

The following is a condensed version of the full Ukrainian Cultural Competency Guide. Please refer to that resource for more in-depth analysis. Note this will not cover all Ukrainians but it does provide an overview of norms and social interactions commonly followed.



Ukrainian Culture

- Ukrainians may adopt a more formal manner at first, but once you earn their trust, you will find your way to their “inner circle.” You’ll be treated as family and form lifelong friends.
- In Ukraine, there is no common business without friendly relationships. There exists the concept of inner and outer circles. Until you become accepted to the “inner circle,” you will remain an outsider.
- Ukrainians are extremely generous and hospitable. All social occasions include food. Visitors are always offered something to eat as well as a beverage. It is considered the height of rudeness to eat in front of another person and not offer them something.
- It is common for Ukrainians to be five minutes late for the majority of social and private events.
- Physical appearance is particularly important, including special attention to wardrobe, which is typically neat and formal.



Social Interaction

- Ukrainians tend to be outgoing, warm and sociable, so initiating a conversation with a Ukrainian is not difficult. In social situations, however, Ukrainians clearly define the borders between formality and familiarity. The style of language used among people who have just met and are engaged in a professional project differs from the style of language used among people who have developed a closer acquaintance and meet more frequently. Territorial dialects influence both formal and informal languages. Young people prefer to use slang when talking with peers.
- When embarking on a visit, it is customary to bring fresh-cut flowers for the host. (Traditionally, it is recommended that the bouquet consists of an odd number of flowers.) If children are present, fruits, marshmallow sticks (пастіла), candy or toys are appreciated.



Meetings and Greetings

- The typical greeting is a warm, firm handshake, maintaining direct eye contact and repeating your name. In wartime, people say “Glory to Ukraine! / Slava Ukrainy,” at the beginning or end of a communication.
- Given that many of those displaced are women and children, it is more appropriate to greet with a smile, a head nod and “Good Morning ‘Добрий ранок’ / ‘Good Day ‘Добрий день’ / ‘Good Evening ‘Добрий вечір,’” as appropriate, rather than any form of physical touch. It is always recommended to ask before making any physical contact.
- Ukrainian names include:
 - » First name, which is the person’s given name.
 - » Middle name, which is a patronymic, or a version of the father’s first name formed by adding “-ovich” or “-iovich” for a male and “ivna” or “iivna” for a female. (E.g., the son of Taras would have a patronymic of Tarasovych, while the daughter’s patronymic would be Tarasivna).
 - » Last name, which is the family name or surname. In formal situations, people use all three names. Friends and close acquaintances may refer to each other by their first name and patronymic.

In formal situations, people use all three names or add Pun/Mr. or Pani/Ms. to the first name. Friends and close acquaintances may refer to each other by their first names and patronymic if one of the friends is older.



Possible Feelings of Displaced Ukrainians

- Close connections of generations are common, with two or three generations living together and taking care of children. Isolation from relatives and loved ones may cause distress.
- Temporary asylum seekers (“refugees” or “displaced people”) might be constantly stressed, even in a safe environment, as they are concerned about their relatives and friends who are back home and by the atrocities they have witnessed. Many Ukrainians will continue reading news from Ukraine and might seem depressed as a result. If they appear to be upset, it may be because of the information they are hearing, reading or watching.
- Many Ukrainians experience “survivor’s guilt” because they managed to flee. They have survivor’s guilt because they have avoided dangers while others did not manage to escape or survive. Some Ukrainian refugees feel ashamed to stay in a relatively safe place, while in Ukraine, people are suffering in dire conditions including living in bomb shelters indefinitely. Be mindful that it can be challenging to hold a normal conversation when their thoughts are focused on the desperate situation of their friends, family and homeland.
- Ukrainians may be concerned about their future and the future of their children. They are experiencing tremendous change in their lives. This is an unexpected change that they did not plan for and interrupted the life they built for themselves and their family. At the same time, it does not mean that Ukrainians are not resilient. Many of them will adapt eventually an ethos of Ukrainians as noted in the history of the country.



Communication Style

- Ukrainians can be direct, but “no” rarely means an unequivocal “no,” and likewise, they will usually assume that your “no” doesn’t mean “no.” For example, if they say, “No,” when you offer them food, offer it one more time to be 100% certain they mean it.
- Many Ukrainians will dance around a subject, especially if it’s a difficult or uncomfortable topic. They may try not to tell you things if they’re afraid they will upset you – even things you think you should know.
- Although direct communication is valued in Ukraine, there is also an emphasis placed on delivering information in a sensitive manner. Often, the level of the relationship will determine how direct someone is. The newer a relationship, the more cautious people will be, but with time, people will likely feel more comfortable speaking frankly.



Taboos

- It is considered bad manners to sit on the floor, on the ground or on the stairs. It is forbidden to walk and sit on grass in many public places, especially where flowers grow.
- Don’t shake hands through a doorway and avoid whistling indoors.
- It is considered bad manners to speak loudly or play with one’s food.



Food & Eating

- Most Ukrainians eat a variety of foods including meat, grains, dairy, fruits and vegetables. Some travel extensively and enjoy international food, while others enjoy cooking traditional Ukrainian dishes. This divide is commonly found among different generations.
- Giving candies or sweets to children when meeting them is both welcome and appropriate, however, be mindful of not offering too much. Caregivers may be concerned about overindulgence or even dietary concerns.
- It may be a priority for caregivers to have access to medical care as soon as possible, so help them put that network in place through your own assistance or through a nonprofit organization or government agency.



Other Guidelines

- Asking refugees lots of questions is inviting them to recount one of the most traumatic experiences of their life. It may be months before they feel comfortable and ready to talk in-depth about war. Instead, provide them with practical support, and explain “the rules of the house.” Make a list of useful information on the area, Wi-Fi code, nearest shops and transport. They may also appreciate knowing how to connect with local support groups. Once your guest is settled, tell them you are there if they do need to talk.
- Ukrainians are used to problems being solved quickly thanks to the long-term relationships they’ve built with neighbors, friends and family. Waiting in a foreign country to get official documents created may feel frustrating. To avoid a misunderstanding, be clear about which procedures to follow. Ukrainians respect authority and understand hierarchy. Those from the younger generation tend to be more proactive, flexible and future-oriented.
- Find small ways to make Ukrainians feel welcome. Learning a few words in Ukrainian is an excellent way of demonstrating that your guest is welcomed.
- Don’t make assumptions. Allow for a range of reactions. For example, some Ukrainians will prioritize finding a job while others will need a quiet place to rest and recover.
- Some will be vulnerable and need mental health support. Do not take it upon yourself to assume those responsibilities. There are organizations that offer this type of support from experts who specialize in trauma-informed mental health services.
- Ukrainians may be accustomed to using certain medicines. They might need help finding over-the-counter alternatives or accessing medical care.