

UKRAINE

AUSTERITY, GENDER INEQUALITY AND FEMINISM

# Mission Impossible: Achieving Gender Equality within Neoliberal Austerity

Oksana Dutchak



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# When the logic contradicts the goal

**R**adical change in the Ukrainian political elite, which happened with the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2019, had no positive influence on the logic of the reforms. Winning elections on the promise of ending the war and somehow (in a limited way) challenging the mainstream nationalist narrative, the new government positions itself to follow libertarian ideology. The logic of their socio-economic policy still follows the path of neoliberal austerity, probably even in a more sustainable manner.

The de facto retreat of the state from regulating the labour market, lack of industrial policy, cuts in social expenditures and infrastructure—all of these and many other neoliberal measures put direct and indirect structural obstacles in the way of progress towards gender equality. These put the lives of many women, especially from underprivileged groups, in socio-economic jeopardy and ossifies the existing structural inequality.

In this paper I will review some of the key recent socio-economic processes and reforms in Ukraine, with particular reference to the Beijing Platform, reflecting on the limits of its framework in the Ukrainian and global context.

## The labour market and industrial policy

**T**he state's regulation of wages in Ukraine—the minimum wage—is not enough to even support the minimum level of individual reproduction,<sup>1</sup> and it is approximately five times lower than the living wage.<sup>2</sup> Seeking to attract investors and following the recipe of international financial institutions, the government perceives low wages as a way to bring jobs. That, however, is false. Unemployment has been stably over 9% since 2014.<sup>3</sup>

Taking into account that female wages are lower on average and that women are more likely to earn the legal minimum wage, this has a negative influence on their lives.

**Table 1:** Wages (gross)<sup>4</sup> and gender pay gap

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019 (9 month)
<b>Legal minimum, UAH</b>	1,134	1,218	1,218	1,378 <sup>5</sup>	1,600	3,200	3,723	4,173
<b>Legal minimum, Int\$<sup>6</sup></b>	348	380	344	262	271	483	519	N.a.

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1 The legal minimum wage is lower than the (undervalued) 'actual' subsistence minimum for one person, calculated by the Ministry of Social Policy.

2 In December 2018 the living wage, calculated by researchers, was UAH 19,599 gross. Source: Dutchak, Oksana and Anna Oksiutovych. 'Right to a living wage [Pravo na minimalnu hidnu zarplatu]'. Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung.

3 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS?locations=UA>.

4 For the end of the period.

5 Moratorium on raises to the legal minimum was active till 1 September 2015, after which it was finally increased.

6 Int\$ or International Dollar is a hypothetical unit of currency that has the same purchasing power parity that the U.S. dollar had in the United States at a given point in time. It allows comparison across borders and time, taking purchasing power and inflation into

<b>Average, UAH</b>	3,026	3,265	3,480	4,195	5,183	7,104	8,865	10,340 <sup>7</sup>
<b>Average, Int\$</b>	927	1,018	984	798	877	1,073	1,236	N.a.
<b>Gender pay gap</b>	22.4%	22.8%	23.7%	25.1%	25.3%	20.9%	22.3%	24.3%

Source: Author's calculations based on State Statistics Agency<sup>8</sup>

The government retreats from active regulation of the wages, leaving it to the market. As shown in Table 1, this leads to some progress in wages in the post-crisis recovery process, but this market-led progress leaves female wages and pensions<sup>9</sup> behind.

*Within the strategic objectives F of the Beijing Platform<sup>10</sup> the problem of gender inequality in the economy is framed as: 'Discrimination in education and training, hiring and remuneration, promotion and horizontal mobility practices, as well as inflexible working conditions, lack of access to productive resources and inadequate sharing of family responsibilities, combined with a lack of or insufficient services such as child care, continue to restrict employment, economic, professional and other opportunities and mobility for women and make their involvement stressful'. A broad range of issues is listed, with no prioritisation, leaving the governments with the possibility of establishing their own priorities, in Ukraine and many other cases—implementing those policies, which do not contradict the neoliberal logic of austerity and leaving the rest out.*

This can be easily illustrated with the Ukrainian example. Reporting on progress in promoting gender equality in paid work and employment<sup>11</sup> the government mostly informs about training for women and

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account. Here and further conversion factors from the World Bank Database (<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/PA.NUS.PRVT.PP?locations=UA>).

