

# RECONNECTING AUDIENCES

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF LOCAL MEDIA IN PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION



With the support of



Fondation Jan Michalski



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# KEY FINDINGS



**Critical role of local media in addressing specific population needs**, compared with national media which is increasingly seen as painting a false picture of reality.



**Audiences on the frontline feel excluded** from national discourse.



**Ukrainians (57%) use local Telegram channels more than traditional media sources:** only 34% often follow national media, and 38% often follow local media.



**Audiences express a deep need for positive news**, such as culture, sports, leisure, and “dream projects.”



**Strong demand for inclusive dialogue between authorities and citizens**, particularly on the use of public funds and tracking reconstruction projects.



**Internally displaced people (IDPs) and Russian-speaking Ukrainians are not perceived as potential sources of local tension.**

# “I WANT HONEST, FAIR INFORMATION”

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, created unprecedented challenges in the lives of regional and local media. Despite the difficulties of war, these media have become a critical source of information for local communities, as well as a link that can bring societies together through commonly shared interests and concerns. In this context, the importance of regional media's informational, humanitarian, and social mission cannot be overstated.

The project “Strengthening Media Resilience in Ukraine,” implemented by Fondation Hirondelle and the Institute for Regional Media and Information (IRMI) for over two and a half years, aims to empower Ukrainian local media as a key tool for civil society and local self-governance. The project seeks to enhance local media's role not only during the war, but also in the country's post-war reconstruction.

How can this objective be achieved for media outlets whose newsrooms and audiences have been dispersed and separated because of war? This sociological study was designed to reconnect local media with their audiences by identifying the key concerns and values in 23 communities, most of which are in the frontline territories in Ukraine's east and southeast. Conducted by the Ukrainian research organization Operative Sociology from March to September 2024, the study included 49 discussions and a survey with 2,391 participants. The results provide an invaluable and rare picture of these war-shaped societies and the social cohesion dynamics within them, as well as the new informational needs of these populations.

The innovative design of this completely offline process for tracking the informational needs of these 23 communities involved the active participation of regional media. Operative Sociology experts, with the support of Fondation Hirondelle and IRMI, worked directly with the media to develop the research tools used in the survey, and the journalists were engaged in discussions about the process at every stage. The media then used the survey's outcomes to develop relevant journalistic content for their audiences. The survey contributes to bridging the trust gap between local media and their audiences, re-establishing the media as a key player in fostering balanced and democratic public dialogue, a vital component to restoring an inclusive and accountable rule of law.

We hope that the research results will be useful not only to the project's grantees, but also to the journalistic community and other stakeholders working in Ukraine.

Fondation Hirondelle and Institute for Regional Media and Information

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# RESEARCH SUMMARY

## ABOUT THE PROJECT AND RESEARCH COMPONENT

The Swiss Foundation Hironnelle and the Institute for Regional Media and Information (IRMI), with the support of Swiss Solidarity, began implementing the project *Strengthening the Resilience of Regional Media in Ukraine* in 2023. The project aims to strengthen Ukrainian local media and support their role in an active civil society.

The project emphasizes the role of local journalists as promoters of social cohesion within their communities, a responsibility that is strategically important for both the state and society. United communities are better equipped to resist enemy aggression and to effectively address local issues. The terminology, narratives, and framing used by journalists in their reports can either contribute to uniting local citizens or, conversely, deepen social divides, potentially fuelling conflicts and social exclusion.

A major component of the project involved sociological research in 23 Ukrainian communities, which was conducted by experts from the sociological company Operative Sociology from April to August 2024. This research component included 49 interviews and a combined quantitative survey using the CATI method in the 23 studied communities (with a sample size of 2,391 respondents). The researchers used J. Chan's social cohesion measurement model to explore how social cohesion can be strengthened at the local level in Ukraine, identify the risks to social cohesion, and examine ways local media can contribute to minimizing social divisions in Ukrainian society under martial law.

## KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

Changes in communities since the beginning of the full-scale invasion are largely determined by geographic location, specifically proximity to the front line and whether the area experienced Russian occupation. For example, frontline communities have faced depopulation, destruction of infrastructure and buildings, and unemployment, among other consequences. In communities farther from the front lines, challenges have emerged, including the need to provide housing and support for internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The horizontal dimension of social cohesion is reflected in a high level of civic and local identity. A significant number of respondents take pride in being residents of their specific community and are eager to contribute to the rebuilding of both their community and Ukraine as a whole. These proactive attitudes are also evident in corresponding practices of civic activism. The study shows that helping others, charity work, and volunteering are common in the daily lives of the vast majority of respondents. Although the level of altruism in everyday life is lower than it was at the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the surge of mutual care and assistance in the beginning of the invasion, February to March 2022, had a generally positive impact on interpersonal relations in the surveyed communities.

The results indicate that the “classic divide” between the poor and the wealthy is strongly felt by Ukrainians under martial law. Other divisions exist between those who have been directly affected by the war (e.g., the loss of homes, loved ones, or jobs, or relocation) and those who have not. Divisions also exist between those with family members in the military and those without. However, most respondents reported no tension between Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking citizens, or between locals and IDPs or refugees. These findings suggest that the uneven impact of the war on Ukrainian families has brought new social divides to the surface. Nevertheless, the presence of groups like IDPs, refugees, and Russian-speaking Ukrainians does not pose significant tension at the local level.

The main cleavage today is based on political stance, in which there is a strong negative attitude toward those with pro-Russian views. Attitudes toward people who remained in occupied territories vary depending on the circumstances—they are understood and/or helped if they hold pro-Ukrainian views but are condemned if they deliberately severed ties with Ukraine. Attitudes toward men avoiding military service are the most ambiguous, ranging from understanding to strong disapproval. While decommunization is viewed positively, there are questions about how it is being implemented. Opinions on changing the religious calendar are neutral, while attitudes toward the Moscow Patriarchate are predominantly negative.

The vertical dimension of social cohesion is mainly characterized by low levels of trust in central government bodies, with a slightly higher “credit of trust” for the president, military administrations, and local authorities. Participation in public discussions at the community level is relatively low, though this may be because of restrictions associated with martial law. There is a strong demand for better oversight of local government actions, which is reflected in a need for information on how local budgets are being allocated, the results of anticorruption investigations, and more transparency regarding the activities of local authorities.

Cohesion is understood as an active community trait, a collective effort aimed at improving life. It involves mutual support, a shared goal, and joint work toward that goal. A common trait across all communities is the initial surge in cohesion after the full-scale invasion, followed by a gradual decrease as people adjusted to the realities of war, according to those interviewed in the survey. The research suggests that not only volunteerism, but also other local and specific collective practices help maintain community cohesion by fostering communication and delivering tangible results.

The media are perceived as agents of public oversight and discussion initiators and are therefore recognized as important agents of cohesion. However, almost half of the survey participants either do not follow or rarely follow the content of the national TV marathon channel, “Yedyniy Novyny,” preferring information from local Telegram channels and social media chats. There is a demand for unbiased and comprehensive coverage of events in the country, including at the local level. Survey respondents reported a desire for positive and inspiring news, as well as reports on anticorruption investigations with clear, practical outcomes. Local media are also expected to provide information about ordinary community members, volunteers, and defenders. There is less interest in stories about IDPs and refugees from the community who have relocated abroad.

A significant finding from the research revealed that despite the many challenges of life under martial law, optimism about personal futures and Ukraine’s reconstruction processes prevailed in respondents’ answers. This optimism could serve as a basis for strengthening social cohesion at both the national and local levels through collective participation in nationwide rebuilding efforts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEDIA PRACTITIONERS BASED ON SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH

### ► INITIATE ANTICORRUPTION INVESTIGATIONS AND “DECENTRALIZED” NEWS

There is a significant demand for journalistic anticorruption investigations, especially concerning the use of budgetary funds and the allocation of financial and other aid received from international partners. Additionally, there is a request for more “decentralized news,” in which local media have greater freedom to cover topics not tied to the national news agenda.

### ► SERVE AS INTERMEDIARIES BETWEEN THE COMMUNITY AND THE AUTHORITIES

In nearly all the communities surveyed, residents reported weak feedback from the authorities. The official communication channels of local governments are often slow, difficult to understand, or not accessible at all. As a result, there is an expectation that journalists and the media should facilitate communication between the authorities and the community. Journalists are expected to act as intermediaries by raising local issues with the authorities. There’s also a demand for informing the community about budget planning and allocation, involving the public in important decision-making, reporting on successful outcomes, advocating for citizens’ rights, and educating the public on relevant legal matters.

### ► MONITOR THE AUTHORITIES TO PREVENT ABUSES

Communities expect local media to play a role in holding the authorities accountable. Residents look to journalists and local media to be actively involved in the fight against corruption and to seek opportunities for dialogue with local officials. News coverage should focus not just on problems but also on solutions, with a forward-looking perspective—publishing previews of decisions and following up on their outcomes to show how they are implemented and what benefits they bring. This approach would enhance dialogue between local authorities and the community, strengthen trust in the authorities, and foster community cohesion.

