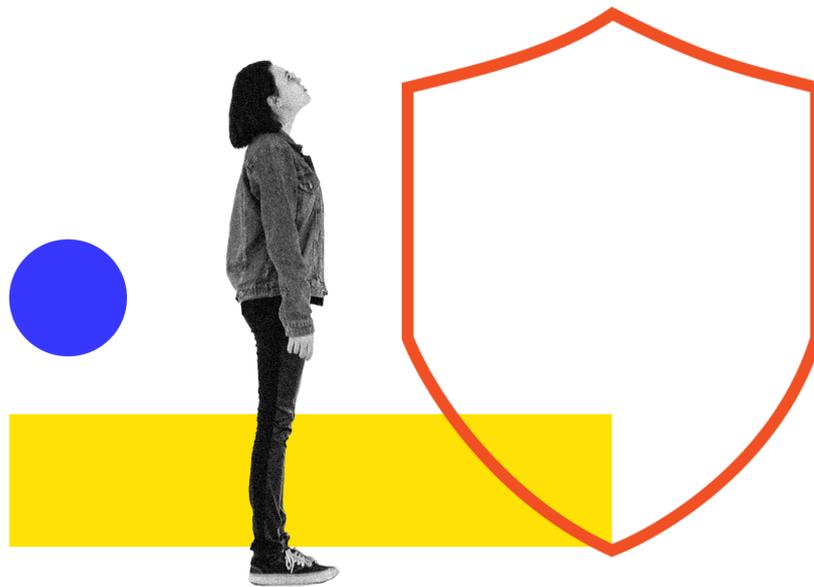


COMPREHENSIVE DEFENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION



• Yulia Dziuba

2025

About the Author

Yulia Dziuba is a lawyer and policy developer, holding a Master of Public Policy from the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her research focuses on human rights, gender (in)equality, and non-discrimination policies in Ukraine.

Email: julia.dziuba.lawyer@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to define the roles of local self-government and public administration within the framework of comprehensive defence, incorporating the gender dimension of Ukraine's public policy. For a long time, the involvement of women in vital state processes, particularly within the security and defence sectors, received little attention due to various factors, including gender stereotypes. However, Ukraine's European integration movement has created the conditions for revising the existing legal framework. This issue became particularly urgent during the war, as a significant number of responsibilities for decision-making in the security and defence sectors under decentralisation were assigned to local self-government bodies and newly formed civil-military administrations. The study provides a qualitative analysis of current legislation governing comprehensive defence within the competencies of local self-government bodies and executive authorities. It presents data from expert surveys conducted among local officials to identify legal implementation practices and the obstacles public officers and politicians face. The study identifies remaining opportunities to strengthen women's involvement in comprehensive defence at the local level in recent years, particularly since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.

Keywords: defence, comprehensive defence, public administration, local self-government, gender equality, Russia's war against Ukraine, Ukraine.

The research was conducted by the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Expert Resource Gender in Detail as part of the project “Gender Approach in the Context of Comprehensive Defence,” funded by the grant “Best Practices of the Swedish Gender Approach as a Tool for Empowering Ukrainian Women to Implement Sustainable Reforms and Promote Ukraine’s European Integration,” with financial support from the Swedish Institute and in partnership with the Swedish International Liberal Centre.

The project draws on gender mainstreaming practices within Sweden’s comprehensive defence system and represents the first attempt in the Ukrainian context to explore the possibilities of implementing a Swedish-style comprehensive defence strategy in Ukraine while simultaneously integrating a gender perspective across key sectors, including the economy, care work, the armed forces, civil defence, governance, information policy, and the volunteer movement.

Analytical reports on the above-mentioned sectors are available on the website of the NGO Expert Resource Gender in Detail.

<https://genderindetail.org.ua/>

The project’s concept author and project lead is Tamara Zlobina, PhD in Philosophy and Head of the NGO Expert Resource Gender in Detail.

Project mentors and reviewers of the analytical reports:

Olena Strelnyk, Doctor of Sociological Sciences

Hanna Hrytsenko, Gender Expert

Project managers: Alyona Hruzina, Halyna Repetska

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	1
ACRONYMS	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
INTRODUCTION	6
METHODOLOGY	7
CHAPTER 1. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPREHENSIVE DEFENCE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL	8
Summary of Chapter 1.....	14
CHAPTER 2. IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPREHENSIVE DEFENCE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN UKRAINE	15
2.1. General Trends and Challenges.....	15
2.2. Community Self-Organisation as the Foundation of Resilience.....	16
2.3. Interaction with Military Administrations and State Structures.....	16
2.4. The Role of Women in Ensuring Comprehensive Defence.....	17
2.5. Volunteer and Veteran Networks as a Component of Defence.....	18
2.6. Resources, Human Capital, and Bureaucracy.....	18
Summary of Chapter 2.....	19
CHAPTER 3. THE SWEDISH EXPERIENCE IMPLEMENTING COMPREHENSIVE DEFENCE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL	20
3.1. The Concept and Key Principles of Comprehensive Defence in Sweden.....	20
3.2. The Role of Municipalities in the Comprehensive Defence System.....	21
3.3. Collaboration with the Military and Regional Authorities.....	22
Summary of Chapter 3.....	22
CONCLUSIONS	24
RECOMMENDATIONS	26
REFERENCES	28
ANNEX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE FOR REPRESENTATIVES OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT BODIES AND EXECUTIVE AUTHORITIES	29

ACRONYMS

CMA	Civil-Military Administration
HR	Human Resources
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LSG	Local Self-Government
NAP 1325	National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security for the period until 2025
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Strategy #121/2021	Military Security Strategy of Ukraine, approved by Presidential Decree #121/2021 of March 25, 2021
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Community resilience is not just about shelters and air defence; it is about people’s confidence that they will be cared for in any crisis.”

Yuliia Darnytska, Member of the Chernihiv City Council, interview

This study examines the role of local self-government (LSG) and state administration bodies in forming Ukraine’s comprehensive defence system, incorporating a gender perspective.

Analysis of the regulatory and legal framework shows that while Ukrainian legislation defines the principles of comprehensive defence, the role of LSG remains fragmented. Powers are duplicated between LSG bodies and military administrations, which complicates coordination and reduces the efficiency of local governance. The gender component is not systematically integrated into most regulatory acts, and the implementation of the National Action Plan for United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security remains inconsistent at the local level.

