

● Interview

Oksana Ihnatenko and Nataliia Kholchenkova: Promoting financial integrity in Ukraine

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ACAMS Today spoke with Oksana Ihnatenko and Nataliia Kholchenkova in celebration of this year's International Women's Day.

Oksana Ihnatenko, CAMS, is a managing director at the Center for Financial Integrity (CFI) in Ukraine and a researcher on Ukraine's financial integrity at the Centre for Finance and Security (CFS) at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). Her research focuses on Ukraine's adherence to Financial Action Task Force (FATF) standards, fighting financial crime, anti-money laundering (AML) efforts and issues surrounding reconstruction.

Nataliia Kholchenkova leads the Chernihiv Women's Union, the partner organization that Ihnatenko and the CFI and the CFS at RUSI are working with to develop training for Ukraine Programme for Learning Integrity in Financial Training (UPLIFT). UPLIFT is a mentorship program for future anti-financial crime (AFC) professionals in Ukraine.¹

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(UPLIFT)?

Oksana Ihnatenko (OI): The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia over the past four years has led to a significant loss of expertise in key sectors that already had preexisting gender imbalances. Male-dominated fields such as AML and law enforcement have been particularly affected by the war.

With many men mobilized into the army since February 2022, there is now a shortage of experienced personnel, creating an urgent need to expand opportunities for women in these sectors. That is why we felt this was the right moment to step in, support those interested in building a career in this field and share our knowledge.

One of the reasons I felt confident that this program would be valuable is the strong level of interest we observed during our meetings with young people in different regions. It became clear that developing a tailored program was a natural next step in our work. And I would like to give a big shoutout to Kinga Redlowska, head of the CFI Advisory Board and head of CFS Europe, who was the driving force behind the project, constantly championing women empowerment.

CFI is convening the initiative, and the CFS at RUSI brings global expertise that we can share with women and men in Ukraine.

**AT: How does the program benefit both the mentor and mentee?
What will be covered during the three mentorship sessions?**

OI: For mentees, this is an opportunity to learn about someone's career path and gain inspiration to truly succeed in this field. Quite often, when you are just beginning a new journey, you can feel lost and lack confidence, so having someone to support and guide you is incredibly important. This program gives mentees a chance to receive that support and ask questions to those who have already walked this path. Sometimes mentors believe in us more than we believe in ourselves, and that encouragement helps you keep going through challenges.

For mentors, it is an opportunity to share their journey, experience and knowledge. There is little value in keeping your experience to yourself if you are not sharing it to help build a better future for all of us.

The sessions are designed to be light-touch and are structured more as friendly conversations on professional topics rather than formal lectures. It is also important to note that mentees and mentors will be matched based on their interests. For example, those interested in journalism and writing about financial crime will be paired with experienced journalists who can help them navigate different aspects of the profession.

AT: What will participants learn during the six online sessions and when will they take place?

OI: We are pleased to share that the UPLIFT program’s online sessions began in February and will run until the end of March. After the sessions conclude, participants will complete an assessment to select those who will move forward to the mentoring phase and receive an opportunity to attend additional training in Poland with experts from the CFS at RUSI.

The sessions explore how AML/counter-terrorist financing frameworks operate in practice, including the core mechanisms for preventing money laundering in Ukraine and internationally, as well as the tools used for financial monitoring and control. Participants also learn about international standards, including the FATF 40 Recommendations and their implementation in Ukraine.

In addition, the program examines the asset recovery process, virtual assets and sanctions evasion risks, while providing an overview of current efforts to return frozen Russian funds to Ukraine.

AT: The theme of this year’s International Women’s Day is “Give to Gain,” which encourages collaboration and generosity to accelerate

gender equality. How do you envision the UPLIFT program's role in promoting gender equality?

Nataliia Kholchenkova (NK): As the head of the Chernihiv Women's Union, every day I see the importance of supporting women of different ages, especially during this challenging time for Ukraine. The war has placed enormous pressure on women—many are balancing professional responsibilities, family duties and emotional stress—so creating spaces where they can grow, learn and feel supported is essential.

In our work, we regularly bring together experts from different fields, from psychologists to language tutors and career mentors to share their knowledge and experience. We strongly believe that when people share what they know, the whole community benefits and grows stronger together. This spirit of giving is exactly what initiatives like UPLIFT represent.

I see UPLIFT as an important platform that creates opportunities for women to gain new skills, build confidence and expand their professional networks, particularly in fields that have traditionally been male dominated, such as financial crime prevention and security. By connecting participants with experienced mentors and international experts, the program not only provides knowledge but also inspiration and a sense of possibility.

In this way, UPLIFT contributes to gender equality by empowering women to step into new roles, strengthen their voices and see themselves as active contributors to Ukraine's recovery and future development.

AT: What impact have these discussions had on the women participating in the program?

NK: We are very pleased that the first regional meeting took place in Chernihiv, as it gave us a valuable opportunity to start an open and practical conversation with women in our community. Back in March 2025, Oksana approached us with the idea of bringing women from our Union together to discuss the financial threats they may face, particularly in the current environment shaped by war and economic uncertainty.

These discussions have proven to be extremely important. We see that women are often specifically targeted by criminals who try to manipulate emotions—for example, by creating a sense of urgency, appealing to empathy or exploiting concerns for family members—in order to obtain money or personal information. Raising awareness about these tactics helps women feel more confident, informed and better prepared to protect themselves.

The war has also created new types of financial risks. Unfortunately, we are seeing more cases of scams related to fake financial assistance, fraudulent charity requests and false offers of support. For many people who are already under stress, these schemes can be very convincing. That is why having clear, practical information and a space to ask questions is so valuable.


At the same time, the professional aspect of UPLIFT is equally important. For many women who have lost a great deal during the war, discovering a new career path can feel like a breath of fresh air—an opportunity to reenter the labor market, rebuild confidence or simply follow a long-held dream of becoming an expert in a new field. Programs like this help women see new possibilities for themselves and take practical steps toward achieving them.

AT: How can ACAMS members become involved in the UPLIFT program as mentors?

OI: We welcome experts from the ACAMS community to become mentors. You can simply reach out to us to express your interest, and we would be happy to have you on board following a short discussion about this opportunity.

I often say that sharing is caring, and strong AFC expertise benefits not only one country but the global community. It is our joint efforts that matter most for success.

Interviewed by: Karla Monterrosa-Yancey, CAMS, editor-in-chief, ACAMS, editor@acams.org 

1. For more information on the program, please visit: <https://cfi-ua.org/announcement-of-project-uplift-ukraine-programme-for-learning-integrity-in-financial-training/> 

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