



# GENDER OR ANTI-GENDER:

Who Is Attacking Democracy in Ukraine?

ІНІЦІАТОРІВ АНТИСІМЕЙНИХ ІНІЦІАТИВ  
ДО ВІДПОВІДАЛЬНОСТІ!

Literary editors: Olena Hubina, Serhii Hubin

Design and DTP: Tetiana Kabakova

Translator: Natalia Slipenko

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Why is the gender policy an important component of Ukraine's European integration, and how does society benefit from equal rights and opportunities of men and women? Why does the word "gender" encounter so much hostility among some citizens, and what can we do to change the situation? How is society radicalized by means of manipulations around the subject of gender, and who is benefiting from this? What information attacks against gender equality have been happening in 2013–2020, and who is behind them? What is actually meant by the words "traditional values" and how can we change the meaning of this old phrase? What can human rights-focused civil society organizations do and with whom can they join forces to fend off attacks against the women's movement and engage more supporters? These are just some of the questions highlighted in the research held by Ukrainian Women's Fund with scholars and civil society organizations Women in Media and La Strada Ukraine with the support of Government Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy.

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*Since gender equality has not yet been recognized as an overarching national Ukrainian concept, there is a certain correlation between the hybrid challenges to Ukraine's national security and the anti-gender ideology.*

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**On the research**

The spread of anti-gender ideology and the activities of anti-gender groups are not a new phenomenon, nor is it exclusively Ukrainian. Its international nature is corroborated not only by simultaneity of their emergence and the use of similar messages and campaigns in different countries, but also by the activity of international organizations and platforms that conduct and fuel such actions.

The content of anti-gender groups' activity is aimed at counteracting certain focus areas, objectives or measures of the national gender policy in Ukraine (and other countries, too). While this content changes over time, the main ideas as of now are to prevent the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, i.e. the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, to eliminate the word "gender" and its derivatives from all current regulatory documents, and to halt any activity designed to ensure and promote gender equality.

At the same time, constant threats, reduced rights and physical violence perpetrated by such groups have become part of daily routine of human rights defenders, feminists and women's organizations representatives: activists encounter situations that narrow their opportunities, fall victim to outright accusations or subtle slander. Such situations are not always visible, and their impact is occasionally viewed as negligible, which is not actually true.

Apart from the activist component (manifesting itself as anti-gender groups and initiatives), gender backlash also contains a discursive component (formation of a peculiar argumentation logic with engagement of scholars and public figures to voice the main ideas of the anti-gender stance). Thus, anti-gender initiatives are based on the authority of these scientists; they recreate the arguments formed in the academic environment and even commission professional comments and analysis from certain research units and individual experts.

Given the situation in different countries, women's foundations from Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, and Germany have joined forces to implement the project Grassroots Women Mobilize for Democracy, which aims to emphasize the importance of civic activism in combating anti-democratic movements, which are becoming increasingly visible today and manifest themselves as right-wing populism, nationalism, religious fundamentalism, etc.

Part of this project was the research on the spread of anti-gender views in Ukraine, carried out in January–March 2020 by the Ukrainian Women's Fund, together with scholars and NGOs Women in Media and La Strada Ukraine, with the participation of the Government Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy.

The findings of the study, the collected facts, and their analysis, will serve as groundwork for development of key messages for a joint international advocacy campaign, which is to serve as a response to the activity and the negative influence of conservative movements.

**The purpose of the study** is to clarify the organization and systemic nature of anti-gender groups in Ukraine, as well as their possible impact on national security based on the analysis of narratives, messages, and practices of these groups, in order to develop recommendations for supporting gender policies and counteracting right-wing populism, nationalism, religious fundamentalism and anti-feminist activities in Ukraine.

### **Objectives of the study:**

- ▶ to find out the main arguments of academic experts who hold anti-gender views, as well as to identify the origin and basic principles of their opinions;
- ▶ to analyze the impact of anti-gender groups on the activity of human rights, women's, and feminist organizations or individual activists;
- ▶ to collect and systematize facts, challenges and threats from anti-gender groups and activists aimed at representatives of human rights, women's, and feminist organizations, as well as organizations protecting the rights of the LGBT community;
- ▶ to systematize challenges, threats and their manifestations (narratives, messages etc.) to the implementation of democratic gender transformations in Ukraine; to develop recommendations for a media campaign supporting the gender policy in Ukraine, which includes:
  - analyzing the array of data from open sources (online media and social media) between 2013 and 2020, based on the big data technology and a set of analytical algorithms, in order to identify information threats to the implementation of gender-oriented policies in Ukraine and the level of their impact on public opinion;
  - identifying the main subjects and objects of information attacks;
  - visualizing information threats and predicting further situations;
  - systematizing the tendencies of combating gender transformation in Ukraine;
  - forming the paradigm: narratives — concepts<sup>1</sup> (values) — messages of anti-gender ideas' implementation in the Ukrainian information space;
  - identifying the linguistic markers<sup>2</sup> of anti-gender communications online;

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1 A concept constitutes value-based views of a certain object formed by the national tradition, culture, religion, life experience, value system, etc.

2 A linguistic marker is a word or a phrase that expresses a certain typological characteristic of an object, person, situation, etc.

- describing the manipulative technologies used to disseminate anti-gender ideas in Ukraine's information space;
- developing recommendations on organizing a media campaign to support gender policy in Ukraine

**The object of the study** — is the organizations and groups positioning themselves as opponents of the national “gender policy” and protectors of “traditions” and “family values.” The study deliberately avoided the use of the term “anti-gender movement(s),” since its use is not universally agreed upon in the Ukrainian context, even though some members of the survey used it in their interviews. Some activists call this phenomenon a manifestation of conservative politics, while others call it a movement that seeks to gain publicity using the subjects of gender and feminism.



*First, we need to define what we mean under ‘anti-gender movements.’ There are colleagues who advise against calling the manifestations of conservative policies of religious organizations and public figures criticizing gender ‘movements’ to avoid attaching additional importance to them. On the other hand, it is quite a mass phenomenon with a variety of manifestations. Some organizations and individuals may have no connection, but at a certain moment we can call them ‘movements.’ They have a common direction of their activities. Or anti-activities. (Larysa Kobelianska, Kyiv).*



*I would call these movements ‘movements which try to gain popularity using the anti-gender hysteria.’ Anti-gender movements in Ukraine are a channel for protests among young people in paramilitary and pseudo-right organizations, which do not actually adhere to the right ideology but instead blindly imitate the methods of similar Russian organizations. Judging by the documented evidence that the Russians fund right-wing organizations in Europe, there is little doubt that similar activity is taking place in Ukraine. (Illia Strongovskyi, publisher of Vydavnytstvo publishing house, book designer, human rights activist, Zhytomyr).*



*The concept of ‘anti-gender movements’ is rather part of everyday language and is partly correct. On the one hand, the idea is that the notion of gender exists regardless of whether we protest against it or not. Using biological differences between men and women, the society creates an understanding and an interpretation to differentiate social roles.*

*Overall, I would propose a more correct term, ‘movements against gender equality.’ In social sciences, the concept of a ‘movement’ is used to describe an increase in the activity of big groups of people who strive to change or to maintain certain social processes. (Olena Strelnyk, Kyiv)*

**The subject of the study** is the practices, narratives, and messages of the aforementioned organized groups.

**Research methods** are characterized by the complementary use of various methods of scientific discovery depending on the researchers' objective:

- ▶ Journalist interviews with activists who have faced opposition to gender equality and feminist actions (a total of 13, including 3 men and 10 women living in Kyiv, Lviv, Zhytomyr, Vinnytsia, Zaporizhia, Mariupol, Uzghorod, and Sumy. The interviewees were selected through an open call to share personal experience posted in Ukrainian feminist Facebook groups Feminism UA, Tovaryshky, and others. In addition, some respondents had previously acted as speakers on Hromadske Radio, whose journalists conducted the interviews).
- ▶ Expert interviews with representatives of the academic field in Ukraine who hold anti-gender views. The criteria for selecting experts were: 1) a position in academic institutions — universities and research institutes; 2) their previous presence in the public space in the role of experts critical of gender policy.
- ▶ Analysis of interviews with experts who hold anti-gender views available in the public domain on the Internet. To ensure the confidentiality of respondents, all their answers are presented only in the aggregated form without identifiable information, and direct quotations are taken only from open sources on the Internet.
- ▶ Big Data research methodology based on the use of the information and analytical service Attack Index designed to process large amounts of open-source information online. The service helps identify the level of the information impact or danger of information flows on a selected subject or individual.

