

UKRAINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY'S
CONTRIBUTION TO THE IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE HUMANITARIAN COMPONENTS
OF THE MINSK AGREEMENTS
(2014-2022)

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Tetiana Kyselova. Ukrainian civil society's contribution to the implementation of humanitarian components of the Minsk agreements (2014-2022).

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This document was developed by the Mediation and Dialogue Research Center at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in cooperation with a Coalition of organizations working to protect the rights of victims of armed aggression against Ukraine.

The Mediation and Dialogue Research Center at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy is a research-based think tank founded in 2017. The Center conducts academic and applied research to advance conflict transformation processes in Ukraine and the wider region by creating a safe space for interaction among scholars, diplomats, representatives of international organizations, and civil society. The Center is a member of the Mediation Support Network. The Center explores topics related to the Russian aggression against Ukraine before and after the 2022 full-scale invasion, as well as the adaptation of traditional peacebuilding approaches to the context of interstate wars of aggression. The Center is led by Dr. Tetiana Kyselova, DPhil (Oxon), Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, website: <https://md.ukma.edu.ua/>

The Coalition of organizations working to protect the rights of victims of armed aggression against Ukraine is an informal network that includes Human Rights Centre ZMINA, NGO "Donbas-SOS", NGO "CrimeaSOS", Right to Protection Charitable Fund, Charity foundation "East SOS", NGO "Civic holding «GROUP OF INFLUENCE», Charitable Organization "Charity Foundation "Stabilization Support Services", and the Crimean Human Rights Group. Since the beginning of Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014, these organizations have provided support to those suffering from the negative consequences of the war: internally displaced persons, residents of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, illegally detained civilians, relatives of missing persons, and others. The Coalition cooperates with the Ukrainian parliament, the Ukrainian government, and international partners to create conditions for the full realization of the rights of those affected by the war.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mediation and Dialogue Research Center, in collaboration with the Coalition of organizations working to protect the rights of victims of armed aggression against Ukraine, has developed a Report that explores Ukrainian civil society contributions to the implementation of the humanitarian part of the Minsk agreements in the period from 2014 to 2021. Although the political and security parts of the Minsk agreement failed, Ukraine has done a lot to protect its people in this period. Ukrainian civil society were the first to respond to the people's needs in a crisis situation and thus contributed greatly albeit indirectly to the implementation of the humanitarian parts of the Minsk agreements. The study presents these contributions in the framework of ten functions:

1. DOCUMENTATION OF CEASEFIRE VIOLATIONS, which were also war crimes, documentation of damages to civilian infrastructure and human rights violations in the places of detention, etc.

2. MONITORING AND EQUIPMENT OF THE ENTRY-EXIT CHECKPOINTS, assistance to people at checkpoints – by physical presence of the NGOs at the sites, regular needs assessments and surveys, consultations, legal and humanitarian assistance to people.

3. ASSISTANCE TO IDPS: legal and financial aid, advice through NGO telephone hotlines, information campaigns, developing and lobbying for changes in legislation regarding IDPs electoral rights, rights to privacy, welfare payments and support, etc.

4. EXCHANGE OF PRISONERS OF WAR, RETURN OF CIVILIAN DETAINEES, SEARCH FOR MISSING PERSONS: compiling the lists and providing assistance to the families and those who returned.

5. WORK WITH COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLE ALONG THE LINE OF CONTACT IN THE TERRITORIES CONTROLLED BY UKRAINE: needs assessments, humanitarian aid, access to state services, capacity building for local governments, dialogue and local conflict prevention.

6. WORK WITH COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLE IN THE TERRITORIES OCCUPIED BY RUSSIA (TOT) – information campaigns, advocacy for procedures to obtain documents and University admission for children from TOT, and dialogues across the contact line.

7. INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS FOR THE POPULATION on the governmental policies and opportunities for Ukrainians from TOT; advocacy to preserve the links with Ukrainians from TOT, COVID measures campaigns.

8. ADVOCACY FOR LEGISLATIVE CHANGES and development of state policies: strategies and laws on IDPs, crossing checkpoints, IDPs' electoral rights, Transitional Justice, establishment of the Ministry for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories, etc.

9. INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY: public statements, shadow reports for UN, legal argumentation for cases in international courts, targeted advocacy campaigns.

10. COORDINATION of civil society among themselves, international actors, and the authorities: international and national coalition building, sharing information with the Trilateral Contact Group and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission.

The Report contains Conclusions and Recommendations on how this past experience can make a foundation for civil society inclusion in any future processes of monitoring and implementation of agreements.

INTRODUCTION

The Mediation and Dialogue Research Center at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (hereinafter referred to as the Center) and the Coalition of organizations working to protect the rights of victims of armed aggression against Ukraine¹ (hereinafter referred to as the Coalition) developed this report based on materials from a two-day workshop generated using reflective practice methodology. Previously, the Center conducted desk research on the functions of civil society in the field of monitoring and implementing both peace agreements and ceasefire agreements, drawing upon the experiences of Colombia, Philippines and other countries. The study found that the roles played by Ukraine's civil society differed significantly from the practices of countries that have experienced civil wars. This is due to the specifics of the Ukrainian context, namely the interstate nature of the conflict (external aggression by an authoritarian regime against a democratic neighboring country) as well as the role and high level of professionalization of Ukrainian civil society. These factors led to the development of a different set of roles and functions, which were tested in the workshop with the Coalition participants in June 2025 and modified accordingly.

The report contains a summary analysis of the experience of organizations involved in monitoring and implementing peace agreements and ceasefire agreements with regards to ten key functions performed by civil society. This analysis focused on practices protecting the rights of Ukrainian citizens who found themselves in proximity to the combat zones on both sides of the front line during the initial period of Russian aggression against Ukraine (from 2014 to February 2022, i.e., before the start of the full-scale invasion).

The report does not aim to map all initiatives and civil society organizations that participated in implementing the humanitarian components of the Minsk agreements in 2014-2022, but rather to provide a systematic overview of such activities using examples from the Coalition's organizations, their partners, and organizations whose activities were known to them.

Against the backdrop of Russia's sabotage of the security provisions of the Minsk agreements, Ukraine did everything possible to ensure the humanitarian component of the ceasefire in 2014-2022. The agreements themselves contained only a few general humanitarian provisions, in particular, paragraphs 7 and 8 of the Package of Measures (the second Minsk agreement)² on the need to ensure "safe access, delivery, storage, and distribution of humanitarian aid" to the general population, as well as "determining the modalities for the full restoration of socio-economic ties." Everything else – entry-exit checkpoint regimes and crossing procedures, ensuring the mobility across the temporary line of contact, supporting and protecting the rights of internally displaced

1. The Coalition includes Human Rights Centre ZMINA (hereinafter "ZMINA Human Rights Center") <https://zmina.ua/en/>, Charity foundation "East SOS" (hereinafter "East SOS") <https://east-sos.org/en/>, Charitable Organization "Charity Foundation "Stabilization Support Services" (hereinafter "Stabilization Support Services Charitable Foundation") <https://sss-ua.org/en/>, Donbas SOS (hereinafter "Donbas SOS") <https://www.donbasssos.org/en/>, NGO "Civic holding "GROUP OF INFLUENCE" (hereinafter "GROUP OF INFLUENCE" Civic Holding") <https://www.vplyv.org.ua/en/>, the Crimean Human Rights Group <https://crimeahrg.org/en/main-page-3/>, NGO "CrimeaSOS" (hereinafter "Crimea SOS") <https://krymsos.com/en/>, and the Right to Protection Charitable Fund (hereinafter "Right to Protection Charitable Foundation") <https://r2p.org.ua/en/>.

2. Set of measures to implement the 2015 Minsk agreements, OSCE. URL: <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/ua150212minskagreementen.pdf> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

persons (hereinafter referred to as IDPs), ensuring the livelihoods of communities located near the line of contact (or divided by it) – was not regulated by the Minsk agreements and was left to the governments of the respective countries.

Civil society organizations (hereinafter referred to as CSOs), both those that existed before 2014 as well as those established after 2014, were the first to respond to the acute humanitarian crisis and the needs of people in the combat zone.

CSO activity in response to the challenges of war was supported by international organizations and donors from the very beginning. Without their financial, technical, and expert assistance, the implementation of most initiatives would have been impossible. This report focuses at the CSO activity without diminishing the key role of the Ukrainian state that even in this first period of war showed itself as rather capable.

In 2014, Ukraine did not have a developed state infrastructure to provide assistance to the population in wartime, and so it was civil society that responded most quickly to these challenges. Along with the central and local authorities and the government, Ukrainian CSOs established a crisis response system. At that time, there was no talk of the eventual Minsk agreements; instead, the main task was responding to urgent needs on the ground, such as evacuation, providing for basic needs, protecting rights, and representing the interests of affected populations before the state and the international community. However, from today's perspective, it was precisely this activity that laid the foundation for the subsequent successful implementation of the humanitarian components of the ceasefire regime provided for in the Minsk agreements.

This report establishes, for the first time, an indirect link between the activities of Ukrainian CSOs and the implementation of the Minsk agreement ceasefire provisions from 2014-2022 by means of a functional analysis of activities carried out by CSOs. This experience, as well as the actual results of the CSO work analyzed in this report in the time period under review, prove extremely important today. The report both updates our understanding of these activities themselves and provides insights regarding the possibility of applying this experience in the future.

The analysis of CSO activities related to the humanitarian components of the ceasefire is organized into ten key functions that they performed in the process.

