

A Brief Report

# Study of Challenges of the Ukrainian Civil Society Sector in a Time of War

Kyiv 2023





This study was initiated by East Europe Foundation and administered by 4Service LLC as part of the Phoenix Project implemented by East Europe Foundation with the financial support of the European Union.

At the request of East Europe Foundation, 4Service LLC surveyed civil society organizations, or CSOs, in the summer of 2023 as part of the Phoenix Project, funded by the European Union.

The purpose was to assess the needs and challenges of CSOs in the context of the war and their role in the process of rebuilding Ukraine.

Findings of the survey address the following:

- Changes in CSOs since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion;
- CSOs' challenges in the second year of full-scale war;
- CSO funding;
- Evaluation of organizations' project activities;
- Evaluation of organizational capacities;
- Evaluation of liaison with the government, media and business; and,
- CSOs' role in Ukraine's reconstruction.

Research is based on a combined approach that relies on both quantitative and qualitative methods. A total of 621 representatives of civil society organizations were interviewed. These included one representative from each organization: 601 through a quantitative survey, and 20 representatives during the qualitative stage of the research.

The field activity took place in July 2023.

# Specifics of the current state of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the context of war

## Geography and current areas of operation

Most organizations (53 percent) that participated in the survey were founded between 2012 and 2021. Twenty-three percent of organizations were founded in the last two years leading up to and during Russia's full-scale invasion.

The majority of those surveyed — 70 percent of people that took part in the research and 91 percent of civil society organizations — had not relocated because of the invasion. Furthermore, 79 percent of organizations did not change their activity because of the war, while 19 percent adapted to the new environment, including through changes to their activity.

Among the surveyed organizations that have relocated, the highest percentage were based in the northern and eastern regions — 35 percent and 24 percent, respectively; while the lowest percentage of CSOs that relocated because of war are in the country's west (20 percent)<sup>1</sup>. Displaced organizations from Ukraine's east are more likely than other respondents to have changed their activity.



*Experts in the qualitative stage of the study confirmed the shift of CSO focus to the most war-affected territories with more intensive activities in new communities and the emerging challenge of networking and civil society activists operating abroad.*

As of July 2023, the primary focus of organizations' activity included volunteering, humanitarian aid, culture, leisure, education and research.

The eastern region has a higher rate of humanitarian aid activity (54 percent of its activity) in relation to other regions. In the western region, there is a shift toward social services (36 percent of activity) and volunteering (37 percent).

**Table 1. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question, "What type of activity is your organization currently engaged in" by region?**

	Among all respondents (%)	Center	North	East	South	West
Humanitarian aid and volunteering	40	39	42	54	40	37
Training and advice	39	38	39	38	41	40
Service provision (including social services)	32	32	30	29	32	36
Protection of rights and representation	20	20	25	25	17	18
Analytics and research	14	11	16	10	9	16
Rehabilitation	13	12	12	15	20	11
Sports competitions and promoting healthy lifestyles	3	4	2	0	3	3
Conducting cultural events	2	0	2	0	2	3
Environment	1	1	1	0	0	2
Refused to answer	1	1	1	2	2	1
Other	1	2	0	2	3	0
Psychological assistance	1	0	0	4	2	0
Animal protection and rescue	1	1	1	2	2	0
Engineering and infrastructure needs	1	0	1	0	0	1

<sup>1</sup> Center: Vinnytsia, Kirovohrad, Poltava, Khmelnytskyi and Cherkasy Oblasts; North: Zhytomyr, Kyiv, Sumy, Chernihiv Oblasts and the City of Kyiv; East: Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk and Kharkiv Oblasts; South: Mykolaiv, Odesa and Kherson Oblasts; West: Volyn, Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopil and Chernivtsi Oblasts)

## Financial support for activities

Identified challenges of financial support for CSO activities:

- Funding sources for CSOs are unstable;
- Organizations lack sufficient resources to maintain staff (only the accountant would be remunerated on a permanent basis while other employees on a project basis which led to staff turnover);
- Funding administrative expenses (office, transportation and warehouses) involves an ongoing quest for resources; organizations find it hard to cover administrative expenses on a systematic basis (they take up a small part of the project budget and certain projects incorporate office rent for a limited period);
- Social entrepreneurship within CSOs might be a solution to many financial problems, although launching a social business requires significant funds that the organization is unable to procure through projects or outside donors' focus of attention; and,
- Lack of expert knowledge in fundraising.

