

Security Needs of CSOs, Activists, Volunteers, Human Rights Defenders of Ukraine in 2024





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Ukrainian civil society organizations, especially those working in the field of human rights protection, face a variety of challenges and threats ranging from physical to digital, legal to communication. Strengthening the security and resilience of these organizations is a necessity for them to operate effectively and respond to the needs of Ukrainian society. But working on effective protection mechanisms requires a clear understanding of the sector's challenges and security needs.

It is for this purpose that the Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law (hereinafter referred to as CEDEM), as part of the [Ukraine Civil Society Sectoral Support Activity](#), conducted a survey on the security needs of civil society organizations, activists, volunteers, human rights defenders and war crime documenters. The survey ran from February 26 to March 31, 2024.

The purpose of the survey was to identify key security challenges faced by CSOs and activists and to gather suggestions for preventing security risks.

The survey was conducted anonymously through a Google form that contained both open and closed questions. This allowed for the collection of both quantitative data and qualitative insights while maintaining the confidentiality of respondents.

Participants from the target groups were recruited by distributing a link to the survey through popular civil society resources: Gurt portal, Civic Space (Hromadskyi Prostir) website, Facebook pages of the Civil Society Sectoral Support Activity, CEDEM and ISAR Ednannia mailing list, etc.

The survey results allow identifying the most serious threats and vulnerabilities, prioritizing areas for intervention and building an evidence base for practical guidelines and advocacy for necessary changes. The survey is also an important step towards strengthening solidarity and mutual support within the non-profit sector.

In addition, the findings will be valuable to all stakeholders – both domestically and internationally. They will help donors, partners and government institutions to better understand the needs of non-profit organizations, especially human rights organizations.

We believe that this study will be an important contribution to strengthening the security and sustainability of Ukrainian non-profit organizations.

This study was held as part of the Project Ukraine Civil Society Sectoral Support Activity implemented by the Initiative Center to Support Social Action "Ednannia" in partnership with the Ukrainian Center for Independent Political Research (UCIPR) and Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law (CEDEM) with the sincere support of the American people through United States Agency for International Development. ISAR Ednannia is fully responsible for the content that may not reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Sixty-three people participated in the survey, representing various types of organizations and activities:

51 representatives of CSOs (80% of respondents)
6 independent activists
2 volunteers
3 representatives of international organizations
1 social worker

Areas of activity of the surveyed CSOs:

The majority of interviewed CSOs are human rights organizations. The most common areas of focus are:

- Protection of rights of vulnerable groups (22.2%)
- Advocacy (14.53%)
- Analytical research (12.82%)
- Gender expertise, protection of women's and girls' rights, combating violence (11.97%)
- Scientific, cultural, educational and sports activities (9.4%)
- Protection of children's rights (6.84%)
- Eco-activism (5.13%)

Less common, but represented areas:

- Protection of the rights of combatants, veterans and their families; support for the AFU (4.27%)
- Anti-corruption activities 4.27%
- Providing legal aid and legal advice to CSOs (3.42%)
- Advocating for the LGBT+ community (3.42%)

Individual representatives are engaged in independent media and journalism, providing humanitarian aid, supporting youth and youth organizations, security, civil society development, and supporting Ukrainian businesses.

