

INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS INTEGRATION IN UKRAINE



Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) Integration in Ukraine

With over 4.6 million registered IDPs, Ukraine's approach provides valuable insights into rapid crisis response, community integration, and participatory governance. Innovative local initiatives offer lessons in empowering displaced people to participate in local decision-making and strengthen societal resilience. Studying these approaches and practices can help in shaping global strategies for managing displacement and fostering social cohesion in conflict-affected regions.

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List of acronyms

Hromada - the term “hromada” refers to the basic administrative unit of local self-governance in Ukraine. A hromada typically encompasses one or several settlements, such as villages, towns, or small cities, along with their surrounding territories. It is responsible for managing local resources, delivering public services, and implementing local policies under the principles of decentralisation. In the material we also use terms “community” as synonyms.

Local Authority - “local authority” in this paper is synonymous with a “body of local self-government”, which denotes the administrative bodies responsible for governance at the local level in Ukraine. These authorities operate within the framework of decentralisation and are tasked with decision-making, resource management, and ensuring the delivery of public services to the local population.

Oblast - Ukrainian Region as Administrative Level • **Rayon** - Ukrainian District as Administrative Level
LSG - Local Self-Government Bodies • **RMA** - Regional Military Administration
DMA - District Military Administration • **IDPs** - Internally Displaced Persons • **CSO** - Civil Society Organisation



Building of future Vcentri Hub, that will be opening in the Dniprovskyi district of Kyiv. **Photo:** Borys Korpusenko.

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Introduction

Following Russia's invasion of Crimea and parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblast in 2014, 275,695 Ukrainians were forced to flee their homes and settle in other parts of the country. Since February 24, 2022, the number of internally displaced persons has increased rapidly. According to the **Ministry of Social Policy**, as of October 22, 2024, there were more than **4.6 million** registered IDPs in Ukraine¹.

The first wave of internal displacement in 2014 led to the establishment of a regulatory framework, which enabled the state to register IDPs and develop policies for assistance and support. However, at the local level, there were few tools for support to IDPs or for their participation in the life of the community where they moved to. The full-scale invasion exacerbated these problems, as the number of IDPs increased tenfold. In response, Hromadas have introduced innovative practices to operationalize the integration of displaced persons.

This toolbox is designed to share practical cases and lessons learned from Ukrainian Hromadas in addressing IDP integration. It is a practical resource for local governments, civil society organizations, and international partners looking to understand and implement effective strategies for integrating displaced populations into host communities – particularly during armed conflicts.

The toolbox presents four scalable initiatives that all provide support while recognizing the agency and contribution of IDPs to their new communities:

1. **IDP Councils** as an institutionalized forum to link displaced communities and government institutions, ensuring that IDP voices are heard in matters that regard them.
2. **VcentriHUBs** as representations of open spaces for democratic participation and civil society events.
3. **Novovolynsk's support package** is an example of how coordinated action between local government, volunteers and businesses can create a comprehensive adaptation to IDP influx.
4. **Victory Gardens in Poltava** shows how a climate adaptation experiment transitioned to an IDP integration initiative, exemplifying how integration can leverage preexisting programs for dual benefits to the community.

All these provide **lessons in participatory democracy**². As such, this guide provides practical ideas for shaping integration policies through participatory governance. Ultimately, it encourages other local governments facing an influx of displaced persons to adapt these initiatives to their own needs.

1 IDP Councils: a universal instrument of participatory democracy in Ukraine

IDP Councils were established to support the integration and rights of internally displaced persons following Russia's invasions. Having transitioned from voluntary, CSO-led structures to a legally required element of Ukraine's governance system, they were formalized as part of the 2025 IDP State Strategy and now operate at local, regional, and national levels. The councils provide platforms for IDPs to participate in decision-making and community life, addressing key issues like housing, employment, and legal assistance while fostering social cohesion. As of December 2024, over 800 IDP Councils have been established across Ukraine, aiding millions of displaced persons.

