

KHARKIV'S LOCAL HEROES

A Case Study of Human Rights
Defenders in War



Nataliia Halunenکو, an ambulance driver in the Kharkiv region.

By Brian Dooley and Maya Fernandez-Powell

Introduction

A fresh wave of lethal Russian attacks on Ukraine's northeastern region of Kharkiv has increased the danger to local human rights defenders (HRDs) already working under enormous pressure. They have responded to the dangers despite a lack of resources and immense risk, evacuating people under fire, taking them to safer areas, and providing medical care.

On [May 10, 2024](#), Russia launched a [new offensive campaign](#) in the Kharkiv region, resulting in Russian soldiers [taking a series of villages on the road](#) between the Russian border and the major city of Kharkiv, which is about 25 miles inside Ukraine.

[Intense fighting](#) is under way between Ukrainian and Russian forces in and around villages and towns such as Vovchansk, Lyptsi, and Kupiansk. [The Institute for the Study of War](#) reported on June 19 that the Russian army is aiming to get within artillery range of Kharkiv city, as Ukrainian forces continue counterattacks north and northeast of Kharkiv.

From early May, local HRDs have been taking enormous risks to evacuate civilians living in communities under attack near the front line. By early June around [12,000 people](#) had been moved away from the border communities of Kharkiv Oblast.

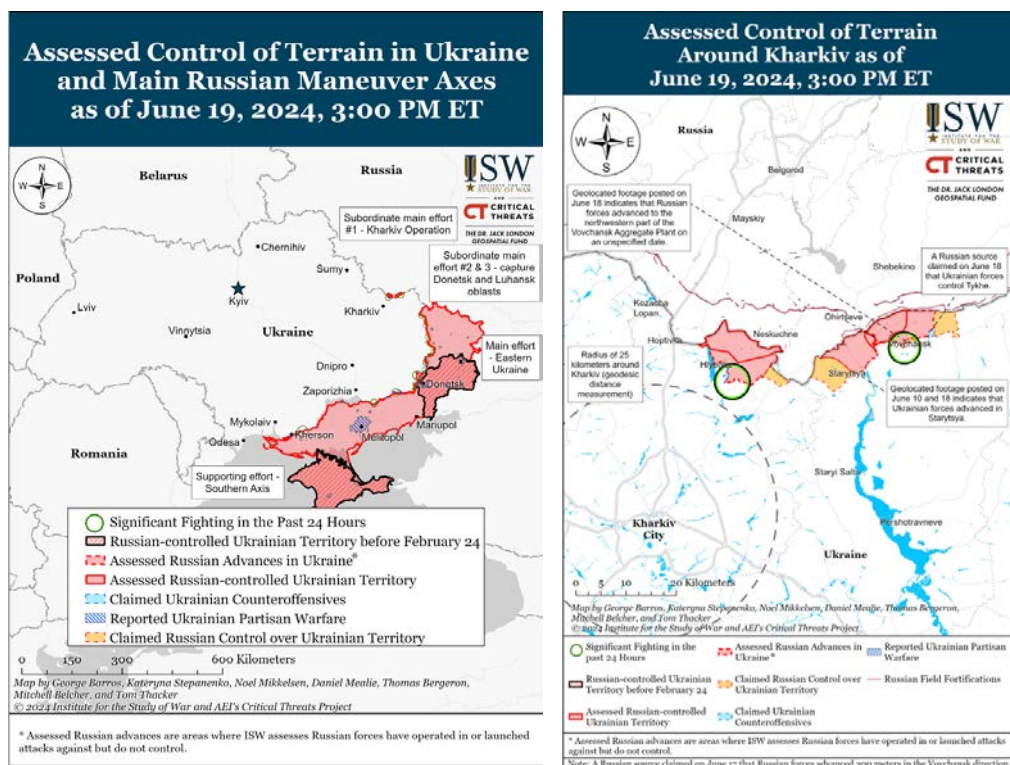
Those evacuated are taken to the relative safety of Kharkiv city, Ukraine's second largest. Similar in size to Philadelphia and around 300 miles east of the capital Kyiv, it is far from a safe haven; [dozens of civilians have been killed](#) by Russian missiles in the city since early May. Many people have left Kharkiv in recent weeks, and very few children remain in the city.

