERES NA MÍDIA DURANTE A GUERRA

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**ABSTRACT**

Today, Ukraine has a unique experience of overcoming gender stereotypes at a new stage of building gender equality during the war, the study of which can be useful for the broader research community. Promoting gender equality during wartime is not only an ethical value but also a strategic necessity and studying gendered discourses and social practices is crucial. The study aims to analyse the gender balance and peculiarities of gender representation, stereotypes and discrimination in war themes in Ukrainian online media content. The article focuses more on the problem of women's representation in media content. The paper provides the latest data from four independent monitoring studies of Ukrainian national and regional online media. Their results show that indirect rather than direct gender discrimination is characteristic of Ukrainian media, and the national media landscape is characterized by an indirect reflection of gender inequality already present in society: men dominate in the majority of thematic areas and topics, including war. Despite the fact that women are still underrepresented or misrepresented in media content positive changes in multidimensional representation and portrayal of women are fixed both by monitoring data and by analytical studies confirming the transformation of gender roles in Ukrainian society in wartime.

**Keywords:** Gender equality. Representation. Gender roles. Media.

**RESUMO**

Atualmente, a Ucrânia tem uma experiência única de superação de estereótipos de gênero em um novo estágio de construção da igualdade de gênero durante a guerra, cujo estudo pode ser útil para a comunidade de pesquisa mais ampla. A promoção da igualdade de gênero durante a guerra não é apenas um valor ético, mas também uma necessidade estratégica, e o estudo dos discursos e das práticas sociais de gênero é crucial. O estudo tem como objetivo analisar o equilíbrio de gênero e as peculiaridades da representação de gênero, estereótipos e discriminação em temas de guerra no conteúdo da mídia on-line ucraniana. O artigo se concentra mais no problema da representação das mulheres no conteúdo da mídia. O documento fornece os dados mais recentes de quatro estudos de monitoramento independentes da mídia on-line Ucraniana nacional e regional. Os resultados mostram que a discriminação de gênero indireta, em vez de direta, é característica da mídia Ucraniana, e o cenário da mídia nacional é caracterizado por um reflexo indireto da desigualdade de gênero já presente na sociedade: os homens dominam a maioria das áreas e tópicos temáticos, inclusive a guerra. Apesar do fato de que as mulheres ainda são sub-representadas ou mal representadas no conteúdo da mídia, mudanças positivas na representação multidimensional e no retrato das mulheres são fixadas tanto por dados de monitoramento quanto por estudos analíticos que confirmam a transformação dos papéis de gênero na sociedade Ucraniana em tempos de guerra.

**Palavras-chave:** Igualdade de gênero. Representação. Papéis de gênero. Mídia.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In 2024, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers adopted a new Gender Equality Strategy for 2024-2029, that will guide the work of Member States toward achieving greater gender equality. It focuses on six strategic areas, including preventing and combating gender stereotypes and sexism; achieving balanced participation of women and men in political, public, social and economic life, etc. As outlined in the Strategy, gender equality entails equal rights for all, as well as the same representation, visibility, empowerment, responsibility and participation, in all spheres of public and private life (Council of Europe, 2024).

UN experts (UN Women, 2022, p. 19) emphasize that equal representation is a goal and a conduit for more just, peaceful societies yet has not been attained. Currently, the war is a factor that determines all social processes in Ukraine, in particular those related to gender equality, the expansion of opportunities and women's rights. According to European Union analysts (EU, 2023, p. 60), the full-scale war in Ukraine has an ambivalent impact on gender equality: on the one hand, it strengthened existing barriers and created new challenges for gender equality and women's rights, on the other hand, society is increasingly aware of the need to involve all citizens, regardless of gender, age and other characteristics to respond to Russian aggression and overcome its consequences.

This claim is confirmed by numerous scientific researches and the results of sociological surveys. Researchers state that the phase of the war, which began in 2022, significantly increased gender and cross-sectoral inequality and discrimination, and "despite some progress in gender equality, the ratification of most of the relevant global conventions and the adoption of relevant legislation, Ukrainian women continue to face obstacles to expanding their economic, civic and political participation" (Chuyko et al., 2023, p. 618).

At the same time, researchers note, that among the consequences of the full-scale Russian invasion, there is growth of support for gender equality (Martsenyuk, 2023, p. 128). The full-scale war showed that stability and further post-war reconstruction and development of Ukraine require equal participation of women and men in all spheres of life.

This ambivalence phenomenon is of scientific interest and practical importance.

In 2024, Ukraine ranked 63rd in the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2024), increasing its rank by three positions compared to previous year despite the war.

Today, Ukraine has a unique experience of overcoming gender stereotypes at a new stage of building gender equality during the war, the study of which can be useful for the world community. Despite the fact that the problem has a significant resonance both in social practice and in scientific discourse

(Author, 2023), the situation regarding the balance in media content and the representation of women in the media requires serious scientific research. Moreover, the scientific study of the problem of gender equality is on the agenda of Global Media Monitoring Project 2025 – Macharia (WACC, 2023) accented on the need to re-strategize moving into GMMP 2025, to “work smarter” and grow new partnerships connecting across academia, civil society, and the media industry.

Proceeding from the foregoing, this study aims to analyse the gender balance and peculiarities of gender representation, stereotypes and discrimination in war themes in Ukrainian online media content. The research methodology is based on UNESCO framework of gender-sensitive indicators for media on unique factual material from recent Ukrainian media monitoring studies.

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

Gender equality in the media can be considered at two levels: equality within media companies (equal opportunities and treatment, access to leadership positions, pay equality etc.) and equality in media content (maintaining a gender balance, avoiding spreading gender stereotypes and sexism).

UNESCO (2012) has elaborated global framework of Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media to enable effective assessment of both levels. In this study, we will focus on the media content level and two strategic objectives with indicators, selected for our research.

