Conflict and Civicness Research Group at LSE

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BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURS:

Transnational Networks and Civic Goals on the Frontlines of the Russo-Ukraine War

Karolina Czerska-Shaw

Roch Dunin-Wąsowicz

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Supporting Ukraine's ‘war-life’ balance since the full-scale invasion

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Authors: Karolina Czerska-Shaw, Roch Dunin-Wąsowicz

PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform
School of Law, The University of Edinburgh
Old College, South Bridge
Edinburgh EH8 9YL
Tel. +44 (0)131 651 4566
E-mail: peacerep@ed.ac.uk
PeaceRep.org
Twitter: @Peace_Rep_
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/PeaceRepResearch
LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/peacerep/

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PeaceRep's Ukraine programme is a multi-partner initiative that provides evidence, insight, academic research and policy analysis from Ukraine and the wider region to support Ukrainian sovereignty, territorial integrity and democracy in the face of the Russian invasion. PeaceRep's Ukraine programme is led by the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) partnering with the Kyiv School of Economics (KSE) in Ukraine, the Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (IOS) in Germany, the Institute of Human Sciences (IWM) in Austria and Jagiellonian University in Poland. Through our collaboration with KSE we work closely with researchers, educationalists and civic activists in Ukraine to ensure that policy solutions are grounded in robust evidence and are calibrated to support democratic outcomes.

About the Authors

Dr Karolina Czerska-Shaw holds a PhD in Sociology and is an assistant professor at the Institute of European Studies, Jagiellonian University in Krakow. She has been a researcher on several international projects, including Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Actions, and focuses on migration policies, migrant and refugee integration and multiculturalism. She collaborates with the Multiculturalism and Migration Observatory of the Krakow University of Economics and is a researcher within the Jagiellonian Centre for Migration Studies. She has advised local and regional authorities in Poland on integration policies. She is also a founding member of the Multicultural Centre in Krakow, a publicly-funded project which aims to develop and promote intercultural relations between the diverse inhabitants of the city.

Dr Roch Dunin-Wąsowicz is a Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in Sociology at the UCL Social Research Institute (IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society) and a Research Associate at the Conflict and Civicness Research Group at LSE IDEAS. He has a track record of academic evidence-based research in the field of sociology with a focus on civil society, migration and European integration. In the past, he studied the social organisation and civic identity of Polish migrants in the UK post 2004, the political mobilisation of Ukrainian migrants in Poland after the EuroMaidan, the social repercussions of Brexit in the UK, and grassroots civic activism across Europe. Dr Dunin-Wąsowicz's academic training is in political sociology. He graduated from the New School for Social Research in New York City and obtained his PhD from the London School of Economics and Political Science. His current research interests cover: transnational entrepreneurs and businesses working towards civic end-goals in support of Ukraine; how in the context of populism, social movements channel civic discontent, counter de-democratization, and enhance democratic resilience in Europe.

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Executive Summary

This report explores the practices and modes of doing business by entrepreneurial actors working towards civic end-goals in support of Ukraine, particularly in the transnational space between Poland and Ukraine.[1] Through 25 in-depth interviews with key actors - business leaders, consultants, institutional representatives and investors - we offer an outline analysis of business involvement in the initial humanitarian efforts, the subsequent recovery processes and the contributions to Ukraine's defence as part of a broader ecosystem of support for Ukraine from overseas. The research builds on work on the development of civic ecosystems in conflict zones, illuminating the presence and importance of entrepreneurial and business actors in this space and the necessity of understanding their role to better support civic structures in the war effort and the recovery process. In the intertwining of civic networks with the entrepreneurial and business sector, we identified the following key actors and their characteristics in this transnational space:

- **War-resilient venture capitalists**. This type of actor is less present yet more desired in this space. Much more sought after than venture philanthropy, which many of our respondents typified as idealistic charity with a small overall impact, there is a need for big investors to work with Ukraine. "If you want to help Ukraine, work with Ukraine", is the major takeaway.
- **Bridging investors and platforms.** There is a growing understanding that transnational bridging platforms, incubators and networks can bolster civically-minded business practices that promote cooperation, integration, and mutual respect. It is also good for business. Poland has become a pivotal gateway for investment to Ukraine, and vice versa for Ukrainian businesses towards the EU market. Bridging actors need to be further supported and encouraged.
- **Corporations with grass-roots CSR.** CSR has been mobilised on an unprecedented scale from the onset of the full-scale Russian invasion on Ukraine. What is important to highlight is the interpersonal and informal dynamics driving CSR initiatives inside major companies, led by Ukrainian and Polish employees personally invested in the war.
- **Women-powered social enterprises.** A critical role is played by socially-conscious enterprises that are transforming organisational models. They are employing or being run by the end-users themselves, namely Ukrainian refugees (mainly women) residing in Poland. This has become the rule rather than the exception, spreading to diverse sectors of the economy.
- **Diasporic entrepreneurs with existential civicness.** These actors are the drivers of the civic end-goals, and can be found in all of the other categories above. They range from well-established migrants to newcomers. Driven by an existential need and a collective imperative to support the war effort, they are the linchpin of actions in this space.

[1] We would like to sincerely thank our three student research assistants, Oleksandra Tokar (Jagiellonian University in Krakow), Inara Zeynalova (George Washington University), and Minh Thien Mai (University College London) for their exceptional work on the project, including translation, transcription, desk research and initial coding.

The activities and practices that accompanied these actors can be characterised by three overlapping dimensions: (1) mass mobilisation of humanitarian aid, (2) security and recovery support, (3) business activities with civic impact.

1. **Mass mobilisation of humanitarian aid**: allowed for the entry of businesses and entrepreneurial actors into the civic space. In a time of ad hoc measures, distrust in institutions, and fragmentation, businesses played a crucial role in supporting and facilitating emergency aid. New business practices and alternative modes of 'doing humanitarian aid' have been noted, from virtual tagging of material goods to cryptocurrency crowdfunding, and B2R (business to recipient) logistics.
2. **Security and recovery support**: Recovery and redevelopment initiatives are the natural space for both international and local businesses to act. Yet the surprising presence of business actors in (mostly informally) supporting defence structures - particularly in the form of auxiliary military equipment - underscores the entanglement of all sectors in the war effort. The 'triple nexus' approach advocated by the UN, meaning the cooperation between humanitarian, peace/security and development aid, is happening organically on the ground and in business networks, without the help of top-down structures.
3. **Business activities with civic impact:** business activities in the transnational civic ecosystem have transformed both the ecosystem and businesses themselves. Evidence of this would be new participatory CSR models which rely on the democratisation of decision-making in projects delivered within corporate structures, mobilised by employees driven to action. There are also instances where business actions have aligned with social entrepreneurship goals without explicitly stating so. There may be a need to redefine and widen the scope of what we mean by 'impact investing' or social entrepreneurship on the frontlines of conflict.

The past two years of cooperation and mobilisation between Poland and Ukraine have helped to solidify strong networks and forms of trust, taking into account civic end-goals and diverse business cultures. This intense cooperation has yielded some good practices but also some challenges that may serve as useful knowledge for future stakeholders. We elaborate on four points in the report:

1. There has been a general **decentralisation, or fragmentation, of modes of mobilisation,** which has had an effect on business practices and the building of professional networks. Businesses have caught on to the bottom-up, post-fordist modes of mobilisation, and have enhanced them with their own personalised networks.
2. Trust is paramount in the space of war, and **bottom-up, informalised networks** have been key to the fast and efficient transfer of goods and services. They have also been seen to circumvent corruption that is perceived in formalised institutions, although the informalisation of networks carry with them their own, often intransparent relations of power.
3. There is a **certain style of doing business in post-communist regions** that relies on informal, personal relations and direct modes of communication, and it is important to know them before entering this space. Yet this is changing, particularly in sectors that

developed after the post-Soviet era, like the tech industry. There is a growing awareness that oligarchic structures and corruption are, image-wise, not good for business.

4. There have been some excellent examples of synergy between Polish and Ukrainian business actors that underscore the importance of a level playing field, focusing on keeping innovation in Ukraine. These need to be highlighted and supported.

Finally, we focus on what businesses working with Ukraine need, and what Ukraine itself needs, as developed by our respondents. Here are some key takeaways:

- Helping Ukraine means helping its economy - through supporting jobs in Ukraine (which means tax revenues) and access to capital for investments.
- Civically-minded business practices rely on keeping innovation going in Ukraine - R&D departments at the forefront.
- Ukrainian businesses can be potential global leaders in formulating resilient business contingency practices amidst increasing geo-political turbulence.
- Ukrainian businesses abroad are building a transnational business environment that is going beyond the shadows of nationalism and corruption.
- Experiences gained by Ukrainian businesses in Europe are instrumental in driving change upon their return to Ukraine. There is a need to support them and their links to Ukraine.
- There is a call for the EU to reconsider its approach to supporting Ukraine's single market integration, advocating for policies that recognise the unique challenges that Ukraine faces.

Introduction

The transnational space between Poland and Ukraine has become a testing ground for the development of new practices, relationships, and solidarities that have shaped the large-scale civic mobilisation of humanitarian assistance, Ukraine's war effort and ongoing reconstruction. In this emerging civic ecosystem, typified by networks of diverse social actors working towards a civic end-goal,[2] entrepreneurs and businesses have emerged as indispensable actors. From multinational corporations partnering with local NGOs to run Corporate Social Responsibility-fuelled programmes, to small ethnic entrepreneurs running side-line humanitarian missions and platforms linking venture philanthropists with social enterprises on the ground, businesses of diverse types are entering into the space of civic mobilisation and transforming it.

This report analyses the ways in which entrepreneurial actors operating in the transnational space between Poland and Ukraine have responded to humanitarian needs, as well as other forms of support for the Ukrainian war effort and recovery process. We look at new practices and modes of doing business, the ways of forging partnerships and network-building, as well as forms of trust and their limitations that are key to understanding the development of this transnational space. The analysis of entrepreneurs and businesses within the broader civic ecosystem of support for Ukraine and Ukrainians helps to capture the complex multi-layered and multi-actored dynamics at play, which are often left out of macro-analyses of the economics of war and recovery processes. In the investigation of the intertwining of civic networks with the entrepreneurial sector, the research highlights the development of a decentralised support ecosystem for Ukraine from abroad. The Ukrainian diaspora has played an instrumental role in providing both material and symbolic remittances, aiding Ukraine since its independence in 1991. This contribution became even more significant following the EuroMaidan and the beginning of the war with Russia in the East in 2014. Since the outbreak of the full-scale invasion in 2022, activities within diasporic communities have grown exponentially. Due to its geographic and cultural proximity, as well as its Euro-Atlantic political alignment with Ukraine, Poland became the site where new kinds of civic practices emerged in 2022: more transnational and dynamic in scope, encompassing civil society organisations, grass-roots movements and, crucially, businesses.