Geographic representation

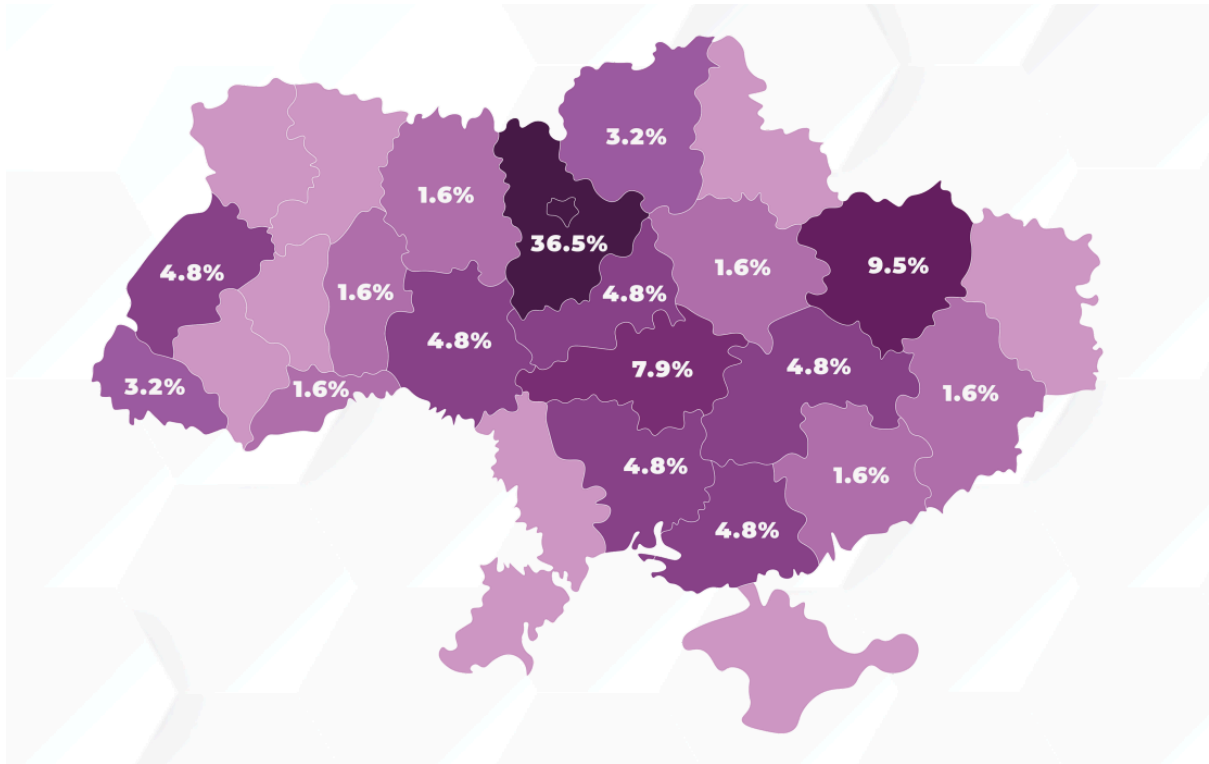
Survey participants represent 18 regions of Ukraine.

Most respondents come from:

- Kyiv Region (36.5%)
- Kharkiv Region (9.5%)
- Kirovohrad Region (7.9%)

4.8% of participants are from Dnipropetrovsk, Lviv, Cherkasy, Vinnitsa, Mykolaiv and Kherson Regions each.

3.2% of participants are from Zakarpattia and Chernihiv Regions each.



The rest of the regions (Poltava, Khmelnytskyi, Donetsk, Chernivtsi, Zhytomyr, Zaporizhzhia) are represented by 1.6% of participants each.

One in ten organizations interviewed have undergone full or partial relocation within Ukraine over the past decade, with three of them temporarily relocating abroad but subsequently returning.

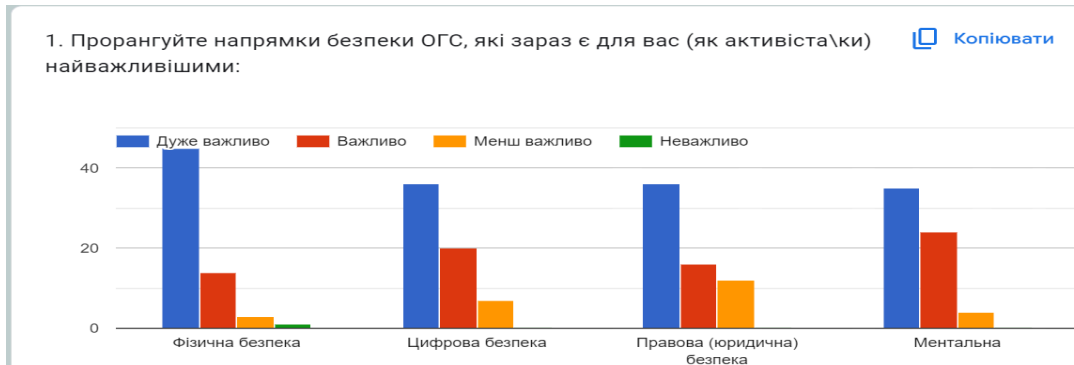
1. PRIORITY OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF SECURITY

