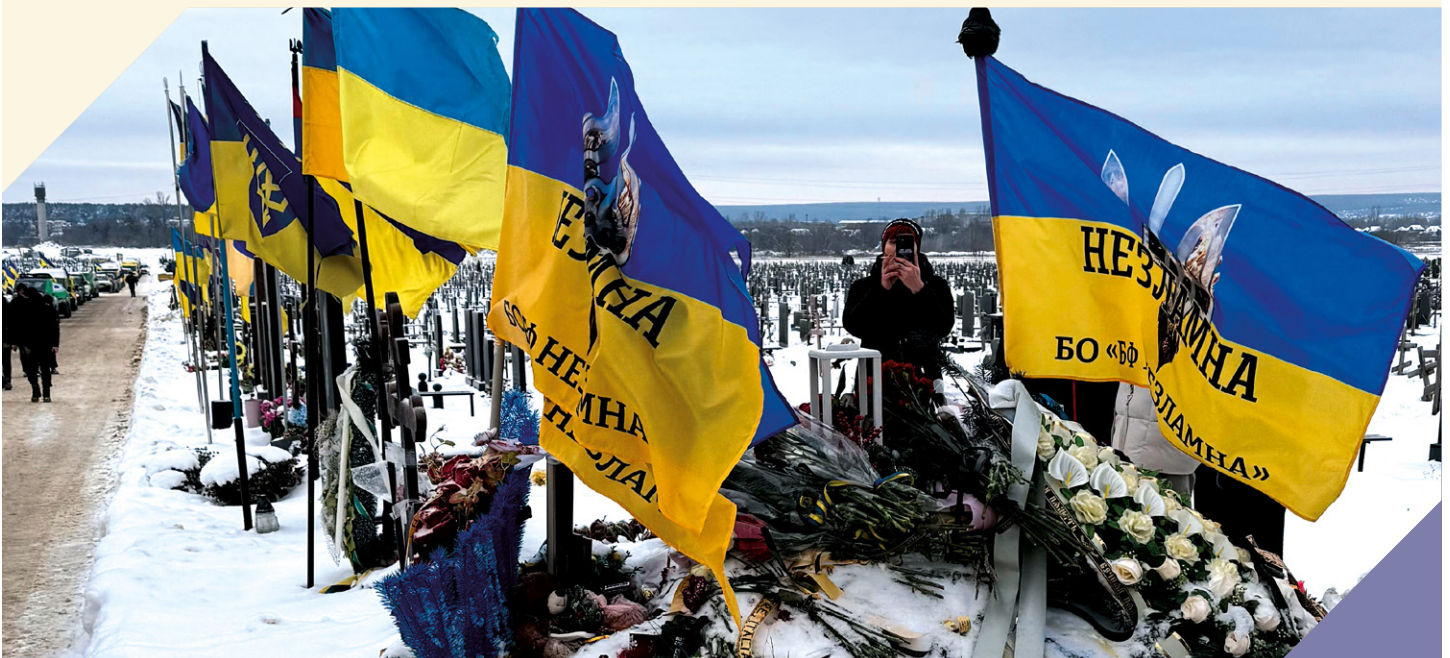


# Ukraine Anniversary Briefing

UKRAINE'S HUMAN RIGHTS CHALLENGES  
WILL PERSIST BEYOND ANY PEACE DEAL



Many human rights activists, including Slava Ilchenko, have been killed while helping to provide humanitarian aid to civilians.

**FEBRUARY 2026**



# Introduction

Local activists in Ukraine warn that whether or not ongoing peace talks with Russia produce a breakthrough, many of the country's most serious human rights challenges will persist long after the fighting ends.

This report examines seven pressing human rights issues that confront Ukraine today and are likely to endure beyond any ceasefire or peace deal. Local Human Rights Defenders urge that international attention not fade from these issues once the fighting stops. Drawing on their assessments, this report considers how each of these issues might develop in a post-conflict environment.

Russia launched its initial invasion of Ukraine twelve years ago, followed by its full-scale invasion four years ago. Russia's two invasions have resulted in widespread war crimes, including the killing of thousands of civilians, mass displacement, the bombing of heating and other infrastructure, and torture under occupation.

