

ANALYTICAL STUDY

UKRAINIAN WOMEN IN THE EU: VOICES, NETWORKS, AND THE FUTURE OF UKRAINE'S RECOVERY

Report by Open Space Works

May-June 2026



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The idea for this research emerged in the fruitful cooperation of Ukrainian Women's Fund and Open Space Works and received its shape and tone thanks to the numerous voices of Ukrainian women across 23 European Union countries who were ready to share their stories during the discussions and via the survey. Those who unite in strong organisations and associations to better deliver the Ukrainian agenda in their countries of residence; those who act every day in their workplaces and neighbourhoods as informal Ukrainian ambassadors; young women who fled Ukraine as teenagers and are now searching for their role and career paths in Europe; those who continue to work or volunteer remotely with Ukrainian businesses and organisations; and those who have returned and are rebuilding their lives in Ukraine.

The research team consisted both of Ukrainian women staying in Ukraine and Poland:

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CONTEXT

“Homecoming is not a solitary activity; it reconnects people and, thus, has a strong collective dimension”¹

Renos Papadopoulos, Involuntary Dislocation: Home, Trauma, Resilience, and Adversity-Activated Development

Almost 2 million Ukrainian adult women are under temporary protection in the EU². Of these, 54.1% of adult women are aged 35-64, making them mid-career and senior professionals whose skills and networks represent a significant underutilised asset for Ukraine's recovery.

According to the last estimates by the Centre for Economic Strategy, only 43% of Ukrainian refugees abroad plan to return and over a third having no such plans³. This means that millions of Ukrainians will remain in the EU for years to come. This is not a static picture. Longitudinal tracking by the Centre for Economic Strategy across five research waves shows that the share of those who definitively plan to return fell from 74% in November 2022 to 43% by December 2024 and continues to decline. By early 2026, 47% of people under temporary protection in the EU were already in the process of obtaining alternative legal status to remain⁴ — not waiting for a protection extension but actively planning long-term residence. This trajectory makes the policy argument for engagement frameworks urgent: the window for shaping connection patterns is narrowing, not widening.

Yet structural barriers, such as non-recognition of credentials, lack of childcare, and labour market restrictions push highly qualified women below their skill level⁵. Nevertheless, studies show that Ukrainian migrant women are actively engaged in civic activities abroad⁶, but need more systemic mechanisms to support their efforts, as well as the creation of conditions for preserving a sustained and long-term connection with Ukraine.

This study is trying to go beyond return intentions to the idea to map what Ukrainian displaced women are already doing and what conditions would unlock even more to inform exploring and developing frameworks for leveraging their economic potential and civic participation to support Ukraine's defence capacity and recovery.

¹ Renos K. Papadopoulos (2021), Involuntary Dislocation: Home, Trauma, Resilience, and Adversity-Activated Development, chapter “Nostos,” <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003154822>

² European Commission, Eurostat (2026), “4.37 Million under Temporary Protection in April 2026,” Eurostat News, June 10, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20260610-1>.

³ Ippolitova et al. (2026), “Ukrainian Refugees after Four Years Abroad: Fifth Wave of Research,” Centre for Economic Strategy, February 24, <https://ces.org.ua/en/ukrainian-refugees-fifth-wave/>.

⁴ ibd.

⁵ Bernhard Perchinig and Jimmy Perumadan (2025), “New Perspectives: Labour Market Integration of Displaced Ukrainian Women: A Comparative Study of Austria, Germany, and Poland,” International Centre for Migration Policy Development, Policy Brief, May, <https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/64761/file/INTAKE-New-perspectives-Labour-Market-Integration-of-Displaced-Ukrainian-Women.pdf>.

⁶ Iryna Maidanik (2025), “Zaluchenist do hromadskoi diialnosti yak instrument (re)intehratsii vymushenykh mihrantiv z Ukrainy [Civic Engagement as a Tool for the (Re)Integration of Forced Migrants from Ukraine],” Demography and Social Economy 3, no. 61: 25–40, <https://dse.org.ua/ojs/index.php/dse/article/download/250/181>

In some formulations, this study uses the language of "resource" and "potential" with regard to displaced Ukrainian women deliberately, because these terms translate into the policy registers that shape investment decisions by governments, donors, and employers.

But the women whose voices and data form the basis of this study are not resources to be deployed. They are people navigating displacement, professional disruption, family responsibility, and civic obligation under conditions they did not choose. The recommendations in this report are addressed to institutions, not to women, because the gap between what women are already doing and what conditions would allow them to do is a failure of institutional design, not of individual motivation.

Throughout this report, the terms "displaced women" and "women under temporary protection" are used to describe Ukrainian women who left Ukraine after 24 February 2022 and are registered under the EU's Temporary Protection Directive. The term "refugee" is used only where it appears in cited external sources, as it carries a distinct legal meaning under international law that does not apply to all persons covered by temporary protection. Using "refugee" interchangeably is legally imprecise and may inadvertently reinforce disinformation narratives.

1. METHODOLOGY

The study uses a mixed-methods design combining a quantitative survey, qualitative in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, and two stakeholder validation workshops. The qualitative and quantitative components were designed to be complementary: the survey maps the breadth and distribution of engagement patterns across the full sample, while the qualitative block provides causal depth explaining why certain patterns exist, what drives them, and what prevents them from scaling.

Data was collected during May-June 2026. The study was developed by Open Space Works and Ukrainian Women's Fund with methodological support from the Office of the Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine, and the Government Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy of Ukraine.

1.1. ONLINE SURVEY

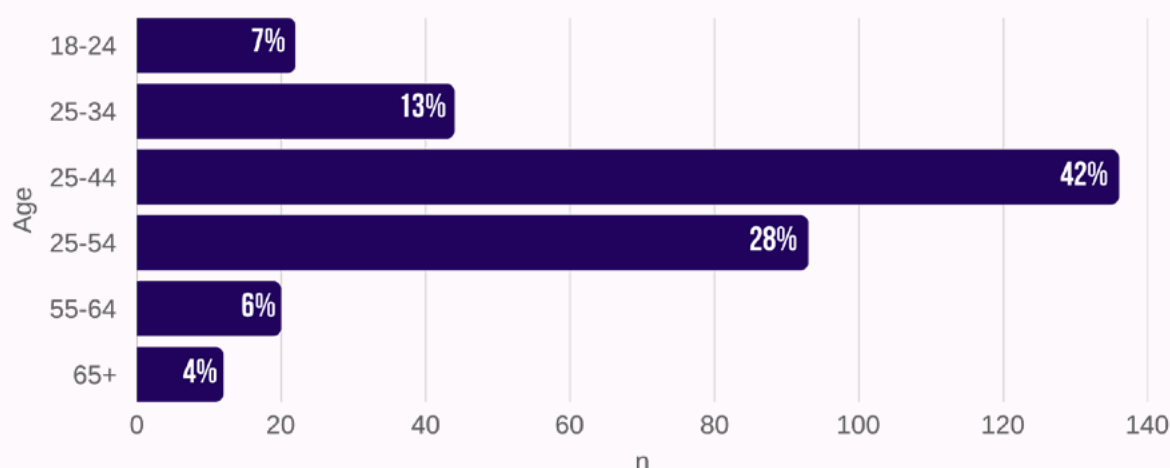
A self-administered online survey was distributed via snowball sampling through UWF and OSWU networks, social media networks and diaspora organisations across more than ten EU countries.

Parameter	Details
Final sample	N = 327 (11 respondents excluded for incomplete responses)
Countries covered	23 EU member states
Survey instrument	29 questions: single-choice, multiple-choice, and scale items

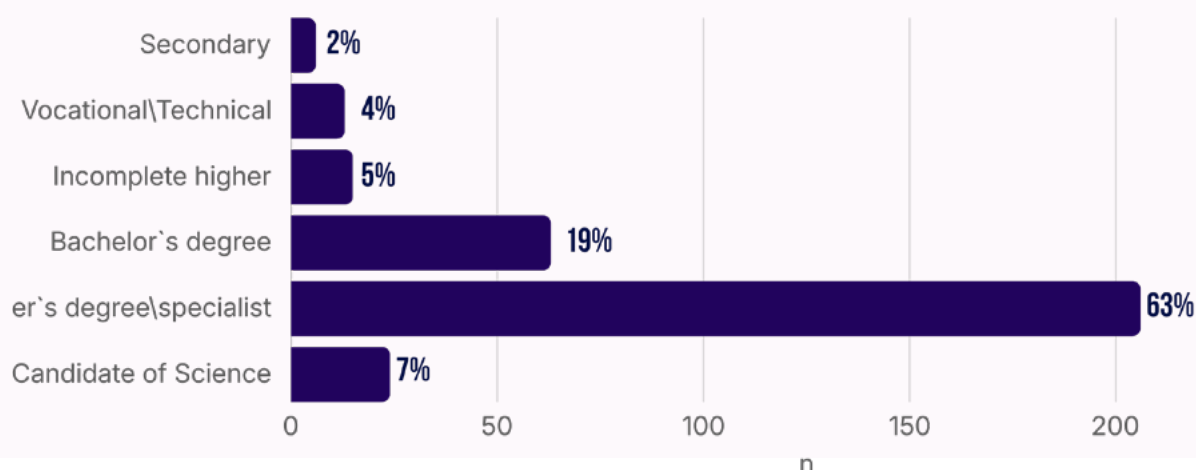
The findings should be read as indicative trends rather than population-level estimates. Snowball sampling systematically over-represents more engaged and networked respondents; the true share of disengaged women is likely higher than the sample suggests.

Respondent Profile. The sample is skewed towards highly educated, mid-career women who have been abroad for more than two years, with the focus on women who moved to the EU after the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine (February 2022). This profile is consistent with the network-based sampling approach and should be taken into account when interpreting results.

 Q1. WHAT IS YOUR AGE? \ N=327



 Q2. WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF EDUCATION? \ N=327



The survey's respondent profile – highly educated, mid-career, abroad for more than two years – broadly reflects the actual demographic structure of Ukrainian women displaced after February 2022, who are themselves among the most highly educated forced displacement populations in recent European history: 74% of displaced Ukrainians hold higher or incomplete higher education⁷.

⁷ CES (2025), Centre for Economic Strategy, Fifth Wave of Research on Ukrainian Refugees: <https://ces.org.ua/en/ukrainian-refugees-fifth-wave/>; wiiw (2026), Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, Ukrainian Refugees: From Emergency to Long-Term Strategy: <https://wiiw.ac.at/ukrainian-refugees--from-emergency-to-long-term-strategy-n-711.html>

In this sense, the sample's educational skew is not a distortion but a feature of the population itself.

