ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG

UKRAINE

AUSTERITY, GENDER INEQUALITY AND FEMINISM AFTER THE CRISIS

Crisis, War and Austerity: Devaluation of Female Labor and Retreating of the State.

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Introduction

Starting in 2014, with the background of the Crimea annexation and military conflict in the east of the country,[1] Ukraine faced a sharp and long economic decline. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita fell by more than 25% in 2014 and by almost 30% in 2015, starting to recover only in 2016 by 3.3% (Minfin 2017). Inflation reached almost 25% in 2014 and 43% in 2015, decreasing to 12% in 2016 (Minfin 2018). The governmental response to the crises was a predictable one, while it was following its own neoliberal creeds, reinforced by oligarchic interests[2] and pressure from international institutions. With increasing government debt due to currency devaluation and general crises, depending on further credits from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the government cancelled fuel subsidies, cut social expenditures, and increased the retirement age, all at the IMF's behest.

Post-2014 austerity was not the first manifestation of neoliberal policy in Ukraine. Starting from the transition to the market economy in the 90s, all the governments have been pushing Ukrainian society towards a neoliberal path. This turn, however, was far from the shock policies implemented in some other countries. The oligarchs were ready to introduce market reforms only so far as to have an opportunity to create their own capital and to stay in power during a relatively turbulent political period. But the crisis of 2014 let the government

1 As of the beginning of 2017, according to the Office of UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights, at least 9,940 people were killed (including more than 2,000 civilians) and 23,455 injured (including 7,000-9,000 civilians) during the conflict (RadioFreeEurope 2017). At the beginning of 2016 there were more than 1.7 million internally displaced people (IDPs) (Ukrainska Pravda 2016) who had to leave the conflict zone in the Donetsk and the Luhansk Region and Crimea. At the beginning of 2017, this number decreased to 1.6 million (International Organization for Migration 2017a).

2 This government was formed from the previous opposition: oppositional oligarchs and businessmen but also some key figures from the EuroMaidan protest, almost all with neoliberal economic and nationalistic political position (radical right wing in some case).

come closer to "shock therapy" than ever before. And that is why the reforms after 2014 need the most attention.

The existing mainstream discourse on gender inequality, to a great extent, fails to address the existing structural problems. Basically, there were almost no attempts to make a systematic evaluation of the socioeconomic influences of post-2014 "anti-crisis" policies on women.[3] Lack of this systematic evaluation shifts the mainstream feminist struggle to political and symbolic representation and to a struggle against gender violence - which is, no doubt, valuable in and of itself, especially in light of the government's failure to ratify the Istanbul Convention. But a lack of a critical perspective on governmental austerity policies and their long-term and structural impact on gender structures leave these structures intact.

In the first chapter of this paper we address the discrepancy between façade equality and the real situation of women in the country before and during the crises. In Section 1.1 we briefly review existing legislation on gender inequality, the failure of the government to implement it and the lack of attempts to address structural socioeconomic inequality. In Section 1.2 we outline this structural socioeconomic inequality, its deeply-rooted causes and its development during the crises of 2014. In Section 1.3 this development is evaluated further - focusing on its influence on women's wellbeing after 2014. In the second chapter anti-crises neoliberal austerity and its influence on gender inequality are described. In Section 2.1 we examine how the reproductive labor of women has been devaluated by austerity. In Section 2.2 we examine how governmental austerity measures influence female opportunities for "productive"[4] labor and, at the same time, deteriorate infrastructure which supports women in reproductive labor. In Section 2.3 we briefly examine ongoing and forthcoming structural reform (in labor legislation, the pension system, healthcare) and their impact

3 With the outstanding exception of the Joint Shadow Report by CEDAW Committee from 2017.

4 The term "productive" may refer to both Marxist and liberal economic theory. In the first case "reproductive" is distinguished from "productive" because it reproduces labor power instead of producing commodities for capitalist market. In this case it does not mean that reproductive labor does not contribute to capitalist economy. In the second case, in liberal economic paradigm "productive" may presume exclusion of the role of reproductive labor for capitalist economy. For those reasons we use quotation marks here.

on Ukrainian women. Through Chapters 1 and 2 we also separate the most vulnerable female categories whose situation has been disproportionally negatively influenced by neoliberal policies to address the crises: rural women, older women, women with children - especially single mothers -, and women who have to provide care for other family members. Chapter 3 deals with war and its effect on gender inequality. There we address the problems with and austerity's impact on additional vulnerable categories created by the military conflict: internally displaced women and women in or close to the conflict zone. The last chapter reviews the situation in Ukrainian feminism, both mainstream and leftist. In Section 4.1 we analyze why the problems, discussed in this paper, have not been sufficiently addressed by Ukrainian feminists. We also outline the context and escalation of threats from the radical rightwing. And finally, in Section 4.2, we provide recommendations for leftists on the possible direction leftist feminism could go and alliance building in the current state of affairs.

1

Façade "equality" and the structural problems of gender inequality in Ukraine

1.1 Façade of "equality" on paper

On the level of legislation, Ukraine is a very woman-friendly country. Gender discrimination is prohibited in the Constitution, the Ukrainian law "On Principles of Prevention and Combating Discrimination in Ukraine," and the country ratified the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" in 1980. Moreover, the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, around which the EuroMaidan mobilization started at the end of 2013 and which was signed in 2014, includes an article on gender equality in economic life. According to it the Agreement includes such goals as: gender equality and equal opportunities for women and men in employment, education, training, the economy, society, and decision-making (Martsenyuk 2016).

One important piece of national legislation to combat gender inequality is the Ukrainian law "On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men," passed by Parliament in 2005. Article 3 of this law proclaims that the state policy on these issues is aiming to: enforce gender equality, prevent discrimination based on sex, use affirmative action, guarantee equal participation of men and women in making socially important decisions, guarantee equal opportunities for women and men in combining professional and family responsibilities, encourage equally-shared parenting, spread a gender equality culture and protect society from gender discriminative information.

This and other legislation integrated many internationally recognized statements, mechanisms and actions to promote gender

equality on all the levels: in politics, economics, culture, private life, etc. As a result, the legislative façade looks almost perfect.[1] But the reality has constantly failed to meet the expectations. For example, this law prohibits employers from indicating gender preferences in job listings or asking potential candidates about their personal life or reproductive plans. However, a brief look at any online or offline aggregator of vacancies and most job interviews reveal the government's total impotence and/or unwillingness to deliver on their promises.

This divergence on symbolic level inequalities, of course, is not the most important, but it reflects deep structural inequalities between men and women in Ukraine. These deep structural inequalities are precisely the major causes of why equality on paper fails. Structural inequalities between the genders are rooted in economics and politics, caused mainly by the unequal distribution of reproductive work but also by interrelated conservatism in the symbolic level of culture, discourse and socialization. A huge level of informality is another important factor in the state's failure to tackle the hidden problems, not to speak of fighting them with declarative legislation.

Failing to deal with gender inequality, the government tries to keep up its façade of a modern "European" state and to introduce some superficial (as opposed to structural) reforms. For example, it attempted to form a new police force during the police reform that was more gender balanced, it legalized women in the army, and cancelled the list of prohibited professions for women in 2017. Some of these reforms can be radically criticized from the leftist feminist perspective, but these attempts by the government demonstrate that it is trying to "keep up the façade." This "keeping up of the façade" goes sometimes that

1 With some exceptions. These include legislation which prohibited women from working in some professions. While most of those professions were in harmful industries, and that was the reasoning for prohibiting women from working in them, some of the prohibitions were strange indeed. For example, women were prohibited from driving a train or a metro train or operating almost any big industrial machinery, including graders, cement-mixers, bulldozers, and tractors. And even for harmful industries, instead of modernizing them to improve labor conditions for all the workers, the law simply restricted women from occupying them. Taking into account that industrial employment is usually better paid, this restriction contributed to the gender pay gap and to the informalization of women who were still working in those positions despite prohibition. Another example can be some formulations in the Labor Code, which implicitly ascribe to women the role of the main caretaker of children.

far - and it is one of the few positive side effects of the government's dependence on international institutions: that international institutions can oppose governmental conservative trends. This happened in 2015 when after several failures the Parliament, under pressure from the EU, introduced the anti-discrimination amendment to the Labor Code, which included a prohibition of discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation. This forced the government to pay attention to gender inequality at the level of women's representation (in some spheres). However, there is no international pressure to solve the structural socioeconomic problems which cause gender inequalities. Quite the contrary: austerity, which has been imposed by the same international institutions, especially after the 2014 crisis, deepens those problems. Controversial though predictable outcomes of the neoliberal austerity policies contribute to gender inequalities: those will be analyzed in the following sections, after providing an overview of gender inequality manifestations in the socioeconomic dimension.

1.2 Structural socioeconomic inequality in reality

Despite all of the government's declarations, Ukrainian society has never been even close to gender equality in socioeconomic terms. Since 1971 female consistently constitute a majority of 53-54% of the total population (World Bank Database 2018a). However, women have never enjoyed equal opportunities under the façade of more or less equal rights. Their opportunities have always been those of the discriminated minority, especially women with other underprivileged statuses: poor women, rural women, older women, women with children, women with disabilities, from LGBT and Roma communities, and so on.

