

FROM RISK TO RESILIENCE:

Civilian Protection Readiness in Ukraine

CENTER FOR
CIVILIANS IN CONFLICT
RECOGNIZE. PREVENT. PROTECT. AMEND.

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Cover:
Civilians near a residential building damaged by hostilities in Kyiv region, Ukraine, March 2022.

ABOUT CIVIC

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) is an international non-governmental organization dedicated to the protection of civilians in conflict. CIVIC envisions a world where every civilian is protected from the harms of conflict. Our mission is to keep civilians safer in conflict by working with communities, armed actors, and decision-makers to prevent and respond to harm. CIVIC was established in 2003 by Marla Ruzicka, a young humanitarian who advocated on behalf of civilians affected by the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Honoring Marla's legacy, CIVIC has kept an unflinching focus on the protection of civilians in conflict. Today, CIVIC has a presence in conflict zones and key capitals throughout the world, where we work with and alongside communities affected by violence to strengthen their own protection and advocate for their rights. We engage armed actors and decision-makers to prevent and respond to civilian harm, and we influence policies and practices to make civilian protection a global priority. As a humanitarian protection actor, we bridge the gap between people at risk and those with the power and responsibility to protect them. At CIVIC, we believe civilians are not "collateral damage" and that civilian harm is not an unavoidable consequence of conflict — civilian harm can and must be prevented.

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

AFU	Armed Forces of Ukraine
CAPI	Computer-Assisted Personal Interview
CATI	Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview
CBP	Civilian-Based Protection
CIMIC	Civil-Military Cooperation
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FPV	First-Person View (drone)
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HRMMU	UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine
IDI	In-Depth Interview
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
MET	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Team
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPP	Nuclear Power Plant
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSBB	Association of Co-Owners of Multi-Apartment Buildings
PSS	Psychosocial Support
SES	State Emergency Service of Ukraine
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UN	United Nations
UNMAS	United Nations Mine Action Service
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines how the experience of Russian occupation shapes whole-of-society resilience in Ukraine, with a focus on civilian self-protection practices and preparedness for a possible escalation of hostilities. It compares de-occupied hromadas with those without occupation experience across five oblasts (Kharkiv, Kherson, Mykolaiv, Poltava, and Sumy). The report is based on a mixed-methods design combining 25 focus group discussions (FGDs) with local residents, 50 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with representatives of local authorities and the public sector, and a representative survey of 2,369 respondents.

From this data, it is evident that four factors consistently determine perceived security: threats from unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), shelter usability, short air strike warning windows, unexploded ordnance (UXO) exposure, and evacuation capacity amid relocation obstacles. Persistent UAV threats, long-term UXO contamination in de-occupied areas, and limited warning for air strikes undermine feelings of safety even where formal civil protection systems exist.

According to our data, the experience of being occupied is associated with self-assessed readiness for both local authorities and civilians, but the relationship is weak and reflects a general trend rather than a direct causal effect. Personal as well as institutional readiness is higher in highly exposed contexts (like Kherson) and lower in less exposed areas (like Poltava). Personal readiness correlates positively with perceptions of the readiness of local authorities, indicating that preparedness is shaped by both crisis experience and institutional capacity. Most respondents associate readiness with having documents and supplies prepared, communication devices charged, and transport available. Respondents with occupation experience more often emphasize longer-term survival strategies, while those without occupation experience focus on rapid departure.

> *Personal readiness correlates positively with perceptions of the readiness of local authorities, indicating that preparedness is shaped by both crisis experience and institutional capacity.*

Local residents' perceptions of local authorities' evacuation readiness depend less on the existence of formal plans and more on their personal evacuation experience in 2022 and whether they believe evacuation plans will work in practice. De-occupied hromadas demonstrate more operational preparedness (e.g., conducting censuses and regular drills with critical infrastructure employers), while hromadas without occupation experience more often lack visible, actionable mechanisms to support evacuations. Clear push factors for evacuation exist, such as an approaching frontline, but weak pull factors—including uncertainty about housing, livelihoods, and dignified living conditions—delay evacuation decisions.



A residential house damaged during an airstrike in Zhytomyr, Ukraine.

Across all oblasts, respondents generally perceive self-reliance to be the default model during a potential escalation of hostilities. Most respondents expect to rely on themselves and their families first; however, a low reliance on local authorities reflects practical judgement rather than distrust. In civilian survey responses, higher personal preparedness does not correspond to lower trust in national authorities. Trust in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), meanwhile, remains consistently high. Civil-military engagement is valued by civilians and local institutions mainly for coordination and information exchange. Civilians view veterans as legitimate intermediaries for civilian preparedness (e.g., as trainers).

Civil society actors such as local civil society organizations (CSOs), international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and United Nations (UN) agencies play a critical role in frontline and de-occupied communities, particularly in sustaining basic services and infrastructure. However, training is seen as a key factor for resilience among local residents. Civilians express a strong demand for first aid, mine safety, evacuation procedures, counterdisinformation tools, and psychological support. Communication continues to play the central role in civilian decision-making regarding evacuation, with Telegram remaining the dominant communication channel overall. Within the Telegram application, women rely more on formal sources of information (local or national authorities, public figures, or any other officially verified channel), while men more often use non-official or anonymous channels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Ukrainian government:

- Set minimum preparedness standards and fund them. Define and finance national standards for shelters (safe, well-lit spaces, private sanitation, childcare, gender-based violence (GBV) risk mitigation), evacuation planning (including animals), and crisis communication and support to vulnerable groups. Require all communities to meet these standards.
- Update national monitoring of shelters from considering only the number of shelters to also consider usability indicators, including 24/7 access, distance, clear signage/communication, and conditions. Consideration of usability indicators should include the specific needs of women and people with caregiving responsibilities.
- Standardize un-classified emergency roadmaps for all hromadas such that they outline (in short, plain language) step-by step instruction regarding who announces evacuation, where residents check verified updates, how vulnerable people register, what to do if communication fails, and what tailored support mechanisms exist for pregnant women, caregivers, people with disabilities, and older adults. These emergency roadmaps should not list routes or assembly points, which change and may remain restricted.
- Integrate disinformation and digital safety into civilian protection programming. Offer information formats that match usage patterns: Telegram/Viber and television/relatives (especially for older residents).
- Continue providing civilians with scenario-based training on mine safety; it should be embedded into the daily routine and should consider gendered exposure patterns, especially in rural de-occupied and frontline areas.
- Prioritize that Civil–Military Cooperation (CIMIC) officers keep daily engagement with different groups of civilians to build trust in communities with AFU present.

For local authorities:

- Make evacuation and crisis plans visible and actionable, testing them with women, caregivers, older people, and persons with disabilities to identify barriers related to timing, safety, and access. Together with the military and emergency services, update evacuation routes, assembly points, and roles in case of escalation. Visualize them through maps, infographics, and drills, and communicate regularly via offline channels and through trusted community actors.
- Institutionalize a crisis focal point as a separate position within local bodies in the hromada administration, to be responsible for: guidance for civilians during crisis situations, registry updates, and coordination with the State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SES).
- Expand evacuation drills to include civilians rather than limiting participation to critical infrastructure staff only. Keep drills small, frequent, and practical, and include caregiving scenarios (e.g., with children, older relatives, and people with reduced mobility).
- Improve shelters by bringing existing shelters to a minimum standard (accessibility, basic supplies, and communications, with attention to women's safety and night-time usability). Plan for backup electricity and water, and clearly explain to residents what is and is not available. If funds are the major constraint, try to utilize the international aid available for enhanced civil protection.

- Progressively upgrade outdated air strike warning coverage to include rural areas, for example through the installation of MASCO (Local Automated Centralized Alert System). Ensure it reaches all residents, including older persons and people with disabilities, by diversifying formats (e.g., through audio, visual, and low-literacy messages).
- Focus on quick hyper-local combat against disinformation, which can trigger premature displacement of civilians and undermine social cohesion and trust in authorities.

For NNGOs/INGOs/UN:

- Support community-level preparedness and training. Organize first aid, mine safety, crisis management, and evacuation preparedness trainings. Help residents develop realistic “go plans” (not just “go bags”) with a special focus on older people, people with disabilities, families with children, IDPs, and animal owners. Provide repeated sessions and use local intermediaries for recruitment and follow-up (e.g., starostas, OSBB, and volunteers). Conduct a short needs/threat scan before launching trainings and adjust accordingly, as needs differ between hromadas with and without occupation experience. Create training options for women with limited time due to caregiving responsibilities (such as holding short sessions in childcare-friendly spaces).
- When designing support, tailor assistance to the evolving, war-induced threat environment, assessing what drives risks to civilians (e.g., FPV exposure, “double-tap” dynamics, and risks to protected personnel under IHL). Integrate intersecting gender analysis into threat assessments and practical mitigation measures.
- Strengthen arrival support in evacuation/transition hubs. Where hubs do not exist, assist with their establishment. Ensure support to evacuees includes childcare-sensitive and women-safe options, as well as accessible formats for older people and people with reduced mobility. Support the state with immediate displacement-related needs in hubs to reduce pressure around unsafe returns.
- Prioritize providing complimentary technical support and funding to volunteer and NNGO or local bodies, including transportation support for people with disabilities (PwD).

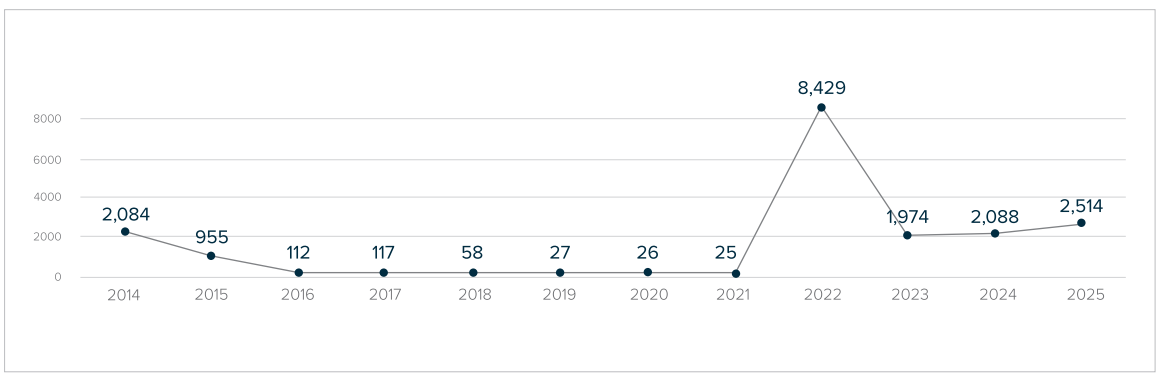
BACKGROUND

The international armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine began in 2014, covering Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts. By early 2022, the Russian Federation had annexed or occupied approximately 7 percent of Ukraine's territory.[1] In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Russian forces reached their maximum territorial control in March 2022, occupying about 27 percent of the country. Beginning in March 2022, Ukraine launched counteroffensive operations and de-occupied hromadas in the northern, northeastern, and southern directions. Starting in 2023, Russia struggled to capture new settlements and expanded the occupied area by only 7,463 square kilometers (equivalen to 1.28 percent of Ukraine's total territory) between 2023 and 2026. According to DeepState, an NGO project mapping front lines based on open-source combat imagery and sources inside the Ukrainian military, Russian forces currently occupy 116,165 square kilometers of Ukrainian land, representing 19.25 percent of territory within the internationally recognized borders of Ukraine.[2]

Although Russia's offensive campaign has stalled, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) found that:

> ***"2025 was the deadliest year for civilians in Ukraine since 2022. HRMMU verified that conflict-related violence in Ukraine in 2025 killed 2,514 civilians and injured 12,142. The total number of killed and injured civilians in 2025 was 31 percent higher than in 2024 (2,088 killed; 9,138 injured) and 70 percent higher than in 2023 (1,974 killed; 6,651 injured). The vast majority of casualties verified by HRMMU in 2025 occurred in government-controlled territory from attacks launched by Russian armed forces (97 percent; 2,395 killed and 11,751 injured)."[3]***

Civilians killed since 2014



Source: United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. Ukraine: Protection of civilians in armed conflict. December 2025 update.[4]

Beyond large-scale civilian casualties, the Russian Federation has systematically targeted critical civilian infrastructure, leaving millions of residents in major urban centers without heating, electricity, and water during harsh winter conditions.[5] This pattern demonstrates a deliberate evolution in the methods and means of warfare, ranging from missile and drone strikes to artillery shelling and the expansion of "kill zones" through the use of first-person view (FPV) drones.[6]

While these tactics shape the immediate battlefield and scope of civilian harm outside occupied areas, occupation represents a qualitatively distinct harm environment. There is evidence of systematic violations of international humanitarian law, including the dismantling of fundamental rights and freedoms, suppression of dissent, imposition of Russian legal and administrative systems, and the deliberate erasure of Ukrainian identity across all aspects of daily life.[7]

METHODOLOGY

Ukrainians have shown an extreme resilience in adapting to the challenges of the Russian full-scale invasion. The aim of this report is to examine how the experience of occupation influences whole-of-society resilience, with a particular focus on self-protection practices and preparedness for a potential escalation of hostilities. The study explores how both civilians and local civilian authorities who experienced Russian occupation prepare for renewed violence, and it compares these preparations with the practices and perceptions of civilians and local authorities in communities without any experience of occupation.

The report assesses preparedness across several areas, including security measures and threat assessment, evacuation readiness, institutional readiness, trust in security and defense forces, and trust in national and local authorities, as well as authorities' effectiveness in responding to the escalation of hostilities, civil-military engagement, civil society engagement, community response capacity, and communication. In examining whole-of-society resilience, the report also focuses on social cohesion in its vertical dimension, moving beyond the more commonly analyzed horizontal cohesion between displaced populations and host communities to assess the degree of reliance on and trust in local authorities and defense and security actors in the event of escalation.

The study consists of quantitative and qualitative components covering five oblasts: Kharkiv, Kherson, Mykolaiv, Poltava, and Sumy. It selected five hromadas from each (25 hromadas in total). The team aimed to have a balanced distribution of rural and urban hromadas, as well as a balance between those that were temporarily occupied by the Russian Federation and those with no experience of occupation. Additional information is available in Table 1. The study adopts a comparative perspective on the basis of clusters—de-occupied hromadas and hromadas with no experience of occupation—rather than comparing oblasts or individual hromadas.

The study followed a sequential mixed-methods design, beginning with a qualitative component and followed by a quantitative survey. As part of the qualitative component using a purposive sample, the research team conducted two online IDIs with representatives of local authorities and the public sector and one online FGD with hromada residents. Each FGD included six participants of different ages, with equal representation of men and women and with the inclusion of internally displaced persons (IDPs). In total, the team completed 25 FGDs and 50 IDIs, with this first data collection stage taking place in September 2025.

The research team conducted the quantitative survey in the same communities as the qualitative component. Where the security situation allowed, the research team conducted in-person interviews (CAPI) in three oblasts using random route sampling. In two oblasts, the team prioritized telephone interviews (CATI) using randomly generated phone numbers. The total survey sample consisted of 2,369 interviews.[8] This data collection stage took place between October and November 2025. The maximum margin of error for each oblast was as follows:

- Sumy oblast – 5.4%
- Poltava oblast – 4.3%
- Kharkiv oblast – 4.2%
- Kherson oblast – 4.5%
- Mykolaiv oblast – 4.3%

Profile of respondents

The sample is representative in terms of gender and age for each community.

