NatAlli
Regenerative Alliances



Challenges and Opportunities faced by Highly Educated Ukrainian Women in the Crisis

Analysing Challenges and Opportunities in the Entrepreneurial and Intrapreneurial Context of the Crisis

www.NatAlli.eu

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01

The NatAlli Project

01 | The NatAlli Project

1.1 Executive Summary

The NatAlli project, funded by the European Union, aims to empower highly educated Ukrainian women to become successful entrepreneurs and innovators, contributing to the regeneration of economies and societies during and after crises in Europe. This report presents part of the findings of the Research Work Package (WP2), which employs a foresight methodology to develop strategies for mentoring the next generation of women entrepreneurs and innovators.

The report begins by introducing the NatAlli project and its objectives, followed by an analysis of key trends and drivers shaping Europe's future. The core of the research focuses on a qualitative study involving interviews with highly educated Ukrainian women, external stakeholders, and mentors, exploring the challenges and opportunities faced by highly educated Ukrainian women in entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial contexts during the current crisis.

Our findings reveal the unique challenges encountered by highly educated Ukrainian women, including language barriers, cultural differences, and the need for professional network rebuilding. The report also highlights the various resources available to support these women, such as governmental support, integration courses, and support from individuals.

Furthermore, the study identifies significant opportunities for highly educated Ukrainian women to contribute to their host societies and economies. Their diverse skill sets, resilience, and innovative thinking position them as valuable assets in driving economic growth and social progress.

The report concludes with a future outlook, examining the women's perspectives on their next steps and potential long-term residence plans. This comprehensive analysis provides crucial insights for developing effective mentoring strategies and support systems to empower highly educated Ukrainian women as key contributors to Europe's economic and social regeneration.

1.2 Project Background

Crises are harmful situations that endanger individuals, organisations, communities, or cultures and need immediate attention and mitigation by leaders[1]. There is a need to discover how crises influence our perspectives, productivity, priorities, mental states, and working situations[2]. By noticing changes, we will be more open to comprehending changes that others confront, allowing us to jointly recognise and solve unforeseen obstacles and

[1] (Boin et al., 2016)

[2] (Cameron et al., 2021)

become more resilient in the future. There are opportunities to change and do things differently than they have been done since some social, economic, and political models have proven extreme vulnerability and collapse against crisis and disruptive changes[3].

Situations of disruptive changes and crises are recurrent. Be it by social distress situations, political instability, wars and pandemics, our societies have faced similar problems throughout history, and their recurrence is foreseen. Our motivation aligns with the transformative agenda of the European Commission (based on the COVID-19 and Ukrainian crises) towards a more digital and more resilient Europe[4].

Due to the Ukrainian crisis, the data from February 2023 shows that there are 8,087,952 Ukrainian refugees across Europe, and the majority of refugees tend to be highly educated women[5]. Women's voices and perspectives are often marginalised during crises, and they may face barriers to participating in decision-making processes. A priority for the mentoring program should be to help women develop the skills and confidence to advocate for their rights and take on leadership roles in their communities. In these situations, mentoring tends to be essential to coping with situations and their consequences[6] to rebuild and reshape economies. Mentorship in this area may be particularly beneficial to women as they manage the psychological, socio-emotional, and professional problems that come with a crisis[6].

While some Ukrainian women return to Ukraine, others are willing to stay in EU countries[5]. This, on one side, creates the necessity for integrating people into the European Union, and another - supporting Ukraine in the crises by creating a mentoring programme for highly educated Ukrainian women. HEIs, Hubs, and Start-up Centres will offer the NatAlli mentoring programme in the form of lifelong learning offers. With this programme, the NatAlli Platform will act as the Launch Pad for Mentoring and training these women, regardless of whether they have migrated to establish in new host countries or are willing to return to Ukraine or stay in Ukraine. The NatAlli project will facilitate the development of the next generation of women entrepreneurs and innovators fully capable of influencing and contributing to the regeneration process of their economies and societies during and after a crisis.

[3] (Santana-Valencia & Chávez-Melo, 2022)
[4] (European Commission, 2021)
[5] (OECD, n.d.)
[6] (Lasater et al., 2021)

The project is led by FH Münster University of Applied Sciences (Germany) and includes a high-profile **consortium** composed of a further six partners from four different countries:

- Momentum Marketing Services – Momentum (Ireland)
- University Industry Innovation Network BV - UIIN (The Netherlands)
- University of Münster – Uni Münster (Germany)
- Impact Hub Amsterdam BV – IHA (The Netherlands)
- Charitable Organization International Charitable Fund Impact Hub Odessa – IHO (Ukraine)
- International European University – IEU (Ukraine)

Management and coordination of the project NatAlli is crucial to ensure effectiveness and efficiency, by guaranteeing that goals and expected results are known to all parties involved, that tasks and responsibilities are clearly defined and efficiently shared and assigned among partners, and that resources are adequately allocated, that any setback is adequately dealt with, that outcomes are delivered and project's objectives are ultimately met.

1.3 Objectives

NatAlli aims to:

- Help identify and understand the challenges and opportunities highly educated Ukrainian women face in the crises.

- Identify fundamental topics that need to be taught as part of mentoring to guide and support women in their entrepreneurship/intrapreneurship, focusing on specific issues that each mentor needs to develop or improve upon.

- Promote the skills of mentors in a holistic way to replicate this effect and impact on women entrepreneurs/intrapreneurs.

- Stimulate collaboration, interdisciplinarity and innovation by bringing together various stakeholders in the innovation ecosystem, including highly educated Ukrainian women, HEIs, and Hubs.

- Harness the innovative and entrepreneurial potential of women by guiding them through mentoring, including them in relevant networks, provide all necessary tools to become agents of regeneration of their economy and society.

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Key Trends and Drivers Shaping Europe

2.1 Background Information

The crisis in Ukraine provides a powerful background for considering the challenges of mentoring in periods of crisis. To fully understand the implications of the current situation, it is essential to understand its historical context and how it has evolved to affect the professional and personal lives of individuals within the country.

| Historical Background and Current Situation

The crisis in Ukraine, intensifying significantly in 2021 and escalating in 2022, marks a build-up in long-standing tensions between the two nations. This conflict, rooted in historical disputes and geopolitical ambitions, witnessed a dramatic turn with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022[7]. According to the UN, the war has displaced over thirteen million people, a third of Ukraine's prewar population, with over eight million refugees living in neighbouring countries. This had a significant impact on all aspects of Ukrainian society, including the labour market, the education system, and opportunities for professional development[8].

| Political and Economic Ramifications

The conflict in Ukraine has had far-reaching economic and political consequences for Europe. Economically, the war has disrupted energy supplies, leading to higher prices and prompting European countries to seek alternatives to Russian gas and oil[9]. Politically, the situation has strained relations within the European Union (EU), challenging its unity as member states navigate diverse perspectives and pressures. Moreover, the need for increased defence spending has become a priority, reinforcing NATO's role in European security[10]. These shifts reflect a larger revaluation of Europe's political and economic strategies in response to the conflict.[11]

| Societal Impact

The ongoing crisis in Ukraine has significantly affected people's lives across Europe. Many Ukrainians have had to leave their homes, seeking safety in other countries. This has led to a large number of refugees moving into European communities, which has increased the need for basic services like housing, schools, and medical care[12]. These issues are particularly pressing for women and children who comprise a large proportion of the displaced population. Women and girls have been disproportionately affected by the crisis,

[7] (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023)
[8] (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2023)
[9] (Jenkins, 2023)
[10] (CSIS, 2023)
[11] (European Union External Action Service, 2023)
[12] (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023)

heightening their risk of gender-based violence and other forms of exploitation.[13]
European countries are working to help these new arrivals find places to live and work, and to help children go to school. At the same time, the communities across Europe have come together to offer support, with many individuals volunteering to help the newcomers. There have been many discussions and events to show support for Ukraine and to think about ways to make peace and help those in need.[14]

2.2 Demographic Dynamics in Europe

Europe's demographic landscape is undergoing significant changes, characterised by several key trends that have major implications for the continent's future. This section looks at ageing, fertility and population growth, urbanisation trends and migration flow to provide a comprehensive overview of Europe's demographic dynamics.

Aging Population and low fertility rates

The ageing population trend in Europe is characterised by an increasing share of individuals aged 65 and over, projected to rise from around 20% to approximately 30% by 2050. This demographic shift, driven by longer life expectancies and falling birth rates, presents multifaceted challenges for public pension schemes, healthcare services, and labour market dynamics[15].
Life expectancy in Europe has shown resilience despite challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Following a decline in 2020 due to higher mortality rates from the pandemic, life expectancy improved in 2021 but did not fully recover to pre-pandemic levels. Women generally live longer than men, with women's life expectancy estimated at 82.8 years and men's at 77.2 years in 2021. Since 2002, life expectancy in the EU has increased by 2.5 years overall, with women gaining 2.0 years and men gaining 2.9 years. There are notable differences between countries, with Spain, Sweden, and Italy having the highest life expectancies, while Bulgaria, Romania, and Latvia have the lowest. Within countries, regional disparities are also significant, with Madrid in Spain having the highest life expectancy at 84.76 years and Ceuta having the lowest (79.71) . These variations reflect the diverse factors influencing life expectancy, including healthcare access and socio-economic conditions across Europe[16].
Moreover, fertility rates have fallen below replacement levels across the continent, with significant implications for population growth and structure. The ongoing low fertility rates, influenced by factors such as economic instability, changing social values and increasing female labour force participation, contribute to a potential demographic decline[9].

[13] (UN Women, 2022)
[14] (Crisis Group, 2022)
[15] (European Commission, 2023)
[16] (European Commission, 2023)

| The Rise of Smaller Households

The decline in average household size in Europe reflects wider societal changes, including increasing levels of individualism and improved living standards. Key factors contributing to this trend include an ageing population, with older adults more likely to live alone, and younger generations delaying family formation for various socio-economic reasons. This demographic change has important implications for housing demand, urban development and social policies. Data from Eurostat highlight this trend in European countries, while analysis from the European Commission examines the socio-economic drivers and consequences. These changes require adaptable policy responses to ensure sustainable development and social welfare.[9]

It's important to note that demographic trends do not affect every country and region in the same way. While the European population ages, demographic developments are not uniform, with considerable variations both between and within individual EU Member States. Some Eastern EU Member States have experienced acute population decline, primarily due to high levels of emigration and internal migration from rural to urban areas in search of better work, education, and training opportunities. These demographic differences can exacerbate existing economic, social, and territorial inequalities, potentially leading to political divides[10].

