



FIELD HANDBOOK · INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERS

Ukraine Survival Guide

What every foreign volunteer should know before, during and after time in Ukraine: the law, the people, the language, the threats, and how to stay alive and useful.

Published by **Lions of Lviv**, Lviv, Ukraine. Rebuilt and fact-checked from a community "Ukraine Survival Guide" (last community update 26 August 2026). Laws, entry rules and curfews were checked against official and news sources in **October 2026**.

Rules in Ukraine change often under martial law. Check anything that matters to you with official sources before you act. Your organisation's rules and Ukrainian law always come first.

Version 1.2 · October 2026 · English · for civilian volunteers

BEFORE YOU START

How to use this book

This book is for foreigners who come to Ukraine to help: humanitarian and medical volunteers, drivers, trainers, journalists and other civilians. Read Chapters 1 to 3 before you travel. Carry the quick reference cards (Chapter 13) with you.

The boxes you will see

PRO-TIP

Practical advice that makes life easier or safer.

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Advice from people who have worked in Ukraine. It is not official guidance. Check it fits your organisation's rules.

WARNING

A mistake that can get you or others killed, arrested or deported. Read these twice.

REMEMBER

The chapter in a few lines.

CHECK BEFORE YOU GO

A fact that changes often (dates, rules, hours). Confirm it with the source named in the box.

WHAT THIS BOOK DOES NOT COVER

This is a survival and conduct guide, not a combat manual. It is written for civilians and does not cover weapons, tactics or military service. Medical skills beyond basic first aid are in the separate **Combat Medic Handbook** (TCCC 2026).

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Emergency numbers

Number	Service	Call it for
112	General emergency	Any emergency, works from any phone
101	State Emergency Service (DSNS)	Fire, rubble, rescue, mines and unexploded ordnance
102	Police	Crime, road accidents, suspicious people
103	Ambulance	Medical emergencies
104	Gas emergency	Gas smell or leak

PRO-TIP

Operators may not speak English, especially outside big cities. Learn the emergency phrases in Chapter 7 and keep your address written in Ukrainian on your phone's lock screen.

Fill in before you travel

Contact	Number / details
My embassy in Kyiv (24 h)	
My local contact (organisation, host or friend)	
Insurance emergency line + policy no.	
Next of kin at home	
My blood group / allergies	
Address where I stay (in Ukrainian)	

US Embassy Kyiv: +38 044 521 5000; after hours +1 202 501 4444 (September 2026).

CHAPTER 1

Ukraine today: what you are walking into

Ukraine is a country at war. Most of the country lives a normal-looking life, but missiles and drones can hit any city, and the front line and border areas are extremely dangerous.

Martial law

Martial law and general mobilisation have been in force since 24 February 2022. Parliament extends them every 90 days. The current extension runs to **31 October 2026**, and parliament is expected to extend it again.

Under martial law, the authorities can impose curfews, check documents, restrict movement near the front, ban photography of certain objects and limit public events. Expect checkpoints, ID checks and closed areas.

CHECK BEFORE YOU GO

Current martial law end date: news from the Verkhovna Rada (rada.gov.ua) or any major Ukrainian news site.

How dangerous is it?

Every Western government advises against travel to Ukraine. The US advisory is Level 4, "Do not travel" (updated September 2026). Most travel insurance is void in Ukraine unless you buy a war-risk policy.

The UN human rights mission recorded **2,222 civilians killed and 13,058 injured** in January to August 2026 alone, 55% more than the same months of 2025. July and August 2026 were the worst months for civilian casualties since 2022.

Zone	Main threats
Western and central cities (Lviv, Kyiv, Vinnytsia...)	Missile and long-range drone strikes, mostly at night. Power cuts. Normal crime.

Large cities near the front (Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia, Dnipro, Odesa, Mykolaiv, Sumy, Kherson)	All of the above, plus glide bombs, short-warning missiles, frequent strikes, repeat strikes on rescuers.
Front-line zone (about 30 km from the line)	Short-range FPV drones hunting people and vehicles, artillery, mines, chemical irritants. Access restricted.
Liberated and border areas	Mines and unexploded ordnance, booby traps, drones from across the border.
Occupied territory	Do not go. Entry from Ukraine is impossible; entry from Russia is illegal under Ukrainian law.

In August 2026 most civilian casualties came from long-range missiles and drones hitting cities (47%). Near the front, short-range drones were the main killer (30%).

The country in brief

- **Regions:** 24 oblasts (regions), the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and two cities with special status (Kyiv and Sevastopol). Most oblasts are named after their capital city. Exceptions: Volyn (capital Lutsk), Zakarpattia (Uzhhorod), Kirovohrad (Kropyvnytskyi).
- **The Dniro river** runs north to south and roughly divides the country into west and east.
- **Language:** Ukrainian is the only state language. Many people also speak Russian, especially in the east and south, but see Chapter 6 before you use it.
- **Currency:** hryvnia (UAH, ₴).
- **Time zone:** EET (UTC+2), summer EEST (UTC+3).
- **Mains power:** 230 V, European two-pin plugs (type C/F).

Curfew

Almost every region has a night curfew. During curfew you may not be on the street or drive without a special pass. Curfew hours are set by each regional military administration and can change at short notice.

Area (as of 20 August 2026)	Curfew
Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, Vinnytsia, Sumy, Mykolaiv and most other regions	00:00–05:00
Poltava, Cherkasy, Chernihiv, Chernivtsi, Kirovohrad regions	00:00–04:00
Kherson, Donetsk and Luhansk regions	21:00–05:00
Front-line communities (for example within 10 km of the line in Donetsk region)	Much longer, e.g. 15:00–11:00
Zakarpattia region	No curfew

CHECK BEFORE YOU GO

Curfew in the exact town you will be in: the regional military administration's Telegram or website, or ask your local coordinator.

REMEMBER

Martial law is in force everywhere. No place in Ukraine is completely safe from missiles and drones. The closer to the front, the more you depend on local knowledge and discipline. Never go to occupied territory.

CHAPTER 2

Before you go

You do not need an organisation to sponsor you before you come. Many volunteers, including the people who wrote this book, arrived on their own, found a cheap room and met organisations once they were here. What you do need is a plan, insurance that works in a war, and people who know where you are.

Two ways to start

Route	How it works
Arranged in advance	An organisation knows you are coming, gives you a role and often helps with housing. Best for longer stays, skilled work (medical, building, driving) and anyone going near the front.
Independent	You book your own room, often in Lviv or Kyiv, then volunteer with several organisations, meet people and build contacts for a longer trip later. This works well for a first short trip.

Finding organisations

- **volunteeringukraine.com** (in English): an independent guide that lists volunteer opportunities by city, with minimum stays (for example kitchens, rebuilding camps, animal shelters, children's projects), plus pages on entry rules, transport and accommodation. It also has a volunteer chat for meeting people before you arrive.
- Email the organisations you are interested in before you travel, once you have firm dates. Say who you are, what you can do, how long you are staying, and ask if they take short-term volunteers.
- Once you are in Ukraine, ask everyone you meet. Hostels, volunteer kitchens, training sessions and expat groups are where most people find their next role.

Going independent: stay safe

- Register with your embassy or your country's traveller registration (see "Admin at home" below).
- Give a person at home your address, your plans and a check-in schedule, and say what they should do if you go silent.
- Find one local contact quickly (a host, a coordinator, another volunteer) who knows where you are staying.
- Stay in the west or centre of the country until you know people and the situation. Do not travel towards the front on your own; go only with an organisation that has a security plan.
- Book a room close to a shelter, and learn the air alert routine on your first day (Chapter 8).

Checking an organisation

Listings sites do not guarantee an organisation. Check it yourself before you hand over money, documents or your safety:

- Check that a Ukrainian organisation is registered: search its name or registration number (EDRPOU code) in the Ukrainian state register (usr.minjust.gov.ua) or on open-data sites such as Opendatabot or YouControl.
- For foreign charities, check your own country's charity register.
- Ask for references from volunteers who worked with them before.
- Ask what happens if you are injured: who pays, who evacuates you, who tells your family.

