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Ukraine

After two years of war, a Ukrainian feminist point of view

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After 2 years of war, how do you see the situation in Ukraine?

Over the past two years, Ukrainian society has undergone dramatic changes in its lifestyle and visions. This transformation is also evident among feminist activists and women in general.

The war sparked a debate about whether feminist movements should be clearly anti-militarist. At a time when Ukrainians face the threat of physical annihilation, the anti-militarist stance of some Western feminists appears as a privilege, blind to the real threats and dangers that Ukrainian women face on a daily basis. Ukrainian feminists have adopted a key message in these difficult times: Ukraine needs weapons. It needs defensive weapons, such as air defence systems to protect its skies from constant Russian missile attacks that devastate Ukrainian cities and kill civilians, as well as offensive weapons to retake occupied territories from the aggressor.

The war has affected everyone in Ukraine. While some areas appear “normal” and free of direct hostilities, rocket attacks and constant threats from Russia persist. Almost everyone has a loved one who serves in the military or has lost someone in those years. Ukrainians are being forced to overcome personal and collective trauma, uncertainty about the future, daily military threats and daily hardships while demonstrating resilience and calling for international support and assistance.

Unfortunately, over the past two years, the general interest in Ukraine has declined, while the challenges facing Ukrainian society have not diminished. These challenges continue to exist or evolve into new forms. Issues range from meeting the needs of thousands of displaced people from frontline cities to providing electricity to cities during the bombing of energy infrastructure. Ukrainians must constantly be flexible, creative and resilient to face the new challenges posed by the war.

Feminists, like all Ukrainians, have been forced to adapt to the new roles and challenges brought about by large-scale war. Many feminists serve in the military or volunteer to meet the needs of the front lines. Feminist organizations in Ukraine are continuing their work, now also responding to needs arising from the war, such as helping internally displaced people and addressing other challenges. The needs of women in Ukrainian society have increased dramatically. Economic and social insecurity is on the rise, along with job losses. Many women lost their homes and jobs and were left alone to deal with the situation when their husbands were mobilized to the front.

Ukraine still does not have a recognized voice in many international discussions. It is often deprived of the means to act by the international community and is seen as a zone of influence for NATO or Russia. Ukrainians must fight not only for their physical survival, but also for the right to represent themselves and defend their interests, continuously preserving their freedom of action. These issues also concern Ukrainian feminists, who must not only think about their survival and provide assistance in the country, but also face the misunderstandings and sometimes paternalistic attitudes of Western feminists.

However, positive changes have also taken place for Ukrainian feminist society. In June 2022, the Ukrainian government ratified the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. This has been one of the main demands of Ukrainian feminists for several years and a step towards greater integration of Ukraine into the EU. In addition, Ukrainian female soldiers are actively advocating for their rights in the military, which has led to changes in the military organization and adaptations to better meet the needs of women. The perception of feminism in Ukraine is changing. Society is no longer looking at it through stereotypes about women activists. A collective representation of women military activists, activists who open shelters and help

solve humanitarian problems, and women volunteers, among others, is emerging. This shift helps to create new bonds with partners and change the overall perception of feminism.

What is the situation of your association and your projects?

With the onset of the full-scale Russian invasion, the Feminist Workshop was forced to expand its scope of activities. Large-scale warfare has not only amplified existing social problems, but has also created new challenges, which have pushed us to implement new directions. Our team has opened Crisis Response, whose main task is to help women and children affected by war. One of the target audiences is internally displaced persons. We have seen that people forced to leave their homes need safety, support, communication, recreation, self-realization and development. These needs are fundamental and essential to human life. That's why we've created shelters – safe spaces that help build trust in the community, increase social cohesion, and engage displaced people in community life. Since their creation, the shelters have welcomed 80 people, some with their pets (three cats, two rats, two dogs). Initially, we created three shelters, and today one of them is still actively operating. We quickly realized that women and children affected by war not only needed housing, but also complex support to overcome their traumatic experiences and live their lives to the fullest. We also provide one-on-one assistance to solve the day-to-day problems faced by the residents of the shelter. Another important aspect of our support has been the organization of groups for the children of internally displaced women, a program to help low-income elderly women, digital literacy classes, and psychological support to the community. And this list is not complete.

Despite our organization's active efforts to deal with the challenges of a full-scale invasion, new challenges are bringing unforeseen expenses, such as the purchase of generators to run the office during attacks on the country's energy infrastructure. Finding funding for our existing and new activities is not getting any easier. The unpredictability and complexity of planning our activities, the difficulty of meeting the demands of Western partners during a full-scale invasion, and the general exhaustion all contribute to making fundraising an additional challenge.

What are your hopes for 2024?

Hope is a privilege we cannot afford in a full-scale invasion. There are concrete actions and support that we need and demand. As Ukrainian feminist organizations working to defend human rights and help women overcome the consequences of the armed conflict, we have a deep understanding of the current context and needs of our audience, as well as the best ways to provide this assistance. Without financial, informational and humanitarian support, we will not be able to work systematically and create change. We don't just hope that the Feminist Workshop will continue its activities and have enough financial and human resources: we are constantly fighting for it. We are also tired of being left out of discussions about possible ways to help Ukrainian women. This year is crucial for us to amplify the voices of Ukrainian feminists on international platforms, advocating for their needs and claiming their right to speak in global discussions. In general, we just want to survive in 2024, in every sense of the word. And like all Ukrainians, we believe in our main goal and fight every day to achieve it: Ukraine's victory and an end to Russian aggression.

*Interview conducted by Patrick Le Tréhondat on 1 February 2024. Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [IPresse-toi à gauche](#).*

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