### ► COVER THE ACTIVITIES OF MILITARY RECRUITMENT CENTRES AND THE ARMY, AND COUNTERACT MYTHS AND RUMOURS

The research indicates that many problems in communities stem from citizens’ lack of information about certain processes, such as the work of military recruitment centres and mobilisation. Some prejudices arise due to the absence of relevant media coverage or insufficient communication from these centres. Timely responses from media representatives can help build trust in the government and dispel myths and rumours on this topic.

► **INCREASE COVERAGE OF ASSISTANCE EFFORTS AND THOSE IN NEED**

Another important mission for local media is informing citizens about opportunities for receiving help from other community members, volunteers, the state, and various organizations. Social cohesion is often associated with people helping each other, so reporting on current problems and assistance efforts can unite the community.

► **SHIFT CONTENT FOCUS TO “GOOD NEWS,” REAL SUCCESSES IN COMMUNITIES DURING THE WAR, AND LOCAL HISTORY**

Psychological stress, anxiety, constant worry, and uncertainty about the future are emotions that Ukrainians experience daily under martial law. This creates a demand for “good news” and coverage of topics that can bring people together, such as successes at the front, volunteer work, and stories of local residents. It is also important to hear more about community development despite the war. Interview participants expressed interest in learning more about new businesses, success stories, everyday life, school and kindergarten activities, the opening of shelters, and overall local development. Refugees linked this with the prospect of returning to Ukraine, reinforcing the belief that they have “somewhere to return to.”

► **“DON’T FORGET” ABOUT THE REFUGEES**

Interviews with Ukrainian refugees abroad show that their lives and immediate problems are far from the idealized images of “good and peaceful living” sometimes perceived by those who remain in Ukraine. Therefore, we recommend that local media write about refugees from their communities, telling their real-life stories abroad and highlighting their volunteer activities and efforts to defend Ukraine’s interests. This will not only reduce social tension but also turn refugees into one of the audiences of local media. As our research indicates, refugees do not actively follow local media, with one reason being that they are not featured in the content or stories.

► **THE IMPORTANCE OF PEOPLE’S STORIES**

Our research highlights the importance of local journalists capturing and sharing people’s stories. By conveying the experiences of individuals such as IDPs, refugees, and those mobilized or returning with trauma, we can foster a deeper understanding of their realities and life choices. When people gain insight into the experiences of others, they are more likely to become tolerant, build interpersonal trust, and contribute to more cohesive communities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DONORS

► **PROMOTE LONG-TERM INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR UKRAINIAN MEDIA**

Investing in local media is an investment in the resilience of Ukrainian society. When communities have reliable sources of information, they are better equipped to navigate crises, rebuild social bonds, and participate in informed decision-making. Long-term financial and institutional support from donors will enable local media outlets to survive and thrive, ensuring that no community is left behind. The research indicates that certain communities, particularly in areas severely affected or occupied by conflict (such as Kherson, Bakhmut, Melitopol, Orikhiv, and Izium), are gradually being excluded from the national discourse. This exclusion results in significant gaps in access to information, creating «information deserts» where residents feel disconnected from both national and international narratives.

► **SUPPORT LOCAL MEDIA AS IMPORTANT AGENTS OF SOCIAL COHESION**

Local media serve as critical agents of social cohesion by delivering accurate, timely, and unbiased information to conflict-affected regions, where misinformation or lack of access to information can deepen social divisions. In areas experiencing intense conflict, such as Kherson, Bakhmut, and Izium, the presence of well-supported local media is essential to maintain a sense of community and help residents remain informed and engaged with national discourse.

► **ENABLE COLLABORATION BETWEEN LOCAL MEDIA AND LOCAL CIVIL SOCIETY FOR INFORMATION PROVISION AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

This partnership is essential for ensuring the provision of accurate information and enhancing accountability in a landscape often fraught with uncertainty and misinformation. Local media play a pivotal role as watchdogs in these communities, monitoring local governance and providing a platform for residents to voice their concerns and aspirations.

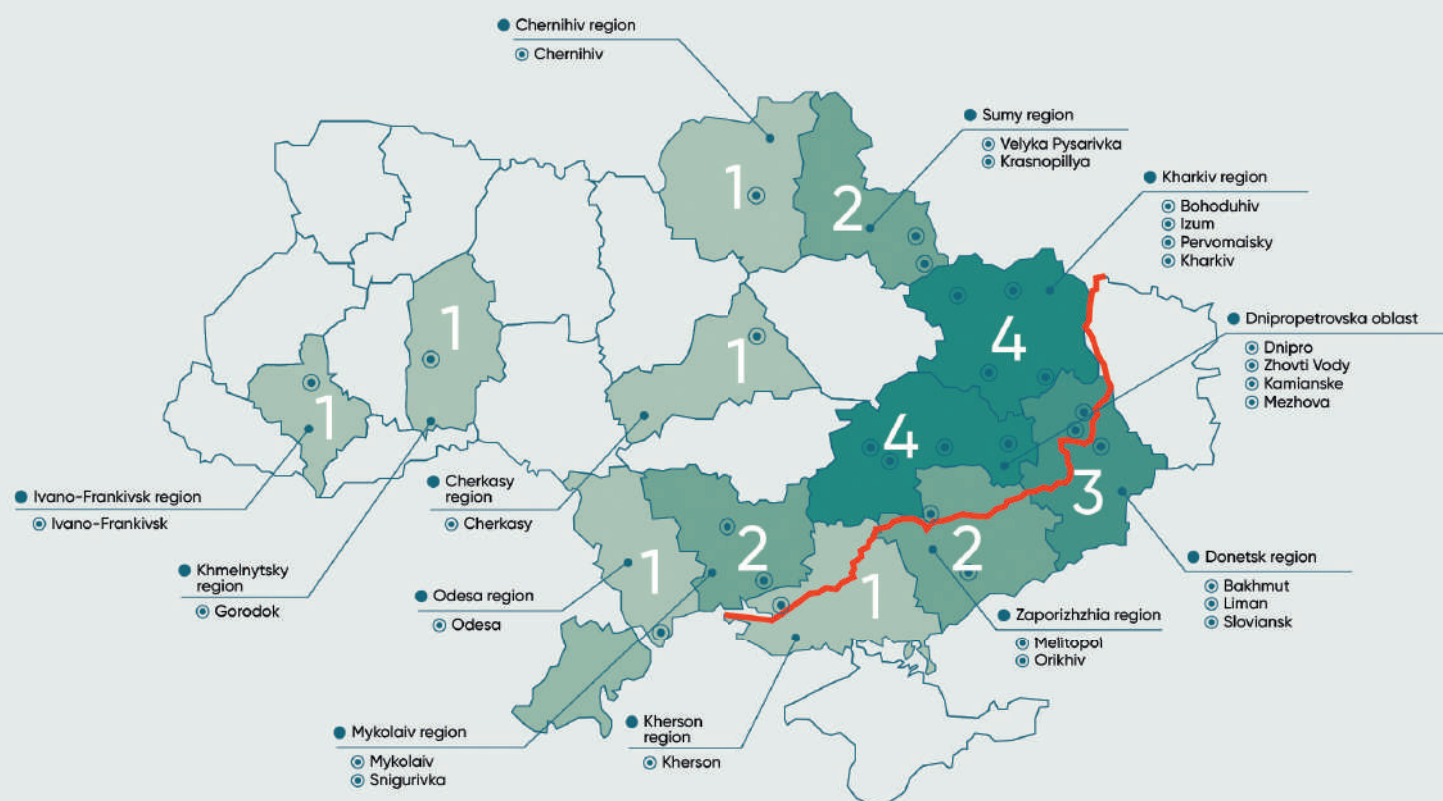


**RESEARCH**

**METHODOLOGY**

How can communities strengthen social cohesion at the local level in Ukraine? What are the potential risks to social unity, and how can journalists help reduce divisions in Ukrainian society during martial law? To address these questions, the research portion of the project was conducted in three main stages, covering 23 territorial communities in Ukraine (see Chart 1).

**Chart 1 - Research-covered regions and territorial units of Ukraine**



Numbers 1 through 4 indicate the regions where the research was conducted.  
 The red line marks the front line as of October 2024.

At the first, qualitative stage of the research, two focus group interviews were conducted in each territorial unit with:

- local residents (one interview in each community, 23 interviews in total).
- local activists such representatives of NGOs, volunteers and local entrepreneurs (one interview in each community, 23 interviews in total).

Auxiliary, three mixed focus-group discussions were conducted with local residents from different territorial units who had travelled abroad and become refugees. The qualitative stage of the research covered 49 interviews with almost 200 participants and lasted from March to May 2024. Thus, three social groups were covered (ordinary citizens, local activists and local residents who had become refugees) to show the diversity of “risk zones” for social cohesion at the local level and social attitudes towards different groups. Media participants were involved in the process of guide elaboration.

