



ANSWERING THE CALL OF THE HEART DESPITE THE CHALLENGES:

Interim Results of the Survey of Foreign
Volunteers and Military Personnel

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- INTRODUCTION..... 3**
- RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS..... 4**
- KEY THREATS AND CHALLENGES..... 6**
 - Key Challenges Ranking:..... 6
 - Current Challenges and Threats Identified From the Open-Ended Survey Format...7
 - Needs for legal assistance..... 9
- INTERACTION WITH THE STATE AUTHORITIES..... 10**
 - Challenges in Interaction with the State Authorities..... 10
 - Relevance of the Identified Challenges..... 11
- RESPONDENTS' RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROSPECTS..... 12**
 - Key Areas for Improvement..... 12
 - Additional Comments..... 13
- CONCLUSIONS..... 14**
 - Suggestions for Actors Interacting with Foreign Volunteers..... 15

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukraine has received unprecedented support from foreign volunteers providing humanitarian aid, medical services, and other critical support. Previously, international volunteering in Ukraine had been developing mainly through programs such as the US Peace Corps, the European Solidarity Corps, and Erasmus+, but the full-scale war has created a new context and new challenges for foreign volunteers. They face a variety of obstacles, from bureaucratic to security, which requires a systematic review of existing mechanisms for regulating their activities.

The fact that a significant number of foreigners have also joined the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine as volunteer soldiers deserves special attention. However, the participation of foreigners in military formations can create additional challenges for them.

To this end, the Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law (CEDEM) conducted a survey on the challenges faced by foreign volunteers, healthcare professionals and military volunteers in Ukraine as part of the Civil Society Sectoral Support Activity Project and in partnership with the National Social Service of Ukraine.

The main **purpose** of the study is to identify the problems faced by foreign volunteers (including foreign military) in Ukraine, in order to further develop legal advice and guidelines on regulating their stay both during and after the war.

The study was conducted from September 2024 to March 2025 using a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach. The survey was conducted anonymously through a Google form that contained both closed and open-ended questions, which allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the situation.

This document highlights the interim results of the study (covering data obtained from September to November 2024) and includes an analysis of respondents' demographics, key threats and challenges, interaction with government agencies, and recommendations for improving the situation. The study involved 60 respondents: foreign volunteers, healthcare professionals and military personnel working in Ukraine. The full report, which will cover an extended analysis and detailed recommendations, will be presented after all stages of the study are completed.

This study was conducted by CEDEM as part of the Project Ukraine Civil Society Sectoral Support Activity implemented by the Initiative Center to Support Social Action "Ednannia" in partnership with the Ukrainian Center for Independent Political Research (UCIPR) and Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law (CEDEM) with the sincere support of the American people through United States Agency for International Development. CEDEM is fully responsible for the content that may not reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

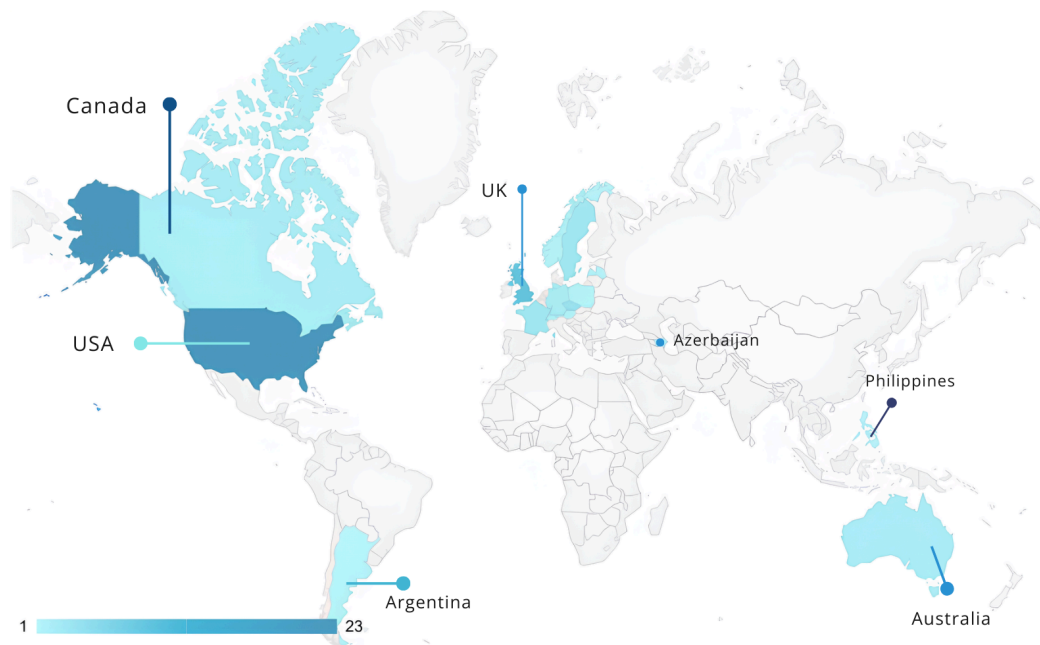
The survey involved 60 foreign nationals who volunteer or serve in Ukraine.