7 January–November.

8 State Statistics Agency (2019a) 'Seredniomisiachna zarobitna plata zhinok i cholovikiv za vydamy ekonomichnoi dialnosti za kvartal', [Average monthly wage of women and men in different types of economic activities, quarterly].

State Statistics Agency (2019b) 'Seredniomisiachna zarobitna plata za vydamy ekonomichnoi dialnosti za period z pochatku roku', [Average monthly wage in different types of economic activities, since the beginning of the year].

9 Pension pay gap in Ukraine is 32% (source of the data: State Statistics Agency (2019d) 'Sotsialnyi zakhyst naselennia Ukrainy' [Social protection of Ukrainian population], p. 26.)

10 UN Women. 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action/ Beijing +25 Political Declaration and Outcome', p. 102.

11 Ukraine. 'National Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 2019', p. 37.

public servants, removing legal restrictions on female employment, developing action plans and some scattered 'success stories'. This (neo) liberal approach leaves employment to the 'invisible hand' and leads to a growing gender pay gap without any effective attempts on the side of the government to address structural problems of horizontal and vertical gender stratification on the labour market, rooted in unequal value of 'productive' and reproductive labour in capitalist society.

Those effective attempts cannot be implemented without state intervention in the labour market, for example, to increase wages in the 'traditionally' female public sector (including public reproductive infrastructure). However, such an increase contradicts the logic of keeping the minimum wage low and of austerity in social spending.

*In actions to be taken under strategic objective F.5 of the Beijing Platform<sup>12</sup> the governments are recommended to 'Review, analyse and, where appropriate, reformulate the wage structures in female-dominated professions, such as teaching, nursing and child care, with a view to raising their low status and earnings'. This recommendation can be perceived as pointing to the necessity of state regulation in wages, though indirectly, sectoral and optional. There is no recommendation on a general regulation of wages, while minimum wage regulation is essential in all the sectors, influencing female wages directly due to existing structures of inequality. It is important to emphasise that in the majority of countries wages in female-dominated public sectors cannot be increased within the logic of austerity, as these measures require an increase in public spending.*

At the same time, the government, among other arguments, uses rhetoric to combat gender discrimination in the existing Labour Code<sup>13</sup> to substitute it with a new and highly regressive one, which will bring almost unrestricted 'flexibility', job insecurity and exploitation.<sup>14</sup> While removing legal discriminatory provisions is almost never enough to influence the structurally rooted practices (issue hardly addressed in the Beijing Declaration and Platform), flexibilisation, insecurity and

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 12 UN Women. 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action/ Beijing +25 Political Declaration and Outcome', p. 117.

13 There are specific articles which entitle mothers to additional protection and benefits, while those are available for men only if they are single fathers.

14 For details: <https://www.bwint.org/cms/news-72/ukraine-new-labour-law-bad-news-for-worker-in-the-new-year-1605>

increased opportunities for exploitation will definitely have a negative impact on workers. And taking into account women's vulnerable and 'cheaper' inclusion into the labour market, they will have a disproportionately negative influence on them. The new Labour Code Project illustrates a classic example of when the (neo)liberal goal to remove legislative gender discrimination is used to legitimise an offence on labour rights, which will have a negative effect on working women.

### 3

## Unpaid work and reproductive infrastructure

**T**he strategic objectives F of the Beijing Platform<sup>15</sup> include among other obstacles to women involvement in economy: 'The lack of a family-friendly work environment, including a lack of appropriate and affordable child care, and inflexible working hours further prevent women from achieving their full potential'. Further, within strategic objective F.3, the last action recommended to governments in cooperation with non-governmental organisations and the private sector is to: 'Provide affordable support services, such as high-quality, flexible and affordable child-care services, that take into account the needs of working men and women'.<sup>16</sup> The reality of socio-economic inequality clarifies this issue: only with extensive state intervention can this childcare become universally accessible. However, this would contradict the logic of austerity.