The data gathered for the report consists of 25 in-depth interviews with a range of experts and practitioners in the field of entrepreneurship and business cooperation in the Polish-Ukrainian transnational space, as well as desk research focusing on socio-economic recovery agendas for Ukraine. The research offers an exploratory mapping of entrepreneurial actor types involved in the transnational civic ecosystem of support, an analysis of the activities they have been engaged in, and the ways of doing business and forging partnerships across boundaries and with a civic end-goal, namely the protection and support of Ukraine as a democratic entity. The study does not aim to be representative in scope. Rather, it aims to shed light on some of the successes and

[2] Rangelov, I., & Theros, M. (2023). Civic ecosystems and social innovation: From collaboration to complementarity. Global Policy, 14(5), 797–804

challenges in this space and, importantly, a view from Ukrainian, Polish and international entrepreneurs and businesses on the ground and their perspectives on needs and ways of working that could be beneficial to the war effort and recovery process, as well as good for business. The report consists of three sections; the first provides a conceptual framework of the transnational civic ecosystem; the second introduces the methodology and provides a mapping of the actors; the third focuses on the viewpoints and socio-economic needs of the entrepreneurial and business actors supporting Ukraine from our dataset.

A Framework for Studying Transnational Civic Ecosystems

Transnational economic cooperation and activities are not new, particularly for diasporic communities. Economic remittances, as well as the transfer of ideas, values and modes of behaviour from the diaspora to the homeland and vice versa in the form of social remittances have been extensively studied and quantified in the Ukrainian context.[3] Economic remittances in 2022 accounted for 15.7% of the country's GDP, whereas foreign official grants stood at 5.4%.[4] Yet what we are witnessing in the Polish-Ukrainian transnational space spreads far beyond economic remittances and transfer of ideas across communities with a shared identity and diasporic ties. It is at once an emerging structure of social relationships, as well as a site of political and civic engagement. It bears the hallmark of transnationalism, first defined by Vertovec, which goes beyond collective activities of self-identifying diasporic groups vis-a-vis homeland economics and politics, towards new social structures and modes of cultural reproduction across national boundaries, mediated or enhanced by information and communication technologies.[5]

As an emerging structure of social relationships, the transnational space between Poland and Ukraine has taken on more diversified, multi-actor and multi-scalar forms of networks since the start of the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022. Ukrainian, Polish as well as international actors, the latter including INGOs, UN agencies, and international volunteers, have become entangled in formal and informal ties, with new forms of trust and solidarities arising between them. As evidenced in other PeaceRep reports on civic mobilisation in Poland,[6] trust is most often nested in informal ties between key actors, whether they be representatives of civil society organisations, grass-roots movements, local authorities, cultural institutions, international agencies, or business leaders. This allows for much more agile, flexible forms of cooperation, whilst at the same time blurring the lines of responsibility in what Stel would call an ad hoc system

[3] Dunin-Wąsowicz, Roch and Fomina, Joanna (2019) 'Euromaidan Moment: The Making of Ukrainian Diasporic Civil Society in Poland.' Democracy, Diaspora, Territory: Europe and Cross-Border Politics, (pp. 91-111). Routledge;
Duszczyk, M., Górny, A., Kaczmarczyk, P., & Kubisiak, A. (2023). War refugees from Ukraine in Poland—One year after the Russian aggression. Socio-economic consequences and challenges. Regional Science Policy & Practice, n/a(n/a). https://doi.org/10.1111/rsp3.12642;
Fomina, J. (2017). Economic migration of Ukrainians to the European Union: A view from Poland. Migrating and the Ukraine emergency: A two country perspectives, 78-89; 52; Krasynska, S. & Martin, E. (2017) The Formality of Informal Civil Society: Ukraine's EuroMaidan. Voluntas (Manchester, England). [Online] 28 (1), 420–449; 55; Łada, A. and Böttger, K. (eds.) #EngagEUkraine: zaangażowanie społeczne Ukraińców w Polsce i w Niemczech, Warsaw: Institute of Public Affairs, 2016; 56; Lapshyna, I. (2019) Do Diasporas Matter? The Growing Role of the Ukrainian Diaspora in the UK and Poland in the Development of the Homeland in Times of War. Central and Eastern European Migration Review. [Online] 8 (1), 51–73.

[4] Ukraine 2023 Report, Communication on EU Enlargement policy, European Commission: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_699%20Ukraine%20report.pdf

[5] Vertovec, S. (1999) Conceiving and researching transnationalism, Ethnic and Racial Studies, 22:2, 447-462, DOI: 10.1080/014198799329558

[6] Czerska-Shaw, K. and Jacoby, T. (2023). Mapping Ukrainian Civicness Abroad in the War Effort: A Case Study of Poland (PeaceRep Ukraine Report). Conflict and Civicness Research Group, London School of Economics. Available at: https://peacerep.org/publication/mapping-ukrainian-civicness-abroad-poland/; Pankowski, R., Czerska-Shaw, K., & Rangelov, I. (2023). Poland's Role in Ukraine's Security Amid the Challenge of Migration: Humanitarian Responses, Civic Solidarities and Downstream Risks (PeaceRep Report). Conflict and Civicness Research Group, London School of Economics.

of un-systematicness.[7] Yet, these de-centered, post-Fordist chains of support offer new forms of accountability and innovation, such as virtual trails of handovers running from 'Business to Recipient' (B2R) or 'Donor to Recipient' (D2R). Goods travelling from Western Europe, through Poland, to Ukraine have QR codes, tracking stickers, photos trails on social media passed on through ad hoc, decentralised chains of distribution, in what has been termed distributed humanitarianism.[8] These new logics of action - which have upscaled since the war in Donbas and EuroMaidan - have also been documented by recent research on the social networks of crowdfunding, highlighting the innovative aspect and pluralism in this decentralisation, whilst at the same time warning of the risks of political divisions and instability.[9]

This transnational space has also become the site of political engagement. There is a crucial leadership of the settled Ukrainian population in Poland in this space, enhanced by those refugees who came to Poland after the full-scale invasion. Together numbering approximately 2,5 million people,[10] they make up 5% of the Polish population, and over 70% of the foreign-born demographic.[11] In some cities, such as Kraków or Warsaw, Ukrainian nationals account for upwards of 10% of the local populace.[12] The war has been a catalyst for the public and political participation of this migrant-diaspora community, evidenced by lobbying efforts for the enhanced social and cultural inclusion of migrants and refugees, as well as support for Ukraine's war effort, national sovereignty and preservation of cultural heritage.

This is also the space of burgeoning civicness, defined by Kaldor and Radice as a logic of public authority based on rights-based political order; a form of behaviour; and a political position as an alternative to corruption, social injustice and sectarianism.[13] It goes beyond the concept of civil society as the space of formalised NGOs, to include practices of diverse social actors that work together, often in ad hoc and informal ways, towards a common goal. As structures and relationships of civicness develop in the space on the frontlines of war and conflict, the notion of civicness may be understood through the framework of civic ecosystems, defined by Rangelov and Theros as "self-organising systems of diverse and interdependent actors held together by shared civic values".[14] In Poland, we

[7] Stel, N. (2020). Hybrid political order and the politics of uncertainty: Refugee governance in Lebanon (p. 264).
[8] Cullen Dunn, E. & Kaliszewska, I. (2023). Distributed humanitarianism: Volunteerism and aid to refugees during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. American ethnologist. [Online] 50 (1), 19–29.
[9] ODI. (2024). Military crowdfunding in Ukraine. Mapping actors and networks in Ukraine Briefing note no. 1. Unpublished background paper. London: ODI, January 2024.
[10] Duszczyk, M., Górny, A., Kaczmarczyk, P., & Kubisiak, A. (2023). War refugees from Ukraine in Poland—One year after the Russian aggression. Socio-economic consequences and challenges. Regional Science Policy & Practice, n/a(n/a). https://doi.org/10.1111/rsp3.12642; Piekutowski, Jarema (2024). Migracje: niewykorzystana (na razie) szansa Polski - Warsaw Enterprise Institute
[11] Sytuacja życiowa i ekonomiczna migrantów z Ukrainy w Polsce – wpływ pandemii i wojny na charakter migracji w Polsce, Departament Statystyki NBP, Warszawa 2023, https://nbp.pl/ wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Sytuacja-zyciowa-i-ekonomiczna-migrantow-z-Ukrainy-w--Polsce_raport-z-badania-2022.pdf.
[12] Wojdat, M. & P. Cywiński (2022). "Urban hospitality: Unprecedented growth, challenges and opportunities", Union of Polish Metropolises, Warsaw, https://metropolie.pl/fileadmin/user_upload/UMP_raport_Ukraina_ANG_20220429_final.pdf.
[13] Kaldor, M. & Radice, H. (2022). Introduction: Civicness in conflict, Journal of Civil Society, 18:2, 125-141, DOI: 10.1080/17448689.2022.2121295
[14] Rangelov, I., & Theros, M. (2023). Civic ecosystems and social innovation: From collaboration to complementarity. Global Policy, 14(5), 797–804

witnessed the development of a system of networks of civic action, crossing international borders and shaping new relationships in largely organic ways, wherein the public interest was, and remains, the protection of Ukrainian state sovereignty, with civic, democratic, 'European' values at the core. This is where transnationalism merges with the framework of civic ecosystems.

In this transnational civic ecosystem, unexpectedly robust activities of businesses and entrepreneurs have made their mark. Individuals and enterprises with economic capital joined the humanitarian effort early on, interacting with NGOs, grass-roots mobilisations, and public authorities.[15] The research in this report focuses on these particular social actors - different types of businesses and entrepreneurs - who have entered into formal and informal relationships and activities in the space of mobilisation for Ukraine and Ukrainians, crossing the lines between humanitarian, security and recovery support. We seek to answer the following questions:

- Who are the entrepreneurial and business actors in the transnational civic ecosystem of mobilisation for Ukraine?
- How are these entrepreneurial and business actors responding to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine?
- What are the characteristics of the networks and partnerships that are being forged by business actors in the civic ecosystem of support for Ukraine and its recovery process?

