



**Social Cohesion:
Directions for Policy
Development
in Donetsk Oblast**



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This report presents key areas for action to shape a social cohesion policy for Donetsk oblast. The proposals are based on a study of the state of affairs in Donetsk oblast, analysis of state policy documents, consultations and preliminary groundwork with representatives of authorities and other sectors including the media, non-governmental organizations and the business community regarding, in particular, the potential of interregional cooperation to jointly address challenges faced by eastern Ukraine. These proposals can be further used in the development of an inclusive action plan for formulating a social cohesion policy for Donetsk oblast.

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



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Introduction

Resolving the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine and restoring Ukraine's territorial integrity remains a key task of the country's national stability and security policy. Accelerated and advanced socio-economic development of the government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts is an important component of social stability in the country and forms a reliable support for security measures in eastern Ukraine. In this context, we see increased social cohesion as a major component of the policy of secure reintegration and peacebuilding in eastern Ukraine.

This **study focuses on assessing the potential for social cohesion in Donetsk oblast** and considers a number of key factors that affect the level of social cohesion in the oblast.

The conclusions are based on:

- analysis of current state policy approaches in the area of social cohesion;
- data and indicators of the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index (SCORE) for eastern Ukraine for 2020–2021;
- interviews with experts and representatives of Donetsk oblast authorities at a variety of levels;
- a survey on secure reintegration policy in 2021 commissioned by the National Platform.

Particular attention is paid to the following elements of social cohesion in Donetsk oblast:

- a) Identity;
- b) The information space and information reintegration;
- c) The level of trust (vertical and horizontal cohesion);
- d) Priorities for the development of interregional and intermunicipal cooperation.

Based on an assessment of the potential for social cohesion, a number of proposals were prepared that can be used for:

- implementation of the goals of the State Regional Development Strategy for 2020–2027;
- development of a plan for implementation of the Strategy of Economic Development of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts;
- preparation of annual action plans to increase the level of social cohesion in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and other oblasts of Ukraine.



I. Approaches to shaping social cohesion in public policy documents

Areas of state policy of social cohesion are defined in a number of Ukraine's strategic development documents prepared in the last 5–7 years, in particular:

1) **The State Regional Development Strategy for 2020–2027**¹ defines the “creation of a state that is coherent in the social, humanitarian, economic, environmental, security and spatial dimensions” as a strategic goal of state regional policy until 2027.

2) **The State Target Program for Recovery and Peacebuilding in the Eastern Regions of Ukraine**² (the action plan for implementation in 2017–2020) defines “social resilience and peacebuilding” as a separate priority and provides measures to improve social resilience, peacebuilding and public security, achieve social cohesion, restore trust, promote cultural dialogue, and nurture tolerance with the involvement of all segments of the population.

3) **The Strategy of Deoccupation and Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol**³ notes cohesion of Ukrainian society as one of the goals for secure reintegration.

4) **The Strategy of Economic Development of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts until 2030**⁴. This document plays a major role in terms of setting social cohesion goals, as for the first time it focuses on the particular goals and objectives of social cohesion policy in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

¹ 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>

² Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 722/2019 of 30 September 2019 “On Sustainable Development Goals of Ukraine for the period until 2030” [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/722/2019#Text>

³ Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 117/2021 of 24 March 2021 “On the Strategy of Deoccupation and Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol” [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/1172021-37533>

⁴ Ordinance of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1078-p of 18 August 2021 “On the Strategy of Economic Development of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts until 2030” [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1078-2021-%D1%80#Text>

The Strategy of Economic Development of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts until 2030, initiated by the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, includes proposals from a number of think tanks and public initiatives, the National Platform Dialogue on Peace and Secure Reintegration, the Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development, and the Center for Innovation Development SeeD Development (<https://cid.center/>).

By highlighting social cohesion as a separate element, the government has taken a step towards **recognizing social cohesion policy as a major element of secure reintegration and peacebuilding in eastern Ukraine.**

Specifically, the strategy:

- makes the Ministry of Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine and oblast state administrations/military and civil administrations of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts responsible for the development of annual action plans on social cohesion issues;
- provides for the use of the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index as an assessment tool to measure the effectiveness of implementation of social cohesion efforts;
- provides for the use of participatory budgets (civic budgets) as a tool of participatory democracy.

There is reason to hope that in the case of implementation of the social cohesion activities declared in the State Regional Development Strategy for 2021–2027, Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts will become pilot oblasts to implement the “coherent country” priority.⁵ Potential action plans for social cohesion in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts offer incentives for cooperation between different cohesion stakeholders: oblast state administrations/military and civil administrations, civil society organizations, entrepreneurs, mass media and amalgamated territorial communities, which would have a positive impact on vertical cohesion in the post-conflict areas.

5) The Strategy of Development of Donetsk Oblast until 2027⁶

The concept of ‘social cohesion’ is not a separate priority in the structure of the strategy. At the same time, Strategic Goal 2 “Quality of life and human development” envisages a number

⁵ State Regional Development Strategy for 2021–2027. Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine no.95 from 5 August 2020 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <http://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/695-2020-%D0%BF#Text>.

⁶ Ordinance of the Chairman of the Oblast State Administration, Head of the Military and Civil Administration N o. 147.5-20 of 17 February 2020 “On the Strategy of Development of Donetsk Oblast until 2027” [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://www.minregion.gov.ua/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/doneczka-strategiya-rozvytku-doneczkoyi-oblasti-na-period-do-2027-roku.pdf>

of measures and projects that will help enhance social cohesion. Specifically, the updated (in 2021) action plan for strategy implementation in 2021–2023⁷ provides for:

1) Launch of an exchange system through the Grateful Donbas nationwide program, which incorporates:

- scientific and educational ‘landing visits’ of top senior high school pupils, students, teachers and professors from Ukrainian oblasts and Kyiv to secondary and higher educational institutions in the government-controlled areas of Donetsk oblast (located far away from the contact line) for training and cultural programs;
- visits to Ukrainian-speaking oblasts and Kyiv of top school pupils, students, their teachers, instructors, talented children with disabilities and their parents, etc. from government-controlled areas of Donetsk oblast.

2) Development of cultural exchanges between oblasts through implementation of the Days of Kyiv in Mariupol project, and by holding cultural and artistic events in the cities of Donetsk oblast.

3) The Decent Country for Decent People project, aimed at enhancing vertical social cohesion and trust in authorities, that provides for:

- development of a network of youth centers (creation of 30 local and 5 raion centers; development of an oblast youth center);
- strengthening the role of youth in the governance processes of Donetsk oblast; holding Government and Youth Community trainings.
- meetings of young people with MPs and representatives of authorities at various levels to discuss regional development;
- youth internships (three times a year for three months) in structural units of Donetsk Oblast State Administration and local self-governments.

4) The Supporting Youth Initiatives project, which provides for annual implementation of around 40 socially significant micro-projects developing youth civic activity with a maximum cost of UAH 100,000 per project.

5) Lastly, the strategy and action plan envisage activities geared towards enhancing the level of human security as a component that affects the level of social cohesion in the oblast.

Such measures aimed at involving young people in decision-making are valuable for the sustainable results of social cohesion policy, especially given the dimension of interregional communication, so it is important to implement them and evaluate their effectiveness.