2.3 Labour Market Evolution

The European labour market is experiencing transformations, driven by several interrelated factors that reshape employment landscapes, worker demographics, and job structures. This section delves into the key drivers behind these changes, their implications, and how stakeholders are adapting.

| Technological Advancement

The integration of digital technologies, automation, and artificial intelligence in various industries has both displaced traditional jobs and created new employment opportunities. This dual impact necessitates a workforce skilled in digital competencies, alongside a continuous need for upskilling and reskilling programs to keep pace with technological progress. Europe's labour market is quite varied, with each local area having its own unique job scene and level of activity. The introduction of automation and artificial intelligence (AI) plays a key role and could change the types of jobs and skills needed across almost 1,100 different areas in the EU, the UK, and Switzerland. The speed at which automation and AI are adopted could increase quickly because of events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to changes in how work is organised, and the technologies used.[17]

[17] (McKinsey, 2020)

Aging Workforce

The ageing population significantly influences labour market dynamics, with a growing share of older employees. This demographic trend challenges the sustainability of pension systems and necessitates policies to encourage longer working lives, such as flexible working arrangements and age-friendly workplaces. Furthermore, the demand for skilled workers is expected to intensify, especially in growing sectors and regions. This demographic shift presents a dual challenge: managing the potential job displacement caused by automation and addressing the scarcity of skilled labour to support economic growth. Automation, assuming a midpoint scenario, could affect 22% of work activities by 2030, equivalent to 53 million jobs, underscoring the need for significant workforce transitions and skill development initiatives.[11]

Globalisation and Geographic Concentration

Employment growth in Europe has shown an increasing concentration in dynamic cities like Amsterdam, Copenhagen, London, Madrid, Munich, and Paris. These cities, which constitute about 20% of Europe's population, have contributed disproportionately to the continent's GDP growth, net job creation, and population increase from 2007 to 2018. In contrast, shrinking regions, particularly in Eastern and Southern Europe, face declining workforces and economic challenges, highlighting a growing divide that could exacerbate regional disparities.

Nevertheless, the increasing interconnectedness of global economies affects European labour markets through the relocation of manufacturing to countries with lower labour costs and the influx of foreign labour. These dynamics prompt a shift towards a service-oriented economy and necessitate measures to ensure that workers displaced by these trends can transition to new sectors[18].

Policy Responses and Future Directions

European policymakers and stakeholders are actively developing strategies to navigate these labour market transitions. To navigate these labour market evolutions, European governments, businesses, and individuals must collaborate to develop effective strategies that address skills shortages, improve access to jobs, especially in dynamic growth hubs, and support regions facing economic decline or workforce shrinkage. Enhancing labour participation and facilitating occupational and geographic mobility will be key to aligning Europe's labour market with future economic and technological realities.[12]

[18] (McKinsey, 2020)

2.4 Technological Innovations and Societal Shifts

This section delves into the impacts of digital transformation, highlighting how it reshapes industries, communication, and individual behaviours. We explore the role of social media in influencing social norms and political landscapes, the evolving demands on education and skill development in response to technological advances, and the contributions of technology to environmental sustainability. These shifts represent both opportunities and challenges, highlighting the need for a thoughtful approach to technology.

| Digital Transformation

The digital transformation reshapes society and the economy. This revolution, driven by the advancement of digital technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and blockchain, is changing how businesses operate and how people interact daily. This underscores a significant change in digital consumer behaviour in Europe, magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a net gain of approximately 100 million digital users since 2019. This spans across various industries, with banking, grocery, and healthcare experiencing the most considerable gains in digitally interactive consumers. The digital adoption landscape is complex and varies by country, often correlating with the nation's per capita GDP, indicating that higher-income countries have seen the most substantial increases in digital adoption. This trend shows a change towards a more digital future, with European consumers not only increasing their digital engagements but also elevating their expectations for digital experiences[19].

Economically, it's enabling more efficient processes and creating new markets and opportunities, particularly in the fields of e-commerce, digital finance, and telework[20]. Socially, digital connectivity is enhancing access to information and services, though it also raises questions about digital divides and the need for digital literacy across all population segments.[21]

| Social media and Communication

Social media platforms have significantly impacted social norms, politics, and individual behaviours, fostering unprecedented connectivity and information exchange. They have redefined how people communicate, influence, and relate to one another, enabling vibrant social interactions and communities around shared interests[22]. Politically, social media has become a powerful tool for mobilisation, advocacy, and the spread of information, though it also presents challenges related to misinformation, privacy, and digital manipulation[23].

[19] (McKinsey, 2022)
[20] (World Economic Forum, 2022)
[21] (OECD, 2019)
[22] (Kumar, 2023)
[23] (European Commission, 2020)

| Education and Skill Development

The demands for education and skill development are rapidly evolving in our tech-driven world. Digital skills are becoming foundational, alongside soft skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and adaptability. The rise of online learning platforms and digital educational tools is transforming traditional educational paradigms, offering learning opportunities beyond conventional classroom settings[24]. This shift demands a reimagining of education systems to prepare individuals for the future of work and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to develop relevant skills in the digital age[25].
Significant sectoral variations in digital adoption were noted, with industries like banking and telecommunications leading the pack, while sectors reliant on in-person interactions prior to the pandemic, such as education and healthcare, faced more significant challenges in maintaining digital engagement levels. The report indicates a strong correlation between digital adoption levels and demographic factors, including age, urban residence, education, and income, underscoring the need for targeted digital skill development initiatives to ensure equitable access to digital opportunities[26].

| Environmental Sustainability

Technological innovations play a critical role in addressing climate change and environmental challenges. Renewable energy technologies, smart grids, and energy-efficient solutions are essential in the transition towards a more sustainable and lower-carbon economy[27]. Additionally, digital tools and platforms are enhancing environmental monitoring, conservation efforts, and public engagement in sustainability practices. However, the environmental impact of technology itself, including e-waste and the energy consumption of digital infrastructures, calls for sustainable design and responsible consumption patterns to ensure that technological progress contributes positively to global environmental goals[28].

2.5 Navigating through Crises

The decade leading up to 2020 saw Europe grappling with a series of crises that shaped its labour markets, economies, and societies in profound ways. The COVID-19 pandemic, arriving on the heels of these challenges, further tested the resilience of European countries, highlighting vulnerabilities but also demonstrating an enduring capacity for adaptation and recovery.

[24] (UNESCO, 2023)
[25] (Siddique, 2023)
[26] (McKinsey, 2022)
[27] (Matos et al., 2022)
[28] (Enano, 2023)

European Debt Crisis

The Eurozone Sovereign Debt Crisis, unfolding from 2009 into the early 2010s, was marked by several eurozone member states struggling to refinance their government debt without external aid. Countries like Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Spain, and Cyprus were central to the crisis, revealing structural issues within the Eurozone, such as imbalanced capital flows and the lack of a policy framework among member states. The crisis was accelerated by the global financial meltdown of 2007–2008, which dried up liquidity and exposed deficits and large public debts in these countries. The European Central Bank (ECB), along with the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), intervened with bailout packages for the affected countries and introduced measures like the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) and the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) to stabilise the situation. The Eurozone Debt Crisis significantly affected society and the labour market across Europe. The austerity measures required by the bailout agreements led to job losses, increased unemployment rates, and reduced public services, causing social distress and hardship. These economic adjustments were particularly harsh in countries like Greece, Spain, and Portugal, where unemployment rates were high, especially among the youth, leading to increased migration in search of job opportunities elsewhere.[29]

Refugee Crisis (2015-onwards)

Europe faced an unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants, primarily from war-torn Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, alongside others from Africa and the Middle East. This event marked the highest number of people seeking safety in Europe since World War II, with over 1.3 million applications for asylum in 2015. Countries in Europe had mixed reactions, with some offering help and opening their doors to refugees, while others tightened their borders and made their asylum laws stricter. This situation showed the challenge in Europe to agree on how to handle such a large number of people coming in.

The crisis had a big impact on European society and politics. It brought up concerns about security, especially after terrorist attacks, and led to increased support for political parties that did not want immigrants, highlighting the difficulties in integrating newcomers into European societies[30].

Brexit (2016-2020)

Brexit refers to the United Kingdom (UK) leaving the European Union (EU), officially happening on January 31, 2020. This followed a vote in 2016 where a slim majority of the UK public chose to leave. The lead-up to this decision was marked by increasing dissatisfaction within the UK about EU membership, focusing on issues like immigration, national sovereignty, and financial contributions to the EU. It has had profound societal impacts

[29] (European Central Bank , 2013)
[30] (European Parliament, 2017)

across the UK, affecting both the labour market and migration patterns. The decision to leave the European Union altered the dynamics of migration, leading to shifts in the workforce composition and uncertainties regarding the rights of EU nationals residing in the UK. This has influenced sectors reliant on EU migrants, bringing changes to labour availability and prompting discussions on domestic skill development and immigration policy adjustments[31].

| Covid-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic, emerging in late 2019, rapidly evolved into a global crisis with significant impacts across Europe. European countries responded with various measures, including lockdowns, to control the spread of the virus, affecting societal norms, the economy, and migration patterns. In the labour market, there were many sectors experiencing job losses, while others, particularly healthcare and digital services, saw increased demand. Additionally, the crisis exacerbated social inequalities, influencing COVID-19 outcomes and highlighting the need for a resilient healthcare and social support system. Migration patterns within Europe were also affected, with restrictions impacting the movement of people across borders, influencing both short-term mobility and longer-term migration trends. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) has been central in coordinating the continent's response[32].

2.6 The Impact of Crisis Situations on Mentoring

Crisis situations significantly alter the traditional dynamics of mentoring relationships, posing challenges but also creating opportunities for innovation and resilience. In times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or political conflicts like those in Ukraine, the nature of mentoring can and should undergo changes to adapt to new realities.

| Challenges in Mentoring During Crises

Crises can significantly disrupt traditional mentoring practices. When organisations go into emergency mode, usual patterns of communication and interaction can be disrupted, making it difficult to maintain strong links between mentors and mentees[33]. Besides logistical issues, crises often increase personal stress and economic difficulties, which can add extra strain to mentoring relationships. During such times, mentors and mentees might struggle to concentrate on their developmental goals due to urgent concerns about health, safety, and overall stability.[34]

[31] (European Parliament, 2022)
[32] (European Comission, 2021)
[33] (Bierema & Merriam, 2002)
[34] (Lu & Lin, 2021)

Opportunities for Adaptive Mentoring Approaches

Despite these challenges, crises can also serve as catalysts for innovation within mentoring programmes. For example, the shift to digital communication tools during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the potential of online platforms to support ongoing mentoring interactions even when traditional face-to-face meetings are not possible. This digital shift has not only helped sustain existing mentoring relationships but has also facilitated the creation of new ones, expanding access and inclusion by connecting individuals across greater distances and diverse backgrounds.[35] Such adaptive strategies ensure that mentoring can continue to function as a vital support system in uncertain times.

Effective Mentoring Relationships and Programs During Crises

Different practical examples show how mentoring programmes have successfully adapted to the crisis. Findings from different studies of mentoring during the COVID-19 pandemic can be synergised to address challenges and exploit opportunities. This crisis was a time of unprecedented uncertainty that had a major impact on mentoring dynamics. The studies have underscored the necessity for mentors and mentees to adapt to new challenges, emphasising transparency and the ability to reflect on changing circumstances to maintain effective mentoring relationships[36]. Moreover, in response to the pandemic, mentoring needed to swiftly adapt to remote formats to ensure continued support and development opportunities. This transition has highlighted the importance of integrating technology to maintain and enhance mentoring interactions. It is suggested that any mentorship program should incorporate a robust digital platform that facilitates reliable communication and resource sharing, ensuring the program's continuity even in the face of logistical challenges[37]. Furthermore, these studies have stressed the significance of addressing mental health and wellness within mentoring relationships, highlighting the role of mentors in providing support not just for professional but also for personal challenges faced by mentees[38].
Similarly, mentoring programs like those by the International Rescue Committee have supported refugees in integrating into new work environments and societies, recognizing the critical role of such support in successful resettlement. These programs have successfully focused on specific needs of their target audience such as language skills, professional training, and cultural integration. A mentorship program should assess and address specific local needs[39]. These examples show the versatility and importance of mentoring in times of crisis. They also highlight how mentoring can serve as a means of support, resilience building and professional development in times of adversity.

