

Postal services in wartime: Lessons from Ukraine

Anna Lioufas



During Russia's full-scale invasion, the Ukrainian postal service has played an important role in maintaining basic societal functions and strengthening the resilience of the civilian population. By distributing cash, medicines, identity documents, and humanitarian assistance in frontline and isolated areas, postal services have complemented, and in some cases replaced, other societal structures.

UKRAINIAN POSTAL OPERATORS have rapidly adapted their operations in areas subjected to extensive attacks on infrastructure, by, among other things, deploying mobile offices, replanning routes, and introducing protective measures for staff. The postal service has also played an important role for national identity, for example through symbolically charged postage stamps and fundraising campaigns for the armed forces.

Ukraine's experience shows that the postal service can function as a hub for logistics, interaction with citizens, and civil preparedness. This is also relevant in a Swedish context, particularly with regard to communication in sparsely populated areas, robust public services in times of crisis, and the role of the postal service within total defence¹.

¹ The term "total defence" is used in Sweden to encompass both military and civilian defence.

1. Background and research questions

This memo is one of the deliverables within a project on the postal service in wartime that FOI, the Swedish Defence Research Agency, has been commissioned to carry out on behalf of the Swedish Post and Telecom Authority (PTS). The research questions have been developed together with the client:

- How have postal services functioned during the war in Ukraine?
- How have postal services been prioritised and adapted to changing needs in Ukraine after 24 February 2022?
- What lessons can the Ukrainian case offer regarding, for example, postal services in hard-to-reach areas, alternative services, and different communication channels?

1.2 Limitations

In dialogue with PTS, we have chosen to focus on Ukrposhta,² as it is the state postal operator. Where necessary, this has been supplemented with information from other postal operators.

It has not been possible to obtain information about the occupied areas; this memo therefore addresses only those parts of Ukraine that are not under occupation.

1.3 Source material

The task of describing Ukraine's experience of postal operations in wartime could not be solved using the existing literature on the subject; it is not a well-researched area. The study has therefore drawn on several new types of source material.

As part of this project, a virtual meeting was held with key stakeholders in the Ukrainian postal system. Participants included representatives of NCEC³ (National Commission for the State Regulation of Electronic Communications, Radio Frequency Spectrum and the Provision of Postal Services of Ukraine), MCTD (Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine),⁴ the designated postal operator Ukrposhta, and the private operator Meest Post.⁵ They presented material prepared on the basis

of FOI's own research questions, after which FOI participants were given the opportunity to ask more detailed questions. Before the meeting, a list of questions was distributed to the Ukrainian contact person, who forwarded these questions to the postal operators.

The following account is based on material from these presentations and Ukrposhta's newsletters, combined with media reporting and publicly available reports from organisations such as the Universal Postal Union (UPU) and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). It should be noted that most of the information comes directly from Ukrainian sources, and that it has not been possible to independently verify all of the details.

2. Ukraine as a postal actor

2.1 Structure and actors of the Ukrainian postal system

In the virtual meeting mentioned above, NCEC described the postal market in Ukraine as "highly concentrated, competitive, and largely self-organised and self-regulated, with minimal state regulation." The postal infrastructure of Ukraine includes 53 postal operators, among which the three largest together provide 97 per cent coverage in the country with their postal networks.⁶

2.1.1 Ukrposhta

According to Ukrposhta's official website, it offers services such as tracking and parcel delivery throughout the country, as well as international e-commerce and financial services. Ukrposhta is the designated postal operator, focusing on universal coverage and traditional postal functions, with a particular emphasis on maintaining reliable operations in rural areas.⁷

2.1.2 Nova Poshta

Nova Poshta is a private company that invests in fast, reliable postal, courier and logistics solutions using advanced technology, with a strong focus on urban populations and businesses.⁸

² <https://www.ukrposhta.ua/en/>.

³ <https://www.ukrposhta.ua/en/> <https://nkek.gov.ua/en/about-ncec>.

⁴ <https://mindev.gov.ua/en>.

⁵ <https://mindev.gov.ua/en>.

⁶ Ukrainian NCEC, presentation at research meeting on the postal service in wartime, online meeting, 1 July 2025.

⁷ Ukrposhta, "Ukrposhta Ukraine's national post," retrieved 3 July 2025, <https://www.ukrposhta.ua/en/>.

⁸ Nova Poshta, "Ukraine's national post and courier services," retrieved 3 July 2025, <https://novaposhta.ua/en/>.

2.1.3 Meest Post

Meest is a private logistics and postal company specialising in international deliveries, particularly between Ukraine and other countries, including those with large Ukrainian diasporas.⁹

2.2 International ranking

The resilience of Ukraine's postal operations is reflected in international rankings carried out by the Universal Postal Union (UPU), the central institution for global postal coordination and regulation. In 2024, Ukraine was ranked eighth out of 192 postal services worldwide, with a score of 72.7 out of 100. This represents a significant improvement on the previous year's score of 51.3. For comparison, Portugal had a score of 70.1, Greece 56.3, and Vietnam 75.6.¹⁰ UPU's ranking¹¹ is based on four core indicators:

- **Reliability (quality and speed of deliveries):** Ukraine increased its score from 82.6 to 91. This puts it ahead of countries such as the US, Canada, and Spain, and approaching Germany, Japan, and Australia.
- **Reach (volume of international mail, imports, and exports):** The score tripled, from 31.6 to 87.9.
- **Relevance of the business model:** Ukraine's score rose from 9.9 to 21.9.
- **Resilience of the business model (ability to withstand technological, social, and economic shocks):** The score increased from 78.1 to 85.4.

3. How have postal services functioned during the war in Ukraine?

Russia's military attacks on Ukraine have had extensive consequences across large parts of the country. One of the most prominent effects has been a marked increase in

both internal and international migration, with millions of people forced to leave their homes because of security risks, destroyed infrastructure, or direct occupation.¹² Core elements of the social infrastructure, such as post offices, terminals, and other civilian facilities, have been attacked or brought under occupation, which has made it more difficult to ensure the supply of goods and maintain communications in many areas. Logistical networks, including roads, railways, and bridges, have been damaged, resulting in significant disruption to domestic transport.¹³ Air transport has in practice ceased, and maritime transport is also severely constrained.¹⁴ At the same time, attacks on power plants and the electricity grid have led to serious instability in the energy supply, particularly in areas close to the front lines, which in turn has affected access to electronic communications services.¹⁵ In addition, the extensive loss of human resources through mobilisation, disability, deaths, and emigration has resulted in an acute shortage of skilled labour in several sectors, further undermining the efficiency of societal functions and their capacity for recovery.

