



# Challenges and Potential for Social Cohesion in **Luhansk Oblast**

Field Report Based  
on the Results of Oblast Consultations

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**Kyiv, 2021**

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

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

The Report is available for download on the websites of UCIPR, [www.ucipr.org.ua](http://www.ucipr.org.ua), and the National Platform Dialogue on Peace and Secure Reintegration, <http://national-platform.org/>.



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

The shaping of social cohesion and social stability is a component of peacebuilding which is extremely important for Ukraine in general and for the eastern Ukrainian oblasts in particular. This policy component has gained a significant place in a number of state development strategies in the past five years.

For example, one of the priority areas of the State Target Program for Recovery and Peacebuilding in the Eastern Regions of Ukraine of 2017<sup>1</sup> is defined as “social resilience and peacebuilding”.

The priority of this area in the program is formulated through measures to restore trust, promote cultural dialogue and foster tolerance with the participation of all segments of the population. This implies promoting activities of civil society institutions and various forms of self-organization of citizens aimed at the development of local self-governance in the context of decentralization. The aim is to create self-sufficient territorial communities capable of self-development, monitor the situation in territorial communities regarding vulnerabilities, risks and social ties, and provide psycho-social support to the population affected by the armed conflict. The Action Plan until 2020 provided for holding educational activities, nationwide media campaigns on conflict settlement and resilience, involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in a structured public dialogue on reconciliation and training to establish mediation groups, training of specialists, community activities on preventing and settling conflicts, promoting cultural dialogue and fostering tolerance.

Issues of shaping social cohesion of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts were highlighted in the Action Plan of the State Target Program for Recovery and Peacebuilding in the Eastern Regions of Ukraine until 2023, updated in September 2021. The Action Plan provides for the development of social and other infrastructure, a number of innovative measures in the

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1071 of 13 December 2020 “On the State Target Program for Recovery and Peacebuilding in the Eastern Regions of Ukraine (Implementation Plan from 2017 to 2020”. [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1071-2017-%D0%BF#Text>). The program was initially designed until 2020, but it was extended until 2023 on 15 September 2021. See Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1026 of 15 September 2021 “On Amending the Resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 710 of 11 October 2016 and No. 1071 of 13 December 2020”. [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1026-2021-%D0%BF#n2>

development and maintenance of socio-economic potential, support of citizens and actions to address community problems.

The State Regional Development Strategy for 2020–2027<sup>2</sup> defines as a strategic goal a number of objectives in the area of not only “restoring and developing the territories, restructuring the economies of the oblasts affected by the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine,” but also “creating a state that is coherent in the social, humanitarian, economic, environmental, security and spatial dimensions.”

Researchers are still debating what social cohesion is compared to other social constructs such as social capital, how to measure social cohesion, how it impacts different dimensions of societies, what influences social cohesion and how.

For the purposes of this report, we adopt the approach to the understanding of social cohesion developed by researchers Lisa Berkman and Ichiro Kawachi. According to them, social cohesion refers to two broader, intertwined features of society, which may be described as: (1) the absence of latent social conflict – whether in the form of income/wealth inequality; racial/ethnic tensions; disparities in political participation; or other forms of polarization; and (2) the presence of strong social bonds – measured by levels of trust and norms of reciprocity (i.e., social capital); the abundance of associations that bridge social divisions (“civil society”); and the presence of institutions of conflict management (e.g., a responsive democracy, an independent judiciary, and so forth).<sup>3</sup>

The authors of the concept say that social cohesion and social capital are both collective, or ecological, dimensions of society, to be distinguished from the concepts of social networks and social support, which are characteristically measured at the level of the individual.

More practically, this concept is depicted in the UN practice, which distinguishes between its two main aspects:

- vertical cohesion that focuses on the state and refers to trust between the government, state institutions, rules and norms, and social groups, and
- horizontal, society-oriented cohesion that describes trust, relationships and interactions between citizens.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No.695 of 5 August 2020 “On Approval of the State Regional Development Strategy for 2020–2027”. [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/695-2020-%D0%BF#Text>

<sup>3</sup> Berkman L., Kawachi I. Social Cohesion, Social Capital, and Health. P.175. in: Social Epidemiology. (1 ed.). Ed.by Lisa F. Berkman, Ichiro Kawachi. Oxford University Press. 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Strengthening social cohesion. Conceptual framing and programming implications. UNDP. 2020. P. 12-13. <https://www.undp.org/publications/strengthening-social-cohesion-conceptual-framing-and-programming-implications#modal-publication-download>

## Methodology

With the aim of formulating systemic state and local policies of secure reintegration, the National Platform Dialogue on Peace and Secure Reintegration collected data on changes in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts that affect the level of trust and reciprocity between different social groups at the vertical (authorities-communities) and horizontal (within groups and communities) levels.

Restoring cohesion and building trust to jointly respond to challenges is one of the cornerstones of all sectoral/infrastructure policies in Luhansk oblast.

Luhansk oblast has been deeply affected by the conflict. There is no area that has not been damaged. Infrastructure, productive economic potential and economic ties and transport connections were ruined, and demographic changes took place. Thirty percent of the oblast's territory is temporarily occupied. The Strategy of Development of Luhansk Oblast until 2027 identifies such challenges to the oblast's general development as "the actual cessation of transit across the Ukrainian-Russian border, the loss of traditional markets, the emergence of large areas along the line of contact characterized by risks of doing business, and a significant number of internally displaced persons." It is difficult to disagree with the statement that "all these problems essentially complicate not only the development of Luhansk oblast and the life of its residents, but also affect the entire domestic Ukrainian market and every Ukrainian."<sup>5</sup>

The war and conflict also caused new complex humanitarian problems. According to international organizations, some 3,400,000 people need humanitarian assistance in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Humanitarian organizations distinguish the following four areas: physical and mental health; standard of living; viability and ability to recover, protection.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, as noted by international organizations working to overcome the conflict implications and build peace, the population simultaneously suffers from a total of relevant problems by a number of indicators, i.e. the adverse effects of the war and conflict are multiple.

To determine the current situation of social cohesion policy in Luhansk oblast, the project team held two consultations with representatives of authorities and the expert community, CSOs and businesses. In May–June 2021, 30 male and female participants took part in the consultations. Furthermore, within the same period, representatives of the five eastern oblasts – Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk, Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhia – discussed the potential of interregional and intermunicipal cooperation. Their key conclusions are included in this report, as well as their proposals for social cohesion policy development. We acknowledge the contribution of all those who shared their views on the implementation and development of cohesion policy in the oblast.

<sup>5</sup> Strategy of Development of Luhansk Oblast for 2021–2027. [Electronic resource]. Access mode: [http://loga.gov.ua/sites/default/files/collections/strategiya\\_lugansk\\_2027\\_last.pdf](http://loga.gov.ua/sites/default/files/collections/strategiya_lugansk_2027_last.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Humanitarian Needs Overview. Ukraine: 2020 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/ukraine/document/ukraine-2020-humanitarian-needs-overview-hno>

The consultations helped us receive data on the understanding of processes of forming and developing policy areas that increase the level of social cohesion and lay the foundations of social resilience, analyze process dynamics, and identify tools to implement areas of social cohesion policy.

This report:

- Analyzes the current situation in Luhansk oblast in terms of vertical cohesion: the level of cooperation of authorities and CSOs, the availability of communication platforms, joint projects, potential interregional projects.
- Identifies key challenges in measuring horizontal cohesion; assesses the level of trust among stakeholders and their readiness to cooperate; evaluates the role of the media and the need for intermunicipal cooperation.
- Defines what is meant by social cohesion and peacebuilding in view of the experience of each of the groups represented at the consultations.
- Analyzes some initiatives in the oblast on shaping common values and strong social relationships.

