

KHARKIV INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH  
KHARKIV HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP

# THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS

REPORT ON THE RESEARCH RESULTS



The research was commissioned and funded by the  
Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group within the project  
'Developing a comprehensive and holistic approach to providing  
assistance  
to missing persons and their families'

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The report contains the results of research on the key needs of the families of missing persons, their awareness of the rights, guarantees and procedures for searching for missing persons; sources of information on available services and guarantees; barriers to obtaining such services; assessment of the work of state bodies with missing persons and relatives; services available to support the families of the deceased and those who have been found; the most problematic issues of concern to the families of missing persons.

The results of the research will be of interest, first of all, to state authorities and representatives of civil society working on the issue of missing persons, as well as to all interested parties.

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# INTRODUCTION

Families of missing persons are usually in a legal and information vacuum, lacking the knowledge and means to search for their loved ones. This creates a sense of helplessness and impunity for the Russian aggressors. Although state authorities can provide certain types of assistance to the families of the missing persons, such assistance is clearly insufficient due to the unpreparedness of the Ukrainian state system to deal with such a large number of crimes. As a result, the families of the missing persons do not receive clear instructions and algorithms of action, their appeals are not considered or are considered with delays.

The research of the problems of families of missing persons, which has never been conducted in Ukraine before, was intended to show the real scale of the problem, the real needs of families of missing persons, and the ways of solving them as seen by the families themselves. Today, families remain in the shadows, unheard and often unseen. The sociological research aims to establish the general level of awareness of the rights, guarantees and procedures for searching for missing persons; sources of information about available services and guarantees; barriers to obtaining such services; assessment of the work of state bodies with missing persons and relatives; services available to support the families of the deceased and those who have been found; and the most problematic issues of concern to the families of the missing.

The results of the research will be of interest, first of all, to state authorities and representatives of civil society working on the issue of missing persons, as well as to all interested parties.

# METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods:

1. A survey of 500 family members of missing persons by telephone using a specially developed questionnaire. Respondents were identified through partner NGOs that provide various services to such families. The survey allowed us to study the extent of the difficulties faced by relatives of missing persons, identify the most priority and significant ones, and assess the effectiveness of various state institutions working in this area. The survey was conducted from May to June 2024, with respondents representing most regions of Ukraine, except for the temporarily occupied territories.

2. 30 in-depth interviews were conducted: 10 with experts (representatives of state authorities, NGOs) and 20 with family members of missing persons. This allowed us to explore various aspects of the current problems and identify possible solutions aimed at humanising and improving the effectiveness of providing assistance to the families of missing persons.

# SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

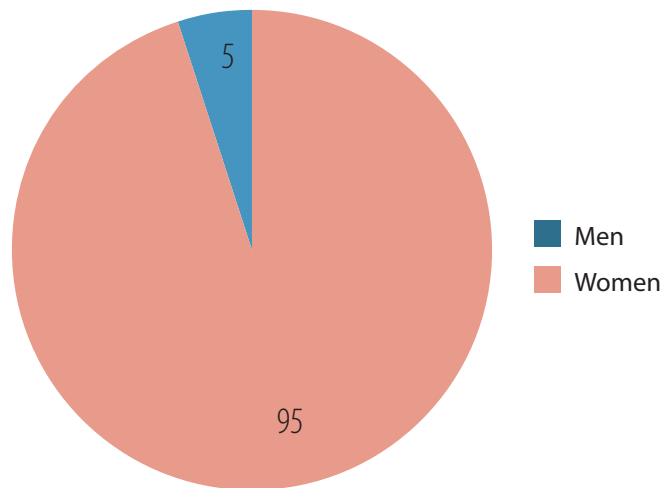


Fig. 1

## Gender of respondents

(in % of respondents)

Almost all respondents are women. There are only about 5% of men among the respondents.

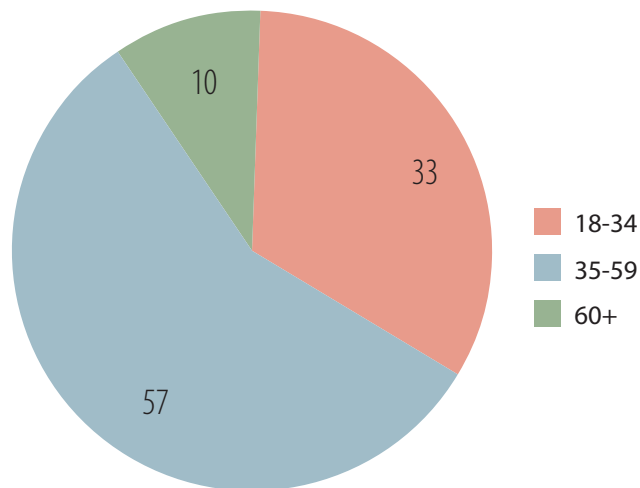


Fig. 2

## Age of respondents

(in % of respondents)

Respondents in the age group 35-59 years predominate among the respondents (57%). More than a third of respondents are young people aged 18 to 34. Every tenth respondent is 60 years old or older. The maximum age of respondents is 79 years. The average age is 43 years.

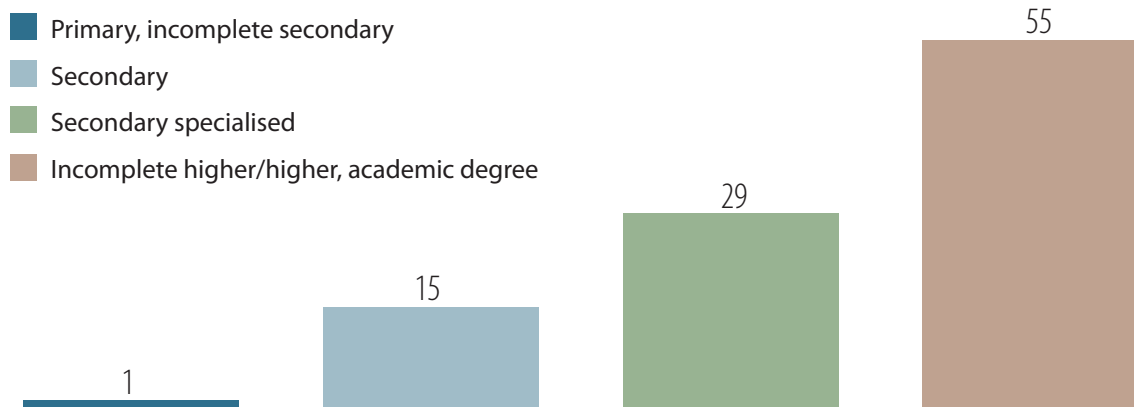


Fig. 3

**Level of education of respondents**

(in % of respondents)

More than half of the respondents have incomplete higher/higher education or an academic degree. 29% have secondary specialised education, 15% have secondary education. Less than 1% of respondents have primary or incomplete secondary education.

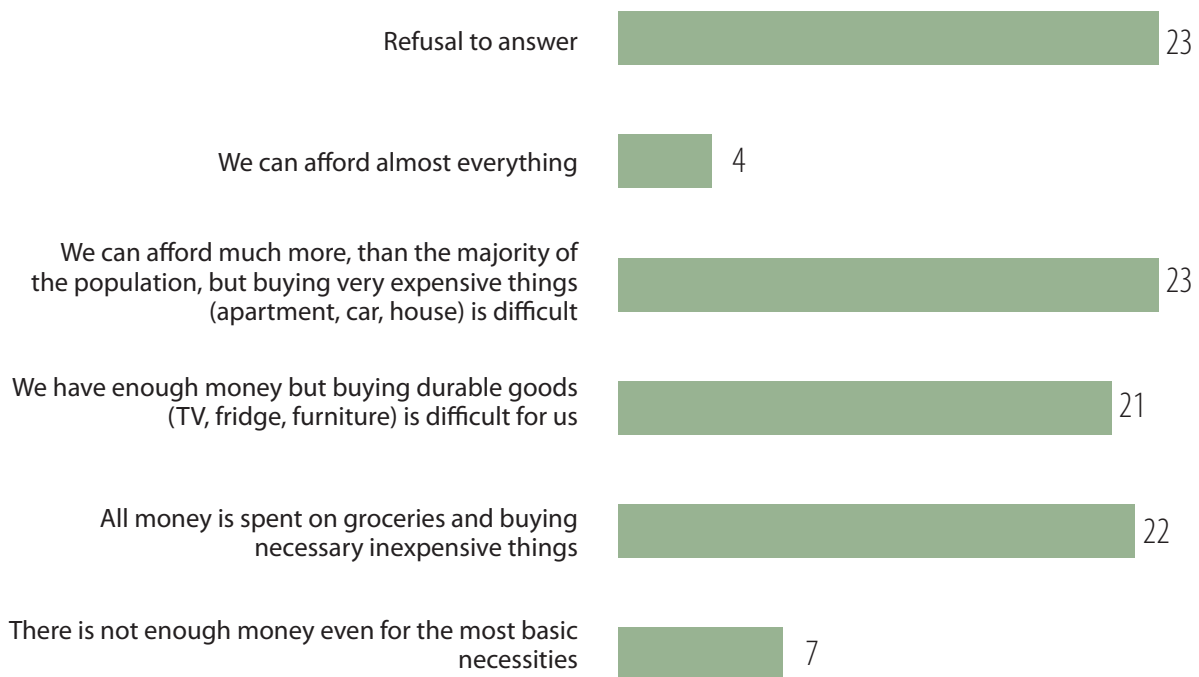


Fig. 4

**Financial situation of respondents**

(in % of those who responded)

About a third of respondents said they had a poor financial situation – 7% do not have enough money even for the most basic necessities, 22% spend all their money on food and inexpensive items. 27% have an average or high income and can afford much more than the majority of the population (23%) or almost everything (4%).