Objective 1: Balanced presence of women and men – reflecting the composition of society, and human experiences, actions, views, and concerns, in media coverage of news and current affairs with these selected indicators:

- proportions of women and men seen, heard or read about in news and current affairs content over a random selection of one week;
- proportions of women and men directly interviewed/quoted in news and current affairs content as sources of information and/or opinion;
- proportions of women and men in the news appearing as: spokespersons, experts, ordinary citizens/vox pop in news and current affairs content;
- proportions of women and men seen, heard or read about and/or interviewed/quoted as sources of information/opinion in news and current affairs content differentiated according to thematic areas such as 1) Politics & government; 2) Economics & business; 3) War & conflict; 3) Science & technology; 4) Sports; 5) Other.

Objective 2: Fair portrayal of women and men through elimination of stereotypes and promotion of multidimensional representation/portrayal with these indicators:

- proportions of stories with stereotypes (depiction of traditional “feminine”/“masculine” characteristics and male/female roles, thereby making them appear normal while excluding other possible traits and functions for men and women in society);
- proportion of feminine noun forms used to refer to a profession, position, or type of occupation when speaking about women (UNESCO, 2012, p. 41-42).

We took these indicators as a basis, but adapted them to the objectives and conditions of our research. At the same time, the study has limitations caused by the lack of available quantitative data on some indicators (e.g. proportions of women to men portrayed as victims, etc.) due to the objective conditions in the country. In particular, attention was focused on the proportions of men and women appearing as: spokespersons, experts and heroes/-ines in media content in general and in different thematic areas.

Gender analysis is conducted based on qualitative information and methods and/or based on quantitative information provided by gender statistics. As one of the main means of verification, UNESCO (2012) recommends monitoring and sex-disaggregated analysis of news and current affairs content.

For comparative analysis, we use the latest data of four independent monitoring studies (two on online national media and two on local media):

- monitoring of media coverage of issues related to gender equality and the distribution of materials of a stereotypical or discriminatory nature, conducted by Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine (MCIP, 2024) – 2,000 materials randomly selected over six months (January-July, 2024);
- monitoring of gender balance in national online media, conducted by the Institute of Mass Information (IMI, 2025a) – 1,000 materials randomly selected of month (January, 2025);
- monitoring of gender balance in regional online media, conducted by Institute of Mass Information (IMI, 2025b) – 4,750 materials and conducted by the Volyn Press Club (VPC, 2025) – 20,230 materials randomly selected of one month (January, 2025).

As is known, the media can both obstruct and accelerate structural changes aimed at achieving gender equality. This inequality becomes even more pronounced when it comes to the presence of women in media content, both in terms of quality and quantity (MCIP, 2024, p. 32). Therefore, the paper focuses more on the problem of women’s representation in media content.

### 3 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

#### 3.1 GENDER BALANCE IN MEDIA CONTENT: REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AND MEN IN MEDIA COVERAGE OF NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS

Close to the notion of gender equality is gender balance meaning “an equitable distribution of life’s opportunities and resources between women and men, and/or the equal representation of women and men” (OECD, 2017, p. 60).

WACC General Secretary Ph. Lee emphasizes the need to study gender issues in the world media:

Studying how women and men are represented in the news is important because often what people see is what they believe. And when it comes to gender, rectifying the mistaken assumptions caused by discrimination, misogyny, and patriarchal beliefs can only be done through a clear-sighted reappraisal and revision of news policies and practices (Global Media Monitoring Project 2020–2021 Final Report, p. 2).

It is on the principles of gender balance in journalistic materials, the inadmissibility of discrimination and sexism that democratic mass media around the world should work. But behind the results of the latest Global Media Monitoring Project (2021), based on the News Media Gender Equality Index, despite some progress on some indicators, the “invisibility” of women as subjects and sources in the news still remains the norm. The result of women’s underrepresentation is an unbalanced picture of the world in which women are largely absent. A monitoring study found a lack of female voices in news journalism, resulting in content that reflects a male-focused worldview.

In Ukraine, one of the solid studies on gender balance in media during wartime was the monitoring of media coverage of issues related to gender equality and the distribution of materials of stereotypical or discriminatory nature carried out in accordance with the action plan of the Concept of Communication in the field of gender equality at the initiative of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine (MCIP, 2024). Its goal was to find out the regularities of the media’s attention to issues of gender equality and to find ways to solve the problem of the spread of stereotypical or discriminatory materials in the conditions of war in Ukraine, which involved solving many specific problems including:

- to assess gender equality in media publications by finding out how the sexes (men and women) and social roles (gender) are represented in the media; establish whether there is an even distribution and highlight areas for improvement;
- to find out the regularities of giving the floor to women as spokespersons in the media, to document the frequency of their appearance and the contexts in which women are given a



platform to express their views and participate in discussions (studying the roles of women in the material – decision-makers, experts, eyewitnesses, opinion leaders, etc).

This research has unique factual material, and according to chairman of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Freedom of Speech Yurchyshyn, serves as a significant indicator for both Ukrainian and Western media representatives, illustrating the progress Ukraine has made in addressing gender balance and its presence in the information field (Women in Media, 2024a).

For the study, a sample of 30 online media was formed, where the most visited editions were chosen with varying degrees of compliance with professional standards of journalism, political affiliation of the editorial office, target audience, subject and locality. As a result, the following online media were included in the sample: *Ukrainska Pravda*, *Radio Svoboda*, *LB.ua*, *RBC-Ukraine*, *Ukrainian National News*, *Gazeta.ua*, *Correspondent*, *Hubs*, *Politeka*, etc. From about 500,000 messages in online resources, 2,000 publications were randomly selected, and from about 100,000 in the National telemarathon *Yedyni novyny* – 1,000 messages. Therefore, the sampling error does not exceed 2.5% for the total array.

