



THE ROLE OF THE UKRAINIAN CANADIAN DIASPORA IN WARTIME MOBILISATION
& POST-WAR RECOVERY & RECONSTRUCTION

by

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Abstract

The Ukrainian Canadian diaspora, rooted in a long history of immigration and strong institution building, supported by Canada's pro-Ukraine foreign policy, and enabled by Canada's multicultural system, makes it well positioned to shape Canada's policy on Ukraine and contribute to reconstruction efforts. Diaspora members bring a unique understanding of Ukraine's pressing needs, maintain ties across Canadian and Ukrainian institutions, and can operate across contexts with language, cultural, and socio-political knowledge.

However, while diasporas are mentioned in conversations on reconstruction, there is enthusiasm on participation from Ukrainian organisations, and Ukraine's increase in focus on diaspora groups, the subject remains understudied and diasporas continue to be underestimated and underutilized. Moreover, there is currently no research which maps out Ukrainian Canadian diaspora mobilisation since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 and its potential role in reconstruction. This project seeks to fill the gap in research pertaining to post-2022 Ukrainian Canadian diaspora engagement and understand how institutional diaspora leaders see their role in reconstruction and how this aligns across institutions, Canadian Government, and Ukrainian Government representatives.

Drawing on 15 semi-structured interviews (June–July 2025) with leaders of core diaspora institutions, diaspora entrepreneurs, Canadian Government officials, and Ukrainian diplomatic missions' representatives, together with recent policy and scholarly literature, the study identifies and analyses 5 of the most critical areas of diaspora wartime and post-war reconstruction engagement, including: preserving Ukrainian ties and identity; Ukrainian Canadian diaspora as actors of political advocacy; business bridging and economic engagement; knowledge-sharing; fundraising and humanitarian aid.

These areas highlight the diaspora organisations and individuals as both preservers of culture and identity and transnational actors influencing Canadian foreign policy, facilitating investment, mobilising aid, and establishing expert networks. However, findings also point to challenges facing the diaspora, including limited volunteer capacity and resources of diaspora organisations, migration wave differences, full assimilation and loss of connection to the community, underutilised individual action, low trust in Ukraine's institutions, and inefficient connection channels to Canadian and Ukrainian governments.

Introduction

According to latest World Bank estimates, Ukraine's reconstruction and recovery will cost approximately USD 524 billion over the next decade, making it one of the largest reconstruction efforts in the world (World Bank Group, 2025). Ukraine will need all the support that it could get through financial aid and investments from international organisations, ally countries, and businesses; human capital for physical rebuilding and knowledge-sharing to build back better; and international support for conducting reforms for European and Euro-Atlantic integration. According to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are nearly 7 million Ukrainians living outside Ukraine's borders as refugees (UNHCR, 2025). The Ukrainian diaspora worldwide constitutes between 20 to 25 million people, with Canada having the largest diaspora of approximately 1.3 million (ICMPD, 2025; Statistics Canada, 2022), the largest in the world after the diaspora in Russia. Canada alone welcomed nearly 300 thousand displaced Ukrainians since the full-scale invasion under the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) visa (Government of Canada, 2025). The majority settled in Ontario, with 15% of total displaced Ukrainians self-reporting to have settled in the Greater Toronto Area (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2023). In total, the number of self-identifying Ukrainian or Ukrainian Canadians can be approximated to at least 1.6 million.

Ukrainians living abroad are an extension of their homeland and act as activists, political lobbyists, and bridges between their host country and home country whereas migration can be perceived as not only a phenomenon that "drains the homeland of the best and brightest," but also as an "opportunity for states to establish deeper economic ties to economies around the world" (Leblang & Glazier, 2022, p. 37). The emergence of diaspora studies is very recent, with

the field experiencing substantial growth since the 2000s (Cohen & Fischer, 2019). Home countries of diasporas are also beginning to pay closer attention to their transnational communities both for material gains and identity-based motivations (ODIHR, 2024). Ukraine started developing a diaspora policy at the time of the Orange Revolution in 2004 through the creation of the Law on the Legal Status of Ukrainians Abroad (ODIHR, 2024). This law stated that the Ukrainian state had the obligation to meet the national, cultural, and linguistic needs of the Ukrainians abroad and called “for spiritual and cultural enrichment” (ODIHR, 2024). There have been many developments since then. During his visit to Canada in 2022, President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, addressed the community with words “it is at this historic moment that we need your effective help. And you must prove with your steps that you are a part of the history of Ukraine, the living history of Ukraine” (Office of the President of Ukraine, 2022). In December 2024, the Ukrainian Government established the Ministry of National Unity, aiming to strengthen national cohesion, support Ukrainians abroad, and facilitate their potential return (Jędrzyak, 2024). In 2025, the ministry began opening Unity Hubs in cities across Europe as on-the-ground support centers for displaced Ukrainians abroad (Office of the President of Ukraine, 2025). Most recently in July of 2025, Ukraine approved a law permitting multiple citizenships to strengthen ties with the diaspora (Stasiuk, 2025).

On the international stage, the 2022 Lugano Ukraine Recovery Conference’s Ukraine’s Recovery Plan Blueprint mentioned diasporas participating in reconstruction in the capacity of “facilitating returns, creating special incentives for entrepreneurs to employ returnees, diaspora investment for the renewal of public infrastructure, engaging academic diaspora for online education, improvements in the system of social service provisions, building and renewal of damaged housing” (ODIHR, 2024). The 2025 Ukraine Recovery Conference in Rome introduced

the very first Diaspora Lab titled “Diaspora-Driven Strategies for Empowering Ukraine’s Recovery and Fostering Cohesion” organized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), including speakers from Ukraine’s Ministry of National Unity, IOM, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Ukrainian World Congress (UWC), among others (URC, 2025). A new diaspora platform supported by the IOM, the Global Alliance for Diaspora Engagement in Ukraine’s Reconstruction, was introduced at the conference. The initiative aims to coordinate and scale the contributions of the Ukrainian diaspora toward rebuilding Ukraine’s institutions, economy, and communities through sustained, cross-sector collaboration (IOM, 2025).

With these developments in mind, Canada’s Ukraine diaspora has the potential to play a significant role in bridging Canada and Ukraine for purposes of Ukraine’s wartime efforts and post-war reconstruction. However, the area of diaspora engagement by states of origin remains underdeveloped and diasporas as a whole remain underestimated. Moreover, there is no current research mapping out the mobilisation of Canada’s Ukraine diaspora post-2022 or the diaspora’s potential role in reconstruction. Thus, the Major Research Paper aims to answer the following research question: How can the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora most effectively contribute to Ukraine’s wartime efforts and post-war reconstruction? To this end, the research project will identify the unique strengths of Canada’s Ukraine diaspora, uncover most pressing challenges, and explore the potential role(s) that the diaspora could play in post-war reconstruction efforts. The goal of this project is to contribute to research on diaspora engagement and mobilisation in time of conflict and war, act as a resource for Ukrainian and Canadian diaspora policy makers, and further discussion on reconstruction in the Ukrainian Canadian community.

Through primary interview and secondary source research, this paper identified top 5 areas for Ukrainian Canadian diaspora's engagement during wartime and post-war recovery and reconstruction. These areas included: preservation of Ukrainian ties and identity; political advocacy; business bridging and economic engagement; knowledge-sharing; fundraising and humanitarian aid. Interviewees frequently mentioned key diaspora institutional organizations which they perceive will lead rebuilding efforts in the community. These organizations include the Canada-Ukraine Foundation (CUF), Canada-Ukraine Chamber of Commerce (CUCC), and the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) which will be analysed in the results and findings section (Romanko, interview, June 9, 2025). The paper first introduces the literature review on diaspora studies, theory of diaspora mobilisation in time of conflict and war, present-day diaspora engagement strategies for Ukraine's reconstruction, the history of the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora, and Canada's foreign policy towards Ukraine. Following the methodology section detailing the research and interview design, the results & findings section analyses the 5 above-noted areas of diaspora engagement for wartime and post-war reconstruction through the perspective of interviewees. The conclusion section summarizes findings and implications of diaspora engagement and avenues for further research.

Literature Review

Diaspora & Diaspora Mobilisation Definition & Theories

The diaspora definition for this paper is taken from Jonathan Grossman's rendition derived from an analysis of to-date diaspora definition discourse balancing the positivist and constructivist approaches by defining diaspora both as a social formation and a conscious identity, acknowledging that individuals must voluntarily identify as part of a diaspora to be

included in it (2019). Grossman defines diaspora as “a transnational community whose members (or their ancestors) emigrated or were displaced from their original homeland but remained oriented to it and preserve a group identity” (2019, p. 1267). Furthermore, this project defines diaspora mobilisation as “individual and collective actions of identity-based social entrepreneurs who organize and encourage migrants to behave in a concerted way to make homeland-orient claims, bring about a political objective, or contribute to a cause” (Koinova, 2015, p. 5).

Diasporas can play an integral role both in their country of origin (home) and country of residence (host). As groups and individuals with a unique cross-cultural understanding, connection with both home and host businesses, governments, and institutions, members of the diaspora often invest in businesses as entrepreneurs between host and home countries, send money home through remittances to family members, and facilitate knowledge-sharing through work experience, education, and/or foreign connections to institutions (Leblang & Glazier, 2022). Diasporas can also be beneficial for contributing to the development, democratic processes, and peacebuilding in fragile states (Nikolko & Belo, 2022). When the home country is in crisis, diaspora communities can mobilize support, organize humanitarian responses, engage in political activism, among other activities (Nikolko & Belo, 2022). The strength of the mobilisation, especially political activism, relies heavily on support of the home country aligning with the host country’s policy (Nikolko & Belo, 2022). However, while diasporas show spurts of mobilisation during times of crisis in their home country, engagement can decrease significantly when the conflict ends, unless an unresolved traumatic issue from the conflict persists (Koinova 2015; Voytiv 2021).

Two dominant approaches are used by home countries in state-diaspora relations: tapping and transnationalism (Leblang & Glazier 2022; Gamlen et al. 2013). In the tapping approach,

home countries engage with and grant certain rights to their diasporas to attract and benefit from the material benefits the diaspora can channel home, including financial, intellectual, or material assets (Leblang & Glazier, 2022). The transnationalism approach involves efforts by the home country to make the diaspora feel connected to the home country “often symbolic and attempt to increase emigrants’ sense of belonging to a homeland and being part of a political movement at home even when they are abroad” (Leblang & Glazier, 2022, p. 27). States use a mix of tapping and transnationalism depending on needs which lead to different outcomes of diaspora engagement. More recent research shows that diaspora policies are not static or purely state-driven, but are relational and shaped by power asymmetries, temporal shifts, and diaspora agency (Koinova, 2018).

Diaspora as Individual Actors: Four Types of Diaspora Entrepreneurs

Maria Koinova, Professor in International Relations at the University of Warwick, is a prominent leader in researching the Ukrainian diaspora mobilisation for Ukraine’s recovery and reconstruction. Koinova identified a gap in diaspora research, whereas diaspora is often perceived on a group rather than individual actor basis, which limits the understanding of the different kinds of individuals with unique strengths and characteristics that make up the diaspora structure. Koinova identified 4 types of diaspora entrepreneurs: brokers, locals, home-bound, and communal, operating through different contexts and with different capacities, that can be tapped in for different purposes. These categories of diaspora entrepreneurs will be used to identify and differentiate between diaspora actors in the Canadian context.

