



# REBUILDING WITH WOMEN:

## AMPLIFYING THEIR VOICES IN UKRAINE'S RECOVERY





## — ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS —

This report was produced by Cities Alliance, StreetNet International and WIEGO.

The publication was funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA).

## — DISCLAIMER —

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the corporate policies or viewpoints of Cities Alliance Secretariat, its members, or UNOPS.

Copyright: © Cities Alliance, WIEGO, StreetNet International, 2022

Front page image: © Ukrinform, Local residents make camouflage nets for Ukrainian defenders, Uzhhorod, Zakarpattia Region, western Ukraine. [Depositphotos.com](https://depositphotos.com)



This material/production has been financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida. Responsibility for the content rests entirely with the creator. Sida does not necessarily share the expressed views and interpretations.

## — ABBREVIATIONS —

<b>CEMR</b>	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
<b>CoR</b>	European Committee of the Regions
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced People
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>KVBU</b>	Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine
<b>VPPU</b>	Free Trade Union of Entrepreneurs of Ukraine
<b>WIEGO</b>	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing

## — CONTENTS —

**06**  
WOMEN AND  
THE WAR IN  
UKRAINIAN CITIES

**08**  
DESTRUCTION OF URBAN  
INFRASTRUCTURE DISRUPTS  
SERVICES AND LIVELIHOODS

**10**  
LOSS OF CITIES' CARE SERVICES  
RESULTS IN ADDITIONAL BURDEN  
FOR WOMEN

**14**  
VIOLENCE AND  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
TRAUMA

**16**  
THE WAR COMPOUNDS  
WOMEN'S ECONOMIC  
VULNERABILITY

**20**  
WOMEN'S  
PARTICIPATION NEEDED  
IN DECISION MAKING

**22**  
RECOMMENDATIONS  
TO REBUILD WOMEN  
FRIENDLY CITIES

**28**  
STORIES OF WOMEN,  
WAR AND PRECARITY

ANNEX





## WOMEN ARE CENTRAL TO COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND RESISTANCE EFFORTS.

Their voices should be part of the decision making process for reconstruction too.



© Fotoreserg, Uzhhorod, Ukraine - Volunteers pack aid bags. [Depositphotos.com](https://depositphotos.com)

# REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

Even before Russia launched its full-scale attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022, women workers, particularly those who are self-employed, struggled to earn their livelihoods. The war has exacerbated existing inequalities. Ukrainian women and girls are increasingly vulnerable to displacement, loss of livelihood, poverty, violence and trauma. And because urban infrastructure has been a primary target of shelling, women face even greater pressure in trying to meet the needs of themselves and their families.

Yet women have mobilised across the country—whether serving with the army on the front lines or providing humanitarian aid and protecting the injured and infirm. Others are safeguarding the future by doing whatever it takes to keep their children and other family members safe. This includes leaving home: over 6.2 million Ukrainians are internally displaced, while about 7.7 million have sought refuge in other countries. Most are women and children.

**Despite their active service, women remain largely absent from formal decision-making processes related to peacemaking and rebuilding. As a result, policies and practices do not fully address their priorities or needs. Women's participation and perspectives are vital to the reconstruction of Ukrainian cities.**

As the war entered its third month, StreetNet International, Cities Alliance and WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing) launched a project to highlight the voices of Ukrainian women workers. Between July 9 and September 19, 2022, 18 women who are directly impacted by conflict in Ukraine were interviewed. Of these, 15 were self-employed individual entrepreneurs (known as FOPs in Ukraine). Most earned income from small trading businesses, whether in public spaces or online or as home-based producers of goods or services. While the sample is small, the interviewees give voice to the experiences and traumas of women in this war, and offer insight and ideas for rebuilding a better future.

Their stories, along with desk research, shaped the report 'Rebuilding with Women: Amplifying their voices in Ukraine's recovery'.

The publication highlights the disruption of urban services and livelihoods. The lack of services—particularly healthcare, childcare and education—has put an additional burden on women and girls due to their social roles. For women entrepreneurs, making a living can be particularly difficult. Half of those interviewed had lost their businesses due to migration, high unemployment, inflation, and disrupted supply chains. The difficulties associated with growing economic and care responsibilities cause increasing psychological stress for women. In fact, many women spoke of how they and their families have suffered psychologically. War also increases vulnerability to sexual violence and exploitation, which impacts women and girls to a greater extent.

The paper identifies four key priorities for rebuilding cities by considering women's specific needs and vulnerabilities:

- a. ensuring women's (and all peoples') physical and mental safety,
- b. creating economic opportunities and women-supportive economic environments,
- c. restoring urban infrastructures aptly for women's needs, and
- d. ensuring women have a voice in all decision-making processes during reconstruction. The process needs to be participatory, with women at the core, and include local authorities and local civil society organizations.





© Yuri Kochubey, Destroyed buildings on the streets of Kharkiv, Ukraine. [Depositphotos.com](https://depositphotos.com)

## WOMEN AND THE WAR IN UKRAINIAN CITIES

The war in Ukraine has resulted in civilian casualties, destruction of basic and strategic infrastructure systems, and the forced displacement of millions of Ukrainian citizens, most of whom are women and children. In the country, 6.2 million people remain internally displaced by war, while by early November, more than 7.7 million Ukrainian refugees had been recorded in Europe.<sup>1</sup> The vast majority are women and children.<sup>2</sup>

Urban areas have been among the most affected territories, with large parts of their buildings and other infrastructure partially or completely destroyed. This includes bridges and power plants, but also hospitals, schools and cultural heritage sites. The extent of urban devastation in Ukraine has led some to use the term 'urbicide'.<sup>3</sup>



**OVER  
6.2 MILLION  
PEOPLE**  
internally displaced

**ABOUT  
7.7 MILLION  
UKRAINIANS**  
sought refuge in other countries

Women and girls are hit hardest by the impacts of war. Existing inequalities are magnified and social networks break down, making them more vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation. The disruption of social services such as medical care and education has increased the care burden on women. They are also increasingly exposed to rising poverty, informality, livelihood loss and security risks, while faced with the pressure of providing for their families.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, Ukrainian women are playing a key role in the resistance movement in Ukraine.<sup>5</sup> Some are fighting on the front line—they make up about 22 per cent of the army<sup>6</sup>—helping with administration, dealing with the injured or providing equipment and supplies. Others have mobilised across the country to ensure the safety of children and elderly people by taking them to underground shelters and by supporting people with disabilities and internally displaced persons (IDPs).<sup>7</sup> Yet despite all these efforts, women are often excluded from formal negotiation and decision-making processes. Resulting policies and practices do not necessarily consider their priorities or needs.

In April 2022, StreetNet International, Cities Alliance, and WIEGO came together to plan how to spotlight the stories of Ukraine's women workers, including the self-employed, representatives of feminist organisations operating in Ukraine, and women supporting displaced Ukrainians in refugee shelters abroad. Between July 9 and September 19, 2022, the project interviewed 18 women who are directly impacted by the ongoing war in Ukraine to determine how the war is affecting women, their incomes and their well-being (see Annex: Stories of Women, War and Precarity). Of these, 15 were self-employed individual entrepreneurs (known as FOPs in Ukraine). Most of these earned income from small trading businesses, small shops, or online stores; a few were home-based producers of goods or services, and a few augmented their income as part-time, informal domestic workers. Although the sample is small, these women nevertheless give voice to the experiences and traumas of women in this war, while also bringing their ideas and hopes to bear on the situation.

With this publication, Cities Alliance, StreetNet International and WIEGO aim to illustrate how, outside of the active combat, the war has disproportionately impacted women and girls, especially those working in the informal sector. In the interviews, the women spoke about the absence of essential services, about psychological trauma and about individual, economic and community resilience. This publication highlights the importance of placing women's perspectives at the centre of the reconstruction of Ukrainian cities.





© Depositphotos, Kharkiv, Ukraine, March 2022, A woman near a residential building destroyed after shelling. [Depositphotos.com](https://depositphotos.com)

## DESTRUCTION OF URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE DISRUPTS SERVICES AND LIVELIHOODS

The war has deliberately targeted cities, as they are centres of political and economic power. In major Ukrainian cities, including Kyiv, Lviv, Zaporizhzhia and Kharkiv, hospitals and schools have been hit and playgrounds and public spaces have disappeared. By May 25—just three months into the war—the Kyiv School of Economics estimated that more than 44 million square metres of Ukrainian housing had been damaged or destroyed, along with 643 health care facilities, 1,123 educational institutions, 621 kindergartens, and 19 shopping centres.<sup>8</sup> The bombing also affected transport infrastructure, with the destruction of 305 bridges, 19 airports, 57 railway stations, and 24,000 kilometres of roads.<sup>9</sup> These numbers are now much higher, as shelling has since intensified in cities like Kharkiv and Kyiv.<sup>10</sup>



**44 MILLION M<sup>2</sup>**  
of Ukrainian housing damaged  
or destroyed, by May 25

**TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURES**  
damaged or destroyed, by May 25  
305 bridges  
19 airports  
57 railway stations  
24,000 km of roads

**In those cities, many lack safe drinking water and there are severe disruptions in electricity to power homes and businesses or health and educational services.**

Numerous attacks on cities during October and November disrupted access to electricity, water, and heat for large numbers of people, leaving them without these vital services ahead of the cold winter months. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that the entire population of Kyiv, estimated at around 3 million, was temporarily left without water for a day, and parts of Kyiv, Lviv, Zaporizhzhia, and Odesa regions were completely disconnected from electricity. These energy disruptions have dramatic consequences for hospitals and health-care facilities which are no longer fully operational.<sup>11</sup>

When infrastructures are destroyed, lives are lost and so are livelihoods. The destruction of bazaars where market traders make their living has been particularly devastating. When Russian missiles demolished Barabashovo in Kharkiv—Ukraine's biggest market with 15,000 enterprises vying for customers—traders lost everything. "Not just jobs, but businesses that have supported people over the years," said Valentyna Korobka, Chairperson of VPPU, the Free Trade Union of Entrepreneurs of Ukraine (Interview 5, 'From organizing workers to organizing humanitarian aid'). Even months later, the market remains a shadow of what it was. In September, another market—this one in Donetsk—was shelled.

The fear among small traders is that even after the war, markets will not be re-established. The trend for years throughout Ukraine has been to demolish these traditional areas in the name of 'progress'. At times, attempts to clear markets have involved violent attacks by authorities and arson, killing vendors.<sup>12</sup> In fact, in September 2022, vendors in one of the markets in the Darnytskyi district of Kyiv contacted Korobka to report that city authorities intended to close part of the market, putting a number of small businesses at risk of closure.

The closures impact not only the vendors and their families, but all those who count on their goods to survive. "It's like a lifeline, because people need to buy both bread and something for bread," Korobka said of the markets in many communities.





© Bumble-Dee, Evacuees from eastern Ukraine near the railway station in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv. [Depositphotos.com](https://depositphotos.com)

## LOSS OF CITIES' CARE SERVICES RESULT IN ADDITIONAL BURDEN FOR WOMEN

The destruction of schools, hospitals and other care services and facilities in cities has put an additional burden on women and girls due to their caregiving role and responsibility both in family and society. Non-embattled cities have also struggled to maintain adequate services for their inhabitants, while receiving and accommodating an increasing number of IDPs.<sup>13</sup>



© Ukrinform, A girl sits on a mat in a shelter after the first civil defence siren goes off in Dnipro, central Ukraine. [Depositphotos.com](https://depositphotos.com)

The loss of services is compounded by the separation of families. With so many men off fighting, and because most men aged 18–60 are not permitted to leave Ukraine alongside their fleeing families,<sup>14</sup> women have had to take on an even greater burden of care for their families, including eldercare, childcare and homeschooling.

**“Firstly, I am worried about my mother’s health, and secondly, mine,”**

said Natalka, a massage therapist in Hostomel. “It became much more difficult, I had to take on many additional responsibilities. My mother is disabled and can’t even move. I am the only one in the family.” (Interview 7, ‘Providing services for free to those in need’).

In particular with cities under attack, there are no safe spaces for children to play, meet and learn.

**“There should be playgrounds, places where you could encourage the child to do something, to develop, some circles, some art schools, sports schools. This is very important to me.”**

said Yulia, an online business owner with a 4-year-old child.



Oksana, a home-based worker originally from Chernihiv but now living in Varash, explained that, when faced with the terror of shelling, she strove to maintain a calm façade and keep her two daughters engaged in normal activities by making sure they kept up with their remote studies. (Interview 1, 'Women and children: War, fear and trauma').