WARNING: SCAMS AND BAD ACTORS

The volunteer scene attracts fraudsters: fake fundraisers, people who steal donated vehicles and equipment, fake "medics" and fake military veterans, and people who sell fake visas or sponsorship. Never send money to a private card because of a social media post. Never hand over donated kit without a receipt. If something feels wrong, ask the community you trust and, if a crime was committed, report it to the police (102).

THINKING OF JOINING THE MILITARY?

This book is for civilians. Foreigners who want to serve in the Armed Forces of Ukraine must apply through the official International Legion site, **ildu.mil.gov.ua**. Recruitment is free: anyone asking you for money is a scammer. Check your own country's laws first; some make serving in a foreign army a crime.

Documents

- Passport valid for your whole stay (more if you need a visa). Carry two paper copies and keep a scan in secure cloud storage.
- Visa or e-visa if your nationality needs one (Chapter 3).
- Health insurance valid in Ukraine under martial law (see below).
- If you have one, a letter from an organisation on headed paper, in English and Ukrainian, saying who you are and why you are in Ukraine. If not, carry your accommodation booking and a short written note of your plans.
- International driving permit (1968 Convention) if you will drive, plus green card insurance for your vehicle.
- Prescriptions for any medicine you bring, in your name, signed and stamped by your doctor.
- Vaccination record.

Insurance

Foreigners entering Ukraine must have medical insurance covering their stay, and border guards can refuse entry without it. Ordinary travel policies usually exclude war. Look for a policy that:

- is accepted in Ukraine and covers you under martial law;
- covers hospital treatment, overland medical evacuation (air ambulance is impossible: the airspace is closed) and repatriation of remains;
- covers the regions you will actually be in. Most policies exclude the front line and occupied areas;
- has a 24-hour emergency line that answers in your language.

CHECK BEFORE YOU GO

Minimum cover required at the border (commonly quoted as €30,000): your nearest Ukrainian embassy or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (mfa.gov.ua).

Vaccinations

See a travel clinic at least 6 weeks before you leave.

Who	Vaccines
Everyone	Tetanus, diphtheria, polio (booster if more than 10 years ago); measles-mumps-rubella; seasonal flu and COVID-19 as advised at home
Most volunteers	Hepatitis A; rabies (pre-exposure course, strongly advised if you work with animals or outside cities)
Some volunteers	Hepatitis B (medical work, any contact with blood); tick-borne encephalitis (field work April–November); typhoid (poor sanitation areas)

Admin at home: do it now

- Write a will and decide where you want to be buried (Ukraine or home) if the worst happens. Tell your next of kin.
- Give someone you trust a power of attorney for bank and legal matters.
- Leave your next of kin: your organisation's contact, your insurance details, your embassy's number, and a "proof of life" question only you can answer.
- Register with your country's traveller registration if it has one (for example US STEP, Canada ROCA, Australia Smarttraveller).
- Agree a check-in plan: how often you will message home, and what your family does if you miss two check-ins.

What to pack

Essentials

- Head torch + spare batteries
- Power bank (20,000 mAh or more)
- Offline maps on your phone
- Cash in euros or dollars (clean, undamaged notes)
- Small personal first-aid kit with a real tourniquet (Chapter 10)
- Earplugs and eye mask (sleep through alerts in a shelter)
- Water bottle and purification tablets
- Warm layers even in summer; winter-grade clothing from October to April

Leave at home

- Military-style clothing for city use
- Patches, flags and slogans that make you stand out
- Your own drone (you may not fly it, see Chapter 5)
- Weapons, ammunition, large knives or pepper spray: check Ukrainian law first
- Anything you would hate to lose

WARNING: EXPORT CONTROLS

Night-vision devices, thermal sights, weapon optics and some drones are controlled exports in the US, EU, UK and elsewhere. People have been prosecuted for taking them to Ukraine without a licence. Body armour and helmets also need a licence in some countries. Check with your national export control authority before you pack or ship any of these.

REMEMBER

Arranged or independent, arrive with a plan, insurance that works in a war, your vaccinations and your affairs in order at home. Make sure someone always knows where you are. Check every organisation before you trust it.

CHAPTER 3

Getting in and out

Ukraine's airspace is closed. Everyone arrives by land, usually through Poland.

Visas

- Citizens of the EU, USA, Canada, Australia, Japan and many other countries can stay **90 days in any 180-day period** without a visa.
- British citizens: visa-free for 90 days in 180 under a temporary arrangement confirmed until **30 January 2027**.
- Other nationalities may get an e-visa at **evisa.mfa.gov.ua** (re-opened in February 2025) or must apply at an embassy.
- To stay longer than 90 days, you need a visa and a temporary residence permit. This usually needs a sponsoring organisation or employer.

CHECK BEFORE YOU GO

Visa rules for your passport: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine (mfa.gov.ua) or your nearest Ukrainian embassy. Ukraine has announced an electronic travel authorisation for visa-free visitors; check whether it has started. volunteeringukraine.com also has a plain-English entry rules page for volunteers.

Crossing the border

Main routes from Poland: train from Przemyśl or Chełm, or by road through Medyka–Shehyni, Korczowa–Krakovets or Dorohusk–Yahodyn. There are also crossings from Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova. The Belarus and Russia borders are closed.

- Trains: book with Ukrzaliznytsia (the "UZ" app or uz.gov.ua). Trains are reliable and sell out fast.
- At the border you may be asked for: passport, an immigration card, proof of insurance, proof of funds, your accommodation or your invitation letter. Your fingerprints and photo may be taken.

- Queues for cars and buses can take many hours. Bring water, food and a full phone.
- Answer border guards simply and honestly. Show your invitation letter if you have one, or your accommodation booking.

WARNING

Entering through any crossing not controlled by Ukraine (from Russia, Belarus, or into occupied Crimea, Donetsk or Luhansk) is illegal. It can lead to arrest, a fine and a permanent entry ban.

Dual Ukrainian nationals

If you are also a Ukrainian citizen, Ukraine treats you as Ukrainian. You must enter and leave on your Ukrainian passport.

- Ukrainian men aged 23–60 generally **cannot leave Ukraine** during martial law and can be mobilised.
- Since August 2025 men under 22 may cross the border with a foreign passport and military registration documents.
- Many dual citizens have had serious problems leaving. Get legal advice before you travel.

Bringing medicines

- Normal medicines: up to **5 packs of each** per person.
- Medicines with narcotic or psychotropic substances (strong painkillers such as codeine or tramadol, ADHD medicines, sleeping tablets, some anxiety medicines): only with a prescription in your name, signed and stamped by a doctor, and no more than the prescribed amount. Keep them in the original packaging.
- Larger quantities for an organisation are humanitarian aid and need customs paperwork. Your organisation must arrange it.

Leaving

- Check how many days you have used. Overstaying gives you a fine and can lead to a ban.

- Do not carry military souvenirs: shell fragments, ammunition, military kit or anything taken from the battlefield. It is illegal and can be dangerous.
- Antiques and items of cultural value need export permission.
- Wash all bags and clothes before you leave, and before you fly home: explosive residue on your kit can trigger airport swab tests.

REMEMBER

Enter only through Ukrainian-controlled crossings, usually from Poland. 90 days in 180 for most Western passports. Insurance, prescriptions and an invitation letter in your hand at the border.

CHAPTER 4

Daily life: money, phone, apps, transport

Money

- Cards (Visa, Mastercard, Apple Pay, Google Pay) work almost everywhere in cities.
- Carry some cash in hryvnia for villages, markets and power cuts, when card terminals stop working.
- Exchange at banks or official exchange offices ("Обмін валют"), never with people on the street.
- Card cloning happens. Keep your card in sight and use ATMs inside banks.

