**Webinar by La Strada International & La Strada Ukraine:**

***The Situation in Ukraine and Civil Society Actions***

**Date: March 7, 2022 15.00 CET**

**Number of Participants: 151**

**Speakers:**

* Ms. Kateryna Levchenko - Government Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy and Vice Chair of the Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe (and founder and former Director of La Strada Ukraine)
* Ms. Kateryna Cherepakha - Director La Strada Ukraine
* Ms. Mariana Yevsyukova - Ukrainian initiative in United Arab Emirates
* Ms. Natalia Karbowska - Ukrainian Women Fund
* Ms. Martha Kebalo - World Federation of Ukrainian Women Organizations
* Ms. Anastasia Nenka - Informative and consultative women centre
* Ms. Olena Shevchenko – NGO Insight
* Ms. Maryna Marchenko - NGO Lada

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Phone number of the Hotline 116 123 (from mobile).

Important: *For now, consultations are provided only through online channels (fb, email, skype).*

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# **Introduction by Suzanne Hoff (LSI)**

La Strada International is the European NGO Platform against human trafficking, with 25 members and 5 associate members in 23 European countries, which aim to prevent human trafficking and to protect and realise trafficked persons’ rights, among others via providing access to adequate assistance and support to victims, information and knowledge exchange, cross-sectoral cooperation, monitoring and advocacy. La Strada Ukraine is one of the founding members of La Strada International.

Suzanne Hoff, International Coordinator of La Strada International, explained that the webinar is organised by [La Strada International](https://www.lastradainternational.org/news/lsi-webinar-on-situation-of-civil-society-in-ukraine/) in close consultation with and on request of Kateryna Levchenko and Kateryna Cherepakha and other La Strada Ukraine colleagues, who are in touch with several other Ukrainian civil society actors. She explained that several Ukrainians speakers will be informing about the situation in Ukraine, in particular about the situation of civil society actors and their support to those in urgent needs. She expressed the hope that the webinar would help to create more support for the work conducted in and outside of Ukraine and the current difficult situation of the Ukrainian population and the need for human rights protection, including the protection of women rights and gender rights. With the webinar, LSI aims to strengthen further exchanges of information, cooperation and support among different civil society actors.

As the war in Ukraine continues and over a million people have already fled – the U.N. has stated that [1.5 million people had fled Ukraine](https://nl.nytimes.com/f/a/_drJyNisbt7EbE5s5wVz6g~~/AAAAAQA~/RgRkCCS1P0TqaHR0cHM6Ly90d2l0dGVyLmNvbS9GaWxpcHBvR3JhbmRpL3N0YXR1cy8xNTAwMzk1MTY2NjI0MDEwMjQ5P2NhbXBhaWduX2lkPTUxJmVtYz1lZGl0X21iZV8yMDIyMDMwNyZpbnN0YW5jZV9pZD01NTA1MSZubD1tb3JuaW5nLWJyaWVmaW5nJTNBLWV1cm9wZS1lZGl0aW9uJnJlZ2lfaWQ9MTYzODMzNjI0JnNlZ21lbnRfaWQ9ODQ4MjUmdGU9MSZ1c2VyX2lkPTVmZmJiYzQxM2MyYTI3ZjA1M2Y4NTgwMDFkMTE3M2IzVwNueXRCCmIctZ8lYvT5omBSHHNoQGxhc3RyYWRhaW50ZXJuYXRpb25hbC5vcmdYBAAAAAA~) during the first 10 days since Russia’s invasion began and this is number is expected to grow further[[1]](#footnote-1) – to neighbouring countries like Poland, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and Moldova. Here also many actors are trying to provide support refugees, including LSI members in the Czech Republic, Romania, Austria, Moldova and other European countries.

It is generally known that conflicts and wars create large vulnerabilities including for forced labour and human trafficking, as we have unfortunately seen with many earlier and ongoing wars. At this moment many Ukrainians in the country and on the run are vulnerable, and we believe all of them should receive assistance and support and not only those that ‘tick the boxes of having been exploited or trafficked’, especially also to prevent further exploitation and abuse”.