To the proportion of women/men in the news appearing as spokespersons or experts seen, heard or read about and/or interviewed/quoted as sources of information/opinion in news and current affairs content – male spokespersons dominated most of the thematic areas and discussion topics (Table 1).

**Table 1 – Proportions of male and female spokespersons in Ukrainian media in 2024**

Thematic area	Male spokesperson	Female spokesperson
War	93%	7%
Foreign policy	86%	14%
Events abroad	83%	17%
Social and humanitarian policy	84%	16%
Economy	79%	21%
Law and order	82%	18%
Domestic policy	81%	19%
Culture	72%	28%
Sports	91%	9%
Science and technology	100%	0%
Other	46%	64%
Average presence rate	81%	19%

**Source: compiled by the author based on monitoring data (MCIP, 2024)**

The high rate of male spokespersons on the topic "War" is determined by the fact that the main commentators in this area are men, such as the President of Ukraine V. Zelenskyi, commanders-in-chief, etc. However, women more often than men commented on the "Other" category (mainly news of show business and weather forecasts). The quite high rate of female spokespersons in the topic "Economy" is because the heads of the Ministry of Economy in Ukraine and the Ministry of Finance in the USA, as well as the director of the IMF, are women. But women are completely invisible (0%) in news about science and technology and almost invisible (7%) in news about war.

The most noticeable dominance of men in the category of high-ranking officials (more than 90%) is due to the fact that they are the ones who mostly hold management positions in Ukraine, such as the President, Prime Minister, ministers. Male politicians account for the majority of quoted spokespersons on political topics: foreign, domestic, social and humanitarian policies. The low number of women among keynote spokespersons can probably be considered a direct consequence of the overall low level of representation of women in government.

The proportion of male (80%) and female (20%) experts is also not in favor of women. Most often women appear as witnesses of events (63.64%) and spontaneous heroines of stories (41.67%). Although among the spokespersons of stereotypically "female" topics ("Culture", "Social and humanitarian policy"), there are more women than stereotypically "male" ones, but men dominate the Ukrainian media regardless of the thematic areas. Social and humanitarian policies are commented on much more often male high-ranking officials. At the same time, the rate of female opinion leaders is twice as high as that of male opinion leaders. Men in the media are more often positioned as carriers of a certain social status, and not just random speakers.

Let's compare the monitoring results with other ones that show the latest data.

Regular monitoring of gender balance in media is carried out by several organizations, including the Institute of Mass Information. After eleven years of systematic monitoring of gender balance, IMI analysts state that the visibility of women in the media has always resonated with events in the country. The representation of women in the media grew every year until 2022, but the full-scale invasion set back the progress of the visibility of women as experts and heroines of materials in this field for several years. This is evidenced by the results of the latest monitoring (IMI, 2025a). The content research was conducted in January 2025 and covered 1,000 materials in 10 nationwide online media: *TSN, Ukrainska Pravda, Censor.Net, Obozrevatel, RBC-Ukraine, Korespondent.net, UNIAN, Channel 24, etc.*



The war has changed the agenda, the thematic diversity, and the experts pool of the mass media. Since the 2022, IMI experts fixed a decline in indicators of the presence of women in the media, and at the same time, the thematic content of the news feeds is changing significantly.

Analyzing the results of gender balance in Ukrainian online media, IMI traces a persistent trend of low representation of women as experts and heroines of publications. According to the results of IMI's annual monitoring, in 2025, women appeared as experts in 21% of materials, and as heroines in 16.5%. These are significantly lower figures than in 2021 (before the full-scale invasion), when female experts appeared in 30% of materials, and heroines in 22%.

According to IMI (2025a), women most often commented on International issues (38.8%). During the monitoring period, the majority of expert opinions were voiced by foreign female politicians who commented on topics related to support for Ukraine: international aid to Ukraine, the deployment of foreign peacekeepers in Ukraine, peace agreements, and the possibility of negotiations between Ukraine and the Russians, etc.

In addition to foreign female politicians, there were comments from the Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration – Minister of Justice O. Stefanishyna, who commented on topics related to the signing of the agreement with the US on minerals deals .and comments on Ukraine's EU membership negotiations.

As IMI analysts note, despite the fact that female experts most often comment on international issues, their presence in coverage of the Economics, Security, Military affairs, and Criminal chronicles remains marginally low.

On the topic of Economics, during the monitoring period, the media most often published expert comments by the First Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine – Minister of Economy of Ukraine Yu. Svrydenko. There were occasional comments by the Minister of Social Policy, Oksana Zholnovych, on the allocation of subsidies for Ukrainians, comments by realtors on the Ukrainian real estate market, and business representatives.

In third place in terms of the number of mentions of women as experts was the topic of Health (6.8%). Most often, these were comments about healthy eating and recommendations on how to avoid vitamin deficiency in the winter.

Another 5.8% of materials that mentioned a woman as an expert were about the weather, 4.9% of materials were about criminal chronicles.

As Mashkova notes:

After the full-scale invasion, we began to record that the level of presence of women as experts decreased by several per cent... Male military officers, officials and their comments pushed women out of the public space. It is clear that this is due to active hostilities and the relevance of the topic, but there are also women in the military who can comment and bring their experience and expertise to bear (IMI, 2024).

The presence of women as heroines in online media is 16.5% (men – 84.5%). During the monitoring period, women were most often mentioned in stories about show business (31.5% of all materials with heroines), criminal chronicles (24.8%), society (10.7%), international issues (9.4%), war (6%).

In materials about show business, mentions of Ukrainian and foreign celebrities most often appeared. Mentions of women as heroines in crime stories occurred in every fourth article. Most often, women in such stories were depicted as victims of road accidents or fraudulent actions or domestic or sexual violence.

Women as heroines were also featured in some stories about sports, education and human rights.

