



PEOPLE OF UKRAINE

BDO Stories



September 2022

More than 6 months have passed since the invasion of Ukraine in February this year. When the crisis began, our global organisation was quick to respond, launching a solidarity fund that received generous donations from BDO firms and colleagues alike.

A global response team was also established. Led by Trond-Morten Lindberg, CEO EMEA, a team of around forty volunteers worked around the clock with Vira Savchenko, CEO of BDO in Ukraine, to provide transportation, accommodation and relocation assistance for BDO colleagues and their families (127 people in total).

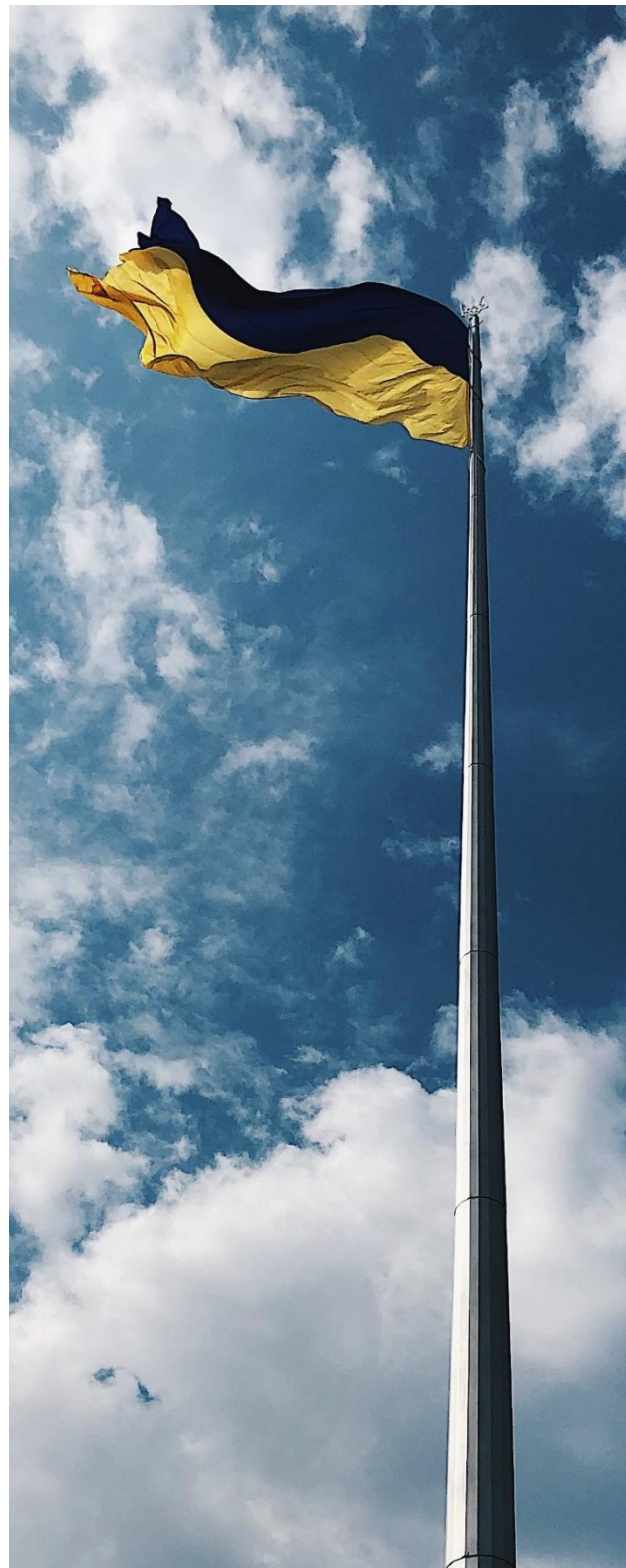
The World Bank now estimates that there are 5.5 million Ukrainian refugees, with the country losing 45% of its GDP. And yet, despite considerable and ongoing challenges, BDO in Ukraine continues to operate in Kyiv and Dnipro, with additional colleagues working remotely in over 15 firms around the organisation, and for the Global Office.

To acknowledge these unprecedented circumstances and the passing of the months, we invited our Ukrainian colleagues to share their personal experiences of the war and provide an update on how their lives have changed since February 24. Their stories are often raw, gritty and emotional, whilst at the same time illustrating first-hand the positive impact of BDO *People Helping People*.

Much as we had hoped it to be different, the war is still ongoing and the Ukrainian people are still living through unbelievable conditions. The stories are as real today as they were before. By sharing them, we also have an opportunity to recognise those involved in our relief efforts, to whom we remain indebted, and to demonstrate our ongoing support.

We hope that you will find these compelling accounts insightful and share our pride in the resilience and fortitude of our colleagues.

Keith Farlinger
former Global CEO





My story

*Vira Savchenko
CEO, BDO in Ukraine*

On February 24, 2022, I was accompanying my father to a doctor's appointment in Cologne, Germany. That day, our lives changed forever. I read the news and I immediately spoke with family, but it took me weeks to fully understand and realise what really happened that day.

After a few hours, requests for help from Ukrainian colleagues and offers of help from BDO colleagues all over the world began to flood in. It was overwhelming. It took me a while to collect my thoughts, but I realised that I could help by connecting those needing help with those who could provide it.

Only a few days after the war was announced, the BDO Global Office established a crisis response team of more than forty BDO volunteers, led by Trond-Morten Lindberg, CEO EMEA, and with the incredible support of the Global Leadership Team, the Global Board and BDO offices all over the world.

"The team consisted of more than forty BDO volunteers, who were all online at the same time during intense moments."



At the BDO office in Kosice

We instantly set up a field response centre in Kosice, in the Slovak Republic, as the city is conveniently located close to the Ukrainian border. The local office, led by Michal Dutko, provided a 24/7 facility for the coordination activities. Together, we managed a wide variety of distress calls and tried to find a solution for each person in need.

When I first arrived at Kosice, it was a normal city. But within hours (not even days) it became full of refugees. People arrived in cars, on buses and even on foot.

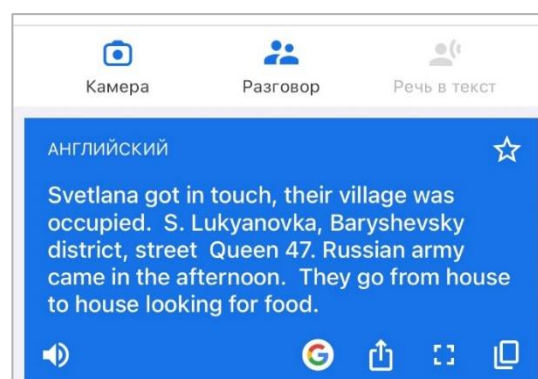
A similar hub was established in Poland by our Polish colleagues, with Trond-Morten and I joining once all our people from Kosice had been relocated to other European countries.

This became my reality for the next few months; making sure all of our BDO colleagues were accounted for, and safe.

The first few days and weeks, we received hundreds of calls and messages. One of our employees was left at the border. She sent me a message with a photo request to pick her up 'here.' Many messages were distressing.



"Pick me up here"



No one was overlooked - some colleagues brought their pets, which are very much part of their family. The dogs and cats that joined their owners were equally looked after and we made sure they could safely travel with them to their final destination.



A few months later I was asked whether BDO in Ukraine could have survived without help from the BDO global family. My answer was a resounding “NO.” Our company, our business as it was, and myself personally, would not have survived these past 6 months. BDO truly is a *People helping People* organisation.

Thank you BDO!



Our employees with families in Vienna

Ukraine is the **largest country** that is entirely **in Europe**.

The total surface area amounts to 603.550 km².

To give you an idea, it is slightly bigger than France, 1.7x bigger than Germany. Belgium is 20x smaller than Ukraine.



This terrible word “war”

Natalia Garbuz
Head of Data Processing, Dnipro



I never imagined that there would be “war.” I believed that there were other means of dispute settlement in the XXI century. Even on February 24, when I woke up from the explosions, I was still didn’t quite believe it. My mind was stubbornly opposed to admitting the terrible reality. I kept doing routine tasks and telling myself and others that today that it would be over by the end of the day.

When the first air raid sirens sounded, I was running, as if I was sleeping, with my family to the bomb shelter. I remember a woman with a 3-month-old infant in her arms that was crying nonstop. She had come to visit her friends, and now she did not know how to get back home. I wiped her tears and reassured her that everything would be okay, but in the panic and horror, the frightened young mother heard no one. I tried to find the right words to comfort everyone, but it felt to me that it was someone else, not me, that was saying it; that someone else, not me, was in a bomb shelter; that someone else, not me, was abnormally calm, without a tear in my eyes, patiently waiting for the news that the air raid siren had ended.

The air raid siren was an annoyance, especially when it sounded whilst cooking a skillet of fried potatoes or stirring a pan of soup that was about to boil. At that moment everything stops with a rush to the bomb shelter. Eventually, we decided to stay inside our space, using the ‘two walls’ principle instead of rushing to the bomb shelter, which was located far away and taking too much time, given that the air raid sirens were triggered 10-12 times per day.

During the first weeks I tried to work, but when I realised that nothing would ever be the same as before, I became a robot. I recollected a saying of my grandmother: “We will overcome a woe by sleeping a while.”

“I hoped that I would wake up and it would all be over. I felt half-dead.”

My children became anxious because I refused to rush to the shelter or sleep in the hallway. The news, the phone, the air raid sirens, the discussion of Plan B, the family chat group to check if everyone was ok, cooking for the volunteers, the general cleaning of my apartment and daily evening discussions about going to Holland with my daughters was exhausting. The male members of the family insisted on our departure. Our Dutch relatives texted us daily and informed us of the commitment of the Netherlands to accept refugees, but we didn't want to hear it. It was out of the question. We were staying...until the news became quite disturbing.

It took me couple of days to persuade my daughters to leave. We arrived at the railway station - the kin of my son-in-law together with her 2-year-old child and our 5-year-old pug dog, who had known nothing but the sofa and gentle hugs in his life. Whilst in the waiting room, we suddenly heard the railway officer announce that a completely empty train had arrived. The train was going to Lviv! We took an empty sleeping car, grateful for not having to sleep in the train station as we'd expected. It was too hot in the sleeping car, with no fresh air. The 2-year-old child was stressed, and our pug laid down on the floor and inhaled and exhaled hard. The next morning, I asked the train steward to let me go out with the dog. There I met a volunteer who gave us sandwiches, bottled water and pies. As we had not thought to bring food with us, we were so happy to receive such treasure!

Lviv railway station was noisy and crowded, with volunteers everywhere. Whilst we were on our way in the train, we were in contact with Vira Mykolaivna Savchenko and Olya Rozhkova, and they had managed to arrange some accommodation for our arrival.

“We were finally safe!”

There were no air raid sirens. The potatoes and mushrooms that we bought at the shop had never tasted so good. A chatty taxi driver drove us to the bus station and told us the history of Lviv. The bus station was crowded, and we waited for the bus for three hours. Once on board it felt like the bus was moving for only 20 minutes, because for the other 28 hours it was stuck in the same place in the queue. Suddenly a scream woke us: an old lady with a bag in her arms had lost a cat that she intended to deliver to her granddaughter in Poland. All the passengers began to look for the escaped animal - in the forest and on the sidewalk, but the cat was nowhere to be found. The old lady was inconsolable. Then, after two hours of searching, someone unexpectedly found the frightened animal sitting under a passenger's seat on the bus.

This terrible word “war”

I couldn't sleep that night. In the morning we had breakfast, thanks to volunteers, and then finally, we passed through customs and arrived in Poland. There were many refugees at the bus station, including toddlers playing on the floor. Volunteers brought them food, toys and clothes. My throat clenched, but I pulled myself together and didn't let myself cry. My friend, who has been living in Poland for ten years, arrived to meet us. Her studio apartment would be our refuge for four days. Our sleep on the kitchen floor would be the sweetest and most peaceful.

