



MOBILISING HEARTS AND MINDS IN WARTIME:

UKRAINIANS' CONCERNS AND HOPES ABOUT
MILITARY SERVICE

July 2024



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Focus groups conducted by Kharkiv Institute for Social Research
Cover photo: Ed Jones/AFP via Getty Images
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INTRODUCTION

When Russia started its full-scale invasion in February 2022, Ukrainians of all ages queued at military enlistment offices, ready to volunteer for the defence of their country. Many had to be turned away. With the war in its third year, recent opinion polls [show](#) that Ukrainians' confidence in victory remains high. The vast majority still rejects the prospect of making territorial concessions to Russia. At the same time, as would be expected in any situation of protracted violence and insecurity, the burst of fervour of the first months has dwindled. Russia's war has brought Ukraine enormous human losses, immense material damage, and a drastic deterioration of living standards. Increasing numbers of casualties at the front and of wounded returning home have had a demoralising effect on Ukrainian soldiers and civilians alike. As a result, though [estimates](#) point to 1.3 million people currently serving in the Armed Forces, today Ukraine is facing acute manpower shortages, prompting the government to find new ways to mobilise an adequate number of people to build reserves and replenish the army's troops. Many have criticised the government for delaying and mismanaging this process, compounding the organisational difficulties in recruiting and training large numbers of new soldiers in 2024.

Under martial law, in effect since 24 February 2022, men aged between 18 and 60 are not permitted to leave the country. Only Ukrainian men aged between 25 and 60 can be mobilised: once they receive call-up papers, they have little choice over where they are deployed. In war-torn societies, draft avoidance inevitably arises, and thousands of criminal cases of draft evasion have been [opened in Ukraine](#). To help replenish the army's ranks, the Ukrainian government even introduced a new [law](#) that allows prisoners with less than three years left on their sentence (excluding those convicted of the most serious offences) to be granted conditional early release if they sign a contract to serve in the army. Meanwhile, in response to a series of corruption and abuse-of-power [scandals](#) afflicting recruitment centres, the Ukrainian government decided to [encourage](#) volunteers to apply to specific roles in the army that match their skills. Thus, the Ministry of Defence started actively collaborating with online platforms such as LobbyX and Work.ua which act as intermediaries between potential recruits and military units advertising vacancies. As the LobbyX website [states](#), 'you can choose a specific unit and position you want to serve in'. Similarly, the Work.ua website [says](#): 'Everyone's skills should be used to the maximum. So we will be stronger, more effective and more motivated.' This collaboration culminated in the new campaign 'Be Yourself', providing a [centralised online platform](#) listing key recruitment centres, a search engine to help users look for vacancies, and frequently asked questions on mobilisation. Overall, this policy reflects a growing understanding that to sustain the country's war-fighting capacity, it is important to address Ukrainian citizens' existing concerns around perceived inadequacy in the implementation of mobilisation and expand opportunities for them to choose where and how to serve. Knowing that they will be able to use their existing talents or even acquire new skills will strengthen their motivation to join the army. Accordingly, the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence [described](#) its advertising recruitment campaign as 'a new opportunity for units to be filled with professional and motivated people'.

In November 2023 the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence [approved](#) the Concept of Military Personnel Policy until 2028, proposing to gradually replace its conscription policies with contract service (a short summary can be found [here](#)). Meanwhile, Ukraine's new mobilisation law entered into

force on 18 May 2024. Key points [include](#): the requirement for all men liable for military service to show up for medical examination and update their data at military enlistment offices or through the new electronic registry;¹ the introduction of fines for draft evaders; the provision of basic training for potential conscripts and the enhancement of military recruitment processes for volunteers. The law introduces better pay and longer leave periods for frontline soldiers. However, the provision for the demobilisation of servicemen after three years was removed, leaving war-weary troops who have been fighting Russian forces non-stop for over two years unable to return home. In turn, this fuelled public disillusionment towards the government.

The question of how to ensure a 'fair' mobilisation process is raising several concerns, directly impacting people's motivation and, consequently, the combat effectiveness of the Ukrainian army. Addressing these concerns should be treated as an important element in the country's strategy for victory. Outgunned and outnumbered by Russian forces, Ukraine's extraordinary resistance is a result of highly motivated individuals putting their best skills to work. On a deeper level, the controversies surrounding mobilisation are creating tensions between different groups in Ukrainian society, especially between those avoiding the draft and those who have not left the front since the start of the full-scale invasion. Russia will readily exploit any internal disunity to its advantage. Thus, understanding what 'fairness' means to Ukrainians in this context and what strategies are most likely to succeed in reassuring and motivating people to join the army should become a top priority for Ukrainian government, media, and civil society representatives alike. Successful mobilisation ultimately rests on mobilising Ukrainians' hearts and minds.

This study examines attitudes towards mobilisation among different groups in Ukrainian society. The report presents key findings from interviews and focus groups with men currently serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), male civilians, wives of men currently in the military, female relatives of men of draft age, veterans, and young people below conscription age. This study was led by the [Public Interest Journalism Lab](#) (PIJL) in collaboration with the [Kharkiv Institute for Social Research](#). The research was made possible thanks to the support of PIJL.

Based on these findings, this report also provides key recommendations that can serve as helpful guidance on how to communicate about the topic of mobilisation for both domestic and international audiences. With regards to the domestic context, the situation on the ground is evolving every day. While policy priorities will ultimately be dictated by developments on the battlefield, the general direction of these recommendations will remain relevant. When looking at the international scene, the return of war to Europe is forcing European countries to redefine their approach to defence and consider a return to conscription. Ukraine currently represents a unique case – a democracy fighting a conventional large-scale war that combines 20-century trench warfare with 21-century drone warfare. Ukraine's experience can thus prove invaluable as European societies, which for generations believed that war would be a matter of the past, face a future for which they are unprepared.

Methodology

In total, data collection was based on seventeen online interviews and three online focus groups, conducted in March and April 2024 across Ukraine.² The table below shows the breakdown of all the focus groups and interviews completed. Footnotes report participants' original quotes to show how their answers informed the arguments presented in this report.

¹ As of July 2024, almost 3 million Ukrainians have [updated](#) their data showing up at a local office or using the new Reserve+ app introduced by the Ministry of Defence.

² No respondents residing in the temporarily occupied territories were included in this study.

Interviews	
Data collection	Data source as cited in the report
2 x interviews with recruitment officers	[Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv]
	[Interview 2, Recruiter, M, 39, Kyiv]
5 x interviews with men currently serving in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU)	[Interview 3, Military, M, 49, Poltava]
	[Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa obl.]
	[Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi]
	[Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv]
5 x interviews with men currently <i>not</i> serving in the AFU	[Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih]
	[Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv]
	[Interview 9, Civilian, M, 38, Kyiv]
	[Interview 10, Civilian, M, 55, Chernivtsi]
3 x interviews with wives of men currently serving in the AFU	[Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv]
	[Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih]
	[Interview 13, Wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv obl.]
2 x interviews with wives / mothers of men currently <i>not</i> serving in the AFU	[Interview 14, Wife of serviceman, F, 49, Kharkiv]
	[Interview 15, Wife of serviceman, F, 53, Poltava]
2 x interviews with wives / mothers of men currently <i>not</i> serving in the AFU	[Interview 16, Wife/mother of man of draft age, F, 45, Kharkiv]
	[Interview 17, Wife/mother of man of draft age, F, 54, Lviv]

Focus groups	
Data collection	Data source as cited in the report
Focus group with 7 x young male civilians below conscription age (19–26 ³)	[FG1, Youth, R1, M, 19, Odesa obl.] [FG1, Youth, R2, M, 20, Chernivtsi] [FG1, Youth, R3, M, 20, Kharkiv] [FG1, Youth, R4, M, 23, Kyiv] [FG1, Youth, R5, M, 24, Kharkiv obl.] [FG1, Youth, R6, M, 26, Kryvyi Rih] [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv]
Focus group with 5 x men currently serving in the AFU	[FG2, Military, R1, M, 53, Kharkiv obl.] [FG2, Military, R2, M, 43, Kyiv] [FG2, Military, R3, M, 27, Kryvyi Rih] [FG2, Military, R4, M, 50, Slovyansk] [FG2, Military, R5, M, 39, Kyiv]
Focus group with 7 x men currently <i>not</i> serving in the AFU	[FG3, Veteran, R1, M, 43, Odesa] [FG3, Veteran, R2, M, 61, Lviv] [FG3, Veteran, R3, M, 48, Kyiv] [FG3, Veteran, R4, M, 39, Kryvyi Rih] [FG3, Veteran, R5, M, 40, Chernivtsi] [FG3, Veteran, R6, M, 47, Ternopil obl.] [FG3, Veteran, R7, M, 49, Kharkiv obl.]

³ This focus group was conducted on 20 March 2024. On 2 April, Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed a bill that lowered the minimum conscription age from 27 to 25 as part of ongoing efforts to expand the number of civilians the army can mobilise into its ranks (Verkhovna Rada, [2024](#)).



MAIN FINDINGS

Photo: Jose Colon/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

Initial enthusiasm is being tempered by the reality of a protracted war

Most respondents (including soldiers,⁴ veterans,⁵ civilians,⁶ women⁷ and young people⁸) shared the view that **the patriotic fervour of the first months had diminished**. One military recruiter noted a major mistake in the government's policy at the time: 'many people could not join in the first days of the full-scale invasion, [their details] were not recorded, no one worked with them. And this patriotic fervour [...] was lost.'⁹ A common observation was that despite their willingness to continue resisting Russia's aggression, Ukrainians face a sober reality: **the most motivated people had all already volunteered to go to the front**.¹⁰ In the words of one soldier: 'those who

⁴ They were more united [...] when the full-scale war started, people had the desire, a lot of people queued at the military enlistment office to sign up and volunteer. Now this moment has passed. [Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.] || At first, the whole nation was on the rise, and every soldier in the Armed Forces was a deity [...] There are decent, normal people there, and there are also, sorry, shit people. And lately, more shit has been poured in, which is why society's attitude towards the armed forces is changing. [FG2, Military, R4, M, 50, Sloviansk]

⁵ When the war was closer, we were more united, and when it moved away, it turned out to be somewhere out there, far away, people began to live ordinary lives. [FG3, Veteran, R7, M, 49, Kharkiv reg.]

⁶ There is no longer any super-patriotism in society [...] The desire to join the army, of course, was there at the very beginning of the war. And now there are not many people who want to do so. [Interview 10, Civilian, M, 55, Chernivtsi] || At first, people were patriotic, there were queues at the military registration and enlistment office, now everyone knows about all the corruption scandals that are going on there: "Do I need it?" [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv] || At the beginning [...] everyone was going, let's make Molotov cocktails, let's go join the territorial defence [...] now [...] a lot of such unpleasant things have come up in the attitude towards people. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih] || When the full-scale invasion started, everyone was at the peak of some kind of... The mood was a bit different, people were more active [...] now [...] everyone has a number of acquaintances who served or are serving [...] there are a lot of bad stories [...] After hearing such stories, [...] people start thinking about what if." [Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv]

⁷ At the beginning of the war [...] everyone was running - they ran, that's it, they had to run, they rushed, but now it's not like that anymore, because there is no effect of surprise. [Interview 13, Wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv reg.] || If in the first days people were all motivated and [...] were ready to go voluntarily, today it is a headache [...] pressure on everybody. [Interview 16, Wife/mother of man of draft age, F, 45, Kharkiv]

⁸ (M.: The feeling of patriotism, to what extent is it motivating now?) Of course, it motivates, but less than at the beginning of the war. (Everyone thinks so.) [FG1, Youth, R4, M, 23, Kyiv]

⁹ Many people were not able to join in the first days of the full-scale invasion, they were not registered, they were not worked with. And this patriotic zeal [...] was lost. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv]

¹⁰ It only causes frustration, [...] those who wanted to fight have already left, [...] mostly those who

were motivated, they came in 2022, some maybe in 2023. Now there are almost no people who will be motivated to join the army.’¹¹ One female participant shared a similar thought: ‘all those who wanted [to fight] have gone [to the front] already. Everyone else who didn’t want to is hiding’.¹² One veteran captured an important evolution in people’s attitudes over time which can in part help explain the failure of the government’s approach to mobilisation: first, many people ‘threw themselves to defend’ the country as volunteers; later, civilians convinced themselves that ‘the boys are managing’, a misperception that was magnified by the government’s official communication line, as highlighted below; finally, ‘people started being frightened’ by a number of factors that will be explored in this report.¹³

A perhaps surprising finding was that **younger respondents below conscription age shared a sense of financial and existential insecurity disproportionately to other groups of respondents**.¹⁴ In the words of one young participant, ‘I don’t see at all a future for myself.’¹⁵ When thinking of what discourages people from joining the army, another young respondent pointed to a general sense of disenchantment: ‘Big losses, if mobilisation is needed, then there will be even bigger losses. Lack of prospects’.¹⁶ A third young respondent talked about the appearance of ‘anti-motivation’ as Ukrainians began to take a more dispassionate view of the evolution of the war: ‘people have no motivation because the rose-tinted glasses disappeared, the understanding and vision of the situation became more realistic.’¹⁷

Now that the war has acquired a protracted character, these attitudes are indicative of a more sober outlook which will ultimately bolster Ukraine’s wartime resilience by encouraging a more nuanced understanding of domestic and international pressures. Yet, Russia will actively exploit any perceived sense of fatigue or pessimism to weaken Western support for Ukraine and destabilise Ukrainian society. The army will continue to require motivated troops to hold the lines. Over a more long-term perspective, Ukraine has the potential to become a top hub of innovation, and its successful post-war reconstruction depends on retaining and attracting young and talented people back from abroad. Thus, these responses highlight **the importance of addressing existing domestic concerns around mobilisation and fostering motivation in Ukrainian society for the country’s military victory but also its post-war recovery plans**.

don't want to are left. [FG2, Military, R3, M, 27, Kryvyi Rih] || Probably forced, because voluntarily, [...] the percentage of these people fell much more after the beginning of the war. [Interview 13, Wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv reg.] || It won't be voluntary anymore. [...] Already people who wanted to go, they have already gone voluntarily. [...] They don't want to go voluntarily anymore. [Interview 15, Wife of serviceman, F, 53, Poltava] || All those who wanted, who didn't want to be under Russia, have already gone. [FG1, Youth, R6, M, 26, Kryvyi Rih] || Society is more scared of mobilization. [...] the main mass of people who wanted to go to serve are already serving. And they have been serving practically since the beginning of the war, and it is of course a great misfortune that it is not really possible to replace them with motivated people. [Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv].