Phone and internet

- Buy a Ukrainian SIM (Kyivstar, Vodafone Ukraine or lifecell) at the station, a phone shop or a kiosk. They are cheap. Tourist eSIMs also work.
- A local number is needed for deliveries, taxis, banking and many apps.
- Mobile internet and banking can go down after strikes or cyber attacks. Keep offline maps and some cash.

Apps to install

App	What for
Air Alert ("Повітряна тривога")	The official air raid alert app. Set it to your region. Also: "Air Raid Siren", alerts.in.ua map
Kyiv Digital	Kyiv alerts, shelters near you, transport, power-cut schedule
Google Maps / Organic Maps	Download offline maps of every area you will visit
Ukrzaliznytsia (UZ)	Train tickets

Uklon, Bolt	Taxis (safer than street taxis)
Nova Poshta	Parcels and deliveries
Signal	Encrypted messages with your team
Google Translate	Download Ukrainian for offline use; camera mode reads signs

PRO-TIP

Most official channels (city administrations, regional military administrations) post alerts and updates on Telegram. Follow them, but see Chapter 9 for what not to send on Telegram.

Shopping and deliveries

- **Rozetka** (rozetka.com.ua): large online store, also outdoor gear.
- **Prom** (prom.ua): online marketplace.
- **OLX** (olx.ua): second-hand classified ads. Meet in public, pay on collection.
- **Nova Poshta**: have parcels sent to a Nova Poshta branch using your phone number. You get a message when it arrives; show the code and your ID to collect.

Getting around

- **Trains** are the best way between cities.
- **Marshrutka** (minibus): to stop one, hold your arm straight out to the side. Pay the driver, say your stop loudly ("Na zupyntsi, bud laska" = at the stop, please).
- **Metro** in Kyiv and Kharkiv doubles as an air raid shelter.
- **Driving** is dangerous: high speeds, poor roads, aggressive overtaking, drunk drivers. Avoid driving at night. Zero alcohol limit. After an accident, stay and call 102.
- Look down when you walk: open or loose manhole covers and broken pavements are common, even in central Kyiv and Lviv.

Power cuts

Russian strikes on the power grid cause scheduled and emergency blackouts, especially in winter. Lifts stop, water pumps stop, phone networks weaken.

- Check your region's outage schedule (city app or energy company site).
- Keep power banks charged, a head torch by your bed and water stored.
- Avoid lifts during alerts and outage hours.
- "Invincibility Points" ("Пункти незламності") are public heated places with power, internet and water during long blackouts.

Accommodation

- Choose a place with a shelter or metro station nearby, and not on a top floor.
- Hostels are a cheap start and a good place to meet other volunteers. volunteeringukraine.com lists accommodation and long-term rental tips.
- Hotels range from renovated Western-style rooms to very basic Soviet-era rooms. Ask which you are booking.
- Do not stay next to obvious military, energy or industrial sites.

REMEMBER

Local SIM, offline maps, cash and charged power banks. Install the air alert app and set your region. Trains for long trips; avoid night driving.

CHAPTER 5

The law under martial law

Good intentions are no defence. Every year foreigners are fined, detained or deported for things they did not know were illegal. These are the rules that catch volunteers.

Carry your passport

Carry your passport (not a copy) at all times. Police, the military and border guards check documents, and men are often stopped. If you are detained for not having it, ask for an official report.

Curfew

Being outside during curfew without a pass can mean a fine, a document check at a police station or a night in custody. Plan your evening so you are home before it starts (see Chapter 1).

Photos, video and posting

Under martial law it is a crime to spread information about the movement or location of troops, weapons and equipment (Criminal Code, Article 114-2). The penalty is up to **8 years in prison**. People have been arrested for filming air defence in action over Kyiv.

NEVER PHOTOGRAPH OR FILM

- Air defence firing, missiles or drones in the sky, interceptions
- Strike sites in the first hours, or any site where the authorities ask you not to film
- Military vehicles, positions, checkpoints, soldiers' faces (without permission)
- Power stations, substations, bridges, railway infrastructure, government buildings
- Train stations and trains carrying equipment

If a soldier or police officer tells you to stop filming or delete a photo, do it.

Drones

Flying any civilian drone outdoors is **banned** under martial law without a permit from the authorities, even over private land. Police can seize your drone, and air defence may shoot it down. Do not bring your own drone unless your organisation has the permits.

Weapons and military items

- As a civilian foreigner you may not own or carry firearms.
- Never pick up, keep or carry ammunition, shell parts, mines or military souvenirs. It is illegal and it kills (Chapter 8).

Drugs and alcohol

- Penalties for drugs are severe. Cannabis is illegal for recreational use.
- Drinking alcohol is banned in many public places: public transport, parks, bus stops. Some regions restrict alcohol sales under martial law.
- Drink-driving limit is close to zero (0.2 g/l). Do not drink and drive at all.

The Red Cross emblem

The red cross is a protected emblem. Only the military medical services, the Red Cross Society and organisations authorised by the state may use it. Putting a red cross on your private car, patch or kit without permission is illegal. Use your organisation's own logo.

Working and volunteering

- Unpaid volunteering on a visa-free stay is generally accepted. Paid work needs a work permit and the right visa.
- Humanitarian aid you bring in bulk must go through customs as humanitarian aid. Your organisation handles the paperwork.

Your own country's laws

Your home country's laws still apply to you. Check them for: fighting in a foreign army, export of military and dual-use goods (Chapter 2), carrying cash across borders and fundraising.

If you are detained

- 1 Stay calm and polite. Do not resist.
- 2 Ask to contact your embassy. You have the right to consular access.
- 3 Ask for an interpreter. You have the right to one.
- 4 Ask for a lawyer before you answer questions about a criminal matter.
- 5 Do not sign anything you do not understand.
- 6 Tell your organisation as soon as you can.

Mobilisation officers (TCC)

Territorial recruitment centre (TCC) patrols check Ukrainian men's military registration in the street. As a foreigner, show your passport. Do not film them, do not intervene and do not get involved in arguments.

REMEMBER

Passport always on you. Home before curfew. No photos of air defence, strike sites, soldiers or infrastructure. No drones. No souvenirs. No red crosses. If detained: embassy, interpreter, lawyer, sign nothing.

Culture and respect

You are a guest in a country in mourning. Almost every family has lost someone. Ukrainians are welcoming and remember the foreigners who came to help, but they notice who behaves like a tourist and who behaves like a guest.

Language and politics

- Say **Kyiv**, not "Kiev"; **Ukraine**, not "the Ukraine"; Kharkiv, Odesa, Lviv (Ukrainian spellings).
- Learn a few words of Ukrainian (Chapter 7). Even "Dyakuyu" (thank you) is noticed and welcomed.
- Avoid speaking Russian unless the other person starts. Many Ukrainians speak it, but for many it is now painful. English is fine.
- Do not describe the war as a "conflict between brother nations", do not argue that "both sides" are to blame, and do not joke about it.
- Do not ask people about their losses, their time under occupation or their missing relatives. Listen if they want to talk.

Moments of respect

KNOW THESE

- **09:00 every day:** the nationwide minute of silence for those killed by the war. You may hear an announcement or a metronome. Stop what you are doing and stand still for a minute.
- **Funeral convoys:** when a fallen soldier's funeral procession passes, people stop, cars pull over and many kneel along the road. Stop, stand still, remove your hat. Kneel if those around you kneel.
- **"Slava Ukraini!"** (Glory to Ukraine) is answered with **"Heroyam slava!"** (Glory to the heroes). Use it sincerely, not as a joke or a party slogan.

In people's homes

- Take your shoes off at the door. You will usually be offered slippers.
- Bring something small: chocolate, cake, fruit or something from your country.
- Flowers: give an **odd** number. Even numbers are for funerals and graves.
- Do not shake hands or pass things across a doorway. Step in or out first (an old superstition, but many people follow it).
- Expect to be fed a lot. Try a little of everything.
- Toasts are common. You may drink less or say no politely; "I am working tomorrow" is a good excuse.