We first turn to the business sector in Poland and the socio-economic backdrop to the presence of Ukrainian business and Ukrainian labour force, focusing on the period between 2014 and 2022.

[15] Czerska-Shaw, K. Krzyworzeka-Jelinowska, A. Mucha J. (2022). Mobilizacja pomocy uchodźczyniom i uchodźcom ukraińskim w Krakowie. Wyzwania i szanse zarządzania niepewnością. Obserwatorium Wielokulturowości i Migracji. Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Krakowie.

Ukrainian Entrepreneurship and Labour Output in Poland

Since 2014, Poland has emerged as a pivotal incubator for Ukrainian businesses abroad, serving as a vibrant hub for businesses and facilitating labour market integration. Poland boasts a **dynamic start-up economy** characterised by a high percentage of SMEs, including a substantial number of single-person businesses. It also stands as a regional hub for the **outsourcing business sector,** with a predominant focus on IT, tourism, logistics, and transport companies. The creation of numerous Polish-Ukrainian business platforms highlights an emerging space for transnational partnerships, such as the tech-focused Polish-Ukrainian Start Up Bridge or the Polish-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce. The main sectors of cooperation are headed by tech, manufacturing, logistics and transport, services and agriculture.

There has been a marked increase in the creation of Ukrainian businesses in Poland since 2022. A report from the Polish Economic Institute revealed that over 24,000 entities had been established by Ukrainians in Poland by September 2022.[16] The number of enterprises founded by Ukrainians has grown exponentially: the largest increase occurred in April 2022, with already 4.5 times more such companies on the Polish market than in January. By September 2022, there were 2.6 times more than in April. Of these, 10,000 were established by refugees, accounting for 5% of the economic activity thereof.[17] This influx, particularly of sole proprietorships, underscores Ukraine's significant role in Poland's foreign investment landscape, with Ukrainians establishing a quarter of all foreign-owned companies in Poland.[18] By comparison, German companies constitute only 10 percent of the companies with foreign capital. A noteworthy aspect of this business migration is the gender dynamic, with 41% of sole enterprises founded by women in 2022, showcasing a diverse range of industries from cosmetics to IT.[19] Additionally, the collaborative ties between Ukrainian and Polish businesses are strengthening, with many Ukrainian companies sourcing from or partnering with Polish firms, demonstrating mutual economic benefits and deeper collaboration.

The war-induced migration trends are potentially long-term, with a significant portion of the Ukrainian community in Poland expressing a desire to stay, motivated by employment opportunities and the welcoming business environment.[20] The welcoming labour market is reflected in the data: the employment rate for working-age refugees from Ukraine went from 28% in May 2022 to 65% in November 2022, the highest in the OECD.[21] It is worth noting that high economic productivity amongst Ukrainian migrants was also the case

[16] Baszczak, Ł., Kiełczewska, A., Kukołowicz, P., Wincewicz, A., & Zyzik, R. (2022). Pomoc polskiego społeczeństwa dla uchodźców z Ukrainy. Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny.
[17] Deloitte (2024). Analysis of the impact of refugees from Ukraine on the economy of Poland Report March 2024, commissioned by UNHCR. Available: https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/106993 .
[18] Baszczak, Ł., Kiełczewska, A., Kukołowicz, P., Wincewicz, A., & Zyzik, R. (2022). Pomoc polskiego społeczeństwa dla uchodźców z Ukrainy. Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Gromadzki, J., & Lewandowski, P. (2023). Refugees from Ukraine on the Polish labour market. Social Insurance. Theory and Practice, 155(4), 29-40.
[21] Deloitte (2024): 4.

before the full-scale invasion. Firm sponsorship was the primary source of economic migration, leading to very high employment rates - 94% as of November 2022.[22]

We can conclude that the Polish economic and labour landscape, coupled with a highly-educated Ukrainian migrant and refugee workforce and well-implemented legal frameworks, have set the stage for successful labour market integration of the Ukrainian refugee population. Firstly, there are structural labour shortages and high rates of vacancies that are being filled by newcomers from Ukraine. Secondly, Poland has had a historically low unemployment rate, 3% as of 2023. Thirdly, Ukrainian refugees and migrants are highly skilled. 56% of refugees have declared possessing tertiary education, which is higher than the pre-war Ukrainian migrant population in Poland (46%), and significantly higher than the Polish population (30%), as well as the population in Ukraine (34%).[23] Finally, the legal framework provided by the EU Temporary Protection Directive and implemented into national law with a special act on March 12, 2022, allowed for the immediate access of refugees to the labour market and accompanying social support and public services. The success speaks for itself: according to the report produced by Deloitte for the UNHCR in 2024, tax revenues from Ukrainian refugees have more than offset the costs of integration. The report predicts that in the long term, refugees should increase yearly government revenue in Poland by around 0.85-1.3%.[24]

Yet, it is important to offset Poland's economic success with the war recovery in Ukraine. Ukraine's GDP fell by 28.8% in 2022, and the unemployment rate is at 20% as of late 2023[25]. There is deep concern that high-skilled Ukrainian refugees will not return to Ukraine to rebuild the state, society and economy. The discussions about international support for insourcing of the war economy and maintaining ties with the diaspora therefore become critically important in thinking about the long-term support for Ukraine's recovery. Poland's strong Ukrainian migrant and refugee population, together with a favourable business and entrepreneurship environment, provide a propitious ecosystem for the development and maintenance of a civically-powered investment into Ukraine's long-term recovery. The following section explores this emerging space.

[22] According to National Bank of Poland estimates, in Deloitte pp 06
[23] Deloitte (2024): 20
[24] Deloitte (2024): 4
[25] Samoiliuk, M. & Levchenko, L. (2024). Ukraine's Economy in 2023. Overview. Centre for Economic Strategy. Ukraine.

Methodology

The research is primarily based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews (n: 25) conducted with key representatives of Ukrainian and Polish business and entrepreneurial actors acting in the transnational space between the two countries. These actors include small and medium sized diasporic entrepreneurs, private investors, institutional investors, representatives of large multinational companies, as well as industry consultants. 12 of the respondents were female and 13 male. The interviews codes are formulated in the following way: [stage of project [V2], gender [F/M], initials of interviewer [RDW / KCS] interview number in chronological order [1-25]]. Additionally, we use in-depth interviews with Ukrainian civil society actors in Poland (n: 11) from connected research projects[26] in order to support the analysis. A qualitative thematic analysis of the interview data allowed for (1) a preliminary mapping of entrepreneurial/business actors in the transnational civic ecosystem of support for Ukraine; (2) a mapping of the activities and practices of these business and entrepreneurial actors; (3) an exploration of the dynamics of networks, partnerships, and forms of trust in this space.

The empirical data collected from interviews is supported by extensive desk research on Polish-Ukrainian business development since 2022, as well as the major themes within international and bi-national frameworks of support that facilitate ongoing recovery 'hubs' for Ukraine, such as Ukraine Recovery Conferences, EU-Ukraine investment bridge summits, as well as impact investment reports by USAID, the World Bank, EBRD, Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (BGK - Poland's Development Bank), amongst others.

[26] Czerska-Shaw, K. Krzyworzeka-Jelinowska, A. Mucha J. (2022). Mobilizacja pomocy uchodźczyniom i uchodźcom ukraińskim w Krakowie. Wyzwania i szanse zarządzania niepewnością. Obserwatorium Wielokulturowości i Migracji. Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Krakowie.

Mapping the field of entrepreneurship and business with civic end-goals

This section provides a mapping of the emergent space of what we call entrepreneurship and business with civic end-goals in the transnational space between Poland and Ukraine. We posit that this mapping could be applied to other transnational civic ecosystems. Whilst there is a well-established literature of actors in international impact investing and social entrepreneurship, its exploration through the prism of transnational civic ecosystems may offer new and dynamic perspectives on the values, activities and linkages between actors in this space.

The major challenge at the outset is to operationalise entrepreneurship and business engagement with 'civic end goals'.. We are not referring here to intentions or motivations, as these can be multifaceted, including and perhaps primarily profit-orientated. Likewise, our intention is not to analyse the output or end-goals of business practices in order to ascertain their civic impact. Whilst there are some established measures to calculate social impact, such as those promoted by UNDP[27], there is even more uncertainty in quantifying civicness and its impact on democratic order, pluralism, and the strength of civil society.

Instead, we focus on the different activities and practices developed by entrepreneurs and businesses that have a clear connection to mobilising in response to the war in Ukraine - whether through humanitarian, security or reconstruction efforts - together defined as the support for the public good. The civic aspect here is linked to the overarching value of victory against authoritarianism and Soviet mentalities, and for democratic state functioning, pluralism and resilient civil society. Therefore, it is not just business for business' sake; rather, business with a civically-mobilised engine to at least a part of its activities. As one respondent noted:

"We just transcend in our beliefs, in our values. Because among our values, we have one: `do what's right, do what's good`, and we live this value. We just had a perfect experience on how to live this value, because it can be tricky sometimes. How do you use it in a usual business life? Now we know how to do it. Now we had a perfect chance to live this value during the last two years. [...] Ukraine is more associated with people who can stand for themselves and ***who value freedom rather than a post-soviet country****" [V2_F_RDW_15].*

The following is a preliminary mapping of this space, from broader, more internationalised actors/types, to smaller and more localised. This list does not represent the *scale* of their presence in the Polish-Ukrainian transnational civic ecosystem, but rather the *characteristics* of their presence.

War-Resilient Venture Capitalism

According to Morgan Stanley, **venture philanthropy** is characterised by engaged, long-term capital investments in social enterprises, 'partnerships with a purpose' that favour investor involvement and activities such as training, workshops and focus on sustained

[27] See for example: https://erc.undp.org/methods-center/methods/assessing-crossing-cutting-themes/ses

transformation.[28] The Valores Foundation in Poland is the first venture philanthropy fund in Poland, while the Ukrainian Social Venture Fund (USVF) functions on the Ukrainian market. Although there is some evidence of these types of funds in this space, the label of 'venture philanthropy' has not gained much traction in the Polish-Ukrainian transnational ecosystem. Instead, we see a focus on supporting a '**war-resilient economy'**, calls for **joint** investments in priority sectors, and **co-transactions** with Ukrainian stakeholders. Venture capitalist firms in the Polish-Ukrainian space of '**Emerging Europe**' (also the name of a UK-based data-driven and social-impact management advisory[29]) are rather advocating for opportunity amidst disruption, at times deliberately, and at times inadvertently contributing to civic-end goals. Yet they are few and far between.

