



TRANSFORMATION OF THE UKRAINIAN LABOUR MARKET:

THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN DURING THE WAR AND POST-WAR RECOVERY

2024-2025



Analytical Report based on the study

"TRANSFORMATION OF THE UKRAINIAN LABOUR MARKET: THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN DURING THE WAR AND POST-WAR RECOVERY"

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFU – Armed Forces of Ukraine

CF – Charity Foundations

CLLU – Code of Labour Laws of Ukraine

EU – European Union

FGD – Focus-Group Discussion

IDP – Internally Displaced Persons

IE – Individual Entrepreneur

II – In-Depth Interview

ILO – International Labour Organisation

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

OSESD – Study of the Social and Economic Situation of Households

SDG – Sustainable Development Goals

SME – Small and Medium Enterprises

TG – Target Group

SUMMARY

With the full-scale war entering its third year, Ukraine is experiencing a significant shortage of both qualified and low-qualified workforce. At the same time, the employment activity of Ukrainian women significantly lags behind that of most European countries. One of the major factors contributing to this situation is the traditional gender-based division of duties in family life. Women in Ukraine typically take on the majority of unpaid domestic work, care for and raise children (including grandchildren), as well as care for elderly and other family members who require assistance due to injuries, illnesses, or disabilities. In many cases, this limits women in finding paid employment or makes it altogether impossible. The war exacerbates these barriers and challenges, further hindering the economic empowerment of women.

Given the above, the research aimed to study hurdles impeding the (re)employment of different categories of women, as well as to analyze ways to economically empower women during the war and the post-war recovery of Ukraine.

Objectives of the study based on the above goal:

- Analysis of existing trends determining the supply and structure of the female workforce in the Ukrainian labour market.
- Assessment of the economic activity of women after the outbreak of the war and their potential for the labour market.
- Identification and classification of factors that restrict the economic empowerment of women, including a deeper analysis of the situation in specific target groups (women with minor children, women who do care work, women of pre-retirement age).
- Identification of possible ways to remove or mitigate the identified barriers and risks at the legislative, institutional, and local levels, along with the preparation of proposals to state bodies, local self government bodies, and non-governmental organisations concerning the economic empowerment of women.

The study had a complex character and included two main components:

1) **Desk research**, including the review of relevant previous studies, analysis of demographic and statistical data, and analysis of valid laws and regulations.;

2) **Empiric sociological study** applying quantitative and qualitative methods:

1. National online survey among women in the working age (18-59 years), involving 716 respondents.
2. Structured individual (face-to-face) interviews with women who have children aged 3-10 years and do not work full-time (205 interviews).
3. Focus groups with women representing the target groups:
 - 2 FGDs with women having minor children (children in the pre-school age, pupils in primary schools);
 - 2 FGDs with women caring for relatives with mobility disorders;
 - 2 FGDs with women in the pre-retirement age (45-59 years).
4. In-depth interviews with experts representing the Federation of Employers of Ukraine, the State Employment Service of Ukraine, the State Service of Ukraine for Child Affairs, the Kyiv City Centre of Social Services, and an NGO supporting the economic empowerment of women and the protection of their labour rights.

Key study results

The key trend determining the supply and structure of the female workforce in the Ukrainian labour market today is its rapid decline. This is attributed to both long-term demographic developments and the full-scale Russian invasion. Ukraine's population has been shrinking for several decades due to high mortality rates, low fertility rates, and migration. The Russian aggression has had an unprecedented impact on the overall situation as well. For women specifically, the major contributing factors include migration-related losses, death and injuries, and further fertility decline. As of early 2024, Ukraine's population was approximately 31 million people¹.

This is 40% lower compared to the beginning of the country's independence more than 30 years ago and 25% lower compared to 2021. Due to these factors, the number of economically active citizens (those who work or are searching for jobs) is decreasing. Between 2021 and 2023, this figure fell by 18%, reaching 14.2 million people as of early 2024. Women accounted for approximately 45% of the total workforce.

The level of participation in the workforce went down significantly as well and was equal to 45.5% for women (in 2021 – 56.1%) and 62% for men (in 2021 – 68%). At the same time, there was a decline both in the absolute number of the employed population and in the employment level. The latter value for citizens aged 15-70 years was only 55.8% (58.9% for men and 41.5% for women)².

The conducted analysis shows a significant number of citizens who are outside the workforce and could potentially be engaged in the labour market. These are mostly women performing unpaid domestic work or caring for children/relatives, as well as women who have given up job searching out of frustration or are unaware of existing employment opportunities. They account for more than 30% of economically inactive women of working age.



Study of the social and economic situation of households (OSES) conducted by the Institute for Demography and Life Quality Problems of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Centre for Social Reforms in December 2023 February 2024 on the government-controlled URL: <https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/documents/social-economical-state-2023-24>

² Same place

The main hurdles and challenges for the economic empowerment of women are not related to existing laws and regulations. In fact, the Labour Code of Ukraine has been updated over the past several years, creating more opportunities for domestic, remote, and flexible employment. This is particularly beneficial for women, who often balance their jobs with maternity and care responsibilities.

The study makes it clear that most women performing care work want to have a paid job. For instance, 97% of interviewed women with minor children (3–10 years) expressed a desire to have a paid job, while 68% of interviewed non-working women with children had looked for a job after the birth of a child. Apart from financial reasons, their main motivations included socializing and the awareness that having one's own income source is crucial, as relying solely on a husband's financial support is very risky in the long term. Three-quarters (74%) of interviewed women with children provided at least one reason why women on maternity leave SHOULD NOT quit their paid jobs.

At the same time, women face significant hurdles on their path to employment. For objective reasons, men or women in many households feel compelled to quit a paid job or reduce their working hours due to family duties (childcare or care for adult relatives with health issues). Such decisions are influenced by several factors, including:

- In some regions close to the frontline, schools and even kindergartens operate online or in a mixed format, requiring parents to arrange care for their children of pre-school and primary-school age;
- In many cases, children do not attend kindergarten for extended periods (several months to several years) due to health conditions or require regular treatment sessions for medical reasons (e.g., with a psychologist, a massage therapist, etc.), which cannot be arranged at pre-school facilities;
- At many schools, all-day groups are either unavailable or difficult to access (for instance, a certificate is required to confirm that both parents are ALREADY employed at the time of application). Consequently, younger pupils stay at school for only 3–4 hours and require care for the rest of the day;
- Families who have adults in need of external care have extremely limited access to free care services, which is due to their overall deficit, suboptimal quality, bureaucratic barriers (for instance, such persons must have an officially acknowledged disability), low awareness among citizens concerning the availability of such services, stereotypes about the use of such services, etc.;
- In many cases, the cost of care services for children and adults (nannies, professional care workers, etc.) is significantly higher than the minimum salary.

In such situations, it is mostly women, rather than men, who give up their jobs. This happens due to both objective reasons (women's salaries and career prospects are usually not equal to those of men) and subjective reasons (stereotypes about care work being "women's stuff" and the belief that a mother's role is paramount for women). 67% of the interviewed non-working mothers mentioned that working mothers could not pay enough attention to their children.

However, despite women's high workload related to caring for children or adult relatives, most women are willing to work in various formats, such as part-time, remote work, mixed formats, flexible schedules, or even on weekends. Unfortunately, the labour market offers only a limited supply of such employment formats. This is due to both objective factors (such formats are not feasible in many industries) and stereotypes among employers, who believe that employees working under such conditions are difficult to control.

For women to consider the possibility of full-time offline employment (in production or office settings), it is essential to significantly improve access to care services for children and disabled adults, as well as to expand the range of social services provided by local authorities.

Women in pre-retirement and retirement age constitute a significant reserve group that could be involved in the labour market. According to the research results, most of them are motivated to work for as long as possible. However, they often face ageism from employers, which begins as early as 40–45 years. Such stereotypes harm women who are willing to work, as well as employers who, without valid reasons, overlook numerous female candidates. These women are highly motivated, possess the necessary experience and competencies, and face no objective obstacles to employment, as their children are already grown and no longer require maternal care.

The research has also identified a number of other barriers to female employment that affect both the above-mentioned target groups and women in general. These include the following:

- Gender stereotypes among employers, which also affect women who do not have children yet, do not intend to have children at all, or can effectively combine maternity duties with their job without compromising the latter (for instance, if a family has grandparents ready to care for the child or if the salary is high enough to hire a nanny);
- Low awareness among citizens, especially women, regarding the key components and tools of state employment and pension policies. This leads to a high level of mistrust toward public financial mechanisms and instruments, inertia, a suspicious attitude toward modern grant programmes for developing small and medium-sized businesses, and low activity in seeking official employment. Many of the interviewed employable women (12%) are not aware of any employment services available through the DIIA Portal. Only 1% of the interviewed women of working age contacted state employment centres or the Diia/Diia.Education/Diia.Business portal to apply for a grant to start a business. At least a quarter of the women of working age are unaware of the pension accumulation mechanism, which leads them to believe that a decent pension is unattainable, even for those who work officially;
- The existing social welfare system is predominantly paternalistic and does not encourage employment among citizens who can only secure low-paid and/or part-time jobs. In many cases, it is more reasonable for these citizens to avoid work (at least officially) and retain their benefits and social welfare payments rather than earn approximately the same amount in a low-paid job while losing their social entitlements.

Based on the study results, recommendations were developed for state bodies, local self government bodies, and other stakeholders to address or reduce the employment barriers faced by different categories of women identified during the research. The report outlines recommendations at both the national and local levels, as well as for specific entities (e.g., the mentioned NGO), and provides models for women's adaptation to the modern labour market and their economic empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Steps aimed at the economic empowerment of women are becoming increasingly relevant given the workforce shortage caused by the war and its consequences (e.g., migration, conscription of men, etc.). At the same time, the employment level of Ukrainian women lags significantly behind that of other European countries³. One of the reasons for this is that women in Ukraine traditionally shoulder a larger share of unpaid domestic work, as well as a significant portion of caregiving duties, including raising children (or grandchildren) and caring for seniors or other family members who require treatment due to injuries, illnesses, or disabilities. In many cases, this limits women's ability to enter paid employment or makes it entirely impossible.

However, there is a lack of systemic (non-sporadic) studies providing a comprehensive analysis of the barriers and risks faced by women who try to combine employment with caregiving responsibilities. Moreover, such studies rarely explore realistic ways to overcome these barriers or develop effective mechanisms to promote the economic empowerment of these women.

Goal of the study: Goal of the study: Analysis of the barriers to the (re)employment of various categories of women and the possibilities for their economic empowerment during the war and in the post-war recovery of Ukraine.

Objectives of the study:

- Analysis of existing trends shaping the supply and structure of the female workforce in the Ukrainian labour market.
- Assessment of women's economic activity after the outbreak of the war and their potential participation in the labour market.
- Identification and classification of factors that restrict women's economic empowerment, including a deeper analysis of the situation in specific target groups (women with minor children, women engaged in caregiving, and women of pre-retirement age).
- Identification of possible ways to eliminate or mitigate the identified barriers and risks at the legislative, institutional, and local levels, along with the preparation of proposals for state bodies, local self-government bodies, and non-governmental organisations regarding women's economic empowerment.

Дослідження проводилося на національному рівні.



³Web resource. – Viewing mode: <https://rshiny.ilo.org/dataexplorer8/>

Target groups of the study:

- women with minor children, including those of pre-school age and pupils in primary schools;
- women caring for relatives with mobility disorders (parents, husbands, or children with injuries or concussions caused by the war, as well as other relatives with disabilities or chronic diseases);
- women of pre-retirement and retirement age.

These groups of women were subject to closer analysis, as they have the potential to increase their presence in the labour market. Additionally, recommendations were developed for these particular groups to encourage more active engagement of their representatives in the labour market.

Study methods

At the initial stage, **desk research** was conducted, which included a review of relevant previous studies, an analysis of demographic and statistical data, and an examination of relevant regulations. The desk research contributed to solving several tasks. First, it provided data directly required to fulfil the study's objectives (e.g., assessment of women's economic activity after the outbreak of the war, identification of factors contributing to the high unemployment risk, preparation of recommendations to mitigate or remove the identified barriers). Second, the desk research results helped to refine the objectives of the empirical sociological research, prepare questionnaires for the online survey and structured interviews with women from the target groups, and develop guidelines for the focus groups and expert interviews.

The results of the desk research were supplemented with information obtained during the **empirical sociological research**. This phase combined several sociological methods for data collection, enabling the acquisition of diverse information from different target groups to address various research tasks.

1. An online survey was conducted among women of working age (18–59 years). The planned sample size for the survey included 700 women to ensure acceptable accuracy (the maximum deviation for surveys with this sample size is $\pm 3.8\%$).

716 women were interviewed in total. Agreed quotas were used to ensure that the sample included women from different regions, localities, age groups, and other categories.

The online survey primarily focused on women's experiences in combining their paid jobs with home duties, including the challenges they face in this area and potential solutions.

2. 205 structured individual (face-to-face) interviews were conducted with women who have children aged 3–10 years.

The survey among women from the mentioned target group focused on factors preventing them from taking paid jobs and on ways to overcome these hurdles (including the conditions under which the respondents would be ready to join the labour market).

3. 6 focus groups were conducted with women from the target groups, including:

- 2 FGDs with women having minor children (pre-school-aged children and primary school pupils);
- 2 FGDs with women caring for relatives with mobility disorders;
- 2 FGDs with women of pre-retirement age (45–59 years).

Focus groups were conducted online, enabling the participation of women from different regions of Ukraine and various types of localities (cities, towns, and rural areas). The online format was also more convenient for women who could not leave their homes for extended periods and would otherwise have been unable to participate in traditional (offline) focus groups.

Main points of the FGDs:

- Women with minor children and women caring for relatives with mobility disorders – collection of information concerning the regular employment experience of the participants (whether they worked PRIOR to the change of their family situation and whether they tried to look for employment/ to work AFTER the childbirth, the change of their family situation demanding care for adult relatives, etc.), the issues and hurdles they faced, as well as possible ways to remedy them.
- Women in the pre-retirement age – collection of information concerning their plans for the future (whether they intend to work in retirement) and the factors determining these plans (what motivates women to work or why they plan to terminate their employment), as well as factors that could motivate women to continue working in retirement.

4. 5 in-depth interviews with experts, including representatives of:

- The Federation of Employers of Ukraine;
- The State Employment Service of Ukraine;
- The State Service for Child Affairs of Ukraine;
- The Kyiv City Centre of Social Services;
- A Ukrainian NGO supporting the economic empowerment of women and the protection of their labour rights.

The in-depth interviews were conducted both online and offline, depending on the experts' preferences. .

Data analysis

The SPSS software was used to analyse the **quantitative data** (results of the online survey among women of working age and women with children aged 3-10 years).

The following methods were applied in the course of data analysis and preparation of the analytical report:

Calculation of one- and two-dimensional distributions of the respondents' answers to the questionnaires, setup of integral values ("indices"), and other methods for statistical data processing (if required). The quantitative data were analysed with disaggregation by the following values:

- Respondents' age;
- Type of locality (regional capital, other city, village/settlement);
- Region;
- Employment type, etc.

In addition, the transcripts of the FGDs and IIs were systematized and subjected to primary content analysis. Furthermore, the data collected using different methods were cross-verified.

Based on the results of the study, recommendations were developed for national and local authorities, as well as other stakeholders, regarding the steps needed to overcome or reduce the hurdles and risks faced by different categories of women identified during the study. The report includes detailed recommendations for both the national and local levels, as well as for specific entities (e.g., the NGO). Additionally, it offers models to support women's adaptation to the modern labour market and promote their economic empowerment.

Ethical principles of the study

The empirical data were collected, stored, and analysed in compliance with ethical standards and based on the principles of voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality for the study participants. The questionnaires did not include any personal data that could identify respondents. For the same reason, all employees of AC “Socioconsulting” involved in the project, including all interviewers, signed confidentiality agreements prohibiting them from disclosing or sharing any respondent data obtained during their work with third parties.

Prior to the beginning of the study, all potential respondents were duly informed about the goal and objectives of the study, its specifics, as well as their anonymity and confidentiality guarantees, their right to voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Following this, each respondent was required to provide informed verbal consent to participate in the study.

The research tools were developed, and the study was conducted in accordance with gender sensitive approaches.

Research limitations

The authors encountered several limitations and challenges while planning and conducting the study.

1. Methodological limitations resulting from a lack of statistical data on the situation in Ukraine.

Due to the Law of Ukraine on Martial Law, the State Statistics Service of Ukraine has not been conducting the Workforce Review in Ukraine since 2022. This research is aimed at determining the number and identifying the structure of the workforce, as well as assessing the national labour market and employment situation in the country.

The Eurostat, the ILO, and other international organisations collecting statistical data by countries can only use the latest available data based on the Workforce Review in Ukraine conducted in 2021. This is a standard, internationally acknowledged approach to the use of statistical data in cases where no current reviews are available.

The authors consider the use of 2021 data in their report justified, as it provides an opportunity to assess the baseline situation and key trends that existed before the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022.

The only source of data enabling a provisional workforce assessment for the later periods is a study of the social and economic situation of households, initiated by UNICEF and conducted by the Institute for Demography and Life Quality Problems of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, jointly with the Ukrainian Centre for Social Reforms, between December 2023 and February 2024 on government-controlled territory in Ukraine. The data from this study are included in the presented report.

2. Limitations in the study design

The sociological component of the study was affected by limitations resulting from the lack of up to-date demographic data. As a result, it was impossible to compile a representative sample of respondents for the quantitative survey among women of working age or their specific subgroups. Consequently, a national quota-based sampling approach was applied, along with several qualitative sociological methods such as FGDs and flexible interviews. These methods enabled us to thoroughly identify and analyze the hurdles faced by women from different social groups in their employment efforts. By comparing the quantitative sociological data with already published studies and estimates provided by interviewed experts, we conclude that the obtained data are sufficiently reliable and relevant. The identified key patterns and the ranking of employment barriers mentioned by women align with all referenced sources.

3. Target groups of research

To ensure a more detailed analysis, we selected three key groups of women: women with minor children, women engaged in caregiving, and women of pre-retirement age. According to our previous studies, these groups represent a significant resource for the struggling Ukrainian labour market. That said, we acknowledge that the list of vulnerable categories of women requiring additional support to enhance their economic activity is far more extensive and includes, first and foremost, internally displaced persons. However, this group was the subject of a separate study that we recently completed and published⁴.



Many other groups of women require a more thorough analysis, taking into account their specific needs and barriers. This is particularly relevant for women with disabilities or Romani women. Future studies of these groups could be valuable both from a scientific perspective and for their practical application.

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⁴ Study “Effectiveness of the policy of supporting the economic activity of internally displaced women as an element of the early recovery of Ukraine” (2023), conducted with the support of ISAR Ednannia [web source]. – Viewing mode: https://sociocon.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Zvit.indd_.pdf

1. SELECTED ISSUES CONCERNING THE REGULATION OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS: ANALYSIS OF THE VALID LEGISLATION

In September 2019, Ukraine joined the Global Sustainable Development Agenda. The President of Ukraine signed the decree “On the Sustainable Development Goals of Ukraine for the Period Until 2030”⁵ as a commitment to the global sustainable development goals declared in the Resolution of the UN General Assembly No. 70/1 of 25 September 2015⁶. As part of the SDG implementation, Ukraine is obligated to ensure gender equality and empower the rights and opportunities of all women and girls. Key elements of the respective SDG include the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls; acknowledgment of the value of unpaid care and domestic work, along with improvements in utility services, infrastructure, and the social welfare system; empowerment of women to act effectively and without restrictions at all decision-making levels; and reforms to provide women with equal rights to economic resources.

Another essential international act on gender equality, ratified by Ukraine, is the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Article 11 of this document declares economic rights, particularly the right to work, the right to non-discriminatory employment, equal remuneration for work, the right to social security, and more. This provision also includes the implementation of positive measures to ensure women's access to the labour market after marriage or childbirth.

To comply with these and other international commitments on gender equality, Ukraine has adopted several legal acts, including those related to women's economic empowerment (Annex 1).

The Constitution of Ukraine⁷ establishes the right of every individual to work (Article 43) and engage in business activity (Article 42). This right is not subject to gender-based restrictions. According to Part 2 of Article 24, equality between women and men is based on equal opportunities in public, political, and cultural activities, as well as in attaining education and vocational training, work, and remuneration. It also includes special measures for the protection of women's labour and health, the adoption of relevant pension benefits, the creation of conditions enabling women to combine work and maternity, and legal protection, material and moral support for maternity and childhood, including paid leaves and other benefits for pregnant women and mothers.

It should be noted that the provisions of this article concerning the combination of maternity and employment contradict the commitments under SDG 5, which emphasize promoting the principle of shared family responsibilities. Such provisions can result in situations where women are less involved in or even restricted from accessing the labour market and economic activities because fathers are not provided with options to combine their parental duties with employment. This leads to an unfair distribution of child-care responsibilities.

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⁵ Decree No. 722/2019 of 30 September 2019 “On the Sustainable Development Goals of Ukraine for the Period Until 2030”
- URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/722/2019#Text>

⁶ Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015 “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.
- URL: www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf

⁷ Constitution of Ukraine -
- URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/254%D0%BA/96-%D0%B2%D1%80#Text>

⁸ Code of Labour Laws of Ukraine
- URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/322-08#n26>

LABOUR LEGISLATION

The main legal act regulating labour relations in Ukraine is the Code of Labour Laws of Ukraine (hereinafter CLLU)⁸. According to Article 2, the right of citizens to work includes the right to be employed with remuneration not lower than the minimum wage set by the state. It also guarantees the right to freely choose a profession, occupation, and job. The state creates conditions for effective employment of the population, promotes employment, training, and upskilling, and, when necessary, ensures the retraining of individuals laid off due to market conditions. In addition, Article 2-1 reiterates the provisions of the Constitution prohibiting employment discrimination, including violations of equal rights and opportunities, direct or indirect restrictions on workforce rights, and discrimination based on gender.