Based on data from the consultations, state policy documents and data on structural changes in the oblasts, experts of the National Platform share their findings and propose the main areas or activities to strengthen social cohesion.

The next step in shaping a social cohesion policy for Luhansk oblast is proposals<sup>7</sup> based on the assessment of the social cohesion situation and suggestions of participants in the discussions. These proposals are designed to help local authorities of Luhansk oblast develop an action plan.

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<sup>7</sup> Social Cohesion: Directions for Policy Development in Luhansk Oblast. Kyiv, UCIPR, 2021. 36 P. [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <http://ucipr.org.ua/ua/publikatsii/vydannia/social-cohesion-directions-for-policy-development-in-luhansk-oblast-2021>

## II. Social cohesion challenges in Luhansk oblast caused by the conflict in eastern Ukraine

### 1. Changes in the population composition since 2014

As a result of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, Luhansk oblast has suffered significant losses of human resources and territory. About a third of the population remains in the government-controlled areas. Although according to a state document approved in August 2021, “the total population of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts where authorities exercise their powers in full is difficult to assess today due to objective reasons”,<sup>8</sup> oblast authorities have some current data.

The population of Luhansk oblast totaled 2,121,000 people<sup>9</sup> as of 1 January 2021, of whom 666,300 live in the government-controlled areas.<sup>10</sup> In January 2014 before the conflict 2,239,000 people lived in Luhansk oblast.

Furthermore, as of 1 October 2020<sup>11</sup>, 281,700 people were registered in the oblast who had received the status of internally displaced persons (IDPs), which makes up a high proportion of the population in government-controlled areas of the oblast. These people need attention, especially as the majority of them (202,800) are pensioners and 8,300 are people with disabilities. The proportion of IDPs in the oblast is tending to increase.

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<sup>8</sup> Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1078-p of 18 August 2021 “On the Strategy of Economic Development of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts until 2030” [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1078-2021-%D1%80#Text>.

<sup>9</sup> Demographic situation in Luhansk oblast in 2020. News release of 19 February 2021. Main Statistics Department in Luhansk oblast [Electronic resource]. Access mode: [http://lg.ukrstat.gov.ua/expres/2021/graf\\_2021.php.htm](http://lg.ukrstat.gov.ua/expres/2021/graf_2021.php.htm)

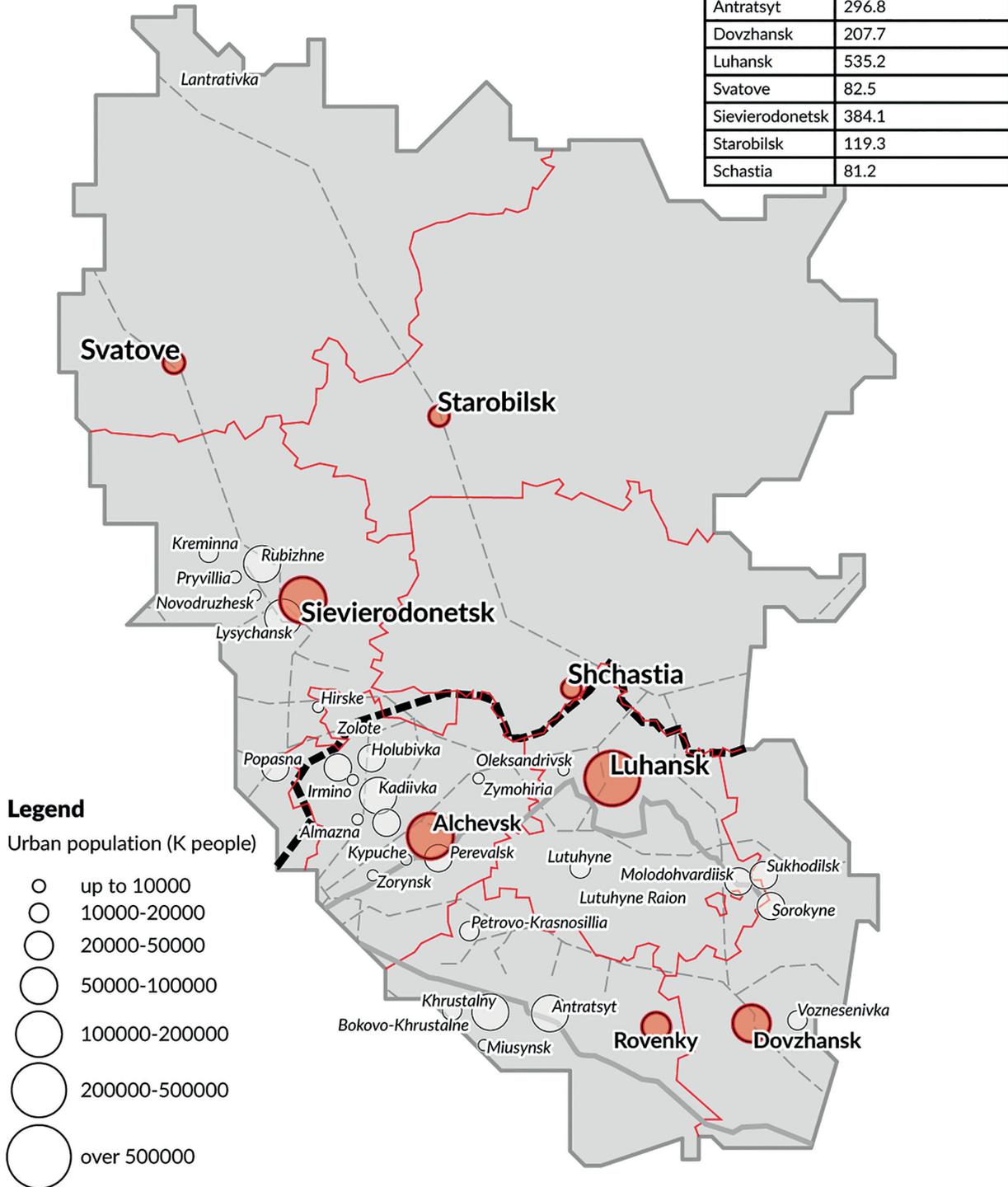
<sup>10</sup> Passport of Luhansk oblast 2020 (in dynamics). P. 4 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: [http://loga.gov.ua/sites/default/files/pasport\\_20201.pdf](http://loga.gov.ua/sites/default/files/pasport_20201.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Information on the number of internally displaced persons registered in Luhansk oblast [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://dszn.loga.gov.ua/uk/page/vnutrishno-peremischena-osoba>

# LUHANSK OBLAST

Figure 1

Raion	Population (K people)
Alchevsk	442.8
Antratsyt	296.8
Dovzhansk	207.7
Luhansk	535.2
Svatove	82.5
Sievierodonetsk	384.1
Starobilsk	119.3
Schastia	81.2



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

The number of internally displaced persons in Donetsk oblast is the highest of all oblasts in Ukraine, while IDPs in Luhansk oblast make up the highest proportion in Ukraine of permanent residents on the government-controlled areas of the oblast.

The number of persons who have the status of participants in the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) or Joint Forces Operation (JFO) is rapidly growing in the oblast. In 2015, there were 1,300 combatants compared to 8,000 as of 1 January 2019. Approximately 16% of them are women.<sup>12</sup>

One of the challenges in the oblast is the declining number of economically active population of working age. As declining population is a nationwide trend, the dynamics of decline need to be taken into account. There were 684,000 people<sup>13</sup> in the government-controlled areas of the oblast as of 1 January 2019 compared to about 712,000 as of 1 January 2016.<sup>14</sup> In January 2021, 113,600 people lived in Sievierodonetsk (the regional center since 2014 and location of Luhansk Oblast State Administration – Oblast Military and Civil Administration), compared to 117,000 in January 2016.

The ratio of men to women is approximately 46/54.