As one of our respondents from the venture capitalist sector noted:

*We can be all busy building something on top, thinking about venture philanthropy. I have this friend [...]. And he calls me and says there's this term venture philanthropy. And says let's set up the fund, let's structure something. And we were going around it. And I was like, listen, we're still going to present the deals, right? And these deals need to be...`Pretending` is the wrong word. But let's say there's a possibility that these deals, these transactions will make money. These will become businesses, but then when you say `venture philanthropy` you actually ask for donations. So these are going to be mini mini things. You don't donate more than 10% of what you can. Maybe less, 2%, I don't know. So I've been stuck between this. How do you make people invest? How do you make people invest at the time of war? I was going around the conferences and saying `**you want to help Ukraine? Work with Ukraine"** [V2_M_KCS_24].*

Bridging Investors & Bridging Platforms

Somewhat paradoxically, the full-scale invasion has strengthened the imperative to create a more enabling investment environment in Ukraine. This is evidenced by international initiatives like the EU's Ukraine Facility Programme or by the development of UkraineInvest, the government of Ukraine investment promotion office established in 2018, now geared towards responses to the war and recovery programmes, such as United24.

According to the Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN), **impact investments** are investments made with the intention of generating positive, measurable social and environmental impact alongside financial return.[30] They are often linked to the support of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and rely on measurement mechanisms to ascertain social impact as a part of investments. Whilst there is evidence that the impact investing sector is growing worldwide, its presence in Ukraine and the broader CEE region has up until recently been untapped, or rather unrecognised. According to a UNDP report on the Impact Investing Ecosystem in Ukraine in 2021, the major challenges to impact investing in the country were a lack of awareness about these types of investment

[28] https://www.morganstanley.com/articles/venture-philanthropy-hybrid-organizations
[29] https://emerging-europe.com/about/
[30] GIIN, 2020. What You Need To Know About Impact Investing. https://thegiin.org/impact-investing/need-toknow/#what-is-impact-investing.

opportunities and the lack of an enabling environment, including legislation and financing incentives.[31]

In the Polish-Ukrainian transnational space, institutional as well as private investment platforms are promoting **Poland as a pivotal gateway for investment to Ukraine**, **and vice versa for Ukrainian businesses towards the EU market.** Amongst them are institutional actors such as the Polish-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce, which has set up a 'Rebuild Ukraine' project project to promote the reconstruction of Ukrainian entrepreneurship, or the **Polish-Ukrainian Start-Up Bridge.** The latter was set up in 2018 to facilitate connections between Ukrainian start-up and R&D projects with the Polish innovation ecosystem, including institutional funds and private equity and venture capital. Since the full-scale invasion, it has acted as a unique hub for incoming Ukrainian businesses, promoting Polish-Ukrainian synergy and mutual business opportunities.

Another bridge-making example is a private Polish-Ukrainian initiative headed by Roman Nikitov, Co-Head of ICU Ventures and Tech Investments Ukraine, called the **United Heritage Special Situations Fund**. It focuses on the potential of the geographical space of Poland and Western Ukraine, underscoring the important 'relocation dynamics' of highly-skilled Ukrainians in Poland, Poland as a critical logistics route between the EU and Ukraine, and the thriving business environment, especially in the tech sector. The Fund's civically-minded investment strategy relies on 10% of GP profits to be allocated to support regional cultural and educational development initiatives **in both Ukraine and Poland, highlighting the mutual impact on 'value-based' education for the next generation's elite in both countries.**

Grass-Roots Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

CSR is defined by the UNIDO as a business management concept that takes into account environmental and social considerations into business operations. It is guided by the motto of the 'triple bottom line', a strategy to balance social and environmental impact, sustainability efforts and profits, or the 3Ps: profit, people and planet.[32] Yet what we have seen in the Polish-Ukrainian transnational civic ecosystem are **corporations pushing the boundaries of typical CSR strategies**, a type of expanded CSR not seen in other bordering zones of conflict. "*We noticed precisely in those corporations, especially in the IT industry, there was actually a desire to build such social commitment and such a desire to build some kind of socially responsible enterprise, that's what we would call it" (V2_M_RDW_09).*

Various large-scale companies such as NOKIA, IKEA, Shell and others have gone from strategic business management towards using CSR departments to drive humanitarian support for Ukrainian refugees in Poland as well as their own Ukrainian employees. This includes **sponsoring the relocation of employees and their families** to Poland, or in some cases just the families (as men are not allowed to leave Ukraine). **Work-sponsored employee volunteerism** with local NGOs during the first phases of the war helped to sustain reception centres and material good drop off points. While internal management

[31] UNDP 2021. The Impact Investing Ecosystem in Ukraine November 2021 Copyright © UNDP (2021)
[32] https://www.unido.org/our-focus/advancing-economic-competitiveness/competitive-trade-capacities-and-corporate-responsibility/corporate-social-responsibility-market-integration/what-csr

strategies no doubt come into play here, there is an important **interpersonal and informal dynamic driving CSR departments** to sustain humanitarian and integration support - that is, Ukrainian and Polish employees directly involved in the war effort. As one respondent from a multinational corporation based in Poland noted:

"The situation in Ukraine, in my opinion, is not part of the CSR. For us, CSR is more like something related to ecology, to nature, maybe to help children, animal shelters [...] [the support] was rather not organised from above, just some actions maybe, but very much ***everything was acted from the side of the employees themselves.*** *They collected something themselves, organised themselves "* [V2_F_RDW_12].

Women-Powered Social Enterprises

According to the Ukrainian Social Venture Fund, **social entrepreneurship** is characterised by those businesses that prioritise social objectives over profit margins.[33] They often exist in the space between the nonprofit and for-profit sector in hybrid formats. The main areas of social entrepreneurship are the integration of vulnerable populations, development of deprived areas, work with social services, as well as supporting sports, ecology and culture. What is key in social entrepreneurial management models is an inclusive and participatory organisational structure, focusing on horizontal, collaborative work and inclusion of those who are on the receiving side of social objectives. There has been an explosion of these types of organisations in the mobilisation of humanitarian and recovery efforts in Poland, where local social organisations, infused with international or institutional support, have grown into fully-fledged undertakings, crucially **employing or being run by the end-users themselves, namely Ukrainian women refugees residing in Poland.**

In the words of one Kraków-based social entrepreneur, there is hardly an organisation working with the integration of refugees that does *not* have Ukrainians with refugee experience amongst their management or staff. One such example is a profit-based restaurant in Kraków, Ciepło [meaning: Warmth], managed and staffed by Ukrainian women with refugee experience, which fuels the non-profit NGO 'Zero Camps', a hostel for Ukrainian refugees managed by the same women. As Natalya Karpenczuk-Konopacka, the President of the Women's Chamber of Commerce in Ukraine notes: *"women's businesses are changing economies and empowering the economics of European countries" [V2_F_RDW_08].*

Diasporic Entrepreneurs with Existential Civicness

This final category of business-owners are critical to the understanding of civic mobilisation for the war effort in Poland. As prefaced in the previous section, in the last decade Poland has become a linchpin for Ukrainian business and entrepreneurship in the European Union. This has only accelerated with the reception of Ukrainian refugees, who are not only highly educated and employable, but also motivated to work, set up businesses, and give back to their country. Those **who are already well-established in Poland have built up their social capital and transnational networks**, **serving as gateways for newcomers.** Being just beyond the frontlines of war, diasporic

[33] https://www.usv.fund/en/about

entrepreneurs - whether established or newcomers - are **driven by an existential need and a collective imperative to support the war effort**. Just like the entrepreneurs who have 'gone civic', many diasporic entrepreneurs have either developed civic arms of their businesses, or have set up or relocated their businesses after arriving in Poland with the full-scale invasion. An example of the former is a chain of barber shops in Poland run by a Ukrainian entrepreneur, who at the same time is publicly active in promoting the Ukrainian cause and providing aid. An example of the latter is the partially Warsaw, partially Kyiv-based company called Task Force, a language services provider that 'proudly originates from Ukraine' and despite the war provides high-quality services to clients all around the world, as noted on their website. The civicness comes from paying taxes and employing Ukrainian refugees in Poland: "**the best we can do to support our country and our team, pay taxes and wages for our people to live** – is to do what we love and can perform well."[34]

Some enterprises have taken on various other forms of social or civic approaches. One Ukrainian IT company that relocated many of its employees to Poland pays its male workers their full salaries while they are called for military service for a period of two years. "*I can't imagine what else can our company do to be more socially responsible to our associates and to the society."* The same company **equates the socially responsible company with the "patriotic Ukrainian company**". "*This means not doing business with Russia, supporting the Ukrainian military and engaging in humanitarian aid [V2_M_RDW_17].*

[34] https://taskforce.ua/en/about-us/

Activities and Practices

How did the entrepreneurial actors outlined above respond to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine? Initially, they became part of the mass mobilisation that commenced on the 24th of February 2022. They engaged in the humanitarian effort within the broader ecosystems of support, encompassing migrants, civil society organisations, as well as state and international organisations. This marks a crucial point of entry into the civic ecosystem for the majority of entrepreneurial actors in this arena. As the landscape of humanitarian assistance became more established, the aid provided evolved and gradually became part of the ongoing reconstruction efforts. Moreover, from the early stages of the conflict, humanitarian assistance was linked with the goal of securing peace for Ukraine through both indirect and direct support of the military endeavours. **Ultimately, the entrepreneurial actors who continue to offer support for Ukraine amidst the conflict have, to some extent, integrated civic end-goals into their everyday business practices, or at least into their business contingency planning.**

Engagement in the 2022 Humanitarian Campaign: Mass Mobilisation

The early humanitarian assistance provided by businesses can be categorised into several types. First, there was financial support, with businesses contributing to funds in Ukraine specifically earmarked for relief efforts (often using new digital financial mechanisms). Second, businesses donated products or services they produce, or participated in the numerous goods drives to dispatch collective aid shipments to Ukraine. The third type involved coordinating assistance, mainly transport and lodging, for the 9 million people who passed through Poland in 2022. Additionally, businesses took part in other relief activities, such as organising "team-building" events related to humanitarian work or allowing employees paid time off to volunteer for specific NGOs as part of their CSR programmes. These activities included, inter alia, visiting refugee hubs, general logistics of humanitarian provision, or directly supporting refugees and their children. Furthermore, businesses lent their entrepreneurial expertise to facilitate all these activities, thereby complementing and enhancing the strategies employed by the voluntary and charitable sectors.

