

PROMOTING UNITY

Recommendations for the development
of a national reintegration strategy
based on the experience
of the Kharkiv and Kherson regions

2024

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INTRODUCTION

As a result of the temporary occupation, the social, economic, public, and resource characteristics of the territorial communities of Kharkiv and Kherson regions underwent fundamental changes. Analysis and consideration of these changes are necessary for the development of an effective reintegration strategy, which must be adapted for use in the newly liberated Ukrainian territories. Kharkiv and Kherson regions have common problems and challenges, which the Ukrainian state is also expected to face in other de-occupied territories (restoration of state administration, work of local self-government bodies, restoration of destruction and assistance to the affected population, etc.).

The living conditions and opinion of the local residents is of great importance when planning certain reintegration measures, but currently there is a problem of insufficient representation of the local residents in research on the topic of cohesion and reintegration, which may lead to the neglect of their interests when developing an integration strategy. Finally, an urgent problem throughout the war period is the cohesion of society. As a result of military conflict and occupation, local communities can be divided physically and psychologically, which will lead to the loss of a common identification factor.

Research methodology

This research was conducted based on two main methods: expert in-depth interviews and a quantitative survey of the residents of the Kharkiv and Kherson regions. Additionally, an extensive survey was conducted to define the research objectives and complement and describe the findings of the qualitative and quantitative studies. The most recent data on the regions' humanitarian, security, and economic situation were used. The handbook was compiled based on nationwide surveys conducted by other NGOs, studies on the reintegration of different regions of Ukraine, and data from international organizations, specialized Ukrainian ministries, and institutions.

Qualitative component of the study

The qualitative component of the study involved in-depth interviews with experts. Expert interviews were conducted following a semi-structured list of questions prepared in advance. The semi-structured interviews included open-ended questions, and the order and content of the questions could be slightly adjusted depending on the respondent's answers. Three categories of respondents were interviewed: active community residents, local government representatives, and civil society organizations. In total, 12 interviews were held: six per region (three for each category).

Two people from each category were selected for in-depth interviews in the Kharkiv and Kherson regions, including representatives of both regional centers and smaller towns and villages. The objective of the qualitative stage was to obtain information and opinions on the process of recovery and reconstruction, identify obstacles and challenges, the role of institutions, authorities, and the community, the level of cohesion among citizens, as well as appropriate solutions and strategies in the areas of culture, Ukrainization, and media. The interviews with local activists aimed to assess the intermediate results of the community recovery and reconciliation process and identify existing challenges and gaps. The results of the qualitative phase were also intended to contribute to developing successful strategies and solutions to improve community reintegration.

Quantitative component of the study

The quantitative component of the study was conducted using the CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) method with the RDD (Random Digit Dialing) software. The sample of respondents was random and representative in terms of age, gender, and settlement type. The study's audience was residents of the Kharkiv and Kherson regions over 18 years of age who lived in settlements covered by Ukrainian mobile network operators.

The study surveyed 1,200 respondents (600 in each region). The survey's margin of error, with a confidence level of 0.95, did not exceed 4.0% at the regional level. The survey was conducted between May 2 and May 4, 2024. The average time spent on the questionnaire was 14 minutes and 17 seconds, and the response rate was 30.3% (the percentage of completed questionnaires relative to those who met the quota).

The questionnaire structure comprised around 40 content questions, 12 socio-demographic questions, and one instrumental question (choice of language). The content section covered the following topics: social cohesion, trust in institutions, areas of concern and their assessment, damage to residential infrastructure, education, additional training and activities, national and patriotic sentiment among the population, and collaboration.

The socio-demographic section consisted of questions regarding the respondents' gender, age, region and district of residence, settlement, and settlements' status (whether it was occupied or not). This section also included questions about financial situation, employment, profession, migration experience, and the language spoken in everyday life.

ASSESSMENT OF THE REINTEGRATION AND RECOVERY

Assessment of current recovery progress

Representatives of the de-occupied communities note that the recovery process is gradually unfolding and is rather at the “**initial stage.**”

However, the stage and success of the recovery depends significantly on the proximity to the border/front line, the scale of destruction, and the communities’ financial capacities.

In the respondents’ words, reconstruction in the liberated territories is mostly in its early stages. It is rather **reactive and driven by the principles of “survival,”** i.e., meeting immediate needs in case of emergency. However, the experts interviewed have not yet reported any long-term, systemic solutions.

“Now we see only **emergency humanitarian response...** Meeting the most immediate needs and an intention then, after some time, to start reconstruction.”
Head of an NGO, 26 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

At the same time, most respondents noted that specific actions have already been implemented in their communities, particularly in terms of restoring damaged housing and infrastructure. Thus, the majority of respondents are, **to some extent, satisfied** with the pace of reconstruction given the current circumstances and are **rather satisfied** with the involvement of local authorities in the process.

“Well, I would like to say that our community is working... They are working very well. They are very quick... **A lot has already been done.** They have done a lot for the community.”
Activist, 63 y.o., Kharkiv region, Chuhuiv

“I would say that after de-occupation, **tremendous work** was done to restore the city’s infrastructure, to resume the work of social and medical institutions.”
Government representative, 40 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

By contrast, in larger cities, activists and civil society representatives tend to have **more complaints about the government:** They believe that reconstruction is inefficient, involves corruption, or that the authorities have been too slow in responding and are unable to cope with ongoing challenges.

On average, on a 10-point scale, residents of the Kharkiv region communities rated the process of community reconstruction at **7 points**, while residents of the Kherson region communities gave it **5.5 points** (the ratings are conditional, as some respondents provided “mixed” ratings for different areas).

Thus, in general, respondents believe that the reconstruction of the Kharkiv region is somewhat more effective than that of the Kherson region. The assessments also allow us to describe rebuilding the communities of both regions as relatively successful.

Next steps in community recovery

Both regions have both common and distinct recovery needs, given the different experiences of local communities during the full-scale invasion.

Responding to the question of what needs to be done next, experts from the **Kharkiv region** primarily mentioned the following needs:

- repair of roads damaged by military equipment,
- demining,
- more rational and efficient resource allocation,
- restoration of energy and social infrastructure,
- and provision of medical care, particularly in distant settlements.

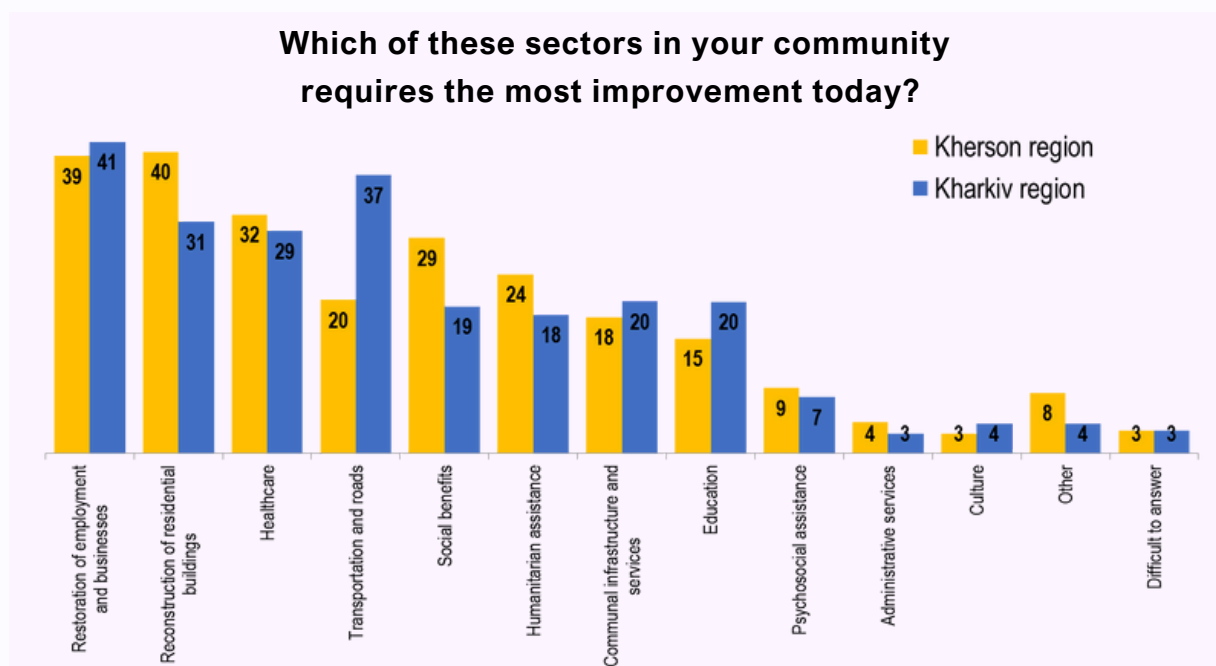
“*Medical care is a priority. Because in some communities, especially in distant places, it is almost 99% unavailable.*”
Head of a charitable foundation, 48 y.o., Kharkiv region, Kharkiv city

The quantitative survey shows that the sectors requiring the most improvement in both regions are the economy (restoration of employment and businesses), **reconstruction of residential buildings, transportation and roads** (in regional towns and villages), and **healthcare**.

For communities in **Kherson region**, the next step of recovery should include:

- preparing the infrastructure for the return of displaced residents,
- resumption of enterprises’ and businesses’ operations,
- restoration of social infrastructure,
- strengthening community unity, which is threatened by different experiences of the population during the occupation and de-occupation,
- and addressing the issue of staff shortages and professional support for the recovery process.

“*...the biggest challenge is the **staff shortage**. There are no good experts here. By and large, a very high percentage of people will not return here after the war, so we need to develop a plan now to bring people back or train professionals who will work here, on the ground.*”
Activist, 42 y.o., Kherson region, Chornobaivka



Interestingly, social benefits and humanitarian aid are more urgent in the Kherson region, while one of the most pressing issues in the Kharkiv region is **the repair of roads and transportation**.

The changes that are most urgently needed:

- In the economic and business sectors, conditions must be created to restore large enterprises, support small and medium-sized businesses, and address monopolization and taxation issues.
- In infrastructure, the priority is to rebuild energy infrastructure and roads and provide essential services in distant communities.
- In the healthcare sector, it is crucial to overcome the staff shortage, provide healthcare facilities with the necessary equipment, and improve access to healthcare in rural areas.

Factors facilitating recovery

Kharkiv region:

- support from partners and donors, both international and domestic,
- involvement of local authorities in the processes, including the search for partners and coordination of efforts,
- and coherent cooperation of all actors (local authorities, recovery program developers, and central government).

Kherson region:

- patriotism and people's mutual assistance,
- an active team of experts who develop promising community recovery projects,
- and ongoing search for and involvement of charitable organizations in the reconstruction process by local and central authorities.

Factors hindering recovery

Besides the facilitating factors, the respondents also mentioned the challenges experts observe in the recovery process. All these factors are significant, as they conceptually affect the situation in the region and influence its future development.

Residents of the **Kherson** region communities mentioned the following recovery challenges:

- 1.the need to increase civic engagement in reconstruction efforts, i.e., to establish a constructive dialogue with the population about the future of the communities,
- 2.situational cohesion and mindset, as some people constantly shift responsibility to others,
- 3.loss of working-age population that sees no prospects for development within the region,
- 4.the need to develop a plan for the return/training of experts,
- 5.low standard of living and living conditions that do not allow people to stay after returning,
- 6.lack of opportunities for children and youth development,
- 7.loss of government credibility in communities where government officials left during the occupation and left the population in the lurch,
- 8.insufficient coordination, uneven reconstruction processes,and the inability of local authorities to control them.

Residents of the **Kharkiv** region identified the following challenges:

1. lack of material resources for reconstruction (finance, construction materials),
2. bureaucratic issues in applying for the eRecovery Program and recording damage,
3. the need for investors and financial assistance, especially the availability of investments for residents of distant settlements,
4. corruption schemes such as money laundering through inflated prices for reconstruction,
5. high danger due to mined areas,
6. domestic production development, in particular agriculture,
7. monopolization in community reconstruction, with the authorities controlling everything, while it would be more effective to delegate some processes to volunteers and create competition in recovery,
8. lack of housing to accommodate IDPs.

Security remains a shared obstacle to reconstruction in both regions, with constant shelling causing new destruction and physical danger to people's lives. In the Kharkiv region, in particular, critical damage to the energy infrastructure due to recent shelling is a significant challenge, as it is a matter of survival for people in the area.

— “ —

*“The recovery process is very **slow**, in my opinion. The situation with the offensive, which is constantly **escalating**, is not quite clear.”*
Activist, 47 y.o., Kharkiv region, Kharkiv city

— ” —



One of the Russian missiles hit a five-story residential building in Kharkiv, May 31, 2024. (Kharkiv Regional Prosecutor's Office)



Children's and youth equestrian school, destroyed by the Russian Federation to the foundation in Derhachi, Kharkiv region, May 30, 2024.



The aftermath of the shelling of a supermarket in Kherson, June 6, 2024.



Komyshany village in Kherson region, May 24, 2024. (Kherson City Military Administration)

Analysis of the recovery process by sector

Economy and business sector

Almost all experts agree that the **population's economic situation is challenging** in both regions. The situation is harder in **rural communities or communities close to the frontline**, where a significant proportion of the population cannot work (people of retirement or preretirement age).

Employment issues are observed in both communities, as most industrial and agricultural enterprises have stopped operating there due to significant destruction or looting by the Russians during the occupation, financial inability to conduct economic activities, mining, etc. According to the respondents, jobs are available in the regional centers, but these opportunities do not always meet people's expectations, often offering unskilled work.

The return and development of local businesses is still in its early stages. Most large budget-forming enterprises are not operating, and no new large companies are being established in the communities. However, small and medium-sized businesses are gradually returning, including new shops and restaurants.

Some respondents noted a lack of credible information about the liberated territories for relocated businesses as one of the obstacles to business return.

“*And just reading all this, relocated businesses start to think about whether to return. And **whether things are really that bad or not.**”*
Civil society activist, 37 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

Respondents from **the Kharkiv community** noted such a feature of business recovery as **reorientation**, with irrelevant businesses closing or significantly reducing their activities (tourism, office space rental, etc.) or switching to an online format. In some cases, it is also noted that small and medium-sized businesses are not doing well due to monopolization of certain spheres by large businesses.

In **the Kherson community**, the specific feature of business return is its **“external” location**, i.e., the main facilities are located outside the community and the region, and the business pays tax elsewhere, which creates a situation in which the local budget is largely composed of subsidies.

Respondents see **cessation of hostilities** as the most effective way to attract investment and bring business back, and in the Kherson region, **the withdrawal of Russian troops** at least 50-60 km from the current front line.

In the economic sector, respondents mentioned programs providing farmers with free seeds, tillage tools, etc., as successful cases of recovery.

“*Farms are being opened with funding from different governments and countries... These farms are already building granaries, which are small **yet their own**. Our own small industrial complexes are already being set up. These farmers and these facilities do not provide raw materials, they provide finished products, and the cost of these products increases. We signed a memorandum with Germany, a farm to supply furniture there...*”
Head of an NGO, 26 y.o., Kherson region

Another successful case worth mentioning is **the government’s decision to exempt local businesses from three main taxes**: flat tax, rent, and property tax. This should significantly reduce the tax burden for businesses in Kharkiv, and the missing revenues of local budgets should be compensated from the state budget. Oleh Syniehubov, Head of the Regional Military Administration of Kharkiv, emphasized the importance of this decision for businesses that continue to operate in the region, noting that it will help to save jobs, create new ones, and meet social needs during the war. These conditions will help businesses adapt to current realities and develop the economic potential of the Kharkiv region.

Infrastructure

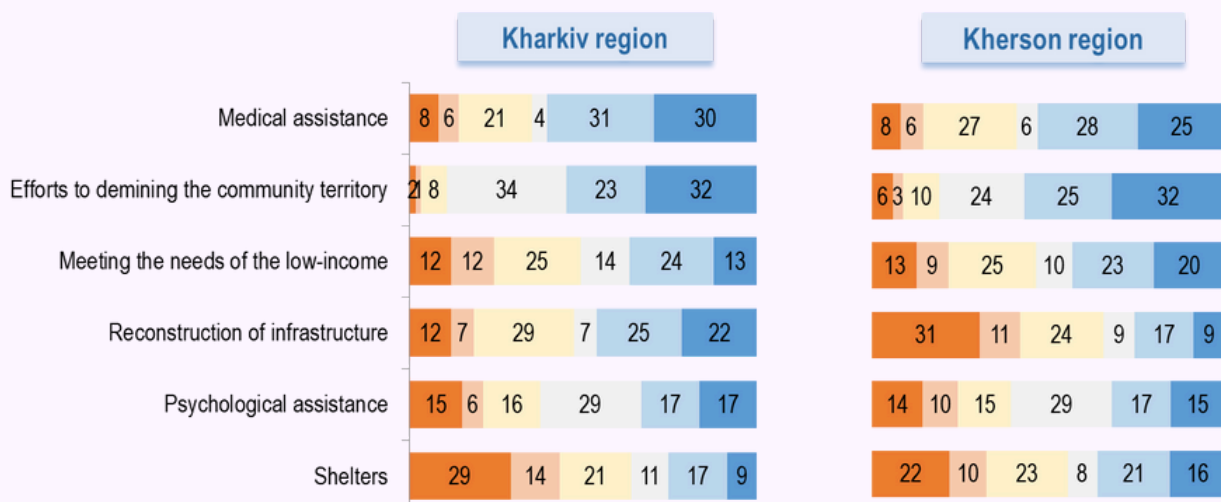
The respondents are **mostly satisfied** with the pace of infrastructure restoration in cities and villages. The majority of respondents gave positive feedback on the work of **the State Emergency Service teams, utilities, and other emergency services** in their communities. Their efforts have helped restore electricity, water, and gas supply in the liberated territories in both Kharkiv and Kherson regions. The work of these services is especially highly appreciated against the backdrop of the constant shelling of critical infrastructure and the risks these specialists face.

The condition of the infrastructure is considered to be better in the Kharkiv region (47% of respondents assessed it as excellent and good) than in the Kherson region (26%). Sociologists note that the positive assessment of the infrastructure in the Kharkiv region resulted from the positive feedback, particularly in Kharkiv, while smaller towns and liberated villages also assessed the reconstruction process negatively.

Shelters were assessed mostly negatively, especially in villages and small towns.

