

An analytical report of complex research conducted by NGO Resource Center with support from the Vital Voices Global Partnership

Capacities and needs of women's rights and women-led organizations in Ukraine: transformations during wartime

The NGO Resource Center (NGORC) works to provide humanitarian assistance and supports the capacity of civil society in Ukraine and the further development of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that aim to strengthen their communities, bring changes to our society, defend democracy, and protect the rights of Ukrainian citizens.

Table of contents

Abbreviations	2
Methodology	3
Executive summary	4
First reaction	6
• Continuing or renewing work: doubts, challenges, and influence factors	8
• Further transformation: Returning to main activities	9
Interaction with government, donors, and between NGOs	12
• Government	12
• Donors and international NGOs	12
• National NGOs	16
Capacities and resources of women's organizations	18
Needs of women's organizations	20
Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention	22
Conclusions	24

Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease or 2019 Novel Coronavirus
CRSV	Conflict Related Sexual Violence
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GCA	Government-controlled Areas
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NGORC	NGO Resource Center
UN	United Nations
WLO	Women-led Organization
WRO	Women's Rights Organization

All quotes are in italics:

*“When the full-scale war began on February 24,
we were all at work at nine in the morning”*

Methodology

The aim of the research is to identify the status of women's rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to continue their activities in the conditions of war, the availability of human resources, and the technical potential for this.

The research was conducted in two stages: qualitative and quantitative. The data was gathered and processed by Gradus Research company.

The qualitative stage consisted of in-depth interviews with representatives of women's rights organizations.

- Target group: heads of women's rights organizations (WRO) in the cities of Kherson, Odesa, Ternopil, Zaporizhzhia, and Kyiv.

- Number of interviews: 5

- Time period: January 4-9, 2023

The quantitative stage of research consisted of completing questionnaires in the mobile application or desktop version of the questionnaire. Representatives of women-led organizations (WLOs) and WROs were presented with either single select or multi select multiple choice questions that were formed on the basis of qualitative interviews and different opinions expressed by the selected interviewees.

- Target group: WRO and WLO employees in Ukraine in government-controlled areas (GCA)

- Number of interviews: 51

- Time period: February 25-March 14, 2023

Limitations

Scope and geographic representation: The focus of this research is defining the needs of WROs and changes in their activities after February 24, 2022 in the GCA.

Sample size: The small size (56 respondents) for the self-assessment survey means that results may not represent the full diversity of women's organizations in Ukraine. The research used a mixed-methods approach: qualitative interviews with five WRO leaders and 51 responses to the online questionnaire. The data sets were analyzed alongside each other to cross-check findings and provide further context.

Interpretation bias: The baseline data may be influenced by different understandings or interpretations of key terms among participants. The research team sought to address this by explaining key terms and responding to any clarifying questions during the interviews. Not all experiences are reflected in this final report.

Executive summary

When Russian Federation launched the full-scale invasion on the 24th of February 2022, it resulted in massive civilian displacement, destroyed infrastructure, and loss of life, which has developed into a nightmarish normality more than a year later. Many of those affected by the war are women and children (often unaccompanied) who suffered from displacement, lack of income sources, and severed links with family and community. Women and girls represent 65% of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine.¹ These women fall under a greater risk of trafficking and gender-based violence.²

Ukrainian civil society was the first to react to the massive and urgent humanitarian needs, mobilizing quickly and showing the motivation and capacity to help those in need. Naturally, Ukrainian women's organizations were the first to respond to the needs of Ukrainian women as they were able to quickly identify the needs of their communities.

The war's escalation also turned many activists and volunteers into founders of new NGOs, and the civil society sector grew rapidly.³ Women mobilize and organize, supporting other women. They inspire, assist, and lead civil society. They defend Ukraine on the front lines with weapons in their hands, take on the responsibility of helping those who defend Ukraine, win support at the international level, care deeply about both the physical and psychological health of the nation, bringing knowledge, and protect the vulnerable, often remaining unprotected themselves.

Even organizations that were at risk of physical destruction, based close to the active combat zones or under occupation, were able to resume their work after some time, finding ways to continue their work even under high-risk conditions.

According to research conducted at the beginning of full-scale invasion, only 7% of women's non-government organizations (NGOs) reported having been forced to suspend their activities.⁴ As outlined by the Rapid Gender Analysis conducted by United Nations (UN) Women at the beginning of the full-scale invasion in March 2022: "While women and women's organizations are playing a crucial role in the humanitarian crisis, they are largely absent from decision-making at the local and national level."⁵

The aim of this research is to identify the current state of women's rights and women-led organizations in Ukraine in the second year of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine. This is especially important, as many since the full-scale invasion have been forced to focus their efforts on ensuring the basic needs of Ukrainian citizens, responding to the challenges of one of the largest humanitarian crises since World War II.

The research helps shed light on the experiences, perspectives, and priorities of women working in civil society in a time of crisis. It may provide insights into the existing capacities, challenges, needs and resources of these organizations. Understanding the challenges allows for targeted support and capacity-building initiatives to enhance the resilience and sustainability of these organizations, enabling them to effectively advocate for women's rights and gender equality.

The majority of women's organizations have strengthened their capacities during this challenging year, including financial capacity of their NGOs, although every fifth respondent reported that their financial capacity decreased. This may be explained by the fact that some organizations which carried out activities in the territories occupied after 24 February 2022 or territories of active hostilities, were not able to focus on the development of new directions of activity, but primarily focused on preserving the organizational capacity of their organization.

¹ reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/iom-ukraine-internal-displacement-report-general-population-survey-round-6-23-june-2022-enuk

² eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/07/challenges-encountered-by-young-women-affected-by-war-in-ukraine

³ cedem.org.ua/news/4365-gromadskyh-ta-blagodijnyh

⁴ eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Rapid%20Assessment%20-%20Womens%20CSOs.pdf

⁵ Ibid

Although a lot of strong women's organizations exist in Ukraine and are active throughout the country, many they do not receive adequate funding and partnerships from international donors and intermediaries to accomplish their double mandate mission, as it is pointed out by their international partners. WROs and WLOs also do not have a place in the government and UN-led decision-making spaces.⁶

The results of this study, may also assist to:

- Amplify the voices of women leaders
- Provide relevant support with their professional growth
- Provide support to women's rights organizations
- Identify needs and gaps in their support systems
- Empower women-led and women's rights organizations
- Advocate among the donor community for projects that protect the interests of women and prioritize the needs identified by local organizations
- Be an impetus for further detailed research



⁶ actionaid.org/publications/2023/standing-our-rights-feminist-insights-ukraine-response

First reaction

Despite the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, women's organizations refused to stop their activities. The vast majority of the respondents (72%) said that they had no doubts about continuing their work.

Among this group, 87% of respondents indicated that their perception of the need for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in a humanitarian crisis was the most important point when they decided to continue operations during the war. Donor support was a positive factor in their decision to continue their work for 73% of interviewed representatives of women rights organizations (WRO) and women-led organizations (WLOs).

The key areas identified by women's organizations during the first months for women and girls were immediate safety threats; lack of basic necessities; loss of livelihoods; psychological impact of war and constant fear; sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) in public and private spaces; lack of communication, information, and social services; and women facing exclusion from planning and decision-making at all levels. Some WROs already had experience working with these or related issues.

"We had the experience of conducting psychological first aid trainings and providing psychological first aid. In 2014, 2015, 2016, we actively supported IDPs and conducted trainings, and so when the war broke out, when the full-scale invasion began, immediately there was the thought, how can we be useful now, what resources do we have?"

