



Vilnius Task Force

Supporting the Future of Eastern Ukraine

Prioritisation framework

Realising the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus through civic participation and civil society engagement in decision-making in Donetsk and Luhansk regions

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I INTRODUCTION

The notion of a Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (HDP Nexus) was conceptualised relatively recently, in 2016, although since the 1990s humanitarian actors have been coordinating responses to immediate humanitarian needs with more long-term solutions for development and peace¹. However, unlike previous efforts, the HDP Nexus goes beyond program or conceptual approaches and marks a structural shift in aid planning, financing and coordination². This change has happened largely because protracted crises have become part of recent history³ (and their duration has increased from four to seven years on average) and require integrated approaches that cannot be limited to meeting humanitarian needs only. Instead, they demand a more balanced division of responsibilities between international donors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and state actors. In this setting, national authorities are expected to regain and reinforce their role in responding to the needs of the population, especially in the context of a protracted crisis. The HDP Nexus recognises that humanitarian emergencies are often a symptom of larger problems caused by a pool of factors including an accumulation of flawed policies and strategies that, in fragile contexts, can contribute to broader inequality and injustice towards conflict-affected communities.

Understanding and implementing the HDP Nexus depends on many aspects, like the context and scale of the crisis, the nature of its origin and stage of its development, state institutions' ability to respond to systemic challenges, the contribution of international humanitarian and development partners, and the role of the non-governmental sector and civil society. International humanitarian organisations, in cooperation with local NGOs, witness the primary effects of conflict, war and disasters on local communities. As first responders, they can propose new models of development and social cohesion, for example, community security working groups⁴, that will continue to work after aid actors ultimately leave the conflict-affected region. Apart from social initiatives,

¹ Weishaupt, S. [The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: Towards Differentiated Configurations](#). United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. 2020, EN.; [The "New Way of Working" Examined: an ICVA briefing paper](#). 2017, EN

² [The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus](#). Oxfam discussion paper. 2019, EN

³ ['Humanitarian needs at 'all-time high,' top UN relief official tells Economic and Social Council.'](#) UN News. 2015, EN

⁴ [Community Security and Social Cohesion working groups](#), UNDP. 2020, UA

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humanitarian organisations often contribute to renovation or creation of infrastructure that is instrumental in responding to basic humanitarian needs and human rights violations, such as, for example, shelters for those most affected by the conflict or other vulnerable groups. In theory and principle, the ultimate goal would be a successful transfer of skills and responsibilities to capacitated local NGOs, service providers and state or local authorities.

In practical terms, a local NGO's experience provides one example of a successful Nexus transition in eastern Ukraine: advocacy and social accountability with citizens to restore the water supply in a community in Donetsk region. According to Right to Protection Charitable Foundation (CF), to facilitate a solution to the problem, the organisation's lawyers suggested that the community create a self-organisation body and communicate with local authorities on behalf of this body. The foundation explained to the community the advantages of this form of public participation (and its importance outside the water supply issue), and also introduced the procedure, showing how to prepare the necessary documents to support their call for action. Thereafter, a representative body was established and the water supply was restored. The community acquired necessary skills for advocacy, social accountability and civic participation, and became more socially cohesive, while local authorities saw that civil society can unite and require officials to respond more actively to the humanitarian needs of the population.

When asked "How can local authorities be encouraged to take a more active role in addressing the humanitarian needs of the vulnerable population in their communities?", 46% of participants of a survey conducted by the Vilnius Task Force (VTF) chose "By promoting local democracy". Thus, civil society representatives recognise the potential of participatory mechanisms and their ability to influence political decisions in the humanitarian sphere. Since Ukrainian civil society is a key driver of the country's transformation process, this paper explores opportunities for implementing the HDP Nexus through more active involvement of the non-governmental sector in political decision-making.

The study rests on the belief that expanding the influence of civil society on the socio-political agenda will increase the transparency and accountability of duty-bearers and encourage local and national authorities to take more responsibility for meeting

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humanitarian needs of the population in Donetsk and Luhansk regions and implementing more effective development and peacebuilding programs in the region. Therefore, **this paper aims to explore the potential of civil society to implement and strengthen the HDP Nexus approach in Donetsk and Luhansk regions**, by examining the difficulties citizens face in participating in local policy-making, and proposing ways to address the identified challenges.

Research methodology. The methodology is based on the triangulation method⁵ that draws upon the following approaches:

- 1) Qualitative method. In-depth interviews were conducted among 30 experts in local self-government, Ukrainian NGOs, ministries and parliamentary committees, international NGOs and embassies, to investigate the challenges and solutions to civic participation in decision-making and find opportunities for implementing the nexus approach. This document is also informed by the results of a civil society consultation, 'Ways to enhance citizen participation in policy-making in Donetsk and Luhansk regions'. The consultation was held on 29.01.2021 and gathered around 60 participants from diverse backgrounds who discussed civic participation challenges and opportunities. Preliminary findings of the research were validated and expanded during two five-hour discussions with Donetsk and Luhansk Task Teams that include representatives of civil society and the authorities at all levels.
- 2) Desk research. Policy gaps affecting civic participation were mapped, and obstacles for the implementation of local democracy in Donetsk and Luhansk regions were explored. Desktop research is based on analysis of Ukrainian legislation, reports by Ukrainian think tanks, UN agencies and programmes and the Council of Europe, as well as public opinion surveys and results of public discussion on related topics.
- 3) Quantitative method. A survey on local decision-making (VTF survey) was conducted among 40 representatives of NGOs that participated in the civil society consultation, to reinforce the qualitative data.

⁵ Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (2000). *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, p. 443, EN

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Limitations: This paper does not pursue the ambitious goal of covering all existing challenges relevant to local decision-making in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, but rather complements existing evidence relating to the problem. It explores primarily those challenges and possible solutions that were **prioritised by the participants of interviews and consultations and marked by them as crucial for their civic activities.**

Remarks:

- To avoid overlap, the document does not consider the issue of creating conditions for economic development that would enhance well-being and, among other things, allow local communities to pay more attention to civic activism. In particular, promoting the growth of small and medium-sized businesses, as well as providing access to credit programs for residents of the region are discussed in detail in the concepts of the Strategy for Economic Development of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions⁶. The solutions that were proposed by participants of the discussions during this study generally coincide with the position of the authors of the strategy. In addition, it was suggested that NGOs specialising in training, mentoring and finding financial opportunities to implement business ideas be involved in educating the local population in business skills⁷.
- Most issues related to governance in civil and military administrations (CMAs) are highlighted in the relevant section (one of the key recommendations from residents of communities along the contact line). Meanwhile, certain policy gaps, for example in the field of political communications, are common to both CMAs and communities where elections took place. Consequently, some sections consider both formats of government in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

Research period: December 2020—March 2021

Recognising the evolving nature of the humanitarian response in eastern Ukraine and the necessity to dedicate special attention to certain population groups, communities

⁶ ‘The Strategy for Economic Development of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions will be in place after 2022.’ Ukrinform, 2021, UA

⁷ For example, Charitable Foundation for the Implementation of Ideas (Severodonetsk)

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and life experiences, additional resources are expected to accompany this document with the latter serving as a reference for future research and analysis.

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II SUMMARY

The research findings suggest that civil society in Donetsk and Luhansk regions is already involved in comprehensive cooperation with the non-governmental sector, as well as central and local government, local self-government bodies and CMAs, and can influence political decisions, in particular in the field of humanitarian and development issues. However, in order to strengthen the capacity of civil society in implementation of the HDP Nexus approach, **a number of obstacles that may limit this powerful resource should be addressed by the Ukrainian government.**

- **First**, lack of appropriate conditions for the development of activism in remote, rural and contact line communities: poor access to health care, insufficient infrastructure, uncertain perspectives for economic development, limited access to high-speed Internet, etc. Without improving basic living conditions, civil participation will remain a secondary and obscure task for most residents, which undermines the possibility to engage citizens in implementation of the HDP Nexus in the region. For example, without access to quality Internet connection, it is impossible to imagine collecting signatures for an electronic petition to the local self-government to improve the quality of water supply or develop distance education which can become a bridge between schoolchildren and students living on both sides of the contact line. It should be noted that state strategies for the development of Donetsk and Luhansk regions may lack inclusiveness, while territories of the region are considered without taking into account the specifics of CMAs, whose operation is unique in governance, budgeting and security issues.
- **Second**, perceived disorganised communication between national authorities and residents of Donetsk and Luhansk regions on key issues related to this region. Among the communication challenges, interlocutors named flawed explanations regarding the criteria for selecting communities where CMAs were established, inadequate public awareness of the decentralisation process (who is responsible for what after the amalgamation of territorial communities), as well as zoning during quarantine and the Covid-19 vaccination process. According to interviewees, Kyiv politicians can make statements and approve decisions about the region without knowing local opinion or holding public and expert discussions with local residents. Communication between

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local self-government bodies and CMAs and their communities is also often perceived by residents as insufficiently open and inclusive. Communication challenges became especially widespread during the transition period in communities where CMAs were established in the first half of 2021. Due to lack of an object of appeal (heads of administrations), access to medical, social and administrative services was absent for months. Meanwhile, insufficient coordination of information messages can have a negative impact on the implementation of programs that link humanitarian and development projects and peacebuilding initiatives — due to inconsistent communication, HDP Nexus stakeholders may have formed different ideas about the region's development priorities.

- **Third**, the possibility, expertise and motivation of citizens to use mechanisms of local democracy. Restrictions on access to participatory instruments were identified in communities with CMAs; they also currently apply to many internally displaced persons (IDPs). Meanwhile, research findings show that participatory democracy provides citizens with real leverage to influence life in the community and, among other things, can contribute to the implementation of humanitarian and development programmes. Successful cases of advocacy on a number of issues could not take place without access to such tools of participation as petitions, citizens' requests, the creation of self-organisation bodies, and so on. For example, respondents reported several cases of local authorities accepting citizens' requests to provide public transport connections to remote settlements; resolving the infrastructure issue ultimately helped the work of humanitarian missions. The new version of the Law of Ukraine "On Local Self-Government in Ukraine" may facilitate access to tools for participation in local self-government communities, but the prospects for democratic development in CMAs remain unclear. The study furthermore indicates the need to build the capacities and competencies of active citizens in local self-government, and signals the low motivation of citizens to participate in forming local policies.

Stakeholders: cooperation of central and local government, local self-government bodies, CMAs and NGOs.

The study demonstrates that local NGOs have the appropriate expertise to identify and respond to the needs of the local population, as well as to advocate for these needs with authorities and participate in policy-making. Many local civil society members widely

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combine various elements of the HDP Nexus in their activities. For example, a coalition of communities on the contact line systematically collects information on the daily challenges faced by CMA dwellers, communicates it to executive and legislative bodies, humanitarian organisations and non-governmental initiatives, and turns this data into a map of development policies and proposals for sustainable long-term solutions. At the same time, the coalition reports a lack of involvement of both its members and CMA residents in general in public discussions on strategic and legislative initiatives aimed at improving the future of communities along the contact line. Consequently, strengthening the capacity of civil society should be accompanied by **the more active involvement** of its members in creating synergies between humanitarian programs, development projects and peacebuilding initiatives in Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Stakeholders: international organisations in Ukraine that integrate the principles of the HDP Nexus into their program activities.

