

TOP INITIATIVE

Strengthening gender equality and contributing to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

GG1-Project

Background

Ukraine - Local Empowerment, Accountability and Development Programme (U-LEAD with Europe) is a multi-donor initiative of the EU and some Member States in support of the Ukrainian decentralisation reform. The reform aims to create an effective system of local self-government that acts in a citizen-oriented way, contributes to local economic development and brings positive change to people's life. The Programme operates all over Ukraine with a head office in Kyiv and 24 regional centers. It has a large and complex structure with 3 operational units and around 90 staff in Kyiv as well as additional 150 people in the regions.

Following the global adoption of the Agenda 2030 the Government of Ukraine prepared its national report adapting targets and indicators to the national context and the country's specific needs including a target on ensuring equal opportunities for representation at all levels of decision-making in political and public life. U-LEAD with Europe's political partner, the Ministry of the Development of Communities and Territories (MinRegion), has subsequently initiated a process of mainstreaming gender into all its policies and legislation and has drawn up a road map for expanding women's participation in political decision-making at sub-national level and raising gender responsiveness of local self-governments. However, despite changes made at the legislative and institutional levels achieving gender parity especially in government and public authorities remains a challenge.

The Top Initiative (TI) was created to strengthen the coherence and effectiveness of activities aimed at achieving gender related indicators as well as to increase the visibility of U-LEAD's contributions to the Ukrainian SDG framework and specifically to SDG 5 on Gender Equality. In order to implement the TI an internal task force (TF) was established headed by the TI caretaker who is also a member of the Programme's Management Team. The TF further consists of gender focal points from different units and draws from additional resources at U-LEAD's regional offices.



Members of the Gender Task Force with slogans for women's empowerment created for a social media campaign

Exploiting the Programme's capacity development approach and comprehensive regional structure, the TI pulled together activities into two main intervention streams (see below) with a variety of measures all over Ukraine addressing gender-related issues most relevant to the national priorities and Programme objectives.

Coordination of these two intervention streams was ensured by the TF but activities were managed by the respective Programme units according to their technical expertise and responsibilities. The establishment of this cross-unit TF was instrumental in increasing the flow of information between units and across regions as well as strengthening awareness and ownership for the issue of gender equality across the entire Programme.

Intervention stream 1: Gender mainstreaming in capacity development activities of the project to improve municipal services in Local Self-Government (LSG)

Public perception and reality of gender equality are not necessarily congruent in Ukraine. On the one hand, women have high levels of education and their participation in the general labour force is very common. Representation of women in public administration is high, though more strongly at lower levels. Especially at the local level this leads to many men as well as women believing that there is little demand for action with regard to gender parity. On the other hand, existing data clearly points to significant gaps: the average wage of men is 30% higher than women's and less than 1% of men take parental leave.

In order to create positive examples of gender sensitive policies at the local level and to strengthen the capacities of local administrations to implement them, the Programme systematically integrated gender equality aspects into their capacity development activities.

- **Gender mainstreaming of training curricula for local financial management** (gender-responsive budgeting- implemented by international partner organisation) and human resource management (gender-sensitive recruitment and selection, gender stereotypes, identification and prevention of discriminatory practices, gender specific motivation and career development)
- **Support to local communities in developing gender sensitive municipal services** (corresponding to Result Indicator R1b: 5 citizen-oriented services, 3 of which are relevant to female citizens, promoted by the Programme are tested in 30 municipalities).

A partnership approach was chosen for this specific activity by way of integrating Programme's objectives into calls for proposals and providing the selected partner organisations with trainings as well as streamlined project documentation and monitoring templates to facilitate data collection. Projects implemented by partners guide the targeted communities through the process of developing municipal services that are adapted to the different gender needs. This is primarily done through introducing the training participants to key principles and concepts, such as gender budgeting for social services and a gender action plan (GAP) for mobility, for example collecting gender-sensitive statistical data on mobility patterns to be reflected in the layout of local transportation routes and establishing close cooperation with the relevant grassroots organisations for effective information exchange. Implementing partners already apply gender responsive approaches that include participatory planning.

