

Risk and Response: Women Human Rights Defenders on Ukraine's Frontline

April 2026 Report
humanrightsfirst.org



Introduction

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs)¹ are taking enormous daily risks to help vulnerable people living on the frontline of Russian’s war on Ukraine. Some deliver humanitarian aid to those in desperate need of food and clothes, while others evacuate elderly and infirm residents from communities under fire.

Some do this work full-time, others join these efforts when they can. Few had any experience of activism before Russia’s full-scale invasion in February 2022.

Human Rights First has regularly worked alongside women activists around the northeastern region of Kharkiv, and sometimes in the Donetsk region further south, and has seen firsthand the lifesaving work they do, and the risks involved.

Across the world, women - including women activists - experience war differently from men. In a 2023 report, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders described² these environments as the “hypermasculinized context of war”. In these contexts, the role of WHRDs becomes more essential even as they face additional challenges “because of [their] work and because of who they are.”

WHRDs often face the same risks as their male counterparts, including restrictions on their rights, but also face additional and distinct risks shaped by entrenched stereotypes and expectations about women’s roles. They are stigmatized and criticized for actions for which men are praised, frequently stereotyped not as agents of change, but as vulnerable individuals in need of protection.

These are not new prejudices. A 2019 report³ by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders also found that women defenders working in conflict and post-conflict are “particularly exposed to gender-based violence, including sexual violence,” and are “more directly affected by breakdowns in health-care services.” Their legitimacy as defenders continues to be challenged and they remain largely excluded from decision-making.

In Ukraine, WHRDs evacuate civilians, deliver humanitarian assistance, and document war crimes, often at significant physical and mental risk. Yet, they are excluded from effective decision-making spaces. In March 2022, UN special procedure mandate holders drew attention to the absence of Ukrainian women from peace negotiations, despite their central role in the humanitarian response.⁴

Human Rights First has a long history of working with WHRDs in multiple countries, including in Bahrain, Poland, and Egypt, supporting those exposing corruption, delivering humanitarian aid, and assisting asylum seekers. Many face not only detention and legal harassment, but sustained efforts to discredit them and isolate them from their communities.

Human Rights First is also part of the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition⁵, a global network supporting WHRDs facing harassment, threats, surveillance, arbitrary detention and other forms of retaliation. Through this coalition and our own Human Rights Defenders program, we promote the work of WHRDs and work toward their protection.

¹ According to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) are all women and girls working on any human rights issue (“women defenders” and “girl defenders”), and people of all genders who work to promote women’s rights and rights related to gender equality.

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a78131-report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-defenders>.

³ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/43/51>

⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/03/ukraine-protection-and-participation-women-essential-say-un-human-rights>

⁵ <https://whrdic.org/>

In 2022, Human Rights First supported the production of a guide for journalists on responsibly reporting war-related sexual violence, authored by three Ukrainian women experts in gender issues.⁶

Human Rights First has worked alongside WHRDs in Ukraine since the Russian invasion of 2014. Since the full-scale invasion in 2022, the organization has made dozens of visits to the frontline region of Kharkiv. This has involved assisting WHRDs with evacuations from frontline areas, documenting war crimes, and reporting on the work of local activists providing humanitarian aid, countering corruption and disinformation, and those responding to the mental health crisis.

This report draws on interviews with WHRDs working in frontline areas of northeastern Ukraine, highlighting their work during the conflict, the risks they face, and the critical role they have played in sustaining communities under fire.

Frontline Evacuations

WHRDs are operating in some of the most dangerous places of the war on Ukraine - taking food and medicine to communities under fire and bringing civilians out of frontline towns and villages. Many had no background in activism before Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.

Yelyzaveta Klykov grew up in Severodonetsk in the Donbas region. In the weeks following the invasion, she fled her city as it came under constant bombardment.⁷ Residential neighbourhoods and civilian infrastructure were repeatedly shelled⁸, and by June the city had been occupied. "I was with my mother, and we managed to get out on a bus evacuating people," she recalls. "It was hard to do, because there were so many people wanting to leave. The bus that left after us was shot." She went to Poland but returned to Ukraine in 2023. "It just felt right. I wanted to come back to my own land." She began studying theatre in Kyiv, and in November 2024 came across a social media post from the Roza na Ruke (Rose on Hand) evacuation team in Kharkiv. "I wrote a comment under it, asking if I could help, and in mid-July 2025 I did my first evacuation."



