

“They are waiting for us”: The impact of the full- scale war on the working conditions of social workers

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● Introduction

The full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation (hereafter referred to as the war) in Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, has changed the life of the entire country and impacted every aspect of it. The war has caused the massive displacement of millions of Ukrainians, the destruction of homes and social ties, the loss of housing, jobs, and confidence in the future. Hundreds of Ukrainians have lost their loved ones in the war, thousands have joined the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and thousands are waiting for their relatives to return home.

The socio-economic consequences of the war are particularly severe for those who were already especially vulnerable, such as low-income families, elderly people, people with disabilities, single parents, and others. These vulnerabilities are largely tied to structural issues in social and housing policies, the lack of necessary social infrastructure, insufficient accessibility in public spaces, gaps in the provision of social services caused by decentralization, high levels of poverty. The war, especially during the first year of the full-scale invasion, highlighted existing problems in various sectors of public services to a certain extent, and, particularly due to significant infrastructure damage caused by hostilities, exacerbated them. Moreover, the war forced those who were previously used to relying solely on themselves to seek help, making millions of citizens feel their vulnerability.

The social protection system for the population is designed to support people in difficult situations that they cannot manage on their own, such as poverty, loneliness, homelessness, prolonged health issues¹, and in cases when they require additional support. Ukrainian legislation defines such periods in a person's life as "difficult life circumstances"² and provides for a range of programs aimed at offering financial support and preventing poverty: government assistance payments, subsidies, and benefits, as well as a wide range of social services intended to prevent the occurrence of such situations, minimize their impact on a person's quality of life, and help

¹ Factors that Ukrainian legislation defines as potentially causing difficult life circumstances include, in particular, harm caused by fire, natural disasters, catastrophes, military hostilities, terrorist attacks, armed conflict, or temporary occupation, as specified in the Law of Ukraine "On social services," Art. 1.

² Ibid.

individuals and families cope with such difficult situations, overcoming the negative influence of various circumstances..

The intensification of vulnerabilities and the growing need for support has led to a significant strain on the social protection sector. Workers in this field were among those who helped to mitigate the negative consequences of the war from the first days of the full-scale invasion and continue to do so to this day.

This text is dedicated to how the war has affected the daily work of these individuals. It focuses on workers who are directly involved in providing social services in municipal institutions located in communities. These are people working in territorial centers for social service, social service provision centers, and social service centers³. They include visiting carers, social workers, social work specialists, psychologists, drivers, department heads, directors of institutions, and other specialists⁴. While many of the insights pertain to these workers as a whole, more attention is given to visiting carers and social work specialists, as they make up the largest group in the staffing structures of institutions that provide social services (in other words, their role in the direct provision of social services is key), as well as to the heads of institutions due to the level of responsibility and influence associated with these positions.

Visiting carers work in territorial social service centers (hereafter referred to as territorial centers) and social service provision centers (hereafter also referred to as SSPCs). They are primarily involved in providing home care services as well

³ It should be emphasized that the range of workers involved in providing social services to the population is somewhat broader than covered in this material. First, this text does not take into account the experiences of workers in residential institutions within the social protection system (such as geriatric nursing homes and psychoneurological institutions), which provide stationary care services. Due to the limitations of this particular material, a decision was made to focus on workers in municipal institutions — social service providers in communities, as their numbers are significantly larger, as is the volume of services they provide. The fundamental working conditions in residential institutions of the social protection system differ substantially, as does the impact of the war on them. Among the most pressing issues affecting the working conditions of these workers are numerous challenges related to organizing the evacuation of the institution and accompanying evacuated residents, as well as the physical strain involved in moving a significant number of residents with limited mobility to shelters during air raid alarms. More information on these issues can be found, for instance, in the reports *Invisible Victims of War: People in Places of Detention* (Kharchenko et al., 2023) and *I Used to Have a Home* (Amnesty International, 2022).

⁴ The term "social workers" is used in this text as a general term for the entire range of workers in the aforementioned three types of municipal institutions that provide social services in communities. The choice of this term is based solely on its practical convenience.

as the service of material assistance. Their work may include helping with household tasks (such as cleaning, cooking), self-care (for example, they may assist a person with bathing and performing other necessary hygiene procedures), moving around the apartment, paying utility bills, handling documentation, and processing mail. In rural areas, visiting carers may also assist their clients with maintaining their gardens. Visiting carers ensure that their clients receive food, personal hygiene products, and other necessary items.

Social work specialists primarily work in social service centers (hereafter also referred to as SSCs) and SSPCs. These workers mainly provide social services to families experiencing difficult life circumstances, guardian families, foster families, vulnerable categories of children, individuals returning from places of detention and their families, among others. The role of social work specialists is multifaceted. First, they are involved in identifying vulnerable individuals and families who may need social services and in keeping records on them. This includes conducting social inspections of households showing signs of difficult life circumstances (for example, signs of alcohol abuse or neglect of parental duties). Second, they are responsible for developing individualized social service plans for a specific person or family, which contain a detailed program of social work, essentially a roadmap the specialist must follow with the family to help them overcome or minimize the impact of their difficult life circumstances. Based on such plans, social work specialists provide ongoing support to vulnerable families, which may also involve collaboration with other social service agencies, assisting in the collection and processing of documents for government social payments and assistance, subsidies, etc.

Managers (directors, department heads) are responsible for organizing the work of the staff and the entire institution that provides social services.

Considering various aspects of working conditions, this text aims to outline the main changes that have occurred since February 24, 2022, and to summarize the main issues that had existed before as well but still remain unresolved. These key aspects of working conditions primarily include the following:

- workload (its nature, the balance between the volume of work and working hours, issues related to overworking related to the workload);
- work schedule (the duration and organization of working

hours and the ability to influence it);

- workplace and provision of work tools;
- movement around the city as part of job duties;
- labor compensation (its amount, fairness, and stability);
- safe conditions for physical and mental health (including issues of work-related stress and the psycho-emotional state of the workers).

A separate topic that received special attention is the impact of bombings, air raid alarms, and power outages on the work process as a whole and the aforementioned aspects of working conditions in particular.

As more of an overview, this material also touches on the comfort of relationships with colleagues and the management, as well as the ability to voice opinions and influence problem-solving in the workplace.

In developing this material, we relied on the basic definition of working conditions by the International Labour Organization (ILO), which states that "working conditions cover a broad range of topics and issues, from working time (working hours, break hours, and work schedules) to labor compensation, physical conditions, and psychological challenges that exist in the workplace,"⁵ as well as on the definition of "decent work" used by ILO. According to the ILO, decent work is employment that "delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for all, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men."⁶ The list of working conditions focused on in this material is somewhat narrower, as its primary emphasis is on those conditions that could be significantly affected by the war.

This text is primarily based on three focus group discussions and several interviews with representatives of primary trade

⁵ <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/dw4sd/themes/working-conditions/lang--en/>. Overall, the ILO's definition aligns with how working conditions are defined under current Ukrainian legislation, specifically as "a set of factors in the working environment and labor process that affect a person's health and ability to work while performing their job duties" (Order of the Ministry of Health of Ukraine from April 8, 2014, No. 248 "On approval of the State Sanitary Norms and Rules 'Hygienic Classification of Labor by Indicators of Harmfulness and Danger of Working Environment Factors, the Difficulty and Stressfulness of the Labor Process'").

⁶ <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>.

union organizations in the social sector, conducted in December 2023.

The three focus group discussions included visiting carers, social work specialists, department heads and directors of territorial centers, social service centers, and social service provision centers.

Each focus group discussion included workers from municipal institutions located in the three main types of territorial communities in Ukraine: rural, rural town, and urban. In every discussion, there was at least one participant from a frontline community, as well as from a community that had received a significant number of internally displaced persons. These communities were from Dnipropetrovsk, Chernihiv, Chernivtsi, Kharkiv, and Kyiv Regions.

This diversity of experiences among the participants was ensured because the type of community in particular can influence the organization of social service delivery and certain key working conditions (for example, payment of bonuses from the local budget; the development of public transportation networks, which is important for workers who frequently travel around the city as part of their job). At the same time, conclusions from previously conducted studies suggest that the workload and nature of the responsibilities of social workers in frontline communities, as well as in communities that have received a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), may have significant differences. Some participants in the focus group discussions also experienced the temporary occupation of their community in 2022.

Additionally, all focus group participants had worked in their positions for at least one year before February 24, 2022. On average, their length of service in their current role was 9.5 years. This criterion was necessary to ensure that, when discussing the impact of the war on working conditions, the participants had sufficient work experience before the full-scale invasion to be able to identify certain changes.

The analysis of these discussions is complemented by conclusions and insights from other research in the field of social service provision, in which the author of the text was involved during 2022–2023, as well as data and insights from other relevant studies examined during the preparation of this material, focusing on the impact of the war on the social sector and vulnerable population groups.

In view of the methods used for data collection and analysis, it should be noted that the insights of this study may not represent the experience of all social workers in Ukraine.

● Workload

The war had the greatest impact on the increase in the workload of social workers and, accordingly, on their work schedules. The main factors that have led to the rise in the workload of workers in institutions that provide social services can be summarized as follows.

Organization of reception and provision of assistance with the resettlement of IDPs in the community, as well as the provision of various services to them

In the first year of the full-scale invasion, the workload for workers in those municipal institutions providing social services which were accepting displaced persons as temporary accommodation sites (hereafter referred to as TAsSs) increased especially significantly, because this placed additional responsibilities on the staff related to assisting with daily living arrangements and organizing meals for individuals residing in TAsSs. Meanwhile, the number of workers in the staffing structure of these institutions typically increased by only a few positions to employ a cook and, if necessary, a few additional workers directly in the food service area. According to accounts from the participants of focus group discussions, in the first months, and in some cases even in the first half a year of the war, social workers participated in organized night shifts to ensure the uninterrupted reception and accommodation of IDPs.