In Ukraine literally zero progress has been made in increasing access to affordable and high-quality pre-school childcare which keeps many women off the labour market<sup>17</sup> and their extremely low income, based on a childcare subsidy, for a long period of time, calcifies gender discrimination in employment opportunities and contributes to

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<sup>15</sup> UN Women. 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action/Beijing +25 Political Declaration and Outcome', p. 105.

<sup>16</sup> UN Women. 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action/Beijing +25 Political Declaration and Outcome', p. 112.

<sup>17</sup> In 2018 the biggest gender difference in the economically active population was in those aged 25–29 (68.6% for women and 90.2% for men), 30–34 (74.6% and 91.8%) and 35–39 (78.5% and 91%)—obviously due to childcare (source of the figures: State Statistics Agency (2019c) Zhinky I choloviky v Ukraini' [Women and men in Ukraine], p. 50).



the structural factors of gender pay gap. The existing system provides enrolment mostly from the age of three,<sup>18</sup> facilities are lacking in rural areas and overcrowded in highly urbanized areas,<sup>19</sup> and wages are extremely low in this 'traditional'<sup>20</sup> female sector. Most of the facilities are from the Soviet period.

*It is astonishing, but accessible (child)care infrastructure is totally absent from the actions recommended explicitly to governments<sup>21</sup> in the Beijing Platform under strategic objective F.6 to 'Promote harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men'. This section of the Platform mainly concentrates on removing legislative discrimination and combating gender stereotypes. Of course, one might object that this recommendation is present in the previous strategic objectives of part F but in the current socio-economic circumstances there can be no just gender harmonization of work and family responsibilities without taking responsibilities out of the family as much as possible. This emphasis, however, is sometimes<sup>22</sup> lacking in the Platform which instead constantly emphasises the necessity of equal share of these responsibilities between women and men particularly through changes in education and legislation.<sup>23</sup>*

Not surprising, the only progress the government reports<sup>24</sup> in this respect is related to the Municipal Nanny Program (where the state compensates a small amount of money for an officially employed

18 Only 15% of children age zero to two are enrolled and it is likely that the majority of them are two—the earliest age when some public kindergarten accepts children (source of the figures: State Statistics Agency (2017) 'Doshkilna osvita v Ukraini u 2017 rotsi' [Pre-school education in Ukraine in 2017], p. 19).

19 Coverage of children by kindergartens in 2017 was 66% in urban and 41% in rural areas, and there were 123 children per 100 places in urban areas (source of the figures: State Statistics Agency (2017) 'Doshkilna osvita v Ukraini u 2017 rotsi' [Pre-school education in Ukraine in 2017], p. 12).

20 78% of workers in the education sector are women (source of the figures: State Statistics Agency (2019c) 'Zhinky i choloviky v Ukraini' [Women and men in Ukraine], p. 61).

21 UN Women. 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action/ Beijing +25 Political Declaration and Outcome', p. 117-118.

22 One of the few exceptions, where care services goes in one recommendation and before combating gender stereotypes, can be found in Actions and initiatives to overcome obstacles Article 82.d (p. 251).

23 See, for example, in Article 30 of the Global framework (p. 26), Article 47 of the Current Challenges (p. 231), Article 60 of Actions and initiatives to overcome obstacles... (p. 235).

24 Ukraine. 'National Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 2019', p. 40-41.

nanny) and to information campaigns against gender stereotypes in housework. It is more than obvious that these 'achievements' have nothing to do with structural change. Problems with pre-school childcare can in no way be solved without a substantial increase in spending on public reproductive infrastructure, which contradicts the logic of austerity and, hence, zero has been done in this direction for many years. Only these changes, together with bridging the time gap between paid maternity leave (plus the male quota therein) and enrolment in childcare facilities can result in a sustainable change in structural gender discrimination in 'productive' and reproductive labour. But for these steps a structural vision is needed. And extensive social spending instead of budget cuts.

