

Ladies and gentlemen, honorable members of the Committee, thank you for letting me speak here today.

Let me start off with a simple phrase: My name is Mariia Korolchuk, and I am a Ukrainian refugee.

Every time I would say that I am but a refugee in front of my colleagues they would protest and tell me not to call myself a typical refugee, because I stand out. I am educated, I know a lot of languages, I am able to take care of myself and my family, provide for them, I was able to integrate. But, in my humble opinion, this is the peculiarity of this specific refugee crisis. I am a TYPICAL representative of my nation. A hard-working educated nation, in the heart of Europe, who in 2013 voiced their choice and confirmed that Eurointegration is the only direction that Ukrainians were willing to move forward with.

By education, I am an international information analyst and I specialized in information and psychological warfare. In other words, I would study wars and geopolitics. I would look at crises in the world from a different perspective, a cold, rational and calculating one. It is easy to do so, if you are not INVOLVED. When you sit in a safe place, a comfortable place, far from the epicenter, you can afford to take your time in studies, in ruling decisions, you may even think that because you are not involved in the situation personally - you have a clear head, free of propaganda, an understanding of what is actually going on. New concepts are easily introduced - like the "Ukrainian refugee crisis". But, apart from being introduced, and holding a lot of discussions and important high-level meetings over this matter, no actual work about the uniqueness of this crisis was made.

There are more than 40 million of Ukrainians. Currently, more than 6 million crossed the border and another 10 million of internally displaced persons in Ukraine are ready to cross the moment the situation in Ukraine gets worse. This crisis is unprecedented and echoes in every part of the world. There are more refugees fleeing from war in Ukraine than most countries in Europe have the actual population. That fact alone challenges the economy of any receiving European country.

Apart from that, unlike past refugee crises, if we take Syria as the most recent example, this time 90 per cent of those who fled are women and children. Women, who had to leave their partners behind, driving or walking into the unknown. Women, who faced the following situation: search for shelter, navigating a foreign country, trying to overcome a language barrier, searching options to provide for the family, taking care of children, finding means of continuing their education process somehow. All these simple things turned out to be challenging, depending on the laws of receiving countries. And all that while being under huge stress, constant worry for the family left behind and for their homeland, being aware of and avoiding being the target of human trafficking. Women were forced to become providers, educators, psychologists, protectors while remaining mothers at the same time. In my belief, if it wasn't for the work of many NGOs and huge unprecedented help from the civil population of many receiving countries, who helped greatly with accommodation, information, transport, clothes and food, these women would simply not have made it. No matter the state funding, cash programs of NGOs, job availability, you must keep in mind that women became SOLE providers for the family, seeing that most men in Ukraine either lost their jobs or were mobilized. To pay rent, buy food, clothes, take care of transport, pay for tuition - all that cannot be covered by one parent only, especially in cases where there is more than one child in the family.

Currently, I reside in Romania with my 3 underage children. When I came there, I witnessed how many NGOs and volunteers worked with Ukrainians who were crossing the border, how new assistance projects were introduced and implemented. I kept reading updated

information on how each different government would rule decisions concerning Ukrainian refugees. But what I DIDN'T see enough were the actual Ukrainians in this equation. When trying to solve the issues with Ukrainians, the most logical thing to do is actually work with or hire Ukrainians. I would like to fill you in a bit more about who Ukrainians are and our mentality, way of life, if you may. Prior to my decision to leave I was desperately searching for an apartment I could RENT, because a refugee camp, modular homes were a red flag for me. I am a woman who has a few masters degrees. I own a private home. I am a CEO of a logistics firm based on the premises of Chornomorsk commercial sea port. I traveled around the world, I consider myself European, I am used to comfortable living conditions that I worked hard for for all my life. Apart from that, I didn't want to become a burden for the country receiving me and my children. So, I was willing to pay for the best conditions that I could afford. Many had the same thoughts, because when I monitored social media - a lot of women wrote similar posts regarding RENT. What I later noticed when I started working with CORE and Funky Citizens as an interpreter and would visit many shelters both in Ukraine and Romania, many sports halls were empty, specially put up camps at the train stations - empty, Ukrainians weren't living on the streets. Places that were specially prepared for the wave of refugees were used as transit points at the best. Ukrainians would try to do their best to either live in private homes, private rentals or would choose shelters that could provide certain levels of comfort. And it has nothing to do with being entitled. Ukrainians are a proud nation. A nation with its own history, language, culture, traditions. An accomplished nation. Pre-war, Ukraine was a thriving country. While on multiple commutes to Ukraine with foreigners, where we would pass not only towns, but villages, they would exclaim in surprise how neat and clean everything around them was. It is the Ukrainian culture. We tend to keep our homes tidy, our front lawns pretty, women tend to take care of themselves and look attractive, children are involved in many activities from the age of two. We do not litter in our homeland, we strive to build, become better, perfect ourselves in every sphere. Ukrainians are a very hard-working nation. An educated nation. It would be a mistake to suppose that this refugee crisis was used as an excuse for many to move to Europe and expect that they would be taken care of. In fact, large number of refugees who preferred to stay in Moldova, Poland, Romania and the idps on the border of Ukraine, suggests that all these people will return home in a heartbeat when it would be safe to do so. Ukrainians had a normal life back home. Good living conditions, jobs, belongings, an actual future. It is difficult to settle for less. You can only settle for so long. And even though Ukrainians are extremely grateful for all the love and support that they received around the world, most want to come back home, some already doing so. Nobody wanted to flee and settle. And when they were forced to do that, nobody wanted to be asked questions like: you are Ukrainian but you speak Russian? Is a southern Ukrainian different from a Western Ukrainian? But didn't you silently agree for your Eastern Ukrainians to be bombed these last 8 years? What kind of a refugee are you, driving such a car? At least the question "Where is Ukraine and what is it" - a popular one in the 90s, was no longer relevant.