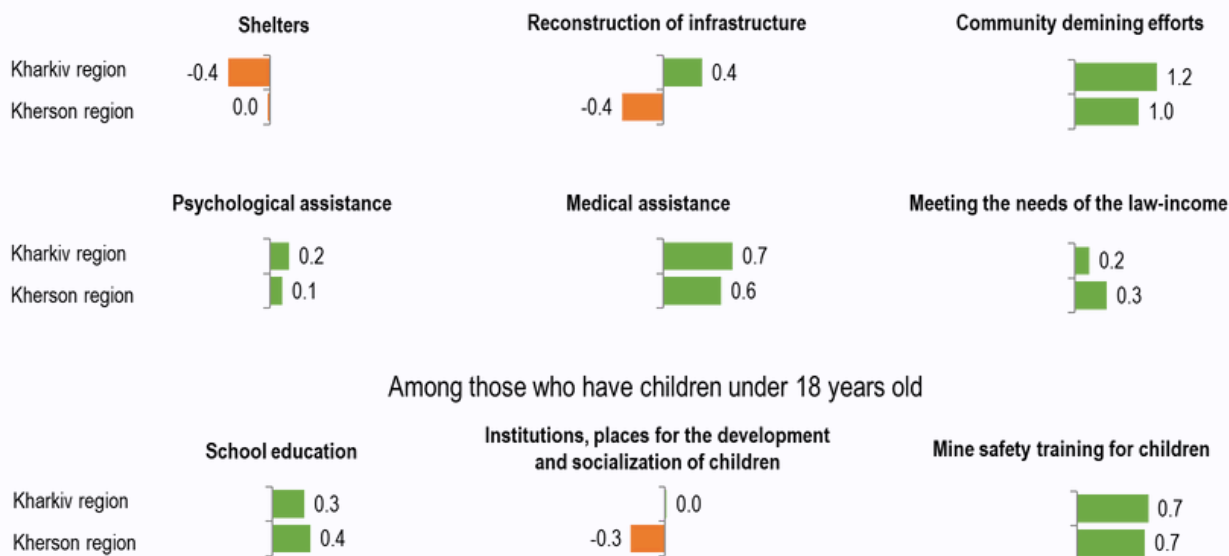
How would you rate these sectors in your community?

1- Terrible 2 3 4 5 - Excellent



How would you rate these sectors in your community?

The average ranges from -2 to 2, where -2 is "terrible" and 2 is "excellent"



Problems with the energy infrastructure remain urgent. In particular, residents of the Kharkiv region report serious difficulties due to the intense Russian shelling of critical infrastructure in April–May 2024. In the frontline settlements of the Kherson region, there are also problems with power, gas, and water supply. In some communities, such as Bilozerka in the Kherson region, drinking water is unsafe, posing additional challenges for the local population.

Some communities consider **mobile boiler houses** and **local energy systems** for individual districts and neighborhoods as an alternative solution, as residents have expressed a need for energy stations independent of the general system. To provide water supply in the event of interruptions, some communities provide **generators** to well owners to supply water to their neighbors.

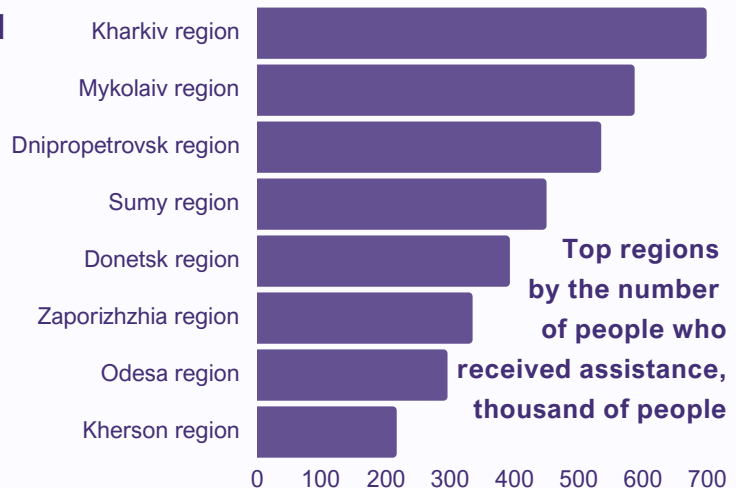
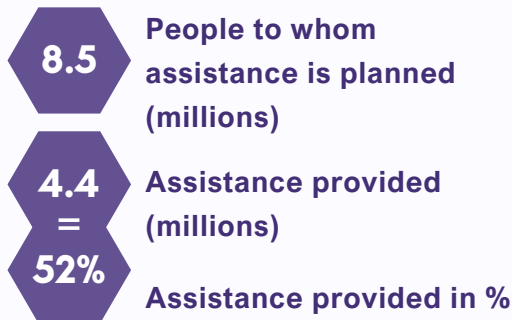
Larger settlements are provided with basic services such as **post offices, pharmacies, and banks**. However, this **is a problem for distant communities** in the Kherson and Kharkiv regions. The situation in the Kherson region is **more critical** due to the high intensity of shelling and the lack of specialists. To provide the necessary services in distant settlements, **mobile postal, pharmacy, and banking teams** are actively engaged.

In the Kharkiv region, the issue of **restoring roads** damaged during the hostilities is acute. Residents and experts say that people have to travel to the nearest cities to get some services, which is complicated by **poor transport infrastructure**. This issue is mentioned especially often in rural areas. For the Kherson region, road restoration is still a lower priority.

Humanitarian situation

The humanitarian situation in Ukraine continues to deteriorate. In early 2024, humanitarian organizations presented this year's Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, calling for **\$3.1 billion** to be raised to help **8.5 million vulnerable people in Ukraine**. In the first four months of the year, despite the shelling hampering their work, humanitarian organizations delivered **18 convoys** to the frontline areas. Thanks to interagency convoys, nearly **7,000 people** in frontline communities received assistance in April alone. In March–April, the **humanitarian access zone was reduced** due to a significant increase in attacks on Kharkiv and northern communities in the Kharkiv region, as well as the introduction of a **mechanism for coordinating the movement** of humanitarian organizations in the Kherson region. Local authorities also introduced **stricter requirements for the coordination of humanitarian activities**. In the Kherson region, the regional commandant's office was assigned to coordinate the movement of humanitarian organizations in the areas with the highest risks, which led to traffic blocking along the right bank of the Dnipro River.

UN report for March-April 2024



The distribution of humanitarian aid in the **Kharkiv** region is changing: **The volume and target groups receiving aid are being reduced**. Currently, humanitarian aid is still being provided **to residents of the border areas** (30-50 km from the border) and communities **under intense shelling**. In the regional center, the distribution of humanitarian aid has almost stopped.

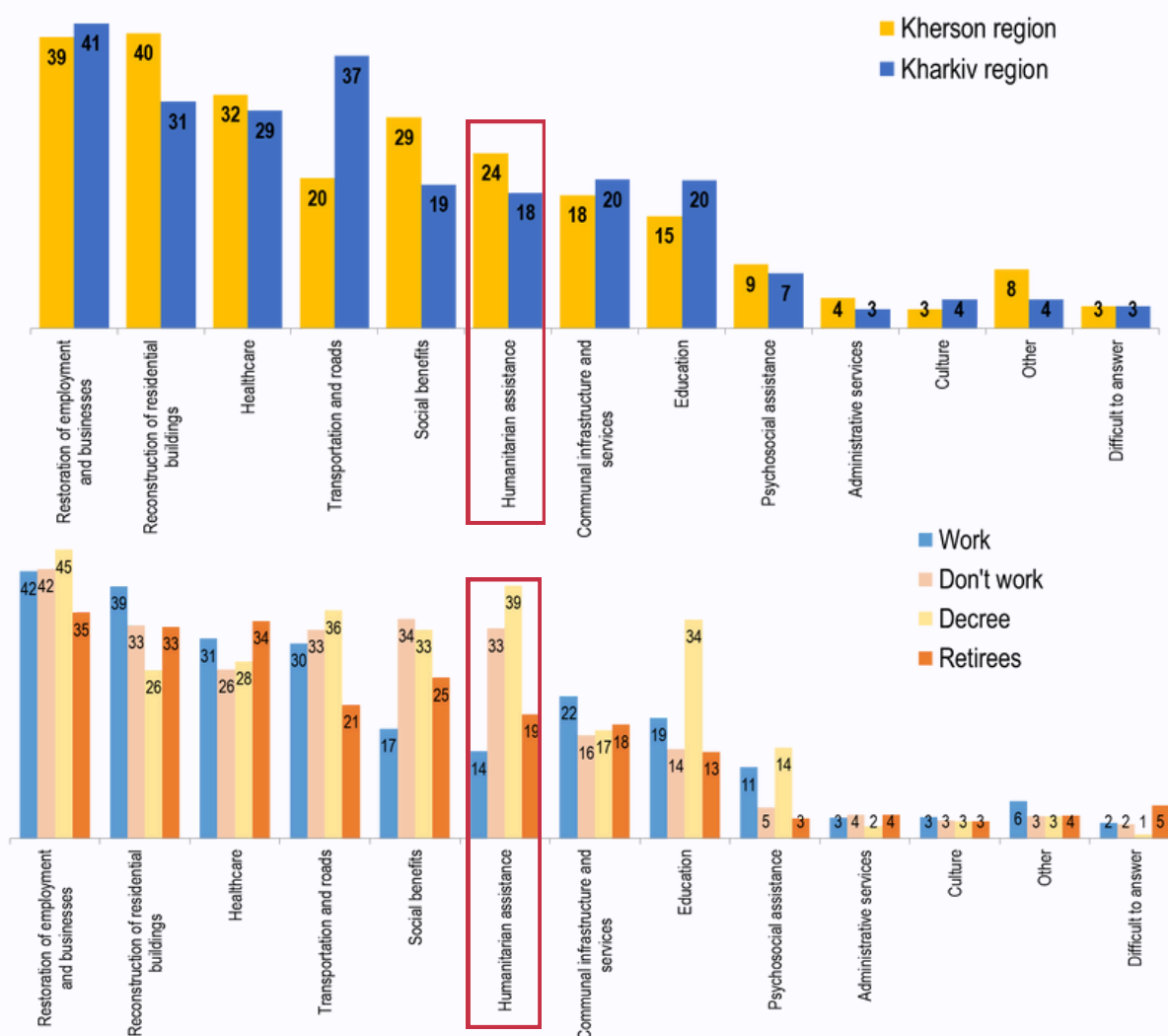
The situation in the **Kherson** region is different: Residents largely **rely on humanitarian aid**. Experts note that this can lead to a refusal to look for employment and business opportunities, even under simplified conditions and with the partners' support. Some people actually live on the humanitarian aid provided and are in no hurry to give it up.

Misuse of humanitarian aid harms the recovery of local businesses. Small shops selling household goods or food cannot generate profit because everything residents need is included in humanitarian kits.

The request for humanitarian and financial assistance is more frequent in the Kherson region (71%) compared to the Kharkiv region (56%). In particular, the following groups need it:

- Parents on maternity leave (90% of respondents said they needed help)
- Poor (lacking money for food, 85%) and low-income people (lacking money for clothing, 78%)
- Internally displaced persons (77%)
- Parents with children (69–74%)
- Rural residents (67% in the Kharkiv region) and residents of both villages and cities in the Kherson region (65–75%).

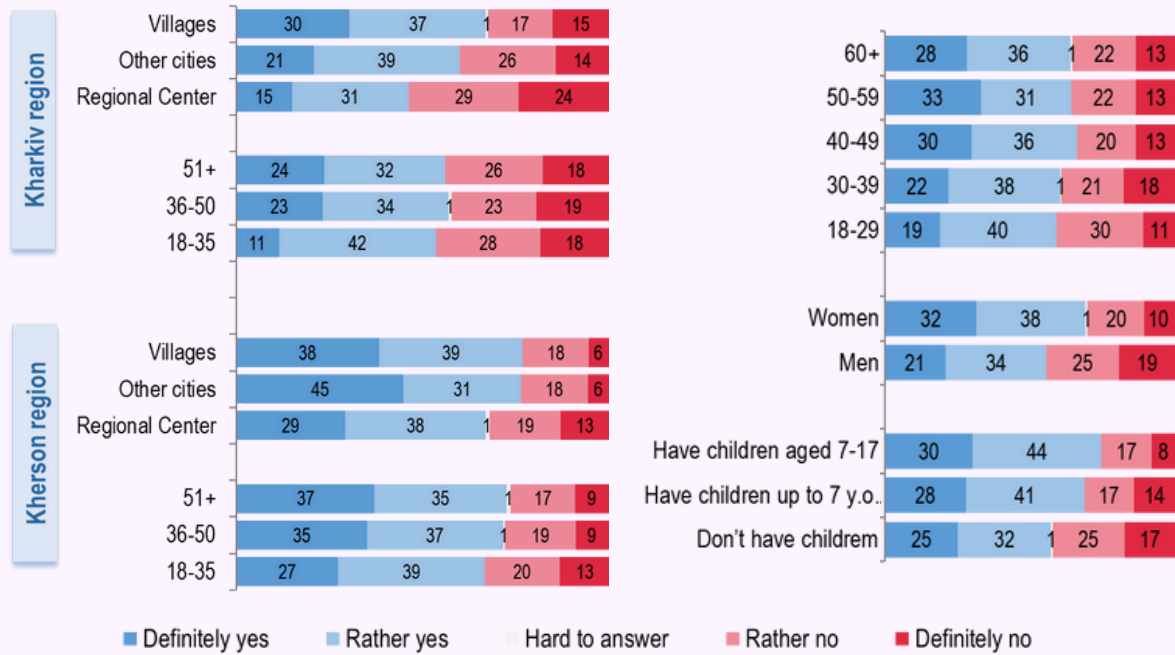
Which sector in your community needs the most improvement today?



Red Cross workers deliver food to residents on the outskirts of Kharkiv. (Marcus Yam/Los Angeles Times)

Quantitative surveys confirm that people of pre-retirement age (50–59 y.o.) and the unemployed also need humanitarian and financial assistance. Although they do not fall into the categories eligible for humanitarian aid, they also need it because they have no source of income, especially in the Kherson region.

Do you personally need financial or humanitarian assistance at the moment?



Meeting the needs of vulnerable groups

Respondents identified children or families with children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and people with limited mobility as the main vulnerable groups in the liberated communities who have suffered the most from the occupation.

Respondents in the Kherson region also noted that a certain category of people does not fall under the current criteria for receiving assistance but needs it due to difficult life circumstances. These circumstances are primarily caused by the lack of employment and self-sufficiency opportunities.

At the same time, the lack of access to assistance is caused by restrictions imposed by donors and humanitarian organizations on specific categories of people who can receive such assistance, such as the unemployed.

A separate issue is people of preretirement age who are not yet retired but can no longer work, as they make up a significant part of the population needing humanitarian aid but not officially eligible for it.

Given the large number of people who cannot receive humanitarian assistance but need it due to difficult life circumstances, the risk of a large number of unemployed people of preretirement age exists. This risk may result in the community's slow economic and social recovery during reintegration.

Healthcare

The Ministry of Health of Ukraine monitors the destruction of healthcare facilities. According to its data, since the beginning of the full-scale invasion and until January 4, 2024, **1696 healthcare facilities have been destroyed**. **195** of them were destroyed, and **1501** were damaged.

Most of damaged healthcare facilities are located in:

- **Kharkiv region (348)**
- Donetsk region (257)
- **Kherson region (204)**

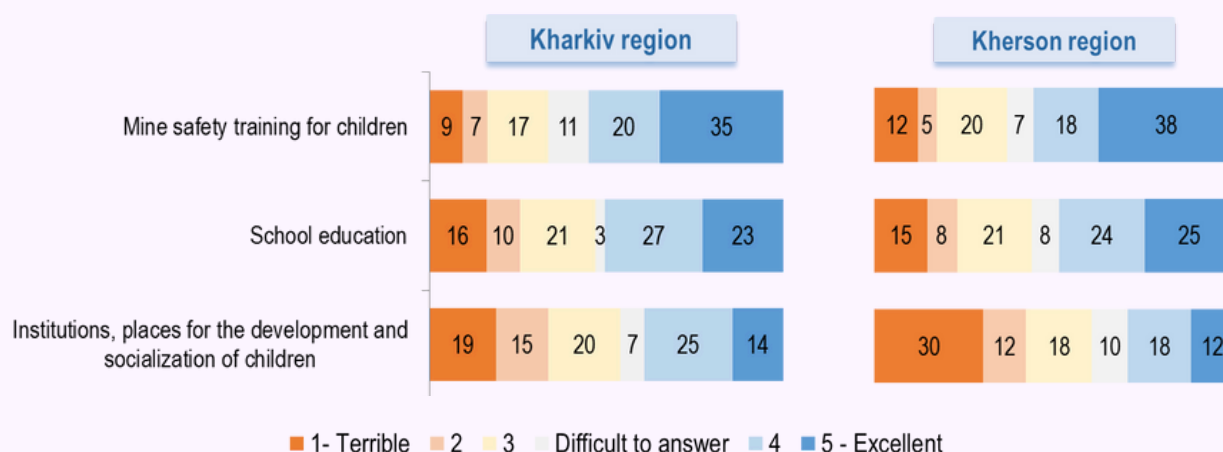
According to the Ministry of Health, as of the end of February 2024, **508** medical facilities were fully restored, and another **360** were partially restored or undergoing restoration. Of these, **74 facilities** were fully restored in the Kharkiv region, and another **128** were partially restored (as of January 2024).

Healthcare is largely reliant on **humanitarian medical aid**. There is a challenge of **staff shortage**. Residents of villages and towns face significant challenges in accessing medical care due to **an acute shortage** of specialized medical staff, medical equipment and destroyed medical facilities.

These issues are partially mitigated by **mobile medical teams** from regional centers or **visiting doctors** from international organizations. For example, **modular emergency care centers** operate in Kostyrka and Novoraysk in the Beryslav district. They temporarily substitute damaged hospitals. The stations are equipped with everything paramedics need to stay and receive patients. Mobile teams of volunteer doctors also work here. One of the medical stations was set up by WHO in partnership with the Ministry of Health, and the other by the international organization Save the Children.

First aid and mine safety training courses are held regularly, and courses for social workers are also offered. Some doctors who left continue to work remotely.

How would you rate these sectors in your community? (among those who have children under 18)



Most parents (**55–56%**) positively assess mine safety training for children.

More than half (**50–54%**) of people wanted to undergo mine safety training. Even more (**60%**) respondents were positive about receiving first aid training.

Education

The functioning of the educational sector in the liberated communities differs significantly between regions and communities. Currently, pre-school, school and university education **is provided exclusively online**, except for a few schools in the Kharkiv metro area. This is due to the security situation in the region and the significant destruction of educational institutions.

