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Mapping Ukrainian CSOs in the Nordic-Baltic Region: Areas of Advocacy and Common Challenges

This policy brief maps Ukrainian civil society organizations (CSOs) active in the Nordic-Baltic region (NB8), based on a 2025 survey and discussions at the Nordic Ukraine Advocacy Summit. It highlights the diverse landscape of advocacy groups, ranging from long-established diaspora organizations to initiatives formed after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The analysis highlights key challenges, such as the lack of coordination mechanisms, uneven access to political platforms, and limited technical capacity. Closer cooperation with policymakers and donors would benefit both sides, utilizing CSOs' expertise in facilitating better integration of displaced Ukrainians and improving inclusive policymaking. It is important to recognize the role of Ukrainian civil society not only as a facilitator in the immediate support efforts but also as a strategic partner in shaping Europe's long-term peace architecture.

Introduction

Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 caused a massive migration of Ukrainians settling across the EU, including the Nordic-Baltic region. This movement gave rise to a wide range of new initiatives, including advocacy, cultural diplomacy, support for integration, and humanitarian efforts. Alongside long-standing diaspora organisations, these newly formed groups quickly became vital actors mobilizing resources, amplifying Ukraine’s voice internationally, and contributing to host societies. In light of these dynamics, it is worthwhile to understand how these organizations operate and what challenges they face.

To this end, the Nordic Ukraine Forum, with the support of the Swedish Institute, conducted *Survey of Nordic-Baltic Ukrainian Civil Society Organisations 2025: Mapping Areas of Advocacy, Structures, and Common Challenges* between March and May 2025 (Zubkovych et al., 2025). This study examined Ukrainian CSOs active in both the Nordic-Baltic region (NB8) and Ukraine, based on a structured survey of 17 organizations (from an initial pool of 42). Notably, the survey focused exclusively on organizations with advocacy for

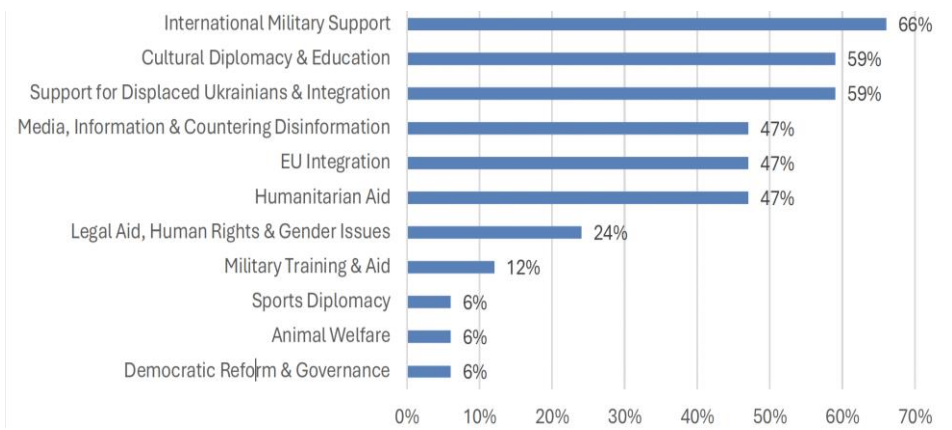
Ukraine as a main activity, excluding smaller initiatives dedicated primarily to humanitarian relief, such as collecting clothes or food. Additionally, the output of the survey has been supplemented by the discussions and outcomes from the Nordic Ukraine Advocacy Summit (NUAS), held in Oslo in June 2025, with 30 participating CSOs. Together, these sources provide a unique empirical overview of the role and activities of Ukrainian advocacy CSOs in the Nordic-Baltic region.

Survey results

Areas of advocacy

The survey covers Ukrainian advocacy organisations based in the Nordic-Baltic region, where Sweden-based organisations or initiatives made up over half of the total respondents. The survey represents both long-established diaspora organizations and newer initiatives formed in response to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. About one-fourth of CSOs were established before 2014 (the earliest in 1997), while the majority were founded after 2022, reflecting the urgent mobilization of diaspora communities during the war.