For this reason, the webinar focused more on the vulnerable situation in general for people in Ukraine and abroad, and what could be done for those people. What actions are taken by La Strada Ukraine and other human rights and gender-based violence organisations and experts in the country to prevent human trafficking and assist victims of trafficking and or victims of gender based violence, as well as related crime. How actions and work and further raise awareness about this war can be supported is also to be further discussed, as many participating in the call, have also been taking actions. LSI has been trying to exchange information with quite some European networks[[2]](#footnote-2) over the last days and will continue to do so.

A call was made to further share information and actions taken by those attending the webinar. See information exchanged via the chat, below.

# **Speakers**

**Ms. Kateryna Levchenko** - *Government Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy and Vice Chair of the Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe*

*Kateryna Levchenko is the founder of La Strada Ukraine, and LSI has been working with her since 1998. Until 2018 she was the Director of La Strada Ukraine. Kateryna Levchenko has also been member of GRETA, the Group of Experts of the Council of Europe on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.*

* Kateryna Levchenko is still in Kiev. She presented the current situation in Kiev and Ukraine related with the invasion and permanent bombing by Russia. She reported about the high number of persons killed already, including 40 children and hundreds of civilians[[3]](#footnote-3).
* In the cities that are bombed; including Kharkov and other cities, a humanitarian catastrophe is happening, as there is a lack of water, food, medicine and (internet) connection
* Ukrainians - fleeing both inside the country and outside to other countries - are in urgent need of assistance (both humanitarian and psychological assistance as well as moral support) and need to be treated with respect and dignity and be protected from further violations.
* It is of importance to fight the Russian propaganda and fake news, as this is a very strong weapon today.
* She explained about the long queues of cars of people; families with children trying to leave at risks of being bombed, and the hospitality and support, she noted at the Moldovan border by Moldovan civil society actors and volunteers.
* She highlighted the need of dissemination of information at the borders, including information on reducing the risks of human trafficking and other forms of exploitation by persons assisting refugees, including the border police.
* She also recommended that information is to be further disseminated within Ukraine among those staying in metros and other places, where they are trying to hide for the bombing.
* See also [below](#_The_call_shared) Kateryna Levchenko’s call to organise actions around the 8th of March in solidarity with Ukrainian women.

**Ms. Kateryna Cherepakha** - *Director La Strada Ukraine -* Website: <https://la-strada.org.ua/>

*Kateryna Cherepakha, is the current Director of La Strada Ukraine. In spite of the current situation, La Strada Ukraine is still trying to offer consultation and advice and share information to people.*

* Most members of LS Ukraine team, including Katya Cherepakha, have left Kiev but remain in Ukraine and continue to offer information and consultations to those in need.
* The situation is changing every day and every hour. The majority of the persons who are trying to flee, are very vulnerable groups, in particular from places under attack.
* Many are cut off from access to food, water, electricity; those in cities that have already been occupied or are under fire, cannot leave and are not provided with medical assistance.
* The organisation receives a lot of requests and questions at the moment (on how to flee, how to stay safe, how to keep their children safe etc).
* Women and children, as well as unaccompanied children who are leaving the county, are in very vulnerable situations and vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking. Men are not allowed to leave as they have to remain available for the army.
* LS Ukraine receives information about cases of sexual harassment and violence in both occupied territories – where LS Ukraine cannot provide any services - as well as in the places (shelters and metro stations) where women and children are hiding.
* Also information is received about unaccompanied children crossing the borders alone, without much information about who is collecting them/taking care of them.

A question was raised about the main tips to prevent further exploitation and human trafficking

* We share basic information in Russian and Ukrainian mainly, also to be disseminated via organisations abroad, including via LSI member organisation and colleagues
* We raise awareness about safety measures, advice persons to keep their documents with them, to obtain more information about persons that are picking people up, including information on organisations that can provide further assistance and support.

**Ms. Olena Shevchenko** – *Director of the NGO Insight*

*Ms. Shevchenko is the Director of the* [*NGO Insight*](https://www.insight-ukraine.org/en/)*. This is a Ukrainian human rights organization which brings together lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender people and queers. The organisation values are the following: equality, feminism, freedom, inclusiveness, diversity for all social groups.*

* The organisation focuses on the rights of LGBTQI, but is in particular also focusing on women rights and is the organiser of the Ukrainian women’s March, for which huge preparations took place until the war started.
* The organisation covers 11 regions in Ukraine. They established two shelters, where persons can stay a night (or longer) on their way to flee the country, which are overfull at the moment.
* From many cities, it is currently simply too dangerous to escape. The organisation is trying to offer consultations via the chat, especially to those persons trapped in cities and those trying to flee the country.
* The evacuation via trains is currently very dangerous and traveling with taxi’s to reach train stations is currently quite expensive; as taxi drivers have started to charge high amounts of money, even for small distances. She stressed the complete chaos and unsafe situation at the stations where ‘men push out children and women in order to take their places in the trains’.