Understanding the priority of different aspects of security is the key to effectively planning and responding to the challenges faced by civil society organizations, so as part of our study we asked respondents to rank the importance of different types of security to them personally.

The results show that, as in previous years, physical security remains the highest priority for the majority of respondents. This trend has been consistently observed over the past three years of our study.

With missile attacks, mine danger, occupation and other dangers being a daily reality, it is only natural that people first and foremost need to feel physically protected.

At the same time, the fact that physical security has consistently outpaced other aspects for a long time may reflect a lack of progress in creating a safe environment for civil society: despite the efforts of many organizations and donors, fundamental threats do not go away, forcing activists to focus primarily on basic survival year after year.



When specifying what threats they personally or their organizations are currently facing, respondents most often mentioned threats to physical and psychological well-being.

2. MAIN SECURITY THREATS AND CHALLENGES

2.1. MAIN PHYSICAL SECURITY THREATS AND CHALLENGES

Among the physical threats faced by respondents and their organizations, the most frequently mentioned were as follows:

- **General dangers associated with the war in Ukraine**, such as missile attacks, UAV attacks, and potential occupation of new territories. About 20 respondents cited shelling as a source of constant risk of injury and damage.
- **Lack of adequate protection infrastructure**, such as bomb shelters and alarm systems in offices. This increases vulnerability during air raid alerts and other threats.
- **Dangers during trips to the deoccupied territories**. Mobile teams face increased risk due to the volatile situation and the possible presence of enemy elements.
- **Threats from the authorities and radical right-wing movements**. These include harassment, threats in social media and potential hate crimes against civic activists and human rights defenders.
- **Risks associated with mine hazards in Ukraine**. A large number of explosives is a constant threat to life and health while traveling and working in the deoccupied territories.

2.2. MAIN MENTAL SECURITY THREATS AND CHALLENGES

Equally serious are threats to the mental health and psychological well-being of activists and NGO employees. The most frequently mentioned problems in this sphere are as follows:

- Professional burnout, which was mentioned in 90% of the answers about mental security. Respondents disclosed in detail the reasons for their burnout, in particular:
 - Irregular working hours and lack of appropriate days off
 - Excessive workload and exceeding the acceptable cope of tasks
 - Constant emotionally exhausting communication with vulnerable categories of population.
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which is a common consequence of experiences of war, loss and working in extreme environments.
- Anxiety disorders and depression, which often develop against a background of chronic stress, uncertainty and emotional upheaval that can lead to decreased motivation and performance.
- Exhaustion and fatigue that builds up over time due to the intensity and complexity of war work. This not only directly affects the well-being of activists, but also sets the stage for increased conflict within organizations.

2.3. MAIN DIGITAL SECURITY THREATS AND CHALLENGES

The issue of **digital dangers** is also important, but interest in this topic has significantly decreased compared to previous years. The most frequently mentioned issues:

- The use of unreliable applications, software and messengers
- Neglect of saving information in cloud storage
- Phishing attacks on employee emails
- Cyberattacks, hacking, spam
- Dissemination of fake information
- Risks associated with storing databases of humanitarian aid beneficiaries
- Security threats to personal information of the team and beneficiaries
- Vulnerability of communication channels
- Insufficient digital security of financial processes, especially when it comes to raising funds using bank cards

