

The logo features the letters 'HR' in a large, white, stylized font with a black outline, set against a blue background. To the right, the word 'Hub' is written in a white, cursive script font on an orange rectangular background.

HR Hub

The background of the cover is a stylized map of a city, likely Helsinki, with white lines representing streets and buildings. The map is divided into two main color sections: a blue section on the left and an orange section on the right, separated by a thick black diagonal line.

Activity Report

September 2022 - December 2023 in the Human Rights Hub

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Human Rights Hub

Establishment of the Human Rights Hub

The Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (HFHR), as part of its Eurasia Department, has been actively providing support to human rights defenders (HRDs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in crisis situations since 2015.

In the initial stages, emergency support to HRDs and human rights organizations encompassed a few activities, including providing legal support to human rights defenders and implementing initiatives to strengthen the physical and IT security of NGOs.

Since 2020, with the deepening crisis of democracy in Russia, the dissolution of NGOs, and the crackdown on civil society in Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of human rights defenders (HRDs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) seeking emergency support from HFHR.

Over a seven-year period, from January 2015 to September 2022, HFHR provided emergency support to 265 beneficiaries, while in the following year and four months, from September 2022 to December 2023, support was provided to 352 beneficiaries.

In response to increasing threats to human rights in the region, HFHR established the Human Rights Hub.

Launched in early September 2022 as a component of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights' Eurasia Program, the Human Rights Hub (HR Hub) serves as a critical support mechanism for human rights defenders facing challenges from armed conflict and repression in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the South Caucasus.

The HR Hub prioritizes the safety of its beneficiaries by facilitating conditions for sustainable work in exile, preserving professional development, and enabling the continuation of activities in the country of origin. It also contributes to the strengthening and institutional development of organizations in the country of origin.

Beneficiaries

Those who benefit from HR Hub activities include Human rights defenders, activists, journalists, lawyers, bloggers, people working for the development of democracy, as well as non-governmental organizations and coalitions of human rights organizations in the countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus. In special circumstances, support may also be provided to immediate family members, including spouses, significant others, partners, and children.

Support is provided to individuals who have chosen to leave their country permanently or temporarily, whether to relocate to Poland or another country in the region where HFHR

works with local partners. In addition, support is available for those who have chosen to remain in their country of assignment and intend to continue their work.

To qualify for support from the HR Hub, applicants must meet two key criteria:

1. Demonstrate a systematic commitment to the protection of human rights or the development of democracy.
2. Confirm the existence of a specific and imminent danger.

Forms of Support

HR Hub offers various forms of support, categorized as relocation, short-term, medium-term and long-term support. The level of support is determined on a case-by-case basis.

Relocation and short-term support: is provided to individuals who need to leave their country due to imminent threats. This support may include assistance in obtaining Polish visas, support with housing, transportation and urgent daily needs, psychological support (crisis intervention), Polish language learning, and support with medical treatment.

Mid-term support: is provided to individuals who have previously received short-term support, but due to ongoing problems (e.g., inability to continue working) require an extension of support. This support may include individual consultations with a psychologist on making new life decisions, support in arranging living conditions and plans for long-term settlement in Poland, psychological support, support for medical treatment and Polish language courses.

As a condition of receiving medium-term support, the beneficiary must provide information about the next steps to become independent.

Long-term support: is provided to people who intend to continue or develop their work for human rights or the development of democracy, regardless of whether they have previously received short- or medium-term support. Unlike short-term and medium-term support, long-term support aims to create opportunities for professional development, continuation of existing work, expansion of existing activities, networking, and integration into Polish society. It does not include emergency and subsistence support, but only participation in internships, trainings, courses, initiatives and other activities organized by the HR Hub to enable applicants to continue their activities in Poland.

Individual and Institutional Grants: HR Hub also provides support to individuals, organizations/employees of organizations or coalitions of organizations who continue to work in their country of origin. The aim of this support is to maintain and develop the potential of individuals, organizations and coalitions, to help them respond to new challenges and risks, to continue and, where possible, to increase the effectiveness of their activities. The level of support will be determined on a case-by-case basis, depending on

the results of consultations with a decision-maker in the organization or coalition of organizations concerned, or with the individual requesting support.

Human Rights Hub's support provision procedure

HR Hub support is provided only at the request of the individual.

Based on the information provided by the individual and subsequent review, a preliminary assessment is made to determine the eligibility and nature of the support required.

The final decision is made by the HR Hub Commission. The Commission's decisions are based on an analysis of the fulfillment of the conditions for support and on a non-discriminatory basis. In certain cases, the Commission may ask the applicant to provide additional information via the contact form.

After the person is relocated to Poland, an interview is conducted with him/her after arrival in order to collect additional information. A contract is signed with the applicant for short-term support, specifying, among other things, the scope of support to be provided.

Persons wishing to receive medium-term support are obliged to present the steps they have taken to become independent while receiving short-term support, as well as concrete plans for the near future in this regard.

The possibility of providing long-term support is determined on a case-by-case basis as part of the ongoing activities of the HR Hub. The scope of long-term support activities is determined annually in the HR Hub strategy.

Human Rights Hub Activity Report (September 2022-December 2023)

Between September 2022 and the end of December 2023, HR Hub provided emergency support to 352 beneficiaries. Of the HR Hub beneficiaries, 114 individuals received support from September 2022 to December 2022, and 238 received support in 2023.