**Ms. Maryna Marchenko** - *NGO Lada* which gives support to women, prior and after childbirth

* Maryna Marchenko is also still in Ukraine. The NGO LADA gives information and support to pregnant women and women that give birth, including on childbirth, post-partum recovery and on how to care for children.
* At this moment, colleagues - who are in safer places elsewhere in Ukraine - try to offer online consultation and to ensure the delivery of support packages, to help to women with preparations for delivery, breastfeeding as well as offer psychological support.
* The organisation is very concerned about pregnant women, who need support including to be evacuated to ensure safe delivery and to get access to other urgent needs.

**Ms. Mariana Yevsyukova** - *Ukrainian initiative in United Arab Emirates,* Mariana earlier worked for ECPAT International and La Strada Ukraine, she is currently based in UAE.

* There are a lot of Ukrainians who were residing outside Ukraine, when the war started and who are now trapped in other countries; not being able to return to Ukraine, including Ukrainians that are staying in the United Arab Emirates, where Mariana is based.
* The situation in the UAE is not easy at the moment. A lot of incorrect information and fake news is being disseminated, which is copied from Russian media sources. Protesting is banned in the country, unless there is special permission.
* The Ukrainian community is trying to regularly meet and to organise themselves; they share information and create support structures including information provision to others.
* She highlighted that a lot of expats in the country, are willing to provide financial support. As fundraising is banned in the country, crowdfunding cannot be taken up, but If people can share Ukrainian initiatives, contacts and bank details, Mariana can ensure to spread information about these actions and the request for financial support. (email: marianayevs@gmail.com )

**Ms. Anastasia Nenka** - *Informative and consultative women centre -* [*https://civilmplus.org/en/actors/women-s-information-and-consultative-centre/*](https://civilmplus.org/en/actors/women-s-information-and-consultative-centre/)

* The centre which Anastasia represents is helping women and young children; they are currently providing hygiene (products); and work on sharing information that people need during the war; and more.
* The main problem is that they have lost communication with colleagues in several parts of the country (for example we lost connection with our colleague in Mariupol)

**Ms. Natalia Karbowska** - *Director on Strategic Development, Ukrainian Women Fund -* [*https://uwf.org.ua/en/*](https://uwf.org.ua/en/)

* Is currently in the Western part of Ukraine, as an Internally displaced person.
* Here in the west part of Ukraine where there are a lot of IDPs, there is a lot of humanitarian aid needed. But there is no aid from large organisations. My question is: where are the humanitarian donors? The only help we have here, is the help from the people living here who help with everything they can.
* With the Ukrainian Women Fund we are trying to support women groups within the country with financial support, any support for this is very much appreciated.

*Further additions by participants:*

**Lilija Henrika Vasiliauskė** (Vilnius Women's House, Lithuania)

* It is very important to hear about the situation of women and children in Ukraine, as here in Lithuania there has mostly been a focus on men and their situation.
* On the 8th of March we have a large event here.
* If there are Ukrainian women coming to Lithuania, please contact us and then we will help (email: vmotnam@vmotnam.lt)

**Eugenia Benigni**

* I would like to express the importance of women’s participation in the negotiations of solutions. It is very important that women in general as well as women from grass root organisations participate at the higher political level.
* Kateryna Levchenko added that she is trying to contact the government to try to have women included in the dialogues.

**Suzanne Hoff** (La Strada International)

* Kateryna Levchenko has been nominated by the Ukrainian government as Ukrainian candidate for the upcoming CEDAW elections. This would be a good moment for all of us to support her strongly to be elected in June.
* It is in general symbolically of great importance to support Ukrainian female candidates for international positions at the moment.

# **Q&A**

Q: What are recommendations for people fleeing to stay safe of trafficking and exploitation?