The first diaspora entrepreneur Koinova identified is the broker, a highly visible, international bridge-builder who can mediate across contexts, connecting politicians, civil

society, businesses, and international organizations (Koinova, 2024). Brokers can identify opportunities, engage transnationally, and link stakeholders with governments for collaboration. However, these individuals are rare. The second type of diaspora entrepreneurs is the local, a well-integrated migrant professional with expertise in areas like business who maintains close ties to their home while building strong connections with social, economic, and political actors in their host country (Koinova, 2024). They leverage their deep understanding of the host environment to drive projects like city twinning, fundraising, political advocacy, and serve as cultural ambassadors for Ukraine. The third category is home-bound, those who maintain strong connections to their country of origin, prioritizing return and actively mobilizing others by leveraging their deep ties with local political, social, and economic actors (Koinova, 2024). The final category is communal entrepreneurs, activists who focus on community-relevant, humanitarian, and educational projects without extensive connections in their host or home countries. They engage in grassroots efforts over political advocacy or high-level engagement (Koinova, 2024).

Canada's Foreign Policy Towards Ukraine

According to the 2021 census, Ukrainians are in the top-10 ethnic groups in Canada, making up 3.5% of total Canadian population (Bessonova, 2022). There have been 6 waves of immigrations of Ukrainians to Canada: 1st wave (1897-1914) when Canada launched a resettlement action for immigrants in the steppes; 2nd wave (1920-1939) interwar immigration and unification of the Ukrainian Community; 3rd wave (1945-1990) political immigration following WW2; 4th wave (1991-2011) economic immigration; 5th wave (2014-2018) young professional immigration following the Revolution of Dignity; sixth wave (2022-present day) war displacement immigration (UWC, 2022). The level and substance of diaspora engagement

across waves can vary based on reasons that the individual or their ancestors left Ukraine (ODIHR, 2024).

Since many individuals who immigrated to Canada from Central and Eastern Europe left their homes for political reasons, they were more likely to pay closer attention to issues taking place in their home countries and creating stronger mobilisation (Bessonova, 2022). Then-Secretary of State of External Affairs of Canada, Joe Clark, stated that “virtually no other nation possesses the web of intense personal connections to Eastern and Central Europe that we have in Canada. That gives Canadians a special interest, and a special capacity, in helping those societies become prosperous and free” (Bessonova, 2022, p. 17). In 1990, Canada created the Renaissance Eastern Europe Program funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade’s Bureau of Assistance for Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). In 1995, focus on CEE was added to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), which cooperated with diasporas as development actors (Bessonova, 2022). Canada’s main priorities in 2020 were the bilateral relationships with institutions of the EU for cooperation within Canada-European Free Trade Association with a special attention paid only to one country, that being Ukraine (according to the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act) due to its continual struggle with democracy and economic development (Bessonova, 2022).

Canada recognized the independence of Ukraine on December 2, 1991, a day following the independence referendum (Bessonova, 2022). Canada’s foreign policy towards Central Eastern Europe and Ukraine has shifted from wanting to prevent the spread of communism during the Cold War, towards technical and financial support for democratisation following the collapse of the USSR, and then to security and Ukraine’s reform progress concerns since 2014 (Bessonova, 2022). Canada’s foreign policy is supportive towards Ukraine for several reasons.

First, assisting Ukraine is an extension of Canada's democratic values, protection of international law, territorial integrity, human rights, and the support of democracy overall (Bessonova, 2022). Thus, most of the assistance to Ukraine and CEE has focused on these elements. Moreover, according to Canada's values, it does not support Russia's aggressive foreign policy in an attempt to assert itself as a great power (Bessonova, 2022). Thus, support for Ukraine is first and foremost consistent because it is "subordinated to the national interest of Canada" (Bessonova, 2022, p. 22). The second reason lies in Russia-Canada relations over the Arctic region which Russia's aggression has deteriorated (Bessonova, 2022). Thus, Canada supports countries like Ukraine and others where Russia is involved. The third reason is the active support by the CEE diasporas across the country (Bessonova, 2022). Given the fact that overall, both the state policies and diaspora views of CEE and Baltic states agree on the war in Ukraine, these diasporas are increasing their influence individually and collectively, and with the absence of competing diasporas with pro-Russia agendas.

Post-2022 Ukraine Support by the Government of Canada: The Ukraine Donor Platform steered by officials from Ukraine, the EU, and the G7 countries, including Canada, was launched in 2023 to coordinate Ukraine's financing needs, both current and for reconstruction purposes (European Commission, 2024). Canada has been a strong supporter of Ukraine long before Russia's full-scale invasion of February 24, 2022. Since 2014, Canada put numerous sanctions on Russia, committed millions in assistance for development, humanitarian and financial assistance, peace and stabilisation operations programme, and the Canadian police arrangement (Bessonova, 2022). In 2015, Canada launched Operation UNIFIER, a Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) military training and capacity-building mission in Ukraine. Canada also supplied non-lethal military gear. Since 2022, Canada has committed more than CAD 19 billion in

financial, military, development, humanitarian and peace and stabilization assistance (Government of Canada, 2024). Canada imposed political and economic sanctions on Russian individuals and entities, signed a Canada-Ukraine Strategic Security Partnership, modernized the 2017 Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement, accepted nearly 300,000 Ukrainian migrants under the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel visa (CUAET) and participates in the ReBuild Ukraine Conferences and the Ukraine Recovery Conferences (Government of Canada, 2025).

The State of the Ukrainian Canadian Diaspora

There is a distinction between how Ukrainian diasporas act in Europe and North America. While European communities are focused on supporting civil society organizations, North American communities focus on cooperation with existing Ukrainian political leadership (ODIHR, 2023). One of the diaspora's powers lies in its geographic distribution as a large community lives in the Prairie Provinces in Western Canada (original historic destination of migrants) and the Greater Toronto Area following more recent waves of immigration and also migration from Prairie Provinces by descendants of first generation Canadians (ODIHR, 2023). While the U.S. also has a large number of Ukrainians, they are much more geographically dispersed and diversified (ODIHR, 2023). One of the first instances of support from the Ukrainian Canadian community to Ukraine was seen following the Chernobyl catastrophe and Ukraine's Independence (ODIHR, 2023). 2014 brought the community stronger together with organisations of protests, humanitarian initiatives, and political advocacy (ODIHR, 2023).

The Canadian political system and politics of multiculturalism enable the political activism of ethnic interest groups (Tatar, 2020). In fact, Canada's policy of multiculturalism was

announced by PM Pierre Trudeau in 1971 during a speech at the UCC (UCC, 2021). The Ukrainian Canadian diaspora engages in “political advocacy aimed at decision makers and society that seeks to impact on public opinion” (Tatar, 2020, p. 37). There are 3 types of advocates: institutionalised diaspora players, individual diaspora entrepreneurs, and diaspora politicians (Tatar, 2020). The most significant and influential institutionalised diaspora player is the UCC, an umbrella organisation established in 1941 which represents provincial Ukrainian Canadian community groups (Tatar, 2020). In 1996, UCC launched the Canada-Ukraine Stakeholder Advisory Council for consultations between the UCC and Government of Canada (Tatar, 2020). Its national office was moved to Ottawa in 2010 and Paul Grod’s presidency in 2010 grew the UCC’s presence at Parliament Hill with frequent formal meetings with the PM and other high-ranking officials (Tatar, 2020). An interview with one of the political staffers stated that “in terms of political clout, only the Jewish Congress in Ottawa is better organized than the UCC” (Tatar, 2020, p. 38).

Individual ethnic politicians are also very important. The first elected MP of Ukrainian descent was Michael Luchkovich elected in 1926 (Tatar, 2020). The first Ukrainian MP who became a cabinet minister was Michal Starr in 1959 (Tatar, 2020). However, while ethnic politicians are important for pushing pro-Ukrainian initiatives in government, there are MPs who have voted against such initiatives as they had to follow party discipline even when their constituents supported these initiatives as well (Tatar, 2020). The 42nd federal election brought 2 cabinet ministers with a Ukrainian background: Chrystia Freeland and MaryAnn Mihychuk (Tatar, 2020). Since then, Freeland served as Minister of International Trade (2015-2017), Minister of Foreign Affairs (2017-2019), Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (2019-2020), Minister of Finance (2020-2024), Minister of Transport and Internal Trade (2025-2025), and as

Deputy Prime Minister (2019-2024). Most recently, Freeland was appointed as Canada's Special Representative for the Reconstruction of Ukraine in September of 2025. Cabinet ministers are considered more important as ordinary MPs are thought to be ineffective for political advocacy (Tatar, 2020). Institutional or individual players not only inform the Canadian government on matters relating to Ukraine, but also create a favourable environment for the Ukrainian Embassy's work (Tatar, 2020).

The Euromaidan and invasion of Crimea triggered unprecedented political activism in diaspora circles and received great support during Stephen Harper's office (Tatar, 2020). From the UCC campaigning for Yanukovich to sign the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, organisation of rallies, creation of the Sergey Magnitsky Law Bill S-226 (2017) for sanctioning against human rights violators and corrupt foreign officials, to the formation of the EuroMaidan Canada committee which sent humanitarian aid (Tatar, 2020). The Canada Ukraine Foundation (CUF) became a lead organisation in coordinating medical and humanitarian aid (Tatar, 2020). An important tactic of the community is communicating its message of a unified and single strong community and its goals echoing the values and foreign policy goals of Canada (Tatar, 2020). The Liberal government's support continued under Justin Trudeau and continues to this day under Mark Carney (Tatar, 2020) (Prime Minister of Canada, 2025). This supports a strong argument for the diaspora's strong influence rather than individualistic motives of Liberal or Conservative leaders.

Today's core members of the Ukrainian Canadian Diaspora consist of an older segment of the community with many being the children or grandchildren of the 3rd wave immigrants (Tatar, 2020). And while the 4th wave of immigrants was enthusiastic about joining in the initiatives following the Euromaidan, "very few of them joined the ranks of the UCC's

leadership” and thus, the status quo of diaspora leadership structure did not change (Tatar, 2020, p. 41).

Post-2022: Following 2022, the Ukrainian Canadian community responded immediately to the invasion and set up numerous projects across the hundreds of Ukrainian organisations in Canada. In fact, it was UCC National which advocated the government for the CUAET visa program, temporary income supports, emergency housing access, access to language training, access to employment and education supports, and expansion of eligibility for the Family Reunification Program (UCC, 2023). CUF raised CAD 53 million in 2022 and CAD 13.5 million in 2023 as part of the Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal launched in 2022 by CUF and UCC (CUF, 2023). The funds went towards areas of food security, Government of Ukraine, mental health support, demining, medical projects, shelter supplies, and support for the elderly (CUF, 2023). The funds also supported Ukrainian newcomers to Canada through airport arrival assistance, food provisions, language classes, employment workshops, shelter, psychological programs, summer camps, among others (CUF, 2023).

