

How we're supporting LGBTI activists and organisations one year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine

[Blog, Inclusion and Equality, Ukraine](#)

On 24 February 2022, Vladimir Putin ordered the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, leading to the largest armed conflict in Europe since the Second World War. For the last twelve months, civil society organisations across Europe, including ILGA-Europe, have had to run the extra mile to fill in the gaps, but sustainable responses remain a crucial challenge. Here's the five main areas in which we've been working over the past year.

Exactly a year ago at ILGA-Europe we anticipated that the Russian invasion of Ukraine would lead to a war that would last longer than what was generally expected, and that it would have a deep and long-lasting impact on LGBTI people both in Ukraine and Russia, and beyond. We defined our support of those impacted by the invasion, and those helping them, as [a marathon, not a sprint](#).

In the weeks following the February 24 invasion, several civil society organisations in Ukraine, neighbouring countries and beyond rolled up their sleeves to help LGBTI people who were either leaving and staying in the country. LGBTI activists and organisations in Ukraine, for whom providing humanitarian aid is not their main job, took on the mission of setting up shelters or getting medicines to those who needed them, getting people to borders or helping those who had difficulties leaving to safety, while organisations in host countries took on the task of welcoming and helping LGBTI refugees navigate the new circumstances they found themselves in.

At ILGA-Europe we asked ourselves two questions. How do we quickly react and give immediate and targeted help the LGBTI organisations and people who are providing humanitarian responses? And how could we provide that help on a more sustainable, longer-term level?

There have been and continue to be no simple solutions. Supporting the work is complex, dynamic and constantly evolving, but we have the resources and capacity to meaningfully provide targeted support, and we've known from the start that needing to be adaptable had to be part of our approach.

We certainly don't want to write a version of this blog in a year's time, but we must be prepared for the consequences of a war that has no clear end. This is how ILGA-Europe have been working over the past 12 months to support the movement as it tries to support those affected by the war in Ukraine.

Supporting humanitarian work through funding

It is not breaking news that organisations in Ukraine need economic support. We have shifted a major proportion of our re-granting funds to give emergency help to local groups providing safety, food and shelter for LGBTI people. We are also supporting organisations outside Ukraine who are working with refugees and supply chains. During the last year we have issued 13 grants to Ukrainian groups with the total budget of €192,134, and six grants to other organisations in neighboring countries to support refugees from Ukraine, with a total budget of €112,935.

We also continue to raise awareness of the needs of LGBTI people among funders so they can mobilise resources.

Putting LGBTI needs on the agenda

LGBTI people have specific needs, however they are frequently overlooked by humanitarian and international institutions. Before the war, ILGA-Europe had very few links with the larger humanitarian sector, which is not an easy area to navigate. We strove to connect, and establish further connections among UN and EU institutions as well as national governments for their aid strategies to become fully inclusive, [succeeding in putting the issue of specific LGBTI needs on the agenda](#). Through regular meetings with these institutions, we've raised awareness about the specific needs of LGBTI people affected the war and pointed to gaps in humanitarian interventions. Particularly, we are working on needs assessments to advocate funders and humanitarian actors. Through our ongoing engagement with humanitarian actors, we are identifying and pursuing concrete opportunities to connect them with LGBTI organisations serving their communities.

Coordinating medicine delivery

Trans and intersex people in Ukraine continue to experience difficulties accessing the [medications](#) they need. There is a gap between what humanitarian aids are providing and what trans and intersex people need. Civil society is left to fill in this gap. For example, at ILGA-Europe we have been, together with other LGBTI organisations, directly coordinating deliveries of hormones. While we will continue to do so for the time being, this remains an emergency solution that should be taken on by institutions in a more sustainable way.

Fostering a coordinate response from the movement

If you read our [Annual Review 2023](#), you will see how many local LGBTI organisations stepped in to help refugees arriving to their countries. Outside Europe, LGBTI organisations also chipped in immediately to help in any way they could, including by sharing information about needs, mobilising funding and helping with direct support to groups on the ground. To be of most help we needed to be coordinated in our response, which would also allow us to be aware of the gaps of our collective support, we worked and continue to work to connect the many LGBTI organisations at regional and international levels who were stepping up to the plate, so they can complement each other and build from our respective strengths.

Helping LGBTI people leaving Ukraine understand their rights in the EU

When people fleeing Ukraine arrive in any EU country, they have a set of rights under the EU's Temporary Protection Directive, such as family reunification and access to healthcare. We have [briefed](#) the limits of this directive to the European Commission and EU countries, while working to ensure that these rights are available for LGBTI people arriving to the EU from Ukraine.

How we Are continuing

A year on, while we continue to support organisations who had to shift their activities towards humanitarian work as the war goes on, we also step up our support for LGBTI activists engaged in political advocacy, seizing the moment of potential EU memberships to push for LGBTI equality and freedom in Ukraine.

As a well-resourced organisation, we will continue to respond to immediate emergencies while continuing to do the deeper, more sustainable work through new programmatic activities and multi-year grant-making that we know will have an impact. We recognise more and more that it is vital to have groups such as ILGA-Europe who are strategically there for the long term

In the meantime, we take this moment to recognise the suffering of all those caught up in this war, and we pay

tribute to the work of activists and organisations in Ukraine, in unimaginable circumstances, to provide for the people in their communities.