Citizenship of the respondents

Overall, representatives of a wide range of countries took part in the survey, emphasizing the global scale of support for Ukraine.

The largest number of respondents were the citizens of:

- **The USA:** 38.3% (23 people)
- **The UK:** 15% (9 people)



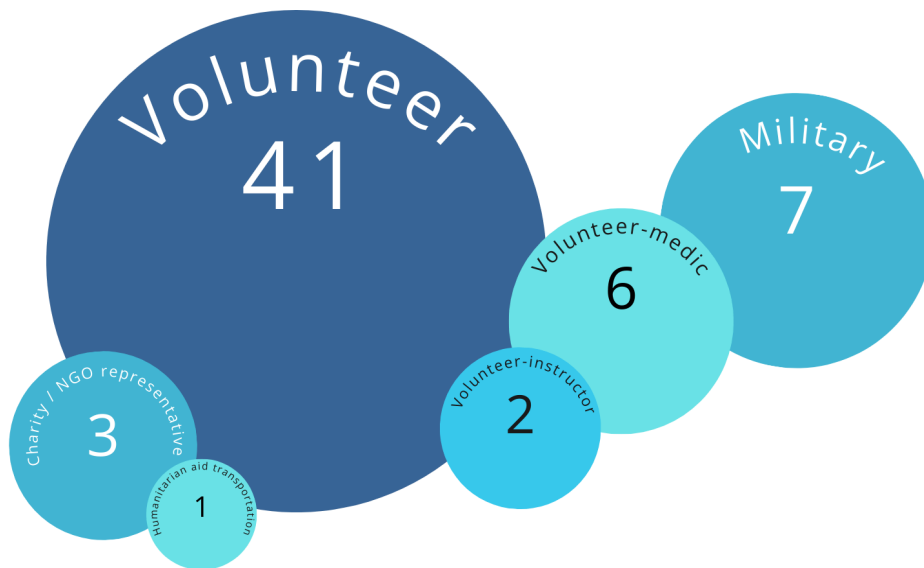
Volunteers from European countries, such as the Czech Republic, Sweden, France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Switzerland, Poland, Austria, and Denmark, as well as Azerbaijan, were also predominantly represented among the respondents. Other continents were also represented, including Australia, Canada, Argentina, and the Philippines.

It is worth noting that among the respondents there are persons with multiple citizenships (Germany/UK/Ireland) and stateless persons. One U.S. citizen indicated that he had a temporary residence permit in Ukraine.

Status in Ukraine

Among the 60 interviewed respondents, the largest share has a volunteer status:

- **68.3%** (41 people): general volunteer activity
- **11.6%** (7 people): military personnel
- **10%** (6 people): medical volunteers



A few representatives indicated that they are volunteer instructors, deliver humanitarian aid and perform medical evacuation, or manage foreign charitable organizations.