According to information presented by the Ukrainian NCEC, the Russian attacks exposed certain vulnerabilities in the Ukrainian postal system.¹⁶ These include the fact that the level of digitalisation among some operators (particularly small firms) was far too low to maintain operations under such strain. Some operators have also had limited financial resources for modernising and developing the postal network. The same presentation noted that the war has also led to changes in consumer needs (for example, a sharp increase in international consignments), a higher tax burden on citizens, increased risks of prohibited items being sent, and rising cyberthreats.

⁹ Meest, retrieved 3 July 2025, <https://ua.meest.com/>.

¹⁰ Universal Postal Union, "The State of the Postal Sector 2024," retrieved 12 August 2025. <https://www.upu.int/en/publications/2ipd/the-state-of-the-postal-sector-2024>.

¹¹ Each country's postal network is assigned a score out of 100, based on UPU big data, including billions of postal tracking records collected in 2023, official UPU postal statistics covering more than 100 indicators, as well as key surveys carried out by the UPU. The index serves as a central measure of how national postal networks contribute to global trade and development, and is used as an advocacy tool to encourage investment in network development worldwide. Universal Postal Union; see "The State of the Postal Sector 2024."

¹² International Organization for Migration, *Crisis in Ukraine*, 2025, <https://www.iom.int/crisis-ukraine>, retrieved 12 August 2025.

¹³ A new report by the Government of Ukraine, the World Bank, the European Commission, and the UN estimates that reconstruction will cost USD 524 billion over the coming decade, significantly more than previous estimates. The analysis is based on a comprehensive damage assessment led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Ukraine; see (UNDP, 2025).

¹⁴ Bandura, R. (2024). *Ships, Trains, and Trucks: Unlocking Ukraine's Vital Trade Potential*. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

¹⁵ Odell et al., *Russian attacks on the Ukrainian power system*, 2024.

¹⁶ NCEC presentation at research meeting on the postal service in wartime.

3.1 Number of postal items handled in Ukraine (in thousands)

International deliveries

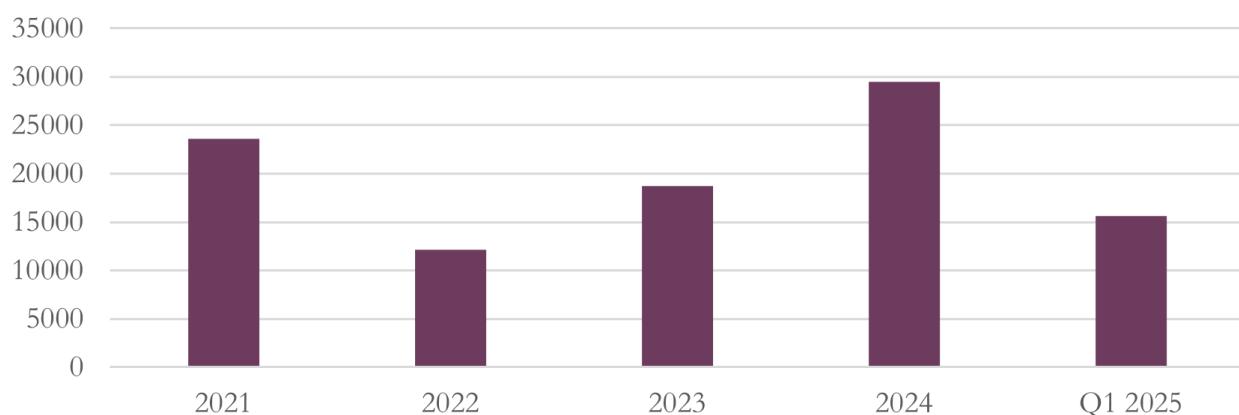


Figure 1. Published with the permission of NCEC

Domestic deliveries

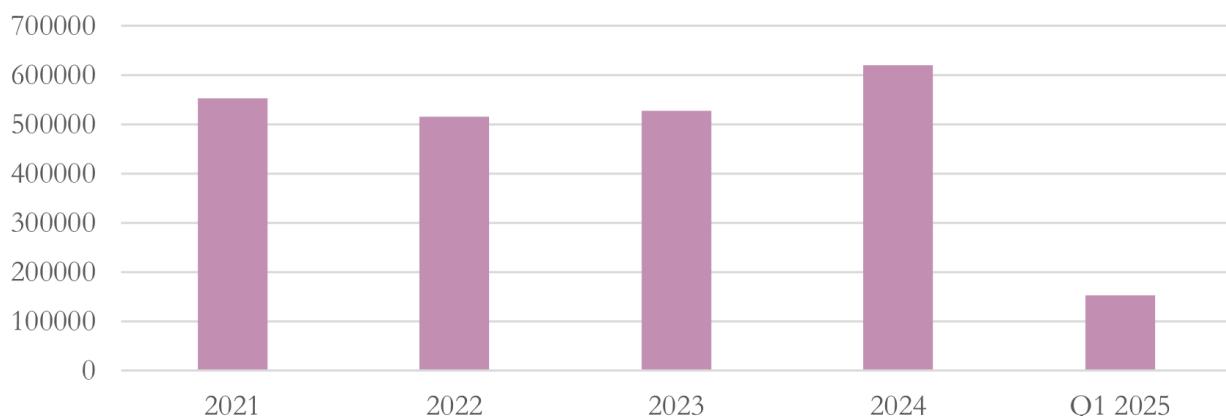


Figure 2. Published with the permission of NCEC

4. How have postal services been prioritised and adapted to changing needs in Ukraine after 24 February 2022?

4.1 Prioritised deliveries

In the meeting, the participating experts from Ukraine stated that Ukrainian postal operators have maintained their full range of services under wartime conditions, meaning that no services have been deprioritised or discontinued. They pointed out that the operators have instead expanded their operations beyond their regular services, launching new types of services as part of social and voluntary support initiatives, for example pharmacy services. On the

basis of information from the different operators, a picture emerges of Ukrainian postal services having undergone a process of streamlining and efficiency gains, a process that began even before the full-scale invasion in 2022. Initially, operations were at a relatively low level, but the measures adopted have had such a significant effect that they have made it possible to sustain the level of service. There is no formally established order of priority, but NCEC assesses that the most highly prioritised deliveries (shipments) during martial law, in addition to the delivery of traditional postal services to users across Ukraine, from abroad and in the reverse direction, also include humanitarian logistics,

humanitarian aid, social support payments, and the provision of state assistance to individuals.¹⁷

