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Anna BALSANKO,

Chief Specialist, Division for the Analysis, Exchange and Implementation of International Best Practices in Environmental Protection, Directorate for External Coordination and Environmental Development, Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture of Ukraine, Kyiv, Ukraine; annbalsanko@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-2556-3920>

Oleh DIBROVA,

Project Manager at the All-Ukrainian Public Center “Volunteer”, Kyiv, Ukraine; o.dibrova.asp@kubg.edu.ua

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-7236-8404>

Tetiana LIAKH,

PhD in Pedagogy, Professor at the Department of Social Pedagogy and Social Work, Faculty of Psychology, Social Work and Special Education, Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, Kyiv, Ukraine; t.liakh@kubg.edu.ua

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8807-0497>

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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES IN DE-OCCUPIED TERRITORIAL COMMUNITIES

Abstract. The article examines the development of volunteer activity in de-occupied territorial communities as a key mechanism for social recovery, trust-building, and the consolidation of local populations after wartime experiences. The aim of the study is to identify the motivational, resource-based, and organizational-institutional factors that shape the nature and scale of volunteer engagement, as well as to formulate practical recommendations for its support and institutionalization during the post-occupation recovery period. The empirical component of the research was conducted within the social project “Community HUB ‘Informed and Proactive’”, implemented by the NGO “All-Ukrainian Public Center ‘Volunteer’” in partnership with the East Europe Foundation and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The study employs a mixed-methods design and includes a survey of 112 residents of the de-occupied Velykooleksandrivska Territorial Community in the Kherson region, as well as two focus-group discussions involving 14 volunteers, social service representatives, and local community activists. The article demonstrates that a considerable share of motivational drivers is trauma-informed, as volunteerism in de-occupied communities often serves as a means of coping with traumatic experiences, reinterpreting past events, and restoring personal agency. At the same time, the analysis reveals a set of barriers related to volunteer burnout, infrastructural destruction, resource scarcity, insufficient institutional support, and fragmented management mechanisms. The methodological recommendations developed on the basis of the research aim to strengthen the motivational and value foundations of volunteerism, improve the resource infrastructure, streamline managerial processes, establish volunteer hubs, and introduce supervision and psychological support systems. Particular attention is given to fostering cross-sector partnerships and developing local regulatory frameworks to ensure the sustainability of volunteer initiatives. The results of the study hold considerable practical value for local self-government bodies, social services, civil society organizations, and international partners working on the recovery of de-occupied territories. The findings may be applied in the development of reintegration strategies, social cohesion policies, and volunteer support programs in the post-war context.

Keywords: volunteer activity, community, de-occupied territorial community, social cohesion, social services, civic engagement, post-conflict recovery.

INTRODUCTION

Following de-occupation, territorial communities in Ukraine find themselves in conditions of profound social transformation, where the restoration of everyday life coincides with the need to respond to acute humanitarian, psychological, and infrastructural challenges. Under these circumstances, volunteer activity becomes one of the key forms of support for the population and an important instrument for strengthening social cohesion. Volunteers are often the first to respond to people's needs, compensate for shortages in institutional resources, facilitate communication between the community and external partners, and, in practice, perform functions that social services fulfill during stable periods.

For social work professionals, operating in de-occupied communities requires heightened contextual sensitivity: the shared traumatic experiences of residents, the exhaustion of local leaders, incomplete or damaged support infrastructure, resource scarcity, and disrupted social ties. These conditions create a unique environment in which volunteer participation simultaneously serves as a mechanism of recovery, a marker of trust, and a means of mobilizing the community's internal resources. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence volunteer engagement becomes essential not only for researchers but also for practitioners working with communities during post-occupation recovery.

The relevance of this topic is further reinforced by the fact that the effectiveness of social work in de-occupied communities largely depends on the ability of social workers to integrate volunteer initiatives into the support system, identify and strengthen local resources, organize partnerships, and prevent burnout among both volunteers and specialists. This requires not only professional knowledge but also a deep understanding of the motivational, resource-related, and organizational factors that shape the dynamics of volunteer engagement in communities that have experienced occupation.

In this context, the article offers an empirical analysis of the factors influencing the development of volunteer activity in de-occupied territorial communities, as well as practical recommendations that may be used by social workers, community leaders, and civil society organizations in planning and implementing population support programs.