Answer by Kateryna Levchenko and Kateryna Cherepakha:

* Recommendations for people fleeing to stay safe of trafficking and exploitation: Carrying the documents in a safe place, checking who is transporting you (take a picture of the licence plate, etc.)
* However, we do realise that at the moment of fleeing, people do not have any choice and possibility to make sure that they take into account all safety measures, they are simply trying to stay alive. Still, it is important that persons who are fleeing are informed about the risks of possible trafficking and possible exploitation and on how to stay safe. It is of importance that volunteers and all people working at the border and sheltering refugees must be given this information so that they can spread this information.

Q: In case of disruption of banks, can we bypass this?

Answer by Kateryna Cherepakha:

* In general there is still access to money at bank accounts. The problem is (in most of the cities) that very often it is not possible to withdraw money because there is no cash in the machines. For some regions, even if you have money on a card, it is not possible to pay with it. It differs per region, and we are not able to predict how it will be in the coming days and whether it will all continue to work.

## Q: Is there any information about and/or contact with the activists of the Kharkov pride?

Answer by Olena Shevchenko:

* We are in contact with these activists through Facebook. They are in the district which is not completely bombed (they have been evacuated from the other district). As to the point about payment problems, in Kharkov even in the big shops, which are still working it is not possible anymore to pay by credit card. This means humanitarian aids is very urgently needed.

# **The call shared by Kateryna Levchenko during the webinar**

March 8th 2022

International Day of Solidarity with the Women and Children

who have become Victims of Putin’s Genocidal War

against an Independent Democratic Ukraine

8 March 2022  -  On this International Women’s Day, a day of solidarity with women standing up for their rights, we suggest that women of Europe and the USA, and around the globe, show their compassion and concern in a common demonstration of empathy with the women and children of Ukraine who are now living under the threat of Russian bombardment.

Please launch “A Day of Empathy With Ukraine’s Women and Children.”   In addition to demonstrating with placards appealing for the provision of air cover for Ukraine, please devote this special day of 8 March to the cultivation of empathy for Ukrainian women and children.  Prepare for yourself an emergency “Go-Bag” (a knapsack with your essentials, important documents and survival supplies in case of evacuation), tape up your windows against their shattering in a bomb blast, sit in the dark after nightfall and cover your windows so that your lights don’t betray your presence inside, divide up your available food into portions to ensure that your provisions last several days or weeks, and imagine, that there is no way to get more food to feed your family.

And most importantly, think about how you would explain to your children what is happening around you and where your normal life has gone. How would you explain to them about war and why another country is bombing your homes and why uniformed strangers bearing another country’s flag are killing innocent peaceful neighbours? This conversation about the realities of war may be useful in the future for the children of Europe and the United States, when Putin, having destroyed Ukraine, turns his sights on other territories.

Photograph your actions taken on this day of solidarity and post them on social media, to show the world what you would do to preserve your family and community in the face of such a war.  Let your fellow citizens and your governments know that you are convinced that we need to help the peace-loving Ukrainian people NOW.  We need to show world leaders that democracy and freedom go hand in hand.

Dedicate this day of solidarity to the 20th Anniversary of the 8-9 March 2002 United Nations General Assembly special session on “A World Fit for Children” which reaffirmed the member states’ commitment to the promises of the 1990 World Summit for Children. Let us recommit to these ideals and stand in solidarity with the Ukrainians and with all of Ukraine’s women and children!

Sincerely yours,
Government Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy
Kateryna Levchenko

# **Information exchanged via the chat**

From V. Pisorn (Defence for Children)

Here's a resource for children in situations of humanitarian need: keep them informed (in child-friendly ways) & keep their information on them (waterproof) in case families get separated. <https://bettercarenetwork.org/critical-considerations-for-movement-of-children-during-a-humanitarian-crisis>

From Sabiha Husic Medica Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Medica Zenica has launched the Peace campaign "Medica for peace- a voice of support for Ukrainian women. The campaign started on 4.3. 2022 and continues for the International Women's Day, but also after, it focuses on support, care and solidarity of women and children and other people in Ukraine. We remember the support that we received, women of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We raise our voice to stop the war, violence and establish peace.

