

Analysis: Ukraine Civil Society Effectively Pivots to Address Exigencies of Russia's Invasion but Post-War Thinking is Crucial for CSOs and the International Community

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Context Development & Early Observations

Launched on February 24, 2022, the unprovoked and unjustified Russia's war has had a devastating impact on Ukraine. As of July 4, the UN reported 11,152 civilian casualties in Ukraine, including 4,889 killed and 6,263 injured, noting that the actual numbers are considerably higher¹.

More than one-third of Ukrainians have been forced from their homes, with 6.25 million displaced internally² and more than 5.65 million finding refuge outside of the country³ and now requiring \$2.25 billion in humanitarian assistance⁴.

The war has resulted in the loss of 4.8 million jobs⁵, equal to 30 per cent of pre-conflict employment in Ukraine, while 42% of the country's small businesses had closed by March 2022⁶. Russia's military invasion has had a significant impact on the Ukrainian social protection system both in terms of increased expenditure and decreased revenue: the country requires an additional \$5 billion each month⁷ to cover essential services and pay soldiers' salaries. The physical damage caused by Russia's military invasion is estimated to have reached \$94 billion, with reconstruction believed to require over half a trillion dollars.⁸

Consumer inflation has spiraled reaching 20.1% in June 2022 in annual terms⁹. The magnitude of the humanitarian crisis unleashed by the war is staggering. Ukraine's economy is

¹<https://disasterphilanthropy.org/disasters/ukraine-humanitarian-crisis/>

² <https://displacement.iom.int/reports/ukraine-internal-displacement-report-general-population-survey-round-6-17-june-2022-23-june>

³ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

⁴ <https://twitter.com/UNOCHA/status/1518872318084276224?s=20&t=0KzMSMP2vNDjgTSzETgX-Q>

⁵ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/documents/briefingnote/wcms_844295.pdf

⁶ <https://theworld.org/stories/2022-06-23/we-re-just-breaking-even-small-businesses-ukraine-reopening-uncertain-climate>

⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-faces-budget-cut-without-5-bln-monthly-external-aid-parliamentarian-2022-06-14/>

⁸ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/05/20/ukraine-front-line-economy-loans-resources-russia-war/>

⁹ <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-economy/3524197-consumer-inflation-in-ukraine-exceeds-20-central-bank.html#:~:text=Consumer%20inflation%20in%20Ukraine%20in.review%20for%20July%2C%20Ukrinform%20report.>

expected to shrink by an estimated 45.1% this year, according to World Bank,¹⁰ while UNDP estimates that the vast majority of Ukrainians will face “extreme economic vulnerability” by the end of the year if the war continues¹¹.

With military action increasingly concentrating in the east of Ukraine, there has been a sense of normalcy returning to Kyiv¹² and other regions away from active war zones with businesses reopening and nearly 4.5 million displaced Ukrainians returning home¹³. However, the military and humanitarian situation and, correspondingly, the needs and challenges of Ukrainians remain very different in various parts of the country¹⁴. Ukrainians based in safe geographic locations, those who are in active conflict zones, and those on occupied territories live in parallel realities.

Nearly 13 million Ukrainians¹⁵ who continue to be stranded in affected areas or are unable to leave due to heightened security risks, the destruction of infrastructure or lack of resources, require comprehensive emergency assistance, including evacuation and shelter, access to food, medicines, basic needs goods, information and financial aid. 6.25 million citizens displaced to safe locations need assistance with temporary housing, covering costs of living, healthcare, rehabilitation and integration into their temporary communities. Ukrainians living in safe locations, including those who have returned home, require recovery assistance in such areas as employment (over 2.7 million returnees are without income since the war began), education and healthcare.

These different realities also reflect varying opportunities and scope for citizens to engage in addressing issues of concern and civil society to respond to the emergent challenges. While citizens and CSOs in affected areas are overwhelmingly concerned with ensuring basic survival, civil society groups in safe locations have been concentrating on several converging themes, including reestablishing operations, distribution of humanitarian aid, international advocacy, participation in recovery plans, and documenting war crimes.

