



Gender Matters: Including women in reconstruction plans in Ukraine from the start

After one year of war, 5.5 million people in Ukraine remain internally displaced.¹ The war has caused the destruction of cities, decimated basic infrastructure, and increased levels of informality. According to the ILO, 5 million formal jobs have been lost since the beginning of the war.²

This situation has exacerbated existing inequalities, especially in terms of gender. Ukrainian women and girls are increasingly vulnerable to displacement, loss of livelihood, poverty, violence, and trauma, while facing even greater pressure to meet their needs and those of their families. Yet, women have mobilised across the country – serving in the army on the front lines, providing humanitarian aid, and protecting the injured and infirm. And there is no question that women must play a crucial role as Ukraine rebuilds.

To highlight the role of women and their needs in Ukraine's recovery process, Cities Alliance, Streetnet International, and WIEGO organised a workshop as a follow up to our report [Rebuilding with Women: Amplifying Their Voices in Ukraine's Recovery](#).

The workshop focused on three key areas:

- 1) Current initiatives European institutions are carrying out in support of Ukraine and its people, and how they are incorporating gender equality;
- 2) The results of *Rebuilding with Women*, and how women are impacted by the war; and
- 3) How to ensure that the medium and long-term recovery process in Ukraine incorporates the needs of women and girls.

Europe's multi-level support to Ukraine

European governments, institutions, international organisations, and civil society have come together to support Ukraine's resistance and recovery with economic resources, humanitarian aid, military forces, and diplomatic support. At the same time, European countries have welcomed refugees fleeing the war; there are currently eight million Ukrainian refugees registered in Europe,³ most of them women and children.

The European Union (EU) has levied nine packages of sanctions against Russia and provided EUR 67 billion for Ukraine and its people. These funds include EUR 18 billion in macro financial support for government functions, such as emergency and health services, and an unprecedented EUR 12 billion for military support and training for 30,000 Ukrainian soldiers. The EU has established Solidarity Lanes so that Ukraine is able to continue trading goods, and in June 2022 granted Ukraine candidate status to join the EU.

¹ <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/ukraine-internal-displacement-report-general-population-survey-round-12-16-23-january-2023>

² https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_844625/lang-en/index.htm

³ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

The EU is also supporting the establishment of accountability and prosecution measures for war crimes – including sexual violence, human trafficking, and gender-based violence (GBV) – as well as organisations that create space for victims to heal mentally and physically. In addition, it is providing funding to the Ukrainian government to create guidelines for managing sexual violence cases, establishing community safety dialogues, and training first-responders in the national police.

European financial institutions have begun investing in the recovery of Ukraine's economic sector, basic infrastructure, and the development of human capital, with an emphasis on women-friendly services. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) invested EUR 1.9 billion in 2022, and it plans to invest an additional EUR 3 billion before the end of 2023 to focus on sustaining the Ukrainian economy, energy security, infrastructure, vital goods and services, and the prevention of GBV and livelihoods restoration.

Since 2007, the European Investment Bank (EIB) has invested around EUR 8 billion in Ukraine, mostly for transport infrastructure, but also some small-scale initiatives, such as kindergartens and hospitals. Since the beginning of the war, the EIB has invested around EUR 2.2 billion to support urgent needs and restore basic infrastructure, while also focusing on refugee-hosting communities.

The recovery and reconstruction process in cities

Cities have been the worst hit areas in Ukraine, with large parts of their buildings and other infrastructure partially or completely destroyed. At the same time, cities hold a vital role in the recovery and reconstruction process due to their economic and political power. Despite the devastation of war, Ukrainians have shown their unity and resilience. With support from allies, they are resisting the Russian invasion and beginning a reconstruction and recovery process.

The Ukrainian government has launched a [recovery plan](#) with initiatives ranging from business and economic opportunities to security and infrastructure. In May 2022, the European Commission (EC) began considering a longer-term reconstruction process in Ukraine and launched the [Rebuild Ukraine platform](#) to coordinate funding efforts. The platform is co-led by the EC, the U.S. government, and the government in Kyiv, and will also include EU countries, financial institutions, and other like-minded partners.

Two other European organisations launched initiatives in support of Ukrainian cities in 2022. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) established the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine to coordinate joint efforts towards reconstruction and provide expertise in capacity building, good governance, and technical assistance to Ukraine's cities and regions. The Council of European Municipalities and Region (CEMR), in partnership with the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC), created a task force to address issues such as support to Ukrainian municipalities, hosting of refugees fleeing Ukraine, and EU sanctions.

The reconstruction process is already underway in parts of the country. In the city of Chernihiv, all of the multi-storage buildings were repaired before the beginning of winter. Shelter was provided for educational institutions and damaged schools restored, restoring offline education services. This has created job opportunities for women and men and is an incentive for residents to return. Chernihiv has also begun a process of cooperation with European cities in Poland, Germany, France, and Finland, sending an important signal to the residents of the city who remain fearful of new bombing, shelling, and destruction.