**Table 2. Answers to the question, "What funding sources does your organization have access to today?"**

	Among all respondents (%)
Membership fees	34
Individual donations	27
No funding	27
Own grant-based project activities	23
Donations from businesses	15
Own business	7
Local budget	6
Other	4
Oblast budget	2
Central budget	1
Refused to answer	1

## Assessment of CSO project activity

According to survey findings, 25 percent of organizations indicated their failure to implement a single project since the large-scale Russian invasion. Fifty-two percent of organizations have 20 or fewer projects. Some organizations have more than 20 projects. Twenty percent refused to answer.

After February 24, 2022, only 17 percent of organizations received international assistance. Eighty-three percent indicated that they had not received such funding.

Statistically significant differences, compared to all respondents, were found in answers from relocated respondents: 29 percent of relocated organizations received international technical assistance grants and such grants were more often received by organizations that changed their avenues of activity – 36 percent – versus 17 percent of all organizations surveyed.

**Table 3. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question about reasons for not obtaining grants at the time of the survey**

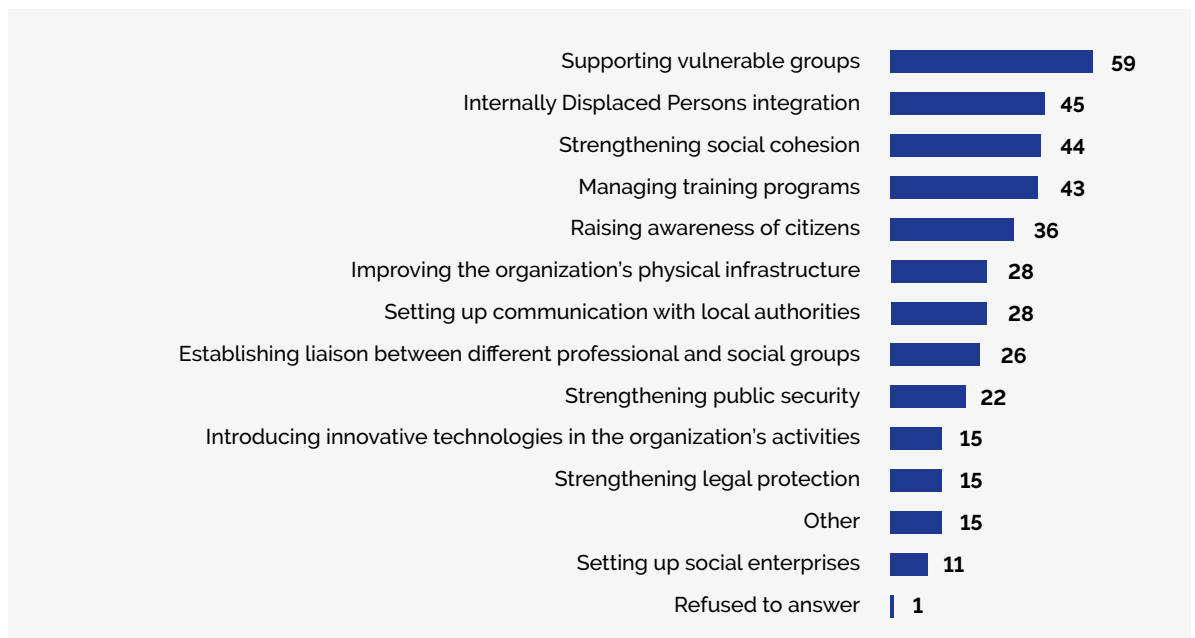
	Among all respondents (%)
Did not apply because there is no project manager (lack of resources)	20
Did not apply because of heavy workload (from other projects)	18
Did not apply because there was not a need	14
Did not apply because do not believe in the possibility of winning a grant transparently	9
Applied, decision is pending	7
Grant denied without giving reasons	7
Did not apply because the time is not right – there is war in Ukraine	7
Did not apply because of nonconformance to technical requirements	7
Did not apply – were not informed	6
Did not apply – no relevant programs were available	4
Did not apply because of short timeframe for preparation	4
Grant denied because of nonconformance to grant technical requirements	3

