

# Leadership for crisis and transformation

## Learning from Ukraine's experience 2022–2025

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# 1. Introduction and context



# Executive Summary – 01

This report explores Ukraine’s experience on **sustainability transformation and leadership** since the start of Russia’s full-scale invasion. It is based on conversation with more than 30 leaders from Ukraine carried out in October 2025. The focus of the exploration and this report is on two topics:

- **Sustainable transformation:** Where and how have new possibilities for sustainability transformations open up? What has been learned in turning these into concrete action?
- **Leadership:** Which leadership behaviours have helped to deal with the situation? What general lessons can be drawn for leadership in times of crisis?

**Sustainability transformations:** Ukrainian institutions and communities have **adapted quickly to the new situation**. Three phenomena of change were identified, each coming with a narrative for reconstruction.

Phenomenon of change	Focus	Time perspective	Narrative for reconstruction in UA
Dealing with Chaos	Safety	Short-term	Repair
Developing a “new order”	Functionality	Medium-term	Building back better
Transformative thinking	Vision	Long-term	Building a Ukraine for the future

Transformative thinking was only rarely encountered yet, often done by individuals.

# Executive Summary – 02

The destabilisation of the previous system has opened up **opportunities for sustainability transformations**. These were identified in the sectors of energy production, urban planning and healthcare. Here **pioneering actors** are testing more sustainable, decentralized, and people-centred models that would have been difficult to advance before. In these sectors, **strong narratives linked to Ukrainian interests** can fuel sustainability transformation. **Enabling structures** are still very weak and **need to be strengthened rapidly and considerably** to sustain progress. The **compelling narratives linked** to the survival of the country make transformation efforts more powerful than in other countries. Developing transformative visions for the future of Ukraine beyond the invasion motivates and builds joint spirit.

**Seven game changers** for supporting sustainable transformations in times of crisis and destabilisation were identified. They can also help transformation stakeholders outside Ukraine:

1. Help transformational narratives to build magnetic appeal.
2. Quickly demonstrate what is possible beyond the crisis – with high visibility
3. Support an enabling environment for early transformations.
4. Strengthen agency and responsibility of decentralised entities.
5. Build transformation capability among key stakeholders.
6. Strengthen the necessary technical skills.
7. Support transformational leadership.



# Executive Summary -03

**Leadership:** A central focus of the exploration is the identification of **lessons on leadership** in dealing with the special situation in Ukraine since 2022. These were drawn interviews with Ukrainian leaders across municipalities, public services, public administration and civil society. These lessons include:

1 – Improve your way forward – wisely

2 - Support self-organisation and flexibility

3 – Continuously maintain team focus

4 – Balance individual needs with organisational effectiveness

5 – Build strong relationships and networks

6 – Foster future-oriented, transformative thinking

7 – Prepare for scenarios that seem unlikely

7 ½ Bonus - Trust your collective ability to navigate unprecedented situations

Across all cases, leaders emphasized **trust, adaptability, clarity, and collective purpose as key to navigating unprecedented challenges**. These lessons can inform leadership in times of destabilisation and crisis beyond Ukraine

# The situation in Ukraine

In recent years, people and institutions in Ukraine **have had to adapt** to new and constantly changing circumstances, particularly since Russia's full-scale invasion.

The current situation also creates space to think about future **developments and transformations** from a new perspective, even though Ukraine still has to focus strongly on the demands of the present.

Acts of **leadership** are driving these processes of adaptation and recalibration. Across Ukraine, individuals are stepping up to shape their institutions, foster change and develop a long-term vision.

In an increasingly unstable world, these experiences can also inform transformation processes, responses to destabilisation and approaches to leadership in Germany, Europe and **worldwide**.

The particular circumstances in which Ukrainians live and Ukrainian institutions operate include:

- **Need for flexibility because of a limited ability to plan**
- **Severe disruption to everyday social life**
- **Reconciling short-term coping needs with medium- and long-term perspectives**
- **Adapting to new channels of communication and new ways of operating**
- **Dealing with the effects of structural weaknesses that already existed before the invasion**

# About this exploration

I was invited by GIZ's Felicity II project to visit Ukraine from 14 to 18 October 2025 for an initial exploration of the issues outlined above. The key questions were:

**Transformation:** Where and how have developments since 2022 opened up possibilities for sustainability transformations for Ukraine? What has been learned in turning these into concrete action?

**Leadership:** Which leadership behaviours have helped people and institutions in Ukraine to respond to the challenges? What lessons does this offer for leadership in times of crisis beyond Ukraine?

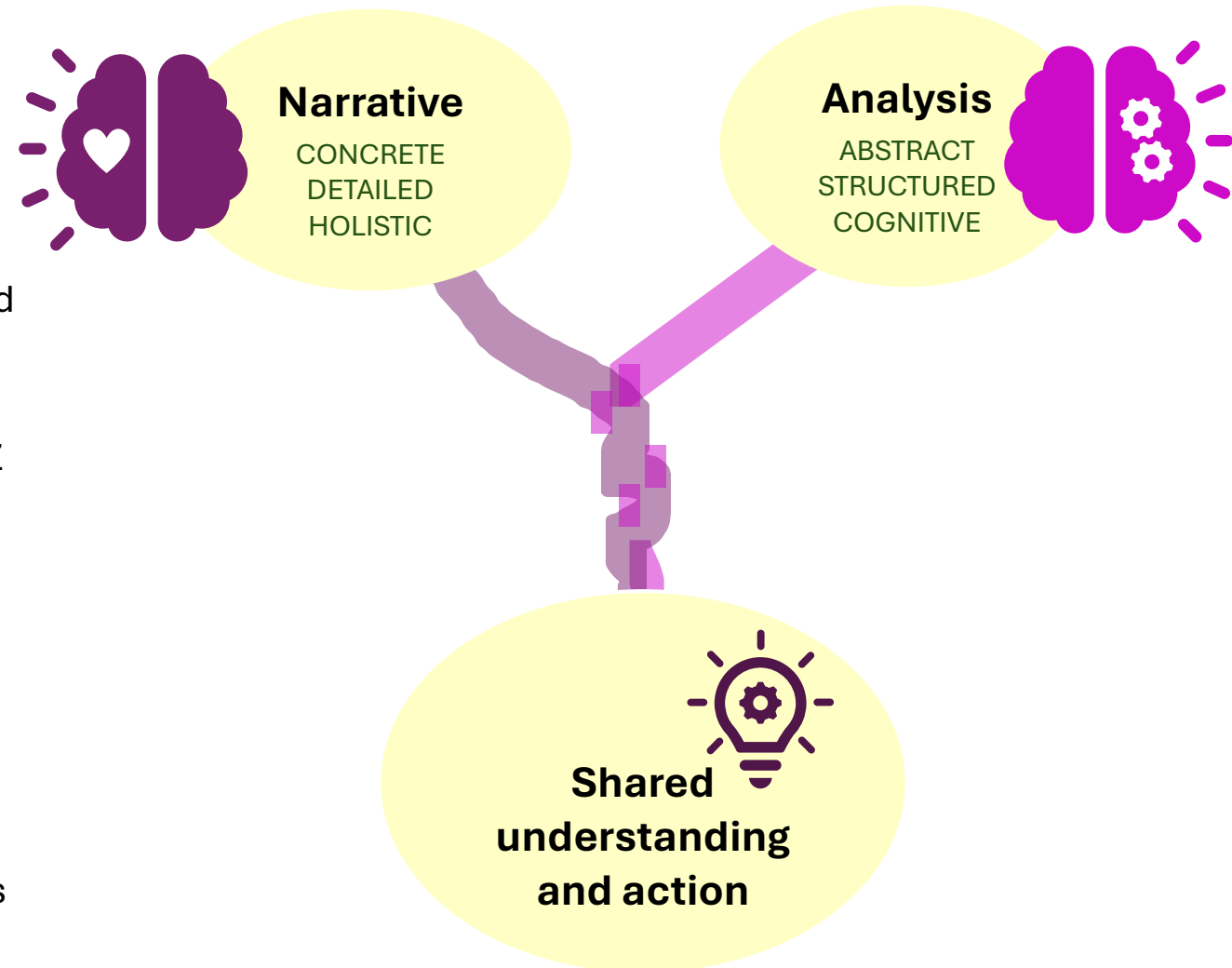
This slide deck summarises **key conclusions** and suggests **ideas for follow-up** action. Given the time limitations, these conclusions are subjective and preliminary. They were developed with conversation partners largely working in **Central and Western Ukraine**. The situation in frontline areas in Eastern Ukraine is different and is not covered here.

My sincere **gratitude** goes to everyone who made this exploration possible – above all, the conversation partners who gave their time, told their stories and reflected on what they have learned.

