

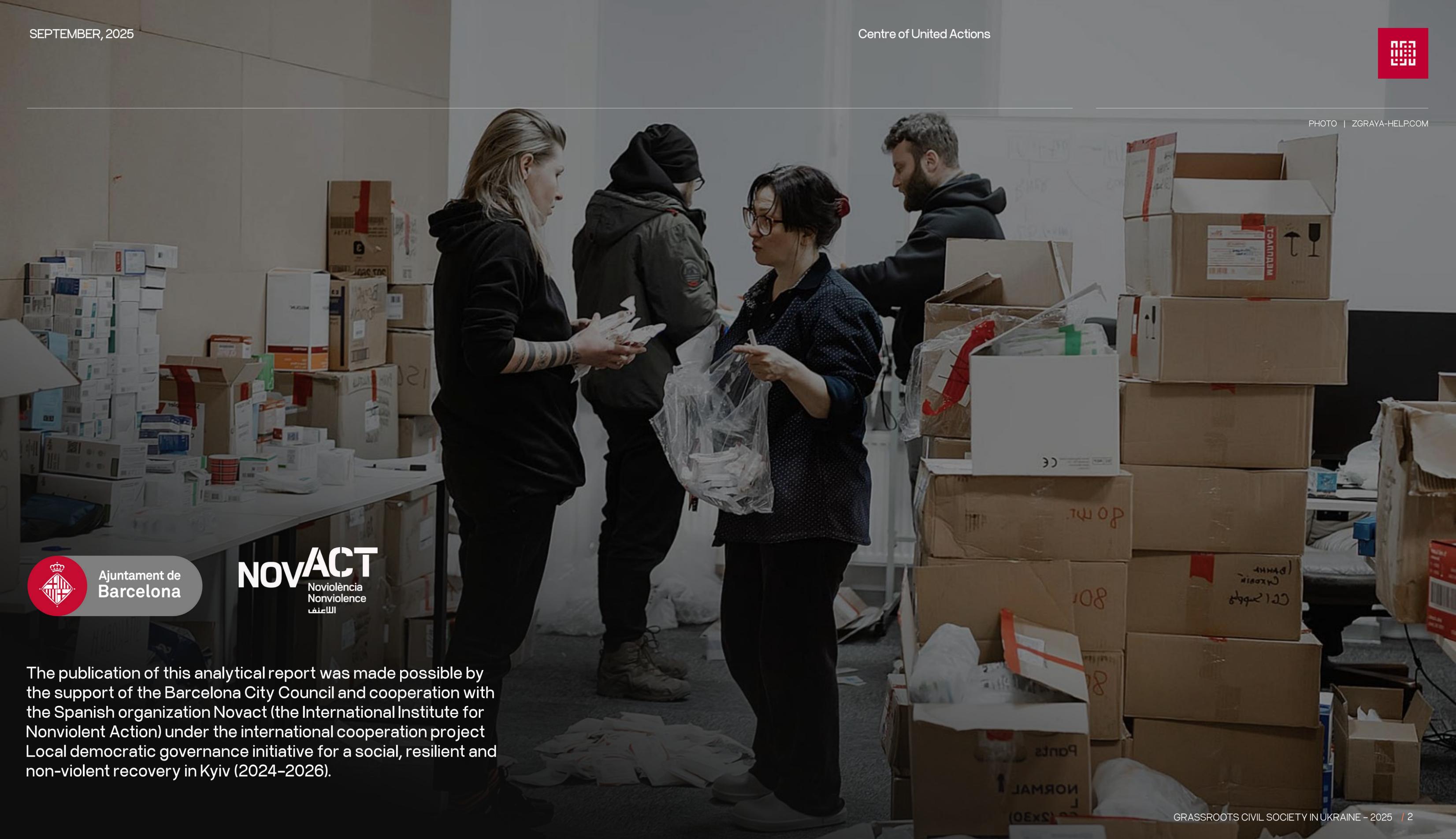


LOCAL CIVIC INITIATIVES OF KYIV OBLAST



Transformations, interaction and
cooperation, challenges and needs

Grassroots Civil Society
in Ukraine – 2025



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Introduction

During the full-scale war, Ukrainian society has demonstrated a high level of self-organization and resilience amid a systemic crisis.



One of the manifestations of its transformation has been the emergence of new and the mobilization of already existing local civic initiatives. These grassroots organizations display remarkable flexibility in meeting the urgent needs of their communities and have become not only instrumental in providing humanitarian aid and support for the defense forces, but also platforms for developing civic participation, solidarity, and democratic governance practices in wartime.

The Centre of United Actions has been studying and promoting the work of Ukrainian civil society during the full-scale war for several years now. In this study, we examined the activities of grassroots organizations at the local level, in particular civic initiatives in Kyiv and Kyiv oblast, which emerged or became more active after the full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022.



PHOTO | ZGRAYA-HELPCOM



Research methodology



Methodology

The research goal

The research goal was to identify the needs and challenges faced by local civic initiatives in Kyiv and Kyiv oblast that emerged or became more active after the full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, as well as to analyze the specifics of their cooperation and interaction with other local initiatives, local self-government bodies, political parties, local councilors, international organizations, and other stakeholders.

Special attention was paid to identifying remarkable stories of resistance and resilience that can serve as examples to follow and scale. In addition, the study aimed to collect solutions that helped civic initiatives address problems in their work and cooperation with stakeholders.



The data gathered by the research team will subsequently be used to **develop a training course** on enhancing the competencies and boosting the capacities of local civic initiatives' leaders.

To achieve this goal, the following research objectives were set:



- * identify the key motivations and reasons why leaders of local civic initiatives establish or join them
 - * determine why local initiatives decide to officially register or, conversely, choose to remain informal associations
 - * investigate how local initiatives have evolved since their inception: changes in areas of activity, target audiences, levels of institutionalization, etc.
- * assess how local civic initiatives cooperate or interact with local self-government bodies, local branches of political parties, local councilors, businesses, other civic initiatives, and donor organizations, in particular:
 - / 01 identify problems that hinder effective cooperation with the abovementioned stakeholders
 - / 02 collect solutions proposed by initiative leaders to address the problems hindering effective cooperation
 - * identify the needs of local civic initiatives
 - * identify the problems faced by local civic initiatives
 - * propose possible ways to address their problems and meet their needs.



Methodology

Research stages

STAGE 01

During the first stage, 15 leaders of local civic initiatives were selected based on the results of an online survey and a screening questionnaire.

This stage made it possible to distinguish local civic initiatives from other types of initiatives and to categorize them for further analysis. The following selection criteria were used: legal status, areas of activity, and place of activity (see Table 1). In addition, the data obtained via the survey was used to create a database with information about the civic initiatives.

STAGE 02

During the second stage, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the fifteen selected leaders of local civic initiatives.

Recruitment of initiative leaders for participation was conducted through:



- * announcements on the website, Facebook and Instagram pages, and email newsletters of the Centre of United Actions
- * posts in Facebook groups of local communities and volunteer networks in Kyiv oblast, on platforms with grant opportunities, and in local media
- * email newsletters to local civic initiatives in Kyiv oblast that had participated in previous studies by the Centre of United Actions.

Fieldwork timeline

Screening questionnaire survey
MAY 1-31, 2025

Semi-structured in-depth interviews
JUNE 1-30, 2025

Research scope

The city of Kyiv & Kyiv oblast





Methodology

Methodological challenges

/ 01

Lack of a clear distinction between different types of initiatives (local civic movements, volunteer communities, informal associations, nationwide initiatives, etc.).

SOLUTION

The concept of “local civic initiatives” was defined so that it could be clearly distinguished from related concepts. At the survey stage, the screening questionnaire included questions that enabled the correct classification of initiatives.

/ 02

Difficulties in engaging unregistered local civic initiatives in the study due to their low public visibility. Some such initiatives do not have social media pages, official contacts, or public presence, which makes it hard to find and reach them.

