

Annual Report 2022

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1. The War and Adaptation to new realities

On February 24th, Russia initiated a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, an event that has divided the lives of millions in both nations into 'before' and 'after.' This act of aggression swiftly reverberated across Russia's domestic policies, ushering in heightened political repressions against civil society, the rapid implementation of military censorship laws, and a disturbing normalization of authoritarianism within the country's governance. Many people, especially young men facing the prospect of being drafted into the army, were forced to abandon their homes. Young men and women found themselves in urgent situations, leaving their homes behind, severing ties with their parents and communities, and embarking on entirely new lives, all amidst a backdrop of significant stress and upheaval.

SKOSH encountered two primary challenges: the need to overhaul its sister's organization's Andey Rylkov Foundation for Health and Social Justice (ARF) operations in Russia, with a particular emphasis on ensuring the safety of ARF personnel, and the imperative to devise mechanisms for aiding our communities and the vulnerable individuals who were compelled to swiftly depart the country due to the imminent threat of military conscription.

1.1. Emergency response: team safety

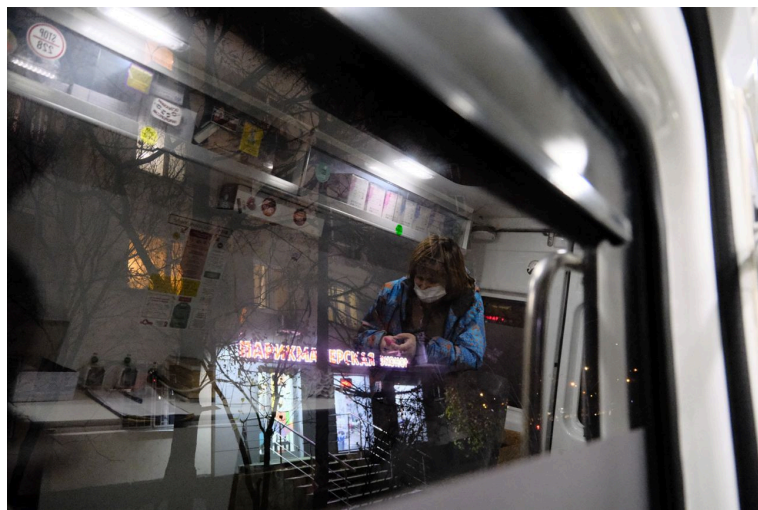
We organized an emergency strategic process in March - a meeting with the SKOSH Board and a series of consultations with the ARF/SKOSH staff and supporters. Given the new threats, we had to refine emergency safety plans for the organization and individuals involved. With the support of a flexible Levi Strauss Foundation (LSF/CAF) grant and additional direct individual support from the Frontline defenders, we contributed to the relocation process for eight people. Several staff members were relocated to Georgia and temporarily Turkey.

We initiated a process to explore humanitarian visa opportunities for ARF staff and individuals involved in our projects. UNAIDS wrote letters to embassies in Moscow to

support our dedicated team members. However, despite this support, most European countries were unwilling to offer protection to the Russian human rights defenders during this period, and most of our effort has been lost. Many European nations, including the Netherlands, maintained strict entry restrictions for Russian citizens throughout the year.

Later, in 2022, Germany opened its doors to offer entry and protection for human rights defenders from Russia, while France extended an invitation to artists seeking refuge. As a result of these developments, by late 2022-early 2023, at least four members of the

ARF staff and five individuals who contributed to the ARF Narcophobia project in 2019-2020 were granted German humanitarian visas that generously provide residence permits, accommodation, and living support. Additionally, one ARF



outreach team member received French refuge with his family.

With a strong focus on people's safety at the beginning of the year, we could maintain the spirit, enhance capacity, keep the team working on the ground in Moscow, and adjust our services to the new, challenging circumstances.

1.2. Mental health support services

In response to the crisis, we decided to extend our mental health services considerably. We enhanced the team of mental health specialists, including professionally trained psychologists and peer psychologists - people from the community who have completed the basic psychology training, and several psychiatrists offering consultations to both our team members and our clients/ communities. Through the ARF Instagram account, we offered a series of up to 6 free consultations via Zoom or in-person to people who

use prohibited drugs. We also held regular team supervision sessions as well as individual supervision.

