DIGNITY

Блакитний птах



PATHWAY AFTER CAPTIVITY AND UNLAWFUL DETENTION

STUDY

2026

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List of Abbreviations

ATO – Anti-terrorist operation

European Convention – Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 1950

European Court, ECHR – European Court of Human Rights

CC of Ukraine – Criminal Code of Ukraine

CPC of Ukraine – Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine

MIA – Ministry of Internal Affairs

ICC – International Criminal Code

UN – United Nations

PACE – Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

RF – Russian Federation

SSU – Security Service of Ukraine

OHCHR – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

I. Introduction

Since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, the armed conflict has been accompanied by widespread instances of captivity, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearance of Ukrainian soldiers and civilians. Military personnel are taken captive because of their participation in hostilities, whereas a wide range of civilians have been affected, particularly those perceived as holding pro-Ukrainian views, having prior military or law enforcement experience, engaging in civic activity or journalism, or maintaining close ties with government-controlled areas. According to the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War, as of September 2026, more than 70 prisoner exchanges have taken place, resulting in the return of 9,726 people from captivity in total.[1]

There is evidence that both military personnel[2] and civilians [3] [4] held in captivity are exposed to torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. These experiences can have lasting consequences for physical and mental health, legal status, and reintegration into civilian or military life. It is essential that people released from captivity have access to services that support multiple domains of recovery, while respecting their rights, choices, and potential emotional vulnerability.

The state's obligation to ensure appropriate guarantees of protection, support, and restoration of rights for such individuals is grounded in the provisions of Ukraine's national legislation, including the Constitution of Ukraine (Articles 3, 21, 55),[5] the Law of Ukraine "On Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Internally Displaced Persons" of 20 October 2014 No. 1706-VII,[6] the Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine,[7] as well as other acts governing the protection of human rights and the response to criminal offenses. However, in practice,

1 Official website of the the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War https://koordshtab.gov.ua/.

2 Interim measures concerning Ukrainian prisoners of war, the ECHR, 1 July 2022: https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press?i=003-7375654-10081123; Report on Possible Violations and Abuses of International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity, Related to the Treatment of Ukrainian Pows by the Russian Federation by Prof. Hervé Ascensio, Prof. Veronika Bílková and Prof. Mark Klamberg, ODIHR.GAL/43/25/Corr.1 22 September 2025, https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/0/598042.pdf; A Deafening Silence Ukrainians Held Incommunicado, Forcibly Disappeared and Tortured in Russian Captivity, Amnesty International 2025, https://www.amnesty.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/eur-50.9046.2025-a-deafening-silence-5.pdf.

3 Enforced Disappearances: National Practice v. International Standards. Analytical Report / A. Pavliuk, Y. Kapalkina, N. Okhotnikova, L. Smachylo // Ukrainian Legal Advisory Group, Human Rights Centre ZMINA, Media Initiative for Human Rights, 2024: https://zmina.ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/07/znyknennya_eng_web.pdf.

4 Total Impunity in the ATO Zone: Investigation of Illegal Detentions and Slave Labor, report of Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, 2016: https://helsinki.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/2016-09-16__Brochure_Plen_ukr_210x297-1.pdf; Prisoners of War: International Practice as to Release of POWs, Civilian Detainees, and Political Prisoners. Conclusions for Ukraine. Report of Euromaidan Press, Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union and Media Initiative for Human Rights, 2018: https://helsinki.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Viazni-Viyny-mizhnarodna-praktyka.pdf, https://www.helsinki.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/last_Summary_report_POWS_en.pdf; Thematic report by the OHCHR, Arbitrary Detention, Torture and Ill-Treatment in the Context of Armed Conflict in Eastern Ukraine, 2014 – 2021: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/UA/UkraineArbDetTorture_EN.pdf; Legal Status of Detainees in the Armed Conflict, Ukrainian Legal Advisory Group, 2021: https://ulag.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/ПРАВОВИЙ-СТАТУС-ЗАТРИМАНИХ-ОСІБ-В-УМОВАХ-ЗБРОЙНОГО-КОНФЛІКТУ-1.pdf; Thematic report by the OHCHR, Human Rights in the Administration of Justice in Conflict-Related Criminal Cases in Ukraine, April 2014 – April 2020: https://ukraine.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-08/Ukraine-admin-justice-conflict-related-cases-en_0.pdf; Isolation. Voices from the Basement. Report by V. Khekalo, M. Andruszewska, 2021: https://www.gov.pl/web/ukraina-uk/izolacjaglosyzpiwnicyua; Enforced Disappearances and Arbitrary Detentions of Active Citizens During the Full-scale Armed Aggression by Russia against Ukraine (February 2022 – June 2023) / N. Okhotnikova, O. Hnatiuk, B. Petruniok; ed. O. Syniuk // Human Rights Centre ZMINA, 2023: https://zmina.ua/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/07/lost_people_eng_web_03.pdf; A Deafening Silence Ukrainians Held Incommunicado, Forcibly Disappeared and Tortured in Russian Captivity, Amnesty International 2025, https://www.amnesty.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/eur-50.9046.2025-a-deafening-silence-5.pdf.

5 The Constitution of Ukraine, 1996: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/254к/96-вр#Text.

6 The Law of Ukraine "On Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Internally Displaced Persons" of October 20, 2014 No. 1706-VII: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1706-18#Text.

7 The Criminal Procedure Code of Ukraine, 2012: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/4651-17#Text.

ensuring equitable access to appropriate services after release from captivity is complicated by the severity of the ongoing conflict and limits to resources, underscoring the need for a coordinated and survivor-centered response by state authorities, civil society, and international partners.

The purpose of this study was to map the post-release trajectories of individuals released from Russian captivity to better understand how the system functions in practice. We sought to identify post-release pathways for civilian detainees, military personnel who return to active service, and military personnel who choose to demobilize after release. We predicted that each group may encounter distinct procedures, decision-making processes, and forms of support, as well as different risks of falling through gaps in the system. Mapping these pathways separately allows for a clearer understanding of where responses are effective and where targeted improvements are needed.

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II. Methodology

IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION

The study was conducted by Blue Bird,[8] a Ukrainian non-governmental organization whose primary objective since 2015 has been to provide legal, psychological, and medical-social assistance to victims of the armed conflict. The organization's specialists have over eleven years of experience working with released prisoners of war, individuals subjected to unlawful detention, as well as with their family members and the families of individuals who have gone missing in the context of the armed conflict. DIGNITY – Danish Institute Against Torture provided methodological and expert support to the study particularly in relation to data collection tools, the analysis of issues related to torture, re-traumatization and trauma-informed approaches, as well as the study design.

STUDY DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

The study involved a survey of service members released from captivity, individuals subjected to arbitrary detention, and victims of enforced disappearance in the context of the armed conflict. Additionally, a review of legal and normative frameworks was conducted to place survey findings in context. This approach was intended to assess how existing legal standards and institutional arrangements function in practice, and how services were experienced by individuals released from captivity.

The survey was designed to understand the experiences of released individuals in the first days, weeks, months and longer term. Participants were asked to identify barriers encountered when seeking medical, psychological, social, and legal assistance, their expectations regarding the justice system, and their recommendations for improving state policy, procedures, and practices. Participants were a convenience sample of individuals who currently or formerly received services at Bluebird. The surveys were administered verbally by trained staff who recorded responses on an electronic form. All participants provided informed consent.

LIMITATIONS

The primary limitation of the study is related to the sample, which is a relatively small convenience sample. There were too few women in the sample to compare responses by gender. Thus, findings cannot be considered representative of the population of people released from captivity.