This observation leads to another finding: the involvement of civil society should be **coordinated** between key stakeholders of HDP Nexus implementation in Ukraine: national authorities, local self-government bodies, CMAs, humanitarian foundations, non-governmental organisations and public activists, as well as international partners. Coordination will curb the scattering and duplication of resources, as well as maximising synergies for better implementation of projects. In particular, interlocutors pointed out that during wildfires in Luhansk region in 2020, local authorities failed to effectively coordinate needs assessment and humanitarian assistance from various organisations and volunteers, or establish crisis communication with partners, which led to uneven distribution of assistance among the affected population. Such problems can be minimised by creating models for responding to possible crisis situations and developing sustainable coordination mechanisms that would allow for ongoing dialogue between HDP Nexus stakeholders.

Finally, strengthening the capacity of civil society and enhancing the involvement of its members in implementation of the HDP Nexus requires **adequate financial support**, especially as NGOs open new horizons and may need to increase their resources for shifts in program activities. For instance, the regional state administration pilot initiative to create a position of humanitarian advisers at CMAs is based primarily on the voluntary support of civil society activists and organisations that share pro bono with public

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officials their humanitarian expertise and experience in development and peacebuilding programs. Funding this support or a fully-fledged advisory position increases the chances of a successful pilot and can help promote the HDP Nexus approach in CMAs.

Stakeholders: international donors.

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III KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Health care

According to a representative from the humanitarian organisation Medicos del Mundo (MdM), there are several key problems in health care in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, most of which are typical for other regions of Ukraine⁸. **Not all communities can finance health care services from the local budget.** Until recently, financing of medical and obstetric centres was through the state budget. Medical reform has brought significant changes to the system of funding, including the operation of medical and obstetric centres. According to the state order⁹, primary medical care in Ukraine is provided by four types of institutions: primary health care centres — 15,000 persons/7 doctors; group practice outpatient clinics — 3,000 persons/2 doctors; mono-practice outpatient clinics — 1,500 persons/1 doctor; and health points — 750 people. Only these facilities receive funding from the National Health Service of Ukraine (NHSU). As medical and obstetric centres were created to serve territories with more than 350 residents, their funding from the state budget has been suspended, i.e. they must either be closed, or their sustainability should be taken over by the local budget. As of 2019, in Luhansk region 67.6% of first-aid posts were located in villages with a population of up to 750 inhabitants¹⁰. The problem of access to health services is more pressing for communities along the contact line. There are 600 settlements in the 20-kilometre zone along the contact line, home to approximately 3.2 million people who systematically experience difficulties in accessing health care¹¹.

The health care system in Ukraine employs many **doctors of pre-retirement and retirement age** who will leave their jobs in the foreseeable future: 50% of therapists,

⁸ Valeriiia Bozhenko, Advocacy Manager, Medicos del Mundo, consultations with members of the Luhansk and Donetsk Task Teams, 24 and 26.03.2021

⁹ Order "On approval of the Procedure for the Formation of Sustainable Primary Care Networks". The Ministry of Health of Ukraine and the Ministry of Regional Development, Construction and Housing of Ukraine, № 178/24, 06.02.2018, UA

¹⁰ 'Do we need medical and obstetric centres in the countryside?' Government Courier. 2019, UA

¹¹ Research on conditions of access to medical care at EECPs. CF Right to Protection, ACCESS Consortium. 2020, UA

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30% of paediatricians and 20% of family doctors are of retirement age¹². At the same time, there is a shortage of medical staff (from 40% to 20% depending on the locality). Some areas where MdM and other medical aid organisations operate are not covered by family doctors at all. Currently, the situation is even worse due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which creates additional challenges for older doctors. Meanwhile, according to interviewees, Donetsk and Luhansk regions are not attractive for young specialists or medical workers who would like to open their own practice, as **insufficient conditions have been created to encourage doctors to work in this region**. The salary of a doctor working in a community along the contact line is no higher than the salary of medical workers whose work is not associated with risk to life due to armed conflict. The lack of medical staff in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, especially in rural areas, harms the quality of services, as there is almost no competition in the market. Remarkably, even when local authorities offer accommodation and allowances to doctors, health workers generally refuse offers to move, especially to small towns where there is little social and cultural life and the quality of the roads does not allow frequent trips outside the community of residence. The practice of attracting interns shows that they also stay in the region only for a certain time – one to two years – to gain their first professional experience, before moving to other regions of Ukraine¹³. However, humanitarian organisations and local NGOs advocate cooperation with interns as a possible solution (albeit a temporary one) but note that its implementation requires legislative changes and negotiations with regional administrations.

The downside of the "money follows the patient" principle is that **some doctors are primarily interested in the number of patients and not in the quality of service provided**. Meanwhile, according to representatives of humanitarian organisations, appeals to the NHSU hotline are often forwarded to the same institution with which comments or complaints are associated, which ultimately does not lead to full satisfaction of the patient's complaint or help improve the quality of service in a particular institution.

Another challenge is the **low awareness** of the population about their rights to health

¹² 'The pitfalls of medical reform: the results of an independent study in the regions.' Reanimation package of reforms. 2019, UA

¹³ Valeria Bozhenko, Advocacy Manager, Medicos del Mundo, consultations with members of the Luhansk and Donetsk Task Teams, 24 and 26.03.2021

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care and the benefits of the ongoing health care reform. This problem is closely related to the fact that in Ukraine the culture of constant care for one's own health is underdeveloped. According to the survey data, in case of illness, 45.4% of adults prefer not to seek professional medical care and instead resort to self-medication¹⁴.

The rights of health professionals themselves and their capacity to influence policy-making in health care cannot be overlooked. According to a study by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, the platform for dialogue between executive bodies, employers and health workers has not been operational for many years. In the meantime, trade unions as a mechanism for advocating for workers' rights do not work properly¹⁵: they often side with employers rather than workers and do not have a significant influence on government decisions. The mission recorded numerous cases of harassment and dismissal of whistleblowers among health workers who reported through media or social media the health sector's insufficient preparedness and response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of safe working conditions. The issue of health care in Donetsk and Luhansk regions has several **concomitant problems**: quality and availability of highways, lack of stable Internet connection, and interruptions in water and electricity supply (some of these issues are discussed in other sections of the paper).

• Recommendations

1) If a community wants to keep a medical institution on its territory, it can apply for a state subvention to finance the costs of maintaining hospitals and obstetric centres. Cooperation with other local territorial communities (TCs) and co-financing of services provided in their health facilities will also help to strengthen the community's response in health care. According to Right to Protection's communication with residents of Svitlodarska TC, some residents of villages that are part of the community find it more convenient to visit the hospital in the neighbouring town of Bakhmut than their own. The main reason for this is logistics: from some villages Bakhmut is closer than

¹⁴ Barska Yu., Zakhozha V., Sakhno Yu., Semihina T., Stepurko T., Kharchenko N. *Health Index. Ukraine – 2019. The results of a nationwide survey*. Kyiv, 2020, UA

¹⁵ Briefing note: Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health care workers in Ukraine. February 2021. UNHR. 2021, EN

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Svitlodarsk¹⁶. During the consultations, residents of Svitlodarsk also noted that their desire to change medical institution remained at the level of intentions, and they did not hold consistent dialogue with the authorities on this issue. Neither did they discuss with public officials specific steps to implement their ideas, such as ensuring constant and high-quality transport links between settlements. The results of a vox-populi held by a humanitarian organisation cannot change the situation alone, and local dwellers should gain the ability to take steps and communicate their opinion to the authorities, supporting their ideas with realistic action plans and proper justification, in particular using local democracy mechanisms (requests, petitions, local initiatives, etc.).

Civil society can be an important **communicator** and coordinator in the process of filling gaps in the medical sphere, and signal the presence of challenges or opportunities to key stakeholders including ministries, region and rayon administrations, communities and NGOs. An eloquent example is the interaction of a humanitarian initiative group from Kramatorsk and a public activist who, based on her experience in the public council at the regional state administration, helped volunteers to communicate with local authorities. A mobile team, which included several cardiologists, intended to help the most vulnerable and those living in remote areas of Donetsk region, but did not have sufficient resources to assess the needs of the targeted population. The activist decided to turn to the authorities for support and negotiated with Yasynuvata Rayon State Administration (RSA). As a result, settlements that most needed the help of such specialists were identified, and the administration provided the doctors with transport to travel to the identified localities¹⁷. In Luhansk region, civil society members initiated development of a mobile application which allows local residents to quickly check availability of medicines in hospitals of the region.

Stakeholders: the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, health care institutions, local self-government bodies, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs.

2) The fact that some solutions to attract new medical staff to the region do not always work or are implemented with limitations **does not mean that certain positive practices**

¹⁶ Volodymyr Orehov, Head of the Right to Protection Office in Slovyansk, consultation with members of Donetsk Task Team, 26.03. 2021

¹⁷ Iryna Stepanova, Chair of the Humanitarian Committee of the Public Council at Donetsk Regional State Administration, consultation with members of Donetsk Task Team, 26.03. 2021

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(offering accommodation and allowances for doctors), as well as the search for other ways to encourage health care professional to stay in the region, should be abandoned. A community that cares about quality of life, for example opening a social hub/creative space, is also more likely to keep residents, including doctors, from leaving. An example of such a cultural and political centre is the Tyu! platform in Mariupol, which regularly organises events on gender issues and contemporary art trends, meetings with opinion leaders, writers, philosophers, etc. from other cities and countries, and residencies for artists from around the world. It is noteworthy that Mariupol as a place of residence attracts Ukrainians from other cities of Ukraine, including Kyiv. The problem with doctors in a large community with a population of almost half a million is not as acute as, for example, in a village on the contact line. However, a community where residents advocate for meaningful transformations in public life is more likely to be attractive to both physicians and other professionals. In April 2021, a social hub was opened in the village of Novhorodske (Toretsk CMA) at the initiative of residents¹⁸. After lifting quarantine restrictions the hub will host events and contribute to the development of cultural and social processes in this small community on the contact line. IZOLYATSIA Foundation, which moved from Kyiv to Soledar in Donetsk region in 2020 with the intention of developing local socio-political life and promoting social change through artistic and research reflections, is also a cultural centre operating in a small TC. The goal of the organization is to conceptualise political events in Ukraine through the lens of social transformations and reforms in the recently united community¹⁹.

Stakeholders: the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, health care institutions, bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs, international donors.

3) The international experience of humanitarian missions shows that in remote areas where doctors do not work permanently, efforts should also be made to provide local residents with **training in first aid**, detecting chronic diseases and responding to emergencies²⁰. To be effective, such response systems must be developed at the initiative of the community and with its active involvement. Of course, this solution

¹⁸ ‘Ukrainian New York innovative public hub opened in Donetsk region.’ UNHCR. 2021, UA

¹⁹ IZOLYATSIA: Soledar. Website of IZOLYATSIA foundation, 2020, EN

²⁰ ‘Out of reach: remote and hardtoaccess populations.’ World Disasters Report 2018, EN

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cannot be seen as an optimal and comprehensive answer to the problem of lack of doctors, but it can address the issue of emergency care and ultimately promote social cohesion. In the long run, it can also contribute to improving the medical literacy of the community and fostering the habit of taking care of one's health.

