

Social recovery and cohesion for Ukraine: 15 recommendations



Cedos is a Ukrainian think tank and NGO that has been working on social development and social cohesion since 2010. After the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, we started to research the social impact of the war both at personal and societal levels. Our research findings have identified key issues and recommendations for inclusive recovery and strengthening social cohesion in Ukraine.

Challenges

Displacement and housing crisis.

The war has caused the largest displacement in Europe since the Second World War, both outside and inside Ukraine. This has triggered the biggest housing crisis in Ukraine since it became independent in 1991. Most of the internally displaced people (IDPs) live in private rental housing that is inadequately regulated and does not provide enough protection of tenants' rights. Due to the post-Soviet mass privatisation of the housing stock and subsequent policies incentivising home-ownership, there is an imbalanced tenure structure and a lack of public housing to accommodate all the people in need.

Employment and reskilling.

Due to the economy's changes, reorientation, and displacement, there is a need to increase productivity, match potential employees with employment opportunities, and combat discrimination in the labour market (especially for older adults). The education system does not provide enough opportunities for reskilling, especially through short-term programs available for unemployed people.

Educational losses and inequalities.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the war have disrupted the education process, resulting in educational losses. This has exacerbated the educational inequalities that existed before the war. Due to the ineffective school network, children

from rural areas demonstrate significantly worse academic results than those from urban areas. The need to combine offline and online formats has increased the workload of teachers.

Social services and psychological support.

Displacement, injuries, and the return of veterans to civilian life increase the need for social services in communities. The lack of capacities of social centres and kindergartens forces working-age persons, especially women, to leave the labour market and provide care work, resulting in a loss of skills and an increasing gender pay gap. The war increases the need for psychological support. In contrast, the capacity of the existing system of such support does not meet the need, and prejudices towards psychological support are common in society.

Working conditions of key workers and public servants. In the key social sectors, including education and social services provision, employees face low salaries and heavy workloads, leading to emotional burnout among existing staff and difficulties in hiring new personnel. The public sector generally faces these challenges, resulting in significant limitations in national and local governments' capacity to make and implement public policies.

Different experiences of living through the war. People have different experiences of living through the war based on participating in armed resistance, volunteering, being displaced, having relatives killed, etc. Socioeconomic status may also influence these experiences. Psychoemotional and economic challenges faced by the country may lead to misunderstandings between people. In the case of the need for difficult political decisions, this may cause conflicts in society, the rise of political populism, and distrust in the state and its course of European integration.

Lack of capacity of state institutions. Staff shortages, low salaries, and heavy workloads in the public sector limit the state's capacity. The ongoing processes of reforms in many sectors, including the unfinished decentralisation reform, the impact of the war, and the ambitious goals of European integration make governance difficult, especially in light of Russian misinformation campaigns and hybrid warfare.

Vulnerability of civil society organisations. Most Ukrainian NGOs lack core funding and depend heavily on project-based short-term financing. While most of the onsite response to the challenges of the war is done by national and local NGOs, a disproportionate share of administrative expenses is accounted for by international NGOs or international organisations with ineffective bureaucracy and context-insensitive solutions.

Recommendations

1. Develop a system of **long-term social housing** with municipal providers capable of financially sustainable management of social housing.
2. Introduce better **regulation of the private rental market** to provide tenants with working mechanisms to protect their rights, including the housing ombudsperson.
3. Create short-term **educational programs for retraining** that are affordable for different social groups, including unemployed people, internally displaced people, and veterans.
4. Introduce **employment assistance programs** adapted to the needs of older adults and eliminate disincentives for their employment.
5. Continue the **secondary education reform**, focusing on dealing with educational losses and overcoming educational inequalities by optimising the school network.
6. Build or renovate **bomb shelters in education institutions** and create digital education centres in areas where permanent offline education is impossible.
7. Develop the capacities of **municipal centres that provide social services**, including sufficient staff, premises, and transport.
8. Support the development of **municipal provision of psychological support services and psychological support** in education institutions in particular.
9. Revise the **number of staff in the public sector** and hire enough personnel needed to deliver the required level of public services.
10. Improve working conditions and the **amount of remuneration for public servants** and key workers in the public sector.
11. Ensure **public participation** and engagement of civil society in decision-making processes at national and local levels.
12. Renovate the existing network of **local cultural institutions** into community-building centres promoting understanding, solidarity and justice within society.
13. Enhance the state system of **statistics collection**, policy analysis and evaluation to strengthen evidence-based policymaking.
14. Provide Ukrainian civil society organisations with **core institutional funding** to ensure their long-term sustainability beyond short-term projects.
15. Implement **humanitarian and development programs** in Ukraine through Ukrainian national civil society organisations rather than international organisations.

About Cedos

Several examples of Cedos's recent projects:

Local development

- Development of the integrated urban development concept for Sumy municipality.
- Assisting 10 communities in creating or renovating community-building centres, both physically and programme-wise with an educational program and mentorship support. This project is the winner of the New European Bauhaus Prize 2024.
- Ukrainian Urban Forum, an annual event about socially just urban development. The event unites grassroots activists, civil society leaders, researchers and professionals, and provides networking and professional exchange opportunities.
- Capacity-building programme for 30 municipalities on organising public participation and citizen engagement at the local level.
- Development of guidelines on gender-sensitive recovery and development at the local level.

Education policy

- Research on the need for a system of psychological support in schools.
- Research on the working conditions of educators in secondary and higher education institutions.
- Research on the impact of the war on secondary education during the first year of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Social policy

- Research on the capacities of local authorities to meet the needs of veterans in social services.
- Analysis of the social impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, including the impact on people with disabilities, veterans and their families, youth, elderly, internally displaced persons, gender equality and LGBT, employment activation and civil society engagement. The research was commissioned by the World Bank and used to prepare the Human Impact Assessment of RDNA 3.
- Six waves of research on people's thoughts, feelings and actions during the war with a unique methodology.

Housing policy

- Legal guidelines for tenants and landlords on how to respect one another's rights in the private rental market.
- Participation in developing the new bill on the basic principles of Ukraine's housing policy.
- Analysis of the opportunities for humanitarian organisations to support municipalities in creating social housing.
- Housing Leadership Lab, a workshop for networking and exchange for representatives of local authorities, civil society and the national ministry.