SOLUTION

A variety of respondent search and recruitment methods were used, from snowball sampling and distribution of questionnaires via social networks to searches in open sources and announcements in dedicated media.

Research limitations

- * This study is exploratory, and its primary focus is on assessing the capacities, needs, challenges, and specifics of the work and interactions with stakeholders of 15 local civic initiatives in Kyiv oblast that were established or registered after the start of the full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022. Therefore, all findings should be considered tentative and representative of the experience of this selected category of initiatives.
- * The study mostly features initiatives that are officially registered, while the experience of informal associations is represented to a lesser extent. Thus, the study results rely mostly on the experience of institutionalized urban civic initiatives.
- * The vast majority of the initiatives covered by the research operate at the city level. Therefore, the specifics of local initiatives in rural and settlement communities – where access to resources and institutional support is typically substantially lower – are covered to a lesser extent.

Ethical aspects

Participation in the study was voluntary. Before the interviews, all civic initiative leaders were informed about the goal and objectives of the study and their right to refuse to answer any question or to end their participation at any moment. In all cases, oral informed consent was obtained for participation in the study and for video recording of the interviews.

The interview recordings were used exclusively by the research team and stored in compliance with confidentiality requirements. All data obtained during the study were processed and stored in anonymized form. The report does not disclose the names of leaders, initiatives, or any other personal identifiers.



Information about the initiatives covered by the study



To gather primary data for the research, we interviewed leaders of local civic initiatives that were created or registered after the full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, in Kyiv and other localities and communities of Kyiv oblast.

In this study, a “civic initiative” is defined as a form of social activity that arises predominantly from the bottom up through voluntary, self-organized actions of citizens (i.e., not initiated or exclusively controlled by the state or businesses), whose main goal is to address community issues.

Civic initiatives may be formal (officially registered) or informal organizations. Local civic initiatives focus primarily on solving community problems at the local level¹, that is, within a specific locality and/or community. Such initiatives may deal with issues of public amenities and improvements, protection of residents' rights, and the implementation of environmental or other projects at the local level. For example, one initiative leader described their organization as follows:



WE ARE AN ENVIRONMENTAL NGO. [OUR] MAIN GOAL IS TO SUPPORT THE ENVIRONMENT AND 'GREEN' PROJECTS SPECIFICALLY IN THE BUCHA COMMUNITY. THEREFORE, WE WORK EXCLUSIVELY WITHIN THE TERRITORY OF THE BUCHA COMMUNITY.*

* Here and throughout, quotations are from interviews with the heads of local civic initiatives.

In total, the study involved the leaders of 15 local civic initiatives from Kyiv oblast that were created or registered after the start of the full-scale invasion.

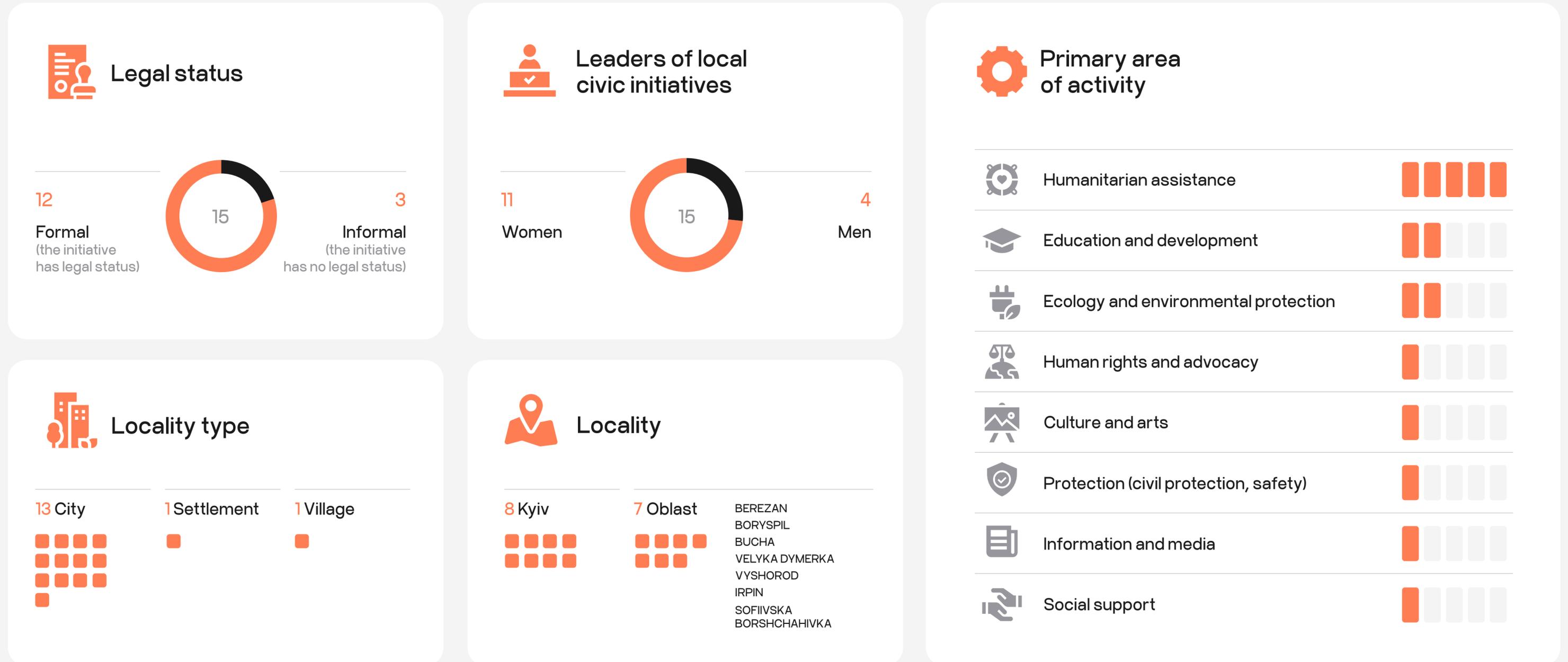
The selection of the initiatives was based on the predefined criteria, more detailed information about the selected initiatives is provided in [Table 1](#).

In addition, the study placed particular emphasis on capturing the experiences of women who were heads of local civic initiatives. Consequently, women made up the majority of participants: 11 women and 4 men.

¹Some initiatives work beyond the local level, combining support at the community level for the families of the fallen and those held in captivity with a nationwide-level advocacy to protect their rights through engagement with state authorities and international institutions.



TABLE 1. LOCAL CIVIC INITIATIVES COVERED BY THE STUDY, BY KEY SELECTION CRITERIA





/ 01

Prior experience and motivation of local civic initiative leaders

1.1. Previous professional
experience

1.2. Motivation to create or
join local civic initiatives



1.2 / Previous professional experience



PHOTO
BE'CHIP.MEDIA

Before creating or joining local civic initiatives, their leaders had very diverse prior professional experience, both in terms of the employment sectors and in the positions they occupied.

Some were engaged in entrepreneurship, others had worked in state institutions or international organizations. Among the leaders were people who had previously worked in law, school education, culture, medicine, marketing, and journalism.

At the same time, the overwhelming majority had no experience working in or participating in civic or volunteer organizations. Their prior civic engagement was mostly limited to short-term volunteering. This included, for example, helping the military or organizing local actions in response to challenges facing their communities. Given the lack of experience in the civic sector, many leaders also lacked experience managing such initiatives.

Their previous professional experience did not always determine their motivation to create or join civic initiatives, but it did affect what resources they could draw on and how they managed the team. The initial set of the organization's capabilities often depended on the prior experience of its leader. For example, those who had previously been entrepreneurs could effectively leverage their experience of working with local businesses to mobilize necessary resources and provide assistance to residents.

However, these same leaders at the beginning were not sufficiently familiar with the specifics of the civic sector and did not have established cooperation with other initiatives or local self-government bodies. This set them apart from leaders who already had prior experience in civic activism before creating their own initiatives, had established contacts with other civic and donor organizations, and understood how to operate in the sector.