Yelyzaveta Klykov.



⁶ <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/ukrainian-experts-produce-guide-for-journalists-reporting-war-related-sexual-violence/>
⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/live/world-europe-61546571>
⁸ <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/03/14/7331166/>

Human Rights First was on that trip, evacuating two elderly women from Kupiansk. “When my city was under terrible shelling in 2022, my subconscious gave off a sort of peace and calm. My mother was very scared, but when she saw that I was calm, she also calmed down,” **Yelyzaveta** said.

Human Rights First was also with her on another evacuation in January this year, in biting cold, as part of the Roza na Ruke team.⁹ A mother and daughter were evacuated through heavy snow from Hontarivka, near Vovchansk - a border town close to Russia that was overrun by Russian forces in 2024 and has since seen sustained fighting and repeated evacuations. To support the work of **Yelyzaveta** and her colleagues at Roza na Ruke, you can contribute through this link: <https://send.monobank.ua/jar/exLZh6cPb>.



Yuliia Keleberda. Credit: Gwara Media, Anna Veklych

Not all of those carrying out this work survive it. **Yuliia Keleberda**, a police officer and member of the White Angels evacuation unit, was killed by a Russian drone in February 2026 while carrying out a rescue mission in Kupiansk. The White Angels is a specialised unit of the National Police of Ukraine which enters areas where ambulances and humanitarian workers cannot safely go, and rescues families, children, elderly residents, and people with disabilities from villages under sustained shelling. **Yuliia** studied at the Kharkiv National University of Internal Affairs and, from 2021, worked in Police Department No. 1 of the Chuhuiv District Police in Vovchansk.

Polina Kulish is a journalist with the Kharkiv-based independent media group Gwara, reporting from frontline areas across eastern Ukraine. In 2024, Human Rights First worked with her to document landmine clearance operations. Polina accompanied **Yuliia** on an evacuation mission to the frontline town of Velykyi Burluk, where the team rescued a mother, grandmother, and two children. “I saw how she worked, calmly and efficiently,” Polina said.

Polina had worked alongside **Yuliia** in November 2025, when she spent several days embedded with a White Angels evacuation team operating in the frontline area of Kupiansk. “**Yuliia** joined the White Angels evacuation team as soon as she left university. She was from the frontline town of Vovchansk, and in 2024 helped with the mass evacuation from there when the Russians attacked,”

⁹ <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/evacuating-civilians-from-ukraines-front-line-in-the-sno/>

Polina told Human Rights First. “She was young but already experienced. A close colleague of hers had been killed during those evacuations, but she didn’t want to talk about what happened there.” To support the work of Polina and her colleagues at Gwara Media, you can contribute through the link: <https://send.monobank.ua/jar/5yFufokaFK>.

The head of the Kharkiv regional police, Petro Tokar, recalled¹⁰: “**Yuliia** was a symbol of the ‘White Angels’ unit. She was known both in Ukraine and beyond its borders. She had a way with words that convinced people to evacuate.” According to one of **Yuliia’s** colleagues¹¹, she “helped everyone, she supported, she could do any job. Shoot a video, help people gather, support people. Play with a child while they were being evacuated to the car.”

Lydmyla (Milla) Chausova knew **Yuliia Keleberda** slightly, since both their families were from Vovchansk. **Milla** left the city before the February 2022 invasion, and moved to Kharkiv, but most of her family remained there. Human Rights First has worked with her evacuating people in 2025. Much of her work now centers on delivering humanitarian aid. She still occasionally conducts evacuations, but these tend to be ad-hoc, when she shows up in her small car with supplies and someone wants to leave. To support **Milla’s** work, you can contribute through this link: <https://send.monobank.ua/jar/6r27Swc4iz>.



Julia Indyk.

Julia Indyk is an experienced evacuation volunteer working in some of the most heavily targeted frontline areas in eastern Ukraine. She grew up in Kharkiv and has been carrying out evacuations regularly for more than two years. “It used to be every other day, but this year it’s virtually every day,” she said. Human Rights First has worked with her on trips in 2025¹² and 2026¹³ to get people from Kupiansk, Sloviansk and Kramatorsk.