Importance of gender equality in recovery and reconstruction

The workshop participants agreed on the fact that women must play a central role in the reconstruction and recovery of Ukraine. All of the actors operating in Ukraine recognise this and are committed to including gender equality and women's empowerment in the process, especially at the community and city level. **It remains unclear, however, how this recognition will translate into effective urban plans and strategies, and how they will be implemented.** The ongoing war has centralised decision-making and power in Ukraine, making it challenging for women's organisations to participate in the discussions on the recovery process, especially in terms of economic recovery.

Furthermore, as emerged during the workshop, there is little evidence that gender-mainstreaming measures have been incorporated into the Ukraine Recovery Plan and the Rebuild Ukraine Platform. The issue of gender inequality is addressed in relation to gender-based violence and domestic violence, but it is not associated with planning and reconstruction of urban services and infrastructure – which risks rebuilding infrastructure systems and public spaces that will reinforce existing inequalities, instead of taking the reconstruction as an opportunity to reduce these inequalities.

Local governments and cities lack the resources and decision-making power to adequately incorporate a gender-sensitive planning approach into projects. They have an important role in the reconstruction process and are under major stress, often without guidelines and resources to act. The decentralisation process in Ukraine that began in 2014, with strong support from the EU, stopped due to the ongoing war and emergency situation.

Civil society organisations, including women-led organisations and groups – who usually understand and bring the voices of women and other vulnerable groups to the decision-making table – **are not consistently involved in the reconstruction process.**

The workshop highlighted the importance of ensuring that a strong gender equality perspective is included in the projects and initiatives of the Ukraine Recovery plan and Rebuild Ukraine platform. At the same time, gender equality and inclusion must be strong pillars of the Ukraine Recovery Conference, which will be held in London from 21–22 June 2023. Organisers should plan specific sessions to discuss funding needs for gender-sensitive initiatives, and how cities will benefit. Such an approach will form the basis for a more inclusive, fair, and sustainable Ukrainian state after the war. In the longer term, it will also help Ukraine join the EU by exemplifying strong human rights and democratic values.

Key messages from the workshop on women and reconstruction in Ukraine

The need for a multi-stakeholder approach. Civil society, local communities, and governments must all be actively involved in the recovery and reconstruction. The process must be participatory, with women at its core. All levels of government should involve women-focused civil society actors in the development and/or revision of city master plans. Many European cities have undergone post-war reconstruction processes, and their experiences, especially in terms of gender-sensitive and participatory approaches, can help Ukraine restore its cities in an effective and inclusive way. Increasing decentralisation and strengthening the capacity of local governments can also improve the reconstruction process by making sure the needs of all represented actors are addressed.

Women must be at the centre of efforts to rebuild Ukraine. The workshop participants highlighted the importance of engaging women and girls in mapping the war's damages, expressing their needs and priorities for urban services, and finding inclusive and innovative solutions for restoring destroyed

buildings. Women-friendly urban services include well-lit footpaths for prams, wheelchairs, and walkers; playgrounds and public spaces; providing street lighting and accessible toilets; and relocating food, health, education, and entertainment facilities to easily reachable distances. In particular, adequate childcare spaces for all workers – whether they are formally, informally, or self-employed – are crucial to allowing women to play a full role in reconstruction. For this reason, it is essential to collect gender-sensitive data and carry out gender needs assessments.

There must be a framework for socio-economic inclusion. Beyond the reconstruction of infrastructure systems, themes such as access to land, services, education, economic opportunities, and inclusive urban planning need to be addressed with the participation of all stakeholders. The Ukrainian government and the international community both have a role to play in fostering income-generating activities during and after the war. This means working together to restore and prioritise childcare and women's healthcare services, as well as designing mobility services that incorporate women's needs.

Develop women's skills. It is important to support the development of women's human capital by improving their skills in growing areas such as digitalisation. Any labour legislation should be in line with international and EU standards and protect workers' rights.

Develop gender-responsive budgeting and audit mechanisms. These mechanisms will ensure gender mainstreaming within the funding disbursed in support of Ukraine, adequate financial support to women-led organisations, and monitoring of initiatives for women's empowerment and gender equality.

Cities Alliance support for gender equality in Ukraine

To continue this work and to support a women-friendly reconstruction process in Ukrainian cities, Cities Alliance plans to organise two additional events in the coming months. In May, there will be a public meeting focusing on the tools and operations for inclusive urban reconstruction and recovery. Plans are also underway to organise a second event, conceptualised as an exchange between women leaders from Ukraine, the Balkans and Africa, in partnership with Council of European Municipalities and Regions.

Please let us know if you would be interested in further collaborating and partnering with our organisation to realise these two initiatives, or other related projects and advocacy initiatives.