Almost the same picture one can depicted in public healthcare, which is also part of reproductive infrastructure women heavily depend on and another 'traditionally'<sup>25</sup> female sector of employment. Part of the large-scale healthcare reform, continued by the new government, involves the 'optimisation' of healthcare facilities—mostly meaning their closure. In general, the healthcare sector faces constant cuts to financing, facilities and personnel,<sup>26</sup> leading to poor access to healthcare, especially in villages (where women are the majority)<sup>27</sup> and close to the frontline, where 1.3 million people are in need of urgent medical assistance.<sup>28</sup> Low wages in this predominantly female sector even led to a wave of self-organised protests by nurses at the end of 2019.

*Within the strategic objectives F of the Beijing Platform<sup>29</sup> one of the problems of gender inequality in the economy is framed thus: 'Lack of employment in the private sector and reductions in public services and public ser-*

25 83% of workers in healthcare are women (source of the figures: State Statistics Agency (2019c) 'Zhinky i choloviky v Ukraini' [Women and men in Ukraine], p. 61).

26 State Statistics Agency (2018) 'Zaklady okhorony zdorovia ta zakhvoriuvanist naselennia Ukrainy, 2017' [Healthcare Facilities and Dynamics of Population Morbidity in Ukraine, 2017], p. 10-12.

27 It is worth noting that a good example of dealing with the lack of medical facilities in rural areas, mentioned in the Parallel report by liberal NGOs, is 'training rural volunteers who will provide preventive healthcare services in their communities' (Parallel Report. Ukraine 2014–2019, p. 27).

28 <https://www.euronews.com/2019/12/19/elderly-left-to-suffer-as-ukraine-conflict-drives-away-health-workers>

29 UN Women. 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action/Beijing +25 Political Declaration and Outcome', p. 102.

vice jobs have affected women disproportionately'.<sup>30</sup> It might be added that in Chapter 3 Current challenges... economic restructuring and the 'Loss of child-care facilities due to elimination or privatisation of State work places'<sup>31</sup> are listed among challenges in countries with 'economies in transition'. However, no direct political conclusions are drawn about the necessity to oppose austerity and privatisation and to promote the development of the public sector, including reproductive infrastructure.

Interestingly, the Ukrainian government acknowledges the negative effect of 'anti-crisis' austerity on women, referring to the shadow report by NGOs<sup>32</sup> and its obligation to take their statements into account. However, when discussing the effects of austerity on the public sector, it writes about the 'collapse of the state sector of the economy',<sup>33</sup> as if this was some natural disaster and not the result of conscious steps taken by the government itself.

To add a small cherry on top, austerity is probably one of the reasons Ukraine<sup>ed</sup> does not even have reliable, disaggregated and diversified statistical data on different aspects of gender inequality. For example, reporting on the availability of data on care work,<sup>34</sup> the government basically recognises that there is no systematic data in national statistics. Moreover, there has been no general census in Ukraine since 2001. And the current government, instead of organising one, planned for 2020, decided to make 'estimates' with an extremely weak methodology vocally criticised by sociologists. The justification is a lack of funding.

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 30 UN Women. 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action/Beijing +25 Political Declaration and Outcome', p. 104.

31 UN Women. 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action/Beijing +25 Political Declaration and Outcome', p. 228.

32 WILPF and others (2017) 'The Effects of Intervention by International Financial Institutions on Women's Human Rights in Ukraine'.

