



## **Recommendations of the Participants of the Ukrainian Women's Congress – Regional Dimension, Cherkasy**

**(March 28, 2025)**

On March 28, 2025, the regional Ukrainian Women's Congress took place in the city of Cherkasy. More than 150 participants attended the event — Ukrainian female and male politicians, representatives of central government authorities and local self-government of Cherkasy region and neighboring areas, civil society activists, women entrepreneurs, representatives of business and culture, as well as foreign diplomats and representatives of international organizations.

The regional congress was dedicated to the role of women at the local level during the full-scale war. Women are now taking on new functions in communities: some head businesses or communities, some engage in volunteer work, care for the wounded, or combine professional activities with supporting their families. The female potential in the regions is viewed as a key resource for bringing victory closer and for rebuilding Ukraine. It is important to involve women in active decision-making at all levels — from local self-government to the formation of economic, social, and cultural policies.

The Congress featured four panel discussions dedicated to the following main topics:

- Women in Local Governance: Role and Impact on Policy
- Women in the Economy: Business Development in the Regions
- Women and the Preservation of National Identity
- Inclusive Community Recovery: The Female Dimension

Based on the discussions, the participants of the Congress developed a set of recommendations addressed to government authorities (legislative, executive, and local), the business community, local communities (civil society organizations), and international partners. Below are the recommendations for each of the mentioned topics.

After discussing the topic '**Women in Local Governance: Role and Impact on Policy**,' the participants of the Congress formulated the following recommendations:

To government authorities (legislative, executive, and local self-government bodies):

- Ensure gender-balanced participation of women in local self-governance and local decision-making processes. This includes the formation of delegations, working and expert groups, commissions, and other advisory bodies. Develop policies to enhance the visibility and leadership roles of women in community governance.
- Eliminate discriminatory norms and legal barriers that limit the activities of women deputies. In particular, revise CMU Resolution No. 69 dated January 27, 2023, regarding border crossing, which has imposed disproportionate restrictions on female members of local councils. Introduce necessary amendments so that women leaders in local self-government can participate in international events, volunteer missions, and work trips abroad without unjustified obstacles.

- Prevent informal practices that exclude women from power. Prohibit by law the forced resignation of a mandate after election, a practice often used to remove women deputies. Introduce legal responsibility for exerting pressure on women deputies to force them to relinquish their mandates.
- In partnership with educational institutions and international organizations, expand training and mentorship programs for women in local governance. Organize specialized qualification courses, leadership training, public administration workshops, and governance skills development for women deputies and local self-government officials.
- Promote the creation of interregional networks of women leaders at the community level. Encourage experience-sharing among female community heads, local council members, elders, and others. Support initiatives to establish gender-focused deputy groups or informal women's leadership clubs within local councils, which would jointly promote gender-equal practices in local policy.

To the business community:

- Support women who choose to enter politics at the local level. Local entrepreneurs and business associations can provide mentoring support to female candidates (especially those with business experience) to help transfer managerial skills to the public sector.
- Promote gender equality in local councils through partnerships. The regional business community can collaborate with local authorities on joint projects, showcasing successful cases of female leadership. For example, include female community leaders on supervisory boards of local business projects and joint commissions (public-private partnerships).
- Invest in social initiatives led by women at the local level. Local companies can provide grants or material support to community projects headed by women.

To local communities and civil society organizations:

- Foster demand for women's leadership. Civil society organizations, women's associations, and active community residents should publicly support female candidates and women in leadership positions. It is important to raise awareness among voters about the need for women's representation in government to increase public demand for gender-balanced governance.
- Create platforms for women's political development. At the community level, it is advisable to establish local clubs or networks of women leaders (for example, "Local Women's Leadership School" or regional forums). NGOs can initiate such platforms where experienced female politicians mentor young activists, exchange experiences, and provide training in public engagement.
- Promote public monitoring of gender equality. Civil society organizations should monitor the adherence to gender equality principles in local government to foster more responsible approaches to equality issues.
- Establish dialogue between the community and authorities regarding women's needs. Local activists should regularly communicate with authorities about the challenges women face (e.g., lack of conditions for combining work and family life, biased attitudes, etc.) and work together to find solutions.

