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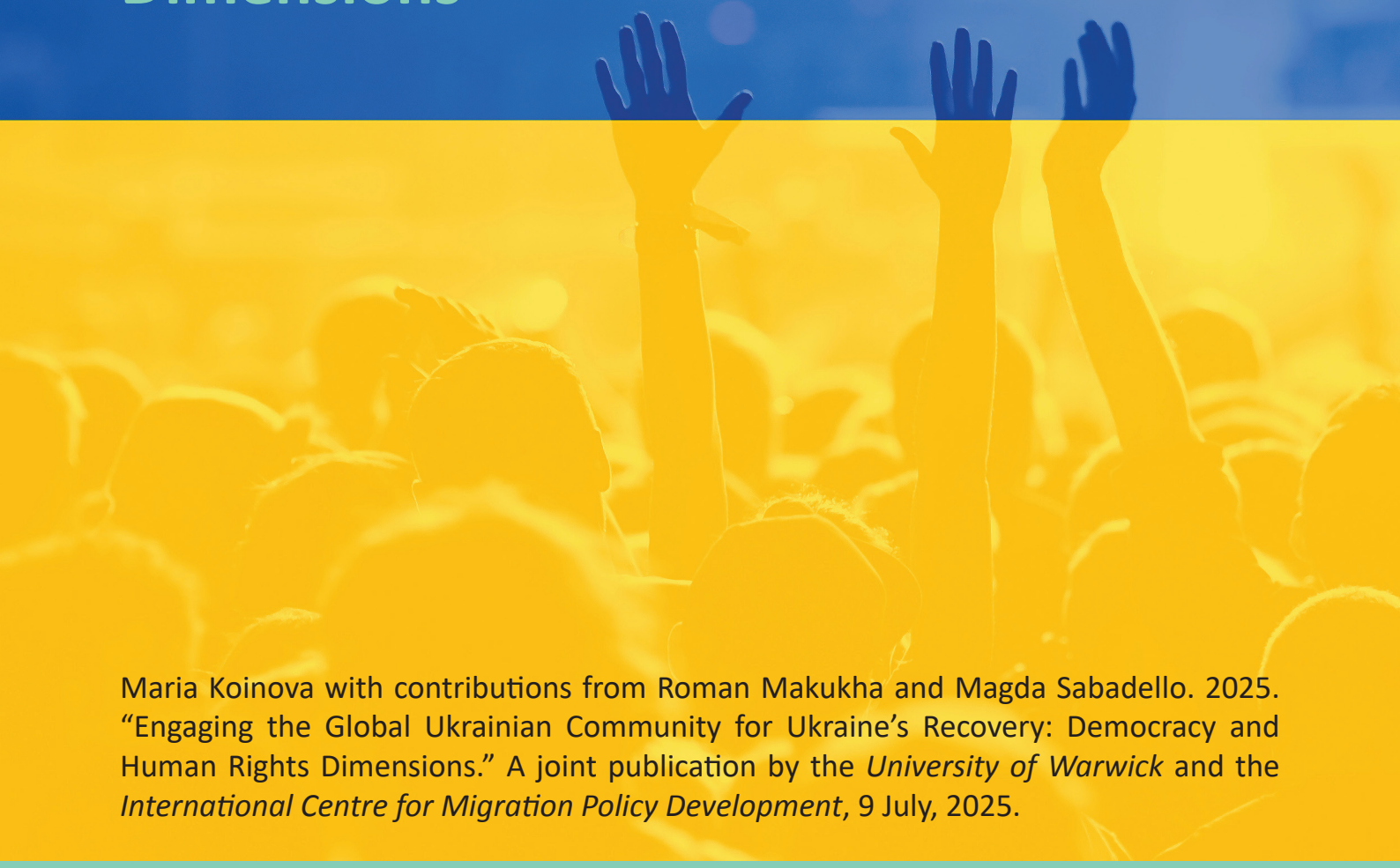
Engaging the Global Ukrainian Community for Ukraine's Recovery: Democracy and Human Rights Dimensions



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Executive Summary

This report establishes a ***framework for engaging the Global Ukrainian Community (GUC) in Ukraine's recovery***, with a particular focus on promoting democratic participation, protecting human and minority rights, and upholding democratic processes. It builds on insights from a 2023 workshop organized by the University of Warwick and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE-ODIHR), a major 2024 training involving 36 stakeholders conducted by the University of Warwick, OSCE-ODIHR and International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), and additional research.

The ***key takeaway for all stakeholders***—including the Global Ukrainian Community (GUC), the Ukrainian government, host-state governments, international organizations, the European Union (particularly in the context of Ukraine's accession), businesses, and civil society—is the importance of deliberately integrating democratic values and procedures into all efforts involving the GUC. This concerns creating inclusive opportunities for participation and ensuring the protection of diversity and human rights across all interactions, initiatives, and policies related to Ukraine's recovery.

The report begins with an overview of the pro-democracy role played by civil society among global Ukrainians, both prior to and following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. It then explores how the focus of ***diaspora engagement has been shifting***—from primarily fundraising and delivering humanitarian aid since 2022—towards broader involvement in business, social, and political entrepreneurship as a foundation for Ukraine's long-term recovery.

The core of the report focuses on the democratic participation of diasporas, emphasizing the significant potential of the GUC to contribute to Ukraine's democratic development. It highlights the importance of engaging with a broad spectrum of ***democratic values***, including trust-building, freedom of assembly and speech, countering disinformation, and promoting diversity. It also underscores the protection of human rights, gender equality, minority rights, and the rights of individuals with disabilities, alongside principles such as transparency and corporate social responsibility.

Furthermore, this report analyses the role that GUC can play in ***democratic institutions and procedures*** at both central and local government levels. This includes providing good governance expertise and fostering municipal partnerships and supporting translocal engagement projects. It also advocates for ways to involve the GUC in Ukraine's EU accession process and the advancement of transitional justice initiatives.

The final section presents ***actionable recommendations*** for the GUC, the Ukrainian state, host-state governments, and international organizations and how they can work to mainstream democracy and human rights concerns when interacting with the GUC, ensuring that Ukraine's recovery is inclusive, participatory, and grounded in democratic principles.

This report draws on academic and policy-relevant research conducted by Professor Maria Koinova at the University of Warwick, and discusses best practices and recommendations by ICMPD as collaborating partners. Professor Koinova brings data and expertise from several pilot impact projects (FSS, PSF, ESRC-IAA 2023-2025), building on her research on diasporas and contested sovereignty in Europe and its neighbourhood, and applying such insights to the GUC through comparative research across six countries in Europe (UK, Germany, The Netherlands, Poland, Czechia, and Bulgaria), policy relevant conversations, and publications. In 2024 the University of Warwick, OSCE-ODIHR and ICMPD co-organized a major training for governmental and intergovernmental officials, and Ukrainian civil society in Warsaw. Conversations from this event are at the core of this report. ICMPD's Dr. Roman Makukha and Magda Sabadello bring further extensive practical expertise in diaspora engagement with a variety of groups beyond the Ukrainian community in Europe, as well as practical involvement directly with the Ukrainian community in Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland. The authors would like to thank OSCE ODIHR and particularly Alice Szczepanikova and Lola Girard for their cooperation on this training, as well as Nataliya Pryhornytska (Alliance of Ukrainian Organizations in Germany and Open Platform) and Kateryna Pavlova (CRISP, Germany) who acted as trainers. We are also grateful to all the participants in this training, in the 2023 Warwick/OSCE-ODIHR workshop, and other venues, for sharing their valuable insights.

Introduction

Three years after Russia's 2022 invasion, more than 6.8 million Ukrainians remain displaced abroad, with 6.3 million in Europe alone, contributing to a global diaspora that exceeds 20 million[1]. Engaging this large displaced population is critical, especially given the pressures to reach a peace agreement, and address Ukraine's need for human capital during a significant demographic crisis. In December 2024, Ukraine established the Ministry of National Unity, focused specifically on meeting the needs of the Global Ukrainian Community (GUC)—a term coined by the government to include both recent refugees and the long-standing diaspora. In February 2025, the Ministry put plans in place to open its first Unity Hub in Berlin, designed to provide Ukrainian citizens with information on career and educational opportunities in both Germany and Ukraine as well as consular support, legal advice, practical administrative services, and language and cultural programmes. Plans are already in place to expand these initiatives to other European locations.

