

Capacity Strengthening Landscape Assessment | UKRAINE

February 2026

INTRODUCTION

This assessment aims to provide the Humanitarian NGO Platform in Ukraine members and other humanitarian stakeholders with a clear, evidence-based understanding of the factors driving civil society organisations' (CSO) capacity strengthening requests, as well as the effectiveness of current support initiatives offered by international organisations (INGOs) and institutional donors. By examining both the demand for and supply of capacity strengthening assistance, the assessment seeks to identify where existing efforts align with the actual CSOs' needs and where gaps, overlaps, or duplications still exist. The geographic focus includes CSOs operating in the East (Zaporizka, Kharkivska, Dnipropetrovska, Donetska) and South (Odeska, Mykolaivska, Khersonska) oblasts of Ukraine, to cover the areas located closer to the frontline. The ultimate aim is to enhance localisation by aligning humanitarian support with the actual organisational challenges and priorities of local CSOs. See a full Methodology on p. 2

All findings are not representative, but indicative only.

KEY FINDINGS

1. 147 of 159 CSO key informants (KIs) reported a need for capacity strengthening support in general, reflecting a strong commitment to continuous development among local organisations, and motivation to provide high-quality assistance for beneficiaries.

2. Top needs included fundraising and grant writing (68% and 43%), staff wellbeing and burnout prevention (53%), English language skills (46%). CSO KIs emphasised that staff wellbeing support is essential for service delivery in extremely stressful frontline conditions.

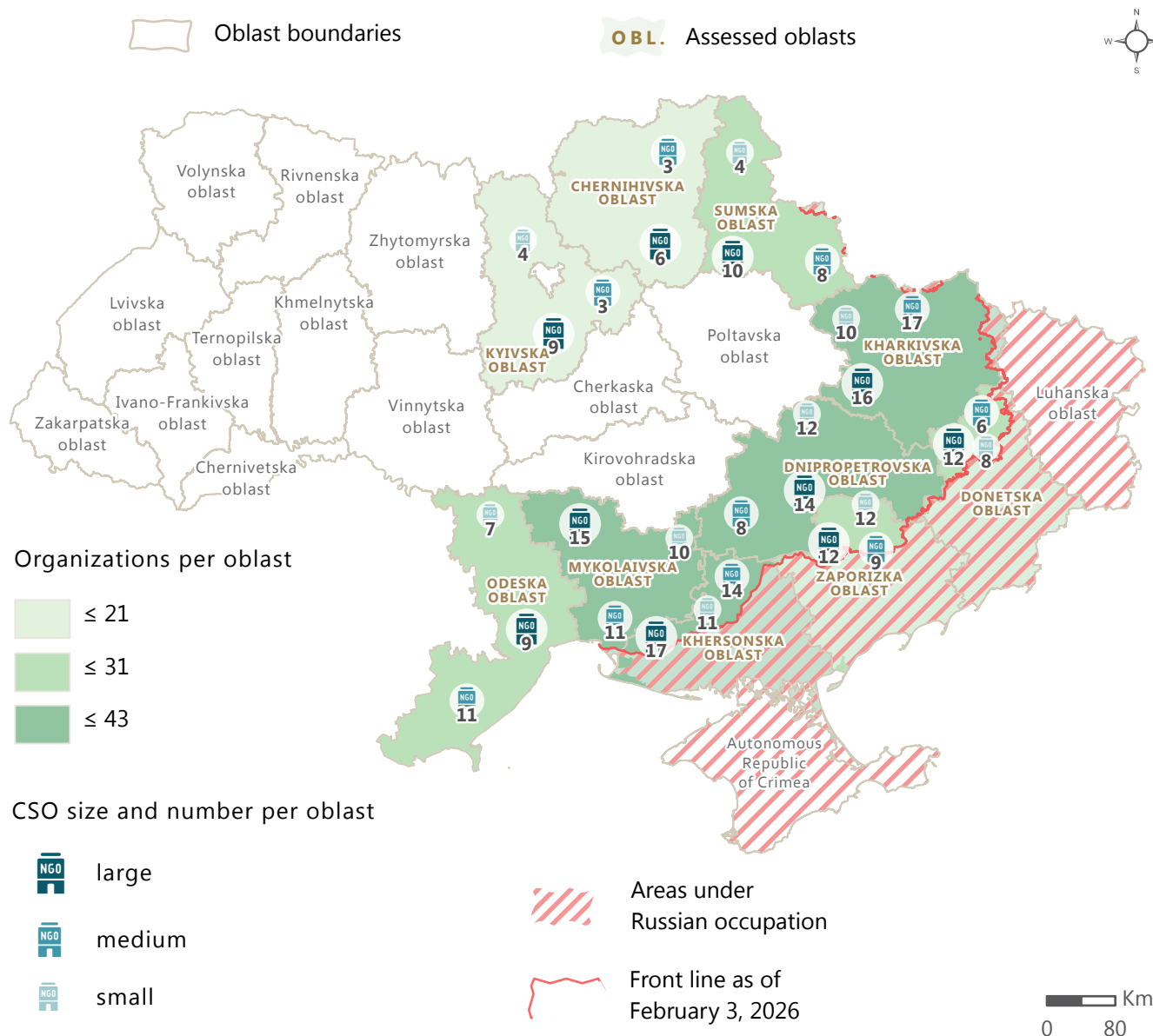
3. Respondents from CSOs frequently reported a lack of trust from donors, designing projects without understanding the Ukrainian context. Many CSO KIs believed donor senior management needs training on the Ukrainian context, security and frontline challenges.