1. DOCUMENTING CEASEFIRE VIOLATIONS AND WAR CRIMES

Documenting war crimes that also violated the ceasefire

CSOs did not document ceasefire violations as such from 2014-2022, as this was done by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (OSCE SMM). That said, they were actively involved in documenting war crimes, some of which were also ceasefire violations. For example, alongside documentation produced by OSCE SMM and Ukrainian law enforcement agencies, the non-governmental organization Truth Hounds conducted independent investigations into the shelling of a passenger bus in Volnovakha in 2015,³ the shelling of residential areas in Kramatorsk⁴ and Mariupol⁵ in 2015, and conducted comprehensive analyses of shelling incidents in civilian settlements in eastern Ukraine from 2016-2017.⁶ Members of the Coalition for Justice and Peace in Donbas (which included East SOS, Donbas SOS, the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, the Luhansk Regional Human Rights Center "Alternative," the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, and the Public Committee for Protection of Citizen's Constitutional Rights and Freedoms) produced a summary report entitled "Civilian Casualties as a Result of the Military Conflict in Eastern Ukraine (2014-2018)."⁷

Starting from 2016-17, CSO hotline telephone operators recorded deaths, including those caused by shelling as ceasefire violations. Some CSOs forwarded this information about the casualties to the Documentation Center of the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union. In 2018, based on this data, a book of remembrance of those who died in the war was created for the Ukrainian National Center for Peacebuilding under the Ministry of Temporary Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons.⁸

3. Investigation of the deadly incident near Volnovakha on January 13th, 2015. Truth Hounds. 22.08.2017. URL: <https://truth-hounds.org/en/cases/investigation-of-the-deadly-incident-near-volnovakha-on-january-13th-2015/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

4. Rockets hit residential area in Kramatorsk, Ukraine. Truth Hounds. 22.08.2017. URL: <https://truth-hounds.org/en/cases/rockets-hit-residential-area-in-kramatorsk-ukraine/> (Accessed: 26.03.2026).

5. Investigation of the shelling of Mariupol on January 24th, 2015. Truth Hounds. 22.08.2017. URL: <https://truth-hounds.org/en/cases/investigation-of-the-shelling-of-mariupol-on-january-24th-2015/> (Accessed: 26.03.2026).

6. Scorching winter 2016-2017. Analysis of shelling of settlements in eastern Ukraine. Truth Hounds. 12.09.2017. URL: <https://truth-hounds.org/en/cases/scorching-winter-2016-2017-analysis-of-shelling-of-settlements-in-eastern-ukraine/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

7. Losses among the civilian population as a result of the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine (2014-2018). Alterpravo. 2021. URL: <https://alterpravo.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Vtrati-civilnogo-naselennya-vnaslidok-voennogo-konfliktu-na-Shodi-Ukraini-2014-2018-rr-ukr.pdf> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

8. Snehiryov, V., Movchan, S., Bida, O. Memory Map: Identification of all those killed in the conflict as a first step towards reconciliation. Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union. 2017. URL: <https://www.helsinki.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Mapalnet.pdf> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

Documenting the destruction and damage to residential infrastructure

In 2014-2022, Right to Protection Charitable Foundation, Donbas SOS, East SOS, and Crimea SOS, along the state bodies and procedures, documented destruction and damage to civilian property, infrastructure and residential facilities as a result of shelling in territories controlled by the Ukrainian government.⁹ The UN Shelter Cluster later summarized this information in a report.¹⁰

CSOs played an archival role documenting the consequences of war. Today, CSOs maintain the most complete archives on the humanitarian aspects of the Russian war in Ukraine before 2022.

Documenting human rights violations along the line of contact

CSOs documented cases of torture and unlawful deprivation of liberty on both the Russian and Ukrainian sides. Since 2014, in parallel with the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission, CSOs have been monitoring human rights violations in the temporarily occupied territories.¹¹ Based on this monitoring, shadow reports were developed for the UN.¹² An important step towards the rule of law in Ukraine was the investigation and conviction of crimes against Ukrainian citizens committed by the Ukrainian Tornado unit.¹³ For example, the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, Truth Hounds, and the Kharkiv Human Rights Group published a report entitled "Unlawful detentions and torture committed by the Ukrainian side in the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine."¹⁴ For CSOs, the main source of such information was people who crossed the checkpoints and who were interviewed there by human rights defenders and provided material and psychological assistance.

9. Roundtable on support to the hotlines for internally displaced and other war-affected people: summing up the results of the grant implementation. Council of Europe Office in Ukraine. URL: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/kyiv/-/roundtable-on-support-to-the-hotlines-for-internally-displaced-and-other-war-affected-people-summing-up-the-results-of-the-grant-implementation> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

10. Case study: Ukraine 2016–2021 / Conflict. Shelter Projects. URL: <https://www.shelterprojects.org/shelterprojects8/ref/A16-ukraine180821.pdf> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

11. Publications. East SOS. URL: <https://east-sos.org/publications/page/4/?direction=694&publication-types-analytics> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

12. Mid-term report by the coalition of NGOs based on report of the working group on the universal periodic review for Ukraine – A/HRC/37/16. ZMINA Human Rights Center. June 2020. URL: https://zmina.ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/12/zmina-alternatereporten_web.pdf (Accessed: 30.05.2026); Affected by conflict. How Ukraine ensures the realization of their rights. ZMINA Human Rights Center. URL: <https://zmina.ua/en/publication-en/affected-by-conflict-how-ukraine-ensures-the-realization-of-their-rights>; Ensuring the observance of socio-economic rights of the conflict-affected population in Ukraine. ZMINA Human Rights Center. URL: <https://zmina.ua/en/publication-en/ensuring-the-observance-of-socio-economic-rights-of-the-conflict-affected-population-in-ukraine/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026)

13. "Tornado" fighters detained for torture and perverted rape - prosecutor. Ukrinform. 17.06.2015. URL: https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-other_news/1855719-biytsiv_tornado_zatrimali_za_katuvannya_i_zbochene_zgvaltuvannya_prokuror_2065069.html (Accessed: 30.05.2026); Men were tortured with tasers and raped in the "Tornado" battalion. Justice for Peace in Donbas. 23.02.2017. URL: https://www.jfp.org.ua/rights/porushennia/violation_categories/nezakonni-mistsia-nesvobody/rights_violations/pryvillia-tornado (Accessed: 30.05.2026)

14. Unlawful detentions and torture committed by Ukrainian side in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, NGO «Truth Hounds». 2017. URL: <https://truth-hounds.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Unlawful-detention-by-ukrainians.pdf> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

2. MONITORING AND EQUIPPING CHECKPOINTS; ENSURING RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DURING CROSSING

After the Minsk agreements were signed, the first challenge was the establishment of entry-exit checkpoints (hereinafter referred to as EECPs). EECPs are official crossings between territories controlled by the Ukrainian government and the temporarily occupied territories in Donbas, also known as "certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions" (CADLR),¹⁵ with the aim of maintaining control over the movement of people and vehicles, preventing the illegal movement of weapons, explosives, and military goods, as well as ensuring that civilians could cross the line of contact for family, humanitarian, and social reasons. A more orderly system of checkpoints had been in operation along the line of contact since the summer of 2015, coordinated by the State Border Service of Ukraine in Donetsk Region (Maryinka, Maiorske, Novotroitske, Hnutove) and Luhansk Oblast (Stanytsia Luhanska, Zolote, Shchastia, etc.). In the case of the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea, such checkpoints were located on the administrative border with Crimea in the settlements of Chongar and Kalanchak (and initially in Chaplynka). Ukrainian human rights organizations were present at the EECPs from the very beginning and carried out a series of activities.

Identifying problems and advocating for changes to remove restrictions when crossing the line of contact

Although first checkpoints appeared in 2014, the first Temporary Crossing Procedure¹⁶ was only adopted in early 2015. In March 2015, a working group was set up at the headquarters of the SBU Anti-Terrorist Center; the group included CSOs that had highlighted issues in 2014, predating the formalization of any checkpoints or official crossing procedures. However, arbitrary restrictions on crossing the contact line remained in place for a long time. Long queues were common (especially on the CADLR side), and there were even cases when many elderly people died while waiting. Some checkpoints that Ukraine proposed to open, such as in Zolote and Shchastia, were blocked by CADLR de-facto authorities. In 2018, a group of CSOs issued an open statement to the President and Prime Minister of Ukraine regarding unjustified restrictions when crossing checkpoints with occupied Crimea.¹⁷ The statement addressed the particular problems faced by Ukrainian citizens after the government suddenly introduced new restrictions at these particular checkpoints. The authors emphasized a lack of advance notice to the public, difficulties in obtaining advice from state authorities, and provided examples of situations (family reunification, medical treatment, return to permanent residence) where the new rules made it difficult or impossible to cross the contact

15. CADRL - Certain Areas of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions as a term was used in the Minsk agreements. In Ukrainian documents, these territories were referred to as "the areas where Ukrainian state authorities are temporarily not exercising their powers." Only in 2018 did the Law finally confirm the term "temporarily occupied territories". On the peculiarities of state policy on ensuring Ukraine's sovereignty over temporarily occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk regions: Law of Ukraine dated 18.01.2018 № 2268-VIII. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/en/2268-19/ed20201126#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

16. On approval of the Temporary procedure for control over the movement of persons, vehicles, and cargo along the line of contact within Donetsk and Luhansk regions: Order of the Security Service of Ukraine dated 22.01.2015 № 270h. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/rada/show/v0027950-15#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

17. Public Statement of NGOs on unjustified restrictions to pass checkpoints with Crimea. Crimean Human Rights Group. 10.08.2020. URL: <https://crimeahrg.org/en/public-statement-of-ngos-on-unjustified-restrictions-to-pass-checkpoints-with-crimea> (Accessed: 30.05.2026). The statement was signed by the Crimean Human Rights Group, ZMINA Human Rights Center, Donbas SOS, East SOS, Crimea SOS, the Regional Human Rights Center, the Almenda Human Rights Center, the Stabilization Support Services Charitable Foundation, the "GROUP OF INFLUENCE" Civil Holding, the Diya Human Rights Center, the NGO "Tenth of April," the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, the Kharkiv Institute for Social Research, and Human Rights House Crimea.

line. The statement also called upon the government to review and clearly define humanitarian grounds for crossing the checkpoints.

CSOs also identified difficulties when transporting belongings, goods, animals, vehicles, bodies, and ashes of the deceased through checkpoints. The list of items permitted for transport through checkpoints used by the Ukrainian border service from 2014-2015 were outdated. For example, the list included typewriters but not computers. Accordingly, CSOs gathered information on these issues and advocated for changes to the Temporary Crossing Procedure and other regulations to facilitate the movement of people through checkpoints.

Advocacy for improving the system of passes for crossing the line of contact

Separately, the population was provided with advice on the pass system as well as assistance in obtaining passes in both paper and electronic form. Human rights defenders contributed to the fact that, starting in 2019, passes were issued by the Security Service of Ukraine for an indefinite period and people did not have to reapply for them. Organizations working on human rights in occupied Crimea actively helped journalists obtain passes.