This work was financed by **GIZ's Felicity II** project, which aims to improve urban infrastructure in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and thereby reduce carbon emissions. (<https://www.giz.de/en/projects/felicity-ii-eastern-partnership-and-central-asia-programme>)

# Methodology

- This approach brings together narrative and analysis. Narratives provide concrete examples of how people act in complex situations and what effects this has; analysis organises these examples into a more abstract, structured basis for further work.
- **25 semi-structured conversations** were held with leaders from different sectors in Ukraine, identified by GIZ colleagues.
- The conversations followed a **questionnaire** with four categories based on the [Future Trails](#) approach: leading self, leading teams, leading organisations and leading social transformations.
- Each conversation **focused** on themes linked to the background of the conversation partner.
- **Results** were collected, distilled and discussed in various meetings with colleagues from Ukraine and other countries.
- **Key literature** used for this work is listed in the annex.



Own illustration, based on Ganz 2024

# Conversation partners

## Municipalities and economic policy

Yevhen Udod, Deputy Mayor of Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast  
Vadym Tabakera, Department of Economic Policy, Lviv Regional State Administration  
Mustafa Nayyem, former Head of the State Agency for Restoration and Infrastructure Development

## Environment

Iryna Burbylo, Maria Halaiko, Frankfurt Zoological Society  
Oleksii Vasyliuk, Ecodiya – Centre for Environmental Initiatives Ecoaction  
Anastasiia Drapaliuk, Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group  
Petro Tiestov, Ukrainian Nature Conservation Group

## Culture and media

Ihor Shapovalov, Academic Symphony Orchestra of the Luhansk Regional Philharmonic  
Mykhailo Glubokyi, Izolyatsia – platform for cultural events  
Otar Dovzhenko, Lviv Media Forum

## Energy, water and buildings

Halyna Lytvyn, GIZ Power 4 Just Transition  
Dmytro Novytskyi, Ukrainian Water Association Ukrvodokanal  
Oleg Drozdov, Kharkiv School of Architecture  
Pavlo Kyshkar, Former MoP, Poltava Gas Production (NaftoGaz), Lieutenant Colonel at Land Forces Commandment

## Social protection and rehabilitation

Halyna Bordun, Lviv City Administration, Coordination Centre for Civil Protection  
Mariana Svirchuk, UNBROKEN – national rehabilitation centre for war-affected people

## International cooperation

Olha Kostiuk, Head of Communications, Sustainable Economic Development Cluster, GIZ;  
André Fabian, Violetta Kalynovska, Yuliia Pron, Viktoria Vasylenko, Taras Zhuravel and Nataliia Zuzak, GIZ  
Andrii Zuiev, formerly GIZ; now: Armed Forces of Ukraine

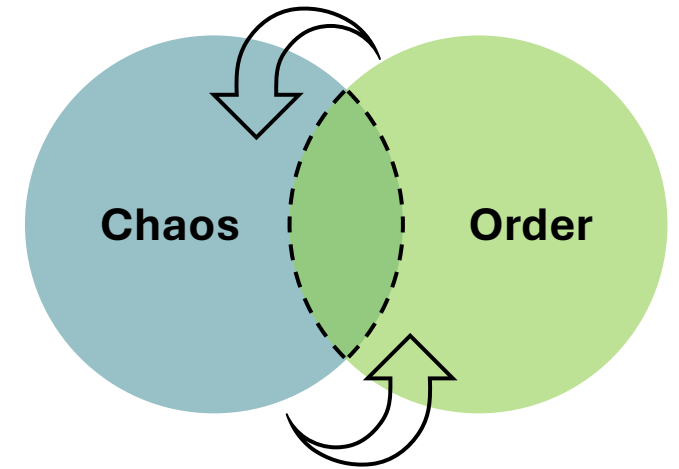
Some additional conversation partners preferred not to be mentioned explicitly.



## 2. Dynamics of transformation

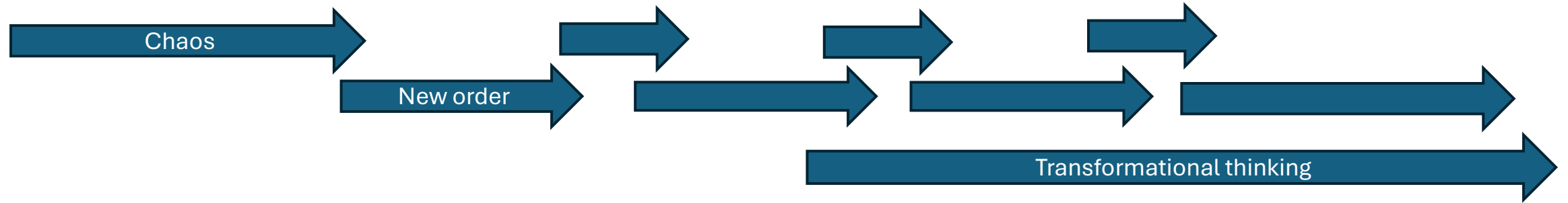
# A systems perspective

- Russia's full-scale invasion very rapidly **destabilised** social, political and economic subsystems across Ukrainian society, including education, healthcare and environmental protection.
- As in any system, each of these **subsystems before the invasion** had its own properties, functions and malfunctions, perceived differently by different actors and groups.
- Since February 2022 there has been a shifting interplay between chaos and (relative) order. Out of this chaos, new system patterns and properties have had to emerge.
- Destabilisation of the pre-2022 system created new **possibilities**. Properties that were previously impossible, or only barely possible in the more stable system, can now emerge – for example, steps towards a more just, transparent and environmentally sustainable society.
- At the same time, destabilisation created risks. Intentionally or unintentionally, system properties can also emerge that undermine sustainable development.



# Key phenomena of dealing with change

Three key phenomena of change have been visible in Ukraine since February 2022. They are not strictly sequential and can be observed at individual, team, organisational and societal levels.



## 1 – Dealing with chaos

- **Focus: Safety**
- **Time horizon: Short term**
- Individuals and teams focus on coping with the acute situation.
- Organisations work to maintain basic services and core functionality.

## 2 – Developing a “new order”

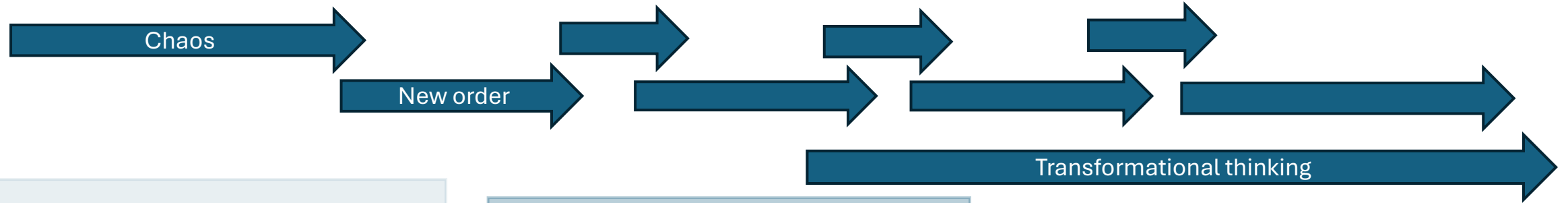
- **Focus: Functionality**
- **Time horizon: Medium term**
- Systems quickly adapt to the new situation, achieve temporary stability and are able to resume services.
- A new order emerges: order is restored and new patterns are established.
- The new order begins to shape the future.

## 3 – Transformational thinking

- **Focus: Vision**
- **Time horizon: Long term**
- Individuals and institutions work with implicit or explicit future visions and shape longer-term developments.
- They use the situation as an opportunity to rethink and redesign systems.
- Clear pathways into the future are defined and pursued.

# Narratives for rebuilding Ukraine

There are currently three reconstruction narratives that correspond to these phenomena



## 1 – Dealing with chaos

- **Focus: Safety**
- **Time horizon: Short term**

### **Reconstruction narrative: Repair**

Undo the destruction and restore what was there before, for example repairing a damaged house with the same materials or replacing water pipes in the same place.

Less frequently encountered

## 2 – Developing a “new order”

- **Focus: Functionality**
- **Time horizon: Medium term**

### **Reconstruction narrative: Building back better**

When reconstruction is required, rebuild in efficiently, functionally and sustainably, improving without changing core properties (improvement, **incremental change**), for example rebuilding a house to be more energy-efficient.

Most frequently encountered

## 3 – Transformational thinking

- **Focus: Vision**
- **Time horizon: Long term**

### **Reconstruction narrative: Building a better Ukraine for the future**

Working with fundamentally different and more ambitious approaches that transform systems towards greater sustainability (=transformation); examples follow in the next slides.