Women have less access to political decision-making: the proportion of women in elected bodies negatively relates to how high or low those bodies are. There are only 11% women in the Parliament, 15% in regional councils, 24% in district councils, 29% in city councils, 46% in settlement councils and 56% in village councils (RATING Pro 2015). Women's access to politics decreases with the decisions' influence. At the same time more than 55% of Ukrainians think that female participation in national-level politics is not sufficient (Karpiv 2017), which can indirectly point to the social acceptability of gender quotas. De-

spite approximately 10 attempts to introduce gender quotas in the elections before 2015, and despite the Ukrainian Constitution directly referring to the possibility of such a measure, all these attempts have failed (Martsenyuk 2016). During the 2015 local elections there was a law introduced to nominate at least 30% women, but this law was almost meaningless as it included no sanctions.[2]

This political misbalance, of course, is partially caused by gender stereotypes about politics as a male sphere. But it also has direct structural roots in an imbalance of socioeconomic resources in society. Since independence, women constitute 47-49% of the total labor force, with a constant tendency to decrease slightly (World Bank Database 2018b). Since independence, the ratio of female to male in the labor force (modeled ILO estimate) has also been decreasing, from almost 82% in 1999 to 74.5% in 2017, with the lowest ratio of 74% in 2012 (World Bank Database 2018c). Women have always played a less active role in the formal economy.

At the same time, female unemployment has always been smaller than male, with the biggest[3] discrepancies of 3 and 3.4% during the crisis years of 2009 and 2014. The generally relative low unemployment should not be misunderstood. Low unemployment can mean not only a relatively good economic environment, it can also point to the low level of welfare support in the society.[4] With a poorly developed welfare system or poor provisions, people can hardly survive on social security even during a short period of time. Without extensive state support and with small private savings in a peripheral economy, people would agree to the most vulnerable employment. In countries with better welfare, workers can afford to wait for suitable or desirable jobs, which is definitely not the case in Ukraine.

Lower unemployment among women can also be partially caused by the same situation, when women agree to any job - part time, infor-

2 The idea of the gender quota in Ukrainian politics has, however, to be approached with caution. With the specificities of local political life, these can be mainly women from the privileged groups who have potential access to the highest electoral bodies. And it is doubtful that they can represent the interest of underprivileged groups.

3 At least during the 2000s.

4 This is clearly stated in the explanatory note of the World Bank Database, for example.

mal, low-paid - to earn something at least. This argument is supported by that fact that 68% of part-time workers in 2011 were women (Institute of Demography and Social Research 2012, p. 180). But another factor is women's disproportional involvement in reproductive labor, which partly and to a great extent keeps many of them away from "productive" economic activities. This can be illustrated by the fact that among economically inactive women 28.6% are housewives or dependents, compared to 10.4% of men (State Statistics Agency 2017a). Another indirect illustration is to view the economically active population by gender in different age categories: in 2016 the biggest difference between men and women appears in those aged 25-29 (22.2 points) and 30-34 (18.4 points), after which the difference decreases, reaching a minimum (3.8 points) for those 40-49 (State Statistics Agency 2017b, p. 60). Childcare in the first two age categories is the obvious cause of female inactivity, reflecting the imbalanced distribution of reproductive labor.

Data from 2010 shows that among European countries Ukraine leads in hours spent by women on housework (excluding taking care of children): 24.6 hours a week on average (Strelnyk 2017a, p.25). Other data from the GFK research in 22 countries showed that Ukrainians and Indians spend the most time on cooking: more than 13 hours a week (GFK 2015). An average Ukrainian woman spends 15 hours on cooking, comparing to 9 hours for an average Ukrainian man (Hromadske Radio 2017). In the timeframe of one year this means that an average Ukrainian woman spends 32 round-the-clock days or nearly 48 days with a break to sleep in a year only to feed her family, which is 40% more than an average men.

Often being more vulnerable and willing to take any job, with time-consuming disproportional engagement in reproductive labor, women in Ukraine are facing vertical and horizontal segregation of employment. While the industrial sector is better paid, fewer and fewer women are employed in it: the percentage dropped from 38.7% in 1994 to 21.6% in 2017, with the lowest rate of 19.7% in 2008 (World Bank Database 2018d). The highest rate of male industrial employment was only 34% in 1992, with the lowest rate of 25.1% in 2003, and a current rate of 27.5% in 2017 (World Bank Database 2018e). The decrease of female employment in the industrial sector may be explained by the decrease

of the female industrial sector, mostly in the manufacturing industry, such as garments and textiles.[5] At the same time, female employment in the service sector, which is usually worse paid, has been growing constantly from 39.7% in 1992 to 65.2% in 2017 (World Bank Database 2018f). Starting from an even higher rate of 42.9% in 1992, the percentage of males working in the service industry has also been growing but only hit 54.4% in 2017 (World Bank Database 2018g). In other words, Ukraine started its independent economy with a far more balanced gender division of labor, which has been diverging ever since.[6] Vertical segregation is also significant. For example, though in 2015 almost 76.1% of public servants were women, 81.3% of the higher senior officers (first category) were occupied by men (State Statistics Agency 2017b, p. 69).

One of the most impressive discrepancies between men and women's careers is in education and science. Girls usually do better at school: in 2017 general testing they performed better than boys in all subjects (Dzerkalo Tyzhnia 2017), a statistically established fact, which completely refutes the patriarchal justification of gender inequality as based on intelligence. There is more: in 2013-2014 women were 52.3% of all the students and held 80% of all the jobs in secondary and higher education, including 52.4% in universities (Kohut 2014). These numbers already point to horizontal stratification where the number of women employed decreases with the increased status of educational institutions. Furthermore, only a quarter of deputy rectors and 9% of rectors are women. Gender inequalities in university careers are telling: only 51% of female lectures have Doctorates of Research or Higher Doctorates, compared to 79% of male lectures (ibid). The same picture is painted for academic titles: 59% of university lecturers without a title are women, 48% of assistant professors are women, and only 30% of full professors are women (ibid).

It is not surprising that all the discussed gender stratifications in

5 This was definitely caused by governmental policies during the "transition" crises of the 90s. The government was subsidizing and supporting heavy industry. On the one hand it did so because it probably perceived this industry as being more promising for future economic development and on the other, mass protests of (mostly) miners in the 90s pressed the government to support heavy industry. And while the logic of supporting male "breadwinners" did not play a major role, it might have also influenced government decisions.

6 General statistics like these simplify the actual picture of labor stratification in the Soviet Union but is illustrative of macro-tendencies.

the labor market have a direct impact on female earnings and resources. First of all, the gender pay gap is significant in Ukraine. Since the beginning of the century and till 2016 the gender pay gap fluctuated between 31.4% in 2003-2004 and 22.2% in 2010 (UNDP 2015, p. 43). In other words, even during the best years, it was worse than in most OECD countries, except Japan, Korea and Estonia. After a tendency to decline after 2004, the gender pay gap increased again significantly in 2015-2016 (see Table 1). This tendency indicates that special policies are needed to prevent wage discrepancy during a crisis. In the next section we will come back to the question of whether the government has attempted to prevent this discrepancy during the last crisis or whether it has done exactly the opposite.

Table 1. Wages (gross)[7] and gender pay gap

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 (9 months)
Legal minimum, UAH	1134	1218	1218	1378[8]	1600	3200
Legal minimum, Int$[9]	348	380	344	262	271	N.A
Average, UAH	3032	3274	3475	4207	5187	7351
Average, Int$	930	1021	982	800	877	N.A
Male, UAH	3429	3711	3979	4848	6001	8271
Male, Int$	1051	1158	1124	922	1015	N.A
Female, UAH	2661	2866	3037	3631	4480	6414
Female, Int$	816	894	858	691	758	N.A
Gender pay gap	**22.4%**	**22.8%**	**23.7%**	**25.1%**	**25.3%**	**22.45%**

Source: Author's calculations based on State Statistics Agency (2017f)

Besides clearly pointing to the significant gender pay gap, Table 1 shows the severity of the socioeconomic crisis, which hit the country in 2014, and its statistical outcomes for the wellbeing of the working population. One should take into account that this data only concerns

7 For the end of the period.

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

9 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 border and time, taking purchasing power and inflation into account. Here and further conversion factor from the World Bank Database (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/PA.NUS.PRVT.PP?locations=UA).

the formal economy. Experts assume that in the informal economy, which may make up 50% of the Ukrainian GDP, the gender pay gap may be even bigger (Koriukalov 2014, p. 31). As a survey of workers in 2013 showed, 12.3% of female workers were not even receiving the legal minimum wage (Butkaliuk 2015, p. 154).

What is also interesting is that female wages have devaluated more than male wages if one compares them in Int$: male wages in 2015 were 79.6% of 2013 wages, while female wages were 77.3%. So one can say that female wages were hit slightly harder than male wages. This can be explained by the fact that on average women earn less than men, hence, women more frequently earn minimum wage. And the minimum wage was frozen when the crises started. Female wages have also been recovering slightly slower: while male wages increased by 10.1% in 2016, female wages increased by only 9.7%.