Potential Roles of Diaspora in Post-Conflict Recovery & Reconstruction

Numerous reports have been released since 2023 by institutions like the International Centre for Migration Policy Development and the OSCE focused on best practices for and potential of the Ukrainian diaspora in post-war recovery and reconstruction. These reports identified the following top areas of engagement: bridging business communities and professionals, facilitating investment, sending remittances, transferring skills and knowledge, engaging in political advocacy, aiding in democratic development, fostering cultural and identity ties, facilitating return, fighting disinformation, and organizing humanitarian assistance and

fundraising (Keudel et al. 2024; ICMPD 2024; ODIHR 2023; Mori et al. 2025; ICMPD 2025).

Below are brief summaries of main areas of participation covered in the reports:

Preserving Ukrainian Ties & Identity: preservation of ties to one's heritage and Ukrainian identity through social and cultural events is important for maintaining engagement across future generations and strengthening communities. Such activities include educational programs like Saturday schools, Plast communities (Ukrainian Youth Association of Canada), dance schools, summer camps, independence-day celebrations, movie-screenings, concerts, and other activities which maintain one's knowledge and ties to the home country (Keudel et al. 2024).

Political Advocacy: diaspora organizations and individuals have the potential of engaging in political advocacy of the host country, depending on the host country's foreign policy towards the home country and strength of established diaspora. Diaspora political advocacy is more likely to occur and thrive in democratic countries (ODIHR, 2024). Activities include meeting with politicians, media, and other stakeholders through which diaspora can advocate and support projects and initiatives between host and home countries (ODIHR, 2024).

Business-Bridging & Economic Engagement: The Ukrainian diaspora, having knowledge and connections in both home and host countries, possess bottom-up interpersonal trust and can act as "interpreters to reduce obstacles in international cooperation or investment originating from differences in political or administrative cultures and market conditions" (Keudel et al. 2024, p. 7). From bridging business communities in host and home countries by teaching about differences in market cultures and conditions (through chambers of commerce and professional network platforms), providing skill training and professional development to displaced Ukrainians, to directly investing in reconstruction projects and starting own businesses (Keudel

et al. 2024). Diaspora also sends remittances to families in their home country which both help alleviate poverty and sustain those in the home country and increase support and cooperation with the home country which is interested in the continuation of the remittances (ODIHR, 2024).

Knowledge-Sharing: knowledge-sharing can take place through various avenues. Diasporas can bring their knowledge and expertise of home country and international systems to advise and support as staff in the capacity of reforms and development or share expertise in recovery areas that the given diaspora has significant strength in (like in medicine or preservation of cultural heritage) (Keudel et al. 2024). Recovery and reconstruction projects can have greater efficiency and impact with participation of diaspora members who are able to pinpoint priorities based on their connection to Ukraine, find partners in host and home countries, and identify most accurate benefit groups. Sharing knowledge among the public of the host country about pressing developments and priority needs to gauge support, thereby engaging in cultural diplomacy to increase understanding of the host country's public (Keudel et al. 2024). Supporting youth engagement in diaspora and leadership in diaspora organization may encourage facilitation of return (Keudel et al. 2024). Building twin city connections for targeted cooperation between host and home country for initiatives including: matching local needs with diaspora expertise; global community networks and “ambassadors” linking hometowns to partners and funding; peer mentorship and training by diaspora professionals for municipal officials (European integration, diplomacy, project design, grant writing); return fellowships, job shadowing and internships to build a talent pool; and locally driven learning/upskilling spaces and community-based curricula that strengthen youth skills, among others (Keudel et al. 2024; ODIHR, 2024).

Fundraising and Humanitarian Aid: diaspora fundraising channels resources to home countries through formal organizations and informal donations. In crises, diaspora actors often

complement professional humanitarian systems by acting and mobilizing early and leveraging their interpersonal ties in host and home countries (ODIHR, 2024). They can sustain support across multiple phases of response and adapt their modes of engagement over time (ODIHR, 2024).

Conclusion

As can be seen through literature review, the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora, rooted in a long history of immigration and strong institution building, supported by Canada's pro-Ukraine foreign policy, and enabled by Canada's multicultural system encouraging ethnic community participation, makes it well positioned to continue influencing Canada's policy on Ukraine and contribute to reconstruction efforts. However, while diasporas are mentioned in conversations on reconstruction, there is enthusiasm on participation from Ukrainian organisations, and Ukraine's increase in focus on diaspora groups, the subject remains understudied and diasporas continue to be underestimated and underutilized. Moreover, there is currently no research which maps out Canada's Ukrainian diaspora mobilisation since Russia's full-scale invasion and its potential role in reconstruction. This project seeks to fill the gap in research pertaining to post 2022 Ukrainian Canadian diaspora engagement and understand the potential avenues for its contribution in post-war recovery and reconstruction. Specifically, the goal of the research is to understand how institutional diaspora leaders see their role in reconstruction and how this aligns and compares across institutions, Canadian Government, and Ukrainian Government perspectives.

Methodology

Research Type & Strategy

This research project undertook a qualitative approach using both primary and secondary sources. Due to the understudied and ongoing development of the topic, this research project took on exploratory inductive research with a bottom-up approach via qualitative interviews, beginning with observations obtained from primary and secondary sources and drawing conclusions through thematic interview analyses. Additional primary sources included diaspora and government websites, reconstruction conference documents, diaspora engagement reports, and the like. Secondary source literature review consisted of books and articles covering the theory of diaspora mobilisation, diaspora mobilisation in time of conflict/war and reconstruction, history and politics of the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora's mobilisation since Ukraine's Independence to present day, Canada's Ukraine foreign policy, the Ukrainian and Canadian governments' engagement with the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada. These sources provided historical and political contexts of the present on-the-ground diaspora environment which was built on using the primary source interviews.

Interviews

A total of 15 cross-sectional interviews were conducted from June 2025 to July 2025 with leaders of the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora institutions, diaspora entrepreneurs, Canadian Government officials, and Ukrainian diplomatic missions' representatives. Interviews were limited to key established diaspora institution leaders to understand frontline discussions taking place at the highest level. Key inclusion criteria included: interviewees having over 10 years of experience in their respective field or community leadership, and capacity to speak about

experiences, perceptions, and knowledge surrounding the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora broadly. A University of Toronto Research Ethics Boards ethics protocol approval was received prior to conduction of the interviews (protocol #: 00048288). Participants were provided with consent forms and given the option of remaining anonymous. 1 participant chose to remain anonymous as Government of Canada Representative.

Interviewees included: Ihor Michalchyshyn, President & CEO of the UCC; Oleksandr Romanko, Board Member of the UCC; Taras Bahriy, President of the UCC-Ontario Provincial Council; Orysia Boychuk, President of UCC-Alberya Provincial Council; Petro Schturyn, President of UCC-Toronto; Myroslav Petriw, former President of UCC-Vancouver; Zenon Potichny, President of CUCC; Valeriy Kostyuk, Executive Director of CUF; Ruslan Kurt, President of the Canadian Association of Crimean Tatars. Diaspora figures in prominent knowledge-sharing positions of diplomacy, institutional advisory, business, and non-profit were interviewed to understand diaspora entrepreneur engagement outside official diaspora institutions. Interviewees included Roman Waschuk, former Canadian Ambassador to Ukraine (2014-2019) and current Business Ombudsperson of Ukraine operating at the intersection of Canadian policy, Ukrainian institutions, and business; Roman Dubczak, Deputy Chair of CIBC Capital Markets, former Chair of CUCC, and Canada's representative to the Business Advisory Council under the Ukraine Donor Platform; Lesya Granger, Chair and CEO of Mriya Aid, interviewed as a case study of a successful diaspora entrepreneur bridging Canadian and Ukrainian institutions to facilitate wartime and reconstruction projects. Consul General of Ukraine in Toronto, Oleh Nikolenko, was interviewed for a Ukrainian Government perspective. Finally, an anonymous Government of Canada Representative was interviewed for an inside domestic perspective on diaspora-government engagement.

Data Collection & Analysis

The interviews were conducted in-person and virtually, with interviews recorded and transcribed for analysis. A thematic analysis was used to code the qualitative data and organize it into respective themes in relation to the research focus. The main themes identified, analysed, and included in the results and findings of the project included: preserving Ukrainian ties and identity; Ukrainian Canadian diaspora as actors of political advocacy; business-bridging and economic engagement; knowledge-sharing; fundraising & humanitarian aid. Key patterns and cases were derived from the interviews to compile an analysis of most relevant conversations, initiatives, and challenges surrounding diaspora mobilisation in wartime and for post-war reconstruction.

Research Limitations

Due to time and scope constraints, one of the research limitations included interviewing only leaders or highly engaged actors in the diaspora which does not reflect the views or levels of engagement of the broader Ukrainian Canadian community, especially individuals from less organized or newer diaspora groups and their voices about contribution to wartime and reconstruction initiatives. Interviews with 6th wave arrivals were also not covered in the interviews. Moreover, since the war in Ukraine is ongoing, policy responses, diaspora activities, and institutional priorities are continuously evolving. Some findings may therefore become outdated or require future re-evaluation. The research captures activities from February 2022 to September 2025, longer term impacts of diaspora engagement on reconstruction will require further study over time.

Section 1: Preserving Ukrainian Ties & Identity

“Helping Ukraine is secondary for the diaspora, the first goal is to preserve our roots in Canada. We have less power to advocate in all levels of governments if we all fully assimilate” (Oleksandr Romanko, interview, June 9, 2025)

“Diaspora’s strength is its size and the fact that it has influence. To me, influence is not just about having influence, it is about people perceiving the community’s influence, and because the community is large, people perceive it as having influence. And so when the community speaks, when the diaspora speaks in a cohesive way, that can be very influential as a result” (Government of Canada Representative, interview, July 3, 2025)

“I have been engaged in different leadership roles for 44 years, and I will say this, we [Ukrainian Canadian diaspora] have never been as strong and unified in those 44 years in my lifetime as we are now” (Peter Schturyn, interview, June 11, 2025).

This section explores the central importance of preserving the Ukrainian identity within the Ukrainian Canadian community as a foundational element for mobilizing effective diaspora support for Ukraine's wartime resilience and post-war reconstruction. The UCC is the most established and recognized diaspora organization representing 53 member organizations and claiming to represent the interests of the Ukrainian ethnic community in Canada (UCC, 2025). One of the mandates of UCC is connecting Ukrainian Canadians across the country to a unified community, engaging them in cultural and social life, and maintaining their ties to Ukrainian heritage and identity (UCC, 2025). When it comes to wartime and post-war reconstruction, this identity and community preservation creates both individual actors advocating within their circles and political ridings, as well as a unified institutional voice bearing influential weight in

political advocacy, provincially and federally whereas “attachment to the homeland is seen as the rationale for continued socio-political action across borders” (McDowell, Aronica, Collantes-Celador & De Silva, 2018, p. 7).