# EXPERIENCE OF FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS IN APPLYING FOR ASSISTANCE

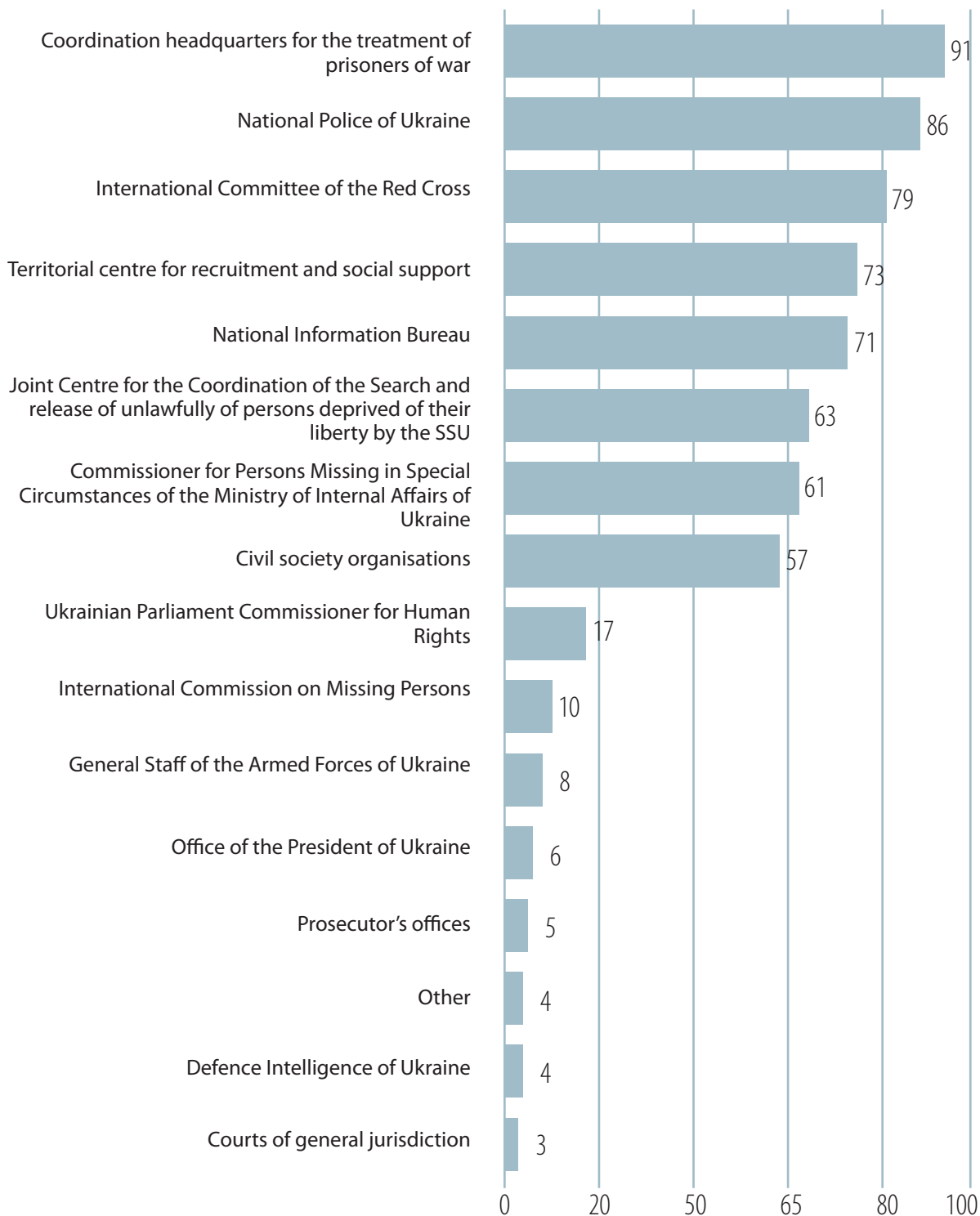


Fig. 5

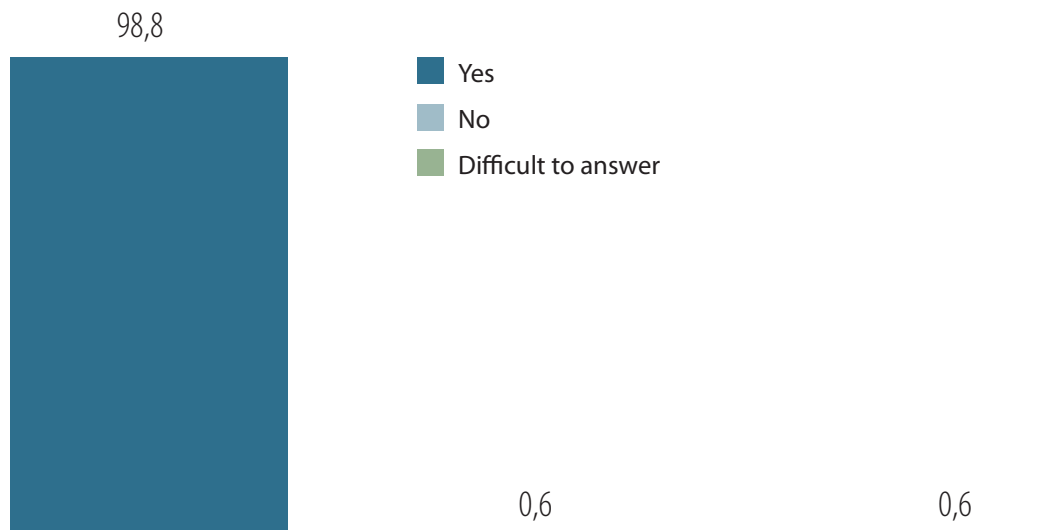
**Which bodies and institutions are currently dealing with families of missing persons?**  
(in % of answers)



No one has informed me. I started looking for him myself. I waited for a long time. Because my husband went on a mission and said: 'I will call him myself. First, don't call me. I will call him myself. And maybe for a long time. Maybe in two weeks. That's it. In three.' And so we sat there, waiting and waiting. Then, when we could not wait any longer, we called. He did not get in touch. That was it, he was already out of the zone. And then I went to the TCRSS myself. And there I was already notified. They gave me a request and that was it. I can't complain about them. They did a good job, they worked well. They found the military unit and informed the commander. However, I waited for 10 days for them to make this notification. And then I received it. Then they told me what to do, told me who to contact. They gave me a piece of paper, a 'memo' with instructions on where to go – to the NIB, the Red Cross. Then his mother gave DNA. And that's it.

*Quote from an interview with relatives of a missing person*

According to the respondents, the families of missing persons are currently dealt with mainly by such bodies as the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War (91%), the National Police of Ukraine (86%), the International Committee of the Red Cross (79%), territorial recruitment and social support centres (73%) and the National Information Bureau (71%). The least frequently mentioned were the courts of general jurisdiction (3%), the Defence Intelligence of Ukraine (4%) and the prosecution service (5%).



*Fig. 6*

**During the last year, have you applied to  
to the above authorities and institutions?**  
*(in % of respondents)*

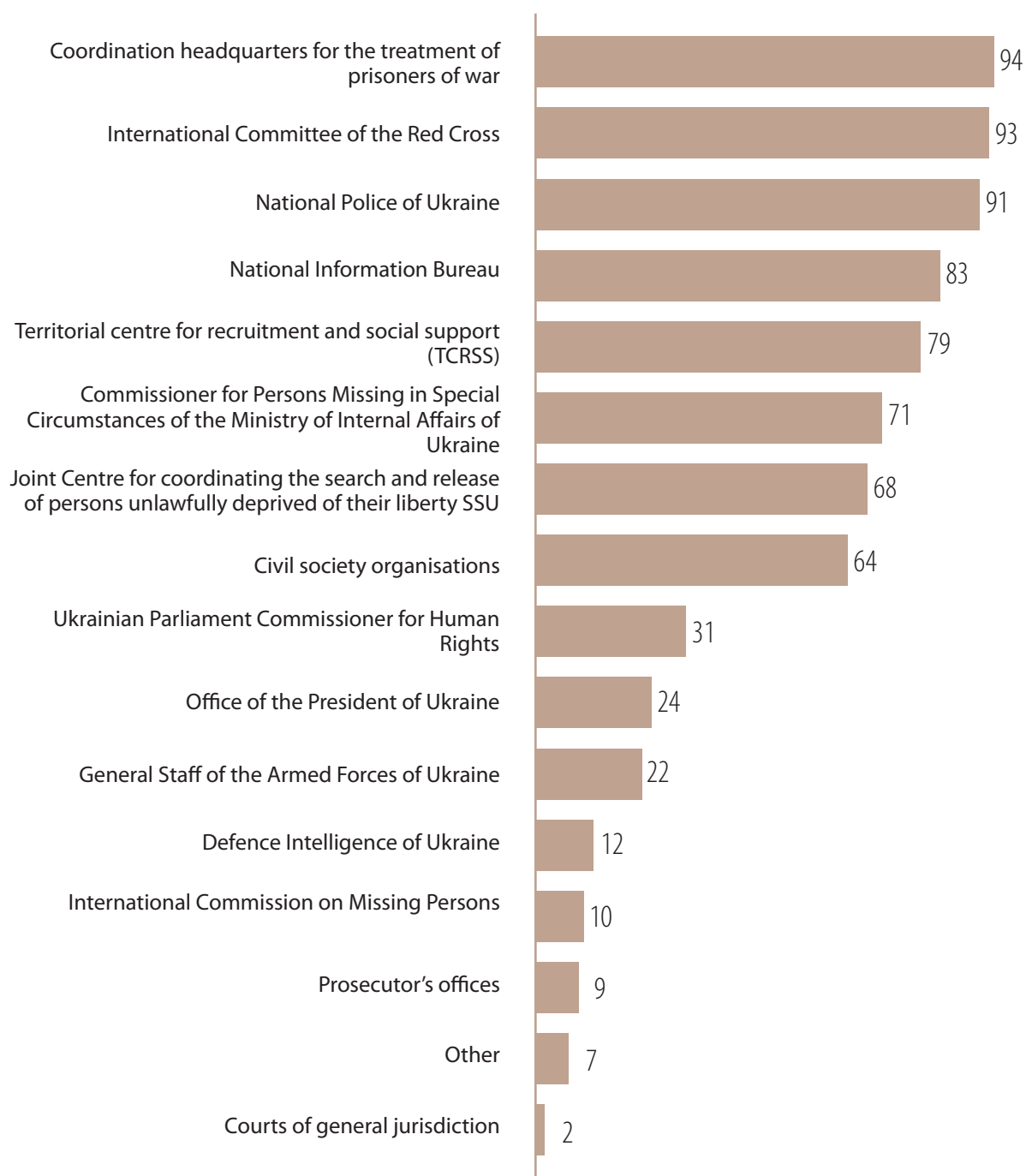


Fig. 7

**Which authorities did you apply to?**  
*(in % of those who reported such experience)*

Almost all respondents (99%) have applied to any of the above authorities in the last year.

