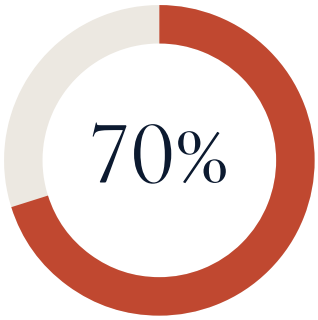
Love Across Borders

Ukrainian women and European men after the exodus



of adult Ukrainian refugees in Europe are women

Four years after the largest exodus in Europe since 1945, several million Ukrainians, most of them women and children, are building their future in Europe, and a growing number with European partners. **They are not looking for a rescuer, but for a reliable equal.**

29%

of the women who reached Germany without their partner in 2022 have since separated for good

×2.6

Polish men marrying Ukrainian women, 2016 to 2024

21%

of Ukrainians think the husband alone should provide, down from 60% in 2018

Three conversations to have early

Why her?
A personal story, never a comparison with other women.

Where would we live?
Distance as a project with dates, not a reason to stop.

A child of our own?
Not the same question as "do you welcome my children?".

Executive summary

1. **A female, highly educated exodus that is settling.** About 70% of adult Ukrainian refugees are women, and 72% of those in Germany hold a higher-education degree. Fewer than half intend to go back.
2. **The war broke many couples.** In Germany, 29% of the women who arrived without their partner in 2022 have since separated for good.
3. **New couples are forming across borders.** In Poland, marriages between Polish men and Ukrainian partners rose from 782 in 2016 to 2,013 in 2024, the largest group of Poles' marriages with foreigners.
4. **Love is sought as an anchor.** In Ukraine, 72% say love gives stability in wartime. Stability and security is the quality the women we surveyed cite most.
5. **The "traditional Ukrainian wife" is a fading image.** Between 2018 and 2022, the share of Ukrainians who think a husband alone should provide for the family fell from 60% to 21%.
6. **Talent is being wasted.** Doctors, teachers and engineers work far below their qualifications, slowed by language and the recognition of diplomas. The women we read talk about their next professional project, not about staying at home.
7. **The media built a myth.** German news coverage portrayed Ukrainian refugee women as grateful, hard-working "Mary Poppins" migrants. Many women fear men who expect a docile wife.
8. **Three conversations are best had early:** why he is looking for a Ukrainian woman, how to manage distance, and whether either wants children. At Adorée we see women more willing to bridge distance than the men who write to them.

A female exodus that is settling

The Ukrainians who fled in 2022 were overwhelmingly women with children, and most of them are now staying. Men of military age could not leave, so about 70% of adult refugees in European host countries are women (OECD, 2023). The Kyiv-based Centre for Economic Strategy estimates that 5.6 million Ukrainians were still abroad in January 2026, mostly in Germany and Poland, and that only 43% intend to return, almost all of them only once the war is over (CES, 2026).

They are not the refugees many Europeans imagined. In Germany's large survey of 11,225 Ukrainian arrivals, 72% held a higher-education degree, against 50% of Ukraine's population; 77% of the women had fled without their partner, and a third still had one in Ukraine or elsewhere (IAB-BiB/FReDA-BAMF-SOEP, 2023).

Time has turned a temporary refuge into a life. By 2025, 45% of Ukrainians in Germany planned to stay for good, and only one in five was firmly set on returning, according to Germany's Federal Institute for Population Research (epd, November 2025). Ella Libanova, Ukraine's leading

demographer, expects no more than a third of war migrants to come back, and warns that when families settle abroad "rather the men who will join them" (LB.ua, April 2026).

The cost is psychological. Across eight host countries, half of Ukrainian refugees show a high risk of distress; work, health and family ties protect them, while children to care for and relatives in war zones add to the strain (Szkup et al., 2026). In Poland, three in four report loneliness, and having a partner is linked to lower depression and anxiety (Chudzicka-Czupała et al., 2026). At Adorée, which grew out of the humanitarian platform EU4UA, our conversations with women who had rebuilt everything else kept coming back to the same idea, which we sum up in one sentence: all is well now, except that someone is missing.