Human Rights First has been working alongside Human Rights Defenders in Ukraine since the Russian invasion of 2014. Since the 2022 invasion, Human Rights First has focused its work on the eastern front of the war, in and around the northwestern region of Kharkiv. Since the February 2022 invasion Human Rights First has made 25 visits to Ukraine, documenting war crimes, evacuating vulnerable civilians from communities under fire, and reporting on the efforts of local human rights activists providing humanitarian aid, fighting corruption and discrimination, and addressing the mental health crisis.<sup>1</sup>

Human Rights First has worked for decades with activists in conflict zones and during revolutions, and understands how difficult it is to look beyond the immediate crisis, and to start planning for what has become known as “The Day After”.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, Human Rights First has made over 20 research trips to Ukraine. In May 2023, Human Rights First reported on how Tsyrkuny, a village north of Kharkiv, survived Russian occupation. Human Rights First released another report in June 2023 on the Russian occupation of the city of Izyum and surrounding villages in the Kharkiv Oblast. In August 2023, Human Rights First published a report from the frontline city of Kupiansk on how locals were holding out against the threat of a Russian re-occupation. In January 2024 Human Rights First reported from Kharkiv on the need for greater psychological support for civilians, including for those who had lived under Russian occupation, and in March 2024 returned to the region to report on demining efforts in the deoccupied area of Balakliia. In June, July, August, October and December 2024, and in February, March and May 2025, Human Rights First reported from Kharkiv on HRDs undertaking evacuations from villages under fire, and in January 2025 released a report detailing the killing of HRD Tigran Galustyan, a volunteer targeted and killed by a Russian drone while evacuating civilians from near Pokrovsk. Throughout 2025 and into 2026, Human Rights First has regularly returned to Kharkiv and assisted HRDs to evacuate people from communities under fire.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/time-for-syrian-civil-soc\\_b\\_9558192](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/time-for-syrian-civil-soc_b_9558192); <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2016-04-13/ending-sectarianism-syria>



Many vulnerable civilians are living on the front line of the war, exposed to attacks on their neighborhoods and homes from Russian missiles.

This report begins that forward-looking assessment. Ukraine will face a multitude of challenges, including what will happen if some of its citizens remain under Russian occupation, and redefining its relationships with the United States and the European Union. The country will also have to restart its economy, and to clear vast areas of its land contaminated by land mines.<sup>3</sup>

This report focuses on seven of those challenges: the prosecution of war crimes, corruption, the disinformation war, LGBTQI+ rights, the mental health crisis, the issue of suspected collaborators, and refugees who have left Ukraine being forced to return.

<sup>3</sup> <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/inch-by-inch/>

## 1. Prosecution Of War Crimes

In November 2025, Ukraine's Office of the Prosecutor General presented to the UN evidence of more than 190,000 alleged war crimes committed by Russian forces since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.<sup>4</sup>

Human Rights First has regularly documented war crimes committed by Russian forces since the 2014 invasion, including torture, attacks on health facilities, and the bombing of civilian infrastructure.<sup>5</sup>

Dmytro Koval is Co-CEO of Ukrainian NGO Truth Hounds, regarded as one of the world's leading authorities on the documentation of war crimes.<sup>6</sup> He also serves as the Chair of International and European Law at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy.

"One of the most pressing challenges for justice today is the increasingly proactive construction of alternative versions of truth, aimed at pre-empting or discrediting justice processes," he said. "While denialism has long accompanied atrocity crimes, what distinguishes the current moment is the scale of political, financial, and informational investment directed toward actively attacking verified facts and institutional credibility."

Such negationism, discrediting the truth, is a major problem. "Recent developments before the International Court of Justice on the partial admission of counterclaims by the Russian Federation in Allegations of Genocide under the Genocide Convention (*Ukraine v. Russian Federation*) demonstrate how international legal proceedings are used to advance claims that attempt to turn victims of gross human rights violations into collateral that is explained by contrafactual accusations of them provoking violations."

Koval said that "These practices not only endanger justice by undermining trust in accountability mechanisms but also retraumatize victims by publicly rewriting or disputing their experiences."

These issues won't disappear when the fighting ends. "They also coincide with broader efforts to undermine the preservation of documentation and collective memory, which are essential foundations for truth-seeking and future accountability," he said. "Sustained international engagement will remain essential to protect documentation, safeguard victim-centred justice processes, and ensure that accountability efforts are not gradually eroded through the distortion of truth."