As of date, the UCC website lists 23 branches and 6 Provincial Councils across Canada (UCC, 2025). Since February 2022, numerous Ukrainian communities across Canada became branches of UCC, many being the very first UCC branches to be established in their respective provinces or territories, including in New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, and Yukon. Most were created shortly following the full-scale invasion as a way to unite members of the Ukrainian Canadian community in time of crisis and act as aid and welcome groups for displaced Ukrainians who came to Canada under the CUAET program. It is important to note, however, that the Ukrainian Canadian community exists both within and outside of the UCC through organizations that are not affiliated with the organization. Due to time constraints and scope limitations of the research project, these communities and organizations fell outside the primary areas of examination. The expansion of the community and increased presence and visibility of the diaspora across the country can be an important foundation for wartime and post-war reconstruction activities, including political advocacy, business-bridging, knowledge-sharing, fundraising, transitional justice, among others. However, as noted by interviewees, the diaspora’s strength lies within its institution leaders whereas individual participation is significantly underactive, resulting in an underutilized advocacy potential of the community. This section goes on to examine the expansion and rejuvenation of the Ukrainian Canadian community through communities which officially joined as local UCC branches or organized communities, their activities, challenges, and what it means for diaspora unity and influence for wartime resilience and post-war reconstruction.

Post-February 2022 Expansion of the Ukrainian Canadian Communities & UCC Branches

“There are 4,000 Ukrainians in St. John’s, NL, there were never more than like a few dozen families before. And we have UCC Yukon now. There have been Ukrainians there for a long time because they go there for work, but they organised themselves and they created a UCC Yukon” (Peter Schturyn, interview, June 11, 2025).

Russia’s full-scale invasion prompted a revival and escalation of community activity as Ukrainian Canadians across the country sought avenues for action and community unity in times of crisis (Koinova, 2024). Moreover, from March 2022 to April 2024 the CUAET program brought nearly 300 thousand displaced Ukrainians to Canada, increasing the population of Ukrainians in major cities and small towns across the country who also went on to contribute to the revival of communities (Government of Canada, 2024). Since February of 2022, 6 communities officially joined UCC as local branches. 5 of these communities were formed following the start of the war. The Ukrainian Cultural Organization of Newfoundland and Labrador (Ukrainian NL) joined UCC in 2024 as the first branch of the province (founded June 2022) (UCC, 2024); the Ukrainian Association of Yukon (UCAY) became the first UCC branch in the territories in 2024 (founded January 2023) (UCC, 2024); the Ukrainian Association of Fredericton became the first branch of New Brunswick in 2024 (founded February 2022) (UCC, 2024); the Prince Edward Island community became the first branch in P.E.I. in 2023 (founded June 2021) (UCC, 2023).

Activities of the new branches included assisting with settling displaced Ukrainians, raising funds for humanitarian aid, organizing social and cultural events including flag raisings, Vyshyvanka Day, Holodomor commemoration, Independence Day Commemoration, war

anniversary rallies, among others. The institutional growth not only connects individuals and preserves Ukrainian identity, but also provides the necessary structural base for sustained political advocacy and influence. Examples of institutional integration and political advocacy among the new branches highlighted include advocacy by Ukrainian NL for the proclamation of Annual Holodomor Remembrance Day in the province and introduction of Ukrainian Catholic and Orthodox services to the community (UCC, 2024). In Prince Edward Island, the community partnered with the Immigrant and Refugee Services Association P.E.I. to act as a primary hub for displaced Ukrainians and advocated for scholarships to support displaced students at PEI University and Holland College (UCC, 2023).

In Ontario, Taras Bahriy and Petro Schturyn discussed how numerous new communities were formed or rejuvenated since the war “now we have North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, which was rejuvenated, Oshawa which was rejuvenated, Carlton Place...Kitchener for decades we did not have an organized community...London Ontario, Woodstock. So it is exploding now. We used to have 6, now we have 20 UCC branches that popped up in the last five or six years” (interview, June 11, 2025). Within the Ontario Provincial Government, UCC Ontario Provincial Council is advocating for a tuition discount for displaced Ukrainian students and equalization of technical qualifications for workers from Ukraine. The council also supported Bill 215, Ukrainian Heritage Month Act, which passed the Ontario Legislature in 2024 and proclaimed each month of September as “Ukrainian Heritage Month” in Ontario (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2024). In Alberta, the UCC Provincial Council is currently helping to set up a UCC in Grand Prairie, Bow Valley, and Lloydminster (Orysia Boychuk, interview, June 16, 2025). The council also established Ukrainian schools and Saturday school programmes in Fort McMurray, Lloydminster, Grand Prairie, Red Deer, and Lethbridge (interview, June 16, 2025). The council

also works closely with governments of all levels advocating for support for displaced Ukrainians, humanitarian and military support for Ukraine.

These recent developments give a glimpse into a trend taking place across Canada, the result of which will be seen years down the line. The growing size of the diaspora and its ability to unify activities across the country send a powerful signal to individual communities, provinces, and the federal government about the real or perceived influence of individuals and diaspora institutions, helping the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora in mobilizing support for Ukraine and Ukrainians in Canada. The importance of maintaining such public image of influential diaspora organizations and community as a whole cannot be underestimated, as prior research conducted on the political mobilisation of the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora preceding the full-scale invasion showed that UCC “staff are very professional and the organisation is well known on [Parliament] Hill among politicians and bureaucrats” and that “in terms of political clout, only the Jewish Congress in Ottawa is better organised than the UCC” (Tatar, 2020, p. 38).

Challenges Facing Cohesion & Engagement

“I think that right now for diaspora members, diaspora development and building solid institutions is a golden time, a golden time in a way that so many Ukrainians came here...They can continue building the institution, opening branches in new cities... But it also requires new responsibilities and newer ways of doing things in more modern ways” (Oleh Nikolenko, interview, June 17, 2025)

“The key for us is to keep those newer immigrants engaged, because we can lose a lot of them, especially in the smaller communities. Assimilation happens everywhere in the world. So we are going to have to try very hard to keep them engaged” (Peter Schturyn, interview, June 11, 2025)

“There was a big boom of emerging organizations and with some time some are surviving or not, some are joining in. We are encouraging them to go where there is a community already built. It would be easier” (Orysia Boychuk, interview, June 16, 2025)

Despite community growth, a boom in organizations and initiatives, and an ever-unified voice of the diaspora institutions, challenges with community organization and mobilisations persist. The most significant challenge highlighted throughout the interviews is coordination of the size of the diaspora. “Historically, it is the largest immigration of Ukrainians in Canada’s history going back 130 years...This 6th wave is the largest we have ever had” highlighted Peter Schutryn (interview, June 11, 2025). While the growing community presents a number of opportunities for the diaspora, the size, limited resources, and stretched volunteer capacity also makes it more challenging to keep up with the new communities, branches, programmes, maintaining a cohesive unified direction, avoiding overlap of initiatives, and maintaining engagement as time goes on. And while war and conflict in home country act as triggers of diaspora mobilisation, activity can wane over time with time of post-conflict sometimes seeing a decrease in diaspora mobilisation unless contentious points of trauma persist (Koinova, 2015). Moreover, community work within the diaspora is run on a volunteer basis, making it evermore challenging dealing with a higher volume of work with limited time and resources (Taras Bahriy, interview, June 13, 2025).

Divisions within the 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th waves of migrants and displaced Ukrainians were also highlighted. This division in understanding is partly due to the difference in perceptions of priorities that comes out from different waves growing up in “different worlds” and versions of Ukraine (Oleh Nikolenko, interview, June 17, 2025). Some consider diaspora organizations as outdated, but with time, organizations have begun to integrate with newcomers and introduce events and activities aligning with the changing interests and priorities brought by the new wave. However, synergy between the waves is crucial to unleash the full potential of the community as Washcuk noted, “older waves, their strength is patience and endurance, they have struck through supporting Ukraine for decades” while more recent waves have “an extremely up to date understanding of Ukraine” (interview, July 2, 2025). Overall, however, the diaspora has been very successful at maintaining organizational coherence across all generations “which means that you then have a broad array of people you could potentially fall back on when it comes to recovery needs” whereas in other countries diasporas can be very fragmented (Roman Waschuk, interview, July 2, 2025).

Oleh Nikolenko, Consul General of Ukraine in Toronto, is working on making connections and bridging the waves. An example of a successful cross-wave initiative that was recently organized by the Consulate in collaboration with the Ukrainian National Federation is the “Ukrainian Football: The Game Goes On” exhibition brought by the Ukrainian National Football Team in June of 2025 consisting of historic Ukrainian football artifacts. Consul General Nikolenko shared that most of the volunteers for the initiative were newcomers, saying that for this initiative engagement by the new wave “came more naturally, because it was a modern exhibition trend in culture, more relevant for them. They understood why we are doing this” (interview, June 17, 2025). The UCC is currently conducting a country-wide survey in

partnership with UCC Charitable and Educational Trust and CUF to better understand the needs and collect UCC engagement and support feedback from Ukrainians and Ukrainian Canadians who arrived to Canada since 2015 (UCC, 2025).

Another challenge is the limited engagement on the individual level. In an interview with Paul Grod, he stated “we have a great community, strong leaders, and strong influential organizations, but when you look at the size of our community and the level of involvement, the level of engagement, the level of donation, it is unacceptable” (interview, June 13). This is evident both in event participation, such as Toronto’s annual Stand With Ukraine rally, while attended by thousands, only constitutes “less than 10% participation [by Ukrainians in Toronto] in these very important events” (Paul Grod, interview, June 13). The lower engagement is seen across all waves, both from Ukrainians who have recently come to Canada from Ukraine and the generation of the descendants for the 3rd wave of migrants (Paul Grod, interview, June 13). Lower engagement, especially from the 6th wave of displaced Ukrainians, can be partially explained by the need to first and foremost settle in Canada and establish a financial cushion to support their families before committing to volunteering (Oleksandr Romanko, interview, June 9, 2025). However, individual participation in organized events and initiatives is something that takes less time and commitment than volunteering and can be increased (Paul Grod, interview, June 13). On the other hand, in an interview with Peter Schturyn, he shared that the 2024 Independence Day celebration in Toronto brought over 30,000 people, “20 to 30% of all Ukrainians in the GTA came together for one day. That has never happened before” (interview, June 11, 2025), showing the discrepancy and potential of individual community participation.

Individual engagement, however, is critical both through participation in community events and initiatives to increase community unity and visibility, as well as within one’s own

community and political riding to raise issues on Ukraine to MPs. Individuals tend to rely on the organization of their community leaders and politicians to act and speak up on their behalf and result in constituents who are not actively involved in individual and community activism (Government of Canada Representative, interview, July 3, 2025). However, what is sometimes not understood by the general public is the extent to which individual voices and engagement on issues surrounding Ukraine influence how local and federal governments weigh and prioritize such issues, “I think if the community made Ukraine a higher priority, I said community, I mean like individuals. I think then there could be a lot more impact on some of these issues,” shared a Government of Canada Representative (interview, July 3, 2025).