The more significant limitation is the sampling strategy: an online survey distributed through Ukrainian women's support organisations in the EU systematically reaches women who are already connected to diaspora networks and civic structures. Several subgroups are likely underrepresented as a result: women with disabilities or serious illness; women in acute economic precarity; very recently arrived women still outside established networks; and young women aged 18-24 whose primary social connections are host-country peer groups rather than diaspora structures.

Age intersects with displacement in ways that aggregate findings cannot fully capture. Young women aged 18-24 who left Ukraine as teenagers built their professional identity, language competency, and social networks in host countries, meaning their connection to Ukraine is mediated primarily through family ties and online spaces rather than professional or civic embeddedness, which explains the largest observed gap between willingness and actual engagement among this cohort. At the other end, older women are least likely to be reached by employment-based engagement frameworks, most vulnerable to involuntary return if host-country social support is reduced, and least visible in civic networks.

Region of origin intersects with displacement experience in ways this study cannot fully disaggregate. Women from frontline and formerly or currently occupied regions – Donetsk, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson – carry a qualitatively different displacement experience than those who left from cities further from active conflict. They may face direct trauma, loss of property or family members, and the specific impossibility of returning to a home region that no longer exists in its pre-war form.

1.2. QUALITATIVE COMPONENT

The qualitative block covered 4 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 11 key informant interviews (KIIs), involving approximately 35 women from more than ten EU countries. The qualitative component covered four focus group discussions, drawing on remotely employed women from Poland, Germany, Italy, Romania, and Spain (FG 1); advocacy-active women from Germany, Poland, and Belgium (FG 2.1 and 2.2); female students and recent graduates from Belgium, France, Germany, Czech Republic, and Austria (FG 3); and women who returned to Ukraine from Czech Republic, France, Slovakia, and Portugal (FG 4.1 and 4.2).

Key Informant Interviews included structured conversation with the representatives of Ukrainian women-led organizations and initiative groups in Germany, Spain, Finland, diaspora supportive initiatives in Ukraine, international development programmes representatives and business representatives. Preliminary findings were tested in two stakeholder validation workshops with representatives of civil society, government and international organisations.

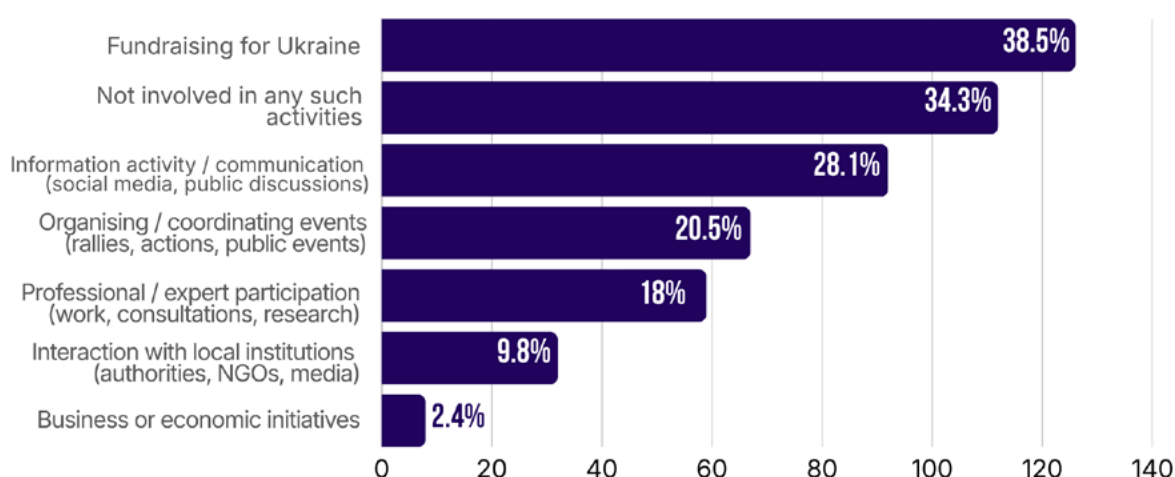
2. CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND ADVOCACY

Ukrainians abroad have played a civic role since the full-scale invasion by supporting Ukraine materially, strengthening its international image and countering Russian narratives⁸. Diaspora mobilisation documents awareness raising, interaction with public and political actors in host countries, and social media-enabled mobilisation as recurring forms of engagement⁹.

Within this broader picture, civic engagement among Ukrainian women in the EU deserves its own closer look. It should be understood through formal participation in organisations or advocacy campaigns, but also through a wider spectrum of everyday practices of people-to-people communication and citizen diplomacy that sustain Ukraine's visibility, legitimacy and support in host societies. This engagement is broad but unevenly structured, ranging from fundraising and volunteering to informal public diplomacy in workplaces, universities, neighbourhoods and personal networks, and in some conditions – to formal interaction with NGOs, media, local authorities or political institutions.

Two thirds of survey respondents (67%) were involved in at least one Ukraine-related activity in the past twelve months. Fundraising remains the most common format (39%), followed by information activity and social media communication (28%), organising or coordinating events (20%), professional or expert participation (18%), and interaction with local institutions (10%).

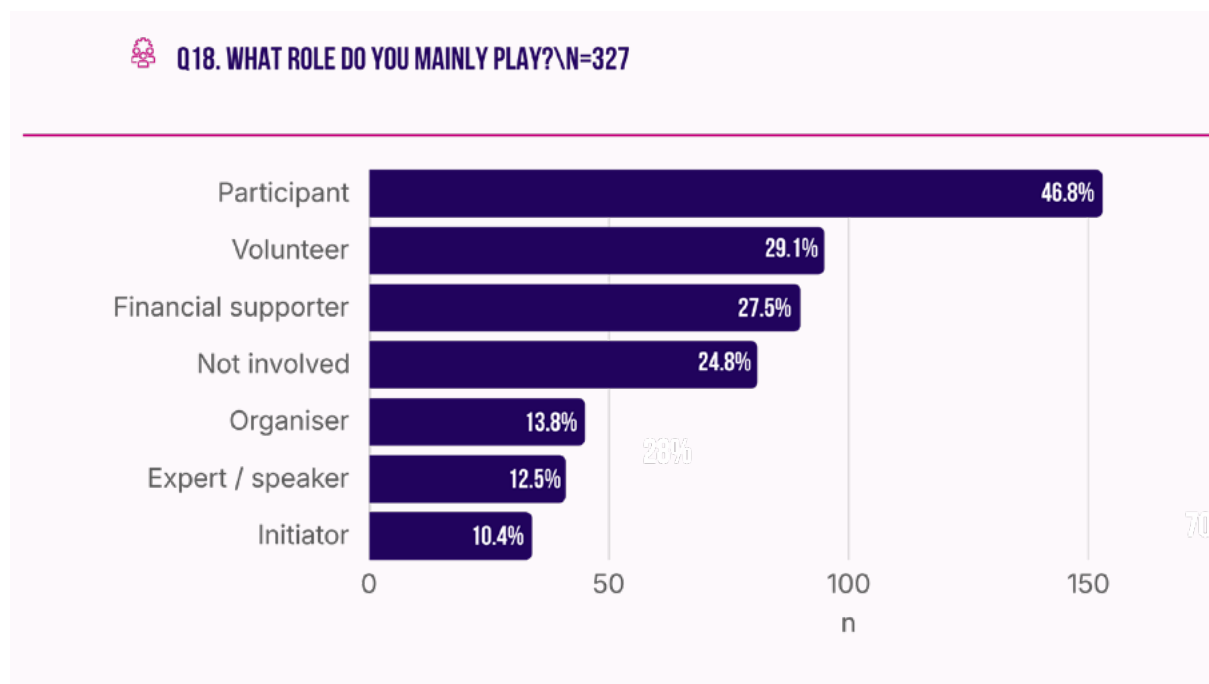
 **Q16. WHICH FORMATS OF SUPPORTING UKRAINE WERE YOU INVOLVED IN DURING THE PAT 12 YEARS? \ N=327,**



⁸ Maria Koinova (2024), "The Diaspora's Mobilization Post-Invasion Has Provided Crucial Support to Ukraine," Migration Information Source, Migration Policy Institute, October 24, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/ukraine-diaspora-mobilization>.

⁹ Agnieszka Fihel et al. (2024), "Diasporas at War: The Mobilisation of Ukrainian Diasporas in Two Different Host Contexts," paper submitted to the EPC2024 conference, Edinburgh, June 12–15, <https://epc2024.eaps.nl/uploads/240069>

However, the structure of their engagement is highly uneven. Most activity takes place outside formal institutions, without organisational affiliation, stable funding, or clear channels of recognition. Frequency of engagement is also differentiated: 23% of respondents are involved at least once a month, while 31% have been involved only a few times, and 29% not at all. The dominant role is that of participant (47%) or volunteer (29%); organisers and initiators together account for 24%.



2.1. PEOPLE TO PEOPLE DIPLOMACY

A significant form of daily engagement is the constant informal task of explaining Ukraine's situation to local residents, colleagues, neighbours, classmates, partners, and acquaintances. This form of engagement requires no organisational affiliation and no budget, and it remains one of the most widespread and emotionally demanding forms of advocacy described by respondents. This is emotional labour in the technical sense: invisible, unpaid, and structurally gendered work that carries real psychological cost. It is disproportionately allocated to women because women are more often in the informal social positions – at work, at school, in neighbourhoods – where this explanatory function falls by default. The Migration Policy Institute (2024) documents growing burnout among diaspora activists as the war continues into its fourth year; for women who carry both integration pressures at home and representative obligations abroad, this burnout risk is compounded¹⁰. For many women, it comes from a deeply held sense that representing Ukraine well, in ordinary daily life, simply matters. Being Ukrainian abroad carries with it a felt responsibility to explain the war, to put Ukraine's needs into words people

¹⁰ Maria Koinova (2024), "The Diaspora's Mobilization Post-Invasion Has Provided Crucial Support to Ukraine," Migration Information Source, Migration Policy Institute, October 24, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/ukraine-diaspora-mobilization>.

can understand, to correct misinformation, and to represent the country in everyday interactions, large and small. Naming it as emotional labour rather than simply as "dedication" matters, because it opens the question of compensation, recognition, and redistribution. FGD participants in this study described the exhaustion of this explanatory role as the sense that it is "truly endless work" with no state-level support behind it and several described reducing their level of engagement over time not from loss of commitment but from depletion of capacity.

"Things that seem so obvious to us have to be chewed over and explained here from scratch. And it's truly endless work, especially for the state to take on. It's good that we're doing all of this at the level of everyday ambassadorship, but there are millions of Ukrainians in Europe and there is still no real Ukrainian voice, no state-level approach, no information campaigns from major media."