Mentions of women as heroines in criminal stories occurred in every fourth article (24.8%). Most often, women in such articles were depicted as victims of road accidents, victims of fraudulent actions, victims of domestic or sexual violence. There were also cases when women broke the law: they collaborated with the occupiers, set fire to cars ordered by the Russians, or abused children.

During the three years of the full-scale invasion, analysts of IMI (2025a) recorded a significant decrease in the presence of women in the media. This is due to intensive coverage of hostilities, Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, as well as an increase in the number of news reports about international support for Ukraine. Most of these news reports are accompanied by comments by men – Ukrainian and foreign politicians, military personnel and representatives of international organizations.

Women were the heroines of publications about war and its consequences in only 6% of materials. Most often, these were women who were injured or died as a result of shelling by the Russian military of Ukrainian territories. Separate mentions also concerned women as relatives or close military personnel.

IMI (2025a) also recorded that due to the full-scale invasion, the number of mentions of servicemen in the Ukrainian media has decreased. The latest results of the IMI study indicate that the percentage of women as heroines and experts is only 3%, in contrast to male servicemen, who have 97% of mentions in the media. For example, even before the full-scale invasion, this figure was also negligible, but higher than now, and amounted to 5% of materials where there were mentions of female servicemen.

Stories about female soldiers, doctors, drone operators, officers, machine gunners, snipers and veterans are rare and the exception rather than the rule. TSN has the highest rate of presence of heroines

(47%), but a high percentage of women's visibility does not always equate to information value (the stories mostly concern women in show business and have signs of sexism).

Also, according to the results of the IMI study, about half of the national media (24 out of 50) continue to use hate speech, discriminatory messages or stereotypical statements about women. According to IMI analysts, the editorial boards most often mentioned women in sexualized descriptions, emphasized age, clothing and appearance, or reproduced the stereotypical image of "housewives".

Among the positive changes, IMI (2025a) noted that Ukrainian media continue to systematically use feminine noun forms. In 2025, only four out of ten analyzed publications reported isolated cases of the absence of feminine noun forms.

The same challenges of gender balance are faced by local media as national media. However, the data of regional media monitoring show a different picture both in terms of the quantitative ratio (proportions of women and men in stories) and their ratio differentiated according to thematic areas.

IMI (2025b) analysed 4,750 publications (50 first publications in each media) in February 2025 in 95 regional online media in 19 regions of Ukraine. The monitoring included news publications from news feeds of online media. Analytics / articles / interviews, journalistic investigations, commercial / political jeans presented not in the form of news, author's columns / blogs, announcements were not analysed.

The monitoring methodology involved an analysis of the number of male and female experts, heroines/heroes in the news, as well as their thematic distribution in regional news. The news topics covered the following categories: War (combat operations), Social consequences, Politics, Economics, Criminal news/Emergencies, Health/Medicine, Social topics (vulnerable categories of the population, IDPs, minorities, people with disabilities, etc.), Culture, Sports, International news, other.

The number of female experts in the news of regional online media in 2024 was 27%, which indicates a gradual recovery of their representation compared to the times before the full-scale Russian invasion (28%). Female experts most often comment on the social consequences of the war (18%), general social issues (16%) and medical topics (13%).

In contrast, men remain the dominant voices in the expert community, providing 73% of expert commentary, with the majority of their speeches relating to the war and its social consequences. This indicates that the strategic, military and political aspects of the war continue to be covered predominantly by men.

Regarding the representation of women as heroines in the news, their share is 26%, while male heroes appear in 74% of cases. Compared to 2024, the number of female experts in regional news has

increased by 4%, while female heroines have only increased by 1%. This indicates a slower recovery of the visibility of women as active participants in events during the war period.

Female experts are gradually returning to the level of representation in the media that existed before the full-scale invasion, while the visibility of women as heroines is increasing much more slowly. According to IMI (2025b), this may be related to gender stereotypes in the coverage of the war and its consequences.

Social issues, Consequences of the war, and Medicine remain the main topics in which female experts are actively represented (together, 47% of the total number of mentions of female experts). Women experts were also mentioned in cultural and social topics – 11% of mentions respectively. At the same time, in criminal news, the share of comments by women as experts has significantly decreased – from 15% last year to 8% this year. This may indicate a change in editorial priorities or a decrease in the number of women commentators in the law enforcement sector.

IMI research (2025b) shows that women experts are almost absent from the coverage of key strategic topics such as the Economics, War or Politics. In particular, in the materials on economic topics, only 7% of all expert comments were made by female experts. In war, politics and international news, women provided 4% of the total number of expert comments each. These figures show an extremely pronounced gender asymmetry in the information field, especially in topics that are of strategic importance for public discourse and decision-making.

It is worth noting that in 2024, the total number of mentions of women as experts on the war and its social consequences was 23% of the total number of mentions of experts in the regional news, which is only 1% less than in 2025. At the same time, the total number of male experts on the war and its social consequences in 2024 was 51% of the total number of expert mentions in the regional news. In 2025, this figure decreased by 5% to 46%, which may indicate a gradual change in expert discourse, including the involvement of a wider range of speakers (IMI, 2025b).

The lowest number of mentions of women as experts was in Sports (1% of the total number of mentions of women experts in the news). Sports topics generally occupy a small share in regional online media, which may partially explain the low representation of women in this segment.

The IMI monitoring study also assessed the balance of mentions of women and men in the media as heroines and heroes of materials.

In 2025, the number of mentions of female heroines increased by 1%, reaching 26%. Accordingly, male heroes remain significantly more represented – 74% of mentions. This indicates a slow dynamics of changes in the gender balance, where men still dominate the narrative of heroism.

According to the monitoring results, as in the previous year, women were most often featured in regional news as heroines in criminal chronicles and emergency news (36% of the total number of heroines in the regional news).