¹¹ *Those who were motivated, they joined in '22, maybe some in '23. Now there are almost no people who are motivated to join the army. [FG2, Military, R5, M, 39, Kyiv]*

¹² *Everyone who wanted to go has already gone. And all the others who didn't want to go are hiding. Even those who wanted to go earlier, now they don't want to go. [Interview 16, Wife/mother of man of draft age, F, 45, Kharkiv].*

¹³ *At the beginning of the war, there were a lot of volunteers [...] Everyone rushed to defend, those who wanted to, those who were not scared. And then we saw that the guys were doing well, [...] And then [...] People started to be afraid. [FG3, Veteran, R2, M, 61, Lviv]*

¹⁴ *Young people making long-term plans - for a year, two years ahead. Now there is no such thing, you just live with the goals for the month [...] you think, damn, I'm 19 years old, I still want to see life somehow. [FG1, Youth, R3, M, 20, Kharkiv] || To think about something further, okay for a week ahead, but for a month ahead - I have no idea what will happen to me in a month [...] the financial situation, it has worsened. [FG1, Youth, R4, M, 23, Kyiv] || This is some kind of final collapse. A collapse in terms of psychological [...] people's mood [...] People are finally running out of money, patience, daily bombings, and so on. [FG1, Youth, R5, M, 24, Kharkiv reg.] || I also lost a friend. He joined the 3rd assault brigade, and three months later he was killed. It's hard to get money, you can feel it. [FG1, Youth, R6, M, 26, Kryvyi Rih] || With the full-scale invasion, I lost quite a few friends, classmates who died [...] Financial opportunities have decreased a lot, the opportunity to travel anywhere has simply disappeared. [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv]*

¹⁵ *I don't see my future at all. [FG1, Youth, R5, M, 24, Kharkiv reg.]*

¹⁶ *Certain people are becoming disillusioned with the nature of the war. There are large losses, and if mobilization is necessary, there will be even larger losses. It's futile. [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv]*

¹⁷ *Some antimotivation has started [...] People have no motivation because they have lost their rose-tinted glasses, their understanding and vision of the situation has become adequate. [FG1, Youth, R3, M, 20, Kharkiv]*



**Those who
wanted to
fight have
already left**

(research respondent)

Unofficial sources of information on the war are trusted more than official ones.

Responses reflect the growing trend of Ukrainians turning to informal sources of information on the war, especially soldiers returning from the front.¹⁸ As one civilian put it, 'the guys who are there say one thing, and here official [sources] are telling us something different'.¹⁹ One veteran noted that the stories shared by soldiers returning from the front can also demotivate civilians.²⁰ At times, such informal conversations can facilitate the dissemination of inaccurate information which can have a demotivating effect.²¹

Given the current pressure to boost the number of Ukrainian troops, when speaking to friends and relatives back home, some soldiers actively encouraged them to select units based on their skills where they can be useful.²² Others said that such flexibility was not available in practice, and they should avoid infantry at all costs.²³ Others encouraged relatives and friends not to join the army altogether because of the lack of troop rotations,²⁴ bad commanders²⁵ or to avoid the hellish conditions of trench warfare more generally.²⁶ One civilian reported that 'the boys who actually experienced hell say – God forbid you end up there'.²⁷

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What is presented officially is a little bit... not embellished, but presented in a calmer tone. [...] here

I am watching [...] the same Telemarathon, and then I talk to my husband, and I can hear in his voice that everything is not quite fine. [Interview 15, Wife of serviceman, F, 53, Poltava] || People who are either mobilized or in a close circle tell completely different things about what is happening at the front than they tell on TV or on the radio. [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv] || There is more trust, let's say, in the person who tells it, especially if it is a friend you have known for several years, many years, decades, than in the information from the media [...] From the first hand. [Interview 13, wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv obl] || What they show on TV, I don't believe it. Why do I have more information, because I communicate with the same brothers-in-arms who are there in the east. (M: Is there a difference between the information that your brothers-in-arms tell you and the official information?) Yes, there is a difference. [FG3, Veteran, R2, M, 61, Lviv]

19

We have the Telemarathon and we have information that people can get themselves. [...] people use different Telegram channels, they communicate with their relatives who are actually serving there [...] the reality is not reflected in the Telemarathon. [...] the guys who are there say one thing, and here we are officially told something else. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih]

20

People who return, as a rule, tell the truth. This greatly reduces the motivation of all civilians. [FG3, Veteran, R4, M, 39, Kryvyi Rih]

21

(M.: Do you have relatives or acquaintances, friends or former friends who do not advise their relatives or acquaintances to be mobilized?) Unfortunately, I do. [...] Many of these people say that if they are mobilized, they will immediately go to the frontline. [...] there is a lot of information that is untrue, it has a great impact on these processes. [FG3, Veteran, R5, M, 40, Chernivtsi]

22

The [military] do not advise to be mobilized just anywhere. If you do mobilize, it should be to the unit where you can prove yourself most effectively, where your skills and competencies are needed by that particular unit. Or to a unit where someone is already serving, maybe a relative, brother, or brother-in-law, or you know the commanders. Or, for example, if you want to learn a profession, we are preparing a unit, and that's where we recommend people to go. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv] || I advise everyone to go, to find a place in their specialty to be as useful as possible in the army. And not like me, a fool, who joined just to join. [FG2, Military, R4, M, 50, Slovyansk]

23

I mean, you can be mobilized to the army anywhere, only not to the infantry [...] to go to war according to your specialty is not possible, [...] you will be taken to the place where you were originally planned anyway. [FG2, Military, R1, M, 53, Kharkiv reg.]

24

(M.: Do you have acquaintances who do not advise their friends and relatives to get mobilized?) Yes. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || (M.: Do you have acquaintances who do not advise their relatives and friends to get mobilized?) Yes [...] Because, first of all, there is no rotation, they do not change them. || I have acquaintances, and I would probably not advise some of them to go for mobilization. First of all, because of injustice. [FG2, Military, R2, M, 43, Kyiv] || Even my husband [...] says, if you have the opportunity, it is better to stay. [...] those who are ready to fight, in principle, the majority of them are already there. [Interview 15, wife of serviceman, F, 53, Poltava]

25

(M.: Do you know anyone who does not advise their relatives and friends to mobilize?) Yes [...] Because [...] they are sent [...] to places where they can really die. Just because of stupidity. [Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.] [...] having been there, they see how they are treated, others are treated. [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih] || Many people I know do not advise, because there is disappointment in the leadership. There are many military personnel who are dissatisfied with their command. Also, the provision. [FG3, Veteran, R6, M, 47, Ternopil reg.]

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They say that there is no place for such young guys at this age. [FG1, Youth, R1, M, 19, Odesa reg.] || The very first people who talk about the troubles at the front are the soldiers who have their own blog. They see with their own eyes what is happening, they post it all on their Telegram or Instagram or TikTok channels, it all spreads. [...] [They reason] that you can just lose your future. [FG1, Youth, R2, M, 20, Chernivtsi] || I personally have a friend who is now demobilized, he served in the ATO [...] He says that you should not go there, it's just a horror. [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv]

27

If we talk [...] about the people who were there, the guys who were really in hell say that God forbid you to get there. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih]

On 26 February 2022, the government introduced the United News Telethon, where Ukraine's TV channels stream joint broadcasts 24/7. Initially, the Telethon was presented as a national security response aimed at providing Ukrainian audiences with reliable information in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion. However, the initiative has fallen under increasing [criticism](#) for restricting press freedom in the country. A recent [telephone survey](#) from the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology shows that over the first two years of the war, Ukrainians' trust in the Telethon has almost halved: from 69% in May 2022 down to 36% in February 2024. As a result, Ukrainians have come to rely more heavily on informal sources of information, such as Telegram and friends and family. An [opinion poll](#) from March 2024 conducted by the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiative Foundation showed that the top three sources of information on the war are Ukrainian Telegram channels (53%), relatives, friends and colleagues (42%), and YouTube (40%). The Telethon is in fourth place (37%). The study observed that older respondents are more likely to rely on the Telethon than younger respondents.

Our research largely confirms these results. **Telegram was by far cited as the most popular source of information on the war. There was a large consensus that the United News Telethon could not be trusted. Soldiers,²⁸ veterans,²⁹ civilians,³⁰ female participants,³¹ and young respondents³² all equally disapproved of the government's relentless efforts to inflate Ukraine's successes and hyperbolise Russia's failures, thus fuelling confidence in a quick victory and misrepresenting the reality on the ground.** One soldier went as far as to say that 'all [official] information is lies'.³³ While acknowledging the challenges in having to balance or even filter negative news (as these could undermine motivation), one military recruiter criticised the government for infantilising Ukrainian viewers instead of rationally explaining the importance of preparing reserves and ensuring rotations as part of a long-term vision of victory: 'it's necessary to talk with people like adults'.³⁴ Amid concerns about a threat to press freedom, one young participant provocatively asked: 'we all laughed at the Russians that they were slaves there, [...] brainwashed. [...] how are we now different from Russia regarding not only mobilisation, [but also our]



**On TV you
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that we
are fighting
with some
Neanderthals
who know
nothing, can
do nothing**

(research respondent)

28 *I know how it was broadcast from the very beginning, that we are about to win [...] and we are going to smash those fools, it was strategically wrong [...] Because at the front people were facing a very cunning, dangerous enemy who learns very well. [...] what is happening at the frontline is completely different from the way information is presented. [...] this whole state information policy, that the Ukrainian Armed Forces are sunshine, just donate, they will cope, they will defeat everyone there, just believe in the Ukrainian Armed Forces. [...] it was wrong. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv] || We believed in some kind of victory. Remember how they promised us - 2, 3 weeks, and everything would be fine. [...] the news said that everything was fine, we were killing everyone, these katsaps were brainless fools. [Interview 2, Recruiter, M, 39, Kyiv] || Everyone believes that official information does not fully show everything. [Interview 3, Military, M, 49, Poltava] || The data of the authorities [...] show what they need [...] that everything is good, but in reality there are moments when things are not so great. They tell people one thing, but when the military speaks, it's the opposite. [Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.] I think this is wrong information, when our media shows that everything is cool, the Moskal is a fool, and we are putting him out. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || On TV, if you watch, for example, the United Marathon or listen to some experts, you get the impression that we are fighting with some Neanderthals who know nothing, can do nothing [...] When young people come to the front, they get confused because the situation is completely different. A very strong, evil and treacherous enemy is fighting against us. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv]*

29 *'Direct Marathon'. They are telling everything, truth and lies, to cover people's ears. That's why my personal attitude towards the official news is very negative. [FG3, Veteran, R4, M, 39, Kryvyi Rih]*

30 *Official information, I think, is not fully disclosed. [...] [There is] more trust in unofficial information. [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv] || Reality is not reflected in the Telemarathon. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih]*

31 *I don't really trust the official channels. I don't watch Marathons [...] because they write one thing, and in fact we see something completely different. [Interview 17, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 54, Lviv]*

32 *Earlier we all laughed a lot specifically about the fact that in Russia [...] they are being brainwashed. Recently, 2 billion has been allocated for the telemarathon to brainwash Ukrainians. [...] The telemarathon has rose-colored glasses, everything is wonderful. || The telemarathon has a lot of rose-colored glasses. [FG1, Youth, R6, M, 26, Kryvyi Rih]*

33 *Everything that is official is a complete lie [...] The fact that the lives and health of our soldiers are the most important thing for us is also a lie, because we have meat assaults worse than the Katsaps. That's why I don't believe the officials, this "Telemarathon" at all. [FG2, Military, R4, M, 50, Slovyansk]*

34 *If there is a lot of negativity, it will undermine any motivation at all. [...] You need to talk to people in an adult way. [...] You have to realize that you will eventually go to war, because people need to be replaced. People there get tired physically and morally, they die. We had to talk and prepare these reserves right away [...] we had to make these programs so that people would understand where we were going. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv]*

freedom of speech or freedom of choice, which we were so proud of?³⁵ This perception that Ukrainian government communication is somewhat emulating Russian propaganda tools is deeply problematic, as it risks feeding distrust in state institutions during wartime. In turn, this could further complicate mobilisation efforts and give Russia an opportunity to destabilise Ukrainian society from within. At the same time, it reflects a mature civil society that is unwavering in its commitment to protecting Ukraine's democracy and Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

Mobilisation is widely seen as necessary but unfair.

There is strong consensus that mobilisation is urgent as Ukraine is facing acute manpower shortages. In short, 'we are running out of people'.³⁶ **Three main reasons were mentioned for justifying the urgency of mobilisation: rebuilding units in the face of high levels of casualties,³⁷ rotating exhausted troops who have been fighting non-stop for over two years,³⁸ and training reserve units to ramp up Ukraine's fighting capacity.³⁹** As one Ukrainian soldier put it, '[mobilisation is necessary] because we are not eternal'.⁴⁰ The point on troops' exhaustion was also raised by soldiers' wives.⁴¹ Alongside exhaustion, physical and mental health issues experienced by soldiers in trenches make rotations an imperative.⁴² Others pointed out that mass mobilisation did not necessarily mean that every single individual had to engage in active combat duty. People can find different ways to contribute to the country's defence by

35 *We all laughed at the Russians, that they are slaves there, [...] brainwashed. [...] But due to not only mobilization, but also freedom of speech or freedom of choice, which we were so proud of, how are we different from Russia now?* [FG1, Youth, R3, M, 20, Kharkiv].

36 *People are running out.* [FG2, Military, R1, M, 53, Kharkiv reg.] || *Mobilization is very important, because we are at war and people are running out, someone has to defend.* [FG2, Military, R4, M, 50, Slovyansk] || *Those volunteers who went in the first days, they are already running out.* [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || *The volunteers came in the winter-spring of '22. And in fact, they are almost over. Therefore, forced mobilization is almost the only option.* [FG 3, Veteran, R3, M, 48, Kyiv]

37 *Unfortunately, there are losses and they need to be replenished [...] mobilization is necessary, why? Because we need to replace those irreversible losses and those who have gone home.* [Interview 2, Recruiter, M, 39, Kyiv] || *Mobilization is extremely necessary. Talking to all my acquaintances who are fighting at the front line, the first problem for everyone is the lack of people.* [FG2, Military, R3, M, 27, Kryvyi Rih] || *There is a very small part of the battalion left, a very small part. Many went to hospitals, many left for family reasons, many are no longer with us. So mobilization is needed, we need to staff it.* [FG3, Veteran, R6, M, 47, Ternopil reg.]

38 *It is incredibly important, because those who, like me, have been serving for a long time, we need to be replaced.* [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || *Replacement is needed because 2 years at the front is very hard.* [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || *Some people approve of the methods of mobilization, some do not, basically, that we need rotations, we need some laws, we have been fighting for 2 years, we have not seen home.* [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih] || *Mobilization is very important, we are nowhere without it. Two years, many more, without rotations, without rest.* [FG3, Veteran, R5, M, 40, Chernivtsi] || *It is necessary, because the guys are already tired.* [FG1, Youth, R1, M, 19, Odesa reg.] || *The military need rotation.* [FG1, Youth, R4, M, 23, Kyiv] || *There should be a rotation, people who are on the front line should go back to their families, have a rest, recover.* [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv] || *I recently watched a program. The man has been at frontline for two years since the beginning of the war. [...] He has not seen his family for two years. This is also an injustice [...]. We need an opportunity for demobilization.* [FG1, Youth, R2, M, 20, Chernivtsi]

39 *We need to recruit people, train them and prepare a reserve, prepare replacements.* [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || *There should be some reserve of people ready to be replaced.* [Interview 15, Serviceman's wife, F, 53, Poltava] || *It is impossible to do it voluntarily, because the professional army that started fighting from the first days, I think it has long been exhausted, it needs some kind of replacement. And at that time, it can train this new generation of military.* [FG1, Youth, R2, M, 20, Chernivtsi] || *Of course, it will be forced, because in the third year of the war, it is no longer possible to do it voluntarily. And then it all depends on the training, on the sergeants.* [FG2, Military, R1, M, 53, Kharkiv reg.]

40 [It is needed] *because we are not going to last forever. [...] We need to be replaced by someone.* [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih]

41 *It is very important because, as the guys say, it is very hard there.* [Interview 14, Wife of serviceman, F, 49, Kharkiv] || *People are already, some of them are no longer with us, some of them are tired, and you just need to change some percentage of them [...] in the end, at least for a vacation, so they can go.* [Interview 15, Wife of serviceman, F, 53, Poltava].