	Among all respondents (%)
Did not apply because do not have grant history	3
Did not apply – no time	2
Developing documentation	2
Grant denied because of flawed projects	1
Applied, grant denied because of insufficient funds	1
Grant denied because of late application	0

Among organizations registered before the year 2000, there are significantly more who did not apply for grants as they did not believe in the possibility of winning transparently (25 percent, compared to nine percent among all respondents). Among recently founded organizations, there is significantly higher percentage of those who are awaiting a decision (14 percent, compared to seven percent among all respondents) and of those who have not applied due to lack of grant history (eight percent, compared to three percent among all respondents).

Those organizations that had international technical assistance grants at the time of the survey stated that the number of such grants was 1–2 (58 percent), 3–5 (22 percent), 6–10 (11 percent) and 11–15 (three percent).

Available grant funds were primarily used to support vulnerable groups, integrate internally displaced persons, increase social cohesion, training and raise awareness of citizens.

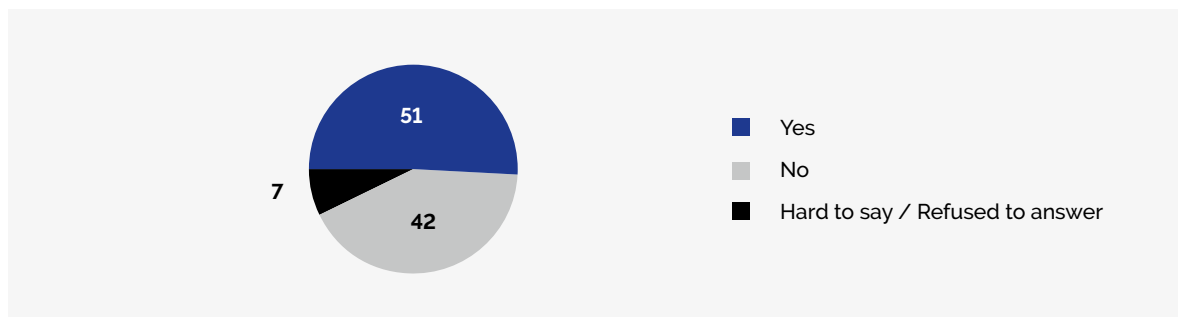


**Chart 1. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question, "What problems did the projects address?", %**

Target audiences for which these grants were administered mostly included internally displaced persons (58 percent), youth (27 percent), persons with disabilities (24 percent) and children (23 percent). Least attention was paid to representatives of the LGBT community (two percent), orphans (three percent) and war veterans and their families (six percent).

## Assessing organizations' capacities

In this block, we studied availability of policies and procedures, the organization's specialists (human resources) and obtained organizations' self-assessment data concerning development of competencies and areas of operations.



**Chart 2.** Distribution of respondents' answers to the question, "Does your organization have well-formulated policies and procedures?", %

Only twenty-one percent of organizations have monitoring and evaluation regulations and 20 percent have a fundraising plan in place.

By contrast, 44 percent of the surveyed organizations have a statute, strategic plan or a document that determines the general course of the organization's development. Forty-one percent have a communication plan that determines how the organization intends to communicate with its audiences.