Human Rights First visited Kharkiv city and region in June 2024 to document firsthand the work of HRDs undertaking evacuations from villages under fire, and to report on how the latest Russian advances have impacted the work of local activists.

These activists express frustration that international observers, claiming fears for their safety, rarely visit the region and that the work of local HRDs often goes unreported and ignored. They say this makes it difficult to raise the money and access other resources they desperately need.

Other difficulties include daily air raid alerts, regular missile strikes, electricity cuts, and immense psychological pressure. Following the introduction of new conscription laws, some activist organizations fear their male staff will be drafted into the military in the coming weeks.





This report is a case study of HRDs working in war, detailing the prolonged and intense danger facing activists in northeastern Ukraine. It aims to highlight the experiences of a range of HRDs operating in an extremely unsafe context, hundreds of miles from the capital city, and to contribute to the wider international discussion about enabling and protecting HRDs working in conflict areas.

Human Rights First has reported from the city of Kharkiv since 2017. Following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, Human Rights First has made over a dozen research trips to the Kharkiv region, producing seven reports and dozens of articles on the work of local HRDs.¹ In May 2022, we reported from Kharkiv on the work of local activists while it was under almost constant bombardment and its suburbs under Russian occupation. We have since continued to [document](#) how Kharkiv's activists and the public have resisted Russian aggression.

¹ In May 2023, Human Rights First [reported](#) on how Tsyrykuny, a village north of Kharkiv, survived Russian occupation. We released another [report](#) in June 2023 on the Russian occupation of the city of Izyum and surrounding villages in the Kharkiv Oblast. In July 2023, we worked with local NGO the Kharkiv Anti-Corruption Center to [report](#) on dubious contracts for the reconstruction of public buildings awarded by Kharkiv's authorities. In August 2023, we published a [report](#) from the frontline city of Kupiansk on how locals were holding out against the threat of a Russian re-occupation. In November 2023, we returned to the region and issued a [report](#) on how civilians in Kharkiv prepared for a bitter winter war as Russia renewed its bombing attacks on Ukraine's heating infrastructure. In January 2024 we [reported](#) from Kharkiv on the need for greater psychological support for civilians, and in March 2024 we returned to the region to [report](#) on demining efforts.



Human rights defenders in war

The [most serious human rights situations](#) take place in conflict areas, and HRDs play a [vital role](#) in documenting human rights abuses and providing direct support to the vulnerable. But current international protection mechanisms aren't working, and many HRDs in conflict are being killed and injured. They are often [abducted and forcibly disappeared](#).

While HRDs, like other civilians, deal with the general insecurity of working in a war zone, they are also subjected to distinct pressures that put their lives at risk. HRDs tend to face a [higher risk of violence](#) from warring factions in conflict zones, and often find themselves [solely responsible](#) for their own protection.

This failure of international mechanisms to adequately understand and protect HRDs operating in conflict zones has become an issue of urgent discussion among some states, NGOs, and UN bodies. In recent years, new approaches to better develop protection mechanisms for HRDs have begun to emerge, from ideas around [collective protection](#) to a 2022 UN Human Rights Council [resolution](#) recognizing particular risks facing HRDs in conflict areas.

Women human rights defenders (WHRDs) are now acknowledged as dealing with [particular risks](#) in conflict zones, as they face an increased threat of violence discrimination, harassment, and more. In some conflict areas, sexual violence is a [deliberate and systematic tactic](#) to target and punish WHRDs for speaking out against a regime or other repressive force. Online abuse and defamation campaigns against WHRDs are also [common](#) and attempt to silence women's voices.

In a 2023 [report](#), the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders detailed the work done by WHRDs in conflict settings, stressing the pressures facing WHRDs when states fail to respond to instances of conflict-related sexual violence, and gender-based violence during a crisis period. In 2019, the Special Rapporteur [documented](#) the failure of UN states to protect HRDs working in conflict areas. The UN secretary-general's 2019 [report](#) on Women and Peace and Security focused on the need to protect WHRDs and pointed to intense harassment against WHRDs in [physical and digital spaces](#).

