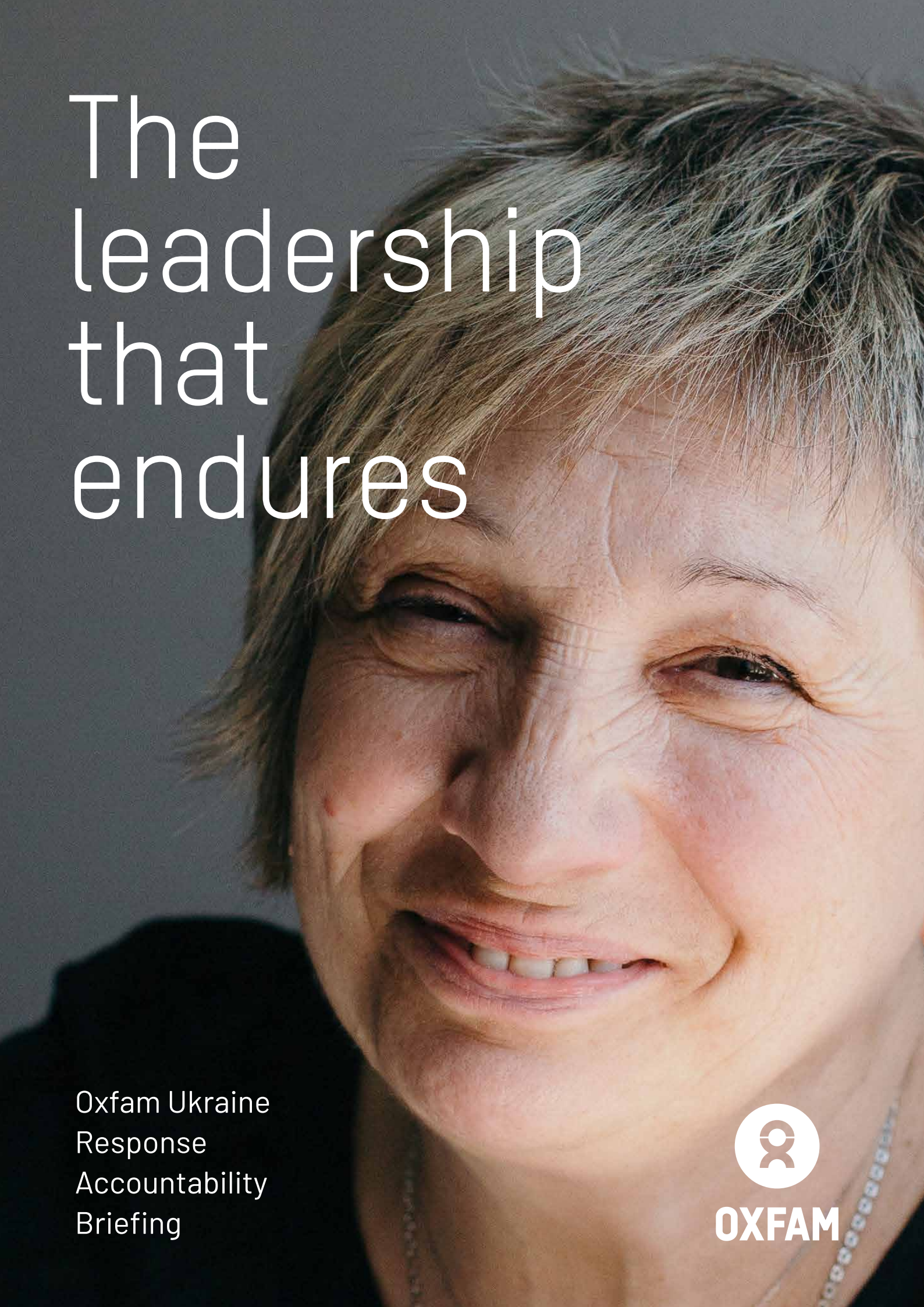
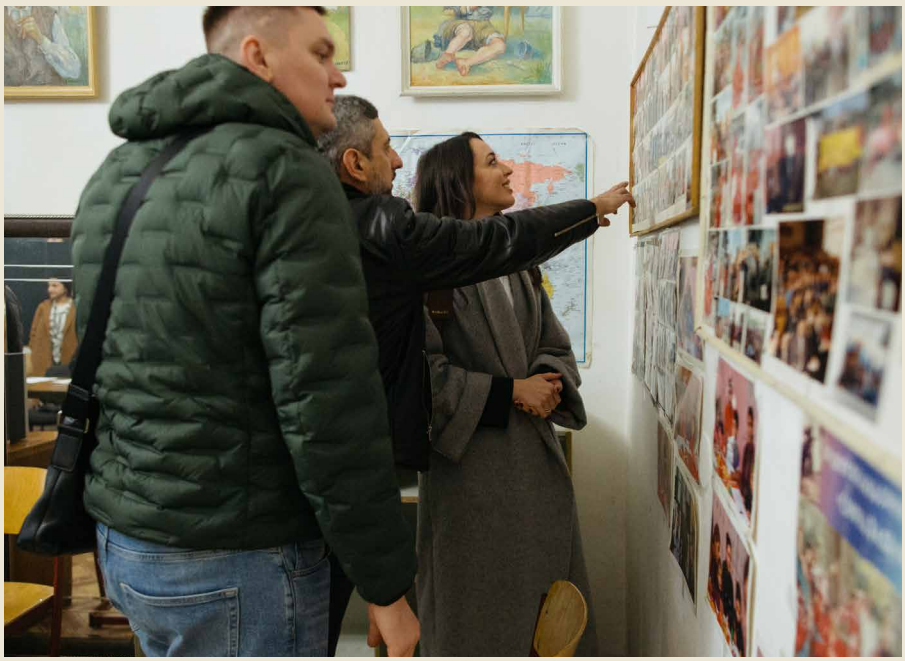
The leadership that endures