This raises questions about the impact a gender pay gap has on working women and their ability to satisfy vital needs. According to the 2013 survey (Butkaliuk 2015, p. 158), only one third of the working women interviewed had enough of a healthy diet. At the same time, more than 43% had no possibility of fulfilling this basic need, compared to 36% for workers regardless gender (Butkaliuk 2014, p. 17).

Retiring after working in this gender segregated labor market, women in Ukraine cannot look forward to well-deserved sunset years. The gender gap in pensions is around 33% (UN Ukraine 2014). At the same time, when the retirement age for women was raised to 60 in 2011 after the IMF's demand (the pension reform of 2017 will be discussed in Section 2.3), one of the arguments behind this step was to make it level with men's retirement age to increase pensions for women. But taking into account all the abovementioned inequalities in the labor market, this argument looks more than doubtful. Statistics also disapprove this reasoning: The biggest gender gap in pensions was 32.8% in 2008 (Libanova et al 2012, p. 60), and the 2011 pension reform had not achieved its assumed positive impact. Experts conclude (Koriukalov 2014, p. 47) that after 45 years women mostly work in lower-paid sectors of the economy and in lower-paid positions.

1.3 Wellbeing of women

This complex and structural unequal position of working and retired women in the economy has a direct impact on their real wellbeing. It shapes their resources and their survival, both individually and of their families.

All in all, Ukrainian citizens were severely impacted by the crisis, which started in 2014. One of the most telling results of its socio-economic dimension is the number of households below the Ministry of Social Policy's (MSP) subsistence minimum (State Statistics Agency 2017c, pp. 252-253; 2017d, pp. 85-87). In 2016, 63.1% of households had a per capita equivalent monetary income for a month below the MSP's subsistence level (for MSP subsistence minimum see FPU 2018).[10] Moreover, in villages this figure is 71.6% of the population. Taking into account that 44.4% of the rural population are adult women and only 37.5% men (State Statistics Agency 2017c, p. 34),[11] this dramatic rural poverty concerns them more and is another dimension of structural gender inequality.

The situation is a little bit better if one takes into account not monetary income but general income. Here 48.2% are below the MSP subsistence minimum in 2016 (compared to 49.3% in 2015). And the rural population figures are almost the same as the general figures, which points to the fact that the rural population compensate for low monetary incomes with vegetable gardens and livestock. Sales of their own products constitute 8.1% of their general income, compared to 0.5% for the urban population and the value of these products consumed in the household constitutes 11.6% of general income, compared to 1.6% for city dwellers (State Statistics Agency 2017c, p. 196).

Unfortunately, it is impossible to compare the dynamics beyond this period, because the governmental agencies started to refer to the

10 The Ministry of Social Policy started to calculate its own subsistence minimum since the end of 2015 and calls it "actual subsistence minimum". It is calculated from the same consumer basket as the legal subsistence minimum, but in actual prices. Still it is significantly underestimated (for example, it does not include any expenses for accommodation like rent). The MSP subsistence minimum for an able-bodied person (including taxes) in November 2017 calculated by the Ministry of Social Policy was UAH 3,920, while the legal minimum wage was still UAH 3,200 and the legal subsistence minimum was UAH 1,684.

11 13.1 million or almost 31% of Ukrainian citizens live in rural areas (State Statistics Agency 2017b, p. 11).

MSP subsistence minimum only at the end of 2015 to evaluate the actual impact of inflation on people's wellbeing, beyond the obviously misleading legal subsistence minimum. However, if one makes the assumption that before the crises the legal subsistence minimum was at least close to the MSP subsistence minimum, this may shed light on the impact of the crises. In this case the highest level[12] of wellbeing is in 2011 (State Statistics Agency 2012, pp. 244-245), when the percentages of households below the legal subsistence minimum were: 11.4% for monetary income, 6% for general income, 18.9% for monetary income in rural households and 8.2% for general income in rural households.

Harder survival outcomes for women during the crises is visible not only in the gender pay gap, the salary dynamics in Int$ and the rural-urban dimension of household poverty but also in total resources available to women and their wellbeing as framed by those resources. This is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Difference between total expenditures and resources of the women-headed and men-headed households

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Difference between total expenditure					
Age					
18-29	8.3%	0.8%	-0.7%	8.8%	0.8%
30-pension age	2.3%	7.1%	5.9%	9.2%	6.4%
Of pension age	18.6%	20.4%	22.0%	19.2%	19.9%
Difference between total resources					
Age					
18-29	8.3%	1.3%	5.2%	9.2%	-2.0%
30-pension age	5.0%	11.4%	9.4%	10.4%	8.2%
of pension age	23.7%	24.6%	25.7%	24.0%	21.1%

Source: Author's calculations, based on State Statistics Agency[13]

Hence, while most of the households led by women usually spend less than those led by men, the crises caused peaks in this discrepan-

12 This survey by the State Statistics Agency goes back to 2008.

13 Calculations based on State Statistics Agency *Vytraty I resursy domohospodarstv Ukrainyi: statystychnyi zbirnyk*, [Expenditures and resources of Ukrainian households: statistical digest], p. 156 and 218 of the respective years (http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/druk/publicat/kat_u/publdomogosp_u.htm).

cy. In 2015 one can observe the peaks of gender-related inequalities in spending for families, headed by young and adult women, and in 2014 one can observe the same peak for families led by women of pension age. Similar tendencies can be observed in total resources available for households. Women-headed households usually have fewer resources than those headed up by men, with peaks in inequalities in 2015 for young-women-headed households and in 2014 for households headed by women of pension age.

In total, genders inequalities on the labor market, in careers and in retirement structurally threaten the wellbeing of Ukrainian women. Among the big groups, outcomes are probably the worst for elderly women[14] and rural women. All these impacts are negatively intensified in times of economic crises, dramatically increasing their risk of poverty. In the following Chapter we will discuss whether and how "anti-crisis" austerity measures by the government in 2014 could have influenced women wellbeing.

14 Approximately six million or 27% of women are over 60 (State Statistics Agency 2017b, p. 12).

2

"Anti-crises" austerity measures after 2014 and their possible impact on inequality

Most of the "anti-crises" measures were intended to balance the budget, which in socioeconomic outcomes for the population means austerity measures. Whether intended or not, these measures could not help but have an influence on gender inequality in the country. In general, "anti-crises" reforms hit women harder, both in the short and long-term perspective. In the previous chapter we outlined general changes in women's wellbeing before and during the crises period and in this chapter we will try to explain the links between governmental socioeconomic policies and the dynamics of gender inequality in the society.

2.1 Devaluation of reproductive labor

After independence and switching to a capitalist economy, the Ukrainian population has been decreasing constantly due to emigration and low birthrates, partially caused by socioeconomic instability, and the decline and transformation of the social structures and institutions. From the peak of more than 52 million in 1993 to the current number of a little more than 42 million (State Statistics Agency 2017e), the total relative decrease was more than 18%.[1] The government did not ignore this tendency and has been trying to counter it. The government's general policy on childbirth can be characterized by a combination of

1 One should take into account that there was no general census since 2001 so this data is only estimated and the decrease might be bigger.

different ideologies, practices and discourses, such as the "continuation of Soviet protectionism in relation to motherhood and childhood, post-Soviet liberalization in relations between a family and the state, nationalism and 'neofamilialism' [and] finally, of the new Western discourses of family planning, women's rights and gender equality" (Zhurzhenko 2015, p. 137). The 52 million Ukrainians were the dream of the nationalistic state and in 2005 there was even a social campaign with the slogan "There Should be 52 Million of Us."

There is no space to analyze the government's demographic policies and their relation to gender inequality in detail. The issue is that some of those policies led to progressive support of reproductive labor, but the "anti-crises" measures had the most negative impact on them.

One of the most progressive policies of the government to support birthrates was a subsidy paid upon a child's birth. This payment had been relatively regularly increased and it was progressive: more money was paid for the second and third child.[2] Its introduction targeted the demographic situation, but intentionally or not, it also played the role of economic support not only for families with children, but also for women, providing them with an independent income during the several-year-long period after having a baby. This could partially offset their staying out of the labor market and strengthen their position in a family. In 2014 this payment was decreased, leveled off and frozen. Table 3 reflects the development of the subsidy for the birth of a child, both in local currency and in Int$ for monthly payments.

Table 3. Subsidy for the birth of a child[3]

	2008	2009	2010	2011[4]	2012	2013	2014[5]	2015	2016
General (1st child)[6], UAH	12240	12240	12240	17952	26790	29160	41280	41280	41280
monthly[7] (1st child, UAH	630	630	630	884	744.17	810	860	860	860

2 For the each child after the third the amount is the same as for the third.

3 Here we exclude payments for the second child, as it is somewhere between payments for the 1st and 3rd child, but only till 2014, when all the payments became the same.

4 Since 2011 this payment was bound to the legal subsistence minimum for children (multiplied by 30 for the 1st child, by 60 for the second and by 120 for the third and following children), valid only till "anti-crises" changes of 2014.

