



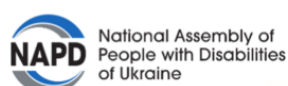
# EMPOWER UKRAINE

## Making the Human Dimension Future-Proof

### Ukraine Recovery Conference

### 24 June 2026

Side-Event co-organised by Empower Ukraine



# Making the Human Dimension Future-Proof

24 June, 15h00 - 16h30 CET (Panel 90 minutes) followed by networking reception 18h30-19h00

Grano Old Town Hotel, Address: Pszenna 3, 80-749 Gdańsk, Poland



- **Alessandra Locatelli**

Minister for Disabilities, Italy

Alessandra Locatelli is the Italian Minister for Disabilities and a prominent political leader driving national policies on inclusion, social innovation, and workforce participation. She has played a leading role in advancing accessibility and inclusive public policy within Italy, positioning these issues as central to economic resilience, demographic sustainability, and long-term social development across Europe.



- **Dmytro Lubinets**

Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights.

Dmytro Lubinets is Ukraine's Human Rights Commissioner and one of the country's most internationally recognised institutional figures during the war and reconstruction period. He has led major initiatives on civilian protection, accountability, and international cooperation, working closely with governments, multilateral organisations, and global stakeholders engaged in Ukraine's recovery and future development.



- **Debra Ruh**

Founder and CEO, Ruh Global IMPACT

Debra Ruh is an internationally recognised business leader, technology strategist, and global advocate for disability inclusion in the workforce and digital economy. Through partnerships with governments, corporations, and international organisations, her work has focused on accessible innovation, inclusive employment, and leveraging disability inclusion as a driver of economic growth and post-conflict recovery.



- **Marcin Walecki**

Resident Country Director for the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Ukraine and visiting fellow at Oxford University, Russian and Eastern Europe Studies.

Marcin has more than 25 years of democracy assistance and governance experience working in roughly 50 countries around the world, implementing programs dealing with anti-corruption and political finance, political party and parliamentary assistance, and gender equality.



- **Gunta Anca**

President, European Disability Forum

Gunta Anca is President of the European Disability Forum, representing the interests of over 100 million persons with disabilities across Europe.

A respected leader within European policy circles, she has been instrumental in advancing EU-level dialogue on accessibility, inclusive growth, and equal participation, engaging with institutions, businesses, and civil society to shape more inclusive economic and social policies.



- **Chiara Anselmo**

Programme Manager at CBM Italia, where she leads initiatives promoting the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities in humanitarian and development contexts.

She brings extensive experience in disability-inclusive programming and international cooperation, with a particular focus on ensuring that recovery and reconstruction efforts leave no one behind.



- **Katarzyna (Kasia) Heba**

Polish lawyer with extensive experience in human rights and public policy. She advises on legal and regulatory frameworks that promote equal access, inclusive governance and the effective implementation of international human rights standards.



- **Konstantine Vardzelashvili**

Head of Democratization Department, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Former Vice-president of the Constitutional Court of Georgia (2006-2016), and a Member of UN Human Rights Committee Konstantine brings first-hand experience in fields of rule of law and administration of justice, experience in providing legal advice and assistance to governments in constitutional and legal reforms; demonstrated consistent contribution to civic education and formal academic education.



- **Uliana Pcholkina**

Public figure and Chair of the Board of the Public Union "The League of the Strong," which unites a network of organisations representing people with disabilities and works to improve the quality of life for every person with a disability in Ukraine. Uliana is also Deputy Chair of the Board of the NGO "Group for Active Rehabilitation," which focuses on supporting people with spinal cord injuries and a Member of the Expert Council on Barrier-Free Communication at the Ministry of Culture and Strategic Communications of Ukraine, and an expert in DE&I and a barrier-free environment coordinator at the Superhumans Center.



