

Engaging the Ukrainian Diaspora in Reconstruction and Development

Warsaw Human Dimension Conference Side Event

6 October 2022

OSCE/ODIHR Meeting Report



Warsaw, October 2022

This report should not be interpreted as comprising official OSCE recommendations based on a consensus decision, an opinion of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights or of any particular OSCE participating State. The content of this report reflects opinions expressed by participants in the event, which took place on 6 October 2022.

ENGAGING THE UKRAINIAN DIASPORA IN RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT

The side event was organized by the OSCE Office on Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in the framework of the ten-day [Warsaw Human Dimension Conference](#) dedicated to discussions on the conditions of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the OSCE area.

Summary

The role of the Ukrainian diaspora has proven crucial in response to the Russian Federation's military attack in Ukraine, including by mobilizing humanitarian assistance or in organizing support for refugees. It can be expected that the role of the diaspora will also be important in the post-conflict phase of reconstruction and development as refugees and IDPs return to their homes and are reintegrated in local communities. OSCE participating States recognize the role of civil society in the promotion of human rights and of the human rights of migrants and their families and recommend that host countries and countries of origin cooperate to facilitate the reintegration of migrants (Vienna 1989, Istanbul 1999, Athens 2009, Astana 2010). This session will invite an expert on diasporas' involvement in post-conflict situations and a representative of a Ukrainian-led civil society organization to discuss experiences and lessons learned from other contexts and diasporas' role in a post-conflict situation and how these lessons might be relevant for the situation in Ukraine.

Speakers

Prof. Dr. Maria Koinova

Professor in International Relations at the University of Warwick, United Kingdom, and one of the leading experts on diaspora involvement in post-conflict situations with expertise in Eastern Europe.

&

Ms. Myroslava Keryk

President of the Ukrainian-led organization "Our Choice Foundation" based in Poland that focuses on supporting Ukrainians in Poland, promoting democratic values and a vibrant civil society.

The event was moderated by **Dr. Alice Szczepanikova**, ODIHR Migration and Freedom of Movement Adviser.

As a basis for further discussion the speakers explored the concept of diaspora and pointed out that migrants who consider themselves part of the diaspora usually retain and nurture some form of **relationship with their country of origin**. Diasporas tend to be further differentiated by the time and the reasons why their members left their country of origin. This applies also to the Ukrainian diasporas that have been formed over the past century by different waves and drivers of emigration. What could be considered the "new" diaspora formed mostly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union when mainly entrepreneurs and labor migrants were leaving. Major political and security-related events shaped subsequent migration flows from Ukraine: the Orange Revolution in 2004, the Euromaidan in 2013 and 2014, and, recently, the Russian Federation's military attack on Ukraine in February 2022. The speakers highlighted that the **Ukrainian diaspora is diverse** and consist of established organizations as well as informal movements whose role and influence should not be underestimated. Ms. Keryk highlighted the **changing gender composition of the leadership of**

newer diaspora organizations. As women had a hard time being appointed in leadership positions in diaspora organizations which were traditionally male led, many established their own organizations, and this increase in the number of female leaders contributes to greater inclusiveness and diversity in the forms of diaspora's engagement and representation. Prof. Koinova confirmed that similar trajectories can be observed among other diasporas.

The main areas of the diaspora's involvement in reconstruction and development in Ukraine are expected to be of **economic, political, and institutional** nature as well as in the areas of awareness raising, advocacy and supporting accountability and **transitional justice processes.** Whereas Ukraine has been the recipient of substantial remittances already before the 2022 invasion, it is expected that **money sent home by Ukrainians living abroad** will play an important role in the reconstruction of the country. Prof. Koinova pointed out some good practices such as that of the Armenian diaspora taking a leading role in reconstructing basic medical infrastructure even in contested areas from which the state authorities and international actors shied away due to political and security sensitivities. Furthermore, **non-financial remittances such as skills and networks built by Ukrainians in their host countries** can not only contribute to economic development but could also be important for future political representation in the country. Consider Ellen Sirleaf, the former President of Liberia, who has spent many years living abroad and worked for various international organizations including the World Bank. When elected the first female President of Liberia, she built on expertise acquired during her time in emigration and exile. The Ukrainian diaspora can be a significant player **in keeping Ukraine at the center of attention of the international community and advocating for the needs of the Ukrainian population** thanks to its established positions and media influence. For example, a Ukraine-born Hollywood star Mila Kunis raised millions of Euros for Ukrainian refugees in March 2022.

Examples from other conflict-driven diasporas have shown that its **members can play a major role in raising awareness about armed conflicts and/or widespread human rights violations, calling for accountability and advocating for transitional justice processes.** For example, consider the imprisonment of Augusto Pinochet, whose regime was responsible for many human rights abuses during its reign of Chile, including forced disappearances, murder, and torture of political opponents and activists. The engagement of the Chilean diaspora in Spain significantly contributed to Pinochet's arrest in London in 1998. His indictment and arrest represented the first ever implementation of the principle of universal jurisdiction by domestic judges.

Alongside with **advocating for the establishment of various transitional justice and reconciliation mechanisms,** diaspora organizations also act as a resource in **collecting evidence and testimonies of human rights violations in their home country.** Ms Keryk explained how hers and other organizations are working on collecting and enabling documentation of such testimonies.

Recognizing the enormous potential for the Ukrainian diaspora's involvement in reconstruction and development, the speakers also responded to a question about **possible obstacles and challenges ahead.** For example, the fact that diaspora organizations do not have presence and therefore a sufficiently strong voice within Ukraine can hamper their influence despite past and ongoing contributions. Moreover, **tensions between Ukrainians who left the country or acted from abroad and those who stayed and fought to defend**

Ukraine from within the country could prove to be obstacle to cooperation and the involvement of returning diasporas in future reconstruction efforts. These and other potential dividing lines will need to be considered to create an inclusive environment in which different contributions are recognized and different voices heard.

The Ukrainian government could consider various **steps towards systematic and transparent engagement of the diaspora**. Experiences from other countries have shown that the **establishment of special institutions dedicated to contacts with the diaspora** can help to channel their contributions and to build the necessary capacity for overcoming likely operational challenges. Innovative examples such as **short-term “secondments” of experts from the diaspora**, who may not be ready to permanently return to their home country, in state institutions could serve as an inspiration. This **institutionalization of diaspora engagement** would not only help to systematically engage diaspora community members but would provide communication channels between the Ukrainian government, the diaspora organizations and their host countries. Themes of transparency and accountability, especially in the use of recovery funds will be of key importance in this process.

Finally, the discussion turned to **the potential role of the OSCE and other international organizations**. They could help in providing blueprints of institutional mechanisms, platforms for dialogue and cooperation, offer capacity building and act as watchdogs for upholding the human rights commitments, inclusivity, transparency and accountability. Such efforts could assist in creating conditions in which the Ukrainian diaspora can become a trusted and effective partner in reconstruction and development.