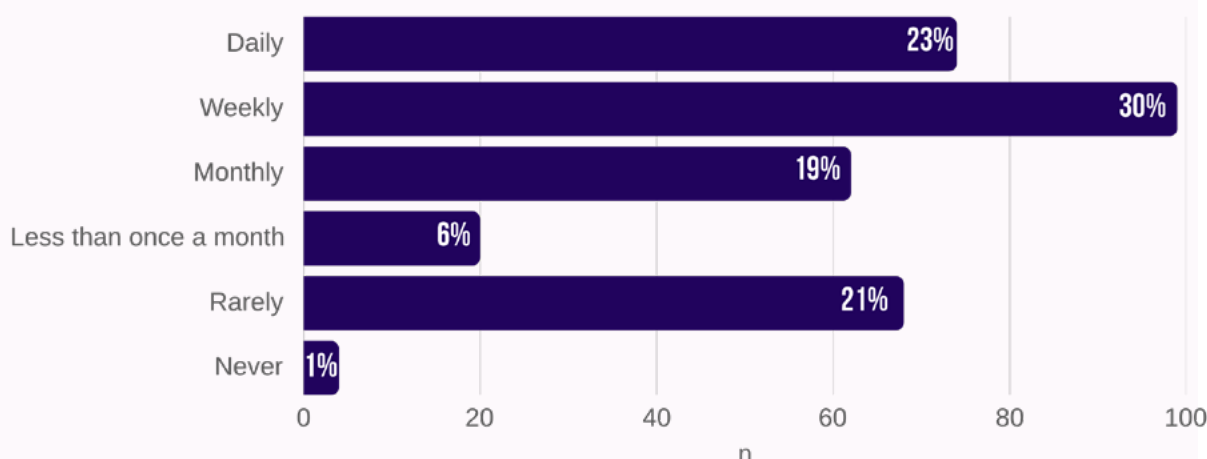
— FGD, Ukrainian women in EU with remote employment connection

Among women with children, everyday diplomacy takes on an additional dimension. Decisions about language use at home, school choice, cultural activities, and community belonging are not only personal – they shape whether the next generation maintains a meaningful connection to Ukraine or assimilates fully into host-country identity. This form of influence is invisible in civic participation statistics but operates at a scale that no formal advocacy programme can replicate. Supporting mothers in maintaining Ukrainian cultural and linguistic identity for their children is therefore a long-term investment in Ukraine's transnational civic presence.

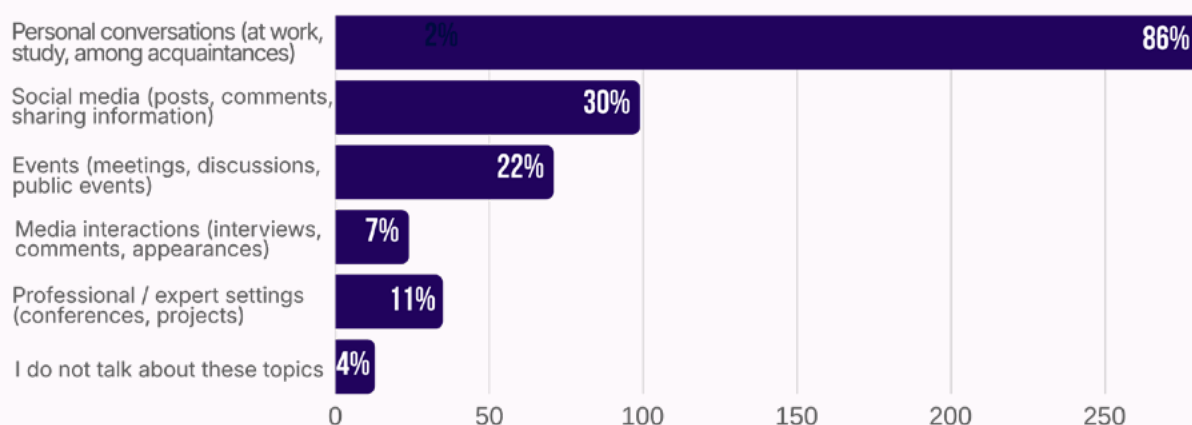
Survey data confirms that this is one of the most pervasive forms of advocacy in the sample. Across the full survey, 53% of respondents talk about Ukraine with people in their host country daily or weekly, and the dominant format is personal conversation at work, in study settings, or among acquaintances rather than any organised or public-facing channel.



Q19. HOW OFTEN DO YOU TALK TO PEOPLE IN YOUR HOST COUNTRY ABOUT UKRAINE?



Q20. IN WHICH FORMATS DOES THIS USUALLY HAPPEN?



2.2. CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

Cultural diplomacy is one of the most visible deliberate forms of advocacy among Ukrainian women abroad, but the qualitative data show that it is not a single type of activity. It performs at least three different functions: making Ukraine visible to host societies, sustaining Ukrainian community life abroad, and aiming to challenge the residual dominance of Russian cultural frames in European cultural spaces.

The first model can be described as embedded cultural presence. In this model, Ukrainian culture is introduced into already existing host-society spaces. This can include participation in local festivals, schools, libraries, churches, theatres, universities, museums, municipal events, charity fairs, community celebrations

or informal neighbourhood gatherings. Its logic is to “show Ukrainian culture”, but also to make Ukraine legible within the cultural routines of the host society. For some respondents, cultural visibility is close to a competitive necessity, a space that has to be actively held, because it will otherwise be filled by Russian culture by default.

“If we don't occupy a cultural or historical niche, Russians will occupy it very quickly, and then we lose support, including from Germans, because they only hear one version.”

— KI, actively engaged women, international organization representative, Germany

The second model can be described as institutional cultural mediation. It operates through professional cultural, academic and diplomatic channels, including Ukrainian language audio guides in museums, cooperation with embassies, university partnerships, curated film screenings, museum projects, public lectures and cultural events hosted by established institutions. Unlike community based cultural events, this model depends on professional expertise, institutional trust and access to recognised cultural platforms. Its value lies in making Ukrainian culture visible not only as community heritage, but as part of European cultural and academic spaces.

“Before the full scale invasion, this museum had never engaged with such a proposal, that Ukraine would fund Ukrainian audio guides on its own territory. The ambassador himself told me that.”

— Ukrainian women, FGD participant

The third model is community centred. It is especially visible among recently established organisations that use film screenings, festivals, music events, poetry evenings, Ukrainian holidays and fundraising gatherings to keep Ukrainian communities connected.

Others argue that visibility alone is not enough if the content reproduces narrow or exhausting images of Ukraine. Respondents criticised two dominant formats: war trauma, which can generate compassion fatigue, and simplified folklore or “kitsch”, which may make Ukrainian culture appear shallow or outdated. In this view, cultural diplomacy should not rely only on guilt, shock or recognisable ethnic markers. It should generate curiosity, respect and admiration for Ukraine as a complex contemporary society.

“Europeans are tired of constant content about the war. We get fed either painful folklore kitsch or content about the war, and neither works. We need to spark real curiosity about Ukraine, not guilt.”

— KI, Ukrainian organization representative, Finland

A constraint shared across all three models is dependence on the goodwill of local gatekeepers, including theatre directors, municipality officials, and event organisers, who can block further dissemination without explanation. Funding scarcity compounds this fragility, with several respondents describing cultural projects run on personal savings, reimbursed months later if at all.

2.3. FUNDRAISING

Fundraising is the most widespread format in which civic and economic engagement overlap. It requires minimal institutional access and can be organised through personal networks or social media, and for many respondents it is the channel where the connection between individual action and concrete outcome feels most direct. Fundraising is the most common Ukraine-related activity in the survey, reported by 39% of respondents.

Unlike institutional advocacy, cultural diplomacy, or professional engagement, fundraising does not require advanced host-country language skills, formal affiliation, access to decision makers, or long preparation. It can be done from any country, at any scale, and often comes with immediate feedback through receipts, photo reports, or public updates, which appears to be part of its appeal.

"I collected money for chemical heaters for soldiers over the winter. We gathered it together, then I got sent a photo report, I forwarded it to my colleagues, and everyone felt like they were part of something incredible, something important."

— KI, actively engaged woman, international organization representative, Germany

This directness also explains why fundraising tends to be the format that survives when others fall away. Several respondents described a shift from active volunteering, organising, and event participation in the first years of the full-scale war toward more limited, lower-effort forms of support in the most recent period, as integration into host-country life left less time and energy for anything beyond it. In this sense, fundraising functions as an entry-level channel of engagement and a fallback position once capacity for more demanding forms of participation has narrowed.

2.4. ADVOCACY AND INTERACTION WITH INSTITUTIONS

Institutional advocacy is the point at which civic engagement can move from visibility to influence. For Ukrainian women in the EU, this form of engagement is statistically less common than fundraising, volunteering or informal public diplomacy, but it is strategically important because it can make Ukrainian interests visible in local decision making, public services, media agendas and political debates.

Over a quarter of respondents (27%) have interacted with NGOs or civil society organisations on Ukraine-related advocacy; 6% have had contact with local authorities and 2% with politicians. Seven in ten have had no such interaction.



Everyday conversations, volunteering and community initiatives can sustain Ukraine's visibility in host societies, but they do not automatically translate into institutional representation. The transition requires language support, advocacy training, information about entry points, mentoring, and trusted organisations that can help women understand where and how they can participate.

To make your point heard, to be present at German venues, you must speak German at a near-perfect level. [...] If we want to talk about advocacy or lobbying, people need to be specifically trained for it.

- KI, NGO representative in Germany

Overall, accessed readiness for more active engagement is high: 76% answered "rather yes" or "yes" to the question of willingness to engage more actively in initiatives related to investment attraction, EU integration support, and Ukraine's reconstruction (Q22).

Someone who really wants to will gnaw through the rock. But someone who wants to, yet has no time to gnaw through rock, will not find the way.

– KI, NGO representative in Ukraine (working with diaspora)

Some institutional entry points already exist but remain underused. In Germany, local Integration Councils and similar advisory bodies offer a concrete mechanism for municipal level participation by residents with a migration background, including in some cases foreign nationals with temporary residence or protection status. Ukrainian representation in such bodies exists, but appears uneven and not yet systematically mobilised. The practical gap identified during the validation workshop is that many Ukrainians are not aware of these channels, do not know whether they can vote or stand, and lack guidance on how to use them for local advocacy.

The Unity Hub model (Berlin, Stockholm) is especially relevant because it can function as an institutional bridge rather than only as a community space. Unity Hubs currently provide support for Ukrainian citizens' connection with the state, verified information and information/advisory support, and help facilitate informed decisions about voluntary return to Ukraine and subsequent sustainable reintegration.