To international partners:

- Support women's leadership development programs at the local level. International organizations and donor institutions are encouraged to expand financial and expert assistance for projects aimed at involving women in local governance. In particular, increase the number of grants for training programs, exchanges, and international internships for female deputies and officials of local self-government bodies.

- Emphasize Ukraine’s international commitments to gender equality. In dialogue with Ukrainian authorities (at all levels), international partners should stress the importance of fulfilling Ukraine’s obligations to ensure equal political participation for women. This includes implementing the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 “Women, Peace, and Security” with respect to increasing women’s involvement in decision-making.
- Provide consultative support and experience-sharing. International partners (e.g., UN Women, OSCE, Council of Europe) can offer expert support to Ukrainian communities in implementing gender-sensitive approaches. This may include sharing best practices of gender-responsive governance in cities and communities abroad, developing recommendations on local gender budgeting, and consulting on creating inclusive political spaces. Such cooperation will strengthen institutional gender equality in Ukraine’s local self-government.

After discussing the topic ‘**Women in the Economy: Business Development in the Regions,**’ the participants of the Congress formulated the following recommendations:

To government authorities:

- Support women entrepreneurs through the expansion of special programs. Introduce new and increase the volume of existing grant programs and preferential loans for businesses founded or led by women. Ensure the accessibility of information about such programs in the regions and simplify the conditions for women, especially in rural areas, to obtain financing.
- Create incentives for scaling women-led businesses. Develop a system of tax or other financial benefits for companies that have reached a significant share of women in leadership positions (e.g., at least 40%) and implement gender equality policies. Encourage medium and large businesses to support small women-led enterprises through mentoring and integrate them into their supply chains.
- Adopt and implement anti-discrimination policies in the labor market. Ensure effective oversight of labor legislation regarding equal pay and non-discrimination based on gender in hiring and promotion. Increase employer accountability for violations of equal opportunity principles.
- Develop childcare and family support infrastructure so that more women can devote time to business development. Local self-government bodies, together with the state, should provide for the opening of a sufficient number of kindergartens, after-school groups, child development centers, and encourage the creation of corporate childcare facilities at enterprises. This will ease the burden on women entrepreneurs who combine business with family responsibilities.
- Promote entrepreneurship in rural communities. Create financial literacy and business mentoring programs aimed at women in rural areas. Expand a network of advisory centers in communities or Administrative Services Centers (ASC), where women can receive assistance with business plan preparation, grant or loan applications, and accessing online trade platforms.
- Support women in STEM and the agricultural sector. Develop and finance programs that encourage women to choose and grow in high-tech industries and agricultural business. For example, introduce scholarships and startup grants for women innovators in agriculture, food processing, IT, etc. This will help overcome stereotypes about “non-feminine” fields and increase women’s contribution to regional economic modernization.

To the business community:

- Implement equal opportunity policies in companies. Regional business structures should develop clear internal policies against gender discrimination and establish complaint resolution mechanisms. It is recommended to regularly conduct gender equality audits in companies (regarding pay, hiring, career progression) and prioritize hiring women in underrepresented roles.
- Introduce systems of recognition and gender equality ratings. Support the creation of regional rankings or awards for enterprises that achieve success in ensuring equality (e.g., percentage of female executives, availability of flexible work conditions, support programs for mothers, etc.). Public recognition will motivate businesses to focus more on these aspects and provide a positive PR image.
- Promote women's professional growth. Businesses can invest in training female employees: conducting leadership, management, and technical skills training for women. Large companies can implement mentorship programs where top managers (men and women) mentor promising female professionals to help them advance into leadership roles.
- Foster socially responsible business for women. More active support is recommended for projects addressing social problems faced by women and vulnerable groups. For instance, creating or funding social enterprises that employ displaced women, women with disabilities, widows of veterans, and other vulnerable groups. Such initiatives support communities and demonstrate the business sector's leadership in rebuilding the country.
- Develop women entrepreneurs' networks. Business associations and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry can organize regular events for women entrepreneurs in the region: forums, business clubs, experience-sharing platforms. This will promote collaboration among women, facilitate partnerships, exchange of best practices, and mutual support in overcoming business challenges.