**The period of anti-gender groups' activity under research** — 2013-2020.

**Conclusions**

The activity of anti-gender groups between 2013 and 2020 can be considered a strategic information operation designed to radicalize society based on the concept of “family values” and to promote pro-Russian ideology similar to Russian “spiritual ties.” To oppose this action, both the government and civil society need to take action.

## The notion of “gender” does not replace “sex”

The concept of gender has been in active use in the social sciences since the 1960s. One important milestone was Robert Stoller’s article *Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity* (1968). In this article, Stoller distinguished between biological sex (men and women) and gender (socially constructed expectations of masculinity and femininity), as well as the social roles of men and women in society. While sex differences in the vast majority of people (except intersex people) are inherent in nature, gender differences are social expectations from each of the sexes, which may differ depending on the culture, historical period, etc.

The concern expressed by anti-gender critics that the idea of gender is allegedly being introduced to replace the idea of sex and denies biological differences between men and women is completely unfounded — as is their idea that the concept of gender somehow inherently offers people to choose their own gender identities, which may be innumerable.

While there are gender theorists who define gender identities as a continuum (various gradations of masculinity and femininity as opposed to polar characteristics) and recognize the possibility of differences between the biological sex and the gender identity (i.e. the existence of transgender, bigender or agender people), even they distinguish sex as something inherent in nature, defining gender as the way each of us experiences our biological sex.

Therefore, the claim that gender theory and gender policy deny the existence of two sexes — male and female — has no scientific basis.

The emphasis on the “free choice” of gender identities made by anti-gender theorists is also problematic. On the contrary, men and women are often limited in their choices due to preconceived notions of masculinity and femininity, with gender roles and identities constructed socially and reproduced not by each specific individual according to their personal preferences but in social institutions (economics, politics, family, education, etc.).

## Confusion of “sex,” “gender,” and “sexual orientation” as a basis for manipulations

Attempts to link the notions of sex, gender, and sexual identity are scientifically incorrect, because in this case, three different characteristics are put together: sex (biological man, biological woman, intersex), gender identity (man, woman, transgender person, bigender person, agender person), and sexual orientation (heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, asexuality).

This way, gender in public opinion is confounded with sexual orientation, LGBT rights, civil partnerships and sex-same marriages, and the situation is only further fueled by anti-gender groups.



*...The idea of gender equality is somehow boiled down exclusively to same-sex partnerships. Of course, these topics are indeed related, but they are not identical. In the fight for gender equality, we should not lose sight of women's rights. **(social scientist, PhD in Social Sciences, researcher Olena Strelnyk, Kyiv).***

## National gender policy in Ukraine

In the political realm, gender equality is achieved through the implementation of gender policies. Under the Law of Ukraine “On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities of Women and Men” (2005), gender equality is defined as the “equal legal status of women and men and equal opportunities for its exercise, which allows individuals of both sexes to engage equally in all spheres of social life.”

The national policies on the implementation of gender equality in Ukraine do not go beyond the “sex binary”; therefore, it would seem easy to explain to the critics that nothing is threatening their values.

But the attitude towards gender theories indicates the existence of much deeper ideological divisions. Representatives of anti-gender circles often strive to maintain the existing traditional division of roles, but to say so directly would be a faux pas, so they turn their criticism to gender theories and call this attitude an “ideology.”

## Criticism of “gender ideology” in the context of conservative political views

In science, the word “ideology” has no negative connotations. Each of us has a certain system of views, ideas, beliefs, values, and attitudes, and we can all identify a political ideology which we consider closest to what we believe in (which we do, for instance, when we vote for a party running for Parliament). In the context of gender theory, there is an important division between conservative nationalistic (“right”) ideologies on the one hand and liberal (“left”) ideologies on the other hand, as identified by numerous social studies of opposition to gender equality from the global perspective (even though these two “camps” are by no means uniform). Ukrainian representatives of anti-gender groups agree that Christianity and “traditional values” are incompatible with left political views, and they believe left political forces to be responsible for spreading relativism on sexuality and gender roles. They also often disseminate a theory on a global “conspiracy” of communists supported by international organizations, such as the UN or the EU.

Anti-gender initiatives insist on a certain vision of social order and social interaction based on identifying enemies, distrust for people with different views and the “surrounded fortress” attitude. Distrust as a worldview is problematic (for example, the idea that the political opponent always “manipulates” and “imposes their ideology”). This paradigm of fear and mistrust can be easily transferred from one “hot issue” to another, as we see from the list of issues of concern to respondents: environmental movements, theory of evolution, welfare state, protection of vulnerable groups, abortion, juvenile justice, etc. Therefore, the task of progressive forces is to offer an alternative paradigm of interaction with the world, more open to dialogue, with non-violent methods of interaction with ideological opponents.

## Dangers of anti-gender groups’ activity: experience of gender activists

The journalist interviews in this study have found that gender activists, feminists, researchers, and human rights defenders are often called “enemies of the Ukrainian nation” and “separatists” or “accomplices of internal occupiers,” “sorosiata (Soros’ babies),” “leftists,” or “leftists’ skanks” by their opponents.

The interviewed activists noted the negative impact of anti-gender groups and actions on their lives, work, and society as a whole. Among other things, they spoke about the fear, harassment, threats, powerlessness they experienced, about their reservations about holding feminist actions in the regions. They also mentioned the demands to have them dismissed and the loss of jobs and shared that they wanted to go abroad.



*They called us ‘genderists,’ they also said we were ‘sorosiata.’ They obviously somehow looked us up online. (activist Volodymyr Kosenko).*



*...I found a text online where we were called ‘enemies of the Ukrainian nation’; ...we were also called ‘collaborators of the internal occupiers. (poet Oles Barlih, Zaporizhia).*



*People who considered themselves affiliated with the right wing attributed everything to me being a ‘leftist skank’ and thus refusing to accept their actions... (Sofia Cheliak, Lviv).*



*I am completely sure I fell victim to the election campaign of a political force running for the Parliament at the time. On social media, its representatives collected signatures for my dismissal, created a separate page supporting my resignation. At the same time, they would comment on me as a person, on my qualities and characteristics, without any assessment of my actions in public office. They discussed my appearance, commented on my age; it was gender-based harassment. (public official).*



*There were situations when LGBT writers or LGBT-related books were presented. Somebody would throw something at these people, splash sour cream at them. I did not have personal experiences like this, but I know it happened. This is a general aggression in society against LGBT people. Now, events about LGBT or with the participation of LGBT writers go more or less well.*

*The forum is a big event. If you threaten the Forum, you have every chance to, let’s put it this way, show off and get into the media. Journalists ask you for comments; such threats become very noticeable. We also considered a possibility that these threats were a way for those organizations to advertise themselves. But there is no way to be sure; I’m just speculating here. (program director of Book Forum Lviv Sofia Cheliak, Lviv).*

## Identifying anti-gender groups

**Identifying anti-gender groups is an important issue.** The surveyed activists singled out the following groups among organizations and individuals known for opposing gender/feminist movements and actions:

- ▶ Conservative political forces, especially the Parliament caucus Values. Dignity. Family; MPs of the previous convocations;
- ▶ Religious unions: Oleksandra Skliar and the St. Olga Sisterhood; the religious community of the Emmanuel church;
- ▶ Radical right-wing associations: the National Corps, Karpatska Sich (the Carpathian Sich), Tradytsii i poriadok (Traditions and Order), Zentropa community, Katechon, C14, the Right Sector, CSO Edelweiss Vinnytsia, Natsionalnyi Sprotyv (National Resistance);
- ▶ The military: the special operations unit Azov;
- ▶ Homophobic organizations and their representatives: Ruslan Kukharchuk, Chair in the All Together! Public Movement, who previously headed the Love Against Homosexuality movement<sup>3</sup>...



*t was an event where the right-wing came. Sorry, they were the National Corps representatives, because I don't have the right to call them right-wing. (Sofia Cheliak, Lviv).*



*I don't think there is a specific organization, or force, or movement, which would oppose constructive change connected with gender equality or feminism. They just randomly choose who will be responsible any chance they get. The purpose is very simple: to channel the aggression of these organizations' young members safely. Such organizations have never been known to engage in something where they can actually suffer the consequences. When it comes to police brutality, or when so-called 'titushkas' take over land for real estate developers, such organizations never show up, nor do they make any statements. People affiliated with such organizations usually act anonymously on the side of the 'titushkas'.*

*If you look at the story with the book Maya and Her Moms published by our publishing house, there was a letter on behalf of 19 organizations addressed to Oleksandra Koval, director of Lviv*

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<sup>3</sup> The word homosexuality is used in Ukrainian in place of "homosexuality" by those who hold anti-gay views; the word comes from the Soviet times when homosexuality was criminalized.

