



CHALLENGES AND NEEDS OF THE VOLUNTEER SECTOR

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Challenges and needs of the volunteer sector

This research was initiated by ISAR Ednannia and conducted by Ilko Kucheriv «Democratic Initiatives» within the Ukraine Civil Society Sectoral Support Activity implemented by ISAR Ednannia in partnership with the Ukrainian Center of Independent Political Research (UCIPR) and Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law (CEDEM) thanks to the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Data was gathered in three main stages: conducting online focus groups, personal interviews, and interviews with the experts. In the first and second stages, respondents were selected intentionally to capture the various volunteering experiences, according to the structure of the volunteer initiative. The collection of data continued until the saturation point was reached. In the third stage, according to the research aims, interviews were conducted with the representatives of two ministries, whose responsibilities include assistance to the volunteer sector and two organizations whose activity is related to the improvement of certain aspects of volunteer activity in Ukraine.

The sample size of the first focus group was 7 persons, and of the second - 10 persons. The second stage consisted of 13 interviews. Expert interviews were conducted with representatives of CEDEM, the Ukrainian Volunteer Service, the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine, and the National Social Services of Ukraine.

***Disclaimer:** The sample did not include volunteer initiatives whose areas of activity are not related to assistance to the defense forces and IDPs, which could, in some cases, affect the definition of the problems of the volunteer sector by the respondents. The uneven distribution of volunteer initiatives in the sample is partly related to the change or expansion of the direction of activity after the start of the full-scale war with the Russian Federation.*



Main results of the research

- Based on the respondents' answers, the term 'volunteer' should be defined as an umbrella term that includes:
 - independent individual volunteers;
 - individual volunteers under the patronage of non-profit organizations;
 - participants of volunteer organizations that are not legally registered;
 - employees of legally registered non-profits. Each of these sub-categories has unique and common problems that they face while conducting volunteer activities. It is worth mentioning that, at the moment, Ukrainian law 'On volunteer activities' protects the rights only of the individual volunteers acting under the patronage of not-for-profit organizations.
- Both in the regulatory framework and in public discourse, there is a lack of understanding of who volunteers are or what volunteer organization is. Analysis of legislation shows that the overwhelming majority of respondents who participated in these studies should be classified as benefactors, not volunteers. Incorrect classification can impede the authorities' plans to introduce the registration system of volunteers.
- Logistical barriers that the volunteers face are mainly related to the lack of clarity and frequent change in the procedures to obtain relevant permits during customs clearance. According to the respondents, new versions of the documents were difficult and sometimes impossible to find in free access. Decisions regarding obtaining permits for the goods to cross the border or volunteers to travel abroad (program «The Way») depended on the personal connections of volunteers.
- Except for the respondents linked to the large charitable foundations, surveyed volunteers who needed to cross settlements at night, either did not have the required permits or managed to get hold of them thanks to their other activities or personal connections. The lack of a uniform procedure for issuing permits leads to corruption risks.
- Reporting non-profit organizations' volunteer activities requires a lot of time. As at the beginning of the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation volunteer organizations provided help in the force-majeure mode, the relevant reporting activities were not conducted. One of the respondents shared that their charitable foundation had to stop its activities for almost 5 months after the Russian army's advance was stopped so that they could put everything in order in their accounting department.
- Among the main reasons why participants of volunteer organizations that are still not registered legally or refuse to register their non-for-profit organizations was the fear of redundant bureaucratization and slowing down the pace of procurements. Respondents mentioned that for registration of the not-for-profit organization, they need the help of an accountant and lawyer, while they do not have costs to cover their work.

- The majority of the surveyed individual volunteers are registered in the volunteer register; however, few refuse to do so. Among the reasons for not registering, they mentioned: lack of information about this register, confidence that the state's control will not affect them, and fear of pressure from the authorities after the war.
- A specific barrier for volunteers assisting armed forces is a very high, to their mind, commission for SWIFT transfers. Because of that, non-profit organizations dealing with high volumes of procurements abroad lose significant amounts that could be spent on necessary goods.
- While carrying out their activities, some of the surveyed volunteers encountered corruption by the authorities. Most of the respondents were complaining about «The Way» program: local authorities were demanding money for permission for volunteers to cross the border. Local authorities also demanded that non-profit organizations share humanitarian aid in exchange for an official document (request) that the organizations needed to receive humanitarian aid in question.
- Some of the respondents had to retort to corrupt actions at the customs to be able to import quadcopters, which are considered to be military goods.
- Some surveyed volunteers assisting armed forces and civilians in the frontline territories shared stories of coming under the enemy's fire. They were injured, and their belongings were damaged due to these attacks. In cases like this, injured volunteers received financial aid from donor organizations because they were not informed they could receive monetary assistance from the state.
- The payment mechanism of one-time financial aid in case of injury or death of the volunteer needs to be improved because it does not foresee compensation in cases when the aid was provided to civilians.
- The main factors that influence engaging in volunteer activities are: closest surroundings, previous experience of volunteering and relevance for the professional activities of a person.
- During interviews and focus groups, respondents emphasized the decrease in the financial contributions caused by the distress of society and the decrease of the population's income.
- At the same time, resources available to volunteers are not always used efficiently; in particular, there are cases when the same aid was provided to the same recipient through several volunteer initiatives.
- There is a severe risk of the outflow of people, both from the volunteer sector and the civil society sector in general, after the end or freezing of hostilities. Several respondents directly stated their intention to leave the country after the war because of their fatigue and disappointment in state institutions.
- Surveyed volunteers noted that distress and burnout are pretty common among their colleagues. These are caused by the excessive load and stressful situations during the volunteer activity. Some of the respondents see rest as the solution to this problem; however, they only sometimes have resourc-



es for it. While others, on the contrary, fight fatigue and stress by increasing their workload.