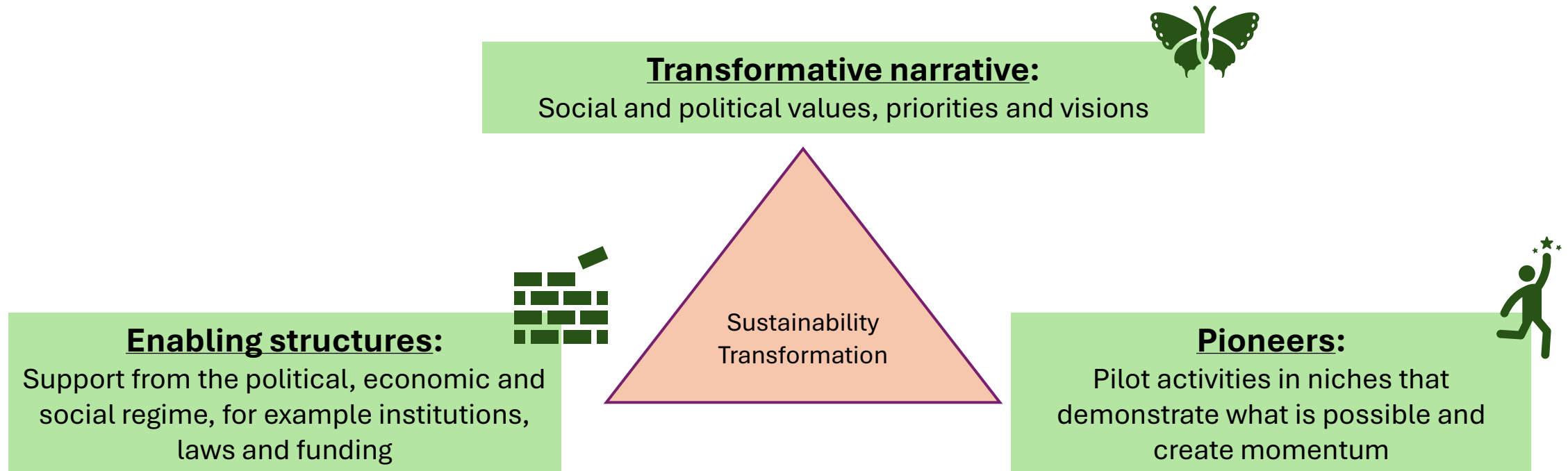
Less frequently encountered

# What do we mean by transformation?

In this exploration, *transformation* refers to social and political processes that are:

- **Ambitious** – aiming at fundamental change, in this case towards sustainability and the SDGs
- **Process-oriented** – unfolding through dynamic, non-linear, iterative processes
- **Multi-scalar** – successful only when change is achieved in many places and at different, interrelated levels

Göpel's multi-layer model for transformation (2017) describes these different levels at which change needs to take place for transformation to occur.



**Example 1:**

**Energy  
production**



# Transforming energy production

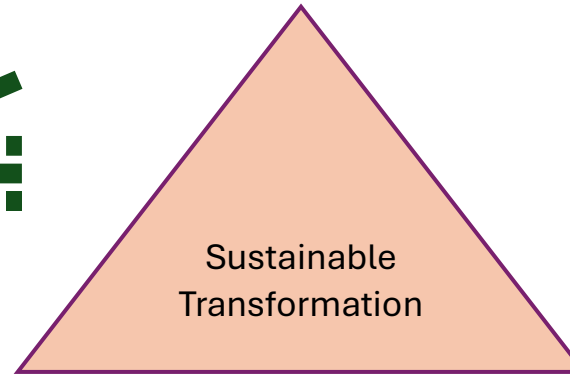
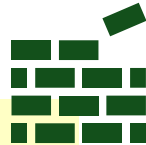
## **Transformative narrative:**

Ukraine needs a **decentralised energy system** to make the country less vulnerable and to ensure a reliable energy supply, even in unstable times. This can best be achieved by expanding renewable energy. A shift to renewables also helps address labour shortages in mining.



## **Enabling structures:**

**Financial support** for renewable energy facilities; support for SMEs and larger businesses to scale up renewables; initial adaptation of laws and by-laws is under way.



## **Pioneers:**

Initiatives that generate energy from **renewable sources**, especially in **coal-producing regions**, for example small-scale solar home systems on balconies and in neighbourhood projects; **solar panels added to reconstructed buildings**; **training centres** building the skills needed, including those supported by GIZ.



## **The past:**

A centralised energy system largely dependent on coal, with negative impacts on health and the climate.

## **Main requirements for further transformation:**

- Strengthen **financial and legal incentives for renewable energy (for example, feed-in tariffs)**
- Expand storage facilities and the energy supply network
- Train **additional renewable energy experts**

**Example 2:**

**Urban  
planning**



# Transforming urban planning

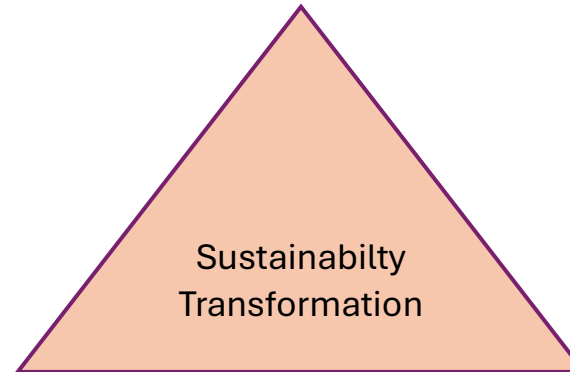
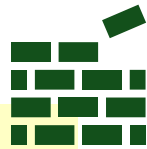


## **Transformative narrative:**

Now is the time to rebuild urban spaces so they are attractive, **inclusive** (fully accessible for veterans), **safe** (with shelters) and **adapted to climate change**. Future Ukraine needs fewer Soviet-style mass housing blocks and more decentralised housing that better reflects a declining population.

## **Enabling structures:**

Currently very limited.



Sustainability  
Transformation

## **Pioneers:**

The **Kharkiv School of Architecture**, together with partners, is developing concepts for new urban plans that embody these ideas, both in areas needing reconstruction after war damage and on newly developed sites.



**The past:** Urban planning and architecture dominated by Soviet-era buildings, now often neglected, non-inclusive (not accessible) and vulnerable to air attacks. Extensive sealed surfaces are not adapted to climate change.

## **Main requirements for further transformation:**

- Wider dissemination of concepts and ideas, including pilot projects
- Stronger support from the ministry and urban planning institutions
- Reskilling and training for urban planning experts and architects

**Example 3:**  
**Healthcare**



# Transforming healthcare



## **Transformative narrative:**

Ukrainians will only continue to risk their lives defending their country if they know they can rely on a capable healthcare system.

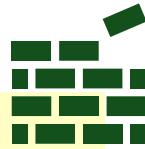
The country now has the opportunity to build a **holistic, high-quality healthcare system** that:

- Addresses both physical and mental health
- Can respond to large numbers of veterans and injured civilians
- Operates digitally and delivers high-quality, patient-centred care

## **Enabling structures:**

Not very supportive yet.

The Ministry of Health is **open** to change and **coordination** between actors is beginning, but major challenges remain. Funding is limited.



Sustainable  
Transformation

## **Pioneers:**

**UNBROKEN** is a pioneering provider offering these services at a very high level, integrating mental and physical rehabilitation with healthcare. It works digitally, uses feedback-based management tools and shares its learning.



## **The past:**

Overburdened, bureaucratic healthcare system with specialised clinics for specific disciplines and largely non-digital technology.

## **Main requirements for further transformation:**

- Inspiring and establishing **more pioneering** institutions
- Strengthening **enabling structures** through strategies, legislation and other measures
- **Reskilling** and building capacity in health management and psychological support

# Social innovation in practice

The three examples suggest that **sustainability transformations** in Ukraine are progressing promisingly and dynamically.

The **extreme challenges** the country is facing have opened up opportunities for transformations that are hard to pursue elsewhere. Instead of causing paralysis, the situation is helping to foster agency, innovation and future-oriented thinking.

The three cases presented are the most prominent and promising ones identified in the conversations. However, there are **likely to be many more that this study has not examined**, for example:

- Using digital technologies to improve public services
- Fostering a new culture of civic engagement, including within the private sector

In all three examples, further progress is far from guaranteed and will require sustained effort.

In other areas of society, **current developments run counter to sustainability goals**, for example in agriculture and environmental pollution.





## The role of compelling narratives

The narratives for sustainable transformations in UA are much **stronger and more compelling** than abstract frames often used in Germany and other countries , for three key reasons:

1. **Transformational narratives speak to basic human needs and put people and their needs at the centre** – at both individual and collective levels. They focus on reducing vulnerability and risk, strengthening social cohesion and safeguarding the country’s future. And they are more attractive and tangible than abstract ideas about climate change.
2. **Maintaining the status quo is not an option:** The pre-invasion political and social system cannot simply be preserved or rebuilt. Something new has to replace the old. Transformation is inevitable, but it can be shaped.
3. **Transformational narratives are powerful motivators:** In a time of heightened political uncertainty, many people feel motivated and energised by thinking about the future Ukraine they are fighting for. Conversation partners clearly valued this perspective and the opportunity to look beyond current hardships.

However, transformational narratives do not automatically gain traction, also compared to narratives brought forward by other stakeholders. So far, these transformative visions are not widely shared. They **need to be articulated, heard, picked up and kept alive through constant retelling** – and they must compete with other narratives that emerge from destabilisation, for example those that deflect attention from sustainability concerns in favour of rapid reconstruction.