We hardly managed to get tickets to Berlin. After arriving there, we realised that we did not have enough time to catch the train to Amsterdam. As soon as we found Wi-Fi, I received a message from Vira: “Should I rent a hotel room for you?” Half an hour later we were settled in a cosy room.

The next day in Amsterdam we met a friend of mine at the station. We hadn't seen each other for 24 years. I will never forget that moment - my friend trying to reach me against the crowd of Ukrainian refugees and the concerned expression on her face. Tears, hugs, and a cup of delicious coffee in the station cafe followed.

From there we had to go to The Hague, where our relatives were waiting for us. Within a few days, I started working again. The idea that I needed to work after waking up in the morning brought comfort to my mind as I still struggled to accept reality. It provided a reminder of the smooth and familiar life that was BEFORE.

“I am thankful to Vira Savchenko and the entire BDO team for being united in providing financial assistance and moral support, in the right place at the right time.”



Ukraine hosts up to **7 Unesco World Heritage sites**: St. Sophia Cathedral & Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, Lviv Historic Centre Ensemble, Struve Geodetic Arc, Virgin Beech Forests of the Carpathians, Residence of Bukovinian and Dalmatian Metropolitans, Wooden churches of the Carpathian region and Chersonese





Volunteering for victory

*Herman Skoryk
System Administrator, Dnipro*

The terrible word ‘war’ became part of our lives unexpectedly and changed them in one moment.

“We became volunteers, supporting where and however we could.”

Nobody considers this to be a special heroic act, because every Ukrainian would do so in such difficult times.

From the first days of the war, all of my relatives have been volunteering.

I have been buying food and water and delivering it to our guys at the checkpoints outside the city.

I helped to organise the bomb shelter in the basement of the kindergarten that my son attends.

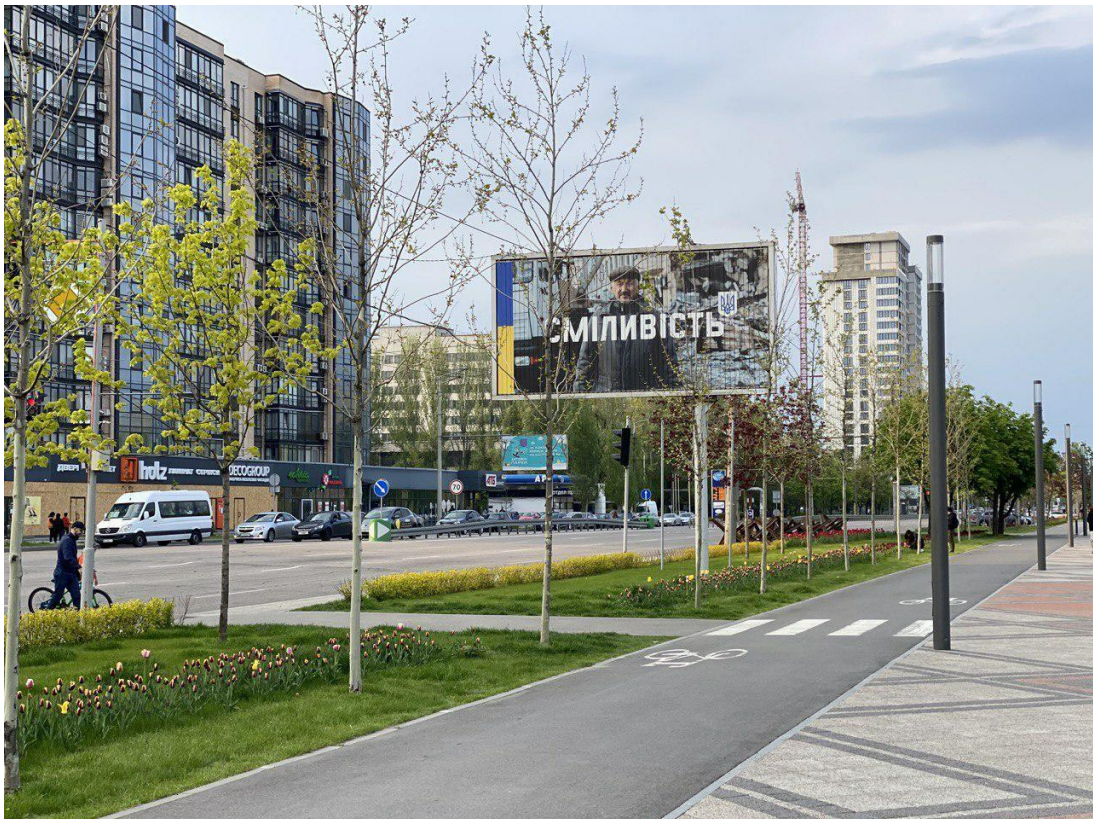
I have contributed to fundraisers to buy body armour, helmets, radio sets, and thermal vision equipment.

I joined the Serhiy Prytula Foundation’s initiative to raise funds to buy unmanned aerial vehicles.
UAH 10 million was raised in three hours.

Also, in the first days of the war, I gave my sleeping bag to volunteers for the Armed Forces of Ukraine.
I was almost kissed for that 😊

My wife is a teacher. She assisted every day in the school that became the base for the volunteer headquarters.

We also donated some clothes for internally displaced persons.



“We are volunteering for our victory!”



“Happy birthday, war has been declared!”

Evgenia Golub
HR Manager, Kyiv

“Happy birthday, war has been declared!”

February 23 was the last day before my long-awaited vacation. After finishing work and saying goodbye to my colleagues, I went home to plan my birthday - where I would go with my friends, what dress I would wear and where to buy a vase for flowers. These were the thoughts that were spinning in my head. I had a plan and a feeling that tomorrow would be the happiest day of my life!

February 24, the day of my birthday and the intended happiest day of my life, began with the phrase: “Wake up, war has been declared!”. These terrible and unexpected words divided life from then on into ‘before’ and ‘after.’ My first reaction was shock and hysteria. I could not believe that Kyiv was waking up to explosions, and a sky illuminated by the flash of rockets. After weeping bitterly for a while, I pulled myself together.

Later, I received a phone call from my mother.

“She was crying as she wished me a happy birthday, then begged me with a trembling voice to survive.”

A dismal silence filled the air. The only sounds were footsteps on the stairs and the rumbling of departing cars. Our block of flats instantly became half empty. We packed our luggage, gathered our documents, filled every jar with water in the apartment (in case the water supply was affected) and arranged to spend the night on the floor in the hallway. In the evening, we decided to go to the store and to the pharmacy, to buy medicines to add to our first-aid kit. Whilst in the queue I asked myself “What do we need to buy in the pharmacy?” and realised that I had no idea. As always, the internet came to the rescue and advised us on what we should include in the first aid kit. We shared the list of medicines with the guy behind us, who was just as confused as we were.

On February 25, we spent the day reading the news. We also made contact with family and friends. For the first time in my life the words “How are you?” meant so much more.

“We spent the night in the hallway, listening to explosions and air raid sirens again.”

On February 26, at 5 a.m., we woke up to a call from a friend, who offered us the chance to leave Kyiv. We decided to take it. Soon we were 100 kilometres away from Kyiv, in a quiet and safe village. There was almost no mobile connection, the internet was only available in one house, and there was only one store for the whole village. This was our reality for the next fifteen days.

Morally it was overwhelming! The darkness began to frighten me. It was strange to sleep without air raid sirens and gunshots, it was strange to go to the store every day as if nothing was happening. I began to blame myself for being safe, while others...

“For the first time in the 28 years of my life, I asked for psychological support to rebalance myself.”

Since April 11, I have been back in Kyiv. Am I afraid? Of course! Like everyone else, I'm afraid. I try to work to have no time for fear. I'm doing my best to take back control of my life and get back to normal - at least a little.

How did the war change my life? I began to appreciate the peace that I have, for example, the opportunity to eat whenever I want. And yet, the air raid siren may still be triggered any moment. Then I must go down to the bomb shelter.

In those 150 days of war, many things changed in our lives. The only thing that has not changed is dear BDO.

“I just want to say thanks for everything that the company has done for me personally, and for each and every affected employee.”

Ukraine is often called the ‘**bread basket of Europe**’ because the soil is famously fertile. Ukraine was, until the war started, the world’s largest exporter of sunflower oil and the third-largest exporter of grain.



The fertile soil in Ukraine is known as chernozem, which means **‘black earth’**. It is able to store more moisture and generate high agricultural yields.

Before the war, around 320 million hectares of land was cultivated every year, providing food for a half a billion people.





War in my hometown

Victoriia Silchenko

Business Development Senior Manager, Dnipro

When the explosions started, the first thing that popped into my head was to go to the store and buy food while everyone was still asleep. It was a shock to be faced with hundred-metre long queues at the supermarket, empty shelves and human panic. It was surreal.

“The first month of the war was a period of complete frustration, constant viewing of disturbing news, thinking about what to do next, and daily gratitude for simply surviving.”

I decided to stay in the city with my family, to be useful to my loved ones during these difficult times and to keep an eye on my home. I knew that it would be difficult, and I still don't know whether this decision was the right one. My mother is an employee working in critical infrastructure. She is required to work a huge amount of overtime, under dangerous conditions. I met her from the train in the darkness of curfew, using a flashlight, to try and calm her down and tell her that she was not alone.

There were few signs of the conflict in Dnipro, so it soon began to fill with refugees and immigrants from the east. Several families lived with me for a while. At first it was a girl of my age from Volnovakha with two children. They escaped to Berdyansk, and then when it was occupied, to Zaporizhzhia, and then to Dnipro. I worried that all I had to feed them with at that time was borsch (Ukrainian beetroot soup), which is far from being a treat for children. But their plates were soon emptied, and everyone was thankful. It was hard to imagine what they had passed through. There were others. Their stories were mind-blowing: a twenty-year-old mother from Volnovakha with a two-year-old child, who gave birth to her second child in the basement. A family from Mariupol, who lived in the basement for months until they managed to evacuate.

I would like to thank BDO and every colleague for their support and care, for providing us with work and new projects, for taking care of our psychological state and physical safety, for helping the Armed Forces of Ukraine and supporting the economy in general. All of these are expressions of love, which are priceless! Because of this, we are able to continue to live and work almost as before and continue to challenge ourselves with new tasks and roles - even under the sound of air raid sirens. I am deeply grateful for what I have - which is much more than many Ukrainians today.

**“It's hard for us to enjoy the roar
of thunder in June.
We're not sure if it's real or
if it's the sound of air defences”**

Even the noise of a train passing through during quiet moments creates tension, because it sounds like a flying rocket. But despite everything, it's still possible to see something good. During curfew, when the lights go down across the whole city and a new kind of darkness descends, you can look up and see bright stars that you've never noticed before. They're so beautiful, it's like seeing them with new eyes.





Fear for my child outweighed everything

Tatyana Zgonik
Senior Auditor, Dnipro

I woke up early in the morning to a phone call from my dad. Early or late phone calls are always a worry. My heart began to race. I picked up the phone and heard:

“My daughter, wake up! War has been declared. Kyiv is being bombed!”

I woke up my husband to the sound of loud explosions. The airport of Dnipro was being bombed. It was terrifying. My son was still asleep.

We had all our documents prepared in one backpack. We hadn't packed anything else, because we just couldn't believe that it would happen. Friends and relatives began to call. My son woke up, and I explained to him what had happened. He is 6 years old. We had talked about the war several times before, but now, on hearing the explosions he had so many questions...

We decided to leave Dnipro and go to Kamensk, to my husband's parents. There, on the left bank of the city, there were no airports, military bases or strategic facilities. It was too frightening to stay in Dnipro.

“We packed our bags, took our parrot and left.”