Whether and how these different realities will change depends on how Russia’s war in Ukraine develops further. There are three main scenarios¹⁶:

- *Scenario 1. Russia advances and takes over more territory of Ukraine.*

Russia’s continuing progress in eastern Ukraine would break Ukrainians’ resistance capacity and allow Russia’s military to take over the territory from Donbas to the west of Crimea. Russia would then consolidate its control of Ukraine’s Black Sea coast, effectively landlocking the country and annexing parts of the south and east. The Kremlin would declare “victory” and offer a cease-fire on conditions that Kyiv concedes lost territories. Exhausted by economic and

¹⁰ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/04/10/russian-invasion-to-shrink-ukraine-economy-by-45-percent-this-year>

¹¹ <https://www.undp.org/press-releases/every-day-delayed-peace-will-accelerate-freefall-poverty-ukraine-warns-undp>

¹² <https://www.newyorker.com/podcast/politics-and-more/normalcy-returns-to-kyiv-as-russia-doubles-down-in-eastern-ukraine>

¹³ <https://ukraine.iom.int/news/almost-45-million-ukrainians-returned-home-displacement-need-recovery-support-iom>

¹⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/map/ukraine/ukraine-situation-overview-map-22-june-2022>

¹⁵ <https://www.voanews.com/a/four-months-into-war-more-ukrainians-decide-to-flee-besieged-areas/6624135.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/06/briefing/ukraine-war-three-scenarios.html>;
<https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/ukraine-five-scenarios-coming-months>;
<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/three-possible-futures-for-a-frozen-conflict-in-ukraine/>;
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-russia-war-end-11652967707>

humanitarian burdens and fearing escalation, Ukraine's European partners would be pressing Kyiv toward a peace arrangement.

- *Scenario 2. Russia does not advance further, leading to a stalemate.*

Russia would dominate the east but would not advance much further, leading to a stalemate and a war of “positions” characterized by reliance on artillery and missiles rather than on regular offensive ground operations. Ukrainian forces would be effectively halting the enemy but would make minimal progress in regaining territory. Despite growing pressure at home, Putin would be able to keep Russia in the state of war, while Kyiv would resist pressure from the international community to seek peace arrangements. This stalemate could last for many months testing each side's endurance and international community's response amidst glooming global economic crisis.

- *Scenario 3. Ukraine halts and counterattacks regaining territory.*

Increased shipments of western heavy armament, loss of Russia's military morale and Moscow's inability to rapidly replace military equipment would allow Ukraine to successfully counterattack. If the Ukrainians do advance, the minimum target would likely be the lines of control in place the day before the Russia's invasion, leaving Moscow in control of two enclaves in Donbas and Crimea. Having received a boost of confidence with the approval of its EU candidacy status¹⁷, Ukraine would be tempted to engage in the offensive. However, its European partners are likely to press Kyiv to limit the counterattack fearing escalation and prioritizing “achieving peace” over “achieving victory”.

Other scenarios, such as the “land for peace” deal¹⁸ (whereby Ukraine regains Donbas but agrees to cede Crimea) or “return to square one”¹⁹ (return to the lines of control in place on February 23, 2022), have been suggested as possible endgames and have a common denominator in that there would be a peace arrangement in place.

While different military outcomes are plausible, it is difficult to assign probability value to any of them. Pact believes that in the circumstances of unpredictability it is important to equally consider all of the above scenarios to ensure adaptive decision-making and management to effectively support Ukrainian civil society, on which the war has had a significant impact.