To local communities and civil society organizations:

- Education and awareness-raising. Civil society organizations, in partnership with businesses and authorities, can conduct free training for women wishing to start their own businesses. These trainings should cover the basics of entrepreneurship, business planning, digital marketing, and legal aspects of doing business. Special attention should be paid to engaging women from rural areas and small towns, for whom the proximity of such educational opportunities is critical.
- Mentorship programs and business incubators for women. Establish community-based business incubators or hubs where beginner women entrepreneurs receive mentoring from experienced businesspeople (including women). Provide consultations on finance, marketing, and help connect them with potential investors or donors. This is especially relevant for relocated businesses that have moved to safer regions, including Cherkasy, which has welcomed many displaced enterprises.
- Promote successful stories. At the community level, use local media, events, and school programs to share examples of successful women entrepreneurs in the region. This will help break stereotypes and inspire other women. Communities can hold annual contests or awards like "Woman Entrepreneur of the Year" to recognize women who have achieved business success.
- Develop cooperation and joint projects. Women in communities should unite in cooperatives or associations based on their activities (e.g., female farmers, artisans, craft producers, etc.). The civic sector can support the creation of such associations and facilitate their participation in fairs, exhibitions, and access to national and international markets.
- Advocate for women's interests in local economic policy. Civil society organizations should engage in the development of local economic strategies and small business development programs, insisting on the inclusion of gender aspects. For example, advocate for the inclusion of special support measures for women (funding, training, promotion) in entrepreneurship development programs. Such civic influence ensures that the voice of women entrepreneurs is heard in economic decision-making.

To international partners:

- Financial support for women's businesses. International financial institutions and donor projects are recommended to expand microfinance and grant support programs for women entrepreneurs in war-affected regions. Requirements for small businesses should be simplified when receiving assistance, and the size of dedicated funds that women can access for business recovery or startup should be increased.
- Educational and exchange programs. International and national partners can organize special exchange programs for Ukrainian women business owners — internships abroad, participation in international business accelerators, where they gain knowledge and contacts to expand women's entrepreneurship in various sectors.
- Technical assistance for digitalization and market access. Provide support (consultations, training, software) to teach women how to use digital platforms, engage in e-commerce, and access export opportunities. This is especially valuable for women in regions who can sell their products globally through online tools. International projects can create online marketplaces or catalogs to promote women-led businesses from Ukraine.
- Monitor gender outcomes of economic recovery. Include gender success indicators in all economic assistance programs to Ukraine. For example, track how many women accessed loans or grants, how many jobs for women were created, and how many businesses are led by women under international aid programs. These results should be regularly communicated to the Ukrainian government and the public to encourage further support for women in the economy.

After discussing the topic '**Women and the Preservation of National Identity**,' the participants of the Congress formulated the following recommendations:

To government authorities:

- Prioritize culture, language, and historical memory even during wartime. Ensure adequate funding for cultural institutions (libraries, museums, theaters, community centers) and educational programs aimed at preserving Ukrainian identity. In times of limited resources, prioritize protecting projects related to the Ukrainian language, culture, and national memory — their funding should not be the first to be cut.
- Support women's leadership in the cultural sphere. Many heritage preservation initiatives are led by women — from school and library directors to leaders of volunteer projects promoting the Ukrainian language. Authorities should provide organizational and financial support to such women leaders and formally recognize their contributions (awards, honors). Develop grant competitions for creative projects led by women (folk ensembles, art studios, children's clubs), especially in frontline or de-occupied communities, where culture helps heal war-related trauma.
- Integrate national identity topics into education and media. The Ministry of Education, together with the Ministry of Culture, should enhance the components of school curricula that explore traditions, history, and the role of women in Ukrainian culture. Schools and universities should introduce special courses or activities focused on prominent Ukrainian women and cultural figures (writers, artists, activists). State broadcasters and media regulators should encourage the production of content (TV programs, documentaries, public service announcements) that promotes the Ukrainian language and culture and highlights women's roles in preserving them.
- Implement state programs supporting national culture at the community level. In the context of decentralization, subsidies or competitions should be developed for communities to implement cultural heritage preservation projects. These may include programs to support local museums, protect intangible cultural heritage (crafts, folklore), or restore damaged or neglected cultural sites. It is crucial to ensure that women experts and cultural figures from

various regions participate in decisions on fund distribution (ensuring gender-balanced expert councils).