Relocation, Short - Term and Mid - Term Support

Beneficiaries and Provided Support

Among those who received support under the HR Hub program were human rights defenders (HRDs), activists, journalists, lawyers, bloggers, people working for the development of democracy, as well as non-governmental organizations and coalitions of human rights organizations in the countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus.

Support was provided to individuals who decided to leave their country permanently or temporarily, whether to move to Poland or to another country in the region where HFHR works with local partners. In addition, support was provided to those who chose to remain in their country of operation and intend to continue their activities.

Support was also provided to beneficiaries' immediate family members, including spouses, significant others, partners and children.

HR Hub program beneficiaries came from 13 countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

Notably, a significant proportion - up to 70% - of those who received support through the HR Hub program were citizens of Russia. The increase in applications from Russian human rights defenders, journalists, and civil society activists was predictable given the Russian government's ongoing trend of criminalizing individuals engaged in legitimate human rights work and the exercise of freedom of expression, using criminal provisions introduced shortly after the invasion of Ukraine to specifically target and stifle critical voices.

Beneficiaries in 2023 (Relocation, short-term and medium-term support)	
Category	Number
Human Rights Activist	15
LGBT+ Rights HRDs	4
Journalists and bloggers	52
Human rights lawyers	10
Public figures (lawyers, foundation employees, leaders of initiatives and foundations)	58
Pro-democracy activists	20
Immediate family members	79
Total number of beneficiaries	238

Number of HR Hub beneficiaries by country (Relocation, short-term and mid-term support)				
Country	Number of beneficiaries			
	January 2015- September 2022	September - December 2022	January - December 2023	Total
Armenia	4	-	-	4
Azerbaijan	5	-	2	7
Afghanistan	-	-	7	7
Belarus	9	1	20	30
Georgia	1	-	-	1
Kazakhstan	8	7	15	30
Kyrgyzstan	26	1	27	54
Moldova	1	-	-	1
Russia	142	79	151	372
Tajikistan	18	25	11	54
Turkmenistan	1	-	2	3
Ukraine	42	1	3	46
Uzbekistan	8	-	-	8
Total number of beneficiaries	265	114	238	617

In 2023, the Human Rights Hub received a total of 359 applications for support, of which 238 were successfully processed. The breakdown of beneficiary requests is as follows:

- 45% requested visa support only.
- 15% requested combined support, including visa support, financial support, and the purchase of air tickets.
- 9% requested legal support.
- 31% requested financial support only.

Remarkably, 66% of applicants received the support they requested, reflecting the Hub's commitment to meeting the diverse needs of people in challenging circumstances.

Number of applications received and supported in 2023 by category (Relocation, short-term and mid-term support)		
Category	Number of submitted applicants	Number of satisfied applications
Visa support only	163	109
Combined support including visa support, financial support and purchasing plane tickets	52	28
Legal support/legalization	32	21
Financial support only	112	80
Total numbers	359	238

Polish Language Courses	
September-December 2022	January-December 2023
45	83

Long-Term Support

Human Rights Hub's Educational Program in 2023

In addition to short- and medium-term emergency support, HR Hub also provides long-term support aimed at enhancing the knowledge and skills of its beneficiaries, enabling them to develop their potential and continue their work under new conditions.

As part of the HR Hub Educational Program, a comprehensive training on democratic transformation was held in 2023 with the financial support of the German Embassy in Poland and HBS.

The "Democratic Transformation" training was held from September 6 to September 15, 2023 and involved an average of 20 participants (civil society activists, democracy promoters, journalists), including active Russian human rights defenders living in both

Russia and Poland. The program consisted of four sessions held in six cities/towns across Poland, covering topics such as human rights, democratic norms, civil society, and local government.

In Warsaw, from 6 to 9 September, the training covered human rights, democratic standards, civil society and local government. Jerzy Stępień, a renowned expert on local government reform in Poland, provided insights into Poland's transformation at the local level in the 1990s. The workshop included discussions on human rights, democratic standards, and civil society, sparking a lively debate on the necessary post-war reforms in Russia.

On September 11, in Opole, the trainees engaged with representatives of the German minority in local government, exploring the monitoring of minority rights in Poland and the benefits of the Law on National and Ethnic Minorities. In Krzyżowa on the same day, the delegation met with the directors of the Krzyżowa Foundation, gained insight into the German-Polish reconciliation process, and received advice on the design of the Russian-Ukrainian reconciliation dialogue. On 12 September, in Wrocław, municipal authorities presented their achievements in the field of participatory budgeting.

The September 13 training session in Poznań, led by professors from the Eastern Institute of Adam Mickiewicz University, covered the history of democratic transition, including the 1989 Round Table negotiations and EU accession in 2004. Trainees assessed reforms in Poland during the 1990s, particularly systemic and economic changes. A visit to the European Solidarity Center in Gdansk on 14-15 September provided insights into the legacy of the Solidarity movement and its role in Poland's transition. Discussions at Gdansk City Hall included consultations on urban development and anti-discrimination policies, and a dinner with key activists of the Solidarity movement. The delegation visited two interactive museums on democratic transformation in Wrocław and Gdansk.

The training provided participants with a unique understanding of democratic transition in Poland, showing how democracy at the local level resists negative political trends and meets people's needs. It provided ideas on the transition from authoritarian to democratic systems, emphasizing the importance of decentralization and cooperation between municipalities, citizens and civil society to improve living standards.