Kharkiv HRDs: A case study of activists in war

Many of the difficulties identified by NGOs, UN experts, and governments faced by HRDs working in war zones are familiar to activists in Kharkiv. These include a detachment from many traditional networks of support outside capital cities, a reluctance for international observers to visit local activists during conflict, and heightened challenges in getting attention and funding for their work.

There are also the more obvious difficulties of immense physical dangers of death, injury, and abduction. There are significant threats to psychological well-being, exhaustion caused



by stress and trauma, sleep deprivation caused by years of near-constant missile attacks, the prospect of burnout, and long-term pressure on personal relationships, including criticism from family members about their work and the risks involved.

A gendered peculiarity facing HRDs in Ukraine since February 2022 is that men over 18, with few exceptions, are not allowed to leave the country. This means that the constant demands for international in-person advocacy meetings have been met almost exclusively by WHRDs. Many women activists have spent much of the last two years making arduous overland journeys into Poland, from where they then fly to various other places all over the world to advocate for Ukraine's human rights movement. It's exhausting work, speaking at conferences, giving speeches, and meeting politicians to explain the reality of the situation facing Ukraine's civil society.

Since the full-scale Russian invasion of 2022 Ukrainian human rights activist Maria Kurinna told Human Rights First she has made "dozens of international advocacy visits across Europe, to D.C., to New York, and to Japan. Combining these trips with everyday non-stop work responsibilities, studying, and caring for retired parents--one in Ukraine, one evacuated to a foreign country--has made my schedule so full that sometimes I literally don't recognize what city I'm waking up in in the morning."

She said that a lack of financing for NGOs means "we tend to pack our visits with 8-10 meetings a day, and do four events in a four-day trip. And we still have to do the regular work tasks at night, in the planes and on trains...."

Meanwhile, NGOs in Ukraine fear their male activists could be drafted into the military.

Since Russia's February 2022 invasion, Human Rights First has witnessed firsthand and reported on the work of dozens of HRDs in Ukraine, mostly in Kharkiv.

These include [journalists](#) and [lawyers](#) documenting war crimes, [volunteer](#) and professional [medics](#) [providing medical support](#) for those living in towns and villages under attack, [psychologists](#) offering counseling for those affected by war trauma, [LGBTQ+](#) activists [running shelters](#), distributing food, and advocating for greater rights including civil partnerships.

They also include [anti-corruption](#) activists exposing dubious contracts from the local Ukrainian authorities to those undertaking reconstruction, [teachers](#) struggling to offer education in a city under siege, and [nuns](#) running orphanages.

We have worked with HRDs providing a range of [humanitarian aid](#), those working in [food kitchens](#), and those supporting survivors of [gender-based violence](#). In response to concerns about how some journalists report on war-related sexual violence, we [published](#) a guide created by Ukrainian media and legal experts, [How to Responsibly Report War-Related Sexual Violence](#).

We have also worked with those trying to secure the release of Ukrainian children taken into Russia, those working to [reform Ukraine's military](#), and those advocating [for the release of](#)



[civilian hostages from Russia](#). We have reported on the work of [demining specialists](#), known as sappers, and visited civilians clearing landmines from their fields.

In Ukraine, Human Rights First has been working with local HRDs since Russia's 2014 invasion. Many have paid a heavy price for their human rights work.

Hundreds of HRDs in Ukraine, including journalists, volunteers, and other civil society activists, have reportedly [been killed](#) due to indiscriminate shelling, targeted attacks, and extrajudicial executions. Others have been subjected to [enforced disappearance](#), including WHRD journalist Victoria Roshchyna, who reports on the persecution of activists and public figures.

The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine documented [over 400 enforced disappearances](#) within five months in 2023 in Russian-occupied territories. Attacks by Russian forces on Ukraine's heating and energy infrastructure have imposed [more threats to](#) the work of HRDs, leaving them without internet access, electricity, and means of communication.