Book Forum.<sup>4</sup> It was a physical letter with signatures and stamps.<sup>5</sup> A cursory examination showed that some of these organizations did not even know what they were signing, while others had no other known activity apart from signing that same letter. Finally, the remaining organizations who signed the letter and actually existed were radically opposed to the book. They were affiliated with the city administration, and the stamps of those organizations were even stored in an office in the city administration building.<sup>6</sup> **(Illia Strongovskyi, Zhytomyr).**



First, these are conservative political forces... For example, the authority of Mr. [Oleksandr] Turchynov [former Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine]. Speaking at the All-Ukraine Family Forum [in March 2019], he literally called it all a distortion and destruction of traditional values. And as you know, when a politician is somewhat trusted, supporters quickly emerge.

His wife, associate professor, head of the Department of Foreign Languages at the Mykhailo Drahomanov National Pedagogical University Anna Turchynova also joined in. Together with Ms. [Olha] Bohomolets, they initiated a roundtable discussion in the Verkhovna Rada, which made a truly unforgettable impression. I think, even a decade later, this event will be remembered as a true precedent in the Ukrainian politics, when the state policy was being destroyed inside the legislative agency, and the lawmakers were, shall we put it this way, singing along to this tune and applauding this destruction.

In the current parliament, it is, of course, Sviatoslav Yurash, a member of parliament from the Servant of the People party, who is proud to have created the largest caucus for family values [i.e. the caucus Values. Dignity. Family]. By the way, he lied that this caucus was supported by more than 300 MPs, when in reality they are fewer than 80.

The second category is religious unions. Of course, no one encroaches on religious values, and they are important to the believer. However, the Constitution of our country states that the church and the state are separate.

The third category of such movements is right-wing radical associations. They use their, so to speak, pent-up combat potential. Examples of this include attacks on workshop participants, like it recently happened in Vinnytsia, in Rivne. **(Larysa Kobelianska, Kyiv).**

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4 <https://bookforum.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Lyst.pdf>.

5 <https://bookforum.ua/ofitsijna-zayava-forumu-vydavtsiv-shhodo-pogroz-vid-predstavnykiv-radykalnyh-pravyh-organizatsij/>.

6 <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news/28729158.html>.

« The terms ‘ring-wing radical’ and ‘anti-gender’ are not identical, but they currently overlap. Patriarchal nature is, to some extent, a characteristic of the right-wing ideology. When it manifests itself in aggressive ways, we can talk about right-wing radicalism. Of course, this is not the only thing. For instance, there are attacks against Roma people. They are obviously not anti-gender in their nature, but they also constitute right-wing radicalism. In addition, anti-gender movements include organizations such as Love against Homosexuality, i.e. they are not radical, in the sense that they do not attack or threaten anyone. However, they actively impose the patriarchal worldview. **(activist and researcher Hanna Hrytsenko, Kyiv).**

« I was surprised to see different denominations really come together at this demonstration (for family values). Even Protestants. In general, they rarely come together in our country like that. **(activist Svitlana Dubyna, Vinnytsia).**

« In 2018, girls ran up to us, I think two of them were minors, and another one was the press secretary of Karpatska Sich, a right-wing radical organization. They ran up to us, threw some paint from a bottle and ran away. Later, they were detained by the police. Uzghorod is a small city. For instance, I personally volunteered to support the military and crossed paths with some people from the Sich. That is, I know their faces, I know their names. **(psychologist, participant of events supporting gender equality and the LGBT community Natalka Kasym, Uzghorod).**

« I know the specific names of people who came to Chernivtsi from Kyiv to lead this resistance. For example, there was Oleksandra Skliar from the St. Olga Sisterhood,<sup>7</sup> Yurii Bondarenko from Traditions and Order,<sup>8</sup> and Artem Oliinyk from Zentropa.

I think that some of those people are some local right-wing radicals. At the same time, now we have ongoing court proceedings with Chernivtsi oblast council, which banned LGBT rallies. So, it turned out that the council’s court fees were covered by a Lysychansk church called Emmanuel. Which means we traced the funds back to Protestant evangelicals. Similarly, if we look at the so-called ‘parent movements’ that are currently marching for family values, they have printed banners of excellent printing quality, and you need money for this. Most likely, it’s some Protestant money. I can’t say for sure, since I’m not an investigator. But I think there can be external funding involved. **(activist and researcher Hanna Hrytsenko, Kyiv).**

7 <https://thebabel.net/texts/29462-biologicheskii-zhenshchina-ne-mozhet-hotet-liderstva-radikalnaya-antifeministka-aleksandra-skliar-o-sestrinstve-svyatoy-olgi-lgbt-i-muzhchinah>.

8 <https://polisya.today/article/yurii-bondarenko-zaraz-ruh-tradyciya-i-poryadok-obyednuye-do-tysyachi-odnodumciv-po-vsiy>.

« For example, when they were preparing to disrupt the Amnesty event, they wrote about it on the Katechon and Zentropa web pages, specific people wrote that, took pictures, bragged. You could easily identify all the participants, there was no problem with that. But what do you do with that information next? The police do not respond anyway. They arrive, see that nobody is getting beaten up. Okay, so they stand, they block some people's way, so what? [The police] simply set the conflicting parties apart, without figuring out who started the conflict. And that's the end of it.

Of course, we knew who it was. There were usually people from Katechon, Traditions and Order; sometimes guys from Azov would come. There were also some people from C14. It's hard to call Zentropa an organization, because it's basically an online page. **(former activist of left, anarchist and feminist movements).**

« First, there was Rita Sakhalinska, then Katechon started visiting, then Traditions and Order<sup>9</sup>. Then, it was unknown people who called themselves ATO veterans, Christians, etc. Then there was the NGO Power of Christ or Christ's Garrison, I don't remember exactly. The most recent time, we were visited by Ruslan Kukharchuk himself, who is now the chair of the All Together! civic movement, which used to be called Love Against Homosexuality. I mean, they still exist, because they were on the list of people signing the letters to city councils. There was also Oleksandra Skliar from St. Olga Sisterhood. They are united by one center, that is, the All Together! civic movement.<sup>10</sup> I feel like they are funded by religious groups. I think it's the Pentecostals and the Baptists. Why? Because one of the court fees for our hearings against the Chernivtsi oblast council was paid by the Religious Community of the Emmanuel Church.<sup>11</sup> It was weird. The scheme worked this way: for three months, there was a wave of appeals to protect the institution of family in various cities. And then the All Together! movement supported these appeals with its letter to oblast councils, as if saying, you should listen to public opinion. **(activist Volodymyr Kosenko, LGBT organization We Exist Human Rights Bureau, Kyiv).**

« ...I knew some of them. I hang out in this environment, with far-right activists. I knew them back from Maidan; we were actually together back then. Svoboda, who else was there?.. Some other

9 <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100001536550844>.

10 <https://vsirazom.ua>

11 Religious Community of the Emmanuel Church of the Evangelical Pentecostal Faith in Chernivtsi city. EDRPOU code 38843862. Leader — Kostiantyn Kuchurian.

people, I don't remember anymore. Former representatives of the Right Sector. They were expelled from the Right Sector. I don't know where they ended up later...

"I started talking to them in the comments. They started using hate speech after that. I went to check who this Roman Kostyushyn person was, and he turned out to be the head of CSO Edelweiss Vinnytsia. **(activist Svitlana Dubyna, Vinnytsia).**



For example, last year I was giving a lecture at Isolation<sup>12</sup> on the reasons for the growing popularity of right-wing radical movements among Ukrainian youth. And they came to the event. I don't know if I can say they disrupted the lecture, but they tried. They turned the lecture into a discussion. I knew the names and faces of a lot of them. For instance, there was the organization National Resistance. They usually come to Equality Marches; they can also disrupt a feminist march on March 8. **(activist and researcher Hanna Hrytsenko, Kyiv).**

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12 [https://izolyatsia.org/ua/project/armed\\_dangerous/armed\\_dangerous-disrupt/](https://izolyatsia.org/ua/project/armed_dangerous/armed_dangerous-disrupt/)

## The impact of anti-gender groups on the work of human rights and feminist organizations' activists

The interviewed activists noted the **negative impact of anti-gender groups and actions they perform on their lives, work, and society as a whole**. Among other things, they spoke about the fear, harassment, threats, powerlessness they experienced, their reservations about holding feminist actions in the regions. They also mentioned the demands to have them dismissed and actual loss of jobs and shared that they wanted to move abroad.



