



Women Lead in Emergencies ●

Shifting power to Ukrainian women's organizations, enabling women to lead in the humanitarian response.

February 2024 — CARE Ukraine



What do we aim to Achieve: Ukrainian women and marginalized groups are heard at all levels and gain more leadership in decisions about humanitarian assistance, resulting in more gender-responsive planning, assistance and services.

What does this mean in practice?

Local and national women's organizations and groups as well as representatives of marginalized groups¹ are an integral part of the Ukrainian society. They know and understand the needs of the people in their communities. Most of the time they have better access to marginalized populations than international actors. And they are the first to reach them.

Therefore, their meaningful participation in decision-making processes to advocate for themselves needs to be guaranteed – to ensure the rights of women and girls are respected and the response reflects their needs and priorities based on their lived experiences.

At the moment, the reality is a different one: The expertise, leadership and unique contributions of women-led organizations/women's rights organizations (WLOs/WROs), and the voices of women in local communities continue to be on the side-lines in humanitarian coordination and decision-making in Ukraine. Humanitarian actors have made inadequate efforts to promote their leadership in relevant fora. This means their experiences and recommendations are largely not being listened to.

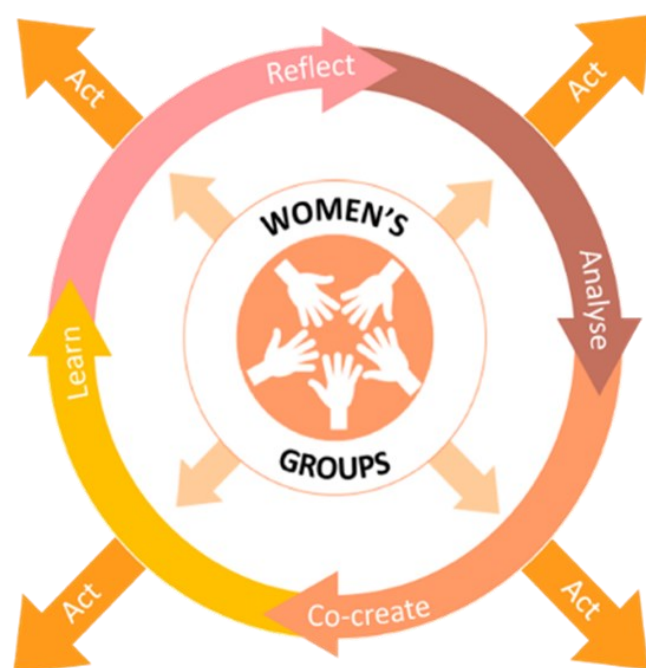
CARE's **Women Lead in Emergencies (WLiE)** approach is a model for gender-transformative humanitarian action that addresses this gap.

WLiE approach and adaptation to Ukraine

Humanitarian aid projects are usually focused on the provision of aid while WLiE also addresses structural barriers for women's participation. WLiE changes how international actors partner with national and local organisations by shifting power to them. Through increased space and influence for women and marginalized groups at the local and national level partner gain more power to participate in the design of humanitarian activities.

WLiE aims to **enable meaningful participation of WLOs/WROs in the humanitarian response at the local, national and international levels**. The approach is built on the following steps:

- **Reflect:** Women's organisations/groups reflect and identify their priorities. This can be formal organisations as well as informal groups.
- **Analyse:** Together, CARE and women's organisations/groups conduct a Rapid Gender Analysis on Power and Participation (RGA-P) to analyse barriers to and opportunities for participation in decision-making structures.
- **Co-create:** Women's organisations/groups co-create ideas about how to support women's leadership within their context. They develop collective action plans to achieve their goals and discuss with CARE what support they need to make it happen.
- **Act:** Women's organisations/groups implement their actions plans with support from CARE, using a dedicated budget that they control.
- **Learn:** CARE and women's organisations/groups use participatory learning to explore what has (not) worked well and to make the adaptations needed to reach the agreed collective goals.



¹ These include LGBTQIA*, Roma women, women with disabilities, HIV-positive women and women of other marginalized groups.

² CARE defines women's rights organizations as those that have an explicit purpose of advancing women's rights or gender equality, and women-led organizations as any non-governmental, not-for profit and non-political organization where two-thirds of its board (including the Chair) and management staff/volunteers (including the Executive Director) are female, and it focuses on women and girls as a primary target of programming.

WLiE has been a proven model implemented in protracted and complex crises and weather-related disasters around the world. Ukraine is the first response where WLiE was implemented from the very beginning of a rapid onset emergency during a war. Ukraine is also the first response where CARE predominantly works by providing funding and support to national and local organisations instead of implementing itself. This was possible due to the large volume of private donations that CARE received, providing the flexible funding to support this innovative approach.

In other contexts, CARE is implementing WLiE directly with informal women's groups. In Ukraine, CARE is currently working with three well-established, locally-rooted Ukrainian WLOs/WROs who implement WLiE at the community level. The partners work with existing and newly-established (semi-)informal women's groups, including IDP women and Roma women.

In total, CARE is currently partnering with eleven WLOs/WROs. To enable our WLO/WRO partners to react to the ongoing war in Ukraine, the focus on women's participation and leadership is complemented with support for life-saving humanitarian assistance to vulnerable and marginalized women and girls. Partners are mostly implementing activities in the fields of protection, gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual and reproductive health (SRH).

What we are doing: WLiE in Ukraine

Phase I: Immediate Crisis Response: Special Action Grants to respond to urgent humanitarian needs (April-August 2022)

Following the escalation of the war in Ukraine, WLOs/WROs identified funding to respond to the humanitarian needs as a priority. That is why the first phase of WLiE in Ukraine focused on providing action budgets to immediately support the life-saving assistance provided by four WLOs/WROs.