Expert interviews with representatives of LSGs and executive authorities from Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Zaporizhzhia, and Volyn oblasts show that communities have taken on a significant share of security, humanitarian response, and population support functions. Despite a lack of resources and an unclear distribution of powers, it is the local level that has become the hub of resilience in crises. Women are actively involved in the work of authorities, yet their participation in decision-making processes within the defence sector remains insufficient.

Analysis of the Swedish model shows that the success of comprehensive defence is built on a partnership between the military, municipalities, business, and civil society. Swedish municipalities have clearly defined responsibilities in the field of civil preparedness, and coordination between levels of government is carried out through permanent cooperation platforms.

Ukraine should adapt these approaches by strengthening the role of local councils and communities, ensuring their resource capacity, integrating gender policy into the security sector, and establishing mechanisms for civil-military cooperation at the oblast level.

INTRODUCTION

Decentralisation reform, which has been ongoing in Ukraine since 2014, significantly transformed the state governance system. Transferring powers and financial resources from the central government to local self-governments (LSGs) created a new decision-making architecture, in which communities gained greater autonomy and responsibility. One of the consequences of this reform was strengthening the local level's role in ensuring national security and resilience.

The Russian Federation's full-scale invasion in 2022 became a litmus test for the decentralised governance system. Communities found themselves on the front lines of the struggle for survival; organising evacuations; maintaining critical infrastructure; and providing shelters, humanitarian aid, and communication with the military. Under martial law, a significant number of male officials were mobilised into the Armed Forces of Ukraine; consequently, an increasing share of managerial functions now falls on women's shoulders. This highlights the need to systematically involve women in decision-making within the security and defence sectors, both at the LSG level and within state structures.

The introduction of martial law on February 24, 2022, led to creating new temporary bodies: military administrations designed to ensure coordination between civilian authorities and the military command. However, legislative inconsistencies between the powers of LSGs and military administrations created legal and managerial tensions on the ground, complicating the implementation of comprehensive defence principles.

In these circumstances, the issue of developing an effective comprehensive defence system, one that encompasses both military and civilian elements, has become particularly urgent. The capacity of communities to ensure resilience, respond to crises, and maintain essential services is becoming no less vital than the army's ability to withstand the aggressor.

This study aims to analyse how LSG and state authorities implement comprehensive defence functions in wartime, incorporating a gender-responsive approach and the potential for adapting international best practices, specifically the Swedish comprehensive defence model.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is based on a mixed-methods approach, combining desk research, qualitative data collection methods, and comparative analysis.

The first stage involved desk research, which included an analysis of Ukraine's legal and regulatory framework in the fields of security, defence, LSG, and gender policy. The study examined the Constitution of Ukraine, relevant laws, state strategies, and international documents governing women's participation in security processes and decision-making. The purpose of this stage was to identify gaps in the current legislation and to define the role of LSG within the comprehensive defence system.

The second stage involved applying a qualitative method, specifically expert interviews. Ten interviews were conducted with male and female representatives of LSG and executive authorities from several oblasts: Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Volyn, and Zaporizhzhia. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire guide (see the [Annex](#)). Due to the complex security situation, some of the communication was conducted in writing. All participants were informed of the study's purpose; ethical principles were strictly followed, and respondents from frontline territories were given the option to remain anonymous.

Separately, a comparative analysis of the Swedish comprehensive defence model was conducted, which allowed for developing practical recommendations to improve the Ukrainian system.

Open-source analysis was applied as a supporting method, specifically examining state statistics, sociological surveys, official reports, and analytical materials from international organisations.

The methodological toolkit is aligned to ensure that the data collected across key thematic blocks are comparable: legal framework, managerial practices, resource allocation, and the gender dimension. This ensured a comprehensive vision of the problem and established a foundation for formulating relevant findings and recommendations.

CHAPTER 1. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPREHENSIVE DEFENCE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

“Resilience rests on four pillars: people, procedures, flexibility, and resources.”

Ivan Vashchenko, Deputy Head of the Chernihiv Oblast Military Administration, interview

The desk research findings confirm that while Ukrainian legislation includes some fundamental principles defining the concept and characteristics of comprehensive defence, it fails to clearly distinguish the role of LSG in its implementation, instead granting various powers to local authorities only in a fragmented manner.

The decentralisation process in Ukraine started in 2014 with the adoption of the Concept of Reform of Local Self-Government and Territorial Organisation of Power in Ukraine (April 1, 2014), the Laws “On Cooperation of Territorial Communities” (June 17, 2014) and “On Voluntary Association of Territorial Communities” (February 5, 2015), and amendments to the Budget and Tax Codes regarding financial decentralisation. However, due to a number of factors, including Russia’s full-scale invasion, the reform has not been completed. To understand how detailed the LSG role is in ensuring comprehensive defence, it is necessary to review the legislation and compare the powers of various local structures.

All legal and regulatory acts related to comprehensive defence can be divided into several groups, including those:

- Related to the concept of comprehensive defence;
- Outlining the roles and powers of LSG bodies and state executive bodies at the local level aimed at ensuring comprehensive defence;
- Incorporating a gender perspective within this context.

Legal acts pertaining to the concept of comprehensive defence

The foundational legal acts defining the concept and components of comprehensive defence include the Constitution of Ukraine, the Law “On the Defence of Ukraine”; the National Security Strategy of Ukraine, approved by Presidential Decree #392/2020 of September 14, 2020; and the Military Security Strategy of Ukraine, approved by Presidential Decree #121/2021 of March 25, 2021 (Strategy #121/2021).

Article 17 of the Constitution of Ukraine states that protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and ensuring its economic and information security, are the most important functions of the state and the matter of the entire Ukrainian people.

Article 1 of the Law “On the Defence of Ukraine” defines the concept of the defence of Ukraine as a system of political, economic, social, military, scientific, technological, informational, legal, organisational, and other state measures aimed at preparing for

armed protection and the actual protection of the country in the event of armed aggression or armed conflict.

