Social innovations to transform challenges to opportunities in employment and social inclusion of women fleeing from Ukraine

GO FORWARD
Successful UA Women in CCS

Guidelines and materials for

Workshop 1: “Ukrainian women: how local communities can help for social integration”

Social Innovation Initiative

Center for Social Innovation

CPIP

STILISTŲ MOKYKLA

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, millions of Ukrainian citizens have been forced to leave their homes and seek temporary protection in European countries. Among them, a significant proportion are women who face multiple challenges while adapting to new social environments, labour markets, and community structures.

Ukrainian women arriving in host countries often encounter barriers related to employment opportunities, access to services, language differences, social networks, and recognition of qualifications. At the same time, they bring with them valuable skills, cultural knowledge, professional experience, and resilience that can contribute positively to the societies where they temporarily reside.

Social integration therefore becomes a key factor not only for the well-being of Ukrainian women but also for the development of inclusive and supportive local communities.

1.2 Purpose of Workshop 1

Workshop 1 aims to create a **participatory and supportive space** where Ukrainian women, representatives of local communities, NGOs, and other stakeholders can discuss challenges and opportunities related to social integration.

The workshop focuses on strengthening the role of **local communities and institutions** in supporting Ukrainian women in their social and professional integration. Through facilitated discussions, participants are encouraged to share experiences, reflect on common challenges, and identify practical ways in which communities can provide support.

The workshop also promotes mutual understanding between Ukrainian women and host communities and contributes to the development of **recommendations addressed to local and national authorities** on how community-based support mechanisms can be strengthened.

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1.3 Structure of Workshop 1

The workshop is organised around **three thematic sessions**, each supported by a short visual presentation and followed by facilitated discussion and interactive activities.

The three themes are:

1. Ukrainian women's situation in war conditions: expectations, challenges and opportunities for social inclusion.
2. Women's human rights in the EU: rights of Ukrainian women, gender equality and protection against discrimination.
3. The role of local communities in supporting social integration of UA women to the society at the countries of their temporary residence.

The learning process is based on **dialogue, reflection, and collaborative problem-solving**, ensuring that participants actively contribute to identifying solutions.

The total duration of the workshop is approximately **4 hours**.

1.4 Learning approach and methodology

The workshop follows a **participatory and dialogue-based methodology**, which encourages active engagement of participants rather than passive listening. The learning approach is based on principles of adult education, experiential learning, and peer exchange.

Participants are encouraged to share experiences, reflect on real-life situations, and collaboratively identify practical solutions to challenges related to social integration.

The methodology combines:

- short facilitator inputs providing contextual information,
- guided discussions encouraging exchange of experiences,
- small-group exercises promoting collaborative problem solving,
- practical activities such as case studies and quizzes,
- reflection activities supporting personal learning and awareness.

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This approach allows participants to **learn from each other's experiences**, build mutual understanding, and develop ideas for improving community-based support for Ukrainian women.

1.5 Expected learning outcomes

After completing Workshop 1, participants are expected to:

- better understand the social situation of Ukrainian women affected by forced displacement
- recognise key challenges and opportunities for social integration
- increase awareness of women's human rights and protection against discrimination in the EU
- identify the role that local communities, NGOs and public authorities can play in supporting integration
- contribute to identifying practical actions and recommendations to strengthen community-based support mechanisms

These outcomes contribute to the broader objective of the **GoForward project**, which is to empower Ukrainian women to participate actively in social and economic life.

2. Session 1

Ukrainian women's situation in war conditions: expectations and challenges

2.1 Context and background

The war in Ukraine has significantly impacted the lives of millions of women who were forced to leave their homes and seek safety in other countries. Many Ukrainian women arrived in European countries with expectations of safety, stability, and opportunities to rebuild their lives.

However, forced displacement often brings a range of challenges, including:

- adapting to a new cultural and social environment,
- navigating unfamiliar administrative systems,

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- finding employment or economic stability,
- balancing family responsibilities,
- overcoming language barriers,
- building new social networks.

While these challenges can create uncertainty, many Ukrainian women demonstrate strong resilience, motivation to work, and willingness to contribute to their host communities. Understanding these experiences is essential for designing effective community support mechanisms that facilitate integration and inclusion.