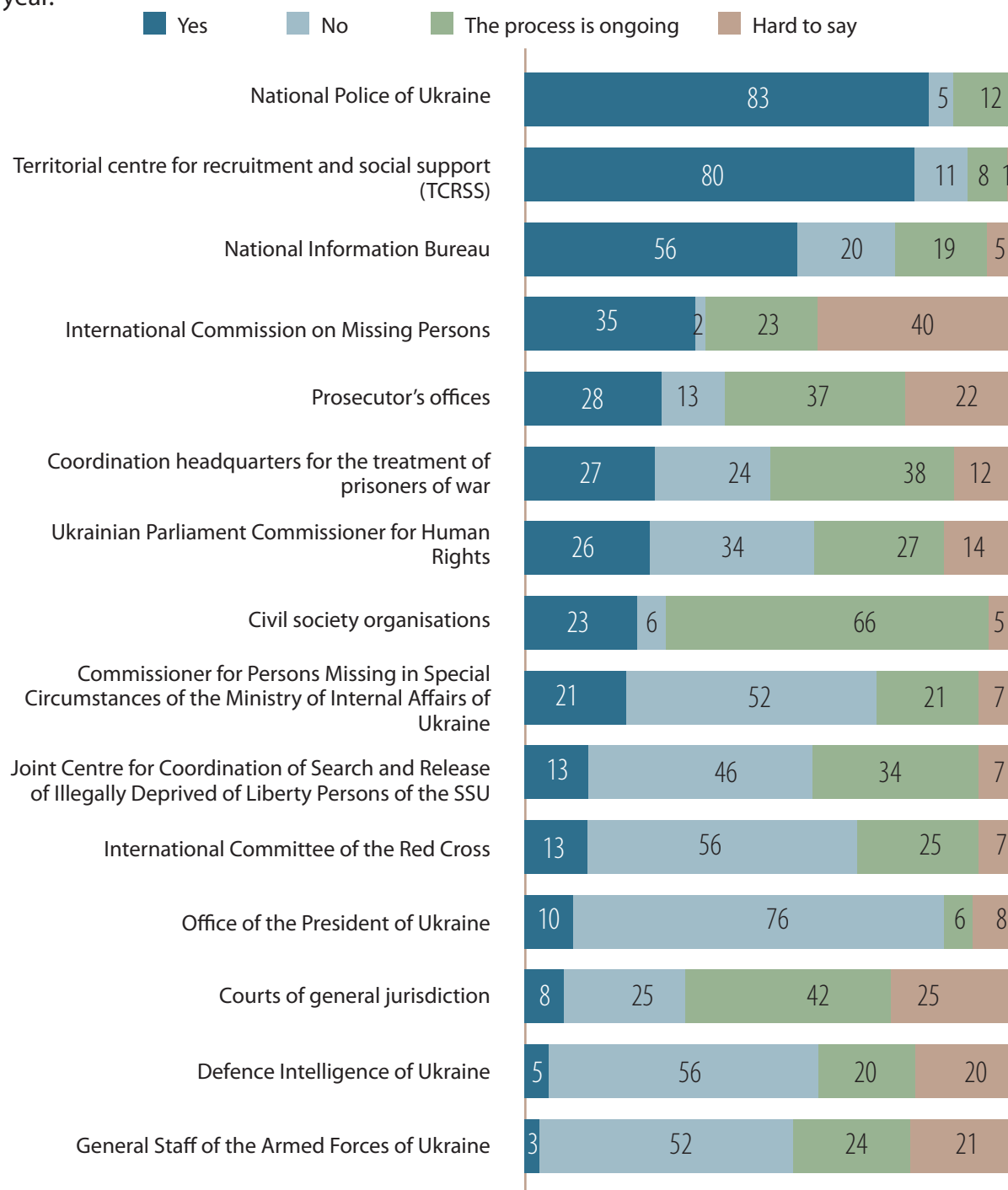


Fig. 8

**Was your issue resolved after you applied to the relevant authority/institution?**

*(as a percentage of those who reported having applied)*

Almost all of those who applied to certain bodies dealt with the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War (94%), the International Committee of the Red Cross (93%), and the National Police of Ukraine (91%). Significant proportions of respondents also contacted the National Information Bureau (83%) and the Territorial

Centre for recruitment and social support (79%). Other options included contacting military units, the military, volunteers, and the UN.

'I called the Red Cross a month later, I wanted to find out if there was any information, if something had changed, if he was listed somewhere, if his name had appeared somewhere. This girl who was in touch with me for a very long time, and she also supported me as a psychologist, really told me how they search for bodies, how it all works. And as for the Co-ordination Centre, they also told me where I had not yet contacted, where I still needed to go, and the phone numbers. In fact, I first contacted a non-governmental organisation, which also has a joint centre, in a telegram, they wrote to me, sent me an algorithm of actions, where I should go, and I wrote it down in my notebook and marked it down, because there are so many phones, so much information, I have already submitted many forms.

*Quote from an interview with relatives of a missing person*

Most often, respondents indicated that their issue was resolved if they contacted the National Police of Ukraine (83%) and the Territorial Centre for Recruitment and Social Support (80%). Also, more than half (56%) of the respondents indicated that contacting the National Information Bureau was effective.

I was in touch with almost everyone, no one was rude to me, no one pushed me away, all organisations, I mean, this is my case, you talked about my case. I know that there are other cases. I mean, I have been in chats, I have read, I have seen, it can be different, someone can be rudely rejected, someone can not answer, so there are very different situations. Thank God, it was easier for me, because everyone was human and everyone met me halfway: Some of them answered my questions, there was a meeting at the Coordination Headquarters, I was able to receive them online, some were offline, so they answered my questions, the Information Bureau called me when it was more or less confirmed that he was in captivity, so there was feedback.

*Quote from an interview with relatives of a missing person*

The first thing people do is go to the police. The second thing is that the Coordination Headquarters and the Red Cross start to work. But they have a system where they make phone calls. We write everywhere so that later we can, excuse me, simply submit some kind of response, or lack thereof, to the same international bodies. But we prepare full-fledged written appeals. That is, a document. And, of course, if we're talking about civilians, it has to be the SSU. Although their jurisdiction there changes a lot. The same cases have been transferred from one to another 10 times. They can apply to the Coordination Headquarters, the NIB.

*Quote from an interview with a lawyer of a civil society organisation*

Our unit, I can't say anything bad, the leadership of our relatives' unit is normal, they did everything that was required by law from a financial point of view, from a documentary point of view, they called me to their office to submit packages of documents to the TCRSS for financial support, because I did not even know about it, to be honest, that I had to keep something. They sent me all the documents I needed to submit to the TCRSS or by Nova Post, no problem, they fulfil all the requirements of the

law. I can't complain about the TCRSS in our district either, they are also quite good and help me with everything.

*Quote from an interview with relatives of a missing person*

Well, from my experience, from my story, I'm telling you, I just liked the work, the people there told me everything, from A to Z, a representative of the human rights ombudsman, they told me right away: 'You can count on legal, psychological, if necessary, we have people who just come here, just tell us, we tell them what to do, because even grandmothers come, they don't know what to do, they have no one else, people are just confused, they don't know where to go next, what to do.' And I call them, I really liked it there.

*Quote from an interview with relatives of a missing person*

I received help all around me. I can't say anything bad. Everything is good everywhere. Everything went smoothly. I cannot say that they treated me badly. Everything that these structures could do, they did. It's just that they are not omnipotent right now. Of course, we are waiting. Because we don't know what will happen. Because in the official investigation it was written that there was no body, no prisoner, nowhere.

And it is not clear where. Missing and that's it. Missing.

*Quote from an interview with relatives of a missing person*

People mostly face problems with TCR, which are always problematic. But again, TCRSS are social support, you are supposed to be social support for families, are not you, why do you call yourself that then? Because they nod at each other. It's just that not everyone will seek, not everyone will look for, call, well, this is a very large human resource, and the mental resource is exhausted, and we ourselves live from one alarm to another in such a place.

*Quote from an interview with relatives of a missing person*

It should be noted that the resource of civil society organisations, which can operate less formally, allows them to collect information that is not available to government agencies.

We are usually looking for it. The task of the Working Group on Missing is to oblige the aggressor country to answer where the person is. A specific place, his or her health condition, his or her status. And to ensure the possibility of correspondence with them. This is not a 100% guarantee that they will do this, but sometimes they do. At least, they are obliged to do so and certain sanctions are imposed on them in case of failure to fulfil these obligations. I will tell you that even these appeals are more effective in the sense that sometimes we get information that no one else has, by applying to different authorities or occupied territories. Sometimes a random body can provide some useful information about a person. In this sense, our work is unique. Because state institutions do not have the right to do what we do in terms of sending these requests. But, at the same time, since we have such close cooperation with the government agencies today, they actually use the results we get. So, you know, 'all means are good in war'. This is the case here. And here we made a decision at the beginning of the full-scale invasion that we would write everywhere, as long as it produced some results. And it is working.

*Quote from an interview with an expert*

The majority of respondents said that their issue was not resolved, even though they had applied to the Office of the President of Ukraine (76%), the International Committee of the Red Cross (56%), the Defence Intelligence of Ukraine (56%), the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (52%), and the Commissioner for Persons Missing in Special Circumstances of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine (52%).

Yes, a statement was written to the police, DNA was submitted, and all of these were submitted to the Coordination Headquarters, the Red Cross, and the NIB. In short, we have written all these statements and that's it, that's all, nothing is known yet. We turned to the Centre for Missing Persons, to lawyers, but they have not helped us yet.

So I filed a statement with the Red Cross: 'A particular missing person at a particular time and place,' and that's it, as they usually do. They called me back two months later to clarify the data. They did not tell me what they found or did not find – they did not say anything. It's still being investigated, as they said, it's still being investigated, so far nothing is known.

*Quotes from interviews with relatives of missing persons*

Among the important problems that are often not solved are problems with identification through DNA testing, payments, and benefits.

There is a lot of chaos and disorganisation in the work of law enforcement agencies. The main reason is that there is a lack of staff. Our law enforcement system is not ready to handle such a large number of crimes. Do you understand? It's impossible, it's just impossible.

