

FIGHT
FOR RIGHT



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR
DEMOCRACY

SUPPORTING FREEDOM AROUND THE WORLD

Women with disabilities during the war

By Fight For Right Ukraine



About

This publication is dedicated to *all women with disabilities who are fighting bravely* during the russian war against Ukraine

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We have different faces. Some of us are serving in the army. Others are volunteering and bringing humanitarian aid to those who need it. We help the Armed Forces; seek vital medicines for children with disabilities who remain in the temporarily occupied territories, and provide psychological support to Ukrainians with disabilities. Some girls and women are defending our country on the information front. We publish the truth about the events in Ukraine, reminding that russia is an

aggressor. We share our own experience, advise, help and distribute useful resources.

Some of us are talking about the war in Ukraine in artistic language, establishing cultural ties with the whole world. Others are going to rallies in support of Ukraine, meet with international figures and simply tell foreigners more about us and our beautiful country. We have already preserved the most valuable thing: our own lives, and the lives of our families. And despite everything, we live on: we plan, dream, work and support Ukraine.

And despite everything, they live on: they plan, dream, work and *support Ukraine*

No matter *who you are and what you are doing*, just know: *you are doing great*

No matter who you are and what you are doing, just know: you are doing great. We embrace everyone and sincerely believe that each of you is approaching our Victory every day.

The same as we do in our team. We are dealing with the consequences of the russian war aggression. The russian war against Ukraine began 8 years ago, with russia's annexation of Crimea and the occupation of parts of eastern Ukraine. But in 2022 russia began a full-scale invasion on the territory of Ukraine. Since the beginning of the full-scale russian invasion, we have managed to create an international initiative to help Ukrainians with disabilities (including about 40 volunteers and experts from around the world), raise financial aid to support and move the home team Fight For Right to a safe country. Moreover, we are uniting efforts to create a mechanism to support people

with disabilities during the russian-Ukrainian war which is more effective than the existing ones from the UN and not only.

Fight For Right, together with The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies and The World Institute on Disability, have been helping Ukrainians with disabilities 24/7.

Our team tirelessly seeks out volunteers, gathering medicine and food for this emergency. We problem-solve and help evacuate everyone who needs it, and we succeeded in evacuating many people with disabilities. There are so many more waiting. We are all fighting for every life!

We have already helped 1702 people. There are many more individuals who still need evacuations, medications, and legal support. Our fight to evacuate Ukrainians with disabilities is a round the clock effort.

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We have already helped *1702 people*





Yuliia Sachuk

Head of the Organisation of People
With Disabilities, Fight for Right

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For me, human rights defence is both a personal and a professional story. I have had a disability since childhood. With my parents, I fought to attend a regular school, not a boarding school for children with disabilities. While I was studying in an ordinary school, I often encountered bullying, misunderstanding and discrimination.

My work in human rights defence started with Amnesty International Ukraine. After that, I worked in organizations for people with disabilities. However, these organizations had a charitable or social model. So, it became logical to create a human rights organization for people with disabilities – Fight for Right – which I established in 2017.

Before Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine, we worked to defend the human rights of people with disabilities. Our aim was to ensure that all people with disabilities know their rights and are able to use and protect them.

With the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion, we began to do the most important thing at that time – save lives. So Fight for Right began evacuating people with disabilities. I started thinking about such activities prior to the Russian invasion, and it was helpful to have that knowledge when we had to quickly take action. Specifically, I started research when we started discussing the possibility of a full-scale Russian invasion.

Our greatest value and achievement is that
we are *saving lives* during the *genocide*
of Russia against Ukraine.

I studied international practices and pushed the Ukrainian government.

Before the war, we launched online psychological support and talked about basic preparations for war. We estimated what human needs would be in this type of scenario and looked for financial support opportunities and accessible shelters.

When Russia's full-scale invasion began, we saw that international organizations had barely included people with disabilities in their humanitarian programs in Ukraine. So we appealed to each other: activists from all over the world quickly mobilized and offered their help.

Soon, from one evacuation service, we have grown into a whole service department. We deliver medicine and products, help people get freed from the temporarily occupied territories and provide legal advice. We have become the main platform for helping Ukrainians with disabilities during this war.

