

Contemporary issues in upholding women's rights and gender Equality



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Abstract On a daily basis, individuals are confronted with a multitude of challenging circumstances, including unfair treatment, interpersonal conflicts, and acts of aggression. The issue of gender equality is particularly pertinent in the present era, as it is evident that all individuals should be afforded equal rights, the right to self-realisation and self-affirmation, and the right to protection. The objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive account of the issues and achievements pertaining to gender equality and the fulfilment of women's rights. The study employed a range of methodological approaches, including theoretical analysis, synthesis, and generalisation; empirical sociological survey and description; and generalisation. The theoretical framework is as follows: The study concentrates on the pivotal issues of the gender system, its evolution, and the realisation of women's rights in diverse global contexts, including Europe. The authors conducted an in-depth analysis of the core issues and accomplishments in this domain. The sociological survey thus revealed the attitudes of Ukrainians towards the phenomenon of gender equality and women's rights, their understanding of the characteristics of the concept, and the legislative basis for its development. The findings of the research demonstrate the necessity for the establishment of a unified global system of gender influence. This will ensure the efficacy of achieving equality between the sexes and facilitate daily life for other marginalised groups in a more expedient manner. The article illustrates that the mere adoption of a legislative framework and inclusion in various international programmes are insufficient for the effective addressing of the issue of gender equality. It is imperative that the general public is made aware of the significance of gender transformation. It is essential to motivate and prepare the population for these changes. Furthermore, the collection and processing of statistical information on gender issues must be more efficient.

Keywords: gender, gender policy, gender issue, gender equality, women's rights, marginalised groups

1. Introduction

The issue of gender equality has been one of the most acute and controversial for decades, and continues to be a topic of significant debate and contention. It remains a pertinent issue despite the existence of a multitude of other critical global concerns, including those pertaining to the environment, economics, food security, demographics, and poverty reduction, disarmament, and peace (Fouani & Grytsenko, 2021). In particular, representatives of the United Nations Agency for Sustainable Development Goals (UNDP) posit that the empowerment of women serves as a catalyst for the advancement of other areas of sustainable development. As the authors previously observed, the advancement of gender sensitivity and women's rights is a fundamental aspect of the United Nations Development Programme's mandate and a core tenet of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

With the backing of the Gender Equality Mark, numerous companies are now endeavouring to devise a model of gender equality and the objective empowerment of women that is both successful and sustainable. The Gender Equality Mark is a certification programme that was established in 2007 for public and private enterprises. It is currently operational in thirty countries across Europe, America, and Eastern Europe.

Historically, social structures have ascribed distinct roles, behavioural patterns, statuses, levels and even a hierarchy to men and women. As a result of their gender, individuals are expected to fulfil specific responsibilities, with women bearing a disproportionate burden in this regard. The Gender Museum (2009), which operates in Ukraine, found that the average woman spends 29 hours per week (approximately two months per year) on housework, 49 hours per week (three and a half months per year) with children, and approximately 6.5 hours per week (two weeks per year) on cooking. Nevertheless, scientific and technological advancement, coupled with the rapid evolution of technology and human space exploration, are propelling the world forward at an accelerating pace.



Consequently, women are still confronted with the same expectations as they were a thousand, five hundred, and ten years ago, but with the addition of new social roles and responsibilities. In the context of historical scholarship, the field of gender studies is relatively new, having only begun to flourish in earnest during the 1960s. As Topini (2014) observes, even in the relatively short history of gender studies, there have been significant periods of both advancement and setbacks.

Notable figures in the field of feminist theory and gender studies include Friedan B., Butler J., Millet K., Braidotti R., and others. The works of American authors such as Scott, Nigel, Morgan and Kelly undoubtedly prove invaluable to scholars engaged in the study of the feminist movement. The authors predominantly address the asymmetrical dynamics between women and men, contemplating the pervasive subordination of women, their acquiescence to perform invisible and secondary roles, and the devaluation of their contributions and accomplishments.