⁷ Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy of Development of Donetsk Oblast in 2021–2023 (updated) [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://dn.gov.ua/storage/app/sites/1/uploaded-files/%20%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%85%D0%BE%D0%B4%D1%96%D0%B2%202021-2023.pdf>



II. Assessment of potential for the development of social cohesion in Donetsk oblast

The conceptual basis of the study is the definition of social cohesion by the Council of Europe, the World Bank and other international organizations.

The Council of Europe defines social cohesion as “the capacity of a society to ensure the well-being of all its members, minimizing disparities and avoiding marginalization (exclusion) of some social groups.”

The World Bank defines social cohesion as “a situation in which a group of people within a certain territory (country) demonstrates the ability to cooperate, which in turn creates an institutional capacity for productive change.” Assessment of the level of social cohesion should be grounded on the basic social (community) values that underpin identity; approaches to mechanisms of distribution of social responsibility and rules of interaction between authorities and citizens, and assessment of the achieved level of citizens’ well-being.

Guided by these principles, we pay attention to the following elements of social cohesion in Donetsk oblast: 1) identity, 2) the information space and information reintegration, 3) the level of trust (vertical and horizontal cohesion), 4) priorities for development of interregional and intermunicipal cooperation.

1. Identity: from conservation of oblast identity to formation of a new oblast identity

In our opinion, working with identity on a residual principle is the main drawback of most projects focused on building peace and increasing the level of social cohesion in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Conflict of identities is an intangible factor that ‘infects’ and adversely affects all levels of social interaction and communication in society. Conflict of identities underpins distrust and hostility to the ‘different’, and contributes to the formation of closed social communities. The freezing of identity-related conflicts poses the risk of recurring social confrontation if external deterrents are weakened, and creates grounds for incitement to hatred and formation and dissemination of the ideology of resolving conflicts of social interest by force.

Notwithstanding the aggression of the Russian Federation and the non-recognition of Ukraine’s right to political independence and autonomy by the Russian political leadership,

Donetsk oblast's identity has not undergone significant transformations. Specifically, data show that:

- in their geopolitical choice, residents of the oblast adhere to a pro-Russia orientation and discourse imposed by Russian propaganda;
- tensions and opposition to nationwide (civic) and oblast identity persist;
- prejudices against Ukrainian citizens living in Ukraine's western oblasts persist;
- the level of distrust in the political leadership of Ukraine and central authorities is much higher than Ukraine's average.

SCORE⁸ data published in 2021 make it possible to record structural features of the identity of residents of Donetsk oblast.

Table 1. Identity recognition indicators. Donetsk oblast. 2021

1.	Identity	Indicator for Donetsk oblast			Indicator for Ukraine		
		Ukrainian	Russian	Citizen of Ukraine	Ukrainian	Russian	Citizen of Ukraine
		4.8	1.5	5.7	7.5	0.5	3.7
2.	The feeling of belonging to the country	7.0			7.7		

“Ukrainian identity” received 7.5 points on average in Ukraine, whereas in Donetsk oblast this indicator is only 4.8 points. In terms of identity, residents of Donetsk oblast identify themselves with the concept of a “citizen of Ukraine” (5.7 points) although this indicator has only 4.8 points on average in the country.

Data analysis shows that although residents of the oblast avoid the definition of identity as “Ukrainian”, they also do not choose “Russian” as an identity marker. Preference is given to the **more neutral concept of a “citizen of Ukraine”**.

Also, the **“belonging to the country”** indicator in Donetsk oblast is somewhat lower compared to the same indicator on average in Ukraine (7.0 vs 7.7 respectively).

⁸ SCORE 2021. Identity: Ukrainians [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://app.scoreforpeace.org/en/use/2021/1/map?row=tn-3-0>. The 4th wave of the survey is funded by USAID's Democratic Governance East Program, UNDP, EU, and developed by the Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD).

A survey of residents of Donetsk oblast also shows that in geopolitical orientation issues, preference is given to development of economic, political and cultural ties with the Russian Federation, which illustrates **the dominance of pro-Russian identity in the oblast. Specifically, the “for cooperation with Russia”** indicator is 5.4 on average in Ukraine, whereas the same indicator for Donetsk oblast is 7.4 out of 10. This figure is higher only for Luhansk oblast, reaching 7.6.⁹

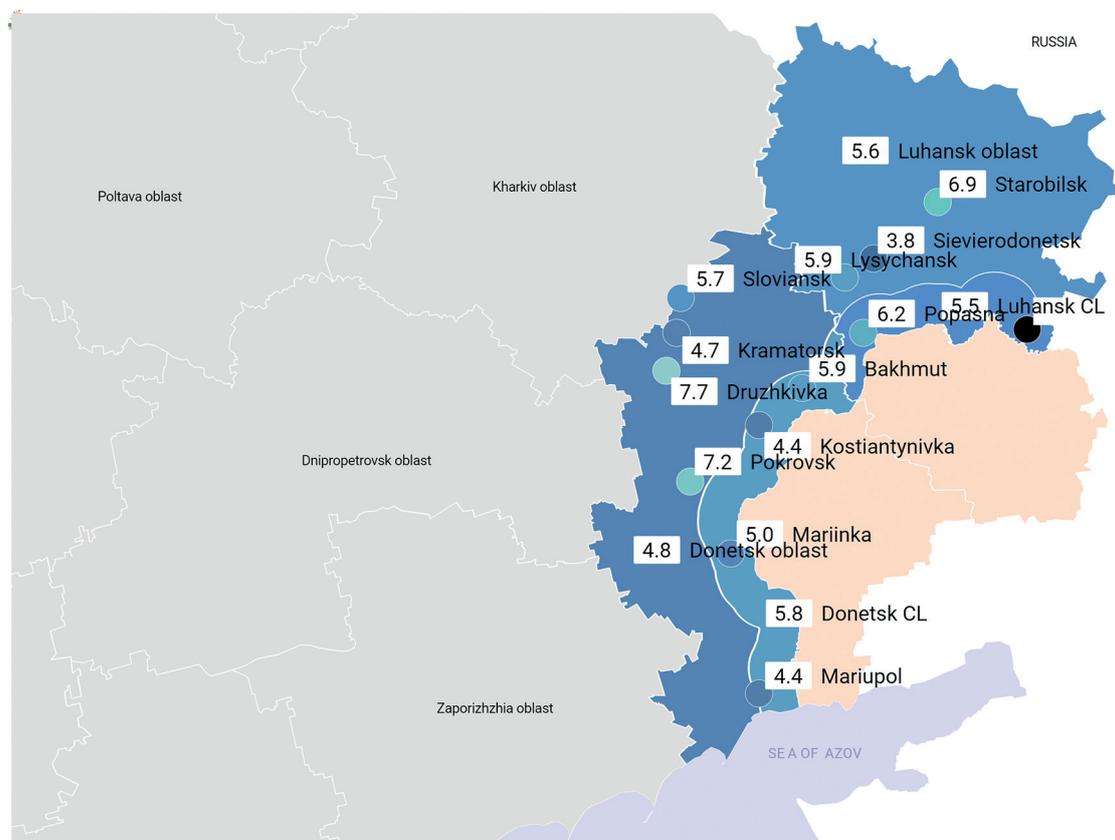
It is no surprise that at nationwide and local elections, Donetsk residents largely support political forces that adhere to and promote the Russian discourse and narrative.