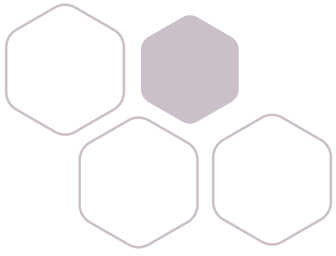
- The primary source of inspiration for volunteers that helps them continue working is the opportunity to see the results of their volunteer activities, gratitude from their recipients and faith that they are contributing towards the victory.
- The lack of gratitude demotivates the surveyed volunteers. Absolutely all respondents, who mentioned this during the focus groups and interviews, pointed out that civilians demonstrate ingratitude towards the volunteers. Based on the volunteers' answers, one of the reasons behind this is the incorrect assessment of the critical needs of the groups of civilians. As a result, some types of aid are received by people who do not critically need it.
- The main request that volunteers have towards the state is not to interfere. Those who would like to receive support and assistance from the state often can not specify their own needs.
- Surveyed volunteers have the following educational needs that would help them to perform their activities: financial reporting, financial operations abroad, crowd-funding, legal literacy,
- logistics, paramedical assistance, management, communication, and interaction with the authorities. Speaking about the educational needs of people just starting their volunteering work, the respondents repeatedly indicated the need to share experiences.
- For independent individual volunteers, more pressing compared to the other types of volunteers is the issue of tax inspections. Besides, it is more difficult for them now to raise funds, though they operate with smaller volumes of assistance. Independent individual volunteers
- have mentioned more often, compared to the others, positive outcomes of networking within the community.
- During interviews and focus groups representatives of small non-profits (in terms of
- staff members and volumes of assistance), as opposed to the independent individual
- volunteers and volunteer organizations that are not legally registered have reported more often than interacted with authorities. As a result of that, they encountered corruption or misunderstandings from authorities more often. Also, for such non-profits, the problem of obtaining permits to travel during the curfew hours and possibilities to utilize «The Way» program is especially acute.
- Big non-profits managed to overcome all the obstacles that they were facing in the framework of their activities. Among the challenges they named are: the necessity to exempt their staff members from active duty and high commissions for foreign transfers.
- In general, the vision of the problems that the volunteer sector faces by the surveyed representatives of the authorities coincides with the vision of the problems that the volunteers shared during the focus groups and interviews.

- When talking about overcoming the barriers, surveyed volunteers predominantly saw the state as the agent who has to solve their problems. In particular, respondents voiced the following
- suggestions:
 - Issuing permits to volunteers so that they can move freely during the curfew;
 - Creation of the mechanism of direct interaction with the authorities so that volunteers could quickly communicate about their problems;
 - Possibility to share financial or material costs of the aid with the state when the volunteers are performing the state's functions;
 - Legitimation by the state of Ukrainian volunteer organizations for international organizations and donors;
 - Educational courses with a system of mentorship;
 - Creation of a single inclusive system of interaction between volunteers that could help fight against the dishonest "volunteers" and coordinate the provision of help between different volunteers;
 - Creation of comfortable conditions for the volunteer activity;
 - Creation of psychological support groups for volunteers;
 - Monitoring by the state of trustworthiness of volunteers;
 - Creation of conditions that would allow aid recipients to share with the public their positive experience of interaction with volunteers.



Main recommendations

- 1** The steps aimed at verifying and registering volunteers by state authorities should consider that individuals who carry out their volunteer activities based on an agreement on the implementation of volunteer activities with a non-profit organization are only one of the types of volunteering in Ukraine. Accordingly, the existence of an agreement for conducting volunteer activities cannot be an exclusive condition for entry into the register or database. It seems appropriate to include both volunteers who act under agreements and individual benefactors (who are currently included in the volunteer register) in such registers or databases.
- 2** It is necessary to raise public awareness of the possibility and procedures of concluding agreements on the implementation of volunteer activities with non-profit organizations, and memorandums on cooperation with authorities. This will increase the visibility of individual volunteers who do not use their cards to collect donations but are situationally engaged in socially useful activities during crises.
- 3** Develop a normative legal act that would regulate the list of organizations, institutions, and persons who can claim to receive permits for traveling during the curfew, as well as the procedure for obtaining such permits to reduce corruption risks. This list should include charitable organizations that can justify the need to travel during the curfew.
- 4** Aggregate on the single state portal all current normative legal acts that are potentially necessary for the conduct of the volunteer activity (and clarifications to them). In particular, those that relate to: the import of goods that will be distributed as humanitarian aid to beneficiaries; border crossing by volunteers; registration of charitable foundations; registration in volunteer register; submission of financial reports; registration of transferring of aid to beneficiaries; receiving financial assistance in case of injury or death of a volunteer. Develop a mechanism for informing volunteers if such regulations are modified.
- 5** When creating educational courses, it is necessary to consider the volunteers' main educational requests: financial literacy (in particular, financial activities abroad, crowdfunding, financial reporting); legal literacy (in particular, volunteers' rights, acting legislation on importing goods, registration of the transfer of goods to beneficiaries, compiling agreements on volunteer activities); logistics, paramedical assistance, management, communications, interaction with the authorities. Such courses should also include an exchange of experience between volunteers and target not only organizations but also currently active and potential individual volunteers.



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