I am a strong believer that the language that you speak does not identify you. In my country there is a true democracy and each individual can freely choose which language one prefers to speak at home. Second of all, the artificial division of Ukraine into West, East, South and North were just, in my humble opinion, a manipulative method to get electoral votes depending on the parties, a method that spiraled.

In my belief, one of the main traits of Ukrainians is their ability to adapt to any circumstances. But it is very difficult to do so, when those who need adaptation abroad are mostly women and children, with no protection, no stability, in conditions that are far from what they were

previously accustomed to, and on top of all that having the cliché - cheap labor force written all over their faces. Ukrainians are more than cheap labor.

I was lucky. I was offered a job with an NGO. A different experience for me, seeing that prior to that I worked in the private sector. And I am loving every single moment of it. Ukrainian state officials stressed how vital it is for every Ukrainian to work and help our country any way we can regardless of where we reside now. This is my part. Thanks to CORE and Funky Citizens I am able to be up to date on many issues regarding how the civil population is being helped both in Ukraine and abroad. I am in constant contact with the actual civilians, I hear their personal stories, I can relate. I am able to make a clear assessment of all the work that needs to be done to help Ukraine both during the active phase of war and after, where there will be the challenge to rebuild Ukraine. And from a personal example I can assure you that there are no more committed workers who would work tirelessly for the benefit of Ukraine, than Ukrainians. I cannot stress enough the role of NGOs in the case of the war in my country. They are the mediators on ground, actually talking and taking care of both refugees and IDPs, understanding the actual needs of people which are far from the essential things like shelter, food, water and medicine. Which, understand me correctly - are vital, but most NGOs try to surpass this first stage and move on to next projects - seeing people as individuals, as a community, who needs to be integrated, to be occupied, help them be able to take care of themselves and not rely on help all the time. NGOs are hiring Ukrainians abroad, creating new jobs, helping to systematize the work of volunteers, who, after more than 3 months are mostly burnt out. They are implementing the projects of refurbishment of many shelters for the IDPs and refugees, finding interesting long-term solutions that could help certain communities, providing help in the re-building of vital infrastructure in Ukraine, trying to think ahead and not only solve immediate problems. The only thing that has me and many of my fellow Ukrainians concerned is that the world community is growing tired of the war in Ukraine, Ukraine is disappearing from the headlines, volunteers- burnt out, volumes of humanitarian aid have diminished. All that while we still have no clue how long the war will continue and the actual extent of the humanitarian catastrophe we will experience a few months time.

I am not naive. I understand that every war has a beginning and an end. As a Ukrainian I believe that I have a right to be angry. Angry, that my future and the future of my children was stripped from me. Ukraine's only fault is that we have a neighbor who wants to deprive us of our identity. Pre-war, when the situation at the borders was constantly escalating, I heard on numerous occasions that this is the 21st century and the global community will not let us be continuously bombed. The global community will not let a genocide take place. Yet, this is the reality that we live in now. But, as I said, Ukrainians are experts in adaptation. We corrected and put off some of our plans. Right now, Ukrainians are united and have two purposes: win and re-build. I am glad that many countries support this vision, otherwise the notion of "Reconstruction of Ukraine" wouldn't have been mentioned multiple times over the last period. It is also my understanding that many countries and NGOs have voiced their support and commitment in this matter. Here, I would like to speak on the behalf of Ukrainian SMEs. This sector is large in Ukraine. A sector that in its majority is currently out of work. And there is only one thought that keeps us, entrepreneurs, sane - the amount of work that will need to be done after the war. Use us, Ukrainians, SMEs, the private sector, as a valuable resource when it comes to reconstruction. We have wonderful experts in logistics, in construction, in project management, in social spheres. We will work tirelessly and efficiently to support our country, our families. Ukrainians are interested in getting their life back on track. We are eager to rebuild our cities, our villages, we want to help heal our

children, women and men from the horrors of this war, we want to have a future. We are willing to team up with NGOs, play by the rules and receive assistance in these matters. Ukrainians envision their future in Europe. I think that 113 days into war it is needless to say that we have proven that we not only share, but we are actually willing to fight for these values. During this war I have made my own assessment, and I believe that the most valuable resource a country may possess is its people. People who fight for freedom, people who build, people with extraordinary brains who push the boundaries of science, people who nurture and educate the future generations. People who are true representatives of humanity. Please, use and VALUE this resource, Ukrainians, when aiding my country, when making plans of reconstruction, when assisting the displaced persons and talking about labor market integrations.