Further, with the support of a Ukrainian civil society organisation (CSO) specialising on gender equality guidelines and checklists for five sectors, including social services and waste management, with relevance for municipal service provision were developed and shared with implementing partners. They formulate simple and concrete examples for steps to be taken.

Mainstreaming gender - yielding greater results

While advocating for gender equality, some communities also recognized the opportunities that emerge from gender-specific differences to achieve better outcomes. As an example, the Programme's initiative "Upgrading Municipal Waste Management Services in AHs" aims to communicate the value of waste as a resource. Given women's role in early socialisation of children, the implementing partner plans to empower women as agents of change by conducting a set of awareness raising activities.

Intervention stream 2: Strengthening women's participation at the local level

The decentralisation process has yet to address the structural barriers preventing women from shaping its outcomes and fully benefitting from the opportunities it presents. Traditional gender norms prevail in Ukraine where women are still more strongly associated with the family and men with political life. Many women considering entering politics report negative stereotypical views and assumptions about their leadership role as being a major barrier. Also, local politics are often dominated by male patronage networks to which women rarely have access constituting another barrier for their political influence. This is especially apparent at the level of newly formed municipalities following territorial reform, which command more authority and larger resources than the previous village councils and are now less likely to be led by a woman. Data from 2018 shows that at municipal level only 17% of all heads of new municipalities are women (in villages its closer to 30%). Facing such male-dominated politics, Ukrainian women are especially active in civil society, as an alternative means to advocate for their interests.

In order to empower women, to increase their contribution to policy development as well as their public visibility several interventions were implemented to raise their capacities and create opportunities for exchange and discussions, knowledge sharing and joint learning.

- **Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women** through local subsidies to three civil society organisations (CSO)
- **Creation of She-LEADS – Female Leadership Network in Local Self-Government** The network aims at strengthening the social capital of female leaders in LSG and enhance their

capacities to master their role of political leaders, to increase their visibility in media and the political community as well as to enable them to bring in expertise to the public discussion on public administration and LSG reforms. The selection of network members was a collective effort of the Gender TF and regional centers (RC) by identifying first of all female heads of local municipalities and then selecting the most active among them. After one year of existence of the network the membership pool registers 38 AH heads from across Ukraine that actively participate in networks activities.

Since December 2018, several networking events, conferences, round tables and trainings were organised directly for She-LEADs members and/or involving selected members of the network. Many activities were organised by the RCs. A review of activities in the Programme's data management infrastructure (DMI) shows that in total 99 gender-related events on various topics ranging from gender-responsive budgeting, dialogue events on women and the decentralisation reform to engaging women in policy development took place in all 24 regions.

Among the highlights was a national female leadership forum which was at same time capacity building (public speaking training and gender awareness workshop) as well as a networking event between She-LEADs members and female leaders from the private sector and civil society, mainly from Kyiv and other cities. The exchange, discussion and joint activities with these female leaders (keynote, speed-dating, innovation challenge) offered the opportunity to learn from each other and to see the added value of reaching out to one another to get ideas and support cross-sectoral.

With the aim to increase visibility of women demonstrating their equal competence in socially valued domains and hence create positive role models, the Programme initiated a Facebook campaign consisting of a series of short stories and corresponding profile pictures with quotes on female empowerment that were recorded and taken at the forum (reached almost 400.000 people). Moreover, a number of journalistic profiles of heads of local municipalities were produced that were published in social media (reached nearly 11.000 people) as well as in print media. Further, a national photo competition was conducted with the motto "Breaking stereotypes: strong women of my community". This attracted more than 700 submissions reflecting a diversity of experiences and challenges faced by women in daily life. The winner photos were subsequently displayed at a Metro Station in Kyiv attracting a broad audience of urban commuters and are now decorating the walls of the U-LEAD head office in Kyiv.



One of the winner photos of the competition „Breaking Stereotypes“

Challenging norms and stereotypes through exchange

Discussions at the national leadership forum disrupted group-thinking among She-LEADs members who were challenged in their often quite conservative views of gender roles in society. For example, during a discussion about sexual harassment at the workplace She-LEADs members reiterated that it was the women's own fault whereas this was strongly opposed by other participants triggering a debate and challenging the thinking of heads of local municipalities.