Communities came together to create bomb shelters, and we used one whenever the air raid siren was triggered. Later, we helped to arrange one in a school. It provided a welcome distraction from the cell phone. Along with other volunteers, we covered the whole room with blankets and cardboard, arranged separate rooms for people with big dogs, and made a ventilation system. The school provided rows of seats and chairs from the school auditorium. The men arranged two separate toilets and a kitchen. After a week, the room looked more like a home, and many people began to go there during the air raid siren.

During the daytime I also tried to work a little and I was grateful for the opportunity to communicate with the team. However, the fear never left. Most of the people we knew went abroad and to the west of Ukraine. Every day we received an e-mail from Vira Savchenko with words of support and instructions on what to do in different situations. We are so grateful to BDO, for supporting us during this time.

“Fear for our child outweighed everything, and when our best friends and colleagues decided to leave, I also wanted to go.”

We had to decide. We woke up one morning and my husband said it was time to buy a small cage for the parrot. I knew then that he had surrendered to my request, and we were preparing to leave. We had never experienced such traffic jams in our lives. Fear drove everyone! Fear of running out of petrol, fear of our son freezing to death. My mother-in-law lost her voice due to all the worry and stress. She didn't recover until two weeks later.

We left Kamensk, and on our way we picked up our colleague Irinka Sirotenko, as a co-driver. In Uman (Central Ukraine) we were happy to discover that our 'room' had been upgraded: from mattresses by the pool in the sauna to a renovated room with mattresses on the floor and soft pillows. How I hugged another colleague, Victoriya Kudryavtseva, when we met her in Uman.

We found an apartment in Truskavets and, although we had only planned to stay there for a short while, we ended up staying for a long three months. Later, we were joined by some close friends; the family of another colleague, Natalia Rozpopa. The support of BDO was invaluable. Even my parents calmed down a bit when I told them that in case of emergency, BDO people would meet us at the border and help us.

We stayed in Truskavets for about three months. Only after a month, when walking in the park with Natalia, did I notice how nice it was there. Nature waking up! There were nice houses and tasty Lviv cheesecake to be enjoyed.

It was hard to make the decision to return home, but how good it was to be there! How happy I was to see and hug my parents after three months of separation. Such joy in moving our parrot from his small cage to a two-story apartment, and what a pleasure to walk around my hometown again.

Fear for my child outweighed everything

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Although there may be some confusion about the origin of the matryoshka dolls, the **motanka dolls** were a part of ancient Ukrainian households and have been around for centuries.

Motanka dolls were meant to be faceless, typically with a cross covering the space where the eyes, nose and mouth would be. The dolls were regarded as guardians of the household, protecting its people.





Days full of fear and uncertainty

Natalia Raspopova
Assistant Auditor, Dnipro

My story begins chronologically, as I recreate in my memory days full of fear, uncertainty and sadness for the citizens of Ukraine.

February 23: I went with my husband to a concert featuring this year's Eurovision winner, and it was that evening that I realised there would be a war. It was sad to watch people dance and enjoy the concert. Why should people experience all these struggles? They should live and enjoy every day!

After the concert, we decided that in the morning we would pack our things and leave the city.

February 24: Early in the morning, like all citizens, we woke up to the sound of explosions. We immediately began to pack things. We called all our relatives. I was scared - not for myself, but for our child. What safe place could we take her to? We decided to go out of town, to the village. Every day, every hour, the news became worse.

“Planes flew very low in the village, almost above our heads.”

March 5: I went with my family to the western region of Ukraine. You may wonder ‘Why to the West?’ The answer is that we were afraid that our region would be taken into the circle, and we would find ourselves trapped and under occupation.

“The road was one continuous traffic jam, in which we spent tiring three days.”

We managed to get to Truskavets, where a colleague was waiting for us. Miraculously, she had found an apartment for us to stay in. The town was abnormally crowded, with the number of arrivals significantly exceeding the number of apartments for rent in the city.

“I was concerned for my aunt in Chernihiv, whom I could not contact for three weeks.

I later discovered that she had a cluster shell in her yard, which miraculously did not explode.

And for my 80-year-old grandmother living near Kyiv, who caught COVID after spending nights in the basement.

For my parents, who stayed at home and did not want to leave; and for all Ukrainians under occupation, for the horror that they faced and continue to experience.”

April-May: I missed my relatives and home whilst being away. I wanted to see them, hug everyone and chat. At the end of May we decided to return. I felt immense psychological relief. Now my family is getting used to living in a new reality.

My family is safe, thanks to everyone who helped us. These challenges will only make us stronger and more resilient! We are deeply grateful for the financial assistance and moral support from Vira Savchenko (CEO, BDO in Ukraine), Anna Chepurna (HR Partner, BDO in Ukraine), and all our BDO colleagues during this difficult situation. **Thank you.**



A tale of two hometowns: Donetsk and Dnipro

Halyna Romanenko
Senior auditor (Dnipro)

I moved from Donetsk to Dnipro back in 2014, and my parents stayed in the occupied territory. They believed that, for me, at the age of 25 it was much easier to change everything and start a new life than for them, at the age of 50.

“Why Dnipro? BDO! A new job, a new city, new people.”

A heavy workload and constant business trips saved me from total despair whilst my parents remained far away. For three years I waited for everything to be better in Donetsk, in the hope that I would return there with my husband and daughter. After a while, I realised that this wouldn't happen for a long time.

We have been living in Dnipro for 8 years. We have a new circle of friends here, acquaintances and favourite places. My parents were planning to move and join us in Dnipro later this year.

My grandmother, who lives 10 km from Volnovakha, visited us every three months to see her great-granddaughter and support us with her, especially during the busiest periods at work. At the end of January 2022, she came to us and she returned home as planned on February 23.

**“According to the schedule, her train arrived at 4:30 a.m.
and it was at that time the Russians began bombing Volnovakha.”**

Until the last moment, we did not believe that a full-scale war had broken out.

In the early days, we had packed our suitcases to be ready to leave, but we realised that now there were no safe places left in Ukraine. The idea of leaving without my husband was unbearable, so we stayed at home.

Vira Savchenko sent e-mails every day, asking how everyone was doing.

Since the first days of the war, BDO supported all employees in Ukraine, including those who wanted to evacuate abroad.

**“This gave me such peace of mind. I was assured that if something happened, we were not alone
and would have the support of the company.”**

Since then, we have tried to return to the life that we had before the war: my daughter's classes, sports, trips out of town.

Even audit activity has increased since April!

“I have faith that the war will be over soon and we will be able to start rebuilding our Ukraine.”

Ukraine officially declared itself an **independent country** on August 24, 1991, when the communist supreme soviet (parliament) of Ukraine proclaimed that it would no longer follow the rules of the USSR and only the laws of the Ukrainian SSR.

By doing so, it de facto declared Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union (now Russia).

The **Ukrainian language** is the only official language in the country.

Interestingly, in the past, the Ukrainian language was rated the 3rd most beautiful language, after French and Persian.

It was also rated the 2nd most melodious, behind Italian.



Escape

Natalia Slipchenko
Senior HR Administration Specialist, Kyiv

Extremely loud explosions woke us up on February 24, 2022 at 5:00 a.m. and we realised with horror that the war had begun. Frightened, we rushed to pack the last of our things and our already prepared emergency suitcase. Half an hour later we were in the car and on our way to our country house near Makarov, in the Kyiv region. Usually, this would be a two hour trip, but on that day, with the traffic jams, it took ten hours. With a toddler of 1.5 years, it was terribly difficult. But if we had known then that there would be such hell to come, we would have gone elsewhere.

“On both sides of the road, we saw many destroyed and burned-out houses”

Three days later, intensive hostilities began near Makarov. We were watching the news 24/7, on TV and on the internet. We could neither eat nor sleep, so we were really tired. From the news, and from messages from friends, we discovered that a large army with columns of tanks and other heavy weapons was already approaching Makarov.

“With our checkpoints and artillery behind us, we were therefore in the very front line of the fire.”

And then it began. There were explosions and shots that did not stop, we saw enemy fighters, and missiles flew in the sky. A landing force arrived in helicopters. When the Ukrainian air defence or artillery was working, the walls and windows of our house would tremble. We taped the windows with duct tape (as advised) so that glass fragments wouldn't hit us in the event of a blast. There was a strong smell of burning and gunpowder in the air, and it was impossible to be outside.



But the real hell began when electricity disappeared from our area. Our house was completely dependent on electricity (light, electric stove, water pump, electric heating, boiler for heating water). We also became isolated from the rest of the world, as we could not watch the news and there was no phone or internet connection.

**“We burned firewood to keep warm, cook hot food and heat water.
Since there is no basement in our house, my child and I slept in the bathroom for a week.”**

Gradually, we began to get used to everything, but the situation became too dangerous. Shells and gunfire were close by and the sky was black with pillars of smoke from explosions and fires.

We decided to run away again. We packed up in 15 minutes and got into the car. In our panic, we forgot to close the door to the house and the gate.

When we reached the highway, bomb fragments, broken and shelled civilian cars, and military equipment were scattered on the road. We saw many destroyed and burned-out houses.

Throughout the trip, we were inspected at numerous checkpoints. The panic and fear made us nervous.

When arrived at a safe place, it took a week to overcome our emotions.

“Now we’ve calmed down a little, but the air raid siren is still triggered day and night - and then the fear comes back.”



Recently, we have been informed that our house was seriously damaged by shelling. Windows were broken, and doors, walls and a fence were damaged.

“It has been really difficult for me to recollect this story and re-live the experience again, but we all believe in our victory, in our armed forces, and in our Ukraine.”

Borscht (a sour soup, made with red beetroots) and **Varenyky** (made of fresh dough) are some of the most popular **traditional Ukrainian dishes**.

The Ukrainian Borscht was added to Unesco's safeguarding list in July 2022.





My home is now my fortress

*Ruslan Aliyev
Valuation Manager, Kyiv*

For many of my friends, the war began in 2014, when they joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine or volunteer battalions, following the occupation of Crimea and the armed invasion of Donbas. Back then, I was a member of a Military History Club. We offered technical and financial support and donated all our equipment to the cause.

February 24, 2022, was an unprecedented turning point. Whilst many suspected that the ‘training’ of Russian troops near our country’s border might evolve into more aggressive action, nobody expected that it would happen so quickly.

I will never forget that day.

**“A rocket, flying over my house, woke me up around five o’clock in the morning.
Later, there was a loud rumble of explosions.
In the darkness, the blaze of a fire could be seen from the Brovary direction.”**

A switch flipped in my head: this is war.

I woke up my girlfriend and, in the dark, in less than half an hour, we made two small backpacks filled with essential items: documents, medicine, clothes, canned and other long-life foods that (fortunately) we’d purchased in advance. We filled up the car with petrol and withdrew some funds using our bank cards.

A metropolis is not the best place to hide during a war, especially a capital city under attack. The company that my girlfriend works for had offered her a long-term relocation with full payment to any European country, but given that our elderly parents live in areas located close to Kyiv and their evacuation out of country would be really complicated, we decided to stay.

“My home is now my fortress!”

The first week became a blur. Life evolved around the phone. An enormous flow of information. Regular messaging. Endless chats. Painful questions: What should we do? How should we act?

In one moment, Kyiv was surrounded by wires, sandbags and anti-tank defences.

**“Moving through the city in wartime is such a contrast, with so many checkpoints
and people with weapons everywhere.”**

The range of human emotions during war is difficult to express.

Fear - when you hear rifle shots.

“Only the dead are not afraid.”

Calmness - when you believe in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and when your cat doesn’t jump around the house when there’s an explosion, because it can differentiate air defence from shelling.

Endless love and faith - love for family and friends, as well as for our Motherland Ukraine.

Belief in humanity, when you see the actions of people who have united and support each other in this difficult time.