NGOs located in western Ukraine did not stop their activities or resumed work within days after the full-scale invasion. Many NGOs that were close to the zone of active hostilities and occupation often needed several weeks to resume activities, as it was necessary to evacuate the team and/or organize the work of those who remained in the occupied territories. 65% of respondents answered that their organization did not relocate, 20% of respondents indicated that their organization completely or partially relocated within Ukraine (Figure 1). 4% of respondents indicated that their organization completely or partially relocated abroad. Some respondents also indicated that relocation did not have a significant impact on the NGO's work. After all, the teams already had the experience of remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Look, there were seven of us, three left, the rest stayed in Kyiv. Two are abroad, I am in western Ukraine. We had experience with COVID before this."

Due to the full-scale invasion and the necessity of scaling up activities, 63% of organizations increased the number of staff (sometimes with the help of IDPs), some through volunteers. At the same time, 18% of the organizations lost some of their employees and 4% experienced a breakdown of their team.

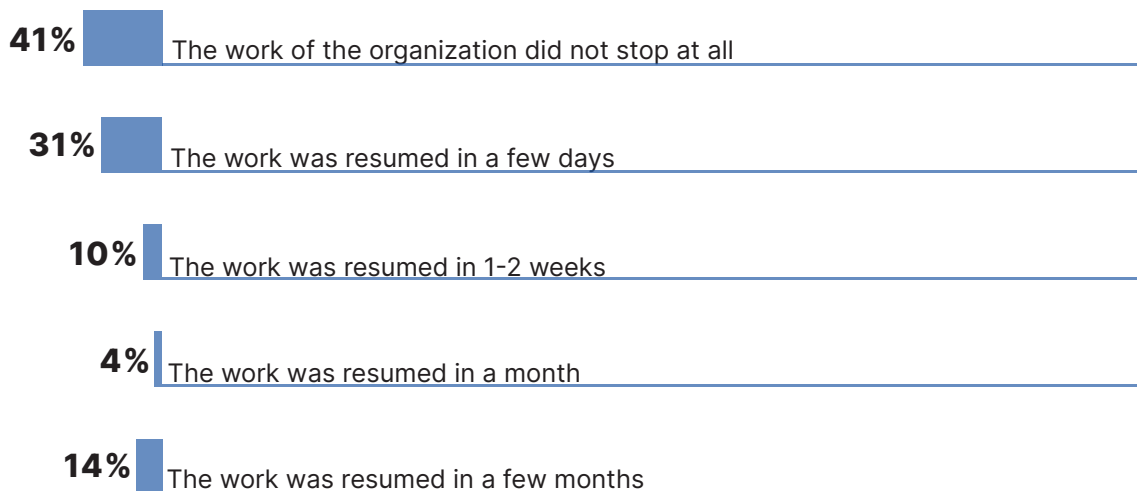
"Actually, the team took several days to relocate. Part of the team, by the way, stayed in Kherson and worked during the occupation. It depended on the personal situation of each of our colleagues."



⁷ reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/collecting-data-and-analysis-how-war-ukraine-impacting-women-and-girls

Changes in activities

Temporary suspension of activity



Geographical changes

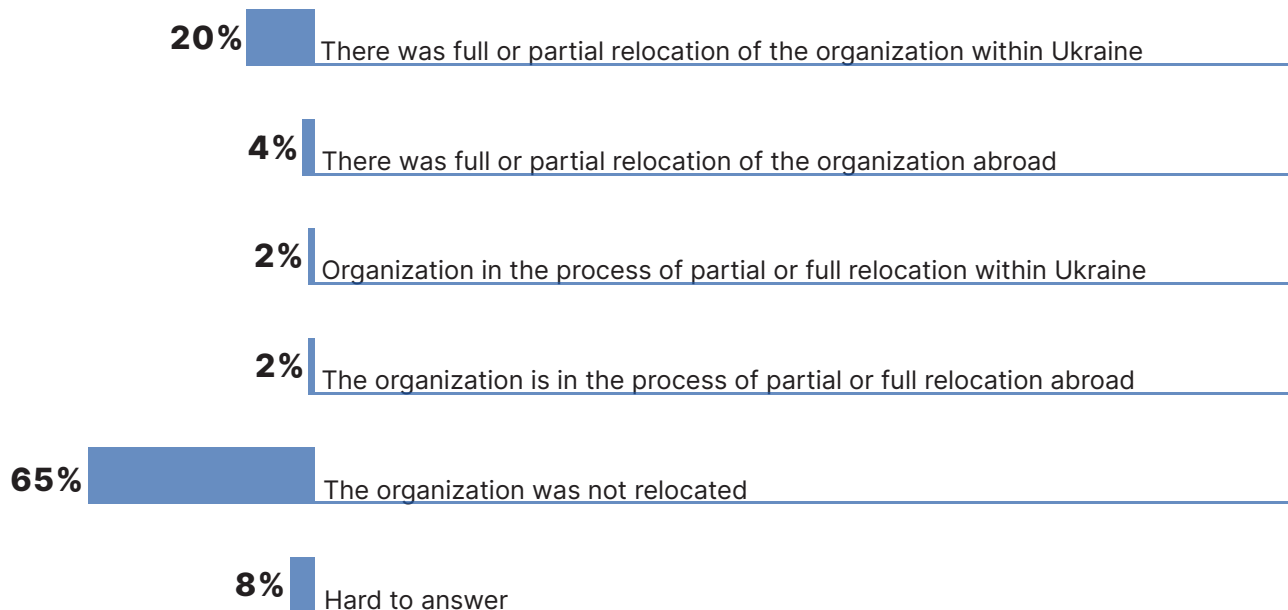
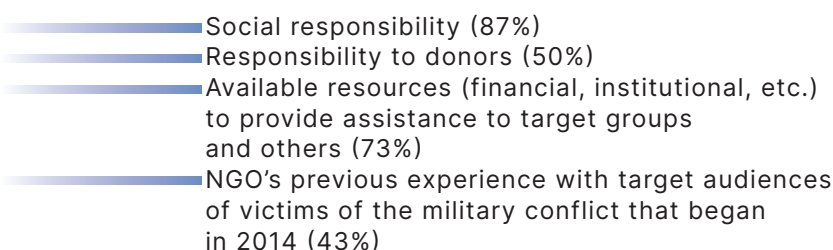


Figure 1.

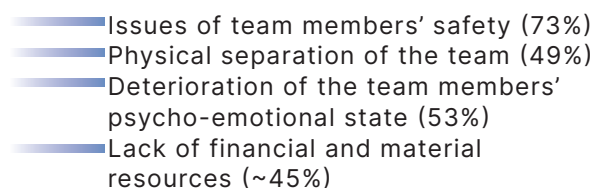
Continuing or renewing work: doubts, challenges, and influence factors

The decision to continue the work was primarily influenced by recognizing the importance and necessity of the NGO's activity (more than 80% of respondents) and the availability of resources, both human and financial (73% of respondents).

The main **motivators** for continuing NGO activities after the invasion were:



The **difficulties** faced by the NGOs included:



"Probably the most powerful factor was that we understood how much people needed us."

"When you see the eyes of the people to whom you probably give hope, you provide someone with real hope, you just save somebody's life."

"We had work experience, since 2014 we have already helped IDPs who came to us from Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. And before that, we had experience working with refugees, asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Africa. We knew what to do, we were not at a loss."

Right after the full-scale invasion, the vast majority of WROs and WLOs were actively involved in providing assistance to internally displaced persons IDPs (73%). While some of the WROs almost completely shifted to humanitarian activity, other NGOs managed to preserve their main areas of activity, supplementing them with providing humanitarian aid.

For 80% of respondents, most of their work before the full-scale invasion consisted of awareness raising and educational activities connected to women's leadership, protecting women's rights, and gender equality. 75% of the interviewed WRO and WLO representatives noted that their main activities included working on preventing GBV or domestic violence and providing assistance to survivors.

73% of interviewed WRO and WLO representatives noted that since the full-scale invasion, their additional priority is providing support to IDPs and 43% of organizations also noted their new priority is providing assistance to the survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

Following the full-scale invasion, some NGOs temporarily shifted their activities to providing humanitarian assistance, even if they had no such previous experience. They provided assistance to the territorial defense forces, the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and vulnerable population groups. Some of the employees found themselves in occupied territories and worked to provide humanitarian assistance in those areas.

