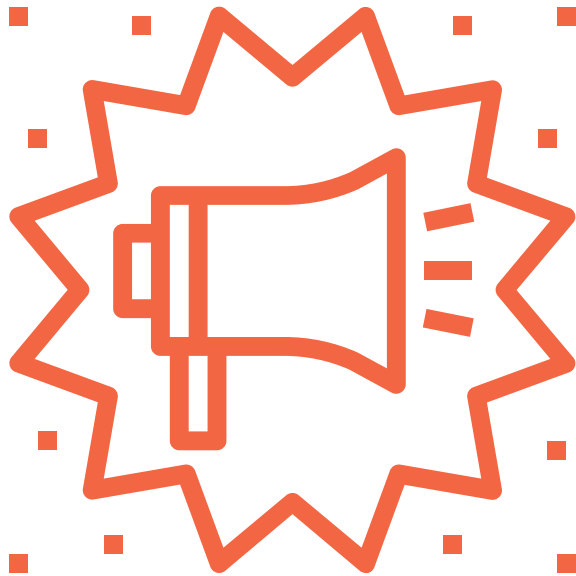




Change Leaders of Local Communities



-

Local advocacy is a way of influencing change. It is a tool to defend one's interests and protect one's rights. It can help anyone to build up their own future today. The project "Local Advocacy for Internally Displaced Persons" supported IDPs in their efforts to make a difference reaching out to sixteen communities across Ukraine. The project embodied and largely transmitted the main idea: that is truly achievable to effect positive change by applying tailored tools of local advocacy in one's life and the life of one's community.

The project "Local Advocacy for Internally Displaced Persons" has been implemented within the grant programme provided by the Council of Europe project "Internal Displacement in Ukraine: Building Solutions".

The publication was prepared as part of the project "Local Advocacy for Internally Displaced Persons" under the grant programme of the Council of Europe project "Internal Displacement in Ukraine: Building Solutions".

The opinions and recommendations expressed in this work are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

-

10 The Calling to Help People

Melitopol, Zaporizhia Oblast

16 The Second Chance

Zaporizhzhia

22 Protection and Patronage

Kryvyi Rih, Dnipropetrovsk Oblast

28 The Effective Team of Like-Minded People

Shostka, Sumy Oblast

34 The Evolutionary Changes

Storozhynets, Chernivtsi Oblast

40 Step by Step

Uzhhorod



Since 2016, NGO “Civil Holding “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” has been involved in education, advocacy, analysis, human rights practices, and strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations. The organization’s mission is to work for prosperity, protecting human dignity and rights at the local, national, and international levels. It has extensive experience in conducting both local and national advocacy campaigns. Experts of the “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” are co-legislators of Draft Law No. 6240 On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine (On Suffrage of Internally Displaced Persons and Other Mobile Citizens Within the Country), the main points of which are included in the Electoral Code of Ukraine, and initiators of the #EachVoteMatters nationwide campaign, thanks to which internally displaced persons and other mobile citizens within the country have the right to vote and the opportunity to vote in all types of elections, including local elections, in the communities where they actually live.

Part of the organization’s team are displaced persons, so they know and understand better than anyone else the difficulties encountered by people who have been forced to flee their homes as a result of Russian aggression.

Members of the “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” team, having experience of displacement and conducting various successful advocacy campaigns, decided to share their knowledge and skills with other organizations that represented the interests of internally displaced persons and defended their rights, as well as action groups of IDPs themselves. That’s how the idea of the “Local Advocacy for Internally Displaced Persons” project came about to provide people with the tools to participate in decision-making and in the implementation of strategic plans and activities at the regional and local levels. Personal involvement, interest, consistency, and continuity of all efforts will certainly, though not immediately, give results. Changes are real. Advocacy can help achieve the desired result not only for the displaced but also for the whole community.

The project started in autumn 2019. The trainings were attended by activists who were engaged in handling the issues of internally displaced persons in their communities and represented their interests, and two representatives – one from a non-governmental organization and one from local authorities or the media. It was a feature that allowed building a dialog between the government and the public, to better understand each other. The training was aimed at acquiring practical skills and tools. The theory was tested. During the series of trainings, the experts of the “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” shared their knowledge and skills, outlined their further steps in advocacy together with the participants, in order to understand, upon returning to their community, in what direction to work, where to start and so on. The participants had a task to develop a “road map of advocacy”. The map is a clear plan of action where advocacy can be used to achieve the goals of solving certain problems of internally displaced persons in this community and to improve the lives of people in general. Members of the “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” team helped activists in this: consulted, gave advice, and supplemented. Advocacy campaigns were implemented through panel discussions, press conferences, trainings, and other events. Quite a lot of analytical research has been developed and surveys conducted to help find out what internally displaced persons needed, what problems and difficulties they had in their communities. The displaced themselves know better than anyone else what they need. Members of the “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” also participated in the said events, paid monitoring visits at the invitation of the community, and actively cooperated with activists, as well as with local authorities and the media.

The COVID-19 situation in Ukraine did not stop the processes that were going on; it just shifted communication and further cooperation to online conferences using modern Internet capabilities. Significant efforts were directed to information activities – the creation and dissemination of information messages, infographics, etc.

NGOs participating in the project have their own results, each of which is important and valuable, because it leads to the main big goal. Further achievements are built on these results. They are the grain that has sprouted and will produce fruit (the result) in the future.

