

UKRAINE: A STORY OF CHANGE



Helping Regional Chambers of Commerce Help Business

Since the 2014 revolution in Ukraine, Russia is no longer the main export destination for Ukrainian products, as it once was. In a time of trade turbulence, Ukrainian businesses needed help adjusting to the new economic reality and diversifying their export flows. They began to see Canada as a lifeboat, not only because of historical ties and a large diaspora, but also due to the opportunities created by the Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement (CUFTA), which gave goods of Ukrainian origin preferential treatment in the Canadian market.

But Ukrainian companies needed help to take advantage of CUFTA. They were used to exporting to Russia, where shared languages and cultural norms made doing business easier. The CUTIS project seized the opportunity to work with Ukrainian regional chambers of commerce and industry (RCCIs) to spread information about Canada and help local businesses, especially small, medium-sized, and women-led enterprises, start exporting to Canada.

Why work with RCCIs? Certainly, they were facing a huge challenge to make themselves more relevant, having relied for years on issuing



Iryna Halimska, Volyn RCCI trainer, leads a pilot training.

certificates of origin as their main source of income. But they were also ideally located in close proximity to production, had existing ties to individual businesses, and were eager to transform their business model to become key players in helping members export. CUTIS noted this eagerness and decided to help 11 RCCIs enhance their capacity to offer valuable consulting services for local businesses.

“Our RCCI has obtained additional partners and members due to the introduction of new services related to exporting to Canada. The main message that we use to motivate our businesses is to develop their exporting capacity.”

—Natalia Bartkiv, Ivano-Frankivsk RCCI

It was the right decision. From the first CUTIS training program on how to help businesses export to Canada, the RCCIs were united in their willingness and determination to learn about Canada and its markets in order to bring new knowledge and skills back to their regions. A number of subsequent workshops further improved their capacity to train, provide information and consulting services, and become familiar with the intricacies of exporting to Canada.

Canadian experts helped RCCIs improve their portfolio and delivery of services, advocacy efforts, member satisfaction, operational and management practices, organizational performance, and overall sustainability. In addition, CUTIS created a number of products that RCCIs now use to help their members, including export guides, tariff and non-tariff road maps, and a template for business consultations. CUTIS brought RCCI staff to Canada and introduced them to representatives of Canadian regulatory agencies, building a bridge that will continue to exist after the project ends.



RCCI trainers working in a group at a 2019 CUTIS workshop.

As a result of these efforts, partner RCCIs are providing new services to local businesses, having transformed from certificate-issuing bodies into full-fledged export consultants offering tailor-made solutions. Local businesses now have access to skilled, qualified experts who can provide the support they need to export to Canada.

“I am incredibly grateful for such a great opportunity to improve my knowledge of exporting to Canada. I can now share my knowledge with local businesses.”

—Ludmila Yemchuk, Khmelnytsky RCCI

An unanticipated, but no less impressive effect has been improved collaboration among RCCIs. The CUTIS training program prioritized networking activities that served as a powerful catalyst for RCCIs to start seeing one another as partners and created an informal network for constant communication and exchange of experience and lessons learned. The partner RCCIs took the initiative to create a community of trainers on social media, where they can seek assistance and share relevant information. CUTIS did what had not been done in decades. The project has united a dozen prominent regional chambers in Ukraine and showed the real value in collaboration. It has also showed how transparent and clear the road-map to trade between our countries can be and what a great opportunity Ukraine has.

“We are now able to offer qualified consulting services to regional businesses on how to export to Canada. The information we received, the business contacts with Canadian regulatory agencies, and the supportive relationships with the other RCCI trainers in Ukraine have been invaluable.”

—Iryna Halimska, Volyn RCCI

The RCCIs were also the CUTIS project's main partner in promoting awareness of the key role of women entrepreneurs in the Ukrainian national and local economies. Through world business cafes, SheChampion workshops, and SHEforSHE mentorships organized with the RCCIs, CUTIS was able to raise awareness of gender-related issues in international trade, share experiences and lessons learned from women entrepreneurs with exporting experience, and impart knowledge on business-related topics of interest to women entrepreneurs. Due in part to CUTIS advocacy for and promotion of women's entrepreneurship, the Kherson RCCI established a committee for women entrepreneurs in January 2020, and Lviv's RCCI created a women's business chamber.