Oxfam Ukraine Response Accountability Briefing

OXFAM

TABLE OF CONTENTS



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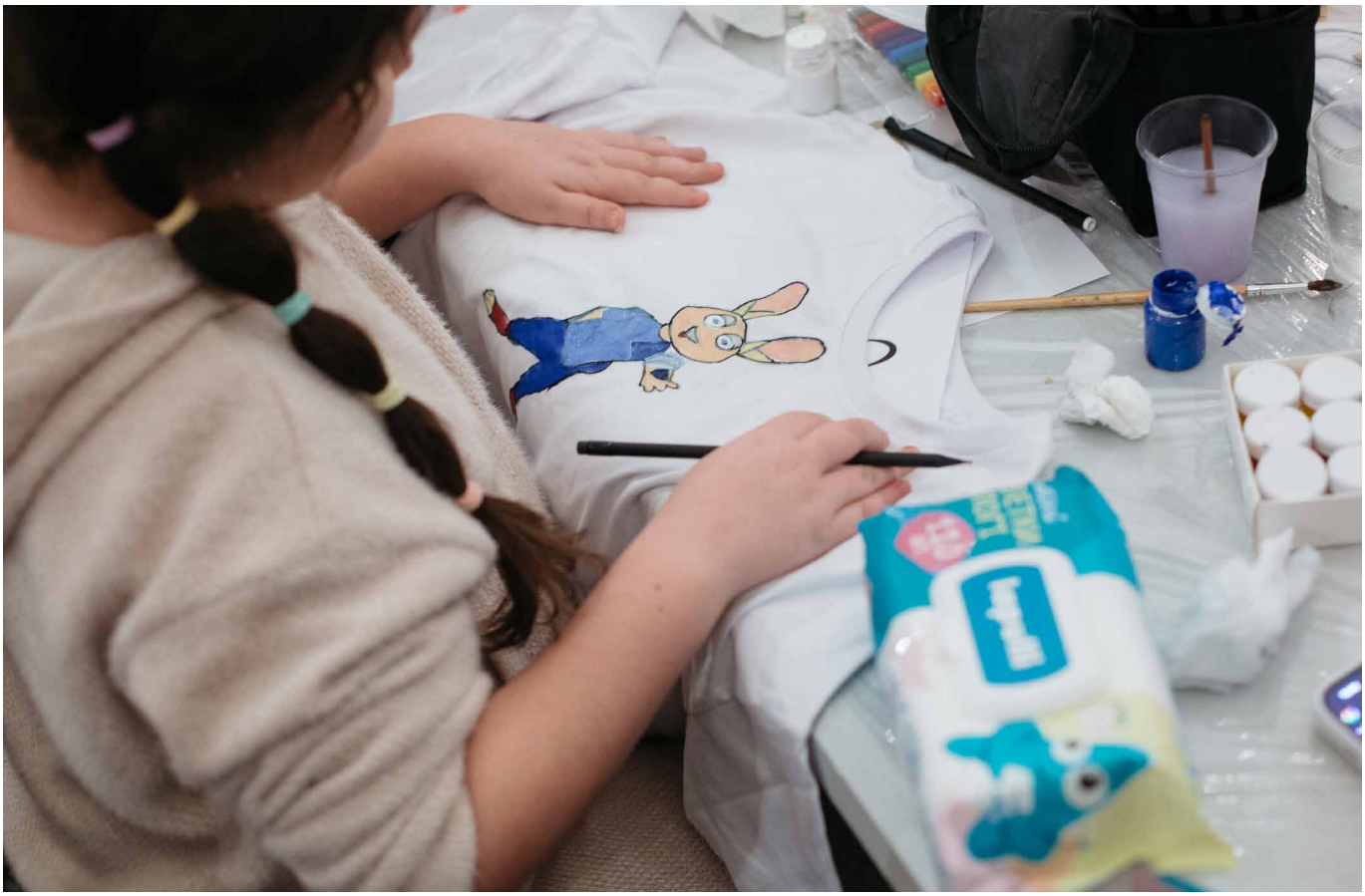
The leadership that **ENDURES**

> Ukrainian organizations are already leading humanitarian action, shaping recovery efforts, and helping communities navigate an uncertain future.



Four years after the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, Ukraine's humanitarian response continues to be shaped by the people and organizations closest to the communities affected by the war. In this edition of Oxfam's Ukraine Response Accountability Briefing, we invited the leaders of Oxfam's strategic partner organizations to reflect on what leadership means in a context of prolonged crisis, uncertainty, and change.

> **Leadership is is measured more simply: by who shows up, who listens, and who delivers.**

Across these reflections, a common theme emerges: leadership is not defined by visibility, status, or proximity to decision-making spaces. It is found in organizations that remain rooted in their communities, that listen before they act, and that continue adapting as people's needs evolve.

For Nataliia Gurjii, Head of ROKADA, leadership begins with staying close to people's lived realities. "Working directly with people means seeing where the system fails," she writes. For Oksana Moskalenko of Women's Consortium of Ukraine, leadership became more grounded when organizations responded directly to families sheltering in basements and communities trying to imagine a future amid uncertainty. For Oleksii Bezhan of Peaceful Heaven of Kharkiv, leadership is is measured more simply: by who shows up, who listens, and who delivers.

Other reflections highlight the importance of leadership that is inclusive, collective, and willing to share power. Anna Leonova of Gay Alliance of Ukraine (GAU) describes the importance of recognizing and responding to the distinct experiences of LGBTQIA+ communities during the war, who are often invisible in humanitarian and state systems. Anzhelika Bielova of Voice of Romni reflects on advocating for greater access to funding and opportunities for other Roma-led organisations, recognising that meaningful progress comes when more voices are able to lead: "Leadership is about watching others rise with you."

Maryna Kurochkina of The Tenth of April emphasizes the importance of ensuring communities themselves are able to shape decisions that affect their

future. For the Tenth of April, "we understand that real change begins locally. Villages, towns, and neighbourhoods must feel empowered to participate in decision-making." Serhii Kolesnyk of Shchedryk reminds us that humanitarian action must also create the conditions for communities to thrive independently long after immediate crises subside.

Together, these reflections offer more than individual perspectives on leadership. They demonstrate that Ukrainian organizations are already leading humanitarian action, shaping recovery efforts, and helping communities navigate an uncertain future.

Four years into the escalation of the war, local leadership is not a future ambition for Ukraine's humanitarian response, it is a present reality. The challenge now is not whether local organizations can lead, but whether the humanitarian system is willing to fully recognize, resource, and support that leadership. This requires more than funding individual projects. It requires investment in the long-term sustainability of Ukrainian civil society, greater access to decision-making spaces, and a willingness from international actors to rethink their own role.

As Oxfam enters the final phase of its time-bound response in Ukraine, these reflections reinforce our conviction that the future of humanitarian action must be shaped by the organizations and communities closest to the crisis. The role of international actors is not to compete with that leadership, but to invest in it, champion it, and create the conditions for it to thrive.

> **Communities must be able to shape decisions that affect their future. We understand that real change begins locally – villages, towns, and neighbourhoods must feel empowered to participate in decision-making.**

We hope these essays contribute to that conversation by providing an opportunity to hear directly from the leaders who are already shaping Ukraine's present and future.

Redefining the FUTURE from the margins

Voice of Romni
Essay by Anzhelika Bielova, Head of Voice of Romni

Leadership is not about coveted titles. In the context of a humanitarian crisis, especially war, leadership is about making necessary but hard decisions. For me, leadership began with decisions no one prepares you for.

When the full-scale invasion began, one of the first decisions I had to make as a mother and as a leader was leaving behind my hometown of Zaporizhzhia. We were on the road for two days until we reached Budapest where our partners supported us by finding temporary shelter for us.

> **Our work goes beyond advocacy alone. We have a holistic approach to supporting Roma communities**

I am from the Roma community, so I know how the Roma community is disproportionately impacted by this war. And so, from Budapest, I started writing grants. By that time, Voice of Romni already existed and was focused on the economic empowerment of Roma women through professional courses and starter kits to support them in their professions. We believe that economic empowerment puts them at a lower risk of gender-based violence.

But organisations don't stay the same in war. Like many organisations, we had to shift to humanitarian response in the first months of the invasion. I eventually returned to Ukraine and saw how massive the needs were, and by that time we were just a small grassroots organisation with unpaid volunteers. We had to adapt quickly, and in doing so, I also had to grow as a leader.

We had to learn systems we had never worked with before. Humanitarian policies, procurement procedures, and other processes were new to us, but they quickly became necessary. I spent long hours attending trainings, studying how established organisations operated, and building structures that would allow us to respond responsibly.

At the same time, I understood that this is not just about updating our systems. When Voice of Romni grew to an organisation of 60 people, trust and proximity became even more important. We have offices in Zakarpattia Oblast (Uzhhorod), Zaporizhzhia Oblast (Zaporizhzhia), Kharkiv Oblast (Kharkiv) and Dnipropetrovsk Oblast (Kryvyi Rih). It is important for me and for everyone at Voice of Romni to always be in touch with the people we serve and to visit communities often.

As our work grew, so did our responsibility to support others beyond our own organisation, because leadership is also about watching others rise with you, it is collective growth and not self-serving. Starting from 2023, we strengthened our advocacy further. One of our strongest advocacy messages was the need for direct funding to Roma-led organisations.