Reporting

Due to the challenges a large and complex project like U-LEAD faces, a new GIZ tool was developed uniquely tailored to its needs, called the data management infrastructure (DMI). Using open source software, a cloud-based solution was devised to provide colleagues in all regional centers across Ukraine with a tool for data entry. All data entered into the system about capacity development activities is gender aggregated. At this point, only the break-down of gender in participation is closely monitored with the result that women make up a majority (see graph next page).

However, throughout the first phase of the Programme DMI has evolved from a data collection and storage system into a sophisticated platform for analysis that has been tailored to GIZ intervention logic and would enable further monitoring and analysis of progress with regard to gender equality in the second phase.

In the results matrix of U-LEAD's first phase there are 2 indicators with gender relevance, one at the level of special objective and one at result level. These indicators are systematically monitored and reported on. According to the latest DMI status report all indicators are on track.

As this initiative addresses cross-cutting issues, all units of the Programme were involved in its implementation as well as representatives from the regional centers. All relevant activities to the SDGs and gender equality were consolidated and integrated into the Programme's reporting structure. In that way the existing efforts were concentrated and made more visible towards donors as well as partners.

Furthermore, all activities under the Top Initiative are documented and reported on under a special chapter in Programme reports and several other presentations, for example, for U-LEAD's steering committee meetings with donors and the partner Ministry.

Results

The fact that gender related activities contribute directly to the project's results and receive higher visibility through the Top Initiative has contributed to a joint feeling of ownership and responsibility in the task force and beyond. Growing national political commitment and demand from the local level with regard to increasing gender equality have supported the motivation and engagement among all stakeholders. What united most active collaborators at national and regional level were strong personal beliefs in gender equality goals.

With the end of the first phase of the Programme in 2020, implementation of this intervention is expected to have raised awareness about the relevance of gender equality with regard to local self-governance and service delivery among LSG authorities but also U-LEAD internally. Furthermore, LSG will be able to better address gender equality at the local level following training measures and the introduction of piloting measures on gender responsive services. In the short term, this will have created examples and good practice which can be shared through the Programmes' national network. Addressing cultural norms and stereotypes and creating social change for more participation of women can only be achieved in the long run. Experiences with the She-LEADs network have shown how a rural-urban gap can be addressed by creating more opportunity for exchange between female leaders with different personal and professional backgrounds. Because of these positive results the tasks force and main intervention streams will be continued in the second phase of the Programme.

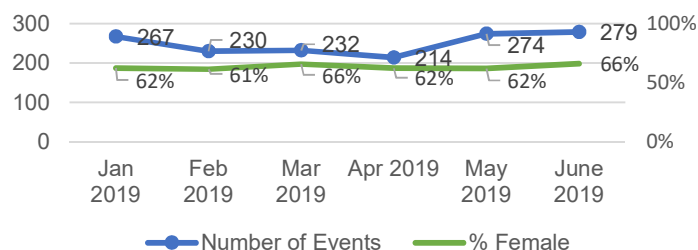
Main challenges

- In large and complex projects like U-LEAD with Europe the diversity of topics and activities is substantial. There was a risk that gender would be "another subject" to cover and perceived to be an additional burden
- The sheer size of the Programme with activities in 24 regions and across many topics makes planning, coordinating and monitoring a real challenge
- Despite high motivation of Task Force members, time allocation to gender activities was not always easy and often resulted in substantial work overload which is not sustainable in the long run

Key success factors

- Identifying and integrating people with intrinsic motivation to contribute in the TF and regional centers as well as among the partners and target group (She-LEADs network)
- Strong support and leadership from Programme management
- Having a broad stakeholder network benefitting from different experiences and creativity

GRAPH 3: NUMBER OF U-LEAD WITH EUROPE EVENTS AND GENDER BALANCE OF PARTICIPANTS IN 2019



Gender balance among participants of all U-LEAD events in 2019 (DMI data)