The topic of the social consequences of war accounted for every fifth mention of a female heroine, while the number of mentions of female heroines in the topic of war (combat operations) did not exceed 7%. At the same time, male heroes had 21% of mentions in the topic of social consequences of war and 15% of mentions in the topic of war (combat actions). It is worth noting that the total number of mentions of women in these two topics increased from 23 to 27% over the year, while the number of mentions of male heroes in these topics increased by 2%, to 36% of mentions. This indicates a significant gender gap in the coverage of military participation, where women are still rarely represented as direct combatants.

One of the important achievements of 2025 was that the study did not record any cases of sexism in regional news. This is evidenced by the results of the monitoring of 227 Ukrainian media, conducted in January 2025 by the Volyn Press Club (VPC, 2025) in partnership with other media organizations. After analysing 20,230 materials, the experts calculated the media gender sensitivity index, based on a balance of women and men as experts and heroes/heroines, and the number of feminine forms in media content.

These results are different from national media monitoring data. In particular, according to regional online media monitoring data, the number of female experts at the beginning of the year is 29% of all materials.

By regions, women most often commented on topics related to Social policy (44%), Culture & Religion (42%), Medicine & Health care (40%). Women also expressed an expert opinion on Education & Science (39%), Charity & Volunteering (37%), Criminal chronicles (29%), Ecology (28%), Economics & Business (24%).

Female expert opinion was heard the least in stories about War and Politics (21% each), Leisure (17%) and Sports (13%).

As heroines, women most often appeared in materials about Culture & Religion (16%), Sport (14%), Charity & Volunteering (13%), Medicine & Health care and Social policy (11% each). They were least represented in materials about War (9%), Politics (7%), and Ecology (4%).

Therefore, the last monitoring studies showed different results of gender balance in national and regional media. Thus, according to the research, in the first quarter of 2025, in national media, women were experts in 21% of all materials, in regional media – in 27-29%. The results regarding the number of heroines in the materials also differ: 16.5% of national media and 26% of hyperlocal media wrote about women. Monitoring data allows us to calculate average presence rate of men and women in Ukrainian online media: as experts this proportion is 74 % : 26 %, as heroes/-ines – 77 % : 23 % (Table 2).

**Table 2: Proportions of men and women presented in content of Ukrainian online media in January, 2025**

Presence in media content	National media <sup>1</sup>		Regional media <sup>2</sup>		Regional media <sup>3</sup>		Average presence rate	
	male	female	male	female	male	female	male	female
experts	79%	21%	73%	27%	71%	29%	74%	26%
heroes/-ines	83.5%	16.5%	74%	26%	74%	26%	77%	23%

**Source: compiled by the author based on monitoring data (IMI, 2025a)<sup>1</sup>, (IMI, 2025b)<sup>2</sup>, (VPC, 2025)<sup>3</sup>**

According to VPC (2025), the dominant topic in all media remains war, which is 35% of all materials. War remains a “male” topic: experts (those who are quoted, referred to) are men in 75% of cases, and heroes (those who are mentioned) are men in 84% of cases.

Despite some differences in the monitoring methodologies and selection of various thematic arrays, the results of all studies demonstrate the insufficient visibility of women in materials about war.

### 3.2 GENDER REPRESENTATION, STEREOTYPES AND DISCRIMINATION IN MATERIALS ABOUT WAR

The media have a special responsibility to promote equality between women and men, and therefore the media can play a positive role in combating the spread of gender stereotypes (MCIP, 2023, p. 41).

As stated in the Gender Equality Strategy (Council of Europe, 2024):

Gender stereotypes are preconceived social and cultural patterns or ideas whereby women and men are assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their sex. Gender stereotyping presents a serious obstacle to the achievement of real gender equality and feeds into gender-based discrimination.

Men’s gender roles revolve around characteristics such as dominance, assertiveness, and strength. Traditionally, men’s gender roles include leader, protector, and breadwinner. Women’s gender roles revolve around characteristics such as passivity, kindness and helpfulness. Women are seen as homemakers, caregivers, and helpers.

Hofstede (1984) believes that masculine cultures expect men to be assertive, ambitious and competitive, to strive for material success, and to respect whatever is big, strong, and fast and expect women to serve and care for the non-material quality of life, for children and for the weak people.

According to the monitoring results, Ukrainian media continue to use stereotypes about women as mothers/relatives and men as warriors. The portrayal of refugees and internally displaced persons fleeing war also reinforces established stereotypes about women, children and older people. Such a simplistic



perception of reality creates problems that people who do not fit social roles face during wartime. For example, women serving in the military are potentially vulnerable not only to the traumatic combat experience but also to the humiliating (or unjustifiably condescending) treatment by other servicemen, based on classic prejudices against women ("the army is not a woman's business").

On the other hand, there is a widespread representation of men as very strong people boldly accepting new challenges, misses the situation when some men, on the contrary, may face psychological difficulties but do not dare to speak about them openly, which worsens their mental health and does not allow them to find ways to solve existing problems and to engage in new practices or initiatives that would make it possible to feel useful to society. The deepening of the dividing line based on gender has negative consequences for the unity of society and the country's defense capability.

According to experts of National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council of Ukraine (NTRBCU, 2023, Oct.), since the topic of full-scale war is still fairly new to the media research community, certain aspects of it are still under development. In 2023, the methodology for monitoring gender issues in the media was updated (NTRBCU, 2023, Nov.), including, in particular, the war context. It was developed to analyse the observance of gender balance by television and radio organizations, but most of the recommendations apply to other media as well. Tamara Martsenyuk as principal author of methodology and guidelines (NTRBCU, 2023, Oct./ Nov.), described the gender roles of men and women in the media during the war.