Participants had the opportunity to expand their knowledge and advisory skills on democratic standards and governance reform, and to make direct contact with key experts and local government representatives. Positive feedback from a questionnaire revealed a high level of satisfaction, with 16 out of 20 participants noting tangible benefits, 14 expressing deeper knowledge, and 12 suggesting more time for rest and discussion.

From October 25-27, 2023, the HR Hub arranged a study visit for 13 HRDs to Wieluń, a small town in Central Poland, with the aim of showcasing the operations of local government institutions. The HRDs visited local government institutions and the municipality, as well as the district court (with a specific focus on the cadastral department), several social care institutions, and schools. Throughout the visit, the HRDs familiarized themselves with:

- The methods of organization and functioning of local governments in the area of education, the organization of state and private schools, their financing and access.
- The responsibilities held by municipalities and districts concerning the quality of education.
- Functioning of social care institutions, methods of assistance, and reintegration of people with vulnerabilities into the society.
- Activity platforms of local communities (cooperation between municipalities and the non-governmental sector based on common programs).
- Functioning of social welfare councils.
- Organization and functioning of the justice and cadastral system at the local level.

On 20 December, HR Hub organized a meeting with European Commission Vice-President Vera Jourova, which was attended by a group of journalists from Belarus and Russia.

During the meeting, the journalists had the opportunity to present the situation of equal opportunities, in particular, access to cyberspace in their respective countries. They also exchanged information on the challenges faced by journalists.

Co-Working Space

In December 2023, HR Hub initiated the creation of a co-working space specifically designed for HRDs working in exile, taking into account the challenges raised by our beneficiaries regarding the sustainability of their professional activities in exile and the need for capacity building.

The recently opened co-working space will serve as a platform to bring together groups of activists with common profiles and interests and support them in developing projects. It will provide a shared workspace for human rights defenders (HRDs) who need a safe and secure environment for their work. In addition, there will be a room for Polish language classes (A and B levels) and another room for psychological consultations, with one of the rooms being adapted to meet design standards for this purpose.

The co-working space will also serve as a venue for organizing various events.

The HR Hub will assist beneficiaries in aligning their projects with established standards, identifying potential donors, and coordinating exchange initiatives. Various activities such as internships, study visits, exchange projects and capacity building sessions on topics such as human rights, fundraising and advocacy are planned for implementation.

Evaluation of the activities of the Human Rights Hub for the first semester of the program (short- and medium-term support) (September 2022-February 2023)

From September 2022 to February 2023, 151 beneficiaries - human rights defenders, activists, journalists, lawyers, bloggers, people working for the development of democracy, as well as non-governmental organizations from 12 countries, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Russia, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan - received support through the HR Hub program. In particular, 86 of these beneficiaries obtained visas and relocated to Poland with the help of HR Hub. Up to 70% of the beneficiaries were Russian citizens.

The support provided included all forms of HR Hub support categories:

Relocation and short-term support, medium-term support, long-term support, individual and institutional grants. The support provided included financial support for airfare, one-time or limited financial support and housing support for social and domestic issues, support in obtaining a visa to Poland, Polish language courses, medical and psychological support, and legal support.

An in-depth survey of HR Hub beneficiaries was conducted to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of the HR Hub program. Sampling for the survey was conducted among individuals who had received various forms of support under the Human Rights Hub program from the day the program was established until February 2023.

The survey used an anonymous questionnaire with 22 mostly open-ended questions. The open-ended question method provides rich and diverse insights, allowing respondents to freely express their thoughts and experiences, which can be immensely valuable in understanding the program's impact and areas for improvement.

HRDs in exile face a combination of physical, psychological, and emotional challenges. The unstable and risky circumstances in which they find themselves, including the constant fear of persecution and surveillance, contribute to a heightened vulnerability that extends beyond physical threats to mental health and well-being. Some beneficiaries have told us in private conversations and interviews that, despite being in a safe environment in Poland, they feel emotionally drained, lack the strength and energy to carry out daily tasks, and that at times even stepping out of the house becomes a significant challenge.

We recognize that completing this questionnaire may have been challenging for many participants as it serves as a reminder of their current difficult circumstances and the difficult journey they have experienced.

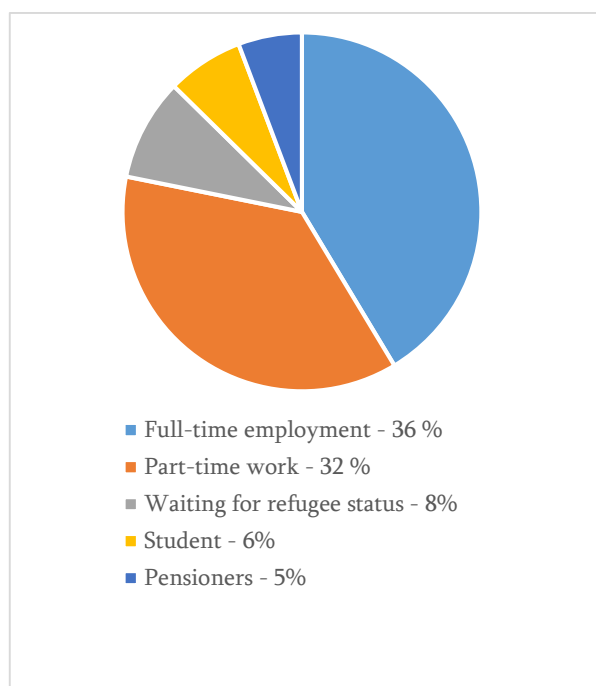
The questionnaire was mailed to 150 beneficiaries. Despite the challenges mentioned, we appreciate the high level of participation in the survey by our beneficiaries, with a total of 85 participants. This represents 56% of the beneficiaries invited to participate in the program evaluation.