Gestures

Gesture	Meaning
Thumb pushed between two fingers ("dulia", the fig)	A rude "you get nothing" or worse. Do not use it.
Flicking your finger against the side of your neck	"Let's drink" or "he's drunk"
Hand held flat at your throat	"I've had enough / I'm fed up"
Arm held straight out to the side at the roadside	Stopping a minibus or taxi

People and regions

Ukrainians often look serious with strangers and do not smile at people they do not know. This is not unfriendliness. Once you are introduced, people are warm, direct and very generous. A greeting ("Dobryi den", good day) when you enter a shop or office goes a long way.

The country is diverse. The west (Lviv, Ternopil) is more Ukrainian-speaking and traditional; the east and south (Kharkiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia, Odesa) have more Russian speakers and have lived much closer to the fighting. People in front-line cities can be blunt and tired. Be patient and do not take it personally.

Behaving as a volunteer

- Follow local leadership. Ukrainians have been doing this since 2014; ask before you suggest.
- Do not photograph people you help, especially children, the wounded or the grieving, without clear permission. Never post them for fundraising without consent.
- Do not harass, chase or pressure local people, romantically or otherwise.
- No drugs, no drunken behaviour in public. Your behaviour reflects on every foreigner here.
- Never take part in, or stay silent about, theft, looting, abuse of prisoners or abuse of civilians. Report it.
- Tip about 10% in restaurants and cafés.

REMEMBER

Kyiv, not Kiev. Avoid Russian. Stand still at 09:00 and for funeral convoys. Shoes off indoors, odd numbers of flowers. Ask before photographing anyone. You are a guest.

CHAPTER 7

Language

Ukrainian uses the Cyrillic alphabet. You do not need to speak it, but reading signs and saying a few phrases will help you, and in an emergency it can save a life.

How to read the pronunciation

Capital letters show the stressed syllable: *DYA-ku-yu* = say "DYA" loudest. **y** in the middle of a word is the short "i" in "sit". **i** is "ee" as in "meet". **kh** is the throaty sound in Scottish "loch". **h** is a soft "h". An apostrophe (') after a consonant makes it soft, as in the "ny" of "canyon".

Basics

English	Ukrainian	Say
Hello (friendly)	Привіт	<i>pry-VIT</i>
Good day (polite)	Добрий день	<i>DOB-ryi den'</i>
Goodbye	До побачення	<i>do po-BA-chen-nya</i>
How are you?	Як справи?	<i>yak SPRA-vy</i>
Thank you	Дякую	<i>DYA-ku-yu</i>
Please / You're welcome	Будь ласка	<i>bud' LAS-ka</i>
Yes / No	Так / Ні	<i>tak / ni</i>
Maybe	Можливо	<i>mozh-LY-vo</i>
Sorry / Excuse me	Вибачте	<i>VY-bach-te</i>
Do you speak English?	Ви розмовляєте англійською?	<i>vy roz-mov-LYA-ye-te an-HLIY-s'ko-yu</i>
I don't understand	Я не розумію	<i>ya ne ro-zu-MI-yu</i>
I / you (polite)	я / ви	<i>ya / vy</i>

Where is...?	Де...?	<i>de</i>
How much is it?	Скільки коштує?	<i>SKIL'-ky KOSH-tu-ye</i>
Water / Food	Вода / Їжа	<i>vo-DA / YI-zha</i>
Toilet	Туалет	<i>tu-a-LET</i>
Here / There	Тут / Там	<i>tut / tam</i>
Wait a moment	Зачекайте / Секунду	<i>za-che-KAI-te / se-KUN-du</i>
Hot / Cold	Гаряче / Холодно	<i>ha-RYA-che / KHO-lod-no</i>
It doesn't matter	Не важливо	<i>ne vazh-LY-vo</i>
I am a volunteer	Я волонтер	<i>ya vo-lon-TER</i>
I am a foreigner (man / woman)	Я іноземець / іноземка	<i>ya i-no-ZE-mets' / i-no-ZEM-ka</i>

Emergency phrases

English	Ukrainian	Say
Help!	Допоможіть!	<i>do-po-mo-ZHIT'</i>
Call an ambulance!	Викличте швидку!	<i>VY-klych-te shvyd-KU</i>
He / she is wounded	Він поранений / Вона поранена	<i>vin po-RA-ne-nyi / vo-NA po-RA-ne-na</i>
Bleeding	Кровотеча	<i>kro-vo-TE-cha</i>
Doctor / Medic	Лікар / Медик	<i>LI-kar / ME-dyk</i>
Hospital	Лікарня	<i>li-KAR-nya</i>
Where does it hurt?	Де болить?	<i>de bo-LYT'</i>
Allergy	Алергія	<i>a-ler-HI-ya</i>

Don't move!	Не рухайтесь!	<i>ne RU-khai-tes'</i>
Shelter / To the shelter!	Укриття / В укриття!	<i>u-KRYT-tya / v u-KRYT-tya</i>
Air raid alert	Повітряна тривога	<i>po-VIT-rya-na try-VO-ha</i>
All clear (alert over)	Відбій тривоги	<i>vid-BIY try-VO-hy</i>
Get down!	Лягай!	<i>lya-HAI</i>
Mines!	Міни!	<i>MI-ny</i>
Fire! (a fire)	Пожежа!	<i>po-ZHE-zha</i>
Drone!	Дрон!	<i>dron</i>
Don't shoot!	Не стріляйте!	<i>ne stri-LYAI-te</i>
Friendly / our side	Свої	<i>svo-YI</i>

Words you will hear near the military

English	Ukrainian	Say
Enemy	Ворог	<i>VO-roh</i>
Left / Right	Ліворуч / Праворуч	<i>li-VO-ruch / pra-VO-ruch</i>
Ahead / Behind	Попереду / Позаду	<i>po-PE-re-du / po-ZA-du</i>
Clear	Чисто	<i>CHYS-to</i>
Attack / Assault	Напад / Штурм	<i>NA-pad / shturm</i>
Minefield	Мінне поле	<i>MIN-ne PO-le</i>
Password	Пароль	<i>pa-ROL'</i>
Helicopter	Гелікоптер / Вертоліт	<i>he-li-KOP-ter / ver-to-LIT</i>
Tank	Танк	<i>tank</i>

Abbreviations you will see

Cyrillic	Latin	Meaning
ЗСУ	ZSU	Armed Forces of Ukraine
ТЦК	TCC	Territorial recruitment centre (mobilisation offices and patrols)
СБУ	SBU	Security Service of Ukraine
ДНС	DSNS	State Emergency Service (rescuers, deminers, call 101)
ДПСУ	DPSU	State Border Guard Service
НГУ / Тро	NGU / TrO	National Guard / Territorial Defence Forces
СБС	SBS	Unmanned Systems Forces (drone branch)
ППО	PPO	Air defence
ЗРК	ZRK	Surface-to-air missile system
РЕБ	REB	Electronic warfare (jamming)
БпЛА	BpLA	Drone (UAV)
КАБ	KAB	Guided glide bomb
СЗЧ	SZCh	Unauthorised absence from a unit (AWOL)
ТОТ	TOT	Temporarily occupied territories
НПЗ	NPZ	Oil refinery
ДТЕК	DTEK	Large energy company (you will see it in power-cut notices)
200 / 300	"dvisti / trysta"	Killed / wounded (radio and slang)

Numbers

#	Ukrainian	Say	#	Ukrainian	Say
0	нуль	<i>nul'</i>	11	одинадцять	<i>o-dy-NAD-tsyat'</i>

1	один	<i>o-DYN</i>	12	дванадцять	<i>dva-NAD-tsyat'</i>
2	два	<i>dva</i>	15	п'ятнадцять	<i>p'yat-NAD-tsyat'</i>
3	три	<i>try</i>	20	двадцять	<i>DVAD-tsyat'</i>
4	чотири	<i>cho-TY-ry</i>	30	тридцять	<i>TRYD-tsyat'</i>
5	п'ять	<i>p'yat'</i>	40	сорок	<i>SO-rok</i>
6	шість	<i>shist'</i>	50	п'ятдесят	<i>p'yat-de-SYAT</i>
7	сім	<i>sim</i>	90	дев'яносто	<i>de-v'ya-NOS-to</i>
8	вісім	<i>VI-sim</i>	100	сто	<i>sto</i>
9	дев'ять	<i>DE-v'yat'</i>	1,000	тисяча	<i>TY-sya-cha</i>
10	десять	<i>DE-syat'</i>	10,000	десять тисяч	<i>DE-syat' TY-syach</i>

13 to 19 end in **-nadtsyat'** (13 trynadtsyat', 14 chotyrynadtsyat'). 21 to 99: say the tens, then the unit: 21 = *dvadtsyat' odyn*, 35 = *trydtsyat' p'yat'*. 60 *shistdesyat*, 70 *simdesyat*, 80 *visimdesyat*.

