



KAPITEL 11 / CHAPTER 11 ¹¹
**GENDER ASPECTS OF WOMEN'S SELF-REALIZATION IN
CONTEMPORARY CONDITIONS**

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At the current stage of societal development, the entrepreneurial activity of Ukrainian women remains significantly lower than that of men; however, it possesses considerable potential for further growth. Public attitudes toward women's economic and social engagement are gradually changing, and each year the proportion of women involved in entrepreneurship steadily increases. Numerous studies and statistical indicators reveal persistent gender inequality in entrepreneurial, social, and political spheres. Certain cultural and mental constructs, gender stereotypes, and traditional norms are frequently used to explain the differences observed among male and female entrepreneurs, politicians, and managers at various levels and across different spheres of activity.

In society, men and women obtain fundamentally different statuses shaped by the peculiarities of social functioning and development. A persistent differentiation between so-called "male" and "female" social roles still exists, similarly to the behavioral distinctions that manifest across multiple fields, including entrepreneurship.

Traditional upbringing and long-standing social norms have entrenched stereotypical beliefs such as "men cannot perform women's work," "a woman's place is in the family rather than at work," and "women are unsuited for leadership positions." These represent only a fraction of the stereotypes within which more than one generation has matured. Although gender stereotypes have gradually weakened over time, their influence on opportunities for professional self-realization remains substantial. Promoting gender equality is therefore one of the essential prerequisites for the development of Ukrainian society.

Contemporary academic literature contains numerous works dedicated to issues of gender equality and gender stereotypes. The study of male and female entrepreneurship is of particular relevance, as transformations in gender ideals have

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contributed to the emergence of gender segregation-manifested as unequal representation of men and women in various socio-economic spheres. Empirical research demonstrates that ensuring gender equality enhances the resilience and adaptability of economies at all levels.

Comparative analyses of age- and gender-related differences in entrepreneurial motivation indicate that the inclination to start one's own business is more characteristic of men, of individuals in their most active working years, and of younger cohorts. Consequently, it is appropriate to apply a differentiated approach to stimulating economic activity among citizens.

Women perceive entrepreneurship not only as a financial support mechanism but also as an opportunity for internal personal development. Their socio-psychological strengths include the ability to generate innovative ideas under non-standard conditions, demonstrate intuition, flexibility, and empathy. In their professional activities, they are drawn to communicative and emotional factors, self-affirmation, and self-actualization. Women are often willing to work for lower wages while still recognizing the significance of their work and demonstrating loyalty both to the collective and to their chosen field. Motivations encouraging women to engage in economic activity include the pursuit of self-realization, the desire to engage in meaningful work, reluctance to work under external supervision, and an aspiration to ensure a decent standard of living.

Many Ukrainian and international scholars have addressed questions of self-realization and gender equality. Representatives of the humanistic school of management - A. Maslow, F. Perls, W. Reich, C. Rogers, K. Horney, among others, have contributed significantly to defining the conceptual essence of "self-realization." Their theories share a common understanding of the individual as a healthy, active being with inherent capacities for self-assertion, self-actualization, authenticity, maturity, and other manifestations of striving toward goal achievement.

Research on the theoretical and practical dimensions of professional self-realization under market conditions is reflected in the works of numerous Ukrainian scholars. Analyses of contemporary scientific approaches to the impact of self-



realization on work motivation and to the use of self-realization mechanisms in enhancing employees' potential for achieving personal and professional goals show that reevaluating the role of the individual in social production broadens the range of influences on productivity. This fosters the development of a new type of employee - one capable of mobilizing personal resources and identifying motivational levers needed to achieve desired objectives. Consequently, professional self-realization represents a domain of personal self-realization associated with the fulfillment of needs for self-respect, self-sufficiency, self-expression, and personal growth.

Despite varying approaches to defining the concept, scholars converge in understanding self-realization as a process through which an individual's essential capabilities are revealed in activity. Self-realization is understood as the development of personal qualities across the life course, enabling individuals to change statuses, roles, and types of activity in accordance with their abilities, talents, and potential. This process is continuous rather than episodic; it assumes ongoing movement toward the realization of new opportunities, the attainment of a level of development that allows an individual to consciously regulate the course of life, to determine methods for solving challenges, and to shape the meaningful content of events that enrich both personal and professional experience [1,2].

Professional realization is closely intertwined with personal self-realization, as it requires independence in the selection of goals, planning, organization, and regulation of one's own activity; freedom of choice regarding decisions and courses of action; and the ability to self-regulate. It also involves creativity and non-standard approaches combined with responsibility for the results of one's work. Professionalism in activity is a systemic quality of a worker that reflects high qualification and competence, a diversity of effective professional skills, and mastery of contemporary methods for solving professional tasks, enabling the performance of work with high productivity.