*I, for one, am not initiating any marches either for March 8, or for the LGBT community. I understand perfectly well how much effort and how much nerves it's going to cost me. I feel endangered living in this city. I was asked, why? I said — because I am a feminist and a human rights defender. **(activist Svitlana Dubyna, chair of CSO Information and Education Center Vis, Vinnytsia).***



*These people did not try to see me or find out the motive of my actions. They harassed me, demanded that I be dismissed; they blocked the street next to our institution. Simultaneously, the same campaign unfolded on social media. I still feel the repercussions of that situation. It happened almost two years ago. A few months ago, I was looking for one of my old interviews and came across a website where I found a page about myself. There was information about many public officials there, including high-ranking officials. And among all that dirt was information about me — about that campaign and those events. But the situation was presented in a distorted way, as if people took to the streets to protest against me, and I organized paid counteraction. And then they talked about wealth, supposedly according to my asset declaration. They multiplied the real numbers by 10. That's the kind of manipulations that were used. I called them, talked to the editor, and they promised me to fix everything. **(public official, Kyiv).***



*I am personally very affected, because the issue of personal security is really urgent. It also affects society. It was these anti-gender movements that blocked the adoption of civil partnerships in Ukraine. The Ministry of Justice of Ukraine directly wrote in its report that 'Due to a high number of appeals, the issue needs to be studied and considered further and cannot be effected at present.'<sup>13</sup>. In addition, the Istanbul Convention is also not getting ratified due*

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13 <https://minjust.gov.ua/news/ministry/vladislav-vlasyuk-ministerstvo-yustitsii-ne-rozroblyalo-i-ne-podavalo-na-rozglyad-jodnih-proektiv-normativnih-aktiv-schodo-legalizatsii-tsivilnogo-partnerstva-dlya-odnostatevih-par>

to anti-gender manifestations. Another issue is the intimidation of society. For example, there was an attempt to intimidate us right at the court hearing where these 25 or so men came and told us they would beat us up. On the way out of the courtroom, one of the men showed me a 'throat cutting' gesture. Rita Sakhalinska wrote in the Facebook comments that, like, 'we did not beat you after all.' **(activist Volodymyr Kosenko, LGBT organization We Exist Human Rights Bureau, Kyiv).**



...I feel really helpless. I don't see any kind of leverage, except the fact that I can get outraged and say 'No, you're wrong!' People will keep believing what they believe. And I have nowhere to go to complain. Say, it's a public official.

Our city mayor constantly congratulates women on 'women's day,' except he does it on the so-called Snakes Day, on September 14, when the religious holiday of the Exaltation is celebrated. There is a legend that, on those days, snakes crawl out onto sunlit places to bask in the warmth. And there are a lot of people who call this day a 'women's holiday,' because they associate women with snakes. They congratulate women, give them snake figurines. Mayor of Sumy Oleksandr Lysenko said this during actual council sessions in his microphone, multiple times: 'Happy Women's Day to you, colleagues!'

I only wrote about this; what else can I do? I don't know what tools are available to make a person living off my taxes stop talking this nonsense. The strangest thing is that very few people care. I am angry, as are five more people; everyone else thinks it's funny. But what can we do? I don't know..... **(activist Olha Panfilova, Sumy).**



It was scary, of course. The difference was that we then realized we could not be intimidated by those threats and attacks. That's why we didn't close, didn't change anything. Perhaps it also showed our opponents that we were not afraid of them — we continued to work and continued to do the same thing, although it was scary: the door was open, anyone could come in and kill everyone. But still. The only thing that changed was that once again, we realized we were on the right track, and we could not be stopped, would not change the format, would not switch to more comfortable subjects. **(activist, feminist, organizer of the Donetsk Is Ukraine movement and director of the TYU platform Diana Berg, Mariupol).**



...Those anti-gender ones, they rarely cause real problems. They can yell at rallies, harass us online, beat somebody up after the Pride. **(former activist of left, anarchist and feminist movements).**



*It was a terrifying experience when you sit at the presentation, with participants from other countries with you. This was the moment when I needed to read poems and share the experience of organizing an anthology, and I was afraid that any minute now I would be hit with either a brick or a Molotov cocktail.<sup>14</sup> I was already envisioning how my skull would be cracked, and my body would be taken to my wife and mother in Zaporizhia.*

*After Lviv, there was also a presentation in Kyiv, where I did not go to because I was worried about my life and safety. I refused to go from Zaporizhia to Kyiv. I doubted I would be killed, but the fact that I could break my bones was a real threat. This proved to be true. The presentation that I did not attend in Kyiv ended up more dangerous for the attendees, because people got into a 'safari' there.<sup>15</sup> One participant had his arm broken; they would catch people next to the metro, in alleys; they attacked in groups. **(poet Oles Barlih, Zaporizhia).***



*...I do not feel pressure, because I work for myself; I have an educated, intelligent circle. There is petty everyday homophobia, which is uncomfortable and wrong, but it is understandable at this stage of society's development. I don't encounter it, but I know people who have, and they have moved abroad because they encountered various manifestations of homophobia... **(psychologist, participant of events supporting gender equality and the LGBT community Nataalka Kasym, Uzghorod).***

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<sup>14</sup> Molotov cocktail is a common name of simple DIY incendiary weapons based on a flammable substance (gasoline, solvent, alcohol etc.). Since a bomb like that is easy to make, it is a common weapon during street rallies.

<sup>15</sup> A "safari" is persecution after an event, when activists are chased by radical individuals who inflict physical damage on them. It is usually committed against LGBT activists and their allies.

## Civil society activists on the principal narratives of anti-gender groups

Anti-gender groups use narratives such as “**Gender is the destroyer of the traditional family**” / “**Feminism is a threat to the population**” / “**Gender equality policy is to ‘swap boys and girls.’**”



*...These narratives are extremely unimaginative. You constantly hear repetitions and a lack of creativity. It is all written based on the same guidelines. These things haven't changed since I first became interested in this fight. (Illia Strongovskyi, Zhytomyr).*



*We had a huge march for family values in Vinnytsia in May 2018. There were direct calls that ‘we must fight against gender.’ To be more precise, ‘Gender is destroying the Ukrainian family.’ (activist Svitlana Dubyna).*



*...I have experience in conducting trainings and seminars on gender issues for different groups of people, often adult audiences. Every time, I hear the myth or the prejudice that the policy of gender equality is ‘swapping boys and girls’ or ‘a threat to the family.’ What does this indicate? That such messages [broadcast by representatives of anti-gender movements] still reach their recipients. And we, in turn, live in our bubbles. (Olena Strelnyk, Kyiv).*



*They pointed out that our rights were not violated, that ‘LGBT is gay propaganda.’ They called themselves defenders of the ‘traditional’ family. They constantly used hate speech right there at court hearings. (activist Volodymyr Kosenko).*



*We’ve got ‘Motherland, family, tradition,’ and ‘this’ corrupts everything and will put an end to families. Then they start talking over and over about God, that you will all burn in hell because God said so. There aren’t normally any comments about ‘Gayrope.’ I think it’s more of a Russian thing. Here in Sumy, I haven’t heard about ‘Gayrope’ a single time. Here, Europe is something good, not bad. (activist Olha Panfilova, Sumy).*