4. Although 67% of CSOs expressed willingness to train other organisations, many of them, especially smaller or more remote CSOs, remain unaware that they can initiate experience-sharing.

5. 110 of 158 CSO KIs reportedly do not know how donors allocate funds for capacity strengthening within grants. Small and remote CSOs experienced more difficulties in raising funds for capacity strengthening.

COVERAGE AND SAMPLING

Areas where assessed CSOs are reportedly conducting activities, by number of actors reporting:



METHODOLOGY

The methodology was created in close collaboration with the Humanitarian NGO Platform in Ukraine to ensure a comprehensive and contextually relevant approach. Before data collection, consultations were held with representatives of international humanitarian organisations and donor agencies who have had experience in delivering capacity-strengthening activities to explore their approaches to capacity-strengthening initiatives targeting CSOs in Ukraine. The data collection was conducted from 23 September to 8 December 2025, targeting both local and international actors involved in capacity-strengthening activities. Interviews were mostly conducted in the **East (Zaporizka, Kharkivska, Dnipropetrovska, Donetsk) and South (Odeska, Mykolaivska, Khersonska) oblasts of Ukraine**, to cover the oblasts located closer to the frontline.

REACH used a mixed method approach for this assessment, beginning with a quantitative phone-based survey to as many CSOs based in East and South oblasts as could be identified, and following up with a smaller set of the originally identified CSOs and INGOs for in-depth qualitative key informant interviews (KIIs). Quantitative data collection was conducted between 23 September and 10 October. REACH field teams attempted to contact all CSOs that were able to be identified as operating mostly in the East and South oblasts and who have had experience in accessing capacity-strengthening activities from INGOs. Ultimately, a total of 159 Key Informants (KIs) representing 159 CSOs completed the quantitative survey, providing their perspectives on types of capacity-strengthening activities accessed, perceived effectiveness, priority areas for future support, and challenges faced in accessing training.