According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, as of December 28, 2023, **380 educational institutions were destroyed and 3,417 damaged** in Ukraine. **Schools** were affected the most. In terms of the geography of destruction and damage, most of them are located in:

- **Donetsk region** – 173 destroyed and 631 damaged educational institutions.
- **Kharkiv region** – 51 destroyed and 579 damaged educational institutions.
- **Kherson region** – 51 destroyed and 296 damaged educational institutions.

The restoration of damaged institutions is gradually proceeding, but **financial resources are often lacking**. Some communities have already prepared plans to restore educational institutions and are arranging or building shelters for a mixed education format.

The Ministry of Education reports that as of January 25, 2024, **restoration work has been completed in 464 (12.04%) and 101 (2.62%)** educational institutions damaged by hostilities **have been repaired**.

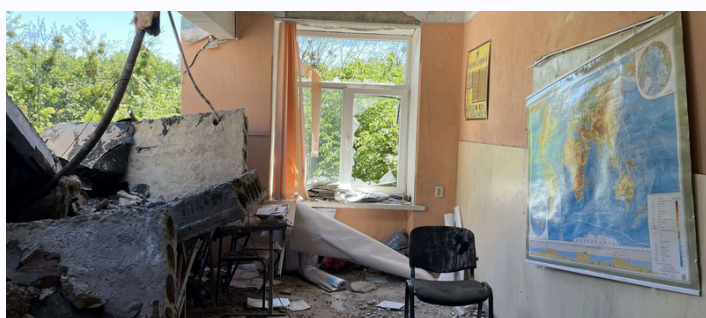
Issues and Challenges

Respondents are dissatisfied with **the impact of online learning on children**, including a lack of socialization, physical activity, and communication with peers. In some communities in the Kherson region, there are UNICEF centers for child development, and in the Kharkiv region, offline clubs are available, but the main educational process is still online in both regions.

Since the Russians are armed with missiles that can reach the target in 40–42 seconds, and the regions suffer from shelling several times a day, it is **dangerous** to resume in-person classes.

At the same time, “frontline” schools with ordinary basements as shelters will also not be allowed to resume offline learning, as they should be equipped with a **protective facility** such as a bomb shelter or a radiation shelter with water supply, drainage, ventilation, and fire extinguishing system.

Another problem in the frontline areas lies in **the large percentage of schools destroyed** during the war. For instance, the situation is critical in the Kherson region: In the liberated part of the region, schools are destroyed or damaged **in almost every village**.

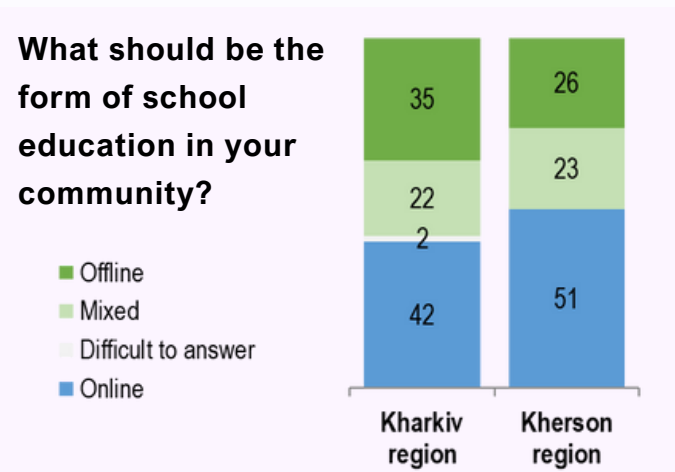


School No. 62, Kharkiv, Ukraine, June 27, 2022. In 2022, the school was repeatedly attacked by Russia. (2022 Human Rights Watch)

Currently, work is underway in the frontline regions **to rebuild** damaged and destroyed schools and provide **proper shelters**. Funds for this purpose are being raised **from all possible sources**, including grant and donor programs, local budgets, and state funding. One of the innovations in the frontline regions is **the construction of underground schools**. The first such school has already been built in **Kharkiv**. Similar facilities are already under construction in the city of Liubotyn and the village of Korotych in the Kharkiv region. The next underground schools may be built in Shostka (Sumy region), Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson. The construction of an underground school in Kharkiv cost 78 million hryvnia (almost \$2 million), and in Korotych, 99 million hryvnia (around \$2.5 million). Such facilities will be reliable, as architects claim that they can protect **not only from fragments but also from direct missile attacks**.

Statistics

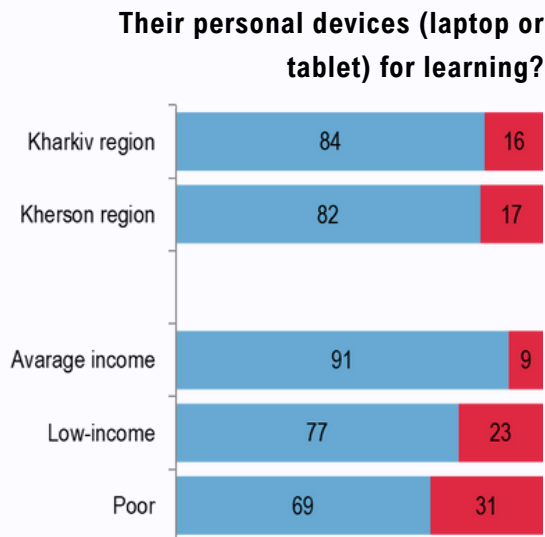
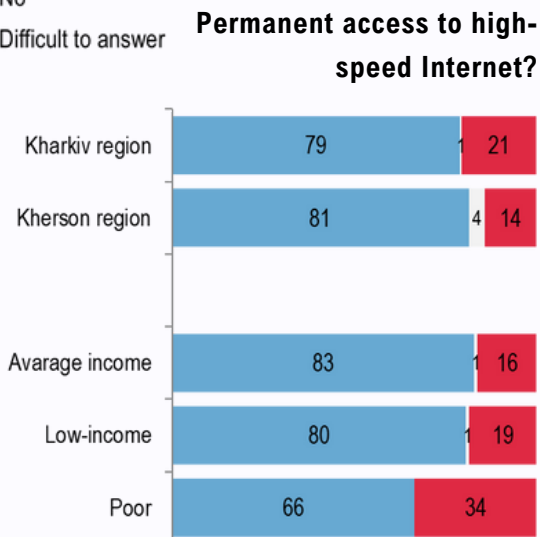
Almost **90%** of children in both regions learn primarily **online**. Most of them have laptops or tablets (**82–84%**) and constant access to high-speed internet (**~ 80%**). However, in poor families, one-third of children do not have their own devices for learning and access to the Internet. About half of parents in both regions support offline or hybrid learning (**49–57%**).



Underground school in Kharkiv, April 2, 2024
(Suspilne Kharkiv/Dmytro Hrebinnyk)

Among those whose children learn online or hybrid, does your child have...?

- Yes
- No
- Difficult to answer



Administrative services

The majority of respondents indicated that their communities' populations have access to administrative services and assess their quality as **fairly high**.

However, **a number of challenges** are still evident, such as limited services in some communities due to **staff shortages**. In both regions, respondents reported that administrative services are limited for rural residents, who have to travel to the nearest cities to receive services, which is not always possible due to the **poor transportation situation** in the region.

“Administrative service centers and social service providers are operating. These include children’s services, social service centers, and social protection departments. All of them work full-time. I have never heard of anyone not receiving a particular service.”
NGO representative, 38 y.o., Kherson region, Bilozerka village

“The social protection system is working, and the Administrative Service Center is also working. Moreover, more services have been provided to people. They can come to the ASC and get married right away. The Ministry of Internal Affairs service center has been brought to us, and notary offices are also open. Notaries are back. State registration officers are also here!”
Government representative, 48 y.o., Kharkiv region, Balakliia

“**Transportation issues** are the main problem for everyone, as there is no social transportation. It’s not that there is no service; it’s just hard for them to get to this service.”
Female activist, 47 y.o., Kharkiv region, Kharkiv city

In Kherson, it is difficult to access some services because the city administration does not disclose its location for security reasons. Some people also raised the need to cancel public service fees for people who lost their property and homes. Air raid alerts and blackouts (especially in the Kharkiv region) were also mentioned as obstacles to receiving administrative services.

“I don’t understand why people who have been affected and lost their documents, not because of their fault, have to pay to reissue new ones.”
Head of an NGO, 26 y.o., Kherson oblast, Kherson city

Housing reconstruction and potential challenges

According to the Kyiv School of Economics, as of September 1, 2023, the total documented direct damage to Ukraine’s infrastructure caused by a full-scale Russian invasion has reached **\$151.2 billion** (at replacement cost). The ongoing war continues to result in the destruction of residential buildings, educational institutions, and infrastructure, leading to an increase in the overall damage.

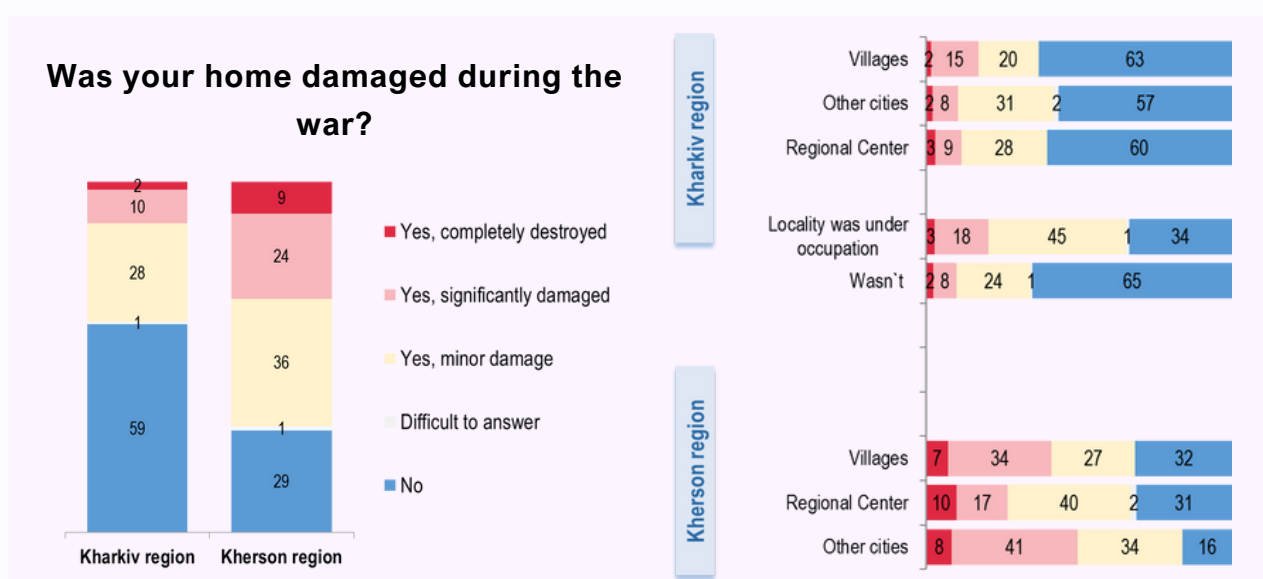
As of the beginning of autumn 2023, the largest **share of damages** remains within the **housing sector, amounting to \$55.9 billion**. In total, **167,200 housing units** have been destroyed or damaged as a result of hostilities, comprising **147,800 private houses, 19.1 thousand** apartment buildings, and an additional **0.35 thousand** dormitories.

In second and third place in terms of damages are the **infrastructure and industry sectors**, as well as **losses to enterprises**. More than 25,000 kilometers of state and local **highways and communal roads** were also damaged.

Kharkiv and Kherson regions are among **the most affected in terms of housing damage**. Our respondents identified **housing reconstruction as one of the most urgent needs** of residents of the liberated territories. Reconstruction is also considered to be the area that needs **the most improvement** in the Kherson region (**40%** of respondents). In the Kharkiv region, reconstruction is **the second most important need** after restoring businesses and employment (**31%**).

69% of respondents in the Kherson region and 40% in the Kharkiv region had their homes damaged to some extent. In the Kherson region, **one in ten** residents had their homes completely destroyed. Another **one-fourth** of homes have been significantly damaged, and **one-third** has minor damage. Reconstruction as a priority was more popular among respondents from cities and villages in the Kherson region (**50%** and **45%**, respectively). **35%** of residents of the regional center identified reconstruction as a need.

Conversely, in the Kharkiv region, reconstruction was identified as a priority by significantly more residents of the regional center (**46%**) than residents of other cities and villages (**23%** and **12%**, respectively). It should also be noted that among the settlements that **were occupied** in the Kharkiv region, the percentage of damaged housing is higher than in the rest of the region, with **two-thirds** suffering from damage.

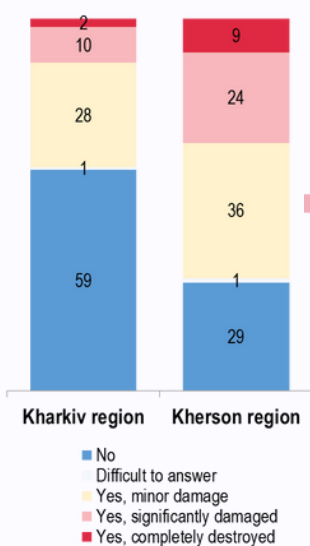


Reconstruction process

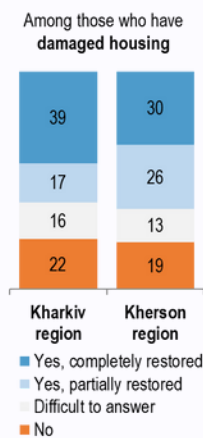
Among the respondents in both regions, about **50%** have their housing already restored (fully or partially), and about **20%** have not.

When talking about reconstruction, respondents mention three strategies that they typically used to restore damaged housing:

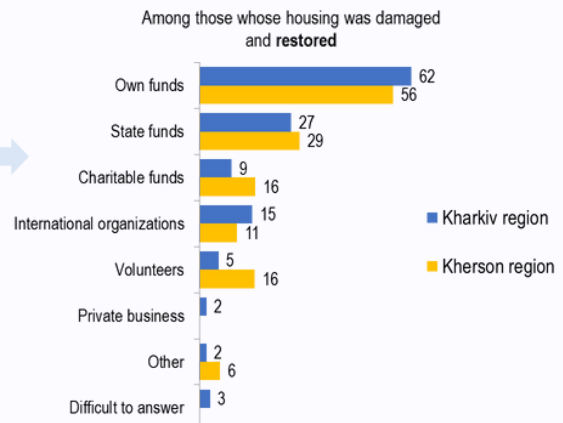
- government support through the **eRecovery Program**.
- assistance from **local authorities or volunteers**.
- reconstruction at their **own expense**.



Have you restored your housing?



At whose expense did you restore the damaged housing?



According to respondents, housing was restored mainly at their own expense (62% in the Kharkiv region and 56% in the Kherson region). However, in the Kherson region, **other parties' funds** were used somewhat more often, such as those of volunteers (13% compared to 5% in the Kharkiv region) or charitable foundations (16% and 9%, respectively). Restoration at their own expense is preferred by those who have only one home and cannot afford to wait for it to be restored with the help of government programs, volunteers, or international organizations.

Note

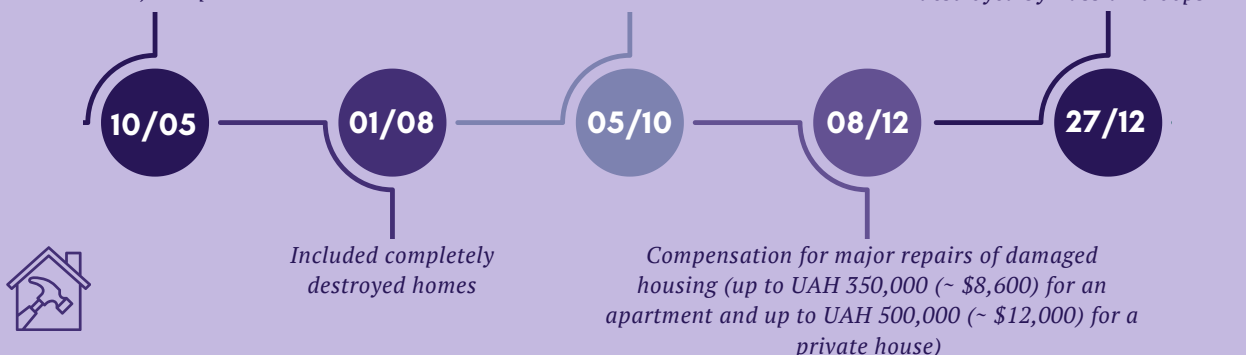
eRecovery is a government program that allows owners of damaged housing to receive financial compensation for its repair or a certificate for the purchase of a new home. This can be done by submitting an application through the government portal Diia. The form of assistance depends on whether the housing was damaged or destroyed. In the former case, the state provides funds for the purchase of materials or services for repairs, while in the latter case, it provides purchase certificates or funds for the construction of new housing. The conditions for receiving aid and the procedure differ depending on the type of damage. The program is also being implemented in stages. Over a year since the program's inception, more than 57,000 Ukrainians have received funds to repair their homes or buy new ones in place of those destroyed by the hostilities through the eRecovery program. The total amount of payments has reached over 11 billion hryvnias.

Stages of the eRecovery Program in 2023

A separate eRecovery service was introduced in the Diia app, allowing for the submission of an electronic information report on damage or destruction of an apartment or house

Compensation for housing repairs that had already been made

Compensation payments for the purchase of new housing for those Ukrainians whose homes were destroyed by Russian troops



There is a similar trend among those who have not yet restored their homes but intend to do so. In the future recovery, people are also more likely to rely on their own funds in the first place (especially in larger cities, younger and wealthier residents) and only in the second place in the state (mostly in villages, poorer and older people). In the meantime, **16%** of respondents in the Kharkiv region do not plan to restore their homes, and the percentage is much lower (**9%**) among residents of the Kherson region. Among those respondents whose homes were lightly damaged, **one in five** fully restored them, while only **one in ten** restored severe damages.

