



## **INTERNATIONAL LEGION FOR THE DEFENCE OF UKRAINE**

### **FACT SHEET FOR VOLUNTEERS CONSIDERING COMING TO UKRAINE TO FIGHT**

DATE: 1 JANUARY 2023

The purpose of this factsheet is to provide some information about coming to Ukraine as a non-Ukrainian citizen to fight for the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The information contained in this factsheet is not applicable if the Ukrainian government considers you to be a citizen of Ukraine. In those circumstances you may be subject to general conscription as a male between the ages of 27 (note: may soon be reduced to 25) and 60 and you do not have paperwork exempting you from conscription; or you may be eligible to volunteer to join the regular Ukrainian Armed Forces if you are a Ukrainian citizen of either gender between the ages of 18 and 60. In either case this factsheet is not appropriate for you; this factsheet is directed at non-Ukrainian foreigners seeking to travel to Ukraine to fight for the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

You should read this factsheet carefully and thoroughly as it contains a lot of information not available in the public domain about the experiences you are likely to have as a foreign military volunteer. It also synopsis publicly available information and provides links to websites you should read in detail before making the decision to travel to Ukraine to fight.

1. At the beginning of the current Russian invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022, the International Legion was formed to accommodate an interest in people with military experience from around the world joining the Ukrainian Armed Forces to resist the Russian invasion. At that time there were a number of websites, forms, email addresses and more or less legitimate methods of applying to join the Ukrainian Armed Forces as a foreigner, and foreigners were playing all sorts of different roles within the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Subsequently the procedures and requirements for joining the Ukrainian Armed Forces as a

foreigner have been formalised and the procedure is now streamlined and straightforward. There is an International Legion which is divided into a series of Battalions operating in different locations. Some Battalions are composed of more experienced international military personnel and others of those with less military experience.

2. The way you apply to join the International Legion is via its official website at <https://ildu.com.ua/>. Do not just arrive in Ukraine without having applied via this website. It contains full guidelines and you should follow them. The email address to which to send your application papers is [int\\_legion\\_ua@post.mil.gov.ua](mailto:int_legion_ua@post.mil.gov.ua) and not any other email address. We are aware of various application forms and Gmail addresses being circulated for ostensible applications to the International Legion. These are of unknown provenance and you should not use them. Apply using the online procedure only.
3. Although in theory women are eligible to apply to join the International Legion we have not met any female members of the International Legion.
4. You can enter Ukraine and then apply to join the International Legion once you are in Ukraine but it will take longer to process your paperwork and the International Legion strongly prefers that you do not do this. If you are in this situation then you are welcome to contact us (contact details below) and we will assist you with the process.
5. The International Legion official website has a comprehensive webpage containing a series of “FAQ’s”. It is here: <https://ildu.com.ua/#faq>. Read it carefully and in full. The information on this webpage is accurate and fairly reliable and a lot of the other information on the internet about the International Legion is not. In particular read the information about the equipment you should bring with you. You should bring as much equipment as you can. You may not be satisfied with the uniforms and clothing you are provided with and you may decide to buy new uniforms, boots, gloves, hats, socks etcetera in the various military stores located in major cities across Ukraine. These military stores sell everything you might need for life on the front line and they are reasonably priced. It is cheaper to buy basic military supplies in Ukraine than it is outside Ukraine. “Epicentre” hypermarket chains in major Ukrainian cities typically have a “Military Shop” inside them selling military supplies, and most cities will have a market area where a number of military supply shops can be located. It is not generally possible to buy firearms or ammunition in Lviv or Kyiv.
6. Contrary to the guidance, under no circumstances attempt to carry firearms, ammunition or ammunition casing (such as magazines) over the border into Ukraine. You stand a high chance of being arrested by the Polish authorities upon exit from Poland, if you get that far with such items. Guns, ammunition and ancillary equipment are available in plentiful quantities in Ukraine in shops in cities in close vicinity to the front line, and you can expect to be buying

much of your own weaponry for combat use. Buy it once in Ukraine and ensure you have ample funds. Guns are not expensive in Ukraine. Do not attempt to leave Ukraine with any firearms, ammunition or other ancillary items, as you will be searched by both the Ukrainian and Polish authorities as you leave and if prohibited items are found on you then you may be arrested. The limit for carrying drones, in case you are asked to carry them over borders by someone else, is one drone per person. Do not exceed this.