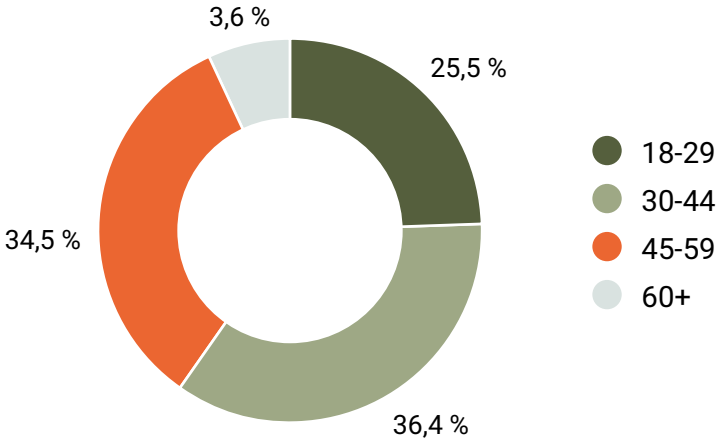
8 NGO "Blue Bird", the official website of the organization: http://hostage.org.ua.

III. Results

3.1 SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

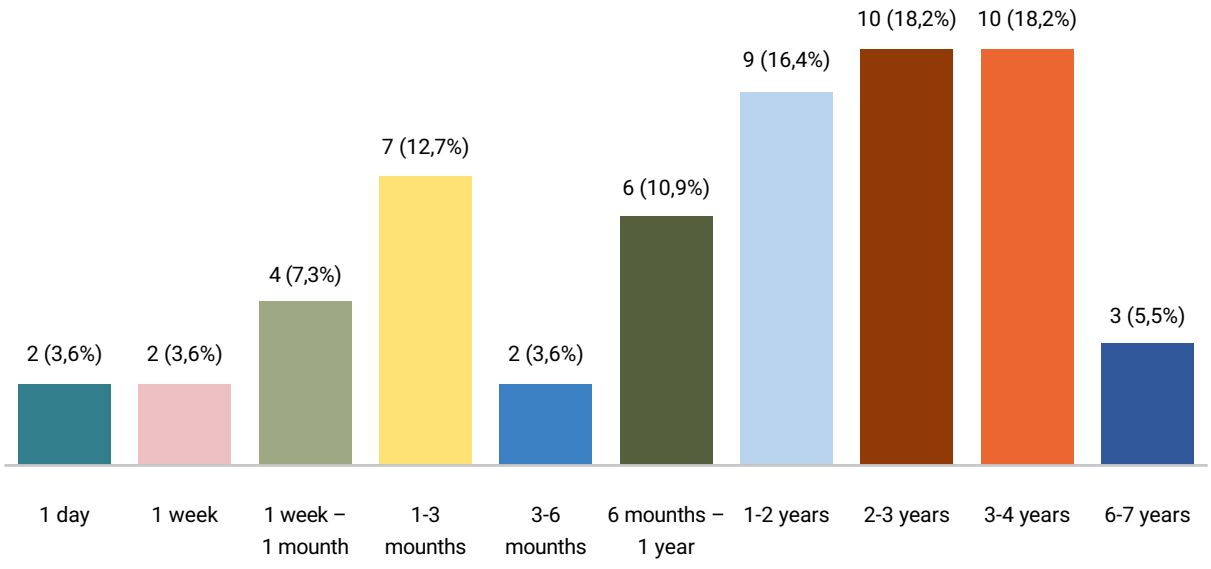
Participants in the survey were 55 adults (47 males; 8 females), with age groups shown in Figure 1. Among them were 25 military personnel (16 active-duty service members, 9 service members who demobilized after being held in captivity. Of the 25 military personnel, two were released outside of official exchanges), 15 civilians released through the exchange, and 15 civilians released outside of the exchange.

Figure 1. Age Groups of Participants, N = 55



The duration of captivity ranged from one to seven years (see Figure 2). A majority (N = 37) was released between 2022 and 2025, with the remainder of the sample having been released prior to the RF invasion of Ukraine. Most participants (N = 27) were residing in greater Kyiv after release, however participants from all regions were included in the study.

Figure 2. Duration of captivity (number of months/years)N = 55



3.2 FIRST HOURS AND DAYS AFTER RELEASE

This section presents survey findings on the initial phase following release, focusing on reception, immediate assistance, access to information, and perceived safety during the first hours and days after return from captivity or unlawful detention. Findings are presented separately for military service members (n = 25), civilians released through the exchange (n = 15), and civilians released outside of the exchange (n = 15). Of the 25 military personnel, two were released outside of official exchanges. For reference, a breakdown of findings by release route (i.e., all participants released through exchange versus those released outside exchanges) is provided in Appendix B.

Reception after release

Participants were asked to identify who met them at the time of their release. Most military service members were met by government agencies (23 of 25, 93%). All of the civilian participants who were released through exchanges and 8 (53%) of those released outside of an exchange reported government agencies as the most common point of contact.

Healthcare personnel were also present at the time of release for most military personnel (80%) and for civilians released through an exchange (73%), but not for civilians released outside exchanges who were more commonly met by family members. Three respondents reported being met by no one. Full reception details are provided in Appendix A Table A1.

Immediate actions taken in the first hours

Participants were asked what actions were taken in the first hours after their release. Most participants (92%) who were in the military at the time of release reported being provided with humanitarian support (e.g., water, food, clothing, hygiene products), contacting family (80%), and receiving a medical exam or health check (80%).

Civilians released through exchanges also reported receiving humanitarian items (67%), having the opportunity to contact family (67%), and receiving a medical exam or health check (53%). In contrast, civilians released outside exchanges reported the lowest rates across actions with 5 of 15 reported receiving no assistance. Full data are provided in Appendix A Table A2.

Information on next steps following release

Table 1 shows responses to a question on whether information on next steps was provided following release. All civilians released outside exchanges, and 11 of 15 released through exchanges, reported receiving no information about next steps in receiving support beyond immediate release. Military personnel reported somewhat higher rates of partial or full information, though no group reported being well informed.

Table 1. Were you provided with information on next steps?

Response	Military (n=25)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Yes, fully provided	6 (24 %)	1 (7 %)	0 (0 %)	**7 (13 %)**
Yes, partially provided	1 (44 %)	3 (20 %)	0 (0 %)	**14 (25 %)**
No, not provided	7 (28 %)	11 (73 %)	15 (100 %)	**33 (60 %)**
Hard to recall	1 (4 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	**1 (2 %)**

Assistance and specialist access in the first days

Military service members and civilians released through exchanges reported higher rates of assistance in the first days after release than civilians released outside of an exchange. For example, among the military sample 88% received medical care, 80% received humanitarian support, and 88% received temporary housing. Similarly, most civilians released within an exchange also reported medical (87%), humanitarian (93%), and housing support (67%). In contrast, almost half (7 out of 15) of the civilians released outside of an exchange reported they received no assistance in the first days.

A medical doctor was the most common specialist seen by military personnel (96%) and civilians released within an exchange (93%), whereas only 47% of civilians released outside of an exchange saw a medical doctor in the first few days after release. Contact with a mental health professional was less common, with 60% of military, 40% of civilians released through an exchange, and 20% of civilians released outside of an exchange reporting professional psychological care in the first few days. Detailed information about assistance in the first days is provide provided in Appendix A Tables A3 and A4.

Unmet needs

Participants were asked to identify their unmet needs and gaps in services during the first few days after release. Information on rights and next steps was among the most commonly reported unmet needs for the two civilian groups (outside exchange 67%, 10 of 15; through exchange 80%, 12 of 15). Civilians released outside exchanges also reported lacking medical care (60%, 9 of 15) and a safe place to stay (47%, 7 of 15). Participants in the military at the time of release reported fewer unmet needs, with 28% indicating nothing was missing. Full data are provided in Appendix A Table A5.