The total sample includes 1,093 men and 1,276 women. Among male respondents, the largest age group is 45-54 years (24 percent), followed by 35-44 years (22 percent). Respondents aged 55-64 years account for 16 percent, and those aged 65+ represent 16 percent. Younger age groups are less represented, with 25-34 years comprising 14 percent and 18-24 years comprising only 8 percent of male respondents.

Among female respondents, the largest age group is 65+, representing more than one quarter of all women surveyed (25 percent). The next largest groups are 45-54 years (20 percent) and 35-44 years (20 percent), followed by 55-64 years (18 percent). Younger women are less represented, with 25-34 years accounting for 10 percent and 18-24 years comprising 6 percent.

This age structure should be taken into account when interpreting survey findings, particularly in relation to preparedness, evacuation behavior, and perceptions of vulnerability.

Table 1. Distribution of quantitative survey methods by community.

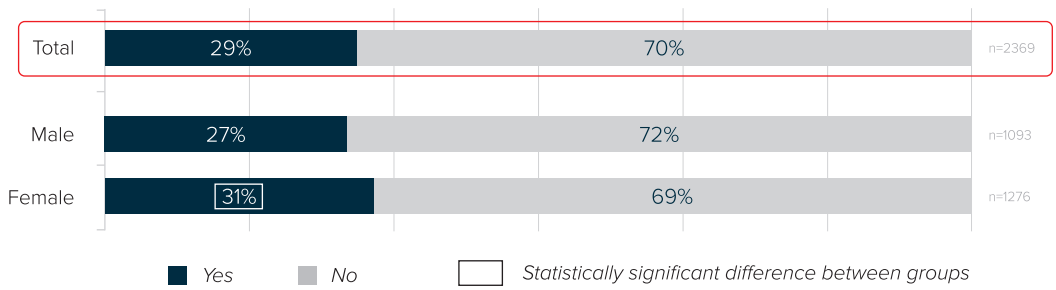
Oblast	Hromada	Type of settlement	Occupation status	Survey method
Sumy	Trostianets	urban	de-occupied	CATI
Sumy	Popivska	rural	not occupied	CATI
Sumy	Okhtyrska	urban	not occupied	CATI
Sumy	Konotop	urban	not occupied	CATI
Sumy	Lebedyn	urban	de-occupied	CATI
Poltava	Lubenska	urban	not occupied	CAPI
Poltava	Pyriatyn	urban	not occupied	CAPI
Poltava	Kotelevska	rural	not occupied	CAPI
Poltava	Gadyach	urban	not occupied	CAPI
Poltava	Dykanka	rural	not occupied	CAPI
Kharkiv	Rohanska	rural	de-occupied	CAPI
Kharkiv	Balakliya	urban	de-occupied	CAPI
Kharkiv	Merefyanska	urban	not occupied	CAPI
Kharkiv	Natalynska	rural	not occupied	CAPI
Kharkiv	Vilkhivska	rural	de-occupied	CAPI
Kherson	Kochubeivska	rural	de-occupied	CATI
Kherson	Novovorontsovska	rural	de-occupied	CATI
Kherson	Kherson	urban	de-occupied	CATI
Kherson	Vysokopilsk	rural	de-occupied	CATI
Kherson	Velykooleksandrivska	rural	de-occupied	CATI
Mykolaiv	Buzka	rural	not occupied	CAPI
Mykolaiv	Pivdenno-Ukrainska	urban	not occupied	CAPI
Mykolaiv	Arbuzynska	rural	not occupied	CAPI
Mykolaiv	Voznesensk	urban	de-occupied	CAPI
Mykolaiv	Snihurivska	urban	de-occupied	CAPI

OCCUPATION EXPERIENCE

Although the research equally targeted de-occupied hromadas and those with no occupation experience, overall, almost 30 percent of respondents indicate that they were personally in a community that experienced occupation, while about 70 percent reported that they did not have such experience. Nineteen percent of respondents currently living in de-occupied communities lived there as of February 24, 2022, while another 2 percent moved there from another community in the oblast or from another oblast altogether.

There is a statistically significant difference by gender: among women, the proportion of those who were in the community during the occupation is higher than among men; among men, this figure does not differ significantly from the overall figure. Although women aged 65+ make up a larger share of the female sample, which could partly explain this pattern, it does not fully account for the difference. In the 25-34, 45-54, and 55-64 age categories, women were more likely than men to report having been in the community during the occupation. In other age groups (18-24, 35-44, and 65+), no statistically significant gender differences were observed.

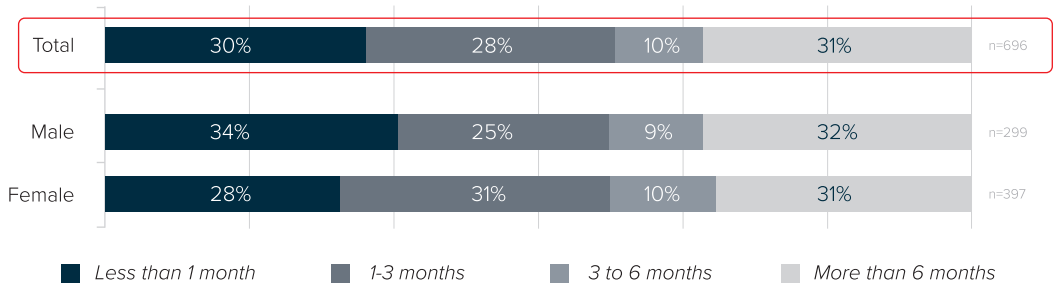
Table 2. "Were you personally in the community during the occupation?" Distribution of responses.



Overall, 30 percent of respondents stated that they had experienced occupation for less than one month, 28 percent for one to three months, and 10 percent for three to six months. Nearly 31 percent reported being under occupation for more than six months. No statistically significant differences in the distribution of occupation duration were found by gender: the structure of responses from men and women generally mirrors the overall distribution with no significant deviations.

By age, there are statistically significant differences from the overall distribution. Among the youngest group, aged 18-24, the experience of living under occupation for up to one month is significantly more common than the overall figure. This holds true for the 25-34 age group and thus likely reflects higher mobility among younger respondents. The opposite phenomenon (a lower level of mobility) is reflected in the fact that, among respondents over 55 years of age, the proportion of those who were under occupation for more than six months is significantly higher. In other age groups, the distribution does not differ significantly from the sample average.

Table 3. "How long were you personally under occupation?" Distribution of responses.



The research examined hromadas with different lengths of occupation. Given that the unit of analysis was the hromada, which consists of several settlements, there were cases where the, whole hromada was not occupied or where the length of occupation varied across settlements in the same hromada.

In Sumy, the oblast occupation lasted for approximately one month, but respondents tended to report that they stayed under occupation for up to three months. This could be explained by the fact that four years have passed since the occupation and respondents' memories and perceptions may differ from official records, particularly given that this figure does not correlate with the displaced population that may have moved from other areas. Additionally, perceptions of security, exposure to threats during the full-scale invasion, and the subsequent evolution of circumstances varied significantly from settlement to settlement even within the same hromada. These factors might have influenced responses to this question.[9]

In other locations, responses on the duration of the occupation generally correlate with the official length of occupation. In Kharkiv oblast, depending on the hromada, the length of occupation fluctuated between three and six months. In targeted hromadas in Kherson oblast, the duration of occupation was the longest-up to eight months. In Mykolaiv oblast, the study focused on two hromadas with a distinct experience of occupation—approximately one month and eight months, respectively. According to the survey in those oblasts, the proportion of respondents who were under occupation for more than 6 months is significantly higher.

Among the current residents of the Poltava oblast, only those who moved to the oblast from other areas as IDPs had lived under occupation, as Poltava oblast was not and is not under occupation.

SECURITY MEASURES: ASSESSMENT OF THREATS

Respondents most often consider UAV attacks to be the most dangerous threat to the civilian population. Significantly less often, civilians cited shelling or bombing from other armaments as the greatest danger, as well as a lack of sufficient quantity or adequate quality of shelters. Other options were mentioned sporadically. This finding likely reflects the constant presence and visibility of drones, which create a persistent sense of exposure even when casualty levels are not higher than those caused by other weapons.

Table 4. "Please assess which of these threats to the safety and protection of the civilian population in your community is the most dangerous." Distribution of responses.

	Total	Male	Female	I was under occupation	I was not under occupation
Threats during UAV attacks	50%	53%	47%	48%	50%
Threats during shelling/bombing	20%	19%	21%	25%	18%
Lack of sufficient shelters, poor quality/ poorly equipped shelters	14%	12%	16%	9%	16%
Threats from explosive objects	7%	7%	6%	12%	4%
Lack of adequate access to food/water	4%	4%	4%	3%	4%
There are no such threats at present	3%	2%	3%	1%	3%
Possible sexual violence	1%	0.5%	1%	1%	0.4%
All or almost all threats pose a danger	0.4%	0.2%	1%	1%	0.3%
Other	1%	2%	1%	0.3%	2%
Refusal to answer / No answer	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%
	n=2369	n=1093	n=1276	n=696	n=1666

Statistically significant difference between groups

There are some statistically significant differences by gender. Men are more likely than women to identify threats during drone attacks as the greatest danger, while women are significantly more likely to mention the lack of shelters or their poor quality. This reflects gendered patterns of exposure and responsibility: men tend to focus on immediate external threats, whereas women emphasize sustained safety and shelter usability—a trend shaped by care giving roles and concerns about accessibility and basic conditions.

There are also some significant differences based on respondents' experience of occupation. Respondents who have been under occupation are significantly more likely to point to threats from shelling, bombing, and other explosive weapons, including mines and guided munitions. This trend likely reflects greater exposure to a wider range of weapons and a higher frequency of attacks in occupied areas, as well as increased contamination by explosive remnants of war. On the other hand, those who have not been under occupation mention the lack of or poor quality of shelters significantly more often. No significant differences between these groups were found for other types of threats.

There are some statistically significant deviations from the overall distribution by age. In the 45-54 age group, threats from explosive devices are more often cited as the greatest danger. Among people aged 65 and older, threats during shelling or bombing are mentioned slightly more often than average.

In all communities in the Sumy oblast as well as two communities in the Poltava oblast, the proportion of respondents who consider drone attacks to be the most dangerous is statistically significantly higher than the overall average. Also significantly more often, some communities in the Kharkiv oblast mention threats from explosive objects or problems with access to food and water along with the prevalence of threats from drones. In communities in the Kherson oblast, concerns related to drone attacks and shelling dominate. In the Mykolaiv oblast, the picture is more varied: in some communities, the lack of or poor quality of shelters is mentioned ignificantly more often; in others, threats during shelling. Some communities show higher values for the selection indicating no current threats.

Across oblasts, administrative representatives generally rated the security situation higher than residents, framing security through institutional capacity—availability of shelters, warning systems, formal procedure, and coordination.[10] In contrast, population assessments more often reflected exposure and lived experience—frequency of Shahed/UAV activity, unpredictability of strikes, short warning windows, and the practical usability of shelters—producing lower ratings where shelters are closed, distant, informal or inaccessible at night.[11]

Where the gap between the perceptions of authorities and the perceptions of local populations narrow, it is usually because the main threat is visible. For example, constant UAV (including FPV attack) in Kherson city and high-exposure parts of Kharkiv. Where the gap widens, it istypically because authorities emphasize "systems in place" while residents describe that protection as limited, uneven, or symbolic.[12] These differences in perception do not reflect disagreement about what the threats are; rather, they reflect different perceptions about how dangerous they feel in everyday life.

Generally, based on IDIs and FGDs, five key dependent variables shape the perception of general security:

- UAV
- UXO
- Warning window of the air attack
- Shelters, particularly their usability
- Evacuation capacity and relocation obstacles

UAV

Respondents emphasize that drones "are always overhead," "fly every night," and "are heard but not seen," creating a persistent sense of exposure even in periods without direct strikes.[13] Unlike shelling, which is sometimes perceived as episodic, UAVs are described as continuous and intrusive, shaping daily routines, sleep patterns, and decisions about movement. As a result, drones are often perceived as more threatening than other weapons, even when they are not always responsible for the highest number of casualties. This perception is mainly driven by the psychological element of fear that drones create.

In Kherson city and nearby hromadas, UAVs are framed as the most dangerous evolution of the threat environment, replacing artillery as the primary source of risk since 2024-2025. FPV drones and drones deploying explosive devices ("petals") are described as especially frightening because they collapse the distinction between frontline and rear areas, rendering "safe zones" obsolete.[14]

> ***"You won't have time to run to shelter. Artillery strikes take 20-30 seconds. Drones fly every day, without weekends or holidays." (NNGO official)***

> ***"Petals [PFM-1 antipersonnel landmines] are a big problem for the city of Kherson. They are already appearing even in the city center, near medical facilities and administrative buildings. Last week, a 13-year-old boy hit it [mine] while riding his bicycle and was injured." (Ukrainian volunteer)***

UXO/ERW

As of 2025, "UNMAS estimates that over 20 percent of Ukraine—or 139,000 square kilometres—in Ukraine is contaminated by mines or unexploded ordnances."[15] Ukraine is the most mined country in the world, with the worst mine contamination observed in Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, and Mykolaiv oblasts.[16] The impact on civilians is considerable: "As of August 2024, there were around 1,286 civilian victims of mines and explosive remnants as a result of the war."[17]

In de-occupied communities, explosive remnants of war emerge as a distinct and enduring security concern. Unlike UAVs or shelling, mines and unexploded ordnance are described as invisible, permanent, and posing risks long after active hostilities have moved elsewhere.[18] Civilians emphasized that de-mining does not necessarily enhance their perceived safety, noting that even after sappers pass through an area, there is no absolute guarantee of clearance. Authorities acknowledged that only populated zones have been inspected, while fields, forests, lakes, and other recreational spaces remain contaminated, and villages remain only partially accessible due to hostilities. To manage this risk, one parent self-imposed strict movement restrictions for his children, having them avoid even small patches of grass and using only paved roads.[19]

Several respondents described the issue of Flower Petal Mines (PFMs, or "petal" mines), including reports of mines appearing in private yards and residential areas due to drone contamination.[20] One civilian in Kherson oblasts shared with CIVIC that his neighbor had walked the same path in his yard repeatedly before slightly stepping aside and triggering a petal mine. Such incidents show the unpredictability of contamination even in well-known environments.[21]

Farmers are another particularly vulnerable group, especially in southern Ukraine, as the land—even when contaminated—remains their only source of livelihood. According to data as of mid 2024, at least 128 Ukrainian farmers had reportedly been killed by explosive devices since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion.[22] Despite this, many farmers continue working their fields, often attempting to clear territory themselves in order to sustain their income and communities.[23]

> ***"With my children, we only walk on the road. Where there is even a little bit of grass, we already treat it as taboo, we don't go there. And my children know this. Only on the road. If a car is coming, they stand on the roadside and wait. They don't step into the grass." (Ukrainian civilian)***