[35] (Wright et al., 2024)
[36] (Tetzlaff et al., 2022)
[37] (Kaufman et al., 2022)
[38] (UC Davis Medical Center, n.d.)
[39] (International Rescue Committee, 2021)

Long-Term Implications for Mentoring Post-Crisis

The adaptations and resilience displayed by mentoring programmes during crises have significant long-term implications for the future of mentoring. For example, the shift to virtual mentoring required by events such as the COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be sustainable and effective, potentially continuing to bridge geographical gaps and increase global connectivity between professionals after the crisis[40]. In addition, crises often require mentors to develop new skills in digital communication, crisis management and psychological support, extending their effectiveness beyond the crisis.[19] Mentoring programmes are also likely to adopt more flexible and inclusive practices, accommodating different needs and schedules to increase access for underrepresented groups.[41] Furthermore, integrating crisis preparedness into mentoring programmes can teach mentees how to navigate potential disruptions as well as career success, promoting resilience across industries[42]. Moreover, crises often lead to increased international support and collaboration, providing opportunities for mentoring relationships to cross geographical and cultural boundaries. Such collaborations can enrich the mentoring experience by providing mentees with access to a wider range of expertise, perspectives and resources. Finally, the focus on building strong professional networks during crises underscores the value of robust support systems, which are critical for long-term career success and stability.[43] These lessons from mentoring in crisis are shaping more effective, resilient and inclusive mentoring models for the future, ensuring that mentorship remains a vital tool for professional and personal development.

[40] (Kaufman et al., 2022)
[41] (Megginson, 2006)
[42] (Higgins & Kram, 2001)
[43] (Kram & Ragins, 2008)

2.7 Challenges of Women in Crisis Situations

Highly educated women face distinct challenges in crisis situations that can impact their professional and personal lives significantly. These challenges come from a combination of societal expectations, professional disruptions, and the balancing of multiple roles.

| Professional Disruptions

Economic downturns, pandemics, and other crises can lead to significant disruptions in industries heavily populated by women, such as healthcare, education, and the service sector. Research has shown that these sectors are often the most vulnerable during economic crises, exacerbating job insecurity and slowing career progression for women[44]. The loss of job stability and reduced opportunities for promotion can widen the gender pay gap and set back the professional gains made by women over the years[45].

| Increased Domestic Responsibilities

Crises often result in increased domestic responsibilities for women. With the closure of schools and childcare facilities, many women found themselves bearing additional caregiving and home-schooling duties, alongside their professional responsibilities[46]. This disproportionate increase in unpaid labour can severely limit women's availability for professional development and career advancement, perpetuating gender disparities in professional settings[47].

| Psychological Impact

The cumulative effect of managing increased work and domestic responsibilities during a crisis can lead to significant psychological distress for women. The dual burden of work and family responsibilities during crises can increase anxiety and exacerbate stress-related conditions, affecting women's mental health and overall work performance. Providing comprehensive mental health support and resources, including counselling and stress management programmes, can help alleviate some of these pressures and support women's well-being[48].

| Limited Access to Mentorship and Networks

Networking and mentorship are critical to career development, yet during crises, opportunities for face-to-face networking and mentorship diminish. The transition to remote working and the cancellation of professional meetings during the pandemic

[44] (Alon et al., 2020)
[45] (An Uneven and Gender-Unequal COVID-19 Recovery, 2021)
[46] (Center for American Progress, 2020)
[47] (Power, 2020)
[48] (Sediri et al., 2020)

disproportionately affected women, who may already face higher barriers to accessing professional networks[49]. Virtual networking and mentorship programmes can play a crucial role in bridging this gap, ensuring that women continue to gain visibility and access to career advancement opportunities during and after the crisis.

2.8 Key Takeaways

Several trends and drivers in Europe have profound impacts on the professional aspirations and personal lives of Ukrainian Women. The findings of this desk research analysis highlight several key areas that require the attention of policymakers, educators and community leaders seeking to effectively support these women.

| Increasing Access to Mentorship and Networking Opportunities

The research emphasises the critical role of mentorship and networking in enhancing the career trajectories of Ukrainian women during turbulent times. Initiatives should focus on expanding digital and face-to-face networking platforms to ensure that these women are not isolated from essential professional support systems[50].

| Supporting Work-Life Balance

Balancing professional responsibilities with personal life is significantly challenging during crises. Strategies need to be developed that focus on flexible working conditions and sufficient support for childcare, which can mitigate the impact of increased domestic responsibilities observed during such periods[51].

| Addressing Psychological Well-Being

The mental health implications of coping with the dual burden of professional and domestic roles are profound. Implementing comprehensive mental health support and resources, including counselling and stress management programmes, is critical to maintaining the well-being of these women. [52]

| Enhancing Educational and Professional Development Programs

Given the rapid changes in the labour market, particularly with the digital transformation, educational programs need to be adaptive and forward-looking, ensuring that women have the skills needed to thrive in evolving professional environments[53].

[49] (Alon et al., 2020)
[50] (Alon et al., 2020)
[51] (Center for American Progress, 2020)
[52] (Sediri et al., 2020)
[53] (McKinsey, 2020)

03

Interview Methodology and Participant Overview

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine has had a profound impact on the lives of many Ukrainians, particularly women. This chapter aims to shed light on the diverse situations faced by highly educated Ukrainian women during this challenging period. Through interviews, we have gained valuable insights into their factors for relocating, their educational and professional background and their work and living experiences, both for those who remained in Ukraine and those who relocated to other countries.

3.1 Recruitment, Conduction and Analysis of Qualitative Interviews

| Timeframe and Recruitment

Our interview process with analysis overall spanned a period of six months, from February 7, 2024, to August 3, 2024. Participants were recruited through various channels, including professional networks, LinkedIn, and personal referrals. This multi-faceted approach allowed us to reach a diverse pool of candidates relevant to our research objectives.

| Interview Format

We employed a mixed approach to conducting interviews, utilising both online and in-person formats. Due to geographical constraints and the international nature of our participant pool, the majority of interviews were conducted online. This flexibility enabled us to include voices from various European countries without compromising the depth and quality of our conversations.

| Methodological Approach

Our research followed an inductive methodology, allowing themes and insights to emerge organically from the data. For analysis, we utilised MaxQDA, a professional software for qualitative data analysis. This tool facilitated efficient coding and helped us identify key patterns and themes across our diverse set of interviews.

| Participant Demographics

For our research purposes, we conducted qualitative interviews with three relevant target groups: Highly educated Ukrainian Women, External Stakeholders and Mentors.

We interviewed a total of 36 highly educated Ukrainian women who had relocated to various European countries due to the conflict in Ukraine. These women represented a wide range of professional backgrounds, including banking, sales, marketing, human resources, psychology, law, management, physiotherapy, sociology, accounting, education, information

technology, and entrepreneurship, with some holding positions as founders and CEOs. The participants were residing in several host countries across Europe, including Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, Spain, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Cyprus, Poland, Croatia, and Estonia. This diverse geographical spread offered insights into the varied experiences of Ukrainian women across different European contexts. Our participants fell into two main categories: those planning to return to Ukraine to support the rebuilding efforts, and those intending to build their career paths in their new host countries.

In addition to the Ukrainian women, we conducted interviews with 16 external stakeholders representing organisations from various sectors, including education, industry, and government. These interviews provided valuable perspectives on the broader ecosystem supporting Ukrainian women's integration and career development in their host countries.

Furthermore, our study included interviews with 12 mentors, recognising their crucial role in the Lifelong Learning offerings of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The mentors in our study came from diverse backgrounds, including operating mentors from entrepreneurially-focused hubs, established women entrepreneurs and company leaders, and entrepreneurial graduate students with ventures from HEI partner projects.

This comprehensive approach to participant selection has provided us with a rich dataset, offering insights into the experiences, challenges, and aspirations of highly educated Ukrainian women in various European contexts, as well as the support systems and opportunities available to them as they navigate their careers in new environments or prepare to contribute to Ukraine's rebuilding efforts.

3.2 Factors for Leaving Ukraine and Relocating

The highly educated Ukrainian women interviewed within the NatAlli project cited several compelling reasons for leaving their homeland and relocating to other countries during the ongoing war with Russia.

The primary driving force behind their decision was the pervasive sense of insecurity and danger posed by the conflict raging within Ukraine's borders. By relocating to another country they were seeking safety and security.
Foremost, the women expressed an overwhelming desire to escape the physical and emotional toll of living and working amidst the chaos and violence of war. The constant threat of bombardment and the ever-present fear of losing their lives or those of their loved ones proved too much to bear. For many, the decision to flee was driven by their wish to protect their children from the traumatic effects of war.

Numerous Ukrainian women had already endured the hardships of displacement, having been forced to relocate multiple times within Ukraine due to the conflict in the eastern regions, such as Donetsk, which began in 2014. As the current war escalated and engulfed various regions across the country, these women ultimately concluded that remaining within Ukraine's borders was no longer a viable option.

Another significant factor influencing the decision to relocate was the presence of friends, family members, or other relatives already residing in potential host countries. These existing connections offered the promise of assistance, accommodation, and a support system upon arrival, providing a crucial lifeline during the upheaval of displacement.

Some women found themselves outside of Ukraine when the war erupted, and the deteriorating situation within the country led them to abandon plans of returning, opting instead to seek refuge elsewhere.

Beyond the immediate safety concerns, the women also cited economic factors as motivators for relocation. The war had severely disrupted employment opportunities within Ukraine, prompting many to seek work and financial stability in other nations.

The specific choice of destination country was influenced by a variety of factors, including job prospects, educational opportunities for children, political stability, personal experiences or connections with the host country, and the presence of existing social networks. The women interviewed for the NatAlli project relocated to several different EU countries, namely Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, UK, Poland, Denmark, Spain, Portugal, Cyprus, Croatia and Estonia.

Overall, the decision to leave Ukraine and resettle elsewhere was a complex and deeply personal one, driven by a confluence of factors ranging from first and foremost, existential threats to practical considerations.

3.3 Educational Background

The interviews conducted with the highly educated Ukrainian women revealed a remarkable level of academic achievement across various disciplines. These women have pursued higher education with dedication, often obtaining multiple diplomas, university degrees, master's degrees, and even doctoral degrees.

The educational backgrounds of the interviewed women span a wide range of fields, reflecting their diverse interests and intellectual pursuits. Some of the areas of study include law, psychology, engineering, philology, social work, script writing and computer science.

This diverse range of educational backgrounds highlights the intellectual curiosity and ambition of these highly educated Ukrainian women. Their academic achievements not only reflect their dedication to personal growth but also their potential to contribute significantly to their respective fields and society as a whole.

3.4 Professional Background

The interviews conducted with highly educated Ukrainian women revealed a diverse range of professional backgrounds and entrepreneurial endeavours. These women have ventured into various fields, showcasing their expertise, creativity, and determination.