None of the activists is going to be satisfied with what they have already achieved. They all dream of a decent and happy life in their new community.



Advocacy and communication training, October 20–22, 2019



Advocacy and Communication Training, October 25–27, 2019

A total of 16 communities participated in the “Local Advocacy for Internally Displaced Persons” project, including those from Kyiv, Kryvyi Rih (Dnipropetrovsk Oblast), Zaporizhia, Uzhhorod, Vyshhorod (Kyiv Oblast), Volnovakha (Donetsk Oblast), Mariupol (Donetsk Oblast), Koziatyn (Vinnytsia Oblast), Lysychansk (Luhansk Oblast), Melitopol (Zaporizhia Oblast), Novyi Buh (Mykolaiv Oblast), Odesa, Poltava, Svatove (Luhansk Oblast), Storozhynets (Chernivtsi Oblast), and Shostka (Sumy Oblast).

In this publication, we want to share the stories of the formation of public activists, the developments and the most successful achievements of non-governmental organizations involved in the project.





The Calling to Help People



When a person wants something, he/she will always find opportunities to get that

This saying of Tetiana Shevchenko, the head of NGO “Community Development Office”, can be called a guide for and slogan of her activities.

The organization was established in 2018 by concerned founders, who made it evident each time that one could find opportunities if they wanted to. The members of the organization include former volunteers, social workers, and employees of the Office of Children’s and Family Services, who have been engaged in social work all their conscious lives. However, the tasks prescribed in normative legal documents do not always meet the needs of people, and the forms of their implementation cannot be applied in practice. Therefore, a great desire to help and awareness of the need to correct these shortcomings became the reason for the creation of the organization. From now on, it allows to expand the possibilities of providing social services to various categories of people who need it, as well as to reveal and increase the potential of its members as social workers. In addition, the processes that accompany decentralization have shown that it is difficult for the government to provide a wide range of quality and affordable social services on its own – it needs help from non-governmental organizations.

With a strong backbone of five, the organization enlarges due to volunteers, and active, concerned members of the community, including IDPs. These are the people that are the drivers of change.

It is impossible to comprehend the incomprehensible; one has to do what they can

We are generally talking about a broad character of work: both education and culture, but the job that the members of the organization are doing today (a social direction) is close and urgent.

The first project that the NGO started with was working with women whose husbands took part in the anti-terrorist operation and creating a mutual assistance group. Training of specialists, improvement of skills,

participation in thematic special training within “All-Ukrainian School of Self-Help” project of the “Gurt” resource center later made it possible to build work in the format of self-help.

Subsequently, the organization expanded its capabilities as internally displaced persons needed assistance. The main problem of the much-discussed relevancy and urgency was various traumatic situations associated with moving from own home. The people who were forced to do that were different. It was a great trauma for some, while for others, it was painless. However, it was traumatic for most. The adaptation period can last up to 20 years. The members of the organization were aware of it, recalling the consequences of displacement as a result of the Chernobyl disaster.

In order to be able to provide qualified care, the organization’s psychologists underwent special training in dealing with trauma. Mutual assistance groups were set up for IDP families, both for adults and children.

The ability to look to the future and predict possible negative consequences, which will inevitably come about, perhaps not now, but in 10–15 years, is associated with such an area of activity as dealing with children affected by traumatic situations. Their parents did not pay attention to this problem, because they had more urgent problems of finding housing and employment. No one thought about the psychological state in which the child might be. At the same time, the provision of a comprehensive and qualified psychological care was a problem, because this was not the sphere of school psychologists, who were focused mainly on the educational and bringing-up process rather than on dealing with children who had experienced a critical, traumatic situation. There are no approved programs at the level of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine related to this problem.

The team of the NGO “Community Development Office”, in cooperation with NGO “Civil Holding “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” as part of the implementation of “Local Advocacy for Internally Displaced Persons”

project under a grant provided by the Council of Europe project called “Internal Displacement in Ukraine: Building Solutions” made it possible to start solving issues related to assistance to children who had suffered as a result of hostilities and armed conflict. Vigorous activity in this direction is still underway.

In particular, the NGO arranged the “Organization of a Multidisciplinary Approach to Solving the Problems of Psychological and Mental Health of Children of Internally Displaced Persons” panel discussion, which, in particular, was attended by representatives of city authorities and displaced persons. Among the issues on the agenda were the provision of assistance to victims of traumatic situations and the mechanism for granting the status of a child affected by hostilities. With the participation of a professional psychologist, the problems of psychological assistance to IDP children in the city’s educational institutions were discussed. Parents shared the experience of their child’s adaptation and the difficulties that the family faced on the way to the child’s complete socialization.

A training session was held that was called “Experience of Conducting the ‘Patterns of Art’ Art-Therapeutic Program to Overcome the Consequences of Crisis in Dealing with Children from Families of Internally Displaced Persons. Presentation and Holding of a Master Class on the Formation of Coaching Skills”, organized by the team of NGO “Community Development Office” together with the Department of Education of Melitopol City Council and Melitopol City Center of Social Services for Family, Children, and Youth. Together with psychologists and social educators, the training participants shared their experience of dealing with the consequences of psycho-traumatic experiences in children and family members of IDPs. An art therapy program was presented at the meeting, taking into account the needs of children affected by hostilities and armed conflict.