While dealing with humanitarian issues, we have not deviated from the human rights approach and human rights activities. For example, we monitor evidence of Russian war crimes against people with disabilities and raise attention to national legislation and response mechanisms. Even before the Russian attack, we launched a platform on GoFundMe to support Ukrainian people with disabilities,

and these funds have become crucial to our work. At the beginning of the full-scale war, these were our only funds for rescuing people. Many people with disabilities from all over the world have donated to us. Their support is invaluable.

Two American organizations have supported us practically – The World Institute on Disability (WID) and The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies.

They have experience in emergency responses and have strengthened us with expertise and various tools for everyday work.

My university in Ireland, where I study International Disability Law and Policy, also helps by providing expertise. My classmate Avery helps a lot. Even though she is not a member of the organization, she took responsibility for its work in the early days of the war with Ira Tekuchova, our analyst. At that time, I was saving myself and my family from Russian missiles. My participation in the Obama Foundation's Leaders programs was helpful as well. The program's participants helped me and Fight For Right's team in our evacuation efforts and they continue to help now.

Our greatest value and achievement is that we are saving lives during the genocide of Russia against Ukraine.

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Tanya Herasymova

Project Manager, Fight For Right

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Before the full-scale russian invasion, I had been preparing for the 3rd School of Political Participation for Women with Disabilities LIDERKA. We had ideas and plans. In February, we held a communication session and planned our future projects.

I decided to leave Ukraine on February 24. In general, I had already been planning to evacuate after the russian invasion in 2014. This time, I stopped working in order to leave and our director of the analytical centre, Ira Tekuchova, and the head of the NGO, Yuliia Sachuk, took over everything. By the time I recovered from the exhausting evacuation trip at the end of February, FFR and its international partners were already evacuating people. I immediately got involved in this process because I could not sit still and

watch the devastating news for days on end.

We were not evacuation experts, so we had to learn everything on the run. We set up some processes based on our intuition as no one on our team had done this type of work before. We had no instructions, no strategies, but we were still able to save people. We continue to do so, and over time it has become much easier. Most of the team has reached safety, so together we worked out various mechanisms for evacuation and providing assistance to people with disabilities, and began to return to the usual planning. However, now we only plan for one week at a time as we know situations can change quickly.

I am very proud that the work of our team has been covered by the

*We were **not** evacuation experts, so we had to learn everything **on the run**.*

world's most famous media outlets. We, a small handful of women, have been able to set up processes to help people with disabilities where humanitarian missions have given up. I am proud of us.

It is difficult to abstract and just do the work mechanically. Whether we like it or not, we are connected to the story of each person we are helping, from those who go from small towns in Ukraine to Switzerland, crossing the border for the first time in their lives, to those who have stayed at home and are waiting for food and medicine because they can not afford to buy it or find a place to get it.

It is difficult when people die while waiting for help. It's heart-breaking. Each person's story will be etched in my memory forever.

I remember the Babitsky family the most. Olha and Serhiy from Chervonohrad, Lviv region.

Both are wheelchair-users and needed to be evacuated abroad and receive medical help.