V. Hupalovska notes that "women who have achieved an optimal level of professional self-realization are more independent in their thoughts, judgments, and actions; they are decisive, capable of making decisions and taking responsibility for them"[3].



N. Hliebova addresses issues of women's self-realization in wartime conditions. Many women were forced to change professions or adapt their skills to new types of work, including those connected with defense and humanitarian assistance [4]. War has intensified traditional caregiving roles but has also required women to assume increased responsibilities for their families and communities under conditions of resource scarcity and security threats. A significant number of women have become active participants in volunteer initiatives or military service—new forms of self-realization that simultaneously contribute to national resilience and security.

Despite notable progress, women continue to face a range of wartime challenges, including psychological trauma, economic hardship, loss of loved ones, discrimination, and persistent gender stereotypes that hinder their self-realization.

I. Tyshchenko highlights the distinctive features of self-realization among mature women in professional life, emphasizing the re-evaluation of women's roles in society, the transition from reproductive functions to professional engagement, and the search for new meanings after completing certain life stages (such as child-rearing) [5,6]. Self-realization is conceptualized as reaching “acme” the pinnacle of professional and personal development—characterized not merely by functioning but by continuous growth, mastery, and awareness of one's potential.

The ability to combine professional and family roles without significant psychological discomfort depends greatly on social support. It serves as one of the central coping resources that helps maintain subjective well-being. Social support positively influences women's capacity for self-realization both in the family and in the professional sphere and minimizes the negative effects of stressors and role conflicts [7].

The increasing involvement of women in entrepreneurial activity underscores the relevance of socio-psychological research on women's entrepreneurship. Currently, there is a notable absence of studies offering comparative analyses of socio-psychological characteristics of male and female entrepreneurs. A theoretical examination of gender studies conducted by contemporary Ukrainian and international scholars reveals a wide variety of approaches and research traditions concerning the



activities of men and women, the relationships between them, and the socio-cultural spaces they inhabit-spaces that demonstrate both similarities and profound differences.

The concept of gender encompasses socially constructed characteristics attributed to men and women, in contrast to biologically determined ones. Thus, gender is understood as a “socio-cultural sex,” emphasizing the social nature of inequality between men and women-an inequality that changes over time in response to societal and cultural transformations.

Two dominant approaches are used today to compare men and women: the biological and the socio-cultural. The biological approach highlights differences in hormonal profiles, the functioning of the central nervous system, and physical constitution. In contrast, the socio-cultural approach explains how society assigns roles to each gender and prescribes corresponding behavioral patterns; individuals must conform to these expectations to be accepted by a given community, often modifying or regulating their own behavior accordingly. The study of gender-specific characteristics in professional activity therefore remains highly relevant to the scientific community [8].

Professional employment is one of the key domains of human life. However, the distribution of women and men across the economy remains uneven. A considerable number of occupational fields have traditionally been perceived as “female” or “male.” Consequently, the objective of the research is to define the concept of women’s professional self-realization while taking age and gender aspects into account, and to identify the specific features of women’s self-realization in both professional and public activity.

Ukraine has become the first country to develop a Gender Equality Index under wartime conditions, analyzing six key domains: work, money, knowledge, time, power, and health. The Index measures gender disparities on a 100-point scale, where 100 represents complete gender equality.

Ukraine ranks 20th among 27 EU countries by overall score, outperforming Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Slovakia, Greece, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania. According to the 2024 European Gender Equality Index Report, Ukraine-



with a score of 61.4-maintains its 20th-place position among 28 countries (Fig. 1).

