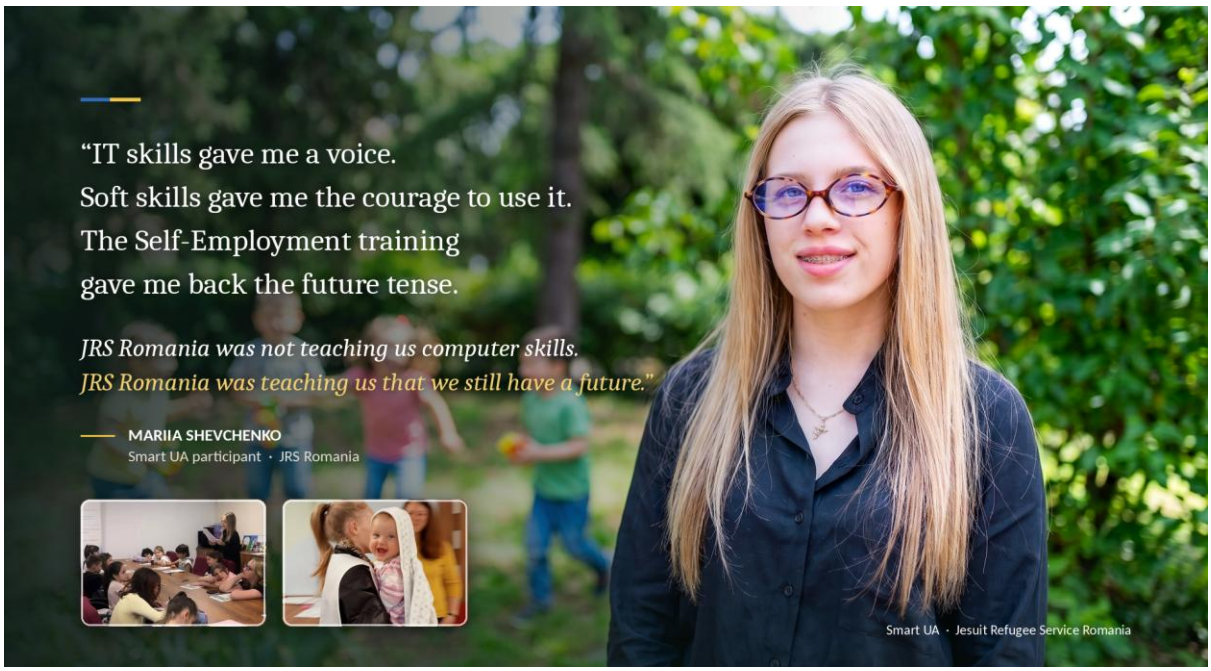
SMART UA FINAL EVENT: 15 September 2026

Testimony of a project participant:

Mariia (Masha) Shevchenko, a young woman Ukrainian refugee living in Romania



"My name is Maria. I am 19 years old. I have lived in Romania since February 2022. I came here when I was 14. I remember the night when the war started. I woke up because it was very loud. A Russian rocket hit the airport. I heard a big explosion. I was very scared. I could not believe that the war had started. The next morning, my teacher wrote to me. She said that there would be no school because the Russian invasion had started. The next day, my family and I left Ukraine. My sister had a baby who was only three months old. The trip was very difficult. There were very long lines at the border. When we came to Romania, we thought we would stay for one or two months. We thought we would soon go back home. But after some weeks, I understood that we might stay much longer. I was very worried and nervous. Everything was new for me. I wanted to help people, so I started looking for places where I could volunteer. I met many Ukrainian people. I heard many sad stories. Some people lost their homes because Russian rockets destroyed them. It was very difficult to hear these stories. But volunteering helped me. I felt that I was doing something useful. I also started studying

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at a Romanian school. I had to learn a new language and get used to a new school and a new country. Today, I study International Relations at university. I also teach English to children in Bucharest. I love working with children. I want them to enjoy learning and feel confident. I also want Ukrainian children to feel comfortable in Romania and make Romanian friends. I found out about the JRS and Smart UA project and decided to join it because I wanted to learn new things. I took part in all the courses from JRS. One of them was the Self-Employment course. I learned how to start a business in Romania. I also met people who already had their own businesses. They told us about their experience and problems. This was very useful for me. I also took IT and Soft Skills courses. I learned how to use social media, make videos, create advertisements, and use my phone camera better. I also learned how to use Excel, make tables, and use formulas. These skills will help me at university and in my future job. But the most important thing I got from the project was confidence. I learned that new skills can give us new opportunities. The project also helped me meet new people and learn from them. Now I want to continue my studies and learn more. I want to keep teaching children and helping other people. In the future, I want to help young people and Ukrainian families who are starting a new life in another country. I know that starting a new life is not easy. Sometimes people just need support and a chance. I think projects like Smart UA are very important. They give people knowledge, skills, and confidence. I also think it is important to give Ukrainian people opportunities to study, work, and learn new skills. I am very thankful to Smart UA and JRS for helping Ukrainian people and giving us new opportunities. I started as a young volunteer who wanted to help people. Today, I can teach children, use my skills, and help others. There are three important things I want people to remember about the Smart UA project. First, the project gives people useful skills. For me, I learned how to use social media, make videos, create advertisements, and use Excel. These skills can help me at university and in my future job. The project also gives people confidence. Before, I was just a young volunteer. After taking part in the courses, I became more confident in my skills and understood that I can learn new things and create new opportunities for myself.

There are three important things I want to share with you about the Smart UA project and why they are important to me.

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- The first project gives useful skills. For me, I learned how to use social media, make videos, create advertisements, and use Excel. These skills will help me at university and in my future job.
- The project gives me confidence. Before, I was just a young volunteer. After taking part in the courses, I became more confident in my skills and understood that I can learn new things and create new opportunities for myself.
- Third I met new people, heard their stories, and learned from their experiences. It showed me that we can support each other and that I can also use my knowledge to help other Ukrainian families and young people.

Thank you."

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