5 Since July 1.

6 For the beginning of the year.

7 In different years and for different children this monthly payment could last 12 to 72 months.

	2008	2009	2010	2011[3]	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
monthly (1st child), Int$	249	214	199	267	228	253	243	164	145
% of average gross monthly wage in Int$	35%	33%	28%	34%	25%	25%	25%	21%	17%
General (3rd and following children), UAH	50000	50000	50000	73440	107160	116640	41280	41280	41280
monthly (3rd and following children), UAH	1250	1250	1250	1836	1364.31	1485	860	860	860
monthly (3rd and following children), Int$	494	425	395	555	418	463	243	164	145
% of average gross monthly wage in Int$	69%	65%	56%	70%	45%	45%	25%	21%	17%

Sources: Author's calculations, based on Parliament of Ukraine (2018), State Statistics Agency (2017g)

It is the monthly payment in Int$ which deserves the most attention, as it provides regular monthly income for a family during at least a year, and in some periods with a third and following children for six years. As one can see from the table, the highest monthly payment for the first child in Int$ was in 2011, corresponding to 34% of the average wage in Int$. In relative terms it was the highest in 2008, when it corresponded to 35% of the average wage. For the third and following children the highest monthly payment both in absolute and relative terms in Int$ was also in 2011, corresponding to 70% of the average wage. Taking into account the obvious fact that wages were often lower in rural regions, the subsidy could basically compensate salaries for rural women, one of the most underprivileged and largest female subcategories.

Not only the amount but also the progressive scale in the subsidy for the birth of a child was important. In that way the government recognized the uneven burden on the family budget with every next child and, intentionally or not, increased financial aid for women with every additional year they spent away from the labor market.

By decreasing, leveling off and freezing this subsidy since July 1, 2014, most of its meaning has vanished. Because of the fixed monthly payment, which has not been increased since, this support has devaluated by 43% for the first child, compared to 2013. Because of the leveling off for the following children and because of inflation, the monthly payment for the third child has decreased 69% since 2013. And in 2016 the monthly subsidy for the birth of a child constituted only 17% of the aver-

age wage. Which is not surprising, taking into account that the average wage has managed to catch up with inflation and ended its decrease in Int$ in 2015, starting to grow again the next year. The austerity measures of 2014 had a huge negative impact on families with children and on the economic power of women in families. Because of such measures to balance the budget, one of the biggest independent resources supporting female reproductive labor has been devaluating constantly. And the aggregated negative effect of female time away from the labor market is not taken into consideration anymore. The outcomes for families with children can be, to some extent,[8] illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Households below poverty line, by number of children

	general	1 child	2 children	3 children	4 children	5 and more
Households with per capita equivalent monetary income for a month below legal/MSP[9] subsistence minimum						
2016	63.1%	68.6%	75.6%	94.5%	90.3%	66.4%
2013	11.4%	14.6%	27.4%	44.6%	63.9%	63.3%
Households with per capita equivalent general income for a month below legal/MSP subsistence minimum, general						
2016	48.2%	55.7%	66.4%	84.9%	86.9%	60.2%
2013	6.9%	10.1%	17.0%	30.6%	38.9%	49.3

Source: State Statistics Agency (2017c, pp. 252-253, pp. 260-261; 2014b, pp. 252-253, pp. 260-261)

The vast majority of families with three and four children live on the edge of the survival. And though non-monetary income, which probably includes additional subsidies and benefits for families with many children, somewhat improves their resources, the situation remains catastrophic, even compared to a general low level of wellbeing. Any comparison with 2013 can only be limited as it is hard to say to what extent the legal subsistence minimum before the crises corresponded to the MSP minimum, and the MSP was not calculated. But because the legal subsistence minimum had been increased at least once a year

8 Though the MSP subsistence minimum was not calculated before the end of 2015 and this specific data exists only for 2016, it can be carefully assumed that the discrepancy between legal and "actual" subsistence minimum was not big in 2013 before the crisis and inflation have started. This is only a conditional comparison though.

9 Below the MSP subsistence minimum for 2016 and below legal subsistence minimum for 2013.

before the crises and inflation was relatively low, it can reasonably be stated that the situation has regressed dramatically (though the comparison in Table 4 should not be as a direct comparison of percentages because it is below the MSP minimum for 2016 and below the official minimum for 2013, it can be used to refer to the negative tendency). Without a doubt, this was partially due to austerity measures which affected support for families with children, as discussed above.

The same "anti-crises" reforms of July 1, 2014 cancelled the subsidy to cover the first three years of childcare. This subsidy was not big compared to the one discussed above, but its cancellation basically means that there is no more direct payment for female reproductive labor in Ukraine at all.

The existing policy to pursue the demographic dream of the nationalistic state was sacrificed to neoliberal austerity. As is commonly known, another popular and far less progressive policy of the nationalistic state can be criminalization of abortions. Luckily, unlike in neighboring Poland, abortions are still legal in Ukraine and the anti-abortion campaign is far less active than in neighboring Russia. However, propositions of this kind regularly appear in Parliament. The last one was just at the beginning of 2017, when a deputy from the president's party proposed a bill which would prohibit abortions accept for medical reasons. This attempted failed, as all the previous had failed. However, it is possible that a further decrease in population due to a difficult socioeconomic situation, combined with conservative and nationalist tendencies, will convince the government to pass these regressive propositions. Guided by the austerity politics, which do not allow demographic tendencies to be stabilized using socioeconomic instruments, at some point the government may give in to temptation and decide to shed all responsibility for the "national revival", placing it squarely on women.

It is also worth mentioning that part of the governmental policy on motherhood, which has a controversial effect on gender equality, was at first intended to support mothers. And this is precisely the policy which needs to be reformed in the first place - both to stabilize demographics and to improve women's socioeconomic situation. According to the law, parents or other principal caretakers have the right to up to three years leave for childcare, during which time their job must be held

for them. However, there are several major problems with this. First of all, nobody is required to pay you anything during the time you are not on the labor market, except for social security payments for pregnancy and delivery for only roughly two month before and two months after birth. Secondly, with the high level of informality, many (if not most) employers do not follow the rule of preserving the job. And thirdly, the mother is the principle caretaker for the child in the vast majority of cases. Though the law allows fathers to take this leave, only 1% of them are taken by fathers (UPCHR 2014, p. 410). This puts women in a vulnerable position on the labor market: according to polls, 29.1% of women were rejected for jobs because of possible motherhood, pregnancy or because they had a small child (ibid, p. 411). A total of 14.7% of women reported that they had to quit their job because of pregnancy, having a child or frequent medical leave (Strelnyk 2017b, p. 150).

It is no surprise: though conservatism may play a role here, the prime cause of female-dominated parental leave is the absence of a salary-related payment during the leave. Taking into account that women usually earn less, families have to make an economic choice. These factors make it structurally impossible to press for gender balance in childcare. And this all contributes to the gender discrimination of women on the labor market, which is even paradoxically reflected in the Labor Code, where there are some specific benefits for "mothers" (Tkalich et al 2017), which can be used by men only if they are single fathers. Those benefits are progressive by themselves, but they also linguistically and legally reflect deeply rooted gender inequalities and the realities of those inequalities.

Austerity measures decrease financial support for mothers and no progress has been made in reforms which can contribute to a better distribution of reproductive labor. Usually mothers have little choice, especially if they are not from the privileged classes. They cannot hire a nanny and public kindergartens are available only when children are 1 and a half years old at the earliest, and generally starting when children are three. By providing three-years maternity leave the state recognizes its unwillingness to develop accessible and high-quality kindergartens for smaller children and puts the burden of reproductive labor on women, economically devaluating it at the same time.

Taking into account that most of single parents are women, and

that most of the caretaking of those who need it is done by women, subsidies for single parents and caretakers are also important to understand how the state supports or fails to support women. The development of some of these subsidies is illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5. Subsidies for single parents and caretakers

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Max. subsidy for single parents, UAH	598.50	643	685.50	727.50	1689	1860
Max. subsidy for single parents, Int$	183	201	194	138	286	N.A.
% of average gross monthly wage in Int$	20%	20%	20%	17%	33%	N.A.
Max. social allowance for caring for disabled adults with first category[10] disability from childhood, UAH	663	711.75	711.75	805.5	935.25	1029.75
Max. social allowance for caring for disabled adults with first category disability from childhood, Int$	203	222	201	153	158	N.A.
% of the average gross monthly wage in Int$	22%	22%	21%	19%	18%	N.A.
Maximum social allowance for caring for disabled children, UAH	598.50	1286	1286	1455	1689	1860
Maximum social allowance for caring for disabled children, Int$	183	401	363	277	286	N.A.
% of average gross monthly wage in Int$	20%	39%	37%	35%	33%	N.A.
Max. social allowance for a person who lives with and cares for a person with mental disability, category 1-2, UAH	1095	1176	1176	1330	1544	1700
Max. social allowance for a person who lives with and cares for a person with mental disability, category 1-2, Int$	336	367	332	253	261	N.A.
% of average gross monthly wage in Int$	36%	36%	34%	32%	30%	N.A.