---

**"It was necessary to distract the children and occupy them with the necessary schoolwork.... Well of course there is no education in the bomb shelter."**

---

For informal sector women workers, challenges with accessing childcare pre-date the war. In a suburb of Kyiv, another entrepreneur, also named Oksana, said there simply are not enough kindergartens (day-care centres for children under school age) in the Svyatoshino district where she lives. She has a five-year-old son and a daughter who is nearly three, but spots are not readily given to entrepreneurs.

---

**"As a private entrepreneur, according to the officials, I do not have sufficient grounds to be entitled to receive a place for my child in public kindergarten."**

---

Like many other women working to support their family and their nation at a difficult time, Oksana from Chernihiv has struggled to access childcare. (Interview 8, 'Traditional arts sustain morale and families').

---

**"I am confused by this situation, that access to kindergartens can be blocked for children whose parents are engaged in the informal sector of the economy. Yes, I am not officially employed, but I also do something and try to help our country in some way."**

---







© Palinchak, Subway station serves as a shelter for thousands of people during a rocket and bomb attack. Depositphotos.com

## VIOLENCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA

Women and men experience security in cities differently. According to UN-Habitat, violence makes up at least 25 to 30 per cent of urban crime and women are twice as likely as men to be victims of violent aggression.<sup>15</sup> In Ukraine, war-related sexual violence and human trafficking are also escalating. Government officials and UN agencies have signalled cases of sexual violence perpetrated mostly against women (but also against men), including minors.<sup>16</sup> Often the survivors do not have access to shelters or protection services, and the violence remains unreported and undocumented. Human trafficking for sexual exploitation has also been reported, especially at borders and transit centres, where many women and children travel unaccompanied or unprotected and there is little documents control.<sup>17</sup> Less visibly, Ukrainian women and girls are also confronting severe emotional distress and trauma caused by the war and displacement.

None of the women interviewed shared stories of direct violence against them or their families. However, in addition to their own experiences, some have absorbed the trauma of what was happening to others in their country (Interview 1, 'Women and children: War, fear and trauma'). Stories of children being raped and tortured by Russian invaders, which have been widely reported,<sup>18</sup> were mentioned by three separate interviewees.

**"Listening to the news from the fronts and war zones, experiencing the occupation in Chernihiv and seeing everything the invaders were doing, I became more concerned about the children."**

said Oksana, the mother of two daughters, who spent several nights in bomb shelters with her family before relocating to Varash in north-western Ukraine.

**"For me, this is the most important thing. When you see what the occupiers do with our Ukrainian children, how they abuse them.... This is the greatest pain for me as a mother, as a woman—not only for my own but also for all other children."**

Svitlana, a paediatrician from Zaporizhzhia who has sought refuge in Moldova with her 13-year-old son, continues to suffer from the stress they experienced (Interview 1, 'Women and children: War, fear and trauma'). Several times a night for weeks they were ripped from sleep by sirens. Her son developed nerve tics—first, a slight twitching near his eyes that later spread to his face, head, neck and shoulder muscles. "We did not sleep at night, and during the day my son was scared, although he tried to support me."

After news that air rockets were hitting houses and killing civilians taking shelter, she realised that no place was safe in Ukraine and heeded advice of local authorities to leave the city—and the country. Months after arriving in Moldova—despite finding both a warm welcome and work—she continues to experience feelings of despair.

**"You know, I feel like a person without a future. A person whose future was taken away and, worst of all, the future was taken away from our children, from my son. Everything was taken from us."**

For many women, economic stress is another cause for psychological despair. According to Valentyna Korobka, in the first six months of the war, over 3,000 individual entrepreneurs who are VPPU members lost their businesses and almost 3,000 more were on the verge of closing. Deepened poverty and the inability to feed families, when coupled with the terrors of war, is overwhelming the mental health capacity of some vulnerable workers. The VPPU has brought in a psychologist to support its membership. (Interview 1, 'Women and children: War, fear and trauma').



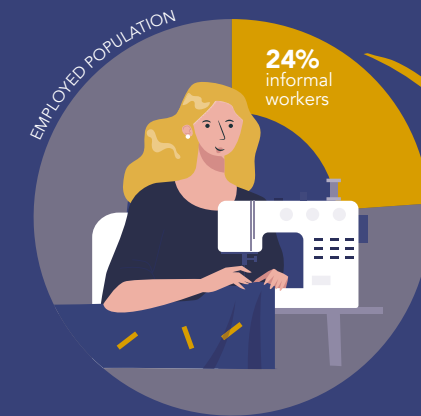


© Palinchak, Empty shelves in Kyiv grocery store. Depositphotos.com

## THE WAR COMPOUNDS WOMEN'S ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY

Prior to the Russian war on Ukraine, there were at least 4 million informal economy workers in the country, representing 24 per cent of the employed population. In 2016, women were 43 per cent of the total employees in the informal sector.<sup>19</sup> Since the war began, people living in the occupied territories have had limited access to cash due to the temporary closure of banks and the inability to load ATMs. Women working in the informal sector or those dependent on pensions or other social support have not always been able to access social protection and resources. Women's civil service organisations (CSOs) also have faced a variety of operational challenges, including a lack of funds and disruptions to the delivery of supplies.<sup>20</sup>

Prior to the Russian war on Ukraine  
THERE WERE  
AT LEAST  
**4 MILLION**  
Informal economy  
workers in the country



In 2016  
of the total employees in  
the informal sector  
**43% WERE WOMEN**

Limited social protections, even before the war, exacerbated poverty for people with no savings, leaving them to rely on a patchwork of charity. While individual entrepreneurs contribute to basic social services, they receive inadequate support. For example, healthcare, considered free, often requires the patient to purchase necessary supplies involved in their care, while private insurance to cover the gaps is often unaffordable.

Pensions are also inadequate. Tetyana, a 72-year-old pensioner, has been struggling to keep herself, her daughter and two grandchildren fed on her meagre pension since COVID-19 lockdowns, when her pension was the only income in the family. "As a pensioner who has worked all her life for the good of the state, I consider it nonsense to receive such a penny pension as I have.... Let a state official try to survive on those two and a half thousand hryvnias, as a pensioner survives,"<sup>21</sup> Tetyana challenged.

In an interview with StreetNet International in October, Olesia Briazgunova, of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (KVPU), explained that the Ukrainian government has also recently made several changes to labour legislation that erode, even erase, workers' rights throughout the country, with the worst consequences borne by women.<sup>22</sup> One change, introduced in March, raises the maximum number of hours in a workday to 12—despite the high number of available, unemployed workers looking for any paid hours at all.<sup>23</sup> Another legalises contracts in which an employee can be called to work when needed, but not guaranteed working hours.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the most contentious of these is Law 5371,<sup>25</sup> which exempts companies with fewer than 250 employees from the Labour Code's employment regulations. Employees in small and medium-sized companies will now have to directly negotiate their pay, working hours, termination clauses and other conditions of employment. Those negotiations will happen at a time of high unemployment, when jobs are scarce and many are desperate for income.

Briazgunova voiced particular concerns that the shift in labour rights will provide opportunities to avoid employing women workers: "Liberalisation of employment legislation will cause a deterioration of women's rights because there will be more opportunities to discriminate on the basis of age, the possibility of becoming pregnant and against young mothers."<sup>26</sup>

In a country that has been striving to formalise and regulate its informal sectors in recent years, the erasure of work standards seems counterintuitive. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated in July 2022 that almost 5 million jobs—about 30 per cent of the country's employment—had already been lost,<sup>27</sup> and that this trend could only worsen as war continued. Increased unemployment and greater flexibility to treat employees as casual, on-call workers will fuel insecurity and drive more people to find ways to augment their earnings by turning to informal, unprotected—and untaxed—work.



Further, it might drive more people away from the country, or prevent those who have left—especially the millions of women and children—from returning to a country where there is little employment opportunity. “It is not known whether there will be any jobs,” said Olena, a 44-year-old woman from Odesa who had left Ukraine. (Interview 9, ‘In a state of waiting, uncertain whether to return’)

**“It is better to look for a place where you can feel stable and be able to help yourself and your relatives. Of course, if there is an opportunity to work after the war, I will definitely return home.”**

Women want to be a part of the recovery in Ukraine, but require fewer obstacles to taking part and succeeding. “At least a little contribution should be made towards job opportunities. There is potential, and people want it to happen,” said Kateryna, who is currently taking refuge with her children in Moldova (Interview 10, ‘Courage after it all falls apart’). “I wish we wouldn’t receive only financial assistance, but also get ‘a fishing rod’, which is the opportunity to earn by ourselves to sustain.”

Some who have stayed in Ukraine would also benefit from assistance to restart private enterprises that have been disrupted by the war. Anzhela and her sister used to run a small business growing vegetables to sell at Darnytskyi Market in Kyiv (Interview 3, ‘Market traders suffer along with their customers’). When the war blocked access to their farm, Anzhela took a low-paying job working long hours in order to provide for her son.

**“There are various international programmes to support small businesses. If they helped me, I would become an entrepreneur again and continue to grow and sell vegetables and fruits.”**

To repatriate its citizens, reunite families and rebuild the country, Ukraine must ensure that it can offer opportunities for decent work for all workers, including good opportunities for those at home, as well as for the millions of women who have sought refuge in other countries. Women’s participation in leadership roles was already increasing before the war, a trend that will continue to benefit Ukraine after it is over.







© Palinchak, Kyiv, Ukraine. A large number of civilians enrolled in the territorial defence units. [Depositphotos.com](https://depositphotos.com)

## WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION NEEDED IN DECISION MAKING

Ukrainian women have been fundamental in the country's democratisation process, and also now in supporting Ukraine's resistance and relief efforts. According to the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), before the war, 40 per cent of the elected local council members in Ukraine were women, and important progress had been made in the proportion of women mayors (from 5.7% to 23%).<sup>28</sup>

During the war, women have taken on new roles and mobilised across the countries in different ways. They now make up over 20 per cent of the army fighting against Russian forces.<sup>29</sup> Women are also working to ensure the safety of children, elderly people and the injured. At the community level, women-led grassroots organisations have increased their presence and visibility working on the side of municipalities.

Despite their personal hardships, fully half of the women interviewed said they have supported the war effort or helped other civilians. Some have used their existing networks to get aid to civilians in need. Others have ensured supplies get to the soldiers on the front lines.

"My daughter and I were among the first to bring everything necessary for the boys to the war," said Alla Alekseeva, a 58-year-old widow who has dedicated herself to relief efforts (Interview 4, 'Sacrificing to support the front lines'). At the time of the interview, she was trying to source 1,000 sleeping bags for two brigades. "Whoever needs help, we try to provide it. We heard that when people returned to Irpin after the occupation with their children, they didn't have anything to eat, they didn't have a place to sleep and nothing to sleep on. We quickly started sending aid there. We gather as a community and help as much as we can."

Others have willingly offered assistance on a much more ad hoc basis. Kateryna, a trader from Kyiv, recounted jumping in to help (Interview 2, 'Determination in a very difficult time').

---

**"When young soldiers were digging trenches under our windows, at a time when there was a fire in Kyiv and they were preparing for anything, I stood with them and with a sore back also dug and did not complain."**

---

Natalka, whose home and massage therapy business were partially destroyed by shelling in Hostomel, said she is providing massage treatment for free to those who really require the help (Interview 7, 'Providing services for free to those in need').

Despite their active service, however, women remain largely excluded from formal decision-making processes related to humanitarian efforts, peacebuilding, and other areas that directly impact their lives.

It is crucial that women have a voice in decisions that will impact the current and future condition of Ukrainian women. The realities and vulnerabilities of women must be heard and reported. Their stories must break the silence, through the inclusion of representatives of feminist and women's groups in all steps of peacebuilding initiatives and the post-conflict reconstruction process. Only if we rebuild cities with women and for women will we rebuild truly inclusive cities for all—cities of peace.





