

# FROM EMPOWERMENT TO EMERGENCY RELIEF: HOW WOMEN'S NGOS IN UKRAINE RESPONDED TO DISPLACEMENT DURING WARTIME

Nadiia Pavlyk & Olena Ostapchuk

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Doctor of Science, Professor at Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University (Ukraine), Researcher at Aarhus University (Denmark)

E-mail: [pavnad@cas.au.dk](mailto:pavnad@cas.au.dk)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2601-4104>

© Olena Ostapchuk

PhD, Gender expert of the NGO “Equal Opportunities Center ‘Parity’”

E-mail: [ostapchuk.olena.zt@gmail.com](mailto:ostapchuk.olena.zt@gmail.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8284-8333>

*Abstract.* The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has profoundly reshaped the role of civil society organizations, compelling them to move from advocacy and long-term empowerment strategies toward emergency humanitarian responses. This article examines how women’s NGOs adapted their missions, priorities, and organizational practices under wartime conditions, focusing specifically on their engagement with internally displaced persons (IDPs). Drawing on seven semi-structured interviews with leaders of women’s NGOs, the study applies a conceptual framework that combines civil society theory with feminist organizational analysis. Methodologically, it adopts a participatory qualitative approach, involving NGO representatives as both interviewees and co-thinkers, thereby centering their lived experiences, adaptive strategies, and perceptions of displacement-related challenges.

The findings demonstrate that the war constituted a critical juncture, producing rapid humanitarianization of women’s NGOs. Organizations that previously specialized in advocacy, education, and women’s empowerment



shifted to delivering food aid, temporary shelter, legal support, and psychosocial services. Interview data highlight five interrelated dynamics: the humanitarianization of missions; the gendered dimensions of psychological trauma among displaced women; the reliance on volunteerism and donor-funded rapid-response mechanisms; strained cooperation with state institutions; and the marginalization of long-term advocacy goals. Despite resource constraints and institutional tensions, women's NGOs exhibited resilience by mobilizing solidarity networks and leveraging their experience in gender-sensitive service delivery. However, their strategic capacity for policy influence and gender advocacy has been curtailed, raising concerns about the sustainability of feminist agendas in post-war reconstruction.

The article contributes to debates on civil society under crisis, NGO-ization, and feminist organizational practices. It argues that women's NGOs in Ukraine embody both resilience and fragility: indispensable as frontline humanitarian actors, yet vulnerable to donor dependence and the sidelining of advocacy work. The study underscores the importance of supporting women's NGOs not only as service providers but also as agents of long-term social transformation in Ukraine's reconstruction.

**Keywords:** women's NGOs; civil society; feminist organizational analysis; humanitarianization; internally displaced persons (IDPs); participatory qualitative research; NGO-ization; war and displacement.

## Introduction

The ongoing full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has not only intensified the humanitarian crisis but also profoundly reshaped the landscape of civil society in the country. Civil society organizations have faced unprecedented challenges while simultaneously assuming central roles in providing immediate relief, social support, and psychological assistance to vulnerable populations. Among these, women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have emerged as key actors, addressing both gender-specific needs and broader societal vulnerabilities. Prior to 2022, Ukrainian women's NGOs were primarily engaged in advocacy, human rights education, and the strategic empowerment of women; however, the war has necessitated rapid adaptation, emphasizing emergency responses and humanitarian aid (UN Women 2025; ZMINA 2025). As one NGO leader recalled, "Our previous work was more optimistic – we taught women how to write business plans, focused on self-employment and entrepreneurship. Now we are working with women to meet their basic needs, including food packages and clothing" (Interview 2022).