Figure 1. Focus areas of Ukrainian CSOs in the Nordic-Baltic region



Source: Zubkovych et al., 2025.



Surveyed CSOs represent a broad mix of leadership roles, gender, professions, languages, membership sizes, and funding models. Most remain volunteer-driven and rely on short-term or project-based funding. More detailed demographic and organizational profiles can be found in the report by Zubkovych et al., 2025.

Survey results show that Ukrainian CSOs in the NB8 focus on a wide range of areas. The most common activities include advocacy for Ukraine's military support, cultural diplomacy and education, as well as support for displaced Ukrainians and their integration (Figure 1).

Many organizations also prioritize working with media, countering disinformation, humanitarian aid to Ukraine, and advocacy for Ukraine's EU integration, followed by legal aid, human rights, and gender issues.

Figure 2 presents the main types of activity through which Ukrainian CSOs pursue their objectives. As shown, Ukrainian CSOs perform their tasks by raising social media awareness (82%) and organizing events in support of Ukraine (82%). Other key activities include demonstrations, media

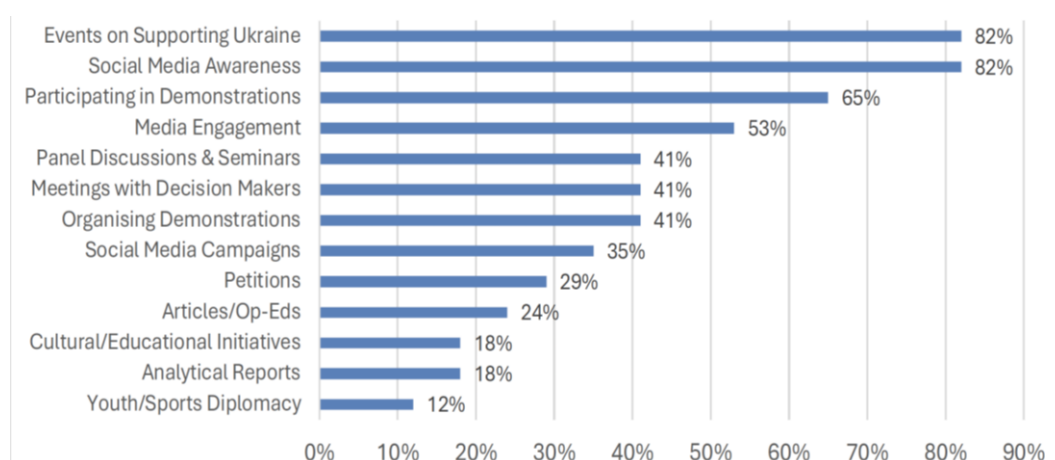
outreach, and direct engagement with policymakers. These findings suggest the need to examine more closely which social media platforms are being used, especially given the increasing risks of disinformation and propaganda.

Main challenges

At the same time, the survey reveals the main challenges that Ukrainian CSOs in the Nordic-Baltic region have been facing (Figure 3). In particular, the respondents mentioned the absence of structured coordination mechanisms, which leads to duplication of efforts and uneven visibility.

For instance, while several groups in Sweden and Norway focus on humanitarian aid, their activities often run parallel rather than in partnership. The lack of common platforms or umbrella networks reduces their collective influence and makes it more challenging to articulate shared priorities to governments and donors. Without stronger horizontal coordination, CSOs risk competing rather than complementing one another in their advocacy and support work.

Figure 2. Types of activities of Ukrainian CSOs in the Nordic-Baltic region



Source: Zubkovych et al., 2025.



Figure 3. Main challenges for Ukrainian CSOs



Source: Zubkovych et al., 2025.