2.4. MAIN LEGAL SECURITY THREATS AND CHALLENGES

Legal security threats were the least mentioned issues among security threats, including:

- Biased attitude on the part of fiscal authorities and arbitrariness of tax officials
- Inconsistency between state legislation and banks, in particular, unreasonable demands of banks to provide passport data of CSO founders
- Low awareness of changes in legislation, especially in the area of humanitarian aid. This increases the risks of inadvertent violation of legal norms and creates uncertainty for organizations
- Insufficient legal support for the activities of volunteers, who often act independently and try to avoid bureaucracy. As a consequence, “most actions do not have proper legal support”
- Low legal awareness of volunteers
- High demand for legal information and legal protection from vulnerable groups such as IDPs, veterans and their family members

- Shortage of legal staff. As one respondent noted: “one lawyer in the organization cannot cope with large workloads”
- Risks associated with inadequate government decisions and legislation that could jeopardize CSOs' activities
- Illegal wiretapping.

3. AVAILABILITY AND ROLE OF SECURITY MANAGERS IN ORGANIZATIONS

According to the survey results, only a small proportion of organizations have designated specialists who deal with security issues. Of the 63 organizations surveyed, only 11 have security managers, or those who perform the role of security manager in one way or another.

This division of responsibilities may be due to organizations' limited resources or a lack of understanding of the importance of having a separate security professional. The absence of a security manager can lead to a lack of attention to security, ineffective risk management, and vulnerability to potential threats.

For clarity, the survey results can be visualized in the form of a chart:

(Organizations that have security managers: 11 (17.5%). Organizations that do not have security managers: 52 (82.5%))



52 organizations out of those surveyed do not have security managers.

These results highlight the need to raise awareness of the importance of having individual security professionals in civil society organizations, as well as providing them with the necessary support and resources to carry out their duties effectively.

4. AVAILABILITY OF CURRENT SECURITY DOCUMENTATION IN ORGANIZATIONS

According to the survey results, most civil society organizations do not have security policies, procedures, plans and protocols in place.

Of the 63 organizations surveyed:

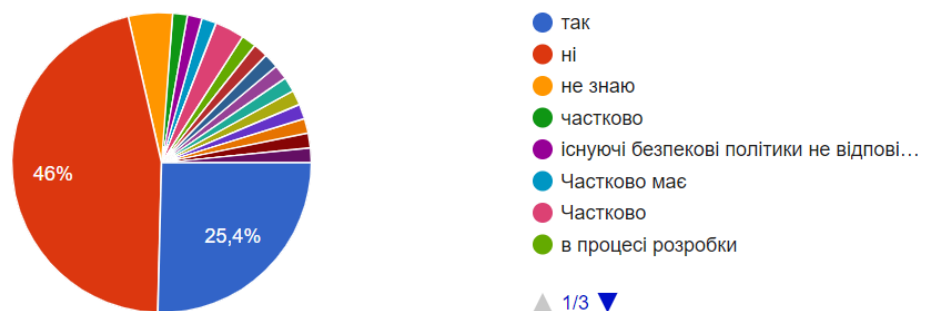
- **29 (46%) do not have valid security documentation**
- **16 (25.4%) have developed security policies and procedures**

- **3 (4.8%) are not aware of the existence of such documents in their organization**
- **5 (7.9%) have partially developed safety documentation**
- **4 (6.3%) have security documentation in the development stage**

In addition, the following responses were obtained **(9,6%)** :

- Policies are in place but **do not satisfy the organization and need to be improved and finalized**
- There are security policies in place at the national level that apply to the organization, but they **are limited to safeguarding and general safety recommendations** for working in natural settings
- Existing security policies **need to be updated, revised and systematized**
- **Security documentation does not meet the challenges of today**, it is planned to be updated in 2024
- The existing security plan **was not updated** when the organization expanded from 15 to 45 people and the **existing security policy is not viable** and was developed by an incompetent person
- There is no global security documentation, **only individual decisions** made and discussed without proper recording

These findings highlight the need to pay more attention to the development and implementation of existing security documentation in civil society organizations, and to ensure that it is regularly updated and relevant to current challenges.



