

# **Girls and Young Feminist Activists at the Forefront Against Russia's Imperialist War in Ukraine**

*February 24, 2023, one year since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine*

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## SUMMARY

Today marks one year since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a war that has [created the largest humanitarian crisis in Europe since WWII](#). The painful and devastating impact of the war has already amounted to over [18,000 deaths](#), the [displacement of millions](#), [destruction of over 50% of the country's energy infrastructure which is essential for vital services](#). The toll of devastation, humanitarian crises, and war crimes - [including sharply increasing sexual violence that has already impacted girls and women from the age of 4 to 80](#) - is expected to be far worse than currently documented and continues to affect every single part of Ukrainians' lives.

## COMPOUNDED CRISES

*"The war is making poverty, inequalities, and absence of appropriate social assistance on a national level more of a problem than it was before. They may not seem feminist issues but in fact they are. Those who hugely suffer from such circumstances are women existing in a constant state of vulnerability" Ivanka, Yana, Zhenya and Tanya of Bilkis*

Girls and young feminist activists, especially disability rights activists, LGBTQIA+ activists, migrants, and others living at the intersections of marginalised identities, are experiencing both the war and the complexities of displacement in very real ways. Routes out of Ukraine are more dangerous and host countries, through oppressive policies and measures, are not providing refuge to those from marginalised identities. In addition, there are networks of refugees and labour migrants displaced from other conflicts who settled in Ukraine for whom isolation and marginalisation has been further compounded by this new crisis.

## GIRLS AND YOUNG FEMINISTS ON THE FRONTLINES, YET INVISIBILISED AND UNDER-RESOURCED

Despite being disproportionately impacted by the war, girls and young feminists are leading frontline response efforts in Ukraine - reaching and supporting the needs that the international humanitarian sector, which has received most of the funding for Ukraine response efforts, is failing to reach.

Girls and Young Feminists are providing: emergency evacuation and relocation support; mental, emotional, and physical care services, accompaniment; and food, shelter, and medicine. Anastasia of Feminist Lodge shares about their efforts: *"Our main priority is humanitarian aid, and we have two main approaches to this work. Our first approach: we use our activist, feminist network in different cities to find ways to send help to the occupied territories. We have already sent large batches of medications, hygiene products, and baby food to Kherson, Berdyansk, and Zaporizhzhia region, the 70% of which is occupied, to the frontline cities like Kramatorsk. We find the right people and build this logistical supply network. There are studies that show that vast majority of humanitarian aid in Ukraine is provided by the efforts of civil society. We also noticed that at the beginning, we simply did it, and didn't state that our aid is feminist humanitarian aid."*

**THE INTERSECTION AND INTERCONNECTION OF WAR AND CRISES**

Injustices and inequality contribute to war and crises, and are part of larger systems of imperialism, expansionism and militarisation across the world. Yet, most crises are systematically overlooked or erased. At this very moment, there are brutal wars, occupations, and conflicts happening in Ethiopia, Chad, Somalia, Western Sahara, Occupied Palestine, Yemen, Myanmar, Afghanistan and in so many other places across the world.

In Syria, where Russia's brutal military intervention has been largely ignored, Russia's war in Ukraine has had an immediate impact on its food supply, energy systems, economic situation, and the [minimal resourcing it received to support emergency relief efforts](#) - all in a country that has been in a humanitarian crisis for over 10 years. And, with the earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria in February, the devastation further prioritises the need to provide immediate support to Syria.

As funders, we navigate complex territory with each emergent crisis. As we watch the humanitarian and philanthropic sectors mobilise as images of war in Europe flood our TV screens and timelines, we know it is our political responsibility to ensure even a small portion of these resources reach those most impacted - and most systematically distanced from money. At the same time, we hold the deeply uncomfortable truth that the multiple crises experienced by Black and Brown bodies in every corner of the globe never make it onto the news, into mass mailer fundraisers or the closed room discussions of philanthropic boardrooms. It is our political responsibility to continue to name these crises - and move money directly to them - even as we mobilise with and for the girls and young feminists of Ukraine.

## RESOURCING GIRLS AND YOUNG FEMINISTS IN UKRAINE

Over the last year a handful of funders, including women and feminist funders, children rights funders and human rights funders, have stepped into action to mobilise and move flexible resources to grassroots efforts led by women, girls, women, trans and non-binary led groups and organisations. Funders made concerted efforts to organise themselves and reduce burden for activists, with new coordination mechanisms being set up. This can be seen through the regular feminist coordination space held by Global Fund for Women and Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights and other key efforts of solidarity between funders and organisations. In this publication, [Ukrainian Women's Fund](#), [Disability Rights Fund](#), [Global Fund for Children](#), [Global Fund for Women](#), [Global Resilience Fund](#), and [Urgent Action Fund for Women Human Rights](#) share their insight and reflections on their efforts to resource girl and young feminist led efforts in response to the war.

## SOLIDARITY REQUIRES ACTION

As Ukraine continues to fight for its survival and freedom, girls and young feminist activists are showing up with bravery to respond and sustain vital frontline work, we must show-up and respond to their call to action. As Funders in solidarity with girls and young feminist activists and movements in Ukraine, we share these **key recommendations**:

- Ensure sustained, flexible and responsive funding for grassroots response efforts in Ukraine, especially those led by girls and young activists

- Recognise, and create space for Ukrainian girls and young activists to describe, lead, and shape the decisions that impact their lives
- Ensure deeper collaboration, dialogue, and accountability between funders and activists
- Sitting in the complexities of war and peace, make space for uncomfortable truths, debate and dialogue as the basis of solidarity
- Fund in a way that actively contributes to decolonising humanitarian aid
- Practise solidarity and disrupt the systems of oppression that render some lives and crises under-resourced and undervalued

## **TOWARDS A POLITICAL FEMINIST PEACE**

“As feminists, moving away from the binary of war and peace towards living in safety, dignity, and freedom means being intentional and willing to unpack the uncomfortable truth of naming things as they are and demanding more accountability. Within our various identities, we need to recognise the dynamics and manifestations of the multilayered oppression against young people and girls affected by wars and crises, which is explicitly demonstrated in our political responses to these crises. **Our work as feminists will always be incomplete if we focus only on resourcing those affected by war. Ultimately, true solidarity and accountability must also be directed towards a feminist political peace.**” Sandie, Purposeful, Occupied Palestine