With time, hubs like this could also become a genuinely useful resource for diaspora communities' own advocacy efforts, offering a recognised, well-resourced space they can draw on rather than build alone. Much may depend on whether hubs lean primarily toward supporting consultations, return-related logistics, documentation and coordination of processes, or whether they grow into something that also nurtures Ukraine-related activism within the host country itself. This potential will likely depend on whether hubs develop practical mechanisms for community use, including regular consultations, clear procedures for proposing activities, project matchmaking, legal and administrative guidance, and small-scale support for cultural, educational, and civic initiatives.

2.5. CONDITIONS FOR BETTER ENGAGEMENT

Respondents repeatedly described a strong willingness to remain connected to Ukraine, but also pointed to practical barriers that make engagement difficult to sustain over time. These barriers include uneven local conditions in host countries, limited access to funding, weak links with Ukrainian institutions, fragmented diaspora structures, and the exhaustion caused by unpaid civic labour.

- **Networks and training.** The most consistently effective mechanism described across the qualitative data is horizontal peer-to-peer networking between organisations. These networks operate through trust, personal contacts and shared tasks rather than through a single centralised structure. Respondents described them as effective because they allow organisations to keep their own niche while

remaining connected through referrals, information exchange, joint events and mutual support. This model reduces competition and makes cooperation possible without requiring one organisation to represent the entire community.

Training and small-grant programmes also appear to be effective when they are practical, low-cost and linked to immediate opportunities. The Vidnova Plus programme in Berlin was described as a particularly useful model: a twice-yearly, three-day training and networking programme for Ukrainian women, combined with access to small follow-on grants. Respondents noted that several participants used rather small grants to implement their own projects. This suggests that even modest financial support can produce visible results when combined with training, mentoring and access to local civil society actors.

Such interventions matter most because of what they counteract. IOM evidence documents a "scar effect" of prolonged under-employment (employment below available professional capacity): years of working below qualification level gradually erodes the professional confidence, networks, and practical skills that more demanding forms of advocacy require¹¹. Training and small-grant programmes help rebuild exactly these things making them one of the few mechanisms that can reverse this erosion, not just soften its effects.

- **University partnerships** offer another durable mechanism for maintaining connection with Ukraine. The Mohyla Academy and University of Giessen partnership was described as a structure that combines education, professional development and cultural code transmission. Such partnerships create repeated interaction between Ukrainian and host-country institutions, support Ukrainian students and faculty abroad, and preserve intellectual and professional ties with Ukraine. Unlike one-off events, they create a long-term institutional channel that can outlast individual project cycles.

- **Grant support.** The most consistently documented systemic barrier is the grant gap for post-2022 organisations. New Ukrainian organisations abroad often cannot access Ukrainian grants because they are not physically based in Ukraine, while host-country grants usually require a local funding history they do not yet have. This creates a closed loop in which the most recently established and often most contextually relevant organisations are also the least able to access funding. Dedicated first-grant instruments or small grant windows for post-2022 Ukrainian initiatives abroad would directly address this gap.

All the grants I could have applied for as the head of a civic organisation in Ukraine are unavailable to Ukrainian women abroad, because you're required to be physically present in Ukraine. And the grants available abroad are completely inaccessible for new organisations like ours, so we're stuck in a grant vacuum, and that's a serious problem.

— KI, Ukrainian organization representative, Finland

¹¹ IOM (2025), Enhancing Labour Market Inclusion for People Displaced from Ukraine <https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl2616/files/documents/2025-03/enhancing-labour-market-inclusion-for-people-displaced-from-ukraine.pdf>

Respondents repeatedly emphasised that supporting Ukraine is rarely difficult because of lack of willingness; it is difficult because it consumes time, health and emotional capacity. Women who are simultaneously studying, working, caring for children or relatives, integrating into a host society and maintaining ties with Ukraine have limited capacity for continuous unpaid engagement. Any financial shock, such as job loss, reduced scholarship or a partner's unemployment, can immediately displace civic activity. This should be treated as a structural fragility, not as a personal failure.

This fragility is also gendered in its distribution. The civic work described throughout this section (community organising, cultural diplomacy, fundraising, everyday ambassadorship) draws on exactly the relational skills, communication capacity, and caregiving orientation that women are socialised to treat as natural and unremunerative. The same qualities that make Ukrainian women effective diaspora advocates are the qualities that make it socially difficult for them to name a cost or set a limit. Any support framework that relies on this supply of goodwill without addressing its gendered and unpaid character should be reflected by the actors.

- **Local context dependence.** Country context further shapes which conditions help civic activism in host countries possible. Respondents consistently distinguished between capital cities and large urban centres, where an established Ukrainian infrastructure of cultural events, language courses, and peer networks already exists, and smaller, more remote or peripheral locations, where this infrastructure is largely absent and has to be built from scratch by individuals or force a deliberate choice of withdrawal.

The same divide reappears at the level of country size. In smaller host countries or in those with fewer Ukrainian residents overall, the diaspora was described as thinner, less organisationally developed, and more fragmented between earlier, already-assimilated arrivals and the post-2022 wave, who do not necessarily cooperate with one another. That is why civic infrastructure for the diaspora cannot rely on a single national strategy and instead needs differentiated approaches for capital city, secondary city, and small town contexts within the same country.

The Czech Republic, which participants described as highly supportive in 2022–23, has become a more difficult context following political changes. Poland was described as having deteriorated sharply after the presidential campaign, with anti-Ukrainian narratives becoming more visible and socially acceptable. Some regions of Germany were identified as one of the most hostile contexts, with reports of open aggression and pseudo-Ukrainian organisations promoting pro-Russian narratives.

"There are simply far fewer Ukrainian organisations and far fewer opportunities in other federal states. A woman might be in a city where one in three people is Ukrainian, yet there is not a single Ukrainian organisation there, and no support, because she is alone."

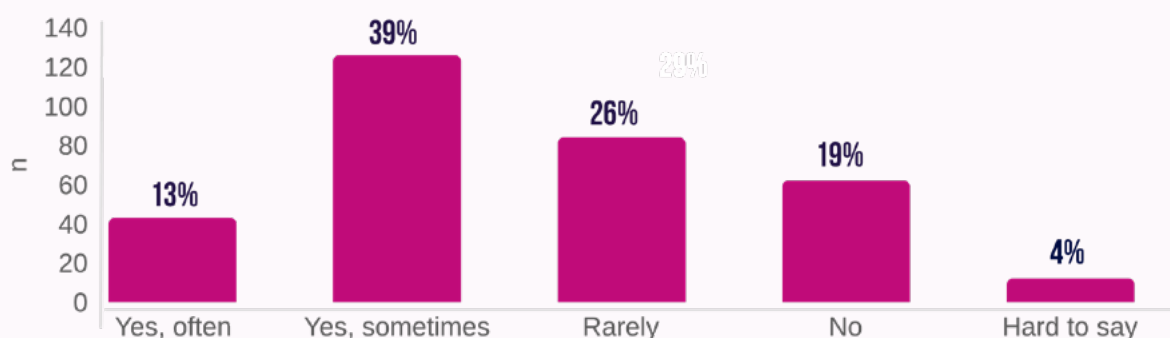
- KI, NGO representative, civically engaged Ukrainian women in Germany

This variation shows that “Ukrainian women in the EU” should not be treated as a single civic category operating under uniform conditions. The same level of motivation may produce very different forms of engagement depending on the host-country context: in supportive environments, women may speak publicly, organise events, engage institutions, or build partnerships; in hostile environments, engagement may shift into closed channels, protected networks, fundraising, or private conversations. So is that support mechanisms should be context-sensitive. **A single pan-European advocacy model would miss the local political conditions that determine what forms of participation are possible, safe, and effective.**

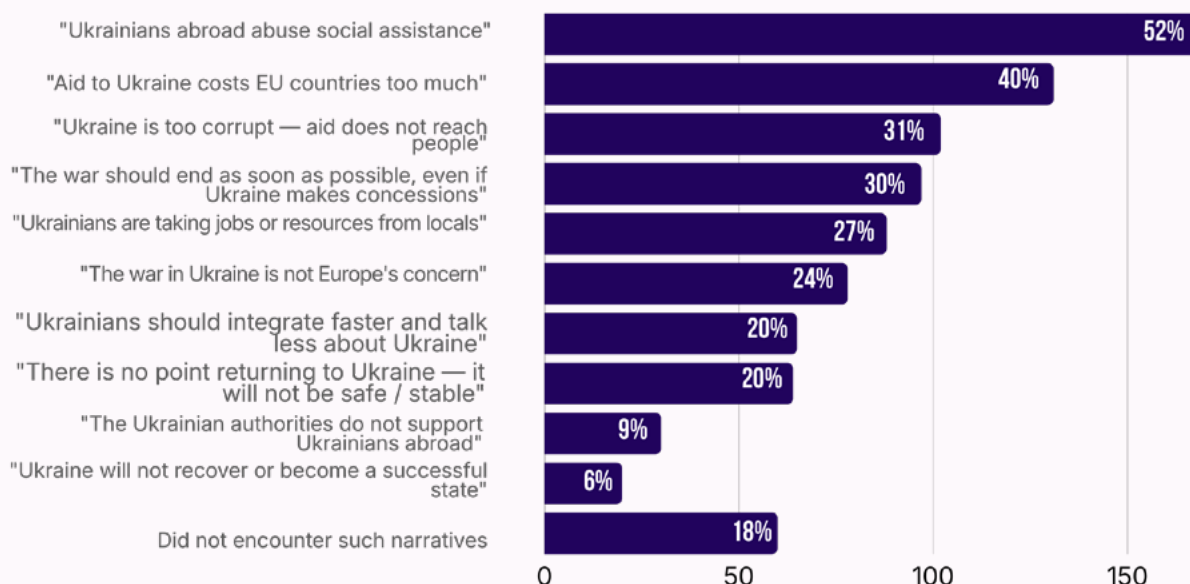
3. DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES AND IMPACT ON PARTICIPATION

Disinformation and manipulative narratives are not only a background condition of Ukrainian women's lives abroad. They operate as an active instrument that shapes the environment in which civic engagement, advocacy and public representation take place. Over half of respondents (52%) have encountered negative or manipulative narratives about Ukraine sometimes or often; 26% encounter them rarely; 19% have not. The most prevalent narratives are: "Ukrainians abroad abuse social assistance" (52%), "aid to Ukraine costs EU countries too much" (40%), "Ukraine is too corrupt" (31%), and "the war should end quickly even if Ukraine concedes" (30%).

