Resilient Ukraine
Safeguarding Society from Russian Aggression

Contents

Summary

- Despite military conflict and an increasingly adversarial relationship with Russia, Ukraine has largely maintained its democratic reforms thanks to its resilience and determination to decide its own future. The country is gradually developing the capacity of its state institutions and civil society to address the political and social consequences of Russian aggression.

- Russia's three main levers of influence in Ukraine include the ongoing armed conflict, corruption, and the poor quality of the political sphere. The Kremlin seeks to exploit these vulnerabilities to promote polarization and encourage a clash between Ukraine's citizens and its governing elite by taking military action, manipulating the corruption narrative, supporting pro-Russia parties, and fuelling religious tensions through the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC).

- The ramifications of the military operation in Donbas reverberate strongly across the country and domestic politics. The most prominent spillover effects include the circulation of firearms and the weakened capacity of authorities to reintegrate internally displaced people (IDPs) and war veterans.

- With no clear way to end the armed conflict, there is a growing risk of societal polarization. This could have negative consequences for any prospective peace agreement. Conflict resolution particularly requires engagement with Ukrainians in the non-government-controlled areas (NGCA). Safe and inclusive reintegration of Donbas into Ukraine is about more than just territory, it is about people.

- President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has demonstrated a genuine willingness to achieve peace and has applied a human-centric approach to managing the conflict. However, his strategy is constrained by a lack of clear actionable steps, an absence of effective coordination between various agencies, and reluctance to engage civil society in decision-making.

- Societal cohesion is a necessary element of resilience. Currently, weak civic agency is challenging this cohesion, with just 10 per cent of the population regularly participating in civil society and few opportunities for the public to take part in decision-making at the local level. This is particularly the case in the southeast and is reflected by low levels of trust in authorities.

- This paper presents four case studies from the civil society sector that showcase effective responses to disruptions caused by Russian actions and negative influence. They illustrate how civil society in partnership with the authorities is creating resilience dividends.

- Resilience-building offers a viable pathway for strengthening Ukraine in the face of aggression. Furthermore, boosting the quality of human capital, regenerating mono-industrial towns in the east and more inclusive regional development could create resilience dividends. Areas of focus could include promoting the resilience approach, supporting independent media, strengthening cognitive resilience and prioritizing social cohesion.

1. Introduction

Ukraine is a front-line state in the struggle between European rule-based order and Russian kleptocratic autocracy. Since the Euromaidan Revolution in 2013–14, Russia has deployed a range of measures – short of an open declaration of war – to undermine Ukraine's aspirations to build an independent democratic system of governance and integrate into the Euro-Atlantic community.

Russia is waging a full-spectrum war against Ukraine, exploiting domestic vulnerabilities to sow chaos and challenge the state. In this sense, Ukraine can be considered a political 'laboratory' of Russian influence on a large scale. Because of its proximity to Russia, the widespread use of the Russian language and Russian infiltration of its security forces, Ukraine is often used by the Kremlin as a testing ground for various coercive measures.

Russian strategic intentions towards Ukraine have not changed since the start of the conflict in 2014. The Kremlin remains committed to keeping Ukraine weak, isolated and under some form of control. In his December 2019 press conference, Russian President Vladimir Putin reaffirmed threats to Ukraine's territorial integrity beyond the Donbas region, in the east of the country, by claiming that the area north of the Black Sea ('Prychormoriya') is historically Russian land.[1]

Fundamentally, the Kremlin wants Ukrainians to believe that they do not need their state and that state-building is a futile effort that only benefits corrupt, dysfunctional elites. It wants to encourage citizens to wonder whether things would not be better if Russia governed Ukraine. For this to happen, the Kremlin seeks to promote polarization and a clash between Ukraine's people and its governing elite.

Since 2014 the Kremlin has adapted its tactics in Ukraine. These have developed from initial fermentation of civic discontent in the southeast against Kyiv, to pushing wider fragmentation, and to the use of direct military means to sustain simmering conflict along the line of contact (LoC) in Donbas. Russia exploits the current military situation in the east to further destabilize Ukraine. However, opinions in the Kremlin differ on how best to deal with Ukraine. Some advocate patience and maintaining pressure via conflict until widespread autonomy for Donbas is granted, while others argue for some form of compromise in exchange for the lifting of Ukraine-related sanctions against Russia.[2]

From the Kremlin's perspective, the broad menu of satisfactory choices includes: integration of the self-proclaimed 'Donetsk people's republic' (DNR) and the 'Luhansk people's republic' (LNR) into the Ukrainian constitution as special-status areas; annexation of these quasi-statelets via recognition; or maintaining military pressure until Ukraine compromises and the West loses interest. In short, Putin would like to have a veto over Ukraine's future.

---

[1] President of Russia (2019), 'Большая пресс-конференция Владимира Путина' ['Vladimir Putin's big press conference'], 19 December 2019, http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62366 (accessed 23 Apr. 2020).
[2] Karyagin, M. and Chesnakov, A. (2019), 'Чеснаков: нельзя играть с Украиной в поддавки', *Актуальные Комментарии*, ['Chesnakov: we can't afford not playing to win with Ukraine', *Actual Comments*], 21 August 2019, http://actualcomment.ru/chesnakov-nelzya-igrat-s-ukrainoy-v-poddavki-1908210956.html (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).

Russian tactics to subjugate Ukraine include disinformation warfare, cyberattacks, trade embargoes and limitation of transit to Asia, undeclared war in Donbas, interference with navigation in the Sea of Azov, energy supply blackmail, and the annexation of parts of Ukraine's territory (e.g. Crimean Peninsula). Since April 2014, over 13,000 people have lost their lives due to the conflict in eastern Ukraine, with an additional 30,000 injured. These figures include over 3,300 civilian deaths and over 7,000 injured civilians.[3]

Russia's aggression has caused major disruptions in Ukraine including rising flows of internally displaced people (IDPs), difficulty in the reintegration of war veterans, the loss of coal supplies for leading Ukrainian metallurgic companies, and complications for the shipping and fishing industries due to the construction of the Kerch Bridge across the Sea of Azov. The region's ports are critical for Ukraine's exports of grain and metallurgical products.

In the occupied territories of the DNR and the LNR the Kremlin is creating pre-conditions to complicate the future reintegration of these territories into Ukraine. Moscow is limiting remaining voices inside the DNR and the LNR calling for these territories to become part of Russia.[4] At the same time, in those territories, it is conducting a soft integration of existing structures in Russia's 'sphere of influence', notably in the economic, cultural and education sectors, and through a passportization policy. At the start of 2020, Russian authorities reported that 200,000 Russian passports had been issued in Donbas using the fast-track procedure available for people working for the separatist 'authorities'.[5]

Russia has used its information channels, which also reach Kyiv-controlled parts of Donbas, to mould a separatist identity through the manipulation of fear and pre-existing grievances. The Kremlin is conducting a form of social engineering through propaganda in order to generate a pro-Russia, anti-Ukrainian electorate. This is particularly controversial since ideological brainwashing of citizens includes schoolchildren via new curricula in history and 'citizenship classes'.[6] In terms of ideological content, Russia's narrative focuses on the de-legitimization of the Ukrainian state[7] and the promotion of the idea of a special status for the separatist territories that goes beyond current Ukrainian legislation.[8] This has resulted in the creation of a local identity shaped by war.[9] While this local separatist identity is not well established, it has the potential to take hold as it has been formed by more than six years of conflict and against a background of rising anti-Ukraine sentiment.

[3] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2020), 'Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine 16 November 2019 to 15 February 2020', https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/29thReportUkraine_EN.pdf (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).

[4] International Crisis Group (2019), 'Rebels without a Cause: Russia's Proxies in Eastern Ukraine', https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine/254-rebels-without-cause-russias-proxies-eastern-ukraine (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).

[5] Kyrylov, D. (2020), '200 тисяч паспортів Росії на Донбасі. «ДНР» та «ЛНР» після «нормандської» зустрічі' ['200 thousand Russian passports at Donbas. DPR and LPR after the Normandy summit'], *Radio Svoboda*, 6 January 2020, https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/30361430.html (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).

[6] Razumkov Centre (2019), 'The War In Donbas: Realities And Prospects Of Settlement', *National Security & Defence*, 1–2(177–178), pp. 2–172, http://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/eng/NSD177-178_2019_eng.pdf (accessed 20 Apr. 2020); Matviyishyn, I. (2020), 'What Is Going On in Donbas? Interview with Representative of Ukraine's Ombudswoman', *UkraineWorld*, 20 January 2020, https://ukraineworld.org/articles/russian-aggression/what-going-donbas-interview-representative-ukraines-ombudswoman (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).

[7] President of Russia (2014), 'Владимир Путин ответил на вопросы журналистов о ситуации на Украине' ['Vladimir Putin answers journalists' questions on the situation in Ukraine'], http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20366 (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).

[8] Karyagin and Chesnakov (2019), 'Chesnakov: we can't afford not playing to win with Ukraine'.

[9] Malyarenko, T. (2019), *Evolving Dynamics and Conflict Potential in Eastern Ukraine*, PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 569, http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/evolving-dynamics-and-conflict-potential-eastern-ukraine (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).

Beyond Donbas, Russian destabilization tactics against Ukraine have evolved over time and are notoriously slow burning. They range from broad attempts to undermine the independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC)[10] to specific efforts to negate a sense of pride among local volunteers. These tactics mostly aim at multiplying internal disputes in Ukraine, exploiting passive discontent and putting pressure on state structures. For instance, Russian authorities are most likely behind a series of fake bomb threats that are putting additional strain on Ukraine's infrastructure and diverting the attention of local authorities.[11] Other endeavours focus on undermining the central government by corrupting regional administrations, as exemplified by recent court decisions in Mariupol regarding the amnesty of DNR war fighters.[12]

On top of continuously discrediting democratic Ukraine, Russian propaganda efforts are now concentrating on depicting President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as a 'puppet' of the West and a 'clown'. Seizing the opportunity presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, Russian state media spins the story of the collapse of Western liberalism and depicts apocalyptic scenarios in Ukraine to increase panic, such as possible hunger protests, lack of cash in the economy, and the disintegration of the healthcare system.[13] Russian-designed disinformation operations and active measures radicalized the local population in Poltava region to violently protest against the placement of Ukrainian citizens recently evacuated from China in the local hospital.[14] This violent demonstration generated negative media coverage of Ukraine in leading international outlets and damaged the country's image.

Fortunately, these major disruptions have not resulted in a nationwide disaster or state collapse. Despite Russia's aggression, economic pressure and information war, Ukraine has managed to preserve its statehood, reclaim parts of territories captured by Russia-backed separatists and roll out a comprehensive programme of ambitious reforms. Ukraine is attempting the equivalent of rebuilding a ship in heavy seas.

The benefits of resilience

Ukraine has persevered as an independent state thanks to its resilience and determination to defend its own future. There are various definitions and examples of resilience. In physical sciences and psychology, resilience is viewed as the capacity to regain shape after various shocks. Among countries under duress, Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria is an example of such perseverance. Ukraine's own crony capitalist economy with its strong vested interests demonstrates similar robust

[10] Romaniuk, R. (2019), 'Митрополит Епіфаній: За спиною Філарета грають деякі проросійські сили' ['Metropolitan Yepifaniy: certain pro-Russian forces are playing behind Filaret's back'], *Ukrayins'ka Pravda*, 11 December 2019, https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2019/12/11/7234473/ (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).

[11] Ukraine has consistently faced a large number of fake bomb threats and hoaxes across the country, mainly in major urban centres, since at least mid-2018. Fake bomb threats are generally made by phone or sent via the internet to local authorities. See Datskevych, N. (2019), 'Ukrainian law enforcers report massive wave of fake bomb calls', KyivPost, 27 April 2019, https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/ukrainian-law-enforcers-report-massive-wave-of-fake-bomb-calls.html (accessed 20 Apr. 2020); Garda World (2019), 'Ukraine: Authorities investigate bomb threats in Lviv and Kharkiv May 6', 6 May 2019, https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/228156/ukraine-authorities-investigate-bomb-threats-in-lviv-and-kharkiv-may-6 (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).

[12] Mariupol TV (2019), 'В Мариуполе ветераны АТО провели акцию, требуя адекватного суда над боевиками «ДНР»' ['In Mariupol veterans of ATO held a demonstration, demanding adequate trial of DPR fighters'], 20 September 2019, https://mariupol.tv/news/society/mariupol/30663/v_mariupole_veterany_ato_proveli_akciyu_trebuya_adekvatnogo_suda_nad_boevikami_dnr.html (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).

[13] Texty.org.ua (2020), 'Гарячі теми російської дези: "Сильного регіонального лідера Кернеса" роблять іконою федералізму' ['Hot topics of Russian disinformation: "strong regional leader Kernes" is turned into an icon of federalism'], 26 March 2020, https://texty.org.ua/articles/100578/monitoring-29/ (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).

[14] Euromaidan Press (2020), 'The pro-Russian network behind coronavirus riots in a small Ukrainian town', 17 March 2020, http://euromaidanpress.com/2020/03/17/panic-is-worse-than-coronavirus-who-and-how-arranged-anti-evacuee-clashes-in-novi-sanzhary/ (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).

resilience and opposition to change. The second kind of resilience is a system's ability to absorb shocks and make adjustments without losing its main features. For example, the US financial sector following the 2008 economic crisis, where some adjustments in policy allowed it to return to business as usual.

For the purposes of this analysis, we define resilience as the capacity of an entity – an individual, a community, an organization or a natural system – to prepare for disruption, to recover from shocks, and to adapt and grow from a disruptive experience.[15]

In the case of Ukraine, the adaptive nature of resilience is of key importance. In addition to withstanding and absorbing shocks, there is an opportunity to generate a resilience dividend. By this, we mean an adaptation that comes out of a crisis, which develops Ukraine's political institutions to a new higher level of operation. Much of Ukraine's post-Soviet transformation occurred as a result of innovation from non-state actors, both private sector and civil society. This is where societal resilience comes into play and why it is so important. It has been the bedrock of Ukraine's transition. At present, Ukraine finds itself needing to accelerate this process of adaptation if it is to emerge as a strong and viable state; it is not enough to maintain the status quo.