According to the Strategy #121/2021, the comprehensive defence of Ukraine (the document also uses “all-encompassing” as a synonym) is a set of measures, primarily consisting of:

- Preventive actions and resilient resistance to the aggressor on land, at sea, and in the airspace of Ukraine, countering threats in cyberspace, and imposing one’s will in the information space;
- Using the full potential of the state and society to repel aggression, including military, political, economic, international legal (diplomatic), spiritual, cultural, etc.;
- Employing all forms and methods of armed struggle against the aggressor, including asymmetric and other actions for the defence of Ukraine, while adhering to the principles and norms of international law.

The document also notes that preparing for and conducting Ukraine’s comprehensive defence requires a new organisational model for national defence, the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and other components of the Defence Forces. This model must ensure advance planning and preparation by state authorities, all components of the Defence Forces, national economic management bodies, and LSG bodies, while maintaining the readiness of the population and the nation’s territory for comprehensive defence and implementing preventive measures to preclude the escalation of military conflict.

Thus, the document recognises that defence capability is not solely a function of the military, but also a matter of governance, local leadership, infrastructure, and the trust of citizens (both men and women) in the state. The document highlights institutional resilience, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights as fundamental factors of security.

Legal acts outlining the roles and powers of LSGs and state executive bodies at the local level aimed at ensuring comprehensive defence

This group includes the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and the Laws of Ukraine “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine,” “On Civil-Military Administrations,” “On the Legal Regime of Martial Law,” and “On the Foundations of National Resistance.”

First and foremost, it should be noted that governance at the local level is exercised by both elected LSG bodies and local state executive bodies, which are part of the broader state executive system. In this section, it is appropriate to compare the powers of the former and the latter to identify where overlaps or gaps in authority occur that should be addressed.

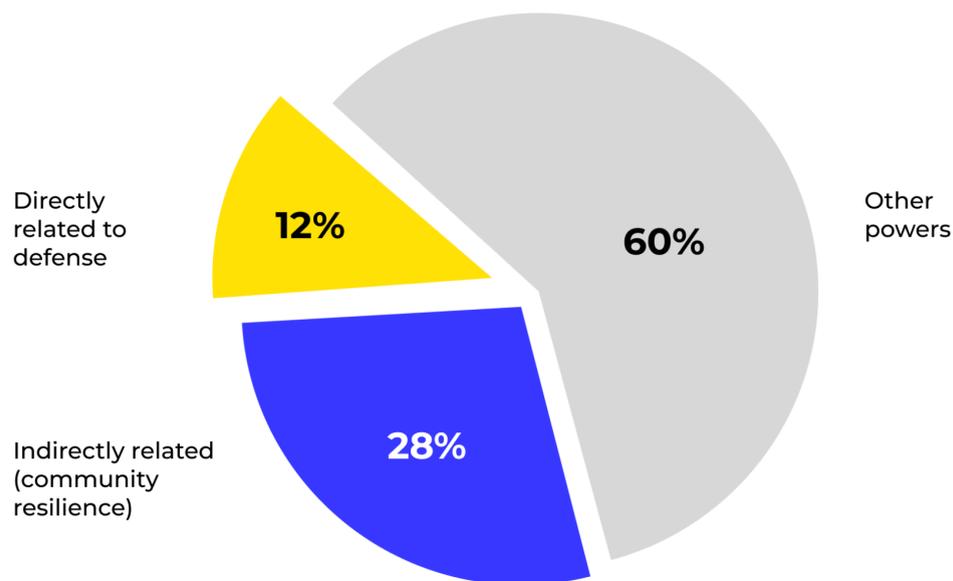
Pursuant to Part 2 of Article 2 of the Law “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine,” LSG is exercised by territorial communities of villages, towns, and cities both directly and through village, town, and city councils and their executive bodies, as well as through district and oblast councils that represent the common interests of these territorial communities.

The law establishes the autonomy of communities in the sphere of self-governance and provides for the following powers:

- Military registration and facilitating mobilisation;
- Supporting military units;
- Participation in the programming of defence measures;
- Organising national resistance measures.

According to the analysis conducted, nearly 40% of the powers of LSG bodies under the Law “On Local Self-Government in Ukraine” directly or indirectly fall within the category of comprehensive defence in its broad sense. This encompasses both military and security tasks, as well as sectors of community resilience: infrastructure, healthcare, social protection, education, and crisis management.

Figure 1.1. Distribution of local self-government powers within the context of comprehensive defence (based on legislative analysis)



At the same time, Article 1 of the Law “On the Foundations of National Resistance” specifies that preparing Ukrainian citizens for national resistance is carried out by state and LSG bodies to foster patriotic awareness and sustained motivation, as well as to ensure the acquisition of knowledge and practical skills necessary for the defence of Ukraine.

The law explicitly establishes the duties of LSGs in:

- Facilitating territorial defence;
- Informing the population;
- Cooperating with volunteer formations;

- Organising the preparation of citizens for resistance;
- Allocating funding from local budgets.

However, the law does not provide for a clear coordination mechanism with other defence actors, creating a gap between political intentions and administrative practice.

Furthermore, the Strategy #121/2021 states that ensuring defence capability requires the involvement of LSGs in planning, preparing, and coordinating preventive measures, infrastructure support, and community mobilisation.

Local state administrations also operate at the local level; they serve as local executive bodies and are part of the state executive branch system. Within its competence, the local state administration exercises executive power in the respective administrative-territorial unit and carries out powers delegated to it by the relevant council.