* * *

Finally, **significant intra-regional differences** are an important factor in assessing identity indicators. In particular, it should be noted that the indicators of individual cities deviate in both directions relative to the oblast average.

Although the average indicator (identity – Ukrainian) is 4.8 points for Donetsk oblast, the same indicator in Kostiantynivka and Mariupol is 4.4, i.e. below the oblast average. Conversely, it is 7.2 in Druzhkivka and 7.7 in Pokrovsk, much higher than the oblast average.

Figure 1. The identity recognition indicator. Donetsk oblast. 2021



Source: SCORE 2021. Identity: Ukrainians.

⁹ Ibid. Identity: Ukrainians. [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://app.scoreforpeace.org/en/use/2021/1/map?row=tn-3-0>

It should be mentioned in advance that a condition for an effective policy of secure reintegration should be sound policy in the area of shaping a modern national identity at national and oblast levels. Preference should be given to an integrated model of national identity, which would organically combine civic (political) identity and individual elements of ethno-cultural and civilizational identities.

The oblast needs to:

- overcome political leaders' and responsible stakeholders' underestimation of the oblast and the risk of freezing identity-related tensions (with certain reservations, between ideologically engaged bearers of Eurasian and pro-European identity);
- overcome mental inertia in the public consciousness and increase political investment and measures aimed at transforming the available model of oblast identity;
- overcome conceptual uncertainty (a deficit of ideas and images which could become the foundation for shaping a new oblast identity and oblast brand);
- recognize openness to change and innovation and willingness to cooperate with representatives of other groups and identities as markers of a new oblast identity;
- create more complementary correlations between national and oblast identities, which would enable a reduction of the identity factor's significance in the process of shaping social cohesion in the oblast;
- overcome the weak, fragmented nature of cultural industries in the oblast and provide support for developing clusters of creative and cultural industries (it is the cultural and creative sectors that are called on to become channels for transformation of the oblast's socio-cultural space and to generate images, roles and symbols of a new oblast identity).

In the long run, when further developing the oblast Social Cohesion Action Plan, a differentiated approach to be applied to different cities and areas within Donetsk oblast must be provided.

2. The information space and information reintegration: overcoming the imbalance between information and mis-/disinformation

The media is crucial for shaping a new regional identity, promoting constructive communication, restoring trust, building socio-cultural ties and increasing social cohesion in the oblast.

The context created by national media has a decisive influence on the information space of Donetsk oblast. Local experts stress the following problems that adversely affect the potential for social cohesion and information reintegration in the oblast:

- continued intensive influence of Russian media on the information space of the oblast and on public awareness;
- unresolved issues related to the technical capacity for conveying Ukrainian media content to residents of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, along with a lack of innovative steps to overcome suppression of Ukrainian broadcasting signals;
- dominance in national media of the narrative in terms of 'betrayal' and 'victory', which erodes the attractiveness and competitiveness of Ukrainian content in the eyes of residents who are under the influence of Russian propaganda; a lack of positive news and discourse;
- insufficient attention in national media to topics and events in the conflict-affected oblasts (Donetsk oblast in national news);
- a biased, simplistic or unprofessional approach to coverage of events and problems faced by people living in eastern Ukraine;
- disparities in the provision of information about the risks and potential of Donetsk oblast – there is a shortage of information about positive changes and tendencies in Donetsk oblast.

Local media is important for the information reintegration of Donetsk oblast. The problems of local media are not limited to the size of the local advertising market and outflows of qualified personnel.

Local media is heavily influenced by corporate groups focused on solving current problems of business development. At the same time, local media has the potential to cover the following:

- counteraction to information and psychological special operations aimed at deepening distrust between society and authorities and between different population groups;
- manifestations of xenophobia and Ukrainophobia in the public space;
- public condemnation of actions targeted at artificial polarization and separation of society on the basis of cultural and ideological stereotypes;
- ways to overcome misinformation and dissemination of fake information;

- successful projects and local actors contributing to social consolidation, confidence-building, social capital and social cohesion in communities and in the oblast.

During oblast consultations, participants noted that the oblast lacks a common information space:

“We actually lack a common information space. We are unaware of what is going on even in the nearest cities. As we communicate through personal contacts, I am always being told by Mariupol residents that they have the impression that everything is being built in Kramatorsk, while here in Kramatorsk we have the impression that everything is being built in Mariupol.”¹⁰

The situation in the information space is vividly illustrated by the Mariupol case, presented in *Ukrainian Geopolitical Fault-Line Cities: Urban Identity, Geopolitics and Urban Policy study in 2020* implemented as part of a project funded by the Norwegian Research Council.¹¹

The study concludes that local media “openly ignore Russian propaganda in the city and do not contribute to counteracting its dangerous narratives.”¹²

Unfortunately, as confirmed by oblast experts, the situation in Mariupol is typical of most cities and towns in Donetsk oblast. The situation can be improved through:

- changes in the content created by local and national media;
- establishing new independent oblast and local media, which may have the support of amalgamated territorial communities or raions;
- involving local authorities in development and implementation of measures to counter propaganda that distorts the real state of affairs.

Lastly, in the context of government decisions on territorial defense, it is recommended to discuss setting up thematic programs that would specialize in coverage of the following issues:

- shaping common values and an open civic identity among residents of the oblast;

¹⁰ See: Challenges and Potential for Social Cohesion in Donetsk Oblast. Field Report. UCIPR, 2021. 28 P. Field Report Based on the Results of Oblast Consultations [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <http://ucipr.org.ua/ua/publikatsii/vydannia/challenges-and-potential-of-social-cohesion-in-donetsk-oblast-field-report-2021>

¹¹ Ukrgeopol: Ukrainian Geopolitical Fault-Line Cities [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <http://www.geokyiv.org/uk/doslidnitski-kejsi/mariupol>

¹² Michel Gentile, Yevhenia Kuznetsova. How Mariupol disappears in a black hole of misinformation. December, 2020. [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://voxukraine.org/yak-mariupol-znikaye-u-chornij-diri-dezinformatsiyi/>

- developing and promoting a new oblast identity;
- ways to form a common information and cultural space in Donetsk oblast;
- covering events and narratives related to social cohesion and peacebuilding at community, city and oblast levels.

3. The deficit of trust in Donetsk oblast: vertical cohesion and horizontal cohesion

Trust is seen as a key factor that determines the quality of social capital, readiness for dialogue and common goals to create social benefits both at the community level and at the level of Donetsk oblast. Analysis of the results of regional consultations with experts reveals a number of factors in the oblast that adversely affect the level of social trust. This phenomenon is recorded in two dimensions: as vertical social cohesion, which includes the level of trust between society (community) and representatives of authorities (local, oblast, national governments) and horizontal social cohesion, which relates to the level of trust and readiness for communication and cooperation between different social groups.