In villages and towns occupied by Russian forces, HRDs have been [targeted](#), tortured, and killed for their work. The Human Rights Center ZMINA in Ukraine [reported](#) that in [occupied territories](#), HRDs were singled out by Russian authorities, and illegally detained and tortured.

During the early weeks of the occupation in Kupiansk, Russian authorities used force on activists who organized a peaceful protest and kidnapped the protest [organizer](#). In Kherson oblast, activists were [illegally detained in inhumane conditions](#) without any charges and without access to a lawyer. [Lawyers](#) who assist those arrested by Russian authorities have been targeted, jailed, and had their licenses removed.

Online abuse against WHRDs in Ukraine is also prevalent. WHRDs [reported to the UN Special Rapporteur on HRDs](#) that far-right Telegram channels have exposed the identities of LGBTQ+ defenders, bloggers, and researchers, which have led to an onslaught of hateful and discriminatory online abuse. They reported that these types of threats are often not taken seriously by the Ukrainian police and are only investigated if there is physical harm.

Working under fire

HRDs in Kharkiv adapted dramatically and quickly following Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion. Within weeks, HRDs who had been working on issues of environmental protection, or primarily engaged in advocacy and lobbying, had suddenly and impressively adjusted to help those being bombed. They organized humanitarian aid and [risked their lives](#) to provide medical treatment.

Many HRDs in Kharkiv had other professions before the full-scale invasion and transformed their work to support their local communities.



[Nataliia Halunenko](#), a professional violinist before the war, became an [ambulance driver](#) for [The Way of Ukraine](#), an organization providing humanitarian and medical aid to those in need. Architect [Olga Kleitman](#) mobilized local contacts and resources to create a large residential home for the elderly who had been bombed out of their homes in nearby villages. Canadian [Francis Cardinal](#) worked as a chef on movie sets but moved to Kharkiv to help set up a food kitchen to feed the vulnerable in a city under attack.



Former professional violinist Nataliia provides medical and humanitarian aid to locals under fire.



Local independent media organization [Gwara Media](#) originally focused on culture and technology in the Kharkiv region, but after the full-scale invasion, shifted to [documenting war crimes](#) from near the front lines and combatting Russian disinformation.

The new Russian offensive that began in May 2024 has forced many HRDs to adjust again.

In February 2024, Human Rights First [reported on the work of the Frunze food kitchen](#) in Kharkiv and how it provides free meals for the city's most vulnerable. Chef Francis Cardinal said that, since the recent Russian advances, there has been a spike in demand for meals as more people without resources arrive in the city from surrounding areas.

The number of recent bombings has increased another part of their work, which is to go immediately to the scenes of missile strikes in the city to provide food for casualties and first responders.

Medics are also under more pressure. In November 2023, Human Rights First [reported](#) from the village of Lyptsi between Kharkiv city and the Russian border. We spoke to Lyptsi's medics, including head nurse Yyliia Pyvovar who showed us how they had begun repairing some of the least damaged rooms in the Lyptsi hospital, much of which had been destroyed by fire when Russian troops abandoned the village in September 2022 following six months of occupation. A new health facility had been built in the hospital's parking lot with support from Ukraine's Ministry of Health, the World Health Organization, and the European Union.

But now Lyptsi is again a battleground as the Russians have advanced along the road to Kharkiv. The hospital is now reportedly destroyed, and the village is the scene of intense ongoing fighting. Yyliia told Human Rights First that her house was destroyed. She and others from Lyptsi have evacuated to the nearby village of Tsyrcuny, where she continues to provide medical aid.

Local journalists at [Gwara Media](#) have been covering the war from the city and surrounding region for over two years, providing news and a fact-checking service. In recent weeks they have had to focus their reporting on the new Russian advances, going to the front line more often. This increases their personal risk and adds to the stress and pressure they already carry.

Faced with the possibility of further Russian advances, they have drawn up plans for the evacuation of staff should Russian soldiers take over the city.

"We have to be prepared for any eventuality," said Editor-in-Chief Serhii Prokopenko. "We discussed how to react to the latest Russian attacks, and if they get closer to Kharkiv. We have plans depending on how close they get."

