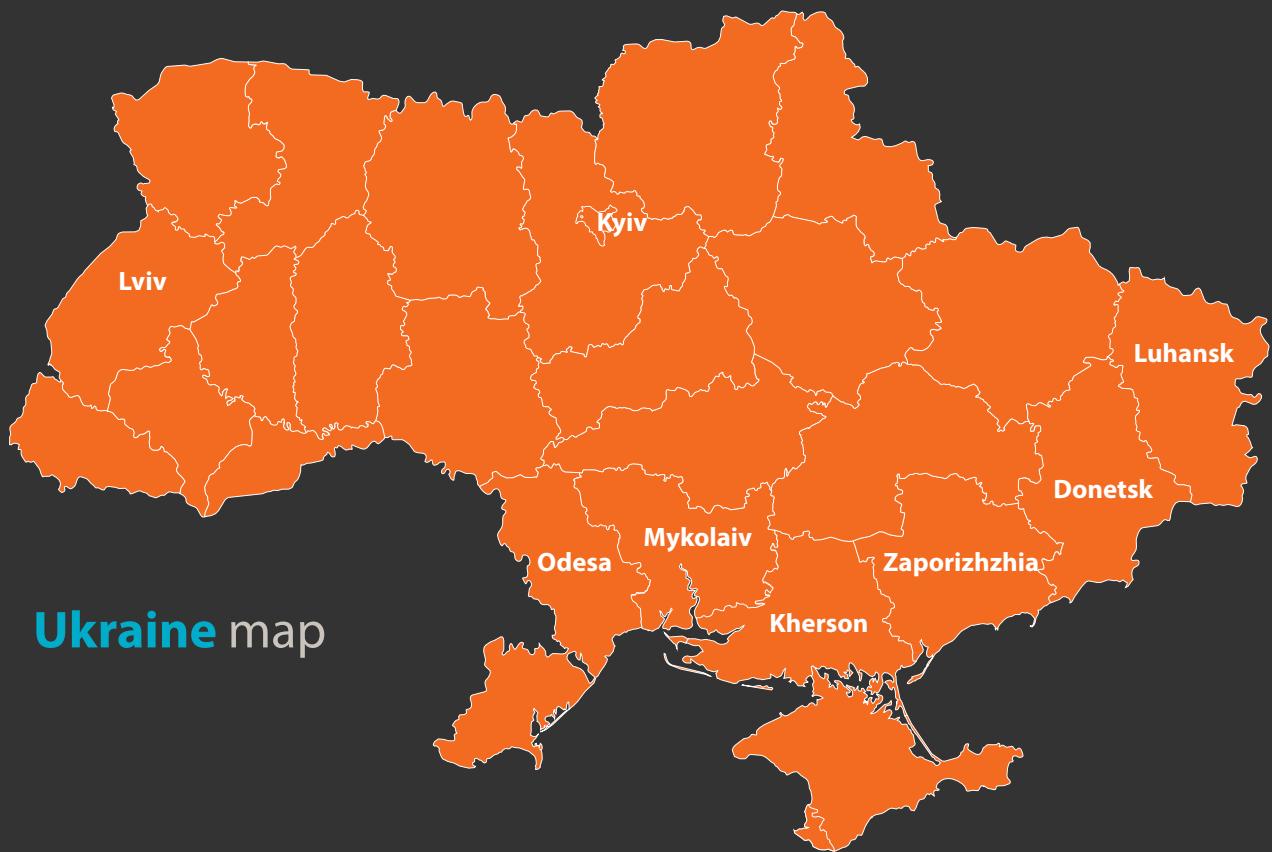


Public protection system in Ukraine:

Oblast level mapping, assessment
and services research



KHERSON, KHARKIV AND DNIPRO OBLAST



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Disclaimer

Any views, opinions and recommendations presented in this research are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of World Vision or the donor.

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Executive Summary

Millions of people are in need of humanitarian aid because of the war in Ukraine. More than 3 million children are among the worst affected. They have experienced violence, psychological trauma, and interrupted education. The system that offers children psycho-social support – Ukraine’s social protection services – was already stretched prior to the war. Now, with increased demands for psychological support and disrupted services due to conflict, gaps are becoming more pronounced. The National Recovery Plan aims to improve social protection systems and infrastructure, with ongoing assessments to enhance support in affected oblasts. This research study aims to support those efforts.

A research team of six people developed the following three research objectives:

1. To comprehensively identify the existing capacity of community and national-level public protection systems and services.
2. To assess the strengths, gaps, and scope of the protection system and services at the oblast to Hromadka level. (Focused Oblast, Dnipro, Kherson and Kharkiv)
3. To offer clear recommendations to World Vision and its partners to incorporate interventions aimed at strengthening protection systems.

The research focused its efforts on three regions: Dnipro, Kherson and Kharkiv. Insight was collected through document review of national statistics, scholarly articles, etc., a survey of 768 people, 21 key stakeholder interviews and 24 focus group discussions over the course of three months.

Throughout this report, you will find a summary of key findings and recommendations learned from the research. We learned that most people were not familiar with child focused programs and child protection services. We also learned that children had limited knowledge of their rights. We heard that information about social services was mostly understandable and accessible, but there were some who did not understand what the services were or could not easily access the information.

The social protection system in Ukraine was often perceived as insufficient, with more than 40% of respondents rating it low and nearly 40% saying it only served a limited number of people. Respondents let our research team know that the accessing services was inhibited by a lack of gadgets for online learning, poor online education quality, no shelters in schools, difficulties with outdoor recreation, and a shortage of qualified specialists. Children faced obstacles in accessing recreational activities due to closures, increased costs, and inadequate information.

Additionally, respondents were concerned by inadequate funding for social protection, insufficient support for families with children, poor job loss support, and inadequate medical assistance. The ongoing war, bureaucratic hurdles, and financial limitations were cited as significant barriers to accessing services.

This report also includes a number of recommendations to strengthen child protection services (see pages 10-12 for a full list of recommendations). They include enhancing psychological support by hiring qualified specialists, providing remote counseling, and developing mental health apps for adolescents. Additionally, the research team recommended creating child friendly spaces for children and adolescents and tailoring activities within youth and child spaces to group interests and making spaces free. The research team also suggested that information be shared more frequently through frequently used channels to increase awareness of child protection and social support services.

Further, the research team encouraged mobile teams to be created to support psychological assistance and home care. They research team underlined the importance of addressing violence and psychological distress by involving individuals in community work. The researchers also suggested expanding services by increasing the number of home-based daycares for displaced Ukrainian women with children. The researchers also recommended training educators and social workers and improving community engagement and evaluation of child protection systems.

Ultimately, this research project hopes to inform and enhance the social protection system, address service gaps, and improve support for children and families. The research team is confident this evidence-based approach can improve the lives of children and their families caught in a humanitarian crisis.

Background

As of May 2024, the war in Ukraine has left 14.6 million of people in need of humanitarian assistance, with 8.5 million described as the most vulnerable who need protection assistance.¹ As well, 3.4 million Ukrainians are internally displaced in the country.

Children are the most affected by the conflict, as they are exposed to death or injury, sexual and physical violence, separation from caregivers, and the death of family members. Children are suffering psychological distress from witnessing or being subjected to violence. Their schooling has been interrupted and they have been faced stress due to shifting roles and responsibilities, along with the breakdown of community-based support mechanisms. According to the 2024 Humanitarian Needs Response Plan (HNRP), 3.17 million children need assistance in Ukraine, making up 22 per cent of the total 14.6 million people who need assistance²

Psychosocial support is urgently needed for Ukraine's children affected by war. The Ukraine Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) estimated that 3.4 million children in Ukraine are in need of immediate child protection services, including 10 per cent of children with disabilities. The Child Protection Sub-Cluster estimates that more than 2 million children have been internally displaced within Ukraine. Based on reports verified by OHCHR, on average, more than two children are killed and more than four injured each day in Ukraine – mostly in attacks using explosive weapons in populated areas. Civilian infrastructure on which children depend continues to be damaged or destroyed.

In areas where fighting is intensifying, humanitarian conditions are dire. Attacks using explosive weapons in populated urban areas continue to inflict civilian casualties, including among children, with considerable damage to essential infrastructure and services. UNOCHA reported¹ a lack of specialised staff to identify and support vulnerable people, particularly in Kherson, where there are currently no State Social Protection workers.

There is concern that the impact of war will cause psychological scars among children. According to a report published in April, 75 per cent of parents reported

their children had symptoms of psychological trauma, which included 16 per cent who had impaired memory, shorter attention span, and decreased ability to learn.