While the government's institutional commitment to global Ukrainians is commendable, and there is increasing interest in engaging the diaspora through a "whole of society" approach as emphasized since the Ukraine Recovery Conference (URC) and its Lugano Principles (2022), as well as subsequent URC conferences in London (2023) and Berlin (2024) and an upcoming one in Rome (2025), a significant challenge persists: there is almost an exclusive focus on considering the return of displaced persons and their reintegration, while the diaspora's economic contributions, investments, and potential for development is still underestimated. Moreover, the potential for both refugees and the diaspora to be democratic actors has not been a central concern for the country's recovery. This report seeks to frontload this concern, as democratic commitment should not be taken for granted, especially in a world of democratic decline.

Addressing these concerns is vital for several reasons. First, democratic values are central to Ukraine's fight to defend its sovereignty and join Euro-Atlantic institutions. Strong belief in democracy as a creed motivates the people of Ukraine—inside and outside the country—in overcoming the inevitable challenges posed by the ongoing warfare. Second, research shows that diasporas can significantly contribute to democratic efforts in their countries of origin,[2] but they can also act as long-distance nationalists and pursue exclusivist claims.[3] Warfare and contested sovereignty tend to present serious challenges to the diaspora's democratic behaviours by increasing nationalist trends.[4] The Ukrainian diaspora has historically supported the country's democracy by protesting against undemocratic policies, notably during the Orange Revolution (2004) and the Revolution of Dignity (2014).[5] Yet, as the warfare continues and early post-war recovery requires preparation, it is necessary to purposefully engage the diaspora and refugees as democratic actors to prevent undesired changes from occurring following the war. Third, Ukraine entered a process for EU accession and negotiations in 2023. This process can take time, and requires long-term democratic commitment from all parties involved, as well as knowledge and expertise from the people of Ukraine to support it. Since the GUC can provide some of this valuable help and expertise,[6] it is important to pro-actively involve it so that Ukraine can meet the democratic requirements and its diaspora and refugees can take part.

1 Danish Refugee Council 2025, https://tinyurl.com/2y86hnjh; Ukrainian World Congress 2025 https://www.ukrainianworldcongress.org/
2 Shain 1999, Kapur 2010.
3 Anderson 1998.
4 Koinova 2021.
5 Koinova 2009, Lapshyna 2019, Oleinikova and Bayeh 2021.
6 Keudel et al 2024.

The aim of this report is to pursue these three goals and to answer a central question: how can various stakeholders—including the Ukrainian civil society abroad, governments, and international organizations—tackle democracy and human rights concerns when engaging the GUC for Ukraine's recovery? We focus on the Ukrainian diaspora in Europe, where it has the opportunity to self-organize and mobilize in support of democratic values and processes, where it is free to exercise its rights to speech and assembly without constraint. This report responds to this question by looking at the pro-democracy role played by global Ukrainians prior to and after Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion; the ways it has engaged in business, social, and political entrepreneurship; its consideration of democratic values and procedures; and Ukraine's EU accession.

The Ukrainian Diaspora's Historical Role in Promoting Democracy

The Ukrainian diaspora resulted from multiple episodes of economic and political migration starting in the late nineteenth century when Ukrainians, alongside other populations from Eastern Europe, migrated to North America.[7] The first large-scale political emigration occurred after Ukraine's failed struggle for independence (1917-20), when émigré centres formed in Prague, Warsaw, Berlin, Paris, and Vienna. Following the creation of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1922, emigration ceased, even during the Holodomor (1932-33), a man-made famine that killed millions of Ukrainians, commemorated widely among Ukrainians abroad into the present day.[8] After WWII, political refugees with anti-communist views fled Eastern Europe, many seeking refuge first in Western Europe before moving to North and South America, with Canada and the U.S. being particularly welcoming. The Ukrainian World Congress, now the largest Ukrainian diaspora organization with chapters in 61 countries, was founded in New York in 1967.[9]

The Ukrainian diaspora has played a significant role in advocating for pro-democracy efforts for Ukraine. During the Cold War, Ukrainian émigrés were active in the Captive Nations movement, viewing the Soviet Union's communist government as an enemy.[10] In the late 1980s, they supported the Rukh movement, which advocated for state independence and democratization.[11] After Ukraine gained independence in 1991, borders opened, leading to large-scale emigration driven by economic and political factors. In the 1990s, the diaspora recognized that democratization was essential for gaining Western support for Ukraine's state-building.[12] Two strands of diaspora groups emerged: "derzhavnyky" (statists), who supported Ukrainian statehood regardless of its domestic politics,[13] and those more liberally minded, who criticized the state's undemocratic practices, especially during and after the 2004 Orange Revolution[14] and the 2014 Euro-Maidan protests.[15]

Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea began reshaping activities within the Ukrainian diaspora. New Ukrainian civil society organizations started emerging abroad, founded specifically on pro-democratic principles, and focusing on upholding the values of the Revolution of Dignity (2014), a massive movement in Ukraine to support Ukraine's path to Euro-Atlantic integration. Notable examples include Razom in the USA, Euro-Maidan-Warsaw in Poland, Prague-Maidan in the Czech Republic, and Promote Ukraine in Brussels. These organizations operated alongside long-established diaspora organizations, such as the Ukrainian World Congress, whose core mission has traditionally been the preservation of Ukrainian identity, language, and culture. Also, the Ukrainian Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches, creating hubs of religious activity, incorporated concerns for human rights and the political situation in Ukraine.[16] During this time Ukrainian organizations across Europe continued to contribute humanitarian aid.[17]

7 This and the following paragraph build on Koinova 2009, 2024.
8 Nikolko 2019.
9 Koinova, 2024.
10 Shain, 1994-1995:834.
11 Koinova 2009.
12 Koinova 2009.
13 Kuzio and Deychakiwsky 2005.
14 Koinova, 2009.
15 Lapshyna 2019.
16 ICMPD 2024:9.
17 Participant, Warwick/OSCE-ODIHR/ICMPD Training, Warsaw, 27-28 June, 2024 [henceforth referred to as Multi-stakeholder Training 2024].

Ukrainian Diaspora and Displaced Persons Since Russia's 2022 Invasion

Russia's 2022 invasion drastically changed the dynamics within the Ukrainian diaspora.[18] The new arrival of over 6 million refugees has been dominated by women and children. Men aged 18-60 have been prohibited from leaving the country due to conscription requirements, although some have managed to do so. In the first days of the war, many men returned from abroad to fight in the Ukrainian army. Refugees were granted special temporary protections through specific programmes in the EU (Temporary Protection Directive), UK (Homes for Ukraine), USA (Uniting for Ukraine), and other countries, providing them with expedited support, such as being able to enter the job market and receive medical care, social benefits, and broader protections.

This shift in population dynamics significantly altered how the diaspora engaged as well. Established organizations and new networks began cooperating more closely,[19] with ***humanitarian support dominating the early diaspora response***.[20] The exact amount of humanitarian assistance remains unclear,[21] as the Ukrainian diaspora has been fundraising through their own networks, as well as through mainstream charities such as the Red Cross and Save the Children, both in Ukraine and abroad. Aid from the diaspora included further backpacks for the military, rape kits for women in recently liberated territories,[22] and ambulances. As a diaspora organizer stated, "We don't count how many trucks we've sent to Ukraine, and many other organizations don't either."[23] Yet, fundraising for humanitarian aid has faced challenges since 2023. A UK-based diaspora activist described the dynamic in June 2024: "Two years ago, I was able to raise £10,000 in just five days. Now, after three weeks of fundraising, I've only managed to raise £3,000."[24]

Growing limitations to fundraising for humanitarian aid due to decreased support from within the host-societies has prompted efforts to engage the GUC through other means. Such efforts are vital, as foreign aid alone, whether from host-countries or the EU, will not be enough.[25] ***Business entrepreneurship*** has emerged as a potential avenue for generating jobs and fostering innovation for Ukraine beyond established programmes. Entrepreneurs can also leverage their unique "in-between advantage"[26] to navigate opportunities available both at home and in various host countries. Although many recent Ukrainian refugees focus on their survival abroad, some have developed entrepreneurial activities alongside the long-standing diaspora. This includes businesses relocated from Ukraine or new ventures abroad, like Nova Post, which connects the diaspora across sixteen countries with Ukraine.[27] Ukraine Invest, a governmental agency, plays an important role in bridging Ukrainian entrepreneurial endeavours with businesses abroad.[28] DIIA Business, a branch of Ukraine's Ministry of Digital Transformation, based in Warsaw, helps connect Ukrainian and Polish entrepreneurs, offering consulting, educational programmes, and networking. Large investments from the GUC in Europe are not pronounced, yet small and medium-sized enterprises have grown in the personal care, beauty, food, interior design, hospitality, and IT sectors.[29] Ukrainian Chambers of Commerce, through fifty-six representative offices, have ramped up