Funding emerged as one of the most pressing issues in the survey. Most organizations reported reliance on short-term, project-based grants or donations. Many CSOs lack multi-year funding, which makes strategic planning and staff retention almost impossible. This precarious situation often leads to volunteer burnout and creates uncertainty about the future of their programs. Donor practices have unintentionally exacerbated this vulnerability by neglecting the long-term capacity-building needs of diaspora CSOs.

The survey further highlights significant disparities in institutional access. Larger CSOs, particularly those based in capital cities such as Stockholm, Oslo, and Helsinki, enjoy greater visibility and are more likely to receive invitations to political consultations. By contrast, smaller groups in regions often remain excluded from policy-making processes, despite being closer to affected communities. This imbalance risks creating unequal representation, where only a handful of well-resourced organizations shape public debate, while others remain invisible. Respondents from Baltic states also pointed out that while they are engaged in cultural diplomacy and integration activities, they struggle to gain recognition from national ministries or international donors. The

result is a fragmented advocacy landscape, where not all voices are equally heard.

Many organizations reported gaps in technical capacity, particularly a lack of specific skills in fundraising, project management, digital communication, lobbying, and public outreach. Additionally, the survey highlighted the dual role that Ukrainian CSOs currently play outside Ukraine. On one hand, they act as advocates for Ukraine internationally, lobbying for sanctions, military aid, and continued political support. On the other hand, they provide practical integration services for displaced Ukrainians, including legal counselling, language courses, housing support, and employment assistance. While both roles are crucial, this dual identity can create tensions. For instance, CSOs in Sweden and Finland reported that resources devoted to advocacy sometimes limited their ability to address integration needs, while groups in Estonia and Latvia noted that local integration demands risk overshadowing their transnational advocacy. Without clearer strategies or additional resources, CSOs may struggle to balance these functions effectively.



Conclusion

The survey of Ukrainian CSOs in the Nordic-Baltic region, combined with insights from NUAS 2025, highlights both their urgent needs and strategic opportunities.

For CSOs, strengthening coordination mechanisms is critical to reduce duplication and amplify their collective influence. Creating cross-border advocacy platforms and thematic working groups would help CSOs to better coordinate their activities, learn from others experience and articulate common priorities. In particular, smaller CSOs would benefit from learning how to adopt effective communication strategies, diversify outreach through multiple platforms, and enhance engagement with local communities and institutional stakeholders.

At the same time, CSOs should invest in internal capacity: skills training in project management, advocacy, and digital communication can improve efficiency and increase funding opportunities. Finally, CSOs should balance their dual roles, such as supporting displaced Ukrainians locally while advocating for Ukraine internationally, by dividing responsibilities and tailoring strategies to avoid role conflict.

In turn, policymakers and donors may benefit from closer cooperation with Ukrainian CSOs. As documented by Anisimova et al. (2025), Ukrainian

CSOs and civil society actors have already stepped in to fill gaps left by the public sector in the Nordic-Baltic countries. They have been facilitating labor market integration by offering mentorship, language support, and professional networks; improving access to information and bridging communication barriers between displaced people, employers, and municipalities. By recognizing and making use of Ukrainian CSOs' experience, NB8 governments can develop more efficient mechanisms for integrating displaced populations. Furthermore, wider interaction with CSOs - including small local ones, currently underrepresented in the policy dialogue - may help coordinate with local communities and ensure inclusive policy-making processes.

Ultimately, it is important to recognize the role of Ukrainian civil society not only as a facilitator in the immediate support efforts but also as a strategic partner in shaping Europe's long-term peace architecture.

References

Zubkovych, A., Anisimova, A., & Adamson, E. (2025). *Survey of Nordic-Baltic Ukrainian civil society organisations. Mapping Areas of Advocacy, Structures and Common Challenges*. https://nuforum.se/what_we_do/nordic-ukraine-advocacy-summit/nuas-reports





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