Accountability for war crimes must not become a bargaining chip in any negotiated settlement.

## 2. Corruption

In 2014, widespread protests against the corruption of President Viktor Yanukovich's government turned into a revolution that resulted in his fleeing the country. Fresh elections and a wave of reforms followed this "Revolution of Dignity." New institutions were created, including the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO), designed to investigate and prosecute high-level corruption without political interference.

<sup>4</sup> <https://united24media.com/latest-news/over-190000-war-crimes-ukraine-briefs-un-on-scale-of-russias-atrocities-13152>

<sup>5</sup> <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/russian-forces-attack-medical-facilities-across-ukraine/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://truth-hounds.org/en/about/>

Those institutions came under attack from the Ukrainian government in 2025, with some anti-corruption activists openly accusing President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office of deliberately undermining anti-corruption institutions after individuals within his close political circle came under investigation.<sup>7</sup>

Prominent anti-corruption activist Vitaly Shabunin, co-founder and Board Chairman of the Anti-Corruption Action Center told Human Rights First in October 2025 that the targeting of those exposing corruption is “not an attack on just anticorruption activists from NGOs, but a broader strategy to undermine the whole anticorruption infrastructure created after the revolution of dignity.”

Since 2014, Human Rights First has focused on working alongside anticorruption activists, reporting on attacks on them by the Ukrainian authorities and others. In 2017, Human Rights First produced *Democracy in Danger*, a report detailing attacks on HRDs working on corruption issues, and briefed the U.S. Helsinki Commission on attacks targeting HRDs in Ukraine working on anti-corruption.<sup>8</sup> In 2023 we visited Kharkiv and, together with the Kharkiv Anti-Corruption Centre (KhAC), researched and issued a report on the irregularities in wartime reconstruction contracts.<sup>9</sup>

In October 2025, Human Rights First published *Attacking the Watchdogs*, documenting raids on anti-corruption institutions, judicial harassment of activists, and the misuse of wartime governance tools to exert pressure on civil society.<sup>10</sup> The report concluded that gains made since 2014 risk being incrementally eroded if these patterns continue.

Dmytro Bulakh of the Kharkiv Anti-Corruption Center described the current moment as one of structural risk to democratic accountability. He said: “Russia’s full-scale invasion has brought profound challenges to democracy in Ukraine. Prolonged martial law has had a significant impact on civil society in general, and on the anti-corruption sector in particular. At the same time, war cannot and should not be used as a justification for undermining democratic principles.”

Bulakh identified what he sees as the core institutional danger: “Based on our experience, the key current challenges facing the anti-corruption sector include the excessive centralization of power that has become entrenched during martial law, as well as the use of state mechanisms, including those related to wartime governance, to exert pressure on active civil society actors.”

“These forms of pressure include censorship, fabricated grounds for persecution, unlawful searches (including against activists serving in the military), the closure of public registers and restrictions on access to information” he said. “Such actions are often justified by authorities as ‘military necessity.’ In addition, mobilisation procedures continue to be misused by some officials as a tool of repression.”

Bulakh also situated these developments within Ukraine’s broader reform trajectory. “Russia’s aggressive war, combined with Ukraine’s weak law enforcement system, further exacerbates these vulnerabilities” he said. “On Ukraine’s path toward EU accession, sustained international support is essential to advance necessary reforms, particularly in the area of law enforcement.”

<sup>7</sup> <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/attacking-the-watchdogs/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Democracy-in-Danger.pdf>;

<sup>9</sup> [https://humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Kharkiv-report\\_July2023\\_final.pdf](https://humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Kharkiv-report_July2023_final.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/attacking-the-watchdogs/>

Looking ahead, he warned that the post-war period may bring new risks if emergency governance structures become normalized. “Looking ahead, we see a major risk in attempts to preserve the extreme centralization of power introduced during the active phase of the war. This may result in continued pressure on civil society, albeit framed through different arguments, as well as in more limited and complex avenues for meaningful public participation in decision-making processes after a ceasefire or peace agreement.”