18 This section partially draws on Koinova 2024, the Multi-stakeholder Training 2024, and additional research.
19 OSCE-ODIHR Report, 2024.
20 DEMAC Report 2022.
21 OSCE-ODIHR report 2024.
22 Participant, Multi-stakeholder Training 2024.
23 OSCE-ODIHR 2024:21.
24 Participant, Multi-stakeholder Training 2024, quoted in Koinova 2024.
25 Pryhornitska, 2024a. Case study.
26 Brinkerhoff, 2016.
27 Koinova interview, June 2024.
28 Koinova interview, June 2024; Nova Post, 2024. https://novapost.com/Participants in Multi-stakeholder training 2024;
29 Koinova 2024a.

activities since 2022, and provided direct links to the Ukrainian business community.[30] The Ukrainian World Congress has considered economic issues as well. The Community of Building Managers in Germany, founded as an alumni network of a GIZ project, established collaborations between German companies and displaced Ukrainian executives.[31] A Ukrainian business platform created in Belgium connected Ukrainian enterprises with EU funding opportunities.[32]

Social entrepreneurship adds to such entrepreneurial endeavours with its intention to shift from humanitarianism to supporting social endeavours and Ukraine's social cohesion. Opora in the UK moved away from matching refugees through the "Homes for Ukraine" programme to supporting various visa-related questions and establishing business grants (£5,000) and a mentoring initiative for Ukrainian refugee-led businesses. The Netherlands for Ukraine Foundation retooled to focus on the rehabilitation of veterans, though the programme "Excursions into the Future,"also purchasing prosthetics, and providing psychological support.[33] The Blue-Yellow Cross in Germany shifted to facilitating the creation of municipal partnerships and twin-city initiatives.[34] Some NGOs, such as Razom, have partnered with local organizations to repair houses and shelters, install water filtration systems, provide power resources, and support the renewal of private farming.[35] Furthermore, through global platforms like Help Tech Without Borders and TeleHelp, Ukrainian doctors and medical professionals abroad have used telemedicine to assist those affected by the war.[36] Other organizations have focused on aiding the record-keeping and planning for the future restoration of architectural and cultural heritage.[37] The long-established Shevchenko Scientific Society supports scholars, writers, and artists affected by the war, while other NGOs focus on empowering youth, particularly through education.[38] Ukraine itself has developed the Social Venture Fund to attract and streamline the development of social enterprises, aiming to rebuild the social fabric and address environmental challenges.[39]

Also, ***political entrepreneurship*** has been key in addressing how Ukraine is perceived abroad and in lobbying for its interests. Diaspora protests in 2022 denounced Russia's aggression, emphasizing the plight of civilians and their humanitarian needs, rallying support for Ukraine's armed forces and for sanctions against Russia. Thousands of sympathizers, especially from the Western hemisphere, joined demonstrations in global capitals and beyond, reflecting a broad international solidarity. As the conflict continued, protests abroad became increasingly targeted. Mass demonstrations were held in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the USA to highlight atrocities and appeal to NATO ahead of its 2023 summit in Vilnius.[40] Protesters called for increased military aid,[41] addressed war crimes, and demanded accountability and the stopping of sexual violence as a weapon of war.[42] The Ukrainian diaspora also played a crucial role in organizing screenings of films documenting the war,[43] notably *20 Days in Mariupol*, which won the Oscar for Best Documentary in 2024, or protesting the screening of *Russians at War* at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2024,

30 Keudel et al, 2024:8.
31 Pryhornitksa 2024a, Case Study.
32 Participant, Multi-stakeholder Training 2024.
33 Opora UK 2024. https://opora.uk/
34 Pavlova, 2024a. Case-study.
35 Razom, 2024. https://www.razomforukraine.org/projects/relief/
36 HealthTech Without Borders 2024 https://www.htwb.org/
37 Keudel et al, 2024.
38 Shevchenko Scientific Society 2024, https://shevchenko.org/
39 Ukrainian Social Venture Fund 2024 https://www.usv.fund/en
40 Global Ukraine, 11 July, 2024, https://global-ukraine.gbhs.fr/en/news/manifestations-500-days
41 Ukrainian World Congress, 4 January 2024, https://www.ukrainianworldcongress.org/ukrainians-rally-outside-australian-government-urging-stronger-support-for-ukraine/
42 NPR, 30 April, 2022. https://www.npr.org/2022/04/30/1093339262/ukraine-russia-rape-war-crimes
43 ICMPD 2024.

calling for its removal.[44] Through publications, social media, and deliberate discussions, diaspora activists—some associated with the Alliance of Ukrainian Organisations and CRISP in Berlin—raised awareness about how Russian propaganda operates and promoted fact-checking strategies.[45]

This short overview demonstrates that the GUC has shown remarkable resilience to support Ukraine from abroad since 2022. Yet, focus on the democratic content of their contributions has been limited, which is specifically considered by this report.

The Democratic Potential of Diasporas

Diasporas have significant democratic potential. Some studies consider how diasporas seek to unseat authoritarian regimes, like the Cuban, Greek, Haitian, Mexican,[46] Iranian,[47] and Syrian diasporas,[48] while research on Russian exiles to challenge Putin's regime is ongoing. Diasporas can be election monitors,[49] fund civil society campaigns from abroad,[50] and send a variety of "remittances" aimed at creating a democratic impact. Financial remittances can empower households to demand democratic politics, as in Mexico.[51] Social remittances can educate diasporas' families and friends back home to seek their human rights, including through the court system, as in Haiti.[52] Political remittances could target changes in the homeland beyond the private or social sphere, while addressing institutions, their transparency and democratic procedures.[53] Diasporas can also make contributions by taking on institutional roles in their countries of origin, while bringing democratic values and good governance practices with them, as in Chad.[54]

While electoral politics from abroad is not currently on Ukraine's agenda, given that martial law still governs the country, the role of the diaspora will become more relevant in the future. Extraterritorial voting is key to exercising democratic rights for those holding dual and multiple citizenships.[55] In acknowledgment of the diaspora's efforts to aid Ukraine during the war, President Volodymyr Zelensky promised to introduce a law on dual and multiple citizenship in 2024, which was passed by Ukraine's parliament in June 2025.[56] The law received feedback from various organizations, including the Ukrainian World Congress.

44 Ukrainian World Congress, 11 September 2024, https://www.ukrainianworldcongress.org/ukrainians-protest-russians-at-war-screening-in-toronto-initial-outcomes/
45 Pryhornytska and Pavlova, 2023.
46 Shain 1999.
47 Michaelsen 2018.
48 Moss 2016.
49 Koinova 2009.
50 Shain 1999.
51 Escriba-Folch et al., 2022.
52 Levitt 1998.
53 Krawatzek and Mueller-Funk, 2019.
54 Brinkerhoff, 2016.
55 Lafleur 2013.
56 Stasiuk in *Politico*, 18 June, 2025.

Trust-building Through Recognition and Participation in Governance

Developing trust in the government and among other societal actors is key in a democratic polity. As Warren argues, "a trust relationship is established when the trust judgements are met by *trustworthy* responses by those who are trusted."[57] Trusting relationships can capture positive incentives, enhance social cooperation, avoid high costs of monitoring and sanctions, provide security and certainty, and enable collective action underpinned by good will.[58] At collaborative workshops (OSCE-ODIHR 2023, Warwick/OSCE-ODIHR 2023, Warwick/OSCE-ODIHR/ICMPD 2024), GUC members stated that the first step to building trustworthy relationships is for the diaspora to be recognized as an actor by other relevant societal actors.

In January 2024, during a speech on the Day of Unity, President Zelensky acknowledged the contributions of the "million-strong diaspora… who collect, find, pack, and deliver everything needed for victory… who have not forgotten their roots and do not let the world forget about Ukraine." [59] This set the stage for the opening of the Ministry of National Unity in December 2024, which is now fully operational.

The year 2024 was marked for the Ukrainian government's unprecedented support and ***recognition*** of the UGC's contributions. Such recognition has been desired a long time by GUC members, who see themselves as active players in Ukraine's recovery and long-term development. Although differing opinions are held on how they should be referred to (e.g., diaspora, émigrés, Ukrainians living abroad, migrants), they aim to build a coordinated voice for Ukraine's recovery.[60]

Despite some progress, challenges remain as broader societal attitudes towards the diaspora continue to be influenced by Soviet-era legacies and new resentments. Attitudes began to shift after 2014, and particularly after 2022. Yet, the exodus of over 6 million refugees has exacerbated some divisions, creating a rift between those who stayed in Ukraine during the war and those now living abroad. Although the efforts of the GUC have been acknowledged by the Ukrainian government, their contributions remain little visible within Ukrainian society. This recognition is crucial for fostering social cohesion and could be better achieved, for example, by leveraging the local media to highlight these contributions and help build trust.