"At first, we responded to the needs that there were, we actively worked with the territorial defense forces, helped them, got everything for them. Then we decided that there are quite a lot of volunteer organizations that help the army."

"We have occupied this niche, where assistance is provided to the civilian population, IDPs, the local population, who found themselves in a difficult situation due to the loss of work, and also families with many children, I mean, we work in a humanitarian area with the population."

“Due to the fact that part of our team was under occupation, and plus we had contacts with the people with whom we worked, and they quickly got together, organized themselves into humanitarian headquarters. Then we cooperated with them, provided them with support, both in the form of goods, as well as financial assistance on their personal [bank] cards. Well, of course, we supported them psychologically.”

Based on the pool of respondents, most of the WROs and WLOs were able to almost completely preserve their main activities: 73% of respondents are still active in awareness raising and the educational sphere, and 69% are still working on combating GBV and providing assistance to survivors. They now complement those activities with a humanitarian aid component, such as:

- Psychological assistance to affected women (71%)
- Psychological assistance to IDPs (69%)
- Providing humanitarian aid (57%)
- Monitoring IDP needs (53%)

The majority of organizations that carried out activities in the territories occupied after February 24, 2022, or areas with active hostilities were not able to focus on developing new kinds of activity, but primarily focused on preserving their organizational capacity.

“To preserve the organization, a significant resource was spent on it, to preserve the activity of our organizations. First of all, the task was to survive, support and give support to others. That was key.”

Further transformation: Returning to main activities

NGOs that shifted to humanitarian activities in the first months of the invasion actively mostly resumed their main activities in the summer of 2022. Primarily, this refers to the NGOs' activities that were in huge demand by society. An overwhelming majority of respondents (96%) stated that even during the war, WROs are able and willing to deal with issues concerning women's leadership, women's rights, and women's participation in the political and social life of the country.

“Women's Movement is very sensitive to the needs, it is informed, it can make an impact. Knowing the problem, you can find the solution. Women's Movement constantly searches for and finds solutions. Before the war, we worked with women's rights, women's leadership; it was a little blurred, because we were involved in different projects, like combating human trafficking, legislative changes, orphans. Now, our focus has shifted specifically to protecting rights, which is connected not only to the legal context, but also the social sphere.”

Currently, WROs' and WLOs' main areas of work include:

- Informational and educational activity

“We have activities related to educational work, which includes trainings and webinars, for school teachers and social workers. We had this before February 24, and this activity did not stop, in general, we are doing it continuously, it's just that the topics have changed somewhat.”

- Psychological assistance to women and children

“Two needs were distinguished separately, children and women; in particular, related to psychological assistance. In other words, psychologists worked with them and continue to work with them.”

- Combating GBV and domestic violence

“Last year, we became an implementing partner of the United Nations Population Fund in the field of population. And we established 119 mobile teams of social and psychological assistance for victims of domestic violence throughout Ukraine.”

Combating sexual violence, helping victims of sexual violence

"In this area, three gynecological offices were opened, not by us, they were opened by the Ukrainian Women's Fund. And we conduct awareness raising activities in order to attract the target group."

Human rights activities with an emphasis on new target audiences: women/men under occupation, women/men detained by the occupiers, prisoners of war, IDPs

"Consultations for the citizens who found themselves in temporarily occupied territories, issues of hostages, prisoners of war, those matters. It is not just humanitarian aid. There was a project of ours, we decided that just providing humanitarian aid is not enough; we provided legal assistance about renewing documents, establishing legal facts for persons who came from the occupied territories. There was assistance in legal matters for people who were 'deported', as currently defined by the representatives of the Russian Federation."

Combating human trafficking

"A large area of [our] work is human trafficking, and, in principle, we became more active in this area with the outbreak of hostilities, because we understood that many women who go abroad, go alone with children, they can become potential human trafficking victims and get into an unpleasant situation of exploitation."

Assistance to people living with HIV

"Let's say HIV/AIDS prevention services, these were the services related to preventing the spread of HIV. But our partners, with whom we discussed what to do, how to support, and so on, now almost all of these projects include a humanitarian component. A person comes for a consultation, for testing, besides this, they can also receive a food package."

Participation with government agencies to develop programs to restore regions/settlements, involving communities

"We already look to the fact that it is necessary to work on the city's development strategy, the Kherson Oblast development strategy, so that both the authorities and the community have a vision, so not to lose the democratic principles, so that the authorities see not only that it is necessary to restore light, restore heat supply, restore water supply, sewerage, the military, and first of all, for the authorities to see the people for whom they do this."

Main areas of activity before the full-scale invasion



Areas of activity

New/additional areas of activity

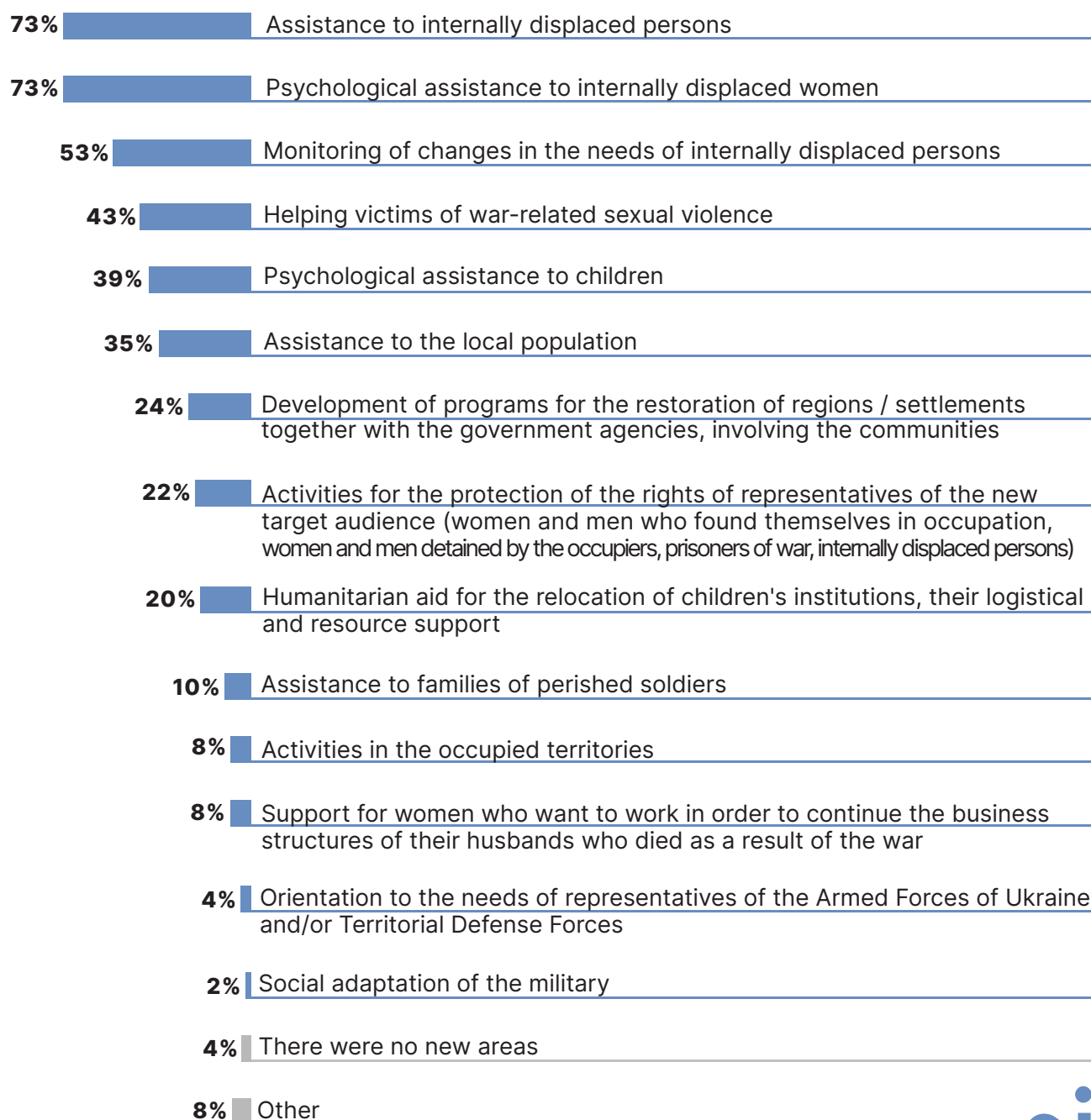


Figure 2.