Throughout 2023, ARF provided 416 psychological consultations - 111 by the trained peer psychologists, as well as 88 general self-help groups, and 76 self-help groups for women.

The main problems as reported by ARF clients in 2022 were:

- Living with various psychiatric conditions
- Problematic drug use
- Suicidal thoughts
- Gender-based violence
- Police violence
- Immigration-related mental difficulties
- War impact on mental health
- Difficulties in relationships

1.3. Community Center in Tbilisi

In response to the urgent needs of young individuals who were forced to leave their homes and families as a result of the war we made a decision to establish the Community Center for Mental Health and Harm Reduction in Tbilisi, Georgia that would focus on the needs of the young Russian-speaking war migrants.

People from our communities were cut off from their roots and families. With the looming possibility of mobilization, this



traumatic experience led to an alarming increase in self-medicating, with many turning to the most dangerous combinations of benzodiazepines and alcohol - the main

substances available in Georgia. At the same time, the Georgian public health system was not prepared to deal with such a level of migration and people didn't have access to basic medicine, let alone mental health.

The Center's approach prioritizes community-based participatory and integrative approaches to address the profound mental health problems inflicted by the war. It serves as a hub for both individual and group sessions, fostering empowerment at the community level. It aims to provide essential mental health, harm reduction, and community support to young war migrants in dire need.

We started to develop the Community Center in the early spring, holding consultations with the communities and the local specialists, looking for suitable premises, and gathering a team of mental health and community support specialists. At the same time, we started to provide online services. The Center fully opened its doors in September 2022. SKOSH supported the development of the concept and design of [Instagram](#), which became the Center's leading online platform and the focal point of digital outreach to the communities in need. During the summer, we used LSF funding to successfully refurbish and equip a centrally located and accessible space in the city. We assembled a team of mental health professionals, including six therapists utilizing various therapy approaches, two psychiatrists, and four trained peer-to-peer consultants. The Center organized a range of regular activities to promote mental and physical well-being, including yoga sessions, bodywork and dance practices, therapeutic and restorative massage, support groups (including dedicated ones for queer and trans individuals), live storytelling circles, and speaking clubs. To raise awareness of the Community Center and its offerings, we hosted various events, including community markets, gatherings, parties, New Year events, cinema clubs, etc.

To expand mental health capacities, the Center also focused on education, especially peer education, to make mental health support more easily accessible. In the fall of 2022, we organized three educational courses on "peer-to-peer counseling," which allowed people to acquire skills in peer counseling. We held over ten discussions with the LGBTQ+ supporters, focusing on pressing topics related to the LGBTQ+ community

and the existing legislation regulating the rights and status of LGBTQ+ individuals in Georgia. Additionally, we organized a series of talks on liberation philosophy and postcolonial discourse in their relation to mental health.

We held several panels with the leading Georgian and Russian drug policy experts. The seminars focused on the destructive aspects of the Russian war on drugs and the impact of the War on Drugs and the War in Ukraine on Georgian drug policy. On the request from our community, the CC also offered a seminar with a leading Georgian drug law to inform the war migrants of Georgian legislation and provide safety advice.

We established collaborative partnerships with local Georgian harm reduction non-profit organizations, including Mandala (referring individuals requiring HIV testing or drug checking), Tanadgoma (referral and events), and Alternative Georgia (distributing ΩSIGMA cards for vending machines with safer drug use supplies, HIV/Hepatitis C tests, condoms, and lubricants).

Number of People Assisted by the Community Center until December 31, 2022:

- 79 individuals received support from psychologists/psychiatrists.
- General Support Group: Engaged with over 50 participants.
- Queer Support Group: Supported more than 40 participants.
- Trans Support Group: Assisted more than 10 participants.

During its inaugural year, the Center has proven indispensable within the newly established Russian-speaking community. Its significance extends beyond individual psychotherapy sessions, fostering diverse activities like public lectures and discussions, community events, yoga, bodywork classes, support groups, and thematic events.



Notably, the Center has achieved a remarkable level of self-sufficiency, by providing paid services, involving volunteers, and applying for donations. The Community Center became a good practice for community-based care, providing essential support and rehabilitation to the war-migrants who have faced hardships and trauma.