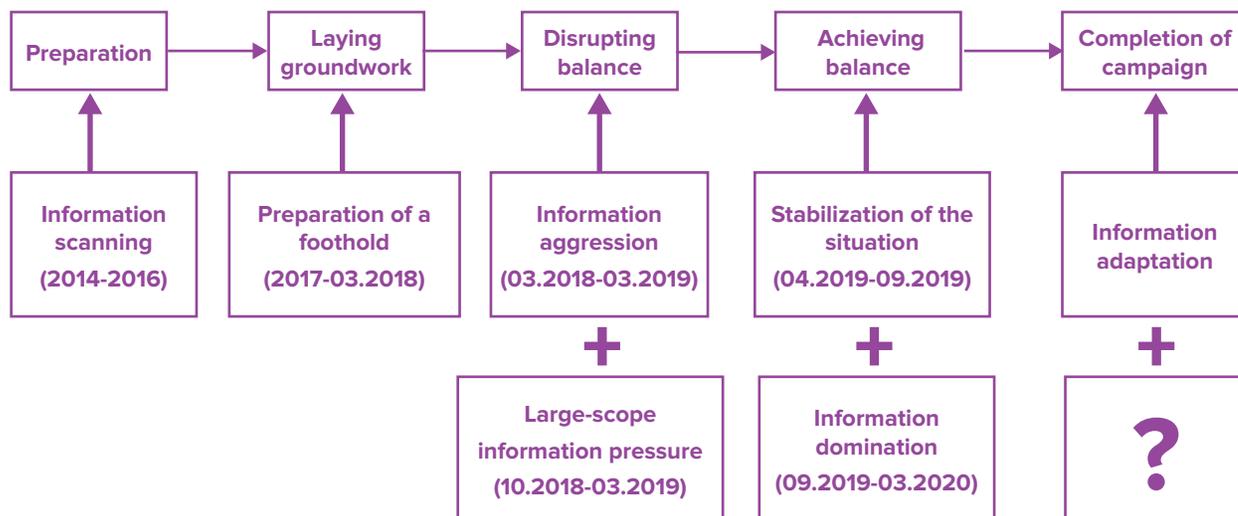


*Those are different messages, but I would single out two primary, mainstream, messages. The first one is that we, that is, supporters of gender-oriented movements, distort the notion of sex,*

*while in reality the notion of 'gender' does not bring anything new to the idea of equality between women and men. That is, it is about the relationship between the notions of 'sex' and 'gender.' There may be some challenges here that arise due to the lack of constructive discussion within women's movements and the expert community on how these things correlate... As for other messages disseminated by the followers of the so-called anti-gender movements, those are something like: 'gender kills the family,' 'feminism is a threat to the population,' because women allegedly don't want to give birth because they want to work. However, there is no major consolidation of the anti-gender ideology representatives around them. The idea of having five or seven children in a Ukrainian family may arouse some skepticism, which is understandable. It is more challenging to find total support of this message event among the supporters of conservative ideas. **(Olena Strelnyk, Kyiv).***

# The correlation between the hybrid challenges to Ukraine's national security and the anti-gender ideology

Our analysis has proven that the promotion of the anti-gender ideology in Ukraine is a strategic information operation organized in line with the classic form of an information operation.



## 2013

In 2013, the strategic information operation on the promotion of anti-gender ideology in Ukraine was completed:

- ▶ the **grand narrative “Family is the biggest value in Ukraine”** was promoted at the national level with the support of governmental information resources (the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the First National TV Channel, UKRINFORM) with the aim to prevent Ukraine’s European integration;
- ▶ the concepts of “sexual orientation,” “non-traditional orientation,” “European values,” “gender” were manipulatively redefined to portray them as promoting the ideology of LGBT communities and causing disintegration of the family institution in Ukraine;
- ▶ the opinion was formed that draft law No. 2342 “On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine for Preventing and Combating Discrimination in Ukraine” and further extension of

application of the law “On Principles of Preventing and Combating Discrimination in Ukraine” was a step towards the dominance of the fascist ideology in Ukraine;

- ▶ a rapid information operation was executed to prevent the adoption of draft law No. 2342 “On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine for Preventing and Combating Discrimination in Ukraine” and further extension of application of the law “On Principles of Preventing and Combating Discrimination in Ukraine”;
- ▶ the strategic information operation to prevent the process of Ukraine’s European integration was completed.

## 2014-2016.

### 2014-2016 – preparation for a new anti-gender strategic operation.

1. The main goal of this stage is to slow down the process of Ukraine’s European integration and to create a manipulative opposition between European and Christian values.
2. 2014 — a significant decrease in the number of publications on anti-gender issues and the level of information attacks.
3. 2015-2016 — a gradual increase in the number of anti-gender stories and a growing level of information attacks. Conducting a number of events, their gradual promotion (International Family Day, the March for Family Values, etc.).
4. The number of Russian-language anti-gender stories drops significantly. While the number of Russian-language stories was almost twice as high as Ukrainian-language ones in 2013, the difference becomes only about 15-20% in favor of Russian-language stories over 2014-2016, with the potential audience of anti-gender publications in both languages being about the same.
5. Revival of the network of anti-gender NGOs, foundations, media, and engagement of new individuals.
6. The introduction of anti-gender ideology at all levels of public administration with the engagement of anti-gender NGOs, religious institutions, educational establishments and public authorities, as demonstrated by a change of grand narratives — from the generalized 2014 **grand narrative “Rebuilding the country starts from recognizing family values”** to narratives aimed at specific changes in the country: **“The anti-discrimination amendment to the Labor Code of Ukraine means establishing homosexual dictatorship in Ukraine”** (2015), **“Introducing education on family values is an urgent issue of the educational system”** (2016).

7. Attempts to engage public bodies of authority in the implementation of family values with the aim to form a strategic unity of religious institutions, civil society and the state.
8. Inconspicuous inclusion of anti-gender strategies and concepts into legislative documents, such as draft law No. 3422 “On Amendments to the Labor Code of Ukraine (to harmonize the legislation in the sector of preventing and combating discrimination with the European Union law).
9. Implementation of operations-level cognitive information operations, including:
  - ▶ the manipulative opposition of democratic Europe vs. Christian democratic Ukraine has been formed;
  - ▶ the concept of family values is compounded with tolerance, anti-discrimination, anti-totalitarianism, patriotism, social justice; thus, the anti-gender approach masks itself as a national value system;
  - ▶ introducing the message that destruction of family values is a characteristic of a totalitarian state.
10. Gradual intensification of the Russian influence on the gender policy in Ukraine, including: simultaneous promotion of joint messages of Vitalii Mikonov, St. Petersburg councilor, and the All-Ukraine Church Council (archbishop metropolitan Mechyslav Mokshytskyi, head of the Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops of Ukraine, Y. Myroshnychenko and others); attempts to promote the course in Family Values in secondary educational establishments — authors of the supporting textbook are pro-Russian (for reference: the authors are L. Koretska, member of the pro-Russian political party Nash Krai, a successor of the Party of Regions; V. Prit — a construction engineer (Zaporizhia State Engineering Academy) and a psychologist (Russian State Social University, 2013!), chair of the anti-gender International Civil Society Organization “Council of Ukrainian Families”).
11. Radicalization of society based on the concept of family values. A pilot information and psychological operation took place in Odesa on July 20, 2015, with the aim to study public opinion on the possible formation of an intolerant attitude towards LGBT communities, as well as to demonstrate possible forceful influence on LGBT communities by radical organizations, including the Right Sector. *(On July 20, 2015, an RGD-5 grenade was thrown at the door of the Libertine bar in Odesa, which was known to be popular among LGBT people. There were no casualties, but an inscription “Family Values Come First” was made near the bar.)*

At the same time, a number of victories have been won at the state level to prevent the spread of anti-gender ideology in Ukraine:

1. On November 12, 2015, draft law No. 3422 “On Amendments to the Labor Code of Ukraine (to harmonize the legislation in the sector of preventing and combating discrimination with the European Union law)” was passed.
2. On October 31, 2016, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine revoked the approval stamp of the Family Values textbook..

## 2017

**In 2017, a new strategic information operation was launched**, the grand narrative of which can be defined as “**Protection of Family Values Means Eradication of Gender Policy.**” It took place in several stages.

**2017 – March 2018 – creation of the information foothold and regrouping of forces. The main results are as follows:**

1. Creating an opposition (a circle of loyal individuals) to the presidential power/the European vector of Ukraine’s development. An information foothold was formed to introduce the grand narrative “Supporters of traditional family values are against the presidential power/the European vector of Ukraine’s development.”
2. Attempts to include the Presidential Administration and the President personally as subjects into the anti-gender narrative.
3. Inclusion of business structures into the anti-gender pool in addition to representatives of anti-gender NGOs, religious institutions, and experts of educational and public institutions. The narrative “Society, the state and church are partners in the fight for family values,” important in 2015-2016, is supplemented with another subject — the business (the narrative becomes “Society, the state, church and business are partners in the fight for family values.”)
4. Demonstration that anti-gender organizations are united with religious institutions when it comes to preserving family values.
5. Creating opposition among Ukrainian regions based on their attitude to family values. Introducing the narrative “Ukrainian regions differ in their attitude to family values.”
6. Attempts to turn the march For Life and Family Values into a nationwide movement.