“I have many friends whose houses were flooded, and everything was swept away. But no matter where they applied, **they are restoring everything on their own.**”
 Activist, 37 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

“In this program, they came and made an inventory, then said they would provide assistance either with materials or money. But this will happen in two, three, or four months **after all this bureaucracy is over.**”
 NGO staff member, 38 y.o., Kherson region, Bilozerka village

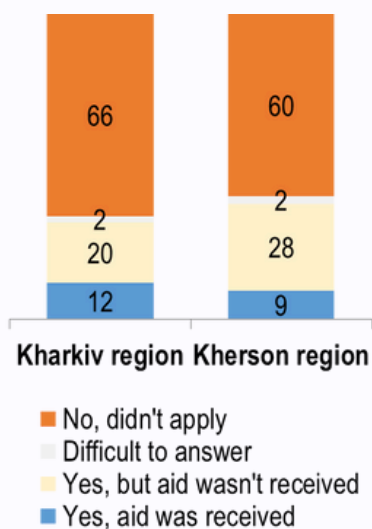
The respondents noted that receiving state aid through government programs (e.g., eRecovery) is **the most complicated process** due to **the required documents** confirming the fact of housing damage and property ownership. This **time-consuming** procedure increases the risk of more natural damage to housing and higher costs of further repairs.

Respondents also pointed out that the eRecovery program does not consider **the risks of repeated property damage**. As a result, people in the liberated territories may lose their homes if the housing has already been rebuilt and damaged again.

“I know cases of my own friends and acquaintances who applied for eRecovery, received the funds and invested them in repairs. Then, however, the house or the neighborhood **was shelled again**, and now people **cannot apply for the same program again** because **the funds have already been practically spent**. There is no follow-up mechanism.”
 Head of an NGO, 26 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

Have you applied for assistance in eRecovery?

Among those who have damaged housing



Among respondents with damaged housing, **less than 40%** have applied to eRecovery: **32%** in the Kharkiv region and **37%** in the Kherson region. However, only some have received the aid: **12%** in the Kharkiv region and **9%** in the Kherson region.

Respondents identified the following **reasons for the small number of aid applications**:

- lack of required documents for submitting such applications,
- insufficient resources provided for damage elimination and repairs,
- and low chances of receiving compensation or refunds for damaged housing.

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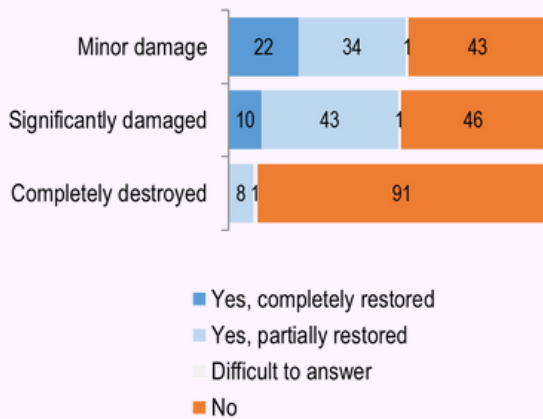
“There were some cases, but only 1–2 out of 100, I guess. It’s very rare, and these go-getters just systematically hounded those structures.”

Head of an NGO, 26 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

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When asked about receiving material compensation, most respondents said they were unaware of such cases or mentioned few people who had benefitted from this mechanism.

Have you restored your housing?



Have you applied for assistance in eRecovery?



Program achievements

Given that the eRecovery program is a unique reconstruction project in terms of the scale of destruction and needs, many of the implemented procedures **are pilot** and will take time to improve. During the program’s implementation, public consultations were held, feedback was collected from service beneficiaries, and changes were made to the eligibility rules. For instance, applications for compensation were allowed to be submitted by co-owned households, and it also became possible to submit applications not only through Diia, but also at ASCs and notaries. These changes were very important, as although submitting documents through the app was a good example of **digitalization and transparency of procedures**, it **was not accessible** to certain groups. Thus, the updated mechanism was helpful, for example, for elderly people without a smartphone or people with disabilities to access services. Moreover, seniors over 60 make up 30% of the program beneficiaries. One more important request from Ukrainians, which was received thanks to public consultations, is the need to provide compensation to people whose damaged or destroyed housing is located **in the temporarily occupied regions**. However, some issues still remain unresolved. These include the process **duration** due to the need for funding and the development of a mechanism, **bureaucracy**, and **inflexible** requirements that make it difficult for victims who lost their documents or had unresolved property issues at the time of the Russian invasion to receive aid. For many people who have lost their original property documents, the price of having them reissued is a challenge.

The program participation is also often denied to those who, for some reason, **do not have their housing** in the **State Register of Property Rights** or have other **incorrect** documents. Therefore, despite significant progress in the number of eligible citizens and active restoration efforts, the program still requires improvements and adjustments.

Local authorities or volunteers in small towns and villages often **provide assistance** in the form of building materials such as windows, roofing materials, and others. However, this aid is limited and allows for **the preservation** of the building from further destruction rather than its restoration for habitable use.

In addition to systemic shortcomings in providing assistance, the recovery process may differ **depending on the type of settlement**. In regional centers, the renovation of residential buildings is carried out with the participation of city utilities trying to eliminate the damage caused by attacks and programs providing assistance for the restoration of residential buildings.

In small settlements or villages, respondents mentioned more often assistance in **restoring minor damage** than in cases of complete destruction of housing. Most said that the owners of damaged property receive limited material assistance, which is not enough to rebuild their homes.

The geographical dimension of aid accessibility lies in the location of a particular settlement in relation to the front line. Damaged or destroyed housing located in towns and villages near the front line cannot be restored due to the terms of the program. Such settlements include the city of Kherson, which is located next to the occupied left bank of the Kherson region.

It is also worth noting that in the Kherson region, some residential buildings were damaged not as a result of hostilities or shelling but due to a **man-made disaster** caused by Russian troops by blowing up **the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant**. This complicates the process of providing assistance due to the diversification of activities required to restore housing resulting from different types of damage.

As a result, the reconstruction of damaged housing in the liberated territories is complicated by the lack of accessibility and flexibility of state aid mechanisms, including the eRecovery program, as well as insufficient resources for assistance initiatives by local authorities and activists.

Moreover, the context of the damaged housing should be taken into account:

- the type of settlement where the housing is located,
- the scale of destruction and its cause,
- and geographical location relative to the front line.

Challenges to the recovery process

External factors stemming from the environment of war and previous occupation further complicate the reconstruction process. The main challenges include **security, lack of funding, and staff shortages**.

Respondents most often mention **the security situation** as the main factor slowing down community recovery. This is explained by the geographical proximity of the territories to the front line and frequent shelling.

“We would have rebuilt everything long ago or would be on the way to rebuilding **if we had not been shelled.**”

Head of an NGO, 26 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

“I think it’s the **fear** that hinders us. There is a fear that it **will happen again**, even though we are now recovering and investing. I guess that’s why we don’t progress much in this regard; the threat is still there.”

Government representative, 46 y.o., Kharkiv region, Pechenihiy

Security concerns are further exacerbated by people’s reluctance to take risks and invest in housing in the liberated territories, given the high chances of **repeated destruction** or loss of this housing in case of a renewed offensive.

As a result, people’s lack of understanding of investment security and proximity to the front line make them reluctant to make large investments in real estate, which **slows down communities’ economic development**.

In fact, **communities’ lack of funds** for reconstruction, caused by poor income opportunities and some communities’ dependence on government subsidies in the liberated territories, is also mentioned as a slowdown factor.

It is also worth noting that **corruption** (as mentioned in the Kharkiv region) can affect the fragile regional economy and complicate the above-mentioned processes.

Although less frequently, respondents noted **the lack of qualified personnel** as a hurdle to community recovery. This barrier, however, is related to the previous ones, as in the lack of employment opportunities, skilled workers have moved to safer areas, and the inability to receive certain types of services affects the quality of services in the community. In turn, this impedes the development of local businesses and the administrative sector.

Thus, community recovery is hampered primarily by **the unstable security situation**, which leads to a negative economic climate in these areas. This is reflected in the jobs availability and community budget revenues, as well as in the reluctance of people to invest in real estate and, accordingly, to settle down in the settlement, given the risks of the renewed hostilities in the area. In some cases, this situation can be complicated by systemic factors such as corruption.



A destroyed building in Kherson, April 18, 2023 (Aziz Karimov/SOPA, Image via Shutterstock)



Kharkiv after shelling, March 2, 2022 (Ukraine Emergency Ministry press service/AFP)

Recovery strategies

When asked which reconstruction strategy Ukrainians should pursue in the region's territories, **restoration of 100% of the damage** or a focus on **REbuilding** (according to the concept of **building back better**), respondents split into two groups. The first group favored rebuilding based on the build-back-better concept, while the other group considered it necessary to first determine the need in each case and then decide whether to restore (repair) or rebuild.

At the same time, respondents' opinions differed depending on the region and whether they were representatives of the civil society sector or local authorities.

“*It is better to rebuild anew. Because if it's broken, there's a crack or something, it's **better to rebuild it all over again.***”
Activist, 63 y.o., Kharkiv region, Chuhuiv

In the Kharkiv region, activists called for rebuilding, while government officials spoke of the need to analyze each case separately. In the Kherson region, however, there was no such correlation.

Speaking about rebuilding, respondents noted the need for a **comprehensive approach** to this process. Such an approach requires considering the security and economic situation in the region, as well as the operational characteristics of facilities, and updating approaches to city planning and urban development. **Residents of Kherson** were particularly positive about **the restructuring of urban planning** (in general, the city's infrastructure rating before the war was lower than in other regional centers).

“*We need to create a development plan for several years, perhaps 10 years. **Depending on the situation on the frontline, the reconstruction should begin.***”
Activist, 47 y.o., Kharkiv region, Kharkiv city

“*First and foremost, many houses that were destroyed are already beyond their lifespan. If you restore them, the same communications, pipes, plumbing, all of this is almost unusable. **It's better to rebuild it all anew.***”
Activist, 37 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

Housing reconstruction is a complex and time-consuming process, but its implementation in the liberated territories is crucial. The prospects of the population's further residence in the affected areas and their participation in their recovery depend on the reconstruction of housing.



An example of reconstruction: Brave to Rebuild volunteers help Liudmyla Savenko reconstruct her house on the outskirts of Kyiv on March 25, 2023 (EMRE CAYLAK PHOTOS FOR FOREIGN POLICY)

ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS IN THE RECOVERY PROCESS

The respondents noted that the active work and support of local authorities, volunteers, activists, civic and international organizations, and charitable foundations helped gradually restore the liberated territories. Specific organizations that were repeatedly mentioned were the Red Cross, the UN, and ADRA.

“People received the most help from **UN organizations**. They were the first to be so efficient... they helped with hygiene and food, bread, everything was well organized.”
Activist, 47 y.o., Kharkiv region, Kharkiv city

“Specifically, **local authorities** were efficient. The occupation authorities repeatedly offered me cooperation so that I could work, but I refused... After the liberation, we all united, and our team immediately organized a humanitarian aid center.”
Government representative, 46 y.o., Kharkiv region, Pechenihiy

Credibility of institutions

The level of credibility of state institutions in the context of the reintegration process of the liberated territories of Ukraine is crucial for several reasons. First, high trust **contributes to social cohesion** and **maintains the population's unity**. People who trust the state authorities are more likely to cooperate and interact with them, facilitating reintegration.

Second, the credibility of state institutions is a key element of **the government's legitimacy**. If the population believes in the government's transparency and effectiveness, it contributes to stability and the rule of law. A high level of trust also facilitates **the implementation of reforms and government programs** necessary for the recovery and development of the liberated territories.

In addition, the credibility of public institutions helps **counteract disinformation and propaganda** that could be used to destabilize the region. Citizens trusting the state are less likely to believe fake news and manipulations, reducing the risk of social conflicts and promoting information security.

Thus, monitoring and raising the level of credibility of state institutions are critical to the successful reintegration of the liberated territories of Ukraine.

- According to the quantitative survey, most residents of the Kharkiv region trust **the local authorities**, but most residents of the Kherson region do not.
- **The head of the Kharkiv Regional Military Administration** is trusted by **63%** of respondents, compared to **19%** of those who do not. In the Kherson region, **37%** of respondents expressed trust and **44%** distrust in the head of the Regional Military Administration. About **15%** in both regions are unfamiliar with the head of the regional military administration.
- Similarly, **67%** of respondents in the Kharkiv region trust **the mayor of a city/village**, while **25%** do not trust them. However, in the Kherson region, the percentage of trust is **39%**, and distrust is **45%**.
- **Local mayors** are more trusted in villages (**63%** compared to **51%** in cities).

- **The President of Ukraine** (the central government) is trusted by the majority of residents of both the Kherson (**63%**) and Kharkiv (**60%**) regions.
- Local activists are more critical of **the central government**. They believe that the central government knows little about the local situation and should express more interest, communicate, and visit the regions.
- In cities, people tend to trust **the President** more often (**65%** compared to **56%** in villages).
- Local residents of the Kharkiv and Kherson regions express high trust in **law enforcement bodies** (**62%** in Kharkiv and **58%** in Kherson regions).

How much do you trust such institutions?



Efficiency of local authorities

Local authorities have been involved in the work since the first days of the communities' liberation. Having been freed from the pressure of the occupation authorities, the local government began difficult and large-scale work to eliminate the consequences of hostilities and meet the basic needs of local residents. The work of the local authorities is **generally praised** by activists and local government representatives themselves.

Effective **cooperation with the community and partners** (other government agencies, non-governmental organizations, international partners, etc.) is considered to be **the main achievement** of the local authorities. Attracting additional resources and funds to overcome the consequences of the occupation was also mentioned.

“I think it was quite effective, as they engaged various organizations, including humanitarian ones, to provide services in the Bilozerka community in every possible way. They participate in various projects... They **take every opportunity** to attract funding, experts, and assistance.”

NGO representative, 38 y.o., Kherson region, Bilozerka village

“If we talk about the involvement of the authorities and the public in the processes, I would say they are **very much involved**. They are even involved in processes that did not occur before the full-scale invasion. This includes strategic planning, attending sessions, inviting experts of various kinds, and preparing and processing documents that can be used to attract additional funding.”

NGO staff member, 38 y.o., Kherson region, Bilozerka

“I guess **80% is their work**, perhaps even more. From the very first days, they did not stop; they worked every day and had no sleep or rest.”

Activist, 47 y.o., Kharkiv region, Kharkiv city

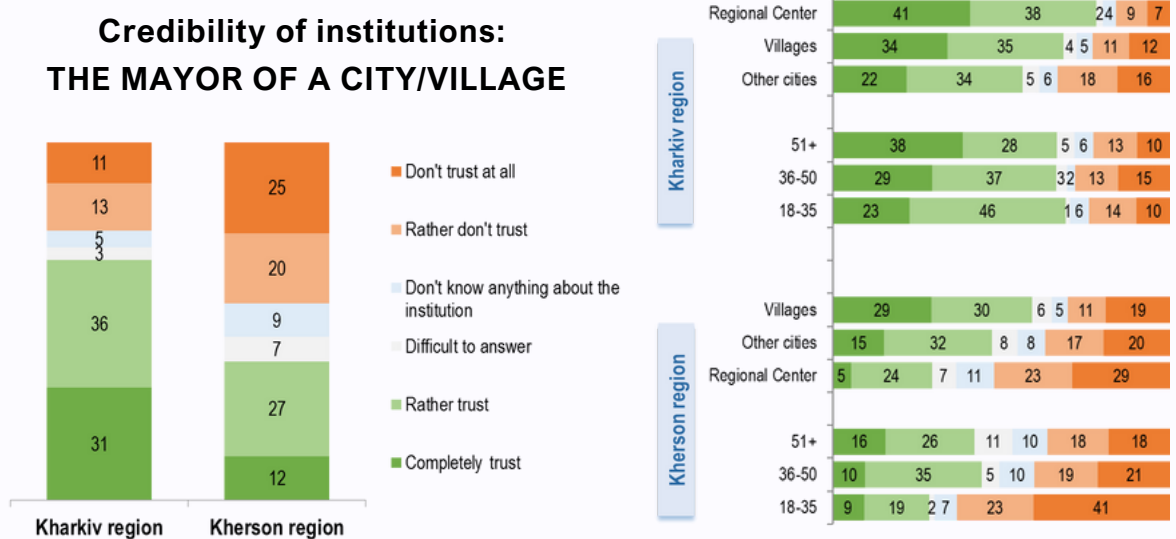
Another government achievement is **the restoration of infrastructure**. This primarily concerns rebuilding facilities after destruction and restoring services such as public transportation, utilities, and medical facilities. Security infrastructure and shelter provision were also mentioned, but only among Kharkiv residents.

Local authority **communication with the community** requires improvement. According to experts, it should be more effective and open. It was suggested that local authorities need to hire communications specialists, especially in Kherson.

“*Their communication is a failure. They have completely failed to communicate with the local residents. I gave you examples, for instance, that even the renovation was done, a new department was opened, new equipment was purchased... But I am the only one who knows about this because I communicate directly with the doctors. Why wasn't this announced anywhere? People need to see that qualitative changes are taking place.*”

“*If a person has full information, there is no room for fiction.*”

Head of an NGO, 26 y.o., Kherson region



It is necessary to reconsider the requirements and qualifications for local government staff. Experts point out the urgent need for **international partnership experts** and people with experience **working on projects and with the civil society sector**. According to local respondents, non-governmental organizations are able and ready to be involved in projects in almost every area requiring recovery. While partnership experts are needed to communicate with international donor organizations and attract funding, project professionals are important drivers of the planning and implementation process on the ground. Respondents also suggested reducing the number of staff or establishing clearer criteria for quality candidates for leadership positions.

“*I believe that local government offices should have people coming from the civil society sector who understand how it works, what a project is, how they are implemented, and how they are involved. They will be able to establish this trust and communication between the authorities.*”

Activist, 37 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

Experts point out **the lack of preparedness of local authorities for the challenges of war and insufficient response to them** as shortcomings of the government. This primarily concerns defense facilities and shelters. They also speak of insufficient preparation for power outages and poor energy security in general (which was a particularly pressing issue for the Kharkiv region at the time of the survey).

On the part of local authorities, there is a request for **more support with explanations** on the implementation of certain legislation and for more communication with central authorities. Representatives of local authorities emphasize the need to establish a flexible system for responding to possible needs and obstacles that may arise while implementing certain programs on the ground. Communication between all levels of the process is key in implementing recovery projects and programs.

Separately, local authorities emphasize the need to **overcome the staff shortage** by providing resources to hire/support and encourage competent employees. Given their work's scope and diversity, local authorities must constantly improve their competencies while facing the security risks of living in a frontline community. This should be taken into account when formulating personnel policies.