# Innovation meets overstretched institutions



These examples show that the current situation in Ukraine has generated **social innovations** at different scales. **Pioneers** are experimenting with new ways of doing things and demonstrating what is possible.

The **weakest part** of the transformation dynamic is often the development and stabilisation of **enabling structures** – incentives, laws and institutions. Public sector organisations such as ministries are overwhelmed by the current situation and find it hard to engage with new transformation agendas alongside their wartime workload. They **need to strengthened rapidly and considerably** to sustain progress

**Key current challenges** for institutionalising the transformation processes described above include:

- Continuing and scaling up legal and institutional support so that pioneers can move into the mainstream
- Ensuring financial viability and attractiveness
- Reskilling and developing the human capacities needed for the future in these fields

# Game changers for transformation in times of crisis



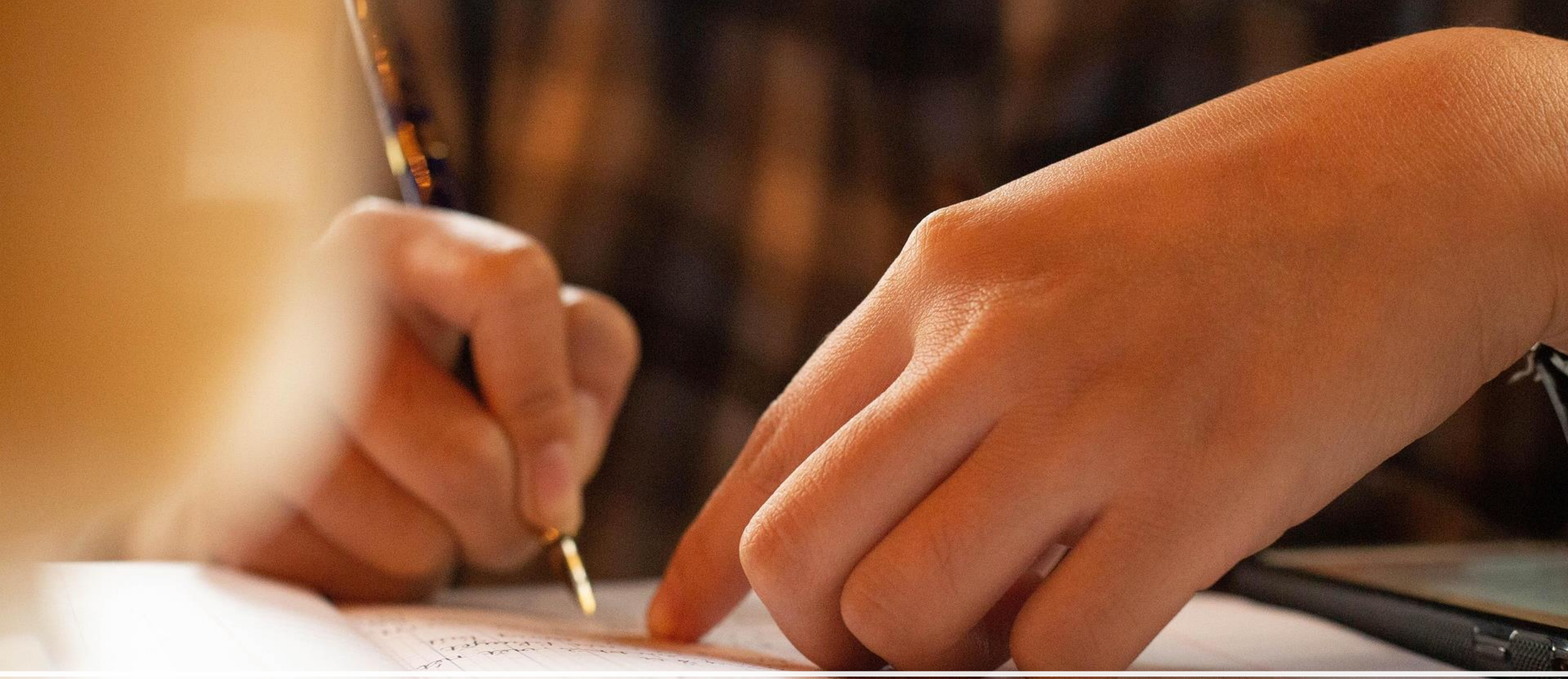
In summary, seven key enablers were identified for unlocking transformation potential in situations of crisis and destabilisation. They also point to ways in which GIZ can further support Ukraine.

Game changers	How this can be supported (for example by GIZ)
<b>1. Help transformational narratives to build magnetic appeal.</b> They should be linked to immediate needs, with spaces for joyful, concrete conversations about the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support conversations about “the future Ukraine we want to build”, nationally and locally</li><li>• Amplify social media voices that spread these narratives</li><li>• Provide facts and figures to underpin the narratives</li></ul>
<b>2. Quickly demonstrate what is possible beyond the crisis – with high visibility</b> -Pioneer institutions need support to develop and scale social innovations, to gain visibility and to be connected with one another and with decision-makers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support pioneer institutions in their work</li><li>• Help ensure their stories are told and lessons shared with a high visibility</li><li>• Connect pioneers with one another</li></ul>
<b>3. Support an enabling environment for early transformations.</b> This means strengthening national institutions to think beyond the current crisis and to establish the necessary support mechanisms, incentives and legal frameworks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support transformation departments and processes</li><li>• Promote feasibility and concept development studies</li><li>• Share examples from other countries that can be built on</li></ul>

# Game changers for transformation in times of crisis



Game changers	How this can be supported (for example by GIZ)
<p><b>4. Strengthen agency and responsibility of decentralised entities.</b> Allow for communal actors and leaders and subnational bodies to act towards sustainability transformations and experiment forward.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support social and technological innovation in cities</li><li>• Focus support on front-runner organisations or cities</li><li>• Encourage purposeful action and courageous experiments</li></ul>
<p><b>5. Build transformation capability among key stakeholders.</b> This means being able to articulate and communicate visions, motivate others, deal with tensions and resistance, build alliances and experiment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Train and coach change-makers</li><li>• Support the convening of stakeholders around a transformative vision</li><li>• Share accessible transformation knowledge via social media</li></ul>
<p><b>6. Strengthen the necessary technical skills.</b> The transformations described show a strong need for technical skill sets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Integrate new skills into existing curricula</li><li>• Train the trainers</li><li>• Provide on-the-job and blended learning programmes</li></ul>
<p><b>7. Support transformational leadership.</b> Strengthen key individuals to drive transformation processes, develop their leadership skills and networks, and enable them to act effectively.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create spaces for reflection and learning</li><li>• Build facilitation and visioning skills</li><li>• Bring change-makers in specific fields together so that initiatives can build on one another</li></ul>



### 3. Seven and a half leadership lessons

# Exploring the role of leadership

- The way **leaders** act and respond has clearly shaped how people in Ukraine have coped with the situation and handled the crisis.
- **Leadership** is about developing a vision of what the future could look like, aligning people with that vision and inspiring them to make it happen despite obstacles (as described by John Kotter). It is **not the same as management**, which focuses on planning and organising processes and resources.
- In this exploration, we understand leadership as a **way of thinking and acting in social systems – in groups and teams, institutions, social networks or sectors**. It is not tied to formal positions. Leaders can be change-makers or play supportive roles in many different ways. They are found everywhere, often without any formal job title. The lessons here focus on self-leadership.
- As in any social change, **diverse forms of leadership have played a crucial role** in enabling Ukraine and its institutions to build resilience and to take steps towards transformation.
- The following slide summarize a **key lesson learned by conversation partners in Ukraine**, followed by a **related story** from each of the interviews.



# Overview of Lessons Learned

1 – Improvise your way forward – wisely

2 - Support self-organisation and flexibility

3 – Continuously maintain team focus

4 – Balance individual needs with organisational effectiveness

5 – Build strong relationships and networks

6 – Foster future-oriented, transformative thinking

7 – Prepare for scenarios that seem unlikely

7 ½ Bonus - Trust your collective ability to navigate unprecedented situations

## 1

# Improvise your way forward – wisely

There was often little or no clear plan for dealing with this exceptional situation step by step – whether for individuals, institutions or teams. Nor was there time to develop one, especially at the start of the full-scale invasion.

Leaders from some of the most successful organisations reported that they worked step by step – week by week, sometimes day by day – and achieved strong results. Standard operational and strategic planning was simply not possible.

- This approach was successful when a **clear overall sense of direction** guided the work from early on, whether expressed in formal plans or as a broad, visionary orientation.
- Many successful initiatives emphasised that they were highly responsive to **feedback** and to the effects of their actions on clients and partners. Feedback mechanisms often started informally and later became more formal.
- Action was also focused on **capitalising on opportunities** in bold, sometimes in unconventional ways, for example to secure funding or political support.

**Supportive leadership behaviour included:** developing and articulating a clear sense of direction; bringing others on board; modelling step-by-step action; creating openness and mechanisms for feedback; and staying alert to opportunities.