Air Strikes Warning Window

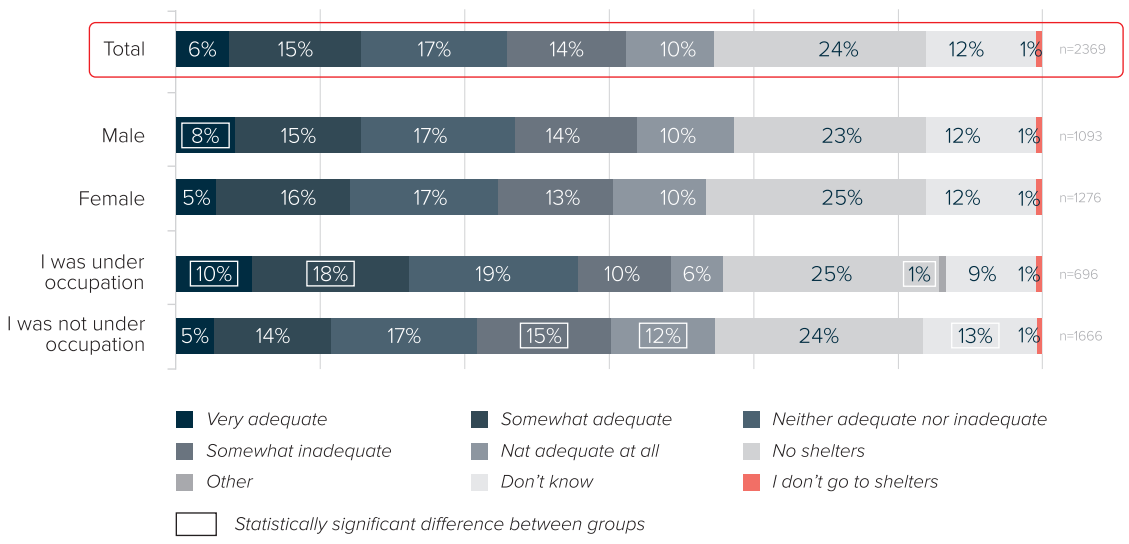
Residents and civil society actors repeatedly emphasized that the time between warning and impact is often too short to make movement to a formal shelter feasible, particularly in villages.[24] As a result, people frequently shelter in place—most commonly in basements or nearby improvised spaces—rather than attempting to reach designated shelters. At the same time, uneven coverage and limited audibility of official sirens reduce their effectiveness as an early warning tool. Many respondents reported relying instead on Telegram alert channels, which they perceive as faster, more reliable, and able to provide understanding of the specific threat (e.g., drones/missiles) and the direction. However, this dependence on digital alerts may further delay protective action. For instance, in the case of a drone attack reported on Telegram, people might deem it sufficient to use the "rule of two walls." However, more precaution might be taken based on the official air warning system because it does not distinguish between type of threat.

> ***"The warning system is outdated. The warning system was put into operation back in Soviet times ... it only covers the district center." (Ukrainian local civilian authorities)***

Shelter Conditions

Regarding the overall condition of shelters, one in five respondents rated them positively (combining the responses "quite satisfactory" and "rather satisfactory"). The percentage of negative assessments (combining the answers "rather unsatisfactory" and "completely unsatisfactory") is higher, comprising about a quarter of respondents.

Table 5. "Overall, how satisfactory or unsatisfactory is the condition of shelters for the population in your community?" Distribution of responses.

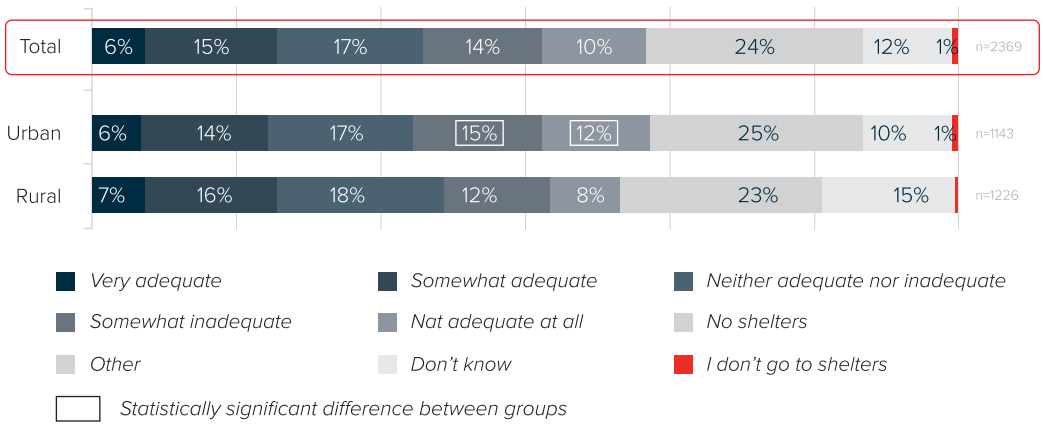


There is a statistically significant difference between men and women in the most positive assessments of shelter conditions. For other responses, the ratio of men and women who are satisfied and dissatisfied does not differ significantly and generally corresponds to the overall distribution.

However, there are significant differences in relation to respondents' experience of occupation. Among those who had been under occupation, the proportion who positively assessed the condition of shelters is statistically significantly higher. At the same time, among respondents who had not experienced occupation, the proportion of negative assessments—i.e., the sum of the responses indicating “rather unsatisfactory” or “completely unsatisfactory”—is significantlyhigher, and uncertainty regarding their assessment was recorded much more frequently.

There are also differences between urban and rural populations. Urban residents are significantly more likely to express dissatisfaction with the condition of shelters. That said, the number of official shelters in rural areas is typically limited, if any are in place at all. Rather, civilians in rural areas rely on basements in private houses. Respondents were thus likely evaluating these informal or household shelters rather than formally equipped facilities, which may have shaped overall perceptions of shelter quality.

Table 6. “Overall, how satisfactory or unsatisfactory is the condition of shelters for the population in your community?” Distribution of responses between urban and rural population.



Compared to the overall distribution, there were no significant differences by age group. Respondents from the older age group (65+) more commonly indicated “No shelters” or “I don't know,” which may be due to lower awareness of shelters among this group.

There is, however, a clear differentiation at the community level. In a number of communities in the Sumy and Kherson oblasts, the proportion of positive assessments regarding the condition of shelters is statistically significantly higher than the overall indicator. In some communities in the Poltava and Mykolaiv oblasts, by contrast, negative assessments or responses indicating a lack of shelters were significantly more common.

Qualitative data from local authorities also indicates protection gaps in terms of anti-radiation shelters near the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant (NPP), which is currently under Russian control. Repeated blackouts at the site highlight persistent instability and safety risks for surrounding communities. Similar concerns were raised by communities in Mykolaiv oblast near Pivdennoukrainska NPP. While some communities report progress in basic civil protection measures like the creation of simple anti-radiation shelters at the settlement level, coverage remains uneven. Moreover, some facilities are not yet operational, and some have been destroyed as a result of hostilities.[25]

Qualitative interviews indicate that the higher percentage of positive shelter assessments among respondents who had experienced occupation reflects a change in expectations rather than improved shelter infrastructure. Living under occupation shifted how people understand protection: instead of judging shelters by formal standards, respondents compare current conditions to the extreme insecurity experienced in 2022. They also rely on self-protection practices such as basements, cellars, and garages.[26] Meanwhile, some respondents evaluated conditions positively simply because there are more shelters in place than there were in the period before occupation.

> ***"We don't have apartment buildings; every house has a basement. Even during the occupation, people stayed in the basements."***
>
> **– Ukrainian local civilian authorities**

By contrast, respondents who have not experienced occupation more often judge shelter conditions against formal expectations, such as availability, accessibility, and compliance with standards. This leads to more negative or uncertain assessments of shelter conditions.[27]

PREPAREDNESS BEHAVIORS AND ESCALATION SCENARIOS

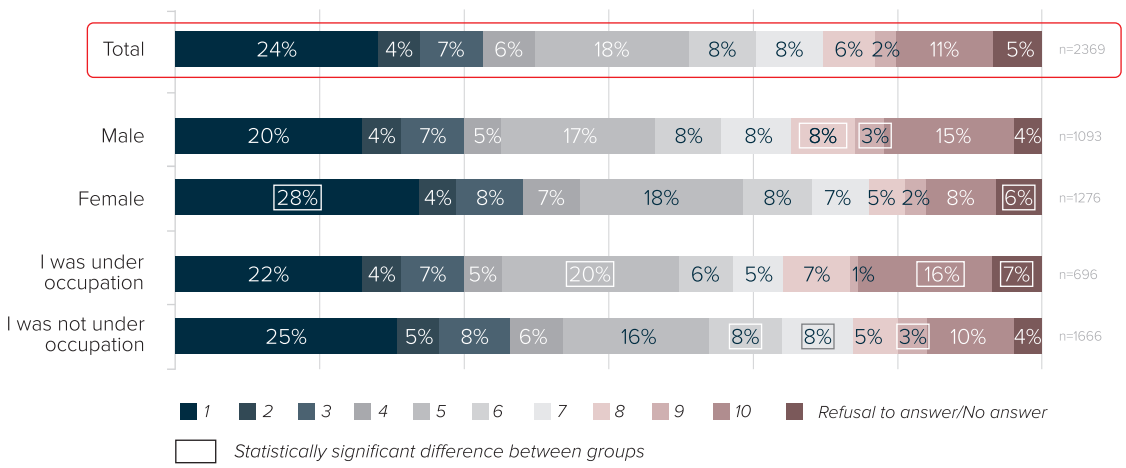
Self-Assessment of Readiness for Escalation

CIVIC used a 10-point quasi-metric scale to measure respondents' self-assessment of their readiness for a possible escalation, wherein "1" indicated "not ready at all" and "10" meant "fully ready for any escalation."

Almost a quarter of respondents rated their readiness for escalation as the minimum possible: 1 point. Forty-one percent of respondents rated their readiness as low (1-4 points), 26 percent rated their readiness as average (5-6 points), and another 27 percent rated their readiness as high (7-10 points). Five percent refused to answer.

The average readiness score for the sample was 4.73 points and the median was 5 points, indicating either moderate perceived readiness or a tendency toward mid-scale responses.

Table 7. "Rate how prepared you personally are for a possible escalation of hostilities in your community on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means 'not at all prepared' and 10 means 'fully prepared for any escalation.'" Distribution of responses.



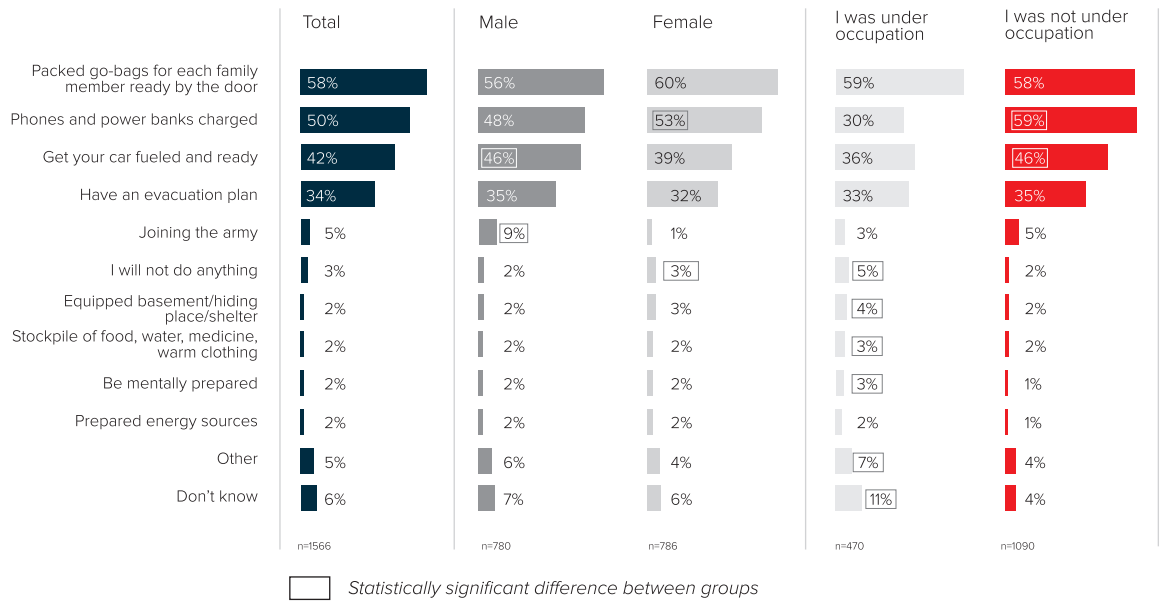
Men generally rate their readiness for escalation higher, selecting scores of 8, 9, and 10 significantly more often than women, statistically. This may reflect gendered differences in perceived roles and responsibilities during crises, with men more likely to focus on direct protection or defense and women balancing personal safety with care giving responsibilities. Age groups did not differ significantly in their responses overall; however, respondents aged 45-54 chose the highest score (10) statistically significantly more often than the sample as a whole. It is also worth noting that respondents in the 65+ age group were statistically significantly more likely to refuse to answer the question.

At the community level, respondents in Poltava oblast more often reported low levels of preparedness, likely because the oblast has not experienced active hostilities or occupation. A similar situation exists in some communities in Mykolaiv oblast. Conversely, in the Voznesensk community, which was occupied for the longest period of time, readiness assessments are higher than in other communities. In the Kherson oblast, this pattern stands out—in all communities, the percentage of the highest value responses is significantly higher than in the sample as a whole.

What "Being Prepared" Means

Among respondents who rated their level of preparedness above 3 points, the most common interpretation of being prepared for escalation included having bags packed for family members, maintaining charged phones and power banks, and having a car ready to leave. These options dominate responses regardless of respondents' gender or experience of occupation.

Table 8. "What does being prepared for escalation mean to you?" Distribution of responses.



There are some statistically significant differences by gender. Women are more likely than men to associate preparedness with having packed "go-bags" by the door and having charged phones and power banks, while men are significantly more likely to mention having a car ready and joining the army. For women, preparedness thus implies a full set of caregiving responsibilities, including maintaining stable connections with children and other family members through charged phones and having emergency go-bags for everyone

There are also noticeable differences based on whether respondents have experienced occupation. Respondents who have experienced occupation significantly more often associate readiness with basic but long-term strategies; for example, they are particularly likely to select the option "equipped shelter, food and water supplies." In contrast, among those who have not experienced occupation, preparedness is significantly more often associated with having charged communication devices and a car ready to leave. This may indicate that respondents who have experienced occupation are more likely to associate preparedness with survival strategies than are respondents who have not experienced occupation. The latter seem more likely to focus on leaving frontline areas if there is an escalation. However, participants from both groups most often selected the same top four responses, meaning that differences in their perspectives are not dominant and do not characterize the groups as a whole.

Notably, during one of the FGDs in Poltava, civilians described how preparedness may diminish over time in the absence of immediate escalation. While some respondents initially took preparedness measures, sustaining this high level of alert proved difficult when escalation did not materialize. The result was a gradual relaxation of readiness practices.[28]

> *"We packed an emergency bag... but over time we unpacked it."*
>
> — Ukrainian civilians



Civilians moving through Krasnohorivka, Donetsk region, Ukraine, February 2, 2024.