**“Many thanks to BDO for their full support and in particular,
the enormous contribution of Vira Savchenko, CEO of BDO in Ukraine,
who with her titanic efforts has given us faith in the future of our company.”**



The morning news

Alona Tonkikh
Graphic Designer, Kyiv

My mother and I were born in February. I was born on February 13, my mother on February 22. On February 24, I had a train ticket from Kyiv to Mykolaiv, to celebrate both birthdays with my family. Unfortunately, after spending three hours at the station waiting for the train, a rocket hit the railway and the line was closed. Despite the chaos that was already going on in city, I managed to take a taxi home. Home for the next few days was the basement of my apartment block.

**“I shared the birthday cake I had made for my mother with the kids in the basement.
At least it made them happy.”**

Meanwhile, my mother had seen a ‘mushroom cloud’ over the station, and becoming more and more worried and the shops ran out of bread.

My mother is a psychologist by profession, and strong, but we decided that she must leave her city. Mykolaiv has several exits - most of them bridges - but after 8 hours of queuing with grenades overhead, my family managed to escape. We agreed a rendezvous point in Lviv. Then it was my turn to get out of Kyiv. I remember the red glow that reached up to the 10th floor from the fire at the oil depot, the drones flying over streetlights, how I drove to the railway station through anti-tank barriers, and the Chinese man who shared his tea without a second thought of returning home.

**“There is a billboard at the road to Petropavlivska Borshchagivka near the Rada.
As I crossed it, I saw a familiar face. It was my photo, taken at a recent village event,
now overlooking my home village.”**

Now my relatives joke that I am protecting it.

There were checkpoints under the billboard on the day I left. The smile on the photo seemed out of touch with reality.



I boarded the train with a cat on my shoulder, and fought for a seat on the floor of the sleeping car aisle, nose to the nose with other passengers.

I arrived in Lviv ahead of my family and searched for a place to stay for the night. My colleague Vira Mykolaivna heard about my plans and offered to help. That evening we were all relieved not to sleep in the car on the side of the road under the air raid sirens, but to sleep under a roof, to have a hot supper and time to make plans.

We decided to keep going. From Lviv to Uzhgorod. After a 20 hour queue at the border we finally reached Slovakia.

From there we chose to drive on Austria, which at the time still had no legal framework for refugees. I was relieved to have already experienced Vienna in peaceful times, because for about two months after we arrived I had no will to leave the apartment. There were no air raid sirens, but I still heard them for a while. Life was peaceful – and this brought guilt. A diagnosis of chickenpox provided a welcome distraction.

Having a job creates the motivation to keep going. A person cannot be without work. Good relations with colleagues play an important role. You are no longer alone with your thoughts. I am thankful to them for that.

In my absence, my neighbour-friends water all my 40 plants and my cat is with me. This gives me hope that ‘home’ still exists. Austria helps in every way it can, for that I will be forever grateful.

It hurts for friends and people you know who are gone... and for those who are alive and protecting us. Now it seems like every family has one of these people.

“It hurts for those who stayed behind (my grandmother and godmother included), but if it hurts, there are feelings. It means you are alive.”



I am grateful to colleagues in my department whose stories, hopes, and emotions kept me from falling out of reality.

I am grateful to Vira Mykolaivna for her support and for being a true example of strength, humanity and resilience.

Whilst in Vienna, I met a volunteer from Kyiv who arranges activities to ensure that no one forgets what is going on in Ukraine; to raise funds, and keep hope alive. So now my weekends are full of marches, meetings and campaigns. We are inspired and reenergised. We are not politicians, but there are many of us. And we will be heard.

Our anxieties remain. I did not turn off the mobile app for air raid siren alerts. My morning still begins with the news. Then I work.

“Our new habit of living in the here and now has not deactivated our desire to return home.”

Many are waiting for the opportunity to return home. Those who are completely out of patience are returning already. Let them be lucky. May we all be lucky. Let the day come when we receive the message that there is no more war.

Vyshyvanka is the national costume of Ukraine. It is decorated with ornamental hand-woven embroidery featuring floral details. Both women and men wear the costume on various occasions.





Sandbags and solidarity

*Iryna Knyzhnikova,
Head of BDO Academy, Kyiv*

Once upon a time, I had an ordinary life: work, training, planning for the future. All that collapsed in one moment. That moment came on February 24. It's a day that no Ukrainian is ever likely to forget, and our family is no exception.

“We woke up to the sound of explosions. My child screamed: Mum, it’s the war!”

We never imagined that there could be the war in the 21st century, and although we've watched movies about war, nothing prepared us for the horror of what we, our children, our parents and all Ukrainians faced.

That same morning, long before the working day began, it was not relatives who got in touch, but the management of BDO. First with messages of support, then with practical assistance.

Our team became one, supporting and helping each other, with our company CEO, Vira Savchenko, taking the whole team under her care. People began to leave Kiev in cars and on foot. Pharmacies, banks and shops were closed.

“The first ‘incoming’ missile hit the next yard at 5 a.m.

The blast pressure lifted me from the bed and the light from the explosion illuminated the whole street.”

After that, we took to the shelter. People were sitting on school chairs or sleeping on the floor, along with dogs, cats, parrots and even rabbits. Everyone was afraid, but it seemed safer there.

Days passed by quickly, but nights dragged on.

Our family stayed in Kyiv. My eldest child and I went to the Territorial Defence Forces and helped to build checkpoints. Every day, from morning to evening, we protected our city, making sandbags. All my neighbours joined the process. Everyone helped as much they could. The cold February weather did not hold anyone back, and although tired, people did not stop.

Despite these challenging circumstance, from the very beginning, the BDO Academy team did their best to support our customers, helping with relocation to Western Ukraine, and even delivering medicines. Our clients from Western Ukraine had kindly offered assistance with housing and sent lists of volunteers who could be contacted. When we shared this information, it felt like the whole world was helping each other.

With the start of the war, our planned training courses had been set aside. But one day in April, a woman called and said:

“I am from Kharkiv. We are being constantly bombed and I am tired of sitting in the basement and doing nothing. Are you arranging any training now?”

This was the trigger for action. We realised that the time had come! In two weeks, we gathered a group and started online training for the DipIFR course.

“Sometimes explosions were heard during the training, and the trainer delivered the course from the shelter during these periods, but the training continued regardless!”

Nothing stopped our trainees from gaining knowledge, and they were so grateful to the BDO Academy team for their professionalism and comprehensive support. We are determined to continue our work and new projects and training courses already await our trainees.

At the same time, I continue to be actively involved in volunteering: collecting clothes, shoes, equipment, body armour, solar panels, cars, and humanitarian aid for civilians.

Thank you to the BDO family for making this possible.



Thank you, Poland

Rusalina Dobrovan
Quality & Risk Management Specialist, ESG Manager, Kyiv

On the morning of February 24, part of Kyiv was awakened by the sounds of explosions, whilst the other part was disturbed by calls from relatives or friends saying that the war had started. With fear and pain in our hearts, we hastily began packing up. Having collected all the necessary things, my family and I decided that we would feel better and safer in a country house located near Kyiv. Once the decision was made, we left.

“On the way there, we saw a large number of cars moving in the opposite direction. About 20 helicopters flew over us and we assumed that they were Ukrainian...until we heard on the news that they were hostile.”

As we arrived at the country house, we heard terrible explosions nearby. We started to have doubts about our decision. Our location was not far from Gostomel, where the airdrome was being bombed, so we decided to go and visit relatives living in the centre of Ukraine. The journey usually takes four hours, but it took twice as long that day. We spent about two weeks with these relatives. It was relatively quiet for a while, until the air sirens began to sound several times per night. Our days were filled with the constant checking of the news. We also assisted volunteers making camouflage nets.



One morning, waking up after another siren, my family and I decided to find a calmer and safer place, so we went to Poland. The trip was quite difficult.

“We spent about two days in the car, including almost forty hours at the border checkpoint.”

BDO stepped in to help during these rough days. Colleagues from BDO seemed to be in touch with us 24 hours a day, with advice and guidance. I am so grateful for their moral and financial support.

“In times of despair, it is important to know that there is someone you can contact to ask for help or advice.”

I particularly want to thank Vira Savchenko. I had the opportunity to meet her in Poland, when my family and I first arrived in Warsaw, and it really boosted our morale.

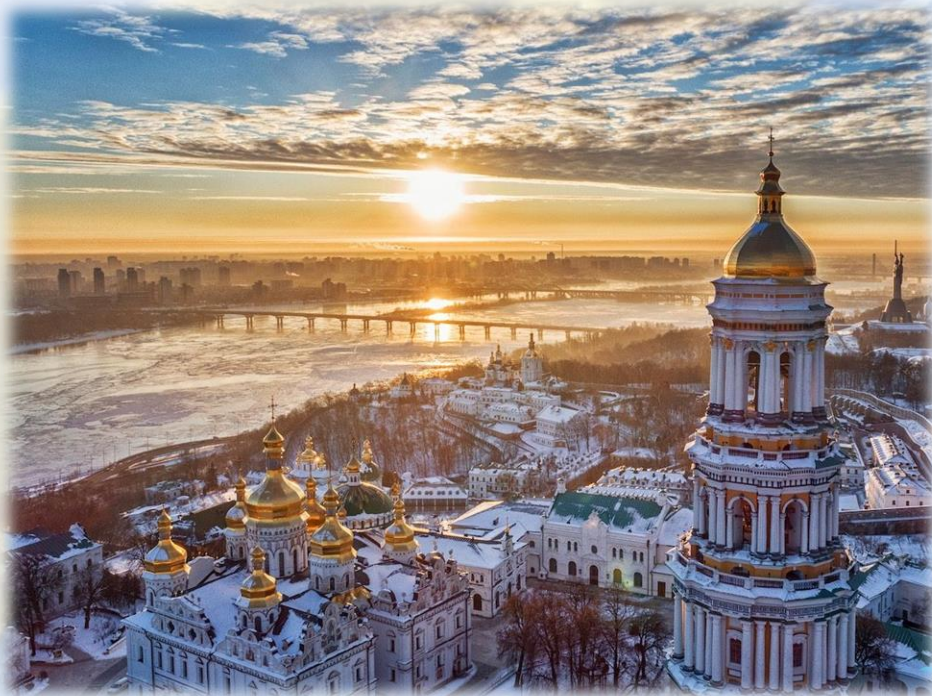
After arriving in Poland, we spent the first week in Krakow searching for an apartment. This was not an easy task, as most apartments had already been rented. We had arrived in Poland with our pet (a pug dog, Miranda), and this made the search even more complicated. Fortunately, a Polish family offered to help and they found an apartment for us, where we are now staying.

Poland has been such a hospitable country and we feel support the support of friendly citizens every day, when walking down the street or going to the store, or just through seeing Ukrainian symbols on buildings and cars. For this we will always be grateful.

The capital of Ukraine is **Kyiv** - Not Kiev.

‘Kyiv’ is the official transliteration of the city’s name in the Ukrainian language.

Ukrainian is not the only language spoken in the country - but it is the only official one.



The **deepest metro station in the world** can be found in Kyiv. It is Arsenalna station, 105.5 metres below the surface.





When the sky turned red

Veronika Orzhekhovska
Senior Auditor, Kyiv

On February 23, my audit team completed quality control on the first of the audit projects for 2021, scheduled for issue two days later. We planned to work through all the comments of the team the following day, but on that morning, our plans changed completely.

On the morning of February 24, my mother woke me and said that war had been declared. I could not believe it, and immediately began to scroll the news. What the official channels were reporting was terrible.

“I couldn’t believe it, but loud explosions outside my window confirmed everything.”

I stepped out onto the balcony and looked at my native street. I didn’t know what to do next. There were huge queues of people at ATMs, pharmacies and supermarkets. People with luggage and pet carriers ran towards the subway.