Focus groups were organised with participants representing different age groups, genders and social strata. Journalists participated in the process of recruiting participants in cooperation with the research team, that is each project participant provided the research team with suggestions for interview participants. To reduce the risk of selection bias, participants were also recruited through research channels and social media. All interviews were conducted online to ensure participant safety and lasted approximately 120 minutes.

The collected empirical data was analysed and presented in the form of case descriptions (short summaries) for each territorial unit based on the results of two focus group interviews with 1) local residents and 2) local activists. A separate report was prepared based on the results of focus group interviews with Ukrainian refugees. Thus, upon completion of this stage, all media partners and project trainers received 23 reports describing the situation in their territorial units and one report based on interviews with Ukrainian refugees living abroad.

To summarise the results of this stage of the research, a seminar with researchers, mentors and media partners was held from June 24 to 26, 2024. At the seminar, the research team presented the key findings of the research, and journalists took part in a training session on developing a Google survey to monitor their audiences and contributed to the editorial translation of the results. Researchers, mentors and media participants discussed the research results together to deep the understanding of data. In the future, the project mentors will use the research data in further trainings with journalists to discuss their awareness of social cohesion “risk zones” at the local level. As a result, the media will be able to develop their own information strategies to strengthen social cohesion and work more effectively with their audiences.

At the second stage of the study, a sociological survey was conducted in all territorial units participating in the project. The questionnaire was aimed at measuring the level of social cohesion in each territorial unit based on J. Chan's empirical measurement scheme<sup>1</sup>. The data sets for each community were then merged into one data set to identify common trends across all participating communities. The generalised results are described in this report.

The population surveyed consists of Ukrainians aged 18 and older who lived in the research territories before the full-scale invasion, but who may now be in different parts of Ukraine as internally displaced persons or abroad as refugees. The survey was based on a combined approach that included computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) with a randomised database of telephone numbers and online recruitment. A combined sampling method was used. The survey was conducted in 23 territorial units participating in the project, with a sample of 73 to 146 respondents in each settlement (total sample is 2,391 respondents). The sample is representative for the population of Ukraine in terms of basic socio-demographic indicators (age, gender, level of education, and region of residence) and for each territorial community. The size of the statistical error in the general array meets the established standards, and for each of the communities, the size of the error increases with a decrease in the number of respondents and varies from 9% to 11%. The distribution of the sample population by age groups for each of the communities is presented in the table.

(1) Chan, Joseph, Ho-Pong To, and Elaine Chan. 2006. *Reconsidering social cohesion: Developing a definition and analytical framework for empirical research. Social indicators research*, 75 (2): 273-302.

Cities	Sample	Age groups			
		18-34	35-49	50-59	60+
Melitopol	146	17,2%	46,2%	25,5%	11,0%
Odesa	144	14,2%	19,9%	26,2%	39,7%
Dnipro	138	9,4%	32,6%	15,2%	42,8%
Cherkasy	138	14,5%	29,7%	13,0%	42,8%
Mykolaiv	135	18,5%	26,7%	16,3%	38,5%
Kharkiv	135	12,1%	24,2%	18,9%	44,7%
Orikhiv	127	37,6%	15,2%	20,0%	27,2%
Snihurivka	120	20,0%	26,7%	14,2%	39,2%
Kherson	116	13,0%	20,9%	18,3%	47,8%
Chernihiv	114	11,6%	22,3%	17,0%	49,1%
Sloviansk	107	8,6%	24,8%	12,4%	54,3%
Ivano-Frankivsk	105	15,4%	31,7%	9,6%	43,3%
Kamianske	100	6,1%	22,4%	17,3%	54,1%
Bakhmut	99	9,1%	23,2%	19,2%	48,5%
Pervomaiskyi	77	6,5%	20,8%	20,8%	51,9%
Bogodukhiv	74	2,8%	19,4%	25,0%	52,8%
Horodok	74	24,7%	24,7%	20,5%	30,1%
Izium	74	5,4%	25,7%	16,2%	52,7%
Krasnopillia	74	16,2%	35,1%	23,0%	25,7%
Lyman	74	10,8%	24,3%	20,3%	44,6%
Mezhova	74	15,1%	32,9%	17,8%	34,2%
Velyka Pysarivka	73	6,9%	26,4%	18,1%	48,6%
Zhovti Vody	73	4,2%	30,6%	12,5%	52,8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 391</b>	<b>13,8%</b>	<b>26,6%</b>	<b>18,1%</b>	<b>41,5%</b>

The statistical error of the total sample population (2391 respondents, with a probability of 0.95 and a design effect of 1.5) does not exceed

- 3.3% for indicators close to 50%,
- 2.9% for indicators close to 25%,
- 1.4% for indicators close to 5%.

In the context of war an additional deviation is added, as there are a number of factors that affect the formation of the sample population: lack of representative statistics on the age structure of the Ukrainian population; educational migration/internal resettlement of young people abroad or to other cities of Ukraine; and partial absence of telephone communication in frontline cities. An additional deviation is added, as there are a number of factors that affect the formation of the sample population: lack of representative statistics on the age structure of the Ukrainian population; educational migration/internal resettlement of young people abroad or to other cities of Ukraine; partial absence of telephone communication in frontline cities.

For individual communities with a sample of about 100 respondents, the margin of error is between 9% and 11%.

In some settlements (11), the survey was conducted exclusively by CATI method based on the existing database of mobile numbers of Operative Sociology, which was formed during previous national surveys. These settlements include:

Communities under occupation	Communities are close to the line of hostilities	Communities are remote from the line of hostilities
Bakhmut	Mykolaiv, Kherson, Kharkiv, Sloviansk	Dnipro, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kamianske, Odesa, Cherkasy, Cherni

For five small settlements, the survey was also conducted using the CATI method, but a combined selection of respondents was used. In these locations, an online campaign was conducted to attract respondents by distributing the survey questionnaire through local newspapers and Facebook and Telegram groups. After the potential respondent filled in the registration form, interviewers contacted the respondent and conducted the survey using the CATI method:

Communities under occupation	Communities are close to the line of hostilities	Communities are remote from the line of hostilities
-	Izium, Bogodukhiv, Velyka Pysarivka, Pervomaiskyi	Zhovti Vody

For the remaining seven settlements, the survey was conducted using a combined method. Thus, at the first stage, a CATI survey was used. At the same time, an online campaign was also conducted in these settlements to attract respondents by distributing the questionnaire through local media sites, Facebook and Telegram groups. After a potential respondent filled out the questionnaire, analysts selected questionnaires that contained logical errors or were partially filled out and passed the contacts of these respondents to the call centre, where interviewers contacted the respondent again and conducted a CATI survey to correct the questionnaire. These settlements include:

Communities under occupation	Communities are close to the line of hostilities	Communities are remote from the line of hostilities
Melitopol	Lyman, Orikhiv, Krasnopillia, Mezhova, Snihurivka	Horodok

A key aspect to consider is that this approach does not meet the requirements of chance, and only those respondents who voluntarily agreed to fill out the participant form, participated in the survey. This introduces some bias into the formation of the sample and creates a certain pattern. For example, participation in a survey may be limited to people who read specific media or use certain social networks.

As a result, for each media partner, a qualitative report was developed for the respective community (23 reports in total) and a general descriptive report was provided for the quantitative stage (based on a sample of 2,391 respondents).

In the third stage, the research team synthesised and triangulated the main findings of the research based on the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The results of this stage are presented in this report. The public presentation of the study is planned to be conducted in Kyiv in October 2024, gathering researchers and local media who participated, media, civil society organizations, and national and international stakeholders.



