Women’s Rights and Gender Equality: Analysis of Issues and Achievements

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Abstract

Purpose: Every day, people are constantly facing unfair situations, conflicts, aggression, etc. For this reason, the desire for a humane solution to acute problems, i.e., peace and an ethical attitude towards others, should become a mutual goal for the entire world population. The issue of gender equality becomes especially relevant today, as it is clear that everyone should have equal rights, the right to self-realization and self-affirmation, and the right to protection. The study aims to describe the issues and achievements on the way to gender equality and fulfillment of women's rights. Research methods: theoretical (analysis, synthesis, and generalization), empirical (sociological survey and description), and generalization. Theoretical framework: The study focuses on the crucial issues of the gender system, its development, and the fulfillment of women's rights in different world countries, including Europe. The authors analyzed the basic problems and achievements in this area. Particular attention is paid to Ukraine as a country that is a candidate for accession to the European Union. Ukraine has committed to meeting generally accepted European and international standards of democracy and humanity. Thus, the sociological survey revealed Ukrainians' attitude to the phenomenon of gender equality and women's rights, their knowledge of the features of the concept, and the legislative basis for its development. It was found that gender policy in Ukraine is formed under the influence and support of Europe. Research findings prove that there should be a unified global system of gender influence. It will ensure the effectiveness of achieving equality between the sexes and facilitate daily life for other marginalized groups faster. Conclusions: The article demonstrates that it is not enough to adopt a legislative framework and be included in various international programs to address the issue of gender equality. The population needs to understand the importance of gender changes. They need to be motivated and ready for these changes. Also, 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, Marginalized Groups

INTRODUCTION

The issue of gender equality has been one of the most acute and controversial for decades. Even today, it remains relevant despite no less critical environmental, economic, food, demographic, or poverty reduction, disarmament, and peace issues. Fouani M. and Grytsenko T. (2021), representatives of the United Nations Agency for Sustainable Development Goals (UNDP), say, in particular, that women's empowerment is a catalyst for other areas of sustainable development. After all, as the authors noted above, the support of gender sensitivity and women's rights is central to the mandate of the United Nations Development Program and the approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

With support from the Gender Equality Mark, hundreds of companies are now striving to develop a successful model of gender equality and the objective empowerment of women. Gender Equality Mark is a certification program established for public and private enterprises in 2007 and operates in thirty European, American, and Eastern countries.

Historically, society has assigned men and women certain roles, behavioral patterns, statuses, levels, and even a hierarchy throughout its existence. Due to their gender, people are expected to fulfill certain responsibilities,
and this is primarily a matter of women. The Gender Museum (2009), which operates in Ukraine, found that, on average, women spend 29 hours a week (almost 2 months a year) on housework, 49 hours a week (3.5 months a year) with children, and about 6.5 hours a week (2 weeks a year) on cooking. However, scientific and technological progress, rapid development of technology, and human space exploration are constantly moving the world forward.

As a result, women still face the same expectations as they did a thousand, five hundred, and ten years ago, but with new additional social roles and responsibilities.

In the historiographical context, gender studies are quite young and began to be actively developed in the 1960s. According to Topini C. (2014), even for such a short time, the progress of gender studies has experienced revolutionary ups and downs.

Among the world's prominent representatives of the feminist movement and gender narratives are Friedan B., Butler J., Millet K., Braidotti R., and others. The studies of American authors (Scott J., Nigel J., Morgan D., Kelly J.) will be helpful for scholars studying the feminist movement. The authors mostly talk about the asymmetry of relations between women and men and reflect on the systematic yielding of women, their consent to perform invisible and secondary roles and the devaluation of their own work and achievements.

Estelle B. Freedman (2002) traces the beginnings of feminist narratives back to 1848. At that time, the first meetings of proactive American women took place, and a unique document, the Convention on Women's Rights, was adopted.

Since then, the global scientific and political community has enshrined the functioning of many regulatory, legislative, and international documents, as well as programs and projects (the UN Charter of 1945 (the principle of equality between men and women was substantiated), the Beijing Declaration, the UN Security Council Resolution "Women. Peace. Security", etc.). Also, the qualitative achievements of gender policy have been confirmed by the publication of many comprehensive works on women's rights. Nevertheless, many critical aspects remain on the way to clear gender equality.