For years, we raised this issue in meetings with UN agencies and international humanitarian partners, highlighting the importance of investing in Roma leadership to be able to effectively support the needs of Roma communities. After sustained dialogues, other Roma civil society organisations started receiving funding, which was a big win for all of us as it marks a shift in localisation in Ukraine.

But the work to advocate for other Roma organisations continues. While there have been changes, direct support for Roma organisations is still lacking plus there are still stereotypes against Roma organisations.

That is why our work goes beyond advocacy alone. We have a holistic approach when it comes to supporting Roma communities. Aside from responding to the urgent needs of communities impacted by the war, we continue to invest in local women leadership and the economic empowerment of Roma women.

> **As our work grew, so did our responsibility to support others beyond our own organisation, because leadership is also about watching others rise with you.**

For us, this kind of leadership will help redefine Ukraine's future. A future where there is more social cohesion and less discrimination against marginalised communities, and where more women hold decision-making power that can push back against the rising challenges of gender inequality. This is the future we are working toward every day.

"We had to learn systems we had never worked with before. Humanitarian policies, procurement procedures, and other processes were new to us, but they quickly became necessary."

FIVE

ways Voice of Romni is building power from the margins

01

They lead from the inside the communities they serve

Voice of Romni (VoR) is led by Roma women who know first-hand the barriers their community face in housing, employment, education, and healthcare, among others. This closeness defines their organizational culture: diversity, equity, and inclusion are not abstract values. VoR hires Roma women and builds their skills through training in humanitarian response, project management, and gender-based violence prevention. Many women who first join as participants in programs gradually take on more active roles in implementation — as facilitators, trainers, or community focal points — strengthening their leadership and ensuring that lived experience directly informs how the organization works on the ground.

02

They work across economic empowerment and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) prevention to transform gender norms

VoR began during COVID-19 by supporting Roma women through short vocational training programs in practical skills such as baking, confectionery, and nail services, enabling women to immediately generate income. This economic work aimed to increase women's financial independence, reduce GBV risks, and challenge long-standing norms that limited their access to education and opportunity. Later, VoR expanded into GBV prevention by raising awareness of different forms of violence and supporting people to recognize and speak about it. They combine this work with structured GBV case management, while also engaging men and boys to promote gender equality.

03

They influenced funding decisions beyond their own organization

For years, Voice of Romni has advocated for the inclusion of Roma-led organizations in both Ukraine's civil society space and the humanitarian response, pushing for Roma communities' needs and priorities to be recognized. Voice of Romni also actively supports smaller grassroots Roma organizations through mentorship in fundraising, communications, and project management, while continuously advocating for more direct funding for Roma-led initiatives. Through both advocacy and frontline leadership, Voice of Romni continues to challenge barriers Roma-led organizations face.

04

They are building long-term economic independence

Amidst the shrinking global humanitarian funding, Voice of Romni is future-proofing their organization and at the same time working to build a better future for the communities they serve. Voice of Romni has established its own social enterprises, including cleaning services and beauty co-working spaces employing Roma women and displaced people. Part of the income generated through these businesses is reinvested into leadership and vocational training for Roma women, grassroots activists, and emerging community leaders.

05

They create spaces for healing, dignity, and community resilience

Voice of Romni does not just work in isolation within Roma communities; they actively build social cohesion across different groups. Through community hubs in Zakarpattia, Zaporizhzhia, Dnipropetrovsk and Kharkiv oblasts, they bring together internally displaced people, including Roma, and host communities. In these spaces, people access psychosocial support, peer connection, and safe environments for children and adults. In this way, VoR creates opportunities for people to meet, understand each other, and build trust, cooperation, and long-term social cohesion.

Leadership beyond the IVORY TOWER

Women's Consortium of Ukraine
Essay by Oksana Moskalenko, Head of Women's Consortium of Ukraine

We come across the words "feminist leadership" a lot, spoken eloquently or written alongside other NGO buzzwords in reports, strategies, and conferences. But for us, actual leadership goes beyond eloquence and theory. It's about leaving the ivory tower, especially in moments of uncertainty.

Before the 2022 full-scale invasion, the Women's Consortium of Ukraine worked to advance gender equality through supporting women's political participation, strengthening women-led and women's rights organisations, and preventing all forms of violence against women and children. Political participation can remain as one example of this broader works.

> **One of our biggest achievements is strengthening the dialogue between communities and local authorities.**

But then came the Russian invasion in 2022. The first month was filled with uncertainty, we did not know which cities would be occupied or which routes would be disrupted. Many logistical routes were disrupted, blocked, or unsafe, making travel difficult and forcing us to organise our work remotely. This was when we launched psychological support, including a hotline.

At the same time, our team grew rapidly. Experts joined us to provide psychological support, process applications for financial assistance, and help manage humanitarian aid sent by international partners. During the first months of the war, our team worked around the clock. We also held regular weekly meetings to review the needs emerging through the hotline and community outreach, allowing us to continuously adapt our response and identify the most effective ways to support people.

This was the moment when leadership left the ivory tower, when the phones started ringing. It became clear that psychological support was urgently needed. We also got in touch with our partner women's organisations, as well as families and children who previously participated in our programmes. People still thank us up to this day for those calls. They say that it helped them leave basements and begin moving again.

Fleeing to safety was not that simple. People lost their homes, their documents, or their resources. Our partners asked how else they could help, and we realized that financial assistance and life-saving information were essential, especially for people evacuating.

Later, we went to the communities and spoke directly to people. Those who were previously under occupation felt lost and didn't know what to do with their future. Through our experts' advice, we started helping people learn to plan gradually: first for three days, then three weeks, then three months, and eventually one year. By April of 2022, we were already talking to communities about recovery. We explained that we could not go back to the past, but something new could be created.

Many communities struggle until now. People are traumatised and are still trying to survive this ongoing war. But even amidst these struggles, communities started finding their voice. One of our biggest achievements is strengthening dialogue between communities and local authorities. We helped people use their voice so they could influence decisions in their local districts. Communities began raising issues such as water quality, topics not previously recognised by authorities. Women leaders also emerged in this process.

Through this work, we learned that leadership should be based on the realities communities face every day. A humanitarian response must be built on real challenges in communities and recognise that people will continue living there long after projects end. Leadership never returns to the ivory tower once it has learned to stand beside people.

5 WAYS

Women's Consortium of Ukraine is changing how communities recover during war

01

They refuse to treat women's rights work as something that could wait until after the war

For Women's Consortium of Ukraine (WCU), humanitarian response goes hand in hand with advocacy and systemic reform. After initially pausing some programmes during the early months of the invasion, WCU realised that laws and policies affecting women and families continue to evolve even during war. The organisation therefore revitalised its long-standing advocacy work, which has been central to its mission since 2001, and returned to monitoring women's political participation, children's rights, and state accountability.

02

They have a strong national reach with a deep focus on rural communities

WCU has a wide geographic presence across 15 regions of Ukraine and collaborates with more than 25 partner organizations within its network. This reach allows the organization to work not only in major cities, but also in smaller towns and rural communities that are often less visible in humanitarian response. Through local partnerships and outreach, WCU helps ensure access to support and participation in areas where opportunities are limited, making recovery more inclusive and locally grounded.

03

They help communities influence local authorities directly

WCU facilitates dialogue between communities and local authorities. In many places where the organisation works, residents initially felt their concerns would not be heard. Through community discussions and local initiatives, WCU helps people become more confident in raising issues publicly and engaging in decision-making. The organisation also supports initiative groups that develop practical community projects, including shelters, multifunctional spaces, and clinic renovations.