Many of the interviewed women have established their own businesses, demonstrating their entrepreneurial spirit. Some have opened retail shops, catering to different markets such as clothing, menstrual products, and footwear. Others have founded charitable foundations, rental services, and booking platforms, addressing specific needs within their communities.
In addition to their entrepreneurial ventures, the interviewed women possess a wealth of professional experience across various sectors. Some have worked as accountants, project managers, journalists, technical writers, web programmers, marketing managers, or consultants.

These diverse professional backgrounds highlight the versatility and adaptability of highly educated Ukrainian women as they have acquired skills and knowledge in various fields, enabling them to contribute to their respective industries and communities.

3.5 Work Situation

The combination of various factors – limited local job prospects, misalignment with their areas of expertise, and restricted opportunities for career progression – creates a challenging landscape for Ukrainian women seeking fulfilling employment.

Some of the highly educated Ukrainian women have found employment opportunities in their host countries. These women have successfully navigated the challenges of relocation and have secured jobs that align with their qualifications and expertise. However, the process of integration into a new job market has not been without its obstacles, as they have had to adapt to different cultural norms, language barriers, and professional environments.
Despite the ongoing conflict, some highly educated Ukrainian women have chosen to remain in their homeland and continue their professional pursuits. They have found ways to maintain their careers, contributing to the country's economy and providing essential services to their communities.
Among the highly educated Ukrainian women interviewed, there are those who have chosen the path of entrepreneurship. These women have established their own businesses, either in Ukraine or in their host countries. However, the war has posed significant challenges for many of these entrepreneurs. Some have been forced to close their businesses due to the

conflict, while others have managed to continue operating, albeit with considerable difficulties and uncertainties.

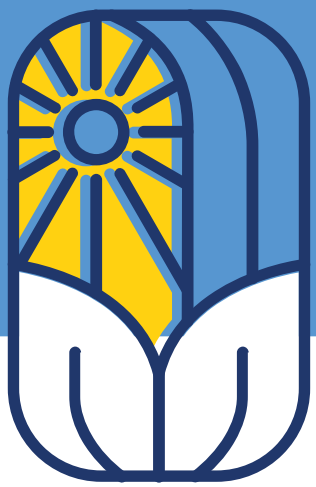
Unfortunately, many highly educated Ukrainian women have encountered significant difficulties in securing employment opportunities. One prevalent challenge is the scarcity of job opportunities within their immediate vicinity or local area. While some positions may be available, they are often located too far away, making commuting impractical or unfeasible, especially for those with family responsibilities or limited transportation options.

Furthermore, many Ukrainian women struggle to find roles that correspond to their fields of study or previous professional experiences. Despite their expertise and qualifications, the available job openings frequently fail to match their specialised backgrounds, leaving them with limited options that underutilise their skills and knowledge. Moreover, some women have expressed frustration at being offered jobs that do not match their educational levels, such as cleaning or manual labour positions. While these jobs may provide a source of income, they fail to utilise the skills and knowledge acquired through years of dedicated study and professional experience. Additionally, a significant concern for these women is the lack of opportunities for career growth and advancement. This can be particularly disheartening for highly educated and ambitious individuals seeking to continue their career trajectories in their host countries.

By understanding their diverse work situations, their needs can be better addressed and necessary resources and opportunities can be provided to help them thrive professionally, regardless of their circumstances. Addressing these barriers is crucial to empowering women, leveraging their talents, and fostering their successful integration into the workforce of their host nations.

04

Challenges of Highly Educated Ukrainian Women



Highly educated Ukrainian women, whether residing in host countries or still in Ukraine, face numerous challenges during the ongoing crisis. These challenges span various aspects of their lives, including stereotypes, bureaucracy, psychological well-being, economic stability, healthcare access, social isolation, childcare responsibilities, language barriers, cultural differences, accommodation, educational recognition, insurance, and employment opportunities. Collectively, these challenges and barriers create a complex landscape for Ukrainian women seeking to embark on entrepreneurial or intrapreneurial endeavours.

For quotes, we are using abbreviations and numbers to ensure the anonymity of our interviewees (e.g. Highly Educated Ukrainian Women, number 9: W9; Mentors, number 5: M5; External Stakeholders, number 7: E7).

| Stereotypes

Ukrainian women often encounter stereotypes and biases, leading to undervaluation of their skills and qualifications. These stereotypes can hinder their professional growth and integration into the workforce.
One prevalent stereotype is the assumption that Ukrainian women are solely reliant on social assistance provided by host countries, disregarding their educational backgrounds and professional expertise. This perception fails to acknowledge their potential contributions to the workforce and perpetuates a narrative of dependency.
Another common stereotype is the belief that Ukrainian women are suitable only for low-skilled jobs, such as cleaning or domestic work, despite their high levels of education and specialised knowledge. This stereotype dismisses their qualifications and professional experiences, limiting their opportunities for career advancement and meaningful employment.
As one interviewee shared, "Sometimes we have very strange situations. When the landlords told me when they came to this house, he told me, oh, we have Ukrainian now. You will keep, clean our house. I will pay you money. No, no, no, I don't want money. Sorry. I'm certificate specialist in Ireland. Yeah, I don't clean" (W9). This anecdote highlights the frustration and disregard faced by highly educated Ukrainian women when confronted with such stereotypical assumptions.
The impact of these stereotypes can be so profound that some Ukrainian women have expressed a reluctance to identify themselves as Ukrainian, fearing that it may lead to being perceived as pitiful or diminished in the eyes of others. One interviewee stated that she sometimes avoids introducing herself as Ukrainian to circumvent the negative stereotypes and biases associated with her nationality.
These stereotypes and biases not only undermine the professional aspirations and achievements of highly educated Ukrainian women but also hinder their successful integration into the workforce and society. Overcoming these deeply rooted stereotypes is

crucial for creating an environment that values and recognizes the skills, qualifications, and potential contributions of these women.

| Bureaucracy and Legislation

Navigating complex bureaucratic processes and legislation in host countrieses significant challenges for highly educated Ukrainian women refugees. The overwhelming amount of paperwork and unfamiliar administrative procedures can be daunting and frustrating, hindering access to essential services and opportunities.

One major hurdle is the sheer volume of documentation required for even basic tasks like renting an apartment or opening a bank account. Ukrainian women express shock at the extensive paperwork involved, which is often a stark contrast to their experiences in Ukraine. As one woman explains, "It's really hard to understand how the country works, how taxes work, how the communication system works, how the foundation system works" (W14).

The bureaucratic maze is further exacerbated by the need to repeatedly provide the same documents to different agencies, creating a sense of running in circles. A participant shared her experience, "I had to go to the social department and have support from the social department during the time when I register for the job centre, because my registration for the job centre lasted three months. They required documents again. Documents afterwards, they require the same documents they have already provided. It was like running around in a circle with these documents" (W18).

The lengthy waiting periods for processing documents and obtaining approvals add to the frustration. As one woman expressed, "In Ukraine, we are like fast workers and we maybe have less bureaucratic moments like paperwork and everything kind of faster" (W14).

The complexity of navigating unfamiliar systems and regulations is a significant barrier, as highlighted by a participant, "It was a bit stressful for me, and in general, all these systems that are more complex than what I'm used to, like going to the supermarket or the post office there, getting some papers or renting an apartment or opening a bank account. I can't say it's a barrier that I can't overcome, but it's a different algorithm. And it was a significant barrier" (W26). Experts acknowledge the bureaucratic challenges faced by refugees, with one stating, "But we are a bureaucratic country and the EU is also a bureaucratic monster. That doesn't make a lot of things any easier" (E2). Another expert pointed out the potential reluctance of governments to facilitate processes for migrants, saying, "So sometimes I have the feeling also the government is not open for that sometimes. Why would I give the chance for a migrant or what makes it easier for the migrant to have a business here" (E1).

In summary, the complex bureaucratic processes and legislation in host countries pose significant obstacles for highly educated Ukrainian women. The overwhelming paperwork, repeated document requests, lengthy waiting periods, and unfamiliar systems create frustration and hinder their ability to access essential services and opportunities, ultimately impeding their integration into the host society.

| Intransparency and Uncertainty

The lack of clear information and uncertainty surrounding their future status in host countries or Ukraine creates a sense of instability and anxiety. This pervasive sense of instability and ambiguity creates significant anxiety and hinders their ability to plan and make informed decisions about their lives.

Many relocated women initially harboured hopes of a swift return to Ukraine, but as the conflict persists, their perspectives have shifted, and the realisation of losing their homeland has taken an emotional toll, impacting their motivation and overall well-being.

The uncertainty extends to various aspects of their lives in the host countries. For instance, they often lack comprehensive knowledge about available language courses, job opportunities, and the specific rules and laws governing their rights. This lack of information leaves them feeling lost and unsure about how to navigate the system effectively.

Employment prospects are further complicated by the uncertainty surrounding the duration of their stay. Many women are hesitant to invest time and effort in learning the local language or seeking employment opportunities, as they do not know how long they will remain in the host country. This indecision hinders their integration into the labour market and perpetuates a cycle of dependency and instability. As one woman states, "After we left Ukraine, I couldn't plan anything. And it impacts it greatly impacts those choices with impacted the choices which I made. I, I couldn't settle. You know, it's a psychological thing. I, I couldn't allow myself to, to settle to, to get attached to the location" (W8).

The absence of clear communication from potential employers exacerbates the frustration and uncertainty. Refugees frequently apply for job positions but receive no response, leaving them in limbo, unsure whether their application is being considered or not.

Moreover, as the Ukrainian women explained during the interviews, they often lack awareness of the various support programs and services available to them, such as language courses, job coaching, and assistance for individuals with disabilities. This lack of information prevents them from accessing the resources they need to facilitate their integration and improve their overall well-being.

The uncertainty surrounding entrepreneurship opportunities for relocated Ukrainian women in host countries further compounds the challenges they face. Lacking clear guidance on the legal and practical aspects of starting a business, many potential or former entrepreneurs find themselves in a state of uncertainty and inaction, hindered from pursuing this avenue for economic self-sufficiency.

In summary, the lack of clarity and uncertainty surrounding their future status in host countries or Ukraine creates a pervasive sense of instability and anxiety for highly educated Ukrainian women. This uncertainty impacts their emotional well-being, motivation, and ability to make informed decisions about their lives, hindering their successful integration into the host societies.

| Psychological Health

Ukrainian women fleeing the war face significant psychological challenges upon arrival in their host countries. The initial period is characterised by intense stress due to the sudden change in environment and circumstances. As one woman recounted, "And, the first month, it was really big, big stress for me because everything new. I'm only alone with my child" (W2). This stress is compounded by the separation from family members, particularly for children who are separated from their fathers. Moreover, women who have left family members in Ukraine often experience persistent anxiety about their safety. This constant worry can be emotionally draining and interfere with daily functioning. Additionally, many Ukrainian women experience intense feelings of guilt for leaving their home country while others remain in dangerous conditions. This guilt, coupled with the traumatic experiences of war and displacement, can lead to significant emotional distress and mental health issues, with one woman stating having a clinical depression diagnosed.

One of the most prominent psychological challenges is the pervasive uncertainty about the future. Many women find themselves unable to make long-term plans or fully settle in their new environments. Some women struggle to overcome a victim mentality resulting from their forced displacement. As one respondent noted, "Not all people have strengths enough inside, not to continue to be a victim of situation that they were forced to move" (W6). Overcoming this mindset and becoming active members of their new communities is a significant challenge for many.