Currently, the urban and rural population ratio in Luhansk oblast does not considerably differ from that typical for Ukraine. While the average proportion of urban and rural population in Ukraine is 69.3% and 30.7% respectively, in Luhansk oblast the proportion of urban population was 72% (4,900 people) and rural was 28% (1,900 people) as of 1 January 2018.<sup>15</sup> However, the ratio has changed greatly based on typical settlement in the oblast,<sup>16</sup> as most of the cities and towns are now on the other side of the line of contact.<sup>17</sup> Prior to the conflict, as of 1 January 2014, the rural population accounted just for 294,000 out of a total of 2,239,000 people.

<sup>12</sup> Gender passport of Luhansk oblast. Sievierodonetsk, 2019. P. 3 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: [https://dszn.loga.gov.ua/upload/editor/gendernij\\_pasport\\_luganskoi\\_oblasti\\_20-12-2019.pdf](https://dszn.loga.gov.ua/upload/editor/gendernij_pasport_luganskoi_oblasti_20-12-2019.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Passport of Luhansk oblast 2018 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: [http://loga.gov.ua/sites/default/files/pasport\\_2018.pdf](http://loga.gov.ua/sites/default/files/pasport_2018.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Passport of Luhansk oblast 2015. Sievierodonetsk, 2016 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: [http://loga.gov.ua/sites/default/files/pasport\\_oblasti\\_2016.pdf](http://loga.gov.ua/sites/default/files/pasport_oblasti_2016.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Gender passport of Luhansk oblast. Sievierodonetsk, 2019. P. 18 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: [https://dszn.loga.gov.ua/upload/editor/gendernij\\_pasport\\_luganskoi\\_oblasti\\_20-12-2019.pdf](https://dszn.loga.gov.ua/upload/editor/gendernij_pasport_luganskoi_oblasti_20-12-2019.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Number of population as of 1 January 2014 and the average number of population in 2013. Ukrstat [Electronic resource]. Access mode: [http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2014/ds/kn/kn\\_u/kn0114\\_u.html](http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/operativ2014/ds/kn/kn_u/kn0114_u.html)

<sup>17</sup> As a result of the temporary occupation of certain areas of Luhansk oblast and the conflict, according to expert estimations, almost a third (27%) of the industrial potential of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts was removed to Russia. Specifically, equipment was removed from machine-building plants in Luhansk oblast, which at that time deprived Ukraine of strategic potential. The largest number of industrial facilities remained in the non-government controlled areas. See Passport of Luhansk oblast 2018 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: [http://loga.gov.ua/sites/default/files/pasport\\_2018.pdf](http://loga.gov.ua/sites/default/files/pasport_2018.pdf)

Hence, the following was recorded in Luhansk oblast:

- higher level of urbanization compared to Ukraine's average;
- population outflow;
- the largest proportion in Ukraine of registered internally displaced persons compared to residents of the government-controlled areas (GCA);
- heavy social burden for the oblast.

Important permanent tasks which affect a targeted policy of social cohesion are:

- assessment of the most accurate data on the number and structure of the population;
- monitoring population dynamics;
- profiling of the population of communities near the line of contact based on factual and statistical information on IDPs.

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

Part of the territory of the oblast and the city of Luhansk have been in temporarily occupied territory since 2014. As of 2021, 545 settlements in four raions, Svatove, Sievierodonetsk, Starobilsk and Shchastia (with the center in Novoaidar), remain in the government-controlled areas (GCA).<sup>18</sup> Following administrative and territorial reform in 2020, another four raions, Alchevsk, Dovzhansk, Luhansk and Rovenki, are located in the non-government controlled areas (NGCA).

<sup>18</sup> Passport of Luhansk oblast 2020 (in dynamics). P. 4 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: [http://loga.gov.ua/sites/default/files/pasport\\_20201.pdf](http://loga.gov.ua/sites/default/files/pasport_20201.pdf)

**Table 1.** Population centers of Luhansk oblast (as of 1 November 2021)

Luhansk oblast	Government-controlled areas of Luhansk oblast (GCA)	Non-government controlled areas of Luhansk oblast (NGCA)
Cities of oblast subordination <sup>19</sup>	3	11
Urban-type settlements	26	83
Villages	507	273

Luhansk oblast is governed by military and civil administrations (MCAs) as interim state authorities that exercise powers of raion and oblast councils, state administrations and other powers defined by law<sup>20</sup> “in the area of repulsion of Russia’s armed aggression, in particular in the area of the Anti-Terrorist Operation”. MCAs operate as part of the Joint General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine<sup>21</sup>.

To date, there are nine military and civil administrations in the oblast at three levels: oblast (Luhansk MCA), five city, one settlement, and two village MCAs.

As of 19 February 2021<sup>22</sup>, MCAs were set up and reorganized in two new raions of the oblast adjacent to the line of contact, Sievierodonetsk and Shchastia (see Figure 2. The structure of military and civil administrations in Luhansk oblast).

There were 26 amalgamated territorial communities in the oblast as of May 2021<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Population centers of Luhansk oblast. Information as of November 1, 2021 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://static.rada.gov.ua/zakon/new/NEWSAIT/ADM/zmistlug.html>

<sup>20</sup> Law of Ukraine No. 141-VIII of 3 February 2015 “On Military and Civil Administrations” [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/141-19#Text>

<sup>21</sup> Starting 30 April 2018 until the beginning of the Joint Forces Operation, MCAs were subordinated to the Anti-Terrorist Center of the Security Service of Ukraine.

<sup>22</sup> Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 61/2021 of 19 February 2021 “On the Establishment and Reorganization of Military and Civil Administrations in Donetsk Oblast. [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/622021-36745>

<sup>23</sup> Population centers of Luhansk oblast. Information as of 1 November 2021 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://static.rada.gov.ua/zakon/new/NEWSAIT/ADM/zmistlug.html>

The specifics of governance in Luhansk oblast given the line of contact and military operations:

- Impossible to hold elections to local self-governments
- Restrictions on activities of representative institutions
- Decision-making by military and civil administrations
- Lack of involvement of public participation tools (consultations, public hearings)

### 3. Changes in transport infrastructure

The temporary occupation of part of Luhansk oblast has caused significant problems in transport links, as the government-controlled areas of Luhansk oblast were formerly connected to the rest of the country largely through territory currently located on the line of contact (see Figure 1. Map of Luhansk oblast). Furthermore, unlike Donetsk oblast that has more transport and logistics exits to neighboring oblasts, Luhansk oblast has more limited opportunities for transport links. About two-thirds of its administrative border is adjacent to Donetsk oblast, and about a third to Kharkiv oblast.

Specifically, as a result of the war, two parallel railway branches that ran from south to north in the western part of the oblast have been cut off from Ukraine's railway network since 2015. These are the main branch, Popasna-Svatove, that covers western raions of the oblast and leads to Kupiansk (Kharkiv oblast), and Lantrativka branch line of Kindrashivska-Nova station in Stanytsia Luhanska which connects the northern raions bordering the Russian Federation and the eastern non-government controlled areas of the oblast. The Ukrainian government is currently deciding how to restore railway connections, in particular the 50-kilometer Popasna-Lantrativka branch.<sup>24</sup> Construction of a railway branch connecting the Kindrashivska-Nova-Lantrativka section with the main railway network of Ukraine is expected to be completed in 2025.<sup>25</sup>

