



People Power Infrastructure:

Mapping Ukraine's Social Movement Landscape



Direct Action Lviv. William Vest-Lillesøe / ActionAid

Front cover: Direct Action Lviv. William Vest-Lillesøe / ActionAid

Contents

Introduction	04
Methodology	06
Limitation of the Study	08
History of Collective Action in Ukraine	09
The Current Situation of Collective Action in Ukraine	10
Restrictions	11
Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats - SWOT	12
Strengths: Remarkable resilience and a powerful mobilization under the hardest circumstances	13
Weaknesses: The struggle of organizing in wartime	17
Opportunities: Stronger influence of social movements on the policy and the society	18
Threats: What impedes movements’ development	20
Recommendations to take the work further	22
Donor Do’s and Don’ts	26
Takeaways from the report and commitments for the future	28
Sources and Literature	30
Annexes	31

Social Movements Mapping in Ukraine:

Launch of the research and discussion around the perspective on democratic resilience in times of war

Introduction

In 2022, the global federation ActionAid Federation made an unprecedented decision for the Federation to initiate humanitarian action work in a region with no prior presence — Eastern Europe. It was due to the influence of the full-scale invasion started by Russia against Ukraine, the challenging of the existing geopolitical mechanisms of international law and post-World War II status (at least, in this part of globe), renewed debates around accountability for war crimes and effectiveness of the International Criminal Court and the UN system, and the anticipated effects on the traditionally excluded and high-risk populations of Ukraine and the globe. Since then, local teams have been providing support to people across Eastern Europe guided by ActionAid's humanitarian signature emphasizing support for women's and young people's leadership in humanitarian crises for just community-based response, resilience, and recovery. Among ActionAid's tactics is the holistic support of social movements (hereinafter — SoMos) rooted in the organizations' approaches as a triple nexus: humanitarian—peacebuilding—development, actor embracing the complexity of the collective human experience of crises beyond the traditional divides in the third sector.

The triple nexus of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding cannot be understood only through the lens of institutions and states; it must also account for the power of self-organized communities. Social movements, often horizontal, informal, and deliberately outside institutional capture, have stepped in where formal systems falter — delivering aid, defending rights, and mobilizing people and communities against injustice. The social movements ecosystem embodies the nexus not as a policy framework but as lived practices: linking survival with dignity, relief with resistance, and recovery with the collective imagination of a more just society. Analyzing civic activism during wartime through this perspective underscores that response and recovery are inseparable from the pressures placed on the social fabric by humanitarian crises, and that resilience grows from communities empowered to act collectively.

The research was conducted in 2025. Social movements, which have long been an integral part of Ukrainian society even before the independence in 1991 and becoming more and more important in the communities life since then, continuing to advocate for rights, freedoms, and justice even under the difficult circumstances of ongoing war, and making its valued input in overcoming the consequences of war on different levels, from the grassroots to the national level.

Despite burnout, budget cuts, constant hostilities, and an overwhelming volume of needs, activists and volunteers persist in delivering services, developing products, supporting vulnerable groups, and stepping in as critical partners where the state lacks the capacity, resources, or funding to act. By proving vital during the war, social movements show their value in practice, which strengthens the credibility and legitimacy of their demands for human rights, justice, inclusiveness, and freedoms.

The purpose of this report is to gain a better understanding of the complex environment that Ukrainian social movements have and continue to navigate as the humanitarian crisis turns increasingly more protracted. A special focus is dedicated to understanding the self-reported strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the role of social movements as civic actors in this context through interviewing a number of the current social movements. The research also aims to identify the strengths of movements to be further fostered, the risks to be mitigated, the gaps between humanitarian, peacebuilding, and developed actors to be bridged, and specific capacity-strengthening areas for movement infrastructure providers, like ActionAid, to increase support and deliver higher value to local communities. Additionally, the research may serve as a valuable source of insight for donors, international and national non-governmental organizations, and a wider range of other stakeholders involved in the struggle for global social justice.

ActionAid extends enormous gratitude to all the members of social movements and representatives of other civic actors who were kind enough to share their experiences, learnings, and wisdom with the



Kyiv Pride 2025. Dominika Ozynska / ActionAid

research team — without your openness, guidance, and recommendations, this research would not have been possible.

The research and report were prepared by a collective of authors. Maintaining the spirit of the movements studied, the project was organized on a collaborative, volunteer basis, with willing contributors joining the team over the course of the work: Andrii Kruglashov – independent researcher, lead interviewer, analyst and coordinator; Iryna Drapp – sociologist; expert in qualitative and quantitative methods, who managed research methods and task coordination, and data analysis; Sonya Triska — student activist focused on animal rights and feminist movements; Sofia Trotsyk — MA student at Kyiv Aviation Institute, covering urban, animal, feminist, and student movements; Yana Nadiyets — MA Student at Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University, network analyst, who contributed to profiling new movements and mapping relationships between social movements.

From the ActionAid Eastern Europe team, the research was coordinated by Matey Nikolov, Regional Social Movements Programme Lead, with the valuable contribution of Daria Khrystych, Senior Project Management Officer, and Yulia Lubykh, Senior Ecosystem and Learning Officer, and the support of Olena Prokopchuk, Civil Society Development Advisor.

ActionAid believes that this work will be interesting to the actors who are establishing their programs in Ukraine and those working in the Ukrainian context for an extended period. If you have any suggestions, or comments, please use the QR code below to get in touch with ActionAid Eastern Europe's Social Movements Team.

Give Feedback



Methodology

The methodology was designed based on ActionAid’s guidance for working with crisis-affected communities and informed by theoretical underpinnings on social movements engagement across the triple nexus.

The aim of this report is to explore the state of the Ukrainian social movements ecosystem in the aftermath of more than three and a half years of large-scale humanitarian crises and response, triggered by the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It examines how social movements contribute to the humanitarian response, adapt to the strains of a protracted crisis, sustain community support in conditions of war and overlapping emergencies, challenges and barriers they face, possibilities they have for the growth, the networking between different movements, and their collaboration with local authorities, international organizations, and other stakeholders.

More specifically, this report aims to:

- **Identify** the primary strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as experienced by social movements in Ukraine;
- **Analyze** the strategies and tactics these movements employ to navigate barriers and advance their goals, including how they have and continue to adapt to the ongoing polycrisis context.
- **Assess** the impact of the humanitarian crises and response on the resilience, autonomy, and capacities of social movements.
- **Examine** the interaction between humanitarian actors and grassroots social movements, identifying both limitations and possibilities.
- **Recommend** practical, evidence-informed policy measures and support mechanisms to address these challenges and strengthen the enabling environment for their continued work.

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, desk research, and participatory observations to strengthen the reliability of insights.

Six semi-structured expert interviews with Ukrainian civil society leaders, from academic institutions, national and local NGOs, and social movements leaders, have been conducted to further define and adapt the theoretical framework and methodology of the research. The interviews revealed deeper insights about the lenses and considerations needed to adequately grasp the experience and role of social movements as civic actors in Ukraine. One recurring theme was the necessity of an **action-based lens** for the identification of social movements : organized communities, formal or informal, should not be viewed as movements unless they are able to sustain **volunteer participation in collective action**, demonstrate **a minimal level of coordination or structure** and collectively articulate a **shared set of values and ideas**. This framing acknowledges that many movements evolve in informal ways, and while some choose the path of institutionalizing or formalizing their work, others intentionally remain informal, horizontal, and flexible.