[...] In the early days of the war, in general, when we were IDPs here, these people who were fleeing from their homes where active hostilities had begun, a shift system was set up at the territorial center here. Staff members were involved in these shifts, but mainly from the administration. A headquarters was established in our city. From this headquarters, they sent people, say, to us... there were several locations where these individuals were accommodated. Well, one of these locations was the territorial center. We had to welcome them here, house them, provide warmth, feed them, and all that. So the shift system was put in place. [...]⁷

Head of primary trade union organization, regional capital city

We started receiving internally displaced persons. [...] part of our building was not heated, and some of the living conditions were not suitable. We were here both day and night, doing everything we could to be able to accommodate the IDPs. And two weeks after the war was declared, we began receiving these people. So already by March 3, we had a large number of internally displaced persons in our facility. [...] up to 15,000 IDPs have passed through our institution. We register them, keep records [...] All services are provided for the internally displaced persons. [...] including free meals, free laundry, and all other services we can offer, and we coordinate with other agencies that come to us and provide the services needed by the internally displaced people. [...]

Social work specialist, day center, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

Comprehensive assistance for IDPs also involved a considerable amount of administrative workload, or "paperwork," as it is often referred to by workers in the field.

Four departments are operating [at the institution], plus the IDPs staying at the facility. And considering that Resolution No. 930 regarding IDPs was issued⁸, the reporting requirements for each IDP have increased significantly. You have to fill out a contract, an act, and there is a lot of reporting to do, we report on them. To local authorities and to various other levels, [with documents] which come to us via email⁹. So, it's clear that the workload for each specialist today is very large. And, well, the staffing plan hasn't increased, obviously.

Social work specialist, day center, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

⁷ In this text, the author presents the informants' direct speech with minimal editing, preserving the original style of their statements. The only edits made to the quotes concern ethical communication about people with disabilities and their needs. In square brackets within some quotes, brief comments have been added to improve understanding of the quote's content in cases where important parts of the sentence were omitted in spoken language.

⁸ This refers to the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine Resolution No. 930 "Certain issues regarding the functioning of temporary accommodation for internally displaced persons" dated September 1, 2023.

⁹ This refers to requests for information that come from other government bodies at the regional or national levels.

Provision of care services for elderly persons who were left alone after the departure of relatives who used to care for them

One of the most important factors leading to the increased workload of staff at institutions providing social services to the population, particularly social work specialists, was the rise in the number of elderly individuals requiring care services in their communities. This was primarily due to the departure of younger, working-age family members who had previously cared for their relatives. In some cases, this also involved elderly individuals who had previously received help with household chores or heavy grocery shopping from neighbors who had since left. As a result, these elderly people did not receive social services from municipal institutions located in their communities before February 24, 2022. Despite the rapid increase in the number of people requiring care services (a responsibility that current legislation directly places on local authorities), this did not lead to a corresponding rapid increase in staff membership at these institutions. Consequently, the workload for each visiting carer increased significantly. In general, according to workload standards, one visiting carer should serve 8–10 individuals in urban areas and 6–8 in rural areas. Among participants in one focus group discussion alone, the actual workload reached 12–18 individuals per visiting carer.

We may have 8–10 per person, but definitely not six. It can be 8–10, yes. [...] If needed, the elderly ask to be taken on, and they are accepted, of course. We try not to refuse anyone these days. There is no standard of 6–8, no, it's more.

Visiting carer, city, Kharkiv Region

Young working-age people left, while elderly women, [people with disabilities] were left behind. Initially, our workers were still in place, but we had a mass departure in April. And that was the hardest time, the heaviest workload, when one visiting carer in our community had, well, around 22, 24 people [...]. That was the hardest. Then, the visiting carers started coming back, and it became much easier. [...] but still, the workload for visiting carers is very high, it has increased [compared to pre-war levels] because we have received many more new social service recipients.

Director of a territorial center, city, Kharkiv Region

The situation is especially difficult for the visiting carers who work in rural areas, as providing home care services there may

also involve quite strenuous physical labor. In villages, a visiting carer frequently has to light the stove, chop wood, and carry water for their clients; in many cases, their work even includes tending to a small household plot for the service recipient.

I work in a rural area. I have a workload of eight people. Well, it's very difficult in rural areas. It's tough, tough, because it's all private housing. A lot of water and wood delivery. [...] whether you want to or not, in the village there's firewood and gardens. That's the first thing that's required from a social worker.

Visiting carer, city, Kharkiv Region

Additionally, as noted by participants in the focus group discussions, another factor is that a significant portion of these new elderly social service recipients have severely limited mobility and self-care abilities: they belong to the 5th mobility group. According to the current standard for providing home care services¹⁰, individuals in this group require visits 5 times a week. Although the content and volume of home care services for each recipient are generally determined individually, depending on the degree of their personal need, the list of activities included in the assistance for recipients in the 5th mobility group is generally one of the most extensive. Individuals whose needs are assessed at the highest levels, 8 and 9, are permanently bedridden, unable to move beyond their beds, and are entirely dependent on external assistance.

Overall, current standards for calculating the number of clients per visiting carer stipulate that one carer cannot serve more than one person from the 5th mobility group due to the significant workload this entails. In addition, caring for such a client provides a 20% bonus to the base salary. However, due to the sharp increase in the number of such individuals, according to many focus group participants, this standard has not in fact been adhered to for an extended period, and in some communities, it is still not being followed. Even if these elderly individuals were eventually placed in residential institutions within the social protection system, social workers in the community provided care services during the initial period. The situation was especially difficult in communities located near active combat zones, where, in addition, a larger number of visiting carers had left, as well as in communities that found themselves under temporary occupation.

¹⁰ Order of the Ministry of Social Policy "On approval of the State Standard for Home Care" No. 760 dated November 13, 2013.
<https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/z1990-13#Text>.

[...] There were significant difficulties when elderly people, those with severely reduced mobility, bedridden people, were left alone, and we had to address these issues urgently: who would care for them, and how the care would be provided. We found ourselves in a difficult situation. [...] the workload was very high, up to 20 citizens [per visiting carer], and we had to [manage] within eight hours, but we didn't work just eight hours, we worked more, and the care had to be provided. In an eight-hour workday, we were servicing around 10–12 people, if necessary, or even more people. [...]

Director of a territorial center, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

17–18 elderly citizens per visiting carer. Among them, three or four are bedridden. It's not just the visiting carers who go to provide care, social workers and department heads also step in when needed, if there is a call, and urgent or crisis assistance is required, we all go, we don't just sit around, and we provide help.

Director of a territorial center, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

The workload was very heavy, but I want to say, it continues. [...] According to Resolution 1417, a visiting carer should have one bedridden person, and they receive a 20% bonus [to their base salary] for the intensity and difficulty of the work if they have such a person. But it's not just the bedridden individuals, there are also those who cannot perform hygiene services; their movement is limited to their apartment. And now we also have three to four such citizens per each visiting carer.

Director of a territorial center, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

Despite the fact that many communities have territorial centers with residential care departments, where some of the elderly who require almost round-the-clock care have been accommodated, this has not solved the problem, because these departments are usually small. Moreover, despite the increased number of service recipients, the number of staff in these departments generally has not increased either. Often, these departments also housed elderly IDPs who needed care services upon arriving in the community.

Receiving, distributing, and delivering humanitarian aid

Another factor that led to a significant increase in the workload of social workers was their involvement in organizing the receipt, distribution, and delivery of humanitarian aid.

Due to the impoverishment of a significant portion of the population caused by the socio-economic consequences of the

war, the loss of housing and personal belongings, as well as due to the arrival of a large number of IDPs in many communities, most of whom required basic household items and some even essential goods, the demand for in-kind assistance has significantly increased among the population of many communities. The involvement of workers at institutions that provide social services in organizing the distribution of humanitarian aid to community residents also led to a substantial increase in their workload. This involvement was essentially an additional task beyond the workers' regular duties and often required them to take shifts at aid distribution points, warehouses, and similar locations.

[...] the workload on the staff [increased], [...] this included the involvement of nurses, accountants, personnel inspectors, department heads, a work safety engineer... that is, well, up to the director, everyone helps with the distribution of humanitarian aid from the Red Cross, everyone is involved. And transportation. Because we need to transport people, our workers to the distribution point, organize everything. This workload is very heavy, very heavy.

Director of a territorial center, city, Kharkiv Region

[...] We took shifts at the clothing bank, where displaced persons would come to receive dishes. Clothing, shoes, bedding, and so on. [...] The management would call, notifying you on the day, saying that today, from 9 a.m., you're on duty there until 4 p.m. And you start quickly calling your clients, telling them that you won't visit today. Or that you'll come after 4 p.m., if someone absolutely needs it. And you push all the mass of work onto the next day. Well, it was tough. Now the clothing bank is no longer there, so things have become a little easier.

Visiting carer, city, Kyiv Region

It's like your regular workday. You go, and that's it. And for the night shifts, others were assigned. Some worked during the day, and others at night. [...] You try, if you were on duty [distributing humanitarian aid], the next day you're already running to those you couldn't visit then. Well, you can't abandon them. It's the same with bread, groceries, medicine. Well, you have to bring it. Well, we managed, we helped. But what else could we do? There's no other option. Who will help them if they're alone, lonely? Who? Their neighbors have left. Or their neighbors are in the same situation.

Visiting carer, city, Chernihiv Region

First of all we tried to provide these people with bedding, dishes, and we received these good mattresses, clothing, food. But all of this had to be delivered and distributed, all by my girls. And we all worked, department heads, the accountant, and I, we were all loaders, that's what we were... And we still are. Yesterday, when you called, [...] we were in a cold school gym unloading a truck of

humanitarian aid. We were so cold, but... that's the job.

Director of a territorial center, Kyiv Region

Additionally, organizing the reception and distribution of humanitarian aid also involved visiting carers in reporting the received items to non-governmental and international organizations, which could often lead to an increase in the already mentioned "paperwork."

[...] If we distribute humanitarian aid, we maintain records. For a long time, we had a lot of humanitarian aid. And, for example, we had three or five funds providing humanitarian aid. So, for instance, if you give soap from one fund, toothpaste from another, and a blanket from a third, you have to complete separate paperwork for each and ensure the person signs for it. [...]