This paper applies a conceptual framework that combines civil society theory with feminist organizational analysis. Civil society theory allows us to examine how women's NGOs operate within broader social structures, negotiate resources, and maintain their role in crisis settings, while feminist organizational analysis emphasizes gendered dynamics, internal decision-making, and the strategies women use to address specific vulnerabilities during conflict (Hrycak 2002). Within this framework, women's NGOs are understood as dual agents: on the one hand, they are part of broader civil society transformations in Ukraine, and on the other hand, they represent specific trajectories of the women's rights movement. The war is analysed as a critical juncture that reshaped both civil society dynamics and gender relations, positioning women's NGOs at the intersection of humanitarian response and long-term advocacy. The findings presented in this article are part of the research "Peculiarities of Service Delivery to Internally Displaced Persons by Women's NGOs and Volunteer Movements" within the framework of the Ukrainian Women's Fund project<sup>1</sup>. The study was conducted in cooperation with experts from the NGO "Equal Opportunities Centre "Parity" (Zhytomyr, Ukraine) to better understand the unique aspects of service delivery to internally displaced persons by women's NGOs and volunteer movements, and to further disseminate successful practices. By integrating these approaches, the study moves beyond descriptive accounts to explore the ways in which wartime conditions reshape organizational priorities, networks, and activism.

While prior research has explored the development of women's NGOs in post-Soviet contexts and the phenomenon of NGO-ization (Hrycak 2002), less is known about how wartime conditions reconfigure their strategies, networks, and societal roles. Existing studies tend to focus either on displaced persons or on civil society in general, leaving a gap regarding the intersection of women's activism, emergency response, and broader civil society transformations during war (Mathers 2024; Strelnyk 2025). NGO leaders in Ukraine emphasized the growing role of solidarity and horizontal networks in addressing urgent needs: "I did not think that in the context of the struggle for resources, women would be so tolerant. They self-organize in the queue without arguing or conflict, and they are understanding when food parcels run out" (Interview, 2022). This illustrates how women's NGOs not only provide material aid but also foster social cohesion among displaced populations, reflecting both civil society dynamics and gendered organizational strategies.

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To analyse these dynamics, this study adopts a participatory qualitative approach, centring the perspectives of women's NGO leaders to capture their lived experiences, challenges, and adaptive strategies. The participatory framework allows for the documentation of nuanced insights that might be overlooked by external observation alone, emphasizing collaboration, mutual learning, and ethical engagement with underrepresented voices (Cornwall 2008). As one respondent noted regarding their role in crisis management: "From experience, people in crisis focus primarily on food security. They seek help with food, but we understand that they also need psychological support – even if they do not ask for it. Therefore, before distributing food parcels, we offered internally displaced persons (IDPs) the opportunity to join an informational session with a psychologist" (Interview 2022).

This article addresses the following research question: How has the ongoing war reshaped the strategies and practices of women's NGOs in supporting internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine, and what does this reveal about broader transformations in Ukrainian civil society? By situating the analysis within the frameworks of civil society, women's activism, and NGO-ization, the study examines both the immediate humanitarian responses and the longer-term consequences for organizational resilience and influence – acknowledging, however, that resilience can simultaneously signify empowerment and systemic strain (Illouz 2020). One interviewee emphasized the adaptation to new realities: "Currently, together with the Equal Opportunities parliamentary group, we are planning to develop a programme to work with displaced women, as I do not see any strategic direction from local authorities" (Interview 2022), highlighting both the NGO-led initiatives and the gaps in state coordination.

The contribution of this study is threefold. First, it provides empirical evidence on the adaptive strategies of women's NGOs in wartime Ukraine, illustrating how they negotiate resource constraints, psychological trauma, and shifting beneficiary needs. Second, it contributes to the scholarly discussion on NGO-ization by analysing how external pressures, donor dependencies, and crisis-driven priorities reshape organizational missions. Third, it offers insights into the evolving role of women's activism in shaping civil society, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities created by conflict.

The paper is structured as follows: the next section outlines the methodology, detailing the participatory qualitative approach and selection of NGO participants; this is followed by a presentation of the results from in-depth interviews with NGO leaders; the discussion section situates these findings within broader theoretical and

empirical debates on women's activism and civil society; and the conclusion draws implications for policy, research, and practice.