Another key insight for understanding social movements in Ukraine is Cometta & Cid’s (2023) notion of the **‘new agora,’** where group chats used by social movements can be understood as digital agoras—horizontal spaces where activists engage in deliberation, coordinate strategies, and enact forms of grassroots democracy. In online group chats is where the majority of modern organizing happens; it is where awareness-raising, recruitment, engagement, coordination, and action planning all take place within a shared, collective space. This is why these digital public spaces – and the diverse strategies employed by different movements within them – must be treated as central objects of analysis in research on contemporary social movements in Ukraine. These chats can range in size from small groups of five to sprawling communities of over 50,000 members, giving them an extraordinary reach that, if leveraged appropriately, can become a powerful asset for crisis preparedness, response, and recovery as well as for transformative collective action.



Julia Kochetova / ActionAid

Today’s movements exist in the interplay between action, shared identity, and the spaces—physical or virtual—where people come together to shape collective strategies for achieving common goals. To further increase the quality of insights for this report, forty-five semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of diverse social movements, both small and large, active and inactive, very formal and informal. The thematic focus was wide-ranging, from environmental and animal rights initiatives to independent unions and professional/ labor movements, feminist, women’s rights and LGBTQIA+ movements, initiatives fighting for the rights of prisoners of war, veterans’ movements, minority rights and student movements, as well as local community activist groups.

During the research, thirty social movements profiles were developed using SWOT analysis, which allowed the research team to conduct a comparative analysis and identify some of the shared strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats shaping contemporary Ukrainian movements. Each profile includes the movement’s SWOT analysis alongside its tactics, goals, internal organizing practices, and alliance building strategies. This comparative analysis, combined with insights from the other methods, provided a profound understanding of specific strategies of individual initiative and a broad analytical base from which

to generalize cross-cutting patterns in the current landscape of Ukrainian social movements.

Additionally, three intersectional focus groups were conducted with attendance from leaders of social movements working on intersecting areas of climate justice, humanitarian dignity, labor rights, and women’s and LGBTQIA+ rights. The focus groups addressed the following topics: common challenges, patterns of interaction, institutionalization efforts, resource dynamics, internal and inter-movement tensions, and strategies for sustaining long-term engagement. This format was chosen to explore intra- and inter-movement dynamics and learn from the variety of activist experiences, not just leaders, thereby revealing social dynamics, shared values, contented meanings, and other insights into the community’s understanding of actions in their context through facilitated dialogue.

The research team participated in education camps, lectures, markets, fairs, rallies, cultural events, and collective actions organized by diverse social movements identified in the mapping phase.

Participatory observation allowed the research team to gain first-hand, contextualized insight into people’s behaviors, group dynamics, mobilization strategies, and public engagement. (For a list of observed events, please check Annex 3)

Limitation of the Study

The thematic focus of the mapping covers human rights and humanitarian actors, as well as NGOs, LGBTQI+, feminist and ecological initiatives, student and veteran movements, and several urban initiatives.

Organizations and initiatives affiliated with far-right, gun-rights, religious, and conservative actors were intentionally excluded from the scope of this research. These actors often reinforce systemic power imbalances by marginalizing or silencing people and communities based on their identities, and their agendas are in direct conflict with ActionAid's Human Rights-Based Approach, which prioritizes inclusion, equality, and the rights of women, youth, LGBTQIA+ people, and other marginalized groups. Including them would not only raise ethical and safety risks but would also compromise the analytical focus of this research, which is to generate insights that are relevant for rights-based humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding partnerships.

The geographical scope of this study remained primarily national, with most interviews conducted in urbanized areas of Kyiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, Lviv, Chernivtsi, and Dnipro. The research did not capture rural movements outside larger cities due to its methodological design and time-bound limitations. Many groups operating in less urbanized areas rely on locally embedded, face-to-face organizing, which proved harder to reach within the available timeframe and resources.

Including them without dedicated participatory methodologies risked generating incomplete and unrepresentative data. Their exclusion ensures analytical coherence by acknowledging the significant differences between rural and urban organizing, while at the same time underscoring the need for future research specifically designed to capture the experiences of rural social movements. Understanding these rural dynamics will be critical for future humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding strategies, as rural communities often face heightened risks during crises and are key to building large-scale inclusive resilience.

For the network analysis, only references from interviews with movement representatives and survey responses were considered. A more in-depth examination of the interconnections between movements would require additional sources, such as media mentions, joint participation in events, social media shares, and other data. Due to the limited resources available for the research, the research team was forced to limit the data set and draw conclusions based solely on gained information through interviews, focus group discussions and other methodologies of the research used.



History of Collective Action in Ukraine

Social movements in Ukraine have deep historical roots, shaped by cycles of flourishing, repression, and renewal that continue to influence contemporary mobilizations.

Social movements in Ukraine have deep historical roots, shaped by cycles of flourishing, repression, and renewal that continue to influence contemporary mobilizations. From the cultural renaissance and peasant resistance of the 1920s, brutally silenced through Stalinist terror and the Holodomor, to dissident networks and *samizdat*¹ traditions that preserved voices of dissent in the Soviet era, Ukrainians consistently mobilized to defend dignity and rights under extreme pressure. The student revolution of 1990 (Revolution on Granite) and grassroots activism after Chernobyl signaled a new era of collective action, while feminist, human rights, Roma, and Crimean Tatar movements in 1990th highlighted the agency of marginalized groups in shaping Ukraine's civic fabric. These legacies of resilience, adaptation, and solidarity are not only the foundation for the mass mobilizations of the 21st century—from the Ukraine Without Kuchma² to the Orange Revolution³ and Euromaidan⁴—but also foreshadow some of the reasons why social movements today become key actors in the humanitarian response, bridging urgent relief, struggling for long-term social change, and fostering a cohesive social fabric.

While there were numerous of the movements, protests and other actions in different regions of Ukraine, and some of them are not enough documented because of their grassroots nature, we believe that the landscape of the further development of social movements was created by the anti-corruption activists (Kateryna Gandzyuk, whose murder shook the activist's community in 2018, Serhii Sternenko, accused for self-defence, who mobilized around himself hundreds of supporters, or Vitaliy Shabunin, who was accused in military service avoidance in 2025), human rights, feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements, movement for

the inclusiveness, movements of representatives of different ethnic minorities, and others.

More than once, political actors tried to establish a "cargo cult," faking the energy of the movements by hiring paid loyalists or dependent staff to walk with flags, guided by their "brigadiers." Still, for the observer, it was clear the participants lacked motivation.

The grassroots movements listed below successfully transitioned into political parties or managed to elect some of their members into public office. These movements were not the primary focus of this study, but may be of interest to readers exploring how civic mobilization translates into political influence:

- The Green Party of Ukraine, which emerged from the post-Chernobyl environmental movement, won 19 parliamentary seats in 1998.
- PORA, whose members gained prominence after the Orange Revolution (2004), saw several representatives enter politics.
- Following the Revolution of Dignity (2014), the Democratic Alliance, one of the most successful youth-led NGOs, transformed into a political party that became a launchpad for emerging civic and political leaders.

While some of the activists were looking forward to the collaboration with the government officials (especially after 2014, when many of the CSO leaders became part of the political structure), some were strongly against the collaboration with politicians, trying to maintain their independent status.

¹ The term "samizdat" literally means "self-publishing." Samizdat was a method used by dissidents, activists, and intellectuals to circulate banned political writings, literature, and critical ideas outside official state-controlled channels, often at great personal risk. In modern usage, it can also refer more broadly to any underground or independent distribution of content outside mainstream or official systems.

² Protest campaign after the murder of journalist Heorhiy Gongadze, establisher of the first internet-newspaper Ukrainska Pravda (Ukrainian Truth) and the release of tapes accusatory to the former President Leonid Kuchma (2000-2001).

³ Orange Revolution was a series of mass protests and political events in Ukraine that took place between November 2004 and January 2005, following a disputed presidential election. The movement emerged in response to widespread allegations of electoral fraud, voter intimidation, and corruption organized by the political-oligarchic force that competed for the status quo with opposition politicians during the presidential elections.