Given the range and depth of psychological challenges faced by Ukrainian women refugees, there is a clear need for comprehensive mental health support. This support is crucial in helping women navigate the complex emotional landscape of displacement and integration. In conclusion, the psychological challenges faced by Ukrainian women refugees are multifaceted and profound. From dealing with initial shock and ongoing uncertainty to managing guilt, anxiety, and identity issues, these women require significant support to successfully navigate their new circumstances and maintain their mental well-being.

| Economic Situation

Even if they have found work, many Ukrainian women find themselves in situations where they are not earning enough to cover their basic needs. One woman shared her experience: "And now, the government made proposition to my company and my employer that if she takes me the government will pay her €800 for two years. It's like €8,000 a year. It's like €300 every month. Yes. Okay. But I work 30 hours. It's cool, but my salary is minimal. Now I have €1,600. It's not enough. Because €600 I need to pay only for rent" (W9). This situation highlights the struggle of working long hours but still not earning enough to comfortably cover living expenses, particularly in countries with high costs of living.

For Ukrainian women in creative and artistic professions, the economic challenges can be even more pronounced. One actress and artist described her situation: "My main challenge is that [it] is really hard to get money. Because, working as an actor, actress and working as an artist... from time to time is just your own enthusiasm. And so, nobody wants to sponsor you" (W14).

Furthermore, Ukrainian women also face the added pressure of supporting not only themselves in their new locations but also family members and businesses back home. As one woman explained. This dual responsibility can create significant financial strain and make it challenging to establish economic stability in their new environments.

Moreover, some face difficulties in understanding and accessing social support systems in their host countries. The lack of information about available support can lead to unnecessary financial hardship and stress for women who are already in vulnerable situations.

The economic challenges faced by Ukrainian women are often compounded by broader economic uncertainties in their host countries. One woman observed: "And also, like an objective challenge is the economic situation because for example, in Estonia, I don't know about other European countries. But in Estonia it seems like a recession because the unemployment rate is growing and, actually it's getting harder to get a job" (W19).

These macroeconomic factors can make it even more difficult for Ukrainian women to find stable employment and achieve financial security.

| Healthcare Access

Ukrainian women who have recently relocated face significant challenges in maintaining their health and accessing appropriate healthcare services.

The unfamiliarity with the local healthcare system presents a substantial barrier to accessing necessary medical care. Initially, many women struggle to navigate the system, unsure of where to go or how to proceed when medical issues arise. However, over time, they gradually gain experience and become more adept at managing these challenges.

Accessing specialised care, particularly in women's health, proves to be exceptionally difficult. In some cases, women face extraordinarily long wait times for essential services such as gynaecological appointments, with some being scheduled as far out as the year 2025.

For those with chronic illnesses, the situation is even more complex. The need for ongoing medication and state assistance becomes a critical issue. Navigating the intricacies of the healthcare system without knowledge of the local language or understanding of protocols presents a challenge. This language barrier, coupled with unfamiliarity with local procedures, significantly hinders their ability to receive necessary care and support for managing their conditions.

| Lack of Contact and Social Networks

Another challenge the women face is maintaining and establishing social connections in their new environments. Many women report a sudden and complete loss of their social networks upon leaving Ukraine, leaving them feeling disconnected and isolated. Building new relationships in a foreign country has proven difficult, with language barriers, cultural differences, and adaptation demands contributing to the problem. As one woman expressed, "We've been here on our own for two years, and it's very hard... I'm in the country, but I have lack of contacts" (W1). This isolation particularly affects mothers, who find themselves without the familial and community support they once relied on for childcare, leading to increased stress for both parents and children. Despite these challenges, many Ukrainian women recognize the importance of integration and are making efforts to become part of their new communities, though the process is slow and often inadequate in replacing the depth of relationships left behind. The lack of social networks continues to impact their daily lives, mental health, and overall integration into their host communities, highlighting the need for targeted support and initiatives to help these women rebuild their social connections.

| Childcare and Motherhood

Ukrainian mothers resettling abroad face significant challenges in caring for their children in new environments. These challenges primarily revolve around balancing work and childcare, addressing their children's emotional needs, and navigating unfamiliar educational and healthcare systems. Many women find themselves suddenly becoming single parents, juggling full-time childcare with the need to find employment. The emotional well-being of children is a major concern.

Mothers report their children experiencing stress due to separation from their fathers and familiar surroundings. One interviewee described her child's distress: "He cried all night. He had a big stomach ache. He was in big stress. Me too" (W2).

Education presents another significant challenge. Mothers struggle to place their children in appropriate schools due to language barriers and differences in educational systems. Some resort to having their children attend both local and online Ukrainian schools, creating a heavy workload for the children. Accessing healthcare and social services for their children can also be problematic due to administrative complexities in the host countries.

| Language Barrier

Another significant challenge for Ukrainian women is the language barrier, which impacts various aspects of their lives and integration processes.

While many Ukrainian women participate in language courses offered by host countries, they often struggle to keep up with the pace of instruction. The fast-paced nature of these courses can be overwhelming, especially considering the numerous other responsibilities and adjustments these women face during resettlement. Many find that they have not yet reached a sufficient language level for more complex situations. As one respondent noted: "Our language course, it's something like simply to give us a level to understand people on the streets. I mean, it's not for work. Maybe we should improve ourselves. Only by ourselves because nobody can help us." (W1).

Some women express a preference for instructors who can speak both the host country's language and Ukrainian, as this would facilitate a better understanding of basic concepts and grammar. The language barrier significantly hinders Ukrainian women's ability to secure employment in their host countries. Many job positions require a high level of proficiency in the local language, often B2 or even C1 level for office or managerial roles. As one interviewee stated: "In Germany, you need a high level of German language for a position of office manager, trade manager, or project manager. As usual, you need the level of German C1. Or maybe in some times B2. But of course not for good positions with good salary." (W5). This requirement creates a catch-22 situation where women struggle to improve their language skills without job immersion, yet cannot obtain jobs without advanced language proficiency.

The language barrier extends beyond the workplace, affecting various aspects of daily life. Ukrainian women report difficulties in communicating with schools, social institutions, and government entities, which often do not have English-speaking staff. This can lead to misunderstandings and complications in accessing essential services. One respondent shared: "What we learn in school or courses is quite different from when you arrive, and everyone speaks quickly, uses slang, or if someone didn't address me directly, I didn't even listen to them. It was like background noise." (W27).

These language barriers can significantly impact the overall resettlement experience, potentially leading to feelings of isolation and frustration.

| Cultural Differences

Ukrainian women relocating to host countries face challenges due to cultural differences. These disparities can manifest in various aspects of daily life, from social norms to workplace etiquette, creating a complex landscape for newcomers to navigate.

One of the primary challenges reported by Ukrainian women is the existence of unwritten rules and social norms that are not explicitly explained. This lack of clarity can lead to misunderstandings and difficult situations, particularly in public spaces or social interactions. The absence of a clear guide to these implicit cultural expectations can be frustrating and isolating for newcomers.

The contrast between new and known healthcare systems has been a source of shock for many Ukrainian women. In their home country, medical attention is often swift, with short waiting times. However, in some host countries, they encounter significantly longer wait times, sometimes up to eight hours. This disparity can lead to feelings of being overlooked or neglected, even when such wait times are standard for all patients.

The workplace presents its own set of cultural challenges. Ukrainian women have reported difficulties in understanding local attitudes towards work, particularly regarding overtime and weekend work. In some host countries, the concept of work-life balance is more pronounced, with stricter adherence to working hours and less emphasis on overtime.

Additionally, there are significant differences in workplace communication. For instance, in some host countries, discussing salary during job interviews is considered taboo, which can be perplexing for Ukrainians accustomed to more direct communication about compensation.

Ukrainian women have noted differences in interpersonal relationships and communication styles. Some report that it's easier to connect with recent immigrants than with native-born residents of the host country. There's also a noted difference in how conflicts or dissatisfaction are expressed. In some host cultures, there's a tendency towards indirect communication, where issues might not be addressed face-to-face but rather through intermediaries or subtle hints. This contrasts with the more direct communication style many Ukrainians are accustomed to.

These cultural differences present significant challenges for Ukrainian women as they adapt to life in host countries. While these differences can be a source of frustration and misunderstanding, they also present opportunities for cultural exchange and personal growth. Awareness of these challenges is the first step towards developing strategies to bridge the cultural gap and facilitate smoother integration into host societies.

| Accommodation

The search for suitable accommodation has emerged as a significant challenge for Ukrainian women relocating to host countries. This issue is multifaceted, encompassing various obstacles that reflect both the sudden influx of refugees and the pre-existing housing crises in many host nations.

One of the primary difficulties faced by Ukrainian women is the intense competition for available housing. This situation has made it particularly challenging for those with limited resources to secure affordable housing. Additionally, the pre-existing housing shortages in many host countries, often exacerbated by factors such as large student populations in university towns, have further complicated the search for suitable accommodation.

Another hurdle is the reluctance of some property owners to rent to Ukrainian refugees. This hesitation stems from various factors, including concerns about the temporary nature of their stay and potential complications with social services or job centres. Some landlords

have been reported to conduct unexpected inspections, fuelled by unfounded rumours about the behaviour of Ukrainian tenants. These practices have created an atmosphere of uncertainty and stress for many Ukrainian women seeking stable housing.

The situation is particularly challenging for those with pets. Some Ukrainian women have reported difficulties finding accommodations that allow animals, with some even facing the heart-breaking prospect of having to abandon their pets to secure housing. This has led some to prioritise countries or regions more accommodating to pet owners when choosing their destination.

Many Ukrainian women find themselves in uncertain living situations, such as staying with host families or in temporary accommodations like hotels. While these arrangements provide immediate shelter, they often come with a sense of instability and anxiety about future housing prospects. The fear of sudden changes in their living situation, coupled with the awareness of the housing crisis in many host countries, creates ongoing stress for these women.

The financial aspect of securing housing is also a significant concern. In some cases, government assistance for housing falls short of actual rental costs, particularly in urban areas. This discrepancy forces many Ukrainian women to consider less desirable options, such as living in remote areas without adequate transportation, which can hinder their ability to integrate and find employment.

For those who do manage to find housing, the conditions are often less than ideal. Many Ukrainian women report living in extremely small or substandard accommodations due to the limited options available. The desperation to find any form of housing sometimes leads to accepting less-than-optimal living conditions or informal arrangements that may lack proper legal protections.

In conclusion, the challenge of finding suitable housing remains one of the most pressing issues for Ukrainian women relocating to host countries. It encompasses a complex interplay of factors including market pressures, landlord attitudes, financial constraints, and the overall housing crises in many host nations. Addressing these challenges will require concerted efforts from both government bodies and local communities to ensure that Ukrainian refugees can find safe, stable, and affordable housing as they rebuild their lives in their host countries.

| Educational Recognition

The process of educational recognition has emerged as a significant challenge for Ukrainian women, with far-reaching implications for their professional integration and career prospects in their new environments. Many Ukrainian women find themselves in a complex situation where their qualifications and work experience from Ukraine do not directly translate or are not readily recognised in their host countries.