Of the 85 participants surveyed, 59 received support along with their immediate families, while others received individual support grants, including two non-governmental organizations that received grants. These grants included direct support, such as legal, psychological and medical support for other human rights defenders and journalists, and institutional support for applicant NGOs.

Living and financial conditions of beneficiaries

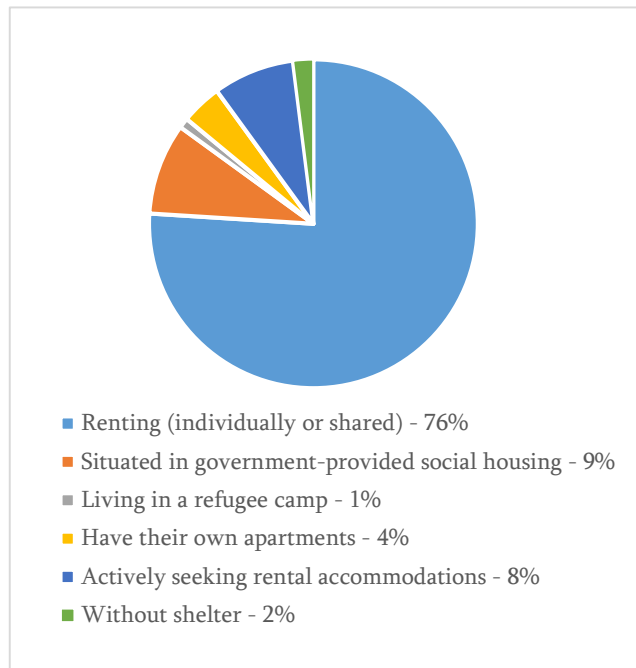
According to the survey results, the majority of respondents are either in full-time employment (36%) or part-time employment (32%), students represent 13% of participants, while 8% are currently unemployed and 6% are waiting for refugee status without the right to work. In addition, 5% of respondents are retired.

Employment situation	
	Number
Full-time employment	30
Part-time work	28
Student	11
Waiting for refugee status	5
Unemployed	7
Pensioners	4
Total	85



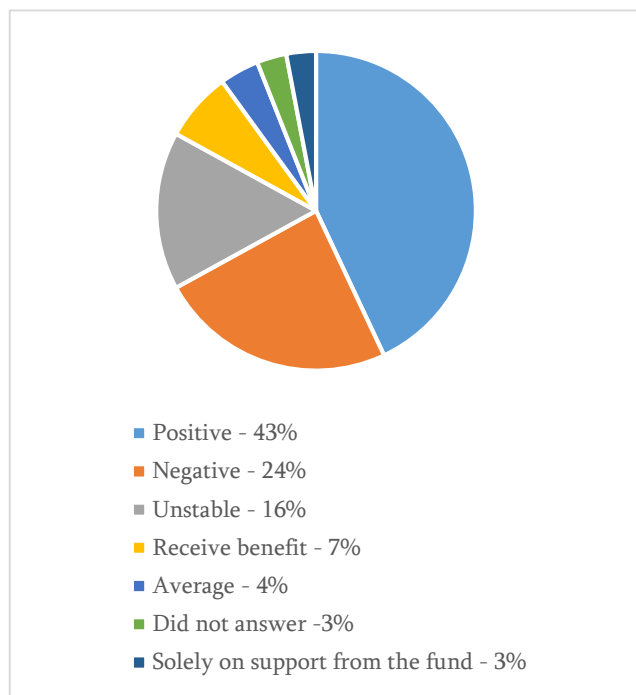
In terms of housing, only two people (2%) out of 85 reported being homeless during the survey, 7 people were actively looking for rental accommodation (8%), 3 had their own apartment (4%), 1 was living in a refugee camp (1%), and 8 were in government-provided social housing (9%), 64 people (76%) were renting, either individually or in shared arrangements.

Type of housing	
	Number
Renting, either individually or in shared arrangements.	64
Situated in government-provided social housing	8
Living in a refugee camp	1
Have their own apartments	3
Actively looking for rental accommodations	7
Without shelter	2
Total	85



In terms of financial status, 43% rated their current financial situation as positive, 24% as negative, and 16% as unstable. Three percent were relying solely on support from the Fund, while 4% rated their situation as average and 7% were receiving benefits. Three percent did not answer.

Financial Status	
	Number
Positive	37
Negative	21
Unstable	14
Receiving benefit	6
Average	3
Relying solely on Fund support	2
Did not answer	2
Total	85



Human Rights Commitment

71% of respondents continue to carry out multi-profile activities in the field of human rights protection. They help political prisoners, organize fundraisers for political prisoners, petition, organize or participate in mass actions for human rights, actively fight against censorship in Russia.

Among the beneficiaries of HR Hub there are many journalists and human rights activists who cover the war in Ukraine, organize events on human rights violations in Crimea and the newly occupied territories of Ukraine, shoot documentaries about refugees and forced emigration from Ukraine, publish articles against the unfolding aggression of the Russian side, cover the human rights situation in Russia, corruption and other problems. They conduct research on the influence of propaganda on the population of the country in preparation for a large-scale invasion of the territory of other states, conduct journalistic investigation, collect facts of crimes in the occupied territories of Ukraine. Some of them participate as volunteers in various programs aimed at helping refugees evacuated from the occupied territories of Ukraine, especially children and women.