Interaction with government, donors, and between NGOs

Government

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, there have been positive changes in the interaction of NGOs with government agencies, donors, and other NGOs. Cooperation with military administrations, humanitarian headquarters, and heads of territorial communities (hromadas) remains particularly effective, according to the WROs and WLOs.

49% of respondents said the degree of interaction with representatives of state institutions of local authorities increased after the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. 27% respondents noted that the degree of interaction remained at the same level, and for 18%, the degree of interaction decreased.

Among the respondents who noted an increase in the level of interaction, 76% answered that the degree of openness in interacting with NGOs increased and 72% noted that the government realized that public organization can be an effective actor. Among those who reported a drop in the level of interaction, 44% were forced to build new relations with state institutions of local government bodies due to changing their type of activity and 33% report a lack of transparency from the government side while working with NGOs (see Figure 3).

New openness and interaction between NGOs and government agencies was often created by necessity. Local authorities began to invite NGO leaders as advisers/experts on compliance with international humanitarian law and on developing regional gender policies. The local authority representatives also realized that NGOs are effective partners that have developed practical humanitarian response mechanisms and resources for implementing them.

"I negotiated with the head of our oblast military administration, and he even appointed me gender adviser so that I would still help him organize this work and have a perspective on their activities."

"We are really acting as a united front now. We are all united by one goal: to help those people who are currently in the community. And the authorities understand that they need more resources."

Despite the war, funds in some regions are allocated from the local budgets for resolving social and legal issues, and due to the advocacy of WROs in the specific region, new provisions to the local budget were made.

"They already hear us. First of all, the government hears, and critically perceives many of the shortcomings that have been identified, and has finally begun to make amendments to its provisions, which did not exist before. We conducted many advocacy campaigns, monitored the documents of local councils, the regional council, and some budget articles appeared that were not there before."

Donors and international NGOs

According to the research, the degree of interaction between WROs/WLOs and donors or international organizations increased, as reported by 78% of respondents. 6% of respondents said the degree of interaction remained at the same level, and 12% of respondents stated that the degree of interaction decreased. 4% of respondents hesitated to respond.

68% of those who reported an increase in interaction noted an increase in the number of donors, and 63% noted that the donors initiated more contacts with NGOs and increased the financing of short-term projects (see Figure 4).

“New donors are appearing, and this is very good. The situation changes. The number of donors has increased significantly.”

“The number of organizations with which we work has increased about 4 times.”

“Donor support has also increased in the amount of funding, probably 5 times. From those permanent partners, it increased by 5. In addition, it happened that we asked, well, we have one American fund, I forgot how it is translated, rapid response, we asked for \$3,000 for help, we were given \$20,000.”

Among the respondents who stated that interaction with donor decreased, half of the respondents stressed that it was due to lack of donors that can support the capacity building of WRO/WLOs, the other half reported that new donors required complicated due diligence processes.

In 2022, a very diverse pool of donors and international organizations entered Ukraine, so WROs and WLOs report contrasting experiences. While some organizations noted that their donors were not ready to support the organizational capacity of WROs and WLOs, others noted that their donors supported their capacity-building. Similarly, while some organizations experienced complications with due diligence processes or grant applications, others noted that some of these procedures were simplified by their donors, which allowed NGOs to devote more time to their operational activities, and it also helped to build trusting relationships with the donors.

On the other hand, among the difficulties, 37% of the organizations pointed out that donors had certain doubts about NGOs being able to implement projects successfully.

In general, many Ukrainian organizations raised issues around “long, complex and often duplicated international due diligence processes and ask for a coherent verification process adapted to the Ukrainian legal framework that also considers the need for rapid response.”⁸ 35% of WROs and WLOs that participated in the research also noted the reluctance of donors to simplify the requirements for preparing and submitting project proposals.

Among other difficulties, 43% of respondents stated that the lack of practical coordinated actions between international NGOs and national NGOs at the local level made interaction difficult. As it was pointed out by CARE: “WLOs and WROs are not adequately, consistently and meaningfully involved in humanitarian decision making and coordination processes and mechanisms at all levels.

Generally, women’s organizations throughout the region largely feel side-lined by humanitarian actors who have made inadequate efforts to promote their leadership in coordination and decision-making fora. While some partners feel involved, lack of transparency about decisions made means that women’s organizations are unclear as to whether their experiences and recommendations are being listened to.”⁹

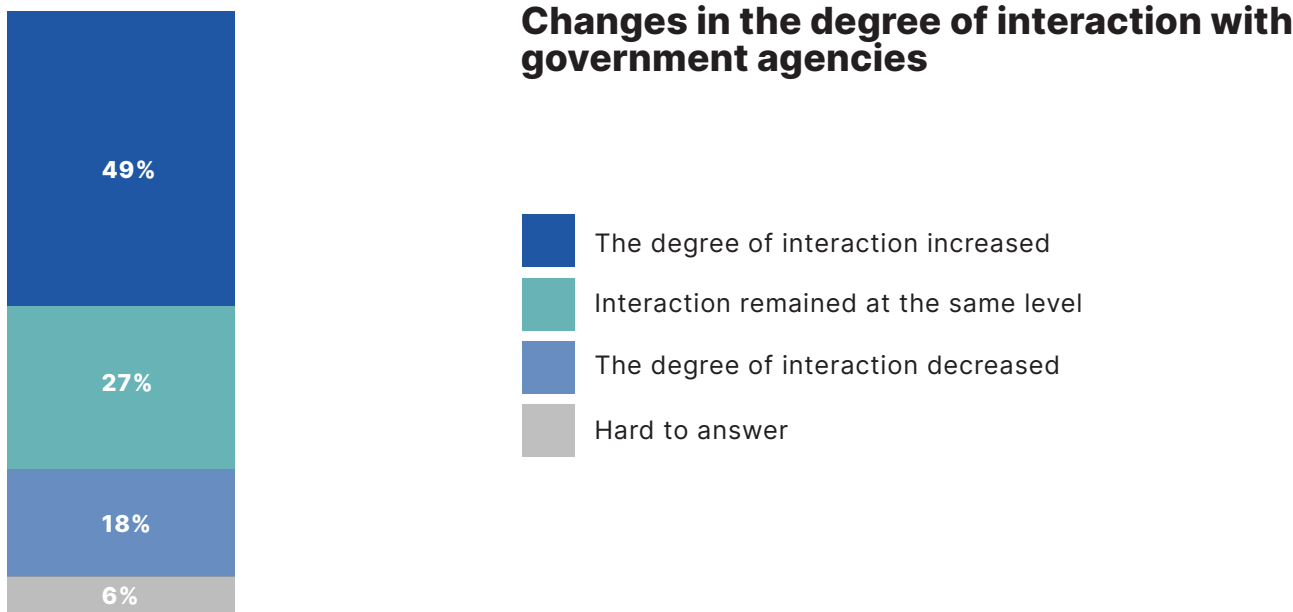
There were operational difficulties receiving funding for organizations working close to the frontline or in partially occupied oblasts (22%).

“I have the last funds that came from abroad, the National Bank did not let them pass to us for a month, because half of the oblast is under occupation. In banking institutions, Zaporizhzhia Oblast is not divided into occupied and unoccupied. And only after correspondence from our donors that we are not occupied, that we are here, that we are working, we received these funds.”