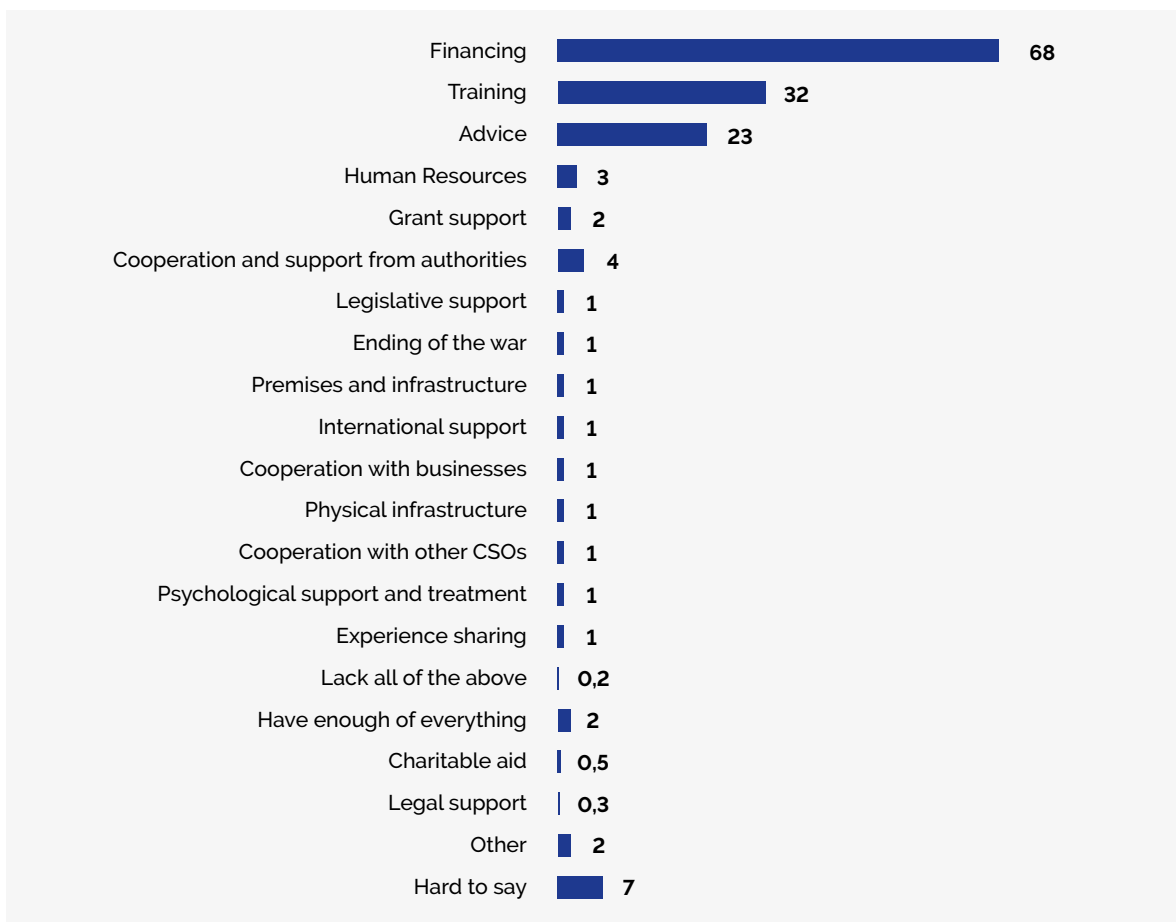
The majority of organizations have a shortage of specialized professional positions. Eighty-five percent of respondents noted their organization did not have a fundraiser; 83 percent did not employ monitoring and evaluation specialists. Eighty-one percent of organizations do not have a procurement specialist and 71 percent do not have a communication specialist.

**Table 4.** Distribution of respondents' answers to the question, "Does your organization have the following specialists?"