4% stated that they are engaged in human rights protection, but not as their main occupation, but they are involved in various initiatives and groups on a voluntary basis.

7% are not engaged in human rights activities because they have just moved and are busy with household issues, do not have sufficient funds, or are simply still studying the local legislation in order to be able to carry out human rights activities in the future.

18% stated that they do not engage in human rights advocacy because it is not safe for them or their families, even though they have moved from their country of origin or deployment. Another reason given for not engaging in human rights activities was health problems, especially disorders of the nervous system.

Availability of education for children of HRDs in exile

Of the 85 beneficiaries surveyed, 29 had minor children, but only 24 moved to Poland with their families. 19 beneficiaries replied that their children were enrolled in schools, kindergartens or integration programs, one beneficiary mentioned that her children were involved in online learning programs, and four replied that their children were not attending school for reasons such as health problems or lack of available educational places.

How beneficiaries found out about the Human Rights Hub

According to the survey results, 35% of those who received support through the Human Rights Hub program were made aware of it by representatives of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, including HR Hub staff. Another 27% learned about it from various other human rights organizations and human rights activists, while 17% were informed by international organizations and 8% by friends. A smaller proportion, 5%, heard about the program from donors, 3% from HR Hub beneficiaries, 2% from open sources, and 1% from independent media. Notably, 2% of recipients did not specify the source of their information about the program.

“You save lives”

I was looking for support after another organization was unable to cover the cost of a psychiatrist appointment for my child. Desperate for help, I reached out to friends to inquire if they knew of any resources. It was through this network that I discovered the contact information for the foundation.

During the same period, my family faced additional hardships as the support for free school meals for my daughter was unexpectedly discontinued.

At that time, only HFHR could help with a humanitarian visa. In Russia I was persecuted for my anti-war activities and ethnic origin.

Because I saw an example of how you helped people in the same situation as me.

I contacted different organizations, but received a positive response only from your organization.

Why to apply for support from the HR Hub ?

When asked, "Why did you contact HR Hub for support?" 30% of respondents said that HR Hub stood out as their first choice among other organizations for support in challenging situations, citing HFHR's impeccable reputation. They noted that the Foundation is known for its quick response and streamlined application process in emergency situations that require immediate support.

35% of respondents applied for support from HR Hub based on recommendations from friends, family, and trusted individuals or organizations that had previously worked with HFHR or received support from HR Hub. The remaining 35% of respondents indicated that they contacted HR Hub due to a lack of information about other options, previous rejection by other organizations, or a lack of viable alternatives.

HR Hub is an organization with an impeccable reputation and the highest authority. In addition, I followed the advice of a good friend and colleague.

Support from HR Hub was provided very quickly. At that moment, in a critical situation, it allowed us to cover many current needs.

The situation demanded swift action, and I turned to the Helsinki Foundation for its renowned prompt support and support.

I patiently waited for this happy moment. The waiting time had a slight impact on me; I had health difficulties, depression, and a panic attack. I am very grateful

The response time to an application

Of the 85 respondents, 56% received a response from HR Hub within 1-4 days, 28% received a response within 5-10 days, 11% received a response within 11-20 days, and 5% received a response within 20 days.

12% of respondents received immediate support, while 22% received support within 1-6 days, 29% received support within 7-10 days, 5% received support within 11-20 days, 13% received support within 21-30 days, and 19% received support within a month or more.

The survey results show that the Hub operated in emergency mode when faced with urgent situations, providing adequate support within 1-6 days. Support beyond 14 days occurred mostly in scenarios where the solution was not under the direct control of the Hub, such as obtaining an exit visa or external challenges in transferring money to beneficiaries.

Some of the beneficiaries mentioned that they were informed that the financial support was approved by the Hub and, with the Hub's permission, they raised money from other people to solve their urgent problems before the money was transferred to them by the Hub.

Although the rules of the HR Hub set a maximum time limit of fourteen days for reviewing and approving or rejecting requests for support, the evaluation found that in practice requests were dealt with within one month in 13% of cases and took longer than one month in 19% of cases. In the aforementioned 22% of cases, the HR Hub Commission did not have enough information to make a decision and additional information had to be gathered. In order to ensure that the cases were not urgent, i.e. that the health or life of the persons requesting HR Hub support was not at risk, the HR Hub Commission postponed the discussion of the cases in question until the relevant information had been obtained.

Support provided by the HR Hub program

“In our situation, financial support was crucial, but the Polish language classes led by an exceptional teacher were instrumental in our adaptation to Poland, serving as our initial gateway to building social networks in the country.”

“Support by HR Hub was provided to cover the cost of air tickets for my family members. I had previously evacuated due to the risk of potential arrest or reprisals from Russian authorities. Reuniting with my family brought immense joy. It's difficult to express the gratitude for this opportunity.”