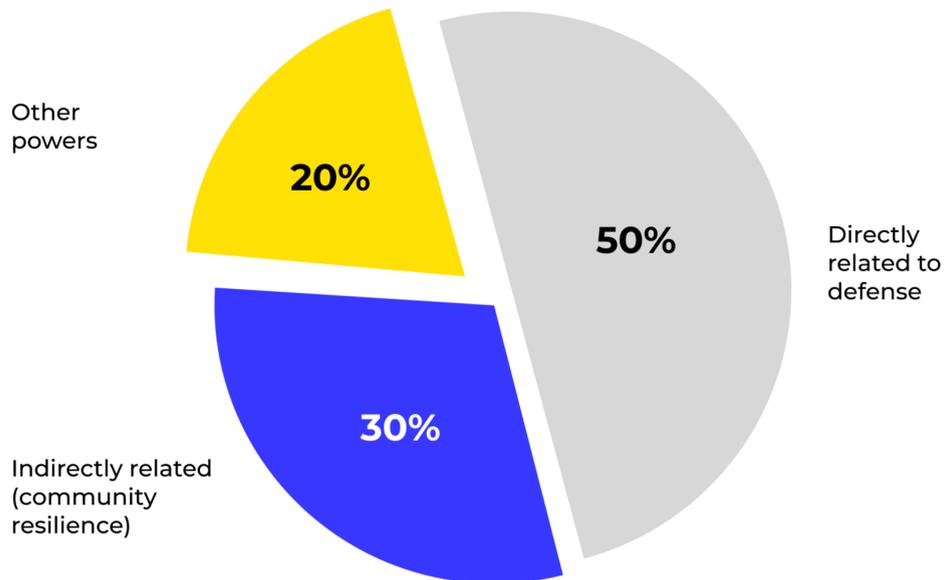
However, in wartime conditions, civil-military administrations (CMAs) were established as a temporary, forced management measure to ensure security and normalise the life of the population in areas repelling the Russian Federation's armed aggression. The Law "On Civil-Military Administrations" defines the organisation, powers, and procedures of CMAs.

Article 1 of the Law "On Civil-Military Administrations" states that CMAs are temporary state bodies in villages, towns, cities, districts, and oblasts, established to ensure the enforcement of the Constitution and laws of Ukraine; provide security and normalise the life of the population; maintain law and order; participate in countering acts of armed aggression, sabotage, and terrorist acts; and prevent a humanitarian catastrophe in areas repelling the Russian Federation's armed aggression, including the conduct of the Anti-Terrorist Operation.

In practice, local state administrations were temporarily transformed into CMAs, taking on new functional roles while retaining their former spheres of influence. The legislation implies that CMAs are temporary bodies in combat zones, with broad powers ranging from mobilisation efforts to organising vital services.

For greater clarity, an in-depth analysis of the Law "On Civil-Military Administrations" was conducted, categorising all current CMA powers into three groups: directly related to defence, indirectly related to defence, and others. As shown in Figure 2, CMAs possess a larger share of powers directly related to defence compared to LSGs, which stems from the very purpose and nature of establishing them.

Figure 1.2. Distribution of CMA powers in the context of comprehensive defence (based on legislative analysis)



However, comparing the powers of LSG structures with the newly formed CMAs at the local level reveals a certain duplication of functions, creating a risk of administrative competition and legal uncertainty. It is worth noting that this situation was observed even before the full-scale invasion, but since then, it has extended to new challenges related to comprehensive local-level defence in wartime.

Table 1 illustrates the extent to which the functions of these two local structures overlap, creating a basis for local-level conflicts.

Table 1.1. Comparison of LSG and CMA powers

	Scope of Powers	Powers of LSGs	Powers of Local Executive Bodies (currently CMAs)	Comments
1.	Military Registration and Mobilisation Efforts	Ensuring the maintenance of military records for citizens and assisting in mobilisation efforts (pursuant to the Procedure for	Coordinating mobilisation training and organisation of conscription	CMAs hold a more centralised function, whereas LSGs provide executive support.

		Conducting the Conscription of Citizens for Military Service during Mobilisation for a Special Period, approved by Cabinet of Ministers Resolution #560 of May 16, 2024)		
2.	Ensuring Vital Community Services under Martial Law	Maintaining critical infrastructure, organising evacuations, and providing assistance to the population	Managing infrastructure distributing humanitarian aid, and emergency powers	Powers overlap, yet lack clear coordination
3.	Interaction with Volunteer Formations of Territorial Communities	May establish and coordinate volunteer formations	Have the right to intervene, control, and subordinate formations	The lack of clear cooperation mechanisms may lead to conflicts.
4.	Preparing the population for national resistance	Conducting training exercises, informing the public, and fostering patriotic awareness	Organising mass training exercises and developing patriotic education programs	Initiatives are often grassroots, but without state support, they fail to scale.
5.	Participating in the planning and implementation of national resistance measures	Assisting with planning and participating in local security programs	Developing strategic plans and coordinating resources	The lack of a joint planning mechanism can lead to inconsistency.
6.	Gender policy in the defence sector	Provision is made for appointing specialised advisors, advisory bodies, and expert groups on gender policy, and for adopting targeted programs to ensure equal rights for women and men.	Provisions exist for appointing specialised advisors, advisory bodies, and expert groups on gender policy. This includes the authority to approve local programs, including those on gender equality.	The legislation does not mandate the inclusion of gender aspects at the local level. Limited implementation, lack of dedicated positions and focal points, and weak institutionalisation
7.	Funding for defence measures	Allocating funds from local budgets	Have access to state resources and authority over	LSGs are resource-constrained, particularly in

			large-scale funding allocation	low-income communities.
--	--	--	--------------------------------	-------------------------

Regarding the category identified in the study of legislation that incorporates a gender component, it is evident that lawmakers pay insufficient attention to this aspect, particularly in the context of LSG. In all the aforementioned acts, adherence to the principle of gender equality is mentioned only in passing.

The primary regulatory act in this regard is the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security for the period until 2025 (NAP 1325), approved by Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine Decree #1544-p of October 28, 2020. One of the document's priorities is to ensure the full and equal participation of women and men in decision-making at all levels, particularly in peace negotiations, peacebuilding, reintegration, and reconciliation; and participation in elections (as both candidates and voters) and socio-political activities. NAP 1325 implementers include, among others, oblast state administrations, Kyiv and Sevastopol city state administrations, oblast and Kyiv city CMAs, and LSG bodies.

Summary of Chapter 1

The distribution of powers between LSGs and CMAs is not clearly defined, creating a conflict of jurisdictions and leading to governance inefficiency. In a number of cases, CMAs assume the functions of LSGs, which undermines the legitimacy of local governance.

Coordination mechanisms are practically non-existent, both between different branches of government and across different levels of decision-making. This leads to the duplication of functions and a loss of efficiency.

The gender component is not integrated into the comprehensive defence sector. Even with relevant strategic documents in place (e.g., NAP 1325), their implementation at the local level remains non-systemic.

LSGs possess significant potential to implement comprehensive defence principles due to their proximity to the community; however, their powers remain weak without state support, clear instructions, and adequate funding.