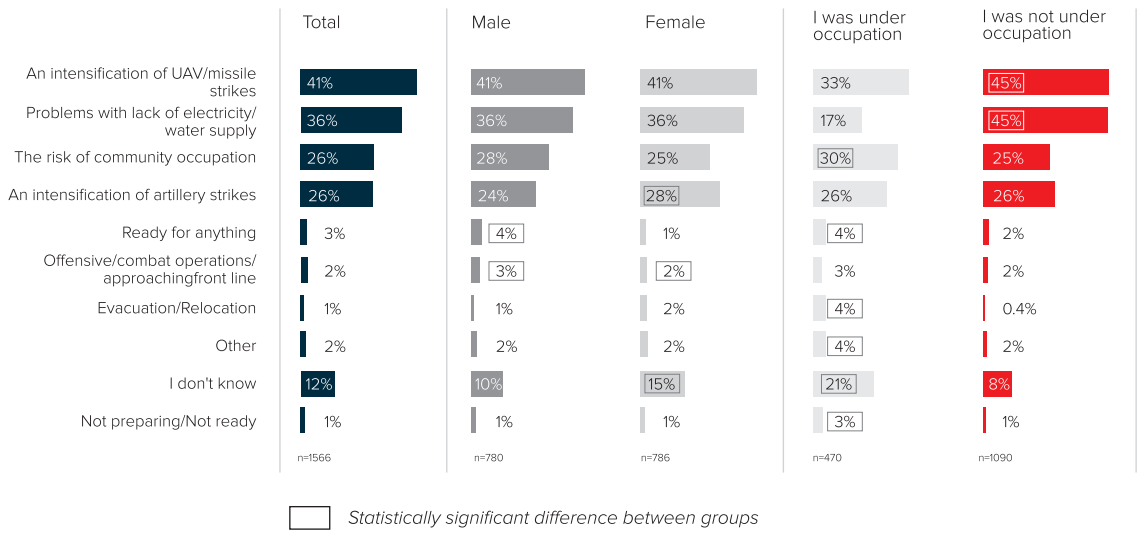
Regarding self-assessed preparedness for escalation, there are some statistically significant deviations from the overall distribution of responses in terms of age. In the 25-34 age group, readiness for escalation is more often associated with packed bags for family members and a car ready to leave than in the overall population. In the 35-44 age group, the existence of an evacuation plan is mentioned significantly more often. Among respondents aged 65+, basic supplies and shelters are mentioned more often than average.

In communities in Poltava oblast such as Pyriatyn, readiness is significantly more often associated with packed bags and charged phones than the overall average, while a higher proportion of respondents in communities in the Kharkiv and Mykolaiv oblasts associated readiness with having an evacuation plan or vehicle readiness. In a number of cases from Kharkiv oblast, the proportion of respondents who associated preparedness with active measures—particularly preparing transport or an evacuation plan—is statistically significantly higher. In some communities, basic measures like stockpiling food, water, and warm clothes were selected more frequently, as were undefined responses.[29]

Preparedness for Which Types of Escalation?

Among respondents who scored more than three points on their self-assessment for readiness is case of escalation, the most frequently mentioned types of escalation included an increase in the frequency of drone or missile strikes and problems with electricity and water supply. These categories dominated across almost all age, gender, and geographic groups.

Table 9. "What specific type of escalation are you preparing for?" Distribution of responses.



There are some statistically significant differences by gender. Women are more likely than men to mention preparing for increased artillery shelling, while men are slightly more likely to indicate the options "ready for anything" and "approaching front line". The proportion of "I don't know" responses is also significantly higher among women.

There are more pronounced intergroup differences based on respondents' experience of occupation. Respondents who have not been under occupation are significantly more likely to be preparing for an increase in drone or rocket strikes and for problems with electricity and water supply. Among those who have experienced occupation, there is a significantly higher frequency of preparing for the risk of reoccupation.[30] There is also a higher frequency of "I don't know" and "I am not preparing" responses from within this group.

In terms of age distribution, there are relatively few significant differences in the responses across the sample. In Poltava oblast, rocket and drone strikes as well as problems with water and electricity supply were mentioned significantly more oftenthan in the sample as a whole. This is also true for respondents from Kharkiv and Mykolaiv oblasts, though not in all communities. In some communities in Kharkiv oblast, the risk of occupation was also mentioned significantly more often.

> ***"Surviving the occupation is the worst option. Now no one will wait. They will pack their bags immediately. The bag with documents is [already] packed."***
>
> **– Ukrainian civilian**

Notably, those who have experienced Russian occupation and perceive a risk of reoccupation do not plan to remain in place again—the qualitative data show that people will act rapidly to evacuate.

The qualitative findings show that respondents across all groups understand escalation in two main ways: an increase in shelling, including shelling that causes damage to critical infrastructure, and a breakthrough of the front line, including an advance by Russian forces to within about 20 kilometers of their communities.[31] Respondents consider the first scenario more likely, the second scenario less likely.

Regarding an increase in shelling, the most important factors in civilians' decision making are the availability of shelters, first aid skills and equipment, mine safety, resources and opportunities to restore infrastructure, and humanitarian support for the population.[32] In terms of a potential breakthrough of the front line, stakeholder priorities include evacuating residents, providing shelter and humanitarian assistance in areas of relocation (including work opportunities and social services), and ensuring the functioning of government bodies and law enforcement agencies under crisis conditions.

Across all scenarios, the same groups are identified as particularly vulnerable: elderly people, who make up a significant proportion of communities; people with disabilities and people with reduced mobility; families with three or more children; and IDPs, who are less integrated into communities and have less access to information.

INSTITUTIONAL READINESS, TRUST, EFFECTIVENESS, AND RELIANCE

Local Authorities' Self-Assessment of Evacuation Readiness

The start of a full-scale offensive and the experience of occupation often caught local authorities unprepared to protect their communities, particularly with regard to evacuation. Additional information on protection concerns around evacuation can be found in CIVIC's 2025 report "Evacuating Under Fire in Ukraine: Lessons on Promoting Protection During War-Induced Movements."[33]

Across oblasts, authorities usually describe crisis planning and internal coordination as being in place, but residents are often not aware that a plan exists or do not understand the actions outlined in the plan. This disparity creates a consistent readiness gap between institutions and the population.[34] In addition, there are cases where the Russian Federation has deliberately used disinformation to manipulate evacuation processes.[35] For this and other security reasons, local authorities keep specific evacuation plans classified.

However, residents usually do not interpret non-disclosure as "classification"; rather, they conclude that plans do not exist.[36] Moreover, evacuation routes and assembly points can change quickly because of active hostilities and are therefore defined based on the situation, making advance disclosure unreasonable. Instead of sharing exact routes, therefore, authorities should clearly explain the plan of action: what residents should do in case of escalation or evacuation. Hromadas should also adopt a public Anti-Crisis Plan/Emergency Road Map that describes step-by-step actions in emergencies without including sensitive operational details.

Unfortunately, communities rarely institutionalize crisis management as a standalone role. Most delegate crisis functions to civil protection units, deputies, or sector heads, and respondents repeatedly describe staffing and training shortages for these units and individuals as a readiness bottleneck.[37]

Significant improvements have been observed in almost all oblasts, however. Currently, representatives of local bodies report not only the existence of evacuation plans, but also that plans are regularly revised and that community stakeholders conduct evacuation drills with the involvement of local authorities, educational departments, medical facilities, and civil protection.[38] These drills do not include the general population, mainly "to avoid panic", according to local authority representatives. Yet respondents tend to believe that basic information about evacuation and evacuation training should be provided to communities, with the deliberate limitation of public information leading residents to assume they will be informed only when evacuation becomes unavoidable.[39]

There are also differences in evacuation readiness between clusters based on occupation experience. De-occupied hromadas in Kherson and Kharkiv describe crisis and evacuation readiness in operational terms: transport, routes, registries of people with reduced mobility, shelter audits, and interagency coordination.[40] This is not typical for hromadas with no occupation experience, where readiness is often described in more abstract terms.



A civilian stands inside her destroyed home in Krasnohorivka, Donetsk region, Ukraine.

Push factors for evacuation are consistent across all five oblasts. They include escalation of shelling, proximity of the front line, loss of electricity, water, or heating, and fear of occupation or encirclement. These factors are concrete and experience-based, often linked to memories of the events of 2022.[41] In contrast, pull factors are weak. Respondents rarely described evacuation destinations as attractive or safe in a long-term sense. Instead, they spoke about uncertainty regarding the final destination.[42] For instance, between August 7 and September 26, 2025, the local authorities issued evacuation orders for 23 settlements across five hromadas in Sumy oblast in response to heavy shelling in border communities. The evacuation prioritized vulnerable groups, and over 35,000 people—including 5,000 children—were evacuated from high-risk areas. But evacuees arriving in Sumy often lacked clear information on accommodations and other types of assistance, as well as information about their rights. Some reported the absence of psychosocial or practical support upon arrival, as well. People repeatedly stressed that evacuation is acceptable only if the state provides transport, temporary housing, and basic living.[43]

Legal Updates

In 2022, there was a vague distribution of responsibilities between the police, military, local authorities, and the Coordination Headquarters on Evacuation, which was under the Ministry of Reintegration at the time. By 2024, the role of residents and local authorities appear to have been clarified to a degree, and changes to evacuation legislation made on October 10, 2025, should contribute to further clarifying roles and responsibilities to help improve evacuation practices. As per legislation and according to civilian perceptions, the military plays a central role across all five oblasts. However, it is primarily to provide civilian authorities with security information to inform evacuation decisions rather than to implement or organize evacuations. Evacuation routes and timing depend on AFU operational conditions and broader security considerations related to active hostilities, yet some respondents reflect that this is what makes evacuation planning feel unpredictable.

In February 2026, the Parliament of Ukraine amended the legislation on mandatory evacuation and incorporated it into the Code of Civil Protection. The relevant military command may initiate mandatory evacuation from settlements located in areas of possible or active hostilities, and the Regional Military Administration adopts the formal decision. The authorities may apply mandatory evacuation to the entire population or to specific vulnerable groups, including children, older persons, and persons with disabilities who cannot ensure their own safety. (Before 2026, mandatory evacuation applied only to children.) Upon written proposal of the military command and coordination with the Government Coordination Headquarters, the authorities may enforce the evacuation of children. Guardianship authorities carry this action out with the involvement of the National Police. In areas under general mandatory evacuation, the authorities introduce a special entry and exit regime and prohibit entry, stay, or return without a specially issued permit. The relevant military administration may authorize return to evacuated settlements (in agreement with the military command) only after hostilities cease and safe living conditions are restored. Authorities can accommodate evacuees from the temporary housing stock fund.[44]

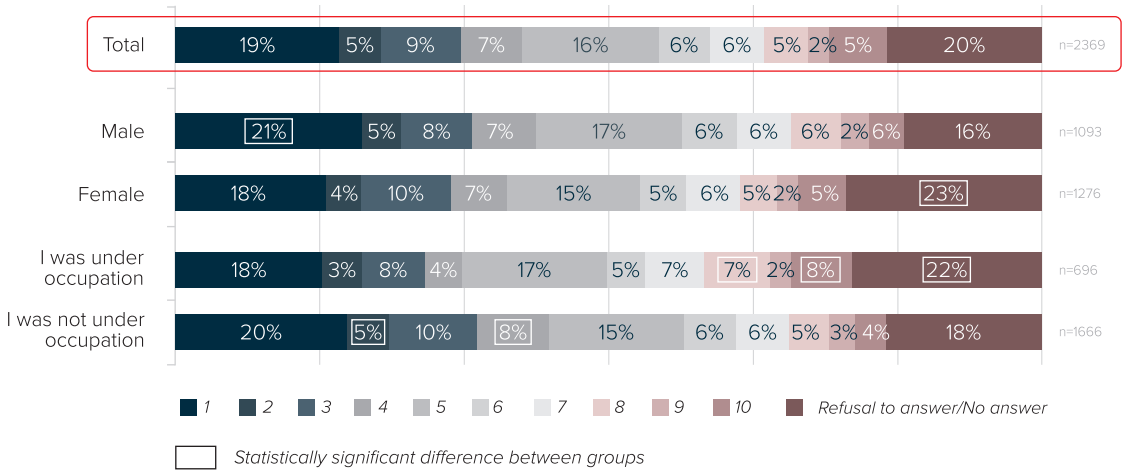
During the FGDs and IDIs, civilians shared with CIVIC that they generally accept forced evacuation in situations of clear and imminent threat, particularly for families with children and, in some cases, for older persons.[45] Mandatory evacuation raises expectations for the state of Ukraine to provide transport and temporary housing provision[46]; however, available temporary housing stock remains severely limited and insufficient even for those already displaced.

Nonetheless, many view forced evacuation as a life-saving measure that also reduces risks for volunteers, police, and military personnel who otherwise must conduct late rescues under fire.[47]

Civilian Assessments of Local Authorities' Readiness

More than half of the survey respondents — 56 percent — rated the readiness of local authorities for a possible escalation of hostilities in their communities at 5 or below on a 10-point scale, indicating predominantly cautious or critical assessments on the part of the population. Almost one in five respondents gave the lowest possible rating, indicating a widespread perception of insufficient preparedness on the part of authorities for potential escalation. However, it should be noted that almost the same proportion of respondents refrained from answering this question altogether.

Table 10. "Please assess how prepared local authorities are for a possible escalation of hostilities in your community on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means 'not at all prepared' and 10 means 'fully prepared for any escalation.'" Distribution of responses.



Although men more often assessed local authorities' readiness as minimal and women more frequently refused to answer or gave no assessment, medium and high readiness assessments did not differ by gender.

Respondents who had experienced occupation more often rated local authorities' readiness as high, while average ratings remained similar across those who had and those who had not experienced occupation. Uncertainty was more common among those with occupation experience, however. Experience of occupation is associated with slightly higher assessments of the authorities' readiness, but the difference is small.

At the oblast level, authorities' readiness is rated significantly lower in almost all communities in Poltava oblast. This may be due to both objectively less intensive preparation for escalation by local authorities in this oblast and a possibly poorer understanding of what preparation should look like, given that there have been no occupied communities in this oblast. In contrast, communities in the Kharkiv oblast are significantly more likely to give their authorities higher ratings for readiness than in other oblasts.