⁴ Also known as Revolution of Dignity - protests against the decision of the former political force led by former President Viktor Yanukovich and his Party of Regions against EU accession, that led to the massive movement against the political regime (2013-2014). It was used by Russia to occupy Crimea and part of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

The Current Situation of Collective Action in Ukraine

On February 24, 2022, following the full-scale invasion, an unprecedented number of Ukrainians mobilized in collective resistance.

By April 2022, up to **80%** of Ukrainians were actively involved in civic activism—donating and engaging in volunteer work, logistical support, or other societal contributions. The participation of the registered NGOs and volunteers affiliated with them has been discovered by many, including ActionAid (the *Civil Society in Flux* and *From the Ground Up: Ukraine's Civil Society in Recovery*, 2025).

Collective action in Ukraine today is tightly linked to the war — new movements have emerged, while those that had previously been active changed or updated their agenda in line with new challenges. Activists became a part of the defense movement in 2022 among many Ukrainians who volunteering for the military service; changing rapidly the focus of most of the movements to the support of the army and to the displaced civil population. Even though wartime leads to restrictions on protests, some took place anyway, with a few becoming regular.

Amidst the study, at least 3 student-driven campaigns involving street protests got ahead while staying non-violent (May-August 2025). The authorities that first ignored it, had to respond to the protest and partly satisfied the demands.

According to the analysis by the Kyiv School of Economics⁵, among motives for the participants of the protest, 21,4% came with motivation of the independence of the anti-corruption institutions—NABU and SAPO, expressed directly in demands to “restore independence” or “protect anti-corruption bodies from the authorities”; 15,8% with a concern of the visibility of the protest and mutual support (“we must show that we are many,” “to support people who are defending rights in our country”), as well as the expression of civic stance (14.2%) (“so that I am heard,” “to show that I care,” “if not me—then who”); 11,3% came with a motive to prevent the usurpation of power and authoritarianism (“not to allow the creation of an authoritarian state,” “against usurpation and dictatorship”), along with more pragmatic motives—demanding changes to legislation (10.0%) and maintaining pressure on the authorities (9.5%) (“to

show the authorities that the people are against their decisions,” “to show the authorities that this is not acceptable”).

But we believe that most of the collective actions happened on the grassroots level, with the ones organizing evacuations, accommodation for the displaced people or those whose belongings were damaged by shelling, organizing community around supporting families who experienced loss, and so on. And while it is still possible (we believe, to some extent) to come with protesting “cardboards” in Kyiv or some other big city, it is rarely possible in other cities, and almost impossible in rural areas where civic space tends to be even more restricted.



Gathering of young activists. Carol Garcia / ActionA

Restrictions

Following Presidential Decree No. 64/2022 on the imposition of martial law on February 24, 2022, the legal framework governing civic action has changed:

Constitutional Limits: Article 39 of Ukraine’s Constitution guarantees the right to peaceful assembly, though it can be restricted by court decision in the interests of national security or public order—to prevent unrest or protect public health and the rights of others.

Martial Law-Specific Powers: Article 8 of the Law “On the Legal Regime of Martial Law” authorizes military administrations and commanders to set further limitations. These restrictions often relate to timing or location—such as bans during curfew hours—making peaceful assemblies physically impossible in certain periods.

Currently, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted a resolution making it mandatory to clear mass public events with the military. Debate is ongoing on how it will affect the right to peaceful assembly, but holding community-building events will get harder.

Still, some of the street actions happened: the regular rallies for the freedom of those captured in Mariupol (FreeAzov), by families of the captured

and missing soldiers, and rallies for the fixed terms of the military service. Additionally, there were movements against martial law limitations for protests — a 8th of March small demonstration in Kyiv in 2024, also for the Strict Military Services, both in Kyiv and Lviv, students protests against merging universities in 2023-2024. They were less visible in the media and more locally rooted.

In addition to formal (both legal and organizational) constraints, **self-censorship has emerged** as a notable factor. Until 2025, society did not seem to approve of protest activities, viewing public actions as inappropriate during wartime, while others felt their issues were no longer of pressing importance. Volunteers and activists wonder if they are doing enough and if they raise issues at the right time.

“Since 2022, people have developed a kind of self-censorship. That is, you start thinking, “Is this the right time for this?”; “When we started, we thought about advocacy through civil disobedience. But the current context makes such practices inappropriate.”

Anonymous contributor

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats - SWOT

In a context where social movements in Ukraine act as first responders, rights defenders and community rebuilders, the research team relied on SWOT analysis as a comparative lens. During the interviews with diverse social movements, 30 movement profiles were developed, integrating SWOT, tactics, goals, internal organizing, represented communities, opponents and allies. By utilizing SWOT as a comparative framework, the research team was able to identify trends, not universal truths, of shared strengths, recurrent weaknesses, cross-cutting opportunities and common threats. This SWOT-based comparative analysis allows us to paint a decent picture of the shared trends within contemporary movements as observed in the current stage of the full-scale invasion while acknowledging the diversity of their roles.

As the role of movements exist is at the nexus of relief, rights, and recovery, this research assumes that understanding their SWOTs will help humanitarian-peacebuilding-development actors to identify hubs and bridges in the civic ecosystem, leverage their high-reach digital community-based spaces for preparedness, response and recovery, and designs support systems that strengthen pre-existing local agency. In short, the SWOT comparative analysis turns dispersed experiences into a strategic evidence base for movement-centric programming across the triple nexus.

Best-Case vs. Worst-Case Scenarios

In a best-case scenario, movements leverage their internal strengths — cohesion, volunteer energy, agility, communication, networks, expertise, and pragmatic engagement with authorities — while making use of external opportunities like reconstruction, EU reforms, digital innovation, and international solidarity. In this trajectory, they consolidate as central drivers of Ukraine's democratic

renewal, shaping inclusive recovery, influencing policy, and embedding civic culture across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

In a worst-case scenario, persistent weaknesses such as donor dependence, burnout, weak infrastructure, and fragmented coordination combine with external threats like shrinking civic space, donor fatigue, and the prolonged war. Movements risk becoming further fragmented and reduced to ad hoc relief providers, while state and business actors dominate reconstruction. Civic influence could shrink dramatically, undermining the long-term prospects for democratic development.

The intention of this SWOT is to be a useful tool as civic actors willing to support grassroots movements reflect on which strengths to foster, weaknesses to address, threats to mitigate, and opportunities to seize with their programming — always with the understanding that it is movements themselves who must decide the path forward.

Strengths: Remarkable resilience and a powerful mobilization under the hardest circumstances

Value-based teams and ethical leadership

Movements repeatedly highlight cohesive teams with shared purpose and rapid decision-making capacity. This is particularly important in wartime, when uncertainty and resource scarcity make a clear vision and division of responsibilities essential. Leadership within the movements is often characterized as ethical and authentic, which builds trust within the core teams and the larger community, and with external partners. Some groups have even managed leadership transitions without disruption, something rarely seen in small, less institutionalized organizations. One activist explained, *"We strike a good balance between flexibility and speed, while also having well-established internal processes. One example is that we are one of the few organizations that managed to change leadership — and didn't fall apart in the process."*

"Working with people requires a lot of effort. Sometimes, you need to talk not just about work, but about personal things. So that people feel their importance, inclusion, involvement, and don't lose motivation."

Culture of civic engagement and mutual aid

A deep culture of civic engagement through volunteerism continues to underpin much of the work of Ukrainian social movements. From evacuations to clean-up brigades, groups rely on collective labor traditions that echo the historic practice of *toloka*. This reliance on mutual aid means that activities can continue even when financial resources are scarce. In contrast to civic actors with heavy payrolls, community members and volunteers engaged in social movements often provide the continuity and energy needed for sustaining operations through prolonged periods of political and financial instability.