4.1.2 The business sector

From the second week of the war, Ukrposhta began operating air deliveries to the US from Warsaw, which has provided important support for the export activities of Ukrainian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are to a large extent dependent on postal services for sales via platforms such as eBay and Amazon.¹⁸ According to Ukrposhta's public newsletter (Ukrposhta, 5 December 2024), e-commerce in Ukraine has shown continued strong growth despite the ongoing war, with a growing share of the population relying on online shopping for both essential and non-essential goods.

To address the logistical challenges, the postal operators, including Ukrposhta, have implemented tailored services such as cash-on-delivery services and flexible delivery options, which have made it possible for e-commerce parcels to reach end customers efficiently.¹⁹ Ukrposhta reports in a newsletter that over 60,000 Ukrainian craft producers and small businesses have exported goods primarily to the US, which accounts for about 50 per cent of the export volume, via its services. Ukrainian presence on US marketplaces consists of more than 42,600 sellers on Etsy and 12,000 on eBay.²⁰

In the same newsletter, Ukrposhta writes that, in order to further strengthen this development, it has, in

cooperation with the now-discontinued USAID, established an e-export school aimed at entrepreneurs and veterans, where they receive training in the use of digital trading platforms such as Amazon, eBay, and Etsy. These initiatives illustrate the role of postal operators in maintaining and promoting Ukraine's e-commerce economy under difficult conditions.

4.2 Regulatory and legislative adjustments

Several changes have been made to regulation and legislation to strengthen postal services during the war. An implementation plan for NCEC's strategic priorities was drawn up early in the war in order to ensure a resilient postal infrastructure: changes to the responsibilities of the national operator Ukrposhta under heightened readiness were laid down in a government decision as early as 17 March 2022.²¹ According to information presented by the Ukrainian NCEC, the following measures have also been introduced:

- Simplification of procedures for government supervision, including the abolition of scheduled/planned inspections, combined with changes to the mechanism for monitoring the quality of postal services.
- Introduction of an out-of-court dispute resolution mechanism for cases between users and operators, and between operators.



Figure 3. Mobile post offices. Published with permission of Ukrposhta.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Alina Klitina, "Interview with Igor Smelyansky the Head of Ukrposhta," Kyiv Post, 6 May 2022, <https://www.kyivpost.com/videos/8920>, retrieved 3 July 2025.

¹⁹ Weisenthal and Alloway, "How Ukraine Delivers the Mail."

²⁰ Ukrposhta, 5 December 2024.

²¹ Pursuant to a decision by the Government of Ukraine (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2022, No. 305), special rules were established for Ukrposhta's operations under martial law, covering, among other things, priority deliveries and transport arrangements.

- Improvement of a mechanism for communication and coordination between public authorities and operators, and between the regulator, operators, and users.

Implementation of the electronic regulatory platform, which includes a subsystem providing information and analytical support for the regulator's activities in the postal field.

4.3 Practical adaptations

Ukraine is one of the geographically largest countries in Europe, which gives rise to major regional variations in conditions, geographically, economically, and socially. The situation at the front line, for example in Donetsk, differs markedly from that in the western parts of the country, such as the areas around Lviv near the Polish border, where economic opportunities and infrastructure are more developed. At the same time, these differences are also shaped by the contrast between urban and rural environments, with access to resources and economic activity varying greatly. These geographical and economic disparities place heavy demands on organisational and operational adaptation in sectors such as the postal service, since solutions that work effectively in one region are not necessarily applicable or sustainable in another.

4.3.1 Security

In discussions with the postal operators, they emphasised that their overriding concern has been the safety of staff and users, and the ability to keep postal branches accessible.²² However, Ukrposhta's Director General, Ihor Smelyanski,



Figure 4. Delivery of food and supplies. Published with permission of Ukrposhta.

²² Presentation by postal operators at research meeting on the postal service in wartime.

²³ Olesya Hrazdan, "Ukraine's National Postal Service Is Ready to Open in Sudzha," *Kyiv Post*, 16 August 2024, <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/37510>, retrieved 3 July 2025.

²⁴ Thomas, "Ukrainische Post."



Figure 5. Evacuation of Ukrainian nationals. Published with permission of Ukrposhta.

notes in a media interview that 100 per cent security is not a realistic goal; instead, the task is to manage an acceptable level of risk.²³ The reality of this level of risk is evident in Ukrposhta's newsletters, which include photographs and personal stories of employees who have been killed in the line of duty as a result of Russian attacks.

To improve security, all operators have had to adapt their logistics, for example by restructuring routes. Ukrposhta's Director General states that "there are collaborators among the population; they receive money from Russia if they pass on the coordinates of our postal buses. As a precaution, we therefore often change routes, use different sources of information, and take new decisions every day."²⁴ Today, Ukrposhta plans its routes in close cooperation with the Ukrainian military in order to minimise the risk of attacks.