One of the primary obstacles is the difference in educational systems between Ukraine and the host countries. For instance, in Germany, the field of psychotherapy is typically reserved for those with medical education, which creates barriers for Ukrainian psychologists and psychotherapists seeking to practice their profession. This discrepancy often forces these professionals to consider alternative career paths, such as coaching or limits them to working only with Ukrainian-speaking clients due to language barriers.
The process of getting qualifications recognised is often lengthy, complex, and costly. In Germany, for example, the procedure can take anywhere from 6 months to a year and costs around €200. This process requires extensive documentation, including diplomas, university transcripts, and personal documents. The situation is further complicated for those whose educational institutions in Ukraine have been destroyed or are in occupied territories, making it challenging to obtain necessary documentation.
Language barriers compound these difficulties. Many Ukrainian women find that even if their qualifications could potentially be recognised, their limited proficiency in the host country's language significantly restricts their job prospects.
The recognition process varies depending on the field of study and the host country. While some professions, like IT, may face fewer obstacles, regulated professions such as medicine and law often require extensive additional training or examinations. This can be particularly disheartening for experienced professionals who find themselves unable to practice in their chosen fields without significant retraining.
Some Ukrainian women have found creative solutions to these challenges. Some opt for retraining in new fields that have lower barriers to entry, such as becoming nail technicians or massage therapists. Others volunteer or take on roles that don't require formal recognition of their qualifications, using these opportunities to gain local experience and improve their language skills.
The situation calls for more streamlined and accessible processes for qualification recognition, as well as support systems to help Ukrainian women navigate these complex procedures. Providing language courses, career counselling, and financial assistance for the recognition process could significantly ease the transition.

| Entrepreneurship Barriers

The combination of the factors already listed makes it more difficult for Ukrainian women to find suitable employment in the host countries and to pursue entrepreneurship.
Despite often having good education and professional experience, they encounter numerous obstacles in the job market. One of the primary issues is the perception of their temporary status, with employers hesitant to hire individuals who may return to Ukraine once the war ends. This uncertainty makes it difficult for Ukrainian women to secure long-term positions.
Language barriers present another major hurdle, with many host countries requiring a high level of proficiency (e.g., B2 in German) for most jobs. This requirement can be particularly

challenging for those who have recently arrived and are still adapting to their new environment.

The recognition of Ukrainian education and work experience is also problematic. Many employers in host countries do not fully understand or value the qualifications and skills acquired in Ukraine, leading to a mismatch between the women's capabilities and the positions offered to them. This often results in highly qualified individuals being forced to accept jobs below their skill level or in unrelated fields. One woman shares: "Sometimes you have very smart people relocated because of war in different countries and they cannot find any job except like cleaning or something" (W23).

For those considering entrepreneurship, additional challenges arise. Some Ukrainian women report difficulties in opening businesses due to perceived competition with local establishments. Moreover, navigating the complex taxation systems and understanding local market dynamics in host countries can be daunting for newcomers.

The pace of work and business practices in host countries can also be a source of frustration for Ukrainian professionals. Many find that the business environment in their new locations operates at a slower pace compared to Ukraine, which can be challenging for those accustomed to a more dynamic work culture.

In conclusion, while some progress has been made in integrating Ukrainian women into the workforce of host countries, significant barriers remain. Overcoming these challenges will require continued efforts from both host country governments and employers to recognise and value the skills and experiences of Ukrainian professionals, as well as providing necessary support for language acquisition and cultural integration.

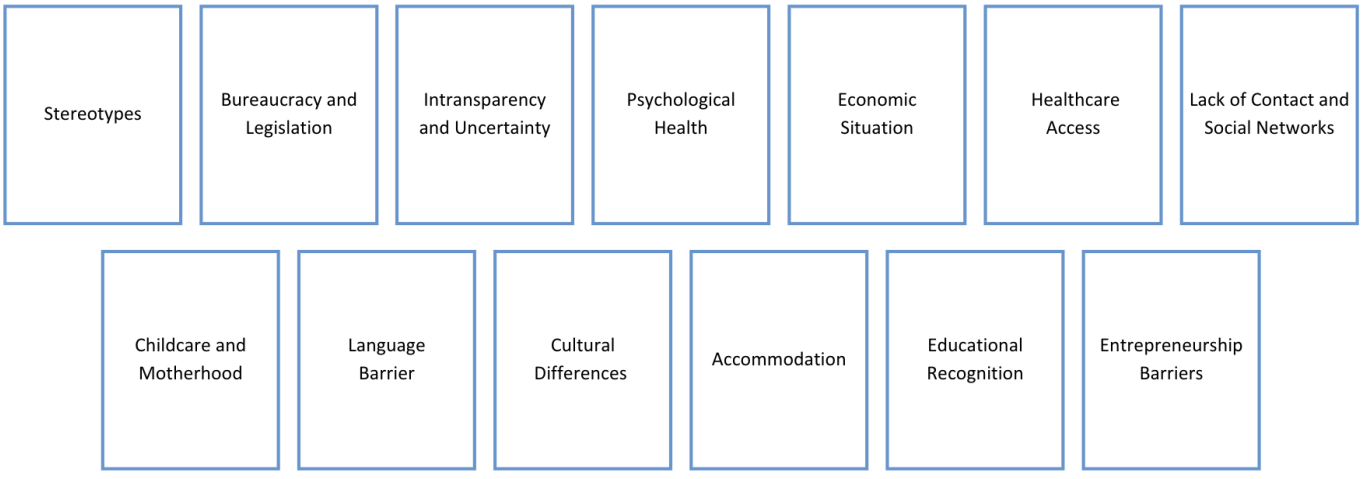


Fig. 1 Challenges Faced by Highly Educated Ukrainian Women During Crisis

05

Resources for Highly Educated Ukrainian Women

| Support from Government

The experiences of the interviewed Ukrainian women reveal a diverse range of their host countries' government support initiatives. These programs have played a crucial role in helping them adapt to their new environments and rebuild their lives.

Housing and accommodation support has been a primary focus for many host countries. In Denmark, for instance, the government has implemented a social housing system that offers refugees common housing or subsidised flats at lower-than-market prices. This approach allows families to transition from shared accommodations to more private living arrangements as they settle in. Similarly, Ireland has established an accommodation support program that covers rent for some refugees, significantly easing their financial burden.

Financial assistance has also been a key component of government support. Many countries provide initial financial support to help refugees get settled. For example, Poland offered a one-time payment of 300 zloty per child to families upon their arrival. In some host nations, refugees receive ongoing financial support until they secure employment, ensuring a basic standard of living during the transition period.

Language acquisition and education have been prioritised by many host governments. Countries like Denmark and Germany offer free language courses to help refugees integrate more effectively into their new communities. For children, access to local schools is provided, often with additional support for language learning. In Ireland, the government has gone a step further by offering opportunities for adult education and vocational training, covering course fees to enhance refugees' employability.

Healthcare access has been another crucial area of support. Many host countries provide free or subsidised healthcare to Ukrainian refugees. In Denmark, for instance, refugees have access to free medicines and medical support, ensuring that their health needs are met during this challenging time.

Employment support has been a focus for many host governments, recognising the importance of economic integration. Job centres and employment programs assist refugees in finding work and adapting to the local job market. Some countries have implemented community employment programs and opportunities for job training or career changes, facilitating long-term economic stability for refugees.

Integration and social support initiatives have been established to help refugees feel welcome and connected in their new communities. Many governments have created dedicated units or programs to assist refugees, while local municipalities often organise events and initiatives to foster integration. Some countries have even provided free public transportation passes to help refugees navigate their new surroundings more easily.

Bureaucratic assistance has been streamlined in many host countries to ease the transition for refugees. Governments have simplified processes for obtaining necessary documents and have provided information in Ukrainian to overcome language barriers. Some countries have

established special units to handle refugee registration and provide initial support, making the administrative aspects of relocation less daunting.
While the level and type of support vary between countries, these initiatives demonstrate a concerted effort by host governments to assist Ukrainian women and their families in adapting to their new environments. Many interviewees expressed gratitude for the support received, highlighting the positive impact these programs have had on their ability to rebuild their lives in their host countries. Despite the challenges that remain, these government support systems have played a crucial role in providing a foundation for Ukrainian refugees to start anew and look towards a more stable future.

| Support from Job Centres

The experiences of Ukrainian women with job centres in their host countries reveal a complex and often inconsistent system of support. While job centres are intended to be a valuable resource for refugees seeking employment and integration, the effectiveness of their services varies significantly.
Many Ukrainian women report that job centres offer free language courses, which are crucial for integration and future employment prospects. These centres also often assist with accommodation, helping refugees navigate the process of finding housing in their new communities. In some cases, job centres have been instrumental in organising various aspects of the relocation process, providing a centralised point of support for newcomers.
However, the job placement services provided by these centres have received mixed reviews. Some women express frustration with the types of positions offered, which are often geographically inconvenient or misaligned with their qualifications and experience. For instance, one interviewee mentioned being offered positions in distant cities, which were impractical due to transportation limitations and family responsibilities.
The quality of service appears to be highly dependent on the individual case worker assigned. While some refugees report positive experiences with dedicated and helpful staff, others describe encounters with indifferent employees who seem to lack motivation in finding suitable employment opportunities.
In some countries, job centres have implemented programs to incentivise employers to hire refugees, such as subsidising a portion of their salary for an initial period. However, these well-intentioned schemes can sometimes backfire, with some employers exploiting the system by cycling through subsidised workers rather than offering long-term employment.
For highly educated Ukrainian women, the job centre experience can be particularly challenging. Many find themselves at a crossroads, struggling to reconcile their previous professional identities with the realities of their new circumstances. Some report feeling undervalued when offered positions that do not match their qualifications, such as factory work or packaging jobs.

Despite these challenges, job centres do offer some valuable resources. In addition to language courses and housing assistance, some provide career counselling services and connections to potential employers. However, the effectiveness of these services in helping Ukrainian women secure meaningful employment that aligns with their skills and aspirations appears to be limited.
Overall, while job centres serve as an important first point of contact for many Ukrainian women seeking to establish themselves in their host countries, there is significant room for improvement in terms of tailoring services to individual needs, providing more targeted job matching, and offering comprehensive support for professional development and integration.

| Integration Courses

Integration courses have emerged as a crucial resource, offering a blend of language instruction and cultural orientation. However, the experiences of these women reveal both the strengths and limitations of such programs.
Many Ukrainian refugees recognise the importance of these courses, particularly for learning the host country's language, which is essential for finding employment and integrating into society. However, some participants have found the language instruction to be inadequate, describing it as rushed and superficial. This has led some to seek additional private tutoring to supplement their learning and prepare for language examinations.
Beyond language, these courses provide valuable information about the host country's systems and culture. Participants have appreciated learning about insurance requirements, administrative procedures, and historical context. Some courses specifically tailored for Ukrainians have offered insights into local mentality and cultural nuances, which are crucial for successful integration.
However, there is a clear demand for more comprehensive and practical information. Refugees express a need for guidance on navigating the job market, understanding subtle cultural differences, and receiving "tips and tricks" for daily life in their new environment. Additionally, there is a strong desire for accurate and accessible information, preferably available in both English and Ukrainian.
While integration courses serve as an important starting point, they often fall short of fully meeting the complex needs of relocating Ukrainian women. This suggests a need for ongoing refinement and expansion of these programs to better support the integration process and empower refugees in their new homes.

| Support from NGOs

In the aftermath of the Ukrainian displacement crisis, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have emerged as crucial resources for Ukrainian women relocating to host countries.