ANALYSIS OF RECENT RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

In contemporary Ukrainian academic discourse, volunteer activity is viewed as an important social resource that integrates civic engagement, support for vulnerable population groups, and the development of local communities. In foundational encyclopedic articles, T. Liakh conceptualizes volunteerism and volunteer activity as multidimensional phenomena encompassing unpaid, socially meaningful actions aimed at supporting others, strengthening social solidarity, and fostering community development (Liakh, 2012, 2021). Empirical studies confirm that under conditions of full-scale invasion, volunteerism has become a systemic factor of societal development and an essential component of Ukraine's international image (Neumann & Zhukova, 2023; Strel'nikova & Yesina, 2022).

A separate body of scholarship focuses on the nature, motivation, and forms of volunteer engagement. Research on volunteerism during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the ability of volunteer initiatives to rapidly adapt to emerging threats and

compensate for the limited capacity of institutional social support systems (Baidarova & Diulherova, 2021). A. Batenkova's work examines intrinsic motivation as a foundation for sustained volunteer activity, highlighting the importance of value orientations, a sense of belonging, and perceived personal efficacy (Batenkova, 2022). Studies on gender aspects of volunteer involvement by N. Mazur and Ya. Tseliukh reveal that men and women may have different motivational profiles and participation patterns, which is crucial to consider in program design (Mazur & Tseliukh, 2022). Organizational forms of volunteer activity in territorial communities are explored by Ya. Martyniuk (2022) and H. Oliinyk and colleagues (2024), who emphasize the role of local institutions and rural community conditions in supporting volunteers. Attention is also devoted to preparing future social work specialists for volunteer engagement in local communities, which is regarded as an integral component of their professional competence (Karpenko & Kotelevets, 2025). In the legal dimension, scholars examine the administrative and legal status of volunteers under martial law (Horinov, 2023) and the specifics of providing volunteer assistance to vulnerable groups within social support systems (Kashytskyi, 2024).

Theoretical and practical developments in the field of social work in territorial communities provide an important contextual framework for analyzing volunteerism. The monograph by H. Slozanska offers a holistic vision of social work as a support system based on mobilizing internal community resources, cross-sector cooperation, and the development of local social capital (Slozanska, 2018). The textbook by I. Piesha and colleagues underscores the importance of resident participation in decision-making, institutional partnerships, and the development of local social services (Piesha et al., 2024). In the works of Zh. Petrochko, O. Karpenko, and V. Liutyi, social activity is viewed as a key factor in community development, forming a foundation for volunteer initiatives (Petrochko, Karpenko & Liutyi, 2024). The development of social cohesion in territorial communities through collective action, local initiatives, and public space is analyzed by T. Liakh, T. Spirina, and Ye. Kovtun (Liakh, Spirina & Kovtun, 2023). Research by Zh. Petrochko and T. Liakh directly identifies volunteerism as a resource for the development of de-occupied communities and as a mechanism for activating internal reserves of the population (Petrochko & Liakh, 2024). A focus on project-based approaches as tools for addressing problems in war-affected communities is presented by T. Spirina and Ya. Martyniuk (Spirina & Martyniuk, 2024), which correlates with the notion of volunteerism as part of broader recovery programs.

A cluster of studies dedicated to de-occupied territories outlines the key challenges of reintegration and recovery. The works of K. Anokhina and V. Varava, as well as V. Demydenko, analyze the problems of reintegrating de-occupied areas, the role of local self-government, and the need for long-term strategic approaches to recovery (Anokhina & Varava, 2024; Demydenko, 2024). O. Shaumian and O. Muzyka illustrate how war affects the emotional state and value priorities of residents in de-occupied territories, emphasizing the population's high psychological vulnerability (Shaumian & Muzyka, 2024). The issue of social work implemented by charitable foundations with residents of de-occupied areas is explored by O. Martynenko, who highlights the gaps between needs and the available support mechanisms (Martynenko, 2024). In this context, the works of O. Dibrova and T. Liakh are particularly relevant, focusing on civic engagement and social cohesion as drivers of recovery in de-occupied

territories (Dibrova & Liakh, 2024), as well as on preventing professional burnout among social work specialists in such communities (Dibrova & Liakh, 2025). These studies demonstrate that recovery of de-occupied areas requires not only infrastructural solutions but also purposeful efforts aimed at strengthening human and social capital.

Thus, analysis of existing research and practice-oriented publications indicates substantial scholarly contributions to understanding volunteerism as a social phenomenon, social work in territorial communities, and the specific challenges of de-occupied territories. However, factors shaping the development of volunteer activity specifically within de-occupied territorial communities - at the intersection of volunteerism, social cohesion, local governance, and the population's post-traumatic experience - remain insufficiently systematized. This gap underscores the necessity of the empirical research presented in this article.