Once we came to our senses, we checked the ‘emergency’ suitcases that we had packed in advance. We decided to stock up on food and essentials and then plan what to do next.

“No one believed until the morning of February 24 that a full-scale invasion would actually begin.”

As we drove silently through our native Obolon district, I scrolled endless horrible news on my cell phone. The sound of terrifying explosions could be heard from different parts of the city. Our district is not far from the Kyiv hydroelectric power station. Mindful of the events of the 1980s, when the dam broke and a considerable part of the city was in danger of flooding, we decided to go to a friend’s house in Pushcha-Voditsa, outside Kyiv. As we lived in a block of flats, their house seemed to be, at the time, a safer place.

It was a disturbing night. No one slept. More terrible and horrible news.

“Going out into the yard, loud explosions were heard that made the sky turn red.”

I called all my loved ones in Kyiv, Lviv, Dnipro and Odessa - family, friends and colleagues. No one could believe what was happening, and nobody knew what to do for the best.

The next day a tank arrived in my native district. We followed every word of the President. Constant loud explosions, helicopters in the sky, fear. We blocked out the light and stayed in the basement day and night for the whole of the next week. It was frightening.

“The ground was trembling under our feet from the blasts.”

On March 3, we decided to return to Kyiv, before continuing to the Vinnytsia region to my mother’s relatives. We invited others to go with us, but people were not ready to leave their homes and pets. On the way, I looked sadly at our lands, at people, at every millimetre of all that was so close to my heart.

Throughout this difficult time and to this day, we continue to be supported by the BDO family. This support has been invaluable, and I am so grateful to everyone in the organisation.

Thank you.



Stay or go?

Andrii Borenkov
Head of Advisory, Kyiv

“My family did not believe that a full-scale Russian invasion would happen.”

But, just in case, we - my wife, our three children (aged 1, 4 and 6), my sister-in-law, my mother-in-law, three dogs and I - decided to make minimal preparations for an emergency evacuation from Kyiv, given that the capital would be a high-risk area.

Before February 16, the date that Western intelligence agencies had suggested as one of the potential invasion dates, we arranged the following:

- We refuelled the car and packed clothes for the entire family for a couple of days.
- We gathered all our important documents.
- We purchased bottled water and fast food to last a while, and withdrew some cash.
- We dropped off a large bag of dry dog food at my mother-in-law's country house.
- We decided what to do if war was suddenly declared.

We agreed that in the event of invasion (or in case of mobile connection loss), we would meet in the country house of my mother-in-law and then decide what to do next. Her house is in the Makarov district, northwest of Kiev. It seemed relatively safe to me then.

I woke up to explosions from the direction of Boryspil, at about 4:15 a.m. I surfed the net for the news and everything became horribly clear. I was fortunate that we had our agreed plan for what to do next. In no more than 15 minutes we were ready to go. We even managed to fill up the car in Petrivka. The highway was almost empty. Only now do I understand how much our advance planning helped us to avoid further problems.

“My sister-in-law left Kyiv half an hour later and it took her around 8 hours to get out of city.”

In the countryside we bought products and decided to wait and see how the situation developed. Nobody could say what would happen next. Western intelligence agencies believed that Kyiv would manage to defend the borders for three days at the most. There were active hostilities throughout the country and Russian troops were attempting to land in Hostomel. In fact, it was their failure in Hostomel that gave people hope that the war had not been lost.

In the morning, after a sleepless night and the constant rumbling of heavy aircraft, we decided to change our thoughts from ‘what bad things must happen to keep us moving?’ to ‘what good things are here to make us stay?’ It soon became clear that we should to keep moving to the west. Fortunately, we had friends in Volyn and we had agreed in advance that, if needed, we could stay in their country house.

“We squeezed into one car - all seven of us plus three dogs - with my mother-in-law's car left behind and later donated to the Armed Forces of Ukraine.”

To avoid potential exposure to enemy shelling, we decided to drive along the roads below the Zhytomyr highway, at least to Zhytomyr. Indeed, the Zhytomyr highway later became a battlefield.

“It took more than 12 hours to get to Lutsk through all the checkpoints that were just being set up. It was especially hard for the children, but they did well to make it through such an exhausting trip.”

After a night in Lutsk with non-stop air-raid sirens, we decided to find some accommodation, because the end of February was chilly and the house of our friends was not equipped with heating. It was a challenge to find anything for rent because we had the dogs with us, but we managed to arrange motel rooms near Lutsk, where we planned to stay for some time.

At that time, I was considering going to Poland, but this became impossible for men due to military mobilisation. There were already huge queues at the borders lasting several days, which would be particularly hard for a family with toddlers.

In Volyn, there were between three and five air-raid sirens per day. During our last night there, the children had to sleep in a bomb-shelter, and the risk of attack from Belarus grew considerably.

Fortunately, a few days later, an exemption from mobilisation was issued for parents of 3 or more minor children, so on the morning of March 1, we decided to try to cross the border.

“We had to pass a lot of checkpoints on the way, and at one of them we had to urgently get out of the car for fear of airstrikes.”

I wasn't sure if I would be allowed to cross the border, and I was also worried about the dogs - two of which had no documents. Fortunately, there were no problems. The Polish border guards asked few questions. It seemed that the fact we had passports for our children was rare! Moreover, there was no queue. In fact, we were able to cross the border in less than an hour, which was a miracle compared to the stories of our friends.

“Only after passing the border did we start to experience real fatigue, and some guilt, given the many colleagues and friends who could not (or did not wish to) evacuate.”

From the start of the war, BDO assisted everyone in need, offering evacuation and financial assistance to all employees and their families in Ukraine. They even engaged the services of private companies to arrange safe routes using intelligence agency data.

“BDO is a company that lives by its principles.

I am sure that many employees will remember this and be thankful for the timely and great support provided.”



Did you know that the **gas lamp** was invented by two friends and pharmacists from Lviv? It is safe to say it was one of the most ground-breaking inventions of modern times.





A different fear

Viktoria Sukhanenko
Head of Advisory on Occupational Health and Safety, Kyiv

“What is fear? It is a concept that is relative. On February 23, 2022, I was afraid of a mosquito bite. The next day, on hearing the roar of Russian shells, I experienced fear for the lives of people close and dear to me.”

We had a feeling that war would be declared. We discussed various scenarios, prepared the basement in our home, purchased food and diesel fuel for the generator, packed our ‘emergency’ backpacks, medicines, lists of necessary contacts, and even attended military training courses. We knew that our town, Irpin, was on the first line of defence, should an attack come from Belarus.

On the second day of the war, several families of friends and relatives from Chernihiv, Kyiv and Irpen came to us. Given that the house was stable and the basement was large, there was hope that it would withstand all the attacks. There was no panic and we quickly took control: everyone was housed, everyone was given a task: kitchen work, babysitting, or trying to catch a mobile connection outside, because it was impossible to call from the basement.

“The children were distracted by games and reading and somehow quickly adapted to basement life. Hearing the air raid siren, they ran with laughter to the shelter screaming: “I was the first!” ...whilst we adults were scared to death.”

We realised that we were quickly running out of food, having donated much to the nearest checkpoint of the territorial defence before we knew that so many people would join us in the basement. On the sixth day of the war, we went to the nearest store for the first time. The shelves were empty and there was no other way to obtain food. After a week of sleepless nights in the basement, hearing endless gunfire and the rapid approach of the line of defence, we decided to evacuate some families with children. By the time they were ready to leave, Irpin was already within the blockade. Bridges were destroyed, and checkpoints did not allow evacuation because it was too dangerous. In search of a way out, we intuitively asked the volunteer centre of the Irpin Bible Church for help, after which, the military promised a corridor.

“By this time, a column of tanks had already appeared near our house.”

We arranged a convoy of 50 cars for children, women, and the elderly, each bearing large signs CHILDREN and white flags. On the first day we drove too slowly, moving only 140 kilometres from checkpoint to checkpoint, where we waited for a safe corridor before progressing to Uzhhorod.

Some members of our family stayed in Irpen. What they experienced during the occupation and how they survived is a separate story, but they are alive! Our beautiful house has been partially destroyed and robbed, but it remains standing in spite of everything. I truly believe that we will rebuild everything and have a peaceful life again in our city.

“From the first day of the war, all BDO colleagues united. We did not know what would happen tomorrow, but we knew that we had each other and felt supported!”

In Zakarpattia, thanks to assistance from BDO, we were able to find a hotel where we stayed for a few days to recover and decide what to do next. Fortunately, friends were then able to help relocate my family to Austria. On this journey we met many wonderful and caring people, and volunteers who provided moral support and assistance. Austria has welcomed us as friends. The state and Austrian citizens are providing Ukrainians with shelter and housing. Matters such as residence registration, health insurance, kindergarten and school for children, German language courses have been quickly resolved. Charitable foundations such as Caritas and others are also supporting our citizens and social stores provide everything that we need at low prices.

Vira Savchenko, did (and still does) everything possible to support everyone in the company. When she found out that my family and I are in Austria, she worked with BDO in Austria to ensure that we are well supported. The team there is led by Peter Bartos, and it is large and quite international. There is a saying that ‘a friend in need is a friend indeed’ and this is very true.

“When Peter and colleagues from BDO in Austria found that several families from Ukraine would come to Vienna, they quickly rented apartments, raised money for furniture, and brought things to equip our homes and toys for the children. We will never forget this and are so thankful for their support!”

In Austria, more than 56,000 of our citizens are under temporary protection status. Accordingly, in every Austrian city, Ukrainians unite in groups to help each other, and gather for peaceful meetings in support of Ukraine. Since the first day of our stay in Vienna, my family has been volunteering in the Austrian Youth Centre, specialising in the provision of humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.



I am currently working remotely and developing long-term plans to increase demand for our occupational health and safety advisory services. During the economic recovery in Ukraine, environmental audit and industrial safety services will be in great demand, as these services will be essential for Ukrainian companies, investors and funds.

Before the war, more than 80% of Ukraine was covered by broadband internet.

Ukraine was the 5th country in the world to launch **Google Pay** and in 2020 it was among the Top 10 for the largest number of payments made with Google Pay.





War changed all of us

Oleksandr Khimichenko
System Administrator, Kyiv

“War - one of the most terrible phenomena of mankind - has changed each of us forever.”

February 24 started for every Ukrainian woman and man with a series of early morning explosions. Waking to the sound, my first thought was that local vandals had destroyed something, and that in a few hours, I would read in the local news that a car had been torched. Soon, I realised that I was mistaken. Panic set in. Relatives did not know what to do, where to run and how to behave in this situation. No one was ready for such events. I did my best to keep cool and think what to do next, fast.

“In a couple of minutes, we made a shelter in the bathroom. Five family members in one tiny bathtub with blankets and a flashlight. We were sleeping dressed and with emergency suitcases close by, to be ready for any situation”

I hardly slept. Firstly, due to stress and secondly, because of the constant air raid sirens.

A few days later, my brother and I decided to help at the checkpoint. We were surprised when our offer was refused. Apparently there were already too many volunteers. Instead, I joined the operational chat in Telegram, providing all kind of operational information to support the cyber-front.

A lot of time has passed since the first day of the war. Many Ukrainians already feel less anxious thanks to the heroes who defend our country. We will never forget those who supported us and came to the rescue during these difficult times.

“I never thought of work colleagues as a ‘second family’ until now. I have realised how much I care about the people around me and how much I value each and every one of them. I can now say with confidence that BDO is one big family of friends.”





When the sky turned grey

Tetiana Verba
Marketing Manager, Kyiv

February 24, 2022, was a normal winter's day. In the blue, cloudless sky above our house in the small town of Bucha, planes flew so low that the pine trees in our forest bent. Helicopters followed and the sky turned grey.

