

# ENSU Trade Union Newsletter

NOVEMBER 2023

ISSUE NUMBER 4

## ***In this issue:***

Welcome to the November 2023 issue of the trade union newsletter of the European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine (ENSU). In it we highlight the inspiring work of the Be Like Nina health worker movement, for whom ENSU is launching a fund appeal for urgently needed medical equipment.

We also feature the emergence of a revived student movement, in protest against unjustifiable fees at Kharkiv University and the private Kyiv International University, and (at Lviv Polytechnic) against an ethno-nationalist university professor and former Svoboda MP notorious for stating that Russian-speaking soldiers in the Armed Forces of Ukraine should "go back to Moscow".

Please distribute this newsletter to your family, friends and networks, so they can become aware of what life is like for working people in Ukraine!

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## **Feature: What are the victories of the Be Like Nina movement?**

*Source: International Labour Network for Solidarity and Struggle*

(November 2, 2023) The Be Like Nina medical movement is actually the only mass organisation in Ukraine which, in the fight for the rights of medical workers, is ready to confront the authorities and hospital administration, legal proceedings and bureaucratic disputes, and carry out large-



scale actions and effective protest actions.

In practice, the movement fights for gender equality, demanding decent wages in an almost exclusively female field, particularly among nurses and junior staff. And its leaders and its main assets are also predominantly women.

Be Like Nina has won victories that are both symbolic and very concrete. We asked BLN president Oksana Sbobodyana what examples of the movement's work its activists would cite as most revealing.

### **Giving nurses a voice**

One of the main achievements of Be Like Nina was called by participants "bringing nurses out of the shadows".

The movement succeeded in drawing the attention of the Ministry of Health to the violation of civil rights and the work of nurses.

The law on increasing the salaries of healthcare workers was adopted after we sent our appeal with proposals to the President, the Ministry of Health and the Cabinet of Ministers, activists point out.

In January 2022, nurses' salaries were increased to 13,500 Hryvnias [349 euros]

We have raised the issue of professional and sexist harassment in medicine. As you know, a law came into force in December 2022.

For example, thanks to the appeal of local nurses, the movement denounced the dismissal of the entire staff of a home for the elderly in the Dnipropetrovsk region, while this subject was ignored by the media.

We denounced the salary cuts in Zaporizhzhia after which the healthcare workers received the appropriate payments.

### **Creation of a platform for unifying healthcare workers**

Another major achievement of the participants of Be Like Nina is "the creation of a platform for communication, friendship and unification of the country", where doctors, nurses and young medical staff can talk together about their problems.

Caregivers from different regions, cities and villages have never been so close to each other, never so much shared news and problems as a group.

Currently, the movement's Facebook group has 85,000 members, and activists point out that they organised it themselves without any political backing or other external support.

Ultimately, our movement united people of a common profession and became a unique modern example for the protection of their rights.

### **Unification of militant unions and creation of new unions**

The Be Like Nina medical movement brings together active independent unions and works to create an independent all-Ukrainian union.

Currently, among the activists are the chairman of the Myrhorod Independent Union, Oleksiy Chuprina, who is also a co-founder of the movement, and the chairman of the Nizhyn Independent Union, Olga Turochka, who, despite pressure from local authorities, was able to lead the union. The movement contributed to the creation of a union at the Maternity Three unit of the municipal hospital in the city of Lviv. Oksana Slobodyana herself leads the Lviv Regional Union of Medical Workers and Medical Personnel.

After the medical reform, the importance of healthcare workers' unions increased, since it is on them that the adoption of the collective agreement depends. This determines the level of salaries, bonuses, working hours, workload and other key points. Unfortunately, in practice, some health sector unions are often inactive or side with the employer.

However, Be Like Nina reminds us why unions should actually exist: to protect their members' labour rights and help them in difficult life circumstances.

The movement also supported caregivers who are fighting against cuts and non-payment of salaries in Nizhyn, Pryluky, Zaporizhzhia and many other cities.

### **International cooperation**

The Be Like Nina movement is already known around the world and cooperates with friendly international organisations.

For example, activists from the movement participated in training in Poland organised by the Unions Help Refugees organisation, where they also communicated with local activists working in the field of care and also fighting for improved working conditions.

*Be Like Nina President Oksana Slobodyana participated in the international trade union conference CSP-Conlutas in Brazil, where she expressed the position of Ukrainian healthcare workers regarding the Russian attack and the struggle of the Ukrainian people for freedom and a dignified life.*

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## **Worker struggles in Ukraine**

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### **Management revenge against maternity hospital nurses?**



*Source: Be Like Nina*

*(November 8, 2023)* In the Khmelnytsky region, the maternity department of the Derazhnyansky hospital is to be closed, and pregnant women are to be sent to find another medical institution. Staff are informed of the closure and are required to inform pregnant women that they should seek another medical facility for their future deliveries. The hospital nurses informed the health workers' movement Be Like Nina about the move.

From January 2024, the number of obstetricians-gynaecologists, paediatricians, anesthesiologists, sonographers, midwives and nurses will be reduced at the hospital.

According to local doctors, a lower limit of at least 150 births per year has been set for the operation of maternity hospitals. But as of today, there have already been 142 births, in November there should be 17, and in December 24. In other words, there are enough births. Citizens filed a petition with the city council to preserve the department, nurses say.

At the same time, the order states that the National Health Service of Ukraine has not concluded a new contract with the hospital for the provision of "Medical assistance during childbirth", thereby depriving the maternity service of funding.

As you know, a scandal recently broke out in the National Health Service regarding this area of medical care: several hospitals falsely exaggerated newborns in order to receive double funding. According to the Ministry of Health, this happened in a third of cases. Additionally, in 2023, the number of caesarean sections has increased significantly. The Ministry of Health specifies that this also indicates "the performance of an operation without medical indications, but only for the

purpose of receiving funds for the procedure." Control over the targeted use of funds by hospitals is entrusted to the National Health Service.

Yes, at Derazhnyansky Hospital only women's consultations and emergency rooms for unforeseen cases will remain. The nurses also believe that the closure of this service could be revenge by the administration against the activity of the staff.

It is at the maternity ward that there are activists who head the council of the labour collective and organise the union. It is revenge for the fact that we speak about violations and want justice, we denounce those who took public funds, we fight corruption, those who use war for their own enrichment. We fight for our survival, say the nurses.

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## Social conflict in Ukraine

Source: <https://www.kadrovik.ua>

(November 8, 2023) From January to August 2023, the National Mediation and Conciliation Service identified 7644 labor conflicts which affected 1.6 million employees. In these conflicts, 45% concerned non-compliance with labour law requirements, 32% the implementation of a collective agreement or individual provisions of an agreement, 46% the establishment of new working conditions and 8% the conclusion or modification of a collective agreement.

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## Bolt Food couriers dispute

- *'You don't live in a country where you can go on strike'*

(Source: <https://laboursolidarity.org/en/n/2941/you-don039t-live-in-a-country-where-you-can-go-on-strike>)

(October 30, 2023) That is what the boss of Bolt Food, an Estonian food delivery company based in Ukraine, told its striking couriers demanding a wage increase and better working conditions.