PURPOSE AND METHODS

The purpose of the study is to identify the factors influencing the development of volunteer activity in a de-occupied territorial community and to analyze how personal motivations, resource capacities, and organizational-partnership conditions shape residents' engagement in volunteer work. The research was conducted in the Velykooleksandrivska Territorial Community of the Kherson region between February and October 2025 within the framework of the social project "Community HUB 'Informed and Proactive'", implemented by the NGO "All-Ukrainian Public Center 'Volunteer'" in partnership with the East Europe Foundation and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. This collaboration ensured access to respondents, local practices, and community documentation, thereby creating favorable conditions for studying volunteerism in its real social context.

To achieve the stated purpose, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative strategies. The survey covered 146 community residents and provided data on the scope of volunteer engagement, motivations, barriers, and perceptions of organizational conditions. The questionnaire included sections on socio-demographic characteristics, previous volunteer experience, internal and external factors of engagement, and the extent of residents' interaction with local institutions and civic initiatives.

Focus-group interviews were used to deepen and contextualize the quantitative findings and to reconstruct individual and collective perceptions of volunteerism after de-occupation. A total of 24 participants took part in the discussions, including volunteers, social service professionals, representatives of local self-government, civil society organizations, and residents from vulnerable groups. The discussions focused on practices of mutual assistance, available resources and risks, the level of community cohesion, and expectations regarding the strengthening of volunteer infrastructure.

The methodological foundation of the study is grounded in human-centered and trauma-informed approaches, which ensure ethical engagement with participants and acknowledge their lived experiences during the occupation and post-liberation period.

MAIN FINDINGS

The empirical study conducted in the Velykooleksandrivska Territorial Community of the Kherson region revealed that the development of volunteer activity

after de-occupation is a multidimensional process shaped by a combination of psychological, material, and managerial factors. Based on the results of the survey and focus-group discussions, three groups of determinants were identified: (1) motivational–socio-psychological factors, (2) resource–material and infrastructural factors, and (3) organizational–managerial factors. These categories are summarized in Table 1; however, their interpretation requires further elaboration in light of the specific characteristics of de-occupied communities and the unique context of residents' lived experiences during and after occupation.

Table 1: Factors influencing the development of volunteer activity in a de-occupied territorial community

Groups of Factors	Content of Factors (Essence)	Impact on Volunteer Activity	Resource Potential	Limitations / Barriers
Motivational and Socio-Psychological	Experience of occupation, solidarity, empathy, civic engagement, patriotism, trust in volunteers	Promote broad engagement, create support networks, and stimulate self-organization	High willingness to help; strong community initiative; volunteerism as a means of psychological recovery	Risk of emotional exhaustion; need for psychological support; fear of re-traumatization
Resource-Material and Infrastructural	Social infrastructure, transportation, financial resources, premises, logistics, stability of electricity supply and communications	Determine the scale, sustainability, and organizational capacity of assistance	Humanitarian aid, support from NGOs and international organizations, presence of local leaders and community hubs	Destroyed infrastructure, insufficient funding, dependence on donors, logistical difficulties
Organizational and Managerial	Regulatory mechanisms, coordination of actions, distribution of responsibilities, partnerships between services and NGOs, compensation systems	Transform volunteer activity from reactive to systemic; ensure the sustainable development of volunteer practices	Institutionalization of volunteerism, coordination mechanisms, compensation systems, development of partnerships	Lack of local regulations and programs, weak coordination, unequal access to resources, non-transparent compensation mechanisms

Source: compiled by the authors

The motivational and socio-psychological factors stand out as the initial driving force behind volunteer engagement. The lived experience of occupation, feelings of solidarity, empathy, and a heightened sense of civic duty create a strong internal need among residents to act for the benefit of the community. Many focus-group participants emphasized that volunteering became a way for them to overcome helplessness, regain control over their lives, and restore personal dignity after prolonged psychological pressure. As a result, the community demonstrates natural self-organization and broad support for initiatives aimed at meeting people's basic needs. However, the study also revealed significant risks of emotional exhaustion, the need for regular psychological support, and the fear of re-experiencing traumatic events. Thus, despite the powerful motivational potential, volunteer capacity may gradually decrease unless the community develops mechanisms for sustaining and supporting its volunteers.