### 3. War By Disinformation

Disinformation has been central to Russia’s war effort since before its 2014 invasion, and in recent years Russian propaganda efforts have become more sophisticated and better resourced. These efforts intend to create panic, erode public trust in democratic institutions and destabilize Ukrainian society

Human Rights First has regularly reported on Russia’s attempts to confuse, demoralize, and frighten Ukrainians in northeastern Ukraine.<sup>11</sup> It has also documented how HRDs are confronting disinformation campaigns and providing reliable information to vulnerable populations near the front lines.

Local HRDs in Kharkiv have been at the forefront of Ukraine’s fight against disinformation, tracking and debunking Russia-backed lies and conspiracies. Their efforts rely on traditional journalism and fact-checking, as well as newer technology, such as a “bot” able to detect fake news.

Independent media outlet Gwara Media has mounted an intense and impressive campaign to counter the huge waves of disinformation from Russian propaganda outlets.<sup>12</sup>

“We saw all this propaganda in the early weeks of the invasion, like saying that Kharkiv had run out of food and water, and that the city had fallen to the Russians,” said Gwara Media’s Managing Editor Serhii Prokopenko. “This was all over some Telegram channels, and from radio stations broadcasting from Belgorod and other Russian cities. We had to do something, so we called for volunteer fact-checkers.”

Hundreds of people applied, keen to help protect the truth. “We took on 100, and they worked in a call center, but it was overwhelming. We were getting thousands of requests a day – up to 5,000. People were asking if all sorts of rumors were true. By the end of April 2022, we had to stop for a week and reorganize.”

Verifying facts while fighting raged around Kharkiv presented enormous challenges, but Gwara Media’s work become a vital public service in a city under sustained attack.

Gwara Media set up the bot Perevirka (Ukrainian for audit) to detect fake news, processing over 66,000 requests from people. They invite people to submit to their website “any news in Ukrainian or English, and within 24 hours you will find out whether you can trust the chosen publication.”

Prokopenko suggests that “Disinformation as seen from Kharkiv in Ukraine is the about systemic erosion of human rights, and a basis for all other human rights violations including war crimes, civilian killings, missile attacks, and the destruction of critical energy infrastructure,” he said.

<sup>11</sup> <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/truth-under-siege/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://gwaramedia.com/en/>



People's homes are under constant threat of attack from Russian bombs. Many, like this building in Kharkiv, have been destroyed.

“We saw this erosion in realtime and it will persist after any ceasefire. It will have lasting impact on the cognitive structure of society, and will survive long beyond active conflict, continuing shaping perceptions far into the future.”

Looking ahead, Prokopenko warned that disinformation will remain a massive challenge, one the international human rights system is not yet equipped to address,.

“Today, disinformation largely falls outside existing legal frameworks, as modern human rights law is rooted in an analogue era. All national efforts to stop disinformation are attacked and delegitimized by external actors, states and technology platforms under freedom of speech,” he said.

“Disinformation undermines the ability to think autonomously, while legal and institutional mechanisms have not yet fully conceptualized this form of harm or developed effective means to address it. As a result, individuals may be legally free, yet epistemically deprived from right to information and reality.”

## 4. Returning Refugees

An issue likely to emerge more prominently in the event of a peace deal will be the status of Ukrainian refugees in the U.S., Europe and elsewhere.

Since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, an estimated 6.9 million Ukrainians have been recorded as refugees in Europe under temporary protection and related mechanisms<sup>13</sup>, and roughly a quarter of a million have arrived in the United States under humanitarian and temporary protection programs. Current estimates suggest there are 5.35 million refugees from Ukraine in Europe.<sup>14</sup>

In November 2025 the United States deported 50 people to Ukraine, despite the ongoing conflict. There is currently no safe place to hide in Ukraine – cities, towns, and villages from east to west are being hit by Russian missiles and drones. As long as these conditions persist, no-one should be forcibly sent back to Ukraine.<sup>15</sup>

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has warned that “no part of the country should be considered safe.”<sup>16</sup> The UNHCR has called on all States not to forcibly return Ukrainian nationals—including individuals whose asylum claims have been rejected—due to the ongoing armed conflict and pervasive risks.