**CHANGES IN COMMUNITY**

**LIFE SINCE THE BEGINNING**

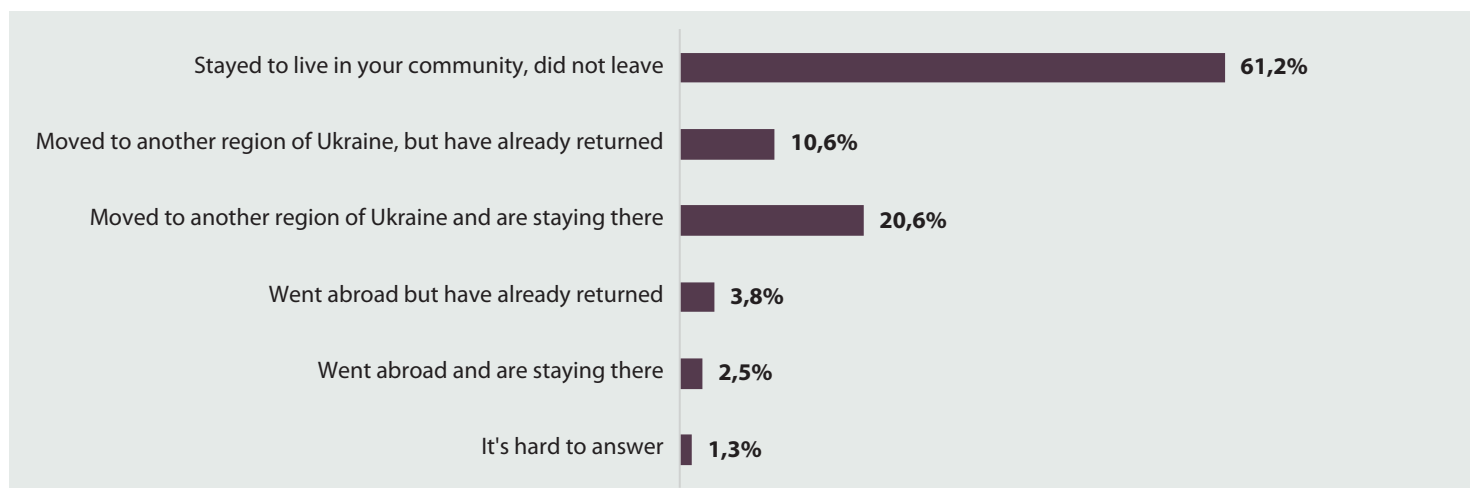
**OF THE FULL-SCALE**

**INVASION**

How can communities strengthen social cohesion at the local level in Ukraine? What are the potential risks to social unity, and how can journalists help reduce divisions in Ukrainian society during martial law? To address these questions, the research portion of the project was conducted in three main stages, covering 23 territorial communities in Ukraine (see Chart 1).

**Chart 2 - Forced mobility of respondents prompted by Russia's full-scale invasion**

**After the start of the full-scale invasion, you...**



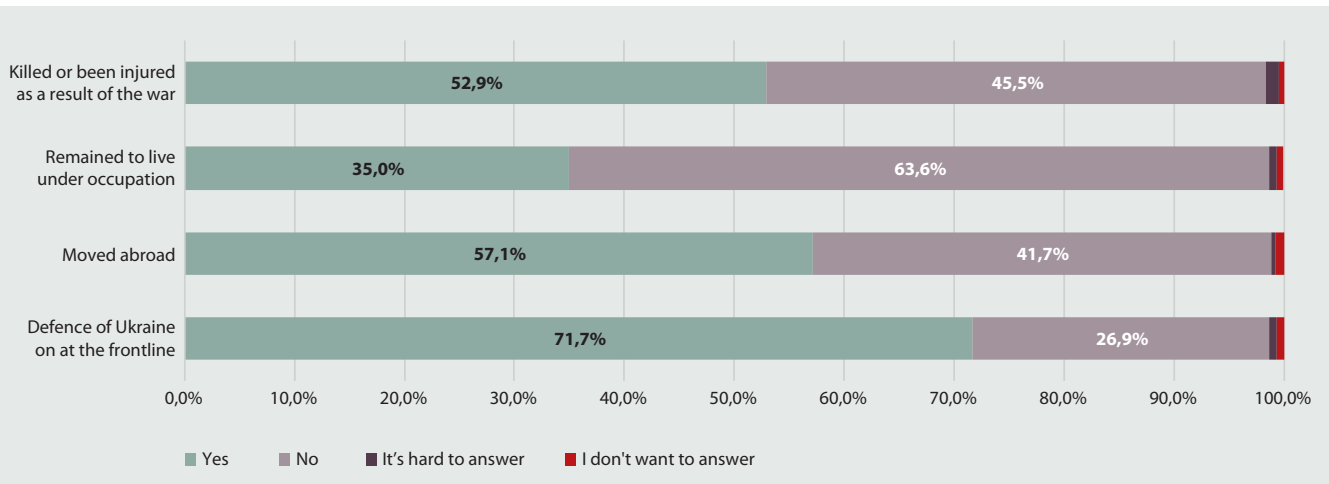
The majority of respondents (84%) from communities under occupation (Melitopol, Bakhmut) moved to another region of Ukraine and remain there. In the communities close to the front line, every second respondent (56.1%) stated that they stayed to live in the community and did not leave. The majority of community members located at a distance from the frontline hostilities remained to live in the community and did not leave (84.2%).

Participants in group interviews frequently mentioned increased psychological stress, heightened anxiety, and a sense of ongoing worry as some of the most common changes in community life since the start of the full-scale invasion. As one interviewee summed it up: "We don't live, we only wait."

The survey results show that 52.9% of respondents have relatives or friends who were killed or injured due to the war (see Chart 3). Every third person (35%) has relatives who remained living in temporarily Russian-occupied territories, and every second person (57.1%) has those who were forced to leave abroad. The majority of respondents (71.7%) have relatives and close ones who defend Ukraine on the frontline. Of course, these circumstances intensify their anxiety for the lives of their relatives and close associates.

**Chart 3 - Social anxiety and stress caused by the war actions**

**Is there anyone among your relatives or close ones who?**



As shown in Table 3.1, communities farther from the front line have the highest number of respondents with relatives or friends serving in the Ukrainian military on the front. Those originally from currently occupied territories are more likely to have fled abroad. Additionally, people from communities either currently under Russian-occupation territory or near the front lines are more likely to have family members who were killed or injured because of the war. This demonstrates that the ongoing conflict affects Ukrainian families across the country, with a greater risk of casualties near the front lines.

**Table 3.1 - Social anxiety and stress caused by the war actions in relation to the status of the community**

**Is there someone among your relatives or friends who...**

Communities under occupation				
	No	Yes	It is difficult to answer	I don't want to answer
Defends Ukraine at the front	67,1%	29,6%	0,8%	2,5%
Went abroad	62,0%	35,5%	0,4%	2,1%
Left to live under occupation	64,8%	33,6%	0,4%	1,2%
Killed or injured as a result of the war	55,0%	42,0%	2,1%	0,8%
Communities are close to the line of hostilities				
	No	Yes	It is difficult to answer	I don't want to answer
Defends Ukraine at the front	71,3%	27,3%	0,7%	0,6%
Went abroad	56,9%	41,9%	0,5%	0,7%
Left to live under occupation	38,6%	59,7%	0,8%	0,8%
Killed or injured as a result of the war	55,8%	42,4%	1,1%	0,7%

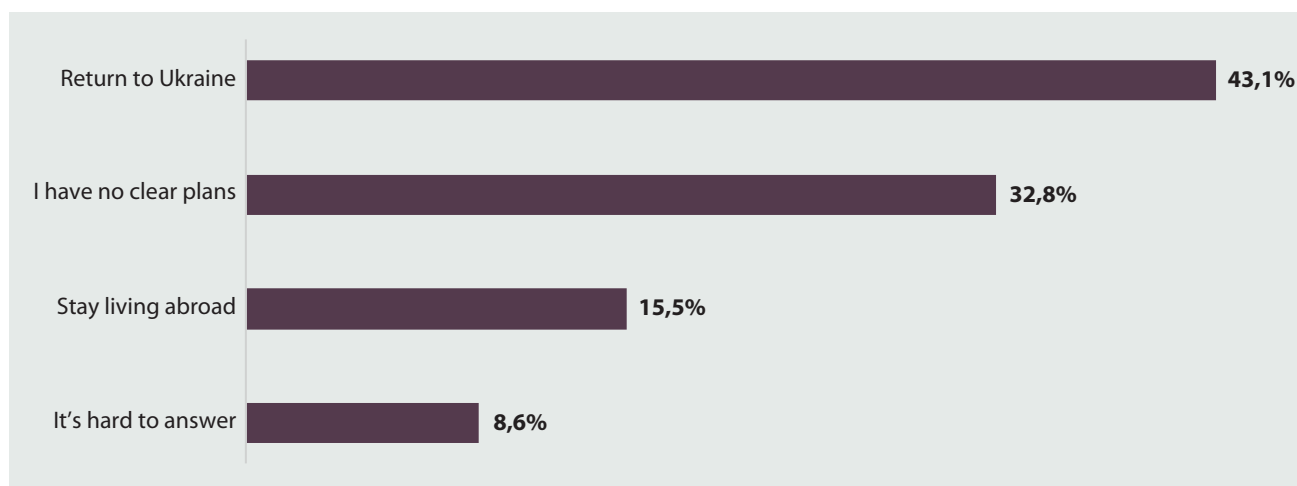
Communities are remote from the line of hostilities	No	Yes	It is difficult to answer	I don't want to answer
Defends Ukraine at the front	73,7%	25,5%	0,6%	0,2%
Went abroad	56,2%	43,1%	0,1%	0,6%
Left to live under occupation	21,8%	77,4%	0,6%	0,2%
Killed or injured as a result of the war	48,4%	50,9%	0,7%	0,1%

Among the key problems that were often mentioned during the focus group interviews were security issues, lack of shelters, blackouts, poor quality education for children and high property rental costs. For residents of the communities under occupation (Bakhmut, Melitopol), the key problem was the lack of their own housing, the inability to find a place to live because of high rent costs, and the need to constantly move. People expressed concern also about state mechanisms for compensating housing losses and withdrawing the status of internally displaced persons, as payments under this status have been a significant financial support for them. The prospects of obtaining housing are one of the most pressing issues for residents of communities that are under enemy occupation or have suffered significant destruction because of hostilities.