42 *Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, many people in their 40s or even 50s have joined the army. After 2 years in the trenches, I can see by the people I served with, people's health is just falling apart [...] People's psyche is suffering, there are people who can't stand it, they run away.* [FG3, Veteran, R3, M, 48, Kyiv]

'provid[ing] better conditions' for frontline deployments, for example.⁴³

A majority of respondents assessed the current mobilisation process as being fundamentally unfair.⁴⁴ By far the most cited reason was the perceived inequality between haves and have-nots, whereby people with material resources were seen as more likely to escape mobilisation. Here, respondents refer to illegal ways to avoid mobilisation through connections and paying bribes. This view found soldiers,⁴⁵ female respondents,⁴⁶ veterans⁴⁷ and young people below conscription age⁴⁸ in agreement. In the words of one veteran, 'as a rule, those who have money do not serve. Those who do not have money, do serve.'⁴⁹

Unsurprisingly, existing proposals to exempt higher taxpayers from the draft due to their positive contribution to the state budget in wartime proved divisive across all groups of respondents. Some participants viewed this as a form of social injustice, reinforcing the impression that this was becoming a war fought by the poor.⁵⁰ Others saw the fiscal benefits for supporting the army.⁵¹



Those who have a lot of money can pay bribes and not serve. And those who are poorer go and serve

(research respondent)

43 *Everyone should take up arms and go to defend the country. And those who cannot, should do every-*

thing for the one who will defend [...] to provide him with the best conditions. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || There is no fair mobilization, in my opinion, if there is a full-scale war in the country and a war of destruction, everyone who can hold a weapon should, in principle, serve, if you cannot shoot, cannot run and so on, you can help with your knowledge, [...] or help somewhere in production. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || Not everyone can hold a gun, everyone helps

the state in different ways. Someone donates, someone treats the wounded, someone defends our borders, someone is on the front line. Everyone has a different role, each role is very important. [FG1, Youth, R2, M, 20, Chernivtsi] || It doesn't matter if he will be at the front line, or a driver somewhere, or even in some kind of support, because people are still needed at least to maintain the army. [Interview 13, wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv reg.]

44 *Mobilization as of today is not fair. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv].*

45 *A person who, let's say, earns decent money, he can solve his issues with help from the right people,*

so that he is not taken away [...]. One can bribe both the military medical commission and the military commissar [...] I think that such people should also be attracted to service. They relax, they go to restaurants and clubs. No, it shouldn't be like that. [Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.] || The mobilization now mainly affects vulnerable groups of the population. And those who have some influence, money and opportunities mostly avoid it all. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || For some, there is no war at all. Let's not forget about the corruption scandals that were everywhere and are still happening. T

he number of people who went abroad for money [...] there is no justice here. [FG2, Military, R3, M, 27, Kryvyi Rih]

46 *Today, it is not fair at all [...] everyone who had the opportunity who have money, [...] they [...] have*

already taken all their children out. [...] they all got exceptions. And if someone didn't, they can buy it at any time. [Interview 16, Wife/mother of man of draft age, F, 45, Kharkiv] || No [...] those who can pay bribes, they pay, and those who cannot pay, they are taken, they take the disabled, the sick, those without limbs, [...] that is, the categories that should not fight. [...] We see how the children of the same deputies are hiding abroad. [...] The law should be the same for everyone. [Interview 17, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 54, Lviv]

47 *There will always be the rich and the poor, someone paid off. [FG3, Veteran, R1, M, 43, Odesa] || The*

state is beginning to be divided into rich and poor. The rich can pay bribes, but the worker cannot. [FG3, Veteran, R2, M, 61, Lviv] || Many people have paid bribes[...] and many with health issues are really serving and cannot leave. [FG3, Veteran, R6, M, 47, Ternopil reg.]

48 *This is a great injustice. In our country, it is like this: those who have a lot of money can pay bribes*

and not serve. And those who are poorer go and serve because they have nothing better to do. And if he refuses, then court, police, a traitor. [FG1, Youth, R1, M, 19, Odesa reg.] || One person manages to freely escape from mobilization, let's say he was captured, taken to the military commissariat, then they found out who his father was and let him go. And another guy who is from an orphanage and has no connections, they just took him and threw him somewhere. [FG1, Youth, R4, M, 23, Kyiv]

49 *Those who have money, as a rule, do not serve. Those who don't, usually go to serve. [FG3, Veteran, R3, M, 48, Kyiv]*

50 *(M.: What is your attitude to the idea that someone who pays enough taxes can be exempted*

from the draft?) [...] This will split the already split society very much. [...] It's not fair to people who don't have that kind of income. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv] || There should be justice. And they offer whoever has a higher salary will not go. [...] in the state, the Constitution is the same for everyone. [...] If everyone defends the state, then everyone, regardless of material status. [Interview 3, Military, M, 49, Poltava] || And what is the difference between them? Between the one who pays taxes and the one who pays less taxes, does he not have the same arms, legs, head and shoulders? [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || If only those who cannot pay high taxes serve, it means that the middle and lower classes are simply erased. [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih] || Money cannot be a criterion for mobilization. It turns out that if you are rich, you don't serve, and if you have less money, you are middle class or poor, you serve. [FG3, Veteran, R3, M, 48, Kyiv] || Of course, the negative thing is inequality [...] we have a democratic state, we have everyone equal, and it turns out that people who, for example, had a business, they should not go to war, why? [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih] || It will be most unfair [...] There is a social gap, that is, the war is not for the rich. [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv]

51 *Private business of the highest level [...] can provide work in the rear, jobs, budget revenues, that is,*

provide for the army, so I think they should work in their places. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || If a person knows how to make money, if he does something, donates, organizes some kind of production, then let him do it, why would he be in the army as an assault rifleman? He will earn much more there than with that assault rifle. [FG2, Military, R1, M, 53, Kharkiv reg.] If a person works, brings money to the state, pays taxes on this income, because of this, the state pays for the military, maybe they should think about whether to touch him or not. [FG3, Veteran, R1, M, 43, Odesa] || There is no need to mobilize workers, businessmen. [...] If a rich man has a salary of 100 thousand, he will not go to the army. It should not be like that. There are professions that have a reservation. [FG3, Veteran, R2, M, 61, Lviv] || Specialists who work for the economy of Ukraine should stay and work for the benefit of the state. [FG3, Veteran, R6, M, 47, Ternopil reg.] || I agree, if a person pays enough taxes,

Another form of unfairness noted by respondents was the **disproportionate targeting of rural areas by mobilisation officers.**⁵²

Only a minority of participants suggested that residents in urban centres are mobilised at higher rates.⁵³

Other reasons why mobilisation was perceived as largely unfair include: military recruitment officers not being held to account for incidents in which men were forcefully detained and deployed from the streets;⁵⁴ the mobilisation of people with certain health issues or disabilities;⁵⁵ deploying people to the frontline without putting their specialised skills to good use;⁵⁶ soldiers having to buy pieces of military gear with their own money due to shortages or poor quality; and the 'retirement' of security officials, shielded from mobilisation.⁵⁷

it means he is effective in his place [...] It's great [...] As soon as [...] goes to war, he will not pay these taxes anymore. [Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv] || If you are a director of a successful management company, [...] and contribute millions of hryvnias to the state budget every day, how can you go to defend your homeland when you are a thousand times more important here. [...] I have a positive attitude. [Interview 10, Civilian, M, 55, Chernivtsi] || Many entrepreneurs are engaged in volunteering. [...] I guess I would not judge. [Interview 14, wife of serviceman, F, 49, Kharkiv] || There should be a transparent law, [...] if you work, raise the economy, make large contributions that still go to the army, then maybe you should stay, because you will do more good in your place. [Interview 17, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 54, Lviv]

52 *It seems that somewhere on the periphery, people are being picked off more. But it always works that way, because there are fewer people there, so it is more noticeable. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv] || There will be more mobilized people per 100 people from the village than per 100 people from the city. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || The mobilization now mainly involves vulnerable groups of the population. [...] some come to us, mostly residents of villages and small towns. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || I know people who say that there are no more men in the villages who are able to fight. [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih] || Maybe in the villages more people are being drafted somehow. [Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv] || I think that probably 70% of the people are from villages and towns like that. [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv] || People from villages are almost the vast majority there, [...] it's not fair at all. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih] || I heard that they have already taken everyone from the village. [Interview 16, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 45, Kharkiv] || Perhaps it is easier in the village, because everyone is visible. [Interview 17, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 54, Lviv] || Many people say that mostly the military training centers in villages catch boys very hard. [FG1, Youth, R1, M, 19, Odesa reg.] || They take more from people in villages or small towns. [...] It's very easy to catch people. [FG1, Youth, R3, M, 20, Kharkiv] || The village has already been so damaged and they are going to do it even more. Still, they mobilize the village more. [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv] || The majority of the soldiers are from the village. [FG2, Military, R3, M, 27, Kryvyi Rih] || More people are taken from villages. In my unit, 70 percent are guys from villages. [FG2, Military, R5, M, 39, Kyiv] || I think that more people were taken from villages than from Lviv. [FG3, Veteran, R2, M, 61, Lviv] || In villages and small towns. Mobilization is quite massive there. [FG3, Veteran, R3, M, 48, Kyiv] || In Chernivtsi region, there is no one left to mobilize in the villages. [...] There are some villages where only a few people remain. [FG3, Veteran, R5, M, 40, Chernivtsi]*

53 *I think there are probably more city residents in the battalion. [Interview 2, Recruiter, M, 39, Kyiv] || Those who are from the city get more. [...] In the villages, I don't think there are so many trips. [Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.] || My subjective opinion is that there are more from cities, because there are more people living in cities and there were more conscripts. If you look at it as a percentage of the population, then maybe there are more in villages. And that is why they are very sensitive to this. Although the number of people from cities is higher. [FG3, Veteran, R6, M, 47, Ternopil reg.]*

54 *Military officers - [...] this circus that is shown on TV, catching, loading, beating, twisting, it's wrong. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || No [...] Because this is how the military commissariats conduct mobilization [...] This is certainly not fair. [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih] || Of course, when the military recruitment centers are catching people running around, it's outrageous. [Interview 2, Recruiter, M, 39, Kyiv] || [Conscription that is taking place] is not very fair. [...] A person [...] walks down the street, then they catch him or her in a bus somewhere, put him or her in a bus and... [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv] || There is no punishment for the military commissions for illegal actions, for abducting people. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih] || If a person does not want to fight, how can you make him? [...] They say that these military officers stopped people, forced them into a bus, and drove away. This is not right. [Interview 14, wife of serviceman, F, 49, Kharkiv] || This is the responsibility of the military officers [...] They take [...] those who cannot pay bribes to close their agenda [...] that they brought someone there. That is why mobilization is unfair today. [FG3, Veteran, R5, M, 40, Chernivtsi]*

55 *No. I think that the flaws are terrible [...] we see that everyone who is taken, is blind, crooked [...] the fact that they take everyone. [Interview 10, Civilian, M, 55, Chernivtsi] || even I, a person who has basically grade 2 hypertension and is partially fit, remained fit after the military qualification examination in Dnipro, it's great. People with chronic illnesses become fit. Mobilization today is absolutely completely and totally unfair. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih] || It's some kind of Soviet system, they take those who are older, who are no longer healthy, and those who are younger are not subject to it. [FG2, Military, R4, M, 50, Slovyansk]*

56 *Injustice is happening in the military enlistment office itself. For example, a couple of days ago there was a healthy guy, [...] a driver by profession [...] Instead of sending him to be a driver, he was sent to an assault brigade, this is injustice. [FG2, Military, R2, M, 43, Kyiv] || When they start, they just need [the military command center] to fill the hole with someone, it's wrong, there should be a specialist in that hole, not someone who is forced to be there. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi].*

57 *We have a lot of military retirees who are in excellent health and own weapons. The same goes for the police. If you hire them, I'm not saying to hire 100% of the police, just 20% of the police. They are trained to use weapons, they are healthy. [FG3, Veteran, R2, M, 61, Lviv] || Former security forces, who served, who are retired, should be mobilized. [FG3, Veteran, R3, M, 48, Kyiv] || Mobilization is unfair at the moment. It is the same with the police, [...] we have not reduced the number of police, but the number of people has decreased. [FG3, Veteran, R5, M, 40, Chernivtsi] || To conduct mobilization fairly, it is necessary to show the society that most of the security forces participate. And people see that the police are reserved, other law enforcement agencies are reserved, why should a worker from a factory leave his job and defend the state? [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih] || There are so-called militiamen, a separate caste, they are retired. [FG2, Military, R3, M, 27, Kryvyi Rih] || People who are in the security forces, they have been armed all their lives, the police, for example. They took an oath and for some reason they are not subject to mobilization. [FG2, Military, R4, M, 50, Slovyansk] || For some reason, the police get [...] additional 30 thousand, what they do is not clear. [Interview 13, Wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv reg.] || I would still consider mobilizing the police. [...] For example, I would mobilize a tenth part of them, and then every rotation for the next year another 10%. [Interview 9, Civilian, M, 38, Kyiv]*

It is worth mentioning that when asked whether military service should be voluntary or compulsory, or whether mobilisation is currently fair, some respondents dismissed these questions as moot: mobilisation is imperative for the country's survival.⁵⁸ One soldier said that 'if [mobilisation] is voluntary, we will not recruit anyone.'⁵⁹

One veteran emphasised that by its very nature, mobilisation can never be truly fair as it interferes with individuals' freedom of choice: what matters is how the government can make specific processes pertinent to mobilisation *fairer and more efficient*.⁶⁰ As shown below, participants' answers indicate that **Ukraine's fight for its survival depends on remedying this fairness deficit, and there is an active domestic debate on the best ways to achieve this.**

Perceived failures around mobilisation are raising concerns and causing tensions in Ukrainian society.

Several respondents pointed to **the risk of polarisation, especially between Ukrainian soldiers who have been unable to leave the front since the start of the full-scale invasion and men who avoid the draft.**

Unsurprisingly, this tension was felt particularly acutely among men currently serving in the AFU⁶¹ and veterans.⁶² One soldier noted the existence of 'a split between [...] those who are in the army and those who are not in the army. Or those who do not want to join this army.'⁶³ One veteran put it in even blunter terms: 'there are those that want Ukraine to exist and those who do not want to get caught'.⁶⁴

The complex psychological landscape painted by female respondents deserves separate mention. A soldier's wife described a growing sense of alienation between 'those who have encountered this [war] in one way or another [...] and those who have had nothing to do with it at all'.⁶⁵ This sentiment was also shared by one female relative of a man of draft age.