Ukrposhta has managed to continue operating by rapidly relocating activities to safer areas.²⁵ Meest Post likewise reports that it has prioritised security by closing post offices in war zones and then resuming operations in safer regions.²⁶

Ukrposhta reports that it has had to implement extensive security measures to protect both employees and customers. Drivers and postal workers in front-line areas often wear body armour and travel in armoured vehicles. In a pilot project, Ukrposhta has equipped certain vehicles with drone defence systems, but this remains at the trial stage. Ukrposhta is also working on a drone-detection system.²⁷

4.3.2 Mobility and reconstruction

To ensure that even the most remote and war-affected areas have access to postal services, Ukrposhta has introduced mobile post offices.²⁸ These are armoured vehicles that deliver letters, parcels, and humanitarian assistance directly to residents who would otherwise be isolated. These mobile units have also been used to pay out pensions and salaries in places where banks no longer function.²⁹

4.3.3 Transport and logistics

The full-scale invasion has forced postal operators to adapt their transport routes because of several interacting factors, such as curfews that prevent night-time transport, air raids, roadblocks at border crossings, fuel shortages, and destroyed roads and infrastructure.³⁰ According to information from NCEC, large postal operators (with the support of the NCEC) have addressed this issue by obtaining special permits from the military administrations, which demonstrates close cooperation between the government and the business sector. Ukrposhta has also entered into close cooperation with Ukrzaliznytsia, the Ukrainian state

railway, in order to ensure postal distribution across the country. The rail route between Lviv and Kyiv was opened for postal transport shortly after the outbreak of the war, a postal route that had not been used for 21 years.³¹ The then Director General of Ukrzaliznytsia had previously worked at Ukrposhta, which facilitated communication and made it possible to launch the first route just five days after the invasion.³² It should also be noted that, at the same time, Ukraine relied on European partners for support with international postal deliveries.³³

Although there are examples of railway lines being cut because of security risks and damage to infrastructure, rail transport has remained one of the central components of postal distribution. The trains have, quite simply, kept running. Ukrposhta has also developed alternative logistical solutions, including road transport and coordination with military actors, to reach cut-off areas.³⁴ Despite the fact that Ukraine currently lacks functioning airports, the country ranked fourth worldwide among postal services in terms of express services last year, and this during an ongoing war.³⁵

At the same time, investment has continued in infrastructure that was already neglected before the war, including the automation of sorting centres and the establishment of new logistics hubs to improve efficiency. Before the outbreak of the war, Ukrposhta had around 11,000 offices, but only 20 per cent of these were equipped with computers, more than half of which were over ten years old. In addition, the average age of the postal vehicles was about 17 years.³⁶

Information on how Ukrainian postal operators use drones varies. According to media reports, the use of drones for smaller parcels, the streamlining of logistics networks, and improved coordination with international carriers have helped maintain operations despite the challenging

²⁵ Hrazdan, “Ready to Open in Sudzha”; and Florian Deprez, “Postal Workers Are Keeping Ukraine’s Front-line Villages Alive,” *Foreign Policy*, 25 September 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/09/25/ukraine-russia-war-postal-workers-ukrposhta-front-line-mykolaiv/>, retrieved 3 July 2025.

²⁶ Presentation by postal operators at research meeting on the postal service in wartime.

²⁷ Thomas, “Ukrainische Post.”

²⁸ Maria Gutierrez, “Delivering Under Pressure: How Igor Smelyansky (MBA’05) has Adapted Ukraine’s National Postal Service to the Chaos of War,” *Georgetown University*, 8 December 2022, <https://msb.georgetown.edu/news-story/alumni/delivering-under-pressure-how-igor-smelyansky-mba05-has-adopted-ukraines-national-postal-service-to-the-chaos-of-war/>, retrieved 3 July 2025.

²⁹ Hrazdan, “Ready to Open in Sudzha.”

³⁰ Thomas, “Ukrainische Post.”

³¹ Center for Transport Strategies, “Ukrposhta Delivers International Postal Items by Rail for First Time in 20 Years,” 29 December 2023, https://en.cfts.org.ua/news/ukrposhta_delivers_international_postal_items_by_rail_for_first_time_in_20_years, retrieved 12 August 2025.

³² Post and Parcel, “Ukrposhta: Showing True Leadership,” 19 May 2022. <https://postandparcel.info/148374/news/ukrposhta-showing-true-leadership/>. Retrieved 3 July 2025.

³³ Sean Wilder, “As War Drags, Ukraine’s Postal Service Perseveres,” *Al Jazeera*, 30 August 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/30/as-war-drags-ukraines-postal-service-perseveres>, retrieved 3 July 2025.

³⁴ Weisenthal and Alloway, “How Ukraine Delivers the Mail.”

³⁵ Thomas, “Ukrainische Post.”

³⁶ Gutierrez, “Delivering Under Pressure.”

circumstances.³⁷ However, Ukrposhta's representatives have stated in discussions that, although the postal service has used drones for more than ten years, it is now primarily the armed forces that use drones, and that there can be problems in the airspace if too many drones are operating in the same area at the same time.³⁸

4.3.4 Internet and electricity access

During the war, internet access in Ukraine has represented a critical and complex challenge for all sectors, not least the postal sector. International support, particularly through the provision of Starlink satellite terminals, has played, and continues to play, a central role in ensuring continuous communication. At the same time, extensive power cuts and damage to the traditional network infrastructure have led to significant disruptions in internet access, especially



Figure 6. Examples of humanitarian aid. Published with permission of Ukrposhta.

in severely affected regions. Starlink has therefore become a fundamental component of Ukraine's communications system during the war, even though the use of this technology entails both strategic advantages and security risks. Debates about its continued use centre on questions of the technology's vulnerability, political control, and ethical implications. Several analysts, including Horton and Korolchuk (2023), nevertheless conclude that, despite the controversy surrounding Elon Musk, the Starlink network is "absolutely decisive" for Ukraine's defence.³⁹

To enable postal staff to carry out their work, they have been equipped with Starlink routers and generators, which allow data to be downloaded at the start of the day and then worked with offline, with synchronisation in the evening.⁴⁰ This solution has been crucial for maintaining mail delivery, as it enables operational communication, logistics management, and secure data transfer even in remote or war-affected areas.⁴¹

Ukrposhta currently has at its disposal:⁴²

- 1,552 Starlink units for internet access;
- 1,716 generators for electricity and heating;
- 8,295 three-in-one units for field work;⁴³
- More than 200 hubs with access to heating, electricity, and the internet.

At the same time, Ukrposhta, like the rest of Ukraine, is dealing with a significant fuel shortage, which is being addressed through extensive fuel imports from other countries.⁴⁴

4.3.5 Digitalisation and innovation

As many people in Ukraine now use digital services more than before, the postal services have also been tasked with providing digital mail and parcel tracking, enabling people to stay in touch and receive important messages remotely. To reduce dependence on physical infrastructure and improve services during the war, Ukrposhta has invested heavily in digitalisation. Services such as online payments, digital mail

³⁷ See, among others, Weisenthal and Alloway, "How Ukraine Delivers the Mail."