Toloka, a traditional Ukrainian practice of building or renovating something together, received its

push from the current reality, and many of the movements that organize around support to the families whose belongings have been damaged, or the rebuilding of the infrastructure, are using the practice to make the whole community work for a few days on the same building: *"It was like an island of salvation—an opportunity to go to the village for the weekend, work physically, and switch off your head... And you legalize for yourself the opportunity, for example, to swim in a lake... But when you've spent two days breaking down bricks... then in the evening by the fire, you're already singing songs... It was our rehabilitation."*

Donations as a civil action. SoMos and different kinds of groups use crowdfunding —primarily for defense and humanitarian needs, at any kind of events: cultural, sport, educational, etc.

In the Ukrainian context, an important community-organizing practice has been the *"yarmarok"*⁶. Historically, such events served to bring communities together, gathering residents from a neighborhood or adjacent streets for socializing, leisure, selling the homemade products, and relationship-building. Over time, however, this tradition has evolved, taking on a new role as a platform for engaging socially active individuals, attracting new participants to civic initiatives, and supporting humanitarian needs. A representative of a small community group says, *"It was the organizers' choice to make it charitable. Originally, it was simply a neighborhood fair. The main idea was to introduce neighbors to each other."* Thus, what began as a domestic practice of neighborly interaction has transformed into a tool of fundraising and social integration.

Agility and operational capacity

Social movements have shown an ability to adapt rapidly to changing conditions. They shift easily between humanitarian aid, reconstruction, advocacy, and cultural mobilization depending on the community needs of the moment. Over time, many groups have also moved towards more professionalized practices, introducing volunteer

agreements, safety protocols, and transparent financial systems. This hybrid of grassroots spontaneity and structured organization has given them credibility with donors and communities alike.

Cross-issue solidarity and intersectionality

Movements frequently work across issue boundaries. Feminist, ecological, labor, housing, and anti-war groups often borrow tactics from one another or engage in joint campaigns. This intersectional instinct has broadened their reach and strengthened their resilience, as struggles are increasingly understood as interconnected rather than isolated.

“Patriarchy and traditionalism are part of our reality. But if you put the person at the center, then intersectionality is always present. All spheres of life are connected. If one suffers — like when there is violence at home — it also affects the economy, work, and wellbeing. Yet, in our country, these links are not always recognized, even though they are deeply intertwined.”



Direct Action Lviv. William Vest-Lillesøe / ActionAid

The “Ungrateful” Campaign and campaigns against sexual abuse at the universities

The “Ungrateful” campaign emerged as a response to systemic sexual violence in the theatrical community, particularly at the Molodyi Theatre. Its core—46 actors—stood up against the director on art. This resistance was not just a reaction to a specific case but an attempt to challenge the culture of silence. The campaign’s key tactic was media visibility and a clear message: “Safety is justice.” Public exposure, visual symbols, and strategic protest coordination became powerful tools. At the same time, the group maintained ethical discipline—refusing to share stories without consent, avoiding politicization, operating through a horizontal structure with clearly defined roles.

Despite its achievements—removal of the director, initiation of criminal proceedings, support from human rights advocates—the campaign faces systemic challenges: lack of an actors’ union, bureaucratic resistance, and the risk of abusers returning.

By exposing the systematic abuse and holding the relevant authority within the Kyiv City Administration accountable, activists managed to secure the dismissal without allowing the ruling party to politicize the case. The involvement of reputable lawyers further strengthened the process, ensuring a solid legal foundation for success in the courts.

The action took place simultaneously with a series of posts on social media from current or former students at different universities on the issue of sexual violence and abuse from the university professors. *“There’s no clear mechanism in the university for how this will work... That also needs to be addressed,”* was stated by the interviewed activist.

Networks and alliances

Another source of resilience lies in the dense networks that many movements have cultivated. Groups often describe themselves as hubs linking activists, local authorities, businesses, and international partners. These networks act as a form of social insurance: when one initiative is overstretched, others step in. The ability to share resources and knowledge across networks reduces vulnerability and enhances collective capacity.

“Because we are a hub, we have a wide network of connections and partnerships. We have a close relationship with the city — we understand their needs... We also understand the needs of ordinary people, and we respond accordingly.”

The movements for the protection of historical buildings and green zones in urban areas had their long development, with different (and often difficult) relationships with authorities. One of the green zones in Kyiv, Protasiv Yar, is occasionally attacked by various actors, and the locals have to prove to the city administration that the zone is used, not to build over the recreation zone.

The local community often has to fight for the memorialization spaces; with the numerous fallen soldiers, the communities only started to practice the memorialization practices, and it is sometimes perceived negatively by the locals because of the inappropriate format or different views on the practices, which often includes the usage of the public space and artistic forms, which some find appropriate and others not.

Tangible outputs and expertise

Some movements hold unique technical or advocacy expertise (e.g., on LGBTQI+ rights, climate policy, housing reform, labor organizing) which can be very useful in ongoing processes of policy development. Others deliver highly tangible services—from psychosocial counselling and legal aid to reconstruction and rehabilitation. Such targeted interventions demonstrate the movement’s ability to meet concrete needs of community members while also serving as a pipeline for increased reach and membership growth.

“We developed a model rental agreement where tenants’ rights are protected, and we want to spread the understanding that a contract really matters. If it becomes widely used, that will already be a big step forward. Even if people use it without us, but the contract lives and works — that is already a result.”

Engagement with officials: changing the status quo

Several groups have developed pragmatic but independent relationships with authorities. This allows them to influence policies or contribute to recovery efforts while preserving autonomy. The ability to cooperate without co-optation is a fine line but has proven to have its consequences.

One activist captured this balance clearly: “We don’t interact with authorities from the stance of moral purity, but we aren’t ‘buddies’ either.”

State officials: collaborators and opponents

For the many SoMos, courts have become an arena for the action, especially since the court reform has not been finalized, and courts often are seen as “evils” against activists, making decisions in favor of big business, politicians, or big groups, with fewer examples of successful decisions in favor of marginalized groups — collective action and a high media interest are sometimes the only possibilities to reach a fair decision.

Petitions to the official bodies often function as binding instruments, directing public attention to different kinds of issues and becoming a tool for mobilization in digital space. At a national level, the e-petition system was introduced in 2015 under the Law of Ukraine “On Electronic Petitions,” providing citizens with the opportunity to submit electronic appeals to government bodies and collect the required number of signatures for consideration. In 2016, the official e-petition portal of the President of Ukraine was launched. Following the establishment of the national portal, the practice of electronic petitions began to be implemented at municipal and regional levels. According to official data, from the introduction of the e-petition system in 2015 until mid-2025, more than 19,500 petitions were submitted to the President of Ukraine alone.



Kyiv Pride 2025. Dominika Ozyńska / ActionAid

Diversity and multi-stakeholder engagement

Movements point out that many have managed to bring together a wide range of stakeholders. By convening activists, veterans, artists, businesses, and municipal officials, they have developed solutions that are both practical and innovative. These collaborations demonstrate that grassroots actors can serve as conveners as well as implementers, bridging divides between sectors that would otherwise remain disconnected. One could be an activist of many movements, bringing natural networking and information circulation between them.

CardBoard Revolution

The biggest rally since the full-scale invasion began on July 22, 2025, and was sparked by the passage of Draft Law #12414. By 263 votes, the Parliament introduced last-minute changes that effectively stripped the National Anti-Corruption Bureau and the Special Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office of their procedural independence, embedding this decision within legislation originally intended to support missing persons. Widespread concern over potential backsliding on anti-corruption reforms and fears of a return to practices reminiscent of the Yanukovich era motivated citizens to mobilize and demand the reversal of these changes.