Consultations with oblast experts showed that the level of 'vertical trust' in Donetsk oblast is influenced by:

- lack of transparency in the activities of local authorities (the absence or 'decorative nature' of public councils; decision-making without public consultation, etc.);
- alienation of oblast citizens from socio-political life as a result of the cancellation of elections (in view of national security risks) and introduction of the regime of military and civil administrations in the oblast and in some population centers;
- underestimation by local authorities of the importance of projects and tools geared towards increasing citizen involvement in community life and socio-political activity (the practice of executing participatory budgets is reported only at the local level of communities and towns). Involvement through participation in socially useful activities (work with the use of professional skills, volunteering, activities in the third sector, other types of social activity) helps to shape a sense of self-esteem and ultimately affects the degree of policy inclusion at the local level;
- absence of a developed network of independent oblast media; people's sense of threat to personal security in case of public criticism and critical publications;
- inaction, lack of public initiative and frustration of citizens regarding the possibility of constructive interaction and cooperation with local authorities;
- activities of civil society organizations that are primarily dependent on funding from international donors;

- insufficient skills of local civil society organization representatives to support effective cooperation with local authorities and businesses;
- the predominant influence of individual oblast and city business groups on decision-making of authorities,
- inaction of authorities, in particular law enforcement agencies, in some cases of harassment of civic activists.

The level of horizontal cohesion is influenced by the following factors:

- a weak sense of a common oblast community. The war artificially divided Donetsk oblast into occupied and government-controlled areas. Following the occupation of Donetsk, Donetsk oblast lost its image of regional center and central regional community in common perception;
- lack of a common public space that intensifies and institutionalizes public communication and promotes trust between citizens. Most cities and communities in Donetsk oblast (with the exception of the large cities of Mariupol and Kramatorsk) have not yet gone through the process of forming a common public space open to dialogue, public communication and cooperation;
- absence of well-established and systematic public communication between communities and within the oblast. According to experts, the biggest deficit of public communication between communities is at the level of newly created administrative districts of Donetsk oblast;
- a fragmented socio-cultural space, which is observed both at oblast and city level. Oblast experts conditionally identified and named a number of separate or isolated clusters that 'live their own lives': the southern sub-oblast with its center in Mariupol; Kramatorsk-Sloviansk-Svyatohirsk agglomeration, and the territorial cluster around Pokrovsk and Dobropillia;
- poor transport accessibility within the oblast and at the interregional level. According to regional experts, "it is sometimes easier to get to Kyiv from Kramatorsk than to Mariupol or neighboring regional centers, Dnipro or Zaporizhzhia."¹³

¹³ Challenges and Potential for Social Cohesion in Donetsk Oblast. Field Report. UCIPR, 2021. 28 P. Field Report Based on the Results of Oblast Consultations [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <http://ucipr.org.ua/ua/publikatsii/vydannia/challenges-and-potential-of-social-cohesion-in-donetsk-oblast-field-report-2021>

3.1. Trust in authorities: Donetsk oblast remains the oblast of contrasts

The value of the “trust” indicator in Donetsk oblast can be illustrated by data obtained in Wave 4 of the SCORE¹⁴. Analysis of the data¹⁵ makes it possible to draw the following conclusions:

1) In general, the indicators of trust in central and local authorities in Donetsk oblast are lower than Ukraine’s average. This concerns the level of trust in central institutions, the president and Donetsk Oblast State Administration (see Table 2. Indicators of the level of trust in institutions. Donetsk oblast).

2) In general, the situation in Donetsk oblast is typical of that in Ukraine, where trust in local institutions (heads of towns and villages) is greater than in heads of oblast executive authorities.

Table 2. Indicators of the level of trust in institutions. Donetsk oblast

		Indicator for Donetsk oblast			Indicator for Ukraine		
1.	Trust	In central institutions ¹⁶	In the president ¹⁷	In local institutions ¹⁸	In central institutions	In the president	In local institutions
		2.2	2.8	3.2	2.4	3.3	3.5
2	Trust	In central institutions: overall	In local institutions: overall		In central institutions: overall	In local institutions: overall	
		2.2	4		2.4	4.4	
3	Trust	In oblast state administration ¹⁹	In head of the town/village ²⁰	In police	In oblast state administration	In head of the town/village	In police
		3.2	4.7	3.1	3.5	5.1	3

Source: SCORE, 2021.

¹⁴ SCORE for Eastern Ukraine Methodology [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://app.scoreforpeace.org/en/use/methodology>

¹⁵ Trust in central institutions. SCORE 2021 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://app.scoreforpeace.org/en/ukraine/2021/1/map?row=tn-143-120>

¹⁶ Trust in central institutions. SCORE 2021 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://app.scoreforpeace.org/en/ukraine/2021/1/map?row=tn-143-120>

¹⁷ Trust in the president. SCORE 2021 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://app.scoreforpeace.org/en/ukraine/2021/1/map?row=tn-147-124>

¹⁸ Trust in oblast state administration. SCORE 2021 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://app.scoreforpeace.org/en/ukraine/2021/1/map?row=tn-152-128>

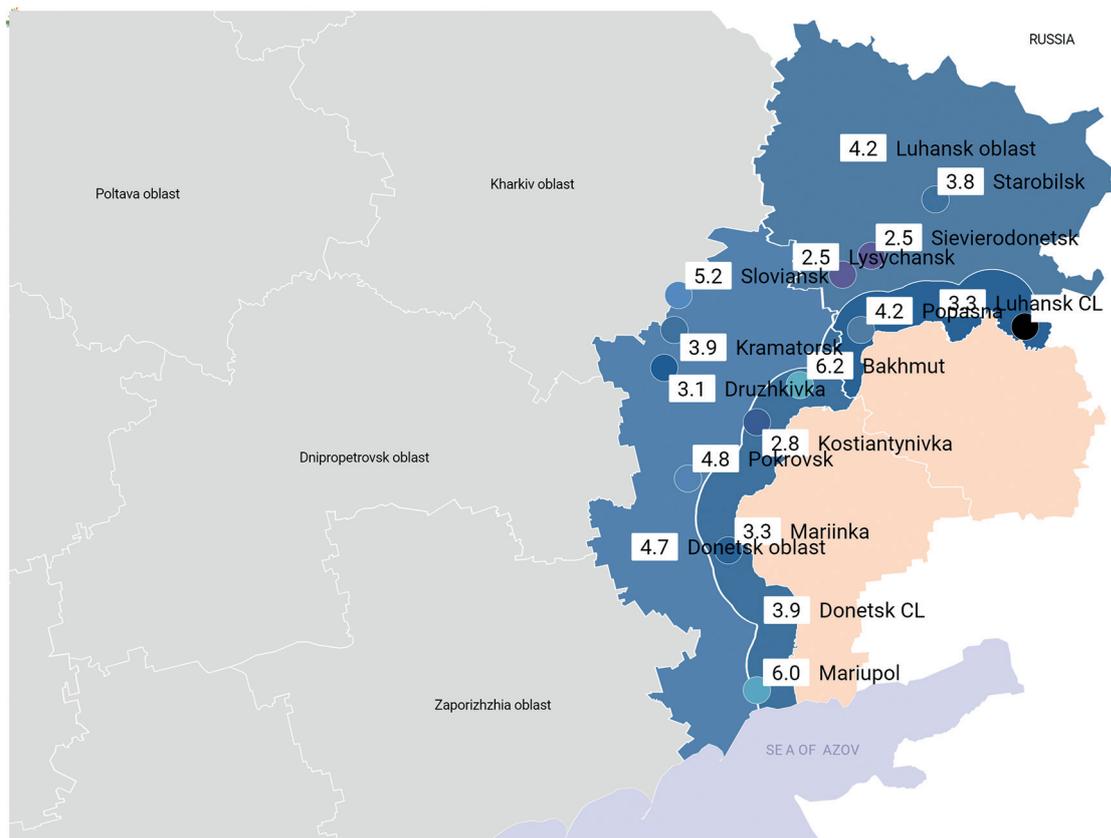
¹⁹ Trust in oblast state administration. SCORE 2021 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://app.scoreforpeace.org/en/ukraine/2021/1/map?row=tn-152-128>

²⁰ Trust in town or village administration. SCORE 2021 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://app.scoreforpeace.org/en/ukraine/2021/1/map?row=tn-151-127>

3) There is a noticeable difference in the level of trust in heads of towns and villages in Donetsk oblast. Specifically, the level of trust in heads of towns and villages in the area bordering the line of contact (3.9) is lower than the average level of trust in heads of towns and villages in Donetsk oblast (5.1).