Since gender concepts in today's world are one of the driving criteria for development, we believe it is necessary to highlight the aim of this study: to describe the issues and achievements in achieving gender equality and compliance with women's rights.

**Research Goals**

To analyze the issues related to gender equality and women's rights, as well as achievements in this area;

To conduct a sociological survey on public awareness of gender policy and women's rights in Ukraine;

To perform a comprehensive analysis of the gender system functioning worldwide and in Ukraine;

To consider the qualitative reasons for the effective achievement of gender equality and women's rights.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

According to Bullough B. and Bullough V. (1995), achievements in addressing gender issues have a significant impact on global political and economic phenomena. They also affect the quality of life of different population groups that are constantly fighting for their rights. In other words, feminology has, to some extent, laid the foundations for solving the problems of marginalized groups, as well as for analyzing and representing their status. As mentioned above, the scholars prove the multiplicity and unevenness of men's and women's views on the same phenomena and the existence of different value systems. The similarity of such opinions is also seen in the works of other gender scholars, in particular Irigaray L. (1985), Raily D., Downs L. (1993), Rendall J., Davidoff L., McCleand K., Varikas E. (2000). In this regard, we can affirm a certain democratic nature of influences and mutual assistance of active participants of gender equality for the rights of different social classes. Some gender studies experts, in particular Pushkarova N. (2003), point to the so-called "plurality of genders" of people and justify the protection of their rights.
Women's Rights and Gender Equality: Analysis of Issues and Achievements

The struggle for women's rights and gender equality is gaining momentum again today. Many organizations in Europe and the Americas are working to protect women's rights and provide expertise on legislation being developed in this area. Today, achievements towards gender equality and addressing gender issues are generally linked to politics. For example, Ditchuk K. (2023) analyzes the work of the European Institute for Gender Equality. The Institute statistically calculates the level of employment of women in different types of activities and calculates the Gender Equality Index. The Institute's work shows that the Nordic countries are mainly distinguished by the involvement of women in big politics. This determines a high level of understanding of the need to address gender equality and readiness to do so (Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Germany). These countries have also introduced ombudsmen to provide legal protection and monitor the implementation of gender laws.

For example, the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (FADA) operates as an independent coordination center in Germany. The Center is contacted by people who suffer from discrimination. The Agency analyzes research papers on discrimination against various social groups, engages in information work to broadly cover topics related to discrimination and gender policy, analyzes statistical data, and submits a report detailing discrimination situations to the Bundestag. Germany's civil status legislation has been amended to allow people to identify themselves not only as male or female but also as "diverse." This has made Germany one of the few countries to have a legal framework for intersex people, FADA (2021).

As for the European Institute for Gender Equality, it provides support to the EU candidate countries to address gender equality and women's rights. In addition to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey, such countries include Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. An important document that defines the principles of gender policy development is the 2020-2025 Gender Equality Strategy adopted by the European Commission in 2020. Specifically, the Strategy for the EU member states is an action plan that defines effective methods for achieving equality and democracy. It is based not only on countering gender-based violence and gender stereotypes but also on preventing sexual abuse and exploitation of children, continuously collecting statistical information on gender issues, and supporting the development of the European Union's Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values program. This program has been in place since 2021.

It should be noted that for the EU member states, the Gender Equality Index (max. 100 points) has been defined, which shows the level of achievements of the country in approaching full gender equality between men and women. According to Sheiele K. (2023), the Director of the European Institute for Gender Equality, there has been progress in this direction recently. According to Sheiele, Sweden is the closest to a quality solution to gender issues, scoring 82.2 points on the scale of the mentioned Index. Hungary and Romania have the lowest scores in the European Union on the Gender Equality Index - 57.3 and 56.1 points, respectively. The Index includes the following areas: work, power, knowledge, time, health, and money.

