

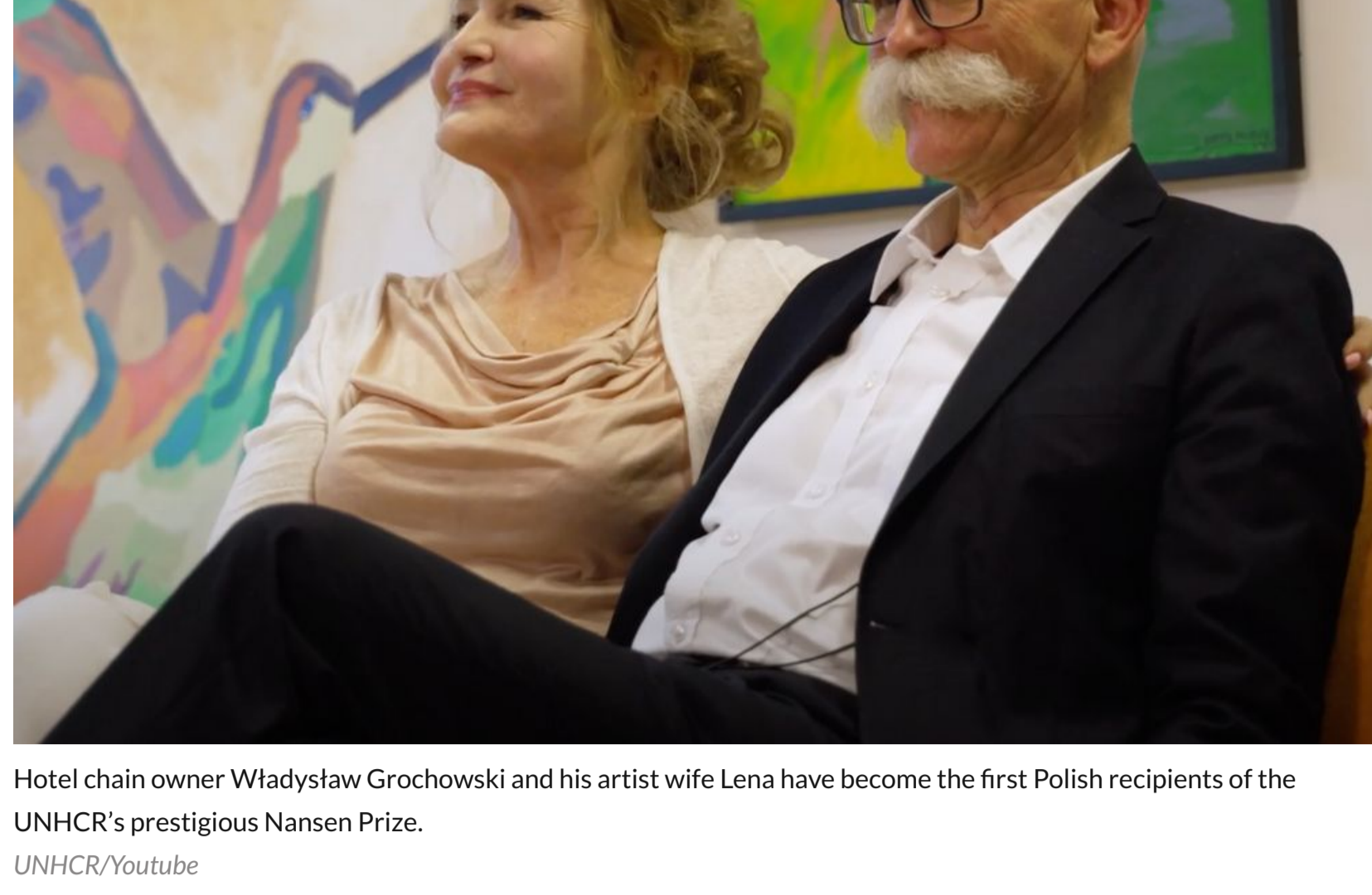
"I must have been inspired" Joseph Conrad

## Unsung Heroes: Polish couple awarded by United Nations for helping refugees with accommodation and jobs

BUSINESS | LIFE



STUART DOWELL NOVEMBER 29, 2023



Hotel chain owner Władysław Grochowski and his artist wife Lena have become the first Polish recipients of the UNHCR's prestigious Nansen Prize.

UNHCR/YouTube

A Polish hotel chain owner and his wife have been awarded by the UN for "going beyond the call of duty" in providing over half a million nights of safe accommodation for refugees.

Businessman Władysław Grochowski and his artist wife Lena launched the Lena Grochowska Foundation in 2014 to support people of Polish origin returning to the country by offering them accommodation in their chain of 16 hotels across Poland.