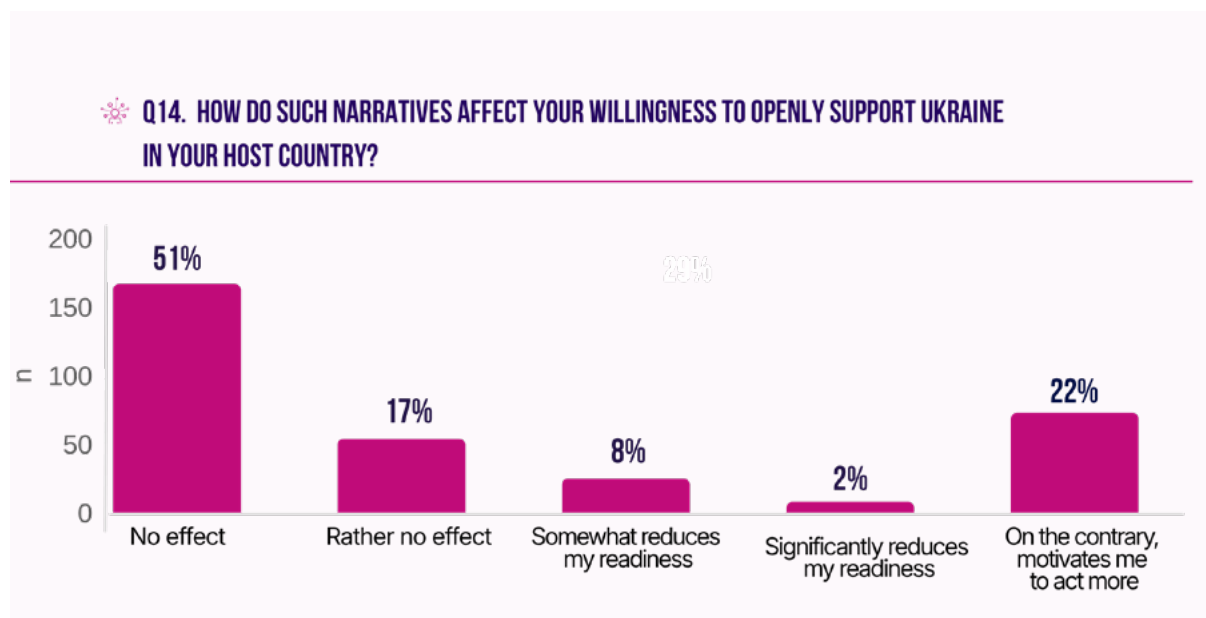
Q12. HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED NEGATIVE OR MANIPULATIVE NARRATIVES ABOUT UKRAINE IN YOUR HOST COUNTRY?



Q13. WHICH NEGATIVE OR MANIPULATIVE NARRATIVES ABOUT UKRAINE HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED MOST OFTEN?



The impact on willingness to advocate is more contained than might be expected: 51% report no effect, and 22% say negative narratives actually motivate them to act more. Only 10% report that their readiness to support Ukraine publicly has been reduced. These aggregate numbers, however, mask more granular dynamics visible in the qualitative data. The evidence points to two levels of harmful narratives.



Level 1: External narratives targeting host-country audiences. These narratives translate Russia's anti-Ukraine messaging into local social and economic anxieties: welfare competition, housing pressure, public spending, corruption, migration fatigue and "peace at any price".

Level 2: Stigmatisation of women who left Ukraine. The "traitor" narrative implying that women who are abroad have abandoned Ukraine is a persistent background factor across all groups. It produces self-doubt, guilt and hesitation about whether women abroad have the moral right to advocate, criticise, represent Ukraine or claim a role in recovery. This is especially damaging because many respondents are already maintaining a difficult dual position: building a life in the host country while remaining emotionally, professionally and civically connected to Ukraine.

I feel like I'm not needed by my own state. I want to invest in it. But I feel it isn't interested in me right now,

– FGD participant, active woman abroad

The qualitative data also suggest that this stigma is stronger online than in direct encounters. Respondents and experts noted that tension between those who left and those who stayed is often amplified in digital spaces, while in-person meetings are usually more nuanced and less hostile. This matters because online narratives can still shape self-perception even when they do not correspond to everyday social reality.

The qualitative data identify some mechanisms through which harmful narratives may suppress participation. In some contexts, respondents avoid speaking Ukrainian publicly, displaying Ukrainian symbols, posting openly about Ukraine, or engaging in visible advocacy because they fear confrontation or hostility. Respondents also describe the impossibility of countering every false claim, especially when narratives are repeated across media, social networks and personal conversations.

4. ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT AND LINKS WITH UKRAINE

Almost half of the respondents (47%) currently maintain some form of professional or work-related link with Ukraine. The most common form is remote work for or collaboration with Ukrainian companies or organisations (20% and 18% respectively); 5% have a business or civic initiative linked to Ukraine; 17% are considering collaboration.

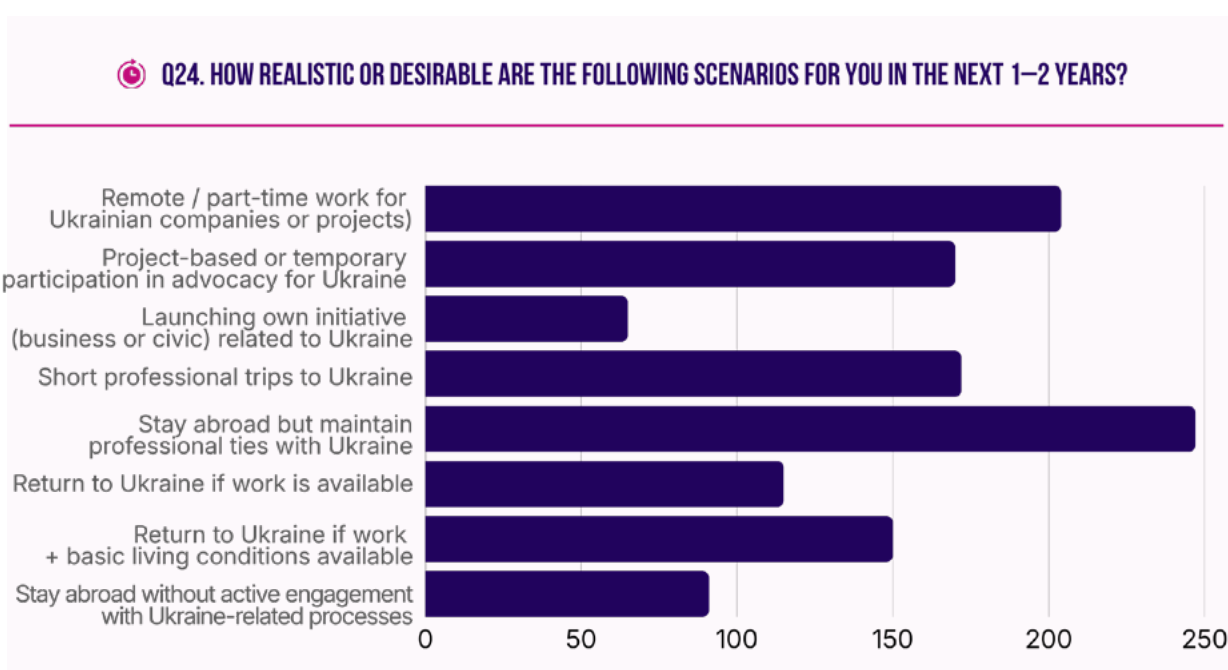


The disinformation environment described in Section 3 has a direct economic dimension. Narratives that frame Ukrainian women abroad as having abandoned their country, or that portray Ukraine's institutions as corrupt and untrustworthy, create specific barriers to remote economic engagement: they reduce women's sense of legitimacy in claiming a professional role in Ukraine's recovery, and they erode trust in Ukrainian employers and state structures as viable partners. This dynamic was noted in qualitative discussions and should be considered when designing economic engagement programmes, countering these narratives is not only a civic task but a precondition for broader economic participation.

The pattern of remote economic engagement varies sharply by country of residence. Available data suggest that in Poland, particularly Warsaw, between 12% and 24% of employed displaced Ukrainians maintain active remote links with Ukrainian employers, compared to 3-5% in Germany and Italy. The Czech Republic occupies an intermediate position. This variation is not primarily explained by differences in willingness or qualifications. It reflects host-country cost-of-living differentials (Ukrainian salaries are more competitive relative to local wages in lower-cost countries), community density (larger Ukrainian communities create more referral

and trust networks), and geographic proximity (which makes hybrid or periodic in-person work more feasible)¹². Policy recommendations for expanding remote economic engagement therefore need to be country-differentiated, not designed as a single pan-European instrument. More recent systematic data on this pattern across EU countries does not yet exist, which is itself a research gap this study's findings begin to address.

Despite this country-level variation in remote engagement patterns, when asked about realistic scenarios for the near future, respondents converge overwhelmingly on connection rather than return. 76% see "staying abroad while maintaining professional or other ties with Ukraine" as realistic or desirable, by far the most frequently endorsed scenario. Remote or part-time work for Ukrainian organisations is seen as realistic by 62%, while full return is realistic for 35% if work alone is available, rising to 46% once work and basic living conditions are both in place.



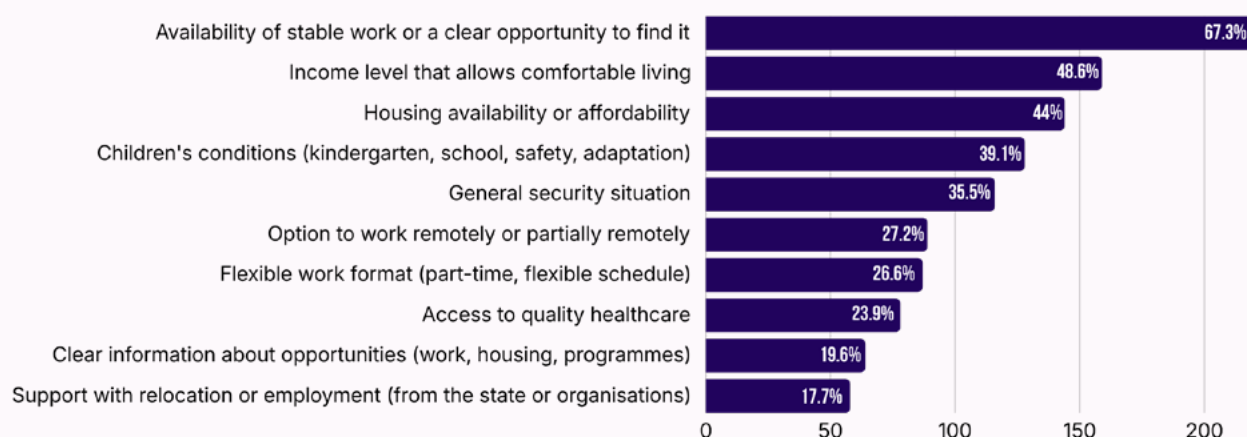
4.1. CONDITIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND RETURN

The factors that would most influence a decision to engage more actively with Ukrainian organisations differ sharply from those that would drive an actual return. For economic engagement, income level is the dominant factor (67%), followed by the security situation (49%) and the option to work remotely (44%). For return, the picture reverses: the security situation dominates overwhelmingly (71%), followed by income level (55%) and then stable employment (32%).