Conclusion

The expansion of Ukrainian Canadian community organizations and UCC branches across Canada, including the establishment of new branches in previously unrepresented regions such as Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Yukon, add the potential for greater community cohesion, increased domestic visibility, and stronger political influence. However, this growth also presents challenges. The unprecedented size of the 6th wave migration under the CUAET program strained volunteer resources, caused coordination challenges and raised concerns over maintaining long-term community engagement. Immigration wave differences in some communities can also hinder unity and efficiency of the diaspora. Moreover, while diaspora organizations are strong and create a significant perception of influence, individual participation in community events and local political advocacy can be higher. The preservation of Ukrainian identity and heritage within Canada is fundamental to the diaspora's ability to effectively mobilize and support Ukraine, during wartime and reconstruction. Potential areas of such engagement are analysed in the following sections.

Section 2: Ukrainian Canadian Diaspora as Actors of Political Advocacy

“There are a lot of reasons as to why Canada has taken a leadership role on initiatives to support Ukraine, but part of it would have been the diaspora’s support and encouragement”
(Government of Canada Representative, interview, July 3, 2025)

“One factor of the diaspora is its motivation in the political process to keep the pressure on the political class to keep Ukraine at the top of the agenda. And I would say Canadians, Ukrainian Canadians, have done a good job at that” (Roman Dubczak, interview, July 2, 2025)

“The reason why the Ukrainian Congress is so strong in Canada is because we are able to speak as one voice, because when the President of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress speaks to the Prime Minister of Canada, she can say that I represent the interests of a Ukrainian community of over 1.5 million people” (Paul Grod, interview, June 13, 2025)

This section explores the potential role of the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora in political advocacy, mechanisms and persisting challenges of political advocacy engagement. All interviewees identified political advocacy as one of the most important, if not the most critical, role for wartime and post-war reconstruction efforts. Although reconstruction remains a secondary focus due to the ongoing war, the groundwork laid by diaspora leaders and organizations is shaping Canada’s foreign policy trajectory toward Ukraine. The Ukrainian Canadian diaspora’s strength comes from a rich and deeply rooted presence of Ukrainian Canadians since the first wave of migration in the 1890s, strong institutions built and maintained over the decades, and the large scale and unity of the community (Tatar, 2020). The size, unity, and long-standing trust and reputation of the community allow Ukrainian Canadian organizations, like the UCC, to speak with one voice on behalf of the real or perceived influence

of 1.3 million members of the community. Participants noted that while the community has maintained strong leadership and mobilisation in the past, the outbreak of the full-scale Russian invasion mitigated the divisions that existed, especially between waves of migrants, helping to mobilize an even stronger unified voice and action. One of the strengths of diaspora's political advocacy was noted by Waschuk in that the diaspora "is able to engage with the government and understand what people in government are thinking, translate that to the community, but then also convey community feelings to people in government" (interview, July 2, 2025).

Diaspora Entrepreneurs in Political & International Advocacy

The Ukrainian Canadian diaspora contains numerous high-level actors of Ukrainian heritage in government and public service, including most notably Chrystia Freeland, former Deputy Prime Minister of Canada, currently Canada's Special Representative for the Reconstruction of Ukraine. Freeland's mother was part of the 3rd wave migration and Freeland maintained strong ties to her heritage and interest in Ukraine. In the 1980s, she went on to study Ukrainian on an exchange at the Taras Shevchenko State University of Kyiv and worked there as a journalist into the 1990s (Roman Waschuk, interview, July 2, 2025). In an interview with Roman Waschuk, he explained that Freeland's knowledge of Ukrainian and an understanding of the country's cultural and political landscape make her a bridge of understanding between Ukraine and Canada "when [Denys] Shmyhal [Minister of Defence of Ukraine] wants to call, he can talk to her directly, especially when she was Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister. That does not mean that diaspora can control what Canada does, but it means that there is a higher degree of understanding" (interview, July 2, 2025).

Among many prominent political figures in Canada's history and current government, Canadian diplomatic representatives of Ukrainian heritage are also a way "that Canada is able to punch above its weight by having more of a cultural affinity, linguistic knowledge that allows a Canadian Ambassador to be more effective". The past four ambassadors of Canada to Ukraine were of Ukrainian heritage, including Troy Lulashnyk (2011-2014), Roman Waschuk (2014-2019), Larisa Galadza (2019-2023), and Natalka Cmoc (2023-present) (Government of Canada, 2025).

Roman Dubczak, Deputy Chair of CIBC Capital Markets and a member of the diaspora, is an example of a non-state actor providing thought leadership in advisory economic diplomacy. Supported by the diaspora and Members of Parliament, Dubczak was appointed as Canada's representative to the Business Advisory Council under the Ukraine Donor Platform to provide business insights and recommendations to support Ukraine's investment environment during reconstruction (Government Representative of Canada, interview, July 3, 2025). Dubczak is the only member of the council with a Ukrainian background and shared in an interview that while there is strong concern and engagement amongst representatives of non-Ukrainian background, those with a personal connection to Ukraine have additional motivation to remain engaged, "the engagement level three years ago is a little different than it is now for the typical person, so a member of the diaspora has the legs to see this all the way through because this is who they are" (interview, July 2, 2025).

Mechanisms of Political Advocacy

"The priorities [of the Canada-Ukraine Friendship Group] are very heavily influenced by the priorities of the Ukrainian Canadian community, the diaspora, so which in a way, the work is a

symptom of or a reflection of the political influence of the diaspora” (Government of Canada Representative, interview, July 3, 2025).

An interview with a Government of Canada Representative shed some insights into the mechanism behind diaspora’s political advocacy. The first government body in the mechanism being the Canada-Ukraine Friendship Group consisting of more than 100 parliamentarians across political parties (UCC, 2020; Parliament of Canada, 2025). The group is part of Canada’s interparliamentary relations ecosystem in addition to the Parliamentary Association and Interparliamentary Groups and does not receive administrative or financial support from the Parliament of Canada (Parliament of Canada, 2025). The friendship group is headed by Yvan Baker, Liberal Member of Parliament for Etobicoke Centre, a Canadian of Ukrainian descent, member of the diaspora, and a strong advocate for Ukraine often mentioned by interviewees in conversations about support in government. The friendship group, or the “Ukraine Caucus in Parliament,” brings together Senators and MPs across political parties to work on initiatives strengthening the collaboration between Canada and Ukraine (interview, July 3, 2025). The work of the group ranges from advocating for military support, applying sanctions on Russia, installing operation programmes like the CUAET program, among other initiatives (interview, July 3, 2025).

In terms of reconstruction, most present conversations relate to Ukraine’s immediate short term needs like the physical side of reconstruction and creating pathways for Canada’s engagement in business and investments (interview, July 3, 2025). There are also conversations on Canada taking the lead role on repatriating Ukrainian children abducted by Russia during the war (interview, July 3, 2025). Interest in these issues among members of the group varies with only a few individuals leading the conversations (interview, July 3, 2025). The issues discussed

within the group are taken by the members to a Minister whose work aligns with the issue at hand and who would then advise the Prime Minister on a course of action for Canada's evolving foreign policy (interview, July 3, 2025).

In general, the process of advancing political priorities identified by the diaspora community in relation to Ukraine begins with diaspora organizations raising these concerns with relevant MPs. These MPs, in turn, bring the issues to the attention of the appropriate ministries, which conduct internal assessments and explore potential courses of action. If deemed viable, these options are formulated into a set of recommendations submitted to the responsible cabinet minister and, ultimately, to the Prime Minister for a political decision. Once a decision is made at the political level, the matter is returned to the civil service for implementation. An example of this mechanism can be applied to a hypothetical scenario explained by the interviewed Government of Canada Representative of Canada deploying post-war reconstruction funds for loans to Ukraine. This priority may be brought up by institutional diaspora leaders to their respective MP, who would then potentially elevate the priority to a relevant ministry, in this case likely the Ministry of Finance. Preceding the political decision to deploy the funds, there would be individuals in the ministry working together to try to figure out if the funds should be deployed, how much should be deployed, and the criteria around the funds, and make recommendations to the decision makers of elected individuals, the cabinet minister and then the Prime Minister. There would be many back-and-forth discussions and interactions before the policy gets decided upon. Once the political decision is final, it would go back to the civil service for execution (interview, July 3, 2025).

A brief real-life example of diaspora-government cooperation resulting in a tangible project supporting Ukraine's wartime needs and rebuilding was the creation of the Ukraine

Sovereignty Bond in 2022. In an interview, Grod shared that the UWC, UCC, and Ukrainian Canadian business representatives worked closely with the Government of Canada during Freeland's tenure as Minister of Finance to create a "Ukraine Sovereignty Bond" which was able to raise CAD 500 million for Ukraine in 2022 through the private market which provided Ukraine with low-cost financing guaranteed by Canada's AAA credit rating (interview, June 13, 2025) (Government of Canada, 2022). This example showcases recent diaspora advocacy and provides a glimpse into future rebuilding projects that the diaspora could help shape.

Ukrainian Canadian Diaspora Institution Reconstruction Advocacy Priorities

In an interview, Oleksandr Romanko, Board Member of the UCC, explained that current reconstruction-related work led by UCC consists primarily of engaging with federal officials to lay the groundwork for Ukraine's recovery (interview, June 9, 2025). This includes initiating conversations with Canadian politicians on establishing legal vehicles for reconstruction while determining and figuring out which ministries, such as Foreign Affairs, Industry, or International Development, will lead the process (interview, June 9, 2025).

Ihor Michalchyshyn, CEO of UCC National, also said that UCC's priorities will remain similar to wartime priorities by supporting economic, financial, and military development to foster "reconstruction that is resilient to future Russian invasion and threats" and using seized Russian assets to build Ukraine's defence capacity now and for post-war reconstruction (interview, June 20, 2025). Canada was the first country to adopt legislation allowing the use of the assets and Nikolenko shared that "we are expecting that Canada will be leading on this" (interview, June 17, 2025).

Zenon Potichny, President of the CUCC, noted that while CUCC's core mandate is to attract Canadian private businesses and investment into Ukraine's economy, its advocacy efforts also extend to all levels of government across the country. He highlighted the importance of provinces working together instead of "like different countries within a country" to streamline political advocacy efforts and strengthen CUCC's national reach (interview, June 12, 2025). Militarily, Potichny stated that advocacy must prioritize support to help Ukraine finish the war or move toward a ceasefire (interview, June 12, 2025). On the business side, advocacy includes pushing for greater financial support and mechanisms like war insurance, particularly involving Export Development Canada, "while basic insurance is reasonable, full coverage is very expensive and almost impossible to sustain" (interview, June 12, 2025). Although a few Canadian firms such as Fairfax operate in Ukraine and support war insurance, Potichny said that additional programs are essential to reduce costs (interview, June 12, 2025). CUCC is also advocating for the launch of a second phase of the Canada-Ukraine Trade and Investment Support (CUTIS) program, further discussed in the business-bridging section (interview, June 12, 2025).

Challenges

"Once the fighting stops, if there is some sort of ceasefire, then I could see the attention of the community leadership transitioning to the rebuild. But I do not know if we will see it from the broader diaspora or not. And I think that will be pivotal actually...because if the issue is considered a priority broadly within the community then that could be more influential. Because [MPs] would not be just hearing from the UCC about it, but they would be hearing from the constituents that come to the door" (Government of Canada Representative, July 3, 2025).