Within days of the new Russian offensive, Kharkiv anti-corruption activists questioned the contracts awarded to those who built the largely ineffective defensive lines and fortifications. They [reported](#) that local Ukrainian officials had awarded dozens of contracts without competitive tendering and to business people with debatable qualifications. They also found that the timber used for the defenses had been bought through [intermediary companies](#) that



had often not dealt in the timber business before, and charged much higher prices than normal.

The new Russian advances have also forced local LGBTQ+ group [Alliance.Global](#) to draw up evacuation plans, which will be triggered if Russian soldiers get to within 30km (19 miles) of the city. They're now 35-40km (22-25 miles) away, but things appear to have stabilized, with the Russian advance halted.

Vasyl Malikov, the Kharkiv coordinator of Alliance.Global, said "Things have definitely become more intense in the last few weeks but we have to think beyond emergency support, and to develop the LGBTQ+ community to build long-term resilience. We're working on longer term educational plans, on programs for HIV prevention," he said.

He said the last few months have shown him that "everything is possible, that you can't predict anything, that things can get worse, and it's impossible to make post-war plans now."

He said his group is "planning work that assumes the war will continue for the foreseeable future, probably for some years to come."

And there has been some progress. Kharkiv's LGBTQ+ communities now have access to STI tests and combined antigen and antibody tests for HIV they didn't have before. Alliance.Global is planning to move into bigger new offices with rooms for psychologists, for distributing humanitarian aid, and for events. But finding suitable premises in Kharkiv is extra complicated because much of the city's heating infrastructure has been damaged or destroyed and, come the winter, those offices that rely on central heating might be too cold to work from.

Former professional violinist Nataliia Halunenko has spent the last two years in some of the most dangerous places in Ukraine, providing medical and humanitarian aid to locals under fire. In November 2023 Human Rights First travelled [with her and a team of medics](#) in an ambulance under fire to the front line city of Kupiansk.

When she's in Kharkiv city these days, she walks around the streets with a medical pack of tourniquets and other equipment in case she's in a neighborhood that gets bombed.

"The main problem now is the lack of money," she said. "Fuel is becoming more expensive, and this is a very important aspect of the work. And now the density of shelling is very high, so very often things, cars, food, and high-value appliances are simply destroyed by rockets or fire."

In recent weeks she has been making the long trip by train across the length of Ukraine to Poland or Germany to pick up donated vehicles. She then makes the thousand-mile drive back to Kharkiv. "This volunteering work gives me real satisfaction, it feels like what I should be doing while the war is on," she said.



Ukraine NGO [Helping to Leave](#) reports having helped 45,000 people during the war, providing financial, humanitarian, and psychological assistance. The organization also organizes and assists with evacuations from highly dangerous places to safer ones.

On June 13 Human Rights First accompanied Helping to Leave to evacuate a woman from the small town of Kivsharivka, close to the city of Kupiansk. Human Rights First has [reported](#) on the intense fighting in the area over the last year. In May 2024 Russian missile attacks killed five local civilians aged between 56 and 72 and injured others.

The drive from Kharkiv to Kivsharivka now takes about four hours because the main bridges into the city have been destroyed by Russian troops and it's necessary to take the long way round. The roads are awful, rutted, and ripped up from tanks and other heavy military vehicles.

Bogdan from Helping to Leave was forced to drive excruciatingly slowly at times, with long stretches at barely 10 miles an hour. Much of the time it's better to leave the road and drive across dirt tracks, through the sunflowers of Borova, the forests of Hlushkivka, and poppyfields in Kolisnykivka. But the threat of being hit by missiles is always there. Bogdan said his car has been damaged by explosions several times.

Everyday car problems like a flat tire or a minor breakdown can be dangerous in an area under fire, where it is vital to get in and out as fast as possible. The drivers must negotiate black ice in the winter, and thick mud in the spring.

Like other volunteers driving into these villages, Bogdan works calmly and efficiently, sometimes driving more than 12 hours a day despite the immense risk. "The last few weeks have been very intense because of the Russian advances," he said. "Sometimes I've been making several trips a day to villages being bombarded to evacuate people into the early hours of the morning under heavy fire. It's hard and exhausting, but necessary."