Rebuilding a love life after separation

The war did not only separate couples by borders; it ended many of them. Of the Ukrainian women who reached Germany without their partner in 2022, 29% have since separated for good, while just under a third of the separated couples have been reunited in Germany (epd, reporting a BiB study, November 2025). In Ukraine, the psychologist Anna Chechenina notes that many couples now split by phone without filing for divorce, so official figures understate the break-ups (Rubryka).

Distance wears love down even when it survives. Kateryna, the young mother photographed in tears at Odesa station in March 2022 and found by Le Monde four years later in Cologne, has seen her husband three times since, for a few days each; he has been drafted. "I love him", she says, but without a shared daily life and its rituals she no longer feels the connection (Le Monde, February 2026).

Love has not lost its value; it has become a refuge. In a February 2026 survey by the Ukrainian firm Gradus, 72% of Ukrainians said love gives them stability in wartime, and 55% said the war had accelerated decisions such as moving in together or marrying (Gradus, 2026).

The rules are also changing. Interviews with young Ukrainian women in Poland by researchers at Kozminski University show greater acceptance of divorce, later marriage and informal relationships, and a stronger wish for financial independence (Kozminski Review, 2026).

Dating in a new country is not easy, and many women keep away from the apps. In our own survey of women in the EU4UA community, almost six in ten have never used one in Europe, and those who did name men who are not serious as their first disappointment.

At Adorée we read this as a demand for seriousness, not for speed: stability and security is the quality the women in our survey cite most often, two in three of them. In conversations, they ask early about values and about the man's past. One wrote that falling in love is not enough to build a family; another wants a partner who is "also my friend and my teammate".

Work, money and gender roles

The Ukrainian woman looking for a provider is a cliché that Ukrainian surveys contradict. Attitudes in Ukraine moved fast: between 2018 and 2022, the share who think a woman should do all the housework fell from 43% to 2%, and the share who think the husband alone should earn the family's income from 60% to 21% (Info Sapiens survey, reported by KVINFO, 2022). In 2024, 46% of Ukrainian women said they were actively seeking career growth and leadership roles (Gradus and Biasless, 2024).

Abroad, ambition meets a wall. In Berlin, Iryna Kravchenko held a senior position at the Ukrainian arm of BNP Paribas before the war; she now helps other refugees with their paperwork, because without German work experience she cannot find a job at her level. Daria, who came to Berlin to dance, says the job centre considers her "good for little more than cleaning" (Le Monde, February 2024). Near Carcassonne, Yulia Solodka, a lawyer who ran a cheese-making business in Ukraine, is offered only cleaning or kitchen work, and Elena Bulavina, a former secretary at a regional TV channel, started as a dishwasher and is now "almost a waitress" (Le Monde, August 2026). Language is the first barrier; the slow recognition of Ukrainian qualifications is the second, and the idealised image of these women tends to hide it (The Conversation, 2024). Ella Libanova notes that most Ukrainian women in Poland now work officially, but often below their level.

Nearly half of the women in our 2026 survey had no stable job, and the conversations we read at Adorée are full of careers on hold: a social-psychology researcher whose degrees are not recognised, an English teacher of sixteen years, a former radio presenter, a graphic designer caring for an elderly woman day and night. None describes this as the life she wants. They talk about resuming studies, opening a small studio, starting an online yoga club, and about wanting to "work, earn some money and help the family".

Money is where cultures collide most visibly on a first date. In a 2025 Le Monde report on Ukrainians rebuilding their lives in France, the poet Anna Malihon describes "catastrophic" dates: men who let her pay half the bill, which she calls a nightmare, and men who announced in advance that they would never commit. Her friend Natalia, an English teacher from Kyiv now working in a nursery school, finds French people calm and polite, but sometimes "only words" (Le Monde, September 2025).

Our reading, from four years of listening to these women: they do not want to be kept, and they do not want to be the family's only safety net either. After years of uncertainty about return, work and housing, they look for a partner who brings more security and less anxiety. That sits between two European models: the traditional breadwinner, which they no longer expect, and the strict fifty-fifty of split bills and separate accounts, which many read as a lack of commitment. Men who offer a comfortable life as an argument are rarely well received; men who ask about her plans, and pay for the first dinner, are.

