War-time volunteering and population displacement

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research article

War-time volunteering and population displacement: from spontaneous help to organised volunteering in post-2014 Ukraine

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The paper reveals the role of volunteering in support of internally displaced people in a context with no or few regulations regarding volunteering and when the state and international organisations cannot fulfil the demands for assistance. It argues that 'pure' characteristics of volunteering are not applicable in such a context. The paper contributes to the literature by combining the understanding of volunteering as a hybrid phenomenon and a process model of volunteering. Drawing on empirical studies conducted by the authors, the paper explores volunteering in Ukraine through the lens of its individual and situational nature. Volunteering manifested itself in spontaneous actions at the beginning of the war and displacement in 2014 as a reaction to urgent needs for evacuation and humanitarian help, and later in the work of NGOs established to provide further support to internally displaced people (IDPs). The developed volunteering practices have a high capacity to support the post-war reconstruction in Ukraine.

Introduction

The number of internally displaced people (IDPs) is exceeding the number of refugees globally. At the end of 2022, 71.1 million people were living in internal displacement worldwide, with the number of displacements caused by conflict and violence consisting of 28.3 million people, mainly in low- and middle-income countries. Forced displacement requires timely and efficient evacuation, providing food and accommodation assistance, and health and mental health support. The conditions of such support are challenging as the context is often characterised by military threats,

demolished transport infrastructure, and the lack of capacities of some states and international organisations to react timely and efficiently.

The experiences of local people and communities (Nguya and Siddiqui, 2020) and inclusion of IDPs in the elaboration of policies (MacGuire, 2018) are essential for durable solutions. At the same time, there is a lack of literature that would address the role of volunteers in dealing with the multifaceted challenges of forced internal displacement in low- and middle-income countries. As Garkisch et al's (2017) systematic review showed, most of the publications in this regard were based on the research conducted in the so-called Global North, mostly in the US, UK and Canada.

The empirical reality of society under extreme social conditions such as war, and the following population displacement in low- and middle-income countries, brings us to a range of debates regarding a critical rethinking of volunteering. We view volunteering as a hybrid phenomenon arguing that terminologically, neither spontaneous help nor 'pure' volunteering are sufficient to reveal the role of volunteers in providing both urgent help to IDPs and designing durable solutions and policies. Besides, for a long time, IDPs were rarely considered as a specific category, until 1998 when the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement were presented to the UN Commission on Human Rights 1998, forming the foundation for a normative framework for addressing the needs of IDPs (UN OCHA, nd).

Ukraine provides a unique case study to explore the role of volunteering in support of the displaced population as it has the highest figure of IDPs ever recorded for any country: 16.9 million (IDMC, 2023: 6), and 15.7 million in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and protection (UN OCHA, nd). Ukraine's IDPs are massively dependent on voluntary assistance. In the face of full-scale Russian aggression volunteer assistance has unfolded in a matter of hours. Most international organisations, with their considerable financial and human resources, were unable to provide the flexible and rapid response that volunteer groups were able to offer, rapidly building logistics and other networks including businesses (Stoddard et al, 2022). It would not have been possible without prior experience. Therefore, we turn to the volunteer activities in Ukraine with IDPs who fled from Donetsk and Luhansk oblast and the Crimean Peninsula as the result of the first wave of Russian aggression between 2014 and 2021, which caused internal displacement of over 1.4 million people (Slovo I Dilo, 2021).

The present paper's aim is to reveal how civil society addresses the needs of IDPs in a context of protracted conflict with no or few regulations regarding volunteering activities, and when the state and international organisations cannot fulfil the demands for assistance. It contributes to the literature by combining the understanding of volunteering as a hybrid phenomenon and process model of volunteering in a context of mass population.

The paper starts with a review of studies of the role of volunteering in support of the IDPs, understanding of volunteering as a hybrid phenomenon (Hustinx et al, 2010; Shachar et al, 2019), and the process model of volunteering (Musick and Wilson, 2008; Wilson, 2012). Then we review the literature regarding the rapid rise of volunteering activities in Ukraine since Euromaidan in 2014 and the start of Russian aggression. Next, after presenting the methodology of our qualitative and quantitative studies in Ukraine among volunteers and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), we discuss our data revealing the transition from spontaneous voluntary assistance to regular volunteerism and collaboration with business, civil society and

state. We show how volunteerism, due to its hybridity, not only provided help to IDPs directly, but mediated and coordinated the responses from businesses, international organisations, and authorities in a context of blurred legal framework and lack of state resources. In the conclusion, we argue, that 'pure' characteristics of volunteering are not effective within the context of displacement in Ukraine, and understanding volunteering as a hybrid phenomenon helped to reveal its role in social policies at local and national levels.