58 As of today, we have no choice. I think so. We have to defend the state. [Interview 3, Military, M, 49, Poltava] || Fair enough, we have to defend our homeland. [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv] | People need to understand that if we are not ready to defend ourselves, then there will be no state at all. [Interview 15, Serviceman's wife, F, 53, Poltava] || *It's unrealistic to create a voluntary army now, only by force. Because this reserve of volunteers has already been exhausted.* [FG1, Youth, R6, M, 26, Kryvyi Rih]

59 *The [mobilization] must be forced. We will not have any other chances. If it is voluntary, we will not recruit anyone.* [FG2, Military, R5, M, 39, Kyiv]

60 *Any mobilization is unfair. [...] Always [...] someone wants to, someone doesn't want to. The question is how the state deals with it. There should be some reasonable processes. Whom it makes sense to mobilize and whom it does not make sense to mobilize.* [FG3, Veteran, R1, M, 43, Odesa]

61 (M: Is the attitude towards mobilization dividing Ukrainian society today?) Yes, because the military wants to, and civilians do not. [Interview 2, Recruiter, M, 39, Kyiv] || *Of course, it divides, because those who do not want to defend their family and country, they are looking for reasons to justify why they do not do it.* [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || *The military [...] are very critical of people who do not want to join [...] usually the military thinks that those who do not fight, they should fight.* [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv] || *Of course, it divides. There are people who haven't left their homes for several years, there are people who run from tree to tree to avoid being caught, there are people who are afraid, and normal people who are given a draft notice will go before they are.* [FG2, Military, R1, M, 53, Kharkiv reg.] || *It's clear that it divides, and it's quite noticeable. Because when you get home and talk to your friends, or, as they say, former friends [...] Many people support those who are hiding.* [FG2, Military, R3, M, 27, Kryvyi Rih] || *[Military] say that people come from treatment, from vacations, it is very offensive when they go out on weekends, for example, to the city center, and there are a lot of young, healthy guys who could be useful to the state, [...] walking around.* [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv]

62 *The society is definitely divided, because I see many people already creating groups "Where are the mobile checkpoints of the military command center", where the police are.* [FG3, Veteran, R6, M, 47, Ternopil reg.] || *Into two categories: some need Ukraine, others do not.* [FG3, Veteran, R3, M, 48, Kyiv]

63 *There is a division between people who live in relative peace and the military who are at war. I felt it very clearly, as did my boys who were on vacation at home. [...] It divides society into two parts: those who are in the army and those who are not. Or those who do not want to join the army.* [FG2, Military, R5, M, 39, Kyiv]

64 *Some are for Ukraine, and others are for not being caught.* [FG3, Veteran, R6, M, 47, Ternopil reg.]

65 *To some extent, of course, it divides society. And it divides it into those who are confronted with it in any way at all. [...] And those who have nothing to do with it in any way [...] we [with friends] lose some contact, [...] the ease of communication, it is lost.* [Interview 13, Wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv reg.] || *It separates because people don't want to go to war, they are not ready.* [Interview 15, Wife of serviceman, F, 53, Poltava]

⁶⁶ One female respondent highlighted the tragic role experienced by military wives, 'sit[ting] in a grey zone. You're sort of a civilian and sort of in the military. You're neither here nor there'. This often makes conversations with other civilians difficult.⁶⁷ On a larger scale, one serviceman noted that geographical distance was converting into psychological distance between cities heavily affected by combat operations and cities 'where people do not know what war is'.⁶⁸ The personal discomfort experienced by some respondents exposes broader societal tensions, showing **the importance of investigating the differentiated impact of the war trauma on men and women and on regions closer to and further from the front line.**

One recurrent criticism mentioned by soldiers,⁶⁹ veterans⁷⁰ and civilians of all ages⁷¹ was that **the image of the AFU is being tarnished by the corrupt and unlawful actions of men in uniform from territorial recruitment centres (TRCs/TЦК),** accused of grabbing men of mobilisation age off the streets and throwing them into vans on several occasions. As several videos on Ukrainian social media [went viral](#), the widespread respect felt for Ukrainian soldiers began to be marred by a sense of suspicion.

Mobilisation age proved to be a source of disagreement. Many Ukrainians have long felt that keeping the country's youth away from the horrors of the battle was a wise policy. In Ukraine, mandatory military service starts at age 18 for those who are not studying to obtain a degree, but thus far, regular conscripts who were under 25 have not been allowed to be sent to the battlefield. The average age of Ukrainian soldiers today is over 40; men can be mobilised up to age 60. One result is that the Ukrainian army tends to be more mature, and many fighters have families to return to and know what's at stake. However, it is also clear that soldiers in their twenties are fitter and recover faster, making them better able to bounce back from injuries.

Most respondents emphasised that war is a young man's game.

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**As of today,
we have
no choice.
I think so.
We have to
defend the
state**

(research respondent)

⁶⁶ *People who lost their people, who went to families who have losses, or there are people who are fighting, and those who are not fighting, so to speak, all stay away. [Interview 17, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 54, Lviv.]*

⁶⁷ *There is a painful topic about the fact that the wives of servicemen, they seem to be there, [...] but there is no [...] accent [...] as if you are in a gray zone. You're kind of a civilian, but you're a kind of military. You're neither here nor there. [...] People want something from you, especially these stupid questions. [Interview 13, Wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv reg.]*

⁶⁸ *In some cities, those who have not seen war do not understand what war is, that it exists in their country, that it exists in our country at all. They think that it will not come to them. [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih]*

⁶⁹ *People see them, the first thought is that a defender is coming, pride, and then: what if it's the military commissariat? When they legitimately issue notices, it's fine, but when it's breaking, dragging into buses, beating, it's not good, and it scares people away. People then, on the contrary, get angry, and then, accordingly, the whole army suffers from such actions of the military commissariat. [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih] || When a person is sent by force, I think a person will not be so enthusiastic [...] to go and give his life for the Motherland. Well, at least not for such bastards. They disgrace the soldiers, they disgrace the uniform, although they are not even soldiers. "[Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.] || Here is an Odesa military commissar, many military commissars became millionaires. How can I believe it if someone is taken there, someone is not taken, someone is excused, and he buys a Bugatti, for example. And there is a war in the country. This is a distrust, first of all, of the army. People do not distinguish between the military commissariat and the army. [FG2, Military, R1, M, 53, Kharkiv reg.]*

⁷⁰ *I remember the beginning of the war. I went out in uniform, people came up to me, thanked me, there was some respect. And now, when people see a soldier, especially young guys, especially when there are two soldiers, they try to go to the other side of the street. [FG3, Veteran, R2, M, 61, Lviv] || The military commissariats are behaving wrong, it's wrong to grab people like that. Naturally, people are getting away from it all. [FG3, Veteran, R7, M, 49, Kharkiv reg.]*

⁷¹ *For the most part, it's respect, pity, a desire to help [...] And with regard to the military commissariat, there is a terrible disrespect. [FG1, Youth, R3, M, 20, Kharkiv] || Nowadays, there are two categories of people in uniform: there are guys who came back to rest for a while. [...] there is another category, [...] the military commissariat. [...] here, the attitude towards people is different [...] I have a deep respect for these people, because they really gave a lot [...] people avoid these people [in uniform] [...] because we have the military commissariat. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih] || In general, pride for them, respect for the military. [...] it is at a high level, the attitude towards the military, perhaps, except for people other than the military commissariat, is not very good. [Interview 9, Civilian, M, 38, Kyiv] || People became afraid of mobilization [...] if before, if during the beginning of the full-scale invasion, people followed the call of their hearts, and it was, it was massive, now people are more afraid to see a military commissariat vehicle on their way. [Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv]*



Photo: Serhii Supinsky/AFP via Getty Images

Soldiers were particularly vocal on this,⁷² though veterans⁷³ and civilians of all ages⁷⁴ were also in agreement that the current mobilisation age leaves servicemen exhausted, ruining their health and inevitably impacting the army's combat effectiveness. However, some respondents disagreed with proposals to lower the mobilisation age for combat duty to 18 on both moral and physical grounds. Some argued that the government should avoid drafting people who are 'too young' because they should be given the chance to live their life a bit.⁷⁵ Others pointed to the catastrophic demographic consequences of such a decision. One civilian insisted that '[if] we start mobilising from the age of 20, demographically we will die out in 20 years. [...]

72

War is the job of the young. It is very difficult physically to walk 10 kilometers in armor, in a helmet,

not all people can stand it, and I have seen people falling down, fainting just from the strain. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv] || Those who were young, they were already wounded, signed out or, unfortunately, already dead [...] it is difficult to perform combat missions at that age. [Interview 2, Recruiter, M, 39, Kyiv] || After 45, there is no point in recruiting people. Firstly, they are physically unfit [...] between 20 and 35. We need young people, the rest will not withstand physically. [Interview 3, Military, M, 49, Poltava] || Up to 55, I know it's 60 now. Because I know a lot of people, my friends say the same thing, who are already old, they all have diseases. There is no health. [Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.] || I am 50. [...] for assault operations, 30-35 years old, up to 40 at most. I feel for myself that it is very hard [...] You have all the ammunition on you, and it is very hard to run 200, 300, 400 meters. Young people fly, run, and if the intensity is 3-4 days, so constantly, that's it, older people can't stand it. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || From 20 to 55. I understand that they are children, but we are at war and you need to be healthy to run and carry. [...] We are killing our army because it is worn out, older people have no health. [FG2, Military, R4, M, 50, Slovyansk] || The average age is 43 years old [...] this is negative, [...] because young guys should fight in the army, [...] who can walk a lot, carry a lot, work a lot. [FG2, Military, R5, M, 39, Kyiv]

73

Up to 45, it's fine, but after 45, it's hard for those people. [FG3, Veteran, R2, M, 61, Lviv]

74

The average age of 43 means that the majority of the army is aging [...] we need young people with more endurance. [FG1, Youth, R2, M, 20, Chernivtsi] || (M.: On average [...] 43. How does this affect the Armed Forces?) [...] On assault efficiency, definitely. And on some kind of endurance, for sure. It's just that physiologically, a guy at 25 has more strength than a guy at 43. [FG1, Youth, R3, M, 20, Kharkiv] || The older the soldier, the worse I think it affects military operations, because it is easier to bear [...] the hardships of war on young shoulders [...] with age, there are more diseases. [Interview 9, Civilian, M, 38, Kyiv] || The Armed Forces should be rejuvenated a bit, because when you are 40 years old, you are basically a semi-retired person [...] a person loses all those functions with age. [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv] || Still, younger people should fight [...] physically [...] there are no chronic diseases, perhaps, this is the first point, and the second point is that they [...] learn better, faster. [Interview 17, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 54, Lviv]

75

At least 27, a man should at least have lived, he has not known life. As there was mobilization from the age of 27, so it should remain. [Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.] || I feel sorry for young people, because they have not lived yet, and they are already going, getting maimed, dying. [...] Maybe 25 years old. [Interview 9, Civilian, M, 38, Kyiv] || Up to 27 are young people who have the right to a private life. Let them spend their young years on themselves, not on this horror. [FG1, Youth, R1, M, 19, Odesa reg.]

We will destroy ourselves, our nation.⁷⁶ One soldier and one veteran agreed with this assessment, thinking ahead as the government will need to attract a young workforce to rebuild the country's post-war economy.⁷⁷

At the same time, other respondents put forward more practical considerations. A few veterans noted that only younger people can effectively fulfil combat tasks in frontline infantry units, while older people above 50 years of age would be able to cover other roles in the rear.⁷⁸ One soldier observed that although more young people are needed, 'if those who are 50+ years old leave now, there will be no army left'.⁷⁹ These responses indicate that **any measures aimed at lowering the conscription age should be backed by strategic planning, introducing longer training periods for younger recruits and ensuring regular unit rotations out of combat duty.**

Lastly, **while there was no consensus on the role of women in the army, this question was not viewed as a source of tension among respondents**, and there is no serious discussion in government about potential mandatory service for women. Ukrainian President Zelensky has [publicly dismissed](#) any such proposals.

A minority of participants across all groups expressed very conservative views on social gender roles.⁸⁰ Some respondents favoured excluding women from the harshest aspects of the war, such as trench warfare, and allowing them to operate in the army's rear.⁸¹ At the same time, despite having some reservations, a number of soldiers, veterans and civilians admitted that women in the AFU can often outperform their male counterparts for specific roles, including snipers.⁸² Only a minority expressed more liberal views, though even for these participants mobilisation should not be extended to women; women should be allowed to join the army only on a voluntary basis.⁸³

76

If we don't want to lose the younger generation, the threshold should be at least 25 years old, because

families appear somewhere between 21 and 25-27 [...] If we go lower, for example, [...] we start mobilizing at the age of 20, we will be demographically gone in 20 years. [...] We will destroy ourselves, our nation. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih]

77

If our children are the ones who fight, we will drop in demographics in 10 years. [...] special forces are

better with young people. And when it comes to mobilization, it is impossible [...] according to the law, mobilization should be done from 25 to 55 years old, with the possibility of voluntary service from 18 to 60 years old for health reasons. [FG2, Military, R3, M, 27, Kryvyi Rih] || I would not like to see very young people, under 27, go either. [...] someone will have to rebuild Ukraine after the war. And in the demographic aspect as well. [FG3, Veteran, R1, M, 43, Odesa]

78

50+ is too much for war, at least in the infantry. [...] If you take the land, artillery, infantry - 25-50, in

combat. Logistics, rear, air defense, security - even over 50. [FG3, Veteran, R3, M, 48, Kyiv] || Combat units and brigades: 21-45, all others, logistics and other assignments: 25-60. [FG3, Veteran, R4, M, 39, Kryvyi Rih]

79

Everything is supported by the young [...] But [...] now those who are 50+ will quit, and there will be no

army left. [FG2, Military, R1, M, 53, Kharkiv reg.]

80

A woman in war, well, I think that's immoral. [...] it's the female gender. Weak. A woman, she has her

own purpose, she should be engaged in the family center, bring up children and be at home, do the housework and coziness. And this is a man's act, it should be done by men. [Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.] || I'm here so they won't be there at all. They are our mothers, they must now, like no one else, more than anyone else, care about our children, for our homelands, for our homes. [FG3, Veteran, R5, M, 40, Chernivtsi] || Clearly, this is not a woman's job. [...] I don't think they have anything to do there. [Interview 10, Civilian, M, 55, Chernivtsi] || I've heard from many people, there is such a toxic masculinity: "If I see a woman in a trench, how will she help me, I can't trust her." [FG1, Youth, R4, M, 23, Kyiv] || Women are physically weak, they will need constant help. [Interview 13, Wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv reg.]

81

If we take into account combat units, the commanders of combat units do not want to, there are certain

restrictions on the recruitment of women soldiers. [FG2, Military, R2, M, 43, Kyiv] || Mortar is a very heavy thing and not an easy profession [...] Some of the jobs are not available for women, but the usual specialties, yes, of course. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih]

82

If a woman is physically fit, she will give some of our boys a head start. [Interview 2, Recruiter, M,

39, Kyiv] || Women can be hired for rear positions, for staff positions, they even do better. The same goes for personnel departments, logistics units, some warehouse managers, [...] if a woman wants to be a machine gun commander, sure, there are women who can do it better than men. [Interview 3, Military, M, 49, Poltava] || Women can be in the headquarters, they can be accountants, financiers, lawyers. Well, to live in the field, in the trenches, in the mud, [...] I think that this is a woman, this is a mother, this is a girl, this is the person who gives birth to children, [...] this is our future. [...] Not every woman is physically able to be in difficult conditions and serve in difficult conditions [...] But with all this, women are among the best snipers. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || I served with ladies who give many men a head start, and they were experts in military specialties. [FG3, Veteran, R1, M, 43, Odesa] || The system is probably a legacy of the Soviet times. I think it will change over time [...] Maybe even physiologically, women can do better in some areas than men. [...] maybe men are better at something that requires more physical activity, and women are better at solving organizational issues. [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv]

83

We did not have a normal gender policy in terms of equality of service. If we look at the State Border

Guard Service, we have mostly women [...] After the 14th year, they started recruiting for other specialties [...] that is, snipers,

Overall, these responses expose **simmering tensions within Ukrainian society that risk endangering the solidarity and resilience which proved crucial for withstanding Russia's aggression in 2022 and will still be needed to ensure a successful post-war recovery.**

Chronic uncertainty and a sense of a lack of control can have a demoralising effect on Ukrainians liable for military service.