Distance and mobility

Many Ukrainian women already live in a second country and are ready to move to a third for the right person; the men who write to them are often less ready for distance than they are. Couples across borders are no longer rare. In Poland, Polish men married Ukrainian partners 2,013 times in 2024, against 782 in 2016; Ukrainians are now by far the first foreign spouses of Poles (PAP, reporting Statistics Poland, 2025; Science in Poland, 2018).

The legal horizon also pushes people to choose. In July 2026 the EU extended temporary protection by a year, to March 2028 (Ukrainian government, 2026); asked what they would do once it ends, 27% of refugees say they would seek residence elsewhere in Europe and 23% would return to Ukraine (CES, 2026).

At Adorée, seven conversations in ten link two different countries. About half of the women in our 2026 survey said they would move for the right person; among women members actually in conversation, it is three in four. In those exchanges, when distance comes up, the man raises it first seven times out of ten, and men more often stop at it: "a pity you live so far", "wouldn't it be better to find someone in Germany?", or, to a woman in Dnipro, "how do you imagine meeting? There is a war". Women more often answer that distance is not an obstacle "if two people really want to get to know each other", while setting limits (six months at most, for one).

Their mobility is a project, not an impulse. It comes with a child's school, ageing parents, a job, sometimes an attachment to Ukraine that does not compete with love: "one can love a man deeply and remain very attached to one's country", one woman wrote. When a man asked in his sixth message whether she was ready to move, another replied that such a decision "is made carefully, not spontaneously; there has to be a reason and a perspective". The exchanges that moved forward were concrete: a video call, then a date, an itinerary, a first meeting on neutral ground.

Once love takes root, return loses its pull. In Normandy, Irinya, who fled Ostrog with her two daughters and three suitcases, now has a permanent job and lives with William, her French partner. Asked by Le Monde whether she will go back, she answers that she has her boyfriend here, and asks whether she should really pack the three suitcases again (Le Monde, September 2025).

Myth or reality: why a Ukrainian woman?

The "perfect Ukrainian woman", devoted housewife and always grateful, is largely a European projection. Lesley Pruitt and Antje Missbach analysed 79 articles published by Der Spiegel and Die Zeit in the first year of the war. The dominant story cast Ukrainian women as welcome guests: familiar, European, educated, hard-working, grateful, protective mothers who share their hosts' values and will go home when the war ends. The researchers compare it to Mary Poppins, the nanny who arrives on the wind, is "practically perfect in every way" and flies off once the family is happier (Pruitt and Missbach, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 2023). Two details matter for anyone dating today. The press rarely mentioned women without children, as if a Ukrainian woman's story

could only be a mother's. And the script ended with a departure: a guest who stays, works, falls in love and builds a family here was not part of it. Such idealisation, the authors warn, sets expectations real women cannot meet and hides the difficulties they face.

The same projection shaped the darker press stories of 2022, when British media widely reported the case of a host who left his partner for the young refugee the couple had taken in, and wrote about "the darker side" of the Homes for Ukraine scheme (The Week, 2022). Such stories fed a suspicion that still follows Ukrainian women into their dating lives.

In Poland, the myth took two opposite forms. In surveys of 10,000 Poles run in 2022 and 2023, the researchers Krzysztof Krakowski and Nicholas Sambanis found that men described Ukrainian women as better wives with lower expectations, while young single Polish women, especially in small towns where women outnumber men, were the coldest towards refugees: they saw rivals on the marriage market (OKO.press, 2023). A disinformation campaign in the spring of 2022, likely amplified by Russian propaganda, played on that fear with stories of Ukrainian women "stealing husbands", while a Facebook group called "Polish man seeks a Ukrainian wife" drew some 17,000 members before it was blocked (OKO.press, 2022). Four years on, 63% of Poles would accept a Ukrainian son- or daughter-in-law, still a clear majority but a share that has been falling since 2023, as political rhetoric and disinformation fuel resentment against refugees, says Myroslava Keryk, director of the Ukrainian House in Warsaw (Le Monde, October 2026).

