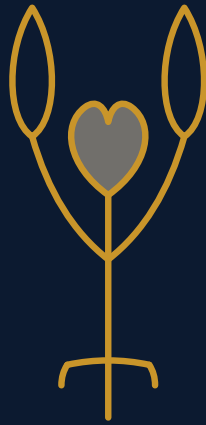


A STUDY BY ADORÉE · 2026



# Restart.

Challenges and quiet wisdom for Ukrainian women *building a new life in Europe.*

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A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

# Why this study exists.

In late February 2022, in the very first days of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, I founded EU4UA.org. What began as a small platform connecting European hosts with Ukrainian women in need of safety grew into something larger: a network through which more than 40,000 women rebuilt the first chapter of their European life.

Four years later, something has shifted. The women I spoke to in 2022 were focused on one thing: surviving. The women I speak to today are focused on something else entirely: living. Finding work that uses their real skills. Mastering a third or fourth language. Raising children whose accent is no longer the same as their own. And, very quietly, beginning to ask themselves whether they are allowed to feel fully alive again. Whether they are allowed to love again.

This document is built from two sources. The first is the institutional literature on Ukrainian displacement — UNHCR, OECD, EU agencies, and peer-reviewed studies published between 2022 and 2026. The second is closer to home: a survey of 215 Ukrainian women established across 18 European countries, which I conducted with the EU4UA community in spring 2026.

I am not a sociologist, and I am not a therapist. What I have is a question I keep hearing, and a pattern in the answers. This study is my attempt to share what I have learned, organized in seven chapters — one for each major terrain a Ukrainian woman in Europe is asked to cross at once.

I hope it helps. If it does not, set it aside. You owe no one your attention, least of all me.

— Arnaud DEVIGNE, May 2026

SETTING THE SCENE

# The quiet revolution *in numbers.*

Numbers without faces are easy to forget; faces without numbers are easy to underestimate. We need both.

## 5.9M

Ukrainian refugees recorded globally as of early 2026 — the largest displacement crisis in Europe since the Second World War.

## 76%

Of refugees fleeing the war are women and children. The gendered nature of this displacement is unprecedented in modern European history.

## 90%

Of Ukrainian refugees globally are now hosted in European countries. Germany and Poland alone host over 2.2 million.

## 57%

Of Ukrainian refugees aged 20–64 in Europe are employed — still 22 percentage points below host-country nationals.

## 40%+

Of surveyed Ukrainian refugees hold a Master's degree or higher — well above the EU average for migrant populations.

## 60%

Of employed refugees report working below their actual skill level. Underemployment is the silent cost of displacement.

## OUR OWN SURVEY

# What 215 women told us.

Between March and May 2026, 215 Ukrainian women across 18 European countries answered a long-form survey distributed through the EU4UA community.

## WHERE THEY LIVE

The five largest groups are in Germany (18%), France (13%), Poland (10%), the United Kingdom (9%), and Spain (7%) — but 18 European countries are represented.

## CHILDREN

54% have at least one child in their care. 20% have two or more. Solo parenting, often across borders, is the dominant family structure.

## DATING APPS

87% are not actively using dating apps. Among those who tried, 32% say the main disappointment was that men were not looking for a serious relationship. Average satisfaction: 2.8 out of 5.

## WORK

36% hold a stable job. 29% are still looking. 16% work on a temporary basis. Together, more than four in five respondents are engaged with the labour market, but stability remains uneven.

## PERSONAL SITUATION

48% are in a relationship. 52% are not. Among those not in a relationship, only 25% are actively looking — the rest are taking time, healing, or unsure.

## WHAT MATTERS IN A PARTNER

Stability and security came first (68%), followed by respect and gentleness (54%), and commitment (48%). Cultural openness and shared family projects came lower — but were never absent.

## CHAPTER 01

# Where you are.

Geography is no longer a question of distance. It is a question of which life you are willing to build now, with the knowledge that the version you imagined three years ago is no longer the only one available to you.

According to UNHCR, the largest Ukrainian refugee communities in 2026 are in Germany (~1.2M), Poland (~1M), the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Italy. The country you fled to may not be the country where you belong long-term — and that is allowed to be a real question.

A 2024 UNHCR household survey found that 65% still expressed a desire to return to Ukraine one day. But this number has been falling steadily. In our own 2026 survey, 37% said clearly they want to stay where they are. Each year, a quiet portion of the "I will return" becomes "I will visit, but my life is here now." That sentence is not a betrayal. It is an acknowledgment.