¹⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/police.kharkov/posts/%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%85%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BA%D1%96%D0%B2%D1%89%D0%B8%D0%B-D%D1%96-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%8F-%D0%B7-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D1%96%D1%86%D0%B5%D0%B9%D1%81%D1%8C%D0%BA%D0%BE%D1%8E-%D1%8E%D0%BB%D1%96%D1%94%D1%8E-%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%B1%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B4%D0%BE%D1%8E-%D1%8F%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%B3%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%83%D0%BB%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%96%D0%B4-%D1%87%D0%B0%D1%81-%D0%B5%D0%B2/937926885473015/>

¹¹ <https://suspilne.media/kharkiv/1249250-u-harkovi-poprosaliso-z-23-ricnou-policejskou-bilih-angoliv-uliev-keleberdou-aka-zaginula-pid-cas-evakuacij/>

¹² <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/volunteers-continue-to-evacuate-civilians-from-kupiansk-as-russian-attacks-intensify/>

¹³ <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/volunteers-defy-drone-dangers-to-evacuate-people-from-kramatorsk/>

Julia is a highly skilled driver, often simultaneously handling a steering wheel, drone detector, walkie talkie and phone. She is known for going to the most dangerous communities to evacuate people. She said she has no idea how many people she has evacuated. It must be at least in the many hundreds, more likely thousands. To support **Julia's** work, you can contribute through this link: <https://send.monobank.ua/jar/3P16PGWY9u>.



Yulia Honcharenko.

Yulia Honcharenko is a police officer at the Chuhuiv Police Department, near the border with Russia, where she serves as the Inspector of Juvenile Prevention¹⁴. With over eleven years of service, she has taken on one of the most dangerous roles in the conflict - evacuating vulnerable civilians, particularly children, from dangerous communities under sustained shelling. Human Rights First worked with her to evacuate people from Hontarivka, a village near the border with Russia, in January 2026.¹⁵ In recent months, she has been involved in evacuating children from areas under mandatory evacuation orders, including Hontarivka and Vovchansk. **Yulia** described her job as involving a lot of communication with the military leadership of the local administration, and with the local people. She cited clear lines of support from her manager Kerpek Denis Yurievich as critical, since the situation can change fast. “I put together lists of people who want to leave, prepare safe routes, sometimes persuade people to leave with kind words and organize how they should be evacuated,” she explained. Since 2022, she estimates that she and her colleagues have evacuated approximately 500 people, including around 200 children through her direct efforts.

Sara Uboldi is an Italian academic specialising in culture and health with a focus on war contexts. A native of Como, she has been active as a volunteer in Kharkiv over the last year, and in December 2025 began assisting with evacuations. “[After working with evacuated children] the transition to participating in evacuations - to being present also in this part of their story - has been very meaningful for me, and it is naturally connected to my professional work and intervention,” she said. Human Rights First joined her and her Italian colleagues for the Svit ta Ukrayina organization in March 2026¹⁶ to evacuate children and adults from the frontline cities of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk. It was her fourth trip to the frontline, either evacuating civilians or taking them humanitarian aid. Earlier in March 2026, during another evacuation trip to Sloviansk, the city was hit by three Russian guided bombs.¹⁷ Sara and her team evacuated wounded people from the site of the explosions. At least four people were killed and 16 were wounded in the attack, including a 14-year-old girl. To support the work of **Sara** and her colleagues at Svit ta Ukrayina, you can contribute through this link: <https://send.monobank.ua/jar/cF8op1xsC>.

¹⁴ <https://gwaramedia.com/en/police-volunteers-used-to-come-with-gifts-but-now-they-are-evacuating-children-under-russian-attacks-story-of-one-evacuation-mission-from-dangerous-zone-in-chuhuiv-district/>

¹⁵ <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/evacuating-civilians-from-ukraines-front-line-in-the-sno/>

¹⁶ <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/volunteers-defy-drone-dangers-to-evacuate-people-from-kramatorsk/>

¹⁷ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/3/10/russian-attack-kills-four-in-ukraines-sloviansk-as-both-sides-claim-gains>

Providing Humanitarian Aid

In addition to evacuation work, WHRDs deliver essential humanitarian aid to communities near the frontline. **Lydmyla (Milla) Chausova** has spent much of the last few years delivering humanitarian aid to people in communities near the frontline, bringing medicine, food, pet food and other supplies in her car. As a young teenager, she worked selling food from the forest. Later, she worked in cafes and restaurants, and teamed up with one of her five sisters as a house painter. She now regularly takes food, medicine and other necessities to those living at the frontline in the Kharkiv region.