04

Women are an important part of this local agency

WCU's feminist leadership prioritises supporting women to move from community participation into active decision-making roles. In 2025, the organisation supported 421 women through leadership trainings, peer-learning sessions, and national forums focused on political participation and local advocacy. This work strengthens women's ability to engage with local authorities, influence community priorities, and contribute to shaping policies that affect their lives, including within the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

05

They treat psychosocial support as part of rebuilding communities

Psychosocial support has been part of WCU's work since 2014, extending beyond individual counselling. Their programmes combine emotional recovery, peer support, youth engagement, and community rebuilding. In 2025, WCU operated hubs across Kyiv, Sumy, Mykolaiv, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts, using art therapy, resilience training, youth clubs, and mobile teams to help children and adults process trauma and regain stability. The organisation also trains specialists and volunteers in psychological first aid and grief support.

HUMANITARIAN response is never one-size-fits-all

Gay Alliance Ukraine
Essay by Anna Leonova, Head of Gay Alliance Ukraine

My actions related to the full-scale war began even before the actual invasion on February 24, 2022, with preparations and consultations. In early February, some of our international partners offered to review our safety policies and warned us about what might come. In Odesa, we were already receiving numerous requests from the LGBTQIA+ community: people asking for help to reach safer places or evacuate abroad.

> **We understood that humanitarian response is never one-size-fits-all: LGBTQIA+ people always navigate additional risks.**

So when the war broke out, this is what we focused on: responding to these requests, mapping routes, and trying to understand which cities were still safe and which might already be occupied. It was chaotic. ATMs and banks were closed, information was scarce, and everything felt like it was collapsing.

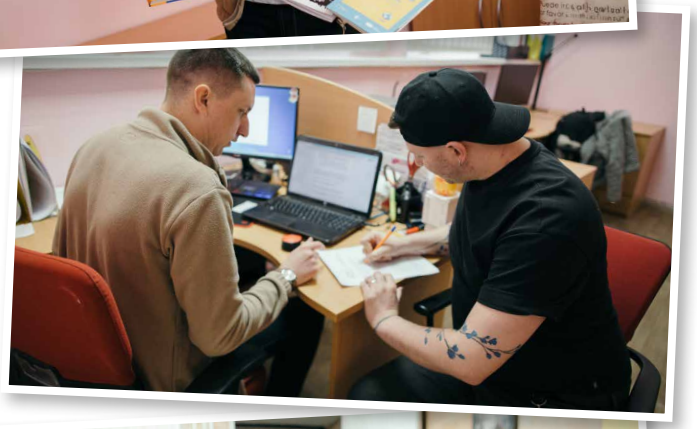
I went to our office in Kyiv, as Russian troops were already gathering in the suburbs. We spoke with the team and made the decision to stay in Ukraine. That decision transformed our organization from a human rights one into a humanitarian one. We started distributing whatever food we could find, because in Kyiv supermarket shelves were half-empty and basic local products were missing. Later, we continued this work closer to the frontlines.

> **Our work was never simple. You cannot just arrive in a village, set up a distribution point and ask LGBTQIA+ people to gather around – that would be unsafe.**

Our work was never simple. You cannot just arrive in a village, set up a distribution point at a school or a local council, and ask LGBTQIA+ people to gather around — that would be unsafe. We had to speak with our donors and explain why standard procedures do not work in this context. That's when we understood that humanitarian response is never one-size-fits-all: LGBTQIA+ people always navigate additional risks.

The LGBTQIA+ community is still not formally recognised as a social group within state systems in Ukraine. This makes them largely invisible in policies and social protection mechanisms, and it also means that their specific needs are often not acknowledged. To ensure that LGBTQIA+ people receive the support they actually need, Ukrainian organizations must be part of the decision-making power that determines where resources go and how they are used.

As a historian, I know that war is often accompanied by a rise in right-wing movements, as well as increasing restrictions on civil rights. We do not want LGBTQIA+ communities to become even less visible in these conditions. That is why everything GAU does is focused not only on addressing immediate needs, but also on ensuring that LGBTQIA+ communities remain part of civic life in Ukraine and active participants in shaping it.



5 Ways

Gay Alliance Ukraine is building a safer future for LGBTQIA+ Ukrainians

01

They have been one of Ukraine's leading LGBTQIA+ rights organizations for more than 15 years

Founded in 2009, Gay Alliance Ukraine (GAU) combines humanitarian assistance, legal protection, advocacy, and public education to support LGBTQIA+ people across Ukraine. Over the years, the organization has evolved from a rights-focused NGO into a multi-layered support network responding to both everyday discrimination and the additional risks created by war and displacement.

02

They created safe spaces and support systems for LGBTQIA+ people displaced by the war

The organization operates community centers in Kyiv, Odesa, Vinnytsia, Mykolaiv, and Kryvyi Rih, where LGBTQIA+ people can access psychosocial support, peer networks, humanitarian aid, and community activities in a safe and inclusive environment. Since the escalation of the war, GAU has also organized dedicated gatherings for LGBTQIA+ internally displaced persons in Kyiv and Odesa, helping people rebuild social connections and reduce isolation after displacement from high-risk areas.

03

They combine mental health support with humanitarian response tailored specifically to LGBTQIA+ needs

In addition to providing food, hygiene kits, shelter support, and medications, GAU delivers long-term psychological counseling, psychological first aid, group therapy sessions, and a national support helpline. This specialized approach is especially important because LGBTQIA+ people in Ukraine often face additional stigma, family rejection, or discrimination while trying to access mainstream humanitarian services. Feedback from community members show that GAU's mental health support has played a critical role in helping people cope with trauma, suicidal thoughts, and social isolation.

04

They strengthen the wider humanitarian sector by training other organizations on LGBTQIA+ inclusion and protection

As part of its partnership with Oxfam, GAU trains staff and volunteers in psychosocial support and psychological first aid while also sharing evidence-based reports on protection risks affecting LGBTQIA+ communities. The organization works with NGOs, healthcare professionals, media representatives, and government actors to improve understanding of LGBTQIA+ protection issues and promote more inclusive humanitarian practices across Ukraine.

05

GAU is pushing for long-term social and institutional change

One of the organization's strategic priorities is advocating for the official recognition of LGBTQIA+ people as a vulnerable social group in Ukraine, which would improve access to social protections and services. GAU is also preparing initiatives aimed at universities across the country, including reviewing institutional ethics policies and providing inclusivity training for students and staff. Through these efforts, the organization is positioning itself not only as a humanitarian actor, but also as a driver of long-term cultural and systemic change in Ukraine.

The Tenth of April
Essay by Maryna Kurochkina, Head of The Tenth of April

Communities writing the Future

Leadership is about making sure power reaches the margins. You do not hold it at the centre if you want to see real change.

Before 2022, The Tenth of April consisted of only about 50 people and we were mainly working in Odesa, Mykolaiv, and Kherson regions. We were providing legal, social, and integration support to communities, especially for asylum seekers, refugees from other countries, or people at risk of statelessness.

> Leadership is about making sure power reaches the margins

After the full-scale invasion, our priorities expanded significantly, and so did our geographical presence. Today, we are present in 12 regions, with close to 1,000 staff members. This meant adjusting quickly and taking on responsibilities we were not used to. This also meant rethinking how we operate internally. As a team, we came together and agreed that we would continue to see ourselves as a local organisation, and this would enable us to have a bigger impact. This means staying close to communities so that we understand their needs.

