



## MY COLLEAGUE FROM UKRAINE

A blog series by our Ukrainian guest researcher  
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### Trade unions and worker associations` activities during the war in Ukraine

Trade unions are often referred to as civil society organizations. Especially when we talk about the “third sector” as actors beyond the market and the state that embodied the third part in the social dialogue and are able to influence the negotiations about the commons, the questions of public concern. There are of course structural differences in how trade unions look like and what role and what influence they have in different countries.

Although in Ukraine many trade unions are legal successors of the trade unions that existed in the Soviet time this doesn't mean that their activities are now connected to the exclusively administrative role of distribution of social benefits connected to the workplace as it was before. A lot of old “state” trade unions and independent trade unions succeed in gaining new identities in the independent Ukraine and representing workers' demands and critical positions regarding certain legislations or policies. In this blog I would like to cover the situation with trade unions in Ukraine during the war: how the war influences their regular activities and what challenges they face.

Already in March, the Ukrainian parliament passed wartime [legislation](#) that restricted the existing rights of trade unions to represent and protect their members. For instance, it allowed the employers to fire the workers or to suspend their employment agreements without the permission of the trade union as it was before.

Many trade unions, however, perceived these restrictions as an inevitable requirement of wartime and concentrated their activities mostly on the **humanitarian mission**. They collect donations and provide aid both to their members and their families as well as other Ukrainians who suffer from war. As Artem Tidva, who represents the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) in Ukraine shares, many members of trade unions have lost their jobs, many lost their homes, because both enterprises and houses were destroyed by shelling, but thanks to the communication among the trade unions activists and between the trade unions in different regions, many people find help and

temporary housing. In general, since the beginning of the war more than 350 thousand of internally displaced people found their shelter in the recreational facilities of the trade unions that belong to the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine.

Often, **Ukrainian trade unions collaborate with the international union community and other civil society organizations abroad**. For example, the International Trade Union Confederation established an [emergency fundraising appeal](#) to raise funds to support humanitarian work of the unions and associations that belong to the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine and the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine. Many trade unions in neighboring countries (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Moldova) help the members of Ukrainian trade unions from the same sphere (construction, mining, healthcare, railways etc.) and their families with the evacuation and shelter or send humanitarian aid to those, who stay in Ukraine to perform their duty.

Ivanna Khrapko, head of the Youth Council of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine, shares that level of interest and **support from the international partners** during the first months of war was unprecedented: "In the first weeks, all our partner organizations abroad started writing to us, asking where we are, how we are, how they can help us. And it was really a challenge for us to figure out what kind of help to ask for first. During that time, I personally really got a sense of what solidarity means, what international solidarity means, and what the power of a union is all about."

Khrapko shares that when trade union activists began to go back to their usual activities such as organization of workshops and trainings, it became clear that the topics and skills which are demanded to be covered in these trainings have changed a lot. "Now, instead of the usual trade union organizing training, we are thinking about teaching our members first aid, telling them about possible problems with human trafficking they might have when crossing the border and so on", she says.

Slowly trade unions also get back to its role of the third part in the social dialogue with the state and business and take a critical appeal towards the new draft laws that propose serious amendments to the Labor Code of Ukraine. In their public campaign trade unions tried to consolidate their forces together with the European trade union confederations and pointed out the inconsistency of the draft laws with the principles and norms of EU legislation and contradictions with the Conventions of the International Labor Organization ratified by Ukraine. While this blog was prepared, the Ukrainian government passed the highly discussed draft laws (number [5161](#) on regulation of non-standard forms of employment and number [5371](#) on deregulation of labor relations in the small and medium-sized enterprises). "Although many changes to the Labor Code that have been passed in law 5371 will only be valid during the martial law, we have already observed the cases, when employers abused the power, they have obtained now", says Tidva of EPSU.

Khrapko agrees that, at the moment, the opportunities to fulfill their watchdog function in the field of labor policy and labor law are significantly limited. The main way for unions to express their position remains official appeals and letters to the authorities. The Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine made a public statement to the President of Ukraine and asked to veto one of these laws. Ukrainian trade unions also turned to their international counterparts to launch a common public campaign in response to the adopted laws. "In current circumstances we cannot organize protests

against certain changes and bills. However, we can talk about their consequences in the media and public sphere” adds Khrapko.

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