Due to the rapid onset emergency caused by the war, CARE did not implement WLiE "to the letter" but, according to the priorities of our partners, started by providing 'special action grants':

Immediate core, flexible funding with simplified procedures, namely

- a lighter due diligence process
- simplified reporting mechanisms.

WLOs/WROs used the funding

- to continue to provide life-saving assistance to women, girls, and vulnerable and marginalized groups.
- to reach other women's organizations working at the community level, who were in a position to deliver critical support but may not be able to access funding to do so.

The support provided by partners included psychosocial support; livelihood assistance; GBV, Protection and Legal Assistance; access to shelter and collective centres; distribution of personal hygiene and sanitary items; and information on accessing critical support.

Phase II: Ongoing Response: Multi-year Funding and Tailored Support

Component 1 – WLOs/WROs lead in Ukraine response (apply WLiE principles):

CARE continues the funding of WLOs/WROs for life-saving assistance and responds to further priorities identified by WLOs/WROs:

Funding: WLOs/WROs called not just for ad-hoc funding, but for **flexible, multi-year grants** enabling them to plan, adapt and respond to the changing context in which they work. Therefore, funding is provided for 12-18 months. WLOs/WROs decide which activities are implemented.

Examples include developing a database of LGBTQI+-friendly specialists; providing psychosocial support, gynaecology and legal support information and services; supporting shelters for GBV survivors; and establishing "social taxis" for service access for people in remote areas, particularly older women and women with disabilities.

CARE has also begun to link larger national civil society organisations (CSOs) with smaller WLOs/WROs who have better access to hard-to-reach groups, to ensure that humanitarian aid is reaching more marginalised communities. This approach is used in a project to distribute NFIs to women, especially disabled and elderly women, in rural areas.

Women-led advocacy priorities: In the last two years, many WLOs/WROs shifted their work towards providing humanitarian aid, leaving limited capacity to fulfil their original mandates.

WLO/WRO partners defined as a priority to continue **to advocate for legislation that protects women and girls' rights** – such as **implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security** and the **Istanbul Convention** in Ukraine – as well as to advocate **for the participation of women in the recovery** phase of the conflict. Examples of activities include establishing and strengthening community-level, women-led taskforces to advance the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and develop action plans on combating GBV in their communities.

Besides providing funding for these activities, CARE is committed to opening and creating spaces and opportunities for WLOs/WROs to directly participate and speak in relevant advocacy fora and reinforce partner's capacities to implement their own advocacy.



Roma women focus group meeting to identify needs as well as to inform and involve women in the project/ CARE Ukraine.

Institutional capacity strengthening: Many WLOs/WROs are new to the humanitarian sector, having shifted from development-related women's rights work to providing humanitarian assistance. At the same time, the capacity building done by international actors in Ukraine is often not tailored to the specific needs of Ukrainian organisations. CARE supports WLOs/WROs with **tailored capacity sharing and strengthening to build their expertise on operating effectively within the humanitarian system**. For example, this includes mentoring of MEAL and finance colleagues to support the set-up of effective policies and systems.

Psychosocial support: WLOs/WROs continually cite heightened risk of burnout. CARE is **providing funding for psychosocial care to staff and volunteers** who are working around the clock to respond to the crisis.

Component 2 – Women's community groups lead in the local response (WLiE approach):

CARE supports WLOs/WROs to implement the WLiE approach with (semi-)informal groups at community level, including conducting an RGA-Power & Participation on the local response.

Three WLOs/WROs and one national CSO work with women from local communities to support their participation and leadership. Participants will attend trainings provided by partner organizations where they engage in Reflect and Analyse exercises, learn basics of project management and citizen participation in decision-making. Then, they will draft their own community projects. After the training, the participants will implement the projects in their communities with mentoring support from the partner organizations.

The effects of the approach can be seen from the start. One partner organizations is working with five groups of Roma women. After attending the trainings, women have begun speaking about GBV in their communities. The groups have also started to establish relations with local authorities. They are planning to establish social stores in their communities which can serve as an entry point to working with them.

CARE is also supporting a national CSO to set up women's groups within existing women and girls safe spaces.

What have we learnt so far?

- CARE adapted its WLiE approach to **working with WLOs/WROs who already support the participation and leadership of women and marginalized groups**, building on existing capacities. This has been important to **ensure that we are not imposing our priorities and ideas about how to do this work** and adapt our programme to the context.
- Working with existing WLOs/WROs who work with marginalised groups has increased **acceptance of and access to communities** who might otherwise be bypassed by the humanitarian response. It also increased the ability to **provide more tailored services** that respond to the needs of the affected populations.
- **Focusing support on smaller WLOs/WROs as well** rather than only supporting national CSOs who are already receiving large amounts of funding is important to ensure they can **play a greater role in the humanitarian response**.
- It is critical to provide **support to WLOs/WROs to be active in spaces outside of the humanitarian response** as well to ensure continuity of their work. This includes political participation, implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the Istanbul convention which are priorities during and after the war.
- **Flexible, multi-year funding with simplified requirements** is important. It enables WLOs/WROs to define their own priorities, be reactive to the needs of their communities and provide timely and effective support, **without the need for complex and time-consuming reporting requirements**.

Credits cover picture : Winds of Change

Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information

Anna Dovgopol
Women Lead in Emergencies Advisor
CARE Ukraine
E-Mail: dovgopol@care.de