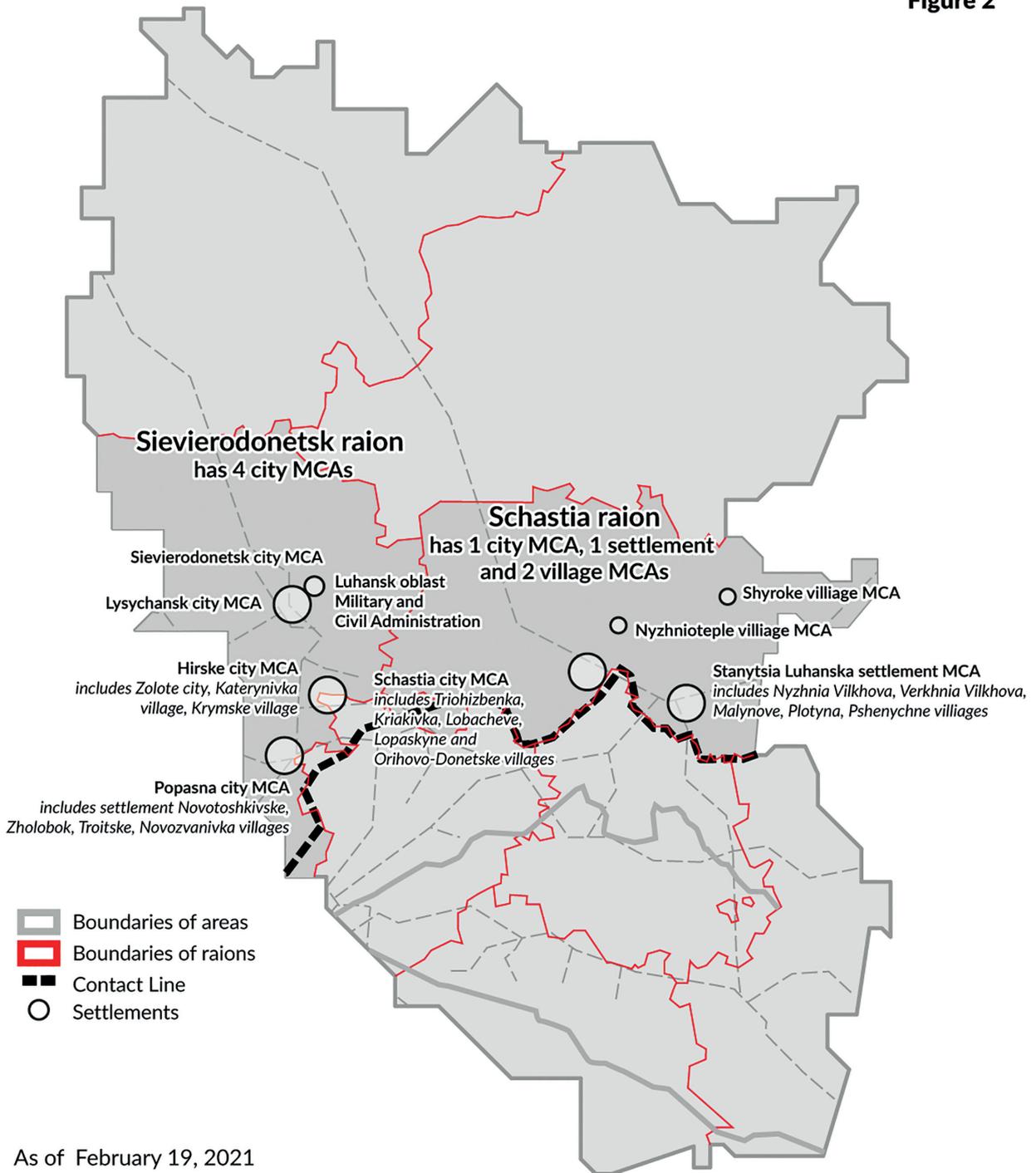
Passenger transport by rail has decreased almost 10 times, and 90% of the passenger carriage fleet is in the non-government controlled areas.

<sup>24</sup> Andrii Myroshnichenko, Donbas railway is a big step towards peaceful reintegration. *Ukrainska Pravda*. 10 July 2021 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/columns/2021/07/10/7300075/>

<sup>25</sup> The project to build a railway branch has been launched in Luhansk oblast. Notification of the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories. 15 December 2020 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://minre.gov.ua/news/rozpochato-realizaciyu-proyektu-budivnyctva-zaliznychnoyi-gilky-na-luganshchyni>

# THE STRUCTURE OF MILITARY AND CIVIL ADMINISTRATIONS IN LUHANSK OBLAST

Figure 2



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

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With the destruction of Luhansk International Airport, the oblast has been left without air traffic.

Highways of Luhansk oblast have also suffered from military operations and from excessive load after 2014–2015. The length of public roads in Luhansk oblast is almost 6,000 km; 2,300 km of them remain in the non-government controlled areas and 3,700 km need major repair.

There are serious challenges to the development of population centers located closer to the border with Russia and simultaneously far from service centers of the oblast.<sup>26</sup>

All this adversely affects the development of people-to-people contacts, movement of goods and business in general. Contacts with citizens of Ukraine living in the non-government controlled areas are impeded by the closure of entry/exit checkpoints by the breakaway republics.

In 2020, about 255 km of roads were restored in Luhansk oblast under the Big Construction state program, in particular, the only existing highway connection between Stanytsia Luhanska and Sievierodonetsk. Some 250 km of highway are expected to be repaired by the end of 2021.

There is an urgent need to develop transport connections between population centers of the oblast that were damaged due to military operations, which will facilitate the movement of people and goods, and help create infrastructure to implement cohesion activities.

Restoring highways and railways plays a fundamental role in building cohesion policy, as it affects contacts, doing business and access to services, and serves as a basis for planned and recommended exchange activities. It will remain a pressing task for the Ukrainian government and local authorities in the coming years.

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<sup>26</sup> Russia is seen from here: how people live in the village located at the extreme edge of eastern Ukraine. Broadcast by Dom TV channel. 11 August 2021 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://kanal-dom.tv/uk/otsyuda-vidna-rossiya-kak-zhivut-v-sele-krajnej-tochki-vostochnoj-ukrainy-foto/>

#### 4. Assessment of horizontal and vertical cohesion at the oblast level

While analyzing the state of social cohesion, participants in the oblast consultations paid more attention to relationships between community members (horizontal cohesion), and less attention to interaction with authorities (vertical cohesion) and cases of joint activities in solving local problems. The severance of habitual ties and difficulties in recovering them have an impact on the perception of cohesion, the consultations show.

Male and female participants are quite critical about the level of communication between communities, civic activists and CSOs and oblast and local authorities and MCAs. According to participants in the consultations, a lack of communication between the active part of society and representatives of authorities at a variety of levels is manifested during crises, in particular, during large fires in Luhansk oblast in summer 2020. Finally, firefighting cooperation in Luhansk oblast in 2021 was an example of cohesion, but residents of the oblast expected greater and more efficient information-sharing and coordination of efforts with activists and the business community.

At the consultations, participants drew attention to conflict-related governance challenges in population centers along the line of contact which are in a vacuum of governance, social life and logistics. These population centers lack access to services and have difficulties in communication with other communities.

It was stressed that communities governed by MCAs lack effective tools of democratic participation and an effective system of local representation (councils of deputies). According to participants in the consultations, under this format of territorial governance, communication between authorities and communities and the level of involvement and information is to a large extent a personal choice of MCA heads.

Civil society activists are expected to play a coordinating role in tackling local development issues. Participants drew attention to the need to establish a systematic partnership with authorities on implementation of local cohesion projects, community mobilization for joint action to address issues of local concern, and implementation of community development measures which often remain on paper. Public councils as advisory structures under authorities need a higher degree of involvement and activity. Activists and representatives of the business community believe that involvement has a positive effect. Specifically, measures to develop information strategies for raions have had a positive effect on increasing the level of community cohesion and creating experience of cooperation and involvement in local development processes.

At the same time, representatives of authorities see improvements in cooperation. They spoke about an increase in the number of active community members, and the enhanced capacity of CSOs to implement projects, including those directly aimed at strengthening cohesion. They noted the positive cumulative effect of training activities of donor organizations, positive aspects of experience-sharing with CSOs from other oblasts, and an increased number of project initiatives in organizations working with infrastructure projects for cultural exchange

(support for libraries and museums and exhibitions in Novoposkovsk, Svatove and Lysychansk communities).

