

06 January

SCM Extends Heart of Azovstal Initiative Through 2026



We are pleased to announce the renewal of the [Heart of Azovstal](#) initiative for the year 2026. SCM Founder and investor [Rinat Akhmetov](#) has approved a budget of \$14 million (UAH 600 million) to ensure that the defenders of Mariupol and their

families continue to receive comprehensive, systemic support.

A Long-Term Commitment to Recovery

Since its inception, the Heart of Azovstal has operated as part of the Steel Front military initiative. Over the past three years, \$40 million (UAH 1.6 billion) has been allocated to the project, assisting defenders who held the line in Mariupol from February to May 2022.

The decision to extend funding reflects the grim reality that the war continues and the needs of veterans are evolving, not diminishing. The project mission remains to act as a centre of care and sustainable assistance, supporting defenders from rehabilitation through to self-realisation.

Rinat Akhmetov, founder of the Heart of Azovstal project, said: "I have decided to continue the Heart of Azovstal project in 2026 because our responsibility to the defenders of Mariupol has no expiration date. Not all of them have returned home, and not all have completed their path to recovery. Many of our warriors remain in captivity, and their families continue to wait and live with hope. As long as there are those who need our support, treatment, and help in returning to civilian life, Heart of Azovstal will remain by their side. This is our duty and our boundless gratitude for their feat, carried out in the name of Ukraine's freedom and independence."

Addressing Critical Needs

The challenges facing returning defenders are severe. Data collected by the project indicates that russian captivity involves systematic torture and deprivation. Consequently, 75% of returning defenders require complex surgeries on bones and joints, while 41% suffer from anxiety disorders.

The 2026 strategy will maintain the project's core programmes while expanding efforts in specific areas:

- **Health and Rehabilitation:** Continuing to provide physical and psychological rehabilitation, prosthetics, and medical treatment involving top experts.
- **Housing:** The At Home programme has already secured 300 apartments for Mariupol defenders with Group I and Group II disabilities, ensuring they have a dignified foundation for civilian life.
- **Reintegration:** The Future programme assists with education, retraining, and business startups, helping veterans navigate the transition to the civilian workforce.
- **Post-Traumatic Growth:** A key focus for 2026 will be advancing the concept of post-traumatic growth at a national level, helping veterans not just recover, but thrive.

Preserving History

Beyond physical and psychological aid, the project is dedicated to historical preservation. In 2026, the initiative will support the M86 project, which documents the memory and truth regarding the defence of Mariupol. This aligns with the wider goal of the Heart of Azovstal to serve as a reliable partner to human rights activists and the government in establishing best practices for veteran care.

SCM invites international and Ukrainian organisations with relevant expertise to cooperate in this vital mission. The extension of this project guarantees that as long as defenders are returning from captivity, they will not return to a void, but to a system of support and gratitude.