Perceived safety in days following release

Respondents rated their sense of safety on a scale of 1 (very unsafe) to 4 (very safe) during the days following release (see Table 2). Mean ratings were similar across groups, ranging from 3.0 to 3.3. Differences between groups were small relative to the variation within each group.

Table 2. How safe did you feel immediately following your release? (4 = very safe, 1 = very unsafe)

Group	Mean safety (1–4 scale)	Std. dev.
Military (n= 25)	3.11	1.06
Civilians through exchange (n=15)	3.07	1.10
Civilians outside exchange (n=15)	3.27	1.10

Medical documentation of injuries

Although a majority of military personnel and civilians released through exchanges had access to some form of medical care at the time of release, most respondents were not offered a medical examination to document injuries sustained in captivity (see Table 3).

Table 3. Were you offered a medical examination to officially document any injuries sustained?

Response	Military (n=25)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Yes, immediately after release	9 (36%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	**11 (20%)**
Yes, but later	10 (40%)	1 (7%)	2 (13%)	**13 (24%)**
No, it was not offered	5 (20%)	12 (80%)	13 (87%)	**30 (55%)**
Hard to recall	1 (.04%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**1 (2%)**

Re-traumatization during post-release procedures

Reports of re-traumatization during post-release procedures varied across groups. More than half (56%) of participants who were in the military at the time of release and 44% of civilians released through an exchange reported experiencing re-traumatization. Fewer civilians released outside of an exchange feeling retraumatized, however, it is important to note that many did not receive any form of service at the time of release. Additional information is provided in Appendix A Table A6.

Summary of First Days

Table 4 contains a summary of the experiences of participants immediately after release and during the first few days. Overall, data shows a gap in reception for civilians released outside of an exchange. These individuals consistently reported the lowest access to supportive services. The high number of participants who felt they did not receive adequate information about the next steps is important to note. Additionally, the relatively high percentage of miliary and civilians who reported feeling retraumatized by procedures is concerning, as is the relatively low provision of medical assessment for the documentation of injuries, particularly for civilians.

Table 4. Summary of Reported Experience in first few days after release

Group	Who met you on arrival		First steps after release		Information on next steps		Assistance in first days		Specialists contacted		Medical exam to document injuries	
Military overall (n=25)	Govt agencies Healthcare Civil society Security svcs No one	**92 %** **80 %** **36 %** **16 %** **8 %**	Food / hygiene Family contact Medical check Instructions	**92 %** **80 %** **80 %** **48 %**	Partial No Yes, fully	**44 %** **28 %** **24 %**	Food / hygiene Medical Housing Family contact	**96 %** **88 %** **88 %** **76 %**	Doctor Law enf. Psychologist Civil society* Lawyer*	**96 %** **68 %** **60 %** **40 %** **24 %**	Yes, later Yes, immediately Not offered	**40 %** **36 %** **20 %**
Civilians through exchange (n=15)	Govt agencies Healthcare Civil society	**100 %** **73 %** **53 %**	Food / hygiene Family contact Medical check Interview	**67 %** **67 %** **53 %** **27 %**	No Partial Yes, fully	**73 %** **20 %** **7 %**	Food / hygiene Medical Family contact Housing	**93 %** **87 %** **80 %** **67 %**	Doctor Law enf. Civil society Lawyer	**93 %** **93 %** **87 %** **40 %**	Not offered Yes, immediately Yes, later	**80 %** **13 %** **7 %**
Civilians outside exchange (n=15)	Family Govt agencies Civil society Healthcare	**60 %** **53 %** **27 %** **13 %**	No assistance Food / hygiene Family contact Interview	**33 %** **33 %** **27 %** **27 %**	No	**100 %**	No assistance Food / hygiene Medical Family contact	**47 %** **47 %** **33 %** **27 %**	Law enf. Civil society Doctor None	**53 %** **47 %** **47 %** **27 %**	Not offered Yes, later	**87 %** **13 %**

3.3 ACCESS TO SUPPORT IN THE FIRST WEEKS AFTER RELEASE

This section presents findings on how basic needs, psychological support, and institutional engagement were organised during the first weeks following release. Data from participants who were in the military is presented separately for those who chose to remain active duty and those who chose to demobilize. Where questions allowed multiple responses, percentages reflect the share of each group selecting each option and do not sum to 100%. A parallel breakdown by release route is provided Appendix B.

Organization of basic needs

Active-duty service members most often relied on military structures (94%) for the organization of basic needs, as did military service persons who demobilized afterwards (56%). Civilians released through exchange most often relied on government agencies (93%) and civil society or volunteer organisations (73%). Civilians released outside exchange most often relied on family or friends (53%) and civil society (40%), with government agencies involved for 2 of 15. Reports that no help was provided, or that respondents managed on their own, came only from civilians. Full data are provided in Appendix A Table A7.

Difficulties accessing basic needs

Reported difficulties in accessing food, housing, and medical assistance are shown in Table 4. Participants from the two military groups tended to report somewhat less difficulty accessing basic needs.

Table 5. Did you have difficulties accessing food, housing, and medical assistance?

Difficulty rating	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
1 – No difficulties	5 (56%)	9 (56%)	4 (27%)	6 (40%)	**24 (44%)**
2 – A few difficulties	2 (22%)	2 (13%)	6 (40%)	3 (20%)	**13 (24%)**
3 – Some difficulties	1 (11%)	3 (19%)	2 (13%)	1 (7%)	**7 (13%)**
4 – Many difficulties	1 (11%)	2 (13%)	3 (20%)	5 (33%)	**11 (20%)**
Mean (Standard Deviation)	1.78 (1.09)	1.88 (1.15)	2.27 (1.10)	2.33 (1.35)	**2.09 (1.17)**

Primary sources of support

When asked who helped most in meeting their needs, military groups most often cited military sources (demobilised 56%, 5 of 9; active-duty 56%, 9 of 16). Civilians released through exchange most often cited government agencies (67%, 10 of 15) and civil society (60%, 9 of 15). Civilians released outside exchange most often cited family or friends (60%, 9 of 15). Independent problem-solving (i.e., “I managed on my own”) was reported at similar rates across groups (roughly one in five). Full data are provided in Appendix A Table A8.

Psychological support

Sources of psychological or mental-health support during the first few weeks also varied by group (Table 6). Among service members who remained active duty, support was most often organised through the military (81%, 13 of 16). For both civilian groups, civil society or volunteer organisations were the most common source (through exchange 40%, 6 of 15; outside exchange 67%, 10 of 15). Reports that no mental health support was organised were highest among the two civilian groups (outside exchange 47%, 7 of 15; through exchange 33%, 5 of 15).

Table 6. How was psychological / mental health support organised?

Source of psychological support	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Government agencies / institutions	1 (11%)	2 (13%)	2 (13%)	2 (13%)	**7 (13%)**
Military	3 (33%)	13 (81%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**16 (29%)**
Civil society / community / volunteers	1 (11%)	3 (19%)	10 (67%)	6 (40%)	**20 (36%)**
Family / close friends / relatives	4 (44%)	6 (38%)	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	**12 (22%)**
Private specialists (psychologist)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	**2 (4%)**
No support was organized	1 (11%)	1 (6%)	5 (33%)	7 (47%)	**14 (25%)**

Note: *Multi-select item; columns may sum to more than 100%.*

Interaction with state institutions

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and the National Police were the most widely contacted institutions across groups during the first weeks. The SBU was contacted by most respondents in every group (67–88%). The National Police was contacted most often by the two civilian groups (both 80%, 12 of 15). The National Information Bureau featured heavily for military groups (demobilised 67%, active-duty 94%) but less so for civilians. Reports of no interaction with any state institution came mainly from civilians released outside exchange (20%, 3 of 15). Full data are provided in Appendix A Table A9.