These organisations have played a pivotal role in easing the transition and integration process for many refugees. The interviews with Ukrainian women reveal a complex landscape of support, where NGOs offer a wide range of services tailored to the unique needs of displaced individuals.

Many interviewees highlighted the existence of both large-scale and smaller, project-based NGOs that provide assistance without financial burden to the refugees. These organisations offer support in various areas, including document processing, job searching, and navigating social services. In Berlin, for instance, there has been a proliferation of such initiatives, some run by German locals and others by Ukrainian expatriates who have successfully integrated into the host society. These Ukrainian-led projects are particularly valuable as they bring firsthand experience and cultural understanding to their support services.

However, a recurring theme in the interviews was the challenge of awareness and access. While help is available, not all refugees are aware of how to tap into these resources or fully understand the scope of assistance offered. This gap in information dissemination presents an ongoing challenge for NGOs and highlights the need for more effective outreach strategies.

The interviews also revealed the diverse nature of NGO support. Some organisations focus on specific areas such as employment assistance, while others offer a broader range of services. For instance, some Ukrainian women reported receiving help from the Red Cross and volunteer groups for accommodation needs, though success in this area varied, particularly for individuals without families.

Mental health support emerged as another critical area where NGOs have made significant contributions. Some interviewees mentioned utilising free therapy sessions provided by Ukrainian foundations, underscoring the importance of culturally sensitive mental health services for refugees dealing with trauma and displacement.

In countries like Portugal, NGOs have played a crucial role in helping Ukrainian women navigate unfamiliar healthcare systems. One interviewee recounted her experience of reaching out to an organisation specialising in her medical condition, which not only provided immediate assistance but also taught her valuable lessons about seeking help in a foreign environment.

The interviews also highlighted the importance of local, grassroots organisations in addressing specific needs that larger NGOs might overlook. For instance, one interviewee mentioned finding a kindergarten for her young child through local connections when larger organisations could not assist due to age restrictions.

In conclusion, while NGOs have undoubtedly become an invaluable resource for Ukrainian women relocating to host countries, the interviews reveal both the strengths and limitations of current support systems. The challenge moving forward lies in improving awareness, accessibility, and coordination among various NGOs to ensure comprehensive support for all Ukrainian refugees, regardless of their individual circumstances or level of familiarity with the host country's systems.

Support from Individuals

The experiences of Ukrainian women relocating to various host countries highlight the significant role that individual support plays in their successful integration. This personal assistance, often provided by local families, friends, and community members, has proven to be an invaluable resource during the challenging transition period.

Many Ukrainian women reported receiving immediate help with accommodation upon arrival. Host families generously opened their homes, offering temporary shelter ranging from a few weeks to several months. This initial support provided a crucial safety net, allowing the women time to navigate the complexities of their new environment. In some cases, these arrangements evolved into longer-term housing solutions, with hosts offering vacant properties or assisting in finding suitable apartments.

Beyond accommodation, individual supporters often acted as guides or coaches, helping Ukrainian women navigate unfamiliar systems and processes. They assisted with tasks such as registering with local authorities, connecting with job centres, and understanding healthcare systems. This personalised guidance proved especially valuable in overcoming language barriers and cultural differences.

The support network often extended beyond immediate hosts to include long-time Ukrainian residents in the host countries. These individuals, having gone through similar experiences, shared invaluable advice and insights, encouraging newcomers to seek help and utilise available resources. Their guidance ranged from practical tips on daily life to emotional support, creating a sense of community in an unfamiliar setting.

In academic and professional settings, individual support manifested through colleagues and supervisors who made efforts to accommodate language differences, such as conducting meetings in English or providing tailored assistance for international researchers. This flexibility greatly eased the transition into new work or study environments.

The willingness of local community members to offer one-on-one support emerged as a recurring theme. Whether through chance encounters or organised volunteer efforts, these individuals provided personalised assistance that often went beyond what official channels could offer. From help with translation to guidance on cultural norms, this support proved crucial in navigating day-to-day challenges.

While the stress of relocation remained significant, particularly regarding long-term housing stability, the overwhelming sentiment was one of gratitude for the open-heartedness and readiness of individuals in host countries to provide support. This interpersonal level of assistance, complementing official aid programs, has been instrumental in helping Ukrainian women adapt to their new circumstances and begin rebuilding their lives.

The experiences shared by these women underscore the importance of fostering and maintaining these individual support networks. They not only provide practical assistance but also contribute significantly to the emotional well-being and sense of belonging for those navigating the complexities of relocation in challenging times.

| Community and Networking

The experiences of Ukrainian women relocating to host countries highlight the crucial role that community plays in their successful integration and adaptation. These communities, both formal and informal, serve as invaluable resources for newcomers, offering practical support, emotional comfort, and a sense of belonging in unfamiliar environments. Many interviewees emphasised the importance of proactivity in seeking out and engaging with these communities, noting that the willingness to connect and communicate opens doors to a wealth of support and opportunities.

Ukrainian expatriates and long-term residents in host countries often serve as the foundation of support networks for newcomers, sharing their personal experiences and offering valuable guidance on navigating local systems and cultures. This knowledge transfer is particularly beneficial for recent arrivals, helping them overcome initial hurdles in areas such as employment, accommodation, and social integration.

The community's role extends beyond practical assistance, serving as a crucial source of social and emotional support. Women reported finding strength in the solidarity of their fellow Ukrainians, creating spaces where they could share information, seek advice, and help each other find employment opportunities. This sense of community is not limited to Ukrainian circles; many women spoke positively about the welcoming nature of locals and the support received from volunteer organisations in their host countries. These interactions foster a sense of belonging and help alleviate the isolation that can accompany relocation.

Furthermore, the community acts as a gateway to professional development and networking opportunities. Several women mentioned finding work or educational opportunities through community connections, highlighting the importance of these networks in facilitating career advancement and skill development. Notably, women-specific groups and IT communities were cited as particularly helpful resources, offering targeted support and opportunities in fields where Ukrainian women are seeking to establish themselves.

However, the interviews also revealed the complexities of building new relationships in a foreign context. While many experienced overwhelming kindness and genuine support, some cautioned about the need to navigate these new connections carefully, distinguishing between those offering help with open hearts and those who might have ulterior motives. This nuanced understanding of social dynamics is an important aspect of the relocation experience that the community helps newcomers navigate.

Ultimately, the Ukrainian women's community in host countries emerges as a multifaceted resource, offering practical assistance, emotional support, professional opportunities, and cultural connection. It plays a pivotal role in empowering women to not only overcome the challenges of relocation but also to thrive in their new environments. Many interviewees expressed a desire to give back to these communities, highlighting a cycle of support that strengthens not only the Ukrainians and enriches the cultural fabric of their host countries.



Fig. 2 Resources for Highly Educated Ukrainian Women

06

Opportunities for Highly Educated Ukrainian Women

| Cultural Enrichment

The relocation of Ukrainian women presents a unique opportunity for cultural enrichment and diversification. As these women settle into their new environments, they bring with them a wealth of experiences, traditions, and perspectives that can significantly enhance the cultural landscape of their host nations. This cultural exchange is not about assimilation, but rather about integration and mutual growth.

Ukrainian women, as newcomers, possess a distinct advantage in their ability to offer something different, something that may not be readily available in their host countries. Their unique backgrounds and experiences allow them to contribute fresh ideas, novel approaches, and diverse viewpoints to their new communities. This cultural infusion can lead to a more vibrant and dynamic society, fostering creativity and innovation across various sectors.

It's important to recognise that these women don't need to completely adapt to their new environment or offer only what locals can provide. Instead, they can leverage their unique perspectives and cultural heritage as assets. This approach not only preserves their identity but also adds value to their host communities by introducing new cultural elements, be it through art, cuisine, traditions, or social practices.

The current global landscape is characterised by increasing interconnectedness, and the relocation of Ukrainian women to host countries offers an opportunity for host countries to become more internationally oriented and culturally diverse. This internationalisation can lead to a broader understanding, tolerance, and appreciation of different cultures within the host society.

While it's crucial for relocated individuals to find ways to integrate into their new communities, it’s equally important for them to maintain and share their cultural identity. As one external stakeholder states: "You are an outcoming, but you bring something with you, so you don't need to adapt yourself completely" (E1). By doing so, they contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and multicultural society. This balance between integration and cultural preservation can lead to a rich tapestry of experiences and perspectives, benefiting both the Ukrainian women and their host communities.

| Labour Market Opportunities

The migration of Ukrainian women has presented host countries with a unique and timely opportunity to address critical workforce shortages and enhance the overall work environment as many European nations face a significant deficit in skilled labour.

The integration of Ukrainian women into the workforce offers a promising solution to this problem. Many of these women bring with them a wealth of education, expertise, and professional experience that can be leveraged to fill crucial gaps in the labour market. This diversity fosters creativity, problem-solving, and cross-cultural understanding, which are

invaluable assets in today's globalised business landscape. As one interviewee states: "At the moment I think there's such a shortage in skilled and educated people" (E5).
Moreover, the arrival of Ukrainian women has challenged and positively transformed certain workplace norms in host countries. For instance, many of these women have noted the absence of age discrimination in their new work environments, a stark contrast to their experiences in Ukraine. This observation highlights the potential for Ukrainian women to contribute to a more inclusive and age-diverse workforce, where skills and experience are valued over arbitrary age limits.
The willingness of Ukrainian women to adapt and learn new skills is another significant advantage they bring to the work environment. Many have shown remarkable resilience and flexibility, embracing new career paths and opportunities that may not have been available to them in their home country. This adaptability is crucial in today's rapidly evolving job market, where continuous learning and skill development are essential.

| Volunteering and Social Engagement

The relocation of Ukrainian women to various host countries following the outbreak of war has brought about a significant wave of social engagement and volunteerism. Many of these women have actively involved themselves in volunteer organisations and support networks, which not only strengthens social cohesion but also fosters their integration into new communities. The stories of these women illustrate the diverse ways in which they contribute to their host societies. For instance, one Ukrainian woman who relocated to Amsterdam in March dedicated her first year to intensive fundraising efforts. Her work went beyond mere financial support; she actively engaged in providing Ukraine with essential medical supplies, equipment, and humanitarian aid. Perhaps most remarkably, she took on the crucial task of organising medical evacuations for wounded military personnel, civilians, and patients with severe diagnoses that couldn't be treated in Ukraine. Demonstrating her successful voluntary efforts, she states: "And so far, we brought 103 patients to the Netherlands" (W20).
In Berlin, another Ukrainian woman highlighted the existence of several companies and projects run by Ukrainian women aimed at assisting refugees. The support is often given by Ukrainians themselves who have fled and have now settled well in the host country and want others to benefit from their knowledge. These initiatives provide invaluable support, such as helping with documentation processes, job communication, and navigating social support offices.
The active participation of Ukrainian women in volunteer work and social engagement has a multifaceted impact on host communities. Their involvement strengthens social cohesion by bringing people together and fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose. It also facilitates their own integration, helping them gain a better understanding of local systems, build networks, and develop a sense of belonging in their new environments. Moreover, the

volunteer work done by these women often addresses critical needs within their communities, providing essential services that benefit not only Ukrainian refugees but also enrich the host society by addressing gaps in support.

| Building Bridges between Countries

Another opportunity for Ukrainian women is to serve as bridge builders and mediators between their home and host nations. This role extends far beyond mere language facilitation, encompassing economic, cultural, and social spheres.