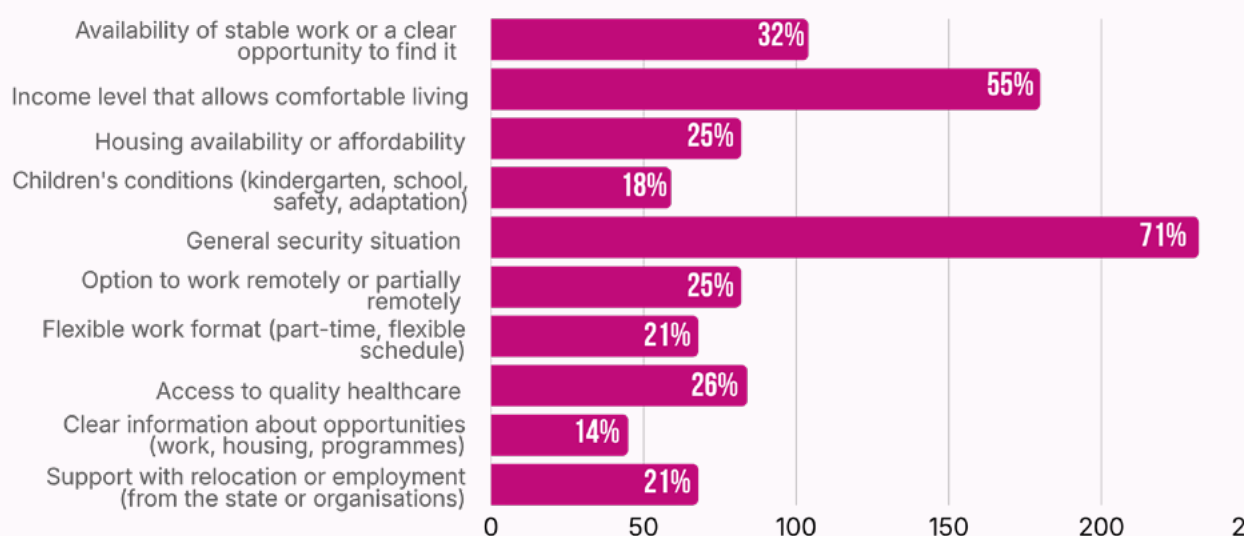
¹² ICMPD / ReliefWeb (2023), Displacement, Integration and Return: What are the Remote Work Possibilities for Ukrainians? <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/displacement-integration-and-return-what-remote-work-possibilities-ukrainians> and German Economic Team (2023), A Survey of Ukrainian Refugees <https://www.german-economic-team.com/en/newsletter/a-survey-of-ukrainian-refugees/>

In other words, respondents are more easily drawn into engagement by financial terms, but are far more cautious about physically returning unless the security situation itself has fundamentally changed, with salary becoming a secondary, though still significant, consideration once that threshold is met.

Q25. WHAT WOULD MOST INFLUENCE YOUR DECISION TO WORK MORE ACTIVELY WITH UKRAINIAN BUSINESSES / ORGANISATIONS?



Q26. WHAT WOULD MOST INFLUENCE YOUR DECISION TO RETURN TO UKRAINE?



Conditions for children, including kindergartens, schools, safety, and adaptation, are rated lower than is often assumed, at 20% for engagement and 18% for return. This does not mean such conditions are unimportant; it more likely reflects the extent to which security concerns currently crowd out every other consideration.

"The biggest challenge is women with children. The children have already spent three or four years in school, they've adapted, and especially now they don't want to go back. And a mother will definitely not return without them."

— KII respondent, diaspora support programme coordinator

Longitudinal evidence reinforces this distinction between engagement and return. Research from EconPol shows that return intentions shift over time and are shaped primarily by security conditions in a person's home region, while employment and skills acquired abroad can still preserve productivity and maintain a future bridge back to Ukraine. This supports a policy sequence built around connection first, with return following once conditions allow¹³.

4.2. BARRIERS TO REMOTE EMPLOYMENT

Tax and legal uncertainty. The absence of clear guidance on the treatment of individual entrepreneur status (FOP) for women working abroad, exposure to double taxation, and the undefined legal status of "Ukrainian-connected" remote workers together create a persistent structural barrier. Four years into displacement, most respondents have still not found a definitive answer to these questions, and adaptation has been forced and informal, involving closed FOP accounts, income routed through third-party accounts, or simple acceptance of dual tax exposure. The validation workshop confirmed this remains a live issue at the level of interstate advocacy, beyond the scope of any single project.

"while I was registered as private entrepreneur and payed taxes in Ukraine My income here was taxed locally too. Then it turned out I had to pay the difference. I can't understand these tricks. I live here, I use the local infrastructure, why should I pay Ukraine the difference?"

— KII respondent, founder of a Ukrainian organisation abroad

Location limitations by Ukrainian employers. A significant share of respondents report that Ukrainian employers decline candidates who are

¹³ Joop Adema, Cevat Giray Aksoy, Yvonne Giesing, and Panu Poutvaara (2024), "Ukrainian Refugees' Return Intentions and Integration in the Course of Time," EconPol Forum 25, no. 6: 36–40, <https://www.ifo.de/DocDL/econpol-forum-2024-6-adema-aksoy-giesing-poutvaara-eu-regulation.pdf>.

abroad, regardless of qualifications or willingness to make regular in-person visits. The rare employer with a genuinely flexible remote culture is described across groups as a confirming exception rather than the norm, pointing to a cultural and organisational pattern that Ukrainian employers need incentive or pressure to change.

"Even if I'm willing to come to Kyiv once a quarter and stay for a month, it doesn't work. It's either a hybrid office or nothing. They demand full physical presence."

— FGD participant, women working remote for Ukrainian company

Skills invisibility in host countries. Women with advanced professional profiles frequently find themselves offered only low-skilled positions in host-country labour markets. The disconnect between professional identity and available work is described as one of the strongest disincentives to deeper local integration and simultaneously as a reason to maintain Ukrainian professional links at all costs.

A cleaner here, but an expert in gender equality back in Ukraine. We've already lost our identity once. We need to feel like ourselves again, at least somewhere."

— KII respondent, founder of a Ukrainian organisation abroad

This dynamic of professional erasure that occurs at both departure and return was named during the validation workshops as "social death": a person can accumulate languages, qualifications, management experience, and civic leadership abroad, yet arrive back in Ukraine holding an effectively blank employment record with no recognised continuity of professional identity. The same mechanism operates in reverse when women leave: Ukrainian credentials and networks become invisible in host-country labour markets. Until such a mechanism exists – whether through digital skills passports, recognition of remote work, return fellowships, or sectoral talent registers – the costs of both departure and return will continue to be borne individually rather than structurally.

These three barriers map closely onto policy gaps already identified in existing return and employment strategy proposals, including the regulation of distance employment from abroad, guarantees of labour and social rights, tax arrangements between Ukraine and host countries, recognition of foreign qualifications, and dedicated support for career reintegration. EICMPD's INTAKE study (2025), covering Austria, Germany and Poland, documents that displaced Ukrainian women face labour-market penalties beyond those facing displaced Ukrainians generally: concentration in lower-wage feminised sectors, pressure toward part-time

¹⁴ ICMPPD INTAKE (2025), New Perspectives on Labour Market Integration of Displaced Ukrainian Women – <https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/64761/file/INTAKE-New-perspectives-Labour-Market-Integration-of-Displaced-Ukrainian-Women.pdf>

arrangements, and persistent credential non-recognition¹⁴.

Research from Poland specifically adds evidence of a gender wage gap within the displaced population — Ukrainian women earning less than Ukrainian men in comparable host-country positions¹⁵.

Several respondents already practise circular migration: regular trips to Ukraine ranging from monthly to quarterly. This pattern is described as the most practical form of maintaining genuine connection, combining in-person professional activity and financial contribution (paying for Ukrainian doctors, tutors, psychologists).

¹⁵ Grabowska et al. (2025), Comparative Migration Studies – <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s40878-025-00478-4>

5. SUPPORT AND COORDINATION MECHANISMS

In this context of predominant intention of a continued connection with Ukraine from abroad the most commonly cited support need across the survey is accessible and clear information about opportunities, mentioned by 60% of respondents, followed by employment and work engagement programmes at 38%, financial support including grants at 37%, and training and upskilling at 35%. Professional network access and coordination support rank lower, at 18% and 24% respectively, which suggests that the binding constraint is not a shortage of networks or coordination structures but a shortage of reliable information and concrete entry points into action.

"What I'd need now is information, at the very least, to know where I can go, what I can do. I used to build employment mapping for refugees, an employer database, a refugee database, that kind of thing. I have no information about what I can actually do. How am I supposed to support Ukraine?"

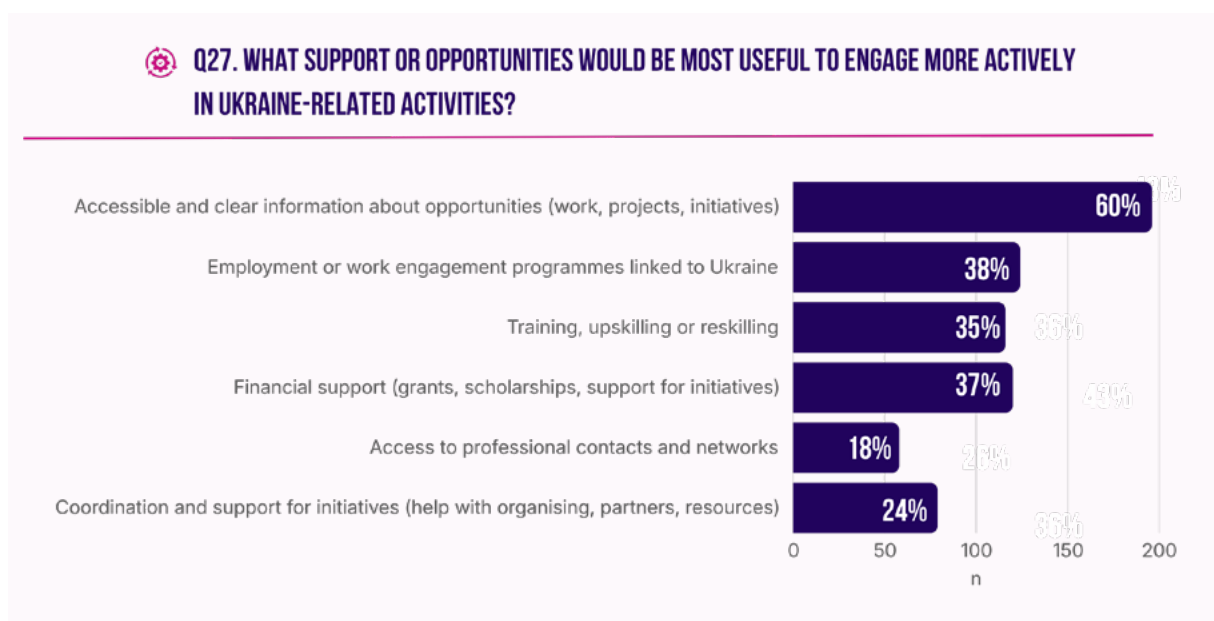
— FGD respondent, advocacy-active women

Preferred communication channels reinforce this picture. Respondents most often select Ukrainian civil society organisations in the host country (48%), dedicated online platforms (43%), and personal contacts or informal networks (36%). Ukrainian embassies and consulates are selected by only 21%, the lowest-ranked option. This does not mean embassies and consulates are seen as irrelevant. Qualitative data suggests respondents view them as important institutional actors, but not yet as regular points of support for community initiatives, employment pathways, or civic engagement.