Satisfaction with state institution interactions

Mean satisfaction with state-institution interactions was higher among the two military groups (demobilised 3.38; active-duty 3.19) than among the two civilian groups (through exchange 2.67; outside exchange 2.25), each rated on a 1–4 scale (see Table 7).

Table 7. How would you rate your experience with interactions with state institutions? (4 = very satisfied, 1 = very dissatisfied)

Group	Mean satisfaction (1–4 scale)	Std. dev.	Valid n
Demobilized military (n=9)	3.38	1.06	8
Active-duty service members (n=16)	3.19	0.98	16
Civilians through exchange (n=15)	2.67	1.11	15
Civilians outside exchange (n=15)	2.25	1.06	12

Note: *Values are group means and standard deviations on a 1–4 scale (4 = very satisfied), with the valid n per group. Respondents reporting no interaction or "hard to say" are excluded from the mean. Subgroup sizes are small; means should be read alongside the standard deviations.*

Summary of the first few weeks

As shown in Table 8, in the first weeks, the organization of support differed by group; military structures provided for the military service people (including those who continued the service and those who later decided to demobilize) groups, while civilians relied more on government agencies (through exchange) or family and civil society (outside exchange). Civilians released outside exchange most often reported difficulties accessing basic needs and were least satisfied with state-institution interactions, while the two military groups reported the fewest difficulties and the highest satisfaction. Reports that no psychological support was organized were concentrated among the two civilian groups.

Table 8. Summary of Support in First Few Weeks

Group	How food, housing & medical care organised		Difficulties accessing basic needs		Who helped most in meeting needs		How psychological support organised		Government agencies interacted with	
Demobilised military (n=9)	Military structures	**56 %**	No difficulties	**56 %**	Military	**56 %**	Family / friends	**44 %**	SBU	**67 %**
	Civil society	**56 %**	A few	**22 %**	Civil society	**44 %**	Military	**33 %**	Nat. Info Bureau	**67 %**
	Family / friends	**44 %**	Some	**11 %**	Family / friends	**22 %**	Govt agencies	**11 %**	Police	**44 %**
	Govt agencies	**33 %**	Many	**11 %**	Govt agencies	**22 %**	No support	**11 %**	Counterintel.	**44 %**
Active-duty service members (n=16)	Military structures	**94 %**	No difficulties	**56 %**	Military	**56 %**	Military	**81 %**	Nat. Info Bureau	**94 %**
	Family / friends	**63 %**	Some	**19 %**	Family / friends	**38 %**	Family / friends	**38 %**	SBU	**88 %**
	Civil society	**56 %**	A few	**13 %**	Civil society	**31 %**	Civil society	**19 %**	Police	**44 %**
	Govt agencies	**6 %**	Many	**13 %**	Govt agencies	**25 %**	Govt agencies	**13 %**	Counterintel.	**31 %**
Civilians through exchange (n=15)	Govt agencies	**93 %**	A few	**40 %**	Govt agencies	**67 %**	Civil society	**67 %**	SBU	**87 %**
	Civil society	**73 %**	No difficulties	**27 %**	Civil society	**60 %**	No support	**33 %**	Police	**80 %**
	Family / friends	**40 %**	Many	**20 %**	Family / friends	**40 %**	Govt agencies	**13%**	Min. Veterans/ Social	**60 %**
	On my own	**7 %**	Some	**13 %**	On my own	**20 %**	Private psych.	**7 %**	Nat. Info Bureau	**27 %**
Civilians outside exchange (n=15)	Family / friends	**53 %**	No difficulties	**40 %**	Family / friends	**60 %**	No support	**47 %**	Police	**80 %**
	Civil society	**40 %**	Many	**33 %**	Civil society	**40 %**	Civil society	**40 %**	SBU	**53 %**
	On my own	**20 %**	A few	**20 %**	On my own	**20 %**	Family / friends	**13 %**	No interaction	**20 %**
	Govt agencies	**13 %**	Some	**7 %**	Govt agencies	**13 %**	Govt agencies	**13 %**	Nat. Info Bureau	**13 %**

3.4 ACCESS TO RIGHTS AND SERVICES IN THE MONTHS FOLLOWING RELEASE

This section presents findings on access to medical, legal, financial, and psychological services in the months following release, including barriers encountered and satisfaction with state institutions.

Services received

Medical and legal services were the most widely received forms of support across all four groups. Financial assistance was received more often by civilians released through exchange (87%, 13 of 15) than by those released outside exchange (27%, 4 of 15). Reports of receiving no services came only from civilians released outside exchange (3 of 15). Full data are provided in Appendix A Table A11.

Accessibility of services

Most respondents were able to access services, though usually with some difficulty (see Table 9). Civilians released through exchange most often reported no difficulties (53%, 8 of 15), while civilians released outside exchange most often reported that access was very difficult (4 of 13). The most commonly reported barriers across groups were a lack of information and bureaucracy.

Table 9. Were you able to access the required services easily?

Response	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=15)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=13)	Total (n=52)
Yes, without difficulties	2 (22%)	3 (20%)	8 (53%)	5 (38%)	**18 (35%)**
Yes, but with some difficulties	6 (67%)	10 (67%)	7 (47%)	4 (31%)	**27 (52%)**
No, it was very difficult	1 (11%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	4 (31%)	**7 (13%)**

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group).*

Most helpful services

Medical services were identified as the most helpful by every group. Financial assistance was valued most highly by the two civilian groups (through exchange 80%, 12 of 15; outside exchange 60%, 9 of 15). Full data are provided in Appendix A Table A12.

Services lacking

Financial and legal assistance were the most frequently cited missing services, particularly among the two civilian groups. Medical assistance was also commonly cited as lacking across groups. Reports that everything needed had been provided came mainly from the military groups and civilians released through exchange. Full data are provided in Appendix A Table A13.

State financial assistance

Most respondents who applied for state financial assistance reported receiving it (Table 10). All civilians released through exchange who responded reported successfully receiving assistance (15 of 15). Reports that the process was too complicated to apply came only from civilians released outside exchange (3 of 15).

Table 10. Did you apply for state financial assistance?

Response	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Yes, successfully received	6 (67%)	11 (69%)	15 (100%)	9 (60%)	**41 (75%)**
Yes, but not yet received	2 (22%)	3 (19%)	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	**7 (13%)**
Yes, but application denied	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	**2 (4%)**
No, not aware of this option	1 (11%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**2 (4%)**
No, process too complicated	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (20%)	3 (5%)

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group). Single-select. Subgroup sizes are small (n = 9–16).*

Interaction with state institutions

The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and the National Police were the most widely contacted institutions across groups in the months following release. The Ministry of Social Policy featured heavily for the two civilian groups, while the Ministry of Veterans Affairs featured for the military groups and was not contacted by civilians released outside exchange. Full data are provided in Appendix A Table A14.

Satisfaction with state institutions

Mean satisfaction with state-institution interactions was higher among the military groups than the civilian groups, with civilians released outside exchange least satisfied (mean 2.07 on a 1–4 scale). Full data are provided in Appendix A Table A15.

Summary of experiences in first few months

In the months after release, medical and legal services were the most widely received across all groups, but financial assistance and the ease of accessing services differed; civilians released through exchange were most likely to receive financial assistance and to access services without difficulty, while civilians released outside exchange most often found access very difficult and most often cited financial and legal assistance as lacking. Satisfaction with state institutions remained lowest among civilians.

3.5 LONG-TERM NEEDS AND ONGOING CHALLENGES

This section presents findings on longer-term needs and challenges identified by respondents beyond the initial post-release period.

Need for long-term support

Most respondents reported needing long-term support as shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Did you need, or do you need, long-term support?

