

**Due to the long-lasting armed conflict in eastern Ukraine and the subsequent large-scale invasion by the Russian Federation, provision of qualified psychological assistance to war-affected people will remain urgent, and there will be a growing demand among professionals for improved mental health methods for providing psychological support. Furthermore, even where qualified mental health professionals remain active, partner stakeholders have highlighted a strong need to build their qualifications to specifically work with vulnerable groups such as demobilizing women and men, who required specialized care and tools to support their mental health.**

*In response to the identified needs, Project activities will support the expansion of access to qualified mental health support services through the capacity development of a network of school psychologists in remote settlements where availability of such services is not sufficient to cover the needs. The capacity development program will specifically focus on the use of Cognitive Processing Therapy tools to address instances of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders, and on tested techniques to communicate and effectively support veterans. Initial conversations with the Ministry of Veteran Affairs of Ukraine have also shown the interest of the Ministry in including the professionals trained through the project, pending assessment of their professional capacities, in the list of certified mental health professionals available to support veterans and their family members. Finally, the Project has set aside budget for supporting hromada-level small initiatives to boost mental service provision, including to the veteran community, through advocacy and expanded outreach of services.*

**Connected to the point above, (re)integration of veterans at community level and enhancing the capacities of local communities to receive veterans, including those with disabilities, is one of the most requested areas for development support within recovery planning and implementation. It is envisioned that capacity development programmes will support this request. Additional efforts should be made to assess the readiness of communities for veterans' reintegration, and provide evidence for national and subnational policy making processes and action plan development.**

*Following extensive conversations with the Sumy Oblast Administration and with the Department for Veteran Reintegration, the Project has agreed to include capacity development of specialists at hromada and oblast level on the adoption of community-based approaches to veteran reintegration (CBR) and on effective tools for communicating with the veteran community. An experienced national consultant has already been identified for the implementation of these activities. Moreover, strategic brainstorming sessions will take place in up to two partner hromadas in Sumy Oblast to formulate concrete action plans for veteran reintegration in line with the principles of CBR. It is also to be noted that in March 2024 UNDP has initiated consultations with the veteran community, academia, representatives of the Ministry of Veteran Affairs of Ukraine, of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, local government and civil society representatives to kick-start the formulation of a methodology for the (self) assessment of the readiness of hromadas to support veteran reintegration processes. The methodology will be piloted in partner hromadas in eastern, western, central Ukraine under the auspices of the Ministry of Veteran Affairs. Following the pilot phase, and the relevant evaluation, the methodology will be revised as appropriate, and expected to be adopted nationwide as one of the tools for the implementation of the new veteran policy being elaborated by the Government of Ukraine.*

**The Project encountered challenges in identifying a suitable civil society organization to support implementation of the Community Mobilization Methodology for Community Security and Social Cohesion in Sumy Oblast. Despite extending the deadline for the call for proposals three times in 2023, no appropriate proposals were received. The decreased capacity of CSOs, attributable to war-related mobility and a shift towards humanitarian activities and volunteering for Ukrainian military forces, was identified as the primary reason. Given these circumstances, a decision was made to initiate activities in the region and seek capable partners during the implementation process. As of February 2024, there is an intention to re-announce the call for proposals. A consortium of NGOs**

**has been formed to submit a joint proposal, reflecting ongoing efforts to identify and engage suitable partners for the Project.**

*The recruitment of the Community Mobilization Officer for Sumy Oblast has been instrumental to the identification of a capable civil society partner for the operation of the network of the community security and recovery working groups. As of March 2024 the NGO "Lyceum" has been identified as the winner of the corresponding grant context and has been awarded a contract. The Project has however taken note of the low capacities of local civil society organizations in the partner oblast and hromadas and has thus decided to extend and expand the capacity development activities (in project writing and management) already included in the 2024 the work plan to ensure that the foundations are laid for improved engagement of civil society in the recovery process. These activities will proceed in parallel to a thorough assessment (planned across all UNDP partner oblasts) of the capacities of civil society (especially organizations engaged in supporting veterans, youth, or individual with disabilities) with the aim to design capacity development initiatives that address identified skills gaps. Furthermore, the project will seek to form linkages between Sumy CSOs and experienced CSOs from neighboring oblasts (i.e. Chernihiv and/or Kharkiv and/or Poltava) to foster mentoring relationships between organizations.*