Ukraine is in an extremely turbulent environment. Russian military aggression and coercive actions, the domestic turmoil resulting from structural reforms and, more recently, the challenge of addressing the COVID-19 pandemic all require resilience from citizens, organizations, cities and communities. The mobilization of active parts of society often compensates for the weaknesses in Ukraine's political institutions. In the current crisis, a new type of institution is already emerging from this interaction between political institutions and non-state actors (civil society, business sector, local communities).

Ukraine already has a certain amount of resilience capital based on the following factors, mainly stemming from its societal culture and views about the armed conflict:

- Ukrainians are accustomed to living with instability;

- Ukrainians are determined to defend the country, as reflected in the rise of patriotic sentiment. The majority of the population views Russia as an aggressor state and sees the conflict as a 'war for independence and restoration of territorial integrity';[16]

- The majority of citizens are hopeful that the country can overcome difficulties;

- Nascent social cohesion among groups of active citizens;

- An active civil society and vibrant volunteer movement; and

- Horizontal social links rather than hierarchical centralized command as the main organizing feature of social interactions.

These factors should be nurtured as Ukraine remains highly exposed to Russian threats. Building the resilience of communities and institutions is an important strategy for Ukraine to achieve its developmental objectives despite the actions of a violent and disruptive neighbour. Resilience is not an inbuilt feature that is present by default in each system. It can be acquired and strengthened if the proper mindset is applied to social change, organizational development and approaches to crises.

---

[15] Rodin, J. (2015), *The Resilience Dividend*, London: Profile Books Ltd.
[16] Democratic Initiatives Foundations (2019), 'Шляхи досягнення миру на Донбасі: суспільні настрої, очікування, перестороги – загальнонаціональне опитування' [Ways of Achieving Peace in Donbas: public opinion, expectations and warnings – nationwide survey], https://dif.org.ua/article/shlyakhi-dosyagnennya-miru-na-donbasi-suspilni-nastroi-ochikuvannya-perestorogi-zagalnonatsionalne-opituvannya (accessed 5 May 2020).

Russia's drivers of negative influence

To better understand how Russia has deployed its various levers of influence in Ukraine, previous research by Chatham House proposed a set of categories to identify areas of strategic *local* vulnerability:[17]

1. Quality of the internal political system (political parties, government-organized NGOs, prevalence of corruption, interconnection between elites);

2. Security, conflicts and Russian military presence;

3. Economic dependence (energy, trade, business ties);

4. Media environment (Russian disinformation, public support for pro-Russia narratives, penetration of Russian narratives into pro-Russia privately owned outlets, weak independent media); and

5. Identity (history, language, minorities, culture, role of the Russian Orthodox Church).

Figures 1 and 2 map Ukraine's vulnerabilities and responses to drivers of Russian influence, as assessed by independent experts, in 2018 and 2019.

### Figure 1: Drivers of Russian influence and responses in Ukraine, 2018
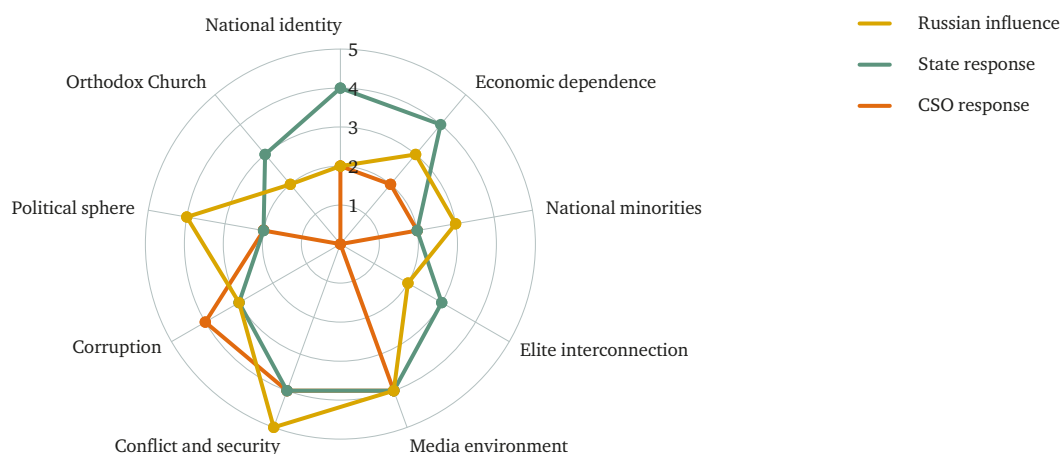
Source: Boulègue, Lutsevych and Marin (2018), *Civil Society Under Russia's Threat: Building Resilience in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova*.
Note: The chart maps levels of various vulnerabilities to Russian influence as perceived by the experts interviewed as part of field work, on a scale of 0 to 5, where 0 = 'non-existent', 1 = 'minimal', 2 = 'moderate', 3 = 'substantial', 4 = 'critical' and 5 = 'most prevalent'. State and civil society responses are rated on a scale of 0 to 5, where 0 = 'no response', 1 = 'minimal response', 2 = 'mild response', 3 = 'moderate effort', 4 = 'substantial effort' and 5 = 'high-level effective effort'.

[17] Boulègue, M., Lutsevych, O. and Marin, A. (2018), *Civil Society Under Russia's Threat: Building Resilience in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova*, Research Paper, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, p. 4, https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/civil-society-under-russias-threat-building-resilience-ukraine-belarus-and-moldova (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).

Figure 2: Drivers of Russian influence and responses in Ukraine, 2019
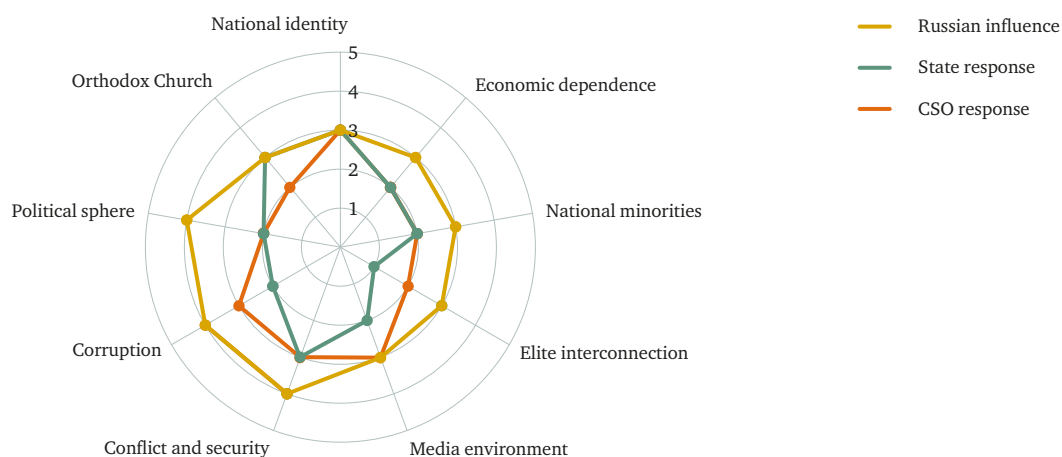
Source: Compiled by the authors, based on 21 responses given by participants of an expert workshop organized in Kyiv on 21 April 2019. Experts included mostly CSO representatives, volunteers and civil society activists.

Note: The chart maps levels of various vulnerabilities to Russian influence as perceived by the experts, on a scale of 0 to 5, where 0 = 'non-existent', 1 = 'minimal', 2 = 'moderate', 3 = 'substantial', 4 = 'critical' and 5 = 'most prevalent'. State and civil society responses are rated on a scale of 0 to 5, where 0 = 'no response', 1 = 'minimal response', 2 = 'mild response', 3 = 'moderate effort', 4 = 'substantial effort' and 5 = 'high-level effective effort'.

Analysis of main vulnerabilities

Russia's negative influence continues to impact the structural features of Ukrainian society. For this research paper we will only detail the first three vulnerabilities (see previous page) and expand on the impact of armed conflict on the body of Ukrainian politics and society. Ukraine's domestic weaknesses, such as the role of business tycoons and high-level corruption, clearly make Ukraine more vulnerable but are largely unrelated to external Russian drivers.[18]

Ukraine's vulnerabilities outlined in the 2018 Chatham House research paper[19] remained prevalent in 2019 and included conflict and security, corruption, and the quality of the political sphere. The impact of the conflict with Russia has decreased compared to 2018, partly because citizens have grown used to the low-intensity aggression in Donbas. This is partially why President Petro Poroshenko's securitized campaign for re-election was unsuccessful (see Chapter 2 for details on the impact of conflict).

Drivers of Russian influence

Perceptions of corruption in Ukraine have increased since 2018. The corruption narrative was prominent during the 2019 presidential election and Russia continues to use it against Ukraine. Simultaneously, transparency in public affairs has increased across the board in Ukraine and the volume of investigative reporting has soared. However, not all of this content was highly professional,

---

[18] For Ukraine's recent anti-corruption reform, see Lough, J. and Dubrovskiy, V. (2018), *Are Ukraine's Anti-corruption Reforms Working?*, Research Paper, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/are-ukraines-anti-corruption-reforms-working (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).

[19] Boulègue, Lutsevych and Marin (2018), *Civil Society Under Russia's Threat*.

balanced and factual. For example, the public broadcaster Suspilne TV aired a programme produced by an independent investigative group, Slidstvo.info, about Poroshenko's offshore accounts including content that violated international standards of investigative reporting.[20] In addition, the oligarch-owned information space, especially private-owned TV channels, created a strong impression that corruption is worse now than during Viktor Yanukovych's presidency and that nothing has changed for the better. All these factors have contributed to an increased perception of corruption.

The oligarch-controlled media have vilified Poroshenko and the ruling elite. However, a 2018 Chatham House paper[21] and another one by the Ukrainian Institute of Economic Research and Political Consultations demonstrated that, contrary to popular perception, anti-corruption measures have saved Ukraine around $6 billion since 2014.[22] The share of Ukrainians who either personally or within their family have experienced corruption has decreased by almost 20 per cent, compared to 2007.[23] At the same time, in 2018, 61 per cent of Ukrainians said that corruption had increased compared to 2013.[24]

The political sphere remains highly vulnerable to Russia's negative influence, owing to weak institutions, the high concentration of corrupt money, and the significant leverage of the media. The degree of fusion between large business groups and politics remains high. The modern toolkit of wealthy interest groups that wish to exercise influence includes media ownership; investment in political parties and individual members of parliament; corruption of judges and prosecutors; and funding right-wing radical groups capable of undertaking small-scale violence if necessary. These features are visible at the national and regional levels.

The entry barrier into top-level Ukrainian politics for independent and motivated actors remains very high. This is partially due to politics being a competition of big money rather than big ideas. With no cap on campaign finance in the Law on Presidential Elections, only political actors supported by vested interests could compete nationwide in the 2019 poll. According to the Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law, during the campaign the top three presidential candidates spent between $5 million and $21 million, mostly on TV advertisements.[25] By comparison, in Poland, where GDP per capita is almost four times higher than in Ukraine, total campaign spending per candidate in 2015 was $4.8 million.[26] Lack of transparency and accountability around political finance in Ukraine allows pro-Russia candidates to inject significant sums of cash into politics, which remains undocumented but influences the political discourse to a large extent.

During the 2019 electoral campaigns the Kremlin clearly endorsed the Opposition Platform – For Life (OPFL). Just eight days before the first round of the presidential election OPFL leaders Yuri Boyko and Victor Medvedchuk met with the then Prime Minister of Russia Dmitry Medvedev

[20] Detector.media (2016), 'Висновок Незалежної медійної ради щодо резонансного «Подвійного життя Президента»' ['Verdict of the Independent Media Council on the resonant episode "Dual Life of the President"'], 18 April 2016, https://detector.media/community/article/114416/2016-04-18-visnovok-nezalezhnoi-mediinoi-radi-shchodo-rezonansnogo-podviinogo-zhittya-prezidenta/ (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).
[21] Lough and Dubrovskiy (2018), *Are Ukraine's Anti-Corruption Reforms Working?*
[22] The Institute for Economic Research and Policy Consulting (2018), 'Ukraine's Fight Against Corruption: The Economic Front', http://www.ier.com.ua/files/publications/Policy_papers/IER/2018/Anticorruption_Report_EN.pdf (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).
[23] Democratic Initiatives Foundation (2018), 'Корупція В Україні: сприйняття, досвід, ставлення' ['Corruption in Ukraine: perceptions, experience, attitudes'], https://dif.org.ua/uploads/pdf/6343688805c078ceeea4aa6.97852084.pdf (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).
[24] 24 Kanal (2018), 'Скільки українців дають хабарі і як ставляться до корупції: результати опитування' ['How many Ukrainians are giving bribes and what are their attitudes towards corruption: survey results'], 8 May 2018, https://24tv.ua/skilki_ukrayintsiv_dayut_habari_i_yak_stavlyatsya_do_koruptsiyi_rezultati_opituvannya_n963902 (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).
[25] Memo provided to Chatham House by the Centre for Democracy and Rule of Law.
[26] Ibid.

in Moscow.[27] Another meeting followed in July, 10 days before the parliamentary elections. Medvedev stressed 'the lack of clear signals from President Zelenskyy and the need for political dialogue between Ukrainian and Russian political parties'.[28] The meeting was widely televised by OPFL-owned TV channels.

These efforts were to demonstrate to voters in southeast Ukraine that the OPFL has access to the Russian leadership and therefore has a real chance to stop the war. Connections to the Kremlin also mean the possibility of unobstructed passage of naval cargo through the Kerch Strait.[29] This could constitute an offer of significant interest to big financial groups, as they face serious constraints after the construction of the Kerch Bridge.

> Despite strong backing from Moscow, the OPFL won 13 per cent of seats on the party list and gained six 'first past the post' seats, giving it 43 MPs out of 423 in the parliamentary elections.