The President signed the law at 11:14 p.m. on the same day, leading to the escalation of the protest, and forcing reconsideration of this decision. It took 1 day to start winning. A group of 48 MPs who opposed the law, as well as the President, proposed another draft law to resolve the problem. A vote scheduled for July 31, 2025, ended up "fixing" the issue with 331 votes and was quickly signed by the President.

Politicians took note, and some tried to "show up" in front of the new groups. Protesters also met one another, embracing their shared scale, "Each group will no longer think only within itself... Once they saw each other — saw that they exist, and that there are many of them — it changed everything," said an expert, who advised protesters.

So far, there are few signs of a long-term organized movement emerging. The risk that the energy might dissipate was prevented by both the quick success and the understanding of the need to go dormant, in order to re-emerge stronger on the day when the decision was meant to be made.

Weaknesses: The struggle of organizing in wartime

Dependence on external funding

A recurring weakness across initiatives is reliance on short-term, project-based funding. Movements often report that they cannot predict resources more than six or twelve months in advance. This makes it difficult to plan strategically, maintain continuity, or retain staff. It also creates a cycle of growth and contraction: activity spikes during project implementation, then drops once grants end.

As one contributor noted with frustration, "The biggest problem is funding and short-term projects. Because of this, there is burnout and emotional exhaustion, which is not compensated for in any way."

Volunteer burnout and turnover

The same volunteer energy that powers movements also creates vulnerability. After three and a half years of war, activists describe widespread burnout, fatigue, and turnover. Emotional strain is particularly high among young volunteers who take on heavy responsibilities with little material support. Several groups report losing experienced organizers to emigration or exhaustion, which weakens continuity.

One activist reflected, "It's not that people don't want to help anymore. It's that they are tired, and some simply cannot continue without some kind of compensation or support."

Conflicts of organizational infrastructure

While some groups have built stronger systems, many still lack basic administrative, HR, and financial management capacity. This limits their ability to compete for larger grants or sustain complex projects. Others, paradoxically, risk becoming overly bureaucratized in their effort to meet donor requirements, which slows down their responsiveness. The uneven pace of professionalization across the sector leads to gaps in accountability and efficiency.

Interviews reveal a divide between movements that remain highly informal and ad hoc and those that are moving toward structured NGO-style models. Both extremes present problems. Informal groups risk exclusion from donor opportunities, while overly formalized groups lose the spontaneity and agility that once gave them their strength.

One activist observed:

"What makes us effective is that we can respond tomorrow, not in three months. But the more processes we adopt, the harder that becomes."



Fragmented coordination

Despite strong expressions of solidarity, practical coordination between movements is inconsistent. Collaboration often takes place on an ad hoc basis, sparked by urgent needs or shared campaigns, but there are few sustained mechanisms for collective planning. Competition for limited funding exacerbates this fragmentation, making the whole sector competitive rather than cooperative, creating sporadic alliances.

Several respondents acknowledged that this lack of coordination reduces overall impact:

“We all want to support each other, but when it comes to resources, it becomes harder to really work together.”

Safety and wellbeing gaps

Most groups cannot afford any insurance for their staff or volunteers, have no security infrastructure or tools, or ongoing psychosocial care. Activists described situations in which they knowingly exposed themselves to risk without the means to mitigate it: *“Even when we know the risks, we have no real mechanisms to protect ourselves.”* The absence of such measures leaves many vulnerable to burnout, harassment, or digital surveillance.

Opportunities: Stronger influence of social movements on the policy and the society

Empowering leadership among activists rather than keeping the power is an investment in the sustainability of movements and organizations. This could be achieved by empowering grassroots constituents to speak on behalf of the movements; coordinating yet not demanding center stage; ensuring there are many leaders and ways for current coordinators to step down and share power.

“I like its democratic nature: no one regards your idea as useless, to the contrary: everyone’s input is important,” - activist said.

Limited national policy influence

Movements are effective at the community and municipal level, having person-to-person communication, but they rarely manage to shape national policy. Barriers include centralized governance, limited institutional access, and competition from more established NGOs that enjoy closer personal ties to decision-makers. These actors often lack the goodwill to represent marginalized voices, perceiving grassroots advocacy as competition for influence rather than a contribution to the common good. As a result, community-led groups frequently find themselves excluded from dialogue, facing an unwanted competition for “eliteness” instead of genuine collaboration for social change.

Geographic and demographic unevenness

Finally, capacity is not evenly distributed. Civic infrastructure is strongest in urban centers, while rural areas remain under-supported. Leadership tends to be concentrated among younger activists, with less engagement from older generations. This creates risks of disappearance of the movement when youth leaders burn out or leave, as there are few mechanisms for intergenerational transfer of knowledge, and few actors who are working with this issue currently.

Reconstruction and recovery

The ongoing process of national reconstruction provides movements with an unprecedented opportunity to demonstrate the value of community-led solutions. Groups already working in housing, rebuilding, or service delivery are well placed to influence local recovery plans and advocate for more inclusive approaches. As one activist put it:

“We know what our communities need because we live here. Reconstruction should not only be about buildings but about people’s lives.”

Shifts in public attitudes

Public trust in volunteerism and grassroots initiatives has grown since the start of the full-scale invasion. Communities increasingly recognize the role of civic actors in evacuation, aid delivery, and reconstruction. This higher level of legitimacy creates space for movements to expand participation, recruit volunteers, and cultivate a sustainable civic engagement culture.

Winning the Space

The LGBT+ movement, as well as feminist initiatives, found it quite uneasy to gain ground, maintaining in a quite homophobic and sexist environment and facing violence from the governance of policy. It wasn’t easy to provide service to the larger community, engaging neutral and passively allied people in the campaigns. There were powerful exceptions who managed not only to debate their opponents successfully, but to engage and go out together at the street rallies with the initiatives *March for Women*, *Kyiv Pride*, and *Kharkiv Pride*.

International solidarity and exchange

Ukraine’s visibility on the global stage has opened doors to international networks, advocacy platforms, and donor partnerships. These connections bring more than just money; they also create opportunities for political backing and knowledge exchange. One young activist remembered, *“At international conferences, it became clear how underrepresented Ukrainian youth were. That showed us we need to be present, and we’ve since found partners who support us.”*

Policy windows through EU integration

The country’s trajectory towards EU accession creates concrete policy windows. Movements can influence reforms in areas such as housing, labor rights, gender equality, and climate policy. By positioning themselves as both grassroots and professional voices, movements can shape legislation and governance structures in the coming years by placing communities and people at the center of the EU accession.

Intersectional and cross-sector alliances

There is growing recognition in the civil society sector that social, ecological, feminist, and labor struggles are interconnected. Building coalitions across these domains allows movements to broaden their influence and resilience. Respondents highlighted the benefits of solidarity across sectors: *“When we work together across issues, people see that their struggles are connected. That makes our movements stronger.”*

Professionalisation support

Donor interest in capacity building provides opportunities for movements to develop more sustainable structures. Trainings in formal and informal organizational development, feminist leadership structures, financial literacy, governance, and volunteer management can strengthen long-term viability without eroding grassroots character.

Recognition by authorities

Finally, the practical contributions of civic actors — evacuations, reconstruction, and community services — have earned respect from local governments. In several cases, municipalities are now open to formal partnerships with movements, potentially giving movements a direct way of influencing local planning, recovery, and service delivery.

Threats: What impedes movements' development

Prolonged war and instability

The continuation of war remains the most significant external threat. Constant disruption, unpredictability, and danger drain energy and resources. Movements are forced to operate under conditions where any plan can be upended overnight.

