Challenges and Potential for Social Cohesion in Donetsk Oblast

Field Report Based on the Results of Oblast Consultations

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Kyiv, 2021

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This report is based on analysis of data and expert opinions provided by representatives of civil society, authorities, and the business community of Donetsk oblast in May–June 2021, and presents key assessments of social cohesion and the peacebuilding situation in the oblast. The matrix of potential for social cohesion is compiled on the basis of a SWOT-analysis (strengths and weaknesses, threats and opportunities) of oblast experts' assessments.

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The National Platform Dialogue on Peace and Secure Reintegration was launched in February 2018. This is a platform for discussing issues of settlement of the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the secure reintegration of the region. Activities of the National Platform are focused on strengthening resilience and reaching consensus in Ukraine on conflict resolution and prevention. The way to do this is to increase citizen participation in the peacebuilding process, submit proposals to authorities on the development of relevant policies, in particular on secure reintegration and national unity, and ensure public awareness of these processes. Since 2019, the initiative has been implemented in partnership with the Committee on Human Rights, Deoccupation and Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories in Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Sevastopol, National Minorities and Interethnic Relations of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine of the 9th convocation.

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I. Research objectives. Social cohesion as the goal and content of policy

Social cohesion is a relatively new concept that has many definitions. For the purposes of this report, this concept is referred to as a way of building trust and interaction among people to achieve common goals.

Social cohesion is an essential dimension of consolidation of any society, and assessment of its state is becoming increasingly important in policy-making. In accordance with the common approach currently being integrated into many policy documents, social cohesion is a state of affairs concerning both vertical and horizontal interactions among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that include trust, a sense of belonging and willingness to participate and help, as well as the expression of these norms in behavior.[1]

According to the Council of Europe, "A core concern is the extent to which people feel connected to society and give their loyalty and commitment to a set of values and social goals that are widely shared."[2]

Pursuant to the Revised strategy for Social Cohesion approved by the Council of Europe in 2004, no society is coherent. "All societies have to live with the strains and stresses caused by divisions and potential divisions. For example, there are in all societies disparities of wealth between richer and poorer people; when these disparities are excessive, or tending to increase, cohesion is put at risk. Again, no society is without ethnic and cultural diversity; the question is how to manage diversity so that it becomes a source of mutual enrichment rather than a factor of division and conflict. A cohesive society is one which has developed satisfactory ways of coping with these and other strains in an open and democratic manner. This means taking action to reduce inequalities and restore equity so that these various divisions remain manageable and do not grow so as to threaten the stability of society."[3]

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[1] Chan J., To H.-P., Chan E. Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research. – P. 290 in: Social Indicators Research, Vol. 75, No. 2 (Jan., 2006) [Electronic resource]. Access mode: http://www.jstor.org/stable/27522534

[2] Towards an Active, Fair and Socially Cohesive Europe. Report of the high-level task force on social cohesion (TFSC (2007) 31E). – Strasbourg, 28 January 2008. No. 9. – P.7 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://rm.coe.int/report-towards-an-active-fair-and-socially-cohesive-europe-janv-2008-t/1680939181

[3] A new Strategy for Social Cohesion of the European Committee for Social Cohesion (CDCS). Revised strategy for Social Cohesion approved by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 31 March 2004. No. 2. – P.3 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/source/RevisedStrategy_en.pdf

The report emphasizes that cohesion is seen as an ideal to be pursued, rather than a goal that can be fully achieved. It constantly needs to be nurtured, improved and adapted. "Every generation must rediscover a controlled balance of power. This is an ever-changing balance that must adapt to changes in the social and economic environment, in technology and in national and international political systems," the report explains. And here the component of integration emerges: "Social cohesion is [...] about creating solidarity in society to minimize exclusion."[4]

As is known, states that maintain cohesion in society are more resilient to all sorts of challenges. The need for a social cohesion policy has become significant for Ukraine. The threat to Ukraine's sovereignty in violation of the principles of international law, and an armed conflict in which part of the country was seized and people have been dying and suffering since 2014, encourages many to think about relations in society that shape social resilience as the ability of communities to mobilize more quickly on the basis of trust and even grow stronger as a result of joint actions and joint responsibility for them.

The Ukrainian state, motivated by the need to constructively manage conflicts taking into account the needs of social groups and consolidate society, is initiating a policy of social cohesion as a conscious action. This policy covers all areas, ranging from education content to transport infrastructure, from a barrier-free space to the type of political competition. Hence, we are talking about social cohesion policy as a separate, conscious and cross-cutting element of sectoral policies.

Study methodology

Since 2019, the National Platform Dialogue on Peace and Secure Reintegration has been focused on all aspects of reintegration, pursuing the idea of a peaceful conflict resolution through strengthening instruments of law and social cohesion. This stage of development requires both an accurate assessment of the situation and the development of validated steps with predictable consequences.

We consider social cohesion, and any factor that affects social capital capacity in society or community, as a factor in the mode of action and relationships that can and should be formed consciously and through deliberate measures. This understanding opens up opportunities for political action aimed at strengthening cohesion and, as a result, achieving social balance and stability.

Part of our joint effort is geared towards identifying the state of social cohesion in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, the two oblasts that are most affected by the conflict and whose residents need more attention and non-standard solutions.

[4] A New Strategy for Social Cohesion of the European Committee for Social Cohesion (CDCS). Revised strategy for Social Cohesion approved by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 31 March 2004. – No. 4. – P.3. – Ibid.

The methodological approach of the project team to assessing the situation has two components:

1) Holding public opinion surveys in different environments of Donetsk oblast.

In May–June 2021, National Platform experts held a round of consultations with representatives of authorities, civil society organizations (CSOs), the business community, educational, scientific and religious organizations, and the media of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.[5] In Donetsk oblast, 31 participants were engaged in the consultations, to whom we express our deep acknowledgment.

On the basis of a structured questionnaire developed by the team, we received answers that represent a snapshot of the views of groups of oblast residents on the three major elements of social cohesion: social relationships, connectedness and orientation towards the common good.[6]

2) Analysis of changes in the environment.

To implement the second element, experts analyzed the dynamics of population composition, infrastructure changes since 2014, and political preferences of residents in the last election cycle of 2019, and recorded the relevant data as of 1 September 2021.

The task of the project team

The task we set together with our partners, the Center for Innovation Development (https://cid.center/) and experts of the National Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of Ukraine (https://niss.gov.ua/), is to work together with representatives of different environments of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, representatives of local executive authorities, local self-governments, and central authorities to develop an action map for each oblast which will serve as a basis for a consistent policy of social cohesion at local level.

Part of this task was already realized during implementation. The Strategy of Economic Development of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts until 2030,[7] initiated by the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, already includes the concept of social cohesion. The inclusion of this dimension in socio-economic development policy was a turning point in the government's attitude to formulation of a social cohesion policy. This action is in line with the approach of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

[5] Quotations of participants in oblast consultations in this report are provided in accordance with the transcript available to UCIPR.