⁸ www.dec.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/2023-01/DEC%20Ukraine%20Appeal%20localisation%20scoping%20paper%20UKR.pdf

⁹ reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/six-months-ukraine-local-and-national-womens-organizations-are-leading-response-conflict-are-side-lined-humanitarian-actors

Interaction with government agencies



How exactly has the degree of interaction increased?

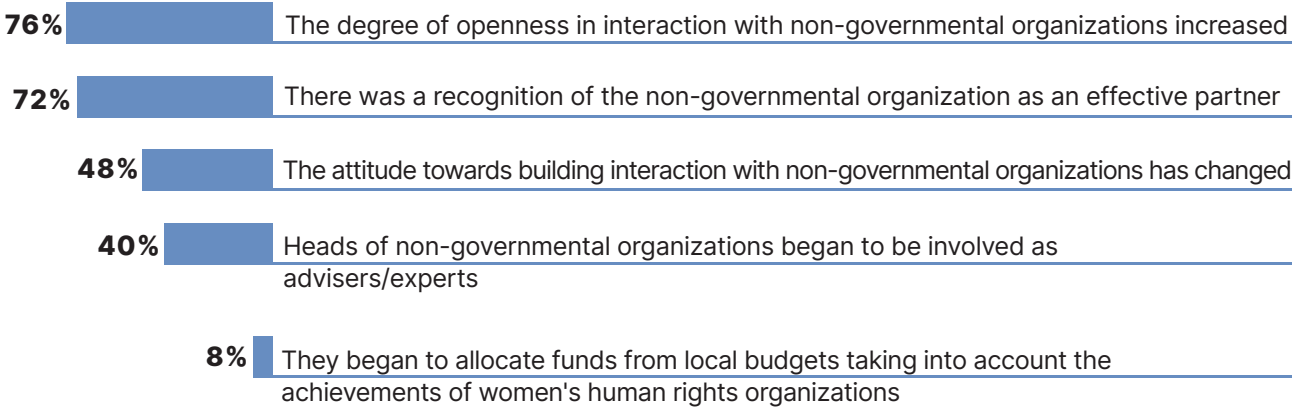
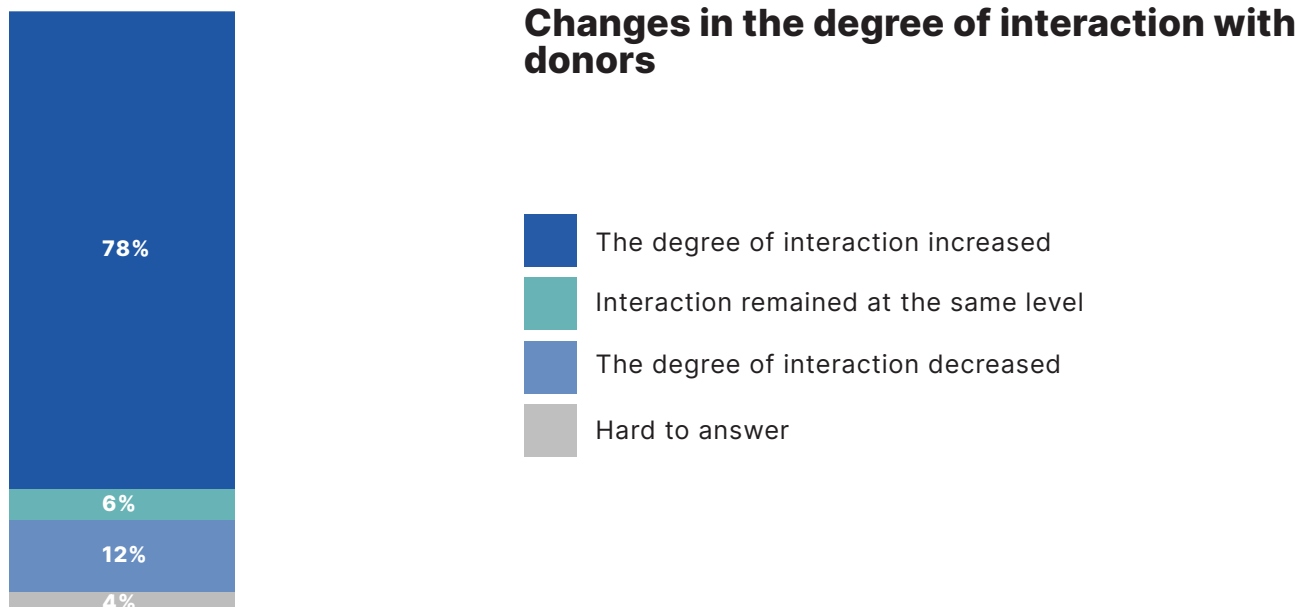


Figure 3.

Changes in interactions with donors



How exactly has the degree of interaction increased?

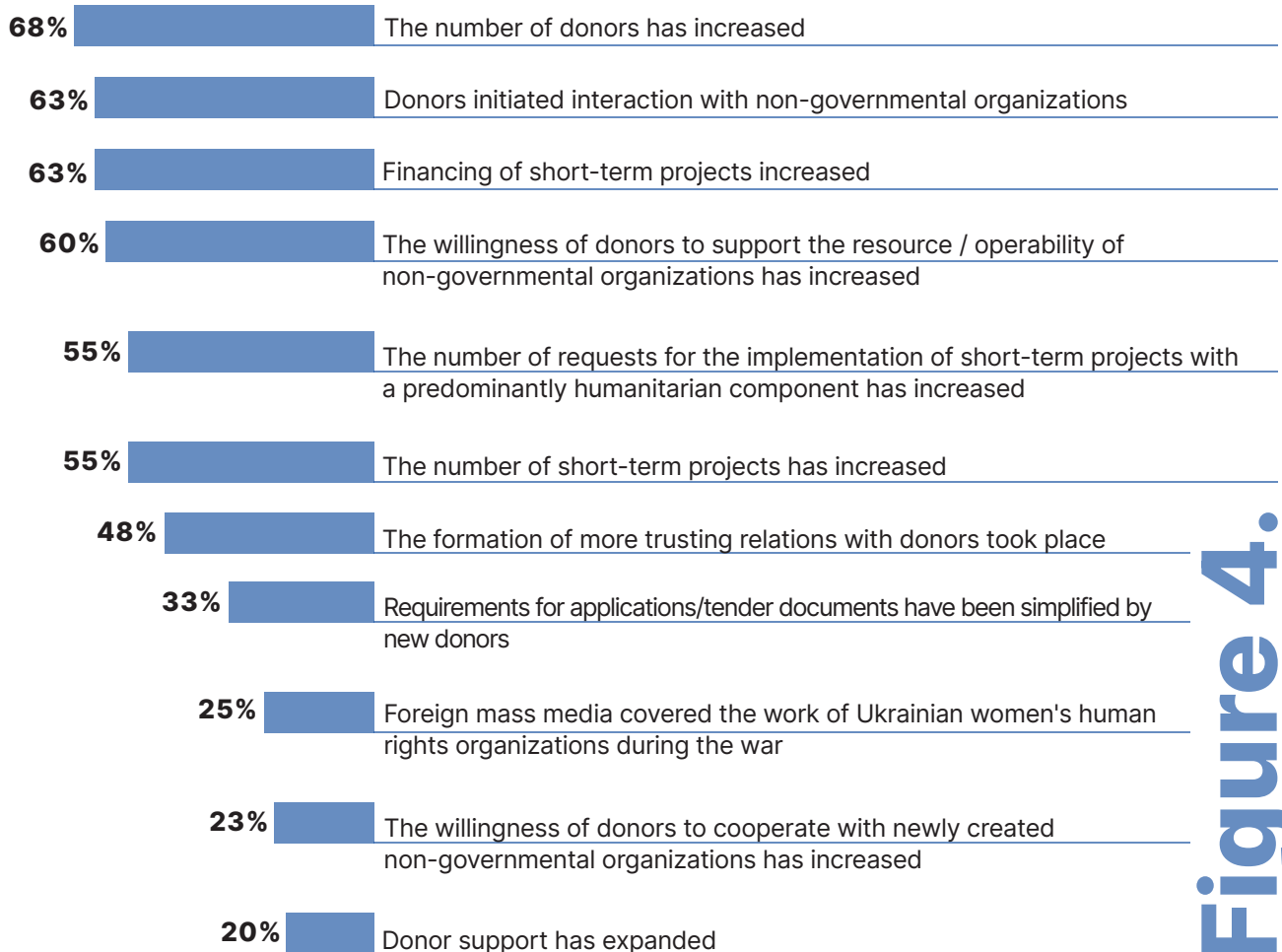


Figure 4.

National NGOs

Most respondents (67%) noted that interaction between national NGOs grew or stayed at the same level (29%), and only one person noted that their cooperation with other national NGOs decreased.

Relationships between NGOs intensified significantly, both at the national level (organizations cooperate in areas with which there was no experience of cooperation before the full-scale invasion) and at the regional level (NGOs cooperate for the optimal distribution of resources).

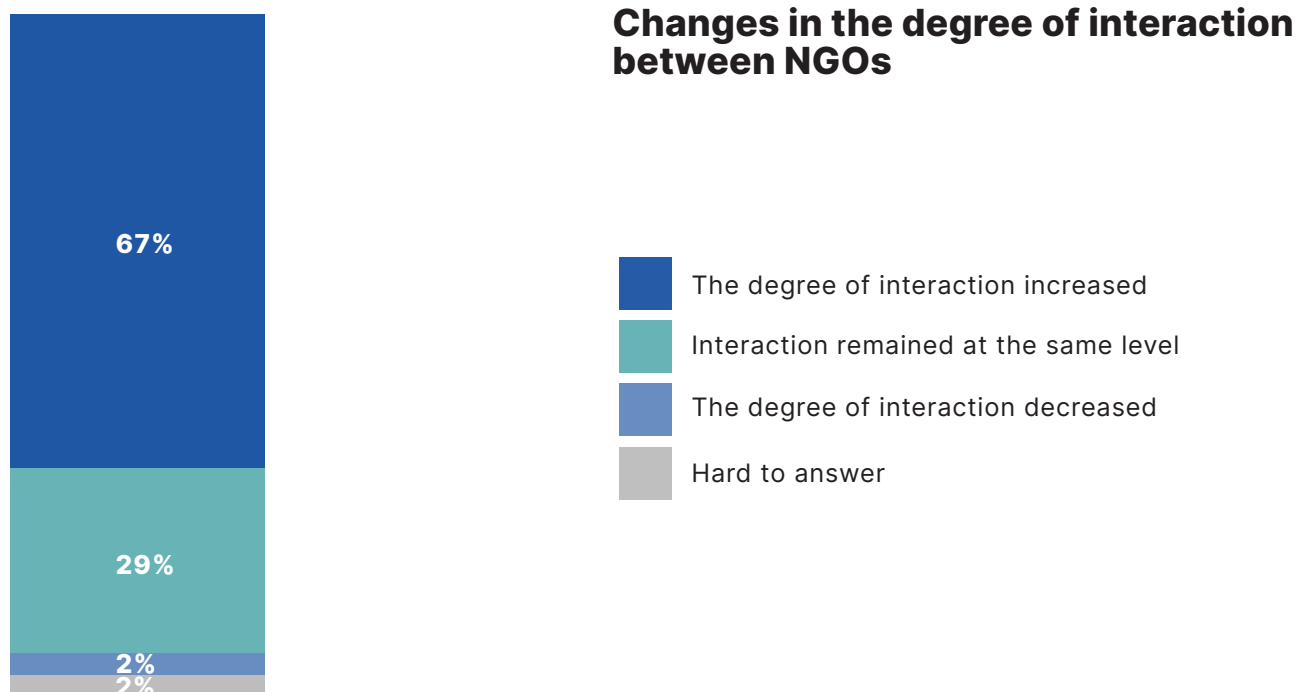
85% of the respondents who stated there was an increase in interaction with other NGOs after the full-scale invasion noted an expansion of partnerships, 65% indicated that the need to strengthen partnerships at all levels became more urgent, and 59% said already existing relationships intensified (see Figure 5).

“In addition to the regional one, we had our own network of non-governmental organizations at the national level. There are more than 30 organizations. We worked with them on combating human trafficking, in this area. Then we started cooperating also in the area of humanitarian aid and support, and a little bit of advocacy.”

Looking back to the beginning of full-scale invasion (March 2022), the overall situation was different, as reported by women's organizations: “88% of surveyed CSOs are currently working closely with volunteer groups, 64% are partnering with local CSOs and 58% with national authorities. Meanwhile, much fewer organizations are collaborating with international donors, INGOs and UN agencies.”¹⁰

¹⁰ eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/03/rapid-assessment-impact-of-the-war-in-ukraine-on-womens-civil-society-organizations

Changes in interactions between NGOs



How exactly has the degree of interaction increased?

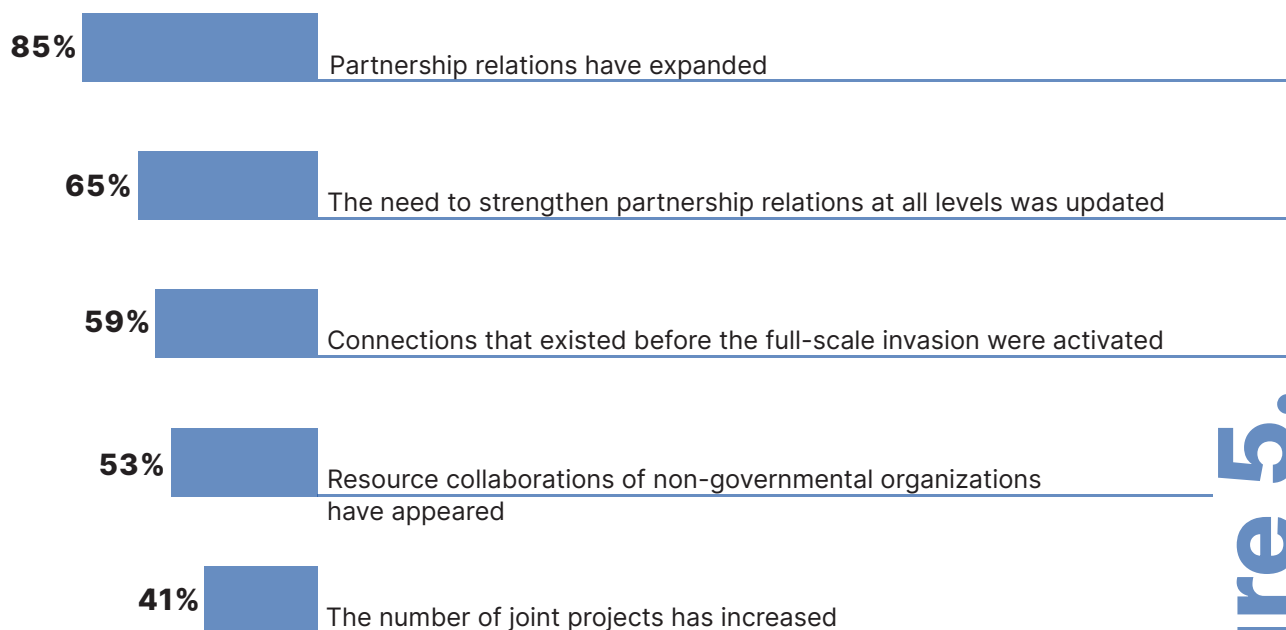


Figure 5.