Contextual information on the situation of Ukrainian women

Since the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022, millions of people have been displaced across Europe, with the overwhelming majority being women and children. According to a Europe-wide survey, women account for approximately 70% of adult Ukrainian refugees, who often arrive with the responsibility of caring for children or elderly family members. (OECD report)

The situation of Ukrainian women in host countries is shaped by a combination of challenges and opportunities. One of the most common challenges is forced displacement, which requires rapid adaptation to a new social, cultural, and economic environment. Women are often called upon to adapt to unfamiliar systems, such as accessing housing, healthcare, education, and employment, while simultaneously managing their family responsibilities.

EU-wide studies highlight several key barriers to social inclusion. These include language barriers, which can limit access to services and employment, as well as difficulties in recognizing qualifications, resulting in many women being forced to accept jobs below their skill level. Furthermore, limited access to childcare services and the need to balance caregiving responsibilities can further restrict their participation in the labor market. (OEDC report)

At the same time, Ukrainian women offer significant advantages and potential for integration. Many of them have a relatively high level of education and professional experience, factors that can facilitate their entry into the labor market. European reports

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also highlight the importance of community support, networking opportunities, and educational initiatives as key factors facilitating integration and social inclusion. (OECD report)

Access to essential services, such as housing, healthcare, childcare, and social welfare, is another important aspect of integration. Studies show that, although many EU countries have established support mechanisms, challenges remain in ensuring equal and timely access to these services, particularly at the local level. (Eurofound publication)

Despite these challenges, women in Ukraine are actively working to build a new life, participating in their communities, and seeking opportunities for employment or self-employment. Understanding their situation from a balanced perspective, recognizing both the challenges and the opportunities, is an important foundation for developing effective community support mechanisms and promoting social inclusion.

In Cyprus, Ukrainian women benefit from the implementation of the EU Temporary Protection Directive, which grants them access to residence, employment, healthcare, and education. National reports and data from entities such as the Deputy Ministry of Migration and International Protection and local NGOs indicate that Ukrainian women in Cyprus are relatively active in the labor market, particularly in sectors such as services, hospitality, beauty, and the creative industries. (UNHCR)

However, as in other EU countries, challenges remain. These include language barriers, limited access to affordable childcare, and difficulties in recognizing professional qualifications, which may lead to underemployment. Furthermore, integration at the community level can vary depending on access to local support networks and information. At the same time, initiatives by local organizations, community centers, and NGOs in Cyprus play a significant role in supporting Ukrainian women through training opportunities, networking events, and social support activities, contributing positively to their social integration and participation in society.

2.2 Discussion questions

The facilitator may guide the discussion using questions such as:

- What were your expectations when arriving in the host country?

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- What challenges have you faced in adapting to everyday life?
- What has helped you the most during your integration process?
- What types of support from the community would be most helpful?
- How can communities better understand the needs of Ukrainian women?

2.3 Practical activity – guided group discussion

"Everyday Integration Challenges"

Purpose:

To help participants identify and share common challenges related to social integration

How it works:

1. The facilitator introduces the topic briefly.
2. Participants are invited to reflect on their personal experiences.
3. Open discussion is facilitated in a supportive environment.
4. Key challenges and insights are summarised.

Expected outcome:

It allows women to recognise shared experiences and helps stakeholders better understand real integration barriers.

2.4 Case study activity

Example

Olena arrived in a European country with her two children. Although she had professional experience in Ukraine, she found it difficult to access employment due to language barriers and lack of recognition of her qualifications.

Discussion questions

- What challenges does Olena face?
- What kind of support could help her integrate more easily?

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- What role could local communities play in helping her situation?

2.5 Social and Economic Challenges of Forced Displacement

Forced displacement can affect multiple aspects of women's lives. Many Ukrainian women arriving in European countries are responsible for family members, including children or elderly relatives. This increases the complexity of their integration process, particularly in relation to employment opportunities and access to childcare.

Research conducted at the European level highlights several common challenges faced by displaced Ukrainian women:

- language barriers affecting access to employment
- difficulties in recognition of professional qualifications
- limited social networks in host communities
- psychological stress related to displacement and uncertainty
- balancing caregiving responsibilities with employment opportunities

Despite these challenges, Ukrainian women often demonstrate strong motivation to participate in the labour market and contribute to their host communities.