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## OBSERVATION ONE

Your host country was a choice made under pressure

Most women chose their host country based on three factors: which border was closest, where they had a contact, and which language they had some access to. These are reasons of urgency, not of long-term fit. Re-asking the question now, calmly, is not disloyalty to the place that received you. It is maturity.

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## OBSERVATION TWO

Western and Eastern Europe are two different experiences

In Poland, Czechia, and Slovakia, cultural and linguistic distance is smaller, employment comes faster, but professional ceilings are lower. In Germany, France, the UK, and the Nordics, cultural distance is greater, but ceilings are higher. Knowing which trade-off fits your phase of life matters more than knowing which is better.

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## OBSERVATION THREE

Mobility within the EU is your right

Temporary Protection status, extended through 2027, gives you the legal right to move between EU member states. In our survey, 63% of women said they would consider moving for love. Most never test this right because the cost of moving feels enormous. But the cost of staying in the wrong place for five years is greater.

# Work, and the long climb back.

You arrived with credentials, experience, and a profession. You are now being asked to prove all of it from scratch, in a language you did not choose, under categories that do not exist where you come from. Your impatience is not a flaw.

The UNHCR analysis published in January 2026, based on more than 6,000 survey observations, paints a clear picture. Roughly 57% of Ukrainian refugees aged 20–64 are employed. But nearly 60% of those employed report working below their skill level — twice as likely as host-country nationals to be in low-skilled jobs.

Our own survey echoes this. 36% have a stable job, but 16% still work on temporary contracts and 29% are actively looking. The gap between having a job and doing the work one was trained for is the dominant practical project of the next three to five years.

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## TIP ONE

Get your credentials formally recognized

The European Commission issued specific recommendations in 2022 for fast-track recognition of Ukrainian qualifications. The EU Skills Profile Tool for Third-Country Nationals is free and available in most member states. The difference between a recognized credential and no formal recognition can be five years of underemployment.

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## TIP TWO

Accept the first underemployed job — with a written exit horizon

The mistake is not accepting a below-level job — it is staying without a written, dated plan to leave. Write one line: "I will give this 12 months, and by [date] I will have applied to [X] roles at my real level." A timeline turns underemployment from a defeat into a runway.

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## TIP THREE

Sectors with the smallest credentials friction

Four sectors absorb Ukrainian professional skills with low friction everywhere: IT and tech, healthcare in shortage countries, education for Ukrainian children, and remote work for international companies where English replaces the host language.

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## TIP FOUR

Self-employment is underused and often the fastest path

EU Temporary Protection grants the right to self-employment. For women with professional skills — consulting, design, translation, accounting, coaching, therapy for Ukrainian clients — launching as a freelancer is often faster than breaking into a corporate hierarchy. It is also more flexible for those with young children.

# Language, the longest bridge.

The host country language is not a hill to climb. It is a bridge that takes a decade to fully cross — and most of that decade is invisible from the outside. Be gentle with yourself, and serious with your method.

In a 2022 IOM survey in Germany, 60% identified language as their single biggest challenge — above housing, employment, and paperwork. According to the EUAA, Ukrainian refugees most commonly speak Ukrainian (98%), Russian (88%), and English (50%), with the host language lagging far behind.

Three years into displacement, most women describe their host-country language as functional but tiring. Functional means shopping, bureaucracy, small talk at work. Tiring means the language still uses a part of the brain that has not yet built automaticity. That tiredness is the real reason social life shrinks — not lack of opportunity.

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## OBSERVATION ONE

You will plateau at year two, and that is not failure

Almost everyone hits a plateau roughly 18 to 24 months into intensive language learning. Vocabulary stops doubling weekly. Grammar stops surprising you. What is actually happening is that the brain is consolidating — building automaticity beneath what you can consciously measure.

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## OBSERVATION TWO

Speaking is a different skill from reading or listening

The skill that determines social and professional integration is conversation — fluency under social pressure, with humour, with the ability to interrupt politely. This skill comes only from speaking, badly and often. Find one conversation partner per week, paid or free, and protect that hour like a medical appointment.