The CLLU also enshrines the right to work and establishes guarantees related to labour relations. Article 5-1 outlines the following guarantees concerning the right to work:

- free choice of occupation;
- free-of-charge support from state employment services in selecting a suitable job and employment aligned with individual preferences, skills, professional background, and education, taking public needs into account;
- based on their previously submitted applications, companies, institutions, and organisations are obligated to employ graduates of vocational schools, vocational pre-tertiary educational institutions, and higher-education institutions in accordance with their attained professions;
- free training for unemployed citizens to help them attain new professions or complete retraining at educational institutions or through the state employment system, with a scholarship provided;
- compensation for costs incurred due to job relocation, in accordance with the applicable regulations;
- legal protection against unjustified employment denial and unlawful dismissal, as well as support in retaining a job;
- legal protection against mobbing (bullying), discrimination, and biased attitudes in employment, as well as protection of a worker's honour and dignity during her/his work. Citizens who have suffered from such actions or inaction have the right to approach the central executive body responsible for implementing state policy on oversight and control of legal compliance in labour relations. They may also turn to the court to acknowledge such facts and seek their resolution (employment remains valid during the claim processing or court proceedings). Additionally, they have the right to receive compensation for damages caused by such actions or inaction, based on a valid court ruling.

Along with the above guarantees, some provisions of the CLLU articles, on the one hand, aim to foster women's access to the labour market but, on the other hand, deepen gender gaps in employment while reinforcing existing gender roles in society. For instance, Article 56 stipulates that an employer shall comply with a request from a pregnant woman, a woman with a child under 14 years of age, a child with a disability (including one in her custody), or a woman attending to a sick family member as per a valid medical certificate, and grant her part-time working days or a part-time working week. While such a provision is commendable in cases involving pregnant women, its applicability to other categories raises concerns.

The analysis of this provision highlights a significant disparity: if a man with a child under 14 years of age, a child with a disability (including one in his custody), or a man attending to a sick family member as per a valid medical certificate requests part-time working days or a part-time working week, the decision to grant this request is left to the employer's discretion.

Consequently, this provision often results in women being the ones to switch to part-time work, as this right is guaranteed to them, unlike their male partners. This, in turn, impacts their career opportunities, salary levels, and the eventual size of their pensions.

Gender-balanced is the provision of Article 60-1, "Home Office Work," which stipulates that the right to sign an employment contract for home office work belongs to pregnant women and employees (irrespective of their sex) who have a child under 3 years of age, or care for a child according to a medical certificate until the child turns 6 years old. This right also applies to employees with two or more children under 15 years of age, a child with a disability, parents of a person with an innate disability (subgroup A of group I), as well as persons who have taken guardianship of a child or a person with an innate disability (subgroup A of group I).

The same provision can be found in Article 60-2, "Remote Working," which grants the right to remote working to the above-mentioned categories of employees.

It should be noted that home office work and remote work are also available to other categories of employees, subject to agreement with their employers. These provisions, therefore, include mechanisms that allow all interested individuals to participate in the labour market regardless of gender and create opportunities to combine parental duties (mother/father) with employment.

Amendments to the Law of Ukraine "On Leave"⁹ have the same effect. The law grants men the right to take leave to care for a child until the child reaches the age of three. This provision enables women to return to the labour market more quickly after the birth of a child.

The general specifics of female employment are outlined in a separate chapter of the CLLU (Chapter XII, "Work of Women"). Most parts of this chapter are imbalanced with regard to gender aspects. On the one hand, its provisions include measures that generally simplify access to the labour market for women with minor children, children with disabilities, or those attending to a sick family member. In the long term, however, they may lead to a lower income level for women compared with men, as women's involvement in overtime work or night work is restricted. Overtime work and work on holidays are subject to double-rate remuneration (Article 106), while night work is compensated with an additional payment of no less than 20% of the salary rate for each hour of night work (Article 108).

However, women with children under 3 years old are prohibited from working at night, doing overtime work, working on holidays, or going on business trips (Article 176). This obviously affects their salary level and, subsequently, the single social contribution, which impacts their future pensions. Furthermore, this provision appears to reinforce stereotypical perceptions of women's societal roles centered on maternity and limits men's ability to exercise their parental duties.

However, Chapter XII of the CLLU includes provisions with positive measures aimed at simplifying access to the labour market for specific categories of women, including:

- the above-mentioned ban on involving pregnant women and women with children under 3 years of age in night work, overtime work, work on holidays, and business trips (Article 176).
- women with children aged 3 to 14 years or women with children with disabilities cannot be involved in overtime work or sent on business trips without their consent (Article 177);

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⁹ Law of Ukraine "On Leave". – URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/504/96-%D0%B2%D1%80#Text>

- pregnant women and women with children under 3 years of age can be transferred to less demanding work (Article 178);
- pregnancy leave, childbirth leave, and maternity leave (Article 179);
- part-time home office work option during maternity leave (Article 179);
- additional leave for mothers with children or an adult child with an innate disability (subgroup A of group I) (Article 182-1);
- breastfeeding breaks for mothers with children under 1.5 years of age (Article 183);
- women cannot be denied employment or subjected to salary cuts for reasons related to their pregnancy or their children under 3 years of age; this provision also applies to single mothers with a child under 14 years of age or a child with a disability (Article 184);
- employers at companies and organisations that widely use female labour must set up childcare facilities, kindergartens, breastfeeding rooms, and sanitary facilities for women (Article 186).

Not all of the above provisions can be utilised by both parents. Obviously, pregnant women are the sole beneficiaries of the respective clauses. Another example is the possibility of employees with children under 3 years being mandated to work less demandingly. A father can only apply for this if he is a single parent. However, he cannot use this option if he has a complete family. Hence,



in some situations, a woman may opt for unpaid child-care work instead of full employment, thus missing out on career opportunities. Additionally, according to Part 3 of Article 178, she retains her average salary from her previous job.

The new law “On Amendments to Certain Legal Acts of Ukraine on the Regulation of the Work of Domestic Workers”¹⁰ regulates labour relations concerning domestic work. These legislative amendments officially acknowledge and legalise work performed by an individual for a household. In most cases, this work is informal and predominantly carried out by women. Consequently, these changes will facilitate the transition of informal work into formal employment and enable pension contributions.

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¹⁰ Law of Ukraine “On Amendments to Certain Legal Acts of Ukraine on the Regulation of the Work of Domestic Workers”
 - URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3680-20#top>

According to the new regulations, a person performing domestic work, i.e., working for a household, is entitled to sign an employment contract with a member of the household. This allows domestic workers to exercise all rights and entitlements specified in labour law, including safe and healthy working conditions. Signing an employment contract obliges the employer to report the employment of a domestic worker to the central executive body responsible for implementing state policy on the administration of the single social insurance tax (currently, the tax authorities). The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine determines the reporting procedure¹¹.

A positive step towards securing social guarantees for working pregnant women and expanding their employment opportunities is the possibility for a pregnant woman, at her own discretion and considering medical indications, to determine the start date of her leave related to pregnancy and childbirth. It has been established that the days of leave provided by law for use before childbirth can be transferred and used by the woman, either partially or fully, after childbirth (starting from the day of delivery). The total duration of the leave cannot exceed 126 calendar days or 140 calendar days in cases where two or more children were born or if the childbirth involved complications.¹²

LEGISLATION ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP

As mentioned above, every individual in Ukraine has the right to pursue entrepreneurial activity. This activity is governed by the provisions of the Economic Code of Ukraine¹³. The principles of economic activity in Ukraine, as determined by this legal act, focus on ensuring economic diversity and equal state protection for all economic agents; freedom of business activity in compliance with the law; free movement of capital, goods, and services within Ukraine; limited state intervention in economic processes, justified by the need to ensure the social focus of the economy, fair business competition, environmental protection, consumer rights protection, public safety, and state security; protection of local manufacturers; and a ban on unlawful interference by state and local self-government bodies or their officials in business relations.

In general, the Economic Code of Ukraine is gender-neutral and does not impose any restrictions or preferential treatment to female entrepreneurs.

At the same time, the state acknowledges the potential of female entrepreneurship. The draft of the new Strategy of Recovery, Sustainable Development, and Digital Transformation of Small and Medium-Sized Businesses for the Period Until 2027 includes specific measures to promote female entrepreneurship. These measures encompass the preparation and implementation of programmes to support and develop various business fields, particularly veteran and female entrepreneurship, youth entrepreneurship, and leadership programmes to support business owners. They also include the development of support infrastructure for small and medium-sized businesses, such as Entrepreneurship Centres operating under the “Diia Business” programme; the launch of targeted programmes to support entrepreneurship among women, veterans, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities with a total budget of USD 3.7 billion; and the development and implementation of dedicated programmes to foster and support entrepreneurship among these groups¹⁴.

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¹¹ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 413 of 17 June 2015 “On the Procedure for Reporting the State Tax Service and its territorial bodies about the hiring of an employee/conclusion of a gig-contract” - URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/413-2015-%D0%BF#Text>

¹² Law of Ukraine “On Amendments to Certain Legal Acts of Ukraine on the Specifics of the Use of the Pregnancy and Birth Leave”. - URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/3238-20#Text>

¹³ Economic Code of Ukraine - URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/436-15#Text>

¹⁴ Business representatives, experts, donors, and regions will be involved in the preparation of the Recovery Strategy for the period until - URL: <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/do-rozrobky-stratehiiu-vidnovlennia-msp-do-2027-roku-doluchat-biznes-ekspertiv-donoriv-ta-rehiony>

These measures are currently included only in the first draft of the Strategy. It remains to be seen which measures will be included in the final text of the adopted Strategy.

Presently, women have no legal restrictions or prohibitions concerning their right to pursue business activities.

2. ROLE OF WORKING WOMEN DURING THE WAR AND IN THE RECOVERY OF UKRAINE

This section focuses on the analysis of the general situation and trends concerning the role of women in the modern labour market in Ukraine. The analysis is based on the latest available data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (as of the end of 2021), the random study of households (hereinafter referred to as “OSED 2024”)¹⁵, as well as the results of the online survey conducted among women of working age (18–59 years) as part of this project (2024).

Both long-term demographic trends and recent factors resulting from the full-scale Russian invasion have significantly impacted the current condition of the labour market and employment situation in Ukraine.

For the past several decades, Ukraine has been experiencing a persistent trend of population decline. The main factors contributing to this trend include high mortality rates, a falling birth rate, and migration. These processes have led to an increasing share of senior-aged groups in the overall population structure, which, in turn, places a significant burden on the pension system, health care system, and social welfare system. Additionally, the number of women has been significantly higher than the number of men for a long time, primarily due to the high early mortality rate among men, particularly in senior-age groups. In the population group above 50 years, the number of women is 1.5 times higher than the number of men¹⁶.

Apart from the negative long-term trends, the demographic situation in Ukraine is now being affected to an unprecedented extent by the Russian aggression. The main factors include significant losses due to death and injury among both military personnel and civilians, as well as a further decline in the fertility rate. According to the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine, the number of newborn babies in 2023 decreased by 10% compared to 2022 (from 207,000 to 187,000). The most significant demographic challenge, however, arises from migration. Many Ukrainians have left areas directly affected by hostilities and other war-related risks, moving to other regions of Ukraine or abroad. According to Eurostat, almost 4.3 million Ukrainian citizens were staying in the EU under the temporary protection programme¹⁷ as of June 2024, most of them being women (46.3%) and children (33.3%). Thus, apart from direct losses caused by human drain, Ukraine is likely to face significant losses in its future workforce demographic potential if its citizens do not return home.

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¹⁵ Study of the social and economic situation of households (OSED) conducted by the Institute for Demography and Life Quality Problems of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Centre for Social Reforms in December 2023 – February 2024 on the government-controlled territory of Ukraine. <https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/documents/social-economical-state-2023-24>

¹⁶ According to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine <http://db.ukrcensus.gov.ua/PXWEB2007/#>

¹⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240709-1>

Domestic migration is another major issue. According to the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, there are currently 4.9 million officially registered internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country. Approximately half of them (2.5 million) cannot return home because their homes are destroyed, located in areas affected by hostilities, or in temporarily occupied territories.

According to estimates by the Institute for Demography and Life Quality Problems of the National Academy, based on a comparison of the estimated population numbers in the regions of Ukraine (government-controlled territories) between the beginning of February 2022 and the beginning of August 2023, the total population loss across the country was nearly 22%.

Due to the above-mentioned demographic issues, the size of the workforce has decreased. From 2010 to 2021 alone, the total workforce (economically active persons who work or search for employment) declined by 3.6 million, reaching 17.3 million in 2021. Furthermore, the workforce has shifted significantly toward the senior-age sector. Figure 2.1 illustrates that the age structure of the workforce is clearly dominated by citizens aged 40 to 59 years. Women account for 47.6% of the workforce.

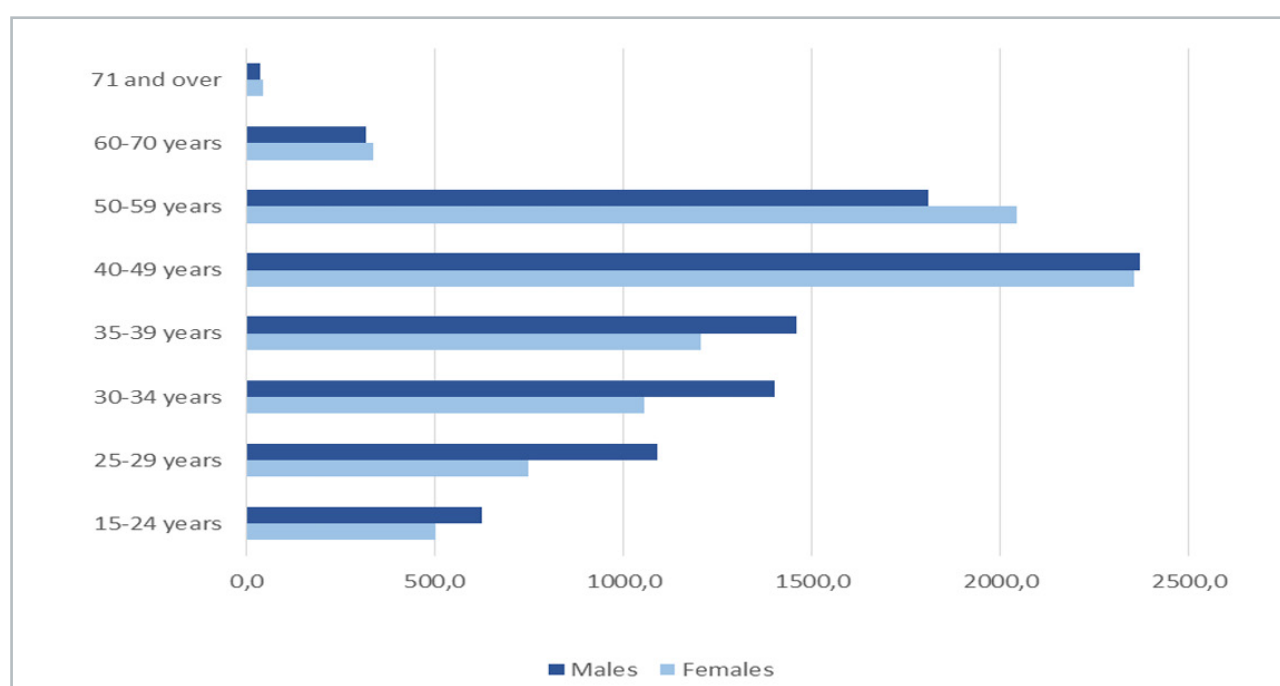


Fig. 2.1. Sex-age structure of the workforce in 2021, in thousands¹⁸

According to the results of OSES 2024, the workforce had further declined compared to 2021, amounting to 14.2 million persons at the time of the study. Workforce participation also decreased significantly, reaching 45.5% for women (compared to 56.1% in 2021¹⁹) and 62.0% for men (compared to 68% in 2021). Additionally, both the absolute number of employed citizens²⁰ and the employment rate declined. According to OSES 2024, the total employment rate among citizens aged 15–70 years was only 55.8% (58.9% for men and 41.5% for women).

Along with this, a moderate reduction in the unemployment rate was recorded during the same period. In 2021, there were 1.7 million unemployed individuals in Ukraine, with the total unemployment rate among citizens aged 15–70 years at 9.9% (9.6% for men and 10.2% for women).

¹⁸ Source: data of the State Statistics Committee of Ukraine

¹⁹ Compared with the same period of 2021.

²⁰ The employed population is deemed to include workforce members who have any paid job at the time of the study.

Population groups aged 40–59 years (Figure 2.2) accounted for the largest share of the unemployed, as well as the largest share of the total workforce.

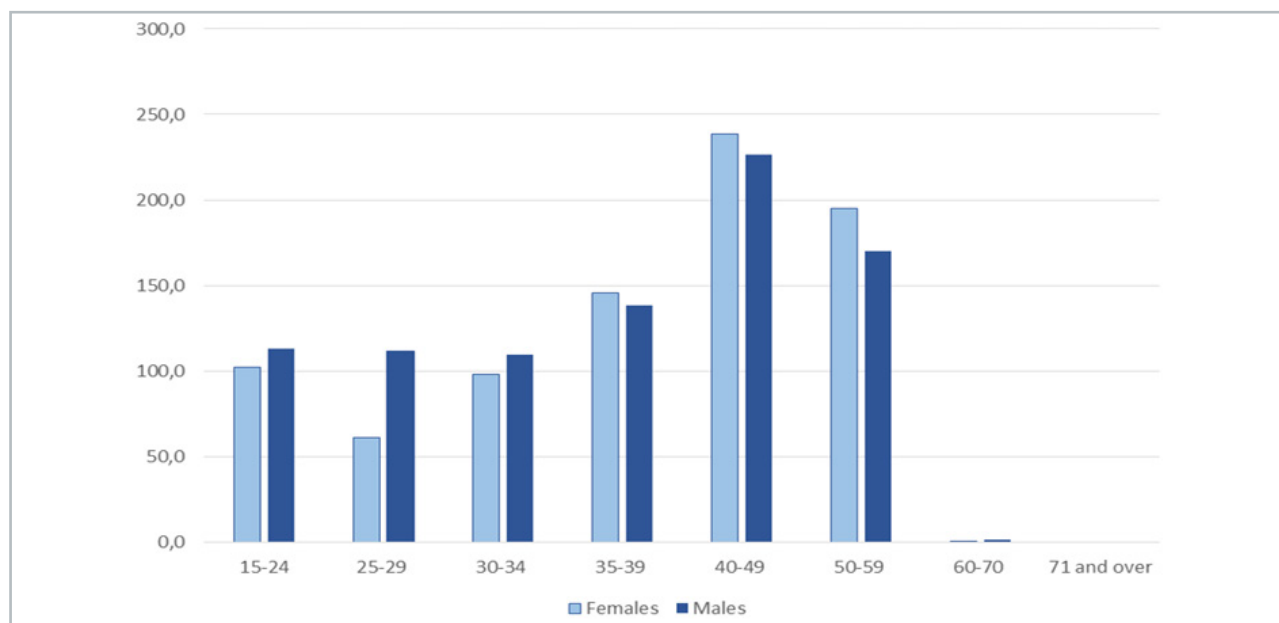


Fig. 2.2. Number of unemployed citizens by sex and age in 2021, thousand persons ²¹

According to the results of OSESD 2024, the number of unemployed persons declined to 971,000, and the unemployment rate decreased significantly compared to 2021, reaching 6.8%. The unemployment rate among women was traditionally slightly higher than among men: 8.8% vs. 5.1%.

For the more thorough analysis of the role of women in the labour market, gender-based differences by status and activity areas shall be considered, as well as the most pressing employment related problems of women shall be studied.

In regards to employment status, the shares of employed women and men are approximately the same, while most employers and individual entrepreneurs are traditionally men, and household members engaged in unpaid housework are predominantly women (Figure 2.3).