“Again, **no one could tell us what we should do**. In fact, we have worked for almost a year after the de-occupation, and many of our questions about the organization of work **were left unanswered**, and we did it at our own risk; perhaps later, we could be punished for it, but we did it so that people received either some services or the authorities could do something.”

Government representative, 35 y.o., Kherson region, Muzykivka village

“However, now they are trying to **shift all the responsibilities to the local authorities** as much as possible. That is, we are now faced with the question of hiring a tax officer to calculate our local taxes. They want to turn communities into independent entities, I don't know, like **a country in the country**, and they will only control things. This is very difficult and very complicated. What kind of a local budget is needed to cover only the experts' salaries.”

Government representative, 46 y.o., Kharkiv region, Pechenihy

Efficiency of the central government

Respondents' opinions on the efficiency of the central government vary. On the one hand, one cannot deny **a certain level of effectiveness** of the center, particularly in agreements with international partners on financial and humanitarian assistance. It is thanks to the resolution of these issues at the highest level that local foundations and charitable companies are able to work (tranches) and deliver aid (logistics).

On the other hand, according to the respondents, charitable organizations do all the work on the ground. They take requests from hospitals, schools, etc., and then work on these requests, finding help and bringing it. This is not managed by the central government but rather **by local initiatives**.

Local government representatives believe that the central government does not really understand **the local context** because it is far from the combat zone.

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*“It is very hard to **understand the needs** when you are 200, 300, 400 kilometers away. When you have not been in the occupation and do not know what an active combat zone is. And when the Ministries of Education or Culture ask you: “Why don’t you organize mass events?” the question arises: “Where?”.*
NGO representative, 38 y.o., Kherson region, Bilozerka village

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Local government representatives also expressed the opinion that the central government is trying to shift too much responsibility to the local authorities.

Activists are also mostly skeptical. They believe that the central government knows little about the local situation.

“*“You know, it seems to me that our entire region rests **on volunteers and the public.**”*
Activist, 37 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

“*“**Nobody hears us:** What problems we have, how hard it is for us, how much it hurts.”*
Activist, 63 y.o., Kharkiv region, Chuhuiv

“*“Sometimes, it seems like **we are talking in a vacuum.**”*
Activist, 42 y.o., Kherson region, Chornobaivka village

“*“Let a few MPs come here to make some **field visits.**”*
Government representative, 35 y.o., Kherson region, Muzykivka village

In this regard, there is a demand for **more local media** that could cover local issues more in-depth and truthfully. Respondents believe that the spread of such media would draw the center’s attention to the problems of individual regions.

Another idea is that the center should take a **more comprehensive** approach to local services and cooperate with them within the same system. The center should provide funding not to individual facilities but to the system (for instance, not to one hospital but to the entire medical sector of the settlement).

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*“**Centralize it all.** Well, one institution can get everything because everyone cooperates with it. The director of one hospital, for example, may be active, and another may be passive. And there, no one cooperates with this passive institution. If the central government centralized all this, then all would gradually develop.”*

Activist, 37 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

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In general, the dominant opinion among respondents is that the central government does not know the context and does not hear enough people on the ground. This opinion is mostly shared by activists and local government representatives.



Volodymyr Zelenskyi visited Ukrainian defenders in Kharkiv, February 19, 2024. (Office of the President)



In Kherson, the President visited the evacuation point of victims after the explosion of the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant, June 8, 2023. (Office of the President)

International Assistance and NGO Activity

Overall assessment of international assistance

Respondents share **different opinions** about international assistance. Some of them assess it **very positively** and express gratitude for any support. For example, thanks to international organizations and foundations, many residents have received grants to develop agriculture and farming. International donors also support educational programs by providing gadgets for online learning, and doctors from abroad provide medical care.

However, most respondents emphasize the need for **more aid**. They also note that not all partners can provide the necessary support, for example, in the area of the military. In some settlements, such as Chornobaivka, there is a lack of assistance, even in humanitarian areas such as healthcare and education. At the same time, in other settlements, respondents emphasized the problem of the so-called “**aid dependency**,” the dependence of local residents on humanitarian aid.

Therefore, we can conclude that the problem is not the amount of humanitarian aid provided but its **uneven distribution**. In addition, an excess of humanitarian aid has a negative impact on the development of local businesses, as it reduces the demand for everyday goods.

Dynamics of changes in the volume of aid

Respondents emphasize that **international aid has decreased over time**. While in the beginning, everyone received aid, now it is provided only to certain categories, which does not take into account all social circumstances, such as people of pre-retirement age and the unemployed. In general, respondents are grateful for the assistance but believe that more is needed and that it is important to respond to needs more rapidly.

Support for the military

Some respondents consider it important to support the Ukrainian military. It was suggested to provide assistance in indirect ways, such as supplying protective equipment and first aid kits. Another alternative way to help the military could be through rehabilitation grants.

Other forms of support

Respondents note that international assistance includes not only financial support, but also free legal aid, educational programs, mine safety lessons, search for missing persons, etc. For example, the People in Need charitable foundation helped install windows and restore heating networks.

Business support programs

International organizations actively support business development by providing grants. One of the areas of these programs is **social entrepreneurship**. Many residents of villages and small towns write grants on their own and contact donors to obtain funding for the improvement of their facilities, purchase of equipment, and attraction of investments. This demonstrates the willingness of donors to provide funds and the active participation of the public in these processes.

The role of young NGOs

Young NGOs play an important role in attracting international assistance. They secure significant funds for their facilities, attract investments, and purchase machinery and various equipment. These organizations demonstrate high activity and efficiency in communicating with donors, which contributes to the implementation of important projects and initiatives.

In what areas is there a lack of assistance from NGOs/international organizations?

Respondents name the following areas where they felt a lack of assistance:

1. **Medicine:** a lack of medical equipment.
2. **Humanitarian aid:** the shortage depends on the region and the type of aid; for example, small settlements in the Kharkiv region are particularly in need of hygiene supplies.
3. **Security and demining:** demining is a huge challenge for the territories that were under occupation and require international support.
4. **Culture and leisure:** there is a need for safe spaces for youth leisure and community gatherings.
5. **Children and inclusive facilities:** there is a great need for infrastructure for children, including inclusive facilities.
6. **Restoration of infrastructure:** assistance is needed to rebuild destroyed facilities.

Engaging new partners: tips

1

Communicate actively. Potential partners are ready to join in the reconstruction and development of the community, but this requires constant communication and invitations to cooperate. The more you communicate, the more partners will be involved. Partners also need to be better informed about critical issues and tragedies, such as the situation around the blowing up of the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant and its consequences.

2

Ensure transparency and reliability. Partners are willing to help, but they need to be confident in the reliability of cooperation. In particular, it is necessary to ensure transparent financial models.

3

Show the potential for development. It is necessary to demonstrate to partners that the community has the potential for development and that cooperation will be mutually beneficial, especially in the long term. Investments in the partnership should be justified by the benefits for investors. Creating conditions for community development, preserving the young population, and preparing a community investment profile will help attract new partners.

4

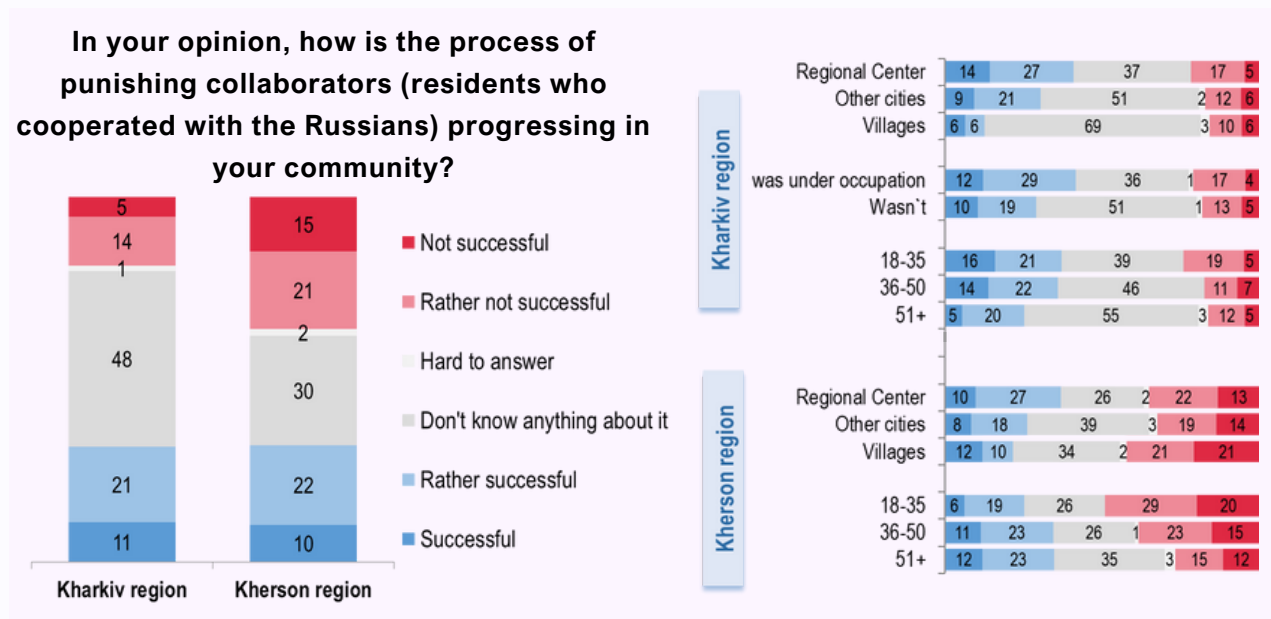
Flexibility and adaptation. Partners can change their requirements and conditions when justified. It is important to explain where the funds are invested and what the benefits of this investment are so that they are ready to provide the necessary support.

Fight Against Collaborationism

As of May 21, 2024, the Unified Register of Court Decisions of Ukraine contains **1,561 verdicts in criminal cases of collaborationism**.

Drawbacks of the system of punishment for collaborators

Almost all respondents believe that the system of punishment for collaborators **is currently not fair**. Only a third of the population called the process of punishing collaborators successful.



Currently, **three main drawbacks** can be identified in the system of punishing collaborators:

1 It has not been established whether the vast majority of collaborators have been brought to justice

There are scenarios where collaborators were not punished at all. **First**, sometimes, the system failed to prosecute collaborators from the highest echelons of power, although it did punish lower-level criminals.

Secondly, the community may have known that someone was a collaborator, but this could not be proven for various reasons:

- the criminals managed to destroy material evidence,
- the perpetrators left Ukraine,
- some supported the occupation administration “morally,” with words, so there was no material evidence at all.

2 Insufficient punishment

Respondents often argued that the punishment for collaborators should be more severe and harsher than it is now. Some believe that it is unfair that the state is keeping imprisoned collaborators at the expense of taxpayers. Residents of the liberated territories also feel that it is unfair when collaborators avoid punishment and receive state benefits, which **increases social tension and distrust of the state**.

The third drawback, on the contrary, refers to cases when someone was unfairly recognized as a collaborator. Some respondents explained that there are different situations. For example, sometimes, a person is forced to cooperate with the occupiers to save his or her life. Therefore, consideration of such cases should be thorough and “**individualized.**” Despite the system’s shortcomings, some respondents mentioned **successful cases** of bringing collaborators to justice and spoke about the success of **Ukraine’s Security Service (SBU)**.

“*In many places, our security service takes these measures... As far as I know from local residents who were under occupation, all the people who somehow cooperated or worked for the occupiers were checked, and **many were punished.***”

Activist, 47 y.o., Kharkiv region, Kharkiv city

“*We know that the Security Service and the National Police **are constantly carrying out this work** and are still identifying those accomplices of the aggressor who live in this city and provide information to the enemy about the facilities.*”

Government representative, 40 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

Human rights activists have identified the following **drawbacks in the legislation on collaborationism**:

The vagueness of the wording in Articles 111-1 and 111-2 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine allows for a broad interpretation of the qualifying features of crimes, as well as an unclear distinction between the elements and qualifications of actions that may fall under collaboration or aiding the aggressor state. This leads to the risk of misunderstanding the definition of collaboration, both among those targeted and those investigating such cases. As a result, Ukrainians, without a clear understanding of what actions are allowed and what actions they will have to answer for, become intimidated and more vulnerable to Russian propaganda.

The lack of prioritization of cases, as well as the issue of proportionality of the offense and punishment, are significant shortcomings in the collaboration investigation system, raising doubts about the effectiveness of resource allocation. Often, the greatest focus is on misdemeanors rather than serious crimes.

Another challenge is **public pressure on the justice system**. According to Serhii Danylov, deputy director of the Center for Middle East Studies, the degree of punishment demanded by Ukrainians depends on their emotional perception, i.e., it is influenced by the possible traumatic experience that people have had: whether they lived under occupation, witnessed torture or murder, were forced to survive, etc. This factor is especially relevant for the population of the liberated territories, where most people have lived through such experiences and have an acute demand for justice. According to Onysiia Syniuk, legal analyst at the ZMINA Human Rights Center, there is a lack of communication with the population on this issue, and in particular, attention to collaboration cases from the media. Such communication would contribute to a more effective satisfaction of the demand for justice, thus reducing public pressure and increasing the level of trust and cohesion in the community. Other shortcomings of the system of punishment for collaborators include the predominant use of **detention** as a preventive measure for suspects at the pre-trial investigation stage and **the accusatory bias** in cases of collaboration.

New approaches in dealing with the issue of collaborators

Proponents of the idea of creating new bodies and approaches to dealing with the issue of collaboration mentioned the use of **an arbitration system**. This implies that the local community should have an influence on decisions regarding potential collaborators. There were cases mentioned above where the community knew about collaborators and expected punishment, but law enforcement was unable to prove the crimes. **Community participation** could help avoid such situations.

In general, respondents often insist on **judicial reform**, not only when talking about collaborators but also about the work of the judiciary in Ukraine.

“We don’t need to create anything additional... how many law enforcement agencies do we have that investigate war crimes there... the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), the Defence Intelligence (HUR), the State Bureau of Investigation (DBR), the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU), the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor’s Office (SAPO) and others... which in fact duplicate work of one another.”
Head of an NGO, 26 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

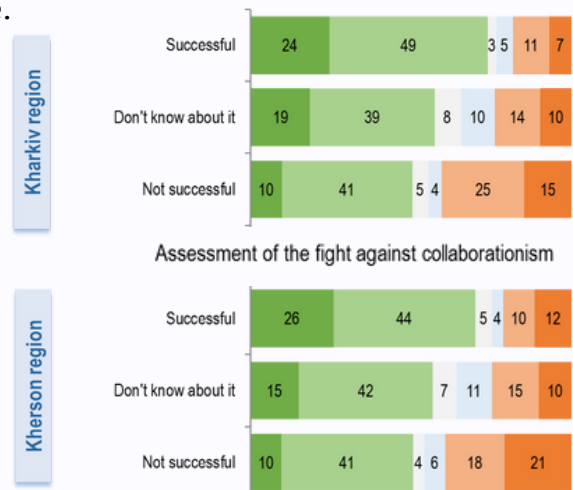
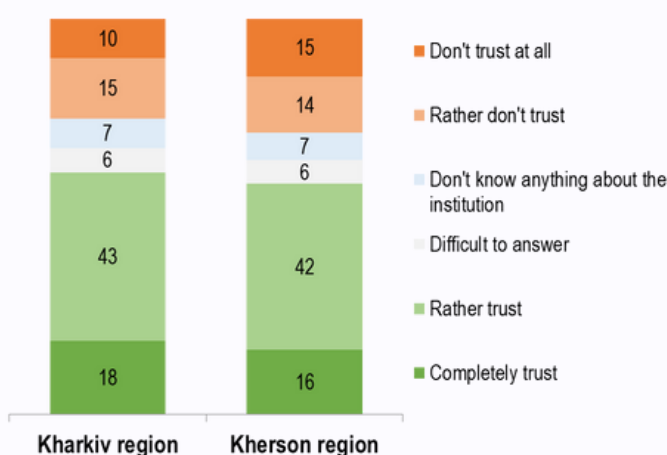
However, critics of the idea of creating new institutions (special tribunals, etc.) explain that there are already enough or too many investigative bodies in Ukraine. Instead, **the work of existing structures needs to be of higher quality and more effective**. Thus, respondents directly or indirectly express a certain distrust of investigative bodies.

On the other hand, some argue that such bodies should be created at the international level. Such structures can investigate not only the actions of local collaborators but also war criminals in general, the Russian leadership, etc.

Thus, both supporters and critics of the idea of new approaches show distrust of the system of investigating collaborationism in Ukraine. However, they have different visions of how to remedy the situation:

- Proponents suggest creating an alternative to the existing state investigative bodies. The suggestion to involve community members in the proceedings is a method of building trust. Local residents usually trust their community more than the central government.
- Critics are disappointed in the creation of new bodies. However, they suggest learning to work effectively with what is available.
- Trust in international investigative bodies is sometimes higher than in Ukraine’s domestic authorities. Therefore, for some respondents, international bodies are also a more reliable alternative.

Credibility of institutions: LAW ENFORCEMENT BODIES



CULTURE, UKRAINIANIZATION, COHESION

Ukrainianization - Re-Ukrainianization

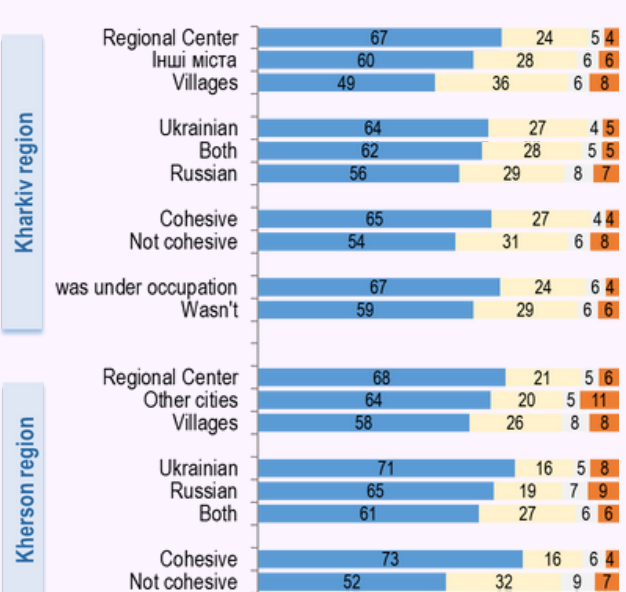
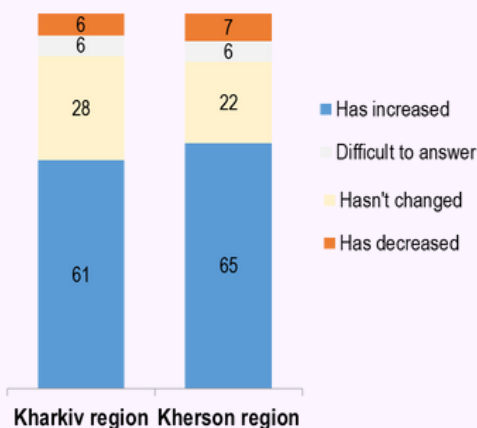
Note

Re-Ukrainianization, as defined by Volodymyr Viatrovykh, MP, is the strengthening of Ukrainian national identity, including support for the Ukrainian language, history, and culture after the deliberate erasure of Ukrainian national identity (Russification, revival of Soviet myths about the past).