> ***Local authorities with experience of evacuation or occupation demonstrate more advanced practices in terms of advance preparation for escalation.***

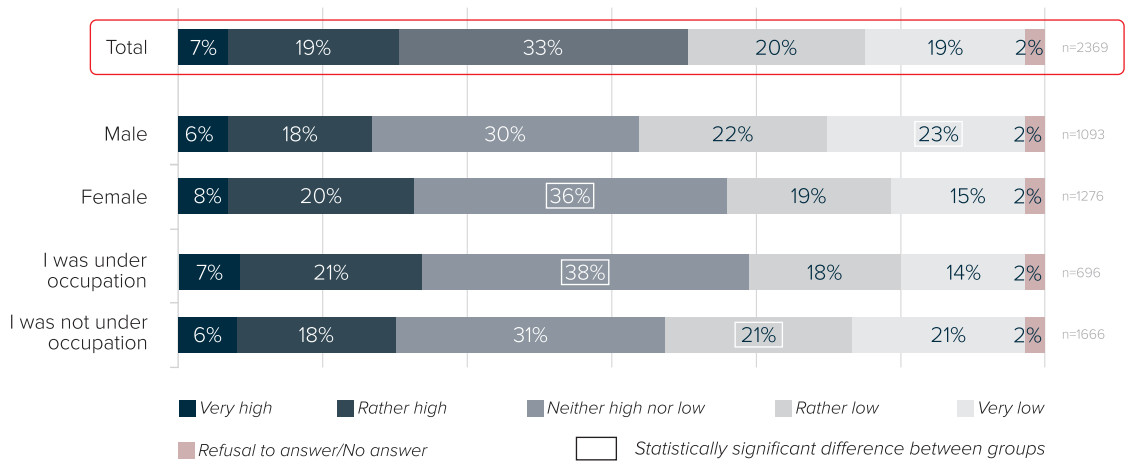
Local authorities with experience of evacuation or occupation demonstrate more advanced practices in terms of advance preparation for escalation. For instance, they conduct resident censuses, identify special needs, and map access to transport.[48]

> ***"A working group gathered in our community and we conducted a census. When we visited each household, we asked people if they needed any help in case of evacuation. Would they evacuate on their own? Our community had general information. We included people with limited mobility, pensioners, small children, and minors. What do we need to do now? For example, my husband and I haven't left anywhere, but we have a car. If we had to leave, we would take people who don't have transport with us." (Ukrainian local civilian authority)***

Trust and Effectiveness: Local Authorities and Law Enforcement

This section examines civilians' trust in local authorities and law enforcement and assesses how civilians evaluate their effectiveness based on direct interactions. It also explores how civilians understand responsibility and reliance on institutions in relation to reliance on themselves and their own responsibilities in the event of escalation. Overall, the balance of trust in local authorities is skewed toward neutral and low ratings, with a relatively smaller percentage indicating high trust.

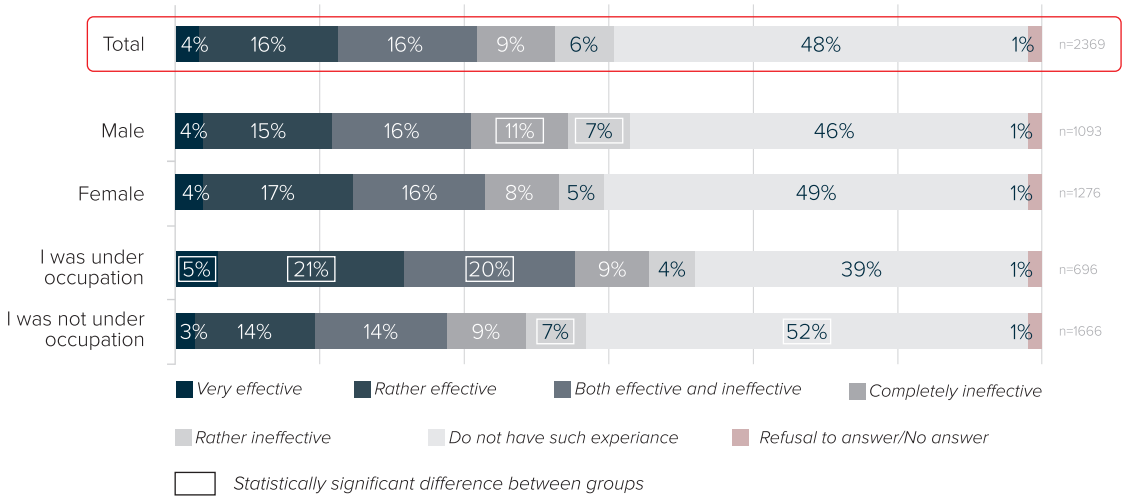
Table 11. "How would you rate your level of trust in the following institutions? Localauthorities." Distribution of responses.



There are significant differences based on whether respondents had experienced occupation: among respondents with no experience of occupation, the proportion of low trust is higher; among those wh have experienced occupation, a neutral attitude is more common. In terms of gender analysis, findings may reflect women's focus on community-based support and protection as well as access to services, whereas men may prioritize self-reliance and household-level defense.

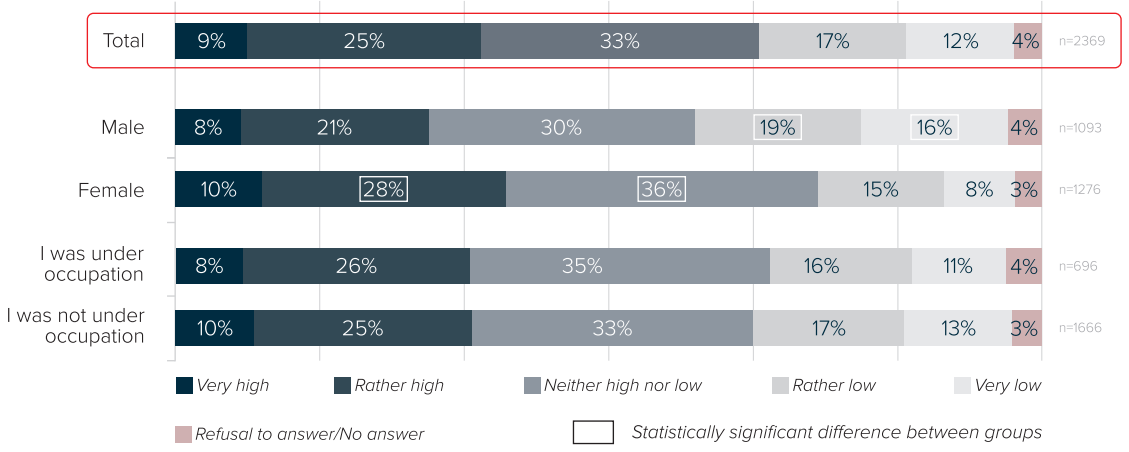
Approximately half of respondents have experience cooperating with local authorities. Among this group, findings reflect more neutral and high ratings for authorities' effectiveness than low ratings. Residents of Kharkiv oblast rate their level of trust in local authorities significantly higher. Similarly, respondents from the Kherson oblast have a relatively high level of trust in local authorities.

Table 12. "Have you had experience cooperating with any of the following institutions that help people in crisis situations (escalation of hostilities, evacuation of the population, etc.)? If so, please assess their effectiveness. If not, please indicate this. Local authorities." Distribution of responses.



Overall, assessments of trust in law enforcement agencies are mixed, with a significant proportion of both neutral and low ratings and a smaller proportion of high trust.

Table 13. "How would you rate your level of trust in the following institutions? Law enforcement agencies (police, State Emergency Service)." Distribution of responses.

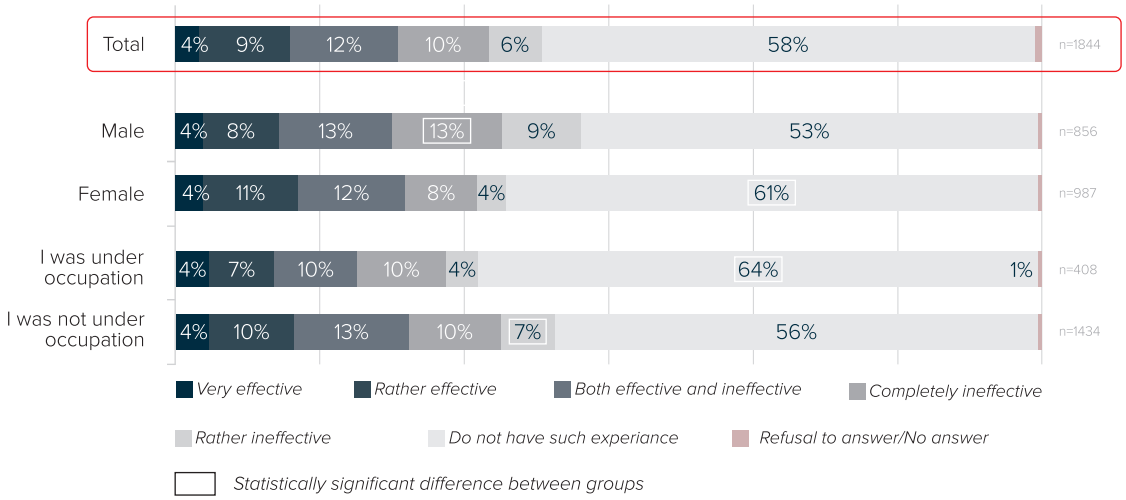


Statistically significant differences were recorded in terms of gender: among men, the proportion of low trust is higher, while among women, high or neutral trust is more common.

No statistically significant differences in the ratio of high and low trust were recorded based on whether respondents had experienced occupation. In terms of age and geographical distribution, the differences are isolated and unsystematic.

Meanwhile, respondents' experiences cooperating with law enforcement agencies are characterized by a predominance of neutral and low ratings among those who have relevant experience. However, a significant proportion of respondents had no relevant experience.

Table 14. "Have you had experience cooperating with any of the following institutions that help people in crisis situations (escalation of hostilities, evacuation of the population, etc.)? If so, please rate their effectiveness. If not, please indicate this. Law enforcement agencies." Distribution of responses.



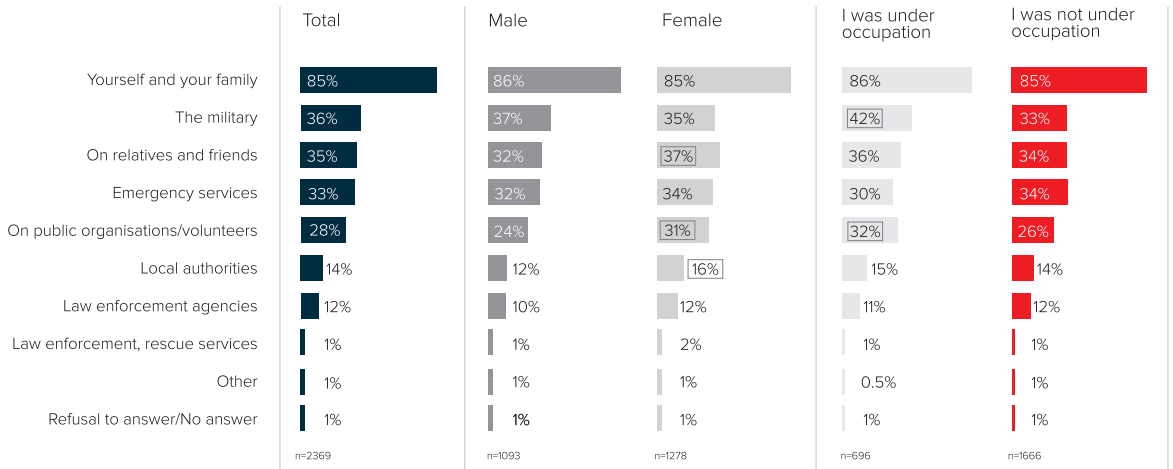
Statistically significant differences were found between men and women: among men, the proportion of low ratings for the effectiveness of cooperating with law enforcement agencies is higher, while women more often note a lack of experience. No significant differences between high and low ratings were found based on whether respondents have experienced occupation. However, unlike the previous institutions discussed, people who have experienced occupation were statistically significantly more likely to report a lack of experience cooperating with law enforcement agencies. Respondents from Poltava and Mykolaiv oblasts had the least experience cooperating with law enforcement agencies, while respondents from Kharkiv oblast generally rated the effectiveness of their local authorities relatively better than residents of other oblasts.

Overall, vertical cohesion (trust in institutions and their ability to deliver effective and timely services in case of the escalation of hostilities[49]) appears stronger in communities that have experienced occupation than in those without such occupation experience; however, civilians still tend not to address their concerns or requests primarily to local authorities or police.

Reliance

In the sample as a whole, the vast majority of respondents stated that they would rely on their own resources in the event of a possible escalation of hostilities. Institutional or external actors such as the military, relatives, friends, rescue services, and public organizations are mentioned much less frequently. A relatively small proportion of respondents selected that they would rely on local authorities and law enforcement.

Table 15. "In the event of an escalation of hostilities, who will you rely on?" Distribution of responses.

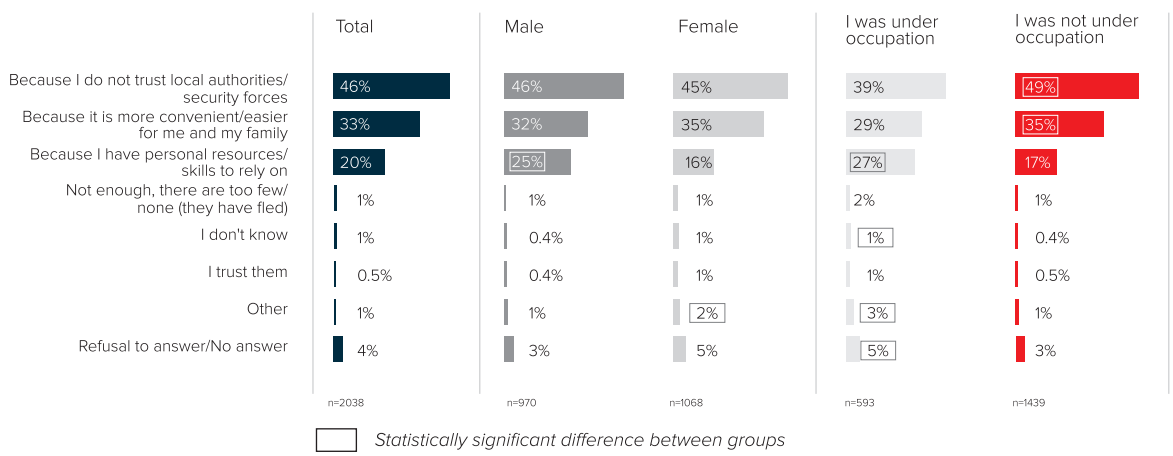


There are some statistically significant differences by gender. Women are more likely than men to say that they would rely on relatives, friends, CSOs, and volunteers in the event of an escalation. No other significant intergroup differences were found.

There are also significant differences based on whether respondents have experienced occupation. Respondents who have been under occupation are significantly more likely to plan on relying on the military and CSOs or volunteers. In both groups, the idea of relying on oneself and one's own family predominates, however, with no statistically significant differences on this point.

Local authorities and police are the least frequently selected sources of reliance in the event of escalation. Respondents most often explain their aversion by citing distrust in authorities or security forces, or by noting that independent action is more convenient or easier for them and their families. These responses are broadly similar among men and women, although men are statistically significantly more likely to indicate that they possess sufficient personal resources and skills to not require external help. Among respondents without the experience of occupation, distrust of local authorities and the perceived convenience of independent action are statistically significantly more common than among those with occupation experience.

Table 16. "Why will you NOT rely on local authorities in the event of an escalation of the conflict?" Distribution of answers.



In terms of age, the differences are limited: younger age groups slightly more frequently responded that “it is more convenient/easier for me and my family” to not rely on local authorities.

Respondents reported they would rely on local authorities as a “last hope” significantly more often when they had not experienced occupation, indicating better social cohesion in communities that have experienced occupation. This data also potentially points to local residents’ underestimation of authorities, as well as the capacity of the local authorities in crisis situations.