Understanding volunteering in a context of internal population displacement: the hybridity approach and a process model

Many studies about volunteering to help with evacuation and provide humanitarian aid in a context of internal displacement take place within disasters. Spontaneous help is often the only way to react timely and efficiently to disasters (Twigg and Mosel, 2017). The extensive review conducted by Helsloot and Ruitenber showed that 'the willingness of people to assist with disasters and serious accidents is generally rather abundant' and called 'informal mass assault' (Helsloot and Ruitenber, 2004: 103). Disasters are met with a strong response from the bottom–up leadership that emerges voluntarily and collectively (Lough, 2021). Such a response provides not only immediate help, but often leads to political action to improve conditions in a context of protracted displacement. For example, post–tsunami in Indonesia IDPs mobilised collective protests and made political claims (Hedman, 2009). The literature about the role of local volunteers in a context of displacement during war or conflict is less common. Still, a study on Northern Ireland in the 1970s showed the role of solidarity and social capital in providing support for the displaced (Gilmartin, 2023). IDPs in Columbia build networks and provide strong 'confrontational collective action' against the governmental policies (Schouw Iversen, 2022). Besides, as stated above, there is a lack of research in volunteering in a context of internal displacement in low– and middle–income countries (Garkisch et al, 2017).

Spontaneous help might not be the most effective mechanism of support in a situation of protracted conflict and displacement, since durable solutions are needed to improve the lives of IDPs. Still, in a context like Ukraine, with the lack of financial capacities and legislation that would support IDPs' rights, the third sector becomes a critical actor in responding to the challenges that IDPs face. We argue that 'volunteering' in its 'pure' characteristics such as being unpaid, out of free will, conducted for the benefits of others, and associated with a non–profit, non–governmental sector (Shachar et al, 2019), would not be applicable. First, this is because of blurred boundaries between community support and volunteering. Following Omoto and Snyder, we understand that the community context 'both influences the volunteer process and can be the target of volunteer efforts' (Omoto and Snyder (2002): 863). Secondly, the 'pure' characteristics of volunteering do not work, as the urgency of displacement in countries that do not have developed institutions working with refugees or IDPs means, also, that the word 'sector' or 'formal organisation' is not appealing as a conceptual framework. In this regard, Wilson's critique of the perception of volunteering is quite relevant: 'Particularly troublesome is the attachment of volunteer work to formal organizations, which means that communities or countries where the infrastructure of nongovernmental organizations outside the private sector is poorly developed will by definition have fewer volunteers' (Wilson, 2012: 176).

Therefore, there is a gap in conceptual understanding of volunteering in the context of internal population displacement in low- and middle-income countries. Combining an experience of volunteering as a hybrid phenomenon and a process model of volunteering can be a suitable model for overcoming this gap.

The hybridity manifests itself in the understanding that 'pure' forms are hardly ever found in real life; third-sector representatives, including business structures, operate in a particular institutional environment, and both non-governmental and governmental structures can be a source of volunteering (Hustinx et al, 2010; Shachar et al, 2019). In addition, the hybridity of volunteering manifests itself 'in the conflation of various motivations, discourses, and practices that can be discerned in the participation patterns at nongovernmental organizations' (Shachar et al, 2019: 8). The hybridity of volunteering is manifesting itself also via political action and work (Shachar et al, 2019). Thus, volunteer activities, international organisations' and state-led support are often intertwined in academic debates regarding the role of the third sector in dealing with challenges related to migration, constantly needing more understanding of the cooperation and coordination of different actors, including authorities (Garkisch et al, 2017).

We approach volunteering via the process model (Musick and Wilson, 2008; Wilson, 2012). While two of the stages of the process, namely antecedents and consequences, are widely explored in the literature, the experiences and practices of volunteering themselves remain under-researched (Wilson, 2012: 176).