The main challenges identified by interviewees limiting the community's efficacy in political advocacy pertains to the integration and complete assimilation of Ukrainian Canadians and Canadians into Canadian society, "as people become more integrated, their priorities tend to shift a little bit towards domestic issues rather than what is happening in Ukraine" (Government of Canada Representative, July 3, 2025). This in turn diminishes the community's overall influence. Although Canada has a very large diaspora, "the portion for whom Ukraine is the number one political priority is a relatively small percentage" (Government of Canada Representative, interview, July 3, 2025). Moreover, the power of an individual is oftentimes underestimated by the general Ukrainian Canadian population. However, it is the accumulation of individual requests and letters to their local MPs that elevate most pressing concerns of constituents to the MPs priorities to corroborate in government (Government of Canada Representative, interview, July 3, 2025). One of pressing issues to support Canada's investment into Ukraine's reconstruction is the expansion of EDC's war risk coverage for investment, a key deterrent for Canadian private sector involvement, "so this issue with EDC, this would have been resolved years ago, right. But my colleagues who are MPs aren't hearing about this from their constituents, right?" (Government of Canada Representative, interview, July 3, 2025).

Conclusion

This section explores the diaspora's capacity for political advocacy for wartime and post-war reconstruction. The diaspora's highly organized and long-standing institutions possess an influence which enables them to advocate on behalf of the community in all levels of government. Diaspora politicians, diplomats, and other types of high-level broker diaspora entrepreneurs act as bridges between Canada and Ukraine, aiding in efficient projects targeting most urgent needs. On an individual level, diaspora constituents can act as louder advocates on

behalf of urgent issues to pressure local MPs to escalate considerations for specific priorities. On reconstruction advocacy, some conversations are already taking place, however, wartime military aid is the current priority. For now, diaspora leaders and advocates are focusing on policy work to define legal vehicles, clarifying which ministries will take the lead, frameworks for utilizing seized Russian assets, expanding EDC's involvement for war-risk investment coverage, and supporting pathways for Canadian businesses to enter Ukraine's market. Analysis of such business-bridging initiatives will follow in the next section.

Section 3: Business Bridging and Economic Engagement

“If you wait until the war is over, you will be missing the train because most of the best projects will be taken” (Zenon Potichny, interview, June 12, 2025).

“We have several companies that work in the insurance area. We have Ukrainians from diaspora here opening hotels in Ukraine, restaurants, they are already contributing to reconstruction because they are opening businesses. They serve as proof that business is possible in Ukraine and that this business can actually be profitable” (Oleh Nikolenko, interview, June 17, 2025).

The Ukrainian Canadian diaspora is a valuable connector in advancing trade, investment, and business collaboration between Canada and Ukraine during wartime and for post-war rebuilding. Rather than waiting for stability, diaspora leaders and entrepreneurs are demonstrating that profitable ventures in Ukraine are possible even under current conditions. However, interviews also show obstacles to diaspora and Canadian investment, including mistrust rooted in the failed ventures of the 1990s and limited war-risk insurance options. This section examines how the diaspora has positioned itself as a business-bridge between Canada and Ukraine through the Canada-Ukraine Chamber of Commerce, priorities for reconstruction

initiatives, the importance of advocating for war-risk financing, concerns over Ukraine's business environment, and present challenges.

Canada-Ukraine Chamber of Commerce as a Business & Investment Bridge

The Canada-Ukraine Chamber of Commerce (CUCC) was founded in 1992 as a member-driven business association focused on promoting trade and investment between Canada and Ukraine (CUCC, 2025). CUCC operates in Toronto and Kyiv offices, offering business to business (B2B) partner matchmaking and market-entry support, business to government (B2G) advocacy and policy liaising, curating trade missions between Ukraine and Canada, export and investment education, promotion/advertising channels for members, and guidance on accessing Ukrainian public procurement via its UCANPRO platform (CUCC, 2025). CUCC also develops and disseminates business tools, such as its Rebuild Ukraine Toolkit for Canadian Businesses, to help businesses navigate funding, risk-mitigation, and sectoral opportunity mapping in areas like energy, agri-food, critical minerals, ICT, and infrastructure. Moreover, CUCC organizes conferences, webinars, and sectoral showcases (CUCC, 2025). Their most prominent conference being the annual Rebuild Ukraine Business Conference launched in December 2022 bringing together Canadian and Ukrainian government representatives, such as Chrystia Freeland and Ukraine's Prime-Minister Denys Shmyhal, businesses, financial institutions, and non-profits for panels discussing strategies to support Ukraine's recovery and economic growth (CUCC, 2023). CUCC partners with institutions including the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Business Council of Canada, Export Development Canada, UkraineInvest, Global Affairs Canada, and Ukraine's diplomatic missions in Canada (CUCC, 2025).

An interview with CUCC's President, Zenon Potichny, shed light on the association's current wartime priorities and ambitions for post-war reconstruction. To support Ukrainian businesses looking to expand into Canada due to a decreased domestic market during wartime, CUCC has been focused on creating initiatives to familiarize Ukrainian businesses with Canada's market (interview, June 12, 2025). Some of these initiatives include bringing Ukrainian business representatives to Canada to attend trade shows and learn about the difference in requirements, laws, and regulations of the market (interview, June 12, 2025). Potichny highlighted the Canada Ukraine Trade and Investment Support (CUTIS) project as an example. The project ran from 2016 to 2021 with funding assistance from Global Affairs Canada with the goal of providing knowledge and support for Ukrainian small and medium enterprises (SMEs), including market research, cluster analysis, web-based portal management, regulatory requirements, gender analysis, and environmental specifications, to assist businesses in competing more effectively in the Canadian market (interview, June 12, 2025). The project "increased trade from Ukraine to Canada by about 30%" and "brought CAD 280 million of investment from Canada to Ukraine just before the war" Potichny shared during the interview (interview, June 12, 2025). Part of CUCC's political advocacy is to launch CUTIS 2 which would help facilitate trade from Ukraine to Canada, but also bring investment from Canada to Ukraine (interview, June 12, 2025).

Another project of interest in the near future is what Potichny referred to as the "Danish Model," whereas Danish companies are brought into Ukraine to encourage Danish investment with Ukrainian partners in building production facilities in Ukraine (interview, June 12, 2025). Thus, instead of producing products outside and selling to Ukraine, Danes are encouraging investment of Danish companies in Ukrainian facilities (interview, June 12, 2025). Potichny believes this model would be viable in Canada and would like to collaborate on it together with

the Government of Canada (interview, June 12, 2025). However, the role of CUCC is limited to assisting companies understand how to navigate Ukraine's investment environment. Once a company is in Ukraine, investment support group UkraineInvest and Ukraine's Ministry of Economy is critical in supporting the companies, identifying and resolving any blockages that arise (interview, June 12, 2025). Moreover, CUCC is working on increasing the Canadian government's dissemination of information about the new Canada–Ukraine Free Trade Agreement (CUFTA) to Canadian businesses (interview, June 12, 2025). Potichny proposes a country-wide tour with trade commissioners across all provinces to ensure that businesses are aware of the new possibilities of their activity in Ukraine (interview, June 12, 2025).

Trust Among Ukrainian Canadian Community on Investing in Rebuilding

Some interviewees expressed skepticism about the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora's potential to act as direct investors in Ukraine's reconstruction, citing a lingering lack of trust shaped by past experiences. Oleksandr Romanko noted that “in the 90s, everyone in the diaspora who entered Ukraine as investors, most of them lost their investments due to the Ukrainian business climate with no protection and criminal structures. The diaspora is skeptical about personal investments” (interview, June 9, 2025). The memory of those early post-Soviet years still informs how some diaspora members approach the idea of investing in Ukraine today. At the same time, others argue that the situation has changed drastically. Zenon Potichny, for instance, emphasized that while issues persist, Ukraine's current business climate is “day and night” compared to what it was in the 1990s (interview, June 12, 2025). Still, he believes that transparency and trust remain fragile and that western governments should be part of the process of fund allocation and monitoring for reconstruction (interview, June 12, 2025).

A case recounted by Roman Waschuk emphasizes the absence of trust in Ukraine's business environment. In 2015, Washcuk brought a Canada bankrolled proposal to then-Finance Minister of Ukraine, Natalie Jaresko, herself a diasporate from the U.S., to introduce a Diaspora Bond (debt securities issued by the home country to raise capital from its diaspora abroad) (interview, July 2, 2025). This initiative is mentioned to this day in diaspora reconstruction engagement policy reports, such as those by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD 2025). "I came to her with that proposal and she said, I think it is too risky. I do not, as Finance Minister, believe Ukraine should be taking money from the diaspora if it cannot guarantee that it will pay them back" (interview, June 12, 2025). And while Ukraine's institutions and environment improved drastically over the past decade, Waschuk stated that "at the moment, I do not have enough trust in our own institutions" for such initiatives to be viable, unless strong international engagement and oversight mechanisms are in place (interview, June 12, 2025). It is also important, however, to talk about success stories of those who opened businesses or invested in Ukraine successfully in a safer and more protected business environment (interview, June 12, 2025).

War Risk-Financing

The number one priority referenced by all interviewees is the development of strong insurance for potential investors, including a multi-level system of insurance with stakeholders such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and others. Governments can provide the first level of insurance with private insurance providing a second level (Oleksandr Romanko, interview, June 9, 2025). Insurance during the war and post-war will be highly expensive, and without government organizations and government backing, insurance for reconstruction would be impossible due to the risk of another invasion even if a ceasefire is

signed (interview, June 9, 2025). It is also important to advocate for increased war insurance, like Export Development Canada. While there are a few Canadian companies such as Fairfax in Ukraine providing such war insurance, “we need much more different insurance programs and companies. As we increase the number of insurance programs, the price for it will go down” (Zenon Potichny, interview, July 3, 2025). Potichny says that at the moment, while basic insurance is reasonably affordable, full coverage is very expensive and “almost impossible to sustain” (interview, July 3, 2025). Advocacy in the private business environment is also critical, as only government support “will not make all the difference, private institutions must invest in Ukraine” (interview, July 3, 2025).

Conclusion

This section looked at the role of the diaspora acting as business-bridgers in wartime and rebuilding. CUCC is the central diaspora institution bridging the understanding of Ukrainian and Canadian business markets and opportunities using various projects, practical tools, and events. Canadian diaspora and non-diaspora are already involved in creating businesses and investing in Ukraine, and the diaspora is playing an important role in making these successes and opportunities visible to the broader Canadian public. Reducing war risk for investments and showcasing success stories of businesses navigation in an improved business environment are important for building investor trust and confidence, both for diaspora and non-diaspora members. Another important point highlighted by interviewees is the lack of strong business leaders which has a significant impact on the influence of the community and resources available for strengthening existing institutions (Paul Grod, interview, June 13, 2025). “We are a generation early that way” commented Dubczak, “in 30 to 40 years, I think the Ukrainian diaspora and its ensuing generations will be more prominent...this level of engagement that we

see now is really a defining moment” the results of which will be seen years down the line, “the Ukrainian diaspora globally may become a more dominant force, much like the Jewish diaspora is right now” (interview, July 2, 2025). Building a foundation of business leaders, connections, insurances, and trust in institutions will be critical for post-war reconstruction engagement from the Canadian business community.

