IS CHARITY OR NGO TRUSTWORTHY: HOW TO CHECK?

YOUR ACTION GUIDE

With Ukraine still fighting against the Russian full-scale invasion, a lot of foreign and international non-profit organizations have been operating in our country. Many of them are working independently – though some of them should be kept an eye on. There are also NGOs and charities that seek cooperation with Ukrainian CSOs and authorities. This being the case, it is critical to verify the trustworthiness of such an institution, as scammers may mimic non-profit organizations to deceive others.

Therefore, an institution offering you support or partnership must be verified. The following checklist will help you be certain that it is legitimate and trustworthy.

STEP 1:
CHECK ITS BACKGROUND INFORMATION

NAME OF ORGANIZATION
Research the name of organization online. Check if there are any other organizations with similar names (or even with the same websites). Should this be the case, become more cautious, as these mimicking organizations are likely to be scams.

WEBSITE
Find a professional website presenting the organization's mission, activities, team, and contact details. Focus on the indicators below:

- Is the website informative and well-designed?
- Are the organization's goals and activities clearly stated?
- Are contact details (business address/es, phone numbers, email addresses, social network accounts) valid and readily available?
- Identify the organization's leaders. Check their profiles on social media and search the web for information about them. Try to look for comprising evidence on them. Give attention to their having any connections with Russia.
- Does the organization disclose its financial reports or information on funding sources? Review these data thoroughly.

- Find out the origin of the organization funding. Some CSOs may be financed by Russia-controlled institutions or foundations.

- Do not trust the integrity certificates posted on the organization's website. Check if they have hyperlinks. If there are no hyperlinks, look for the organization data on the websites of the institutions said to have audited and certified it.

SOCIAL MEDIA
Check for active social media profiles of the organization (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram). Are there followers on the organization's social media? Does the page engage the audience? Is there anything suspicious on social media?
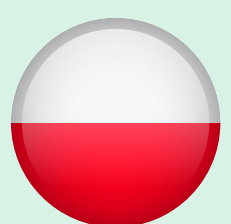
CHECKING INFORMATION ABOUT A DONOR
You can follow the **'Know your donor' Guidelines** by the HM Revenue and Customs (the UK government department) to check the donor. This is quite a strict policy your organization may want to adopt as a standard approach.

STEP 2:
CHECK ITS REGISTRATION & LEGAL STATUS

CHECK WHETHER THE ORGANIZATION IS REGISTERED IN ITS HOME COUNTRY. IF NOT, IT IS LIKELY TO BE ILLEGITIMATE. SOME COUNTRIES HAVE ONLINE DATABASES FOR COMPANY REGISTRATION. HERE ARE SOME OF THE OFFICIAL ONLINE DATABASES FOR CSOS:

POLAND:
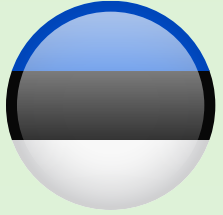**Portal Organizacji Pozarządowych ngo.pl (NGO Portal)**
Data on the 150,000 CSOs registered in Poland. The resource provides information on year and place of registration, contacts, links on social media and websites, financial reports, and the number of employees.

UNITED KINGDOM:
The Charity Commission
Data on charities registered in the UK: the overview information, trustees, financial history, contacts, and accounts of the organizations. The Charity Commission website also informs whether the organization has reported on its activity.

ESTONIA:
E-Business Register
This database covers not only businesses but also non-profits registered in Estonia. It provides information on the registration, contacts, beneficial owners, financial reports, and areas of the CSO activity.

GERMANY:
Transparenzregister
The official database of the Federal Republic of Germany for beneficial owners of different organizations. This website information is not publicly available, however, journalists and NGOs that conduct research on money laundering or terrorist financing issues may be granted an access.

EU:
You Control
YouControl is an analytical system containing a dossier on every legal entity from Ukraine, the UK, and some EU countries. On a paid basis, the web resource can provide the information on the organization's profile, its financial data, and official documents. YouControl World is a system for searching company's connections, building and visualizing business links between companies and individuals from the CIS countries and the United Kingdom, and uncovering hidden insights.

Council of Europe INGO Database
This database is limited as it includes only international NGOs enjoying participatory status with the Council of Europe. Thus, the database cannot be considered comprehensive, though it has an official status and lists trustworthy organizations. It provides information on the areas of competence, activities, geographical representation, contacts, and location of the organization.

The Transparency Register
This database lists "interest representatives" – organizations who carry out activities to influence the EU policy and decision-making process. An organization on the list can be considered reliable as it is permitted to influence the EU policy. However, being on this list is not enough for the comprehensive evaluation of the organization.

USA:
Internal Revenue Service
You may check whether a charity organization is registered and is tax-deductible in the USA.

STEP 3:
CHECK IF THE ORGANIZATION IS ON THE SANCTIONS LIST

YOU CAN CHECK IF THE ORGANIZATION IS ON THE SANCTIONS LIST ON THE FOLLOWING RESOURCES:

- **Sanctions Search OFAC**
- **United Nations Security Council Consolidated List**
- **SAM.gov**

- **State Sanctions Registry**
  (a list of the individuals and organizations sanctioned by the Government of Ukraine)

STEP 4:
INFORMATION ON THE ORGANIZATION ON THE EXTERNAL WEB RESOURCES

THERE ARE ALSO SOME EXTERNAL RESOURCES THAT CHECK THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF CHARITIES AND CSOS. THESE RESOURCES ARE HIGHLY CREDIBLE, THEREFORE THEIR EVALUATION OF THE CSOS MAY BE CONSIDERED RELIABLE. SOME OF THESE RESOURCES MAY BE FOUND BELOW:

- **Candid (formerly Foundation Center and GuideStar) (globally)**
Provides information on private and community foundations across the world (mainly on grant-making organizations, though grantees can be also found there) covering financial data, mission, contacts, and leadership of the organizations. The website has a four-seal system to indicate the transparency and completeness of an organization's profile.

- **GlobalGiving Atlas (globally)**
Provides access to the database of over 9.6 million validated charities and NGOs. It presents the organization's website links, location, and focus areas verified by the GlobalGiving Atlas. The search can be customized by country or by the organization's name.

- **Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance** (globally)

Provides information on transparency of charitable organizations worldwide. However, this website has a not-so-wide pool of organizations represented.

- **North Data** (EU)

A free online search engine that offers information on European organizations and companies including their history, financial metrics, and people involved.

- **Charity Navigator** (USA)

Provides information on transparency of US charitable organizations. Though it does not provide registration data, information on the performance and credibility of organizations (often with metrics and star rating) can be found.

- **CharityWatch** (USA)

Provides basic data on charities and rates them with a 'CharityWatch Grade.' In some cases, you may see a percentage of total expenses a charity spent on its programs in the specific year as well as the top salaries in the organization.

- **GreatNonprofits** (USA)

Lists 6,500 USA non-profits. It provides information on programs, beneficiaries, and geographical representation of the organizations. However, the major resource value is the "Community Stories": stories, reviews, and comments by volunteers, donors, and supporters on their collaboration with an organization.

In Germany, there is a practice of giving non-profits an integrity status: a 'Seal of Approval.' This status is granted by the German Central Institute for Social Issues (DZI), composed of representatives from the public, private, and civil society sectors.

OTHER TIPS FOR CHECKING

- Apart from the organization, give attention to the person who has contacted you. You can ask for their CV or a confirmation letter. In some cases, receiving a criminal record certificate from the person you are in contact with would be reasonable. For instance, British citizens can easily obtain such a certificate as this is a widespread practice in the UK. Therefore, it would be no trouble for them to provide you with the document. Try to find original examples of the documents you are asking for online not to be deceived by wrong ones.

- Address your colleagues, seeking references and recommendations on the organization, especially those who often work with international partners.

- Be aware of the "scamming "classic": putting pressure on you so that you immediately provide funds or some information, or make a decision.

- When you have a feeling of something being wrong with the organization, particularly if you have been made a too-good-to-be-true offer, re-double your attention.

- Cash transactions made by charities and NGOs are usually suspicious.

- Never share sensitive information or internal documents with an unverified organization.

YOU CAN COME ACROSS UNTRUSTWORTHY UKRAINIAN ORGANIZATIONS, TOO. FORTUNATELY, UKRAINIAN CSOS ARE OFTEN WELL FAMILIAR WITH EACH OTHER. THEREFORE, YOU CAN ASK A UKRAINIAN ORGANIZATION YOU TRUST TO CONFIRM THE INFORMATION ON A POTENTIAL PARTNER.

To check a Ukrainian charity or NGO, the following resources may be used:

- **YouControl**
An analytical system that produces a complete profile for each company and individual entrepreneur of Ukraine based on open data from more than 220 sources, tracks changes in public registers, and visualizes links between affiliated persons. Special conditions are offered for the media, investigators, and CSO staff: a full access to the YouControl analytical service for cooperation on a barter basis.

- **Opendatabot**

This resource can also help to verify an individual or an organization by access to public registers. It provides information on the organization's financial data, legal actions, and its top management.

- **Clarity Project**

Clarity Project also provides information based on public registers, including data on the public finance of an organization or an individual. This resource presents and visualizes the connections of an organization or a person under search.

REMEMBER: BEFORE STARTING A COLLABORATION WITH ANY ORGANIZATION,

IT MUST BE CHECKED!

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