One of the most significant advantages Ukrainian women bring to their host countries is their multilingual capability. Their proficiency in Ukrainian, often Russian, and increasingly in the language of their host country, positions them as invaluable intermediaries. This linguistic versatility can greatly benefit economic and cultural relations, facilitating smoother communication and understanding between businesses, organisations, and individuals from both countries.

Moreover, the presence of Ukrainian women in the workforce has opened up new avenues for international collaboration and knowledge exchange. Some have already begun fostering connections between educational institutions in their host countries and Ukraine, paving the way for future partnerships, internships, and cultural exchanges. These initiatives not only enrich the academic and professional landscape but also contribute to long-term international cooperation and understanding.

A particularly inspiring example of this bridge-building role comes from one interviewee, who expressed a keen interest in learning about systems and practices in her host country that could be beneficial if implemented in Ukraine. She specifically mentioned her involvement in researching patient rights organisations, prompted by a friend who heads a similar organisation in Ukraine. This proactive approach demonstrates how Ukrainian women are actively seeking to transfer knowledge and best practices back to their home country.

The interviewee stated, "I would love to learn as much as possible here things that work. And maybe apply in Ukraine" (W7). This sentiment encapsulates the potential for Ukrainian women to act as conduits for innovation and social progress. By understanding how patient rights are defended in their host country, including the organisational structures and funding mechanisms within hospitals, these women can contribute to improving healthcare systems and patient advocacy in Ukraine.

This example illustrates a broader trend of Ukrainian women actively engaging in cross-cultural learning and knowledge transfer. Their unique position allows them to identify effective practices in their host countries that could address challenges in Ukraine. This not only benefits Ukraine in the long term but also enriches the host country by fostering a culture of international cooperation and mutual understanding.

| Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Most of the Ukrainian women interviewed bring a wealth of entrepreneurial spirit, skills, and innovative ideas with them. They are not just seeking refuge, but are actively contributing to their new communities and economies through entrepreneurship.

Many of these women arrive with extensive business experience from Ukraine, where they ran successful enterprises ranging from event agencies to tech startups for children. This background equips them with valuable insights and a drive to create new ventures in their host countries. However, they quickly learned the importance of adapting to local business cultures and markets, recognising that what worked in Ukraine may need adjustment in their new environment.

The entrepreneurial pursuits of Ukrainian women span diverse sectors. Some are leveraging their expertise in textiles to create eco-friendly products like reusable menstrual items. Others are applying their skills in media management to launch new platforms or booking services for events. There's also a growing interest in digital entrepreneurship, with women exploring opportunities in e-commerce, online education, and content creation centred around Ukrainian culture and experiences.

These entrepreneurs are not just focused on personal gain. Many are driven by a desire to contribute positively to both their host countries and Ukraine. They're initiating projects aimed at addressing pressing issues such as environmental concerns, mental health support, and economic recovery in Ukraine. In essence, Ukrainian women entrepreneurs are bringing more than just business ideas to their host countries. They're introducing innovation, resilience, and a global perspective that enriches local economies and communities. Their ability to adapt, create, and persevere in the face of adversity is not just inspiring – it's transforming the entrepreneurial landscape in their new homes and building lasting bridges between nations.



Fig. 3 Opportunities for Highly Educated Ukrainian Women

07

Future Outlook

The plans and aspirations of Ukrainian women are as diverse as their individual experiences, reflecting a complex mix of hope, uncertainty, and longing for home. Many Ukrainian women find themselves at a crossroads, grappling with difficult decisions about their long-term prospects. Some have embraced the opportunity to build new lives in their host countries, seeing a chance for stability and growth for themselves and their children. Others maintain a strong desire to return to Ukraine as soon as conditions allow, viewing their current situation as temporary despite the ongoing conflict. And for a significant number, the future remains shrouded in uncertainty, with plans constantly shifting as they navigate unfamiliar terrain and monitor the situation back home.

| Uncertainty

Many women cannot return to their original homes in Ukraine due to ongoing occupation or destruction. As one interviewee explained, "I have no place in Ukraine because our home in Donetsk is still occupied, and we don't know, even when the war ends, if it ends, what will happen with these territories" (W4).

While host countries have been welcoming, many have strict immigration policies that make it challenging for Ukrainian refugees to stay long-term. One woman described the obstacles in Denmark: "I would prefer to stay in Denmark, but it's almost impossible because they have very strict rules about immigration. You need to get some work visa or study visa...It's almost unreal to get" (W4). Similar difficulties were noted for other countries like Canada. This creates a sense of instability, as refugees feel they must constantly prove themselves worthy of staying.

Many women left family members behind in Ukraine, creating a sense of living two parallel lives. As one interviewee shared, "We live two lives. We live here and now. And we live our life in Ukraine. My parents are in Ukraine. I can't take my parents because they don't want to leave Ukraine" (W9). This division makes it difficult to fully settle abroad or make concrete plans for the future.

Even if the war ends, there are concerns about how long reconstruction will take and whether it will be safe to return. One woman explained, "We don't know how many years the reconstruction will take...There are some predictions of 10, 15 years. For kids to grow in these conditions of reconstruction and after-war period, it's hard" (W16). This uncertainty about Ukraine's future stability complicates long-term planning.

To cope with this uncertainty, some women are trying to adopt a more flexible outlook. One interviewee described her shift in perspective: "Now I'm trying to change my mindset, to become what I call a person from the universe. Ukraine is my home, Ukraine is my motherland. But now I'm living somewhere and I don't know where I will live next" (W14). This approach allows them to take advantage of opportunities in their host countries while remaining open to eventually returning to Ukraine.

| Going Back to Ukraine

Many Ukrainian women who escaped their country due to the war express a strong desire to return home once it is safe to do so. Their motivations are deeply rooted in emotional connections to their homeland and a sense of responsibility towards its future.

The emotional pull of home is a powerful factor for many. One interviewee described the unexpected happiness she and her husband experienced upon returning to their house in Ukraine after a year and a half away. She noted, "We felt that we are getting energy but not giving the energy," (W20) highlighting the profound emotional connection to their personal space and belongings.

Some women view their time abroad as an opportunity for personal and professional growth that could benefit Ukraine upon their return. One respondent shared her interest in learning new skills or practices that are not common in Ukraine, with the intention of introducing them back home. She has already begun researching social services and patient rights organisations in her host country, aiming to apply this knowledge to improve similar systems in Ukraine.

The prospect of returning in a professional capacity is appealing to some. One interviewee expressed her hope to return as a project manager for a German organisation, recognising the potential for greater financial security in such a role. This approach demonstrates a pragmatic consideration of the economic challenges that may persist in post-war Ukraine.

For others, the connection to Ukraine remains strong despite adopting a more nomadic lifestyle. One woman described her family's plan to continue dividing their time between Ukraine, Georgia, and the Netherlands, with Ukraine remaining an integral part of their lives. Their ongoing investment in renovating their home near Kyiv underscores their commitment to maintaining roots in Ukraine.

While the desire to return is strong, it is tempered by practical considerations. Most women emphasise that their return is contingent on the war ending and the situation in Ukraine becoming safe. As one respondent put it, "I want to return to Ukraine if the situation will change" (W11)

Despite the uncertainties, some women have already made concrete plans to return. One interviewee stated, "I'm moving back somewhere in May," (W25) indicating that for some, the pull of home outweighs the ongoing challenges.

In conclusion, while the timeframe and circumstances of their return vary, many Ukrainian women maintain a strong connection to their homeland and a desire to contribute to its reconstruction and future development.

| Staying in a Host Country

Many Ukrainian women who fled their homeland due to the war have begun to consider long-term settlements in their host countries. This decision is often complex, influenced by various factors including safety, opportunities for personal and professional growth, and family considerations.

For many women, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine remains a significant deterrent to returning. One interviewee expressed her concerns about the continued missile attacks in Kyiv, stating, "I cannot imagine how can I return now in Ukraine" (W10). The desire for safety, particularly for those with children, is a powerful motivator to remain in the host country.

Several women view their displacement as an opportunity for career development and integration into their new societies. One respondent mentioned, "I want to stay here and I want to make a career here, and I want to develop here" (W2). Another saw the chance to learn the language and integrate into society as a way to contribute to the host country's economy. Some are exploring entrepreneurial opportunities, with one woman expressing interest in opening a business in her host country. Others are leveraging their professional experience, such as a project manager with 26 years of experience who is planning to continue her career in Germany.

The decision to stay is often made with the entire family in mind, especially for those with children. One mother explained the difficulty of uprooting her teenage daughters again after they had already adapted to their new environment. She stated, "I act in the interest of all my family," (W6) highlighting how her children's education and social connections in the host country influence her decision to stay.

For some women, returning to Ukraine would mean starting over completely. One divorcee explained, "I really don't have where to return... I don't have property or apartments or a job school for my kids if I go back. I would need to build everything again" (W8). This realization has led her to intend to stay in Ireland.

While choosing to stay in their host countries, some women still maintain strong ties to Ukraine. One interviewee mentioned renovating her house near Kyiv remotely, demonstrating a continued investment in her home country despite settling elsewhere.

It's important to note that for many women, the decision to stay is not final or absolute. Some express a conflict between their emotional desire to return and the practical reasons for staying. As one woman put it, "My heart wants to return to Ukraine, but my mind told me that it is better for me and for my family to stay in a safe place" (W10).

In conclusion, the decision to stay in host countries is multifaceted, balancing safety concerns, professional opportunities, family needs, and emotional ties to Ukraine. While many women are leaning towards long-term settlement, they remain adaptable to changing circumstances and continue to hold Ukraine close to their hearts.

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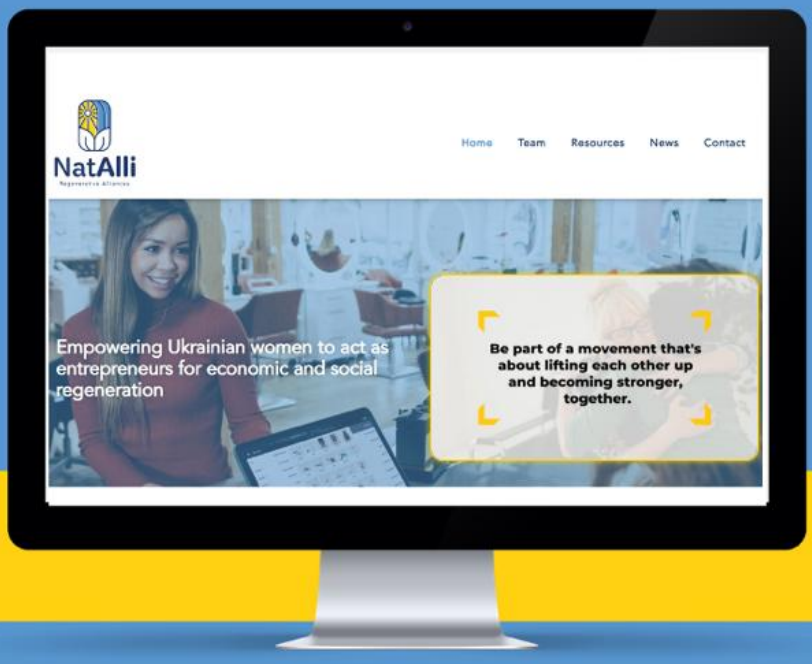
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