“*We woke up on 24 February and started to improvise and then, day by day, found our way of dealing with this situation.*”

# Story: UNBROKEN

**UNBROKEN** provides medical treatment, prosthetics, physical and psychological rehabilitation, housing and reintegration for wounded Ukrainians.

The centre has expanded significantly since 2022. Activities began with organising evacuation trains from hospitals in eastern Ukraine. It now treats more than 5,000 patients a year.

**Mariana Svirchuk**, CEO of UNBROKEN, told the story of how:

- **UNBROKEN acted very early in the invasion**, organising evacuation trains from hospitals in eastern Ukraine
- Emails she sent to military surgical facilities in the US and the UK were an important catalyst for UNBROKEN's development at a time when no other support was available
- They built **feedback mechanisms** from patients into their work from the outset, inspired by the idea of a “customer journey”



## 2

# Support self-organisation and flexibility

- In many organisations there was, at first, considerable **confusion** about who was authorised to make decisions and how work should be organised. Staff often waited for instructions from management, while managers themselves were sometimes overwhelmed by the situation. Self-organisation in small, flexible teams enabled people to respond quickly and effectively.
- Especially at the beginning, this required some **basic structure**. Teams and individuals needed to understand their new field of work and, often, who was responsible for what.
- It also required **contact**. People emphasised the importance of very regular, almost continuous contact with superiors, to align actions and receive guidance.
- A general sense of being trusted by their line manager helped people take on their new, broader responsibilities – especially because they knew they would be backed if something failed or had unintended consequences.
- Often, pre-invasion **formalities were quickly dropped**. There were **fewer long meetings**, fewer official letters and fewer formal channels of communication – and more phone calls and communication via messaging apps.
- Over time, self-organisation in some organisations became **more structured**, with clear roles that also made it easier to cope with higher staff turnover. Elsewhere, there was pushback: the initial agile structures were dismantled and bureaucracy returned, often with negative effects.
- **Supportive leadership behaviour included:** explicitly encouraging self-organisation, providing structure, regular contact and trust, allowing self-organised ways of working to develop, and resisting a return to bureaucracy.

“ We had to act. We organised ourselves, got things done and asked for permission afterwards. ”

## Story: Kryvyi Rih

Kryvyi Rih is a major industrial city of around 604,000 inhabitants in central Ukraine. Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Kryvyi Rih has been a frequent target of Russian missile strikes and a focus of the campaign in southern Ukraine.

**Yevhen Udod**, Deputy Mayor of Kryvyi Rih, described how:

- The city administration **organised the defence of the city** and **kept everyday life going** during a six-month Russian siege, despite receiving few orders from the central government
- City officials set up **quick-action committees** with regular meetings, phone calls and clear decision-making structures
- **Strong relationships** with local companies and farmers helped to build decentralised supply networks for the city



# 3

## Continuously maintain team focus

Conversation partners reported that they saw team members becoming overwhelmed, distracted and mentally and physically exhausted. Leaders recognised this in themselves as well. For some, this seems to be increasing as the constant challenges continue. A major difficulty for teams and leaders is the inability to plan reliably for the future.

- Leaders needed to support their teams in **staying focused on work priorities** – through strategic guidance, operational support and regular reminders of what the team can control and influence, and of their shared objectives.
- Over time, it helped when leaders **established stability** in a “new order” tailored to the situation in Ukraine, including online work and changed tasks. A key element was **adapting meeting structures** so that teams regularly reviewed current priorities, clarified responsibilities and action points, and built in moments for check-in and connection.
- Leaders provided predictability and stability by aligning their words and actions and **avoiding cognitive dissonance**.

Leaders also **created stability through their own behaviour and way of dealing with the situation**. Many stressed the importance of leading with inner clarity about priorities and taking time for reflection – even though this is very challenging.

**Supportive leadership behaviour** included: helping staff to maintain focus, establishing stability and predictability in the team, and safeguarding their own clarity and sense of focus.

“ My team is exhausted and easily distracted. We need to remind ourselves often what our key tasks are. ”

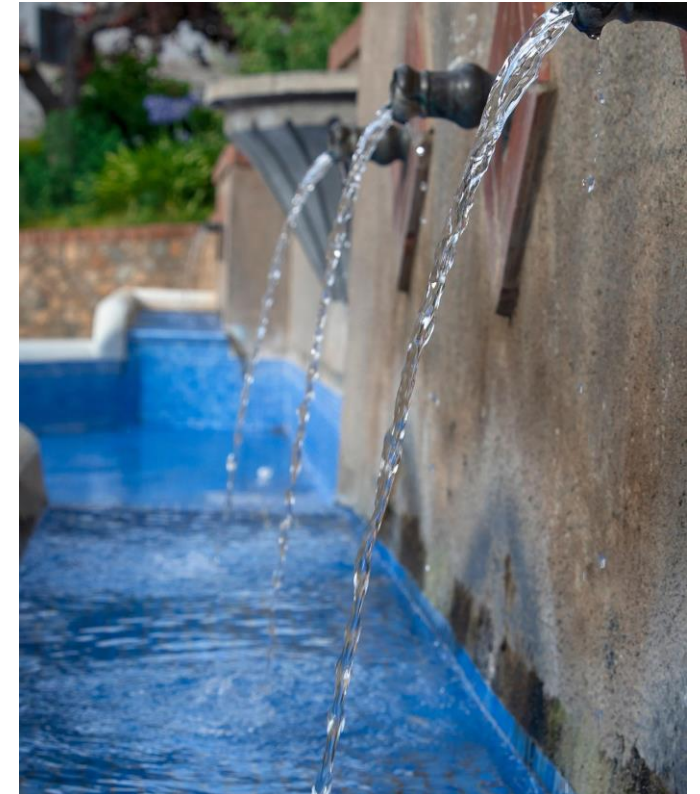
# Story: Ukrvodokanal

[Ukrvodokanal](#) is the **association of Ukrainian water utilities**. Its members treat wastewater and provide drinking water to the population.

Head of the association **Dmytro Novytskyy** shared how:

- The association's leadership quickly assessed **what was most urgent and within their control**
- Immediately after the invasion began, the network **focused on securing safe water supplies** for critical infrastructure and the wider population
- In the early phase of the full-scale invasion, they introduced new meeting structures and schedules to coordinate their response

Some of these experiences are documented in detail in a dedicated booklet.



## 4

# Balance individual needs with organisational effectiveness

- Leaders recognised that team members responded very differently to the situation, shaped by their personalities, family backgrounds and individual circumstances. Where people received no individual support or did not feel seen, their effectiveness often declined over time.
- Many people said they felt a unique **sense of meaning and inner strength**, supporting the country through their work and volunteering in their free time. This helped them to keep going.
- Many leaders said they **prioritised staff wellbeing and safety** over getting work done. They did so not only at the beginning of the full-scale invasion but also later on. They provided practical support, such as quickly granting extra cash and advance payments. Many organisations now offer psychological support through coaching or group sessions.
- Leaders realised that **individuals' support needs in this situation were not predictable**. For example, staff members who usually worked very independently often needed more contact and support.
- At the same time, leaders had to ensure the functioning of the team and the organisation, sometimes by taking difficult decisions. These needed to be communicated early and transparently.
- **Supportive leadership behaviour** included: giving individual attention to people's needs, supporting resilience and wellbeing, strengthening their sense of purpose, and being clear and transparent about what was and was not possible.

“ The most important discovery in this time has been our inner strength. ”

## Story: IZOLYATSIYA

[IZOLYATSIYA](#) is a cultural centre founded in 2010 on the site of a former insulation factory in Donetsk. It became a vibrant place for art and creative action in eastern Ukraine. After the Russian occupation, the site was turned into an illegal prison. IZOLYATSIYA now operates from Kyiv and across Ukraine.

**Mykhailo Glubokyi**, one of the centre's core members, explained how:

- IZOLYATSIYA **supported individual team members** to relocate to Kyiv at different times and to reshape their professional paths
- They **adapted their programme** for the Ukrainian cultural scene, based on a close understanding of local needs
- They transformed the traumatic history of their former art space being turned into a place of torture into meaningful work for IZOLYATSIYA, addressing this experience through their projects



## 5

# Build strong relationships and networks

At the beginning of the full-scale invasion, **relationships were a key source of stability** amid the chaos. They also underpinned **self-organisation in teams and networks**, neighbourhoods and communities. Together, people were able to act and find solutions to everyday challenges even without a detailed plan.

- Many leaders reported that teams drew on strong existing relationships and ways of working after the invasion, and those with a strong culture of collaboration developed an **even greater sense of community and maturity**.
- **Relationships at work and in wider networks** were described as stabilising and helpful. However, they were difficult to sustain in an online setting and required constant effort.

In this unprecedented situation, **diversity in personalities, skills and backgrounds** was a key success factor in teamwork and networking. It called for different capabilities, from drawing on life experience to being open to new technologies.

Effective leaders helped build **robust communication channels** for fast, clear exchanges and to strengthen trust, accountability and positivity in teams. Many noted that humour helped greatly in this.