Building trust through recognizing the GUC involves multiple actors, including host-state governments. A notable example is the impact the city of Cologne exerted in recognizing the Blue-Yellow Cross NGO with the "Order of Merit." This formal acknowledgment gave the NGO visibility, so that when a regional partnership was formed between North Rhine-Westphalia and the Dnipropetrovsk Region in 2023, the NGO was already seen as a partner in facilitating this collaboration. Beyond formal recognition, working in mixed teams with a shared goal—such Germans and Ukrainians working together in this partnership—is essential for fostering trust and embedding initiatives within the community.[61]

One of the biggest steps the Ukrainian government has taken to build trust and establish closer ties with its diaspora and migrant communities abroad has been the development of the Unity Hubs initiative, carried out by the Ministry of National Unity in collaboration with the European governments, European Commission and international organisations. The Unity Hubs will seek to empower Ukrainians abroad whether they return or

57 Warren, 2018:77, italic in original.
58 ibid. 77.
59 Address by the President of Ukraine on the Day of Unity, 22 January 2024, https://tinyurl.com/mrxnac5h
60 OSCE-ODIHR 2024:30.
61 Paragraph based on Pavlova 2024b Case study; Participant, Multistakeholder training, 2024.

stay, to build closer ties with Ukrainian citizens, and to provide support with administrative matters. Many other services at the planned Unity Hubs, such as cultural classes, Ukrainian language schools, and clubs, will foster cultural and national identity and maintain connection to Ukraine, through which the government hopes to recognize the enormous efforts of the GUC and to strengthen civic trust.

As highlighted by participants in the Warsaw training (2024), there are additional avenues and actors that could recognize the GUC. The GUC could be engaged through ***participation in governance***—directly or in consulting roles—when policies are formulated, and in decision-making processes of the Ukrainian government and various institutions, especially when developing strategies concerning the diaspora and refugees. It can also contribute to the broader recovery strategies envisioned for Ukraine. Ukrainian embassies could involve GUC representatives when particular decisions need to be made, as well as involving them in concrete ways with the country's recovery. Given that temporary protections for Ukrainian refugees have been extended multiple times since 2022, decisions made by host-states and the EU regarding new protection mechanisms could also involve relevant GUC representatives. Additionally, private actors, such as companies and businesses, could recognize the GUC while capitalizing on their expertise.

Democratic Values

The GUC in Europe enjoys rather favourable conditions related to its ***freedom of assembly and association,*** as host-state laws governing the formation of associations are relatively open. Ukrainians who have been living abroad before the full-scale invasion as well as those newly arrived under temporary protection have enjoyed the freedom to gather peacefully in public locations and express their views in forms of various protests, marches, advocacy rallies, and others. These gatherings have indeed been mainly peaceful and attracted hundreds and thousands of supporters, including from the local populations, and helped form a united voice and to pass on messages crucial for certain decision-making. The Ukrainian World Congress and its branches across the world have established structures over the decades, and new ones have emerged since 2014. The primary challenge since 2022 has been that networks of refugees and diaspora have carried out humanitarian activities, but officially registered organizations of refugees have been few, when analysed from the position of the freedom of association. Refugees, focused on their own survival, have spontaneously volunteered to assist those in Ukraine, without much coordination and working tirelessly to provide support whilst balancing jobs, childcare, family support and other commitments. Exposure to years of volunteering has also brought burnout. As a result, there have been growing calls for a more structured approach and for professionalising the sector.[62]

For the GUC to be effectively engaged, acknowledged, and consulted during relevant decision-making processes, policymakers need to know which organizations to turn to. This necessitates comprehensive mapping of organizations,[63] but also the transformation of networks into organisations as legal entities. Only when these organisations are formally registered, can the GUC be systematically included in projects and programs, as legal entities can become formal partners, and also undergo due diligence, often required for engagement with diaspora actors. Hence, a major way the GUC can be supported as a democratic actor, is to foster its organisational formation and formal registration.

Furthermore, to fully engage the GUC, in addition to a comprehensive mapping of organizations, initiatives, and communities, diaspora engagement needs to be paired with capacity building. Many organisations vary in size, structure, and resources and many are facing underfunding and understaffing. This underlines the crucial need for capacity-building. Building knowledge on policy, governance, advocacy, and community development as well as equipping the diaspora with practical skills in project management and fundraising, leadership and governance, advocacy, communication and media relations, monitoring and evaluation are tools for empowerment and will strengthen diaspora organizations and communities to be more confident, capable, and connected. Thereby, they can have bigger roles as partners in political participation and policy development, especially on those topics that affect the Ukrainian displaced persons and migrant communities.

Freedom of expression is another key democratic value which the GUC has largely enjoyed in Europe, although certain challenges exist. One is how to communicate messages to mainstream media. While regular communications within the GUC take place through social media, Telegram channels, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn, mainstream media have been more challenging to engage. Even during the height of the humanitarian campaigns in 2022, as a UK-based observer notes, the mainstream media talked about the massive humanitarian engagement from host-societies, rather than flagging the contributions of the GUC specifically or boosting their voice, in particular.[64] With media attention waning towards Ukraine, GUC activists continue to seek ways to publish their ideas in mainstream outlets, in order to reach wider audiences.

62 Participants, Multistakeholder training 2024.
63 OSCE-ODIHR 2024.
64 Small group discussion, Multi-stakeholder training, 2024.

Challenges to freedom of expression also emerge in more indirect ways, as Ukrainians living abroad grapple with the effects of Russia's disinformation, which they seek to actively counter. Such challenges exist across the researched host countries. Therefore, it is vital to recognize the GUC's contributions locally in the host-states. This not only opens opportunities for future project partnerships but also for reshaping opinions, as Ukrainians directly interact with host populations who may be subject to disinformation campaigns.[65] Since 2022, as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion, diaspora groups and migrant communities have emerged as defenders of Ukraine's narrative abroad, mobilizing unprecedented support for their country. Such visibility has expectedly made them targets of disinformation and propaganda as well. Therefore, in order to maintain credibility and unity, and to rally support for international solidarity, it is absolutely essential to equip the diaspora with strategic communication skills, media relations, and anti-propaganda strategies. In order to respond to this need, ICMPD has provided targeted training to strengthen the communication capacities of the Ukrainian diaspora. The trainings have covered crisis communication, storytelling, public relations, media engagement, and most importantly, anti-disinformation and anti-propaganda strategies. Tailored trainings such as these help GUC leaders not only advocate for Ukraine but also become effective communicators, engaging international audiences and protecting the Ukrainian community from false and harmful narratives.

Diversity, human rights, and minority rights are fundamental to liberal democracies, yet are the most challenging to implement, even in times of peace. During wartime, human rights are often compromised by security concerns and the "rally-around-the-flag effect," amplifying national unity while minimizing concerns for diversity. Also diaspora can contribute by extending their services and outreach to displaced non-Ukrainian people who were residing in Ukraine before the war (and now are in EU under temporary protection status), including non-Ukrainian family members, for instance, addressing their needs and rights for national/cultural identity and human capital, as part of broader Ukrainian society.

Members of the GUC have been vocal in raising awareness about the severe ***human rights violations faced by Ukrainians under Russia's occupation***, especially as evidence of rape, torture, and other abuses has emerged, particularly from de-occupied territories. For example, in April 2022, a powerful demonstration in Berlin saw Ukrainian women rally against the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war.[66] Whilst the Centre for Civil Liberties in Ukraine has documented more than 68,000 instances of crimes committed by Russian troops,[67] efforts to do so have been taking place also in diaspora and refugee circles. Organizations abroad such as Project Sunflowers, the Centre for War Crimes Documentation in Poland, and the Ukraine Legal Network in the Netherlands have documented human rights violations and the traumatic experiences of Ukrainian refugees who fled the war.[68]

Amid the bombing and shelling of military and civilian infrastructure in Ukraine, however, issues of diversity have not been at the forefront of discussions within Ukraine and for Ukraine, although they remain important and should be addressed by the diaspora.[69] A substantial discussion has focused on ***Ukrainian women's rights***, especially since the refugee arrivals consist mainly of women.[70] Much of the burden within Ukraine has fallen on women, while men are engaged in front-line combat. Women in Ukraine have assumed many roles traditionally held by men, such as truck drivers, construction workers, and deminers.[71] These roles are expected to expand even further after the war. Additionally, women are currently shouldering, and will likely continue to shoulder, the burden of supporting returning veterans, many of whom may face psychological challenges. Therefore, the