The previous notable strike by Bolt Food couriers broke out in 2021, but without success. Then the couriers accused the company of having reduced their payment per delivery by 50%.

October 20, Kyiv, Bastionna Street. Striking couriers from Bolt Food gathered in front of the company's offices. The security guards at the company explain to them (not very diplomatically) that there will be no dialogue with the management of the company, the regional director of the company is aware of the strike, but he is busy with important business. This is the fifth strike by Bolt Food couriers in the past month. The first was held in Dnipro at the beginning of October.

### *Mass distribution leaflet to couriers*

(October 29, 2023)

Dear couriers!

We have started a war against Bolt Food.



The main reason for this is the lowering of pay rates, especially on the left bank of Kyiv, unreasonable hold-ups, and the general devaluation of the work of couriers.

Our goal is to complicate the life of the company, affect its revenues and make this issue public through social media and the mass media.

Since we all need to earn money to feed our families, our strategy is that of work to rule.

### **Strategy (important)**

Each employee takes at least one day off a week, which is why the Food Cats [strike] committee is asking everyone to mobilise for a common purpose.

Namely, an increase in income!

Let's join forces and reorganise our work schedules so that we have a day off together on FRIDAY.

This will allow us all to earn money during the week and to strike the company (until it understands).

We invite you to join this strategy and share it with all your friends and acquaintances who work in the field of distribution.

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## **The struggle of a Ukrainian worker for reinstatement**

*Source: Telegram channel of Vitaliy Dudin, labour lawyer*

(October 27, 2023) In the autumn of 2020, Serhii Zagurskyi was fired from his pharmaceutical company and decided to appeal. He had to bring two legal actions, because the employer was able to annul the first dismissal decision and then issue a new dismissal decision. At the beginning of the Russian invasion, Serhii went to the army, but he continued to fight in court and turned to me for help.

In the autumn of 2023, the court reinstated him and awarded him 1164276 UAH [= €29,628] in compensation for forced absenteeism.

The Court recalled the following truths:

- You cannot ignore the union's requirement to approve the dismissal of a member of an elected workplace body.
  - The employer must offer the employee a vacant position in the event of dismissal.
  - You can dismiss an employee after two months' notice, and if that day expires on a day off, then on the following Monday.
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## **Student struggles in Ukraine**

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### **Reactionary right mobilises against Direct Action student union**

*Source: Extract from media release by Priama Diia (Direct Action)*



*On the left the students, on the right the reactionaries*

*(November 20, 2023)* Following the dismissal of the xenophobic professor Iryna Farion (see following articles), her supporters held a rally near the Lviv Polytechnic

Oksana Mykytyuk, assistant professor of the Ukrainian language department at Lviv Polytechnic University, said that the department's staff was against the dismissal of Iryna Farion.

On Monday, November 20, a rally was held near the Lviv Polytechnic in support of Iryna Farion, associate professor and licensed professor, former people's deputy of the higher educational institution "Svoboda". Several dozen people gathered for the rally, especially her colleagues from the Ukrainian language department, fellow party members and supporters.

A separate point of the rally's resolution included an appeal to law enforcement agencies with a request to investigate the activities of the left-wing student union Direct Action, which organised the student action against Iryna Farion.



It will be recalled that the State Security Service (SBU) opened proceedings against Iryna Farion under four articles of the Criminal Code. The reasons for the investigation by law enforcement agencies were the statements of the linguist about Russian-speaking soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the disclosure of personal data of a student from Crimea who wrote a letter to her.

On November 14, several hundred Lviv students demonstrated near the main building of the Lviv Polytechnic to demand the dismissal of teacher Iryna Farion due to these scandals. After listening to the demonstrators' demands, the university created a commission which was to report its conclusions before November 23.

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## Victory for students!

*Source: Press release Priama Diia (Direct Action)*

(November 15, 2023) In the shortest possible time, after public outrage and the powerful student protest that followed, the chauvinist Iryna Farion (pictured) was fired from the Lviv Polytechnic!

The official reason was an "immoral offence." This is not only good news and gives us hope that there is still common sense in this world, but it also proves once again that there are no impossible goals when we are united and fight together for justice. The fact that the person inciting hatred was expelled from the university is due to the personal merit of all those who responded to the call of Direct Action and expressed strong protest in front of the walls of the polytechnic.



It should be noted that during negotiations with students, the administration of Lviv National Polytechnic University stated that it was impossible to dismiss Iryna Farion without, firstly, completing the work of the moral and ethical commission and, secondly, without solid legal bases. This unexpected dismissal shows that during negotiations with Direct Action, the university management actually wanted to ignore the students. We have once again confirmation that the most effective way to improve education is through struggle, not negotiation.

Commenting on Mr Farion's dismissal, Education Minister Lisovyi said, "students have been, are and always will be a powerful engine of change and transformation." These words are indisputable proof that students had the last word in this high-profile case - this is our common victory!

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## The two statements from the Direct Action student union

(November 13, 2023) Tomorrow, November 14, at 12:00, near the main building of the Lviv National Polytechnic University, at 12 Bandera Street, a protest action will be organised, the main demand of which is the dismissal of Iryna Farion (pictured) from her professorship at the polytechnic school because of her xenophobic statements about Russian-speaking servicemen of the Ukrainian armed forces.

In addition to openly hateful statements, Irina Dmitrievna's recent activities caused real harm to students who supported her: according to media reports, a private letter from a student from Crimea appeared on Farion's Telegram channel, where the latter expressed a pro-Ukrainian position. As Farion's publication contained the student's personal data, he was quickly arrested by Russian special services.

We emphasise once again that centres of hatred and obscurantism have no place in the teaching staff of universities. We call on everyone who wishes to join the action, bring friends and posters to show the administration and Ms. Farion herself that students will not tolerate her attempts to incite hatred on the basis of the language.

### ***EDUCATION WITHOUT HATE – POLYTECHNICS WITHOUT FEES!***

## **Lviv: The student demonstration against Ilyna Farion and her chauvinistic statements took place! What is the result?**

*(November 14, 2023)* Today, several hundred students and concerned citizens gathered near the main building of the Lviv National Polytechnic University and demanded that the administration fire or not renew the contract of the scandalous teacher. Among the slogans: "Farion out!", "Learn, love, punish Farion!", etc. The protesters were not prepared to make any concessions and strongly demanded that the teacher be removed from her position. University organisations or other [right-wing] student unions did not officially support the protest, clearly demonstrating the corrupt nature of bureaucratic student unions and the need for independent alternatives.

Finally, student representatives from Direct Action and several other independent organisations, as well as the administration, organised a round table. During the protests, Direct Action activists, along with other students, presented transitional demands, the ultimate goal of which is the resignation of Iryna Farion. Since the university administration did not provide clear answers to the students' questions, justifying this by the absence of a legal assessment, another round table will be organised next Thursday, to which a lawyer and Farion herself will even be invited.