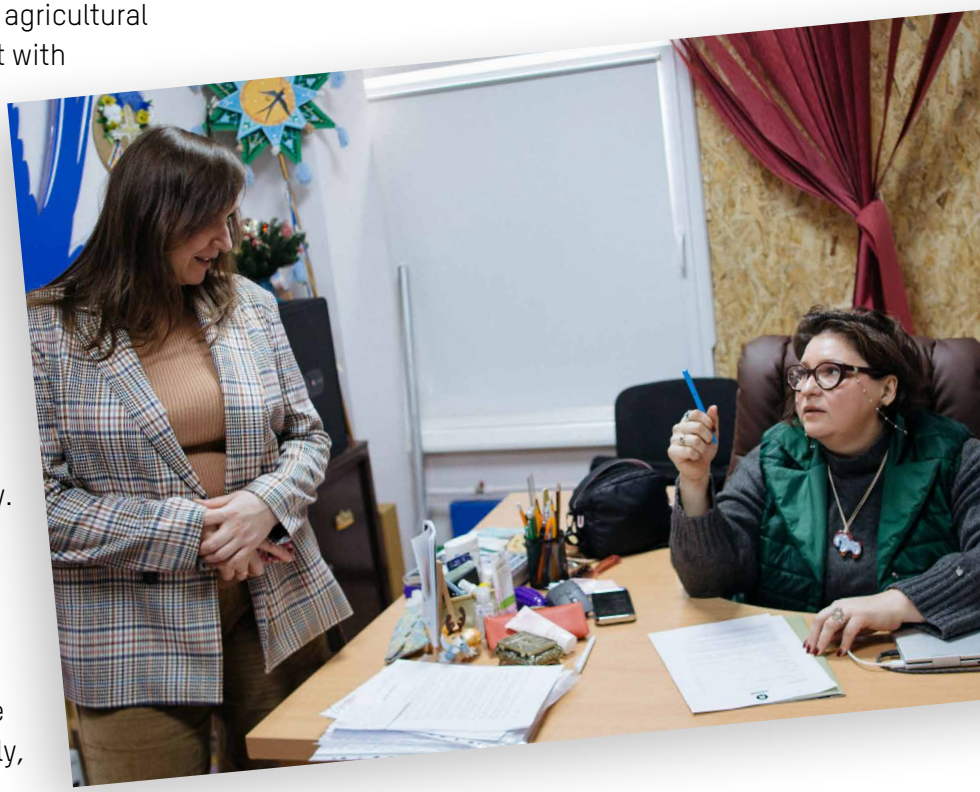
Over time, this proximity showed us that their small initiatives are where leadership lives. For example, there were communities that organised agricultural initiatives and later shared their harvest with internally displaced people. There are cases where there are initiatives that grew into sustainable sources of income that can support families and those around them. Witnessing these initiatives transform communities has been inspiring for us, and so we continue to stand behind them by funding their ideas, helping them navigate local systems, and supporting them as they turn their ideas into reality.

Another important part of our work is creating spaces where leadership is shared. We do this by bringing different communities together, building trust between them, and supporting dialogue so that decisions are shaped collectively, so that these collective voices can influence local systems and policies that affect their daily lives.

We do this by creating practical opportunities for people to meet and build trust across a shared humanity. One example was a football match we organised between teams from diverse backgrounds, with participants who are Ukrainian including Roma communities, as well as refugees and asylum seekers from different countries. For us, success was not about the game itself. Success was seeing that cooperation is possible even in environments where misunderstanding once existed. This work does not stop at dialogue, it also extends to advocacy. For example, we advocated for vulnerable groups to be included in municipal healthcare programmes and child protection systems. We also worked on housing issues for internally displaced persons and compensation for destroyed property. These actions affected not just individuals but entire groups of people.

Through this work in the past four years, we understand that real change begins locally. Villages, towns, and neighbourhoods must feel empowered to participate in decision-making.

Our role is to strengthen communities so that people feel confident writing their country's future, because leadership does not live at the centre. It lives wherever people are trusted to act.



5 things that define The Tenth of April's leadership

01

They started as a very specialised legal organisation

The Tenth of April originally worked almost exclusively on refugee and statelessness law, which is quite a niche area in Ukraine. After the invasion in 2022, they expanded into 12 regions and grew from around 50 staff members to nearly 1,000 to meet the urgent needs. But their legal identity still strongly shapes their humanitarian approach — even in emergency response, they think in terms of rights, status, and legal pathways, not only aid delivery.

02

They invest in ideas from small communities and help them grow

TTA believes that small community initiatives are a core part of how communities survive and recover during war. Because even small efforts can grow into stronger community support systems over time, organization invests in local community initiatives and recovery efforts or locally led initiatives that strengthen community resilience. TTA sees these activities as part of protection; they reduce people's vulnerability and help them cope with immediate risks and stress.

03

They combine technical work with care work

TTA does not separate infrastructure from people's wellbeing. After the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam, they initiated water and engineering projects with a difference. Engineers often travel together with psychologists and social workers so communities could receive both technical and emotional support at the same time. In their programming, they combine legal assistance, psychological support, child protection, GBV prevention, housing, and access to drinking water rather than treating these as disconnected issues. It demonstrates a broader understanding of crisis response: rebuilding infrastructure alone is not enough if people themselves remain exhausted, isolated, or traumatised.

04

They are building a platform for stronger civil society in the South

The Tenth of April is working to strengthen civil society in Southern Ukraine by building a platform that connects local organizations. This platform brings together NGOs, shares information, and helps coordinate responses to community needs more effectively. It also provides support such as training, subgrants, and networking opportunities so smaller organizations can grow and work more sustainably. The idea is to reduce fragmentation and make sure local actors are not working in isolation but as part of a stronger system.

05

They prioritise integrity and realistic action over rapid expansion

Even with their growth, TTA describes their organization as "local" first. Their decisions are guided by what communities actually need and what can be delivered safely and effectively in frontline conditions. TTA places strong emphasis on the quality and relevance of support, even when this requires slowing down or adjusting plans. This approach ensures that programs remain grounded in reality.

Make support ACCESSIBLE in practice, not just on paper

Rokada
Essay by Nataliia Gurjii, Head of Rokada

Our approach has never been about organizing help from a distance. When we receive a call, we go to people. To make this possible, we have dedicated transport in every region where we operate, because access to help often depends not on its existence, but on whether a person can physically reach it.

Before the full-scale invasion, ROKADA worked with refugees and asylum-seekers in Ukraine as one of UNHCR's partners. After the war began, we also started supporting internally displaced people. Many of the needs remained similar: social support, housing, employment, documentation, and integration into new communities. However, the scale was entirely different. As the needs grew, so did our organization.

Working directly with people also means seeing where the system fails. We have encountered cases where individuals with severe disabilities were placed in inaccessible housing and remained effectively trapped for months. These experiences shape our advocacy. We do not design solutions in isolation, we build them from what people actually go through. This allows us to identify gaps in legislation and push for changes that make support accessible in practice, not just on paper. As our work expanded, we became more engaged in shaping how humanitarian response is designed and delivered in Ukraine. We clearly see the need for a Ukrainian vision of localization, and we are actively working toward it as part of a broader alliance.

> **Localization is not just about directing more funding to local organizations, it's about shifting decision-making power.**

For us, localization is not just about directing more funding to local organizations. It is about shifting decision-making power. Too often, responses are based on models developed in entirely different contexts, without sufficient understanding of local realities. In Ukraine, this can lead to ineffective or even harmful approaches. We know, for example, that support should not be concentrated only in frontline areas. Safer regions also require investment, because this is where people rebuild their lives. Without access to housing, jobs, and services there, people are pushed to return to unsafe conditions. Localization also requires responsibility in how aid is delivered. Short-term solutions may be important for addressing immediate needs, but on their own they do not provide sustainable results. Humanitarian assistance should not only help people cope with the consequences of a crisis today, but also create conditions for recovery and greater resilience in the future. Humanitarian organizations should look for more responsible choices.