Women know this. In our survey, one feared men "with stupid stereotypes in their heads, that a Ukrainian woman is submissive and will serve them"; another worried that a man could keep a woman dependent because of her weaker passport. And in Adorée's conversations, one question keeps coming back, often in the first messages: why are you looking for a Ukrainian woman specifically?

The answers that work tell a personal story: a man who hosted a refugee family in 2022, a former Ukrainian partner, years of volunteering for Ukraine. The answers that fail compare: "I'm tired of European women", "women here no longer value family". A woman's usual reply is that she is looking for a man, not for a nationality. Men who arrive with the stereotype also tend to ask selection questions (height, weight, "do you want to work or stay at home?"). One exchange ended with the woman asking: "Am I at the police station, or in a job interview?"

Love in translation, love in wartime

Most of these couples write across two or three languages, with a translator in between, and against the background of a war one of them has lived through. Both shape what gets misunderstood.

Research on intercultural couples finds relationships that are "largely positive", but notes that things "get lost in translation" and that emotional authenticity suffers when partners do not share a language (Yurtaeva and Charura, 2025). We saw it happen; about one conversation in eight mentions a translator or a translation. A woman described her idea of a couple, including a weekly romantic evening; translated, he read a sexual schedule and answered on that. A translator changed

a man's first name; another man used the wrong woman's name and was sent back, with irony, to "Olga". Voice messages in French went unheard by a woman who reads only Ukrainian. The fix is simple: agree on a language, write rather than record, use the platform's translation, and check the important sentences.

The war is less present than one might expect: it comes up in about one in four of the conversations that go beyond ten messages. Women decide when it is discussed; six times out of ten, they are the ones who raise it. The Ukrainian psychotherapist Kateryna Leshchenko, who has worked with Ukrainians abroad since 2022, describes a "refugee syndrome" in which uncertainty about return weighs on every decision, and sees language and financial security as what helps most (Vilni Media, 2024). In the conversations, a drone that hit a home in Kyiv, a husband lost, a daughter who stayed behind, come up in one sentence; then the woman moves on. When one asked not to talk about the war any more, the man apologised and changed the subject, and the conversation lasted for weeks.

Two things go badly. Insistence, or assumptions about her state ("seeing you on this app means you had a rough time"). And neutrality: a man who called the war bad for both sides was answered, "So… you are neutral". For a Ukrainian woman, the question is often a test of values, not of geopolitics. Solidarity, on the other hand, opens doors: men who hosted a family or volunteered in 2022 are thanked, and trusted.

Children and life calendars

Ukrainian and Western European women grew up with different life calendars, and the children question needs to be asked early and plainly. Before the war, Ukrainian women had their first child at 26 on average (2019), three to six years earlier than women in France, Germany, Spain or Italy today, where the average now runs from 29 to 32 (UNECE statistical database). Motherhood in Ukraine was long "nearly universal": only about 4% of women born in the early 1960s had no child by their early thirties, although the share rose to 13% for those born a decade later (Perelli-Harris, Demographic Research, 2008).

The war has made the question heavier. Ukraine's population is shrinking fast, and Ella Libanova sums up the demographic outlook bluntly: "there are people to die, but no one to give birth" (LB.ua, 2026). For many women abroad, a new partner also means a decision about a child of their own, or about raising the children they already have in a new family.

In Adorée's member profiles, the wish for a child of one's own falls steeply after 43, and a woman of 40 without children is more often hoping for one than closed to it. On the men's side, the common belief that men stay open to fatherhood longer does not hold: many men over 50 consider that chapter closed. Yet children come up in only about one conversation in five. The classic pairing of a 50-year-old man with a 40-year-old woman therefore deserves an early, honest conversation, using words that leave no room for doubt: "a child of our own" is not the same as "your children".

What brings us together

Differences make the headlines, but what we mostly read is warmth. Research is reassuring on this point: a meta-analysis cited by Yurtaeva and Charura (2025) found that partners in intercultural couples are as satisfied as those in same-culture couples, and their own interviews show couples drawing strength from curiosity, flexibility and the habit of talking things through, until they build a "third culture" of their own.