Social work specialist, social service center, city, Chernihiv Region

It should also be noted that social service workers in communities, in addition to being involved in humanitarian aid efforts, are often engaged in establishing additional communication with donor organizations, writing grant applications, and submitting project proposals to attract external funding to meet existing needs. This can include the purchase of household appliances, furniture, and other items necessary for equipping TASs or other places of residence for IDPs, as well as the purchase of other essential items for equipping institutions that provide social services, such as bicycles, specialized transport for individuals with disabilities, or for making repairs in facilities. This activity is usually performed in addition to the person's main job duties and is not compensated additionally.

[...] our work has become more established with international organizations, NGOs, volunteers, and foundations that come and provide various humanitarian aid. [...] Thanks to international funds, we [...] completely replaced the heating system, changed all the wooden windows to metal-plastic ones, and opened a very nice sewing room where clothing repairs are done. We opened a computer room for children of internally displaced persons [...]. We are currently negotiating with other international organizations and foundations [...] and plan to continue renovating our facility with their help to improve living conditions for IDPs.

Social work specialist, day center, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

[...] today, the workload is also complicated by projects, among other things. Because in 2023, we already participated in two projects [...] where our community was fortunate enough to attract sufficient funds. [...]

Director of a social service center, city, Kharkiv Region

Registering the status of a child affected by military actions

For social work specialists and administrative staff at institutions that provide social services, the workload significantly increased during a certain period due to work related to processing the status of a child affected by military actions.

Receiving citizens whose children require the registration of such status¹¹, as well as preparing all necessary documents, was quite time-consuming.

[...] currently, in our community, we are granting the status to children affected by military actions and armed conflicts. And, well, for example, since July, when the law came into effect, we have already completed almost 1,500 needs assessments. And we have seven specialists. So you can understand the volume. Even now we have a very long waiting list for next year of people to whom we are providing these services [processing the status]. [...]

Social work specialist, social service center, city, Chernihiv Region

[...] A lot of children lived under occupation. Right now, I don't know how it is in other communities, but here, we are processing this war status, and almost every other child lived in occupation. That means they didn't leave, they weren't allowed to leave. Some lost their parents due to explosive injuries. [...]

Social work specialist, social service center, city, Kharkiv Region

[...] In addition [to the primary workload], there is the granting of status to children affected by military actions. I know that, as of today, our guardianship and care authorities have issued 900 orders. That means this status has been assigned. And, of course, all these 900 children have gone through us. Because each one had a needs assessment and a report provided in accordance with the law. [...]

Social work specialist, day center, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

¹¹ According to Paragraph 3 of the Procedure for Granting the Status of a Child Affected by Military Actions and Armed Conflicts, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine Resolution No. 268 dated April 5, 2017, the right to obtain this status is granted to a child, as well as an individual who, at the time of military actions, armed conflicts, armed aggression by the Russian Federation, had not reached 18 years of age (adulthood) and who, as a result of military actions and armed conflicts, sustained physical or psychological trauma.

Increasing number of domestic violence cases

The increase in cases of domestic violence and, consequently, the number of women who require urgent/crisis social services, as well as the further provision of shelter, psychological, and other assistance, is yet another additional factor contributing to the growing workload.

Compared to 2021, the number of domestic violence reports registered by the National Police increased by more than one and a half times in 2022, rising from 144,394 cases to 244,381. In 2023, this number doubled, reaching 291,428 reports.¹²

Work with families of military service members and veterans

An additional factor contributing to the growing workload, which is gradually increasing, is work with families of military service members and veterans. Some participants in the focus group discussions mentioned this, and similar conclusions can be drawn from a study focused on providing social services to veterans, conducted in 2023.¹³

Checking bomb shelters and informing about their work

Some informants mentioned that at the beginning of the full-scale war, in addition to their primary duties, workers at institutions that provide social services in their community also inspected the shelters marked on the map. They ensured the shelters' existence, verified that they could be accessed without obstacles, and checked their physical accessibility for people with limited mobility.

Based on the verified information, workers engaged in informing and conducting educational outreach regarding the

¹² Slovo i Dilo (2024). How many cases of domestic violence are recorded in Ukraine. Accessed at: <https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2024/06/26/infografika/suspilstvo/skilky-vypadkiv-domashnoho-nasylstva-fiksuyut-ukrayini>.

¹³ For more details, see Lomonosova, N., Khelashvili, A., & Nazarenko, Y. (2024). Social Services for Veterans in Communities: Challenges and Needs. Research report. Accessed at: https://cedos.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/soczposlugy_digital.pdf.

importance of using shelters during air raids and bombings among social service recipients.

We developed a map where we knew the location of the nearest shelter. Visiting carers went to all their clients and, under signature, made sure they were informed about the location of the nearest shelter, and where they could go if they were not there. [...] this was an enormous task for the visiting carer. Because we... while we were given a list of shelters, it was necessary to check the conditions, what was available, how a person could be moved there, and the condition of that person.

Head of primary trade union organization, regional capital city

● Salaries

Salaries in the social sector have long been among the lowest in Ukraine's public sector. For example, just before the full-scale invasion, in 2021, the average monthly salary in the area of non-residential social assistance (the salaries of workers in territorial centers, SSPCs, social service centers) was 10,095 UAH. By comparison, the average monthly salary in the healthcare sector that same year was 11,825 UAH, and the average nominal salary across Ukraine in December 2021 was 17,453 UAH¹⁴. Thus, in 2021, the average monthly salary in the social assistance sector was 1.7 times lower than the national average.

It is important to note that the average salary is calculated based on data from all full-time employees, both those in positions with lower tariff grades (such as visiting carers) and the heads of institutions that provide social services. Different positions in institutions providing social services have different qualification requirements and, accordingly, are assigned different grades in the Unified Tariff Scale, which determines the base salaries of all public sector workers, including visiting carers. Each employee's salary is composed of the base salary and various additional payments provided by current legislation (such as for years of service, qualification category, PhD degree, etc.). For example, in 2021, the average salary of a leading social work specialist (12th tariff grade), including various possible additional payments, could reach an average of 12,000–15,000 UAH. In contrast, visiting carers (6th tariff grade) almost universally worked for the minimum wage, except in large cities and cities with populations over a million people which could provide higher bonuses from the local budget. As of the end of 2021, the minimum monthly wage in Ukraine was 6,500 UAH. Such low salaries also lead to minimal pensions which these workers will be able to receive in the future.

Three main issues related to such low salary levels even before the start of the full-scale invasion can be outlined as follows.

First, the salary grades in the Unified Tariff Scale have not been reviewed for a long time, and as a result, the purchasing power

¹⁴ The average monthly salary of full-time employees by types of economic activity from the beginning of 2021 — Main Department of Statistics in Kyiv: <http://www.kiev.ukrstat.gov.ua/p.php3?c=1140&lang=1>.

of salaries based on this scale has steadily decreased against the backdrop of inflation and rising prices.

Second, the base salaries for some salary grades are lower than the minimum wage, which leads to several negative consequences for employees in these grades, particularly for visiting carers. This problem is tied to the current mechanism for calculating base salaries for public sector workers. Since the amendments to the Labour Code and the Law of Ukraine "On remuneration of labor" in 2017, base salaries have been linked to the subsistence minimum for able-bodied persons (currently at 2,920 UAH) rather than the minimum wage, as was the case before 2017. At the same time, according to Article 3 of the Law of Ukraine "On remuneration of labor," employers are required to top up the salary to the minimum wage level if "the calculated salary of an employee who has fulfilled the monthly work norm is lower than the legislatively established minimum wage." As a result, a significant portion of the bonuses and additional payments that employees are entitled to are effectively "absorbed" in the process of bringing their base salary up to the minimum wage level.

Third, as a result of the territorial-administrative reform (decentralization), local self-government bodies gained extensive powers, including in the provision of public services such as education, healthcare, and social services. According to Article 34, Paragraph 4 of the Law "On local self-government in Ukraine," the executive bodies of territorial communities are responsible for ensuring the provision of basic social services in accordance with the law¹⁵. To do this, local self-government bodies (hereafter referred to as LSGBs) can establish municipal institutions that provide such services. They are required to maintain these institutions, which includes funding the salaries of staff employees, paying utility bills, covering other necessary operational expenses (such as the purchase of work materials), and maintaining the premises. The problem lies in the fact that the main source of funding for these powers comes from local budgets, which vary significantly in size from community to community. Thus, the amount of some additional payments and bonuses added to the base salaries of workers at institutions that provide social services can differ greatly between small rural communities and large cities with populations over a million people.

¹⁵ The list is defined in Article 6 of the Law of Ukraine "On social services."

In addition, LSGBs have the right to independently determine the directions of using local budget funds in accordance with the law, meaning they can decide the amount of funding allocated for specific community needs. For example, they may decide that certain additional payments to base salaries (such as a bonus payment for Social Worker’s Day) will not be paid this year. Often, employees also do not receive all the necessary additional payments and bonuses they are entitled to due to a lack of funds in institutions. This problem also arises with the awarding of bonuses to employees. As a result, this leads to significant differences in salaries.

As of the end of 2023, after two years of full-scale invasion, the salary situation in the field has not significantly changed.

Most participants in focus group discussions, regardless of position, mentioned that their salary remained the same as it was before the war. At the time of publishing this text in the fall of 2024, the only ones for whom the situation has somewhat changed are employees in the lower tariff categories, particularly visiting carers. Since the minimum wage was increased in 2024, specifically to 7,100 UAH per month from January 1 and to 8,000 UAH per month from April 1, this, in turn, led to an increase in the salaries of those employees whose base salary was below the minimum wage¹⁶.

However, the real value of salaries has decreased due to high inflation and the rapid rise in prices for food and other goods and services, including transportation. According to data from the State Statistics Service¹⁷, in 2022 alone, food prices increased by 34.4% compared to the previous year, leading to a decrease in real wages. Consequently, the purchasing power of salaries for workers in the social field has dropped even further, and the share of food expenses in total household expenditures has increased.