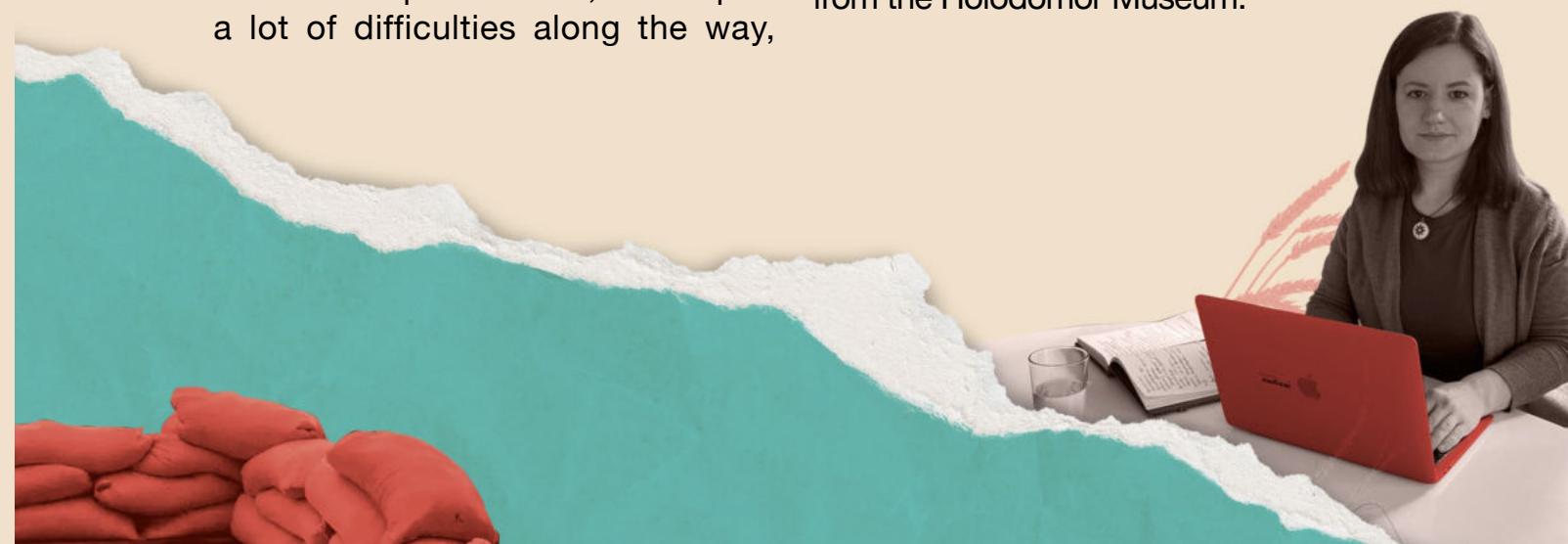
It was a complicated and long case that impressed me, for despite a lot of difficulties along the way,

these people endured 3 trips to different parts of Germany, and were constantly communicating with us so that we could help them. This is important for evacuees: they should be ready to take responsibility but not transfer it to those who have agreed to help.

Sadly there was a case that we didn't have enough time to manage. It was an elderly woman with a hip fracture. We were prepared to evacuate her the day after we took the request, but before we could reach her she died from lack of food and water. I cried for a long time after learning this. To me, it seemed that this situation could only be possible in my grandmother's stories about the Holodomor*, but not in 2022.

*Holodomor was the genocide of the Ukrainian nation committed in 1932–1933. It killed around 3.5 to 5 million Ukrainians. It was committed by the leadership of the soviet union in order to suppress disobedient Ukrainians and ultimately eliminate the Ukrainian opposition regime, which sought to build a sovereign Ukrainian state separate from moscow. Definition from the Holodomor Museum.

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Victoriia Kharchenko

Case Manager, Fight For Right

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I worked with the Fight For Right (FFR) team to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities before the full-scale russian attack in 2022. Since the beginning of the war, I had to stop working for ten days until I was able to safely evacuate myself. I use a crutch, so it was almost impossible for me to evacuate from Kyiv on my own. I am thankful to my close friends for supporting me during the evacuation and giving me a sense of security, that we are not alone and we will cope with the situation. I think it would have been more difficult to stay in inaccessible housing in Kyiv than to evacuate.

After leaving Kyiv the first place where my friends and our cats settled

was Moldova. There I gradually began to accept my new reality and began a new role to help evacuate people with disabilities.

While working on evacuations, we had several inquiries where medical evacuation was needed. People were worried that they could not leave, and there was no ambulance available to help them evacuate. It was not my targeted decision to take this part of the work. I only took on one request for medical evacuation, and no one objected. But later on, these types of cases became my responsibility.

It really hurts me that my relatives are still in Ukraine, in particular in the temporarily occupied Kherson. But no one will benefit from crying and doing

It is heartbreaking for me to know that it is *impossible* to do medical evacuations in the temporarily *occupied territories*

nothing. So I am just doing what I can.

We work every day to get Ukrainians with disabilities to safety. At the beginning of the war, an ambulance was not available to help our efforts, but now we have several options that can help evacuate people. We have hope and even excitement. I have gone from a modest advocacy manager to support for people and families.

There is still the problem of getting people out of hot spots in Ukraine. There are a lot of locations where the fighting is too close by and where doctors are afraid to go.

It is heartbreaking for me to know that it is impossible to do medical evacuations in the temporarily occupied territories. These people want to escape not only because of the danger they face from Russian war aggression but also because they need treatment or vital medications that are running out.