[6] Cohesion Radar: Measuring Cohesiveness – social cohesion in Germany, a preliminary review, Bertelsmann Foundation, 2012 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: www.gesellschaftlicher-zusammenhalt.de/.../Social_Cohesion_2012.pdf

[7] Ordinance of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1078-p of 18 August 2021 "On the Strategy of Economic Development of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts until 2030" [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://www.kmu.gov.ua/npas/pro-zatverdzhennya-strategiyi-ekonom-a1078r

(OECD), expressed in the idea that "social cohesion is a valuable goal in itself and contributes to maintaining long-term economic growth."[8]

Accordingly, this report:

- presents the dynamics of processes in Donetsk oblast[9] in terms of vertical social cohesion as the interaction of citizens and their association with authorities, the activities of authorities, and the inclusion of civil society institutions in policy-making;
- identifies key challenges in measuring horizontal cohesion;
- analyzes the level of trust of stakeholders in each other (readiness to cooperate);
- stresses the role of the media in strengthening social cohesion;
- outlines promising areas of intermunicipal cooperation;
- formulates an understanding of social cohesion and peacebuilding in view of the experience of each of the groups represented at the consultations;
- evaluates ideas for possible initiatives in the oblast to shape common values and strong social ties;
- provides data on an understanding of the processes of formulating and developing policy areas that enhance social cohesion and provide the foundations of social resilience;
- indicates tools for implementing areas of social cohesion policy.

The next step of the project consists of proposals for policy development to strengthen social cohesion in Donetsk oblast,[10] based on the assessment and proposals of participants in the discussions.

[8] Perspectives on Global Development 2012. Social cohesion in a shifting world. OECD. P. 17 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/perspectives-on-global-development-2012_persp_glob_dev-2012-en#page1

[9] An identical report under the project is based on data from Luhansk oblast. Challenges and Potential of Social Cohesion in Luhansk Oblast. Field Report Based on the Results of Oblast Consultations. UCIPR. 2021. P. 32 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: http://ucipr.org.ua/ua/publikatsii/vydannia/challenges-and-potential-of-social-cohesion-in-luhansk-oblast-field-report-2021

[10] Social Cohesion: Directions for Policy Development in Donetsk Oblast. UCIPR, 2021. P. 36 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: http://ucipr.org.ua/ua/publikatsii/vydannia/social-cohesion-directions-for-policy-development-in-donetsk-oblast-2021

I. Social cohesion challenges in Donetsk oblast caused by the conflict in eastern Ukraine

1. Changes in population composition since 2014

The total area of Donetsk region is 4.4% of the country's territory and is equal to 26,500 sq. km.

Although a significant share of industrial potential remains in temporarily non-government controlled areas, the oblast remains very urbanized: the share of urban population is 90.8% and rural is 9.2%, compared to a Ukrainian average of 69.3% urban and 30.7% rural population.

Donetsk oblast	Government-controlled areas of Donetsk oblast	Non-government controlled areas of Donetsk oblast
28 cities of oblast subordination	15	13
24 cities of raion subordination	16	8
131 urban-type settlements	67	64
196 settlements	93	103
919 villages	661	258

The total population of government-controlled areas is 4,087,000 (before the onset of the armed conflict, the population of the oblast was around 4,300,000).

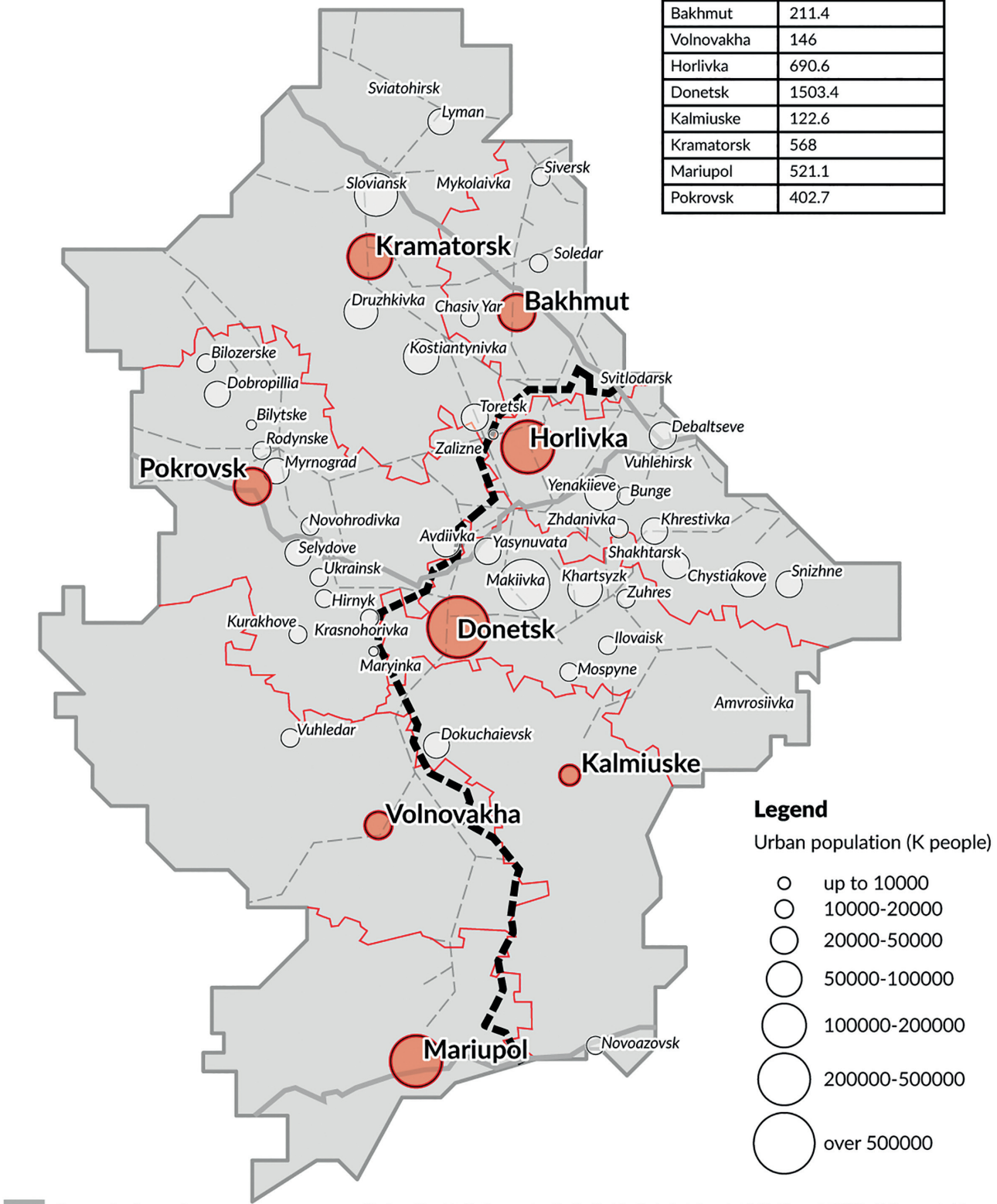
Donetsk oblast is one of the most densely populated in Ukraine (157 people per 1 sq. km as of early 2019).[11]