Authority representatives said that self-organization of the population had grown a lot in recent years and claimed, “There are very active public organizations that create something on their own, hold cultural festivals, or ask us for some help. And there are organizations that do not ask and say that they will do everything without us.”

Participants in consultations with the public sector understand social cohesion as joint activities involving joint action by community members to improve community life and the ability of community members to jointly respond to challenges that affect community life.

According to participants in the discussions, the mobilization of communities was facilitated by the need to address issues related to:

- resettlement and integration of IDPs;
- assistance for military personnel;
- response to natural disasters, e.g. fires in Luhansk oblast in summer 2020;
- creation of common spaces in population centers.

At the same time, there are other issues of common local concern, e.g. responding to the difficulties of doing business due to the COVID-19 pandemic, or a hike in utility tariffs, although participants did not label them as facilitating social cohesion.

Emphasis was placed on a lack of systematic work to shape community cohesion and social environments. To a large extent, manifestations of cohesion are spontaneous and sporadic in nature. Mention was also made of a lacking proactive position – manifestations of social solidarity are rather instances of reactive behavior from members of public organizations.

According to participants, the tools for achieving and enhancing social cohesion in communities include:

- the role of leader, social responsibility;
- understanding and knowledge of how to achieve community development goals; development of common skills of effective interaction;

- the need to communicate and consolidate different active community members around the implementation of common ideas, regardless of the age and social status of residents;
- taking into account the specifics of each community; an individual approach to identifying community needs and implementing social cohesion tasks (based on the needs and interests of particular communities and the specific situation);
- development of elements of participatory democracy, especially with regard to the specifics of governance and security challenges in communities and population centers bordering the line of contact.

Among approaches to the formulation of cohesion policy, we should highlight an in-depth study of needs and opportunities, taking into account the social, economic, demographic, infrastructure and logistics situation in each community.

According to participants in the consultations in Luhansk oblast, “We work together despite differences.”

Residents of the oblast expect systematic implementation of cohesion policy at the local level. Participants noted that social cohesion as a peacebuilding dimension contains a security element implemented as both national security and personal security of everyone.

## **5. Political identification in the oblast**

Political activity and the political environment in the oblast were also affected by the armed conflict, changes in the governance system, the absence of elected local authorities (oblast, raion and other councils due to the failure to hold elections in 2020 in community centers near the line of contact), decentralization processes, and changed boundaries of administrative units.

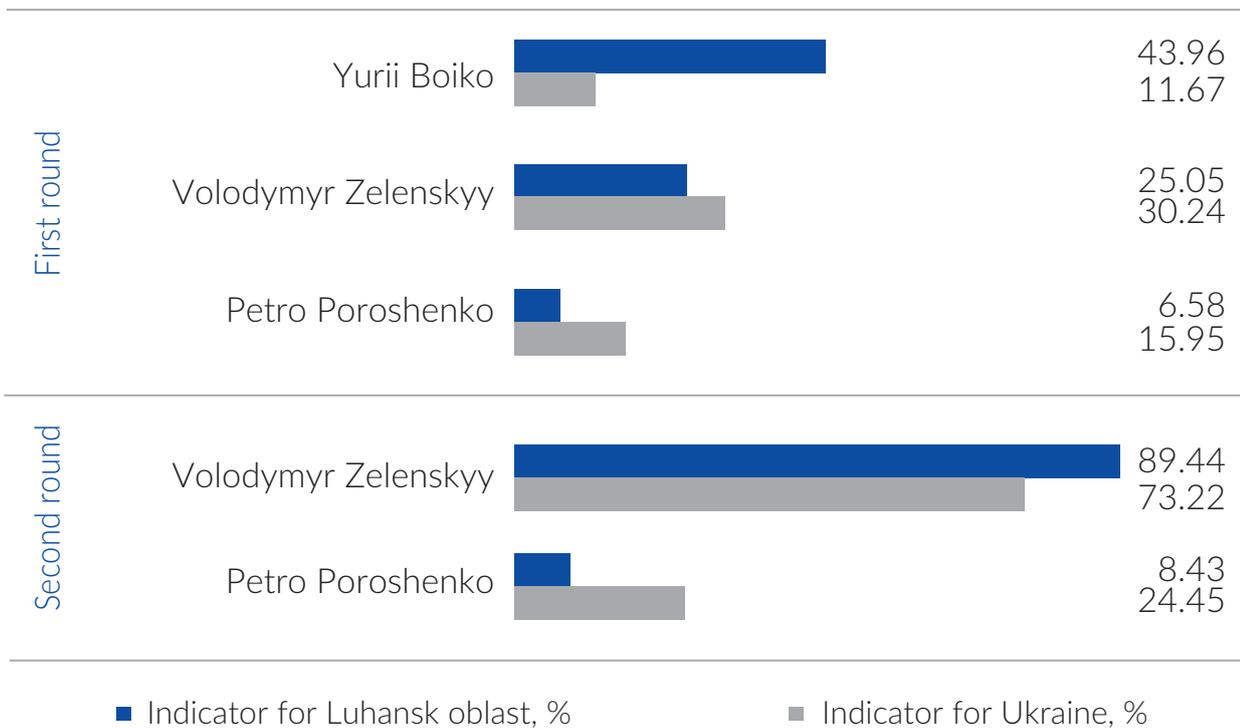
Luhansk oblast has faced numerous problems linked to the possibility of holding elections since the beginning of the armed conflict, due to the theater of operations and security challenges.

At the same time, the oblast's voters who took part in the 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections demonstrated a high level of political activity, a high level of dissatisfaction with the actions of the Ukrainian president and national representative authorities, and adherence to political proposals that enable regional identification and focus on rapid conflict settlement.

## Political consolidation following results of the 2019 presidential election in Luhansk oblast

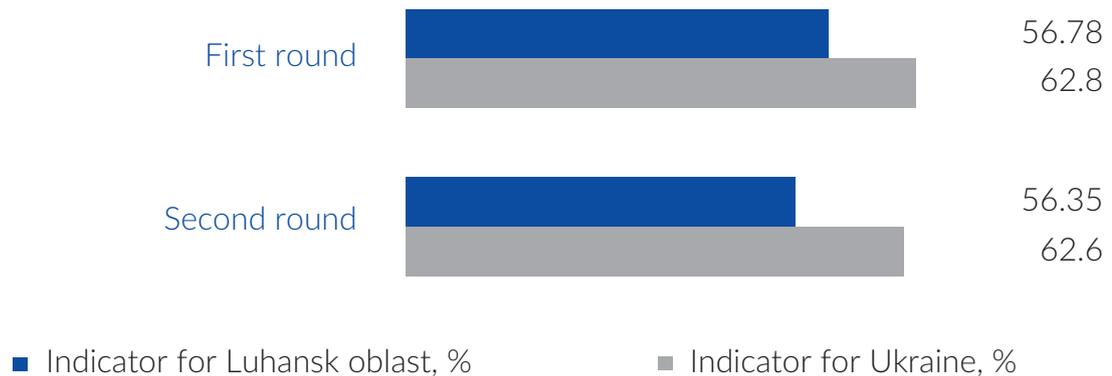
For active voters of Luhansk oblast, Yuriy Boiko, leading a political force oriented towards restoring relations with Russia and Ukraine's neutral status in military and political alliances, received slightly less than half of votes (43.96%). However, in the second round, when the choice was between the then incumbent head of state and a candidate who based his rhetoric on opposing 'old' with 'new' policies, almost ten times more voters gave their votes to the candidate who, in contrast to his predecessor, assured them of restoring peace. Support for Volodymyr Zelenskyy turned out to be even higher in Luhansk oblast than Ukraine's average (89.44% vs. 73.22%). See Diagram 1. The distribution of votes for candidates in the 2019 presidential election in Luhansk oblast.