It is essential to acknowledge that the approaches to mass mobilisation evolved over time. Initially, as one might anticipate, there was a significant lack of systematicness. The example below makes clear the onset of the full-scale invasion in **February 2022 served as a catalyst for entrepreneurial action within the civic space.** This employment agency organised a reception facility for refugees at a key railway station just a few days after the invasion commenced. After accommodating over 2000 individuals in a small space within the first days, they quickly adapted their strategy, limiting access exclusively to mothers with children to ensure a focused and adequate level of assistance and support. This approach of tailoring support to meet the specific needs of the incoming population and the capabilities of the assisting entities was reflective of the broader relief effort: *"At the beginning, it appeared more chaotic, much like all the aid being sent by various countries to Ukraine. It took several days, even weeks, to organise everything,*

identify the specific needs for medications, tools shortages, and determine what to send and what was in surplus" [V2_M_RDW_11].

Many businesses played crucial roles as logistical support underpinning the relief effort. Notably, a Polish-Ukrainian business association in Poland established distribution centres in Chełm and Łuck to streamline the collection and transportation of aid from countries including the Netherlands, Portugal, and Finland [V2_M_RDW_06]. This was done in collaboration with the Polish state rail company, PKP Cargo. The early stages of their involvement in 2022 were characterised by a focus on organisational dynamics, particularly the challenge of aligning numerous well-intentioned individuals with effective support channels. A dedicated team from this business association, extending beyond their initial organisational limits, led these efforts. This included identifying and coordinating volunteers based on their skills and the needs identified. An online platform was developed to connect individuals offering temporary accommodation with those in need, facilitating a tailored matching process. Moreover, the initiative reached beyond Polish borders, with some Ukrainian arrivals choosing to continue their travels to countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Switzerland, highlighting the transnational scope of their engagement.

Significantly, a l**arge portion of the financial and material assistance began to be directed straight to other businesses, civil society organisations, departments within municipal governments, and military units at the front line, circumventing large international NGOs and the Ukrainian state apparatus**. For instance, a leading technology company in the EU orchestrated the acquisition of drones through blockchain financing established by the Serhiy Prytula Foundation. This instance serves as a prime example of employing cryptocurrency to aid the war effort. Blockchain technology, while not exclusively, is associated with cryptocurrencies, which have seen widespread use in Ukraine. Cryptocurrencies enable fast, transparent, and traceable transactions, allowing donors to track their contributions and recipients to confirm fund reception. In order to circumvent corruption and bureaucratic hurdles, the Ukrainian government has also embraced a decentralised approach to war funding and humanitarian aid. **As traditional financial systems faltered, digital financial solutions emerged as crucial alternatives.** Utilising digital currencies enabled the efficient allocation of funds towards essential military purchases, bypassing the limitations inherent in conventional financial systems. However, it is important to note that concerns persist about the use of cryptocurrencies, particularly about Russia potentially using these alternative currencies to bypass sanctions. Nevertheless, this example of a partnership between an EU-based business and a Ukraine-based organisation that has the necessary legal structures to acquire military-grade hardware illustrates the strategic employment of this technology in conflict regions.

Humanitarian Aid Transformed: Towards Security and Recovery Support

Throughout the first year after the full-scale invasion, the nature of the humanitarian aid effort gradually shifted towards recovery initiatives. **Many businesses in this study shifted their focus away from dispatching material humanitarian support, recognizing that most essentials could now be sourced within Ukraine itself.** While

financial aid continued, developmental aid was put in place, such as: supporting the physical reconstruction in Ukraine, employing more Ukrainian workers abroad and in Ukraine, and training employees and officials from Ukraine. This transition from providing direct humanitarian relief to focusing on development and capacity-building reflects a broader understanding of supporting peace efforts, which include, among other measures, military support. Notably, all interviewees admitted to providing some form of informal assistance or equipment that could be utilised by the Ukrainian Armed Forces, underscoring a unanimous commitment to supporting Ukraine's defensive capabilities alongside its developmental needs. What's more, the support provided by businesses for the military effort in Ukraine is deeply rooted in values: a dedication to supporting Ukraine's sovereignty as a symbol of freedom and democracy.

An official familiar with business matters shared insights on how various actors sought to contribute to the rebuilding efforts. This included both large corporations and small family-owned enterprises. A significant contribution came from a "major player in the electronic market" that established partnerships within Ukraine, offering to replace infrastructure that had been destroyed [V2_F_RDW_02]. Further illustrating this shift towards reconstruction aid, a representative from a migrant-focused NGO in western Poland, which routinely collaborates with businesses, discussed how at first prepaid SIM cards were distributed to refugees in Poland (a donation from a large multinational corporation) to meet immediate needs. Soon after they launched a project aimed at the professional development of migrants, with the objective of enhancing their vocational skills. Additionally, they undertook several projects in Ukraine, including a partnership facilitating the networking of civil society and local government representatives from Ukraine, Germany, Sweden, and Poland. **They discovered that local administrations, often in collaboration with experienced civil society organisations, served as their most crucial partners on the ground.** Leveraging these networks ensured a transparent and efficient flow of financial aid. The overarching aim is to foster the development of a highly educated and socially aware civil society within Ukraine, which can play a role in rebuilding "a*n open, European, tolerant, highly developed Ukraine, developing based on, for example, a sustainable economy, mainly consisting of medium-sized businesses rather than massive enterprises, and so on. We have a certain vision of what Ukraine should look like, and we try to take actions to implement that vision*" [V2_M_RDW_09].

In southern Poland, an entrepreneur from the IT industry [V2_M_RDW_10], originally from Lviv, provides a compelling example of both humanitarian and developmental support that's also linked to the war effort: aiding those relocating within Ukraine, as well as supplying power generators and batteries to facilitate Starlink satellite connections. These efforts, aimed at ensuring the continuity of their company's operations, highlight a drive motivated by self-interest yet significantly beneficial to the broader community. Furthermore, this entrepreneur extended substantial support to the Ukraine Armed Forces. This included the provision of 4x4 vehicles, bullet-proof vests, drones, medical supplies, warm clothing, military uniforms, and IT infrastructure crucial for military training. Since the onset of the conflict, the company has collectively contributed over €4 million in aid.

Employees of an employment advisory services firm located in central Poland have also been involved in the direct provision of military equipment. In the initial phase of the crisis, they described the situation as having been chaotic, with everyone in the company, from regular employees to the CEO, placing the emergency above their usual business operations. The challenge of coordinating such efforts was amplified by the fact that a significant portion of their workforce, one-third of their 500-person staff, was based in Ukraine (Kyiv and Lviv). **This geographical and operational link between Poland and Ukraine has deeply influenced the firm's identity, underscoring a profound connection to the war. This Polish-Ukrainian partnership reflects not just a business relationship but a deeply integrated aspect of their corporate ethos and social responsibility initiatives**: *"We sent it [military aid] directly, often to the regiments. So, it was truly very direct assistance, and we have two, I don't want to say souvenirs, but we have two flags from soldiers who came from the front, which also hang in the office (...) we have a military helmet that we sent and received back with a note that it was crushed halfway and with a note that it saved a soldier's life*" [V2_M_RDW_11].

In order to underline how their support for the military effort is driven by values, an employment advisory services firm from central Poland [V2_M_RDW_11] maintains it provides support for the "defenders of Ukraine". In the initial days of the war, they encountered a situation within their company where some of their employees or clients expressed a strong desire to return to Ukraine to fight. Mostly, these men were seeking to either contribute to Ukraine's defence efforts or be closer to their families remaining in the country. As they began to return, the firm felt compelled to provide some form of support. Thus, they initiated a campaign among their staff wherein they packed essential items into backpacks: supplies to stop bleeding, bandages, warm clothing, and various other necessities. As time progressed, and especially after establishing partnerships with non-governmental organisations in Poland and Ukraine, their assistance expanded on a larger scale. They started taking orders for specific needs of Ukrainian defenders and facilitated the delivery of essential items, medical supplies, helmets, drones, and "more" (reference to military aid).

While some interviewees chose to sidestep discussions about military aid, focusing instead on their involvement in humanitarian aid and recovery support, a significant number stressed the importance of acknowledging the profound effect military aid has on Ukraine's security landscape. Many underscored the fact that, although relief and development aid are vital components of the support provided to Ukraine, the decisive factor in ensuring the country's security fundamentally rests in the provision of weaponry and other forms of support to the military forces. Consequently, while their main activities may centre around humanitarian and recovery assistance, there is a broad acknowledgment of the essential role that military support plays in the overall endeavour to secure Ukraine's sovereignty and an understanding that people support the military in one way or another. As one of our respondents revealed:

The company doesn't [help the military], as far as I know, we are not allowed to do so, because our clients might not support us, if the company funds the military. So the fund itself is not supporting it or participating in military projects. But,for sure, what I know, if some

of our associates are called for military service (mobilisation of men in Ukraine), we help with equipment: helmets, bulletproof vests, things like that. On an individual basis. You know, if associates are providing some support to Army forces... Does it mean the company does so? Yes and no. So formally, `No`. But in fact, it's `Yes`* [V2_M_RDW_17].

Development of Business Practices with Civic Impact

During the early stages of the conflict, from the end of February 2022 to Christmas of the same year, the response to the crisis was notably spontaneous, characterised by a wide display of material and emotional generosity. However, the period that followed introduced a significant change in the approach to providing assistance by integrating it into long-term business planning. There has been a growing trend among companies in our study to integrate aid to Ukraine within their corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs or social chapters. It indicates a shift in business' strategies with respect to CSR, with companies now preferring to manage their support efforts internally or in structured cooperation with chosen NGOs, minimising or eliminating the need for ad hoc intermediaries. By incorporating aid efforts into their operations and CSR strategies, businesses are making it a part of their operational ethos and corporate identity. Additionally, some businesses may contribute positively to civic-end goals, often without explicitly identifying as social entrepreneurs.