In her 2002 study, Estelle B. (Freedman, 2002) traces the origins of feminist narratives back to 1848. At that time, the inaugural meetings of proactive American women were held, and a distinctive document, the Convention on Women's Rights, was adopted.

Subsequently, the global scientific and political community has enshrined the functioning of numerous regulatory, legislative, and international documents, as well as programmes and projects. These include the UN Charter of 1945, which substantiated the principle of equality between men and women; the Beijing Declaration; and the UN Security Council Resolution "Women. Peace. Security." Moreover, the qualitative achievements of gender policy have been corroborated by the publication of numerous comprehensive works on women's rights. Nevertheless, there are numerous critical aspects that require further attention to achieve comprehensive gender equality.

In the contemporary era, gender concepts serve as a pivotal determinant of global development. Consequently, it is imperative to elucidate the objective of this study, which is to delineate the challenges and advancements pertaining to gender equality and the observance of women's rights. The objective of this research is:

1. To examine the issues pertaining to gender equality and women's rights, as well as the advancements made in this domain;
2. To conduct a sociological inquiry into the public perception of gender policy and women's rights in Ukraine;
3. To undertake a comprehensive examination of the functioning of the gender system at the global and Ukrainian levels;
4. To investigate the qualitative factors that have contributed to the successful attainment of gender equality and women's rights.

As posited by Bullough and Bullough (1995), the advancement of gender issues has a considerable impact on global political and economic phenomena. Furthermore, they impact the quality of life of various population groups who are persistently striving to secure their rights. In other words, feminology has established a foundation for addressing the issues faced by marginalised groups and analysing and representing their status. As previously stated, the scholars demonstrate the multiplicity and unevenness of men's and women's perspectives on the same phenomena, as well as the existence of disparate value systems. Similarities in opinion can also be observed in the works of other gender scholars, in particular Irigaray (1985), Downs (1993), and Rendall (2020). In this regard, it can be asserted that there is a particular democratic quality to the influences and mutual assistance of active participants in the pursuit of gender equality and the rights of different social classes. Some gender studies experts, in particular Pushkarova (2003), argue for the recognition of the "plurality of genders" and advocate for the protection of the rights of those who identify as such.

The campaign for women's rights and gender equality is once again gaining momentum. A multitude of organisations across Europe and the Americas are engaged in the protection of women's rights and the provision of expertise on the development of legislation pertaining to this domain. In the contemporary era, advancements towards gender equality and the resolution of gender-related issues are predominantly associated with the political sphere. To illustrate, Ditchuk (2023) offers an analysis of the work of the European Institute for Gender Equality. The Institute employs statistical analysis to determine the prevalence of women in various occupational roles and to calculate the Gender Equality Index. The Institute's findings indicate that the participation of women in national politics is a distinctive feature of the Nordic countries. This indicates a high level of comprehension regarding the necessity for gender equality and a willingness to address it (as evidenced by the cases of Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Germany). Furthermore, these countries have established the role of ombudspersons, whose function is to provide legal protection and monitor the implementation of gender equality legislation.

To illustrate, the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (FADA) operates as an autonomous coordination hub in Germany. The Centre receives inquiries from individuals who have experienced discriminatory practices. The Agency's activities include the analysis of research papers on discrimination against various social groups, the dissemination of information on discrimination and gender policy, the analysis of statistical data, and the submission of a report detailing discrimination situations to the Bundestag. The German civil status legislation has been amended to permit individuals to identify themselves as either male or female, or as belonging to the "diverse" category. As a result, Germany is one of only a few countries to have a legal framework for intersex people.

With regard to the European Institute for Gender Equality, it offers assistance to EU candidate countries with the objective of addressing gender equality and women's rights. In addition to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey, the list of countries includes Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

A significant document that delineates the tenets of gender policy development is the 2020-2025 Gender Equality Strategy, which was adopted by the European Commission in 2020. In particular, the Strategy for EU member states constitutes an action plan delineating efficacious methodologies for attaining equality and democracy. The strategy is based on a multi-faceted approach, encompassing not only the counteraction of gender-based violence and the challenge of gender stereotypes, but also the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation of children, the continuous collection of statistical information on gender issues, and the support of the development of the European Union's Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme. The programme has been in place since 2021.

