



# Key priorities and recommendations for investigative media and donors in **Ukraine**

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# Introduction

Investigative journalists and media outlets in Ukraine are facing an increasingly precarious situation, significantly affected by Russia's full-scale invasion and the recent USAID 'stop-work' order. Investigative journalism is widely recognised as a crucial mechanism for ensuring the proper functioning of a democratic society by holding authorities to account.

In Ukraine, investigative journalism has been a priority for decades, leading to a high level of expertise. This has not only resulted in high-quality investigations that inform the public and promote transparency but has also repeatedly led to tangible societal impact by exposing abuses of power and uncovering corruption. As such, investigative journalism has played a vital role in fostering a more democratic and just Ukraine. This is particularly critical in the current context, where three simultaneous processes are unfolding: Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, the commencement of reconstruction efforts in several regions, and the potential for forthcoming peace talks.

This convergence of events has amplified the need for investigative journalism, particularly in exposing war crimes and instances of corruption. However, while the demand for investigative reporting continues to grow, the environment in which journalists operate is becoming increasingly constrained and dangerous.

Against this backdrop, on 24 January 2025, the US government abruptly announced the suspension of funding for media development and journalism. This decision has posed a significant threat to investigative media in Ukraine, leaving many organisations facing existential risks. Recent research by RPDI highlights that Ukrainian investigative media have been heavily reliant on US funding, with a majority of surveyed outlets receiving between 50% and 92% of their financial support from the US. The sudden withdrawal of funding has resulted in substantial financial shortfalls, creating an urgent need for mitigation strategies to sustain operations and develop long-term viability plans.

In response to this crisis, IMS and RPDI have convened leading Ukrainian investigative media outlets and organisations, along with key donors supporting freedom of expression and access to information. This initiative has resulted in a set of strategic priorities and recommendations aimed at ensuring continued support for investigative journalism in Ukraine, addressing both immediate challenges and future opportunities.

# The funding priorities for investigative media

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**Priority 1 - Core support:** There is an acute need for institutional support to ensure the continued operation of investigative media in Ukraine. The core support has to cover salaries for journalists, editors, videographers, and communication employees, rent of office fees, utility bills, etc.

**Priority 2 - Content production:** There is a need to support content production when it comes to amongst other transportation costs, access to information and equipment.

**Priority 3 – Distribution of content:** There is a need to support the distribution of content including maintenance of websites and social media channels, as well as promoting content to increase the reach of audiences.

**Priority 4 – Capacity development to strengthen media viability:** As a response to the current context, investigative media needs support when it comes to strengthen their viability including on fundraising strategies and alternative income revenues.

# Recommendations for respectively investigative media, donors, and implementers

## For investigative media

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**Recommendation 1 – Develop IJ network, build coalitions and enhance collaboration:** IJ Network in Ukraine and coalitions can be a tool to not solely ensure knowledge-sharing and expertise, but also to strengthen professional solidarity, cost-efficiency and financial viability. Coalitions could create new possibilities for amongst other project development and proposals.

**Recommendation 2 – Share resources:** There is a need to initiate and share a resource centre for investigative journalism which could offer services such as fact-checking, legal services, translation, accounting, subscription to paid services, and support on project proposal developments.

**Recommendation 3 – Build and engage communities of readers and viewers:** There is potential when it comes to strengthening the sense of community and belonging among readers and viewers who donate to investigative media. This can be done through for example bonuses and early content access.

**Recommendation 4 – Focus on impact:** There is a potential when it comes to highlighting and promoting not solely investigations, but the impact of the investigations. The emphasis on societal impact and relevance can engage new audiences as well as donors.

## For donors and implementers

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**Recommendation 1 – Strategic Communication and Coordinated Action:** To maximise impact and sustainability, donors and implementers must establish a structured mechanism for communication and coordination. This ensures that efforts are complementary rather than duplicative, fostering a more efficient and holistic approach to supporting investigative media. Regular dialogue, information-sharing platforms, and collaborative planning will help identify gaps, leverage resources effectively, and enhance the resilience of independent journalism. A strategic, unified approach is essential to safeguarding press freedom and ensuring that all critical areas receive adequate support.

**Recommendation 2 – Grants for content production:** There is a need to provide investigative media with grants for content production. Content production is the very core of investigative media and needs to be ensured prior to everything else.

**Recommendation 3 – The importance of contextual understanding:** Donors without local office branches in Ukraine, ought to strengthen their understanding of the media landscape and broader societal context in Ukraine. This will also significantly qualify their project designs ensuring that it is aligned with the volatile context in Ukraine as well as correspond to the increasing focus on localisation.

**Recommendation 4 – Focused capacity development and increasing professional skills:** Capacity development and training should focus on the current and specific needs of investigative media. Considering the current situation in Ukraine, there is a need to prioritise training on fundraising and media viability. Moreover, there is a need for trainings of specific skills such as OSINT, GEOINT and SOCMINT as well as integrating AI in production cycles and utilising satellite photos. Thus, capacity development is still a need both when it comes to operations and content production, but it needs to correspond closely to the existing needs of investigative media and come on top of core- and content support.

**Recommendation 5 – Stop thematic calls for proposals:** There is a tendency amongst donors to focus calls for proposals on specific themes, which might not correspond to the existing contextual needs of investigative journalism. The need for investigative journalism varies depending on and is interconnected with the local context. For example, the needs in the front-line regions might relate to war crimes whereas the need for Kyiv Oblast might relate to the reconstruction process. Regardless, there is a need for flexibility in order to respond to the existing needs and challenges. This flexibility will also allow for investigative media themselves to prioritise, and not the donor environment.

# Background

This document was developed following a strategic workshop organised by IMS and RPDI in Kyiv on March 14, 2024. The workshop brought together representatives from national and regional investigative journalism media, as well as donors and implementers. It also draws on the findings of [\*Survey of National and Regional Investigative Journalism Centres\*](#), presented by RPDI during the workshop, which provided essential context for the discussions.

*IMS (International Media Support) is a non-profit organisation supporting local media in countries affected by armed conflict, human insecurity and political transition. Peaceful, stable societies based on democratic values rely on ethical and critical journalism that aims to include, not divide. Good journalism. Better societies.*