CHAPTER 2. IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPREHENSIVE DEFENCE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL IN UKRAINE

“Women are capable of making a significant contribution to community security, yet their role remains undervalued and requires formalisation.”

Ellada Bakhtina, Member of the Iziium City Council, interview

2.1. General Trends and Challenges

Implementing comprehensive defence at the local level in Ukraine takes place under extremely challenging conditions, where communities are forced to simultaneously provide for the basic needs of the population, respond to military threats, maintain critical infrastructure, and build long-term resilience. The lack of clear coordination mechanisms between central executive bodies, CMAs, and LSGs often leads to functional duplication, administrative conflicts, and the overstretching of local staff.

Despite this, the local level has proven its capacity to act swiftly, flexibly, and effectively, even without prior instructions “from above.” In most cases, the actions of local councils were aimed at organising humanitarian support, coordinating volunteers, establishing reception centres for internally displaced persons (IDPs), setting up logistics with neighbouring regions, and communicating with the population.

It was the communities that proved that comprehensive defence is possible not only as a state doctrine but as a living, practical system of interaction between the people, the authorities, and partners.

Yuliia Posternak, Head of the Kulykivka Town Council (Chernihiv Oblast), recalls:

“You don’t prepare for war in two weeks. We received no official instructions, yet we acted intuitively: we were the first to secure shelters, assist with evacuations, and keep people’s spirits and faith high.”

Similar trends were confirmed in both the south and the east of the country. Ellada Bakhtina, a member of the Iziium City Council (Kharkiv Oblast), emphasized:

“We became a pillar of support for the people who stayed in the region. It was crucial not only to ensure defence but also to show that we had not been broken.”

Between 2022 and 2025, local comprehensive defence became more than just a crisis response; it emerged as a new governance format where flexibility, communication, and trust proved more vital than formal instructions.

2.2. Community Self-Organisation as the Foundation of Resilience

From the first days of the war, communities established coordination centres and volunteer networks, setting up logistics for evacuations, shelters, food supplies, and communication with the military.

A representative of the Melitopol City Council recalled:

“We operated amidst chaos, setting up a coordination headquarters, launching evacuations, and organising food and aid for the victims within the first hours. This was a feat of team self-organisation, not the execution of top-down instructions.”

Her colleague added:

“For the people in Melitopol, it was vital to see that the authorities had not disappeared. It was a matter not just of information, but of psychological support.”

Similar processes took place in Nova Odesa, with the creation of the VDVV HUB, a coalition of local authorities, veterans' organisations, and volunteers.

Olena Khlivna-Andreeva, a member of the Nova Odesa City Council (Mykolaiv Oblast), described:

“Within the HUB, we signed a memorandum of understanding between veterans' organisations, educators, volunteers, and the local authorities. This isn't just about helping the army; it's a system where everyone knows their specific area of responsibility.”

This level of community self-organisation became the foundation of comprehensive defence, spanning everything from shelters and healthcare to psychological support and international cooperation.

2.3. Interaction with Military Administrations and State Structures

Despite effective self-organisation, communities often face the issue of blurred mandates between LSGs, military administrations, and central government bodies.

Nataliia Kholchenkova, a member of the Chernihiv City Council and Head of the International Relations and Investment Department, noted:

“The core problem is the lack of a clear division of powers. We do a great deal to support the community’s defence capabilities, but formally, this does not fall within our official duties.”

Ivan Vashchenko, Deputy Head of the Chernihiv Oblast Military Administration, provided a systemic perspective:

“The war has shown that local self-government is not just a tier of administration, but a vital element of national defence. However, the legislation is lagging behind reality. We must formalise coordination mechanisms to avoid duplication and chaos.”

At the same time, there are communities where interaction with military administrations is well-established; Nova Odesa serves as a prime example:

“We have no difficulties in coordination between the local self-government and the military administration — everything is one hundred percent okay!” Olena Khlivna-Andreeva asserted.

In such cases, communities demonstrate that effective defence is built on trust and partnership, rather than subordination.

2.4. The Role of Women in Ensuring Comprehensive Defence

In many regions of Ukraine, it was women who became the driving force behind resilience, serving as leaders, council members, coordinators, and volunteers.

Yuliia Vusenko, a member of the Volyn Oblast Council, shared:

“Today, women carry an overwhelming burden, yet they have not faltered. They make decisions, coordinate communities, and shape policy even under fire.”

In Chernihiv, Nataliia Kholchenkova manages international partnerships that ensure infrastructural and humanitarian resilience:

“We coordinate international aid and have developed a community recovery plan. Resilience is not just about shelters; it’s a system of decisions that gives people confidence.”

In Kharkiv Oblast, Ellada Bakhtina emphasized:

“Women became the coordinators of life: from food drives to communicating with the military. Without this female network, communities simply would not have survived.”

Women did not merely fill staffing gaps; they transformed the management style, shifting from a vertical hierarchy to a partnership-based approach rooted in cooperation and care. They became not only aid coordinators but also the architects of trust. Women took charge of humanitarian hubs, developed international partnerships, provided psychological support, and offered a strategic vision for recovery.

Yuliia Darnytska concluded:

“The greatest strength of our community lies in mutual support. We have realised that comprehensive defence is not just about weapons; it is about the bonds between people.”

Ellada Bakhtina added:

“When there is a community nearby that acts instead of waiting, that is what defence truly is.”

Thus, Ukrainian communities have proven that comprehensive defence is possible even under the harshest conditions, provided there is trust, leadership, self-organisation, and self-belief.

2.5. Volunteer and Veteran Networks as a Component of Defence

Civil society has become a powerful component of comprehensive defence. Volunteer initiatives, veteran councils, and public associations have evolved into systemic partners for local authorities.

In Nova Odesa, veteran associations are actively involved in logistics, equipment repair, psychological support, and preparing humanitarian shipments.

“The potential of veterans is immense; we are utilising it fully and will do so even more,” noted Olena Khlivna-Andreeva.

In Chernihiv, in partnership with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Community Development Council and the Working Group on Recovery and Social Cohesion, with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), are operational. This exemplifies the integration of the civil sector into strategic planning.

In Kharkiv Oblast, Ellada Bakhtina described a similar dynamic:

“People united not by rank, but by conscience. Veterans, educators, businesses — everyone became part of the defence front.”