Psychological trauma, stress, and anxiety are more pronounced for children in frontline areas and areas along the Russian border, including Kharkivska, Luhanska, Donetska, Zaporizka, Khersonska, Sumska, and Mykolaiivska, where the severity of needs was assessed to be highest in 2023.³ Further, IOM estimates that up to 728,000 children under the age of 17 years are members of households displaced within Ukraine.⁴

Child protection concerns were present in Ukraine in the years leading up to 2022. In particular, households with children (43%) were more likely to experience higher levels of poverty compared to the national average (39%).⁵ The escalation of the war increased children's vulnerability, including those who are displaced, suffering from lack of access to basic services, those remaining in de-occupied and frontline areas, and those who have been acutely impacted by the war (having lost family members, housing, etc.).⁶

MSNA⁷ data suggests that 56 per cent of assessed households nationally were found to have severe unmet livelihoods needs (2023). The needs were the highest in regions affected directly by conflict, in the Eastern and Northern oblasts.

Since the escalation of the war, men and women have played different roles, with many women acting as caregivers to children, faced with increased responsibility, and many men engaged directly in the war, resulting in increased exposure to injury or death and psychosocial distress.⁸ Such gender norms have impacts on children's exposure to and experiences with protection risks, including displacement, family separation, psychosocial distress, child marriage, early childbearing, and gender-based violence (GBV).



The war in Ukraine has heightened the risk of severe exploitation among displaced children, those in institutions, disabled children, stateless children, minority group children, forcibly transferred children, and homeless or orphaned children, although the exact prevalence of child labour is unknown.

IOM's Trafficking in Persons programme reported that between January and September 2023, its programming identified and assisted 296 victims of trafficking, including the two per cent of these victims who were under the age of 18.

Since February 2022, OHCHR documented cases in which civilians (adults and children) have been transferred from one temporarily occupied territory to another or to the Russian Federation by Russian authorities.⁹ The suspected scale of such transfers is difficult to confirm due to accessibility of temporarily occupied territories and areas near to the frontline. However, the government of Ukraine believes the figure to be at least 19,546.

Our interviews with stakeholders revealed several issues in social care and protection during the research. The war worsened the situation by increasing vulnerable groups, especially children in conflict zones, and damaging social protection infrastructure. These conditions led to a gap in social services, necessitating adjustments despite reduced capacity in social protection and employment services.

Social protection in Ukraine includes:

1. Social insurance for job loss or temporary incapacity
2. Financial assistance like subsidies and social payments
3. Social services

The Ministry of Social Policy (MoSP) manages over 30 cash-based benefit programs including pensions, unemployment grants, and housing allowances for vulnerable groups. Social assistance programs used over 15 separate information systems, registries and beneficiary databases which were outdated and highly decentralized. Since 2020, efforts have been made to centralize and digitalize these systems through the Unified Information System of the Social Sphere (UISSS), piloted in early 2022. The MoSP and Ministry of Digital Transformation (MoDT) aim to enhance digital services and streamline benefit processes.

In July 2022, Ukraine's National Recovery Plan was endorsed to focus on resilience, modernization, and recovery. This plan highlights the need for financial investments, technical support, and staffing to adapt social protection programs and address the needs of various vulnerable groups.

Humanitarian assistance will continue to support basic needs during the conflict but addressing the long-term adequacy and responsiveness of social benefits is urgent. Rebuilding social infrastructure should align with investment and policy changes, emphasising community-based services.

¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-needs-overview-2023-december-2022-enuk>

² Ukraine Protection Cluster, "Protection Monitoring Findings (1 January - 31 August 2023)," September 8, 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-protection-cluster-protection-monitoring-findings-1-january-31-august-2023-enuk>

³ OCHA, "Humanitarian Needs Overview Ukraine 2023," December 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-humanitarian-needs-overview-2023-december-2022-enuk>.

⁴ IOM, "Ukraine Internal Displacement Report: General Population Survey, October 2023". Ukraine — Internal Displacement Report — General Population Survey Round 14 (September – October 2023) | Displacement Tracking Matrix (iom.int)

⁵ Liudmyla Cherenko, Volodymyr Sarioglo, and Natalia Sitnikova, "Child Poverty: Impact of the War in Ukraine on Households with Children" (UNICEF Ukraine, April 2023), <https://www.idss.org.ua/archiv/Ukraine%20Child%20Poverty%20Report%202023%20engl.pdf>.

⁶ Cherenko, Sarioglo, and Sitnikova, "Child Poverty: Impact of the War in Ukraine on Households with Children."

⁷ Protection Cluster, UNHCR. Originally published: 11 Jan 2024. Protection Monitoring Findings, 1 January-31 December 2023. <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/protection-monitoring-findings-1-january-31-december-2023-enuk>

⁸ Care International. "Rapid Gender Analysis: Ukraine," October 2023.

⁹ OHCHR, "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine 1 February - 31 July 2023." "Children of War," accessed November 8, 2023, <https://childrenofwar.gov.ua/en/>; OHCHR, "Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine 1 February - 31 July 2023."



Assessment Purpose and Objectives

Purpose: The assignment aims to map and assess the existing capacity of the Oblast level public protection system and services within the selected oblasts in Ukraine.

The objectives of the needs assessment are:

1. To comprehensively identify the existing capacity of community and national-level public protection systems and services.
2. To assess the strengths, gaps, and scope of the protection system and services at the oblast to Hromadka level. (Focused Oblast, Dnipro, Kherson and Kharkiv)
3. To offer clear recommendations to World Vision and its partners to incorporate interventions aimed at strengthening protection systems.

Geographical Scope: Dnipro, Kherson and Kharkiv region

Methodology

Secondary data review

Sampling: National and regional levels

Information was gathered from existing sources such as statistics, reports, scholarly articles, archival data, surveys, etc. The unit of measurement for secondary data was gathered from available documents, statistical data, data from open registers, and current state and local programs, including their content, status, and performance results, regarding public protection systems and services at the community and national levels.

Survey

Sampling: A survey using CAPI1 (face-to-face survey using tablets and mobile devices). Surveys were conducted on residents ages 18 and older (including vulnerable groups of the population and Internally Displaced Persons, a quota for people with children was added).

Sample size: 768 respondents, with 384 respondents per region. (Survey covered Dnipro and Kharkiv region. Kherson region was excluded from the qualitative aspect due to accessibility and security reasons.)

Key informant interviews

Sampling: Formal and informal stakeholders

Sample size: 21 respondents: 9 NGO representatives (3 in each region) and 11 State social services representatives (3 in Dnipro region, 4 in Kharkiv, and 4 in Kherson regions).

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Parents FGDs: 2 FGDs in each region. Men and women who have children under 18 years.
Sample size: 6 FGDs.

Kids and Teenagers FGDs: 6 FGD in each region. Separate groups with girls and boys of different ages (1 group - children under 10 years old, 2 - children 11-13 years old, 3 - children 14-17 years old)
Sample size: 18 FGDs

Ethical Aspects of the Assessment

The general approach to working with this research was based on the following principles:

- Considering gender aspects
- Maintaining anonymity and confidentiality of the data received
- Compliance with the Code of Professional Ethics of the Sociologist of the Sociological Association of Ukraine/ESOMAR and the Helsinki Declaration of Ethical Principles for Research
- Compliance with World Vision Child Protection and Safeguarding guidelines
- Compliance with security measures during military situations

Ethical principles of research:

- Rights-based: The research is aimed and intended to promote and protect human and child rights
- Do no harm: The research enables no discrimination between consulted people, creating or exacerbating degradation, conflicts and insecurity and will take into account the special needs of the most vulnerable groups of children and women
- Participatory and voluntary: The respondents participation is informed and voluntary and full right is ensured for withdraw at any time upon the request of the subject (respondent)
- Compliance: with the Code of Professional Ethics of the Sociologist. The attitude of the sociologist towards other ideas and people – authors or supporters of these ideas – is determined by tolerance and respect (Code of Professional Ethics of the Sociologist [Electronic resource – access mode: <http://www.sau.kiev.ua/codex.html>!])

The survey team strictly adhered to the rules and requirements for research standards involving children and adolescents.



1. KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A

Only 12% of survey participants were very familiar with programs and initiatives aimed at children. The survey results indicated that 44% of respondents had limited knowledge about the available social protection programs in their city of residence, while 43% did not have such information about any social protection programs. A children's focus group participant emphasised the importance of information in the social protection system: *"Children need assistance to navigate adult life, to understand what awaits them, what to do, how to find a job, how to establish communication, how to navigate in society," (FDG Kharkiv, boys' group, age 13-17).*

For the children and teenagers, in most cases, it is difficult to distinguish the rights of children and adolescents individually. The older segment of children mentioned the right to personal space and intolerance of insults, but a complete understanding was not yet formed. For the younger segment, physical safety was more important - to ensure that no one insults them.