Significantly, current servicemen,⁸⁴ veterans⁸⁵ and civilians⁸⁶ insisted that the army needs not simply people, but *motivated* people, and the government needs to invest significant efforts in this direction. In the words of one civilian, 'it is necessary to encourage, not forcefully push [people] into buses, because it has a very negative effect.'⁸⁷ At the same time, motivation directly impacts combat effectiveness and morale in the army: ultimately, unmotivated and unprepared troops will prove 'useless' and 'unreliable'.⁸⁸

An [opinion poll](#) conducted by the agency InfoSapiens in January 2024 showed that among men not currently serving in the army, almost 16% are fully prepared to serve if called on, 19% are fairly prepared, over 18% feel fairly unready and almost 30% were absolutely not ready. So, what is currently demotivating potential conscripts? What can truly motivate and incentivise Ukrainians to join the army?

Among the top five reasons that may discourage men from mobilising, the InfoSapiens poll found (in decreasing order): insufficient material (65.6%), the possibility of long-term disability or death (64.1%), indefinite service terms (63.8%), inadequate training before unit deployment (64.3%), probability of being deployed to a unit with a 'bad' commander (59.6%).⁸⁹ The responses in this study largely confirm the results from InfoSapiens. On a more fundamental level, participants reported **fear of dying or being disabled**⁹⁰

gunners. Now, new units are being created for drones, and some women are already going there. The world is changing, we are slowly moving away from the dark Soviet past. Accordingly, both the structure and gender policy are changing. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || Everything is at their will. [FG2, Military, R4, M, 50, Slovyansk] || Women should join the army on a voluntary basis. They should not be forced to join the army in any way. [FG2, Military, R5, M, 39, Kyiv] || War is not a woman's business at all. [...] if a woman wants to, she can only do it voluntarily. There can be no mobilization of women at all. [FG3, Veteran, R3, M, 48, Kyiv] || They should be there only by their own will [...] If a woman wants to, why not? Why should she be prohibited? [Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv]

⁸⁴ *We need to provide the army not only with ammunition, but also with motivated people. [FG2, Military, R5, M, 39, Kyiv] || The military commissariats conduct mobilization in this way [...] we need to replenish the army, but it should be done in a different way - with motivation, encouragement. [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih]*

⁸⁵ *Mobilization is definitely needed, but we need to change the form of mobilization, engagement, and take some additional measures, because we don't need such people just to pack them into buses. [FG3, Veteran, R4, M, 39, Kryvyi Rih] || When will there be no problems with mobilization in Ukraine? [...] It should be a certain level of culture in the country, it should be driven by the state. [FG3, Veteran, R1, M, 43, Odesa]*

⁸⁶ *It should not be some person caught by the military commissariat on the road, who is scared [...] It should be a motivated person. [Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv] || Somehow we need to encourage people to join the army, our state is not doing a good job in this. [...] We need to encourage them, not force them into the bus, because it has a very negative impact. [Interview 9, Civilian, M, 38, Kyiv] || Mobilization should be voluntary, of course, but it should be motivated. [Interview 17, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 54, Lviv]*

⁸⁷ *We need to encourage them, not force them in the bus, because it has a very negative impact. [Interview 9, Civilian, M, 38, Kyiv]*

⁸⁸ *If a person is not ready, and he is brought there, he is useless. [FG3, Veteran, R2, M, 61, Lviv] || At the beginning, in 2022, they went [...] we had 90% of motivated fighters there. [...] at the end of the 2022, people started coming in such a way that it was really scary to get into a trench with them, because you cannot count on this person. They are not motivated, they are not trained well. [FG2, Military, R4, M, 50, Slovyansk]*

⁸⁹ *For the sake of simplicity, these figures combine the percentages of people who responded 'definitely agree' and 'rather agree' in relation to each factor listed.*

⁹⁰ *Now there is only the fear that they kill there. [Interview 2, Recruiter, M, 39, Kyiv] || Fear of dying. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || They are afraid of getting injured or killed. I think this is the main reason. [Interview 9, Civilian, M, 38, Kyiv] || Fear of dying. [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv] || People are afraid to die. [Interview 15, Wife of serviceman, F, 53, Poltava] || Thoughts, when you see the first wounded being brought back, your heroism actually deflates very quickly. You realize that you could be in their place, you could come back disabled, you could be killed. You start to fear for your life. [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv]*

as well as a general sense of uncertainty as key demotivating factors.⁹¹ This was also identified as the top concern impacting people's readiness to be mobilised in a survey conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI, 2024, p.25). As Ukrainians are fighting an existential war for survival, mobilisation is understandably perceived as a matter of life and death. Any research into how Ukrainians are expressing and handling these fears should be approached as a tool to support the country's efforts to maintain resilience in the face of a long war, and be wary of amplifying Russian disinformation narratives aimed at disparaging Ukraine's odds of success.

In more concrete terms, indefinite service contracts – in part as a consequence of the failure to prepare sufficient reserve units – were often mentioned by both servicemen⁹² and civilians⁹³ as a key factor holding people back from signing up. One civilian referred to soldiers as being essentially 'hostages' of the situation.⁹⁴ Female respondents also lamented the negative impact of this **uncertainty over the terms of demobilisation**:⁹⁵ 'when a person gets there, they do not know when they will leave.'⁹⁶ More specifically, soldiers complained about the lack of troop rotations and regular rest periods for units.⁹⁷ As one male civilian put it, 'everyone already understands perfectly well that this is, in essence, a one-way ticket'.⁹⁸ Female respondents also agreed with the demoralising impact of the lack of regular rest periods,⁹⁹ though two wives of current servicemen suggested that individual commanders have a lot of discretion in this area.¹⁰⁰

One soldier disagreed with the possibility of demobilising servicemen at the front for as long as the war continues, barring serious medical problems.¹⁰¹ Across all groups of respondents, **the lack of adequate training of reserve units was also named as a key factor frustrating**

91 *When you join the Army, you don't know where you will end up and what kind of commander you will meet. [Interview 3, Military, M, 49, Poltava] || Most likely, by not understanding what will happen to him. [Interview 13, Wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv reg.]*

92 (M.: Does the uncertainty of the terms of service affect you?) **It does.** [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv] || *First of all, the uncertainty is still the first thing, because I go there, because every person plans their life. [Interview 2, Recruiter, M, 39, Kyiv] || The uncertainty of the timing - it affects, because people do not want to live, as they say, blindly. [...] it is necessary to finally decide on the terms of mobilization service. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || The uncertainty of the terms of service - yes, it has a strong impact [...] "I am being called up, how long will I be called up? The guys have been serving for 2 years, and there is no term. And it will drag on."* [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih]

93 *Maybe I would go if it was, for example, for a period of one year or two years with some breaks, because I understand that if you are mobilized, you cannot demobilize or go on some kind of long vacation. [Interview 9, Civilian, M, 38, Kyiv] || Yes, [affects]. [...] people serve and do not go on vacation because there is no one to replace them. [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv]*

94 *Of course, it affects the situation, it turns out that the people who went there are hostages [...] very rarely do I see the guys who are here in the city, who came on a trip [...] they are not replaced, [...] the conditions are terrible and it turns out that a person does not rest physically, in any way. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih]*

95 *That [...] is probably the hardest question. Because nobody understands when it will all end. There are no questions about demobilization [...] there is uncertainty about the time. [Interview 13, Wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv reg.] || It is the uncertainty of those who are mobilized, the duration of service is uncertain. [...] One of the main factors is when you don't know for how long you are taken. But the whole male community thinks that once they get there, they're there forever. I just hear that from all sources. [...] once you get there, you're not going to be demobilized anymore. [Interview 16, Wife/mother of man of draft age, F, 45, Kharkiv].*

96 (M.: What, in your opinion, is the biggest obstacle?) *The fact that when a person gets there, he doesn't know when he will leave. [Interview 15, Wife of serviceman, F, 53, Poltava].*

97 *Morally exhausted, psychologically exhausted. Well, everyone realizes that time is running out, because there is no time. It was there once, but we didn't take advantage of it. [Interview 3, Military, M, 49, Poltava] || I have a lot of people I know who cannot be changed, there is no rotation. He is in such hot spots. The person has no health, really no health. [...] People can't even visit their relatives for a week. [...] It can be frustrating. [Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.]*

98 *Everyone understands that it's basically a one-way ticket, if you go, if you become a military man, there is no rest until the end, until the end of the war. [Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv]*

99 *This is a big problem. Because they have been there for more than a year, and when their rotation will even be, they don't know. [Interview 15, Wife of serviceman, F, 53, Poltava] || Of course it affects. [...] And rotations when they will let you go. [Interview 17, Wife/mother of man of draft age, F, 54, Lviv].*

100 *Some of them are constantly there, closer to the front line [...] it's already hard for them there, and they want to go home, to their families a bit more. [...] in my environment, with whom we communicate, they are resting. [...] it probably depends on the commanders. [Interview 14, Wife of serviceman, F, 49, Kharkiv] || With weekends there are no opportunities at all. [...] but since this year they have changed the commander there and now they get leave. It all depends on the command. [Interview 15, Wife of serviceman, F, 53, Poltava]*

101 *We are at war, how long can it last? Do we know when it will end? [...] A person should be demobilized only [...] when his health condition does not allow him to continue serving. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi]*



Photo: Ed Ram/For The Washington Post via Getty Images

to go because they've heard these stories about how untrained guys were sent to the frontline right away.¹⁰² Inadequate training, which directly impacts motivation, also weakens the Ukrainian army's fighting capacity: it's 'safer' to **demobilisation plans**.¹⁰³ As one soldier put it, 'a lot of people are afraid fight side by side with well-trained servicemen.'¹⁰⁴

The army's combat effectiveness also suffers as a result of the failure to efficiently allocate people to units based on their professional skills.¹⁰⁵ Both

102 Many people are afraid to go because they have heard these stories about untrained guys being thrown straight to the front line. [FG2, Military, R4, M, 50, Slovyansk]

103 This is an important factor, but in order to have these weekends, vacations, and holidays, there must be a reserve of people who can replace you. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || There are very few such opportunities [...] no more than 30% of the unit can be dismissed. The problem on the contact line is that there is a shortage of personnel. If, for example, 2-3 people are sent on vacation for the same 15 days, there is no one to replace them on the line, minus sanitary losses, minus the sick. That is, if you take a unit that is 100% staffed, then in 3-4 days it may have 50% of the people who can be at the position. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || It has a negative impact. [...] it is definitely necessary [...] for a person to have a rest somewhere, to recover both morally and physically [...] You go, they say you are supposed to be there for 36 months, [...] And then they say: "Sorry, we're going to continue, we really don't have anyone to replace you." [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv] || There should be some kind of a priority. Because these are the people who have not seen their families normally since the beginning of the war. [...] there should be the best instructors [...] You've served a year, yes, you've learned there, you've faced a lot, you can be an instructor for some time. [Interview 13, wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv reg] || [Mobilization] should be partial, so that some replacement could be made. It's just that in order to mobilize a person, he needs to be trained. [Interview 15, wife of serviceman, F, 53, Poltava] || We had a lot of time since 2014 to create everything, to train people. Not the way it is now - a guy is 25-26 years old, he was caught and not even sent for training, but immediately to the front. This is not normal. [FG1, Youth, R1, M, 19, Odesa reg.]

104 A person has to understand that he is not just going to serve, to be left behind as one of the untrained laborers who sees a machine gun for the second time in his life. But people who are professionals, who are proven, who are battle-hardened. And with such people it is more secure at the front. [FG3, Veteran, R1, M, 43, Odesa] || It happens that people come without any training at all, they have only seen the assault rifle in pictures, how to hold it, and they have very little time to prepare. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || They are taken in, and instead of learning how to use the weapon, how to set up bandages, they do almost nothing, they are given 3 cartridges and they shoot these 3 cartridges. This is not training, it's ready meat. [Interview 17, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 54, Lviv]

105 I had IT people who worked for international companies in the trenches, and they were just ordinary shooters. That is, people who could do a more efficient job, they are not doing what they know to do more efficiently. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv]

soldiers¹⁰⁶ and civilians¹⁰⁷ pointed to **the demotivating effect of people with specialised skills being sent wherever there is need without taking into account their expertise**, often to infantry assault units which are in constant need of making up for losses.¹⁰⁸ In parallel, respondents denounced the lack of a sufficient number of opportunities to choose positions tailored to one's profession or skills. One young respondent admitted that these limitations are very discouraging: 'I am an engineer with higher education [...] where will they deploy me if not as an assault trooper? [...] Who will even bother looking into this if there is a shortage of people now? This is why this is a source of fear.'¹⁰⁹ When people have a letter of recommendation to fill a particular position in a specific unit which then gets disregarded, it's particularly demotivating, leaving a sense that 'the state has deceived them'.¹¹⁰ One military recruiter lamented that recruiting centres can no longer guarantee to volunteers that they'll be sent to their unit of choice: 'They've put on the same level a motivated person who wants to fight on their own terms, wants to choose their unit, and a person who was caught and subjected to state coercion'.¹¹¹

Frustration was also voiced over the **perceived lack of basic training pertinent to the position that mobilised men are asked to fill**.¹¹² Civilians were most likely to acknowledge the demotivating effect of the current



**Faith itself
is a fire, but
it has to be
supported
by wood.
Firewood is
that weapon**

(research respondent)

106

(M.: Allocation to service without taking into account professional skills?) *Demotivating. According*

to the new directives of the General Staff, they just assign wherever they want, just by percentage, which is very bad. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv] || There are specialists who have a limited understanding, and they are sent to places where they have no understanding at all. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || There is a problem because it happens that people come to the unit, they are sent without an interview, without work in their specialty, in their areas, and they just start filling vacant positions with them. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || In the military commissariat, they just need statistics. If you bring a driver, and they need 100 shooters today, they don't care, you know, they have a quantitative selection, not qualitative, but quantitative. [Interview 2, Recruiter, M, 39, Kyiv]

107

At the moment, they are recruiting what they need. That is, a person gets to a military unit, and then

he is not a clerk anymore, he can become a machine gunner. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih] || Sometimes they take computer specialists to dig trenches. [Interview 10, Civilian, M, 55, Chernihiv] || (M.: Let's say I'm a driver, and they send me to be a machine gunner? Is that what people have?) Yes, that's what we have. This is what we faced. [Interview 14, wife of serviceman, F, 49, Kharkiv]

108

A military commissariat is a military commissariat. You went there, passed the commission, you are a specialist in this or that, and you were sent to the infantry. And you would have made a great sailor, for example, or an anti-aircraft gunner. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || An engineer comes, he is an assault rifleman in the infantry. A person who can do something, but in a different position. [FG2, Military, R2, M, 43, Kyiv] || Guys who have been mobilized for the last 3-4 months, and they are still told to go to the infantry. So who needs it? [FG3, Veteran, R4, M, 39, Kryvyi Rih] || You have to ask the person, we had tankers by specialty, but they were sent with us to the infantry. [FG3, Veteran, R7, M, 49, Kharkiv reg.] || My partner, when he was in conscript service, he was trained as an artilleryman, but he was mobilized as an assault rifleman. [FG1, Youth, R2, M, 20, Chernivtsi] || There is a certain division into professions, but when our army needs an assault rifle, they will not look at whether you are an engineer or a tractor driver, they will just cover the needs of the brigade that needs to get replenishment and that's it. [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv] || The military medical commission itself has changed, we are all healthy [...] most of us, people see that those who get there go to the assault rifles, that is, all healthy, all fine, we go to the assault rifles, but this cannot be. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih]