> **For us, effective humanitarian work means making difficult, context-driven decisions.**

For us, effective humanitarian work means making difficult, context-driven decisions. Ultimately, it is about focusing on what truly protects people, not just what looks "right" from the outside.

5 WAYS

Rokada bridges frontline response and systemic change in Ukraine

01

They adapt their long-standing experience with refugees to internally displaced people

Before 2022, Rokada worked primarily with refugees and asylum seekers in Ukraine. When the invasion began, the organization quickly adapted to the needs of internally displaced people (IDPs) across Ukraine. Rokada is applying its expertise in displacement, protection, and integration to a crisis on a much larger scale, expanding from supporting a relatively small refugee population to helping millions of Ukrainians displaced by the war. What was once a narrow specialization became a national-scale response system.

02

They work through direct community presence rather than remote coordination

Rokada's model is built around continuous physical presence in communities. Their teams do not wait for communities to approach services – they actively travel to people in remote locations, collective centres, and hard-to-reach households. The use of specialised transport is not an add-on but a core operational infrastructure, enabling sustained engagement with people who cannot independently access support. This approach reshapes how needs are identified: through proximity, observation, and accompaniment rather than referral systems alone.

03

They turn frontline casework into systemic advocacy

A defining feature of Rokada's work is the way frontline casework feeds into national advocacy efforts: field teams identify legal inconsistencies, document them through casework, and escalate them into national-level policy discussions. One example involves the recognition of civilians injured by landmines and explosive remnants of war. In the past, such cases could be classified in official records as a "general illness", limiting access to appropriate status, support, and compensation. ROKADA participated in advocacy efforts on this issue alongside other organizations and stakeholders and continues to support affected individuals, as both the legal framework and its implementation still require further improvement.

04

They embed accessibility and inclusion across all programming

Accessibility is not treated as a thematic intervention but as a cross-cutting operational standard. This includes adapting physical infrastructure (such as community spaces and institutional buildings), improving mobility access, and ensuring services are usable for people with disabilities and older persons. This extends to digital infrastructure as well: Rokada has redesigned its website based on testing with users with visual impairments, ensuring compatibility with screen readers and assistive technologies.

05

They help people become part of communities, not just recipients of aid

For Rokada, displacement requires more than emergency support – it also requires helping people rebuild their place in society. The organization works with internally displaced people and host communities to strengthen long-term integration, including through employment support, community initiatives, and support to IDP Councils – groups of internally displaced people who work with local authorities to improve integration. Rather than treating displacement as a temporary condition, Rokada helps people become active members of the communities where they now live.

Shchedryk
Essay by
Serhii Kolesnyk
Head of
Shchedryk

“We want Ukrainian communities to stand on their own”

When the war first began and we stepped into humanitarian work, my only wish was for it to end as quickly as possible. I wanted to distribute aid, help people get through the immediate crisis, and then return to the life we all had before. Back then, I saw this work as something temporary, a response to an emergency.

But over time, my view of humanitarian leadership shifted. I realized that what we are building is not a short-term response, but a systemic effort – one that will continue long after the war is over.

Before 2022, I was part of the rayon (district) council. I had never imagined myself working in the humanitarian sector, but life has its own way of reshaping your path. When the full-scale invasion began, my first instinct was to think about survival, but soon I started thinking about how I could help others.

> My view of humanitarian leadership shifted. I realized that what we are building is not a short-term response, but a systemic effort – one that will continue long after the war is over.

Together with two colleagues, we started organizing the delivery of humanitarian aid across Mykolaiv and the surrounding region. At first, it was a grassroots effort – reactive and driven by urgency. But soon, more and more international donors began arriving in the city. We understood that they needed trusted, formal partners. That's when we decided to register our organization, Shchedryk. In Ukrainian, "Shchedryk" means "generous." It is also the name of a well-known folklore Christmas song. For us, the name carries a deeper meaning: it reflects not only the act of giving, but the spirit of shared support and community care.

As time went on, we moved beyond short-term humanitarian assistance and started thinking strategically about recovery, livelihood, and sustainability. We understood that if we want to see the Ukraine we dream of, we have to build it in a way that allows people and communities to stand on their own.

In our vision, Ukraine is autonomous, self-reliant, and economically strong – no longer dependent on external aid. The support we receive today cannot become a permanent crutch, it should be a bridge toward independence.

> We understood that if we want to see the Ukraine we dream of, we have to build it in a way that allows people and communities to stand on their own.

Our approach is simple: we start with helping the individual, then a community, a village, a town, a region. Step by step, we rebuild not only infrastructure, but the economic resilience and dignity of Ukrainians. Because ultimately, this is not just responding to a crisis, it is shaping our future.

5 ways Shchedryk is shaping humanitarian response and recovery in southern Ukraine

01

They evolved from spontaneous volunteering into a structured humanitarian actor

Shchedryk emerged in the first weeks of the full-scale invasion, when local volunteers and representatives of local government began coordinating humanitarian aid deliveries to Mykolaiv. As humanitarian needs rapidly expanded, Shchedryk gradually developed into a structured organization managing large-scale projects, partnerships with international donors, and complex recovery programming. Shchedryk became part of a wider shift in Ukraine, where local volunteer initiatives grew into experienced humanitarian organizations.

02

They prioritize dignity and self-reliance in recovery programming

For Shchedryk, recovery is closely tied to restoring people's ability to support themselves, make decisions about their future, and remain active within their communities. Through vocational training, small business grants, and employment-focused programs, Shchedryk supports people not only in meeting immediate needs but also in rebuilding stable sources of income. This includes training programs for professions in high local demand, such as public transport drivers, welders, bakers, and tailors.

03

They use local knowledge and relationships to respond quickly to community needs

Since Shchedryk has strong roots in local government and community networks, it works closely with municipalities, local services, and residents across the Mykolaiv and Kherson regions. This includes supporting job opportunities in local transport systems, coordinating assistance with authorities, and helping improve access to services in underserved areas. Through this approach, humanitarian response is connected not only to immediate relief, but also to the longer-term recovery and functioning of communities.

04

They see institutional development as part of humanitarian response

For Shchedryk, humanitarian work is not only about delivering assistance but also about building transparent and sustainable systems. The organization places strong emphasis on audits, financial reporting, safeguarding policies, feedback mechanisms, and staff development. This has enabled Shchedryk to manage larger-scale humanitarian programmes while maintaining consistent operational and accountability standards.

05

They want to strengthen the next generation of local humanitarian organizations

Building on their own experience of rapid institutional growth, Shchedryk moves towards supporting the wider ecosystem of local humanitarian actors. The organization is developing approaches to mentorship and peer learning, sharing expertise in areas such as fundraising, reporting, project management, and organizational development to strengthen smaller initiatives and contribute to a more resilient local sector.

Leadership at the frontlines

Peaceful Heaven of Kharkiv
Essay by
Oleksii Bezhan
Head of
Peaceful Heaven
of Kharkiv

In humanitarian work, we talk about leadership in bold and promising language like accountability, shared responsibility, and partnership. But in many instances, we have seen leadership practised differently, sometimes exercised from a distance, relying mostly on frameworks and strategies designed by those who are far from the people they are meant to serve.

> **In communities living in the frontlines, leadership is about presence, by who shows up, who listens, and who delivers.**

In communities living in the frontlines, leadership is about presence, by who shows up, who listens, and who delivers. For Peaceful Heaven of Kharkiv, leadership did not begin with strategies but with the need to help people.

When PHK started in the early days of the Russian invasion in 2022, it was just four people responding to urgent calls for help. Eventually, more people joined PHK as demands grew. There was no clear strategy yet, the goal was to help people based on what they asked for and by listening closely to what mattered most in the moment. We started with a community kitchen and basic assistance, then expanded to evacuations and temporary housing for people whose homes were destroyed.