One of the most poignant cases I've worked with during my time as a case manager is the evacuation of 92-year-old Anatolii Melnyk. His grandchildren

contacted us because Anatolii needed medical transportation because of health conditions. He had a hip fracture and cancer. It was a pretty tough task, but we found a vehicle that would work and evacuated him from Kyiv to Košice.

I coordinated the process, and using the theory of the six handshakes rule, we found a private ambulance car to evacuate Anatolii. Our team were able to pay for it thanks to our partner IFES Ukraine. We are immensely grateful to the medical staff who are now working to their limits and risking their lives daily. Medical evacuation and evacuation, in general, are two-way processes. When you try to do everything to evacuate people, but they don't make any effort, it is impossible. Luckily, Anatolii's family was able to coordinate with a receiving party and find a clinic for him to stay in Slovakia.

In Slovakia, Anatolii underwent a successful hip operation. I've since been told that Anatolii's grandchildren will name their daughter in my honour – Victoriia. I hope she will be happy because in Latin it means «victory».

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Tetiana Kovalchuk

Case Manager, Fight For Right

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Until February 24 of this year, I lived in peace and creation. This peace was suddenly disturbed by the Russian invasion. I was not ready and could not believe the reality of what was happening. The first attack at the apartment building on Lobanovsky woke up an instinct of self-preservation within me. Helplessness is the most unpleasant of all feelings. When you can't protect your own child, yourself, your animals. I was alone in a wheelchair, with limited mobility, and had no chance to reach the shelter. I didn't even think about the possibility of evacuation because I didn't have a carrier for my cats, and without them, I wouldn't have left.

The women from Fight For Right came to help me. They worked quickly and clearly, remotely got a reliable box

and a backpack for my animals. In a day, we were ready to go. My daughter, three cats and I found ourselves at the height of the panic of the invasion in a crowded train station. We left a suitcase with a laptop and all our belongings on the platform and barely escaped from Kyiv to Lviv. We were lucky because on this day, March 2, the remains of a Russian missile crashed through the station.

Volunteers from Lviv met and sheltered us at a sports school. The next day, with our cats in our arms, we crossed the Ukrainian-Polish border on foot. Then the countries, cities and apartments, buses, cars and trains we were on changed. We traveled several thousand kilometres, and spent 6 days on complicated and long roads. The FFR team and support from volunteers

From the first days of the war, everyone worked 24/7 to support the international FFR team

saved us on our exhausting journey.

From the first days of the war, everyone worked 24/7 to support the international FFR team, which directed all its efforts to evacuate the civilian population of Ukraine. It is extremely complicated to work with people who are confused, traumatized, depressed, shocked, in despair and in panic because of Russian invasion. They seek salvation, counsel, support, understanding and help. They are willing for credence, security guarantees and count on you to provide them. You have to be in shape yourself to be able to support them. Although in conditions of war and a state of emergency, there are no guarantees of security. But we, the FFR team, are doing our best to fulfill the needs of people fleeing the war.

Our first priority is to listen, hear, feel and understand what exactly needs to be done in order to organize the process to achieve the desired result in the shortest possible time. It is necessary to identify the evacuee's

basic needs in order to determine the best possible solution. This is a complicated but necessary job. Saving the lives and health of people who were able to be rescued from the horrors of war is the greatest success we could have. The large amount and quality of assistance that was organized and provided to both those who left and those who remained should be celebrated.

Every case, every story, has left its mark on my memory. Closing a case often doesn't end the story. They still write to you, call, share their experience and consult with you. We are so happy that our team managed to organize the evacuation of a large group of children and young people with disabilities – swimmers. It was a national swimming team with athletes from regions all over Ukraine. They are now at a sports base in France. They are safe, train regularly and will be able to represent their country on the sports front and win new victories.

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Olha Vovk-Sobina

Coordinator, Happy Child Foundation

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Since mid-February, my colleagues at the Happy Child Foundation and I had been discussing a possible russian attack. We considered plans and actions and talked about what we would do in different scenarios. How would we evacuate family-type institutions where children with disabilities are educated or people with serious diseases? What assistance would we be able to provide?

