

Terms of References

Team Leader for the Component on Capacity Strengthening of Local Self-Government Associations (LGA) in Ukraine

Polaris Programme: Support to multi-level governance in Ukraine

About SALAR International & its engagement in Ukraine

SALAR International is a subsidiary of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), representing all 290 municipalities and 21 regions in Sweden. As the international branch of SALAR, we work globally to support local democracy and good governance in developing and transitioning countries. Our expertise covers areas such as capacity building in municipal management and service delivery, local and regional development planning, support for local government associations, decentralisation policies and European integration. Geographically, SALAR International's projects cover countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the Middle East and the Sub-Saharan Africa.

SALAR International has been engaged in Ukraine since 2014, providing support to Ukraine's decentralisation process through three major initiatives focusing on building a robust multi-level governance system, increasing accessibility and quality of services at the local level, and enhancing international cooperation between municipalities from Ukraine and the EU. After the full-scale invasion, SALAR International has added crisis support to Ukrainian municipalities, providing them with material assistance.

Description of the assignment context

To address the changing needs of Ukrainian municipalities and national level stakeholders during wartime, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) has initiated a broader programme in support of multilevel governance and recovery. This programme is called "Polaris: Supporting Multi-level Governance in Ukraine". It is implemented by SALAR International and planned for four years (July 2024-May 2028).

As the international arm of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, SALAR International brings to the programme the long-standing Swedish tradition of strong, politically neutral, member-driven local government associations. This Swedish foundation—built on cooperation, professionalism and national advocacy—provides an important reference point for supporting Ukraine's own LGAs while ensuring all support is adapted to the Ukrainian context and rooted in the associations' own priorities.

Polaris Programme aims to work with both short and long-term focus, addressing the needs of the multi-level governance system in Ukraine and in parallel strengthening municipalities' public service provision, as well as their direct engagement in the recovery and reconstruction processes, in line with the requirements of Ukraine's EU accession.

The Programme's support is provided through two operational components: one focusing on policy and collaboration with national stakeholders, and the other providing direct support to municipalities. The support encompasses five thematic areas: Education, Fiscal Decentralisation and Budgeting, Administrative Service Provision, Locally-led Recovery, and International Municipal Cooperation. In addition, the Programme will provide material support to meet short-term material crisis needs of

municipalities.

Within this framework, the LGA Support Component plays a strategic role by strengthening Ukraine's national and regional local government associations—key actors for representing hromadas, shaping policy dialogue, promoting democratic practices and safeguarding decentralisation gains.

Organisational set up

The programme is a joint Swedish-Ukrainian initiative with management structures in both Stockholm and Kyiv. It encourages a flat organisational structure, meaning a high degree of autonomy and responsibility for involved experts, as well as strong local ownership among beneficiaries such as national stakeholders and Ukrainian municipalities.

More than 50 people are working full-time in Ukraine within various thematic teams as well as support units.

The Programme has its office in Kyiv but the support and activities target local self-government in all regions of Ukraine and will be implemented in all regions controlled by the Ukrainian government. The support is provided on demand, in most cases through open calls.

Role description

This is a senior position with overall responsibility for leading the programme's work on strengthening Ukraine's national and regional associations of local self-government. The Team Leader plays a central role in supporting these associations to become democratic, transparent, member-driven, and politically independent organisations that can effectively represent their members, facilitate multi-level dialogue, and contribute meaningfully to decentralisation, recovery, and EU-integration processes.

The position requires a high level of diplomatic skill, political sensitivity, and strong communication abilities. The Team Leader interacts regularly with political leaders of LGAs, national institutions, regional authorities, thematic experts, and international partners. Beyond technical expertise, the role requires grounded experience in democratic practice—including personal engagement within elected bodies, membership-based organisations, and civic leadership—ensuring the ability to understand political realities from the inside. The ability to build trust, navigate complex political dynamics, and maintain neutrality while facilitating dialogue among actors with differing interests is essential.

The Team Leader provides strategic leadership, coordination, and quality assurance for the expert team working on LGA capacity development. This includes guiding associations through democratic governance reforms, strengthening their regional networks, facilitating interregional thematic forums, and supporting associations in forming common positions in areas where collective advocacy is needed.