Source: Author's calculations, based on Parliament of Ukraine (2017, 2018), Cabinet of Ministers (2017), State Statistics Agency (2017g)

10 There are three categories ("groups") of disabilities in which the first is the highest: when a person cannot take care of him or herself without the help of another person.

Till January 1, 2016 the subsidy for single parents (the majority of whom are women) was calculated as the difference between 50% of the legal subsistence minimum for a child of the respective age and the general monthly income of a family per family member (over the past six months), but no less than 30% of the respective legal subsistence minimum. This meant that all single parents received at least some amount of money, however small. Those who received more than the minimum subsidy (due to low income) had to prove this with documentation every six months. Since the beginning of 2016 it is calculated as the difference between 100% of the legal subsistence minimum for a child of the respective age and the general monthly income of a family per family member (for the past six months); the minimum payment was eliminated. When the changes were introduced this meant that a single mother with one child was not eligible for this subsidy anymore if her monthly income exceeded UAH 2,334 (with a child under six) and UAH 2,910 (with a child over six). This limit was introduced to make this subsidy "more targeted" and to exclude families with "high incomes" (Yanovska 2016). Taking into account that the MSP subsistence minimum for January 2016 was UAH 2,482 for one person, two-member families (for example, a single mother and her child) were put on the edge of survival. The change had a positive effect on the maximum amount, which in 2016 reached 33% of the average wage in Int$ and finally caught up with inflation. But only single parents with no income at all could receive this maximum: one third of an average wage or 59% of the MSP subsistence minimum for one person (as of December 2016). As of December 2017 it still constituted 61% of the MSP subsistence minimum for one person. Statistically, cancellation of the minimum payment excluded at least one third of single mothers from the list (UNN 2018).

The ocial allowance for caring for people with disabilities is paid additionally to subsidize them and can be classified as a kind of payment for caretaking. The maximum social allowance for caring for disabled adults with first category disability from childhood is calculated as 50-75% of the legal subsistence minimum for a disabled person (depending on the disability's subcategory). Even before the crises it could constitute only 22% of an average wage for caretaking for people with the highest disability. And because of the inadequate increase in the le-

gal subsistence minimum during the crises, it has devaluated: in 2016 it constituted only 18% of an average wage or 33% of the MSP subsistence minimum for one person (as of December 2016) and could not overcome crisis inflation. As of December 2017 it still constituted 34% of the MSP subsistence minimum for one person. This subsidy (though in a smaller proportion, 15%) can be paid to disabled adults in other categories, but only if they don't have close relatives and if the medical commission considers that they need permanent care. The allowance for permanent care of a single person with a "lower" disability is five times smaller than the maximum social allowance analyzed above.

The social allowance for caring for disabled children is paid only if a caretaker is unemployed, with the exception of single parents. Since 2017 an exception was also made for caretakers of children with the highest disabilities. It was equal to 50% of the legal subsistence minimum for a child of the respective age. Since July 2013 it was changed to 100% for children with the highest disability, remaining 50% for the rest. Because of this, the maximum payment significantly increased in 2013 and has been devaluating slowly since. At the end of 2016 it was at best one third of the average monthly wage in Int$, and at the end of 2017 it constituted only 61% of the MSP subsistence minimum for one person.

The social allowance is also paid to a person who lives with and cares for a person with a 1-2 category mental disability if he or she needs constant care. It has to be validated every six month and till the beginning of 2017 it was calculated as the difference between three legal subsistence minimums for every family member and the family's average monthly income over the past six month but could not be higher than the legal minimum wage. However, in 2017 the maximum was delinked from the minimum wage and linked to the legal subsistence minimum obviously because the minimum wage doubled in 2017. All in all, the crises devaluated this payment significantly and at the end of 2016 it was equal to 30% of the average monthly wage in Int$, and at the end of 2017 it constituted only 56% of the MSP subsistence minimum for one person.

There is also a social compensation for people who permanently provide social (care) services for the elderly, adults and children with disabilities, and for people with health problems who cannot care for themselves (Cabinet of Ministers 2014). It is 7-15% of the legal subsistence

minimum and is valid only if those who need care are not being assisted by public social services and if a caretaker is unemployed, and if no other social allowance for caring is provided. Moreover, no matter how many people one takes care of, she can receive compensation only for one.

One of the most humiliating caretaking subsidies is compensation for an unemployed person who takes care of a person with a first category disability or of a person over 80 (Cabinet of Ministers 2016). It is still stated in the law that the amount of this compensation should be 480,000 karbovanets, the currency which was used before hryvnia was introduced in 1996. It means that a person receives a compensation of UAH 4.80, which is less than 15 eurocents as of the end of 2017.

In sum, most of the subsidies for caretaking, performed mostly by women, were far less than the average wage before the crises and have been devaluated by crisis inflation and the government's "anti-crises" decision not to adjust the legal subsistence minimum in a proper proportion. While the only subsidy for single parents was increased over inflation, only parents in severe poverty (without any income) can receive its maximum amount, which is not enough to provide adequate support even for one person, not to speak of her child. And those with incomes a little bit over the MSP subsistence minimum for one person were considered too "rich" to be assisted, excluding most of the single mothers from the recipients. The rest of the caretaking payments could not recover from inflation and the government's intentional policy to "save" the budget was (in this case) at the expense of exploiting women in difficult family circumstances.

2.2 Structural changes in opportunities for female "productive" labor and infrastructural changes

Together with devaluing female reproductive labor, the government passed other reforms, which structurally increased the inequality of opportunities for Ukrainian women. These were also done within classical neoliberal austerity measures to balance the budget during the crises.

On March 27, 2014 the "anti-crises" package was passed, which included the decision to decrease the number of public servants in the central government and local state administrations by at least 10%. As was mentioned in Section 1.2, 76% of these servants are wo-

men. Hence, the neoliberal policy of austerity and the "small state" also mainly affected women. Furthermore, the number of state servants decreased at least by one third: there were nearly 300,000 of them in 2015 (RBK 2015), and at the beginning of 2017 there were a little more than 200,000 (Interfax 2017).

Another step by the government, which has been gradually implemented over the years and accelerated by the "anti-crises" policies, is "optimization" of the education system. Approximately 55,100 of education workers were either fired or quit between 2015 and 2016 (State Statistics Agency 2017h).[11] And there were more talks in 2017 about further layoffs (Vashi Novyny 2017). Since 12% of women are employed in education, compared to 3.2% of men (Libanova 2012, p. 42), this tendency has hit them harder. Generally, the government closes small schools, mostly in villages, and vocational schools. The number of rural schools decreased by 11.7% between 2005 and 2013 (State Statistics Agency 2014a, p. 10). Almost 8% or 1400 schools (State Statistics Agency 2018b) and more than 7% or 58 vocational schools (State Statistics Agency 2018c) were closed between 2014 and 2018. There is no such tendency for kindergartens, but there are not enough kindergartens anyway: they are understaffed and still serve only 55% of children (State Statistics Agency 2017i) and only one third in rural areas. This is recognized even by the government itself, though only in official reports. For example, the 2017 baseline report by the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Ukraine states that it is necessary to "develop a network of pre-school institutions, especially in rural areas" in order to improve gender equality (MEDTU 2017, p. 43).

Similar tendencies, though less broad in scope, can be seen in health, another "female" sector of employment, which with social work employs 10.6% of women, compared to 2.5% of men (Libanova 2012, p. 42). While there are no general large scale hospital closures during the crises years (though there were some cases and even protests against them), the "optimization" of 2005-2013 has led to a 70% decrease in the number of hospitals in rural areas (State Statistics Agency 2014a, p. 10). Between 2014 and 2016 39% or 41 hospitals and 21% or 123 clinics were closed in vil-

11 It is impossible to compare with previous years due to Crimea's annexation and part of the territories excluded from the government's control.

lages (State Statistics Agency 2017k, p. 8). As a result, 48% of rural women do not have medical care centers or hospitals nearby (UNDP Ukraine 2015). In general there was no decrease in the number of doctors over the last three years, although there was a decrease in other medical staff, down 12,000 or 3% from 2014 to 2016 (State Statistics Agency 2017j). This tendency may escalate and impact the number of doctors and hospitals when the government implements its intended large scale health care reform (which will be discussed briefly in the following section).

Another neoliberal step of expenditure cuts, passed in 2014, was the actual destruction of the social workers' institution. In 2012 the previous government decided to increase the number of 4,600 social workers by 12,000 (Korrespondent 2012). The same 12,000 were excluded from the state budget in 2014, which, for example, was criticized by mainstream women rights organizations (La Strada 2014). Taking into account that this institution took care of families in difficult situations, of people with disabilities, the elderly and orphans, this step deprived women of help in their reproductive labor. Besides these functions, social workers were also supposed to work with family violence, which has always primarily targeted women and children. The "optimization" of social workers has led to less support for women's reproductive labor in difficult family situations and left them with less protection. This step is even more destructive in the situation with IDPs, who could also be supported by social workers. It seems that the government has at least partially realized this impressive mistake and now there are talks of hiring 1,500 additional social workers in the regions with high IDP density (iPress 2015).