To the business community:

- Support cultural and educational projects. Socially responsible businesses can become partners in preserving national identity. Local companies are encouraged to sponsor cultural heritage sites or institutions (e.g., help repair a museum, finance library events, digitize archives). Sponsoring patriotic festivals, performances, and concerts in the region will contribute to community cohesion and morale.
- Promote Ukrainian identity in corporate culture. Business entities are encouraged to use the Ukrainian language in all aspects of their work (documentation, client communication), and to support employees in learning the language (e.g., offering courses for those transitioning from Russian). Where possible, encourage wearing elements of traditional clothing during holidays and celebrate national and folk holidays in the workplace. This fosters an environment where Ukrainian identity is valued and lived daily.
- Produce goods that support culture. Local businesses can invest in creative industries that preserve Ukrainian uniqueness. For example, publishing houses can print Ukrainian books (especially for children or educational/historical content); clothing brands can develop lines with traditional designs; food companies can promote local Ukrainian recipes. Supporting women entrepreneurs in crafts and folk arts (embroidery, pottery, etc.) through product purchasing or assistance with branding and marketing also contributes to preserving traditions and creating jobs.
- Initiate educational events for the community. Businesses can partner with local governments to organize events that raise awareness of Ukrainian culture among the population. These could include public lectures, Ukrainian film screenings, book fairs, or children's art contests on themes like "My Homeland." Such events are often organized and attended by women, and by supporting them, businesses contribute to strengthening the identity of the younger generation.

To local communities and civil society:

- Engage residents in cultural heritage preservation. At the community level, develop volunteer movements focused on protecting and promoting local history and culture. Women activists are already organizing Ukrainian language clubs for displaced persons, leading heritage tours, and reviving folk crafts. Civil society organizations should support such initiatives by providing materials, space, and public visibility.
- Organize cultural events as part of recovery. In war-affected communities, it's important to hold cultural events that restore a sense of normalcy and help people reconnect with Ukrainian space. Festivals, celebrations, and fairs showcasing traditional culture (songs, dance, food, folk games) should be held even in difficult times — with safety measures in place, even in shelters if needed. Women's associations and clubs can take on these events, involving youth and children to pass on traditions.
- Create a network of "cultural volunteers." Introduce the concept of cultural volunteerism in communities — where concerned citizens (mostly women, as they are most active in this field) take on specific roles: one may lead free language courses, another may coordinate book donations for libraries, another may work with displaced children teaching songs or crafts. Civil society should coordinate and support these volunteers, providing them with recognition and resources.
- Counter disinformation and Russification. Local activists should expose the spread of pro-Russian narratives and attempts to diminish the importance of the Ukrainian language or promote its abandonment. It is essential to run educational campaigns emphasizing that Ukrainian culture is an integral part of resistance. For example, in border or de-occupied communities, organize events highlighting the value of the Ukrainian language, sharing

stories of cultural destruction by Russia and of heroes who protected our identity. These efforts are often led by women's NGOs and educators and require ongoing support.

To international partners:

- Strengthen support for Ukrainian culture and media. UNESCO and similar organizations, together with international donors, should expand funding programs for preserving Ukraine's cultural heritage during wartime. This includes providing resources for digitizing and evacuating unique museum collections from high-risk zones, restoring damaged monuments, and supporting artists and writers — many of whom are women working on themes of war and memory.
- Apply international pressure on the aggressor in the cultural sphere. The international community must continue to demand that Russia stop destroying Ukrainian cultural heritage in occupied territories. It is vital to expand the use of mechanisms for documenting war crimes against culture and holding perpetrators accountable.
- Advance cultural diplomacy and exchanges. It is recommended to expand programs that introduce the world to Ukrainian culture and contemporary struggles. Involve female cultural leaders in international tours and conferences where they can speak about Ukrainian identity and the challenges of war. Organize international tours of Ukrainian artistic groups (choirs, theaters, women-led art exhibitions) so that Ukraine remains in the global spotlight and Ukrainian language and art continue to resonate worldwide.
- Support language initiatives for Ukrainians abroad. Millions of Ukrainian women and children have found themselves abroad as forced migrants. International partners can help by establishing cultural centers or Ukrainian language programs in areas of large diaspora settlements to maintain ties with their homeland. This is an investment in the future: once they return, these individuals will continue to cherish and uphold the Ukrainian identity preserved even in exile.