It was also agreed that the university's moral and ethics commission would include two students from the protest who would keep the minutes of the commission's meetings. All minutes will be published on the Direct Action pages.

We thank all those who joined the campaign, who are not afraid to fight against obscurantism and for better education without hatred.

Until the goal is achieved, we must continue to fight.

Let's fight - we will win!

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## **Kyiv International University: new student mobilisation**

*Source: Direct Action*

*(November 24, 2023)* Students at the private Kyiv International University (KyMU) protested on November 24 against the introduction of fines for classes in which they do not attend.

'The university is a space for development, not for business', reads a protester's poster, Kyiv, November 24, 2023

Mykhailo Samsonenko, activist of the independent union Direct Action, explained the reason for the rally: "We gathered because the student body is not satisfied with this decision of the management, especially regarding the order of the president of KyMU. They had promised not to introduce this provision during the period of martial law. And since November 14, if I'm not mistaken, they decided to take it without any discussion with the students. This is why there is indignation," affirms the activist.

Direct Action union helped organize this rally to make the student population heard. One of the demonstrators' demands is also to stop increasing tuition fees during the period of martial law.

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## Kyiv International University: You miss a lesson, you pay

Source: Press release Priama Diia (Direct Action)

(Undated) Worrying news comes to us from the private university Kyiv International University (KyMU). KyMU students and their relatives report that from November 16, the university introduced a fine for missed lesson hours. It is proposed to fine 80 UAH (2 euros) for each missed



lesson: if a student misses one lesson, he or she must pay 80 UAH, if two lessons, 160 UAH, (4 euros) etc.

This condition was included in the admission contract with students, but at the time of signing the contract, the administration promised that it would not apply during martial law. In response to student outrage over the new regulations, the school's management declared that "whoever wants to withdraw, withdraw", although it is virtually impossible to find a new establishment in the middle of the academic year, as students point out.

Direct Action believes that the Kyiv University administration deceived students during the admissions campaign, which placed them in a financially disadvantageous position. Simply paying for missed classes is a blatant form of violation of the integrity of the university and an absolutely unacceptable manifestation of the commercialisation of education. We urge the management of the institution to immediately reverse this decision and we invite you to make these frauds known to your friends and acquaintances.

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## How to legally steal from students?

*Note: For several weeks, Kharkiv students have been mobilising against the reduction in scholarships. This is the leaflet explaining their dispute.*

(November 6, 2023) Two weeks ago, we collected signatures for a letter to the president's office. In this document, we demanded the establishment of justice regarding the percentage of scholarship holders in the universities of Kharkiv and all of Ukraine.

We received a response today. The ministry reports that Polytech has the right to reduce the percentage of scholarships if funds are not allocated to it.

No wonder, because laws and regulations are always written in such a way that there are loopholes, with the help of which the text will be interpreted to the benefit of those in power.

In general, it is very interesting that officials always find funds for the installation and dismantling of monuments, for stored barrels, but in no case for students. Meanwhile, there is a war in Ukraine, and we need qualified specialists in all fields more than ever.

Students are treated with contempt not only in the administration of Kharkiv University, but also in other cities. For example, there was recently a scandal at Kyiv Polytechnic University when the administration allocated money to paint a mural. And this at a time when the university does not have properly equipped shelter facilities in the event of an air raid!

What can we say in the end? With its response, the ministry perfectly expressed its attitude not only towards Kharkiv students, but also set an example to other administrations of other universities throughout Ukraine that it is POSSIBLE to deprive TWO-THIRD of students' scholarships and that there will be no consequences for this. After the situation in Kharkiv, it can be said that similar regressions will continue to take place at the universities of Zaporizhzhia, Dnipro, Kyiv, Odessa and many universities in other cities. Because it's now "legal".

Only organised groups of students throughout the country will be able to put an end to the arbitrariness of officials. We must act now, in a coordinated manner and as a group. And take action by all, and don't hope that someone will solve the problems for us. And if nothing is done, why be surprised that with our money, instead of paying scholarships, they move the paving stones for the tenth time in a year?

Let's act together. Let's fight together. We are also responsible for the results, all together.

Join the struggle!

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## Other Ukraine labour news

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### Shockingly, 22% of workers earn less than the minimum wage

Source: Vitaliy Dudin publishes interesting data on the labour force in Ukraine on his Telegram channel

(November 21, 2023) At my request, the Pension Fund provided the following data from the Register of Socially Insured Persons:

Total number of employees: 9,549,129

Employees receiving less than the minimum wage: 2,064,802

Part-time employees: 1,005,351 (including 666,164 part-time working)

Employees working under an employment contract with irregular hours: 9,959

Employees based on employment contracts: unknown (although 455 employees are residents of [Diia City](#) (Note: Diia City provides IT companies with one of the best tax regimes in Europe))

At first glance, there has been no catastrophic decline in employment (before the invasion there were 10.3 million workers. There are no signs of a sharp increase in precarious work (including unspecified working hours and permanent contracts)).

But labour guarantees often offer only nominal protection. Shockingly, 22% of workers earn less than the minimum wage. Their share is increasing, as is the number of poor people.

Such poverty in work is incompatible with European standards. Only organised pressure from workers will make it possible to correct errors in social policy and employer behaviour.

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### Urgent appeal to release workers missing from Ukrainian power plant

Source: [IndustriALL](#)

(November 2, 2023) IndustriALL Global Union and IndustriAll European Union are urgently calling for immediate action to locate and secure the release of workers who have disappeared from the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) in Ukraine.

Three workers from ZNPP have gone missing under disturbing circumstances. Brazhnyk Oleksii Petrovych, a retired lieutenant colonel of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and engineer at the Korzh, Sergiy Volodymyrovych, an engineer at the Electrical Shop of ZNPP, was abducted on 4 September 2022 and has not been found since.

Korzh Olexander Volodymyrovych, employed at the State Scientific and Technical Center for Nuclear and Radiation Safety at ZNPP, was taken captive alongside his brother Sergiy on 4 September 2022. Although he was briefly released on 07 September 2022, he was detained again on

16 December 2022 and transported to an undisclosed location. His current location remains a mystery, adding to the growing concerns about the safety and well-being of these missing workers.

IndustriALL has sent urgent letters to key international bodies. The letters, addressed to the Director-General of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the [Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency](#), the [Head of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine](#), and to the [members of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances](#), call for immediate action to secure the release of the workers.



IndustriALL Global and IndustriAll Europe have also sent a [joint letter to European Union representatives](#) to assist in the location and release of the workers.

Isabelle Barthès and Judith Kirton-Darling, acting joint

general secretaries of industriAll Europe affirm:

"We strongly condemn the enforced disappearance of workers at the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant, which is a crime and simply inhumane. Together with our global sister organisation, we call on the United Nations to intervene urgently to secure the release of the missing workers. We will do our utmost to monitor and shed light on the situation of workers in Russian-occupied territories and companies in Ukraine and inform the EU authorities accordingly".