Among all respondents (%)	Yes, full-time	Yes, part-time	No	Hard to say / Refused to answer
Fundraiser	1	9	85	5
Monitoring and evaluation specialist	2	11	83	4
Procurement specialist	2	13	81	4
Human resources specialist	3	14	80	4
Strategy development specialist	1	14	80	5
Public relations manager	1	14	80	5
Information technology specialist	1	17	75	6
Volunteer coordinator	3	19	71	7
Communication specialist	4	20	70	6
Lawyer	3	24	66	7
Financial manager or accountant	9	32	52	7
Project leader and coordinator	18	31	39	12

Regarding volunteers, just over 40 percent of surveyed organizations have up to 20 volunteers involved in all sorts of activities. Nineteen percent have 1 to 5 volunteers; 14 percent have 6 to 10 volunteers; and, 12 percent have 11 to 20 volunteers.

In the respondents' opinion, their capacity can be significantly boosted by funding (the view held by 68 percent of respondents), training (32 percent) and advice (23 percent).



**Chart 3.** Distribution of respondents' answers to the question "Please indicate what external support you need to strengthen your capacity?", %



**Chart 4.** Distribution of respondents' answers to the question, "What additional support would be useful for your organization?", %

Special support is needed for organizations in the country's east in logistical support (63 percent), and assistance in developing strategic plans for relocated organizations (27 percent compared to 16 percent among all respondents).

## On CSOs' performance and self-assessment

According to self-assessment of their performance, most organizations regard themselves as being average or fairly competent in most areas, including management, human resources and internal communication. Organizations experience a greater lack of competence in resource mobilization and innovative technologies.

Nineteen percent of respondents assess the level of their physical infrastructure as very low; 17 percent of respondents believe their level in financial management is also very low and 16 percent of respondents gave a very low score to their fundraising skills.

In the CSOs' opinion, the capacity for project and program management is best developed. By contrast, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation, projects and programs, building partnerships between CSOs and the government and better accessibility of decision-making at the local level require major development.

## Organizations' challenges

According to the survey, organizations prioritize the following internal and external problems.



**Chart 5. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question, "What internal problems do you observe most often now when evaluating the current state of the organization?", %**



**Chart 6. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question, "What external problems do you observe most often now when evaluating the current state of the organization?, %**

Significantly, the lack of funds is felt most by organizations established in 2022–2023 (74 percent compared to 63 percent of all respondents); and, least by those operating since 2001. By contrast, representatives of organizations established between 2012 and 2021 indicated higher levels of emotional burnout. Emotional burnout is also more common with organizations that have relocated.



The following external problems were mentioned most often: low level of support from local authorities (42 percent); donors and international organizations (39 percent); and, businesses (30 percent).

## Training and development

Urgent needs identified by organizations correlate with their demand for training. Many CSOs are interested in assistance with development of strategic plans, fundraising or risk management training as well as sharing experience with other CSOs.

General CSO needs:

- Assistance in drafting and preparing applications for competitive selection and grants — 54 percent;
- Financial support — 53 percent;
- Upgrades to physical infrastructure — 42 percent. This is especially true for CSOs in the east of Ukraine (63 percent); and,
- Assistance with strategic planning: 16 percent of all surveyed and 27 percent among relocated CSOs

Relevant training topics:

- Project writing (50 percent);
- Building relationships with the public, business and government (40 percent);
- Organizational management (36 percent);
- Language (33 percent); and,
- Fundraising (33 percent)

The greatest lack of knowledge about communication and project activities was recorded among new organizations in 2022–2023. For them, relevant training mostly covers project writing (61 percent), building relationships with the public, business and authorities (46 percent), report writing (34 percent) and media relations (34 percent).

Language training prevails among organizations in the east — 48 percent versus 33 percent among all respondents, while training in report writing is more useful for organizations that have changed their activity — 35 percent versus 25 percent among all respondents.

**Table 5. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question, "What training topics are most relevant to you today?"**

	Among all respondents (%)
Project writing	50
Building relationships with the public, business and government	40
Organizational management (financial management, strategic planning, and personnel management)	36
Language learning	33
Fundraising	33
Psychology in the war/post-war context for children and adults teams	31
Specifics of handling vulnerable groups (servicemen, internally displaced persons and persons with traumatic experiences)	30
Digital literacy	27
Report writing	25
Media relations	24
Safety (Explosive Ordnance Reconnaissance and Elimination (mines safety) and first aid)	22
Own business (how to develop your business, laws and regulations and tools)	22
Monitoring and evaluation	22
Team building	22
No need for additional training	8
Other	3
Refused to answer / Hard to say	2

Eighty-one percent of those surveyed said participation in institutional capacity building programming and projects funded by international donors was relevant; 14 percent said it was irrelevant and five percent did not answer.