¹⁶ Once again, the issue persists regarding the "absorption" of supplementary payments and bonuses into the adjustment of salaries to reach the minimum wage level.

¹⁷ Ekonomichna Pravda (2023). Inflation in Ukraine in 2022 amounted to 26.6% — State Statistics Service of Ukraine. Accessed at: <https://www.epravda.com.ua/news/2023/01/10/695830/>.

There is stability, sure, but with a minimum wage of 6,700, my salary is 5,700. Well, there's no logic whatsoever. This year, everything is stable, every month, the salary is always the same, there's never a bonus of 50% or 100% or anything like that. Everything is stable. But you understand that with a stable salary, everything keeps rising, everything is rising. Food prices are rising, diesel, gasoline have become more expensive, transportation fees have increased, everything has become more expensive.

Social work specialist, social service provision center, city, Chernivtsi Region

I feel for our workers. And you know, you can't even look such a person in the eye because you can't give them more. You can't. You give them an 80% bonus, but still, 6,000–7,000, that's not the kind of money you can live on nowadays. [...]

Director of a territorial center, city, Kyiv Region

We have additional payments. And support for visiting carers. At the beginning of this year, we didn't have enough funds. But then, following the results of the first quarter, our visiting carers received 100% support. But the base salary is so small that, well, what's that bonus? Just a little more than the minimum wage¹⁸. If we talk about the driver, who... as they say, worked day and night, drove even under shelling. He's still driving now, traveling between villages. He leaves in the morning and works until late because, well, that's his job. His salary is 3,400. Well, what is that?

Director of a territorial center, city, Kharkiv Region

Even before the war, the low salary levels led to loss of personnel in the social field, which is a common problem across the entire public sector. At the same time, due to the impoverishment of the population caused by the economic consequences of the war, rising prices, and mass unemployment in the first year of the full-scale invasion, there may also be a certain number of cases of employees involved in providing social services who resign because their family has lost its primary source of income (for example, due to the loss of a job by the other spouse).

The increased workload associated with organizing the distribution of humanitarian aid, receiving and resettling IDPs, and the significant rise in the number of individuals/families that a social work specialist works with or a visiting carer provides services to at their homes, did not involve additional salary supplements or bonuses in most cases mentioned during the focus group discussions. Thus, at least in the first two years

¹⁸ This refers to the payment of bonuses amounting to 100% of the base salary. Since the base salary of social workers and some other employees, as previously noted, is lower than the minimum wage, the resulting salary, which consists of the base salary and this bonus, is still only slightly higher than the minimum wage.

of the full-scale invasion, the growing workload did not lead to an increase in salaries.

Nothing has changed for us. It was the same before the war, and it has remained the same during the war. We don't have any new additional payments. [...] We have additional payments for stressfulness and a bonus. That's it. The salary has remained at the same level as it was before the war.

Director of a social service center, city, Kharkiv Region

We [...] stayed here at our facility both day and night. But we didn't receive any additional payments to our salary for that. We have the same base salaries. No changes, no night shift payments¹⁹ or anything else. Yes, we were at work [all the time], but our salary remained the minimum one that is currently set by the approved tariff categories.

Social work specialist, day center, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

Some workers also reported that due to the difficult situation with local budgets in their communities, even the payment of the bonuses and supplements to base salaries they previously received was suspended in 2022. In several cases, the payment of some bonuses had still not been restored as of December 2023.

The salary has changed. It has become smaller, they took away the indexation, and therefore my salary has become lower. There were no bonuses whatsoever, on the contrary, they canceled holiday bonuses, so it decreased.

Social work specialist, social service center, city, Chernihiv Region

For most of us [social work specialists], the salary has mostly remained the same as it was, for some the base salaries are lower, and they are being brought up to the minimum wage. But for visiting carers, some of the bonuses were removed, and their salary has significantly decreased. [...] the additional payments are being taken away, but the work of a social worker is quite difficult, and with the minimum wage, people don't really feel much desire to work.

Social work specialist, social service center, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

Even before 2022, it was quite common among workers in the field of providing social services for the workload of an employee going on vacation to be distributed among other workers during that time. Despite the fact that this increases the workload for others and most likely leads to exceeding the legally defined allowable workload²⁰, additional pay for this was

¹⁹ This refers to the supplementary payments to salaries for working at night.

²⁰ This refers not only to the increase in the number of clients per se. Participants

rather rare. During the full-scale invasion, especially in its first year, when some workers either resigned or left the community temporarily for safety reasons, this approach both to work organization and to payment for labor, according to the focus group participants, remained unchanged.

While the [search] is ongoing, and the [position] is still open, the work is distributed among other employees. There are no additional payments, but we keep working, well, the workload increases, while the salary stays the same.

Social work specialist, social service center, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

It is noteworthy that despite the problem with low salary levels, workers in the social field who participated in the focus group discussions repeatedly emphasized the importance of stable pay, as well as the fact that they have a salary at all.

We comfort ourselves with the thought that someone else might have it worse. And we are still getting a salary, and thank God we are working. There are people who have been left without a job. [...]

Visiting carer, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

[...] we should be thankful that we have a salary today and that we are receiving something. That is, despite what's happening, we need to be grateful for this. [...]

Visiting carer, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

During all three focus group discussions, at least once, a comparison was made between the salary levels in the social field and those in education and healthcare, where average salaries are also generally low but still higher than in the social field. This difference in salary levels is to some extent perceived by social workers as unfair, as well as a sign of the undervaluation of the importance of their work by society and the state.

[...] I believe that our profession is somewhat underestimated in society in terms of its importance. When I tell someone that I'm a visiting carer, the reaction is like, "Oh, ew."

Visiting carer, city, Kyiv Region

in the focus group discussions also emphasized the challenges of working with "new" people as substitute carers, as both social services and social work involve communication with people. Establishing a trusting relationship and mutual understanding with them is crucial for the quality delivery of social services.

You can't say that 6,000–7,000 hryvnias is a sufficient salary at the moment, you can't say that. Because the social field is always kept at the bottom, always at the bottom, at the bottom, and at the bottom! Why does a teacher go to work, a doctor go to work and make 15,000–20,000, but we go to work for a salary of 5,000–6,000–7,000 hryvnias? My department head has 23 years of experience and a salary of 7,500! Where? This is unacceptable.

Social work specialist, city, Chernivtsi Region

[...] The biggest problem right now is staffing, and it's not just because people have left, but also because of the salaries. The salaries, because they are low, very low compared to all other institutions. We are located on the hospital grounds, and when they publish their declarations, people are shocked. Compared to us, their salaries are much [higher], about two to three times higher. [...]

Director of a territorial center, city, Chernivtsi Region

As already mentioned, especially at the beginning of the full-scale invasion, in the first half of 2022, a rather significant portion of social workers made the decision to leave their communities. Some of them later returned to work, and those positions that became vacant because the workers did not return, as of December 2023, according to the material reviewed for this text, had already been filled. At the same time, it should be noted that finding people for the vacant positions, according to the informants, was often difficult, primarily due to the low salaries the social field can offer. Finding individuals with the necessary qualifications in such conditions is quite challenging.

The salary itself isn't very attractive to people. And today, unfortunately, as before, there is a need for skilled specialists. But today, unfortunately, this need has grown. [...] [Everything] is further complicated by the lack of competencies in the people we hire, professional competencies, so it's very hard for them to work. [...] And the person, how can I put it? They struggle, like a fish out of water. They try to do things well, but they experience both emotional and physical overload. Because this [experience] is developed over the years. [...] all social workers need a more careful review of salaries in order to encourage people. To make them stay here. To see this job as the calling of their lives. Otherwise, of course, if people take a look, it's hard, the salary isn't great. And they already gradually start looking for another job. [...]

Director of a social service center, city, Kharkiv Region

One example of the response strategies employed by managers of institutions that provide social services is the temporary involvement of workers from related fields, such as healthcare and education (given the difference in salary levels, it can be assumed that this was practiced only during the most difficult

period at the beginning of the full-scale invasion when a significant portion of people lost their jobs for various reasons.) In addition, they actively engage individuals registered with the local office of the State Employment Service (hereafter referred to as SES) to perform certain types of work (particularly as part of home care services in tasks that may not require specific qualifications, such as cleaning, cooking, grocery shopping, as well as providing the service of physical assistance to persons with disabilities who have musculoskeletal impairments and use wheelchairs or have visual impairments); these efforts are part of a co-financing program that involves unemployed individuals in socially useful paid work in the interest of the community²¹, a program which institutions that provide social services had used even before February 24, 2022. However, a significant drawback of this approach is that it only provides a temporary solution to the problem, because, according to the law, such work can only be performed at specially created temporary workplaces, and the duration of such fixed-term employment contracts cannot exceed 180 days. Additionally, this only partially reduces the workload of current staff, as qualified workers cannot be replaced in this way.

One of the participants in the focus group discussions, who heads a municipal institution that provides social services, shared a different approach to addressing the staffing issue. She succeeded in convincing several internally displaced women who had relocated to the community to use a training voucher offered by the SES ²²to obtain a second degree in social work and subsequently work in the community in this field. Overall, this approach is more sustainable, but without a rise in salaries, it may be difficult to persuade a significant number of unemployed individuals registered with the SES to

²¹ Article 31 of the Law "On employment of the population" provides for the possibility of engaging registered unemployed persons in public and temporary work. In addition to individuals registered with the territorial agencies of the State Employment Service, the legislation allows for the involvement of individuals who are officially employed but have lost part of their wages due to the forced reduction (suspension) of manufacturing (or other activities) at the enterprise/institution where they are employed. According to the Law, these types of work do not require additional special, educational, or professional training.

²² In Ukraine, certain categories of officially registered unemployed individuals at employment centers can receive a voucher and undergo free training in a specified list of professions. The value of the voucher cannot exceed ten times the subsistence minimum for able-bodied persons. As of September 2024, this amounts to 30,280 UAH. More information about the conditions for receiving a voucher can be found on the State Employment Service website:

<https://www.dcz.gov.ua/profnavch/voucher>.

use the training voucher to gain qualifications specifically in the social sector.

