

Project “Engaging the Ukrainian Diaspora in
Reconstruction and Development: Democracy and Human Rights Dimensions”
Sponsored by the Research England Policy Support Fund at Warwick University

Case Study

Unlocking Potential: How the Ukrainian Queer Community in Exile
is Paving the Way for Ukraine's Recovery

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Kwitne Queer is the first Ukrainian LGBTIQ+ organization in Germany.¹ It was established to give the Ukrainian LGBTIQ+ community visibility as an actor, regain subjectivity, and represent themselves as a political entity. When Ukrainian protection-seekers arrived in Germany in 2022, queer individuals were frequently advised by state authorities to connect with organizations serving Russian-speaking queer communities. This approach, due to different experiences and incidents of anti-Ukrainian discrimination, often led to retraumatization and hindered their desire for political representation as Ukrainians.

Kwitne Queer is involved in advocacy work,² and also engages with processes within Ukraine. As a visible queer Ukrainian actor in Germany, the organization aim to contribute to the implementation of anti-discrimination policies in Ukraine. Kwitne Queer participates in public debates on human rights in Ukraine, such as organizing a panel discussion on same-sex marriage during Berlin Pride.

Although queer organizations and structures are present in Ukraine, they often exist in a somewhat isolated cluster within civil society. In contrast, Kwitne Queer reports that it has become an integral part of the Ukrainian civil society in Berlin. Although there were initial constraints, the experience of exile has fostered reconciliation within the community. This experience can be instrumental in Ukraine’s recovery by providing practical approaches to marginalized groups’ integration into broader society. For instance, the advocacy and community-building techniques developed by Kwitne Queer in Berlin can be applied in Ukraine to create more inclusive policies and practices. These efforts can help bridge social divides, promote equality, and strengthen the overall resilience and unity of Ukrainian civil society during the recovery process.

Main data

Establishment: 2023

Registration: 2024

Form of registry: eingetragener Verein (NGO)

Location: Berlin, Germany

Size: Five core team members and 10 volunteers.

Fields of work: Representation, creation of safer spaces and legal support for queer Ukrainians in Germany, cultural diplomacy and countering homophobia.

Enabling Factors

Diaspora network. The Alliance of Ukrainian Organisations e.V. (AUO) has played an important role in facilitating connections between Kwitne Queer and other Ukrainian diaspora initiatives. This network has not only provided opportunities for collaboration but also a platform for regular psychological support meetings, which are essential for community well-being. CineMova e.V., a member of AUO, has conducted a training program on political participation and the legal framework in Germany.³ This training not only motivated the formal registration of NGOs but also demystified the bureaucratic processes involved. Additionally, PlusUkrDe, an NGO representing HIV-positive Ukrainians in Germany, has served as a pioneering example.⁴ It was one of the first organizations registered by protection-seekers who arrived after the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022, demonstrating the potential for successful organizational establishment within the diaspora.

Support from local queer communities. Local queer organizations such as Sonntagsclub, Mama Cash, Kudepo, and AHA have provided crucial support to the Ukrainian LGBTIQ+ community, offering resources, safe spaces, and advocacy support to help integrate the Ukrainian community into the broader local queer movement. Their backing has been instrumental in fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity, which has been vital for the community's resilience and empowerment.

¹ Bade, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/44z8tkkm>

² Vitsche, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/46da7ecr>

³ Cinemova, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/y8kmuw66>

⁴ Darida, 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/2p8rycez>

Anti-discrimination laws and equality policies. Berlin's robust anti-discrimination laws and equality policies have created a supportive environment for marginalized groups. The availability of an anti-discrimination smartphone app⁵ has further empowered individuals by providing accessible tools for reporting and combating discrimination. These legal frameworks and technological tools have been crucial in ensuring that the rights of the Ukrainian LGBTIQ+ community are protected and upheld.

Restraining Factors and Mitigation

The process of registering an organization in Germany presented significant **bureaucratic challenges**. These were exacerbated when advocacy was listed as one of Kwitne Queer's goals in the statute, as this often required additional scrutiny and compliance with specific regulations. Overcoming these hurdles required a thorough understanding of the legal system and persistence in navigating the complex bureaucratic landscape.

Members of the Ukrainian LGBTIQ+ community have often faced **ignorance, lack of understanding of their life circumstances, and discrimination** from some segments of the host-society. These problematic behaviors have added an additional layer of difficulty in their integration process. Addressing these issues requires continuous advocacy, education, and efforts to promote cultural understanding and acceptance.

Homophobia has been a significant challenge, both within the host society and among some Ukrainian activists. This internal and external prejudice has created barriers to community cohesion and support. Mitigating this issue has involved fostering inclusive dialogues, raising awareness, and building alliances with supportive groups to challenge and change homophobic attitudes.

The cumulative stress from facing these numerous challenges has often led to burnout among community members and activists. However, the network of support and the persistence of individuals have played a crucial role in overcoming this. Regular psychological support meetings, community solidarity, and shared experiences have helped in managing burnout and sustaining the energy needed for continued advocacy and organizational work.

The experience of Kwitne Queer holds particular relevance for Ukraine's recovery. By adapting the advocacy and community-building techniques honed in Berlin, Ukrainian civil society can better integrate marginalized groups, bridge social divides, and promote equality. The success of Kwitne Queer underscores the importance of inclusive policies and practices, which can strengthen the overall resilience and unity of Ukrainian civil society. As Ukraine rebuilds, the lessons learned from the diaspora's efforts in exile can provide a blueprint for fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and democratic society.

This case study is the intellectual property of the Research England Policy Support Fund Project "Engaging the Ukrainian Diaspora in Reconstruction and Development: Democracy and Human Rights Dimensions" at the University of Warwick. **This case study can be used for policy development by:**

1. **Quoting/referencing:** Pavlova, Kateryna. 2024. "Unlocking Potential: How the Ukrainian Queer Community in Exile is Paving the Way for Ukraine's Recovery," Research England Policy Support Fund Grant "Engaging the Ukrainian Diaspora in Reconstruction and Development: Democracy and Human Rights Dimensions," University of Warwick.
and
2. If you intend to use the case study in policy development or it informs your thinking or practice please **contact the PI of the project**, Prof. M. Koinova at m.koinova@warwick.ac.uk *and the author*, Kateryna Pavlova, at pavlova@crisp-berlin.org

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⁵ AnDi – smartphone application of the state of Berlin.