



**UN
TRUST
FUND** TO END
VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN
AND GIRLS

30 YEARS

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NGO Insight
(Ukraine)





There is never a right time.



I've heard that my whole life: that this isn't the right time for women's rights, not the right time to protest, not the right time for LGBTQ equality, because there's a war on. But if you stop, everything falls apart.

In 2007, activism was just something we did because it was needed. There was no office, no funding, and barely a name yet for what a small group of us were building.

What we had was the conviction that lesbian, bisexual, and trans women in Ukraine needed a safe space that had not yet existed, and that no one else was going to build it for us.

When we organized the first exhibitions about the realities of lesbian, bisexual, and trans women's lives at the time, we were attacked by conservative groups, by the government, by the police. The same cycle repeated for five or six years.



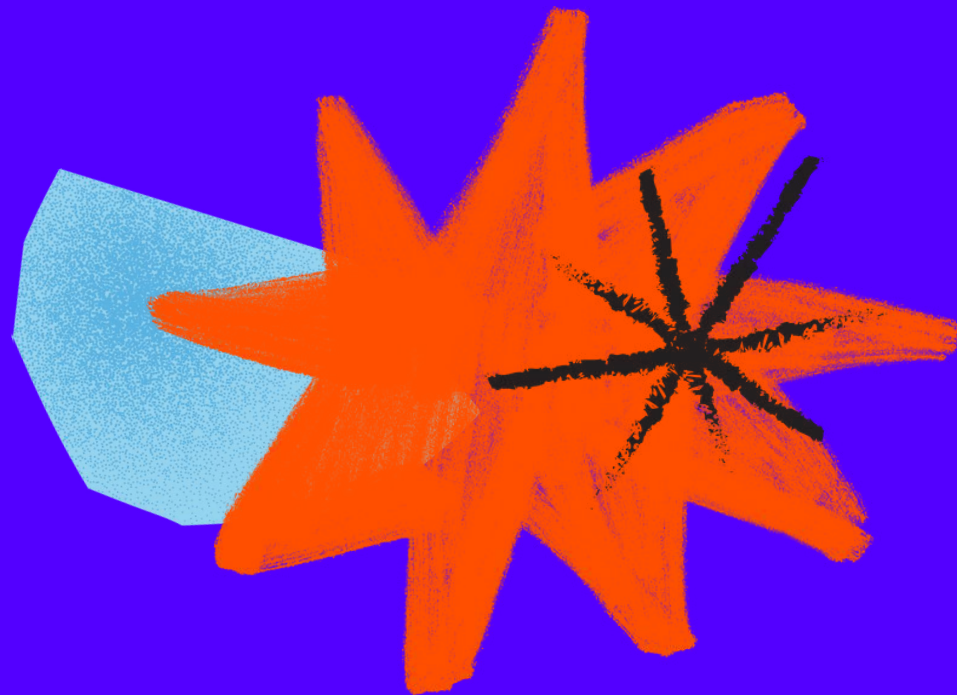
A stylized illustration in the top left corner. It features a blue silhouette of a person with their arms raised, set against a light blue background. Below the person is a large, dark blue hand with fingers spread. The entire illustration is framed by a light blue border with a pattern of small dots.

In the first weeks of Russia's full-scale invasion, we simply followed what our community needed. People were calling and writing, asking for specific help. Within a few weeks, we had brought 5,000 cat carriers into Ukraine, because for lesbians and trans people fleeing under bombardment, their animals – even ones that weren't theirs, even strays left behind on the streets – mattered. Donors looked at us like we were crazy. 'This is not our priority,' they said.

That is where the UN Trust Fund's support has felt different. The flexibility they offered was critical, but so was the sense of a genuine partnership, with dialogue and an understanding of what was happening on the ground.



The grant we received in 2024 gave us the space to respond to what people actually needed, not to what a proposal template had assumed or what we had anticipated months earlier when we submitted it. In a crisis, that ability to decide and adapt quickly matters.



Across Ukraine, activists and volunteers on the ground are the ones closest to those realities. We exist to support them, and give them the trust and the space to act quickly, because in Ukraine, you can't wait days for a decision. You need to be fast to save lives. Being trusted to move that fast is what I want us to preserve – both for our own people, and from every funder who works with us.

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To anyone who still tells me now isn't the time:

It never will be. This is the fight you keep going anyway.



Olena Shevchenko is a Ukrainian human rights defender who co-founded the feminist LGBTQI+ organization Insight in 2007.

She is also a co-founder of Women's March, a civic initiative uniting women's rights organizations across Ukraine. Her work has been recognized with the Netherlands' Human Rights Embassy Tulip (2021); Olena was honored as one of TIME's 2023 Women of the Year.