The successful NGO projects include a “Prevention of Bullying” social project, implemented with the assistance of the Executive Committee of Melitopol City Council. It included informing teachers about this negative and dangerous phenomenon, as well as providing school psychologists and social educators with practical tools to combat it. During a number of events, the organization’s specialists shared practical knowledge and skills with everybody who was interested. In addition, team members wanted to draw attention to this topic in the context of amendments

to the Law of Ukraine “On Education”, where the school should be responsible for actions taking place on its territory, as well as to the importance of involving class teachers in dealing with bullying as people who see the situation from the inside. Later, the school children themselves joined the activities within the project: they conducted joint classes on bullying, developed a booklet bookmark in the form of a phone, which listed the numbers and details for contact if necessary. The members of the organization will not be limited to these measures, and will continue to work in this direction, because the problem has not yet disappeared.



Training “Experience of conducting an art therapy program”, March 5, 2020

It is important to keep working

The team of the non-governmental organization and its leader understand that by no means can they be satisfied with what they have already achieved; they have to continue acting. In the “Plan of Intercultural Integ-

ration of Melitopol City Until 2020”, approved by Order No. 95-p of the Mayor dated February 28, 2020, NGO “Community Development Office” and Melitopol City Center of Social Services for Family, Children, and Youth proposed a number of activities under the title of “Creating Platforms for Social and Psychological Support for Persons Displaced from the Zone of Armed Conflict”. Their goal is psychosocial support and provision of social services to internally displaced persons. It is planned to create mutual assistance groups on a regular basis, conduct psychological consultations, trainings, quests, master classes, and sensory therapy. All of these measures are a long and continuous process of providing psychosocial assistance to all categories of IDPs affected by the war in the east of the country.

Ukraine has faced a problem of COVID-19, resulting in quarantine, self-isolation, and a number of negative consequences that follow, namely a feeling of loneliness, lack of communication, exacerbation of family and domestic conflicts. Even under these conditions, the professional psychologists, members of the organization, did not leave their jobs. People who applied to them often did not formulate their application as a request for psychological support, but mostly as a practical issue. Even this was indicative of a high level of trust in the non-governmental organization and its members, who were ready to listen and help under any circumstances. Sometimes, even the team itself wonders where they get so much strength and energy to help, and therefore, to make people’s lives better. Most importantly, they will not stop at what has been accomplished so far.

The Second Chance



Breaking the vicious circle

Iryna Chorna is a displaced person who came from Donetsk to Zaporizhzhia in 2014 together with her daughter (a child with a disability), her sister with two children (the youngest of which was only four months old at the time), elderly parents, and a grandfather (eight people in total). It turned out that she was the only one in this large team who could work. However, it was not so easy to get a job for a person with two higher educations. Applying to the employment center in the city of Zaporizhzhia, Iryna was refused, because she had the status of a person caring for a child with a disability. In our country, this is a person who receives assistance (about UAH 200 at that time) and who is subject to an official record of service. If she refused the assistance to get registered and find a job, her child would automatically be deprived of the disability status, which would make it impossible for the child to go to a specialized school. It was difficult even to get a job on the market as a regular saleswoman. Iryna was terribly ashamed to apply to various charity organizations, because she thought that at her age and being in good health, she was able to earn money on her own. She got trapped in a vicious circle: on the one hand, she had to feed her family, and on the other hand, no one employed her for various reasons. One day, Iryna came to Zaporizhzhia regional organization of the Red Cross Society in Ukraine and found out that they needed volunteers. From September 2014 until now, she has been a volunteer of this organization. For four months, she used to stand in a hypermarket wearing the Society cloak holding a basket for people to put things, hygiene items, and food for internally displaced persons in. In order to get a food gift basket, she had to stand two days a week. She stood four days, because her family was big, and she had to feed them all.

A long time passed since then. Iryna was an employee of “Save the Children” International Humanitarian Organization in Ukraine. Now she works for the “Child Smile” Zaporizhzhia regional charitable fund.

Iryna's family are people of different categories of vulnerable segments of the population from among internally displaced persons. They faced nu-

merous problems: registration of social benefits, pensions, disability, search for housing, etc. In other words, they faced all the trials that a displaced person can only imagine. Initially, she got a lot of help, both tangible and intangible, from various organizations, both local and international. This help provided her with an opportunity to study – to master a new specialty. In particular, Iryna was trained by the International Organization for Migration and received a grant. However, 5 years passed, and it became clear that everyone was leaving, there was relatively little help, but people still had problems. It was not clear enough for her what to do next. Having passed through all the difficulties and troubles, coped with them and overcome them, she had only one way to go – to help other people from among internally displaced persons with the same issues.

Everything happens on time

It so happened that Iryna learned about the trainings organized by NGO “Civil Holding “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” as part of the “Local Advocacy for Internally Displaced Persons” project under a grant provided by the Council of Europe project called “Internal Displacement in Ukraine: Building Solutions” and participated in them.