Stakeholders: health care institutions, bodies of local self-government, CMAs, humanitarian organisations, Ukrainian NGOs, active citizens.

4) **Quality control of medical services** is also the responsibility of citizens. By participating in the work of supervisory bodies or a trustee board, the quality of doctors' work can be influenced in diverse ways²¹. For example, the tasks of a supervisory board include observance of the rights and safety of patients during provision of medical care, as well as monitoring the proper handling of patient complaints. In addition, through advisory bodies, the community can introduce suggestions for improving the institution's performance, develop its own indicators of service quality, agree them with medical institutions and monitor their implementation. Furthermore, **appointments for the position of chief medical officers** in health care institutions should proceed in a competitive, transparent and inclusive way, with due consideration of gender balance. Open job appointments create a competitive environment for hospital managers, allow new and innovative ideas to win, and give communities an opportunity to participate in their implementation. Currently, civil society members have introduced an online pilot platform to accommodate information on staff recruitment in Ukrainian hospitals.

Stakeholders: health care institutions, bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs, international donors.

5) It is also recommended to **promote** the benefits of health care reform, explain its shortcomings and share positive examples of solving problems in the health care sector — how other communities in Donetsk and Luhansk regions manage to attract new doctors, improve living conditions for health workers (and the whole community), and solve problems creatively. Dissemination of such explanations and stories may proceed through local administrations' websites, regional media resources, or printed leaflets which can be distributed at public gathering places (Ukrposhta, Oshadbank, leisure

²¹ Download infographics: all about Supervisory bodies and boards of trustees. Public space. 2020, UA

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centres, etc.). It is also worth conducting creative campaigns that would **motivate residents of the regions to visit a doctor regularly**, seek help on time, and be aware of the need to take care of their health. This culture of self-care can be most effectively promoted among young people, in particular through the work of youth councils and the activities of NGOs in schools and universities in the region.

Stakeholders: the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, health care institutions, bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs, local media.

6) While restoring confidence in labour unions as a mechanism to protect workers' rights could be challenging, health care professionals should look for new ways to advocate for their needs and improve policies. For example, they can create **professional associations** at the regional and national level that are independent of the institution and its management, and which include both health professionals and members of civil society including lawyers, advocacy and communication experts who would, among other things, help protect whistleblowers' rights and promote necessary policy changes.

Stakeholders: health care professionals, Ukrainian NGOs.

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2) Infrastructure challenges

Insufficient transport connections affect the provision of administrative services, access to health care and education, and create barriers to economic development, including in tourism. **Freedom of movement is also closely linked to civic participation and social accountability, which should not be limited to the area of residence and require mobility.**

According to many respondents, local authorities are often reluctant to fund transport to small and remote communities. So, for example, in Luhansk region, humanitarian organisation ADRA Ukraine is filling this gap and organising a free bus to connect several locations that are left without regular transport and provide citizens with access to social and administrative services outside their place of residence.

Participants of consultations reported that many roads in the region are in **critical condition**. Local communities do not have enough resources to finance their repair or restoration. Plans to restore railway connections and link remote settlements with other communities and neighbouring areas have not yet been realised, and locals generally do not believe this will ever happen²². The unsatisfactory condition of the roads affects prospects for communities' economic development, as even suppliers of goods may refuse to cooperate with some remote localities due to unwillingness to risk their transport. A representative of the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine (MinTOT) noted that road quality issues are on the ministry's agenda, in particular, there are plans to modernise 183 km in Luhansk region at the expense of the European Investment Bank²³.

In documents that will form the basis of the Strategy for Economic Development of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions, **policies regarding CMAs (including infrastructure) are not treated separately**. The territory of the region is considered according to degree of urbanisation, while distance to the contact line is not considered by analysts. Due to the closure of most enterprises and the introduction of loose taxation in communities along

²² Consultation with members of Luhansk Task Team, 24.03.2021

²³ [Marta Bukhtiyarova, Director General of the Directorate for Strategic Planning and European Integration, Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, consultation with members of Luhansk Task Team, 24.03.2021](#)

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the contact line, CMAs have significant budget deficits and fewer opportunities to reduce them than other locations in Donetsk and Luhansk regions²⁴. Therefore, CMA communities deserve special attention in the formulation of regional development policies, especially when it comes to areas that such communities will not be able to finance at their own expense.

• Recommendations

1) The organisation of transport connections in the community is the responsibility of local authorities. Although international and national humanitarian actors sometimes address these challenges directly or indirectly, they will neither operate in eastern Ukraine forever, nor can they perform the mandate of the authorities — especially when the problem requires a systematic approach and long-term planning and solutions by local officials and citizens.

Respondents reported several cases when active citizens successfully advocated for local transport solutions, so communities should scale up such cases and make efforts to ensure that authorities consider their voices on one hand, while on the other hand, authorities should ensure this process is enabled and communities are informed of tools and mechanisms to improve such services. One way is the **use of participatory democracy mechanisms** (such as petitions, citizens' requests and local initiatives), through which local residents may communicate to public officials the need to introduce new routes. The HDP Nexus approach is logical here. Since humanitarian organisations are also interested in improving the infrastructure for their activities, they are often willing to provide legal assistance to civil society and explain how to make inquiries, appeals to the authorities, and so on. Ultimately, such cooperation between humanitarian actors and civil society enhances citizen participation in local policy-making and helps find a longer-term solution to the problem.

Stakeholders: bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs, international and Ukrainian humanitarian organisations.

²⁴ Reutsky, K., Shukan, J. 'The temptation of authoritarian rule: civil and military administrations in the zone of military conflict in the government controlled territories in the east of Ukraine.' DRA, Vostok-SOS, 2019, pp. 10-12, RU

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2) The concepts of the Strategy for Economic Development of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions outline pathways to restore the region's highways and build and modernise key branches of the railway, partly at the expense of the state budget, partly with loans from international financial institutions. Participants of the consultations believe the strategy will not cover all communities; in particular, it is necessary to provide **subventions from the state budget to local budgets of communities on the contact line and approve a state program of restoration of infrastructure which was destroyed as a result of military action**. Meanwhile, the process of modernising critical infrastructure may take a long time, but some actions fall within the competence of local authorities. Local activists can advocate for solutions that will not be financially burdensome but will help (as far as possible) improve the quality of travel and ultimately increase residents' trust in the authorities. Such solutions include, for example, repairing the most problematic sections of roads which, among other things, will contribute to a better and more rapid response to humanitarian needs.

Stakeholders: the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, the Ministry of Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine, the Ministry of Infrastructure of Ukraine, the Ministry of Finance of Ukraine, bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs.

3) **Development of communities along the contact line**, including infrastructure, should be outlined in a **separate section** of the Strategy of Economic Development of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions (and **any strategic documents on the development of these regions**), and should propose solutions based on the special format of governance in CMAs: "Such localities should be considered by the strategy as separate territories with the most inclusive approach, taking into account a significant difference in the conditions of development in comparison with peaceful communities of the region"²⁵.

Stakeholders: the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, the Ministry of Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine, the Ministry of Infrastructure of Ukraine, analysts involved in the development strategies of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

²⁵ Andriy Hrudkin, Member of the Board of the NGO Strong Communities, Project Manager of On the Collision Line, commentary on the previous version of the prioritisation framework

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3) Limited access to Internet and mobile phone services

Digitalisation is a prerequisite for civic activism: "Civic participation is impossible without the Internet and highways"²⁶. Moreover, some tools of participatory democracy like e-petitions are only available on the Internet. **The Internet expands opportunities for activism but also enhances access to distance education**, which is a valuable resource in the context of the HDP Nexus: the Internet can help connect schoolchildren and students living on both sides of the contact line. Following the statement that "Schools and universities are a platform for dialogue for both parties"²⁷, the **NGO Open Policy Foundation** successfully advocates at national and regional levels for facilitating access to education for young people affected by the conflict. In collaboration with international humanitarian organisations, the foundation is also working to ensure that children and young people from remote and rural areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions can study online. The key issue in providing this access remains the possibility to use high-speed Internet connection. A participant of the consultation stated that poor Internet connection left many schoolchildren without access to educational programs during the Covid-19 quarantine.

According to several respondents, low levels of Internet and mobile coverage are a more pressing issue for rural areas, especially in Luhansk region, whose government-controlled territory is less urbanised than in Donetsk region. In the context of large-scale digitalisation of provision of **administrative services** in Ukraine, there is a risk that residents of rural and remote areas, where coverage by fibre-optic networks is inadequate, will be restricted in access to such services. The need **to improve the digital skills of the population** deserves special attention, both for the opportunity to use online services and to increase media literacy.

In communities along the contact line and in rural areas, public activity and quality of life, in general, are also affected by limited access to mobile **communications**, while the importance of mobile connection has significantly increased during the pandemic of Covid-19. In response to a humanitarian organisation's request to the office of one of the mobile operators, no concrete proposals were received from the company to

²⁶ Interview with an expert, 15.01.2021

²⁷ Civil society consultation, 29.01.2021

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improve the quality of communication²⁸.

• Recommendations

1) Although expanding Internet coverage can be a difficult task, especially in areas along the contact line (risk of infrastructure damage) and in rural areas (funding issues), this topic should be considered as **one of the priorities** for the well-being of residents of Donetsk and Luhansk regions and specifically highlighted in the strategy of **economic development**²⁹. Quality Internet will not only improve access to education and strengthen the prospects of peacebuilding but can also reduce unemployment and promote economic growth in communities. Kyiv could use its digital expertise to advise on such improvements and identify innovative solutions.

Stakeholders: the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine; bodies of local self-government, CMAs.

2) In terms of civic participation, there is an opportunity to use existing infrastructures, such as **libraries or youth centres or leisure/social cohesion centres, and turn them into spaces for digital activism**³⁰. However, according to some participants of the consultations, libraries, even if modernised at the expense of international organisations, can be perceived by children and young people as an extension of school/official space. An example is the renovated library of Soledar community, which young people do not see as an organic place to spend their free time and are reluctant to visit³¹. Instead, there are examples from other communities where the local budget supports **modern hubs, the use of which is free for members of civil society**. Such spaces are more likely to become a popular place for leisure and training that could interest community residents to participate more actively in public life: "**Alternative**

²⁸ Volodymyr Orehov, Head of the Right to Protection Office in Slovyansk, consultation with members of Donetsk Task Team, 26.03.2021

²⁹ The Vilnius Task Force provided this recommendation to a working group drafting the Analysis of Economic Development of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions, a document that will form the basis of the Strategy of Economic Development of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions

³⁰ Interview with an expert, 8.1.2021

³¹ Oksana Sarzhevskaya-Kravchenko, Director, ICF IZOLYATSIA, consultation with members of the Donetsk Task Team, 26.03.2021

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spaces should be established primarily in rural areas so that young people do not leave their communities in search of a better life elsewhere"^(ibid).

Stakeholders: bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs, international donors.

3) To improve digital skills, **training** should be provided for the local population, for example, based on libraries and centres of social cohesion or, if available, newly created hubs for activists. If due to financial reasons or quarantine it is not possible to carry out such activities, in recent years in Ukraine many resources have emerged that work to strengthen digital and media literacy³². Many of them use infographics that can be printed and disseminated in public spaces to attract attention. The state portal Diya also offers educational courses and series' for users with different levels of expertise in working with digital platforms.