## Methodology

This study draws on seven semi-structured interviews conducted in May–June 2022 with leaders of women's NGOs in Ukraine. The study is exploratory in nature. It does not aim at statistical representativeness but rather seeks to capture diverse perspectives of women's NGO leaders at an early stage of the war, with the purpose of informing both academic debates and practical responses. Participation in the interviews was voluntary, with interviewees providing informed consent for audio recording and the subsequent use of interview data. Organizations were selected through purposive sampling based on two criteria: prior experience working with internally displaced persons (IDPs) since 2014, and active engagement in humanitarian support following the 2022 full-scale invasion. Focusing on leaders provided access to organizational memory, resource allocation strategies, and decision-making processes, while recognizing that this perspective does not capture the full spectrum of staff and beneficiaries' experiences. Existing research has demonstrated that IDPs in Ukraine face not only material deprivation but also social stigma and prejudice (Bulakh 2017; Rimpiläinen 2017, 2020). While our data cannot directly capture IDPs' voices, the NGO representatives repeatedly referred to these dynamics when explaining the complexity of service delivery, highlighting how displacement intersects with pre-existing inequalities and societal attitudes.

The research employed a participatory approach, meaning that NGO representatives were involved not only as interviewees but also as co-thinkers. They reviewed elements of the interview guide, validated emerging themes, and discussed the practical implications of findings. This aligns with feminist participatory methodologies that emphasize reducing hierarchies in research and amplifying underrepresented voices (Caretta & Riaño 2016; De Oliveira 2023). While the interviews were conducted in a conventional semi-structured format, the participatory element was realized through collaborative validation: insights generated by NGO leaders were subsequently incorporated into the development of a practical guide to support IDPs, co-designed with women's organizations. This ensured that respondents' experiences directly informed broader organizational practices. The choice of a participatory approach was motivated by both methodological and ethical considerations. Participatory methods enhance the credibility

and practical relevance of research by involving practitioners not only as respondents but also as contributors to framing research questions and validating findings (De Oliveira 2023). In crisis contexts such as wartime Ukraine, this helps ensure that analysis remains grounded in rapidly changing realities.

Furthermore, participatory methodologies address power asymmetries in knowledge production. As Caretta and Riaño (2016) argue, feminist participatory approaches create more inclusive research spaces, reducing hierarchies between researcher and participant while amplifying voices that are often marginalized or underrepresented in academic accounts.

Participatory research also carries a transformative potential. Beyond documenting experiences, it can stimulate reflection among participants, generate dialogue about practices and policies, and contribute to organizational learning (Plowman, Nocker & Engeström 2016). This aligns with the aims of the study, which sought not only to analyse NGO responses but also to co-produce knowledge that might support the sustainability of women's organizations in post-war reconstruction.

Formal ethical review was not required under the regulations in place; nonetheless, particular attention was paid to safeguarding the identities of respondents, given the relatively small and interconnected field of women's NGOs in Ukraine. To minimize identifiability, quotations are depersonalized, organizational details are generalized, and sensitive information is aggregated. Participants gave informed consent and approved the use of their statements.

To provide readers with a concise overview of the methodological choices, we summarize the study design, sampling, participatory approach, and ethical considerations in Table 1. Presenting the information in tabular form allows for greater transparency and readability while avoiding unnecessary repetition in the main text. The table highlights not only the technical aspects of data collection but also the epistemological orientation of the research, including our commitment to a participatory and feminist methodology. This format makes it clear how methodological decisions were shaped by both the extraordinary wartime context and the specific features of the women's NGO sector in Ukraine.

Hence, the target group consisted of representatives of women's NGOs with extensive experience in systematic work with IDPs. This article does not claim to represent the voices of IDPs directly, but rather examines how women's NGOs perceive and respond to the challenges faced by displaced populations. The analysis reflects the perspectives of organizational leaders who mediate between international donors, the Ukrainian state, and the IDPs themselves.