The letters highlight the cases of three workers affiliated with the union Atomprofspilka, who have mysteriously vanished:

This forced disappearance of individuals constitutes a crime against humanity under the International Criminal Court statute, as well as a violation of the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

The Russian Federation should immediately and unconditionally cease its aggression, withdraw its troops from Ukraine, and end the suffering it is inflicting on the people of Ukraine. We call on you to contact the Government of the Russian Federation to ensure the immediate safe release of the workers from the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant who have been victim of enforced disappearance.

"We stand united in our demand for immediate action. The disappearance of the workers from the Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant is a violation of human rights. IndustriALL will not rest until these missing workers are safely returned to their families. We urge the international community to join us in this call for justice, unity, and the protection of workers' rights worldwide,"

says Atle Høie, IndustriALL general secretary.

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## Employer use of Law 2136 to suspend employment benefits

*Source: Information published by labour lawyer Vitaliy Dudin*

(November 1, 2023) Unions are fighting in court against the abuse of Law 2136, which has allowed owners to neglect their obligations to workers during the war.

In 2022, using Article 14 of this law, the Leoni factory stopped transferring funds to the union for cultural, physical education and health improvement activities. The law came into effect on March 24, 2022, but the employer still refused to pay for the month of March. The union took legal action. However, the Court of Appeal rejected the request, finding that requiring the employer to transfer the funds was an inappropriate solution.

In contrast, the Kryvyi Rih branch of the Free Trade Union of Railway Workers of Ukraine (VPZU) successfully appealed the decision of the Board of Directors of Ukrzaliznytsia, (the state rail company), which had suspended the provisions of the sectoral agreement and collective agreements covering payments for employment benefits, health coverage, retirement benefits and military service. The employer's decision was approved on March 14, 2022, under article 11 of Law 2136 on the suspension of collective agreements.

The court ruled that this constituted a violation of article 58 of [the Ukrainian Constitution](#) (against retroactivity).

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## A study on domestic work in Ukraine (extracts)

*Source: Published par [Labor Initiatives](#)*

(November 3, 2023) Today, 59% of domestic workers in Ukraine work informally. Most of them (84%) are women. These are the results of a national survey on the labour rights of domestic workers in Ukraine, presented on October 30 by the organisation Labor Initiatives and the company Research.ua.

In Ukraine, the Union of Domestic Workers, established in 2019 and currently has around 200 members (mainly nannies and housekeepers).

In March-May 2023, Research.ua conducted a quantitative survey of 450 domestic workers across Ukraine. According to the results of the study, of the 38% of domestic workers whose work is documented, the majority work under employment contracts (22%), some under civil law contracts (12%) and on the basis of a contract with an agency (5%). Despite respondents' scepticism about formal employment, the majority agree that formal employment will ensure respect for labour rights (73%) and help increase pensions (64%). At the same time, more than 50% of respondents fear that formal employment will increase the cost of services and reduce income due to the need to pay taxes.

Among the advantages of working from home, respondents distinguish the following: "money for living", flexible hours, independent planning of work schedules and determination of priorities. Among the disadvantages are routine work and excessive physical exertion.

The large-scale invasion of the Russian Federation into Ukraine also has an impact on this sector. As the study shows, many internally displaced people or Ukrainians who lost their jobs due to the war began working as domestic workers. People who once worked as school or university teachers now work as nannies, governesses and private tutors. 63% of respondents working informally and 43% of those working formally noted a decrease in their income during the war.

59% of respondents faced non-payment or insufficient payment of remuneration for the work performed. While the majority of respondents indicated that their overtime and weekend work is paid at a premium or double rate, for 45% of respondents this work is paid as usual. The duration of leave depends on whether a person works officially or not. Generally speaking, 47% of respondents have the possibility of taking 10 to 27 days of vacation. But for 49%, vacation days are not paid by the employer. More than 60% of respondents do not know or have difficulty answering questions about unions or professional associations that could help domestic workers. Three-quarters (74%) of respondents said they would contact a professional association or union if it helped them find a job, provided legal support and was a platform for sharing experiences and discussing conflicts with the employer.

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## Interview with ReSew coop: ‘Cooperatives are one of the ways to spread the principles and ideas of self-organisation’

Source: Facebook page of ReSew coop: <https://www.facebook.com/ReSewKyiv>

### Introduction by Patrick Le Tréhondat

*(November 8, 2023) From the first days of the full-scale war, the capacity for self-organisation of Ukrainian society was crucial. Where the state could not fulfil its tasks, society organised itself to respond. A gigantic social, humanitarian and solidarity activity has developed. Even in the military domain with Territorial Defence, which has in a certain way become the organisation of the armed people. This tradition of self-organisation does not come from nowhere. The Maidan Commune (November 2013-February 2014) had already shown the whole world the deep willingness of the Ukrainian people to take their affairs into their own hands. Further, the powerful Ukrainian cooperative movement at the beginning of the 20th century certainly nourished this ability. It was a path and a tool as much for national (anti-colonial) as well as for social and economic emancipation.*



*One of the programs of the 2023 feminist film festival (Kyiv) will be dedicated to labour rights. According to the organisers: "Although we are actively sold the idea of professional success and that the office is like a second home, work is often not a question of pleasure but a question of*



*survival. For us, labour rights are above all a question of solidarity and empathy. This is why we invited to co-organize this program a ReSew sewing cooperative – Швейний Кооператив (Chveinii kooperativ), which exists politically and ecologically without bosses or subordinates and is united by the love of their work–sewing."*

*We continue our exploration of the world of cooperatives and new forms of self-organisation of Ukrainian society with an exchange with the members of this cooperative.*

**Please tell us the story of your cooperative and its activities, before and after February 24. How do you work or decide? What are the prospects for the future?**

We organised into a cooperative in August 2016. We saw this project as economic, environmental, and feminist and planned to work in the following areas:

- 1) popularising the repairing and upcycling of clothes and textiles and an eco-friendly lifestyle.
- 2) publishing information about discrimination in the production of clothing and textiles (economic, environmental, gender), the forming of a fair value of labour in the clothing industry, criticism of fast fashion and overproduction of clothing and textiles.
- 3) joint responsibility of the project participants for the functioning of the cooperative: collective meetings, decision-making by consensus, joint management of social networks using alternative (not aggressive) marketing, communication with customers, procurement/search for materials, formation of a transparent financial scheme controlled by all cooperative members, and other functions.

Later, we started holding workshops where we taught, advised, and helped to repair clothes, modify them to suit the needs of the wearer, sew pouches and canvas bags to replace plastic ones, and reusable menstrual pads. We started working a lot with the queer and trans\* communities, creating comfortable and affordable clothing for members of these communities. This was all important and interesting for us. We had regular customers and workshop attendees, who supported our principles.

Gradually, we earned enough money to buy industrial sewing machines and a steam generator, and we created comfortable conditions in the workshop. In different years, there were 5, 3, 2, 4, 3



participants. In 2018, together with the ZBOKU art initiative, we rented a joint space and started operating as a community centre for queer, trans\*, and non-binary people in Kyiv. We wanted to inspire seamstresses to work with us or create similar cooperatives. In general, to popularise the cooperative form as an alternative to the hierarchical one, so we participated in demonstrations against the New Labor Code and artistic, cultural and educational events

dedicated to the struggle for labor rights and working conditions in Ukraine.