2.6. Resources, Human Capital, and Bureaucracy

During the interviews, all respondents highlighted an acute shortage of personnel and resources at the local level, as well as a decline in international aid, which, in some cases, had ceased entirely because cities were occupied and their residents and authorities had relocated.

Yuliia Posternak noted:

“We lost half of our staff because not everyone is willing to work for almost no pay. However, those who remained have become a true team.”

At the same time, rigid bureaucracy complicates operational actions:

“We are working with paper, not with people,” she added.

Ivan Vashchenko emphasized the need for reforms:

“Bureaucracy must be reduced not for the sake of chaos, but out of trust in local authorities. Communities have proven they are capable of making decisions responsibly.”

Respondents from all regions agreed: without decentralised response mechanisms and a real boost to the staffing capacity of local governments, comprehensive defence will remain, in part, an improvisation.

Summary of Chapter 2

Comprehensive defence at the local level in Ukraine is implemented through a combination of formal institutional mechanisms (legislative frameworks, the executive vertical, and coordination with military administrations) and informal practices that emerged in response to wartime challenges. Flexibility, repurposing of resources, and the initiative of local leaders (both men and women) have become the defining factors of efficiency.

The war has transformed communities into pillars of national resilience. It was the local councils and administrations that assumed responsibility for evacuations, setting up of shelters, maintaining critical infrastructure, coordinating humanitarian aid, and working with veterans. In many cases, they acted without centralised instructions, relying on their own decisions, partnerships, and the trust of their citizens.

The role of women in the comprehensive defence system is prominent, though uneven. Women are actively represented in social policy, education, humanitarian aid, and international cooperation, yet their participation in security and defence decision-making remains limited. At the same time, they have become the driving force behind local resilience, organising humanitarian hubs, facilitating communication between the authorities and the community, and coordinating international aid.

The experience of Ukrainian communities proves that preserving and strengthening local self-government institutions is a critical element of the comprehensive defence strategy. It is at this level that the state's direct contact with its citizens is ensured, trust is built, and the human and social capital necessary to guarantee the country's resilience during and after the war is mobilised.

CHAPTER 3. THE SWEDISH EXPERIENCE IMPLEMENTING COMPREHENSIVE DEFENCE AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

3.1. The Concept and Key Principles of Comprehensive Defence in Sweden

In Sweden, the strategy of comprehensive defence is defined by the concept of Comprehensive Defence, meaning that national defence is not only the military's responsibility but involves all sectors of society: civilian, private, and various government agencies. The primary goal is to enhance resilience and the capacity to respond to a wide range of threats, from conventional military ones to hybrid or crisis-related challenges.

The Comprehensive Defence and Heightened Alert Act (1992:1403) defines comprehensive defence as the combined activities of military and civil defence. It mandates that municipalities and regions, under conditions of heightened alert, must implement measures for planning and organising the activities necessary to fulfil their comprehensive defence functions (Tolis, 2018, p.4).

The 2015 reform led to restoring and intensifying comprehensive defence planning by strengthening the civil component. In 2022, a new civil defence structure was introduced: the country was divided into six civil defence areas, with a County Administrative Board responsible for each, and 10 preparedness sectors were established, each overseen by a specific government agency.

In Sweden, local and regional military and civil actors work together within the framework of comprehensive defence. These actors identify five properties of the security network, which serve as the basis for analysing cooperation.

Table 3.1. Properties of the Security Network in Sweden (Tillberg, Berndtsson, & Tillberg, 2025, p. 51)

Dimension	Meaning	Positive aspects	Key Challenges
Structure	Formal organisation, distribution of powers, geographical and institutional boundaries, and management	Establish new cooperation forums and engage a broader range of civilian actors	Role ambiguity, overlapping responsibilities, and varying levels of preparedness across regions

	mechanisms		
Culture	Shared norms, professional identities, communication styles, and the language used between military and civilian actors	Efforts to avoid purely “military” language and cultivating a shared culture of cooperation	Perceived inequality, civilian sense of military dominance, and a lack of understanding of a partner’s logic
Policy	Regulatory and legal frameworks, regulations, actors’ obligations, and information-sharing protocols	Existence of a legal framework and national defence strategies	Lack of specificity at the local level and vague expectations for municipalities
Technology	Communication tools, information systems, and data exchange infrastructure	Presence of secure systems within military structures and developing cyber defence	Civilian actors lack consistent access to relevant technologies; system incompatibility
Relationships	Trust, personal contacts, knowledge of a partner’s capabilities, and a history of cooperation	Personal ties and prior collaborative experience enhance efficiency	Mutual distrust, doubts about a partner’s capabilities, and the expectation that the other side will “fail to deliver”

3.2. The Role of Municipalities in the Comprehensive Defence System

Swedish municipalities (*kommuner*) have a statutory duty to plan for and ensure essential public services even during crises and war. They are responsible for vital services: water supply, local energy, transportation, elderly care, social services, schooling, and local healthcare (shared with the regional level).

The core responsibilities of local authorities include:

- Public warning systems, shelters, and safety measures — ensuring that residents have an action plan, know where to go, and have access to shelters;
- Maintaining vital societal functions — healthcare, energy, water supply, and other critical services during emergencies or periods of heightened alert;
- Contingency planning — local councils develop response plans and coordinate with civil defence authorities and the armed forces;
- Coordination with state and other levels of government — County Administrative Boards coordinate at the inter-municipal level, support smaller municipalities, and interface with national agencies;
- Public support and voluntary organisations — participate in or organise local defence and volunteer groups, training, and information dissemination (Government Offices of Sweden, 2025).

Essentially, their role is to guarantee the resilience of citizens' daily lives in times of crisis, allowing the military to focus on combat missions.

At the same time, Swedish sources also highlight significant challenges municipalities face. For instance, there is a visible disparity in capacity: large municipalities like Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö possess ample crisis management resources, whereas small rural communes are significantly constrained. Additionally, role ambiguity persists: local authorities do not always fully understand what is expected of them within the comprehensive defence framework, as national policy often lacks detail. Technological inequality is also worth mentioning, as municipalities do not always have access to the same communication systems as military or regional authorities. This complicates information exchange [OECD, 2023, p. 37].