Section 4: Knowledge-Sharing

“Even if they [displaced Ukrainians] decide to stay abroad and establish new lives abroad, they will still maintain connection with Ukraine which will be instrumental for rebuilding. Having Ukrainians in such big numbers as one unified voice that can actually voice stories about Ukraine, can do advocacy, can promote Ukraine’s interests that will be beneficial for people of Ukraine regardless if they stay outside of Ukraine or not” (Oleh Nikolenko, interview, June 17, 2025)

Another important role that the diaspora sees itself in contributing for post-war reconstruction is knowledge-sharing. The Ukrainian Canadian diaspora is multifaceted and consists of different waves, generations, and entrepreneurs who can act as bridges in multilateral bodies, advisory missions, and on-the-ground reconstruction capacity. Moreover, the older and newer members of the Ukrainian Canadian community and diaspora can facilitate two-way knowledge and skill-sharing avenues. As Consul General Oleh Nikolenko explained, “the diaspora is still part of our nation... and probably from the same values, mentality, and cultural identity. That is why it is much easier for Ukrainians to understand what Ukraine needs” (interview, June 17, 2025). This alignment in values, networks, and lived experiences makes the diaspora well-positioned to act as a conduit of expertise, advice, and communication between

both countries. This section will explore the avenues for diaspora knowledge-sharing based on perspectives of community leaders interviewed, including through international advisory, professional capacity, youth engagement, and educational institutions. A case study of a Canadian non-profit focused on demining efforts, Mriya Aid, will be used to illustrate a present-day example of a diaspora broker entrepreneur creating transnational projects through their unique positioning as an actor with knowledge and strong connection between Canada and Ukraine.

Knowledge-Sharing in International Institutions and Reform

The understanding of and access to Canadian institutions, leaders, and international partners coupled with a more nuanced understanding of Ukraine's on-the-ground and urgent needs, makes Ukrainian Canadians valuable bridges in bilateral and multilateral capacities. When it comes to institutional bodies, Romanko believes that "diaspora can be very influential in entering international organisations, foundations, and government structures that will be responsible for coordinating and supervising reconstruction...such as the UN, EBRD, World Bank, IMF, and others" (interview, June 9, 2025). Ihor Michalchyshyn shared that there has been a tradition of Ukrainian Canadians going to Ukraine to assist or act as advisors in various initiatives since Ukraine's independence in 1991 through Canadian funded or international work. Continuing to "engage Canadian educated individuals with experience to help the Ukrainian Government and Ukrainian civil society work through complicated processes that have been involved in post-Soviet kind of governance reform, justice reform, and defence" (interview, June 20, 2025). An example discussed in previous sections includes actors like Roman Dubczak, a non-state actor providing thought leadership in advisory economic diplomacy as Canada's representative to the BAC platform.

Professional & Youth Knowledge-Sharing

On an individual actor level, Petro Schturyn noted that Ukrainian Canadian professionals like lawyers, judges, professionals in fields like IT, accounting, investments, construction, hotel industry, oil and gas, among others can help with building up the civil society (interview, June 11, 2025). When it comes to engaging Ukrainian Canadian youth, Paul Grod shared that the UWC aspires to create a knowledge-sharing internship initiative, targeted especially at those who were born in Canada and did not have opportunities to visit the country (interview, June 13, 2025). The internship program would last for several weeks with the chance to intern in the Ukrainian Parliament or contribute skills to a specific rebuild project. “There are many Canadians who are Ukrainian who have never visited Ukraine, yet they consider themselves proud Ukrainians. We have to give them an opportunity, especially youth” to visit Ukraine and create connections for further engagement (interview, June 13, 2025).

Education, Training, and Institutional Bridging

Diaspora leaders like UCC are also working on utilizing connections with Canadian educational institutions for displaced Ukrainians in Canada, skills learned from which can be transferrable upon return to Ukraine for reconstruction. UCC Alberta Provincial Council is already working on establishing such connections as told by Boychuk “one of the areas is meeting with universities and technical schools like Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT), a technical school, and looking at opportunities to connect with them and ways of educating people who are here on a work visa to develop their technical skills with the potential of returning back home and build the economy and their businesses” (interview, June 16, 2025). UCC AB is also engaging with the Rotary Clubs for conversations about development,

humanitarian, and community work “using those avenues to help connect with Ukraine right now, build those relationships” (interview, June 16, 2025). There are also Memorandums of Understanding being signed between towns and cities in Alberta and Ukraine, “we have an MOU with Ivano-Frankivsk and with Lviv...we help to facilitate other communities to build that relationship with the governments” (interview, June 16, 2025). The Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies based in Edmonton has been active in documenting the war and salvaging archived contents since the war broke out. McEwan University has been involved through the Ukrainian Resource and Development Centre for over 30 years “playing a role with doctors and nurses and developing agriculturalists, developing that technical capacity doing exchanges” (interview, June 16, 2025). Knowledge-sharing in the opposite direction from Ukraine to Canada will also be valuable for all sides, “Ukraine is a very digitalized country that has a lot to share, diaspora here has a lot to learn from Ukrainians” (Oleh Nikolenko, interview, June 17, 2025).

Knowledge-Sharing Between Ukrainian Canadian Diaspora and Canadian General Public

It is important to note another avenue for knowledge-sharing, between Ukrainian Canadians and the general Canadian public, like through dismantling Russian disinformation. In 2024, when the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) included a film “Russians at War” documenting experiences of Russian soldiers, the diaspora reacted quickly launching a campaign against the alleged Russian propaganda, causing mass media attention and forcing TIFF to postpone the screening. The diaspora “organized peaceful protest and after the screening was over, they helped organize workshops about Russian disinformation for Canadians” (Oleh Nikolenko, interview, June 17, 2025).

Case Study: Mriya Aid and Tactical Knowledge-Sharing

Mriya Aid is an example of diaspora entrepreneur operational knowledge transfer. Mriya Aid was created in February of 2022 by a group of Canadian security professionals, managers, and former service members, including those who served on Operation UNIFIER, with the goal of organizing shipment of critical defence equipment like drones, night vision, and medical kits in the first months of the war (Ukrinform, 2025). In 2023, the organization decided to specialize in supporting Ukraine's demining efforts by designing and funding International Mine Action Standards compliant training and equipment packages for Ukrainian sappers, instructors, and demining team leaders to operate with safety and efficiency (Ukrinform, 2025). Lesya Granger, current CEO of Mriya Aid, began volunteering for the organization from its inception in 2022 assisting the then Chair, Melanie Lake, former Task Force Commander for Operation UNIFIER (Lesya Granger, interview, July 4, 2025). And while not on the Board of Directors, Lesya, a Canadian of Ukrainian heritage with a long-standing history of volunteering for Ukraine since the 1980s, was invited to attend meetings of the Board of Directors due to her nuanced understanding of both the Canadian and Ukrainian contexts. In an interview, Lesya shared that "the decisions being made there [at the meetings] had to be communicated back to donors and to the public in a way that was appropriate...How do you communicate this kind of aid that we were providing in a way that Canadians can understand and in a way that Ukrainians could also get their heads around given the complexity of the situation at that time" with most of the donors then and now being non-Ukrainian, not of Ukrainian ancestry, or from the diaspora (interview, July 4, 2025).

In March of 2023, Lesya became Chair and CEO of Mriya Aid. Mriya Aid partners with the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence's Main Directorate of Mine Action, Civilian Protection and

Environmental Safety, who communicate with the Armed Forces of Ukraine to send Ukrainian sappers to a private training center partnering with Mriya Aid in MAT Kosovo (Ukrinform, 2025). Lesya and her team act as project managers, providing funding, logistics, and administrative support for the training. In 2024, Mriya Aid received CAD 2.5 million from Canada's Department of National Defence to train and provide equipment for 130 Ukrainian deminers (Ukrinform, 2025). Lesya is a Ukrainian Canadian who was able to act as a bridge between Canada and Ukraine, the institutions, organizations, and individuals, to create connections and joint projects between the countries. Lesya's unique vantage point allows her to form closer connections which result in greater efficiency and project results. Lesya shared that she and her team have meetings with "state agencies, whether it is the top commanders and the heads of the state agencies, whether it is the people doing the work on the ground, because we speak Ukrainian, and not just speak Ukrainian, but we understand their perspective and there is this cultural understanding as well, they tell us things that officially they cannot tell others, like our [Canadian] government officials who go over or our government representatives. So that way we are able to get a lot of information that is actually more useful to be impactful and so we bring that back to Canada" (interview, July 4, 2025).

Lesya fits the diaspora entrepreneur category of a broker, as she herself defined as "they are people who have done it in the past, who feel comfortable with Ukrainians culturally in a way that the general diaspora may not because of a cultural divide" however, "these people in the community are exceptions" (interview, July 4, 2025). Lesya works closely, however, with communal diaspora entrepreneurs, those who "do not have that connection necessarily, but they do feel that they want to help, and they do have a personal feeling of connections and sometimes actual family members. And those people are the ones who then can be mobilized and

encouraged to help in whatever way” (interview, July 4, 2025). This case study showcases a real life example of the capacity of diaspora entrepreneurs and how different individuals with different connections and opportunities can mobilize on different levels to support a unified cause.

Challenges

Paul Grod noted a reluctance from the Canadian Government to leverage the diaspora. When government programs are created, they are directed to non-Ukrainian NGOs for execution. However, what ends up happening is “those non-Ukrainian NGOs, they then come to us, like the UWC or UCC, and say we would like to fund you to set this program up” (interview, June 13, 2025). Lesya Grander, Chair & CEO of Mriya Aid, also says that government funds could be used more efficiently by organizations which have operations on the ground “there are projects that are not very impactful. The money goes to either Canadian or non-Canadian entities, some of which are impactful, some of which have absolutely huge overheads and very few of the actual resources end up in Ukraine” (interview, July 4, 2025). This challenge was echoed in other interviews as diaspora organizations position themselves as actors with knowledge and expertise to conduct projects and utilize resources in a more efficient capacity.

Conclusion

The Ukrainian Canadian diaspora’s role in knowledge-sharing can be highly beneficial in post-war reconstruction. From advising international institutions and coordinating Canada-Ukraine initiatives, to exchanging practical expertise and education between the countries. The diaspora’s shared language, values, history, and sometimes lived experience with Ukraine while also having access to and understanding of Canadian institutions and partners

allow diaspora a unique advantage in navigating across environments and contexts. This can be seen in diaspora entrepreneurs taking on advisory roles in multilateral and Canadian programs and professional on-the-ground capacity. Partnerships with educational institutions for credentialing, exchanges, and transfer of applied skills can equip Ukrainians seeking to return with skills that can be applied for reconstruction. Canadians also have a lot to learn from Ukraine's adaptability, digitalisation, technological innovations, business, and other fields. Youth mobility post-war between the countries is also an avenue that can build strong bridges for the future development of both countries and support Ukraine's recovery.