Russian aggression and forced displacement in 2014 intensified the process of creating social networks, informal coalitions which, as a result, formed a space of 'weak' ties (Granovetter, 1983). Participation in such coalitions became a tool for overcoming mistrust and a mechanism for building social capital, through the formation of ties between representatives of different social and status groups including state institutions and business. The paper addresses the hybrid character of volunteering in Ukraine via its relations with business, communities, social welfare, and state authorities. We argue that the character of these relations impacts the state of the civil society role in addressing issues with displacement in 2022.

Volunteering in Ukraine after Euromaidan

Pre-2014 studies in Ukraine, such as Phillips' study on women volunteers, showed that 'the dismantling of the social society net, and the revamping of economic institutions' made social activism, especially in form of mutual aid associations 'possible and necessary' (Phillips, 2005: 508). Some studies reflected, though, on the relatively low level of volunteering despite the political freedoms in Ukraine in that period (Kamerāde et al, 2016). However, between the 2004 Orange Revolution and the start of Euromaidan protests in November 2013, Ukrainian civil society made a 'qualitative leap' and started seeing itself as 'a fully-fledged actor in the reform process and demands its inclusion in policymaking' (Solonenko, 2015: 220). Maidan 2014 was a pivotal moment that strengthened solidarity among Ukrainians. While some third-sector groups demonstrated a transfer of social and human capital to the situation of mass displacement (Worschech, 2017), many organisations active today and providing help to IDPs were created at the very beginning of the conflict, their support arising out of a spontaneous offer of help (Drozd, 2017). Channell-Justice considers the rise of volunteering in post-Maidan Ukraine as a part of neoliberal governance and democracy that includes 'a shifting relationship between governing

and the governed' (Channell–Justice, 2022: 15). Many informal groups established during Euromaidan later became formal organisations (Krasynska and Martin, 2017).

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) index of sustainability of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) of Ukraine recorded an increase of the institutional capacity, financial viability, advocacy campaigns, service provision, and public perception of CSOs in 2014 (CSO SI, 2014: 16). The 2020 index showed that CSOs in Ukraine benefit from a relatively high level of sustainability, just under most of those in the Northern Tier countries (CSO SI, 2020: 15). The rapid increase in involvement in various forms of volunteering in the context of Russian aggression, war and occupation has taken place in Ukraine against a background of consistently low rates of membership in formal civic organisations (at 14–17%) (*Ukrainske syspilstvo*, nd: 449). As Shapovalova and Burlyuk noted, 'the ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine emerges as a key factor shaping civic activism since the Euromaidan' (Shapovalova and Burlyuk, 2018: 28). The volunteering activities included assistance to the military, community support, mobility support (to assist people with mobility issues to cross border controls), and support to IDPs, among others.

Othering and social distancing were significant issues faced by IDPs (Sereda, 2020). Government media often supported such behaviour by portraying IDPs as victims or, instead, threats (Rimpiläinen, 2020). IDPs often found themselves 'trapped' within the power geometry which reproduced the war lexicon and were blind to the intersections of displacement with gender, older age, and health (Kuznetsova and Mikheieva, 2020; Kuznetsova, 2021). The third sector became a significant factor of an agency that both supported IDPs in Ukraine in becoming 'assets' to their communities and cultivating self-reliance (Uehling, 2021), sharing knowledge and social capital (Novikova and Shamileva, 2017). Volunteering played a significant role in supporting communities in war-torn territories of eastern Ukraine (Stepaniuk, 2022) via 'pooling resources and consolidating solidarity needed to solve common problems and work for the benefit of community growth' (Syla, 2018: 154), and promoting a dialogue with different stakeholders. As a result, as Jarymowycz states, during the war in eastern Ukraine volunteering became 'the most trusted societal institution and a space where ideals around state-society relations were being reimagined' (Jarymowycz, 2019: 131), though volunteers did not intend to replace state functions. From the legal perspective, at that time Ukraine did not have special legislation that would provide policies for IDPs.

At the start of the invasion in 2022, Ukrainian society responded to the rapid demands related to evacuations and providing support to displaced people in extreme conditions of war. Most, or as some analytics mentioned, virtually all humanitarian aid in Ukraine 'was organised and implemented by local actors, including some 150 existing national non-governmental organisations (NGOs), church groups and some 1,700 newly created local aid groups' (Stoddard et al, 2022: 3). We argue that it is not a new phenomenon, as our study demonstrates how volunteering in a context of internal displacement before 2022, in its broad 'hybrid' sense, became an agent of social change and impacted social policies at local and national levels.