Status: Active

Year started: 2019

Website: <https://yednanniazaradyii.org.ua/en/vpo/> →

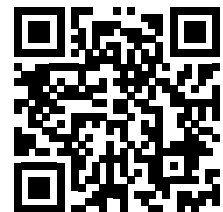
Level of Government: Local Self-Government,
Regional Military Administration, District Military Administration

Main actor: Charity Foundation Stabilization Support Services

Goal: Solving displacement crisis and integration of IDS into
local communities, developing local democracy

Contact: Olga Ivanova

More: <https://yednanniazaradyii.org.ua/en/about-project/>



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#Dialogue

Creation of the IDP Councils



Meeting of the Poltava Regional Military Administration and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) with representatives of the IDP Council.
Source: “Poltavshchyna” online media outlet.

The concept of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Councils in Ukraine emerged in response to the humanitarian challenges caused by the Russian annexation of Crimea and the onset of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in 2014. In 2019, the non-governmental organization Stabilization Support Services³ introduced the concept of IDP Councils inspired by similar models in Colombia.

IDP Councils would focus on addressing the primary challenges faced by displaced persons. These included the restoration of lost documents, access to state assistance, integration into new communities, psychological support, housing, and employment opportunities. By providing a formalized space for IDPs to engage with local authorities,

the councils play a crucial role in bridging the gap between displaced persons and government institutions.

The first steps toward institutionalizing these councils were taken through the Cohesion through Youth-Led Action (CYLA) program, under which two pilot IDP Councils were established. The initiative gained traction, and under the United Voices in Action (VIA) program, IREX expanded the model to create of 23 additional IDP Councils in VIA target communities across Ukraine. This scaling-up process solidified the IDP Council framework as a structured mechanism for IDPs to participate in decision-making and advocate for their needs at the local level.

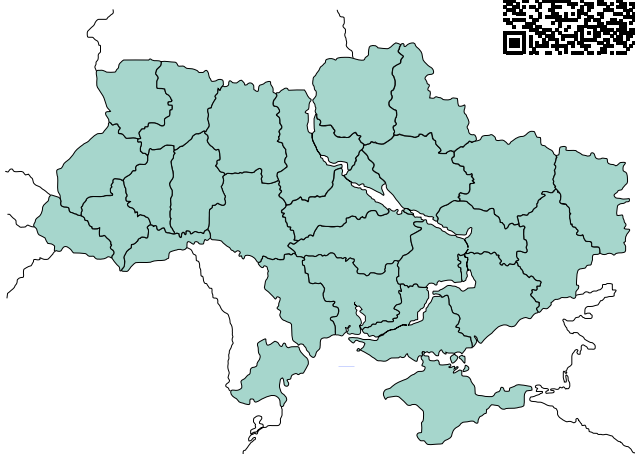
As the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 displaced millions more people, it became increasingly evident that IDPs themselves needed to be directly involved in decision-making processes concerning their welfare all over the country. Specialized organizations working with displaced populations recognized the urgency of empowering IDPs to actively participate in problem-solving at the community level. As a result, IDPs began advocating for participatory democracy tools and accountability mechanisms to ensure their voices were heard and that they were seen **not as a problem, but as active contributors to their host communities**.

The process of establishing new IDP Councils gained momentum, leading to a more widespread and structured approach to integrating displaced persons into local governance and decision-making processes. Ukraine's government officially institutionalized IDP Councils at the national level by including them as a priority in the 2025 IDP State Strategy and passing a resolution about IDP Councils through the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine in August 2023. The new resolution regulates the activities of IDP Councils, defining their composition and – most importantly – recommending state administrations and local self-government bodies create IDP Councils to support their integration.

MAP OF UKRAINE

804 IDP COUNCILS

INTERACTIVE MAP



Current status

As of December 2024, there are over 804 IDP Councils on three levels: 683 on Hromada, 98 on Rayon, and 23 on Oblast levels. An interactive map makes it easy to find the right IDP Council.

Only in 2024, 102 IDP Councils were established in 21 oblasts of Ukraine. Several large international organizations, such as UNHCR or IREX, work with IDP Councils. IDP Councils now serve as an essential link between displaced communities and government institutions, ensuring that IDP voices are heard in policy development and crisis response strategies.