**Supportive leadership behaviour** included: creating spaces in which teams and networks could develop; valuing and fostering diversity; and addressing conflicts constructively and proactively.

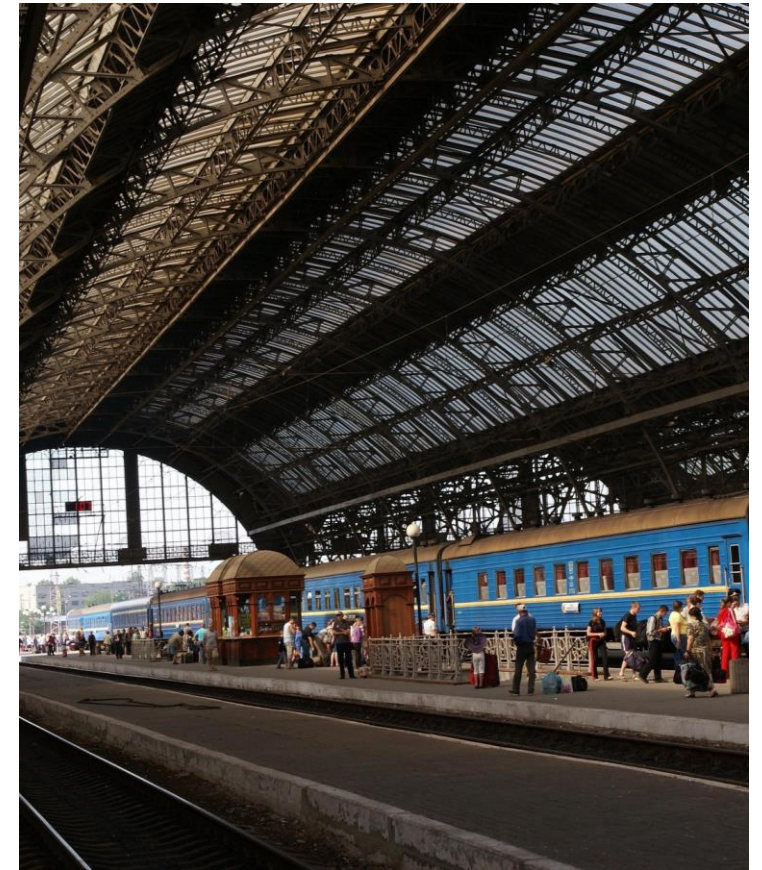
“ Our team worked well together before the invasion, and we have grown even closer since. The neighbouring team is struggling with internal conflict. ”

# Story: Coordination Centre for Civil Protection Lviv

The Coordination Centre for Civil Protection in Lviv played a central role in rapidly organising large-scale support services for internally displaced people after the invasion began. In the first days of the Russian attack, up to 100,000 displaced people arrived at Lviv's railway station each day, compared with the usual 5,000 travellers.

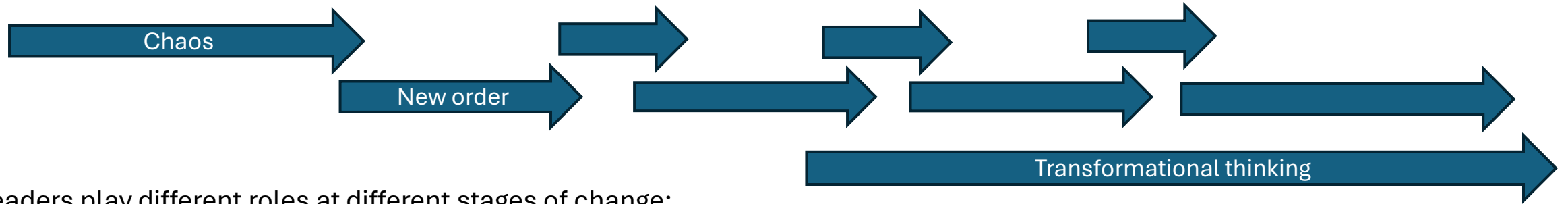
**Halyna Bordun** told the story of how:

- Within a few days, an efficient **support system involving hundreds of professionals and volunteers** was built from scratch to provide logistical, medical and psychological support to displaced people
- This was made possible by **drawing on existing networks** and quickly integrating people who were willing to help
- The centre now plays a key role in building relationships between stakeholders to support the integration of veterans and address mental health needs in the Ukrainian population



## 6

# Foster future-oriented, transformative thinking



Leaders play different roles at different stages of change:

- In times of **chaos**, they need to reduce uncertainty by providing stability, enabling self-organisation and offering individual support.
- They then help to establish **a new order**: creating effective structures, strengthening teamwork and allowing new routines to develop.
- **Transformative thinking** often begins only when leaders set the tone for looking beyond the short and medium term.

Leaders described a particularly rewarding part of their role as **being able to zoom out**, explore what is possible and direct their own and their team's attention towards transformative visions, such as building a renewed Ukraine (see chapter 2). This calls for **reflection, creative thinking** and the ability to formulate a compelling vision.

**Supportive leadership behaviour** included: recognising long-term possibilities beyond the current situation, clearly communicating future visions and inviting people to engage with them.

“Often it was my role to make people look beyond the current situation.”

# Story: Kharkiv School of Architecture

The [Kharkiv School of Architecture](#) offers educational programmes that provide focused skills, practical experience and a new perspective on architecture. Shortly after the start of the full-scale invasion, the school had to relocate from Kharkiv to Lviv. It now runs in-person programmes in Lviv and spearheads thinking on new urban architecture and planning.

**Oleg Drozdov**, one of the school's founders, described how:

- They decided that **in-person programmes were essential** for achieving the kind of learning they wanted
- The school **quickly identified new opportunities** for urban planning and built these into its programmes and planning initiatives
- They see the current situation as potentially giving rise to a **new avant-garde in art and architecture**, as happened in Europe after 1919 and 1945



# 7

## Prepare for scenarios that seem unlikely

Only 2 of the 25 conversation partners from more than 20 organisations reported that, before the full-scale invasion, they had **developed and analysed scenarios that resembled what later happened**. Many said: *We had a sense that something big might happen, but we told ourselves it would not.*

This reflects neuroscientific and psychological research suggesting that **denial is often our brain's first response** to large-scale threats (for example, Kari Norgaard, 2011). People tend not to acknowledge unwelcome information and try to ignore it until action becomes unavoidable.

- Most organisations **had done no scenario planning**, or had only considered scenarios that were very different from what actually happened. Their risk management systems likewise failed to anticipate this chain of events
- Some leaders avoided discussing a possible war before the invasion because they **did not want to worry staff**. With hindsight, they felt that, while it was sensible not to spread anxiety too widely, such scenarios should at least have been discussed within the leadership team.

Leaders also noted that **many small actions taken before the invasion** for other reasons later helped them cope – for example, keeping contact lists up to date, building wide and stable personal networks, and informally playing through possible future scenarios.

**Supportive leadership behaviour** included: recognising one's own denial mechanisms, creating space to discuss uncomfortable scenarios, and taking “no-regret” preparedness measures for potential crises.

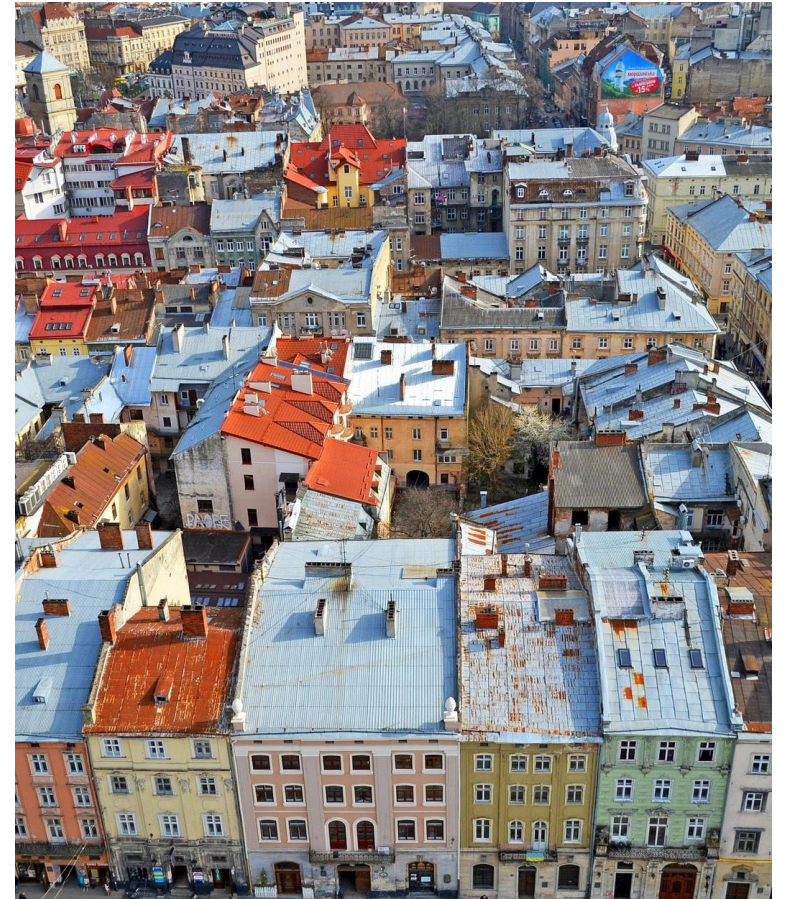
“ We never thought this could happen.”