Donor dependency and volatility

Shifts in global political priorities make donor volatility a persistent risk. Several activists expressed concern that international attention could shift elsewhere, leaving them without resources: *"Right now, the world supports us. But what happens if that changes? We can't build sustainability on uncertainty."*

Risk of co-optation or over-regulation

Engagement with state institutions, while sometimes productive, carries the risk of co-optation or over-regulation. Movements could find themselves bound by bureaucratic frameworks that limit their independence and agility.

Fragmentation and competition

Limited resources foster **competition among groups**, which can undermine cooperation and weaken collective bargaining power. Without stronger platforms for coordination, this fragmentation will persist.

Security risks

Activists face threats ranging from digital surveillance to physical intimidation. Few groups have the resources to systematically protect themselves. One respondent admitted, *"We operate knowing the risks, but we don't have the resources to protect our people if something happens."*

Social Movements in the Temporarily Occupied Territories (TOT)

There are two waves of the resistance movements at the TOTs: the first one that started after the incursion of Russian troops into Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and Crimea, which has been operating since 2014, and the wave that started after new territories were occupied in 2022 and afterward.

Here are some examples of movements at the TOTs:

- "Yellow Ribbon", which emerged in the spring of 2022 as a non-violent initiative promoting Ukrainian symbols, distributing leaflets, and organizing campaigns at the TOT;
- "Zla Mavka", a women's movement from Melitopol (but there are reasons to consider it as active in a wider territory) that collects testimonies of women under occupation, holds information campaigns;
- "Atesh," founded by Crimean Tatars and Ukrainian activists, conducts reconnaissance and provides coordinates of military targets to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, including in Crimea;
- "Popular Resistance of Ukraine" and the "Berdiansk Partisan Army" that focus on sabotage, attacks on occupiers' infrastructure, and distributing leaflets with warnings to collaborators.

There are not many possibilities to conduct research on these movements due to the high risk for the activists that can lead to torture, threats to the families, or death from the Russian occupying forces. There are significant limitations for the research, particularly regarding access to financial sources, communication channels, and internal organization. While their activities and potential are undoubtedly important to understand, these aspects go beyond the scope of this report.

Shrinking civic space

The combination of martial law, emergency powers, and centralized governance has restricted civic freedoms. Advocacy, protest, and independent organizing are constrained. Some fear these restrictions will outlast the war, permanently narrowing the space for activism.

Uneven recognition in reconstruction

As reconstruction accelerates, there is a real danger that grassroots actors will continue to be sidelined by state- and corporate-led initiatives, despite their proven track record. This marginalization could reduce movements to providers of temporary relief rather than drivers of a people-centered structural change.

Steps forward

The best- and worst-case scenarios for Ukrainian social movements have already been outlined at the start of this chapter. What the SWOT confirms in more detail is that the difference between the two hinges on support, resources, capacity, and recognition. Movements cannot thrive in isolation; they need opportunities to network, build alliances, and connect with more institutionalized movement-building infrastructure – and here is where the external parties could provide support. Targeted investment in capacity building, mentorship, and direct support will determine whether this kind of grassroots civic actors emerge fragmented and fragile or as a sustainable force capable of shaping a humanitarian response and recovery that are just and dignifying.



Humanitarian response in Ukraine. Anastasia Vlasova / ActionAid

Recommendations to take the work further

The resilience of social movements in Ukraine during three and a half years of full-scale invasion is linked to their **ability to self-organize, sustain collective action, and build solidarity across differences**. Strengthening this organizing capacity is therefore not optional — it is the backbone of humanitarian response, recovery, and just transition. The following recommendations are directed to **movement infrastructure providers, donors, and authorities**. While not unique, the recommendations in this section are less frequently present across reports from other civil society stakeholders, including an analysis by ActionAid Eastern Europe on participation of the NGOs in the recovery agenda (From the Ground Up: Ukraine's Civil Society in Recovery A Political Economy Analysis of Civil Society Dynamics and Perspectives for the Future, ActionAid, 2025). Some of the more traditional recommendations are presented in the following section in the format of “do’s and don’ts” as presented by the civil society actors interviewed for this report.



For Movement Infrastructure Providers (ActionAid, INGOs, NGOs)

1. Capacity is the foundation of resilience.

The most transformative role for movement infrastructure providers is to support movements build the everyday systems that make local activism sustainable: facilitation of strategic processes, systems of recruitment, engagement and coordination of community members, digital security, organizing leadership development, democratic governance, strategic campaigning, documentation and learning, financial management, and other elements of the minimal viable institutionalization structures. Without these basics, grassroots groups and movements on the path of institutionalization remain vulnerable to burnout, fragmentation, and dilution.

As one activist from a successful movement noted:

“We strike a good balance between flexibility and speed, while also having well-established internal processes.”

2. **Care is capacity.** Providers must recognize that stipends, insurance, and psychosocial support are not extras but essential tools of sustainability. Investing in the wellbeing of community members, volunteers, activists, leaders, and the core teams ensures that the people who carried their communities through war can continue to lead through recovery. Neglecting care risks hollowing out the very people that have proven most effective in crisis.

As stated by one of the activists interviewed:

“You have a psychological project, and maybe it’s needed for you yourselves, just as much as for those you help over time. Because when you work too much, burnout happens anyway. I think in our case, psychological support is needed for every Ukrainian, no matter what.”

3. **Connection builds power.** Beyond individual organizations, providers should support community hubs and shared platforms where groups meet, strategize, and learn from each other. These spaces are incubators of solidarity and can link feminist, ecological, housing, labour, minority rights and queer struggles into broader alliances capable of influencing the complex societal systems within which people live. Additionally, international actors should play the role of bridges to global arenas where possible, ensuring grassroots voices from Ukraine are heard in EU accession and international policy spaces.

“Last year we formed a coalition of small Roma youth organizations, and independent activists also joined — people who either don’t belong to any organization, or whose organizations forbid them from publicly joining others. In this coalition, we look for points where we can support one another, share donors, share resources, and exchange our internal knowledge and skills to strengthen each other.”



Gathering of the activists. Carol Garcia / ActionAid

For Donors and Philanthropic Actors

- 1. Predictable funding sustains activism.** Donors must move away from short-term project cycles and provide multi-year, flexible support. Stable resources allow movements and those supporting them to plan strategically, retain experienced people, and remain agile in the face of a rapidly changing environment. Donors have the power to force international organizations to pass down overheads to their local partners, a practice that is infrequent in the status quo. Without meaningful access to predictable resources, initiatives expand and collapse in cycles that erode resilience and decrease trust in the role of civic actors.

As put by one of the movement leaders:

“We had six months of funding to cover our core team. It meant we didn’t have to chase every small grant just to survive but could focus on our real priorities. What we really lack is longer-term support — six, nine, even twelve months isn’t enough. Jumping from one project to another like that is not a good practice, and we never know if we’ll be able to continue our initiative.”

- 2. Organizational health is impact.** Financial literacy, HR systems, and governance practices are what make groups reliable and sustainable. Equally, for less formalized entities, activist care — stipends, wellbeing, safety measures — should be treated as program essentials, not overhead. When wellbeing is neglected, impact is not sustainable.

As one organiser explained:

“The biggest problem is funding and short-term projects. Because of this, there is burnout and emotional exhaustion, which is not compensated for in any way.”

When wellbeing is neglected, impact is not sustainable.



- 3. Collaboration multiplies results.** Donors should design intersectional funding mechanisms that reward cooperation rather than competition. Frequently underresourced coalitions between housing, feminist, ecological, and labor movements reflect the interconnectedness of people’s struggles, and their ability to represent the diversity of communities in attempts to gain systemic influence. Diverse movements are more likely to reach communities that often fall between the cracks of traditional programming. Funding priorities can either be an enabler, or a blocker of civic actors capable of breaking silos between sectors and peoples.