”

WE ALSO REACH OUT TO BUSINESSES, AND WE HAVE MANY FRIENDS WHO SUPPORT US ... THAT IS, BUSINESSES PROVIDE US WITH HUMANITARIAN AID, INCLUDING SOME NON-STANDARD ITEMS ... WE HAVE BUSINESSES THAT GIVE CHILDREN VARIOUS SCHOOL SUPPLIES, MODELING CLAY, AND THE LIKE. I CAN GIVE YOU A VERY LONG LIST. CURRENTLY, THIS IS HUMANITARIAN AID THAT WE RECEIVE FROM BUSINESSES.



1.2 / Motivation to create or join local civic initiatives

For most leaders, the key reason to create or join civic initiatives was the full-scale war, which changed their previous roles and statuses in society. Faced with new challenges for the state and communities, they felt an inner need to act, take responsibility, and support others.

/ 01

For most leaders of the initiatives covered by this study, the first steps were rather spontaneous than deliberate: less about purposeful actions to create an initiative and more about the desire to contribute to overcoming the consequences of the full-scale war, mainly within the localities and communities where they lived. Over time, this temporary engagement grew into a more permanent, professional activity. As challenges and needs changed, the initiatives changed their areas of focus and gradually became institutionalized.



I DIDN'T EVEN IMMEDIATELY UNDERSTAND WHO WE WERE AND WHAT WE WERE DOING... THEN EVERYTHING JUST TOOK OFF AND STARTED SPINNING: WAGONS OF DUMPLINGS [VARENYKY], FOOD, CLOTHES, MILITARY STUFF.

/ 02

Sometimes, the motivation to create initiatives was driven by personal tragedies caused by the war, including the death or captivity of loved ones. In such cases, civic activism became a way to cope with trauma and, at the same time, a means of supporting others going through similar experiences.



I AM A MOTHER OF A FALLEN AZOV SOLDIER... THIS PAIN CANNOT BE CONVEYED IN ANY WORDS... BUT IT GAVE ME AN IMPULSE TO WORK IN THIS AREA. TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER AROUND ME A BIT, TO HELP THOSE WHO ARE LIKE ME.



IT'S A PERSONAL STORY – MY NEPHEW, A CONSCRIPT, WAS IN MARIUPOL, FOUGHT THERE, AND THEN WAS CAPTURED. AND WE STARTED LOOKING FOR HIM, FILED THE FORMS EVERYWHERE, FOUND RELATIVES, SOMEHOW ORGANIZED OURSELVES SO THAT TOGETHER... AND LATER, WE CREATED A COORDINATION HEADQUARTERS.

/ 03

For other leaders, a sense of group solidarity was important: the desire to unite comrades-in-arms, establish communication among them, and ensure social protection and cohesion of the veterans' community.

Thus, the full-scale war triggered an unprecedented mobilization of Ukrainian society: thousands of people who had not previously engaged in civic activism began to self-organize, cooperate, and implement grassroots initiatives at the local level. For most leaders of such initiatives, motivation was not a conscious desire to change professions or build a career, but an inner impulse to act at the beginning of the full-scale war.

The full-scale invasion prompted us to engage in civic activism. My husband and I immediately decided not to leave the city... It was important to stay and be useful here, on the 'home front'.



PHOTO
ROMAN BALUK



/ 02

Activities of local civic initiatives

2.1. Goals, issues, and forms of activity

2.2. Transformations of local civic initiatives



2.1 / Goals, issues, and forms of activity



Local civic initiatives covered by the study do not focus on solving a common problem at the local level. Each works in its own field or fields, addressing both the consequences of the full-scale war and challenges that predated it.

Some initiatives focus on providing humanitarian assistance or social support, others work in education and development, ecology and environmental protection, culture and arts, healthcare, information and media, human rights and advocacy, civil protection and safety, or reconstruction (see [Problems of the initiatives covered by the study and ways to address them](#) ).

For example, initiatives working in humanitarian assistance cover basic needs, provide psychological and legal support, and help specific categories of community residents – such as single parents and internally displaced persons – find employment. Some initiatives also provide support to families of prisoners of war, the missing and fallen defenders, as well as to veterans and their families.

Initiatives working in education and development help young people engage in the social and political life in their communities. Green initiatives focus on the protection of the environment, including combating tree cutting and water pollution in their communities. Initiatives concerned with culture work on cultivating practices of honoring heroes and popularizing the heritage of national minorities, as well as increasing residents' interest in the history of Ukrainian cities and regions. Media initiatives help disseminate verified information about events and figures in Ukrainian history, while advocacy initiatives defend the rights of prisoners of war and the missing persons through international pressure on Russia and engagement with state authorities. In the area of protection, a key task is supplying equipment to community residents serving in the Armed Forces.

In their activities, initiatives use a wide range of tools (see [Problems of the initiatives covered by the study and ways to address them](#) ): providing humanitarian, social, and psychological assistance; running information and educational campaigns; organizing cultural, educational, and therapeutic events; conducting research and needs assessments; building partnerships and support networks; and mediating between vulnerable groups and authorities.

Some initiatives implement projects to create educational materials and platforms, engage in advocacy at the local, national, and international levels, and hold art events, commemorative events, and mobilization activities that allow them to move beyond a strictly local level.

The reasons for focusing on these issues are often linked to the personal experiences and values of initiative leaders and/or their teams. For some, it is important to support specific groups with whom they identify or whose activities align with their values. Others see their work as a response to the demands of the time, driven by both the consequences of the war and the social needs of their community members.



2.1 / Problems of the initiatives covered by the study and ways to address them

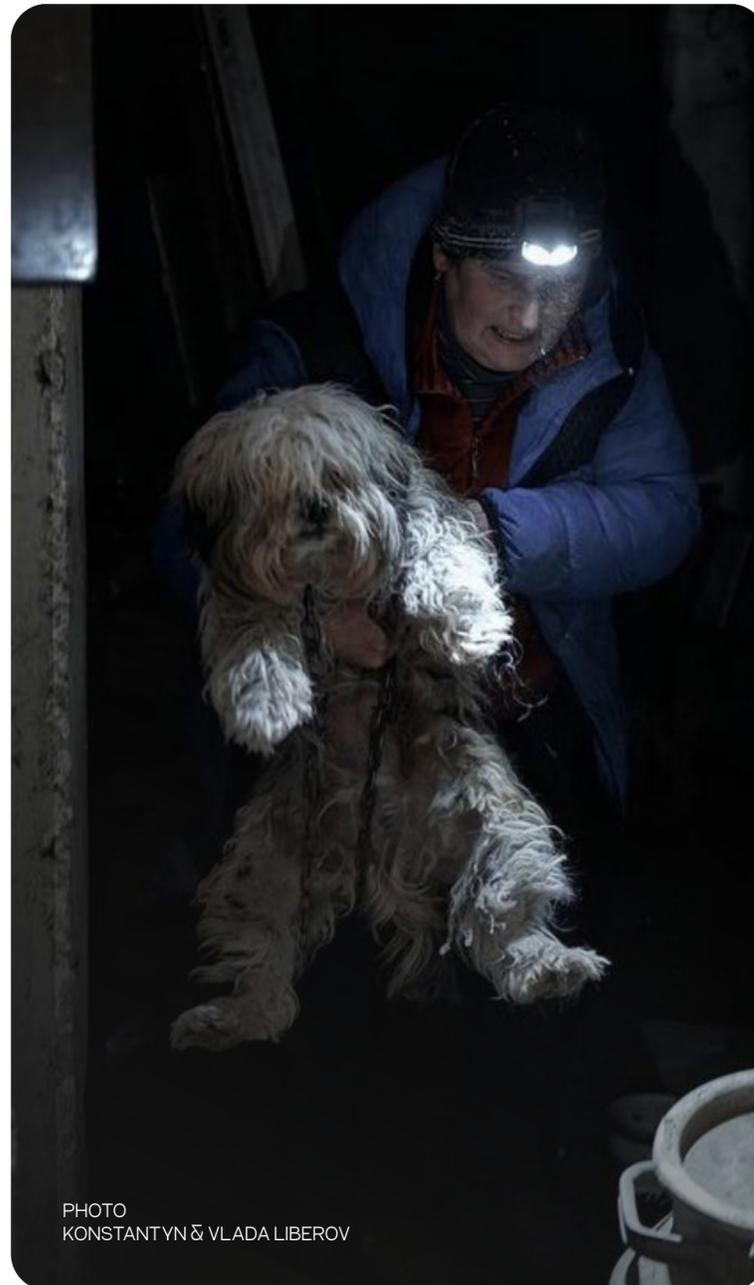


PHOTO
KONSTANTYN & VLADA LIBEROV

Social isolation and loss of support:

- * establishment of public spaces where IDPs, families of the fallen, single parents, and veterans can get together

Emotional exhaustion and psychological trauma:

- * establishment of travel tours and art therapy sessions
- * provision of 24/7 psychological support

Low youth engagement in community life:

- * establishment of youth councils under local self-government bodies
- * youth involvement in community reconstruction projects
- * establishment of cultural and volunteer spaces at community cultural centers to host various youth activities

Communication gaps between citizens and local self-government bodies:

- * advocacy activities, meetings, and public consultations

Deterioration of environmental conditions in communities:

- * implementation of the recommendations for comprehensive community reconstruction programs based on "green recovery" principles
- * regular evaluation of water and air quality
- * establishment of environmental groups at schools
- * planting of flowerbeds and trees

Loss of historical memory, identity, and languages of national minorities:

- * implementation of projects to mark urban spaces with plaques commemorating notable figures in the history of cities and communities
- * publication of educational materials to promote the languages of national minorities of Ukraine

Lack of an appropriate culture of honoring fallen defenders in communities:

- * establishment of spaces of remembrance: placing flags on the Maidan and installing memorial plaques for fallen soldiers
- * photo and art exhibitions

High numbers of stray animals in communities:

- * sterilization, vaccination, adoption, and improvement of conditions in shelters

Shortage of military gear:

- * weaving of camouflage nets and production of camouflage materials
- * sewing of military gear
- * fundraising for military equipment
- * cooperation with local enterprises and communities to supply the military with necessary equipment



2.1 / Transformations of local civic initiatives



Most of the initiatives covered by the study have undergone significant transformations over time. Changes mainly concerned the scale and areas of activity – which could both expand or narrow – as well as the methods used to achieve their goals.

As was discovered in the previous study and confirmed by the current one, their activities were constantly transforming: they shifted priorities, broadened target audiences, institutionalized, or scaled down depending on available resources and emerging community needs. Informal initiatives changed or ceased their activities more often, particularly due to limited resources and unstable organizational structures.

PHOTO
OLENA TITA

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Expansion and scaling were the most common changes.

Initiatives that initially worked in a single area often branched out into new fields or broadened their target audiences. For example, a volunteer group that began by weaving camouflage nets expanded to making barrel wraps, helmet covers, sniper veils, adaptive cushions for transporting the wounded, etc.



WE DON'T JUST MAKE [CAMOUFLAGE] NETS ANYMORE. WE STARTED MAKING BARREL WRAPS, HELMET COVERS, SNIPER VEILS. WE ALSO HAVE ADAPTIVE CUSHIONS... AND OUR VOLUNTEERS KNIT SOCKS, TOO.

/ 02

A change in the target audience was another type of transformation.

Initiatives that initially worked exclusively with the military or internally displaced persons shifted their target audiences and began implementing programs for people with disabilities or for youth.



AT FIRST, WE HELPED THE ARMED FORCES OF UKRAINE. THEN WE BEGAN SUPPORTING INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS, AND NEXT – PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES. AND NOW WE'RE DRAWN TO WORKING WITH YOUTH, AND WE'RE CREATING A COMMUNITY SPACE FOR THEM.



2.1 / Transformations of local civic initiatives



PHOTO
OLENA TITA

/ 03

Activities were scaled down mainly where resources were limited or when initiatives underwent institutionalization and focused on the most important areas of their work.

/ 04

Institutionalization was typically one of the key transformations for local civic initiatives, marking a transition from spontaneous informal activity to more stable and organized work.

The vast majority of the initiatives covered by the study had already completed official registration. Some did so at the very beginning (including in the first months after the full-scale invasion), while others did so after a prolonged period of volunteering, when it became clear that official status was necessary for further development. Some initiatives were in the process of registration at the time the study was in progress.

The main reasons prompting local initiatives to register were:

- * the ability to attract funding, including grants from businesses and international partners, and to open accounts for large fundraising drives
- * more trust and easier interaction with local self-government bodies, municipal entities, and businesses
- * convenience in working with donors: avoiding intermediaries previously engaged solely to transfer funds to a legal entity's account
- * the requirement set by the partner organizations or local authorities to have a legal entity to be able to access their resources or cooperate.

At the same time, the initiatives that remained informal stated that the lack of time, knowledge, experience, and resources to officially register were the main obstacles to their institutionalization.



YES, WE'VE ALREADY CONSIDERED REGISTERING AN NGO AND EVEN DRAFTED OUR OWN CHARTER. HOWEVER, SEVERAL FACTORS STAND IN THE WAY FOR NOW: WE LACK THE KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE, PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTING SUPPORT, AND TIME, AS NEW REQUESTS AND INITIATIVES KEEP ARISING THAT REQUIRE IMMEDIATE ATTENTION.

Thus, institutionalization served two goals: on the one hand, it was a response to the demands of the time and the need to cooperate more effectively with local authorities, donor organizations, and other initiatives; on the other, it was a way to strengthen internal organizational capacity and ensure the sustainability of their work.

/ 03

Cooperation and interaction with stakeholders

3.1. Cooperation and interaction of local civic initiatives with local self-government bodies (LSGBs)

3.2. Cooperation and interaction of local civic initiatives with local branches of political parties and local councilors

3.3. Cooperation and interaction of local civic initiatives with businesses

3.4. Cooperation and interaction among local civic initiatives

3.5. Cooperation and interaction of local civic initiatives with donor organizations



3.1

Cooperation and interaction of local civic initiatives with local self-government bodies (LSGBs)



PHOTO
KVIVFORUM.ORG

FORMS OF COOPERATION AND INTERACTION



Most local civic initiatives had experience cooperating with local self-government bodies.

Most commonly, it took the form of administrative support (processing documents, including issuing permits for transporting humanitarian aid, certificates for IDPs, and applications for financial assistance) and provision of infrastructural resources (access to premises and spaces in municipal institutions), as well as co-organization of cultural, educational, and humanitarian events.

The findings of this study regarding cooperation between grassroots initiatives and LSGBs are consistent with the results of our previous research: local authorities most often provided infrastructural resources and administrative support in processing documentation.

Leaders of initiatives that do not cooperate with local authorities stated that key reasons for the lack of cooperation were disillusionment, prior negative experiences, red tape, and ignored requests.

Some initiatives approached LSGBs with proposals to participate in public events, but received no support or faced indifference. In some cases, local authorities openly refused to engage in the initiatives' activities, leading to a loss of trust and suspension of further attempts to establish cooperation.

Some organizations deliberately chose to operate without involving local authorities, believing they could implement their initiatives more effectively on their own.

PROBLEMS IN COOPERATION AND INTERACTION



Survey and interview results varied widely regarding the level of cooperation.

Some initiative leaders assessed interaction with local authorities positively or somewhat positively, while others viewed it rather negatively, particularly due to half-hearted participation on the authorities' part, indifference and "box-ticking" cooperation without real engagement.

The success of cooperation typically depended on specific officials, the capacity of LSGBs to work with local initiatives, and the activity and persistence of the initiatives themselves.