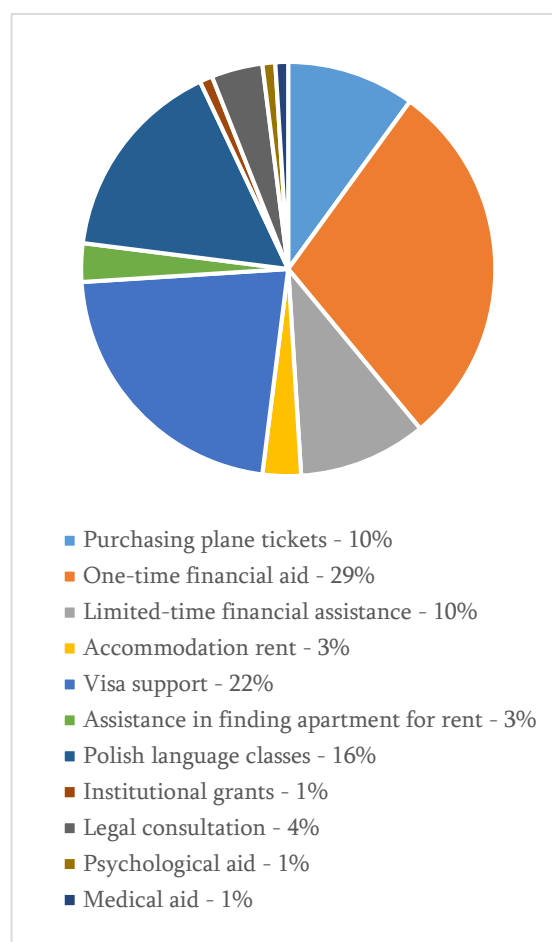
“I had no money for daily living expenses or airfare. I unexpectedly found myself in this position. HR Hub support during this challenging time was invaluable. Thank you immensely for helping me through this difficult situation.”

Which type of support offered by HR Hub was more helpful? Why and how?

Of the 85 survey respondents, up to 42% received support to address socio-economic challenges, including housing rent, one-time financial support, and temporary financial support. In addition, 32% received relocation support (visa support and/or purchase of airline tickets), 3% received housing support, 16% of beneficiaries attended Polish language classes, 4% received legal support, 2% received medical and psychological support, and 1% received institutional grants.

In addition to the above-mentioned forms of support, the majority of respondents noted consistent moral and informational support from HR Hub staff.

Type of support accepted from HR Hub	
Category	Number
Purchasing plane tickets	14
One-time financial aid	41
Limited-time financial support	15
Accommodation rent	4
Visa support	31
Support in finding apartment for rent	4
Polish language classes	23
Institutional grants	2
Legal consultation	6
Psychological aid	2
Medical aid	1
Total	143¹



Survey participants found it difficult to determine which aspect of the program's support was more beneficial or impactful, as they equally valued the different types of support they received.

The majority of beneficiaries received comprehensive support, which included various forms of support such as airfare, financial support, housing, and free Polish language lessons, etc.

¹ The discrepancy between the number of survey respondents and the number of categories of received support is due to the fact that some beneficiaries received multiple forms of support from HR Hub. For example, they might have received support with visas, housing, and legal support. So, the total number of support categories mentioned in the survey is more than the number of people who answered.

Survey respondents highlighted that HR Hub's support enabled them or their families to leave countries where their physical safety was at risk. Those who relocated to Poland and took Polish language courses spoke highly of the importance of these courses, noting that they were a long-term investment that enabled integration into society and employment opportunities. Even beneficiaries who received only one-time emergency financial support expressed its immense importance, emphasizing its timely nature in preventing more serious problems.

What types of support were missing from the HR Hub, and how did this affect respondents' situation?

Of those surveyed, 75% expressed satisfaction that the support provided by the HR Hub was timely and responsive to their requests and needs.

"Generally, I believe that providing support in obtaining permits for human rights activists, including women human rights activists, to travel to Poland with potential employment in human rights centers, volunteer organizations, and other entities working in the field of countering aggression and preventing its consequences would be highly beneficial."

However, the remaining 25% highlighted gaps in the areas of legal aid, financial resources, employment support and adaptation support. Specifically, this group expressed the need for support in securing residency rights for exiled human rights defenders, job placement support, and support in adapting to a new country. Russian citizens mentioned that they would prefer to receive national visas rather than Schengen tourist visas in order to be able to leave Russia for longer periods of time with permission to work in the countries where they would be replaced.

The limited financial support provided by the HR Hub was a concern for some beneficiaries, who wished to receive ongoing support without any restrictions, so that they could reapply for support if necessary.

"It provided emotional stabilization and simplified the adaptation process associated with relocating from Ukraine."

"Our organization was at the stage of inspections by the government agency and at the stage of the trial, we were able to cover taxes, duties, compensation and other expenses on time, which helped us to avoid large fines."

"It helped me settle down in Warsaw, rent an apartment and get the medical help I needed, as well as have time to look for a job"

"Support in further legalization is crucial. A humanitarian visa is valid for a year and does not allow for extensions. Simultaneously, legalizing while maintaining employment in the Ukrainian editorial office is nearly impossible. It would be beneficial if HFHR had programs for continued legalization or, at the very least, provided financial and legal support for self-legalization."

It's important to note that beneficiaries' assessments varied due to different circumstances. Some felt that the support provided by the HR Hub was insufficient, while others found that it exceeded their expectations. For example, one beneficiary expressed surprise and gratitude at receiving what she considered a significant amount of money, noting, "For me, \$1,000 is a fabulous amount of money," while another mentioned that because of the limited support from HR Hub, she had to seek additional support from other funds.

Respondents' recommendations for improving HR Hub support

Survey respondents were asked to consider what changes might be needed in the HR Hub support program to improve its quality and increase the sustainability of HR Hub beneficiaries.

