


Swiss-Ukrainian project  
**DESPRO**  
Decentralization Support in Ukraine

 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra  
  
Swiss Confederation

**skat** Swiss Resource Centre and  
Consultancies for Development

# EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH DECENTRALIZATION REFORM



**WOMEN-LEADERS IN  
LOCAL SELF-GOVERNANCE  
DESPRO NETWORK**

Kyiv, 2020

The Swiss-Ukrainian Decentralization Support Project DESPRO is an international assistance project working in the reform of local self-governance (or “decentralization”) in Ukraine. DESPRO is funded by the Swiss Confederation via the Swiss Cooperation Office and implemented by Skat, and has been active since 2007.

## 1 Introduction

An important vector of democratic development of Ukraine is the establishment of gender equality in Ukrainian society, which presupposes equal participation of women and men in all fields of life as well as equal access to resources for both sexes. According to the 2020 Global Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum, of 153 countries Ukraine occupies the 59th place in the fields of economic participation, education, healthcare and broadening rights and opportunities in politics.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, when we speak of political participation of women in Parliament and of those occupying top positions in ministries, Ukraine shows lower results (out of 144 countries – 83rd, 88th and 82nd place respectively).<sup>2</sup>

Equal participation of women and men in decision-making also plays a significant role in the process of reforming local self-government and decentralization in Ukraine. In this context, empowerment of women in local self-government, their active involvement in economic development processes and bridging the gender gap in terms of access to resources and in decision making are extremely important.

In accordance with the vision of the Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development (SDC), the issue of gender equality is transversal for the DESPRO project and is taken into consideration at all stages of the project’s implementation, from project design to implementation and monitoring. An important aspect of the DESPRO approach is that by improving access and quality of public services, primarily, water supply and waste water management, DESPRO facilitates



gender equality and is beneficial to women who, especially in rural areas, are traditionally overloaded with housework.

In 2015, SDC conducted a gender peer-review of the DESPRO project and recommended the following: 1) to ensure the presence of women in decision making bodies; 2) to encourage the balanced participation of women and men in decision making. These gender-specific recommendations were implemented from 2018 onwards, and focus on (i) providing women with better access to decision-making and (ii) creating better opportunities for the development of leadership qualities among women in the communities. Swiss-Ukrainian Decentralization Support Project DESPRO develops a network of women-leaders to expand opportunities for increasing the leadership potential of women in local self-government, to drive change at the local level and support sustainable regional development in Ukraine.

## 2 Achievements (2017-2020)

In 2017, the Project conducted a study on the “Involvement of Women in the Process of Implementation of Decentralization Reforms”<sup>3</sup>, which aimed to analyze female participation in decentralization processes as well as to assess the influence of local self-government reform on women’s participation in political life at the local level. Over 70 local self-government women and men from different oblasts of Ukraine were surveyed within the framework of the study. The study identified a gender asymmetry in terms of women’s representation in senior positions and decision-making at the local level.

To address these issues, DESPRO conducted face-to-face and online events in 2018 and 2019 on building women’s capacity in local self-government, which aimed to support women’s participation in decision making.

In order to broaden opportunities for the potential of women in amalgamated territorial communities, the DESPRO Project launched the support program for female local self-government leaders in 2018. Over the period of 2018-2019, three workshops, each consisting of 2 training sessions, for 76 women (representatives of amalgamated territorial communities) were

<sup>1</sup> [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2020.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2020.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://despro.org.ua/library/research/Women%20involvement%20in%20Decentralisation\\_DESPRO\\_2017.pdf](https://despro.org.ua/library/research/Women%20involvement%20in%20Decentralisation_DESPRO_2017.pdf)

conducted. Within the framework of the workshops, the participants learned effective communicative techniques, developed their team work skills, and learned the basis of negotiation practices with a specific emphasis on introducing changes at the local level.

Workshops were a great success: for example, DESPRO received over 300 applications from female local self-government representatives from all the oblasts of Ukraine for participation in the last workshop in 2019. As a result of the training, an average of 96.6% of the participants assessed that the knowledge and practical skills gained through the training was useful for their work in local self-government.

In 2019, the Project partnered with the Ukrainian Association of Amalgamated Territorial Communities for conducting workshops in order to transfer experience, institutionalize and scale up this activity among local self-government on the whole territory of Ukraine in the future.

In order to consolidate and further institutionalize DESPRO's work in this field, in 2020 the Project developed a Strategy to be implemented in 2020 – 2021. The general purpose of the document is gender sensitization and women's empowerment in local self-

### 3 Process/Methodology

Innovative models of decentralized water supply, waste water and solid household waste management, maintaining and servicing that is specifically targeted for the community, were developed by DESPRO / Skat and have been implemented in communities since 2007. Such activity focuses on implementation of local projects aiming to provide high-quality public services to the households. It directly addresses gender relations as housework, which is most often done by women, becomes easier and takes less time. Improvements in public health due to higher quality water supply and sanitation services also decreases the workload of many women who often need to look after sick family members.