Capacities and resources of women's organizations

After the start of the full-scale invasion, certain capacities of WROs and WLOs grew due to the additional funds from donors and the opportunity to spend them on developing the weak sides of their NGOs. 63% of respondents have the opinion that the institutional capacity of their organizations was strengthened. 47% believe the ability of their organization to influence the situation in the region has strengthened, and another 16% believe that they are in the process of growth.

One-third of respondents felt the organization's ability to influence decision-making in the local community has strengthened, while 29% believe that the organization's ability to influence decision-making in the local community remained at the same level.

"We are developing a methodology for providing assistance to IDPs in our territorial communities, which they (the government) have taken into account. We also developed indicators of people who suffered from domestic violence, survivors of human trafficking, including captivity, people who have been in captivity. We also developed these indicators for our community."

According to 49% of respondents, the human resources of their organizations increased, which corresponds to the number of organizations that increased their teams, also 49%. 47% noted an increased possibility to purchase office equipment or renting bigger premises for their organizations.

Communication resources increased among 57% of respondents, which is the largest growth among different resources. Communication resources remained at the same level, according to 31% of respondents. Organizations prioritized developing their communication capacities to reach a larger and more diverse pool of beneficiaries, as described in the qualitative interviews.

Financial resources increased for 55% of the WROs and WLOs representatives interviewed. It is interesting that a larger number of organizations (78%) reported that their interaction with donors increased, but that did not always translate into increased financial capacity. For 20% of organizations, their financial capacity decreased.

The financial capacity of organizations located close to the occupied territories decreased.

"Donor support has decreased, meaning the funds we received, compared with the past, the grants we received now are much smaller. They (donors) are worried, I understand, after all, the situation is unstable."

Even though financial resources for most organizations increased, they also explain:

"Now we receive a lot of offers (for funding), but this is help specifically for funds that we are not allowed to spend on the organization's resources, and it is difficult."

Similar issues were highlighted by WROs and WLOs in Ukraine and neighboring countries that distinguish the problem as: "The lack of flexible funding, including grants not covering all costs, particularly operational and core overheads, and the short-term nature of funding received, has far-reaching consequences for the very existence of WROs/WLOs. It also impairs the effectiveness of the lifesaving assistance they provide to the most vulnerable and weakens the overall humanitarian response".¹¹

"It seems to me that the work of people working in the social sphere should be reviewed, their salaries and the rest. Those who work in the fields are worth supporting. They do not have insurance, for example, like representatives of international organizations; they do not have those resources. They destroy their transportation, their own cars, the cars are old, they need to be constantly repaired. All this is not taken into account by some of the donors, I am not talking about all of them."

¹¹ reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/one-year-after-escalation-war-ukraine-making-international-funding-work-womens-organisations

Capacities of WROs and WLOs

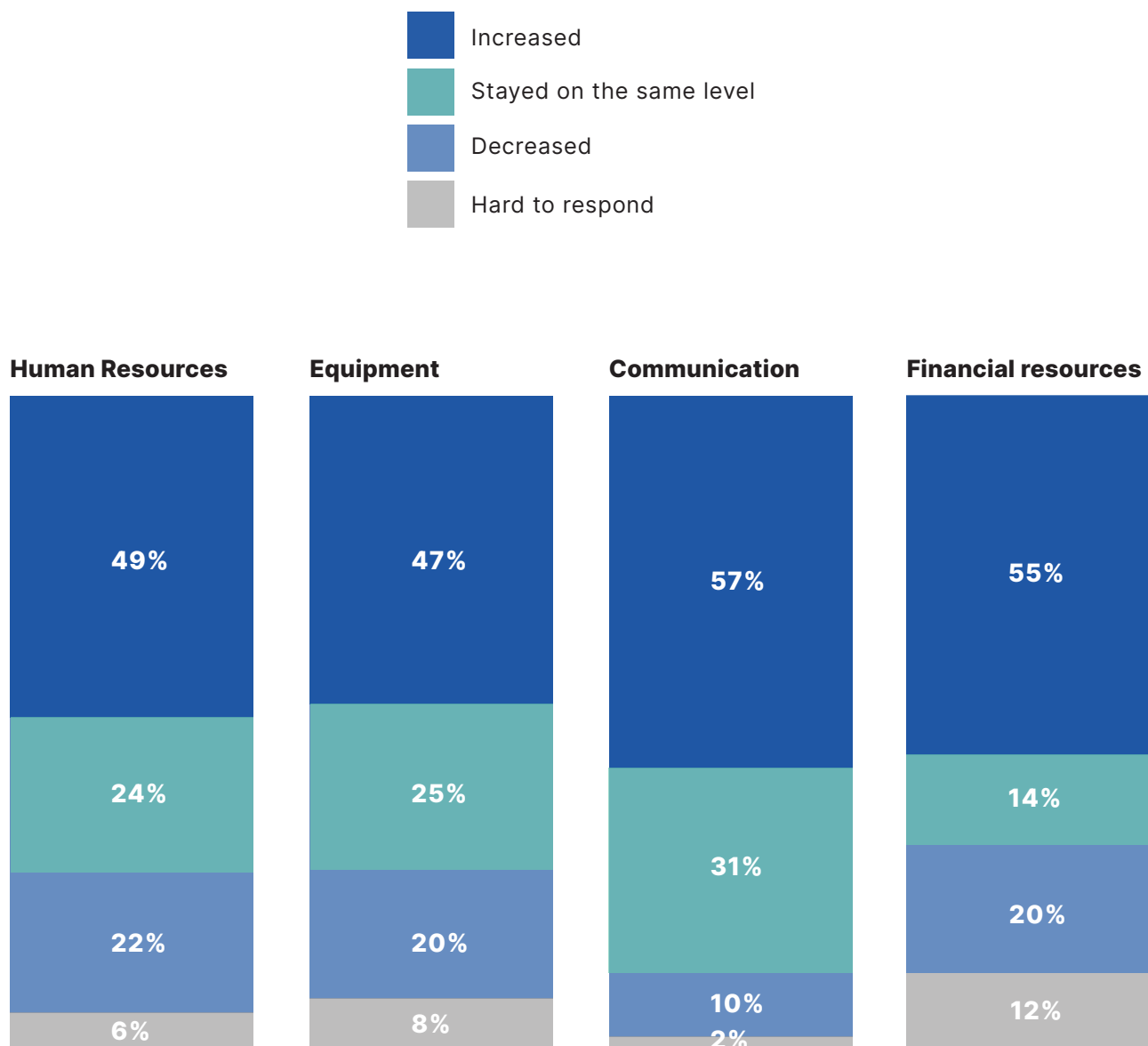


Figure 6.

Needs of women's organizations

WROs and WLOs identified burnout prevention as their primary need. The second most important priority is to continue funding for their ongoing activities.

"My employees could not psychologically withstand this situation for a month, taking into account the fact that we had bombing, and a large number of the population was [gone], my main staff left. And it was the most difficult, because it is difficult to actually find people whom you can trust, who have such a high level of responsibility and, most importantly, who are ready to work, let's say, selflessly, without funds."

57% of interviewees noted that organizations need new skills and knowledge; among them, 90% noted the need learning English. Related, it is important to note that 61% of all respondents pointed out the need to develop relationships with international NGOs.

"Learning languages is necessary. In my opinion, an NGO that works with donors must speak foreign languages, and it is necessary to work on this, because it opens up a tremendous resource."

Despite most respondents already working in the areas of GBV, raising awareness, and providing assistance to GBV survivors, many organizations indicated improving their practice of identifying survivors as another important skill they need to learn.

It is relevant to consider a recommendation related to capacity-strengthening needs from the Ukrainian Women's Fund based on two feminist forums held in 2022. They pointed out that there is a need to change how learning is approached, from one-sided "capacity building" to "exchange of experiences, mutual learning", i.e., peer learning.¹² This is particularly important considering that Ukrainian WROs and WLOs have worked with these issues for years and already have extensive experience relevant to the local context.