Lastly, there are significant differences in the 'trust rating' of mayors in Donetsk oblast (see Figure 2. The indicator of trust in local institutions. Donetsk oblast. 2021). In particular, mayors of Bakhmut (6.2, the highest indicator), Mariupol (6.0) and Sloviansk (5.9) have high levels of trust. Levels of trust in the mayors of Kostiantynivka (2.8), Druzhkivka (3.1) and Mariiinka (3.3) are significantly lower. It is possible to assume that lower indicators of trust in heads are not always determined purely by geographical location, since of the three above cities, only Mariiinka is located in the area bordering the contact line.

Figure 2. Indicator of trust in town or village administration. Donetsk oblast. 2021



Source: SCORE 2021.

A summary of the above trust data makes it possible to say that **Donetsk oblast remains an oblast of contrasts.**

In general, the proximity of government-controlled areas of Donetsk oblast to the theater of military operations definitely leaves its stamp on the governance model in the oblast.

Overcoming inequalities in communication and increasing the level of trust between authorities and society under the regime of military and civil administration is possible through:

- additional investment in the **system of communication** between authorities and society;
- **making citizens aware** of the activities of military and civil administrations;
- wider use of tools designed to provide **sustainable feedback between authorities and society**;
- introduction of a regime of systematic **public involvement in consultations** on community-related decisions. To this end, it is possible to use such a tool as the oblast plan of support for civil society organizations designated to implement the National Strategy for Civil Society Development in Ukraine for 2021–2026.²¹ The involvement of public and business initiatives in the implementation of measures (plan) of the National Strategy for Creating a Barrier-free Space in Ukraine until 2030²² could contribute to inclusive policy;
- introduction of joint activities with the participation of local authorities, police and the public for public discussion and finding ways to improve community security.

Separate and additional **measures should focus on increasing the level of trust of Donetsk oblast residents** in central authorities. Specifically, it is recommended to introduce and practice:

- field meetings of central public authorities (the Cabinet of Ministers; Ministry of Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine; Ministry of Culture and Information Policy; Verkhovna Rada 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, etc.). If there are quarantine restrictions, it is possible to use telecommunications. It is important to build the subject of these meetings on feedback from citizens and civil society organizations;
- systematic involvement of oblast representatives (local authorities, business community, civil society organizations) in the design and monitoring of implementation of oblast development programs;
- holding special parliamentary (or committee) hearings on the development of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts;
- more adequate coverage of oblast development problems and participation of oblast representatives in broadcasts on national TV and radio channels.

²¹ Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 487/2021 of 27 September 2021 «On the National Strategy for Civil Society Development in Ukraine for 2021–2026». On the National Strategy for Civil Society Development in Ukraine for 2021–2026 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://www.president.gov.ua/documents/4872021-40193>

²² Ordinance of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 883-p of 4 August 2021 "On Approval of the Action Plan for 2021 and 2022 to Implement the National Strategy for Creating a Barrier-Free Space in Ukraine until 2030" [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/npas/pro-zatverdzhennya-planu-zahodiv-na-2021-i-2022-roki-z-realizaciyi-nacionalnoyi-s40821>

3.2. Trust in other groups (horizontal cohesion): oblast prejudices

Alienation, prejudice and hostility to the 'different', lack of communication and unwillingness to engage in dialogue with people who share other beliefs and values are all markers of gaps in horizontal cohesion between different social groups within the community.

Analysis of numerous interviews with experts in Donetsk oblast enables us to identify **topics and issues that polarize public opinion and erode understanding and horizontal cohesion** among different groups:

- conversation in the style of 'talking to a brick wall' is typical of pseudo-dialogues between representatives who publicly demonstrate their pro-Ukrainian ethno-cultural identity and people who expressly or implicitly profess Ukrainophobic sentiments;
- opposite positions in respect to the model of political settlement and future status of the temporarily non-government controlled areas. Ukrainian society has split into two potentially irreconcilable camps: those who advocate 'peace at any price' (including even a refusal to reintegrate the temporarily non-government controlled areas) and the 'party of war' where any peacebuilding effort is considered futile or destructive as long as Russia provides comprehensive support to regimes in the temporarily non-government controlled areas. This radicalization leaves little room for effective dialogue, however it does not preclude the need for such dialogue;
- misunderstandings between heads of amalgamated territorial communities (ATCs) and the communities of population centers that have been included in newly created ATCs or enlarged raions without taking into account historically established communications and weak shared infrastructure;
- prejudices of some residents of Donetsk oblast against people from western Ukraine;
- hostility and aggression of citizens who adhere to traditional family and marriage values towards members of LGBT communities.

One of the oblast experts described the state of horizontal cohesion in Donetsk oblast very clearly, having emphasized the absence of community consolidation:

"We are very good at being friends together against conditional authorities in the broadest sense of the word. This is when people unite. But this is for a short period of time. As soon as we achieve our goal, that's it, we are again divided by political matters. Unfortunately, there are very few non-political reasons for cohesion in Donetsk oblast."

* * *

To analyze quantitative horizontal cohesion indicators, we also used data of Wave 4 of the SCORE eastern Ukraine 2021 survey.

In general, the SCORE surveys measure datasets that characterize the state of intergroup relations:

- 1) contacts with different groups,
- 2) readiness for dialogue,
- 3) social threat from different groups,
- 4) social proximity towards different groups.

We will now explore and **analyze the third indicator, “social threat from different groups”**. After all, the absence of a ‘social threat’ is a necessary, but insufficient condition for promoting dialogue and trust between members of different groups.

Table 3. Social threat from different groups. Donetsk oblast. 2021

	Ukraine's average indicator	Donetsk oblast's indicator
Social threat from:		
Different groups (overall)	2.8	2.8
Military personnel of the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) or the Joint Forces Operation (JFO)	2.4	3.6
Internally displaced persons (IDPs)	2.6	1.9
People from eastern Ukraine	2.1	1.6
People from Crimea	2.4	2.0
Pro-Russia oriented people	3.7	3.0
People from western Ukraine	2.1	2.6
Ukrainian nationalists	3.2	4.7
Pro-EU oriented people	2.1	2.6
People living in the non-government controlled areas (NGCA)	3.4	2.5
People who support the separation of non-government controlled areas	3.6	3.5

Analysis of the data presented in the table enables us to draw a number of preliminary conclusions:

1. The value of the “social threat from different groups” indicator in Donetsk oblast **coincides with Ukraine’s average**. This means that despite the socio-cultural differences between Ukrainian oblasts and the fact that Donetsk oblast borders the area of hostilities, **the level of threat from ‘different’ social groups is not that critical**.