³⁸ Presentation by postal operators at research meeting on the postal service in wartime.

³⁹ Adam Horton and Serhiy Korolchuk, "Whatever the Fuss over Elon Musk, Starlink Is Utterly Essential in Ukraine," *The Washington Post*, 18 September 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/09/08/elon-musk-starlink-ukraine-war/>, retrieved 12 August 2025.

⁴⁰ Thomas, "Ukrainische Post."

⁴¹ Weisenthal and Alloway, "How Ukraine Delivers the Mail."

⁴² Presentation by postal operators at research meeting on the postal service in wartime.

⁴³ These devices are used by postal staff to retrieve and update delivery information directly from the field. By downloading information on consignments before leaving the post office, they can plan their routes efficiently and ensure that all parcels are delivered on time. When they return to the post office, the devices are updated with information on delivery status.

⁴⁴ Post and Parcel, "Ukrposhta: Showing True Leadership."

tracking, and e-commerce have been expanded. The war has forced all postal operators to innovate rapidly, leading to efficiency gains in areas such as automated mail sorting. Ukrposhta, for example, has introduced automated letter sorting and hopes to increase capacity from 1,500 parcels per day to 4,000 parcels per day by the end of the year. Meest notes that it has had to introduce several digitalisation measures, including functions such as online parcel tracking, electronic notifications, and orders via mobile apps.⁴⁵

4.3.6 Cybersecurity

Ukrposhta has had to make extensive investments in IT security in order to manage recurring cyberattacks, particularly after the launch of a postage stamp honouring the Ukrainian border guard, which provoked Russia.⁴⁶ A clear example of what a cyberattack can look like was the attack on 12 December 2023, when one of Ukraine's largest mobile operators, Kyivstar, was subjected to a major cyberattack affecting around 25 million users and resulting in a two-day outage in telephony, text messaging, and mobile internet. The incident affected Ukrposhta's operations in several core areas, including postal distribution and sales activities. It also impeded both the dissemination of information to recipients about arriving consignments and the verification of customers' identities via SMS.⁴⁷ Ukrposhta's Director General, Ihor Smelyanski, emphasises that cybersecurity is a matter of national security, with threats that are continuous and require significant resources to build robust and sustainable systems. He points out that cyberattacks against critical infrastructure can have far-reaching consequences for society, which underlines the importance of investing in IT security.⁴⁸ Among the issues he highlights as particularly important are data storage and data export:

We are working to create sustainable services, and this has become a question of national security: is it safe for the national postal operator to store data in the cloud? Can we export these data? If the situation with Russia deteriorates, they do not need tanks; they can simply shut down financial systems and make sure that we cannot pay out pensions. It is a more effective tool for influencing an election.

4.3.7 Administration and databases

The challenges in war-affected areas entail a continuous and complex re-evaluation of Ukrposhta's database, as large parts of the built environment have been destroyed and millions of Ukrainians have been displaced within the country or abroad.⁴⁹ In order to ensure effective communication, particularly in light of the government's need to reach citizens, it is crucial that the database is continuously updated with current information about where people are now located and which buildings are still intact. From an analytical perspective, this database management is central to maintaining the functionality of the postal service under ongoing wartime conditions. It reflects a broader challenge for all public services in conflict zones: adapting to rapidly changing demographics and infrastructure. Meeting this challenge requires not only technical capacity but also close cooperation with local authorities and other actors to ensure reliable and up-to-date data.

4.4 Who has driven the process?

The postal service in Ukraine has undergone extensive changes since the outbreak of the war in 2022, with a number of measures implemented to adapt operations to the new situation. In communication with NCEC, they note that a distinctive feature of the postal services sector in Ukraine as a whole is the minimal involvement of state authorities in the activities of businesses operating in this field. Therefore, the key decisions regarding the maintenance of their postal networks were developed and implemented by the postal operators themselves. However, the NCEC and the Ministry of Development, together with the operators, quickly generated and implemented solutions that helped ensure the resilience of the postal services sector. Legislative changes were adopted promptly after the start of the war, indicating that the political leadership recognised the urgent needs and responded accordingly. At the same time, it remains an open question whether certain changes, such as the introduction of pharmacy deliveries and cash disbursements, are the result of local initiatives or of management decisions within the postal operators.

⁴⁵ Presentation by postal operators at research meeting on the postal service in wartime.

⁴⁶ Post and Parcel, “*Ukrposhta: Showing True Leadership*”; and Shoshana Wodinsky, “Ukraine’s Postal Service Gets DDoS’d After Printing Stamps of Sunken Russian Battleship,” *Gizmodo*, 22 April 2022, <https://gizmodo.com/ukraines-post-office-cyberattack-guard-moskova-stamp-1848829405>.

⁴⁷ Ukrposhta newsletter, 14 December 2023.

⁴⁸ Ihor Smelyansky, interviewed by PwC, June 2018, *PwC Ukraine*, <https://www.pwc.com/ua/en/survey/2018/interview-ukrposhta-ceo-igor-smelyansky.html>.

⁴⁹ Marek Rosycki, “Ukraine—The ‘Border Land’ of Europe and Future CEP Mecca?” *Parcel & Postal Technology International*, 11 July 2023, retrieved 3 July 2025; and Wilder, “As War Drags, Ukraine’s Postal Service Perseveres.”

5. Lessons regarding postal services in hard-to-reach (war-affected) areas and alternative services

The postal service in Ukraine performs a critical function that is, in many respects, more than “just” a traditional provider of postal services. Its rapid adaptation to the disruptive conditions of war, including the development of humanitarian services, deliveries of medicines, and financial services, demonstrates strong organisational capacity and a high degree of social responsibility. The challenges are enormous, but operations are crucial for maintaining societal functions and supporting civilians in hard-to-reach areas. At the same time, the postal service has also been subject to some criticism, for example regarding certain fundraising methods, and it is important that it continues to work on issues such as transparency and confidence-building in a complex wartime situation.