The fear took hold slowly. At first, we excused the disruption as military training at the nearby Hostomel airfield, but within a couple of minutes the explosions began. We immediately started surfing the net for news. We could not believe that the war had begun. In one day, our usual life, bustling with daily chores and plans for the future, was instantly turned upside down.

Thereafter, events unfolded at breakneck speed. Within three days, Bucha was completely occupied by Russian troops.

“We were forced to hide in a cold basement.

For 14 days we heard the sounds of flying, shooting and booming above us, with such force that the basement walls were shaking. We sat huddled together like frightened little mice.”

In moments of silence, we emerged from the basement for a few hours to collect water, cook food and get in touch with relatives to let them know that we were alive. Every time we opened the iron cellar door we saw more destruction. We all prayed that our house would be safe. We felt like we were in a parallel reality, that all this could not really be happening to us.

On March 8, it snowed. The temperature dropped to -8°C and, although we slept in winter clothes, we were chilled to the bone. Gas was no longer available, and by that time, we had no water or electricity. We did our best to keep our hysteria from the children and elderly women who were with us in the basement and cried quietly in the corner so that no one would see us. Under the shelling, food was brought to us by a volunteer. When it ran out, 30 people from our basement decided to go out on their own through the Russian checkpoints towards Irpen.



“We packed our emergency backpacks with the necessary documents, took out our SIM cards to save our data (in case our cell phones were confiscated), ripped a white sheet to make a white flag, and started walking”

After a couple of kilometres, we stumbled upon some Russians searching houses. When they saw us, they asked where we were going. We were numb with fear, but having found my strength, I started gibbering that we were cold, hungry and that there were children, emaciated elderly women, dogs, and a cat among us, so they must let us go! Fortunately we were allowed to continue towards the checkpoint.

“As we turned into the narrow street leading to the bridge between Bucha and Irpen, we saw a terrible scene... dozens of dead civilians from Bucha... over which we had to step over to get to the bridge.”

We saw a Ukrainian flag on the hill and our military shouted to us – “Run to the right, there are snipers!” We prayed loudly as we ran across the bridge straight into their warm embrace. From there we were driven to the bridge in Romanovka village, before continuing to Kyiv.

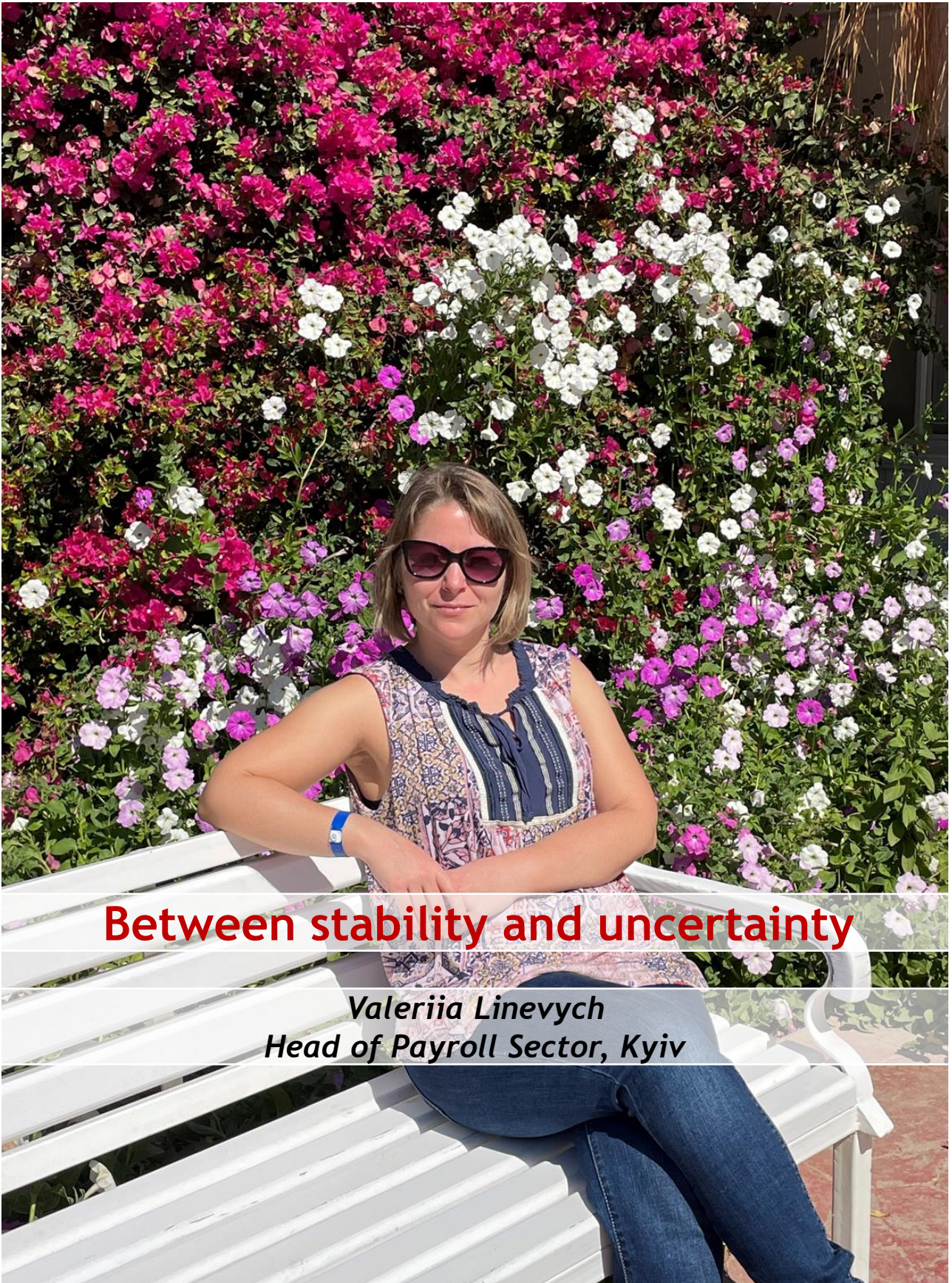
“War has taught me that the most important thing is to appreciate humanity and to be grateful for being alive!”

The coastal city of **Odessa** is an essential port for Ukraine, but was equally a popular tourist spot, lovingly called ‘**pearl by the sea**’. It houses the Odessa National Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre.



Freedom square in Kharkov is **the largest square in Europe**. Its length is 750 metres and width is 125 metres.





Between stability and uncertainty

Valeriia Linevych
Head of Payroll Sector, Kyiv

It all started at five o'clock in the morning on February 24, 2022.

“Thursday morning is the line between stability and uncertainty, between plans for the future and a plan to simply survive until the next morning.”

Like everyone else in Ukraine, I woke up to explosions. I knew then that the war had started. I can't say that it was unexpected, because my emergency suitcase was already packed. The first two hours were just a total shock. I could only watch from the window as almost all my neighbours pulled bags out into the street, put children in their cars and went somewhere in the darkness. At seven o'clock I received a phone call from a client - a woman with whom I have worked for 10 years - always calm and balanced. With a trembling voice she asked me to urgently pay all her employees an advance for March, in anticipation of what was to come.

Once the shock faded a little and the panic began. I contacted all my family members and friends, and tried to calm them (and myself) down. I contacted my colleagues. We all understood that about 1000 employees of clients and their families were dependent on the speed of our work to receive their payments.

“Everyone worked at the limit of possibilities; from basements, hallways and bomb shelters, in between air raid sirens, non-stop”

We took only short breaks to find products in the stores and buy emergency items.

The first wave of panic lasted about a week. I became used to sleeping on the floor in the hallway, behind two walls, without turning on the light after sunset, and to cooking just one meal per day. It was not clear whether there would be light or water the next day, and indeed whether there would be a 'tomorrow'.

The constant flow of information (or lack of it) almost drove everyone crazy. If a relative or friend did not answer a call, the worst case scenarios would come to mind and hysteria would often set in. My friends from Hostomel stopped replying on March 3, and from that day on I spent every minute, every hour, trying to get some news and calling everyone I know. Finally, on March 8, they got in touch. This was the most joyful moment of recent months, despite learning from them that a bomb had fallen on my house in Hostomel and that my apartment had been destroyed.

During the second week of the war, information about the evacuation was everywhere. Everyone began to pack suitcases and leave. Many BDO colleagues, and acquaintances from companies with whom we had friendly relationships, strongly recommended leaving. Uncertainty about the future kept us from focusing on the present, but on March 7, we decided to go to Poland. The night before leaving, no one slept.

“At 7 a.m, as soon as the curfew ended, my mother, the cat and I went to the railway station to board an evacuation train.”

Thousands of people were just standing in shock, as we were, waiting for the train. Some people had large suitcases, other just had plastic bags. Some had animal carriers, others carried their pets under their jackets. A couple of minutes before the train was due to depart, we were informed of the track number. Thousands of people rushed to the platform. I have never experienced anything like it. My mother was pushed away by the crowd and I lost sight of her. I was blocked at the other end of the platform. Things were pulled out of my hands. Children were crying and getting lost. Babies were being carried overhead. The next moment, a shot was fired into the air and people stepped aside a little. At that moment my mother jumped into the train, and I was pushed into the train by the crowd. Not everyone got on the train. Many people were left behind on the platform.

“During the 9-hour journey to Lviv, four of us took turns to sit in 3 seats. We were lucky. Most people on the train were standing. People were packed in so tightly that I could not even sit on the floor in the place where I stood.”

Children were laying down under tables on suitcases, under the seats or just on the floor. Animals were held in arms. Even pregnant women and old ladies aged over eighty were standing. There was not enough oxygen. The windows did not open and people were fainting from suffocation and exhaustion.

About half way into the journey, a women with a three-month-old baby tried to make her way to another carriage, in the hope that there would be fewer people there, but she could not squeeze through the crowd whilst holding the child.

In desperation, she handed the bundle over to strangers, who passed him down the train, carefully supporting his head and trying not to wake him. Meanwhile, the mother elbowed her way through, screaming furiously when she lost sight of her infant. I don't know if they felt better in the other carriage, but they didn't come back to us.

In Khmelnytskyi, we were aided by volunteers, who gave us packages with sandwiches, apples and water through the windows. We were deeply grateful.

On reaching Lviv, we faced a new question: how to get to Warsaw. A direct train was impossible to take due to the crowds, so we were expected to cross the border on foot - a journey of 20 km in freezing cold weather. My mother was no longer able to walk, but to wait at the railway station for a few days for the situation to improve also made no sense. After circling around the station a few times, I managed to find a bus to Warsaw, and we left the same night. There followed many hours on the road and a 6 hour delay at the border, but at least there was no air raid siren, we could sit and stretch our legs, sleep, and even drink water.

Thanks to assistance from BDO management, and colleagues from all over the BDO global organisation, we now have a roof over our heads and the opportunity to calm down a little, recover and continue to work with new energy. Meeting with Vira Savchenko, CEO of BDO in Ukraine, has given me confidence in the stability of the company and our future.

“These days all my priorities have changed. I am no longer interested in where to go on vacation, and there are no more tears for the lost property I worked hard for years to secure. The only thing that matters is that people close to me are alive and safe.

Fear is in the past, and we hope for a future under a peaceful sky.”



Mount Hoverla, part of the Carpathian mountains, is **the highest peak in Ukraine**, 2,061 metres high, and a popular site for extreme sports.





One war diary

Victoria Yarova
Chief Accountant, Dnipro

On February 24, I woke to the sound of incoming messages on my son's mobile phone. There were about 170 unread in the group chat of his classmates. One of the first that I saw said: "...the airport was bombed, they bombed us! Guys, we're all going to die." I thought it was nonsense, that it couldn't be true - just 10 year old boys making things up. Unfortunately I was wrong.

I tried my best not to cry and keep myself together, but I couldn't... I felt weak through total despair. Irpin, Bucha, and Hostomel were now zones under attack.