It is important to note that for the EU member states, a Gender Equality Index has been defined, which allows for the measurement of the level of achievement of each country in approaching full gender equality between men and women. The index ranges from 0 to 100 points. As stated by Sheiele (2023), Director of the European Institute for Gender Equality, recent developments have demonstrated encouraging progress in this regard. In the view of Sheiele, Sweden represents the most effective solution to gender issues, with a score of 82.2 on the aforementioned index. Conversely, Hungary and Romania have the lowest scores in the European Union, with 57.3 and 56.1 points, respectively. The index encompasses the following areas: work, power, knowledge, time, health, and money.

It is evident that the issue of gender inequality is gradually being addressed in European countries. However, this is not the case in countries of Asia and the Pacific. Japan is one of the most developed countries in the world. The traditions that have been preserved for thousands of years are of great consequence to the progress of the economy, the development of politics, the advancement of science and the evolution of technology. Furthermore, they are fundamental to the maintenance of familial bonds, the care of the elderly, respect for the planet and all living things. These traditions have a detrimental impact on the pursuit of gender equality and women's rights. In other words, there is no effort being made to address the issue. The issue of gender inequality in Japan is one that is persistently overlooked and remains unresolved (Dalton, 2017). Such a gender policy has the potential to jeopardise Japan's relations with other democratic world powers.

It is notable that South Korea, China and Singapore demonstrate a greater degree of concern than Japan with regard to gender issues, the overcoming of stereotypes and the protection of women's rights. These countries are more inclined to align themselves with the European and American gender systems.

Dzhudi (2023) provides an analysis of the challenges encountered in France in the pursuit of enhanced gender policy. The author identifies the current period as one of crisis, in which the country is attempting to overcome barriers to equality and combat discrimination. This is attributed to the deterioration of the economy. It is also important to consider the role of the media, which, according to the author, presents information about vulnerable groups (women, LGBT people, and people with disabilities) in a veiled and stereotypical manner. Nevertheless, some media outlets have begun to broadcast content that openly analyses the behaviour of members of various marginalised groups, as evidenced by the series "Sex Education," which is available on Netflix.

2. Methods

The following methods were utilised during the course of the research:

1. Theoretical analysis, synthesis and generalisation were employed. These methods were used in order to engage with the research base and to examine the relevant literature sources and websites.
2. Empirical research was conducted through the utilisation of a sociological survey and descriptive analysis. These methods were employed for the purpose of analysing the sociological survey.
3. The generalisation method was utilised for the purpose of comparing the development of gender policy in Europe and Ukraine, with a view to identifying both achievements and challenges in this area.

A sociological survey was conducted among 50 randomly selected male (25) and female (25) respondents (aged between 40 and 55) from a Ukrainian city. The objective was to ascertain the level of awareness of gender policy and the importance of respecting women's rights among Ukrainian men and women. The rationale for selecting this specific age group of respondents is based on the findings of previous research, which indicates that adolescents and young people tend to possess a relatively high level of knowledge about their rights, freedoms, and opportunities. Additionally, they often demonstrate a democratic and humane attitude towards the opposite sex, freedom of choice, and a resistance to violence and other forms of external pressure. The respondents aged 40-55 are primarily equipped with the requisite professional and experiential background to comprehend the nuances of gender inequality.

With regard to the sample and the procedure employed, the total number of individuals invited to participate in the survey was 50 randomly selected respondents. The age range of respondents was 40–55 years. The questionnaire method was employed. The data were subjected to statistical analysis.

3. Results and discussion

The question regarding the content of the gender equality phenomenon did not present any significant challenges for the respondents. A total of 46 respondents confirmed their knowledge and indicated that they understood the phenomenon to entail equality in rights, opportunities, and self-realisation between men and women. With regard to the proposition that gender equality constitutes a driving force for the development of the country, 38 of the interviewees expressed significant reservations.