3.3. Collaboration with the Military and Regional Authorities

A significant challenge for Sweden's LSG is the cultivation of a "dual understanding": continuing to provide essential public services while simultaneously aligning with military logic and national defence requirements. This necessitates a new management culture, where municipal officials recognise their own role within the defence system and view the military not as a separate domain, but as partners in jointly ensuring the country's security (Tillberg, Berndtsson, Tillberg, 2025, p. 51).

Municipalities operate within a civil-military cooperation network coordinated by the County Administrative Board. This means that local governments must act as a partner to military garrisons while simultaneously collaborating with businesses, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the police, and emergency services.

Practice shows that success depends on personal contacts: where mayors or municipal department heads maintain a close dialogue with the military, cooperation is significantly more effective (Tillberg, Berndtsson, Tillberg, 2025, p. 51).

Summary of Chapter 3

Sweden's Comprehensive Defence represents a seamless system where military and civil sectors operate as mutually reinforcing parts rather than separate entities. This enables creating a multi-layered resilience network, where municipalities serve as the first line of support for the population's vital needs.

Municipalities have been assigned clearly defined mandates, ranging from shelter planning to ensuring water supply, energy, and essential services during crises. Thus, LSG in Sweden is not a "secondary" player, but a central pillar of the Comprehensive Defence concept.

Cooperation is based on the principle of "dual understanding": municipal structures must maintain their own logic (service delivery) while simultaneously accounting for military needs. This transforms management culture and requires local officials to possess specialized knowledge and skills in the field of defence.

Success is ensured by trust and personal contacts. Where established communication channels exist between municipalities and military garrisons, the work proceeds faster and more effectively.

The key lesson for Ukraine is that community resilience in crises is just as vital as the military component. If the population lacks access to schools, healthcare, transportation, or social services, the army will be unable to carry out its tasks effectively.

CONCLUSIONS

Comprehensive Defence is not merely a military strategy, but a multidimensional system of interaction between the state, society, and its citizens. Its effectiveness depends on the society's ability to combine institutional, social, and human resources in a collective effort to ensure security. Ukraine's experience during the full-scale war has confirmed that the local level became the very foundation upon which the state's defence capability, community resilience, and citizens' trust in government rest.

The study shows that Comprehensive Defence in Ukraine is being formed from the bottom up, based on community self-organisation, local leadership initiatives, flexible management, and horizontal interaction between authorities, the military, volunteers, and citizens. In conditions of uncertainty and a lack of centralised instructions, LSG bodies took on key functions, from organising evacuations and humanitarian aid to supporting veterans, communicating with the military, and coordinating international partners.

This experience demonstrates that true Comprehensive Defence begins at the local level, where decisions are made rapidly and people have direct contact with the authorities. The LSG bodies that became the "pillars of resilience" in Ukraine, sustaining the life of communities even during active hostilities.

At the same time, the study identified systemic challenges: blurred lines of authority between LSGs and military administrations; duplication of functions; excessive bureaucratic burden; staffing shortages; and insufficient legal recognition of local government's role within the national security framework. Despite this, the most effective examples of adaptation occur at the local level: communities establish hubs, develop their own response plans, engage veterans and civic initiatives, and secure international support.

The Gender Dimension of Comprehensive Defence

A distinct finding of the study concerns the role of women within the Comprehensive Defence system. Interview data confirm: women have become an integral part of management and humanitarian processes in communities. They lead departments of education, international cooperation, and social policy; coordinate volunteer networks; and organise humanitarian aid and communication with international partners. Female leadership often became the driving force behind stability in crises, combining empathy, accountability, and the ability to respond swiftly.

Women in LSG are not merely executors of social functions, but architects of trust, thanks to whom communities have maintained cohesion and mutual support. However, their involvement in decision-making within the sphere of security and defence remains limited. The majority of respondents noted that women's participation in strategic defence policy or crisis management is still perceived as an exception rather than the norm.

At the same time, the war has created new conditions in which women have become not just participants, but co-authors of transforming the governance system. Their activity in the humanitarian, educational, diplomatic, and social spheres has effectively become part of the state's defence potential. Therefore, the gender component of Comprehensive

Defence should not be auxiliary but integrated, as a fundamental element of management processes, HR policy, and training for LSG personnel.

Comparison with the Swedish Experience

Comparative analysis shows that Ukraine and Sweden face similar challenges in implementing comprehensive defence, yet they possess different levels of institutional maturity. In Sweden, the *totalförsvar* principle relies on a balance between state governance and civic responsibility, whereas in Ukraine, this balance is only beginning to take shape. Crucial for Ukraine is the Swedish concept of “dual-track understanding” at the local level: authorities’ ability to simultaneously perform basic functions (education, social services, life support) and operate within a national security logic, without perceiving the military as a “world apart.”

Ukrainian communities are already naturally moving in this direction: integrating security functions into daily management, establishing crisis headquarters, developing rapid response systems, and actively working with the civic sector and international partners. This process should be codified at the state policy level not as an exception, but as the new norm for modern governance.

Summary

Comprehensive Defence in the Ukrainian reality is, first and foremost, the human dimension of security. Its effectiveness is determined not by the quantity of resources, but by the quality of interaction between the authorities, citizens, the military, business, and international partners. Communities that have learned to collaborate, exchange information, and trust one another demonstrate the highest levels of resilience.

Amidst the ongoing war, Ukraine is creating its own model of comprehensive defence: hybrid, decentralised, and based on mutual support. Its foundation consists of:

- Self-organisation and community initiative;
- Institutional capacity of local authorities;
- Strong volunteer and veteran movements;
- Gender-balanced leadership;
- Partnership between the state and civil society.

The Ukrainian experience proves that comprehensive defence is not merely a matter of defence strategy, but a new culture of governance centred on trust, responsibility, and human dignity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine (NSDC)

Develop and approve a Comprehensive Defence Concept or Strategy for Ukraine that defines the institutional role of LSG within the national security system.

Embed the principle of “comprehensive resilience” into strategic documents as a core component of national defence policy, with clearly defined functions for LSG, military administrations, and central executive bodies.

2. Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine

Refine the regulatory framework for coordination between military administrations and LSG bodies to avoid duplicating powers and ensure rapid decision-making.

Establish resource support mechanisms for communities involved in comprehensive defence activities, including state programs, targeted subventions, and personnel training.