In addition to her evacuation work, **Sara Uboldi** has also brought humanitarian aid to communities under fire. Former professional violinist **Nataliia Halunenko** has now trained as an ambulance driver and has spent the last few 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 went with her and a team of medics in an ambulance under fire to the frontline city of Kupiansk to treat civilians who needed medical help.¹⁸ She has often made the long trip by train across the length of Ukraine to Poland or Germany to pick up donated vehicles and then makes the thousand-mile drive back across to Kharkiv. “This volunteering work gives me real satisfaction, it feels like what I should be doing while the war is on,” she said.¹⁹



Sara Uboldi (left).



Alla Feshchenko.

Alla Feshchenko began volunteering after Russia’s 2014 invasion of the Donbas region, helping people who were hungry or abandoned at train stations. Before that, she had run two shops and had no prior experience in volunteering or activism. “It was terrible to see people leave behind everything they had, never to go back to their homes, never to drink out of their cups again,” she said. To support **Alla’s** work, you can contribute through this link: <https://send.monobank.ua/jar/5y8ecDmBRa>.

¹⁸ <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/ukraine-medics-defy-missiles-and-mud-to-bring-aid-to-civilians-on-front-lines/>

¹⁹ <https://www.thestrade.com/news/im-focused-on-what-needs-to-be-done-why-a-ukrainian-violinist-returned-home-to-volunteer-in-the-war-effort/18166.article>

Community Support and Conflict Response

Beyond direct humanitarian and evacuation work, WHRDs play a critical role in sustaining communities through organising, documentation, and governance. **Alla Feshchenko**, over the past 12 years, has gone from someone who knew nothing about these issues to someone who helps communities rebuild, and who provides trainings on project management, business skills, and fundraising. The strength of activism, she said, lies in transforming it into something that encourages people to play a greater role in their local communities. Much of her work involves addressing conflicts within local communities, often between residents and local councilors over budgeting or basic political decision-making.

“We help people to communicate better with the local authorities. We show them that it’s better for everyone if there’s no conflict, and that the community is more likely to access grants if donors see there isn’t local conflict.” She also noted that local authorities often do not consult residents about how budgets are planned. “Meetings about the community are held behind closed doors, and people can’t see how decisions are being made that impact them. It’s sometimes done in the name of ‘security,’ but often there is no need for it to be a secret meeting.”

She also noted that because so many men are serving in the military, new space has opened for women to take on greater roles in community organizing and local governance. “We show people how to better present their case to local politicians. There are more opportunities for women now, and women have the skills to play important roles in communities where there is conflict, by de-escalating tensions with the council.”

Women activists should also be a key part of negotiations in ending the war and in rebuilding Ukraine. Decades of evidence from all over the world shows that involving civil society makes a peace agreement much more likely to succeed, and that including those speaking up for rights makes the success of such agreements much likelier. Women’s participation increases the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least two years by 20 percent, and by 35 percent the probability of a peace agreement lasting 15 years.²⁰

Sara Uboldi founded “Emergency Pre-Texts” which is now dedicated to serving children in the basements of Ukrainian war zones.²¹ “I work using a protocol to support mental health and the processing of trauma especially with children who have been evacuated,” she said. “They are experiencing the trauma of losing their homes and their safe places—such as their schools, kindergartens, parks where they used to play with other children—in short, their entire everyday life.” In October and November 2025, she worked with children who had been evacuated. “I worked with the children on the concept of a safe place, of a home that cannot be lost. Even if a house has been destroyed or taken away, it becomes important to rely on one’s inner resources and find a safe place within ourselves.”