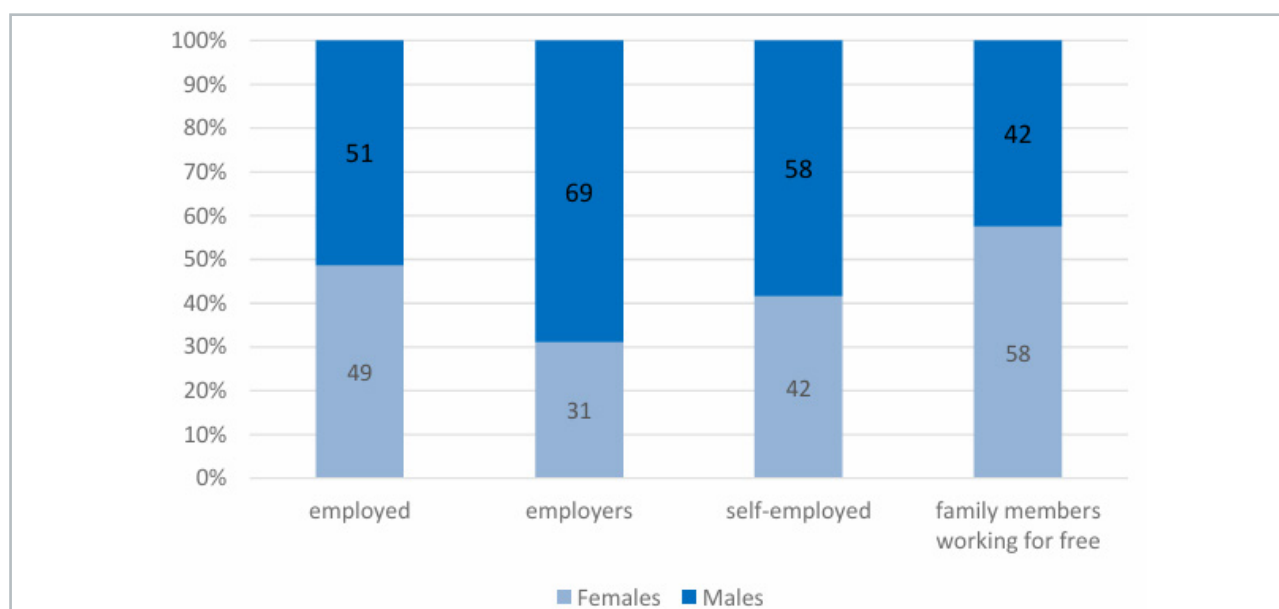


Fig. 2.3. Men and women by employment status in 2021, % ²²

²¹ Source: data of the State Statistics Committee of Ukraine

²² Source: data of the State Statistics Committee of Ukraine

Gender differences are also visible in the workforce distributions by professions. Fig. 2.4 presents the gender-based distribution of employed citizens by occupations as well as the remuneration level for different professional groups. Operation of machines and equipment as well as qualified technical bluecollar jobs (industrial jobs) are clearly dominated by men. Instead, women dominate in the retail and service sector.

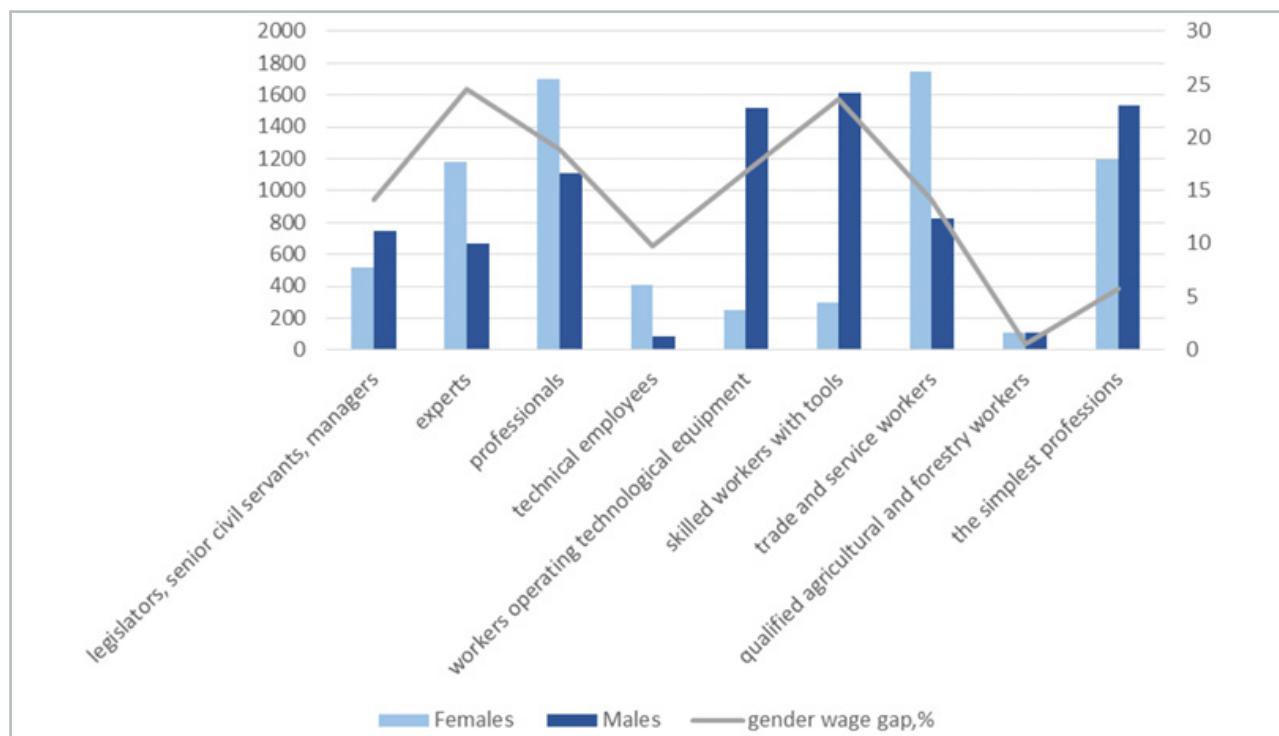


Fig. 2.4. Number of working women and men, remuneration level by groups of professions, 2021, persons ²³

Comment 1:

The following two specific features shall be noted:

- 1. Women strongly outnumber men in the retail and service sector (by 53%), whereas this group of professions lags behind in terms of salaries (only 60% of the average nationwide salary).*
- 2. Women dominate among professionals, i.e., in sectors with a relatively higher remuneration (124% of the average nationwide salary). However, this group includes professions where salaries vary strongly. For instance, IT professionals earn 160% of the average nationwide salary, while professional nurses can only make 67% of it.*

Subsequently, women dominate professional groups with low salaries (professional nurses and midwives, school and pre-school teachers).

In parallel with the reduction of the economically active population, the number of economically inactive citizens increased both among women and men compared with 2021 (fig. 2.5).

²³ Source: data of the State Statistics Committee of Ukraine

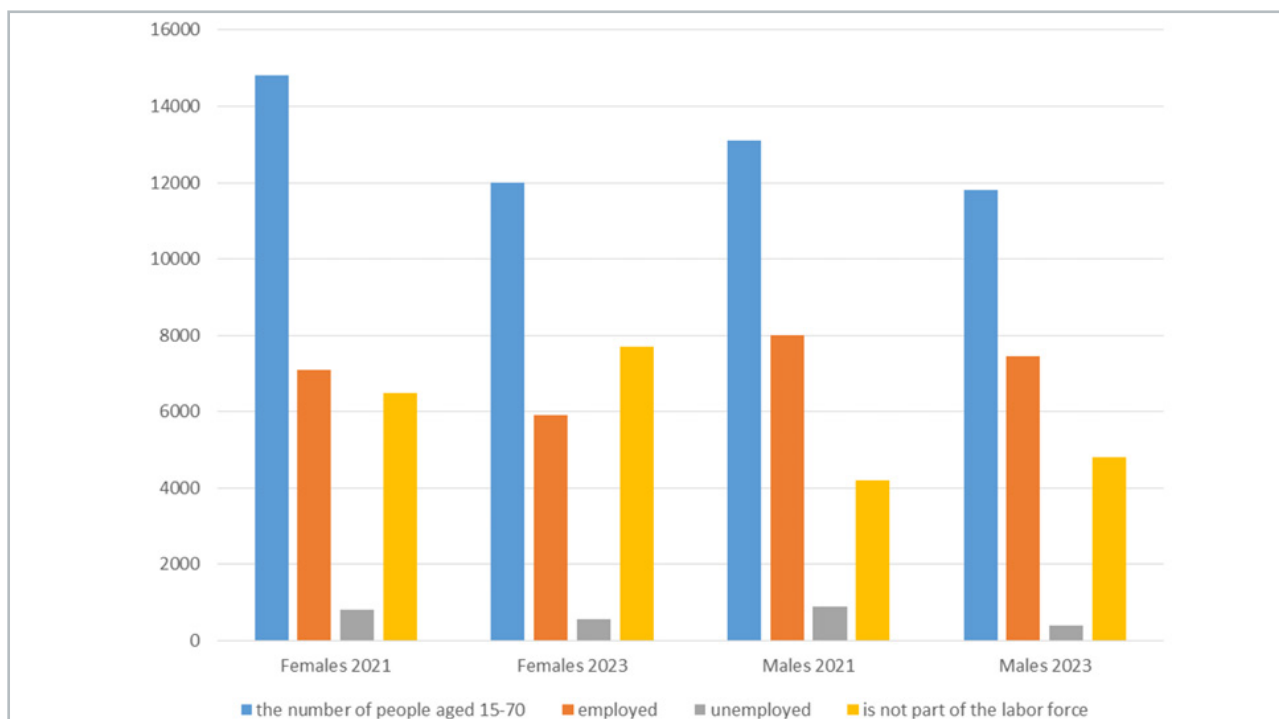


Fig. 2.5. Quantitative changes in the economic activity of women and men in 2023 against 2021, thousand persons ²⁴

Along with declining and ageing workforce, a lot of citizens for various reasons still stay out of it (economically inactive population). These are students (pupils), pensioners, persons doing domestic (family-related) work or are supported by third parties as well as citizens who have given up the hope to find a job, think that there is no proper employment for them or do not know where to find a job.

The structure of the female population that was outside the workforce before the war due to unemployment is presented in fig. 2.6. 30% of the economically inactive women did not work, because they did housework, cared for other family members or were supported by their partners.

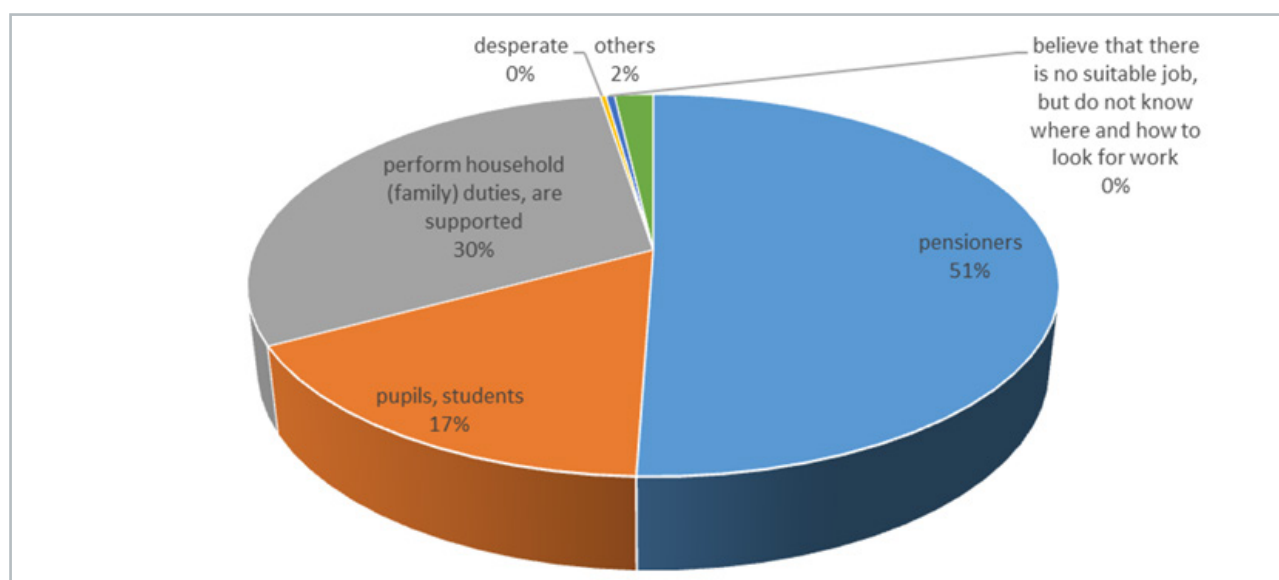


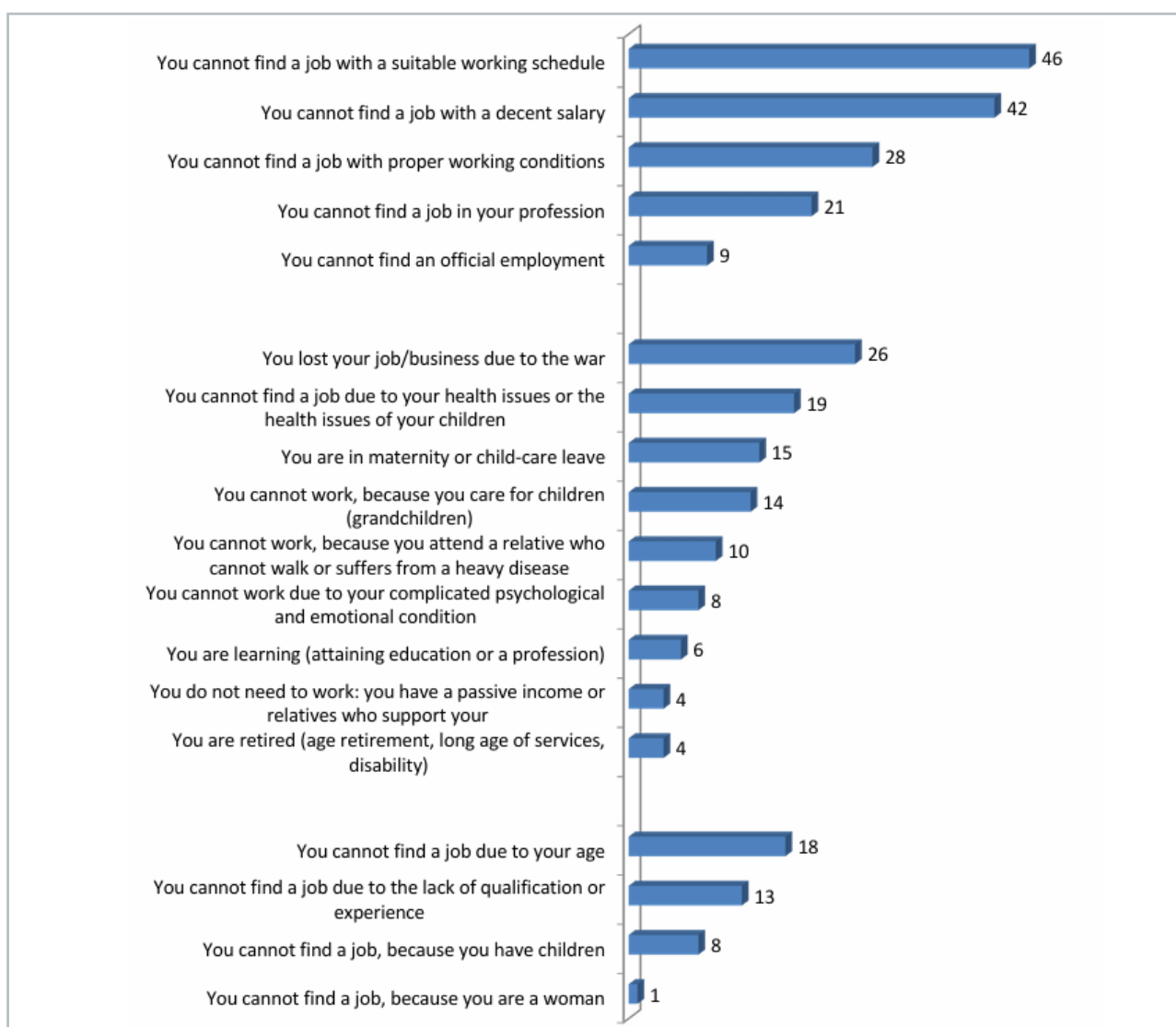
Fig. 2.6. Women who stay out of the workforce and reasons for their economic inactivity, 2021, % ²⁵

²⁴ Source: OSESD data 2024. <https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/documents/social-economical-state-2023-24>

²⁵ Source: data of the State Statistics Committee of Ukraine

The online survey among women in the working age made it possible to some extent to specify the reasons of their economic inactivity, especially concerning women considered as “despaired job seekers” and those who think there is no suitable work for them. In total, a quarter of the respondents (26%) did not work at the time of the study. In most cases, the respondents told they could not find a job suitable for them by various parameters. The most important criteria for taking over a job included the acceptable working schedule and salary.

Approx. a quarter of the economically inactive women mentioned that they had lost their job/business due to the war. Other popular reasons for the economic inactivity included family duties (care for children/grandchildren, relatives suffering from movement disorders or heavy diseases) as well as other significant circumstances (for instance, health issues, including psychological and emotional disorders). A significant number of the respondents mentioned the stereotypes and prejudices they were confronted with in the labour market: ageism, rejection of applications due to children, etc. (fig. 2.7).



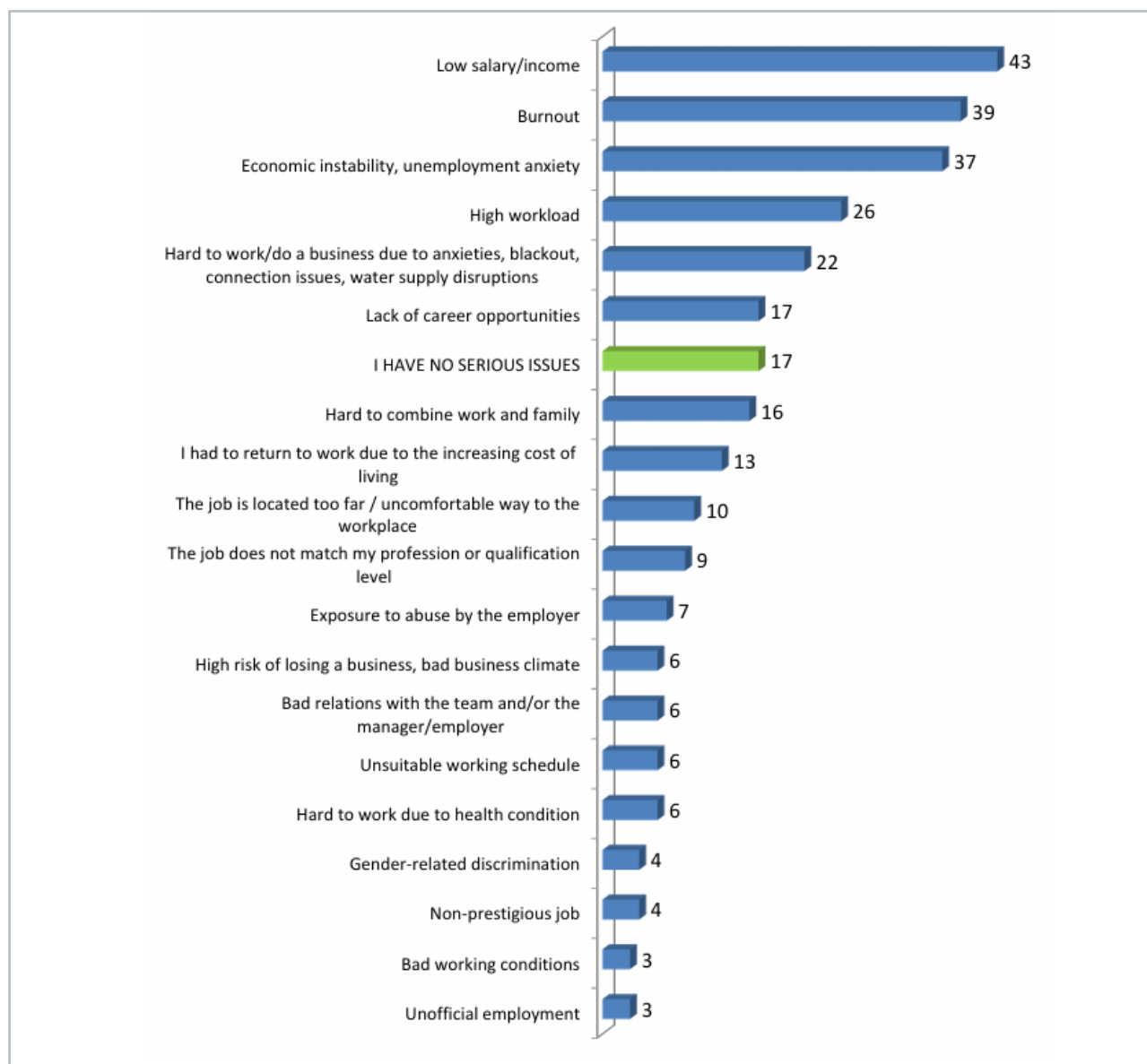
* The total value for answers exceeds 100%, since the respondents could select several options

Fig. 2.7. Reasons for the unemployment of the respondents, % of the respondents who do NOT work (n=188)

The results of the online survey among women seem to confirm that low salaries are one of the most troubling problems for women in terms of employment. Most respondents (97%) have work experience. Almost half of them (47%) consider themselves as highly qualified professionals. Three quarters (74%) of the respondents were employed at the time of the survey.

83% of the women worked as employees (full- or part-time), 22% of the respondents worked as individual entrepreneurs or freelance professionals, 5% had a temporary or seasonal job, 2% had unpaid jobs in a family business or in individual farms²⁶.

Low salaries rank first among the issues women are facing in terms of employment. Overall, 43% of the respondents were dissatisfied with their salary level, including 45% of the respondents representing the group of highly qualified professionals and 42% representing the rest (differences are statistically irrelevant). Apart from the low salaries, the working women also mentioned burnout, economic instability and fear of unemployment, high workload, hardships of the war (fears, issues with electricity supply and web connection), etc. Just one in six respondents (17%) stated they had no noteworthy employment-related issues (17%) (fig. 2.8).



* The total value for answers exceeds 100%, since the respondents could select several options

Fig. 2.8. Most troubling employment-related issues for working women, % of the working women (n=528)

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²⁶ The total value of employment forms exceeds 100%, since the respondents could choose several of them

“Informally employed” individuals constitute a special category of the working population – these are individuals whose work does not have a proper social and legal status (employment in non-registered businesses, casual jobs, domestic work, etc.). Informal work can be found both in the official and unofficial sectors of the economy. It can exist as employment, self-employment, or domestic work.