Initially set up to support repatriated descendants of Poles exiled to Central Asia during the communist era, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in 2022 alone the Grochowski's foundation invested EUR 4.1 million in housing for refugees, and it has since opened centres in six cities in Poland.

Lena Grochowska Foundation

However, the nature and scale of their philanthropy evolved significantly when Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Responding to the humanitarian crisis, the couple extended their support to thousands of refugees seeking safety in Poland.

Grochowski, who owns the Arche chain of hotels, said: "On February 24, we took the first refugees in at the hotel in Lublin. On the next day, crisis centres were created in all 16 hotels. We welcomed everyone who came to us. I am proud that we managed all that. It was quite a challenge."



The foundation provided refugees with more than 500,000 free nights of accommodation.

UNHCR/YouTube

In 2022 alone, their foundation invested EUR 4.1 million in housing for refugees, and it has since opened centres in six cities in Poland.

This commitment caught the attention of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), leading to their recognition as the European recipients of the prestigious Nansen Prize, an award reserved for individuals who go "beyond the call of duty" in supporting refugees.

This is the first time that the award has gone to Polish recipients.



In addition to providing accommodation, the Grochowski's have empowered refugees by helping them to find jobs and to get training.

UNHCR

Andreas Kirchhof, a Senior External Relations Adviser at UNHCR, said: "They have given a lot more than aid to refugees.

"They have empowered refugees by helping them to find jobs, to get training, to get socially included.

"And secondly, they have mobilised the business community. They have worked with cities, they have worked with humanitarian organisations, so it's a whole of society approach which we see here and which benefits refugees."

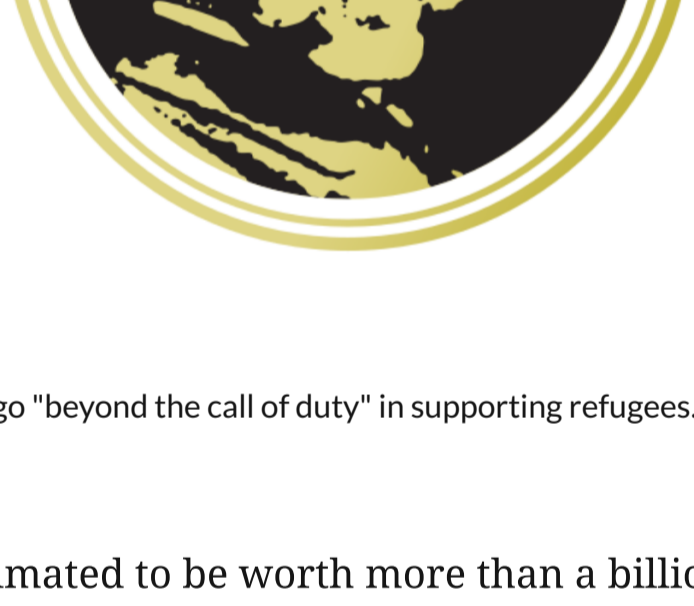


Grochowski is no ordinary business man. He takes business calls on a retro flip phone and doesn't use a computer. Emails are printed out for him and he only reads the most important.

His business journey began in agriculture, before transitioning to the launch of the Arche Group in the 1990s. The group has built more than 10,000 apartments to date, manages a hotel chain with more than four thousand rooms and 27 restaurants and has several smaller businesses.

The money earned from selling apartments is invested by Arche in renovating palaces, manor houses, old sugar mills and factories, which it turns into profitable hotels.