As we can see, the issues of gender inequality are gradually being addressed in European countries, but this cannot be said about the 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 crucial to the progress of the economy, politics, science, and technology. Also, they are essential in maintaining family ties, caring for older people, respecting the planet and all living things. These traditions play a negative role in the struggle for gender ideals and women's rights. In other words, there is no struggle. Gender inequality in Japan is a problem that is completely ignored and unwilling to be solved (Dalton E., 2017). Obviously, such a gender policy jeopardizes Japan's relations with other democratic world powers.

South Korea, China, and Singapore are more concerned than Japan about gender issues, overcoming stereotypes, and protecting women's rights. These countries are more inclined to the European and American gender systems.

Dzhudi L. (2023) analyzes the problems faced in France on the way to improving gender policy. The author notes that the country is currently in a crisis period to overcome barriers to inequality and discrimination, as well as attributed it to the deteriorating economy. No less important is the role of the media, which, according
to the author, presents information about vulnerable groups (women, LGBT people, people with disabilities, etc.) in a veiled and stereotypical way. However, some media platforms broadcast products that openly analyze the behavior of members of various marginalized groups (the series "Sex Education," Netflix).

RESEARCH METHODS

The following methods were employed during the research:

Theoretical (analysis, synthesis, and generalization). These methods were used for working with the research base and studying literature sources and websites.

Empirical (sociological survey and description). They were used to analyze the sociological survey.

The generalization method was employed to compare the development of gender policy in Europe and Ukraine, as well as to identify achievements and challenges in this area.

RESULTS

We conducted a sociological survey among 50 random male (25) and female (25) respondents (between the ages of 40 and 55) from one Ukrainian city to determine the level of awareness of Ukrainian men and women about gender policy and the importance of respecting women's rights. We suggested selecting this particular age of respondents because research shows that adolescents and young people have a fairly high level of knowledge about their rights, freedoms, and opportunities, as well as a democratic and humane attitude toward the opposite sex, freedom of choice, impatience with violence and other threats from the environment. On the other hand, respondents aged 40-55 mainly have sufficient professional and life experience to understand certain situations related to gender inequality.

The question about the content of the gender equality phenomenon did not cause any difficulties for the respondents. In fact, 46 of them confirmed their knowledge and answered that this phenomenon means equality in rights, opportunities, and self-realization between men and women. Regarding gender equality as a driving force for the development of our country, 38 interviewees had serious doubts.

Most of the interviewed women confirmed that they constantly witness or participate in discriminatory situations at home, at work, etc. (23 people). Men notice such situations far less often (7 people). They want to have a person of the same gender as their boss (21 people), and most women do not care what gender their boss is (24 people). It is worth noting that 40 respondents consider the fight for gender equality to be a trendy issue and not very important at the moment. However, 42 respondents have ambitions for their own careers.

Unfortunately, 46 recipients were not aware of any legal act, program, or concept enshrined in law that exists in Ukraine to help equalize gender inequality. Thus, almost all respondents are convinced that gender equality is unlikely to be achieved shortly.

The last question of the survey is quite controversial and trivial. However, 43 respondents, including men, believe that women live longer due to a more active and healthier lifestyle. They are involved in more processes in the professional and household spheres and are constantly busy both at home and at work. We can conclude that the respondents' answer to the last question proves their understanding of the importance of women, their busyness, and their place and role in the family and society. Women are responsible for solving the tasks that men in Ukraine are not yet able to solve and, for the most part, do not want to.

| 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 |
| Certification program "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" |
Women's Rights and Gender Equality: Analysis of Issues and Achievements

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Anti-discrimination agencies (or services)</th>
<th>The Law of Ukraine &quot;On Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence&quot;</th>
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<tr>
<td>UN Security Council Resolution &quot;Women. Peace. Security&quot;</td>
<td>Introduction of gender quotas equal to 40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee of the European Parliament</td>
<td>National Social Service of Ukraine</td>
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<tr>
<td>European Women's Audiovisual Network</td>
<td>Public organization &quot;UPLAN,&quot; GenderMuseum</td>
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<td>European Network of Gender Equality Bodies</td>
<td>Support for the European Institute for Gender Equality</td>
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<tr>
<td>European Strategy for Gender Equality 2020 - 2025</td>
<td>Amendments to the Ukrainian Orthography, the use of feminine gender, changes to the classifier of professions</td>
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<td>European Commission's campaign against gender stereotypes</td>
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Source: compiled by the authors.

