

## **One year after Russia's attack on Ukraine: How can we as an international professional psychotrauma community assist our Ukrainian colleagues**

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February 24th marked one year of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine; one year of indiscriminate bombings and shelling, deaths of thousands of civilians, forced migration of millions, harrowing realities emerging from regions liberated from Russian occupation – mass graves, torture, rape, and other crimes against humanity.

"Ukraina Peremozhe" ("Ukraine will win") is a motto, a mantra, a prayer shared and recited by millions of Ukrainians, and we see the truth behind this slogan. Unprecedented resilience, fortitude and unity of Ukrainian people has shown the world that people of Ukraine will not surrender. They fight for freedom and democracy and they do this with dignity and meaning.

As an international professional psychotrauma community, we are especially proud of our Ukrainian colleagues, who, from the very beginning of the full-scale war, are showing a tremendous ability of coping and resilience.

Many of our colleagues are acting as first responders in the field of mental health and psychosocial aid, providing critical resources to their fellow citizens and helping them to survive. Some left their therapeutic practices and went to the frontlines to defend their homeland. Some enlisted in the armed forces to provide mental health support to the deployed soldiers. Many, in collaboration with colleagues from different countries, are initiating and participating in various capacity building programs to be prepared to respond to the population's mental health needs after the war; many are looking ahead and considering not only mental health care, but also mechanisms of international justice.

When the war ends, a lot of efforts will be invested to bring the country to the pre-disaster status. But we also know that there is a potential for breakthrough and achieving better than the pre-disaster condition. Providing necessary resources and support to promote such a development should be the task of the international community.

How can we, as an international psychotrauma community, assist our Ukrainian colleagues in this? It is important to continue supporting Ukrainian mental health professionals in enhancing trauma care system. There is a solid knowledge and experience that has accumulated in our

field that could be transferred. There should also be an awareness that we could learn from our Ukrainian colleagues as well. Therefore, it is important:

- To be sensitive towards needs of the Ukrainian society as well as the needs of the various communities and target groups as IDPs, Refugees, children and young people, veterans, people with mental disorders, etc. The best evidence on mental health and psychosocial support needs to be applied, adjusted and has to inform corresponding policies and practices
- To take into consideration not only needs but also resources of the targeted communities, families and individuals, while planning and implementing interventions. As we usually state: resilience, self- and community-efficacy should be emphasized
- To be sensitive towards the local culture and take into consideration specific factors that influence symptoms presentations, relevance and applicability of particular interventions
- Be aware that an important experience of provision of mental health and psychosocial support to the people in need amid ongoing war (since 2014 and especially during the last year) is being accumulated nowadays in Ukraine, and this unique experience needs attention and conceptualization – to gather new evidences of good practices and learn from experiences, to have a „2-way street,“ where international and local best evidences meet and enrich each other
- Studies should be planned and implemented (and corresponding local research capacity enhance) to assess the changing needs of different groups, to inform psychosocial support and mental health care policies. Effectiveness of the interventions should be measured, and research and clinical practice should be bridged to assure properly tailored care
- To consider development of trauma-informed and trauma-focused care within the larger context of mental health responses and support the ongoing mental health reform in the country – via gradual deconstruction of large psychiatric institutions and developing community-based services, fostering multidisciplinary approach, introducing transdiagnostic methods
- To foster intersectoral collaboration considering human rights and justice dimension as there is no mental health without justice.