[11] The main Department of Statistics in Donetsk oblast. Press release, June 2021. [Electronic resource]. Access mode: http://www.donetskstat.gov.ua/pres/presreliz.php?dn=0621&number=3

DONETSK OBLAST

Figure 1

Raion	Population (K people)
Bakhmut	211.4
Volnovakha	146
Horlivka	690.6
Donetsk	1503.4
Kalmiuske	122.6
Kramatorsk	568
Mariupol	521.1
Pokrovsk	402.7



The figure "Donetsk oblast" was produced by the Ukrainian Center for Independent Political Research (UCIPR) with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The study was made possible thanks to the generous support of the American people, provided through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The product content is solely the responsibility of UCIPR and does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the US Government. Reproduction and use of any part of this product in any format, including graphic, electronic, copying or use in any other way without the corresponding reference to the original source, shall be prohibited. "Social Cohesion and Peacebuilding in Donbas with the National Platform" project is supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The share of women in the oblast's population is almost 55%, and there is a significant gender imbalance in certain age groups: for example, 33% of women are aged 60 and over, while only 21% of men are in this age group.[12] More than 30% of the population are people aged 60 and older.

At the same time, there were 1,700,000 young people[13] (approximately 41% of the population) living in the oblast as of January 1, 2021, so policy-making regarding all aspects of work with youth should definitely be a focus of attention.

One third of the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is registered in Donetsk oblast, the largest share compared to other oblasts of Ukraine. At the beginning of 2021, there was a total of about 1,460,000 IDPs in Ukraine, of whom, according to data for 2018, some 540,000 were registered in Donetsk oblast.[14] These people still need systematic integration and equalization of opportunities, including provision of housing, restoration of many violated rights, and employment opportunities.

The social burden on the oblast is onerous. Some 80% of approximately 512,000 IDPs registered in the oblast as of early 2021 are children, people with disabilities and the elderly. National and local policies for their integration should be based on both the needs of IDPs and capacity-building of host communities, and should be formulated for the long term.

The following was recorded in Donetsk oblast:

- a high level of urbanization compared to Ukraine's average;
- predominance of women in the over-60 age group;
- the largest share of registered IDPs compared to other oblasts;
- a heavy social burden on the oblast.

[12] Report on strategic ecological assessment. 2021. p. 33 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://dn.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/1/uploaded-files/%20%D0%A1%D0%95%D0%9E.pdf

[13] Ordinance of the Chairman of the Oblast State Administration–Head of the Military and Civil Administration No. 163-5/21 of 05.03.2021 "On the Oblast Targeted Social Program "Youth of Donetsk Oblast" for 2021–2025", p. 6 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://dn.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/1/NewsODA2021/I_kvartal/22.03/molod_prog.pdf

[14] Ordinance of the Chairman of the Oblast State Administration–Head of the Military and Civil Administration No. 326-5/19 of 27 March 2019 "On the Oblast Program of Support and Integration of Internally Displaced Persons in Donetsk Oblast for 2019–2020" [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://dn.gov.ua/npa/pro-regionalnu-programu-pidtrimki-ta-integraciyi-vnutrishno-peremishchenih-osib-v-doneckij-oblasti-na-2019-2020-roki

We can state in advance that administrative decisions and resource mobilization for the integration of IDPs, job creation policies, gender needs assessment and the inclusion of these groups in decision-making are serious tasks for social cohesion policy in the oblast.

2. The governance system in the context of the conflict and decentralization

The governance system in Donetsk oblast, as well as in Luhansk oblast, has undergone significant structural transformations since 2014. Due to the armed conflict and temporary occupation of part of the oblast, certain areas are not controlled by the Government of Ukraine. Since October 2014, oblast authorities have been based in Kramatorsk. At the same time, due to its proximity to the theater of operations, a special governance model has been formed in government-controlled areas.

Decentralization reform has significantly changed the administrative and territorial structure of the oblast. Earlier, there were 18 raions in the oblast, but as a result of the reform's second stage completed in 2020, 8 raions were formed uniting 66 territorial communities (20 of them are in non-government controlled areas and do not function). Twelve communities were established by the end of 2019, and others emerged during the second stage of decentralization reform in 2020.

Since 2015, a number of interim authorities, military and civil administrations (MCAs),[15] have been created in Donetsk oblast. They simultaneously exercise both the powers of raion and oblast councils (representative authorities of local self-government) and of state administrations (local executive authorities) in the respective territory (raion, oblast). The ongoing problematic political situation in the oblast is evidenced by the continued creation of new MCAs. As elections to local councils were not held in 10 communities along the line of contact in 2020, and because new administrative and territorial units were formed, a further 10 MCAs[16] were set up in 2021. An MCA was established in late May 2021 in the large city of Sloviansk due to an ongoing post-election crisis and in order to freeze the conflict between the city council and the mayor representing opposing political forces.[17] A total of 12 MCAs (one oblast, six city and five settlement) were established on the territory of Donetsk oblast as of 1 September 2021.