Monitoring human rights violations when crossing the line of contact

CSOs also monitored and recorded human rights violations by Ukrainian state authorities (border guards and others) at checkpoints, usually on their own initiative. For example, one of the monitoring reports by East SOS notes that representatives of the Joint Center for Control and Coordination were physically absent from the Stanytsia Luhanska checkpoint on weekends.¹⁸ Based on the results of such monitoring, state bodies and international structures were informed. For example, field meetings of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Human Rights, De-occupation and Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol were initiated in cooperation with civil society organizations within the framework of parliamentary control, sometimes with the participation of the Ombudsman's Office.¹⁹ In Kyiv, CSOs participated in meetings of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Human Rights, National Minorities, and Interethnic Relations.²⁰ CSOs not only constructively criticized the work of state bodies, in particular the State Border Service, but also actively helped them improve their work. Thanks to the fact that CSOs served as bridges of communication with international organizations and donors, they were able to advocate for changes to provisions for the passage of citizens and find the money to replace outdated systems with new ones.

18. Monitoring of the "Stanytsia Luhanska" Entry-Exit Checkpoint: What Violations Were Detected? East SOS. 06.07.2021. URL: <https://east-sos.org/publications/monitoryng-kpvy-stanyczya-luganska-yaki-porushennya-vyyavyly/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

19. MPs Hold an On-Site Committee Meeting on the Border with Crimea. Korrespondent.net. 12.02.2020. URL: <https://ua.korrespondent.net/ukraine/4192974-nardepy-provodi-at-vyizne-zasidannia-komitetu-na-kordoni-z-krymom> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

20. Committee Hearings on the Topic: "The State of Compliance with the Rights of Internally Displaced Persons and Citizens of Ukraine Residing in the Temporarily Occupied Territory of Ukraine and in the Territory Not Controlled by the Ukrainian Authorities in the Anti-Terrorist Operation Zone." Committee of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on Human Rights, Deoccupation and Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, National Minorities and Interethnic Relations. 18.02.2015. URL: <https://kompravlud.rada.gov.ua/documents/sluhannja/73735.html> (Accessed: 30.05.2026). Later - Committee on Human Rights, Deoccupation and Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, National Minorities and Interethnic Relations.

Monitoring people's needs when crossing the line of contact

CSOs were able to respond more quickly to various needs on the ground than the state due to the physical presence of representatives at the checkpoints. These representatives recorded issues and necessities in monitoring reports which formed the basis for providing direct help to people on the ground.

The civil society sector pushed a unique vision that checkpoints were not merely a space for crossing the line of contact, but also a humanitarian access point.

Advocacy to improve living conditions and services when crossing the line of contact

Civil society organizations monitored conditions for those staying near and crossing the checkpoints. They did so by conducting surveys and collecting information on people's needs, difficulties, and issues when crossing. For example, from 2016 until the large-scale invasion, the Right to Protection Charitable Foundation published monthly monitoring reports entitled "Crossing the line of contact" with the support of UNHCR.²¹ Their report "Survey on the conditions of crossing the EECs and IBCs in eastern Ukraine" from January 2022²² contained an analysis of crossing conditions and changes that facilitated movement through the checkpoints, such as improvements to the SBU website and abolishing the need to use the "Vdoma" app. The report also highlighted the difficulties citizens faced during crossing as well as plans to disseminate information in order to address these issues.

Since 2014, various CSOs had been working to ensure that crossing points were accessible to people of all ages and abilities. For example, on November 15, 2018, a group of CSOs publicly appealed to the Ukrainian government with demands and recommendations regarding the improvement of checkpoints on the administrative border with Crimea. These involved providing administrative services and transport connections for citizens crossing the checkpoints (prior to this, people had to walk for more than a kilometer).²³

CSOs served as a bridge between state bodies, local self-government bodies, international organizations, donors, and local businesses. CSOs, for example, negotiated for the state to provide accommodation near the line of contact, which international organizations would equip at their own expense. These organizations negotiated who would be responsible for upkeep and

21. Temporary Order on Crossing the Line of Demarcation Within Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. Right to Protection Charitable Foundation. 29.01.2016. URL: <https://archive.r2p.org.ua/tymchasovyj-poryadok-peretynu-liniyi-rozmezhuвання-u-mezhah-donetskoyi-ta-luganskoyi-oblastej/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026); Monitoring Report "Crossing the Line of Contact Through EECs" December 2017–January 2018. Right to Protection Charitable Foundation. 26.02.2018. URL: <https://archive.r2p.org.ua/monitoryngovyj-zvit-peretyn-liniyi-zitknennya-cherez-kpvy-gruden-2017-sichen-2018-2> (Accessed: 30.05.2026), and others.

22. Report: "Survey of Citizens on the Conditions of Crossing EECs and BCPs." January 2022. Right to Protection Charitable Foundation. 15.02.2022. URL: <https://r2p.org.ua/en/page/zvit-kpvy-mpp-sichen-2022> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

23. Human Rights Defenders Demand that the Government of Ukraine Improve Infrastructure at EECs on the Administrative Border with Crimea – Crimean Human Rights Group. Crimean Human Rights Group. 15.11.2018. URL: <https://crimeahrg.org/uk/pravozahisniki-vimagayut-vid-uryadu-ukrayini-provesti-blagoustruy-kpvy-na-adminkordoni-z-krimom/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026). The appeal was signed by the heads of three organizations: Crimean Human Rights Group, Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (UHHRU), and Crimea SOS.

security, and they helped set up shelters (beds, water, tea, sugar, etc.) while local authorities and the State Emergency Service organized accommodation. CSOs negotiated with local businesses to ensure the sale of food and essential goods at checkpoints, even at night. Thanks to CSO advocacy, a mobile service for obtaining Ukrainian passports was introduced at checkpoints on the administrative border with Crimea.

In close cooperation with the State Border Service, CSOs worked to identify people who had managed to pass through an entry point but did not have time to complete their crossing, thereby finding themselves in the buffer zone after the checkpoint working hours had ended. These citizens were provided assistance with finding accommodation for the night.

Providing advice to people who crossed the line of contact

Human rights organizations organized mobile teams who worked directly at checkpoints controlled by Ukraine, provided people with information and legal advice on documents, social benefits, privileges, crossing rules, and psychological support, especially to the elderly, women with children, and people under stress. Information stands and consultation tents were set up at the checkpoints.

Support for crossing the line of contact during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic period (2020-2021) was difficult, and mobility through the checkpoints almost came to a halt. CSOs tried to restore the possibility for people to cross the checkpoints. When the so-called LPR and DPR (in fact, Russia) decided to close the checkpoints, CSOs advocated for people living in the occupied territories to be able to cross through other, international checkpoints, and for the cancellation of fines for Ukrainian citizens who crossed these checkpoints without the proper documents. Most of these administrative cases were processed by the Bilovodsk and Svativsk courts in Luhansk region. Due to the large number of administrative cases, most of them were closed after the three-month period for bringing charges had expired. CSOs represented individuals' interests and appealed decisions on fines. The coalition developed and published a document entitled "Coalition position on the reversal of quarantine restrictions on entering and exiting the temporarily occupied territories"²⁴ and presented expert recommendations.

CSOs developed information materials to assist with crossing checkpoints. In particular, the Coalition organizations, together with the Office of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the Ministry for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, developed a memo entitled "Administrative Responsibility for Departure/Entry from/to the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine through the Territory of the Russian Federation

24. Coalition position on reversal of quarantine restrictions entering and exiting the temporarily occupied territories. ZMINA Human Rights Center. URL: <https://zmina.ua/en/publication-en/coalition-position-on-reversal-of-quarantine-restrictions-entering-and-exiting-the-temporarily-occupied-territories> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

and Exemption from It."²⁵ This informational document outlined the procedures for drawing up protocols and decisions on administrative offenses, as well as provided recommendations on how to act in such situations. A separate section of the memo is devoted to exemptions from administrative liability and a list of humanitarian grounds that allowed the border to be crossed even while bypassing closed entry-exit checkpoints.

25. Memo "Administrative Liability for Exit/Entry from/to the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine via the Territory of the Russian Federation and Exemption from It." ZMINA Human Rights Center. URL: <https://zmina.ua/publication/pamyatka-administratyvna-vidpovidalnist-za-vyyezd-vyizd-z-na-tymchasovo-okupovani-terytoriy> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

3. ASSISTANCE AND PROTECTION OF IDP RIGHTS

CSOs were the first organizations to start working systematically with people from the moment they first crossed the checkpoint into territories controlled by the Ukrainian government, providing further assistance and helping them integrate into their host communities.

Providing information to people who crossed the contact line and became IDPs

In 2014-2015, there were no organized evacuations of the civilian population as such, but there was an urgent need for reliable information for people who wanted to leave the occupied territories for those controlled by the Ukrainian government. CSOs provided such information: where to go for help, both at checkpoints and via telephone hotlines, where to go, information on the availability of temporary accommodation for IDPs, etc. In 2014 and 2015, for example, in Yasynuvata, CSOs, together with the Regional Military Administration, created exit maps for civilians.

CSOs had their own teams at checkpoints as well as telephone hotlines that provided legal assistance on issues such as document restoration, obtaining compensation, registering civil status acts, applying for and reissuing regular and mining pensions, etc. The free legal aid system only began providing legal advice in 2016, meaning that from 2014-15 all legal assistance was provided at CSO expense.

Assisting IDPs with registration

A separate major challenge was registering IDP status and ensuring human rights when obtaining and renewing IDP registration certificates in territories controlled by the Government of Ukraine. There were cases where state authorities refused to issue or renew IDP certificates. CSOs stepped in to help individuals and lobby for legislative and systemic changes regarding these issues. Until 2016, IDP certificates had to be renewed every six months, which proved difficult and often unreasonable. CSOs succeeded in changing the law, in particular the resolution "On the Registration of IDPs."²⁶ The requirement for the State Migration Service to stamp the certificate was abolished, and the certificate became indefinite. CSOs also advocated for the provision of public services (banking services, medical services, schooling, pensions) without an IDP certificate.

