Supporting civic engagement in times of war in Ukraine
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Practical Insights
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Introduction

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, which had already challenged funders to become more flexible and agile in their responses, the escalation of the war in Ukraine has challenged grantmaking foundations to their core. The philanthropic response has also been a strong one: The US-based Candid has tracked 1,591 grants (and counting) that have been given or pledged by funders from across the world worth a total of $1,581,399,185. Reliable information and data are needed to inform how and where this money should be spent.

After nearly a year since the beginning of the full-scale war in Ukraine, foundations continue to support various actions in the civic space of the country. Grantmaking foundations are continuously looking for on-the-ground information, which can be difficult to garner in times of war, to help inform their grantmaking decisions. However, what data do funders rely on to support their interventions? Which areas require the highest amount of support? Where does Ukrainian civil society require the most assistance?

This “practical insights” paper aims to shed light on these areas by highlighting various studies that have looked into these questions. The insights outlined aim to answer a set of questions, with the overarching aim of demonstrating to funders the intrinsic value of utilising research and data to help form interventions in Ukraine during this extremely challenging period for the country, but also for the international community. The paper is based on presentations and studies that were presented at the ninth “Philanthropy for Ukraine” online event organised on 21 October 2022 by Philea. (All studies referenced in this paper are listed in endnote 2).

The importance of research

Research can provide a broader picture of a situation: It can facilitate learning and highlight key issues that can assist the decision-making process of practitioners. In turn, it can shape and foster programmes as well as mould and enable relationships with grantees. In times of crises, it can inform funders (perhaps also with no previous experience in a geographical region) of what kind of support can be provided to new grantees.

Regarding studies on charitable giving and volunteering that sample if and how individuals give to charity, the question arises: Why should foundations care? Since the studies collect data on giving habits, this helps to inform funders to understand the behaviour of society when it comes to giving and volunteering. Thus, this gives grantmaking foundations a more complete
picture of the funding environment of a country/or region. In addition, in light of crises and other challenges, studies of this nature can help track how they alter the habits of individuals, by either giving more or less. Moreover, findings help funders find effective ways to build on emerging civic engagement practices to strengthen the resilience and effectiveness of formal civil society organisations as well as informal groups.

What does the research say?

How has charitable giving changed in Ukraine since the major escalation of the war in the country on 24 February 2022?

Philanthropy has changed dramatically in Ukraine since the start of the full-scale war on 24 February 2022. According to the study "Charity in times of war" by Zagoriy Foundation, the number of Ukrainians that have “practiced giving” stands at 85.6% of the population, with the average donation being around $83.75 per month. This is an increase of around 20% and $70 respectively, before the start of the full-scale war.

In fact, referring again to the study by Zagoriy Foundation, the full-scale war has led to the mobilisation of not just individuals, but also businesses and civil society organisations (CSOs). As regards businesses, many have normalised donating part of their income and have provided support to people in need. CSOs have altered their programmes and activities and have incorporated new approaches into their work. As far as individuals go, many have founded their own non-profit organisations and have started fundraising campaigns, among other efforts. This truly demonstrates the widespread effect that the war has had on Ukrainian society and the effectiveness of different types of actors to respond.

New philanthropic trends have also emerged since 24 February 2022. They include more recurrent donations from individuals as well as an increase in “micro-donations.” Additionally, the media and influencers have played a big role in mobilising philanthropic efforts. In terms of philanthropic organisations, research also shows that there are 12 times more registered charities in April 2022 than before February 2022, adhering to this trend. In addition, although Ukrainians trust international organisations the most, they would rather give money (and time) to local foundations.

What form does civic engagement now take in Ukraine?

Along with charitable giving, the onset of the full-scale war in Ukraine has considerably affected levels of civil engagement in the country. According to
findings from the study "Civil society and sense of community in Ukraine: from dormancy to action", findings from 2021 state that 85% of Ukrainians did not belong to any civic or political association. Fast forward to April 2022 and 80% are now involved in a civic or political association in one way or another. Regardless of war, the citizens are also demanding further justice when it comes to corruption, emigration and economic issues, but also around questions of pay and gender-based rights. In other words, “Ukraine is more than just a place where a war is happening.”