# Story: Lviv Department of Economic Policy

The [Department of Economic Policy](#) of the **Lviv Regional State Administration** played a crucial role in helping businesses from eastern Ukraine relocate to the relatively safe and stable Lviv region. It organised the transport of machinery and equipment from eastern Ukraine to Lviv, allocated plots of land for the businesses and helped integrate them into local economic life.

Department head **Vadym Tabakera** shared how:

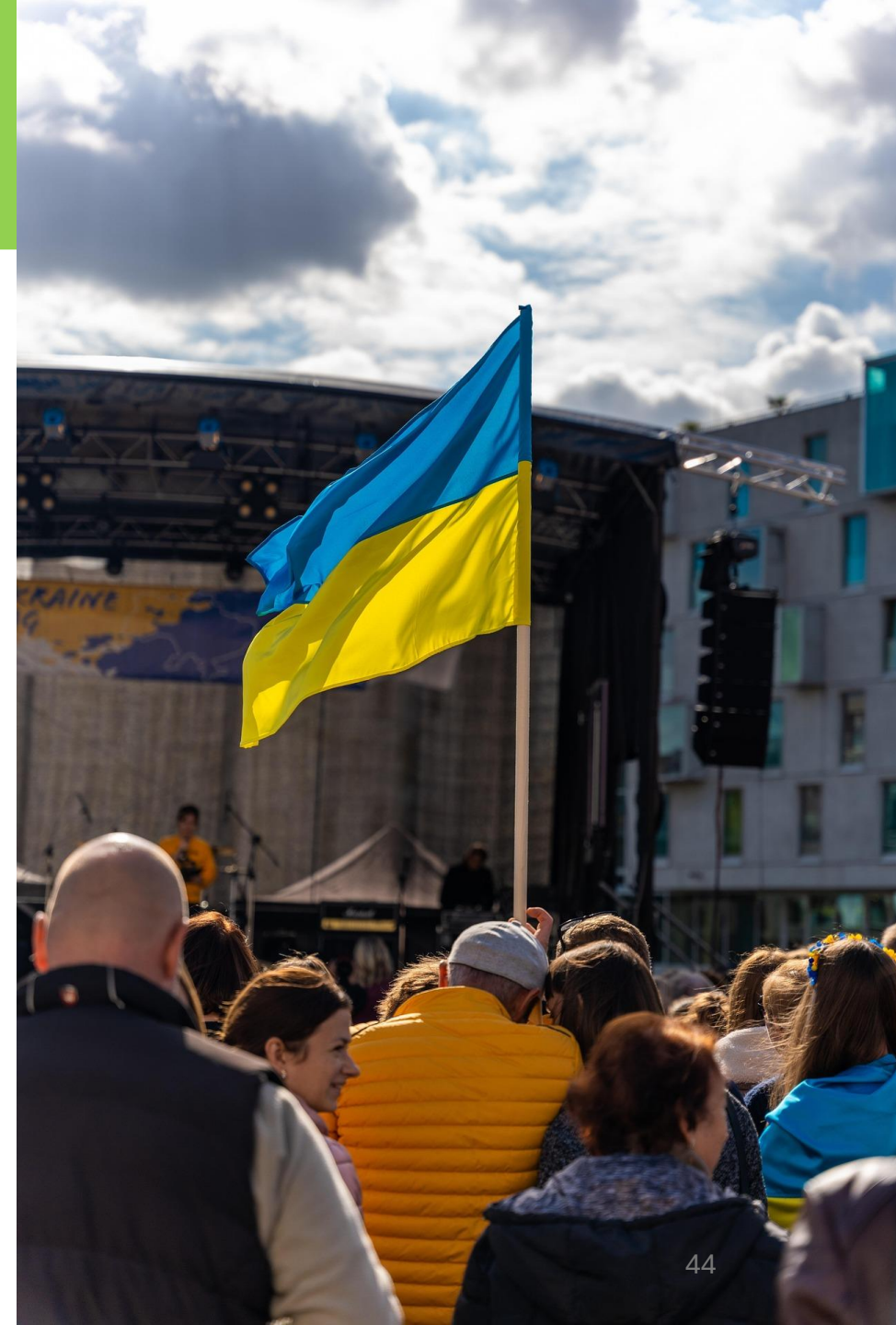
- His organisation had **worked with different scenarios** before Russia's full-scale invasion
- **Existing networks** with donors, industries and other parts of the administration made it possible to launch relocation initiatives swiftly and smoothly
- Working methods were adapted to a **more agile approach**, including after-action reviews, digitalisation and iterative improvement

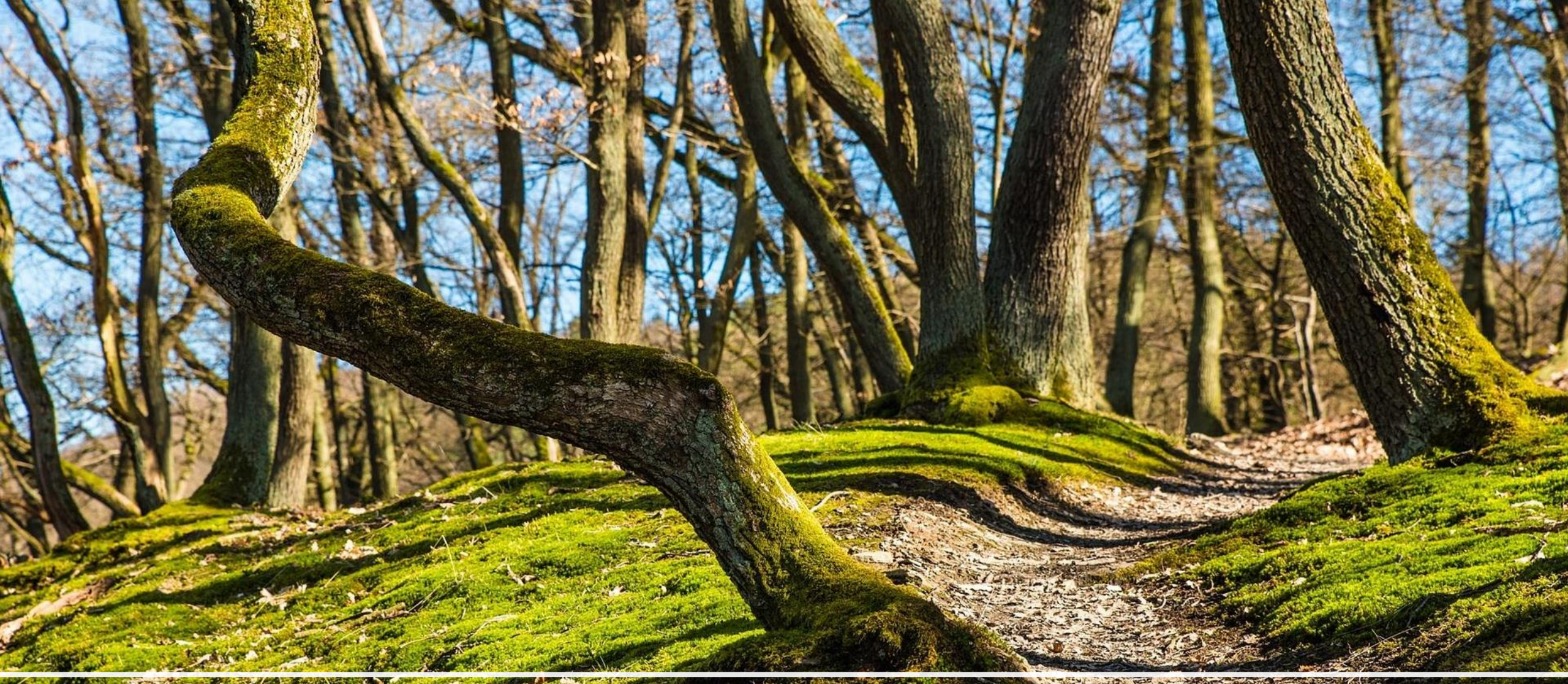


And what was also learned

Trust your collective ability  
to navigate unprecedented  
situations

“ We never imagined we would  
find ourselves in such a situation  
– but when we were,  
we knew what to do.  
Together we achieved far more  
than we had ever expected. ”





## 4. Environmental issues in Ukraine



# The current environmental situation in Ukraine

Several conversations focused on the current environmental situation in Ukraine. Overall, the environment is in a highly concerning state and environmental policy faces serious challenges. At present, there is little transformational momentum on environmental issues more broadly.

**Effects of Russia's full-scale invasion on the environment** are immense and increasingly devastating. They are being documented in detail.