Table 1. Characteristics of the interviewees

NGO	Oblast (region)	Role of Participant	IDP-related experience	Main activities before February 2022	Main activities after February 2022
1	Chernivtsi	Manager / initiator	Since 2014	Civic engagement, human rights	Volunteer networks, IDP support, legal and psychological services
2	Khmelnytskyi	Program coordinator	Since 2014	Gender education, advocacy	IDP integration, children's services, community support
3	Kyiv	Program head	Since 2014	Training, empowerment programs, women's development	Crisis consultations, temporary shelters, support for IDPs
4	Lviv	Director / founder	Since 2014	Gender advocacy, training, legal advice	Psychological support, legal services, family assistance
5	Odesa	Coordinator / manager	Since 2014	Social assistance, legal advocacy	Shelter provision, logistics, legal consultations
6	Vinnitsia	Director / project leader	Since 2014	Women's rights advocacy, education, awareness-raising	Humanitarian aid, psychological support, information hotlines
7	Volyn	Project manager	Since 2014	Social support, civic education	Humanitarian aid, coordination, housing for IDPs

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The interviews were conducted online, in Ukrainian, by the authors of the article in cooperation with representatives of a women's NGO Parity with professional qualifications in sociology, psychology, or social work, and significant research experience. The partner NGO Parity only helped with facilitation and data collection, which minimized conflicts of interest and kept the analysis independent.

The interview process spanned seven days during May and June 2022. Our in-depth interview aimed to explore the specific approaches, challenges and good practices of women's NGOs and volunteer movements in assisting internally displaced persons in Ukraine by gathering insights from practitioners with first-hand experience. The guide consisted of seven sections:

- 1) A general information section, where we collected demographic and professional details about the interviewees, including gender, age, role within the NGO, years of experience and categories of beneficiaries served.
- 2) A section dedicated to the experience of working with IDPs, focused on exploring the extent of NGO involvement with IDPs before and after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Interviewees reflected on changes in their work, key challenges, motivations and the social profile of their beneficiaries.
- 3) A knowledge, skills and competences section that assessed the awareness and training needs of women's NGO staff working with IDPs, including financial literacy, mental health support, legal aid and employment services, and identified critical skills and support mechanisms to enhance their effectiveness.
- 4) A "Difficulties and solutions" section that focused on the obstacles women's NGOs face in assisting IDPs, including operational constraints, beneficiary dissatisfaction and conflict resolution strategies. Interviewees discuss key challenges and methods for improving service delivery.
- 5) A case study analysis that described a specific case from interviewee's experience where the outcome was unexpected and reflected on the factors that contributed to success or failure. The aim of this section was to identify patterns and good practice that could inform future strategies.
- 6) A recommendations section, where interviewees provided input on what should be included in a guidebook for women's NGOs working with IDPs, suggesting practical recommendations.
- 7) The conclusion and follow-up section that provided debriefing and an opportunity for further discussion.

This structure ensured a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strategies used by women's NGOs in providing services to IDPs.

All participants possessed over ten years of experience in the public sector and served as leaders, initiators, or managers of gender-focused projects. Prior to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by

Russian forces, their primary activities centred on anti-discrimination initiatives, human rights advocacy, and women's rights education. Additionally, some organizations implemented programs to support women's entrepreneurship, offered psychological and legal counselling, and provided advocacy and representation for LGBTQI communities.

Following the onset of Russian military aggression against Ukraine in 2014, all participating NGOs expanded their focus to include support for IDPs. Interview findings revealed that the nature of this work has evolved significantly since then. Respondents indicated that prior to February 2022 their efforts primarily targeted the strategic empowerment of displaced women through initiatives such as non-formal education, human rights training, coaching and mentoring, counselling, and employment support. Notably, two out of the seven interviewees had prior experience organizing shelters for IDPs.