© Palinchak, War of Russia against Ukraine: Kyiv subway station serves as a shelter for thousands of people during a rocket and bomb attack. [Depositphotos.com](https://www.depositphotos.com)

# RECOMMENDATIONS TO REBUILD WOMEN FRIENDLY CITIES

Although the war is still ongoing, the reconstruction and recovery process in Ukraine has already started. The government of Ukraine is mapping the damage and has launched a National Recovery Plan that covers multiple fields, ranging from business to energy security, and from social infrastructure to EU integration. In May 2022, the platform 'RebuildUkraine,' designed to coordinate funding efforts for the reconstruction, was announced by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and was recently discussed during an international conference hosted by the German G7 Presidency and the EU Commission. The platform will be co-led by the Commission, the U.S. government and the government in Kyiv and would include EU countries, financial institutions, and other like-minded partners. As stated by President von der Leyen, "now it is time to bring the platform to action, together with the international donors, international businesses and, of course, civil society."<sup>30</sup>

In preparation for the operationalisation of this coordination platform, and based on the women's voices gathered, this publication proposes a four-fold approach for a gender-responsive reconstruction of Ukraine's cities:



## A) ENSURING WOMEN'S AND PEOPLES' PHYSICAL AND MENTAL SAFETY

The chaos of war will continue to leave women and children vulnerable to physical and mental risks. Many are already deeply affected by the terror and uncertainty of war and experiences of violence, including gender-based violence (GBV), sexual assaults and trafficking. Women's mental and psychosocial health must be a key priority for post-war reconstruction and humanitarian support. Their traumatic experiences about GBV, fear for their children and displacement need to be heard and addressed. Medical needs must also be addressed. A shortage of healthcare providers and medications are taking a toll on Ukrainian civilians, and this directly affects women both as patients and caregivers/parents. The international community must step up its support in this area.

International actors need to partner with local civil society organizations, women leaders, and mediators to document GBV experiences and psychological distress. In particular, women's rights organisations have to be supported in disseminating information on GBV risks and mental health support services available within Ukraine and across borders into neighbouring countries.

Continuous support to hotlines, shelters, and daily care centres for GBV survivors need to be ensured. **The Ukrainian national government and city authorities need to be supported in rebuilding their health systems in a way that is more capable of dealing with women's mental health and psychosocial needs.**



## B) CREATING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES AND WOMEN-SUPPORTIVE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENTS

Disappearing jobs and income, along with skyrocketing prices, have left the working poor without enough money for food or housing, despite their ongoing hard work. Trade unions have stepped in to fill the gaps that social programmes are not meeting, but their important role in protecting the workers who are essential to rebuilding has been curtailed by martial law. Further, the struggles of the working poor are greatly exacerbated by war. Both the Ukrainian government and the international community have a role to play in helping foster income-generating activities during and after the war.

States and industries should remember the lesson from the shocks of the pandemic and this war: those with the skills and equipment to work remotely over the internet have a greater ability to maintain their income during crises. Both technological infrastructure and worker training should be strengthened to maximize this ability. Increased development would benefit women in particular, who face greater unemployment and the challenges of caring for family members during crises.

Of particular concern should be those small business owners—including market traders and home-based workers—who have lost their places of work (whether markets or homes) to shelling. Recovery plans should consider and prioritize livelihoods alongside residences. In no way should the devastation of war serve as an excuse to 'sweep away' traditional marketplaces or re-zone home-based businesses out of existence.



Even individual entrepreneurs who have lost most or all of their income are determined to recover their businesses. Their forward-looking, positive energy will be crucial to helping Ukraine recover from the devastation of war. **Ukraine must recognize the value of all its workers if it is to recover economically. This includes making sure that legislation enables, rather than hinders, business development and decent working conditions.** Labour legislation should reflect international standards and protect workers' rights, and it should recognize the valuable role that trade unions can play in national recovery and unity.



### C) RESTORING URBAN INFRASTRUCTURES APTLY FOR WOMEN'S NEEDS

The Ukrainian government and its partners must consider women's needs and priorities when planning and re-activating urban services.

Women-friendly urban services can include well-lit footpaths for prams, wheelchairs, and walkers; playgrounds and public spaces; the provision of street lighting and accessible toilets; and the relocation of food, health, education and entertainment facilities at easily reachable distances. Creating mixed neighbourhoods and accessible care services will have a positive impact on the time women can dedicate to education and work, and at the same time improve the community's health and well-being. In particular, adequate childcare spaces for all workers, whether formally employed, self-employed or informally employed, are crucial to allowing women to play a full role in reconstruction. In the same way, free services to care for the elderly and infirm are crucial. While subsidizing care services to make them widely accessible, the rebuilding process should also set the basis to prevent new conditions of unpaid work for women and girls.

When planning the restoration of infrastructures of cities and villages, **it is necessary to engage women and girls in mapping the war's damages, expressing their needs and priorities in terms of urban services and finding inclusive and innovative solutions** for restoring destroyed buildings. In other words, women must be at the centre of the efforts to rebuild Ukraine.



### D) INVOLVING WOMEN IN ALL DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

Ukrainian women who now find themselves on their own, supporting the war effort and/or making decisions for themselves and their families are proving they are up to the challenge of leadership. This includes the millions of women who have sought refuge in other countries but want to return home. Hearings are often not enough to understand and include the priorities of women, and especially women who are self-employed or informal economy workers. Women must have a seat at the decision-making tables to ensure their perspectives are heard. There must be a larger involvement of their representatives in civil society, too. All levels of government should involve women-led and women-focused civil society players in the development and/or revision of city master plans.

Many European cities have experienced post-war reconstruction processes. Their experiences, especially in terms of gender-sensitive and participatory approaches, can help Ukraine restore its infrastructure in an effective and inclusive way. **An exchange platform that links local authorities and NGOs in Ukraine with cities in other countries that have experienced war (e.g., the Western Balkans) should be envisioned. Such a platform could be used to collect and adapt co-creation approaches for post-war reconstruction and recovery.**

## THE GREATEST NEED

While reduced income and better supports—for both people and businesses—were major concerns for almost all women interviewed, when asked what they felt was most important, the majority offered the same, powerful word in their responses:

**For peace to come, this is the most important thing.**

~OLENA, FRANKFURT, GERMANY

**I really want to hope—and this is the main dream of all Ukrainian people, of all mothers in Ukraine—that peace will come as soon as possible.**

~OKSANA, VARASH, UKRAINE

**What I want most at the moment is peace, peace and once more – peace!**

~NATALKA, KYIV, UKRAINE



© Ukrinform, People rip pieces of fabric to make camouflage nets for Ukrainian defenders, Uzhhorod, Zakarpattia Region, western Ukraine. [Depositphotos.com](https://depositphotos.com)



## ENDNOTES

- 1 UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency, 'Ukraine Refugee Situation', UNHCR Operational Data Portal, 29 November 2022. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>
- 2 UN Women and Care International, 'Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine,' 4 May 2022. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/05/rapid-gender-analysis-of-ukraine>
- 3 York, Joanna, 'Fighting for the future: Ukraine tackles rebuilding cities destroyed by war', France 24, 16 May 2022. <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220516-fighting-for-the-future-ukraine-tackles-rebuilding-cities-destroyed-by-war>
- 4 UN Women and CARE International, Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine, 4 May 2022, CARE International and UN Women Ukraine, Geneva and Kyiv, 2022. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Rapid-Gender-Analysis-of-Ukraine-en.pdf>
- 5 Nikolayenko, Olena, and Maria DeCasper, 'Why Women Protest: Insights from Ukraine's EuroMaidan', Slavic Review, vol. 77, no. 3, Fall 2018, pp. 726–751. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/slr.2018.207>
- 6 Hendrix, Steve, and Serhii Korolchuk, 'On the front lines, Ukrainian women are often the first responders', Washington Post, 3 July 3, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/03/ukraine-military-women-record-numbers-medics/>
- 7 UN Women and CARE International, Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine, 4 May 2022, CARE International and UN Women Ukraine, Geneva and Kyiv, 2022. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Rapid-Gender-Analysis-of-Ukraine-en.pdf>
- 8 Kyiv School of Economics, 'Direct damage caused to Ukraine's infrastructure during the war has reached over \$105.5 billion', KSE, 27 May 2022. <https://kse.ua/about-the-school/news/direct-damage-caused-to-ukraine-s-infrastructure-during-the-war-has-reached-over-105-5-billion/>
- 9 Bandura, Romina, Janina Staguhn, and Benjamin Jensen, 'Modernizing Ukraine's Transport and Logistics Infrastructure', CSIS Center for Strategic & International Studies, 20 October 2022. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/modernizing-ukraines-transport-and-logistics-infrastructure>
- 10 Schreck, Adam, and Hanna Arhrova, 'Russia unleashes biggest attacks in Ukraine in months', AP News, 10 October 2022. <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-kyiv-government-and-politics-8f625861590b9e0dd336dabc0880ac8c>
- 11 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Ukraine – Escalation of attacks across the country', Flash Update No. 7, OCHA Ukraine, 23 November 2022. <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/ukraine/flash-update/2Ux6VgqPw3RFeWqcP67e8a/>
- 12 Трудові ініціативи [Labour Initiatives], 'Kyiv market workers' union in violent clashes with alleged raiders,' News, 29 December 2016. <https://www.trudovi.org.ua/en/2016/12/29/kyiv-market-workers-union-in-violent-clashes-with-alleged-raiders/>
- 13 Zagreba, Viktor, and Armin Wagner, 'Ukraine: Initial thoughts on the impact of war on transport and a potential action plan', TUMI, Transformative Urban Mobility Initiative, 2022. <https://www.transformative-mobility.org/campaigns/ukraine>
- 14 Visit Ukraine.Today, 'Exceptions: when a man can leave Ukraine under martial law', 22 March 2022. <https://visitukraine.today/blog/102/exceptions-when-a-man-can-leave-ukraine-under-martial-law#:~:text=2022%20%E2%84%96%2064%2F2022%20%22On,to%2060%20from%20travelling%20abroad.>
- 15 UN-Habitat, Cities Free from Violence Against Women and Girls, 2020, <https://unhabitat.org/news/04-dec-2020/cities-free-from-violence-against-women-and-girls>
- 16 UN Women and CARE International, Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine, 4 May 2022, CARE International and UN Women Ukraine, Geneva and Kyiv, 2022. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Rapid-Gender-Analysis-of-Ukraine-en.pdf>
- 17 United Nations Population Fund, Protection Cluster, 'Gender-Based Violence: Secondary Data Review', GBV Sub-Cluster Ukraine, 27 April 2022. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-gender-based-violence-secondary-data-review-27-april-2022-enuk>
- 18 Kyiv Post, 'Prosecutor general claims at least five cases of child rape by Russians', 20 September 2022. <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/prosecutor-general-claims-at-least-five-cases-of-child-rape-by-russians.html>
- 19 International Labour Organization, 'Undeclared Work in Ukraine: Nature, Scope and Measures to Tackle It, Working paper', Enhancing the Labour Administration Capacity to Improve Working Conditions and Tackle Undeclared Work, EU-ILO Project, April 2018. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---lab\\_admin/documents/projectdocumentation/wcms\\_630068.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---lab_admin/documents/projectdocumentation/wcms_630068.pdf)
- 20 Fitsova, Anastasia, Liliana Filipchuk, and Natalia Lomonosova, 'Immigrant women in Ukraine: Labour market access and social integration', CEDOS, 20 December 2019. <https://cedos.org.ua/en/researches/immihrantky-v-ukraini-dostup-do-rynku-pratsi-ta-intehratsiia-do-suspilstva/>
- 21 Tetyana was interviewed by StreetNet International on 27 July 2022 in Kyiv city.
- 22 StreetNet International, 'Interview with Olesia Briazgunova, of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (KVPU)', October 2022.
- 23 Deloitte, 'Major Changes Introduced by the Law of Ukraine "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine on Optimization of Labor Relations" No. 2352-III', 20 July 2022. <https://www2.deloitte.com/ua/en/pages/press-room/tax-and-legal-alerts/2022/07-20.html>
- 24 Rowley, Thomas, and Serhiy Guz, 'Ukraine uses Russian invasion to pass laws wrecking workers' rights', Open Democracy, 20 July 2022. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/ukraine-draft-law-5371-workers-rights-war-russia/?source=in-article-related-story>
- 25 Education International, 'Ukraine: Trade unions strongly oppose new law that undermines labour rights, collective bargaining, and democracy', 01 September 2022. <https://www.ei-ie.org/en/item/26761:ukraine-trade-unions-strongly-oppose-new-law-that-undermines-labour-rights-collective-bargaining-and-democracy>
- 26 StreetNet International, 'Interview with Olesia Briazgunova, of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (KVPU)', October 2022.
- 27 International Labour Organization, 'The impact of the Ukraine crisis on the world of work: Initial assessments', ILO Brief, 11 May 2022. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_844295.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/documents/briefingnote/wcms_844295.pdf)
- 28 Tskhelishvili, Bela, Nathalie Noupadja, and Jaimie Just, 'Women in Politics: A CEMR study', #Power2her, Council of European Municipalities and Regions, Brussels, 2019. [https://www.ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR\\_Women\\_in\\_politics\\_study\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR_Women_in_politics_study_EN.pdf)
- 29 Hendrix, Steve, and Serhii Korolchuk, 'On the front lines, Ukrainian women are often the first responders', Washington Post, 3 July 3, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/07/03/ukraine-military-women-record-numbers-medics/>
- 30 European Commission, 'Opening remarks by President von der Leyen at the International Expert Conference on the Recovery, Reconstruction and Modernisation of Ukraine', German G7 Presidency and EU Commission, Berlin, 25 October 2022. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT\\_22\\_6375](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_22_6375)
- 31 De Luce, Dan, 'Russian troops raped and tortured children in Ukraine, U.N. panel says', NBC News, 23 September 2022. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/russian-troops-raped-tortured-children-ukraine-un-panel-says-rcna49168>
- 32 The Ukrainian hryvnia was valued against the USD at approximately 0.34 before the invasion. It held steady for the first 5 months before dropping precipitously to USD 0.27 on July 22. The currency exchange has remained fairly steady at that lower rate since.
- 33 Irpin, a city of more than 60,000 people near Kyiv, was occupied by Russian forces. After Russian forces pulled out, evidence of great hardship and war crimes were discovered.
- 34 StreetNet International, 'Ukrainian trade union leader, Valentyna Korobka assaulted', 14 February 2014. <https://streetnet.org.za/2014/02/14/ukrainian-trade-union-leader-valentyna-korobka-assaulted/>
- 35 Abboud, Oksana, 'Trade union leader of Ukrainian entrepreneurs, Valentine Korobka assaulted again!', StreetNet International, 5 December 2014. <https://streetnet.org.za/2014/12/05/trade-union-leader-of-ukrainian-entrepreneurs-valentine-korobka-assaulted-again/>
- 36 StreetNet International, 'Ukrainian small entrepreneurs ask to stop violence and to let them work to feed their families', 30 December 2016. <https://streetnet.org.za/2016/12/30/ukrainian-small-entrepreneurs-ask-to-stop-violence-and-to-let-them-work-to-feed-their-families/>
- 37 Since self-employed entrepreneurs such as market traders have no employers, collective bargaining takes place with local, regional and sometimes national officials who wield power over these workers' livelihoods.
- 38 Koshiw, Isobel, 'Ukraine charges Russian soldiers alleged to have shot at civilian cars', The Guardian, 28 September 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/28/ukraine-charges-russian-soldiers-alleged-to-have-shot-at-civilian-cars>
- 39 NDTV/Agence France-Presse, 'Ukraine Town Mayor Killed In Russian Fire While Distributing Bread', 7 March 2022. <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/ukraine-town-mayor-killed-in-russian-fire-while-distributing-bread-medicine-2808351>
- 40 Belmonte, Nerea, 'Russia bombs the strategic Zatoka bridge in a bid to cut off part of Odessa', Atalayar, 27 April 2022. <https://atalayar.com/en/content/russia-bombs-strategic-zatoka-bridge-bid-cut-part-odessa>
- 41 Carswell, Simon, 'Ukrainian refugees in Moldova: "She misses her father and her toys"', Irish Times, 5 April 2022. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/ukrainian-refugees-in-moldova-she-misses-her-father-and-her-toys-1.4845470>
- 42 StreetNet International website: <https://streetnet.org.za/>
- 43 Reuters/NDTV, 'Russia Destroys Ammunition Depot At Ukrainian Air Base: Report', 9 April 2022. <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/russia-ukraine-war-russia-destroys-ammunition-depot-at-ukrainian-air-base-report-2873295>
- 44 UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency, 'Ukraine Refugee Situation', UNHCR Operational Data Portal, 06 December 2022. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>