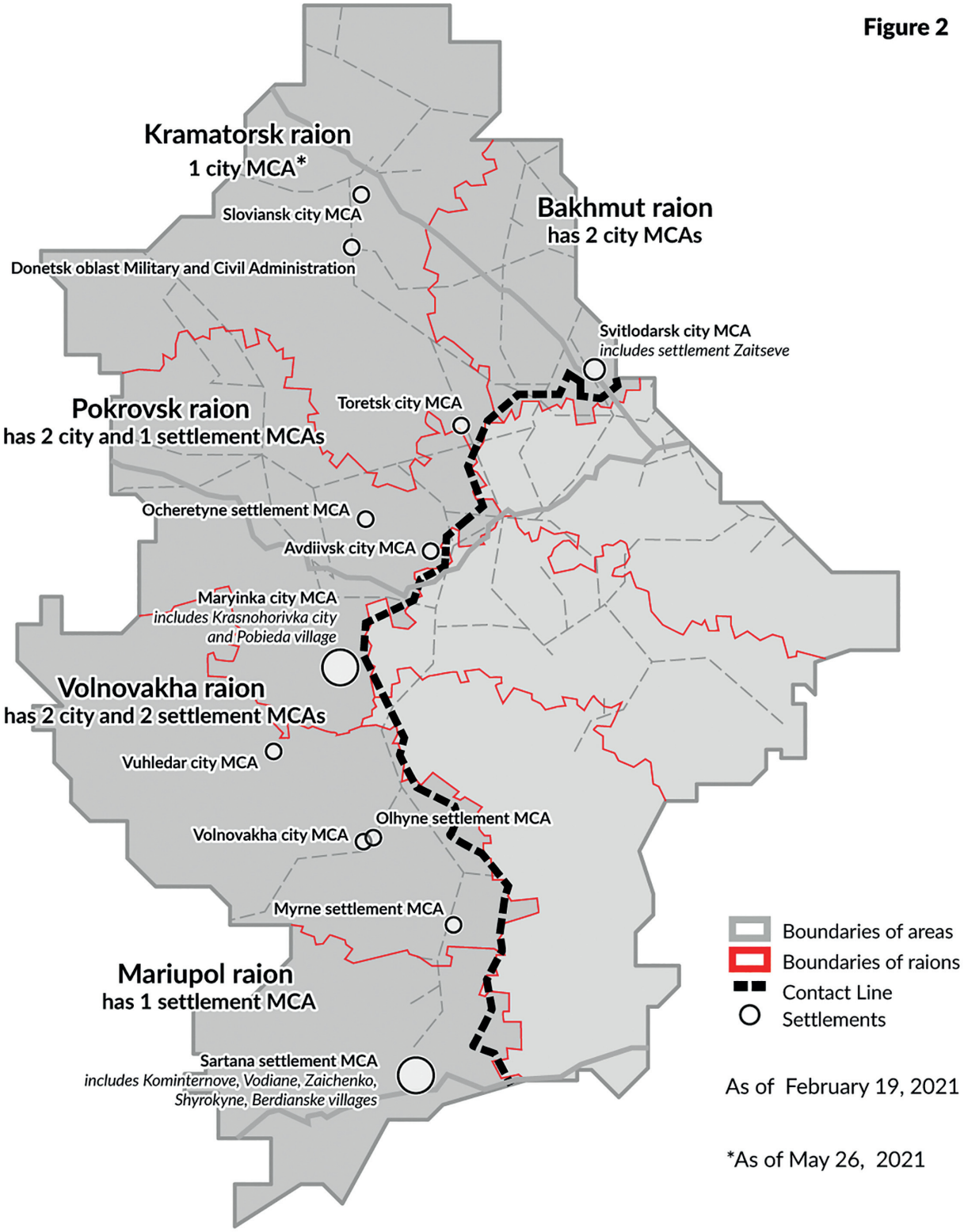
[15] Law of Ukraine No. 141-VIII of 3 February 2015 "On Military and Civil Administrations" [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/141-19#Text

[16] Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 61/2021 of 19 February 2021 "On the Establishment and Reorganization of Military and Civil Administrations in Donetsk Oblast" [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/612021-36741

[17] Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 210/2021 of 26 May 2021 "On the Establishment of the Military and Civil Administration" [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/2102021-38985

THE STRUCTURE OF MILITARY AND CIVIL ADMINISTRATIONS IN DONETSK OBLAST

Figure 2



The figure "The structure of military and civil administrations in Donetsk oblast" was produced by the Ukrainian Center for Independent Political Research (UCIPR) with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The study was made possible thanks to the generous support of the American people, provided through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The product content is solely the responsibility of UCIPR and does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the US Government. Reproduction and use of any part of this product in any format, including graphic, electronic, copying or use in any other way without the corresponding reference to the original source, shall be prohibited.
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It should be noted that the creation of MCAs in Donetsk oblast has had an ambiguous impact on the socio-political situation and level of social cohesion in the oblast. On the one hand, according to participants in the consultations, the creation of MCAs strengthened the executive's control over the security situation in the oblast at community level. Moreover, the concentration of governance helped avert 'manufactured political crises' that had paralyzed government institutions and undermined the political situation in the oblast. This governance model, as noted by consultation participants, enabled more effective mobilization of resources and accelerated administrative decision-making.

On the other hand, the specific conditions of this governance model in the oblast lead to the atrophy of electoral and participatory democracy tools, thus narrowing the space for public policy and political communication. Participants in the consultations stressed the following problems:

- absence of collegiate authorities and decision-making outside of independent public expertise;
- lack of information about the motives and goals of administrative decisions;
- narrowed feedback channels and difficulties holding public consultations;
- risk of losing opportunities to access international donor funds for individual communities;
- absence of the deputy corps as a channel for expressing the interests of the local population.

According to participants in oblast consultations, the MCA institution enables more efficient decision-making, but creates challenges for citizens' participation and development of self-government bodies and local democracy.

At the same time, there are examples of proactive efforts on the part of local authorities and MCAs to build trust in terms of vertical cohesion. According to the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index (SCORE) for eastern Ukraine,[18] the level of satisfaction with provision of public services, social benefits, quality of infrastructure and Internet increased in 2017–2019. MCAs of the newly-created enlarged raions play an important role, as they attempt to ensure communication and coordination between heads of different amalgamated territorial communities (ATCs) and launch intermunicipal cooperation programs.

[18] UN Score for Eastern Ukraine (USE). An analytical tool measuring levels of social cohesion in eastern Ukraine. UNDP Ukraine [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://www.ua.undp.org/content/ukraine/en/home/recovery-and-peacebuilding/use.html

Specifics of governance in Donetsk oblast given the line of contact and military operations:

- impossibility to hold elections to local self-governments;
- restrictions on activities of representative institutions;
- decision-making by military and civil administrations;
- lack of involvement of public participation tools (consultations, public hearings).

Cooperation of MCAs with international organizations, in particular on public security, solving problems of IDPs, etc. is an important aspect of the institutionalization of activities for social cohesion development.

3. Changes in transport infrastructure

Due to proximity to the theater of operations and the severance of logistics communications in Donetsk oblast, the indicators for transport connectivity and accessibility have deteriorated.

The fact that the oblast capital, Donetsk, has been in temporarily non-government controlled areas since 2014 has damaged infrastructure formerly tied to the oblast center. Specifically, rail links between the north and south of the oblast ran through Donetsk until 2014, and no alternative high-speed railways have been built so far to unite the government-controlled parts of the oblast, including Kramatorsk and Mariupol as the two key cities controlled by the Ukrainian government. According to participants in the consultations, "it is sometimes easier to get to Kyiv from Kramatorsk than to Mariupol or neighboring regional centers, Dnipro or Zaporizhzhia."

In government-controlled areas of the oblast, highways that were damaged, including due to hostilities, are being actively restored. An uneven pace of recovery of road and rail links, along with the loss of access to key logistics hubs, has led to a significant change in the structure of passenger and freight traffic. The share of road transport in freight increased from 64% in 2013 to 71% in 2018, whereas the share of rail transport fell from 36% to 29%.

The total length of public roads in Donetsk oblast is about 8,000 km, of which 6,200 km are local roads. At the same time, around 1,500 km of roads of local significance are located in non-government controlled areas.

