

**DUBLIN**

Front Line Defenders – Head Office
First Floor, Avoca Court
Temple Road, Blackrock
Co. Dublin, A94 R7W3, Ireland

info@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +353 1 212 3750
fax +353 1 212 1001

BRUSSELS

Front Line Defenders – EU Office
Square Marie-Louise 72
1000 Brussels
Belgium

euoffice@frontlinedefenders.org
www.frontlinedefenders.org

phone +32 2 230 9383
fax +32 2 230 0028

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Ukraine: Woman human rights defender Olena Shevchenko tear gassed in Lviv

On 14 April 2022, woman human rights defender, **Olena Shevchenko**, was tear gassed on the streets of Lviv by two unidentified individuals while delivering humanitarian aid. Olena Shevchenko and the NGO “Insight” (ГО Інсайт) fled Kyiv after the Russian Federation started a full-scale war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022. In Lviv, the woman human rights defender and her colleagues continued to provide support to Ukrainian LGBTIQ persons and women affected and displaced by the war. As a result of the attack on her on 14 April 2022, the woman human rights defender suffered a chemical burn on her face, eyes, and hands. Shortly after the attack, Olena Shevchenko filed a complaint to the local police precinct in Lviv.

[Olena Shevchenko](#) is a prominent woman human rights defender and community organizer from Ukraine, working on advancing LGBTIQ and women’s rights. Olena Shevchenko is the Chairperson of [Insight](#), an NGO that focuses on promoting and protecting the rights of LGBTIQ persons in Ukraine. The woman human rights defender is also a European Representative at the [International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association \(ILGA World\)](#), the co-chair of the [European Lesbian* Conference](#), and a co-chairperson of the [Coalition Against Discrimination](#) in Ukraine.

On 14 April 2022, while Olena Shevchenko was finishing unloading humanitarian aid from the organisation [Марш Жінок \(Women’s March\)](#) in Lviv, an unknown individual approached the woman human rights defender on the street, and addressed her directly. When Olena Shevchenko looked at the person, the disguised individual tear gassed her, aiming at her face and eyes, and disappeared from the scene of attack. As a result of attack, Olena Shevchenko received emergency medical assistance at the site of the attack as she suffered from a chemical burn on her face, eyes, and hands.

Olena Shevchenko has been previously subjected to threats, harassment and intimidation. In 2016 WHRD has already been assaulted in Lviv during the Фестиваль Рівності (Equality Festival): at the time far-right protesters attacked the location, stoned the premises, and threw Molotov Cocktails (now in Ukraine referred to as *Bandera Smoothies*) at the participants. In March 2018, Olena Shevchenko and her colleagues were tear gassed during Kyiv Pride. She was afterwards arrested by the Kyiv police and charged with “violation of the procedure for conducting peaceful assemblies.” In November 2019, two unknown individuals beat the woman human rights defender up while shouting homophobic slurs.

In May 2021, Insight’s premises in both Odessa and in Kyiv were attacked by unknown individuals. In Odessa, Insight were also forced to cancel an event on 30 May 2021, Fem Talks, as members from two well-known right-wing groups threatened activists and community members who took part in the event. On the same day, in Kyiv, approximately 20 people aggressively broke into the organisation’s office and threatened the human rights defenders. The police arrived late to the site of the attack, and refused to accept the complaint from the human rights defenders.

Front Line Defenders is gravely concerned by a pattern of systemic attacks on LGBTIQ rights defenders in Ukraine over the last years, and the failure to bring those responsible to justice. It believes that the attack against Olena Shevchenko is a result of her peaceful human rights work to

protect and promote the rights of LGBTIQ persons in Ukraine. The targeting of LGBTIQ defenders and organisations has a chilling effect on civil society.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Ukraine to:

1. Ensure that all necessary measures are taken to guarantee Olena Shevchenko's access to medical support as needed, and safeguard her physical and psychological integrity;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attack against Olena Shevchenko, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Ensure that LGBTIQ rights defenders are recognised as an integral part of civil society and receive all the necessary protection.