IDPs Councils as part of Ukraine's legal framework

IDP Councils have evolved from civil society-driven initiatives into legally mandated advisory bodies, now formally integrated into the government structure under Ukraine's governance framework.

Under the current legal framework, IDP Councils operate as advisory bodies at various levels of governance, including the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Kyiv City, Sevastopol City, and District and Region Military Administrations. Their establishment follows a specific government decree, which defines their role in implementing regional policies aimed at ensuring and protecting the rights and interests of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Beyond advocacy, these councils support local governance, facilitate the adaptation and integration of IDPs, and contribute to the development of community-based solutions.

The Model Regulation on IDP Councils, approved in August 2023, serves as the primary regulatory document governing their operations. It outlines their composition, functions, and responsibilities, while also recommending that District and Region Military Administrations and Local Self-Governments establish IDP Councils as a mechanism for integrating IDPs into host communities.

This legal recognition marks a significant shift, ensuring that IDPs are not only beneficiaries of policies but also active participants in shaping them.

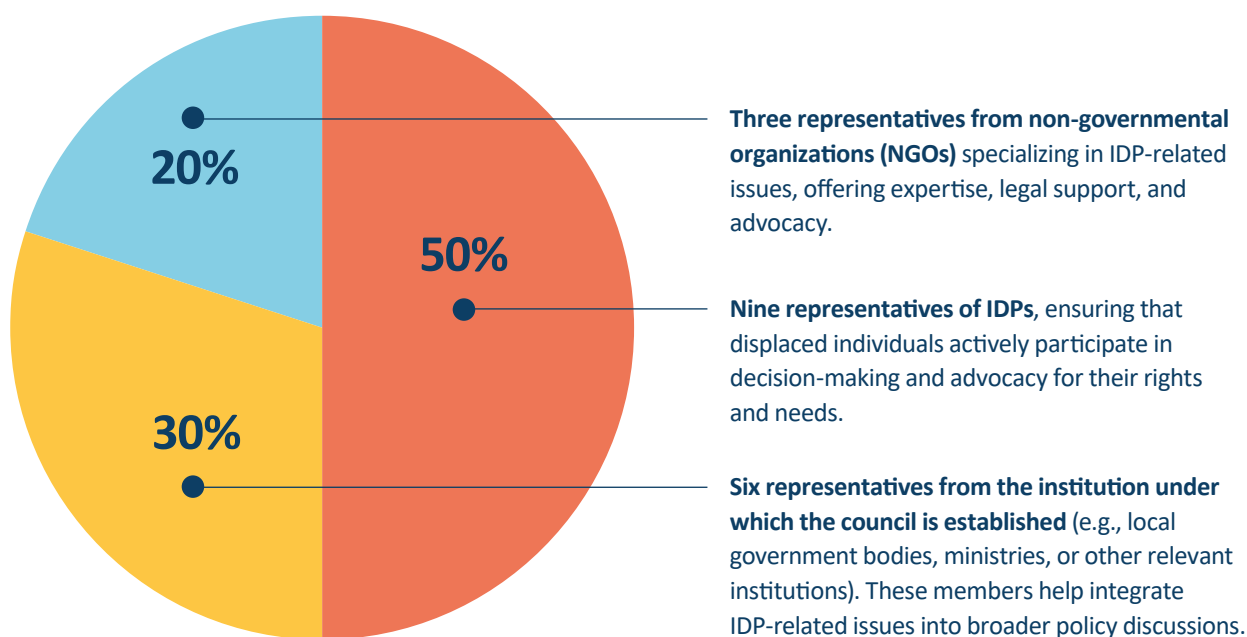
In addition to the Model Regulation, IDP Councils align with Ukraine's broader strategic framework on internal displacement. Key policy documents include the State Policy Strategy on Internal Displacement until 2025 and the Operational Action Plan for its Implementation (2023–2025). These frameworks emphasize the importance of institutionalizing participatory governance mechanisms for IDPs and strengthening their role in local decision-making. Indeed, the legislative advancements reflect a broader institutional commitment to ensuring IDP representation in decision-making processes.



The regional forum "Integration of Displaced Persons in Volynska Oblast. **Source:** United Voices in Action project.