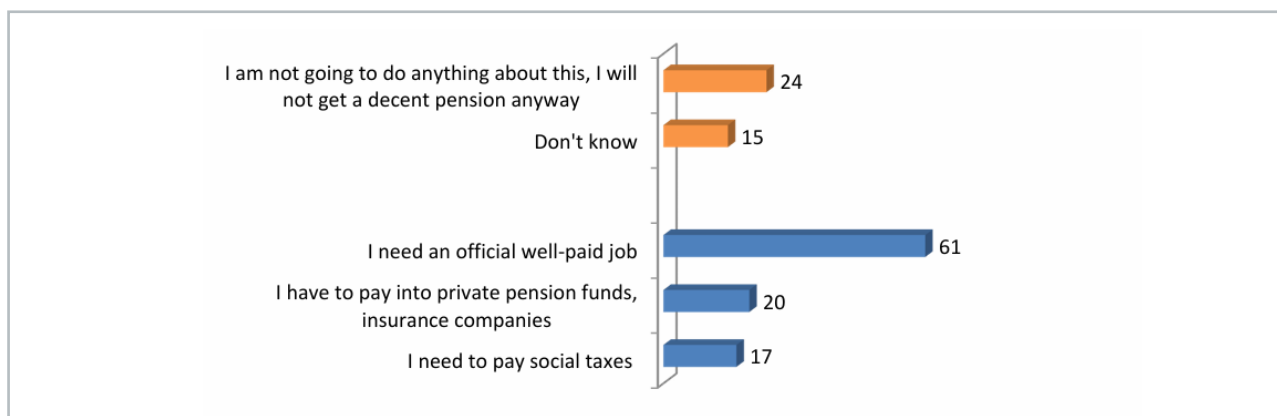
As a rule, this employment exists without a formal contract, which means that the employer does not bear any legal responsibility. Such an employment is considered unprotected. An informally employed worker can leave, for instance, without the annual or study vacation, she/he can be dismissed at any time at the employer’s discretion, she/he does not make any contributions to the pension system, etc. In 2021, a significant part of the working population was classified as informally employed – 19.3% of the population in the group aged 15-70 years. It was equal to approx. 3 million citizens. Women accounted for almost 40% (1202.1 thousand persons) of the informally employed workforce.

It shall be noted, however, that the number of the informally employed population as per OSES 2024 went down significantly to 2.3 million persons, which is 22.6% lower compared with the same period of 2021. Informal employment among citizens aged 15 years and older went down as well compared with 2021: from 19.1% to 17.2% of the working population in the respective age group. It was equal to 20.3% for men and 13.4% for women.

Comment 2.

Contrary to the OSES data confirming the decline in informal employment, more and more cases are being reported when employers resort to informal employment schemes for male workers: they establish IEs or take them out of the core staff and sign civil-law contracts with them. Such cases are reported by workers themselves, representatives of the business associations and the government.

Overall, most citizens of Ukraine, including working men and women, are not well informed about the way pensions are calculated in Ukraine, which means that they do not understand how a decent pension can be earned. In addition, most citizens are reluctant to “look far ahead” and are not motivated to take necessary precautions. According to the online survey among women in the working age, a quarter of the respondents (24%) stated they did not believe it would be possible to earn a decent pension under any conditions. 15% of the respondents could not answer the question. On the other side, 61% of the respondents mentioned at least one way to earn a proper pension. All of them mentioned that official employment with a high salary was necessary for a good pension, while some respondents also mentioned cooperation with private pension funds and the possibility to pay pension contributions on their own (fig. 2.9).



* The total value for answers exceeds 100%, since the respondents could select several options

Fig. 2.9. Answers to the question “Do you know what you have to do to achieve a decent pension?”, % of the respondents (n=716)

Workforce demand.

Large-scale migration processes and conscription measures have resulted in significant and contradictory changes in the labour market. The economic shock at the beginning of the invasion led to a decline in workforce demand and supply. Later on, the demand for workforce started to recover along with the overall economic recovery, while the activity of job seekers was going down steadily.

According to the State Employment Service, the number of vacant jobs increased notably over the past year. In 2023, the number of job postings was significantly lower than the number of job seekers (42.8 thousand jobs for 214.1 thousand candidates, equating to a 1:5 ratio). By 2024, however, the number of vacant jobs (as of 1 July 2024) had risen to 62.4 thousand, while the number of job seekers decreased to 110.7 thousand (a 1:1.8 ratio).

Given the above, the present situation in the Ukrainian labour market is marked by the deficit of workforce and a disbalance between demand and supply. Employers mention conscription, qualification gaps as well as too ambitious salary expectations among candidates as the key reasons for their recruitment challenges.

At the same time, a significant number of citizens stay out of the workforce and could be engaged for employment. This economically inactive part of the population is dominated by women and rural residents. There are various reasons for economic inactivity, including retirement and study. However, there is a big group that is worth being considered: women involved in unpaid domestic work, women who care for children or family members, women who have given up their employment efforts or are not aware of existing employment opportunities. Hence, these women are confronted with certain barriers to their employment. This group of women is socially vulnerable and is highly exposed to poverty risks as well as has an uncovered need for social support services. In addition, women who do not work do not make payments to the pension fund, which means that they can miss out on their pension or can only receive the minimum pension.

3. ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: EXISTING BARRIERS AND WAYS TO OVERCOME THEM

This chapter offers the overview and analysis of barriers hindering a more active engagement of women in paid work. Special attention is paid to the barriers that are typical for specific groups of women (mothers of minor children, women who care for adult disabled relatives, women in the pre-retirement age).



3.1. General overview of existing barriers

A number of barriers and hurdles have been identified that impede a more active engagement of women in the labour market and their economic empowerment. These barriers have different roots (economic, psychological, etc.) and make themselves visible at different levels (individual, regional, national). Some of them are relevant for all or most women, while some only affect specific categories (e.g., girls and young women, women with children, women in the pre-retirement age, etc.). Attempts are made below to identify the types of these barriers.

1. The unfavourable economic situation in Ukraine, is reflected in the low level of salaries and a high tax burden on businesses (which leads to a widespread unofficial employment). Low salaries for offered jobs and the lack of social guarantees for unofficially employed workers demotivate women from active job search. In many cases, even women focused on their professional development and career are disengaged by these circumstances and opt for domestic duties instead of employment. For instance, a lot of young mothers do not resume their employment, since they cannot find a nanny for their child/children at an acceptable price. Women in the pre-retirement/retirement age often refrain from working to be able to care their grandchildren and enable their parents (i.e., their own children) to work²⁷.

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²⁷ Study “How to increase the employment of women and why it is important for the economy” (2019), conducted with the support of the International Renaissance Foundation [web source]. – Viewing mode: https://ces.org.ua/wpcontent/uploads/2019/09/%D0%B3%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BF%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0_1610.pdf

Women whose family members require constant care (for instance, husbands, parents or other relatives with disability, or if they need rehabilitation after injuries, have chronic illnesses, etc.) are also often compelled to take these duties on their own, since their possible salary does not cover the services of a professional care worker.

Low salaries in many sectors often make it economically unreasonable for pensioners (both women and men) to take over available jobs, even if they wish to continue working. That is why they abstain from further economic activity, rely on their pension and apply for subsidies to cover the utility costs instead of having to work for a meagre salary and lose their subsidy entitlement, since their pension and salary exceed the income threshold a bit above which a household loses its right to apply for the subsidy.

The issue of low salaries is especially relevant for the IDPs. Having a low-paid job along with having to pay the rent that has increased significantly in most regions since the outbreak of the war just does not let them survive²⁸.

2. Gender disparity in family duties.

Although the law provides men and women with equal rights in family life (for instance, a father, just like a mother, can make use of the child-care leave to care for children until they become 3 years old or can take 14 days of paid paternity leave within three month of the birth of the child), the biggest share of the unpaid domestic work as well as care for children and other family members who need support is traditionally done by women in Ukraine^{29,30}. According to various sources, the share of men applying for child-care leave for children aged under 3 years does not exceed 5%^{31,32}.

This is influenced by both stereotypes, such as “this is not a men’s job,” and objective reasons – women typically earn less and have lower career prospects, making it more reasonable for the family in the long run for the woman to step out of paid employment temporarily instead of her husband^{33,34}. This creates a vicious cycle of stereotypes that reinforce each other. On the one hand, there are stereotypes suggesting that women are primarily responsible for family duties and care work, automatically prioritizing domestic tasks over their careers when faced with a choice. This severely impacts women’s prospects in the labour market, including finding good jobs and advancing their careers. On the other hand, women’s chances in the labour market are often worse than those of men, which frequently leads them to abandon paid employment in favour of family duties, such as child care and care for other family members.

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²⁸ Study “Effectiveness of the policy of supporting the economic activity of internally displaced women as an element of the early recovery of Ukraine” (2023), conducted with the support of ISAR Ednannia [web source]. – Viewing mode: https://sociocon.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Zvit.indd_.pdf

²⁹ Study “How to increase the employment of women and why it is important for the economy” (2019), conducted with the support of the International Renaissance Foundation [web source]. – Viewing mode: https://ces.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/%D0%B3%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BF%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B0_1610.pdf

³⁰ Gender disproportions in Ukraine during the war [web resource]. – Viewing mode: <https://niss.gov.ua/news/komentari-ekspertiv/henderni-dysproportsiyi-v-ukrayini-pid-chas-viyny>

³¹ Gender Passport of the City of Kyiv [web resource]. – Access mode: <https://kyivcity.gov.ua/img/item/general/7048.pdf>

³² Gender equality and response to domestic violence in the private sector in Ukraine: appeal for action [web source]. – Access mode: <https://ukraine.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pubpdf/%D0%93%D0%95%D0%9D%D0%94%D0%95%D0%A0%D0%9D%D0%90%20%D0%A0%D0%86%D0%92%D0%9D%D0%86%D0%A1%D0%A2%D0%AC%20%20%281%29.pdf>

³³ Kostiuchenko T. Gender profile of the labour market: comparing the cases of Ukraine and Lithuania [web resource]. – Viewing mode: https://ucep.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/gender_survey_SUPERFINAL_UPD.pdf

³⁴ Study of the employment and prosperity level of men and women, conducted by InfoSapiens [web resource]. – Viewing mode: https://www.sapiens.com.ua/publications/socpolresearch/77/UKR_Gender%20employment%20and%20welfare%20Study.pdf

The gender disbalance concerning care work is closely linked with a number of other factors, including, for instance, issues in the operation of nursing and school facilities (that, in addition to their core function, also offer child-care services, while mothers are at work) and provision of care services for people who need this support.

3. Issues related to the operation of nursing facilities and schools.

Some of the issues existed before the war, while the other ones (mostly security risks) became relevant after the outbreak of the war and include the following.

- After the outbreak of the war a lot of children were relocated abroad, which somewhat alleviated the lack of places in kindergartens in Ukraine, though this issue still persists. At the same time, this deficit became more in the “relatively safe” Western regions of Ukraine due to the arrival of a big number of IDPs³⁵. In the areas close to the frontline, the pre-school facilities do not work altogether. In the liberated regions of Ukraine, mainly in the Kyiv and Chernihiv regions, a lot of kindergartens and schools were heavily damaged or destroyed. Most of them are still under recovery or reconstruction. This seriously affects access to education for children. The interim solutions in this field include trips to facilities located in other districts and online learning.
- Security risks: not all kindergartens and schools are equipped with shelters having a sufficient capacity. Given that, kindergartens often accommodate a smaller number of children compared to the time before the war, so they can accommodate all children and teachers in their shelters. Schools implement online learning or a mixed learning format (combination of online and offline learning) or learning in shifts (first and second half of the day). Accordingly, it becomes an issue for the parents to care for primary school children, when they stay at home. Even if a kindergarten/school has a shelter or uses the shelter of a neighbouring facility, not all mothers are ready to leave their children in the kindergarten, if they know that its shelter does not meet the valid standards or that children shall walk like 10 minutes to the nearest shelter in case of the alarm.
- The working schedule of kindergartens was and remains unsuitable for working mothers, since it does not take into account the end of the working day and the time necessary to drive to the kindergarten to pick up children³⁶.
- Many schools do not offer all-day care, which also affect the employment opportunities for the mothers of primary school children.

4. Care for adults who need support due to their health disorders. The issue mostly concerns the lack of services (rehabilitation, day care, hospice and palliative care) for different categories of citizens who need them (people with disability, senior citizens, persons who need rehabilitation after injuries)³⁷. This issue is related to a number of factors, including:

- Funding constraints and lack of personnel at state/municipal care facilities, the lack of such facilities, which is why the existing ones cannot cover the demand for such services in full. This issue is especially acute in smaller towns and rural areas where such services are not available altogether.

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³⁵ Study of the economic activity of female IDPs and their strategies for income recovery, conducted by InfoSapiens in 2023 with the support of the Government of Germany [web resource]. – Viewing mode: https://www.sapiens.com.ua/publications/socpol-research/266/ISInt_IDPs_women_report_UKR.pdf

³⁶ Study “Barriers for the employment of vulnerable groups of women”, conducted in 2017 with the support of the UNDP [web resource]. – Viewing mode: https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ua/3da604e36a9adbca140bf8566ee2a6cfe1edcfbcacd5a2d019e_0503915dc735a.pdf

³⁷ Same place

- Conditions for the provision of care services by state/municipal facilities. For instance, single senior citizens constitute the only group eligible to receive free-of-charge day care services at home. If they have adult capable children, their children are responsible for caring for their parents, even if they live in another city or abroad.
- The price of care services provided by private specialists/facilities is high even compared with the average salary and especially the pension of relatives (if available). Thus, such services are not affordable for a big share of the population.

The conclusion is that women often find themselves in a situation where they have no other choice but to quit their paid jobs to be able to care properly for their children or other relatives. This issue has become even more acute due to a new category of family members who are in need of care – military personnel going through rehabilitation after being injured in the war.



5. Stereotypes among employers.

According to different studies, women have to constantly face gender stereotypes and prejudices in the labour market, which are entwined with age and other stereotypes. They refer not only to the division of professions into “female” and “male” ones, which impacts the selection of professions by girls and boys^{38,39}.

In fact, employers have a much wider range of stereotypes concerning women. Girls and young women looking for their first job often see their applications rejected by employers citing their lack of experience and the need for additional training with arguments like “if we have to put extra efforts into training a new worker, it would better be a boy, because he at least will not seek a maternity leave.” *декрет*».

³⁸ Herasymenko H. Why gender disbalance has to be reduced in the energy sector [web source]. – Viewing mode: <https://ua.boell.org/uk/2019/07/22/chomu-potribno-skorochnuvati-genderni-disporciyi-venergetichnomu-sektori>

³⁹ Gender disparities in Ukraine during the war [web source]. – Viewing mode: <https://niss.gov.ua/news/komentari-ekspertiv/henderni-dysproportsiyi-v-ukrayini-pid-chas-viyny>

Women who have small children or can become pregnant (even if they do not plan it yet) can also be confronted with reservations by employers that their children will often be sick and they will often be on sick leave. As far as women aged 40-45 years are concerned, potential employers “reclassify” them from the “fertile” into the “pre-retirement” group and tend to reject their applications with the argument “we need younger employees”^{40,41}.

According to a survey conducted by AC “Socioconsulting” among female IDPs in 2023, almost a half (46%) of female job seekers aged 46–59 years received age-related rejections from employers. More than a third (37%) of the respondents who have children under 5 years received rejections, because they have minor children⁴².

Presently, progress is being made in overcoming such stereotypes. Due to the severe lack of personnel caused by the conscription of men and migration, employers are increasingly engaging other categories of job seekers, including women. They are launching programmes to attract young candidates, particularly senior students and graduates of higher education institutions and vocational schools (both boys and girls). Employers are also implementing retraining programmes for women to acquire professions previously considered exclusively “men’s work” (e.g., subway train drivers, loader truck drivers, etc.)⁴³. Additionally, employers are now more actively engaging workers in the pre-retirement and even retirement age⁴⁴.



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⁴⁰ Kostiuchenko T. Gender profile of the labour market: comparing the cases of Ukraine and Lithuania [web resource]. – Viewing mode: https://ucep.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/gender_survey_SUPERFINAL_UPD.pdf

⁴¹ Study “Employment barriers for vulnerable groups of women”, conducted in 2017 with the support of the UNDP [web source]. – Viewing mode: https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ua/3da604e36a9adbca140bf8566e2a6cfe1edcfbcacd5a2d019e_0503915dc735a.pdf

⁴² Study “Effectiveness of the policy of supporting the economic activity of internally displaced women as an element of the early recovery of Ukraine” (2023), conducted with the support of ISAR Ednannia [web source]. – Viewing mode: https://sociocon.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Zvit.indd_.pdf

⁴³ Until 2017, the Order of the Health Care Ministry of Ukraine No. 256 remained valid, which listed 450 professions prohibited for women (e.g., subway train driver, long-distance bus driver, diver, firefighter) [web resource]. – Access mode: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z0051-94#Text>

⁴⁴ Sudakov M., Lisohor L. Labour market of Ukraine 2022-2023: condition, trends and prospects [web source]. – Viewing mode: https://solidarityfund.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ebd_ukraine-lm-1.pdf

According to the Federation of Employers of Ukraine, many large companies are addressing their recruitment challenges by replacing male workers with women, as well as through automation and additional investments in their loading equipment fleets—a positive trend in itself. Companies like Epicentre K (a home improvement company), NOVUS (a grocery chain), and OKKO (a petrol station network) serve as positive examples of modernizing their fixed assets to better utilize female labour. At OKKO, the share of women working as distribution centre specialists responsible for consolidating and dispatching supplies to petrol stations increased to 60% in 2023, a position previously dominated by men.

One more stereotype among employers concerns their attitude to remote working. Employers often insist that workers badge in even if they can do their work in the remote mode. A lot of employers are also negative about a flexible working schedule and mixed employment formats (combination of remote and office work).

However, the quarantine caused by COVID19 as well as the war and war-related issues (security risks, blackouts, traffic issues) served as a nudge for many employers to implement more flexible working schedules.

6. Issues related to the functioning of the vocational and higher education system, the gap between the needs of the labour market and the education system have a material impact on young job seekers including both boys and girls⁴⁵. Occupations and professions offered by educational institutions are significantly different from the real structure of the labour market, with educational institutions often focused on “prestigious” professions instead of those really needed by employers. Subsequently, graduates often face the fact that their profession is not needed in the labour market at all or that they cannot expect any jobs in their home region⁴⁶.

Adding to the issue, educational institutions offer purely theoretical training (often based on obsolete knowledge, concepts, standards) and do not offer any hands-on learning component. The attempt to solve this issue through mandatory internship for students in companies has been ineffective, since the internship is only a formality in many cases and does not provide students with any useful knowledge and skills. As a result, graduates are mostly not ready to work effectively in their first workplace and need additional training/mentorship by their senior colleagues⁴⁷. Employers are reluctant to provide this kind of support and tend to search for candidates with at least a minimum experience, while graduates are struggling to find their first job⁴⁸.

Another issue is that existing stereotypes concerning gender roles have a significant impact on the choice of profession by girls and boys, which further affects the career prospects of young people. For instance, the STEM disciplines are traditionally considered as a male domain, while teaching professions (pre-school and school) are dominated by women. Studies show that approx. 20% of the parents actively influence the choice of profession by their children based on traditional gender roles, thus contributing to the preservation of these stereotypes⁴⁹.

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⁴⁵ Same place

⁴⁶ Youth segment in the labour market of Ukraine during the war [web source]. – Viewing mode: <https://niss.gov.ua/news/komentari-ekspertiv/molodizhny-sehment-rynku-pratsi-ukrayiny-v-period-povnomasshtabnoyi-viyny>

⁴⁷ Same place

⁴⁸ Study “Employment barriers for vulnerable groups of women”, conducted in 2017 with the support of the UNDP [web source]. – Viewing mode: https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ua/3da604e36a9adbca140bf8566ee2a6cfe1edcfbcacd5a2d019e_0503915dc735a.pdf

⁴⁹ 9#CVIDOMI: Rebuild the Country - UNFPA communication campaign aimed at supporting young people in choosing their career path [web resource]. – Access mode: <https://ukraine.unfpa.org/uk/news/cvidomi%D0%B2%D1%96%D0%B4%D0%B1%D1%83%D0%B4%D0%BE%D0%B2%D1%83%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B8-%D0%BA%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%97%D0%BD%D1%83%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BC%D1%83%D0%BD%D1%96%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%86%D1%96%D0%B9%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%BF%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%96%D1%8F-%D0%B4%D0%BB%D1%8F%D1%81%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%8F%D0%BD%D0%BD%D1%8F%D0%BC%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B4%D1%96%D1%83%D0%B2%D0%B8%D0%B1%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%96%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%94%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE>

7. Ineffective state employment policy, missing effective mechanisms of unbiased HR practices or incentives for employers to recruit vulnerable citizens, including mentorship programmes for young workers or a flexible working schedule for women with children.

8. Restrictions and barriers for entrepreneurship and self-employment.

In many cases, entrepreneurship and self-employment could become a suitable alternative to and solve the issues that women (and men) are facing in the labour market. However, the development of this sector of economic activity in Ukraine is burdened with constraints that became even more acute after the outbreak of the war.

They include:

- Non-systemic and ineffective state policy in fostering entrepreneurship, unconcerted efforts of the state and various international organisations and projects. Subsequently, numerous initiatives aimed at fostering entrepreneurship and self-employment among women still do not deliver a tangible effect.
- An excessive number of taxes. Presently, economists list 135 types of taxes, charges, excises for different types of business activity. This makes it harder for citizens to endeavor a business, even a small one. It is very hard to come to terms with the tax system without a special training, which makes people timid and affect the self-esteem of would-be entrepreneurs.
- Conditions for receiving a state grant to start or develop a business are not attractive enough. A lot of women are skeptical about receiving such a grant via the Diia portal, since it shall be repaid together with taxes charged on its amount (18% - income tax and 1.5% - military charge).
- Missing affordable loans for business development.
- Complicated search for premises to lease, recruitment issues, etc.⁵⁰.