26. On registration of internally displaced persons: Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 01.10.2014 № 509. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/509-2014-n#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

Supporting IDPs in obtaining state assistance for living expenses

The struggle of human rights organizations for IDP housing rights in 2014–2022 focused on transitioning from “temporary resettlement” to long-term state strategies and preferential lending. During this period, leading human rights organizations, in particular the Right to Protection Charitable Foundation, the “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” Civil Holding, My Home UA, and Donbas SOS, monitored IDP compact residences, provided assistance to IDPs through telephone hotlines and in courts, and advocated for housing program budgetary financing. Thanks to these activities, the state launched the Affordable Housing Program (70/30) and preferential lending. With the active participation of NGOs and international partners, a program of preferential mortgage loans for IDPs was launched in 2021 with funding from the German government (a grant of €25.5 million). This was the result of lengthy negotiations between human rights defenders and the Ministry for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories with international donors. In addition, human rights defenders actively contributed to the adoption of a number of CMU resolutions on this issue: Resolution No. 582, which defined the procedure for forming housing funds for temporary accommodation of IDPs;²⁷ Resolution No. 505 on monthly targeted assistance for IDPs for living expenses;²⁸ Resolution No. 767 on mechanisms for state monetary compensation for housing destroyed as a result of armed aggression).²⁹

Civil society organizations effectively “pulled IDPs out of the blind spot,” making them visible to local communities, the state, and society as a whole.

Protection of IDPs' personal data

In 2017-2018, human rights defenders from the “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” Civil Holding conducted an advocacy campaign and submitted a petition to the Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights regarding the illegality of transferring IDP personal data to private companies for verification that violated the right to privacy and data protections laws. As a result, a case was won in the Constitutional Court of Ukraine. Following a decision by the Constitutional Court, the regulations were amended and this practice was abolished. This work made it possible to protect the rights of many IDPs who had suffered interference in their private lives by private collection agencies.³⁰

27. On approval of the Procedure for the formation of housing funds for temporary residence of internally displaced persons and the Procedure for granting temporary use of residential premises from housing funds for temporary residence of internally displaced persons: Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 26.06.2019 № 582. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/582-2019-n#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

28. On monthly targeted assistance to internally displaced persons to cover living expenses, including housing and communal services: Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 01.10.2014 № 505. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/505-2014-n#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

29. Issues of monetary compensation payment to victims whose residential houses (apartments) were destroyed as a result of a military emergency caused by the armed aggression of the Russian Federation: Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 02.09.2020 № 767. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/767-2020-n#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

30. Promoting Electoral Participation of Internally Displaced Persons. “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” Civil Holding. 10.12.2018. URL: <https://www.vplyv.org.ua/archives/2831> (Accessed: 30.05.2026); Our advocacy campaign #EveryVoiceMatters was recognized as the “Advocacy Campaign of the Year”. “GROUP OF INFLUENCE” Civil Holding. 13.12.2021. URL: <https://www.vplyv.org.ua/archives/5989> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

Protecting IDPs' electoral rights

During 2014-2019, Ukrainian human rights organizations such as the "GROUP OF INFLUENCE" Civil Holding, the Civil Network OPORA, ZMINA Human Rights Center, the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, and the Right to Protection Charitable Foundation, carried out a systematic advocacy campaign to restore the electoral rights of IDPs.³¹ After the war began in 2014, IDPs could only vote in presidential and parliamentary elections (based on party lists), but were completely deprived of their right to vote in local elections in their host communities, as well as according to the majoritarian system. The state argued that IDPs did not belong to the territorial communities where they actually lived. CSOs held mass street protests called "I Have the Right to Vote" in front of the Verkhovna Rada building, organized events in Kyiv and local communities where IDPs lived, and provided legal support for a strategic case in the ECHR.³² As a result, the case of Seligenenko and Others v. Ukraine was won by the displaced persons, and Ukraine had to pay them compensation. In 2019, the Verkhovna Rada adopted a new Electoral Code.³³ Thanks to these activities, IDPs were able to change their electoral address on a declarative basis and vote *en masse* for the first time in the 2020 local elections.

Increasing the capacity and activism of IDPs

Separate work was carried out to enhance the capacity and activism of IDPs themselves,³⁴ as well as to establish and support the activities of IDP Councils: consultative and advisory bodies at the local community level. In particular, the first five IDP Councils were established with the support of the Stabilization Support Services Charitable Foundation,³⁵ which also contributed to the development of legislation on IDP Councils,³⁶ conducted regular mapping of IDP Councils, and helped coordinate their activities through the IDP Council Platform.³⁷

31. Our advocacy campaign #EveryVoiceMatters was recognized as the "Advocacy Campaign of the Year". "GROUP OF INFLUENCE" Civil Holding. 13.12.2021. URL: <https://www.vplyv.org.ua/archives/5989> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

32. From displacement to the fight for the right to vote for millions of Ukrainians. "GROUP OF INFLUENCE" Civil Holding. 28.04.2020. URL: <https://www.vplyv.org.ua/archives/4775> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

33. Electoral Code of Ukraine: Code of Ukraine dated 19.12.2019 № 396-IX. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/396-20#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

34. Leaders of change in communities. "GROUP OF INFLUENCE" Civil Holding. URL: <https://www.vplyv.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Лідери-змін-у-громадах-ukr-2021-1.pdf> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

35. About IDP Councils. Stabilization Support Services Charitable Foundation. URL: <https://sss-ua.org/en/idp-councils/?cn-reloaded=1> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

36. On approval of the Model Regulation on the Council on Internally Displaced Persons: Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 04.08.2023 № 812. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/812-2023-n#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

37. IDP Councils Portal. Stabilization Support Services Charitable Foundation. URL: <https://radyvpo.org.ua/en/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

Transitioning from ad hoc solutions to comprehensive IDP policy

CSOs have become leaders in addressing IDP issues with a comprehensive approach, from crisis response to holistic public policy. They advocated for the creation of IDP integration strategies, and the state adopted two such strategies: the "Strategy for the Integration of Internally Displaced Persons" and the "Implementation of Long-Term Solutions for Internal Displacement" for the period up to 2020³⁸ and then up to 2024.³⁹ They developed proposals and lobbied for the adoption of a profile law on IDPs⁴⁰ and amendments to the Code of Civil Procedure regarding civil status registers, the Electoral Code, etc.

38. On approval of the action plan for the implementation of the Strategy for the integration of internally displaced persons and the implementation of long-term solutions regarding internal displacement for the period until 2020: Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 21.11.2018 № 944-r. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/944-2018-p#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

39. Strategy for the integration of internally displaced persons and the implementation of medium-term solutions regarding internal displacement for the period until 2024: Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 28.10.2021 № 1364-r. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1364-2021-p#n15> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

40. On ensuring the rights and freedoms of internally displaced persons: Law of Ukraine dated 20.10.2014 № 1706-VII. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1706-18#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

4. POW EXCHANGE, THE RETURN OF CIVILIAN HOSTAGES, AND THE SEARCH FOR MISSING PERSONS

It was through civil society that the state's position on prisoners was formed, including the creation of specialized legislation and state infrastructure to work with returning Ukrainian citizens and their families, to support them after their return, as well as shaping Ukraine's position at the international level.

CSOs were the first to respond to the pain of Ukrainians whose relatives were imprisoned in Russia and the temporarily occupied territories after 2014.⁴¹ Especially in the early years of the war (2014-2016), people turned to both state authorities and civil society organizations on these issues. In 2016, the first self-organized association of people appeared to protect their rights and the rights of their loved ones: the Association of Relatives of Kremlin Political Prisoners, which worked in close cooperation with existing human rights organizations.⁴²

Creating lists and helping to identify people

CSOs created lists of prisoners and missing persons on their own and worked to find people and verify the lists. For example, the Crimean Human Rights Group created lists of political prisoners in occupied Crimea and updated them monthly.⁴³ Donbas SOS and East SOS created a database of civilian hostages and their family members. These organizations asked civilian hostages who had been released to cooperate in identifying those who remained in captivity.⁴⁴

International advocacy on the return of prisoners of war and civilian hostages

From 2014-2016, the Ukrainian government did not advocate internationally on these issues. It was thanks to CSOs that, starting in 2016, the names of Ukrainian citizens, journalists, and public figures who were illegally detained by the Russian Federation began to appear in UN resolutions (Oleg Sentsov, Volodymyr Balukh, Server Mustafayev, Iryna Danilovych, and others).⁴⁵ CSOs helped develop

41. Udovenko, A. Chronology of prisoner-of-war exchanges: 2014-2020. Justice for Peace in Donbas. URL: https://www.jfp.org.ua/blog/blog/blog_articles/58 (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

42. We Are Fighting for the Freedom of the Kremlin's Political Prisoners. NGO "Association of Relatives of the Kremlin's Political Prisoners". URL: <https://www.relativespp.org/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

43. Ukrainian prisoners: Crimean Muslims cases. Crimean Human Rights Group. URL: https://crimeahrg.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/prevcrimea_prisoners-_a4_eng_2020_06.pdf (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

44. To released hostages. Donbas SOS. 15.10.2014. URL: https://www.donbasssos.org/20141015en_hostages/ (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

45. Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine: UN General Assembly Resolution of 22.12.2018 no. 73/263. URL: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/73/263> (Accessed: 30.05.2026); Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine: UN General Assembly Resolution of 16.12.2020 no. 75/192. URL: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/75/192> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

position for specific UN resolutions. The Center for Civil Liberties initiated the “#LetMyPeopleGo” campaign for the return of civilians illegally detained by Russia.⁴⁶ At the international level, CSOs also contributed significantly to developing legal positions and documents on behalf of Ukraine in the European Court of Human Rights, the International Criminal Court, and UN bodies.⁴⁷

Documenting illegal detentions

Since 2014, CSOs have been systematically documenting the illegal detention of Ukrainian citizens, torture, and places of confinement in the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, collecting testimonies from people who were held in places of confinement. The following organizations published reports, in particular on the experiences of female hostages and gender-based violence: the Media Initiative for Human Rights,⁴⁸ Crimea SOS,⁴⁹ East SOS, the Center for Civil Liberties, UHHRU (within the framework of the Coalition “Justice for Peace in Donbas”)⁵⁰, the Eastern-Ukrainian Center of Civil Initiatives,⁵¹ and the Crimean Human Rights Group.⁵²

Assistance and support after captivity

In addition to searching for missing Ukrainian citizens and documenting illegal detentions, CSOs accompanied people who returned from captivity – both military and civilians – providing them with psychological assistance, rehabilitation, and help in adapting to life after their return. With the assistance of CSOs, the first draft law on missing persons was registered in the Verkhovna