When we arrived at Kivsharivka, Elena was packed and ready to go. Like virtually every other building in the village, hers has been badly damaged by missiles. Its windows were blown out and large holes had been smashed through the walls. She pointed to a rocket sticking out of the ground that she said had landed that morning and plowed into the earth without exploding. It missed her building by a few yards.

There are various groups involved in evacuations.

The Rose on Hand team grew from a small group of local volunteers in Kharkiv who tried to find a missing teenager in 2021. Founder Aleksander explained how he organized locals, found specialist boats to scour the lake where the 18-year-old Victoria was believed to have gone missing, and made call after call to beg for help in the search.





Elena's building in Kivsharivka badly damaged by missiles.

He said the day he heard her dead body had been washed up he decided to focus on finding missing people and called his search and rescue organization the Rose on Hand after a tattoo Victoria had.

Since Russia's February 2022 full-scale invasion, his team of about 40 volunteers has developed into a network that immediately shows up at the scene when the city is hit by a missile to help the official first responders find the injured. This work is particularly hazardous, as the Russian military often uses the "[Double Tap](#)" [method of attack](#), where it fires missiles on a location, waits for emergency workers, rescuers, and civilians to arrive at the scene, [and then fires more at the same place about 15 minutes later](#).



Alksander's team has also been evacuating hundreds of people from villages near the border since the latest wave of Russian attacks. He estimated that between late May and early June, they brought about 400 people from villages under fire to Kharkiv city.



Alksander, the founder of the search and rescue organization 'Rose on Hand.'

He said his team usually uses their own vehicles for these rescues, as government help with paying for gas is intermittent. They mostly rely on local donations to keep going.



Many people at great risk in the villages where the latest fighting is taking place are reluctant to leave, afraid of what will happen after they are evacuated. But reassurance gets back to villages from those who have made the journey out, confirmation that organizations like Rose on Hand can be trusted to take them to safety.

On the night of Monday, June 10, an elderly woman, Lubov, called Alksander to say she wanted to leave her village of Velykyi Burluk, which is close to the Russian border and under heavy fire. Soon after dawn the next morning, Alksander and his colleague Jakob Straus were on the road to her village to evacuate her.



Jakob helps evacuate people from villages under fire.



Straus, a former teacher from Slovenia, is one of the international volunteers working in Kharkiv. He drives for various groups who do evacuation runs into villages under fire and also drives vehicles from Poland into Ukraine for use on the front line.

He has been working out of Kharkiv for a year, often going into areas under fire to bring out vulnerable people. "Sometimes you get a call late at night to go and fetch someone the next day from a dangerous place. It has to be done."

Human Rights First joined Straus and Alksander on the six-hour round trip to bring the woman from Velykyi Burluk to Kharkiv city. "Every time you go on an evacuation trip you know you might not come back," said Alksander on the road there. "But I think about what we have done so far and all the lives we have saved."

At the crossroads in Velykyi Burluk is a house almost completely destroyed. In the afternoon of February 14, 2024, a 27-year-old volunteer was bringing food to the house when a Russian missile hit it, instantly killing her and the family she was trying to help. The village has been regularly shelled since, and destroyed houses are everywhere.



The house in Velykyi Burluk where a woman volunteer was killed by a Russian missile.



Lubov was ready to go when we arrived, her belongings packed in boxes and bags. She has a hip problem and walked carefully backward down the three flights of stairs from her apartment and into the van.

A few hours later we arrived at the main reception center in Kharkiv city where a converted school acts as a processing center for those coming from the villages. They're given mattresses and medicines, first aid kits, food, and glasses. The shelter is efficient and calm. Some of the staff are young women who wear bibs announcing they are the Dialogue Police, ready to mediate and calm fraught altercations between people under pressure and stressed from being evacuated.



Lubov is interviewed after being evacuated from Velykyi Burluk, a village close to the Russian border.

After Lubov picked up various supplies, we brought her to a friend in the city where she will stay for the time being.



Vovchansk is just three miles from the Russian border and has been a battlefield [since Russian troops entered the town on May 10](#). Tania told Human Rights First how she worked as a nurse in Vovchansk for nearly 40 years, specializing in treating newborn babies.