# ANNEX

## Stories of Women, War and Precarity

Between July 9th and September 19th, 2022, StreetNet International interviewed 18 women who are directly impacted by the conflict in Ukraine. Most of the women were self-employed individual entrepreneurs when the war began. These short stories reflect their ongoing challenges and their hopes for the future.

### 1. WOMEN AND CHILDREN: WAR, FEAR AND TRAUMA

Psychological trauma will be an enduring impact of this war.

### 2. KATERYNA: DETERMINATION IN A VERY DIFFICULT TIME

Individual entrepreneurs are determined to recover their businesses. Their forward-looking, positive energy will be crucial to helping Ukraine recover from the devastation of war.

### 3. ANZHELA: MARKET TRADERS SUFFER ALONG WITH THEIR CUSTOMERS

Disappearing jobs and income, along with skyrocketing prices, have left the working poor without enough money for food or housing, despite their ongoing hard work. Trade unions have stepped in to fill the gap social programmes are not meeting.

### 4. ALLA ALEKSEEVA: SACRIFICING TO SUPPORT THE FRONT LINES

Behind the scenes, women are making sure soldiers get what they need. These women are also crucial to the war effort.

### 5. VALENTYNA KOROBKA: FROM ORGANIZING WORKERS TO ORGANIZING HUMANITARIAN AID

Trade unions and their leaders, prevented from doing many of their normal activities under martial law, have turned their considerable energy to providing humanitarian aid. The Free Trade Union of Entrepreneurs of Ukraine (VPPU) is among the most active.

### 6. OKSANA FROM KYIV AND YULIA IN GDANSK: KINDERGARTEN CARE A CRUCIAL NEED FOR ALL WORKING MOTHERS

Adequate child care is essential to allow individual entrepreneurs to contribute fully to their families and the economy.

### 7. NATALKA: PROVIDING SERVICES FOR FREE TO THOSE IN NEED

Good people are demonstrating that sacrifice, heroism and rehabilitation take many forms.

### 8. OKSANA FROM CHERNIHIV: TRADITIONAL ARTS SUSTAIN MORALE AND FAMILIES

At a time of national crisis, traditional arts can sustain morale—and for artisans, can create sustaining income for families.

### 9. OLENA: IN A STATE OF WAITING, UNCERTAIN WHETHER TO RETURN

For some women, a reluctance to leave Ukraine at the start of the war has now turned into a reluctance to return, given the uncertainty of what the future holds.

### 10. KATERYNA: SHOWING COURAGE AFTER IT ALL FALLS APART

Women who now find themselves on their own and making decisions for themselves and their families are proving they are up to the challenge. Ukraine must be ready to change with them and ensure they have opportunities in their future.

### 11. IRYNA: REFUGEES OVERCOME HURDLES TO BECOME CONTRIBUTORS

Refugees fleeing Ukraine bring strengths, and want a clear pathway to building a future and contributing in their new home country.

### 12. TAISIA: REMOTE WORK OPPORTUNITIES CAN INCREASE ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

The ability to work remotely proved again, as it had during the COVID-19 pandemic, to be a big determinant of whether a woman could continue to earn an income.

### 13. NATALIA: CARETAKERS OF THE FUTURE

Because they are caregivers to the children, women are the caretakers of the future.



# 1. WOMEN AND CHILDREN: WAR, FEAR AND TRAUMA

## Psychological trauma will be an enduring impact of this war.

Psychological distress is the hidden toll of war. For families in Ukraine whose lives have been suddenly, violently disrupted and who now face an uncertain future, the trauma will have a lasting impact.



### YULIA

Interviewed July 2022 by phone in Gdansk, Poland

**"In one way or another, the war made every family in Ukraine unhappy."**

said Yulia, who lived in Kyiv with her husband and 4-year-old daughter until fear drove them out on the third day of the Russian invasion.

**"Our belief that everything would be fine in a few days did not come true, and it became more disturbing and scarier."**

The family, including Yulia's mother and her sister and niece, fled west, arriving by chance in the city of Berdychiv when their vehicle ran out of petrol. They took shelter with acquaintances.

"Inconveniences and constant worries had a psychological effect on us and our child," recalled Yulia. She recounted how they would put the child to bed in her clothes and wait

for the alarm warning. "When the alarm arose, we carried out the sleeping child, grabbed warm blankets and quickly went to the damp basement, where the child was forced to sleep." She adds that at least there was a very old stove to help keep them warm. "We threw firewood, some bushes, and leaves there and warmed ourselves, because the dampness was such that it was difficult to even breathe," Yulia said.

**"And after such a week of life, I started having a panic attack. I didn't want to eat or think, I didn't want to do anything ... I was shaking all over."**

The daughter, too, was suffering. "She wants to go outside to play with the children. We explained to her that this is impossible now, that she needs to be a little patient. 'How is it a little, if it's not a little at all?' my child complained."

And then the war nudged closer. "There were explosions near us. We were so scared several times," Yulia recalled. "One time there was

no alarm signal and we just slept. Something exploded near us and shook so much that it's scary to remember."

As difficult as it was, the family decided to split up so the women and children could find refuge in Poland. Yulia's husband was prohibited by law from leaving Ukraine.

**"A very emotional, painful moment is the separation of the family, leaving my husband and the father of our child."**

Yulia said, the pain apparent in her voice. "The family should be together regardless of the circumstances."

Yet Yulia knew she could not stay. "I was so panicked in Ukraine that I calmed down only when we spent the first few days in Gdansk. Some peace began, but I don't know what would have happened to me if I had stayed in Ukraine any longer. Something must have happened to my psyche ... I was on the edge."

Now, though she feels safe in Poland and her daughter has rebounded, Yulia faces a new kind of anxiety.

**"We have to solve a rather serious question for ourselves. Should we return to Ukraine or start building a life here in Poland?"**



© Bumble-Dee, Refugees rest in a gym of Lviv Polytechnic National University in Western Ukraine. [Depositphotos.com](https://www.depositphotos.com)

### KATERYNA

Interviewed 9 July 2022 at the Labour Centre in Chisinau (Moldova)

The anxiety caused by an uncertain future is keenly felt by those in Ukraine and those who have left.

Kateryna, a mother with two daughters who went to Moldova, said she works hard to shield her children from fear and despair but some days, she herself is overwhelmed.

**"I am an adult, yet I was still scared and cried for at least a month. While walking on the street, I would suddenly start crying without any specific reason."**

Her fear relates not just to the terrors of war, but to what comes after.

**"There is a frightening thought that things will never be the same again. That everything will be different. You think about how many broken lives and destinies."**



## ANZHELA

Interviewed 11 September 2022 in Kyiv

Anzhela, a vegetable trader in Kyiv who lost her own business and sees daily the economic hardship as well as the psychological trauma of war, is also weighed down by uncertainty.

**"I don't want to plan anything in advance, because war is scary. I live only one day at a time. I lie down and pray and when I get up, I pray again that I am awake and will see the morning again."**

None of the women interviewed shared stories of direct violence against them or their families. However, in addition to their own experiences, some said they absorbed trauma of what was happening to others in their country. Stories of children being raped and tortured by Russian invaders, which have been widely reported,<sup>31</sup> were mentioned by three separate interviewees.

## OKSANA

Interviewed 3 August 2022 in Kyiv

"Listening to the news from the fronts and war zones, experiencing the occupation in Chernihiv and seeing everything the invaders were doing, I became more concerned about the children," said Oksana, the mother of two daughters, who spent several terrifying nights in bomb shelters with her family before relocating to Varash in northwestern Ukraine.

**"For me, this is the most important thing. When you see what the occupiers do with our Ukrainian children, how they abuse them.... This is the greatest pain for me as a mother, as a woman—not only for my own but also for all other children."**

While Oksana's own children faced the terror of shelling, she strove to maintain a calm façade and keep them engaged in normal activities by making sure they kept up with their remote studies.

**"It was necessary to distract the children and occupy them with the necessary schoolwork. Well, of course there is no education in the bomb shelter."**

## VALENTYNA KOROBKA

Interviewed 11 September 2022 in Kyiv

Valentyna Korobka, Chairperson of the Free Trade Union of Entrepreneurs of Ukraine (VPPU), has seen how the difficulties of war are affecting her membership. She noted that an experienced psychologist who works with the VPPU, Liliya Mykhailivna, has heard from families how young children are trying to work out their frightening new experiences through play. For example, some have been teaching their dolls to "play war" and run to hide in a bomb shelter.

**"When the siren signal sounds and the alarm starts, you need to hide in the bomb shelter. Even small children know this."**

Valentyna said heavily. "This is how children play now in Ukraine."

Of course, parental concerns don't diminish with age. Valentyna said that older people are worried about their grown children and grandchildren—especially if they are fighting on the front lines.