Q26 (CHANNELS). THROUGH WHICH CHANNELS OR FORMATS WOULD IT BE MOST CONVENIENT TO RECEIVE INFORMATION AND ENGAGE WITH UKRAINE-RELATED INITIATIVES?





Information needs are also closely tied to the question of return specifically. Participants asked not only for general information about Ukraine but for practical tools to assess realistic options, including an employment database and a map of opportunities after return, noting that there are not enough such channels inside Ukraine itself. Women abroad need verified, usable, and regularly updated information covering jobs, projects, communities, grants, housing, education for children, administrative procedures, and ways to stay professionally connected to Ukraine, not only motivational messaging about return or contribution.

These findings align with the directions of the Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity's 2026–2027 Action Plan, which includes digital support tools, development of the Unity Network, preparation of communities in Ukraine, coordination with EU member states, and voluntary return and sustainable reintegration¹⁶. The data suggest these tools should be framed more broadly than return infrastructure, since for many respondents continued connection from abroad is the more realistic near-term scenario. A system built only around return, without also supporting remote work, professional bridging, diaspora civic initiatives, fundraising, advocacy, and cultural engagement, would miss the main pattern identified in the survey.

5.1 SUPPORTING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Civic engagement abroad is sustained largely through informal networks and small, often under-resourced organisations, and the support most needed here is structural rather than motivational.

¹⁶ Ministry of Social Policy, Family and Unity of Ukraine. Draft Action Plan for 2026–2027 on responding to challenges related to the possible end of temporary protection for Ukrainian citizens in the EU; MSP public consultation news, June 1, 2026. URL: <https://www.msp.gov.ua/>

Financial support is especially important for Ukrainian organisations founded abroad after 2022. Many fall into a grant gap, ineligible for Ukrainian grants because they operate outside Ukraine, and unable to access host-country grants because they lack a local funding history. Dedicated first-grant instruments, small operational grants, and simplified support schemes would help newer organisations move from survival mode to sustained community work, directly addressing this stated need.

The role of embassies and consulates also deserves reconsideration. Although not currently the preferred channel for most respondents, they remain important institutional anchors, and their role would be stronger if they worked through trusted Ukrainian CSOs, local initiative groups, and Unity Hubs rather than only through formal communication. This could include convening local Ukrainian organisations, sharing verified opportunities, supporting information campaigns, and linking initiatives with Ukrainian institutions.

The potential of Unity Hubs for enabling civic engagement was already described in Section 2.4 and applies equally here: their institutional role is most valuable when they actively connect Ukrainian women to host-country civil society structures rather than operating primarily as return-support services.

5.2 SUPPORTING PROFESSIONAL AND ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT

For many women, meaningful work is the main condition for sustained connection with Ukraine, whether through remote work with Ukrainian organisations, temporary or circular engagement, consulting, mentoring, skills transfer, or return pathways where appropriate. Financial incentives alone, whether tied to return or to remote engagement, are unlikely to be sufficient without reliable anchors such as meaningful work, stable housing, childcare, education pathways for children, and gradual reintegration support.

Across the range of professional engagement models described by respondents, from remote contracts to short-term placements to full return, several design principles recur regardless of format.

- A clearly bounded time horizon lowers the psychological barrier to engaging at all. A defined, limited commitment, whether a one-year placement, a fixed-term remote contract, or a short-term consulting arrangement, appears to make the initial decision easier, since it does not require indefinite commitment before someone has had a chance to test the fit. Professional engagement programmes of any kind should be explicit and concrete about duration rather than open-ended, at least at the point of entry.
- Selection criteria matter more than credentials. Programmes that select participants based on demonstrated civic or professional engagement,

rather than relying primarily on academic credentials or language proficiency, tend to identify people who are more committed to the work itself and better equipped to navigate the practical and cultural friction of re-engaging with Ukrainian institutions, in person or remotely.

- Institutional/ team resistance is a predictable obstacle, not an exception. Existing staff within host institutions, in Ukraine or in diaspora organisations abroad, often perceive newly engaged participants as competitors for resources, visibility, or decision-making influence, and this resistance tends to surface at the working level rather than at the top. Programme design should anticipate this directly, for example through structured onboarding, clear role definition from the outset, and proactive relationship-building between new participants and existing staff, rather than treating it as an unforeseen implementation problem.

«I ran into the fact that our own Ukrainians can refuse to let you in, fearing competition, or distrust you and treat you as a temporary person. So you explain that I came back for a year, I came back from Europe, I can help you, I know how this works. But I'm here for a year, and no one uses this resource the way it should be used.»

– FGD respondent, return programme participant

Effective return support requires a complex sequenced model. Workshop participants described a four-stage logic: first, accessible and verified information about opportunities; second, psychological support for decision-making and transition; third, active post-return support including job matching, housing guidance, and children's reintegration; and fourth, economic anchoring through project grants or employment guarantees. Critically, this sequence should not route exclusively through state employment centres whose capacity and geographic coverage remain uneven – but should draw on business associations, community organisations, and municipal structures as parallel and sometimes primary delivery channels.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

Engagement abroad and voluntary return are not competing policy goals – they are mutually reinforcing ones. Validation workshop participants and existing longitudinal evidence both confirm that policies supporting structured connection from abroad do not reduce voluntary return intentions – they sustain them. Women who maintain professional ties, civic networks, and institutional relationships with Ukraine while abroad are better positioned to return when conditions allow, because they have preserved the social capital, professional legibility, and practical knowledge of Ukraine that a clean break would erode. The policy implication is direct: every investment in remote employment, diaspora advocacy infrastructure, and cultural engagement is simultaneously an investment in return readiness. Framing these as alternative budget lines – "engagement or voluntary return" – misreads the mechanism.

Economic engagement is real, but structurally undermined. Just over half of respondents currently maintain some professional link with Ukraine. The barriers preventing broader engagement are not primarily about willingness. They include legal and tax uncertainty, unclear rules around remote work from abroad, location discrimination by Ukrainian employers, and the weak recognition of both Ukraine-acquired and host-country-acquired skills.

People are ready to engage economically with Ukraine from abroad chiefly under favourable income conditions, this is the factor most often cited as a precondition for remote work or collaboration with Ukrainian organisations. Favourable security conditions is the factor most often cited as a precondition for physical return, with income mattering as a secondary condition once safety is no longer in doubt.

Civic engagement is broad, informal, and largely unsupported. The most common forms of contribution include fundraising, informal advocacy, cultural diplomacy and everyday explanation of Ukraine to host-society audiences. These activities require time, emotional labour and social capital, but usually receive little or no institutional support. The infrastructure that does exist is often horizontal and peer-based. It is valued because it is flexible, trusted and locally responsive, but it survives largely on unpaid labour and personal motivation, which makes it durable in spirit and fragile in practice. The shift from organising and institutional engagement toward fundraising as a fallback is not only about available time and energy, it is also about what women believe themselves professionally capable of after years of skills-invisible work in host-country labour markets. By extension, the same mechanism applies to civic capacity: years of skills-invisible work erode the professional confidence and networks that more demanding forms of advocacy require. Rebuilding that confidence is therefore not a motivational task but a structural one.

Information is the first bottleneck. Across both civic and economic engagement, the most frequently cited support need is accessible and trustworthy information about opportunities and entry points. Respondents need to know where to work, where to contribute, how to access funding, how to upgrade skills, how to stay connected to Ukrainian institutions, and what realistic options exist if they decide to return. This is a comparatively low-cost problem to address, but its impact is potentially high because information gaps currently block both remote engagement and informed return planning.

Return and departure share a common structural cost. The phenomenon of loss of professional legibility that occurs when women leave Ukraine and again when they attempt to return. Qualifications, work experience, languages and expertise accumulated across borders are not consistently preserved or recognised. The underlying issue is therefore not return alone, but the absence of a system that carries forward a person's professional history across displacement, residence abroad and possible reintegration in Ukraine.

The barriers are gender-compounded. The professional erasure documented in this study, namely – credentials unrecognised, skills devalued, civic labour unrewarded – operates more severely for women than for men in comparable situations. Within displaced Ukrainian communities, women earn less than men, are pushed more frequently into part-time work, and carry a greater share of caregiving responsibilities that constrain the hours available for both paid work and civic engagement. Policies designed in response to this research must therefore go beyond removing universal barriers and address the specific, documented ways in which those barriers are heavier for women, otherwise gender-sensitive language will wrap gender-blind instruments.

Embassies and consulates are trusted in principle but believed to be underused in practice. They rank lowest among preferred support channels, not because respondents view them as illegitimate, but because they are not yet seen as accessible, responsive points of contact for the kinds of everyday support women need. At the same time, Unity Hubs, the Diaspora Alliance and the emerging Unity Network create an opportunity to redefine the role of embassies and consulates as institutional anchors working through trusted civil society organisations, community initiatives and specialised referral pathways.