According to a FGD with children and teenagers, the children's group generally lacked knowledge about child protection services and service providers including

organisations. In most cases, when there was a threat to themselves or other children/adolescents, they relied on themselves and their immediate environment (parents, friends, and trusted adults), as well as emergency and law enforcement services. Other organisations and specialised services were unfamiliar to them, and clear information about action and processes were absent.

Mostly children and adolescents, along with their peers, required assistance and support in the following scenarios:

1. Emergencies (physical and psychological danger)
2. Situations related to education and motivation – exam preparation, extra classes, language learning, sports competitions, etc.
3. Establishing communication within groups – interacting with peers and adults, including parents
4. General socialization – learning how to behave in society, determining future professions, achieving goals, etc.

B

The most popular mass media channels for obtaining information about social services and opportunities for children were the Internet and social networks (78%), as well as social messengers and groups (74%). Television, radio, and outdoor advertising were used much less frequently, with respective usage rates of 17%, 3%, and 5%

Based on the focus group discussions, popular information channels for the child group included Telegram, TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube.

C

Most respondents (61%) considered information about social services and opportunities for children to be understandable, while 21% indicated that the information was not clear. Regarding the accessibility of information, 57% of respondents believed it was accessible, while 24% claimed otherwise.

D

It was found that 35% of respondents rated the level of social protection system assistance as average, while the majority (41%) considered it low. Among respondents with children under 18 years old, 37% considered social protection assistance average and 44% considered it low

E

Only 18% of surveyed respondents believed that social welfare services were accessible, while another 39% claimed that the services were mainly available to a limited number of people.

Based on the focus group discussions with parents regarding accessibility, the following barriers were identified:

- For parents from the Kherson region, obstacles to accessing social services for children include the lack of gadgets for online learning.
- Poor quality of online education.
- Absence of shelters in educational institutions.
- Difficulties with outdoor recreation (territories contaminated or littered with ammunition).
- Lack of qualified medical specialists.

For participants from the Dnipropetrovsk region, one of the main obstacles to obtaining comprehensive and quality child social services was the low quality and high cost of medical services. Parents from the Kharkiv region mentioned that the main barriers to accessing social services for children were insufficient financial capabilities (payment for extracurricular activities) and, the decline in the quality of educational services.

For the children, a wide range of recreational or self-development opportunities were desired but unprovided. Children reported difficulties with the availability and access to activities, including the closure of clubs, instructor displacement, increased costs, and lack of organised shelter during air alarms. They also found some options uninteresting or basic, located in inconvenient areas, and reported a lack of complete information about local courses, sections, master classes, and classes.

Major problems identified in the Social Protection System:

- 55% of respondents highlighted the inadequacy of funding for state social protection programs
- Around 35% of respondents expressed concerns about the insufficient support for families with children
- 24% of respondents noted the lack of adequate support following job loss as a significant problem
- Approximately 21% of respondents identified the poor medical assistance state as a pressing concern
- The absence of housing and outdated living conditions was cited by 21% of respondents as challenges

- 48% of respondents pointed to bureaucratic hurdles as the main reason limiting access to social protection
- Almost 39% of respondents mentioned financial limitations as a significant obstacle.

Issues with the quality of social services for families with children:

- 41% cited insufficient information awareness among families regarding available services
- 35% of respondents highlighted long queues and wait times for service delivery
- Approximately 28% of respondents noted the absence of an individualised approach to family needs

Barriers to accessing social protection for families with children:

- 57% of respondents attributed limited access to social protection to the ongoing war

F Despite certain difficulties in accessing services, those who sought or needed them still rated them above average. A notable majority expressed satisfaction (69%) with the support provided, indicating a foundational trust in the system. Among respondents with children under 18, 67% expressed satisfaction with the support provided.

G 42% were satisfied with the response of social services to the specific needs and problems of children and adolescents. Similarly, in the focus groups with parents they rated the child welfare system at 4 out of 5 on the satisfaction scale.

H According to the respondents, it was crucial for both the social protection system and donors to prioritise aspects such as giving more attention to the needs of families with children (24%), ensuring transparency and openness in operations for social services (16%) and to provide consulting with parents and children (6%).

According to the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with children and teenagers, the following recommendations were made:

Organisation of access to psychological support:

- Invite qualified specialists who are skilled in working with children and adolescents and adhere to the principles of confidentiality during consultations
- Facilitate communication, explain problematic points in relationships with parents, and teach techniques for effectively avoiding conflict situation
- Teach interpersonal skills, communication in groups and society, conflict resolution, and coping with problems independently

- Provide the opportunity to receive psychological counseling in a remote format
- Develop mobile applications for adolescents to improve mental health, if possible.

Assistance in self-determination regarding future professions:

- When organizing leisure activities, attention should be paid to the needs and interests of middle and older adolescents
- Create spaces for children and adolescents
- Organise interesting leisure activities on the outskirts of the city, near residential areas, with the possibility of free attendance

Establish active and regular information dissemination to children and adolescents about:

- Possible types of leisure activities in the city
- Available courses, classes, sections, and workshops
- Programs and support aimed at children and adolescents from international organisations

About child protection services in case of threat:

- Form an action plan in an emergency situation
- Involve children/adolescents in various volunteer activities (assistance to the military, environmental care, helping the elderly, younger children, animals), creative and artistic tasks
- Increase attention to the safety of children and adolescents - organising youth spaces with access to shelters, ensuring communication with adults when necessary

According to the Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs) with parents and stakeholders, the following recommendation were made for social protection system and donors:

- Popularise and promote existing free resources (educational)
- Choose communication and dissemination channels according to the type of community. For example, for small communities, outdoor advertising, such as distributing leaflets around the town or placing them in mailboxes, would be more relevant
- Provide work of mobile teams (for example, in cases requiring psychological assistance) involving psychologists traveling with humanitarian aid and providing support in communities while humanitarian assistance is being distributed
- Ensure home care specifically for families with children with disabilities
- Combat the spread of violence in families or alleviate psychological distress by creating projects aimed at engaging individuals, such as the unemployed or those struggling with alcoholism or other issues, in areas that are assisting others (for example, in family-type shelters) or in other such community work can be encouraged (Specifically for family-based care, the experience of implementation, known as "family assistant." Also, a person who simply helps with household chores)
- Provide case-management and case support to encourage the expansion of such services for families
- Encourage and expand the provision of home-based daycare services, primarily focusing on childcare
- Expand the coverage of programs to include Ukrainian women with children who are residing abroad and have moved from the territories of the surveyed regions
- Provide additional education for teachers, social workers, and psychologists to enhance their psychological competencies and offer psychological support
- Create child-friendly spaces and ensure that the services of these spaces are accessible to all residents living in this location/community

- Consider and apply a gender-sensitive approach when creating child-friendly spaces
- Ensure the sustainability of implementation as children form attachments to the staff, and interventions need to have continuity and stability
- Make child-friendly spaces accessible and within walking distances to community population centres. The location could even be a single room with a staff member present
- Design services based on data and needs of the target audience for whom the project is planned
- Study and implement international experiences from countries like Georgia and Israel, along with engaging relevant experts. However, there should be criteria for assessing the expertise of these individuals, specifically considering their relevant experience and its applicability to our context in Ukraine
- Implement a continuous evaluation and monitoring system
- Actively engage socially responsible businesses within communities
- Ensure prevention and intervention to avoid falling into Complex Life Circumstances.
- Establish a Parents and Social Workers Council, and invest in capacity building



2. MAIN RESULTS

AWARENESS

1. Assessing the awareness levels regarding programs and initiatives for child protection, the majority of face-to-face surveyed participants demonstrated a moderate level of knowledge, with 44% claiming to have some knowledge while 43% admitted to not knowing at all. A total of 12% exhibited a high level of awareness. In the group of people with children under the age of 18, 43% stated that they do not know at all. This indicated that parents of younger children may be less informed about child protection programs compared to the general audience.

