



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



Tomasz Przybysz-Przybyszewski

Secretary, Polish Disability Forum (PFON)

Tomasz Przybysz-Przybyszewski is Secretary of the Polish Disability Forum (PFON), the only Polish umbrella organisation representing persons with disabilities. He has extensive experience in disability rights advocacy, accessibility, and inclusive public policy, working to strengthen the participation of persons with disabilities in social, economic, and political life. Through his engagement with civil society organisations, public institutions, and international partners, he contributes to advancing disability-inclusive policies.

- **Katarzyna (Kasia) Heba**

Legal Expert and Human Rights Advocate, Poland

Katarzyna (Kasia) Heba is a Polish lawyer with extensive experience in human rights, public policy, and legal reform. She advises on legislative and regulatory frameworks that promote equal access, inclusive governance, and the effective implementation of international human rights standards. Her work focuses on strengthening rights-based approaches within public institutions and supporting policies that advance inclusion, participation, and social justice.

- **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.

- **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.



- **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.



- **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.



- **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. He has represented Ukraine at high-level international events, including the Ukraine Recovery Conference in Rome in 2025.

- **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.



• **Viktoriia Nazarenko**

Chairperson, National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities of Ukraine (NAPD)

Viktoriia Nazarenko is Chairperson of the National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities of Ukraine, the country's largest umbrella organisation representing persons with disabilities and their organisations. A respected advocate for disability rights and social inclusion, she has been at the forefront of efforts to promote accessibility, independent living, rehabilitation, and equal participation in public life. She works closely with national authorities, international partners, and civil society to ensure that disability inclusion remains a central pillar of Ukraine's recovery and long-term development.



• **Meelis Joost**

Chair, Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities (EPIK)

Meelis Joost is Chair at the Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities (EPIK) and a recognised expert on disability rights, accessibility, and inclusive policymaking. With extensive experience engaging governments, international institutions, and civil society organisations, he has contributed to the development of policies that strengthen equal opportunities and participation for persons with disabilities. His work focuses on advancing disability-inclusive governance and ensuring that accessibility and inclusion are integrated into broader social and economic development agendas.





Programme

Time	Agenda Item
14h50	NAPD Video while people are sitting: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8D1Q1KcPgWE (10 minutes)
15:00	Good day, take seats and introduction to Kasia Heba Polish Disability Forum (PFON): by Tomasz Przybysz-Przybyszewski Secretary, Polish Disability Forum (PFON)
15:05	Welcome by Katarzyna (Kasia) Heba, Polish Disability Forum (PFON) And Play video - PFON Video (3 minutes)

15h15-15h25	Video Messages Play video Alessandra Locatelli, Minister for Disabilities, Italy (1.5 minutes) Play video Dmytro Lubinets, Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights (3.5 minutes)
15:30 - 16:30	Panel Discussion: Perspectives on Future-Proofing Ukraine's Recovery: Inclusion, Investment and Growth Moderator: Marcin Walecki, Resident Country Director for Ukraine, National Democratic Institute (NDI) Panelists: 1. Debra Ruh, Founder and CEO, Ruh Global IMPACT• 2. Konstantine Vardzelashvili, Head of Democratization Department, OSCE 3. Gunta Anca, President, European Disability Forum 4. Uliana Pcholkina, Board Chair, League of the Strong 5. Ruslan Topchan, Ukrainian war veteran, National Assembly of Persons with Disabilities Interactive Q&A with Audience
16:30-16h40	Thank you to panelists Handover to Chiara, Viktoriia and Daria for next steps by Tomasz (PFON)
16:40-17h00	Closing Remarks Summary of panel and video messages (for persons with intellectual disabilities) and introduction to the Declaration by Chiara Anselmo, CBM Italia (5 minutes) Reading of the Gdansk Declaration and call to action by Daria Kukurika (LOS) and Viktoriia Nazarenko (NAPD) (5 + 5 minutes)

	Handover from Poland to Estonia: Tomasz (PFON (in person) (5 minutes) to Estonia Meelis Joost (EPIK) (Online) (5 minutes)
17:00	Thank you and invitation to networking reception Close of Zoom channel by Tomasz (PFON) Thanks: Interpreters and captioners Tech, sound and camera team Hotel colleagues CBM Italia for funding this event, and CBM Germany colleagues for funds and collaboration
17:00 - 18:30	Networking Reception in Orangerie for some snacks and drinks. Wine, beer and softs but hard liquor is for your own payment pls.
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. Email: phillipa.tucker@edf-feph.org	

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.