While voluntary return remains a right, including for Ukrainians residing in the U.S. and elsewhere, any return process following a peace agreement must be genuinely voluntary and accompanied by appropriate safeguards to ensure safety, access to housing, documentation, and protection from retaliation or renewed displacement. Premature or forced returns not only endanger safety, but they are also counterproductive as they contribute to internal displacement and instability. If the situation should shift in the future, steps should be taken to ensure the conditions, infrastructure and access to rights protections necessary to facilitate effective large scale voluntary returns.

## 5. Dealing With Suspected Collaborators

Many Ukrainian communities have been under occupation since the invasion of 2014, and many more since the invasion of 2022. Despite some pushback by the Ukrainian military in late 2022 to retake towns occupied by Russian forces earlier that year, a renewed Russian offensive that began in the summer of 2024 has meant Russian reoccupation for some villages and towns in the Kharkiv and Donetsk regions.<sup>17</sup>

Both Russian invasions of 2014 and 2022 were helped by locals in Ukraine providing Kremlin forces with intelligence on military movements and locations of sensitive infrastructure. During the occupation of Ukrainian territories, some locals also collaborated with Russian troops. Since the 2022 invasion, there are numerous documented examples of collaboration by civilians in Ukraine with Russian forces.

<sup>13</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Temporary\\_protection\\_for\\_persons\\_fleeing\\_Ukraine\\_-\\_monthly\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Temporary_protection_for_persons_fleeing_Ukraine_-_monthly_statistics).

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.nbcconnecticut.com/news/local/what-to-know-about-the-uniting-for-ukraine-program-in-us/3505740/>. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

<sup>15</sup> <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/human-rights-first-condemns-u-s-governments-deportation-of-ukrainians-into-active-war-zone/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press-releases/unhcr-news-comment-deadly-attacks-western-ukraine-show-no-part-country-safe>

<sup>17</sup> <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/highly-suspect/>

Ukraine has been confronting the difficult and sensitive issue of what to do with suspected collaborators. Human rights activists in Ukraine say the current system is unfair and vague and have been advocating for changes in the laws covering collaboration. They propose significant changes to current legislation and call for clearer standards from state bodies and the public of what constitutes collaboration, and how it should be addressed.

Local HRDs say the Ukrainian authorities' response to those accused of collaborating often falls short of international legal standards, and the legislation is vague, inconsistently applied, and permits the prosecution of individuals who provided vital services under occupation, including shelter and medical support work.

While some locals under occupation enthusiastically act as informers for Russian forces, others act as online propagandists, posting on social media, encouraging the invasion. Some openly welcomed Russian soldiers into their village or city.

However, there is no clear definition of what constitutes collaboration, and local activists say the laws are being applied with worrying double standards. Similar behaviors are sometimes identified as collaboration and sometimes not.

International legal experts note the critical distinction between conduct that voluntarily supports Russian occupiers and conduct carried out under coercion, necessity, or survival. Maintaining this distinction is essential to ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law and avoiding unjust prosecutions.<sup>18</sup>

A series of draft laws under consideration to address the issue are generally designed to make the punishments more severe, rather than to address the realities of living under occupation.

Activists warn that the current application of the law risks estranging those living under long-term occupation from the Ukrainian state, as they will feel alienated if the Ukrainian authorities condemn them as collaborators.

Ukrainian human rights NGO ZMINA has analyzed how suspected collaborators are punished.<sup>19</sup> Onysiia Syniuk, Head of Research Department at ZMINA Centre for Human Rights, explained how the legislation developed and why it now poses structural problems: “The issue of collaboration in terms of the Russian aggression against Ukraine has been discussed since before the full-scale invasion, but specific legislation was adopted in March of 2022, immediately after the full-scale invasion. The goal, as the legislators themselves claimed, was preventing collaboration with the enemy in the occupied territory.”

Synik, an expert in international law, noted that the urgency of the moment shaped the law's design. “While it might have been feasible for a short period of time, the approach did not account for the territories occupied since 2014 and for the four subsequent years of occupation of new territories since 2022. The wording of the article, broad and imprecise, with no regard for nuance and the standards of international humanitarian law, designates almost any actions in the occupied territory as collaboration.”