33 Ukraine. 'National Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 2019', p. 42.

34 Ukraine. 'National Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 2019', p. 40.

## 4 Social welfare and payments

**S**urprisingly, in the Beijing Platform there are almost no recommendations for actions in the sphere of social welfare and payments. Section A states that 'In too many countries, social welfare systems do not take sufficient account of the specific conditions of women living in poverty, and there is a tendency to scale back the services provided by such systems'.<sup>35</sup> Current challenges... mentions that external factors, such as financial crises, 'have affected the ability of States to provide social protection and social security as well as funding for the implementation of the Platform for Action. Such difficulties are also reflected in the shift of the cost of social protection, social security and other welfare provisions from the public sector to the household'.<sup>36</sup> Pensions and retirement benefits are mentioned once.<sup>37</sup> The rest of the parts on social security are explicitly related to social security related to employment with no recommendations to develop welfare provisions in general.

Besides cuts in the public sector, another negative influence of austerity on gender inequality, recognised by the government,<sup>38</sup> is a reduction in social payments. But while recognising the problem, the government did nothing to change the situation which is the direct result of the 'anti-crisis' freezing of the subsistence minimum (on which the majority of social payments is based) in 2014.

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35 UN Women. 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action/Beijing +25 Political Declaration and Outcome', p. 35.

36 UN Women. 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action/Beijing +25 Political Declaration and Outcome', p. 227.

37 UN Women. 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action/Beijing +25 Political Declaration and Outcome', p. 118.

38 Ukraine. 'National Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 2019', p. 41.

Since the 2014 anti-crisis freeze, the legal subsistence minimum, which is supposed to be calculated on the basis of the consumer basket, is pulled 'out of thin air'. At the same time, since the end of 2015 the Ministry of Social Policy has been calculating the 'actual' subsistence minimum, based on the same consumer basket but in real prices. Currently the legal subsistence minimum is two times lower than the 'actual' one, keeping enrolment eligibility and the level of social benefits unreasonably low.

For all the above-mentioned reasons, in 2018 and 2019 courts have ruled the legal subsistence minimum violates the law—with no consequences. Moreover, courts have ruled that the consumer basket is also illegal and insufficient because of procedural violations. This means that even the 'actual' subsistence minimum is under valued as it is based on the consumer basket.<sup>39</sup> It is worth mentioning that the legal minimum wage has never reached the undervalued 'actual' subsistence minimum for one person.

This artificial devaluation of the legal subsistence minimum has a direct influence on most of the social benefits, including those mainly received by women: social payments for single mothers, caretakers and pensioners, the majority of whom are women. This helps the government save but keeps many people from vulnerable categories, mostly women, without proper social support, supposedly guaranteed by the law.

At the end of 2019 the government announced radical reform of the subsistence minimum system. Promising to increase the legal subsistence minimum to the level of the 'actual' subsistence minimum, the government at the same time announced its plan to unlink almost all the social benefits, except pensions and subsidies for families in poverty, from the subsistence minimum. This will lead to 'manual' regulation of most of the social payments and make the prospects of their indexation quite vague. Moreover, it can also do the same for wages in the predominantly female public sector, as they are now calculated on the basis of the legal subsistence minimum.

*In the end, the Ukrainian example of austerity in welfare provisions il-*

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<sup>39</sup> For example, it does not include rent, internet, mobile phone, washing powder, sanitary napkins.

*illustrates the major gap in the Beijing Platform which omits the State's responsibility to provide direct supplementary income to underprivileged groups, an essential measure to support women in the context of poverty feminisation. The underlying logic of these reforms in Ukraine (and many other countries) can be attributed to the general structural priority of economic growth over social reproduction: expansion of social reproduction can happen only after economic growth/recovery but whether it will really happen and the extent of this expansion depends not only on the scope of economic growth/recovery, but rather on the government's political choices, based on its ideological standpoint.*

## 5 Right-wing conservative response to the crisis of social reproduction

**Ukraine provides a classic example** of when the government fails to do its job of getting money into the state budget it adopts the discourse of austerity and ‘small state’, pressed for and promoted by international financial institutions, arguing that it is necessary (and even more effective) to cut social expenditures and state reproductive infrastructure. In the end, as in many other countries, anti-crisis austerity becomes a permanent and integral feature of socio-economic policy. As a result, the ‘productive’ sphere is left to the rule of the market, which builds upon the existing structures of gender (and other) inequality, crystallising and often intensifying them. This leads to the crisis of social reproduction, which is left with critically limited state support, resulting in a declining population, mass migration and material and time poverty, especially for women.

