Successful matching: the Special Initiative for Ukraine proves to be relevant

Promotion of foreign trade and investment, labour market integration and a corporate social responsibility project: the second round of the Special Initiative for Ukraine in the context of the *Partnering in Business with Germany* programme came to a successful end in Berlin and Düsseldorf at the beginning of April 2025. 76 Ukrainian “bridging managers” and 63 German host companies look back on valuable cooperation.

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The closing events highlighted the successes and the potential of this project, which not only fosters mutual understanding, but also results in sustainable economic cooperation between German companies and Ukrainian refugee managers. The events focused on the positive experience and the long-term impact of the Special Initiative. Representatives of the Embassy of Ukraine (Berlin), the Consulate General of Ukraine (Düsseldorf), the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, numerous job centres and cooperation partners, including the Düsseldorf Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the German Eastern Business Association and the “companies integrating refugees” network attended the events.

For the Ukrainian managers, participating in the Special Initiative was a major step in their personal development and career. German companies benefited from the targeted selection of Ukrainian participants, who were able to access new business opportunities in light of their expertise and networks.

Stefan Wittek, Managing Director of the Magdeburg construction company B.T. Innovation, describes his experience with Oleksandr Kozytskyi, one of the Ukrainian “bridging managers”, as follows: “Oleksandr’s participation and his networks in Ukraine opened up the possibility for us to find new suppliers for textile reinforcement systems.” The cooperation with the Ukrainian engineer helped B.T. Innovation to find a new business partner in Ukraine. B.T. Innovation will in future work together with the Ukrainian company Well-being Contech

Information

Countries

Ukraine

Kategorie

Programme news

in modernising wastewater treatment plants. Mr Kozytskyi confirmed that the concept of “bridging managers” works.

Tandems: participants with representatives of their host companies ©GIZ/Andreas Dobslaff

Long-term potential of “bridging managers”

In light of the positive experience of the pilot group and the continued demand from both Ukrainian refugee entrepreneurs and German companies, it was decided in 2024 to continue the Special Initiative. Dr Bernd Weyershausen, CEO/Managing Director of Keller & Bohacek GmbH & Co. KG, said that it was a great programme for companies like his, especially when you want to establish a business in Ukraine or find a person who can support an existing business on the basis of Ukrainian language skills.

Although the current round of the Initiative has come to an end, the support for Ukraine continues to exist. Talks about a possible continuation of the Initiative are already being held. The overarching objective of the programme continues to be to strengthen Ukraine’s economy, promote the country’s integration into the European internal market and further expand cooperation between German and Ukrainian enterprises.

Ukraine has been a partner country of the *Partnering in Business with Germany* (PG) programme since 2001. It was one of the first countries to join the programme. The Special Initiative of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action is an extension of its support for Ukraine, which has lasted for many years, to include the target group of refugee entrepreneurs. In January 2025, a joint declaration of intent on the continuation of the cooperation in the context of PG was signed in Kyiv with the aim to further deepen economic relations between German and Ukrainian enterprises and strengthen the strategic collaboration.

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