2. Support of Andrey Rylkov Foundation

2.1. ARF Street work

Despite the new challenges, our sister organization Andrey Rylkov Foundation continued and expanded its work in all the main directions throughout the year: direct service to people who use drugs, human rights work, advocacy, and stigma-reduction through developing humane and scientific discourse on HIV/AIDS and drugs. However, due to political pressure in Russia, the advocacy work has largely shifted to SKOSH.

The direct service work to people who use drugs in Moscow continued with the support of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. Besides, in 2022 ARF extended field work with the sex workers with the support of Mediciens Du Monde, France.

People who inject drugs	Sex workers
Distribution	
2482 unique beneficiaries received basic service packages	1604 unique beneficiaries received basic service packages
11,770 contacts	5512 contacts
Counseling	
8781 psycho-social consultations for 2040 individuals 306 psychological consultations for 110 individuals	3837 psycho-social consultations for 1110 individuals 179 psychological consultations for 100 individuals
194 legal consultations for 162 individuals	19 legal consultations for 15 individuals

Also: medical consultations, self-help groups, and consultations on chemsex	236 medical consultations for 160 persons
2382 tests on HIV for 1392 persons	1192 tests on HIV for 735 persons
1762 tests on Hepatitis C for 1195 persons	739 tests on Hepatitis C for 498 persons
186 tests on syphilis for 135 persons	466 tests on syphilis for 383 persons
288 lives were saved with Naloxone	

2.2. Strategic litigation

ARF continued its strategic litigation cases, mainly to the level of the European Court of Human Rights and several binding UN Committees, to improve the legal environment for the health protection of people who use drugs. In 2022, there were eight running cases:

1. Prohibition of the “drug propaganda” as a violation of the freedom of information and expression. (Konstantinov Sergey v. Russia, №25465/16).
2. Violation of the freedom of assembly. (Smirnov v. Russia, № 12896/20)
3. Prosecution of non-profit organizations. Challenging the labeling of ARF as a "foreign agent." (Fond imeni Andreyka Rylkova v. Russia, № 11264/20)
4. Refusal to provide medical assistance to detainees experiencing opioid withdrawal as a form of torture. (Case of Bulatova Elena in CEDAW).
5. Disproportionately severe punishment on drug charges. (Case of Uliana Koneva (CEDAW), Oksana Shpagina (CEDAW), Julia Yarina (Human Rights Committee).
6. The registration of PWUD as a mechanism to restrict civil rights. (a complaint with the UN Human Rights Committee on behalf of Ivan Anoshkin)
7. Revoking a driver's license on the basis of drug dependency. (Alexey Nigmatulin v. Russia).
8. Arbitrary detention of PWUD.

3. Other legal cases managed by SKOSH

3.1. Support of human rights defenders in Russia (NGO “April”)

The non-profit organization “Project April” is the only harm reduction organization in Togliatti, Russia. It has been founded and is run by people who use drugs. In 2016, the organization was labeled as a “foreign agent” by the Russian Ministry of Justice, which has put them at a high risk of harassment and prosecution.

In July 2021, the court imposed a fine on the organization and its director, Tatyana Kochetkova. The amount of the fine was 400,000 rubles (~5,000 €). In 2022, with the financial support of Harm Reduction International, we funded the director of April, who had to undergo multiple local court trials, and a lawyer who helped April make two applications to the European Court of Human Rights.

In 2022 the case of “April” has also been considered in the national courts of the Russian Federation. The complaints to the European Court on Human Rights about the illegality of the administrative prosecution of “April” have already been registered and will be considered, since violations of the rights of the organization occurred before Russia's withdrawal from the Council of Europe.

This case of illicit prosecution shows again the vulnerable position of harm reduction NGOs in Russia. We strongly believe that we, as a part of civil society, should use any available legal means to protect each other. While it is unlikely for the Russian state to admit its crimes in the near future, it is still important to show the illegality of its acts.

3.2. “Rave not raid” initiative

In 2022, SKOSH continued to support the “Rave not raid” initiative aimed at the exposure of illegal police practices at the raves. The team of the initiative documented several raids and provided consultations to their victims. We filed a complaint to the court to declare the practice of raids illegal. Unfortunately, the court did not satisfy the complaint and the lawyer was unable to continue the case due to the heavy workload due to the beginning of the war. The project team continued to monitor the situation, but after the beginning of the full-scale invasion, not a single raid on the clubs took place.