“I believe it's crucial to stay flexible in response to challenges and maintain a swift reaction. The situation at the front remains unpredictable. Life in a war-torn country is exceptionally difficult, marked by constant stress, rising expenses, regular additional costs for security, and the need to ensure the ability to meet basic needs (such as electricity and housing) in the event of housing loss or a deterioration in the situation at the front. I think there is a huge field for continued support.”

While more than 50% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the effectiveness of the HR Hub's support and made no specific suggestions for improvement, the remaining 50% made various recommendations.

- ***Increase coverage of HR Hub activities in the media and various online platforms:*** Respondents mentioned difficulties in finding information about the Hub's activities on online platforms or in the media. They mentioned that even within the human rights community, very few people are aware of the support provided by the HR Hub, suggesting that the coverage of the HR Hub's activities should be increased.

However, it should be emphasized that the issues raised by the respondents are related to a deliberate strategy of the HR Hub. This is to ensure the safety of both the beneficiaries and the HR Hub staff themselves. Recently, there has been a significant influx of people from Eastern Europe into Poland, which, as we know from confidential discussions, makes it difficult to properly screen everyone, even by the National Internal Security Agency. Consequently, there is a high risk that the widespread promotion of HR Hub activities could lead to the arrival in Poland of undesirable individuals who may seek to infiltrate various foreign diasporas or engage in actions against the internal security of Poland. Assisting such individuals could also pose a direct threat to HR Hub employees who are in direct contact with individuals seeking support. As a precautionary measure, HFHR does not publicly disclose the activities of the HR Hub. Information about the HRD Support Program is disseminated only through trusted information channels, closed groups, and partner organizations.

- ***Ensure confidentiality and information security:***

Security was highlighted as crucial, emphasizing the need for confidentiality and information security systems to prevent any harm to individuals or organizations. The constant improvement of information security systems was mentioned by beneficiaries as one of the guarantees of the effectiveness of HR Hub's activity.

It's worth mentioning that the safety of the beneficiaries is a top priority in the activities of HR Hub. The team operates under strict guidelines in this regard, a practice that has been followed since the application for support was completed and submitted. In addition, there is a continuous effort to improve internal procedures, particularly in maintaining the security of information exchange and the data of individuals applying for support. We constantly monitor potential threats to the physical safety, cybersecurity and data security of beneficiaries.

- **Legal support:** Some beneficiaries expect the Hub to assist them in further legalizing their stay in the resettlement countries, including obtaining visa extensions or residence permits. They also express a need for workshops on host country legislation and request support in establishing NGOs in these host countries, among other things.

The recommendations made by the survey respondents are in line with the observations made by the HR Hub team in this regard. Recently, many individuals resettled to Poland with the support of the HR Hub have faced challenges as the expiration date of their humanitarian visas approaches. This has led to significant problems requiring last-minute solutions. From our observations, it appears that some individuals neglected matters related to legalizing their stay, while others believed there was a possibility to reapply for a humanitarian visa (despite repeated communication from the HR Hub team that this was not possible) or were unable to do so due to health issues or lack of income.

In addition, we noticed a growing problem with tax compliance, often due to a lack of familiarity with the Polish tax system or an inability to fill out tax forms on their own. Taking all this into consideration, the HR Hub team has decided to prepare and conduct regular adaptive meetings for beneficiaries. The topics of these meetings will include basic information about Poland, customs, holidays and lifestyle; issues related to legalization of stay in Poland; basic tax issues; and the current situation on the job and rental housing market.

- **Training and employment support:** Some beneficiaries expect support to HRDs in finding sustainable employment in their host countries, capacity building training for HRDs on human rights and domestic human rights programming, and more Polish language courses.

Respondents' expectations are in line with the HR Hub's ongoing development plans, with a particular focus on long-term support for capacity-building activities for HRDs working in exile.

The need for training, including on fundraising, strategic planning, project implementation, and various human rights issues, was consistently expressed by HR Hub beneficiaries during meetings and individual interviews in 2023.

Looking ahead to 2024, one of the main goals of the HR Hub is to establish effective training programs aimed at strengthening the potential and knowledge of HRDs working in exile, enabling them to continue their work under new conditions.

In 2023, despite space limitations, 83 people participated in Polish language courses held in one of the two rooms allocated to the Eurasia Department in the HFHR office.

To overcome this challenge, HR Hub launched a remarkable initiative in December 2023 to create a co-working space specifically designed for HRDs working in exile. This initiative positions HR Hub to meet the increasing demand for Polish language training in 2024.

- ***Financial support:*** Providing long-term financial support to ensure that HRDs can sustain a satisfactory quality of life.

According to the HR Hub regulations, financial support can be provided for a period of 3 months, with the possibility of an extension up to 6 months in exceptional circumstances. This approach has been adopted due to the high number of applications from individuals seeking support, including financial support. In addition, it is intended to serve as an incentive for individuals relocating to Poland to become self-sufficient, including finding sources of livelihood. In this way, we aim to prevent HR Hub beneficiaries from developing a learned helplessness syndrome.

In addition, HR Hub's activities are not intended to fill all the gaps in social security coverage for everyone, as this is the responsibility of the state. However, among the beneficiaries of HR Hub there are people who, due to psychosomatic conditions, need more time and support to become self-sufficient. These include HRDs who are single parents, especially those raising children with disabilities, as well as parents in large families.

- ***Medical and psychological support:*** Health and psychological support within the HR Hub is organized on a case-by-case basis based on the specific needs of the beneficiaries.