**Diagram 1.** The distribution of votes for candidates in the 2019 presidential election in Luhansk oblast



Source: The election of the President of Ukraine. CEC Data. <https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vp2019/wp001.html>

Although voting was not held at many polling stations, the turnout of residents of the oblast at the presidential election was comparable to nationwide turnout (56.7% vs. 62.8% in the first round).

**Diagram 2.** Voter turnout at the 2019 presidential election in Luhansk oblast

Source: The election of the President of Ukraine. CEC Data. <https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vp2019/wp063pt001f01=719.html>

### Political identification following the results of the 2019 parliamentary election in Luhansk oblast

Yurii Boiko's party gained the same stable support at the snap parliamentary election on 21 July 2019. Luhansk oblast was one of two where Opposition Platform – For Life won in the multi-member constituency. Compared to the outcome of its predecessor, Opposition Bloc, at the 2014 election, this political party received about half of votes and had almost three times more support in the oblast than Ukraine's average. The split of Opposition Bloc in 2018, which meant two political forces went to the polls separately, also prevented the party from using the outcome in its favor. Opposition Bloc won 4.78% of votes in Luhansk oblast, ranking third with a significant gap, but its overall results in Ukraine did not allow the party to get into parliament. The presidential party, Servant of the People, ranked second in the oblast (28.83%). See Table 2. The distribution of votes for political parties in the 2019 snap parliamentary election under proportional representation.

Voter turnout at the parliamentary election was slightly lower (49.2%) than at the presidential election (56.35% in the second round), but despite the summer season and the fact that a large part of the oblast's population did not have the opportunity to elect deputies, voter turnout was only slightly below Ukraine's average (49.8%) and much higher than at the 2014 election in the oblast (32.9%). These data indirectly indicate the desire of voters of Luhansk oblast to have a stronger response from the political environment to challenges faced by the local population.

**Table 2.** The distribution of votes for political parties at the 2019 snap parliamentary election under proportional representation

Political parties that won the majority of votes in Luhansk oblast	Luhansk oblast	Political parties that passed the electoral threshold in Ukraine
Opposition Platform — For Life	49.83	13.05 – 2nd result
Servant of the People	28.83	43.16 – 1st result
Opposition Bloc	4.78	–
Party of Shariy	3.68	–
European Solidarity	2.94	8.10 – 4th result
Batkyvshchyna	2.11	8.18 – 3rd result
Radical Party of Oleh Liashko	1.82	–
Strength and Honor	1.35	–
Voice	1.30	5.82 – 5th result
Ukrainian Strategy of Groysman	0.69	–
Freedom	0.45	–
Green Party of Ukraine	0.61	–
Freedom	0.45	–

Source: The 2019 election of the People's Deputies of Ukraine. CEC Data. <https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vnd2019/wp317pt001f01=919pid100=44.html>

## The 2020 local elections in Luhansk oblast

In 2020, local elections were not held in eight communities of two of the four raions in the government-controlled areas of Luhansk oblast, Sievierodonetsk and Shchastia. These cities and towns include Hirsk, Lysychansk, Popasna and Sievierodonetsk City Councils in Sievierodonetsk raion, Nyzhnioteple Village Council, Stanytsia Luhanska and Shirokiv Settlement Councils in Shchastia raion, and Shchastia City Council. The relevant decision was made on 8 August 2020 by the Central Election Commission,<sup>27</sup> based in particular on the conclusions of Luhansk Oblast MCA regarding security threats.

<sup>27</sup> Ordinance of the CEC of 8 August 2020 "On the impossibility of carrying out the first election of deputies of certain village, settlement and city councils of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and the relevant village, settlement and city heads on 25 October 2020". The list of village, settlement and city territorial communities of Luhansk oblast where it is impossible to hold the first election of deputies of the relevant local councils and village, settlement and city heads on 25 October 2020. Annex 2 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/v0161359-20#Text>

At the same time, the composition of all four raion councils was elected, with typical outcomes. In each of the raion councils, Opposition Platform – For Life won the majority of votes, followed by Our Land and the presidential Servant of the People, both well behind the leader (3–5 times).<sup>28</sup>

In city councils, support for nationwide political forces was even lower. Opposition Platform – For Life, Our Land, For the Future and Opposition Bloc were predominantly represented in Svatove, Kreminsk, Rubizhne and Starobilsk City Councils.

Hence, it is possible to state that active voters of the oblast show homogeneous preferences at all representative levels, and demonstrate explicit support for political forces that have a more pronounced oblast positioning. At the same time, their loyalty to political forces that get into parliament is low (except for Opposition Platform – For Life).

The results of our consultations showed that the decision to cancel local elections in some communities was poorly discussed with community members and was not welcomed by activists, despite authorities' arguments about the need to ensure the security of citizens. According to participants in the oblast consultations, although security was threatened in some population centers during previous nationwide electoral campaigns, the 2019 presidential election and snap elections to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine were still held in these places.

Participants in the consultations point out problems of communication between authorities and members of communities where local self-governments have not been elected. These communities are characterized by the curtailment of local democracy, a lack of information about activities of authorities, and poor involvement of community members in solving issues of local concern.

## 6. The information space in Luhansk oblast

As there is no access to Ukrainian media in many population centers of Luhansk oblast, residents have been exposed to Russian propaganda for years through the broadcast of Russian media outlets.

Ukraine lacks an information policy in the government-controlled and especially non-government controlled areas of Luhansk oblast. Residents of the temporarily occupied territories do not have normal access to Ukrainian broadcasting due to technical restrictions on access to digital and analog channels, while Luhansk TV Tower (194 meters, in NGCA) extends the signal to almost the entire oblast. At the same time, the Ukrainian government has made some efforts to restore access to Ukrainian television signal in NGCA and strengthen it in the government-controlled areas of the oblast. On 22 September 2017, a new TV tower (134 meters) was

<sup>28</sup> 2020 local election. The outcomes of the election of deputies of raion councils [Electronic resource]. Access mode: [https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vm2020/pvm037pt001f01=695pt00\\_t001f01=695pid112=21pid100=44rej=0.html](https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vm2020/pvm037pt001f01=695pt00_t001f01=695pid112=21pid100=44rej=0.html)

opened in the village of Bakhmutivka, Luhansk oblast, and in August 2021 a new TV tower (150 meters) started broadcasting in Komyshevaha urban-type settlement. Broadcasting from this tower can cover some 200,000 people on both sides of the line of contact and convey content which is important for an adequate understanding of the situation in the oblast and the country.

Despite this technical development, there is a need to design and implement strategic communications with different audiences on state policy in general and on intensifying efforts to strengthen social cohesion and trust between different environments in particular.

In 2016, the State Strategy of Information Reintegration of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts for 2016–2020 was developed, but the government approved it only in July 2018, two years before its completion. The action plan for strategy implementation was never drafted. The strategy is currently being finalized before the next iteration of its implementation. An expert survey conducted as part of activities of the National Platform found that, in the opinion of the overwhelming majority of experts, adoption of the strategy in no way contributed to formulation of a consistent state policy of information reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories.

According to experts interviewed by the National Platform Dialogue on Peace and Secure Reintegration in March 2021, the updated strategy should be realistic and take into account transitional legislation norms, secure reintegration policy, and various scenarios (ranging from preservation of the current situation to a large-scale escalation of the armed conflict or even the final takeover of the non-government controlled areas by Russia, as in the case of Crimea's annexation). The strategy should be based on bilateral communication with residents who remain in the non-government controlled areas without establishing official relations with breakaway authorities of the Luhansk People's Republic.<sup>29</sup>

To date, Luhansk oblast's population uses different channels for dissemination and consumption of information. Young people are more focused on social media, whereas middle-aged groups prefer radio, local print or electronic media outlets.