2. **Donetsk residents have a lower than the Ukrainian average indicator of social threat** from people from: 1) eastern Ukraine, 2) Crimea, 3) internally displaced persons, 4) people living in the non-government controlled areas, and 5) pro-Russia oriented people. This can be explained by the fact that in Donetsk oblast, **geographic and linguistic dimensions predominate in determining ‘belonging’ to the Ukrainian political nation, and people from the same oblast or Russian-speakers are to a large extent perceived as ‘friends’**.

3. **A higher level of social threat** (but not critical compared to Ukraine’s average) is perceived by Donetsk residents in relation to pro-EU oriented people, 2.6 vs. 2.1 of Ukraine’s average, or to people from western Ukraine, 2.6 vs. 2.1 of Ukraine’s average. This can be explained by **prejudice against the ‘different’**, because the sense of threat is addressed both to people from other oblasts and to people with a different geo-cultural and linguistic orientation.

4. **The highest level of tension** among representatives of Donetsk oblast is associated with people marked as “Ukrainian nationalists”. Ukraine’s average indicator of social threat from representatives of the group of “Ukrainian nationalists” is 3.2, whereas in Donetsk oblast it has a value of 4.7 out of 10.

5. Lastly, the most interesting indicator is social threat from “people living in non-government controlled areas who support NGCA separation”. It is indicative that this indicator in Donetsk oblast is 3.5, which almost coincides with Ukraine’s average of 3.6.

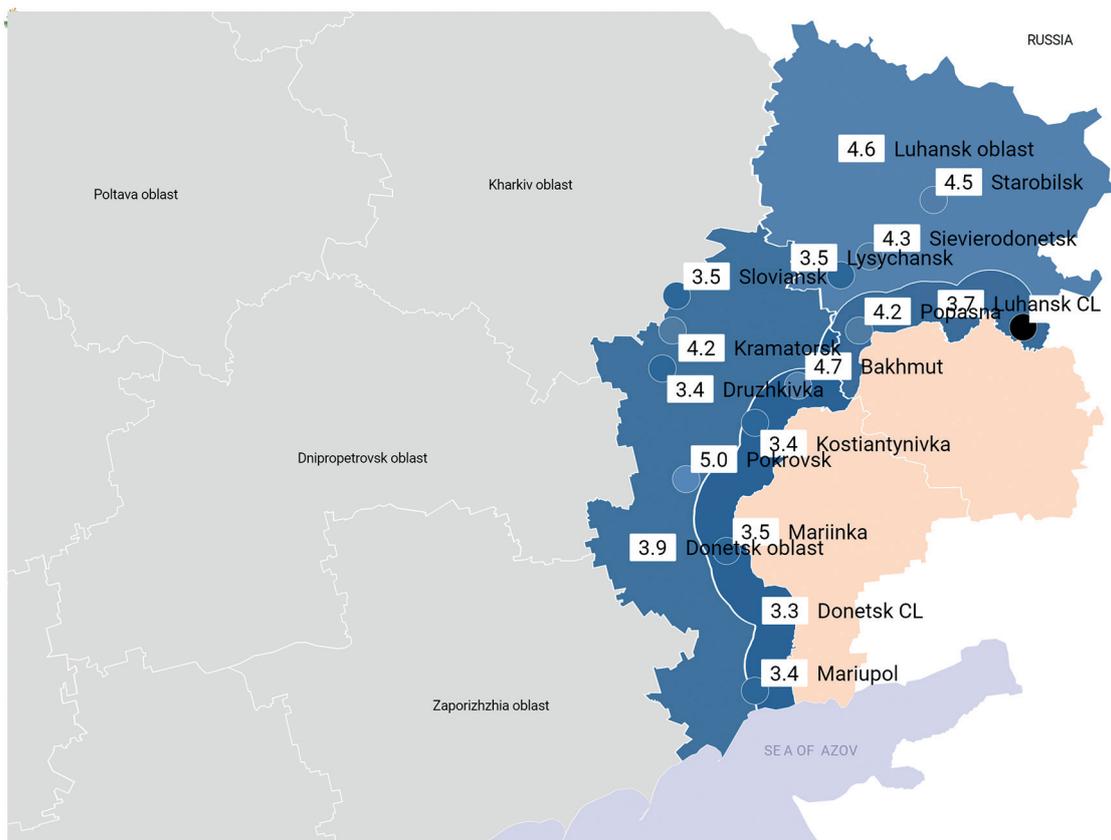
The above analysis gives reason to conclude that **residents of Donetsk oblast are still prejudiced against certain groups**. Needless to say, this has a negative effect on the potential for horizontal cohesion in the oblast. Residents of Donetsk oblast are more cautious of residents of western Ukraine and people with other geo-cultural orientation. Also, it is possible to assume that Donetsk residents have a higher level of identification with and recognition of compatriots from eastern oblasts, which is natural in view of the history and historical dominance of a strong, closed-type oblast identity.

At the same time, **the coincidence in the attitude of residents of Donetsk oblast and that of ‘average Ukrainians’** to the “social threat from people living in the non-government controlled areas who support NGCA separation” is interesting and revealing. This gives **hope for promoting dialogue and joint efforts to restore the territorial integrity of Ukraine**.

3.3. Trust in the Ukrainian army

The low level of trust in the Ukrainian army in the government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts attracts attention. Specifically, Ukraine's average indicator of trust in the Ukrainian army is 6 points, whereas in Donetsk oblast this indicator is only 3.9, which is significantly lower than in the neighboring oblasts of Kharkiv (4.8), Dnipropetrovsk (5.8) and Zaporizhzhia (5.7).

Figure 3. Trust in the Ukrainian Army. Donetsk Oblast. 2021



Source: SCORE 2021.

In war conditions, low indicators of trust in the Ukrainian army in the government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts cannot but cause concern.

Representatives of the Department for Military and Civil Cooperation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (CIMIC), established in 2014, are involved in the security and delivery of international humanitarian aid, often take care of water supply, transport of patients to medical facilities and restoration of damaged houses, and provide assistance to kindergartens, schools, orphanages and libraries in more than 91 population centers.

This is obviously not enough. A change in the attitude of people living in Donetsk oblast towards the Ukrainian army requires:

- joint efforts of central, oblast and local authorities, representatives of the Department for Military and Civil Cooperation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and national and local media;
- more active coverage of Armed Forces participation in solving social and humanitarian problems of communities (not only those on the line of contact);
- participation of ATO/JFO military personnel who are natives of Donetsk oblast in civic education activities.

4. The potential of interregional and intermunicipal cooperation for social cohesion policy

Development of interregional and intermunicipal cooperation remains **an underestimated tool of secure reintegration policy**. In particular, interregional and intermunicipal cooperation may have a positive impact on:

- the involvement of oblast residents and business representatives in shaping a common economic, socio-cultural and legal space in Ukraine;
- the use of the effect of scale and consolidation of resources to solve problems of common importance to neighboring areas or the whole macro-region;
- intensification of contacts and ties between residents of Donetsk oblast and other oblasts of Ukraine and creation of conditions for shaping a more open oblast identity in Donetsk oblast;
- a change in the mental map and increased feelings of belonging to Ukraine of residents of Donetsk oblast;
- the transfer and implementation in Donetsk oblast of successful and effective governance and social practices developed in other oblasts.