3.1 / Problems in cooperation and interaction with LSGBs and ways to address them, as reported by initiative leaders

 NEEDS →

 WAYS TO MEET THE NEEDS

- * Cumbersome bureaucracy to get permits for the events and projects with LSGBs

- * Streamline approval procedures for projects involving local civic initiatives

- * Disregard for the local initiatives' work by LSGBs

- * Establish informal communication channels with LSGBs
- * Apply advocacy pressure on LSGBs through publicity, media, and social networks

 NEEDS →

 WAYS TO MEET THE NEEDS

- * Lack of knowledge and competencies among local officials (local authorities do not always understand the specifics of project work carried out by civic initiatives and businesses, leading to delays and confusion in cooperation)

- * Disillusionment and loss of faith among initiatives regarding cooperation with authorities

- * Build the capacity of local authorities to cooperate with civic initiatives and businesses

- * Build horizontal partnerships with other initiatives
- * Provide training on effective methods of cooperation with LSGBs



3.2

Cooperation and interaction of local civic initiatives with local branches of political parties and local councilors

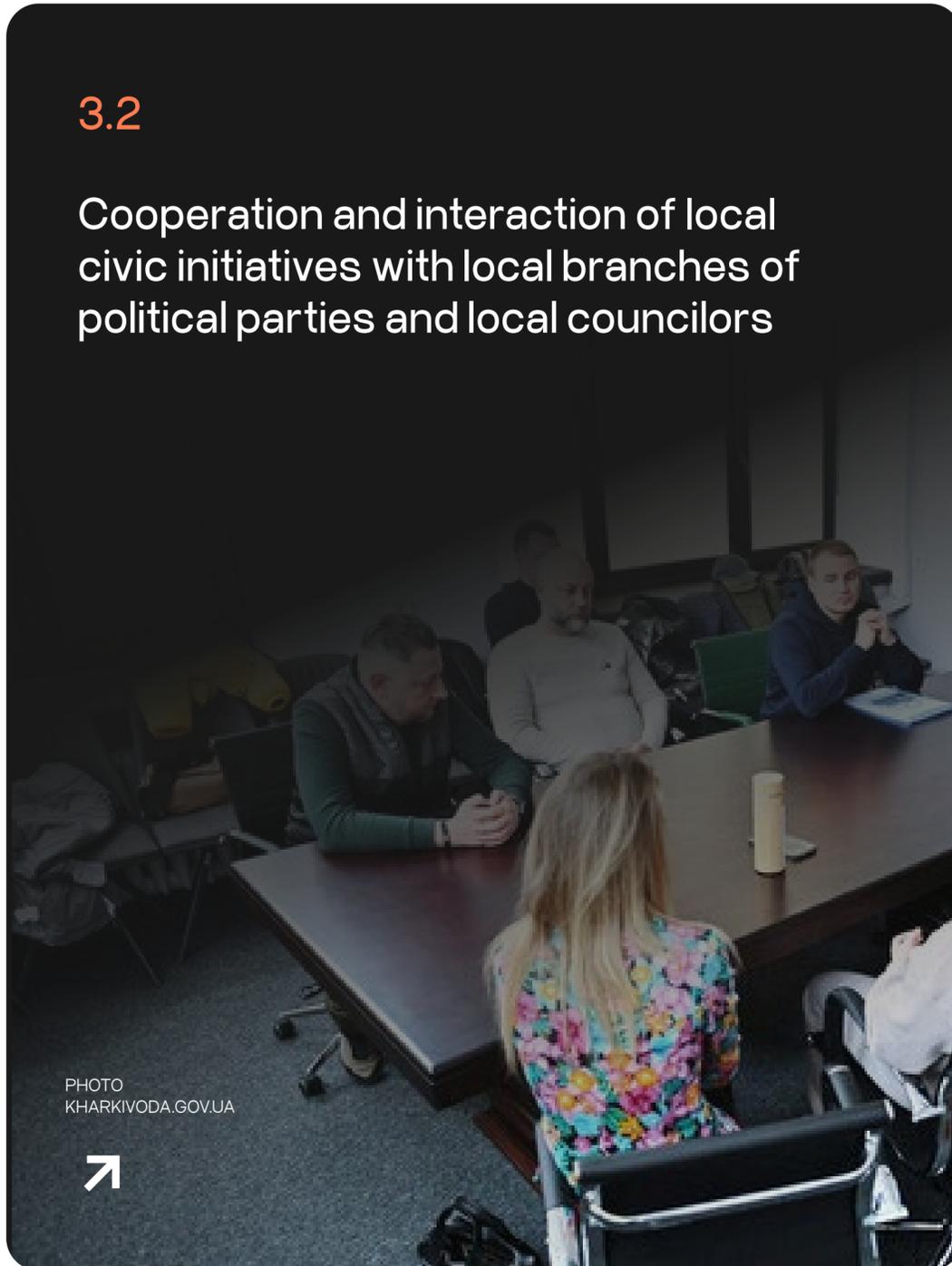


PHOTO
KHARKIVODA.GOV.UA



FORMS OF COOPERATION AND INTERACTION



Most local initiatives either did not cooperate at all with political parties and local councilors, or such cooperation was sporadic.

Initiative leaders cited distrust of parties and councilors, reluctance to tie their activities to political interests, a desire to maintain neutrality, concerns about reputational risks, passivity of parties and councilors, and fatigue with an unstable political environment as the main reasons. At the same time, some leaders did not rule out such cooperation in the future, provided there is a clear alignment of values between their initiative and the party or councilor, or in cases of critical need.

Where cooperation did occur, it was mostly sporadic and amounted to consultations on organizing public events, requests for formal inquiries, invitations to councilors to attend public events, or appeals for help in facilitating communication with local authorities.

PROBLEMS IN COOPERATION AND INTERACTION



Satisfaction with cooperation and interaction with political parties and local councilors was, overall, low.

Most initiatives did not seek such cooperation, considering it untimely or risky. Others noted that while they did cooperate with parties or councilors at some point, it did not yield tangible results or was limited to symbolic attendance of events by councilors. In some cases, the absence of cooperation was even viewed positively – as a way to safeguard civic activities from political influence and PR.



3.2 / Problems in cooperation and interaction with local branches of political parties and local councilors and ways to address them, as reported by initiative leaders

 NEEDS →

 WAYS TO MEET THE NEEDS

- * Low level of trust in political parties and politicians due to negative experiences, bias, or reputational risks

- * Cooperate only after prior due diligence regarding the reputation of parties and councilors and the alignment of their values with the values of the initiative

- * Desire to remain apolitical (initiatives declare nonpartisanship in charters or founding principles to preserve independence and sustainability)

- * Cooperate on politically "neutral" projects without public party branding

 NEEDS →

 WAYS TO MEET THE NEEDS

- * Fear of instrumentalization or manipulation (concern that parties will use civic initiatives for PR)