65 Participant, multi-stakeholder training, 2024. See also Pryhornytska and Pavlova 2023.
66 NPR, 30 April 2022, https://www.npr.org/2022/04/30/1093339262/ukraine-russia-rape-war-crimes
67 PBS 24 April, 2024
68 OSCE-ODIHR 2024, Koinova 2024a.
69 Koinova Interviews in Germany, July 2024.
70 The following paragraphs are based on discussions from plenary or break-out sessions at the Multi-stakeholder training, 2024. See also Ukrainian House Report 2025.
71 The European Correspondent, 14 July, 2024, https://www.europeancorrespondent.com/r/ukraines-war-challenges-traditional-gender-roles

diaspora cannot support women in isolation; it needs to also contribute indirectly to improving their situation by creating programmes to address the psychological issues faced by returning veterans.[72]

Furthermore, GUC organizations are currently advocating for the protection of women and children abroad. For example, the World Federation of Ukrainian Women's Organizations have played a critical role connecting female activists abroad with those in Ukraine.[73] The Association of Women in Great Britain, part of AUGB and traditionally focusing on Ukrainian women's history and cultural affairs, supported further refugee women to find work, provided seminars, and acted as bridge-builders with local groups. The Ukrainian House in Poland was part of a study shedding light on grassroots Ukrainian women's activism and significant humanitarian response.[74]

However, the needs of women and children should be better understood, and the diaspora can further facilitate this conversation. Increased efforts are needed to create better educational and employment opportunities for women refugees, as many work in roles below their qualifications.[75] The diaspora plays a crucial role in such endeavours, to aid those now abroad so that when they return to Ukraine, they can be well equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, and experiences. Additionally, the trafficking of women increases during wartime. The diaspora can raise awareness, support victims, and facilitate discussions with both Ukrainian and host-state governments, as ICMPD did with counterparts from Georgia. Women-led diaspora organizations are particularly well-positioned to act as intermediaries, provide referrals, and help victims access further support in the host-country.[76]

The discussion about ***Ukrainian men abroad*** has been more complicated due to implications for military conscription. In the first month of the war, over 66,200 men returned from abroad to fight for their homeland.[77] However, the heavy casualties sustained during the past two years have severely depleted many military units, leading to a decline in volunteer enthusiasm and increasing pressure to expand the draft.[78] Also, many men have managed to legally or illegally leave Ukraine and remain in Western countries. According to Eurostat, of the 4.3 million Ukrainians currently living in the EU, approximately 860,000 are men.[79] In a controversial move between April and May 2024 Ukraine's government temporarily stopped consular services from accepting applications from men of mobilization age.[80] Losing vital documents for men could challenge their human rights, not only regarding their status as citizens of Ukraine, but also abroad, as they could lose access to housing and welfare benefits, limited to only those with valid passports.[81] Consular services have since reverted to processing such documents, yet men aged 18-60 who have been living abroad must also present an up-to-date military registration document.[82] The Ukrainian government has sought to incentivise military-aged men to return, and has established a voluntary military unit, the Ukrainian Legion based in Poland, open to Ukrainian citizens in the EU, which received 1,300 applications by January 2025.[83]

The war has further highlighted the importance of raising awareness about ***LGBTQ+ rights*** of Ukrainian citizens internationally. At present same-sex marriage remains prohibited under Ukraine's 1996 constitution, which cannot be amended during wartime. Therefore, efforts of LGBTQ+ Ukrainians abroad have been crucial in both protecting the rights of this minority among refugees, and in creating safe queer spaces. They have also been

72 Multi-stakeholder training 2024.
73 Koinova 2024a.
74 Ukrainian House et al, 2025.
75 Deloitte and UNHCR 2025.
76 Participant, Multi-stakeholder training, 2024.
77 Reuters, 5 March, 2022, https://tinyurl.com/48tph87e, building on Koinova 2024a.
78 The Guardian, 29 June 2024, https://tinyurl.com/2jzkp92w
79 Reuters, 23 April, 2024. https://tinyurl.com/pwy49hje
80 LRT, 17 May 2024. https://tinyurl.com/4dc3vtv5
81 The Loop/ECPR Blog, 2024. https://tinyurl.com/3bdwyjdx
82 Visit Ukraine, 2025, https://tinyurl.com/5xf2pe84
83 Kyiv Independent, 11 January 2025, https://tinyurl.com/8dzdwcuw

instrumental in raising awareness, advocating, and applying pressure from abroad to introduce further reforms in Ukraine. Despite initial constraints, the experience of exile has fostered reconciliation within this group and its integration among mainstream diaspora organizations. Kwitne Queer, the first Ukrainian LGBTQ+ organization established in Germany in 2023, is a notable example of such activism, supported by the Alliance of Ukrainian Organizations in Germany to connect with other Ukrainian diaspora initiatives. As a visible actor in Germany, Kwitne Queer advocates for the implementation of anti-discrimination policies in Ukraine, participates in public debates on human rights, and has organized a panel discussion on same-sex marriage during Berlin Pride.[84] LGBTQ+ abroad are further advocating for registering same-sex partnerships while being based in the EU, in order to increase EU pressure on Ukraine.

Furthermore, ***people with disabilities*** became more visible during the war. Currently, there are 3 million people living with disabilities in Ukraine.[85] This number is expected to grow due to war-related injuries and traumas. Russia's invasion has disproportionately affected vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. While current governmental policies focus on veterans with disabilities, there is a significant gap in addressing the conditions of non-veterans with disabilities, where further reforms are needed. The GUC role can be crucial, as Ukraine needs input from other countries and their ministries of social affairs on best practices to tackle these issues. Knowledge and advocacy from GUC members could be useful in two respects: addressing the de-institutionalization of people with disabilities, and improving the certification of disability, which does not yet correspond to contemporary international standards. Organizations such as Fight for Right based in Ukraine, which have successfully connected to the diaspora, can bring best practices of positive discrimination—such as how to give disabled people access to barrier-free transportation, access to buildings and the labour market, as done in Germany, and involvement in hiring processes.[86] They can also work with relevant Ukrainian institutions and those in host-states to exert influence on Ukraine to introduce reforms, as well as to advocate in the context of Ukraine's EU accession to ensure compliance with human rights standards.

The GUC can also engage on issues of ***business and human rights***. Since 2021 Ukraine's national strategy on human rights has included a special chapter (16) dedicated to business and human rights, with an action plan adopted until 2030 to promote principles of socially responsible businesses in line with OECD and UN Global Compact guidelines.[87] This engagement will be crucial for Ukraine's economic reconstruction, as investments, businesses, and corporations operating in Ukraine will need to support socially responsible practices. As discussions within the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights intensify and Ukraine is evaluated for its evolving standards, Ukrainian diaspora organizations can participate in these discussions and provide their civic voice and expertise. The GUC can also connect businesses with organizations representing under-represented groups, serve as an information point, and explain how to hire under-privileged groups sustainably, drawing on experiences from various host-states. Diaspora business and social entrepreneurs can also introduce socially responsible practices within their own enterprises. Large private donors may be challenged to comply with socially responsible business practices, as human rights conditionalities are requested by host-state governments and the EU when giving out grants and loans; however, it may be difficult to apply these conditionalities to private actors.[88] Therefore, diaspora organizations could become partners for the introduction of voluntary measures for corporate social responsibility, exercising corporate citizenship and monitoring practices.

Dealing with ***ethno-national minorities*** during times of war is the most challenging among all human rights-related questions of diversity. This is because ethno-national minorities could be implicated in challenging

84 Based on Pavlova 2024b, Case Study.
85 Reliefweb 10 June, 2024. https://tinyurl.com/yjzttwzn
86 On Germany's law and anti-discrimination related to people with disabilities see: https://tinyurl.com/msjbrm8s
87 Kharkiv International Legal Forum, 2021, https://legalforum.nlu.edu.ua/en/events/business-and-human-rights/
88 Koinova interview, online, May 2024.

statehood, even during times of peace, as scholarship has shown.[89] Approaching some ethnic minorities in diaspora circles is not as challenging, if they are not perceived as presenting a security concern. For example, Ukrainian diaspora groups have become highly supportive of Tatars, many of whom left Crimea after Russia annexed it in 2014. Ukrainian umbrella organizations abroad—such as the Ukrainian Institute in London and the Ukrainian House in Warsaw—organized events featuring the history and culture of Tatars.[90] Engaging Roma refugees from Ukraine has been more challenging, as they have experienced a double discrimination—as refugees and as Roma—and have been treated at intersection of "racialized exclusion, systemic neglect and significant gaps in policy responses."[91] As Ukrainian diaspora activists from Germany acknowledged, more could be done to advocate for the rights of Ukrainian Roma refugees in host-states.[92] In Hungary, through a controversial legislation, Roma refugees were evicted from their government-sponsored shelters.[93] Challenges were seen also throughout Europe. Yet, also best practices exist. For example, in Poland, the Central Council of Roma has been active as a bridge-builder, and in raising awareness of Ukrainian Roma refugees, by using their contacts with politicians, seeking to put the Roma issue on the policy agenda, and involving other NGOs and private donors internationally.[94]