We aim to understand volunteering as a hybrid phenomenon based on an in-depth study of volunteer experiences and practices in Ukraine after the beginning of Russian aggression in 2014. The hybridity of volunteering manifests itself both in a fusion of motivations, discourses and practices, and in specific configurations of cooperation and coordination between different actors, including volunteers, business, international organisations, and state institutions. Accordingly, in our study we sought to identify

and explore: a) how logistically coherent and well-organised interactions are formed in place of spontaneous volunteer reactions in a context of blurred legislative framework; b) what space of interactions and cooperation between different actors Ukrainian volunteer initiatives form around themselves; and c) whether the peculiarities and configuration of this cooperation allow us to strengthen the theoretical argumentation in favour of the hybridity of the volunteerism phenomenon.

Methodology

Data collection

The paper is based on a series of field studies by the authors conducted between 2016 and 2018, which included surveys of representatives from NGOs and semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviewing is a pivotal tool used in research on the role of informal civil society (Belina, 2022) and provides a voice to unaffiliated volunteers (Esterberg, 2002). Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted in the Lviv, Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and Mariupol, with representatives of NGOs (n = 8); international organisations and their affiliations in Ukraine (n = 14); central and municipal authorities (n = 3); charities staff (n=3); and individual volunteers and members of volunteer groups (n = 2).

We employed the purposive quota sample (Campbell et al, 2020) to ensure that the study involved participants from different types of civil and volunteering organisations, for example, providing legal advice, transport, housing and humanitarian aid, and so on. As the research was conducted in 2016–2018, several years after the start of the Russian aggression, most of the study participants had previous experience of volunteer work, which then took various organisational forms. It also helped to record the transition from spontaneous volunteering to organised forms of activity aimed at helping war-affected populations.

The interviews were complemented by desk-based research on the structure of the organisations, their main projects and engagement with the government and business, and then analysis of open sources, such as Facebook posts by volunteers.

Also, 138 NGO representatives from government-controlled areas of Ukraine were surveyed in March 2018. The survey employed the convenience sample and administrated online partly via the snowballing technique, partly via posts on social media in specialised forums. We invited representatives of those civic organisations that help IDPs (see Kuznetsova and Mikheieva, 2018).

The research complied with the ethical requirements of the universities organising the study. Participants provided informed consent and were informed about their rights to withdraw from the study. They could select between being anonymous or representing themselves and/or their organisations.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. At the initial stage of the analysis, we conducted a line-by-line open coding of the interviews which related directly to volunteering as a process. In the next phase, the open codes were reassembled by linking categories and subcategories. The codes were then categorised, and the axis was built from them (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Axial coding allowed us to look at the primary codes we constructed in the wider context of the narrative, and to work with the causes and conditions of the phenomena and processes under study

(Gresswell, 2007; Järvinen and Mik–Meyer, 2020). In our analysis we focused on the central phenomenon: volunteering related to the needs of displaced civilians in the context of the first wave of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014. This made it possible to link together the process of volunteering itself and the conditions that facilitated the initiation of volunteering; the characteristics of volunteering that shape certain reactions of both the volunteer and others; the effects of volunteering on the volunteers themselves; and the interaction of volunteers with business structures and public institutions.

From spontaneous help to the large-scale institutional cooperation: the hybrid character of volunteering at the start of the displacement

Volunteers were the main support group during the first phases of forced displacement in 2014. Some of them were IDPs, some were representatives of host communities neighbouring the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. For instance, 'Donbas SOS' was founded in 2014 as a hotline used for the quick coordination of help for injured people. As of 2019, the organisation had five coordinators and around 40 volunteers for the hotline; also, there was a network of regional volunteers in Donetsk, Luhansk and 14 more regions of Ukraine. Another organisation, 'Station Kharkiv' got its name because of the specificity of its work. Its volunteers were at the railway station to meet people escaping from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions consumed by war. The organisation's volunteers provide help to IDPs, such as in searching for places of residence, or providing advice regarding all possible questions from families forced to rapidly leave their homes for an indefinite time. Just in the period from June till December 2014 'Station Kharkiv' managed to find places of residence for 30,000 displaced people. 'All money was from sponsors and concerned citizens of Kharkiv', according to the local mass media: 'The authority didn't help either with money, or with places of residence for refugees, or with catering arrangements' (Vesti.UA, 2014). Indeed, the state social protection system was not ready for such mass internal displacement, and in most cases their role was restricted to the preparation of documents for allowances to be received by the separate categories of IDPs. There were not enough resources and technologies for the social assistance of the displaced people (Semigina and Gusak, 2015).