In the war zones, almost all banks, pharmacies, and shops are currently closed. People receive food, medicines, newspapers, and power banks through us. And they collect their pensions and social benefits—in cash—because not even payment terminals work without electricity.⁵⁰

5.1 Evacuation of the population

Through cooperation between Ukrposhta and the Ukrainian railways, a system has been established to facilitate access to emergency funding for evacuated persons.⁵¹ When refugees board the trains, their contact details are collected in real time by train staff, enabling Ukrposhta to prepare and provide

financial support upon arrival. This process was established rapidly, within three days of the outbreak of the war.⁵²

5.2 Humanitarian deliveries to citizens

Ukrposhta has become a central actor in the transport of humanitarian assistance, both internationally and within the country. Over the past year, more than 300 tonnes of humanitarian aid have been transported from the US alone, with similar flows from other international donors. Distribution also covers rural and occupied areas, where mobile post offices distribute pensions and food.⁵³ At the same time, some humanitarian efforts have been subject to criticism, for example concerning automatic charity surcharges on postal items without customers' consent, which has sparked debate about Ukrposhta's role and its relationship with the government.⁵⁴

5.3 Supply of medicines in front-line areas

In response to the lack of pharmacies in more than 20,000 Ukrainian villages, Ukrposhta has obtained a pharmacy licence and established a pharmaceutical warehouse, making it possible to distribute medicines even to the most remote and front-line areas.⁵⁵ Through the “Ukrposhta Pharmacy” initiative, it has offered free delivery of medicines within three days between regional centres, as well as storage for up to seven days in local post offices. The project is integrated with the state programme “Affordable Medicines” and handled more than 51,000 orders in 2024, a substantial share of them from conflict zones. Complementary



Figure 7. Ukrainian stamps.

Source: Shutterstock.



⁵⁰ Thomas, “Ukrainische Post.”

⁵¹ Ukrposhta newsletter, 14 December 2023.

⁵² Post and Parcel, “Ukrposhta: Showing True Leadership.”

⁵³ Klitina, “Interview with Igor Smelyansky.”

⁵⁴ Komersant Ukrainian, (10 January 2025), *Scandal over charitable contributions: Is Ukrposhta's initiative legitimate?* Komersant.

⁵⁵ Thomas, “Ukrainische Post.”

initiatives include “Doctors at Ukrposhta Mobile Post Offices,” in which mobile units provide basic medical services to improve access to healthcare and prevent disease in isolated areas.⁵⁶

5.4 Banking services and cash disbursement

In a context where traditional banking services are often unavailable, Ukrposhta has taken on a key role in handling cash financial transactions for individuals and businesses, which is of critical importance for economic stability during the war.⁵⁷ Even before the war, Ukrposhta had the ambition to broaden its services to include financial solutions, a development that has now been accelerated by the degraded banking infrastructure in the country. With support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Ukrposhta has obtained a banking licence and begun to develop banking services.⁵⁸ The company has also been responsible for the payment of salaries, pensions, and social benefits, particularly in areas where banks are inaccessible because of damaged infrastructure or staff shortages. Physical cash disbursements have been essential, not least for older people who lack access to digital payment options. Ukrposhta’s Director General, Ihor Smelyanski, underlines the importance of this social mission and describes how the organisation has managed to reach even areas that have only been recently liberated despite major logistical obstacles.⁵⁹

5.5 Messaging services

In areas without electricity or mobile networks, Ukrposhta has implemented an initiative under which residents can submit messages using forms, which are then printed and delivered by postal staff and volunteers during their rounds. Senders are notified when their message has reached the recipient, which fulfils an important social function in the war’s isolated regions.⁶⁰

5.6 Shipments of goods

Ukrposhta has its own warehouses and uses a hub-to-hub system to distribute food and supplies, which is crucial for maintaining deliveries in a difficult and dynamic wartime environment.⁶¹ According to Ukrposhta, it has established its own logistics hubs and warehouse centres in several regions to manage the collection, sorting, and onward distribution of parcels and supplies effectively.⁶² These hubs function as central nodes where goods are gathered before being sent on to regional or local post offices and mobile units. Goods, including food and humanitarian aid, are moved between larger logistics hubs by train and lorry transport before being distributed to smaller centres and, ultimately, to recipients, often via mobile offices or volunteers. This model enables flexible and scalable distribution despite disruptions to infrastructure.

Humanitarian aid, particularly food and medicines, is often consolidated in larger hubs, for example in Lviv or other relatively secure regions, before being transported to front-line and isolated areas. Ukrposhta is responsible for securing the entire chain from receipt of supplies from international donors to final delivery to those in need.

5.7 Postal services as a morale booster

During the war in Ukraine, postal services have played a significant role as a morale-boosting factor for both the civilian population and military personnel. The possibility of sending and receiving letters, parcels, and supplies from relatives serves as an important link to everyday life in an otherwise unstable and uncertain situation.

Ukrposhta has used postage stamps as a tool to strengthen national morale while raising funds for Ukraine’s defence. War-related stamps have become symbols of resistance and national pride, with motifs that honour the Ukrainian struggle and the armed forces. These stamps function not only as moral support but also as expressions of solidarity with the country’s ongoing struggle.⁶³ One of the most iconic examples is the stamp bearing the text “Russian warship, go to hell”, which quickly became a

⁵⁶ Ukrposhta newsletter, 7 November 2023.

⁵⁷ Weisenthal and Alloway, “How Ukraine Delivers the Mail.”

⁵⁸ Thomas, “Ukrainische Post.”

⁵⁹ Klitina, “Interview with Igor Smelyansky”; and Gutierrez, “Delivering Under Pressure.”

⁶⁰ Thomas, “Ukrainische Post.”

⁶¹ A hub-to-hub system in logistics means that goods are transported between central hubs, where they are sorted and consolidated before being sent on to the next hub or to their final destination. The system relies on efficient handling and coordination at these hubs in order to optimise transport flows, reduce costs, and improve delivery times, particularly when handling large volumes over long distances.

⁶² Presentation by postal operators at research meeting on the postal service in wartime.