Resource-material and infrastructural factors largely determine the practical feasibility of volunteer activities. De-occupied territories are characterized by partially destroyed infrastructure, shortages of transportation, unstable communication and electricity supply, and the absence of safe and adequate facilities for storing and distributing aid. Survey results confirm that logistical constraints are among the key limiting factors for volunteer work. At the same time, the community receives substantial support from humanitarian organizations, local leaders, religious groups, and international partners, which expands its resource base and enables the provision of essential assistance to vulnerable populations. However, reliance on external resources creates instability: if humanitarian support decreases, the capacity of volunteers is significantly reduced. This highlights the need to develop local resource bases and logistical solutions that can ensure the long-term sustainability of volunteer efforts.

The third group of factors - organizational and managerial - proved to be the least developed, yet the most influential from a long-term perspective. The community generally lacks local regulatory documents governing volunteer activities, coordination mechanisms among services, compensation systems for volunteers, and procedures for assessing population needs. Focus-group participants stressed that volunteer efforts often depend on the initiative of a few highly motivated individuals, making these processes vulnerable to burnout or the forced relocation of key activists. In communities with at least minimal institutional support, better organization, more effective resource mobilization, and stronger social cohesion were observed. This demonstrates that structured management mechanisms can transform volunteer activity from a reactive crisis response into a sustainable practice of local development.

Overall, the study shows the interdependence of the three groups of factors that form an integrated model for the development of volunteerism in a de-occupied territorial community. Motivational factors provide the foundation for civic engagement, resource-infrastructure factors determine the real possibilities and scale of activity, while organizational-managerial factors ensure sustainability and institutionalization. Consideration of this model is essential for designing recovery programs, enhancing the effectiveness of social support, and building long-term volunteer strategies in communities that have experienced occupation.

Based on the results, it is advisable to develop a set of recommendations addressing the motivational-value, resource, and organizational-institutional dimensions of volunteer development in de-occupied communities. In the motivational-value

dimension, it is important to implement communication and educational programs aimed at strengthening civic solidarity, preserving volunteer identity, and restoring a culture of mutual assistance. Effective measures include creating platforms for sharing volunteer experiences and organizing public events that help communities reflect on their wartime experiences and build internal trust. Special attention should be given to psychological support for volunteers, as it reduces the risk of emotional exhaustion and promotes sustainable engagement.

The resource dimension of volunteer development requires the creation of safe spaces for coordination and resource storage, improvement of logistical mechanisms, and provision of necessary technical tools for volunteers. Building partnerships between communities, businesses, charitable foundations, and international organizations is essential for maintaining stable systems of resource support. Equally important is the regular monitoring of population needs, which helps avoid duplication of efforts, optimize aid distribution, and ensure its targeted use.

The organizational-institutional dimension requires the development of local regulatory frameworks that define coordination procedures, access to resources, compensation conditions, and mechanisms for cooperation with social services and civil society organizations. It is advisable to create or strengthen volunteer hubs that will coordinate initiatives, track needs, train volunteers, and build partnerships. Additionally, the introduction of supervision systems and professional support mechanisms is crucial to ensure the quality of volunteer activity and promote its long-term sustainability.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The development of volunteer activity in de-occupied territorial communities of Ukraine is a key factor in restoring the social fabric, strengthening trust, and building collective resilience after the experience of occupation. The empirical findings obtained in the Velykooleksandrivska Territorial Community demonstrate that volunteerism simultaneously performs humanitarian, integrative, and psychosocial functions, creating the foundation for the community's transition from a state of survival to recovery and development.

The study established that the evolution of volunteer practices is shaped by the interaction of three groups of factors: motivational-psychological, resource-material, and organizational-managerial. The first group ensures residents' readiness to act and their high level of engagement; the second group defines the practical possibilities for delivering assistance; the third group determines the sustainability and manageability of volunteer processes. However, the weakness of managerial mechanisms and the absence of institutional frameworks for volunteer activity currently constitute the greatest challenge for de-occupied communities.

The results confirm that volunteerism in de-occupied areas cannot be viewed as an auxiliary or temporary activity. It holds strategic significance for local development, the restoration of social capital, and the formation of resilient communities. Therefore, state institutions, local self-government bodies, and civil society organizations must regard volunteer activity as an integral component of systematic social policy for post-war reintegration.