Emigration from Ukraine after Russia's invasion concerned also large ethno-national minorities. Some of them have ***kin states in Europe***—Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania. Representatives of these minorities have done humanitarian and other voluntary work from abroad.[95] The most significant challenges stem from national and linguistic politics related to Russia. Ukrainian activists, in particular, stress that host-country authorities must be more attuned to the needs of Ukrainians abroad and work to create safer spaces for them.[96] Moreover, there has been a growing pressure to learn and speak Ukrainian in the diaspora, contrasting with Russia's policies that undermine Ukrainian identity, language, and history. The Ukrainian government is also considering the preservation of cultural and linguistic identity of Ukrainians abroad as key, to prevent further assimilation.[97] The Unity Hubs of the Ministry of National Unity, currently being established abroad, will seek to support Ukrainian migrants in maintaining their national and cultural identity, by providing Ukrainian-language courses and programmes for cultural preservation.

89 Brubaker 1993.
90 The Ukrainian Institute, London, 23 May 2024. https://tinyurl.com/37hvtjt3
91 German Marshall Fund, December 2024. https://tinyurl.com/2n373vn9
92 Warwick/OSCE-ODIHR Workshop, Warsaw, 3 July, 2023.
93 Kyiv Independent 22 August 2024,
94 Participant, Multi-stakeholder Training 2024.
95 Koinova conversation with Bulgarians from Bessarabia, July 2024, Bulgaria; See also Ukrinform 07/06/2024 at https://tinyurl.com/y2k7kcck; Infopost 03/04/2024 at https://tinyurl.com/mtyakxkr
96 Multi-stakeholder Training 2024.
97 Participant, Multi-stakeholder Training 2024.

Democratic Institutions and Procedures

The following section focuses on the existing or potential GUC contributions to different democratic institutions and procedures in Ukraine. Institutions in democratic regimes are designed in ways to ensure participation directly or through elections, and ensure open and fair competition for power based on the popular vote, demand accountability of governments and circulation of elites, and provide a forum for discussing political issues and different social interests.[98] For diasporas, having home-country citizenship is key to enable their voting from abroad, a widespread feature of democratic regimes, to run for office, to participate in referendums, and to take leadership roles in the various branches of government.[99]

Having Ukrainian citizenship is essential for holding governmental positions. Since the 2014 Revolution of Dignity, Ukraine has actively sought the expertise of high-profile individuals with extensive international experience to guide the central government and contribute to democratic reforms. However, the majority of Ukrainians living abroad are still restricted from taking on such roles. They can serve as advisors, but to be actual decision-makers, they need to have Ukrainian citizenship.[100] Germany's GIZ has a special programme for developing advisory capacities and facilitating knowledge exchange by sending diaspora experts to their countries of origin, including Ukraine. The aim is to contribute professional expertise to various institutions, including ministries and civil society.[101] Moreover, in Ukraine, a pilot project called "Create Ukraine" was inaugurated with the Ministry of Economy and Kyiv School of Economics. This project aims to attract talented young professionals to return from abroad and participate in state-building processes and change-making.[102]

The GUC community can also play a role in supporting ***local and regional governance***, civil society, and businesses by building on the decentralization reforms that have been institutionalized in Ukraine since 2014. Here the focus is how to support regional authorities and territorial communities (*hromadas*) that have amalgamated smaller municipalities into larger ones with Ukraine's decentralization reforms.[103] *Hromadas* are responsible for developmental planning, raising local taxes, and making important decisions on projects of local significance, such as education, healthcare, sports, culture, and social welfare.[104] They exercise such powers through local and regional councils and their executive bodies.[105] Between 2014 and 2022, Ukrainian diaspora organizations started gradually developing long-term relationships with communities and local organizations.[106] However, these relationships remain primarily informal and trust-driven. There are two major avenues through which the GUC can exert a more institutionalized impact on local affairs in Ukraine: through municipal partnerships and by connecting local organizations with diaspora networks and organizations on the principle of translocalism, including through hometown associations.[107]

There are ongoing efforts among Ukrainian *hromadas* and local civil society to build ***twinning projects with municipalities and regions abroad***.[108] Municipal partnerships have gained prominence in Ukraine as an excellent tool for creating exchanges, enabling capacity-building, and bringing innovation.[109] For example, such efforts between Cherniv in Ukraine and Aachen in Germany have included the involvement of the UNESCO Chair

98 Luckham et al 2000:6.
99 Koinova 2009, 2021, Brinkerhoff 2016, Gamlen 2019.
100 Participant, Multi-stakeholder training 2024.
101 GIZ, Shaping Development-Oriented Migration, 2023. https://tinyurl.com/37yu6ujz
102 Create Ukraine 2025, https://foundation.kse.ua/en/create-ukraine/
103 Koinova, 2024b. Translocalism Policy Memo.
104 Umland and Romanova 2019.
105 PONARS 19 September 2023, https://decentralization.ua/en/news/17176
106 Ibid.
107 Koinova 2024b, Translocalism Policy Memo.
108 Paragraph based on Keudel, Koinova, Pavlova and Pryhornytska 2024, unless otherwise noted.
109 Cities4Cities, https://cities4cities.eu/long-term-intermunicipal-partnerships/

at Aachen University to work on the design of the reconstruction plan for Cherniv's main street. In addition, *hromadas* are developing a transnational dialogue with EU institutions through municipal staff in liaison offices located in Brussels with accumulating expertise on how EU institutions work. They also connect local municipalities to the EU Committee of the Regions. Such extraterritorial outreach of Ukrainian *hromadas* is well suited for providing information about localities to investors, and for mobilizing resources for other projects associated with Ukraine's recovery at the local level.[110] Yet it has not been regulated, and many communications are still supposed to take place via the embassies.[111] Diaspora NGOs can play an active partnership role in such twinning projects, as in the above example (North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany–Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine). Yet, such bilateral twinning projects are not purely diaspora-driven. The diaspora can be a partner in multistakeholder relationships.

Another way diasporas could exert targeted impact on local government is to support local needs ***translocally***. This means that the strong sense of belonging people feel with a particular place of origin could be an additional asset to support their needs.[112] This means that a village, town, or other settlement has durable connections to natives of that place who now live abroad or have relocated to other places within that state.[113] For example, the Vinnitsya region in Ukraine has extended networks of people who now live in various other countries or have been internally displaced to other parts of Ukraine. Local-to-local connections emerge, whereas diasporas participate in exchanges that include the sharing of information, ideas, goods, commodities, remittances, funds, visits, communications, services, labour, and others.[114] These connections are no longer bilateral—municipality to municipality—but multipronged, as they include diasporas living in different places across the globe who stem from the same place or feel they belong to it.[115] Such multipronged connections have a significant development potential, given that diasporas are prone to empathize with the challenges of family, friends, and wider communities left at "home." Translocal exchanges can manifest through humanitarianism, rebuilding housing, running for local political office, and developing business and social investment projects, among others in the locality.[116]

Hometown associations (HTAs), as established in Latin America and Africa, are an example of such translocal connections and composed of extended families or people originating from the same town or village, and respond directly to specific community needs. Such needs are understood when diaspora members visit the hometown community, and often concern the building of schools, renewal of public infrastructure, assisting with healthcare, and support of church and town gentrification, among others. HTAs leaders are usually elected democratically by board members, and collaborate with various institutions at the local level, notably mayors and municipal leaders.[117] In Ukraine, *hromadas* can initiate these underdeveloped relationships by advertising project needs through social and local media that diasporas from specific areas follow from abroad. *Hromadas* can also develop frameworks for these projects to be both co-sponsored and co-governed with the GUC collaboratively.[118]

The GUC can also play a role in supporting ***Ukraine's EU accession,*** although this is an intergovernmental process with limited space for institutional engagement of diasporas. There is a clear need to explain the EU integration process to GUC members through capacity-building initiatives, and to identify all the roles they could play.[119]

110 Ibid.
111 Participant, Multi-stakeholder training, 2024.
112 Appadurai 1995
113 Koinova 2024b, Translocalism Policy Memo.
114 Bunchuay-Peth 2014.
115 Participant, Multi-stakeholder Training 2024.
116 Koinova 2021.
117 Orozco with Lapointe 2004.
118 Koinova 2024b, Translocalism Policy Memo, Discussions, Multi-stakeholder Training 2024
119 Multi-stakeholder training 2024.