The main categories of beneficiaries served by the women's NGOs in their work with IDPs included the following: female members of parliament and public figures; single mothers; women facing difficult life circumstances; internally displaced women with children; women raising children with disabilities; women serving in the military; women with disabilities; women with many children; young women; LGBTQI community members; men of retirement and pre-retirement age. Hence, women constituted the primary category of beneficiaries, often identified by specific social statuses, such as motherhood, disability, single parenthood, lack of awareness, or low income. These conditions often compounded the challenges faced by women, creating a need for additional resources.

The interviews highlighted several key factors that motivated women's NGOs to engage with IDPs during the early stages of the full-scale invasion. First, the sheer social need created by the influx of displaced women into the cities where the NGOs operated generated a growing demand for assistance, particularly in areas such as housing, employment, and basic material support. Second, the availability of rapid-response grants allowed these organizations to scale up their activities quickly, leveraging limited resources to meet urgent needs. Third, a proactive approach was essential, as social service systems and state welfare provisions were often not yet operational, requiring NGOs to act immediately to provide essentials such as clothing, food, and personal hygiene products. Finally, the urgency of the situation compelled organizations to respond swiftly and adaptively, ensuring that support reached those most affected despite severe logistical and operational constraints.

## Main results

The history of the Ukrainian women's movement spans over 140 years, encompassing efforts to challenge social customs and laws that discriminated against women, establish women's organizations to support public activism, and reconsider patriarchal notions of gender roles in society (Bohachevsky-Chomiak & Veselova 2005). Women's NGOs in Ukraine began to develop following the declaration of Ukrainian independence actively in 1991. We define women's NGO as a civil union created by women, for women, with the purpose of supporting women in various spheres of their life.

Notably, according to the Gender Profile of Ukraine, prior to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, there were approximately 1,000 registered women's organizations in the country, out of about 160,000 NGOs. The partner networks of the largest stakeholders in the development of the women's movement in Ukraine – the Ukrainian Women's Fund and UN Women – consisted of about 250 and 150 active women's organizations, respectively (European Union, July 2023).

The war in Ukraine, which began in 2014 and escalated dramatically in 2022, has transformed the role of civil society and its organizations. It has highlighted both their efforts to promote equality and fairness and the results of these efforts in advancing societal knowledge, attitudes, and readiness to build a European society grounded in human rights. At the same time, the full-scale invasion presented new challenges for women's NGOs, such as the need to create support systems with minimal resources to protect the large number of people affected by the war swiftly. Women's NGOs have emerged as key actors in addressing these challenges, leveraging their expertise to provide both immediate relief and long-term support.

The findings from the interviews with women's NGO leaders reveal how the full-scale war in Ukraine has reshaped their work, priorities, and organizational strategies. NGOs have been forced to rapidly adapt to the urgent needs of internally displaced persons, balancing immediate humanitarian assistance with ongoing commitments to women's empowerment and advocacy. The following sections explore five key dynamics that emerged from the data: the humanitarianization of women's NGOs, the fostering of gendered solidarities, shifts in strategic priorities, the role of networking and coordination, and the demonstration of organizational resilience.

**Humanitarianization of Women's NGOs.** The interviews reveal that the full-scale invasion in 2022 constituted a critical juncture that reshaped the mission of women's NGOs. Prior to February 2022, these organizations concentrated on strategic empowerment of displaced

women through non-formal education, human rights training, and entrepreneurship support. The outbreak of war forced a rapid humanitarianization of their agendas: food aid, temporary housing, and emergency clothing distribution became central activities. As one NGO leader put it: “We stopped all our projects and just started feeding people who arrived at our door” (Interview 2022). This shift demonstrates how crisis conditions redirect civil society organizations away from long-term advocacy towards survival-oriented functions. At the same time, NGOs drew on their pre-existing experience in service delivery and social advocacy to maintain ethical standards in crisis response, ensuring that interventions remained gender-sensitive.