The alphabet

Watch out for letters that look like Latin letters but sound different: **В** = v, **Н** = n, **Р** = r, **С** = s, **У** = u, **Х** = kh, **И** = y (as in "sit"), **Г** = h.

Letter	Sound	Letter	Sound	Letter	Sound
А а	a (father)	Й й	y (boy)	Ф ф	f
Б б	b	К к	k	Х х	kh (loch)
В в	v	Л л	l	Ц ц	ts
Г г	h	М м	m	Ч ч	ch
Ґ ґ	g (go)	Н н	n	Ш ш	sh
Д д	d	О о	o	Щ щ	shch
Е е	e (bet)	П п	p	Ь ь	softens the letter before it

Є є	ye (yes)	Р р	r (rolled)	Ю ю	yu (you)
Ж ж	zh (measure)	С с	s	Я я	ya (yard)
З з	z	Т т	t	'	apostrophe: short break, as in п'ять
И и	y (sit)	У у	u (food)		
І і	i (meet)	Ї ї	yi (yield)		

The letters Ъ, Ь, Э and Ё are Russian, not Ukrainian. If you see them on a sign or a document, it is in Russian.

CHAPTER 8

Staying safe: air raids, drones, mines and more

Most foreign volunteers who are hurt in Ukraine are hurt by things they could have avoided: ignoring alerts, standing at windows, walking off the road, or staying too long at a strike site.

Air raids

Alerts come through the app, sirens and messages. A ballistic missile can arrive within minutes of the alert, and near the front there may be no warning at all.

- 1 **Alert sounds:** go to a shelter, a metro station or an underground car park. Do not wait to see if "it's serious".
- 2 **No shelter in reach:** use the **two-wall rule**. Go to a corridor, bathroom or stairwell with at least two walls between you and the outside. Stay away from windows and glass.
- 3 **Never** watch or film from a window, balcony or roof. Falling debris from intercepted missiles and drones kills people every month.
- 4 **Stay sheltered** until the all clear ("vidbiy tryvohy"), even if it has gone quiet.
- 5 **Afterwards:** keep away from impact sites and fallen debris. Report unexploded fragments to 101.

PRO-TIP

Sleep in the room of your flat with the most walls between you and the street, not next to the window. Keep shoes, phone, torch, documents and water by your bed so you can move to the shelter in under a minute.

Repeat strikes on rescuers ("double tap")

Russian forces have repeatedly struck the same place again after rescuers, medics and journalists arrived, in Kharkiv, Odesa, Zaporizhzhia, Kramatorsk

and elsewhere. The second strike can come minutes to an hour or more after the first.

- Let the State Emergency Service (DSNS) and ambulance crews lead at a strike site. Follow their instructions.
- If you must help: keep the team small, park facing your exit, stay as short a time as you can, and leave at once if a new alert sounds.
- Do not gather to watch or film.

Drones near the front

Short-range FPV drones now reach 20 km and more behind the front line. They hunt people and vehicles, including clearly civilian and humanitarian ones; the UN has documented drones attacking civilians in Kherson and aid workers in front-line towns. Fibre-optic drones cannot be jammed.

- Only go near the front with an organisation that has a security plan, current local intelligence and permission to be there.
- Travel in the safest hours your local contacts recommend. Move fast, do not stop in the open, keep spacing between vehicles.
- Use routes covered by anti-drone netting where they exist.
- Listen: an FPV drone sounds like a high-pitched buzz or a large insect. When you hear one, get under solid cover immediately (a building, dense trees, a bridge). Do not try to outrun it in the open.
- If your vehicle is targeted, get out and away from it into cover. Vehicles are the main target.
- Do not gather in groups outside. Do not stand around a vehicle to talk.

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE: WHAT THERMAL CAMERAS SEE

- Drones at night see body heat. Only solid overhead cover (concrete, earth, a building, a vehicle body, dense tree cover) reliably hides you.
- Emergency foil blankets, ponchos and sleeping bags warm up within minutes and then show your shape.
- Smoke does not hide you from a thermal camera.
- Torches, phone screens, cigarettes and vapes are seen from far away at night.

Mines and unexploded ordnance

About **133,000 km²** of Ukraine (around one-fifth of the country) is potentially contaminated with mines and unexploded ordnance (State Emergency Service, April 2026). Contamination is worst in Kharkiv, Kherson, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Mykolaiv regions, but mines are still found in Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumy regions too.

THE RULES THAT KEEP YOU ALIVE

- Stay on hard-surface roads and paths that are in daily use. Do not step onto verges, fields, forest, gardens or riverbanks in formerly occupied or front-line areas.
- Do not enter abandoned buildings, trenches or positions.
- **Never touch** any unknown object: ammunition, wires, bags, phones, toys, cans, anything on a body.
- Watch for warning signs: red triangle, skull, "МІНИ" (mines), "Обережно міни" (caution, mines). Also local marks: tied rags, crossed sticks, painted stones.
- Drone-dropped mines and cluster bomblets lie on roads and in towns, sometimes camouflaged with dirt. Small green or brown plastic "butterfly" mines (PFM-1) are designed to look harmless.
- Booby traps have been found in homes in liberated areas: under mattresses, in furniture, on doors, attached to bodies.

If you see a mine or explosive object

- 1 Stop. Do not touch it, do not go closer, do not photograph it close up.
- 2 Remember where it is (landmarks, not your GPS walk).
- 3 Go back exactly the way you came, stepping in your own footprints.
- 4 Call **101** and warn others.

If you realise you are in a minefield

Stop. Do not move your feet. Call for help (101 or your team). Wait for deminers. If someone is hurt by a mine, do not run to them: rescuers become the next casualties.

Chemical threats

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has confirmed the use of the riot-control agent CS in Ukraine, and Ukraine reports chloropicrin and other agents dropped on trenches and shelters by drones. Civilians near the front can be exposed.

- **Signs:** sudden burning eyes, coughing, choking, a strange smell, a cloud from a grenade dropped by a drone.
- **Action:** put on a mask if you have one. Move **upwind and uphill**, out of basements and trenches: many agents are heavier than air and collect low down.
- Remove contaminated outer clothing, wash skin with lots of water and rinse eyes for 15 minutes. Do not rub your eyes. Get medical help.

Crime and scams

- Pickpockets work stations, markets and crowded transport.
- Drink spiking happens. Do not leave drinks unattended or accept drinks from strangers.
- Use app taxis rather than taxis waiting at stations.
- Do not leave documents, money or kit visible in a car. Vehicle theft is common.
- Fake flat rentals and dating scams target foreigners. Never pay a deposit for a flat you have not seen.
- Report crime to 102.