In the course of the survey, we found that the mere raising of the issue of Ukrainianization, or especially “re-Ukrainianization,” is incomprehensible to the representatives of the region. It evokes the association that “others” perceive them (residents of the liberated territories) as inferior Ukrainians who need “re-education.” The respondents had difficulty understanding the concept of “re-Ukrainianization,” which evoked various emotions, from confusion to laughter. Most people understood it to mean something related to a return to the Ukrainian language. Therefore, the use of such rhetoric in public communications is highly undesirable and should be taken into account when formulating relevant policies.

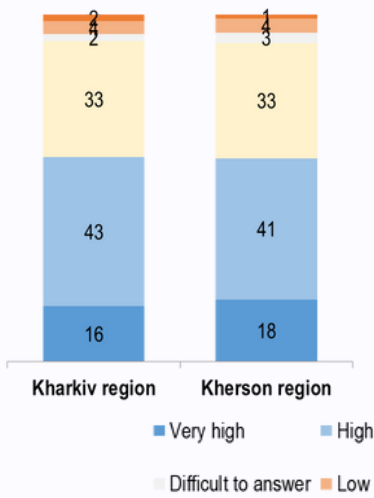
The majority of respondents in both regions believe that the level of pro-Ukrainian position and interest in everything Ukrainian in their locality **has increased** over the past year. **The experience of the war and being under occupation** could have pushed residents to embrace everything Ukrainian and to express themselves as Ukrainians. In particular, in the Kharkiv region, **67%** of respondents from settlements that were under occupation reported an increase in the level of pro-Ukrainian position, as opposed to **59%** of residents of cities/villages that were not under occupation. The experience of occupation as a contributing factor that strengthened Ukrainian identity was also mentioned by residents of Kherson.

How has the level of pro-Ukrainian position, interest in Ukrainian among residents changed over the last year?

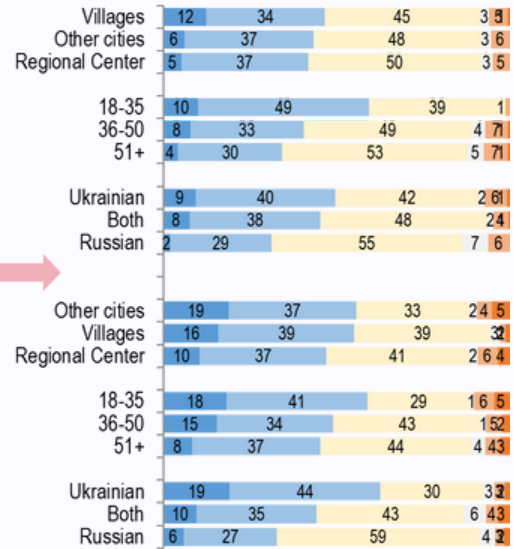
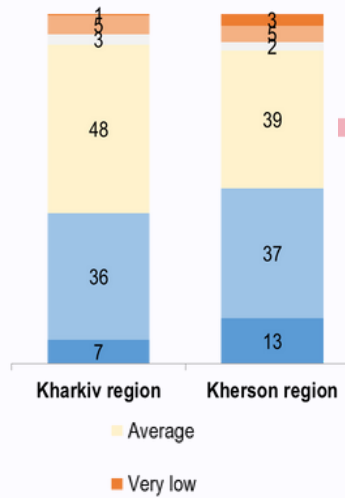


“The Russian aggression became the main pillar of [Ukrainianization] because we became Ukrainianized thanks to it.”
Civil society activist, 37y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

What is the level of pro-Ukrainian position and support for Ukraine among residents of your community?



What is the level of interest in Ukrainian (language, culture, history)?



In addition, the majority of respondents (~60%) in both regions believe **support for the pro-Ukrainian position is generally high** (another third believes that the level is average).

However, the pro-Ukrainian position should not be confused with the level of interest in everything Ukrainian. A feature of both regions is that the **youth** show more interest in Ukrainian.

About half of Kherson residents consider the level of interest in Ukrainian culture to be **high** (about 40% consider it to be average). They are more likely to believe that Ukrainization will happen on its own if a small boost is given to the culture of Ukraine and the region. In general, respondents from the Kherson region were more willing to talk about all issues related to Ukrainization; it was more understandable to them than to Kharkiv residents, who were less likely to speak on this topic.

In the Kharkiv region, almost half of the respondents rate the level of interest in Ukrainian culture as medium and slightly less, **43%**, as **high**. The issue of Ukrainization is **more sensitive** here, but for local residents, a lack of interest in culture does not equal a lack of pro-Ukrainian position. Experts from the Kharkiv region emphasized that Ukrainization should be motivated, that it should be a voluntary process, and that it is quite long, so one should not expect quick results.

“*This should not be forced; it should be gradual and we will come to this. The documents, everything is in Ukrainian. All services should be in Ukrainian only... We need to motivate people to switch to the state language. In fact, Ukrainian culture is very, very great and useful, and many things, songs, poems, and poets.*”
 Head of a charitable foundation, 48y.o., Kharkiv region, Kharkiv city

Hostile attitudes towards “pro-Ukrainian theses” were the only issue on which the representatives from the Kharkiv region were **almost unanimous**. They think that such an attitude either does not exist at all or happens very rarely.

Active citizens from the Kherson region had different opinions on this issue; they **spoke more often about collaborators**. Some noted that there are still citizens in the region who have ambiguous or negative attitudes toward “pro-Ukrainian theses.” Others argued that after 2022, such theses were rejected by the majority of citizens in the region. Sometimes, it was clarified that residents of the regions faced negative attitudes during the occupation, and after the de-occupation, this became very rare.

“

*“Today, those people who still have some dreams about, I don't know, Russia, the Soviet Union, we need to keep stating that these people exist, they are here, **they live among us.**”*

Local government representative, 40 years old, Kherson region, Kherson

Measures taken to re-Ukrainize the liberated territories

According to the interviewed experts, **not many activities** were carried out in the context of re-Ukrainization in the liberated communities. The main ones mentioned by the respondents include the following:

- renaming of streets,
- demonstration of national symbols in public space,
- and creating both national and local identities (Ukrainian as a brand).

According to the residents of the liberated communities, **culture**, its dissemination, and promotion play an important role in Ukrainianization, not only for the younger population of the communities but also for the older generation. In general, respondents spoke out **against the forced imposition of cultural values** and suggested alternative methods of popularizing contemporary Ukrainian culture, meaning that everything Ukrainian becomes “trendy” naturally. The “brand” of the Armed Forces plays an important role in this.

“

*“I believe that if we know our history, our great-grandfathers, what we are fighting for now, what our husbands and brothers are dying for. I think **this will strengthen the spirit, and our children will know their worth.**”*

Head of an NGO, 38 y.o., Kherson region, Bilozerka village

“

*“Well, look, it's love for embroidery, it's speaking Ukrainian, it's the spirit of patriotism, that is, the **Armed Forces** are, you know, like a **brand**, just a brand.”*

Local government representative, 35 y.o., Kherson region, Muzykivka village

“

“I don't know about other regions, whether street renaming is on the agenda.

We can't look at these names anymore; it's like a trigger for us.”

Civil society activist, 37 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

“

*“I really like the fact that the style, you know, **adapts to the conditions of today.** These are tracksuits with national embroidery, and yes, these are T-shirts with national symbols, with a trident, with a viburnum, with a watermelon, which is associated with **our city, with the inscription Chornobaivka.** People do not buy these things because they are forced to buy them. They buy it because they want to buy it.”*

Head of an NGO, 26 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

“

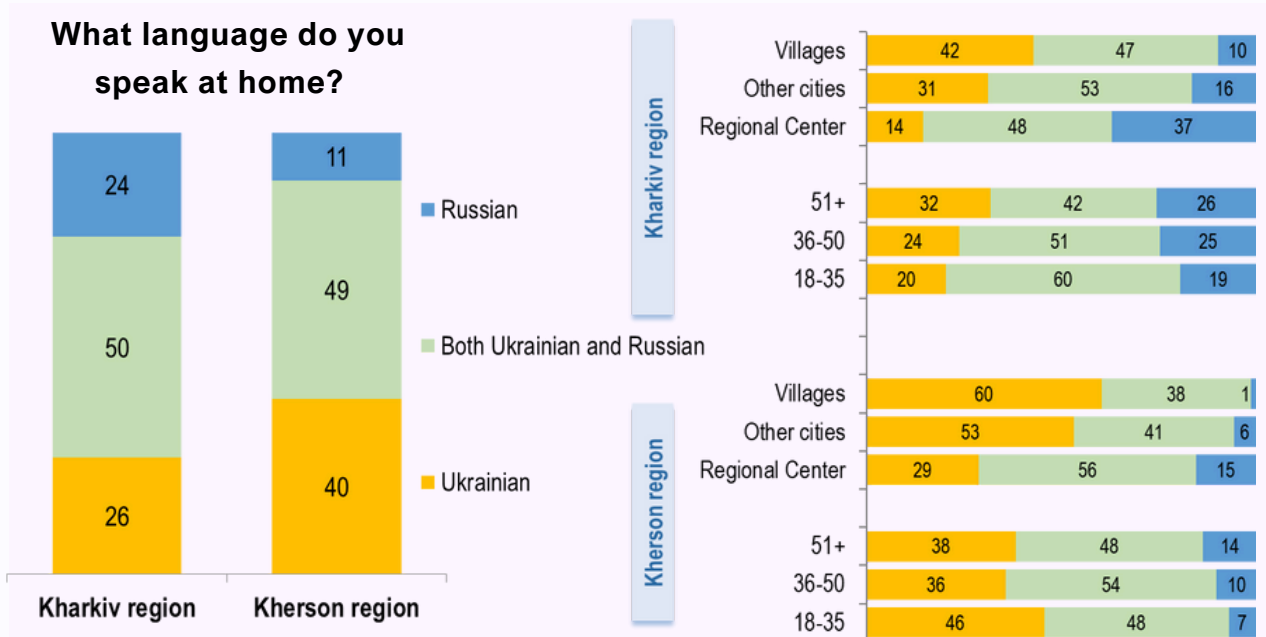
*“Unfortunately, this self-identity **was shaped by the war**, unfortunately. But it's happening, and it's very cool that it exists... not only young people are encouraged to it.”*

Head of an NGO, 26 y.o., Kherson oblast, Kherson city

The language issue, the (non-)transition to the Ukrainian language

The inevitability and importance of switching to the Ukrainian language is a common opinion among respondents.

Overall, there are more exclusively Ukrainian speakers in the Kherson region (40%) than in the Kharkiv region (26%). Experts from the Kherson region confirm the fact that many people in the region switched to Ukrainian after the occupation; more often than not, these are residents of smaller settlements. In terms of age structure, in the Kharkiv region, there are more Ukrainian speakers among the older generation, while in the Kherson region, the figure is similar among both older and younger people.



It cannot be assumed that everyone has switched to Ukrainian, as there are still residents who are not comfortable speaking Ukrainian in everyday life. For example, 24% of respondents in the Kharkiv region speak only Russian, while in the Kherson region, the number of such people is 11%.

However, those who are “not comfortable” with speaking Ukrainian are most often **treated with understanding** by their fellow citizens, including Ukrainian speakers. Some switch to another language depending on the interlocutor. **Half of the respondents** in both Kharkiv and Kherson regions said that they speak **both Ukrainian and Russian**.

“Some people still adhere to the position that they **speak the language they are comfortable with**. But there are very few of them. Mostly, everyone speaks **Ukrainian**.”
Government representative, 35 y.o.,
Kherson region, Muzykivka village

“I speak **Ukrainian**, no matter how bad my Ukrainian is, but I try to speak Ukrainian. So if someone speaks to me in Russian, there are no questions; we speak Russian. That’s how it should be; **there should be no arguments about which language a person speaks!**”
Head of a charitable foundation, 48 y.o., Kharkiv region, Kharkiv city

Interestingly, 71% of Russian-speaking respondents in Kharkiv and 63% of Russian-speaking respondents in Kherson chose Ukrainian when asked: “In what language are you comfortable being interviewed?” In both regions, **about 90%** of bilinguals chose Ukrainian.

What language do you speak at home?

Which language is more convenient for you to pass the interview?



Moreover, it is noteworthy that respondents in both regions **do not see language as a unifying factor in society.**

The most important thing that almost all respondents emphasize is that **there should be no disputes and language conflicts**, as the language of communication should remain a voluntary choice. Moreover, people need time to get used to speaking Ukrainian. There is undeniable support for **the mandatory use of Ukrainian in the public sphere**, but in personal communication, many emphasize the freedom to speak the language that is more comfortable.

— “ —

*“We have **all the documentation in Ukrainian**, all of it, but we are not forced to talk. We don’t have any kind of aggression.”*

Head of an NGO, 47 y.o., Kharkiv region, Chuhuiv

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*“Our region is Russian-speaking. But be that as it may, a person can speak... if he or she is comfortable, let him or her speak Russian. But everything that concerns documentation, applications, announcements, all of this should be in Ukrainian only. **We live in Ukraine; this is the only way it should be.**”*

Activist, 63 y.o., Kharkiv region, Chuhuiv

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The village of Kiselyvka, Kherson region, after de-occupation, June 2023. (Yulia Ratsybarska, RFE/RL)

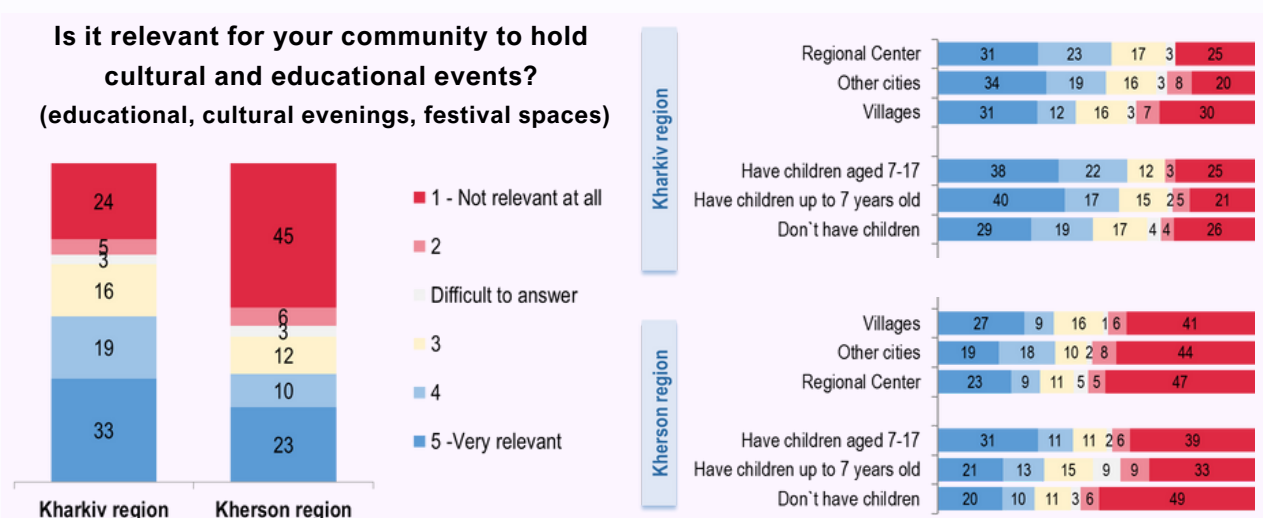
Culture and Media

Culture

The area of culture is facing significant challenges: cultural institutions are closed due to **the threat of shelling**, and events are held exclusively **online**. Young people do not have safe places to gather, which makes it difficult to organize events and joint activities.

Considering the problem of cultural development in the liberated territories, our survey’s key question explored **the relevance of cultural and educational events** (educational, cultural evenings, festivals, workshops, etc.) for the local population.

The opinion was expressed that culture is important even in times of war. More than half (**52%**) of the respondents in the Kharkiv region considered the events to be relevant or very relevant. In contrast, this figure was only **33%** in the Kherson region.



The majority of respondents in the Kherson region consider the events to be **not relevant or not relevant at all** due to the **more acute** security situation in the region and the **unresolved**, more pressing economic issues. It is noteworthy that mostly residents of Kherson **without children** were most opposed to such cultural events, while the opinions of people with children were divided – such events are considered desirable for the development and socialization of children. It is also worth noting that respondents considered it very important to be aware that cultural events **do not cause significant losses to the local and national budgets**.

“If we talk about culture, it is still ... **on hold**. Because, again, the **security situation does not allow us to hold various cultural events in any way**.”
 NGO representative, 38 y.o., Kherson region, Bilozerka village

“This is a matter of state development because culture is about films, and **it requires a lot of funding. Perhaps it’s not the time for that now**.”
 Civil society activist, 47 y.o., Kharkiv oblast, Kharkiv

Media

Residents of the liberated communities most often noted that the media should broadcast **unbiased information** about the current situation, and this is the best they can do. The respondents are rather skeptical about the “United News” national telethon (and especially the costs allocated for it) and its “positive” propaganda.

“**There is no better approach than the truth.** And I think that the media, media people, should stick to that, and that’s it. Nothing more.”
Head of an NGO, 26 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

“If we are going to hear the truth, no matter how bad or good it is, well, **we have to hear it.**”
Head of a charitable foundation, 48 y.o., Kharkiv oblast, Kharkiv city

“Maybe we can popularize it more. We have Mavka, a very good cartoon that we made. And I think I’ve watched it twice, and it’s no worse than Disney cartoons. You can invest more in it. **If I have to choose between a telethon and Mavka, I’d rather have two Mavkas** than pay experts who just talk...”
Civil society activist, 37 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

According to the survey “**Post-war recovery of Ukraine and media consumption**” by the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation, conducted on **March 3-12, 2024**, an interesting feature of the east (**Kharkiv**, Dnipro regions) and south (**Kherson**, Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv, Odesa regions) is that **local telegram channels** were mentioned as the main source of information about daily news (**55%** and **55.6%** respectively). These are followed by sources such as YouTube, national telegram channels, relatives, and colleagues (respondents could choose any number of answers). In the East, **only 25.4%** of respondents said that they receive news from the “**United News**” telethon, the lowest rate of all macro-regions of Ukraine (immediately followed by the South with **36.2%**).