5. ORGANIZATIONS' SECURITY NEEDS

5.1. ORGANIZATIONS' SUPPORT NEEDS TO STRENGTHEN CAPACITY TO RESPOND TO TODAY'S CHALLENGES

The survey revealed that most organizations need support, in particular (*respondents had the opportunity to choose several answer options, so the percentage of answers is as follows*):

- 57.1% need access to knowledge and funding
- 55.7% need funding
- 52.4% need training on strengthening organization's resilience in times of war
- 46% need planning/training on various types of security
- 39.7% need crisis strategic planning

- 1.6% need additional protection for their organization
- 1.6% need better legal literacy

A mere 2 respondents indicated that they did not need any type of support, one of them added that training was perceived as an additional burden and they were sure that they did not need such support.

5.2. THE NEED FOR SECURITY AUDIT

Security audit is an important tool for assessing aspects of digital, physical and legal security in the activities of civil society organizations (CSOs).

CSO security audit is a process of comprehensive assessment of the organization's security system levels, taking into account an assessment of three factors: assessment of personnel, processes and technical support.

According to the survey results:

- 41.3% do not have the resource to conduct a security audit
- 35% need to conduct a security audit
- 22.2% do not need a security audit
- 1.6% recently conducted a security audit

This data indicates that a large proportion of the CSOs surveyed (35%) need a security audit but do not have sufficient resources to implement one. This underscores the need to provide support and resources for CSOs seeking to improve their security situation through peer review and guidance.

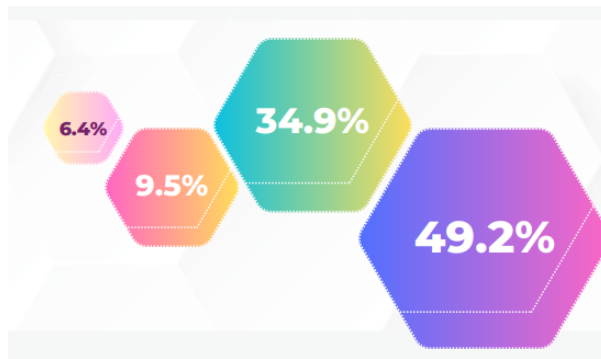
5.3. THE NEED TO DEVELOP SECURITY DOCUMENTATION

The development of security policies, procedures, plans and protocols is an important part of ensuring that civil society organizations operate effectively.

Policies and procedures for CSOs are almost always documented sets of internal rules that help organizations operate effectively while adhering to certain goals and values. Policies establish basic principles and directions for action, while procedures define specific steps and sequences of actions to accomplish tasks.

In CSOs, such policies and procedures can cover various aspects such as financial management, working with volunteers/people, communication with the public, protection of personal data of employees and participants in educational/training activities, security, etc. They help to create structure and order in the organization's operations, ensuring that it is stable and fit for purpose.

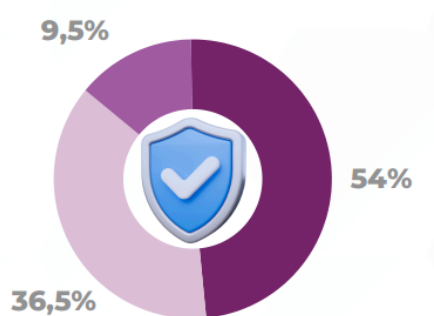
According to the survey results:



- 49.2% need to develop safety documentation
- 34.9% do not have the appropriate resource and knowledge to create policies and procedures
- 9.5% do not need to develop safety documentation
- 6.3% have developed and implemented policies and procedures

6. SAFETY COMPETENCIES AND TRAINING NEEDS

The survey results indicate that a significant proportion of civil society organizations (CSOs) pay attention to improving the security competencies of their teams.