Response	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Yes	9 (100%)	15 (94%)	8 (53%)	13 (87%)	**45 (82%)**
No	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	1 (7%)	**3 (5%)**
Difficult to say	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	5 (33%)	1 (7%)	**7 (13%)**

Medical care and social or financial support were the most commonly identified long-term needs, and need was high across all groups. Social benefits or financial support were cited most often by civilians released outside exchange (93%, 14 of 15) (see Appendix A Table A16). Health issues were the most frequently reported ongoing challenge across all groups. Housing difficulties and insufficient social benefits weighed more heavily on the two civilian groups (see Appendix A Table A17).

Medical, psychological, legal, and financial support were the most cited remaining gaps, concentrated among the two civilian groups. Reports that everything needed was available came mainly from the military groups (see Appendix A Table A18).

3.6 PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS ON EXPERIENCES FOLLOWING RELEASE

Most difficult period

Across all groups, the first months following release were most often identified as the most difficult period, followed by the subsequent period of one year or more (Table 12). Very few respondents in any group identified the first hours or days as the most difficult.

Table 12. Looking back, what was the most difficult period after your release?

Period	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=15)	Civ. through exchange (n=13)	Civ. outside exchange (n=14)	Total (n=51)
First few hours after arrival	1 (11%)	2 (15%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**3 (6%)**
First days	1 (11%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	**3 (6%)**
First weeks	0 (0%)	2 (15%)	2 (13%)	4 (29%)	**8 (16%)**
First months	4 (44%)	5 (38%)	7 (47%)	5 (36%)	**21 (41%)**
Subsequent period (1 year or more)	3 (33%)	3 (23%)	6 (40%)	4 (29%)	**16 (31%)**

What respondents would change

Responses to a question about what they would change varied considerably across individuals. Overall, participants were most likely to report they would have preferred to have better interaction with government agencies (25% of full sample), particularly civilians released outside of an exchange (40% of 15). Results are shown in Table 13.

Table 13. If you could change one thing about this process, what would it be?

What they would change	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Better interaction with government agencies	2 (22%)	3 (19%)	3 (20%)	6 (40%)	**14 (25%)**
More information and clear instructions	1 (11%)	6 (38%)	2 (13%)	1 (7%)	**10 (18%)**
Assistance with employment / housing / education	1 (11%)	1 (6%)	4 (27%)	2 (13%)	**8 (15%)**
Faster access to compensation and benefits	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	3 (20%)	4 (27%)	**8 (15%)**
Better medical care	0 (0%)	2 (12%)	2 (13%)	1 (7%)	**5 (9%)**
Better psychological support	2 (22%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**3 (5%)**
Hard to say	1 (11%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	**3 (5%)**
All of the above	1 (11%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**2 (4%)**
Comprehensive legal assistance	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	**1 (2%)**
Other (dental care, housing, combatant status)	1 (11%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**1 (2%)**

3.7 OVERALL SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

These findings should be read in light of the limitations. This was a small, non-representative sample of 55 respondents, with subgroups as small as nine people. The figures are indicative of the experiences of those interviewed and cannot be generalized to all people released from captivity. Furthermore, there were marked differences in the length of captivity and the release dates which could influence responses.

Despite the limitations, findings provide some insight into the experiences of military and civilians who were released from captivity. There were some differences between reception and services provided to miliary and civilian groups. Notably, Civilians released outside of exchanges consistently reported receiving the least assistance across reception, the first days, the first weeks, and the months that followed. And civilians as a whole were less satisfied with their interactions with state institutions than military respondents, a gap that persisted from the first weeks into the following months.

There were also similarities across the groups. Although participants who were in the miliary were somewhat more likely to report they received information needed about next steps, respondents reported receiving little or no information after release, and information remained among the most noted unmet needs months later. However, it is important to note, particularly during immediate release, people may be under stress or in shock, making it difficult to retain information.

Re-traumatization during post-release procedures was also reported across groups, most often in connection with interviews and questioning, indicating that the procedures intended to process and support people could themselves cause harm.

Finally, the first months and the subsequent period of a year or more were identified as the most difficult by respondents across all groups. This underscores that the consequences of captivity extend well beyond the initial period of release and call for sustained, coordinated support across medical, psychological, legal, and financial domains.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Strengthen and expand the national system of support and rehabilitation for persons affected by captivity, arbitrary detention or enforced disappearance. Such support should ensure access to medical care and rehabilitation, psychological rehabilitation, socio-economic assistance and legal support across all regions of Ukraine, regardless of the circumstances, manner of the person's release, and other conditions. Where needed, such support should be provided on a long-term basis.

2. Improve the provision of information on available rights, entitlements and pathways for accessing assistance at different stages following a person's release. Clear and practical guidance, including a roadmap for accessing relevant services, should be made available to affected persons. The information provided should be understandable to people without a legal background.

3. Simplify the procedure for officially establishing the fact of deprivation of personal liberty as a result of the armed aggression against Ukraine. Review and adapt the mandate and powers of the Commission in Charge of Establishing the Fact of Deprivation of Personal Liberty as a Result of the Armed Aggression against Ukraine to better address the challenges faced by persons released from places of detention in the territories of Ukraine occupied by the Russian Federation or in the territory of the Russian Federation in connection with the armed conflict.

4. Law enforcement authorities, other state institutions, as well as civil society and charitable organizations, should take measures to prevent the re-traumatization of released prisoners of war and persons who have been subjected to enforced disappearance or arbitrary detention.

Appendix A
Detailed breakdowns by respondent group

Table A1. Who met respondents on arrival

Who met you on arrival	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Government agencies	7 (78%)	16 (100%)	15 (100%)	8 (53%)	**46 (84%)**
Healthcare / medical professionals	6 (67%)	14 (88%)	11 (73%)	2 (13%)	**33 (60%)**
Civil society / volunteers / NGOs	2 (22%)	7 (44%)	8 (53%)	4 (27%)	**21 (38%)**
Family	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	9 (60%)	**10 (18%)**
Security services (SBU/GUR/ CI)	0 (0%)	4 (25%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	**5 (9%)**
Media / journalists	1 (11%)	3 (19%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	**5 (9%)**
Military	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	**2 (4%)**
Police	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**1 (2%)**
Civilians	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**1 (2%)**
No one	2 (22%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	**3 (5%)**

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group). Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table A2. First steps reported after release

First steps after release	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Instructions from government officials	5 (56%)	7 (44%)	3 (20%)	0 (0%)	**15 (27%)**
Contact / call to family	6 (67%)	14 (88%)	10 (67%)	4 (27%)	**34 (62%)**
Water, food, clothing, hygiene	7 (78%)	16 (100%)	10 (67%)	5 (33%)	**38 (69%)**
Medical examination / health check	6 (67%)	14 (88%)	8 (53%)	4 (27%)	**32 (58%)**
Interview / document verification	2 (22%)	2 (13%)	4 (27%)	4 (27%)	**12 (22%)**
Did not receive any assistance	1 (11%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (33%)	**6 (11%)**

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group). Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table A3. Assistance received in the first days

Assistance in the first days	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Medical examination / treatment	7 (78%)	15 (94%)	13 (87%)	5 (33%)	**40 (73%)**
Psychological support	3 (33%)	10 (63%)	6 (40%)	3 (20%)	**22 (40%)**
Food, water, clothing, hygiene	8 (89%)	16 (100%)	14 (93%)	7 (47%)	**45 (82%)**
Temporary housing / accommodation	7 (78%)	15 (94%)	10 (67%)	3 (20%)	**35 (64%)**
Contact or meeting with family	6 (67%)	13 (81%)	12 (80%)	4 (27%)	**35 (64%)**
Legal consultation / assistance	3 (33%)	4 (25%)	4 (27%)	1 (7%)	**12 (22%)**
Information on rights and next steps	5 (56%)	9 (56%)	4 (27%)	1 (7%)	**19 (35%)**
Has not received any assistance	1 (11%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	7 (47%)	**9 (16%)**