7. There are all sorts of websites offering to provide advice or assistance with the application process. It is our suggestion that you ignore these websites as they may offer fraudulent services or they may be a front for other activities unknown.
8. The Ukrainian State Security Service will undertake a criminal record check in your country of residence / nationality in cooperation with the domestic law enforcement authorities and if they find a serious criminal conviction then your application will be refused.
9. Some nationalities will be habitually refused admission to the International Legion and we trust you can imagine which nationalities those might be.
10. The usual route of entry for volunteers in the International Legion is over the Medyka border between Przemyśl (pronounced "Pshairmish") (Poland) and Lviv (Ukraine). At that border, having crossed border formalities, there is an International Legion reception office on the Ukrainian side for those who have been accepted in principle into the International Legion after having applied by email. This office is not manned 24 hours a day. It is our experience that is manned during "reasonable daylight hours" perhaps five to six days a week so do not arrive on a Sunday. "Reasonable daylight hours" might mean between 10am and 3pm. The hours it is manned will be substantially shorter in the winter months than in the summer months.
11. If that office is manned when you cross the border then you present yourself to the officer(s) in the office and they will make arrangements for you to be screened further and they will explain all relevant procedures. If the office is not manned then you will need to make your way into Lviv and contact the International Legion directly. Their telephone number is +380 800 507 028 (from outside Ukraine) / 0800 507 028 (from inside Ukraine). International Legion soldiers are typically (although not exclusively) trained at the Yavoriv military base outside Lviv but do not attempt to go there on an *ad hoc* basis without first making contact with the commanding authorities. If you have arrived in Lviv anticipating joining the International Legion and you are not sure what to do next, then you are welcome to contact us at [contact@development-foundation.org](mailto:contact@development-foundation.org) (although this email address is typically checked maximum once per day) or by WhatsApp at +380 98 467 4579. Please note that this Ukrainian number does not accept regular incoming calls; please use it for WhatsApp only. WhatsApp is the preferred instant

messaging service amongst both civilian and military personnel in Ukraine and you should have it installed on your mobile telephone before arriving in Ukraine.

12. Buy a Ukrainian SIM card at the border at Medyka. They cost no more than 200 Gryvnas (5 Euros) and they are essential to stay in contact with friends and family who will naturally be concerned for your welfare while you are serving in the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Again, have your friends and family download WhatsApp onto their mobile telephones so that you can stay in contact with them. It is our experience that Signal is not much used in Ukraine except by very limited communities and in any event it is less user-friendly than WhatsApp. Avoid Telegram if you are serving in the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Contrary to much rumour, mobile phone coverage is reasonably comprehensive across the entirety of the front line where you are likely to be stationed after training.
13. Your provisional acceptance into the International Legion will be finalised only upon your entry to Ukraine and you have been subject to a medical assessment, including both an assessment of your physical fitness and a psychiatric assessment. If you suffer from a psychiatric condition then do not attempt to conceal it; psychiatric conditions may or may not impede you from fighting but they can be exacerbated by front line conditions and it is essential that a person be open and frank about any psychiatric condition they may have so that a full and proper assessment be made. If you try to conceal such things, you are likely to place the welfare of both you and your colleagues at risk later on.
14. There used to be a rule that all members of the International Legion were required to have prior military experience. This has been abolished but it is still strongly preferred that you have some experience working with the military or in another profession such as law enforcement. Specialist skills are also valued. If you have no skills or experience relevant to the Ukrainian Armed Forces then it is unlikely that your application will be approved.
15. The International Legion will not provide visa or other support and it will not pay your travel expenses to Ukraine. You must travel to and enter Ukraine on your own initiative. The same is true with departure from Ukraine after the conclusion of your tour of duty. However your contract with the International Legion serves as a residence permit for as long as it is valid. Upon its termination you will have a specific period of time to leave Ukraine. You are not eligible for a residence permit *ipso facto* just because you are serving or you have served in the International Legion. The route to a Ukrainian residence permit is quite different and information about it appears here: <https://www.the-paladins.com/post/fragments-from-a-war-diary-part-193>
16. You are not in fact a volunteer as a member of the International Legion. You will be paid the same as a regular Ukrainian soldier. The current rates are approximately US\$600 per month

for positions behind the front lines (e.g. Kharkiv or Dnipro); approximately US\$1200 per month for positions in the so-called “Red Zone” (that is to say, within accurate shelling range of Russian artillery, so the entirety of free Donetsk *Oblast*; most of free Zaporizhzhia *Oblast*); and US\$3,300 per month on so-called “combat deployment” (fighting on the front line, typically in Bakhmut or Kherson - we understand the current situation to be that International Legion troops have withdrawn from Avdiivka but domestic Ukrainian soldiers remain). Salaries are paid in Ukrainian Gryvnas into domestic accounts gross. Be aware that it is far from straightforward to transmit money out of Ukraine by international wire, so to the extent that you have not spent your salary while in Ukraine you may find yourself carrying it out of Ukraine in cash.