Thereafter, qualitative KIIs were conducted from 12 November to 8 December 2025 with 15 CSOs, 8 INGOs and 3 UN agencies representatives. These interviews explored in greater depth the motivation behind capacity-strengthening requests from CSOs, and INGOs experience regarding designing, managing, or evaluating capacity-strengthening initiatives with local CSOs. *The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phases were analyzed to identify successful strategies and areas for improvement in localisation efforts across Ukraine.*

LIMITATIONS

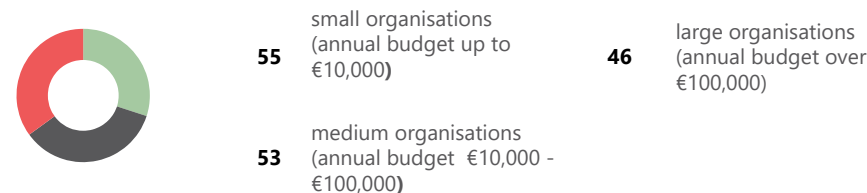
It is impossible to confirm that all relevant CSOs and INGOs engaged in capacity-strengthening activities across East and South oblasts were identified by the field team. While efforts were made to contact all organisations that met the inclusion criteria, a small number did not respond or chose not to participate. As a result, some actors in may not be represented in the study. The results cannot be assumed to be statistically representative of the entire group. Therefore, **all findings are indicative** rather than representative. Some CSO representatives were unaware of the terminology used in the assessment, which required more time for explanation. Given the difficult security situation and limited human resources of the REACH team, most interviews were conducted online. Due to prolonged power outages and communication problems caused by massive shelling, it was difficult to contact the KI, and there were challenges during the interviews (some phrases were unclear). Different CSO representatives participated in the quantitative and qualitative phases, so there are discrepancies in some of the responses. Additionally, findings are highly individual and are not generalisable.

¹ - CSO respondents could select more than one option
² - hromada is the main type of municipality and the third level local self-government in Ukraine



Local Organisations' Profile

CSOs' size, reported by CSOs (n=155):



OVERVIEW OF CSO NEEDS

Table 1. Top 3 priority needs in areas of coverage, reporting¹ (n=146)

Fundraising (diversifying funding sources and strategies)	68
Staff wellbeing / burnout prevention	53
English language classes	46
Grant writing	43
Financial management	36
Organisational development	36
Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning	32
Project management	26
Mentorship and coaching	24

Most INGO respondents noted that capacity strengthening priorities vary depending on CSO partner organisation and were unable to identify a specific area. At the same time, many noted that the priority is a complex concept of 'fundraising', which includes grant writing, communication strategy development, and analysis of local NGO work.

Table 2. Perception of organisation need in staff wellbeing programs (mitigate burnout), by number of CSOs reporting¹ (n=139)

Once every quarter	59
Almost every month or more often	26
Once every few months	20
Several times a year	19
Once a year	15

Interestingly, the concept of 'capacity strengthening' is perceived somewhat differently by respondents from both CSOs and INGOs. But also inside these subsets (CSOs and INGOs). The general understanding includes **strengthening specific technical skills** (in a particular sector) and overall **professional development of the organisation and employees**.

Of the 159 CSO key informants, 147 answered that their organisation needs capacity strengthening support in general. According to the results of in-depth interviews, the need for continuous development is a requirement of today's world, especially given the new tools that can be applied in the work of organisations and the interest in continuing to support their hromada² at a high level (see Table 1).

Because the CSOs surveyed are frontline organisations, while assisting affected populations, their staff themselves work in extremely challenging conditions (see Table 2). KI from Odesa, whose office was destroyed by shelling, shared her priorities for capacity strengthening: "After all these attacks and clearing the ruins, we saw that our colleagues were burned out, emotionally exhausted, and they help people. And if a person is devastated, how can he help others? Impossible. And we had this question: 'What is more important to us: equipment or our employees?' Our employees. And we used this money to organise two wonderful retreats for our employees. We also conducted training for them on **burnout [prevention]**. We hired a psychologist-supervisor, an external person. And she worked with them, that's all. And then we noticed how the psychological state of our employees improved. They started smiling again."