Of course, there are problems with payments. Everyone has problems with payments, delays in benefits. They receive them as long as they have a certain status, some kind of financial support. Again, our treasury, our budget, cannot withstand this – some people disappear, others are recruited. It seems to me that everyone is trying their best to reduce these flows, to somehow limit them and so on.

The notification system works well. Very rarely do I see them staying there for more than a week. Usually, they are very prompt in this matter. This is the same as with the military.

*Quote from an interview with an expert*

Psychological assistance was sought by 44 per cent of the interviewed family members of the missing persons.

I believe that we should still offer psychological help, and probably when communicating with relatives, the following question should be asked: 'How can we help you now, either legally or psychologically, to whom can we refer you?' Sometimes people just don't know. Or 'we have a specialist, you can just talk to him'. When you talk to a person, you see that they just want to talk, they need to tell someone, and maybe at that moment you need to pick up the person and hand them over to the psychological service specialists who work with such families. Sometimes it just happens that you need to listen, people want to talk about it, people scream about it, their souls just scream about it, it's pain, and they scream from pain. And we understand that if it is a state institution, and a person has a narrow focus, he has to take testimony and that's it,

he can't spare any more time, but he can redirect, if there is such an opportunity, so that someone else can take it up.

*Quote from an interview with an expert*

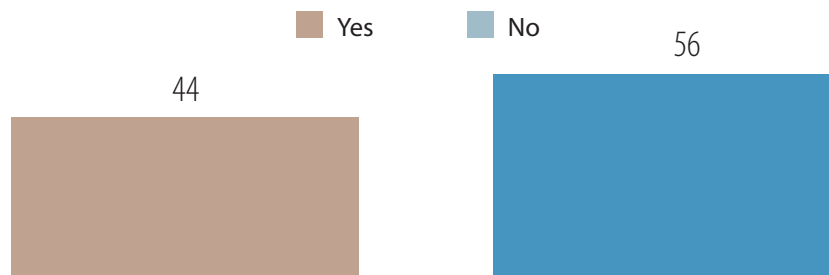


Fig. 9

**Have you ever sought psychological help?**

*(in % of respondents)*

I believe that psychologists should be in all these structures, because a person can come in, I will tell you frankly, in a state of affect, and he or she will cry, cry and cry. They try not to pay attention to such people, so as not to shake them, and the person will leave with this. And do you think she will leave satisfied? He will leave more or less calmly from the organisation where, when all the necessary data is completed, he will be picked up by a person who is ready to listen. If you say to a person in this state: 'Please, let's go through, you tell me, share, I will listen to you, I will help you in any way I can,' or at least "listen". And then, when the person talks and leaves, what do you think this person will think?

*Quote from an interview with relatives of a missing person*

We were brought together and talked to a psychologist. The psychologist explained everything very clearly and in an accessible way. I think it is necessary to meet at least once a month and hold these sessions. During these meetings, we express our thoughts about our sons, what they went through, how they lived. It's very...

Listening to each story is very moving, and you can draw some conclusions for yourself. The psychologist is great.

*Quote from an interview with relatives of a missing person*

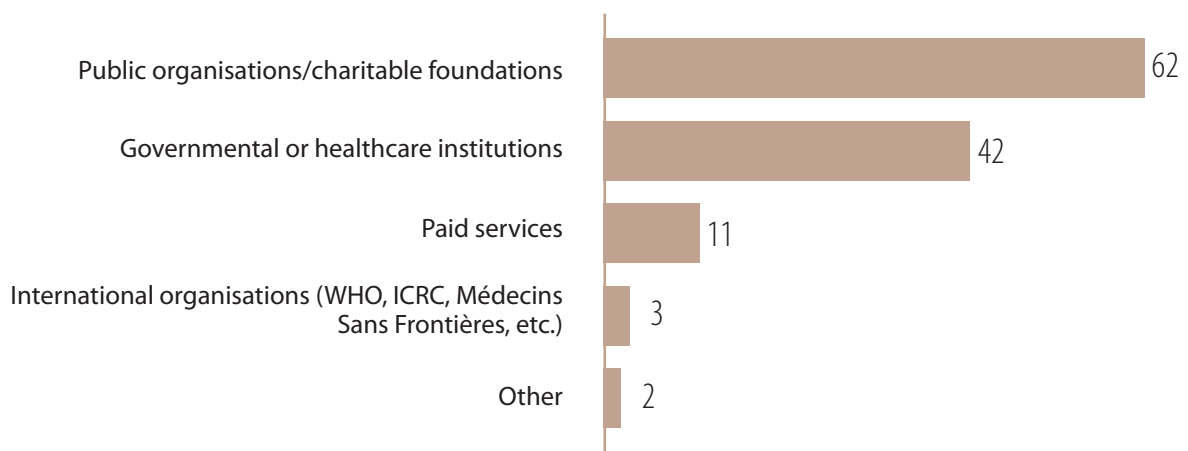


Fig. 10

**Who provided psychological assistance?**

*(as a percentage of those who reported seeking help)*

This is very good. Ten people, mostly mothers. The wives get together separately and talk somehow. And here she gives an impetus, a hint that you need to control yourself and have hope. Psychology is very good. I think it helps really well. And meetings. And meetings of these women who have already gone through more. Who have been waiting for a year and a half. I have been waiting for six months, and some of them for a year and a half. One woman has been waiting for two years. There is uncertainty. The only thing she was told was that he was in captivity. And now two years have passed, and so far nothing.

*Quote from an interview with relatives of a missing person*

It was useful, because I recommend all women who are going through this loss, like me, to go to psychologists, because before that, before the war, I had never gone to psychologists, I had never used such services, I had always managed somehow on my own, and now it was a person who helped me to survive all this, who taught me how to breathe, who recommended me, who gave me some wisdom, who helped me through it all, taught me how to breathe, gave me advice, gave me some wisdom, and in the end, I was recommended to work with a psychotherapist, to switch to medical support, to medication, because it was hard to cope on my own.

*Quote from an interview with relatives of a missing person*

The overwhelming majority of respondents (62%) who reported having sought psychological help received it through NGOs/charitable foundations. Also, quite a few respondents turned to state institutions or healthcare facilities (42%). Paid services were used by 11% of respondents. Among other options, they said that they had turned to psychologists they knew.

But at the same time, given the scale of the problem and the specific needs of these vulnerable groups (relatives of missing persons, people who survived captivity), the lack of qualified psychologists is a serious challenge. Even if a psychologist is available, not every specialist can be effective with certain categories of victims when providing assistance.

We have a lot of clients who have survived captivity. These are military exchanges and civilians who were held captive in the occupied territories. And, of course, these are relatives of those who have different statuses: civilians, military, missing, prisoners. The biggest problem, a global one, is the lack of resources, especially psychologists. These people need really qualified psychological help. And here it is very important, I want to note that these should not be just psychologists for the sake of it, you know, because they seem to have worked there. They should be professionals who know their job. This is what is really lacking.

*Quote from an interview with an expert*



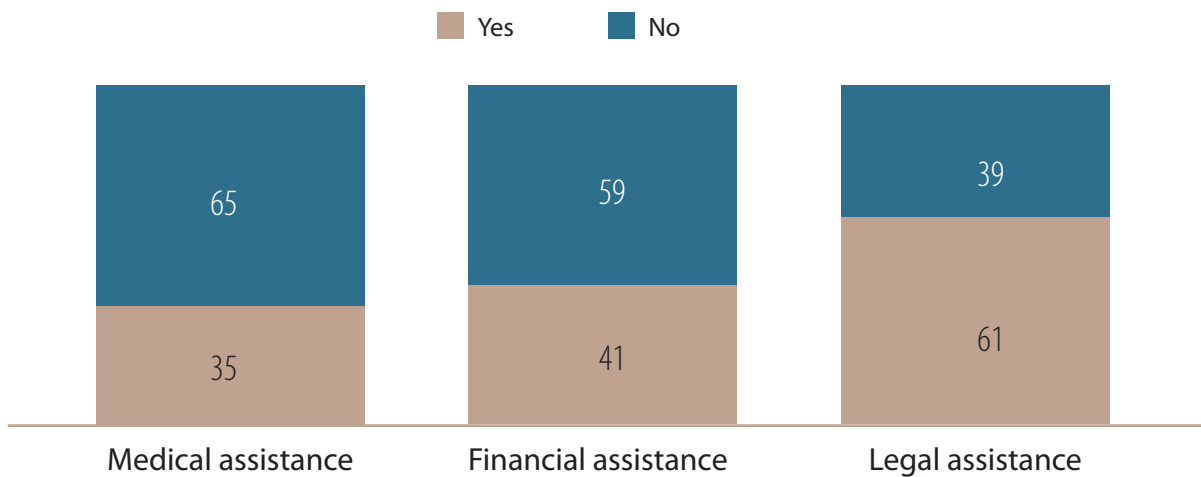


Fig. 11

**Have you applied for such assistance in connection with the disappearance of your relative?**

*(in % of respondents)*

You see, we had an experience when we were on our way to interrogate a raped woman. And it turned out before the interrogation that one of the psychologists had no such experience.

She said to me: 'Well, I will try'. But this is not a category where you can 'try'. You will try it in other places and in other cases. These are not toys, you can injure yourself even more here. They have to be trained to the highest level. Ours, for example, are constantly trained according to the Istanbul Protocol. They are constantly trained to work specifically with tortured people, with victims of war. That is, there can be no 'somehow'.

*Quote from an interview with an expert*

In connection with the disappearance of a relative, most respondents sought legal assistance (61%). Financial assistance was sought by 41% of respondents, and medical assistance by 35%.