Of course, we faced a lot of problems: the low cost of products in the textile market, the devaluation and lack of prestige of sewing labour, and even online bullying. But thanks to our own enthusiasm and the fact that we were surrounded by people who shared our principles, the cooperative continued to innovate. Starting on February 24, 2022, we stayed in Kyiv for about a month. We moved to the workshop because it was a semi-basement, sewed chevrons and underwear for the military and Territorial Defence on a volunteer basis. We helped everyone we could among our relatives, friends and in the neighbourhood where we lived.

On March 20, 2022, two members of the cooperative left for Finland. Abroad, we started organising events (solidarity dinners, film screenings, and presentations) to raise funds for comrades and initiatives that we know continue to work in Ukraine, including providing humanitarian aid to civilians on the front line and military aid to people from anti-hierarchical, feminist, and queer communities. It is also important for us now to maintain relationships with our friends and

comrades with whom we have done activities in the past years and who formed our community, but are now scattered around the world.



**The Kyiv feminist festival presents you as "politically and ecologically without bosses or employees". What meaning do you give to this presentation?**

One of the ideas and principles of the cooperative was the horizontal structure of the organisation. Tonya (Ton) Melnyk, one of the founders of the cooperative, says that they had experience working in the garment industry in Ukraine in various positions, both as a subordinate and as a production manager. From all sides, it was a disappointing experience, because either they save on your wages and working conditions, or you are forced to do so because those higher up in the

hierarchy set such requirements for the sake of profit. All of this leads to the exploitation of oneself, other people, and natural resources, which did not suit Ton, as a person with an activist background. Back then, ten years ago, this idea of a horizontal sewing enterprise was born, where there would be no bosses or subordinates, all decisions would be made on the principle of consensus, that is, taking into account the interests and voice of each member of the cooperative, the profit would be divided equally, or according to alternative principles, depending on how the participants agree. Initially, the people interested in creating ReSew were people from environmental circles, and together with them ReSew was conceived as an upcycling project. But most of all, the idea resonated with leftist, anarchist, feminist, and queer circles. The critical attitude of all the members of the cooperative towards fast fashion, overproduction and pollution created by the global garment industry, along with the exploitation of mainly feminine socialised people, gave rise to the fundamental idea of being politically and environmentally opposed to any exploitation.

**Do you know of other cooperatives like yours in Kyiv or Ukraine and if so have relationships with them?**

When we were working in Kyiv, we cooperated with many grassroots horizontal initiatives and organisations, such as ZBOKU, Salt, Femsolutions, FreeFilmers, and others. But if we are talking about production cooperatives, there was Bar Koshchei and the Hleb Nasushchnyi cooperative. The latter cooked vegan dishes from dumpster-dived products and offered them to the community at a very affordable prices or for free. We invited them to participate in several of our events, including the Free Market 2018. It was an interesting and positive cooperation. We also know about some cooperatives that existed and some still operate in Ukraine, although there was no specific cooperation between us. For example, in Nyzhnye Selyshche in Zakarpattia, there is the Longo Mai cooperative, which produces direct-pressed juices; in Lviv, there is a cooperative that sells sportswear and shoes; in Kharkiv, there has been a food cooperative based on anarchistic squat for quite some time. We also know several cooperatives from Belarus and Russia that share similar principles to ours, and we have cooperated several times in some joint anarchist events. For example, the printing cooperative Listovka and the Café-falafel shop Horizontal.

**At the beginning of the 20th century, Ukraine experienced a significant cooperative movement which was a lever for the national and social liberation of Ukraine. What role do you give to cooperatives like yours in a social transformation of Ukraine with a view to social emancipation?**

Cooperatives, in our opinion, are one of the ways to spread the principles and ideas of self-organisation in society. Many grassroots movements owe a debt to these ideas. And grassroots movements, in turn, lead to major social changes and transformations. Our cooperative is young enough to be able to measure the impact of ReSew's activities on society. At the same time, over the years of work, the attitude towards such ideas as recycling, upcycling and environmentally conscious behaviour has changed significantly. Reusable pads, menstrual panties, pouches, and canvas bags are already in trend, and they are not associated with the Soviet past. But, if we talk about the cooperative movement in general, it is a school for people to be able to organise and act in different situations without leadership, which was repeatedly reflected in Ukrainian society at the beginning of the Maidan protests and also at the beginning and during the full-scale invasion. The ability to self-organise is a tool that allows society to show itself as a political actor that the so-called current government has to listen to. And the direction in which society will move depends on how this tool will be used. That is why it is very important to strengthen the voice of grassroots, feminist and anti-hierarchical communities in Ukraine to prevent the dominance of right-wing discourse, which easily takes over all the best instruments of social organisation against the backdrop of war.

**We often associate cooperatives like yours with the term self-management [самокеріваність]. Does this term self-management seem to you to reflect what your cooperative is? Is this a familiar idea among the Ukrainian left or more generally in social activities?**

We distinguish between the terms "self-management" and "self-organisation". For us, it is the self-organisation of people, individuals who invest a lot of resources in the activities of a grassroots horizontal organisation that is more applicable. After all, all the members of the cooperative are not only seamstresses, but they also communicate with clients, purchase materials, advertise activities of the organisation, write educational and activist posts, they are accountants, PR activities of the organisation cleaners, community managers and activists. All those involved in the cooperative's

operation are equally responsible for its functioning. Self-management, in our opinion, somewhat erases the contribution of each individual working in the cooperative. We also do not see that anyone can join our cooperative at any time. This person should be one who shares the principles of intersectional feminism, ecological ideas of production, and is ready to work responsibly in a non-hierarchical structure. According to our observations, similar principles guide most leftist organisations in Ukraine and abroad, which position themselves as horizontal or non-hierarchical (low-hierarchical) and practise direct democracy tools.

To support ReSew, go to <https://www.patreon.com/ReSew> and choose a subscription €2, €4 or €6 per month

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## **Safety or work? Top 10 labour disputes caused by the war**

*Source:* Socportal

(November 6, 2023) Due to the Russian invasion, many Ukrainians lost the opportunity to work in the usual way. And while at the beginning of the war, absenteeism or telecommuting was considered acceptable, now it is becoming a cause of conflicts, dismissals and litigation.

This is evidenced by material from the court register, in which plaintiffs among employees decided to fight for their labour rights because employers showed a lack of understanding of their circumstances," says Vitaliy Dudin, labour lawyer and activist of the NGO Social Movement.

In 2022, the number of appeals by citizens to the courts of first instance for the protection of labour rights almost halved compared to the previous year, from 17,000 to 9,000. And this was not due to a decrease in the number of violations of rights, but to the fact that it has become more difficult to achieve justice due to legislative changes and restrictions on access to justice.

Dudin prepared for *Socportal* examples of ten court judgements about working in war conditions. In some cases, the workers won, and in some cases, the employers.