In 2020, about 140 km of roads in Donetsk oblast were restored as part of the Big Construction program, and about 870 km of public roads in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts are expected to be restored by the end of 2021.

Transport and logistics in Donetsk oblast

Transport links between the oblast's population centers that were damaged due to military operations urgently require repair to facilitate the movement of people and goods.

4. Horizontal cohesion at oblast level

Horizontal cohesion is a measure of social cohesion demonstrating the degree of cohesion and solidarity between social groups regardless of differences or even divisions.

Participants in expert consultations in Donetsk oblast in May–June 2021 give different definitions and interpretations of the concept of social cohesion which, however, are close to the definition of the Council of Europe. They describe social cohesion through the following characteristics:

- willingness to listen to each other;
- no conflicts within society;
- readiness to unite around a common goal;
- the ability to act together to achieve a particular public (social) good despite competition and conflict, value and ideological differences.

Participants in the expert consultations noted evolutionary changes in socio-cultural communications underway in cities and communities of Donetsk oblast which are increasing the level of horizontal cohesion:

- expansion of the range of public communication and the social interaction space of urban residents, as a result of disseminating the practice of forming bodies of self-organization of the population;
- transition of communication from the family (apartment) circle to the apartment block and yard circle;
- the enhanced role of local self-government in the form of street and block committees: bodies of local self-organization are moving from monitoring citizens' needs concerning landscaping and public amenities to involving citizens in projects, gaining experience in cooperating with international organizations and attracting extra-budgetary funds;
- school reform has intensified the role of parent committees: the accumulation of experience in joint action to address issues of school education reform and school improvement is taking place in a "parent committees-teachers-local authorities" triangle.

According to the Index of Social Cohesion and Reconciliation for Eastern Ukraine,[19] the oblast's residents are proud of their industrial achievements and are more tolerant towards vulnerable groups such as LGBT people. A higher index of cooperation in communities along the line of contact (6.1) than in other areas of Donetsk oblast (5.3) deserves attention. At the same time, residents of population centers along the line of contact in Donetsk oblast are less interested in relations with residents of non-government controlled areas, and are more focused on the use of online media than residents of the relevant territories of Luhansk oblast.

Despite support from the government and international donors, strongly pro-Ukraine oriented non-government organizations remain a proactive minority.

Projects for enhancing social cohesion in Donetsk oblast should be based on an inclusive approach, i.e. the principle of involving different population groups in the processes irrespective of differences in ideology or political views.

5. Political identification in the oblast

Since the onset of the armed conflict, the political landscape of the oblasts has undergone some transformations, which are clearly linked to changes in both the rules of the 2020 parliamentary election and the system of governance.

Political identification following the results of the 2019 presidential election in Donetsk oblast

In 2019, presidential and snap parliamentary elections took place, and showed an even greater loss of position by traditional oblast political actors, while maintaining a relatively high level of mobilization in view of difficult circumstances in which the elections were held.

Voter turnout at the presidential election was almost equal in both rounds, but at the same time slightly lower than Ukraine's average. These indicators are however not drastically different from the general turnout. In Donetsk oblast, turnout was 59.47% in the first round of the presidential election on 31 March 2019 and 57.21% in the second round on 21 April 2019, with Ukraine's general turnout at 62.8% and 62.06% respectively.

[19] UN Score for Eastern Ukraine (USE). An analytical tool measuring levels of social cohesion in eastern Ukraine. UNDP Ukraine [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://www.ua.undp.org/content/ukraine/en/home/recovery-and-peacebuilding/use.html

Diagram 1. Voter turnout at the 2019 presidential election in Donetsk oblast

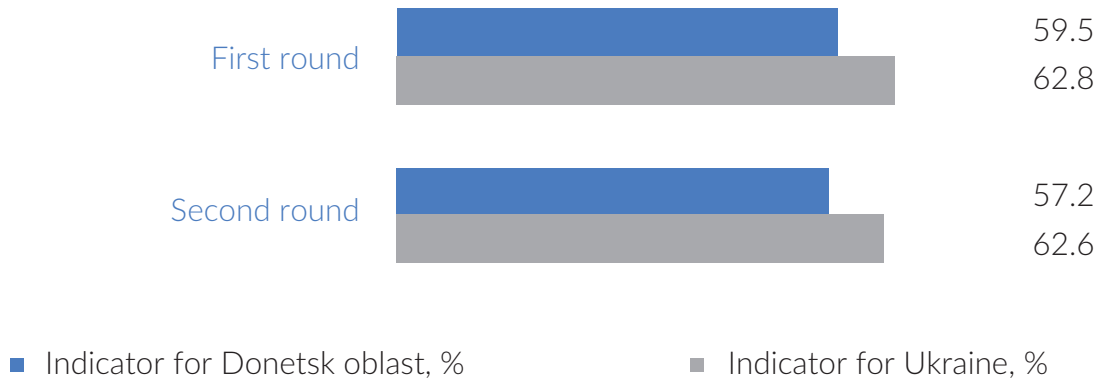
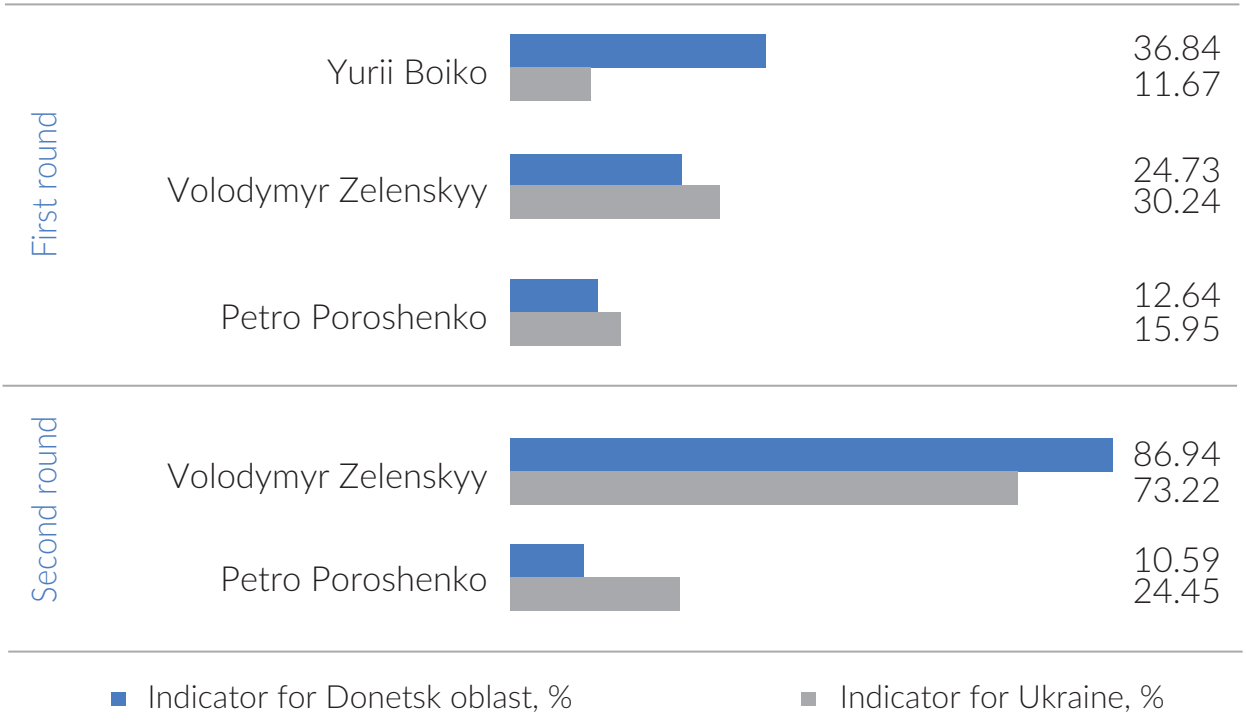