For instance, the image of a military hero, a male warrior, a soldier, is often a form of idealized masculinity. The idea that men take life while women give it is key in understanding gender differences, especially in cultures where military myths play a significant role in the formation of national identity. As well as the belief that military structures are a kind of mobility channel for boys who want to become real men. During training "the cult of masculinity" is brought up, involving the assimilation of rules for the manifestation of aggression, obedience, and legitimizes violence (NTRBCU, 2023, Oct.).

In contrast to the image of a male warrior and defender, society formed another gender-stereotypical image – a cowardly man. He does not fight but retreats, runs away, hides, lies, avoids, pretends, keeps silence. Such a man does everything for his safety and to suit personal interests, and not for the sake of state and public purposes.

In Ukraine, a great discussion has unfolded around the topic of male emigrants. The vision of courage and masculinity goes beyond holding a weapon. In this way, the opinion is formed that it is important to be here and now, to share the collective trauma of the war, and those who left are removed from the imaginary party, become "unworthy" men.

No less challenging for the media is the portrayal of men whose wives are at war. Men who did not go to fight, but stayed at home perform care work, may be subjected to gender-stereotyped judgments: a man may be shamed for his participation in raising a child, performing civilian service instead of military service, which is traditionally considered a “man’s” job (NTRBCU, 2023, Oct.).

Monitoring data show that the issue of the presence of women in the army is generally in the information shadow. However, it cannot be said that this topic is completely secondary – on the contrary, its actualization is facilitated by a full-scale war and the realization that women side by side with men defend the homeland, and therefore need no less attention to their problems. The low visibility of women in the military is a serious problem for the Ukrainian media field (MCIP, 2023).

Although according to the official data of the Ministry of Defense, in 2023 more than 62,000 women were serving in the Ukrainian Armed Forces, among them 43,400 are military personnel, their visibility in the national media remains insufficient. In materials where women appear as heroines of materials about the war, they are relatives of male soldiers or victims of shelling. Stories about servicewomen, female soldiers, officers, medics, snipers, veterans, etc. are few and the exception rather than the rule (IMI, 2024).

In local media, women were most often written about as volunteers, relatives of fallen soldiers and politicians, and about men primarily as soldiers, as well as volunteers and politicians.

As a result of the militarization of society, women as professionals and leaders are disappearing from the columns of the Ukrainian media. As Bukshina (2023) notes, the Ukrainian media present the male face of war more often than the female one. The news is not only information from the battlefield, it is also coverage of the topics of humanitarian aid and public diplomacy. However, women are made “invisible” in such topics. In matters of negotiations and international advocacy, messages from and about women are lost in the information field, as a result, society has nothing to form an opinion about the strength and scope of women’s leadership in this field. The expert notes that, in general, there are very few stories about women leaders in the media. In most stories, they appear as victims.

Women more often than men appear as victims and eyewitnesses of events. In some ways, this contributes to the representation of women in the media space as disadvantaged people – generally weaker and more vulnerable to the everyday hardships associated with war. At the same time, it is considered socially less desirable for a man to complain about problems in the media; the image of a defender who bravely repels enemy attacks, despite fear, and frees his homeland from the occupiers, as well as personally protects his relatives and homes from violence, murder, torture, robbery is more traditional (MCIP, 2023, p. 68).

According to Zakharchenko (Detektor media, 2024), journalists are still guided by the gender stereotype that women are more emotional: "Where there is a need for some kind of expert opinion or position, preference is given to men. And when eyewitnesses to events, such as shelling, problems related to war, are needed, women are more often given the floor".

This trend is visible not only in the Ukrainian but also in the world media. The representation of war in the media shows men as active subjects, while women are assigned a subordinate role, emphasizing their vulnerability and identification with traditional roles. In the visual narrative placed on the front pages of the world press about the war in Ukraine, women have a high presence but appear as secondary and silent characters, fixed in the roles of victims, people who need to be protected (Iraola & Peña-Fernández, 2023).

Ellner (2022), examining gender stereotypes in media coverage of the war in Ukraine, considers, that a binary picture painted by the current media narrative of traditional gender roles where women do the caring, and men do the protecting, fails to capture the diverse life experiences of Ukrainian women in relative peace and war. When we look beyond stereotypes, we see that the agency of Ukrainian women in the face of extreme challenges and traumatic events is diverse and abundant. Portraying women as helpless victims reduces them to passive recipients, and undermines their dignity.

However, Ukrainian women do not want to be victims; despite the problems with sexism and discrimination women are building their agency, taking an active part in social and political events, in the defense of Ukraine. Phillips & Martsenyuk (2023, p. 4) emphasize:

As autonomous agents, women in Ukraine are carving out new roles for themselves in a society at war. It is crucial to consider how women in Ukraine (and those living abroad as war refugees) are asserting their rights in all spheres of life as they take up new agentic roles and expand the repertoire of roles, duties, rights and responsibilities accrued to women in Ukrainian society.

With the increase in the number of servicewomen in the Armed Forces of Ukraine after the full-scale Russian invasion, the discourse on women's participation in the war intensified in the Ukrainian infospace. In addition to the traditional narrative about the image of a man-warrior, mentions of women serving in the Armed Forces have become more frequent (NTRBCU, 2023, Oct.).

The new methodology for gender monitoring describes two main approaches to defining gender roles: traditional (patriarchal) and egalitarian (emancipatory). Such approaches are views of what the unique roles of men and women should be on a continuum where the traditional and egalitarian approaches are extreme opposites. A patriarchal approach to gender roles creates a clear division between male and

female roles, which are often opposed. The main features of femininity are attachment to reproductive and caring work, which involves being in a private space, “natural” skills of emotional management and external beauty. The defining features of masculinity are the opposite: dominance in the public space, where power is concentrated, emotional restraint and severity, and less strict standards of beauty compared to women (NTRBCU, 2023, Nov.).

In a broader sense, masculinity is characterized by active and creative characteristics (activity, aggressiveness, dominance, independence, self-confidence, logical thinking), and femininity – by expressive characteristics (dependence, timidity, sentimentality, low self-esteem, caring).