- * Cooperate privately

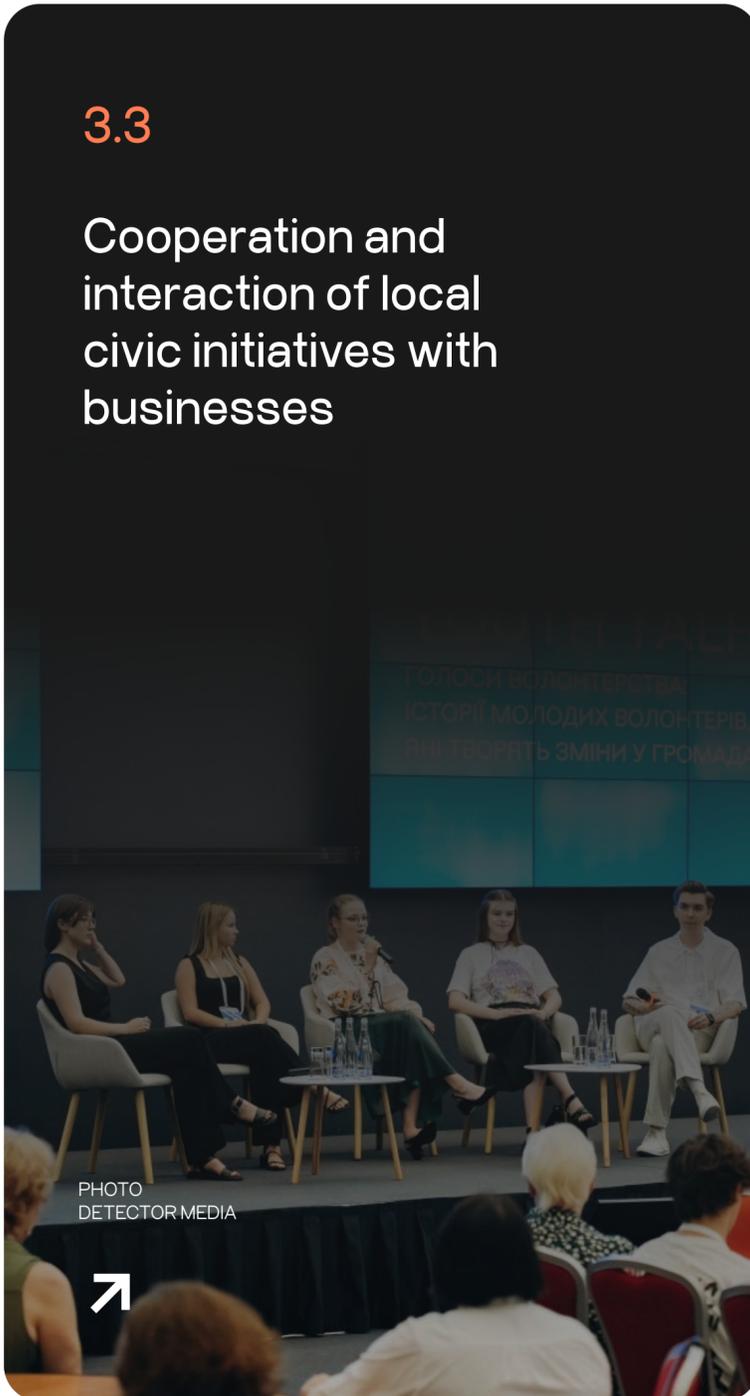
- * Limited resources (cooperation with political forces is not a priority when time, effort, and other resources are focused on implementing core projects)

- * Train initiative representatives in advocacy basics and interaction with local party branches and councilors



3.3

Cooperation and interaction of local civic initiatives with businesses



FORMS OF COOPERATION AND INTERACTION



Experience of cooperation with local businesses was mostly sporadic or short-term, though in some cases it evolved into stable partnerships – especially where initiative leaders themselves were involved in entrepreneurship and already had ties and partnerships with local businesses.

The vast majority of initiatives initiated or tried to initiate cooperation with local businesses to obtain humanitarian aid or in-kind support. In fewer cases, assistance came at the initiative of businesses – mostly from entrepreneurs who knew the initiative leaders personally.

About one-third of the initiatives covered by the study had no experience of cooperation with local businesses at all. The main reasons were businesses' failure to respond to the initiatives' requests, lack of fundraising specialists, and lack of experience or clear understanding of cooperation mechanisms.



WE DO NOT COOPERATE YET. WE HAVE THE IDEA TO WORK WITH UKRAINIAN BUSINESSES, BUT WE HAVE NO EXPERIENCE. WE WROTE THEM SEVERAL TIMES AND WERE IGNORED. THIS IS A SEPARATE LINE OF WORK, WE NEED A SPECIALIST WHO ENGAGES BUSINESSES. WE ALSO HAVE THE IDEA TO WORK WITH INTERNATIONAL COMPANIES... I DON'T YET KNOW HOW TO DO IT PROPERLY, BUT THE IDEA IS THERE.

PROBLEMS IN COOPERATION AND INTERACTION



Overall, initiative leaders assessed satisfaction with cooperation with local businesses as more positive than negative.

Some emphasized that businesses have become an important pillar of their initiatives' resilience, thanks to regular support and provision of resources. Others noted their interaction with businesses remains weak, sporadic, or is not a strategic workstream. Most initiatives see potential to deepen such cooperation through more proactive communication and the establishment of long-term collaborations.



3.3 / Problems in cooperation and interaction with businesses and ways to address them, as reported by initiative leaders



NEEDS →

- * Lack of experience in engaging businesses (initiative leaders and teams lack sufficient skills for effective communication and cooperation with businesses)
- * Lack of initiative on the part of businesses (cooperation usually develops only at the initiative of civic organizations)
- * Lack of responses to initiatives' outreach to businesses (initiatives reach out but receive no responses to letters or requests)



WAYS TO MEET THE NEEDS

- * If funding permits, engage fundraising specialists
- * If funding is not available, ask initiatives that have successful cases of cooperation with businesses to share their experiences
- * Regardless of funding, conduct team training through workshops and consultations
- * Build informal relationships based on trust with businesses through personal contacts, involvement in events, and joint initiatives
- * Formalize cooperation by signing memoranda or partnership agreements to fix commitments
- * Strengthen interaction through regular communication with businesses about current needs and the results of implemented projects



3.4

Cooperation and interaction among local civic initiatives

FORMS OF COOPERATION AND INTERACTION



The vast majority of local civic initiatives had experience cooperating with other local initiatives within their communities.

The most common forms of collaboration were sharing resources (materials, premises, contacts), coordinating actions during events or campaigns, mutual informational support on social media, and organization of joint events (exhibitions, actions, camps, memorial events, etc.).

The main reasons cited for not cooperating with other local initiatives were the lack of trust toward certain initiatives – especially those perceived as connected to local authorities or businesses – which raised concerns about informal influence or political bias.

Some initiatives saw others as competitors for resources, donor attention, or audiences, complicating cooperation. Negative prior experiences also mattered: during interviews, some initiative leaders mentioned conflicts and unsatisfactory division of responsibilities in joint projects.

Another obstacle was the lack of contacts or platforms for establishing cooperation: organizations could operate in parallel within one community, yet remain unfamiliar with each other. In addition, some initiatives deliberately maintained autonomy to preserve freedom of action and avoid having to coordinate decisions with others.

Some initiative leaders pointed to differences in values, priorities, or approaches, though many did not rule out future cooperation provided there are shared values, personal trust, or a need to pool efforts to achieve a shared goal.

PROBLEMS IN COOPERATION AND INTERACTION



Overall satisfaction with cooperation among local civic initiatives is predominantly positive.

Most initiative leaders noted that interaction is constructive, based on mutual support, resource sharing, and shared values. Particularly valuable are informational support, readiness to help quickly in difficult situations, and flexibility in coordination. Difficulties related to personal conflicts or competition were mentioned but seen as exceptions. Overall, cooperation with other local initiatives is viewed as an important and desirable development.





3.4 / Problems in cooperation and interaction among local civic initiatives and ways to address them, as reported by initiative leaders



NEEDS →



WAYS TO MEET THE NEEDS

- * Competition among initiatives, when local initiatives view others as competitors rather than partners
- * Personal conflicts between initiatives (relationships sour due to personal distrust or rivalry)
- * Lack of shared vision, values, or trust (distrust due to personal ties of initiatives with local authorities or businesses)

- * Build cooperation with initiatives that share common values and are not competing for influence; delineate roles and areas of responsibility to avoid duplication
- * Gradually build trust through small joint actions: information exchange, attending each other's events, informational support; carefully select partners with aligned values



NEEDS →



WAYS TO MEET THE NEEDS

- * Low qualification level or lack of experience in the field (some initiatives lack sufficient capacity for effective cooperation)
- * Lack of legal status (the fact that some initiatives are not registered complicates official cooperation)

- * Support less experienced initiatives through consultations, mentorship, and invitations to joint events
- * Allocate tasks among the initiatives within project activities in an unambiguous manner
- * Encourage initiatives to register: explain the benefits of official registration, assist with document preparation and official reporting
- * Provide legal consultations on registration requirements



3.5

Cooperation and interaction of local civic initiatives with donor organizations

FORMS OF COOPERATION AND INTERACTION



Since 2024, most local civic initiatives have had experience cooperating with donor organizations. Some received grant support to implement their own projects or joined programs via partner organizations.