For many, economic stress is another cause for psychological despair. According to Valentyna, in the first six months of the war, over 3,000 individual entrepreneurs lost their businesses and almost 3,000 more were on the verge of closing. Deepened poverty and the inability to feed families, when coupled with the terrors of war, is overwhelming the mental health capacity of some vulnerable workers. She reports that some VPPU members have suffered so much distress it has led to strokes and heart attacks.

## SVITLANA

Interviewed 9 July 2022 in Kyiv

Svitlana, a long-time pediatrician in Zaporizhzhia, continues to feel acutely the stress of what she and her 13-year-old son experienced.

"Every time there was an alarm, my child and I ran out and went down to the parking lot. We stayed dressed at night to get there faster," Often they would have to run down two or three times a night and spend 3-4 hours there. This carried on for two weeks.

Her son developed nerve tics—first, a slight twitching near his eyes that later spread to his face, head, neck and shoulder muscles. "We did not sleep at night, and during the day my son was scared, although he tried to support me."

And then came the breaking point. "One day in Kharkiv, an air rocket hit a house and destroyed a parking lot, under the rubble of which people died. And it became clear to us that there is no safe place here. The local authorities urged people to leave the city, and if possible, the country."

So Svitalana and her son did. They sought refuge in Moldova but assumed, like so many, that the international community would find a solution to end the war after a few weeks. "Therefore," Svitalana said, "in the first months, we were in a state of shock."

Months after arriving in Moldova—despite finding both a warm welcome and work—she continues to experience feelings of despair. "You know, I feel like a person without a future. A person whose future was taken away and, worst of all, the future was taken away from our children, from my son," she said.

**"Everything was taken from us. That, in short, is how I feel."**

For many individuals, and especially for those who have been grievously harmed, witnessed horrors or lost loved ones, the trauma will not be set aside easily.



## 2. DETERMINATION IN A VERY DIFFICULT TIME

Individual entrepreneurs who have lost most or all of their income are determined to recover their businesses. If encouraged, their positive energy will be a beacon in the recovery.

### KATERYNA

Interviewed 27 July 2022 in Kyiv



When the war began at the end of February, 40-year-old Kateryna and her husband chose to stay in Kyiv with their children.

**"As patriots, we wanted to stay in Kyiv ... because we are young and strong. We are the flower of the nation and must stand up for our country."**

It was a frightening time. "There was continuous shooting. People were running with automatic weapons. Later the next day, we saw burnt corpses of people, smashed cars, and broken trees in the square. Bullets hit buildings and windows, snipers ran across the roofs, setting up ambushes and shooting."

Still, she remained determined to be part of the Ukrainian people's resistance. "When young soldiers were digging trenches under our windows, at a time when there was a firefight in Kyiv and they were preparing for anything, I stood with them and with a sore back also dug and did not complain."

Within a few weeks, however, the couple's resolve wavered. "Later, a shopping center was bombed, which was a few stops away from our house. Many civilians died on this tragic day. Then the windows in our apartment almost flew out, the plaster fell," she recalled.

**"Then my husband and I decided to go to the west of Ukraine for the safety of the family, for our sake."**

On April 3rd, they relocated to the village of Doroshivtsi in the Chernivtsi region, just north of the Romanian border and away from the gunshots, explosions, and sirens.

Many other family members had already moved to the village and through a church community, they found a house to live in where they only pay for utilities. Ten members of Kateryna's family live there together. She said they have been lucky to receive support—both from the government in financial assistance available to internally-displaced persons (IDPs) and from the community. "People also helped us as much as they could, in particular, with food."

Nonetheless, the family's income was significantly reduced.

**"Before the war, I had a small business. I bought things second hand in thrift stores and sold them on the Internet, including online stores. There is quite a big competition, but I have a lot of experience in the field of trading, so I managed to launch this small business."**

She loved the work and her sense of ownership over it, and she made a decent income despite the unpredictability of independent trading.

She also appreciated that her work provided the flexibility to devote enough time to her children.

But with the invasion, she lost her business and the income she had counted on.

While her husband was able to return to work, the loss of Kateryna's income means the family must make do with much less.

"I was used to spending money for my children, for myself, for my family, but now the situation has changed. Let's say that the benefits that were there are not anymore ... in food and everyday life," she said.

Now in the Chernivtsi region, she said, she does not have the opportunity to work. Her trading business has all but collapsed, with almost no sales activity since the start of the war. However, she fully intends to resuscitate it as soon as she can return home to Kyiv.

Despite all she has seen and the hardship of their current displacement, Kateryna has found ways to stay strong.

**"I try to think positively that there is no need to be afraid and that it is necessary to help those around me, those who are afraid. Support your loved ones and relatives. When you talk to a close and familiar person, then uncertainty and fear disappear."**





### 3. MARKET TRADERS SUFFER ALONG WITH THEIR CUSTOMERS

Poverty is greatly exacerbated by war. Disappearing jobs and income, along with skyrocketing prices, have left the working poor in Ukraine without enough money for food or basic necessities, despite their ongoing hard work.



#### ANZHELA

Interviewed 11 September 2022 in Kyiv

Before the war, Anzhela was a private entrepreneur running her own business. Along with her sister, she grew vegetables on a country plot and sold them at the Darnytskyi Market in Kyiv. She typically earned between 500-600 hryvnias per day. When war erupted, the market closed.

**"No one knew how tomorrow would start. Will we wake up or not? We did not work then but ran and hid in the basements. My produce spoiled because the garden is located in the Chernihiv region and there was no way to get there, we couldn't use it this year."**

Anzhela—who is on her own looking after an injured son—had to take a job as a hired market trader, for which she is paid 10 per cent of the goods she sells. On a good day, that amounts to about 250 hryvnias (USD 6.75<sup>32</sup>). But the job takes 13 hours a day and involves not just selling but considerable recordkeeping.

"I come to work at 8 o'clock in the morning, and I leave work at 9 o'clock in the evening or later." That late leaving means she has to rush; it takes 25-30 minutes to get home on foot and the curfew begins at 10 o'clock.

And now, as an employee, she cannot run and hide because the market remains open.

**"When the air-raid alarm sounds, I do not leave the goods, but stay at my workplace."**

She estimates that at least 30 per cent of the stalls and trays of small traders at the market have closed, and the assortment of available goods has shrunk by almost half. "Many people who worked left Kyiv, and many of those who remained closed their trays because they cannot keep them."

And while that means fewer competitors, it means far fewer buyers.

Between lost work and skyrocketing prices, she believes everyone is suffering.

**"What can people buy? They just look and ask to reduce the price, because they can't afford anything. They ask to sell two onions or one carrot. 'Sell me two tomatoes,' says one buyer, 'now I will cut them, make a salad and that's all.'"**

Although she has a job, Anzhela is also facing severe hardship. "I don't have enough resources to provide for myself and my family." Her son, who worked in security, was recently in a car accident and had to have surgery. He needs treatment but that costs money at a time when they don't even have enough for food.

**"And you still need to pay for utilities. Cannot! I cannot at all."**

Fortunately, Anzhela is a long-time member of the VPPU. When the union heard of her circumstances, they stepped in to help.

VPPU President Valentyna told the story of Anzhela in a separate interview, and noted, "We in the trade union collected funds together to help her. Mutual aid saves us all."

Anzhela, meanwhile, is holding out hope for greater aid for the traders of Ukraine.

**"There are various international programmes to support small businesses. If they helped me, I would become an entrepreneur again and continue to grow and sell vegetables and fruits."**





## 4. SACRIFICING TO SUPPORT THE FRONT LINES

Behind the scenes, women are putting aside their own needs to support the war effort. Their contributions should be lauded—and their efforts remembered and rewarded with the support they require to rebuild their livelihoods.

**ALLA ALEKSEEVA**

Interviewed 15 September 2022 in Kyiv-Yampil (Vinnytsa Region), Ukraine



Despite financial hardship, Alla Alekseeva, a 58-year-old widow, has dedicated herself to the war effort, spending more on sending supplies to the soldiers at the frontline than she spends on herself, her family or her business. She is determined to make sure they can keep fighting—and that they will be victorious.

She does this out of a fierce love for Ukraine, and because one of her many grandchildren has been fighting in the war since the very first days. “He is 22 years old and has not been in touch lately. And we are worrying so much.”

Before the war, Alla had been an entrepreneur for over 25 years. She and her late husband ran a small auto parts store. The pandemic caused a downturn in her small business, and then the war completely stopped it for a time.

**“With the beginning of the war, I closed my business and only gave out what the boys needed for the frontline and for free. It all started suddenly and then there was nothing to eat and nothing to wear for the soldiers.”**

Now she is doing some trade again, but not nearly enough. She said the number of buyers has decreased by about 70 per cent, while prices have jumped up—and Ukrainians have spent their savings. “Much of what buyers need is not available, and what is available is very expensive.” The competition, meanwhile, has not decreased, because everyone is trying to do something to survive. And while the military has a need for parts, “if the Ukrainian soldiers need some necessary parts, they get them at cost.”

But Alla is too concerned about fueling the war effort to waste her time feeling sorry for her own diminished income.

“My daughter and I were one of the first to bring everything necessary for the boys to the war, although we were told that we would not make it, but we were helped in this by Valentyna Korobka, who was the head of the Voluntary Headquarters of Ukrainian Entrepreneurs,” Alla recalled. “I appealed to her, as a member of the trade union she heads [Free Trade Union of Entrepreneurs of Ukraine] with a request to facilitate and ensure available passage for us to reach our soldiers in order to bring them aid without obstacles. My daughter and another volunteer brought aid to our soldiers in hot spots.”

**This was early in the war, she said. “There was a certain chaos, when few people were able to drive to such hot destination points. Now the logistics have improved, more aid is coming to the frontline. Now we load the car, and the guys take everything we need to hot spots, to those divisions with which we maintain communication.”**

At the time of this interview, she had received requests for more than 1,000 sleeping bags. “We can’t buy them, because it’s a lot of money, so we collect sleeping bags, warm clothes and used sweaters ... everything we can. And, of course, food,” she added. “They need everything. They are there in the dugouts, in the trenches. It has been raining for two weeks.”

People know her in Yampil and when she gives the call, they come together. “Whoever needs help, we try to provide it. We heard that when people returned to Irpin after the occupation with their children, they didn’t have anything to eat, they didn’t have a place to sleep and nothing to sleep on. We quickly started sending aid there. We gather as a community and help as much as we can.”

Even the children have become part of the war effort. “They organize block posts, collect money

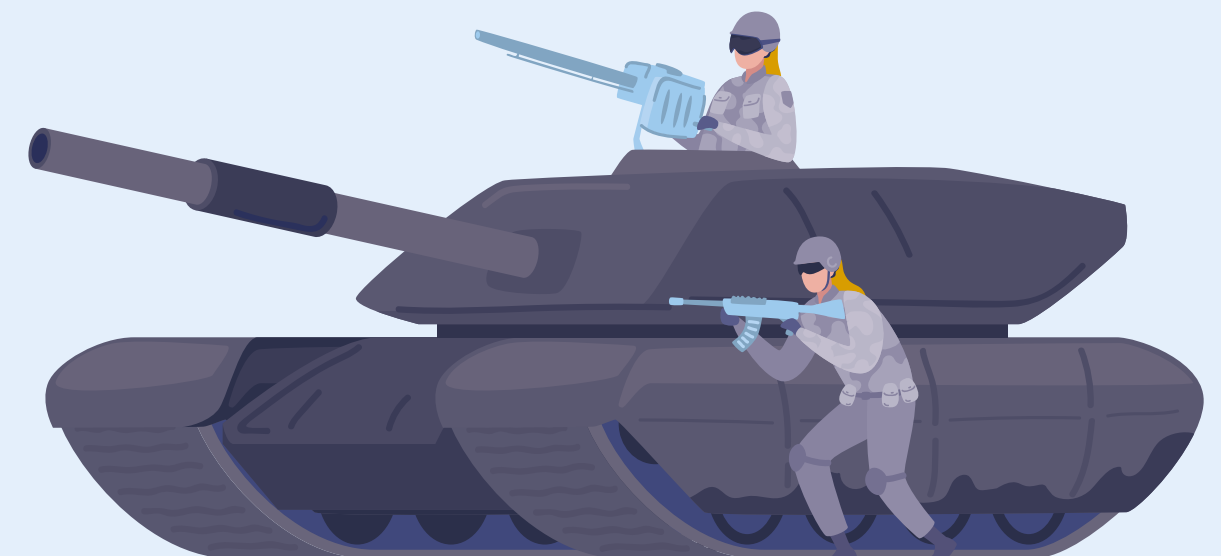
for the Armed Forces and bring it to us,” she noted. “When children bring money, tears come to my eyes... We have such beautiful children. We have a patriotic generation growing up.”