The narrative of a west-Poland-based SME's evolution in its approach to CSR in response to the conflict illuminates a **transformative journey from informal discussions about volunteering to a robust, structured, and participatory CSR model.** Initially, the aid provision was reactive. In time, however, a more organised set of CSR activities was established. Currently, 150 employees actively participate in decision-making related to charity, with 70 individuals involved in the "Emergency Ukraine'' internal communication channel, representing a third of the company's workforce. This marked development of CSR is attributed to the tangible impact of the aid provided, which allowed employees to see the real difference their efforts were making. Previously, the company's engagement with CSR had not been as pronounced. Now, CSR is not merely a tool for winning tenders but a genuine expression of the employees' commitment to making a difference. **A pivotal change in the CSR program was giving employees greater control over initiatives.** The company has restructured its CSR budget allocation process, allowing employees to vote quarterly on which foundations or projects to support. **This democratisation of decision-making exemplifies a significant shift towards participatory CSR:**

"*In fact, the war in Ukraine has somewhat catalysed this in such a way that people have actually gotten involved in real aid (...) [P]eople saw that things were happening, that they were actually influencing and that they could help someone and that the company was supporting that and that the company itself was also helping. So this has certainly strengthened CSR in our company. (...) And thanks to that, we managed to develop CSR to such an extent that now it's actually involving more than half of the company in a project that gives real help to NGOs or Polish foundations in different categories"* [V2_F_RDW_18].

Another example is the development of CSR within a tech company (operating in Ukraine, the EU and North America), which led to direct involvement of employees in providing

technology education to displaced Ukrainian mothers and their children. Prior to the war, they had supported teaching of technology in village schools in Ukraine. The conflict has solidified their commitment to the cause: "*We chose it to be our mission to spread the popularity of the IT domain within the different layers in society, especially in those vulnerable groups like young moms, girls who choose science and economics and mathematics. And also we thought about supporting veterans…*" [V2_F_RDW_15].

The conversation around corporate social responsibility is evolving to reflect a more strategic approach by corporations in our study towards their involvement in Ukraine. These companies are demonstrating a commitment to the country's future that goes beyond short-term interests. Their investments are guided by a vision of long-term prosperity and stability for Ukraine, recognizing the potential and value of the Ukrainian workforce, both of which can render future profits. This optimistic outlook on Ukraine's prospects may lead corporations to invest in the country's future as a show of confidence, explains a currently UK-based Ukrainian social entrepreneur: "*Our hypothesis is that by investing capital, education, and building a community around enterprises with a significant societal influence and those tackling major societal challenges, we support the sustainability of these businesses and help them grow. In turn, this creates a positive effect for society because, in the end, we aim for an inclusive, prosperous, democratic Ukraine*" [V2_F_KCS_20].

Contrastingly, the perspective from smaller and medium-sized companies, which often depend on unskilled or semi-skilled labour, reveals a different pattern of engagement. According to our respondent, these companies may show less inclination towards continuing deliberate support initiatives, yet some contribute to social entrepreneurship and impact investing in an indirect or unintended manner. **There are instances where business actions align with the principles of social entrepreneurship or impact investing without a formal structure or recognition of such activities.** These businesses, particularly through their investments in Ukraine's workforce and revenue, as well as inclusion of refugees in operational choices, end up contributing positively to civic-end goals, often without explicitly identifying as social entrepreneurs: *"There're businesses that are social entrepreneurs without realising they're actually social entrepreneurs. For example, there are people doing impact investing without doing it institutionally. They just invest hoping something good will come out of it"* [V2_F_KCS_20].

Another example of entrepreneurs applying civic-end goals that are not typically denoted as such, are those that are adopting a politics of care, including psychological support to ensure a 'war-life' balance. As a prominent IT company that relocated some of its employees to Poland emphasises: *"The company puts much more focus on the well-being of people. We have a lot of initiatives supporting people psychologically, mentally because it's really difficult times. This feeling of care from the company has grown. I wouldn't say that there is anyone in the company who doesn't feel that the company takes care of them, and it was always the focus. We are a people centric company and a humanistic company. But the emphasis on this has grown a lot"* [V2_M_RDW_17].

The Building of Business Networks and Ways of Working

Business cooperation between Poland and Ukraine has taken on a whole new meaning since the start of the full-scale invasion. Those who have contributed to entrepreneurship and business activities with civic-end goals outlined above have, naturally, become entangled in systems of networks, partnerships and certain ways of doing business. Below, we investigate how these networks and partnerships have developed on the frontlines of war, what values sustain them and what pressures and pitfalls they must navigate.

Bottom-up Post-Fordist Chains of Production

Civic mobilisation in the first months of the full-scale war has been described as decentered, bottom-up, and largely ad hoc.[35] As evidenced in the section above, this research confirms that the business networks and partnerships active in this civic ecosystem were characterised by similar logics. Business leaders noted the failures and inefficiency in large-scale international humanitarian efforts and institutional structures, and filled in the gaps through personal, decentralised business networks. The success of SUV and drone procurement through crowdfunding is a prime example of this kind of success, as documented in other research on the subject.[36] As two of our respondents underline:

"When we saw the Red Cross helping Ukrainian kids to allocate in Russia, stolen from occupied regions. I mean, how can you think about the Western institutions making impact investment? To what? They all failed. So once again, ***we felt we're on our own*** *and* ***we were just getting personal networks of investors*** *in the US and Poland and Germany and whatever people that you know, people that know people, and even then we're fooled sometimes"* [V2_M_KCS_24].

"People were self-organising, like with the trucks and crossing the borders and calling their relatives somewhere and figuring out. ***Those chains were built by people, not by some ministry of delivery of humanitarian aid.*** *And because of that, it was so effective and efficient and was able to fix problems right where they happened. This is the key for all things that happened in Ukraine and is happening right now,* ***starting with how we are buying drones just by crowdfunding,*** *up to training and organising and creating those chains of humanitarian aid"* [V2_F_RDW_02].

[35] Cullen Dunn, E. & Kaliszewska, I. (2023). Distributed humanitarianism: Volunteerism and aid to refugees during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. American ethnologist. [Online] 50 (1), 19–29; Czerska-Shaw, K. and Jacoby, T. (2023). Mapping Ukrainian Civicness Abroad in the War Effort: A Case Study of Poland (PeaceRep Ukraine Report). Conflict and Civicness Research Group, London School of Economics. Available at: https://peacerep.org/publication/mapping-ukrainian-civicness-abroad-poland/; Czerska-Shaw, K. Krzyworzeka-Jelinowska, A. Mucha J. (2022) Mobilizacja pomocy uchodźczyniom i uchodźcom ukraińskim w Krakowie. Wyzwania i szanse zarządzania niepewnością. Obserwatorium Wielokulturowości i Migracji. Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Krakowie.

[36] ODI. (2024). Military crowdfunding in Ukraine. Mapping actors and networks in Ukraine Briefing note no. 1. Unpublished background paper. London: ODI, January 2024.

Whilst most businesses cannot boast openly of having provided military aid, it is clear that support for the army runs alongside formal business networks. Direct provision of auxiliary military equipment that circumvents official channels and relies on personal networks is a constant refrain among the businesses studied. In these decentralised, bottom-up networks described by our respondents, we noted the logic of **targeted aid delivery. The imperative to know the end user, or recipient, and to target aid to this orphanage, that regiment, this particular community, changed the business model.** As one respondent explained, they went from thinking about B2B logics, to B2R logics - business to recipient. Generalised aid is seen as inefficient, underlining the need for a precise understanding of the required assistance and its intended recipients to prevent waste and combat corruption. This approach, according to many of our respondents, ensures that support is both effective and accountable, highlighting the evolving dynamics of aid delivery in the context of the ongoing conflict. An IT worker from northern Poland noted the challenges faced in ensuring aid reached its intended destinations and the solutions predicated on informal connections adopted to circumvent these systemic issues:

"*We already took a risk because we were sending Starlinks and handing them over with minibuses. A driver would go, take a few packages, a few people, and then he would pass it on to another person or a friend in Lviv. They then sent it by transport to Dnipro or Kharkiv. And there was a risk that this ordinary person, whom we never saw, might change his phone number. We found him in a group chat saying he could transport these packages and we could give them to him. Later we would pass things on to the same people, but never... And from friends, I know that there was never a case in such a bus where carriers made money on these transports, nothing ever disappeared. But unfortunately, when aid was sent to the City Hall, to foundations, to Caritas, to all official organisations, later there was only a trace left, or even no one knew that something was supposed to arrive"* [V2_F_RDW_13].

Ways of Working: Corruption vs Informality

As the quote above highlights, the decentralisation - or fragmentation - of chains of production and delivery of aid is, at least in part, a reaction to the alleged abuses of power concentrated in institutionalised or formal channels. There is a prevalent perception that corruption undermines the effectiveness of aid and is bad for transnational business. Yet there is some optimism that reports of corruption in Ukraine are exaggerated and that the war has catalysed a reduction in corrupt practices. This trend has compelled business actors to prioritise legal compliance in their operations, while also nurturing a collective aspiration to change Ukraine's international reputation concerning corruption. As one respondent explained:

"What is not helping is these corruption scandals that we hear about, but at the same time, I'm very happy they're made public. See, when you read the news, they're like a lot of corruption scandals. But that's good, because corruption happens when it is quiet. When it comes to the surface that means that it's highlighted. So when you read about corruption in Ukraine, that means that journalists do their work, that society does their work" [V2_M_KCS_24].

At the same time, the actors supporting Ukraine emphasise the paramount importance of **cultivating personal connections in business and aid efforts**, and maintain that this kind of **informality is key to building trust and circumventing corruption.** The significance of establishing trust and fostering personal relationships emerges as a critical factor for successful provision of aid and business collaboration in Ukraine. Effective engagement often **requires in-person interactions and navigation of informal settings, illuminating the cultural specificities intrinsic to doing business and conducting philanthropic activities within the post-communist space.** As one agricultural and manufacturing business consultant noted: *"You can have a competitive business, but if you don't know how to communicate in new markets - literally the style and framework of communication - you can lose a lot of opportunities and then get frustrated and not go forward"* [V2_M_KCS_21]. As another IT investment consultant noted: *"The first thing I learned in Ukraine is that you won't achieve anything by just writing emails. (...) They need to see you, listen to what you say, how you speak, how you behave, shake your hand"* [V2_M_KCS_14].

Yet informal relations also have their pitfalls, relying on social norms and relations of power that uphold untransparent systems and which may be indecipherable to those on the outside. As the IT investment consultant explained: "*The Ukrainian market is unreadable to someone not from Ukraine, and it is not always good, because there is an oligarchic structure, and it continues to exist"* [V2_M_KCS_14]. **There is a growing weariness amongst both international and Ukrainian entrepreneurs to do business in such arrangements, because "*it's not in terms of capital or technology, just image-wise it's not cool"*** [V2_M_KCS_14].