In the February 2022 invasion, she said the Russian takeover of the town was calm and quiet. “We woke up and saw Russian troops on the streets. Five months later they left just as quietly.” But this year the town has been heavily bombarded, and since May, it has been the scene of intense conflict. She said the hospital where she worked has been totally destroyed in the fighting, as are the town’s bridges and many other buildings.

One morning a few weeks ago she was in her garden when a Russian bomb hit her house, destroying it and five surrounding houses. Her husband of 60 years was in the house. He was killed while eating his breakfast.

Without a home and in a town under intense fire, she was evacuated to Kharkiv city, and now lives in an elderly people’s home run by local architect Olga Kleitman. Within weeks of the 2022 invasion, Olga joined with others in Kharkiv to establish the [Through The War](#) NGO. “We rescued elderly people, often with disabilities, who were left alone, sometimes in bombed-out houses without electricity,” she said. Under intense shelling, the volunteers provided the vulnerable with hot food and medicines. Some people need round-the-clock care.

Kleitman recruited the help of others to restore a dormitory of a disused factory which now is home to 50 people, 25 of whom are bedridden. Most are women and many are from frontline communities destroyed by the war. Human Rights First [reported](#) on the residential home in November 2023.

It’s a Kharkiv civil society success story. Much renovation work has been completed in the last six months, and more is under way. The home now has ducks and chickens, and apple and cherry trees. Residents pay nothing to stay there, and even though much of the food, transport, and repairs are provided by volunteers, and medicine and other goods are donated from Europe, the running costs are still around 500,000 hryvnias (\$12,300) a month. Some money comes from U.S. employee matching gift programs. The next big project is to install an elevator.

“We prioritize those people who don’t have relatives to take care of them. We get a huge amount of local support, but when the city is under heavy bombardment it’s very hard for the residents,” she told Human Rights First. “I’ve thought about evacuation plans but the authorities say if we relocate the residents they will be split up across various other centers, and we don’t want that.”

Olga has plans to expand the home into a village for people with disabilities, and to establish a ceramics art therapy workshop. But, like other local activists, her work faces constant challenges of lethal danger and a lack of money.

Local Kharkiv HRDs are saving lives despite a lack of attention, resources, and weariness in the U.S. and Europe with the Ukraine war. They face many of the usual challenges



experienced by HRDs working in conflict areas but also some specific to the context of Ukraine. International systems of protection and support are proving inadequate to protect them and enable their work.



Tania (right) from Vovchansk with Olga who runs an elderly people's home in Kharkiv.

Officials of embassies based in Kyiv rarely visit Kharkiv, and U.S. officials won't go to the city or region, citing security concerns, leaving the work of local HRDs largely unnoticed.

Activists based in the region say they have to make the ten-hour round-trip train journey to the capital to connect with foreign officials in person, to explain the worsening situation, and to advocate for the help they need.



Recommendations

The U.S. Secretary of State has instructed all ambassadors and mission leadership to engage directly with civil society and HRDs as part of a foreign policy grounded in democratic principles. The U.S. embassy in Kyiv, in accordance with the Secretary's recommendation and the [2021 Guidelines for U.S. Diplomatic Mission Support to Civil Society and Human Rights Defenders](#), should regularly visit HRDs in Kharkiv.

Donors and other allies should be open to directly supporting civil society initiatives in Kharkiv, including small local groups.

The U.S. government should publicly acknowledge the critical role that HRDs are playing across Ukraine and increase efforts to support HRDs and their organizations.

The U.S. should support, with relevant civil society and professional organizations, psychological support and rehabilitation programs for HRDs affected by conflict-induced and work-related trauma.



Mission Statement

Human Rights First works to create a just world in which every person's intrinsic human rights are respected and protected, to build societies that value and invest in all their people. To reach that goal demands assisting victims of injustice, bringing perpetrators of abuse to justice, and building institutions that ensure universal rights.

Human Rights First is a nonprofit, nonpartisan international human rights organization based in Los Angeles, New York, and Washington D.C.

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Cover photo courtesy of Nataliia Halunenko.

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