Forms and modes of cooperation included funding, receipt of humanitarian aid, joint exhibitions, camps, memorial events, as well as knowledge exchange or advisory support.

At the same time, some leaders noted their initiatives could not secure support from donor organizations due to the lack of legal status, limited resources, or insufficient experience in preparing grant applications. Some initiatives implemented joint projects without formal support but with informational or in-kind contributions from other organizations.

PROBLEMS IN COOPERATION AND INTERACTION



Overall, initiative leaders who had experience cooperating with donor organizations assessed it positively.

They emphasized the importance of transparent procedures, clear funding requirements, and the support provided by international partners in a time of crisis.

At the same time, many problems were reported: complicated grant procedures, strict bureaucratic requirements, reporting burdens, and limited funding options for newly-established and informal organizations. Some initiative leaders also pointed out that certain donor organizations do not fully understand the specifics of the local context, needs, and operations of small local initiatives.



PHOTO
VECHIRNIY.KYIV.



3.5 / Problems in cooperation and interaction with donor organizations and ways to address them, as reported by initiative leaders

 NEEDS →

 WAYS TO MEET THE NEEDS

- * Strict reporting requirements and complex bureaucratic procedures

- * Conduct training on how to write grant applications and reports

- * Challenging requirements for grant applications, especially for initiatives without prior experience

- * Get consultations on how to prepare applications and reports

- * Short-term funding and lack of stability

- * Donor organizations should provide multi-year grants and support programs to give a chance for sustainability

 NEEDS →

 WAYS TO MEET THE NEEDS

- * Difficult communication with donors, especially for new and small initiatives

- * Establish permanent feedback channels for local initiatives

- * Lack of donor trust toward initiatives without legal status

- * Organize training and mentorship on how to register a civic initiative

- * Competition for resources among local initiatives

- * Encourage joint project applications submission by multiple initiatives and prioritize local initiatives



/ 04

Needs, problems, and ways to address them

4.1. Problems of
local civic initiatives

4.2. Needs of local civic
initiatives and ways to
address their problems



4.1 / Problems of local civic initiatives



Interviews with leaders of local civic initiatives in Kyiv oblast that emerged or became more active after the start of the full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, confirm previous findings on the most common challenges faced by civil society organizations.

In particular, the results fully align with the study *Civil Society in Ukraine in the Context of War: Report on a Comprehensive Sociological Research*, which identified the key problems in 2022–2023 as lack of funds (63%), weak material and technical base (33%), emotional burnout (26%), shortage of staff (25%), and insufficient cooperation with local authorities (24%).

Compared to previous years, financial difficulties for civil society organizations only intensified in 2025. This is directly related to the suspension of international support from USAID. According to the policy brief *From Support to Survival*, the abrupt halt of USAID operations in January–February 2025 led many organizations working on democratic reforms, anti-corruption, independent media development, and civic participation – areas rarely supported by European donors – to lose from 75 to 90% of their funding.

The findings of this study demonstrate not only the persistence of key challenges but also the same order of their prioritization.

The most widespread problem, confirmed by all initiative leaders, is still the lack of funds. This includes not only the absence or low level of long-term grant support, but also the inability to cover basic administrative costs, retain teams, purchase materials, or support operational activities. This situation triggers a range of other issues, including the loss of qualified personnel, excessive workload on teams, emotional exhaustion and burnout, which cumulatively increase the risks of declining work quality, institutional instability, and even a complete halt of local initiatives.

Shortage of staff remains no less critical, especially for initiatives operating in smaller localities: there are too few people in general (due to mobilization, migration, family circumstances), and too few people have the required skills like management, fundraising, donor communications, strategic planning, etc. In most cases, organizations cannot afford training for the existing staff or hiring new staff and are insufficiently informed about available donor support programs or advisory assistance.

Among internal challenges, leaders also mentioned the lack of time. For most, civic activism is combined with primary employment, family responsibilities, and, in some cases, military service. This makes it hard to maintain systematic work, coordination, and project implementation, especially for unregistered initiatives where there is no internal division of responsibilities.

Interaction problems also remain relevant both within teams and externally. Some organizations face competition, conflicts, and misunderstandings with other local initiatives.

Emotional burnout and fatigue are other major long-term issues. Amid ongoing war, economic instability, and emotional strain, public engagement declines, support diminishes, and it becomes harder to organize teams and pass on experience. This creates a risk of a gradual decline of local activism that is especially critical considering the scarcity of resources and the difficulty of rebuilding local initiatives in particular.



4.2 / Needs of local civic initiatives and ways to address their problems

Given the problems mentioned above, a set of current needs can be formulated that determines the capacity of local civic initiatives for sustainable functioning and development. One of the interview questions invited leaders to propose ways to solve the problems they named and suggest how their current needs could be met.



PROBLEMS

LACK OF FUNDING →



PERSONNEL SHORTAGES →



NEEDS

- * The need for funding to cover administrative costs
- * The need for funding to cover operational costs
- * The need for long-term financial support or bridge funding between projects

- * The need to recruit personnel (both paid and volunteer) with expertise in administration, communications, coordination, fundraising, and partnership development

- * The need for more even distribution of responsibilities to reduce the burden on leadership



WAYS TO SOLVE PROBLEMS AND MEET THE NEEDS

- * Apply for grants from the state and international donors to cover administrative costs
- * Cooperate with local businesses to get sponsorship

- * Post vacancies on volunteer platforms, social networks, and via partner organizations to attract qualified personnel

- * Define key roles within the team and identify which skills need strengthening (especially fundraising, communications, coordination)

- * Introduce a fundraising system to support initiatives financially
- * Conduct training on business planning and fundraising to implement fee-based services and launch commercial activities

- * Cooperate with universities to engage students as interns
- * Engage staff from other localities for remote work

- * Regularly monitor team workload and adjust the distribution of responsibilities

- * Attract funding via the Employment Center to support public works
- * Move toward social entrepreneurship or other revenue-generating activities (e.g., fee-based services, charitable contributions, commercial activities) to ensure financial stability

- * Build the capacity of new staff members through internships and training



4.2 / Needs of local civic initiatives and ways to address their problems



PROBLEMS



NEEDS



WAYS TO SOLVE PROBLEMS AND MEET THE NEEDS

CHALLENGES OF TEAM MEMBERS' QUALIFICATIONS →



* The need for regular assistance with reporting, official registration or changes to the legal status of the organization

* Get legal consultations and assistance in preparing required documentation (reports, registration, changes to organizational form)

* Get assistance in preparing documents for registration or changing the legal status of the organization

* The need for regular assistance with reporting, official registration or changes to the legal status of the organization

* Get training and consultations on grant application drafting, preparing financial and operational budgets, and maintaining documentation

* Improve team skills in the effective preparation of funding applications

* The need for advancing competencies in strategic planning, communications, and analytics

* Organize training and learning sessions on strategic planning, communication strategies' development, analytics, and results evaluation

EMOTIONAL BURNOUT →



* Training in self-management, burnout prevention, and stress management

* Organize stress-management and burnout-prevention training for the team

* Organize monthly meetings and training to improve the psycho-emotional well-being of team members

* Encourage regular vacations' planning



4.2 / Needs of local civic initiatives and ways to address their problems



PROBLEMS

LACK OF MATERIAL AND TECHNICAL RESOURCES →



PROBLEMS IN COOPERATION →



NEEDS

* The need for basic equipment: laptops, projectors, furniture, routers, etc.