After discussing the topic '**Inclusive Community Recovery: The Female Dimension,**' the participants of the Congress formulated the following recommendations:

To government authorities:

- Ensure the representation of women in recovery planning processes. When forming councils, task forces, or working groups for reconstruction at all levels of government, include women (community representatives, experts from various fields). This applies to both the National Recovery Council and local advisory boards — women's voices must be heard when determining priorities.
- Implement gender-responsive budgeting in recovery programs. When planning the use of state funds and international aid for community recovery, conduct gender analysis: who benefits from a given project, and whether the needs of both women and men are addressed. Allocate resources for specific actions supporting women and vulnerable groups (e.g., psychological support centers for women who have experienced war trauma; child-friendly spaces in employment centers so mothers can attend training or job searches).
- Prioritize the restoration of social infrastructure. At both national and local levels, prioritize funding for the reconstruction of schools, hospitals, kindergartens, and centers for administrative and social services. These facilities are crucial in determining whether people — especially women with children — will return to their communities. Without a kindergarten or school, a mother cannot work; without a hospital, living with children or elderly relatives is unsafe. Therefore, the first step in recovery is rebuilding social infrastructure alongside housing.
- Create conditions for the return of displaced women. Develop a national reintegration program that offers relocation and employment support to women who fled abroad or to other regions. For example: housing programs (preferential leasing or home loans), simplified

procedures for starting a business in one's home community, incentives for companies hiring returning women. It is also important to support services that take over some domestic responsibilities (laundries, care services) to facilitate women's re-entry into economic life.

- Involve women in non-traditional recovery sectors. State and local authorities should support initiatives to train women in professions critical to reconstruction (e.g., construction workers, engineers, electricians). Launch retraining courses for women who want to pursue new careers, and encourage construction companies to hire them. Experience shows that women are already contributing to infrastructure recovery, mastering traditionally "male" professions. The state must support this trend, remove regulatory barriers if any exist, and publicly highlight success stories.
- Address the needs of diverse groups of women. When planning community recovery, pay special attention to women with disabilities, single mothers, those with many children, elderly women, and veterans. This means that restored housing, public buildings, and shelters must be barrier-free and accessible. Consult with representatives of these groups during the planning stage. Recovery should be based on the principle of universal design, ensuring that infrastructure is convenient for everyone — from mothers with strollers to people in wheelchairs.

To the business community:

- Engage in community recovery through public-private partnerships. Local and national businesses have the opportunity to participate in reconstruction projects (housing, roads, social infrastructure) while implementing high inclusivity standards. Companies working with state or donor funds should adhere to equality principles — employing men and women on equal terms and ensuring gender-sensitive working conditions (e.g., proper facilities at construction sites, flexible hours for parents).
- Invest in social housing projects and community facilities. The business community can establish charitable foundations or public-private initiatives to construct kindergartens, rehabilitation centers, or temporary housing for IDPs. When implementing such projects, businesses should collaborate with women's civil society organizations to better identify the needs of target groups (women, children).
- Launch employment programs for women in recovery. Businesses, especially in construction and service sectors, can create internship and training programs specifically for women seeking to contribute to recovery efforts. For example, a building materials company can train female consultants on home reconstruction materials; an agricultural company can train women in agronomy to help restore agriculture in liberated territories.
- Promote job creation in affected areas. To prevent population outflow (especially of women) from war-affected regions, businesses should open production facilities and offices in these communities, where it is safe to do so. Relocated companies that moved to Cherkasy region are already setting an example. This trend must continue, creating new jobs for women so people see a future and choose to rebuild their communities.
- Develop corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies for communities. Companies should design CSR strategies that support local communities during recovery. This may include adopting schools (providing equipment), supporting families of fallen or injured employees, or sponsoring youth sports teams and leisure centers. These investments in community social capital are especially valuable when the state is overwhelmed with reconstruction demands. Women — as primary users of social services — will feel this support most directly.