In November 2021, the Civic Engagement Poll conducted by ENGAGE²⁰ found that only 4% of Ukrainians were actively involved in civil society organization activities and just 7% claimed to be regular participants in community events. The war has revealed that, despite these low formal measures, there was a powerful undercurrent in Ukrainian civil society that outpoured in the form of civil resistance and organizing for the common good²¹. Thus, according to Rating Group's April poll²², nearly 80% of Ukrainians are involved in defending their country in one way or another: 45% of the respondents help protect the country by financial contributions; 35% volunteer to help others or the military and 18% participate in information resistance.

While citizen engagement in addressing war challenges has been on the rise, formalized CSOs came under an existential threat with the start of Russia's military aggression. Top challenges that Ukrainian CSOs had to address included ensuring safety and security of staff and

¹⁷ <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/06/23/approved-eu-countries-endorse-ukraine-and-moldova-as-official-candidates-to-join-bloc>

¹⁸ <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/ukraine-five-scenarios-coming-months>

¹⁹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/04/ukraine-russia-war-consequences/629541/>

²⁰ <https://dif.org.ua/en/article/missing-out-on-opportunities-despite-potential-benefit-citizens-are-skeptical-about-engaging-in-cso-activities-or-supporting-them-financially>

²¹ <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2022/05/04/did-ukraines-civil-society-help-turn-back-the-russians/>

²² https://ratinggroup.ua/en/research/ukraine/vosmoy_obschenacionalnyy_opros_ukraina_v_usloviyah_voyny_6_apr_elya_2022.html

organizational assets, safeguarding operational continuity, and adjusting programmatic priorities to remain relevant to the emergent needs of the society.

While 28 partners of ENGAGE pivoted their activities, Pact has observed that many CSOs downplayed the risks of Russia's invasion and remained reluctant to think strategically about managing operational risks and potential reprogramming. International funders have played a key role in nudging their CSO partners to pivot activities and offered them flexibility to repurpose existing funding towards organizational survival and emergency response interventions. While this approach by the funders has allowed partner CSOs to stay afloat and relevant, it inevitably created conditions for CSOs' response agendas to be increasingly donor driven. Institutional funding became equal to project support, which suggests that ensuring the survival of its civil society partners and preserving their legacy may be as important to funders as achieving new impacts.

While mobilizing CSOs' work around select emergency response areas felt like a necessary step to ensure adequate response to exigencies of the war, the post February 24 period brought to light early lessons of the war-torn civil society advocacy landscape. These early lessons are not only preliminary but also potential targets to persistently address moving forward, given the fluid nature of the potential outcomes of the war and the adaptive capacities that both donors and civil society actors demonstrate and continuously develop:

- In the early response phase, donors have adopted a two-pronged strategy: on the one hand, they rendered immediate assistance – often in the form of expanded operational flexibilities as well as rapid award increases – to current preferred CSO partners. Well-established Kyiv- and Western Ukraine-based CSOs who maintained the closest cooperation with international donors before the war erupted were among the first to respond to the humanitarian challenges and were the first to receive additional donor support.
- On the other hand, international donors, almost without exception, launched new institutional support facilities to help CSOs overcome sudden existential challenges. Most grant-making activities conducted in the first months of the war have adopted institutional (core or operational) grant-making in their toolboxes.
- The logistical barriers caused by evacuation and relocation of millions of Ukrainians and the expediency with which international donors responded to the impact of the war on CSOs, inevitably meant that effective donor coordination was deprioritized, often resulting in multiple awards for similar activities, initiatives, and actors.
- Another fallout of the war is the sudden and almost complete disappearance of private sector contribution. While the private sector has withdrawn from tangible support to on-going partnerships with CSOs, it has been leading the emergency response by example. Private schools launched free online classes for children, restaurants donate meals for Ukraine's defenders and popular fashion brands provide protective clothing for soldiers, while large retailers Rozetka and Fozzy Group, delivery service Nova Poshta, the Kyiv School of Economics, and many others collectively raised \$26 million to purchase military gear²³. Other large businesses actively fundraise to support the Ukrainian army and territorial defense units, provide food kits to vulnerable groups, help counter Kremlin-backed propaganda, and deliver medicines, clothing, and hygiene products to refugees²⁴. Ukrainian oligarchs have provided substantial donations towards defense and humanitarian