46. Appeal of the relatives of the Kremlin's prisoners and Euromaidan SOS, which runs the LetMyPeopleGo campaign for their release. Center for Civil Liberties. 13.07.2017. URL: <https://ccl.org.ua/claims/zvernennya-ridnyh-v-yazniv-kremlya-ta-evromajdanu-sos-yakyj-vede-kampaniyu-letmypeoplego-dlya-jih-zvilnennya/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

47. Mid-term report by the coalition of NGOs based on report of the working group on the universal periodic review for Ukraine – A/HRC/37/16. ZMINA Human Rights Center. June 2020. URL: https://zmina.ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/12/zmina-alternatereporten_web.pdf (Accessed: 30.05.2026); Conflict-affected people: how Ukraine ensures the realization of their rights. ZMINA Human Rights Center. URL: <https://zmina.ua/en/publication-en/conflict-affected-people-how-ukraine-sures-the-realization-of-their-rights/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026); Ensuring the realization of socio-economic rights of persons affected by the conflict in Ukraine. ZMINA Human Rights Center. URL: <https://zmina.ua/en/publication-en/ensuring-the-realization-of-socio-economic-rights-of-persons-affected-by-the-conflict-in-ukraine/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

48. Katrychenko, T. Women's face of Donbas hostages. Media Initiative for Human Rights. 2021. URL: https://mipl.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/womendonbas_ua.pdf (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

49. Detention conditions of Crimean political prisoners : Overview of cases. CrimeaSOS. URL: <https://krymsos.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/detention-conditions-of-crimean-political-prisoners.-overview-of-cases.pdf> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

50. Bielousov, I.L., Korynevych, A.O., Martynenko, O.A., Matviychuk, O.V., Pavlichenko, O.M., Romensky, Y.V. and Shvets, S.P. 2015. Surviving Hell: Testimonies of Victims on Places of Illegal Detention in Donbas. Kyiv: «TsP Komprint» Ltd. URL: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/267941/Matviichuk_Report_Koalition_Surviving%20hell.pdf (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

51. Alyokhin, A., Kyrychenko, S., Korynevych, A. et al. 2017. War without Rules: Gender-Based Violence Related to the Armed Conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Edited by V. Shcherbachenko and G. Yanova. NGO “Eastern Ukrainian Center for Civic Initiatives”. URL: https://www.jfp.org.ua/system/reports/files/110/uk_gon_15117.compressed.pdf (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

52. Crimean Human Rights Group. Crimean Human Rights Group. URL: <https://crimeahrg.org/uk/golovna/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026). Since 2015, the CHRG has been producing monthly Monitoring Reviews of the human rights situation in Crimea.

Rada in 2016. CSOs were actively involved in drafting this text and advocating for changes in state policy in this area.⁵³ The Law of Ukraine "On the social and legal protection of persons who have been deprived of personal liberty as a result of armed aggression against Ukraine, and their family members" was finally adopted in 2022, but still needed further amendments.⁵⁴

53. Ukraine is in no hurry to implement UN recommendations on protection of victims of conflict – human rights activists. ZMINA Human Rights Center. 14.12.2020. URL: <https://zmina.ua/en/event-en/ukraine-is-in-no-hurry-to-implement-un-recommendations-on-protection-of-victims-of-conflict-human-rights-activists/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

54. On social and legal protection of persons in respect of whom the fact of deprivation of personal freedom as a result of armed aggression against Ukraine has been established, and members of their families: Law of Ukraine dated 26.01.2022 № 2010-IX. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2010-20#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

5. WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLE ALONG THE LINE OF CONTACT IN TERRITORIES CONTROLLED BY UKRAINE

In 2014 and up to now, Ukrainian legislation did not define the concept of a “gray zone” (buffer zone, etc.). Attempts by human rights defenders to create a legal framework for these most vulnerable territories controlled by the Ukrainian government until 2022 have been unsuccessful. Instead, state bodies were guided by several normative acts - the “List of settlements in which anti-terrorist operations were carried out,”⁵⁵ which provided benefits to local communities in terms of taxes, etc., the “List of settlements in which state authorities are temporarily not exercising their powers,” “List of settlements located on the demarcation line.”⁵⁶ These lists did not match each other; some settlements were included in one list but not in others, and vice versa. Moreover, at some stage, the lists were to be updated by the Ministry for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, but the updates were not made, or were made late. This led to problems in communities, which local authorities and CSOs had to resolve manually.

Monitoring the needs and provision of services to frontline communities

To identify and subsequently resolve community issues, CSOs launched mobile teams that traveled to the field to assess and monitor the needs of the population (including vulnerable categories such as IDPs, women, children, the elderly, the sick, and people with limited mobility). Such teams included the Right to Protection Charitable Foundation, Donbas SOS, and East SOS. They also monitored infrastructure, business development, freedom of movement, the provision of public services, the supply of electricity, water, food, goods, medicines, medical, educational, and banking (installation of ATMs) services, etc. Based on the results of this monitoring, CSOs worked to include specific settlements in state lists and ensure that international and Ukrainian organizations that brought humanitarian aid had access to them. Thus, thanks to CSO advocacy, bus service was established between the villages of Novotroitsk (where the checkpoint was located) and Olenivka in Donetsk Region.

In addition to providing services to communities along the contact line, CSOs assisted state bodies in larger communities, which, due to the influx of IDPs and people arriving from the occupied territories, experienced double or triple pressure on their entire infrastructure: courts, civil registry offices, Administrative Service Centers, pension fund authorities, social protection authorities, SMS departments, banking institutions, and ATMs. In Bakhmut, for example, the workload of the pension fund administration tripled after 2014. CSOs helped with the purchase of computer equipment, digitized the pension fund registries (three databases), and connected local authorities with

55. On approval of the list of settlements on the territory of which the anti-terrorist operation was conducted, and recognition of some decrees of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine as no longer valid: Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 02.12.2015 № 1275-r. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1275-2015-p#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

56. On approval of the list of settlements on the territory of which state authorities temporarily do not exercise their powers, and the list of settlements located on the line of contact: Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 07.11.2014 № 1085-r. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1085-2014-p#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

international organizations and donors. Thanks to the work of CSOs, a UNDP project was launched to establish mobile administrative service centers in local communities located near the contact line.⁵⁷ CSOs (e.g., the Right to Protection Charitable Foundation) conducted local advocacy on typical housing programmes.

Capacity building for frontline communities

CSOs paid particular attention to strengthening the capacity of local self-government bodies in communities located near the contact line. CSOs worked with local authorities, including through groups of local activists, creating their own networks on the ground. For example, in 2019, they helped such communities learn about and take advantage of subsidy programs from the state budget (50/50 and 70/30 programs) and provided consulting support to these communities.

CSOs provided training on capacity building for local self-government bodies on issues such as budgeting, land management, community social passports, the creation of joint pilot projects in communities, human capital development, and the involvement of international donors and fundraising. Separate work was carried out on the integration of IDPs into communities near the line of contact. In particular, the Right to Protection Charitable Foundation organized integration and information events for IDPs, refugees, and stateless persons.⁵⁸ The Stabilization Support Services Charitable Foundation implemented a network of IDP Advisors in the regions who analyzed policies, developed proposals for legislative changes, and provided advice to civil servants.⁵⁹

Dialogue and prevention of local conflicts

Since 2019, work has been carried out in communities in Luhansk, Donetsk, and Zaporizhzhia regions along the contact line to prevent local conflicts. As part of the UNDP, an early warning and response system for conflicts in communities (GISMAERC) was established.⁶⁰ A group of analysts and specialists in mediation and dialogue, led by the Center for Law and Mediation, identified conflicts and conflict situations in communities, collected and systematized information about them, and organized work to resolve conflicts and situations in communities through dialogue and other tools for peaceful dispute resolution.

57. Mobile centers – specially equipped vehicles – will provide public services for the most vulnerable populations in the communities of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. UNDP. November 2020. URL: <https://www.undp.org/uk/ukraine/press-releases/yes-ta-oon-peredaly-mobilni-tsnapy-dlya-hromad-na-skhodi-ukrayiny> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

58. CCCM Digest of the CF "Right to Protection" (June 2025). CF "Right to Protection". 14.07.2025. URL: <https://r2p.org.ua/en/page/daidzhest-sssm-bf-pravo-na-zakhyst-cherven-2025> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

59. About IDP Councils. Stabilization Support Services Charitable Foundation. URL: <https://sss-ua.org/en/idp-councils> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

60. GISMAERC. Initiative "Geoinformation System for Monitoring, Analysis, Assessment, and Resolution of Conflicts". URL: <https://dialog-ua.org/en> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

Informing the population during the COVID epidemic

Since 2019, CSOs have been informing the population in communities along the line of contact about the risks of COVID and the difficulties of restricted access to checkpoints. Human rights organizations, for example, advocated for the need to purchase COVID vaccines for IDPs, about whom the state had initially “forgotten,” they also advocated for legislative changes regarding a simplified procedure for crossing the state border for Ukrainian citizens from the occupied territories during quarantine restrictions.⁶¹

Preparing frontline communities to respond to a large-scale invasion in 2022

Closer to the full-scale invasion, in 2021, CSOs held discussions in communities along the contact line on scenarios for responding to a potential invasion and evacuation plans in case of changes in the front line.

When we were developing these plans, people thought we were crazy. Although the communities did not end up using these plans, at least they had some steps in mind and understood who was responsible for the evacuation.

61. Coalition position on reversal of quarantine restrictions entering and exiting the temporarily occupied territories. ZMINA Human Rights Center. URL: <https://zmina.ua/en/publication-en/coalition-position-on-reversal-of-quarantine-restrictions-entering-and-exiting-the-temporarily-occupied-territories/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026); Human rights activists call on the government to respond to the critical humanitarian situation in the occupied territories. Radnyk Program. 29.10.2020. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20251023211326/https://radnyk.org/noviny/pravozahysnyky-zaklykayut-uryad-vidreaguvaty-na-krytychnu-gumanitarnu-sytuaciyu-na-okupovanyh-terytoriyah/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

6. WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLE IN THE TEMPORARILY OCCUPIED TERRITORIES (TOT) OF UKRAINE

Despite the fact that access to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine has been almost entirely closed to Ukrainian civil society since 2014, Ukrainian citizens who remained in these territories have always been a major focus of attention for Coalition members.