3.3. Case of Maria Gusleva: CBD Possession

In 2022, SKOSH collaborated with the Russian legal initiative on drugs hand-help.ru to help manage the case of Maria Gusleva, born on November 16, 1995. Maria faced legal trouble when she was detained at Sheremetyevo Airport in Moscow on December 14, 2021. During the customs check, authorities found a jar with 5g crushed hemp trim CBD mix containing 0,2 of THC, along with a grinder with hemp traces. Maria had legally bought these items in Paris tobacco shop but was facing up to 8 years in prison for ‘contraband’ to Russia. SKOSH facilitated communication with the French cannabis legal network to obtain advice and letters of support, and made trips to France to secure letters from the product producers and a lawyer. As a result of the joint effort, during the final court hearing in July 2022, Maria ‘only’ got 3 years of probation.

4. Response to violence against women who use drugs

Women who use drugs are the group that is particularly vulnerable to many types of violence due to their fragile social status and general gender inequality. These women have remained entirely invisible, silenced, and unprotected for decades. This situation

indicates the need for effective systematic actions from NGOs, state governments, and international bodies.

In 2022, we helped to sustain support for women who use drugs in Moscow, establishing contacts with women's crisis centers in Moscow and nearby cities and successfully arranging cooperation with two of them. ARF can redirect its clients to these centers when they need shelter or rehabilitation, and the centers can redirect their clients when they need our services (HIV testing, document recovery, facilitating access to HIV/AIDS centers, providing medical assistance). Additionally, ARF team has also organized regular online support groups and individual psychological consultations for women survivors of violence. With the support of the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association, ARF/ SKOSH developed a poster and a brochure to raise women's awareness of gender-based violence and ways to address it. We have also promoted several stories in mass media to raise the public awareness on violence towards women who use drugs.

Besides that, SKOSH's Anya Sarang collaborated with the Eurasian Harm Reduction Association to write [a best practice collection](#) for the EECA region "Integrating assistance to women affected by violence into harm reduction programs. Best Practices from the Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia"¹, provided mentoring services to an initiative group in Estonia, and promoted women's shelters in Dushanbe, Tajikistan through involvement in the preparation of the Funding Request to the Global Fund.



¹ Sarang A., Ofitserova E. Integrating Assistance to Women Affected by Violence into Harm Reduction Programs. Vilnius, Lithuania; Eurasian harm reduction association (EHRA), 2022.

5. International Advocacy and Awareness

We had to decrease our activity in international advocacy in 2022 because of emergent war-related changes at the beginning of the year and intensive work on the Community Center development later throughout the year.

Nevertheless, there still was a significant success in the autumn of 2022: ARF has finally received ECOSOC consultative status after 6 years of sabotage and misuse of procedure by the Russia representatives in the ECOSOC NGO Committee.

5.1. ECOSOC Consultative status of the Andrey Rylkov Foundation

ECOSOC, a principal UN organ, focuses on international economic, social, and environmental issues. The consultative status can provide an NGO with a platform to participate in ECOSOC's meetings, share expertise, and influence policy decisions.

ARF first applied for the ECOSOC consultative status in May 2015. In April 2016 ARF was invited to the 2016 Resumed Session of the UN Committee on NGOs and in June 2016 ARF application was deferred for the first time. Between June 2016 and 2021, the application was deferred 11 times.

The research conducted by the International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC)² shows that such UN state members as Russia and China used their position in the UN Committee on NGOs to ask banal and repetitive questions whenever the Committee considered ARF and other drug policy NGOs applications. This way, they were able to defer the application indefinitely, preventing NGOs from accessing the ECOSOC status.

² Fernández, Adrià Cots, and Marie Nougier. "A Captured Gatekeeper: An Evaluation of Drug NGO access to ECOSOC accreditation and the UN Committee on NGOs." IDPC, May 8, 2022. <https://idpc.net/publications/2022/03/a-captured-gatekeeper-an-evaluation-of-drug-ngo-access-to-ecosoc-accreditation-and-the-un-committee-on-ngos>.

In March 2022 SKOSH contributed to the IDPC advocacy process by participating in a briefing on barriers to accessing ECOSOC accreditation for drug policy NGOs and sharing ARF experience in applying for the ECOSOC status. Shortly after, Russia was not re-elected to serve on the NGO Committee for the first time in many years.