109

I'm an engineer with a university degree. [...] And what position will they give me there except a stormtrooper? [...] And who will look at it, if now there is a shortage of people. That's why there's fear in it. [FG1, Youth, R6, M, 26, Kryvyi Rih]

110

At the stage of distribution, they will all be sent to a combat unit or somewhere else, regardless of the letters of recommendation they applied for. In fact, this is very demotivating, [...] they realize that they have been deceived by the state once again. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv]

111

They make no distinction between a motivated person who wants to fight on his own terms, who wants to choose his unit, and a person who was caught, who was forced by the state. [...] we cannot guarantee a mobilized person who was selected by the mobilization unit that he will get to his unit. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv]

112

If you send a person to a particular department, he or she must have proper training. He must clearly understand what he has to do there, how he has to do it. This is not happening today to the extent that it should be. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || Guys are appointed as grenade launchers, they go through the training, that's it, they are sent to the battlefield, and the guys have never even fired a grenade launcher [...] No one looks at whether you know how to do something or not, you were drafted, can you hold a gun? You can go serve. [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih]

accelerated time frame of military training,¹¹³ though some servicemen¹¹⁴ and veterans¹¹⁵ also raised this point. However, a few younger respondents maintained that recruitment and training processes had been significantly improved.¹¹⁶

Soldiers and veterans were most adamant in criticising the role of **unprofessional commanders**.¹¹⁷ As explained by one soldier, 'a lot depends on commanders [...] in some units it's more or less okay [...] but there are also so-called meat brigades [...] It's very demotivating if you get caught up in the meat brigade, and they just don't look after you'.¹¹⁸ This concern around unprofessional commanders exploiting mobilised men as cannon fodder was raised also among civilians.¹¹⁹ One veteran claimed that this dissatisfaction with commanders could translate into a more general distrust towards the government.¹²⁰ A couple of young respondents reported stories from acquaintances currently serving who found themselves threatening commanders for giving bad orders or disrespecting their troops.¹²¹

Another demoralising factor was **the fear that military equipment would be inadequate or not arriving in a timely manner**.¹²² In the words

113 *There are guys who were mobilized and trained. Without having any combat experience in a month,*

[...] It is quite difficult to become [...] at least a person with an understanding of what war is [...] how to behave [...] the guys get some general training, but it is not enough [...] This is express training. [Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv] || The timeframe for training, I think, is too short, probably an accelerated version, [...] and therefore, perhaps, more people die because they are not well trained. [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv] || I have not heard from anyone that there was a quality training. Basically, it's 2 months and a person is sent from the training ground to somewhere else in advance, 2 months is not a proper training [...] people are also put off by this. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih] || It's discouraging because the training is disgusting. [Interview 13, Wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv reg.] || If before, they say, the training was three months long, [...] now it is less time, and after the training, yes, there are fears that they will be sent to the front line straight away. [Interview 14, wife of serviceman, F, 49, Kharkiv] || The training consists in digging trenches, but not in military training. [Interview 16, Wife/mother of man of draft age, F, 45, Kharkiv]

114 *This issue should have been addressed even earlier. [...] the fact that now they are just conducting express training is not very good. [Interview 3, Military, M, 49, Poltava]*

115 *There are cases when a person is handed a summons on Monday, and on Friday he is already with us, near Bakhmut. We meet right at the position on Saturday, and he asks me: "Is this line two or three?" I say it's line zero. He says that he was promised in the military registration and enlistment office that he would be standing at the checkpoint. [FG3, Veteran, R7, M, 49, Kharkiv reg.]*

116 *The same engineers or higher math teachers, they often do some kind of map work, mortar work, artillery work. I haven't noticed any problems with that, I haven't seen any problems, the distribution of people according to their skills is very good here. [FG1, Youth, R3, M, 20, Kharkiv] || My acquaintance was trained for 2-3 months, he was not immediately thrown under Bakhmut [...] the training was at a professional level. [FG1, Youth, R6, M, 26, Kryvyi Rih]*

117 (M.: Unprofessional commanders?) *It has an influence. [Interview 2, Recruiter, M, 39, Kyiv] || (M.: Rumors about the professionalism, unprofessionalism of commanders, does it influence attitudes?) Very much. [Interview 3, Military, M, 49, Poltava] || A career officer is primarily concerned about his career. [...] He forgets that he has people in his subordination who have families, for whom he has to do everything to save them. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || Yes [...] If a commander is not professional, he will not be able to prepare his subordinates to behave in a difficult situation. If a commander does not know it is a threat to his subordinates, he cannot do it. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || Commanders are a little bit unaware that yes, we are already military, but we are first of all ordinary people [...] We did not graduate from any academies or anything, that they command us like that [...] incompetence of commanders has a very strong impact. [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih] || There are a lot of unprofessional officers, a lot. And a lot of guys are disappointed with the fact that these officers wear crowns and do not listen to ordinary soldiers. [FG3, Veteran, R5, M, 40, Chernivtsi]*

118 *A lot of situations depend on the commander, [...] in some units it is more or less normal, [...] and there are so-called meat brigades, battalions [...] It demotivates you a lot when you get into a meat brigade and you are simply not taken care of. [FG2, Military, R5, M, 39, Kyiv]*

119 *There are units [...] [where] you are treated like cannon fodder. They don't care about the lives of their subordinates. [Interview 9, Civilian, M, 38, Kyiv] || The attitude to the guys who arrived there beforehand as cannon fodder [...] the very fact that people know that even they will come there to fight [...] they are like expendable material. It also plays a big role. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih] || Unprofessional commanders, [...] now there is this problem. [Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv]*

120 *Very bad things happen there in relation to commanders and ordinary soldiers. It is all being reported to the public, and it turns out that people do not want to go there, they have already lost trust in the state. [FG3, Veteran, R7, M, 49, Kharkiv reg.]*

121 *I listen to stories from my companion. In his neighboring brigade, a military lawyer visited them. He was unhappy because they did not go to the assault [...] And he told them that if they did not go and do what they were told, he would sue them all. And the guys said: "You are now at position zero, we will shoot you now, and no one will know what you died of." [FG1, Youth, R2, M, 20, Chernivtsi] || Very common. [...] I have a friend who came back, he was demobilized [...] [his commander] treated everyone with disdain. He said: "I will just kill him in civilian life and that's it". [...] It is important to know that you were not sent to an assault that was not prepared, not supported by artillery, and you were killed because of someone's stupid desire to please someone. [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv]*

122 *Fear. People are just afraid. [...] people do not know where they are going, what they will be given.*

of one civilian, 'obviously it's scary sitting in some trench or in a dugout without the ability to shoot and just waiting for a miracle'.¹²³ One female participant used the following image to describe the negative impact of weapons shortages on soldiers' morale: 'Faith itself [...] is like fire, but it must be supported with firewood. Weapons provide that firewood.'¹²⁴ Younger respondents lamented Ukraine's heavy dependence on Western partners (especially for artillery ammunition)¹²⁵ and soldiers' need to purchase military gear of better quality out of their own pockets or through volunteers.¹²⁶ One serviceman explicitly said that this self-reliance has a demotivating effect,¹²⁷ a sentiment that was shared also by other soldiers, veterans and civilians.¹²⁸

Cases of corruption, especially in defence procurement, also have a demoralising effect.¹²⁹ As one soldier put it, 'corruption scandals are very demotivating. [...] And you understand that someone here is putting their soul on the line, and someone there earns from it'.¹³⁰ Respondents also reported that red tape tends to discourage people liable for military service.¹³¹

Another demoralising factor was the perception that political elites are being shielded from military service, therefore creating a sense of social injustice.¹³² One soldier stated that: 'what demotivates me is the

Will they give you an AK assault rifle or some new one? What kind of equipment will they have? [...] The inability to provide the army with everything they need in a timely manner. [Interview 3, Military, M, 49, Poltava] || (M.: Can it be that a person [...] is afraid that there will be no necessary equipment [...] and this keeps him from mobilizing?) It is true. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || Yes, weapons and supplies have a very strong impact [...] you cannot go to the battlefield naked and barefoot. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || Yes, of course. [...] The Russian Federation can launch 30 mines per day, and ours will only give 5 mines per day. [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih] || The first priority should be the factor of having something to fight with. And if you don't have it, [...] you don't go with just your hands. [Interview 16, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 45, Kharkiv]

123 *Of course it's scary to sit in some trench or in a dugout without being able to shoot back and just waiting for a miracle, [...]. Of course, this also has an impact. [Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv]*

124 *The ability of the authorities to provide weapons, this aspect may play a role. [...] faith has to be provided with something material. Faith itself is [...] a fire, but it has to be supported by wood. Firewood is that weapon. [Interview 17, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 54, Lviv]*

125 *It's not that bad with personal uniforms. [...] Body armor, helmet, assault rifle, I think they will be provided. [...] There is indeed a problem with artillery shells, with ammunition [...] It depends on our Western partners. [FG1, Youth, R4, M, 23, Kyiv] || Now the Americans will delay help, I'll go, and what, I'll run with a shovel? That's not fun. [FG1, Youth, R2, M, 20, Chernivtsi]*

126 *The majority buys with their own money. Because what the state gives out is either of poor quality or not for your size [...] Guys buy assault rifles with their own money. [FG1, Youth, R2, M, 20, Chernivtsi] || My friends are constantly collecting donations to buy thermal cameras, sleeping bags, better uniforms. Although it is not so bad now, it is not enough, not the level we would like. [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv]*

127 *Poor supply of equipment demotivates, first of all, in terms of repairing the same vehicles or when guys buy some uniforms with their own money, it demotivates. [FG2, Military, R2, M, 43, Kyiv]*

128 *In the third year of the war, the guys are not provided with basic necessities, they drive their own gasoline, their own cars, repair them. [FG2, Military, R3, M, 27, Kryvyi Rih] || There should be equality, a full package of everything [...] And when volunteers help, you have to buy something yourself, it's a little bit offensive. [Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.] || We need help for the guys on the front line - drones, cars, equipment. They are raising money. At the same time, the state is throwing millions on all sorts of nonsense. People say that they are collecting pennies, but the state throws away billions and millions. [FG3, Veteran, R2, M, 61, Lviv] || You should be provided with everything you need, and it should not be up to your friends who bought clothes, bulletproof vests, shoes, bags, even a helmet to send a person to the frontline. [Interview 17, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 54, Lviv]*

129 *People, plus the background of those scandals: "Do I need it, what am I going to be there?" [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv] || The more such facts of theft, the more such facts that humanitarian aid was taken out for him somewhere, you know, they demoralize. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih] || Bribes are insane, which we hear about in the news now, that people, like the last day, just protecting, some losing limbs, and some having access to funding, filling their pockets, building houses, buying cars, taking money abroad where they can buy yachts, palaces, [...] So why go if... [Interview 17, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 54, Lviv]*

130 *Corruption scandals are very demotivating. When they steal on the same eggs, when they steal on uniforms. And you realize that someone is putting their heart and soul into it, and someone else is making money on it, it's very damaging. [FG2, Military, R4, M, 50, Sloviansk]*

131 *Bureaucracy is a big obstacle. [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih] || If you lose a machine gun, you have to go through a long paperwork. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || Oh, it's a painful thing. [...] There are a lot of functionaries at the headquarters, and they all need these plates, certificates in the fight. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || People do this writing, I don't know, they devote too much time, nerves and other things to it. Of course, this also affects. [Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv] || (M.: Do you think young people have such a fear? Not to serve because of the bureaucracy?) Yes. [FG1, Youth, R1, M, 19, Odesa reg.] || Very big bureaucracy. [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv]*

132 *(M: You said that at first there were lines at the military enlistment office, but now they catch people. Why? What stops you?) [...] Because of injustice, someone has to mobilize, and someone is hiding. People are also offended. A person says he should do it too, but I'm going. They don't go, but I go [...] everyone has to mobilize. [Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.] || At the beginning of the war, there was hope that this war would mobilize both our society and our government, but the society is mobilized, but the government is not so much. [FG1, Youth, R4, M, 23, Kyiv] || People see the injustice. [...] Our mayor Sadovyi has sons of my age, he has already bought up half of Lviv, [...] and I have to go and defend his property? I am young, I have nothing, no real estate, nothing. And he bought up half of Lviv and said: "My son will not go." [...] and I have to go to a place where I can be killed or crippled. [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv] ||*

inequality of mobilisation. No matter what we say about our government, I do not see and probably will never see their children, loved ones, relatives serve in the army.’¹³³

Finally, it is also important to consider a more long-term dimension. **Respondents from all groups insisted on the importance of providing adequate social guarantees for mobilised men, reporting a fear of ‘abandonment’ from the government for themselves (especially if they get wounded)¹³⁴ and their family.¹³⁵ One young person posed the question: ‘Will anyone need you once this war is over?’¹³⁶ One soldier referred to the government’s current approach to veterans with disabilities as a ‘catastrophe’: ‘When you are wounded or have disabilities, the army no longer has any interest in you.’¹³⁷ One veteran claimed that veterans are being ‘forgotten’ altogether by the government.¹³⁸ **This dimension requires separate attention, as it risks exacerbating existing resentment towards the authorities among soldiers at the front, disappointing veterans who may feel their sacrifice was in vain, and further discouraging civilians from signing up.****

It should come as no surprise that the cumulative effect of these negative factors pushes many family members to dissuade men of draft age from joining the army.¹³⁹ The final section outlines some immediate solutions advanced by respondents to mitigate the most urgent problems in the government’s current approach to mobilisation and motivate more Ukrainians to sign up and turn the tide of the war.

133 *I am demotivated by the inequality of mobilization. No matter how much we talk about our state leadership, I have not seen their children, relatives, and friends in the army and probably will never see them. [FG2, Military, R3, M, 27, Kryvyi Rih]*

134 *It is very important how those who have already been demobilized are treated. This is really a problem, and it really affects people - they see it, they listen to it, what they are told, it is very important. [...] It's a question of what will happen to you after you are wounded, if you stay alive. [FG2, Military, R1, M, 53, Kharkiv reg.] || I am now of limited capacity and I am sitting on 20 thousand salary and I cannot feed my family with this money, [...] This is very demotivating for me. [FG2, Military, R3, M, 27, Kryvyi Rih] || Some kind of uncertainty that you are there, that something will happen to you, will you be protected? Maybe a little bit of distrust in the state, that a person will be left alone in case of something, if he/she becomes disabled there. [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv] || What can stop you, if you die, that's one thing, but if you lose your limbs, or... who will take care of you? The state will not take care of you, [...] and you become a burden on your family. [Interview 17, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 54, Lviv] || I heard from my parents about the same Afghanistan [...] where young guys, even if they came back safe and sound, were psychologically very much broken [...] I don't see the state taking care of them. I see a lot of soldiers who are either drunk or just having some kind of hysteria. [FG1, Youth, R3, M, 20, Kharkiv]*

135 *The biggest reasons are two. The first is fear, and the second is uncertainty that your family will be fine if you go to war. [Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv] || There is a fear that if I go to war, for example, and I am killed, my family will bury me with their own money. [...] As a rule, missing persons are not paid anything for death. [FG1, Youth, R6, M, 26, Kryvyi Rih]*

136 *Fear of uncertainty. [...] Fear that you will be wounded there, disabled, crippled, fear about who will take care of you. Your legs will be blown off, and you still have a long life to live, because you are young. And you won't find a*

job. [...] will anyone need you after this war? [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv]

137 *For me, as a partially functional person, I communicate with the same kind of people, almost all of them are like this. It's just a disaster. When you become wounded or partially functional, you are no longer interesting for the army. [FG2, Military, R3, M, 27, Kryvyi Rih]*

138 *I look at how the state treats people who fought in the war, they simply forget about them. [FG3, Veteran, R7, M, 49, Kharkiv reg.]*

139 *We have had many people who have refused, [...] wife doesn't support the idea, threw a tantrum, or parents locked another candidate in the house when he was supposed to leave. These things happen. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv] || In families with normal relationships, the wife and children will probably have a very strong influence. [Interview 2, Recruiter, M, 39, Kyiv] || If a woman does not want her husband to go, she will hide him, and he will hide. [Interview 3, Military, M, 49, Poltava] || Some people do not want to let go a brother, a husband, a son. They try to make sure that the person stays with his family. [Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.] || A very big factor is when he is defending the country and his wife writes: "I'm sorry, I can't live like this anymore. I'm leaving you". What motivation does he have to continue serving? No motivation at all. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || It has a significant impact, because the family starts to worry about the person. And then the process of persuasion begins: "maybe you should think about why you need it". Family circumstances, even more so. These factors can keep a person from mobilization. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Slovyansk] || They have fears for their loved ones. And these loved ones influence 100%. [FG2, Military, R4, M, 50, Slovyansk] || Mom, wives, of course, are against it, for the most part. [Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv] || The family is against your mobilization, [...] they are afraid that you will return either crippled or missing. [Interview 9, Civilian, M, 38, Kyiv] || Very much, because any mother, any wife will sit at home and say, don't go anywhere [...] They will protect him whatever happens. [Interview 13, wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv reg.] || The whole family is against you mobilizing. [...] I will not let my child go, I will not let my husband go. [Interview 15, wife of serviceman, F, 53, Poltava] || [Relatives] talk you out of it, of course. [...] you are used only as meat. [Interview 16, Wife/mother of man of draft age, F, 45, Kharkiv]*

Maximising certainty in uncertain times and opportunities to exercise some control through recruitment could relieve anxiety and motivate war traumatised people to join the army.