● Means of labor, movement, and transportation

The work of social workers, especially visiting carers and social work specialists, involves a significant amount of movement within the city or village where they work. This can include direct visits to clients' homes (in the case of providing in-home care service, a significant part of the service is delivered there), as well as moving around the city to purchase food, medicine (in the case of visiting carers), visiting other municipal institutions (for example, to schedule a doctor's appointment for the person receiving in-home care or to obtain certain documents from the Administrative Service Centre), and so on.

In large cities with developed public transportation, workers of institutions that provide social services whose job responsibilities involve visiting clients are usually provided with public transit passes. In smaller communities, bicycles often become the primary means of transportation for workers. Additionally, many employees walk a lot, as public transport networks in larger communities often don't cover all areas of the city, and in rural areas, using a bicycle during cold weather can be dangerous and often impossible. Furthermore, in hilly regions, many visiting carers, who are often pre-retirement or early retirement age, may find it physically challenging to travel long distances by bicycle.

In the summer, we have bicycles, they've been issued to us. But in the winter, of course, it's a problem. Because you can't ride a bicycle anymore. As for transport... For example, in my case, I have my area where I work, and the minibus doesn't go there. It goes around it, on one side and the other, but not exactly where I am. So when the ice on the roads starts, in the winter, I have to walk. It's so hard. Even when I go on vacation, it's very difficult to find a replacement for me in that area.

Visiting carer, city, Chernihiv Region

The problem of providing visiting carers with bicycles existed even before the war: from her work on previous analytical materials, the author is aware of numerous cases in communities where workers used their own bicycles due to a lack of such means of transportation in their institutions. Moreover, it was quite common for bicycles for workers of institutions that provide social services to be purchased with funds from individual benefactors, local businesses, non-governmental organizations, and international donors. Since local budgets often didn't allocate money for bicycle purchases

(particularly due to a lack of funds), the provision of work tools for employees frequently took place essentially in the form of charity.

A separate issue for many years has been the lack of vehicles on the balance of institutions that provide social services. According to the study *Social Services for Veterans in Communities* (Lomonosova et al., 2024), which covered 16 communities in various regions of Ukraine, as of fall 2023, most institutions that provide social services had only one vehicle. Often, due to its age and poor technical condition, it was not suitable for use at all. Meanwhile, the need for a vehicle to perform the duties of social service workers is quite high. A vehicle is needed both for delivering heavy and bulky material assistance to homes in the case of visiting carers, and for social work specialists to visit families in difficult life circumstances, especially when traveling to provide social services in response to urgent or crisis situations (for example, in cases of domestic violence).

Previous studies show that the staff of institutions typically manage such situations by using the personal vehicle of one of the employees, if available, or by sharing vehicles that are on the balance of other municipal services in the community (for example, the police, the Children’s Affairs Service, healthcare institutions, etc.), or the local self-government bodies directly.

This often leads to situations where, due to the need to use private transport, social workers end up involving their family members in their work.²³

[...] My husband, he also takes part in my work, when he comes home from work, we use the car to deliver potatoes, onions, well, all the [heavy stuff]. [...] He says, soon I’ll go to your accounting office because they already owe me a salary. [...]

Visiting carer, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

[...] When there was no [public] transportation available, my husband would drive me to work every day and helped our visiting carers as much as he could in the absence of public transport. [...]

Director of a territorial center, city, Kharkiv Region

Even today, we got a call in the morning that a volunteer organization brought a whole set for our clients, a canister, a blanket, a throw, a towel, soap, shampoo, a bedding set, a pillow. I said there’s a [company] car available, and I’m ready to get in the car, load it up, and, along with the driver, deliver everything door-to-door to our clients. But, well, we took it to the villages, and we

²³ Детальніше про такі копінгові стратегії можна почитати там само, с. 60–71.

were told: “Girls, you’ll do it by hand.” So that’s what I’ll be doing tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, taking my cart bag, taking my husband, and just going back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. [...] I try to involve my husband when there are big purchases like this or when we distribute food parcels or something. Even though he says that soon he’ll be getting paid by us. Because he’s constantly coming with me and carrying things. But he, well, he feels sorry for me, not wanting me to strain my legs or back [...].

Visiting carer, city, Kyiv Region

Based on the focus group discussions conducted for this study, it can be concluded that all these issues have persisted for a long time and remain largely unresolved to this day.

Additionally, in communities that were temporarily occupied in 2022, workers faced an even greater problem. Often, the fleets of public transportation in these communities were destroyed and/or looted by the Russian army. As a result, in the first months following the de-occupation of these communities, the public transportation network needed some time to recover. During this period, social workers, like other residents of the city, could only move around using their own vehicles (if they had them) or on foot.

Moreover, the buildings of institutions that provide social services in communities that experienced occupation also suffered destruction and damage. Participants in the focus group discussions frequently spoke about destroyed and stolen computer equipment, as well as the personal files of social service recipients. Workers had to restore all of this from scratch, which created additional burdens for them and temporarily reduced the level of material and technical provision for their work.

[...] After the liberation, when we returned to work, it was also difficult. Because we came back to our office which was completely empty. All the work we developed, all the equipment, the company car, personal belongings, personal files, well, everything was destroyed. They say some of it was stolen, and some of it — they made bonfires here. So, at first, it was tough. We were drawing everything by hand. [...]

Social work specialist, social service center, city, Kharkiv Region

Regarding other material provisions, aside from means of transportation, it can be concluded from the conducted study that certain problems related to this have mostly persisted to this day. For example, just as before the full-scale invasion, all social workers who participated in the focus group discussions

noted the need to periodically purchase some office supplies (paper, pens, notebooks) with their own money.

Interviews conducted by the author of this text with visiting carers in the summer of 2020 helped reveal a problem with the provision of workwear (Bobrova & Lomonosova, 2020). The same issue was mentioned by social workers who participated in the focus group discussions conducted for the preparation of this material (both visiting carers and heads of institutions that provide social services).

[...] absolutely, this happens. They use their own money for workwear. In our center, we haven't purchased, say, smocks for probably five years, the ones used for home cleaning and meal preparation. So they use their own funds. And it's not just the visiting carers, but also our janitors [too]. [...] But when we draft the budget, we account for literally everything. And we understand that something will need to be cut²⁴. [...]

Director of a territorial center, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

We buy notebooks, pens, all these reports, we purchase all of this and print it ourselves. We also buy gloves for work.

Visiting carer, territorial center, city, Kyiv Region

²⁴ This refers to the fact that, due to a lack of funds in the local budget, local self-government bodies may reduce the funding allocated for the maintenance of municipal institutions.

● Power outages, air raid alarms, and bombings

Massive bombings, power outages related to them, and frequent air raid alerts significantly impact the work of social workers.

Regarding air raid alerts, focus group participants mentioned that they generally try to go to a shelter or, if unavailable (for example, if the alert occurs while moving around the city), they find refuge in relatively safe places or move to a room shielded from windows by two walls. However, the significant workload of social workers has some influence on how they respond to an alert in different situations. For instance, social work specialists and institution heads who handle citizen consultations and meet with service recipients to address their issues in the institution’s premises noted that in the event of an alert, they not only move to the shelter with clients but continue working there to stay on schedule with receiving citizens and to prevent work from piling up. Overall, almost all focus group participants shared that regardless of their location, they try to use the time spent in shelters during air raids productively, otherwise, they would have to complete the accumulated tasks during their personal time.

[...] During the air raid alerts, we offer our visitors to go to the shelter that’s located the closest to us. We close up and also go to the shelter. Well, of course, [this] affects us. Because sometimes we have to spend a good chunk of working hours sitting in shelters. And this still affects the work, and the work doesn’t just go away. And you hear a lot from people that they’re not happy with this. That it’s nonsense, and there’s no need to go [to a shelter] now. [...]

Social work specialist, day center, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

[...] During air raid alerts, we don't always go down to the shelter, although it's there and very well equipped. If there's, well, a serious threat, like when it's reported that our community [is in danger], then we do go down. With clients. Because, for example, right now, we're writing a lot of needs assessments²⁵, and people are scheduled, the queue is long, even booked two or three months in advance. We can't shift it, it's hard for us to adjust to this, so we continue working during the air raid alert, we never just go down to the shelter and wait it out. We always keep working, we don't go

²⁵ Current legislation, primarily the Law of Ukraine "On social services," provides for the delivery of social services to an individual or family through case management. Case management involves a comprehensive assessment of the individual's or family's needs for social services, based on which an individual service plan is developed, and the necessary specialists are engaged.

down often, but when we do, we serve clients there. The center is closed during the air raid alert, but those who are inside the building go down to the basement with us.

Social work specialist, social service center, city, Chernihiv Region

The situation is more difficult for visiting carers, whose workday almost entirely consists of moving around the city or village, and whose schedule for visiting clients whom they provide in-home care is very tight. Because of this, they mentioned that they may ignore air raid alerts and even continue moving during shelling in some cases to ensure they visit all the clients they have scheduled for the day. In such cases, for those working in larger settlements, the biggest issue becomes the stoppage of public transportation, which does not operate during air raid alerts. Since visiting carers purchase food, hygiene products, medications, and other necessary items for their clients, this can be especially challenging in such situations.

Scheduled and emergency power outages have the most negative impact on the work of visiting carers because they need electricity to carry out tasks related to providing the service of in-home care. This includes the operation of elevators in apartment buildings, as it is difficult to carry heavy bags of groceries to 4–5 apartments on high floors, and the ability to directly assist their clients with household chores: cooking, helping with laundry, thorough cleaning, etc. Without electricity, it becomes quite difficult to complete all tasks within the limited time that each visiting carer has for serving each client. Focus group participants mentioned that during periods of frequent outages, they tried to coordinate their client visit schedules with the power outage schedules, and sometimes even performed certain tasks, like cooking, in their own homes.

Some people, for example, need to have food cooked for them, but they only have an electric stove. Visiting carers had to cook food at their own homes and bring it over, or rely on some sort of hot meals. In short, they had to find ways to manage the situation. [...]