Table 3. Identification of need in capacity strengthening support, reported by CSOs³ (n=158)

Our organisational request (based on self-assessment)	113
Our manager decision	49
Donor recommendation	43
Our speculation/observation (after discussion with partners)	38
Donor requirement	32

Many KIs during in-depth interviews named both **mentorship** and various types of support, as the preferred formats (see Table 5). One KI from small CSO in Donetsk oblast mentioned *“exchange visits are very interesting, where we could gain some experience for ourselves, workshops, even sessions, trainings, anything where you can obtain new knowledge for learning. We find initiatives, but it would be better if there were more of them, and if they [donors] found us too.”*

Table 5. Most preferable capacity strengthening mode, reported by CSOs (n=147)

Mixed	86
Offline	25
Online	18
Mentorship	13
Practice sessions	4

129 of 157 CSO KIs perceived capacity strengthening support to their organisation’s needs as relevant/very relevant. However, a few respondents noted that international support did not meet CSOs’ needs. For example, a KI from a medium-sized CSO complained - *“The ones we worked on with the [INGO partner] were online courses. Well, let’s say, useless courses... I believe that courses should be interactive, and they should be somewhere remote, in our case, from Kherson. Where people can “absorb” and understand this information. Because sitting under shelling, just ticking a box that you’ve listened to it and received this certificate online, it usually doesn’t make any sense.”*



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Funded by
the European Union

3 - CSO respondents could select more than one option

Table 4. Internal organisational capacity assessment, reported by CSOs (n=159)

We use a specific tool for assessing	92
We don’t use a specific tool for assessing	38
No, we don’t need it	15
No, we don’t know how but want to learn	11
No, we don’t know how	3

130 out of 159 KIs reportedly conduct internal organisational capacity assessment (see Tables 3, 4). *“We conduct [assessments]... And I even enjoy going through it — it’s self-analysis by [platform]! We are constantly applying for something [grants]! And that’s why we have to go through it all the time! And it’s so interesting!”* - medium-sized CSO from Kyiv. Another respondent from Kharkiv noted that thanks to a joint project with partners, their organisation had devoted eight months to developing organisational capacity - *“We focused on the internal capacity assessment of our organisation, strategic planning, and policy development. It is a challenging and monotonous task, but it must be done.”*

Only a few INGO representatives responded that they assess their own organisational capacity in one way or another. However, one INGO KI shared an interesting experience of mutual assessment: *“We once conducted a mutual capacity assessment, which means we evaluated each other [with a local partner]. This grounds us a little, because we can say that we have a strong team, with international experts who have years of experience in the field and so on. But this exercise allows us to see things from the outside. Perhaps all these experts with different experiences are incredible specialists, but in the Ukrainian context, that doesn’t help them at all. Another point is that we also had this in practice: we learn from our mistakes, we also went through this, so this exercise gives us a bit of a reality check.”*

The quality of cooperation with partners and the level of initiatives implementation depend largely on the proactivity and personal qualities of the INGO partner manager. But in general, CSOs appreciated the recommendations received during capacity strengthening. *“Yes! Most of the recommendations that were made were implemented, even if we felt some initial resistance. For example, we were advised to develop a Code of Conduct — a kind of social policy within the organisation! In fact, we already had one, but it was somewhat hidden.”* - shared CSO representative from Sumy.

Experience of capacity strengthening initiatives

157 of 159 organisations reportedly received capacity strengthening support from international organisations or donors in the past year (from September 2024). Many Ukrainian CSOs reported that they are overwhelmed by the amount of capacity-strengthening initiatives currently being offered. Heavy workloads, limited staff, and lack of time often limit their ability to participate in such initiatives. Several CSOs also emphasised the need for advance information about planned initiatives so that they can integrate these opportunities into their organisational work plans. It was noted that long-term training require additional funding to retain staff throughout the training period. In addition, CSOs expressed a need for continued post-training mentoring from donors, which would ensure ongoing access to practical advice from trainers.

Table 6. Experience of capacity strengthening initiatives implemented in the past year, reported by CSOs (n=155)³

Series of trainings	97
One-time training	84
Long-term (mentorship) support	50

Interestingly, according to CSO KIs, large organisations were more likely to receive long-term (mentorship) support than small ones (39% vs. 28%) (see Table 6).