Moreover, the DESPRO approach, which is based on community initiatives, supports the involvement of a large number of women in project work, starting from decision-making and ending with actual implementation. At the local level, the project promotes the participation of women in decision-making processes, and effective representation of women in working groups, project events, etc. The Project collects gender-disaggregated data related to all activities, maintaining at least 40% of women represented in all the project activities. Face-to-face and online training events, conducted by the Project include a course on gender equality. For example, such a course was introduced in the curriculum of DESPRO's Local Self Governance School, a special training program held every year for local partners.



government through consolidation of the experience gained. This included the empowerment of local self-government representatives and their associations to increase women's representation in decision making at the local level. In order to continue this work, DESPRO activities will be aimed at: 1) conducting training on the topics of gender and women's participation in decision-making and leadership; 2) organizing webinars for female local self-government leaders, involving well-known experts for experience exchange; 3) launching a mentorship program for young female leaders in communities; 4) sharing cases of best practices of women heads, deputies, and local self-government officials.

Women's equal participation in decision-making plays an important role in the process of the local self-government and decentralization reform in Ukraine. In order to promote active participation of women and incorporate women's perspective into the decentralization agenda, the Project established a functional network of women reforms' leaders – heads of communities and potential female local self-government officials. At workshops, organized by the Project, women learned effective communicative techniques, developed their team work skills, and learned the basis of negotiation practices with a specific emphasis on introducing changes at the local level. In total, approximately 96.6% of female participants assessed the gained knowledge and practical skills as useful for their work in local self-government.



At the same time, there is a need to understand gender aspects better and in a more differentiated way, in order to meet the needs of both men and women and facilitate gender equality at the local level. In this context, DESPRO activities aimed at awareness raising among male and female local self-government (LSG) representatives on gender while creating public services in their communities.

## 4 Lessons learned

- Decentralization reform has considerably influenced the level of women's involvement in the local decision-making processes. Male and female participants of various surveys noted that the situation with gender equality has improved with the launch of the reform, with women getting more involved in the decentralization process. Many women started perceiving the reform as a chance to solve not only community problems, but also ensure their personal growth, including the possibility to develop their leadership potential, solve conflicts and find innovative solutions to everyday issues..

- The transversal topic of gender equality presupposes cooperation with all organizations working for local self-government and decentralization of power reform as well as integration of the issues of equal participation of women and men into all activities. Associations of local self-government bodies are best placed to share best practices of modern and

A special online course on gender equality in local self-government was developed and launched by the Community of Practice web resource. It is a helpful tool for men and women working in communities to know more on how to integrate gender into their everyday work at the local level. The course was completed by 64 LSG representatives, men and women, at the end of 2019.



innovative community governance.

- The DESPRO project practice of introducing a 40% quota on women's participation in all face to face events, working group meetings, etc. proved to be an effective tool to encourage gender equality at the local level.

## Resources

DESPRO Online course "Gender policy for Local Self Governance Development"

<https://udl.despro.org.ua/?lang=en>

DESPRO (2019) Female leaders: three stories of women-local self-government leaders

<https://decentralization.gov.ua/en/news/11162>

"DESPRO Women leaders in Local self-governance network" videos

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=12&v=r5x8hI08y_l&feature=emb_logo)

[time\\_continue=12&v=r5x8hI08y\\_l&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=763024540705356)

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Ways of Consolidation and Institutionalization of Capacity Building Activities of Women-Leaders: Analytical Report

[https://despro.org.ua/library/research/Consolidation%20and%20Institutionalisation\\_Focus%20groups%20studies%20report\\_eng.pdf](https://despro.org.ua/library/research/Consolidation%20and%20Institutionalisation_Focus%20groups%20studies%20report_eng.pdf)

Need for Awareness Raising Regarding Gender Policy among ATC Female Leaders: Report

[https://despro.org.ua/library/research/Capacity%20building%20needs%20among%20women%20leaders\\_eng.pdf](https://despro.org.ua/library/research/Capacity%20building%20needs%20among%20women%20leaders_eng.pdf)

Results of a Survey, Conducted among Local Self-Government Representatives of Amalgamated Territorial Communities on Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women

[https://despro.org.ua/library/research/LSG%20Gender%20Survey%20results\\_eng.pdf](https://despro.org.ua/library/research/LSG%20Gender%20Survey%20results_eng.pdf)

Involvement of Women in the Process of Implementation of Decentralization Reforms: Report

[https://despro.org.ua/libraryresearch/Women%20involvement%20in%20Decentralisation\\_DESPRO\\_2017.pdf](https://despro.org.ua/libraryresearch/Women%20involvement%20in%20Decentralisation_DESPRO_2017.pdf)