Despite our discussions, the beginning of the full-scale russian invasion took us all by surprise. It turned out that effectively working while under attack is easier said than done. Some of my colleagues moved to the west of Ukraine and some left for abroad. Some were like me and sent their children to safety and stayed in Ukraine to help. During the first week of the full-scale russian invasion, I felt like I

was doing everything for the first time. The experience I had gained over ten years did not matter. Pharmacies and stores did not provide guarantees and generally did not release medications. We had to travel to the neighbouring Dnipropetrovsk region to buy medicines for our beneficiaries.

On February 24, I thought that I was being slow and ineffective. The curfews were very distracting because they left too little time in the day to be productive. I was left without colleagues who helped patients with mucoviscidosis in Ukraine. I worked alone for a week as my closest colleague had to leave. Three of our funds became frozen as well as the association itself. But I had no moral right to surrender. At that moment, I felt a duty to help and safeguard more than 1,000 lives. I joked with my close friends that I had

The temporarily occupied territories *are my biggest pain*

studied the Polish language in 2 days, and German in 5.

The temporarily occupied territories are my biggest pain. More than 80% of my region is occupied by the russians. I chose to stay and help where others gave up, like in the temporarily occupied territories of Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kherson regions. I continued to help with the evacuation of critically ill patients and the delivery of medicines for palliative orphan patients. Currently, I work with the military, rescue, security services, volunteers, human rights defenders, carriers, and local and foreign organizations to provide these services.

It brings me joy that there are Ukrainians with disabilities who are currently receiving all the necessary assistance and are being evacuated abroad from the russian occupation. My heart breaks for the people with disabilities who died in Mariupol without oxygen and heat in their homes destroyed by the russians.

I have two powerful stories to share from working in wartime. When I recount them, I feel tears in my eyes, but also wings behind my back and

a sense of inner strength. **The first is about Lisa, a girl with mucoviscidosis, and her mother Natalia.** The family lived under russian shelling in Mariupol for three weeks. Once every two days, at night time, Natalia walked 6 kilometres to a place where there was a weak mobile connection to let me know that they were alive. They slept standing in the basement, clinging to each other to stay warm, and they collected rainwater to drink.

The second story is about Maxym from the Donetsk region. Maxym ran out of essential medicines and his inhaler was broken. The situation was very tough then, for there was heavy fighting in the Zaporizhzhia region. Fast delivery of medical equipment and drugs was simply impossible. Another family from the temporarily occupied Berdyansk that we helped came to help us. Parents of children with disabilities shared the same stock of drugs that I was sending them before. They also gave inhalers and even bought in pharmacies rests of these vital drugs. An impossible task was accomplished! Luckily over time the family managed to leave Ukraine. Maxym is also now safe outside of the country...

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Laura Sapega

Founder of Sapega Foundation*

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Since February 24, the focus of my attention has been not only on my young son and family but also on deaf and hard of hearing Ukrainians. Due to the full-scale russian attack, they are now in an even more complicated situation than before. Now, most of my day is spent on the phone: I am in touch with the NGOs we work with and the people we help. Sometimes it seems to me that my phone has become a part of my hand.

The hardest thing is to find an opportunity to help everyone who applies. There are many requests for

help, and there is not enough money for everyone. Yes, there are a lot of charities now, but they are among hearing people, so they rarely reach deaf people. Unfortunately, people with disabilities, as always, are mostly out of focus. That is why we work hard every day to ensure that the hard of hearing people can also get help.

It's hard to get yourself under control and don't cry every time you listen to those stories. It hurts me to get through this. I feel pain for children whose childhood has been stolen. Anti-anxiety meds save me. I understand

It's hard to get yourself under control and don't cry every time you listen to those stories

Women with disabilities during the war by Fight for Right

So far, we have raised about 650,000 hryvnias and helped approximately 200 families and 300 children

that I have to hold on to help them more.

So far, we have raised about 650,000 hryvnias and helped approximately 200 families and 300 children. Also, 15 pregnant deaf and hard of hearing women received our help.

There is still a lot of work ahead. Many deaf families with children have remained in the temporarily occupied territories and have no opportunities to leave.

This war left many scars on people's hearts. I would like to know if there is a cure for these scars?