Diagram 2. The distribution of votes for candidates in the 2019 presidential election in Donetsk oblast



Source: The election of the President of Ukraine. CEC Data. https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vp2019/wp300pt001f01=719.html

At the same time, there is a higher level of commitment to political parties that clearly demonstrate pro-Russia oriented policies.[20] The pro-Russia candidate Yurii Boiko won the largest number of votes in the first round in Donetsk oblast (36.84%), followed by the main opponent of the ruling political party Volodymyr Zelenskyy (24.73%) and by then-incumbent President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko (12.64%). Choosing between candidates in the second round, when the choice was based on the confrontation of 'old' elites and associated failures in the peace process and a 'new alternative' capable of achieving peace, voters demonstrated a high degree of consolidation in their support for the second option: more of them voted for Zelenskyy (86.94%) compared to Ukraine's average (73.22%), while 10.59% voted for Poroshenko compared to a Ukraine average of 24.45%.

Political identification following the results of the 2019 parliamentary election in Donetsk oblast

In almost the same period, in the snap parliamentary elections of 2019 people gave their votes to political forces that are strongly associated with the oblast's interests. Despite a territorial reduction of the electoral base of political forces in general, Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts became the two in Ukraine where Opposition Platform — For Life led by Yurii Boiko (which split, prior to 2014, from the Party of Regions, a pro-presidential and pro-Russian force) won the majority of votes. Petro Poroshenko's European Solidarity won in Lviv oblast, while the pro-presidential Servant of the People ranked first in all other oblasts.

In Donetsk oblast, Opposition Platform – For Life received 43.05% of votes, followed by Servant of the People with 27.4% and Opposition Bloc (the other successor of Party of Regions) with 11%. Hence, as a result of the split, Opposition Platform – For Life got fewer votes, and Opposition Bloc received only six seats in parliament on majority lists. Probably, if both parties had been on the same list the result would have been higher.

The split in the strongest pro-Russia political force led to the loss of position by both wings set up on the basis of the former Party of Regions. At the same time, three times more voters in Donetsk oblast compared to its nationwide results at the 2019 snap parliamentary election supported Opposition Platform – For Life, giving it a significant lead. Taking into account the results for Opposition Bloc, which also positioned itself as a mouthpiece of the oblast's interests, it is possible to speak of a relatively high degree of political consolidation given the fact that 45% of the oblast's voters took part in the election.[21] Therefore, Donetsk voters are not too loyal to the composition of the current parliament (parties that passed the electoral threshold in a multi-member constituency across the country, e.g. Batkivshchyna, European Solidarity, Voice, do not have stable voters in Donetsk oblast). Hence, policy-makers should take into

[20] During the presidential election, a noticeable split was recorded between groups within Opposition Bloc, due to which the main candidate from this political party, Yurii Boiko, ran for president as a self-nominee and the party nominated Oleksandr Vilkul (4.15% of votes and 8th place).

[21] CEC data. The 2019 election of People's Deputies of Ukraine. The course of voting [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2019/wp063pt001f01=919.html

account the fact that voters of the oblast demonstrate great interest in political forces that build mobilization in the segment of 'Russian-speaking' and/or pro-Russian citizens (Opposition Bloc) or in favor of populist discourse (the Party of Shariy); at the local level, these interests are represented by Opposition Platform – For Life.

Table 1. The distribution of votes for political parties at the 2019 snap parliamentary election under proportional representation

Political parties that won the majority of votes in Donetsk oblast	Donetsk oblast, %	Political parties that passed the electoral threshold in Ukraine, %
Opposition Platform — For Life	43.41	13.05 – 2nd result
Servant of the People	27.19	43.16 – 1st result
Opposition Bloc	10.77	–
Party of Shariy	5.55	–
European Solidarity	3.59	8.10 – 4th result
Batkivshchyna	1.95	8.18 – 3rd result
Strength and Honor	1.65	—
Voice	1.31	5.82 – 5th result
Radical Party of Oleh Liashko	1.20	–
Ukrainian Strategy of Groysman	0.70	–
Freedom	0.60	–
Green Party of Ukraine	0.54	–

Source: The 2019 election of People's Deputies of Ukraine. CEC [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2019/wp300pt001f01=919.html

As confirmed by participants in our consultations, political parties that use pro-Russian slogans in their public rhetoric retain the sympathy and support of the oblast's voters.

2020 local elections in Donetsk oblast

Local elections took place in the oblast on 25 October 2020 with some restrictions because of security considerations. Specifically, as in 2015, the election of deputies to Donetsk Oblast Council was not held, nor were elections in 10 communities of Bakhmut, Volnovakha, Mariupol and Pokrovsk raions of the oblast located along the line of contact.[22]

In general, candidates from Opposition Platform – For Life won in the oblast in 2020. However, local parties were sometimes its rivals. Specifically, Maxim Yefimov's team Our Kramatorsk[23] was elected to Kramatorsk Raion Council and the party of the then-incumbent mayor Vadim Boichenko won the election to Mariupol Raion Council.[24] These local parties, whose programs were built around the priorities of oblast development and prosperity, also took votes from nationwide pro-Russian forces in other eastern and southern oblasts including Kharkiv, Odesa, Dnipropetrovsk, and others.

At the same time, conflicts within the newly elected councils prompted resolution/freezing of the situation through newly created military and civil administrations (the most recent example is the establishment of Sloviansk MCA in 2021 following the ongoing crisis in Sloviansk City Council).

6. The information space in Donetsk oblast and the role of the media

The mass media are crucial for restoring socio-cultural ties and communication in a society that seeks to overcome post-traumatic stress syndrome and shape a positive model of social cohesion.