In December 2022 the UN Committee on NGOs once again voted against accrediting ARF the consultative status. This vote showed once again the flaws in the current mechanism of relations between the UN and NGOs. However, the US delegation together with like-minded members of the UN managed to pass the accreditation of the consultative status to several NGOs, including ARF, on the ECOSOC vote on December 7th. With this consultative status, ARF will be able to contribute to the work of ECOSOC and participate in UN intergovernmental meetings providing the opinion and expertise on drug services and policies, and an insight into the War on Drugs in Russia.

5.2. Narcophobia Project. Working with mass media

The Narcophobia project previously run by ARF and now SKOSH focuses on providing a wide audience in Russia with accurate information on drug policy and debunking the War on Drugs propaganda. Historically it has focused on engaging with other sectors of Russia's civil society, artists, activists, human rights defenders, and media. In 2022 the work on the Narcophobia project has been paused due to urgent war-related pressures. At the same time, we decided to shift our focus from fighting the War on Drugs narratives mainly in Russia to raising awareness of the European and international audience on the devastating situation of the people who use drugs in Russia and the occupied territories of Ukraine.

With every new repressive law, it is getting more and more difficult for Russian civil society to influence the inhumane, unscientific drug policies of the Russian state. This is why it is so important to reach the European decision-making bodies and ask for their reaction to the unfolding crimes against people who use drugs.

In June, “Vot-tak.tv”, an online media platform established by the first independent Belarusian TV channel, published [an article](#) about ARF and how ARF’s work had changed after the beginning of the full-scale invasion.³

In Autumn 2022 we consulted VICE on their material on the changes in the Russian dark web drug market after the beginning of the war. [The article](#) was published in January 2023.⁴

We also made a comment on new amendments to the Russian “anti-gay” law for Inter Press Service [article](#), where we talked about how the amendments will affect queer club life in Russia in the context of more broad risks for effective HIV prevention.⁵

Overall, the work on spreading awareness outside Russia has yet to bring huge results, but we believe that this area of work will be **really important** in the upcoming years.

Conclusion

The 2022 Annual Report of Stichting SKOSH reflects a year of immense challenges due to Russia’s war against Ukraine. Despite these obstacles, SKOSH showed remarkable resilience in fulfilling its mission to help those most affected.

The organization quickly responded to the war's impact by prioritizing the safety of its sister’s organization Andrey Rylkov Foundation (ARF) members and aiding those forced to leave due to the war. Safety plans were put into action, relocating team members, while mental health services expanded significantly to support those facing mental health issues due to conflict, drug use, and gender-based violence.

³ Anatoly Persikov. “«Этому государству ничего объяснить невозможно». Сотрудники фонда Рылькова — о работе после войны” Vot-tak.tv, June 11, 2022.

<https://vot-tak.tv/novosti/10-06-2022-fond-rylkova-posle-vojny>

⁴ Niko Vorobyov, Max Daly. “There’s a Wild Scramble for Control of the Dark Web Taking Place in Russia” VICE, January 27, 2023.

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/wxnmg5/russia-darknet-market-wars>

⁵ Ed Holt. “Russia’s LGBTQI ‘Propaganda’ Law Imperils HIV Prevention” Inter Press Service, December 16, 2022.

<https://www.ipsnews.net/2022/12/russias-lgbtqi-propaganda-law-imperils-community/>

A major achievement of the year was the establishment of the Community Center for Mental Health and Harm Reduction in Tbilisi, Georgia. This center became a vital support hub for young Russian-speaking war migrants, offering essential aid, therapy, education, and collaborative initiatives, especially for mental health struggles caused by displacement.

Despite challenges, SKOSH continued its support for ARF, ensuring continued services like street work, legal aid, and strategic litigation for those accessing drug-related services in Russia. Efforts were made in defending human rights, initiatives against police practices, and offering legal help in significant cases.

SKOSH strived to continue efforts to address violence against women who use drugs, working with crisis centers, awareness campaigns, and advocating for this vulnerable group.

Though international advocacy was limited due to the war, SKOSH celebrated a significant milestone by obtaining ECOSOC consultative status for ARF, overcoming years of bureaucratic hurdles.

In summary, the 2022 report showcases Stichting SKOSH's commitment to serving communities during crisis, its adaptability, and its resilience in providing crucial services amidst the challenges of war and supporting those most in need.