The crisis of social reproduction has a certain influence on the political field in Ukraine. LGBT+ and feminist activists are the main classified targets of ultra-right violence against people in Ukraine.<sup>40</sup> In the meantime, at the beginning of 2020 the biggest interfractional alliance ‘Values. Dignity. Family’ was created in parliament, with a solidly conservative agenda. The deputy of the biggest party Sviatoslav Yurash explained its creation: ‘The goal...is to defend the eternal values of Ukrainian society and to resist the attempts to destroy fundamental

40 Institut Respublika and Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (2020) ‘Ultra-right Confrontation and Violence in Ukraine: Monitoring Results 14-10-2018–14-10-2019’.

natural rights in the name of political fashion; to prepare and pass the laws which will strengthen family values, principles of a worthy society and upbringing of children and youth on the basis of family values; and also to promote and popularise a broad scope of global conservative ideas within the Ukrainian intellectual community'.<sup>41</sup>

Right-wing attacks on activists for women's and LGBT+ rights on the streets and conservative populism inside the parliament is a symptomatic response to the capitalist crisis of social reproduction, which has been observed all over the world in recent years.<sup>42</sup> Without an egalitarian, progressive and democratic alternative, these tendencies may put the whole agenda of gender equality in jeopardy on the global and local scales.

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41 <https://tsn.ua/politika/u-radi-stvorili-naybilshe-mizhfrakciyne-ob-yednannya-vono-zahischatime-simeyni-cinnosti-1476585.html>

42 Though some Ukrainian women and feminist NGOs explain these tendencies with 'the Russian Federation's hybrid war against Ukraine' (Parallel Report. Ukraine 2014–2019, p. 7).



**U**nfortunately, the Beijing Declaration and Platform is not an effective response to the crises of social reproduction—and reality has proved it time and again. Though the document proposes many progressive vectors to combat gender inequality, it has major integral failures. Trying to accommodate different standpoints and interests, it fails to provide understanding of cause-effect relations in structural gender inequality, particularly understanding the interrelations between socio-economic structures of capitalism and patriarchy and their long-lasting influence on social reproduction. It is symptomatic (though maybe a little bit naïve to pay attention to) that the terms ‘capitalism’ and ‘patriarchy’ are not mentioned in the document—not once. This is an obvious symptom of how depoliticised the human rights discourse is (and has always been). This depoliticised framework channels policies into yet another (albeit quite extensive) technical solution. At the same time, many key statements in the Beijing Declaration and Platform lack political conclusions and recommendations: for example, that austerity has a negative influence on women. And is not helping the economy much anyway.<sup>43</sup>

Not surprisingly, that lack of structural understanding leads to a lack of structural vision: the Beijing framework does not provide a justified algorithm where steps to progress on the way to gender equality would be prioritised, making a distinction between steps aiming at the root of the problem and those supplementing steps to demolish legislative barriers, combating gender stereotypes, which are relatively easy but can hardly maintain a sustainable positive influence on

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43 <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/may/27/austerity-policies-do-more-harm-than-good-imf-study-concludes>

socio-economic reality without creating structural preconditions for change. This leaves governments with the possibility to report constant progress with 'cheap' cosmetic changes without any effective contribution to real change, which cannot be done within the logic of neoliberal austerity. The position of governments, especially of indebted countries, can be easily explained by their attempts to balance the requirements of the international financial institutions and the UN. Not surprising, the UN is constantly losing this battle: failing to follow its recommendations has no consequences whatsoever, while failing to follow the dictates of international financial institutions leaves governments without an external money inflow considered by many to be indispensable.