A “pro-Ukrainian” product versus a Russian one

Experts note that Russian media is practically unpopular, and there are very few, if any, people who watch or trust it. It is important to distinguish between a **Russian-language product** and a **Russian product**.

“People watch movies in Russian, but they have stopped watching Russian products.”
Civil society activist, 37 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

On the other hand, some say that they simply “have not heard anyone talk about it,” which does not always mean that they do not watch it but that they do not talk about it publicly. Most often, these are either those who have access to such sources of information technically – they have Russian channels or radio, or they are older people who find it harder to change their focus. A separate problem is that there is a lot of Russian content on the TikTok network.

“Honestly, I haven’t heard anyone say that they watch Russian channels or programs. I talk to my parents a lot, and now the only problem is that TikTok has Russian stories and videos. I would like it if our government simply **blocked all Russian channels** so that there would be no access to them.”
Head of NGO, 38 y.o., Kherson region, Bilozerka village

“Sometimes, maybe someone can see Russian channels on a satellite somewhere, but, again, it has become so disgusting. That is, **this trigger hits the brain**, and people really... only a few people watch. But, again, those are the ones who, unfortunately, are still waiting for Russia.”
Civil society activist, 42 y.o., Kherson region, Chornobaivka village

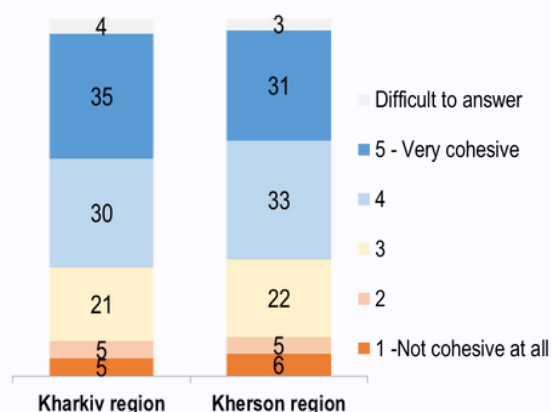
The experts we interviewed often noted that Ukrainians should increase the number of **high-quality “pro-Ukrainian” cultural products**, as Russians are winning on this battlefield by the number of films and resources used to spread propaganda.

“Again, this is **an information war**. And the content that Russia produces today, there is very little we can do to counter it.”
Head of an NGO, 26 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

Cohesion

Ukrainians have been united by the war after the full-scale invasion – this is the conclusion of the vast majority of people we interviewed. Representatives of both the Kherson and Kharkiv regions assess the level of community cohesion as **sufficient or high (over 60%)**, meaning that, in general, the communities of the liberated territories **are united**. This was emphasized most of all by young people in the regions, as well as residents of regional centers (particularly because of pride in the hero cities of Kharkiv and Kherson).

How would you rate the level of cohesion of the residents of your region?



On the other hand, this answer is often preferable, while **the question of mutual confidence** in the context of **punishing collaborators** and **the difference between the level of suffering** in the regions shows problematic points of cohesion that follow implicitly from the answers to other questions. After all, on the one hand, the war brought together those who experienced common suffering and the experience of occupation and alienated those who left and did not have such an experience.

Why are people united?

- Common misfortune and problems.
- The aspiration to help each other.
- A shared difficult experience (including the occupation).
- Patriotism, a common goal, and love for the Motherland.
- Understanding that only together it is possible to defeat the enemy.

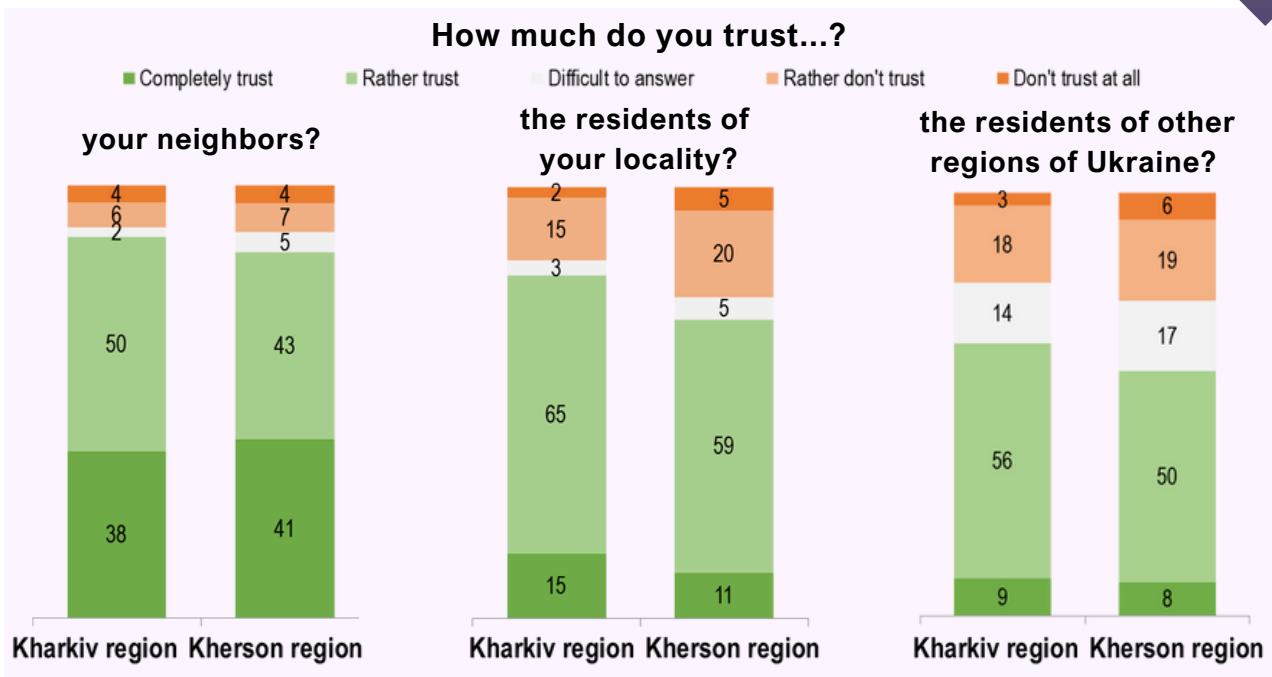
“The war increased the level of cohesion... **the war showed that there are no strangers**. There is no stranger’s father, no stranger’s grief, no stranger’s son, no stranger’s anything. There is trouble, there is a problem, everyone is trying to solve it... Well, this is true for every situation. The airstrike is incoming, and a house is damaged – the whole street is repairing it.”
Head of an NGO, 38 y.o., Kherson region, Bilozerka village

“**First of all, the war put everything in its place and showed who is who**. There has never been such unity as there was during the war and during the occupation with Ukrainians who turned out to be pro-Ukrainian.”
Civil society activist, 42 y.o., Kherson region, Chornobaivka village

The occupation experience **has especially united the residents of the Kherson region**, which has smaller communities and a large part of the territory that was occupied. Among the representatives of the Kharkiv region, this was mentioned less often.

The majority of respondents in both regions said they trusted their neighbors (**over 80%**). **80%** of respondents in the Kharkiv region trusted the residents of their locality, while in the Kherson region, this figure was slightly lower but still high – **70%**.

The shelling and difficult circumstances do unite people, but this cohesion is sometimes episodic, and there is no guarantee that it will remain at a high level for a long time.



In general, respondents claim to have a positive or neutral attitude toward Ukrainians in regions more distant from the front. But in fact, they often mentioned that residents of more peaceful regions do not understand them because **they have not gone through a similar experience as they did and do not understand their traumas**. However, some noted that there should not be different attitudes toward Ukrainians in different regions because everyone suffered to a certain extent. On the other hand, there were also opinions that residents of regions closer to the frontline need more help and attention from the authorities.

“*Unfortunately, they don't understand, maybe **fortunately** they don't understand it... well, they may not have had such massive changes since the beginning of the full-scale invasion.*”

Local government representative, 40 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

“*The more secure the situation becomes, the less united people get.*”

Civil society activist, 47 y.o., Kharkiv oblast, Kharkiv city

When it comes to the issue of confidence, only **65%** of respondents in the Kharkiv region trust residents of other regions, while in the Kherson region, the figure is **58%**. This indicates a certain **“gap in society”** between regions where life goes on despite the war and regions where the fighting does not allow for normal life.

Residents of the frontline territories feel a certain **“resentment”** because they **cannot live a full life like people in other regions** of the country. Representatives of the liberated regions also feel that other regions know little about their situation. Western regions, in their perception, have leisure and fun, while in the liberated territories, there is a sense of “mourning” and “fear,” which is, according to respondents, more noticeable in the Kherson region.

“*But nevertheless, **people live their lives there**. People have the opportunity to go to parks, sit in cafes, and celebrate children's birthdays in such establishments. And we are still at home.*”

Local government representative, 35 y.o., Kherson region, Muzykivka village

“*They live their lives, **they do not see it**. But I think it's a false perception because even in the western regions **they have suffered a lot in their own way**. Many guys who are fighting are from the western regions.*”

Civil society activist, 37 y.o., Kherson region, Kherson city

Factors that impact cohesion negatively

To summarize, it is worth noting that the communities were generally cohesive: ready to help each other, working together to win and support the Armed Forces. However, people are different, and it cannot be stated unequivocally that all community residents are 100% united, as there are still those who do not support the general trend.

According to experts, **the reasons WHY people are not united** include the following:

- **Different experiences during the occupation:** some people lived through more difficult conditions, while others fled and returned. Misunderstandings and devaluations of each other's experiences appear both at the community level and in attitudes toward other regions.
- **Mistrust of information sources,** lack of reliable, trustworthy sources: causes a certain distortion of reality and can also affect the views of community members
- **Negative attitudes** towards Ukraine, Ukrainian, and possible collaborative activities: such people are called "waiters" – waiting for the return of the Russian government, opposed to the Ukrainian government, or simply said to have collaborated with the occupiers.
- The time spent **in the occupation** and **Russian propaganda**. It is especially relevant for the Kharkiv region.

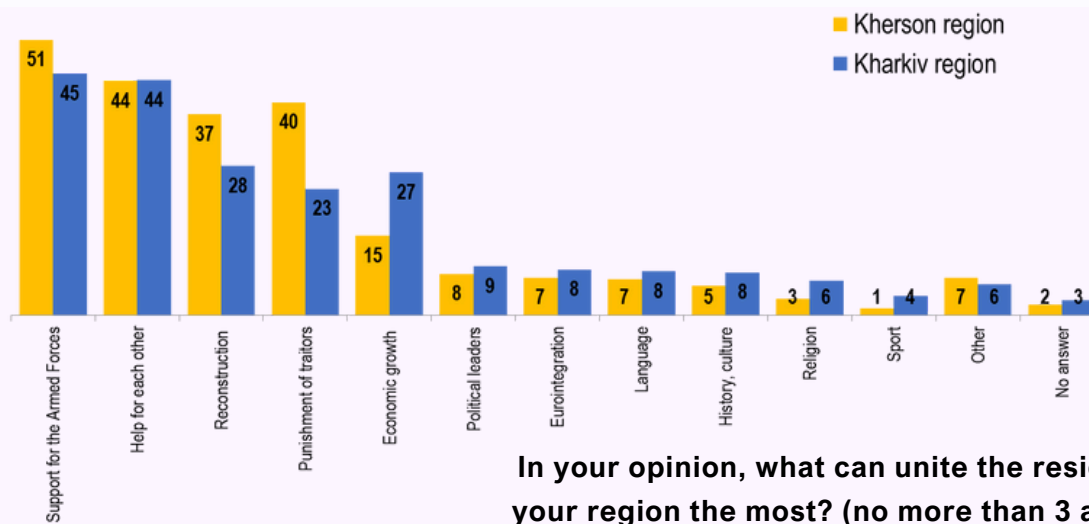
«To be honest, the people who were under occupation, 12,000 of them, **are very difficult people**. For six months, they were told that Russia was here forever. People were already very distressed, you understand. And the government has done a lot. We are now working on the problem of security and community cohesion.»

Government representative, 48 y.o., Kharkiv region, Balakliia community

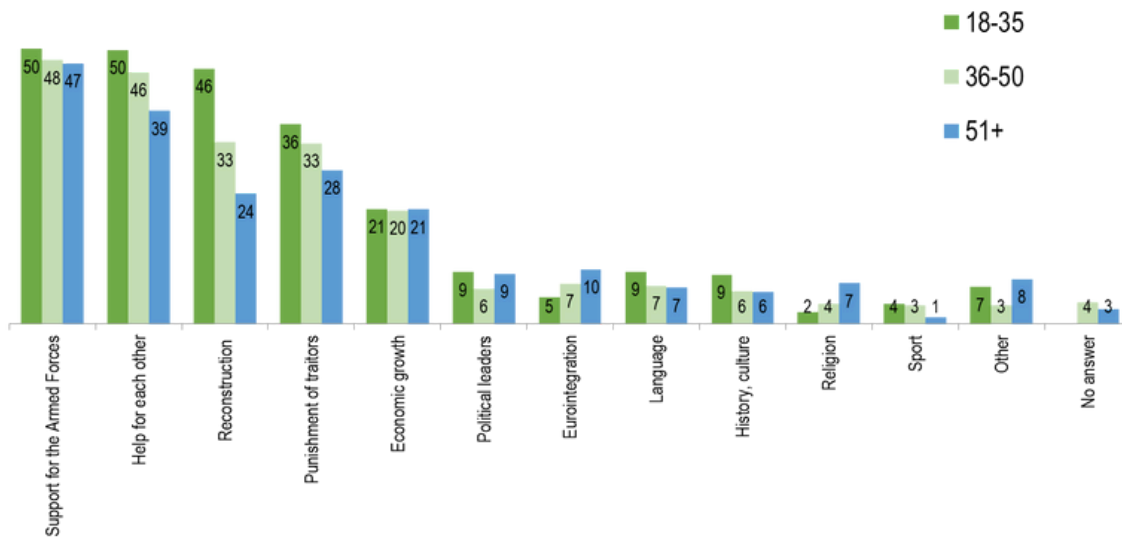
It is also worth remembering that the question of cohesion partially encourages respondents to answer in the affirmative, but when discussing other topics, respondents gave examples of life situations that proved the ambiguity of the thesis and problems with overall unity in communities.

Measures that could increase cohesion

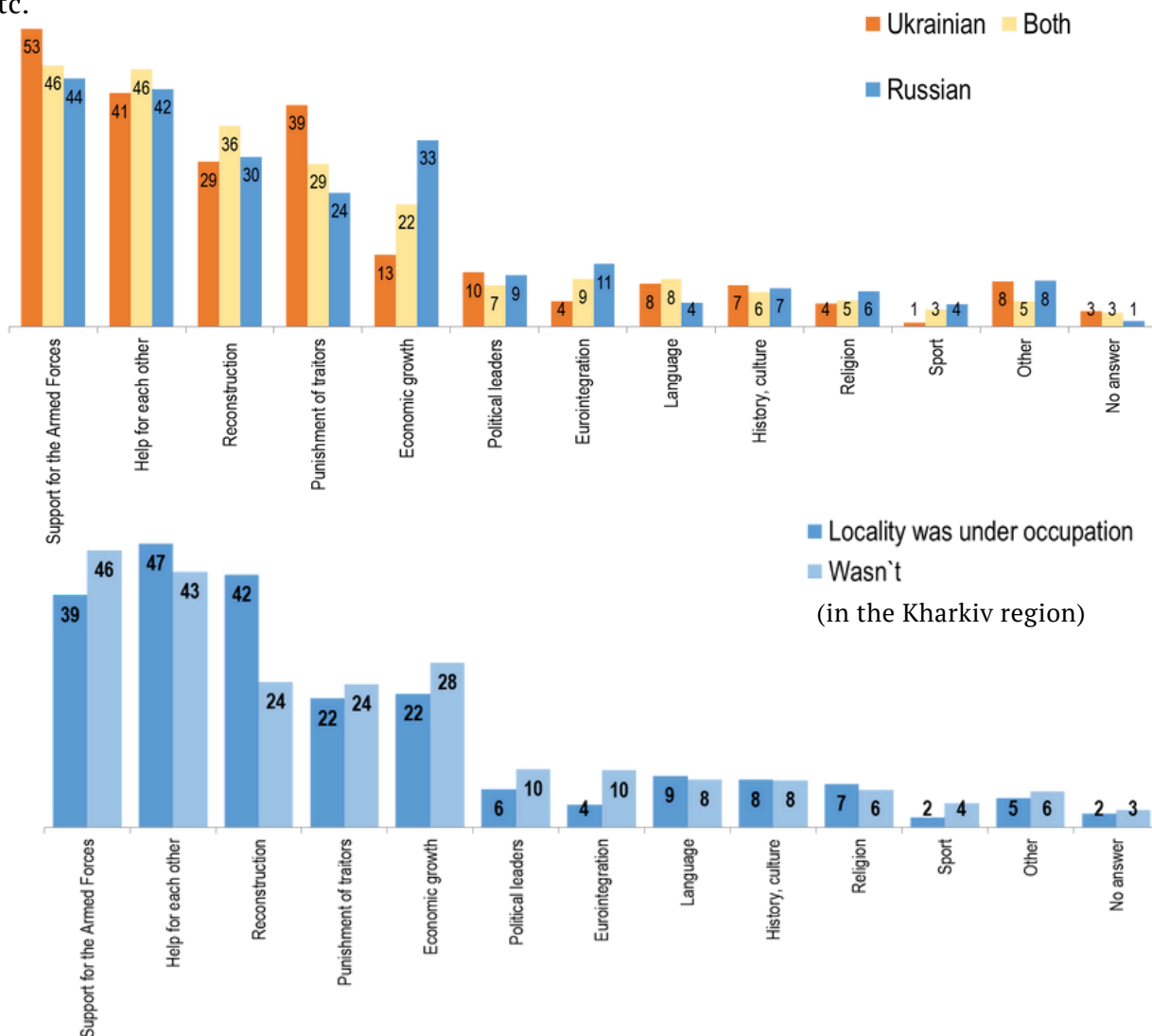
When asked, "What can unite the residents of the region the most?" the majority of respondents in both regions chose **support for the Armed Forces**, followed by **help for each other**.