# AVAILABLE ASSISTANCE FOR FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS

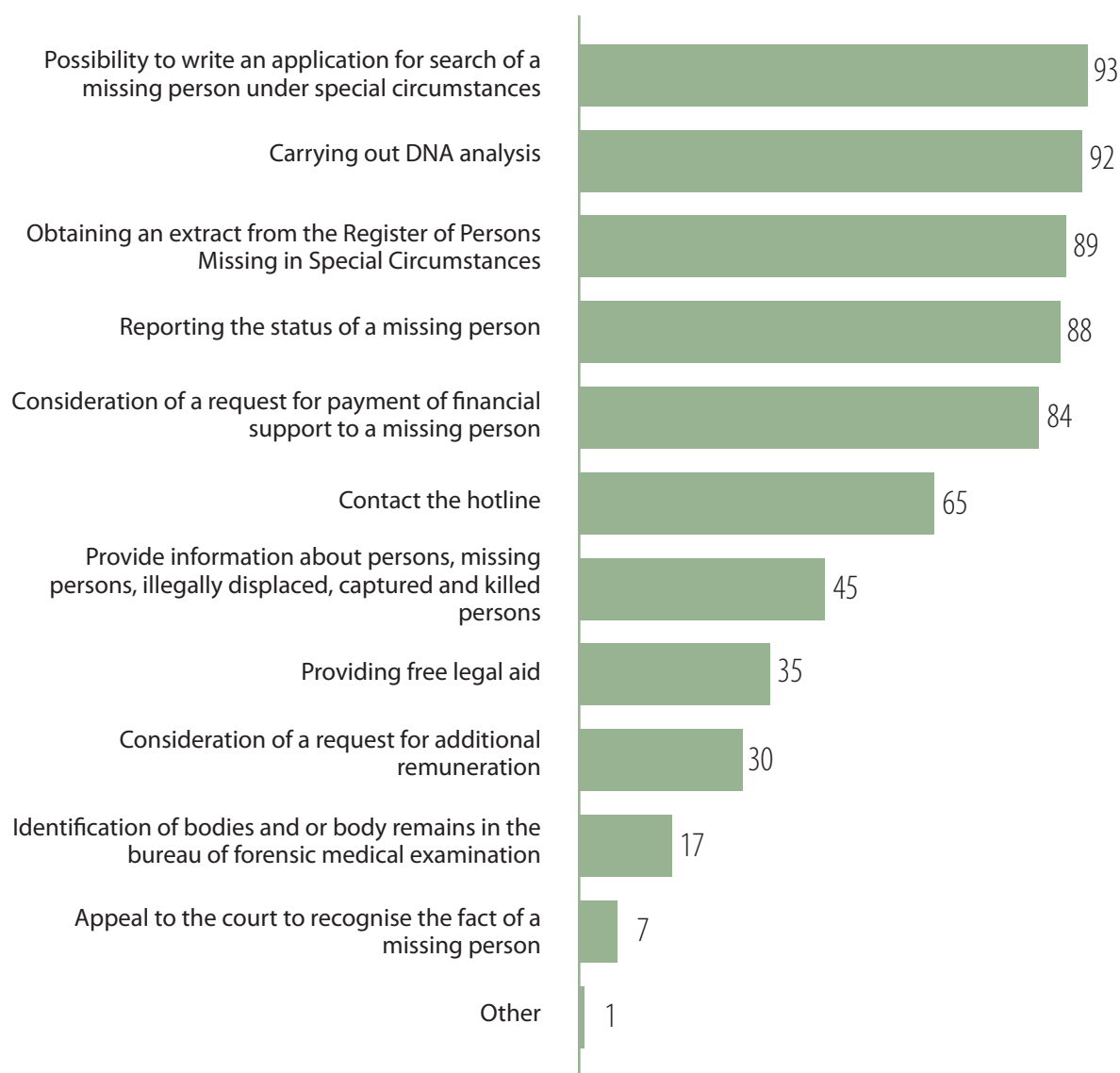


Fig. 12

## What procedures/services are available for families of missing persons? (in % of answers)

Among the procedures and services that currently exist for families of missing persons, respondents most often chose the following: the possibility to file a request to search for a missing person (93%); DNA analysis (92 per cent); obtaining an extract from the Register of Missing Persons under special circumstances (89 per cent); reporting the status of a missing person (88 per cent) and considering a request for payment of financial support to a missing person (84 per cent). The 'Other' options included support from civil society organisations and the possibility of receiving financial assistance from the village council.



Fig. 13

**What difficulties do families face in accessing such services?**

*(in % of answers)*

The majority of respondents (70%) indicated that complex bureaucratic processes of registration to receive such services stand in the way of obtaining such services. Also, a significant number of respondents pointed to the indifference of specialists providing such services (42%). One third of respondents noted such barriers as lack of information about organisations or specialists providing such services (33%) and lack of information about the services (33%). Among the 'Other' options, long waiting times and the need for material costs were mentioned.

## THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS

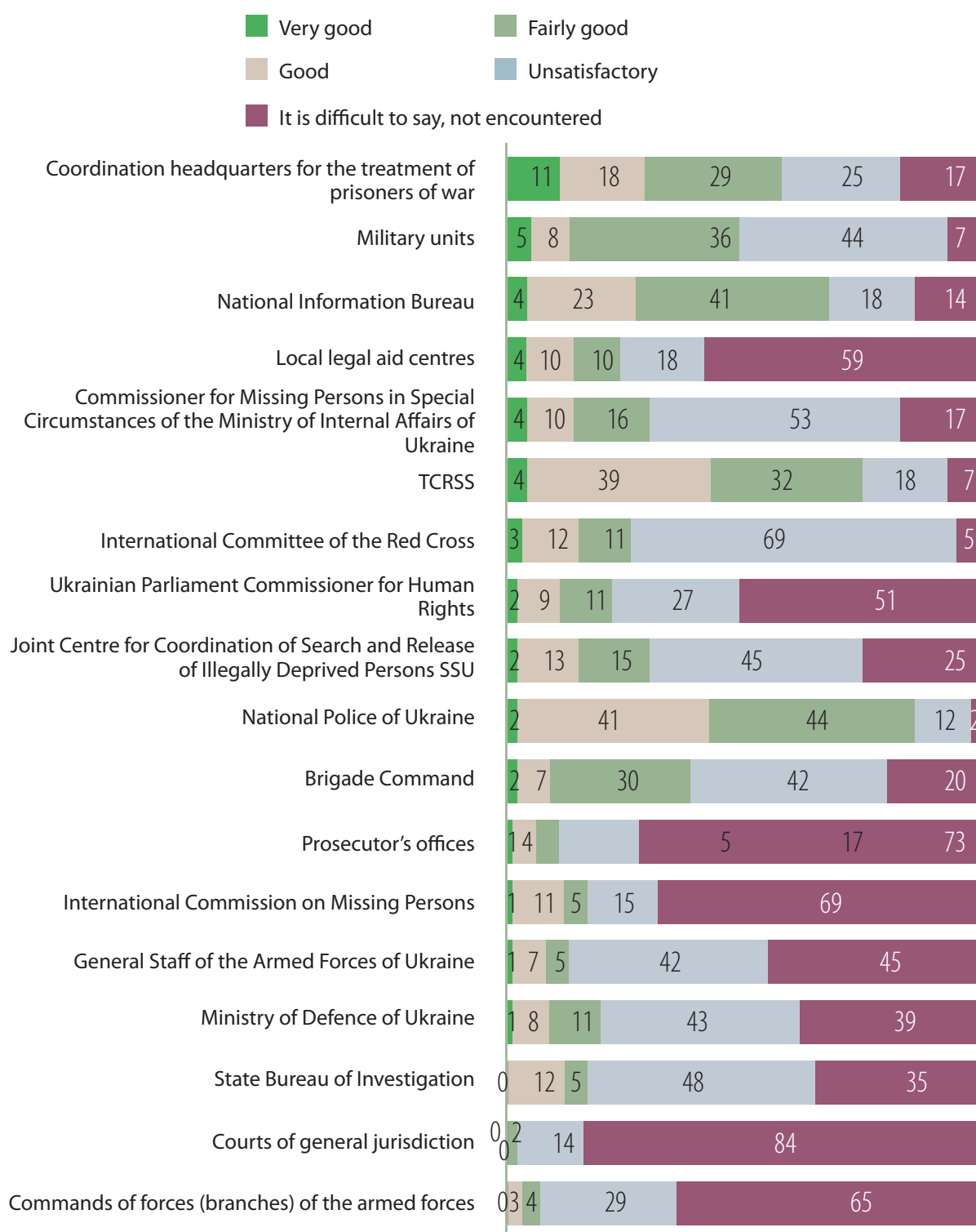


Fig. 14

### Assessment of the work of different bodies/organisations, working with families of missing persons (in % of respondents)

Respondents often found it difficult to assess the work of the proposed bodies/organisations (or had not encountered them). The National Police of Ukraine and the TCRSS received the best ratings, while the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Commissioner for Missing Persons in Special Circumstances of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine received the worst.