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group). Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table A4. Specialists contacted in the first days

Specialists contacted in the first days	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Medical Doctor	8 (89%)	16 (100%)	14 (93%)	7 (47%)	**45 (82%)**
Psychologist / psychotherapist	5 (56%)	10 (63%)	6 (40%)	3 (20%)	**24 (44%)**
Lawyer / human rights advocate	6 (67%)	4 (25%)	6 (40%)	4 (27%)	**20 (36%)**
Social worker	1 (11%)	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	**3 (5%)**
Law enforcement / prosecutor	4 (44%)	13 (81%)	14 (93%)	8 (53%)	**39 (71%)**
Military authorities (MoD, command)	4 (44%)	7 (44%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**11 (20%)**
Civil society / volunteer organizations	4 (44%)	10 (63%)	13 (87%)	7 (47%)	**34 (62%)**
Counterintelligence	0 (0%)	3 (19%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**3 (5%)**
Has not contacted any specialists	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (27%)	**4 (7%)**

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group). Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table A5. Important things reported missing in the first days

Important things missing in the first days	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Medical care / assistance	2 (22%)	4 (25%)	7 (47%)	9 (60%)	**22 (40%)**
Psychological support	3 (33%)	5 (31%)	4 (27%)	4 (27%)	**16 (29%)**
Legal assistance / consultation	0 (0%)	5 (31%)	6 (40%)	6 (40%)	**17 (31%)**
Information on next steps and rights	1 (11%)	5 (31%)	12 (80%)	10 (67%)	**28 (51%)**
Food, water, clothing, hygiene	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (27%)	5 (33%)	**9 (16%)**
A safe place to stay	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	3 (20%)	7 (47%)	**11 (20%)**
Ability to contact family immediately	1 (11%)	2 (13%)	2 (13%)	1 (7%)	**6 (11%)**
Nothing was lacking / missing	3 (33%)	4 (25%)	2 (13%)	2 (13%)	**11 (20%)**

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group). Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table A6. Procedures reported as re-traumatising

Procedures causing re-traumatization	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
No, there was none	3 (33%)	5 (31%)	4 (27%)	9 (60%)	**21 (38%)**
Medical examination	1 (11%)	5 (31%)	4 (27%)	3 (20%)	**13 (24%)**
Interviews / questioning	3 (33%)	6 (38%)	10 (67%)	5 (33%)	**24 (44%)**
Administrative procedures	0 (0%)	3 (19%)	7 (47%)	3 (20%)	**13 (24%)**
Working with psychologists	1 (11%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**2 (4%)**
Hard to remember	1 (11%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	**4 (7%)**

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group). Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table A7. How basic needs were organised in the first weeks

How basic needs were organised	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Government agencies / institutions	3 (33%)	1 (6%)	14 (93%)	2 (13%)	**20 (36%)**
Military structures / facilities	5 (56%)	15 (94%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	**21 (38%)**
Community / civil society / volunteers	5 (56%)	9 (56%)	11 (73%)	6 (40%)	**31 (56%)**
Family / friends	4 (44%)	10 (63%)	6 (40%)	8 (53%)	**28 (51%)**
On my own	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	3 (20%)	**4 (7%)**
No help was provided	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	2 (13%)	**3 (5%)**

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group). Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table A8. Who helped most in meeting needs in the first weeks

Who helped most in meeting needs	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Family / friends	2 (22%)	6 (38%)	6 (40%)	9 (60%)	**23 (42%)**
Government agencies	2 (22%)	4 (25%)	10 (67%)	2 (13%)	**18 (33%)**
Military	5 (56%)	9 (56%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	**15 (27%)**
Civil society / community / NGO / volunteers	4 (44%)	5 (31%)	9 (60%)	6 (40%)	**24 (44%)**
International organizations	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	**2 (4%)**
On my own	1 (11%)	3 (19%)	3 (20%)	3 (20%)	**10 (18%)**

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group). Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table A9. Government agencies interacted with in the first weeks

Government agencies interacted with	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Security Service of Ukraine (SBU)	6 (67%)	14 (88%)	13 (87%)	8 (53%)	**41 (75%)**
Police	4 (44%)	7 (44%)	12 (80%)	12 (80%)	**35 (64%)**
National Information Bureau	6 (67%)	15 (94%)	4 (27%)	2 (13%)	**27 (49%)**
Min. of Veterans Affairs / Social Affairs	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	9 (60%)	1 (7%)	**12 (22%)**
Counterintelligence	4 (44%)	5 (31%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**9 (16%)**
Office of the Prosecutor General (OPG)	2 (22%)	1 (6%)	3 (20%)	2 (13%)	**8 (15%)**
Ministry of Defence (MOD)	0 (0%)	5 (31%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	**6 (11%)**
GUR / Main Intelligence Directorate	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	**2 (4%)**
Min. of (Temporarily) Occupied Territories	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	**1 (2%)**
Did not interact with government agencies	1 (11%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (20%)	**4 (7%)**

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group). Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table A10. Mean satisfaction with state-institution interactions

Group	Mean satisfaction (1–4 scale)	Std. dev.	Valid n
Demobilised military	3.38	1.06	8
Active-duty service members	3.19	0.98	16
Civilians through exchange	2.67	1.11	15
Civilians outside exchange	2.25	1.06	12

Note: *Group means and standard deviations on a 1–4 scale (4 = very satisfied), with valid n per group. Respondents reporting no interaction or "hard to say" are excluded from the mean.*

Table A11. Services received in the first months

Services received (first months)	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Medical	7 (78%)	13 (81%)	14 (93%)	9 (60%)	**43 (78%)**
Psychological	6 (67%)	9 (56%)	6 (40%)	7 (47%)	**28 (51%)**
Legal	8 (89%)	15 (94%)	12 (80%)	8 (53%)	**43 (78%)**
Financial assistance	7 (78%)	9 (56%)	13 (87%)	4 (27%)	**33 (60%)**
Documentation (medical-legal / forensic)	3 (33%)	3 (19%)	5 (33%)	0 (0%)	**11 (20%)**
Social / socialisation	2 (22%)	4 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**6 (11%)**
No services were offered	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (20%)	**3 (5%)**

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group). Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table A12. Most helpful services in the first months

Most helpful services (first months)	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Medical	9 (100%)	12 (75%)	11 (73%)	12 (80%)	**44 (80%)**
Psychological	3 (33%)	7 (44%)	5 (33%)	6 (40%)	**21 (38%)**
Legal	4 (44%)	5 (31%)	7 (47%)	4 (27%)	**20 (36%)**
Financial assistance	2 (22%)	2 (13%)	12 (80%)	9 (60%)	25 (45%)
Documentation / document restoration	1 (11%)	4 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**5 (9%)**
Social	1 (11%)	5 (31%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	**6 (11%)**
No services were offered	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	**1 (2%)**

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group). Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%. Subgroup sizes are small (n = 9–16); figures are indicative.*

Table A13. Services reported missing in the first months

Services missing (first months)	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Medical	2 (22%)	8 (50%)	7 (47%)	7 (47%)	**24 (44%)**
Psychological	2 (22%)	3 (19%)	4 (27%)	5 (33%)	**14 (25%)**
Legal	2 (22%)	5 (31%)	8 (53%)	9 (60%)	**24 (44%)**
Financial assistance	4 (44%)	4 (25%)	9 (60%)	10 (67%)	**27 (49%)**
Documentation	1 (11%)	3 (19%)	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	**6 (11%)**
Everything provided (nothing missing)	2 (22%)	3 (19%)	4 (27%)	0 (0%)	**9 (16%)**