The main reason for her participation was that she understood that the displaced were quite capable to (and it was high time to) solve their own problems and not wait for organizations to come and do it. Thanks to the “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” and other organizations, IDPs finally won the right to vote in local elections. It helps a lot now. The training made it possible to outline the issues to advocate. This is how the idea of advocating social housing for internally displaced persons in Zaporizhzhia came about. However, as it turned out, several activists in the community were already working on this issue: Olena Makaya, Anastasiia Perepelitsia, and Svitlana Vaniukhina. So, all four of them came together and realized that solving one problem, such as the housing need, was no longer enough. They had to address all issues that the displaced encountered in the city: through negotiations with the authorities, proposals, programs, recommendations, and through dialog. They came up with an idea to create an advisory council as part of the Municipal Executive Committee. They soon implemented the idea. There are some developments; a policy plan for the next three months has been prepared. The priority matter for them is to study the needs in the city of Zaporizhzhia,

because they have to clearly understand what percentage of people want to participate in the housing program, how many of them have the funds to make the first contribution, and so on.



Meeting of the initiative group, March 2020

Another important topic that members of the organization deal closely with is the status of child victims of hostilities and armed conflict, because this process develops very slowly: people lack an understanding of why they have to obtain the status and what benefits it provides. It is important to hold an information campaign among internally displaced persons and to work with local authorities on the possible preferences for children with the status. The issues that Iryna and her colleagues put on the agenda are different social issues. For example, they have recently discussed that the Department of Social Protection in Zaporizhzhia does not have mobile phone numbers. All contact phone numbers are conventional, so older people are not always able to and know how to call; it costs money. The activists were promised that this issue would be resolved in the near future, and that a mobile phone number would definitely become available at any department. The situation

with the media – the issues of avoiding “hateful speech” and adhering to “do no harm!” principle, and avoiding new conflicts in the community – are small but important issues raised by the Advisory Council.

Long-term plans

The IDP Advisory Council in Zaporizhzhia currently includes eight people working for various NGOs, but it is not yet fully staffed. An open competition has been announced for the vacant positions, so that everyone who is willing can participate and become a member of the team based on the results of the selection.

Iryna and her colleagues have already established various ties in 6 years. In addition, NGO “Civil Holding “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” provides comprehensive support at all levels: material support in the form of funds for events, information support in the form of leaflets, infographics, etc., and legal support in the form of counseling and assistance.

In addition to the main activities of the Advisory Council, it deals with issues of humanitarian assistance, legal and psychological issues, etc., which people seek to handle, so the Council is looking for ways and means to address them.

Iryna is extremely optimistic! She says that we, the displaced people, are happy because for the second time in our lives, we find ourselves in a situation when we have to start over, which makes us stronger, because we have gained experience, we have not been broken, we can live on and help one another, and the IDP Advisory Council in Zaporizhzhia is a tool in achieving this.





Protection and Patronage



Things went great before that...

Larysa Sydorenko is the coordinator for internally displaced persons and co-founder of NGO “Egida – Center”.

In 2014, due to constant shelling in her hometown, she was forced to move to Kryvyi Rih, where her daughter studied and her aunt lived. Immediately upon arrival, she faced a number of difficulties: the inability to get a job while being a good specialist, because she was 50 years old at that time; she could not expect to get assistance from the state, because the assistance was provided to vulnerable social groups. It so happened that during the communication with the IDPs, she came up with an idea to join efforts and establish a non-governmental organization that would handle the matters of internally displaced persons, including assistance in obtaining certificates, social benefits, the bodies and persons to contact to obtain them, legal issues, etc., because things went well in people’s lives before the war. Larysa is a physicist by education. Therefore, she is a person of specifics and action. She didn’t have to wait long to implement her plan.

Enough to go with the flow

Until 2016, there was no organization in Kryvyi Rih created by the displaced themselves. The action group held its first meeting and decided to quit going with the flow and waiting, and start solving their problems by themselves. A presentation event was held to celebrate the creation of the new non-governmental organization, attended by all representatives of government agencies, local human rights activists, and the public. The Municipal Executive Committee welcomed the event, as it had long wanted the IDPs to unite and solve vital issues together. Initially, the organization was called “Egida for IDPs. The Protection of the Rights of IDPs”. The name was not accidental, but very symbolic: egida (aegis) means protection, patronage. The organization immediately began to develop actively: to establish cooperation with governmental and non-governmental structures, organizations, to which it redirected, if necessary, people who needed help; to form a client base; its members began to study and participate in various trainings and events. A very strong team of like-minded people was formed, who complemented each other. The first period was dedicated to training.

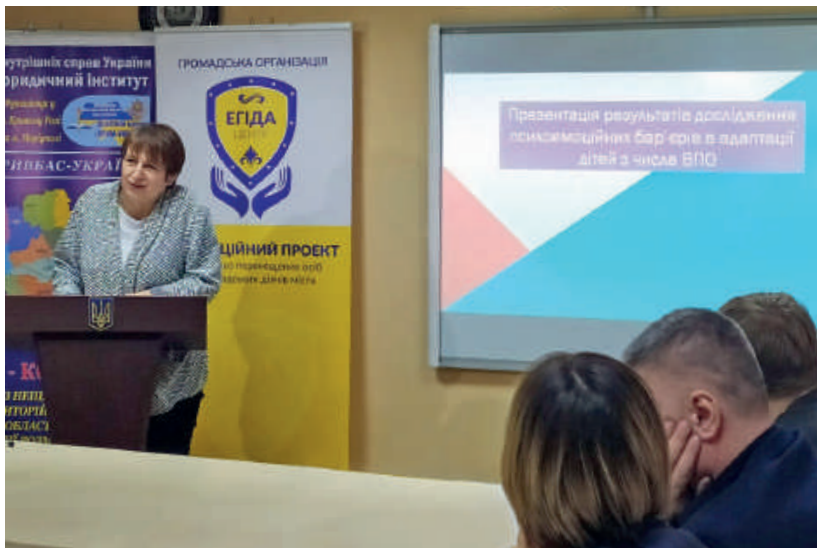
Larysa and her team took part in “Promoting Integration and Ensuring the Rights of Internally Displaced Persons in the Community of Kryvyi Rih” project to support the residents of the eastern regions of Ukraine and became its leader. During 2017–2018, the socio-psychological and legal assistance was provided to internally displaced persons as part of the project, including social support on a case management basis. Much has been done during this period: the IDP Assistance Coordination Resource Center has been established; an information guide for newly arrived displaced persons has been developed; a comprehensive city plan of integration and adaptation measures for internally displaced persons for two years has been adopted; IDP participation in the “Public Budget” city competition has become possible; thanks to fruitful cooperation and quality work, the city has the opportunity to attract investment; other regions have started to adopt the experience of Kryvyi Rih; case management trainings have been conducted in three regions of the country.