Male and female participants emphasized the importance of local media to inform communities about events in the oblast and promote elements of cohesion, i.e. values, common practices and activities. The importance of local compared to national media is explained by its focus on news and issues of local concern. These dominate the local information space, as news about community life is usually not broadcast on national media.

At the same time, local media face underfunding and limited opportunities, including curtailment of the advertising market which, according to participants, adversely affects the capacity to keep communities informed and facilitate communication between stakeholders on joint action.

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<sup>29</sup> Information component of the policy of secure reintegration of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts: directions, lessons, objectives. Analytical Report. K., 2021. 20 pages. Materials are available from the National Platform Dialogue on Peace and Secure Reintegration and UCIPR.

Female participant in the oblast discussion from Sievierodonetsk:

“As a result of infrastructural changes, we now face a situation where a small number of people live in a large area. This is a question of delivery, a question of implementation. The advertising market in Luhansk oblast moved to the Internet during the war, because print media were not published at all, or were published in a form approved by militants, to put it mildly. There were no adequate information publications here. All printing houses remained on the other side of the line of contact, so did distribution networks, including Soiuzdruk, Luhanskdruk and so on. Now Ukrposhta is engaged in delivery and distribution and dictates, as a monopolist, its own strict rules given the low quality of services. Furthermore, the main consumers of print media are people of retirement and pre-retirement age who, unfortunately, have a low income. They count every hryvnia spent on subscription to print publications. Hence, print publications are on the edge of survival. Unfortunately, due to this story of the reform of print communal media in Luhansk oblast, they are actually on thin ice.”

**Among conflict topics that can be covered or used by local media** are issues raised by political actors and issues of local economic competition.

**Among topics that consolidate communities in local media**, participants stressed charity and the importance of balanced coverage of local news and verified information.

## 7. Social cohesion challenges and the risk of social disintegration

Communication and cooperation of authorities with civil society institutions is not only an important, but an integral tool for shaping, promoting and developing social cohesion in the oblast and in communities.

Consultation participants' assessments of active cooperation by CSOs and authorities differ.

Representatives of public organizations often do not see that projects supported by authorities contribute to mobilizing communities for joint action to address issues of local concern.

At the same time, authority representatives underscored systematic cooperation with CSOs, in particular activities of CSOs and cultural institutions (museums, libraries) in implementing community initiatives. They also emphasized the growing institutional capacity of oblast CSOs to implement complex project tasks of social cohesion. This was achieved through the involvement of schools and the exchange of best project management practices

with other oblasts (communities). Positive examples of cooperation include the participation of communities in developing raion information strategies which, according to participants, creates an experience of cooperation and involvement in local development, and has a positive effect on increasing community cohesion. According to participants, activities of oblast non-governmental organizations and initiatives enable them to solve social problems and, despite political tensions, involve residents in joint efforts to improve living conditions in population centers through very simple measures, e.g. joint planting of trees, landscaping and charity (distribution of food, fund-raising, distribution of medications and provision of assistance).

Cooperation with authorities at the level of local democracy tools, e.g., advisory and public councils, was assessed ambiguously. In general, there are around 280 active public organizations in the oblast dealing with the interests of youth, developing projects in the area of culture and sports, human rights, etc.<sup>30</sup> The main gap, in the opinion of representatives of public organizations, is in communities where the system of local representation, replaced with military and civil administrations, does not work.

At the same time, authority representatives said that they do not see problems in the work of public councils, as communication and cooperation are in place. In 2020, a public council of 36 representatives of public organizations was elected. The council held five meetings in 2020, but only one in 2021.<sup>31</sup>

These conflicting assessments of the state of cooperation may indicate the different expectations of the parties regarding cooperation and its outcomes, as well as the need to considerably improve communication and effectiveness of local democracy tools given decentralization reform and changes in the administrative and territorial structure in 2020 that created new communities and raions and, accordingly, the objective of developing new interaction mechanisms.

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

Local experts shared their opinions on efforts to shape a new image of Luhansk oblast. According to oblast stakeholders, rebranding could not only show the oblast's external potential but also promote further joint perception of difficult and sometimes dramatic changes that the oblast has experienced throughout its long history.

<sup>30</sup> Directory of CSOs of Luhansk oblast. Sievierodonetsk, 2019. 50 P [Electronic resource]. Access mode: [http://loga.gov.ua/sites/default/files/buklet\\_oda\\_24\\_07\\_2019.pdf](http://loga.gov.ua/sites/default/files/buklet_oda_24_07_2019.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> Public council at the Oblast State Administration [Electronic resource]. Access mode: [http://loga.gov.ua/oda/about/depart/dep\\_uvp/gr-oda](http://loga.gov.ua/oda/about/depart/dep_uvp/gr-oda)

Representatives of public organizations and authorities agreed that although a single new image of the oblast is currently absent, there is a need to create the image of an oblast that is open to innovation and transformation. Work on branding new communities<sup>32</sup> could enhance joint actions of residents, lay value foundations that could help overcome current fragmentation and inequalities in oblast development, and create an attractive image of the oblast.

Interregional cooperation could serve as an important tool for strengthening cohesion.

Participants in the discussions perceive interregional and intermunicipal cooperation projects as an opportunity to be included in nationwide trends and cultural, economic, social, and humanitarian processes.

Among examples of cooperation with other oblasts, participants listed cases related to the development of people-to-people contacts, involvement in projects and exchange of best practices of governance, communication of authorities and communities, local democracy development, small business development, launch of cultural projects, implementation of youth policy (the example of youth centers in Donetsk oblast) and humanitarian initiatives.

Although Luhansk oblast borders only two oblasts, it should pay more attention to the potential for such interaction. This was discussed at interregional consultations with representatives of the five oblasts of eastern Ukraine, Kharkiv, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk and Dnipropetrovsk, held by the project team in June 2021. Participants are confident that creating a financial basis for this interaction could help achieve common goals.

The Strategy of Development of Luhansk Oblast for 2021–2027 reasonably states that “interregional cooperation should be a focal point of the system of a new oblast policy”. At the same time, it is necessary to go further, clearly outlining areas of this cooperation, sources of funding for joint projects, and mechanisms for implementing common priorities.

The oblast leadership is aware that the process of raion enlargement requires closer interregional cooperation at the sub-oblast level, within the newly formed raions.<sup>33</sup> There are four agreements in Luhansk oblast in the register of officially concluded agreements on intermunicipal cooperation as of June 2021.

A further task of the governing authorities is to overcome the limited approach to cooperation and collaboration (raion solid waste utilities, raion water supply utilities, raion enterprises for

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<sup>32</sup> 20 communities of eastern Ukraine got new brands. Notification of 11 June 2021. EU and UNDP [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://www.ua.undp.org/content/ukraine/uk/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2021/twenty-communities-in-eastern-ukraine-now-have-new-brands.html>

<sup>33</sup> For detailed deliverables of the project on the potential of interregional cooperation to strengthen cohesion and economic development of the oblasts and communities, see Ya. Zhalilo, O. Snihova. Realizing the Potential of Interregional and Intermunicipal Cooperation in the Framework of Cohesion Policy. Analytical Report. UCIPR. 2021. 28 pp [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <http://ucipr.org.ua/ua/publikatsii/vydannia/realizatsiya-potentsialu-mizhregionalnogo-ta-mizhmunitsipalnogo-spiv-robotnitstva-v-mezhakh-politiki-zgurtovanosti-analitichnij-zvit>

provision of services for vulnerable groups, etc.), create financial instruments for interaction, and gain experience and institutional capacity for intermunicipal and interregional cooperation.