For the participants of the quantitative survey who moved abroad and remain living there (2.5%), an additional question was asked about their future plans. Currently, 43.1% of respondents intend to return to Ukraine. One third (32.8%) have no clear plans at all, while 15.5% intend to stay abroad (see Chart 4).

**Chart 4 - Future plans after the end of the war (Among those who answered “went abroad and are staying there” to the question “After the start of the full-scale invasion you...”, n=59)**

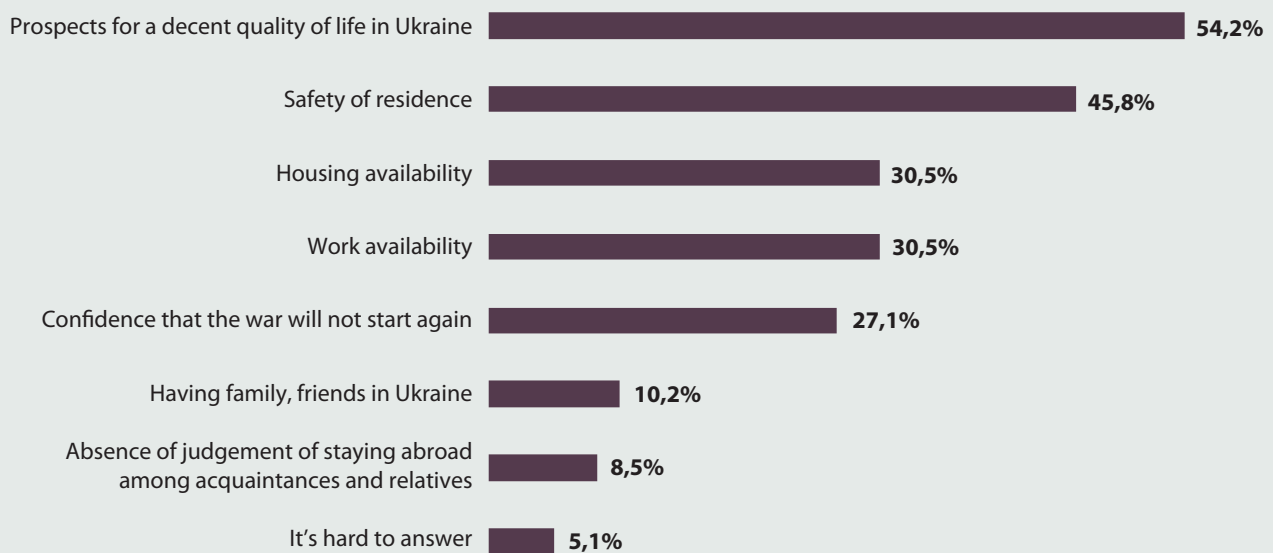
**When the war ends, are you planning to...**



The key conditions for returning to Ukraine after the war, as mentioned by respondents, include the prospects of a decent quality of life (54.2%), safety of residence (45.8%), and the availability of housing and jobs (30.5%). Additionally, 27.1% want confidence that the war will not start again, while 10.2% value the presence of family and friends. For 8.5%, a crucial factor is not being judged for staying abroad by acquaintances and relatives (see Chart 5).

**Chart 5 - Conditions for returning to Ukraine after the end of the war (Among those who answered “ went abroad and are staying there” In the question “after the start of the full-scale invasion, you?”, n=59)**

**What is necessary for your return to Ukraine after the end of the war?**



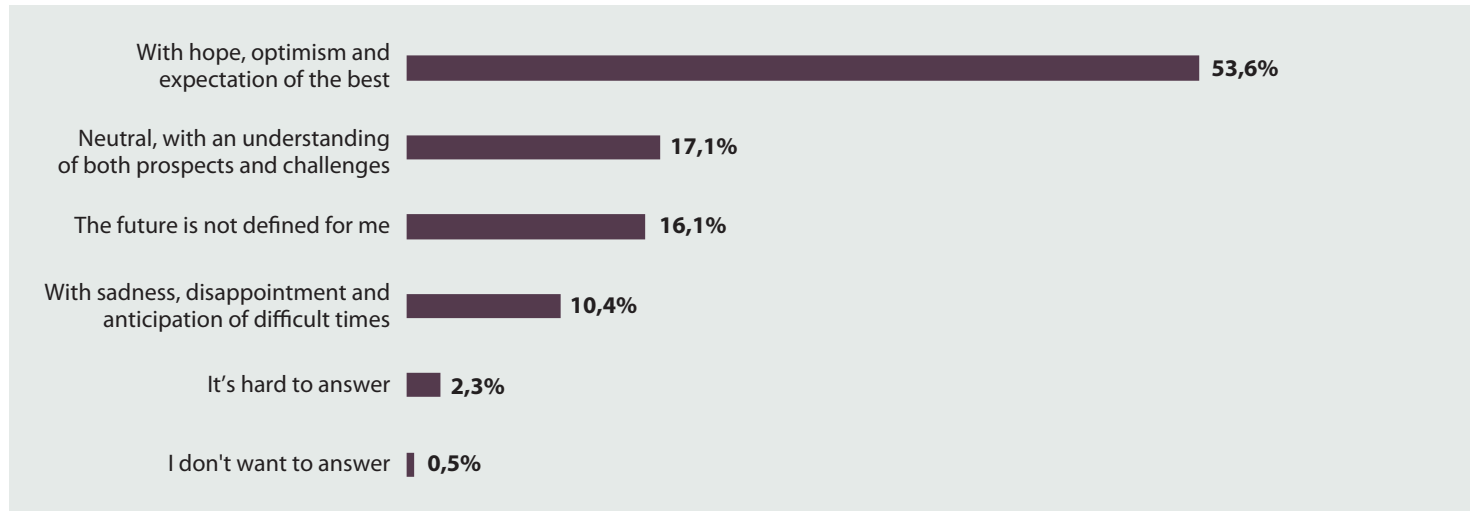
In communities farther from the front line, the population has increased significantly because of an influx of IDPs. In communities geographically close to the front line, there is a noticeable decrease in the number of residents (“no one to work on the land”), a significant destruction of residential and infrastructure facilities, and the problem of unemployment is acute. Among local sentiments, uncertainty of the future and awareness of the danger to life is common.

**“ You have to plan your life, but it is impossible to plan it, because we do not know what will happen not only on the second or third day, but even in a minute. ”**  
 (interviewee, Velyka Pysarivka)

Despite all the obstacles of life under martial law, Ukrainians look to the future with optimism. Every second (53.6%) of the survey participants noted that they look into the future “with hope, optimism and expectation of the best.” There was neutral image of the future with an understanding of both prospects and challenges from 17.1% of the respondents. Uncertainty and pessimism about the future is dominant in 16.1% and 10.4%, respectively (see Chart 6).

## Chart 6 - Perceptions of the future

### You are looking into your future...



Ineffective communication between citizens and local authorities was also mentioned as a problem that worries community residents in their daily lives. Thus, one of the focus group participants noted that:

“**I would like a faster response and greater involvement of local authorities in the real needs of people which exist in the community.**”  
 (interviewee, Ivano-Frankivsk)

In some communities, on the contrary, the improvement of relations between businesses, the community, volunteers and the authorities was noted.

“**It seems to me that our relations between business, government and the public sector have become much stronger.**”  
 (interviewee, Kharkiv)

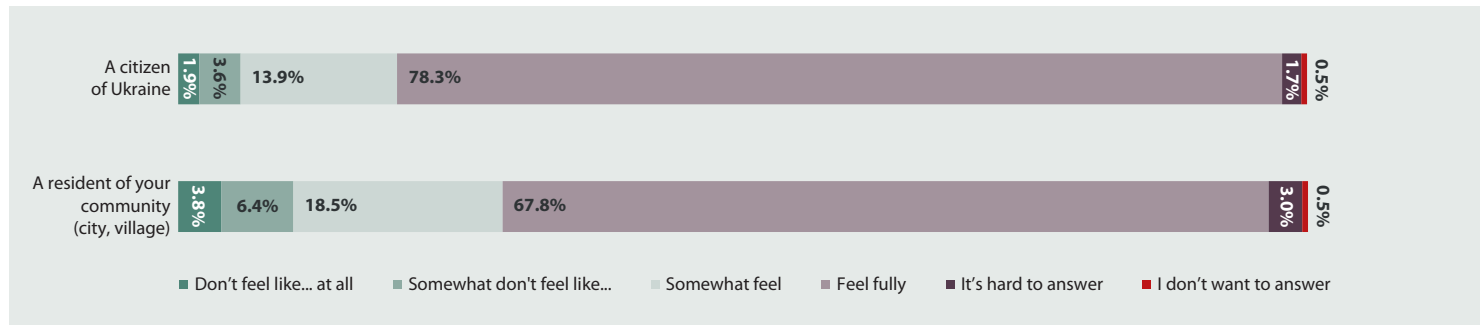


# HORIZONTAL DIMENSION OF SOCIAL COHESION

The feeling of support for each other, solidarity and social responsibility for the fate of the other creates favourable conditions for the formation of a single common identity. Thus, when analysing quantitative data, a high level of awareness of their civic identity was recorded. A high percentage (92.3%) of respondents feel like citizens of Ukraine, while 86.3% identified as residents of their community (see Chart 7).