Detention by enemy forces

The risk is highest near the front and the border. Foreign humanitarian volunteers have been detained by Russian forces before; one British aid worker, Paul Urey, died in Russian-controlled detention in 2022. Never go towards occupied territory and never trust a "local guide" who offers to take you there.

REMEMBER

Alert = shelter, every time. Two walls between you and the street. Never film the sky. Leave strike sites quickly. Near the front, solid overhead cover beats everything. Stay on the hard road, touch nothing, call 101.

Security of information (OPSEC)

Russian intelligence watches social media, dating apps and phone networks. A photo posted at the wrong moment can bring a missile onto a building full of people.

The ten rules

- 1 **Never post where you are while you are there.** If you post, do it days later, after you have left, and never from military sites.
- 2 **Check the background** of every photo: street signs, shop names, landmarks, windows, vehicles, soldiers' faces, unit patches.
- 3 **Turn off location** on your camera and apps. Turn off fitness trackers (Strava and others) and "find my friends" sharing.
- 4 **Blend in.** Civilian clothes in cities, a plain backpack, no patches or slogans. Don't talk loudly in English about your work in public places.
- 5 **Move in pairs** and always tell someone where you are going and when you will be back.
- 6 **Assume your calls and ordinary messages can be intercepted.** Use Signal with disappearing messages for work. Ukraine banned Telegram on government and military devices in 2024 because of the Russian intelligence risk; use Telegram to read news, not to talk about work.
- 7 **Near the front, phones give away positions.** Follow your organisation's phone rules: off, flight mode, or left behind.
- 8 **Talk less.** Do not share names, unit numbers, locations or plans of soldiers or volunteers, even with friendly strangers. Be wary of people who ask too many questions, online or in person.
- 9 **Keep your phone clean.** Strong screen lock, encrypted backup, and no sensitive photos or contacts you would not want an enemy checkpoint to find.
- 10 **Vary your routine.** Do not take the same route at the same time every day. Trust your instincts: if something feels wrong, leave.

WARNING

Posting the location of a strike, of air defence or of troops is not only dangerous, it is a crime under martial law (Chapter 5).

REMEMBER

Post late or not at all. Location off. Signal for work. Phones off near the front. Say less than you think you need to.

CHAPTER 10

First aid essentials

Most people who die of wounds die from bleeding, in the first minutes, before a doctor can reach them. The person next to them can often stop it. Every volunteer in Ukraine should carry a tourniquet and know how to use it.

SCOPE

This chapter is first aid for everyone, consistent with the TCCC Guidelines 2026 (all service members level). Airway devices, needle decompression, IV access and drugs are skills for trained medics: see the **Combat Medic Handbook**. A book does not replace hands-on training: take a practical course (for example TCCC All Service Members, Stop the Bleed or a Red Cross course) before you travel.

Your personal kit

Item	Why
1–2 genuine tourniquets	Life-threatening limb bleeding
Hemostatic or plain packing gauze	Packing deep wounds
Pressure (emergency) bandage	Holding pressure on a wound
Vented chest seals (pair)	Holes in the chest or back
Gloves, trauma shears, marker, tape	Protect yourself, cut clothes, write the tourniquet time
Hypothermia blanket	Every wounded person gets cold
Rigid eye shield	Eye injuries
Your own medicines + paracetamol	Personal needs

Carry the tourniquet where **both hands** can reach it, on your belt or chest, not in an ankle pocket: mines and drones often injure the legs.

WARNING: FAKE TOURNIQUETS

Counterfeit tourniquets are common and they break under load. Signs of a fake: a very low price, poor stitching, a flimsy or unmarked windlass and buckle, missing or misspelled printing. Buy only from the manufacturer or an authorised dealer. The CoTCCC recommends: **CAT Gen 7, SAM-XT, SOF-T Wide, TMT, RMT-Tactical, TX2 and TX3.**

Ukrainian-made tourniquets are also widely used by the Ukrainian army. Never carry a training (often blue) tourniquet as your real one. If you find a fake, destroy it so it is not passed on.

First: stay alive yourself

- Do not run to a casualty while shooting, shelling or a drone threat continues. A dead rescuer saves nobody.
- Near a strike site, think "second strike" (Chapter 8). Near mines, do not step off the path to reach someone.
- Call 103 or 112, or get someone else to call.
- Wear gloves if you have them.

MARCH: the order of treatment

M

Massive bleeding

Tourniquet, wound packing, pressure. This kills fastest.

A

Airway

Unconscious and breathing: recovery position.

R

Respiration

Seal holes in the chest; watch breathing.

C

Circulation

Stop other bleeding; look for shock.

H

Hypothermia & head

Keep warm; protect a head or eye injury.

M · Massive bleeding

When to use a tourniquet

- Bright red blood spurting or pouring from an arm or leg
- Blood pooling on the ground or soaking quickly through clothes
- A limb amputated or partly amputated
- Bleeding that does not stop with firm pressure

How to apply it

- 1 In danger, or if you cannot see the wound: put it **high and tight** on the limb, as high as possible. When safe and you can see the wound: 5–7 cm (2–3 in) above it, not on a joint.
- 2 Pull the strap as tight as you can before you turn the windlass.
- 3 Turn the windlass until the bleeding stops. It will hurt; that is normal.
- 4 Lock the windlass and secure the strap.
- 5 Write the time on the tourniquet (or the casualty's forehead) with a marker.
- 6 If bleeding does not stop: put a second tourniquet side by side, just above the first. Never below.

Tourniquets work on children too. The TCCC 2026 guidelines require every tourniquet to be reassessed as early as safely possible, ideally within 2 hours, by a medic or trained person. Do not loosen or remove a tourniquet yourself unless you are trained to do so; get the casualty to medical care.

Wound packing (neck, armpit, groin, deep wounds)

- 1 Find the bleeding point at the bottom of the wound.
- 2 Push gauze in, fold by fold, until the wound is full and tight. Hemostatic gauze works best; plain gauze or a clean cloth works too.
- 3 Press hard on top with both hands for at least **3 minutes**.
- 4 Wrap a pressure bandage tightly over it. Leave the end of the gauze visible so a surgeon can find it.

A · Airway

An unconscious person who is breathing should be rolled into the **recovery position** (on their side, top knee bent forward, head tilted back slightly) so blood and vomit drain out of the mouth. A conscious casualty can sit in whatever position helps them breathe.

R · Respiration (breathing)

- Every hole in the chest or upper back gets a **vented chest seal**. Look for an exit wound and seal it too.
- No chest seal? Use plastic or a glove, taped down on all sides.
- If breathing gets worse after the seal is on (more breathless, panicking, blue lips), lift one edge of the seal to let air out ("burp" it), then get a medic urgently: this may be a tension pneumothorax.

C · Circulation and shock

Signs of shock: pale, cold, sweaty skin; fast weak pulse; fast breathing; confusion, drowsiness; thirst. Stop all bleeding, keep the casualty lying flat and warm, and get them to a hospital fast.

H · Hypothermia and head

Cold blood does not clot well. Keep every wounded person warm, even in summer: get them off the ground, remove wet clothes if possible, wrap them in a hypothermia blanket and cover the head. A person with a head injury who is unconscious goes in the recovery position; watch their breathing.

Other injuries

Burns

- Stop the burning: smother flames, remove the person from the source, brush off dry chemicals and rinse off wet ones.
- Small burns: cool with cool running water for up to 20 minutes. Do not keep cooling large burns: the casualty gets dangerously cold.

- Cover with a clean dry dressing or cling film. No creams, butter or oil.
- Burns to the face, singed nose hair or a hoarse voice: the airway can swell over the next hours, even if the person seems fine. They need a hospital now.
- **White phosphorus** and incendiaries keep burning while air reaches them. Keep the area covered with water, wet cloths or wet mud. Remove visible particles if you can do it without touching them with bare skin. Do not use oily dressings.

Eye injuries

Do not press on the eye. Tape a rigid eye shield (or the bottom of a cut plastic cup) over the injured eye. If something is stuck in the eye, do not remove it; pad around it and cover it with the shield.