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## OBSERVATION THREE

English is a back door, especially in Western Europe

Half of Ukrainian refugees speak English. In Germany, the Netherlands, the Nordics, and increasingly France, a large portion of professional life happens in English. If your host country language is taking longer than expected, investing in fluent professional English in parallel can open doors three years faster.

## CHAPTER 04

# The weight **no one** names.

Loneliness among refugees is not a personal failing. It is a structural feature of displacement, recognized in dozens of peer-reviewed studies as a major driver of mental and physical health outcomes. Naming it is the first act of recovery.

A 2025 study in *Frontiers in Public Health* found significantly higher loneliness scores and fragmented social networks among Ukrainian refugees. A separate Polish study found that 77% of Ukrainian refugees reported loneliness, even when employed. Female refugees report higher rates of anxiety and depression than their male counterparts in the same population.

The medical literature is consistent: loneliness, when sustained, increases cardiovascular risk, impairs cognitive function, and is a predictor of premature mortality on a population level. Treating loneliness as a health concern, not a character flaw, is one of the most important reframings a refugee woman can make for herself.

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## WAY ONE

The schoolyard is an underrated social infrastructure

For refugee mothers with school-age children, the school environment is where most initial friendships form. Picking up children, parent meetings, school events — these are the lowest-effort, highest-return social opportunities available. Show up consistently for six months and the network builds itself.

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## WAY TWO

One Ukrainian friend, one local friend — the asymmetric rule

The rule that works is asymmetric: one Ukrainian friend you can fall apart with in your language, one local friend you can rebuild with in theirs. Two relationships, not twenty.

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## WAY THREE

Beware the loneliness that wears the mask of busyness

The most isolated women were rarely the unemployed ones. They were the ones who had filled every hour — work, children, language class, errands — and left no protected space for relationships to deepen. Busyness is the most socially acceptable form of avoidance. If you cannot remember the last conversation that mattered, that is the signal — not the symptom.

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## WAY FOUR

Professional support is not a luxury, it is infrastructure

Most EU countries offer free or subsidized mental health support for refugees, and Ukrainian-speaking therapists are increasingly available remotely. Using this is not weakness; refusing it under sustained distress is.

## CHAPTER 05

# When you carry two lives.

The literature describes it as "enforced single motherhood". The women I spoke to described it more simply: "I am two parents now, and my husband is still my husband, but he is two thousand kilometres away." Both descriptions are true.

Only 23% of Ukrainian women refugees in Germany arrived with their partner. 35% arrived without their partner (who remained in Ukraine, often under mobilization restrictions), and 42% arrived as single women. In our own survey, 54% of respondents have at least one child in their care.

A 2024 Czech study found a 74% rate of separation or divorce in original families — capturing not only formal separations but the slow erosion of partnerships across borders. Three years of displacement is long enough for two lives to grow in different directions.

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## UNSPOKEN ONE

Your child's integration may outpace yours, and that is good

Many mothers told me a version of: "my daughter speaks German better than me now, and she has friends I cannot understand." It can feel like losing a child. It is, in fact, the success of the entire reason you left. Sit with the discomfort and trust the outcome.

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## UNSPOKEN TWO

You are allowed to ask honestly about your marriage

Marriages built before 2022 were built for one set of circumstances. The women who were honest with me said they had each independently asked themselves whether the relationship they had then is the relationship they would build now, knowing what they know. Both answers — yes and no — are allowed.

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## UNSPOKEN THREE

Build a small village before you need it

The single most important protective factor for refugee single mothers is the existence of a small, reliable network of three to five people who can pick up your child, watch your home for two days, or sit with you on a difficult evening. Most women realize they need this network only in a crisis. Build it now, slowly, before the crisis arrives.

## CHAPTER 06

# Becoming, *without unbecoming.*

You can become a woman who lives in Berlin or Lisbon or Tallinn without ceasing to be a woman from Lviv or Odesa or Kharkiv. The two are not in competition. They are layered. The work is to integrate them, not to choose between them.

A 2025 paper in Wiley's Global Networks journal identified internal strengths and external support systems as the twin predictors of resilience. Internal strengths included connection to faith, artistic expression, contact with nature, and a continued sense of personal future. The pattern was clear: women who fared best did not abandon their Ukrainian identity to integrate. They layered it.