²³ <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2022/05/04/did-ukraines-civil-society-help-turn-back-the-russians/>

²⁴ <https://eba.com.ua/en/biznes-prodovzhuye-pidtrymuvaty-krayinu-pid-chas-vijny/>

needs²⁵, going as far as Rinat Akhmetov promising to rebuild Mariupol once Russia's occupation is over.

- Three months into the war, perplexing parallel realities that exist in Ukraine began to take shape in civil society too. Similar to the post-Euromaidan era, there are now at least two parallel civil societies: a well-funded, institutionalized, and organized traditional CSO community and an agile, novel but fragmented emerging community of activists, humanitarian response groups, volunteer movements and private sector initiatives. Finally, there are also two parallel notions of the development trajectory: one that day-to-day stresses immediate and short-term objectives (such as, humanitarian response or documenting war atrocities), and one that looks into the post-war reconstruction, recovery, and reforms.
- Prioritization of survival and emergency response has had an impact on some fundamental areas of civil society's work. The anti-corruption sector (particularly AntAC together with ANTS) has been successful in advocating internationally for more rigorous military and humanitarian aid to Ukraine and the country's EU integration, which undermined their role in advancing the anti-corruption reform, strengthening anti-corruption institutions and disclosing corruption cases at home, especially amidst growing concerns over possible misuse of western aid²⁶. Despite ENGAGE As VoxUkraine experts summarized, *"before Russia invaded Ukraine..., civil society was very active in pressuring the government to appoint a top anti-corruption prosecutor. Now civil groups are focused on the war, but after Ukraine wins (and especially if it has a roadmap for the EU accession), the internal problems will be high on the agenda again."*²⁷ Similarly, in the civic oversight sector there is an impression that everyone is watchdogging the enemy, while very few continue to work toward transparency and holding the government accountable.
- Russia's war tore apart not just families, friends, and colleagues, but also civil society networks. Facing shock, relocation, regrouping, and communication challenges, many CSOs deprioritized coalition work or repurposed activities of their networks. Thus, the Reanimation Package of Reforms remained silent for a while, while human rights defenders were among the first to reformulate network priorities around war crimes documentation. Anti-corruption CSOs all went in their own directions at first, and later pivoted their priorities away from their missions towards international advocacy (e.g., through the Warsaw-based International Center for Ukrainian Victory), EU integration and war-related analytics. Elsewhere, civic education CSOs lack collaboration in designing similar online platforms, while such watchdogs as ZIC and CHESNO appear to be duplicating each other's work. Both donor coordination and CSO coordination suffered. While some networks will recover, others might never again recuperate, or will have their role taken over in the future.

Conclusions for USAID Assistance

²⁵ <https://forbes.ua/inside/pidstavili-pleche-skilki-naybagatshi-ukraintsi-vitratili-na-dopomogu-armii-ta-ukraintsyam-za-chas-viyni-03052022-5763>

²⁶ <https://www.voanews.com/a/ukraine-s-anti-corruption-campaigners-see-no-misuse-of-western-military-aid/6587614.html>

²⁷ <https://voxukraine.org/en/corruption-in-ukraine-how-important-is-the-problem/>

USAID, other international donors, and implementing organizations would need to adapt their assistance priorities and approaches depending on which of the war scenarios plays out.