As evidenced by the findings of the social survey on gender issues (Figure 1), the majority of the interviewed women reported experiencing or engaging in discriminatory practices on a regular basis, both in their personal and professional lives (23 individuals). Such situations are less frequently observed by men (7 individuals). A preference for a superior of the same gender was expressed by 21 individuals, while the majority of women (24) indicated no preference regarding their superior's gender. It is noteworthy that 40 respondents view the pursuit of gender equality as a trivial and inconsequential matter. Nevertheless, 42 respondents expressed a desire to advance their careers.

It is regrettable that 46 respondents were unaware of any legal act, programme, or concept enshrined in Ukraine to help equalise gender inequality. Consequently, the vast majority of respondents believe that gender equality is unlikely to be achieved in the near future.

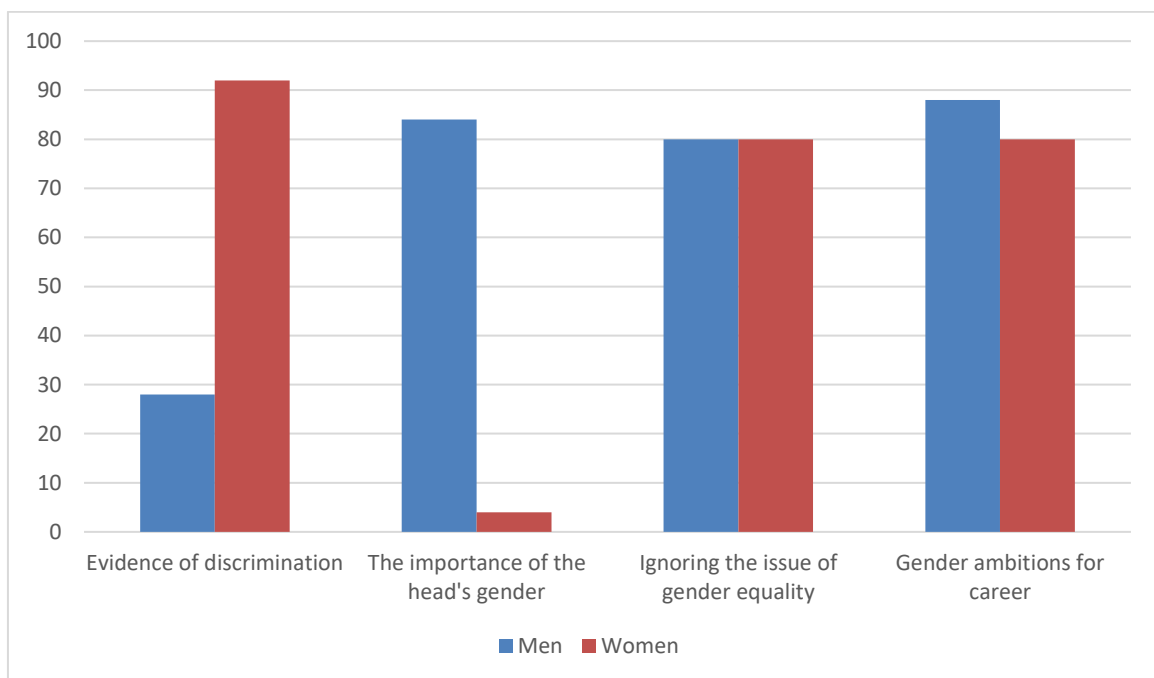


Figure 1 Results of Social Survey, %.

The final question of the survey is the subject of considerable debate and is arguably of little consequence. Nevertheless, 43 respondents, including men, adhere to the conviction that women enjoy a longer lifespan as a consequence of their more active and healthier lifestyle. They are engaged in a greater number of processes within both the professional and domestic spheres, and are continually occupied, both at home and at work. The responses to the final question demonstrate an understanding of the significance of women, their high level of activity, and their position and function within the family and society. Women are tasked with resolving issues that men in Ukraine are either unable or unwilling to address.