## NANSEN REFUGEE AWARD



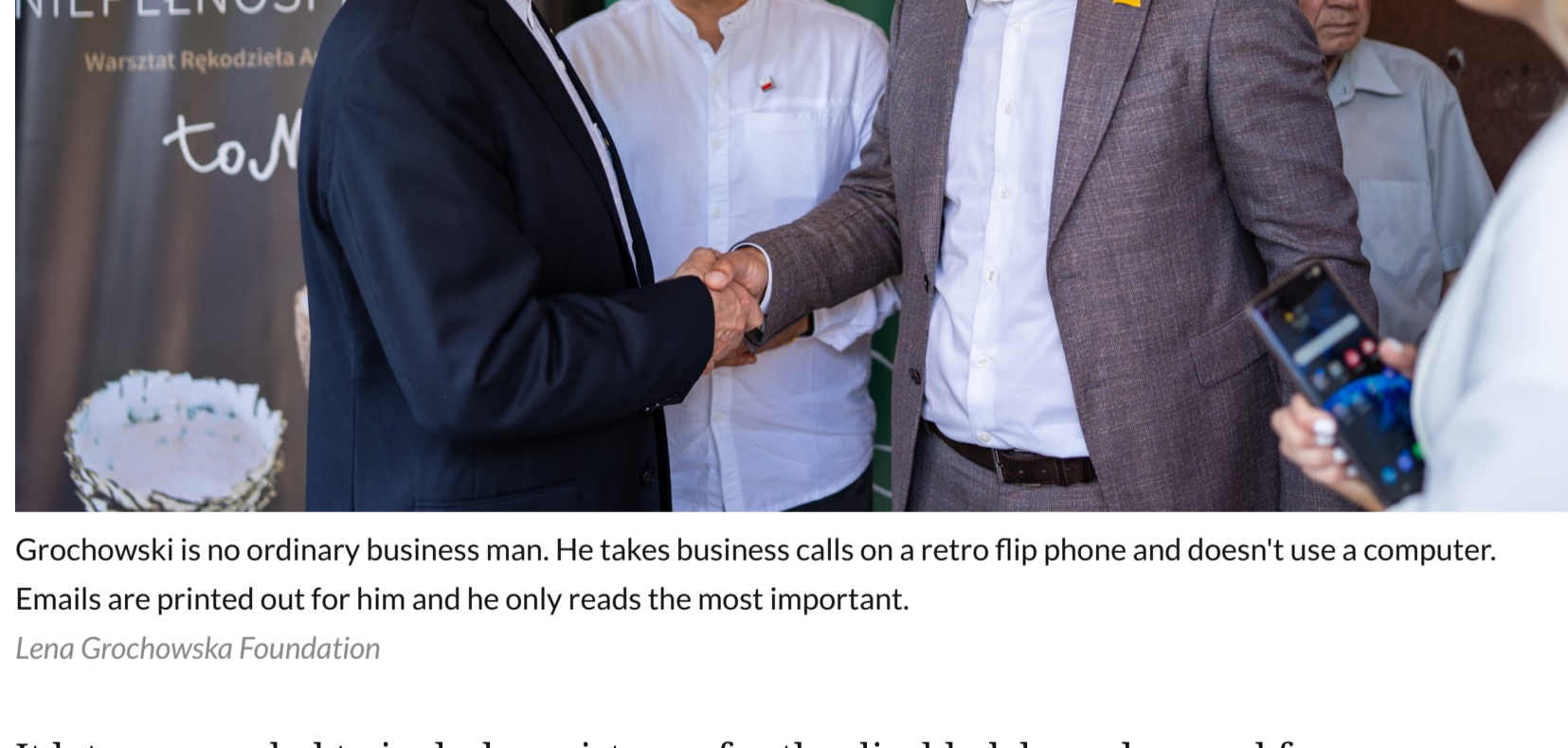
The prestigious Nansen award is reserved for individuals who go "beyond the call of duty" in supporting refugees.

UNHCR

Despite its unlisted status, the company is estimated to be worth more than a billion zlotys.

"In business, money is a completely secondary element for me. I have never read any business plan," he explained.

The foundation that he started with his wife started out helping repatriated descendants of Poles exiled to Central Asia during the communist era.