[22] Order of the Central Election Commission No. 161 of 8 August 2020 "On the Impossibility of Holding the First Elections of Deputies of Some Village, Settlement and City Councils of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and Corresponding Village, Settlement and City Heads on 25 October 2020". [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://act.cvk.gov.ua/acts/pro-nemozhlivist-provedennya-pershih-viboriv-deputativ-okremih-silskih-selishhnih-miskih-rad-donetskoi-i-luganskoi-oblastey-ta-vidpovidnih-silskih-selishhnih-miskih-goliv-25-zhovtnya-2020-roku.html

[23] Kramatorsk City Council. Deputy factions and groups. The reshuffle. 14.06.2021 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://krm.gov.ua/deputatski-fraktsiyi-ta-grupy/

[24] Mariupol City governance. Last visit on 26.08.2021 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://mariupolrada.gov.ua/fractions

Expert consultations showed that the potential of local media could be used more extensively for:

- dissemination of positive practices of social cohesion;
- mutual awareness among different groups of the population;
- overcoming information isolation between sub-oblasts and parts of the oblast.

Access to Ukrainian television signal in the oblast is important for information policy implementation. As Donetsk TV tower (360.5 meters high) extends the Russian signal to both non-government controlled and government-controlled areas of the oblast, a new TV tower on Mount Karachun near Sloviansk (180 m) was restored and launched to replace it on 5 December 2016, and a new TV tower was opened in Girnyk (190 m) on 1 October 2018.

The State Strategy of Information Reintegration of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts for 2016–2020, developed in 2016, was not properly implemented because it was approved by the government only in 2018, while the Action Plan for Strategy Implementation was not approved at all. According to the results of an expert survey conducted as part of activities of the National Platform Dialogue on Peace and Secure Reintegration,[25] strategy implementation did not have a decisive practical impact on communicating information to the population of the oblast, including non-government controlled areas.

7. Social cohesion challenges and the risk of social disintegration

The consolidation of state institutions and development of partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs) is a key precondition for strengthening social cohesion in the oblast and in communities.

Analysis of the content of two consultations with oblast public and local authority representatives makes it possible to identify and classify models of interaction on social cohesion issues:

- public self-organization and bottom-up initiatives that 'make' authorities respond to and participate in public events and public projects;
- proactive position of local authorities seeking to involve initiatives of communities and CSOs;

[25] The information component of the policy of secure reintegration of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts: directions, lessons, objectives. Analytical Report. K., 2021. 20 pages. Materials are available from the National Platform Dialogue on Peace and Secure Reintegration and UCIPR.

- 'cross-interaction' of self-governments (local authorities) and initiatives of public organizations and representatives of certain social groups;
- joint action and social cohesion practices as a consequence of reforms (school reform, decentralization, systemic projects under the auspices of international organizations in eastern Ukraine).

At the same time, participants in consultations mentioned the following factors that erode trust between authorities and society (vertical social cohesion):

- absence of openness of local authorities and their predominant focus on communication through the executive;
- absence of coordination in activities of local authorities at oblast level in cases requiring proper investigation into a crackdown on civil society activists;
- weak institutionalization of cooperation between local authorities and CSOs.

Lastly, some objective factors and structural inertia adversely affect the level of social cohesion in the oblast. Participants in the consultations listed the following gaps in social cohesion:

- absence of the feeling of a common oblast community;
- deficit of common public space;
- absence of well-established and systematic public communications between communities and within the oblast;
- fragmented socio-cultural space both at oblast and city levels.

8. Shaping a new oblast identity and examples of cohesion – interregional and intermunicipal cooperation

According to local experts, shaping a new oblast identity is one of the indicators of qualitative changes in social cohesion. Donetsk Oblast State Administration, in conjunction with academia and CSOs, has launched activities on shaping a new image and brand of Donetsk oblast. The strategic task that needs to be solved in the oblast is to rebrand it and show its potential, readiness for change and positive practices in the economy, culture, etc. In other words, at the level of oblast authorities and public representatives, there is understanding and desire to present and communicate to the Ukrainian and global information space a more balanced image of the oblast. To this end, there is a certain political will and a circle of interested professionals who have joined a working group. Also, public consultations have been conducted and there is a plan in place for developing a marketing strategy to promote the new image and brand of the oblast.

According to participants in the regional consultations held in June 2021, local media are strongly influenced by corporate groups that are focused on solving utilitarian business problems and could work harder to shape common values and a new oblast identity.

Notwithstanding the lack of a common vision of a new image for the oblast, discussions during the consultations suggest that shaping a new oblast identity open to innovations and transformation could create:

- a value platform that could help overcome persistent fragmentation and inequality in oblast development;
- a tool for consolidating the proactive part of civil society, representatives of local and oblast authorities and the business community;
- the shaping of an effective brand and attractive image of the oblast.

Most representatives of authorities who joined the expert consultations emphasized the sensitivity and importance of interregional and intermunicipal cooperation for ensuring national unity and social cohesion in eastern Ukraine and, simultaneously, a lack of leadership in many processes. A typical statement of a representative of Donetsk Oblast State Administration is as follows: "Now we have agreements with the oblasts of Ukraine, notably with nine oblasts and the city of Kyiv. But unfortunately these agreements are only on paper, and in fact, no active work is underway in this area. Therefore, this work that you have done, this National Platform, will help us intensify our activities within the framework of all the agreements concluded earlier."

Participants in interregional consultations with representatives of five oblasts of eastern Ukraine (Kharkiv, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk and Dnipropetrovsk) conducted by the project team in June 2021 agreed on the expediency of establishing interregional and intermunicipal cooperation. The creation of such interaction and a financial basis for it would, in their opinion, enable common goals to be reached.

There is an understanding that the process of enlargement of raions requires closer interregional cooperation at sub-oblast level, within the newly created raions.[26] On the one hand, communities have a number of problems which require close partnership and cooperation

[26] For more detailed project deliverables on the potential of interregional cooperation to strengthen cohesion and the economic development of the oblasts and communities see Ya. Zhalilo, O. Snihova. Realizing the Potential of Interregional and Intermunicipal Cooperation in the Framework of Cohesion Policy. Analytical Report. UCIPR. 2021. 28 pages [Electronic resource]. Access mode: http://ucipr.org.ua/ua/publikatsii/vydannia/realizing-the-potential-of-interregional-and-intermunicipal-cooperation-in-the-framework-of-cohesion-policy-analytical-report

to solve (raion solid waste utilities, water supply utilities, enterprises providing services for vulnerable groups, etc.). On the other hand, the selfishness of locals (local business groups) impedes intermunicipal cooperation, as they put corporate interests above the public good and social cohesion goals.

Key issues of interregional and intermunicipal cooperation:

- delayed regulatory and legal framework for implementation of the second stage of decentralization (no new wording of the law on local state administrations; no understanding of the designated functions to be performed by these raion state administrations);
- lack of effective projects and plans for implementation of available interregional cooperation agreements;
- lack of experience and institutional capacity for establishing intermunicipal cooperation.

