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EMPOWERING WOMEN LEADERS IN A TIME OF CRISIS: FOSTERING INCLUSION IN UKRAINIAN ACADEMIA

Introduction.
Ukrainian universities face a multitude of challenges, due to Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, including war-induced psychological effects, faculty and student displacement, a shattered academic environment, etc.

Cultivating strong and inclusive leadership among Ukrainian academics, particularly women, is crucial for their resilience in a time of crisis and will help their academic success. Academic leadership requires the transformation of skillset and mindset, the development of the "adaptive capacity to learn and evolve in crises" and the integration of new approaches and practices into the evolving realities of higher education institutions (Fernandez & Shaw, 2019; Hamid, et al., 2023). The project "Fostering Women's Leadership in Ukrainian Academia: An Intersectional and Culturally Responsive Perspective", funded by the British Council, as a collaborative partnership of Mariupol State University (MSU) presently located in Kyiv- Ukraine, and the University of Hull (UoH), United Kingdom, catalyses positive change reaching local, national and international academic communities.

The project will help to provide women academics (and their male colleagues) with the tools and resources they need to overcome the current crisis, improve their teaching and steer their organisations toward an inclusive society and social justice by emphasising inclusive leadership development and knowledge exchange. It will raise awareness about the complexities of gender and leadership in academia, and it will focus on the intersection of gender with other social identities, i.e. age, sexuality, disability, ethnicity, and status as displaced/refugee.

This will be accomplished through the following main **objectives**: 1) sharing successful

institutional practices and support initiatives on gender equality and leadership development in Ukrainian academia; 2) designing and implementing an original innovative training methodology for university lecturers to foster leadership for women in Ukrainian academia; 3) contributing to long-term and sustainable institutional change that promotes leadership development of gender equality, and opportunities for women and addresses gender, disability (and other protected categories)- and culture-related biases; 4) embedding the intersectional perspective about leadership in higher education; 5) encouraging further collaboration between the UoH and MSU based on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) values and intersectionality.

It is worth noting that the Guide to Addressing Gender Equality (2018) emphasises the interconnectedness of gender equality with other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, n.d.). The project specifically aligns with the following SDGs: Goal 5: Gender Equality - the project outcomes will directly address target 5.5, ensuring women's full participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels; Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities - the project also contributes to target 10.2, empowering and promoting the social, economic, and political inclusion of all individuals, regardless of their background; Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions - the project supports target 16.6 by fostering the development of effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels.

Results. A key component of the project will be the design and delivery of a professional development course for MSU academics, titled "Inclusive Leadership in Academia through Cultural Immersion", to enhance their leadership qualities and EDI awareness; prepare them to design their courses, taking into account categories of difference (gender, disability, age, cultural background, etc.); develop their students' leadership qualities with an intersectional perspective; and effectively collaborate with their colleagues from diverse cultural backgrounds to enrich research and teaching.

The course is based on intercultural pedagogy that encourages academics to approach other cultures with open minds, acknowledging similarities and differences, and through this intercultural dialogue, to gain a deeper understanding of their own cultural framework (Trebisacce, 2019); Deardoff's concept of intercultural competencies, Bennet's developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) and the Artful Thinking programme designed by Harvard School of Education and National Gallery of Art, USA. The following thematic modules will be covered in the course training sessions: 1) Leadership and EDI in Academia; 2) Gender and intersectionality; 3) Inclusive Course Design; 4) Inclusive Teaching Practices through Cultural Immersion; 5) Promoting and Measuring Student Success; 6) Redesigning a Module with an Intersectional Perspective: Teaching Gender Theory and Intersectionality

(S.Gonzalez-Arnal, 2014). The course will take an active training approach and involve participants developing and presenting their own course designs and delivery methods to tailor the learned principles to their specific teaching contexts and receive constructive feedback from their peers and course instructors.

To provide broader community engagement, the project will also include a hybrid international workshop at UoH for university staff, students and the general public to raise awareness of how inclusion and the professional progression of women and EDI can be supported institutionally. The workshop will gather in-person speakers from UoH and Ukrainian universities in exile – MSU and Vasyl' Stus Donetsk National University (Vinnytsia, Ukraine), non-governmental organisations – Ukrainian Association of Organisational and Work Psychologists and Ukrainian Association of Professors and Researchers of European Integration, and online speakers from the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) de Ecuador, the Free University of Berlin and Masaryk University, among others.

To ensure broad accessibility and disseminate project findings and resources effectively, an open-access webpage with all project information available in both English and Ukrainian will be created. The webpage will include information about the professional development course that will allow other universities to access this resource and see how the training can be implemented. Besides, the webpage will be a repository for the information and good practices exchanged in the international hybrid workshop. The papers offered by the speakers will also be accessible from the webpage linked to the websites of both MSU and UoH. The project webpage will be consistently updated with the latest project information. In addition to the webpage, findings will be disseminated at international conferences, through academic publications, social media channels and targeted media outlets.

Through its implementation, the project is anticipated to yield the following outcomes: firstly, by attending the professional development course "Inclusive Leadership in Academia through Cultural Immersion", MSU academics will be enabled to apply principles and practices of inclusive teaching -with an intersectional perspective- and leadership development, and in accordance with them to design new content for or revise old content of existing courses, and to create culturally responsive inclusive environments for their students; secondly, by participating in a workshop at the UoH, British and Ukrainian administrative and academic staff and students and related invited organisations will be able to gain a better understanding of the need for a diverse body of staff and students, and to develop and maintain inclusive policies; thirdly, by approaching the project webpage, the international academic (and nonacademic) community will be aware of an actionable roadmap for strengthening women's leadership qualities in academia, embracing EDI practices

with an intersectional perspective and ensuring equal and meaningful educational opportunities for all genders.

Conclusions. To summarise, the project "Fostering Women's Leadership in Ukrainian Academia: An Intersectional and Culturally Responsive Perspective" addresses a critical need to create sustainable academic inclusive environments within Ukrainian higher education. The project's intersectionality focus ensures recognising and dealing with diverse women leaders' specific needs and perspectives. Furthermore, the project's international component promotes knowledge exchange and collaboration, maintaining a global support network for women leaders in academia. This project can potentially create a lasting positive impact on women's leadership in Ukrainian academia and beyond.

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