Stakeholders: bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian and international NGOs.

4) Negotiations with mobile operators should continue, with the involvement of the state in this process and assessment of the risks of damage to equipment due to hostilities or criminal activity. Mobile operators should also prioritise this issue as part of their corporate social responsibility, which can also be reflected in revenue. **The system of insurance** of military-political risks to improve the business climate in the region, proposed by the concept of the Strategy of Economic Development of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions, can be extended to digital infrastructure facilities.

Stakeholders: the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, bodies of local self-government, CMAs.

³² 'Information hygiene or how to recognise false news on the Internet?' NGO Society and Law. 2021, UA

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4) Political communication and citizens' involvement in local policy-making

Several experts reported that local authorities sometimes show **a low level of interest in communicating with community members and involving them in decision-making**: "Local authorities can start deforestation to erect a building without even notifying community members of such plans; without prior consultation with citizens"³³. A representative of the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine agreed that communication between local authorities and communities is at times ineffective and dialogue may be lacking. According to several participants of the consultations, another problem is **the lack of institutional practices**, in particular (but not exclusively) in CMAs, where the management style may depend on the personality of the head of administration and his attitude to citizen participation: "If a leader [in a CMA] is democratic, e-petitions, a participatory budget, etc. will be in place in the community; but this does not happen often"³⁴. The implementation of many participatory instruments is generally regulated at local level and depends on the decisions of local self-government. According to a 2018 survey, only 11 of 20 communities in Donetsk and Luhansk regions had statutes adopted and registered in accordance with the law³⁵.

Both government officials and activists can experience limitations in communicating with each other, which negatively affects cooperation, as "public officials sometimes treat active citizens as enemies, but activists can also be hostile to local authority representatives"³⁶. At the same time, involving citizens in solving important social issues should be seen as a resource for building trusting relations between officials and citizens. In particular, the head of the Novopokrovskaya TC believes that promotion of local democracy in his community helps strengthen the confidence of local people in public officials³⁷. Positive examples of open and partnership-based communication

³³ Olena Agafonova, NGO Charitable Foundation for the Implementation of Ideas, civil society consultation, 29.01.2021

³⁴ Andriy Hrudkin, Coalition of Frontline Communities On the Collision Line, civil society consultation, 29.01.2021

³⁵ 'Instruments of local democracy in communities of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.' Tochka dostupu, p. 33, 2018, UA

³⁶ Civil society consultation, 29.01.2021

³⁷ Consultation with members of Luhansk Task Team, 24.03.2021

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between TC management and citizens may reduce tensions and gain the support of the community to continue implementation of reforms. According to the head of Novopokrovskaya TC, his community pays special attention to educating new generations of conscious and responsible citizens and involving young people in social processes.

Interviewees reported that even before the reorganisation of communities in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, **the division of responsibility** in the structure of local self-government as well as between authorities at different levels was neither necessarily logical and clear, nor always properly communicated. "The average citizen does not always understand who is currently responsible for what. Responsibility between different departments of local self-government is blurred"³⁸. During establishment of CMAs, according to interlocutors, the situation worsened, and locals perceived it as a vacuum of power. On the other hand, several interviewees argued that citizens often face indifference in their communication with authorities, when officials cannot help with the problem (because it is not their responsibility and they were approached by mistake) and are reluctant to give advice or redirect the person to the required department or specialist³⁹. The office of Right to Protection CF is often consulted for legal advice in such cases.

According to a study on water quality in Donetsk region conducted by People in Need in 2020 and 2021⁴⁰, residents of the region **do not have a clear understanding of who is responsible for organising water supply**, including the division of powers between the state administration and a private water company. This creates a number of difficulties for those receiving this service, as well as for humanitarian organisations that are providing water for the seventh year in a row to some communities without access to water supply systems. The study also indicates low awareness of the population of Donetsk region about the quality and measures for monitoring water indicators. In general, the issue of access to water is not on the agenda of local authorities and is resurfacing mostly against a background of disruptions to its supply.

³⁸ Interview with an expert, 15.01.2021

³⁹ Volodymyr Orehov, Head of the Right to Protection Office in Slovyansk, consultation with members of Donetsk Task Team, 26.03.2021

⁴⁰ Study on the Quality of Water - 2 in the Government Controlled Area of the Donetsk oblast. People in Need Ukraine. 2020, EN

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At the national level, according to several interviewees there is no **coherent and clear communication strategy for Donetsk and Luhansk regions and no open communication with residents of the region**. This includes the criteria for selecting communities where CMAs were established, the specifics of territorial reorganisation in the context of decentralisation, zoning during quarantine, the vaccination process, and so on. According to interlocutors, Kyiv politicians (even if they represent a single political force) may make contradictory statements that lack comprehensive explanations and sometimes logic — not to mention that these statements or strategic decisions are often approved without discussion with residents of the region. Insufficient coordination of information messages can negatively affect implementation of the HDP Nexus, as due to disorganised communication some stakeholders in the process may form different ideas about the development priorities of the region.

Many consulted experts mentioned that a **Memorandum of Understanding** with authorities at different levels (from head of the territorial community to ministries) is, in the majority of cases, an effective safeguard **to increase the chances** that agreements reached under previous administrations will stay in place.

• Recommendations

When asked the open question "How can different challenges in communication and collaboration with authorities be overcome?", participants of the VTF survey mostly used the words "dialogue", "communication" and "advocacy".

1) **Measures to build communication capacity** of public officials can be helpful to promote more open interaction between those in power and community members. Such training should not only engage administration heads but also reach new audiences, including representatives of communal enterprises and executive bodies of local self-government (especially those responsible for communications with citizens).

Stakeholders: bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs, international donors.

2) Events that bring together **both civil society and public officials and stimulate a regular dialogue** between these parties on specific policies can also contribute to more

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sustainable and constructive communication between NGOs and local administrations. In addition to activities that are mandatory for the authorities and should involve citizens, such as mayor's reports to the community, it is necessary to systematically organise town hall meetings, round tables and forums, as well as informal or semi-formal events like business breakfasts, joint visits to cultural events, and meetings of public officials with local residents outside the administration.

Stakeholders: bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs, international donors.

3) An interesting format, especially in a conflict situation, could be the involvement of independent **dialogue facilitators** in communication, who would help the parties to hear different positions and find a compromise solution⁴¹. In Ukraine, there are already some successful cases of such mediation, for example, dialogues on language in education with the participation of representatives of national minorities, local self-government bodies and civil society in Uzhhorod, Lviv, Odesa and Chernivtsi⁴². According to interviewees, it is better to promote this format with the support of international organisations, whose impartial opinion the local authorities will listen to more willingly than to proposals made by community members^(ibid).

Stakeholders: bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs, international organisations.

4) Regular **field meetings** of representatives of local self-government bodies and CMAs with local residents will also contribute to the establishment of dialogue⁴³. Additionally, visits by representatives of regional state administrations to remote and small communities should be organised, especially to localities along the contact line. Participation in such visits by representatives of the central government including ministries, parliamentary committees, etc. is also welcome in the eyes of local communities. Such field meetings are already taking place, and active citizens of Donetsk

⁴¹ Oksana Stupak, Deputy Chairwoman, NGO Youth of the East, discussion on 19.03.2021

⁴² ['Dialogue in local communities: Recommendations for local governments.'](#) Institute of Peace and Understanding, Kyiv 2018, UA

⁴³ Andriy Hrudkin, Coalition of Communities On the Collision Line, consultation with members of Donetsk Task Team, 26.03.2021

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and Luhansk regions appreciate the opportunity to communicate directly with representatives of both local and central authorities. According to a representative of Markivka community, field communication with citizens gives the head of the community more information about the needs of the population, allows a dialogue to be built with residents and motivates those in power to work more effectively⁴⁴. Public officials also become closer to the community if they can bring the provision of administrative services as close as possible to the recipients, for example, through organising mobile centres of administrative services in remote parts of the community. Interviewees also mentioned the Internet as an effective means of communication between authorities and local citizens, noting that not all communities have the means to maintain a website and that in the absence of such a resource, communication through social media and messengers works well⁴⁵.

Stakeholders: the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, Regional State Administrations, bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs.

5) A positive example of **cooperation between local self-government and the non-governmental sector** is a study commissioned by Starobilsk RSA from an NGO to explore opportunities to strengthen dialogue with citizens and develop a new communication strategy⁴⁶. Most of the study's recommendations were taken into account by the administration, which began to use more infographics and videos in its messages, hold question-and-answer sessions, and introduced social media pages. Therefore, local authorities should be encouraged to cooperate more actively and communicate with the public sector in order to better understand the needs of the population and seek creative ways of interacting with citizens.

Stakeholders: bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs.

6) Local self-government bodies are encouraged to more consistently **explain to citizens**

⁴⁴ Consultation with members of Luhansk Task Team, 24.03.2021

⁴⁵ Volodymyr Orehov, Head of the Right to Protection Office in Slovyansk, consultation with members of Donetsk Task Team, 26.03.2021

⁴⁶ Oksana Ochkurova, Chair, NGO Active Community Center for Joint Development, consultation with members of Luhansk Task Team, 24.03.2021

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the division of responsibilities between their departments, executive committees, communal enterprises, etc., as well as regularly inform their communities about any changes in their work, using various communication channels: Internet (website, local media), printed materials (particularly for rural areas) and, if possible, organise a hotline. This will help make citizens more aware of what is happening in their community. Regular communication between local administrations and citizens is especially important for communities in transition: what to do if a CMA is established; to whom to address inquiries in newly united territorial communities, etc. It is also important to have leaflets or guidance materials for citizens explaining what a CMA and territorial community are, how they operate, and how they can help⁴⁷.

Stakeholders: regional state administrations; bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs.

7) To enhance communication policy at the national level, it is recommended to **coordinate messaging on events in Donetsk and Luhansk regions** between the key stakeholders including the Office of the President of Ukraine, the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, the Ministry of Community Development and Territories of Ukraine, regional, rayon and local administrations, and CMAs⁴⁸. Since it was reported that the key shortcoming of the government's communication on issues related to Donetsk and Luhansk regions is the inconsistency of messages from different stakeholders, it would be worth creating a single communication centre, or at least an official position that would enable information to be collected from key stakeholders and communicated regularly and consistently to all local residents by all possible means, ranging from print newspapers in rural areas to the dissemination of information through local media and citizen journalists throughout the region. A well thought-out and strategic information policy will encourage local residents to become more loyal to the government and help build a more effective dialogue between the communities of

⁴⁷ Oleksiy Khmara, Project Manager, ACTED, commentary on the previous version of the prioritisation framework

⁴⁸ The Vilnius Task Force provided a relevant recommendation to the working group drafting the report on assessed policy options, modelling results and recommended policy options for the Economic Transformation Strategy of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions

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Donetsk and Luhansk regions and national politicians. A coherent communication policy will also create better conditions for implementation of the HDP Nexus in the region, particularly in terms of early planning and coordination.