As evidenced by the comprehensive examination of the functioning of the gender system on a global scale and within Ukraine (Table 1), the fundamental tenets of gender policy in Ukraine are predicated upon global principles. These two approaches are mutually reinforcing in critical respects.

It is important to note that the generalised table on the functioning of the gender system globally and in Ukraine does not capture all the measures that work to ensure its effectiveness. It is important to acknowledge the significant progress that has been made towards achieving gender equality at the global, European and Ukrainian levels. It can be reasonably assumed that, in the long term, the issues currently hindering progress on this front will be resolved.

A review of the evolution of global gender policy indicates that Europeans will assume a pioneering role in this domain. It is evident that the Nordic countries have witnessed the dismantling of gender stereotypes and a consistent trajectory of advancement in the respect of women's rights, including their active participation in significant political arenas.

The results of the Ukrainian sociological survey indicated a lack of interest in the changes occurring in the surrounding world with regard to gender. Despite Europe's support for Ukraine in addressing gender issues and the existence of an effective



system of gender-related initiatives, the reason for the slow progress remains unclear. A comparable situation is evident in neighbouring Romania and Hungary (Zakharova et al., 2022).

Table 1 Overall analysis of the gender system functioning globally and in Ukraine.

The basis of gender policy worldwide	The foundation of gender policy in Ukraine
United Nations Agency for Sustainable Development Goals (UNDP)	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
Certification programme "Gender Equality Mark"	Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (ratified in Ukraine)
Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence	The Law of Ukraine "On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men"
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	Law of Ukraine "On Principles of Prevention and Combating Discrimination in Ukraine"
Anti-discrimination agencies (or services)	The Law of Ukraine "On Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence"
UN Security Council Resolution "Women. Peace. Security"	Introduction of gender quotas equal to 40%
European Women's Lobby	UN Security Council Resolution "Women. Peace. Security"
Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee of the European Parliament	National Social Service of Ukraine
European Women's Audiovisual Network	Public organisation "UPLAN," GenderMuseum
European Network of Gender Equality Bodies	Support for the European Institute for Gender Equality
European Strategy for Gender Equality 2020 - 2025	Amendments to Ukrainian Orthography, the use of feminine gender, changes to the classifier of professions
European Commission's campaign against gender stereotypes	

It seems reasonable to posit that a number of factors contributed to this outcome.

1. A lack of motivation. This refers to a lack of comprehension regarding the significance of attaining gender equality, its efficacy for the country's advancement, and the acceleration of European integration processes in Ukraine.
2. The absence of a willingness to implement positive qualitative gender changes lends support to the position that the present moment is not an optimal one.
3. Low self-esteem. It is unfortunate that a negative personal assessment represents a significant barrier to women seeking to protect themselves or to access assistance and protection.

It is evident that there is a necessity for Ukrainians to become more gender-sensitive, with the countries of Germany and Sweden serving as exemplars in this regard. It is imperative that they acknowledge women's capacity to assume prominent and global roles in political, economic, military, and familial domains.

In comparing the findings with previous research results, it is worth noting the work of individual researchers. The opposition of the feminine and masculine is frequently a subconscious yet efficacious method of metaphorically constructing a political image of the world and processes within the country, as well as conceptualising them in the minds of the communication addressee. Shaw (2020) is in agreement. His conclusions corroborate those of the present study.

In order to establish a genuinely democratic society, it is essential to give due consideration to the gender factor in the formation and functioning of the state mechanism at all levels. This even entails the creation of specific institutions with the purpose of monitoring the efficacy of such actions. As Cameron (2022) and Elona (2022) contend, this is a valid argument. The involvement of women as equal subjects in decision-making, in the formation of national strategies for social development, and the entry of both sexes into the public political process on an equal footing is a historically determined necessity that has long been suppressed in Ukraine by the functioning of the post-socialist reality. The findings of the scientists' research are in alignment with those of the current study, which highlights the necessity to address the gender aspects of social development.