In Adorée's conversations, couples bond over ordinary things: mountain walks and the sea, Christmas markets, a novel both are reading, gluten-free recipes compared between Rome and a village near Kyiv. Places create instant closeness: "Paris and Lyon remind me of my Odesa, probably because the French built it", one woman wrote. Cultural differences are told with humour: a woman in Spain noticed that Ukrainians never used to linger at the table after a meal, and that her son now tells her he is Spanish when she asks him to wear a coat.

The press tells similar stories. On the Arcachon Bay, the oyster farmer Nicolas Courbin met Viktoria at a poker tournament; for several years they lived between Gironde and western Ukraine, where she was based, and had two children before settling in France. When the war began, she took in Ukrainian women who had fled; several still work in the couple's oyster hut (Le Monde, August 2026). Near Carcassonne, Jean-François Carrasco had helped drive a village aid convoy to the Polish border in April 2022, which brought 42 Ukrainians back. Months later, standing in for a missing driver, he recognised one of them, Olena Khairulina, as she boarded his bus. They exchanged numbers; "but he's the one who called me", she teases. They now live together in a civil partnership (Le Monde, August 2026).

Many of these couples also share a story of help. Since 2022, many European households opened their homes to Ukrainian families; EU4UA alone connected some 40,000 women and children with hosts, and several of the men we read hosted families themselves. Women meet them as people who already know what they went through.

Women bring a fresh view of Europe too, often grateful and lucid at once. One in the Czech Republic called her years there "transformative" and thanked the country for sheltering her family; another, in Ireland, found local men surprisingly passive about dating. What four years alongside these women have taught us at Adorée is that cultural differences rarely end a conversation; haste, silence and stereotypes do.

> Cultural differences rarely end a conversation. Haste, silence and stereotypes do.

Practical guide: seven exercises

Each exercise answers a misstep we saw again and again in real conversations. Most take ten minutes.

1. **Answer "why her?" before she asks.** Write three sentences on why you are looking for a partner from Ukraine and read them as she would. Keep what speaks about her and your own story with her country; delete anything that compares her to other women.
2. **Swap the questionnaire for a conversation.** For every question you ask, share something of the same depth. Height, weight, housework and sex are not first-week topics.
3. **Choose the language together.** Ask which language she prefers, use the platform's translation, write rather than record until you know she understands, and check one important sentence by asking how she read it.
4. **Let her open and close the war.** Acknowledge it in a sentence or two and follow her lead. If she changes the subject, do not come back to it. If she asks your view, answer as a person, not as a commentator.
5. **Treat distance as a project.** Before any talk of moving, agree on the next concrete step with a date: a video call, then a first meeting on neutral ground. Ask what ties her to where she lives, and say what ties you.
6. **Have the children conversation early.** Say whether you want a child of your own and whether you welcome hers, in words that leave no room for "maybe".
7. **Ask about her work as a future, not a past.** "What would you like to do here?" opens more than "what did you do in Ukraine?". Then listen to the plan.

For women, the same list reads the other way: ask early about his past relationships and his children, say what security means to you in concrete terms, and say how long a distance you can hold.

Method and limits

This study-guide combines published research, press reporting and three Adorée sources: a 2026 survey of 217 women from the EU4UA community, the anonymous profiles of Adorée members, and a reading of about 170 pseudonymised conversations between members, completed by a keyword count across the 208 conversations in which both partners wrote. Adorée's sources describe women and men who chose a selective introduction service; they are indicative, not representative of all Ukrainian women or European men. No member is named, quotations are short and stripped of identifying details, and members who objected to the analysis of their messages were excluded. External sources were read in full unless stated; experts quoted work in Ukraine, Poland, Western Europe, Australia or the United States. This edition has not yet been reviewed by an independent academic.

Studies, data and press

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About Adorée

Adorée is a selective introduction club for Ukrainian women settled in Europe and European men looking for a serious relationship. It grew out of EU4UA, the humanitarian platform that connected some 40,000 Ukrainian women and children with host families from 2022. Profiles are never public, every member is reviewed by a person, and membership is free for women.

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