We help deaf and hard of hearing Ukrainians with:

- evacuation from dangerous regions of Ukraine to the west of the country or to Europe;
- food for those who remained in the temporarily occupied territories and who have not the opportunity to leave;
- basic necessities for newborns and young children of deaf/hard of hearing parents (diapers, milk mixtures, napkins, etc.);
- funds for pregnant deaf women and women in childbirth.

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* Fight For Right works with the Sapega Foundation. We have joined forces to help deaf and hard of hearing people in the circumstances of the russian attack.





Raisa Kravchenko

Ukrainian Disability Advocate

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On February 24th, I woke up early as usual, so I heard the first explosions at 5.30 a.m. in my kitchen.

I didn't immediately understand that these were the first sounds of a full-scale Russian war against Ukraine. But an hour later, I received a call from the staff of the state-run institution where my 38-year-old son is receiving care in the inpatient department. They demanded that I remove my son from the institution immediately. I was very concerned about the prospect of caring for him 24/7. Such unexpected changes in life could provoke a sharp exacerbation of his behavioural disorders. Still, I understood that it was better to leave Kyiv with him for safety reasons.

For the first couple of weeks, I had to urgently stock up on medicine for my son and myself (I have a dis-

ability as well and have to take 5 pills a day). I gathered food, clothes and arranged my new life. It was difficult for my son, for whom air-raid sirens became a particular stressor. And three times, police brought him home after he was out walking past the curfew. For me, this situation caused a heart attack. Then my family and friends got together and took care of my son – seven people could barely support his needs for safety and daily care.

Despite concerns about my own family, I didn't immediately realize that both the Dzherela Charitable Organisation and the Coalition for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities would not be able to continue the planned activities during the war. Instead, we must urgently respond to the new needs of

It was difficult for my son, for whom air-raid sirens became *a particular stressor*

people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

Danish organization Amis suggested Dzherela Charitable Organisation send two groups of its members to Denmark, including my son in one of the groups. He is currently safe.

One day during a conversation with a foreign colleague, she heard the air-aid siren for the first time and was horrified. Only then did I realise that the threat of attacks from the sky was real. And this impression of «MEMENTO MORI» is one of the strongest emotional impressions I have of the war. The second is the brief remark of a colleague from Chernihiv that she and her adult son with an extremely complex form of autism and epilepsy fled the Russian invasion by crossing the Desna in a simple boat.

Fortunately, our organisation had friends and partners abroad who were eager to help those who needed it. For example, the European network of organizations for people with

intellectual disabilities, Inclusion Europe, be fundraising from 82 partner organizations from 39 countries.

The Charity Organisation «Dzherela» created a network of support and provided one-time individual financial assistance for 3470 UAH to about 140 families. We also organized the departure of two groups (38 people) to Denmark, provided personal assistants for 13 people with intellectual and behavioural disabilities and conducted a 10-day field course of psychological assistance for 8 people with intellectual disabilities in our own transit house.

The Coalition for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities has already provided individual financial assistance to about 700 families, and we expect to continue assistance in cooperation with Inclusion Europe.

We also hope to provide security information in an easy-to-read format.

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Fortunately, our organisation *had friends and partners* abroad who were eager *to help* those who needed it





Anna Landre

Fellow in The Partnership for Inclusive
Disaster Strategies

17 I am an American wheelchair user and disability activist currently studying for a masters degree at the London School of Economics on a Marshall Scholarship. My field of study/work is at the intersection of disability, international development, humanitarianism, and urban planning. Since the start of the pandemic, I have worked with The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies as a Fellow on various projects.

Two days after the russian invasion began, I saw a tweet from Fight For Right about helping Ukrainians with disabilities evacuate or safely shelter in place. I sent it to Shaylin and Germán, the Directors of The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies, and asked them if we could reach out to Fight For Right to see

how we could help their efforts. They immediately agreed, and we first met with Avery two days later on Sunday. It's our mission to support others in the disability community during emergencies and disasters, so we were motivated to see what we could do to help Fight For Right in a time of such high need.