With newly regained political status as a member of parliament and as deputy head of the OPFL party – as well as being the owner of several media channels and an extensive business empire – Victor Medvedchuk has actively pushed the idea of autonomy for Donbas, for Kyiv to directly negotiate a peaceful solution with the Russia-backed separatists, and a nationwide referendum on a future peace deal. Support for giving Donbas special status – which could be a Trojan Horse to undermine Ukraine on its path to integration into the Euro-Atlantic community – is weak nationwide and stronger in the southeast. The OPFL's presidential candidate Yuri Boyko, who also pushed this agenda, was the winner in the first round of presidential elections in Donetsk and Luhansk and came second in Odesa, Zaporizhia, Kherson, Mykolaiv, Dnipro and Kharkiv.[30] Despite strong backing from Moscow, the OPFL won 13 per cent of seats on the party list and gained six 'first past the post' seats, giving it 43 MPs out of 423 in the parliamentary elections. After both elections, OPFL-loyal TV channels gradually turned against President Zelenskyy, accusing him and his team of lacking the political will necessary to achieve peace in Ukraine.[31]

Medvedchuk's influence operation is not limited to Ukraine. He co-produced a film with Oliver Stone, *Revealing Ukraine*,[32] which premiered at the Taormina Film Festival in July 2019. The film featured the dominant Kremlin propaganda narratives about the Euromaidan and the history of Ukraine. It focused on anti-US, anti-Soros narratives and pushed the idea of Ukraine being the battlefield for a proxy war between the US and Russia. Medvedchuk, his wife Oksana Marchenko and Putin himself appeared in the film. A week before Ukraine's elections separatist media and pro-Russia outlets in Ukraine spun key messages from the film.[33]

---

[27] Mazurenko, A. (2019), 'Бойко і Медведчук у Москві зустрілися з Медведєвим' ['Boiko and Medvedchuk meet with Medvedev in Moscow'], *Ukrayins'ka Pravda*, 22 March 2019, https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2019/03/22/7209955/ (accessed 20 Apr. 2020).
[28] TSN (2019), 'Медведчук і Бойко знову проводять зустріч з Медведєвим у РФ' ['Medvedchuk and Boiko once again meet with Medvedev in Russia'], 10 July 2019, https://tsn.ua/politika/medvedchuk-i-boyko-znovu-provodyat-zustrich-z-medvedyevim-u-rf-1376022.html (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[29] Hromadske International (2019), 'Parties' Funding: How Pro-Russian Oligarch Viktor Medvedchuk Is Regaining Power in Ukraine', 19 July 2019, https://en.hromadske.ua/posts/how-pro-russian-oligarch-viktor-medvedchuk-is-regaining-power-in-ukraine (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[30] *Ukrayins'ka Pravda* (2019), 'Результати виборів президента України 2019. Перший тур' ['The results of the 2019 presidential election in Ukraine. First round'], 31 March 2019, https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2019/03/31/7210618/ (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[31] Kravets, R. (2019), 'Олігархи у телевізорі. Кого піарять та з ким воюють Ахметов, Коломойський, Медведчук' ['Oligarchs on TV. Whom do Akhmetov, Kolomoisky and Medvedchuk promote and whom do they fight against'], *Ukrayins'ka Pravda*, 18 December 2019, https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2019/12/18/7235172/ (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[32] Another Way Productions (2019), 'Revealing Ukraine', http://revealingukraine.com/ (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[33] Texty.org.ua (2019), 'Теми дезінформаційних новин за 15–21 липня 2019 року' ['Topics of disinformation in news for 15–21 July 2019'], http://texty.org.ua/action/file/download?file_guid=95489 (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).

Medvedchuk's link to Russia is not only ideological; he benefits substantially from access to prime Russian oilfields. NZNP Trade, a company connected to his wife, produces oil at the Novoshakhtinsk refinery. This provides him a considerable source of revenue since one-third of the diesel that Ukraine consumes comes from this particular refinery via connected companies.[34]

In the religious sphere, the perception of Russia's leverage has increased as it remains influential through the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). The situation has escalated after the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople signed a decree granting autocephaly, the so-called *Tomos*, to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) in January 2019.

This raises the possibility of future conflict fuelled by Russia in communities where parishes of the ROC might decide to join the OCU. The procedure for such a transfer was established by parliament in January 2019 and more than 541 parishes out of around 11,000 have completed a peaceful transfer.[35] Indeed, Ukrainian security officials reported that Russian security services were offering $2,000 to those willing to light fires in ROC church buildings in order to ignite religious conflict in Ukraine.[36] In Zaporizhia and Kryvy Rig, police have arrested people attempting to set churches on fire.[37]

Moscow reacted very negatively to *Tomos* and made clear efforts to obstruct other Orthodox churches from recognizing it. Putin was vocal that he reserves the 'right of action to protect Orthodox believers' in Ukraine in case their rights are violated.[38] This expanded the pretext of possible intervention in Ukraine, which previously included only ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking populations. As seen from Moscow, *Tomos* is a serious matter. It signifies a further advancement of the West towards the Russian World and poses a threat not just to security but to Russia's positioning as the Third Rome and defender of Orthodoxy.[39]

The independence of Ukraine's church is used by Russia to polarize communities and discourage parishes from joining the OCU. Separatist and pro-Russia media push narratives to discredit autocephaly, stating that the whole affair is motivated by a money grab and using the former head of the church Patriarch Filaret to spread disinformation that *Tomos* is illegal.[40] This aims to obstruct consolidation of the OCU and maintain the ROC's control over the parishes in Ukraine. This control is critical for Russia as Ukrainian parishes make up over 40 per cent of the ROC, which allows it to claim to be the largest Orthodox Church in the world.

[34] Hromadske International (2019), 'Parties' Funding: How Pro-Russian Oligarch Viktor Medvedchuk Is Regaining Power in Ukraine'.
[35] Slovo I Dilo (2020), 'Скільки православних громад перейшли до ПЦУ' ['How many Orthodox parishes transferred to the OCU'], 5 February 2020, https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2020/02/05/infografika/suspilstvo/skilky-pravoslavnyx-hromad-perejshly-pczu (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[36] Security Service of Ukraine (2019), 'СБУ викрила плани російських спецслужб дестабілізувати ситуацію в Україні' ['SSU revealed Russian secret services' plans for destabilizing the situation in Ukraine'], 9 February 2019, https://ssu.gov.ua/ua/news/1/category/2/view/5699#.2Y0daPk0.dpbs (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[37] Religious Information Service of Ukraine (2019), 'У Запоріжжі Затримали Групу Осіб При Спробі Підпалу Храму УПЦ МП, – СБУ' ['In Zaporizhia, a group of persons detained while attempting to set on fire a Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate – SSU'], 18 February 2019, https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all_news/community/scandals/74750/ (accessed 21 Apr. 2020); Religious Information Service of Ukraine (2019), 'У Кривому Розі Невідомі Підпалили Двері Храму УПЦ МП' ['In Kryvy Rig, unknown persons set fire to the door of a Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate'], 17 February 2019, https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all_news/community/scandals/74737/ (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[38] Milanova, Y. (2019), 'Путін: Росія готова захищати віруючих в Україні' ['Putin: Russia is ready to defend believers in Ukraine'], *Ukrayins'ka Pravda*, 31 January 2019, https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2019/01/31/7205386/ (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[39] Sherr, J. and Kullamaa, K. (2019), *The Russian Orthodox Church: Faith, Power And Conquest*, Tallinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/ICDS_EFPI_Report_The_Russian_Orthodox_Church_Sherr_Kullamaa_December_2019.pdf (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[40] Texty.org.ua (2019), 'Моніторинг тем, які піднімає російська дезінформація. Випуск №3. Вся увага на вибори' ['Monitoring of the topics mentioned in Russian disinformation. Issue №3. All attention on the elections'], http://texty.org.ua/pg/article/nnnade4ka/read/94663/Monitoryng_tem_jaki_pidnimaje_rosijska_dezinformacija_Vypusk (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).

While all other Ukrainian religious communities observed government-imposed restrictions related to COVID-19, ROC churches ignored distancing guidelines. Archbishop Pavel of Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra called on all 'believers young and old to hurry into churches and hug one another'. He said, an 'epidemic is nothing to be afraid of, but a sin which kills a soul is'.[41]

As shown in Figure 2, perceptions of the Ukrainian state response against Russia's negative influence have changed since 2018. At that time, the Poroshenko administration mainly focused on rebuilding the armed forces, strengthening the security services and implementing policies related to national identity (mainly on language and decommunization). At the NATO level, a Civil Emergency Planning Committee was launched to ensure the resilience of the state and its critical infrastructure.

Nonetheless, in the view of most non-state actors the authorities are not adequately addressing Russian vectors of negative influence. Civil society actors see the state response as weak, mostly due to the preoccupation of senior officials with the electoral race in 2019. Reforms have largely come to a halt and weak state institutions are unable to function in such an environment. However, there has been a stronger state response in the sectors that were central to Poroshenko's electoral programme (conflict and security, the Orthodox Church, and language and national identity). The assessment of Zelenskyy's efforts are not included in Figure 2, as the expert survey was conducted too early in his presidency.

The level of response from civil society organizations (CSO) has increased across all sectors, particularly in key areas of vulnerability. Their effectiveness varies and is often constrained by limited capacity, uncooperative local authorities and disengaged citizens. Local CSOs are assisting with delivering services to IDPs, veterans and families affected by war. A number of think-tanks and anti-corruption groups are pushing for more accountability, transparency and a higher quality legislature. This is especially visible at the regional level among local CSOs and community-based organizations. The case studies in Chapter 3 illustrate how CSOs contribute to a more resilient Ukraine.

---

[41] Bega, V. (2020), 'Києво-Печерська лавра ігнорує карантинні обмеження' ['Kyiv Pechersk Lavra ignores the quarantine measures'], *Hromadske*, 19 March 2020, https://hromadske.ua/posts/kiyevo-pecherska-lavra-ignoruye-karantinni-obmezhennya?tg-group (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).

2. The Impact of the Armed Conflict

For almost six years Ukraine has been in a state of simmering conflict. The ramifications of the military operation in parts of Donbas reverberate strongly across the rest of the country and domestic politics. The conflict has myriad effects that influence the quality of democracy, human capital, social fabric, and the level of violence in society.

Conflicting demands: Liberal democracy vs national security

Most Ukrainians, across the country, demand a more effective and accountable system of governance. At present, citizens, civil society and state institutions are experiencing heightened insecurity that jeopardizes further reforms. According to a National Democratic Institute (NDI) public opinion poll, 61 per cent of Ukrainians believe that Russian military aggression is a big threat.[42] As a consequence, Ukrainian society struggles to reconcile two aspirations: strengthening homeland security and a desire for more civic and political liberties.

The conflict in Donbas complicates the consolidation of democracy. For example, many see an apparent contradiction between the need to insulate Ukraine from Russian disinformation and the need to ensure media independence. Recent attempts to pass a law on disinformation met with strong opposition from the media community. Journalists see this law as an encroachment on their freedoms and a 'dangerous intrusion [by the] state into the media community'.[43] Similarly, the need for the state to react to the rise of right-wing non-state actors – such as the National Corps, which positions itself as a CSO – challenges the commitment to create an open environment for the development of civil society.

To date, civil society efforts and Ukrainians' innate suspicion of state authorities have helped maintain and expand freedoms during the conflict. Many CSOs are pushing for more accountability, decentralization and respect for human rights. Perhaps counterintuitively, despite the war, Ukraine has undergone a comprehensive process of decentralization with the subsequent empowerment of local authorities and amalgamated communities since 2014.[44] Traditionally, a country at war would centralize most of its state functions, yet Ukraine chose to do the opposite.

Societal polarization

The war in eastern Ukraine is polarizing society. The conflict is viewed differently between regions depending on how they are directly affected by it. While the majority of Ukrainians believe that conflict resolution will require some form of compromise with Russia and the separatist regions,

---

[42] National Democratic Institute (2019), 'Opportunities and Challenges Facing Ukraine's Democratic Transition', https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_September%202019%20survey_Public_vf.pdf (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
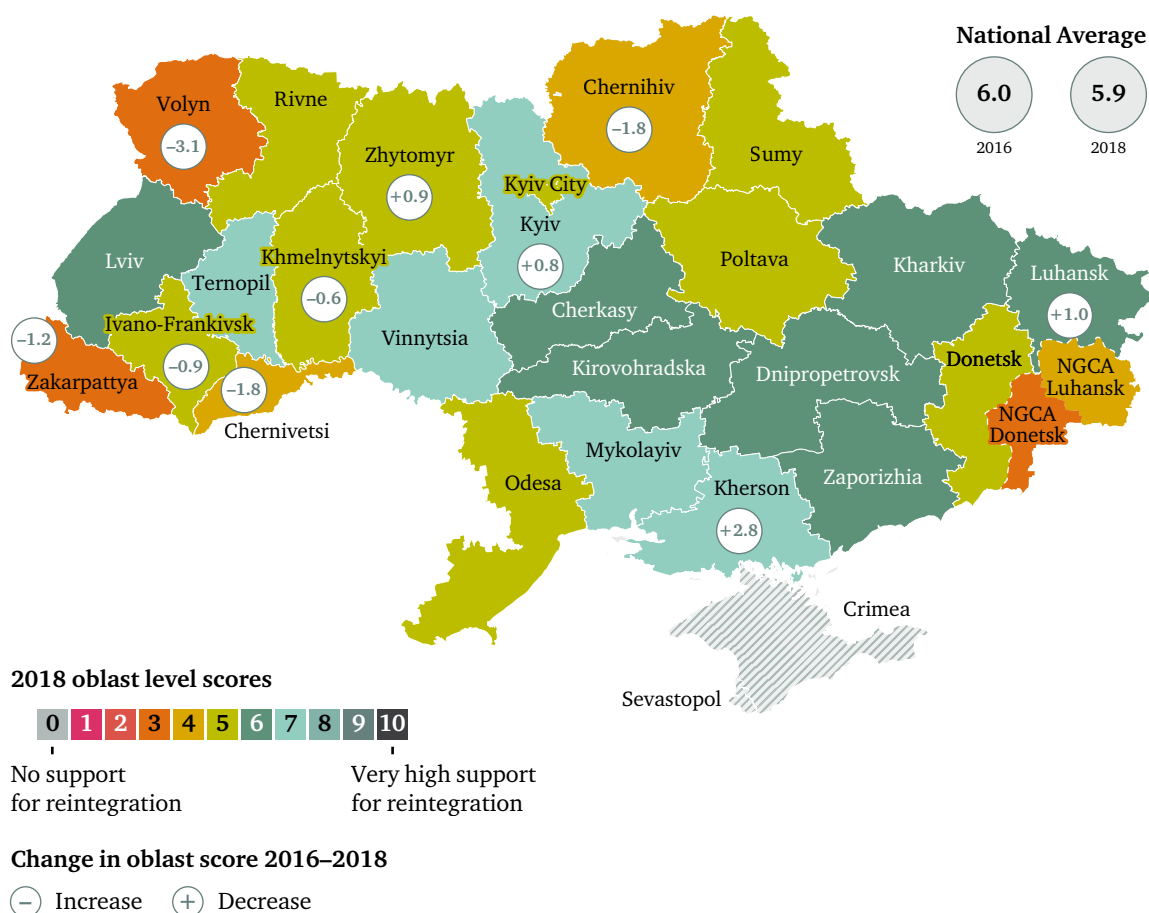[43] Detector Media (2020), 'Заява медійників щодо законопроєкту про дезінформацію (ВІДКРИТА ДО ПІДПИСАННЯ)' ['Statement from the media community on the law on disinformation (OPEN TO SIGNING)'], 27 January 2020, https://detector.media/community/article/174234/2020-01-27-zayava-mediinikiv-shchodo-zakonoproektu-pro-dezinformatsiyu-vidkrita-do-pidpisannya/ (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[44] Romanova, V. and Umland, A. (2019), *Ukraine's Decentralization Reforms Since 2014: Initial Achievements and Future Challenges*, Chatham House Report, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/ukraine-s-decentralization-reforms-2014-initial-achievements-and-future-challenges (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).