Recognising these challenges helps local communities design **targeted support mechanisms** that facilitate social inclusion.

3. Session 2

Ukrainian women's human rights in the EU

3.1 Context

In the European Union, women's rights are strongly protected through legal frameworks promoting gender equality, non-discrimination, and equal opportunities in employment and social life.

Ukrainian women residing in EU countries benefit from these protections, which aim to ensure:

- equal treatment in the labour market,

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- protection against discrimination,
- access to education and training,
- social protection and support services.

However, gender stereotypes and misunderstandings about rights may still affect women's opportunities and participation in society.

Understanding these rights empowers women to recognise and respond to discriminatory situations.

3.2 Key topics covered

The session introduces participants to:

- principles of gender equality in the EU,
- examples of discrimination in employment and social life,
- the impact of gender stereotypes,
- practical ways to recognise and respond to discrimination.

The focus is on practical everyday situations, rather than legal terminology.

Women's human rights in the EU and everyday application

This section outlines the fundamental principles of women's human rights in the European Union, with an emphasis on equality, dignity, and non-discrimination. Ukrainian women under temporary protection in EU countries, including Cyprus, have the right to access employment, education, healthcare, and social services on equal terms with nationals, in accordance with EU law.

The materials explain these rights in a practical and understandable way, focusing on everyday situations such as:

- equal treatment in hiring processes and working conditions.
- the right to fair pay and a safe working environment.
- protection from discrimination based on gender, nationality, or immigration status.

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- access to public services such as healthcare, education, and social support.

Particular emphasis is placed on the concept of gender equality, which is a fundamental value of the EU. This includes women's right to participate on an equal footing in the labor market, in decision-making, and in social life. The aim is not to provide legal details, but to help participants understand what their rights mean in practice and how they apply to their daily lives.

Understanding rights, gender stereotypes, and protection against discrimination

This section aims to help Ukrainian women understand their rights in relation to their current life situation, while raising awareness about the common risks and barriers they may face in the labor market and in society. (Eurofound)

A key element is the recognition of gender stereotypes, which can negatively impact opportunities. Examples include the perception that women should only take low-skilled jobs, prioritize family obligations over their professional careers, or accept lower wages. These stereotypes can limit access to employment, career advancement, and fair treatment.

The material guides participants to:

- recognize situations in which discrimination may occur (e.g., unfair hiring practices, wage inequality, exclusion from opportunities).
- understand that such treatment is unacceptable and that they are protected by EU law.
- identify simple and realistic ways to respond, such as seeking information, asking for clarification, or contacting support organizations.

In addition, the material emphasizes the importance of self-confidence and self-awareness, encouraging women to value their skills, qualifications, and experience. Practical examples are used to demonstrate how women can:

- effectively communicate their skills.
- seek support from local organizations and networks.
- make informed decisions when entering the labor market.

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Overall, this module aims to empower women in Ukraine with basic, practical knowledge about their rights, while helping them recognize and address discrimination in a constructive and informed manner, thereby supporting their social and economic inclusion. (Gender Equality Index)

3.3 Discussion Questions

- What does gender equality mean in everyday life?
- Have you experienced or observed stereotypes affecting women's opportunities?
- How can women recognise discriminatory situations?
- What can individuals or communities do to promote equality?

3.4 Interactive Quiz

Example questions:

1. Equal pay for equal work is a principle protected in the EU. **True / False**
2. Gender stereotypes can influence hiring decisions. **True / False**
3. Women have the right to equal access to training and employment opportunities. **True / False**

The facilitator discusses the answers and encourages reflection on real-life examples.

4. Session 3

Role of local communities in supporting social integration

4.1 Importance of community support

Local communities play a crucial role in supporting the integration of newcomers. Through cooperation between local authorities, NGOs, employers, and citizens,

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communities can create supportive environments where Ukrainian women feel welcome and empowered.

Community-based support can include:

- access to information and services,
- language learning opportunities,
- professional networking,
- mentoring programmes,
- cultural and social activities.

Such initiatives not only support Ukrainian women but also strengthen **social cohesion and intercultural understanding**.