According to the research paper, from the perspective of funders, in societies dominated by informal activity, civil society appears weak, unorganised and unfocused when viewed through a formal structural lens. Formal activities may be important indicators of strength, but they do not capture the whole story. Informal activity can be powerful, and in some cases (like Ukraine) perhaps more powerful than formal action in terms of civic action. Ukrainians choose not to become members of formal organisations in order to act, which relates back to the social, political and historical legacy of their country. They simply do not register, become members, or consider formal organisations as “the” definition of civil society.

In response to these insights, the authors of the study suggest that donors in Ukraine should be flexible by providing assistance in ways that leverage existing informal networks. Donors might provide grantees with “mini-grants” to disperse to key players operating more informally. They could allow grants to be given directly to informal stakeholders without requiring legal registration. They might hire prominent informal actors as “consultants” or “contractors” to allow them to continue their good work leveraging their informal networks.

Looking beyond the borders of Ukraine: What kind of support has been provided to refugees who have fled to Poland?

To fully understand the impacts of the war, research into how refugees fleeing the country have been supported can contribute to the overall picture. Poland has become a major host country for refugees fleeing Ukraine. Following this, the soon-to-be-published paper by a University of Warsaw scholar “Aid for Ukrainian Refugees in Poland provided by citizens: who and why do they support”, gives insight into support that has been provided by Polish society.

This research shows that Poles have supported refugees in a variety of ways. Based on two sample surveys which were undertaken in different time periods, 60% and 59% of respondents respectively stated that they do provide support.
Poles have been providing support with financial donations but also through direct voluntary work with refugees, among other ways. In terms of who is providing this support, different categories were noted such as: women, older people and people with a higher trust in international organisations and institutions.

Some noteworthy characteristics of people providing support include feeling more frustrated with the war and worrying about it more, and those who fear the war in Ukraine will escalate to other countries.

**Concluding remarks**

As the full-scale war in Ukraine continues, research on the country will continue to advance and expand. In addition, various studies that have been conducted on charitable giving and volunteering may be at a preliminary stage; and therefore may not provide enough “academic distance” on the topic at hand. However, important and vital data points and trends can be garnered from various pieces of research that can help to assist the viewpoints and decisions of grantmaking foundations.

Nevertheless, important practical insights can already be derived on how the full-scale war has influenced the current state of giving and volunteering in Ukraine, but also on refugees from Ukraine:

- Charitable giving and volunteering from individuals in Ukraine have increased, and the ways of giving have also evolved.
- Many strata of society have mobilised their efforts in light of the war, including businesses, CSOs and individuals. The media and influencers are also playing an increasingly important role.
- Informal actions can be more powerful than formal ones in terms of civic action in times of crises.
- Ukrainians have not necessarily chosen to become members of formal organisations in order to act. Formalised organisations are not considered the sole definition of civil society in the country.
- Polish society has mobilised itself to assist Ukrainian refugees, with the majority reporting that they have provided assistance.

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Civic engagement in Ukraine: Practical insights

2 Philea convenes funders on a regular basis in a meeting series called “Philanthropy for Ukraine” to zoom in on different themes and topics. The meetings feature various speakers; often live from Ukraine itself. The ninth edition of the “Philanthropy for Ukraine” online event series delved into the current state of giving, volunteering, citizen resistance, and how civic space is shaping in Ukraine. Liubov Rainchuk (Head of program department, Zagoriy Foundation) presented on the latest study by her foundation, which focussed on “Charity in times of war.” Dr. Eric C. Martin (Professor of Management at Bucknell University’s Freeman College of Management) and Dr. Kateryna Zarembo (Guest researcher at the Technical University Darmstadt (Germany), Associate fellow at the New Europe Center (Kyiv, Ukraine), lecturer at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy”) jointly presented their findings from their research paper entitled: “Dormant Civil Society, Sense of Community and External Jolts in Ukraine.” To also provide a picture from a neighbouring country and refugees from Ukraine, Dr. Magda Roszczyńska-Kurasińska (a psychologist and an economist at the Robert Zajonc Institute for Social Studies, University of Warsaw) presented preliminary findings from the research into: “Aid for Ukrainian Refugees in Poland provided by citizens: who and why do they support.”