Helping Fight For Right with evacuation and aid operations has been a really mentally and emotionally difficult experience. It's awful to see such unnecessary suffering, which is of course intensified by the specific access issues that Ukrainians with disabilities are facing. For the first few weeks I wasn't sleeping enough because I just wanted to spend time helping as many people as possible, and I skipped many of my classes to

The biggest challenge for me has been feeling stressed about *not being able* to do more *to help*

be able to provide more support. I was very affected by the reports coming out of Mariupol, of the carnage and suffering caused by russia that some small teams of reporters were able to get in to document. In particular, there was a photo report in the Associated Press that I read thoroughly over the course of a day – I had to keep taking pauses because seeing the conditions was so awful. I felt similarly about the photos that were taken in Bucha and Irpin after they were liberated from the russian occupiers.

Cases of wheelchair users affected me the most, because I see myself in them and think about how I'd likely be left behind in an emergency or disaster. One night, I was working on evacuation cases from the hospital while waiting for a spinal injection treatment that I get for my disability. At that moment, I received a new case, of a child with my same diagnosis that needed housing near a specific hospital in Poland so they could have access to the same exact treatment I was about to get. That really hit home, and I couldn't help but feel overwhelmed by the tragic consequences of war, especially on those who are already marginalized in society.

The biggest challenge for me has been feeling stressed about not being able to do more to help. For example, it was hard trying to do case management while not being a Ukrainian speaker or knowing as much about the country in general as someone who

grew up there. I wanted to help, but also realized quickly that I was not as useful in that role as a Ukrainian person would be. Additionally, Fight For Right is often taking the aid and evacuation cases that are the most challenging and that other NGOs are leaving behind, so we have a very logistically challenging job. I often felt like I was bad at my job, when in reality I was just doing something very difficult with a low success rate in general. I also had to learn that in order to be the most helpful to Fight For Right, I needed to make sure I was taking care of myself – sleeping enough, eating well, and taking breaks even when I sometimes felt guilty for doing so.

One of the most disappointing things I've seen during the war has been the neglect of people with disabilities by humanitarian agencies operating in and around Ukraine. As someone who studies humanitarianism, I know that these organizations claim to be inclusive and that there is significant literature describing the needs of people with disabilities during emergencies. So the fact that they still aren't implementing that guidance, while claiming to be inclusive, is infuriating.

Fight For Right's work shows that it is possible to carry out disability-inclusive evacuations and aid in a war-zone, even with the limited resources available to us as a small organization. The bigger, well-resourced humanitarian organizations should be supporting us in this work.



Marcie Roth

Executive Director and CEO, World Institute on Disability

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I am the Executive Director and CEO of the World Institute on Disability, one of the world's oldest disability rights organizations, founded by Judy Heumann and Ed Roberts in 1983 and continually led by people with disabilities for 40 years.

In the 20 years I've worked in disability inclusive emergency management, I've consistently noticed that Disabled Persons Organizations (DPO's) never seem to get access to humanitarian resources in crises and disasters. The big humanitarian organizations get lots of funding and access but they are usually not knowledgeable about disability rights. Their approach is usually one of charity rather than supporting the leadership and expertise of DPOs who are most experienced in supporting the whole community. So, in 2020, we started

the Global Alliance for Disaster Resource Acceleration (GADRA) with the Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies and ONG Inclusiva. GADRA brings corporate and foundation humanitarian actors directly together with disaster and crisis impacted DPOs to support them to continue to lead and assist people with disabilities in their community.

Typically we've supported DPOs impacted by disasters. When we saw that Russia full-scale was waging war against the peaceful democracy of Ukraine, we wanted to support Ukrainian DPOs by connecting them with corporate and foundation resources so they could continue to lead. Anna Landre connected with Avery Horne at the very beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion and Avery connected us with Yuliia when she was

Every time *I learn of more people* having their needs met by *Fight For Right*

first evacuating. Supporting Fight For Right (FFR) was a very good fit, since we are all disability rights leaders and we have ways to help that FFR needed to continue operating .

Right from the start of full-scale Russian invasion, we knew we would offer to help Ukrainian DPOs if they wanted our help. We tried to identify DPOs but found most disability organizations in Ukraine weren't actually trying to assist with evacuation or sheltering in place. I remember seeing thousands of people in the train stations and knowing that many people wouldn't be able to get to these locations either because they aren't physically accessible, because information isn't accessible to people who are blind or deaf, and people with intellectual disabilities, and because people with psychosocial disabilities found them inaccessible due to their own needs. Then, when we attempted to connect with the UN Protection Cluster, we found they weren't going to help people with disabilities to evacuate, and didn't even have anyone knowledgeable about disability leading their Aging and Disability sub cluster. Then we heard about people in institutions being left behind, trafficked to EU countries and taken against their will to Russia. All of this has fueled our interest in supporting Fight For Right in any way we can.