Another austerity measure in the "anti-crises" package, already mentioned above, was the decision to freeze the legal minimum wage and legal subsistence minimum despite rocketing inflation. As shown in Table 1, this led to a decrease in the legal minimum wage in Int$ by more than 37% between 2013 and 2016. The government started to increase it slowly only in September 2015, and that increase could not catch up with inflation. Finally, at the beginning of 2017, the legal minimum wage was unprecedentedly doubled. One of the most probable results of this doubling is the previously unknown low gender pay gap: in the first half of 2017 it decreased to 19.7%. Because mostly women re-

ceive lower and minimum wages, mostly women have seen their wages (at least in formal economy) double.

However, the government took this step in a tricky way and with questionable intentions. To avoid a sharp increase in budget expenditures, it delinked public workers' salaries from the legal minimum wage. Before, the legal minimum wage was based on basic salaries ("tariffs") for public workers. Now it is the legal subsistence minimum, which remains two times lower than the legal minimum wage. The probable main motive of the government was actually to increase tax revenues without radically increasing budget expenditures. Since the legal minimum wage defines the amount of the "single/united" social contribution, paid by small business owners and employers, those contributions have increased.[12] The increase has taken place regardless and for at least half a year the gender pay gap decreased in most of the spheres in mid-2017, while the sharpest decrease happened in administration and education. Unfortunately, this impact was not long-lasting, and the gender pay gap in September 2017 increased to 22.45%.

However, the refusal to increase the legal subsistence minimum in line with inflation is still there. And one of the most important things it influences is subsidies. We reviewed this impact on caretaking payments in the previous section, but pensions are also a major issue here. Until October 2017 the legal subsistence minimum for retired and disabled people defined the minimum pension. By October 2017 it was UAH 1,312 or EUR 43,[13] and the average pension in April 2017 was UAH 1,828 or EUR 63[14] (Ukrinform 2017). At the same time, 67% of pensioners receive the minimum pension (ibid), and women usually receive 33% less than men, while they are 63% of total pensioners (Siohiodni 2017). The low pensions impact them negatively and disproportionally.

With the economic crises in the background, this all leads to women having an increasing load of devalued reproductive labor, losing their jobs, earning relatively less, and with no prospects for a respecta-

12 This is not to criticize a tax increase but to point to the divergence between rhetoric, questionable actions and the actual intentions of the neoliberal government when it tries to maneuver between cutting costs, the necessity of increasing revenues and keeping up the "good business climate" during the crisis.

13 Currency rates from Oanda, September 1, 2017.

14 Currency rates from Oanda, April 1, 2017.

ble retirement. It irrevocably leads to the feminization of poverty, caused both by ongoing neoliberal reforms (Butkaliuk 2015, p. 154) and by the conflict (UN Women 2016). In the context of crisis and inadequate governmental policies women are facing higher risks of poverty, especially in underprivileged groups, among which older women, women with children and rural women are the biggest. However, the government cares little for their plight: it follows the austerity path dictated by international creditors, which does not contradict its own vision of "anti-crises" policies. Alternatives are not considered, though they do exist.

For example, while analyzing austerity measures in European countries, instead of "optimizing" education, health care and other social spheres, feminists propose (European Women's Lobby 2012) to develop them instead. Besides supporting women in their reproductive labor, this development could create jobs in traditionally female areas. This would, at least partially, counterbalance the disproportional impact of economic decline on women. There would, of course, be other positive outcomes for society's wellbeing at least within capitalist system if it were to choose the path of "purchasing power – economic growth" instead of the neoliberal "business climate – economic growth." However, the Ukrainian government has obviously chosen the latter, perceiving catastrophically cheap labor as an advantage, and not as its own total defeat, which affects women disproportionally.

2.3 Forthcoming "reforms"

While the 2014 reforms were a classical example of austerity measures in the context of economic crisis, austerity itself is in no way limited to that period. On the contrary, it is a general neoliberal policy, applied as a doctrine by the government, and with all things being equal, it will most likely determine the development of the country in the coming years. Among the ongoing/forthcoming reforms, the Labor Code project, pension and health care reforms are worth mentioning because of their potential large-scale and long-lasting impact.

Ukraine still has the Labor Code from the Soviet period. There is no doubt that it needs reform, but that can be done from different standpoints. The first standpoint can be used both by (neo)liberals and leftists: the existing Code is simply not working for a huge (if not major-

ity) part of labor relations in the country due to the informal economy, problems with law enforcement, etc. Leftists argue for improvements in law enforcement and bringing labor relations into the formal sector. While liberals can argue the same, they also push for subsistent changes in the Code, which would legalize part of illegal practices existing today. Their logic is simple: the Code is too tough and those practices exist anyway. It is crucial to understand that there is a difference between criticizing the content of the Labor Code for being outdated in terms of gender equality between working mothers and fathers, and criticizing it for being too tough and damaging the "investment climate."

Attempts to pass the new Labor Code have been going on for years. In 2015 it was passed by Parliament "on the first reading" and since then different parliamentary groups and committees have been working on it. In gender inequality its reform is twofold. On the one hand it stops talking about "working mothers" and reproducing the image of women as the primarily caretakers for children. Now this paradigm (at least on paper) should shift to "workers with family responsibilities" who have additional benefits and protection in employment. In theory, the new Labor Code gives families opportunities to decide which of the partners will use those benefits (Tkalich 2017). Being yet another façade change, which cannot alter the existing disproportional distribution of reproductive labor caused by structural problems as discussed in Section 1.2, this norm is progressive by itself.

However, at the same time, the new Labor Code excludes the norm according to which an employer has to provide a written explanation if he or she refuses to employ a pregnant woman or a mother of a child under three. Today this refusal can be appealed in court but would become impossible under the new Code. In the last version of the Labor Code a no-probation rule is applied only to pregnant and mothers of children under three, while in the previous edition of the new Code this was proposed for men too. While firing pregnant women is still punishable by law, in the newest edition of the Code workers with family responsibilities can be fired in cases of disciplinary infractions (with plenty of room to maneuver in defining those infractions). At the same time the new Labor Code will not introduce the fathers' quota in childcare

leave[15] and in fact men will not be able to take childcare leave if their wives are not formally employed (Dudin 2017). The new Code also deprives men of 14 days of unpaid leave for the birth of a child.

One of the worst norms in the new Code – less restrictions on fixed-term contracts – will have a negative impact on labor relations in general and women in particular. While it is women who are mostly working in cultural sectors and as teachers, the new norm will allow the use of fixed-term contracts for these (and some other) professions without restriction. Other negative norms, which will impact workers in general, include potentially unrestricted overtime,[16] lower (than in the first editions of the new Code) fines for informal employment and payment below the minimum wage, no fines for civil agreements instead of labor agreements (ibid), etc. Hence, some progressive parts of the new Labor Code go in the same package as a massive regressive shift for labor in general, for women in particular and with no real progress in reproductive labor redistribution.

On October 3, 2017 the government passed the new pension reform. It was one of the IMF's demands to decrease the budget deficit.[17] On the relatively positive side, it delinks minimum pensions from the legal subsistence minimum and now they must correspond to 40% of the minimum wage. Another positive aspect of the reform is cancellation of the 15% tax for working pensioners, but only if after this tax their pension is lower than 150% of the legal subsistence minimum for a pensioner. The formula to calculate it was also changed which, to a certain extent, has increased pensions and theoretically has introduced their automatic recalculations. The biggest relative increase has happened for those who did not receive the minimum pension because they did not have enough pensionable service (by 45% or EUR 13).[18] This is a relatively positive change for women, who were overrepresented in this category of pensioners, but they will still only get 46% of the MSP sub-

15 Impossible anyway since parental leave is unpaid.

16 While there is supposedly a restriction on yearly overtime hours (which should be paid double), in other parts of the new Code overtime over this yearly restriction must be paid triple, with no restriction on the length of this "triple" overtime.

17 The logic of decreasing the budget deficit, however, did not prevent the government from decreasing the single social contribution by employers in 2014, which had a major impact on the Pension Fund's deficit.

18 Currency rates from Oanda, October 1, 2017.

sistence minimum (as of October 2017). For the minimum pension the reform means a very small increase - 11%, or approximately EUR 4 - , which makes the minimum pension 48% of the MSP subsistence minimum (as of October 2017). And while the government has already reported that the average pension has increased by almost 30% or by EUR 17[19] (ICTV 2017), it is still 18% less than the MSP subsistence minimum (as of October 2017). All in all, as can be seen in Table 6, the devaluation of the average pension in Int$ is great. And while there is no conversion factor available yet to evaluate its "increase" after the last reform, an assessment in EUR clearly shows that the average pension is still almost two-times smaller in EUR than it was before the crises.