At the end of 2017, for the first time ever, the displaced were able to go beyond their own problems and make a gift to the city, which had become their new home. Music Camp International, a unique music camp, was held for the first time in Kryvyi Rih and attended by 200 children. The displaced were increasingly often called “new Kryvyi Rih people”.

There was an understanding that IDPs could not be separated from the community. There is no integration when you solve the problems of displaced persons only and ignore other social categories. There was a need to create an integration project. Thus, in 2018, “Egida – Center” appeared. The NGO was created by internally displaced persons together with public figures of the city and aimed to help not only internally displaced persons but also ATO/JFO soldiers, members of their families, and other vulnerable population groups. The NGO includes a Resource Center in operation, as well as “Peace Camp. Kryvbas – Donbas – Ukraine” social city project, the purpose of which is the social adaptation of children from among IDPs, children from families of ATO/JFO soldiers, and other privileged categories.

ries. The project consists of summer shift on the basis of KPZ DOT “Slava” in Skadovsk and one-day training camps on the basis of city hubs during the year. The NGO also includes “Kryvyi Rih. The Territory of Peace and Sports” project, which is a one-day summer camp travelling to recreations. Areas of activity of the organization are advocacy, child protection, social housing; socio-psychological, legal, and humanitarian assistance; dealing with the media, etc. Currently, two housing programs are being implemented, 15 apartments have already been purchased and handed over to IDPs, and reconstruction of a dormitory for social housing for internally displaced persons is underway.

Larysa feels strong about her activity – she is determined not to be afraid, but to act. Her NGO took boarding schools under patronage, repeatedly provided humanitarian aid to the front, was engaged in delivery of humanitarian aid, including wheelchairs, to the city, organized concerts, took an active part in “Children of Kryvbas to Children of Donbas” social action, held a “Volunteer Day”, etc. The team of the organization is open to cooperation, actively participates in events with other institutions/action groups/organizations, and cooperates with them and the authorities.



Conference “Long-term solutions for IDPs”, December 13, 2019

Reality dictates

Being the coordinator for internally displaced persons, Larysa believes that one should not decide for the displaced what they need, one should just ask them in order to properly organize the actions and assistance in general.

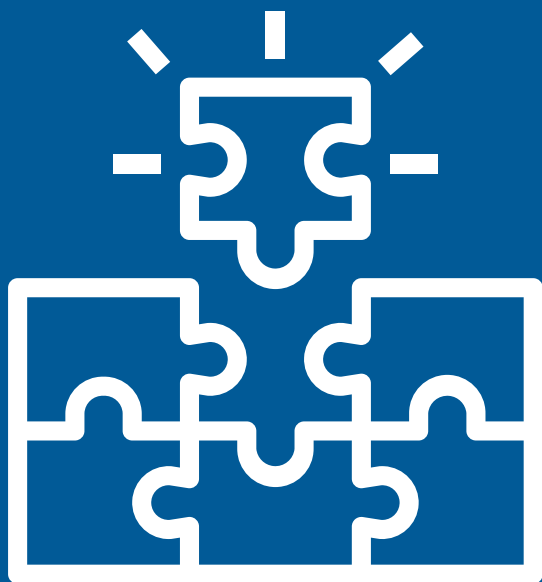
In early 2020, the team of NGO “Egida – Center”, in cooperation with NGO “Civil Holding “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” as part of the implementation of “Local Advocacy for Internally Displaced Persons” project under a grant provided by the Council of Europe project called “Internal Displacement in Ukraine: Building Solutions”, conducted a large-scale study of the needs of families with children affected by hostilities and armed conflict.

At the initiative of NGO “Egida – Center” and as a result of long-term work of its team under this project, the program of protection of children affected by hostilities and armed conflict was approved by Kryvyi Rih City Council on December 24, 2019. According to the program, children who have this status will be entitled to the following at the expense of the city budget: annual cash payment in the amount of UAH 5 000; free travel by public transport; free meals in schools; free sanatory programs; 50 % compensation for the cost of kindergarten; reimbursement of treatment costs at the rate of not more than UAH 9 000 per year.

As of November 2019, 2 000 internally displaced children lived in Kryvyi Rih. Only 21 of them were granted the status of children affected by hostilities and armed conflict.