Belly wounds with organs outside

Do not push organs back in. Cover them with a clean, moist dressing (sterile saline or clean water) and loosely bandage. Keep the dressing wet.

Broken bones

- 1 Check the hand or foot for pulse, warmth and feeling.
- 2 Splint the limb in the position you find it, with anything stiff, covering the joint above and below the break.
- 3 An arm can be strapped to the chest.
- 4 Check pulse and feeling again after splinting. If it is gone, loosen the splint.

CPR

- **Not from injury** (collapse, drowning, electrocution, cold): call for help, then push hard and fast in the centre of the chest, 5–6 cm deep, 100–120 times a minute. If trained, give 2 breaths after every 30 compressions; if not, compressions only. Use an AED if one is available.
- **After blast or gunshot wounds**, a person with no pulse and no breathing almost never survives CPR in the field. TCCC does not recommend it there, especially when other casualties need you.

Medicines for the wounded

- Do **not** give aspirin, ibuprofen or most other anti-inflammatory painkillers to a bleeding casualty: they make bleeding worse.
- Paracetamol is safe. The Ukrainian army's soldier pill pack is paracetamol 1000 mg + meloxicam 15 mg + an antibiotic (moxifloxacin 400 mg or levofloxacin 500 mg), taken as soon as possible after a wound.
- Civilians: get the casualty to a hospital rather than giving antibiotics yourself.

Myths and truths

Myth	Truth
A belt works as a tourniquet.	Without a windlass (a stick twisted to tighten it), a belt cannot stop arterial bleeding. Improvised tourniquets often fail. Carry a real one.
Tampons are great for bullet wounds.	They swell at the surface and do not reach the bleeding point. Pack the wound with gauze or cloth instead.
A tourniquet always costs the limb.	A tourniquet on for under 2 hours rarely causes serious harm. Not using one costs lives.
A pulse oximeter is always right.	It can be wrong in shock, cold, carbon monoxide poisoning and when the casualty moves.

REMEMBER

Safety first. Massive bleeding first: tourniquet high and tight, pack and press. Recovery position for the unconscious. Seal chest holes. Keep everyone warm. No aspirin or ibuprofen for the wounded. Get trained before you go.

Health, weather and wildlife

Diseases to know about

Disease	How you get it	Protect yourself
Tick-borne encephalitis (TBE)	Tick bites (mainly April–November); also raw milk and cheese from infected goats, sheep or cows	Vaccine (3 doses; quick schedules exist), repellent, long trousers tucked into socks, check for ticks daily, no unpasteurised dairy
Lyme disease	Tick bites	Remove ticks early; see a doctor if a spreading red rash or fever follows a bite
Rabies	Bite, scratch or lick on broken skin from dogs, cats, foxes, bats. Found across Ukraine.	Pre-exposure vaccine; do not touch stray or wild animals; after any bite, wash 15 min with soap and water and get treatment the same day
Hantavirus	Breathing dust from mouse and rat droppings (cellars, sheds, abandoned buildings). Dozens of cases a year in Ukraine.	Spray droppings with disinfectant and wipe; never sweep dry. Gloves and a mask.
Leptospirosis	Rodent urine in water or wet soil, through cuts or by drinking	Gloves, cover cuts, do not drink untreated water (even from forest springs)
Hepatitis A, cholera and other gut infections	Dirty water and food, especially where water systems are destroyed. Outbreaks have been reported in occupied areas.	Hepatitis A vaccine, treat all water, wash hands

Tuberculosis, HIV, hepatitis B and C	Ukraine has high rates of TB (including drug-resistant TB) and HIV	Gloves for any contact with blood; condoms; after a needle-stick or blood splash, get medical advice within hours (HIV prevention works best within 72 h)
Measles, polio, diphtheria	Outbreaks in recent years	Make sure your routine vaccinations are up to date

REMOVING A TICK

Grip it with fine tweezers as close to the skin as possible and pull straight out, slowly. Do not twist, burn it or cover it with oil. Clean the skin, note the date, and watch for a rash or fever for 4 weeks.

Water and food

- Bottled water is safest. In damaged or front-line areas, treat all water.
- **Boil:** a rolling boil for 1 minute.
- **Bleach:** 2 drops of plain unscented household bleach (5–6%) per litre, wait 30 minutes. Double it if the water is cloudy or very cold.
- **Iodine:** 5 drops of 2% tincture per litre, wait 30 minutes.
- **Tablets and filters:** follow the instructions. A filter plus chemical treatment is best.
- Do not accept open food or drink from people you do not know, especially near the front.
- Do not eat wild mushrooms or berries unless an expert local identifies them. Mushroom poisoning kills people in Ukraine every year.

Heat

Summers in Ukraine reach 35 °C and more. Heat illness is a spectrum and can move from mild to deadly in minutes.

Stage	Signs	Do this
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Heat cramps	Painful muscle cramps, heavy sweating	Shade, rest, drink water with salts, loosen clothes
Heat exhaustion	Heavy sweating, pale cool skin, dizziness, headache, nausea, weakness, fast breathing	All of the above plus active cooling: wet the skin and fan, cold packs at neck, armpits and groin
Heat stroke	Confusion , strange behaviour, collapse or seizures; hot skin (may be dry or sweaty)	Emergency. Cool immediately: immerse in cold water up to the neck if possible, or cover with sheets soaked in ice water and keep them cold. Call 103. Do not wait for the ambulance to start cooling.

Cold

Winters reach -20°C and power cuts can leave homes unheated. Cold is also dangerous at temperatures above freezing when you are wet.

Hypothermia

Signs: shivering, clumsiness, slurred speech, confusion; later shivering stops and the person becomes drowsy. Get them out of wind and wet, remove wet clothes, wrap them in dry insulation and a windproof layer, and warm the trunk first (heat packs in armpits, chest and groin, not on bare skin). Give warm sweet drinks only if fully alert. No alcohol.

Frostbite

Skin goes white or grey-yellow, hard and numb. Do not rub it. Do not use fire, stoves or heaters on numb skin: it burns easily. Rewarm in warm (not hot) water only when there is no risk of it freezing again. Get medical care.

Trench foot (immersion foot)

Feet that stay wet and cold for many hours, even at $10\text{--}15^{\circ}\text{C}$, are damaged. First they go numb, cold and pale, then red, swollen and painfully burning; blisters and gangrene can follow.

- Prevention: dry socks every day (carry spares in a waterproof bag), dry and air your feet whenever you can, foot powder, do not sleep in wet

boots.

- Wool or synthetic socks wick sweat; plain cotton does not. Neoprene socks only with a liner and only when not marching.
- Treatment: clean and gently dry the feet, keep warm and raised, do not rub or massage, do not walk on them. See a medic.

Staying warm in winter

- Heat one small room, not the whole flat. Close unused doors, hang blankets over doors and windows, put rugs or cardboard on the floor.
- Seal draughts with tape or plastic sheet.
- Dress in layers; wear a hat indoors and sleep in a good sleeping bag. Eat more calories, especially fat.

WARNING: CARBON MONOXIDE

Never run a generator, gas stove, barbecue or charcoal heater inside, or a stove without a working chimney. Carbon monoxide has no smell and kills people in their sleep every winter. A cheap battery CO alarm is worth packing.

Clothing near the front

- Synthetic fabrics (nylon, polyester, acrylic, fleece) melt into the skin in fire and blasts. Prefer flame-resistant clothing (Nomex, modacrylic, aramid), then wool or cotton.
- Gore-Tex keeps rain out but also keeps sweat in. Change socks often.
- Civilian volunteers should not wear military uniform or camouflage; it can make you a target.

Wildlife

Snakes

Ukraine has two venomous snakes: the **common adder** (*Vipera berus*), found in forests and wetlands across most of the country, about 60 cm long with a dark zigzag down the back; and the much rarer **steppe viper** (*Vipera renardi*)

in the southern and eastern steppe. Bites are painful and cause swelling but are rarely fatal.