**Psychological Trauma and Gendered Vulnerabilities.** Respondents consistently emphasized the psychological trauma among displaced women, especially those evacuating with children under emergency conditions. Unlike 2014, when families had more time to prepare, the sudden mass displacement of 2022 created deeper emotional and psychological distress. One woman explained to the interviewee: “I left with my daughter and mother in ten minutes; I didn’t even take documents. I was just crying the whole way” (Interview 2022). Women described themselves as fearful, disoriented, and often lacking basic documents or language skills to move abroad. These accounts highlight how forced migration reproduces gendered vulnerabilities: women disproportionately carry responsibility for children and elderly relatives, and their emotional well-being is inseparable from their caregiving roles. Women’s NGOs became frontline actors in addressing this trauma, combining humanitarian aid with psychosocial support despite scarce resources.

**Resource Mobilization, Networks, and Volunteerism.** A striking feature of the 2022 response was the activation of dense networks of solidarity. NGOs mobilized rapid-response grants from international donors, engaged volunteers, and relied on personal connections with public figures, business leaders, and parliamentarians. As one director noted: “Without volunteers, we would have collapsed. They came before we even called” (Interview 2022). This networked form of resource mobilization underscores the embeddedness of women’s NGOs within Ukraine’s broader civil society. Volunteers were described as indispensable, enabling organizations to scale up beyond their limited human resources. This dynamic illustrates how crisis reinforces the horizontal character of Ukrainian civil society, blurring the line between formal NGOs and mass volunteer initiatives.

**Strained Relations with State Institutions.** The role of local authorities appeared uneven across regions. Some interviewees reported constructive cooperation, while others experienced competition and

lack of coordination. One interviewee reflected: “The city administration wanted to control everything, but we were faster, so they saw us as rivals” (Interview 2022). The proliferation of parallel volunteer hubs sometimes resulted in a “tug of war” over resources. This reveals structural tensions between state institutions and NGOs in war-time Ukraine: while both aim to support displaced populations, fragmented coordination risks inefficiencies. Women’s NGOs positioned themselves simultaneously as service providers and as advocates for improved state policies, though the latter role was frequently overshadowed by immediate humanitarian imperatives.

**From Advocacy to Marginalization of Strategic Goals.** Humanitarianization came at a cost: the downgrading of advocacy, policy development, and long-term strategic programming. One activist admitted: “We have no time for gender policy now. All we do is help people survive the day” (Interview 2022). Interviewees admitted that urgent needs absorbed nearly all resources, leaving little capacity for advancing the women’s rights agenda, influencing peace negotiations, or engaging in systemic gender-transformative work. This trend resonates with broader debates in feminist organizational studies on the tension between NGO-ization and movement sustainability. While the ability of women’s NGOs to respond flexibly in crisis demonstrates resilience, their marginalization from peace and security processes risks entrenching gender inequalities in post-war reconstruction.

**Emerging Long-Term Concerns.** Despite the immediate focus on humanitarian needs, some respondents identified emerging strategic challenges: the need for permanent housing solutions, integration into host communities, employment opportunities, and professional retraining. As one NGO worker explained: “Women tell us they need jobs, not just food packages” (Interview 2022). This highlights how women’s NGOs navigate both immediate relief and future-oriented challenges, potentially shaping reconstruction and nation-building. The emphasis on language acquisition and cultural adaptation reflects how displacement intersects with identity politics in Ukraine, especially given the renewed salience of Ukrainian language and cultural policies since 2022 (Ahrensberg & Pavlyk 2024). These issues highlight that women’s NGOs are not only crisis managers but also potential shapers of long-term societal integration and nation-building processes.

This study shows that the full-scale invasion of 2022 acted as a critical juncture for women’s NGOs in Ukraine. Key dynamics emerged: humanitarianization of missions, gendered psychological trauma, network-based resource mobilization, strained relations with state institutions, marginalization of advocacy, and long-term integration

challenges. Together, these dynamics illustrate both the resilience and fragility of women's NGOs under conditions of war.