Naturally, high among the needs for women's organizations is continuing funding for existing projects (69%) and needs for donors to support existing areas of activities of organizations, that do not fall under any ongoing project (49%). Another major need (55%) is to cover costs for additional physical assets, like new premises, equipment, etc.



¹² uwf.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/roadmap-womens-feminist-movement-of-ukraine-ua.pdf

Needs of WROs and WLOs

Current organizational needs



What skills are needed?

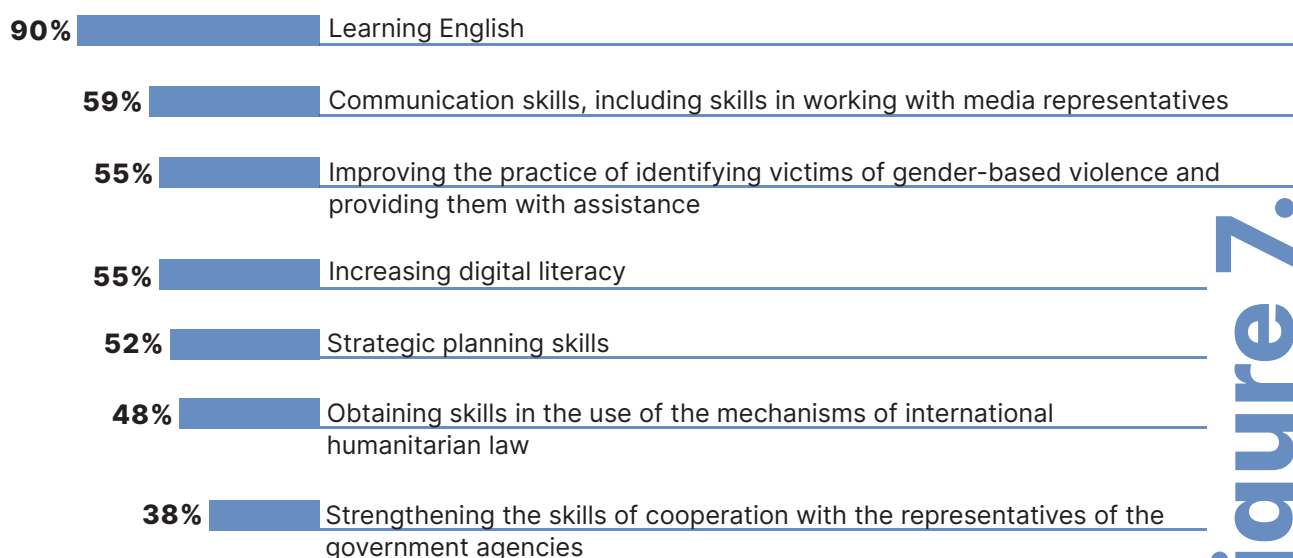


Figure 7.

Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention

Despite the full-scale invasion, women's local and national NGOs continue activities related to implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325. 59% of respondents noted that they conducted events and 61% of respondents participated in event connected to implementing the Resolution.

The events respondents organized were dedicated to¹³:

- Participating in gender policy planning at the local level (63%)
- Trainings for target audiences (including team members) to increase awareness about the Resolution (53%)
- Developing and finalizing local and national women's NGOs' policies and strategic plans taking into account the Resolution's requirements (50%)
- Trainings for local government representatives (43%)
- Trainings on using the Resolution's instruments for monitoring of activities (27%)

The Ukrainian Parliament's ratification of the Istanbul Convention is highly estimated by women's local/national NGOs, and they consider it a significant achievement of long, hard, and joint efforts. The NGOs noted that its ratification significantly expanded the mechanisms for preventing and punishing violence against women.

The ratification of the Istanbul Convention provides a powerful impetus to changes in society about the perception and response to various forms of violence against women. These changes can be implemented by developing effective prosecution mechanisms, which must be enshrined at the legislative level. The state should actively involve NGOs in developing protection and prosecution mechanisms, ensure appropriate changes in legislation, promote consolidation of established practices, and provide further support.

"We expect that, thanks to international donor support, we will be able to implement and develop the services in Ukraine in such a way that they will remain as good practices. When the war ends, Ukraine will already have the experience of working with victims and the experience of working with shelters, which the state will still be able to implement."

The ratification of the Istanbul Convention has already had an impact on NGOs' practical achievements and on strengthening cooperation between NGOs, law enforcement agencies, and other government institutions.

"We created crisis rooms in Ternopil, this is just now, in connection with this ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Then in the area of (judicial) punishing rapists, a lot of attention is paid to their punishment. Activity in the area of punishment has now been expanded in connection with the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. And law enforcement officers are strictly asked what they do in each case."

"In changing the philosophy of how our officials think. I see it, I feel it, it is already perceived and even applied, I am not afraid to say such a word. There are changes."

"The political will to resolve problems in the field of gender-based violence has appeared in Ukraine. And this is such a willingness, openness on the part of state structures to study this topic, in other words, to take on this responsibility."

¹³ Some events covered more than one topic.

At the same time, the interviewees also emphasized the necessity of speeding up development of effective mechanisms of influence government authorities and law enforcement agencies.

"It has been ratified, but the mechanisms are not working yet."

"It hasn't changed much for us. Currently, we are only involved in restoring specialized services, but this is my expert activity with the UN Population Fund. Now, specialized services will be provided, and assistance to those who have suffered from sexual violence related to the conflict, we are working in this area in a professional manner."

Conclusions

The research indicates that, despite the challenges of the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, women's organizations remain in advance positions as leading national and local civil society organizations: 96% of respondents confirmed their willingness and ability to continue the work on issues of women's leadership, women's rights, and women's participation in the political and social life of Ukraine.

With the beginning of the full-scale war, the everyday priorities of WROs and WLOs were significantly expanded due to the additional workload related to assisting IDPs (especially women and children) and CRSV. The war and security issues brought changes to women's organizations but did not weaken them, as new members (very often volunteers or IDPs) joined the teams. During the full-scale war, partnerships between national organizations and with government institutions (at the local level) and business structures were strengthened and the authority of WROs and WLOs on the local level has grown. There is also a trend of cooperation with donors and expanding the donor community supporting WROs and WLOs. It is important to note that enhanced interaction with donors does not necessarily translate into increased funding for women's organizations.

WROs and WLOs located in the frontline areas are an exception to the trends. Their capacities decreased in several areas, from a decrease in financial resources and the number of qualified team members to an increased workload for the team members who remain and a deterioration in the general material and technical conditions. A special acknowledgement must be given to them because despite all challenges, they were able to restructure their teams and continue their work, establish reliable partnerships with regional military administrations, and demonstrate the effectiveness of their work even within the communities that remain in the occupied territories.

The growing common and steady tendency among the members of all organizations regardless of their geographic location is related to psychological exhaustion, fatigue, and burnout from long-term work during the war, strong psychological pressure, winter blackouts, sleepless nights, and the constant threat of military attacks.

Other needs that were highlighted by national organizations are to ensure funding to continue their ongoing projects or activities they are already engaged in. As for new skills or knowledge, the overwhelming majority emphasized learning English as the biggest need, which can also be explained by their increased interaction with donors and desire to establish relationships with international NGOs and influence policy dialogue.

The research convincingly demonstrates that women's organizations continue to play an active role in the national life of Ukraine and they remain active in their local communities, continuing to work for the needs of local people during the full-scale war. Local WROs and WLOs stay in contact with communities regardless of challenges and threats, continue assessing the needs, strengthen community engagement and dialogue, and respond quickly and flexibly.

Like other national organizations working close to the frontline, WROs and WLOs remain more vulnerable, considering both their safety and security, as well as their institutional resources, as they spend more resources and time to protect their teams and beneficiaries.

No one can predict how long the war will last, but it is clear that women's organizations will continue their activities during all stages of the war as well as during Ukraine's peaceful recovery and restoration.