citizens in the south and east of the country are markedly more willing to 'make any compromise to achieve peace' than citizens in the centre and west of the country.[45]

Social polarization emerges between citizens who express strong patriotic sentiment and demand restoration of a pre-war status versus citizens who would compromise along the lines laid down by the Kremlin. Map 1 below illustrates different attitudes to reintegration of occupied territories into Ukraine. In western Ukraine, support for the reintegration of Donbas is significantly lower than in the rest of the country and is decreasing due to a lack of progress in the peace talks.

Map 1: Ukraine's attitudes towards reintegration of Donetsk and Luhansk

National Average
6.0 (2016) 5.9 (2018)

2018 oblast level scores

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

No support for reintegration — Very high support for reintegration

Change in oblast score 2016–2018

(−) Increase (+) Decrease

Source: USAID Office of Transition Initiatives (2018), '2018 Ukraine Social Cohesion & Reconciliation Index (SCORE)', https://www.scoreforpeace.org/files/publication/pub_file//VIS_Ukr17_SCOREInfographicsUKRFinal.pdf (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).

The level of support for reintegration is lower in the oblasts with higher numbers of participants in the war (either direct participants or those with family members or close friends who have served in the armed forces). For instance, citizens in Volyn show less support for reintegration compared to citizens in Ternopil or Ivano-Frankivsk due to its high numbers of military personnel. In addition,

---

45 Democratic Initiatives Foundation (2019), 'Шляхи досягнення миру на Донбасі: суспільні настрої, очікування, перестороги – загальнонаціональне опитування' [Ways towards achieving peace in Donbas: social sentiment, expectations, caveats – a nationwide survey], 6 December 2019, https://dif.org.ua/article/shlyakhi-dosyagnennya-miru-na-donbasi-suspilni-nastroi-ochikuvannya-perestorogi-zagalnonatsionalne-opituvannya (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).

some regions in the west (Zakarpattya, Ivano-Frankivsk, Volyn and Chernivtsi) have low levels of support for a pluralistic civic identity. Such civic identity is expressed in a belief that everyone despite their ethnic and cultural background who calls Ukraine home is an integral part of society. This could also explain divergent views within a region.

Citizens of the southeast more strongly support granting special status to the LNR and the DNR as is outlined in the constitution and back the non-alignment or international neutrality of Ukraine. They are also more willing to agree to local elections with no pre-conditions and approve of giving the Russian language official status.[46] One group of citizens demands victory over an aggressive Russia, while the other would be satisfied with some form of a peace deal and an end to the current conflict. These divisions can potentially lead to wider societal schisms and entrenched distrust of a future peace deal.

There is also disagreement between those who believe it is possible to negotiate with Putin's Russia and those who believe that only the collapse of the Putin regime will enable the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity. Negotiating peace with Russia is important to 48 per cent of Ukrainians.[47] President Zelenskyy's willingness to discuss peace with Putin is viewed by many as a path to capitulation. To prevent this from happening, dozens of organizations and activists created a new civic movement, Resistance to Capitulation, to put pressure on Zelenskyy to voice his red lines for negotiations with Putin. Nationwide protests across Ukraine on the eve of the Normandy meeting in December 2019 were supported by the political opposition and more radical right-wing groups such as National Corps, Vidsich and Svoboda.

The humanitarian crisis

The conflict has created a devastating humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine. Out of 5.2 million people affected by the war in Donbas, 3.5 million – including 2.2 million in the non-government-controlled areas (NGCA) – are dependent on humanitarian assistance and protection services, mostly for physical protection, food and water security, and basic healthcare.[48] Living conditions on the LoC are deteriorating, with serious issues emerging around access to medical care, vital foodstuffs and water. Prices of basic commodities and essential goods are reported to have increased to unsustainable levels.[49]

Military operations have also put significant strain on road and rail infrastructure, thereby limiting access to humanitarian aid, human contact and markets.[50] Another often overlooked issue is the presence of abandoned coal mines and other industrial assets left unsupervised in war-affected regions, which present the risk of environmental hazards and water-supply contamination.[51] This is compounded by the absence of financial resources and human capital to restore a sense of economic normality in occupied Donbas: most businesses have been de facto 'nationalized' by the so-called authorities and the energy and industrial sectors have been decimated.

---

[46] Democratic Initiatives Foundation (2019), 'Ways towards achieving peace in Donbas'.

[47] National Democratic Institute (2019), 'Opportunities and Challenges Facing Ukraine's Democratic Transition'.

[48] United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2019), 'Ukraine: 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan (January – December 2019)', https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ukraine_humanitarian_response_plan_2019_en_0.pdf (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).

[49] Razumkov Centre (2019), 'The War In Donbas: Realities And Prospects Of Settlement'.

[50] DRA (2019), *Everyday life in the shadows of war: the security and wellbeing of civilians living near the frontlines in eastern Ukraine*, Berlin: DRA, https://civicmonitoring.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/ENG-web-DRA-report-shadows-of-war.pdf (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).

[51] Hamilton, R. E. (2019), 'Coal Mines, Land Mines and Nuclear Bombs: The Environmental Cost of the War in Eastern Ukraine', *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 26 September 2019, https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/09/coal-mines-land-mines-and-nuclear-bombs-the-environmental-cost-of-the-war-in-eastern-ukraine/ (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).

The militarization of occupied Donbas and its spillover effects

The presence of landmines and other explosive remnants of war scattered on both sides of the LoC threaten wider human security. Demining efforts are far from sufficient, especially since Donbas is the most densely mined area per square kilometre[52] – with the highest number of mine incidents – in the world.[53] This is disproportionately affecting civilians and children and has led to long-term environmental concerns and limited access to mined portions of Ukraine. Recent efforts by the government aimed at establishing a legal framework to coordinate national mine action[54] are welcome but should be scaled up and supported more broadly by international donors and humanitarian organizations.

> Demining efforts are far from sufficient, especially since Donbas is the most densely mined area per square kilometre – with the highest number of mine incidents – in the world.

The spillover of small firearms and explosive devices from the conflict area into the rest of Ukraine is a serious cause for concern. The number of crimes committed with the use of firearms has substantially increased. About 300,000 units of small arms went missing from official storage between 2013 and 2015, most from the then Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO). Ukrainian authorities regularly confiscate large numbers of grenades, mines and various explosive devices.[55] In 2019, 1,500 units of firearms were confiscated from the population.[56]

Conflict has increased the level of violence in Ukraine. Since 2014, one in 10 Ukrainian citizens acquired a firearm.[57] The Association of Firearm Owners actively lobbies for the legalization of firearms. Since 2015, there has been a worrying increase in domestic abuse and gender-based violence perpetrated by veterans.[58] This goes alongside a form of reverence for military values across society, which could have negative political consequences in the long term. These issues remain largely unaddressed by the Ukrainian government and its policy documents for governmental programmes hardly mention measures to mitigate the spike in domestic violence related to the military conflict.[59]

---

52 Razumkov Centre (2019), 'The War In Donbas: Realities And Prospects Of Settlement'.
53 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2019), 'Ukraine: 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan (January – December 2019)'.
54 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (2018), 'Ukrainian parliament adopts legal framework for mine action, with OSCE advice provided', https://www.osce.org/project-coordinator-in-ukraine/406043 (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
55 Martyniuk, A. (2017), Дослідження Незаконних Потоків Зброї *[Investigation of Illegal Streams of Weapons]*, Geneva: Small Arms Survey, http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-BP3-Ukraine-UKR.pdf (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
56 Kartasheva, A. (2020), 'В Україні за минулий рік вилучили понад 1,5 тис. одиниць вогнепальної зброї' ['More than 1.5 thousand units of firearms seized over the past year in Ukraine'], UNN, 13 February 2020, https://www.unn.com.ua/uk/exclusive/1852073-v-ukrayini-za-minuliy-rik-viluchili-ponad-1-5-tis-odinits-vognepalnoyi-zbroyi (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
57 Kostiuk, A. (2020), 'Чи хочуть українці легалізації зброї: опитування' ['Do Ukrainians want legalisation of weapons: a survey'], 24 Kanal, 7 February 2020, https://24tv.ua/chi_hochut_ukrayintsi_legalizatsiyi_zbroyi_opituvannya_n1271515 (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
58 Johnson, D. (2016), 'As Ukraine's women speak up on sexual violence, we must not ignore those affected by conflict', *Open Democracy*, 25 July 2016, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/speaking-on-sexual-violence/ (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
59 Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine (2020), 'Стратегічний план діяльності Міністерства соціальної політики України на 2020 бюджетний рік і два бюджетні періоди, що настають за плановим (2021–2022 роки)' ['Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine for the 2020 budget year and the two consequent budget periods (2021-2022)'], https://www.msp.gov.ua/documents/5641.html (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).

War-affected populations and pressure on social institutions

Over 1.4 million people are officially registered as IDPs in Ukraine.[60] Although their integration into Ukrainian society is considered broadly a success, serious issues remain, especially when it comes to social protection, socioeconomic rights, employment and overall access to services in Ukraine.[61] The relocation of citizens to neighbouring regions such as Kharkiv and other cities in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts has become a serious burden on local administrations. Their capacity to service many more people with pension payments and various subsidies is limited.

The small city of Volnovakha, which had 103,000 inhabitants before the conflict, now has 52,000 pensioners, of which almost half are IDPs. In the government-controlled areas (GCA) of Donbas, almost half the households are eligible for housing subsidies due to low incomes. Experts estimate that 30–40 per cent of residents in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts are living in poverty.[62]

The Ukrainian Pension Fund reports that almost all pensioners from the occupied territories have registered with the Kyiv authorities.[63] Access to pensions remains one of the main difficulties for IDPs attempting to settle elsewhere, as half of them need to maintain their IDP status in order to qualify for their monthly pension payments.[64] Pensioners and IDPs, regardless of their residence, should not be subject to unequal and unfair treatment. This discrimination is feeding resentment against central authorities and nurturing grievances against Kyiv.

> A recent study showed that over 20 per cent of IDPs have diagnosed moderately severe or severe anxiety, while less than a quarter of IDPs with clinically significant anxiety and depression have sought mental health support.

There are persisting mental health issues among IDPs that the authorities have yet to address. A recent study showed that over 20 per cent of IDPs have diagnosed moderately severe or severe anxiety, while less than a quarter of IDPs with clinically significant anxiety and depression have sought mental health support.[65] This does not necessarily reflect a problem of access to psychological support but rather an issue of basic mental health awareness and stigmatization. Ukrainian authorities hardly communicate the importance of mental health to IDPs and other target groups such as veterans, and there is little done to improve access to mental health services. This in turn increases the incidents of gender-based violence.

---

[60] UNHCR (2020), 'Ukraine: Internally Displaced Persons (IDP)', https://www.unhcr.org/ua/en/internally-displaced-persons (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[61] Likhachev, V. (2018), *Reintegration or Alienation?*, Berlin: DRA, https://civicmonitoring.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Reintegration-or-Alienation-En.pdf (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[62] International Alert and Ukrainian Center for Independent Political Research (2017), 'Громадяни і держава на підконтрольних територіях Донецької та Луганської області: Проблеми, виклики, бачення майбутнього' ['Citizens and the state in the government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhanks oblasts: problems, challenges, visions for the future'], http://www.ucipr.org.ua/publicdocs/sirazona_UK.pdf (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[63] Pension Fund of Ukraine (2014), 'Понад 662 тис. переселенців вже звернулися до управлінь Пенсійного фонду за переведенням пенсій' ['More than 662 thousand IDPs have already applied to the Pension fund administrations to transfer pensions'], https://www.pfu.gov.ua/17018-ponad-662-tys-pereselentsiv-vzhe-zvernulysya-do-upravlin-pensijnogo-fondu-za-perevedennyam-pensij/ (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[64] International Crisis Group (2018), *'Nobody Wants Us': The Alienated Civilians of Eastern Ukraine*, Europe Report №252, 1 October 2018, https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine/252-nobody-wants-us-alienated-civilians-eastern-ukraine (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[65] Kuznetsova, I., Mikheieva, O., Catling, J., Round, J. and Babenko, S. (2019), 'The Mental Health of Internally Displaced People and the General Population in Ukraine', https://idpukraine.com/2019/03/06/the-mental-health-of-idps-and-the-general-population-in-ukraine-briefing-paper/ (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).