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group). Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%. Subgroup sizes are small (n = 9–16); figures are indicative.*

Table A14. Government agencies interacted with in the first months

Government agencies interacted with (first months)	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Ministry of Social Policy	2 (22%)	2 (13%)	9 (60%)	8 (53%)	**21 (38%)**
Ministry of Veterans Affairs	2 (22%)	8 (50%)	5 (33%)	0 (0%)	**15 (27%)**
Security Service of Ukraine (SBU)	3 (33%)	6 (38%)	10 (67%)	11 (73%)	**30 (55%)**
Police	2 (22%)	4 (25%)	9 (60%)	8 (53%)	**23 (42%)**
Ministry of Defence (MOD)	2 (22%)	3 (19%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	**7 (13%)**
Office of the Prosecutor General (OPG)	5 (56%)	4 (25%)	3 (20%)	4 (27%)	**16 (29%)**
Counterintelligence	1 (11%)	1 (6%)	1 (7%)	0 (0%)	**3 (5%)**
Did not interact with government agencies	1 (11%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	**4 (7%)**

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group). Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table A15. Mean satisfaction with government interactions

Group	Mean satisfaction (1–4 scale)	Std. dev.	Valid n
Demobilised military	2.78	1.30	9
Active-duty service members	3.19	0.75	16
Civilians through exchange	2.27	0.80	15
Civilians outside exchange	2.07	0.80	15

Note: *Group means and standard deviations on a 1–4 scale (4 = very satisfied), with valid n per group.*

Table A16. Long-term support needed

Long-term support needed	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Medical care / assistance	7 (78%)	12 (75%)	9 (60%)	9 (60%)	**37 (67%)**
Psychological / psychosocial support	4 (44%)	9 (56%)	7 (47%)	11 (73%)	**31 (56%)**
Legal assistance	4 (44%)	10 (63%)	8 (53%)	9 (60%)	**31 (56%)**
Employment support	3 (33%)	2 (13%)	4 (27%)	7 (47%)	**16 (29%)**
Education / retraining support	1 (11%)	5 (31%)	4 (27%)	4 (27%)	**14 (25%)**
Social benefits / financial support	4 (44%)	9 (56%)	9 (60%)	14 (93%)	**36 (65%)**
Temporary housing	2 (22%)	4 (25%)	8 (53%)	3 (20%)	**17 (31%)**
None / no requirements	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	**2 (4%)**
Too soon to say (<1 year)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (20%)	1 (7%)	**4 (7%)**

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group). Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table A17. Issues still relevant today

Issues still relevant today	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Health issues	7 (78%)	15 (94%)	10 (67%)	10 (67%)	**42 (76%)**
Psychological consequences / trauma	5 (56%)	6 (38%)	4 (27%)	6 (40%)	**21 (38%)**
Lack of work / income	1 (11%)	2 (13%)	2 (13%)	2 (13%)	**7 (13%)**
Housing difficulties	2 (22%)	3 (19%)	6 (40%)	8 (53%)	**19 (35%)**
Lack of / insufficient social benefits	1 (11%)	1 (6%)	3 (20%)	7 (47%)	**12 (22%)**
Legal issues	3 (33%)	8 (50%)	6 (40%)	4 (27%)	**21 (38%)**
Problems with family / community	1 (11%)	6 (38%)	2 (13%)	1 (7%)	**10 (18%)**
No issues	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	**1 (2%)**
Too soon to say (<1 year)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (20%)	1 (7%)	**4 (7%)**

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group). Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table A18. Long-term support still lacking)

Long-term support still lacking	Demob. Military (n=9)	Active Duty (n=16)	Civ. through exchange (n=15)	Civ. outside exchange (n=15)	Total (n=55)
Medical care / treatment	4 (44%)	5 (31%)	10 (67%)	10 (67%)	**29 (53%)**
Psychological support	1 (11%)	5 (31%)	6 (40%)	11 (73%)	**23 (42%)**
Legal assistance	3 (33%)	5 (31%)	11 (73%)	10 (67%)	**29 (53%)**
Financial support / compensation	3 (33%)	4 (25%)	7 (47%)	10 (67%)	**24 (44%)**
Employment support	2 (22%)	1 (6%)	5 (33%)	2 (13%)	**10 (18%)**
Education / retraining support	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	5 (33%)	0 (0%)	**7 (13%)**
Community social services	1 (11%)	5 (31%)	7 (47%)	7 (47%)	**20 (36%)**
Everything available (nothing lacking)	1 (11%)	3 (19%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	**5 (9%)**
Too soon to say (<1 year)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)	1 (7%)	**2 (4%)**

Note: *Cells show count (row percentage within group). Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Appendix B
Data presented by release route

For reference, the tables below reproduce the comparison by release route (through versus outside official exchanges). This grouping is not independent of the four-group breakdown in Appendix A : the outside-exchanges group comprises the 15 civilians released outside exchanges together with the 2 military personnel released outside exchanges.

Table B1. Who met respondents on arrival, by release route

Who met you on arrival	Through exchanges (n=38)	Outside exchanges (n=17)	Total (n=55)
State authorities / government agencies	38 (100%)	8 (47%)	**46 (84%)**
Medical personnel	29 (76%)	3 (18%)	**32 (58%)**
NGO / volunteer representatives	16 (42%)	—	**—**
Family	—	9 (53%)	**—**
No one	—	2 (12%)	**3 (5%)**

Note: *Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table B2. Information on next steps, by release route

Were you provided with information on next steps?	Through exchanges (n=38)	Outside exchanges (n=17)	Total (n=55)
Yes, fully provided	7 (18%)	0 (0%)	**7 (13%)**
Yes, partially provided	14 (37%)	0 (0%)	**14 (25%)**
No, not provided	17 (45%)	16 (94%)	**33 (60%)**
Hard to recall	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	**1 (2%)**

Note: *Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table B3. Perceived safety in the first days, by release route

Safety rating	Through exchanges (n=38)	Outside exchanges (n=17)	Total (n=55)
4 – Very safe	18 (47%)	9 (53%)	**27 (49%)**
3 – Somewhat safe	11 (29%)	3 (18%)	**14 (25%)**
2 – Somewhat unsafe	4 (11%)	3 (18%)	**7 (13%)**
1 – Very unsafe	5 (13%)	2 (12%)	**7 (13%)**
Average score	2.9	2.9	**2.9**

Note: *Ratings on a 1–4 scale (4 = very safe).*

Table B4. Medical examination offered, by release route

Were you offered a medical examination?	Through exchanges (n=38)	Outside exchanges (n=17)	Total (n=55)
Yes, immediately after release	11 (29%)	0 (0%)	**11 (20%)**
Yes, but later	10 (26%)	3 (18%)	**13 (24%)**
No, it was not offered	16 (42%)	14 (82%)	**30 (55%)**
Hard to recall	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	**1 (2%)**

Note: *Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table B5. How basic needs were organised, by release route

How basic needs were organised	Through exchanges (n=38)	Outside exchanges (n=17)	Total (n=55)
NGOs / volunteers	23 (61%)	7 (41%)	—
Military authorities	20 (53%)	1 (6%)	—
Family / friends	19 (50%)	9 (53%)	—
State institutions	17 (45%)	3 (18%)	—
Not organised at all	1 (3%)	2 (12%)	—

Note: *Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table B6. How psychological support was organised, by release route

How psychological support was organised	Through exchanges (n=38)	Outside exchanges (n=17)	Total (n=55)
Military authorities	15 (39%)	0 (0%)	**15 (27%)**
NGOs / volunteers	13 (34%)	7 (41%)	**20 (36%)**
State institutions	5 (13%)	2 (12%)	**7 (13%)**
Family / close friends	8 (21%)	2 (12%)	**10 (18%)**
Private specialists	2 (5%)	0 (0%)	**2 (4%)**
No support organised	7 (18%)	7 (41%)	**14 (25%)**