The state signal has emerged, but local-level mechanisms remain insufficient. The launch of the Diaspora Alliance, Unity Hubs and Create Ukraine shows that Ukraine is beginning to build an engagement infrastructure for Ukrainians abroad. However, this signal has not yet consistently translated into practical mechanisms that women and organisations can use in their everyday work: first-grant access, remote employment pathways, tax guidance, continuation routes after professional programmes, support for post-2022 organisations, or clear consular referral protocols in sensitive cases.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Ukrainian Government

- **Develop a framework policy on Ukrainians abroad with a dedicated focus on women.** Rather than treating time spent abroad as a gradual loss of connection, Ukraine should recognise the ongoing contribution made from outside the country — through vetted information channels, recognition of engagement, and mechanisms for sustaining ties. Under the principle of «nothing about us without us,» those affected by the policy should take part in shaping it rather than receiving a finished document; government communication should respect their agency and their right to decide for themselves whether to stay or return.
- **Provide clear, country-sensitive guidance on tax residency (residence country dependent), double taxation, social contributions and remote work from abroad.** Existing double-taxation agreements do not remove the practical uncertainty faced by women who combine Ukrainian and host-country income. Clear guidance, model scenarios and interstate clarification are needed to prevent informal workarounds and make remote economic engagement with Ukraine legally safer.
- **Preserve and formally recognise professional experience gained abroad.** Ukraine needs tools to prevent professional de-skilling: digital experience profiles, recognition of remote work, return scholarships, internships, and sector-specific databases of professionals and employers. Separately, the process for recognising foreign diplomas and academic degrees should be simplified — it is currently so cumbersome that qualified women return home effectively classified as «unqualified.»
- **Inform communities on benefits of reintegration and provide clear guidance on building reintegration infrastructure** – involving local business associations, community organisations, educational institutions, municipal structures and local media.
- **Continue developing Unity Hubs as a tool for implementing state policy to support Ukrainians abroad and preserve their connection with Ukraine.** Unity Hubs should not be framed only as voluntary return-support centres. Their educational, cultural, professional and community functions should be used to support Ukrainian civic initiatives in host countries, including regular consultations, clear procedures for proposing activities, project matchmaking, legal and administrative guidance, and small-scale support for cultural, educational and civic initiatives.
- **Build on existing diaspora organisations rather than bypassing them.** Pre-2022 Ukrainian diaspora organisations – particularly in Germany and other Western European countries – have established credibility and trust with host-country civil society, municipal authorities, and media that post-2022 organisations have not yet had time to build.

- Many were founded in Russian-speaking post-Soviet contexts and have been cautious about overt political positioning; their work has focused on integration rather than advocacy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should invest in partnership-building with these organisations as trusted intermediaries for advocacy channels, rather than treating them as outdated or irrelevant and building parallel structures from scratch. Equally, post-2022 organisations should not be positioned as replacements for existing ones: differentiated functions, referral relationships, and joint platforms serve the community better than competition for the same space.
- **Build continuation pathways into professional engagement and voluntary return programmes.** Partner with private sector to develop attractive voluntary reimmigration programs with specific focus on women. Structured programmes for the return of professionals in the public and private sector can be a motivating voluntary return mechanism which simultaneously support rebuilding, but their value can be lost if participants have no follow-on route after the placement ends. The possibility of such remote engagement is more sphere dependent and should be further investigated. Government-backed programmes should include alumni networks, consulting rosters, follow-on fellowships, remote expert pools and short-term assignments that allow participants to remain connected.
- **Establish a consular mandate and referral protocol for gender-based violence cases.** Ukrainian embassies and consulates currently lack the mandate, trained staff, and referral pathways to respond to cases of domestic violence, sexual violence, and trafficking involving Ukrainian nationals abroad. Survivors have no Ukrainian institutional entry point. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should develop, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Policy and relevant international organisations (UNHCR, IOM, UN Women), a minimum consular response protocol that includes: trained focal points, referral agreements with host-country shelters and legal aid providers, and safe reporting channels. This is a protection gap, not only a service gap.

For International Organisations and Donors

- **Recognise returnees and intended returnees as a distinct transition group requiring tracked support.** Return should not be treated as a single administrative event that ends the displacement process. Returnees may face specific risks related to professional reintegration, housing, children's adaptation, institutional resistance and social isolation. Support programmes should reflect this transition period without framing all returnees as vulnerable.

- **Fund longitudinal tracking of returnees and intended returnees.** Donors should support evidence on what happens after return, including employment outcomes, attrition, re-emigration, access to housing, children's reintegration, and the practical effects of return-support programmes over time. Point-in-time return statistics are not enough to assess whether return is sustainable.
- **Create first-grant instruments for Ukrainian organisations founded abroad.** Organisations of Ukrainians in EU countries can access limited grants support because they are not physically based in Ukraine and cannot access host-country grants because they lack a local funding history. Dedicated first-grant programmes, simplified small grants and operational support would close important structural gaps identified in the study.
Fund advocacy work on par with service delivery. Donors are generally more willing to fund service provision, while advocacy work — which often drives policy and systemic change — remains underfunded. This imbalance should be deliberately corrected.
- **Prioritise local, newly established, and grassroots organisations when designing programmes and setting funding priorities.** Existing donor programmes tend to favour large, established organisations, leaving smaller and newer initiatives without access to funding — even though these are often the ones most attuned to their communities' needs.
- **Invest in shared information infrastructure.** Verified, regularly updated databases of jobs (including possibilities which may include distance work, circular mobility and work from abroad), grants, housing, education, reintegration resources, professional opportunities and community initiatives should be treated as core infrastructure. The absence of trustworthy information is consistently identified by respondents as the first barrier to both engagement and return planning.
- **Support horizontal peer-led networks as infrastructure in their own right.** The most trusted and responsive forms of support currently operate through peer networks, not centralised structures. Donors should fund coordination, referral systems, convenings, shared tools and small operational costs without requiring these networks to formalise into a single representative body.
- **Support psychological resilience as part of advocacy capacity.** Women who engage in advocacy, fundraising, cultural diplomacy and countering disinformation carry a significant emotional burden. Psychological support, peer supervision, burnout prevention and safety protocols should be treated as part of the infrastructure of sustained civic engagement, not as an optional add-on.

- **Ensure that return-support programmes avoid perceived unfairness toward those who stayed in Ukraine.** Any stipend, grant or reintegration support for returnees should include a clear public rationale and eligibility logic. Programmes should avoid creating the perception that returnees are rewarded while those who remained in Ukraine are overlooked.

For Civil Society Organisations, Diaspora Networks, and Media

- **Treat information-sharing as a core service.** Since respondents consistently identify lack of information as their primary unmet need, CSOs and diaspora networks should treat opportunity mapping, verified referrals and practical guidance as central activities rather than by-products of other work.
- **Document and share effective programme design principles.** CSOs and diaspora networks should systematise lessons on realistic selection criteria, genuine decision-making access, bounded time horizons, institutional resistance, participant support and post-programme pathways. This would help smaller and newer initiatives avoid repeating the same mistakes independently.
- **Continue investing in horizontal coordination across countries.** This study consistently finds that peer networks are more trusted than a single representing organization on behalf of the diaspora. Diaspora organisations should continue building cross-country relationships, referral systems and shared advocacy or service tools while preserving the autonomy and niche of each organisation.
- **Build mentorship and exchange between women's organisations in Ukraine and abroad.** Organisations founded by Ukrainian women abroad often operate in isolation from one another and from Ukrainian women's and civil society organisations, without structured opportunities to learn from each other. Organisations and activists should take the initiative to establish mentorship links with more experienced Ukrainian women's organisations supporting newer initiatives abroad and to arrange regular exchanges: internships, joint visits, and shared projects between organisations in Ukraine and the diaspora. This would give new organisations abroad access to accumulated experience in fundraising, advocacy, and management, while giving Ukrainian organisations a direct channel for understanding what women abroad actually face.
- **Work with Unity Hubs as practical platforms, not only symbolic spaces.** Where Unity Hubs exist or are planned, Ukrainian organisations should be involved in shaping their functions, proposing activities, identifying community needs and linking services to real civic and professional initiatives. This will help ensure that hubs become useful tools for sustained connection, not only visible infrastructure.
- **Actively shape the Ukrainian media environment around diaspora women.**

Ukrainian online media and social media communities are currently perceived by many displaced women as hostile or shaming toward those who left and toward those considering return. Civil society organisations, diaspora media, and Ukrainian feminist organisations are better placed than state actors to shift this tone, through deliberate narrative work, published personal stories, reframes of departure as responsibility rather than abandonment, and active pushback against content that stigmatises women abroad. This is not a communications task separate from advocacy: it is a precondition for the civic and economic engagement that all other recommendations depend on.

- **Balance the success narrative with more realistic stories, including stories of return.** Media coverage of Ukrainian women abroad, which often presents stories of success, distorts the actual experience of displacement. Media outlets should keep in mind that forced emigration means forced integration, and that success is often a form of adaptation to circumstances rather than a free choice. This one-sided success narrative should be complemented by stories of hardship, doubt, and return — giving audiences a more realistic picture of the experience of displacement.

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ANNEX 1. DETAILED SAMPLE STRUCTURE (QUALITATIVE COMPONENT)

Key Informant Interviews

#	Type of organization	Country
1	Ukrainian women in EU, Founder of Ukrainian organisation* in EU	Spain
2	Public relations specialist at the organisation of Ukrainians in EU	Germany
3	Migration topic expert	Germany-Ukraine
4	Ukrainian in EU, Programme representative of local NGO working with Ukrainian women	Germany
5	Ukrainian in EU, International organization representative	Germany
6	Civil society initiative working with diaspora (advocacy/dialogue)	Ukraine
7	Government sector representative, diaspora engagement	Ukraine
8	Ukrainian women in EU, Founder of Ukrainian organisation in EU	Finland
9	International development / professionals return programme	-
10	Defense industry employer	Ukraine
11	Defense industry employer	-

*by Ukrainian organization in EU we mean organization of Ukrainians aimed at promoting Ukraine support narratives and culture in EU countries

Key Informant Interviews

Group	Profile	Number of participants
FG 1	Remotely employed women (Poland, Germany, Italy, Romania, Spain)	6
FG 2.1 and 2.2	Advocacy-active women (Germany, Poland, Belgium)	6
FG 3	Female students and recent graduates (Belgium, France, Germany, Czech Republic, Austria)	6
FG 4.1 and 4.2	Women who returned to Ukraine (from Czech Republic, France, Slovakia, Portugal)	7



The Ukrainian Women's Fund (UWF) - is a charitable foundation that supports the development of women's civil society organizations and the feminist movement in Ukraine in order to expand women's rights and advance gender equality. Part of UWF's work is cultivating demand for gender analysis as a foundation for shaping effective policies — particularly in the areas of recovery, European integration, and the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.



Open Space Works is a women-led social enterprise – ethically driven and purpose-oriented – that combines research and participatory facilitation. We operate with a clear social mission to advance inclusive and community- driven approaches in humanitarian and development practice and derive resources into scaling to strengthen local leadership and knowledge generation in Eastern Europe. We provide developmental, humanitarian, governmental, and civil society stakeholders with evidence-based research and participatory facilitation to enable action-oriented decisions and enhance program impact.