Section 5: Fundraising & Humanitarian Aid

“The communities need to fundraise and do their part as well to rebuild the destroyed churches, cultural centers, and things like that which perhaps governments would not be prepared to support” (Paul Grod, interview, June 13, 2025)

This section outlines the fundraising and humanitarian aid activities undertaken by the diaspora, with a focus on the Canada Ukraine Foundation (CUF) and a brief overview of country-wide fundraising initiatives by other organizations. Established in 1995 as a national charitable foundation, CUF has acted as a central coordinating body for Canadian support, responding rapidly to urgent needs on the ground and expanding its work into multi-year, long-term programming. From food parcels and ambulances in the first year to power infrastructure, mental health, and demining in later years, CUF has consistently adapted its priorities based on evolving wartime conditions. As of 2025, CUF's strategy has shifted from emergency relief to programming that simultaneously addresses current needs while laying the groundwork for post-war recovery. This includes a focus on mental health, energy resilience, and

infrastructure, all while engaging Ukrainian businesses and institutions to stimulate the local economy. Through its work, CUF not only supports Ukraine but also reflects the humanitarian commitment of the Ukrainian Canadian community to both their homeland and to Canada.

Canada Ukraine Foundation's Activities Since 2022-2024

In 2022, within days of Russia's full-scale invasion, CUF and the UCC launched the Ukraine Humanitarian Appeal raising CAD 52 million from 72,000 individual donors over 11 months with CAD 51.8 million coming from donations and fundraising contributions (CUF, 2022). CAD 28 million was disbursed in the first year on essential aid, including food parcels for 850 thousand people, medicine for 800 thousand patients, 50 light-mast generators for grid repair, 28 ambulances, 20 negative-pressure VAC units, and 3 demining robots for the liberated region of Kherson (CUF, 2022). CUF's network of Canadian and Ukrainian NGOs delivered bulk food, hygiene kits, and water filters into frontline oblasts, funded tactical-medicine training, and restarted surgical missions (CUF, 2022).

In 2023, donations went down to CAD 13.5 million with total revenue of CAD 16.6 million, but project outlays rose to CAD 30 million through deployment of multi-year reserves from 2022 (CUF, 2023). The focus shifted to providing essentials to assist civilians survive wartime winter conditions, deliver health and medical technology, develop mental-health programmes for children and caregivers, emergency services post-Kakhovka flooding, seed-funding for IMAS-compliant demining projects, and domestic support of displaced Ukrainians in Canada (CUF, 2023). In 2024, total revenue was CAD 12.3 million with CAD 11.4 million in donations (CUF, 2024). Programmes of focus included power and infrastructure resilience through grid-repair equipment and solar-battery UPS kits for hospitals, mental-health

support for veterans, hospital support through supplying of medicines to 38 frontline hospitals and launching of an equipment-sharing platform with Ukrainian companies to stimulate local procurement (CUF, 2024). CUF works in partnership with the Government of Ukraine, Government of Canada, and other diaspora organizations like UCC and UWC. UCC conducts its fundraising initiatives through CUF as it is not a registered charitable organization (Oleksandr Romanko, interview, June 9, 2025).

Canada Ukraine Foundation's Present and Long-Term Priorities

CUF's priorities at the outset of the war were on the reactive side as the foundation was trying to cover very specific pressing needs of the time. In 2025, during the fourth year of the invasion, CUF pivoted their strategy to seeing not only how a project can relieve an immediate issue, but to "how do we resolve a problem right now to make it more straightforward after in the recovery process" shared Valeriy Kostyuk in an interview (interview, June 30, 2025). Current projects focus on healthcare and humanitarian aid, support for displaced Ukrainians, power and infrastructure, Canada-Ukraine Surgical Aid Programme, mental-health support, and demining (interview, June 30, 2025).

Kostyuk highlighted the mental health profile as an example of both immediate and long-term aid. Currently, CUF funding research being conducted by the Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace, and Security of mental health services available in Ukraine and co-funding with UWC a veteran hub trustline, both addressing current needs and also building capacity for post-war recovery (interview, June 30, 2025). CUF also ensures to engage Ukrainian businesses and services when delivering humanitarian aid like winterization kits in order to not only provide aid, but also support Ukrainian businesses and economy (interview, June 30, 2025). On the

infrastructure side of things, CUF is in the process of identifying what kind of infrastructure recovery it can be engaged in once the full-scale invasion is over. CUF partners with Canadian Government ministries, on-the-ground Ukrainian NGO and government partners (interview, June 30, 2025)

Canada-Wide Diaspora Fundraisers & Charities

Beyond CUF, community organizations across the country have coordinated fundraising for medical, humanitarian, and non-lethal defence aid campaigns since the full-scale invasion. Some examples for scope purposes include: Buduchnist Credit Union's Ukraine Humanitarian Aid Fund and donation-matching with the Ukraine Humanitarian Aid Fund & Friends of Ukraine Defense Forces Fund (BCU, 2025); Help Us Toronto projects for Ukraine's children and veterans (Help Us Help, 2025); Saint Javelin merch-for-aid organization (Saint Javelin, 2025); UCC national and local branches across Canada organizing humanitarian aid fundraising; local drives, GoFundMe campaigns; donations for displaced Ukrainians, etc; Ukrainian Canadian Social Services supporting displaced Ukrainians (UCSST, 2025), League of Ukrainian Canadians Friends of Ukraine Defence Forces Fund providing body armour and humanitarian assistance to Armed Forces of Ukraine (FUDF Fund, 2025); Ukrainian Canadian Students' Union fundraising for Armed Forces of Ukraine aid (SUSK, 2025); Plast wartime medical aid fundraising (Plast Canada, 2023); Second Front Foundation donating drones and medical supplies (Second Front UA, 2025); Mriya Aid providing demining training and equipment (Mriya Aid, 2025); Wild Hornets Canada fundraising to develop FPV drones (UCC-T, 2025), among others.

Conclusion

In the long-term, CUF sees itself as a partner in delivering aid on behalf of Canadians and helping to fill necessary gaps of projects on-the-ground. As the war progresses in its 4th year, support and donations inevitably decline and require new strategies to keep up. To engage with and give back to the Canadian public, CUF is “also making an impact on behalf of the Ukrainian community in Canada here at home” by developing projects and making donations to organizations like the Canadian Red Cross who are matching contributions in collaboration with the Government of Manitoba and Alberta to tackle wildfires, “I think showing Canadians that yes, they help Ukraine and at the same time the Ukrainian community is giving back to Canada.” Community fundraising will be critical to support early intervention rebuilding projects that might take governments and international institutions longer to establish. It is also important for filling the gaps of projects that governments might not take on.

Conclusion

This research paper aimed to map out mobilisation of the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora’s leading institutions since Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022 and gain a better perspective of how the diaspora positions itself in contributing to Ukraine’s recovery and reconstruction. To this end, the paper sought to answer the research question: how can the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora most effectively contribute to Ukraine’s wartime efforts and post-war reconstruction? The interviews identified 5 of the most critical areas of diaspora wartime and post-war reconstruction engagement, including: preserving Ukrainian ties & identity, political activism, business-bridging and economic investment, knowledge-sharing, and fundraising and humanitarian aid.

Preservation of an identity connected to one's Ukrainian heritage and ties to Ukraine serves as a foundation for the following opportunities for engagement. Preserving one's ties and engagement with the community allows growth and development of the community, creating stronger institutional organizations, thereby signaling cohesion and influence in all levels of government. The post-2022 growth of UCC branches and community generally created opportunities for increased mobilisation, but also strained resources, coordination, and introduced new divisions between the wave of displaced Ukrainians. Political advocacy was perceived as the diaspora's greatest strength and most important path of engagement for wartime and post-war reconstruction. The diaspora's strong institutions rooted in over a century of migration waves and Canada's environment allowing diaspora advocacy to thrive, created an influential diaspora capable of advocating for significant government initiatives. And while diaspora institutions are strong and influential, individual engagement among diaspora constituents remains low.

When it comes to business-bridging, CUCC is the main bridge between Canadian and Ukrainian businesses. Diaspora and Canadian business projects already exist, and it is crucial to continue raising awareness about the success stories and avenues for engagement to encourage the broader Canadian business community to enter Ukraine's market. Expanding war-risk insurance coverage, having more competitive insurance companies, and mitigating corruption is crucial to create favourable investor conditions. Knowledge-sharing is the most diverse avenue for engagement, including creating twin city projects, educational exchanges, having diaspora members act as advisors in international development organizations and work in professional fields in Ukraine, among other projects. Fundraising and humanitarian aid through foundations like the leading CUF can fill gaps in critical reconstruction projects.

The Ukrainian Canadian diaspora is in a unique position to contribute to wartime efforts and post-war reconstruction with strong community institutions, advocacy influence, and diaspora entrepreneurs. Diaspora members possess a unique understanding of Ukraine's pressing needs, have connections to Canadian and Ukrainian institutions, and can operate across contexts with language, cultural, and socio-political knowledge. This enables them to act quicker and more efficiently than official bureaucratic institutions with red-tape and less contextual knowledge. To help Ukraine rebuild, the diaspora "must listen to what is needed, listen to Ukrainian veterans, teachers, etc. What do they need? People, textbooks, money, architects? What does the government and NGO sector need? Who are they looking for? How can we leverage Canadian experience and goodwill?" (Ihor Michalchyshyn, interview, June 20, 2025).

However, challenges of working with the Government of Ukraine persist. Interviewees noted that working with the government is difficult, many civil servants are underpaid and the government acts as an official partner without meaningfully assisting the diaspora. Most of the work depends on volunteerism of diaspora members (Oleksandr Romanko, interview, June 9, 2025). The strength of the diaspora is also a double-edged-sword as the "Government of Ukraine kind of takes Canada for grantedLike we do not have to try very hard, our people have got this" (Roman Waschuk, interview, July 2, 2025). Moreover, the Government of Ukraine has ways to go about viewing the diaspora as partners instead of establishing their own means for engagement without collaborating with existing structures, especially when Ukrainian embassies and consulates are already overwhelmed (Roman Waschuk, July 2, 2025).

Avenues for further research would include looking into each specific category of engagement on a deeper level and mapping activities across the country. Another category which was not covered due to research limitations include the potential role of the diaspora in

transitional justice. Organizations like the Canadian Association of Crimean Tatars interviewed for this project views itself as a potential actor in transitional justice for political prisoners and victims of repression since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. In 2022, the House of Commons recognized the mass deportation of Crimean Tatars by the Soviet Union in 1944 as genocide against the Crimean Tatar people and created an annual Memorial Day on May 18th (Ruslan Kurt, interview, July 3, 2025). It would be also important to conduct a study looking at smaller non-UCC affiliated organizations and mobilisation by the 6th wave of migrants as the community is not solely represented by the UCC and its branches. The research shows that the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora is still an underestimated force that has a great potential for post-war reconstruction if aimed and supported properly. Countries of origin like Ukraine are beginning to wake up to this new reality of opportunities for engaging with their diasporas across the world. Today, Ukraine cannot afford to overlook their communities and must develop stronger engagement strategies to benefit from their transnational network of support.

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