### Generalized findings of qualitative research on CSO needs for special knowledge to:

- Analyzing organizational resources;
- Sharing experience with organizations from other regions of Ukraine, including project experience;
- First aid;
- Building dialogue with business, local government, communities and hospitals; and,
- handling family-type homes.

### Conduct their activities in community recovery:

- Addressing environmental problems in the community;
- Implementing youth policy in the community;
- Experience in restoring and developing liberated territories;
- Communication for psychological support and integration of persons who stayed in the occupied territories;
- Communication for psychological support of witnesses of hostilities (both children and adults);
- Communication with local authorities;
- Working on local budgets; and,
- Social work with HIV / AIDS and tuberculosis patients as well as disease prevention.

## Assessing interaction with authorities, media and business

Respondents evaluated the development of their organization's relationship with various entities. Assessment of liaison with local authorities is: while 28 percent regard potential for cooperation with authorities as sufficient, 26 percent said the authorities offered no support for civil society organizations. Survey findings indicate the highest (level of relationship has been attained with the media and other CSOs.

A high level of relationship with the community was noted by 33 percent of respondents.

Organizations reported the lowest level of relationship with government structures and authorities (26 percent) and donors (25 percent).

Organizations were least satisfied with access to decision-making. Twenty-seven percent of respondents said that they were completely dissatisfied, 26 percent indicated dissatisfaction with public involvement in policy making and 25 percent were dissatisfied with liaising with local authorities.

**Table 6. Distribution of respondents' answers to the question, "Please evaluate the level of development of your organization's relationship with... Using a five-point scale for the assessment, where one is the primary level and five is at an exemplary level."**

Among all respondents (%)	Primary level	Initial level	Moderately developed	Highly developed	Exemplary level	Hard to say
Relationship with donors	25	11	19	19	15	11
Media	16	9	28	27	15	5
Other CSOs	11	9	27	32	15	5
Local self-government	21	13	26	23	12	5
Government structures	26	14	25	19	7	9
Wider public community	7	9	33	33	13	5

# CSOs role in postwar reconstruction of the country

Ninety percent of those surveyed intend to join the process of rebuilding Ukraine and their local community.

To be involved in reconstruction, respondents mostly lack:

- Funding (33 percent);
- End of war, victory and peace (17 percent);
- Cooperation and support from authorities (10 percent);
- Time (seven percent); and,
- Experience and knowledge (five percent).

Respondents see their organizations in rebuilding the country as follows:

- Humanitarian response (39 percent);
- Educational services (35 percent);
- Social protection (31 percent);
- Psychological support (27 percent); and,
- Information (19 percent).

Analysis of responses shows the vision of organizations' role in rebuilding the country differs somewhat by the timeframe of the organization's establishment.

Organizations founded before 2000 and after 2022 gave preference to restoration of infrastructure at 41 percent and 46 percent of responses, respectively. Organizations founded between 2001 and 2011 showed less interest in this activity (25 percent).

Psychological support: this avenue was more often mentioned by newer organizations – those founded between the years 2012 and 2023.

Organizations established before 2000 chose educational services as one of their main activities (22 percent). Organizations established between 2001 and 2011 showed less interest in this activity (12 percent).

Organizations in the east of the country chose restoration of infrastructure as the highest priority of their potential operations (53 percent).

Compared to organizations from other regions, those in the northern and eastern regions showed a greater interest in restoring the economy.

Organizations in the western region showed the greatest interest in psychological support (41 percent).

Restoration of infrastructure and psychological support represent key activities for most organizations, regardless of the time of their foundation or their headquarters location.

**Full text of the survey  
in Ukrainian and English  
is available at the [link](#).**

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