9. “Logistics” barriers, including a sub-optimal transportation network both in big cities and between cities and towns/villages. This issue was also relevant before the war and is even more persistent now due to shelling, blackouts, and lack of personnel in public transport companies^{51,52}.

10. Regional disparities, like the domination of specific sectors in the economy of different regions, which results in structural differences between regional labour markets and makes employment more challenging for IDPs. Most IDPs are well educated and have a high qualification level and a respectable work experience, but they have no chance to find a job in line with their skill set in their new place of residence, since the Western regions of Ukraine, for instance, do not have steel or chemical industry^{53, 54}.

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⁵⁰ Study “Effectiveness of the policy of supporting the economic activity of internally displaced women as an element of the early recovery of Ukraine” (2023), conducted with the support of ISAR Ednannia [web source]. – Viewing mode: https://sociocon.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Zvit.indd_.pdf

⁵¹ Study of the economic activity of female IDPs and their strategies for income recovery, conducted by InfoSapiens in 2023 with the support of the Government of Germany [web resource]. – Viewing mode: https://www.sapiens.com.ua/publications/socpol-research/266/ISInt_IDPs_women_report_UKR.pdf

⁵² Study “Barriers for the employment of vulnerable groups of women”, conducted in 2017 with the support of the UNDP [web resource]. – Viewing mode: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ua/3da604e36a9adbca140bf8566ee2a6cfe1edcfbcacd5a2d019e0503915dc735a.pdf>

⁵³ Study “Effectiveness of the policy of supporting the economic activity of internally displaced women as an element of the early recovery of Ukraine” (2023), conducted with the support of ISAR Ednannia [web source]. – Viewing mode: https://sociocon.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Zvit.indd_.pdf

⁵⁴ Study of the economic activity of female IDPs and their strategies for income recovery, conducted by InfoSapiens in 2023 with the support of the Government of Germany [web resource]. – Viewing mode: https://www.sapiens.com.ua/publications/socpol-research/266/ISInt_IDPs_women_report_UKR.pdf

11. Individual factors. In the modern dynamic world, the structure of the labour market is subject to constant changes: some professions come into oblivion, while new ones arise. Necessary competences and requirements to workers in different professions – from teachers and doctors to sale assistants and cleaning workers – change regularly as well. Life-long learning becomes a must for citizens wishing to stay relevant in the labour market. However, not all people are ready to make efforts and learn something new. This is especially relevant for citizens in the pre-retirement age (both women and men), even if they have relatively low-paid jobs.

Apart from the missing readiness to learn, individual psychological barriers related to employment include resignation (reluctance to continue a job search after several rejections or to assume different jobs, until a suitable job becomes available) and unwillingness to work altogether. These types of attitudes can be found among women (and men) in different age groups. In addition, people in the pre-retirement age often miss competences and skills compared with their younger colleagues concerning the usage of modern equipment and software (or psychological constraints or resignation concerning their own ability to learn new things) as well as demonstrate a lower mobility and adaptability compared with their younger counterparts⁵⁵.

Apart from psychological barriers, health issues constitute another barrier for the (further) employment of women (and men) in the pre-retirement and retirement age who have issues keeping up with the intensive workload, irregular working times, etc. Along with this, employers, as mentioned above, are often not ready to drive down their requirements concerning work intensity and workload. Fig. 3.1 presents categories of women who are most vulnerable in the labour market as well as factor determining their vulnerability (employment barriers for these categories of women).

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⁵⁵ Study “Barriers for the employment of vulnerable groups of women”, conducted in 2017 with the support of the UNDP [web resource]. – Viewing mode: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ua/3da604e36a9adbca140bf8566ee2a6cfe1edcfbcacd5a2d019e0503915dc735a.pdf>

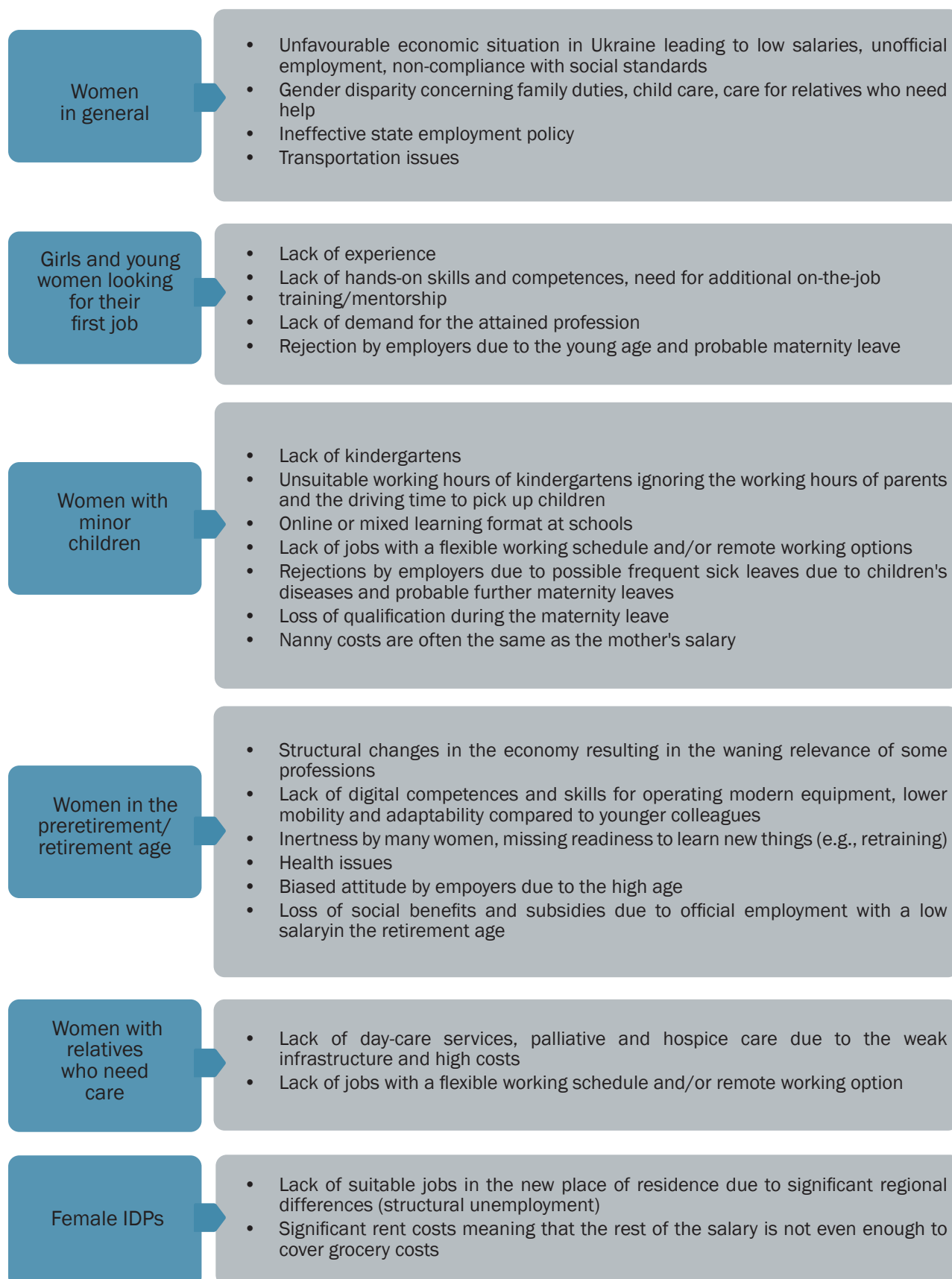


Fig. 3.1. Employment for different categories of women

3.2. Women with minor children

According to the Demographic Development Strategy of Ukraine for the period until 2040, the employment level of women aged 25–44 years depends significantly on whether they have minor children. It reaches up to 71% among women without children aged 3–5 years but drops to only 52% among women with children in this age group⁵⁶.

The analysis of hurdles and opportunities for the employment of women with minor children conducted as part of this study included desk research, a quantitative survey, and two focus-group discussions with representatives of this target group.

In total, 13 women aged 28–46 years with 1 to 3 children, including at least one child aged –10 years, participated in the focus-group discussions (FGDs). These women represented various regions of Ukraine, different types of localities, and diverse employment situations (not working, working part-time, working remotely, etc.). Women working full-time did not participate in the FGDs.

Additionally, 205 women with children aged 3–10 years participated in the survey. The participants met specific criteria, such as residing in Ukraine at the time of the survey and not working full-time (part-time work or casual jobs were acceptable). The inclusion of women who were not working or working part-time allowed the researchers to analyse the reasons for their economic inactivity or limited participation in the labour market, as well as the factors that could facilitate their more active employment.



Overall, the respondents have an appropriate employment potential. The absolute majority of the respondents (93%) belongs to the most promising age groups in terms of employment (25–45 years). 3% of the women are younger than 25 years, 4% are older than 45 years. Almost three quarters of the respondents (73%) have a higher-education degree, 20% have vocational secondary education, 7% have full secondary education.

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⁵⁶ Demographic Development Strategy of Ukraine for the period until 2040 [Web resource]. – Access mode: <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/npas/pro-skhvalennia-strategii-demohrafichnoho-rozvytku-ukrainy-na-period-do-2040-roku> 922r-300924

Employment motivation. The respondents presented contradictory views concerning the distribution of the family roles, maternity duties, and career aspirations. The paternalistic views are rather strong: more than 90% of the respondents say that the state/family shall support women, so they do not have to work in their maternity leave. A significant share of the respondents also agrees with stereotypes about the traditional division of the family roles and agrees that a working mother cannot pay enough attention to her child. At the same time, three quarters of the respondents want their husbands to care for children on equal terms (fig. 3.2).

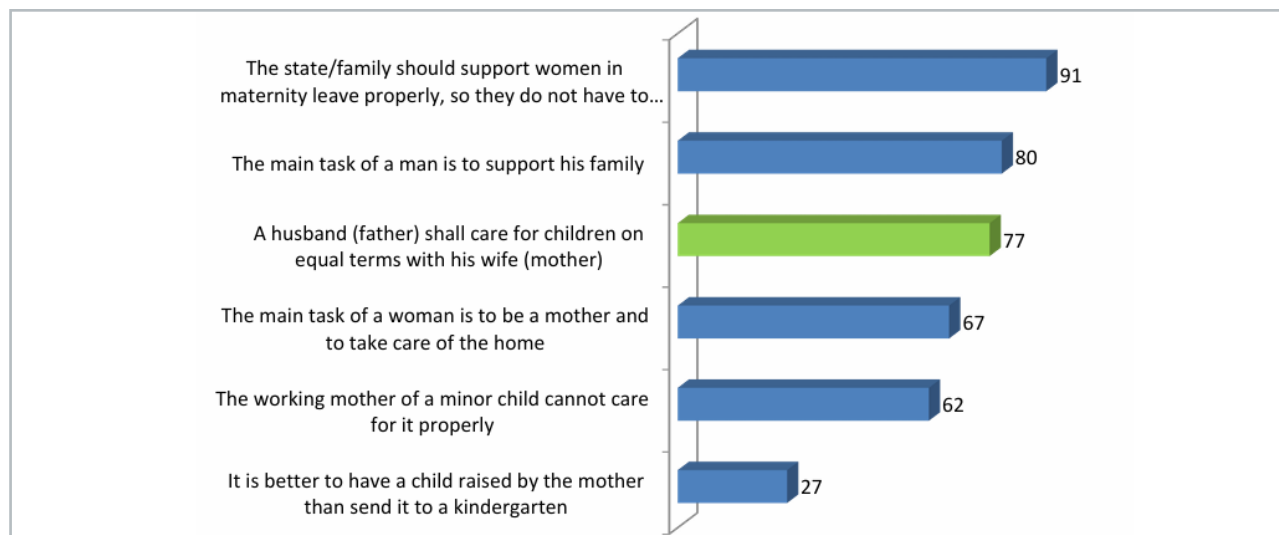
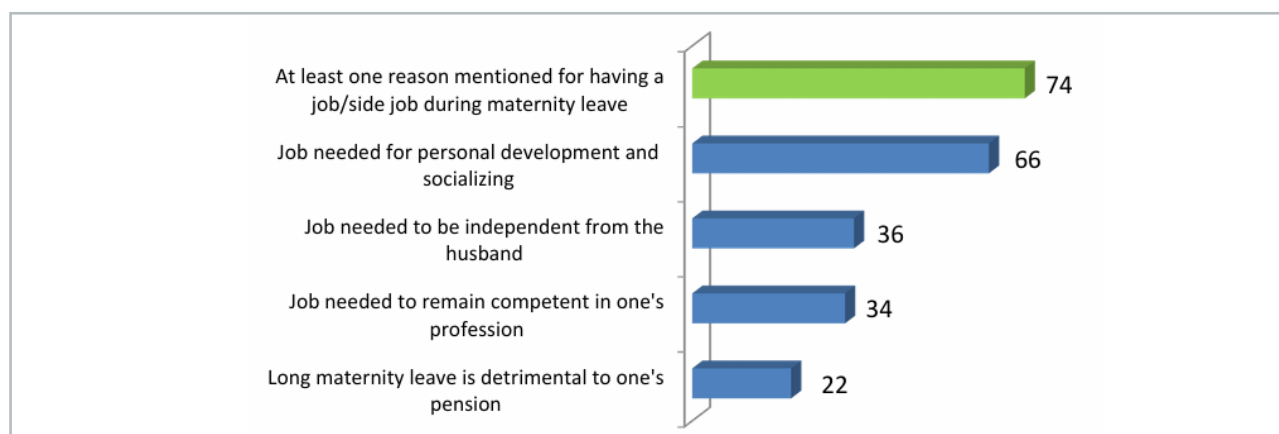


Fig. 3.2. Views of women on the “proper” distribution of the family roles, % of the respondents (n=205)

That said, three quarters (74%) of the women named at least one reason why it is NOT worth quitting a paid job during the maternity leave. The main argument for this, however, was not about professional development or financial independence from a husband but that a job enables a woman to communicate with people and stay “open to the world” (fig. 3.3).



* The total value for answers exceeds 100%, since the respondents could select several options

Fig. 3.3. Motivation for women to keep working during the maternity leave, % of the respondents (n=205)

Employment status of the respondents and issues in the labour market. As previously mentioned, the survey was conducted exclusively among women who do NOT work full-time. The results revealed that 74% of the respondents are not employed at all, while only 26% have some form of employment. Among those employed, the majority are engaged in hired work (38% of the employed respondents) or temporary/seasonal jobs (38%). Self-employment or freelance work is also relatively common, accounting for 19% of the employed respondents. A significant portion of the employed women work remotely, in a mixed format, and/or have a flexible working schedule (fig. 3.4). However, a critical issue is that more than a third of these women are working unofficially, primarily in temporary or seasonal jobs.

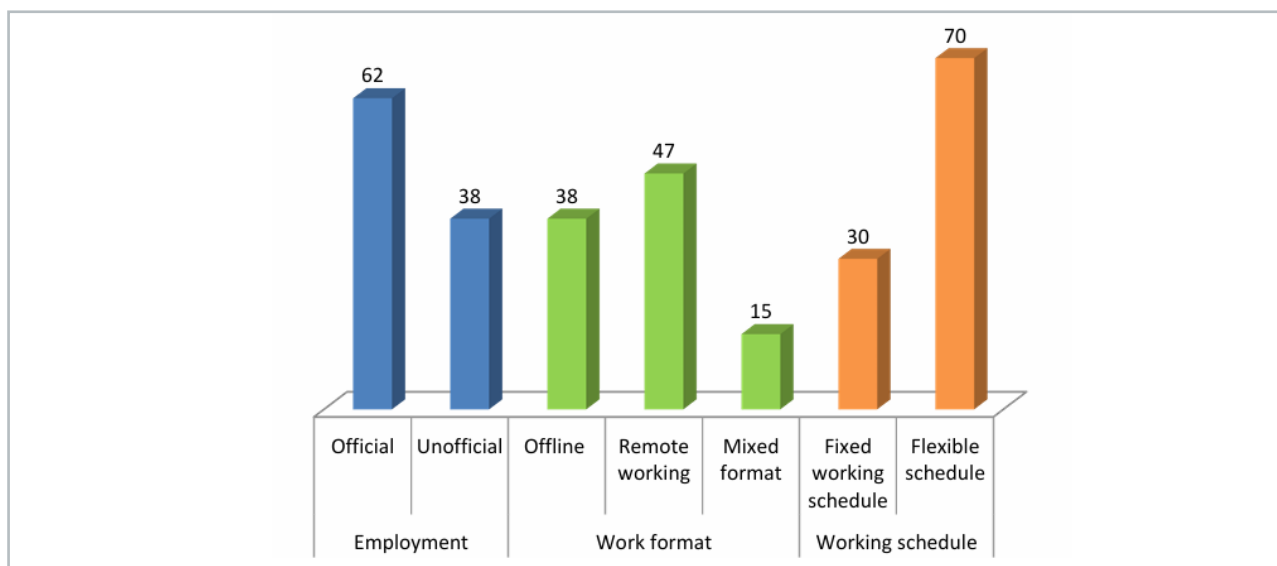
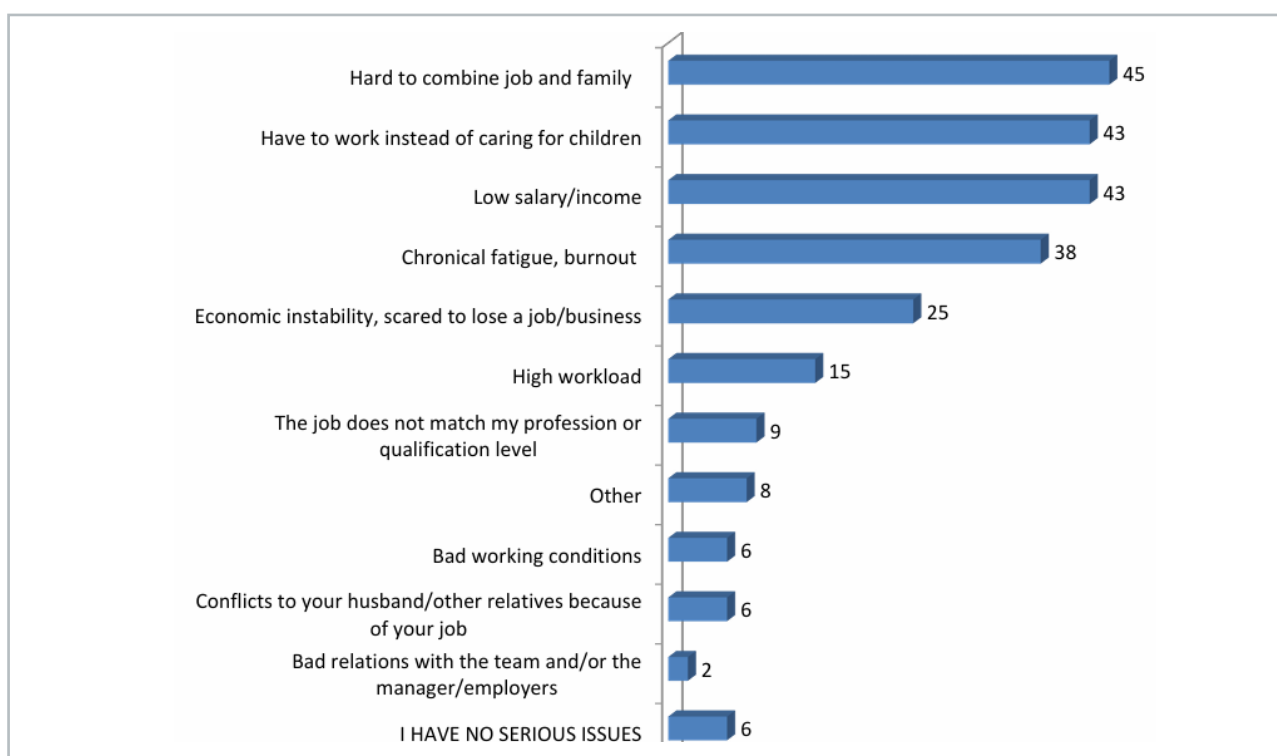


Fig. 3.4. Employment situation of the respondents, % of the respondents (n=53)

The most concerning points for the working respondents include combining their jobs with the need of constant care for their child/children and family duties, the duty of making a living instead of giving more time to the children, and the chronic tiredness/burnout. Traditionally, a lot of respondents are not happy with their salaries (fig. 3.5).