- 8) Since local administrations **may themselves suffer from a lack of information** about transformations taking place in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, regular internal communication about these changes between stakeholders (the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, regional administrations, local self-government bodies, and CMAs) could be helpful to make sure that local administrations are aware of ongoing transformations.
- 9) Access to water is an internationally recognised human right⁴⁹. **Community awareness of access to and quality of water should be part of the communication policies** that regional state administrations, bodies of local self-government and CMAs implement in the communities of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Regional state administrations are encouraged to conduct regular briefings and present reports on water quality and supply, as well as hold public discussions with local residents and the expert community on these issues. Regional administrations should also strengthen mechanisms for systematic water monitoring and regularly inform citizens about monitoring results, as well as measures to improve water quality. Besides, regional state administrations should clearly define the responsibilities of all key actors involved in water supply, quality monitoring and response to emergencies, and propose an effective mechanism for filing and handling water quality complaints. NGOs and activists should bring water access and quality issues to the agenda in their communities, including through participatory democracy tools. In addition to the communication aspect, water supply in Donetsk and Luhansk regions offers potential for implementation of the HDP Nexus, as this sector already involves state administrations and private suppliers, humanitarian organisations and non-governmental actors. The key point is the need to propose solutions that will not only respond to immediate needs in cases of water outages or deterioration of water quality but also identify pathways to develop this area, including long-term solutions to improve drinking water quality and ensure its stable supply. Equally important is the redistribution and coordination of mandates between

⁴⁹ Human rights treaties with explicit reference to safe drinking water and sanitation. UNHR, EN

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stakeholders, which should result in increased responsibility of state administrations for water supply in their communities.

Stakeholders: Regional state administrations, bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs.

10) Since the non-binding nature of many participatory mechanisms contributes to authorities' reluctance to involve the local community in decision-making, amendments to the Law "On Local Self-governance in Ukraine"⁵⁰ and the Law "On Civil and Military Administrations" are needed to **make basic instruments obligatory for introduction at the local level**. This move may empower citizens to participate in decision-making independent of the political will of the administration. Moreover, this legislative change will be useful **to address the issue of an over-personalised approach to governance exercised by some heads of local administrations**. According to some participants of the discussions, it is necessary not only to oblige the authorities to implement tools of local democracy at the local level but also to provide liability for non-compliance with this norm⁵¹.

Stakeholders: the Parliamentary Committee on Organisation of State Power, Self-governance, Regional Development and Urban Planning, the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, the Ministry of Social policy of Ukraine.

11) **Memoranda of Understanding** should be promoted in civil society as a tool that can contribute to sustainable communication and cooperation with authorities at various levels. Representatives of Luhansk Regional State Administration noted that they had signed such memoranda with several communities in the region. According to some representatives of civil society, it should be borne in mind that memoranda can be purely declarative, so safeguards should also be provided in case the parties to the agreement violate its terms.

Stakeholders: NGOs, bodies of local self-government, CMAs, ministries of Ukraine.

⁵⁰ The new version of the Law "On Local Self-Government in Ukraine" has already passed three stages of discussion and should be considered by the Verkhovna Rada

⁵¹ Olena Nizhelska, Head of the Seversky Donets Crisis Media Center, consultation with members of Luhansk Task Team, 24.03.2021

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5) Expertise of civil society members

The majority of civil society representatives included in this study recognised that both parties can do better in their communication and collaboration with authorities. Active citizens, whether organised in NGOs or acting individually, often **lack understanding of how city/village councils, their executive committees and other bodies of local self-government, as well as CMAs, operate.** For this reason, citizens' requests are sometimes addressed to the wrong people or bodies, which may lead to a negative perception of citizens by authorities.

Furthermore, since many NGOs in Donetsk and Luhansk regions were established in the emergency period of 2014 and were focused on addressing immediate (often humanitarian) needs during the first years of conflict, some of them have not been sufficiently experienced in their choice of local democracy instruments. This implies not only selection of a relevant mechanism but also sometimes the use of specific/legal language to draft a request properly and the ability to attract community support for this request and communicate its objectives efficiently. Insufficient expertise in the use of participatory instruments and sometimes even misuse of them (e-petitions, requests which literally bombard officials for any reason) may also lead to activists being perceived negatively by public officials. Although NGOs in Donetsk and Luhansk regions regularly conduct capacity-building training to address these challenges, there is still work to do in this direction.

• Recommendations

1) **Training on relevant topics** can be organised to raise awareness among civil society members about the functioning of local self-government and CMAs and the division of responsibilities between their departments, as well as the proper use of participatory tools. During such events, NGOs can get better acquainted with the work of local authorities, as well as with the way local self-government is organised and how participatory democracy works in other countries.

Stakeholders: bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs and experts specialising in local self-government, as well as international organisations that can

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present best practices of local self-government from their countries.

2) A key consideration is **attracting a new audience**, as capacity-building events are often attended by the same participants. A welcome approach would be to explore new places such as enterprises, factories, educational institutions (schools, colleges, universities) and more actively work in social media networks (development/promotion of a training course on local self-government/CMAs). Also, administrations themselves can move from "protection" mode to an "openness" strategy. For example, events in the format of "**One day in a CMA**" can be held: a group of visitors visit the administration's departments and observe the work of CMA staff members who can involve a visitor in their work, ask for advice, discuss some issues, and so on. A similar format may apply for communal enterprises⁵².

Stakeholders: bodies of local self-government, CMAs, educational institutions, enterprises, Ukrainian NGOs.

3) Reaching a new audience is also possible through authorities introducing **online representation on social media**, not limited to Facebook. For example, Instagram, Twitter or TikTok can also serve as platforms for familiarising citizens with the work of local public officials. Youth councils or active young citizens can help communities create content and co-manage these accounts. It is important that social media networks not only unilaterally provide information about authorities' activities, but also become a space for interactive communication with citizens, for example, when the mayor interestingly and creatively describes their workday, informs the public about key changes in community life, invites people to public events, answers questions and conducts surveys and challenges.

Stakeholders: bodies of local self-government, CMAs, youth councils, Ukrainian NGOs.

4) **Internships for civil society members**, including young people in local self-government bodies and CMAs, will help people better understand how local self-government and CMAs operate, and educate a new generation of active citizens.

⁵² Andriy Hrudkin, Member of the Board of the NGO Strong Communities, Project Manager for On the Collision Line, commentary on the previous version of the prioritisation framework

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Internships can be part of a course developed by civil society resource centres along with local public officials to involve citizens in standing committee meetings, city/village council sessions, regulatory work and community response. The course may also include competition for and implementation of projects aimed at solving community needs. Internship programs will allow participants to gain experience in local self-government and may motivate them to move to the executive branch or participate in local elections.

Stakeholders: bodies of local self-government, CMAs, youth councils, Ukrainian NGOs.

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6) Active participation of citizens in local decision-making

A remark heard from different interviewees: local populations often demonstrate a **low level of civic participation**, lack of interest in decision-making, and passivity when it comes to communication with authorities⁵³. According to a representative of Bakhmut territorial community, even though the community has allocated money for the participatory budget, holds competitions for social projects regularly and put in place the petitions mechanism, only a small number of residents are willing to participate in local policy-making: out of 58 NGOs registered in Bakhmut, only a few are active participants in public processes⁵⁴.

The low activity of citizens can be partly explained by the absence of success stories about local interaction with local authorities. The media usually refer to only a few positive examples of communication with officials or cases of effective advocacy on issues significant for communities. There are few **bloggers or opinion influencers** based in communities of Donetsk and Luhansk regions who could promote and explain the use of local democracy instruments and share their experience of communicating with authorities. According to an expert, in recent years international donors have considerably **decreased financial support for regional journalism**⁵⁵. This has changed the regional media market, with many journalists leaving for other sectors like commercial reporting or moving to large cities for alternative employment opportunities.

• Recommendations

1) **Success stories** (with examples from other communities and regions) about problem-solving through participatory mechanisms, constructive communication with public officials and the benefits of self-organisation of citizens should be promoted through independent local media and bloggers, with due consideration of Internet access restrictions in rural areas. This can increase citizens' trust in local authorities and

⁵³ Yana Litvinova, Head of the City Council, Starobilsk City Council, discussion on 17.03.2021 in Severodonetsk

⁵⁴ Consultation with members of Donetsk Task Team, 26.03.2021

⁵⁵ Agenda of Civil Society in Ukraine. Discussion organised by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 21.04.2021

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motivate them to participate more actively in addressing the community's challenges⁵⁶. Success stories are important for two more reasons: community residents on the contact line are constantly in a stressful situation and need encouraging messages; and examples of positive developments will help create alternative narratives to media products and news from non government-controlled areas that are often consumed in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, particularly in communities on the contact line⁵⁷. Regarding the format of communication, participants of the consultations advised **considering podcasts**⁵⁸, which are becoming increasingly popular and do not require a permanent Internet connection to produce. Podcasts can also be downloaded from any location where there is Internet and listened to later.

Stakeholders: local media and bloggers, as well as NGOs supporting regional media and conducting capacity-building sessions for citizen journalists.

2) Now that decentralised budgets keep more tax revenues at local level, watchdog activities and **media attention to the work of authorities is crucial** for at least two reasons. Firstly, by covering positive achievements resulting from the increased financial capacity of communities, journalists help build trust in local authorities and motivate citizens to become part of these processes and try their hand at policy-making. Secondly, media scrutiny keeps public officials energised and contributes to their transparency and responsiveness to citizens' needs. For these reasons, it is important for institutional donors and international NGOs to consider support for regional storytellers including reporters, citizen journalists and influencers as an add-on to project activities.

Stakeholders: local journalists, international organisations, international donors.

3) According to an expert, among the reasons why there are few bloggers in Donetsk and Luhansk regions is not only lack of funding or expertise, but also **risks associated**

⁵⁶ The Vilnius Task Force provided a relevant recommendation to the working group drafting the report on assessed policy options, modelling results and recommended policy options for the Economic Transformation Strategy of Donetsk and Luhansk regions (media as a platform for promoting the idea of entrepreneurship)

⁵⁷ Tetyana Krasko, Secretary of the Village Council, member of the coalition On the Collision Line, consultation with members of Donetsk Task Team, 26.03.2021

⁵⁸ Oksana Sarzhevska-Kravchenko, Director, ICF IZOLYATSIA, consultation with members of the Donetsk Task Team, 26.03.2021

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with covering conflict issues and, to some extent, the reluctance of local residents to stand out⁵⁹. Networking with citizen journalists from other conflict-affected areas can be useful, as it will help create a space for open and free communication and exchange of experiences. For example, reporters from other countries can share with Ukrainian bloggers their ways of working with the community and reporting on sensitive issues, mechanisms for developing their own media, and physical and digital security strategies. This communication may motivate Ukrainian journalists and bloggers to cover community life more actively on their platforms. The standard way to establish such networking is to hold media forums, preferably offline and in a locality in Donetsk or Luhansk regions. The event can also be conducted as a challenge, where journalists and media experts from Ukraine and other countries are given tasks and have a limited time to create, for example, a long read about the local community.

Stakeholders: local journalists, international organisations, international donors.

4) Diverse **training programs** to build the capacity of NGO members, which have gained significant momentum since 2014, should continue. Such events may include motivational training, sharing success stories and practices to prevent burnout, and educating new generations of conscious citizens. Local NGOs, which act as resource centres for capacity-building events and aim to activate communities, can serve as platforms for such training⁶⁰.

Stakeholders: Ukrainian and international NGOs.