However, some of HR Hub's beneficiaries require prolonged or very expensive treatment, which is beyond the financial capacity of the program. Therefore, in most of these cases, financial support is provided to cover part of the cost of treatment. Psychological support is also provided in the form of crisis intervention, usually limited to three sessions, as initiating and continuing psychotherapy requires a significant financial investment. However, it is a fact that some resettled persons require long-term or cyclical psychological support. Addressing this challenge will be one of the focuses of the organization in 2024.

It should be noted that some beneficiaries do not have a full understanding of the Hub's objectives, activities and available opportunities, leading to excessive expectations. For example, some respondents suggested broadening the scope of beneficiaries beyond human rights defenders, and one suggested universal support for all people living in CIS countries.

Other suggestions included establishing smoother integration mechanisms into Polish society or providing initial support to those arriving on humanitarian visas.

I was in an extremely difficult situation. For me, HR Hub support was very effective. A few months later, I simply didn't even want to remember, and not just describe, everything that happened to me. All this affected my health, although there were already many problems. My heart immediately began to hurt. Depression. I stopped contacting others. And when a young woman hanged herself in stairwell in our place of compact residence, leaving her son an orphan, I realized the importance and necessity of such projects such as HR hub and support provided by them. Support is very important.

I sincerely thank all employees for their help and support.

I don't know what would make support more effective. Perhaps more detailed information about what kind of help you can get.

They asked me what I needed and how they could help. But I was in such a state that I couldn't think about that, I didn't need anything.

Concluding remarks

During the period from September 2022 to December 2023, HR Hub played a pivotal role by providing emergency support to a significant total of 352 beneficiaries. This diverse group included human rights defenders, activists, journalists, lawyers, bloggers, and their immediate family members, as well as various organizations based in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. Beneficiaries came from 13 countries, with a remarkable 70% from Russia, reflecting the challenges faced by HRDs in Russia due to government policies.

The HR Hub support program addressed the complex needs of the beneficiaries by providing support in areas such as visa support, financial support, legal support, and housing support. In addition, the program included an educational component with a focus on long-term support. The support covered a wide range of areas, highlighting the unique challenges faced by HRDs in exile.

The evaluation of the HR Hub's activities for the first semester of the program revealed its impact on 114 beneficiaries. The evaluation, conducted through an anonymous questionnaire, provided valuable insights into the program's impact and areas for improvement. Key findings from the survey included the challenges faced by HRDs in exile, highlighting physical, psychological and emotional aspects.

Despite being in a safe environment, some individuals expressed feelings of emotional exhaustion, highlighting the need for ongoing psychological support. The survey also shed light on the financial conditions of beneficiaries, highlighting their employment status, housing situation and financial stability.

Beneficiary engagement in human rights activities remained strong, with 71 percent actively participating in multi-profile human rights protection efforts. However, challenges were noted, with some citing health issues, household concerns, or security concerns as reasons for not engaging in human rights activities.

Survey participants' feedback provided valuable recommendations for improving the HR Hub's support program.

Respondents expressed a need for legal support, particularly to facilitate legalization of their stay in host countries; recommendations included workshops on host country legislation and support in establishing NGOs.

Ensuring confidentiality and information security was highlighted as critical, with emphasis on continuous improvement of internal procedures to ensure the security of information exchange and data.

Training and employment support, as well as financial support, were identified as critical needs by some beneficiaries, in line with the HR Hub's plans for long-term support and capacity-building activities for HRDs working in exile.

Medical and psychological support, organized on a case-by-case basis, was acknowledged, but challenges were recognized, especially in cases requiring prolonged or expensive treatment, suggesting an area of focus for HR Hub in 2024.

Some beneficiaries highlighted the importance of training, employment support and financial support, in line with HR Hub's initiatives for long-term support and capacity building for HRDs in exile.

While medical and psychological support was organized on a case-by-case basis, challenges were identified, particularly in cases requiring prolonged or costly treatment. This underscores a priority for HR Hub in 2024, signaling a commitment to address and enhance support for beneficiaries facing prolonged or costly health care needs.

In summary, HR Hub remains dedicated to adapting and refining its support programs to meet the evolving needs of beneficiaries, with an unwavering commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of individuals seeking support in challenging circumstances. The recommendations provided by survey respondents serve as valuable insights for HR Hub's continuous improvement and sustainability.

Recommendations to the Human Rights Hub:

- 1) Maximize the efficiency of actions, including the adoption of a separate procedural path for highly challenging situations and the reduction of waiting times for responses, even in complex cases.
- 2) Amend the working rules of the HR Hub to include the possibility of providing support for a period longer than 6 months, especially in justified cases.
- 3) Carry out an internal audit on the security of information exchange and data storage for the beneficiaries of the HR Hub.
- 4) Prepare and regularly conduct adaptive information sessions for HR Hub beneficiaries on topics such as basic information about Poland as a place of residence, legalization of residence in Poland, and basic issues of Polish tax law.
- 5) Expand long-term support activities through educational programs and trainings.
- 6) Increase the number of Polish language courses
- 7) Improve access to medical and psychological care for beneficiaries.
- 8) Conducting regular evaluation surveys among HR Hub beneficiaries in order to systematically gather feedback, improve the quality and efficiency of HR Hub's work, and adapt services to the specific needs of beneficiaries.

The members of the Human Rights Hub team express gratitude to all individuals, organizations, and institutions that make our work possible. Particularly, we want to extend our heartfelt thanks to the very people we aim to support—for all the trust given to us and the valuable feedback that enables us to continuously improve.

Thank you!



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