Table 7. Frequency of organisation participated in capacity strengthening initiatives in the past year, reported by CSOs (n=157)

Almost every month or more often	46
Several times a year	45
Once every few months	29
Once a year	11

“Well, from time to time you hear ‘no more trainings,’ but usually this refers to trainings on Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and Gender-based Violence. Probably because these are often mandatory trainings provided by international organisations for Ukrainians. However, if you ask for topics such as data protection, finance management, HR management, logistics management, fundraising... High-quality fundraising training can change the future of some organisations, and they are well aware of this. If such training is offered, most organisations will gladly participate, even large ones.” - KI from INGO. See Table 7

Effectiveness of capacity-strengthening support

Among assessed CSOs
75%
reported experiencing **NO** duplication of capacity strengthening initiatives from different organisations in the past year

However, small CSOs were almost twice as likely to encounter duplication of initiatives than large ones (30% vs. 17%). Some respondents perceived duplication as useful – “an extra reason to recall something” (see Fig. 1). And a respondent from a small CSO from Donetsk oblast noted that the most frequently duplicated topics were “*project management, writing grants, mini-grants..., everyone loves that, and there’s a lot of it [such trainings], but we’d like something more interesting, something that meets our needs, perhaps more complex topics.*”

Figure 1. Perception of whether training recognition, completed by CSO will reduce duplication, reported by CSOs (n=159)

- 128 yes, it will help to reduce duplication
- 18 no, it will not help to reduce duplication
- 13 don’t know



Among the most effective, several CSO KIs described **exchange visits, networking, strategic session and mentorship support**. Respondents noted the value of trainings, tailored to their experience in the humanitarian sector, as well as the opportunity for CSOs to decide for themselves how to best spend funds for organisational development. Small CSOs lacking time and staffing are particularly grateful for assistance with **ready-made templates**: “*They [partners] met with us only once for the annual reporting, and it was very comfortable. They send us forms via Google Drive, we simply fill in our information, they process it and submit it in the required format. In other words, they help us, civil society organisations that don’t have time for all this. But we have to report and show our results.*” (KI from Mykolajivka oblast)

The least effective in terms of capacity strengthening were efforts to teach local organisations to work in the Ukrainian context, and the lack of trust from INGOs to CSOs. «*There were many failures in terms of gender sensitivity, in terms of gender in general. Because when you have 12 years of expertise, and you go to a training by a person who has been working in this field for 2 years, you understand, it’s a bit [not useful].*» - large CSO



4 - CSO respondents could select more than one option

Expertise Exchange Experience

Figure 2. Reported willingness to provide capacity strengthening support to other organisations, reported by CSOs (n=159)



Most CSO respondents believed that **expertise exchange is possible** between local organisations and donors, and that **donors will trust** such training. To this end, they suggest that donors become more ‘inclusive’ and engage more closely with local partners. However, some KIs do not believe that such interaction will be based on trust: “*I would love to train! Would they [donors] believe? I hear from many colleagues in our civil society sector how many international donors, not knowing what is happening here now, often consider us to be some kind of poor country, like in Africa, and try to implement African contexts... to do the same here! And then they run into the problem that... there is much more we can research, organise, advise on how to do things, and so on. And what they are already saying among themselves [INGOs] is: ‘Don’t bring them [CSOs] a ready-made project. It’s better to ask them how to do it!’ I think it would be really good if they asked [our expertise] before [proposing].*” – middle-sized CSO from Kyiv.

Many CSO representatives reported **experience in having already trained** Ukrainian and international partners (see Fig. 2). Among the challenges, in addition to insufficient communication, lack of inclusion of small, remote organisations, a few CSOs noted safety and logistical problems. Almost all CSO respondents perceived that donor senior management should be trained in the Ukrainian context (in particular, GBV prevention and effective interaction with local organisations). “*We live in completely different circumstances, and it seems to me that it is more difficult for us than in Germany [for example] to hold ... [an event], because [participants] are afraid [to take part in the event]. People who are coming for food are also afraid. So, I think we need to demonstrate our work several times. Not just tell them [donors] that we work there, but take them with us and show that we are working in extremely difficult conditions.*” – shared a small CSO from Kharkiv.