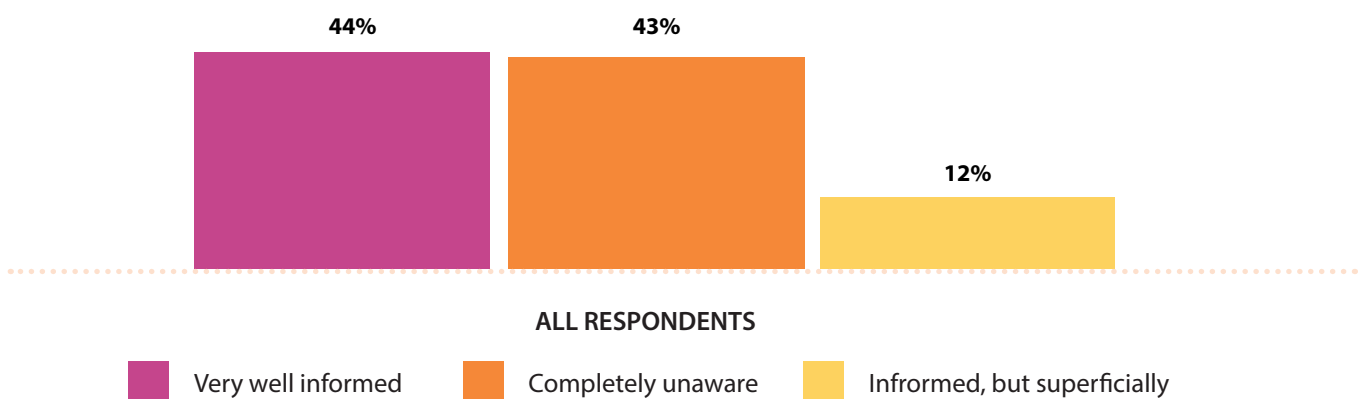


Chart 1. Do you know about the availability of programs and initiatives* aimed at children in your place of residence? (Without "Difficult to answer")

Parents' answers at FGDs corroborated the data collected. In terms of parental awareness about child protection rights and opportunities, it appeared to be relatively low. Parents FGDs indicated a general familiarity with children's rights, citing examples such as the right to life, education, free healthcare, and digital communication rights. When parents encountered questions about their child's rights, they typically turned to the Internet or reached out to child welfare services or other relevant authorities for guidance.

During the discussions, parents noted that the child protection system was needed to prevent violence and other forms of abuse against children, identify families with children experiencing such cases, provide social protection (support for children in difficult life circumstances and children from other vulnerable groups), ensure access to medical care, and education. Additionally, it was expressed that the child protection system served as a "mediator between parents and children". For some participants among parents FGDs, the child protection system was limited to ensuring the well-being and protection of vulnerable groups of children and their parents, rather than encompassing all children.

During focus group discussions among children and teenagers, children lacked awareness of services - both in terms of understanding the specifics of such initiatives and their expectations regarding participation and utilization of similar services. In most cases, relevant communication was not encountered, and information was obtained from adults (parents, relatives, teachers).

Overall, participants' knowledge and participation in programs targeted at children and youth were sporadically mentioned. In most cases, young respondents' answers were uncertain, often lacking specificity - they may have heard about an initiative or seen information, stumbled upon it accidentally, perhaps attended once, or received a service. The surveyed groups found it difficult to theoretically evaluate the relevance and interest of such programs to them. Often, when responding to this question, the children's groups expressed associations of child protection system with traditional clubs and activities organized within schools or commercial institutions, or with psychological assistance from humanitarian organisations, etc.



I heard that there is a humanitarian organization that provides assistance, they also sometimes provide psychological assistance to children,”
FGD, Kharkiv, boys, 14-17 years old

Among the programs and services aimed at supporting children and adolescents, initiatives from UNICEF were more frequently mentioned by children and adolescents. The program is free for children affected by war. It includes workshops on mental health day, distribution of backpacks with school supplies, organisation of creative workshops, and organisation of spaces for movie screenings through a projector in safe locations.

“Sometimes I go to UNICEF. We make toys and put them up. And little children come and can take them. I also went to UNICEF, watched a movie there. They gave popcorn and juices. There is a basement there, but it is equipped like a room. There are these bags you can lie on, and a projector. Also, these backpacks from UNICEF;”
FGD Kherson, boys, 11-12 years old

Less frequently mentioned were first aid training (the organiser of the courses was not specified for the audience).

“I think, for our generation, for our children, adolescents, and generally for all our people in our country, it is very relevant now because we have a war, and you should have some basic knowledge of first aid;”
FGD Kharkiv, girls, 13-17 years old

Some boys and girls from Kherson and Kharkiv mentioned assistance and leisure organisation based on a general education school (provision of humanitarian aid, psychological support, education, and competitions).

“At School No. 31 in Kherson, there are psychologists, they work with children, there are active games, dancing, drawing, embroidery, well, it’s interesting. Because there is a psychologist, if you can turn to them, they will help, support;” Kherson, girls, 8-10 years old

“Also, sometimes here some volunteers hold events for children. For example, different competitions, we draw pictures, then send them, and someone wins the contest;”
FGD Kharkiv, girls, 13-17 years old

Occasionally, there were some boys and girls who participated, shown interest, and could describe the specifics of interaction. They mentioned the free participation for children and adolescents. It was worth noting that in Kherson respondents were more familiar with programs and services for children and adolescents as they more often had experience participating.

Half of the children who participated in FGDs from Kherson mentioned the following initiatives:

- a. Aid from the Red Cross - Provision of humanitarian aid (food, water, clothing), as well as periodic psychological consultations
- b. Activities of the All-Ukrainian Educational and Cultural Network Goncharenko Centre (<https://goncharenkocentre.com.ua/>) - Various educational activities, receipt of psychological support
- c. Organisation of individual workshops (for example, painting Easter eggs) at the local resilience point

In Dnipro, in a girls’ focus group, for ages 13 to 17, a website for teenagers where you can get psychological help (<https://teenergizer.org/>) was identified. Participants noted they could write about a problem and get help. The service was viewed positively and described as effective, anonymous, and had the possibility of online consultations. It was also noted the use of free mobile applications that track mood, motivation, etc. (for example, BetterMe: Mental Health)

In the Kharkiv, boys’ group, ages 11 and 12, there was occasional mention of the activities of the Voices of Children Fund, without specifying initiatives, *“they do something there and get gifts.”*

It can be concluded that programs and services aimed at children and adolescents were little known among the child and adolescent groups. Despite needing these leisure activities, they were viewed as less relevant because respondents didn’t engage with traditional clubs, didn’t fully understand the help available, and didn’t feel a lack of communication or need for more information (often not seeking it themselves or asking parents).

Face-to-face survey respondents stated that the main sources of information about social services were the Internet and social networks, used by 78%. Social messengers and groups followed at 74%, while television was used by 17%. Notably, 81% of people with children under 18 used the Internet and social media for information, which was significantly higher than the 10% among all respondents. This suggested that parents of younger children actively utilised online resources for information about social services, possibly due to a greater need for convenient and fast sources of information.

2. The perception of the understanding and availability of information about social services varied among respondents in Hromadas. While 61% believed the information was understood, only 57% deemed it available. Regarding awareness of child protection programs and initiatives, both groups exhibited similar trends, with a majority claiming to be knowledgeable but superficially so (44% for the entire audience and 45% for those with children under 18).

Among the children and teenagers' focus groups, there was a general lack of awareness about child protection services, and it was difficult for them to name specific organisations. The term "child protection service" often evoked strong associations with custody services, services that assist in cases of domestic violence, charitable foundations that raise funds for children's medical treatment, and support for children with special needs. These were primarily seen as handling severe cases requiring serious help and specific support. Less frequently, it was not seen as useful for prevention, family strengthening, information sharing, or psychological services.

The level of interest in child protection services among the children and teenagers' focus groups were mixed. Some respondents expressed interest in learning more about the service, including its contact information and the scope of its activities (which cases it handles, and what support and assistance it provides). They also indicated the need for spreading information about the activities of child protection services among their target audience.

"It would be important to know a phone number you can call in case of an unforeseen situation, or something bad on the internet that parents can't help with. Also, I think it would be important to know what kind of help they would provide there,"
FGD Kharkiv, girls, 13-17 years old

Other respondents (mostly younger individuals) indicated that they did not feel a need for information about such a service. They considered the information less important, relying more on their parents' awareness and assuming that they could find the service and its contacts through Google if necessary.

"I don't know of any organizations that help children. But there are close people, relatives, parents, and friends who will always come to help in any situation"
FGD, Kharkiv, boys, 8-10 years old

The most optimal channels for information dissemination about the activities of child protection services were through:

- a. Schools
- b. The city
- c. telegram channels
- d. TikTok and Instagram.

"If there is such an organization that will help with the protection of children and adolescents, it can contact school administrations and hold some event where they explain everything and provide qualified assistance"
FGD Kharkiv, boys, 13-17 years old

Also, at children's and teenager's FDGs, it was mentioned that information conveyed should not be a "dry" message but should explain its relevance and contain an emotional component (e.g., through events, contests).