<sup>18</sup> <https://globalrightscompliance.org/new-grc-guide-investigating-collaboration-crimes-in-ukraine-in-line-with-international-law/>

<sup>19</sup> [https://zmina.ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/04/colaboratz\\_eng\\_web.pdf](https://zmina.ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/04/colaboratz_eng_web.pdf)

Legislative shortcomings have become embedded in practice. Syniuk added, “After four years of investigative and court practice, the issues in legislation are entrenched in practice: holding a position in the occupying administration, regardless of intention and the reality of performing functions on that post, is enough to be charged and convicted. Performing functions aimed primarily at maintaining life in the occupied territories, such as fire-fighting, is not an exception. The reality of occupation, inherent threat from the occupying administration and the lack of alternative resources to survive, is not taken into account. It boils down to the approach that remaining in the occupied territories is proof of support for the occupying administration and Russian aggression.”

Implications extend far beyond criminal prosecutions “This will be an issue for years to come It will impact all of the reintegration, transitional justice, social cohesion processes,” she said. “The lack of understanding of the reality in occupied territories is a barrier to developing cohesive and effective state policy on reintegration, and a challenge for those who are leaving or planning to leave occupied territories either for the territories under Ukrainian control, or third states.”

## 6. Mental Health Crisis

In February 2026, the World Health Organization reported that a “mental health crisis affects an estimated 10 million people” in Ukraine, and that the burden of “mental health conditions is expected to worsen.”<sup>20</sup>

Human Rights First has reported from Ukraine’s front line on the shortage of mental health support and spoken to experts in psychology about how the war was impacting people’s mental health. One told Human Rights First how “specific fears were manifested in the fact that people were afraid to sleep in a bed at home rather than in a bomb shelter, afraid to take off their outer clothes before going to bed, or fears to wash or go to the toilet -- there were fears of dying in the bath or in the toilet during the shellings.” These fears, he noted, were added to the usual “pre-war” problems of loneliness, relationship problems, and others.<sup>21</sup>

While efforts are being made to promote psychological knowledge for the general population, including the consequences of experiencing traumatic events, local Human Rights Defenders dealing with these issues say many more resources are needed.

Associate Professor of Psychological Sciences Taras Zhvaniia, working with Alliance Global, says, “The number of requests for psychological help is only increasing. There is a need for qualified training of psychologists themselves, because the basic professional training of most psychologists did not involve the development of the competencies of providing psychological assistance in war conditions.”

Reports indicate the number of people complaining of mental health problems in Ukraine doubled from 2023 to 2024, and that sales of antidepressants soared in recent years. The government recently announced plans to open at least 200 mental health centres nationwide.<sup>22</sup>

Human Rights First has worked with the NGO Helping to Leave, a joint project of organizations registered in the Czech Republic and Ukraine, as well as by independent volunteers. They assist those making the difficult and dangerous journey from territories currently occupied by Russian forces into the rest of Ukraine.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/ukraine--who-health-emergency-appeal-2026>

<sup>21</sup> <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/hidden-harms/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/europe/2025/02/06/ukraine-opens-up-about-mental-health-to-tackle-wartime-trauma/>



A resident of Kupiansk readies to evacuate from the city under attack.

They organize the provision of psychological, human rights, humanitarian, and any other assistance for those who have managed to leave areas of Ukraine occupied by Russia.

Helping to Leave’s Co-CEO Daria Rabinovitsch said “Both aid workers and civilians in Ukraine are living under prolonged psychological strain. Many of those who help have been running on adrenaline for years, and when the fighting stops, delayed trauma and burnout may hit them hard. For people fleeing the war zones, returning home can be just as traumatic as evacuating – coming back to towns destroyed by the Russian army and lost lives is an enormous emotional shock.”

She noted to that “Even after a ceasefire, the mental health consequences of the war in Ukraine will last for years. Long-term psychological support will be essential to help people process loss, rebuild a sense of safety, and move forward.”

## 7. LGBTQI+ Rights

In a significant advance for LGBTQI+ rights in Ukraine in July 2025, a Kyiv court officially recognized a same-sex couple as a family, marking what could prove to be legal turning point for LGBTQI+ rights in the country.<sup>23</sup>

While Ukraine does not currently recognize same-sex marriages or civil partnerships, the court ruling may serve as a crucial precedent for future legal recognition of LGBTQI+ families. Public opinion has been steadily shifting away from prejudice, but there is still a long way to go, with dozens of violations of LGBTQI+ rights, including hate crimes, reported in 2025.<sup>24</sup>

A serious national discussion is under way about legalizing same-sex civil partnerships.<sup>25</sup> National surveys since the 2022 invasion suggest a sharp change in Ukrainian public attitudes.<sup>26</sup> By 2024, those who expressed a “negative view” of the LGBTQ+ community had dropped by more than a third from six years previously, down from 60.4 percent to 38.2 percent. According to polling in 2025, The introduction of registered civil partnerships for same-sex couples was supported by 29.8% of respondents; 30.1% expressed indifference, while 35.1% held a negative view.