IDPs faced massive bureaucratic challenges in receiving pensions and benefits, while those who lived in occupied territories and were not registered as IDPs could not rely on any state support (Bulakh, 2020; Kuznetsova and Mikheieva, 2020). The state relied on a very static image of an IDP as a registered person (Kuznetsova and Mikheieva, 2020), though an IDP can be considered as a 'hybrid category', because some people do not have such a status while still having specific needs and vulnerabilities because of displacement or living in temporarily occupied territories (Ivashchenko-Stadnik, 2017).

IDPs provided examples of 'organic' place-based leadership (Lough, 2021) gathering and distributing resources necessary for relocation and humanitarian assistance of the forcibly displaced. In Mariupol, one of the respondents explained why she, together with the other volunteers and NGOs, assisted in moving 1,200 people from the district which she had left a few months prior to the start of the war:

> 'I know that in my house, in my apartment block, a whole family is living. They came; they have two children. We greet everybody; we walk in the street on the weekend, meet. All of us can get into such a situation; we don't know

what is going to happen to us tomorrow: that's why I started doing this. How can one do differently? You are a human, that's all.' (interview, Mariupol, 2017)

The increase of mutual assistance was observed not only in the south-east of Ukraine near the area of military actions, but also in other regions. Here is confirmation from a respondent of help provided for a number of IDPs, mainly children, living in one of the northern regions:

'I arrived and got to know that we had a group [of IDPs] here; there were children among 180 people from Donetsk…. I went to the local school and got acquainted with the management. I asked them to make an announcement at a school and [asked people] to bring anything they had at home…. And gradually everybody started to bring, bring, bring…. Then, people started to come, approximately 80 people [per day].' (interview, female, 40–50 years old, 2017)

The spontaneous efforts were very soon supplemented with more organised support. The International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Office for Refugees, Danish and Norwegian Refugee Councils, the Red Cross Society, Caritas, and a range of other international establishments started monitoring the situation in Ukraine and targeted assistance for separate categories of the Ukrainian IDPs, very often by means of projects by local communities and NGOs.

The complexity of the situation required equally complex logistics and legal and financial expertise. To share information and expertise some volunteer groups started supporting each other. This cooperation resulted in flexible and complex CSOs, which included a variety of volunteer groups as independent and autonomous units. One of the All-Ukrainian CSOs, Ukrainian Frontier, described the origins of their organisation this way:

'We have our accounting and central office in Kyiv, of course, because it is more convenient to interact with our government and all sorts of organisations there. But we have branches in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, Odesa, and Kharkiv, everywhere else! Ukrainian Frontier was therefore set up to provide legal and administrative support to volunteer organisations, in essence…. So this is where it all started – the volunteer initiatives that were there – they started joining Ukrainian Frontier when they did not yet have a legal entity of their own.' (interview with a representative of Ukrainian Frontier, 2018)

The outbreak of war in 2014 was the point of sharp activation of volunteer activity in Ukraine. In these conditions, the hybrid character of Ukrainian volunteering was clearly manifested, both in the different motivations of people who came to understand the need for volunteering, and in the processes of creating large-scale networks of interaction, which formed at almost all levels, including both informal networks, NGOs, business, government agencies, and international organisations.

Volunteering in a challenging context of the blurry legal framework

In Ukraine, the activity of non-profit organisations of different types (civil associations, political parties, charitable organisations, religious organisations, associations of

apartment building owners, trade unions, and so on) is regulated by special laws (GCC nd). However, the specificity of the initial spontaneous reaction of active representatives of society had the intensive character of initiatives with little knowledge of the legal framework.

The tense expectation of the state's response to such activity, on the one hand, and the need to legally formalise all the transactions with all those involved in volunteering, on the other hand, led to the emergence of volunteer aid for volunteers: "In fact, we had planned that we would help them create this legal entity, our lawyers would help them write the charter, register the organisation and so on, and so it turned out" (All-Ukrainian's CSO, Ukrainian Frontier, 2018).