In terms of a patriarchal approach, the army, as an extremely masculine world characterized by discipline, strictness and order, is incompatible with female emotionality. The only condition under which the patriarchal approach tolerates and allows “emotional women” into a “male environment” is that they use emotional management to improve that environment. Another sign of femininity that is strictly controlled and regulated from a patriarchal point of view is a well-kept female body that fits into social standards of beauty. Physical appearance is the one of main attributes of femininity. In the workplace, the contribution of women as employees is often leveled instead they are seen as “an ornament to the collective”.

According to the egalitarian approach, positions of power and decision-making opportunities are more evenly distributed between women and men. Women are not assigned only private space and domestic responsibilities, which gives them agency and enables them to enter the public space that traditionally belonged to men. This contributes to a more balanced representation of both genders in various spheres of social life, including those that the patriarchal discourse considers “masculine”. It also assumes that individuals are evaluated and rewarded solely by their abilities and performance regardless of gender. Women’s participation in the military is not exoticized or heroized, but considered and valued on an equal footing with men (NTRBCU, 2023, Nov.).

The characteristics and features of gender roles of military women are given in Table 3.

**Table 3: Gender roles of military women**

Gender Role	Characteristics	Features
<i>Patriarchal approach</i>		
Heroine	heroization and romanticization	the very presence of a woman as a "weaker gender" in a masculine environment is considered a special feat, therefore special criteria different from men's are used to evaluate her activities and achievements;
	exoticization	female military personnel are not in their place in a "male environment", so their presence is seen as an atypical scenario;
	benevolent sexism	even in the same conditions of danger, women need special protection from men
Caring helper	supporting role	women's role is seen as complementary and auxiliary, regardless of the type of their activity;
	responsibility for reproductive work responsibility for emotional work	women are assigned caring work, so even when on the front lines, they are responsible for creating comfort; in addition to physical comfort, women are charged with the responsibility of creating an emotionally comfortable and supportive environment
Ornament to the society	supporting role	woman does not fight directly, but creates favorable conditions for those who are in place;
	ornament to the armed forces	the presence and attractive appearance of a woman is to inspire male defenders, femininity is mentioned and emphasized as the main feature
<i>Egalitarian approach</i>		
Woman warrior	equality	a woman who fulfills her professional duties on an equal footing with others regardless of gender; her contribution is considered and evaluated solely for effectiveness according to criteria common to all;
	professionalism	a woman who does her job together with the men competes with them on an equal footing; along with professional technical skills, she is characterized by professionalism in an emotional context: she is strong, courageous, does not show sentimentality and emotionality
Revolutionary	agency	a woman whose activity is innovative and transformative;
	visibility	a woman is a recognizable person;
	leadership	a woman who leads others by her example and action

**Source: compiled by the author using methodology for gender monitoring (NTRBCU, 2023, Nov.)**

In terms of a patriarchal approach, the main characteristics of women's gender roles are heroization, romanticization, exoticization, benevolent sexism, supporting roles, responsibility for reproductive and emotional work. According to the egalitarian approach, the main characteristics of women's gender roles are equality, professionalism, agency, visibility and leadership.

We strongly agree with researchers, who believe that although wars are generally perceived as strengthening militarized masculinity, the defense of Ukraine against the Russian invasion causes "a

completely different emancipatory effect, which entails a fundamental redefinition of masculinity and femininity” (Kratochvil & O’Sullivan, 2023, p. 356). The redefinition of femininity is shaped by the embodied experiences of resistance to the Russian invasion, which bring together gendered discourses, practices, and corporeality. Ukrainian women have managed to change gender stereotypes in society.

BBC (2023) conducted a special research, which provides a comprehensive understanding of how women are being affected by the war and how traditional gender roles are being affected by conflict. Researchers used a mix of traditional methodologies (nationally representative survey, focus groups, interviews with women and men) and then brought these findings with large-scale content analysis of the digital space in Ukraine using artificial intelligence. This study found, that women and men generally support women participating in the war, but more conservative gender attitudes are evident – for example, women are still seen by some as ‘berehynia’, or guardians of the ‘home hearth’, but men are ‘elevated’ – especially in the media – as defenders and heroes.

Based on the results, the experts made some recommendations, among which it is important to cite the following:

- the disruption of gender roles and the strong sense of national unity could be leveraged for a positive impact on gender equality. Showcasing women contributing to the war effort in roles traditionally dominated by men, and demonstrating leadership, resourcefulness and decision-making, can help counter narratives which risk entrenching gender stereotypes.
- media and communication have a key role in ensuring an equal and balanced picture, by showcasing the issues and challenges faced by women, and the contributions of both men and women to the war effort. Media should ensure gender balance in content and output, and avoid stereotypes and norms (BBC, 2023).

The last recommendation (to ensure gender balance in content and products, and avoid stereotypes), in one form or another, is made by the vast majority of experts studying the situation in the Ukrainian media and ways to improve it.

Director of the Institute of Constructive Journalism and New Media Bukshyna (2023), emphasizing that Ukraine’s experience is unique, no one has ever had a war on the informational and military fronts at the same time, recommends that the media:

- highlight female leadership, invite more female experts and representatives of civil society, tell more stories about organizations created by women to solve issues related to war, show that despite stereotypes imposed on society, women are capable of strategic thinking, analysis, and decision-making;



- remember and emphasize that not only “our men” but also “our women” fight against the enemy, and when talking about female defenders, it is important to highlight not only personal stories and exploits, but also to emphasize their professionalism;
- maintain gender balance;
- avoid generalizations and stigmatization, proportionally reflect the burden and dangers for women during the war and after victory, draw attention to the different roles of women and their problems in different situations.