7. Creation of information and psychological preconditions for the promotion of pro-Russian ideology in the Ukrainian information space.
8. Indirect opposition to the implementation of European values and Ukraine signing the Association Agreement with the EU; e.g. the March for Family Values and Prohibiting Abortions was announced in Ivano-Frankivsk a few hours after the announcement that the EU Council of Ministers approved the visa liberalization regime for Ukraine.
9. Intensifying the level of information attacks around the concept “protecting family values.”

**March 2018 — March 2019 — the stage of disrupting balance. The main results are as follows.**

1. Opposition to the European vector of Ukraine’s development has been formed from representatives of various Ukrainian strata (political, religious, educational, social, etc.).
2. Open opposition to the implementation of European values and Ukraine’s accession to the Association with the EU.
3. Formation of active confrontation between supporters of “family values” and the Presidential Administration. The Presidential Administration’s non-recognition of the petition [No. 41/001462-18-ep](#) “On the Cessation of Homosexual Propaganda and Protection of Traditional Family Values” served as a formal reason to allege that “homosexual ideas” are being spread in Ukraine, which subsequently lead to the formation of the “enemy image.”
4. Systematic nature of the March for Life and Family Values, which took place for the third time and was described as a nationwide movement.
5. Active confrontation between pro-European forces and anti-gender groups regarding the Equality March. Formation of the conflict between the European Parliament and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate: each of the parties to the conflict addressed the President of Ukraine with opposing messages (support the Equality March and participate in it vs. prevent or disrupt the Equality March).
6. Promotion of the narrative “Gender Equality is a threat to national security.”
7. Transition to active confrontation between anti-gender forces and the Presidential Administration — petition [No. 41/001462-18-ep](#) “On the Cessation of Homosexual Propaganda and Protection of Traditional Family Values,” whose provisions were phrased using suggestive influence techniques.
8. “Opening up” of anti-gender pro-Russian forces, for instance::

▶ ПAction Plan for the implementation of the National Strategy for Human Rights by 2020 (No. 1393-r.) was adopted on November 23, **2015**, and the petition was filed **three years later — in 2018**;

▶ the phrase **“for the first time”** in the story **Council of Churches Claims for the First Time that Freedom of Speech Is Restricted in Ukraine** which refers to the events of the Revolution of Dignity at the subtext level;

▶ participation of Russian media in the distribution of stories (“Russian Pulse”, portal Credo. Ru — a Russian information and analytical website on religion, which has Ukrainian and English versions; RIA Novosti Ukraine, etc.).

9. Revival of the 2016 narrative — **“Teaching young people family values is a national business.”**

10. A manipulative appeal to the Parliament, the Cabinet of Ministers, the President of Ukraine and the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine from members of Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast Council, which, among other things, called for preventing legalization of civil partnerships, eliminating phrases such as gender identity and sexual orientation from legislation and approve the law “On the Prohibition of Homosexuality Propaganda,” prohibit Equality Marches, etc. *(The only text of the appeal to the Parliament, the Cabinet of Ministers, the President of Ukraine and the National Security and Defense Council from members of different oblast councils — Ivano-Frankivsk, Rivne, Chernivtsi, Sumy, and others — was published on the website <https://orada.if.ua/decision/про-звернення-обласної-ради-щодо-зах> and is currently inactive).*

11. Preventing the ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

12. Attempts of the Council of Churches to create a central body of executive power for the support of family, children, maternity, and paternity, and to pass draft Directive No. 8521 “On Measures for Ensuring Protection of Family Values and the Institution of Family in Ukraine” as an alleged alternative to the ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

13. Attempts to conceptually compound gender ideas with neo-Marxism (O. Turchynov).

14. The coexistence of identical narratives **“Gender policy is a threat to national security”** and **“Strong family is the basis of national security”**, which was formalized in the resolution of the IV All-Ukraine Family Forum. The messages of the resolution summarize the requirements of anti-gender movements.

15. Attempts to discredit the image of the incumbent President of Ukraine and his Administration as inconsistent with public demands for family values.

**April 2019 — March 2020 — the stage of achieving balance. Adaptation to the new social and political situation. Main results:**

1. Expressing hope for the new Presidential Administration to implement the family values ideology at the national level.
2. Reducing the level of information aggression in the context of “protecting family values.”
3. Formation of new channels of information influence.

**Stage of information domination. Results:**

1. Systemic implementation of anti-gender ideology. Step 1 — putting forward aggressive demanding messages in the petition to President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy “On the Protection of Christian Values as the Basis for Ukraine’s Stability, Development and Prosperity”; step 2 — creation of the Values. Dignity. Family caucus.
2. Concentration of anti-gender events that previously took place during the year, over February-March 2020:
  - ▶ **in the field of education** — change of the narrative “**Teaching young people about family values is national business**” to a more aggressive one “**Say no to gender in education!**” An anti-gender Coalition of Political and Social Organizations “For Ukrainian Education” was created;
  - ▶ **in the academic and expert field** — forming the opinion that the gender theory is an “ideology” without any scientific basis;
  - ▶ **in the security field** — attempts to reinforce the narrative “**Gender ideology is a threat to the national security,**” using the message “**Gender ideology is Ukraine-phobic.**”
3. Formation of a joint anti-gender cognitive field with the Russian Federation: to prevent the destruction of traditional family values and emergence of “parent 1” and “parent 2”; to ensure compliance with the Constitution in the context of protecting family and family values; to prevent ratification of the Istanbul Convention, etc.

**Dialogue: yes or no?**

How possible is a dialogue between public authorities, civil society and international organizations working within the framework of national legislation and Ukraine's international commitments to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men and implementing the national gender policy, on the one hand, and representatives of anti-gender groups, on the other hand? Does it make sense? What should it be based on?

Researchers believe that it makes sense to selectively engage religious organizations of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Roman Catholic Church and organizations promoting "traditional family values" in this conversation to explain that their views and a gender-oriented approach in public life do not actually contradict each other. This can be done through discussion platforms and round tables on relevant problems, such as the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. A number of organizations that have been analyzed are not "anti-gender" by their nature. They often use the mottoes or narratives that they have been fed as the situation demands. Communication with such organizations will significantly reduce the "degree" of their anti-gender rhetoric and thus reduce the societal radicalization around gender-related manipulations.

Regarding the potential dialogue/communication/opposition to anti-gender ideology, most activists interviewed in the course of the research have pointed out that dialogue with the attackers is impossible. There are examples of finding common ground in practice, though..



*Intellectual reasoning won't work at their level; we need something simpler. Therefore, human rights messages should be elementary. For example, 'they will come to you and take your cow' as opposed to 'your rights will be restricted.' Secondly, it is also important to work institutionally with lawmakers. For example, last year, our Vydavnytstvo publishing house published a handbook *Feminism in Law*. I believe the fact that we have prepared and published this book is our contribution, because literature explaining how this should be done has started appearing in Ukraine. Of course, you also need visibility, because everything bad in society happens when people don't see the real benefits of work done by feminist and human rights organizations. **(publisher of Vydavnytstvo publishing house, book designer and human rights activist Illia Strongovskyi, Zhytomyr).***



*I think that dialogue and clarification can only work on those who do not engage in physical attacks. Say, on those who are just participating in a counteraction with a peaceful poster that disagrees with our views. It is also important to put pressure on the police to properly investigate such cases instead of writing them off as simple hooliganism. We need to avoid the situation*

*when the same people attack multiple times and suffer no consequences. If a person attacks somebody once, they need to be punished. It is important that the police do not tolerate this. In addition, we need sex education in schools. A child should not become homophobic in school. I see that many of these attackers are students, young people. This is not only a Ukrainian trend. Young age is the time when people get involved in certain movements. Fighting against bullying is another important component. **(activist and researcher Hanna Hrytsenko, Kyiv).***



These people cannot be demonized, they cannot be completely written off. These are people just like us. If we discriminate against them or demonize them, it would mean that we are violating the norms that we ourselves are trying to enforce. Everyone has the right to their own political position. If this position falls within the scope of the law but is different from ours, we have no right to discriminate against them. The Forum's position on such instances is this: we try to resolve everything using available and legal tools — through dialogue or patronage, when an influential institution supports us. If we enter into a dialogue, we can prevent potential violence or other threats to the event...