Table 6. Average pension in Ukraine[20]

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Average pension, UAH	1253.3	1470.7	1526.1	1581.5	1699.5	1828.3	2446.6
Average pension, Int$	384	459	431	301	287	N.A	N.A.
Average pension, EUR[21]	119	137	133	81	64	63	72

Source: Author's calculations, based on ICTV 2017 and State Statistics Agency 2018a

By calling the reform a "pension increase" the government was trying to shift discursive attention from its biggest impact: the increase in the minimum pensionable service and/or pension age (Ekonomichna Pravda 2017). For example, in 2018 women who are 60 years old can retire with at least a minimum pension only if they have been formally working for at least 25 years (25 years of pensionable service). Before it was 15 years. This increase will continue one year every year: in 2019 a 60 year old worker can retire only with 16 years of pensionable service, and after 2019 only 65 year olds will be able to retire with at least a minimum pension if they have 15 years of pensionable service. And here we go back to the question of people, mostly women, who do not participate in the formal economy and who will be facing the problem of not enough pensionable service to retire with the minimum pension.

One of the slogans under which the reform was passed was that it will allow pensions to increase. However, when the majority of re-

19 Currency rates from Oanda, October 20, 2017.
20 Beginning of the year.
21 Currency rates from Oanda, January 1 of the respective year.

tired people receive the minimum pension, only the modest minimum pension increase applies to them. And this is especially true for women, whose pension is on average only 33% the male pension, and who are most often receiving the minimum pension. This increase still puts the pensions of most of older people, the majority of whom are women, at less than half of the MSP subsistence minimum. Moreover, the increase in formal work through the pension reform will hit women hard if the unequal gender distribution of reproductive labor in society is taken into account. Maternity leave and reproductive labor influence women's wages and therefore their pensions. The existing situation in the pension system and its current reform have continuously reproduced the women-pensioners as one of the worst-off categories in the time before and after the crises (see household statistics in Section 1.3).

The health care reform will also hit women harder. As was discussed in the previous section, the decreasing number of jobs in the sector will lead to less employment opportunities for a predominantly female labor force. The introduction of official payment for almost everything above the first level of aid and diagnostics will also make the health care system less affordable for women and women-headed households due to income inequality. And the further shortage of hospitals through "optimization" processes will mean less infrastructure to support women's reproductive labor, shifting more caring responsibilities to families and therefore women. This impact will be disproportionately harder for the rural population, again, making rural women one of the most disadvantaged categories. The ongoing closure of rural hospitals and clinics in villages, which will most likely continue with the healthcare reform, leave this population without the possibility of being treated in their areas. This process will put the additional financial burden (logistics, medication) on individuals, and it will be unbearable for some, especially for older rural women.

In general, the current and forthcoming reforms of the labor law, pension and health care systems will increase gender inequalities and decrease opportunities for women. Instead of deploying reforms, which would compensate for the underprivileged positions of women, the government follows the opposite path, which will also hit one of the least well-off categories - the older and rural female population - the hardest.

3
War and displacement

In its structural outcomes war usually has the most negative impact on the socially disadvantaged, including women. In the context of the Ukrainian military conflict this raises the problem of women's lives as IDPs. In 2016, 62% of IDPs were women (Smal 2016).

Displacement has a definite impact on the population in general and women in particular. For the female majority of IDPs the issues of housing, searching for jobs and the integration into a local community are even more important, especially in the context of all the austerity measures and their gender-related disproportional outcomes for women. They come to a new place where less "female" jobs are available because of "optimization" in the public sector. It is not surprising that women constitute almost 72% of the registered unemployed IDPs (ibid). On the existing labor market they are offered lower positions and wages than men are. They, most likely, will more often fall into the informal sector. At the same time they (according to the female proportion in IDPs) have to become a principle or even only breadwinner more often compared to the women in a local community. With the limited resources available to them, women IDPs have to buy the basic everyday items and rent an apartment: 66% (ibid) to 90% (Right to Advocacy 2017) of IDPs rent one. In general, women IDPs must shoulder an increasing financial burden, both because of displacement and because of structural changes in the economy caused by austerity measures. Taking into account that half of IDPs are people over 60 (UN OCHA 2017, p.8), their survival depends heavily on their pension. Controversial pension reform, discussed in the previous section, influences their ability to survive. A lack of jobs and lack of housing are the top causes

of IDPs' return to separatist-controlled territories: in September 2017, 16% of the population in separatist-controlled territories were IDPs who returned (International Organization for Migration 2017b, p. 6). Approximately half of them are over 60 years old. To get their pension, which is the main source of income for 61% of them (ibid), they have to go to government-controlled territory at least every two month, going through a long procedure at checkpoints and facing the danger of shellfire and landmines.

It is logical that the problem of an additional financial burden should be solved by state support. And it does exist: as of October 2017 the social allowance for IDPs amounted to UAH 884 (EUR 30[1]) for pensioners and children, UAH 442 (EUR 15[2]) for working-age able-bodied people, and the one linked to legal subsistence minimum for disabled people, if a person has a disability. Besides being critically small in monetary terms, this state support is related to continuous scandals connected with the procedure and with state practices to control IDPs (ibid; WILF 2017, p. 14).

The degradation of reproductive infrastructure and the devaluation of caretaking support are other problems faced by women on the intersection of displacement and austerity. Taking into account that women are those who are mostly integrated into this infrastructure, and as such, mostly dependent on its operation, displacement has a negative effect on them. These are women who are mostly responsible for the pre-school and later education of children, for their health and the health of other family members who need additional care (people with disabilities, the elderly). If a family cannot get support from the public reproductive infrastructure, mostly women will be performing caring functions: staying with children if no kindergartens are available; caring for others by themselves if no social worker can assist. All this, in turn, decreases women IDPs chances of finding full time employment, formal employment, decent wages or at least an opportunity to earn money. And the state's support of caretaking - because of inflation and the government's austerity policies - is not nearly enough to balance their material conditions and compensate for the time and

1 Currency rates from Oanda, June 1, 2017
2 Currency rates from Oanda, June 1, 2017

energy spent on this labor. All in all, female IDPs constitute yet another large underprivileged group of women.

Probably one of the most underprivileged groups of Ukrainian women is the one that lives in and close to the war zone. They lose jobs due to economic crises and war and many settlements face problems with electricity and water, lack supply of basic goods, transportation and basic reproductive infrastructure like hospitals, schools or kindergartens (WILF 2017, Holoborodko 2018, UN OCHA 2017, UNICEF 2017). In some cases there are not even facilities for basic healthcare or obstetric care (see discussion on healthcare reform in Sections 2.2 and 2.3). To get to the nearest facility women would have to spend 100% or even 200% of their monthly income on transportation because there is no regular public transportation (WILF 2017, p. 11). As a result many do not receive proper treatment and cannot have their children treated. Women in the "grey zone" (between the Ukrainian army and the separatist militia) and separatist-controlled areas would also have to pass a checkpoint which means additional time, sometimes also corruption (Holoborodko 2018), improper treatment, harassment (WILF 2017, p. 11) and other problems. More than 310 education facilities are within 15 kilometers of the contact line on government-controlled territory (46% of them are kindergartens) and 38% of them are within 5 kilometers of the contact line (UNICEF 2017, p. 13). Many women have to keep their children out of kindergartens for safety reasons, lack of transportation or poverty (UNICEF 2017, p. 17). The government clearly does not do enough, and in their stead volunteers, NGOs, and international organizations supply citizens with basic goods and services. But this supply is by no means systematic, especially in the "grey zone." And there are problems which cannot be solved without the government like systematic access to healthcare and education, jobs, subsidies, and regular transportation.

Another big issue for women living in or close to the conflict zone is sexual violence and exploitation. There is still no statistics on the scope of the problem (WILF 2017, p. 9) and only individual cases are reported. However, there is some indirect statistics pointing to the breadth of the issue: between October 30, 2014 and March 31, 2016 in the government-controlled territory of Donetsk and Luhansk

Regions there were twice as many court decisions on family sexual violence compared to the same period before (Symonova 2017). Taking into account the lack of law-enforcement and fear (especially if acts of violence are perpetrated by soldiers), the problem must be hugely underreported. "Sex for survival" is another problem in the conflict zone: because of the humanitarian situation women and even teenagers (UNICEF 2017, p. 10) agree to have sex (often with soldiers) for money or food (WILF 2017, p. 9-10).

The lack of appropriate state action to address the numerous problems faced by women because of war is caused not only by war itself but by austerity measures. These negatively influence the situation of women all over the country but lead to systemic humanitarian problems near the frontlines. Cutting expenses in the social sphere deteriorates infrastructure, job opportunities and housing, putting IDPs women and their families at a high risk of poverty and often forcing them to return back to "grey zone" or separatist-controlled territories, putting their safety and life on the line.

4
Feminism and the Ukrainian crisis

4.1 (Un)responsive feminism

Ukraine is a society where the word "gender" has always been perceived as derogative by the radical conservative minority and where religion, though officially separated from the state, plays a major role. With the political crises and war, while the sociopolitical mainstream has been polarizing and drifting to the right, radical conservative and clerical phenomena have escalated. The latter, for example, has created the situation wherein ratification of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence has been basically blocked by the Council of Churches. This situation has led to criticism and protests by mainstream and radical feminists and human rights organizations. However, as of the beginning of 2018, the Convention has not yet been ratified.

