

International feminist solidarity with Ukraine for inclusive and just reconstruction

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The post-war future of Ukraine is one of the central topics of political debate at the national and international levels. Russia's war against Ukraine has not only forced millions of refugees and internally displaced persons to flee their homes, but has also severely affected Ukraine's economy and infrastructure, leading to a record annual drop in GDP, paralyzing industry and causing a sharp [rise in unemployment](#). In addition, the war has disproportionately affected the lives of women, who [make up more than 90% of refugees](#), along with the children and elderly [in their care](#).

Visions of how to rebuild the country vary in scope and priorities, and often reflect the [conflicting interests](#) of stakeholders. Regardless of the strategic plans and narratives that will guide the country's recovery, it is clear that the costs will be borne by Ukrainian workers. At the same time, global pressure to further [liberalize the labor market](#) and reduce social programs to protect employment may lead to an even more vulnerable and precarious position for Ukrainian women in the labor market. The extent to which the concepts for rebuilding Ukraine reflect the interests of Ukrainian workers, including women, will depend on the extent to which they are included in the debate and to what extent their voices are heard and recognized.

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The Gender Expert Chamber of the Czech Republic, in cooperation with the Czech Academy of Sciences, organized a [panel discussion](#) on "Transnational Feminist Solidarity in Support of Ukraine's Reconstruction and Struggle". Among the invited guests were Ukrainian sociologist and political activist Oksana Dutchak, researcher and activist of the International Women's League for Peace and Freedom Nina Potarska, journalist and editor-in-chief of Voxpot Vojtěch Boháč, and Eva Čech Valentová, representative of the Czech Association for Integration and Migration. The discussion, moderated by Míla O'Sullivan from the Institute of International Affairs, allowed us to hear about the struggles and visions of post-war reconstruction from the mouths of representatives of Ukrainian civil society.

The issue of transnational solidarity is particularly relevant given that international reactions to Russian aggression, particularly from Western leftist circles, are not always based on a deep understanding of the struggles waged by feminist groups and workers in Ukraine. In March 2022, a number of Western feminists signed a manifesto condemning the support of Ukraine with military equipment and calling for immediate demilitarization as a way to achieve peace and security in the region. This misunderstanding of the historical circumstances and the current situation was highlighted in a response initiated by Ukrainian feminists entitled "[The Right to Resist: A Feminist Manifesto](#)." The authors, including the panelist Oksana Dutchak, condemned the ignorance of those who engage in "abstract geopolitical analysis" and do not recognize Ukraine's right to resist

imperialist aggression and “the right of women to independently determine their needs, political goals and strategies for achieving them.”

As part of the panel discussion, Oksana Dutchak voiced a number of issues that have become particularly relevant during the war and require a joint response from both the Ukrainian and Western left. Firstly, the large number of Ukrainian refugees in Europe and the barriers they face on the way to migration have once again raised the issue of European [border regimes](#). The current crisis has demonstrated double standards, racial discrimination and preferential treatment of certain groups of refugees. It has also highlighted the systemic barriers that Ukrainian refugees (most of whom are women with children) face when trying to integrate into European labor markets.

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In addition, the war requires the creation of a new, sustainable security system in the region, capable of guaranteeing peace and stability for the countries of Eastern Europe. Ukraine’s experience points to the vulnerability of neutral states and the urgent need to build an effective, stable and fair security system that would be able to protect against further imperialist aggression. Any criticism of NATO and similar structures should take into account the interests of small states for which such military-defense groups are vital. In addition to the creation and maintenance of effective security alliances, programs to accelerate global disarmament should be implemented, as well as the conclusion of multilateral and large-scale strategic arms reduction treaties.

Activists and experts in Ukraine have also made a strong case for [writing off the external debt](#). The economic crisis that Ukraine is facing due to the Russian invasion is taking place against the backdrop [of growing debt obligations](#), in particular to international financial organizations and institutions such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the European Commission (EC). As noted by the panelists, the enormous amount of external debt is a cause for concern. Moreover, even before the full-scale invasion began, it was obvious that Ukraine would not be able to manage its growing debt and at the same time fulfill IMF conditions. In this context, the [WB argued](#) that “good governance” is crucial for a state at war that continues to receive financial support through lending.