This was also how I joined the sector. For me, humanitarian work was not simply a profession but a necessary response to what people are living through. When the invasion began, I was with my family living in Kherson. The region was occupied and I witnessed the shelling, destroyed homes, and the suffering of civilians. In 2023, I joined PHK to expand operations in Kherson, and by 2025 I became head of the organisation, growing alongside its expansion.

Over time, feedback from communities, hotline requests, and monitoring visits helped define our structure and longer-term strategies. Today, this approach is reflected in the practical work we deliver across the regions where we operate.

Some of our work today includes food distribution in high-risk areas, livelihood support such as greenhouses and agricultural inputs like greenhouses, seeds, livestock feed, other farming supplies and reconstruction activities. The organization has also developed evacuation programs that include long-term housing arrangements, where families are relocated and supported through the entire process.

Delivering aid in frontline communities is never easy. There were even times when we had to do repeated reconstruction efforts because buildings repaired by our teams had been damaged by attacks again. But for us, our presence in these locations far outweighs distant leadership. For us, effective leadership is measured not by reporting outputs but by whether assistance reaches people who truly need it.

It was through this proximity to frontline communities that we start to be recognized not only as an implementing partner, but also as a contributor to planning discussions. In coordination meetings, we are asked to provide input based on our experience. We saw that this shift reflected a growing trust in our expertise and operational knowledge.

While international organisations naturally have more experience and have better access to resources, Ukrainian organisations like ours have also grown in the past four years, we improved our systems, and adopted new standards through collaboration with international actors. Yet even as Ukrainian organisations grow stronger, the realities facing civilians remain unchanged. Continued support from the international community remains critical, not as charity, but as a necessary response to the realities people are still living through.

FIVE WAYS

Peaceful Heaven of Kharkiv is leading frontline humanitarian response in Ukraine

01

They built their response around close frontline presence

Peaceful Heaven of Kharkiv (PHK) is closely tied to staying physically present in communities living under constant attacks. The organization continues working in high-risk and frontline areas, like Kherson and Kharkiv oblast, where many organizations cannot regularly operate because of security restrictions. Staff members regularly work under shelling, drone attacks, and repeated destruction, often returning to repair the same buildings multiple times after renewed attacks.

02

They are developing evacuation models focused on long-term stability

PHK focuses on what the organization describes as "full-cycle" evacuation support. Instead of only transporting people out of dangerous areas, the organization helps families relocate to safer regions, secure temporary housing, and navigate the transition process over a longer period. This approach aims to reduce uncertainty for displaced families and support more sustainable relocation.

03

They see coordination as essential to effective humanitarian response

Peaceful Heaven of Kharkiv places strong emphasis on coordination and information-sharing between humanitarian actors operating in the same regions. The organization actively participates in coordination meetings and regularly exchanges information about urgent needs, access constraints, and operational gaps with other organizations. PHK views this cooperation as especially important in frontline regions, where limited access, security risks, and rapidly changing conditions require organizations to work closely together.

04

Many of their staff bring first-hand experience of frontline living

Many PHK staff members, including leadership, have personally experienced occupation, displacement, shelling, or life in frontline regions. Based in Kharkiv — one of Ukraine's most heavily shelled cities — the organization operates in a context many of its staff know first-hand. This shared lived experience shapes how the organization approaches assistance, community trust, and operational decision-making in high-risk areas.

05

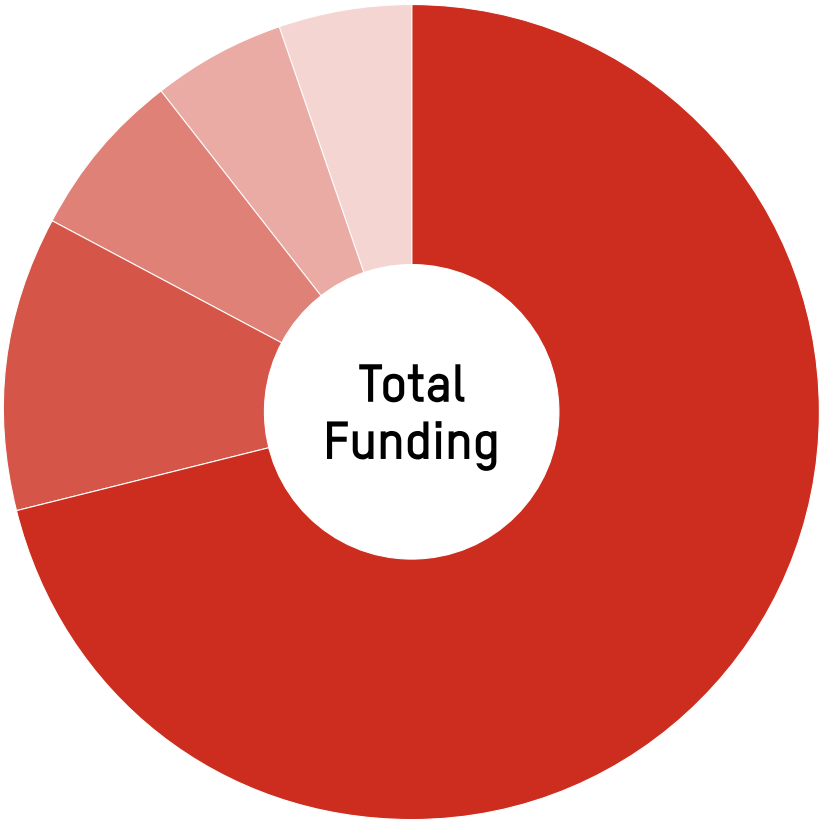
They operate through regional offices and direct community feedback channels

Peaceful Heaven of Kharkiv works through regional branches based in the areas where assistance is delivered, including Kherson and Mykolaiv regions. These field teams are directly connected to communities and operational decision-making. The organization also relies on multiple feedback channels, including hotlines, monitoring visits, and local staff, to collect information on urgent needs, access constraints, and gaps in assistance. This allows PHK to adjust programming based on real-time conditions.