Composition and decision-making structures of IDP Councils

Within this legislation, IDP Councils are advisory bodies designed to represent the interests of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Each council can have up to 30 members, comprising the following as a minimum:



In some cases, additional members may be included based on local needs, including representatives from international organizations, legal experts, and social service providers. The primary mode of operation for IDP Councils is through regular sittings, which follow an approved work plan. Meetings typically include policy discussions, the review of IDP-related cases, and coordination with local and national authorities.

Key decision-making mechanisms include:

- To pass a resolution, more than half of the Council members present at the meeting must vote in favor.
- Sessions follow a predetermined agenda, often including updates on legal frameworks, social assistance programs, housing policies, and employment opportunities for IDPs.
- Councils often form special committees or temporary working groups to address specific issues such as housing, legal aid, or community integration.

It is currently a priority to clearly define the composition of IDP Councils, expand the eligibility criteria for candidates, and establish clear guidelines on early termination of council members' powers to ensure transparency and accountability.

Examples of issues addressed



Housing and accommodation: Many councils work with local authorities to identify available housing for IDPs and propose legislative improvements to enhance housing support programs.



Employment and economic integration: Councils advocate for job placement initiatives, vocational training programs, and access to entrepreneurship support for IDPs.



Legal aid and documentation: Ensuring that displaced persons have proper documentation to access social benefits, pensions, and medical services.



Psychosocial support and healthcare: Some councils initiate mental health programs, community support groups, and medical assistance initiatives for displaced individuals.



Education and children's welfare: Addressing challenges related to school enrollment, access to higher education, and adaptation programs for displaced children.



Participation in local governance: Encouraging IDPs to engage in municipal decision-making beyond the IDP Councils and participatory budgeting to strengthen their civic inclusion.

What makes the IDP councils innovative?

The IDP Councils initiative addresses **a critical gap in local governance by giving internally displaced persons a direct role in community decision-making.**

Historically, communities were unaware of the specific needs and opportunities of IDPs and often made inefficient decisions, leading to wasted resources and unmet needs. IDP Councils is pioneering a participatory democracy approach, fostering accountability for the government to provide adequate support, while ensuring that IDPs are not merely seen as beneficiaries but active contributors to collective problem-solving.

The government's commitment to institutionalizing this participatory model marks a shift from top-down assistance to a more inclusive, bottom-up approach, ensuring IDPs have a voice in policy development and implementation. **The scalability and success** of this framework is evident from the over 800 IDP Councils established across Ukraine.

2 VCENTRI HUBS in Kyiv: physical spaces for civil society and IDP initiatives

A VcentriHub is a free, open public space for all civil society representatives, including organizations run by and for internally displaced persons (IDPs), to discuss new ideas for building and transforming the city. It is adapted for people with disabilities and divided into zones that can be transformed depending on visitors' needs. While a third of the events target IDPs' needs and focus on IDPs' CSOs, all of Kyiv's residents can join the development and implementation of social, cultural, and educational activities. Similar public spaces are expected to appear in every district of Kyiv.

Status: Active

The year started: 2023

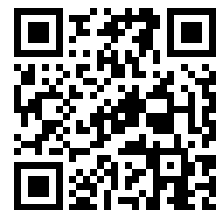
Website: <https://vcentri.com/vcentri-hub/>



Level of Government: Local Self-Government

Main actor: Municipal Institution "Communication Center" of Kyiv City Council

Contact: Iryna Kolechkina (Deputy Director of the Communication Center)



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The HUBs as democratic open spaces



“City Workshop” by Ukrainian Red Cross with assistance of VcentriHub. **Photo:** Borys Korpusenko.

VcentriHUB is a network of free, open public spaces designed to support civic engagement, facilitate dialogue between local authorities and communities, and integrate internally displaced persons (IDPs) into hromada life.

Currently operating in four districts of Kyiv—*Shevchenkivskyi*, *Obolonskyi*, *Solomyansky* and *Holosiivskyi*—these hubs have become a vital part of the city’s participatory infrastructure, fostering cooperation between civil society, businesses, and government institutions. Many IDP-focused CSOs previously lacked permanent meeting spaces or infrastructure to conduct training, advocacy efforts, or legal aid sessions.