**Chart 7 - Identity models as a component of social cohesion**

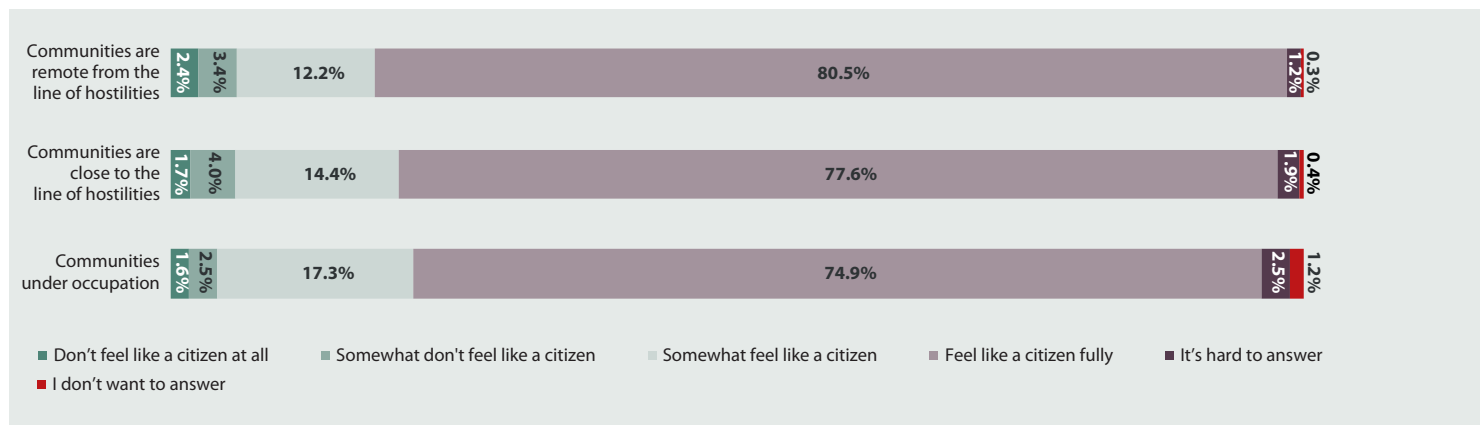
**How much do you feel like...**



A crosstab analysis, which examines the correlation between two variables, reveals that the farther respondents live from the front line, the more likely they are to select the response "I feel fully a citizen of Ukraine." However, for all respondents regardless of their place of residence, there is a high level of awareness of their civic identity. Thus, the percentage of respondents living in communities under occupation who feel fully or rather feel like citizens of Ukraine is 92.2%. In communities close to the line of hostilities the response was 92%, and in communities far from the line of hostilities it was 92.7% (see Chart 7.1).

**Chart 7.1 - Civic identity depending on the place of residence**

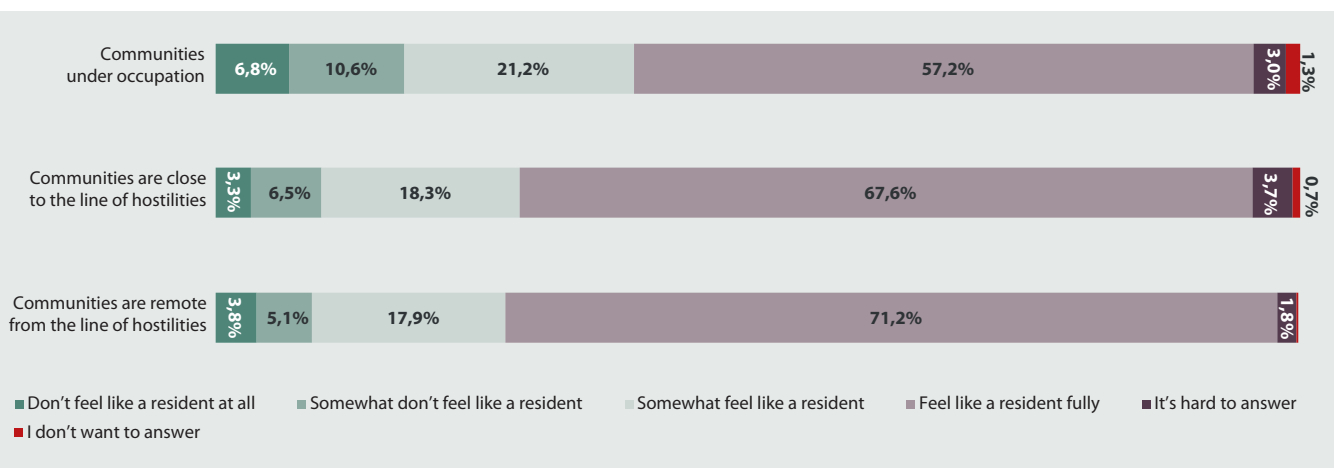
**Tell me, please, how much do you feel like?**



A crosstab analysis of the question of feeling a resident of the community gives reason to argue that the indicators of the level of local identity are also high. However, for respondents living under occupation, the level of feeling like a resident of the community is lower. Thus, 78.4% of respondents from communities under occupation feel fully and mostly like a resident of the community. While 85.9% of respondents living in communities close to the line of hostilities and 89.1% in communities far from the line of hostilities feel fully and mostly likely to be residents of the community. This could be explained by a certain rupture of social ties at the local level caused by the fact that people left their permanent place of residence, went abroad or relocated to other regions of the country (see Chart 7.2.).

**Chart 7.2 - Local identity depending on the place of residence**

Tell me please, how much do you feel like...



However, even under the conditions of military invasion, this is a relatively high indicator of social cohesion at the local level. It is also worth noting that 77.8% of respondents are proud of the fact that they are residents of their community, and 75.1% are ready to actively participate in the reconstruction of their community and Ukraine as a whole (see Table 8).

**Table 8 - A sense of belonging and attitudes towards activism, according to J. Chan as a component of social cohesion**

**Rate your level of agreement with the following statements on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree.**

	Disagree strongly	Rather disagree	Agree in some respects and disagree in others	Rather agree	Strongly agree	It's hard to answer	I don't want to answer
People in our community (city, village) always want to use you	33,6%	17,8%	29%	6,8%	7,3%	5%	0,7%
I am willing to pay more taxes if it improves the well-being of my community	28,8%	11,7%	21,9%	12,2%	20,1%	4,8%	0,6%
I would like to spend some of my free time volunteering and helping others	14,0%	8,2%	22,0%	20,6%	31,0%	3,7%	0,5%
I am proud to be a resident of my community (village, city)	4,4%	3,6%	12,4%	14,5%	63,3%	1,4%	0,5%
I am ready to actively contribute to the reconstruction of my community and Ukraine as a whole	6,2%	3,3%	12,5%	17,8%	57,3%	2,4%	0,5%

One of the manifestations of community cohesion is the willingness to act selflessly for the benefit of other members of society and for one's community. Increased community cohesion was mentioned by interviewees as one of the key changes since the start of the full-scale invasion:

**“ People have become more united, friendlier. They sympathise with each other more, help ”**  
(interviewee, Horodok)

In the socio-cultural conditions of Ukrainian society, the expression “to use you” is interpreted as the possibility of using the help/activity of another member of the community for one’s own selfish purposes. Thus, according to the results of the survey, every second participant (51.4%) disagreed with the statement that “people in the community always want to use you”, and 28.9% agreed to some extent and disagreed with this statement to some extent. In fact, this is a confirmation that every second of the respondents feels a selfless attitude and attitude towards themselves from other members of the community and only every seventh respondent notes the possibility of a selfish attitude depending on the situation.

When analysing the results of the quantitative study, a discrepancy was recorded between the willingness to actively participate in the reconstruction of their community (75.1%) (see Table 7) and a willingness to pay more taxes if it advances the improvement of their community (20.1% strongly agree, 12.2% rather agree). A total of 40.5% of respondents did not agree to pay more taxes for the improvement of the community (28.8% did not agree at all, 11.7% rather disagreed). This may be because of both the low level of trust in the authorities and the difficult financial situation of Ukrainians. At the same time, 51.6% (31% strongly agree, 20.6% rather agree) of respondents expressed a desire to spend part of their free time volunteering and helping others (see Table 8).

According to the results of the quantitative survey, every second participant (54.4%) said they try to help other people (outside of their family) with household chores or work, and to provide emotional support. Regarding the practices of charity (providing financial assistance to those in need) and volunteering (helping IDPs and the military), more than a third of respondents said they do it quite often, 36.8% and 37.2% respectively. Almost a third said they do it sometimes, and a third said very or rather rarely (see Table 9).