As one organizer states:

“It seemed to us that this aspect was missing in the Ukrainian climate movement, and that’s why we now position ourselves not just as a climate organization, but as an intersectional one. We are interested in how inequality plays out across sectors and try to bring these questions into climate policy and green recovery”

For Authorities (Local and National)

- 1. Protecting civic space is essential.** Authorities must continue to ensure that emergency restrictions under martial law do not harden into permanent limits on freedom of assembly, association, and protest. Restoring and safeguarding these freedoms is critical for maintaining trust in institutions.
- 2. Participation must be institutionalized.** Civic actors should be embedded in municipal and national recovery planning. Their legitimacy comes from their rootedness in everyday life, and this lived knowledge should shape recovery strategies. As one activist explained, *“We know what our communities need because we live here. Recovery should not only be about buildings but about people’s lives.”*
- 3. Partnerships need to be formalized.** Local governments already rely on grassroots actors for evacuation, aid, and rebuilding, but these

contributions often remain informal. Authorities should create formal partnership agreements, recognize the value of these services, and integrate them into planning. Recovery must also be inclusive — deliberately bringing women, youth, LGBTQ+, Roma, and ecological actors into decision-making processes.

While the recommendations listed above point to what needs to be done by the respective stakeholders, movements also remind us that **how civil society acts matters as much as what civil society does**. The ends do not justify the means. Building resilience and justice requires an approach rooted in trust, care, and solidarity, not just in the projects’ outputs or ability to report to the auditors’ requests. For this reason, we also highlight the “do’s and don’ts” of donor behavior — practices that either strengthen or undermine the very movements we seek to support — as highlighted by the civil society leaders interviewed for this report.



Direct Action Lviv. William Vest-Lillesøe / ActionAid

Donor Do's and Don'ts

Do's — What Helps

- **Engage actively and with care.** Civic actors who provide continuous mentoring, show up in the field, and stay engaged build stronger trust than those who only send emails, templates, contracts, and associated policies.

“It really mattered that they were not just giving us money but working with us, mentoring us, being present. It felt like they cared about our success, not only about reports.”
- **Listen first.** The most valued partners were those who asked about community needs instead of arriving with ready-made project ideas as implemented elsewhere but inadequate to meet local needs.

“The ideal interaction is when a donor comes and asks, what are the needs of your community? They don't propose ready-made templates, but they listen.”
- **Be quick and build trust before scaling.** Short delays between agreement and first disbursement, combined with relationship-building before large grants, allowed groups to act when it mattered most with minimal bureaucratic blockers. As a rule of thumb, larger partners should provide small-scale support quickly as a step to build mutual trust before larger fundraising and programmatic relationships.

“When the first support came quickly, we could act immediately. Later, when bigger funding arrived, we already had trust and systems in place. That made all the difference.”
- **Develop programs together.** As activists shared with us, “They ask us to implement, but not to design. That's not partnership.”
- **Apply feminist principles in practice.** Partners who respected weekends, leave, and care showed that they understood well-being and long-term sustainability of the team as equally important to project outputs.

“Good donors act on feminist principles — without top-down dictates, without authoritarianism, and without formal requirements just for the sake of requirements. They even respect that we also need weekends, rest, and time off.”

- **Reinforce local leadership and meaningful participation.** Partners who include the practices of supporting local leaders, usually don't come with solutions, but rather ask for suggestions from the local groups. “Don't just build capacity — shift power.”



Direct Action Lviv. William Vest-Lillesøe / ActionAid

Don'ts — What Harms

- **Don't replace trust with reporting.** Overwhelming reporting demands divert time and energy away from real work.

“Sometimes it feels like the reporting is the main work, and the actual activity comes second. We end up spending days on forms instead of helping people.”
- **Don't transfer risk to grassroots.** Asking small movements to deliver in dangerous areas without protective support is exploitative. Partners should ensure that proper budgets are allocated for security equipment, rest and recuperation, and necessary capacity building to minimize risks faced by first-line responders and rights-holders.

“We were asked to deliver where no one else would go, but without proper protective equipment or support. Meanwhile, donor representatives stayed away, citing security. It felt like our lives were cheaper.”
- **Don't neglect health and wellbeing.** Refusing to budget for rest or psychological care accelerates burnout.

“They want us to deliver endlessly but won't cover even the basics of wellbeing. Burnout is treated as our private problem, not a structural one.”
- **Don't hide inefficiency behind compliance.** Movements stretch small budgets far, yet some larger civic actors often spend far more on grants administration than locally rooted grassroots movements and organizations

“We can make 10,000 dollars work for people, while the donor spends 100,000 on managing that 10,000. Where is the cost-effectiveness in that?”

- **Don't marginalize local actors.** Despite doing a very large chunk of the work and having much more extensive reach and community rootedness, local groups receive a fraction of the funds available in different funding mechanisms.

“After years of response, we saw less than 1% of funding go directly to local NGOs. Yet it is the locals who actually carry most of the work.”
- **Don't impose projects.** External priorities imported from elsewhere alienate communities and waste resources.

“Too often they come with their own pet projects, theories, and priorities. It feels colonial — like we are there to implement their ideas instead of amplifying what already works here.”
- **Don't exacerbate inequalities.** SOP-heavy systems favor larger, formal NGOs and leave grassroots actors behind.

“The strong become stronger, and the weak become weaker. Those who can tick all the boxes get more support, while those doing the hardest work are left out.”
- **Don't steal the best people.** As the sector has experienced a lack of trained resources, many of the local activists were headhunted by better-equipped international or bigger local actors, taking off the talents. As an alternative, internships and mentorships should take place.

Takeaways from the report and commitments for the future

The message from activists is clear: international organizations and donors can be part of the solution if they trust, listen, and support sustainability — or part of the problem if they impose, control, and transfer risk. The choice lies in whether international organizations and donors treat movements as partners with expertise, or as contractors to be managed.

Based on the evidence in this report and our work alongside partners since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, ActionAid Eastern Europe recognizes that one of the most powerful drivers of change is the capacity of communities to organize themselves, sustain solidarity, and act collectively. Therefore, **ActionAid Eastern Europe commits to:**

1. Strengthening Movement Capacity

We will continue to prioritize **capacity strengthening** as the foundation of resilience. This means supporting movements to build the systems, skills, and confidence they need to endure — from financial literacy and governance to volunteer management, digital security, and leadership pipelines. We see this not as overhead, but as the essential infrastructure of justice.

2. Investing in Care and Wellbeing

We commit to treating care as capacity. Movements cannot thrive if volunteers are exhausted and activists burned out. We will advocate for, and where possible resource, stipends, psychosocial support, and protection measures. As one activist told us, *“Because of this [short-term projects], there is burnout and emotional exhaustion, which is not compensated for in any way.”* We take this seriously as a structural challenge, not an individual weakness.

3. Ensuring Intersectional Safety and Protection

We will advocate for and support **holistic protection strategies and intersectional approach** for activists at risk — covering physical, legal, digital, and psychosocial security. Women, LGBTQ+ people, Roma activists, and young organizers often face disproportionate risks, and we will work to ensure their safety is not an afterthought but a core priority.

4. Building Alliances and Solidarity

We will work to connect movements across sectors and borders. This includes nurturing alliances between feminist, ecological, housing,

labor, and queer groups, as well as linking Ukrainian movements to regional and global solidarity networks. One Roma activist put it clearly: *“In this coalition, we look for points where we can support one another, share donors, share resources, and exchange our internal knowledge and skills to strengthen each other.”* ActionAid will help create the space and resources for this solidarity to grow.

5. Amplifying Grassroots Voices

We will act as a **bridge, not a substitute**. Our role is to amplify grassroots voices in EU accession processes, international advocacy, and donor spaces — while ensuring that communities remain in the lead. We will push for localization that means more than rhetoric: shifting not only resources but also agenda-setting power.