Time of first arrival in Ukraine

Among the interviewed respondents, three main waves of arrival to Ukraine were as follows:

1) Before the outbreak of the war in eastern Ukraine (before 2014):

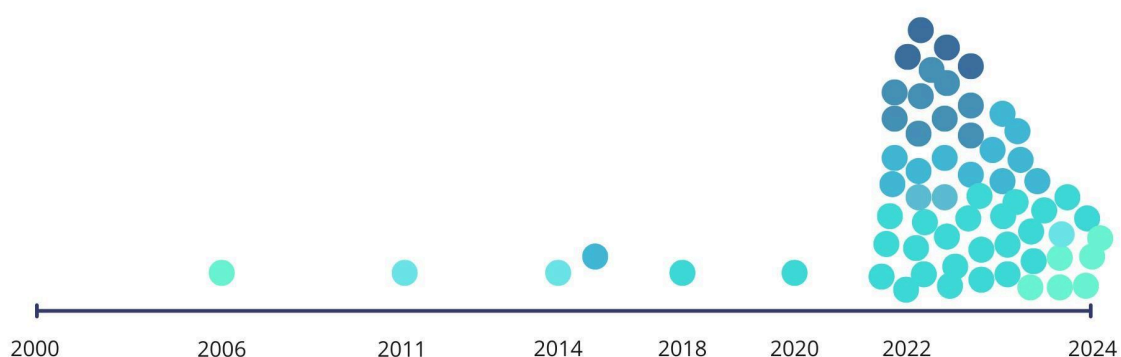
- **3.3%** (2 people) arrived in 2006 and 2011.

2) Before the full-scale invasion (2014-2021):

- **6.7%** (4 people) arrived between 2014 and 2021.

3) After the start of the full-scale invasion (since 02/24/2022):

- **90%** (54 people).



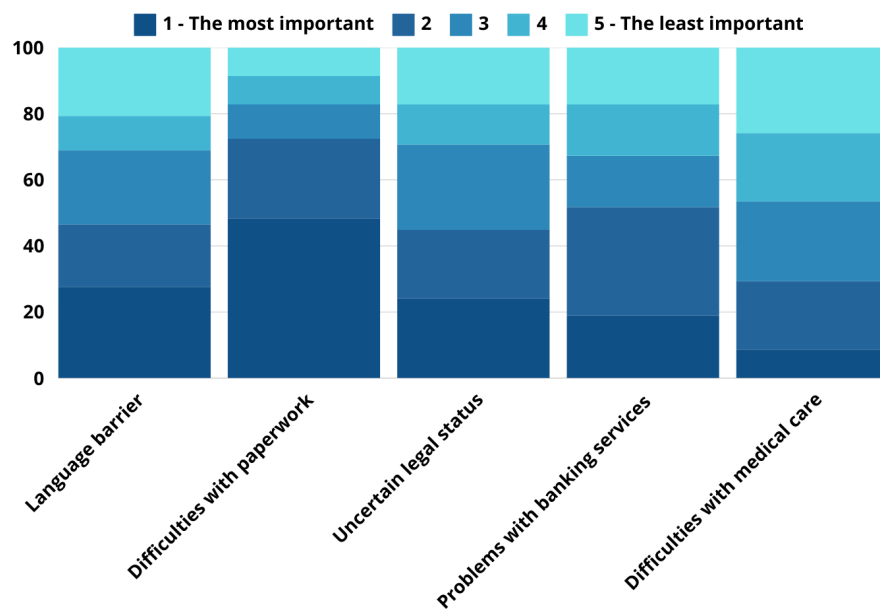
One respondent indicated their intention to come (“Willing to come”), but has not yet arrived in Ukraine. The data show that the vast majority of foreigners surveyed joined the effort to help Ukraine after the start of the full-scale invasion, with the largest wave of arrivals in 2022.

KEY THREATS AND CHALLENGES

Understanding the challenges faced by foreign volunteers, healthcare professionals and military personnel in Ukraine is critical to creating an effective system of support and integration. As part of the survey, we asked respondents to prioritize different challenges on a 5-point scale, with 1 being the most important challenge and 5 being the least important.

Key Challenges Ranking:

- **Paperwork is the most critical challenge:** 72.4% of respondents rated it as the most important (scores 1-2).
- **Banking services** is the second most important challenge, with 51.7% of respondents giving it a score of 1-2.
- **Language barrier:** 45.8% of respondents gave it a high priority (scores of 1-2).



Moderately important and less critical challenges:

- **Uncertain legal status:** 44.8% of respondents identified it as an important challenge (scores 1-2).
- **Medical care** was the least critical challenge: only 29.3% of respondents rated it as very important, with the highest score of 3-5.