"Dnipro, my hometown, was actively preparing to fight back."

We rushed to buy food, medicines, power banks, batteries and candles, and gathered 'emergency' suitcases and backpacks. We visited my mother and gave her money, food and medicine. I slept for only two to three hours per day, wondering what would happen next and how we could survive it.

The air raid sirens were triggered for the first time in Dnipro on February 27, just as my son and I were walking to the store. We quickly returned home and I rushed to check our 'basement' located under the barn, but my husband said that it was useless. We would not be able to use it during an air strike as it was not strengthened with concrete. The basement would become our grave.

"On February 28, it was quiet again, apart from five air raid sirens and a visit of 'Security Service Ukraine' officers with machine guns, looking for a neighbour."

March 1 was the first day of spring, but the war continued. There were more bombings, more civilian victims. The infrastructure of Ukrainian cities was being destroyed. It seemed that everything was on fire.

**"I'm scared, terribly scared, that the worst thing could happen - a nuclear strike.
We shout at each other and scream with anger and frustration,
because we are powerless and it's out of our control."**

On March 11, there were fewer and fewer people in the city. So many were leaving. There were long queues at the railway station. The evacuation trains were full to bursting point. People were scared for their lives and scared more for their children. As I can't leave my mother and it will be too physically difficult for her to withstand the trip, we stay.

April 17, Palm Sunday. 11 years ago, our long-awaited son was born. He so wanted to spend this birthday in a completely different way, to spend time with friends and classmates, have fun, and receive a long-awaited gift - the laptop, for which he had been collecting money for so long.

Three months have now passed since the beginning of the war. Cities have become ruins and enterprises, infrastructure, fuel depots and oil refineries have been destroyed. It is difficult to accept the fact that this is possible in Europe, in the XXI century, leaving hundreds of thousands of ruined, broken lives.

Dnipro, our hometown, has changed a lot. The windows of many buildings are covered with plywood or sheets of metal, anti-tank devices are located at crossroads, and monuments are protected by sandbags. There are fewer people in the city centre, but life is gradually reappearing. Some stores have reopened, and thousands of evacuees and refugees from destroyed cities are arriving every day. Dnipro has become a powerful humanitarian centre.

Everyone lives with hope for the future, to rebuild the country and the economy and quickly return to our homes and 'normal' life.

**"The war forced all of us to live in the 'here and now' and not make long-term plans.
Life can be packed into one emergency suitcase, bag or backpack,
and there is nothing more important than that."**



One of 41 million Ukrainian stories

Anna Shcherbakova
Marketing Manager, Kyiv

“On February 24, 2022, my life changed irrevocably and forever”

These are the words that open the story of almost every resident of today's Ukraine. And these words are not exaggerated. The phrase ‘before the war’ has become so commonplace and familiar, as if it had always been so.

“Our life was ‘before’. Our troubled reality is now. We hope very much for a positive future.”

But let's back to the day that would become a dark page in our history...

My family, like most Ukrainians, awoke to phone calls from relatives and friends bringing disturbing news - a full-scale war, a war with our neighbours, a war in the civilised world - and in the 21st century. And in spite of the bitter experience of 1941-1945.

Within a few minutes, the rumbling of fighter jet engines flying over our house in Kyiv began. After that, it was all a blur. For the first few hours we were in denial. It would be over soon, the enemy would retreat, they would not harm civilians. The compulsive scrolling of news on social media began, checking photos of burning buildings, bloodied people, air raid sirens, explosions...

“Within two hours, my nervous system failed and we moved with two suitcases and a cat to the basement of our house.”

We will never forget those five days in the basement! The whistle of rockets, the rumble of fighter planes, the sound of explosions, artillery volleys that seemed to be really close, the rocket debris that hit a house nearby. And yet this was only a small part of what hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians had to experience.

On the 6th day we decided to leave Kyiv. It was quite a challenge. There seemed to be no end to the checkpoints in Kyiv and it was impossible to take the train due to the crowds, but we did manage to leave. Within a day and a half we were in Chernivtsi. We were thankful to God that we had a place to flee to in relative safety!

Since the outbreak of the war, BDO in Ukraine has proved to be more than just a prestigious company with a good reputation. It has stood by its people in difficult times and become a real family. A daily rollcall checked on every employee. Our IT staff sent practical advice on how to stay in touch in the event of a blockade. Those who had evacuated successfully shared their experiences and offered support. I have been amazed at how inclusive and caring the management have been (and continue to be). Special thanks to Vira Savchenko, who was in touch 24/7. Sometimes it seemed that she was not resting at all.

70% of my contacts, including my husband, lost their jobs when the war began, but BDO in Ukraine has protected our jobs and eased our worries. As a result, we can continue to work productively, sustaining the economy of Ukraine.

“I am grateful to have colleagues with a big heart, an ability to empathise and a strong patriotic spirit.”

Even though our team is now spread all over Ukraine and Europe, more than ever before, we are united.

Thank you BDO!



One of Ukraine's most popular tourist places is the so-called '**Tunnel of Love**'. Situated in Klevan, it is a 4 km section of an industrial railway, surrounded by stunning greenery, and a favourite for couples who are looking for a romantic walk.



The **very first university in Eastern Europe** was opened in Ukraine.

The **Ostrog Academy** is the oldest Ukrainian Scientific and Educational Institute, established in 1576 as the Slavic-Greek-Latin Academy in Ostrog by Prince Konstantin-Vasily of Ostrog.





A 5-day escape

*Henning Dräger
Sustainability Partner, BDO in Ukraine
and Global Sustainability Director*

A 5-day escape

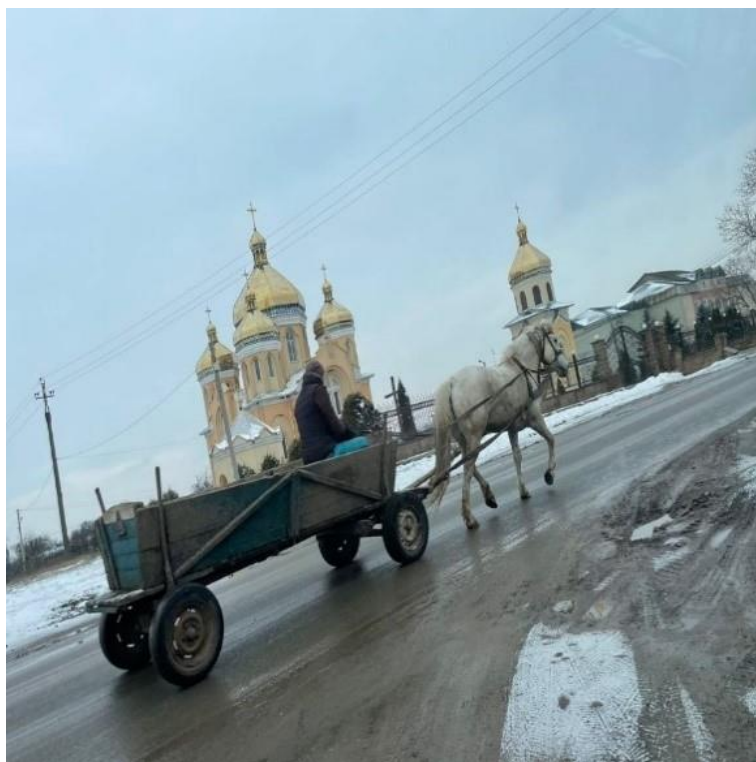
On March 1 my family and I were at home in Kyiv, rushing to cram whatever we could fit into our suitcases. We squeezed in pants, socks, underwear, sleeping bags, and cans of non-perishable food. We'd already withdrawn as much cash as we could from local ATMs.

It was one week into Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and rockets were raining down over the capital. Staying in the city had grown perilous, and a friend texted me to warn that Russian troops might try to encircle Kyiv and cut off the escape routes. If we were going to get out, we needed to leave immediately.

I loaded our Ford Fiesta sedan with luggage. Then, with my son Thor and his mom, Natalia, we headed to Kyiv's Ramada Hotel, where the next morning we linked up with a United Nations car convoy leaving at 6 a.m. The convoy stretched to nearly 70 cars long, affording those in it a degree of security that traveling independently would not. But traveling in such a large group was not always easy and getting from Kyiv to the border of Hungary took nearly five long days. Finding places to sleep, shower, and refuel was a constant source of stress.

All the while, we couldn't stop thinking of what we had left behind: our home, school, colleagues, and friends. The saddest part was seeing once picturesque countryside villages suddenly surrounded by walls of sandbags and trenches, in advance of the oncoming assault.

“I have cried so many tears of sorrow, loss, and anger. I feel a profound sense of loss for the future of young Ukrainians. I never thought that my CV would include the designation *refugee*.”



The five day convoy journey into Hungary was just the first leg of our trip. From there we passed through Slovakia, Poland, and finally Germany, with the final destination intended to be my hometown of Copenhagen, Denmark. When we arrived in Denmark, we stayed with my sister whilst we determined our next move.

“It remains impossible to say when or if we will get back to Ukraine. In Kyiv, our apartment remains empty, save for the relics of life before the war that I left behind: suits and ties, college graduation gifts, pictures of my parents.”



In addition to worrying about what the future may hold, I spend a lot of time thinking about my BDO colleagues. Not all of them wanted to leave, or were lucky enough to escape. Some stayed behind in Ukraine to take up arms on the frontlines. Others, sheltering at home, have found temporary comfort in the monotony of continuing to do their work as the enemy forces close in. The predictable workings of tax, advisory and audit are helping them ‘keep sane.’

The well-being of my son Thor – who’s pleased to be off school, even though he doesn’t fully understand what’s going on – also dominates my thoughts. At 8-year-old he’s been absorbed by playing on his iPad during long drives or overnight stays in unfamiliar cities. On car trips we avoid listening to news reports on the radio and do our best to keep the conversation light.

Amid everything going on, one pastime has emerged that’s brought my family a sense of catharsis: singing the Ukrainian national anthem together. When the uncertainties of our reality start to feel too great, we sing the anthem’s single verse. It celebrates patriotism and seems particularly well suited for this moment.

**“The glory and freedom of Ukraine has not yet perished.
We, too, brothers and sisters, we’ll live happily in our land.”**

On February 27, the world-famous Antonov An-225 Mriya (Dream), **the largest cargo aircraft in the world**, was destroyed by the Russian army at Gostomel near Kiyv. Ukraine is firmly convinced it will rebuild.





Before and after

*Iryna Demyanchuk,
Head of Sales, Kyiv*

When I was invited to write about how my life changed after 24.02.2022, the first thought I had was: What should I write? I cannot complain. My family is alive and we are together in relatively safety. We have a place to stay in and money to sustain us. We are lucky! We evacuated to the west of Ukraine in April and settled with my sister's family in a place provided by relatives of our friends. But EVERYTHING has changed.

I realise that I have begun to think in terms of 'before' and 'after' the outbreak of the war, just as my grandparents did when telling stories about their lives, their childhood and their youth.

"...That was before the war."

"During the war..."