While public attitudes are shifting positively, these are not yet reflected in legislation.<sup>27</sup>

Vasyl Malikov, Co-Chair of the National LGBTI Consortium in Ukraine and Head of the NGO ‘SPECTRUM KHARKIV’, said the wartime context has sharpened existing rights challenges. “The war has been going on for four years now, and human rights challenges for LGBTQI people are becoming more acute in wartime. First and foremost, this concerns the adoption of legislation on civil partnerships. The draft Civil Code, recently submitted by members of the Verkhovna Rada, which among other things regulates family relations, should be inclusive of LGBTQI communities and ensure the recognition of same-sex families in Ukraine, not the opposite. The active response to the discriminatory norms proposed in the draft Code by civil society, including LGBTQI organizations, in Ukraine is part of a long-standing movement for civil partnerships and legal recognition of same-sex couples.”

Legal recognition is only one part of the broader equality framework. Malikov added, “The issue of combating hate crimes also remains important. In September 2025, the possibility of taking into account crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity when entering them into the unified register of pre-trial investigations was introduced. Further efforts to combat discrimination will require the development of an effective system to counter crimes motivated by intolerance.”

He stressed that inclusion must extend beyond legislation into reconstruction policy. “Finally, human rights challenges also refer to the inclusion of LGBTQI people in early and post-conflict recovery processes and non-discrimination in humanitarian response. Facing vulnerability and discrimination, LGBTQI people remain an integral part of Ukrainian society and should be an integral part of Ukrainian recovery.”

<sup>23</sup> <https://united24media.com/latest-news/ukraine-lgbtq-rights-advance-with-first-legal-recognition-of-same-sex-couple-9612>

<sup>24</sup> <https://zmina.ua/en/event-en/without-legislative-progress-but-with-growing-support-a-report-on-the-situation-of-lgbtq-people-in-ukraine-in-2025-has-been-presented/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/same-sex-partnerships-in-ukraine-would-show-its-values/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://gay.org.ua/en/blog/2022/06/01/ukrainians-have-dramatically-improved-their-attitude-towards-lgbt-people/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://zmina.ua/en/event-en/without-legislative-progress-but-with-growing-support-a-report-on-the-situation-of-lgbtq-people-in-ukraine-in-2025-has-been-presented/>

# Recommendations

1. International organisations, diplomats, and multilateral institutions should conduct regular in-country visits and publicly report on conditions, including engagement with Human Rights Defenders, journalists, and affected communities.
2. States must not trade away accountability for war crimes in any ceasefire or peace agreement. Governments should publicly reaffirm support for independent investigations and prosecutions.
3. Ukraine's allies should publicly support and properly resource anti-corruption institutions and civil society actors.
4. Donors and Ukrainian authorities should prioritize long-term, trauma-informed mental health services, including training qualified professionals and guaranteeing nationwide access beyond the cessation of hostilities.
5. States must uphold non-refoulement and refrain from forcibly returning Ukrainian nationals while conditions remain unsafe. Any returns following a ceasefire must be genuinely voluntary and accompanied by safeguards ensuring safety and rights protection.
6. International partners should resource and strengthen efforts to counter disinformation, including independent media, fact-checking initiatives, and technological tools to address coordinated information manipulation.
7. International financial assistance should be conditioned on measurable progress in protecting LGBTQI+ rights and other vulnerable groups.



About Human Rights First: Human Rights First is a nonprofit, nonpartisan international human rights organization founded in 1978 to address the lack of legal protection for refugees and asylum seekers. We work alongside human rights defenders, hold human rights abusers accountable, fight for the conditions that uphold democracy, and provide tools that bring the power of AI and advanced technologies to justice and human rights movements.

Human Rights First is based in Los Angeles, New York, and Washington D.C.

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