# RIGHTS AND GUARANTEES OF FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS

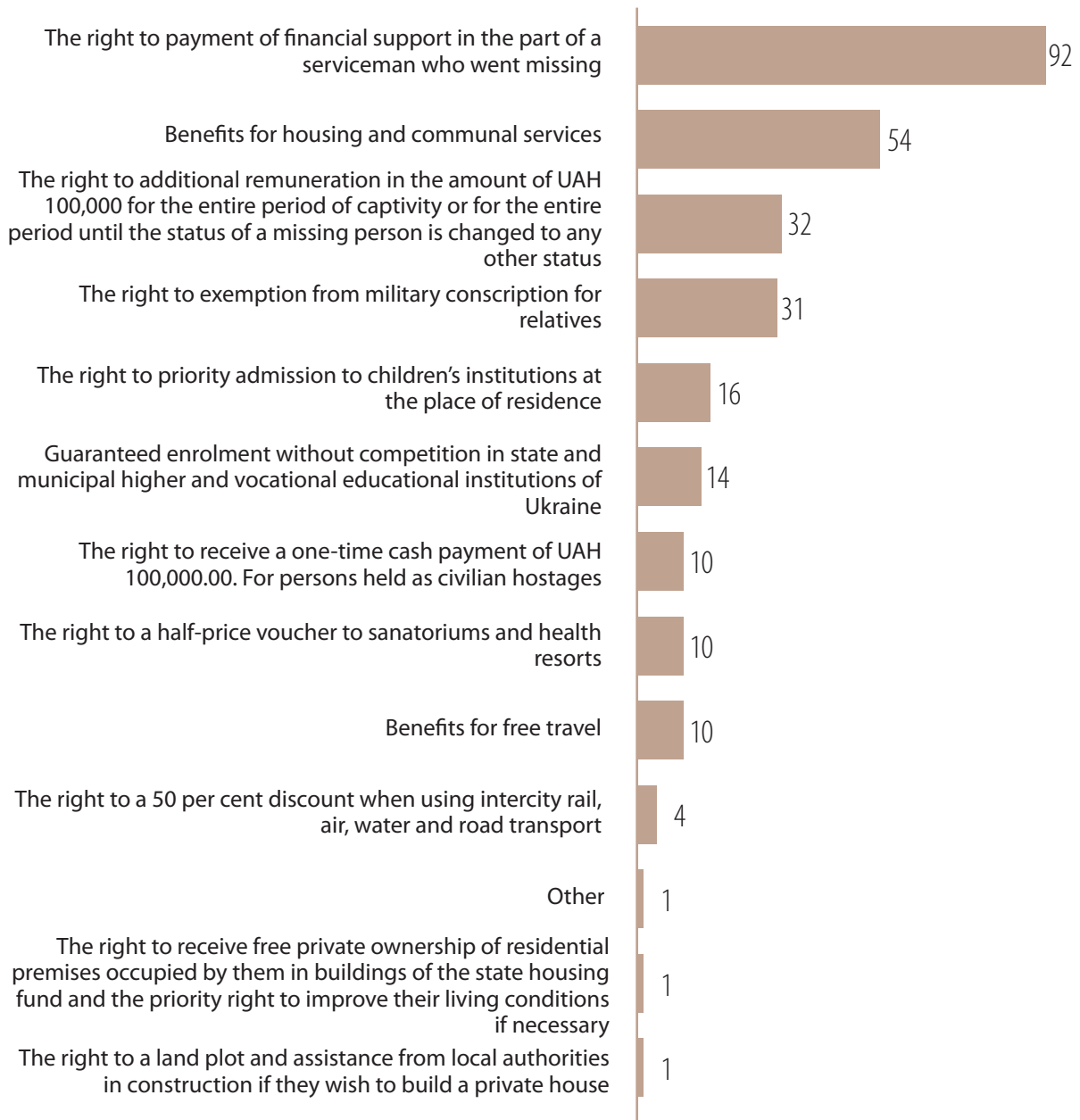


Fig. 15

## What rights and guarantees do families of missing persons have?

(in % of answers)

Sometimes, even legally, people do not know what to do and where to go. Even me, for example, we have a separate situation, and I understand that everything seems to be logical with these social payments, but there are questions, because only parents, spouses and children receive payments. But if, for example, a sister is a sister, a brother is a brother, and there is no one else, or even if they live, but not here, on that territory, what should these people do? Where do these funds go? He or she is supposed to receive it, so where is it, there is no information about it, where is it kept? Is he or she

somewhere at the moment, or have they disappeared, or are they in captivity, or where are they? So they are somewhere, right? There is no explanatory work on this issue.

*Quote from an interview with relatives of a missing person*

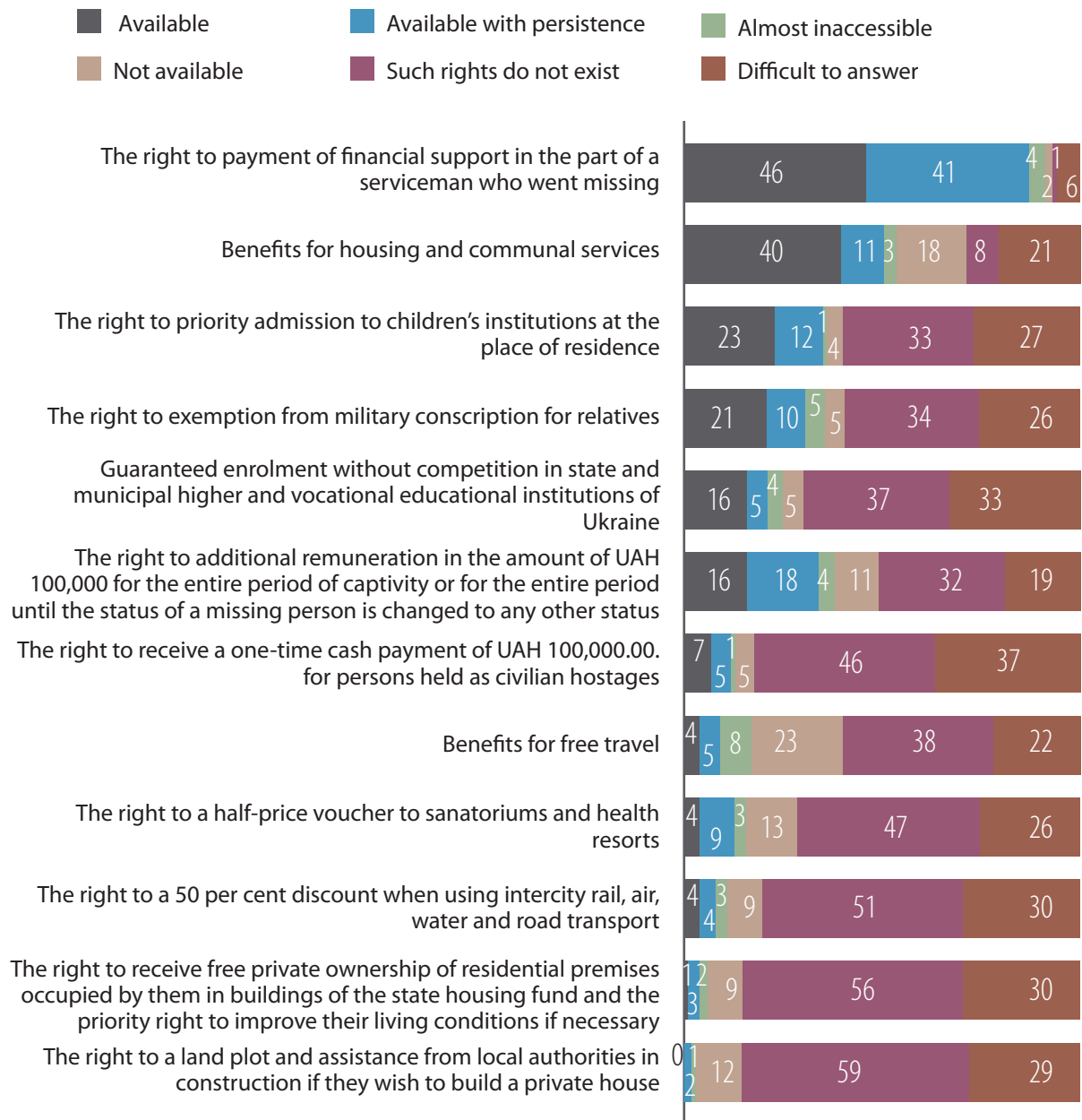


Fig. 16

**Assessment of accessibility of rights and guarantees for families of missing persons**  
(in % of answers)

92 per cent of respondents indicated that families of missing persons are entitled to the payment of financial support in the part of the serviceman who went missing. Slightly more than half of the respondents indicated the right to housing and utility benefits (54%). One third of relatives noted the right to an additional remuneration of 100 thousand hryvnias for the entire period of captivity or for the entire period until the status of a missing person is changed to another status (32%), as well as the right to exemption

from military service for relatives (31%).

The most frequently mentioned rights were the right to receive financial support for a missing soldier (46% – available, 41% – available with persistence), benefits for housing and communal services (40% and 11% respectively), the right to priority admission to children’s institutions at the place of residence (23% and 12%) and the right to exemption from military service for relatives (21% and 10%). More than half of the respondents believe that there are no such rights at all, such as the right to receive free private ownership of the residential premises they occupy in the state housing stock and the priority right to improve their living conditions if necessary (56%), the right to a land plot and assistance from local authorities in construction if they wish to build a private house (55%) and the right to a 50 per cent discount when using intercity rail, air, water and road transport (51%).

The research also showed that a significant problem is the assistance provided to relatives of civilian missing persons – state guarantees, services and even assistance from NGOs for this category of war victims are much worse developed.

The problem is that there are almost no state guarantees for civilians. At the local level, there is some assistance included in some local budgets, but that’s it. At the state level, there is nothing. Of course, there are some benefits for military families. There are no issues there, but they also have to be fought for, sorry.

*Quote from an interview with an expert*

# PROBLEMS OF FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS

I don't even know. We went to the police, and everything seemed to be adequate, normal. My mother went to the police again later and was told that his case had been passed to the prosecutor, and that he had to send it somewhere else, but he did not. Nobody explains anything, there is not enough information about him, something is not clear at all, some kind of Bermuda Triangle. Why is that? We don't even know where he disappeared to this day, and we haven't even been given the results of the official investigation to review.