DISTRICTS OF KYIV



Built within municipal public spaces, VcentriHUBs provide a direct link to local governance, enabling quicker responses to emerging initiatives and public concerns. As venues for urban policy discussions, public consultations, training programs, and cultural events, they enable the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders, including IDPs, in decision-making processes.

Another gap filled by the VcentriHUBs is providing spaces for specialized training and resources. Through targeted programs on digital literacy, employment, psychological support, and legal assistance, IDPs with other citizens receive the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate their new environment, access essential services, and participate in economic life. The hubs also serve as a meeting point for IDPs and local residents, to strengthen social cohesion and reduce tensions between displaced populations and host communities. The spaces are designed to be inclusive, featuring a main event hall, a coworking area, a conference room, and a dedicated children's room to accommodate diverse activities and participants. Accessibility is of particular importance as the invasion has increased the number of people living with disabilities from war-related injuries.

The impact of VcentriHUBs is already significant. They have become dynamic spaces for civic participation, social integration, and public service development with an estimated **20,000 visitors** annually. Each VcentriHUB has modern infrastructure, including multimedia tools, Wi-Fi, and climate control systems. While Holosiivskyi Hub is in its early stages, the hubs in Obolon and Shevchenkivskyi districts hosted over 1,431 events in 2023, with approximately one-third focused on IDPs.

Activities range from youth initiatives and digital literacy training for senior citizens to policy discussions, consultations, and creative events, making the hubs a cornerstone of local democratic engagement. British Embassy-supported training programs for IDPs and locals have further expanded the reach of the hubs, facilitating 205 training sessions and engaging over 5,000 participants in topics such as first aid, nuclear and chemical safety, and mine awareness. In addition, the NGO Ukrainian Women's Guard has conducted tactical medicine and self-defense courses for more than 250 women.



Open lecture for the community in VcentriHub.

Source: vcentri.com.

What makes the VcentriHUBs innovative?

VcentriHUBs are not just public spaces—it is a model that brings internally displaced persons into local governance and the community life. Unlike traditional municipal initiatives that focus on service provision, this creates a structured, participatory environment with **systematic inclusion of IDPs in governance through public consultations.**

Many organizations supporting displaced persons have lacked permanent meeting spaces or the infrastructure to conduct large-scale training, advocacy efforts, or legal aid sessions. The online consultation module provides a direct channel for IDPs to engage with local authorities, voice their concerns, and influence decision-making, while the physical space enables organizations to organize activities, collaborate with local authorities, and scale up their initiatives. As such, the VcentriHUBs facilitates integration by a combination of participatory governance tools, mechanisms for advocacy, skill-building programs, and free access to resources.



Blood donation initiative with International Red Cross in Vcentri hub. **Source:** vcentri.com.

3 Novovolynsk's approach to IDP influx: cross-sectoral cooperation to combine immediate support with long-term integration

In response to the full-scale Russian invasion, grassroots volunteering spread rapidly across Ukraine to underpin state efforts in providing humanitarian aid, military equipment, and shelter for refugees. Leveraging an approach to IDPs as positive contributors to the community, Novovolynsk town shows how a highly coordinated response between local government, businesses, and civil society has generated a support system that provides direct assistance for IDPs and long-term community integration.

Status: Active, but fewer projects and initiatives

The year started: 2022

Websites: www.facebook.com/novik.help/
www.facebook.com/novik.sos/



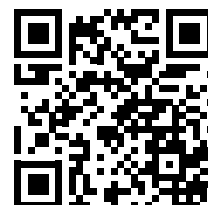
Level of Government: Local Self-Government

Main actor: City Council

Goal: Solving displacement crisis and contributing to economic development

Contact: vykonk@nov-rada.gov.ua

Video: Town that volunteers for Ukraine's victory.
 Novovolynsk war-time story.



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When the small town of Novovolynsk, located near the Polish border, saw an influx of IDPs that increased the town's population from 50,000 to 60,000 in the first months of the full-scale invasion, its residents volunteered to provide necessary aid to civilians and the military. For example, self-organized groups coordinated, sorted and delivered over 200 international aid trucks that arrived in Ukraine in two months. Public and private entities have worked together alongside civilian society since the first days of the war.