Head of primary trade union organization, regional capital city

Since it is sometimes impossible to completely avoid the negative impact of these circumstances, the schedules of visiting carers can be rather severely disrupted, leading them in some cases to continue working outside of their regular hours. Additionally, despite the generally positive assessment of digitalization in the social sector given by the focus group participants, the lack of generators and other backup power

sources in some institutions that provide social services often makes access to necessary electronic databases and software difficult or impossible during blackouts.

● Emotional state and physical health

The work of many employees in the social services sector involves a high level of physical exertion. For many categories of workers, this relates to the significant amount of movement they do throughout the day. The greatest physical load falls on visiting carers, as much of their work is directly physical. As previously mentioned, they purchase groceries for their clients and mostly deliver them by hand.

In the first months of the full-scale invasion, many cities, towns and villages experienced a shortage of food and especially medicine. This led to an increase in the time required to search for and purchase necessary goods – standing in lines and making more trips. The purchase and delivery of food could also be dangerous for many visiting carers during the early months of the war, as could traveling for all the other workers. In communities located near active combat zones, the heightened level of danger remains even today.

[...] We would get in line to buy something [...] at 5 or 6 in the morning. By 9, when the store opened, you [could buy], but by 10, there was nothing left. By noon, there was no one in the city because things were flying back and forth. And sometimes I'd be walking, and it was, well, scary because no one was around, but you're walking because you know you have to bring something to the person. [...] We got a lot of help, there was a farmer who brought us milk. And we would deliver this milk to everyone. Public transport wasn't running, and it was still too early to ride bicycles back then. But, well, we already started trying to use them, at least to hang [bags on them], because we were carrying 20-30 liters to deliver to each person. [...]

Visiting carer, city, Chernihiv Region

[...] In the first month, all my workers stoically endured all the shelling, getting to work under fire. I even remember, for example, that walking the 500 meters to work was a challenge: how to get there, where to hide when the shelling got more, kind of, dangerous, close, where you could quickly jump into a building stairway, and that way you make it to work. And all my workers, there were six of them, all the workers for the entire month of March stoically made their way to work and were at their workplaces.

Director of a social service center, city, Kharkiv Region

The rapid increase in prices further exacerbated these problems, as a significant portion of goods, especially

medications, are purchased by visiting carers using their clients' personal funds, and most elderly people in Ukraine receive small pensions. Additionally, the aforementioned humanitarian aid is also often distributed by visiting carers by hand.

[...] Moreover, you know how our elderly are, they are frugal. And they want everything bought for them in advance. [...] Medications in advance. In general, to do all this work. Buy matches, buy candles. Think about how to get everything at the lowest price. [...] at first glance, it might not seem so... important. But for a visiting carer who, for example, has 13–14 people under their care, and each one needs something found and bought here and there, specifically where they want it. Either in their neighborhood or by going to the market to buy everything at cheaper prices. Or go to the pharmacy, specifically find and monitor where the price of the medications they take is the lowest. [...]

Head of primary trade union organization, regional capital city

We deliver everything that's brought to our social services center. They bring everything. Food, diapers, canned meat, we even delivered millet and chickens. We carried it all, carried everything on our own backs, so to speak. Backpacks, carts. We're thankful for the carts they gave us. We had to do all of it. And even now, we still carry so much. [...] We were told not to get involved with the Red Cross and the UN. They said to let relatives or acquaintances deal with them. But how can you not get involved? You understand, how can you not? So, of course, you do. [...] I have families where there's no one left. The daughter and son-in-law left for Germany, the grandkids are in Poland or Czechoslovakia, doesn't matter. [...] How could I not bring her something? You split those 17 kilograms in two, and you carry it all yourself [...].

Visiting carer, city, Kharkiv Region

The working conditions are very tough because everything has to be carried by hand. Yes, we have bicycles. [...] We even won five scooters. But that's just five, and there are forty of us. And the terrain here is like this—mountains, mountains, and more mountains. The city itself is on a mountain. So, you go down a mountain, but what's the point? You load up the bicycle and then have to drag the bicycle as well. There's the backpack, the bicycle, and you're pulling it too. Because you can't ride up the mountain. And the mountain is a kilometer, or even one and a half. Where can you ride? So, you're pulling it by yourself. And when it's slippery, oh my God. [...] And then you still have work to do.

Visiting carer, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

Such work, along with the increasing number of clients receiving in-home care services per visiting carer, especially when it comes to recipients in the 5th group of mobility activity, leads to significant strain on the workers' leg and back muscles and has a negative impact on their health.

[...] The most common issue among our visiting carers, aside from psycho-emotional burnout, is the strain on their spine. These are hernias, those kinds of back and lower back conditions. Because they carry groceries. Yes, according to workplace safety regulations, they are allowed to carry up to 7 kilograms. But, you know, that grandma doesn't care. And the visiting carer, too, if, for example, they go to the market to shop, they won't make three trips to the market for each grandma. They buy groceries for all three, for example. So, they carry all those groceries. And this takes a toll on their health. It would be nice to have some kind of resort treatment. At least a few [trip vouchers]. But that isn't practiced here. There are no trip vouchers, and no one provides this.

Head of primary trade union organization, regional capital city

When discussing the negative impact of the war on their physical health during work, focus group participants also frequently mentioned a lack of sleep due to shelling, air raid alerts, the necessity of going to work no matter what, as well as a lack of time for rest, working without days off or vacations. Working without weekends and vacations can be particularly common among heads of institutions.

[...] we work late into the night and on weekends, because there's this problem and this situation. But generally, we try to get everything done, everything we're tasked with, [as well as] what we have to do daily, according to our schedules and regulations, all of that is completed and done. [...]

Director of a territorial center, city, Chernivtsi Region

I want to note that not only the Social Service Center but all the structures of the executive committee [of the city council], medical institutions, and social services, everyone was on duty, everyone working without any weekends at all, the concept of weekends didn't exist anymore... there were none at all, no Saturdays, no Sundays, no days off, we were fully on duty, as they say, from Monday to Monday.

Director of a social service center, city, Kharkiv Region

[...] we, the managers, [...] ourselves have been here around the clock. Since the first day of the war, I've been at work around the clock, without any days off. Because internally displaced persons live in our facility, we can't leave them alone, because there are many of them. [...] clearly, these are people who need services provided to them, who come to us every day, and their problems need to be addressed. The workload is enormous, for every staff member and for the management of the facility. I've been working for three years, [...] and, to this day, I can say that there probably hasn't been a single full day off that I could spend with my family. I'm always at work, and we're constantly doing something. We're doing repairs, we're being with people, we're working with international foundations.

Deputy director of an SSPC, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

Despite the significant physical strain, the focus group participants probably spoke the most frequently about the emotional burden specifically.

You know, it was so hard emotionally, it was so hard. Colleagues were leaving. But we stayed, my husband and I stayed in the city. I'm telling you this now, and everything inside me is trembling. But this is what we lived through. Well, what else could we do? You just keep going, and the next day, you go again. Even though we stayed in for a week [without leaving home]. We stayed in for a week, but I went. What else could I do, the child wants to eat [...]. So, I went again. Crawled, you could say. But, well, somehow, we made it through that year. This year is a little easier.

Visiting carer, city, Kharkiv Region

Overall, the work of employees in the entire social sector involves working with people in difficult life situations who need external support. Accordingly, such work requires a high degree of emotional involvement. With the beginning of the full-scale invasion, as more people began to feel vulnerable, the workload for social workers as a whole increased. A significant portion of these people have lost something important in their lives and need support. Often, it is the social workers who are the first to provide that support.

When the fighting passed, [city name] was ruined, more than 3,000 homes were destroyed. Now, it's very difficult to work with the people who have been left without housing. People are, you know, very [hurt], with such resentment, such grief towards it all: "Why did this happen to me?" It's something, well, you know, you have to approach it in a way that... [...]

Director of a territorial center, city, Kyiv Region

At the same time, a significant portion of social service recipients, especially those who are alone, turned primarily to social workers for support, comfort, and reassurance at the beginning of the full-scale war, as these workers are essentially like family to them. It was particularly difficult for the elderly who remained in their community without any close relatives.

[...] Emotionally [difficult], yes. You know, the war has affected all of us. Us, our families. And for the grandmothers, when they realized they were just left behind, and their family took everything and left, but the grandmother stayed behind alone here. And she pressures [us], like, "You're obligated, you're the state, you must." She understands there's no way out, that she's been abandoned, and sometimes she takes her anger out on us. Who else would she take it out on? After all, we're the only ones she talks to.

Visiting carer, city, Kharkiv Region

Regarding the day center, we also faced difficulties with the onset of the war because people living alone would come to our center to find support. At that time, we all became psychologists, even though we each had different professions [...]. It was a huge stress for each of us, including the staff at our center. We brought our pensioners together, gathered them in one room, played some kind of thematic films to help them get distracted, organized art therapy, held some kind of psychological training sessions. [...] It got to the point where they were bringing their neighbors. [...]

Director of a territorial center, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

Attempts to support their clients during the first weeks and months after the invasion took up a significant portion of the visiting carers' working hours, and this communication often took place in their off-hours as well.

[...] and all the emotional burden, it's all on us. [...] I have some wards who were affected in the first days of the war. Their homes were damaged, they were left in nothing but their nightgowns, running into the streets. And imagine all of this, one of my clients is a woman with a child with disabilities. And now, two years have passed, and she still has panic attacks. If something bangs, she calls me: "Olena²⁶, what was that?" She can call me at night, at six in the morning, at five in the morning—"What was that bang, where was that bang?" And for me, I start having a panic attack myself, but I pull myself together and start [talking] to her, "Nataliia Mykolaivna, yes, yes, everything is fine, it's our guys."

Visiting carer, city, Kharkiv Region

[...] Everyone was anxious, the old ladies didn't know what was happening or when. They constantly needed information because their psychological condition was worsening. So you could say that visiting carers were on the phone with them 24 hours a day, because they could call at night or anytime, needing answers to their questions. "Halia, there's an air raid alert right now. Halia, is there anything falling, is there anything banging?"