Still, voluntary associations faced inflexible systems at different levels and confronted established procedures and rules. The lack of legislation that would legalise this activity, and also provide clear mechanisms for publicity and accountability, have put volunteers in a peculiarly uncertain position.

The study participants mentioned that they were willing to cooperate with the Ukrainian Tax Service but could not produce documentation that could be considered by the tax authorities. At the same time, such kinds of informal economy are widespread in Ukraine: as the recent National Bank of Ukraine study demonstrated, nearly a quarter of Ukraine's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is from the shadow economy (National Bank of Ukraine, 2020). Therefore, it was not a surprise in our research that due to the shadowy nature of some of their activities, businesses were often interested in paying in cash from personal money rather than transferring money officially.

Volunteer organisations have had just as many problems in their relations with large foreign donors, which preferred to support organisations with a solid reputation built up over years. However, most of the volunteer groups that emerged in 2014 as a reaction to the dramatic situation in the country could not, in fact, have such a reputational history. This also created a gap between the existing grant-making procedures and mechanisms and the real need in society for instantaneous volunteer responses to people's needs.

In 2017 more than 80% of requests for means provision for the humanitarian needs of Ukraine have not been funded (Metre et al, 2017). Despite the constant lack of resources, even from the international actors, the local organisations have been improving within the limits of the possible, based both on their own developments and on skills received by means of training and experience exchange with the foreign partners. Because of the involvement of the international organisations, who brought better methods of working with IDPs, as well as resource possibilities from the third sector getting stronger, the quality and diversity of the services provided has been gradually increasing. The public reaction to the different problems faced by IDPs became quicker and more efficient as a result.

In general, the institutional environment, which includes the peculiarities of the previous development of political systems and their contemporary institutional frameworks, forms a specific configuration of volunteering. Including new subjects, often unexpected, in volunteer activity, further emphasises the hybridity of volunteer activity and points to the complexity of the theoretical distinction of assistance to the needy depending on the subject of the aid. We often see mobile, fluid, situational interactions between individual leaders, volunteer groups, NGOs, businesses, government agencies, national and international donors and political organisations. The configuration of these interactions adapts to the need and, therefore, is unstable. As a result, the understanding of the logic of creating spontaneous partnerships in

conditions of uncertainty, rather than proven cooperation schemes, becomes more critical for volunteer activity.

Interactions between voluntary sector and authorities: new spaces of trust and cooperation

The survey of representatives of 138 NGOs in Ukraine, carried out within the scope of the research project in 2018, showed that the forced displaced persons more often received the following services: consultations regarding employment (81%); psychological support (79%); arrangements for free time (67%); assistance in renewal of payment of allowances and pensions (58% and 53%); and help with finding a place of residence (49%). In most cases, NGOs and volunteers were forced to deal with multifaceted case management: as a rule, people who asked for help had the burden of a whole set of problems which could not be solved separately. For instance, lost documents caused restrictions in the search for accommodation and employment. Older adults with suspended pensions could not pay for the accommodation, especially if they did not have any other support. To react quickly and efficiently to the IDPs' needs, volunteer groups and NGOs took on a whole range of interactions between the population, civil society, and the state, building relationships and communication which did not exist before.

Our research revealed that the key forms of interaction between volunteers and state structures after 2014 were about advocacy for IDPs' rights; development of strategies to solve key problems of IDPs both in cooperation with authorities, civil organisation and media; informal meetings and lobbying of interests of both affected categories of population and different stakeholders that solve their problems; active influence, motivation and training of representatives of the state authorities in writing and submitting projects for international funding; and incorporation of certain types of volunteer work as a function of the state body.

Such interactions quickly uncovered structural problems with the decision-making processes at the state level. For example, a representative of the Donbas SOS organisation described their experience with the Ministry for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories Internally Displaced Persons of Ukraine[1] as follows:

> 'We have signed a memorandum with the ministry and our hotline now works in such a way that we cover all consultations. If there are problems on the ground, we pass on all the information to such an organisation as the IDP Adviser. Well, these are mainly pension issues, social issues – they communicate with the departments. And if there are systemic problems, we pass it on to the ministry. But again, the ministry says it will refer this to working groups. And it passes it on to the working groups. I am, for example, one of the coordinators of the working group, that is, in fact, we are now passing it on to me. The ministry says: we don't have anybody to deal with this. Thus, in fact, the ministry is in the scheme, but it is not working.' (Donbas SOS)