... From experience, I will say that the police are absolutely open to cooperation. If you know that your event is treading the line and you may get lucky or not so much, you need to get the support of public institutions: city, town or oblast councils, ministries. This will help you with PR.... **(program director of Book Forum Lviv Sofia Cheliak, Lviv).**



*It wasn't an actual dialogue, it was a shouting match. I still tried to get it back on track. When it comes to narratives, they don't recognize that gender is constructed. On the other hand, they say things like, 'a real man should' or 'a real woman should...' Then I ask them, don't you think you are constructing it, if we discuss who is real and who is not? So, there's constantly the 'traditional family' narrative. **(activist and researcher Hanna Hrytsenko, Kyiv).***



*It seems to me that the understanding has become much greater. We have recently held a workshop on gender-sensitive journalism and there were quite a few people. Since there were widely respected people there, like Andrii Kulykov, who is universally loved in Mariupol, and to whom people are willing to listen speak on these subjects, these are markers that kind of open people up to a sensitive subject like gender issues. As for local authorities, we are the only independent cultural organization operating in Mariupol, so we are in kind of parallel dimensions. We know about each other, we support each other if necessary under certain circumstances, but we haven't yet had any joint initiatives, and we are okay with that. **(activist, feminist, organizer of the Donetsk is Ukraine movement, director of the TYU platform Diana Berg, Mariupol).***



...Obviously, yes, when it comes to specific individuals who are ready for such a dialogue. As a woman who identifies as a feminist, I believe the subject of family in itself is not contradictory to the ideas of gender equality.

In my texts, I even proposed ideas and slogans for rallies supporting the Ukrainian family: paid paternity leaves, decent maternity hospitals, adequate attitude to mothers and children, good kindergartens, etc. Perhaps, we could come together [with representatives of movements supporting the Ukrainian family] in these issues.

I have a feeling we are losing this battle a little now. I have experience in conducting trainings and seminars on gender issues for different groups of people, often adult audiences. Every time, I hear the myth or the prejudice that the policy of gender equality is 'swapping boys and girls' or 'a threat to the family.' What does this indicate? That such messages [broadcast by representatives of anti-gender groups] do reach their recipients. And we, in turn, live in our bubbles. **(social scientist, PhD in Social Sciences, researcher Olena Strelnyk, Kyiv).**



We've mostly got a lot of people there who, I think, don't quite know how to articulate their views. They are shouting something, but when you ask them what the problem is, they will say something like: ban gay marriage. You tell them: but this event is not about gay marriage at all... **(former activist of left, anarchist and feminist movements, Kyiv).**



Yes, we tried to object. But we understood that there was no real point in this. Anything we said, even if it was something about reconciliation, provoked even greater aggression. I just wanted to keep quiet so that I could leave unharmed **(poet Oles Barlih, Zaporizhia).**



I think these are some very marginal things. Their views mostly do not affect people on the street. Let them come up with all kinds of nonsense about Marxist gender. Regular people have a very philistine position on feminism or gender. It is not really influenced by either feminists, or the far right.

I believe the situation has overall improved over the past 5-6 years. But it's not because the feminists are organizing rallies and the bad right-wing people attack them. This is cultural influence, a shift in the mindset, the impact in the media and personal experience. I also think the right is not going anywhere. There are always forces that strive for progress and forces that oppose them. I think they will eventually accept a lot of things and change some of their views, because the world is changing. **(former activist of left, anarchist and feminist movements).**

**Current and future social challenges and threats tied to the anti-gender ideology and the activity of anti-gender groups**

The activity of anti-gender groups poses a threat not just to activists of human rights and feminist organizations' activists, but also to society and the national security of the country overall. The results of the big data analysis give reason to believe that the final stage of the information operation **Protection of Family Values — Elimination of Gender Policy** will start in 2020.

**The main task of this stage** will be to create discursive and psychological conditions to “ensure the protection of family values and the elimination of the gender ideology.”

To do this, a **new information background will be created**: public authorities, including the Values. Dignity. Family caucus, stand for the implementation of family values.

Potential **threats** to the promotion of gender policy in Ukraine:

- ▶ the Values. Dignity. Family caucus constitutes a majority, which will not vote for pro-European draft laws, including the ratification of the Istanbul Convention;
- ▶ radicalization of society based on the concept of family values;
- ▶ attempts to exclude the notions of “gender,” “gender identity,” and “sexual orientation” from the Ukrainian legislation;
- ▶ attempts to abolish the enacted Strategy for Implementation of Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination in the sphere of education Education: Gender Dimension 2021, which they believe to violate parents' rights to raising their children in accordance with their beliefs and the rights to influence the educational process;
- ▶ attempts to put an end to the anti-discrimination expert review of educational literature, whose results have allegedly practically demonstrated contempt for the fundamental values of the Ukrainian people;
- ▶ promotion of the pro-Russian ideology similar to the Russian “spiritual ties.”

#### **Mechanisms for implementation of anti-gender policies:**

- ▶ identification of common cultural and historic, ethnic, religious and other positions of Russians and Ukrainians in the context of traditional family values;
- ▶ engagement of a broad range of tools for influence on the Ukrainian political elite and target audiences;
- ▶ creation of large volumes of virtual products related to the idea of family values;
- ▶ exploitation of public opinion leaders for promoting the anti-gender ideology;

- ▶ news hooks used as factors of information influence on the country's leadership;
- ▶ gradual increase in the number of anti-gender policy supporters;
- ▶ organization of active widely publicized events supporting the implementation of family values and elimination of gender policies;
- ▶ attempts to provoke mass protests that may be driven by the religious factor, including the attitude to traditional family values;
- ▶ radical attitude towards LGBT people.

### **Challenges:**

- ▶ reinforcing the belief in the need for anti-gender policy in Ukraine and consolidating a strong belief in the dominance of Christian family values;
- ▶ radicalization of society based on the factor of family values;
- ▶ reinforcing the narrative “Gender ideology is a threat to the national security” using the message “Gender ideology is Ukraine-phobic”;
- ▶ implementation of anti-gender ideology in education;
- ▶ **“surrendering what has been won” in the gender sector.**

**Conclusions and recommendations  
on organizing a media campaign to  
support gender policy in Ukraine**

Since gender equality has not yet been recognized as an overarching national Ukrainian concept, there is a certain correlation between the hybrid challenges to Ukraine's national security and the anti-gender ideology.

Manipulative influences on the concept of "family values" can be prevented proactively. This involves using all possible communication channels to broadcast the constructive meaning of the concept and debunking destructive discourses of its use. The concept of "family values" is manipulative because its meaning is quite vague, which means that each communicator can use it to refer to different things. Thus, a clear and understandable definition of concepts is a necessary condition for effective communication.

Family values can be defined as follows:

1. morally reasonable and ethically substantiated good virtues and corresponding norms of behavior in the family;
2. the main content of primary ethical notions (good and evil, justice, happiness, dignity, honor, duty, etc.) and principles (selflessness, humanism, reverence for life, etc.) understood by all members of a family;
3. universal patterns, requirements and ideas of morality directly important to family members.

Ukraine leans towards traditionalism and values of survival, that is, society respects the institutions of family and marriage, power; society is prone to national pride. During the coronavirus pandemic especially, society feels defensive, so anything different (like people who support gender equality and feminist views, which are either mistakenly or manipulatively viewed as a threat to family) that goes beyond the "normalcy" boundaries is considered dangerous. When activists of the gender movement form their communication strategy and conduct awareness campaigns, they need to take into account the fact that conservative views dominate in Ukrainian society.

It is important to use the value-based approach to identify the needs and interests of the conservative part of the society, to find possible common ground and transition from the category "other" to the category "different, but close."

At the level of public policy, it is important to take steps for public support on the issues of reproductive labor (extending the chain of nurseries, kindergartens, extracurricular clubs for school students and summer camps; free or subsidized education in all educational establishments and in the workplace; high-quality affordable healthcare; paid paternity leave) and increasing the salaries in traditionally female-dominated sectors of economy, especially those where the government is the biggest employer (education, healthcare).

People with conservative views find it important to emphasize family and traditional values. It should be highlighted that gender equality does not threaten these values, but, on the contrary, is the key to a strong and healthy family based on love and mutual respect. To achieve this, attention needs to shift from criticism alone to positive examples. Successful examples include campaigns for the involvement of fathers in partner childbirth, household chores and raising children or support of free sports clubs for teenage girls.