⁶³ Weisenthal and Alloway, “How Ukraine Delivers the Mail.”

symbol of Ukrainian resistance. Revenue from these limited editions has been channelled into the financing of, among other things, demining equipment, humanitarian efforts, and reconstruction projects.⁶⁴ Stamps featuring the well-known mine-detection dog Patron have raised about USD 500,000, of which 80 per cent was allocated to demining equipment and the remainder to animal shelters.⁶⁵

6. Conclusions and lessons learned

The Ukrainian postal service has played a central role during the ongoing war in terms of logistics, public services, and psychological support. The three initial research questions have been answered, albeit with the reservation that the information is primarily drawn from Ukrainian sources and has not always been independently verified.

How have postal services functioned during the war?

Ukrainian postal operators have managed to maintain their full range of services despite extensive damage to infrastructure and threats to staff. They have rapidly adapted routes, modes of transport, and working methods, including through mobile offices, railway transport, and digitalisation.

How have postal services been prioritised and adapted to changing needs?

Humanitarian assistance, the distribution of medicines, and financial disbursements have been at the centre of efforts. The postal service has also taken over functions that banks and pharmacies have not been able to provide. Digital solutions and alternative energy sources have been crucial in sustaining operations.



Figure 8. Lviv post office after the attack and on the next day

⁶⁴ Wilder, "As War Drags, Ukraine's Postal Service Perseveres."

⁶⁵ Vitaliy Shevchenko, "Ukraine's Stamps Put Humour, Patriotism and Swearing in the Post," *BBC News*, 25 December 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cly4w8z28xzo>.

What lessons can the Ukrainian case offer regarding, for example, postal services in hard-to-reach areas, alternative services, and different communication channels?

Ukrposhta has shown how the postal service can become a broad public actor that reaches the population when other systems break down. Mobile solutions, redundancy, and cooperation with other actors have been key to this success.

Ukraine's experience shows that the postal service can play an unexpectedly central role in national resilience during war and crisis. Postal services have not only delivered letters and parcels but have also functioned as core societal services for economic support, communication, humanitarian assistance, and morale. It is not realistic to transfer Ukraine's experience directly to Swedish conditions, but it is nevertheless clear that these experiences provide several relevant implications for Swedish preparedness.

Robustness in sparsely populated or isolated areas

Ukrposhta's investment in mobile offices and cash disbursements highlights the value of analogue alternatives where digital infrastructure is lacking or has been knocked out. In Sweden, this applies, for example, to sparsely populated areas or areas without backup power in the event of electricity outages. Planning should include mobile emergency solutions, including for medicines and government communications. Cash handling, however, is different in Sweden than in Ukraine today, and PostNord's banking operations were discontinued as early as 2014, which means that this aspect is perhaps less relevant. It should nevertheless be noted that the use of cash in preparedness planning is a central part of Sweden's overall supply preparedness. Official reports and recommendations from the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) and the central bank, Riksbank, emphasise the importance of households and vital societal functions having access to cash in order to manage

crises and disruptions in payment systems.⁶⁶ It is therefore of great importance that both individuals and societal actors take these recommendations into account and follow them in order to strengthen Sweden's preparedness.

Digitalisation with redundancy

Ukraine's rapid transition to digital postal management demonstrates a strong capacity for innovation, but it also involves risks. Starlink terminals, generators, and offline workflows have made it possible to continue operations despite network and power outages. It is important to ensure that postal and logistics systems can function without network connectivity for extended periods and that alternative communication channels exist for critical services. A Swedish equivalent should therefore ensure offline functionality, backup systems, and data protection, particularly if the postal service handles sensitive information or payments.

The postal service as a broad public-service provider

In Ukraine, the postal service has taken over parts of banking and pharmacy functions and has assisted in humanitarian transport. In Sweden, it is important to identify which complementary public services PostNord or other operators could provide in a crisis, especially in areas where other services are among the first to disappear. Sweden has sparsely populated areas in which public actors are already working to find solutions to delivery problems during adverse weather conditions or other complicating circumstances. These experiences, combined with lessons from Ukraine, may be particularly relevant for Sweden.

Cooperation with military and civilian actors

Ukrainian actors have worked closely with the military to protect personnel and routes. For Sweden, joint planning should take place between PostNord, MSB, the Swedish Armed Forces, and regional actors, especially with regard to logistics, protection of personnel, and supply. This already takes place to some extent through the Transport

Preparedness Sector—Public–Private Cooperation (BT POS), a cooperation structure established in 2023 by the Swedish Transport Administration (Trafikverket) to strengthen Sweden's ability to manage societal disruptions and ensure essential transport in all societal situations, including war and heightened alert.

Postal services as a psychological resource

Postal deliveries have proved to have considerable symbolic value for both civilians and military personnel in Ukraine. The physical parcel, letter, or pension payment contributes to the feeling that the state is still functioning. The importance of the postal service's presence in conveying the message of a united nation is highlighted in several contexts. Swedish preparedness planning should explore this softer value, particularly in the context of civil protection and societal resilience in times of crisis.

7. Final reflection

Media interviews with postal staff and with people who use the postal service paint a picture of the postal system as an important factor in maintaining a sense of belonging to society. For soldiers at the front, parcels constitute not only practical support but also an emotional confirmation that they have not been forgotten. For civilians, especially those in isolated or conflict-affected areas, the continued functioning of the postal service contributes to a sense of belonging, security, resilience, and national identity. In areas that have returned to Ukrainian control after having been under Russian occupation, it has been important to deliver Ukrainian currency to pensioners and other residents as a reminder that they are part of Ukraine. The presence of the postal service signals, quite simply, that the state and society remain active, which strengthens collective morale and hope, a dimension that, in protracted conflicts, can be at least as important as material resources. ■

⁶⁶ See, for example, Sveriges Riksbank, "The Riksbank takes the lead in peacetime crises and states of heightened alert," *Sveriges Riksbank*, 10 March 2025, <https://www.riksbank.se/en-gb/payments--cash/payments-in-sweden/payments-report-2025/the-riksbanks-work-and-recommendations/the-publics-ability-to-pay-in-times-of-crisis-and-states-of-heightened-alert-needs-to-be-strengthened-/the-riksbank-takes-the-lead-in-peacetime-crises-and-states-of-heightened-alert/>; and Statens Offentliga Utredningar, *En modell för svensk försörjningsberedskap*, Statens Offentliga Utredningar, SOU 2023: 50, 2023, <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/a93eb5b8e6fa4d3ca3202828cf2bf549/en-modell-for-svensk-forsorjningsberedskap-sou-202350.pdf>.