Things are changing, and some industries have caught onto this quicker than others. As the agricultural and manufacturing business consultant noted, this may have to do with the historical legacies of certain sectors of the economy:

"There were real issues with [Ukrainian] business culture and the way of talking with potential clients. And it was such a barrier, I came to realise it's not a peripheral thing. It's a central, important thing. Now, there are lots of exporters to the EU and Ukraine, so it's not like nobody has figured this out. [...] I think one place Ukraine has absolutely dissolved these business culture differences is in IT. I just don't think those problems exist in the IT sector. The IT sector did not emerge from ancestral Soviet business, whereas manufacturing and food did" [V2_M_KCS_21].

Bridging Networks

Ultimately, the strength of Ukraine and Ukrainian sovereignty has an impact on the whole CEE region, and Polish entrepreneurs and businesses know this. Amongst our respondents in the start-up sectors, there is a clear vision of how to go forward, and it relies on cross-border synergies and cooperation, with a **strong focus on keeping innovation in Ukraine.** As one respondent notes:

"When you have this neighbour destabilised next to you, you yourself are seen as a destabilised region. And it's a collapse. ***So our operating model is to keep R&D there,*** *to look for that synergy with Polish customers, with Polish laboratories, with Polish partners.*

And for the future we have planned so as to continue acceleration on much more capital (with more for development). But we also want to implement incubation. And we dream that these projects will be Polish-Ukrainian, that the team will be Polish-Ukrainian, that this synergy will be created, that this project will have the opportunity to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the reconstruction of Ukraine, that is, on this living organism to implement something, to build something" [V2_M_KCS_14].

The sizable and highly-educated Ukrainian population in Poland has a crucial role to play in these bridging networks. This has been evident in the efficiency and effectiveness of providing assistance to Ukraine, wherein **operations have been heavily reliant on the existing networks** that were established before the war, especially by economic migrants from Ukraine. These individuals possess commendable social competencies and a nuanced understanding of both Polish and Ukrainian perspectives. What is clear is that the bridging networks between Polish and Ukrainian businesses will be pivotal in the future reconstruction process. As one respondent notes: *"Such an important function of ours is to* ***build relations, that is, to establish such various business contacts*** *between Polish and Ukrainian companies, because we also* ***proceed from the bottom up*** *to build these relations between Polish and Ukrainian business for the future reconstruction or modernization of Ukraine"* [V2_M_RDW_11].

What do Businesses Supporting Ukraine Need: Conclusions and Recommendations

In this concluding section, we turn to the needs of Ukraine and Ukrainian business as seen through the eyes of our Polish and Ukrainian respondents. Whilst the Polish-Ukrainian transnational space is critical to the support and recovery process, it is not enough. Our respondents were quick to underline the limited number of larger investors, often attributed to their cautious approach to doing business in Ukraine: *"The lack of networks is a challenge. I think we need big players on board. The challenge is war. [...] Because the investors are wary of investing in Ukraine"* [V2_F_KCS_20]. Yet investment needs to be based on some common principles that ensure the integrity of the Ukrainian economy and support for social and civic structures and ways of doing business.

From Dependency Towards Cooperation

The importance of international support is paramount, yet there is also an urgent need to bolster Ukraine's economy independently, claim businesses actively supporting Ukraine from abroad. This strategy not only retains jobs within Ukraine but also supports the broader economy, presenting job provision as a more sustainable form of aid than financial donations alone. As a Ukrainian IT executive explains: ***"International support, it's good that we have it, it's excellent that we have it. But we also need to build and to try to support our economy in Ukraine.*** *[...] The dedication of Ukrainian teams is really big, we can use it and they can use it and we can still keep workplaces in Ukraine.* ***This is also a type of help. You can donate money or you can give people the job, right?*** *The second thing is even better because you support yourself, you support the economy"* [V2_F_RDW_15].

Another solution floated by a respondent is to **retain taxes in Ukraine.** While is a potentially divisive issue, the basic premise is not to create big ideal-type institutions that uphold asymmetrical power relations between Ukraine and the West, but real solutions that would be impactful on the ground. In the end, it is the Ukrainian taxpayer that pays for the military to run and is critical for the survival of the state.

"There are much bigger things that can be done to fix this world, to just help Ukraine rather than block it from the border, [dont'] take its taxes. [...] ***Help Ukrainian citizens pay taxes in Ukraine,*** *even up until the war finishes. [...] But we're talking about impact investment into Ukraine. Can we just help Ukrainians finance themselves? Maybe that's an easier route. Maybe we don't need to find any money. Maybe we don't need to invent an institution to talk about impact investment"* [V2_M_KCS_24].

Ukraine's experience offers invaluable lessons, positioning it as a potential leader in formulating resilient business contingency practices amidst increasing global turbulence. The now popular term of creating a 'war-life balance' - the ability to conduct business as usual in the face of conflict - serves as a strategic asset in navigating the conflict alongside international support. *"Ukraine should probably get rid of this image of forever asking for something, this beggar image because we are not begging for buying*

things. It's a fight for life. [...] I think that the business continuity thing has to be fully reconsidered all over the world because we found ourselves in a situation when our previous business continuity plans were absolutely useless. I understand that nobody can be prepared for the war, but now we have very bitter lessons learned and now we are reconsidering the whole concept of business contingency. And I think that ***Ukraine can be a leader in building true business contingency.*** *Now the world has become more turbulent and it will be even more turbulent in the next years"* [V2_F_RDW_15].

Some of the practices built up in the Polish-Ukrainian transnational space are promising. In the IT sector, there is an emphasis on **retaining R&D departments in Ukraine** even if the company partially relocates to Poland. "*We have this approach. If a Ukrainian company comes to Poland, sets up its business, and it is to receive a public grant, then, as in any other EU country, this intellectual property must be transferred to that company, because the Polish taxpayer cannot finance with public money a project that de facto has this `Nexus` in Ukraine. [...] But what is left in Ukraine? Further R&D can be developed. These people can continue to work there"* [V2_M_KCS_14]. Poland also gains because it increases its innovation potential at low cost, and whilst both sides bear the risks, they also benefit from it.

Yet some of our respondents observed that this does not seem to be the practice in other European countries. "*On the other hand, it is very common that Western funds, Western projects, such mechanisms often want to uproot. They take the whole team, they transport, they have everything. They simply have a golden cage and invite [then]. `Go inside.' Well, who wouldn't? And this applies primarily to Ukraine.* ***Because it's a drain*** *and the Germans don't see it. In the end, they don't see it, because they don't neighbour Ukraine, but we do* [V2_M_KCS_14].

Access to Capital and Long-term Thinking

The discourse on Ukraine's recovery coming from international conferences and actors on the ground alike emphasises the need for a holistic approach that goes beyond short-term relief efforts. This comprehensive outlook is underpinned by the key pillars of investment, entrepreneurship, and community support, each playing a pivotal role in the nation's path towards rebuilding and sustainable development. The international conferences and discussions on the ground underscore the importance of attracting investments to **stimulate economic growth and rebuild critical infrastructure.** Entrepreneurs are recognized as essential catalysts for change, driving economic modernization and adaptation in a rapidly evolving global landscape. Their role in introducing new ideas, creating jobs, and fostering competitiveness is crucial for Ukraine's ability to rebuild more robustly and resiliently. Beyond economic factors, the recovery discourse places a strong emphasis on the **role of community support** in ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive recovery process.

Notably, the intergovernmental Ukraine Recovery Conference process serves as a platform to attract investors to Ukrainian businesses, promoting the idea that the current moment offers a unique opportunity for investment. The rationale is that investing now

will position investors favourably before a surge in post-conflict interest makes the market more competitive. This perspective underscores a strategic vision for bolstering the Ukrainian economy through direct investment, leveraging its post-war prospects to foster long-term growth, says a Ukrainian IT executive: *"[They] draw the attention of investors to different Ukrainian businesses to support the Ukrainian economy and even to invest right now. And they claim that it's the best time to invest, because afterwards there will be many people who will want to invest and you will be at the end of the queue. That's why it's better to start now"* [V2_F_RDW_15].

Drawing parallels with Central-Eastern Europe's experience in the 1990s, entrepreneurs are heralded as the most progressive and effective agents of change. Businesses, by virtue of risking their own capital and competing on a global stage, are positioned as pivotal actors in driving the modernization and global integration of Ukraine's economy. This narrative champions the entrepreneurial spirit as essential for progress and for achieving tangible results in the country's reconstruction, explains a Poland-based technology entrepreneur: "*[W]e strongly believe that entrepreneurs are the most progressive group in society, the ones who operate in the most systematic, methodical way, who check whether there is a result or not. Because they risk their own money. And in Poland, it was the same in the 90s. This part of society [entrepreneurs], which modernised the fastest, reached a global level because it had to compete on a global level"* [V2_M_KCS_14].

Some of our respondents emphasise the need for a shift away from reliance on subsidies and government intervention towards empowering enterprises with access to capital, education, mentorship, and community involvement. The actors involved in these discussions advocate for the creation of supportive ecosystems that facilitate social entrepreneurship and sustainable development. Impact investment funds, in particular, were highlighted by some of our respondents as a promising tool to encourage and support social entrepreneurship, suggesting a strong belief in the efficacy of investment and community support mechanisms to drive change: "*People don't want subsidies (...).* ***They basically need a certain amount of certain types of capital. They need access to capital.*** *They need education and mentorship and whatnot, and they want to be part of communities. (...) So I think that impact funds will be a very successful instrument and they will come to spur support and growth for social entrepreneurship"* [V2_F_KCS_20]. The emphasis on socially minded entrepreneurship and community engagement illustrates a forward-looking perspective, aiming to rebuild Ukraine not just in its former image but as a modern, resilient, and inclusive society.

Transnational Dimension: A European Ukraine

Since 2014, Ukrainian national identity has undergone a significant revival, a resurgence in part influenced by the Ukrainian diaspora's efforts to maintain cultural connections and support Ukraine's sovereignty. This is particularly significant in Poland, which is not only Ukraine's neighbour and host to one of the biggest Ukrainian diasporas in the world, but also the physical and metaphorical doorway to the European Union. The period since has seen Ukraine increasingly recognized as a nation of resilience and a fervent advocate for freedom, attributes that have been further highlighted since 2022. The recent war-

related diaspora, numbering around 6.5 million worldwide[37], has played a crucial role in enhancing Ukraine's international reputation and actively promoting its foundational values, thereby embedding the notion of Ukrainian identity with connotations of courage and resilience. Business and entrepreneurial endeavours in Ukraine from 2022 have also contributed to promoting the cause of closer integration with the EU. For example, Ukrainian entrepreneurs relocating their businesses to Poland or elsewhere within the EU are strategically positioning their assets to navigate the uncertainties of conflict while acquiring invaluable experience in European business norms and securing a place in the European market. Others are expanding their business into Ukraine as means of bolstering Ukraine's long-term economic prospects, laying the groundwork for a post-conflict investment resurgence in Ukraine. These entrepreneurial endeavours signify a broader shift towards transnational business practices, ones that bridge Ukraine more closely with European markets and standards, promising a robust foundation for Ukraine's future economic and political integration into Europe.