The main reason for such a low rate is the ignorance of the displaced about the availability of this status and distrust of its practical value. A campaign is underway to inform the public about new opportunities, and the implementation of the program is being monitored.

Larysa believes that a strong state is the one that cares for children and the elderly. NGO “Egida – Center” is active in all these areas and has many plans for the future to improve the lives of fellow citizens.





Громадська Організація
«Організація переселенців
«Потрібні люди»

An Effective Team of Like- Minded People



Both the displaced and not

Vasyl Borozdin is the head and co-founder of Publik Organization “Organization of migrants «Necessary People»”, a public adviser, a superactive, enterprising person, an IDP who does not consider himself such. He has been involved in architecture and design for over 25 years now. Even his moving to Shostka in 2014 was related to work – a successful 3-year contract. No one ran away. He could not even think that everything would turn out that way. There were no active hostilities in his hometown at first, but then shelling, motor convoys, and forced relocations of his acquaintances and friends began. In August, he took his mother and at the same time, he personally encountered difficulties that almost all the displaced had to overcome: problems, related to registration and enrollment with the local Labor and Social Protection Administration, transfer of pensions from one bank to another, etc. Due to the specifics of his work, Vasyl established contacts with local authorities and later, with other non-governmental organizations and activists in a short period of time.

When solving his family issues, he realized that IDPs were confused and needed information, coordination, and help.

Active people are drawn together

Close communication with his compatriots, who were also forced to move, reaffirmed for him the need to unite, create a community, and solve the problems of IDPs together. It is not enough to be just a good person to regulate some processes. One needs leverage, status in the form of a non-governmental organization to get more people to hear and see, listen and help.

There was no organization in Sumy that would deal with displaced persons, let alone Shostka.

The organization undertook a mission of explaining to internally displaced persons what opportunities and rights they had and helping them with paperwork. It began to deal with legal, social, and humanitarian problems, involving various non-governmental organizations, investing, in particular, financial and time resources of its members.

The displaced community consists of more than 300 people now. It so happened that a meeting is held every Thursday, at which various issues of their lives are dealt with; meetings with invited people (officials of the Pension Fund, the Labor and Social Protection Administration, lawyers, etc.) take place. Until 2019, people were constantly talking about their home and the situation around it – people got the so-called “itchy feet”. But everything has changed since. There are almost no such talks now. People come to the realization that Shostka is now their home. The displaced persons have adapted and feel comfortable. The non-governmental organization has gradually switched to the development of the entire community that has to evolve to be successful.

Vasyl believes that the most important task, which the organization has already completed, is to introduce people to each other. The IDPs are very friendly and organized as far as holidays, various events, and household issues are concerned.

Extremely important field of concern of the non-governmental organization is providing internally displaced persons with housing. In cooperation with NGO “Civil Holding “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” as part of the implementation of “Local Advocacy for Internally Displaced Persons” project under a grant provided by the Council of Europe project called “Internal Displacement in Ukraine: Building Solutions”, it is engaged in an advocacy campaign aimed at informing interested parties about the innovations introduced into the program on the provision of temporary housing to internally displaced persons within the provision of subventions from the state budget in the amount of 70 % from the state budget and 30 % from the local budget. This program is optimal for vulnerable segments of the population, retirees, and people for whom lending programs are not available due to difficult financial situation. In addition, the NGO intends to make adjustments to the program.

At the beginning of the year, a panel discussion on “Temporary Housing for IDPs” was held in Shostka with the participation of representatives of public authorities, local governments, and NGOs. Participants voiced their proposals for the implementation of government programs to improve housing conditions for IDPs in the communities, proposed to the relevant ministry to form a procedure for implementing these programs, which would clearly define the conditions of government support, requirements for participation documents, implementation deadlines, etc. They stressed



Round table “Temporary housing for IDPs”, January 9, 2020

the need to revise the priority criteria for housing in terms of distinguishing such categories as elderly people (70+) and single people. All recommendations were sent to the relevant ministry. The participants of the event also addressed the mayors of Sumy, Konotop, Putyvl, and Shostka with a proposal to join the government program of temporary housing for displaced persons. There is active cooperation in this matter with NGO “Civil Holding “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” and other non-governmental organizations.

IDPs are few, but active

Publik Organization “Organization of migrants «Necessary People»”, led by Vasyl, the most famous activist not only in Shostka, has been very active.

In particular, among the eight projects accepted in the city participation budget for 2020, five projects are from this organization, namely:

1) installation of air conditioners in a children's hospital; 2) improvement of a recreation area with paving slabs; 3) installation of a children's playground; 4) construction of a "SkyPark" sports and recreation tourist complex; 5) arrangement of an architectural flower bed in the center of the city.

Since its inception, the organization has regularly participated in various city events: photo exhibitions, social advertising competitions, fashion shows, etc. It organizes many events on its own, involving not only displaced persons but also the city people. It pays much attention to young people and children who are the extraordinary potential and the driver of change. Planting with flowers and design of the flower bed in the city center, which has really adorned the city, is also the work of members of the organization and all concerned.

As the head of the organization, Vasyl has an extraordinary ability to establish friendly relationship, to communicate fruitfully, to attract, like a magnet, good people, uniting around himself a powerful and effective team of like-minded people, the leaders of change. He also believes that it is important to involve residents in all the processes taking place in Shostka, so that they do not stay away, but get involved in the life of the city and the community, understand what they need and seek to achieve it.