**Table 9 - Practices of civic activism according to J. Chan as a component of social cohesion**

**Rate how often you do the following on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very rarely and 5 being very frequently.**

	Very rarely	Quite rarely	Some-times	Quite often	Very often	It’s hard to answer	I don’t want to answer
Help other people (except your family) with household chores, work, provide emotional support	8,4%	6,1%	29,4%	30,4%	24,0%	1,4%	0,3%
You are engaged in charity (you provide material assistance to those who need it)	16,8%	8,7%	33,0%	22,1%	14,7%	4%	0,7%
You volunteer (help the military, IDPs, animals)	19,2%	10,4%	27,7%	20,3%	16,9%	4,6%	0,8%
Participate in the discussion of the problems of your community (city): sign petitions, participate in public discussions, protests, etc.	37,3%	13,0%	21,1%	12,2%	7%	8,4%	0,9%

The low level of respondents' involvement in community discussions—only 19.2% reported participating (7% very often, 12.2% quite often)—is linked to the lack of such practices in Ukrainian public life, as well as the low level of dialogue and trust in government institutions. In addition, these activities are significantly reduced under martial law. Conducting educational trainings on awareness of the principles of participatory democracy can significantly increase the level of citizen involvement in public discussion.

In many communities, participants noted that residents come together to respond to common problems or challenges. The examples of helping to clear rubble after a missile strike or replacing window frames in damaged buildings were mentioned. However, some also noted that cohesion has weakened over time:

**“ At the beginning of the full-scale invasion, our community united. People were more united, helped each other, and it was probably until the beginning of 2024. Now, in my opinion, there is a sense of cohesion, but it has slightly weakened. Perhaps people have lost hope that the war will ever end. ”**  
(interviewee, Bohodukhiv)

During the group interviews, the idea of increased patriotism and the adoption of the Ukrainian language was often mentioned as one of the key changes that took place in the communities studied since the beginning of the Russian military invasion:

**“ Now it is quite common that when, for example, people address me in Russian, I answer in Ukrainian, and they switch to Ukrainian. This did not happen before. It's like this, little by little, slowly, but they are switching quite actively. ”**  
(interviewee, Odesa)

According to the survey, the majority of respondents (60.3%) do not have any difficulties interacting with those who speak Russian. Only 18.8% agreed that they have some difficulties in interacting with people who speak Russian. Almost the same proportion of respondents (18.2%) chose the answer “I agree in some respects, disagree in others” (see Table 10).

Interview participants also expressed concerns about mobilisation and the negative attitudes toward the Territorial Centers of Recruitment and Social Support (TCR). Additionally, changes in men's behavior were noted, driven by fears related to potential mobilisation:

**“ Today's life is connected with mobilisation, a lot of men have limited their exposure to public places, staying more at home. They go to work by taxi mainly to avoid appearing in front of military registration and enlistment offices, and they come back in the evening. ”**  
(male interviewee, Cherkasy)



# KEY SOCIAL CLEAVAGES

Social cohesion is measured by examining the presence or absence of intergroup alliances or divisions. J. Chan summarised that “both strong alliances and strong cleavages reduce the overall level of social cohesion because they disintegrate society as a whole”.<sup>2</sup> To identify possible social splits in communities, the guide included questions on identifying the basis of conflict situations, and also the specifics of perception of different social groups in communities and readiness to cooperate with them. Life under martial law in Ukraine has led to the formation of new social groups that did not exist previously in Ukrainian society. These new groups include Ukrainian refugees who have left and are living abroad; Ukrainians who evade military service; and those Ukrainians who remained living under Russian occupation. The relevant alternatives were included in the quantitative questionnaire, which allowed us to measure both the “classic” cleavages proposed by J. Chan (rich/poor; LGBT people; people with different political views) and new cleavages related to life under martial law. Social cleavages exist when members of society are not ready or willing to interact with representatives of certain social groups (e.g. people with non-traditional sexual orientation, other political interests, poor or rich), or when they have prejudiced attitudes towards representatives of such groups, which can result in social conflicts.

The findings show that the “classic split” between rich and poor is acutely felt by Ukrainians under martial law, with 64.8% saying that tensions exist in their communities on this issue. The second and third most common tensions appeared in interactions between those who have been affected by the war (lost their homes, loved ones, jobs, or have moved) and those who have not (46.3%); and between those who have someone in their family at the frontline and those who have no one at the frontline (44%). At the same time, the majority of respondents (58.6%) reported no tension between people who speak Russian and Ukrainian; and close to the same number (60%) reporting no tensions between local residents and internally displaced. Just over half of respondents (59.5%) indicated that there is no tension between locals who stayed and locals who went abroad (see Table 10). These data indicate that life under martial law has actualised the emergence of new social splits in Ukrainian communities, related to the “uneven” impact of the war on each Ukrainian family. At the same time, the perception of such social groups as IDPs, refugees and Russian-speaking Ukrainians is not one that causes potential tensions at the local level.

**Table 10 - Social tensions and contradictions between social groups**

**Rate how much you agree that there are contradictions or tensions between the following groups in your community, from 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree**

	There is tension	There is probably tension	There is no tension	It's hard to answer	I don't want to answer
Between the poor and the rich	32,2%	32,6%	26,8%	7,8%	0,6%
Between people who speak Russian and Ukrainian	14,5%	23%	58,6%	3,3%	0,6%
Between those who have soldiers in their families and those who have no one at the front	17,7%	26,3%	49,2%	6,1%	0,8%
Between local residents and internally displaced persons	11,5%	21,3%	60,0%	6,2%	0,9%
Between locals who stayed and locals who moved abroad	9,3%	21,0%	59,5%	9,4%	0,8%
Between those who were affected by the war (lost their homes, loved ones, jobs, moved), and those who did not suffer it	13,7%	27,5%	48,7%	8,9%	1,1%
Between those who were affected by the war (lost their homes, loved ones, jobs, moved), and those who did not suffer it	18,0%	28,3%	44,3%	8,5%	0,9%

(2) Chan, Joseph, Ho-Pong To, Elaine Chan. 2006. *Reconsidering social cohesion: Developing a definition and analytical framework for empirical research. Social Indicators Research*, 75, 2: 297.

It is also important to note that according to the survey, 45.6% disagreed that there is tension regarding representatives of non-traditional sexual orientation, while a quarter (24.9%) agreed that there may be conflict in these situations. For 47.5%, the difference in support for pro-Ukrainian political forces, but not those supported by the respondent, is not a reason for tension or conflict, while 17.9% said that it is difficult for them to interact with those who have a different opinion on the political situation (see Table 10).

The key line of disunity among the participants of the interview should be recognised as the **attitude towards locals who have pro-Russian views**. Tension in relations between local residents arises among those who “wait for the Russian authorities.” During the interviews, the participants gave various examples of “interactions” with this group, from calling law enforcement agencies to everyday “disapproval” and social isolation:

“**You see, it comes to the point where they can sometimes call the police. Everyone is so united and attacking the one who brings this ‘Russian world’ here, you see.**”  
(interviewee, Mezhova)

“**As for me, there is an option and quiet, when people simply do not approve of this person. They try to avoid communicating with her or him. They just have different opinions, and it somehow goes away quietly. But there are also cases, in my opinion, when people openly say to someone, “Are you waiting for the Russian liberators?” They say that you’re wrong, I’m going to hand you over to the [Ukrainian security services] or something like that. So, a more general trend, in my opinion, from my social circle, is to separate such people from society.**”  
(interviewee, Iziurm)

During discussions about the attitude of residents with pro-Russian views, in some communities, opinions were also voiced about suspicions of collaboration in favour of the occupier:

“**There are still locals who are very sorry that the Russians left. They left them these petals [anti-personnel landmines -ed.], showed them how to activate them, and they put them where they are not visible.**”  
(interviewee, Iziurm)

The interviewees shared examples of “social labelling” of collaborators who were further socially isolated:

“**I would like to add that after the liberation of Snihurivka, locals wrote on the gates of those who collaborated that they were collaborators. In the market, those people who traded, their containers also have bad words written on them, who they are. It is connected with cooperation with the occupiers.**”  
(interviewee, Snihurivka)

As one of interview participants summed up, this particular line of social demarcation (who side are you on?) is key to building trust and social relations between locals:

“**You walk down the street and people ask, “Who are you for? For Ukraine or for Russia?” I don’t like such questions. He may be for Ukraine, but he also wants to know whether I am for Ukraine or Russia.**”  
(interviewee, Sloviansk)

According to the survey, 61.7% of respondents agreed with the statement that it is difficult for them to interact with people in the community if they have pro-Russian views. This is the highest rate among all other groups proposed for assessment. For 45.3% of respondents, interaction with parishioners of Moscow Patriarchate churches presents difficulties. At the same time, only 12.9% of respondents experience difficulties in interacting with Russian-speaking Ukrainians (see Table 11).