Social Service Quality

3. The assessment of social service quality for families with children was different. While the majority of the entire group (48%) rated it as average, a slightly higher percentage of those with children under 18 rated it (51%).

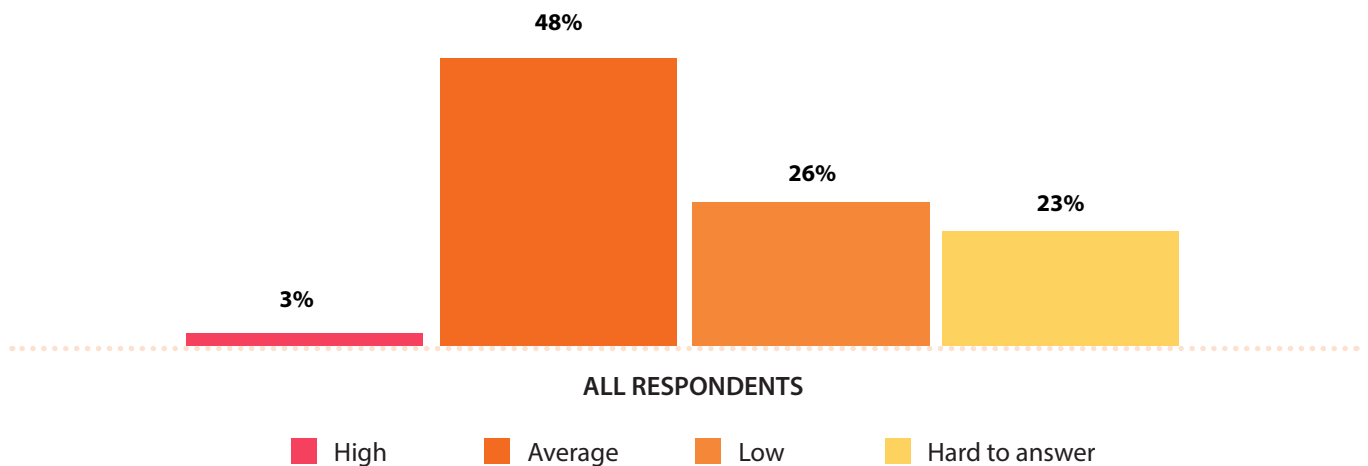


Chart 2. How do you rate the quality of social services and services for families with children provided in your place of residence?

According to the parents FGD, the quality of services provided to children was rated by parents at 4 out of 5 points. This was a positive assessment, but there was room for improvement. However, many respondents could not evaluate child social protection providers because they did not use their services, partly due to security concerns. Additionally, parents noted that the assessment of service quality depends on the specific types of services: some are rated better, others worse.

*"In our city, we are in a potential combat zone, so we don't have enough services."
(FGD, Dnipropetrovsk region, female)*

*"If there are children, you know, it's not to the extent we would like it to be. As rightly said, it's a potential combat zone, and adding the situation in the country, these constant alarms – if it starts, children go down to the shelter."
(FGD, Dnipropetrovsk region, female)*

*"4-4+. The rating is high, yes, considering the state we are all in. The authorities manage, the programs work, there are solutions, contests, and training – everything is there, everything is wonderful. Despite the personal impressions we've discussed, overall, everything works well. The ratings are very good."
(FGD, Kharkiv region, male)*



SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM STRENGTHS

The results of the sociological survey analysis indicated a fairly high rating by the participants regarding the level of professionalism and competence of service providers in the field of child protection: almost 57% of survey participants expressed a positive attitude towards these aspects. Only 13% of responses indicated a low level, which was a small fraction compared to the overall positive sentiment.

Regarding the confidence in the competence and adherence to ethical standards by providers, 54% indicated strong confidence. Only 16% of responses noted poorly, underscoring the general trust of survey participants in adhering to standards.

Similarly, 54% believed that child protection service providers adhered to established standards in service delivery.

These results reflected a positive perception of professional activities and service quality in the field of child social protection, which are key factors for the successful functioning of the social protection system.

Formal stakeholders highlighted in interviews the adaptation to new realities as a significant achievement in the social protection system. While the legislation has not changed substantially, approaches to work have evolved due to resource shortages, a lack of experienced professionals, and changes in working conditions, including risks associated with shelling. The work with children has become more individualised because it was no longer safe to gather children in groups. The educational system now operates online, as educational institutions cannot serve as gathering places for children, complicating organised activities. Security risks for social workers have also increased. Despite these challenges, the system has adapted its approaches and continues to function under difficult circumstances.

Regardless of the existing difficulties, the system continues to engage children in various aspects of life, including education. There are programs aimed at supporting education, including assistance with English and mathematics. The active role of non-governmental organisations in assisting children and families in difficult life situations was also noted.

An important achievement was the increase in the number of family-based care forms for children, which promotes better development and socialization.

Informal stakeholders noted increased assistance from international organisations following the full-scale invasion. This aid was directed towards addressing issues faced by low-income families and providing psychological support to children and their parents. Experts mentioned projects in informal education aimed at giving children the opportunity to meet offline, facilitating socialization and adaptation, particularly in areas with large numbers of internally displaced persons and local children. Such initiatives contribute to the development and social integration of children, helping them gain essential experiences and support





SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM ISSUES

4. Exploring the main issues within the social protection system, it's clear that inadequate funding stands out, with 55% of respondents highlighting this concern. Additionally, bureaucratic hurdles (48%), financial limitations (39%), and the impact of war (57%) were also cited as significant barriers to accessing social protection services. Notably, 39% of respondents felt that these services were only accessible to a limited number of people, while 24% perceived them as scarce and ineffective. Among those with children under 18, the percentages shift slightly, with 57% identifying inadequate funding as the top concern. Similarly, bureaucratic obstacles (52%), financial constraints (42%), and the impact of war (59%) were mentioned by a significant portion of this group. Moreover, 42% believed that social protection services were only accessible to a limited number of people, while 25% saw them as scarce and ineffective.

Table 1. In your opinion, what are the biggest problems in the social protection system in your place of residence today? % does not equal 100% due to multiple alternatives

	ALL	DNIPRO	KHARKIV
Insufficient funding	55	56.8	52.9
Low level of support for families with children	35	31.3	39.1
Poor state of medical care	35	31.3	39.1
Insufficient support in case of job loss	24	18.0	29.2
Lack of housing and outdated housing infrastructure	21	24.2	18.0
Limited access to services	24	16.7	24.2
Low support for family structures and children's needs	17	12.5	20.8
Insufficient number of programs and initiatives	12	9.6	13.8

Given the stakeholders' views from in-depth interviews with NGO and social service representatives, a detailed examination of the child protection system in Kherson is needed because of its proximity to active combat zones and its previous occupation.

Formal stakeholders highlighted several systemic and practical problems in the child protection system in Kherson and Kherson Oblast, including:

- **Shortage of Qualified Personnel:** The main reasons for staff shortages are low wages and a lack of motivation to work under high-risk conditions. Many professionals have left the area due to the war. The lack of sufficient specialists complicates rapid response to complex situations and may lead to unacceptable risks for children, including the potential for removing children from families.
- **Low Motivation:** The salary levels for specialists in social services are significantly lower than in international projects or private practice, making it difficult to attract qualified personnel.
- **Overburdened Specialists:** Social workers are overwhelmed with work that does not meet standards and norms. They manage too many families and perform additional tasks beyond their capacity.
- **Lack of Resources:** The absence of necessary resources, including training, transportation, and material support, reduces the effectiveness of their work.
- **Logistical Problems:** The war has disrupted transportation links, complicating access to some communities and delaying the work of specialists.
- **Insufficient Methodological Support:** There is a lack of methodological support due to difficulties in organising training and a shortage of materials and resources.
- **Systemic Deficiencies:** The lack of stable funding, support, and regulatory frameworks affects the overall quality of work.

Experts also expressed concerns about future challenges for the child protection system, such as the potential for unreported domestic violence and the long-term effects of children missing in-person schooling due to COVID-19 and the war. Experts were concerned children could lack the necessary skills for further development, leading to adverse outcomes in their lives and futures.

Overall, the problems in the child protection system in Kherson and Kherson Oblast were closely linked to the war and its consequences, which complicates social work, particularly in child protection.

Informal stakeholders also pointed out issues within the child protection system in Kherson Oblast. Despite a legislative framework and numerous agencies aimed at helping children, the system remains underperforming and inefficient. Some families, particularly those with vulnerable children, did not receive the necessary support due to poor coordination and bureaucratic obstacles. Children who remained in the city during the shelling often lack adequate social protection, which can lead to psychological trauma. Organising leisure activities for children and their families was particularly challenging in conflict conditions. The legislation did not always consider the needs of families and their welfare, complicating access to social support. Low social payments and lack of employability and income generation opportunities put many families in a difficult financial situation.

In Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk Oblasts, the primary challenges for child protection services were related to their proximity to active combat zones and post-war recovery efforts. Experts identified significant issues such as bureaucratic overload and the system's inability to quickly respond to the needs of children, especially those affected by the war. Workers often had to handle numerous statuses and documents for each child, creating considerable work difficulties.

Addressing basic problems like water supply and restoring community facilities after the conflict was a priority but requires substantial effort and resources. The most critical challenge was the lack of effective mechanisms for supporting and rehabilitating families who have experienced crises and insufficient tools for resolving family conflicts. The system tends to focus more on punishment rather than support and development, complicating assistance to vulnerable families and children.

In Dnipropetrovsk Oblast, experts highlighted the absence of sexual and drug education in schools. More active preventive work with parents and children to address socially dangerous behaviour and health risks was needed. Public events and meetings were suggested to raise awareness and engage the community in these issues. Additionally, it was noted that workers responsible for these issues might be restricted by outdated norms and need greater flexibility to address situations effectively.

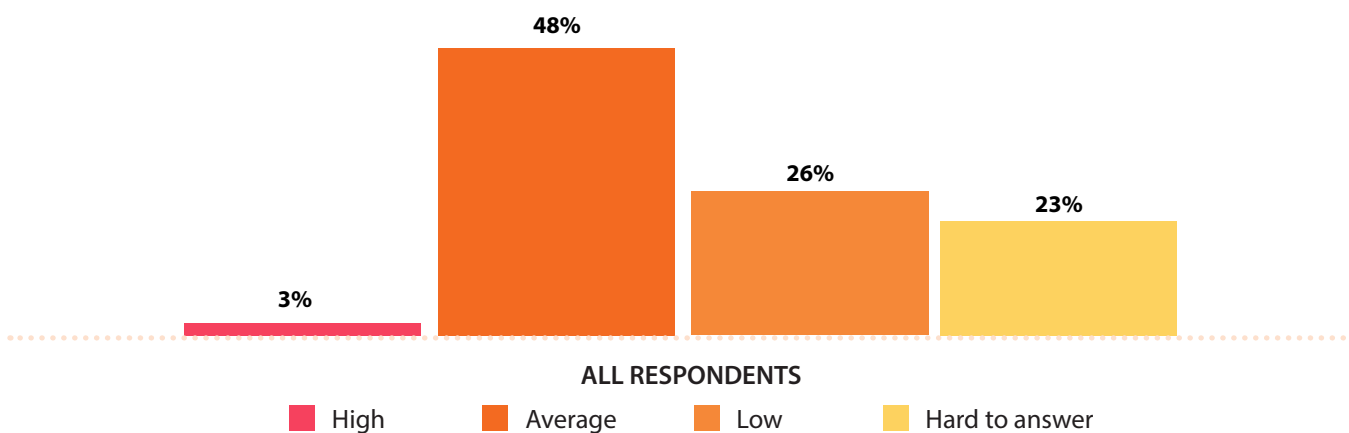


Chart 3. How do you rate the quality of social services and services for families with children provided in your place of residence?,

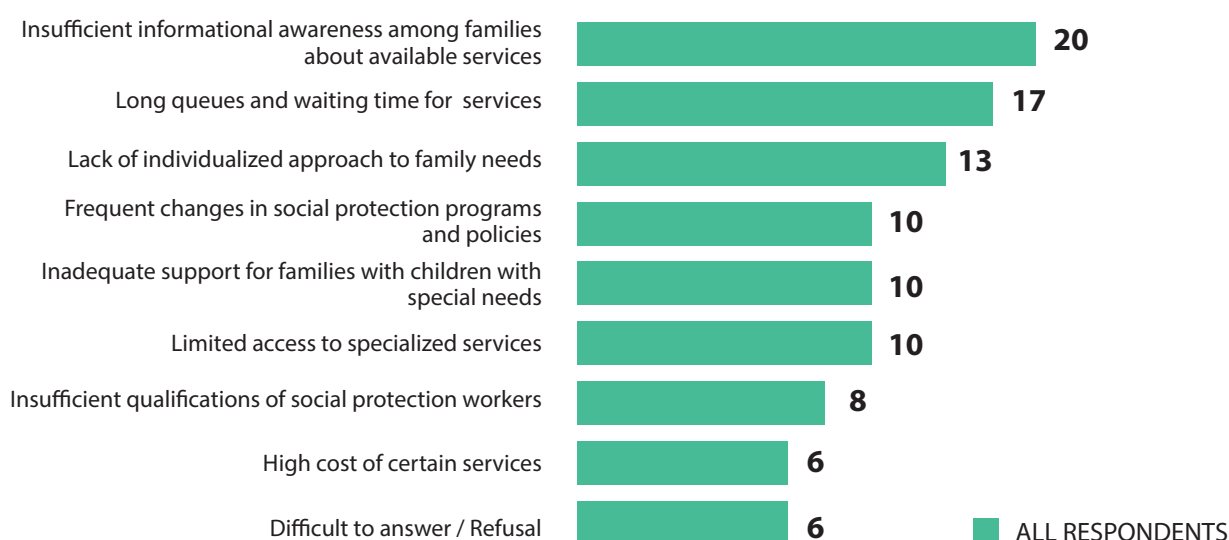


Chart 4. What problems do you notice in the quality of social services and services for families with children in your place of residence?,

Table 1. In your opinion, what are the biggest problems in the social protection system in your place of residence today? % does not equal 100% due to multiple alternatives

	ALL	DNIPRO	KHARKIV
Providing education and access to health	22	21.8	22.1
Ensuring safety in public places and on the streets	21	18.5	22.5
Prevention of violence and abuse	18	22.0	15.2
Provision of social support and assistance in difficult situations	15	15.7	15.1
Providing access to cultural and artistic events	7	5.3	9.0
Development of child-friendly spaces	7	7.5	6.7
Ensuring access to quality games and entertainment for all children	6	5.9	6.2
Difficult to answer/refusal	3	2.5	2.6
Other	0.7	0.8	0.6

Formal stakeholders at interviews identified several violations within the child protection system in the Kherson region, such as violence, abuse, and exploitation. The types of violations described include:

- **Domestic Violence:** This is a prevalent issue that social services continually address.
- **Child Exploitation:** Before the war, there were cases of child labour exploitation, particularly among Roma children who did not attend school and were engaged in scavenging at landfills
- **Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation:** The war has introduced new challenges, such as the abduction of children and adolescents by Russian forces, which are classified as human trafficking or child exploitation
- **Regulatory Challenges:** Some war-related incidents lack specific regulatory frameworks, compelling social services to apply existing laws to classify such situations.

A significant number of domestic violence cases in de-occupied territories were attributed to stress and adult unemployment, leading to family conflicts. Children often witnessed these conflicts as they stay home due to the lack of schooling.

Police and social services were actively working to document cases of domestic violence and provide assistance to victims. Donors, such as United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) and other organisations, support programs aimed at combating domestic violence, gender-based violence, and conflict-related sexual violence.

Experts from the Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk regions also reported a worsening domestic violence situation due to continuous stress, anxiety, and the lack of structure in life during crises. Violence often resulted from emotional and moral exhaustion.

Informal Stakeholders' Observations

Informal stakeholders in Kherson described a situation where, due to military actions and curfews, a large portion of the population remains at home, with children rarely going outside. This makes it challenging to monitor cases of domestic violence. They noted that from experience, domestic violence tends to increase due to the psychological stress and uncertainty faced by parents, who often vent their emotions on children.

Representatives from the Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk regions also noted that the deteriorating psychological state of society due to the war can lead to family violence.



ADVOCACY & ENGAGEMENT

The majority of face-to-face interview respondents indicated that the social protection system partially addressed the needs of the vulnerable population, with 45% of all respondents expressing this view. Additionally, 38% of respondents noted that the system failed to cover a significant portion of those in need. In Dnipro, the trend aligned with the overall pattern, with 50% stating that the system partially covered those in need and 34% indicating limited coverage. However, in Kharkiv, responses are more evenly split; 42% believed that the system did not adequately cover those in need, while 41% felt it partially did. Among respondents with children under 18, 47% also noted that the system partially meets the needs of the vulnerable, and 40% observed that the system provides insufficient coverage.

According to the focus group discussions (FGDs) with parents across the surveyed regions, there was a belief that local authorities should assist in providing various services. For instance, one parent emphasised the need for local authorities to collaborate more closely with parents and educational institutions to gather first-hand information about children's needs and to communicate available opportunities and programs for children. Parents also felt that authorities should ensure the accessibility and safety of bomb shelters for children, potentially creating underground learning spaces.