- **Ruslan Topchan**

Ruslan Topchan: Ukrainian veteran, disability rights advocate, and staff member of the National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities of Ukraine (NAPD). A former soldier of the 5th Separate Assault Brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, he sustained life-threatening injuries during combat in 2022 and subsequently underwent extensive rehabilitation. Today, he is a prominent voice for the inclusion of veterans and persons with disabilities in Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction efforts. Through his work with NAPD Veterans programme, Ruslan promotes accessibility, rehabilitation, independent living, and the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in public life. He has represented Ukraine at high-level international events, including the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Rome in 2025.

x 1. Business Dimension    x 3. Local and Regional Dimension

x 2. Human Dimension      x 4. EU Reform Dimension

## Programme

**15h00: Welcome:** Katarzyna (Kasia) Heba, PFON

**15h15-16h30: Panel Discussion: Perspectives on Future-Proofing Ukraine's Recovery: Inclusion, Investment and Growth (35-40 minutes)**

Moderator: Marcin Walecki, Resident Country Director for Ukraine, National Democratic Institute (NDI)

Panelists:

- Debra Ruh, Founder and CEO, Ruh Global IMPACT
- Konstantine Vardzelashvili, Head of Democratization Department, OSCE
- Gunta Anca, President, European Disability Forum
- Uliana Pcholkina, Board Chair, League of the Strong
- Topchan Ukrainian war veteran, National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities

Interactive Q&A with Audience (20 Minutes)

**16h30: Video messages from allies abroad**

- Alessandra Locatelli, Minister for Disabilities, Italy
- Dmytro Lubinets, Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights

**16h45: Closing Remarks:**

- Call to Action Declaration - Chiara Anselmo, CBM Italia

**17h00-18h30: Networking Reception**

European Disability Forum (EDF) with the Polish Disability Forum, National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities (Ukraine) and the League of the Strong (Ukraine), with CBM Italia.

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## Concept

Ukraine's recovery is not only about rebuilding infrastructure. It is about rebuilding human capital, restoring communities, strengthening resilience, and creating the conditions for long-term economic growth and stability.

As Ukraine advances on its EU accession pathway, recovery efforts present a unique opportunity to build a modern, future-oriented society aligned with European values and standards.

**The human dimension of recovery will be critical to the country's long-term competitiveness, workforce participation, demographic resilience, and investment environment.**

Millions of Ukrainians have been directly affected by the war, including veterans, displaced populations, women-led households, persons with disabilities, families facing new barriers to participation in society and the economy. At the same time, businesses, local authorities, and recovery actors are navigating challenges linked to labour shortages, reconstruction, service delivery, and community resilience.

Recovery efforts that place people at the centre deliver stronger and more sustainable outcomes. Future-proof recovery efforts will strengthen labour market participation, support return and reintegration, and improve investment sustainability.

Human-centred recovery must therefore be embedded across reconstruction planning, financing, infrastructure, governance, and service delivery. Investments made today will shape Ukraine's future workforce, competitiveness, and social cohesion for decades to come.

**Future-proof recovery also creates significant opportunities for businesses and investors.** Companies integrating accessibility, inclusive design, and user-centred approaches into reconstruction, infrastructure, housing, technology, transport, and service delivery will be better positioned to access emerging markets, strengthen workforce resilience, improve talent retention, align with evolving European standards, and deliver more sustainable long-term investments. Recovery solutions designed to meet the needs of Ukrainians will not only support social resilience, but also drive innovation, usability, and competitiveness across sectors.

**This is particularly important for veteran reintegration, workforce recovery, and demographic resilience.** Ukrainians will only return and reinvest in their communities if they can access housing, transport, employment, education, healthcare, and public services that enable full participation in society and the economy.

A recovery that is resilient, locally grounded, and future-oriented will be stronger, more competitive, and more sustainable. Investing in people is not only aligned with European values and international commitments. It is smart economics, good governance, and a strategic investment in Ukraine's long-term recovery and stability.

**Let's not miss that chance.**