²⁰ <https://wps.unwomen.org/participation/>

²¹ <https://culturalagents.org/emergency-pre-texts-in-ukraine/>

RISK

Evacuation work in eastern Ukraine carries severe and immediate risk, with volunteers operating under constant threat from shelling and drone strikes. In 2024, HRD Tigran Galustyan, a member of Roza na Ruke, was driving to rescue civilians from Ukraine's eastern front near Pokrovsk when he was targeted and killed by a Russian military First Person View (FPV) drone.²²

In March 2026, a Russian FPV drone targeted a humanitarian mission vehicle evacuating civilians from the village of Oleksiyevo-Druzhkivka, killing two elderly women who were in the car and injuring two other civilians.²³ Evacuation mission leader Yevhen Kaplin said it was the 100th attack on the humanitarian mission's vehicles but the first to result in civilian deaths.

Julia Indyk described how the intensity of her work has picked up recently “because [they’re] losing more volunteers to do this job - some are being killed, some taken into the army.” On December 25, 2025, her long-term work colleague Slava Ilchenko was targeted and killed by a Russian drone while doing evacuation work.²⁴ Human Rights First had worked with them together on evacuations. “What happened to Slava has left me numb,” she said. “I don’t feel much fear now, or much of anything.”

On February 20, 2026, White Angels police officers **Yuliia Keleberda** and her colleague Yevhen Kalhan were killed when a Russian Lancet drone struck their evacuation vehicle near the village of Serednii Burluk, around 12 miles from the frontline. In 2025, the team carried out evacuations in ordinary pickup trucks. By early 2026, they had received armored vehicles, but the added protection was not enough to save **Yuliia** and Yevhen. Other evacuation volunteers have been killed by small FPV drones, but the Lancet is a much larger and more powerful munition, designed to circle over an area before diving and detonating on impact. Standard drone detectors used to track FPV drones cannot reliably detect an incoming Lancet strike. The two White Angels were killed instantly.

The official police statement on her death said she and Yevhen Kalhan “had carried out numerous evacuations to the most dangerous settlements, rescuing dozens of families and evacuating children, elderly people, and people with disabilities. They risked their lives to save others.” **Yuliia** is survived by her parents.

Journalist Polina Kulish remembers **Yuliia** as “small, chatty, funny, friendly, and lively. Her protective helmet looked enormous on her head.” The first reports of her death shook the reporter. “I just froze when I saw the news, it seemed unbelievable. It was the first time since I became a journalist that someone I knew personally had been killed. It’s hard to express it. I saw it on social media first and felt like there was a rock inside my chest. **Yuliia** looked even younger than 23, almost like a girl.” The young policewoman wore braces on her teeth. “I saw her in the open coffin,” Polina said. “I saw the braces, and for me they represent the future - that you wear those painful things, go through the expense and suffering of them because then you will have healthy teeth and a beautiful smile. Yuliia hoped to see the end of the war, to have that future. But she didn’t.”

²² <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/targeted-and-killed/>

²³ <https://euromaidanpress.com/2026/03/20/russia-kills-civilians-in-strike-on-marked-evacuation-vehicle/>

²⁴ <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/at-kharkiv-cemetery-for-slava-killed-by-a-russian-drone-on-christmas-day/>



Nataliia Halunenko.

Nataliia Halunenko said she does not feel fear while going into a town being bombed. “I don’t feel that scared,” she said. “I’m focused on what needs to be done. And when I’m there I’m concentrating on doing what I need to. But on the way out afterwards is when some fear can set in - things can change minute to minute and while you’re right at the heart of the war zone you’re without internet and don’t get updates, so when you leave you never know if the road out is safe.”²⁵

Yelyzaveta Klykov reflected on how she manages the psychological weight of this danger: “I think about the danger afterwards, when I’ve been in those situations. At the time, you have to stay focused.”

Yulia Honcharenko similarly noted: “It’s important to have the right attitude and the right approach. Sometimes you have to calm people in a dangerous situation, say reassuring things to adults. It’s vital, because I understand that if I panic, I won’t be able to help people properly.”

GENDERED CHALLENGES

WHRDs, including the women mentioned in this report, often face gendered social pressure on top of physical danger. Even as they perform some of the most dangerous frontline work, their legitimacy is still questioned.