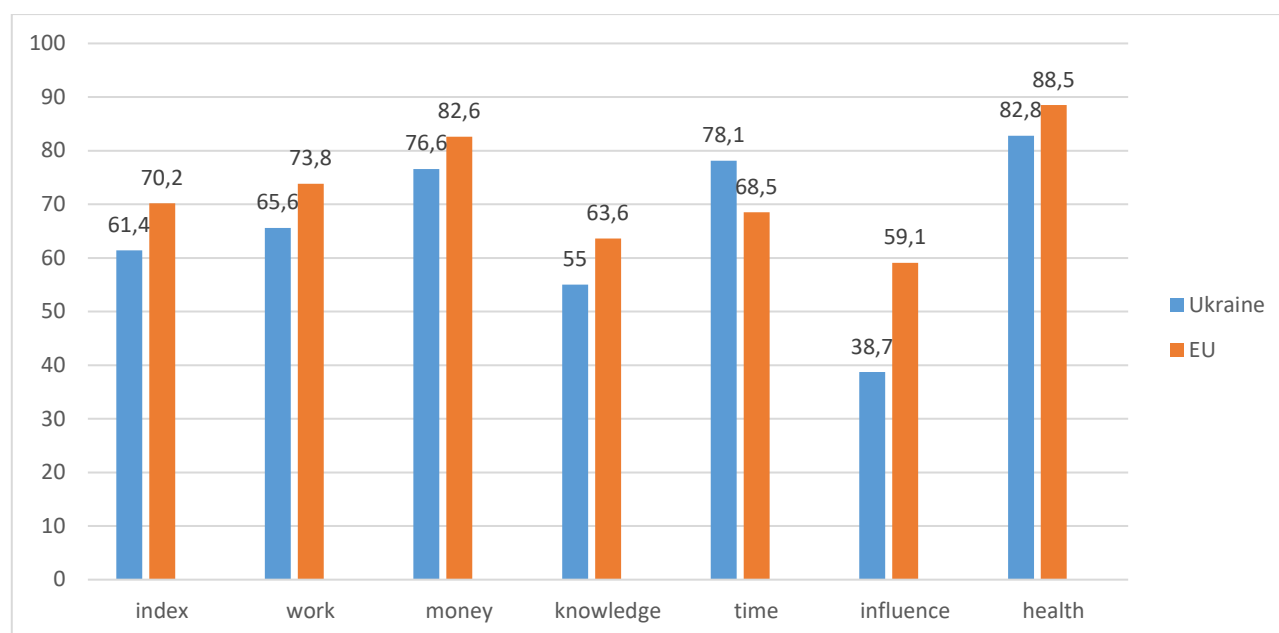


Fig. 1 - Values of the components of the Gender Equality Index in Ukraine and the EU, 2023

The Index provides a comprehensive picture of major spheres of societal life and offers insight into the underlying structures of European gender-equality policy. Euro-integration reforms in Ukraine increasingly address human rights and gender equality, and adopting the Index methodology allows Ukraine not only to respond proactively to new EU requirements but also to understand the criteria by which gender equality is assessed. Consequently, national policymakers can apply analytical approaches consistent with EU standards and evaluation practices.

Ukraine’s performance does not differ radically from the European average but displays significant discrepancies across specific domains. The domain of power exhibits the greatest inequality, although it has shown the most progress over the last decade. Women remain underrepresented in leadership positions in politics, business, and decision-making structures. The domain of time is also highly unequal due to the disproportionate burden of unpaid labor. Ukraine even exceeds the EU average in this domain because of the exceptionally high involvement of both women and men in volunteer and charitable activities, especially during wartime.

The knowledge domain shows substantial gender disparities. Ukraine continues



to exhibit strong gender segregation in educational specialization: women dominate fields such as education and healthcare, whereas men remain prevalent in technical disciplines. Although this domain has shown considerable improvement over the last decade, the gender gap remains pronounced.

Despite high levels of educational attainment, women remain more economically vulnerable than men. The gender wage gap persists, and women have more limited access to highly paid jobs. Data show that a larger proportion of women than men report lacking sufficient financial resources to cover basic needs.

Based on the conducted analysis, several conclusions can be drawn:

- Ukraine's results indicate that the country shares many of the values and challenges related to gender equality with Europe, showing that Ukraine is not an outlier within the European context;

- The full-scale war has exacerbated existing inequalities while simultaneously creating new opportunities, particularly in volunteerism and women's involvement in traditionally "male" sectors;

- Calculating the Gender Equality Index represents an essential step in Ukraine's European integration, contributing to the alignment of national policies with European standards.

One of these is the implementation of gender quotas not only in electoral processes, but also in the formation of the Cabinet of Ministers, appointments to key state positions, and supervisory boards of state-owned enterprises. Additionally, a national mentorship and training program for women aspiring to leadership roles in public administration and the private sector should be developed.

To reduce the gender wage gap, it is recommended to conduct a comprehensive audit of salaries in the public sector and to encourage private businesses to adopt transparent pay structures based on the principle of "equal pay for work of equal value."

Another important aspect of gender policy is expanding access to affordable and high-quality childcare services and eldercare facilities, enabling women-who predominantly bear responsibility for caregiving-to participate more fully in the labor market.



Support for women’s entrepreneurship should be strengthened by introducing specialized financial programs and microcredit opportunities for female-owned businesses affected by the war, including those operated by internally displaced women.

Regarding the domains of time and health, it is crucial to promote the institution of paternity leave, fostering a culture in which childcare is recognized as a shared responsibility of both parents. Equally important is providing psychological support that accounts for the specific mental health and rehabilitation needs of women and men affected by the war.