*“even after almost a year, we are NOT used to the whistles of flying missiles and loud explosions. We are not used to waking up in the middle of the night and running to a bomb shelter, basement or corridor, using the “two walls” rule.” Iryna of Young Feminists of Odesa*

*“The war is making poverty, inequalities, and absence of appropriate social assistance on a national level more of a problem than it was before. They may not seem feminist issues but in fact they are.” Ivanka, Yana, Zhenya and Tanya of Bilkis*

*“There are studies that show that 99,7% of humanitarian aid in Ukraine is provided by the efforts of civil society. We also noticed that at the beginning, we simply did it, and didn’t state that our aid is feminist humanitarian aid.” Anastasia of Feminist Lodge*

*“Big mainstream channels tell about how many countries and organisations are helping us. At the same time, the work of grassroots initiatives is invisible.” Masha of Resew*

*“Solidarity. This word has gained a new sense for Ukrainian feminists after February 24, 2022. We know how important it is for us to support and to be supported, to feel ourselves a part of the community. We believe that only together Ukrainians can resist Russian aggression and everyone’s contribution is important for our future.” Ukrainian Women’s Fund*

# Girls and Young Feminist Activists at the Forefront Against Russia's Imperialist War in Ukraine

## CONTEXT

Today marks one year since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which is only expected to intensify. A war that has [created the largest humanitarian crisis in Europe since WWII](#), driven by Russia's ruling elite imperialist agenda, seeking exploitation and occupation of former occupied USSR countries and beyond. A war where, despite and because of being disproportionately impacted, girls and young feminists are at the frontline of response efforts from supporting evacuations and relocations, to providing direct services, supplies, food, socio-emotional care, and developing support networks within Ukraine and beyond.

For Ukraine, the invasion in February 2022 came after persistent alarms were raised by the Ukrainian people who had faced Russia's invasion attacks since the spring of 2014 when [Russia occupied Ukrainian territories](#) and increased their misinformation campaigns to undermine Ukraine's democracy and autonomy.

The painful and devastating impact of Russia's war in Ukraine has already amounted to over [18,000 deaths](#), the [displacement of millions](#), and the [destruction of over 50% of the country's energy infrastructure which is essential for vital services](#) (including health care, education, water, and heat). In the current occupied Ukraine territories, the United Nations Commission has documented ["patterns of summary executions, unlawful confinement, torture, ill-treatment, rape and other sexual violence committed in areas occupied by Russian armed forces across the four regions on which it focused. People have been detained, some have been unlawfully deported to the Russian Federation, and many are still reported missing. Sexual violence has affected victims of all ages. Family members, including children, were sometimes forced to witness the crimes."](#) As Alena of Charitable Organisation Positive Women of Khmelnytskyi describes: *"Russia is setting up concentration camps, transporting people in masses to Siberia, kidnapping activists in the occupied territories, and Russian soldiers are robbing, raping and abusing people for fun."*

The toll of devastation, humanitarian crises, and war crimes is expected to be far worse than currently documented and continues to affect every single part of Ukrainian's lives.

Iryna of Young Feminists of Odesa city shares:

*"Since the beginning of the full-scale war, on 24 February 2022, our initiative group of activists, like all Ukrainians, has been facing constant shelling of cities, rocket attacks on residential buildings and civilians, kindergartens and schools, hospitals and maternity hospitals for a year*

*now. Every Ukrainian hears the loud sound of a siren almost every day, although we used to hear this sound only in horror films. But even after almost a year, we are NOT used to the whistles of flying missiles and loud explosions. We are not used to waking up in the middle of the night and running to a bomb shelter, basement or corridor, using the "two walls" rule."*

and Rostik, a Global Fund for Children panelist adds:

*"[the war] changed everyone in Ukraine. Every single person. It changed the way of thinking. All the problems we had one week before seem like nothing. We are focusing on our friends and families being alive because that is all that we need. I really want this war to end soon."*<sup>1</sup>

## COMPOUNDED CRISES

*"The war is making poverty, inequalities, and absence of appropriate social assistance on a national level more of a problem than it was before. They may not seem as feminist issues but in fact they are. Those who hugely suffer from such circumstances are women existing in a constant state of vulnerability" Ivanka, Yana, Zhenya and Tanya of Bilkis*

Girls and young feminist activists, especially disability rights activists, LGBTQIA+ activists, migrants, and others living at the intersections of marginalised identities, are experiencing both the war and the complexities of displacement in very real ways. The war has had an acute impact on girls and women; [65% are internally displaced](#), [1 in 5 - even before the war - experienced gender-based violence](#), and [face higher food insecurity and malnutrition, worsened access to energy](#), and are being excluded from participating in decision making spaces. People with disabilities are being left behind; the [UN reported that many are being abandoned or trapped in their homes or institutions with no access to support services](#), and [have limited or no access to emergency information. Women and girls with disabilities face higher risk of rape and sexual violence](#). For the LGBTQIA+ communities, [discrimination and violence have been aggravated during the war. Essential life-saving and affirming medications are denied, many cannot leave the country due to denial at check-points, financial and safety difficulties, and when seeking asylum many are facing entry denials, discrimination, and anti-LBGTQIA+ policies](#).

*"War added a new identity: a refugee. It's a challenge for me but also a privilege: not every person with disabilities in Ukraine has a possibility to flee from the country. It was not a hard or easy decision. It was the only way to survive as a wheelchair user." Tanya of [Fight for Right](#), an organisation of Persons with disabilities leading emergency response for Ukrainians with disabilities, shared via [a tweet](#).*

Routes out of Ukraine are more dangerous and host countries, through oppressive policies and measures, are not providing refuge to those from marginalised identities. In addition, there are

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<sup>1</sup> [Click here to read Rostik's interview with Maria Creamer, Senior Communications Officer of the Global Fund for Children.](#)

networks of refugees displaced from other conflicts in the region who settled in Ukraine for whom isolation and marginalisation has been further compounded by this new crisis.

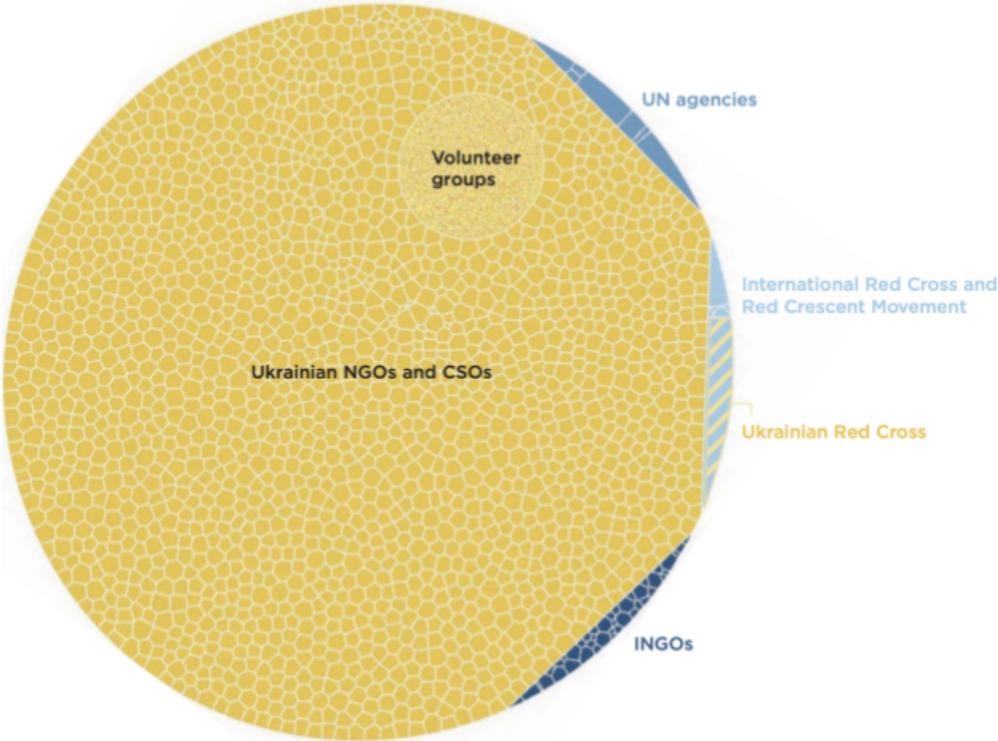
Girls and young activists are experiencing the Ukraine war in complex and multi-layered ways across borders. At the same time, networks of solidarity amongst young activist groups across the region are providing sources of essential and life sustaining support, solidarity, and practical action.

## GIRLS AND YOUNG FEMINISTS ON THE FRONTLINES, YET INVISIBILISED AND UNDER-RESOURCED

Girls and young feminists are leading frontline response efforts in Ukraine- reaching and supporting the needs that the international humanitarian sector, who has received most of the funding for Ukraine response efforts, is failing to reach. As Urgent Action Fund shares, and the graph reflects, “there is an astounding difference between who is doing the work and who is receiving the funding for the Ukraine humanitarian response. [Thus,] what matters is not necessarily what we fund, but who and how we fund. ”

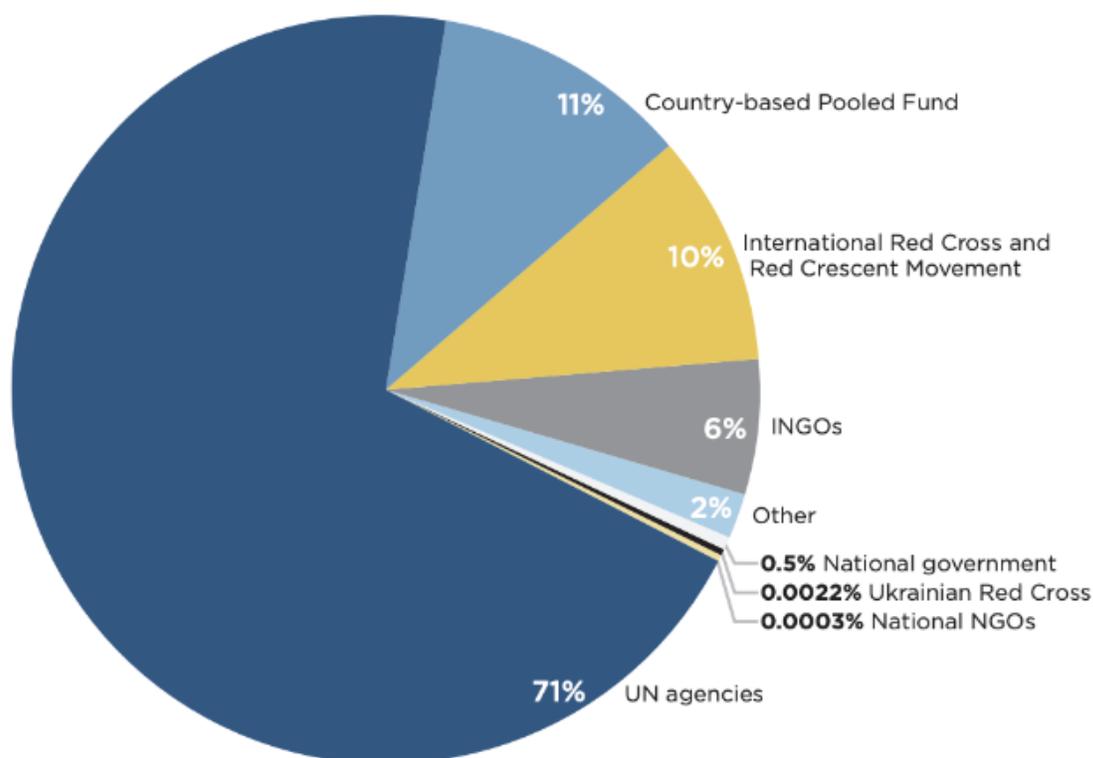
**Figure 1: Operational presence**

Humanitarian providers inside Ukraine are depicted here by number of organizations and their average staff size.



[Description of image: Circular chart that shows the operational presence of humanitarian provides inside Ukraine, depicted by the number of organizations and their average staff size. Almost 90% of the chart represents Ukrainian NGOs and CSOs. The remaining groups are: volunteer groups (2nd largest amount), UN agencies ( less than 10%), International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (less than 10%), Ukrainian Red Cross (less than 10%), and INGOs (less than 10%). Data sources: [www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/ukraine\\_review\\_2022.pdf](http://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/ukraine_review_2022.pdf)]

**Figure 3: Allocation of humanitarian contributions as of 23 May 2022**



Source: UN FTS 2022

[Description of image: Circular chart that shows the the allocation of humanitarian contributions as of 23 May 2022. 71% to UN agencies, 11% to Country-based Pooled Fund, 10% to International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, 6% to Interntational Non-governmental Organisations, 2% Other, 0.5% to National Government, 0.0022% to Ukrainian Red Cross, 0.0003% National Non-governmental Organisations.), and INGOs (less than 10%). Data sources: UN FTS 2022 and [www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/ukraine\\_review\\_2022.pdf](http://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/ukraine_review_2022.pdf)]

Young feminists on the frontline are providing: emergency evacuation and relocation support; mental, emotional, and physical care services, accompaniment; and food, shelter, and medicine. In addition they are working on the documentation of crimes and the impact of the war, as well as on advocacy and awareness efforts in regional and international spaces. Some young activists share about their efforts:

- *“With the outbreak of war in our country, the volume of work for our initiative group has only increased, we continued to support the feminist community and their immediate environment, helping to solve the problems of those who come to us: legal, psychological and humanitarian needs that women and girls have as a result of the hostilities. We organise transfers and help them leave the hot spots for safer regions and countries, find and rent temporary accommodation, provide them with necessary clothing and food. We provide online legal advice to women. Our volunteer psychologist conducts individual sessions via Skype. Our assistance extends not only to those who live near us in Odesa, but also to those who have decided to move to a safer place. This year we have helped about 500 women and girls. The electricity situation in Odesa Oblast remains the worst in Ukraine. The lights are switched on for a maximum of 2-3 hours a day. Due to the problems with electricity and heating, the need for thermal underwear and power banks is also growing. We partially meet these needs and provide the requested assistance, but the demand exceeds our capacity.”* Iryna of Young Feminists of Odesa
- *“We began by evacuating people from the hotspots. We searched for transport from Mariupol, Kherson, Chernihiv and other cities. That was the first stage, when we were doing it 20 hours a day. Then the evacuation began. We told people where should they go, how can they leave the city, who and when can provide them with accommodation, and we made connections with locals. At the same time, we always needed humanitarian aid. We required food and evacuation funding, as many people didn't have money for that. Once the mass evacuation was over, we started thinking of the next stage, when these people that wanted to flee fled, and we kept working with the ones that stayed. We helped dozens of people to find accommodation. Some of them has lost their home due to certain circumstances, so we helped them to find a new home. Not shelter, but home. We helped someone find a job. And that was where new challenges and needs arose. It turned out that some people that we thought were successfully moved abroad have problems there. For instance, in Germany they have problems with registration, they can't find a place to stay or seek medical help. So we began to solve these problems as well. That was somewhen at the end of April or May. We defined our goals, received money from the fund, and kept helping with medications, food, and equipment for those of our members that are currently in the army.”* Anonymous
- *“Our main priority is humanitarian aid, and we have two main approaches to this work. Our first approach: we use our activist, feminist network in different cities to find ways to send help to the occupied territories. We have already sent large batches of medications, hygiene products, and baby food to Kherson, Berdyansk, and Zaporizhzhia*

*region, 70% of which is occupied, to the frontline cities like Kramatorsk. We find the right people and build this logistical supply network. There are studies that show that the vast majority of humanitarian aid in Ukraine is provided by the efforts of civil society. We also noticed that at the beginning, we simply did it, and didn't state that our aid is feminist humanitarian aid."* - Anastasia of Feminist Lodge

- *"Many women lost their jobs or the resources they had after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Confusion, fear, loss of security - this is just a short list of the emotions that Ukraine has been experiencing since 24 February 2022. In March 2022, we launched our volunteer initiative "Help Ukrainian women find a job". As part of this initiative, we provided women with job search advice, mentoring support, and held online events on self-discovery, career track, self-esteem, and career change. We also held a week-long online intensive course on "How to find a job during the war". [Currently,] our main goal is to provide as much information as possible, to provide various opportunities for women. In particular, we hold psychotherapeutic group meetings, trainings with career counsellors and meetings with companies that implement gender policies."* Iryna of Women UA
- *"During summer our initiative sent a lot of humanitarian aid to those in need. We didn't expect how hard this would appear: infinite boxes and visits to Nova Poshta. Another aspect of our work turns out as cooperation with foreign European groups or individuals. In the last few months, we also returned to pre-war activism such as street protests, making zines, a new project "The space of things", and different types of educational content in social networks. At the same time we are working to not let our country transform into an undemocratic state."* Ivanka, Yana, Zhenya, and Tanya of Bilkis
- *"Queer and trans\*people have gradually moved on from the shock of the first year of the war and solved some of the challenges for themselves. Some return to their hometowns, mobilisation and advocacy activities are held. Trans\* people, for example, have been arranging apartments for six months to spend time together, see new faces, and help each other in humanitarian issues. There is an understanding that the LGBTQI+ community has already experienced the worst times when we fought for our own lives in a free country. Now we are gradually developing organisational capacity and expanding communications - to understand how many LGBTQ+ people live in Ukraine and what their needs are."* Anastasiia of Cohort
- *"The damage done by Russia is difficult to measure. We focused our activities on hygiene care for menstruating people and medication for people with mental disorders. This volunteer work takes up most of our time. And there is almost no strength for other activities. This is full-time work and it is paid for by the gratitude of people and our awareness that we have closed the vital issues of the family for a month. Women\* always have a greater burden, but with blackouts and constant rocket fire, this burden is multiplied by 100. We created an anonymous online project where women and queers share their experiences. And each story takes the ground from under your feet. You don't know how to help and change the situation in a person's life. And you can't do that. Because Russia is to blame for all the horrors that people experience! But you wipe your*

tears and look for an opportunity to correct the consequences of the war that Russia started. And thank the Armed Forces of Ukraine for every day you live." Julia of FemSolutions

## **RESOURCING GIRLS AND YOUNG FEMINISTS IN UKRAINE**

Within hours of the full scale invasion, our grantee partners in Ukraine reached out asking for support, and activists advisors from the region proposed ways to reach groups and move to action to ensure we were in timely solidarity with girls and young feminists in Ukraine.

### **Resourcing a core cohort of young feminist groups:**

Our response in Ukraine reflects the needs we've heard directly from girls and young feminists. Over the last year, through our resourcing resistance portfolio, we have moved flexible rapid response grants, over 250,000 USD, to more than 25 girl and young feminist led groups in Ukraine who are directly responding to the situation and showing up for their communities. These grants continue to be renewed based on what activists tell us they need, and the resources we are able to mobilise. The large majority of groups are unregistered and informal, led by activists under 30 years old and operating with extremely small budgets.

### **Participation and accountability at speed:**

From the beginning, our approach has been driven by, and in response to, the needs of girls and young feminists from Ukraine and the region, called to action and accountable to them in all we do. This aligns to our broader practice of participatory grant making and working deep relationship and partnership in crises and beyond<sup>2</sup>- ensuring decisions are made by and for girls and young activists.

In practice in a crisis context, this has meant convening small panels of advisors from the region and using online communication to ensure they are supported in making rapid and informed decisions on resource allocations. It also means compensating people for their time, and recognising and removing guilt when they are too exhausted or overwhelmed to show up. With funding coming in dribs and drabs, and wanting to move money as quickly as we could, it required regular communication with advisors, and their continued outreach to groups. Without our advisors and the support of young feminist groups and sister feminist funders, we could not do this work. Beyond moving the money, we have made efforts to work with activists in co-convening space with other activists and funders.

Ultimately, working with activists in humanitarian and crisis contexts means we are constantly in a learning process of what it means to be in genuine solidarity and questioning and sense checking our own practices. Collaborating with activists who are often joining calls from bomb shelters, with intermittent access to electricity, who are exhausted and deeply frustrated, who

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<sup>2</sup> [Click here to learn about our work to support girl and young feminist activists organising against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.](#)

have been forced to flee Ukraine, but work tirelessly for their people, has meant, we need to truly hold the tension of when participation is meaningful, desired or possible. This means working at a rhythm that is guided by what is possible and what makes sense in volatile contexts. It has also been key to reflect on the fact that activists should not have to take on the emotional and mental labour to educate and inform funders, especially during the acute crisis. It also means learning to acknowledge our desire to go fast, in a state of urgency, and temper that with the reality that this situation will not end quickly. And at the same time, when we can move resources with the speed and agility needed by our grantee partners.

What we are learning is that we can not make assumptions, especially about what they need, and we must be open to challenging ourselves in the way we show up.

### **Moving money on behalf of the feminist funding ecosystem:**

Purposeful quickly shared this commitment with partners and expressed a willingness to move money on their behalf without charging an overhead when they could not move to unregistered groups or were experiencing difficulties. We see this as an important part of our role as a feminist funder embedded in a broader ecosystem of mutual support and shared accountability. On this basis, we have also moved money on behalf of the Disability Rights Fund, Oak Foundation, and FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund, totalling more than 350,000 USD.

### **Bridging the Funder-Activist Gap:**

In addition to providing rapid response funding in Ukraine, we have worked with advisors and grantee partners from Ukraine and the region to convene three activist-funder dialogues, in partnership with Feminist Workshop. These were well attended by diverse funders across the funding ecosystem and acted as a chance for young feminist activists to be directly heard by funders and share the frontline responses they were leading. This also served to organise funders and shine a light on the limits and failures of key humanitarian actors to reach girls and young activists who were organising at the community level.

### **An ecosystem of funders**

Over the last year a handful of funders, including women and feminist funders, children rights funders and human rights funders, have stepped into action to mobilise and move flexible resources to grassroots efforts led by women, girls, women, trans and non-binary led groups and organisations. Funders made concerted efforts to organise themselves and reduce burden for activists, with new coordination mechanisms being set up. This can be seen through the regular feminist coordination space held by Global Fund for Women and Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights and other key efforts of solidarity between funders and organisations.

Below are key insights from partners and allied funders who have directly resourced girl and young feminist led efforts in response to the war. It is not a complete list, but highlights some of

the critical work being done. Their continued work is vital to supporting grassroots movements in the war and recovery.

### **Ukrainian Women's Fund**

*Solidarity. This word has gained a new sense for Ukrainian feminists after February 24, 2022. We know how important it is for us to support and to be supported, to feel ourselves a part of the community. We believe that only together Ukrainians can resist Russian aggression and everyone's contribution is important for our future. This is what solidarity is for us – the solidarity of feminists from different regions, backgrounds, views, and different generations.*

*We often hear that separate programs for different audiences, including young women and girls, are more effective than inclusive ones. Our answer has always been that we need both. We need to empower young women activists and their organisations but at the same time, we need a mainstream feminist movement that is open and supportive of the young generation. Our joint movement.*

*This is what solidarity means for us at Ukrainian Women's Fund. And this is the movement we are building through the core support to young feminists' organisations, travel grants to young activists to participate in international events, inviting young women-leaders to participate in the capacity building programs for the movement and, ensuring that the voice of young feminists is heard when the movement is discussing joint values, strategies and plans for the future.*

*And this is our message for other donors. Invest in solidarity within the movement, and support the young generation of leaders, because this is how the feminist future should look like!*

### **Disability Rights Fund**

Jen and Rosa reflected on their response collaboration: *“When Russia invaded Ukraine and completely upended the lives of everyone – particularly women and girls, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised populations – we knew help was needed, and that these were the groups that would get left behind.”* To move with trust, speed, and solidarity needed in the moment, the Disability Rights Fund partnered with Purposeful to quickly move resources to organisations of persons with disabilities with a focus on young disabled activists and disabled women-led groups. This process was a *“a chance to connect with our core, to centre our values, and to foreground solidarity over structure, partnership over process. A chance to move beyond an organisational approach to a collective organising strategy.”* [Click here to read full article published in Alliance Magazine.](#)

### **Global Fund for Children**

*“The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has been devastating for millions of Ukrainian children and youth. Millions have been scattered across Europe and the world. No matter where they are though-as internally displaced people within Ukraine or in another*

*country, Ukrainian youth are coming together in unprecedented numbers to help one another and their country. Ukrainian youth were already among the most technologically skilled populations in the world-and Ukrainian youth activists have put all that knowledge into action to connect with Ukrainians and other young allies in Europe and the world.*

*But now, a year after the initial invasion, many Ukrainians youth activists are running out of resources and energy. They are exhausted from constantly working to help their friends and families and communities. This is not the time for donors and supporters to decrease their attention and resources. This is the time to maximise donor resources to help Ukrainian activists lead the way to a better Ukraine. And it's time for donors to trust these activists to do the work. Donors need to make fewer requirements and recommendations and listen and learn more. Provide resources, not restrictions.” - Joseph of Global Fund for Children*

### **Global Fund for Women**

“Since before the Ukraine invasion we have been tapping into collective action and organising with peer feminist funders, women’s rights organisations and activists from Ukraine and bordering countries affected by this unjust war. We have joined several of the meetings organised by Purposeful which has been a great way for us to hear directly from young feminist activists on how we can support their efforts on the ground. In addition to the organising, we have also been prioritising funding feminist led organisations that are pivoting and doing feminist crisis response, focusing on those serving most marginalised communities that don’t have access to humanitarian aid or funding.” - Sandra

And Polina, Global Fund for Women’s Adolescent Girls Advisory Council advisor, expands: “Global Fund for Women is highly committed to including people of different origins into the community, and thus it is familiar with supporting colleagues in war or crisis. Diversity in Global Fund for Women helped to create a network of people who are not discouraged because of such horrible, devastating events; instead, these events add fuel to the fire of the fight for justice.”

### **Urgent Action Fund for Women Human Rights**

*After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Urgent Action Fund was uniquely positioned to support those on the frontlines due to our rapid response grantmaking model and existing network in the region. Our greatest strength is our deep, trust-based relationships with local activist movements. This enabled us to anticipate the conflict and send out an urgent appeal even before the war broke out. To date, we’ve awarded nearly \$3 million and over 150 grants to activists in Ukraine and the surrounding region. Our average grant size was around \$17,000. We funded activists and groups affected by the Ukraine crisis throughout 16 countries.*

*Because we know how essential it is to support collective care strategies to address activist burnout, we supported Ukrainian feminist activists to host a long-term retreat space in Poland for peer activists and their families to catch their breath and rest before returning to their vital*

*work. Because we know how essential it is to uplift the leadership of young feminists, we supported a vibrant network of young feminists building alliances across diverse regions affected by Russian imperialism to develop a groundbreaking feminist decolonial agenda for the region. As the conflict continues, we aim to resource the resilience of feminist movements in Ukraine by enhancing the collective care, protection, and survival of feminist activists, particularly those from and advocating for marginalised communities, and by supporting the sustenance of their activism and organising efforts.*

## **SOLIDARITY REQUIRES ACTION**

*“Over the past two weeks, people's tension and fear has been growing, as all the news reports suggest that the Russian aggressor has amassed half a million troops near our borders and is planning a second full-scale attack on our country. People are preparing for massive rocket attacks, stocking up on food, water and warm clothes.” - Iryna of Young Feminists of Odesa city*

As Ukraine continues to fight for its survival and freedom, girls and young feminist activists continue showing up with bravery to respond and sustain vital frontline work, funders must show-up and respond to their call to action.

Yosh of Feminist Workshop describes: *“we have seen how the millions of dollars flowing into Ukraine after 2014 are playing a dubious role for civil society as a whole. Grant logic often whitewashes the reputation of the people who provide this support and settles in the pockets of fund managers to a great extent. Such spending of money leads to the fact that now we have a group of “professionals” who are good at writing reports and measuring everything, but know little about working with people at the grassroots.. And this actually is an obstacle for civil society. Now activists are in a situation where they have to prove that they are doing real work, on the one hand, to these “professional” managers, while they spontaneously self-organise to not only provide humanitarian aid, but also to respond to the problems of corruption, violence and discrimination that have not disappeared from our society.*

*And on the other hand, we have to debate with Western funds. Sometimes these debates concern the support of the army, because in the policies of the foundations it is written that the army is an oppressive tool against women, and for them it is also necessary to maintain neutrality. But the Ukrainian army is women (30% of the army). Sometimes the debate concerns the nature of coverage of internal problems in Ukraine, such as crimes by the Ukrainian army, corruption, attacks on LGBTIQ+. Because the powerful Russian propaganda machine uses available examples to destroy Ukraine.”*

Our experience in resourcing activists in humanitarian and emergency contexts has shown us that girls and young feminists continue to be unrecognised for their contributions during crises, remain underfunded and experience barriers to access funding or decision-making tables. With around [\\$30.9B](#) in annual funding for humanitarian assistance, less than [5% is reaching women's rights organisations](#) and, we suspect, an even smaller fraction for girl and youth-led emergency response work.

## Key Recommendations

As Funders in solidarity with girls and young feminist activists and movements in Ukraine, we share these **key recommendations**:

### **1. Ensure sustained, flexible and responsive funding for grassroots response efforts in Ukraine, especially those led by girls and young activists**

*“Our call for funders is to listen to local organisers and responders, follow the lead of women, girls, gender nonconforming people and give as much unrestricted long-term funding as possible.”* Sandra, Global Fund for Women

Girls and young feminists are first responders when a crisis strikes and are critical actors in medium and long-term recovery efforts. Despite the critical emergency response work of girls and young activists to the war in Ukraine, they are receiving a tiny portion of the funding. As an anonymous activist describes: *“this period of spontaneous humanitarian aid is over, and we are getting less of that. It is true for both foreign and local aid.”* In the midst of war, our responsibility must be to provide stable support that activists can trust and rely on - and define on their own terms.

### **2. Recognise, and create space for Ukrainian girls and young activists to describe, lead, and shape the decisions that impact their lives.**

*“Support of Ukrainian civil society is not only money, it is visibility and recognition of the work being done.”* YOSH of Feminist Workshop

The humanitarian sector is divided by siloes that are focused on immediate response needs and are often extremely top-down in their approach, leaving little room for the visibility of community-based work and much less that which is led by girls, trans youth and young women. Further, traditional humanitarian response efforts fail to reach adolescent girls and young feminists in their response efforts and invisibilise the critical work that girls and women are doing during crises. We must actively create space for, value and amplify the efforts of girls, children and young activists in responding to crisis contexts. This means Ukrainian representation, Ukrainian perspectives and Ukrainian voices on key issues related to their lived realities and related policies and funding.

*“Big mainstream channels talk about how many countries and organisations are helping us. At the same time, the work of grassroots initiatives is invisible. Everyone wants to measure the impact by quantity, but it’s a weird way to measure it.”* - Masha of Resew

### **3. Ensure deeper collaboration, dialogue, and accountability between funder and activists**

[“In an ideal future, affected communities are able to articulate the type of assistance they need, who is best placed to offer that assistance, how to assess the effectiveness of different responses, and how to ensure the accountability of response efforts.”](#)<sup>3</sup>

Responding to crises in the ways activists truly need requires trust-based relationships grounded in mutual accountability. The communities are the experts of their reality and they will be leading recovery work- long after the international humanitarian response system leaves. To develop trusting relationships, we must commit to open and continuous dialogues between funders and activists - bridging barriers between what funders assume, and what activists actually need. While also ensuring it is through a non-extractive or tokenising approach. As Jen and Rosa described: *“When we face barriers in our practices and our positionalities, we are most likely to transcend them in relationship with our peers, friends and comrades. This work is always better together.”*

#### **4. Sitting in the complexities of war and peace, making space for uncomfortable truths, debate and dialogue as the basis of solidarity**

To move unrestricted resources to activists in war zones is to acknowledge the blurry, complex and highly contested meanings of war and peace. There is an urgent need for deeper cross-generational and transnational dialogue to understand the sometimes uncomfortable truth of violence in liberation movements and how this connects to, feeds off and is compounded by the profitisation of war on all sides. Rigid ideological boundaries that don't respond to the realities of what it means to survive in a war zone can reinforce harm. Being open to dialogue, building spaces of convergence and relationships of solidarity are the only ways we might get closer to lives of dignity and freedom. This conversation is complex and loaded - but it is contingent on those of us seeking to move resources in solidarity to look beyond the binaries of war and peace to a more nuanced understanding of what activists need to define safety on their own terms. Similarly, we need to encourage an expanded understanding of 'crisis' that is contextualised and shaped by people with lived experiences, as Angelika shares *“in our region we have experienced crises for decades - understanding the layering of the crises and difference between an acute emergency and a crisis is important.”*

*“They think that war ends in peace. In their world, this is how it ends: there was news on TV about the war in country X (some distant and “uncivilised” country), and then the horrific footage stopped being shown. And in general, the news from this country disappeared, because “peace has come”. When you watch a war on TV, it is very easy to believe that “there are no winners in war”. But in reality, war always ends in someone's victory, whether overt or covert. Only after one side wins and the other loses does peace come. And the content of peace depends on which side of the conflict wins the war.*

*All these western “peacekeeping” initiatives in the midst of a conflict are essentially “we don't care who wins or loses in your conflict. Just sit down at the table and start making peace.” We*

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<sup>3</sup> [Toward a Feminist Placed Based Response to Forced Displacement](#) report by Women's Refugee Commission, Feminist Humanitarian Network, and Quicksand.

*don't care who raped and who was raped. Just make peace, conflict is bad. Ukrainians, agree to peace on any terms! Don't you understand that the longer the war lasts, the more people die? These open letters from feminists outrage me, but do not surprise me. It's a typical example of how people rely on ideological templates instead of thinking with their heads."* Alena of Charitable Organization Positive Women of Khmelnytskyi

## **5. Fund in a way that actively contributes to decolonising humanitarian aid**

From the experiences and lessons shared by girls and young feminists who are impacted by crises as well as others working on emergency response, we know that we must address the *humanitarian industrial complex* - the undemocratic, top-down, siloed, and centralised control of power and wealth in the humanitarian sector to maintain socio-political and economic leverage. The status quo only works to reinforce unjust and inefficient solutions that further exacerbate crises and overlook systemic injustices - while erasing the role of specific governments, agencies, and businesses that are fueling the very crises they are meant to be 'solving' - [one example of this is climate change](#). And, while we work toward decolonising humanitarian aid, it's important to recognise that it is not a quick solution where we do not use any of the current systems. As Angelika describes: *"there is a space for more nuance and openness for evolving the field rather than saying everything about the current humanitarian system is terrible and needs to be thrown away."*

*"We have heard the urgent call from our feminist partners to politicise and decolonise the mainstream humanitarian response to the crisis. Funders and policymakers need to critically analyse both Russian and Western imperialisms and how they affect the crisis. The humanitarian sector and its donors are perpetuating colonial dynamics that are continuing to cause harm to grassroots communities and activist movements. It is imperative for donors and policymakers to listen to activists working at the community level to understand how to do less harm and how to better support movements, before, during, and after crises."* Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights

## **6. Practice solidarity and disrupt the systems of oppression that render some lives and crises under-resourced and undervalued**

Young activists are experiencing the Ukraine war in complex and multi-layered ways across borders. Crisis is an ever-present reality for so many around the world. Rooted in radical feminist solidarity and understanding the importance of dismantling systemic injustices within the humanitarian sector and emergency response efforts, we must refuse to isolate and ignore the brutal crises impacting communities across the world - both the crises that are capturing headlines and the ones ignored.

This means resourcing the interconnection and intersection of crises and systemic Injustices. **It also means continuing to fund in Ukraine, and resourcing girl and young feminist led groups and organisations across humanitarian contexts in some of the world's most forgotten crises, including in Occupied Palestine, and across the African continent.** It

means making the links between the current intersecting crisis in Syria and the situation in Ukraine, and holding space for transnational dialogue and cross border organising in the service of our collective safety, dignity and freedom.

*“The war is intensifying at an alarming rate, leading to massive violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Contradictions and border violence continue in Europe and globally when it comes to the treatment of Ukrainians in comparison with other refugees and migrants. Funds raised by INGOs and humanitarian agencies continue to fail to reach those who need it most quickly. There is still insufficient focus on the exacerbation of racist, xenophobic, heterosexist violence and discrimination against structurally marginalised groups.”*  
Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Human Rights

## **TOWARDS A POLITICAL FEMINIST PEACE**

*“In Ukraine and across the world, feminist activists have highlighted the need to achieve lasting political peace by holding perpetrators to account for their war crimes and offering the oppressed reparations and prospects of long-term political recovery. While the period after military presence ends is typically less violent, there’s another reality for people affected by war; some lost loved ones, while others no longer have shelter, were sexually abused, were traumatised, and more. The impact of the aftermath of physical war on the dignity, rights, and well-being of the oppressed people, especially girls and young people, and how it influences their livelihoods and dreams for the future is often ignored.*

*Political feminist peace in this context is a collaborative process that requires activists, civil society organisations, funders, the private sector, and governments to implement various measures before, during, and after the war. At the heart of this collaboration is an imperative need for a genuine political will for peacebuilding, especially by those who monopolise and misuse power. **What we have witnessed in political responses to war, and sometimes inherited in Western feminist circles, is an entrenched narrow definition of peace as the absence of war** that ignores the need to fundamentally name and address the reasons and systematic injustices that caused the war in the first place. Furthermore, a deliberate dismissal of power asymmetries is conveyed in an unfair comparison between the violence of the oppressor and the violent ways the oppressed apply in response.*

*When feminist political responses demonstrate a gap between their proclaimed feminist values and their practices and approaches to peace, they explicitly show how they accumulate “progressive” gains at home but continue to be progressive except for oppressed populations, especially women and girls, impacted by the expansion of white supremacist projects.*

*Our feminist vision is that girls and young people live in safety, dignity, and freedom. We believe in the possibility of a world where states abide by the human rights framework enshrined in the UN Charter and international human rights law, and global political peace is attained without double standards of international justice. We recognise how lucrative the absence of the rule of law is, but we further believe in the power that lies in building trust and promoting reconciliation. **We are in awe of the feminist voices that demand accountability, political recovery, and***

**reparations**, especially within the structures of the multilateral political system responsible for world peace.

*As feminists, moving away from the binary of war and peace towards living in safety, dignity, and freedom means being intentional and willing to unpack the uncomfortable truth of naming things as they are and demanding more serious accountability. Within our various identities, we need to recognise the dynamics and manifestations of the multilayered oppression against young people and girls affected by wars and crises, which is explicitly demonstrated in our political responses to these crises. **Our work as feminists will always be incomplete if we focus only on resourcing those affected by war. Ultimately, true solidarity and accountability must also be directed towards a feminist political peace.***

Sandie Hanna, Purposeful, Occupied Palestine

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We are grateful for all the experiences, wisdom, and resources that contributed to the creation of this publication that seeks to highlight the vital frontline response efforts of young feminist in Ukraine and how we, as funders, can take action to show-up with the solidarity that they need.

The publication was developed by the [Global Resilience Fund](#), a Fund - facilitated by [Purposeful](#) - supporting girls and young feminist activists responding to humanitarian crisis. In partnership with [Bilkis](#), [Cohort](#), [FemSolution](#), [Feminist Lodge](#), [Feminist Workshop](#), [ReSew](#), [Ukrainian Women's Fund](#), Young Feminists of Odesa city, [Disability Rights Fund](#), [Global Fund for Children](#), [Global Fund for Women](#), and [Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights](#). Translated by Olenka Gu and Kira Leonova, and illustrated by [Liza Yablonskaya](#), a Ukrainian illustrator and photographer.

## UKRAINIAN YOUNG FEMINIST GROUPS AND FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS

[Bilkis](#) is an independent intersectional and inclusive feminist initiative based in Kharkiv. In the summer and a portion of autumn, Bilkis provided humanitarian aid for east regions. For now Bilkis is leading a social projects called “The space of things” where you can come and leave things that you no longer use and also take the things you need, and “Hodivnychka” which provides food on the street on weekly basis for those who need. Additionally, they are working on creating zines and different types of educational materials.

[Cohort](#) is an organisation advocating for the trans community in Ukraine. Their advocacy revolves around three central aims: destigmatising transness by educating members of the nation's press; constructing a database of friendly medical professionals who could serve as expert advocates in the political battle to depathologise trans identity; and helping members of the community find footholds in the nation's workforce. As a response to the war, Cohort has provided vital support to the trans community including: medical supplies, food, relocation funds, and shelter.

Charitable Organisation Positive Women of Khmelnytskyi supports the development of the women's feminist movement in Ukraine and the creation of conditions for self-realization and improvement of the lives of women and their families in difficult life circumstances, especially women who have suffered from war, and women who have suffered from gender-based violence. They support and advocate for women from vulnerable groups and women living with HIV.

[FemSolution](#) is a Ukrainian grassroots left-wing horizontal feminist initiative, founded by students in 2016. Since the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, this group focuses on the distribution of menstrual hygiene products for people affected by the war and of medical supplies for people with mental health issues. Both needs are strongly gendered, as women and girls are disproportionately affected by armed conflicts.

[Feminist Lodge](#) is a grassroots initiative, founded in Kyiv in 2017 in order to promote gender equality through educational and cultural activities. The war has forced its members to switch to providing vulnerable women and their families with humanitarian aid, which they distribute in the countryside, including the temporarily occupied territories, as well as to internally displaced people.

[Feminist Workshop](#) operates in Lviv and surrounding region, working with refugees and older women. Since the beginning of the war, Feminist workshop has widened the range of its activities, including babysitting and helping displaced women with accommodation, providing elderly care and psychological support and other humanitarian issues.

[Fight for Right](#) is an organisation that fights for the rights of people with disabilities in Ukraine. They are working to ensure every person with disabilities knows their human rights and freely exercises them. And with the beginning of the full-scale invasion, they have organised emergency response to help Ukrainians with disabilities with evacuation, providing targeted assistance, psychological support, and legal advice.

[ReSew](#) is a horizontal, anti-authoritarian, queer feminist initiative from Kyiv that makes comfortable and affordable clothing for trans and nonbinary people, conducts workshops in upcycling and repairing textile items for the LGBTQIA+ and feminist communities.

[Ukrainian Women's Fund](#) is the only women's fund in Ukraine and has been supporting women's rights/feminist organisations, as well as the women's rights movement and gender equality for twenty consecutive years. Since the escalation of Russia's military aggressions, the Fund has been supporting the urgent needs for water, food, medicine, hygiene, communications, and other basic needs of the most vulnerable groups of women and girls.

[Women UA](#) is an initiative brings together women with experience in recruiting and other fields in order to help finding work for other women, mothers with children who lost their jobs due to the war and have now appeared in western Ukraine or abroad. began as an initiative that works to create a supportive environment for Ukrainian women who have lost their resources, guidance, feel exhausted and in danger due to the war.

Young Feminists of Odesa city initiative began its active work 3 years ago. Prior to the start of active hostilities throughout Ukraine (February 2022), the initiative group worked to create a WGSS (women and girls safe space) for the formation of a feminist community in Odesa and the region.

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#### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

We encourage you to support the organisations listed above. If you would like to partner, donate, and/or request more information, please email us at [info@wearepurposeful.org](mailto:info@wearepurposeful.org)