Participants in the interregional consultations agreed that decentralization creates both new opportunities for intermunicipal cooperation and social cohesion, and challenges associated with the risks of fragmentation and isolation or separation of relationships in the oblast.

According to regional experts, a key role in responding to the above challenges should be played by central executive authorities and the government; a proactive policy of the Oblast State Administration/Military and Civil Administration as an authorized entity of consolidation and social cohesion, and development of a legal framework and mechanisms enabling effective local decision-making, including publicizing the potential of interregional cooperation.

## 9. Mechanisms of involvement to increase cohesion

Participants in the consultations in May–June 2021 stressed that projects on shaping social cohesion are underway in the oblast. A lot of work is done with youth, which is extremely important taking into account oblast development strategies in the long run. Municipal institutions and donor projects are in place to support both youth initiatives and the development of youth policy infrastructure, e.g. youth centers that provide space for communication and learning.

At the same time, participants agreed that in the long term, there is clearly a need to formulate an integral policy of social cohesion aimed at enhancing trust between different groups, preventing and managing conflicts, and creating a sense of belonging to a particular social group (community).

To date, the **Strategy of Development of Luhansk Oblast for 2021–2027**<sup>34</sup> includes goals that can positively affect the social cohesion level in Luhansk oblast, in particular:

- Effective human-centered management;
- Secure territory, security, national identity and an integral information space;
- Restoration of critical and social infrastructure.

To overcome the inequalities, problems and challenges associated with cohesion processes, a number of approaches are proposed, in particular:

- governance based on the principles of non-discrimination and gender equality;
- creation of an effective system of interregional partnership;

<sup>34</sup> Strategy of Development of Luhansk Oblast for 2021–2027. Sievierodonetsk, 2020 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: [http://loga.gov.ua/sites/default/files/collections/strategiya\\_lugansk\\_2027\\_last.pdf](http://loga.gov.ua/sites/default/files/collections/strategiya_lugansk_2027_last.pdf)

- creation of safe conditions for living and moving around the oblast guided by a gender-based approach;
- intensification of awareness-raising campaigns and assistance in countering propaganda of Russian TV channels.

At the consultations, experts pointed out some initiatives and measures that could influence the institutionalization of social cohesion policy:

- the use of mechanisms for involving citizens in decision-making; intensification of activities of public councils and the introduction of public consultations at a variety of levels, including communities governed by military and civil administrations;
- programs supporting internally displaced persons and military personnel of the Anti-Terrorist Operation/Joint Forces Operation are in place;
- a pilot geo-information system for monitoring, analysis, evaluation and conflict resolution (<https://dialog-ua.org/pages/about.html>) is underway. This project of the UN Peacebuilding and Reconstruction Program aims to create a system for monitoring, preventing and resolving conflicts in communities around decentralization and land issues, conflicts between schools and parents, between certain groups, between the military and the local population, between businesses and authorities, authorities and CSOs, etc.
- the creation of dialogue platforms and cooperation of initiatives at local and oblast levels;
- exchange of best practices of community governance with other oblasts (raions).

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

Processes to increase the level of social cohesion in Luhansk oblast concern a whole set of policies to enhance the quality of life of the oblast population, taking into account security challenges.

In general, analysis of studies, consultations, strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats for policies of increasing social cohesion makes it possible to identify the following components in Luhansk oblast:

	Strengths	Weaknesses
1	The availability of social cohesion elements in the Strategy of Development of Luhansk Oblast; understanding of the comprehensive nature of challenges; readiness to prepare practical plans for development, systematic monitoring and evaluation of the social cohesion level	A high proportion of internally displaced persons who need attention regarding the whole complex of human rights at national and local levels
2	Donor support for social cohesion projects, including the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation (museums, clusters, cultural projects), and individual projects funded from the public budget; development of relevant areas wherever possible under the current system of governance	Lack of resources at the local level to support community projects on social cohesion (local, regional, and interregional levels)
3	Recognition of needs; development of projects (strategic programs) focused on infrastructure restoration and development; fundraising	Broken ties and destroyed logistics in the oblast; slow infrastructure development
4	Capacity of civil society organizations working with and representing citizens' interests; interest of organizations in the creation and practical application of advisory formats of cooperation with MCAs; the search for specific means to take into account the population's interests and involve citizens in decision-making and creating experience of the value of joint cooperation	Weak feedback from civil society institutions, small and medium-sized businesses of the oblast due to administrative and territorial reform and the new raion division; the specifics of governance through MCAs and lack of a representation system in two raions of the oblast
5	Citizen trust in local media; desire to support local media and consume information that helps understand processes going on at local level	Limited access of the elderly population to print media; reduction of the advertising market and its move to e-platforms; weak financial base of print media; restrictions on television signal access
6	Attention of the international community to all aspects of secure reintegration and recovery; development of a project to assess the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index for eastern Ukraine; promotion of cooperation between different stakeholders	Heavy workload on authorities; lack of staff in service provision systems; inability to provide high-quality services to residents of the oblast
7	Ability and desire of the business community of the oblast to participate in community development projects	Weak involvement of economic entities in solving social cohesion problems
8	Implementation of interregional cooperation projects (in particular in the cultural area); development of CSO capacity and cultural networks	Concentration of public and donor social cohesion projects primarily at the micro-level
9	Ability of local media to verify facts and work with different audiences; development of online communication; interest of youth organizations in communication projects	Low level of coverage of social cohesion in oblast media

	Opportunities	Threats
1	Consolidation of all actors interested in acting for the sake of social cohesion and peacebuilding; the use of potentials in each sector	Reasons for increased distrust in the decisions of incumbent authorities; decreased political loyalty to the center; reduced loyalty to decisions of national authorities
2	Development of inclusive action plans to increase social cohesion in each community as a platform for cooperation of authorities and CSOs; development of indicators and a performance appraisal system	Growing social apathy, including among youth and the active population of the oblast
3	Development and implementation of oblast participatory budgets as an involvement tool; implementation of projects for youth; creation of conditions for development; support for projects aimed at involving youth in solving oblast problems	Atmosphere of uncertainty, loss of a sense of security; inability to receive high-quality services (medical, educational, social); strengthening of migration trends in the oblast
4	Connectivity within the oblasts, and with other oblasts; work with different groups	Possibilities of provoking tensions and confrontations between different social groups
5	Development of interregional and intermunicipal cooperation; practical development of a cluster approach to solving issues of common importance for different communities; synergy of potentials with neighboring Kharkiv and Donetsk oblasts	The accumulation of unresolved acute issues in all areas that pose challenges to the health and security of residents of the oblast, including environmental, security, social, medical and educational
6	A more proactive position of authorities as those capable of assessing and coordinating resources; raising of donor funds to support activities that are part of inclusive community development plans	Lack of a vision of local development prospects on the part of citizens
7	Attention to labor market planning; involvement of the local business community in projects on exchange of best practices; development of social entrepreneurship; promotion of charity especially for 'gray zone' communities	Growing demographic, social and territorial disparities; outflow of the economically active and skilled population; an increasing burden on social infrastructure
8	Development of initiatives aimed at strengthening the regional brand; shaping a resource-intensive image of the oblast that requires development in unity with all capacities of other oblasts and the state in general, and simultaneously the inclusion of Luhansk oblast's past and present in the context of shaping the Ukrainian political nation	Localization of the action scale; restriction to short-term initiatives; lack of a common planning horizon; curtailment of intraregional ties
9	Involvement of local media in developing strategic goals and identifying tools to support the information component of social cohesion and secure reintegration policy, conflict prevention and peacebuilding; technological infrastructure for broadcasting in the oblast in particular and the eastern region in general	Absence of systematic information and explanation of efforts of national and local actors to overcome contradictions and social conflicts; creation of an environment for manipulation; incitement to hatred among different social groups and representatives of different communities

# NOTES

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in Luhansk Oblast**

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