Bite: keep the person still and calm, take off rings and watches, keep the limb still and at heart level, and go to hospital. Do not cut, suck, apply ice or put on a tourniquet.

Karakurt spider

The karakurt or European black widow (*Latrodectus tredecimguttatus*) lives in the south. It is small (about 1–2 cm), black, often with 13 red or orange spots. Most bites happen in fields at harvest time. The bite causes severe pain, cramps and sweating; it is rarely fatal today but needs a hospital.

Plants

Giant hogweed (Sosnowsky's hogweed) grows along roads and rivers: a huge plant with white umbrella-shaped flowers. Its sap causes severe burns when the skin is then exposed to sunlight. Do not touch it.

REMEMBER

Vaccinate: routine, hepatitis A, rabies, TBE for field work. Any animal bite = hospital today. Treat water. Heat stroke = cool first, then call. Dry socks every day. Never burn fuel indoors without ventilation.

Stress, burnout and coming home

This war is a marathon, not a sprint. The volunteers who help the most over the years are the ones who rest. Even soldiers get leave.

What causes it

Your first strike or first death, mass casualties, injured or dead children, losing a friend or teammate, feeling helpless, constant alerts and broken sleep, and the guilt of leaving when others cannot.

Warning signs

- Irritability and anger
- Anxiety, always on edge
- Poor concentration, bad decisions
- Trouble sleeping, nightmares
- Not eating, or drinking more alcohol
- Guilt, numbness, no interest in anything
- Wanting to be alone all the time
- Taking unnecessary risks

These can start straight away or months or years later.

What helps

- Sleep, food, water and movement. Protect your sleep with earplugs and a routine.
- A buddy you check on, and who checks on you.
- Talking soon after a bad event in a small group ("defusing"), and a fuller conversation in the days after ("debriefing").
- Limiting alcohol. It helps you sleep for one night and makes everything worse after that.
- Planned breaks out of Ukraine. Many long-term volunteers go home for part of the winter to rest and resupply.
- Peer support and professional counselling. Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Coming home

Home can feel strange: people worry about small things, nobody understands, and you may miss the intensity of Ukraine. That is common. Give yourself time, stay in touch with people who were there, and get professional help if sleep, anger, drinking or low mood do not improve within a few weeks. Your country's veterans' or trauma services can often help volunteers too.

IF YOU OR SOMEONE ELSE IS IN DANGER

If you have thoughts of harming yourself, tell someone today and contact a crisis line in your home country or an emergency number. In Ukraine, Lifeline Ukraine (7333) supports veterans and their families (mainly in Ukrainian).

Quick reference cards

Emergency numbers

112 all emergencies · **101** rescue, fire, mines · **102** police · **103** ambulance · **104** gas

Air raid alert

1. Go to a shelter or metro now.
2. No shelter: two walls between you and the street, away from glass.
3. Never watch or film from windows or balconies.
4. Stay until the all clear ("vidbiy").
5. Stay away from impact sites; expect a second strike.

Mine or explosive object

1. Stop. Touch nothing.
2. Remember the place.
3. Back out in your own footsteps.
4. Call 101. Warn others.

Casualty

1. Safe to approach? Think drones, second strike, mines.
2. Call 103 / 112.
3. Massive bleeding: tourniquet high and tight; pack and press 3 min.
4. Unconscious and breathing: recovery position.
5. Chest hole: seal it; burp if breathing worsens.
6. Keep warm. Write the tourniquet time.

Ten words that matter

Help!	Допоможіть!	<i>do-po-mo-ZHIT'</i>
Ambulance!	Швидку!	<i>shvyd-KU</i>
Wounded	Поранений	<i>po-RA-ne-nyi</i>
Shelter	Укриття	<i>u-KRYT-tya</i>
Mines!	Міни!	<i>MI-ny</i>
Don't shoot!	Не стріляйте!	<i>ne stri-LYAI-te</i>
Friendly	Свої	<i>svo-YI</i>
I'm a volunteer	Я волонтер	<i>ya vo-lon-TER</i>
Thank you	Дякую	<i>DYA-ku-yu</i>
Please	Будь ласка	<i>bud' LAS-ka</i>

Pre-departure checklist

- ☐ Plan made (organisation lined up, or room booked and organisations emailed); local contact saved
- ☐ Passport valid, visa or visa-free days checked
- ☐ Insurance valid in Ukraine under martial law, evacuation included
- ☐ Vaccinations done (routine, hepatitis A, rabies, TBE if needed)
- ☐ Prescriptions for my medicines; no more than 5 packs each
- ☐ Will, power of attorney, next-of-kin plan, check-in schedule
- ☐ Export rules checked for any optics, drones, armour
- ☐ Genuine tourniquet and first-aid course done
- ☐ Air alert app, offline maps, Signal installed
- ☐ Emergency numbers page filled in

CHAPTER 14

Sources

Facts that change were checked in October 2026 against these sources. Check them again before you rely on them.

- Community "Uke Survival Guide" (last update 26 August 2026): original material this book was rebuilt from.
- Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine: martial law and mobilisation extension to 31 October 2026 (reported by Mezha, 14 July 2026).
- US Department of State: Ukraine Travel Advisory, Level 4 (issued 28 August 2026, updated 3 September 2026), travel.state.gov.
- UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office: Ukraine travel advice, entry requirements and safety pages, gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/ukraine.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine (mfa.gov.ua) and e-visa portal (evisa.mfa.gov.ua).
- Volunteering Ukraine (volunteeringukraine.com/en): volunteer opportunity listings and travel information, checked October 2026.
- International Legion for the Defence of Ukraine: official recruitment site, ildu.mil.gov.ua (checked October 2026).
- Regional curfew hours: Visit Ukraine summary of regional military administration orders (updated 20 August 2026).
- UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine: Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, August 2026.
- State Emergency Service of Ukraine, Department of Mine Action: 133,300 km² potentially contaminated (Ukraine Media Center, 2 April 2026).
- Criminal Code of Ukraine, Article 114-2 (dissemination of information on troop and weapons movements under martial law).
- Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine resolution of 26 August 2025 on border crossing by men under 22 (Komersant).
- State Customs Service of Ukraine: rules on importing medicines (reported January 2024).
- Rules on civilian drone flights under martial law (Sud.ua, 2026).
- Law of Ukraine on the nationwide minute of silence at 09:00.
- Ukraine's ban on Telegram on government and military devices (National Security and Defence Council, September 2024).
- Norwegian Institute of Public Health: travel vaccine advice for Ukraine; US CDC travel health notices.
- Ukrainian Public Health Center and regional health authorities: hantavirus and leptospirosis reports, 2026.
- OPCW reports on riot-control agent (CS) use in Ukraine, 2024–2025.

- Committee on Tactical Combat Casualty Care: TCCC Guidelines 2026; and the Combat Medic Handbook v1.1 (this project).
- Ukrainian Ministry of Defence Order No. 506 (24 July 2024): individual first-aid kit and pill pack contents.

KEEP THIS BOOK ALIVE

Rules, curfews and threats change every few months. If you find something out of date or wrong, tell the person who gave you this book so the next volunteer gets the right information.

ABOUT US

Lions of Lviv



Lions of Lviv is a community dedicated to learning, service and resilience. We educate, empower and connect people in Ukraine through free public sessions, workshops and volunteer opportunities.

Our founder is a certified Tactical Combat Casualty Care (TCCC) instructor who has trained students, civilians, volunteers and military since 2024 to respond to trauma, bleeding and crisis situations. In a region under threat, these skills are not optional: they are essential.

TRAIN WITH US

Take a hands-on first aid and bleeding-control session when you arrive in Lviv. New in town? Our free sessions are a good place to meet other volunteers and local organisations.

Facebook: facebook.com/lionsoflviv