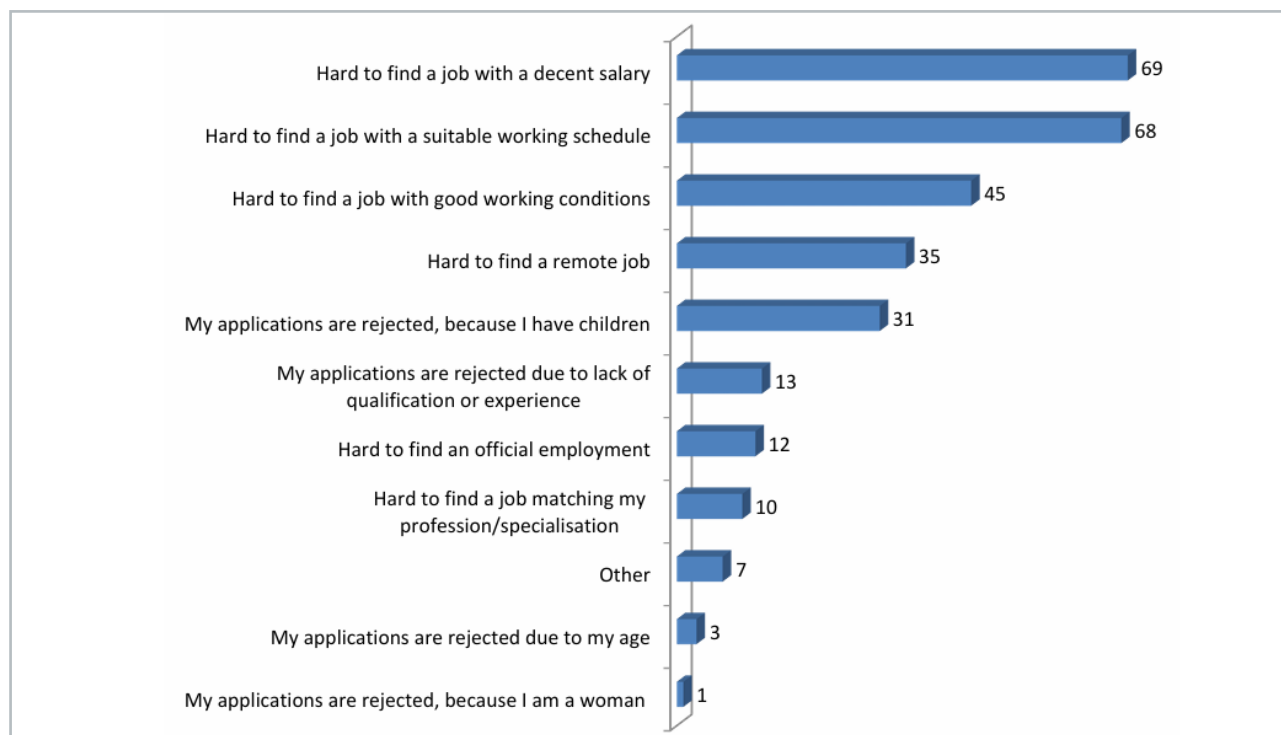


* The total value for answers exceeds 100%, since the respondents could select several options

Fig. 3.5. Issues that are most concerning for working women, % of the respondents (n=53)

Women who did NOT work at the time of the study were asked about their experiences with job searches or side jobs after childbirth. Two-thirds of the respondents (68%) reported having such an experience, while only one-third did not attempt to find a job. As a result, approximately one-quarter (26%) of the interviewed mothers of minor children were working at the time of the study, around half (51%) had tried to find paid employment, and approximately a quarter (23%) had not looked for a job at all.

Among the women who wanted to work but were unable to find a job, the main reasons included dissatisfaction with the offered salary, working schedule, and overall working conditions. Additionally, nearly one-third (31%) of the respondents reported facing bias from employers due to their status as mothers (fig. 3.6).



* The total value for answers exceeds 100%, since the respondents could select several options

Fig. 3.6. Issues faced by women who looked for a job, % of the respondents (n=104)

Employment barriers. In many cases, employment is not only about women's motivation. The collected sociological data confirm the relevance of the barriers detected through the desk research and helped extend their list.

1. First, it is the **gender disbalance in child care in particular and unpaid domestic work in general**. In most cases, all these duties or most of them are delegated to women (fig. 3.7).

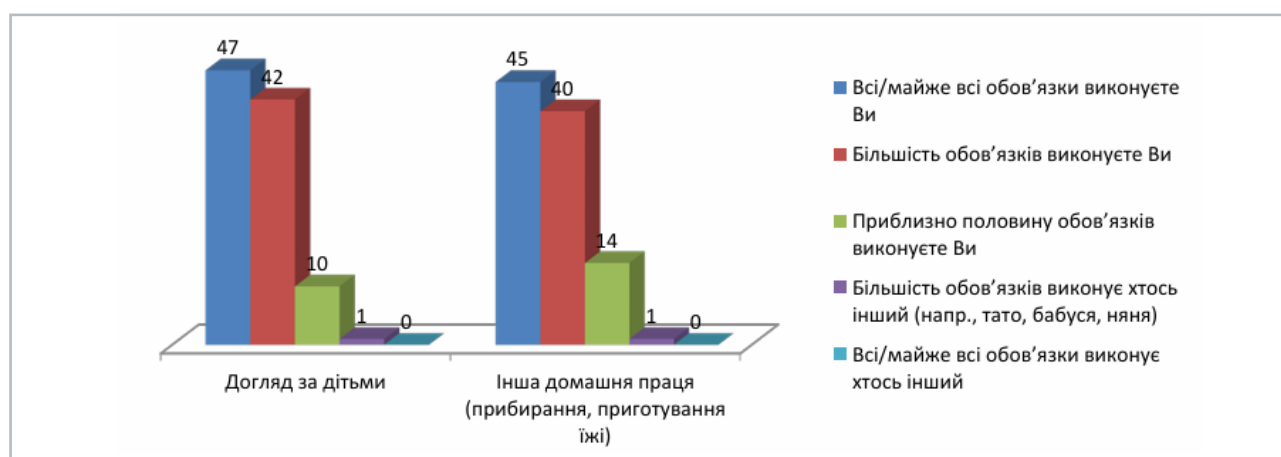


Fig. 3.7. Answers to the question "How are these duties distributed in your family?", % of the respondents (n=205)

Just one in 205 respondents (less than 1% of the respondents) answered that she spent less than 2 hours per day on average for child care and other housekeeping work, while the other respondents spend more time for these duties.

A significant share of the respondents spends more than 8 hours per day doing the unpaid domestic work. This is valid for both economically active women and women who do not work (fig. 3.8).

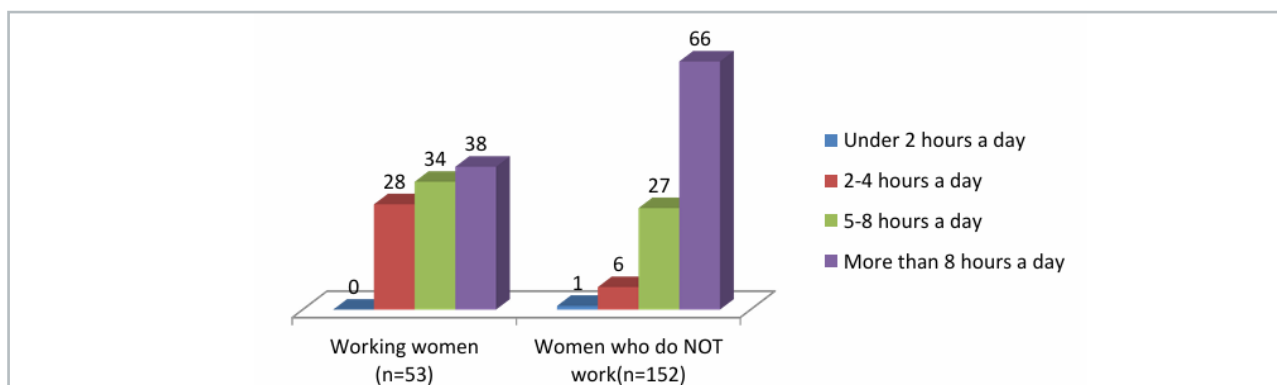


Fig. 3.8. Time spent by working/non-working women for the housekeeping and care work, %

A lot of FGD participants state that women are responsible for most domestic work and child-care tasks, even if they work several hours a day.

“When my husband has a day off, I go to work upon request. And then you come home at 21.00 or 22.00, and everyone is waiting for mom. The children do not do their school tasks with their father and start asking: “Mom, we have some homework to do, mom, we are hungry”. At like 23.00 it comes to their mind that they have to do something for tomorrow’s labour lesson” (FGD participant from the Ivano Frankivsk region, three children aged 12, 8, and 2 years).

2. Gender disbalance in unpaid care and domestic work is further exacerbated by **the need for child care when kindergartens and schools operate online or when children cannot attend a kindergarten**. 59% of the interviewed mothers reported that their minor children stay at home constantly or mostly due to the online or mixed format of kindergarten/school operations or due to health issues. In this situation, only a few working women are eligible to receive a refund for the “municipal nanny” service, as local authorities, even in districts close to the frontline, typically do not decide to shut down local kindergartens.

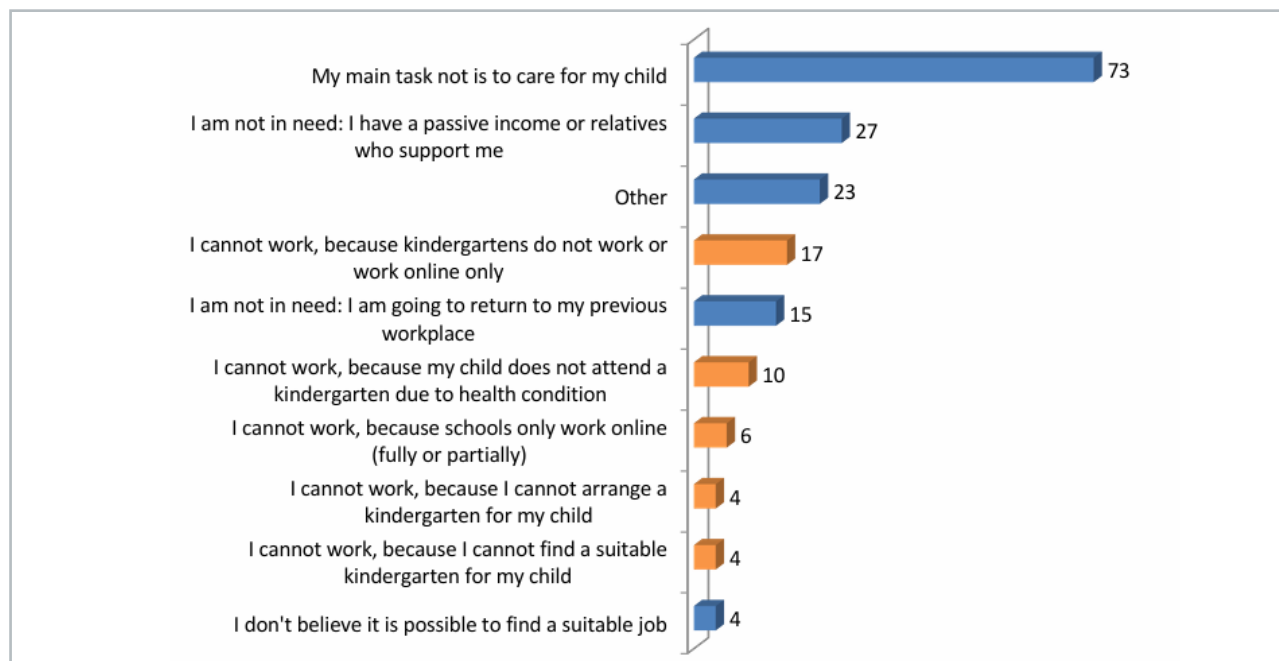
The remaining 41% of the interviewed women have their children attend kindergartens, schools, and extracurricular activities in the offline format. Of this group, 8% reported that their children spend 12 hours a day away from home. This is obviously not enough time for their mothers to be able to work. 31% of the respondents stated that their children spend 3-4 hours a day away from home, while 61% said their children spend 5 to 8 hours away. Theoretically, this time window should be sufficient for mothers to work at least part-time.

However, in many cases women cannot use their time at their own discretion. The reason is that a child can often spend this time at different places: several hours at a kindergarten/school, following which a child needs to be transferred for several hours to another location (training / tutor, etc.). The child’s schedule can also be different on different days, which significantly constraints the employment possibilities of the mother. Only 17% of the interviewed women mentioned that they had 3-4 or more consecutive free hours at the same time on a daily basis.

Another factor detrimental to female employment is the need for child care during the summer holidays, which last several months. Summer holidays are not only observed at schools but also at many kindergartens. Only 30% of the respondents said they can send their children to their grandmothers or other relatives (22%) or to a children’s camp (8%). Meanwhile, 70% of the respondents do not have this option.

Most women (73%) who did not search for a job after the childbirth consider child care as their primary duty (fig. 3.9). Apart from that, many respondents do not work due to the online operations of kindergartens or schools in their region or the health condition of their children.

A third (33%⁵⁷) of the respondents from this group mentioned at least one similar reason for them to stay away from employment (orange bar in the chart). Another third (35%⁵⁸) of the respondents say they did not need to look for a job, because they have other income sources like passive income or support from their relatives (27%) or because they plan to return to their previous job (15%).



* The total value for answers exceeds 100%, since the respondents could select several options

Fig. 3.9. Reasons for which women did NOT try to find a job after the childbirth, % of those who did NOT look for a job (n=48)

3. Numerous issues in the operations of kindergartens and all-day groups at schools, even if they operate offline. Kindergartens and schools do not take into account the working hours of most employees and the time required to drive to them to pick up children. At the same time, schools demand a proof that both parents work, so their children qualify for the all-day group (thus, the mother has to find a job first to have her child accepted into the all-day group, though it would be logical to proceed in the reverse order).

“Kindergartens are open until 18.00 or 19.00, while employers often ask you to work until 20.00 or 21.00, if we talk about supermarkets or malls. If this happens in a big city, you also need some time to drive to the kindergarten” (FGD participant from the Kyiv region, two children aged 11 and 4 years).

“My daughter attended a kindergarten; she was in a group for children with speech defects. The kindergarten was over earlier for them, I had to pick her up at 16.00. I went to work in that period, and I tried to finish the work within half a day instead of the full working day” (FGD participant from the Odessa region, one child aged 4 years).

4. Gender stereotypes and expectations in society concerning the role of a “good mommy” often force women to quit a paid job not only in cases when it is really necessary (for instance, a child requires care at home due to health issues), but also to ensure self-fulfilment for her child/children (for instance, extracurricular training, travelling with children participating in competitions, contests, etc.) while sacrificing her own career.

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⁵⁷ The integral value is lower than the sum of separate answers belonging to it, since it is calculated as a share of the respondents who mentioned at least one of the given options. Hence, if 1 respondent selected 2 or more answers at the same time, she will still be only considered once in the integrated value

⁵⁸ Same place

“Presently, I cannot find a suitable job that would let me care for my children. Our younger daughter wants to be a professional singer, she attends a music school, which is far away; I cannot let her go there on her own. That’s why I have to drive her there, wait and pick her up three days a week. I take a full-time job now, my daughter won’t be able to do what she wants to” (FGD participant from the Khmelnytskyi region, three children aged 21, 12, and 8 years).

The ways to overcome the identified barriers impeding the employment of mothers with children aged 3-10 years and to foster their more active engagement in the labour market include the following

1. Expansion of the range of services to provide child care for the time when mothers work or have other things to do. The analysis shows that mothers with minor children have a high uncovered demand for such services including rooms where they could leave a child for several hours, the extended working hours of kindergartens, and all-day groups at schools for all children whose parents need it. Many women (15-37% depending on a specific service) would even be ready to pay for such services (fig. 3.10).

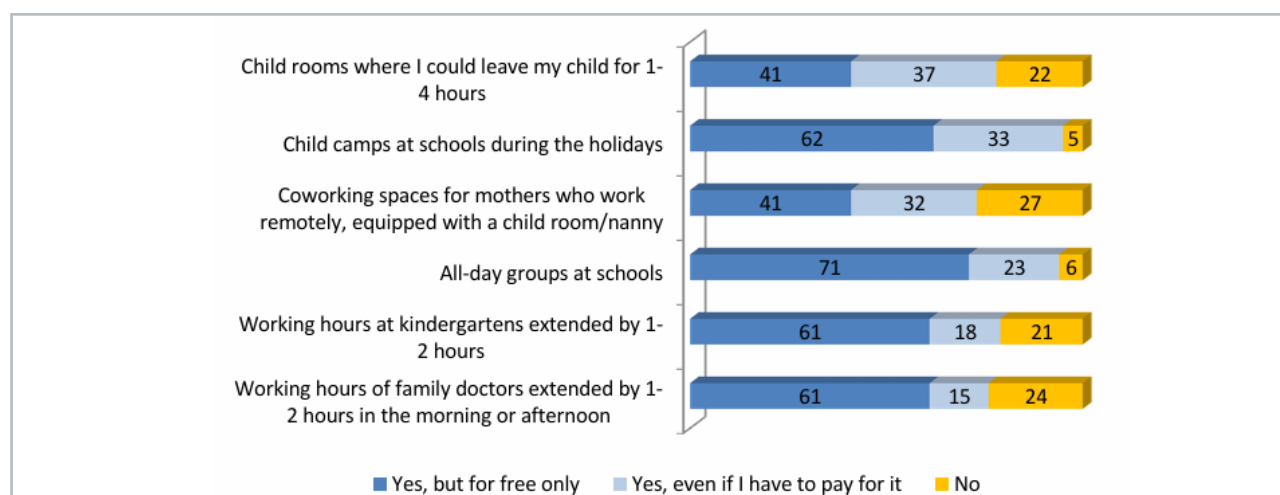


Fig. 3.10. Willingness of women to use child-care services, % of the respondents (n=205)

During the FGDs, women with minor children also mentioned they would like to use the mentioned services even against fee, provided that the price is acceptable given low salaries in many available jobs. It makes more sense to a woman to work and spend a part of her salary for the child-care services than not to work at all.

2. Fostering the competitiveness of women in the labour market including upskilling, retraining, employment support programmes, business support programmes, counselling on the labour rights of women. According to the study, all these measures are needed by women with minor children, with some of the women even being ready to pay for them (fig. 3.11).

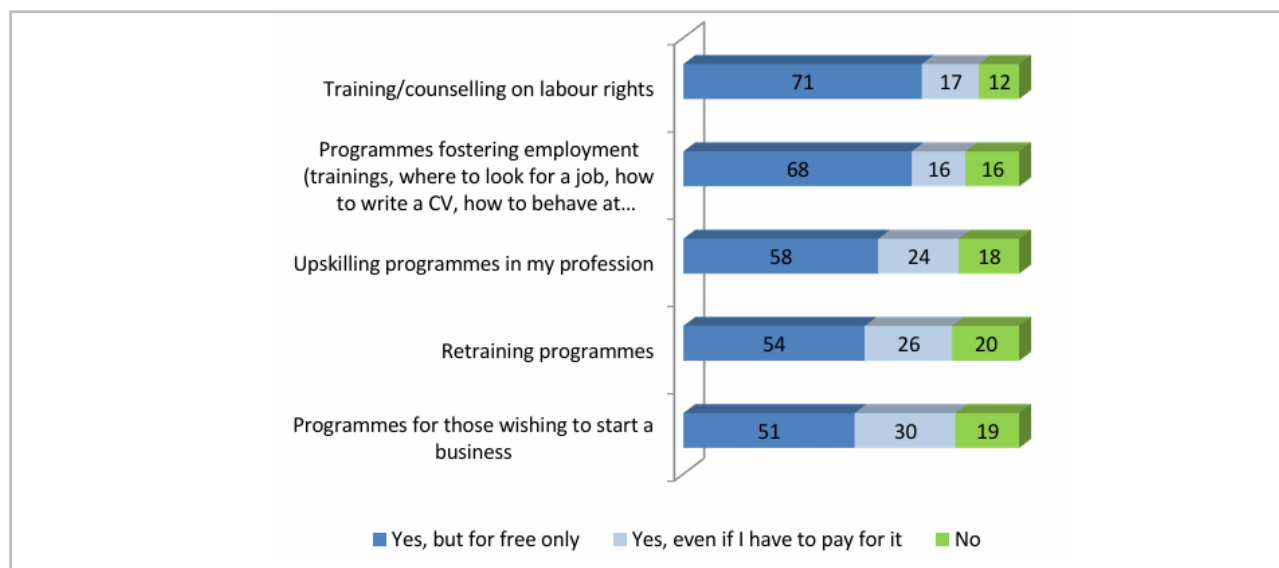
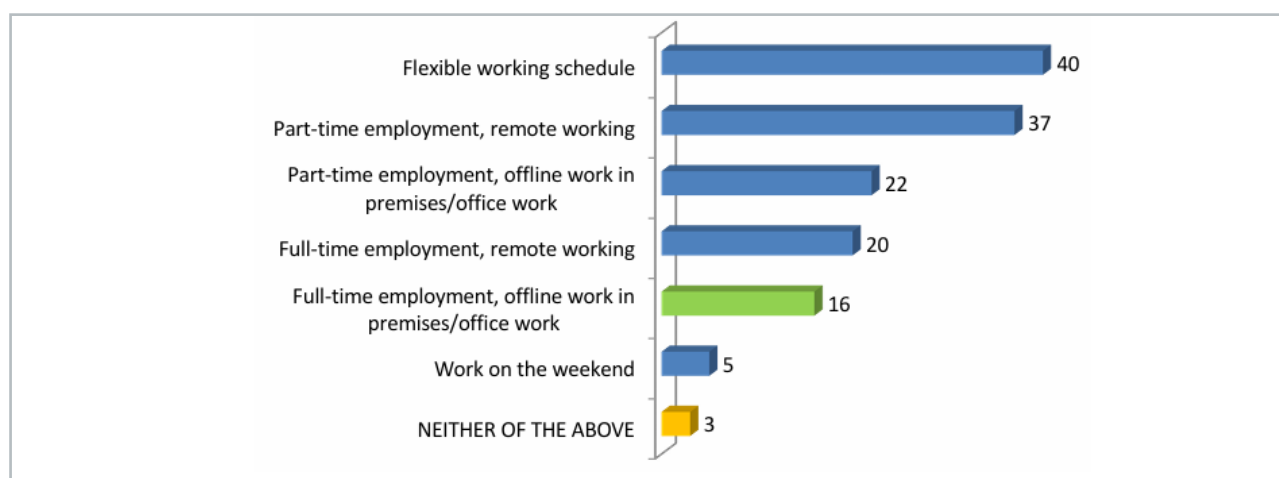


Fig. 3.11. Readiness of women to use services boosting their competitiveness in the labour market, % of the respondents (n=205)

3. Development of different employment formats: part-time, remote/mixed, flexible working schedule, etc. The study shows that these formats are more acceptable for women with minor children compared with the full-time employment and fixed working hours traditional for Ukraine (fig. 3.12) Most respondents would be ready to work if they could have an employment format enabling them to combine a job with the maternity duties. Only 3% of the respondents say that no employment form is suitable for them.