Head of primary trade union organization, regional capital city

We use every possible means to lift their spirits, to keep them from losing heart. Even though this isn't the first time they've experienced something like this, the state of war and everything else. We try to support them in any way we can, both physically and emotionally. In any way possible. [...] I want to go even further and say that we are engaged in charity work, you know. Because we are psychologists, we are compassionate, we are kind, we support them physically and support their moral spirits [...].

Visiting carer, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

From the experience of many focus group participants, due to the emotional toll it takes, interacting with the relatives of care recipients was just as challenging as directly providing services

²⁶ Names have been changed here and throughout.

to a larger number of clients compared to the period before the full-scale invasion. In their view, relatives often displayed a lack of understanding of the limited resources of the municipal workers and, at times, a lack of respect for their work.

Some people’s children, excuse me, have gone abroad, leaving their grandfathers, grandmothers, fathers and mothers here. And sometimes [...], even when they do call, it’s with [an attitude] like you’re obligated. With [an attitude] that you’re supposed to be there day and night and everything. “You have to, we left, and you must take care of them, and that’s it.”

Visiting carer, city, Chernihiv Region

I want to mention a moment when, in March, in April, we received a lot of calls, the relatives who were abroad, they would call [...]. I was listening to all of this when we were in the reception area, writing down the addresses, names, who needed a visit [...]. Once, I picked up the phone, couldn’t hold back, and spoke with some children who called from Poland and said, “You need to take care of them.” And I asked them, I said, “Tell me, please, why did you leave this person behind?” [...] You know, sometimes relatives would yell into the phone: “Who do you think you are, how can you say that? Yes, I couldn’t take her, my grandmother with me, or mother.” And, you know, it was very emotionally... very hard to hear.

Director of a territorial center, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

An additional factor of emotional workload for most workers is the anxiety about their children and grandchildren. It is important to note that women make up the overwhelming majority of workers in the field of social services and social assistance. According to the State Statistics Service²⁷, as of the end of 2021, women accounted for 81% of workers in the residential care services sector and 89% in the non-residential social assistance sector. Worrying about their children, who are at home, in daycare, or at school during an air raid, significantly affects them while they are doing their jobs, as noted by the participants in the focus group discussions.

When the situation became very difficult, very, and all of my employees have small children, and after they would spend nights sitting in basements, and afterwards, the mothers would go to work, leaving their children with a neighbor or some grandmother to watch over them, naturally, this caused very significant difficulties.

Director of a social service center, city, Kharkiv Region

²⁷ According to the State Statistics Service data on the average number of full-time employees by gender and specific types of economic activity for January–September 2021; data obtained in response to a request

If there's an air raid alert, we all go into the corridor or a room with two walls. Our building is old, and the walls here are, I think, about 70 cm thick, definitely. So, we wait for an hour or two, then go back to our workstations, and... [it] affects our psychological state. Our mental state, our nervousness. You worry about your children, because you're 30-40 km away from your children. Who will pick up the child from daycare... and the older boy is at school.

Social work specialist, social service center, city, Chernivtsi Region

Another issue for the workers, as well as for all other women, is the closure of many daycares due to destruction and the lack of adequate shelters, as well as the shift to online schooling for the same reasons. This often creates the so-called "second shift" for women at home, related to increasing amounts of reproductive labor. The need to care for children and the anxiety for them, as several focus group participants noted, led some of their colleagues to make the decision to resign.

[...] in our city, not everyone is working, our school can only operate offline two days a week, and the rest of the days it is online. Not all kindergartens are open either, although work is being done right now to create shelters in them. But I want to say that every mother is also worried about how she will send her child to kindergarten when there are sirens, rockets flying, explosions happening, and hitting... it's very, very difficult. And so, if the father is in the Armed Forces, he says: "Stay with the children, we have some income, we'll manage somehow." And that's how some vacant positions have opened up in our institution.

Director of a territorial center, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

● Psychological support and counteracting emotional burnout

If we assess the availability of psychological support and measures for emotional relief, in general, it can be cautiously concluded that such support is available to employees of institutions that provide social services, but it is quite fragmented and irregular.

As we know from previous research, one of the positions in the staff structure of institutions that provide social services which is most often unfilled and remains so for a long time is that of the psychologist. This is primarily due to the low pay relative to the complexity of the work. The absence of a psychologist on staff is a problem not only for social service recipients but also for the employees of the institution, as they lack a qualified colleague who they could turn to when faced with difficult emotional experiences or when feeling the first signs of emotional burnout.

At the same time, the presence of a psychologist in the institution does not necessarily mean that other colleagues have the opportunity to turn to them, as the number of requests for psychological support has significantly increased during the war. The need for psychological support has been expressed not only by IDPs arriving in the community but also by those who were already receiving social services at municipal institutions before the start of the full-scale invasion. For example, according to some informants, elderly individuals who, before the war, received social services such as social adaptation or day care and participated in Third Age Universities organized by institutions that provide social services, often began seeking psychological support from the institution's staff after the full-scale invasion began. As a result, the staff psychologist does not always have the capacity to work directly with the employees of the institution.

We have a psychologist. [...] I've heard that some colleagues have reached out. They can work with us. When we attend meetings or submit reports, they can organize something like an educational session. [...] it can be in a relaxing, playful form. But, well, this is very rare now. [...]

Visiting carer, city, Chernihiv Region

We have a psychologist at our center. But our psychologist only works with clients. For example, this year, no activities [for staff] were conducted, we received no psychological support. So, I can say that we are not supported psychologically in any way here. [...] even looking at my colleagues' state, you can see how exhausted they are, indeed, we're working so much right now, and, well, professional burnout can often be quite visible, even in the emotional state of my colleagues. And I think this [psychological support] is necessary. But nobody takes any measures.

Social work specialist, city, Chernihiv Region

According to focus group participants, regional social service centers are often involved in organizing activities for emotional relief and counteracting emotional burnout; in some institutions, this may be done by primary trade union organizations.

[...] I am very grateful to our management. We had psychologists working with us. There were group sessions and individual ones. Then we had training sessions specifically to help us be able to support our elderly clients. To prevent these panic attacks. Especially during explosions, when there are all these air raid alerts. [...]

Visiting carer, city, Kyiv Region

The management [of the institution] takes care of ensuring, and I am involved in this as the head of the trade union, that we really organize activities to prevent psycho-emotional burnout with the involvement of a psychologist. We try to go on trips to some kind of scenic or interesting places to spend time together. Sometimes we go out into nature together with the psychologist to relieve psycho-emotional stress. We prepare a program beforehand, including some exercises for psycho-emotional relief. [...]

Head of primary trade union organization, regional capital city

We currently don't have a psychologist on staff, but various trainings are held quite often, self-help, mental health support. Our regional social services center provides us with such seminars, trainings, etc., essentially every month to help us get back to normal.

Social work specialist, SSPC, city, Chernivtsi Region

Additionally, since the onset of the war, the scope of activities of many Ukrainian non-governmental organizations has expanded; these organizations actively provide assistance to vulnerable populations, particularly within the framework of humanitarian response programs. Psychologists from non-governmental organizations are often the ones who temporarily fill the gaps in psychological support due to the lack of psychologists in institutions that provide social services. Focus group participants noted that as part of such

cooperation programs, specialists from non-governmental organizations conduct trainings and group sessions with the staff of institutions that provide social services.

We used to have a psychologist, and the position is still vacant today. But our girl resigned, she went to the military recruitment office. Psychologists regularly come to us through various projects. I've had multiple opportunities to conduct such trainings with all visiting carers, social workers, any staff members of the territorial center. So, in this regard, the work is being done. [...]

Director of a territorial center, city, Kharkiv Region

One of the common problems is that such activities are most often held during working hours. As a result, due to the heavy workload, this can force workers to choose between participating in the training or continuing with the scheduled work to prevent it from piling up. According to focus group participants, this makes some workers reluctant to agree to such trainings. Additionally, it can be assumed that since most of the working time of visiting carers is spent on client visits, despite constant work with people, they are the least covered by psychological relief activities.

We don't have our own psychologist on staff, we have a vacancy. We are regularly visited by NGOs [names of organizations] — these are well-known organizations we collaborate with. [...] Since we've had internally displaced persons since the first day of the war, initially, it was comprehensive work with these people. Later, we were offered to continue such focus groups with the staff. Based on our experience, we can say that this takes up a lot of the employees' time. [...] Our employees, well, they don't really like such activities. We spend a lot of time on it, the work is put on hold, it throws us off psychological balance even more.

Social work specialist, social service center, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

Many different organizations offer educational activities. And if I know that such organizations exist, there are plans to hold events on preventing professional burnout, then my employees definitely participate in these events. The only problem, of course, is that the participants are usually social work specialists, department heads, social workers... But, unfortunately, visiting carers are not yet able to participate in such events. Because each of them has their own work schedule. Every day they need to provide services to specific people. So, there's a certain issue here. [...]

Director of an SSPC, city, Chernihiv Region

● Attitudes toward the work

The daily work of social workers helps to mitigate the negative impact of the war on the population, and the workers themselves often directly describe their work as, in a way, "shielding" the people they work with from suffering and hardship. During the focus group discussions and interviews that formed the basis of this material, it was often mentioned how, as was discussed above, social workers try to emotionally support those to whom they provide services – because they are the first ones whom people turn to for such support, because they are the only ones who can provide it, and because they view such support as part of their work, even though it is usually not written into the job descriptions of most of them.

In addition, this desire to somehow "shield" vulnerable people from the war is reflected in their overall attitude toward their work and may have been one of the key motivations for workers to continue coming to work, even during the most difficult first months of the full-scale invasion. Equally important, it has kept them from leaving the profession, despite issues such as low pay and heavy workloads. In this sense, one can see how the daily work of social workers embodies one of the core functions of social policy: to mitigate the negative effects of the risks that every individual may face throughout life.