In the opinion of the representatives of a labour consultancy in Poland, since 2014, Ukrainian national identity has experienced a significant transformation. People now proudly identify as Ukrainian and feel a strong connection to the European family. Being Ukrainian has become fashionable, especially among the diaspora, which maintains close ties with Ukraine and is eager to support it. At the same time, Ukrainians want to be seen as proud and hardworking, not seeking handouts but striving for sovereignty and dignity. Positive PR initiatives like Eurovision have bolstered Ukraine's image, but they acknowledge that there's still a need for military victory: *"Ukrainians living abroad hold on to this bond with Ukraine. Above all, two-thirds of refugees want to return to Ukraine in the longer or shorter term. Over sixty percent, about two-thirds, help Ukraine during the war, regardless of whether it is helping the family, helping close ones, supporting the Armed Forces of Ukraine, supporting NGOs, engaging in aid activities here in the country of residence, promoting Ukrainian culture, promoting Ukrainian literature"* [V2_M_RDW_11].

The evolving identity of Ukraine within Europe underscores an essential shift towards broader European acknowledgment of Ukraine's sovereignty and its rightful place in the European family. There is a clear call to move beyond outdated stereotypes and to embrace a contemporary, civic vision of Ukraine, characterised by democracy, local governance, and tolerance. Lessons from Poland in addressing nationalism and corruption are viewed as crucial for guiding Ukraine on its path to becoming a fully integrated, democratic European nation. The Ukrainian diaspora's unique characteristics and contributions position Ukraine to engage in more elevated dialogues on the international stage: *"The Ukrainian diaspora in Europe, because of its characteristics, allows Ukraine to now engage in dialogue at a slightly higher level than it currently stands (...). But this Ukrainian diaspora largely demonstrates that Ukraine can indeed play in the league of highly developed countries"* [V2_M_RDW_09].

One of our respondents from a Polish-Ukrainian business association discussed the reshaping of Ukraine's image in Europe. **They aim to develop a business environment in Ukraine that is resilient and holds a strong reputation globally, moving beyond**

[37] https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine

the shadows of nationalism and corruption that have historically marred its image. They claim this ambition is largely supported by the engagement of the Ukrainian diaspora and refugees, who frequently inquire about Poland's experiences with combating corruption. By focusing on legal reforms and the evolution of anti-corruption laws in Poland, particularly in the context of its EU integration process, these business actors aim to inspire similar transformative efforts in Ukraine, fostering a more transparent and accountable business ecosystem: "*When we undertake certain actions and Ukrainians, the Ukrainian diaspora, refugees get involved, they often ask directly how Poland dealt with corruption, right? As we mainly focus on legal mechanisms, we show the evolution of anti-corruption law in Poland. What it looked like before joining the European Union, at the moment of joining, during the transition period and after, this is what interests them"* [V2_M_RDW_09].

Nonetheless, the ongoing conflict poses significant challenges, as immediate concerns overshadow the broader objective of aligning with EU norms. Scepticism about the sustainability of Ukraine's enthusiasm for EU integration is voiced by an entrepreneur residing in Poland. If the conflict persists, the process may be very protracted: "*It's not like everyone will suddenly be thrilled with the EU and will want to see only the positives, because they will quickly understand that it's not the case. Another thing is that we just talk about when Ukraine will join the EU. (...) However, I think it will be a very long, painful process. And I also heard a statement that it's better for Ukraine to have closed doors to the EU, which someone will eventually open, than to have them ajar forever"* [V2_M_KCS_14].

Concerns are also raised about the EU's understanding of the implications of a sustainable Ukrainian economy within the Union, with **critics highlighting previous EU policies that may have hindered Ukraine's economic initiatives**: "*I am not sure the EU has yet grogged what it will mean for Ukraine to have a sustainable economy that's participating in the EU. [...] We need to do a lot so that Ukraine does not just get its existential hopes absolutely smacked down by sort of small minded EU selfishness (...)*" [V2_M_KCS_21]. This critique extends to the perception of unequal playing fields within the EU, highlighting the disparity in how state aid and economic policies are applied across member states compared to the expectations placed on Ukraine. This discrepancy underscores a **call for the EU to reconsider its approach to supporting Ukraine's single market integration, advocating for policies that recognize the unique challenges Ukraine faces and the need for tailored support mechanisms.**

Still, the movement of Ukrainian businesses to Poland and elsewhere in the EU, observed since the onset of the conflict, represents a strategic adaptation to maintain economic stability and secure assets. Companies relocating or expanding into Poland are creating a "second leg" to stand on—a contingency plan that allows them to preserve operations within the Ukrainian market while establishing a safety net abroad. This strategy does not signify a withdrawal from Ukraine, as it had been the case prior to 2022, but rather an expansion into the EU: "*What I observe is the companies that come to Poland, they build for themselves here a certain alternative, a second leg that allows them to maintain stability in the Ukrainian market, that is, they don't close, they don't roll up there, but in case of emergency they have an alternative in Poland*" [V2_F_RDW_07].

The underlying belief is that once the war is over, a portion of the resources and experience accumulated in Europe will flow back to Ukraine, enriched by a deeper understanding of European business practices. This return of capital and knowledge is expected to contribute positively to Ukraine's economic reconstruction and integration into the European market. The experiences gained in the EU are seen as instrumental for Ukrainian businesses to drive change upon their return, potentially transforming Ukraine's economic landscape for the better. This dynamic underscores a broader narrative of resilience, adaptability, and long-term vision among entrepreneurs supporting Ukraine from abroad:

"*When we talk about Ukrainians who have left Ukraine for Poland, many entrepreneurs have left and moved their businesses to Poland, creating jobs for workers, paying taxes, and so on. (...) It's understandable that we always talk about when we win this war, a portion of this money will return to Ukraine, because it will be understood that labour there costs less. (...) The point is to now secure this money here and also gain experience. It's a very strong point that many entrepreneurs have understood that business here is not like in Ukraine. (...) Here (in Poland), you need this, that, outsource accounting, comply with European Union law, Polish law, and somehow manage all this*" [V2_M_KCS_22].

Yet the onus is on the international community, with the European Union and the UK to the fore, to establish a level playing field when it comes to opening up Ukraine to the Common Market and other free trade deals. There is more than a certain measure of hypocrisy in protecting European markets from Ukrainian products, particularly grain, as Europe has been flooding Ukrainian markets for some time. As one of our respondents pointedly illustrates:

The EU is going to have to understand on a much bigger level what it means to integrate the Ukrainian economy. And when Polish farmers blocked the border over getting treated by Ukrainian farmers. [...] That's exactly what you did for the last 30 years, and they literally blockade the border over it. It doesn't make me optimistic that the EU is ready for how much it's going to have to carve out a space for Ukraine's economy. And that will mean ***stop torpedoing basic industrial policy [in Ukraine].*** *I know you asked me if Ukrainians are ready. But my answer is it matters more what the EU thinks. Ukrainians will learn, but if the EU doesn't give them the space, it won't matter* [V2_M_KCS_21].

Appendix: Interview codes

All interviews were held online via Zoom, except V2_M_KCS_22, which was held in person.

Interviewer initials	type of respondent	gender of respodent	interview date	Interview code (project number_gender_interviewer_number chronological order
RDW	celebrity entrepreneur	F	08.08.2023	V2_F_RDW_01
RDW	expert	F	15.08.2023	V2_F_RDW_02
RDW	institutional actor	M	16.08.2023	V2_M_RDW_03
RDW	celebrity entrepreneur	F	18.08.2023	V2_F_RDW_04
RDW	institutional actor	F	23.08.2023	V2_F_RDW_05
RDW	institutional actor	M	24.08.2023	V2_M_RDW_06
RDW	institutional actor	F	25.09.2023	V2_F_RDW_07
RDW	institutional actor	F	25.09.2023	V2_F_RDW_08
RDW	NGO leader	M	02.10.2023	V2_M_RDW_09
RDW	start-up / corporate actor	M	02.10.2023	V2_M_RDW_10
RDW	consultant	M	11.10.2023	V2_M_RDW_11
RDW	corporate actor	F	20.10.2023	V2_F_RDW_12
RDW	corporate actor	F	03.11.2023	V2_F_RDW_13
RDW	corporate actor	F	12.12.2023	V2_F_RDW_15
RDW	corporate actor	M	07.01.2024	V2_M_RDW_16
RDW	corporate actor	M	12.01.2024	V2_M_RDW_17
RDW	corporate actor	F	17.01.2024	V2_F_RDW_18
KCS	start-up / institutional actor	M	08.12.2023	V2_M_KCS_14
KCS	institutional actor	M	29.01.2024	V2_M_KCS_19
KCS	social entrepreneur	F	29.01.2024	V2_F_KCS_20
KCS	consultant	M	05.02.2024	V2_M_KCS_21
KCS	entrepreneur / institutional actor	M	07.02.2024	V2_M_KCS_22
DW	corporate actor	F	09.02.2024	V2_F_RDW_23
KCS	venture capitalist actor	M	07.03.2024	V2_M_KCS_24
RDW	expert	M	13.03.2024	V2_M_RDW_25

About PeaceRep

PeaceRep is a research consortium based at The University of Edinburgh. Our research is re-think- ing peace and transition processes in the light of changing conflict dynamics, changing demands of inclusion, and changes in patterns of global intervention in conflict and peace/mediation/transition management processes.

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PeaceRep.org | peacerep@ed.ac.uk | Twitter **@Peace_Rep_**

School of Law, University of Edinburgh, Old College, South Bridge, EH8 9YL

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Cover Image: A volunteer sews a national flag at a volunteer center in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. February 28, 2022. Photo by Elena Tita / the Collection of war.ukraine.ua

Conflict & Civicness Research Group
LSE IDEAS
lse.ac.uk/CCRG| Twitter **@LSE_CCRG**
ideas.ccrg@lse.ac.uk