Veterans are another key group. There are around 360,000 veterans of the war with Russia and the number will continue to grow.[66] This is a new constituency for the state and civil society, which will influence Ukrainian politics and civil society for decades to come. This group will likely push for broader legalization of firearms and embody an us-vs-them attitude that will make compromise difficult. Entrenched opposition against the amnesty for residents in occupied Donbas is particularly strong among families of deceased military personnel.[67]

There is also a worrying prevalence of substance abuse (drugs and alcohol), domestic violence and war-induced psychological disorders among veterans and demobilized soldiers. Veterans now face reintegration issues, which are compounded by lower economic and financial prospects and the difficulty of acclimatizing to a society that does not know how to treat its war heroes. Increasing public information about such abuses could increase social stigmatization of veterans. Psychological rehabilitation and mental healthcare for veterans are not widespread in Ukraine. This is not only affecting current morale within the armed forces, but the long-term ability of the country and willingness of its people to fight. The lack of psychological support for soldiers impedes their ability to cope with battle experiences and makes them less inclined to report mental health issues and to seek help when they return to civilian life.

Zelenskyy's approach to conflict resolution

'Conflict resolution' and the 'safe reintegration' of Donbas have become new catchphrases in domestic political discourse. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has a strong political mandate and has demonstrated a genuine will to resolve the conflict. His team is skilled in political marketing and the study of public opinion. They operate on the assumption that there is significant conflict fatigue among the majority of the population and that if they achieve a ceasefire and manage to negotiate the release of prisoners of war, this will be a sufficient political result and something that Poroshenko failed to deliver.

Zelenskyy has clearly voiced a human-centric approach to managing the conflict by prioritizing the well-being of citizens on both sides of the LoC. His aim is the integration of people regardless of the territory they live in, by facilitating the exchange of information and goods and removing barriers to human mobility. Zelenskyy also initiated development of a transitional justice framework that would serve as one of the reintegration tools both for Donbas and Crimea.

The change of leadership in Kyiv has provided an opportunity to restart international negotiations as part of the Normandy Format and to kick-off internal deliberation about the safe reintegration of Donbas. International negotiations continue around the implementation of the Minsk Protocols, especially the package of measures signed in February 2015. These stalled in 2016, partially because of irreconcilable expectations between Kyiv and Moscow.

---

[66] Synhayivs'ka, M. and Samokhvalova, L. (2019), 'Ірина Фріз, міністр у справах ветеранів: Суспільство має бути готовим комунікувати з ветеранами на якісно новому рівні' ['Iryna Friz, minister for veteran affairs: Society needs to be ready to interact with veterans on a qualitatively new level'], Ukrinform, 13 March 2019, https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-polytics/2658992-irina-friz-ministr-ministerstva-u-spravah-veteraniv.html (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).

[67] ZN.UA (2018), 'Переважна більшість родичів загиблих проти амністії ватажків, вбивць і організаторів псевдореферендума в Донбасі' ['Overwhelming majority of relatives of those killed are against amnesty for the leaders, murderers and organisers of the pseudo-referendum in Donbas'], 11 February 2018, https://dt.ua/UKRAINE/perevazhna-bilshist-rodichiv-zagiblih-proti-amnistiyi-vatazhkiv-vbivc-i-organizatoriv-psevdoreferenduma-v-donbasi-268979_.html (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).

Zelenskyy's desire to reboot international diplomacy around Donbas prompted Russia to revisit the Steinmeier Formula, a clarification about the enactment of special status for parts of Donbas that was much criticized in Ukraine.[68] At the time, Ukrainian authorities were willing to give the Kremlin the benefit of the doubt and assumed Moscow actually wanted to take some action, if not to compromise, on Donbas. Kyiv placed preconditions on discussions with the Kremlin and notably spoke against enshrining a potential special status for Donbas in the Ukrainian constitution, insisting on the primacy of the security component of negotiations over the political process.

Predictably, the last round of the Normandy Format discussions in December 2019 did not deliver a breakthrough.[69] Rather, it established small steps in the security dimension – notably further exchanges of prisoners, the creation of three new priority disengagement areas by March 2020 and new crossing points for populations, as well as an updated demining plan. The recommitment to the ceasefire, however, did not last long, 11 Ukrainian servicemen were killed in the east in January 2020.[70]

Assessing state capacity to manage the conflict

So far, Zelenskyy has been adamant in maintaining Kyiv's red lines in discussions to settle the conflict – primarily the implementation of security guarantees before addressing political aspects of the Minsk Protocols, rejection of the idea of 'federalization' of Ukraine, and insistence on better control over the Ukrainian–Russian border. Protests in Ukraine against the Steinmeier Formula and in support of the red lines helped Zelenskyy calibrate his position on the eve of the Paris meeting in December 2019.

Zelenskyy operates in a restricted environment and is gaining a better understanding of the necessity to ensure the integrity of Ukrainian interests in terms of conflict management. Sticking to the red lines has calmed domestic public opinion and political opposition but it has also weakened the chances of resolving the conflict in the mid-term. Such a scenario would require strengthening of societal resilience.

Recent endeavours aimed at increasing resilience include cooperation with NATO on the Coherent Resilience 2020 joint exercises in Odesa[71] and attempts to fight disinformation.[72] Senior leaders have reached out to Ukrainian citizens near the frontline, which has helped strengthen relations and convey to those regions that Kyiv cares about them. The high-level investment forum in Mariupol in October 2019 put the spotlight on pressing needs for infrastructure and human development projects in the region close to the conflict area.

---

[68] Allan, D. and Litra, L. (2019), 'Zelenskyy Finds That There Are No Easy Solutions in Donbas', Chatham House Expert Comment, 23 October 2019, https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/zelenskyy-finds-there-are-no-easy-solutions-donbas (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[69] Minakov, M. (2019), 'Results of the Normandy Format Talks for Ukraine: Hope, with Reservations', *Focus Ukraine* blog of the Kennan Institute, 11 December 2019, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/results-the-normandy-format-talks-for-ukraine-hope-reservations (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[70] Stek, L. (2020), '11 загиблих у січні: чому провалились домовленості Зеленського і Путіна' ['11 killed in January: why the arrangements of Zelenskyy and Putin failed'], *Radio Svoboda*, 3 February 2020, https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/donbass-realii/30412995.html (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[71] Service of the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine (2020), 'Ukraine and NATO agree on joint exercises in Odesa', 15 January 2020, https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/spilni-navchannya-ukrayini-i-nato-v-odesi-kuleba-i-kadenbah-pidpisali-dokument (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[72] Coynash, H. (2020), 'Ukraine proposes to fight 'disinformation' using dangerously undemocratic methods', *Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group*, 24 January 2020, http://khpg.org/en/index.php?id=1579729272 (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).

Investment in essential infrastructure will be piloted through the Reconstruction and Reintegration Fund for Donbas created jointly with the World Bank.[73] At this stage, the efforts of the central government resemble intent rather than a viable policy. Studies and research focusing on how to rebuild the economy of Donbas are lacking. Meanwhile, proposed initiatives aimed at restarting local businesses and revitalizing the local economy are for now too small.[74]

The new Ukrainian leadership has limited capacity to apply a resilience-based approach to the conflict. The main constraint is the closed nature of its conflict-related decision-making process involving the president, Head of the Office of the President Andriy Yermak, and the president's First Aide Sehiy Shefir. This limits the prospect of diverse views, increases anxiety levels in society and fails to prepare the ground for future conflict-related measures. Lack of strategic communication with regard to the conflict plays into the hands of the Russian propaganda machine, which uses any opportunity to spread suspicion and negative messages about Kyiv.

This kind of poor communication was recently in evidence when Ukraine agreed to set up a consultative council as part of a trilateral group in Minsk that would include representatives of occupied Donbas on an equal footing with representatives of Kyiv to discuss political modalities of conflict resolution. This move was not discussed with the ruling party or leading CSOs. As a result, it provoked protests, public petitions, condemnation by CSOs and volunteers, and an open statement from a group of about 60 MPs from the ruling party opposed to the decision.[75]

> This is consistent with the marginal inclusion of civil society in the design and implementation of the conflict-related agenda. The Office of the President, as the main policymaking unit on Donbas and Russia, has no formal consultative body that engages civil society.

This is consistent with the marginal inclusion of civil society in the design and implementation of the conflict-related agenda. The Office of the President, as the main policymaking unit on Donbas and Russia, has no formal consultative body that engages civil society. Informal off-the-record meetings are sporadic and serve as an opportunity for authorities to share ready-made solutions rather than exchange ideas and seek feedback from civil society.

The rare exchange of ideas and approaches between policymakers and CSOs takes place as part of the work of the Committee on Human Rights, De-occupation and Reintegration of the Occupied Territories in parliament and the Commission for Legal Reforms. The Commission has a Working Group on the Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories, headed by Anton Korenevych, the president's special representative for Crimea.[76] Among its other tasks, the Working Group

[73] Slovo I Dilo (2019), 'В Україні запустили Фонд відновлення Донбасу' ['Reintegration Fund for Donbas launched in Ukraine'], 29 October 2019, https://www.slovoidilo.ua/2019/10/29/novyna/polityka/ukrayini-zapustyly-fond-vidnovlennya-donbasu (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[74] Radio Svoboda (2019), 'Зеленський розповів бізнесменам, скільки потрібно для відновлення Донбасу' ['Zelensky told businessmen how much is needed for the restoration of Donbas'], 20 June 2019, https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-zelenskyi-biznes-donbas/30010773.html (accessed 21 Apr. 2020).
[75] For the civil society statement, see VOX Ukraine (2020), 'Звернення громадських діячів про недопущення створення консультради з «представниками ОРДЛО»' ['Civil society statement on unacceptability of creation of consultative council with "representatives of ORDLO"'], https://voxukraine.org/uk/zvernennya-gromadskih-diyachiv-z-privodu-stvorennya-konsultativnoyi-radi-z-predstavnikami-ordlo/?fbclid=IwA R13HXLC4YVgpy9upwYSbBcC6r5TH7ye2C47GSXhxpQjUDiV29JmYmH7N6c (accessed 22 Apr. 2020); for the statement of Sluha Naroda MPs, see Den' (2020), 'Частина депутатів від "Слуги народу" виступила проти створення Консультативної ради з ОРДЛО' ['A number of Sluha Naroda MPs speak out against creation of consultative council with ORDLO'], 13 March 2020, https://day.kyiv.ua/uk/news/130320-chastyna-deputativ-vid-slugy-narodu-vystupyla-proty-stvorennya-konsultatyvnoyi-rady-z (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).
[76] Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (2019), 'Положення про Комісію з питань правової реформи' [On the Commission for Legal Reforms], 7 August 2019, https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/584/2019/print (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).

is notably responsible for the development of the transitional justice roadmap for war-affected Ukraine. The group includes leading civic experts from the National Platform for Safe Reintegration, the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, Dialogue Initiatives, Fabryka Dymky Donbas, and Reanimation Package of Reforms. CSOs provide feedback on regulation and legislative changes to laws on education, registration and other issues impacting populations residing in the occupied territories.

Reform of the defence sector has been another area of productive cooperation between state and non-state actors, which has resulted in institutional transformation. Most recently, the Independent Defence Anti-Corruption Committee (NAKO), an initiative of Transparency International, managed to advocate a new national security law to strengthen the role of civic oversight in the defence sector, particularly in procurement, to improve transparency and accountability.

Ukroboronprom (UOP), a state military conglomerate, is suspected of involvement in corrupt activities. Ongoing court cases allege that in the last 10 years the company's losses related to corruption amounted to almost £30 million – the real figure is likely to be much higher as these statistics are from open court cases only.[77] In December 2019, a new Law on Defence Procurement was adopted with active encouragement from NAKO and Statewatch, a CSO that monitors civil liberties in Europe. Civic oversight of the law's implementation will continue, particularly where NAKO, as a member of the UOP Transformation Committee, will be working to identify major gaps and corruption risks within the existing UOP governance structure and assist in developing a transformation roadmap.

Overall, conflict resolution policy currently lacks effective coordination between various state entities and the executive and legislative branches of power. There is no unified platform within the government to discuss and develop a common conflict-related policy. However, Oleksii Reznikov's new role as deputy prime minister and minister for the reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine will likely streamline the decision-making process and implementation efforts. This is especially relevant as at present the Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories and Internally Displaced Persons is not fit for purpose.[78]

With the ruling party's supermajority in parliament, it may seem like an easy road to legislative backing of conflict-related policies. However, the human-centric approach[79] demands addressing myriad complex grievances from citizens on both sides of the LoC. Among the most pressing remaining concerns are:

- *Resolving the pensions issue for NGCA populations.* Pension payments remain a problem, especially because of the constant IDP registration process for pension access.

- *Easing, if not lifting completely, the economic blockade against the NGCA.* This Poroshenko-era policy is detrimental to economic and people-to-people contacts, which are the basis of safe reintegration.

[77] Shtuka, N. (2020), '«Укроборонпром» зазнав майже 1 млрд грн збитків через розкрадання' ['Ukroboronprom lost almost 1 billion UAH through theft'], *The Page*, 11 January 2020, https://thepage.ua/ua/news/ukroboronprom-ponis-majzhe-1-mlrd-grn-zbitkiv-cherez-rozkradannya (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).

[78] International Crisis Group (2018), *'Nobody Wants Us': The Alienated Civilians of Eastern Ukraine*.

[79] Marangé, C. (2019), 'A People-Centered Approach to Conflict Resolution in Ukraine', War on the Rocks, 3 July 2019, https://warontherocks.com/2019/07/a-people-centered-approach-to-conflict-resolution-in-ukraine/ (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).

- *Facilitating border crossing conditions*, from basic access to streamlining border control and security checks. Border crossing conditions remain horrendous for most local residents.[80]

- *Continued disengagement in Stanytsia Luhanska* and improving the border crossing there. Reconstruction of the bridge is a good step forward[81] but more attention is needed here.

- *Create compensation procedures* for citizens on the LoC in order to address property loss and forced expropriations.

- *Ensure voting rights of IDPs* are properly exercised. From 1 July 2020, the new electoral code allows IDPs to participate in local elections.