GUC members can maintain access to ***host-state institutions*** where EU policies for Ukraine are formulated.[120] Given that specific countries have veto powers to start and close various negotiation chapters, GUC advocacy and bridge-building can be useful through mechanisms such as citizens initiatives, discussions, and assemblies. The GUC can also get involved with host-state civil society and trade unions, and spread messages to mainstream and social media while pursuing an all-society approach.[121] It is also important, as with other diasporas, to engage through the party system of individual EU member-states and foster the careers of Ukrainian-origin politicians and representatives over time. These representatives can then become Members of the European Parliament and other EU bodies.[122]

The GUC can further influence EU accession negotiations by way of ***direct engagement with EU institutions***, such as the EU Commission, European Parliament (the most permeable among all EU institutions for diaspora access), European External Action Service, and Brussels-based think tanks to shine a light on different issues. The European Committee of the Regions has been key in hosting local government representatives (such as of the Vinnytsia and Lutsk *hromadas*).[123] Local government representatives could act also as "city ambassadors" while in Europe, while ensuring to collaborate and coordinate with local embassies.[124] Also, Promote Ukraine has operated an Ukraine Hub in Brussels since 2022, with over 100 volunteers, more than 70 demonstrations, and 50 closed-door meetings with policymakers, as well as assisting Ukrainian refugees in Belgium.[125] Leveraging its dual presence in Brussels, Promote Ukraine also aims to influence Belgium's foreign policy towards Ukraine. For example, it has organized protests to urge the Belgian government to end gas contracts with Russian providers.[126] ICMPD has also actively engaged GUC diaspora in Brussels through high-level public discussions, including on the role of human capital in the resilience and reconstruction of Ukraine.[127]

The GUC can further provide ***expertise during the negotiations*** of different chapters that lead to institutional reforms. To empower the diaspora, a GUC Advisory Body to the Ukrainian government can be created to provide advice, feedback, and suggestions for different chapters and institutions relevant to them in Ukraine, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of the Economy.[128] Also, it is crucial to receive directions from the Ukrainian government in this very technical and political process, to make sure that specific expertise is communicated as needed at particular times, as some chapters would be open for negotiations, while others closed; including diaspora members in these expertise groups can correspond to the work needing to be done for different chapters—for example, on transport and agriculture. This could be communicated directly, or via the Ukrainian embassies abroad. From the perspective of EU institutions, there is a necessity to coordinate the multiple diaspora voices in Brussels through an umbrella organization, to streamline their various messages, and provide structured information about available expertise that can be drawn upon if needed, of organizations and individuals.[129]

The GUC can contribute to Ukraine's institutional reforms by acting as ***monitors of Ukraine's progress towards EU integration***. This includes overseeing the negotiations of various chapters, tracking their pace and trajectory, and ensuring the implementation of reforms and the financial soundness of new trusts and endowments throughout the recovery phase.[130] ***Pursuing transparency and accountability of funding and its use is key to democratic principles and is a key role that the GUC can play as monitors and watchdogs***. The GUC could also

120 Building on Koinova 2021, Keudel et al 2024.
121 ibid,
122 Koinova 2021.
123 Multi-stakeholder training, Koinova interviews in Brussels, June 2024.
124 Discussions, Multi-stakeholder Training 2024.
125 Promote Ukraine, 2025, https://www.promoteukraine.org/overview/
126 Keudel et al. 2024.
127 Multi-stakeholder Training, 2024.
128 Keudel et al 2024.
129 Discussions, Multi-stakeholder Training, 2024.
130 Keudel et al 2024.

monitor Ukraine's compliance with the 1993 Copenhagen Criteria. These criteria require Ukraine to achieve stability in its democratic institutions, market economy, rule of law, and human and minority rights. Such a monitoring role would be highly valuable for EU institutions, as "passing a law is one thing, but seeing how it works is another; this also requires knowing the right actors to engage with."[131]

GUC members can play ***other roles in Ukraine's EU accession.*** They can connect Ukrainian hubs, houses, and centres established in EU countries and a hub in the European Parliament to local government authorities and governing structures of internally displaced people.[132] Thereby the GUC can further share its knowledge and expertise on EU integration, accumulated over time. They can also participate in mapping resources and organizations, convey best practices, engage in public–private partnerships, advance institutional reforms, and participate in EU programmes related to Ukraine, such as EU4Health, Digital Europe[133] EU Diaspora Facility (EUDiF) and Horizon Europe.

Beyond participating in and supporting Ukraine's democratic institutions and EU accession, which entails democratic compliance, the GUC can further engage with democratic procedures in Ukraine over the long term. This includes advancing current efforts in seeking transitional justice and, when Ukraine's political system reopens for elections, engaging in voting from abroad.

During ongoing conflicts, diasporas engage in multitudes of activities such as advocacy, lobbying, financial resource mobilization, support to the military, and humanitarian efforts. During post-conflict reconstruction, diasporas shift their focus to adding financial investments and entrepreneurship,[134] assisting return and reintegration of displaced citizens, and additional engagement in development projects.[135] Furthermore, diasporas can play a key role in advancing ***transitional justice*** processes during post-conflict reconstruction. This can take place through a variety of juridical and non-juridical measures to address past human rights abuses and atrocities, such as support for legal tribunals, invoking persecution of war criminals through universal jurisdiction, participating in truth commissions as in Liberia and Haiti, memorialization through social movements as in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda and Sri Lanka, and using various digital platforms and tools.[136] Besides the traditional commemoration of Holodomor, which has persisted since the twentieth century,[137] the Ukrainian diaspora, especially refugees, have been actively seeking justice for the atrocities committed since Russia's 2022 invasion, such as through above-mentioned initiatives in Poland and the Netherlands.

This report does not advocate for holding presidential or other ***elections*** in Ukraine during wartime. Instead, it aims to provide a longer-term perspective to prepare for discussions about the democratic potential of the GUC that will inevitably arise after the war. Recent surveys indicate a significant decline in the intention of Ukrainians abroad to return home, dropping from 74% in 2022 to 43% in 2024, with only 20% fully confident they will return, according to CES 2025 data.[138] Given that millions of Ukrainian citizens are likely to remain abroad even after the war, it is essential to consider expanding the existing legislation, practices, and conditions for voting from abroad. A December 2024 poll by the SOCIS Centre for Social and Market Research, conducted across Ukraine and the occupied territories, revealed that 67% of respondents believe Ukrainians who have moved abroad should retain their right to vote as they remain citizens of Ukraine. The multiple-citizenship law is expected to increase the number of eligible voters over time. Currently, Ukrainian legislation permits voting from abroad only in person, on election day, and at embassies and consulates.[139] This regulation is restrictive, as diplomatic missions cannot accommodate tens of thousands of eligible voters.

131 Participant, Multi-stakeholder Training, 2024.
132 Keudel et al 2024.
133 Ibid.
134 Koinova 2021.
135 Mori et al 2025.
136 Koinova and Karabegovic 2019.
137 Nikolko 2019.
138 CES 2025, see also IOM/MPI 2024 on intentions to return.
139 Ukrainska Pravda25, https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2024/12/26/7490759/:

Recommendations

Despite the civic activism and democratic engagement of the Global Ukrainian Community before and after Russia's invasion, further opportunities have been identified, leading to recommendations for all stakeholders: (1) the Global Ukrainian Community, (2) Ukraine's government and other actors, (3) host-state governments and other actors, (4) the EU and (5) international organizations. ***The key takeaway for all stakeholders is to deliberately consider and mainstream democratic content when engaging the GUC, offering multiple opportunities for participation and the preservation of diversity and human rights during all exchanges, engagements, and policies designed for Ukraine's recovery.*** The democratic content of exchanges is often taken for granted, since Ukraine is fighting this war for democracy's sake, and is on the path to EU accession. However, the longer the war continues, the more destructive, anti-democratic, and nationalist tendencies can take deeper root in communities. This is particularly true among traumatized refugees and diasporas abroad, who are rarely included in mainstream state policies. Hence, ***every engagement with the Global Ukrainian Community should incorporate a filter of giving opportunities to participate as a key partner, and requiring considerations of democratic principles, procedures, and human and minority rights.***

For the Global Ukrainian Community

1. Seek channels to self-organize through registered organizations as legal entities in host-states. This will enable the recognition and participation of GUC with various stakeholders involved in programmes and projects for Ukraine's recovery.

2. Build civil society organizations that represent various minorities within Ukrainians abroad. Additionally, mainstream support for minorities within other Ukrainian organizations, including Roma, Tatars, marginalized gender and sexual groups, and disabled individuals.