Here is how one informant, the director of a social services center, describes their view of the primary role of social workers during the war:

In our community, the war started from the very beginning because there is practically no distance between us and our aggressor. Our community is on the border, some of the settlements were under shelling every day. [...] our task, my personal task, was to ensure that our wards who receive services did not feel the impact of this change in circumstances as much as possible. This applies to both the wards living in our residential facility and those receiving in-home care services. [...] we found ways to ensure that our wards [...] didn't really feel that the war had started, whether in terms of food, daily routines, or anything else. Yes, they know, but the situation is such. That is, we managed to keep people away from additional stressful situations in order to be able to shield them, so to speak [...].

Director of an SSPC, city, Chernihiv Region

In the answers of the informants, it was also mentioned that, in addition to regularly working overtime as part of their jobs,

some of them can often engage in what is essentially volunteer assistance for the people they work with, including providing financial and material help. This was especially common in the first half of the full-scale invasion and generally most often involved assisting IDPs and elderly people living alone. Social workers shared how they tried to improve their living conditions and somewhat enhance their quality of life, even when it meant doing so at their own expense.

[...] we currently have internally displaced persons living [at our institution], but the expenses for them are not covered by the institution. For office supplies, these things are purchased, well, more or less, and if something is missing, it's minor. But when it comes to people who need some kind of assistance, we are, well, like volunteers, you could say. This has included food, in certain periods, and financial help for processing documents. Even, well, small things, like someone living here has a birthday²⁸. And, well, they are in such conditions, so we'd chip in, and... even if it's a small present, there will still be a present, there will be some attention. That was the situation before, now we get a bit more support from NGOs, but [before] it was things like kettles, extension cords, some kind of flashlights, all these little things for daily life, clothes, well... it was all a necessity. Now, there's less of this, but constantly something breaks, there are some kind of household expenses that don't fit into the institution's budget [...].

Social work specialist, social service center, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

Overall, when speaking about difficult working conditions, unsatisfactory pay, and the negative impact of the war on their work which social workers have had to deal with, they often shared what specifically motivates them to continue doing this job (even though this wasn't the subject of the interviews or focus group discussions). In these stories, a strong emotional connection frequently emerged, one that workers have with the people they provide social services to – a connection that goes somewhat beyond simply fulfilling their professional duties and, in terms of emotional involvement, often resembles the bond between close family members, relatives, or friends.

We still love them all. I don't know. I still love them. Well, still. Even if we argue sometimes, or say something — and they stay silent. But you still love them. And we still forgive them, and somehow it all gets forgotten. [...]

Visiting carer, city, Chernihiv Region

²⁸ Based on interviews conducted by the author as part of other studies, it can be cautiously assumed that the practice of social workers purchasing small gifts for birthdays and other holidays for recipients of care services who live in residential departments of territorial centers and have no close relatives may be quite widespread.

[...] it was very hard because so many people and girls [referring to other social workers] went abroad. And some stayed in the occupation. It's like they're just outside the city, but they can't get here. And all those people are on our shoulders now. Well, of course, it was scary. It's hard for you, you can't manage anything for yourself, but you can't abandon them. How could you abandon them? You can't. We had to.

Visiting carer, city, Chernihiv Region

This attitude is most commonly observed among visiting carers and other workers involved in providing or organizing care services for elderly people. It should be noted that service recipients themselves also often demonstrate a strong emotional attachment to the visiting carers. This was confirmed by a 2023 study focused on assessing satisfaction with received services²⁹. The quality of life for many elderly people is heavily dependent on the visiting carers who come to help them³⁰. They are often nearly the only people with whom these individuals interact, and whom they can turn to in order to meet their emotional needs. During interviews conducted as part of the aforementioned study, it was noticeable, among other things, that many informants struggled to answer questions about what could be improved in the provision of the service they receive, most often responding that everything was already fine and repeatedly emphasizing their gratitude for receiving help at all, stating that they don't have the "moral right" to complain. Thus, it can be assumed that these mutual emotional bonds may sometimes develop between service recipients and the workers.

After the Ukrainian army liberated some of the communities occupied in March 2022, social workers could be involved in door-to-door visits to elderly people and people with disabilities who had been receiving in-home care services and material assistance before the full-scale invasion. These visits were conducted together with police representatives to assess the condition of these individuals. Since a significant portion of

²⁹ More details on the results of the *Study on Social Protection and Social Rights in Ukraine: Satisfaction with Social Services* (Lomonosova, N., Kabanets, Y., Buts, O., Babych, K., 2022) can be found at the link:

<https://cedos.org.ua/researches/doslidzhennya-z-pytan-soczialnogo-zahystu-ta-soczialnyh-prav-v-ukrayini-zadovolenist-soczialnymy-poslugamy/>.

³⁰ For example, this is how one of the study participants, a 66-year-old female home care recipient from Chernivtsi, described it: "Even the girls who come as substitutes, you know, when they go on vacation, even with them I've already developed... well, maybe they've known me for years, I've known them. So, I don't know, it's always been comfortable. Like I said, if it weren't for them, I don't know what I would do. [...] They're the only ones I have, there's no one. In the summer, as I said, I can still ask for something in the yard. But in the winter, sitting here at home, I depend only on them, completely."

those receiving these services have limited mobility and live alone, not all of them were able to relocate to safer places during shellings, nor could they ensure their own food supply after visiting carers could no longer reach them due to ongoing shelling and other actions by the Russian army. In cases where neighbors were unable to provide help, some of these individuals died. Here is how one visiting carer from a de-occupied community in the Kyiv Region describes her memories of participating in such visits:

I could have refused. But I couldn't even bring myself to say such a thing. Because I understood that, well, they were waiting. Even those who weren't mine, so to speak, but you come to them and say you're a social worker, and when I arrived there, it was tears, it was... They didn't even need the bread, although the first thing was — bread, bread, bread.

Visiting carer, city, Kyiv Region

The emotional reward from their work plays a significant role in the motivation of social workers. When talking about their workload, salary levels, and whether they receive any additional pay for overtime, for working in difficult conditions in frontline communities or those temporarily occupied by Russia in 2022, the informants in this study often mentioned emotional reward, and their hopes for the future were not only about improving working conditions and pay but also about gaining societal recognition for the importance of their work. As already noted, social workers generally tend to compare the conditions and pay in their profession with those offered in healthcare and education, but also the societal value placed on those professions. The hope that they will be remembered, noticed, and understood was expressed in conversations quite frequently.

We manage, we try to provide for our people so that they, well... [...] I see that there are girls who — tiny salaries, but they've worked for 30 years, or more. And for these wards of ours, they are more of a family than their own children and relatives. And they are the closest people. And today, I'll tell you, well, for the sake of this... The pay is low, and it's so hard, but it's the gratitude of the people, it is what keeps all of us here, on this earth, in this job of ours. [...] this is work, and we do everything we can to manage it, and people are grateful to us for that.

Director of a territorial center, Kyiv Region

I believe that this is the work we do, well, we don't abandon anyone. We help in tough times. Even now, let's take the current situation, war, there are snowstorms now³¹. And, for example, I went to an elderly lady, and I couldn't even reach her gate, all of mine are in the private sector. And in the private sector, we just go and dig them out. We don't leave them behind. And I think that there are people who have it worse. So, we'll hope that someday we'll be remembered.

Visiting carer, city, Dnipropetrovsk Region

³¹ The conversation took place in December 2023.

● Conclusions

Overall, it can be concluded that the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has had a negative impact on the working conditions of social workers. At the same time, it is mostly about deepening the existing problems that were already prevalent in this sector before. These include low wages, heavy workloads that often exceed the norms established by legislation, widespread insufficient provision of work tools and means of transportation necessary for social workers to move within the community.

Among the factors that contributed to the increased workload during the war, especially in the first year of the full-scale invasion, were the organization of reception and assistance in resettling IDPs in the community, as well as providing them with various services; the involvement of social workers in the organization of reception, distribution, and delivery of humanitarian aid, as well as in processing the status of children affected by military actions; the growing number of people requiring care services due to the large number of elderly individuals left alone after their relatives who used to care for them left; and the increase in cases of domestic violence cases. The work with the families of military service members and veterans, whose volume has been gradually expanding, is also becoming another such factor. In some communities, social workers were also involved in checking the availability and accessibility of shelters, which slightly increased their workload in February–March 2022. In communities that were/are located near active combat zones and/or regularly shelled by the Russian army, as well as in those that were under occupation, the departure of some social workers to safer regions was another factor that led to increased workloads for the workers who remained.

The existing problems with labor compensation were exacerbated by the rapid rise in inflation and the increase in food prices, which led to a decrease in the purchasing power of salaries in the social sector. Due to decreased revenues to local budgets, many communities temporarily suspended (or reduced) the payment of various bonuses and additional payments, which constitute a significant portion of social workers' salaries. After the minimum wage increase in 2024, the wages of some social workers in the lowest tariff grades, whose base salary was lower than the minimum wage, slightly increased. However, there remains a problem with linking the

calculation of base salaries to the legislatively defined subsistence minimum (which, moreover, is very low and does not reflect actual living costs) and the "absorption" of some additional payments and bonuses into bringing salaries up to the minimum wage level.

The war also affects the safety of the labor of those employed in the social sector, especially social workers living in communities near the front line. Since their work is largely tied to moving around the city, and in some cases, these movements make up the majority of their workday, social workers face increased safety risks during wartime as they are often in locations far from shelters. The demanding work schedule and high level of responsibility for its completion often prompt workers to take a highly practical approach to using the work time which they spend in bomb shelters, and sometimes they may disregard safety rules and ignore air raid warnings. The suspension of public transport during air raids, as well as frequent power outages, also negatively impact the daily work of those employed in the social sector, especially visiting carers, making it significantly more difficult for them to carry out their duties.

Increasing salaries and revising the methods of their calculation, reducing the amount of paperwork and reporting that social workers have to complete, providing consistent psychological support, and extending the length of vacations for physical recovery and psychological relief – these are the steps most frequently mentioned by the informants in this study when discussing ways to significantly improve working conditions in the social sector. Improving working conditions and compensation, in turn, will help raise the prestige of the social worker profession and encourage the retention and development of the workforce potential in this field.

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