Despite financial hardship, Alla continues to spend more on the war than on herself and her family.

**“For me, this is the most important thing—to provide support for the soldiers. We have to do it. If we stop, or if we cannot stop the invaders, they will move on and other countries will have such losses as we have now, and they should be aware of it. I understand that all this is very difficult and not cheap, that people do not have jobs and money is running out, but our support for the frontline must continue, no matter what.”**

She worries not just for her grandson but for all the soldiers. “They are all ours. I can’t get to my grandson—I don’t know where he is—but I’m helping other guys who need help.”

She hopes someone out there is also helping her grandson, and that peace will soon come “so that our children will have a good future.”





## 5. FROM ORGANIZING WORKERS TO ORGANIZING HUMANITARIAN AID

Trade unions and their leaders, prevented from doing many of their normal activities under martial law, have turned their considerable energy to providing humanitarian aid. The Free Trade Union of Entrepreneurs of Ukraine (VPPU) is among the most active.

**VALENTYNA KOROBKA**  
Interviewed 11 September 2022 in Kyiv



"Mutual aid saves us all," Valentyna Korobka said in the course of a phone interview. Korobka, the Chairperson the Free Trade Union of Entrepreneurs of Ukraine (VPPU), was elaborating on all the ways that collective actions are helping Ukrainians survive these dark days.

Under martial law, labour rights have been narrowed and Ukrainian trade unions have been barred from most of their traditional activities advocating for workers' rights. Instead, they have directed their resources and energy toward helping their members and communities in immediate ways. VPPU, a 20,000-member union of market vendors and small-scale entrepreneurs formed in 2011, is one of those unions.

When the shock of war came on February 24th, VPPU immediately established a volunteer centre under Korobka's leadership.

"Members and activists of our trade union, working as volunteers, made a lot of efforts to help socially vulnerable categories of the population—disabled people, families with children, large families—to leave Ukraine.

We helped evacuate children from boarding schools and orphanages. Very often we had to calm down those who were in despair and suffering from panic attacks," she recalled.

The VPPU used its broad outreach and dissemination network to make sure people knew how to reach their nearest bomb shelters.

**"We performed various, difficult kinds of work. Volunteers sometimes replaced doctors. They helped carry things, had to transport cancer patients... We took on a lot of work to help people in need."**

In her own district, she knew who might need assistance—sick and disabled and elderly people unable to leave their apartments. Churches, too, gave the crews information on who was in need.

**"Disabled people who could not move were taken out. We cooperated with the Railway Workers' union, which helped us to take these people and transport them to other cities."**

VPPU has also helped members whose official documents were burned when their residences were shelled, advocating with government officials to provide new passports quickly. Without this official identification, individuals cannot get government assistance.

In the relief effort, everyone who can has jumped in to help. Elderly people said they would do whatever was necessary. Young mothers found minutes to do this or that job down to the smallest detail. "They did not count on time and did not take into account difficulties to help to do something useful. People used to say that it calms them down."

Korobka summed up the value of all the efforts by VPPU and its members. "We were and are a part of joint work that brings our victory closer."

But that work, like all work during war, has not been easy.

**"We delivered aid and food to Mariupol, Kharkiv and other cities.... When we arrived in Romanivka, which is not far from Irpin,<sup>33</sup> people did not have a single piece of bread. When we brought 200 loaves of bread to this village, it was grabbed in a matter of minutes."**

**"Similarly, private entrepreneurs are risking their lives in Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Sumy and other regions. I communicate with many of them. They brought bread and other foodstuffs under fire, risking their lives to save the local population from starvation.... It was very difficult to survive in these conditions."**

Korobka herself is no stranger to risking her own safety to improve things for her membership. In February 2014, she was physically assaulted<sup>34</sup> for her role in Maidan protests in Kyiv after the Ukrainian government pulled back from signing the Association Agreement with the EU that would bring Ukraine's legislation in line with European and international standards. Later that year, on a trip to Kharkiv to help negotiate with administrators and authorities for better working conditions for vendors at Barabashovo market, she was again assaulted.<sup>35</sup>

Korobka, however, continued fighting for workers' basic rights.

In 2016, she led vendors in a battle<sup>36</sup> over municipal plans to "improve" Kyiv by dismantling, without consultation, markets and trading stalls. In other cities, too, she and VPPU have helped vendors negotiate with municipal authorities<sup>37</sup> after vendors have been forced from the public space on which they earned their income to allow for more powerful interests to control it.

These practices, the result of urban policies that favour malls, supermarkets, entertainment centres and other big-money interests, continue to this day—even during war, when Russian missiles have demolished markets, including Barabashovo in Kharkiv—Europe's biggest market with 15,000 enterprises. "Not just jobs, but businesses that have supported people over the years," Other markets have subsequently been shelled.



And still, the push to close markets continues. "In Kyiv, 13 entrepreneurs working at one of the markets in the Darnytskyi district of Kyiv contacted me today [September 11, 2022] and informed me that despite the ongoing war, they are receiving orders that the city authorities intend to close part of the market and thus put a number of small businesses at risk of closure. This is unacceptable today."

The closures impact not only vendors and their families, but all those who count on their goods. "It's like a lifeline, because people need to buy both bread and something for bread," Korobka said of the markets in many communities.

In addition to her role with VPPU, Korobka is an individual entrepreneur who trades in a wide range of goods, from socks and tights to children's toys. While the business was enough to sustain her and her husband before the war, it is now struggling.

**"People's purchasing capacity has fallen and now it is not very profitable to do business. Many entrepreneurs went bankrupt and closed their businesses."**

Now, she has had to pause the business. After expending so much effort to help others, she finds herself in a difficult situation. Her husband is sick, and at the time of the interview they were awaiting confirmation that his illness is cancer.

**"I am supported by relatives, friends, and trade unionists. Because you can't stay alone with trouble."**

If there is a need for cancer treatments, it will require funds she does not have. "People's lives are sometimes saved by money. Although they say it is not the most important thing, without it—I don't know how it will be." So now Korobka will ask for help from those she knows. "Because what can be more important in life than family and loved ones, for whom we are responsible?"

Mutual aid saves us all.

Which is why Korobka is grateful to all those, in Ukraine and around the world, who have provided assistance.

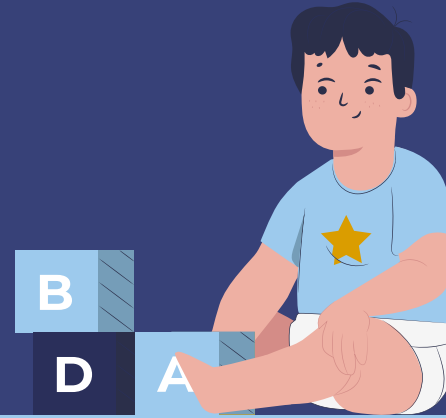
**"Only together can we win. We turn to you and ask for help. We can do much more together."**





## 6. KINDERGARTEN CARE A CRUCIAL NEED FOR ALL WORKING MOTHERS

Adequate child care is essential to allow individual entrepreneurs to contribute fully to their families and the economy.



### OKSANA

Interviewed 3 August 2022 in Kyiv, and

### YULIA

Interviewed July 2022 by phone in Gdansk, Poland

For self-employed women, the battles with bureaucracy began before the war. Top of mind for many self-employed mothers was the difficulty of accessing kindergarten spaces for their children. This is true of Oksana, a 41-year-old mother of a son, age five, and a daughter who is nearly three. Oksana has worked for years as an individual entrepreneur engaged in graphic design. In addition to helping support herself and her children, the business provided employment to one officially registered full-time worker.

**"I was motivated to be an entrepreneur by the fact that this allows me to build my own work schedule, taking into account the family responsibility and circumstances of raising two small children."**

But Oksana soon ran into a bureaucratic challenge—one that pre-dates the war—of

accessing childcare. In the Svyatoshino district where she lives, she says there simply are not enough kindergartens (day-care centres for children under school age), and spots are not readily given to entrepreneurs.

**"As a private entrepreneur, according to the officials, I do not have sufficient grounds to be entitled to receive a place for my child in public kindergarten."**

"I found out that I need to bring a certificate from the Center for the Provision of Administrative Services in Ukraine. There, they told me that they could only provide a document from the unified state register. Well, when I took this document to the head of the kindergarten, she asked me, 'Where does it say that you are involved in work on a permanent basis during the working week?' I understood that applications are accepted there from 'top people'. And that is why many of those who work as entrepreneurs cannot place their

children in kindergarten. I was even advised to build my work schedule in such a way that I could do it without need of kindergarten for my kids."

The start of the war put a stop to her small business, and days after the Russian assault began, Oksana took her children to Poland, where she hoped they would be safe. With no opportunity to work, she received social assistance from Ukraine, including a two-month allowance for the children of 500 zloty (about USD101). Ironically, in Poland she was offered a place for her children in kindergarten. But other aid proved elusive.

"You come to apply for social assistance in March and ask when it will be ready. And you hear back that probably in May. And when exactly? 'Well, someday you will get it' is the response.... I applied for aid from the UN on April 4—and I never received it. They sent me first one piece of paper to fill out, then another one. I know people who received aid from the UN, but I do not know how they select people to receive this."

From Ukraine—which she believes has managed to maintain services very well considering the strain—she promptly received the assistance given to entrepreneurs in the amount of UAH 6,600 (roughly USD162 as of September 1, 2022).

Missing home and determined to get back to earning, she returned to Ukraine after a few months. She has tried to reinvigorate her business, but the current climate of hardship and uncertainty has made it all but impossible to find clients. The work, she says, is still less than half the pre-war level, and she cannot hire an employee again.

And while trying to recover her business, she must continue to care for two young children—the future of Ukraine—without any state support.

Other Ukrainian mothers interviewed also raised the inequity of access to kindergarten as a major issue they would like addressed, even in wartime: "Children need to be provided with access to education and kindergartens. Small children also need to be around their peers. Mother, family is good—but children should also have their own environment. And for me as a mother, it would also be very important," another home-based worker, interviewed in July, said.

### YULIA

Self-employed workers living as refugees in other countries have faced fewer obstacles to child care. For example, Yulia, an online shop owner who fled to Poland with her 4-year-old, along with her sister and niece, also said kindergarten is essential to develop a child. Even in exile, both mothers are busy earning their livelihoods through their online trading businesses.

**"Kindergarten helped us out. When the children were there, we could work quietly."**

Still, there are challenges. First, there is no nearby kindergarten, so one of the mothers must commute by bus, which is time consuming, or by car, which is expensive with fuel prices so high. Secondly, limited hours do not suit a working schedule.

"I do not understand about the schedule of the kindergarten," Yulia noted. "We have to pick up children from day care before 4 pm—and I still have to work until 6 pm."

But Yulia is grateful to have a kindergarten placement for her child and believes the more development opportunities a child has, the better: "I am currently in Gdańsk and I see that the city pays a lot of attention to holding various events on weekends—in particular festivals, various free attractions with the participation of children and parents," Yulia said.

She thinks all children should have access to playgrounds and other child-specific spaces, as well as opportunities to play sports, learn art or music, etc.

Like all Ukrainian mothers, even during war and living in exile, Yulia is thinking about how the future can be improved—and about a brighter future for her child.

**"It is important when the child lives her full life."**



## 7. PROVIDING SERVICES FOR FREE TO THOSE IN NEED

Good people are demonstrating that sacrifice, heroism and rehabilitation take many forms.



### NATALKA

Interviewed 29 July 2022 in Kyiv, Ukraine

Natalka is a 45-year-old massage therapist who worked informally before the war, providing services to clients for four days each week in her home in Hostomel. Doing this, she was able to earn about 10 thousand hryvnias a month.

When Natalka left Hostomel on February 26th for Kyiv to look after her mother, who is disabled and cannot move around on her own, Russian forces were already on the ground in Hostomel and the situation had become perilous for civilians.<sup>38</sup> Hostomel lies just to the north of Kyiv and saw fierce fighting in February and March as Russian and Ukrainian forces vied for control. Utilities, communications systems and access to food and medicine were severely disrupted. In March, the city's mayor and several volunteers<sup>39</sup> were killed while delivering food to people in need.

The bombardment of Hostomel partially destroyed Natalka's home, which was also her workplace. This war has also destroyed her income. For a while, she had no earnings because many people left and those who remain have little money to spend and are more concerned about food, home and other priorities.