### **How labour law changed during the war**

In the confrontation between the employee's right to work remotely in safe conditions and the enterprise's need to fulfil socially necessary functions, the latter often wins, says the expert.

According to Dudin, the protective orientation of the Labour Code of Ukraine has been significantly undermined due to legislative changes designed to respond promptly to common situations during the war.

The changes made to labour legislation have almost always been to the advantage of employers. In particular, the requirement to coordinate the dismissal of a trade union member with the elected body of the trade union was temporarily abolished, the procedure for changing essential working conditions was simplified (no need to give a two-months' notice) and new grounds for dismissal were introduced (for example, failure of an employee to notify the employer of the reasons for his absence for more than four months). There is also a possibility to suspend an employment contract on the basis of Article 13 of the Law of Ukraine (On the Organisation of Labour Relations under Martial Law) and Law No. 2136. Due to the lack of control by the state, many employers could not resist the temptation to use these innovations for their own benefit. Radical deregulation acts were adopted under the pretext of preventing the collapse of the economy, however, the lion's share of them remains valid even now, when the situation has largely stabilised, says Vitaliy Dudin.

He emphasises that workers often appealed to the court because they saw their rights violated in the issuance of dismissal orders, deprivation of their earnings or relocation of production. And the dynamics of judicial procedure show that the longer cases last, the more critically the courts evaluate the plaintiffs' arguments about safety problems.

If at the beginning of the invasion the courts agreed that the very fact of declaring martial law in Ukraine could serve as a justification for absence from work, then later on the courts demanded a stronger justification of the real danger to the life and health of workers, says the expert.

### **Can employees who have travelled abroad be dismissed for absenteeism?**

According to the lawyer, most attention should be paid to cases of dismissal for absenteeism.

The employers' opinion is clear: in conditions of financial shortage, they do not want to pay those employees who do not give enough to their work. Consequently, absence from the office "was seen as evidence of disloyalty," says Vitaly Dudin.

He notes that although at the beginning of martial law, the Ministry of Economy recommended not to dismiss workers for absence from work in war conditions, market realities dictate other solutions. If workers were dismissed for absenteeism, it was difficult for them to prove the validity of the reasons for absence.

For example, in July of this year, the Darnytsia District Court of Kyiv, in case No. 753/15245/22, refused to reinstate the director of the Territorial Center for Social Services (provision of social services) of the Darnytsia district. Since the beginning of the war, the woman had been in France, from where she could work remotely, but on March 21, 2022, she was fired for absenteeism. In dismissing the claim, the court considered the woman to have ceased to perform her official duties as director and left Ukraine, and she had no right to work remotely.

### **Research: Ukraine may become European leader in the number of 'freelancers'**

On March 1, 2022, the woman, as a director, established a remote work regime for herself, but the court considered that she did not have the authority to do so. Article 60-2 of the Labor Code provides for the possibility of issuing an order to introduce remote work only with the permission of the employer, and, as emphasised in the court decision, the relevant district state administration should be considered as such. Additionally, the plaintiff motivated her departure abroad by fear for her life; namely, she appealed to the fact that rocket fragments fell near her house in the first days of the invasion. This, in her opinion, was evidence of a valid reason for her absence from work. However, the court found this argument unconvincing, as the point of fall of the dangerous fragment was allegedly geographically remote from the plaintiff's place of residence. The case is currently pending appeal.

### **At the same time, there is a court decision in favour of the workers in similar disputes.**

In August 2022, in case No. 242/1050/22, the Selidivsky City Court of the Donetsk region reinstated a woman who worked as a commercial director at a local enrichment plant. The employer dismissed her on 22 April 2022 for absenteeism, but the court found that the conduct of hostilities near the plaintiff's place of residence objectively prevented her from going to work, and screenshots of reports and correspondence confirmed the fact that she was working remotely.

A similar decision was made in October 2022 by the Volyn Court of Appeal in case No. 166/282/22. According to the story, a nurse of the KNP Ratnovska Central District Hospital, who had taken a holiday and was in Poland with her children, was dismissed for absenteeism. It was recognised that the dismissal for absenteeism was groundless at the time when the employee applied

for leave as a mother of two children (the employer rejected the application without explanation). given the woman's fears as a resident of a district bordering the Republic of Belarus for the life and health of her children. The plaintiff's arguments about evacuating her children from the beginning of the full-scale invasion of the district were recognised as convincing.

In June this year, the Supreme Court in case No. 577/1447/22 confirmed the legality of decisions on the resumption of work of a man who had been dismissed from the position of engineer-technologist at the Konotop Aircraft Repair Plant "Aviacom" in Sumy region. The company called him back from downtime on 20 April 2022 and dismissed him the next day due to non-appearance, although the plaintiff was in Germany. The court recognised that the employee could not arrive promptly from abroad when summoned in one day, so the dismissal for absenteeism was unlawful. The employer had improperly notified the employee of the end of the downtime and ignored his request to postpone going to work.

### **Creating Jobs, Saving Schools and Supporting the Army:**

Another similar example - in August this year, the Frunzensky District Court of Kharkiv, in case No. 645/2548/23, resumed employing the Kharkiv Regional State Laboratory. The employer believed that the woman was unjustifiably absent from work on 12 May 2023, but she was on leave as an internally displaced person (IDP). The Court found that the claimant, as an IDP, was entitled to leave without pay for up to 90 days. She had applied to her employer and had not received a specific refusal. The employer insisted that it considered the certificate of IDP status invalid.

### **What can a labour contract be suspended for**

In the conditions of the war, employers were able to suspend labour relations: that is, not to dismiss an employee, but also not to pay his or her salary and not to pay insurance contributions. Some workers who left their settlements tried to appeal against such a decision.

The Chernihiv Court of Appeal, in August this year, made a decision in case No. 740/1926/22 concerning the head of the director of educational work of Nizhyn general education school No. 1. The woman had been in Germany for more than a year and wanted to appeal against the order to suspend her labour contract because, according to her, she was able to perform her duties remotely. The court did not accept as correct the arguments that the city of Nizhyn was at risk of rocket attacks and that the plaintiff could not come to work because of the destruction of the railway and the lack of shelter at the school. However, of crucial importance was the fact that the school lacked an electronic document management system, which precluded the possibility of performing duties remotely.

Another similar decision was made in June this year by the Rivne City Court in case No. 569/12425/22. There, the manager of the shop of CP "Rovnekniga" first suspended her labour contract, and, three months later, she was dismissed under paragraph 8-3 of Article 36 of the Labour Code (absence of an employee from work and information about the reasons for such absence for more than four consecutive months). Therefore, the woman challenged the order on suspension of the labour contract dated 14.04.2022 and the order on dismissal dated 21.07.2022. The employee with 40 years of experience at this enterprise considered that there were no conditions for suspension of the labour contract and insisted that the employer was aware of her whereabouts in the Republic of Lithuania (she was in touch) and that she was suspended for part of the 4-month period.