Foreign military personnel: The most critical challenge for the military respondents is the language barrier, especially for respondents from non-English speaking countries. Difficulties with paperwork are also a high priority, often ranked as the first or second most important challenge. Uncertain legal status is in the middle, as the legal status of foreign military is more legally defined, especially given the recently adopted Law of Ukraine “On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine on the Legal Status of Foreigners and Stateless Persons Participating in the Protection of the Territorial Integrity and Inviolability of Ukraine”. Instead, problems with banking services and difficulties with medical care are generally perceived as less important, although medical care is the most important challenge for some military respondents.

We will further examine the specific threats and challenges faced by foreign volunteers in each of these areas.

Current Challenges and Threats Identified From the Open-Ended Survey Format

In addition to ranking the pre-identified challenges, we gave volunteers the opportunity to share their experiences in an open format, asking them what other threats they face:

The most frequently mentioned threats were direct military risks (25% of respondents) and problems with documents (20% of respondents). Let's take a closer look at the main categories of threats:

War-related threats (15 mentions)

Among the immediate war-related threats faced by respondents were:

- **Artillery shelling and missile attacks**, especially in frontline cities:

"Frequent drone missile and bomb attacks on Kharkiv where I live"

- **FPV drone attacks**, which pose a particular threat to medics on the front line:

"As combat medics we face threat all the time from the Russians, FPV drones and artillery"

- **Risks of working in the frontline zone**, including threats to aid delivery and evacuation:

"Security risk of frontline operations"

Problems with documents (12 mentions)

- **Difficulties with obtaining and extending visas:**

Access to and ease of applying for new/renewal of Visa D-10¹ and TRP (Temporary Residency Permit)"

- **Registration of the place of residence:**

"I want to do the right thing and register my address but no landlord has agreed and I'll be forced to pay a fine like I'm the criminal"

- **Lack of understanding of procedures:**

"there are no exact instructions and it's very hard to collect the information and understand what exactly, as foreigners, we should do"

¹ **D-10 Visa** is a special type of long-term visa for foreign volunteers, which gives the right to stay in Ukraine for up to 1 year with the possibility of further obtaining a temporary residence permit.

Financial difficulties (8 mentions)

- **Problems with labor remuneration:**

"Lack of pay. Salary unpaid. No combat pay"

- **Difficulties with banking transactions from abroad:**

"Difficulty getting money wired to my Ukrainian bank account"

Import of humanitarian aid (4 mentions)

- **Restrictions on the import of vehicles:**

"We operate 14 Polish registered vehicles mostly inside Ukraine... When we want to leave the country, or when we try to re-enter, sometimes our volunteers have a different vehicle owned by an organization on their record at the border customs office and they will not allow us to enter"

- **Complicated customs procedures:**

"This rule alone has made it extremely difficult and in some cases impossible for us to acquire aid from Western Europe"

It is worth noting that about 15% of respondents indicated that there were no threats or did not provide an answer. The interconnectedness between different categories of threats is particularly noteworthy. For example, problems with documents can complicate access to banking services, while foreigners' lack of understanding of the residence registration procedure affects the possibility of obtaining a temporary residence permit. This emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing the identified problems.

Foreign military personnel: The current challenges and threats faced by **foreign military and medical volunteers** operating in active combat zones should also be considered separately, as some of the challenges are significantly different from those faced by civilian volunteers:

Threats of criminal prosecution (5 mentions)

- Risks of legal prosecution due to the lack of knowledge/understanding of Ukrainian legislation:

"At my second unit; my group of foreigners were looking to disband after we finished combat operations; so we were told we had to sign forms and then we could leave. But when we signed the forms and left; we were labeled as deserters and charged as criminals in civil court"

- Possible criminal prosecution in the country of origin for participation in foreign armed groups.

Physical security (2 mentions)

- Threats from the command: Several respondents reported receiving threats of physical violence from former commanders and other unit members.
- Sexual harassment.

Needs for legal assistance

The analysis revealed that a significant number of foreign volunteers need legal support. Respondents could choose several types for legal assistance and add their own suggestions. According to the analysis results, the priority areas are as follows:

Legal status and migration legislation (25 respondents)

This is the most popular category of legal aid among the respondents. The requests relate to:

- Registration and extension of legal status in Ukraine.
- Clarification of migration legislation.
- Procedures for obtaining citizenship, especially for military personnel:

"Citizenship for service in the military?"