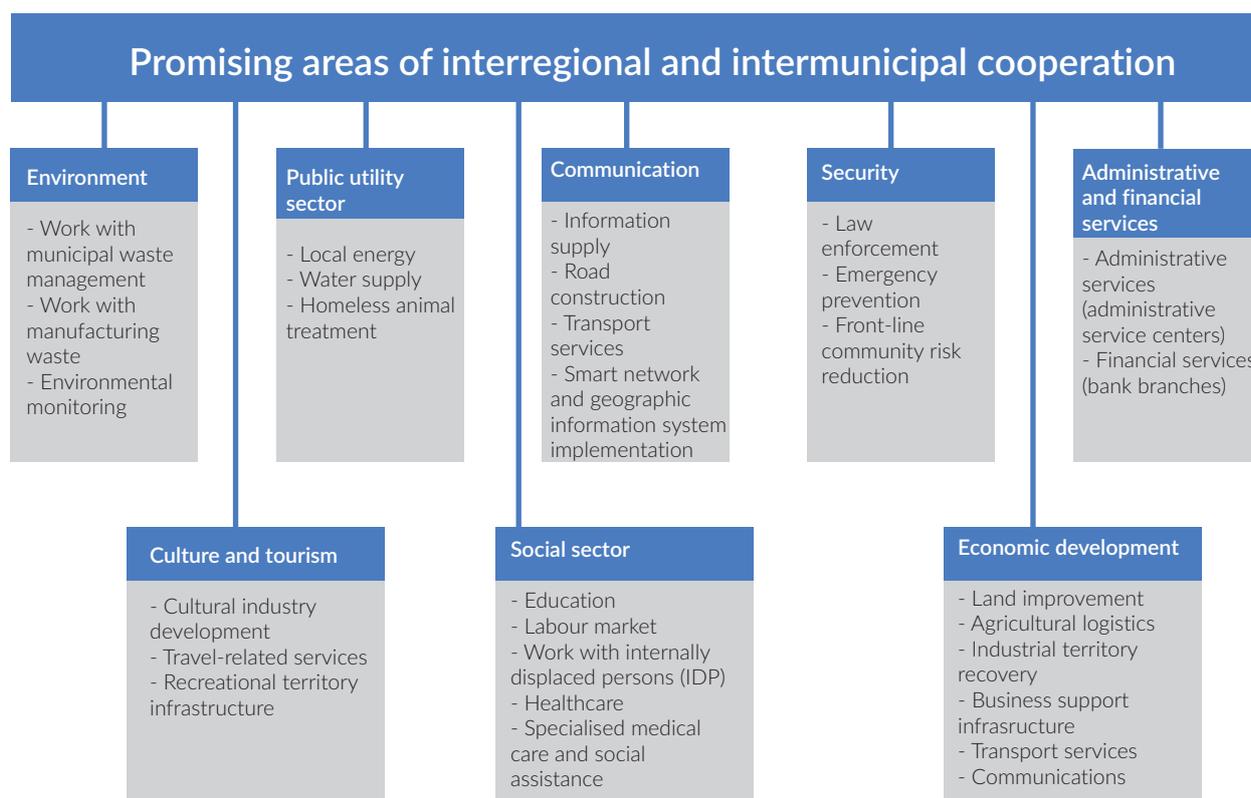
During interviews with oblast experts, it was possible to obtain information on the available practices of interregional cooperation in Donetsk oblast. In this respect, activities in the area of cultural exchange, including exhibitions and exchange of artworks between Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv and Donetsk oblasts are noticeable and significant. In early summer 2021, such an exhibition was held in Mariupol and is scheduled for other cities of Donetsk oblast. In 2019, Theater Gate oblast open festival was launched in Mariupol under the auspices of Donetsk Oblast State Administration, bringing together theaters from Kyiv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Mykolaiv, Zaporizhzhia, Nizhyn and Sievierodonetsk.²³ The second festival took place in September 2021.

²³ The Theater Gate festival was launched in Mariupol. Message of Donetsk Oblast State Administration of 5 September 2019 [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <https://dn.gov.ua/news/v-mariupoli-rozpochato-festival-teatralna-brama>

At the same time, there is a **gap between the number of interregional cooperation projects implemented in the oblast, and potential forms of interregional cooperation which are not being implemented.**

Specifically, one of the studies²⁴ of the National Platform Dialogue on Peace and Secure Reintegration provides a broad list of forms and areas of interregional and intermunicipal cooperation that should be used to a greater extent (see Figure 4. Promising areas of interregional and intermunicipal cooperation):

Figure 4. Promising areas of interregional and intermunicipal cooperation



It is obvious that the above promising areas of intermunicipal and interregional cooperation should be reflected in preparation of the Annual Action Plan for Social Cohesion in Donetsk oblast.

The development of intermunicipal cooperation within newly-formed raions also deserves special attention.

²⁴ Yaroslav Zhalilo, Olena Snihova. Realizing the Potential of Interregional and Intermunicipal Cooperation in the Framework of Cohesion Policy. Analytical Report. UCIPR. 2021. 28 pp. / In Engl. / [Electronic resource]. Access mode: <http://ucipr.org.ua/ua/publikatsii/vydannia/realizing-the-potential-of-interregional-and-intermunicipal-cooperation-in-the-framework-of-cohesion-policy-analytical-report>



III. CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the results of expert consultations enables us to make a general assessment of the potential for social cohesion in the oblast, and offer a set of proposals that could be used:

- in organizing public consultations on social cohesion and peacebuilding in eastern Ukraine;
- in developing plans for the implementation of secure reintegration and peacebuilding policy in eastern Ukraine, and the Strategy of Economic Development of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts;
- by regional and local authorities in the process of developing an action plan on social cohesion in Donetsk oblast;
- in assessing and planning Ukraine's cooperation with international donor organizations;
- in organizing awareness-raising programs and media coverage of social cohesion and peacebuilding in eastern Ukraine.

General assessment of the state of social cohesion in Donetsk oblast:

- According to survey data, particularly SCORE 2021, Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts are characterized by extremely low levels of trust in the authorities, both at central and local levels.
- Planning documents and implementation plans of local and oblast authorities focus primarily on 'hard' projects and infrastructure development, while 'soft' projects could significantly affect the level of trust between authorities and society and the place of Donetsk oblast in Ukraine's social cohesion ranking.
- The biggest deficit of trust and vertical social cohesion is in communities where military and civil administrations have been introduced.
- Groups that have different views on the reasons for and prospects of resolving the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine are characterized by alienation and a lack of communication, which has a negative impact on horizontal cohesion.
- Efforts to increase social cohesion are developed primarily with funding from international donors, which is insufficient for sustainable results.
- Projects are scattered, and there is a lack of communication and interaction between civil society organizations implementing social cohesion projects.

- Most social cohesion projects are implemented at the micro-level (community level) and do not have a cumulative effect and impact on public consciousness in the oblast.
- There is a lack of media coverage of the formation of common approaches, perception of positive transformations and best practices of social cohesion.
- The information space is full of messages that disseminate negative expectations and support an inferiority complex and stereotypes that exacerbate centrifugal processes and the division of society.