Many things have already been done for the city and the community. Even more things are being implemented and planned, and will certainly be realized.





The Evolutionary Changes



No one will come and start doing things...

Yuliia Kalashnikova is the head and founder of NGO “We are from Ukraine”, and a displaced person. She had never been involved in public activities before the war. She was a civil servant, a mother of three, who just did not have enough time for that. However, with the forced relocation to the town of Storozhynets, various legal issues began to emerge that needed to be resolved and that neither the local nor the central authorities were eager to resolve. Unfortunately, there are no powerful organizations in Chernivtsi Oblast that deal with issues of internally displaced persons. So Yuliia came to the conclusion, as she put it, in an evolutionary manner that she had to start her own NGO in her community, which would make changes, because no one would come and start doing this.

The NGO has been operating for a year now. It has been studying the legislation, getting acquainted with various housing programs, researching the issues connected with the targeted help, and, step by step, helping the internally displaced persons directly.

The Storozhynets community is large and multinational, consisting of about 40 thousand people, including Romanians, Poles, and Germans, but there are few internally displaced persons in it – 70 of them (15 families) according to statistics. Most of them live close by; they support each other where they can, help and fight together for their rights. They became aware that they needed to work in the community and with the community.

Charging with energy

Yuliia is extremely active, persistent, and purposeful. She started her public activity having no experience but a great and inexpugnable desire. She still had uncertainty and doubts somewhere deep in her heart, wondering whether it would work out, and whether she would make it. However,

she had people around ready to give her support, because it was very difficult for her to take on an important and big issue and try to do it on her own. In addition, she needed experience, and she managed to gain it through persistent training, overcoming fear and ignorance. Though she is not a teacher by profession, she has chosen it as her vocation and generously shares the acquired knowledge with her surroundings, involves them in various programs and trainings, informs them.



Advocacy and communication training, October 20–22, 2019

Participation in advocacy training for internally displaced persons, organized by NGO “Civil Holding “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” as part of “Local Advocacy for Internally Displaced Persons” project, which was implemented under a grant provided by the Council of Europe project called “Internal Displacement in Ukraine: Building Solutions”, gave Yuliia a strong impetus and provided support, because it is very difficult to start doing something with local authorities, implementing certain changes, having no experience and legal education. In addition, the format of the trainings, which involved not only

representatives of non-governmental organizations but also of local authorities, has demonstrated that there are other representatives of government and members of non-governmental organizations who face similar problems and solve them, some do it better, some don't. It is very important that the authorities see that no one wants too much, there is nothing unclear, everything is transparent and available. Thanks to the experience of participating in the trainings, certain mistrust and caution have disappeared, communication with local authorities is underway, and some processes are speeding up.

At the training, Yuliia learned about the government program for financing temporary housing, under which the government could provide 70 % of the required amount for the repair or construction of such housing for internally displaced persons. The remaining 30 % should be found by the community. Since then, there has been an active cooperation with the "GROUP OF INFLUENCE" within the project.

The main direction is temporary housing and targeted assistance

The "Internal Displacement: Areas of Concern and Ways to Deal with Them" panel discussion is the first experience for Yuliia in presenting her interests to the community, the central issues among which, in particular, were temporary housing and the status of a child victim of hostilities. In her opinion, internal displacement has gradually turned into a permanent residence, and the displaced will be able to integrate through obtaining permanent or temporary housing or through some other related programs. In particular, the NGO, in cooperation with combatants, has launched an advocacy campaign in support of the conversion of an abandoned dormitory building, which has 38 apartments, for temporary housing for displaced persons, participants in ATO/JFO and members of their families. It has already managed to get the approval of the city authorities and deputies of the City Council. Now it is up to the regional authorities to include the dormitory building in the asset list, so the work is underway.

In addition, the issue of targeted assistance is on the agenda, namely underpayment and suspension of such assistance. The non-governmental organization, together with the "GROUP OF INFLUENCE", seeks in court to restore the unreasonably suspended payment of targeted assistance.

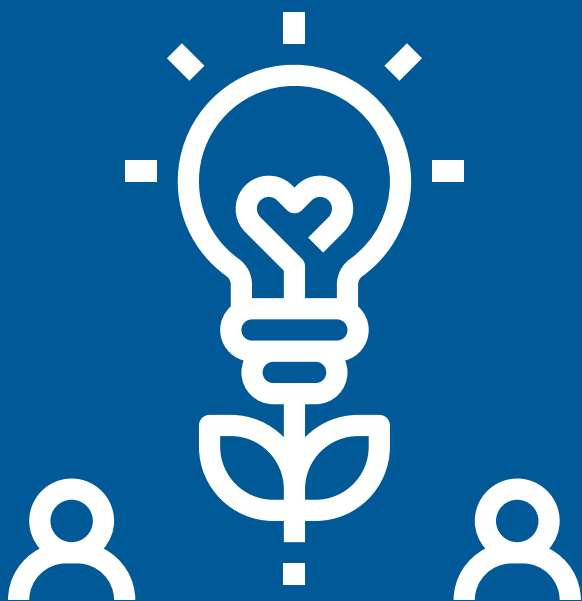
I see a lot of work to do

Establishment of an organization that deals with problems of internally displaced persons was the first endeavor, but even then it was clear that this was not enough. As the head of a non-governmental organization and a resident of Storozhynets, Yuliia plans to work for the community and in the interest of the community: to look for activists, to unite people, to offer co-operation, to elaborate new projects and to implement them together. There are very few active non-governmental organizations in the united territorial community, although several dozen of them have been registered. Throughout its existence, the non-governmental organization has already launched three projects, including, in particular, an environmental one, which is about doing away with polyethylene in the city's stores.