In addition to working closely with FFR, we are also working with our

Government and Congress to hold them accountable to following our disability civil rights laws as well as in support of Ukraine's ratification of the CRPD. This means we are expecting all US funds will be used, granted and sub granted in compliance with physical, program and equally effective communication access.

Every time I learn of more people having their needs met by Fight For Right and our growing Alliance, I feel great relief, but I am also very acutely aware of so many people waiting for help and many more who are still left behind. I know there are 88 children with disabilities trapped in an orphanage (we won't share the location), urgently needing medication and even though they have somewhere safer to evacuate to, there is no green corridor and they are in great danger. I know there are many others in similar circumstances.

I think there are several challenges for Ukrainians with disabilities now. First of all, many people have been unable to find accessible housing, which forces them into institutions. Secondly, there seems to be a plan to build more institutions – this must be prevented. And the last but not least: people with disabilities who have evacuated are in limbo – do they try to settle in and seek services and employment where they are, continue to move further away in search of disability services and employment or do they return to Ukraine, even if their Oblast has been damaged or destroyed.

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Judith E. Heumann

International Disability Rights Advocate,
Co-founder of the World Institute on Disability (WID)

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I've been involved in disability politics now for decades. And years ago, disabled women faced discrimination even within the disability community. It's been many years that women with disabilities have been working on taking our rightful place within the disability community. Now there are more and more disabled women who are very active outspoken people. And within some of the communities disabled women are playing more prominent roles, certainly, in the independent living movement. I think that's a very fair statement.

For me, I never aspired to be identified as a leader. I think my knowledge and the way I work, people are interested in. Since the sixties we've been working together on many

different issues, identified problems, look at solutions, play different roles in advancing that and being politically involved is one of them.

So I didn't aspire to any of this. I think it's just something that has come along over time.

The World Institute on Disability was founded in 1982 by me, Ed Roberts and Joan Leon. We started it, because there was no public policy organization run by disabled people. We wanted to learn from other countries about what they were doing that we could benefit from. But as well we wanted to take what we were doing here, in the US, and help to share it with people outside of the USA.

And now one of the big efforts of WID are in the area of disaster pre-

And I guess one of the biggest things is we should *not be ashamed* of our disabilities

paration and relief. So it fits very nicely with the work that they're doing in Ukraine.

When I heard news about the war in Ukraine, my first thoughts were that it's all an injustice and that the incursion of Russia into Ukraine was wrong. Our government and other NATO governments are doing a lot to support Ukraine. At the same time, I clearly understand that in any tragic situation, disabled people will not benefit equally from things like evacuation, protection, food, medical care, for a whole host of issues. So overall, I was very worried about what was going on and how it is going to reflect on disabled people.

In the situation of the war it is important to ensure that not just the people who had disabilities before the war would get the help. Unfortunately, now there are many new disabled people, both with physical disabilities and mental health disabilities. We really need to be looking much more broadly on what was, and what is, and what will need to be done.

There's so much that's not a normal situation going on in Ukraine. But I just want to highlight. The work that Fight For Right and many others are doing is very important. We keep hope alive, we support each other. I think our movement gives us all strength. All of us get pretty sad when we see

all these things going on, but with our commitment we continue to improve the situations around the world. We are making a difference, even though sometimes we move forward not as quickly as we want.

One useful advice that I have for all female leaders who are working under the circumstances of the war is a kind reminder that we don't just work together all the time. We're friends, we can also talk about good and bad things that are happening in our home, in our relationships, whatever.

We also have friendships, but it's very important that we are engaging with other women's organizations and really getting other women's groups to understand who we are as disabled people and how they need to be working collaboratively with us. You know, we need to be looking at things like violence against girls and women, various forms of abuse. We should work collaboratively and include disability to our agenda.

And I guess one of the biggest things is we should not be ashamed of our disabilities. And I think it's still a very big issue that we're afraid to speak up. We're afraid of something negative happening to us, but I think if we are really working together and becoming a more visible, powerful movement, we will continue to make change.

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