Progress in social reproduction and effective measures to bring about structural change in the existing system can in no way be implemented without channelling money from the main economic beneficiaries of the system, which rely on (women's) unpaid labour, into reproductive and other public infrastructure. In all probability they cannot be implemented without changes to the structural logic of the system we live in, where social reproduction is subordinated to capital accumulation and framed to serve this goal.

Socio-economic gender inequality in capitalist societies is rooted in the unequal value of 'productive' and reproductive labour, where the capitalist market relies on the existing patriarchal, neocolonial and racialised structures of inequalities to save on social reproduction and placing it disproportionately on the shoulders of women, sucking resources out of poor communities and plundering nature. An effective declaration aimed at a more egalitarian society (including the gender dimension of equality) should start by recognising this point. It must and unavoidably will be political in nature, recognising structurally rooted conflicting interests between the society and the market, capitalist accumulation and sustainable livelihood, private and common good. Instead of proposing yet another technical solution, an effective declaration should have a structural vision and aim to challenge the structural roots of inequality. It should clearly define those roots and recognise the necessity of a radical change—in systems of labour, neocolonial, gender, racial and environmental exploitation. The depo-

liticised nature of human rights discourse (obvious even in the most radical statements from UN structures, where separate expert groups extensively and critically raise the issues of inequality, poverty and corporate interests<sup>44</sup>) must be challenged openly.

An effective action plan, based on this declaration, should make political choices by prioritising the common interests of humankind (survival) and decent human life over the private interest of capital. Its roadmap must make a distinction between the actions targeting the root causes of inequalities and supplementary actions, prioritising the first. Radical and systematic change cannot be achieved without incorporating a radical feminist perspective, which has for a long time been urging governments to prioritise social reproduction over capital accumulation. This perspective cannot but question the logic of austerity, neoliberalism and the logic of capitalism in general. Of course, this puts the whole existing socio-economic system into question, but this is the only way to achieve real change and not a superficial change, which masks structural inequalities with the stories of individual successes of neoliberal progressivism.

Finally, an effective action plan can only be created and implemented with two decisive preconditions. The first is a change in the institutional architecture of global governance and political power. One cannot hope any declaration and action plan to be effective in the global system where the dominance of transnational capital, founded in international financial institutions, rules over any good will on the part of the official bodies of international governance. This global system undermines sovereignty, democracy and a sustainable future. The second precondition and probably a way to crystallise the vision and roadmap to structural change is a necessity to make a real turn to radical democracy. The vision and roadmap cannot be developed without decisive voices from frontier communities, which have been struggling against the consequences of the multiple offences of global capital and the crises it creates. Only moving in this direction gives global society a chance not only to progress towards gender equality but also to get

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 44 See, for example, [https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/egm/un%20women%20expert%20group%20meeting%20cs%2064%20report%202019.pdf?la=en&vs=3153&fbclid=IwARodWCHASJmjY2846gcYuvkHa8MSTQk\\_u9yvhqziAdkMEq8IQ772l-gGP3M](https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/egm/un%20women%20expert%20group%20meeting%20cs%2064%20report%202019.pdf?la=en&vs=3153&fbclid=IwARodWCHASJmjY2846gcYuvkHa8MSTQk_u9yvhqziAdkMEq8IQ772l-gGP3M)

us out of the crises of social reproduction as well as of finance and the environment.

Does this sound like a political and abstract declaration? Then let's try something more specific. Of course, some preliminary actions can be drafted from Ukrainian (and other) examples. There is an urge when developing public reproductive infrastructure, which would take a significant part of reproductive labour out of the family. This public infrastructure must be good quality, accessible and affordable to not perpetuate existing inequalities. It must provide a decent job. And yes, it obviously needs a wealth of resources. This final statement makes it crystal clear that such concrete but very basic steps cannot be realistically and universally recommended to governments in all parts of the world without a radical change in global governance, socio-economic structures and the very logic of the system, based on neoliberal austerity and the general priority of capital accumulation. If we want an effective, realistic and non-hypocritical action plan we must start from a deeply political declaration.

# Biography

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