This means that NGOs supporting IDPs not only helped to coordinate and inform the work but were the key agents in 'getting things done'. Systematic joint activities among the state, NGOs, and international organisations have generated experiences,

on the one hand, and a critical approach towards state policies, on the other. Because of their flexibility and willingness to learn, voluntary organisations quickly adopted the experience of international organisations and converted it into active action. For example, the Right to Protection (R2P) charitable fund, initially operating as the constituent organisation of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) since 2001 (Right to Protection, nd), was then established by HIAS as an independent charitable foundation in 2013. R2P became one of the key leaders of the civil society sector in the field of migration in Ukraine. Interviews with representatives of this organisation revealed that they had already elaborated standard procedures for litigating typical situations of rights violations. These activities have significantly mitigated the impact of discriminatory political decisions against people affected by the war.

The rise of such activities, their visible and public nature, has gradually begun to work as reputational and social capital. A research participant shared the experience that wearing an NGO's branded T-shirt and a badge often helped in communication with banks related to IDPs:

> '… when we come in a T-shirt and with a badge, yes, and when we can just come in an ordinary T-shirt and see which is more effective. When we come in our work T-shirt, with a badge, the bank staff start doing their job a little bit better, that's what I wanted to say….' (R2P)

Right to Protection had the same experiences while communicating with social welfare services. All of this has had a significant overall impact on the way state agencies deal with their clients. The understanding that a situation of rights violations would not go unnoticed forced officials to act strictly in accordance with laws and procedures. This increased the general competence of public officials and also created a new culture of public services. After all the public debate about the rhetoric of the state representatives in relation to the IDPs and the population of the occupied territories (see Kuznetsova and Mikheieva, 2020), government officials now clearly acknowledge the people as the state's primary value.

Where the correct procedures were followed, representatives of volunteer groups and civic activists initiated innovations that aimed at improving the quality of public services, both by actively encouraging the authorities to seek additional sources of funding (writing grants, projects, budgets) and by making small improvements to the service delivery process.

> 'When there were queues at the social welfare department, where people were standing really for three, four and five days to get an appointment with a specialist, well we… have crushed it. [There is now] just a hotline. A person can call by phone and make an appointment, so that he/she does not have to stand for three or four days…. Elementary simple, but it cost three months of work.' (NGO Protection of the rights and freedoms of internally displaced people: Right to Life)

Direct cooperation played an important role in this regard. The low civic engagement of the Ukrainian population before 2014 was due to a lack of trust in its effectiveness (for example, Kamerāde et al, 2016). This, in turn, acted as a self-limiting factor: distrust in effectiveness prevented people from trying to engage with authorities

to achieve any impact. However, speaking about a broader context, as one of our studies has shown, the shift from reflection to direct action radically changes the situation (Mikheieva et al, 2020). A survey, conducted in 2020 in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson oblasts, demonstrated that about 40% of the respondents have tried to solve their problems via contacting local authorities and enterprises, signing petitions, or participating in volunteer activities (Mikheieva et al, 2020). Most of them assessed their actions as effective. The emergence of success stories has, in turn, encouraged the spread of such practices. However, the business sector, not the state, was the main partner for providing volunteering activities and, in many cases, the boundaries between business and NGOs were blurred.

Ultimately, understanding the diversity of volunteer activities and the networks of interaction that ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of assistance allows us to move away from the traditional opposition between volunteers, businesses, international organisations, and state response to urgent social needs. In this case, volunteerism, due to its hybridity, proved to play the role of a mediator that links different levels of response to social needs and ensures close interaction between different actors in assisting IDPs.

Conclusion

This paper contributes to a critical perspective in understanding volunteering as a hybrid phenomenon (Hustinx et al, 2010; Shachar et al, 2019) within the process model, in the overlooked context of internal population displacement caused by war in low- and middle- income countries. We argue that 'pure' characteristics of volunteering are not effective in the context of the blurred legal framework for volunteering activities and the urgency of the response to the displaced population's needs, that established organisations or authorities could not cover. Spontaneous volunteering in a time of a war and protracted displacement, as our study demonstrated, can become a crucial actor not only for the urgent humanitarian support of the displaced population, but hugely contributes to shaping relations between different stakeholders including authorities, third-sector organisations and international sponsors, and designing new policies.