Interaction with the state authorities (19 respondents)

The second most popular category, which includes:

- Communication with the military authorities:
- Clarification of administrative procedures.
- Issues related to paperwork.

Additional legal needs

- **Interpretation of legislation** (6 respondents)
- **Compensation and reimbursement** (1 respondent)

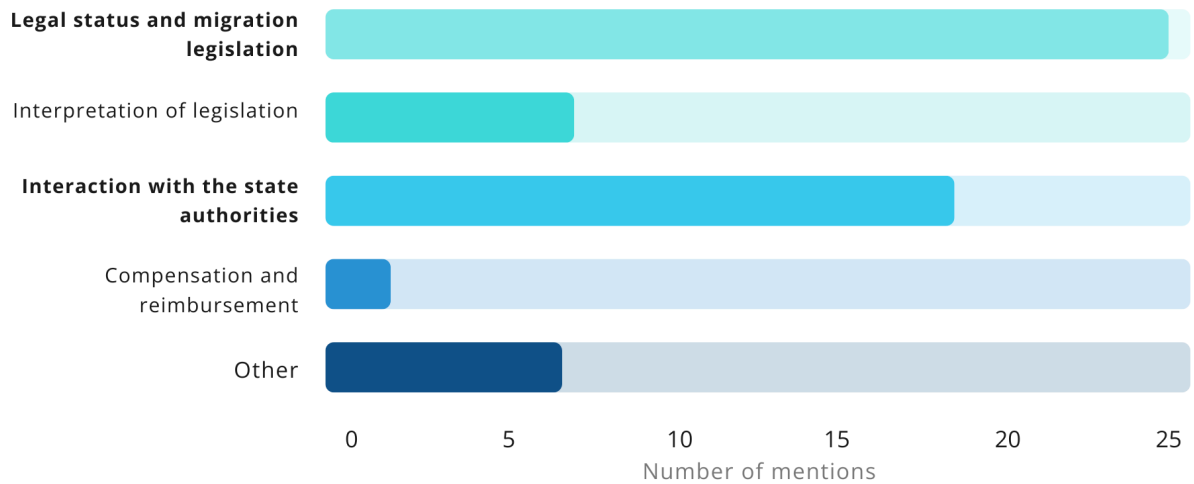
It should be noted that 3 respondents indicated that they did not need any legal aid, mainly due to:

- *Sufficient experience:*

"I am a long-term volunteer, and have learned to handle most issues"

- *Knowledge of the Ukrainian language and procedures:*

"I can't say that I specifically need a consultation because I speak Ukrainian and have an understanding of the administrative procedures that I need"



INTERACTION WITH THE STATE AUTHORITIES

According to the survey of 60 foreign volunteers about their interaction with Ukrainian government agencies, two in three respondents (67.8%) reported some difficulties. At the same time, 22% of respondents reported smooth interaction, 10.2% were unable to provide an unambiguous assessment, and one respondent did not provide any answer.



67.8%

of respondents

faced difficulties in their interaction with the Ukrainian government agencies

Challenges in Interaction with the State Authorities

Respondents who faced problems noted the following key challenges:

1. **Communication barriers** (70% of respondents who had difficulties):
 - Language barrier when communicating with officials.
 - Different interpretation of legal requirements by different officials:

"Officials not correctly understanding/following the states requirements as posted on government websites. Each person interprets the same information differently"

2. **Administrative obstacles** (67.5% of respondents who had difficulties):
 - Unclear requirements and procedures.

"Foreign volunteers need a serious, competent counterpart they can turn to without being sent from one authority to another"

- Lack of clear English or multilingual instructions:

"Very often we have problems while crossing borders with humanitarian aid... Also obtaining temporary permit wasn't easy, as we couldn't find any clear instructions anywhere"

3. Problems with documents:

- Difficulties with obtaining residence permits (55% of respondents who had difficulties).
- Delays in processing documents (42.5% of respondents who experienced difficulties).
- Problems with residence registration (27.5% of respondents who experienced difficulties).
- Difficulties with the recognition or validation of foreign documents (27.5% of respondents who experienced difficulties).