Since 2014, CSO members of the Coalition have consistently and systematically drawn attention to how people in the temporarily occupied territories remain citizens of Ukraine and need the care of the state, understanding that they are not the enemies of Ukraine and that Ukraine has not forgotten them. CSOs have advocated for horizontal ties between people in government-controlled and occupied territories.

Introducing simplified admission mechanisms to Ukrainian higher education institutions

In 2016-2022, CSOs worked to introduce a simplified university admission mechanism for children from TOT through the specially-created educational centers "Crimea-Ukraine" and "Donbas-Ukraine," as well as through their financing from the state budget.⁶² Applicants from these territories were able to enter higher education institutions without taking the External Independent Testing (EIT) exams, based rather on their educational declarations and internal exams. East SOS,⁶³ ZMINA Human Rights Center,⁶⁴ Donbas SOS,⁶⁵ Crimea SOS,⁶⁶ the "GROUP OF INFLUENCE" Civil Holding⁶⁷ and others conducted regular monitoring of the work of these educational centers and various issues related to admission, informed the population in TOT about admission procedures, provided recommendations to the Ukrainian government on improving procedures (in particular by financing the centers and supporting applicants from the temporarily occupied territories). In 2020 they facilitated the extending admission parameters ("quota two") by law to all TOT, including Crimea and CADLR.

62. Human rights activists call on the authorities to include funding for the education of youth from occupied territories in the budget. ZMINA Human Rights Center. 09.11.2020. URL: <https://zmina.ua/statements/pravozahysnyky-zaklykayut-vladu-profinansuvaty-pidgotovchi-kursy-dlya-abituriyentiv-z-okupovanyh-terytorij/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

63. Results of the monitoring of "Donbas-Ukraine" and "Crimea-Ukraine" educational centers. CF "East SOS". 19.07.2024. URL: <https://east-sos.org/publications/rezultaty-monitoryngu-osvitnih-czentriv-donbas-ukrayina-ta-krym-ukrayina/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

64. Three days at the checkpoint. How children from occupied territories enter Ukrainian universities. ZMINA Human Rights Center. 02.12.2020. URL: <https://zmina.ua/media/try-doby-na-kpp-yak-dity-z-okupovanyh-terytorij-vstupayut-do-ukrayinskyh-vyshiv-i-skillkom-vdalosya-prorvatysya/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

65. Improving the admission procedure. Part 1. What IDP students say. Donbas SOS. 24.01.2022. URL: <https://www.donbasssos.org/vstup-doslidjennia-vpo-1/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

66. Simplified admission procedure to institutions of higher and professional pre-higher education for applicants from Crimea. CrimeaSOS. 23.06.2021. URL: <https://krymsos.com/sproshhenyj-poryadok-vstupu-do-zakladiv-vyshhoyi-ta-fahovoyi-peredvyshhoyi-osvity-dlya-abituriyentiv-z-krymu/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

67. It is necessary to consider the need for funding preparatory courses for applicants from temporarily occupied territories. "GROUP OF INFLUENCE" Civil Holding. 09.11.2020. URL: <https://www.vplyv.org.ua/archives/5602?utm> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

Informing people in the TOT

Since 2019, Ukrainian CSOs have been involved in informing residents of the occupied territories about the risks of COVID-19 and the changing procedures for crossing the line of contact as per quarantine restrictions.⁶⁸ Special attention was paid to violations of the right to information in the occupied territories of Crimea. Since 2012, the Crimean Human Rights Group has been monitoring the information space in the south of Ukraine and publishing reports. The results of monitoring in 2019, for example, showed that in Kherson region, the Russian Federation blocked nine Ukrainian radio stations and 34 frequencies and instead broadcast Russian propaganda. The towers that Ukraine tried to build to counteract this, unfortunately, did not work as expected.⁶⁹

Dialogue initiatives

Communication with Ukrainian citizens in territories not controlled by the Ukrainian government in 2014-2022 was also carried out through dialogue initiatives. In 2019-2021, the Right to Protection Charitable Foundation implemented three dialogue projects with environmental experts from both government-controlled and occupied territories on the risks of mine flooding and other man-made disasters related to the impact of the war, as well as on the problems of representatives of supporting professions (humanitarian workers, psychologists, teachers, doctors etc). These dialogue processes resulted in recommendations on environmental issues and an art exhibition of the dialogue participants' works.⁷⁰

68. Human Rights in Eastern Ukraine During the Coronavirus Pandemic. Freedom House. URL: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/HumanRightsEasternUkraineDuringCoronavirusPandemic6-UA_v01_UPD.pdf (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

69. In most settlements of northern Crimea, Ukrainian FM frequencies were seized by Russian broadcasters. Crimean Human Rights Group. 06.06.2019. URL: <https://crimeahrg.org/en/in-most-settlements-of-northern-crimea-ukrainian-fm-frequencies-seized-by-russian-broadcasters/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

70. Dialogues. Right to Protection Charitable Foundation. URL: <https://archive.r2p.org.ua/category/dialogy/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

7. INFORMING THE PUBLIC

Informing the public (in both government-controlled and non-government-controlled territories) was an important area of CSO work. Coalition members and their partners conducted information campaigns to convey the Ukrainian government's position to the public on both sides of the line of contact/administrative border about the fact that this war is an occupation of Ukrainian territories by Russia, about the Ukrainian government's policies on IDPs, their rights and procedures, receiving pensions and social benefits, crossing the line of contact, the admission of applicants from temporarily occupied territories to educational institutions, obtaining documents, the risks of COVID-19, etc. It was important that the Russian language was used for communication across the line of contact, as this allowed the Ukrainian position to be conveyed to a larger audience.

Non-governmental telephone hotlines became a separate integrated channel for providing information to people who had crossed checkpoints, were internally displaced persons in government-controlled areas of Ukraine, lived in temporarily occupied territories, faced various problems related to the armed conflict, etc. From the very beginning, CSOs possessed information about the situation at all checkpoints and beyond through the information that people shared via hotlines. Such lines were organized as early as 2014 by Donbas SOS, East SOS, and the Right to Protection Charitable Foundation. CSOs not only organized and supported hotlines, but also developed related infrastructure. The first state hotlines appeared in the Ministry for Temporarily Occupied Territories (MTOT) only in 2018. And even then, the experience of CSOs was already being applied. CSOs wrote scripts for operating state hotlines, trained call center operators, and helped their colleagues in state structures with fundraising. For example, based on experience gained from 2014-2022, the "GROUP OF INFLUENCE" Civil Holding worked with MTOT hotline operators after the full-scale invasion started.

The hotlines were equally accessible to residents on both sides of the line of contact.

According to human rights activists, "People from the TOT will not call 1545 (the state hotline), but they will call the hotline of an NGO."

In addition to hotlines, information was provided to the population on both sides of the contact line through the following channels:

- Billboards with hotline numbers were placed in communities bordering the contact line and at checkpoints.
- Handouts and leaflets distributed by mobile teams of human rights defenders at checkpoints and in communities.
- Social networks. In the early stages, services such as VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, and more recently even TikTok were used.
- Local media in areas along the contact line and media platforms that were relocated deeper into territories controlled by the Ukrainian government but retained their target audience

in communities along the contact line. In 2016-2017, such newspapers were distributed by human rights defenders at checkpoints.

- Advertising hotlines on the radio and even information via loudspeakers at checkpoints (after crossing, people approached and got the hotline number).
- Word of mouth: the transmission of information from person to person through relatives, friends, acquaintances, and colleagues on both sides of the contact line.

Of course, the work of CSOs to inform the public could not replace state policy in this area, and human rights defenders actively advocated for the state to address this issue more actively and effectively. Thus, in 2021, ZMINA Human Rights Center conducted a public survey on government communication, which revealed a lack of information in the Russian language concerning the position and policies of the Ukrainian government.⁷¹ Since 2021, the Crimean Human Rights Group has been monitoring the information space in southern Ukraine and has also identified problems with Russia effectively blocking the work of Ukrainian radio stations and websites.⁷²

71. Attitudes of Ukrainians to issues related to overcoming negative consequences of the armed conflict in Ukraine. ZMINA Human Rights Center. URL: <https://zmina.ua/en/publication-en/attitudes-of-ukrainians-to-issues-related-to-overcoming-negative-consequences-of-the-armed-conflict-in-ukraine/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

72. In most settlements of northern Crimea, Ukrainian FM frequencies were seized by Russian broadcasters. Crimean Human Rights Group. 06.06.2019. URL: <https://crimeahrg.org/en/in-most-settlements-of-northern-crimea-ukrainian-fm-frequencies-seized-by-russian-broadcasters/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

8. ADVOCATING FOR LEGISLATIVE CHANGE AND PUBLIC POLICY DEVELOPMENT

CSO Coalition members have consistently advocated for the creation of a comprehensive state policy for people who have been most affected by the war since 2014. These organizations have unique access to the problems faced by people on the ground, the ability to "raise" these issues at the institutional level and develop comprehensive systemic solutions there, thus changing the system itself.

According to human rights defenders, "we are full-cycle organizations – we identify the problem ourselves, help specific people with this problem, generalize the practice, change state policies, help the state implement them, and monitor this process."

Public statements by public figures, organizations, and coalitions were used as the main advocacy mechanism to influence the legislative process. The ZMINA Human Rights Center website has a unique collection of such public statements. From December 2013 to February 22, 2022, 89 public statements by CSOs were published on this site.⁷³ Most of these statements are addressed to the President of Ukraine, the Verkhovna Rada, and various executive bodies. Many of these statements were part of broader campaigns to change legislation or public state policies regarding the rights of IDPs, Ukrainian citizens in the occupied territories, women (in particular, Ukraine's ratification of the Istanbul Convention), etc. Such advocacy campaigns for change were accompanied by informational events: conferences, publications in the media, social networks, radio and television appearances, and the creation of their own media products, including podcasts, social media channels, etc.

In 2014-2022, the human rights community was involved in drafting legislation on IDPs, transitional justice, and other aspects of overcoming the consequences of Russia's aggression, as prior to 2014 neither such problems nor legislation existed in Ukraine. Not only did the state lack a comprehensive vision for addressing these issues, but it also did not want to do anything about them, because "it will all be over soon." Civil society managed to change this misguided approach and prove that changes must be made now, not after a future victory, as well as systematically rather than selectively.