According to the court, the labour contract was lawfully suspended because the plaintiff was absent from February to July 2022 in Ukraine. At the same time, the court found to correct the arguments

that there were no grounds for dismissal due to absence from work for more than four months: since April 2022, the labour contract with the woman was suspended, so this period of time could not be attributed to the 4-month period of absence. Moreover, the grounds for dismissal provided for in Article 36(8-3) of the CLLT were introduced only on 19.07.2022, so the 4-month period could be attributed only from that date.

### **Inadequate notification of the employer's location**

In some cases, employees attempting to appeal their dismissal failed to notify their employers in a timely manner as to where they were and whether they could return to work. Or they did so incorrectly.

In July of this year, the Druzhkivsky City Court of Donetsk region, in case No. 229/511/23, refused to rehire a man who was dismissed from his position as head of department at the Bakhmut College of Transport Infrastructure. The institution was relocated to the city of Dnipro. The employee was dismissed in December 2022 based on the same Article 36, paragraph 8-3 of the Labour Code. The employer considered that the employee had been absent for more than 11 months, of which five months were after the relevant ground of dismissal had arisen under the Labour Code. The claimant argued that after his departure from Bakhmut and his registration as an IDP, as evidenced by a certificate dated 12.09.2022, meant that he had informed the employer of this fact by sending a copy of the said certificate to the personnel department. However, the Court found that the plaintiff, during the period of absence, never personally notified the employer of the reasons for his absence and did not communicate. The plaintiff's certificate was provided by his wife via Viber messenger using her own telephone number.

A similar decision was made in June this year by the Kyiv District Court of Odesa in case No. 947/15490/22. He refused to reinstate a man who was dismissed for absenteeism from the position of shop manager of "Okhtyrka Combine of Bread Products" in Sumy region. The plaintiff left at the beginning of the full-scale invasion to Odesa, where his family resides. According to official reports, on April 8, 2022, the Sumy region was completely liberated from the Russian occupiers, and in May, the enterprise resumed operations. Therefore, the court noted that the claimant had not provided any substantiated explanations showing the validity of the reasons for his failure to report to work. The employer proved that it had tried through messengers to obtain the employee's explanation for the absence but was unsuccessful.

### **Dismissed for refusing to move to Austria**

If, in previous cases, workers were dismissed for refusing to return to Ukraine or from a region with military operations. Here there are cases where the opposite has happened because of the refusal to leave the homeland.

In August, a very interesting decision was made by the Kropyvnitsky Court of Appeal in case No. 404/3054/22. The dismissal was contested by a former nurse of the KNP, "Kirovograd Regional Specialised Children's Home of a new type of Kirovograd Regional Council". She refused to move to Austria, where the children of the institution were evacuated in March 2022. In April, the management informed her of the need to move abroad and that in case of refusal, she would be dismissed under paragraph 6 of Article 36 of the Labour Code.

The plaintiff's position was based on the fact that since 24 February 2022, there have been no hostilities or other circumstances that threatened or might threaten the life or normal living conditions of people on the territory of the Kirovograd region. Therefore, the employees could leave voluntarily. The court found that since the departure of all the pupils to Austria, the main activity of

the institution was carried out abroad. Since the employer had the right to change the essential working conditions, and the employee refused to continue working after their change, the dismissal was considered legal.

However, such cases, when people flatly refuse to leave their homeland, are an exception. The more pressing problem for the country remains the question of how to bring six million citizens back home. And if, for a certain part of refugees, the preservation of labour relations and rights at home was an incentive to return, recent legal trends may change this.

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## **Solidarity with Ukraine's workers and unions**

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### **Aid delivered to Ukraine from unions in Wales**



See: <https://ukrainsolidaritycampaign.org/2023/11/05/aid-delivered-to-ukraine-from-unions-in-wales/>

Source. *Ukraine Solidarity Campaign*

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### **Campaign to build potable water wells in Ukraine**

Source: *International Labour Network for Solidarity and Struggle*

(November 5, 2023) After the attack that culminated in the collapse of one of the country's largest dams, Nova Kakhovka, workers fighting the Russian invasion are appealing for money to buy drills to build wells. "The water that is distributed today is unusable for drinking, not only is it undrinkable, but it is also unusable for anything else, even if it is boiled. It has a lot of chemicals and impurities in it," Yuri stressed.

International solidarity plays a crucial role in helping those facing the horrors of war. Trade union convoys, with their direct and concrete support for the Ukrainian working class, have been a vital

source of hope and assistance to the people who daily face the violent Russian invasion in defence of their land and dignity.

Support the fundraising campaign to build water wells.



### **Resolution of the 5th International Meeting of ILNSS:**

#### **UKRAINE - NPGU and KVPU of the city of Kryvyi Rih**

Having listened to the report of the representative of NOGU and KVPU from the city of Kryvyi Rih, a member organisation of the Network, Yuri Samoilov, about the critical situation with the supply of miners with clean water, we decided to help to collect funds and means for the purchase of a drilling machine to make wells in the groundwater. And in this way, we will help the miners and their families to get clean water for the workers in the city of Kryvyi Rih by their own means.

#### **Read the motion on Ukraine:**

At the 5th meeting of the International Trade Union Network of Solidarity and Struggles two comrades from Ukraine were present, Oksana, a nurse in Lviv from "Be like Nina" and Yuri from the metalworkers' union in Kryvyi Rih. Both were able to testify directly to many trade unionists from other countries about the reality of the situation in Ukraine since the invasion of the territory and the occupation by the army of the Russian regime.

In a continuation of the motions adopted at our previous meeting in April 2022, the member organisations of the Network:

- continue their support for the Ukrainian trade union and popular resistance, materialised in particular by the workers' solidarity convoys ; our comrades in Ukraine lead the struggle against Russian imperialism, but also against the capitalists of their own country.
- They reaffirm their opposition to all imperialism, to all military blocs and their services (NATO

and CSTO), to the militarisation of the world, which translates in particular into ever-increasing military budgets and the militarisation of society.

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## International grassroots solidarity from Switzerland: delivery of school equipment to the village of Starosillya



Source. Belgian Committee of the European Network for Solidarity with Ukraine (ENSU)

*(Undated) For ENSU, solidarity from the grassroots is essential. It enables us to respond as effectively as possible to the needs of the many grassroots organisations that are contributing to the Ukrainian resistance. It establishes direct links between these organisations and solidarity activists in Europe. It makes Ukraine part of our own struggles here for a fairer society. A testimonial from our comrades in the canton of Vaud in Switzerland.*

As the Russian army's murderous aggression continues in Ukraine, the sad consequences of the realities of this war remain unchanged: a battered civilian population, families torn apart, towns in ruins, and a devastating humanitarian crisis that continues to cast a shadow over the lives of thousands of Ukrainians.

In a large part of the country, humanitarian efforts are still largely carried out by volunteers from civil society who, faced with the urgent and vital needs of the affected population, spontaneously organised themselves as soon as the large-scale invasion began. Their selfless dedication is a fundamental pillar of the incredible resilience of the people of Ukraine, and their hard work can only elicit deep admiration for the solidarity they have shown. However, it is essential not to let this sense of exaltation obscure the fact that

these initiatives are first and foremost compensating for a flagrant failure on the part of the Ukrainian government in this respect. Indeed, it is primarily the latter's inability to respond adequately to the basic needs of the population that first prompted citizens to self-organise in order to resolve these problems.