Yelyzaveta Klykov noted that many people around her question whether a woman should be doing this work at all. “Many people are afraid of doing this work or expect someone else to do it. A lot of people say a woman shouldn’t be doing this, that I have my own life to lead. My mom has resigned herself to it now and is supportive.” Human Rights First has similarly heard expressions of doubt and disapproval about women’s ability to carry out the dangerous work of evacuations. **Julia Indyk** noted one dimension in which gender provides a practical advantage: “Women are able to do this work because we’re not wanted for the military.”

²⁵ <https://www.thestradd.com/news/im-focused-on-what-needs-to-be-done-why-a-ukrainian-violinist-returned-home-to-volunteer-in-the-war-effort/18166.article>



Lydmyla (Milla) Chausova.



Alla Feshchenko.

At the same time, women bring specific skills to this environment. Polina Kulish observed of **Yuliia Keleberda**: “It’s important to keep everybody calm in those situations, and to avoid any panic. Women can bring a certain empathy and calmness to those situations, and she knew how to do that. It’s a really important skill, and she was very good at it.” **Yelyzaveta** expressed a similar view: “I think women can bring a calmness to some of these situations.”

Alla Feshchenko observed that the large-scale mobilisation of men into the military has created new space for women in community organising and governance: “There are more opportunities for women now, and women have the skills to play important roles in communities where there is conflict, by de-escalating tensions with the council.”

LACK OF RESOURCES

Funding and equipment shortfalls are a persistent challenge for WHRDs doing frontline work. **Lydmyla (Milla) Chausova** subsidises her activism through her work selling cosmetics and said that raising money was a constant challenge. “International media interest and political interest are fading from Ukraine now. It’s harder to get attention for this work.” She said she always needs money for car repairs, and never takes time off. “There’s too much to do.”

Nataliia Halunenko told Human Rights First, “The main problem is the lack of money,” she said. “Fuel is becoming more expensive, and this is a very important aspect of the work. And the density of shelling is very high, so very often things, cars, food, and high-value appliances are simply destroyed by rockets or fire.”²⁶

The equipment available to evacuation teams has improved in some areas - the White Angels unit received armored vehicles by early 2026 - but the threat environment has also escalated, with Russian drone technology advancing quickly, extending the range of attacks well beyond where they were a year ago²⁷, and standard drone-detection equipment can no longer reliably detect all the munitions now being deployed against evacuation vehicles.

Julia Indyk noted the attrition of the volunteer workforce itself as a resource problem: “We’re losing more volunteers to do this job - some are being killed, some taken into the army.” The pool of people able and willing to do this work is shrinking even as the need grows.

²⁶ <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/driving-to-the-rescue-kharkivs-lifesaving-volunteers/>

²⁷ <https://united24media.com/latest-news/russia-unleashes-next-gen-lancet-drone-with-extended-range-and-deadlier-payload-in-ukraine-11935>; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/jan/23/russia-deploys-new-high-speed-drones-amid-claims-they-contain-western-parts>; <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2026/03/27/8027474/>.

Conclusion

As in other conflicts, women activists in Ukraine are saving lives and delivering essential services at great risk to themselves. Much of this work goes unreported as international media attention to the war fades, and documenting these efforts is itself dangerous. WHRDs on the eastern front, facing constant physical threat and acute resource shortages, continue to carry out lifesaving work. Their role is critical not only in immediate response, but in local conflict resolution and the rebuilding of Ukraine's civil society after the war.

Recommendations

1. International organisations, diplomats, and multilateral institutions should conduct regular visits to Ukraine, focused on WHRDs, including those engaged in humanitarian work, and publicly report on the risks they face.
2. Governments and international actors should ensure the meaningful inclusion of WHRDs in peace processes and humanitarian decision-making.
3. Donors should visit Kharkiv and elsewhere along the eastern front, assess the situation for themselves, and directly support WHRDs and women-led organizations.
4. States should integrate a gender perspective into legal and policy frameworks relating to HRDs.
5. International partners should strengthen protections against online and offline targeting of WHRDs, including harassment, surveillance, and smear campaigns

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.

Acknowledgements

This report was researched and written by Brian Dooley and Suchita Uppal. It was edited by Camila Rice-Aguilar.

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