> ***Civilian perceptions of evacuation readiness depend less on whether formal plans exist and more on whether people believe those plans will work in practice.***

Thus, across the five oblasts, civilian perceptions of evacuation readiness depend less on whether formal plans exist and more on whether people believe those plans will work in practice. In qualitative interviews, residents describe who they would rely on in the event of escalation in a similar order as the data showed in the quantitative study: first, they would rely on themselves and their families, then on neighbors and trusted local figures, and then on volunteers and civil society actors. Only then would they rely on formal institutions such as local authorities, emergency services, or the police. In qualitative interviews, this pattern is more reflective of practical judgement than distrust in local government, however. People repeatedly explained that, in an emergency, acting independently is faster and more reliable than waiting for organized assistance, especially when evacuation decisions must be made quickly and information is incomplete. Respondents also emphasized that self-reliance reflects an understanding that local authorities may lack sufficient resources to assist everyone simultaneously, rather than an assumption of institutional failure.[50]

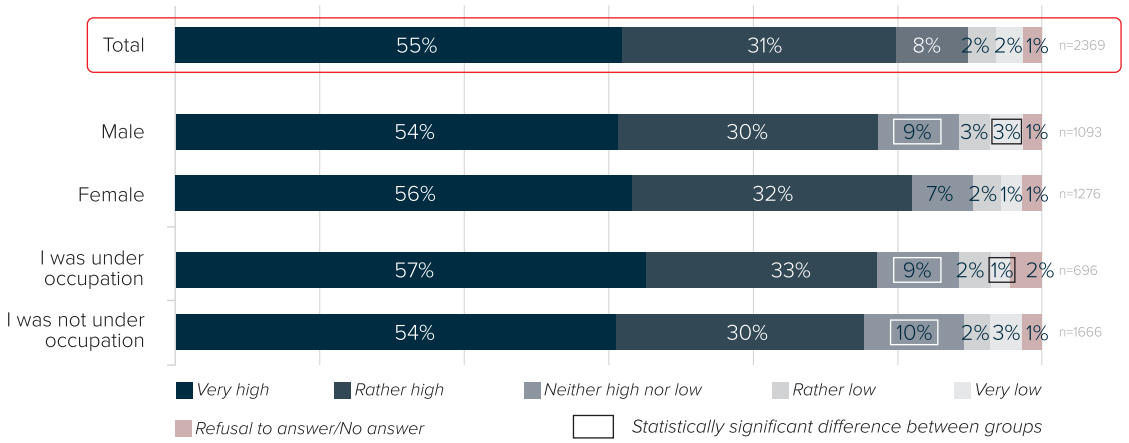
One participant in Kherson oblast described feeling that authorities had left without warning, reinforcing a sense that civilians had to rely on themselves. In several communities, local police and other services had in fact been redeployed to frontline or combat-support roles during the early stages of the Russian invasion. While this reallocation of personnel may have been operationally necessary, it reduced visible local presence and may have contributed to perceptions of abandonment and lower trust.

> ***“We learned that we should not have stayed under occupation and shelling but should have leftimmediately. Because we stayed under shelling for a long time, it had an impact on our psychological health. When the occupation began (I will take our city of as an example) our authorities—primarily the police—left without warning anyone. So from that moment on, I learned one thing: you can only rely on yourself.” (Ukrainian civilian)***

CIVIL-MILITARY ENGAGEMENT

The level of trust in the Armed Forces of Ukraine is generally high, with high trust ratings dominating over neutral and low ratings. The AFU remains the most trusted institution in Ukraine.[51]

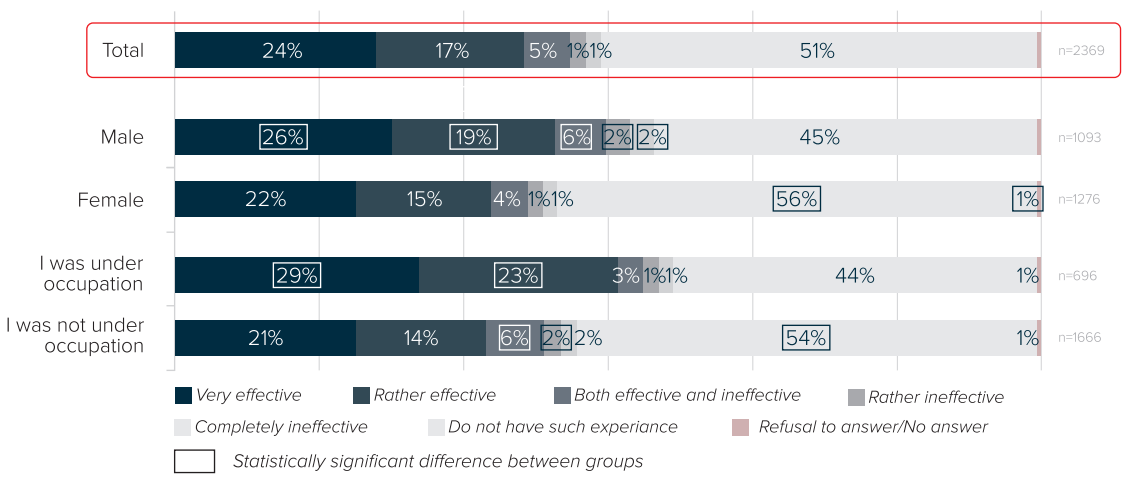
Table 17. "How would you rate your level of trust in the following institutions? Armed Forces of Ukraine." Distribution of responses.



In terms of gender, there are no statistically significant differences in the proportion of high trust. Among men, however, the proportion of low trust is slightly higher. Statistically significant differences were observed based on whether respondents had experienced occupation: among respondents who have been under occupation, the proportion of high trust is higher, while an average level of trust is more common among those who have not experienced occupation. Nevertheless, in both groups, more than 84 percent of respondents reported a very high or rather high level of trust in the AFU.

Among those who had experience cooperating with the AFU, high ratings regarding the AFU's effectiveness clearly dominate, while low ratings are rare. That said, a significant proportion (51 percent) of respondents had no experience cooperating with the AFU at all.

Table 18. "Have you had experience cooperating with any of the following institutions that help people in crisis situations (escalation of hostilities, evacuation of the population, etc.)? If so, please rate their effectiveness. If not, please indicate this. Armed Forces of Ukraine." Distribution of responses.



Statistically significant differences were recorded by gender among those who had direct experience engaging with the AFU: among men, the proportion of high ratings is higher, but other answers were also recorded much more often. This can be explained by the fact that men generally have much more experience cooperating with the AFU than women.

There is also a difference in terms of whether respondents have experienced occupation. Respondents who have been under occupation more often rate the AFU's effectiveness more highly, while those without the experience of occupation more often recorded that they do not have experience cooperating with the AFU.

High trust in the Armed Forces of Ukraine does not translate into acceptance of visible military presence, however. In frontline and de-occupied communities, respondents consistently report strong trust in the military while opposing military personnel gathering civilians, visible deployments, or the placement of equipment (including electronic drone detection) near civilian areas. This opposition is largely due to fears of becoming a target.[52]

Respondents clearly distinguish the military from mobilization and recruitment institutions. For example, criticism of Territorial Recruitment Centres responsible for mass mobilization coexists with consistently high trust in the military as a protective force (the latter often being described as "defenders").[53]

Respondents frequently describe civil-military cooperation as limited. Where such cooperation exists, it is most often associated with training children in schools. At the same time, many stress that civilian preparedness should be led by local authorities, emergency services, medics, and veterans, while the military should remain focused on defense tasks except in narrowly defined, practical training roles.[54] Veterans are widely perceived as the most legitimate intermediaries for civilian engagement, while CIMIC officers were rarely mentioned.[55]

Responses among local authorities and local residents regarding engagement with military personnel differ. Local authorities describe well-functioning coordination mechanisms between the AFU and local authorities, primarily at the oblast level. Notably, all oblast administrations were transformed into military administrations under martial law.

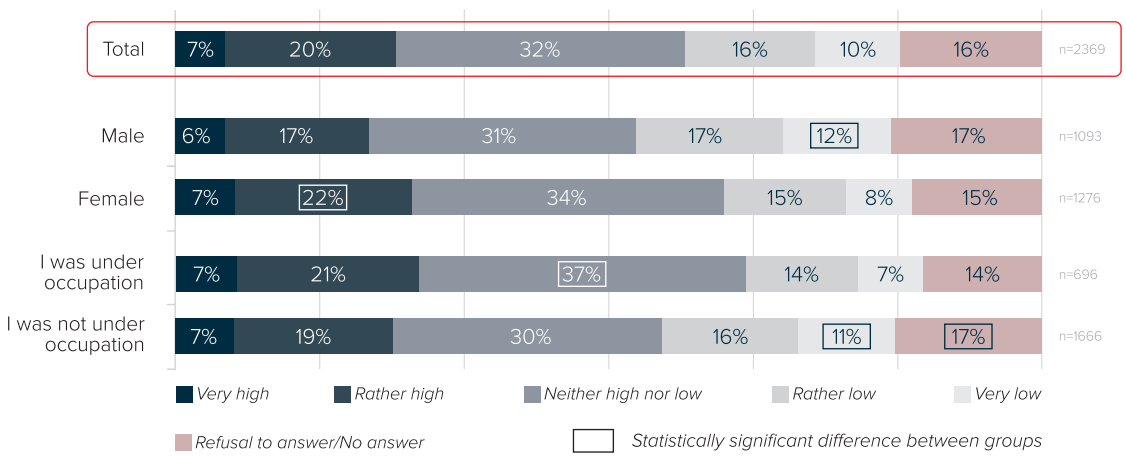
CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

Protection of civilians constitutes a positive obligation of the state. Where state authorities are constrained by operational, security, or capacity-related factors and are unable to fully implement protective measures, civil society organizations may step in to provide assistance in the provision of basic services or assist the state with better capacity-building activities. This role is complementary in nature and is not a substitution for the state's legal responsibilities.

From the previous section, it is evident that the majority of respondents who have experienced occupation (60 percent) had interacted with local authorities. One quarter of these respondents rate their engagement positively. Building on these findings, the present section examines how respondents perceive different actors involved in civilian protection and crisis response. It addresses who they most frequently interact with (state institutions or civil society organizations), as well as how they assess the effectiveness of these different actors. The analysis distinguishes between local civil society organizations and international actors, including international NGOs and UN agencies operating on the ground.

Overall, the level of trust in local civil society organizations is moderate, with neutral assessments prevailing and an approximate parity between the share of high and low trust.

Table 19. "How would you rate your level of trust in the following institutions? Local civil society organizations." Distribution of responses.



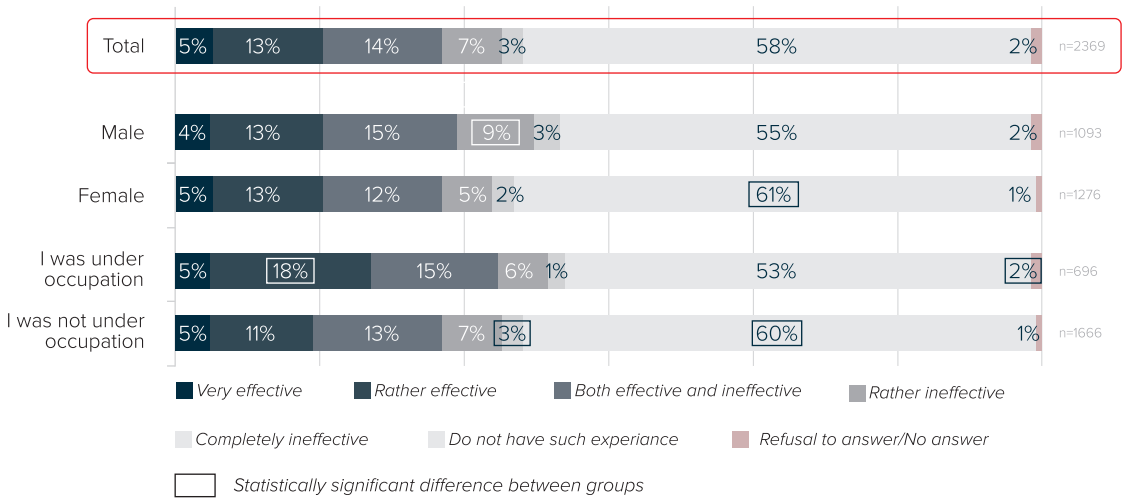
Statistically significant differences were observed in terms of gender: women more often reflect high trust, while low trust is more common among men.

There are also significant differences based on whether respondents have experienced occupation: among respondents who have not experienced occupation, the proportion of low trust is higher; among those who have experienced occupation, a neutral attitude is more common. This reflects needs-based programming, showing that CSOs focus first on areas with higher demand and, due to limited funding, are not able to cover every oblast in Ukraine.[56]

Respondents in Poltava oblast show a noticeably lower level of trust in local CSOs, while those in Kharkiv and Kherson oblasts show a higher level of trust. This again might be explained by the density of CSOs delivering work close to the front line.

A high proportion of respondents record no experience of cooperating with local civil society organizations—significantly more so than those who record no experience cooperating with local authorities. Among those who did have experience cooperating with local civil society organizations, there are more high effectiveness ratings than low.

Table 20. "Have you had experience cooperating with any of the following institutions that help people in crisis situations (escalation of hostilities, evacuation of the population, etc.)? If so, please rate their effectiveness. If not, please indicate this. Local civil society organizations." Distribution of responses.

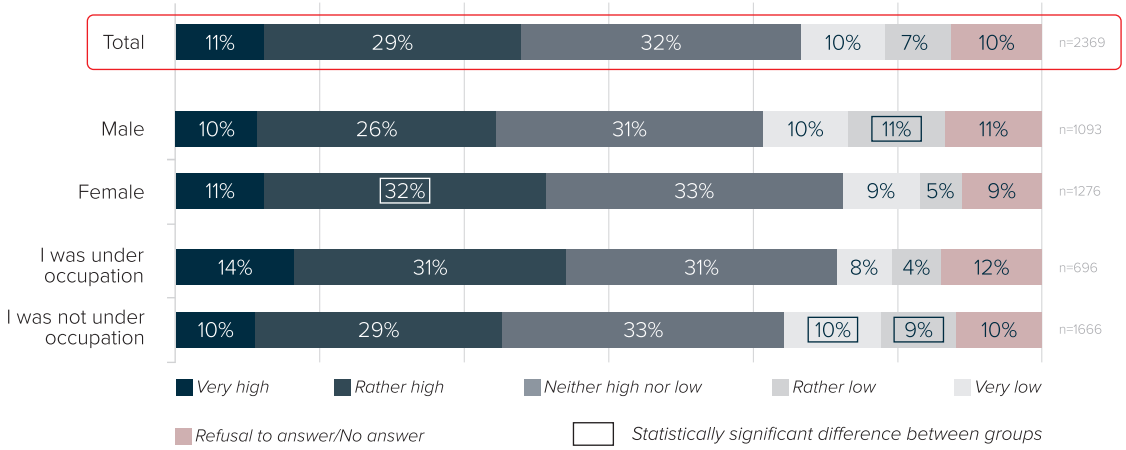


Statistically significant differences were recorded by gender: among men, the proportion of low ratings is higher, while a lack of experience cooperating with civil society organizations is more often noted among women. There is also a difference in terms of whether respondents have experienced occupation—respondents who have been under occupation more often record high ratings of effectiveness.