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## PRACTICE ONE

Keep one Ukrainian ritual untouchable

Every woman I spoke to who described herself as doing well had at least one Ukrainian practice she protected from translation. Sometimes it was Christmas Eve dinner. Sometimes a Sunday phone call with her mother. Sometimes reading aloud to her child in Ukrainian for 15 minutes a day. The specific practice matters less than the act of refusing to let it dissolve.

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## PRACTICE TWO

Choose what to translate, not what to lose

There is a difference between adapting — choosing what to translate — and assimilating — letting parts of yourself dissolve because translating them is too tiring. The first is yours. The second is theft, performed against you by exhaustion. Notice the difference each week.

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## PRACTICE THREE

The Ukraine you carry is not the Ukraine you left

The Ukraine you left existed in February 2022. The Ukraine that exists today is different — more battle-scarred, more politically determined, more European in orientation. The Ukraine you carry inside yourself is allowed to evolve too. Updating it is not betrayal. Refusing to update it is what makes you a museum of yourself, instead of a person.

## CHAPTER 07

# Building a personal life, again.

The hardest chapter to write, because it is the one most rarely spoken of publicly. Yet in survey after survey, it surfaced — often near the end, often quietly, often with a small confession that the question matters more than it was supposed to.

Of the 215 women in our survey, 52% are not in a committed relationship. Of those, only 25% say they are actively looking. The others are taking time, healing, or unsure. The question of personal future has not gone away just because the war has not gone away.

87% are not actively using dating apps. Among those who tried: men were not looking for serious relationships (32%), profiles did not match reality (19%), the experience felt transactional and degrading (18%). Average satisfaction: 2.8 out of 5.

You are allowed to want a relationship again. You are allowed to want to be desired again. You are allowed to want a partner who shares your daily life, who understands what you have crossed, and who treats your past not as luggage but as substance.

## PRINCIPLE ONE

Apps are mostly the wrong tool for what you actually want

The dominant description from women who tried mainstream dating apps was "draining", "transactional", or "not for women like me". The apps were designed for a different demographic, a different stage of life. Your fatigue with them is not a personal flaw. It is a fit problem.

## PRINCIPLE TWO

Discretion is no longer optional, it is the standard

When asked what would most appeal in a new kind of service, "discreet and confidential" came second (45%), just behind "men pre-selected and serious" (50%). Women with children and a public professional life cannot afford the exposure that dating apps require.

## PRINCIPLE THREE

You do not have to be sure to start exploring

The biggest barrier in our survey was not "I do not want a relationship". It was "I am not sure yet, so I am doing nothing". But there is a middle path between doing nothing and fully committing to dating — the path of building, slowly and privately, the conditions under which a future relationship could happen. Most women never give themselves permission to walk that path. You can.

## YOU TOLD US

# You told us what you **wanted**.

Across 215 long-form answers, a pattern came through clearly. Not a marketing pattern. A human one.

**68%** said stability and security mattered most in a partner.

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**54%** said respect and gentleness.

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**48%** said commitment and seriousness.

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**87%** are not using dating apps.

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**50%** want men pre-selected and serious.

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**45%** want a service that is discreet and confidential.

We listened. Then we built something that answered each of these points, one by one. It is called Adorée.

AN INVITATION

# If any of this echoed.

My name is Arnaud Devigne. I am the same person who founded EU4UA.org in the first days of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and helped your community find safety in Europe. I am not behind a logo or a corporate name. My face, my voice, my email are all public — because in our survey, the most frequent concern raised about a service like this was, simply: **who is behind it?**

Adorée is a private, human-curated matchmaking platform that exists for one reason: to give the women in this study a serious, dignified, completely confidential option for the seventh chapter of their European life. It is always free for women. Every man is reviewed by hand before being accepted. No profile is ever public. There is no swiping, no scrolling, no algorithm optimized for distraction.

You do not have to be ready. You do not have to be sure. You do not even have to create a profile today. Look, take your time, decide nothing — or decide when you are ready. The door does not close.

CLUBADOREE.COM

Take your time.

The door is open **whenever you are ready.**

Arnaud Devigne

arnaud@eu4ua.org · Founder, EU4UA.org & Adorée

## REFERENCES

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Every numerical claim in this document is drawn from one of the following sources. A note on the EU4UA / Adorée survey: 215 respondents, of whom 94% live across 18 European countries. The survey is not statistically representative of the full Ukrainian refugee population in Europe — it is a self-selected sample of women engaged with the EU4UA community. Percentages quoted in this document describe the survey sample only.

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