In Ukraine, volunteering manifested in spontaneous actions at the beginning of the displacement in 2014, reacting to urgent needs for evacuation and humanitarian help, and later in the work of NGOs established to provide further support to IDPs for several years. Moreover, volunteering activities were associated with business and political activities and provided an intermediary connection between IDPs, social welfare and banks. This form of volunteering does not fit within the perception of volunteering in its 'pure' characteristics.

First, we argue that in response to the rapid character of the events such as Russia's war on Ukraine, civil society including IDPs were able to consolidate quickly and respond to both urgent humanitarian needs, but also to work with the business sector and the state on more sustainable solutions for the IDPs. Businesses (in most cases these are small or medium-sized businesses, as large businesses prefer to work with their own charities) saw volunteer groups as professionals to whom they can entrust and delegate social work. And trust, in turn, encouraged volunteers to care about their reputation and make their activities as open as possible. In a context of social upheaval and awareness of the state's considerable lag in its response, professionals who

entered volunteering often saw it as an alternative to the unwieldy state machinery, and as an opportunity to implement projects that they could not bring about within the already existing structures.

Secondly, a key focus on the process of volunteering allowed us to talk about how volunteers and voluntary organisations created new forms of integration, cooperation, and discourses, and ultimately contributed to social transformation. The focus on process has allowed us to move away from the duality between spontaneous and formalised volunteering. In the Ukrainian context of war and forced displacement, we could observe hybrid volunteering practices and strategies, some of which transformed into stable and formalised activities. However, both organised and spontaneous volunteering activities had a significant impact on IDPs: both providing urgent humanitarian assistance and achieving changes in legislation such as mitigating some barriers in providing pensions to people from occupied territories. We argue that, on the one hand, the voluntary sector compensated for the lack of necessary welfare policies, while on the other, it established and supported the agenda of the protection of IDPs' political and social rights.

The complex and flexible work of volunteers in Ukraine before 2022 involved efficient logistics and management, built on trust and informal connections, making use of sponsorship funding, and was publicly open to provide accountability for communities. Such activities are built on the involvement of a wide range of participants. This widespread involvement of people in charitable activities created a feeling of engagement and solidarity that is crucial during the war and displacement (see also Gilmartin, 2023). We suggest that, since 2014, volunteering has shaped new practices including collaboration with different stakeholders. However, especially in the current geopolitical and internal political context, there can be reservations regarding the level of political reforms related to efficient and developed volunteering as they require 'an adequate change in the quality of democratic institutions' (Soboleva, 2020: 162). The legal framework for volunteering in Ukraine is still quite fragmented, and lacks clear pathways for transforming spontaneous volunteering into full-time professional activities. This increases pressure for the activists who must navigate the complex legal, political and business environment. A limitation of the combination of our research methods is that we could not capture the full diversity of volunteer activities in the context of the first wave of Russian aggression. However, delving into the volunteers' individual perspective allowed us to go beyond registered organisations and look at volunteering through the lens of its individual and situational nature at its inception, and through the lens of key stages in volunteering and related issues.

Further research is needed to explore some simulations within the voluntary sector. As there were no formal systems of accountability for volunteering activities, one might suggest that some third-sector organisations did not have enough of the expertise, training and background checks which are common in other contexts (for example, Twigg and Mosel, 2017). The role of foreign volunteers was not in the focus of our study, though they also supported local communities. The knowledge transfer from international organisations would also require further study. This paper has not focused on intersectionalities, though there is evidence of various activities regarding female and LGBTQ+ participation in all areas of IDP support including social cohesion, gender-based violence, accommodation, health, and so on. There is a need to explore further how intersectionality has been embedded into the volunteering

activities towards IDPs. The case of Ukraine also provides important insights about the grassroots character of social support when state-funded welfare is weakened by economic decline, war, and neoliberal policies.

The strategy for the reintegration and rebuilding of Ukraine after Russia's invasion needs to engage with all the experience from the voluntary sector developed since 2014. Ukraine needs to be ready for 'a constructive use of war experiences' (Simić and Milojević, 2014). Likewise, the organic and place-based leadership that the third sector in Ukraine has demonstrated towards IDPs since 2014 could be considered as one of the pillars for the post-war reconstruction. Still, it is crucial to develop an adequate welfare system that would respond to the essential needs of those who are in need, so the third sector could provide independent support rather than compensate for the lack of the vital support from the state.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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