In discussions about the activities of local authorities, parents highlighted the importance of funding extracurricular activities, providing children with educational devices, and conducting educational outreach (including topics such as sexual education, hygiene, career guidance, handling explosive and unexploded devices, and children's rights). Additionally, it was suggested that authorities support the establishment of therapeutic physical education programs for children.

*"Local authorities should cooperate more closely with kindergartens and schools, as these are the primary channels of communication. They can directly communicate with parents through schools or kindergartens, attend parent meetings, and inform them about their capabilities, functions, and available programs for children. How else would they know about children's issues or reach out to them? Only through such communication channels."
(FGD, Kharkiv region, Male)*

The situation regarding coverage of resources and services for children from various vulnerable groups varies depending on the region of the participants. In the Kherson region, parents noted that social support programs cover "non-traditional and classical" families less and are more geared towards helping vulnerable groups of children. However, even these children faced certain difficulties accessing resources and services. Parents highlighted that children with disabilities (such as cerebral palsy) have difficulties accessing rehabilitation massage as they need to travel to another location. Orphans found it challenging to obtain social housing, and there is insufficient financial assistance available to them. Additionally, orphans struggled with social acceptance and integrating into society. For example, one man witnessed that aid beneficiaries forced a woman to queue with many children to receive humanitarian aid despite having very small children.

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*"I think they (the social protection services) work more now on the socially vulnerable, orphans, children under guardianship, children with disabilities. Everyone else relies on their own, their parents' services and that's it. So, in reality, the social protection system does not cover normal, traditional families that do not belong to vulnerable groups although they need services."
(FGD, Kherson region, Male)*

LEVEL OF SOCIAL SERVICES SATISFACTION AND CONFIDENCE

Overall, 47% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the support offered by the social protection service to children and adolescents in the designated cities (69% among those who decided and selected a rating). Among those with children under the age of 18, 49% expressed trust and confidence in social services for the protection of children and adolescents.

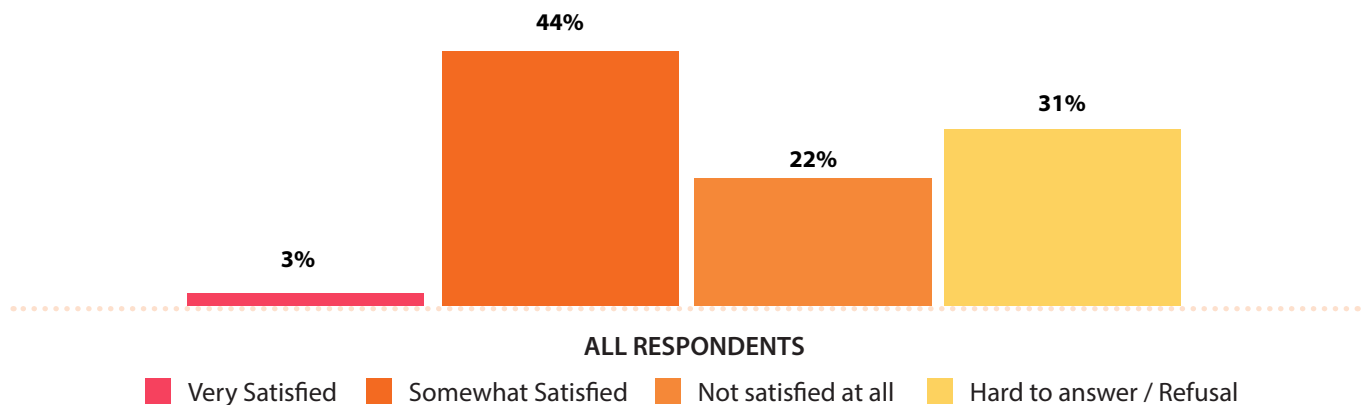


Chart 5. In general, how satisfied are you with the support provided by social protection services to children and adolescents in your place of residence?

In Kharkiv, 40% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the support provided by social services to children and adolescents in the city. Conversely, 28% expressed dissatisfaction and 30% hesitated or refused to answer. While many men were satisfied (40%), a significant portion (32%) struggled to decide. Women's opinions were more evenly divided: 39% were satisfied, 25% were dissatisfied, and 35% did not answer or refused. Among young people aged 18 to 29, the majority were satisfied with the support from social protection services. Respondents in the age category 30 to 54 were almost evenly split between satisfaction (37%), dissatisfaction (33%), and difficulty in answering or refusal (30%). In the 55+ category, the majority remained satisfied (42%).

5. The overwhelming majority of respondents exhibited trust in the social services responsible for safeguarding children and adolescents within their locality, comprising 62% of all respondents. An intriguing observation arose from the data: nearly an equivalent proportion of respondents expressed distrust in these services (19%) as those who either refused to respond or were unable to do so (19%). Specifically, 66% of respondents with minor children express confidence in the social services for child and adolescent protection

A comparable pattern is observed in Kharkiv, albeit with a slightly higher level of distrust compared to Dnipro (21% of all respondents in Kharkiv). Conversely, in Dnipro, a higher proportion of respondents were unable to provide an answer than those who expressed distrust (22% and 17%, respectively, of all respondents in Dnipro). This sentiment is consistent across genders. Regarding age demographics, it becomes evident that the majority of individuals exhibiting trust in child and adolescent protection services fall within the age bracket of 30 to 54, constituting 64% within this specified category.

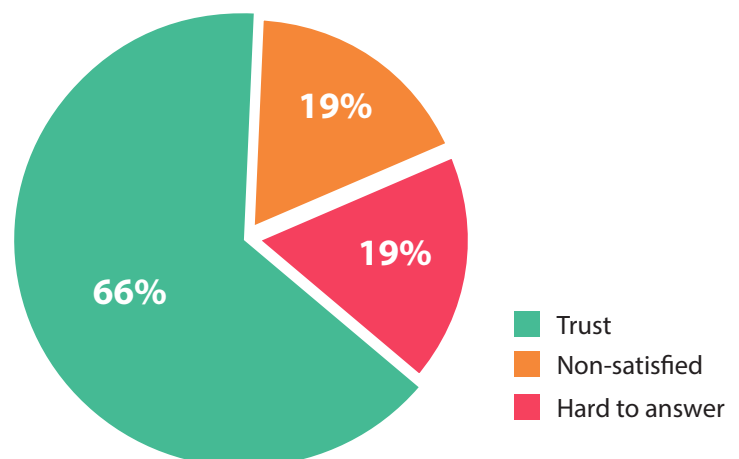


Chart 6. How much do you trust the social services for the protection of children and adolescents in your place of residence?

Roughly half of the respondents expressed confidence in the social services responsible for safeguarding children and adolescents within their city of residence, constituting 53% of all respondents. A notable proportion of respondents (27%) remained uncertain about these services, while 20% either found it challenging to respond or declined to do so. In Kharkiv, 50% displayed clear confidence, while 33% were uncertain, and 17% of Kharkiv residents either refused to respond or were unable to do so. In Dnipro, the distribution of responses followed a similar pattern, with the majority expressing confidence (56%), 22% remaining uncertain, and 22% unable to provide an answer. Gender-wise, responses were evenly distributed across categories, with similar trends observed across different age groups, where 50% or more of children and adolescents expressed confidence in social services.

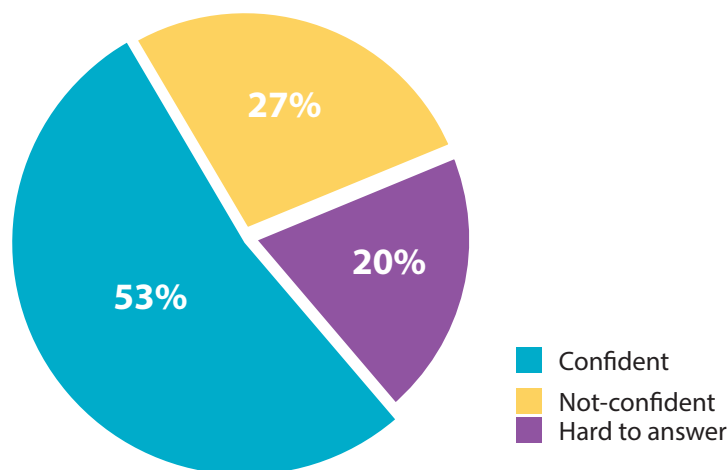


Chart 7. How confident do you feel in social services for the protection of children and adolescents in your place of residence?

