

Pinpoints of Resilience: Veterans Co-Creation Project

Public Summary — Midterm Progress Report, September 2026

Prepared by the Organization for Nonviolent Movements (ONM)

About the Project

“Pinpoints of Resilience: Veterans” is a co-creation project building a Ukrainian-language training curriculum on unarmed civilian-based defense, nonviolent communication, and conflict resolution. Rather than being developed and delivered top-down, the curriculum is authored together with Ukrainian veterans, service-members active in civil society, activists, psychologists, journalists, and researchers who bring their lived experience directly into the content.

The project launched in July 2026 and is working toward an initial milestone of co-created course modules by the end of September, culminating in an in-person finalization and pilot workshop hosted by Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University (TNPU) this autumn.

The project is led by ONM together with ActionAid Eastern Europe, with guidance on curriculum structure from a veteran Ukrainian colonel and a TNPU professor, research and educational design support from a researcher at Sciences Po and NOVACT, and advisory input from an independent specialist in protection of civilians and community resilience. TNPU's Veteran Development Center is a core partner for the project's later phases and the pilot workshop. Roughly 10 Ukrainian co-creators are contributing, drawn from a wide range of backgrounds — combat veterans, active-duty service-members (often former activists), a sociologist, psychotherapists who work with veterans, a war correspondent, and civil society organizers.

The project follows an “artist’s studio and clay” model: international facilitators provide a starting framework and materials, and Ukrainian co-creators shape the final content with their own knowledge and experience. This is ONM’s second curriculum built through this co-creation approach; the first, a French-language course for African civil society, has reached over 200 alumni across 20+ countries (led by ONM Director Amber in 2023-24 when she was senior advisor with CNCR; after ONM’s founding, ONM inherited the project).

Objectives

- Build, with Ukrainian co-creators, a practical and theoretical curriculum on unarmed civilian-based defense, nonviolent communication, and conflict resolution for veterans, students, and civilian audiences, initially in Ukraine with potential for applicability in EU and Baltic countries.
- Develop a shared, Ukraine-experience-anchored conceptual framework for civilian-based defense, updating a field of study that has evolved rapidly since 2022.
- Document and analyze nonviolent tactics used by Ukrainian veterans since the full-scale invasion, across three areas: resisting invasion and occupation, strengthening community resilience, and reinforcing democratic institutions and accountability.

- Sustain a genuine, horizontal learning community in which the process delivers real value to Ukrainian participants, rather than functioning as a one-directional training.
- Connect Ukrainian civic experience with international nonviolent movements elsewhere, encouraging mutual learning across contexts of resistance to authoritarianism and hybrid attacks.

Approach

Co-creation runs on an online learning platform, supported by regular messaging-based coordination and weekly bilingual video calls with translation support. Participants choose between two complementary tracks — documenting and analyzing real-world tactics, or building curriculum content directly — with the two tracks feeding into each other throughout the project.

On the research track, each documented tactic draws on multiple sources, treating the tactic itself, rather than any single individual act, as the unit of analysis. All interview data is anonymized before analysis and shared only in aggregate form. The team has also developed careful criteria for determining which tactics fall within the project’s scope, reflecting how blurred the line between civilian and military action has become in the Ukrainian context.

Co-creators completed a self-assessment at the outset of the project and will repeat it after the autumn workshop, to measure changes in confidence and understanding over the project’s life.

Preliminary Findings

Although the research track is still actively collecting cases, several patterns have already emerged clearly enough to shape both the research framework and the curriculum.

A three-part typology of civic action has stabilized, distinguishing tactics that directly resist Russian aggression, tactics that sustain community resilience by reducing civilian suffering, and tactics that reinforce democratic institutions and accountability.

Veterans participating in the project display what the team calls a “**dual identity**”: they carry forward the vigilance, protective, and discipline-oriented instincts developed in military service, but redeploy them into civilian, nonviolent roles, rather than being seen as “broken” and needing to be “fixed” or needing to leave that experience behind (**an asset-focused, transformative, and constructive approach to veterans wellness**).

Because Ukraine is actively resisting a foreign aggressor, the civic and veterans’-rights actions documented by the project also reinforce Ukraine’s democratic identity and its EU integration path — a dimension with few parallels in earlier civil-resistance case studies elsewhere.

The project’s early findings suggest that **existing frameworks in the civil resistance field under-represent logistical and community-resilience tactics** relative to their prevalence in Ukraine, a gap the project aims to help close for the wider field of study.

An early exchange between Ukrainian participants and Francophone African civil society activists, arising organically from ONM’s existing network, has surfaced a shared conviction: that **connecting people across different struggles against authoritarianism builds empathy and mutual learning on both sides**.

Veterans from the frontlines are drivers of civic action and of upholding democratic values in the rear.

Veterans, and particularly active-duty service-members in the project, are the loudest voices calling for resourcing and mainstreaming unarmed civilian-based defense preparedness in national law and nation-wide education & training as a defense policy.

Early Signals from Participants

Nine co-creators completed the project's first self-assessment (a second and final assessment will be completed at the end of this phase of the project). All demonstrated an understandably strong existing understanding of unarmed civilian-based defense and nonviolent resistance (not necessarily identifying with equivalent Ukrainian terminology), correctly identifying core concepts from the outset, and expressed strong conviction in the value of nonviolent civic action and the essential role of ordinary citizens in national defense. Self-reported confidence in various skills (such as writing or research, marketable skills valuable to young, job-seeking veterans) varied slightly but were overall moderately high.

Participants rated their access to international solidarity and community support very low — a signal that Ukrainian veterans and civil society actors bring deep knowledge and commitment to this field, but lack recognition, and stand to benefit from stronger connections to international networks (for example, other activists struggling against authoritarianism and hybrid attacks) and local support networks. Closing these gaps is precisely what this project is designed to do.

Looking Ahead

The project's next milestone is the in-person finalization and pilot workshop at TNPU early autumn, where the co-created curriculum will be tested with real end-users (initially, veterans) for the first time. The workshop will also bring together ONM, ActionAid Eastern Europe, the Center for Nonviolent Conflict Research, and TNPU to align on the terms of a formal partnership agreement.

Looking beyond this initial phase, ONM sees strong potential to deepen the exchange between Ukrainian and Francophone African civil society partners, particularly around countering Russian disinformation and human trafficking/army recruitment, and to expand the reach of the resulting curriculum to new educational, defense, and policy communities across Europe.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss how funders and partners can help sustain and scale this work.

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