In their 2022 research, Smith and Sinkford put forth a series of critical recommendations aimed at advancing gender equality in global decision-making within the healthcare sector. These recommendations encompass the integration of approaches to gender mainstreaming, gender analysis, and gender-transformative leadership. The researchers posit that gender stereotypes and restrictions on women's rights are inextricably linked with the barriers that perpetuate gender inequality in global healthcare leadership.

In their 2022 study, researchers Rosa and Clavero examine the issue of gender inequality in the context of the educational environment. It is posited that higher education institutions have the potential to act as efficacious agents for the advancement of gender equality, diversity, and inclusion within the sphere of higher education and society at large.

Conversely, Dar and Shairgojri (2022) investigate the importance of gender mainstreaming in good governance for the comprehensive development of a nation. The researchers highlight that integrating gender considerations into decision-making processes through consensus-building and representation is a crucial step towards women's empowerment.



Significant advances have been made in this field of research, as evidenced by the work of Sosa (2021), who has studied the impact of anti-gender campaigns on human rights systems. The author analyses the evolution of discourse from religious justifications to legal arguments and proposes strategies for enhancing the resilience of human rights systems against these processes.

Furthermore, the work of Kuteesa et al. (2024) is of great significance, as they investigate the obstacles to gender equality in education and propose strategies for enhancing social opportunities. The authors posit that encouraging girls to participate in STEM fields and non-traditional professions can significantly enhance their economic opportunities and help mitigate the pressure of gender norms.

4. Conclusion

A review of the evolution of global gender policy indicates that Europe will assume a pioneering role in this domain. Indeed, statistical evidence indicates that their capacity to surmount obstacles and inequalities between men and women, other marginalised groups, and individuals who deviate from the norm is proving to be highly effective. European countries that have achieved success in this domain (Germany, Denmark, Sweden) extend support to EU member states with comparatively lower scores on the Gender Equality Index and to EU candidate countries by setting examples and providing financial assistance.

As a prospective member of the European Union in 2022, Ukraine is obliged to present a report to the European community on the implementation of several programmes and conventions. In particular, Ukraine is committed to the eradication of gender inequality and the safeguarding of the rights of women and vulnerable groups. However, the results of the sociological survey indicate that the issue of gender inequality is not considered to be a fundamental aspect of the democratic process, nor is it perceived to be a significant priority due to the prevailing circumstances of martial law. Nevertheless, a considerable proportion of the country's population continues to experience gender-based injustices on a systematic basis. It is our contention that this decision is erroneous in that the role of women, particularly in the context of military aggression and conflict, is of paramount importance.

Indeed, a number of measures have been implemented in Ukraine in recent years with the objective of enhancing the role of women. To illustrate, in 2019 the Ukrainian spelling system introduced the feminine gender, which is not a necessary measure but is one way of addressing the gender issue.

It is evident that several factors contribute to the stagnation in achieving gender equality. These include:

1. Ineffective collection of statistical information on situations of gender injustice, non-compliance with women's rights, and the reasons for their occurrence.
2. Concealing of gender inequality situations.
3. Insufficient promotion of the importance of women's role in the modern world in the media and social networks.

It is also important to highlight the significant advances that have been made in gender policy.

The promotion of equal rights and opportunities for women and other marginalised groups, including bisexuals, transgender people and other groups that are subject to contradictory attitudes and influences, has been a significant achievement of gender policy.

Moreover, an ethical attitude towards addressing gender and equality issues in various marginalised groups has emerged. The creation of legislative support, programmes, projects, and conventions that protect the interests of women and vulnerable groups is a significant achievement. Similarly, the encouragement of all women in the world to fight for their rights and their fulfilment, in particular through familiarisation with the solid legal framework that protects them, is a notable accomplishment. Furthermore, the creation of conditions for a wide range of people to be familiar with gender policy is a crucial step in advancing gender equality.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were fully informed about the study's background information and provided their consent.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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