Funding and Expenditure in Ukraine

Total funding for Oxfam's Ukraine response

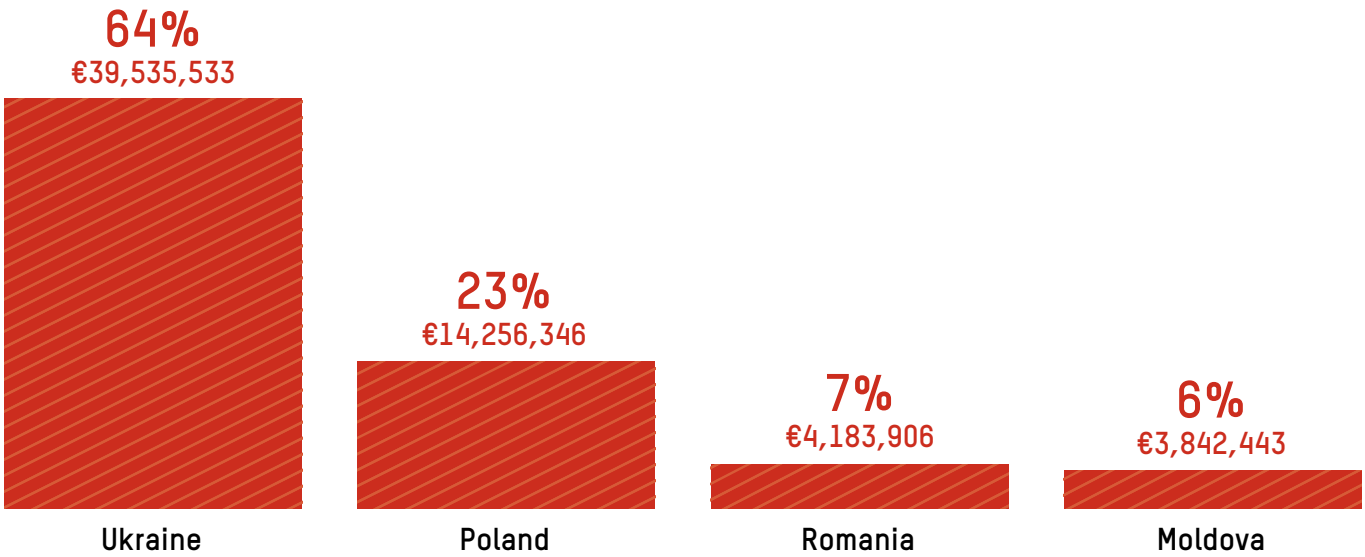
€64,473,587



- OGB (1): € 45,859,135
- ONL (2): € 7,560,000
- ODE (3): € 4,384,484
- OBE (4): € 3,363,368
- Other affiliates (5): € 3,306,600

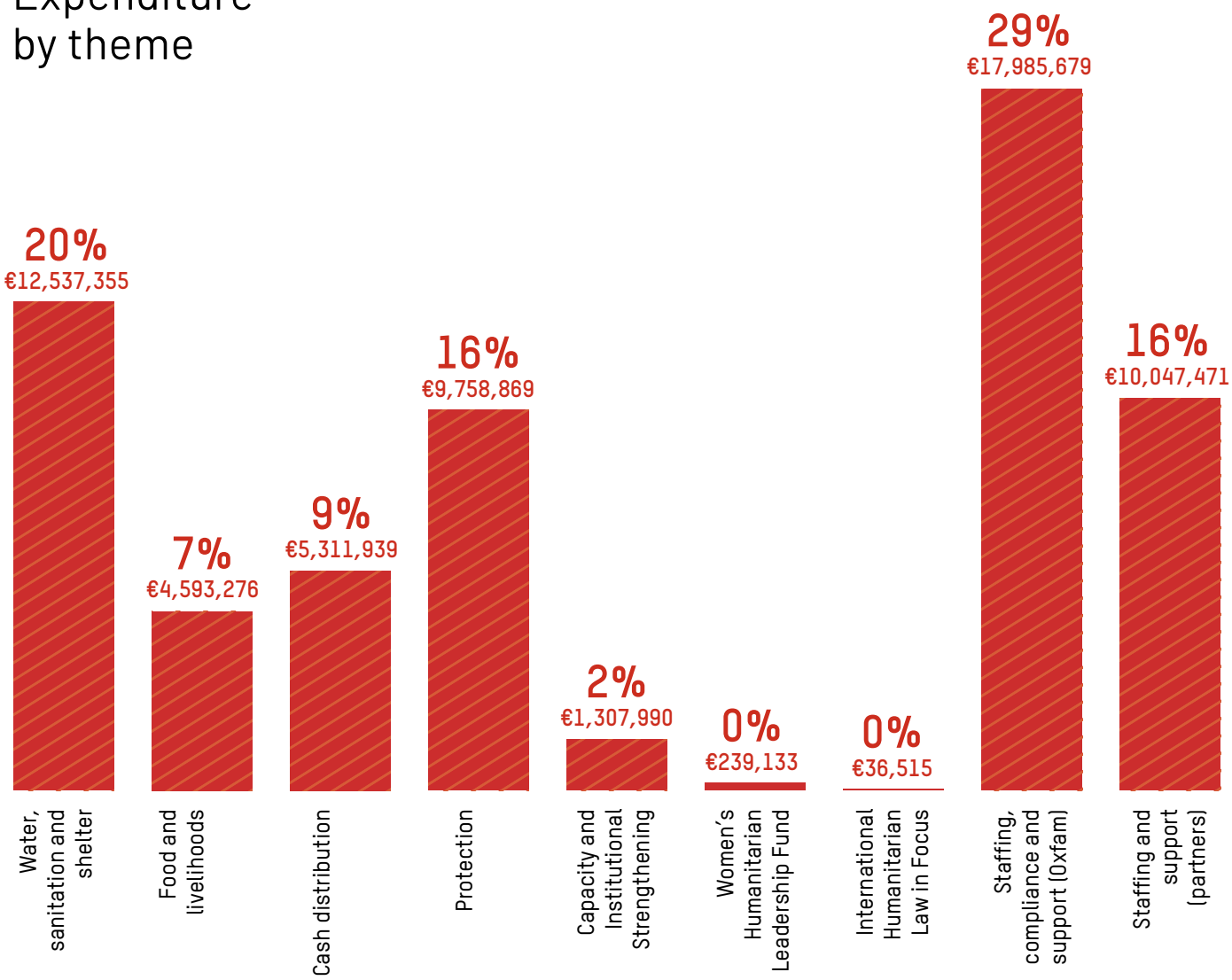
Total expenditure as of 28 February 2026: **€61,818,228**

Oxfam: 29,009,046 (47%) **Partners:** 32,809,182 (53%)



(1) Oxfam Great Britain's contribution includes funds received through the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) (€42m),Ukraine Response Appeal Funds (€3m) and new funds from the Disasters Emergency committee (DEC) through their Collective Initiatives for the Women's Humanitarian Leadership Fund in collaboration with Action Aid (€430k).
(2) 100% of Oxfam Novib's contribution come from funds received through the consortium appeal fund Giro 555. The total contribution to Oxfam from Giro 555 is €12,000,000. Contributions to the following organisations were made for their work in Ukraine at the start of the conflict: Action Contre la Faim, HEKS/EPER, Norwegian Refugee Council, People in Need. €7,560,000 was dedicated to work by the Oxfam Ukraine response across Ukraine, Poland, Moldova and Romania.
(3) Oxfam Germany's contribution includes funds received through the consortium appeal fund BEH (Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft).
(4) 100% of Oxfam Belgium's contribution come from funds received through the consortium appeal fund 12-12.
(5) Other affiliate contributions came from Oxfam Australia, Oxfam Quebec, Oxfam Canada, Oxfam Intermon, Oxfam Denmark, Oxfam France, Oxfam New Zealand, Oxfam Ireland and Oxfam America.

Expenditure by theme



Indirect Cost Recovery (ICR) Sharing

Oxfam Ukraine is committed to sharing Indirect Cost Recovery (ICR) with our local partners, aligning with Oxfam's global policies and commitments to localisation, the Grand Bargain and the Charter for Change. ICR is funding that covers essential operating costs like rent and utilities not tied to specific projects.

From April 2024 onwards, all new partnership agreements included a provision for ICR sharing, a crucial step in supporting the financial sustainability of Oxfam's partners in Ukraine. Oxfam is sharing ICR with our partners at 7% of contract budgets, from the ICR we receive from donors. By doing this, we ensure that partners have access to flexible, unrestricted funding, which is essential for covering overhead and administrative costs, ensuring they have greater stability and sustainability.

According to the Humanitarian Localisation Baseline for Ukraine conducted in 2024, 46% of national organizations that were surveyed stated they never receive funding for their overhead costs. The lack of sufficient funding for overheads prevents these organizations from strengthening their organisations and weakens their long-term sustainability. Oxfam's ICR sharing helps address these gaps, empowering our local partners to take on leadership roles and strengthen their resilience. This approach is a vital component of Oxfam Ukraine's ongoing response strategy, ensuring that local actors are equipped to lead in the humanitarian response.


OXFAM