73. Statements. ZMINA Human Rights Center. URL: <https://zmina.ua/en/statements-en/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

Work on legislative changes

The work on implementing legislative changes required a lot of resources, focused on new issues related to the consequences of Russia's aggression against Ukraine since 2014, and had many components:

- Analyzing current legislation and law enforcement practices, identifying problems, and using this analysis to develop specific recommendations for changes to regulations⁷⁴ and proposals for government programs and action plans⁷⁵
- Developing strategies, roadmaps, action plans, and operational plans, including:
 - Roadmap for Transitional Justice for Ukrainian Society in the Context of Armed Conflict;⁷⁶
 - Concept for Transitional Justice;⁷⁷
 - Strategy for the De-Occupation and Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol, 2021;⁷⁸
 - Two Strategies for the Integration of Internally Displaced Persons and the Implementation of Medium-Term Solutions for Internal Displacement for the Period (until 2021 and until 2024).⁷⁹
- Contributing to the creation of new specialized laws and regulations, in particular:
 - Law of Ukraine "On Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Internally Displaced Persons," 2015;⁸⁰
 - Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 509 "On the Registration of Internally Displaced Persons," 2014;⁸¹

74. Protection of the rights of internally displaced persons: analysis and recommendations for improving the regulatory and legal framework. "GROUP OF INFLUENCE" Civil Holding, Donbas SOS. 2018. URL: https://www.vplyv.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Group-of-Influence_analyses.pdf (Accessed: 30.05.2026). List of issues related to the consequences of the armed conflict in Ukraine, the resolution of which falls within the competence of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. "GROUP OF INFLUENCE" Civil Holding. URL: https://www.vplyv.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/propozytsii_koalitsii.pdf (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

75. List of issues related to the consequences of the armed conflict in Ukraine, the resolution of which falls within the competence of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. "GROUP OF INFLUENCE" Civil Holding. 30.04.2020. URL: <https://www.vplyv.org.ua/archives/4924> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

76. UHCCI has developed a transitional justice roadmap for Ukrainian society in the context of armed conflict. Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union. 25.11.2019. URL: <https://www.helsinki.org.ua/articles/uhspl-rozrobyla-dorozhniu-kartu-pravosuddia-perekhidnoho-periodu-dlia-ukraints-koho-suspil-stva-v-umovakh-zbroynoho-konfliktu/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

77. Concept of the state policy on the protection and restoration of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the context of the armed conflict on the territory of Ukraine and overcoming its consequences (Concept of Transitional Justice). Mission of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. URL: <https://ppu.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Conception.pdf> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

78. On the decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine dated March 11, 2021 "On the Strategy for De-occupation and Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol": Decree of the President of Ukraine dated 24.03.2021 № 117/2021. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/117/2021#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

79. On approval of the Strategy for the integration of internally displaced persons and the implementation of medium-term solutions regarding internal displacement for the period up to 2024: Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 28.10.2021 № 1364-r. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1364-2021-p#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

80. On ensuring the rights and freedoms of internally displaced persons: Law of Ukraine dated 20.10.2014 № 1706-VII. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1706-18#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

81. On the registration of internally displaced persons: Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 01.10.2014 № 509. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/509-2014-n#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

- Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 582 "On the Approval of the Procedure for the Formation of Housing Funds for the Temporary Accommodation of Internally Displaced Persons and the Procedure for the Provision of Temporary Use of Residential Premises from Housing Funds for the Temporary Accommodation of Internally Displaced Persons," 2019;⁸²
- Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 767 "On the payment of monetary compensation to victims whose residential buildings (apartments) were destroyed as a result of an emergency of a military nature caused by the armed aggression of the Russian Federation," 2020;⁸³
- Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Status of Persons Missing Under Special Circumstances," 2018;⁸⁴
- Law of Ukraine "On the social and legal protection of persons who have been deprived of personal liberty as a result of armed aggression against Ukraine, and their family members," 2022.⁸⁵

Contribution to the creation and work of specialized state bodies

CSOs contributed to the creation of a number of state bodies responsible for assisting people affected by the armed conflict, including the State Agency for the Recovery of Donbas in 2014⁸⁶ and, since 2016, the Ministry for Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons (MTOT) superseding it.⁸⁷ CSOs worked closely with the MTOT on issues related to supporting IDPs and people in the TOT and advocated for the body's preservation after 2022 as an independent ministry. CSOs were also active participants in the process of establishing the Ukrainian National Center for Peacebuilding under the MTOT, which aimed to coordinate actions between the state and civil society. The Center was established on the basis of an inclusive

82. On approval of the Procedure for forming housing funds for temporary residence of internally displaced persons and the Procedure for providing residential premises from housing funds for temporary residence of internally displaced persons for temporary use: Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 26.06.2019 № 582. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/582-2019-n#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

83. Issues of paying monetary compensation to victims whose residential houses (apartments) were destroyed as a result of a military emergency caused by the armed aggression of the Russian Federation: Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 02.09.2020 № 767. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/767-2020-n#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

84. On the legal status of persons missing under special circumstances: Law of Ukraine dated 12.07.2018 № 2505-VIII. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2505-19#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

85. On social and legal protection of persons in respect of whom the fact of deprivation of personal freedom as a result of armed aggression against Ukraine has been established, and members of their families: Law of Ukraine dated 26.01.2022 № 2010-IX. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2010-20#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

86. Some issues of the State Agency for the Restoration of Donbas: Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 26.11.2014 № 655. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/655-2014-n#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

87. Some issues of the Ministry for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories: Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 08.06.2016 № 376. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/376-2016-n#Text> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

consultation process with civil society and opened in December 2021.⁸⁸ Since 2022, the Center has served as the National Information Bureau in accordance with the Geneva Conventions.⁸⁹

Contribution to the creation and operation of platforms and institutions

CSOs were the driving force behind the creation of platforms and institutions that advocated for Ukraine's interests and issues related to Russia's aggression, in particular in the creation of the Crimean Field Mission on Human Rights (the only permanent international monitoring initiative that operated in Crimea until July 2015, until it was banned by the Russian government),⁹⁰ and the Crimean Platform - an international consultative and coordination format aimed at achieving the de-occupation of Crimea and its peaceful return to Ukraine.⁹¹

Participation in the work of state bodies, advisory support to state bodies

Where possible, CSOs were involved as experts in the work of many state bodies and institutions, thereby building trust, networks, and working relationships while advocating for their agenda. CSOs contributed to the organization of the first parliamentary hearings on IDP issues, participated in working groups at the Ombudsman's Office, the Ministry for Temporary Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons, the Central Election Commission, the Ministry of Social Policy, the Legal Reform Commission, as well as its working group on the reintegration of temporarily occupied territories,⁹² the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Human Rights, Deoccupation and Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, National Minorities and Interethnic Relations,⁹³ etc.

88. Korinovska A. Vereshchuk announced the creation of a national center for evidence of rights violations resulting from the actions of the Russian Federation by the end of the year. Suspilne Novyny. 04.11.2021. URL: <https://suspilne.media/177844-veresuk-anonsuvala-nacentr-zboru-dokaziv-porusen-prav-vnaslidok-dij-rf-do-kinca-roku/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

89. On approval of the Procedure for implementing measures regarding the treatment of prisoners of war during a special period: Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 17.06.2022 № 721. Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. URL: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/en/721-2022-n/ed20220617#n18> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

90. Organization activity. ZMINA Human Rights Center. URL: <https://zmina.ua/en/activities-en/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

91. About the Platform. Crimea Platform. URL: <https://crimea-platform.org/en/about/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

92. Issues of the Legal Reform Commission: Decree of the President of Ukraine dated 07.08.2019 № 584/2019. URL: <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/5842019-28949> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

93. Committee on Human Rights, De-occupation and Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, National Minorities and Interethnic Relations. Committee on Human Rights, De-occupation and Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, National Minorities and Interethnic Relations. URL: <https://kompravlud.rada.gov.ua/> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

9. INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY

In 2014-2022, CSOs made a significant contribution to international advocacy on issues related to the war. CSOs:

- Conducted systematic monitoring of human rights in the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions and Crimea and presented reports to the international community and international organizations.⁹⁴
- Collected testimonies from people who fought against the occupation regime⁹⁵ or suffered from it, distributed such reports among international partners, and participated in presentations of reports at international conferences.
- They developed, published, and advocated for open statements on behalf of various coalitions, organizations, and civil society activists, for example, to the international community regarding the protection of Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia and the persecution of Crimean activists.⁹⁶ At the UN they called on the Russian Federation to stop its armed aggression against Ukraine⁹⁷ and for the establishment of an international tribunal against Vladimir Putin and Russia's top leadership.⁹⁸
- Worked on and advocated for shadow (alternative) CSO reports within the framework of international human rights protection mechanisms. For example: Alternative CSO reports to the Universal Periodic Review within the UN (2017);⁹⁹ Shadow Report on the Implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (2019);¹⁰⁰ and the

94. The human rights situation in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea during the seven years of occupation : Analytical report. Human Rights House Crimea, Crimean Human Rights Group, Regional Centre for Human Rights, Almenda Centre for Civic Education, ZMINA Human Rights Center. 2021. URL: <https://zmina.ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/09/booken.pdf> (Accessed: 30.05.2026). Violations of international humanitarian law and the right of Crimean Tatars to self-determination in occupied Crimea. Crimea SOS. URL: https://krymsos.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/porushennya-mgp-ta-prava-krymskyh-tatar-na-samovyznachennya-v-okupovanomu-krymu_ukr.pdf (Accessed: 30.05.2026). Compliance with human rights in Eastern Ukraine during the coronavirus pandemic. Freedom House. URL: https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/HumanRightsEasternUkraineDuringCoronavirusPandemic6-UA_v01_UPD.pdf (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

95. Vyrtošu I. Crimean album: stories of human rights defenders. ZMINA Human Rights Center. URL: https://zmina.ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/05/crimeanalbum-booken_web.pdf (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