IV. PROPOSALS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL COHESION POLICY IN DONETSK OBLAST

- Enhance the political status of social cohesion policy by including the “social cohesion” priority in plans for implementation of the Strategy of Socio-Economic Development of Donetsk Oblast and community development strategies.
- Build a policy of social cohesion as a cross-cutting element that has a vision and is implemented in all sectoral policies, including urban planning, transport and logistics infrastructure, accessibility of services, etc.
- Rely on the advantages of the oblast, notably the high level of industrialization, high share of urban population, and attention to oblast needs at the national level.
- Carry out practical planning of measures to increase social cohesion, based on an assessment of needs of members of each community.
- Develop a system for the prevention of social exclusion, taking into account the specific structure of the oblast’s population, which includes the largest share of internally displaced persons, and a high proportion of elderly and people with disabilities. Evaluate practical tools for their involvement in local policy-making with regard to advisory infrastructures and public participation, given the limited representation system.
- Design and adopt a system for measuring the effectiveness of social cohesion policy in Donetsk oblast; develop indicators of the Social Cohesion Index at the level of oblast, cities and communities of Donetsk oblast (SCORE can be used as a basis). At the same time, three major groups of internationally recognized indicators should be borne in mind: 1 – life quality indicators, 2 – the contribution of all stakeholders in solving well-being issues, 3 – the dissemination of cohesion values.
- Policy measures could be more effective if action plans are developed on an inclusive basis, and consolidate and institutionalize community initiatives.
- Community participatory budgets and oblast participatory budgets could serve as a financial basis for activities to strengthen social cohesion.
- Introduce the practice of scaling up successful and effective projects on social cohesion at the oblast level.
- Rely on dialogue initiatives and elements of transitional justice to promote understanding.

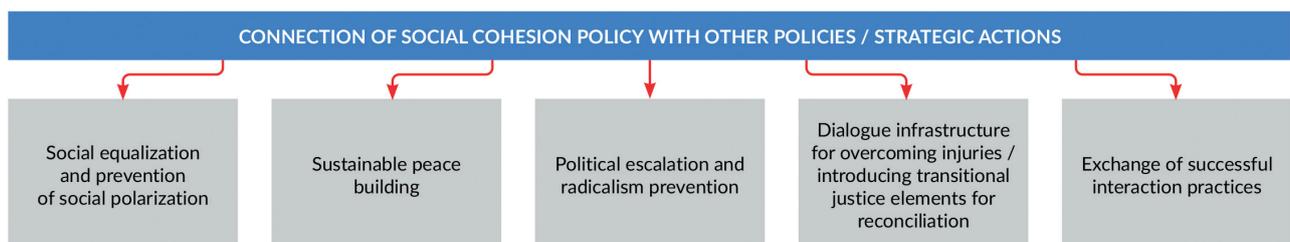
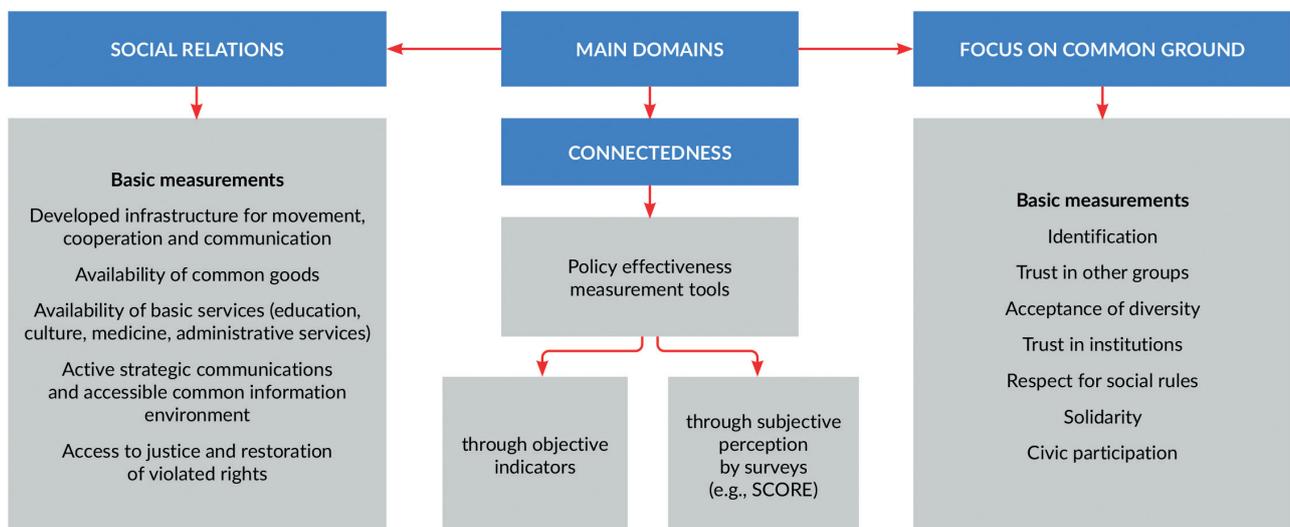
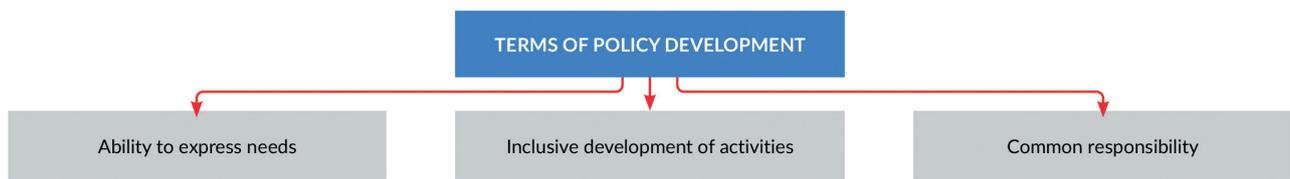
- Focus social cohesion projects on peacebuilding; gradually transit from a direct dialogue on peacebuilding to projects providing for the involvement and collaboration of people who have different cultural backgrounds, but are open to cooperation on community development issues, and expand access of all community members to resources.
- Involve public organizations in the development of cohesion policy activities, in particular in development of the oblast program for implementation of the National Strategy for Civil Society Development in Ukraine for 2021–2026, as well as in their evaluation and review.
- Cover Donetsk oblast social cohesion issues in the mass media. Ensure support for cooperation projects between local and national media from the government and international donors. At present, these media outlets can include TV channels (Dom, Hromadske, etc.) and information and analytical publications (websites).
- Use the potential of interregional and intermunicipal cooperation to address issues of common concern for neighboring areas.
- Ensure educational and knowledge exchange activities regarding the potential and best practices of social cohesion for representatives of authorities at a variety of levels.

MAIN DOMAINS FOR SOCIAL COHESION POLICY IN THE EAST OF UKRAINE

SOCIAL COHESION IS THE QUALITY OF COEXISTENCE OF PEOPLE WHO IDENTIFY THEIR BELONGING TO DIFFERENT SOCIAL GROUPS



The policy goal is increasing the level of trust between people from different groups
Such a policy is relevant in societies that recognize the interdependence of groups and build solidarity based on diversity to avoid polarization and conflicts



The infographic "Main domains for social cohesion policy in the East of Ukraine" 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.



Notes



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**Social Cohesion:
Directions for Policy Development in Donetsk Oblast**

Policy development document

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