A strong record of democratic institution-building, coupled with personal insight into how representative bodies function, is central to this role.

The Team Leader works in close collaboration with the broader POLARIS thematic teams in Ukraine—Education, Administrative Service Provision, Fiscal Decentralisation, Recovery, and International Municipal Cooperation—to integrate these thematic areas into the work of Local Self-Government Associations and to ensure strong horizontal communication across the programme. The Team Leader also maintains continuous contact with the SALAR International headquarters in Stockholm.

Main responsibilities

- Conducting needs assessments for each LGA open to work with the programme and designing tailored capacity-building support that respects their internal development.

- Supporting LGAs in strengthening democratic governance, transparency and member-driven practices.
- Guiding associations in strategic and organisational development to improve long-term sustainability.
- Strengthening the capacities and roles of regional LGA branches in multi-level dialogue and peer exchange.
- Leading the development and delivery of trainings, workshops and ToT modules for LGA leaders and staff.
- Coordinating thematic and interregional events together with POLARIS thematic experts.
- Ensuring effective transfer of thematic knowledge to LGAs across decentralisation, recovery and EU integration areas.
- Facilitating political dialogue among LGA leaders on advocacy, reform priorities and other sensitive topics.
- Supervising and coordinating the work of the LGA expert team to ensure high-quality implementation.
- Contributing to programme monitoring, reporting, risk assessment and adaptive planning.

Key qualifications

- Academic degree, minimum bachelor's degree in social/political science, economics, law or equivalent relevant field.
- Minimum of 7 years of experience in decentralisation and local governance, or in comparable reform fields focused on democratic institution-building and organisational capacity strengthening.
- Excellent diplomatic judgement, with a track record of working effectively with political leaders or representative bodies..
- Strong communication and facilitation skills, with the ability to clearly translate complex reforms and guide discussions toward clarity and cooperation.
- Understanding of how politically driven organisations function and how to support their democratic development.
- Experience of conducting needs assessments and designing support to organizational development.
- Proven ability to design and deliver capacity development, such as trainings, workshops, peer-learning and ToTs that feel relevant and engaging.
- Strength in organisational and strategic development, supporting associations in assessing member relations, internal procedures, leadership structures and sustainability.
- Leadership experience with expert teams, fostering coherence, motivation and shared learning.
- Ability to work across multiple thematic areas, connecting thematic expertise with the needs and priorities of LGAs.
- High political and contextual awareness and the ability to adapt as circumstances evolve.
- Strong commitment to democratic values and inclusive leadership, promoting equal participation, gender equality and diversity.
- Fluency in English.
- Ability to communicate in Ukrainian
- **Experience as an elected representative, leader of a democratic organisation, or holder of public democratic mandates is considered a strong asset and will significantly strengthen a candidate's suitability for the role.**

Merits

- Documented participation in democratic processes.
- Good understanding of international development cooperation.

Selection Criteria

The selection of candidates will be based on the following criteria: knowledge of local governance, particularly local government associations; organizational development capacities; strong communication and team leadership skills; experience in participation in democratic processes, and the ability and willingness to travel to or be based in Ukraine.

Diversity and equal opportunities

SALAR International embraces diversity and respects human rights in all areas of its work. SALAR International strives to create a gender-equal and diverse working environment. Team members shall respect equal rights of individuals and strive to create an atmosphere where people's differences are accepted and valued. SALAR International supports working arrangements that enable personnel to combine work with family commitments.

Location: International or based in Ukraine with ability to travel within Ukraine

Duration: The position is offered until 31 May 2026, with the possibility of extension for an additional two years.

Scope: This is a consultancy contract with a workload of 50% to 100%, depending on the expert's availability.

Application: Send your application with max 3 page CV and max 1 page cover letter (in PDF) to ukraine@salarinternational.se. Please note "Team Lead LGA" in the subject line. The interviews will be conducted on an ongoing basis. Only shortlisted applicants will receive a response by email when the recruitment has been finalised. For any questions or clarifications, please contact: ukraine@salarinternational.se.

Personal information provided by the applicant in the recruitment process will be handled by SALAR International.

Deadline: 15 January, 2026.