Importantly, politicians and officials in the Hromada think of IDPs as potential resource for the community, not only a problem that needs policies. The Mayor says displaced people are considered “not a burden, but our chance”.



MAYOR OF
NOVOVOLYNSK

Before the war, we worked on a development strategy, and one of the points was demography. We all saw that it was negative, and a whole program was needed to increase the birth rate. And now, when these people have, unfortunately, arrived, it is a bonus for us, so to speak. We are working to ensure that the people who came here stay here. First, it is safe here, and secondly, we have enough kindergartens and schools.

To enable this, the Hromada coordinated a response plan that combined addressing immediate needs of people arriving in the town with building blocks for long-term integration. They developed several components of direct assistance through a support center and humanitarian aid coordination that give way to longer-term integration by drawing on digital solutions and collaboration.



Manufacturing camouflage nets for the military in Novovolynsk Hub. **Source:** Novovolynsk.

IDPs Support Centre and Information points:

- **Checkpoint Assistance:** Volunteers were stationed at checkpoints to guide IDPs to the support center;
- **24/7 Operations:** The IDP Support Center functioned non-stop, processing 400-800 applications daily and assisting over 7,000 individuals in obtaining IDP certificates;
- **Centralized Information:** The City Council set up a 24-hour information desk and hotline, ensuring displaced persons had access to essential services;
- **“Novovolynsk SOS” Chatbot:** Provided real-time information on housing, food, medicine, job opportunities, and access to social services. The chatbot facilitated direct communication with IDPs, streamlining the process of meeting their needs.

Humanitarian Aid Coordination:

- **Logistics Center “Novovolynsk” HELP:** Initiated by volunteers with support from the City Council, it built strong partnerships with local businesses and international organizations to coordinate the reception and distribution of humanitarian aid to meet immediate needs.
- **Warehousing and Distribution:** Humanitarian aid was collected, sorted, and dispatched from multiple warehouses, ensuring all goods reached their intended recipients. Strict accountability measures were enforced, with detailed documentation sent to donors.

Features of the comprehensive response to IDP influx

Technology-driven solutions

One of the most advanced aspects of this initiative is the Novovolynsk SOS chatbot, a real-time digital platform that enabled IDPs to quickly access essential services. This tool removes bureaucratic barriers, allowing displaced persons to independently obtain housing, food, medicine, job opportunities, and legal assistance without relying on slow, traditional channels. The chatbot also provides information on healthcare access, social protection laws, and educational opportunities, including Ukrainian language and history courses to help IDPs integrate into local culture.

Data-driven and digitalized registration system

Recognizing the urgent need for accurate tracking for efficient service provision, Novovolynsk established a municipal IDP register at its Support Center. Initially, registrations were conducted manually, but by March 2022, the process was fully digitized with the help of volunteers from Kyiv. This transition eliminated delays, ensured easier monitoring of IDP movements, which could optimize the allocation of humanitarian resources.

Consultative and participatory approach

Novovolynsk's model is consultative, ensuring that IDPs are active participants in shaping the support they receive. On February 25, 2022, the City Council launched an open-access Google form, inviting both displaced individuals and local residents to contribute information. This form collected real-time data on IDP needs (housing, food, clothing, legal assistance) and mobilized community resources, ensuring a grassroots-led, needs-based response. That introduced more contact points between the old and new residents of the town and encouraged a sense that everyone is in it together.

What makes this approach innovative?

The Novovolynsk IDP response initiative stands out for its technology-driven approach, collaborative decision-making, and emphasis on long-term integration even in measures for short-term aid. The perception of IDPs as a positive contribution to the community, despite the negative circumstances in which they arrive, is central to this approach. Organizing collaborations between public, private and civil society sectors, Novovolynsk could leverage digital tools, local volunteer networks, and participatory governance to provide transparent and effective support. In doing so, the model addresses immediate humanitarian needs as well as integrates displaced persons as active contributors to the community's future development.