Parliament is not just the place where votes are cast, it is an important chamber for deliberation of these complex issues that impact millions of constituents. The recent creation of a special commission on regaining territorial integrity is a step forward[82] but members of parliament could play a better role in addressing local grievances. While liaising with other parliamentary committees, government discussions should focus on the practicalities of conflict management, the granting of special status to Donbas, security guarantees and various issues related to providing education, healthcare and documentation for citizens in the occupied areas.

Social cohesion

Ukraine's leadership is committed to achieving peace for its citizens. But the chances of implementing a future peace deal would improve if the government prioritized social cohesion efforts. Social cohesion is a product of social change and a necessary element of resilience. The safe reintegration of Donbas into the rest of Ukraine is more likely to succeed if risks to nationwide unity diminish and mutual understanding increases between those on both sides of the LoC. The polarizing lines described above are cutting through the fabric of society. Several factors are putting pressure on social cohesion, especially the disengagement of citizens from their communities, poor integration of war-affected populations and growing isolation and indoctrination of residents in the NGCA.

Weak civic agency

Ukrainian society can be broadly divided into two groups: a minority of around 10 per cent of citizens who actively participate in civil society,[83] and a passive majority. Weak links between the two groups impede sustainable behavioural changes that many CSOs and active citizens aspire to. At the city or town level, citizens are atomized and rarely united in community associations. They discuss politics and community problems mainly in private spaces such as in their homes. They have little agency

---

[80] DRA (2019), *Everyday life in the shadows of war*.

[81] President of Ukraine (2019), 'Відновлення мосту біля Станиці Луганської транслюється в онлайн-режимі' ['Reconstruction of the bridge near Stanytsia Luhanska is streamed online'], 18 September 2019, https://www.president.gov.ua/news/vidnovlennya-mostu-bilya-stanici-luganskoyi-translyuyetsya-v-57349 (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).

[82] The special commission of Verkhovna Rada on the questions of restoring territorial integrity and ensuring sovereignty of Ukraine was created on 17 October 2019. It aims to 'formulate and carry out' government policy towards Donbas, identify potential threats in the course of de-occupation and re-integration of the occupied territories, ensure committee cooperation within the Rada, and formulate recommendations. See Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (2019), 'News', https://rada.gov.ua/news/Novyny/183014.html (accessed 22 Apr. 2020). A Rada committee on Human Rights, De-occupation and Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories in Donetsk, Luhansk Regions and Autonomous Republic of Crimea, National Minorities and Interethnic Relations, was also created in August 2019.

[83] Golub, A. (2018), Громадянська пасивність [Civic passivity], *Tyzhden.ua*, 28 March 2018, http://tyzhden.ua/Society/211149 (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).

to drive change. Only 1 per cent of citizens say it is their responsibility to contribute to reforms.[84] According to the UN SCORE index of social cohesion for Ukraine, the lack of political and civic agency is the main driver of decreasing social cohesion in the five eastern oblasts.[85]

With little option but to consume narratives hostile to reform projected either by Russian disinformation channels or oligarch-owned Ukrainian TV channels, citizens feel powerless and anxious; they continue to be the victims of corrupt elites. Especially in the southeast, the idea that Ukraine owes everything to either imperial Russia or the Soviet Union prevails. The re-discovery of local history that is free of Soviet propagandistic narratives about the origins of those communities has barely started. Ignorance about the past allows the Kremlin to polarize society, spread narratives of hate and maintain the delusion that Ukraine could never succeed without Russia.

> Substantial gaps in the quality of civic community among different regions leads to a disparity in the quality of overall governance. As a result, decentralization will have varying effects across Ukraine.

Research of decentralization in Italy has proven that the quality of civic community – as measured by membership in community-based organizations, readership of local newspapers and civic engagement in local decision-making – is key to good governance and resilient communities.[86] Substantial gaps in the quality of civic community among different regions leads to a disparity in the calibre of overall governance. As a result, decentralization will have varying effects across Ukraine. In some places, governance will improve, but in others it may lead to disenfranchisement and polarization, especially in the regions of the southeast. Sustained attention of volunteers and activists is further complicated by volunteer burn out and lack of support infrastructure for restorative care and mental health.[87]

The quality of civic community and the level to which citizens feel empowered varies across Ukraine, it is particularly problematic in the southeast. For example, at present the percentage of citizens who believe they have the ability to take part in decision-making at the city level (attend public hearings, sign petitions, access data on public spending) is lowest in Uzhgorod, Mykolaiv and Severodonetsk, all below 13 per cent compared to 29 per cent in Ivano-Frankivsk in the west. In Mykolaiv, 78 per cent say they have never interacted with the local authorities.[88] The situation is worse than it was in 2017. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that among Ukraine's regions the population of Mykolaiv is least satisfied with their levels of education or ability to engage in entrepreneurship. In February 2018, the approval rating for the mayor was at 25 per cent in Mykolaiv, compared to 71 per cent in Ivano-Frankivsk.[89] It matters if people believe they have a sense of civic responsibility and believe they can make a difference in their communities. In Mykolaiv oblast more than

[84] reforms.in.ua (2017), 'Тільки 1% Українців вважає, що відповідальність за реформи несуть громадяни держави' [Only 1% of Ukrainians believe that citizens are to be responsible for the reforms], http://reforms.in.ua/ua/news/tilky-1-ukrayinciv-vvazhaye-shcho-vidpovidalnist-za-reformy-nesut-gromadyany-derzhavy?fbclid=IwAR30c74l- (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).
[85] SCORE compiles 70 indicators from civic behaviour to intergroup relations, security, access to services, etc. in order to identify strengths and weaknesses of social cohesion in the context of the conflict across the five eastern oblasts of Ukraine. The first driver of decohesion is lack of civic empowerment, followed by locality dissatisfaction and economic security. See SCORE (2018), 'Ukraine Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index', https://www.scoreforpeace.org/en/ukraine/2018-General%20population%20Government%20Controlled%20Areas-0 (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).
[86] Putman, R. D. (1993), *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
[87] Hromadske TV Dnipro (2019), 'Дотла. Волонтерське вигорання' ['To ashes. Volunteer burn-out'], https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-UEtdcWVmrA (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).
[88] Center for Insights in Survey Research (2018), 'Fourth Annual Ukrainian Municipal Survey', https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018-3-22_ukraine_poll.pdf (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).
[89] Ibid.

80 per cent of residents belong to the passive citizenship category, while in Ivano-Frankisvka only 24 per cent are in that group. [90] Additionally, low levels of trust, especially in national authorities, lead to civic disempowerment.[91]

Most experts agree that there are no deep divisions among Ukrainians. But there are structural problems that affect nationwide cohesion, such as inadequate connectivity (roads, railways and air connections), various levels of exposure to Russian media, poor internal mobility and weak cultural exchange. For example, more than half of citizens in the cities of Severodonetsk, Kherson, Mykolaiv and Odesa have never travelled to other Ukrainian cities.[92] In view of this, the new initiative of the Ministry of Youth, Sport, Culture and Information to finance exchanges for 250,000 students in 2020 is a move in the right direction. This is particularly important as citizens from different regions are increasingly labelling each other in a negative way. Ukrainians in the GCA of Donbas are concerned that strident views of so-called nationalists and separatist groups will make it impossible for them to hear each other's arguments and have a discussion.[93] Similarly, people in the west of Ukraine most frequently use negative stereotypes when referring to those from the east.[94] School exchanges that provide meaningful contact for young people from different regions could improve intergroup harmony.

Disenfranchised veterans

The growing veteran community is a powerful new factor in Ukrainian civic life and its reintegration is key for social cohesion. The veteran community is not homogeneous and it remains fragmented and relatively disorganized in terms of social and political representation. However, many veterans are active in their communities in pushing for reform and social justice. New veteran CSOs are flourishing, and there are around 300 officially registered groups. In many cases they provide peer support, are active in community development and engage with young people.

Veterans may be highly motivated to contribute to positive change in Ukraine but they face many difficulties when returning to civilian life. Most problems relate to difficulty in obtaining plots of land, state subsidies for transportation, housing, customs clearance for vehicles, and access to healthcare and mental health counselling.[95]

The lack of integration of different veteran groups has led to tensions within this community. The older generation of Second World War veterans and those with a pro-Soviet outlook are usually targeted by pro-Russia political forces, while the new generation of veterans is more vulnerable to right-wing radical political movements. Although the interests and needs of the different veteran groups are similar, there is still division. Collisions between veterans have resulted in the rest of the

[90] SCORE (2018), 'Constructive Citizenship in Ukraine', https://www.scoreforpeace.org/files/publication/pub_file//PRE_UKR18_Civic_EngagementENG.pdf (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).
[91] United Nations Ukraine (2018), 'UN Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index for Eastern Ukraine: Key changes from 2017 to 2018', https://scoreforpeace.org/files/publication/pub_file/Trends2018_ENG.pdf (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).
[92] Center for Insights in Survey Research (2018), 'Fourth Annual Ukrainian Municipal Survey'.
[93] SCORE (2019), 'Changes in Social Cohesion, Citizens' Satisfaction and Visions of Reintegration: Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts', https://scoreforpeace.org/files/publication/pub_file//PUB_DGEUkr19_Preliminary%20Findings%20Presentation_ENG.pdf (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).
[94] Hustings, I. D., Lemishka, O. and Scheerder, A. (2019), 'SCORE Ukraine: tracking trends', https://www.scoreforpeace.org/files/publication/pub_file//SCORE%20Ukarine_Tracking%20Trends%20for%20Selected%20Indicators%20(2016-2018)_ENG.pdf (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).
[95] Yuridichna Sotnya [the Legal Hundred] (2019), 'Статистика гарячої лінії Юридичної Сотні за травень 2019 р.' ['The Legal Hundred Hotline Statistics for May 2019'], 10 June 2019, https://legal100.org.ua/statistika-garyachoyi-liniyi-yuridichnoyi-sotni-za-traven-2019-r/ (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).

population viewing them with some scepticism. In addition to other factors, such as corruption in military equipment procurement, this has led to deteriorating approval ratings for the armed forces, which already fell in 2018 in cities such as Odesa, Mykolaiv, Zaporizhia and Ivano-Frankivsk.[96]

Facing difficulty in civilian life and dissatisfied with the quality of state services, disenfranchised veterans are an easy target for recruitment by various criminal and right-wing paramilitary groups. According to some estimates, veterans constitute around 10 per cent of radical groups, such as the National Corps, which engages ex-combatants from the Azov Battalion. Veterans are easy recruits for private security companies connected with criminal and ultra-right groups.[97] In the high-profile killing of the journalist Pavel Sheremet, two out of three arrested suspects have links with the armed forces.[98] The horrific death of Kateryna Handziuk from Kherson following an acid attack by two ATO veterans prompted a wave of protests to demand justice. Protesters called for the identification not only of those who executed the crime, but more importantly of those who ordered it.

Increased social inclusion of veterans is indispensable for social cohesion. During a research interview, a Ukrainian expert called veterans a potential 'politically guided bullet' that could be instrumentalized for nefarious reasons – including by Russian disinformation campaigns and information warfare. The current presidential agenda for peace in Donbas does not resonate positively with this community, making it all the more important to ramp up social inclusion of this group.[99]

Ukrainians in the NGCA

The soft absorption conducted by the Kremlin in the NGCA seriously impedes prospects for the smooth reintegration of this region into Ukraine and could further risk the already fragile cohesion in the country. There is a danger of long-term alienation of DNR and LNR populations from the rest of Ukraine. Limited comprehensive data on public views in the occupied areas notwithstanding, some studies point to a level of support for Donbas to unite (on the condition of a special status) with Ukraine, however, among those in the NGCA there is more support for these occupied areas to become part of Russia.[100]

The government should introduce measures to ensure the NGCA's population feel in control of their own destiny in Ukraine, regardless of the outcomes of other efforts aimed at conflict resolution. This is still a viable proposition because of a willingness among the population to more comprehensively include those in the NGCA and IDPs within society and in the political debate.[101]

These steps are not about indulging citizens of the DNR and the LNR, but merely ensuring that NGCA populations are treated as humanely as possible and that their concerns are heard. A genuine human dimension to conflict settlement would only strengthen Ukrainian social fabric. The wider strategy should clearly differentiate war-affected citizens from war criminals and the local so-called separatist leadership.[102] Experts working on Ukraine's transitional justice mechanisms emphasize that residents

[96] Center for Insights in Survey Research (2018), 'Fourth Annual Ukrainian Municipal Survey', p. 174.

[97] International Alert (2019), 'Ветерани в Україні: що далі?' ['Veterans in Ukraine: what next?'], https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Ukraine_Whatsnextforveterans_UKR_2019.pdf (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).

[98] Detector Media (2020), 'Справа Шеремета: підозрювана Юлія Кузьменко залишиться під вартою до 3 квітня' ['The Sheremet case: the suspect Yulia Kuzmenko remains in custody until April 3'], 4 February 2020, https://detector.media/infospace/article/174485/2020-02-04-sprava-sheremeta-pidozryuvana-yuliya-kuzmenko-zalishitsya-pid-vartoyu-do-3-kvitnya/ (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).

[99] Author interview with a security expert, who chose to remain anonymous, Kyiv, 17 October 2019.

[100] SCORE (2019), 'Changes in Social Cohesion, Citizens' Satisfaction and Visions of Reintegration'.

[101] School for Policy Analysis NaUKMA (2019), 'Survey on Donbas', https://spa.ukma.edu.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Survey-on-Donbas-.pdf (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).

[102] International Crisis Group (2018), 'Nobody Wants Us': The Alienated Civilians of Eastern Ukraine.

of occupied Donbas doing public service for the occupation 'authorities', and who are not involved in any human rights violations, will be free from criminal responsibility. This is an important message that should be clearly communicated to the population across Ukraine.

There are still obstacles to dialogue with NGCA residents. However, initiatives aimed at building confidence and increasing people-to-people contacts should be encouraged by Western donors and the Ukrainian government alike. Several initiatives exist but they remain confidential and on a small scale. Furthermore, local populations are often scared to engage with those from other regions, fearing repercussions from the 'authorities' of occupied areas. Recreating a sense of mutual trust should start with small steps, for instance through university linkages where students from Donetsk and Luhansk are invited for exchanges or academic fellowships in the rest of Ukraine.