High and neutral trust ratings dominate in the perception of international civil society organizations; the proportion of low trust is significantly lower. Overall, the ratings look better when comparison with local CSOs, as there are fewer negative ratings.

In small rural communities, there are often no active local organizations, or local CSOs may be newly established, under-resourced, or in tension with local authorities. In such contexts, residents may primarily encounter assistance delivered by larger national or international organizations, which are more visible and consistently branded. In addition, distinctions between local, national, and international actors are often blurred in practice. Many organizations implement programming using international funding and display UN or donor branding, making it difficult for community members to differentiate between implementing partners. In transcripts, civilians frequently refer to "organizations" in general terms without clearly distinguishing their status.[57]

Table 21. "How would you rate your level of trust in the following institutions? International civil society organizations." Distribution of responses.



Statistically significant differences were found in terms of gender. Among women, the proportion of high trust is higher, while among men, low trust is more common.

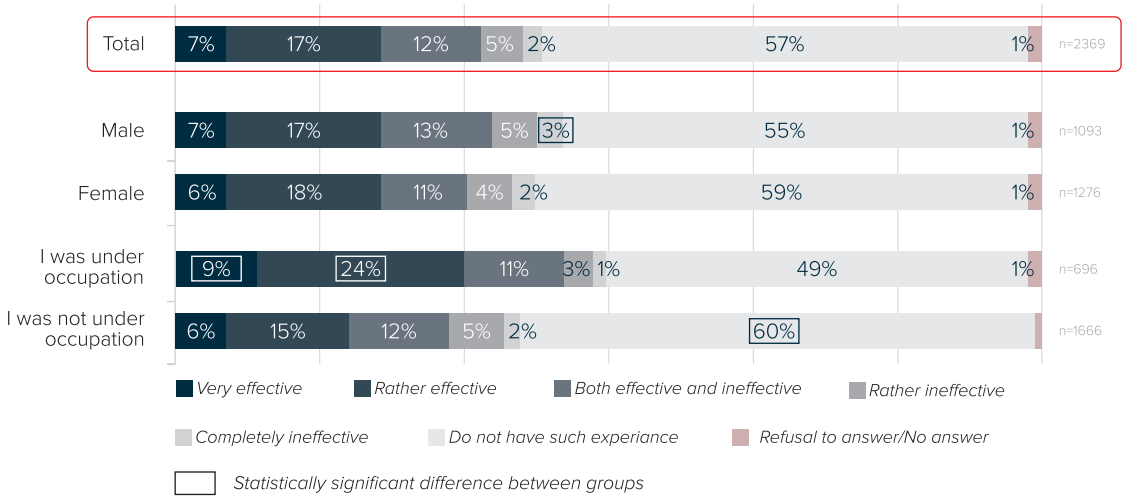
There are also significant differences based on whether respondents had experienced occupation. Respondents who have been under occupation are more likely to show high trust in INGOs and UN agencies, while those who have not experienced occupation more often reflect low trust.

Residents of Kherson oblast report the highest levels of trust in international NGOs and UN agencies. Qualitative data indicate that, compared to other areas where research was conducted, Kherson has received the most extensive international support. Respondents estimate that up to 50 percent of essential community functions depend on international assistance. As residents noted, the withdrawal of even a small number of organizations would create serious risks for the functioning of the community.[58]

> ***The withdrawal of even a small number of organizations would create serious risks for the functioning of the community.***

Relatively few respondents report having experience cooperating with international NGOs and UN agencies; however, among those who do have experience, responses more frequently suggest the perception that these agencies are effective. The overall level of engagement is similar to that reported for local CSOs, and the pattern of higher effectiveness ratings persist among respondents who have experienced occupation.

Table 22. "Have you had experience cooperating with any of the following institutions that help people in crisis situations (escalation of hostilities, evacuation of the population, etc.)? If so, please rate their effectiveness. If not, please indicate this. International civil society organizations." Distribution of responses.



Qualitative findings from the IDIs (mainly with the representatives of local authorities) indicate that local civil society organizations, international NGOs, and UN agencies play a central role in civilian protection and crisis response, particularly in frontline and de-occupied communities. Their activities are described as essential for sustaining basic services, restoring critical infrastructure, and supporting both the population and local authorities in conditions of ongoing insecurity. Local authorities' representatives who have had more experience engaging with (I)NGOs and UN agencies further stressed that much of these agencies' support concerns infrastructure that is not always visible to residents—such as generators, boiler rooms, water drainage, sewage systems, and solar substations—but that is indispensable for civilian life. This might explain the discrepancy between their responses and the responses of residents during FGDs. The latter mainly focused on in-kind assistance (food, hygiene kits, repair kits, building materials), cash assistance, legal and psychosocial aid, and other individual assistance receivedfrom the CSOs.[59]

Respondents reported that the territorial coverage of civil society and international assistance remains uneven and largely category-based, prioritizing formally defined vulnerable groups like registered IDPs. Communities that were not occupied or that are located further from the front line report more limited access to aid and a lower intensity of CSO engagement, even though war has reduced economic activity and has gradually depleted community resources and budget.[60] This disparity in terms of where CSOs focus their work and activity helps explain the low ratings of CSO effectiveness among some respondents, as well as why CSOs were rated as more effective by those who have experienced occupation and have experience collaborating with them.

Respondents also expressed concerns regarding the sustainability of civilian protection efforts, pointing to declining donor resources and uncertainty about the continuity of international support. This includes concern about the closure of USAID-funded programming.[61]

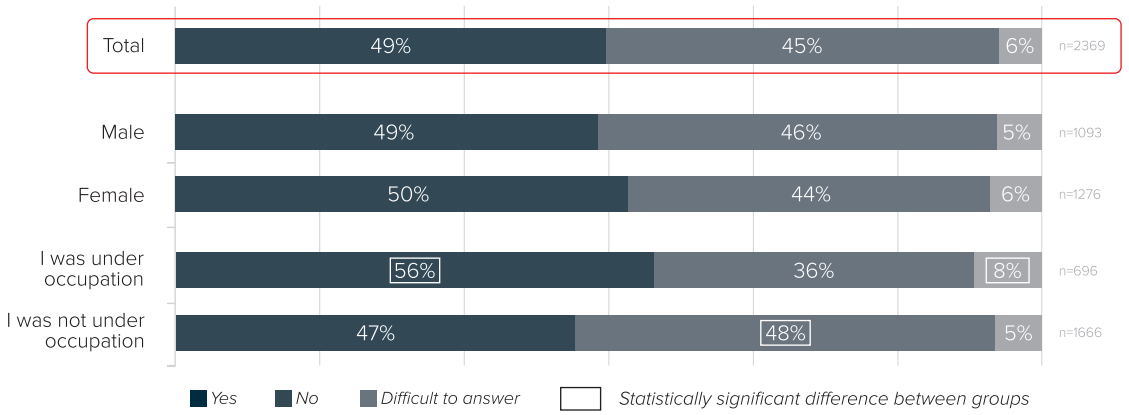
TRAINING AND COMMUNITY RESPONSE CAPACITY

Many CSOs and some state authorities (such as the State Emergency Service of Ukraine) offer training opportunities rather than material humanitarian aid. Trainings can be a core component of resilience, as they convert awareness into practical capacity. In situations where emergency services cannot reach the site of an attack, being able to help yourself, your family, and your neighbors is critical and life saving. Generally, participation in safety and emergency response training reflects a willingness to actively prepare for risks. It reinforces both individual coping capacity and collective resilience at the community level.

> *In situations where emergency services cannot reach the site of an attack, being able to help yourself, your family, and your neighbors is critical and life saving.*

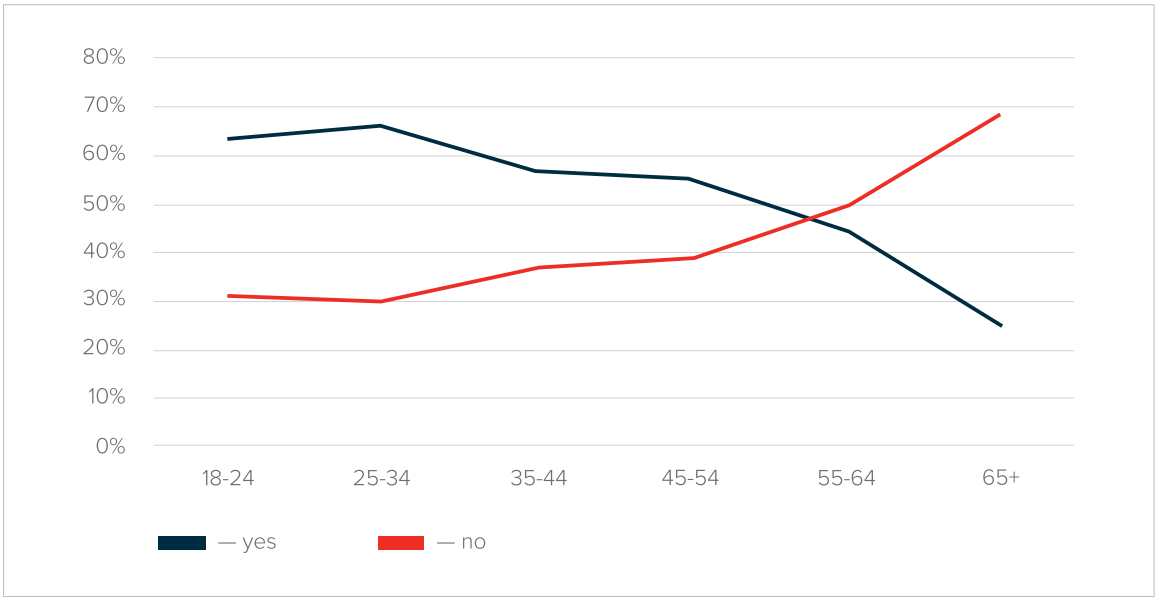
Overall, almost half of the respondents noted that they are willing to participate in safety and emergency response training; the percentage of those who are not willing to do so is only slightly lower. The proportion of "difficult to answer" responses remains small and does not affect the overall distribution.

Table 23. "Are you ready to participate in training on safety and emergency response, such as first aid, evacuation, mine safety, etc.?" Distribution of responses.



There are practically no differences among responses in terms of gender. Among both men and women, the proportion of those willing to participate in training is almost the same and corresponds to the overall level in the sample. The same is true for the proportion of "no" responses. Age-related differences, however, show a clear correlation between younger age and higher willingness to participate in training.

Figure 1. Graph depicting age distribution of respondents who are and are not ready to participate in training.



Statistically significant differences are also observed in terms of whether respondents have experienced occupation. Among respondents who have experienced occupation, the proportion willing to participate in training is higher than among respondents who have not experienced occupation. This discrepancy may be explained by those who have lived through more threatening and high-risk experiences having a stronger desire to learn the skills necessary for survival in the event of escalation.

Some FGDs, especially in hromadas that were not occupied, suggested having training on ”survival during occupation” that would include behavioral guidance as well as training on security measures.[62] However, representatives from the public sectors, especially authorities who were under occupation, normally rejected these requests as being too dangerous and having the potential to cause panic.[63]

Respondents most often mentioned two main areas of desired training: physical safety and non-physical threats, including disinformation and psychological support. In addition, respondents across all areas where research was conducted repeatedly prioritized first aid, mine safety, evacuation procedures, and recommended actions during shelling as areas for training. Indeed, they framed these skills as immediately applicable and essential in situations where formal emergency response is delayed or unavailable.[64] Qualitative data further indicate that respondents perceive one-off training as insufficient; rather, they emphasize the need for regular, repeated training.[65]

Respondents clearly identified disinformation and digital insecurity as threats to their resilience. They link it with fear, panic, and poor decision-making.[66] While some respondents place disinformation training on the same level of importance as first aid, many note that first aid training is conducted far more frequently than training on digital insecurity. This may explain attitudes within the general population.

> ***“People need to be taught to recognize where information is true and where it is false. This is the most important thing right now.” (Ukrainian local civilian authorities)***



Elderly civilians at an evacuation center for displaced residents in Kharkiv, Ukraine, March 14, 2024.

Demand for psychological assistance training reflects both prolonged exposure to stress and a noticeable change in attitudes over time. While such support was initially met with skepticism, respondents now describe psychological training as practical and necessary. In communities affected by occupation or repeated hostilities, it is increasingly seen as a tool for coping, maintaining emotional stability, and continuing everyday functioning under pressure.[67]

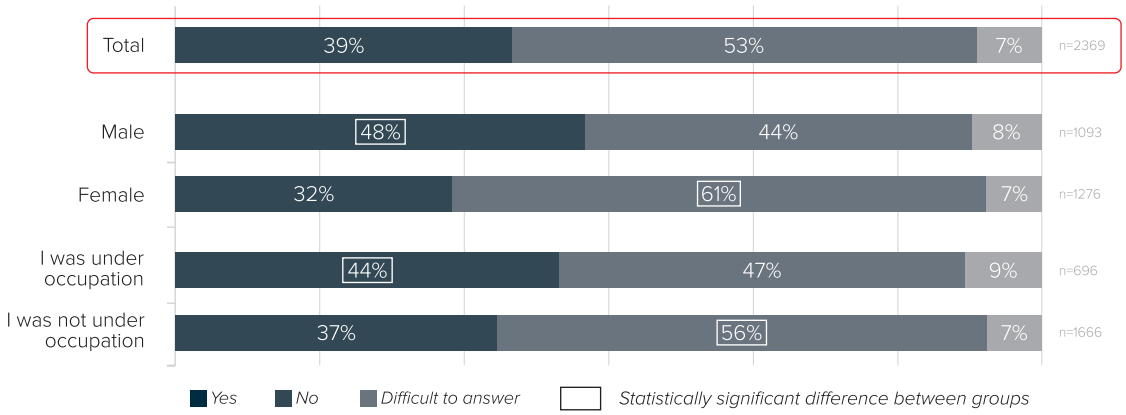
Qualitative data reveal a gap between institutional assessments and residents' experiences of training. While local authorities reported that safety training is accessible to the entire population, FGD participants from the same communities described limited access, particularly in regard to first-aid training. They cited needing to travel outside the hromada to obtain practical skills.[68] This may point to gaps in communication channels rather than shortcomings in training provision itself.

Interaction with the military and with veterans emerges as a cross-cutting expectation that shapes perceived training credibility and usefulness. Respondents across oblasts associate military- or veteran-led training with higher quality, realism, and relevance, particularly for first aid, mine safety, evacuation, and behavior during shelling.[69] Among other training providers, respondents mentioned CSOs,[70] the SES of Ukraine (often through mobile teams),[71] the Ukrainian Red Cross,[72] National Resistance courses,[73] and the Ministry of Education (indirectly via media literacy initiatives).[74] Overall, respondents rated training provided by these actors positively, regardless of whether the training was led by a state institution or an NGO.