5) Among the reasons for the low level of community involvement in discussion of socially important issues interlocutors pointed **to the passive position of the authorities**, that are not always ready to duly explain their actions⁶¹. For example, documents such as strategies of community social and economic development are published on community websites, but there may be few or no people willing to comment on them due to lack of specific knowledge, and complex vocabulary used by the text authors. To encourage community members to participate in discussion, the

⁵⁹ Interview with an expert, 8.1.2021

⁶⁰ For example, Charitable Foundation for the Implementation of Ideas (Luhansk region)

⁶¹ Andriy Hrudkin, Member of the Board of the NGO Strong Communities, Project Manager of On the Collision Line, consultation with members of Donetsk Task Team, 26.03.2021

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authorities should present the proposed strategies using clear language and examples, answer citizens' questions and disseminate presentations with explanations to as many media outlets as possible. At the same time, the absence of such actions by the authorities does not reduce the responsibility of citizens who can independently study the principles of formation of strategies and other key documents, in particular by attending training on relevant topics.

Stakeholders: bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs.

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7) "Two different civil societies"⁶²

When asked "What are your preferred forms of cooperation with civil society?", representatives of both Donetsk and Luhansk Regional State Administrations answered that they preferred communication with public councils. It was noted that these advisory bodies are not ideal, but can keep public officials energised. According to an interlocutor, the disadvantages of councils include the fact that after election they often lose contact with the community and offer solutions that are far from the real life of citizens.

Meanwhile many experts, as well as some participants of the consultations, expressed **concerns about the genuine nature of some NGOs**, especially those who represent civil society in sectoral councils (youth and public councils) under state administrations. Several interviewees argued that such councils sometimes consist of activists and organisations loyal to the authorities, with a goal of legitimising administrations' narratives which in turn can counter the civil society agenda. Another problem is that "the public council can be very opposed to the authorities and oriented **not on dialogue but on confrontation**"⁶³ (for recommendations, see "**Political communication and citizens' involvement in local policy-making**"). According to a representative of the Public Council in Donetsk Regional State Administration, not all council members attend meetings and actively participate in discussions; sometimes it is difficult to even form a quorum for approval of the body's decisions⁶⁴ (see "**Active participation of citizens in local decision-making**").

• Recommendations

1) To reduce the risk of public councils being filled by government-loyal activists, the process of forming these advisory bodies should be made more open and the maximum number of local media resources and social media networks should inform in detail about the selection stages. An online discussion of nominations can proceed on

⁶² Civil society consultation, 29.01.2021

⁶³ Interview with an expert, 18.12.2020

⁶⁴ Iryna Stepanova, Chair of the Humanitarian Committee of the Public Council at Donetsk Regional State Administration

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the administration's website. The council holding the competition may include not only representatives of the administration and local NGOs but also Ukrainian and international experts on local self-government. It is also important to take into account the principles of inclusiveness and gender balance when forming councils.

Stakeholders: regional state administrations, bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian and international NGOs.

2) In order to **maintain contact with the community** on whose behalf the council acts, regular field meetings should be held in different localities. Representatives of administrations (including the Department of Information and Public Relations) may also be involved in such meetings and organise events together with members of public councils on issues of concern to residents, conduct surveys on desired forms of public participation in the decision-making process in the community, etc.

Stakeholders: regional state administrations, bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs.

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8) Civil and military administrations: a special format of government

Heads of local CMAs are not elected by citizens; instead, they are appointed by the leaders of regional CMAs. That is why, according to a report⁶⁵, **CMA leaders can be quite authoritative in their work** and closed for local public monitoring of their activities. Several interviewees stated that governance in CMAs is as a rule built around personalities, which makes the administration's communication and cooperation with citizens dependent on the political will of a specific leader. According to a participant of the VTF consultations, the CMA of the city of Severodonetsk has only three ways open to the public to participate in decision-making: personal reception (this mechanism works with certain restrictions), peaceful protest and lawsuits⁶⁶.

Generally, in the majority of CMAs there are **no statutes** of territorial communities, no regulations on mechanisms of local democracy and usually no information on websites concerning available opportunities to participate in policy-making⁶⁷. Some CMAs **do not have websites** at all, and it is not possible to find e-mails on the Internet to which citizens can send their requests.

Meanwhile, the deputy head of the CMA in Avdiivka said during a consultation that **the administration considers all citizens' requests, but supports only constructive proposals** which have sufficient justification and proper support from the community⁶⁸. For example, when it comes to erecting a monument, the authorities need to consider how many people will see it, whether other residents of the area consider it necessary, analyse detailed explanations about the importance of this monument, and so on. It is noteworthy that this opinion was supported by a civil society representative, who noted that in the case of the monument, the community should indeed come up with comprehensive proposals (for example, in the form of a petition) and demonstrate that

⁶⁵ Reutsky, K., Shukan, J. 'The temptation of authoritarian rule: civil and military administrations in the zone of military conflict in the government controlled territories in the east of Ukraine.' DRA, Vostok-SOS, 2019, RU

⁶⁶ Olena Nizhelska, Head of the Seversky Donets Crisis Media Center, consultation with members of Luhansk Task Team, 24.03.2021

⁶⁷ 'Analysis of mechanisms of participation of members of territorial communities in local self-government.' Tochka Dostupu, 2019, UA

⁶⁸ Consultation with members of Donetsk Task Team, 26.03.2021

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this idea is based on public support⁶⁹. Agreeing that most CMAs do not have public councils, a representative of Avdiivka CMA said that his administration plans to develop a civil society platform in the city. During discussions, the example of the CMA of Shchastya was mentioned, where a public council has been established and is actively working.

According to participants of the discussion on the law on CMAs⁷⁰, **the managerial competencies** of heads of administrations are also important. CMA leaders are military personnel, often with limited experience in administration. Lack of training in management for CMA staff may also explain occasional difficulties in communication between the administration leadership and citizens^(ibid). During the consultation, the representative of Avdiivka CMA noted that candidates for the position of head of administration undergo numerous checks and audits, so their managerial skills should not be questioned by the citizenry. Also, the administrations employ former representatives of local self-government bodies, who have all the necessary competencies to work in their positions in CMAs⁷¹.

Despite the temporary nature of the situation (which, however, in some cases lasted several months), the issue of **a transition period** in creation of new CMAs cannot be overlooked: citizens reported disruptions in provision of social and medical services, regular power outages and budgetary problems⁷² — a setting in which civic activism can hardly develop.

Creation of CMAs led to the dissolution of village and settlement councils that had existed for decades as representative bodies of the respective communities. Unlike the communities formed as a result of decentralisation reform in which elections took place, the residents of villages and settlements in CMAs **will not have their own representation**, i.e., deputies to protect the interests of their village/settlement. Nor will they have a “starosta” — a village or settlement representative to communicate

⁶⁹ Andriy Hrudkin, Member of the Board of the NGO Strong Communities, Project Manager of On the Collision Line, consultation with members of Donetsk Task Team, 26.03.2021

⁷⁰ Discussion on the Law on CMAs, organised by Vostok-SOS on 13.01.2021

⁷¹ Consultation with members of Donetsk Task Team, 26.03.2021

⁷² ‘Regarding the risk of suspension of medical and social services in Stanychno-Luhanska, Shirokivska and Nyzhnoteplivska united territorial communities, as well as in other OTGs near the contact line.’ Joint statement of non-governmental organisations providing humanitarian assistance in eastern Ukraine, 2021; [Humanitarian snapshot January 2021](#), OCHA, EN

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local needs to the administrative centre of the community⁷³. Rural residents are accustomed to going to village council heads to solve their problems; now the councils are replaced by CMAs, some of them created in the neighbouring village. According to many respondents, this complicates interaction with the authorities, especially given the problems with infrastructure and Internet coverage in rural areas.

Several participants of the consultations argued that basic needs, such as security and food, are priorities for communities residing along the contact line, and except for a few activists and NGOs people are usually unaware of local democracy: "**CMA is not about development. It is about meeting basic needs**"⁷⁴. A significant contribution to the promotion of access to local democracy for CMA communities has been made by the coalition of contact line communities On the Collision Line, which also offers long-term development solutions. Representatives of the coalition advocate at local and national levels a roadmap for the development of local communities, hoping that improved well-being of citizens will create a more favourable base for promotion of civic participation in community life. This programme includes several components, including enhanced opportunities for development, stimuli for business, and infrastructure development⁷⁵.

Interlocutors also repeatedly stressed that the issue of creating **fairer living conditions** for residents of areas along the contact line deserves special attention. Despite dangerous living and working conditions in the immediate vicinity of hostilities, communities on the contact line do not have adequate social protection and compensation for physical and moral damage from being in constant danger. Utility providers who respond to accidents under shelling, medical workers who not only work in dangerous conditions but also have to provide services despite water and electricity outages, often without access to the Internet and mobile communications, teachers, CMA representatives, etc., all usually receive salaries no higher than their colleagues in other Ukrainian communities where the security situation is much better. Even though the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine has established allowances for work under special

⁷³ Andriy Hrudkin, Member of the Board of the NGO Strong Communities, Project Manager of On the Collision Line, commentary on the previous version of the prioritisation framework

⁷⁴ Interview with an expert, 22.12.2020

⁷⁵ Road map of local development of communities along the contact line 2020–2022. On the Collision Line, UA

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employment conditions in Donetsk and Luhansk regions (up to 50% of the salary)⁷⁶, interviewees reported that they were aware of numerous cases where neither doctors nor utility workers received any benefits.

Participants of the consultations also cited the example of legislative regulation of the status of a mountain settlement, where residents are entitled to benefits (20% supplement to pensions, scholarships, all types of state material assistance, tariff rates and increased salaries by 25%)⁷⁷.

• Recommendations⁷⁸

1) According to most respondents, **CMAs have the potential to become more democratic and open to their communities**. Amendments to the Law "On Civil and Military Administrations" are needed to strengthen the prospects for local democracy in communities along the contact line, an opinion that both members of civil society and representatives of local administrations agree on. Notably, CMA residents insisted that they be more actively involved in public consultations on life in their communities, including discussions on amendments to the Law "On Civil and Military Administrations". A good example to follow is the inclusive public consultations conducted by the Parliamentary Committee on the Organisation of State Power, Local Self-Government, Regional Development and Urban Planning during work on the new version of the Law "On Local Self-Government in Ukraine".

Amendments to the law may include **the following proposals:**

⁷⁶ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine "On special conditions of remuneration of employees involved in ensuring the anti-terrorist operation, employees involved in measures to ensure national security and defence, repulse and deter armed aggression of the Russian Federation in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as well as employees of state and municipal institutions, organisations financed from the budget and located in the settlements on the contact line, № 708, 2018

⁷⁷ 'Regarding the provision of benefits to citizens who have received the status of a person living and working (studying) in the settlement, which has been granted the status of a mountain settlement.' Website of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. 2009

⁷⁸ Some recommendations on enhancing civic participation were submitted to the Parliamentary Committee on the Organisation of State Power, Local Self-Government, Regional Development and Urban Planning in order to amend the Law of Ukraine "On Civil and Military Administrations"

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— **Increase the influence of public councils on decision-making in CMAs.** Often CMA leaders already have more or less close contact not only with hospitals and schools but also with local NGOs, businesses, parties and media. This relationship can be formalised through the establishment of permanent advisory councils under CMAs, which would also include representatives of humanitarian organisations. According to a report⁷⁹, CMAs may be required to seek the advice of such public councils on all decisions concerning community life, such as humanitarian needs, housing, transport, education and health care (and to a lesser extent, on issues related to security and defence). This mechanism will help reduce the personality-based management style inherent to some CMA leaders and build a management system that relies more on institutional practices.