**Climate change mitigation and adaptation, and biodiversity conservation are clearly deprioritised** politically (with the exception of energy supply and efficiency, see above), including in public spending.

Environmental issues have lost political visibility and influence following the **merger of the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture into the Ministry of Economy**.

**Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) are not applied consistently** in reconstruction efforts. The planned Action Plan for the Post-War Reconstruction and Development of Ukraine has been launched but not yet concluded. However, the “do no significant harm” principle is gaining traction.

Given the current political climate and challenges, **national NGOs are less visible and outspoken** in their watchdog role vis-à-vis the Ukrainian government on environmental policy.

**National parks were viewed positively**, particularly in the early phase of the full-scale invasion, when they hosted internally displaced people and their premises and infrastructure were used to supply goods to the population.

# Towards a more ambitious environmental policy

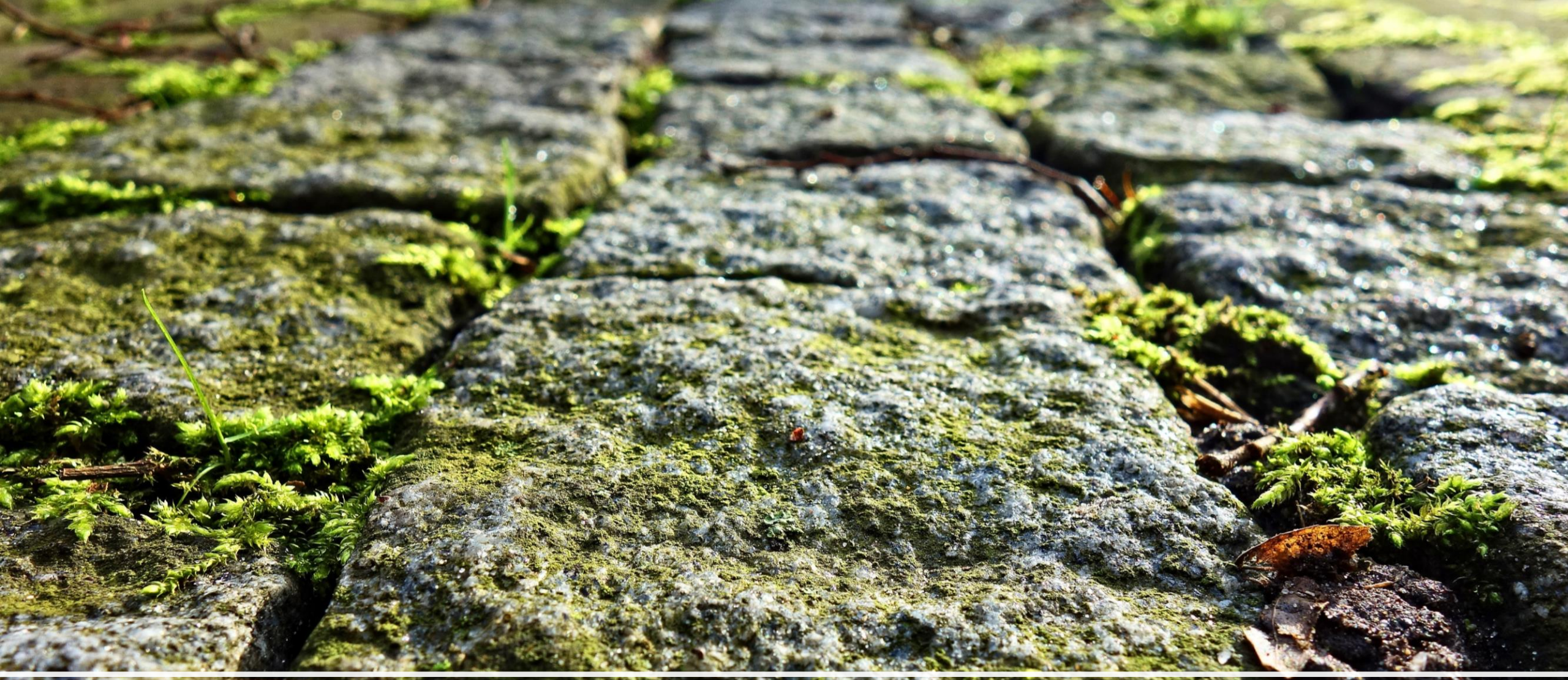
**Narratives to strengthen environmental policy** are currently rather weak. The process of preparing for EU accession could give new momentum to conservation and environmental concerns.

**On an institutional level, an ambitious vision** for a strong Ukrainian environmental policy would include:

- Robust legal anchoring of EIAs and SEAs, including their integration into reconstruction efforts
- An institutional set-up with a strong, well-equipped environmental protection agency, drawing on examples from Germany or Czechia
- A dedicated funding mechanism for nature conservation and environmental work
- An active and professional ecosystem of NGOs
- Political lobbying activities focused on these elements.

As part of an agreement to end the Russian full-scale invasion, environmental organisations propose that Russian **frozen assets** could be used to cover costs of the environmental consequences of the invasion.

**Pilot projects**, such as those carried out by Felicity II (Bauhaus Erde), can support these efforts.



## 5. Next steps



# Next steps -01

This exploration is intended as a starting point for understanding what can be learned from Ukraine's experience between 2022 and 2025. Possible follow-up activities for GIZ and other actors include:

## Sustainability transformations

- **In-depth analysis of key enablers of transformation in crisis, examining examples, e.g. on energy production, in greater depth and nuance, for instance for IKI**
- **Developing strategies** for bringing **longer-term transformation perspectives** into Ukrainian reconstruction efforts
- **Sector-specific studies on transformation potential and strategies**, for example for GIZ clusters

It is also planned to explore presenting these lessons in an online event with GIZ, IKI and other players as well as other relevant fora.

# Next steps -02

## Part 2 – Leadership and organisational practice

- Make these lessons known in Ukraine and beyond by **presentations or a publication**
- Developing **accessible stories** to underline the leadership lessons (podcasts, videos), for instance a **short video to come with each leadership lesson**, including a leader from Ukraine.
- Further analysis of **organisational practice and leadership in crisis situations**, also on what did not work, with a focus on public sector or large institutions.

It has been agreed with Felicity II that the stories collected and the analysis can be further deepened and shared externally by the author.



## Annex: Literature

# Key literature – Ukraine and resilience

- Alfarsi: *Blueprint for Crisis Resilience – What the World Can Learn from Ukraine*: <https://www.profolus.com/topics/blueprint-for-crisis-resilience-what-the-world-can-learn-from-ukraine/> (30 Oktober 2025)
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- Koshelenko: *Management in Times of War: Leadership Examples from Ukraine’s Government and Private Sector*. Ultimate Beneficiary Publishing, Ukraine (2024)
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# Key literature – Reconstruction and environment in Ukraine

- Build Ukraine Back Better Platform: *Build Ukraine Back Better – Roadmap for the Sustainable Recovery of Ukraine*: [https://en.ecoaction.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Roadmap\\_Sustainable\\_Recovery\\_Ukraine\\_2025-en-s.pdf](https://en.ecoaction.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Roadmap_Sustainable_Recovery_Ukraine_2025-en-s.pdf) (2025=)
- Ackermann et al.: *Building Forward Better – Review of sustainable frameworks and lessons from Ukraine*. (IISD, 2025): <https://www.iisd.org/publications/brief/building-forward-better-sustainable-recovery-ukraine>
- De Klerk et al: *Climate damage caused by Russia’s war in Ukraine: 24 February 2022 – 23 February 2025* (Ecoaction): <https://en.ecoaction.org.ua/climate-damage-3-years-numbers.html> (2025)
- Heinrich Böll Foundation, Kyiv office, Resource & Analysis Center “Society and Environment”: *Green Recovery Of Ukraine – Processes, Forms and Vision of Key Stakeholders*: <https://rac.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/racse-report-green-recovery-2025-eng.pdf> (2025)
- Leukhina: *Moving Beyond Resilience in Ukraine’s Recovery* (2023) <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2023/12/moving-beyond-resilience-in-ukraines-recovery?lang=en>

# Key literature – Transformation

- Ganz: *People, Power, Change*. Oxford University Press. (2024)
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# About FELICITY II

## **FELICITY II – "Cities Advisory Facility Eastern Partnership and Central Asia Countries"**

**FELICITY II is an international initiative supporting sustainable urban infrastructure development in Eastern European and Central Asia countries, aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The programme provides technical and analytical assistance to municipalities to help them design and implement climate-friendly investments in water supply, wastewater management, and energy-efficient buildings.**

This measure is organized with the support of FELICITY II, which is funded by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety under the International Climate Initiative (IKI) and supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

FELICITY II is implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH in cooperation with the European Investment Bank and with the support of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, under the framework of the International Climate Initiative (IKI).

If you are (potentially) negatively affected by an IKI project or want to report the improper use of IKI funds, you can file a complaint via the [IKI Independent Complaint Mechanism \(ICM\)](#).

Supported by:



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