To local communities and civil society:

- Facilitate community participation in recovery planning. Authorities and activists should establish dialogue with residents about recovery priorities. Organize public hearings,



surveys, and meetings where women — as a large and active segment of the population — can voice what the community needs most urgently: rebuilding a hospital or school, creating jobs, or restoring roads. This participatory approach ensures that recovery plans meet real family needs.

- Ensure transparency and accountability in reconstruction. Civil society organizations must monitor the use of reconstruction funds, especially international aid. This includes gender monitoring: whether resources reached women-centered initiatives and whether the needs of mothers, women veterans, and displaced women were considered. Regularly publishing reports on recovery (e.g., how many kindergartens were built, how many women received housing) will build trust and reveal gaps.
- Support mutual aid initiatives in communities. Women are already organizing to address urgent needs: sewing clothes for displaced persons, arranging shelters, helping one another with childcare. These grassroots initiatives must be supported and scaled. For example, establish community volunteer centers to coordinate aid for vulnerable populations; create “time banks” where people (often women) exchange services (childcare, cooking, etc.) — making family life easier and fostering solidarity.
- Consider women’s needs in housing recovery. Civic activists should monitor the quality of rebuilt housing. Ensure that new homes meet family needs: safety, energy efficiency (to reduce utility costs), nearby playgrounds, shelters, and accessible transport. Since women are most often responsible for family life, their decision to return or stay depends on how livable the post-recovery space is.
- Support the most vulnerable. Local NGOs should implement projects offering targeted assistance to women affected by war. Examples include home visits for elderly single women, legal aid for women who lost spouses in the war and need to process documents, or support groups for those who survived occupation or violence. These small-scale initiatives are vital for inclusiveness: recovery is not just about buildings — it’s about human well-being. Communities must show they will not leave anyone to face hardship alone.

To international partners:

- Integrate gender requirements into all reconstruction projects. International donors and organizations funding recovery must require project implementers to uphold gender equality principles. These requirements can be embedded in grant agreements — e.g., mandatory consultations with women’s organizations during planning, or specific targets (how many female-headed households received housing, how many women were employed through the project, etc.). Regular audits of such indicators will help improve inclusiveness.
- Expand support for women-focused community development programs. This includes psychosocial rehabilitation (stress management, skills training), small business development projects for women in affected areas, and initiatives encouraging women’s participation in local governance. International partners could fund the creation of Women’s Support Centers in each region offering legal, psychological, and professional support to women in recovery — similar to veteran centers, but tailored for women who survived occupation or lost family providers.
- Organize exchange visits: invite women mayors or activists from post-war countries to Ukraine to conduct master classes, and send Ukrainian female leaders abroad to learn from their experience.
- Target funding toward critical infrastructure. Donors should prioritize components essential for the return of women and children: hospitals, schools, kindergartens, electricity and water systems, internet and communication networks. In housing reconstruction projects, include shelter construction and address ownership rights (ensuring women have equal rights to new homes and don’t lose property registered to men). By financing these areas, international partners invest in restoring normal life for Ukrainian families.

- Partner with local women's organizations. When implementing projects in specific communities, donors should work not only through government agencies but also directly with local NGOs, especially women-led ones. They know the real needs on the ground and can ensure effective engagement of women beneficiaries. For example, housing recovery projects can be coordinated with local women's committees that liaise with families and verify whether mothers' needs are met. This cooperation will build trust in international aid and make recovery more targeted.

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This document was prepared based on the discussions of the Ukrainian Women's Congress (Regional Dimension, Cherkasy). The recommendations aim to enhance women's participation in all spheres of regional life during the war and in the post-war period, to achieve gender equality and sustainable community development.