In other words, financial institutions [expect the state](#) to support a “successful market economy,” primarily by protecting private business and stabilizing macroeconomic parameters. The WB’s top priority is “addressing inflation and macrofinancial stability”, followed by “restoring the ability of private businesses to return to normal operations”. Thus, the most important aspects that remain unaddressed are [health care](#), care for [vulnerable groups](#), security and material needs of the Ukrainian people.

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The WB also argues that reconstruction plans can “provide an opportunity to rethink social services...the reconstruction of social service institutions should aim at a new model of care that is no longer predominantly institutional (e.g., orphanages, nursing homes, institutions for people with disabilities), but rather focuses on home and community-based care.” In other words, this approach is based on [shifting the responsibility](#) for social support and care to people and their families, which once again indicates that the social burden will be mostly borne by women.

Although this is a significant blow to the fight for gender equality in Ukraine, the precarious and vulnerable position of Ukrainian women in the labor market, in the informal economy, and in

fulfilling their social obligations [is not a new topic](#). As emphasized in the Right to Resist manifesto, "Ukrainian feminists have been fighting against systemic discrimination, patriarchy, racism, and capitalist exploitation long before today." As Nina Potarska of the International Women's League for Peace and Freedom noted during the discussion, the urgent need for humanitarian aid diverts attention and resources from efforts to ensure gender equality and protect social rights.

Forced to flee the war zone, and often to leave the country altogether, Ukrainian women have faced problems with access to housing, social infrastructure, stable income, medical services, and reproductive rights (especially when it comes to access to contraception and abortion). Many of them are at risk of forced sex trafficking. Problems with access to social services, including schools and kindergartens, have increased the burden on women, who often care not only for their children but also for disabled or elderly family and community members. These responsibilities also make it difficult for women to integrate into the labor market.

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Nina Potarska also drew attention to the situation of women in the occupied territories who are trapped between the need to survive in the conditions imposed by the occupation forces and potential accusations of collaboration by the Ukrainian authorities. This usually concerns teachers, doctors, and other female workers who are forced to look for survival strategies in a new and extremely threatening reality.

Eva Čech Valentova from the Czech Association for Integration and Migration spoke about the limited resources and heavy workload of non-governmental organizations working with migrants and refugees, whose "helplines have turned into hotlines. The large wave of refugees caught European countries, including the Czech Republic, completely unprepared to provide them with adequate housing, and revealed a lack of crisis management plans and weak organizational capacity. In this context, private households and their ability to organize themselves played a crucial role in accommodating refugees.

In addition, Czech migration policy poorly reflects the gender context of migration and remains, in the words of Eva Czech Valentova, "gender blind." This refers to reproductive rights and access to healthcare, combating gender-based violence, as well as the social and reproductive role of women as the sole caregivers of their children and other family members. At the same time, the inadequate addressing of these issues at the political and institutional levels complicates the processes of fair and sustainable integration of women in the labor market and in society in general. Currently, the Czech government's plans and proposals focus on the short-term and the most urgent material needs of refugees. They ignore the long-term needs for adequate social infrastructure that can support women and their children in the process of integration.

Finally, journalist Vojtech Bogach presented an important aspect of the role of women journalists in covering and documenting the consequences of the Russian invasion. Russian aggression, as well as wars in general, is often described as a hypermasculine demonstration of power, and the narrative of male courage and heroism dominates the stories documenting the war. Vojtech Bogach emphasized the crucial importance of covering stories that avoid these hypermasculine views and instead detail the sacrifices made by women who venture into dangerous and unpredictable journeys for the safety of their children. Women journalists have the opportunity to go beyond typical war reporting and become an important voice for truthful, sensitive and comprehensive coverage of such troubling times.

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