If you give people the certainty that they can get into a selected unit, that they will be really selected according to their competencies, they would be more willing to apply

(research respondent)

When asked what motivated people to take up arms at the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, some respondents argued that it was the desire to protect one's home and family.¹⁴⁰ For others, it was the understanding that their nation was under attack and the sight of so many civilian losses that mainly motivated them to join the army in defence of the country.¹⁴¹

The war has left an indelible mark on Ukraine's society. Trauma will result in a deep need for control for many Ukrainians in the face of existential insecurity. **With the war now in its third year, participants' responses reflect a societal demand to inject some certainty and control back into people's lives.** This insight has direct bearing on current debates regarding how to motivate people to join the army.

Some younger respondents explicitly reported that their readiness and motivation to serve in the army would be strengthened if service terms were clearer:¹⁴² 'I am ready to risk my health and my life for the good of my Motherland, but only if I don't have to sit there for two, three, four years with no way out, like our poor guys who are there'.¹⁴³ Similarly, soldiers, veterans and civilians emphasised that **people's motivation to join the army would be much greater if they were given more opportunities to fill roles in line with their skills through recruitment.**¹⁴⁴ Here respondents praised the work of military units involved in recruiting: 'all these brigades, like the Third Separate Assault Brigade, which conduct these recruitment initiatives, [...] they explain, show people around. This should be done so that a person understands where they can end up, and what they will have to do there.'¹⁴⁵ As a result, there is a demand for enhancing existing recruitment mechanisms according to [the model of the Third Separate Assault Brigade](#).¹⁴⁶ One recruiter exclaimed: 'Give the units the opportunity to recruit directly, [...] it's them who will be fighting [side by side] with these people, not the General

140 *First and foremost, it is to protect my home and family. [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih] || At the beginning of the war, [...] I did not want the city where my relatives are to be occupied. [FG2, Military, R2, M, 43, Kyiv] || There are people who tried to get in at the beginning of the war [...] but they were not accepted. (M.: What motivates them?) "I don't want their foot to enter my house, I don't want it." [FG2, Military, R3, M, 27, Kryvyi Rih] || Protection of families. [FG3, Veteran, R6, M, 47, Ternopil reg.]*

141 *Patriotism, [...] the fact that our people, our nation, are being killed. The fact that civilian victims are killed is very strong and painful, it also strongly motivates you to take up arms and defend your country. [Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.]*

142 *If I knew how long I would serve, that would motivate me to endure this period, then maybe yes. [...] It's important to have a definite term. [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv]*

143 *I am ready to risk my health and my life for the good of my Motherland, but only if I will not sit there for 2, 3, 4 years without leave, like our poor guys who are there. [FG1, Youth, R4, M, 23, Kyiv]*

144 *If you give people the certainty that they can get into a selected unit, that they will be really selected according to their competencies, they would be more willing to apply. [...] Those candidates with whom I personally spoke, they wanted to choose their units themselves, they understood that it was necessary, they wanted to defend their country, but they did not want to apply to the Military Commissariat. They wanted to do it through a recruiter to talk to the unit commander. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv] || Fair mobilization should take place with the help of, for example, recruitment centers. Then a person comes, again, to move away from the statistics of military registration and enlistment offices, from the military commissariats. [...] A recruiting center is more loyal to this: 'Good afternoon! Good day! Do you have a wish? I have a wish. Oh, let's see where your skills will be best used. [...] Perhaps, in the military commissariats, we should change people, not make them just statisticians, but somehow find motivated people who will understand the need for high-quality and professional recruitment. [Interview 2, Recruiter, M, 39, Kyiv] || If it was more civilized, maybe people would come and say: "I've studied to be a drone pilot, so please send me to be a drone pilot", and not to the infantry. [FG3, Veteran, R4, M, 39, Kryvyi Rih] || If a person is mobilized, he or she should be able to choose what, where, in what direction, what specialty he or she chooses, so that he or she gets to that specialty, because there is a real example when a person chose one specialty and was taken to another. [Interview 9, Civilian, M, 38, Kyiv] || That you are not just taken away, but you can go yourself, you want to, that's exactly where you want to go. This way you will be taken, you don't know where, but this way you already know where you will go, at least. Maybe this will also be a kind of motivation, that a person will not be so afraid that he is going nowhere. [Interview 15, wife of serviceman, F, 53, Poltava]*

145 *All these brigades, the 3rd Assault Brigade, which hold recruitment events like this, [...] tell and show. This is what needs to be done [...] so that a person understands where they can go, what they will have to do there." [Interview 3, Military, M, 49, Poltava]*

146 *"Charter", "3 Assault" and "Azov" [...] They advertise themselves, put them on websites, people call and recruit. It has to be. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || Recruitment should be conducted in this way. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || I rate the communication of the Azov regiment at 100+ points. [FG2, Military, R1, M, 53, Kharkiv reg.] || Let a person choose where to go, if he wants to be a drone operator, let him go, that's already a motivation for a person. [Interview 3, Military, M, 49, Poltava]*



Photo: Ed Ram/For The Washington Post via Getty Images

Staff [of the Armed Forces].¹⁴⁷

In particular, brigades running their own recruitment such as the Third Separate Assault Brigade and the [Da Vinci Wolves Separate Mechanised Battalion](#) have three main points of attraction: participants believed that these have better commanders than average;¹⁴⁸ they have a reputation of being very professional, looking after their troops, creating a sense of camaraderie and providing excellent training and equipment;¹⁴⁹ they represent a brand of quality and even prestige¹⁵⁰ ('the understanding that not everyone can get in also motivates'¹⁵¹).

Ultimately, **recruitment is seen as an effective strategy because it restores in people a sense of control and certainty. When people feel**

147 Give the units the opportunity to recruit directly, [...] they have to fight with these people, not the General Headquarters. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv]

148 ['Azov', '3rd separate assault'] They are very successful. [...] they provide certainty, they have normal commanders. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv] || If the guys were in the hell of war and came back again, i.e. transferred from my battalion to the "3rd assault", it means it works? It works. [Interview 2, Recruiter, M, 39, Kyiv] || I heard a lot about the 3rd Assault Brigade, the recruitment, [...] it was really good advertising [...] they encouraged me that there was a good team, good equipment. [...] The command is quite good. [Interview 9, Civilian, M, 38, Kyiv] || In the same advertisements for the "3rd Assault" and "Azov" battalions, motivated people go there. They know where they are going, [...] they are not dragged there by a force. [FG3, Veteran, R2, M, 61, Lviv]

149 ['Azov', '3rd separate assault'] despite the fact that it is an assault unit, [...] they have the lowest losses compared to other infantry, because they are trained [...] they have queues for infantry specialties among men. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv] || This all affects people's motivation, their fighting spirit. A man is not afraid that something will happen to him. He knows that there are comrades who know what they are doing and can help. [Interview 3, Military, M, 49, Poltava] || They value a person, they are also interested in teaching a person, giving him some knowledge. [Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.] || People have supplies, people have specialists, people have a completely patriotic command that will tear off everything for each of their soldiers, because they are responsible to the guys. [...] 'Charter', '3rd Assault' and 'Azov' [...] there is a clear and correct approach to training. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || Why is the "3 Storm" so popular? Why are 'Da Vinci Wolves' popular? [...] Because these are people who have taken recruitment seriously, they take those who they need, they train them, and they openly show what happens during the attack and so on. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih] || They say to come to them, there will be no soviet army, they have everything modern, modern equipment, they do not throw guys into a stupid battle or stupid actions, they provide professional training. Here, they motivate and excite. [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv] || In the hearing, when "Azov" means some mega-professionals, these are, let's say, people who will protect you. [Interview 16, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 45, Kharkiv]

150 [Azov, 3rd Separate Assault] They have been recruiting for a long time, well done. There is only respect for them, they have created a brand. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv]

151 "Azov" is, in principle, such a brand [...] which arouses respect, confidence, for real men. It is very prestigious [...] And the understanding that not everyone can get there, also motivates [...] because from these bricks somehow in the consciousness the image of such, I don't know, titan of the military is formed. [Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv].

empowered, they also feel more motivated. One military recruiter said, ‘a person should know where they will end up [...] it is important for a person to know that they have at least some influence [...] Without this, we simply cannot continue to fight, if people won’t join in [...] People really like [...] when [unit commanders] talk with them, ask them about their skills, and they get to choose.’¹⁵² One civilian succinctly explained the popularity of military units involved in recruitment: ‘Why do [people] [...] choose, for example, the same “Third Assault Brigade” more? Because they actually see what will happen to them there’.¹⁵³ Similarly, one female respondent stressed that ‘when you can make some decisions on your own [...] these moments are motivating [...] when you are treated as a full-fledged person, and not as cannon fodder.’¹⁵⁴ One veteran pleaded: ‘make each person understand that you’ll give them a job based on their specialty if they know how to do something. Not everyone can be an assault troop.’¹⁵⁵

The logic behind successful recruitment is dictated by an understanding that the right to choose will strengthen motivation, but also that capitalising on the best skills of motivated people will increase the army’s combat effectiveness.¹⁵⁶ One soldier explained that ‘the right to choose where you serve should be left to individuals to some degree, because if they are good at flying drones, then they will not be a good gunner’.¹⁵⁷ This is seen as the main strength of recruitment: ‘it’s effective, people have a choice. It’s like applying for a job.’¹⁵⁸

More generally, one soldier explicitly favoured the transition to a contract army ‘where people will understand why they chose this life path’, removing mobilisation altogether due to its coercive nature.¹⁵⁹ A few civilians also emphasised the importance of autonomy and freedom of choice against any coercive measure.¹⁶⁰ Accordingly, one civilian’s wife emphasised that coercive measures would have only a demotivating effect on men of draft age.¹⁶¹ Others disagreed to a point: while volunteers should be given space, mobilisation should remain coercive, though it should be conducted within



Let a person choose where to go, if he wants to be a drone operator, let him go, that’s already a motivation for a person

(research respondent)

152 *It has to be defined, a person has to know where he or she is going [...] It is important for a person to know that he or she has at least a little influence [...] Without this, we simply cannot continue to fight if people are not engaged [...] people really like [...] to be talked to, asked about their skills and chosen by them. It’s not just, like, hands and feet, ready to go, a stormtrooper. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv]*

153 *Why do [people] [...] choose, for example, the same “3rd Assault”? Because they actually see what will happen to them there. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih]*

154 *When you can make decisions on your own [...] these moments motivate you. [...] when you are treated as a human being, not as meat. [Interview 17, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 54, Lviv]*

155 *Let the man know that if he can do something, give him a job in his specialty. Not every man can be a stormtrooper. [FG3, Veteran, R1, M, 43, Odesa]*

156 *It’s not up to the military commissariat to catch people, it’s up to people to go to the military commissariat. If this situation changes in this direction, then we will have a better army and people will not be so scared. [Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv] || Not unfair, but unconstructive mobilization. [...] A mobilized person [...] has no choice: what military specialty to get, what unit to go to [...] You come to the military commissariat like a sheep. They just take you with a stick and poke you in one direction. [FG3, Veteran, R4, M, 39, Kryvyi Rih] || It should be compulsory, but there should be maximum training for the position that a person who is forcibly mobilized chooses. [FG1, Youth, R4, M, 23, Kyiv]*

157 *The right to choose where you serve should be, to some extent, up to the person, because if he is good at flying drones, he will not be a good artilleryman. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi]*

158 *They give a contact where a person can apply, you can just consult, you don’t have to add any data, they just tell you what is there. In which case you agree to join or be drafted into a unit, and under what conditions you are drafted. I think it’s effective, that a person has a choice. It’s the same as when you get a job. [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv]*

159 *I am in favor of having a fully contract army, no mobilization [...] when the proper army is formed, when it is contracted and it is a job, then people will understand why they chose this path in their lives, not a mortgage. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi]*

160 *It should really be a person’s choice, when he is put in a framework, it is wrong [...] Voluntary [...] What is happening now, that they catch people in the streets, like on some kind of safari hunting, it seems to me a little bit wrong in moral and all respects. A person is being forced, a person has to make a choice. [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv] || In Kharkiv [...] they also shove you into buses and everything else. It’s not normal, it’s not good, we are human beings, not just some meat, biowaste and everything else. [FG1, Youth, R5, M, 24, Kharkiv reg.]*

161 *So far, everyone is afraid that if you don’t come, [...] your driving license will be taken away, or [...] your cards will be blocked. This is not a normal story at all [...] When we learn such facts, there is no motivation to go to defend the country at all - it is already forced, it is already intimidation, it should not be. [Interview 17, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 54, Lviv]*

legal limits without abuse of power from TRCs.¹⁶²

There was a **strong consensus that making rules more transparent, especially making service terms clearer, would be a game changer.**¹⁶³

As one female respondent said, 'a person who is already going there must understand what they are getting into.'¹⁶⁴ One civilian insisted that all citizens should be given basic training regardless.¹⁶⁵

Soldiers,¹⁶⁶ civilians¹⁶⁷ and young people¹⁶⁸ agreed that **state guarantees to wounded soldiers or the families of deceased soldiers plays an important role in men's motivation to join the army.** As one member of the military put it, 'the worst thing for a soldier is what's going to happen if they are forgotten.'¹⁶⁹ Another soldier emphasised: 'if our state takes proper care of the wounded, the dead, and their families, properly trains and provides [all that's necessary] for its people, then believe me, we have a lot of people who would go to fight.'¹⁷⁰

A large number of respondents mentioned that mobilising more members of the political elite would set an example for Ukrainian society and remove the image of army service as an obligation that has fallen on the



The right to choose where you serve should be, to some extent, up to the person, because if he is good at flying drones, he will not be a good artilleryman

(research respondent)

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Mobilization should be compulsory. There should be a presidential decree on general mobilization. And a person can go voluntarily if he or she has not passed the medical examination and is not fit for service, but can volunteer. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || It should be voluntary for a while, and then it should be forced, but it should be within the limits of the law, not like now. [...] Without beating, so that they don't play cat and mouse, so that they don't chase the guys. [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih]

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[It is necessary to create transparent rules of the game that are understandable to the whole society, [...]] How it works, how much you are involved, let them name at least some period, 3 years, 5 years, 10 years. Well, let them name this period and really work out the systematic nature of these rotations. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv] || Maybe let people accept this - 36 months, and that's it, and you won't be mobilized for a year. [Interview 2, Recruiter, M, 39, Kyiv] || The terms of service should also be taken into account, because 36 months of service in Lviv and 36 months of service somewhere near Kupiansk or Bakhmut are completely different things. That is, lawmakers must clearly define: For such categories, so much, for such categories, so much time should be spent in service. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || It should be written down what mobilization brings. The term should be clearly stated, what will happen to those who refuse and evade it. [FG2, Military, R2, M, 43, Kyiv] || There must be a term of service. [FG2, Military, R4, M, 50, Slovyansk] || There should be transparent laws regarding material support, salaries and terms of service. [Interview 17, Wife/mother of a man of draft age, F, 54, Lviv] || People need to understand when they are mobilized, how much they are going to be involved. [FG2, Military, R4, M, 50, Slovyansk] || For people to know that [...] there is a date, you are told to prepare your documents in six months, [...] somehow it should be in a step-by-step way. That is, the first batch is already at war, the second is preparing, the fourth is preparing for leave. [Interview 9, Civilian, M, 38, Kyiv]

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A person who is already going there, he should understand what he is going for. [Interview 13, Wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv reg.]