6. Embedding Intersectionality and Inclusion

We commit to an approach that is **intersectional and feminist at its core**. This means centering the perspectives of women, youth, LGBTQ+ people, Roma, and ecological activists in all aspects of recovery. As one respondent reminded us, *“Reconstruction should not only be about buildings but about people’s lives.”*

7. Embedding Knowledge and Learning

We commit to supporting **collective memory and knowledge-sharing** across movements. This means helping document practices, build archives, and create cross-country exchanges so that lessons are not lost to burnout or turnover. Strengthening learning systems ensures that future generations can build on today’s innovations rather than starting from scratch.

Our Promise

Through these commitments, ActionAid Eastern Europe positions itself not simply as an aid provider but as a **movement infrastructure partner**. We will stand with communities as they move from survival to shaping the future — ensuring that the capacity to organize remains the strongest legacy of this time.

Call to Action

ActionAid Eastern Europe cannot do this alone. The resilience of Ukraine’s civic fabric depends on a shared effort. **To every movement infrastructure provider, donor, authority, or ally reading this: join us.** Join us in recognizing that the most strategic investment is in the **capacity of communities to organize**. By acting together, we can ensure that social movements are not only responders to crisis but become the **pillars of a just, feminist, and people-centered recovery**.

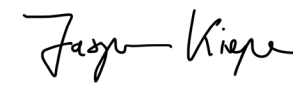
ActionAid Eastern Europe

We, the Senior Leadership Team of ActionAid Eastern Europe, stand with those who dare to build a just world from the ground up. This report is more than a reflection — it is a call to keep listening, learning, and standing in solidarity with the movements that light the way forward.

We commit to protect and nurture these sparks wherever they rise — to share power, open doors, and protect the spaces where collective courage grows.



Matey Nikolov,
Social Movements
Programme Lead



Jasper Kiepe,
Head of Programmes



Laura Giron,
Head of Finance &
Operations



Jara Henar,
Regional Director

Join us

We invite all who believe in people power — activists, allies, and dreamers — to join us in strengthening movements across Eastern Europe.

If you are already building change, or wish to stand with those who are, reach out. Let’s connect, collaborate, and keep the fire growing.

Contact us →





Gathering of the activists. Carol Garcia / ActionAid

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Annexes

Annex 1: An example of the introductory statement and guiding questions to the interviews.

1. Introductory Statement
2. I represent [company name], a research company. We are conducting an expert survey focused on current social issues.
3. Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to skip any question or stop the interview at any time.
4. During the interview, an audio/video recording will be made for technical purposes — to preserve, analyze, and systematize the information. Only the research team will have access to the recordings.
5. The collected data will be used in a de-identified and aggregated format. The final report may include the names of movements and their descriptions, but respondents’ names will not be disclosed. The report may be made publicly available (in both electronic and printed formats).

Do you agree to participate under these conditions?

I. Introduction

Please tell us a bit about yourself.

- What is your name?
- How old are you?
- How long have you been involved in civic activism/ movements?
- What exactly do you do in your work?
- Can you briefly describe your journey in the civic sector?

2. Please tell us a bit about yourself.

- About the Organization / Movement
- What is the name of your organization/movement?
- When was it founded?
- What areas of activity are you engaged in?
- What is the main goal of your organization/movement?
- Has this goal changed over time?
- What values does your organization/movement share?
- Where do you operate geographically (regions, oblast, hromadas, etc.)?
- Who benefits from your activities (possibly even unintentionally)?
- Are you legally registered?
- Does your activity follow a seasonal pattern? What influences your dynamics?
- What would you identify as your movement’s/organization’s strengths and weaknesses?

3. Organizational Structure

- What type of structure do you have: horizontal, vertical, or other?
- How many people are involved in the movement/organization? Is this number stable?
- How can someone join you?
- Do you have formal leadership? Who is in charge?
- What roles exist in your structure (both formal and informal)?
- Have there been cases when participants left your movement? Why did it happen?

4. Key Project or Achievement

- Tell us about your biggest project or achievement.
- How was it organized?
- What resources were needed? How did you obtain them?
- What impact did this project have?
- Who did you collaborate with during the project?
- Did the community/hromada support you?
- Were there any individuals or groups who interfered?

5. Collaboration

- Do you have experience collaborating with other civil society organizations? (With whom? What was the nature of the collaboration? Please describe it in more detail.)
- Do you know organizations working on similar issues? (Have you tried to cooperate with them? Why aren't you working together?)
- Have you worked with donor organizations? (Which ones? How did you find them? Did you receive grants or subgrants?)
- Have you worked with local self-government bodies or government representatives? (If yes, was it a positive experience? If not, did you try to establish cooperation? What went wrong?)
- In your opinion, who could help the most in achieving your goals?

6. Opponents and Risks

- Who are your opponents? Why do you consider them as such? How have they obstructed your work?
- What risks do you see in your work?
- How do you plan to address these risks?
- How are you currently managing them?
- What resources do you have (budget, technical capacity, expertise)?

7. The Future Plans

- How do you envision the development of your organization/movement over the next 3 years?
- What could support your sustainable development?
- What are the key factors to ensure long-term sustainability?

Conclusion

- Is there anything else important you'd like to add to our conversation?

Annex 2: Survey Questions

1. Name of the person completing the questionnaire _____
2. Your role in the organization/movement _____
3. Name of the movement or civic organization _____
4. Year of establishment _____
5. Year of legal registration _____
6. What is the mission of your movement? _____
7. How many people are involved in your movement?
 - Members/staff
 - Volunteers
 - Supporters/followers
 - Others
8. What tactics and forms of action do you use in your activities?
9. Do you currently cooperate / have you cooperated with other movements or NGOs? _____
10. Please list the movements/NGOs you cooperate(d) with. _____

11. Do you currently cooperate / have you cooperated with government representatives? _____
12. Please list the government bodies you cooperate(d) with. _____

13. Are there organizations that oppose your activities? _____
14. Please list the organizations that oppose your work.
15. What resources would significantly accelerate your progress toward your goals? _____

16. Which internal capacities would you like to strengthen? (please indicate the order of priority) _____

17. Management and organizational processes
 - Human resources
 - Financial sustainability
 - Technical capacity
 - Analytics and knowledge
18. To what extent is your funding sustainable? _____
19. Which partnerships or networks would be most useful for you? _____

20. Are you willing to provide contact information? _____
21. Please provide your contact details.

Annex 3: Observed events

- **June 6** – Podilsky Shuk market, Kyiv.
- **June 14** – Chernivtsi, *March Humane Chernivtsi: Safety for People and Animals*.
- **June 22** – Sumy *Maibutnyoho & Dancing Poets* fundraising performance.
- **July 11** – Social movement's fundraising campaign and fundraiser.
- **July 12** – Kyiv, *Kvity Ukrainy* festival, aimed at protecting the modernist structure from further dismantling.
- **July 15** – #VitrenkaNaViter protest movement.
- **July 22–24** – Protest against Draft Law #12414, which threatened the procedural independence of the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) and Special Anti-Corruption Prosecution (SAP).
- **July 26** – *Toloka* joint volunteer action, dedicated to restoring a museum.
- **July 31** – Protest near the Parliament for the independence of anti-corruption institutions
- **August 8** — Protect Protasiv Yar film screening in memoria of Roman Ratushny
- **August 14-15** — SoMo gathering on SWOT of political education
- **August 24-25** — SoMo's Summer Camp

Social Movements Mapping in Ukraine



ActionAid is a global movement of people working together to achieve greater human rights for all and defeat poverty. We believe people in poverty have the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and communities. ActionAid is a catalyst for that change.

ActionAid Eastern Europe

Kyiv, 38 Yaroslaviv Val Street, office 2, UKRAINE 01034

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