* The total value for answers exceeds 100%, since the respondents could select several options

Fig. 3.12. Employment formats acceptable for women with minor children, % of the respondents (n=205)

Most young women need a flexible working schedule. Three quarters (77%) of the respondents would like to work Monday to Friday, almost a quarter (23%) would like to work on the weekend (fig. 3.13)

Hence, the study demonstrates that women with minor children constitute a promising group in terms of employment, they especially need remote working and part-time jobs. To win young mothers for the labour market, however, it is necessary to arrange proper child-care services for the time when they are at work (e.g., extended working hours of kindergartens, all-day groups at schools, extended social benefits, etc.).

Most women do want to work, some of them even attempted to combine their jobs with the family duties. However, these women were forced to quit their jobs to ensure proper care for their children.

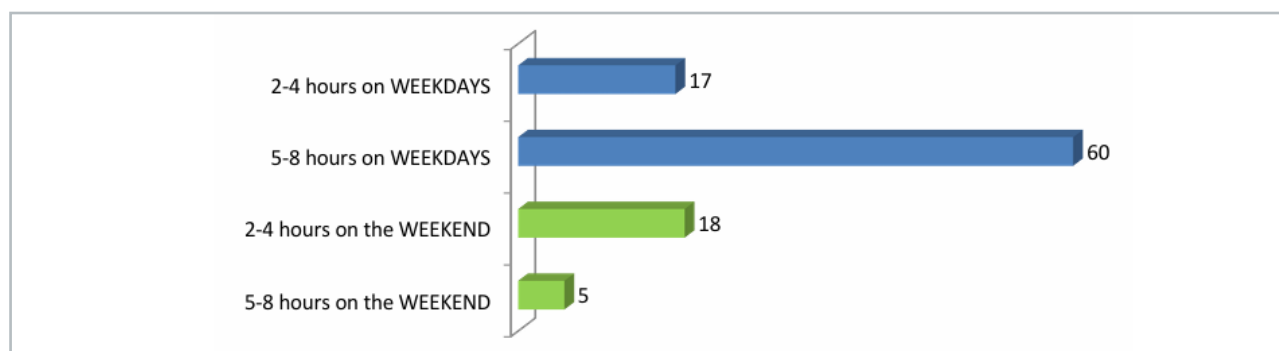


Fig. 3.13. Work duration acceptable for women with minor children, % of the respondents (n=205)

3.3. Women who care for adult family members

To collect data on this target group, two focus groups were conducted in addition to desk research. The participants included 11 women who care for their adult relatives, mostly elderly (mother/mother-in-law, father, aunt, grandmother, or grandfather of the husband). Of these, 8 participants care for elderly relatives, 2 women care for their adult children, and 1 woman cares for her husband. In all cases, the health issues of the relatives (e.g., stroke, cerebral palsy, dementia, femoral neck fracture, blindness, bone tuberculosis, etc.) are not related to the war and its consequences (injuries, concussions, etc.).

The participants are aged 35 to 57 years and live in different regions of Ukraine. Only women who do not work full-time (part-time or side jobs are allowed) were involved in the FGD.

Statistical data on the number of women caring for adult family members are not collected in Ukraine, as statistics group together all women who do not pursue paid employment due to family duties, which includes care for children, adult relatives, and housework in general.

However, sociological surveys show that the share of such women is significant. According to the online survey conducted as part of this study, 10% of non-working respondents mentioned their care duties for disabled adult relatives as an impediment to regular employment. In a survey of IDP women conducted by AC “Socioconsulting” in 2023, 6% of non-working respondents⁵⁹ mentioned the same reason for staying away from employment. This figure is expected to rise due to the full-scale war. According to Olena Zelenska, the First Lady, approximately 3 million persons with disabilities are officially registered in Ukraine, including more than 300,000 citizens who acquired this status after the outbreak of the war⁶⁰.

⁵⁹ Study “Effectiveness of the policy for the economic empowerment of internally displaced women as part of the early recovery of Ukraine” [web resource]. – Access mode: https://sociocon.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Zvit.indd_.pdf

⁶⁰ Official Facebook page of Olena Zelenska [web resource]. – Access mode: https://www.facebook.com/olenazelenska.official/?locale=uk_UA

Employment motivation. According to the FGD results, all participants who care for adult relatives want to work. They strongly prefer part-time offline or online jobs, as full-time offline employment is not suitable for them.

“My mother can walk in our apartment, but I cannot leave her alone for a long time, because she can fall down and stay on the floor, or she can forget to turn off some device. I can only leave her alone for a couple of hours. I cannot find a suitable job in our settlement. I would be glad to take over some part-time job like cleaning up apartments or offices like in big cities. But we only have job postings for cash-desk workers at some grocery shops from 7.00 till 23.00” (FGD participant from the Odessa region who cares for her mother).

The main factor making women search for a job is a hard financial situation. At the time of the study, only 5 of 11 participants had some paid, unofficial employment included.

“I clean up apartments or offices at request. My employer calls me and I can jump in for 2-3 hours, while my husband and children are at home. I clean up apartments once or twice a week, I do not do offices that often (except for some conferences, trainings, etc.). This is an unofficial job” (FGD participant from the Ivano-Frankivsk region, cares for the husband’s grandfather).

“I have a part-time job on a contract basis: once a week (approx. 4 hours) I work as a hairdresser for IDPs in a civil charity organisation. The rest of the time I am a housewife who cares for her mother-in-law” (FGD participant from the Dnipropetrovsk region who cares for her mother-in-law).



Several participants said that they had had a job or a side hustle before the war, lost that and could not find anything new.

“I worked as a 1C-software operator. It was a part-time job – 6 hours per day: 3 hours at noon and 3 hours at night. The firm shut down due to the war. It is very hard to find such a job in Odessa now, because everyone wants to work from home. In addition, we have electricity supply issues now, and I don’t have a power station” (FGD participant from the Odessa region who cares for her mother).

“Before the war I cleaned up offices, while my children were at school from 9.00 till 14.00. I have been jobless since 2022, since my employer shut down the operations after the war” (FGD participant from the Kyiv region who cares for two adult children with disability).

Hence, social benefits and payments as well as aid from charity organisations remain the key source of income for the women representing the target group (for instance, the pension of the relatives they care for; one of the participants has her own pension as a disabled person, while two other women have a pension designated for children with disability). Given that these benefits and payments are very low, most respondents have a very precarious financial situation, which also has to do with the prices of medicines and hygienical items (for instance, diapers for adults, single-use bed pads, etc.). Neither of the FGD participants mentioned any possibility or experience in applying to social welfare bodies for the refund to a natural person providing social care services on a professional or non-professional basis. Most probably, many women have no idea of this option, though they are eligible for it.

“I receive UAH 2,250 from the state as a benefit for caring for my mother. And I have my mom’s meagre pension... I am drowning in debts, and I do not know when the utility companies will cut off my electricity and water supply – it can happen at any time. I have lost any hope” (FGD participant from the Odessa region who cares for her mother).

“Caring for a sick senior person is very complicated and expensive. I apply to charity organisations for help. Luckily, some of them help us from time to time. They present us food packages, hygienic kits, medicines” (FGD participant from the Zaporizhzhia region who cares for her aunt).

Women also need communication to get distracted from their problems at home. Some of them understand that women should have their own source of income instead of relying on financial support from their husbands or other relatives, even if it seems sufficient.

“I am trying to look into future, because nobody knows what will happen tomorrow. I have a husband now who works and supports me. But tomorrow he can be drafted into the Army, and what will I have to do to survive?” (FGD participant from the Zaporizhzhia region who cares for her mother).

At the same time, just one of 11 women mentioned her wish to receive a decent pension as her motivation to work, which means that she needs an official job to pay the taxes. The other respondents were unanimous that “it is impossible for a common citizen in Ukraine to earn a decent pension”. Thus, they have already put up with the idea that their pension will be very low and see no sense in doing anything to try to improve it. Most respondents also do not care whether their potential job can be official or not.

“I do not count on my pension; my age of service is too low. I mostly worked unofficially. And when I happened to land an official job, the salary was minimal. So, I cannot rely on any pension soon. I am going to work as long as I can” (FGD participant from the Odessa region who cares for her mother).

Moreover, several respondents mentioned that they were reluctant to take over official jobs or register themselves as individual entrepreneurs (which is a condition for obtaining state grants to start a business). Assuming an official job means for them that they will lose the already humble social benefits they have now.

“I would like to complete a hairdresser training, so I could cut hair as a side hustle. However, free courses are only available via the Employment Centre. I am afraid that in this case the state can cancel my already small benefit for caring for my mother (UAH 2,250) and I will be stranded without anything at all” (FGD participant from the Odessa region who cares for her mother).

This seems to confirm the assumption based on the analysis of the valid regulations: the social welfare system for vulnerable groups of citizens in its present form can foster paternalism.

The reason is that a citizen who can only expect a low-paid job is “better off” economically without working at all (at least officially), since such a citizen keeps receiving social benefits that are only marginally lower than her/his potential salary.

Employment barriers.

1. The main employment barrier is the **gender disbalance in families concerning care work and domestic duties** in general. Sociological data demonstrate that in all researched cases women are always burdened with care for family members who need support, even if these are relatives of their husbands. Just one of 11 respondents said that her family had more or less fairly distributed tasks concerning care for her husband’s mother, with her husband and their adult children equally involved.

“I have been caring for my husband’s grandfather for like 4 years. My husband’s mother left abroad, and the grandfather was left alone. I had my maternity leave at the time, and my husband had to go to work [what about women? They have to stay at home? – authors’ comment], so I had to care for our grandfather” (FGD participant from the Ivano-Frankivsk region who cares for her husband’s grandfather).

“My husband’s mother has been staying in bed for 2.5 years already (fracture of the femoral neck). She lives separately, 2 bus stops away from us. My family helps me care her. In the morning, our elder children (18 and 21 years) go to the grandmother and serve her a breakfast. I attend her in the afternoon and until the evening. If my husband is at home, we attend her together” (FGD participant from the Dnipropetrovsk region who cares for her mother-in-law).

Other noteworthy factors include.

2. **The sub-optimal rehabilitation system for people with heavy health disorders**, for instance, citizens with innate disability, senior citizens with heavy diseases (strokes, complicated fractures, etc.). In many cases, a proper rehabilitation could significantly improve the health condition of patients: disability could be prevented, the capability to support oneself could be preserved or (at least, partially) recovered; the experience of some of the participants seems to confirm it.

“My daughter (18 years) has innate disability – she suffers from cerebral palsy. She is smart. Throughout all these years we have attending doctors and massage specialists, taking rehabilitation courses... Thanks to our efforts, our daughter started walking at 6 years. This year she has been admitted to a jewelry college” (FGD participant from the Kyiv region who cares for her daughter with disability).

However, the supply of such services in Ukraine lags behind the demand, especially in terms of free or affordable services. In addition, there are bureaucratic hurdles in places for obtaining such services (mandatory referral, medical opinion; sometimes, it’s even required to have a proven classified disability entitling a patient to obtain rehabilitation services).

Access to rehabilitation services is especially challenging for senior citizens with a complicated diagnosis. Medical personnel tend to have prejudices like “senior people have already had their lifetime”, “there are minimum chances for recovery in such a high age, which is why it is not worth making efforts to recover older patients”. In some cases, the attitude of medical personnel towards such patients clearly violates the principles of medical ethics and humanity, which is very traumatizing to relatives who care for them.

“We have changed 4 family doctors over the last three years. Nobody wants to have a senior patient with such a diagnosis (dementia) among her/his patients, doctors just do not need it. Last time I signed a contract with our new family doctor, she told me bluntly: “Please do not contact me every time, I will not be attending you. Be grateful that I have a contract with you at all.”” (FGD participant from the Odessa region who cares for her father).

“My husband’s father passed away 10 days ago. He stayed in bed after the fracture of the femoral neck. His condition was getting worse, and we had to call a doctor. But she told us that we had to pay for a taxi or for the fuel, if we want to see her. I can’t get it [crying]: a man worked his whole life, paid taxes and still has to pay for the ambulance vehicle, how is that?” (FGD participant from the Zaporizhzhia region who cares for her mother).

3. Stereotypes, prejudices, and fears of both people who need care and their relatives who care for them. Mostly, these are attitudes like “a third person will never care a sick man the way his relatives can”, “it is a shame to send a senior person and/or a person with disability to a specialized facility, if her/his children are alive”, “specialized facility can only offer low-quality medical and care services”, “it is a shame to rely on other people (social workers or professional nannies) to satisfy one’s natural needs (eating, washing, going to the toilet, etc.)”.

“We were invited to a rehabilitation course for people with disabilities at the Pavlov Hospital the other day. The training sessions lasted for 2 hours, we learnt various hands-on skills. Then we were presented their computer class, their training class. They also have a teacher of labour. We were proposed to prepare a package of documents and to apply for rehabilitation treatment, so our son could officially stay there for some time. But he did not want to stay there, he thinks that he will have to live there permanently, that I will “lock him up” in that facility (FGD participant from the Kyiv region who cares for her adult son with disability).



“I have to stay 24/7 with my father, because he has dementia. I did not apply for any external assistance, because my father does not tolerate any third people around. Assistance from social workers is not an option to me” (FGD participant from the Odessa region who cares for her father).

Just one out of 11 FGD participants tried to arrange a stay at a specialized facility for her relative she cares for, but there were no free places available. The rest of the participants never considered such an option.

“We have one care facility operating as part of the local hospital, they care for seniors there. I know that their service is very good. They bill your pension and some extra fee. However, it is almost impossible to get in, because it’s always overbooked. I know a number of people who cared for their

relatives at home before the war, together with their husbands. When the war came, a lot of men were drafted, and it got hard for the women to take care of everything. This is why this facility is overloaded now” (FGD participant from the Zaporizhzhia region who cares for her aunt).

“It’s up to everyone to decide if you send your senior relative to a nursing home or not – it depends on your personal situation and capacities. My answer to this option is “No”” (FGD participant from the Zaporizhzhia region who cares for her mother).

4. Citizens who care for their relatives are not well-informed about social services available in Ukraine. Neither of the 11 FGD participants who care for their adult relatives was aware of the social home-care service and did not apply for it. One of the possible solutions would be a more active awareness-raising campaign by health-care workers, especially by family doctors. The latter could inform their customers about benefits specified by law (for instance, supply of hygienic articles) as well as social services for citizens who need care. They could also recommend applying to social welfare bodies to obtain more information.

5. The results of the desk research and interviews with experts also demonstrate that the existing system of social services for citizens who need care does not cover the current demand. The quality of such services also leaves much to be desired in some cases. The women themselves did not mention that, since they do not have any experience in using these services.

6. The complicated and bureaucratic procedure of obtaining the disability status, which is mandatory for a citizen or her/his relatives to become eligible to the relevant social benefits and the care services.

“We do not receive any care assistance, because my mother-in-law does not have an officially acknowledged disability. She has a fracture of the femoral neck, she has been staying in bed for 2.5 years, we have a medical certificate proving that. But to receive the disability status, we need to transfer her to a hospital, which is extremely hard to do, because she cannot walk and she does not want to move anywhere” (FGD participant from the Dnipropetrovsk region who cares for her mother-in-law).

7. Complicated psychological condition of women who care for their relatives. Financial issues, lack of social and psychological support, harsh attitude by medical personnel make women feel that they are left alone with their problems and have no chance to improve their life. In many cases, it leads to resignation, women give up any attempts to find a suitable job. One of the possible ways to address this issue could be to establish a support network involving these women in the offline (for instance, selfassistance groups) or online format (for instance, groups/communities in social networks/messengers) where they could exchange information and support each other.

“It would be nice to have some groups where women could come together, share their experiences, help each other. It would be great to have a lawyer, a psychologist, a social worker in such groups. Now, everyone has to survive on her own with her problems” (FGD participant from the Kyiv region who cares for her husband).

“I attend a psychological support group at the civil organisation “Safe Women’s Space”. They organise various events for women (women who have children with disabilities, women suffering from domestic violence, etc.). We get together on Saturdays. These meetings give me a positive kick for the week ahead. It is very important to get distracted from your problems sometimes and to find positive people for communication” (FGD participant from the Kyiv region who cares for her daughter with disability).

8. The participants of a more senior age also mentioned their **lack of skills**, especially concerning work on a PC or fluent Ukrainian (crucial for working in the service sector).

“A lot of jobs are now related to computers and the Internet, but it’s not for me. I do not have these skills. I am not trained for this, and I am very bad at coming to terms with gadgets” (FGD participant from the Odessa region who cares for her mother).

“My knowledge of Ukrainian is not sufficient for the jobs I would be able and would like to assume (for instance, an assistant at an online shop, taxi dispatcher, call-centre operator, etc. – various remote jobs). I live in Odessa, we have a Russian-speaking family, it is a problem for me” (FGD participant from the Odessa region who cares for her mother).

9. In many cases, jobs that are suitable for the respondents, require some **kick-off investments** (like buying a PC for remote working, arranging a stable Internet connection or purchase tools and utensils for a hairdresser). Women normally do not have enough money for this. At the same time, they are often skeptical about grant programmes providing funds for such purposes.

“I can work as an illustrator or an online teacher (I am a painter), but I need a stable Internet connection for this. When we have a blackout, the connection is dead and everything stands still. I do need a charging station to be able to work during blackouts. Such equipment is very expensive” (FGD participant from the Zaporizhzhia region who cares for her aunt).

“Until 2013 I worked as an individual entrepreneur in retail. After 2014, the economy in Ukraine got much worse, purchasing power went down, and I quit my business. Based on my experience, I can say that doing business in our country is like gambling. You need to think twice, before you take some grants or something else from this government” (FGD participant from the Odessa region who cares for her father).

We can conclude that this target group (women caring for adult relatives) has an employment potential. In most cases, however, it is about part-time jobs and/or remote working. However, women need support from the state, employers, and NGOs to gain necessary skills; they also need support in purchasing necessary equipment, information concerning existing social services, etc.

3.4. Women in pre-retirement age

To collect data on this target group, focus groups were conducted in addition to the desk research. 10 women aged 45-59 years participated in 2 FGDs. The involved women had a different employment status. 8 FGD participants work officially or unofficially, including 7 women working full-time. 2 FGD participants do not work.

Employment motivation. Women aged 45+ years who participated in the research can be divided into two groups based on their attitude to work in retirement. The retirement age is determined by the women's age service to a significant extent.

The first, more numerous, group includes economically active women with a high age of service. In the focus groups, these women mostly declared their willingness to keep working in retirement. Their main motivation is money, since a decent pension is hardly achievable even for women who worked in an official employment for all their life. At the same time, women who are ready to make savings for their future pension do not see any reliable solutions to protect them. Hence, they view their ongoing employment as a way to "live instead of survive" without turning to children/grandchildren for help.

"If you are an individual entrepreneur, you only have your age of service accumulating, nothing more. I am absolutely sure that I will not have any pension in this country. That's why I thought more than once about making some savings, I tried to find some solutions, but still, I could not find any trustworthy bank or insurance company to entrust them with my pension savings" (working FGD participant from the Kyiv region).

"My pension has already been calculated for me, I know the amount (a 59-year-old respondent), which is why I am going to keep working not to be a burden for my children. They have their own life plans; they have to work for themselves. It is not their fault that I have been working since I turned 17 years and still expect our government to ensure at least some minimum amount for me to keep me away from begging and relying on my children" (working FGD participant from the Kyiv region).

At the same time, there are other motives at play including the one that a job keeps a person "open to the world" and enables it to communicate with other people, establish social connections and learn something new.

"I will be working with pleasure as long as I can. I am not waiting for the moment to come when I do not have to work anymore. I live as long as I do something. It is boring to stay home, even if you are well off financially. I want to mingle around, and I want to be needed" (working FGD participant from the Kyiv region).

The second group of the respondents – unemployed women with a low age of service. They are not going to work and rely on support from their children/grandchildren instead.

"My son has completed his master studies and is going to start doctorate studies. He works remotely as an IT professional and supports me. I tell him: "Learn, get more skills, you will be supporting me in my retirement" (unemployed FGD participant from the Zaporizhzhia region, IDP).

Employment barriers. Almost all respondents mentioned that they faced serious employment issues like a job loss or a declining number of customers due to the war and/or relocation as well as the need to retrain (e.g., due to the shutdown of hospitals as part of the health-care reform), a heavy disability affecting employability, etc. Many women also mentioned their ageism experience.

According to the study conducted by the AC "Socioconsulting" in 2023 among IDP women, almost a half (46%) of the respondents aged 46-59 years who tried to find a job after their relocation had to face rejections from employers due to their age⁶¹

The respondents had different strategies for overcoming the said barriers. Women with extensive work experience made active efforts to cope with them: they actively searched for a job, changed their profession whenever required, took over even “imperfect” jobs, etc. Such efforts led to employment sooner or later. In some cases, however, new jobs had worse conditions compared to the previous ones like the lower salary, the lower starting position (e.g., switch to the position of a school teacher after working as a teacher at a higher-education institution) or the higher workload.

