

28 April

## Scaling Post-Traumatic Growth: Heart of Azovstal at the Kyiv Security Forum



At the recent Kyiv Security Forum, Oleksandr Didur, a defender of Mariupol and a former prisoner of war, highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive veteran support in Ukraine.

Speaking as a post-traumatic growth trainer for the [Heart of Azovstal](#) project, Didur called for the expansion of peer-to-peer rehabilitation methods at the state level. He noted that veterans often prefer working with those who share their combat experience rather than civilian psychologists, making the peer-to-peer model highly effective for recovery from the realities of war.

Didur stressed the importance of immediate intervention when defenders return from russian captivity, advocating for systemic assistance that includes medical rehabilitation, psychological care, document restoration, and integration into civilian life. The Heart of Azovstal, part of [Rinat Akhmetov's Steel Front](#) military initiative , is already implementing these practices to support the defenders of Mariupol who held the line from 24 February until 20 May 2022.

The scale of the challenge remains immense as the war continues. Data collected by the project indicates that russian captivity involves systematic deprivation, resulting in 75% of returning defenders requiring complex surgeries on bones and joints, while 41% suffer from anxiety disorders.

To address these ongoing needs, SCM investor [Rinat Akhmetov](#) has approved a \$14 million budget to extend the Heart of Azovstal project through 2026. This brings the total commitment to supporting Mariupol defenders and their families to \$54 million. The 2026 strategy will maintain core programmes, including health and rehabilitation, reintegration, and the At Home programme, which has already purchased 300 apartments for defenders with disabilities. Advancing the concept of post-traumatic growth at a national level will be a key focus, helping veterans to thrive in civilian life.

**Rinat Akhmetov, founder of the Heart of Azovstal project**, explained the extension:

*"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."*

Through SCM companies and the Steel Front initiative, this sustained funding guarantees that defenders returning from captivity enter a supportive environment dedicated to their long-term recovery and success.