National Resistance courses were noted by respondents as a formal training framework covering first-aid training, weapons handling, and general preparedness. These courses are implemented pursuant to the Law of Ukraine "On the Fundamentals of National Resistance." Their purpose is to equip citizens with basic knowledge and practical skills to protect themselves, their communities, and the state under crisis and wartime conditions. Training follows standard Territorial Defense Forces curricula and includes practical exercises, emergency response skills, basic tactical training, first aid, and simulations of emergency and combatrelated situations.[75]

In addition to individual resilience, respondents highlighted a collective form of resilience at the hromada level: the establishment of volunteer fire brigades.[76] Volunteer fire brigades strengthen local safety by reducing response times to fires and emergencies, including incidents related to the war such as shelling, strikes, and other conflict-related damage. They are particularly critical in rural and remote areas where professional services may arrive later. They provide rapid first response, assess situations on the ground, and either contain incidents or support state rescue units.[77] However, the sample overall shows that fewer people are willing to participate in such volunteer initiatives in the field of security than those who are unwilling (39 percent versus 53 percent).

Table 24. "Are you willing to join volunteer initiatives in the field of security, such as voluntary fire and rescue teams in the community?" Distribution of responses.



In terms of gender, there are statistically significant differences between the groups. Among men, the proportion of those willing to join volunteer security initiatives is higher. Yet while men may be more willing than women to participate in such initiatives overall, there are a growing number of women-led volunteer firefighter brigades in Ukraine. These have emerged in the context of wartime mobilization, which has reduced the availability of men for local emergency response roles. This trend has particularly been observed in Rivne, Odesa, Chernihiv, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts.[78]

Women tend to be underrepresented in volunteer fire brigades in part due to the perception that such roles require high levels of physical strength. When security-related volunteering is framed primarily through examples such as fire brigades or direct emergency response, participation patterns may thus reflect gendered role expectations rather than differences in willingness. At the same time, women are actively involved in other forms of volunteer support linked to the defense and security context, including logistics, fundraising, equipment procurement, and protective materials production. They also lead humanitarian efforts.[79]



Photo by Olena Zashko.

A displaced woman during a conversation at an evacuation center in Kharkiv, Ukraine.

The youngest respondents demonstrate the highest willingness to participate, but respondents aged 35-54 showed the highest response rate (including positive responses in total). Given that a significant proportion of respondents in frontline or previously occupied areas are elderly, this demographic composition reflects the broader sample structure and may influence responses to this question.

Statistically significant differences were also observed in terms of whether respondents have experienced occupation. Respondents who had been under occupation were more likely to declare their willingness to join volunteer initiatives. Meanwhile, residents demonstrated a higher willingness to join volunteer security initiatives in the following locations: Kherson oblast (Kochubeivska, Vysokopilska, and Velykooleksandrivska hromadas), Sumy oblast (Trostianets and Lebedyn), Poltava oblast (Lubny), and Mykolaiv oblast (Arbuzynska).[80]

Safety centers are one example of strengthened community security and preparedness in Ukraine. They began operating in 2015 as part of the country's decentralization reform. The legal definition of a safety center was formally introduced into Ukrainian legislation in February 2026.[81] According to the Code of Civil Protection, a safety center is defined as a specialized infrastructure facility equipped with dedicated premises such as: a fire station with a dispatch unit; a base for an emergency medical team; and/or a police station that accommodate several emergency services responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of the population. The purpose of these centers is to ensure public access to safety-related public services, enable comprehensive responses to security challenges, prevent and respond to emergencies and other hazardous events, mitigate their consequences, and ultimately enhance overall community safety and resilience.[82]

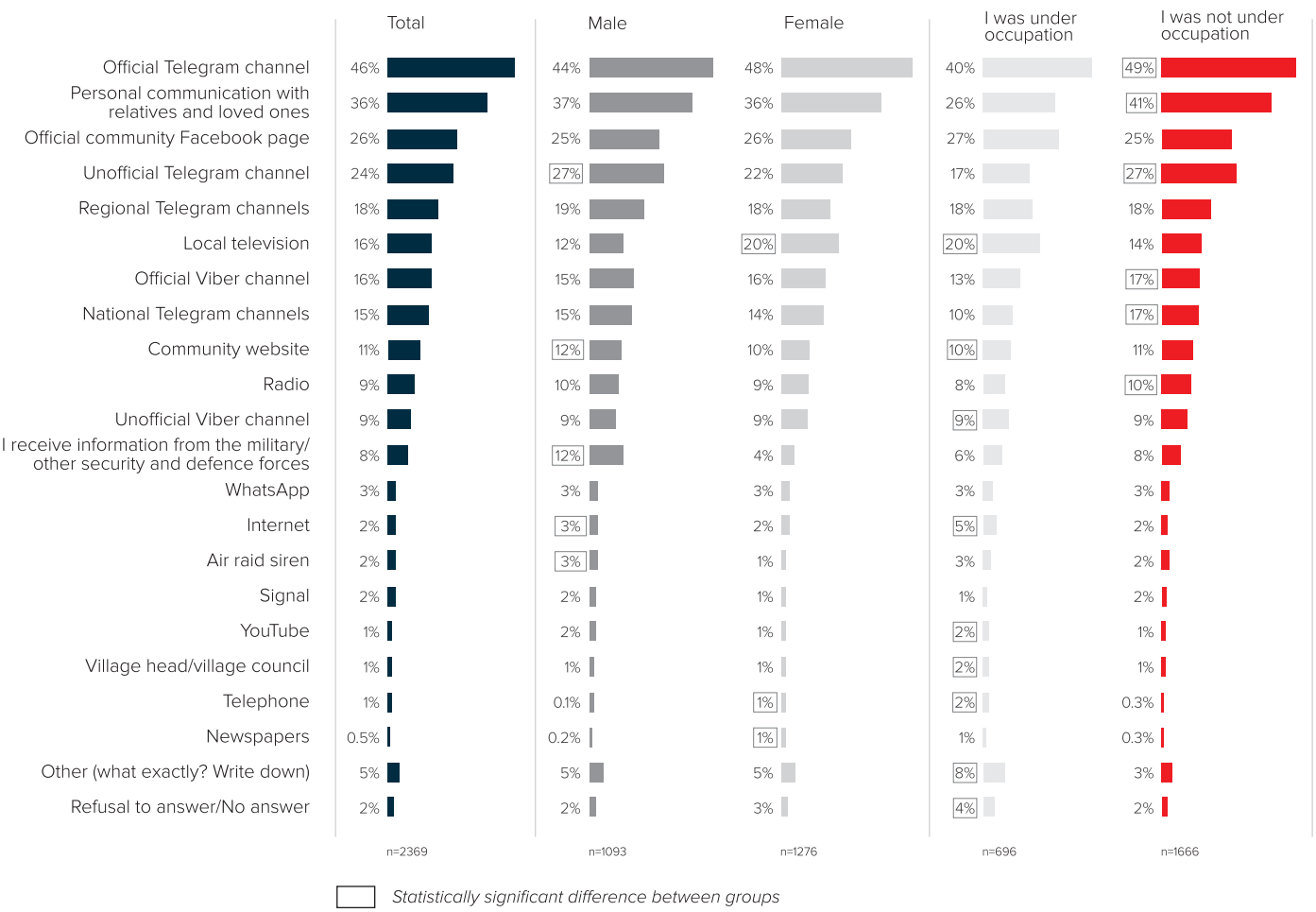
> ***"We have cohesion in all areas, because we have now organized and opened a Safety Centre. We have a volunteer fire brigade that is currently training at [name hidden] university and is ready to start." (Ukrainian local civilian authorities)***

COMMUNICATION

The AFU has introduced resilience to disinformation as an indicator for assessing the civilian environment as well as individual and collective resilience.[83] Residents surveyed by CIVIC demonstrated a high level of awareness of information-related risks and expressed interest in additional training in this area. For these reasons, the study examined communication as a distinct concern.

Official Telegram channels are the most frequently mentioned source of information about security concerns among all respondents—about half of them mentioned it. More than a third of respondents mentioned communication with relatives and friends as a significant source of information. Between 11 percent and 26 percent of respondents use their community's official Facebook page, unofficial Telegram channels, oblast-level Telegram channels, local television, the official community Viber channel, national Telegram channels, and/or their community's website. Overall, Telegram emerges as the most widely used source of information about the security situation. It is viewed as reliable in the communities where research was conducted. It is also important to note that most of the frequently used information channels are official.

Table 25. "What sources of information do you use to obtain reliable information about the security situation in the community, including the guidance of actions in case of escalation of hostilities and/or evacuation announcement?" Distribution of responses.



In terms of gender distribution, men were significantly more likely to mention unofficial Telegram channels as their source of information, while women were more likely to mention local television. This difference indicates lower digital literacy for older women as a major group in the sample. Among age groups, younger respondents (up to 44 years old) mentioned Telegram significantly more often. Respondents aged 65+ mentioned local television and communication channels with relatives and loved ones significantly more often than others.

Respondents with no experience of occupation mentioned the local television and community website options less often and almost all other options more often, which may indicate slightly greater trust in official sources of information.

At the community level, respondents in Kharkiv oblast reported significantly higher use of Telegram and Viber than the overall sample. Residents of Sumy and Kherson oblasts more often relied on less popular sources such as air raid sirens and information from the village council or village head. Qualitative data from Mykolaiv oblast show that respondents consistently described Viber groups as the most effective and trusted local channel, while they explicitly excluded Telegram. They relied on a core communication triad consisting of the community website, Facebook, and Viber alerts.[84]

At the same time, respondents consistently described official community websites as secondary or symbolic tools rather than operational ones. Across oblasts, respondents explained that they use websites mainly for general announcements or formal reporting and rarely consult them in moments of immediate danger. Respondents frequently stressed that official websites do not provide actionable guidance about threats.[85]

Regarding disinformation, respondents in Kherson and Mykolaiv mainly highlighted their daily experience of scams related to humanitarian aid and payments, as well as anxiety amplified by rumor in conditions of limited connectivity.[86] While government representatives across oblasts often reported that institutions monitor and debunk disinformation "within competence," population groups stated that they either do not see these efforts or cannot distinguish them from routine communication.[87]

Lastly, trusted intermediaries play a critical role in information provision, but the form they take differs by oblast. In Kherson, Kharkiv, and parts of Sumy, respondents identified informal community leaders, Homeowners Association (укр. ОСББ) structures, and the personal accounts of village heads, volunteers, starostas, and individuals with direct links to the military as faster and more trusted sources of information.[88]

CONCLUSION

Civilians' perceptions of security in many frontline areas of Ukraine are shaped primarily by their exposure to UAVs and UXO, the usability of shelters, the warning window for air attacks, and the availability of evacuation support amid relocation obstacles.

Overall, the results of CIVIC's survey and qualitative interviews indicate that both being under occupation and experiencing a longer duration of occupation are associated with slightly higher assessments of readiness for a possible escalation of hostilities. Nevertheless, the strength of this correlation is relatively weak, indicating a general trend rather than a direct relationship between the duration of occupation and the level of preparedness.

Personal readiness for possible escalation is associated with both prior crisis experience and perceptions of institutional capacity at the local level. Respondents who rated their own readiness higher also tended to rate local authorities as more prepared. This pattern does not simply reflect general optimism. Rather, it suggests that visible institutional capacity to manage the crisis, regardless of whether it is perceived as strong or weak, shapes how residents assess and develop their own preparedness.

There are higher assessments of preparedness—both of personal preparedness and of local authorities' preparedness—among respondents who have experienced occupation than among those who have not experienced occupation. Although the fact of occupation does not appear to be the cause of better preparedness, it does influence realistic risk assessment and quicker reaction to the potential for escalation.

Representatives of all surveyed groups in de-occupied territories who have experienced occupation and (often) evacuation are aware of the extremely high risks of re-occupation. For them, evacuation is therefore a top priority. Respondents with prior occupation experience in de-occupied communities emphasized their constant readiness for evacuation (e.g., packed belongings, documents, funds, and fueled car), as well as their readiness for independent relocation without an official evacuation announcement. Meanwhile, authorities spoke of readiness in the following terms: quantifying the number of residents who have their own cars and are therefore ready to evacuate independently; quantifying the number of residents who will rely on the authorities; installing the air raid warning systems; establishing proper bomb shelters (including anti-radiation); and demining activities.

Authorities with experience of occupation appear to have adopted and revised evacuation plans. At thesame time, many authorities pointed out that the situation is complex, volatile, and unpredictable, underscoring that it is impossible to create a plan that would correspond fully to reality and foresee all possible scenarios. Thus, having an evacuation plan ready is a positive development but does not guarantee its successful implementation.

For civilians, neither a higher readiness for escalation nor a higher sense of self-reliance is linked to distrust of local authorities. Rather, the factor driving civilians to plan on self-reliance is likely an understanding of the state's limited resources and a belief that relying on oneself will provide the fastest solution. The ability to decide quickly and a preference for autonomy plays a crucial role for residents of frontline areas. Respondents with access to private transport often plan to evacuate independently, while older respondents and those with reduced mobility expect to rely more on authorities regardless of their level of trust.



Destroyed building following a strike in Vovchansk, Kharkiv region, Ukraine.

Notably, civilians in de-occupied communities reported higher levels of solidarity and trust in local authorities. Where occupation experience is absent, residents may underestimate the institutional capacity of local authorities to manage crisis situations and deliver effective support, even if that support is not always perfect. To change this perception, local authorities need to proactively communicate what steps will be taken in case of escalation, what actions will be taken to make evacuation effective, and what plans they have to enhance individual and community resilience. Civilians identify training, particularly in first aid, psychosocial support, mine safety, evacuation procedures, and countering disinformation, as one of the most effective and realistic tools the state can use to strengthen community preparedness and individual resilience.

Trust in the Armed Forces of Ukraine remains consistently high. However, while Ukrainian legislation assigns CIMIC officers the task of fostering defense awareness among civilians and enhancing preparedness for national resistance, civilians did not refer to civil-military engagement in this context. For civilians, CIMIC activities are mainly associated with first-aid training for children. Yet in 2022, CIMIC officers were highly engaged in the evacuation of civilians. This shift in understanding and perception around the role of CIMIC officers may be linked to reduced direct engagement between CIMIC personnel and civilians following the update of CIMIC doctrine in October 2025.

It might also reflect the increasing burden of CIMIC's social support responsibilities for families of those killed in action (KIA) or injured in action (IIA), which has come to dominate the workload of CIMIC officers. It was suggested that civilian preparedness should instead be led by veterans, with the military being expected to remain focused primarily on defense tasks. This might help veterans reintegrate into society, as well.

Gender shapes how civilians assess risks, engage with institutions, and approach preparedness. Women's threat perception is strongly influenced by caregiving responsibilities, leading them to prioritize safety (e.g., shelter conditions) and continuity of public services. Meanwhile, men report responsibilities such as fueling cars and being able to relocate family to a safer place in case of imminent threat. In terms of age difference, as well, civilians view their roles differently in regard to community response capacity (e.g., volunteer fire brigades). Preparedness strategies that fail to account for these gendered and aged patterns risk overlooking key drivers of community resilience and participation.

ENDNOTES

1 American Chamber of Commerce in Ukraine (ACC), Ukraine Fact Sheet, May 2025, https://chamber.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/AmCham-Ukraine-Fact-Sheet_May-2025.pdf

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