Specific challenges

Respondents also noted the below:

- Corruption at the border crossing.
- Restrictions on the import of vehicles:

"Vehicle issues with only ability to have vehicle in country for 1 year"

The analysis identified a number of systemic challenges that directly affect the effectiveness of volunteers, including:

- Lack of a unified approach to the application of procedures.
- Difficulty in registering a place of residence due to the unwillingness of landlords to get the paperwork done.
- Lack of English-language support for administrative procedures.
- Delays in the paperwork process.

Relevance of the Identified Challenges

Analysis of the responses regarding the relevance of these problems shows that the vast majority of respondents continue to face the described difficulties:

- 57 people (95%) confirmed that the problems remain relevant.
- 1 person (1.7%) believes that the problems are not relevant.
- 2 people (3.3%) could not assess the relevance of the problems.

Such a high rate of problem relevance (95%) indicates the systemic nature of the identified difficulties and the lack of significant improvements in the interaction between foreign volunteers and government agencies.



95%

**of respondents
consider these problems to be still relevant**

Given the high percentage of respondents who face difficulties (67.8%) and the fact that 95% of respondents consider these problems to be still relevant, the study results emphasize the need for comprehensive changes in the work of government agencies with foreign volunteers. Priority areas for improvement:

- Improving the efficiency of public services for foreigners
- Simplification of administrative procedures
- English-language support for all processes
- Implementation of a unified approach to the application of rules by all government authorities
- Establishing effective communication between foreigners and government agencies

RESPONDENTS' RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROSPECTS

Key Areas for Improvement

In order to identify possible ways to improve the conditions for foreign volunteers in Ukraine, we asked respondents to share their views on changes that could positively affect the situation. Respondents identified the need for:

1. Administrative support

- Simplification of migration procedures for volunteers, in particular for obtaining and extending a D-10 visa.
- Digitalization of processes:

"Implement digital scheduling systems for appointments"

- Creating a one-stop service center for foreign volunteers:

"There should be 1 clear contact point/service center for dealing with foreign volunteers in all large cities. This contact point should be a one-stop-shop"

2. Improvement in banking services

- Introduce special banking services for foreign volunteers, including simplified procedures for opening a bank account and receiving all bank documents in English.

"Allow temporary residents to open fully-functional bank accounts"

3. Optimization of customs procedures:

"Expedited processing of supply trucks at the border for pre-approved organizations"

4. Language adaptation.

- Ensuring that English-language consultations are available in government agencies:

"All officials should speak English"

- Providing documentation and official instructions in English.
- Introducing English-language pages on the official websites of the main government agencies that interact with foreign volunteers and military personnel.

Additional Comments

The analysis of additional comments from respondents revealed several important aspects. One of the biggest risks is a decrease in international support, particularly in the humanitarian and volunteer spheres, due to bureaucratic obstacles. Lack of understanding of the registration and paperwork processes by foreigners or complicated procedures for obtaining a temporary residence permit may reduce their initiative and interest, which in turn may lead to a decrease in the level of support from the international community.

Another aspect is the need for better integration of qualified foreign specialists, such as doctors, engineers, and mine clearance experts. These people have invaluable experience, and the lack of openness to cooperation or clear procedures for interaction can lead to the loss of qualified personnel. To ensure stable and rapid development, it is crucial to create conditions for the effective integration of foreign experts.

"The military system has a serious problem at the organizational level of dealing with skilled foreigners who want to help"

However, despite the numerous challenges, many volunteers report positive experiences in Ukraine. The high motivation of volunteers to continue their activities in Ukraine is likely due to the sense of importance of their work and the real impact they have on local communities.

*"I f*cking love this country and have given almost two years of time to help"*

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions presented here summarize the interim results of the study conducted from September to November 2024, in which 60 foreign volunteers, medics and servicemen participated. This stage of the study has identified a structured picture of the challenges and needs of foreign volunteers in Ukraine, demonstrating both key problems and possible solutions.

The most acute problem for foreigners is the paperwork, with more than 72% of respondents identifying it as a critical challenge. Limited access to banking services and the language barrier also cause difficulties: more than half of the respondents mentioned these problems as significant obstacles in their activities, especially when interacting with government agencies.

In the security sector, a quarter of respondents noted war-related threats as the main risk, including artillery shelling and FPV drone attacks in the frontline areas. However, administrative threats are no less important: 20% of respondents have faced serious problems due to difficulties with documents, and 13.3% reported financial difficulties.