References

Bandura, R., Timchenko, I. and Robb, B. (2024). Ships, trains, and trucks: Unlocking Ukraine's vital trade potential. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

Center for Transport Strategies. (29 December 2023). Ukrposhta delivers international postal items by rail for first time in 20 years. https://en.cfts.org.ua/news/ukrposhta_delivers_international_postal_items_by_rail_for_first_time_in_20_years. Retrieved 12 August 2025.

Deprez, F. (25 September 2022). Postal workers are keeping Ukraine's front-line villages alive. Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/09/25/ukraine-russia-war-postal-workers-ukrposhta-front-line-mykolaiv/>. Retrieved 3 July 2025.

Gutierrez, M. (8 December 2022). Delivering under pressure: How Igor Smelyansky (MBA'05) has adapted Ukraine's national postal service to the chaos of war. <https://msb.georgetown.edu/news-story/alumni/delivering-under-pressure-how-igor-smelyansky-mba05-has-adopted-ukraines-national-postal-service-to-the-chaos-of-war/>. Retrieved 3 July 2025.

Horton, A. and Korolchuk, S. (18 September 2023). Whatever the fuss over Elon Musk, Starlink is utterly essential in Ukraine. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/09/08/elon-musk-starlink-ukraine-war/>. Retrieved 12 August 2025.

Hrazdan, O. (16 August 2024). Ukraine's national postal service is ready to open in Sudzha. Kyiv Post. <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/37510>. Retrieved 3 July 2025.

International Organization for Migration. (2025). Crisis in Ukraine. <https://www.iom.int/crisis-ukraine>. Retrieved 12 August 2025.

Kabinet Ministriv Ukrajiny. (2022). Postanova vid 17 beresnya 2022 r. № 305—Pro osoblyvosti roboty aktsionernoho tovarystva “Ukrposhta” v umovakh vojennoho stanu. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/305-2022-%D0%BF>. Retrieved 12 August 2025.

Klitina, A. (6 May 2022). Interview with Igor Smelyansky the head of Ukrposhta. Kyiv Post. <https://www.kyivpost.com/videos/8920>. Retrieved 3 July 2025.

Komersant Ukrainian. (10 January 2025). Scandal over charitable contributions: Is Ukrposhta's initiative legitimate? Komersant. <https://komersant.ua/en/skandal-navkolo-blahodinykh-vneskiv-chy-pravomirna-initiatyva-ukrposhy/>

Odell, A., Lioufas, A., Olsén, M., Mossberg Sonnek, K., Welander, F. and Hörnedal, A. (14 August 2024). Russian attacks on the Ukrainian power system (FOI-R--5596--SE). Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut (FOI).

Post and Parcel. (19 May 2022). Ukrposhta: Showing true leadership. <https://postandparcel.info/148374/news/ukrposhta-showing-true-leadership/>. Retrieved 3 July 2025.

Rosycki, M. (11 July 2023). Ukraine—The “border land” of Europe and future CEP Mecca? Parcel and Postal Technology International. Retrieved 3 July 2025.

Shevchenko, V. (2024). Ukraine's war stamps put humour, patriotism and swearing in the post. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly4w8z28xzo>. Retrieved 3 July 2025.

Statens Offentliga Utredningar. En modell för svensk försörjningsberedskap. Statens Offentliga Utredningar. SOU 2023: 50. 2023. <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/a93eb5b8e-6fa4d3ca3202828cf2bf549/en-modell-for-svensk-forsorjningsberedskap-sou-202350.pdf>.

Sveriges Riksbank. “The Riksbank takes the lead in peacetime crises and states of heightened alert.” Sveriges Riksbank. 10 March 2025. <https://www.riksbank.se/en-gb/payments-cash/payments-in-sweden/payments-report-2025/the-riksbanks-work-and-recommendations/the-publics-ability-to-pay-in-times-of-crisis-and-states-of-heightened-alert-needs-to-be-strengthened-/the-riksbank-takes-the-lead-in-peacetime-crises-and-states-of-heightened-alert/>.

Thomas, K. (10 March 2025). Ukrainische Post: “Wir sind der erste Punkt der Zivilisation an der Front.” Die Zeit. <https://www.zeit.de/wirtschaft/2025-03/ukrainische-post-versorgung-lebensmittel-ukrposhta-ihor-smelyansky>. Retrieved 3 July 2025.

Ukrposhta. (16 February 2023). Ukrposhta has been supporting important governmental programs. Ukrposhta Status.

Ukrposhta. (5 December 2024). Supporting the exporters: ETSY CEO impressed by Ukrposhta's operations. Ukrposhta Status.

Ukrposhta. (7 November 2024). Ukrposhta pharmacy. Ukrposhta Status.

UNDP. (25 February 2025). Tre år efter invasionen: Ukraines återuppbyggnad kommer kosta 524 miljarder dollar. FN:s utvecklingsprogram. <https://www.undp.org/sv/sweden/press-releases/tre-ar-efter-invasionen-ukrainas-ateruppbyggnad-kommer-kosta-524-miljarder-dollar>. Retrieved 28 August 2025.

Universal Postal Union. (2024). The state of the postal sector 2024. <https://www.upu.int/en/publications/2ipd/the-state-of-the-postal-sector-2024>. Retrieved 12 August 2025.

Weisenthal, J. and Alloway, T. (23 February 2024). How Ukraine delivers the mail during wartime. Odd Lots. <https://omny.fm/shows/odd-lots/how-ukraine-delivers-the-mail-during-wartime>. Retrieved 3 July 2025.

Wilder, S. (30 August 2022). As war drags, Ukraine's postal service perseveres. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/30/as-war-drags-ukraines-postal-service-perseveres>. Retrieved 3 July 2025.

Wodinsky, S. (22 April 2022). Ukraine's postal service gets DDoS'd after printing stamps of sunken Russian battleship. Gizmodo. <https://gizmodo.com/ukraines-post-office-cyberattack-guard-moskova-stamp-1848829405>