From Yulia Anosova

Just an example of recommendations we reposted: <https://www.facebook.com/lastradaukraine/posts/4982898541787190>

From Corina Panaite (ADPARE)

Hello! We have places for unaccompanied children in state institutions. For women with children, we can activate the national network of NGOs that have centres for women victims of violence. Please, if you know of specialists (psychologists, social workers) who are already in Romania and can help us in assisting victims of trafficking in persons who arrive in Romania, let us know. We currently have a victim identified at the border and who arrived at our protected apartment. We are ready to support relocated victims of trafficking. We can provide more information about our protection program and the assistance we can provide.

From Ernesta Rousseva, NCCTHB

The following information containing hotlines and important phone numbers to contact in case of human trafficking in Bulgaria can be shared:<https://www.facebook.com/NCCTHB/posts/330052352482207>

Regarding the identification, referral and support of VoTs, the priorities and measures provisioned in the Bulgarian NRM are completely relevant for Ukrainian migrants as well.

Marta González

The Eurocentralasian Lesbian Community provides support to Ukrainian refugees at the border. [ELC Eurocentralasian Lesbian Community](https://www.facebook.com/EurocentralasianLesbianCommunity/photos/a.1875203499391844/3183457801899734/?type=3&eid=ARBmYcBZReHLV1jDE3L_rlARIIcCivly2SQ9_hMukNcerkgje10CkyXaCV5FgaPngYmhPBfBP3ervwAK&__xts__%5b0%5d=68.ARCU14ffj7blmxR7AE09VUULjbq9mdy9el0Ig15ZXx4qJqO2Vfl4BnuUDkfvcfrsit0BhV6GDqOJYavpdFITXtupnFAVe2oQ-516dNtRjWmrRvs_i8ezZKlbUK3uTV4vTtX79MPGvb-V_IfkEvE8vOJHCQIHbZh3Co6-Iq9oJ1LmlRUiM8umCP8UwSiwG7RoVQG4CsKRzEB9EupnLrtmnvGvYscPRpjzoj7NAyns7llfhCrJLpfpDtNbe3suXSgXilGk64bZJb39mZ8tagJ-TD6S0WIs0stwFPhQaHAku6uKkkQ9L6zj1zc)

From N. Karbowska

<https://urgentactionfund.org/> Urgent Action Fund campaign to mobilize funding for Ukraine

From Eugenia Benigni

I am trying to mobilise as much as I can to support women and children affected by the war, at different levels: grassroots, political, international. Feel free to reach out to strategise and mobilise: ebenigni@gmail.com. cell.: +393335918479. For those who don’t know me, I worked for OSCE and EU Missions in Ukraine, Russia, Moldova and other countries, as well as the Swedish Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation.

From Léa Dudouet (WAVE Office)

We at WAVE, the European network of women's specialist support services are mobilising with our members in neighbouring countries to collect resources for Ukrainian women and children (especially survivors of violence), WAVE stands in solidarity with Ukrainians and with women’s specialist services helping women survivors of violence and children in these trying times. Keep an eye on our website and social media channels, we will soon be starting a solidarity campaign, and our website here (where information on all our members can also be found): <https://wave-network.org/>

From Eugenia Benigni

As the Russian army advances, the LGBTQIA+ is particular at risk of being targeted, as Russia’s policies as you know are not LGBTQIA+ friendly.

From Ketevan.Bakradze (WILPF Austria)

Please contact us also in Terms of WILPF Austria (Women`s international League for Peace and Freedom) Email-Adress : wilpf.austria@gmail.com

From Marion Böker; IAW, EWL

I share with you the statement and a letter to EU leaders by EWL after a webinar with Ukraine women on March 3rd. [see attached documents]

From Eugenia Benigni

There is also a problem for transgender M to F whose passport shows M sex and therefore they are not allowed to leave the country as they may be mobilised.

From Ilze Siliņa-Osmane/EMN Latvia

The prepared EU Temporary Protection Directive is specifically designed to provide immediate protection to those in need and to avoid overloading Member States' asylum systems, including undocumented refugees.

1. Information of 7 March 2022 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Red Cross, PICUM, ESWA, WAVE, VSE, Child Helpline International, HRDN, Missing Children Europe, ECPAT/Defence for Children, Child Circle. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Information of 7th March 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)