Given the current situation, many public non-governmental organizations developed recommendations to improve gender balance in Ukrainian media.

NGO Women in Media presented the “Gender Equality Policy in the Media Content”, developed with the support of the OSCE and recommended by the Commission on Journalistic Ethics (OSCE, 2024). The State Strategy for Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men until 2030 requires ensuring media coverage of information in a gender-sensitive manner. Editorial boards are suggested to adopt this policy and strictly adhere to it. In particular, in the representation of women and men in the content, it’s recommended:

- ensure that both men and women are mentioned equally in news and current affairs;
- track how many men and women were mentioned in materials and how they are distributed according to various characteristics, such as affiliation with a national community, disability, gender identity, etc.;
- promote a positive image of women as active participants in social, sporting, economic and political life;
- support women’s meaningful participation in the materials as experts: give them a voice, instead of talking about women in indirect language or mentioning them only in passing;
- track and measure the percentage of stories in media focused on women and/or gender-based violence, as well as the percentage of time or space devoted to stories where women are the sources of information or views;
- maintain a balanced representation of women and men by inviting experts and specialists from those topics in which women are unfairly underrepresented, in particular in military affairs, army, politics, economics, finance, etc., and not only in education, the social sphere, culture and art;
- apply the principles of gender equality for different types of editorial content;
- ensure gender equality in materials on all spheres;

- avoid inappropriate comments about the appearance of women and men.
- not to promote stereotypical images of femininity/womanliness and masculinity/manliness that impose ideas about certain mandatory types of behavior, personal qualities, or external characteristics are mandatory for a person of a particular gender.
- select visualizations for materials to be consistent with gender policy;
- not to emphasize on gender, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity, nationality or race, disability, social and marital status, unless this is an important, substantively determined component of the material;
- use gender statistics, i.e. statistics disaggregated by sex;
- use feminine forms, as this practice is important for increasing the visibility of women's social and political contribution (OSCE, 2024, p. 6-8).

At the national level, guidelines on media coverage of gender equality and prevention of violence, sexism, and gender stereotypes were approved by the Order of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine in June 2023. The guidelines have been developed to increase the level of society and the media's understanding of gender equality principles in content produced; to introduce gender-sensitive indicators that will influence the formation of a positive image of a woman leader devoid of established stereotypes; and to ensure that the media use common approaches and tools to create zero tolerance for violence, including gender-based violence (MCIP, 2023, p. 5).

In particular, the guidelines emphasize that gender equality provides for the equal presence, power, responsibility, and participation of both women and men in all spheres of public life, including the media. The media can both obstruct and accelerate structural changes aimed at achieving gender equality. This inequality becomes even more pronounced when it comes to the presence of women in media content, both in terms of quality and quantity. It is important to promote a positive image of women as active participants in social, economic, and political life. It is about meaningful participation of women as experts, which requires giving them the floor, instead of talking about women indirectly or mentioning them only in passing. Journalists should present information with a balanced representation of women and men, making efforts to find women experts in those areas where women are unfairly underrepresented, such as the military, army, politics, economics, etc., and not mainly in education, culture, and the arts (MCIP, 2023, p. 32). Also the media should avoid outdated stereotypical images of women.

Moreover, in 2024 the "Gender Equality in Ukrainian Media" coalition was created, which unites public organizations, independent media and state bodies in cross-thematic cooperation. Its purpose is to foster dialogue and coordination in promoting gender equality and inclusivity in Ukrainian media,

as well as to strengthen gender mainstreaming as a principle of good governance (Women in Media, 2024b). The members of the coalition emphasize that the media have a huge potential for making social changes, in particular in the process of rebuilding Ukraine; media are not just a mirror of society, they are capable of changing society and public consciousness thanks to the distribution of gender-sensitive, non-stereotypical and inclusive content.

According Orgeret & Mutsvairo (2023), it is important to remember that, gender both shapes and is shaped by media content.

Despite the existing imbalance, we note the positive changes regarding the destruction of gender stereotypes and transformation of gender roles in Ukrainian society, reflected in changing representations of women in modern media. We can state that a new woman role – a female citizen of Ukraine – appeared in the media. This is a complex image that integrates different incarnations: mother, wife, female worker, defender and others, but isn't reducible to each. It is not equal to the sum of stereotypes but is a new integrated image, the key element in the construction of which is national identity. A woman appears as a citizen of a democratic society, a conscious and active voice of national interests and national spirit, who along with men contributes to the common cause, expresses readiness and will to achieve the national goal (Author, 2023).

#### **4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The results of several independent monitoring studies show that indirect rather than direct gender discrimination is characteristic of Ukrainian media, and the media landscape is characterized by an indirect reflection of gender inequality already present in society, where gender roles are relatively rigid.

The research findings reveal that despite significant changes in society caused by the war, Ukrainian women are still underrepresented or misrepresented in stereotypical roles in media content. The empirical evidence indicates a gender imbalance in national and hyperlocal media in favour of men, who dominate the majority of thematic areas and topics, including war.

However, if in quantitative terms it's still too early to talk about progress in the representation of women in media content, in qualitative terms significant changes are noticeable. Positive changes in advancing a fair portrayal of women and men through the elimination of stereotypes and promotion of multidimensional representation and portrayal are fixed both by monitoring data and by analytical studies confirming the transformation of gender roles in Ukrainian society.

Women in Ukraine, in the very precise and concise formula of Phillips & Martsenyuk (2023), are carving out new roles for themselves in a society at war. And these trends are reflected and developed in modern media, which not only mirror the current situation but play a transformative role in promoting gender equality and overcoming gender stereotypes.

Overall, the monitoring results indicate the need for further work to ensure equal representation of women in the media space, as well as the importance of a consistent editorial policy on gender equality.

Further research should have a greater number of participants of different ages, from different faculties and universities and be conducted based on different languages to yield more generalizable results.

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