“Before the war I worked as a teacher at a technical university. When the war broke out, I had to relocate. I tried to change my profession at the new place. I completed a course for IT testers, but I am already in the age that employers are not happy about. I sent out a lot of applications and never was invited to an interview. Then I decided to do what I have always done: I went to work as a teacher at a secondary school” (working FGD participant from the Kyiv region, IDP).



“I have had disability, since I became 30 years old – my hip joint is removed. I use crutches to walk, but I still live an active life. Before my disability, I worked as a nurse, then I found a retail job, because there is nothing you can do at a hospital running around with crutches. I got hired at a small home-improvement shop where you do not have to walk that much. I drive to the shop where I have a chair and all is set up properly for me to work” (working FGD participant from the Kyiv region).

«“I worked for 20 years as a physiatrist at a tuberculosis hospital, but our facility was shut down as a part of the health-care reform. We were 5 doctors, and they sent us to different primary care centres as family doctors. We had our trainings for half a year, the war had just started, so most courses were offered online... Working as a family doctor is very hard. This is my second year in this position, and I still don’t know some things concerning how to handle some of the documents... My salary is down as well. We were promised UAH 24,000 before taxes, equal to UAH 20,000 after taxes. But this is not true, in my first six months as a family doctor I only made UAH 10,000 or 11,000” (working FGD participant from the Vinnytsia region).

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⁶¹ Study “Effectiveness of the policy for the economic empowerment of internally displaced women as part of the early recovery of Ukraine” [web resource]. – Access mode: https://sociocon.org/wpcontent/uploads/2024/04/Zvit.indd_.pdf

Such hurdles (ageism and retraining) turned out to be too high to women who did not work for a long time and have little working experience. Such respondents could not find a job after all.

“I am a certified specialist in zootechnics and genetics, I worked in this position before my marriage. I got married, delivered a daughter and quit my job. My husband supported our family and gave me time to take care of our children. Then he died. I tried to find a job, but could not find anything. Before the war I lived in Komyshevukha, it was impossible to find any official employment there. Most people went to work to Orikhove (50 km away) or to Zaporizhzhia. After I had moved to Zaporizhzhia, I tried to find a job there, but I was too old for all employers. Only the ATB grocery chain was ready to hire me. But their staff have a high fluctuation rate, and I did not want to join them. Retail is not my thing at all” (unemployed FGD participant from the Zaporizhzhia region, IDP).



Situation in the labour market. The key issue of concern for all working women is related to the low salaries in all sectors, which do not cover even minimal living costs (food, living, clothing, medicines).

“When people say that there no jobs available, they usually mean that there are no jobs with a salary sufficient to cover the cost of living. Quite a lot of employers only pay enough money for a “loaf of bread”, but you want something more. And you have to pay the rent, if you are an IDP, you have to pay for the utility services, you need some clothes to put on. These are normal human needs, but you cannot cover them with the offered salaries. The first 6 months I worked at a school with the regular salary, then I took over additional assignments to earn a half-salary more, now I think that I have to find some side hustle. The teacher’s salary is a pain” (working FGD participant from the Kyiv region, IDP).

Since most respondents aged 45+ women have been actively working for a long time, they can analyse the developments in the labour market over the past several years. They were asked several questions about the changes they have been observing in the labour market. One of the questions was whether they can see a trend towards expanding female employment due to the conscription of men, which was registered in the course of the desk research.

Overall, most respondents confirmed this trend. At the same time, however, they mention that a significant share of jobs that are now theoretically open for women come along with hard or harmful working conditions (for instance, in the steelmaking industry) or require a proper education and a longtime training (for instance, in health care).

“I think this is true, women have more employment opportunities now. My husband works at a big warehouse, they used to have men only. Now, they are running out of men, and women are taking over these jobs, because the salaries are fairly good. My husband also tells me that women already work as bus drivers in some city in the Kyiv region, it used to be the men’s job only” (working FGD participant from the Kyiv region).

“We have a lot of vacant jobs in the health-care sector... But if you are a doctor and have been working in health care all your life, it’s hard to retrain fast. You can attend some courses, of course, but they will not make you an oncologist able to compete with the one working for 10-20 years in this position. You can’t become a surgeon fast enough either... We have young graduates now who came to us after their online studies at the university – they cannot become surgeons overnight” (working FGD participant from the Dnipropetrovsk region).

Hence, the research results demonstrate that women in pre-retirement/retirement age constitute a promising group in terms of expanding the workforce, especially in sectors that do not require significant body efforts. A lot of such women have experience and are willing to work, their children are already adult and live separately, which means that these women are not forced to combine work and their family duties anymore. The research results also confirm that a lot of the women from this group make active efforts to find a job despite widespread stereotypes. They are also willing to learn and attain a new profession, if required. At the same time, employers and HR specialists still have prejudices concerning the professional skills of women in the pre-retirement age. Ageism is a material hurdle impeding employment for this target group.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the review of the valid regulations on the economic and social rights of citizens, it can be noted that they do not contain provisions discriminating women and girls in terms of employment. The labour law contains mechanisms aimed at involving all interested citizens in the labour market irrespective of their sex and create opportunities for combining maternity/paternity and work.

The Labour Code of Ukraine is being modernized, which opens more opportunities for home work, remote work, and flexible employment. It is obviously also beneficial for women who often combine employment with maternity and care work. The legal amendments adopted in 2024 regulate and legalize domestic work done by natural persons. In most cases, this is informal female labour that can now be made formal and generate pension contributions.

The social regulations are adjusted to the war realities and requirements of the modern life. Development of social services at the municipal level is an important tool of social support for families representing vulnerable groups of the population and promotion of employment among the parents in such families. They shall include services for parents who care for their children with disabilities: day care services, support in inclusive learning, etc. The challenge now is to put the social regulations into practice, meaning the lack of supply of social services in communities. Another innovation refers to expanding the categories of working parents who are eligible to the municipal nanny service. This service now covers internally displaced persons and citizens living with their children in areas where pre-school facilities cannot operate and the local executive bodies approve their shutdown.

The above positive changes in the regulations have not yet had a significant impact on the economic activity of women in Ukraine. According to the national study of the social and economic situation of households conducted by the State Statistics Service of Ukraine in December 2023 and in January-February 2024 on the government-controlled territory of Ukraine, the employment level among the female population aged 15-70 years was only equal to 41.5%, which is significantly lower compared with men (58.9%). Ukraine is now into the third year of the full-scale war and is suffering from the strong deficit of both qualified and low-qualified workforce. The results of the research also demonstrate that candidates are having increasing requirements in terms of salaries, working conditions and proper technical setup in the workplace.

The results of the research also demonstrate the necessity of the economic empowerment of women and the availability of a potential in this field. The labour market is now marked by a significant lack of workforce and a disbalance between demand and supply. This situation results from long-term negative demographic trends (declining birth rates, ageing population, high level of early mortality among men, negative migration trends) and the consequences of the Russian invasion (large-scale migration within Ukraine and abroad, conscription to the AFU, loss of life and health among the military personnel and civilians).

At the same time, the analysis of social and economic statistical data demonstrates a high number of citizens who are currently staying out of workforce and could be engaged in the labour market. These are mostly women and citizens living in rural areas. While it is hardly possible to win rural population for the labour market to a significant extent without the restructuring of the economy (for instance, placement of big manufacturing facilities across all regions on the country contrary to their concentration in the big cities of the most developed industrial regions), there is a high number of women who look promising in terms of their potential employment. These are women doing unpaid domestic work, caring for children or other family members. These are also women who have given up their hope to find a job or do not know anything about existing employment opportunities.

A more active involvement of the above categories of women in paid employment would help remedy the disbalance in the labour market and improve their social security. Presently, these women are exposed to the risk of poverty and lack social support. In addition, non-working women do not pay pension contributions, thus risking to miss out on their age pension or to receive the absolute minimum only.

The results of the online survey among women with minor children (3-10 years) and focus-group discussions with this group of women as well as with women who care for adult relatives make it clear that most of them want to work. Apart from financial reasons, women mention their wish to “stay open to the world” and say that they need their own source of income, since it is too risky in the long run to rely exclusively on the financial support from their husbands.

At the same time, these women experience significant hurdles on their way to employment. For objective reasons, men or women in many households see themselves compelled to quit a paid job or reduce their employment for the sake of the family duties (child care, care for adult relatives with health disorders). Such decisions have to do with a number of factors including:

- In some of the regions close to the frontline, schools and even kindergartens work online or in a mixed format, which makes it necessary for parents to arrange care for their children in the pre school and primary-school age;
- In many cases, children do not attend a kindergarten for a long time (several months to several years) due to their health condition or require regular treatment sessions for medical reasons (e.g., with a psychologist, a massage specialist, etc.), which cannot be arranged at pre-school facilities;
- At many schools, all-day groups are not available or hard to get into (for instance, a certificate is needed to confirm that both parents ALREADY work at the time they apply for the all-day group). Subsequently, younger pupils only stay at school for 3-4 hours and need to be looked after for the rest of the day;
- Families who have adults in need of external care have an extremely limited access to free care services, which has to do with their overall deficit, sub-optimal quality, bureaucratic barriers (for instance, such persons shall have an officially acknowledged disability), the low awareness among citizens concerning the availability of such services, stereotypes about the use of such services, etc.;
- In many cases, the price of care services for children and adults (nannies, professional care workers, etc.) is significantly higher than the minimum/average salary.

In such situations, these are mostly women instead of men who give up their jobs. It happens for both objective (women’s salaries and career prospects are usually not equal to those of men) and subjective reasons (stereotypes about care work as “women’s stuff”, the idea that the mother’s role is paramount for women).

However, despite the women’s high workload related to care for children or adult relatives, most women are willing to work in different formats like part-time, remote work or in a mixed format, with a flexible working schedule, on the weekend, etc. Unfortunately, the labour market only has a limited supply of such employment formats, which is due to both objective factors (such employment formats are not acceptable in many areas) and stereotypes among employers who assume that employees working on such terms are hard to control.

To motivate women to consider the possibility to work full-time in the offline format (in premises/offices), a set of measures shall be implemented aimed at improving the affordability of services in child/adult care and expanding their range.

Women in the pre-retirement and retirement age constitute another significant reserve group that could be involved in the labour market. According to the research results, most of them are motivated to work for as long as possible. However, they are often confronted with ageism by employers, which is the case starting from 40-45 years. Such stereotypes damage women who are willing to work as well as employers who for no good reason ignore numerous female candidates, though these women are highly motivated, have necessary experience and competences and also have no objective factors impeding them from work, since their children have already grown up and do not need mother care.



The research has also identified a number of other barriers for female employment affecting both the above-mentioned target groups and women in general. These are as follows:

- Gender stereotypes among employers that also apply to women who do not have children yet, do not intend to have children at all, or women who can combine maternity duties with their job without any negative impact on the latter (for example, if a family has grandparents who are willing to care for the child, or if the salary is high enough to hire a nanny);
- Low awareness among citizens, especially women, about key aspects of state employment, entrepreneurship, and pension policies. This leads to high mistrust towards public financial mechanisms, inertia, a suspicious attitude toward modern grant programs for small and medium sized business development, and low activity in seeking official employment, etc. Many women are poorly informed about the pension calculation process, which leads them to believe it is impossible to earn a decent pension even with a regular job or small business;

- The existing social welfare system is predominantly paternalistic and does not encourage employment among citizens who can only take low-paid and/or part-time jobs. In many cases, these citizens find it more beneficial to stay out of work (at least officially) to retain their benefits and social welfare payments, rather than taking a low-paid job that would result in the loss of these entitlements while earning roughly the same amount.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study results, a number of recommendations were prepared that are aimed at increasing the economic empowerment of women and overcoming/reducing the identified barriers to their employment. The report describes the recommendations for the national and local level as well as for specific entities (for instance, NGOs). It also offers models for the adaptation of women to the modern labour market and their economic empowerment.

The economic empowerment of women requires a comprehensive approach and includes the below strategic action lines:

1. Creating conditions for combining employment and family duties.
2. Support during pregnancy, care for children and other relatives.
3. Support in vocational education and training, entrepreneurship training.
4. Creating equal conditions in the labour market.

Public-private partnership mechanisms can play a crucial role in implementing the above measures, especially:

- implementation of development programmes for kindergartens and corporate care centres. Companies can cooperate with the state to set up pre-school facilities and all-day groups located near their business premises, or they can support employees with children by partially covering the care costs;
- implementation of education initiatives by establishing training centres or online platforms for the upskilling/retraining of women who did not work for a long time. The state could subsidise the training, and businesses could provide internships and jobs to the graduates;
- implementation of programmes to support female entrepreneurship. Facilities can be established to provide micro-loans for female start-ups jointly financed by the state and private investors; mentorship programmes for future entrepreneurs where experienced business representatives could share their knowledge and experience; counselling services for preparing business plans to be submitted in grant and micro-loan contests;
- implementation of systemic vocational training measures for pupils of secondary schools and their parents aimed at promoting professions that are actually in demand in the labour market as well as at dismantling gender-based stereotypes about traditionally “male” areas, which should empower women in such areas as the STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, mathematics);
- use of technological innovations to reduce the physical labor in such sectors as construction, transportation, logistics, etc., which would allow to engage women more actively; active promotion of success stories about the modernization of companies leading to the increasing number of working women;
- joint public-private benefit packages and insurance, including health insurance (for instance full or partial coverage of insurances costs for employees’ children by employers), social benefits and entitlements that can stimulate female employment;
- implementation of government incentives for businesses to employ women from vulnerable groups (including women with minor children, women in the pre-retirement age, etc.) and implement flexible work formats (part-time, remote work, etc.) whenever possible.

Measures at the state level:

- To adopt amendments to the Strategy for the Recovery, Sustainable Development, and Digital Transformation of SMEs for the period until 2027 namely to include an extended list of special measures for the support of female and micro businesses (for instance, dedicated loan programmes).
- The Operational Action Plan 2024-2027 for the Implementation of the Demographic Development Strategy of Ukraine for the period until 2040 shall contain specific measures for the employment empowerment of currently inactive women in the employable age, especially women with minor children, women caring for adult family members as well as women in the pre-retirement and retirement age.
- Information campaigns should be conducted to overcome stereotypes among employers, especially gender-related stereotypes and ageism.
- A more effective mechanism should be put in place to response to gender- or age-related discrimination in the labour market without weary court processes (an information campaign should be conducted to explain the powers of the Ombudsman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and the procedure of reporting discrimination cases to the Ombudsman).
- Up-to-date interactive training programmes should be implemented to raise the economic culture of the citizens, to dispel numerous myths about the services of state employment centres, including grant programmes for education, starting or developing a business, awareness raising concerning the calculation of pensions and ways to increase one's pension (preferably with hands-on examples).
- National information campaigns should be implemented for the change of behaviour aimed at overcoming stereotypes concerning social norms and promoting the equal distribution of the family duties between spouses. The mandatory condition for the development of information materials is the involvement of women from different groups, including wives of servicemen, for testing their concepts and samples.
- The regulations on the social home-care services should be revised, so they become available not only for families in difficult life circumstances, but to all households with members who need external care.
- It is necessary to foster the development of a comprehensive system for the rehabilitation of citizens with heavy health disorders including both veterans and civilians like citizens with innate disabilities and senior citizens with heavy diseases (strokes, complicated fractures, etc.); the list of the respective services should be extended, these services should be made more accessible (e.g., the bureaucratic procedures should be reduced).
- Citizens who have relatives needing external care should be better informed about existing benefits and support (e.g., hygienic packages) as well as social services for people who need care. A possible solution would be to have family doctors refer relatives of patients needing care to social welfare agencies.
- The social welfare system should be improved to enhance the motivation of citizens to look for jobs even with low salaries (for instance, some transitional period could be implemented when a

citizen can both work and receive her/his previously granted social benefits).

- The list of persons entitled to the vocational training vouchers should be extended without any age based restrictions (it is especially relevant for women who need to obtain a driving license).

Recommendations for local authorities:

- The extension of the working hours of municipal kindergartens by 1-2 hours should be considered, probably with the parents paying additionally for this service..
- The online mode of the operation of pre-school facilities shall be deemed unacceptable. In the most dangerous regions where the regular operation of pre-school facilities is not possible the “municipal nanny” service shall be used more actively.



- All-day groups at schools should be made accessible for all who need them (probably with the parents paying additionally for this service): all-day groups should be set up at all schools that do not have them yet; currently existing artificial barriers for membership in the all-day groups should be removed (for instance, the official employment proof for both parents).
- Steps should be made to support the extension of the range of existing child-care services at the municipal level. A possible solution would be to provide premises to private pre-school facilities and child development centres at a discount or rent-free as well as to provide day-care services, support in inclusive learning, etc.
- Steps should be made to support the development of a comprehensive system of social services aimed at providing home care to citizens needing help and social backup for their relatives. A possible solutions would be to use social ordering of relevant services, to provide premises to providers of such services at a discount or rent-free.
- Municipal budgets and external funding should be used to provide access to the 24/7 services of rehabilitation and care for disabled citizens in communities.

Recommendations for employers:

- The implementation of more flexible employment formats should be considered (part-time, remote work, flexible working schedule) wherever possible.
- The creation of a network of co-workings with child-care rooms should be supported. Such business spaces are especially crucial for big cities and can also serve as resilience points for women working remotely. This kind of socially oriented business can be a promising niche for female startups that count on grant support from international organisations or the government.
- Upskilling/retraining programmes should be implemented for female candidates.
- Non-discriminatory practices in human resources management should be promoted, including non discriminatory employment, transparent job postings, and employment processes promoting diversity.

Recommendations for NGOs:

- Trainings should be organised to develop required competences for the modern labour market, including free computer courses, accounting courses, trainings for beauty specialists, Ukrainian courses.
- Employment trainings should be organised (how to search for a job, how to avoid fraud schemes in employment, how to prepare a CV, how to behave during an interview, etc.) as well as trainings/counselling in labour rights and their protection.
- Efforts should be continued/enhanced to promote self-employment and start-ups. Two components shall be combined in this field:
 - o providing necessary knowledge and competences;
 - o grant support for the best trainees.
- Women should be better informed about existing employment and business opportunities (for instance, grant programmes), potential participants should have more trust to such programmes.
- Support networks should be established for citizens who care for their relatives; such networks can operate offline (for instance, self-assistance groups) or online (dedicated groups/communities in social networks/messengers), their participants could exchange information and support each other. If possible, such networks should offer counselling services by relevant specialists: doctors/rehabilitation experts, lawyers, psychologists, etc.
- Awareness-raising and advocacy work with local councils should be conducted to promote the implementation of affordable social services at the municipal level (including the elaboration of their “economic” effect) as well as to identify possible funding sources WITHOUT public budgets (for instance, based on grants).

Most probably, a lot of these recommendations could be implemented after the war due to budgetary constraints, the dangerous situation in many regions (especially in the East and South), the ongoing processes of internal migration, the required compliance with security measures, etc.

At the same time, however, most of the proposed measures can already be implemented, provided that representatives of the government and local authorities have the political will, while employers, NGOs, other forms of women's self-organizations actively engage, and international NGOs provide the necessary support. The most relevant measures in this context are those promoting the employment of potentially economically active women. These include information campaigns focused on employment opportunities, fast-track retraining programs, basic business education, and training aimed at helping women quickly adapt to the labor market after a long break. These measures do not require significant funding and can have a quick economic impact through the employment of participants (e.g., tax payments, social taxes, and, most importantly, the financial independence of working women).

ANNEX 1. Legal acts in the field of gender equality

International legal acts

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966;
- Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, 1949;
- Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, 1979;
- European Convention on Human Rights, 1950 and its protocols to it;
- European Social Charter (revised), 1996;
- Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, 2005;
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006;
- Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981;
- Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951;
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965;
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966;
- Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, 1995;
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948;
- Beijing Declaration, 1995; and
- Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, 1992 ;
- UN Security Council Resolution No. 1325 "Women. Peace. Security"

National framework

- Law of Ukraine "On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men"
- Law of Ukraine "On Principles of Prevention and Counteraction of Discrimination in Ukraine"
- Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 930 dated October 9, 2020 "Some issues of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men"
- Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 12.08. 2022 No. 752-r "On approval of the State Strategy for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men for the period until 2030 and approval of the operational plan for its implementation for 2022-2024"
- Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 16.12.2020 No. 1578-r "On the approval of the plan of measures to implement the obligations of the Government of Ukraine, taken within the framework of the international initiative "Biarritz Partnership" to establish gender equality"
- Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1544 dated October 28, 2020 "On approval of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace, Security" for the period until 2025"
- Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 12.08. 2022 No. 752-r "On approval of the State Strategy for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men for the period until 2030 and approval of the operational plan for its implementation for 2022-2024"
- Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 16.12.2020 No. 1578-r "On the approval of the plan of measures to implement the obligations of the Government of Ukraine, taken within the framework of the international initiative "Biarritz Partnership" to establish gender equality"
- Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1544 dated October 28, 2020 "On approval of the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace, Security" for the period until 2025"
- Order of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine No. 86 of 07.02.2020 "On the approval of the Instruction on the integration of gender approaches during the development of normative legal acts"

- Order of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine No. 257 of April 14, 2020 "On Approval of Methodological Recommendations for Assessing the Gender Impact of Industry Reforms"
- Order of the Ministry of Social Policy No. 359 dated 27.12.2022 "On the approval of Methodological recommendations for the implementation of a gender approach and a human rights-based approach at the level of territorial communities"
- Order of the Ministry of Finance of Ukraine No. 1 dated January 2, 2019 "On the approval of Methodological recommendations for the implementation and application of a gender-oriented approach in the budget process"
- Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 119/2021 of March 24, 2021 "On the National Strategy in the Field of Human Rights"

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