According to a participant of the consultations⁸⁰, community security and social cohesion working groups launched at the initiative of UNDP can become a platform for establishing advisory bodies in the CMAs, as they already have the necessary contacts and mechanisms for communication with administrations and involve active citizens to promote the formation of informed political decisions.

—Introduce and promote the use of **participatory democracy tools**. In addition to the above-mentioned public councils, mechanisms such as citizens' requests and petitions can be used more systematically.

—Introduce a mechanism for **public reporting by the head of the CMA** (analogous to reporting by the head of a city council). This tool is often used by mayors as a formality, but the habit of reporting to the community can increase the leader's sense of responsibility to citizens and show CMA residents that they are capable of influencing authorities' decisions.

— Introduce **a public audit procedure for CMAs and, if possible, a separate complaint mechanism** to allow citizens to report misconduct to the Joint Forces Operations Headquarters. Such complaints may relate to cases of bribery, nepotism, or abuse of power by CMA executives and other administration personnel.

⁷⁹ 'Conflict is not frozen.' Monitoring report. Vostok-SOS, DRA. 26.01.2021, UA

⁸⁰ Iryna Stepanova, Chair of the Humanitarian Committee of the Public Council at Donetsk Regional State Administration, consultation with members of Donetsk Task Team, 26.03.2021

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After consulting civil society members and public officials, it was decided to abandon the idea of introducing a feedback mechanism for local residents so that they could express their views on nominations for the position of CMA head. According to the majority of respondents, this will, firstly, significantly delay the process of appointing heads and deepen the crisis of the transition period⁸¹. Secondly, such a nomination mechanism is unlikely to be implemented because regional state administrations usually appoint CMA leaders from other regions and the attitude of the local community can only be formed on a "insider/outsider" principle⁸².

Stakeholders: the Parliamentary Committee on the Organisation of State Power, Local Self-Government, Regional Development and Urban Planning, the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs.

2) In order to strengthen online communication, it is worth allocating **funds for the development of websites** for those CMAs that do not have online representation and **obliging all CMAs to publish contacts on their websites** for citizens' requests. Given digitalisation and expansion of Internet coverage in the country, investing in administrations' web resources is completely justified and will help increase citizen participation in local decision-making.

Stakeholders: the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, CMAs, international donors.

3) The opinions of the community and CMA leadership coincide when it comes to citizens' proposals to the authorities. Regardless of the participation tool that ensures communication between activists and CMAs, any ideas should be clearly and intelligibly set out and reinforced by data, and if possible, by photographs and examples from other communities. If the proposal is signed by other residents, it shows that the appeal enjoys

⁸¹ Oleksiy Khmara, Project Manager, ACTED, commentary on the previous version of the prioritisation framework

⁸² Andriy Hrudkin, Member of the Board of the NGO Strong Communities, Project Manager of On the Collision Line, commentary on the previous version of the prioritisation framework

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community support and can indeed make a difference to their lives.

Stakeholders: CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs, civil society members.

4) To strengthen the **managerial competencies** of CMA heads, training can be organised on administration and communication. The key point is the leaders' motivation to participate in such events, especially given the high workload as heads of administrations approve most decisions in the community singlehandedly. According to an NGO representative, if capacity-building activities are part of a larger international project and training is a condition for involvement in the project, it may encourage heads of administrations to find time to increase their competencies⁸³. An alternative to training may be establishing an analogue of the "school of mayors" or "school of local self-government" for CMAs.

Stakeholders: CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs, civil society members, international NGOs.

5) Despite the temporary nature of the **transition period**, it is **worth exploring** and drawing conclusions for the future (especially given that introduction of a CMA in deoccupied territories may be one of the transitional models of governance there)⁸⁴. To prevent problems associated with a transition from local self-governance to CMA in future, it is necessary to analyse the problems and develop specific sectoral recommendations, taking into account negative experiences, for example: what kind of legislative changes are needed to avoid a crisis in social and health services provision.

To preclude challenges during the transformation of local self-government bodies into CMAs and ensure uninterrupted provision of services after the transition period, regional administrations proposed a pilot idea – to introduce a position of social and humanitarian adviser at CMAs that would perform the role of communicator between communities and administration leadership. According to the proposed concept, such advisors should be independent of the head of the CMA, provide him/her with up-to-date information on the life of communities that are part of the administration and

⁸³ Olena Nizhelska, Head of the Seversky Donets Crisis Media Center, consultation with members of Luhansk Task Team, 24.03.2021

⁸⁴ 'Conflict is not frozen.' Monitoring report. Vostok-SOS, DRA, p.12. 26.01.2021, UA

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recommend measures to address problems. Participants of the discussions commented on the lack of a mechanism that would oblige CMA leaders to take into account the advisor's recommendations, therefore regional state administrations are encouraged to consider this point. Currently, the initiative to create advisers is partially implemented with the support of civil society activists and organisations that, on a voluntary basis, share with government officials their expertise in the humanitarian field and experience in working with development and peacebuilding programs. Funding this support or a fully-fledged advisory position increases the chances of a successful pilot, and can help promote the HDP Nexus approach through strengthened cooperation between local civil society actors and local non-governmental service providers in CMAs in favour of long-term results once CMA mandates come to an end.

Stakeholders: the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs, international donors.

6) To facilitate the transition from local self-government to CMA, especially in rural areas, it may be recommended to introduce an analogue of the **starosta**, a person who will collect information about the needs of residents of their village/settlement and communicate it to the CMA leadership. The community should have the right to comment on the candidacy of the starosta, for example during public hearings or discussions⁸⁵. In contrast to humanitarian advisors, starostas are supposed to take care of a wider range of issues that are not limited to humanitarian and social spheres. Therefore, it is recommended to amend the Law "On Civil and Military Administrations" providing for the possibility of creating the position of starosta in CMA communities.

Stakeholders: the Parliamentary Committee on the Organisation of State Power, Local Self-Government, Regional Development and Urban Planning, the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs.

7) **To improve the economic situation** in communities along the contact line and motivate residents to participate more in community life, proposals of On the Collision

⁸⁵ Andriy Hrudkin, Member of the Board of the NGO Strong Communities, Project Manager of On the Collision Line, commentary on the previous version of the prioritisation framework

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Line NGO can be considered. The road map for development of territories along the contact line includes the following components⁸⁶:

— Expanding opportunities for development (including CMAs in the list of communities with which other communities can enter into cooperation agreements; enabling CMAs to approve decisions in the field of urban and territorial planning) and implementation of development strategies (subventions for master plans, detailed plans of territories, assessment and inventory of community lands). To this end, it is necessary to amend the Law "On Cooperation of Territorial Communities" and the Law "On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine on Land Use Planning".

Stakeholders: the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, Deoccupation and Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories in Donetsk, Luhansk Regions and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, National Minorities and Interethnic Relations, the Parliamentary Committee on the Organisation of State Power, Local Self-Government, Regional Development and Urban Planning; the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, regional state administrations, CMAs.

— Creating stimuli for business (protection of property rights for existing and new business; retraining employees; business training; promoting self-employment; access to credit; decreased taxes).

Stakeholders: the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, international donors, international NGOs.

— Infrastructure (restoration of damaged infrastructure; enhanced opportunities for CMAs to participate in competitions for regional development projects).

Stakeholders: the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine.

⁸⁶ Road map of local development of communities along the contact line 2020–2022. On the Collision Line, UA

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- Health care (possibility to receive secondary/specialised medical care; comfortable living conditions for doctors; attracting new doctors to work in CMAs; providing medical institutions with specialists from among local students).

Stakeholders: the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, CMAs.

Furthermore, administrations themselves can pay more attention to development and resource-seeking programs. For example, they can **create a development department within the CMA** or at least introduce a relevant position⁸⁷. The responsibilities of such a department or expert may include working on development programs and strategies, conducting public discussions of these documents with citizens, communicating with representatives of relevant ministries of Ukraine, advocating for necessary legislative initiatives (together with other CMAs and NGOs on the contact line), searching for funds to implement ideas, etc., supporting an informed transition and fostering knowledge for an incoming civil administration.

Stakeholders: CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs.

8) Regarding **living and working conditions on the contact line**, interlocutors proposed to implement social programs (not necessarily monetary) at the expense of the state or international donors, as local budgets cannot cover such costs. For example, tourist trips across Ukraine or abroad for community residents, health tours for children and youth, school trips to neighbouring communities with better sports infrastructure. It is also important to provide constant psychological assistance, ensuring the functioning of mobile teams, hotlines and rehabilitation programs. Local activists reported their readiness to facilitate implementation of such projects.

Stakeholders: the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, CMAs, international donors.

⁸⁷ Status of observance of human and citizens' rights and freedoms on the temporarily occupied territories and at the line of contact, public discussion, 22.04.2021

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9) Participation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the formation of government decisions

According to a study, **only 20% of participatory democracy tools are fully accessible to IDPs**, 40% may contain barriers to use, and 40% are unavailable⁸⁸. Mechanisms of local democracy, such as citizens' requests and access to meetings of collegial bodies are available without restrictions, as this is determined by the Constitution and laws of Ukraine at the national level. However, when it comes to local level, in many cases IDPs face barriers to participating in policy-making through their place of registration (they may be registered in other communities, for instance in non government-controlled territories). A person's registered place of residence is often the only legal way to prove that he or she lives in the territorial community and, consequently, belongs to it. The terms "place of residence" and "registered place of residence" are often used interchangeably⁸⁹. Paradoxically, the new Electoral Code has enabled IDPs living in the community to participate in local elections. At the same time, due to attachment of the right to participate in local democracy to the registered place of residence, IDPs often cannot sign petitions to the authorities they have elected.

An expert argued that some heads of territorial communities are reluctant to spend money on "outsiders" (meaning IDPs), not seeing them as part of the community. Such leaders want to care only about those who have resided on the territory since long before the conflict⁹⁰.

The low participation of IDPs in processes important to the community remains a separate issue. Experts believe that the involvement of IDPs in local elections was low compared to other members of the community, which may indicate a certain ignorance of the possibilities of exercising political rights and alienation from participation in political life at the local level⁹¹.

⁸⁸ 'Analysis of local democracy instruments available for internally displaced persons.' Hruppa Vplyvu, 2020, UA

⁸⁹ Map of judicial problems of civil society in Ukraine. ICAP, UICPR, CEDEM, 2020, UA

⁹⁰ Interview with an expert, 15.01.2021

⁹¹ Social responsibility and occupied territories.' Analytical centre of the Ukrainian Catholic University. 2020, UA

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• Recommendations

1) In order **to avoid discrimination in accessing certain instruments of participation against IDPs** and other citizens who do not live in their place of registered residence, it is necessary to amend the Law of Ukraine "On Local Self-Government in Ukraine" and define the term "resident of a territorial community". This issue has already been taken into account in the text of the new version of this law ("Residents of the territorial community are all who live on its territory") that is yet to be considered by the Verkhovna Rada in 2021.