## Discussion and conclusions

The findings advance our understanding across three interconnected strands of scholarly literature. First, within civil society studies, they demonstrate how the crisis accelerates humanitarianization that reorients NGOs away from long-term agendas and toward survival functions (Hilhorst 2018). In the Ukrainian context, this resonates with earlier observations of a vibrant, volunteer-driven civic sphere mobilized during Euromaidan and the war in Donbas (Zhurzhenko 2021). Recent work confirms that the 2022 war further expanded civil society's scope in Ukraine, intertwining volunteerism, NGOs, and governance (Mathers 2024; Lutsevych 2024). Women's NGOs were not passive service providers but crucial mediators between citizens, donors, and sometimes reluctant state actors.

Second, within feminist organizational studies, the results echo debates on NGO-ization and movement sustainability. Hrycak (2002) pointed to tensions between grassroots activism and professionalized advocacy, often shaped by donor agendas. As in other conflict-affected contexts (Abu-Lughod 2010; Bernal & Grewal 2014), humanitarian imperatives risk overshadowing advocacy, but they also provide resources that may sustain organizations in the long run. In Ukraine, scholars have shown how women's activism often intensified during crises but struggled to institutionalize gains in the political arena (Zhurzhenko 2001; Stepanenko & Stewart 2025). The Ukrainian case both confirms and complicates this picture. On the one hand, wartime humanitarianization amplifies the risk of reducing women's NGOs to service delivery. On the other hand, the extreme conditions of war show their resilience and ability to leverage networks, thus broadening our understanding of feminist organizing under duress. Following Illouz's (2020) critical perspective, resilience should be seen not only as a strength but also as a social demand that can mask systemic inequalities and transfer the burden of adaptation from institutions to individuals and grassroots actors. From this standpoint, the celebrated resilience of women's NGOs simultaneously reveals their vulnerability within unequal structures of aid and governance.

Third, the article contributes to debates on NGO-ization and donor dependence (Bernal & Grewal 2014). As scholars have shown, NGO-ization describes the institutionalization and professionalization of grassroots activism into formal NGOs, a process that often prioritizes

donor accountability over local constituencies and risks depoliticizing feminist agendas (Alvarez 1999; Jad 2004; Crotty et al. 2023). The war-time context in Ukraine sharpens these dynamics: while rapid-response funding enabled women's NGOs to scale up their activities and provide essential services, it also heightened organizational precarity, as short-term grants absorbed capacities without reinforcing long-term advocacy. This case therefore illustrates how crisis-induced humanitarianization can both empower and marginalize women's NGOs, depending on whether emergency resources translate into sustained political influence.

The consequences for Ukrainian civil society are ambivalent. On the one hand, the responsiveness of women's NGOs reinforces the horizontal, volunteer-driven character of Ukrainian civic activism. On the other hand, the marginalization of advocacy work risks weakening the women's movement in reconstruction processes. As interviewees stressed, humanitarian relief has absorbed most of the resources, forcing women's NGOs to suspend or scale down their strategic empowerment programs. While this emergency shift is vital, it raises concerns that prolonged humanitarianization may undermine advocacy for gender equality in the reconstruction phase. Future research should therefore track whether humanitarianization is temporary or entrenched, and how international donors can support both immediate relief and long-term advocacy.

In conclusion, women's NGOs in wartime Ukraine illustrate the paradox of resilience: they proved indispensable in humanitarian response, yet their strategic visions were curtailed. Their dual role – as crisis managers and as potential agents of gender-transformative change – will be decisive for both the future of Ukrainian civil society and the trajectory of the women's movement.

By amplifying the voices of Ukrainian women, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of forced migration and its gendered dimensions. Future research should continue to document these experiences, ensuring that the lessons learned inform global displacement policies.

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