Although some conservative religious views are not fully in line with the principles of gender equality, there are still possible situations where they play a positive role. For example, the issue of gender binary and complementarity of genders, on the one hand, restricts women's rights in traditionally "masculine" sectors (for example, there is a belief that men "complement" women with their strength and masculinity, and women "complement" men with their tenderness and care), but this principle can also be used to recognize "equal dignity" for traditionally "female" sectors on the labor market, which have traditionally been considered less prestigious and less desirable. This way, we can undermine the dominance of "male" characteristics: individuality, success, career growth, and emphasize the importance of "female" characteristics for society — solidarity, mutual support and care for those who are weaker. As for the issue of reproductive rights, focus can be shifted from the moral aspects of abortions to ensuring all prerequisites for every conceived child to be desired in society and for the government to provide the pregnant and mothers with necessary support. These are some examples of issues where people with different worldviews can still work together for the common good.

Society has distorted knowledge of gender, gender policies, sexuality, equality: homosexuality is considered a disease, or at least a choice, while gender is considered something that can be "imposed from outside," not inherent to Ukrainians. Most of the above statements are stereotypical beliefs and prejudices, which are usually rooted in emotion rather than reason. Such circumstances call for original communication strategies.

For many Ukrainians, the issues of sexual identities or the rights of trans people are not a priority. It is important to demonstrate that gender equality is for everyone and to highlight the subjects that unite people, such as discrimination on the labor market or violence against women and children.

When more controversial issues arise, such as gay or trans people, it is best to avoid moral evaluation (good vs. bad), but instead focus on human rights and the unacceptability of violence and discrimination while speaking a language understandable to the interlocutor, possibly

referencing religious texts while speaking with believers (for instance, statements on equal rights and respect for gay people can be found in official documents of the Catholic Church).

Given that society is not ready to talk about gender and gender equality directly, it is necessary to look for points of contact in the discourse that society can and is ready to accept. In this case, it is important to work for the sake of changing the mindset, considering the current situation in society. For example, part of Ukrainian society does not understand the name “Istanbul Convention” and perceives it as threatening, because the name does not explain the content, and the city of Istanbul itself is not directly associated with Europe. It is best to avoid simplifying the name and instead refer to the Convention by its full title — the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. For short, it can be called a “Convention against domestic violence” or “Convention fighting violence against women.”

In addition, the concept of gender equality can be combined with a more easily understood explanatory phrase “equality between men and women,” especially in awareness campaigns for the general public.

It is best to defend people’s rights to their own views and encourage non-violent dialogue and expression of views. It should be emphasized that different views in the society are normal, including different views on the notion of “gender,” but it is not a reason to disrespect the opponent or engage in violence.

It is necessary to develop a long-term strategy for the implementation of a media campaign supporting gender policy in Ukraine, to define its operational, tactical and strategic goals. The media campaign will be effective if there is an understanding of target audiences and their aspirations, as well as a vision of the best ways to convey information. It is advisable to conduct a comprehensive study to identify the subjects of media campaigns, audiences, to develop recommendations on working with them, and to create an effective mechanism for identifying such audiences in the future. In addition, it is advisable to propose a “gender dictionary” for media representatives and have it presented at the national level.

Create a system of national information on the implementation of gender policy.

An important step in the consciential opposition must be the transition from passive defense (inertia response; situational, tactical, selective counteraction) to proactive offense operations.

Form non-contradictory narratives and messages of the media campaign for different target audiences. This calls for a functional mechanism of receipt/dissemination of coordinated messages by individuals responsible for communication.

Since anti-gender groups use narratives such as “Gender is the destroyer of the traditional family” / “Feminism is a threat to the population” / gender equality policy is to “swap boys and girls,” it is essential to develop simple, clear messages which will also take root in public opinion. Such narratives should be designed to expand the notions of “tradition” and “family.” For example, “Our tradition is freedom,” “My cat and I are a family, too.”

One of the main subjects of the media campaign supporting gender policy in Ukraine should be the ratification of the **Istanbul Convention against gender-based violence. The grand narrative of the media campaign may be as follows: “Ratification of the Istanbul Convention is a prerequisite of national security.” Possible narratives: “Equal rights of all Ukraine’s citizens are a European choice”; “Gender equality is the basis of family well-being”; “Gender equality is a family value”; “Rebuilding the country starts from recognizing the value of every single person”; “Young people stand for gender equality”; “Ukrainians stand for respect for everyone”; “We recognize the right to be yourself.”**

This work should consolidate the non-governmental information sector and actively engage elements of “soft power,” especially public diplomacy structures.

It makes sense to work with meanings, for instance, to explain the wrong and manipulative use of the notion of “family values” by anti-gender organizations: suggest the exact definition of this concept; disseminate it across all types of media; edit the Wikipedia page on family values.

It might make sense to develop billboards and other forms of advertising clarifying the basic ideas of the Istanbul Convention, such as: **“I stand FOR protecting women against all forms of violence and preventing it”; “I am FOR elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and FOR promoting true equality between women and men”; “Violence against women is a violation of human rights.”** The Convention should be presented as simple quotes and visualized.

Position the perspective of the “gender conflict,” the “point of view” of gender policy; take it into consideration while developing strategies of combating hybrid threats. The response to action taken by anti-gender groups should be proactive and asymmetric.

Interpret the “gender conflict” considering Ukraine’s national interests. To do this, we need to shape the idea held by various target audiences of what the “gender conflict” is and fill gaps in worldview and understanding.

High-profile events organized by anti-gender groups should be used for asymmetric implementation of gender policies, for instance, when the International Day of Families is celebrated.

It would be a good idea to start long-term entertaining media projects — talk shows, such as a “Gender Morning show,” “Gender for Men and Women,” with the participation of celebrities, experts, politicians, etc.

Social media and YouTube have very few therapeutic texts or any content on anti-discrimination gender-related matters. The word “gender” should become a trend.

It would be great to post creative gender-focused texts on Instagram, since this network is popular among the youth.

Humor is a powerful weapon, and it makes sense to develop products that ridicule anti-gender and any other discriminatory actions.

Gender-oriented texts should also be created for children, in simplified forms.

Activity analysis of various anti-gender organizations that have malign influence on people’s minds and use various manipulative and suggestive techniques should be made publicly available (on the media and the Internet). This activity should involve political scientists, psychologists, linguists.

It is necessary to maintain presence on social media, since availability of information makes for greater visibility. The principle of survival on social media has changed: it is not the fastest who survives, but the newest. This means creating content that remains relevant and focused.

Every communication effort must meet the needs of mobile users, as they now make up the majority of Internet users: it should be short, attractive content, easy to use and viewable on all mobile devices.

The information confrontation requires a comprehensive approach. This means identifying reliable communicators among civil society who could speak in favor of gender policies (government speakers are not as influential); defining cultural common ground (interpersonal values, behavior, norms, trends, etc.) and their use to promote gender policies.

Gender policy and its communicators need to have attractive branding developed.

It makes sense to selectively engage religious organizations, such as the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Roman Catholic Church and organizations promoting “traditional family values” in this conversation to explain that their views and a gender-oriented approach in public life do not actually contradict each other. These can be discussion platforms and round tables organized on relevant problems, such as the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. A number of organizations that have been analyzed are not “anti-gender” by their nature. They only use the mottoes or narratives that they have been fed as the situation demands. Communication with such organizations will significantly reduce the “degree” of the anti-gender rhetoric and thus reduce the societal radicalization around gender-related manipulations.

Involve individuals with a high level of public trust in these communications — i.e. those people whom the society has “granted” the right to decide “what the norm is.” These can be famous Ukrainian athletes, singers, showmen, and TV presenters.

It is important that these people should speak with their audience directly through producing content, not by presenting the idea in isolation. For example, famous rapper Aliona Aliona can produce a song and film a video about something like a battle between tradition and modernity, about outdated views of “the real man” or “the real woman.” This could be done instead of formal awareness campaigns and billboards with her picture across the city with a caption “I support gender equality.”

This work should be done strategically, offering an alternative to the younger audience without attempting to change the older generation. For examples, as of now, civil society organizations hardly ever reach the audience of the social network TikTok (a resource for creating and publishing short videos from your cell phone). TikTok has the youngest audience compared to other social platforms. Almost 70% of TikTok users are people of ages 16 to 24. At the same time, the platform already has its young leaders and opinion leaders. It is a good idea to partner with them and make content together, turn them into carriers of values, respect for human rights and gender equality. One such idea may be a school of human rights for TikTok bloggers, aiming at eventual creation of an awareness campaign.