The topic of civil society is a fascinating topic for Yuliia that she feels very keenly about. In order to be able to help people and the community to the full, the woman was trained as a public counselor, gained basic theoretical knowledge in all areas, and learned how to organize processes in the community so that it could function effectively. It became clear how many areas in the community were not dealt with.

Yuliia dreams of involving young people and people aged 55+ in active cooperation to create changes together.

Collaboration with NGO "Civil Holding "GROUP OF INFLUENCE", which brought together non-governmental organizations involved in the protection of rights of internally displaced persons, as well as with other organizations and structures, makes it possible to share experience, learn, and grow. Yuliia is looking for and engaging concerned people in her community, because she needs people who will help create changes in the community together. She is not well-known in the community yet, but she is a supporter of evolutionary development. People will gradually find out due to the projects implemented. It is actions that are supposed to attract attention and guarantee trust now and in the future. Success in one project gives confidence and energy to implement more projects. Yuliia believes that in this way, she can charge others with this energy and work for the benefit of the community. There is actually a lot of work to do.



Step by Step



If you're drowning, you're on your own

Kostiantyn Blazhevych is the Chairman of the Board of NGO “Zakarpattia-Donbas” and, unfortunately, an internally displaced person like thousands of others. He moved to Uzhhorod in February 2015. He had never been involved in public activity before. He had no idea what it was, but he immediately realized that he had to do something – to address the issues that he encountered. It was a jump start for him. He gathered around himself IDPs, like-minded people, to whom public activity was also new, and in March of the same year, he started a non-governmental organization. He got support from close ones, a group of people who, combining work and family matters, lit up with the idea of change. The main goal of the organization, toward which it is still going, was to provide housing for internally displaced persons, but at the same time, there were other goals (necessary and relevant at the time), both humanitarian and food-related.

The members of the organization did everything that could help make life for the displaced persons in Uzhhorod easier, as it was very difficult to cope with everything alone.

We are IDPs, so we know what we need

Kostiantyn focused the activity of the organization on solving the housing issue, because, as three surveys conducted in different periods have shown, the main problem for IDPs in 2015, 2019, and 2020 is still lack of their own housing.

There has been no central heating in Uzhhorod for several years, and all boiler houses have been signed off to the City Council. He got an idea of using the area under these facilities to start building housing for internally displaced persons. The organization managed to move forward in small steps, without losing optimism and enthusiasm, and got a boiler house next to the military unit. Its total area, together with the land,

is 24 ares. The land registration procedure took a lot of time and effort, because one has to be either the owner or at least the tenant to start doing something.

NGO “Zakarpattya-Donbas”, in cooperation with NGO “Civil Holding “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” as part of the implementation of “Local Advocacy for Internally Displaced Persons” project under a grant provided by the Council of Europe project called “Internal Displacement in Ukraine: Building Solutions”, organized and held a press conference presenting “My New Community”, the new advocacy campaign. The aim of the campaign was to draw the attention of the city community to the problem of a lack of housing for most IDPs. According to a survey by NGO “Zakarpattya-Donbas”, only 8 % of internally displaced persons living in Uzhhorod and Zakarpattia Oblast plan to return home after the end of the war and the liberation of the occupied territories. In general, advocacy campaigns became one of the tools that helped Kostiantyn and his team achieve the result – to get a land plot for 5-year rent.



Active team day

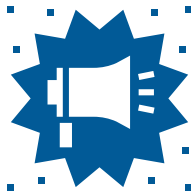
There are already technical conditions and a sketch project for a 9-storey residential building required to start construction directly, but this is not enough. A housing project has to be developed, which is quite expensive – UAH 750 thousand. The goal of another advocacy campaign is to find potential investors or sources to cover the value of this documentation. A panel discussion was scheduled for the spring of 2020 with the representatives of local authorities, both from the city and the region, where it was planned to develop a “road map” for the implementation of the housing project. However, due to quarantine in Ukraine, it had to be postponed indefinitely. But the planned activities will certainly take place, because it is another step towards achieving the main goal.

In addition, the non-governmental organization, led by Kostiantyn, took an active part in advocacy campaigns to provide internally displaced persons with the right to vote in local elections. The long-awaited right to vote is another leverage in resolving the housing issue.

Getting things moving

Kostiantyn and the team of the NGO do not lose optimism, because many steps have already been taken to achieve the set goal. It is important to get things moving, to launch the first housing project for internally displaced persons. Several NGOs are working on this issue in Ukraine. The first one to do it will pave the way for the others. It will be easier to do it later, backed up by their experience. Having information about the solution of a certain issue as an accomplished fact, the state authorities will look at it in a completely different way – without caution, will act more actively, and will finally make it possible to build a public-private partnership.

Kostiantyn is convinced that things will definitely work out, because a lot of effort and time has been put in and spent. The NGO is committed to moving forward toward achievement of the goal set – to provide internally displaced persons with long-awaited housing.



Icons:

Nithinan Tatah, Tippawan Sookruay
thenounproject.com

Circulation of 60 copies