Finally, socioeconomic and business linkages between the NGCA and Ukraine could benefit prospective reintegration. Local residents from the occupied territories should be empowered to believe that it is better to live and invest in Ukraine than in the DNR and the LNR. People-to-people contacts should be encouraged between business owners and entrepreneurs, especially small and medium-sized enterprises. This is particularly relevant as many IDP business owners retain commercial links with both the NGCA and the GCA.[103] Local trade and business links should be understood more comprehensively as an innovative way to engage with residents of occupied Donbas and increase confidence-building measures across the LoC.

Overall, thanks to smart interventions by non-state actors, a new dynamic is emerging that contributes to social cohesion and helps bind communities together around a common future, rendering society more resilient. Social connections based on trust are indispensable at times of constant change and crisis (see the case studies in the following chapter).

---

[103] Mirimanova, N. (2017), *Economic connectivity across the line of contact in Donbas, Ukraine*, Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, https://www.hdcentre.org/publications/economic-connectivity-across-the-line-of-contact-in-donbas-ukraine/ (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).

3. Creating Resilience Dividends: Case Studies

Societal resilience tends to grow from smaller structural changes that initially strengthen local communities. In many cases, weak state institutions have driven civil society, volunteers and active citizens to show initiative and propose solutions to improve resilience. The state bureaucracy still tends to work on the Soviet-era principle that initiative could lead to trouble.

The following cases illustrate responses to social disruptions in Ukraine. They were effective because they demonstrate five key characteristics of resilience: awareness, an integrated approach, diversity, self-regulation and adaptation. These approaches also embraced partnership with the state as a way to scale up and sustain efforts.

These case studies show initiatives that make Ukraine more resilient to the Russian threat through building cognitive resilience, establishing a system for the reintegration of veterans or enabling communities in the south and east of Ukraine to rediscover their roots. They also demonstrate that the ongoing conflict provides an opportunity to generate resilience dividends for Ukraine.

IREX: Building cognitive resilience

Low levels of media literacy among Ukrainians leaves the country vulnerable to manipulation and disinformation. In this context, the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) has been implementing media literacy courses through the Learn to Discern in Schools programme since 2015.[104]

IREX works in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science to spread media literacy courses in secondary schools across the country.[105] Courses target 8th and 9th grade students (13–15 year olds), and focus on critical thinking, information consumption skills and news media knowledge. They offer an integrated approach where new skills are embedded in the official curriculum in such subjects as history, Ukrainian language and literature, and art history.

The programme has so far had good results. Compared to control groups of students who did not attend training, IREX students were 18 per cent better at identifying fake news stories. They also showed more awareness about distinguishing between facts and opinion, message construction and detecting hate speech.[106] The model is sustainable (train-the-trainer courses) and replicable (scalable across the country and easily adaptable to other countries), which are key for efforts to build up resilience. Currently IREX implements similar programmes in Jordan, Serbia and the US.

---

[104] IREX (2019), 'Strengthening Media Literacy in the Ukrainian Education System', https://www.irex.org/project/strengthening-media-literacy-ukrainian-education-system (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).
[105] Since early 2018, the project has been deployed in 50 secondary schools in Chernihiv, Ternopil, Mariupol and Dnipro.
[106] IREX (2019), 'Evaluation of Students' Ability to Detect Disinformation After Learning Media Literacy Techniques in School', https://www.irex.org/resource/evaluation-students-ability-detect-disinformation-after-learning-media-literacy-techniques (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).

Nakipelo media group in Kharkiv: Giving voice to the local community

Participatory politics supported by local media is crucial to societal resilience against disinformation and information manipulation. The independent sociopolitical media group Nakipelo was founded, in Kharkiv in 2014, to reflect the views of citizens and civil society representatives on local events and the general situation in Ukraine. It is used as a platform to raise citizen concerns about local problems (notably corruption in the regional government, human rights abuses, lawlessness of public utilities, disability issues and LGBT rights) and voice them to the local administration. Nakipelo resources include a news website;[107] a press centre for briefings, training and workshops; an information website;[108] and social media channels.[109]

Nakipelo also focuses on raising awareness and building public initiatives to assist IDPs and veterans. It was instrumental in engaging the Kharkiv municipal administration to address the issue of IDPs in 2014 as well as building community-based organizations to support them. After the lacklustre response of local authorities to the IDP issue, Nakipelo corralled local volunteers and activists to help. It continues to serve as a platform for interaction and engagement between CSOs and the local administration to jointly address the issue of IDPs in Kharkiv.

> After the lacklustre response of local authorities to the IDP issue,
> Nakipelo corralled local volunteers and activists to help.

Nakipelo has demonstrated key characteristics of resilience.[110] The project started with citizen journalists and the structure became more professional over the years. Its media output is diverse, and it has built capacity in terms of production (infographics, multimedia content, training for journalists etc.) and outreach. It is highly integrated within the CSO community in Kharkiv and works closely with public organizations, especially the municipal anti-corruption centre. The project is self-regulating thanks to its small, horizontal structure for decision-making and coordination across departments. Finally, the structure is flexible and adaptive to new opportunities, which has allowed it to create an advertising department, and take part in fundraising and reputation-building.

In another example of the media's role in resilience-building, the local newspaper in the city of Horodenka (around 9,000 inhabitants) went beyond its traditional function as an information source and used its Facebook page to launch public consultation processes. To date, the newspaper has facilitated discussions about education and healthcare reform with over 7,000 views online.[111] According to Editor-in-Chief Ihor Terletsky, 'People are very passive. We should engage them in the life of the community. So we will continue our interactive platform to discuss pressing issues.'[112] As a result, the number of the paper's followers on Facebook has increased to almost 10,000. Similar public consultations under the mentorship of the Kyiv-based Ukrainian Association of Press Publishers were successful in Troitske, Luhansk oblast. The local newspaper *Selskaya Nov* installed boxes in villages where citizens, mostly farmers and the elderly, could leave questions and provide feedback to their local council. These were later published in the newspaper.

---

[107] Nakipelo (2020), https://nakipelo.ua/ (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).
[108] Civil Forum (2020), http://civilforum.com.ua/ (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).
[109] This includes a Youtube channel, https://www.youtube.com/user/nakipelovo (accessed 22 Apr. 2020), and a Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/nakipelovo/ (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).
[110] Rodin (2015), *The Resilience Dividend*.
[111] Redaktors'kyi Portal (2019), 'Громади просять дискусій!' [Communities demand discussions!], 24 May 2019, http://redactor.in.ua/2019/05/24/громади-просять-дискусій/ (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).
[112] Materials provided by the Ukrainian Association of Press Publishers.

Both initiatives increased the profile of local media and stirred the community to reflect on its own strengths and weaknesses and its connection to local governance. In short, they started building social cohesion. Having a non-digital component to these projects is particularly valuable as it helps to include marginalized people on the wrong side of the digital divide. Such simple interventions by local media are timely, meet a strong community demand and are key to successful decentralization.

The Legal Hundred: Defending those who defend Ukraine

The Legal Hundred (*Yurydychna Sotnia*)[113] is a Ukrainian non-profit organization working on veteran affairs and issues related to defence and security since 2014. It evolved from an online group of pro bono lawyers during the Euromaidan to an extensive network of volunteers and a team of experts who provide legal aid to veterans, draft laws and advocate legislative reform. For one of the founders, the impetus to do something was an experience in a hospital where they witnessed desperate parents struggling to get social insurance and benefits for their wounded son.

A dysfunctional and chaotic maze of state bureaucracy left veterans and their families desperate for help. In an attempt to provide clear information and guidance on how to obtain state-guaranteed assistance, the Legal Hundred started by preparing explanatory materials and building awareness among veterans. Information is provided in print, via a hotline and on social media channels to about 1,000 veterans each month. Overall the organization has served over 40,000 veterans and active military personnel.

Since 2016, the organization has moved to focus on advocacy, as it understood that structural changes require legislative reform. The lawyers worked in partnership with members of parliament to pass nine laws, including draft law No. 6109 on gender equality in the military, a series of laws abolishing the illegal practice of military contracts without defined terms, and laws increasing social security provisions for wounded veterans.

With its strength coming from grassroots connections to veterans, the Legal Hundred has strong legitimacy among external actors. After it consistently advocated the establishment of a Ministry of Veterans Affairs in Ukraine in 2017, it was chosen to lead the project. This cooperation between the Legal Hundred and the parliamentary Committee on Social Policy and Protection of Veterans' Rights developed concepts, policy papers and draft legislation for the new ministry.

The organization is playing a leading role in the process of reforming the legal framework that defines the status of veterans and conflict-affected civilians. This project is being carried out in partnership with the Ministry of Veterans Affairs and entails extended negotiations with different veteran groups across the country.

The Legal Hundred exemplifies five key characteristics of resilience. It is intimately aware of issues facing its stakeholders and its own capacity. Strong engagement with direct and indirect stakeholders allowed it to develop a comprehensive understanding of deficiencies in its processes and to predict challenges for its constituency. The Legal Hundred runs a legislative research and reform centre, where four lawyers work on a permanent basis, analysing current and new laws as well as drafting new legislative proposals. It monitors its strengths and weaknesses as an organization and holds

---

[113] Yurydychna Sotnia [The Legal Hundred] (n.d.), https://legal100.org.ua (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).

annual strategic self-assessment sessions with facilitators. Critically important is its attempts to build wider awareness about veteran issues. The Legal Hundred publishes annual reports and engages stakeholders in public presentations.

An integrated and inclusive approach allowed the Legal Hundred to persevere in tackling systemic issues, rather than providing short-term quick fixes. As a non-partisan organization it works with a large number of stakeholders, including veterans, veteran organizations, members of parliament, government bodies, donors and international organizations. Early in its development the Legal Hundred accessed various government bodies through participation in public councils and advisory commissions. It ensured a much-needed feedback process by communicating the needs of the veteran and military community to policymakers and state agencies. It also engaged with the Western donor community to influence funding priorities and inform donors about the sector. To tackle the issues of tension within the veteran community, the Legal Hundred is now trying to shape a unified national policy through a new legal framework for veterans, conflict-affected citizens and those injured and killed during the Euromaidan protest.

> The organization has a diverse network of paid staff and volunteers. At its core are 12 employees but more broadly the Legal Hundred engages lawyers, veterans, families of veterans, young volunteers, the private sector, law firms, local and national government officials, and experts from other NGOs.

The organization has a diverse network of paid staff and volunteers. At its core are 12 employees but more broadly the Legal Hundred engages lawyers, veterans, families of veterans, young volunteers, the private sector, law firms, local and national government officials, and experts from other NGOs. The Legal Hundred works with 99 pro bono lawyers. Most importantly, the organization has regional reach. Since the beginning of 2018, it has run six sustainable development courses for over 120 leaders of NGOs for veterans across Ukraine, which are strong partners in awareness-raising and legal aid. The offices of these NGOs in six regions were transformed into local representatives for the Legal Hundred.

The Legal Hundred self-regulates by frequently assessing its programming to ensure autonomy of different units (regional offices, legal teams, advocacy groups) while safeguarding internal cooperation and communication. When there is an opportunity to free up resources it transfers part of its services to the state system. In 2019, state legal aid centres started providing assistance to veterans free of charge. This allows a transfer of trust from civil society to state institutions, which is very important for Ukraine.

The organization constantly adapts to external needs and challenges. In less than six months in 2014 it went from a social media group of lawyers eager to help veterans to an officially registered non-profit organization with a small team of regular volunteers providing information and connecting clients with pro bono lawyers. Every year the Legal Hundred adds a new project to its portfolio.

Thanks to its flexibility, the Legal Hundred has become the go-to organization for veteran issues. It has substantially contributed to the institutionalization of veteran affairs and continues to do so. Better integration of veterans in civilian life is an important feature of social cohesion for Ukraine.

UCMC: Rediscovering local identity

In 2016, the Ukraine Crisis Media Centre (UCMC) engaged museums in small cities –
including some cases close to the LoC as well as displaced museums from Donetsk and Luhansk –
in a thought-provoking exercise about their own development and role in the community.
The Museum is Open for Renovation project engaged a team of independent cultural consultants
to work with 32 museums of differing size in 28 cities ranging from Mariupol (population: 400,000)
to Novoaydar (population: 9,000).

UCMC is aware of the potential of culture to bring about change. Most museums in Ukraine were
established in the 1960s and 1970s as Soviet propaganda tools and as places where the Communist
Party engaged with the common people. Little has changed since and museums remain ossified
structures. Their inaction at a time when Ukraine is shaping its new identity is a weakness. Identity
is often a collective story citizens tell about their character and their origin. Since independence
Ukraine has lived with various clashing narratives about itself.

The cultural infrastructure in Ukraine was quite extensive during the Soviet era but deteriorated
after independence. A UCMC audit of cultural infrastructure in 75 decentralized communities
showed that 50 per cent of libraries have closed down since independence, but that there are still
around 500 cultural appreciation clubs, 19 museums, 32 art schools and 270 libraries. There is not
a single cinema. The existing cultural places, if revived, have the capacity to gain new convening
power and to energize communities. In most cases participation in the UCMC project made local
museums aware of their unique cultural heritage, which was previously ignored and lacked proper
public presentation. Druzhkivka city's unique collection of porcelain is a striking example of this.[114]

Working with local historians, teachers and different levels of government, UCMC provided an
inclusive format for all to contribute. This integrated approach created a space to develop new cultural
products with the community rather than presenting them with ready-made solutions. UCMC asked
communities to use museum artefacts to tell their stories. For example, in Novoaydar, Luhansk oblast,
a reconceptualized textile exhibition was a trigger to create a cultural map that traces settlement in
the region. The exhibition's Lemko costumes were evidence of the punitive resettlement from the east
of Poland following the Second World War. The map also traced the settlement of ethnic Russians and
Ukrainians from central regions in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Suddenly, a new story started
taking shape about the diversity of the region.