Interestingly, residents of the Kherson region prioritize **reconstruction** and **punishment of traitors**, which confirms the hypothesis that the issues of destroyed housing and bringing collaborators to justice are more urgent here than in the Kharkiv region. Instead, residents of the latter mentioned **economic growth** as a “unifying factor” more often, i.e., they emphasized more long-term aspects.



The age structure shows that of all the groups, **young people** emphasize reconstruction as a measure to increase cohesion, as they want to plan their future lives here, build a family, etc.



The linguistic structure shows that more Ukrainian than Russian speakers favor punishing collaborators, while more Russian than Ukrainian speakers favor economic growth.

Another interesting trend is that residents whose settlements were under occupation **favor reconstruction more as a factor of increased cohesion**, as it is a more urgent problem for them.

Taking into account the survey results and the testimonies of the interviewed experts, we can identify measures that could increase cohesion:

- Involve local residents in projects aimed at helping Ukraine’s defenders.
- Communicate with residents and emphasize what unites Ukrainians.
- Organize events, clubs, and other types of joint activities (cultural or social) that would bring together different categories of community residents if there is a need for this in a particular community.
- Create joint housing reconstruction projects that involve the public, private, and civil society sectors.
- Involve more experts, NGOs, and volunteers who specialize in reconstruction/recovery/reintegration.

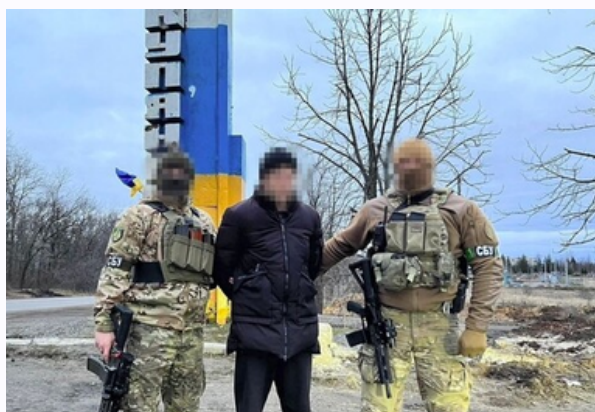
— “ —
“*[What unites us?] All our fundraisers, donations, when we raise funds to support our army, to support individual brigades. We help our defenders to rehabilitate.*”
Head of an NGO, 38 y.o., Kherson region, Bilozerka village

— ” —
— “ —
“*[What measures could increase cohesion?] To invite people from different organizations, such as volunteers, to help with some urgent issues, to help, for example, the army.*”
Civil society activist, 47 y.o., Kharkiv oblast, Kharkiv city

— ” —
— “ —
“*To organize open lectures, seminars, culturffal events, flash mobs at the high level.*”
Civil society activist, 42 years old, Kherson region, Chornobaivka village



The Security Service of Ukraine detained a man in Kherson who helped FSB employee escape on boats to the left bank of the Dnieper, November 24, 2022. (SSU)



A collaborator from Kupiansk, Kharkiv region, received a real term of 13 years: the man wanted to export 700 tons of grain to the Russian Federation. July 31, 2023. (SSU)

RECOMMENDATIONS

ECONOMY AND BUSINESS SECTOR

To create employment opportunities:

- Provide financial support, loan programs, and other incentives to resume the activities of industrial and agricultural enterprises.
- Organize training and retraining programs for residents to enable them to take up vacant jobs.
- Develop public works and engage the population in infrastructure restoration.
- Develop public works and engage the population in infrastructure restoration.
- Attention should be paid to the employment and greater economic involvement of the middle-aged population (39-59 years old).

To improve the business climate:

- Develop and implement anti-monopoly measures to support competition in the market.
- Promote cooperation between the government and international volunteer funds to create favorable conditions for business.
- Cooperate with other governments to launch enterprises at their investment.
- Organize market monitoring to identify demand for certain services and goods and communicate the main trends in communities to help businesses adapt to the needs of the region.
- Facilitate adaptation to difficult working conditions, such as electricity shortages (e.g., compensate owners for energy efficiency investments), and improve business security to maintain operational stability (e.g., provide insurance and shelter equipment).

To make the region more attractive to investors:

- Develop a mechanism for providing tax breaks and other incentives to attract investors, including foreign companies, to build new businesses.
- Develop a clear and transparent algorithm for business benefits.
- Cooperate with international organizations to provide grants and interest-free loans to small and medium-sized businesses.
- Develop a program of public partnership with the private sector to finance infrastructure projects.
- Ensure communication of successes and positive changes in the region through the media and other channels to attract investors.

To support the agricultural sector:

- Introduce programs to support farmers, including the provision of free seeds, tillage tools, and financial assistance.
- Facilitate the creation of grain storages and processing facilities, which will allow farmers to produce higher value-added products.
- Cooperate with other governments to develop the agricultural sector through international programs and memorandums.

To get the business back:

- Ensure active communication about business opportunities and benefits in the liberated territories.
- Organize information campaigns for entrepreneurs to provide them with up-to-date information on benefits, support programs, and business development opportunities.

To support local producers and traders:

- Provide support for small entrepreneurs engaged in growing and selling products on local markets.
- Provide legal support to protect the interests of small producers and traders from excessive pressure from regulatory authorities.

INFRASTRUCTURE

To support and expand the activities of the State Emergency Service and utility teams:

- Provide them with the necessary resources and protection equipment to work effectively under the restoration of critical infrastructure;
- Introduce incentives to attract people to work in this area, including social packages, salary increases, reservations for people liable for military service, etc.

To implement alternative energy solutions:

- Develop and implement local energy systems, including mobile boiler houses and solar panels for multi-story buildings.

To ensure the availability of basic services in remote communities:

- Expand the programs of mobile postal, pharmacy and banking teams to cover all remote settlements.
- Accelerate road rehabilitation, especially in rural areas, to improve access to services.
- Consider implementing temporary solutions to facilitate transportation in critical areas.

To expand the water supply program:

- Develop and implement programs to provide generators for wells in areas with intermittent water supply.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

To increase access to humanitarian assistance for various vulnerable groups of citizens:

- Donors should reconsider vulnerable categories to ensure that people of pre-retirement age (50-59 years) and those without any relatives have access to assistance.
- Organize retraining courses and set quotas for their employment.

- Create rehabilitation centers to support the population.
- Involve volunteer organizations to organize mobile aid points (food, clothing, hygiene products) – points of resilience.

To ensure an even distribution of humanitarian aid:

- Formulate requests for humanitarian aid from the city council based on the real needs of the communities.
- Ensure targeted aid distribution.
- To involve residents in the process of distribution, unloading, and reporting on the use of humanitarian aid, which will promote their activity and responsibility.

To meet the needs of vulnerable groups:

- Organize mobile teams of social and medical workers to visit people with limited mobility and the elderly.
- Ensure availability and accessibility of social transportation for people with limited mobility.
- Ensure targeted assistance to people with limited mobility and vulnerable groups with the participation of volunteer organizations and social services.
- Expand the activities of psychological assistance centers and organize additional workshops and activities for children, taking into account safety requirements.
- Open psychological assistance and support centers. Organize psychological self-help groups, especially for families of preschool children.

HEALTHCARE

To address the problem of staff shortages:

- Organize retraining and additional training programs for healthcare workers.
- Engage medical volunteers and specialists from other regions and countries.

To improve access to medical services for residents of the liberated territories:

- Increase the number of mobile medical teams to serve remote, rural, and frontline areas.
- Engage international organizations to support mobile medical teams.
- Develop and support remote medicine, in particular for specialists who have left the region but are ready to provide consultations online.

To improve the state of medical infrastructure:

- Provide medical facilities with the necessary equipment through humanitarian and international programs.
- Restore and repair the destroyed medical facilities and equip them with shelters.
- Build underground medical hospitals.

To strengthen the resilience of the community population:

- Organize first aid and mine safety courses for the population, especially children and adolescents. This will satisfy their interest in war and its consequences in a safe and controlled environment, thus reducing their propensity to engage in risky behavior. Alternatively, it is also recommended to organize targeted family-type courses for parents with children.
- Train social workers and local government representatives in basic medical skills to provide prompt assistance in emergency situations.

EDUCATION

To ensure equal access to online and offline education:

- Provide gadgets and access to high-speed internet to children from low-income families.
- Accelerate the restoration of damaged schools and kindergartens.
- Build and equip shelters to allow for the expansion and improvement of hybrid learning.

To support socialization and physical activity:

- Organize online and offline clubs, social events, and child development centers in a safe environment.

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

To strengthen staffing:

- Develop programs to attract and retain staff for administrative service centers and social services, in particular in remote and affected areas.
- Organize regular training and professional development for administrative service workers.

To improve the accessibility of services:

- Provide social transportation for the population of remote villages to get to the nearest administrative service centers.
- Introduce mobile administrative service centers, especially in communities with limited access.
- Develop e-services. Services can be provided online through electronic platforms, thus avoiding the need to visit physical offices.

To expand the range of services:

- To open free legal aid offices that will provide advice and support online and offline.

To reduce the financial burden on victims:

- Cancel the payment for restoring documents for people who lost their property and documents as a result of the hostilities.
- Facilitate the procedure for registering property rights for residents of damaged housing.

RECONSTRUCTION

To ensure the affordability of housing reconstruction for the affected population:

- Ensure accessibility of restoration of property documents for people who have lost their homes or suffered damage as a result of hostilities caused by Russia's aggressive actions. Special attention should be paid to vulnerable categories, such as the elderly.
- Develop a strategy to compensate for losses in case of repeated damage to property by aid recipients.
- Regulate assistance to citizens whose homes were destroyed or damaged as a result of Russia's aggressive actions, for example, not by direct hits or because of the occupiers' provocation of a man-made disaster, such as the blowing up of the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant.
- Provide settlements and local authorities with equal opportunities and resources to restore and preserve housing in case of damage, regardless of the size of the settlement and its geographical proximity to the combat zone.
- Raise awareness of housing recovery programs, their conditions and opportunities, as well as recovery mechanisms through various institutions (e.g., Administrative Service Centers).
- Diversify assistance depending on the level of damage.
- Develop a compensation scheme for citizens who have already spent their own money on housing repairs.
- Provide alternative assistance for residents of areas closer to the front line which do not receive any support under the state program eRestoration.

To ensure the availability of human resources:

- Develop a strategy to engage qualified professionals in the process of rebuilding and restoring communities, from construction workers to urban planners.

To apply a comprehensive approach to the reconstruction process:

- Take into account the security and economic situation in the region, as well as the operational characteristics of facilities and update approaches to urban planning and urban space development.
- Fund urban redevelopment strategies and the development of local architectural unions.

To ensure transparency of reconstruction projects:

- Corruption risks remain significant in the reconstruction process, so reconstruction projects should be as transparent as possible.
- Transparent communication about reconstruction projects and the priority for receiving assistance also remains important.

FOR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

To central authorities:

- Support local authorities through clarifications and interaction. Provide more support with clarifications on the implementation of certain legislative acts, as well as more active communication with local authorities.
- Consider the need for a flexible system to respond to possible needs and obstacles that may arise during the implementation process of certain programs on the ground.
- Start developing strategies to attract qualified specialists to work on the ground.
- Provide communities with resources to hire and support competent staff.

To local authorities:

- Consider the need to include specialists in international cooperation, fundraising, and public communications in community staff.
- Work with the regional authorities on developing and coordinating crisis management plans to overcome possible threats and challenges related to the hostilities.
- Support and develop local media that could cover local issues more thoroughly and objectively. This would contribute to the transparency of community life and draw the attention of the central government to the problems of individual regions.

INTERNATIONAL AID AND NGOS' ACTIVITIES

To ensure an even distribution of aid:

- Pay attention to improving the work in the areas of humanitarian aid (its targeting), healthcare, demining and security, child development, and the creation of safe and inclusive spaces.
- Improve the monitoring and evaluation system to ensure that aid is distributed evenly.
- Continue programs that include humanitarian and financial assistance, legal aid, education, and mine safety. Consider involving organizations in the search for missing persons.
- Support small and medium-sized businesses. Encourage social entrepreneurship through special grants and training programs. For this purpose, it would be useful to introduce training programs in grant writing and project management for local residents.

FIGHT AGAINST COLLABORATIONISM

To increase the effectiveness of identifying and prosecuting collaborators:

- Review the requirements for the evidence base.
- Ensure prompt response and international cooperation to prosecute collaborators who have fled the country.

- Consider empowering local communities through the introduction of an arbitration system. This would allow local communities to influence decisions regarding potential collaborators, increasing trust in the investigation and punishment process. Review the possibilities of accepting and considering reports/evidence from citizens about participation in collaboration activities.

To improve the penal system:

- Engage human rights defenders and civil society experts in reforming the legislation on the punishment of collaborators.
- Consider increasing penalties for collaborators by equating collaborationism with high treason.
- Restrict the rights of collaborators to receive state payments and benefits after serving their sentences.
- Introduce a thorough individual review of each case of cooperation with the occupiers, taking into account the circumstances under which a person was forced to cooperate (for example, to save his or her life).

To improve judicial reform:

- Focus efforts on improving the efficiency and quality of work of existing investigative agencies (National Police, Security Service, State Bureau of Investigation, National Anti-Corruption Bureau), reducing duplication of their functions.
- Conduct regular training and exchange of experience projects between different investigative agencies to improve coordination and joint work.
- Facilitate cooperation with international bodies that can provide methodological assistance and resources for the investigation of collaborationism and war crimes.

To increase transparency:

- Involve local residents by organizing public committees or advisory councils that will monitor and evaluate the work of local investigative bodies. Hold regular meetings with the public to discuss the results of investigations and provide feedback.
- Ensure open access to information on collaboration investigations, including reports on the number of people prosecuted and the outcome of trials.

CULTURE, UKRAINIZATION, COHESION

To increase the effectiveness of the implementation of measures for the Ukrainization and development of the cultural sphere:

- Communicate the issue of “Ukrainization” with special care, given that it is especially sensitive among residents of the liberated territories.
- Use a systematic approach in educational institutions for children, emphasizing the study of Ukrainian history and literature from the early grades.
- Introduce state training programs at all levels, including for adults, to help them learn more about Ukrainian culture.

- Organize cultural events that focus on Ukrainian authenticity, the Ukrainian “brand,” and support for the army. The main idea of the events should be resilience and mutual assistance as a factor that unites, strengthens, and promotes a spirit of pride in the region and the country.
- It is important to raise awareness about the sources of funding for cultural initiatives in order to increase positive public perception of cultural events as having the right to exist and being valuable during the war.
- Emphasize not only the “troubled” times of Ukrainian history but also highlight the “victorious” moments; disseminate contemporary Ukrainian literature to dispel myths about the inferiority of everything Ukrainian.
- Promote the restoration of the regions’ national authenticity, including traditions, local heritage, and cultural heritage. This would unite the local community and attract others who would like to learn interesting facts about the region.
- Fund the Ukrainian music and film industries and invest in the development of diversity.
- Introduce more Ukrainian content on television and on social media.
- Engage in educational work: introduce history and culture in the media space; publish information about “important dates” in Ukraine’s history and culture.
- Create safe places for cultural events, hobby clubs, and clubs accessible to different groups of people, regardless of age, gender, or nationality, which will help combat prejudice.
- Support online cultural initiatives to engage young people.
- Promote unbiased news reporting to increase public trust in state news channels.
- Fund the development of local media outlets that cover the problems and successes of local communities.

To increase social cohesion:

- Involve local residents in projects aimed at helping Ukraine’s defenders (organizing fundraising campaigns, weaving nets) and supporting their families.
- Organize events to preserve the memory of locals who fell for the freedom of Ukraine.
- Organize events, clubs, and other types of joint activities (cultural or social) that would bring together residents of different segments of the population if the security situation allows for such events (alternative: online events).
- Create joint projects for housing reconstruction that would engage the public, private, and civil society sectors.
- Develop the institution of public discussions and civic engagement. Through this mechanism, communicate with residents, raise issues of concern to residents, and jointly seek solutions.
- Develop and conduct events and support projects aimed at uniting people from different regions of Ukraine, combating prejudice, minimizing social tension, and understanding different experiences of war.
- Involve specialists and the expert community in the process of developing an appropriate communication strategy to promote the attributes of Ukrainian identity and strengthen cohesion among the population.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Thus, the reconstruction of Ukraine's liberated territories is currently in its early stages. It focuses on immediate needs such as road repairs, demining, resource allocation, and the restoration of energy and social infrastructure. Longer-term solutions are still being developed.

In the Kharkiv region, international and domestic support, active local authorities, and close cooperation between all actors are contributing to the recovery. In Kherson, patriotism, mutual assistance, local specialists, and charitable organizations are also contributing.

Challenges in both regions include limited resources, bureaucratic obstacles, corruption, the need for investors, and a high need for demining. The economic situation remains fragile, especially in rural areas where many businesses have shut down. Infrastructure reconstruction is ongoing, but remote areas face challenges in accessing services due to poor logistics.

The humanitarian situation varies: in Kharkiv, the amount of aid is decreasing, while people in Kherson still rely heavily on it, which affects their motivation to find employment and do business. Vulnerable populations, including pre-retirees who have problems with work and do not have official assistance, require special attention.

Medical services are dependent on humanitarian aid. Its accessibility is problematic in remote areas. Education is under attack, as online learning predominates due to risks and damaged facilities, raising concerns for children's development. Administrative services are generally accessible, but remote areas face challenges. Shelter reconstruction is a priority, but it is hampered by the availability of state aid and limited resources.

Rebuilding trust in state institutions is essential for reintegration and reforms. Better coordination by the central government and active participation of local authorities, communities, and partners are crucial for recovery.

Combating collaborationism is important to restore a sense of justice and trust. The pro-Ukrainian sentiment is growing, and cultural events, despite challenges, are important for socialization and cohesion. The media should shift to providing unbiased information and develop local media to better understand the situation on the ground.

Communities are largely united, although the issue of punishment for collaborators and different experiences of war reduces the level of trust and understanding between residents of different settlements.

Despite the challenges, the combined efforts of international partners, local authorities, and communities are driving progress. Infrastructure is gradually being restored, the economy is beginning to revive, and conscious citizens are realizing the harmfulness of the societal divide. The road to reintegration of the regions is difficult, but the determination and hard work of the Ukrainian people will ensure recovery and prosperity.

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