54 % of the surveyed organizations **offer safety training, first aid training, self-defense courses, etc.**, however, **36.5%** of the organizations do not have the resource for relevant training and **9.5%** do not implement such activities.

At the same time, the majority of respondents (**95%**) **feel the need for additional security training. The most in-demand topics include:**

- CSO digital security (25%)
- First aid (20%)
- Mental security and psychological first aid (22%)
- Legal security of organizations (11%)
- Security fundraising (6%)
- Physical safety of CSOs and activists, including mine and fire safety, physical training and self-defense (16%)

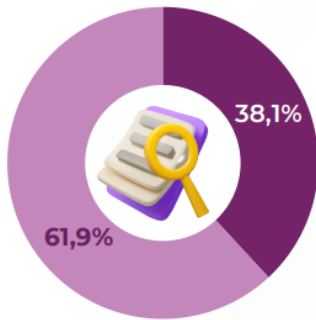
Regarding **formats for communicating security topics** (respondents prefer the below (respondents had the opportunity to choose several answer options, so the percentage of answers is as follows):

- Trainings/webinars with active audience engagement (76.2%)
- Lectures/podcasts (38.1%)

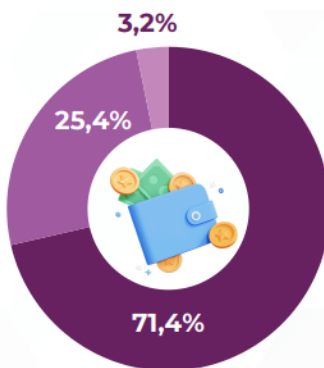
- Manuals/guides/notes (36.5%)
- Videos/reels/animation (35%)
- Infographics and scribing (30.2%)
- Analytics/articles/information compilations (20%)

Respondents also emphasize the importance of comfort, safety, efficiency and optimal duration of training.

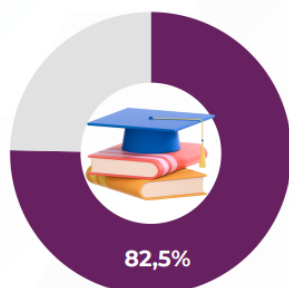
7. AWARENESS AND EXPERIENCE IN RAISING FUNDS FOR CSO SECURITY



Survey results indicate a **lack of awareness among civil society organizations about the existence of grant funds** and other security opportunities. A mere 38.1% of the surveyed organizations are aware of such opportunities while 61.9% do not have this information.



Accordingly, the majority of CSOs (**71.4%**) **have not raised grant funds for the security** of their organizations, activists and volunteers. Only 25.4% of surveyed organizations have experience in obtaining such funding, and 3.2% do not have information on this issue.



At the same time, the vast majority of surveyed organizations (**82.5%**) **have a need for training on CSO security fundraising**.

These results indicate that there is an urgent need to raise CSOs' awareness of available security fundraising opportunities and to develop their fundraising competencies.

Appropriate awareness campaigns and training activities can significantly strengthen CSOs' ability to ensure their own security and sustainability.

8. RESPONDENTS' REFLECTIONS ON CSO SECURITY

The final question of the survey asked respondents to share their thoughts and ideas about their organizations' security needs. The responses received highlight a number of important aspects and challenges that civil society organizations (CSOs) face in the area of security.

- "Based on preliminary information, the security needs of an organization, especially a non-governmental organization (NGO) engaged in relief or social work, can be quite pronounced and specific.

An important aspect is the ability to identify individuals with whom the organization comes into contact and to check their backgrounds, in particular criminal records or current wanted status. This not only ensures the safety of the organization's members, but also helps to avoid the risks associated with inadvertently collaborating with individuals who could harm the organization's reputation or operations.

It is particularly important for an NGO that engages in outreach to have access to reliable tools to verify the identity and background of individuals. This may include, but is not limited to, the use of criminal records databases, wanted person tracking systems, and other information-gathering tools.

