

# Fund managers, truckies: The Australians supporting Ukraine's war

**Hans van Leeuwen** *Europe correspondent*



Feb 23, 2024 - 8.42am



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By day, Kateryna Argyrou is a fund manager at Maple-Brown Abbott. But in her spare time, she moonlights as co-chairman of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations – and gets some pretty interesting emails.

A retired helicopter engineer from Far North Queensland wrote in recently to offer his services. He and a dad's army of former colleagues were ready to step in and reassemble the Defence Force's controversially dismantled Taipan choppers [<https://www.afr.com/link/follow-20180101-p5f0zo>], so they could be shipped to Ukraine.



Alex Vynokur, CEO of Betashares and a director of the United Ukraine Appeal, with Kateryna Argyrou, co-chair of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations and portfolio manager at Maple-Brown Abbott. **Louie Douvis**

Argyrou says there are plenty of emails like this, which land in AFUO's inbox from all over the country. Truck drivers looking to go to Europe and deliver supplies. Construction workers offering to go and rebuild houses.

"There are lots of tradies in Australia, with hands-on skills they just want to offer. That comes through on a weekly basis," she says. "It's very heartening and incredibly surprising, but just lovely that Australians just want to do what they can."

Even though she has been living in Australia for 12 years, and even though the Ukraine war this weekend enters its third year, she says it still surprises her "how everyday Australians care, how they're outraged, that this is not fair. Australia is the land of having a fair go."

But even in the land of the fair go, there is still a growing risk that Australians – be they the public, the politicians, or the ample-pocketed donors to the cause – might be growing weary of a conflict on the other side of the world.

The potential for creeping donor and public fatigue "is something that I worry about every day", Argyrou says. "I don't want Ukraine to be forgotten. I don't want Russia's invasion of Ukraine to be the forgotten war."

Changing times calls for changing tactics. The public needs stories, not statistics. Politicians need specific asks, not vague calls to action. And donors need hypothecated projects, clear accountability and transparency, and a narrative about Ukraine's future.

## Business opportunity

Alex Vynokur, CEO and co-founder of Betashares and founder of the United Ukraine Appeal (UUA), acknowledges that the task of tapping up companies and philanthropists to fund Ukraine-based charitable work is getting tougher.

“There’s no question about the fact that we are starting to exhaust the ability of individuals and corporations to show the same level of generosity as they did in the early days,” he says.

“Would I describe it as fatigue? I’m not sure if it’s fatigue, or just the fact that daily lives of Australians, and Americans and Europeans, essentially just take over. That’s just reality.”

To rally and motivate donors, the UUA is trying to be positive and constructive. “We are starting to focus more on what the future of Ukraine would look like, or could look like, in the postwar era,” he says.

“Ukraine needs to have a future which is aligned strongly with Western democratic values, with an open economy, with its ability to trade with its allies and partners.”



A Ukrainian soldier takes his position on the frontline near Klishchiivka in the Donetsk region this month. **AP**

He points out that Australia's prime minister in the Second World War, John Curtin, began planning the country's postwar reconstruction while fighting was still going on.

"The reconstruction project will be a gigantic effort. The flip side of that is, it will present a very significant opportunity, both at the government level, as well as for private businesses," he says, name-checking Australia's expertise in agriculture and infrastructure.

"There are a large number of Australian businesses that will be very interested to participate on what ultimately will be a Herculean effort."

## Prodding the pollies

Vynokur says the government has a responsibility to lead by example on strong support for Ukraine, which would help galvanise donors and punters.

With that in mind, Argyrou plans to join a three-day AFUO mission to Canberra next week.

"I'm taking time off work just to go," she says. "We have back-to-back meetings with members of parliament, senators, ministers, just to explain the situation to them on the ground. Why it's important and why Australia's support matters."

She says it is still possible to get Canberra's attention. It's just harder, and requires a new tack.

"When it comes to politics and working with the Australian government, we have to be very clear in what our asks are," she says.

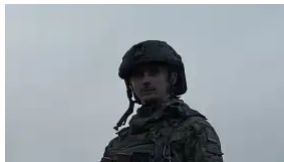
"Australian politicians have a million things on their plate, and they're obviously focused on the Indo-Pacific region. ... We have to be very targeted and specific, clear about what we want to achieve, and make sure that we're speaking to the decision makers."

One of the topics of conversation will be the closed Australian embassy in Kyiv. Reopening it would bring the country into line with all Ukraine's other allies.

"I know that the government has their risk assessment and they're being conservative and risk averse, but I really do hope that they take that extra step," she says. During the AFUO's mission to Canberra, this will be the "No.1 goal".

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