The project team ensured a wide range of voices were heard: local historians, history teachers,
children and communities. It was a grassroots effort with the community contributing artefacts, such
as textiles, costumes and local ceramics. In Druzhkivka museum staff surveyed citizens about famous
people of the region that should be represented in the museum. As a result, they created a theatrical
performance featuring famous composer Mykola Leontovych and his contemporaries.[115] Local
authorities see museum revival as a way to help tourism and to attract more funds from the national
budget for cultural infrastructure.

The UCMC project has created a network of museums that use these new approaches and exchange
best practices. This new professional community will tackle other issues of local identity in the future
and support the region in writing the next chapter in its story.

---

[114] See the new catalogue created as part of the project: Ukraine Crisis Media Center (2019), 'Порцеляна з фондів музею' ['Porcelain from the
museums' collections'], https://issuu.com/leonidmarushchak/docs/_____-_____2 (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).
[115] Mykola Leontovych is the author of the famous 'Carol of the Bells'.

UCMC managed to embed an adaptive approach from the very beginning. Museums were not viewed as closed spaces filled with objects. They were approached as institutions that should help the community with self-awareness and self-reflection, as safe and independent meeting spaces for citizens, and even as regional hubs. For this reason, most museums created a special public space for lectures and meetings and engagement with local schools.

Strong local ownership makes it likely that these cultural interventions will continue. A UCMC survey of project participants shows that 72 per cent say they wish to continue the project and 98 per cent say museums can play an important role in community life. There is hope that the network could be a useful resource in contributing to communities' resilience against future threats.

4. Recommendations

Resilience relies on many components. When severe shocks happen the hardware of resilience is essential – such as effective infrastructure, conventional and cyber defence capabilities, rescue equipment, and natural-disaster urban planning and architecture. But when disruptions occur, soft elements such as people and ideas also have an important role to play. Institutions, organizations and individuals that demonstrate commitment, shared values, engagement, unity around a common purpose, and a sense of identity make a big difference in building resilience.

Despite the severe consequences of Russian aggression, this crisis could be seen as an opportunity to modernize industry in eastern Ukraine, invest in boosting the quality of human capital, regenerate struggling mono-industrial towns and provide more European-style urban development for the residents of Donbas. It is also an opportunity to adopt a more inclusive and sustainable approach to regional development. In short, it is possible to create resilience dividends out of this man-made disaster. The recommendations below focus on actors in Ukraine and international donors that support democracy and good governance.

Embed a resilience-based approach

- Systemic thinking and effective cooperation between state and non-state actors will improve responses to Russian aggression and preparations for future threats. National and local government should embed cooperation with CSOs, active citizens and business actors into the new systems of governance created through public administration reform and decentralization. This is not only a matter of democracy, but also of national security.

- Shielding society from Russian aggression should be a collaborative effort led by central government across the country. For a national strategy to be effective, central government should draw information from local communities. In the context of decentralization, active citizens should be empowered to participate more in local politics. This will help to foster the inclusion of citizens in policymaking, effective public consultations and the development of local democracy.

- Western donors and private philanthropic organizations assisting civil society should consider resilience as a core objective along with building the capacities of CSOs, cities and communities. Most donors want to see proof of sustainability in their investment projects, but sustainability is static and prioritizes the preservation of what has been achieved, while resilience is dynamic and enables actors to capitalize on changes and disruptions. This idea should be integrated into new projects and resilience assessment tools, similar to the Resilient Futures project,[116] developed and promoted for wider use.

---

[116] Resilient Futures (2020), https://www.resilientfutures.com/ (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).

Reform and capacity-building for independent media

- There is still an urgent need to strengthen information security in Ukraine, as well as to increase the understanding and number of impact assessments of Russian disinformation operations. Western donors should boost funding to quality media and information security. This could provide media organizations and political parties with the tools and resources for big-data analysis of Russian disinformation.

- In addition to improving the quality of content, there is an opportunity for Western donors to assist capacity-building of editorial boards and promote the role and responsibility of the media in a democracy. These efforts should look to improve the reputation and self-regulation of the media sphere and journalists. Western donors should support this through targeted education programmes for journalists alongside responsibility awareness training for content dissemination. This could be done by supporting the expansion of the Ukrainian Commission on Media Ethics.[117]

- Western donors could provide technical assistance, funding and advocacy for sustainable public investment into the development of Suspilne TV, the national broadcaster, to ensure it operates in a transparent and accountable way.

- Local media can develop and nurture civic communities, which has a direct correlation with the quality of local governance. Western donors should consider approaching local media as a way of boosting community voices. Local and hyper-local media in Ukrainian regions can empower citizens. This can be achieved by supporting community radio stations and training in media management and social media marketing.

- Western assistance should focus on providing mentorship to motivated teams of local media. Donors could engage European and US media groups for mentorship programmes. For example, the Poynter Institute[118] or the Membership Puzzle Project by New York University and De Correspondent[119] could be valuable contributors. Once Ukrainian media professionals see the impact of their work, it will encourage them to build active linkages to communities and sustain their publications. This could lead to building a network to promote best practices among local media, local activists, community-based organizations and heads of newly amalgamated communities across Ukraine.

- Western donors should support new and alternative media through grants for the creation of grassroots initiatives. The example of Nakipelo in Kharkiv is a case in point: grassroots projects can learn to institutionalize their work and potentially replicate it in different regions. With the de-nationalization of media there are new opportunities to scale up successful new media outlets.

---

[117] Commission on Journalism Ethics (2020), http://www.cje.org.ua/ua (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).
[118] Poynter Institute (2020), https://www.poynter.org/ (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).
[119] The Membership Puzzle Project (2020), https://membershippuzzle.org/ (accessed 22 Apr. 2020).

Cognitive resilience

- As outlined in the previous Chatham House research paper,[120] the development of critical thinking and media literacy is crucial in order to build resilience against disinformation and information manipulation. This is the objective of IREX's media literacy courses in schools. This cognitive resilience-building goes hand in hand with wider efforts at reforming the education sector.

- The general public and youth are not the only groups in need of critical-thinking courses. In the media sphere, journalists should systematically undergo training and education in information warfare tools, cyber hygiene and basic cyber knowledge.

Social cohesion

- In order to identify future points of social tension and lines of polarization, the Ukrainian government should develop an Index of Social Cohesion for each region and train government officials to use it to develop regional policies.

- Reintegration of Donbas should be inclusive and accompanied by efforts to strengthen national unity. Kyiv must demonstrate that local populations in the NGCA are valued as equal citizens, and include them in the reintegration process. At the same time, the government should engage western Ukrainian regions that are anxious about the reintegration of Donbas, and address their concerns about a possible disruption to the European integration of Ukraine. Reintegration policies for Donbas should include measures to strengthen support for human rights, social tolerance and pluralistic Ukrainian identity.

- Efforts to strengthen national unity should focus on improving connectivity. Upgrading transport infrastructure is an important task. As is scaling up and launching new exchange programmes for professionals and students.

- The government should facilitate a nationwide conversation between policymakers, CSOs, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), media and regional elites. Discussions could address the preconditions to peace, the terms of potential compromises, and elaborate on the safe reintegration of Donbas. The Ukrainian leadership and members of parliament should embark on listening tours in order to take stock of citizen grievances. If the voices of Ukrainians are not heard, even the best peace deal will fall apart.

- Ukraine still suffers from a disconnect between citizens and formal CSOs, especially advocacy and human rights groups. Local community-based organizations also struggle to engage citizens, especially in anti-corruption work. Closing this gap will boost civil society's role in driving social change and delivering a resilience dividend. Donors should promote the model of individual membership of CSOs (including membership fees as a source of income), volunteering, stakeholder consultations, civic oversight and needs assessments of beneficiaries. CSOs should increase their capacity to use social media and other communication tools to listen and engage with wider audiences and run public information campaigns.

---

[120] Boulègue, Lutsevych, and Marin (2018), *Civil Society Under Russia's Threat*.

- The concerted efforts of state and non-state actors are needed to reintegrate and support IDPs and veterans. Systematic and comprehensive programmes of psychological rehabilitation for veterans and IDPs, and similar care for active forces, should be created and scaled up nationally. However, this is difficult to achieve especially with the shortage of trained psychology experts to work with the military. Economic opportunities, such as providing microfinance for SMEs run by veterans and IDPs or support for businesses that are inclusive of veterans, would undermine the appeal of criminal or right-wing groups.

- Ukrainian CSOs, cultural institutions and local media should provide citizens, particularly vulnerable groups (IDPs, veterans, or those at economic risk), with a safe space to voice their concerns. Despite necessary budget cuts related to tackling COVID-19 it is important to sustain levels of funding, especially for the Ukraine Cultural Fund, in view of the positive role cultural institutions play in social cohesion. This space should be both online and offline. Face-to-face exchanges among groups help build connections and are crucial for resilience. The first step in any dialogue is understanding the position of the other side.

- In the current digital age, the role of individual activists is increasing and that of traditional organizations is under pressure. That is why it is critical to develop the infrastructure for citizen participation across various sectors (environment, social protection, youth policy, urban development, education). The government should prioritize projects that create such infrastructure and encourage a culture of citizen engagement.

- Ukraine's reforms are very uneven. Decentralization is patchy, and the implementation of sectoral reforms varies from region to region. In such circumstances social cohesion is valuable to support the exchange of best practices between local government officials, local media and activists from different regions. State agencies and donor technical assistance projects should support high standards of digital democracy, environmental protection, cultural management, business development and education, and internal connectivity and transport infrastructure development.

- The future of Ukraine depends on the transformation of relations between citizens, politicians and businesses. With the generational change and emergence of new political parties after the 2019 presidential election, civil society and progressive leaders must launch political reforms to enable more representative democracy. The cornerstone of reforms should be an amended electoral code that increases transparency of political campaign finance and limits the amounts that political parties and individuals spend on campaigning. Such structural changes would make the political system more responsive to citizens and better insulated against Russian negative influence.

5. Conclusion

Almost six years of Russian aggression has demonstrated Ukraine's capacity to persevere against difficult odds. The country has proven more difficult to subjugate than the Kremlin expected. However, the struggle is far from over and Vladimir Putin shows no sign of changing his objectives. The armed conflict is likely to continue and will exert further pressure on Ukrainian society and politics for the foreseeable future.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy's presidency represents a challenge for the Kremlin. His victory undermines the dominant Russian narrative that Ukraine is a 'nationalist' and 'fascist' country that discriminates against the Russian-speaking population and wants to destroy the Russian World. This artificial threat is used to justify Russian interference in Ukraine's affairs.

Until now, the Kremlin has also actively used anti-Ukrainian rhetoric and disinformation to dispel growing domestic dissatisfaction with the Russian government and to deter protests. The Revolution of Dignity is portrayed as the main cause of disruption and chaos in Ukraine, a path that would supposedly lead to disaster if followed by the Russian people. Steady positive development of Ukraine could shatter these narratives. Zelenskyy embodies a generational change and a new kind of politics that, if successful, could resonate widely in the post-Soviet region. Therefore, Moscow will likely increase its pressure on Ukraine.

The Kremlin still has the upper hand to coerce Ukraine using energy, in particular the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline and Ukraine's dependence on Russian petroleum products for diesel and other types of fuel. New threats could come from environmental risks related to spikes in hostilities, the disruption of mining in occupied Donbas, cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, support to anti-government radical groups to ferment violence, and new forms of malign manipulation of the mass media. In the near future, the Kremlin will also use its connections to parties like the OPFL to influence local elections.

However, the most critical risk factor to Ukraine is the ongoing conflict in Donbas and its political, social, economic and security consequences. The continuation of the low-intensity war should not prevent the government and civil society from envisaging ways to regenerate conflict-affected areas controlled by Kyiv and the future reintegration of the NGCA with the rest of Ukraine.

Just being aware of and acknowledging these threats is a large part of being resilient. Another part, as demonstrated by the case studies in this research paper, is a capacity to bridge divides and to establish flexible structures that engage a multiplicity of perspectives for the benefit of the community. Ukraine's current resilience capital is precious. It remains one of the country's main assets at times of armed conflict and domestic political turbulence and it should be nurtured to enable the establishment of the European rule-based society that so many Ukrainians aspire to.

About the Authors

Mathieu Boulègue is a research fellow with the Russia and Eurasia Programme at Chatham House. Previously, he was a partner at a risk management and strategic research consultancy, where he worked as director of Eurasian affairs. In his research, Mathieu focuses particularly on Eurasian security and defence issues, as well as on Russia's domestic and foreign policy.

Having trained as a policy and security analyst in the field of post-Soviet affairs, Mathieu regularly publishes articles and papers on Eurasian security and foreign policy questions. He has degrees from Sciences Po Toulouse in France and King's College London.

Orysia Lutsevych manages the Ukraine Forum at Chatham House. She is an internationally recognized expert on civil society in the former Soviet region. Her most recent research project focuses on the study of resilience and how it can be applied to safeguard Ukraine at times of armed conflict with Russia. She has published numerous Chatham House research papers, including *Civil Society Under Russia's Threat: Building Resilience in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova* (November 2018), with co-authors Mathieu Boulègue and Anais Marin, and *Agents of the Russian World: Proxy Groups in the Contested Neighbourhood* (April 2016). She coordinated and co-authored a major Chatham House report, *The Struggle for Ukraine* (October 2017), with Timothy Ash, Janet Gunn, John Lough, James Nixey, James Sherr and Kataryna Wolczuk.

Acknowledgments

National Endowment for Democracy
Supporting freedom around the world

About the Ukraine Forum

The Ukraine Forum at Chatham House is a unique research forum and platform for debate. Launched in 2015, it provides insight for international audiences on internal Ukrainian dynamics. It offers perspectives from the government, the private sector and civil society. To date the forum has held over 50 events with more than 80 Ukrainian and 40 European policymakers, journalists, civil society activists and academics. It has produced approximately 40 video interviews with experts on reforms, and seven short films about change-makers. The major Chatham House report *The Struggle for Ukraine*, analysing the changes in Ukraine since 2014, was downloaded or read online over 11,000 times across 76 countries.

More information about Ukraine Forum research and events can be found at: https://www.chathamhouse.org/about/structure/russia-eurasia-programme/ukraine-forum-project

Independent thinking since 1920