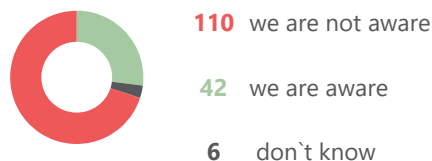
Table 8. Reported topics CSOs are willing to train other organisations, by number of CSOs⁴ (n=98)

Success stories, best practices and lessons learned	61
Ukrainian context	39
Engagement with community	36
Crisis support for vulnerable groups	34
Engagement with state services (aka social department)	31
Organisational development	31
Grant writing	29
Project management	23
Development and implementation of policies and procedures (due diligence)	22
Fundraising	21
Professional burnout	18

Many INGO representatives stated that **experience exchange is already occurring** in their partnerships: some CSOs conducted training for INGOs or exchanged experiences during cluster meetings (see Table 8). But a few KIs noted not all CSOs are aware of this opportunity. “*I think it could be common practice, but it requires willingness on both sides, on the part of smaller or medium-sized organisations. They often don’t know that such a practice exists, that it’s normal. If they have worked with few people, they are completely unaware that they have rights. I even discovered some strange things during sessions, where organisations were surprised that, for example, in a situation where we set a deadline, they can also set a deadline for us. They would say, ‘Oh, we thought that only you could set deadlines for us...’ And when both sides have their eyes open, are open to each other, are open in general, then this practice will become more and more common.*” (INGO KI)

FUNDING

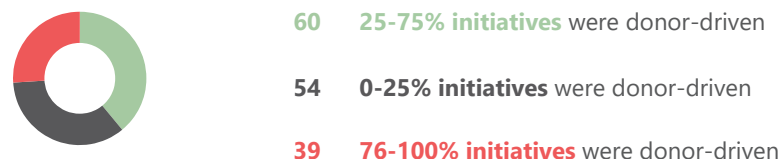
Figure 3. CSOs awareness of how grantor allocates funding for capacity strengthening initiatives, reported by CSOs (n=158):



Most CSOs require donors to provide information on the allocation of funds for capacity-strengthening initiatives within the framework of a joint grant (see Fig. 3). *“Yes, this information should be available because we need to understand the general approaches and principles of how funding will be allocated, for example, to activities that are more or less prioritised. And we will see what our needs are and what donors can cover and finance. We will understand what we can include in the [grant] budget.”*- shared CSO KI from Dnipro. Some CSO respondents indicated that donors differ in sharing this information with local partners.

On the other hand, a few INGO KIs provided information to CSOs about funds allocated to capacity strengthening, and several shared information about flexible funding opportunities or open grant proposals from other donors.

Figure 4. Percentage of donor-driven capacity strengthening initiatives for the past year, reported by CSOs (n=153)



Perception on sufficient funding

Most CSO representatives noted that **donor investments in capacity strengthening are insufficient**, “because very rarely do projects include capacity strengthening as a separate line”, and “as a rule, if money is allocated, they are for additional activities”. Several also pointed to the lack of flexible financing options in grants, although just as many noted that they take advantage of these opportunities. However, one CSO KI from Kyiv shared that after a grant for organisational capacity development to build a communication strategy, they lack donor support in its implementation. *“We’ve basically figured out what direction to move in, but now I don’t have the organisational capacity to expand the team! And here the question is that this organisational capacity is not only about training, but also about where we will find the money to move this direction forward! Well, I guess we just need to think about how to fund not only the training, but also the implementation afterwards! Long-term support. I think the funding should take into account that, hypothetically, if 100% complete a certain training, then 20% of them will be ready to move forward with the knowledge they have gained! But they will need financial support to move forward!”*

Part of CSO KIs complained about the **difficulty of raising funds for capacity strengthening** (see Fig. 4). One KI from a small CSO in Mykolaivska oblast noted that *“there was a call for proposals, but I didn’t apply. I worried because I currently have 4 active projects, and... even if I win the grant, even if I really need it, when you weigh organisational development and the results of four projects, what young people and people need, you give preference to preparing and reporting on these projects. And activities, they take time.”*

Several INGO respondents agreed that their local partners find it difficult to raise funds for capacity strengthening (especially small organisations and organisations in remote areas). A few INGO KIs believed that capacity-strengthening investments are insufficient because some donors do not include organisational development costs in their budgets, while others prioritise emergency programme support.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



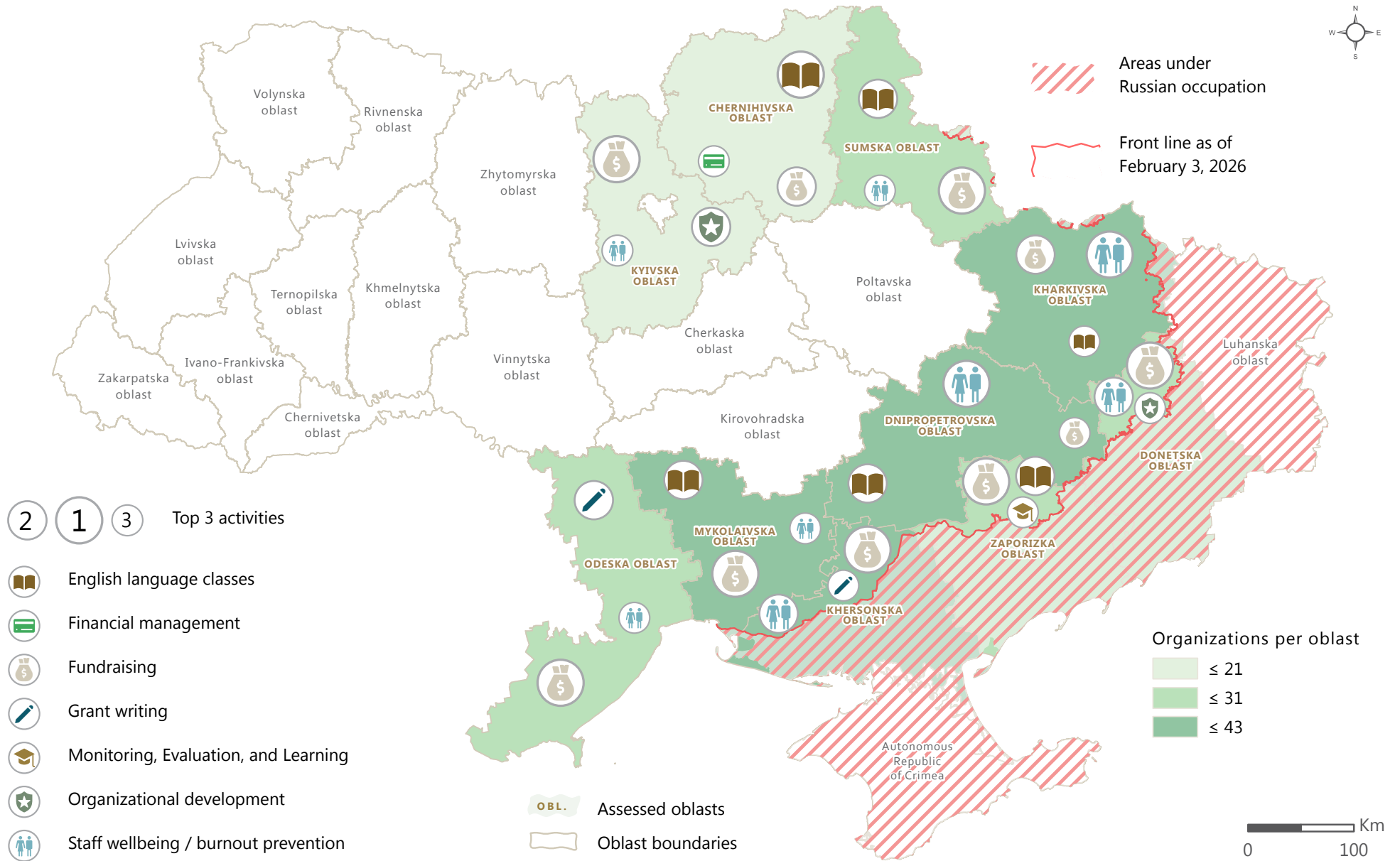
ABOUT REACH

REACH Initiative facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).



PRIORITY NEEDS FOR CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

Top 3 priority needs for capacity strengthening in assessed CSOs, by number of actors reporting⁵:



5 - CSO respondents could select more than one option



Recommendations For Donors

COMMUNICATION

- Grant CSOs ownership and decision-making power over their capacity-building needs
- Develop direct communication channels with local CSOs

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- Provide unrestricted funding for capacity development
- Invest in a system of local capacity builders. For instance, ISAR Ednannia had such a case: a CSO incorporated its best practices into training for other organizations.
- Complement trainings with mentoring and financial support to implement training knowledge (grants/sub-grants)

INTERNAL CHANGES

- Sometimes, different departments within a donor organisation may provide inconsistent interpretations of requirements and regulations. Improved coordination between finance, partnerships, and other departments is therefore necessary to ensure a shared and consistent understanding of donor requirements
- Because donors often lack understanding of Ukraine's legal and operational context, a joint understanding is essential to ensure that capacity-strengthening initiatives address CSOs' real constraints and are not misaligned with the legal restrictions they face.

AWARENESS RAISING