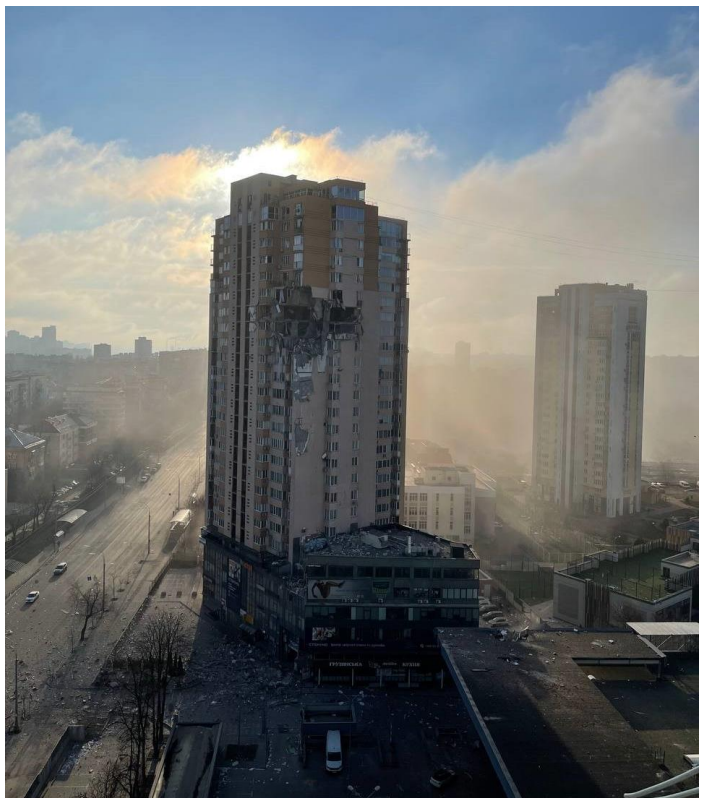
"After the war..."

"We were not ready for war."

An phone call from frightened relatives describing Russian military and an endless column of equipment driving past brought the realisation that war had broken out. It took four hours to refuel the car, about an hour waiting in line at the pharmacy, a long search for a working ATM, and extra time to pack an emergency suitcase. Over the next few days, I read more news than I had in the whole of the previous year. I tried and failed to reason with relatives and friends from Russia. We no longer communicate with them. It's impossible to avoid uncomfortable topics and talking about politics during a full-scale war.

The scariest moment

The most terrible moment in my life was when, on the morning of 26.02.2022, a rocket hit a block of apartments at Lobanovsky Street in Kyiv. My sister's house, where she has lived for 11 years with her children, is located there. The first 30 minutes were full of insane fear. The news reports only provided minimum information to avoid provoking further rocket launches. I tried to call my sister, but there was no connection with her or her husband. Nobody could make contact with friends and relatives. Finally, I found a image that showed the colour of the facade of the affected building. It was the building next to my sister's. I was swamped with mixed emotions. On the one hand, I felt joy. On the other, I felt guilt and sadness for the people who suffered in the explosion. And I still had no contact with my sister. What if a blast wave had hit her apartment?! It wasn't until two hours later that she was able to call me and confirm that she and her family were fine. They were in a bomb shelter, having been urgently evacuated and asked to turn off their cell phones.



Breaking News

We received so many messages from people we know and from strangers, often begging for help. Our colleagues and friends from Irpen and Bucha, who suddenly were in the epicentre of hostilities, were sending messages to everyone they knew, trying to find a way out. They reported their location, that they were trapped in cold, dark basements with children and elderly people without water, food or medicines, and that they could not flee because many others had been shot during such attempts. We received a message from a relative in South Ukraine about a shell landing in her garden. Friends, who had left Kyiv at the very beginning of the war and moved to a small village, got in touch and said that tanks were passing near their place, and that only half of all the houses in the village had been spared from the shelling, but they had survived! My sister unsuccessfully attempted to evacuate from Kyiv to her relatives, having been warned by the territorial defence about the danger of shootings and carjacking on the Zhytomyr road.

I lost so much sleep over shocking news like this. And for another reason: I did not want to miss the air raid siren. I needed to have enough time to carry my child to the small place in our apartment that complied with the 'rule of two walls.' Always, when there were air raid sirens and loud explosions in our neighbourhood, we moved into a hallway, barricaded all the windows and went out only in case of emergency or to buy some food and walk the dog. When I went to the shop, the shelves were empty.

“Whilst I was standing in the queue the air raid siren was triggered, but after standing in line for one hour, no one would leave the queue!”

Evacuation

The circle of danger around Kyiv was rapidly closing in, so we decided to evacuate. By four o'clock in the morning, by the light of a cell phone torch, I had gathered all the necessary things. There were eight of us and a sheepdog. There were only 20 litres of petrol in the tank. We didn't know where we were going, we only knew which road to take. It was the only permitted road for leaving the region, because in the villages along the road there was daily rocket shelling. It was so scary! We only became calm once we crossed the border of the Kyiv region. All along the way we searched for a place to stay overnight, but it was useless. All the houses were overcrowded. We spent three days driving with occasional overnight stays until we found a place where we could stay longer. We were lucky. We were hosted by wonderful people, with whom we finally became very good friends. In fact, along our journey we met many caring, sincere people that helped us.

I would not have been able to evacuate without the assistance of Vira Savchenko, CEO of BDO in Ukraine. I was the only one with a job in my family after the outbreak of the war.

“I will be forever grateful to the leadership of BDO in Ukraine and to all the other BDO colleagues that helped (and are still helping), mostly without even knowing us personally. I find it difficult to call us a BDO team now, as we are a real BDO family.”

How our lives have completely changed. One day we were living a happy life, making plans for the future, and then the war began and destroyed everything. And yet, everything I had invested so much effort in before suddenly seems insignificant. The most important thing is that my family is alive!

Liberation

The Kiev region was liberated and stories began to emerge about the horrors that have taken place there. For the first time, since the outbreak of the war, I cried. For several days I could not pull myself together emotionally. During a war, you see first-hand its cruelty and ugliness. It is hard not to feel bitter, and of course I want justice.

That spring was like a blackout. I love the Carpathians, the mountains and nature in the west of Ukraine. In the past, the awakening of nature, the first grass and the first flowers, gave me new energy, motivation and happiness. This year I had a different feeling. When looking at the things that used to give me strength I didn't feel anything. It didn't feel real.

At the end of May we returned to Kiev.

“How good it felt to be at home! The air raid sirens were less frequent than before we left, and no explosions were heard. We unblocked the windows and moved the sofa from the hallway back into the sitting room.

Life goes on...”

‘Carol of the Bells’ is a popular Christmas carol composed by the Ukrainian composer Mykola Leontovych in 1914 with lyrics by Peter J. Wilhousky. The song is based on a Ukrainian folk chant called ‘Shchedryk’.





*Liubov Rondova,
CRM Data Manager, Dnipro*

The news that the war had been declared reached my family in Dnipro. And on March 5, 2022, after a family discussion, it was decided that I would leave Dnipro with my friends and go to Lviv, before travelling to my youngest daughter in Australia.

When I arrived in Lviv, I did not know when and how I would cross the border, but Vira Savchenko, CEO of BDO in Ukraine, and colleagues in the BDO Global Office kept in touch and offered support and assistance. I spent three days there. The first day in a hotel, the second day at a volunteer's place and the third day in an apartment that BDO had rented for employees.

On March 9, a car finally arrived to pick me up. I was transferred across the border to Poland, where a second car was waiting for me, and dropped me off in Warsaw, where I checked into a hotel. The next day I did the necessary pre-travel covid test, and by March 12 I was with my daughter in Australia.

My husband, our older daughter, our granddaughter and our dog all stayed in Dnipro. The girls actively volunteer, helping the military and displaced persons.

“I don't plan to stay in Australia. I really want to go home to my native Ukraine!”



In 2021, **the population of Ukraine** was around 43 million.

After the war started, the UN estimates that the current population is around 40 million, a decline of about 8.8 %.

Over 3.9 million refugees from Ukraine have registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes.

2 days after the war started, the **queues at the various border crossings** were rapidly increasing.

By the end of August, more than 11.9 million movements out of Ukraine were recorded since the start of the war, with 5.3 million movements back into the country.


State Border Guard Service of Ukraine-Western Border

22 min. • 


Queues before border crossings with nearby countries for leaving Ukraine, as of 26.02.2022 at 07:30 a.m.

 Republic of Poland:

“Jagodin” — 3,500
“Rawa-Ruska” — 900
“Gruszew” — 700
“Ustilug” — 1800
“Ugrinow” — 1150
“Smelnica” — 1050
“Shegyni” — 2230
“Krakowiec” — 1400

 Slovak Republic:

“M. Bereznyi” — 150
“Uzhorod” — 320

 Hungary:

“Tisza” — 215
“Zvonkove” — 0
“Cosino” — 0
“Luzhanka” — 175
“Vilok” — 0

 Romania:

“Diakovo” — 0
“Solotvino” — 75
“Porubne” — 1000

 Republic of Belarus:

“Domanove” — 0



People helping people

Trond-Morten Lindberg
CEO, EMEA

The end of February is mid-term for Norwegian schools, so it was vacation time for my children. We were in our mountain cabin, where I can easily combine work and some quality time with them. On the morning of February 24, around 6am, I was driving my daughter to her football camp when I received a phone call from Vera Savchenko, CEO of BDO in Ukraine. Extremely upset, she informed me that Russia had just bombed Kyiv. Although we had been in touch in previous weeks and we all knew the situation was precarious, I was still taken by surprise. The news was horrifying. I dropped off my daughter, drove back, and started planning.

The following Monday, I flew to Austria. From there I drove to our office in Bratislava in the Slovak Republic, where Vera joined me a couple of days after. It was clear that support would come at a considerable cost. Almost immediately, I received a message from Dr. Holger Otte, CEO of BDO in Germany, offering financial aid. It was truly heart-warming. Building on this invaluable support, we set up a global BDO fund.

“Our firms from around the world came together and within days we were financially able to support our Ukrainian colleagues and their families in need.”

Our first priority was to locate all of our people and contact each one of them.

“Vera and I spent hours on the phone. Colleagues from the Global Office spontaneously offered their help. Our crisis response team quickly grew from the initial group of four to a solid team of around forty people, working around the clock to offer support.”

After a few days in Bratislava, Vera and I decided that we needed to be closer to the border. We moved to Kosice, where BDO has a small office of about ten people. We received such a warm welcome. For several weeks, we occupied their largest meeting room. No request was ever too much.

We began to see the first of our BDO colleagues and their families crossing the border. Some of those moments remain truly memorable. Vera and I had been working through lists of names for days... and now some of those ‘names’ had finally arrived at our hotel. To see them arrive safely was such a rewarding feeling, even though the situation for so many others was only worsening. We spent time with them, listening and giving them moral support. But our job was not done.

“We then had additional conversations with each colleague, wherever they crossed the border, to discuss their next destination and whether they wanted to start working again, and to secure jobs and housing for them.”

We stayed in Kosice and Warsaw until around Easter. In addition to the support from the team in Kosice, our Polish colleagues were doing an amazing job welcoming and hosting another large group of people who had crossed the border there. That’s where I met Rusalina Dobrovan, a risk management specialist at BDO in Ukraine, who had waited in line with her family at the Polish border for more than 36 hours! It is hard to even imagine this experience, but her story and our conversation when she was at the line on the Ukrainian border will not be forgotten.

Every now and then I went home for a short weekend, but in those critical weeks, we had to be available and ready to support. We have all worked hard to support our people, and to ensure that BDO in Ukraine remains a sustainable business. Support from the Global Office remains strong, although our Ukrainian team have shown what incredible resilience they have by taking over the majority of this function.

These past few months have really opened my eyes. I always knew that, as a global organisation, we could be fully united as one. That we could make that happen. Now I know that we will make it happen.

“We have shown how we can work together and unite, and I have never been more proud to be part of the BDO family. We truly are *people helping people*.”

The people we cannot thank enough:

- Every firm contributing to the support fund.
- The entire crisis response team, including the immediate response team: Ruzika Verryn, Lore Braeken, Ramona Genes, Luz Vasquez and Selina Sundar. We could not have done it without you!
- Our firms in the Slovak Republic and Poland, who received us with such kindness and went ‘above and beyond’ to help and accommodate those crossing the border.
- Our firms in Romania, Hungary, Moldova, Austria and the Czech Republic, who were tremendously supportive and were our ‘feet on the ground’ whilst we were elsewhere.
- All of our firms for coming together as one to support BDO in Ukraine and our colleagues in need.