Local communities, NGOs, and public authorities play a crucial role in supporting the social integration of Ukrainian women, especially in the context of forced displacement and adaptation to a new environment. Social integration is not only about access to employment, but also about feeling safe, included, and connected within the host society. Community-level support can significantly reduce isolation and help women rebuild their personal and professional lives.

Local communities can contribute through simple and practical actions that directly affect everyday life. These include providing access to information about services, organising language courses, offering childcare support, and creating safe spaces for social interaction. Community centres, cultural organisations, and local initiatives can act as entry points for participation, where Ukrainian women can meet others, exchange experiences, and gradually build confidence.

NGOs play an important role by offering targeted support services, such as career guidance, training programmes, psychological support, and legal advice. They often act as mediators between Ukrainian women and public services, helping to overcome administrative or language barriers. In addition, NGOs frequently organise workshops,

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networking events, and mentoring activities that support both social inclusion and labour market integration.

Public authorities, at local and national levels, are responsible for ensuring access to rights and services, including employment, healthcare, housing, and education. Their role also includes developing inclusive policies and supporting initiatives that promote integration. Effective collaboration between public authorities, NGOs, and local communities is essential to create coordinated and sustainable support systems, which respond to the real needs of Ukrainian women and contribute to long-term social cohesion.

4.2 Examples of Good Practices

Community-based support for Ukrainian women can take many forms, depending on the local context. Across Europe, several good practices have emerged that demonstrate how communities can effectively support social integration. These practices are not fixed models but can serve as inspiration for adaptation at local level.

One common example is the organisation of community hubs or safe spaces, where Ukrainian women can access information, participate in social and cultural activities, and receive support services in an inclusive environment. These spaces often combine language learning, creative workshops, and networking opportunities, helping women build both social connections and practical skills.

Another good practice is the development of mentoring and networking programmes, where local volunteers, professionals, or entrepreneurs support Ukrainian women in understanding the labour market, improving communication skills, and exploring employment or self-employment opportunities. These initiatives are particularly effective in building confidence and facilitating integration into local communities.

In the Cyprus context, several local initiatives, such as the *Community of Ukrainian-Cypriot Friendship Facebook page* have already contributed to supporting Ukrainian women through community events, creative workshops, and networking activities, often organised by NGOs, community centres, and social innovation organisations. These activities create opportunities for cultural exchange, skills development, and active

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participation in society, while also strengthening connections between Ukrainian women and the local population.

4.3 Activity – Small Group Work

"What Can Communities Do?"

Purpose:
To identify practical ways communities can support Ukrainian women.

Procedure

1. Participants are divided into small groups.
2. Each group discusses the following question:

What practical actions can local communities take to support Ukrainian women's integration in the labour market and society?

3. Groups write down their ideas.
4. Ideas are shared in plenary.

4.4 Prioritisation Exercise

"What Matters Most?"

Purpose:

Participants review the ideas generated and vote for the most important actions.

How it works:
After discussions, participants are invited to prioritise the most important ideas or recommendations (e.g. by voting, ranking, or simple consensus).

Possible criteria:

- feasibility,
- potential impact,

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- relevance to the local context.

Why it works:

It leads to clear conclusions and prepares the ground for concrete recommendations.

The facilitator summarises the most supported ideas.

5. Reflection & Action sheet for participants

A. Reflection: After the workshop, reflect on the following questions.

- What is one challenge Ukrainian women face in social integration?
- What is one important right that women have in the EU?
- What role can local communities play in supporting integration?

B. Action ideas

- What is one action that could help Ukrainian women integrate better in the community?

C. Recommendations

- What should local communities or authorities improve?

6. Workshop Wrap-Up

The workshop concludes with a collective reflection where participants summarise key insights from the discussions.

Participants are invited to reflect on:

- the main challenges faced by Ukrainian women,
- the role of rights and equality in integration,

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- the actions communities can take to support inclusion.

The results of the discussions contribute to the development of recommendations for local and national authorities on strengthening community-based support for Ukrainian women's social integration.

7. Final workshop output

The discussions and reflections generated during Workshop 1 contribute to the development of **recommendations addressed to national and local authorities**.

These recommendations aim to strengthen the role of communities in supporting the social integration of Ukrainian women through improved cooperation between local institutions, NGOs, and community actors.

8. EU Research References

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