### **The Iron Angels, workers of Kryvyi Rih**

The Iron Angels association, embodied by a group of women workers from the town of Kryvyi Rih in the Dnipropetrovsk oblast, is a remarkable example of this grassroots mobilisation. After several months of spontaneous occupation of their local cultural centre, which had been transformed into a reception and distribution centre for humanitarian aid to displaced persons from occupied regions, they decided to form an independent association. The association takes its name from the high level of mining and steelmaking activity for which the women's hometown is famous. All the people involved in this initiative are volunteers: some are still working in the mine or factory and devote their free time to the association; others are already retired, on maternity leave or working part-time. Most of their spouses and husbands had mobilised to support the war effort by joining the army.

During the first four months of the invasion, the association helped more than 18,000 people fleeing the fighting in the Kherson oblast, whose right bank was partially occupied at the time, mainly by providing them with clothing, shoes and blankets. Since then, their action has extended to the oblasts of Donetsk, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Dnipropetrovsk, Cherkassy and Kharkiv, to which more than 100 humanitarian convoys have been organised to meet the needs of the inhabitants of the liberated villages in these regions. Living conditions in these villages remain extremely difficult: most of the houses have been completely or partially destroyed, infrastructure and basic public services are non-existent, and the local economy has ground to a halt due to the impossibility of farming.

### **100 tonnes of aid: toys, parcels, medical equipment and... drones**

Some of these villages are still under regular bombardment. Their tireless efforts have already benefited several thousand families, to whom more than 100 tonnes of humanitarian supplies have been delivered, including food parcels, toys for children, household products, clothing and a variety of other essential items.

As well as meeting humanitarian needs, the association's women also help regular army units, taking advantage of their many expeditions close to the front to supply them with medical supplies, drones and other equipment essential to the armed forces. The dedication of these women, who have no previous political, associative, militant or trade union experience, is undeniably immense.

After learning about the dedicated efforts of the Iron Angels association, we decided, as part of the *Comité vaudois de solidarité avec le peuple ukrainien et les opposant-es russes à la guerre*, founded on 1 March 2022 in Lausanne, Switzerland, to actively support this organisation. After first helping to raise funds to buy a van in the spring of 2023, the committee decided to extend this collaboration by organising a collection for the village of Starosillya, in the north of the Kherson oblast.

### **Educational aid for 117 children who survived the Russian occupation**

As the start of the new school year in September approached, the 117 children attending the local school were short of adequate school equipment to continue their education. The village is facing a very difficult material situation. Occupied on 26 February 2022, it was liberated on 4 October of the same year - one of the first localities to be recaptured by the Ukrainian army during the battle for the liberation of Kherson [launched on 29 August]. The village of Starosillya, on the river Inhoulets, was on the front line for many months. The war left deep scars in the village. Today, around half of the village's infrastructure is still

destroyed. Despite the lack of a drinking water supply, the absence of electricity and the minefields, life has nevertheless returned to normal in the region, and the village now has 240 inhabitants out of the 580 who lived there before the war.

So, after identifying the priority needs of the pupils at the start of the school year with the help of the school's teachers, and completing our fundraising over the summer, we travelled to Kryvyi Rih on September 15, 2023. There, we met the women of the Iron Angels association, accompanied by a member of Solidarity Collectives, a network of anti-authoritarian volunteers united to help the Ukrainian resistance movement. The welcome was extremely warm, and the meeting with the members and the presentation of their work only confirmed the sincerity and scope of their actions. One of the women, Tetiana, explained that she had never driven a car before the invasion. Yet she has passed her driving test and travelled over sixty thousand kilometres since then.

### **The testimony of the Vaud delegation in Starosillya**

We loaded the van (which we had helped to buy a few months earlier) with the school equipment and set off the next day for the village of Starosillya. Although Starosillya is around a hundred kilometres from Kryvyi Rih, the state of the roads meant that we couldn't reach our destination in under 2 hours 30 minutes. Tetiana explains that she doesn't know whether the roads were necessarily in better condition before the war, despite the many traces of artillery fire that mark the landscape, lines of charred trees, trenches and camps abandoned by Russian soldiers. Many sunflower fields have been abandoned and have not been able to be harvested since the summer of 2022, as they are still mined. The level of destruction in the region's villages is greater than imagined, and bears witness to the intensity of past fighting. Virtually every building is badly damaged. Many inhabited houses are using large tarpaulins as makeshift roofs.

Although we arrived on a Saturday, a day off for school children, many of the village children came to meet us, accompanied by their parents and teachers. Each of the 117 children received a full set of school supplies, prepared in advance to ensure efficient and fair distribution. Invited to eat by some of the villagers who had gathered for the occasion, we were able to watch the courageous and resilient inhabitants of the village join forces to rebuild their homes and their lives, despite the material and immaterial scars, the difficult memories and the taboos associated with the occupation. Offering these children a better education, where they can learn, develop and blossom despite the hardships they face on a daily basis, is not just about material things. It also sends a message of solidarity and hope to these Ukrainian children: it shows them that they are supported, that their future counts and that they can realise their dreams in a free Ukraine. The same applies indirectly to their parents.

We believe that it is essential and relevant to support and strengthen initiatives that emerge from below. Our objective goes beyond Ukraine's victory, it aims to contribute to the reconstruction of a democratic and free state, with a strong civil society where ordinary citizens are active and influence political life. It is important to remember that the Soviet period in Ukraine led to the atomisation and destruction of any tradition of workers' self-organisation from below. In the years following the end of the Soviet Union, privatisation and unbridled capitalism further exacerbated the precariousness of social rights and made it difficult to defend them. The political and organisational skills acquired during the war could be put to good use in pursuing this popular commitment, thereby contributing to the general democratisation of society. This self-help activity brings together people from different backgrounds, both urban and rural, and helps to strengthen the social fabric. This is a remarkable achievement, despite the difficult and unfortunate context that gave rise to this dynamic.

There are countless other places like Starosillya. Direct material aid, even if it may seem trivial to us here, provides real support to the people there. Direct and concrete solidarity must continue.

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## **‘The union is the vanguard of the people’: Impressions from a trip to Ukraine**

**By Angela Klein**

A group of four trade unionists from Germany and Switzerland travelled to Ukraine from October 9-14, 2023. The trip was organised by the initiative "Solidarity with Trade Unions in Ukraine - Humanitarian Aid" and financially supported by the Human Dignity and Labour Foundation. A solidarity address and donations collected by the initiative were handed over (see October edition of ENSU trade union bulletin). Approaches for further support work have emerged, which we want to continue in our trade unions. First reports of the trip were published [in German] in the November issue of *Sozialistische Zeitung*.

[Continue report here](#)

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## ***Worker struggles in Belarus***

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- [Leanid Sudalenka - about forced labour in Belarusian colonies in an interview with \*Salidarnast\*](#)