In addition, it is important to implement internal security procedures, such as thorough screening and vetting of volunteers and staff, as well as regular security training.

Moreover, it is important to collaborate with local law enforcement agencies and other organizations to share information and increase general awareness of potential threats. This may include participation in joint programs or networks to improve security not only within an individual organization, but also in the broader community.

The bottom line is that it is important for an NGO, especially one that works in the field of aid, to pay maximum attention to security needs, including the identification of individuals and background checks, to ensure the safety of its members and maintain a high level of trust and reputation in the community."

- "We don't openly talk about security, but everyone realizes that it is severely compromised because of the war. Community activities, unless they are related to AFU assistance, turn into survival and plugging the leaks. The diminishing importance of everything, including childhood, is becoming increasingly widespread. We really risk losing the social sphere. "
- "There is a great need for mental health support and prevention of professional burnout."
- "Mental health is number one on the list.."

- “All fundraising is focused on medical and psychological care for the affected population and we forget that we are acting in extreme conditions ourselves and burn out from the team's self-sacrificing attitudes.”
- "The problem of our organization regarding security is that the security component is present in the life of the organization mainly only in the format when we provide a service to other organizations. Because that's our project activity and there are donor funds for that. And when it comes to establishing security measures and proper protocol and security, this has been put on the back burner for two years. And this is despite the fact that some members of the team receive regular threats from the representatives of radical right-wing movements. And this problem, despite internal discussions, has not been solved in any way. That is why I am writing that we need an external audit. Because the internal voices of team members are not listened to."
- “Until now, I didn't know that it was possible to implement a security policy in an organized manner.”
- "We have done trainings on preventing gender-based security challenges, but none specifically for CSOs. There is a great need for tactical combat casualty care, security audit of territories, security of mass events, sanitary security during pandemic and environmental disasters, etc."
- "Our organization has gotten to the point where it understands the need to develop security policies and procedures for all areas: physical, digital, legal, psychological security. Because all the members of our organization are IDPs, and we work with IDPs. And we need help in this area."
- "The security area in the broad spectrum is underestimated within the organization (even by the control and audit bodies, not to mention the majority of volunteers). In addition, the implementation of all policies, protocols, falls on the shoulders of volunteers, who sabotage in every possible way any “unnecessary” filling out of documentation. Everyone agrees that something needs to be done about safety, but they are not ready to do it themselves."
- "There is no end of work to be done here. Security is the last thing that volunteers think about and they have even less resources to improve it."
- “It requires the involvement of a separate person, which in turn requires resources, which are always scarce. And usually this is necessary for the projects which are difficult for us to justify, and there is no resource to write new ones focusing solely on safety.”
- "Training for social workers (service providers) in the process of providing services to people with communicable diseases. It is also important to prevent burnout."
- “We need helmets, body armor 4+, armored car.”

- “Participation in first aid training.”

9. CONCLUSIONS

- Civil society organizations in Ukraine face various security challenges, with physical and mental security risks having the highest priority. Threats related to the war, professional burnout and psychological well-being are the most acute ones for CSOs.
- Most of the surveyed organizations do not have separate security specialists and surveyed security documentation, indicating a lack of attention to this aspect of operations and a need to strengthen CSOs' security capacity.
- CSOs need a variety of support to strengthen their resilience, including access to knowledge and funding, training on various aspects of security, crisis planning, and security audits. The development of security policies and procedures is also an urgent need for many organizations.
- There is a significant demand for additional security training among CSOs, especially on digital security, first aid, mental health and legal security. It is important to ensure that such training is affordable and effective, taking into account the preferences of CSOs regarding formats.
- There is a lack of CSO awareness of security fundraising opportunities and lack of fundraising experience in this area. Raising awareness and developing competencies in security fundraising is an important area for CSO capacity building.
- Respondents' reflections highlight the complexity of CSOs' security needs and the need for a systematic approach to addressing them that takes into account the specifics of the organizations' activities, the specifics of the current context, and the long-term implications for the sustainability of the sector.

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