Future research should focus on expanding the empirical base through comparative analyses of volunteer practices across various de-occupied communities, which will make it possible to identify territorial differences and common patterns in the formation of volunteer potential. An important direction is the study of long-term volunteer motivation dynamics, particularly the impact of emotional fatigue, support mechanisms, and strategies for preventing professional and volunteer burnout. Promising areas also include examining the role of local self-government and cross-sector partnerships in stabilizing and institutionalizing volunteer activity during the post-occupation period. Additionally, there is a need for in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of volunteer interventions in work with vulnerable population groups, including assessments of their impact on restoring social capital and strengthening social cohesion.

Collectively, these research directions will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of volunteerism as an instrument for post-war recovery and community development.

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ЧИННИКИ РОЗВИТКУ ВОЛОНТЕРСЬКОЇ ДІЯЛЬНОСТІ В ДЕОКУПОВАНИХ ТЕРИТОРІАЛЬНИХ ГРОМАДАХ

Анна БАЛЬСАНКО, головний спеціаліст відділу аналізу, обміну та впровадження міжнародних кращих практик у сфері охорони довкілля, Директорат зовнішньої координації та екологічного розвитку, Міністерство економіки, довкілля та сільського господарства України, м. Київ, Україна; annbalsanko@gmail.com

Олег ДІБРОВА, менеджер проєктів Всеукраїнського громадського центру «Волонтер», м. Київ, Україна; o.dibrova.asp@kubg.edu.ua

Тетяна ЛЯХ, кандидат педагогічних наук, професор, професор кафедри соціальної педагогіки та соціальної роботи, Факультет психології, соціальної роботи та спеціальної освіти Київського столичного університету імені Бориса Грінченка, м. Київ, Україна; t.liakh@kubg.edu.ua

Анотація. *Стаття присвячена аналізу розвитку волонтерської діяльності у деокупованих територіальних громадах як ключового механізму соціального відновлення, формування довіри та консолідації місцевих спільнот після пережитих воєнних подій. Метою дослідження стало виявлення мотиваційних, ресурсних та організаційно-інституційних чинників, що визначають характер і масштаби волонтерської активності, а також обґрунтування практичних рекомендацій щодо її підтримки та інституціоналізації в період посткупаційного відновлення.*

Емпірична частина роботи проведена у межах соціального проєкту «Громадський HUB "Обізнані та ініціативні"», реалізованого ГО «Всеукраїнський громадський центр "Волонтер"» у партнерстві з Фондом Східна Європа та Офісом Швейцарського агентства розвитку та співробітництва. Дослідження ґрунтується на змішаній методології та включає опитування 112 мешканців деокупованої Великоолександрівської громади Херсонщини та дві фокус-групові дискусії за участі 14 волонтерів, представників соціальних служб і місцевих ініціатив. Поєднання кількісних і якісних даних дозволило виявити як загальні тенденції, так і внутрішні смисли волонтерства, зокрема пережитий досвід втрат, зміну ціннісних пріоритетів, роль взаємодопомоги у зниженні соціальної напруги й відновленні почуття безпеки.

На основі зібраних матеріалів сформовано інтегровану модель чинників розвитку волонтерської діяльності, що включає три взаємозалежні групи: мотиваційно-соціально-психологічні, ресурсно-матеріальні та організаційно-управлінські. У статті показано, що значна частина мотиваційних імпульсів має травма-інформовану природу, оскільки волонтерство в деокупованих громадах часто виступає способом подолання травматичного досвіду, переосмислення пережитих подій та відновлення суб'єктності. Водночас аналіз виявив комплекс бар'єрів, пов'язаних із виснаженістю волонтерів, руйнуванням інфраструктури, нестачею ресурсів, слабкою інституційною підтримкою та фрагментарністю управлінських механізмів.

Розроблені на основі дослідження методичні рекомендації спрямовані на зміцнення мотиваційно-ціннісної основи волонтерства, удосконалення ресурсної інфраструктури, впорядкування управлінських процесів, створення волонтерських хабів, впровадження супервізій і систем психологічної підтримки. Особливу увагу приділено необхідності розвитку міжсекторальних партнерств та формування локальних нормативних актів, що гарантуватимуть сталість волонтерської діяльності.

Результати дослідження мають значний практичний потенціал для органів місцевого самоврядування, соціальних служб, громадських та міжнародних організацій, які працюють у сфері відновлення деокупованих територій. Отримані дані можуть бути використані під час розроблення стратегій реінтеграції, політик соціальної згуртованості та програм підтримки волонтерства у поствоєнний період.

Ключові слова: волонтерська діяльність, громада, деокупована територіальна громада, соціальна згуртованість, соціальні послуги, громадянська активність, постконфліктне відновлення

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