*Quote from an interview with relatives of missing persons*

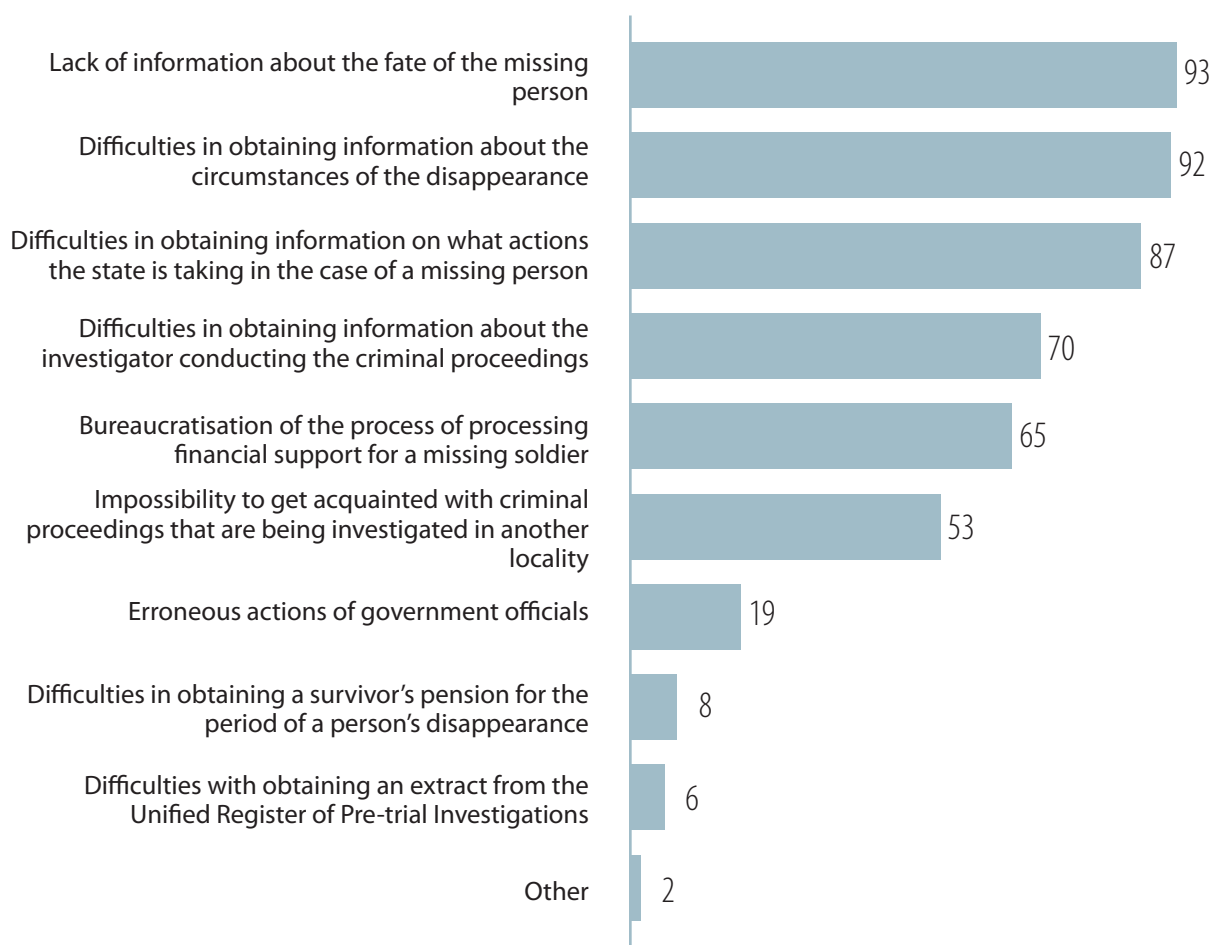


Fig. 17

## Problematic issues that are of greatest concern to families of missing persons today (in % of answers)

It was hard for me, I knew nothing when my husband disappeared, I did not know where to go, what to do. The first place I went was to the TCRSS representative who came to me with the notification, I asked him where to go, what to do. He sent me to the police and the NIB. Then I started calling the NIB, and they told me where else to go. Then I asked my friends, relatives, groups, who knew what and recommended it, I went there and read the information. But it took a long time, given the fact that the family



at home did not think about anything but their grief until the last moment. I filed a statement with the police, but not immediately, and the police were still very scolding, which is why we turned to them a couple of days after receiving the notification.

*Quote from an interview with relatives of missing persons*

The families of missing persons are most concerned about the lack of information about the fate of the missing person (93%), difficulties in obtaining information about the circumstances of the disappearance (92%) and difficulties in obtaining information about what actions the state is taking in the case of the missing person (87%). In addition, 70% of respondents reported difficulties in obtaining information about the investigator conducting the criminal proceedings.

We cooperate well with the Coordination Headquarters. But there are some difficulties. For example, a person comes to them when he or she writes an appeal. They give them a form of appeal to the working group on enforced and involuntary disappearances, and they even send it to them. But they do not read it. They just hand it over. A person somehow fills it out and signs it. And they send it. As if this is help, well done. But from experience, what is sent in this form is sometimes simply filled in incorrectly somewhere. And this is a reason not to even consider it. That is, filling out a form without checking it with a lawyer who knows how to do it is harmful because you can apply there only once. That is, on one issue.

*Quote from an interview with an expert*

There are difficulties in proving the fact of disappearance and, accordingly, in obtaining this status. Proof requires information that the person really disappeared, under what circumstances they disappeared. And there are real problems. Because when it comes to civilians under occupation, there are not many witnesses. Sometimes there are some family reasons, some more banal ones – documents are lost, or something else is collected.

*Quote from an interview with an expert*

Important factors that traumatise the already traumatised victims are the bureaucratisation and inconsistency of paperwork procedures and the lack of sympathy and sometimes rudeness of staff in state institutions.

This is the human factor. Sometimes you come across service providers, specific performers, who simply behave in a way that is not human. Information can be presented in different ways, given the trauma of this contingent. It seems to me that we need to prepare people for this. There should be either selected or trained personnel. Even the basics of psychology should be taught. This is very important, you know? Because it makes people feel discouraged.

*Quote from an interview with an expert*

I can go as a lawyer for someone, or with someone, or for someone. But I see what is happening on the ground in those bodies. Firstly, people are waiting in incredible queues. Secondly, there is bureaucracy. Thirdly, of course, everything takes a long time. With the military, it's better. The military has at least some kind of system. With civilians, there is simply no system. If we're talking about civilians again, then we need to start all over again, to launch these processes in general. At the moment, there is almost nothing here. There is no one to make a claim to, because there is nothing. The Ministry

of Reintegration issues a certificate, and that's all. This is their function – they still have it. They can write there, I'm sorry, to who knows what. They can also be understood. They also need some relevant evidence. They can't just grant this status to everyone. Somehow, but it's really deplorable.

*Quote from an interview with an expert*

Of course, bureaucracy. Sometimes a person comes in and they are told that they are missing a certificate. They go to get this certificate, bring it, and are told: 'You are still missing this'. That was the case and still is. Maybe you should say what you need right away? So that a person does not have to go there 100 times, stand in these queues and so on.

*Quote from an interview with an expert*

One thing I can say is to be patient, I understand that this is a job, I understand that they face this every day, and they see different reactions from their loved ones, not everyone can speak so calmly when they want to cry, hit or do something else. So, to be more patient with those who show their active reaction and open the door, relatively speaking, you know, I mean to meet them halfway, answer as much as possible, or give more information, or correct, redirect to whomever they can, because people knock, and sometimes not everyone knows where they are knocking, they just grab, that is, not everyone can understand that even in such a situation there is a certain algorithm, that there is a certain work.

*Quote from an interview with a relative of a missing person*

Another problem is the poor work of representatives of military units with relatives – the army remains a rather closed institution, and quite often servicemen avoid communicating with relatives, are in no hurry to provide information and help them to complete documents as quickly as possible.

Speaking for the military, it all starts with military units, in fact. In reality, everything that happens in relation to the military depends to a large extent on the work of the military unit. Because everything that goes to the TCRSS, respectively, goes from the military unit to the TCRSS. And at this stage, of course, there are difficulties with collecting documents, for example.

*Quote from an interview with a relative of a missing person*

Today there is, for example, the following problem: The lack of any publicly available addresses, even electronic addresses, of military units. In other words, in order to send an appeal somewhere, a person needs to apply through the Ministry of Defence. On the one hand, it's understandable why these addresses are hidden, but it is possible to provide a legal address so that someone can come to the post office and pick it up? At least this way. It's trivial to start with. Usually, they just don't have enough lawyers and people to handle all this. Because the queues are just enormous. You have to make an appointment two weeks in advance to get in. This is if we are talking about the military.

*Quote from an interview with a relative of a missing person*

Respondents noted poor internal communication and inconsistency of processes between different service providers and the lack of a 'single window' for relatives of missing persons, which would greatly simplify all procedures and communication with the

state.

You see, this is a single system. TCRSS is separate, this is separate, that is separate. There is no unified system. Yes, a person is missing. Everyone gives only part of the information. Here's an example: Iryna Ukraine chat. There is everything there – from top to bottom. There must be some kind of centre. For example, I did not know where to go at first, what to do and how to do it. It was a friend of mine who found out that my husband was missing and called me back. It was like that, word of mouth. She advised me to apply there, write there, make a personal account there, make a... To register, you have to go to the bank, open a card, and make an electronic signature. That's how it is. Older people can't do that. If there was such a centre, then when a person learned about the news, they could get help in one place, even if it was over the phone: 'Yes, we sent them there. We sent them there. We made a note of it. You will receive a text message.

This is especially important for the elderly.

*Quote from an interview with a relative of a missing person*

It was a long time. And that's the only thing I can say, because I was literally one of the first to apply, and I received it in full three months later. And the extract has a mistake in the place of birth, although I submitted my passport details and all that stuff with the same email request, they made a mistake. It's just not clear why this extract is needed, you know? There are a lot of documents and it's really not clear what it's about, everyone says it's important. It would be very good if it was in one structure, if you submitted a package of documents to one structure, and then it did everything it needed to do or demanded everything it needed from you, it would be really much easier. Because there, you have to submit to the SSU, submit to the NIB, and I don't understand what the result of these applications is.

*Quote from an interview with a relative of a missing person*

Why are there so many fraudsters? Because people don't know what to do and where to go. People are in a trance, I was in a trance myself. I don't know, I went for three months and did not know what to do. If I had not been told: 'Natasha, do this. Don't send it there, send it here'. That's it. And others just don't know. Especially the elderly.

*Quote from an interview with a relative of a missing person*

All of these problems worsen the already difficult psychological state of people who are forced to deal with uncertainty and are under constant stress. Given that the average age of a serviceman in Ukraine is 43+ years, a significant number of parents are elderly people who have also lost important support.

One thing I want to tell you is that it is hard to wait. Waiting for this answer: Where is he, what is he? And to worry. This is what you are waiting for. What will they write to you? Where is he now? What is the condition of your son or husband or brother? I think it's this. For me, this is the most important thing. The fact that one thing is written. And the second thing is to wait. You have to wait. Waiting all the time. And what the answer will be is unknown.

*Quote from an interview with a relative of a missing person*

In general, everyone wants to get as much information as possible at once. And it's very frustrating for everyone that there is nothing known. That's all. And money. Material support, of course. Everyone... Especially mothers. When they can't get

anything. That's what they're worried about. That's two. That's what I know. And that's why they seek legal and psychological help, of course. Because it is difficult to endure this waiting. It's hard to bear this expectation.

*Quote from an interview with a relative of a missing person*

# INFORMATION SOURCES FOR FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS

You know, they are a very specific audience with their own needs. They unite in groups on social media, and these groups are a key source of information for them, where they share their experiences. They can be in more than one such group and get information.