"If before the war I had the opportunity to work four days a week, now I only work one day. The rest of the time I take care of my disabled mother," Natalka says. "I talk to my

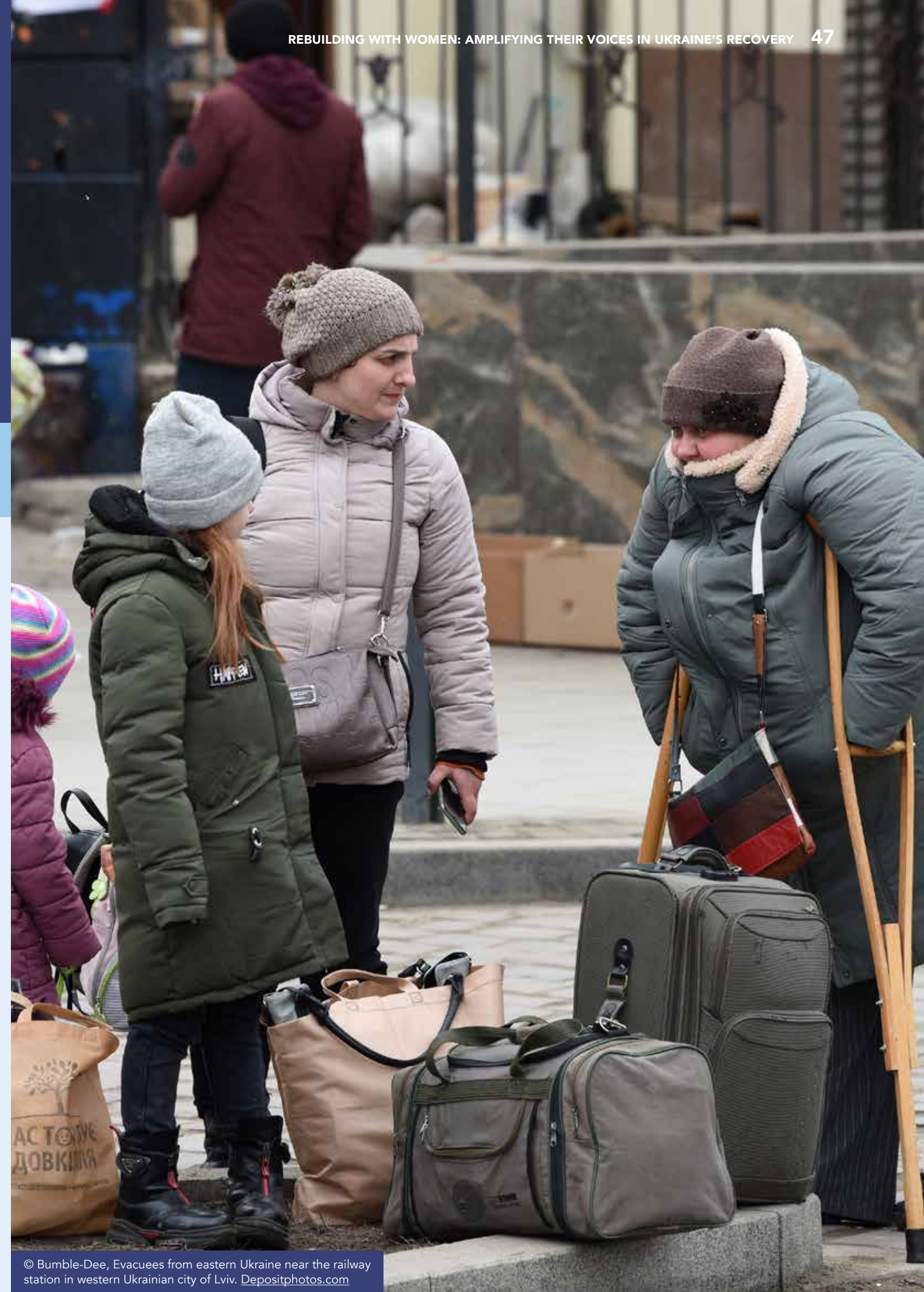
clients, and they plan to come back, but they don't know when exactly yet."

Despite the drop in her income, she chose not to apply for IDP status and support from the government. "I believe that there are people who need it more than I do, because they have much bigger problems."

It is a struggle to provide for herself and her mother, who also receives a small pension. And Natalka is worried—about her mother's health and her own, the difficulty in getting medications, and the lack of access to health care.

**"Many doctors left the country, and those who remained firstly helped our defenders and the Armed Forces of Ukraine."**

While she is committed to repairing her home and workplace, she has also been applying to rehabilitation centres for the disabled, hoping to get an official job there. In the interim, Natalka provides services for free to people who really require her help. This is how she feels she can help her nation during this war.





## 8. TRADITIONAL ARTS SUSTAIN MORALE AND FAMILIES

At a time of national crisis, traditional arts can sustain morale—and for artisans, can create sustaining income for families while contributing to the economy.



### OKSANA

Interviewed 28 July 2022 in Kuznetsovsk (Varash), Ukraine

"I have been fond of embroidery since childhood. And now I had to turn my hobby into a way of earning for the family," explained Oksana, a young mother of two daughters.

Embroidery is a time-consuming and painstaking skill, and Oksana has become quite skilled with both thread and bead. Before Russia's full-scale invasion, her skills were generating a good income—sometimes as much as USD 500 every month, she said.

Part of her success was picking up on a growing desire for Ukrainian symbols.

**"People have begun to pay more attention to the symbols of our Ukrainian nation. I thought about this and began to implement it in my work. I made souvenirs, embroidered towels, shirts, and this gained particular popularity since 2014, when Russia seized Crimea and part of Donbas territory of Ukraine."**

Oksana is from Chernihiv, a city that has suffered greatly from Russian shelling. "We survived the occupation time and were often in a bomb shelter with our children. It was very scary. We had interruptions both with food and with water. We hoped that the Armed Forces of Ukraine would liberate the city and we stayed there until mid-March. Eventually, we decided to go to my husband's family in the city of Varash...in the west of Ukraine. It is safer, especially for children."

When they left Chernihiv, they took only the most necessary things, leaving behind most of her embroidery supplies.

Her husband's job disappeared in the war. The family has been able to access support from the state as internally displaced persons, and Oksana expressed gratitude to the volunteers who have helped them with access to necessary supplies—including when they were in bomb shelters. In particular, her husband's mother relies on volunteers to bring the medication she needs, as well as helping out with food.

With prices rising for basic necessities, Oksana's craftwork has become even more important. Fortunately, despite supply-chain interruptions, she was able to buy what she needed to resume her work.

Her oldest child, an 11-year-old daughter, has taken up what is called "diamond embroidery", which allows the artisan to follow a drawing on paper or canvas. This type of needlework has gained popularity among folk-art supporters.

**"By July 28, the Day of Ukrainian Statehood, my child embroidered a picture of sunflowers, which are an indispensable element of the Ukrainian theme. She decided that she wanted to sell this painting and donate the proceeds to help the Armed Forces of Ukraine."**

Oksana believes that her work is important both to the national survival and the survival of her family. "Interest in Ukrainian national symbols and interest in traditional embroidery in society is growing, so orders for my embroidery, especially with national symbols, are increasing. This is at least some kind of support for the family."

However, like many other women working to support their family and their nation at a difficult time, Oksana has struggled to access childcare.

**"I am confused by this situation, that access to kindergartens can be blocked for children whose parents engage in the informal sector of the economy. Yes, I am not officially employed, but I also do something and try to help our country in some way. My child even embroiders pictures and sells them to help the Armed Forces of Ukraine."**

She believes it is essential to a child's development to be in a structured environment with their peers. "I am confused why my child is singled out and cannot go to kindergarten with all the other children. She, like all other children, has the right to the same education and development and everything else."





## 9. IN A STATE OF WAITING, UNCERTAIN WHETHER TO RETURN

For some women, a reluctance to leave Ukraine at the start of the war has now turned into a reluctance to return, given the uncertainty of what the future holds.



### OLENA

Interviewed 9 July 2022 in Chisinau, Moldova

Most refugees like Olena, a 44-year-old woman from Odesa, were reluctant to leave. "I didn't want to leave my country at first. But, with the beginning of the war, many people began to leave and problems with work appeared."

Before the war, she worked informally for families who needed a nanny for children between the ages of 2–6, but the work she loved dried up as families clung together in shelters or fled the region. Her church offered to relocate Olena and her husband, along with other families, to a nearby town after Odessa was targeted by Russian shelling<sup>40</sup> that killed several civilians. However, the Russians destroyed a key bridge in the region and it was no longer possible to go there.

"I had even found another job and intended to work, but when I heard that the bridge had been blown up again, I got scared and thought that our city was being occupied," she recalled. "You are in such a tense state of waiting for something terrible and you don't know what will happen tomorrow."

With the help of the charitable organization Nadia ("Hope"), which cooperates with the church, she sought refuge in Moldova, arriving

on the first of May. She did not leave behind all her fears, however, "Now I'm a bit calmer because I don't hear any explosions.... But all the same, I am worried about my relatives and my husband who have remained in Ukraine. And I understand that it is not known what will happen tomorrow and when I can return back home."

She decided to apply for a passport, "so that in case of something, I would be able to go somewhere and look for a job."

The uncertainty of her return to Ukraine distresses her. "It's a tough choice. After all, my relatives remained in Ukraine. And on the other hand, if you take into account the state of Ukraine, it is not known whether there will be any job. If you look at the situation from this point of view, it is better to look for a place where you can feel more stable and be able to help yourself and your relatives."

**"Of course, if there is an opportunity to work after the war in Ukraine, I will definitely return home."**





# 10. COURAGE AFTER IT ALL FALLS APART

Women who now find themselves on their own and making decisions for themselves and their families are proving they are up to the challenge. Ukraine must be ready to change with them and ensure they have opportunities in their future.

## KATERYNA

Interviewed 9 July 2022 in Chisinau, Moldova



Kateryna's life, in hindsight, seemed idyllic. She lived in a village near Odesa with her husband, two teenage daughters and her husband's mother. The family's private house sits on a large plot with a vineyard and a small farm. This, she says, has always offered very good support for the family. But it wasn't the only support. Her husband, a construction worker, was the main breadwinner of the family and Kateryna also brought in a modest income.

The 44-year-old former art teacher had left work to raise her children, now 16 and 13 years old. A few years ago, Kateryna started sculpting various products from polymer clay—decorations at first, and later toys for the development of children. She worked from home, connecting with and selling to children's centres, forming a solid customer network. Her income remained too small to register and pay taxes in Ukraine, but she planned to grow the business.

Best of all, she loved the work. "The fact that you can make something beautiful out of a piece of material, and which people admire, brings me great pleasure. Even some little thing that reflects some warmth, creates an incredible feeling for me."

And then, so suddenly, it all fell apart. Just a few days after Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, tanks started entering her village.

**"My children took it very painfully. They were shaking and stressed, and I had to give them a sedative from morning to evening to calm them down."**

Immediately she and her husband agreed she should take the children to safety (her mother-in-law did not wish to leave). The local church provided some information, and Kateryna and her children fled to Moldova like hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians did in the early days of the war.

Despite the strain the influx of refugees<sup>41</sup> had on the small country, Moldova has welcomed them with great hospitality.

**"People always bring something to us and offer something. When our people go to the cafe, Moldovans often give them something for free."**

There is, she says, a great desire to help all Ukrainians.

Kateryna and her daughters quickly received financial assistance from the UN as refugees, while their stay in Moldova was covered by the World Foundation "Nadiia" ("Hope"). The organization also covers their diet, including vegetables, fruits, and sweets.

But, Kateryna noted, assistance doesn't fulfill all the needs of a person.

**"I wish we wouldn't receive only financial assistance, but also get 'a fishing rod', which is the opportunity to earn by ourselves to sustain."**

Despite the warm welcome, the trauma of war and separation has taken its toll on the family. Once Kateryna's daughters met friends and had the distraction of their online education, they needed less of her steady comfort and support. Kateryna, however, has continued to experience anxiety.

"I am an adult, yet was still scared and cried for at least a month. While walking on the street, I would suddenly start crying without any specific reason."

Her fear relates not just to the terrors of war, but to what comes after. "There is a frightening thought that things will never be the same again. That everything will be different." She worries that it will take a long time—more than one generation—to rebuild Ukraine. "This is very upsetting and frightening. You think about how many broken lives and destinies."

One of the greatest changes is taking on the role of the head of the family.