Institutionalise local-level crisis response practices by establishing inter-agency coordination centres and conducting training programs for public officials.

Ensure a gender-responsive approach in all government programs related to national security, defence, and recovery, recognising the role of women in local resilience systems.

3. Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

Amend legislation on LSG and national security to clearly define the competencies of local authorities in comprehensive defence, including crisis management, humanitarian aid, and veteran support.

4. Local Self-Government Bodies

Develop local resilience action plans for crises, specifying responsible departments, logistical routes, communication systems, and military coordination protocols.

Strengthen internal coordination mechanisms between executive bodies, humanitarian hubs, educational institutions, medical facilities, and veteran organisations.

Integrate gender equality principles into local security policies by ensuring women’s participation in crisis management centres, local defence councils, and advisory bodies.

Disseminate effective practices of cooperation with volunteers, civic initiatives, and international partners as a tool for knowledge exchange and strengthening resilience.

5. Civil Society Organisations and International Partners

Facilitate exchanging best practices between communities regarding cooperation models among authorities, the military, and civil society, as well as international knowledge transfer (e.g., Sweden-Ukraine).

Support training programs for local officials and council members, specifically in the areas of crisis management, strategic communications, and inclusive governance.

Promote documenting and disseminating successful practices by women leaders in comprehensive defence as case studies for integrating a gender perspective into future security policies.

REFERENCES

1. Konstytutsiia Ukrainy. (1996). Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady Ukrainy, № 30, st. 141.
2. Zakon Ukrainy «Pro mistseve samovriaduvannia v Ukraini». (1997). Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady Ukrainy, № 24, st. 170.
3. Zakon Ukrainy «Pro spivrobitnytstvo terytorialnykh hromad». (2014). Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady Ukrainy, № 34, st. 1167.
4. Zakon Ukrainy «Pro dobrovilne obiednannia terytorialnykh hromad». (2015). Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady Ukrainy, № 13, st. 91.
5. Zakon Ukrainy «Pro oboronu Ukrainy». (1991). Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady Ukrainy, № 49, st. 668.
6. Zakon Ukrainy «Pro viiskovo-tsyvilni administratsii». (2015). Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady Ukrainy, № 13, st. 85.
7. Zakon Ukrainy «Pro pravovy rezhy m voiennoho stanu». (2015). Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady Ukrainy, № 28, st. 250.
8. Zakon Ukrainy «Pro osnovy natsionalnoho sprotyvu». (2021). Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady Ukrainy, № 39, st. 314.
9. Ukaz Prezydenta Ukrainy № 392/2020 «Pro Stratehiiu natsionalnoi bezpeky Ukrainy». (2020, 14 veresnia). Ofitsiinyi visnyk Prezydenta Ukrainy.
10. Ukaz Prezydenta Ukrainy № 121/2021 «Pro Stratehiiu voiennoi bezpeky Ukrainy». (2021, 25 bereznia). Ofitsiinyi visnyk Prezydenta Ukrainy.
11. Kontseptsiiia reformy mistsevoho samovriaduvannia ta terytorialnoi orhanizatsii vlady v Ukraini. (2014). Kabinet Ministriv Ukrainy.
12. World Economic Forum. (2025). *The Global Gender Gap Report 2025*. Geneva: World Economic Forum.
13. Tolis, C. (2018). *Strategic resilience: A case of collaborative exploration of land-use planning and total defence*. In Proceedings of the Australasian Conference on Information Systems (ACIS 2018 (86)).
14. Victor Tillberg, L., Berndtsson, J., & Tillberg, P. (2025). Navigating Collaboration: Understanding Civil-Military Interactions in Swedish Total Defence From a Security Network Perspective. *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*, 8(1).
15. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2023). *Public Governance Monitor of Sweden*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/086f9b89-en>
16. Government Offices of Sweden. (2024). *Total Defence: The Swedish Approach to Comprehensive Security*. Stockholm: Ministry of Defence.

ANNEX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE FOR REPRESENTATIVES OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT BODIES AND EXECUTIVE AUTHORITIES

1. Defining the Mandate: Roles and Responsibilities in Comprehensive Defence

- In your opinion, what role does your institution or position play in strengthening the community's capacity to respond to war-related challenges (security, evacuation, communication, sheltering, basic services, etc.)?
- What does the concept of "community resilience to wartime challenges" mean to you? Which components do you consider key (infrastructure, people, resources, interaction)?
- Have you received official directives, recommendations, or instructions regarding community preparedness for potential war-related crises? If so, from whom?
- To what extent do you consider the reallocation of functions among local government service units (such as communal enterprises) appropriate during wartime? In your view, what hinders or, conversely, facilitates such flexible task redistribution?

2. Inter-agency Cooperation

- How does the interaction between the city council, the community, and the military/civil-military administration occur regarding defence matters?
- Are there any difficulties in coordinating actions between local self-government bodies and civil-military administrations? If so, what are they specifically?

3. Mandates, Resources, and Challenges

- What specific powers do you exercise within the framework of ensuring community defence?
- Do you have sufficient resources (human, financial, technical) to exercise these powers?
- What are the primary challenges you face in this line of work?
- Are war veterans in your community involved in processes to enhance local safety and resilience? (e.g., as advisors, volunteers, members of working groups, informal experts, etc.)
- How do you assess the potential for veteran participation in such processes at the local level? (In your opinion, what facilitates or hinders this?)

4. Women's Participation in Defence Processes

- Are women involved in decision-making regarding security and defence issues in your community?
- If so, in what positions and with what authority? If not, why do you think that is?
- How do you assess the level of women's representation in your authority within the security sector?

- To what extent, in your opinion, is a gender-responsive approach integrated into defence planning?

5. Legislative and Regulatory Framework

- To what extent, in your opinion, does the existing regulatory framework allow for effectively implementing comprehensive defence at the local level?
- What legislative changes, in your opinion, are necessary to ensure more effective involvement of local authorities and women in defence matters?

6. Case Studies and Narratives

- Could you provide an example of a successful practice in exercising defence powers within your community?
- Have there been instances where women in your community demonstrated leadership in the security sphere?

7. Recommendations

- What changes or measures would you recommend to strengthen the involvement of communities and women in ensuring security?
- Is there anything we haven't asked that you would like to add regarding this topic?