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We should have training centers, [...] every citizen who is militarily obliged, who does not have a military specialty yet, should be trained at least once in their life. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih]

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There should be interest and insurance for your life and your family. For example, if I went and I died, there should be [...] support for my family [...] There are people who have had their limbs torn off - an arm, a leg. They are then discharged, and they are like unnecessary material [...] It is also offensive. [Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.] || If you die, you have to be sure that your family, your children, that if you do not support them, the state will. [FG2, Military, R1, M, 53, Kharkiv reg.] || I would like [...] the country to be able to provide rehabilitation and full support for the families of the dead, the wounded, and those who became partially functional. [FG2, Military, R2, M, 43, Kyiv, Ukraine] || People need to understand [...] what social guarantees they will receive in case of disability, that they will not be abandoned, that they will be protected, [...] that their family will be supported. [FG2, Military, R4, M, 50, Slovyansk]

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A person has to be protected somehow, if you voluntarily go, mobilize and know that in case of something, you know that your family will not be left without anything, without finances. [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv] || Everyone [...] has to consciously understand that they will not be left on their own. He will be supported and treated properly, [...] Then there will be motivation and the rightness to go to serve. [Interview 5, Military, M, 39, Chernivtsi] || I would work out guarantees for the family of a serviceman [...] a person making such a decision should be absolutely sure that in any outcome [...] his family will be well off for the rest of their lives. [Interview 8, Civilian, M, 41, Kharkiv] || A person should be protected in case of injury or, God forbid, death, there should be some kind of financial compensation. [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv] || If people see that the state cares about them, then most problems will simply go away [...] I want to see the support of the state, that is, people who really gave their health or even their lives, so that their relatives also see the support of the state. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih]

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The United States is an example. There are entire foundations, organizations, special pensions, programs such as "Jobs for the Wounded" or for military personnel who have received a disability. These are very large programs, they have been working on this for years, and people in the US do not feel abandoned. [FG1, Youth, R3, M, 20, Kharkiv] || A person who gets wounded, he/she is needed only by his/her family, I don't see such strong state support. [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv]

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For soldiers, this is the worst thing to happen if they are forgotten. [Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.]

170

If our state takes proper care of the wounded, the dead, their families, trains and supplies people properly, then believe me, we have a lot of people who would go to war. [FG2, Military, R4, M, 50, Slovyansk]

most vulnerable parts of the population.¹⁷¹ Interestingly, when what asked which government initiatives could contribute to increasing the motivation of Ukrainian citizens to join the army, the results of the above-mentioned survey by the International Republican Institute lists the ‘mobilisation of all social groups, regardless of status and income’ as the second most popular initiative, behind ‘improvement of material support for the army’ (weapons, clothing, food)’ (IRI, 2024, p.27).

When it comes to financial incentives, respondents from all categories reported that this factor does *not* play a major role in people’s motivation to join the army¹⁷² (‘Currently that’s the least of anyone’s worries’¹⁷³). However, many believed that these can have some weight in individual cases.¹⁷⁴ Again, some argued that this factor is irrelevant, as their army salary goes towards purchasing military gear or repairing military equipment.¹⁷⁵ One young respondent dismissed the idea that a talented young person would give up their life ambitions for a higher-than-average salary in Ukraine: ‘What is 100 thousand [hryvnias] when you use it to buy some equipment yourself in order to increase your chance of survival by 0.5%?’¹⁷⁶

Overall, these responses highlight the importance of acknowledging Ukrainians’ current concerns and proposed solutions to remedy pitfalls in the implementation of mobilisation. Professional recruitment will certainly be useful as part of Ukraine’s efforts to replenish the ranks of the AFU. However, this method alone is not a cure-all solution. As war drags on, it will remain extremely challenging to find volunteers to be frontline combat soldiers. In fact, some of the most popular vacancies [include](#) mechanics, drivers, unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) operators. As depleted Ukrainian forces have

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It is necessary to give the example, so that the deputies would go, so that the people would see.

I'll tell you honestly, only laborers and workers fight in the army. [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih] || It starts to hold back that... Like everyone likes to say, when the politicians go and the officials go, then I'll go. [Interview 13, Wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv reg.] || Fairly should [...] go and deputies [...] their children, they are all abroad now [...] Then, maybe, people will come, there will be that message that we are all equal, that we can do together [...] There should be equality. If someone defends the country, then everyone should, no one should be untouchable, [...] because he is a deputy, or some official, or someone's son. There should be a general mobilization. [Interview 4, Military, M, 33, Odesa reg.] || If we had a declared war, then absolutely everyone, when a war is declared, is obliged to protect their country. Deputies, oligarchs, policemen, absolutely everyone. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih] || Officials must go, [...] and today they all have reservations until the end of martial law. [...] Deputies, understandably, do not. On the lower ranks are the administrations, the local government. [Interview 16, Wife/mother of man of draft age, F, 45, Kharkiv] || It is necessary to start going from the top to set an example. Then the average person will go as well. [FG3, Veteran, R7, M, 49, Kharkiv reg.]

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Most people I talk to say that money was not a big motivation to join the Armed Forces. Everyone went to defend the state. [Interview 3, Military, M, 49, Poltava] || Now there are almost no motivated people. There are some people who go for money, but there are not many of them. [FG2, Military, R3, M, 27, Kryvyi Rih] || I think not so much. [...] No one wants to get an extra hundred thousand hryvnias, but to wake up every morning, and it's not clear whether to wake up, to sleep under bullets in a blindness, I doubt it. [Interview 13, wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv reg.] || I don't think it's so common to fight for money. [...] 70 percent is patriotism. [And 30] is probably financial. [Interview 10, Civilian, M, 55, Chernivtsi]

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There are local problems with financial support, but in general, everything is fine. This is the least of anyone's worries right now. [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv]

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(M.: Does financial support motivate people?) I think so. Because some people who have lost their jobs are now starting to turn to this. [Interview 2, Recruiter, M, 39, Kyiv] || Some people are motivated by salaries. [Interview 6, Military, M, 50, Lviv] || Some people are influenced by salaries, because in the army, salaries are now higher than somewhere in a factory or a plant, because enterprises are stagnating because of the loss of logistics and everything else. And people are getting poorer, in the army they see stability. [Interview 7, Military, M, 31, Kryvyi Rih] || Either people who need some money urgently, maybe some family member is sick, this is the only option where to find this money. It can be like this. [Interview 13, Wife of serviceman, F, 27, Kharkiv reg.] || They used to be motivated by the idea of protecting their house when it was the first days, first months. And now it's only financial. [FG3, Veteran, R4, M, 39, Kryvyi Rih] || Because of the hopelessness. I have no job, no money, so I can go. I have an acquaintance [...] He was not paid his salary, and he had to live on something. And he wanted to join the Armed Forces because he didn't have enough money. [FG1, Youth, R6, M, 26, Kryvyi Rih] || People who saw 120 thousand in their hands, they will not go. And a person for whom it is a lot of money, he will think that he has a chance. Because he was working in the village, driving a tractor, earning 15 or 20 thousand hryvnias. And here, 90 or 100, this is a big income for him. [FG1, Youth, R7, M, 26, Lviv]

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What the guys get is a pittance, [...] I know relatives, friends, classmates, these funds that the state gives our military, 30, 100 thousand, they mostly invest in themselves, that is, body armor, parts for weapons, sights. They buy all this at their own expense. [...] they even repair their cars at their own expense. [Interview 11, Civilian, M, 52, Lviv] || It's controversial [...] [military salaries] need to be raised, because in most cases they are spent on fighting, i.e. body armor, equipment, things that the state should provide, but the guys buy it on their own. [Interview 12, Civilian, M, 30, Kryvyi Rih] || Now there is less funding, in principle, [...] they still buy food and clothes. [Interview 14, Wife of serviceman, F, 49, Kharkiv]

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For a Ukrainian, for an average person, it seems "wow". But [...] what is 100 thousand when you buy yourself some equipment to increase the chance of survival by 0.5%? [...] Young people had more goals, plans, even some grandiose ambitions for life. And that's why for 120 thousand someone is not ready to die, to fight. [FG1, Youth, R3, M, 20, Kharkiv].

suffered setbacks amid a shortage of ammunition and delays of weapons supplies, the government will continue to [need](#) to mobilise people to serve in fighting units.¹⁷⁷ As one soldier put it, ‘getting into the army on the basis of

one’s professional skills is a big problem. No one wants to join the infantry.¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, **by maximising opportunities for people to select roles and units in line with their talents and preferences, Ukraine will bring in more motivated people and thus gain an important advantage to outsmart the numerically superior Russian forces. In parallel, making mobilisation fairer by decreasing uncertainty and setting more transparent rules around the terms of military service, training periods for new units, and social guarantees for military personnel, will help motivate more people to sign up and increase the combat capability of Ukraine’s army.**

¹⁷⁷ *I think there should be both forcing and voluntary involvement of people.* [Interview 1, Recruiter, M, 42, Kyiv]

¹⁷⁸ *It is a very big problem to get into the army in your specialty. No one wants to join the infantry.* [FG2, Military, R2, M, 43, Kyiv]

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UKRAINIAN STAKEHOLDERS

- **Future mobilisation efforts should be guided by two main principles: first, eradicating the vagueness around the duration of military service, training conditions, and social guarantees and, second, emulating recruitment success stories at scale** by expanding individuals' options to select roles and units that will enable them to capitalise on their professional skills. Together, these two principles can assuage existing concerns and increase people's motivation to serve in the army. They will also restrict Russia's room for manoeuvre in sowing confusion and division.
- **Ukrainian government officials should address the public's demand for more honesty in official assessments of the situation on the battlefield.** This will reduce the temptation to rely exclusively on informal sources of information which risks amplifying disinformation and breeding distrust towards the official sources.
- Ukrainian civil society and the media should cover the process of mobilisation with more caution and closer consideration of the reality on the ground. Mobilisation by its very nature undermines personal freedom, and there can never be uncomplicated incentives for people to risk their lives. Russia's war against Ukraine is unjust in its essence, and this invasion necessitates very difficult decisions for the Ukrainian government around mobilisation which might not be entirely fair in the end. Under these circumstances, it is worth spelling out the reasons why certain actions are taken and the consequences that failure to implement these might create, with the reminder that it is Russia, not the Ukrainian government that has forced such decisions.
- **Ukrainian government officials should diversify their audience engagement on the topic of mobilisation,** designing ad hoc messaging also for wives and mothers of men of draft age focused on explaining the benefits of serving in the army, both for families and the country more broadly. This will help tackle fears triggered by the most coercive measures around mobilisation, signalling the government's readiness to listen to and address citizens' apprehensions.
- **To counter the fear of unprofessional commanders, communication efforts across the Ukrainian government, media and civil society should highlight the introduction of new successful courses for officers aligned with NATO standards,** such as 'Training Captains' [[Вишкіл капітанів](#)]. These courses aim to develop professional skills and procedures which will ensure that commanders prioritise the safety and health of military personnel

above all. This will strengthen public perception that the Ukrainian army is moving away from Soviet practices which paid little regard for casualties. Additionally, to counter worries around the lack of adequate training before being deployed, official communications efforts should emphasise that training continues also within the units where individuals are deployed.

- **The Ukrainian government's future campaigns around mobilisation should feature individuals willing to share their own personal journey of joining the army, particularly what factors have managed to alleviate their initial scepticism.** This approach will help normalise the public's concerns and encourage widespread understanding that Ukraine's survival vitally depends on a whole-of-society approach to strengthen its military capabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

While NATO high officials [insist](#) on the need to boost the capacity of the Alliance's defence industry in preparation for a potential war with Russia, recent opinion polls point to inconsistencies in Western publics' readiness to fight a war of attrition in a situation of near-peer powers.¹⁷⁹ Key lessons from Ukraine's resistance include:

- As the Ukraine-Russia war has entered an attrition phase, it is important to **maximise media opportunities for explaining to Western audiences why major political and territorial concessions to Russia will increase, not decrease the risks of the war spilling over into a wider (and possibly nuclear) confrontation involving NATO member states.**
- **More media space should be given to motivated Ukrainian servicemen and women and volunteers articulating their vision of Ukraine defending Europe as a whole** to counter Russian disinformation narratives seeking to portray Ukraine's resistance (and Western support) as futile and obstructive to peace. It is also important not to misinterpret concerns about mobilisation with the willingness to agree to territorial concessions.
- **Emulate Ukraine's whole-of-society approach to defence by increasing cooperation between government and civil society in strengthening Western societies' resilience and preparedness, including against hybrid threats.** Government and civil society representatives should consider publicising useful information tools on the example of Ukraine's Handbook on what to do in the event of war [[Dovidka.info](#)]. In 2022, the Swedish government followed this example, preparing a similar brochure for its citizens titled 'If crisis or war comes' (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, [2022](#)). There is a [growing appetite](#) within NATO to design civil defence plans in individual member states to strengthen their ability to deter and withstand a possible future Article 5-level attack from Russia. These could include military conscription. Public communication about Russia's growing military threat, and the measures taken by European governments to counter it, should be done carefully but firmly to mitigate the risk of mass panic but also to create awareness and normalise this subject in the public debate.
- In the event of a military confrontation between NATO countries and Russia, Western states will have access to high-end weapons. **Adequate training programmes should be scaled up already.** As highlighted by a [RUSI report](#), 'High-end weapons also require high-end troops. These take significant time to train – time which is unavailable in a war with high attrition rates.'

¹⁷⁹ A third of UK under-40s would refuse to be conscripted (YouGov, [Jan. 2024](#)). 44% of Poles are against reinstating military conscription (Polish Press Agency, [Dec. 2023](#)). However, a majority of French respondents aged 18-25 express readiness to enlist for the protection of their country (Le Parisien, [Apr. 2024](#)).