Note: *Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Table B7. Satisfaction with state-institution interactions, by release route

Satisfaction rating	Through exchanges (n=38)	Outside exchanges (n=17)	Total (n=55)
4 – Very satisfied	16 (42%)	1 (6%)	**17 (31%)**
3 – Somewhat satisfied	13 (34%)	6 (35%)	**19 (35%)**
2 – Somewhat dissatisfied	3 (8%)	2 (12%)	**5 (9%)**
1 – Very dissatisfied	6 (16%)	4 (24%)	**10 (18%)**
No interaction with state institutions	0 (0%)	4 (24%)	**4 (7%)**
Average score (excl. no interaction)	2.9	2.1	**2.7**

Note: *Ratings on a 1–4 scale (4 = very satisfied); average excludes those reporting no interaction*

Table B8. Barriers to accessing services in the months following release, by release route

Barriers to accessing services	Through exchanges (n=38)	Outside exchanges (n=17)	Total (n=55)
Lack of information	19 (50%)	11 (65%)	30 (54%)
Bureaucracy	12 (32%)	4 (24%)	16 (29%)
Lack of services in the region	8 (21%)	7 (41%)	15 (27%)
Refusals by institutions	2 (5%)	4 (24%)	6 (11%)

Note: *Multi-select items may sum to more than 100%.*

Appendix C
Legal Framework and Access to State Support after Release from Captivity or Unlawful Detention

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ACCESS TO STATE SUPPORT FOLLOWING RELEASE FROM CAPTIVITY OR UNLAWFUL DETENTION

Access to state support for released civilians and prisoners of war is based on the Law of Ukraine No. 2010-IX *On Social and Legal Protection of Persons in Respect of Whom the Fact of Deprivation of Personal Liberty as a Result of the Armed Aggression against Ukraine Has Been Established, and of Members of Their Families*, as well as Resolution No. 1775 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 24 December 2025 *On the Procedure for Taking Priority Measures to Support Civilians Affected by Deprivation of Personal Liberty as a Result of the Armed Aggression against Ukraine*.

It should be noted that the Law applies both to military service members and civilians. For civilians, however, establishing the fact of deprivation of personal liberty required, among other things, proof that their detention in temporarily occupied territories or in the Russian Federation was connected to their pro-Ukrainian position or civic, professional, political or human rights activities, or was intended to exert pressure on Ukraine, other states, organisations or individuals. In practice, this approach left some civilians who had been arbitrarily detained or subjected to enforced disappearance without adequate protection, as they were unable to provide sufficient evidence that their detention fell within the grounds specified by law. Resolution No. 1775 partially addresses this gap by allowing civilians to receive priority support before the procedure for establishing the fact of deprivation of personal liberty is completed.

The table below presents the main forms of state support available to these categories of persons and the specific arrangements governing access to them.

Types of support	Civilians	Military service members
Main issue affecting access to support	Access to the full range of special guarantees remains conditional on establishing the fact of deprivation of personal liberty. This can be particularly difficult for persons who return independently or outside official procedures. At the same time, Resolution No. 1775 allows civilians to receive priority support while the procedure is still pending.	Persons released through official procedures generally enter the state support system immediately, while certain special guarantees remain conditional on establishing the fact of deprivation of personal liberty under Law No. 2010-IX.
Priority support following release/return	Available under Procedure No. 1775, including to persons who return independently.	Available as part of organised state assistance following release from captivity.
One-time financial assistance	UAH 50,000 under Procedure No. 1775; UAH 100,000 after the fact has been established under Law No. 2010-IX[9]	UAH 100,000 after the fact has been established under Law No. 2010-IX.
Annual state financial assistance	UAH 100,000 after the fact has been established under Law No. 2010-IX.	UAH 100,000 after the fact has been established under Law No. 2010-IX.
Medical assistance	Yes	Yes, including through the military medical system.
Psychological assistance	Yes	Yes
Rehabilitation	Yes	Yes
Restoration of documents	Yes	Yes
Housing support	Temporary accommodation may be provided as needed; practical availability is limited.	No separate special guarantee following release from captivity is provided; access to general housing mechanisms may be available depending on status.
Deferment/discharge from service	Deferment from mobilisation after the fact has been established.	**Right to discharge from military service after the fact has been established.**

9 50,000 and UAH 100,000 payments are provided under separate assistance mechanisms; the procedure for their payment depends on whether assistance under Law No. 2010-IX has already been received.

As can be seen from the table, Ukrainian legislation provides a broad range of guarantees for persons released from captivity or unlawful detention. At the same time, access to state support differs substantially for civilians and military service members. Released service members generally enter the support system through official release procedures and subsequent state assistance. Civilians, particularly those who return independently or outside official procedures, often face additional difficulties in establishing the fact of deprivation of personal liberty and accessing the full range of special guarantees available under Law No. 2010-IX. At the same time, priority support under Resolution No. 1775 may be provided to civilians before this procedure has been completed.

In addition, military service members released from captivity are covered by dedicated medical, financial and post-isolation support mechanisms, as well as veteran support mechanisms if they are discharged from military service. As a result, the support system for military service members is generally more structured, comprehensive and long-term than that available to civilians.

Problems in the Practical Implementation of State Support

Adoption of the Resolution No. 1775 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine was an important step towards providing civilians with priority support before the procedure for establishing the fact of deprivation of personal liberty is completed. At the same time, whether this mechanism is effective will largely depend on its implementation in practice, effective coordination among state authorities, and the timely identification of persons in need of support.

Particular difficulties arise for civilians who are released outside official exchange procedures or negotiation processes. Information about such individuals is often not recorded in state records, making it more difficult for them to access the guarantees provided by law. In such cases, the work of the interagency commission responsible for establishing the fact of deprivation of personal liberty is particularly important, as is effective cooperation among social services, healthcare providers and law enforcement authorities.

Persons released outside official procedures often do not receive timely medical examinations, psychological support, rehabilitation or social assistance. In particular, dental care, which is often necessary following torture and inadequate detention conditions, remains largely inaccessible. There is also no established mechanism to monitor their physical and mental health after release. In addition, there is a shortage of case managers and other support professionals who could help individuals navigate the complex process of accessing healthcare, social services, law enforcement authorities and government agencies, while reducing the risk of retraumatisation.

Access to housing remains one of the most pressing problems. A significant proportion of released persons are from temporarily occupied territories and, upon return, are unable to go back home and lack the resources to secure adequate housing on their own. Although legislation provides for the right to temporary accommodation and other forms of support, Ukraine still lacks a sufficiently developed social housing system for this category of persons.

Particular attention should be paid to deferment from conscription during mobilisation for civilians and discharge from military service for military service members. Access to these guarantees is directly linked to establishing the fact of deprivation of personal liberty. Given the prevalence of torture, the severe psychological consequences of captivity, and the need for prolonged treatment and rehabilitation, these guarantees are an important means of protecting the rights of released persons.

Person-centred and trauma-informed approaches are equally important when providing assistance. Representatives of state authorities, healthcare institutions, law enforcement agencies, civil society organizations and international organisations should take into account the physical and psychological condition of people who have experienced captivity or unlawful

detention. Support should be provided in accordance with the principles of respect for human dignity, informed consent, confidentiality, professional competence and the prevention of re-traumatization.

Thus, effective implementation of the guarantees provided by law requires more than simply having support mechanisms in place. It also depends on effective coordination among the responsible authorities, timely identification of the needs of released persons, long-term support, and a person-centred approach to assistance.



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