The situation concerning the gender distribution of private entrepreneurs (FOP) in Ukraine in 2024 illustrates not merely a statistical shift but a fundamental structural transformation in the Ukrainian economy and society. The key conclusion is that 2024 marked a historical turning point: Ukrainian women have emerged as the dominant force in small-scale entrepreneurship, representing a societal adaptation to the challenges of full-scale war. Women registered approximately 61% of all new private entrepreneurs (Fig. 2.) - the highest proportion ever recorded in Ukraine

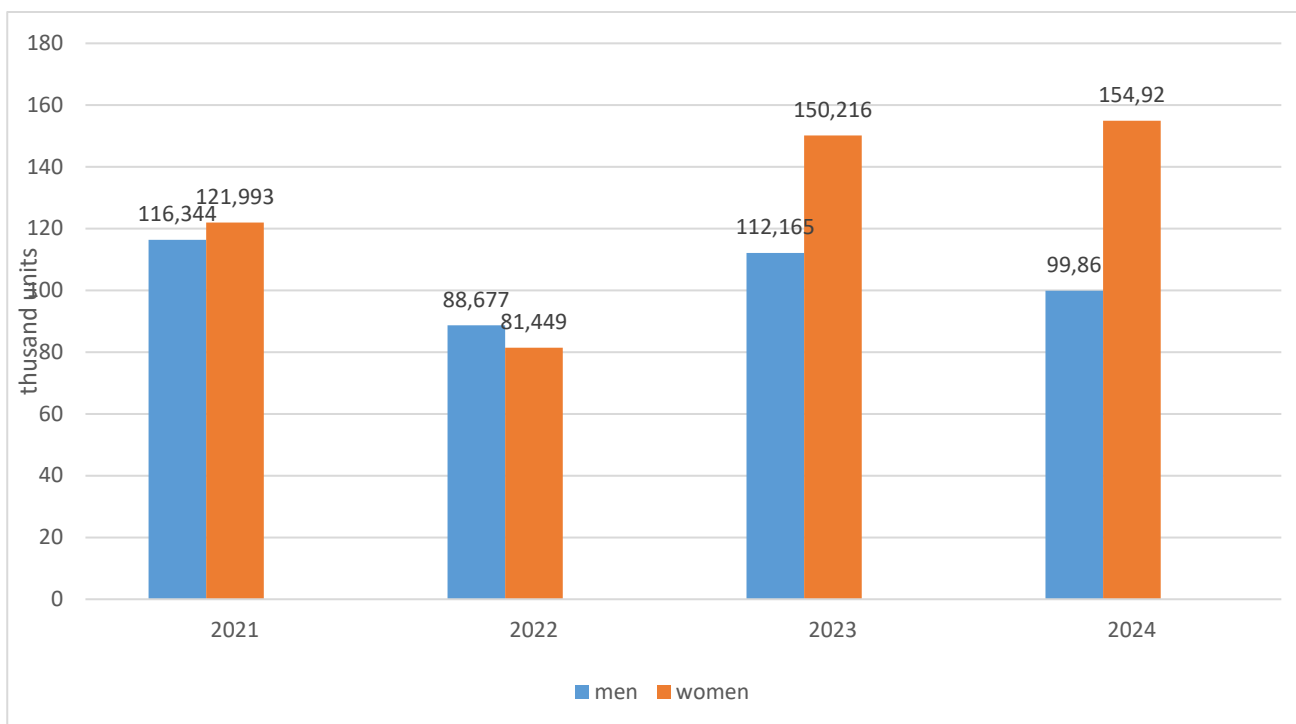


Fig. 2 - Gender dynamics of sole proprietor registrations in Ukraine in 2021-2024



The overall share of women among all active private entrepreneurs reached nearly 50%, indicating a rapid movement toward gender parity in the entrepreneurial sector.

By the end of 2024, approximately 2.3 million active private entrepreneurs operated in Ukraine, of which 1.1 million were owned by women. Sectoral analysis shows that women primarily establish businesses in retail, personal services, education, healthcare, and consulting - fields requiring relatively low startup capital and allowing flexible work arrangements. Men remain dominant in construction, logistics, and industrial production.

The gender distribution of private entrepreneurs in 2024 reflects the phenomenon of “economic resilience through women’s entrepreneurship.” Ukrainian women are not merely adapting to extreme circumstances - they are actively shaping the new economic reality of the country and have become a key driver of small-business sustainability during wartime.

The issue of women’s professional self-realization has emerged in Ukrainian academic discourse only in recent decades, reflecting global transformations in gender norms. Despite persistent gender differences in career development, an increasing number of women are rejecting traditional stereotypes and asserting their personal and professional agency. Self-realization in the professional sphere is a key determinant of subjective well-being and psychological health. Understanding the multidimensional nature of women’s professional self-realization is essential for dismantling destructive gender norms and overcoming gender segregation.