96. Open statement of human rights and public organizations of Ukraine regarding the persecution of Crimean activists. ZMINA Human Rights Center. 08.11.2017. URL: https://zmina.ua/statements/vidkrita_zajava_pravozahisnih_ta_gromadskih_organizacij_ukrajini_shhodo_peresliduvan_krimskih_aktivistiv/ (Accessed: 30.05.2026). Statement of human rights organizations regarding the politically motivated persecution and illegal conviction of Ilmi Umerov. ZMINA Human Rights Center. 28.09.2017. URL: https://zmina.ua/statements/zajava_pravozahisnih_organizacij_shhodo_politichno_motivovanogo_peresliduvannja_ta_nezakonnogo_zasudzhennja_ilmi_umerova/ (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

97. More than a hundred public organizations call on UN Security Council members to support Ukraine. ZMINA Human Rights Center. 26.11.2018. URL: https://zmina.ua/statements/ukrajinski_go_zaklikajut_chleniv_radbezu_oon_pidtrimati_ukrajinu (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

98. We demand the United Nations to establish an international tribunal over Putin and Russia's top leadership. ZMINA Human Rights Center. 28.02.2022. URL: <https://zmina.ua/en/statements-en/we-demand-the-united-nations-to-establish-an-international-tribunal-over-putin-and-russias-top-leadership> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

99. Universal Periodic Review: Alternative Dimension (2017). "GROUP OF INFLUENCE" Civil Holding. 08.05.2018. URL: <https://www.vplyv.org.ua/archives/537> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

100. Shadow Report on the Implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. "GROUP OF INFLUENCE" Civil Holding. 27.01.2019. URL: <https://www.vplyv.org.ua/archives/2477> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

Report of the CSO Coalition based on the Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review for Ukraine (2020).¹⁰¹

- Developed legal positions on behalf of Ukraine which were submitted to the European Court of Human Rights, the International Criminal Court, and UN bodies.
- Published blogs, articles, and podcasts in Ukrainian and international media based on reports and monitoring.
- Organized and held conferences, meetings, and events with international partners in Ukraine and abroad to advocate for the achievements of CSOs.

101. Mid-term report by the coalition of NGOs based on report of the working group on the universal periodic review for Ukraine – A/HRC/37/16. Human Rights Centre ZMINA. June 2020. URL: https://zmina.ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/12/zmina-alternatereporten_web.pdf (Accessed: 30.05.2026). Affected by conflict. How Ukraine ensures the realization of their rights. ZMINA Human Rights Center. URL: <https://zmina.ua/en/publication-en/affected-by-conflict-how-ukraine-ensures-the-realization-of-their-rights> (Accessed: 30.05.2026). Ensuring the observance of socio-economic rights of the conflict-affected population in Ukraine. ZMINA Human Rights Center. URL: <https://zmina.ua/en/publication-en/ensuring-the-observance-of-socio-economic-rights-of-the-conflict-affected-population-in-ukraine> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

10. COORDINATION BETWEEN CIVIL SOCIETY, INTERNATIONAL ACTORS, AND THE GOVERNMENT

One of the many problems with the Minsk agreements and the Minsk negotiation process was the lack of an institutional mechanism for connecting Track One with Ukrainian civil society, one that would be integrated into negotiation infrastructure and the process of implementing the agreements. As a result, contacts between civil society representatives and international mechanisms (the OSCE Trilateral Contact Group - TCG, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission – OSCE SMM) were inconsistent and uncoordinated. The OSCE SMM, while patrolling the territories bordering the contact line, constantly communicated with the local population, while meetings with CSOs initiated by the OSCE SMM or the TCG were occasional and sporadic. For their part, the CSOs had the opportunity to meet with SMM representatives at their office in Kyiv when they had specific proposals or questions for the SMM. Closer contact between the CSOs working in eastern Ukraine was with local SMM teams. For example, in 2017-18, there was a proactive SMM team in the Donetsk region, and every two weeks there were exchanges of information between this team and the CSOs.

CSOs also had meetings and informal contacts with the UN Monitoring Mission and UNHCR. However, there was no formal coordination mechanism between UN agencies and the OSCE SMM either, and contacts between them were maintained through bilateral meetings.

Ukrainian CSOs were best connected to the international donors and international non-governmental organizations. This enabled CSOs to act as “bridges” between the state, local self-government bodies, international organizations, donors, and local businesses in overcoming specific problems at checkpoints or in communities along the contact line. For example, CSOs negotiated with local businesses and local authorities to provide accommodation for people crossing the contact line or to modernize algorithms for providing social services to the population, while at the same time CSOs negotiated with international donors to provide financial support for such initiatives.

Relations with the Ukrainian government at all levels were a strategic priority for many human rights CSOs. In 2014-2021, they actively cooperated with the Interagency Center for Assistance to Citizens on the Release of Prisoners and Hostages, the Ministry for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories, the Working Group on Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories, the Committees of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, the Office of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and other state bodies (see also section 8 of this Report).

Important coordination work was carried out within the human rights community to coordinate actions among themselves. In 2014-2022, the human rights community in Ukraine already represented a branched system of civil society organizations and entire networks. After 2014, a number of new human rights organizations emerged, focusing on the region adjacent to the line of contact and on people who found themselves directly in the epicenter of the armed conflict. Subsequently, coordination between human rights organizations began to take place within coalitions. Some examples of coalitions in the period 2014-2022 were:

- A coalition of organizations concerned with protecting the rights of victims of armed conflict, including the Crimean Human Rights Group, the Right to Protection Charitable Foundation,

ZMINA Human Rights Center, Stabilization Support Services Charitable Foundation, East SOS, Crimea SOS, the "GROUP OF INFLUENCE" Civil Holding, and Donbas SOS;¹⁰²

- The Coalition for the Protection of Civil Society in Ukraine was created in response to threats to freedom of association by the state. Coalition members include ZMINA Human Rights Center, Freedom House Ukraine, the Center for Civil Liberties, Ukrainian Independent Center for Political Research, East SOS, the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, and others;¹⁰³
- International coalitions, such as the Civil Solidarity Platform, which brings together more than 100 CSOs from 31 countries, including many Ukrainian human rights organizations.¹⁰⁴

Within the coalitions, functions were distributed among different organizations, joint action plans were developed for all the functions mentioned above in this report, and the strategies, missions, and values of the organizations themselves were synchronized.

102. Ukraine is in no hurry to implement UN recommendations on protection of victims of conflict – human rights activists. ZMINA Human Rights Center. 14.12.2020. URL: <https://zmina.ua/en/event-en/ukraine-is-in-no-hurry-to-implement-un-recommendations-on-protection-of-victims-of-conflict-human-rights-activists> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

103. Memorandum on the creation of the Coalition for the Protection of Civil Society in Ukraine. Ukrainian Center for Independent Political Research. URL: http://www.ucipr.org.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=936:memorandum-pro-stvorennya-koal-c-na-zahist-gromadyanskogo-susp-lstva-v-ukra-n&catid=16&Itemid=202&lang=ua (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

104. Members. Civic Solidarity Platform. URL: <https://civicsolidarity.org/members/?region=ua> (Accessed: 30.05.2026).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report, prepared by the Mediation and Dialogue Research Center at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in collaboration with the Coalition of organizations working to protect the rights of victims of armed aggression against Ukraine, examines the role of the civil society sector during the first phase of Russia's armed aggression from 2014 to 2022. It was Ukrainian civil society that supported people during this period and responded as quickly as possible to the critical needs of citizens affected by the war. Through their daily work, activists, volunteers, and human rights defenders made a significant, albeit indirect, contribution to the successful implementation of the humanitarian provisions of the Minsk Agreements, despite the complete failure of the security and political components. At the same time, it is impossible to speak solely of civil society's contribution, for without the state and local authorities, the crisis response system could not have functioned. Here, the Ukrainian government, though not from the very beginning, proved itself to be resilient and capable. And of course, the activities of civil society organizations would have been impossible without the support of donors and international organizations. Without prejudice to this synergetic effect, this Report is focused on the activities of civil society during 2014–2022.

The civil society sector has become a driving force in the processes of documenting war crimes and certain ceasefire violations, damage to civilian infrastructure, and instances of torture and human rights violations in places of unlawful detention. The physical presence of civil society representatives at entry-exit checkpoints was crucial. Thanks to their work, crossing conditions were monitored, regular assessments of the population's needs were conducted, and legal advice and humanitarian aid were provided to citizens. Civil society was especially focused on comprehensive support for internally displaced persons (IDPs), including legal and financial assistance, the operation of hotlines, active advocacy for legislative changes to ensure IDPs' voting rights, the right to privacy, social benefits, and more.

Equally important was the role of civil society in searching for missing persons, as well as in supporting prisoners of war and civilian hostages. Activists compiled lists, provided support to families, and directly assisted those who had already been released. At the same time, efforts were made to support frontline communities in the territories controlled by the Ukrainian Government, where civil society organizations assessed needs, delivered humanitarian aid, facilitated access to government services, strengthened the capacity of local self-government, and prevented local conflicts through dialogue.

The civil society sector also paid close attention to fellow citizens in the temporarily occupied territories, launching information campaigns on government policy, facilitating procedures for obtaining documents and helping young people enroll in Ukrainian universities, advocating for the preservation of social ties, and supporting measures to combat the coronavirus pandemic. This practical experience translated into a noticeable impact on state policy, including the establishment of a dedicated Ministry for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories and the drafting of laws and other regulations. On the international stage, civil society provided strong advocacy.

Today, this wealth of accumulated unique experience must become an integral foundation for engaging civil society in any future negotiation processes or processes of monitoring and

implementing agreements. To achieve this goal, think tanks, human rights and humanitarian civil society organizations working in frontline areas must actively raise awareness among the state and its international partners regarding their own capacities and previous successes in the de facto implementation of human-centered aspects of agreements from past years. There is an urgent need to join forces to develop a "single window" system that will enable comprehensive monitoring of human security in frontline regions, covering physical, political, food, environmental, medical, and other dimensions of security.

For their part, the Ukrainian government and other authorities must place greater emphasis on a human-centered approach in all negotiation processes and post-war recovery programs, focusing on the rights and needs of citizens, particularly those living in frontline communities and in temporarily occupied territories. It would be desirable for Ukraine's international partners to also fully support civil society initiatives in this area, ensuring that Ukrainian experts are involved in consultations regarding the role of civil society in negotiations and post-war agreements. It is critically important to include provisions on mechanisms for cooperation with the public in the mandates of any potential monitoring missions, which will ensure a systematic exchange of information, increase the effectiveness of decision implementation, and guarantee the full functioning of the civilian component of ceasefire and security monitoring in the post-war period.