17. A substantial proportion of the International Legion soldiers are deployed to Sloviansk, a city in free Donetsk *Oblast* about three hours southeast of Kharkiv by minibus. This counts as within the “Red Zone” but depending on your role you may or may not be classified as undertaking “combat deployment”; Bakhmut (the contested front line city) is about 40km away and that is regarded as “combat deployment”. Life in Sloviansk itself is fairly safe if mundane. The city suffered widespread destruction in 2014 and has not been rebuilt. The greater majority of civilians fled and did not return. There are few shopping facilities in Sloviansk and no entertainment (and no alcohol). The Sloviansk suburb of Kramatorsk, about 10km southwest of Sloviansk, is more lively and also has a railway station with daily services as far as Lviv. Both these settlements are relatively safe although Russian missile attacks are not unknown.
18. You should obtain hard copy maps of Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson *Oblasts* in a bookshop in Lviv before departing for the East, and ensure that you are familiar with all the principal settlements; the location of the front line; and indeed the geography of Ukraine in general. These maps can be purchased in “Ye Bookshop”, Tadeusha Kostyushka Street 5, in central Lviv, about a five minute walk from the Taras Shevchenko monument, and they are very cheap. The maps exist only in Cyrillic. Expect incidents of GPS jamming that will render Google Maps difficult to use even if you download maps for offline use, and also periodic mobile telephone network outages (one such outage that reached the international media in December 2023 lasted for over a week). Therefore it is extremely useful to have paper maps. The maps are accurate and up to date and have been prepared for civilian not military use so you may want to laminate them or at the very least keep them wrapped in clingfilm or otherwise protect them against the elements.
19. If attempting to leave the “Red Zone” as a member of the International Legion you can expect to have your papers checked to ensure that you have appropriate discharge or leave papers.

20. The working language of the International Legion battalions is English. We hear that some Spanish-language units have been formed but we do not know much about them. If you cannot understand and follow command orders in English then you are not appropriate for the International Legion.
21. The period of training prior to deployment for International Legion members is typically six weeks, although your training may be truncated if you have prior experience as a member of a foreign country's armed forces.
22. The term of a contract with the International Legion is three years although in practice very few members of the International Legion serve the full term. You are free to resign from the International Legion at any time except when you are in "combat deployment" (i.e. in Kherson / Bakhmut). We have heard multiple stories of members of the International Legion deserting when they are in "combat deployment" because conditions in places classified as "combat deployment" are extremely difficult. If you desert during "combat deployment" then provided you rid yourself of all military clothing and equipment and leave the country immediately it appears that the Ukrainian authorities will not stop you. However if you desert from a "combat deployment" position and remain in Ukraine then the Ukrainian State Security Service will be tasked to find you and arrest you for desertion. If the Ukrainian border guards suspect that you may be a deserting soldier upon your departure from Ukraine then they may contact the military authorities to check. But if you give no indication of being a deserting member of the military personnel then it is unlikely that they will make this check.
23. The entire front line region, including the whole of free Donetsk *Oblast*, is dry: that is to say, there is no alcohol. Therefore if you are stationed to combat deployment or in the "Red Zone", your period of service will be without alcohol. If this is not agreeable to you then do not apply to join the International Legion.
24. If you are injured, then bear in mind that there are no "helivac" services. You will be carried from the trenches to the nearest vehicle, and then driven to the nearest field hospital or municipal hospital in whatever vehicles are available. You should bring your own medical kit of the highest quality and you should take detailed advice on what should be in it if you do not already know. If you do not know what a good medical kit ought to include, then ask yourself whether you are really prepared for what is necessary to fight in the International Legion. The most important item is a high-quality tourniquet, so that if a limb is injured from shrapnel or a bullet wound then your loss of blood can be stemmed and you are less likely to "bleed out", i.e. bleed to death. Ultimately soldiers who do make it to hospital do survive. International Legion soldiers tend to be treated in a premier military hospital in Kyiv.

25. Combat operations on the front line are dangerous and there have been a number of high-profile deaths of members of the International Legion. Also there is a substantial risk of psychiatric injury and we have encountered a number of International Legion soldiers returning from combat operations with obvious indications of post-traumatic stress disorder. If you are concerned that you may have a mental health problem as a result of your fighting on the front line or your experiences in the military, feel free to contact us for free, sympathetic and impartial guidance.
26. For more detailed information or for any questions, feel free to contact us and we can place you in contact with specialist advisors on military issues who have intimate familiarity with the operation of the International Legion of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. We do not charge a fee for our advice or recommendations.

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