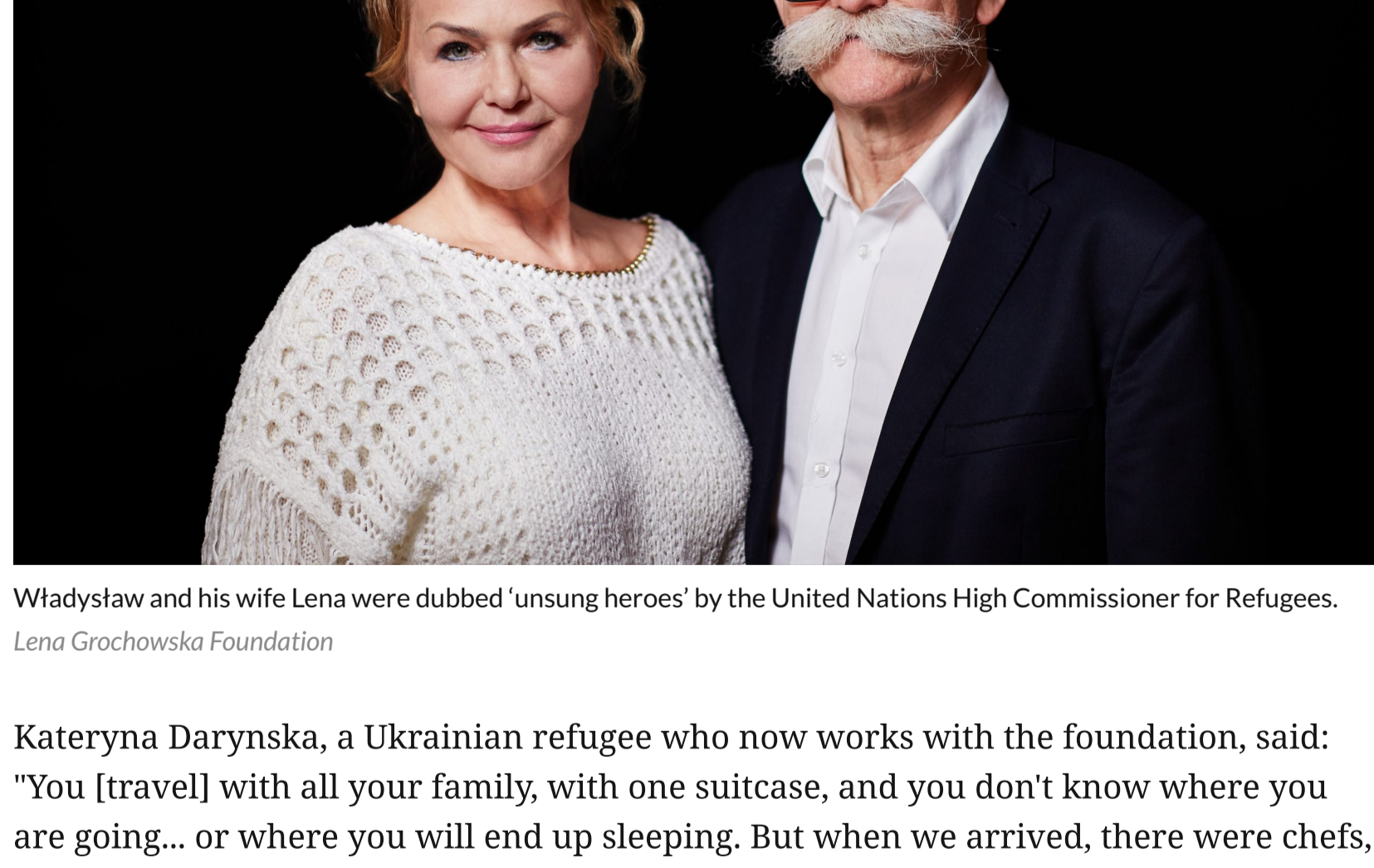
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Lena Grochowska Foundation

It later expanded to include assistance for the disabled, homeless and former prisoners. A key area of support has been the provision of accommodation in buildings owned by the Arche Group, the seventh-largest hotel operator in Poland.

In the wake of the escalation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, more than 1.5 million refugees found safety in Poland.

Over the following year, the foundation provided refugees with more than 500,000 free nights of accommodation.



Władysław and his wife Lena were dubbed 'unsung heroes' by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Lena Grochowska Foundation

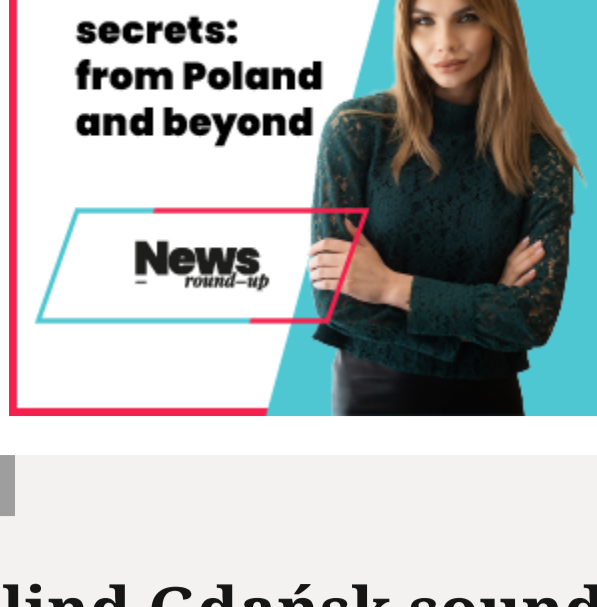
Kateryna Darynska, a Ukrainian refugee who now works for the foundation, said: "You [travel] with all your family, with one suitcase, and you don't know where you are going... or where you will end up sleeping. But when we arrived, there were chefs, a lot of employees [waiting for us], and we got warm food."

"And they fed us, gave us linen, they gave us everything. It was so important to us," she added.

The Grochowski family's commitment extends to migrants on the Polish-Belarusian border, further solidifying their impact on the refugee crisis.

TAGS: POLAND, JOB, UNITED NATIONS, REFUGEES, ACCOMODATION, UNHCR, LENA GROCHOWSKA, WLADYSLAW GROCHOWSKI, ARCHE, ANDREAS KIRCHHOF

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LIFE

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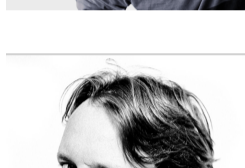
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