*Quote from an interview with an expert*

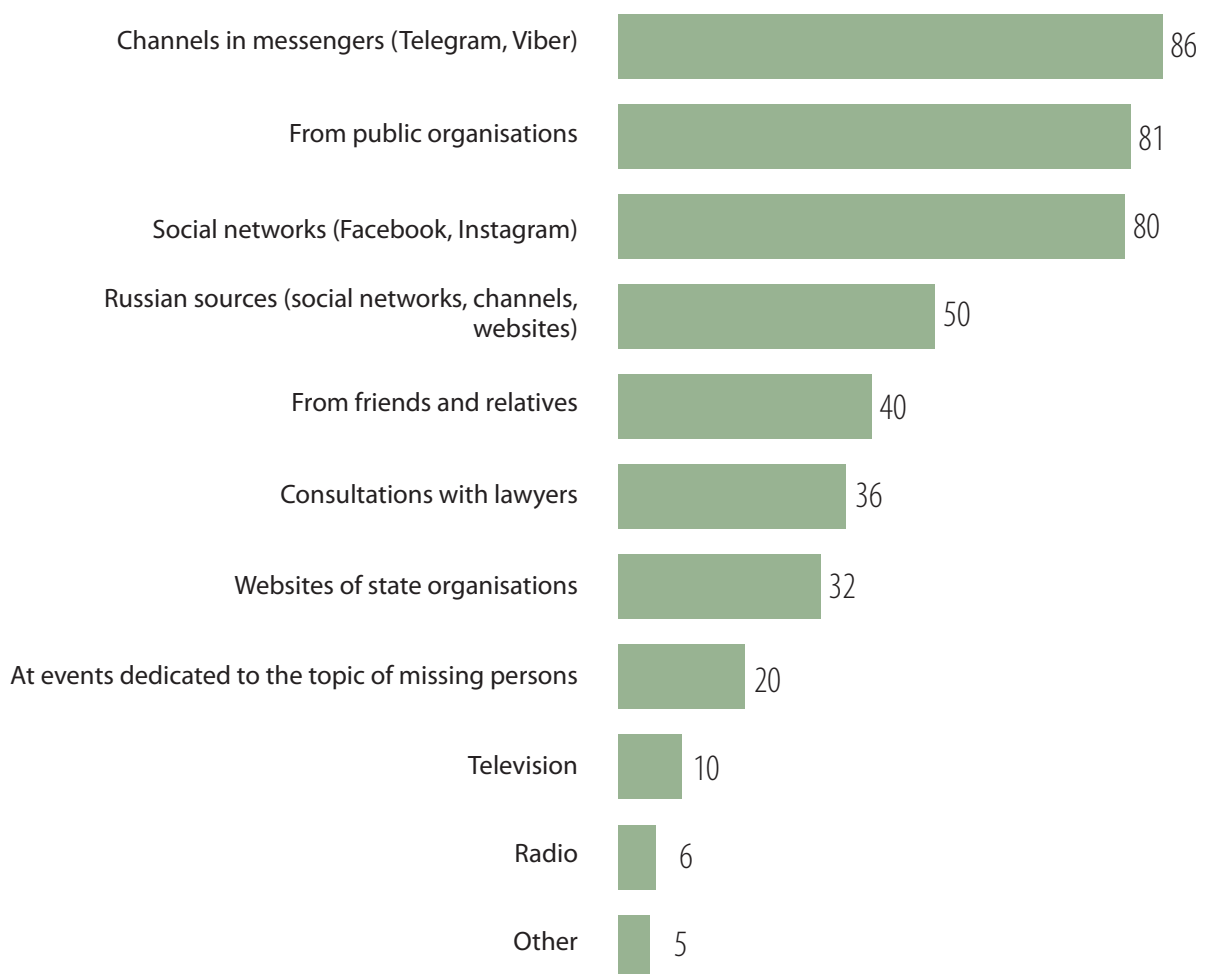


Fig. 18

## What sources do you use to obtain information about available services and guarantees for families of missing persons?

*(in % of answers)*

The vast majority of respondents use the following sources to obtain information about available services and guarantees for families of missing persons sources such as channels in messengers (86 per cent), NGOs (81 per cent) and social media (80 per cent). 50% of relatives also turn to Russian sources (social networks, channels, websites) in search of information not so much about available assistance, but rather to find relatives and

changes in Russian legislation.

Desperation and the desire to get any information about a loved one forces people to literally scour various telegram channels to collect information, which can sometimes be a traumatic experience in itself.

There are no websites, or telegram channels, or we found out from our husband's family members through the telegram channel, we are all in the telegram channel.

*Quote from an interview with a relative of a missing person*

I have a channel called 'Iryna Ukraine', there are many channels where I found a photo of my loved one and many different ones, but I don't remember all the names. There are just channels, for example, city channels, where the mayor posts something, you can read it there, because they also write a lot about veterans, they write a lot about some kind of assistance, they post all the information, that is, in different city groups, both here and there. If I'm interested in some personal issue, I go to Google and start looking for it, if I don't see it on the channel, I try to read it either there or here, to look for something, or I go to the ministerial website, where they also post information. I mean, a person who seeks will find it, I think.

*Quote from an interview with a relative of a missing person*

We also look at the names of prisoners and the dead in all these Russian chat rooms, and I can see them in my mind's eye, half a head, half a face. My sister said she would not watch it, that she had watched it once and could not sleep, but I watch it, every day, I watch it, all the notifications I receive on Telegram, I look through everything, every photo, every video, maybe somewhere, I hope.

*Quote from an interview with a relative of a missing person*

I have a colleague where I work, at a factory, she was looking for her husband for eight months, and she found him in a telegram, his photo in a Russian chat room, I talked to her, she told me how they buried him, how the military unit said there was nothing there at all, it turned out he was dead. The body was there, they did another DNA test, and that was it, and she buried him, but she said: 'Just like you, I watched every day all the photos, videos, all this, I monitored, I wrote to him, it's very moral, very hard and hopeful, it seems that this is it, this is the last thing.' She has a 10-year-old child, she says: 'I was very exhausted, I went to the prosecutor's office because I did not know where my case was.' These investigators were changing, and no one knew her, it turns out that no one told her anything, did not inform her that your husband's case would be transferred to so-and-so – there was no such thing. She searched for everything herself – she went to the military prosecutor's office to find out which investigator was in charge of the case. She said that she had to find out everything like that.

*Quote from an interview with a relative of a missing person*

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# CONCLUSIONS

- According to the respondents, the families of missing persons are currently being dealt with mainly by the following bodies: the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War (91%), the National Police of Ukraine (86%), the International Committee of the Red Cross (79%), territorial recruitment and social support centres (73%) and the National Information Bureau (71%).
- Almost all respondents (99%) have applied to any of the above authorities in the last year. Almost all of those who contacted certain authorities dealt with the Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War (94%), the International Committee of the Red Cross (93%), and the National Police of Ukraine (91%). Significant proportions of respondents also contacted the National Information Bureau (83%) and the Territorial Centre for Recruitment and Social Support (79%).
- The research showed that people apply to ALL available bodies involved in the work with missing persons, which leads to duplication of efforts and excessive workload for the entire mechanism of missing persons, as well as exhausts the relatives of the missing persons who have to tell their story several times and, accordingly, re-experience the trauma.
- Most often, respondents indicated that their issue was resolved if they contacted the National Police of Ukraine (83%) and the Territorial Centre for Recruitment and Social Support (80%). Also, more than half (56%) of the respondents indicated that contacting the National Information Bureau was effective.
- The majority of respondents stated that their issue was not resolved if they contacted the Office of the President of Ukraine (76%), the International Committee of the Red Cross (56%), the Defence Intelligence of Ukraine (56%), the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (52%), and the Commissioner for Persons Missing in Special Circumstances of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine (52%).
- The interviews showed that there is a significant need to simplify the application procedures for relatives of missing persons. The need to communicate with various state bodies and bureaucracy increases stress for people who are already often in a poor psychological state. In addition, a significant proportion of relatives are elderly. Respondents emphasise that procedures should be organised on the principle of a 'single window', the number of specialists from state bodies involved in working with victims should be increased, and the submission of documents in electronic form should have an alternative and qualified assistance in their preparation and submission.
- Psychological assistance was sought by 44 per cent of the interviewed family members of the missing persons. The overwhelming majority of respondents (62%) who reported having sought psychological help received it through NGOs/charitable foundations. Also, quite a few respondents turned to state institutions or healthcare facilities (42%).
- The majority of respondents who described their experience of receiving

psychological assistance were satisfied with its quality. At the same time, the interviews showed that the staff of state institutions providing services to this group should receive special training; it is necessary to create additional opportunities for psychological recovery for relatives both at the stage of application and during the waiting process, and that psychologists involved in working with different categories of victims should receive special training.

- In connection with the disappearance of a relative, 61% of respondents also sought legal assistance. Financial assistance was sought by 41% of respondents, and medical assistance by 35%.
- Among the procedures and services that currently exist for families of missing persons, respondents most often chose the following: the possibility to file a request to search for a missing person (93 per cent); to conduct DNA analysis (92 per cent); to obtain an extract from the Register of Missing Persons under special circumstances (89 per cent); to report the status of a missing person (88 per cent); and to consider a request for payment of financial support to a missing person (84 per cent).
- The majority of respondents (70 per cent) indicated that complex bureaucratic registration processes stand in the way of receiving such services. Also, a significant number of the respondents also pointed to the indifference of specialists providing such services (42%). One third of respondents noted such barriers as lack of information about organisations or specialists providing such services (33%) and lack of information about services (33%).
- 92 per cent of respondents indicated that families of missing persons are entitled to the payment of financial support in the part of the serviceman who went missing. Slightly more than half of the respondents indicated the right to housing and utility benefits (54%). One third of relatives noted the right to an additional reward of 100,000 UAH for the entire period of captivity or for the entire period until the status of a missing person is changed to another status (32%), as well as the right to exemption from military service for relatives (31%).
- The most frequently mentioned rights were the right to receive financial support for a missing soldier (46% – available, 41% – available with persistence), benefits for housing and communal services (40% and 11% respectively), the right to priority admission to children’s institutions at the place of residence (23% and 12%) and the right to exemption from military service for relatives (21% and 10%).
- The families of missing persons are most concerned about the lack of information about the fate of the missing person (93%), difficulties in obtaining information about the circumstances of the disappearance (92%) and difficulties in obtaining information about what actions the state is taking in the case of the missing person (87%). The research also showed that a significant problem for the families of missing persons is that they have to maintain a high level of effort and organisation at a time when they are experiencing a high level of stress and emotional burden.
- The vast majority of respondents use such sources as channels in messengers (86%), NGOs (81%) and social media (80%) to obtain information about available services



and guarantees for families of missing persons. 50% of relatives turn to Russian sources (social networks, channels, websites) in search of captured relatives and changes in Russian legislation. According to the results of the interviews, people are looking for sources where they can get all the necessary data, samples and experience of similar appeals in one place.

*Scientific publication*

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OF MISSING PERSONS  
REPORT ON THE RESEARCH  
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