Unlike the security challenges faced by anyone staying in Ukraine during the armed aggression of the Russian Federation, the most critical challenges for foreign volunteers can be positively influenced by effective strategies and coordinated actions of the state, business and the public sector.

The study revealed systemic problems in the interaction with government agencies: 67.8% of respondents reported significant difficulties, and 95% confirmed that these problems remain relevant. The biggest obstacles include communication barriers and complex administrative procedures. In the area of legal support, the greatest demand exists for assistance with the legal status and migration legislation (41.7% of respondents).

Based on the preliminary analysis, it is possible to identify priority areas for necessary changes. First and foremost, we need to focus on administrative reforms, such as the creation of a one-stop service center for foreign volunteers and simplification of migration procedures. At the same time, it is necessary to work on improving financial inclusion and on logistical optimization and language support.

These interim results demonstrate that only a comprehensive approach and coordination between different government agencies can significantly improve the conditions for foreign volunteers in Ukraine. A full analysis of the situation and detailed guidelines will be presented after all stages of the study are completed in March 2025.

Suggestions for Actors Interacting with Foreign Volunteers

Based on the identified challenges, including legislative and law enforcement ones, guidelines have been developed to improve the conditions for foreign volunteers and foreign military personnel in Ukraine. The key task is to create a unified system of communication with foreign volunteers and military personnel and to develop a mechanism for cooperation between entities interacting with them.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine should:

- Prepare and ensure that the Law of Ukraine “On the Legal Status of Foreigners and Stateless Persons” is amended to abolish the need for a D visa for volunteers from visa-free countries for the period of martial law and one year after its termination.
- Introduce the practice of canceling consular fees for obtaining a D visa, which is used by South Korea, Latvia, Germany, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Hungary, Montenegro, and Japan, defining clear and transparent conditions that will be in effect until the end of martial law and for at least 3 years after it is lifted.

The State Migration Service of Ukraine should:

- Ensure that foreigners have access to oral English-language advice on their legal status through the SMSU hotline.
- Analyze the possibility and consequences of simplifying the requirement for the registration and verification of residence of foreign volunteers for the period of martial law and one year after its termination.

The National Social Service of Ukraine

- Develop a special English-language information section on the NSSU website that will contain advice for foreign volunteers on how to conduct volunteer activities in Ukraine in both Ukrainian and English.
- Create a one-stop shop for requests from foreign volunteers; and indicate on the official English-language version of the NSSU website the contact e-mail address for foreigners if they have additional questions regarding their volunteer activities in Ukraine.

The Ministry of Defense of Ukraine should:

- Analyze the possibility of using the official NATO languages – English and French – in the training of foreign volunteers and the provision of administrative services to foreign military personnel. Adapt the use of English and French in documentation.
- Develop courses to improve language skills in the units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, in particular, English courses, and to ensure that all representatives of the AFU who communicate with foreign military personnel due to their positions and during their service take these courses.
- Conduct proper verification of reports of sexual harassment and threats of physical violence among military personnel and investigate these cases in accordance with the current legislation of Ukraine.

The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine should:

- Amend the tax legislation to simplify the taxation of volunteer insurance (draft law No. 10040 of 09/13/2023).

Ukrainian insurance companies should:

- Develop an insurance package for international volunteers that will cover the costs of treatment in case of injury during volunteer activities in Ukraine, as well as war-related risk insurance.

The National Bank of Ukraine and Ukrainian banking institutions should:

- Encourage and initiate the development and implementation of special banking products for foreigners, including international volunteers, which will include simplified procedures for opening a bank account, expand the list of banking services, and provide services in English.

This survey was conducted as part of the Project Ukraine Civil Society Sectoral Support Activity implemented by the Initiative Center to Support Social Action "Ednannia" in partnership with the Ukrainian Center for Independent Political Research (UCIPR) and Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law (CEDEM) with the sincere support of the American people through United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The research is conducted by the team of the Center for Democracy and Rule of Law. The analysis of the interim results of the survey's data was carried out by:

- **Arina Yevhienko**, sociologist, project manager at the Center for Democracy and Rule of Law;
- **Daria Hrosul**, junior lawyer at the Center for Democracy and Rule of Law.