* The need to own or at least have access to affordable vehicles for delivering humanitarian aid or transporting teams

* The need to have access to safe and properly equipped premises for the teams to work and organize events

* The need to improved interaction and cooperation with LSGBs, businesses, political parties and local councilors, other local initiatives, and donor organizations



WAYS TO SOLVE PROBLEMS AND MEET THE NEEDS

* Attract resources from donors and international organizations to purchase equipment

* Cooperate with businesses to provide free or discounted transportation services

* Get access to premises through partnerships with local authorities

* Build competencies via training on cooperation with LSGBs, businesses, political parties and local councilors, other local initiatives, and donor organizations

* Share equipment with other organizations that have surplus resources

* Seek funding to purchase vehicles through grants or donations

* Get access to premises through partnerships with local businesses

* Engage businesses to obtain the required equipment

* Use premises provided by volunteer or other local initiatives



Key Findings From the Study





05 / Key findings of the study

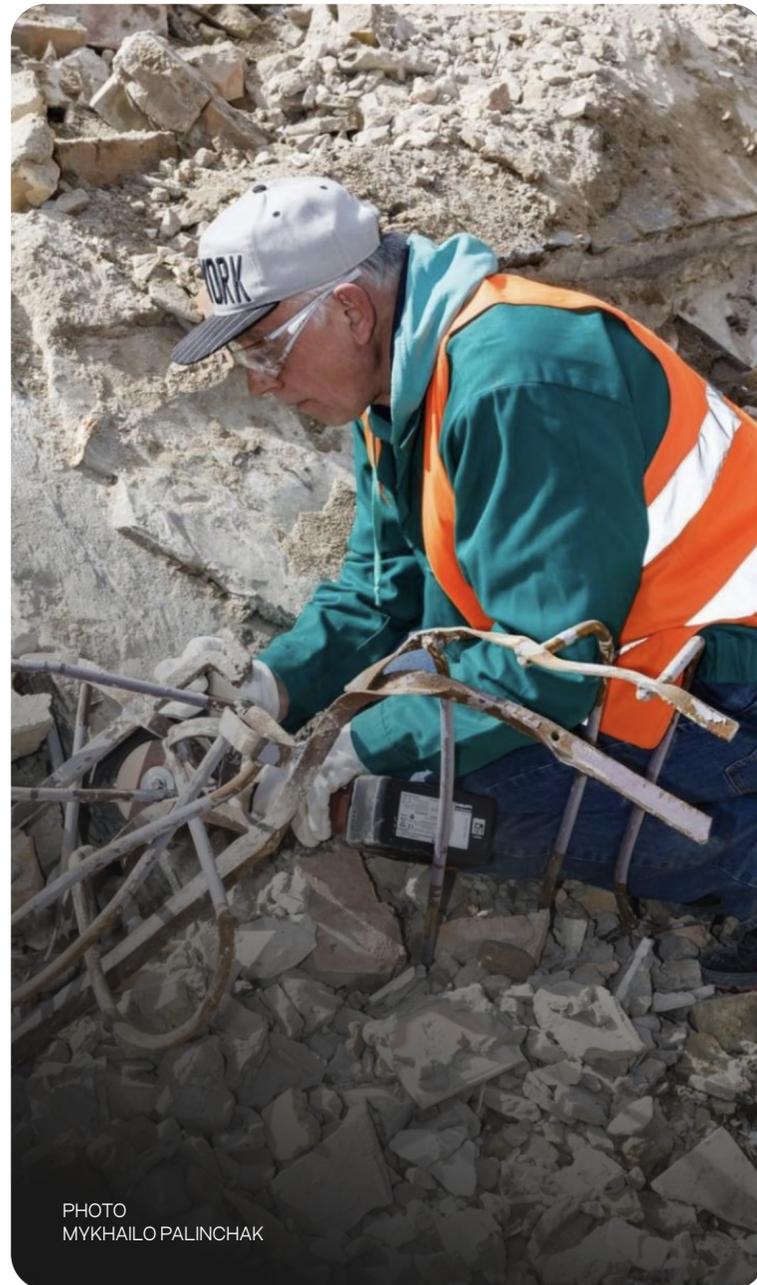


PHOTO
MYKHAILO PALINCHAK

/ 01

Motivation and reasons why leaders established or joined their local civic initiatives.

The primary motivation was to respond to the challenges caused by the full-scale war.

Most initiative leaders participating in the study noted that their inner impulse toward active civic engagement was driven by the war and its consequences for their communities. The impetus to create initiatives was the desire to be useful in a time of crisis, support others, and take responsibility. This process was often spontaneous, without clear preconditions for creating formal initiatives.

/ 02

Transformations of the activities of local civic initiatives.

Initiatives created after the beginning of the full-scale war underwent significant changes in their activities.

Many of them started with humanitarian assistance but later expanded to cover new areas, such as environmental projects, cultural initiatives, and social support. Changes also concerned target groups, as initiatives decided to provide support for, for example, people with disabilities and youth. Institutionalization became an important step for most initiatives, as it provided stability and better opportunities for development.

Most initiatives went through with the official registration to gain access to donor funding, support from local authorities and businesses, and to increase public trust. However, many initiatives remained informal due to the lack of knowledge, time, or resources needed to obtain legal status. Some initiatives chose to stay informal to preserve independence from external influence.

/ 02

Cooperation with local self-government bodies (LSGBs).

Local civic initiatives actively cooperated with LSGBs, receiving administrative support and infrastructural resources. The most common forms of cooperation were document processing, provision of premises for events, and co-organization of cultural, educational, and humanitarian activities. However, the main problems were red tape, the lack of initiative from the LSGBs' side, and disillusionment due to prior negative experiences.

Initiatives that managed to overcome these obstacles used advocacy through publicity, media, and social networks, as well as informal communication to interact with local authorities more effectively.



05 / Key findings of the study



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OLENA TITA

/ 04

Cooperation with local branches of political parties and local councilors.

Cooperation with political parties and local councilors was more limited due to distrust and potential reputational risks.

Most initiatives chose neutrality, fearing manipulation or the use of their activities for political PR. Cooperation with politicians was mostly informal: requests for formal councilor inquiries or invitations for councilors to take part in public events. Nevertheless, leaders of civic initiatives are willing to consider cooperation with parties whose values they share, for example, joint depoliticized projects that allow cooperation without party branding.

/ 05

Cooperation with local businesses.

Most initiatives cooperated with local businesses to obtain humanitarian aid or other resources. The main challenges were the lack of experience in engaging businesses, and businesses ignoring requests from the initiatives.

To establish cooperation, initiatives need to involve fundraising specialists, exchange experience among initiatives, conclude memoranda, and strengthen interaction through regular communication.

/ 06

Cooperation with other local civic initiatives.

Cooperation among local civic initiatives was generally efficient and based on mutual support, resource sharing, and joint events. In some cases, there were problems due to competition for resources, personal conflicts, or lack of trust stemming from perceived political or business ties of certain initiatives.

Possible ways to build cooperation include gradually developing trust through participation in small joint initiatives, information exchange, and co-organization of public events.



05 / Key findings of the study



PHOTO
MYKHAILO PALINCHAK

/ 07

Cooperation with donor organizations.

Cooperation with donor organizations was mostly positive, but strict reporting requirements and the complexity of submitting grant applications pose challenges for small and informal initiatives.

This cooperation can be improved by training on grant application development, mentorship, established feedback channels with donors, and encouragement for initiatives to submit joint applications.

/ 08

Needs of local civic initiatives and ways to address their problems.

MAIN PROBLEMS

- * financial instability
- * personnel shortages
- * lack of team qualifications
- * emotional burnout
- * difficulties in cooperating with LSGBs, businesses, political parties, and other initiatives

MOST COMMON NEEDS

- * funding for administrative and operational costs
- * qualified personnel
- * strengthening of teams' competencies in strategic planning, fundraising, donor communications, and project management.

Initiative leaders strive to meet these needs by attracting grants, cooperating with local businesses, developing social entrepreneurship, and implementing fundraising mechanisms. Another important need is training in business planning, stress management, and burnout prevention.

To improve cooperation with other stakeholders, initiative leaders consider it necessary to build competencies for interaction with authorities, businesses, and other initiatives, as well as to develop partnerships and joint projects.

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