Humanitarian aid redistribution to be shipped for frontline communities in Novovolynsk Hub **Source:** Novovolynsk.

4 Victory Gardens in Poltava: repurposing urban sustainability projects for IDP integration

Originally conceived as an urban sustainability initiative, the Poltava City Vegetable Garden project took on new significance following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the resulting displacement crisis. In becoming part of the national “Victory Gardens” campaign, it became a tool for strengthening food security as well as social cohesion. By engaging IDPs and local residents in urban agriculture, it combines sustainability with opportunities for trust-building and dialogue.

Status: Suspended in 2023, pending re-launch

The year started: 8 July 2022

Websites: <https://irm.rada-poltava.gov.ua/projects/sad-gorod/> →

Level of Government: Local Self-Government

Stakeholder: Municipal Organization “Poltava City Development Institute” of the Poltava City Council

Goal: Solving displacement crisis and food crisis, integrating IDPs in the community

Contact: Oleksandr Pechenenko (Chief of Municipal Organization “Poltava City Development Institute”)

More: <https://sadyperemohy.org/>



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From climate adaptation experiment to IDP integration

The Poltava City Community Garden initiative was originally conceived in 2020/21 by the municipal organization “City Development Institute” under the City Council, as part of a training program to explore nature-based solutions in urban environments. The team explored public engagement strategies and climate adaptation methods, with inspiration from international projects such as recreational green zones on urban rooftops.

However, Poltava, an agrarian region with abundant parks and green spaces, initially presented low demand for a community gardening initiative. Many residents already had access to private gardens, making the need for a shared urban green space less pressing.

The onset of Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022 drastically changed this dynamic. As thousands of internally displaced persons arrived in Poltava, individuals engaged in the project showed adaptability and creativity and the initiative took on a new purpose: integrating new residents into the community through urban agriculture. The project evolved from a climate adaptation strategy into a tool for food security, social cohesion, and community resilience.

A month into the invasion, the international assistance project SURGe (Support to Ukraine’s Reforms for Governance)⁵, had launched the Victory Gardens promotional campaign, which the Vegetable Garden now joined. The goal was to help hromadas strengthen food security, promote urban and school gardens, and create sustainable community-based agricultural projects.

This initiative had multiple objectives, including:

- **Providing fresh vegetables and herbs** to IDPs temporarily housed in educational institutions.
- **Demonstrating IDP integration** by shifting the perception of displaced individuals from aid recipients to active residents working alongside the local population.
- **Strengthening local food production and processing facilities**, ensuring sustainable food sources for IDPs and residents alike.
- **Promoting a healthy lifestyle and fostering connections between individuals, nature, and society.**

By March 2023, the initiative Victory Gardens had expanded to 10 pilot hromadas, assisting over 7,000 families with seeds, equipment, and agricultural infrastructure. Urban agriculture, and other nature-based solutions, often already aim to combine environmental with social and economic benefits. As such, creatively integrating them with IDP support is a model that may be scalable to many places.

However, the project in Poltava faced significant challenges in 2023-2024. As educational institutions, which had served as temporary housing for IDPs, resumed their academic functions, many displaced individuals were relocated, disrupting the initiative's support model. Additionally, bureaucratic obstacles emerged when the municipal company that owned the gardening land withdrew its support. The land could not be transferred to the City Development Institute, limiting further expansion.



IDPs working in Poltava Victory Gardens.

Source: "Poltavshchyna" online media outlet.

As a result, the initiative is currently still seeking a new location with plans to relaunch in 2025. In another display of adaptability, the project has revised its design to maintain IDP integration aims but with a broader, joint sense of ownership of the initiative among both displaced persons and local residents.

What makes this process innovative?

The Poltava City Community Garden leveraged and repurposed an existing project to integrate IDPs into the economic and social fabric of the Hromada. Unlike conventional food relief programs, this initiative empowers displaced individuals as active participants in local food production to promote self-reliance and facilitate social cohesion.

Most IDP-focused programs emphasize support and protection, but this initiative redefines IDPs as a resource rather than a burden. By actively involving displaced individuals in gardening, food processing, and local agricultural initiatives, the project fosters a sense of belonging and mutual responsibility. IDPs and local residents meet, collaborate, and form social bonds, helping to reduce tensions and integrate displaced populations into daily community life.