3. Seek access and collaboration with mainstream civil society and associations in host-states, including to develop mixed teams to collaborate locally.

4. Seek access to host-state and EU institutions involved in policy formulation, such as parliaments and local and central government institutions. This will enhance advocacy, visibility, and the capacity to be considered as stakeholders in partnerships.

5. Participate in host-state political parties and trade unions to enhance the representation of individual Ukrainians abroad and enable their long-term potential for running for office in host states.[140]

6. Incorporate corporate social responsibility and considerations of diversity and human rights when engaging with businesses in host states and Ukraine. Include such clauses in enterprises owned by GUC business and social entrepreneurs.

7. Continue seeking to combat disinformation and empower others to recognize fake facts and news.

8. Write for media outlets in host-states and Ukraine that target mainstream audiences, also in the local language, beyond social media.

9. Seek streamlined and already existing or developing channels to engage with the Ukrainian government's ministries and institutions, demonstrating expertise and potential for becoming advisors, as well as showcasing expertise for EU integration, and for taking on governmental roles upon return.

140 Koinova 2021.

10. Engage directly with Ukraine's regional and local authorities to identify community needs and seek ways to co-create solutions and ways to include GUC members in the co-governance of these initiatives. Explore the potentials of city-to-city partnerships, translocal engagement, and hometown associations.

11. Develop monitoring capacities and organizations to ensure transparency of governmental and business processes in Ukraine's recovery, including electoral monitoring.

12. Enhance digital engagement for monitoring processes through various existing platforms or through such to be developed with GUC support.

13. Maintain awareness of the potential problems posed by nationalist and exclusivist discourses and actions, as they can be detrimental to building and maintaining relationships with various stakeholders.

For the Ukrainian government and institutions

1. Recognize the contributions of the GUC to Ukraine's recovery through media messages from high-profile central and local government officials. This can help bridge the growing gap between Ukrainians who have emigrated during the war and those who have remained in the country.

2. Engage the GUC in co-designing policies and processes that specifically concern this community, including protections abroad, prospective return, and host-state integration. Additionally, involve the GUC to co-design policies and processes in areas where they have been already contributing, such as business, social, and political entrepreneurship.

3. Design policies and processes related to the GUC that specifically factor in diversity and human and minority rights. This includes engaging the GUC abroad to maintain Ukrainian identity in civic ways, encompassing cultural and other types of diversity within the migrant populations, as well as their diversity in matters of future return.

4. Leverage voluntary actions tailored to specific migrant individuals when crafting policies for GUC return and integration into host-states. Some GUC members have strong ties to both Ukraine and their host-states, making them ideal brokers, bridge-builders, and mediators. Others, including the long-term diaspora, are more connected to their host-states and can excel in lobbying and forming partnerships with host-state institutions such as academia, business, government, and municipal entities. A third group, while living abroad, remains emotionally and socially close to Ukraine, making them effective advocates for return and encouraging others to do the same. Creating targeted messages and programmes to attract individuals beyond organizations can enhance efficiency while preserving the voluntary nature of choices among GUC members.[141]

5. Actively engage GUC individuals with expertise and capacities (a) to advise and be hired in government positions upon return, and (b) to contribute to Ukraine's EU accession across different negotiation chapters.

6. Reach out to the GUC with specific needs to co-design, fundraise, and co-govern local and regional governance projects.

7. Explore city-to-city partnerships, hometown associations, and other translocal arrangements.

8. Regulate access of local governments/*hromadas* in the EU's Committee of the Regions.

9. Expand out-of-country voting beyond embassies and consulates.

141 Koinova 2021, Koinova 2024c, "Four Types of Diaspora Entrepreneurs" Policy Memo.

10. Within the Unity Hubs, currently being developed by the Ministry of National Unity in cooperation with host state governments and International organisations, develop brochures and training on how GUC can participate as a democratic actor in Ukraine's recovery. Consider organising state Institutions "fairs" in the host countries, for instance, within the Unity Hubs to provide direct advice, support and consultations on various state services and programmes for displaced people, diaspora and potential returnees.

11. Within the new programme on giving awards to GUC members, consider an award for promoting democracy and human rights among refugees and diaspora.

For host-state governments and institutions

The following recommendations feature the role of the GUC as a distinct actor, in line with the focus of this report. However, this does not negate the rationale of host-state governments in striving for coherent policies across various migrant groups to promote social cohesion in the host-societies. The recommendations below position the GUC within the broader framework of such host-state considerations.

1. Expand institutional access: enhance the engagement of Ukrainian civil society organizations, businesses, and social and political entrepreneurs with host-state governments and parliaments at both central and local levels. Such engagement can be fostered in alignment with host-state policies aimed at involving diverse diaspora groups. Diaspora entrepreneurs, also beyond Ukrainians, often encounter limited access to institutional frameworks and decision-making processes within host-states. They call for broader access to enable meaningful participation in the co-creation of policies that impact both their communities and society at large.[142] Expanding such access could also support host-state objectives related to equality and diversity.

2. Integrate GUC organizations: facilitate the inclusion of GUC organizations in information-sharing and the co-design of measures related to the protection of Ukrainian refugees abroad. This should also cover matters of return, ensuring the voluntary choices of GUC members are preserved.

3. Capacity-building programmes: develop capacity-building programmes for GUC, enabling it to act as a democratic and human rights actor in Ukraine's recovery.

4. Recognition awards: establish awards, particularly at the local level, to recognize the excellence of GUC organizations. This will raise their visibility and enhance their capacity to engage as future stakeholders.

5. Local partnerships: strengthen city-to-city partnerships with Ukrainian local government authorities. Explore support for translocal engagement, hometown associations, and other matching grant programmes that position GUC organizations to co-design and co-govern local projects.

6. Diaspora expert programmes: create programmes that place diaspora experts with central and local governments and other institutions in Ukraine. These programmes should follow existing best practices and ensure that placements contribute to the inclusion of diversity and human rights in their activities.

7. Inclusive practices in grants and loans: advocate for the inclusion of human and minority rights in businesses, as well as grants, loans, and other exchanges involving GUC business, social, and political entrepreneurs.

8. Ensure that temporary protection and return policies, developed at the level of EU nation-states, include GUC members as discussion partners, and that their perspectives are taken into consideration.

9. Secure funding for diaspora- and refugee-led initiatives, including at the EU level. Many organizations—particularly those established after 2022—are currently facing a funding crisis that threatens their continued operation despite their active contributions over the past three years.

142 Koinova 2021

For the EU

1. Enable sustained access to the GUC beyond events-related activities of the Ukrainian "hub" in Brussels. This would require EU's relevant institutions to reach out and include relevant GUC organizations, ideally an umbrella organization, that could be engaged in such conversations.

2. While designing policies, processes and programmes for Ukraine's EU accession, consider also the development of mechanisms that could include input from the GUC for Ukraine's recovery.

3. Engage GUC experts to support the evaluation and monitoring of Ukraine's progress towards EU accession. Given that the European Commission publishes regular progress reports, GUC experts and relevant organizations can play a vital watchdog role—particularly in the areas of democracy, human rights, and transparency. Members of the diaspora, with access to diverse and independent sources of information, are especially well positioned to contribute meaningfully to this oversight process.

For international organizations and other institutions

1. Engage the GUC in information-sharing and as partners in the co-design and implementation of projects, specifically concerning the community on matters of temporary protection, return, and host-state integration, and include considerations of diversity and human and minority rights in them.

2. Build multistakeholder relationships, programmes, and projects, including GUC representatives, to enhance visibility, capacities, and opportunities. This includes raising awareness of the GUC's role in democracy and human rights. The Research England Policy Support Project, which underpins this report, could be considered as an example of good practice of engaging an academic institution, the University of Warwick, with OSCE-ODIHR and ICMPD as international organizations and nonacademic project partners, while integrating as trainers two GUC leaders from the Association of Ukrainians in Germany and CRISP NGO, and other over thirty participants from governmental, nongovernmental, and international organizations.

3. Involve NGOs and GUC experts in research projects concerning the Ukrainian community, as either co-researchers or partners, depending on the funding schemes.

4. Organize national and regional-level capacity-building and training events tailored to diaspora organisations, initiatives, and migrant communities to (a) empower and engage the diaspora in advocacy, political participation, sustainable civic leadership, community development and governance; (b) equip the GUC with knowledge and skills to enable their scaling up, to strengthen their voice, and to become stakeholders; and (c) foster collaboration and networking, so they can serve as partners and further play a democratic role in Ukraine's recovery, their rights, and future opportunities.

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