In general, decentralization creates new opportunities for intermunicipal cooperation and social cohesion and simultaneously poses challenges associated with the risks of fragmentation and separation/isolation of relationships in the oblast.

According to regional experts, the key role in overcoming these threats should be played by central executive authorities and the government, a proactive policy of the Oblast State Administration/Military and Civil Administration as an authorized entity of consolidation and social cohesion, and improvement of the legal framework that defines the functioning of local self-governments.

9. Mechanisms of involvement to increase cohesion

In general, the social cohesion activities of oblast authorities are based on the priorities set out in the Strategy of Economic Development of Donetsk Oblast until 2027 (quality of life and human development) and in the Youth of Donetsk Oblast Targeted Social Program for 2021–2025.[27]

[27] Ordinance of the Chairman of the Oblast State Administration–Head of the Military and Civil Administration No. 163-5/21 of 05.03.2021 "On the Oblast Targeted Social Program "Youth of Donetsk Oblast" for 2021–2025. [Electronic resource]. Access mode: https://dn.gov.ua/news/zatverdzheno-regionalnu-cilovu-socialnu-programu-molod-donechchini-na-2021-2025-roki

Participants in the consultations stressed that a number of projects aimed at shaping social cohesion are underway in the oblast. At the same time, they underscored the absence of an integral and consolidated policy and policy implementation tools in the form of an oblast Action Plan on Social Cohesion.

Experts pointed to a number of initiatives and measures that could affect the institutionalization of social cohesion policy, in particular:

- intensifying public council activities and holding public consultations at a variety of levels;
- in partnership with departments of the Oblast State Administration/MCA and with the support of the Chairman of the Oblast State Administration, CSOs have created a Working Group on development and implementation of the oblast participatory budget mechanism in Donetsk oblast;
- a competitive mechanism to support public initiatives and cultural events is in place in Donetsk oblast;
- programs supporting IDPs and Anti-Terrorist Operation/Joint Forces Operation military personnel are underway;
- A pilot geo-information system for monitoring, analysis, evaluation and conflict resolution (https://dialog-ua.org/pages/about.html) is underway. This UN Recovery and Peacebuilding Program project aims to create a system for monitoring, preventing and resolving conflicts in communities related to decentralization and land issues, conflicts between schools and parents, between certain groups, between the military and the local population, between businesses and authorities, authorities and CSOs, etc.

III. The potential for social cohesion in Donetsk oblast (SWOT-analysis)

Analysis of assessments made during public consultations and a set of objective indicators of the oblast's development enable us to make a number of generalizations and present them in the form of a SWOT-analysis of social cohesion potential in Donetsk oblast.

	Strengths	Weaknesses
1	Inclusion of the social cohesion priority as an element of the State Strategy of Economic Development of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts until 2030	Underestimation of social cohesion and peacebuilding in state policy implementation; absence of a vision of social cohesion as a separate priority of the Strategy of Economic Development of Donetsk Oblast until 2027
2	Donor support for social cohesion projects	Absence of a comprehensive analysis of social cohesion problems
3	Interested citizens and successful initiatives that strengthen social cohesion at oblast level and at the level of territorial communities	Absence of cooperation between authorities and CSOs in social cohesion issues as a permanent activity
4	The presence of military and civil administrations – the capacity to quickly make administrative decisions	Weak feedback and a lack of local democracy opportunities under military and civil administrations
5	A number of strategic documents aimed at addressing important capacity-building issues of Donetsk oblast	Slow formulation of an integral state policy for comprehensive development of the potential of Donetsk oblast
6	Availability of a circle of journalists who are ready to join the development and implementation of media projects to facilitate social cohesion; availability of community-owned and independent media; development of communication channels via the Internet	Media representatives' insufficient awareness of social cohesion issues; insufficient coverage of social cohesion issues in oblast media
7	Willingness of local businesses to get engaged in support of social and image projects in the oblast; social entrepreneurship projects in place	Weak involvement of business entities in building social cohesion
8	Attention of the democratic international community; activity of humanitarian and security missions in the oblast	These projects cannot compensate for the government's lack of activity and consistency in building a strategic vision of the oblast's development
9	The shaping of oblast identity as a component of the development of civic culture and a political nation	Difficulties caused by the disintegration process and the atmosphere of uncertainty

	Opportunities	Threats
1	Inclusion of the cross-cutting dimension of "social cohesion" in strategic development documents of Donetsk oblast	Preservation of inequalities in territorial development and social exclusion at the level both of citizens-authorities and of citizens-citizens
2	Consolidation of actions of various CSOs, including but not limited to those in the social cohesion and peace building sector	Weakening of the effective response to bottom-up initiatives and loss of coherence in assessing policy needs at local and national levels
3	Enhancement of the platform for interaction between authorities, business community and CSOs, e.g. the introduction of participatory budgets at community and oblast levels as a tool of involvement and development of cooperation skills to address common community problems	Growing social apathy, including among young people and the active population of the oblast
4	The search for specific tools of public involvement in the absence of a representative level of local authorities; development of advisory initiatives for interaction with state administrations/ military and civil administrations and their units, in particular, through e-platforms; development of technical conditions for disseminating electronic interaction platforms	Possible consideration of the needs of oblast residents in policy-making, and provision of a full range of services (especially given the largest share of registered IDPs compared to other Ukrainian oblasts) is weaker than it could be
5	Use of interregional potential with neighboring Zaporizhzhia, Dnipropetrovsk, Luhansk and Kharkiv oblasts (but not limited to these) and intermunicipal cooperation to address issues of common importance, e.g. transport infrastructure development, waste management, environmental policy implementation, etc.	Isolation/separation of communities; lack of up-to-date logistics infrastructure for doing business; decreased availability of services for community members (especially along the line of contact); inefficient budget policy in addressing issues of common concern
6	The need for strategic development of the information component of secure reintegration policy at national level; coverage of positive practices and media support for initiatives of authorities and the public in local and national media	Maintenance of the 'information occupation' regime; strengthening sentiments among the population associated with such slogans as 'peace at any price' (under the terms and conditions of the Russian Federation); restricted public awareness of governmental and local policy efforts to build peace, and the non-recognition of policy effectiveness
7	Cooperation with donors in support of social cohesion and consolidation projects	Atmosphere of uncertainty; accumulation of unresolved conflicts; loss of a sense of economic prospects and personal security
8	Support for projects aimed at involving young people in solving problems in the oblast	Distortions of the labor market; transformation of areas into depressive territories; stronger migration trends in the oblast and outflow of the labor force and youth
9	Achievement of an integral and sustainable understanding of the potential of the oblast and its communities in their diversity and inseparability from all social relationships in the country	The ability to provoke tensions and confrontations among different social groups; maintenance of centrifugal tendencies

Challenges and Potential for Social Cohesion in Donetsk Oblast

Field Report Based on the Results of Oblast Consultations

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