The expansion from an urban sustainability project to one with wider objectives shows how flexibility and adaptiveness were required to address changing circumstances and new community needs. The shifts reflect how Poltava handles IDP integration through a participatory, community-led approach. The initiative is not about providing essential resources; it builds a sense of shared responsibility by encouraging IDPs and residents to work together, fostering trust and dialogue while addressing food security concerns.

Conclusion

While large-scale forced migration is common in war, Ukraine's displacement crisis is unique in the rapid speed of movement and the large number of IDPs in relation to refugees. This toolbox has explored four initiatives – IDP Councils, VcentriHUB, Novovolynsk's IDP support measures, and Victory Gardens – that have been effective tools to address issues of housing, food provision, and psychological assistance alongside community integration. These initiatives do not simply regard IDP as beneficiaries of aid, as active contributors to their host communities.

Indeed, the Ukrainian experience shows that local governments, civil society organizations, and volunteer movements play an indispensable role in responding to large-scale displacement. Taking into account the unprecedented scale of displacement, state efforts alone would not suffice. Grassroot solutions and effective coordination between stakeholders were key in these initiatives, to complement national policies with timely and effective solutions.

When IDPs are engaged from the start as active stakeholders rather than passive beneficiaries – and involved in democratic decision-making – both displaced persons and host communities benefit. External funding, grants, and training programs were instrumental in some of these measures and play a crucial role in strengthening local governance and community resilience. To avoid disruptions in the work of local initiatives and slow down current progress, continued support is necessary.

In all its uniqueness, the Ukrainian experience can inspire municipalities worldwide facing displacement crises of different kinds. These initiatives stand out for their varying utilization of participatory democracy, where displaced people exercise significant agency in forming policies of integration and are not merely beneficiaries of services actively shape policies that affect them. The key lessons from these initiatives — **local leadership, inclusivity, digital solutions, adaptability, long-term planning, and sustained funding** — make the initiatives practical models that can be scaled up or replicated and tailored to other contexts.

As the war continues to bring unpredictable escalations and displacement, examining Ukraine's approaches in integrating IDPs will continuously provide insights into large-scale crisis-time adaptation. Ukraine's experience proves that a bottom-up approach is not only feasible but highly effective, reinforcing the call for inclusive and community-driven policies as displacement rises globally.



Some key takeaways

- LSGs (local self government) should be seen as partners for central authorities in solving war-related crises.
- Nongovernmental stakeholders' engagement must be thought of strategically during crisis preparation.
- Local-led responses are crucial for IDP integration.
- The state can support the scaling and institutionalization of grassroots democratic innovations, such as IDP Councils, during crises.
- Participatory governance strengthens community resilience.
- Digital tools and data-driven approaches improve service delivery.
- Flexibility and adaptability are key in crisis response.
- Long-term planning is essential for sustainable integration.
- Displacement can be a chance for local economic growth, particularly in formerly rural degrowing areas.
- Physical meeting places strengthen local resilience.
- Nature-based solutions can contribute to IDP's basic needs and participatory democracy.

Notes

1. Official Ukrainian data: <https://www.ioc.gov.ua/analytics/dashboard-vpo>; <https://acmc.ua/minsoczpolityky-oprylyudnylo-statytyku-pro-killist-vpo-v-ukrayini-za-oblastyamy/>

2. For a discussion on how participatory democracy strengthens societal resilience, see ICLD Research Report 33: Local Democracy and Resilience in Ukraine: Learning from Communities' Crisis Response in War (Oleksandra Keudel, Andrii Darkovich, Oksana Huss, and Valentyn Hatsko, 2024). <https://icld.se/en/publications/local-democracy-and-resilience-in-ukraine-learning-from-communities-crisis-response-in-war/>

3. Stabilization Support Services is one of the global organization IREX's implementing partners in Ukraine.

4. Information about these programs are available on IREX's website: <https://www.irex.org/region/europe-urasia/ukraine>

5. funded by Global Affairs Canada and implemented by Alinea International.