- Adopt a flexible approach to capacity strengthening initiatives in terms of promoting a culture of continuous capacity development and improvement among local partners, rather than focusing solely on one-off trainings (i.e., teaching only "what has not yet been taught").
- Support internships, exchanges, and peer-to-peer learning among partners
- Promote good practices and knowledge-sharing tools (e.g., workbooks)

TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations For INGOs

REDUCING THE LOAD

- Recognise past capacity assessments conducted by other INGOs

COMMUNICATION

- Remain open to learning from CSOs about their needs and development priorities, and advocate with donors on this basis
- Support mentoring to help CSOs identify their actual needs
- Monitor capacity strengthening (define expected outcomes at the start and capture lessons learned at the end)

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- Apply a flexible approach to capacity strengthening to accommodate emerging and unpredictable needs
- Complement trainings with mentoring and financial support to implement training knowledge (grants/sub-grants)

INTERNAL CHANGES

- Deliver trainings in Ukrainian and tailored to the local context
- Ensure staff are trained on the Ukrainian context (legal, operational, and cultural aspects)

AWARENESS RAISING

- Advocate for CSO needs

PLANNING

- Align capacity-strengthening activities with CSO's operational work

Recommendations For CSOs

COMMUNICATION

- Strengthen negotiation skills from the outset of collaboration
- Foster open, two-way dialogue and mutually beneficial partnerships
- As CSOs may lack information about possible initiatives to strengthen capacity, it is important to clarify this with donors as much as possible

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- Advocate and seek opportunities for complementing trainings with mentoring and financial support to implement training knowledge (grants/sub-grants)

INTERNAL CHANGES

- Take responsibility for their own development and proactively communicate with donors
- Prepare thoroughly for meetings with donors (involving relevant staff and understanding partner mandates)
- Conduct internal monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation to demonstrate impact and advocate for the value-added of investing in capacity strengthening

AWARENESS RAISING

- Advocate for funding of PSC (overhead costs)

PLANNING

- Engage with relevant donors/INGOs representatives actively in project development and design stages



The assessment results and development of recommendations were discussed at an in-person workshop in Kyiv on March 17, 2026. The recommendations are based on the ideas of 18 participating CSOs and 12 international organisations.