3. EXPECTATIONS AND FUTURE VIEWING OF CHILD STATE PROTECTION SYSTEM AND SERVICES

Respondents highlighted their vision of the ideal state of the social protection system in the future (in 2 years). This vision included universal access to all necessary services (27%), improved accessibility and quality of social services for all (20%), services adapted to the needs of each family (16%), effective and flexible support programs (16%), providing access to various forms of assistance (12%), and a wide range of programs for the integration and reintegration of marginalized groups (5%).

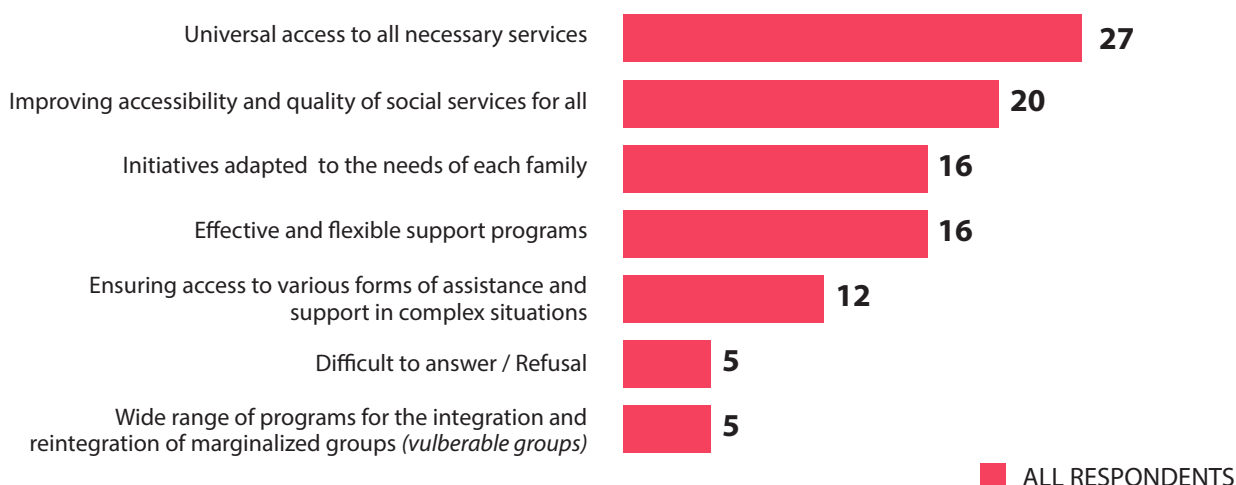


Chart 8. How do you imagine the ideal state of the social protection system in the future (in 2 years)

EXPECTATIONS AND FUTURE VIEWING OF CHILD STATE PROTECTION SYSTEM AND SERVICES

Parents expectations

Parents during FGDs highlighted their desire for greater transparency and openness from social services and local authorities regarding child protection and meeting their needs in the future. For instance, a man from Dnipropetrovsk Oblast mentioned the importance of having a more transparent voting system for projects funded by the public budget and subsequent reporting on them.



*There's this issue where when you call the hotline, they tell you one thing. But when you go directly to the office and inquire about it, you get a completely different answer. It's the same with everything else. They'll tell you 'free education,' 'free admission.' Everything will be free for you. But when you actually come, I'll tell you how you want it on the hotline. They say, 'the hotline didn't inform you correctly, you misunderstood it.' There's a big difference between being informed and actually coming and finding out how it will be."
(FGD, Kherson Oblast, M)*

Children and teenagers' expectations

- **Engagement in volunteer activities:** There is a positive image of such activity, which generates enthusiasm and a desire to be involved. For example, assisting the military, as well as lonely elderly individuals, environmental monitoring, garbage collection, animal care, etc.
- **Increased accessibility to psychological support:** Involving specialists experienced in working with children and adolescents who understand their needs. Training to combat bullying is relevant. Additional reasons for seeking psychological assistance include continued shelling and the proximity to the front line, tension due to children and adolescents being in fairly confined spaces, especially in Kherson.
- **Orientation towards providing useful, practical knowledge and skills, varying depending on the age category:** For older adolescents, providing first aid training; for younger adolescents (Dnipro, boys aged 8-10), swimming, karate, chess, foreign language; for girls of middle and older adolescence, courses on self-care (cosmetics, manicure, etc.).
- **Career guidance assistance:** Conducting career orientation tests, inviting representatives from various professions to talk about the specifics of their work, creating a space where one can learn about various professions, and trying out different positions.
- Creating spaces for leisure activities, such as chill zones or in the format of anti-café (establishments where payment is made for the time spent, which includes certain refreshments, activities, etc.). The opportunity to meet and spend time with friends in a cozy place, use the internet, and charge gadgets.

When creating spaces for children and adolescents, the participants suggested considering the following: adherence to safety measures/ provision of shelter, organisation of leisure activities (workshops, movie screenings, board games, tournaments/contests), and "engaging in some interesting activity together." Offline spaces are welcomed - the groups missed face-to-face meetings. However, a more realistic and simpler approach is the organisation of regular events involving children and adolescents in an online format - easier to organise, and easier to participate (no need to travel).



When more people unite with a common goal, I think it will be very effective," FGD Kharkiv, girls, 13-17 years old

Friendship bonds are not just a social need but also a power source of strength. They help reduce stress levels, improve mental health and well-being, and support a fulfilling and healthier life.

Future priorities of the child welfare system: experts' points of view.

Experts emphasised the importance of the social support system for families in difficult life circumstances and the protection of children, especially those affected by armed conflict. The reduction of personnel in the social support system led to an increase in social problems and complicated violence prevention. Working with children affected by armed conflict allows them to receive additional opportunities and benefits. The importance of involving psychologists and experts from other fields was also emphasised. Collaboration with psychologists and experts contributes to better learning and development for children. In addition to human resource development, it is necessary to create accessible infrastructure facilities. It is important to create safe and convenient spaces for children's recreation and learning, such as resilience centres and play areas. To ensure all these services and initiatives, support from non-governmental organisations, volunteers, and charitable foundations is essential. Adequate funding is crucial for the child welfare system.

A significant problem is the insufficient number of child-friendly spaces because parents cannot send children outdoors due to safety concerns and the lack of proper socialisation amid online learning. Spaces for children's leisure activities require safe conditions, reliable buildings, and sufficient funding for equipment and supplies. The stability and further development of these spaces can be ensured through several avenues:

1. Managed by grassroots organisations. This can help maintain their functionality and funding, especially considering greater transparency and management efficiency.
2. Managed by government institutions. However, experts caution that the bureaucracy typical of such institutions may pose a real challenge for any organisation. The possibility of incorporating child-friendly spaces into the education system is welcomed. This can help ensure stability and funding while maintaining high-quality services. Local staff should also be involved in working in such spaces because they are more trusted by the community, and community support is crucial.

To succeed in these programs, it is important to ensure affordability, high-quality services, and safe environments. It is important to work towards creating an inclusive environment where every child can feel comfortable, regardless of their needs and abilities, including children with special needs (e.g., visual and hearing impairments). This would be a significant step towards creating an inclusive environment.

Resources needed to support the child welfare system:

- Human resource development, including the need for further training in psychology and anxiety management.
- Stable funding (state social services should learn to fundraise).
- Construction and equipping of shelters for the population (safe environment).

Additionally, there is a problem of insufficient support for orphaned children and children without parental care due to the lack of specialists and the remoteness of areas where vulnerable groups reside. Expanding the staff through funding from non-governmental organisations, which will be involved in providing services and support, is proposed.

Ensuring a qualified workforce for the child welfare service system is possible through:

- Increasing wages: It is important to raise salaries to make this sector more attractive to qualified professionals.
- Employee training: Further training, including in psychology, social pedagogy, and law. Experts also emphasised the importance of dedication and empathy in child welfare-related work, which is facilitated by effective communication with clients.

There are opportunities for partnership and collaboration between grassroots organisations, government structures, and other stakeholders to support the child protection system. Experts actively advocated for improving the child protection system through the collaboration of various organisations and institutions. Some experts already have experience in cooperating with government agencies and other non-governmental organisations. Collaboration can be achieved through joint grant applications by grassroots organisations and government bodies. The option where the state finances projects and purchases special services from grassroots organisations is also positively assessed. This can be effective provided the state has corresponding structure and personnel who understand social protection and can properly direct funding.



Abbreviations

CF	Charitable Foundation
CPS	Child Protection Service
CSE	Complex Life Circumstances
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IRC	Inclusive Resource Center
MU	Municipal Institution
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
TH	Territorial Community

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We are truly grateful for the collective effort and collaboration that made this study possible.



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World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities to reach their full potential by tackling the root causes of poverty and injustice. World Vision serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender.