

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary

In times of war and displacement, Ukrainian women who have fled to Europe face unique risks and vulnerabilities. Rather than focusing solely on their ordeal, this report seeks to shed light on the agency and resilience that Ukrainian refugee women display in a time of hardship and uncertainty. Across the world, craft has been found to be connected not only to issues of cultural empowerment and ethnonational identity preservation, but also to the economic empowerment and inclusion of women as well as other socio-economically marginalized groups like migrants. By exploring how craft can become a vector of individual and collective resilience, this report aims to shed light on how Ukrainian women are persevering through times of crisis. Our analysis is based on 26 interviews with displaced Ukrainian women artisans currently living in three European countries: France, Germany, and Poland. We hope that our findings can shed light on how people – and women in particular – manage to cope with and adapt in harsh circumstances to inform how different stakeholders can support resilience strategies and integration opportunities among those most severely affected by war.

Key Findings

1. Craft is an opportunity for economic integration and business development

First, our research findings show **the great potential of craft for the economic empowerment and integration of Ukrainian refugee artisan women in their host countries and in the European creative sector**. European economies would certainly benefit from the entrepreneurial and innovative spirit of Ukrainian craftswomen.

Most interviewees showed the **entrepreneurial motivation to make craft their main professional activity**, either by selling their work or teaching crafting skills to others. Some women were already benefiting from the support of organizations, such as Ukrainian cultural and community organizations or local cultural institutions, like museums.

However, all faced **numerous interconnected and mutually reinforcing barriers** to achieving this goal. Most cited barriers included bureaucracy and

complex legal procedures for opening a business, language barriers, a lack of financial means to start up a business, a lack of crafting materials and space, as well as a lack of business contacts and occasions to exhibit or sell their work. Women living in more rural areas were significantly more affected by this.

Nonetheless, many interviewees expressed **confidence in their ability to overcome these barriers with time and start their own craft business**, even with limited resources. In certain places, women even felt greater creative freedom and support for their creative projects than in Ukraine. Across all countries, women displayed a willingness to innovate to adapt to local markets and take advantage of the momentum.

2. Craft is an opportunity for social integration

Second, our research findings suggest that craft has a **high social value** in the lives of Ukrainian women and strongly contributes to their mental and social wellbeing in their host country – ultimately fostering **social connectedness and integration**.

The therapeutic nature of crafting has made the act a tool of emotional resilience for many Ukrainian refugee artisan women. Since the beginning of the war, craft has helped many women cope with mental health issues such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The creation of social networks through crafting and art spaces also played an important role in reducing the social isolation of refugee women. Artisanry creates safe spaces of community for Ukrainian refugee artisan women, with many women expressing how this allowed them to feel more connected to the Ukrainian community while outside their country. Community spaces created through craft may also provide spaces for **intercultural exchange by connecting them with members of their host communities through art**. Craft served as a way to increase the social capital of refugee women in their host country.

However, the knowledge of these spaces largely rested on **word of mouth and social networks**, with women who live in rural communities being less likely to access art spaces as a form of community support.

3. Craft can provide opportunities for resistance and political agency in times of war

Third, our research findings show that craft can serve as a tool of war-resistance which enables Ukrainian refugee women to regain political agency outside of their homeland.

Some interviewees reported **feelings of guilt** for having fled their country and being unable to help on the ground. Nonetheless, craft appears to empower Ukrainian women refugees to find new spaces of participation and means of agency to support the country's resistance to Russian aggression.

Uniquely positioned outside of their home country, displaced Ukrainian artisan women seek not only to **mobilize financial support, but also public support for their national cause** by increasing public awareness about their home country. Most of the women interviewed who monetized their craft work and/or skills explained that at least part of the money they made from sales and/or teaching lessons went towards supporting the Ukrainian military. Interviewees also shared an ambition to manifest Ukrainian identity abroad and show the uniqueness and value of Ukrainian culture to European audiences through their craft.

By integrating elements of Ukrainian folk culture and patriotism to their craft, Ukrainian craftswomen refugees **unsettle and challenge long-standing narratives of cultural proximity and subordination which underpin Russia's neo-imperial attack** on Ukrainian statehood and nationhood.

By turning their craft into an opportunity for long-distance patriotism, political agency, and war resistance, Ukrainian women show their resourcefulness and ability to support national resilience in times of crisis.

Recommendations

We present seven essential recommendations derived from our research findings aimed at informing **policymakers at national and European levels**, as well as **NGOs working on the ground**, to support Ukrainian refugee artisan women. These recommendations focus on overcoming the primary obstacles that these women face while continuing their artisanship in their host countries. The proposed recommendations also aim to facilitate better integration for Ukrainian refugee artisan women into the European artisanship sector.

1. Increase the **visibility of information on how to start a business** for refugee entrepreneurs
2. Increase the **visibility of information on how to access funding** for refugee entrepreneurs
3. Offer **capacity building courses** for refugee artisans
4. Provide **networking opportunities** for refugee artisans
5. Facilitate **access to crafting material and studio space** for refugee artisans
6. Promote **more flexible hours for language courses**
7. Provide **venues for refugee artisans to showcase and promote** their work

We acknowledge that cross-cutting these recommendations is the necessity to facilitate access to the resources for women who live in rural and remote areas and for those who face language barriers in order to foster greater inclusion.

About this publication

Since 2019, Sciences Po's Gender Studies Programme, PRESAGE, partners with the global nonprofit Women Forward International to offer a cooperative project pairing a Sciences Po Master's student team with organizations who advance women. This report is the result of the fourth year of this fruitful collaboration. We also extend our gratitude to Nest and Open Society University Network for assisting this project.

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