Under the *first scenario of Russia's continued military expansion*, the need to support the full spectrum of emergency response by civil society will persist. Russia's extended offensive will also necessitate the support of sustaining morale and the resistance capacity of the Ukrainian nation, and assistance to CSOs to compliment functions of state institutions and private sector initiatives, fend off Russia's propaganda and advocate for continued military, financial, and humanitarian international aid to Ukraine. Extension of the active phase of the war will push back any reconstruction and recovery plans, requiring mobilization of all resources to achieve peace and help those in most need. It would still be crucial for USAID to take a critical look at exiting partnerships and consider whether patching up the old CSO foundation and putting out fires is the right way forward. Similar to the Revolution of Dignity, the war has revealed a wider yet less formalized civil society and actualized the role of the private sector, which may offer new opportunities for USAID to render more effective emergency response while laying ground for a Ukrainian civil society of the future. Also true under the next two scenarios, assistance should be provided to help CSOs reconnect and rebuild pre-war coalitions, while creating space for new networks to emerge and grow.

Under the *second scenario of a stalemate*, USAID is encouraged to exercise a sectoral development approach, which would imply two priorities: a) supporting emergency and recovery response by those old and new civic groups who have proven to be most effective in doing that and who have best access to the most vulnerable constituencies; and b) simultaneously stimulating non-emergency relief CSOs' return to their original missions of advocating for reforms, holding the government accountable and educating Ukrainians to be more effective citizens. Supporting guiding civil society coalitions, similar to the Reanimation Package of Reforms²⁸ that emerged after the Revolution of Dignity, would be instrumental in strengthening civil society influencing capacity. Additional mechanisms would have to be put in place to ensure that the emergent activist and volunteer initiatives and their network have adequate access to USAID resources so that they do not lose momentum and are able to compete with "privileged" formalized civil society groups.

In the circumstances of a stalemate, it would be important to rethink the current consensus around Ukraine and recognize that in order to reconcile the different realities in the country, the one-size-fits-all approach will have to be abandoned. Donors and implementers would have to reassess their "preferred partnerships" with CSOs with the view of tapping into the new civic spirit brought about by the war. Interventions that further strengthen national unity and the resistance spirit of Ukrainians will be necessary to help the country endure the protracted crisis, while assisting humanitarian and economic recovery as well as strengthening state institutions will gain relevance.

Assistance needs and approaches under the stalemate situation will be amplified under the *third scenario of Ukraine's successful counter-offensive* or any other scenario that entails a peace arrangement with Russia. In either case, more normalcy would return and be more evenly spread across the country allowing for full-fledged recovery, reconstruction, and reforms. CSOs who had pivoted their activities earlier in response to humanitarian crises would require assistance in fully returning to their original missions, constituencies and stakeholders.

Similar to the Revolution of Dignity²⁹, the war has revealed high levels of informal and effective organizing in the society – the potential which will absolutely need to be capitalized on

²⁸ <https://rpr.org.ua/en/>

²⁹ <https://www.norc.org/Research/Projects/Pages/ukraine-civil-society-assessment.aspx>

and engaged with when rebuilding Ukraine. It will be important to grasp what the new civil society looks like and lend it adequate support because, as post-Maidan experience shows, war veterans, humanitarian aid coordinators, volunteer leaders, and individual activists are likely to form a sizable portion of Ukraine's new political elite. Equally crucial will be the understanding of the basis for recovery and reconstruction plans and ensuring that such plans emanate from and involve the right sources, and are based on adequate evidence and realistic objectives.

Prioritizing genuine organizational adaptive and influencing capacities over institutional loyalty and readiness to align political positions with those of the funders would allow USAID to effectively engage with the emergent civil society to address one of key assistance priorities under the third scenario – strengthening and rebuilding state institutions or abandoning old and building brand new state structures. As more normalcy returns under this scenario, consideration should be given to ways of using the civic infrastructure that has been created during the war (e.g., in Lviv) for reconstruction purposes.

While true for any of the suggested war development vectors, donor coordination principles and mechanisms will need to be meaningfully revisited under the third scenario to ensure accountable and effective use of international aid. This will be a necessary response to the potentially increased influx of western funding and increased public scrutiny of how the recovery and reconstruction funding is being used.