The generalized table on the functioning of the gender system globally and in Ukraine, of course, does not capture all the measures that work for its effectiveness. However, it should be noted that a lot has been done to achieve gender equality in the world, as well as in Europe and Ukraine in particular. Therefore, over time, the problems of solving this issue will be eliminated.

**DISCUSSION**

An overview of the development of global gender policy allows us to conclude that Europeans will be the leaders in this area. After all, the Nordic countries are the ones that have seen the complete destruction of gender stereotypes and constant progress in respecting women's rights, including their involvement in big politics.

The interpretation of sociological survey results of Ukrainians revealed a low level of interest in gender changes in the surrounding world. Although Europe supports Ukraine in addressing gender issues and has a system of effective gender-related initiatives, the reason for such slow progress remains unknown. A similar situation is observed in neighboring Romania and Hungary (Zakharova et al., 2022).

We can assume that there are several factors that led to this situation:

1. **Low motivation.** We mean the lack of understanding of the importance of achieving gender equality, its effectiveness for the country's development, and the acceleration of European integration processes in Ukraine.

2. **The lack of desire to implement positive qualitative gender changes supports the position that it is not the right time.**

3. **Low self-esteem.** Unfortunately, negative personal assessment is one of the barriers that prevent women from protecting themselves or seeking protection and assistance.

We have to agree that Ukrainians should become more gender-sensitive, following the example of Germany and Sweden. They should recognize women's ability to perform prominent and global roles, including political, economic, military, and family ones.

**CONCLUSIONS**

An overview of the development of global gender policy allows us to conclude that Europeans will be the leaders in this area. After all, statistics show that their willingness to overcome barriers and inequalities between men and women, other marginalized groups, and people who differ from homogeneity is working effectively. European countries that have clearly succeeded in this area (Germany, Denmark, Sweden, etc.) support the EU member states that have slightly lower scores on the Gender Equality Index and the EU candidate countries by setting examples and providing financial support to them.

Ukraine, as a candidate for accession to the European Union in 2022, is obliged to report to the European community on the implementation of several programs and conventions. In particular, Ukraine is committed to overcoming gender inequality and respecting the rights of women and vulnerable groups. However, according to the analysis of the sociological survey, Ukrainians do not consider the issue of gender inequality
to be an essential issue in the democratic spectrum, nor is it significantly crucial due to martial law. However, a significant number of the country's population systematically faces gender injustice. We believe that this decision is not correct because the role of women, mainly during military aggression and conflicts, is vital. In fact, in recent years, many things have been done in Ukraine to enhance the role of women. For example, in 2019, the Ukrainian spelling system even introduced feminine gender, which is not a necessity but one of the ways to address the gender issue.

Let us highlight some reasons for the stagnation in achieving gender equality:

Ineffective collection of statistical information on situations of gender injustice, non-compliance with women's rights, and the reasons for their occurrence;

Concealing of gender inequality situations;

Insufficient promotion of the importance of women's role in the modern world in the media and social networks;

Lack of motivation to achieve gender equality among most of the population.

At the same time, let us emphasize the essential achievements of gender policy:

Promotion of recognizing equal rights and opportunities not only for women but also for those groups of the population that society often treats with disdain, misunderstanding, and condemnation (bisexuals, transvestites, and other marginalized groups that are subject to contradictory attitudes and influences)

The emergence of an ethical attitude to addressing gender and equality issues in various marginalized groups;

Creation of legislative support, programs, projects, and conventions that protect the interests of women and vulnerable groups;

Encouragement of all women in the world to fight for their rights and their fulfillment, in particular through familiarization with the solid legal framework that protects them;

Creating conditions for familiarization with gender policy for a wide range of people.

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Women's Rights and Gender Equality: Analysis of Issues and Achievements


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