At the local level, self-government bodies have a mandate to amend the statutes and regulations of the community and determine that IDPs are residents of and belong to the community. This will open IDP access to tools of local democracy as well as local programs and benefits⁹².

Stakeholders: the Parliamentary Committee on the Organisation of State Power, Local Self-Government, Regional Development and Urban Planning, bodies of local self-government.

2) **Advisory bodies with the participation of IDPs under local administrations** are an example of a successful model of uniting active citizens to defend their rights and interests, especially in communities where they can be perceived as guests and outsiders. According to the coordinator of the IDP council in Kramatorsk, the initiative is designed to strengthen the humanitarian principle "Nothing for us without us"⁹³. IDP councils are involved in the work of local self-government and development and implementation of local policies (including the humanitarian sphere). For example, they contribute to shaping and conducting programs for construction and/or reconstruction of affordable and social housing for IDPs. Council representatives also try to involve vulnerable groups among IDPs, namely women, national minorities, people with disabilities, and the LGBT community⁹⁴.

⁹² 'IDPs in new communities: needs and inclusion.' Zmina. 2021, UA

⁹³ Interview with the coordinator of the IDP advisory body in Kramatorsk. Radnyk VPO, Stabilization Support Services. 2020, UA

⁹⁴ 'Strengthening the participation of IDPs in democratic processes of local self-government.' Stabilization Support Services, UA

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Advisory bodies cannot replace the full range of local democracy mechanisms that exist in Ukraine and are partially inaccessible to IDPs, but they can reinforce the voices of IDPs at local level. Initiators of this form of IDP participation in Ukraine noted that advisory bodies are the prerogative of large communities, as there are not many IDPs living in settlements with a population of 10,000 or less⁹⁵. A disadvantage of the model is lack of representation. It is quite expensive to hold elections to advisory bodies, even online, but despite difficulties in implementation, the election of council members can be the next step in developing this model of participation. IDP councils have been established under several administrations in eastern Ukraine, but this model should be extended to other regions or new communities in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In addition to councils, new forms of IDP participation can be considered, in particular, IDP representatives in youth councils under regional state administrations, or in public councils at CMAs.

Stakeholders: bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs, IDP associations.

3) Regarding **intensification of IDP participation in public life**, several participants of the consultations believe that many IDPs do not see any sense in communicating with local authorities and participating in political processes in general, because they feel unnecessary to the state. There are only a few examples of successful implementation of policies in the field of providing IDPs with housing. The strategy for integration of internally displaced persons, which operated in the period 2017–2020, was not properly funded, and policies to address the problems of IDPs normally remain unimplemented⁹⁶. The new strategy (for the period up to 2023), which should provide guidelines for local policies on IDP integration, has not yet been adopted. Neither the reasons for the delay in its approval, nor the pace of negotiations on this document (which take place mostly within the expert community) are properly communicated by the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories. In addition to more intensive coverage of the document's shaping, it is recommended to hold consultations on the strategy with both experts and residents of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Question-and-

⁹⁵ Valeriia Vershinina, Program Manager, CF Stabilization Support Services, consultation with members of Luhansk Task Team, 24.03.2021

⁹⁶ 'Social responsibility and occupied territories.' Analytical centre of the Ukrainian Catholic University. 2020, UA

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answer sessions with the participation of the deputy prime minister-minister for the reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine could become a platform for starting discussions on the strategy and other issues relevant to IDPs.

Stakeholders: the Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs, IDP associations.

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10) Provision of social services

Representatives of humanitarian organisations working in the social sphere believe that bodies of local self-government often **do not seek to cooperate with non-governmental actors who can provide social services**, due to low awareness of the mechanisms of such cooperation and lack of experience in building partnerships with NGOs. Often, insufficient procurement of social services by local authorities is explained by unwillingness to change the usual algorithms. "Some officials do not realise or do not want to see the potential of NGOs to provide social services. Our organisation supports leisure centres for the elderly, people who are often overlooked by the authorities. However, it cannot be said that local authorities value our support or want to involve us in implementation of projects in the social sphere in future"⁹⁷. There are also positive examples of communities where local authorities invite representatives of NGOs (including humanitarian organisations) and service recipients to council sessions, involve them in working group discussions and try to take their views into account when approving decisions on social services⁹⁸.

According to respondents, local administrations may occasionally use **outdated classifications** of groups in need of social services and conduct **needs assessments rather formally**. Instead, NGOs working in the social sphere usually refer to more modern methodologies to collect and assess the needs of the population for social services. Apart from the direct provision of services, NGOs often hold educational and entertainment activities with the involvement of beneficiaries, which strengthens social cohesion in the community.

A participant of the consultation argued that the purchase of social services from the non-governmental sector may increase the cost of services for the administration, so such cooperation may not be beneficial for the authorities. On the other hand, several respondents believed that the provision of social services by NGOs can, on the contrary, reduce the cost of the service, as NGOs often receive grants for their activities, which allows them to exclude some administrative costs from the price of the service for the administration.

⁹⁷ Interview with an expert, 23.12.2020

⁹⁸ Consultation with members of Luhansk Task Team, 24.03.2021

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Among the reasons for insufficient cooperation, some respondents mentioned **the lack of necessary by-laws** for full implementation of the Law of Ukraine "On Social Services"⁹⁹. Besides, **the Register of Social Service Providers and Recipients** has not yet been launched (currently it is in test mode), which complicates the participation of NGOs in provision of services, as a single information system should provide access to the most up-to-date information on social procurement by all participants. However, it should be noted that registration on this resource is not a prerequisite for cooperation of local administrations with the non-governmental sector.

Low procurement of services from NGOs is sometimes explained by the fact that there are simply no organisations in the community (especially in small settlements) that would compete with communal or other service providers with which the local self-government cooperates. Another challenge is associated with insufficiently active civil society, whose representatives do not always want to work with local administrations (for recommendations, see "**Active participation of citizens in local decision-making**").

• Recommendations

1) Local authorities are encouraged to **be more open in their cooperation with NGOs in the provision of social services** and involve them in activities such as assessing the needs of the population. Administrations may enter into agreements with NGOs by purchasing social services from such organisations, in the format of public-private partnerships, and inviting NGOs to participate in competitions for social programs. Best practices also need to be followed – in some communities, local authorities invite social service providers from the non-governmental sector to collegial meetings and involve them in the development of social programs and strategies.

Stakeholders: bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs.

2) **Training on capacity building** for local authorities, as well as digitalisation of the process can help improve the quality of social services provided by state actors (these practices are already implemented by NGOs, for example, CF Stabilization Support

⁹⁹ Map of judicial problems of civil society in Ukraine. ICAP, UICPR, CEDEM, 2020, UA

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Services). NGOs are encouraged to share their experience in this area with local authorities, as well as more actively offer their services, initiate negotiations, make presentations of their work and invite beneficiaries of social services they work with to participate in such events.

Stakeholders: Ukrainian NGOs that work with social services provision in Ukraine, bodies of local self-government, CMAs.

3) NGOs that can provide services to the population can be more proactive and promote public-private forms of partnership, for example through events where representatives of different communities can share their experiences in outsourcing social services. NGOs providing social services are also encouraged to conduct advocacy campaigns in their community and to inform residents about alternative opportunities and benefits of receiving services from non-state actors.

Stakeholders: Ukrainian NGOs that work with social services provision in Ukraine.

4) **To enhance NGO participation in provision of social services**, by-laws should be approved that ensure full implementation of the Law of Ukraine "On Social Services". A representative of the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine noted that this step would be really necessary. At the same time, the presence of acts cannot guarantee successful cooperation of NGOs with local authorities¹⁰⁰. The obstacles may be explained not only by the lack of by-laws, but also by how existing acts are implemented, given the above-mentioned challenges (authorities' unwillingness to cooperate with NGOs and the low motivation of civil society to partner with public officials). Although approval of by-laws will not ensure against all obstacles to partnership between local authorities and NGOs, their enactment will help those who already seek constructive cooperation in social services provision.

Stakeholders: the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine.

5) **The Register of Social Service Providers and Recipients needs to be fully launched** so that NGOs have access to a single database and can participate in the provision of

¹⁰⁰ Consultation with members of Luhansk Task Team, 24.03.2021

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social services to the population without hindrance. The relevant resolution was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine at the end of January 2021; It is planned to complete the register only by June 2022¹⁰¹. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine plans to launch a pilot project to introduce a single information system in several communities in August 2021 — an initiative that can be considered a first step towards implementing these recommendations. Potentially, this pilot can be scaled up to all Ukrainian regions.

Stakeholders: the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs.

5) Participants of the consultations noted that as well as cooperation in the social sphere, it is necessary to strengthen existing ways of cooperation and develop new models that enable local administrations and CMAs to involve NGOs in **outsourcing services in other sectors** (humanitarian programs, youth policy, sports and culture)¹⁰². Since local NGOs are often partners with humanitarian foundations and development and peacebuilding organisations, such involvement will improve implementation of the HDP Nexus in the region. Cooperation can take place through competitions for public projects and programs, as well as by inviting NGO representatives and civic activists to participate in local council meetings. The introduction of a **humanitarian council** under local self-government bodies and CMAs (based on the principle of creating a public council) should also be considered, since such an advisory body would be a crucial source of expertise on humanitarian issues for the authorities and a mechanism for participation in decision-making for civil society.

However, in addition to willingness to cooperate, **coordination** remains an important element of the success of the HDP Nexus. During wildfires in Luhansk region in 2020, civil society mobilised itself and organised assistance to people affected by the crisis very quickly. However, according to interlocutors, due to lack of coordination by local authorities, this assistance was not distributed duly and evenly¹⁰³. The contributing

¹⁰¹ Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of January 27, 2021 № 99 "On the Register of providers and recipients of social services", UA

¹⁰² Andriy Hrudkin, Member of the Board of the NGO Strong Communities, Project Manager of On the Collision Line, commentary on the previous version of the prioritisation framework

¹⁰³ Olena Nizhelska, Head of the Seversky Donets Crisis Media Center, consultation with members of Luhansk Task Team, 24.03.2021

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activities of humanitarian organisations were also not always properly coordinated. As a result, some beneficiaries received much more than they needed, while elsewhere this assistance was sorely lacking. A civic activist stated that if the local authorities had developed mechanisms for stable communication and involvement of NGOs in their work before the crisis, such problems could have been avoided^(ibid). As for long-term solutions for the development of areas affected by wildfires and prevention of a recurrence of such a crisis, these activities should also be coordinated to avoid overlapping resources and make use of the potential for synergies offered by the HDP Nexus.

Therefore, local self-government and CMAs are recommended to develop sustainable partnerships with the non-governmental sector and establish **coordination platforms** that would enable a permanent dialogue between the authorities, humanitarian foundations and NGOs. Members of civil society in large settlements and communities on the contact line may be advised to **create emergency response/crisis communication centres** in case of natural and man-made disasters and escalation of hostilities. These can be informal associations such as self-help groups, which can mobilise the population in case of danger and provide the necessary support to the authorities in responding to humanitarian problems.

International organisations that integrate the HDP Nexus into their programs may offer authorities and civil society successful coordination mechanisms from other contexts and advise them on their implementation.

Stakeholders: bodies of local self-government, CMAs, Ukrainian NGOs, international organisations.