"I am learning to live without my husband, to live alone and rely on myself only—learning to be the one who takes responsibility and decisions by myself, and not following someone else. I'm learning to be the head of the family and solve financial issues. I need to decide what we will do next: to stay or go home?" Kateryna said. "I didn't have to do that before because I had a strong back that I could rely on."

Support from friends who have also come to Moldova, and the generosity of the church, help ease her uncertainty. "Otherwise, I can't imagine how I would manage all of this."

The ongoing financial strain is also a source of anxiety. Her husband lost his job when construction projects stopped. While he and his mother can eat what their small farm produces, Kateryna must provide for two children in someone else's country. Her attempts to find work in Moldova have not been successful, so she is trying to make some income from her art.

"I brought with me my homemade toys, as well as material for their manufacture. I am currently looking for an opportunity to sell these," she said. However, promotion is not something she ever did in Ukraine, and she has some trepidation. "I have to become brave and decisive."

Oksana Abboud, International Coordinator for StreetNet International<sup>42</sup> and herself a refugee from the war in Ukraine now in Canada with her two children, said she has seen how these difficult circumstances are giving many women courage to rely on themselves.

"They are more confident because they have had to rescue themselves, save the kids and survive," she said. "Women will be more able to move into leadership roles now."

For all her anxieties, Kateryna displays that courage and a steady optimism. She holds onto the vision that peace will come, and reconstruction will happen. "For some reason, I believe that it will be better than it was before, and our Ukraine will flourish."

And she holds on to the desire to return home.

"In general, our land is beautiful, people are beautiful, and opportunities are good," she said, adding she believes in a good future.

However, she wishes that people faced fewer obstacles to working. "At least a little contribution should be made towards job opportunities. There is potential, and people want it to happen. They want to work and create and have no one interfere in their lives."



# 11. REFUGEES OVERCOME HURDLES TO BECOME CONTRIBUTORS

Refugees fleeing Ukraine bring strengths, and want a clear pathway with fewer obstacles to building a future and contributing in their new home country.

**IRYNA**

Interviewed 1 August 2022 by phone from Avignon, France



After spending a grueling week in the basement of a multi-storey building in Kyiv with her four-year-old daughter, Iryna applied for refugee status and was accepted by France. She and her daughter left behind their home, business and family on March 9th and traveled for five days to the French city of Avignon. They arrived exhausted, and it took her daughter some time to recover from the stress.

Iryna is grateful for the warm welcome and support they have been given. She wants to become a contributing member of the society—but she has concerns for the future.

The 41-year-old ran her own business before the war. She sold various goods, in particular optics, jewelry, fabrics, and underwear—high demand products that brought in a good income. Now, she misses working, and dislikes being dependent on support from the state and volunteer groups.

**"In France I receive some assistance, which is enough for me and my daughter. When we arrived this aid was not paid immediately. For the first two months, we were fully provided with food and clothing, then we received assistance. If this monetary aid is spent in ordinary stores in France, it is very little money. However, there are many social stores here, as well as stores from the local association of Ukrainians, which sell the same products but much cheaper for Ukrainians fleeing the war."**

**I have been provided with a good apartment. "Living conditions and services here are quite well arranged.... My child was placed in a very nice kindergarten. The attitude of teachers towards Ukrainian children is extremely good."**

"If it weren't for these associations that help us, there wouldn't be enough money for everything," she said, noting that she has become a member of a Ukrainian support group that organizes charity concerts, fairs and other fundraising promotions. But she believes that as time goes on and people turn their attention to their own lives, this support will wane.

That raises concerns about what will happen in the future. "After all, it will be necessary to pay for education and pay for an apartment. I am currently applying for additional financial assistance for my daughter's education."

Living in peace has given her great comfort, but the uncertainty is another source of stress.

Iryna would like to go to work, but first must overcome the language barrier. She has begun learning French, so that she can get a job. However, she worries about bias against immigrants to France, and what it will mean for her future prospects.

**"People who are not French and moved to France for various reasons—not only because of the war in Ukraine—find it difficult to break through and build a career. You will not get into management positions."**

She could return to the kind of entrepreneurial work that she was good at in Ukraine—but that, too, seems to present hurdles.

**"Here in France, it is also very difficult to be an entrepreneur and it is difficult to start a business because there are many conditions, barriers and obstacles."**

However, Iryna does not see France as a temporary shelter. Rather, she would like to build a life there. Her greatest concern is how to secure her daughter's future.





# 12. REMOTE WORK OPPORTUNITIES CAN INCREASE ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

The ability to work remotely proved again, as it had during the COVID-19 pandemic, to be a big determinant of whether a woman could continue to earn an income.



## TAISIA

Interviewed 30 July 2022 by phone from Kyiv-Uzyn (Ukraine)

"At the beginning of the war, there were much fewer food products. It was a big shortage of food," recalled Taisia, a 41-year-old individual entrepreneur who sold auto parts in Kyiv until the war forced her to flee with her mother to Uzyn, a small city south of the capital.

**"In order for people to have proper access to food products and services, they need to be provided with more benefits and social assistance."**

Taisia's business shut down and her clients either left Ukraine or joined the armed forces. Now she relies on social assistance to survive and keep her mother alive. The government payments have been a great help, Taisia said. So was the National Bank of Ukraine's decision to offer a credit holiday at the war's outset, allowing clients to postpone payments.

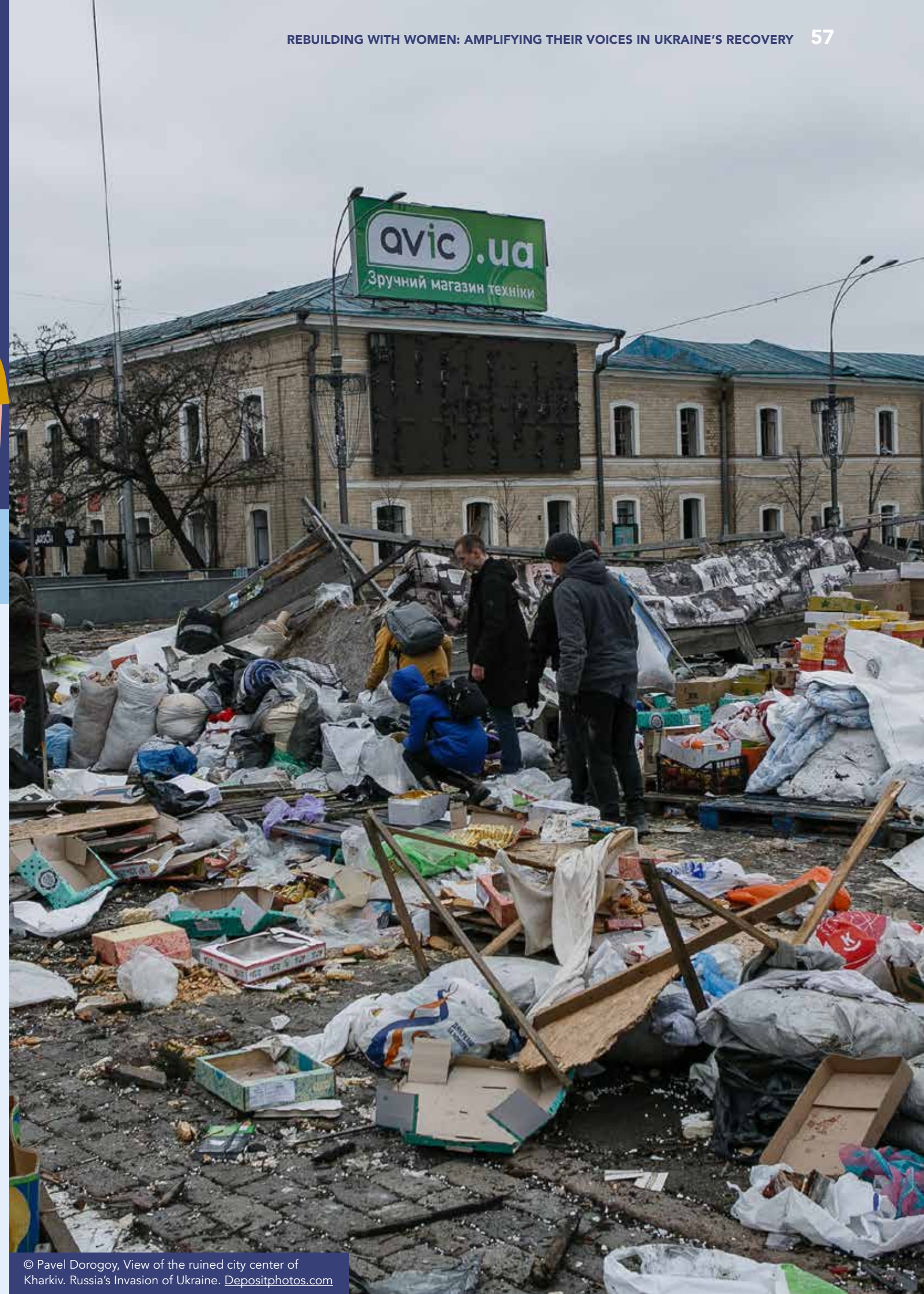
Nonetheless, she faces an uncertain future. With her clients gone, she is considering changing her occupation to something she can do all online.

"I am considering work for myself that I would perform remotely via the Internet. This is related to security and the possibility of not depending on the place of work. As evidenced by the situation during COVID and now during the war, it is much safer and more convenient to work via the internet."

**"Of course, forced relocation is not easy, but it was primarily due to the security of one's own life."**

Now, she thinks about going further from the war, leaving Ukraine altogether. And that's another reason why she believes remote work will be her future.

No matter whether she ends up living abroad or returns to Kyiv as she wants to when the hostilities end, she hopes to access the development and training to adapt better to future shocks. "It is important that there are some benefits provided for women and their development and professional training when it is necessary to change their profession."





# 13. CARETAKERS OF THE FUTURE

Because they are caregivers to the children, women are the caretakers of the future.



**NATALIA**  
Interviewed 27 July 2022 in Kyiv

Some women have continued to serve their country by continuing to work and look after their children, to ensure that Ukraine has a future.

Thirty-year-old Natalia, divorced, is raising 10-year-old twin children. Before the start of the full-scale war, she lived in the city of Myrhorod in central Ukraine. The region has a Ukrainian airbase that has been targeted by Russian airstrikes.<sup>43</sup>

**"Before the war, I officially worked as a sales consultant in a large hypermarket. However, being alone with two children, my salary was not enough to support the children and rent an apartment. I had to work informally cleaning apartments."**

At the beginning of the war, Natalia fled Myrhorod with her children and went first to Kyiv. "I thought it would be safer here.

However, shots and explosions in the capital forced us to leave for Poland." She had just 6,000 hryvnias (approximately USD162) in her pocket but expected to get a job.

Her hopes in Poland, however, were not fulfilled. Without the proper documents, she could not get official employment, so she took a job as an informal seller and also worked unofficially cleaning apartments. The money was only enough for food, but she resisted asking for additional support.

**"My priority was to earn money myself, because I knew that I could count on those funds. And I didn't think it was necessary to waste my working time and go to fill in the documents and apply for assistance, because I needed to feed my children."**

In July, she and her children returned to Kyiv, and she had to get used to the sirens all over again. While Kyiv is relatively calm compared to other urban centres, "in Kyiv, too, sirens constantly sound, which throw me off balance." She is grateful for the presence of her children, who help keep her calm, focused and positive.

Online, she's found a job as a merchandiser, but this starting position does not pay enough, so she also plans to return to cleaning apartments to help pay rent and raise her two children.

**"There will be more opportunities for me as a cleaner, because people are returning to Kyiv. I realized one thing for myself—that the work of cleaning apartments, no matter how difficult it may be, brings a constant and normal income."**

Still, she does not have enough financial resources to provide for her family, especially with the current prices in Ukraine. "After all, I have two children, I rent an apartment, I am preparing my children for the school year, for online learning, and they already have the necessary equipment for this—both phones and a laptop."

Nonetheless, she has not asked for assistance from state bodies or social services and has no plans to do so. Despite rigorous long days, she prefers to contribute through her work and keep her gaze firmly fixed on the future.

**"What worries me the most is the future of my children, myself and my country."**





# Cities Alliance

Cities Without Slums

Hosted by



UN House,  
Boulevard du Regent 37  
1000 Brussels, Belgium

 [gender@citiesalliance.org](mailto:gender@citiesalliance.org)  
 [www.citiesalliance.org](http://www.citiesalliance.org)

 [@CitiesAlliance](https://twitter.com/CitiesAlliance)  
 [@CitiesAlliance](https://www.linkedin.com/company/citiesalliance)