Ukrainian feminist discourse has always been dominated by the moderate agenda. Facing a significant development in recent years, Ukrainian mainstream feminism now struggles with a lack of political and economic representation, symbolic representation, discrimination, home and gender-based violence and so on. However, its discourse can be characterized by a lack of attention to the founding role of socioeconomic structures of inequalities between men and women and a lack of understanding of socioeconomic inequalities among women themselves. The latter results in the predominant model of middle-class feminism, where the issues of the socioeconomic realities of (working) poor, rural and older women are marginal.

In the end, during the crises period there were campaigns for legalization of female soldiers, lifestyle choices, protests in support

of female reproductive rights, campaigns and protests against sexism and family violence and so on. Of course, some of them are extremely important to female wellbeing and even life, protests for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence a case in point. However, there were basically no campaigns and protests against the state's socioeconomic policies during the crises despite their negative outcomes for women. Criticism of the exclusion of 12,000 social workers from the state budget in 2014 by La Strada, mentioned in Section 2.2, is a rare exception.

A telling example of this liberal focus is that in 2015, when the Parliament passed the Labor Code Project "at the first reading" without including the anti-discrimination amendment, there were street protests by various groups of liberal, feminist and LGBT activists. And most of the participants, except the LGBT NGO "Insight", were only criticizing the exclusion of the amendment and not the regressive Project itself.

Leftist feminism, on the contrary, is stagnating. It can even be claimed that it has never existed as a movement. There has never been leftist feminist campaigning on a significant scale.[1] And though leftwing feminists have been bringing their socioeconomic agenda to the traditional march on March 8, this one-day-a-year format has probably been the only street format with significant mobilization for many years. Being part of the country's leftist movement, leftist feminism has been facing additional challenges since the war started in 2014. The most important of those challenges are the process of decommunisation and growing rightwing power in the mainstream discourse. With all this and the additional polarization of the society since 2014, leftist feminists did not contribute much to protest ongoing reforms from a feminist perspective, though there were some leftist protests against those reforms from the general critical point of view. For example, in

1 While there were no large scale leftist campaign, there were some long-term campaigning (like against the Labor Code Projects) and significant solidarity actions (mostly with workers) before 2014. The almost total absence of an explicitly feminist agenda may be explained both by the weakness of leftist feminism and by sexism in the movement. For example, one of the attempts to unite leftists before 2014 involved a huge discussion during which some of the leftists strongly opposed the inclusion of gender issues in the platform's declaration/program.

August 2016 there was a protest against cutting the education budget with the slogan "Money for Education, Not War." Leftists also supported local protests against closing hospitals, campaigned against the Labor Code Project and so on. All of these protests, however small, did happen in a hard time for the Ukrainian leftist movement. The fact that the actions were scattered and predominantly small-scale was caused by the general weakness of the leftist movement, which accentuated after 2014.

Some leftist feminist also contributed to public discourse by writing critical materials on some of the reforms, like the Labor Code reform, and their impact on women. The only systematic attempt to critically evaluate the governmental reforms was in the CEDAW shadow report "The Effects of Intervention by International Financial Institutions on Women's Human Rights in Ukraine" (WILPF 2017), with contributions from leftists. However, most of this criticism does not get to the mainstream. Basically, at this stage the movement is developing and spreading a systematic critical vision of the austerity reforms and their effect on women.

As was mentioned, decommunisation and the growing power of right-wing groups are the major external factors contributing to this stagnation. In a polarized society with an anti-leftist mainstream there are many ways to preclude criticism. Some of them are implemented by the state, like the prosecution of undesirable activism. Others are successfully implemented by right-wing groups, like physical attacks and confrontation. The latest examples from January 2018 show that coordinated work between right-wing groups and state forces is already a banal reality: the right wing provokes and confronts leftist activists during protests and police detain the latter.[2] In just one month of 2018 this had already happened twice. And this is not surprising, since some rightists either closely cooperate with or even work in law enforcement.

Confrontation between the right wing and left wing is nothing new in Ukraine, though its scope and disproportion of power is definitely higher now because of the growing symbolic and organizational power of the right and the fragmentation of the left. What is new is

2 This case is described here: http://khpg.org/index.php?id=1516458710.

that besides their "traditional" attacks on LGBT activities, right-wing groups have been also confronting non-leftist gender-related events. While previously those could have been targets of soft confrontation from mostly church-related groups, now they are sometimes targeted by militant rightists. One recent example is their confrontation with feminists in universities: in 2017 they managed to "cancel" protests against sexism in two universities and a gender club in another, with official administrations and law enforcement standing passively by. The situation escalated during the March 8 events: there were numerous attacks by rightists in different cities in Ukraine.[3] In the following days, several attacks occurred in Uzhhorod and at least three women and human-rights related events were disrupted by rightists in different cities. Basically, the tendency leads to a situation where rightists will be able to shut down any unwelcome event, with the (lucky) exception of large-scale mobilizations. It is sad, but symptomatic, that only at this stage has the liberal mainstream started to pay attention to this real and serious threat, which has been there for leftists for several years at least.

4.2 Recommendations for leftists

At this stage in the movement's dynamics, further development, structuring and popularization of the critical perspective on relations between government policies and the structures of gender inequality are unavoidable. A lack of understanding about how ongoing policies influence the short-term and long-term situation of gender inequality and an almost total lack of this discourse in the society leads to zero obstacles in the government's path to continue. Of course, there are internal power struggles in the government, but the potential winners of these struggles are hardly better candidates to propose alternatives.

With leftists' limited capacity, it is essential to find traverse points between mainstream feminist and leftist feminism discourse. This may sound defeatist, but with leftist feminism at all time lows, this dialogue and cooperation is needed, at least to use developed mainstream platforms and joint street actions for critical interventions. This

3 Some of them are described here: https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/womens-march-participants-attacked-ukraine.html.

piece points to the most promising traverse point, which could be reproductive labor. Its inflation and structural impact on gender inequality is already relatively common knowledge in Ukrainian feminism. A complex perspective and criticism of ongoing policies from this standpoint could do much to contribute to the general feminist discussion.

Another traverse point between mainstream and leftist feminist discourse would be the issue of objectification. It goes beyond the scope of this paper (and the knowledge of its author) and, unfortunately, it is left almost untouched by Ukrainian leftists. At the same time the mainstream discourse has made a breakthrough in the related issues of gender-based violence and sexual harassment in recent years. Starting from Ukraine and spreading to some other parts of the post-Socialist space, the campaign "I'm not afraid to tell", based on personal (mostly) female experience, went viral and took the discussion of female physical vulnerability to completely new heights. At the same time, leftist feminism was almost mute, lacking both the capacity and any developed critical assessment of the female body's integration into the capitalist system, with all the respective outcomes of harassment and violence. Defining this position is even more urgent in the context of military conflict and tens of reported (and probably hundreds of yet unreported) cases of sexual violence and exploitation in the conflict zone.

Obviously, in conditions of the left's extremely limited capacity, alliance-building is an essential strategy. Political parties, unfortunately, are unlikely allies in this case. After the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU) was basically banned in 2015, there is not a single (even formally) left-wing party in the Parliament now, and not a single promising one outside it. CPU was a rather oligarchic structure and its activities during the years before the crises were far from leftist but this ban, one of the biggest single-step acts of the decommunisation process, has left a significant share of the population without any political representation for their interests, no matter how conventional it was. While some people expressed hope that this would free up space for "real" left party building, this hope is impossible to realize in the short and even medium run, taking into account all the political tendencies mentioned above.

While most of the official structures are hopeless, there are people inside those structures who can and do listen to alternative

opinions and are open to discussion. This is true with different official Committees and even Ministries, but also with the main trade union Federation of Trade Unions. Mostly bureaucratic and "yellow", it is still a federation of local branches, some of which are far more radical than the official leadership. For example, in 2011 the local branch of educational workers managed to organize the Ukrainian-wide strike of teachers demanding an increase in wages. And, of course, even more fruitful cooperation can be further developed (because it already exists) with independent unions, whose position is far more critical of the government.

Other potential actors besides independent trade unions can be found in civil society. Those include more radical groups in the LGBT community, human rights NGOs and groups, local women's NGOs and initiatives which do not have an explicit ideological position. There are also different people there, including those who are more critical but perhaps lacking a base or structural perspective on the issues discussed in this paper. At the same time, cooperation and communication with them can enrich our own vision of the situation.

Another aspect which should be improved is related to the feminist network itself. While the major Ukrainian cities (like Kyiv, Kharkiv, Lviv) have some feminist groups and organizations, others do not, and the only individual activists can be found in smaller cities. It is crucial to support those individual activists and to develop a feminist ecosystem at least in other big cities with the longer-term goal of reaching smaller towns.

The last important thing in building up capacity is international cooperation. This includes both cooperation with international feminist organizations and cross-border cooperation. While a certain amount of international cooperation has already been happening, the elaboration of a systematic leftist perspective on gender inequality in Ukraine can contribute to it by developing a basis for comparison, defining clear reference points and common ground. Such cooperation can increase the amount of available resources, networks of international solidarity and integrate Ukrainian leftist feminism into a global discourse of anti-austerity and the search for alternatives.

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