**Table 11 - Difficulties in interacting with different social groups**

Rate how much you agree with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is strongly disagree at all and 5 is strongly agree.

It is difficult for me to interact with people in our community (city, village) if they...

	Strongly disagree	Mostly disagree	Agree in some respects and disagree in others	Mostly agree	Strongly agree	It's hard to answer	I don't want to answer
Have pro-Russian views	13,5%	4,2%	12,1%	8,9%	52,8%	7,6%	0,8%
They are parishioners of the churches of the Moscow Patriarchate	19,8%	5,3%	13,6%	9,7%	35,6%	15,0%	0,9%
Communicate in Russian	49,3%	11,0%	18,2%	8,0%	10,7%	2,2%	0,5%
Celebrate Christmas on January 7	53,4%	10,1%	16,8%	5,7%	7,8%	5,4%	0,8%
Are internally displaced persons	66,8%	7,2%	10,7%	4,5%	5,6%	4,8%	0,5%
Evading mobilisation	30,1%	9,1%	23,1%	8,4%	16,4%	11,9%	0,9%
Remained under occupation	37,8%	7,4%	18,1%	5,7%	8,8%	21,4%	0,8%
Went abroad and became refugees	50,4%	8,8%	17,9%	5,5%	8,4%	8,2%	0,8%
Have a non-traditional sexual orientation	39,1%	6,4%	10,6%	4,8%	20,1%	17,7%	1,1%
They support pro-Ukrainian political forces, but not the ones you support	37,0%	10,6%	23,3%	7,2%	10,7%	10,3%	0,9%
They live a "pre-war life" (go to cafes, theatres, gyms), but volunteer and donate	45,8%	11,9%	17,6%	6,9%	8,8%	8,4%	0,5%
They live a "pre-war life" (go to cafes, theatres, gyms), do not volunteer or donate	24,9%	9,0%	16,4%	11,6%	26,1%	11,3%	0,6%
Did not feel the impact of the war (did not lose their homes, do not have military in their families, did not lose their jobs, did not have to move)	40,3%	9,7%	19,6%	6,8%	14,7%	8,0%	0,7%

The crosstab analysis of difficulties in interaction with people of pro-Russian views showed no significant differences regarding distance from the frontline regions. Thus, 65% of respondents who came from occupied communities agree that it is difficult for them to communicate with people who have pro-Russian views. At the same time 60.2% of respondents from settlements located near the battle line also agreed with this statement (50.4% completely agree, 9.8% rather agree). For those located far from the lines of hostilities, 63.2% of respondents noted that it is difficult for them to communicate with people with pro-Russian views. These results show a common attitude toward this group across the country.

In third place in terms of tension are interactions with those who live a “pre-war life” and do not work toward bringing victory in the war closer. The start of the full-scale invasion provoked public discussion and changes in the public attitudes of Ukrainians about whether it is acceptable to continue living the “pre-war life” in these circumstances. The concept of “pre-war life” refers to the full-fledged conduct of one’s daily life, taking into account only those needs that Ukrainians tried to meet before the full-scale invasion. In general, the survey results show that the attitude towards those who live a “pre-war life” (e.g., go to cafes, theatres, gyms) but volunteer and donate is better than attitudes toward those who do not donate (see Table 10). This confirms the assumption that being proactive, volunteering and participating in the support for Ukraine on its way to victory improves interactions between individuals in everyday life, in which everyone is united by a common goal.

**The perception of those who evade military service** demonstrates rather different opinions among the interviewees, from total condemnation to rational justification. Just over a third of respondents (39.2%) have no difficulties in interacting with those who evade mobilisation. A quarter (24.8%) of the participants agreed that there may be some difficulties in interacting with those who evade mobilisation (see Table 10).

Among the arguments put forward by interviewees in defence of those who evade service are the claims that not all men are ready for military service, as well as the lack of proper training from the state or a lack of personal motivation:

“**And secondly, well, the war, you can’t just go out with a machine gun. You have to be prepared, and you have to have personal ambitions, because no one wants to be a ‘live meat.’ So, in my opinion, there should be training... Those who wanted to go, they have gone a long time ago, and those who are supposed to be there are not willing to do so very quickly.**”  
(interviewee, Dnipro)

“**There are people who really want to serve, but they do not trust. They understand that there have been cases when a person was taken by the TCR, served with a call-up notice, and two weeks later, this person was brought back as the 200 [Ukrainian military uses the term ‘Cargo 200’ to indicate the dead – ed.]. That is, there is no trust, because we understand that this person has not received proper training. It’s scary, people are really afraid of this, so there are conflicts. And you really understand people, no one wants to be on this path.**”  
(interviewee, Orikhiv)

In some communities, the attitude towards those who evade military service is not a topic of tension.

“**We don’t have such a problem in Sloviansk. No one is hiding, no one is chasing anyone, no one is pushing into cars [forced mobilisation of people on the streets by representatives of military authorities – ed.], as shown in the video. I have not seen anything like that. It’s all civilised somehow. Yes, we have a lot of volunteers, and we have friends who have already been killed. Yes, the guys are fighting for their country. But I don’t know of any such cases, we don’t have such facts.**”  
(interviewee, Sloviansk)

Some participants noted that they try not to discuss mobilisation and “evasion” with each other to minimise the risk of tension in communication with their friends:

“**I try to close this topic and somehow move away from it, because there will be very big conflicts, and everyone will fight. Someone knows that, let’s say, one friend’s husband went and another one didn’t, and she feels bad because of this, that “my husband went and yours didn’t.”**”  
(interviewee, Odesa)

Among those who condemn the phenomenon of “evasion,” there is a widespread opinion that it is a violation of the law, and that there is often a system of double standards when corruption is used to create loopholes. The negative perception of those who evade service is linked to the demand for social justice:

“**Why can people who have money pay [a bribe] or leave? These deputies take someone else under their wing to avoid being taken away, and it turns out that ordinary mortals, our guys who have no money and no big positions, have to defend their homeland.**”  
(interviewee, Melitopol)

“**And this one was taken away, and this one is sitting. Why is that? My son should serve, your son should not. Of course, there are a lot of these questions.**”  
(interviewee, Odesa)

Another acute issue within the framework of mobilisation is the indefinite nature of service and the absence of demobilisation. The participants in the discussion expressed a proposal to strengthen the **information campaign on mobilisation to spread the understanding that conscription and mobilisation do not always mean work “at zero” [on the front line – ed.]**. Therefore, it is necessary to work with communities in the context of informing them and increasing their motivation to join the Defence Forces to ensure the security of Ukraine:

“**That’s why it should be, if we are talking about how to fix it...we have to show people that there are other professions that are lacking, that you don’t just die on the front line.**”  
(interviewee, Kharkiv)

The **perception of those who lived under occupation** depends on whether people were forced to stay in the occupation (due to various circumstances, such as age, health or relatives in need of protection) or whether they stayed there on purpose, having the choice and opportunity to leave. In the first case, the decision to stay was perceived mostly neutrally or with sympathy, as “not everyone has a place to go” or not everyone had the financial means to do so:

“**Even in Donetsk and Luhansk there are still people, patriots of Ukraine, who are waiting for the liberation of these cities. And in Crimea and everywhere. They just don’t have the money. Where can you get \$400 [to be able to pay for evacuation – ed]? There is nowhere to get this money.**”  
(interviewee, Ivano-Frankivsk)

At the same time, the **attitude towards those who stayed in the occupied territories** consciously and purposefully should be defined as suspicious, negative and associated with supporting the enemy, some respondents said:

“**If you stayed in the occupied territory or you live close to the front line and do not want to move, then perhaps you are waiting [for the enemy].**”  
(interviewee, Zhovti Vody)

**“ I have a negative perception of those who stayed and travelled to Crimea, to Moscow, to Red Square, taking pictures there, enjoying life, the ‘zhduniy’ [negative slang for those who are ‘waiting’ for the Russians to come -ed.], those who support the pro-Russian, occupation authorities. ”**  
(interviewee, Dnipro)

Quantitative data show that only 14.5% of respondents agreed that they have difficulties interacting with those who remained under occupation. The attitude towards this group is generally not socially tense, but more than 20% chose the option “difficult to answer,” which indicates rather divided opinions (see Table 10). In some communities that have survived the occupation (e.g. Kherson), interviewees reported no conflicts or misunderstandings between residents:

**“ People become kinder to each other, it’s really true. And realising that we all live here under shelling, that every day can be your last. People still treat each other better, regardless of their social groups. ”**  
(interviewee, Kherson)

As we can see, common challenges in the face of daily existential threats “work” as a factor in levelling social disunity.

**Attitudes towards Ukrainians who have moved abroad** vary considerably, depending on who has left and what kind of behaviour they have adopted. In particular, there is a neutral attitude toward women with children, especially when leaving is associated with the need to ensure the safety of children:

**“ The stories I know are all with children. For safety reasons, it is normal. It is their personal choice. ”**  
(interviewee, Dnipro)

The attitude towards those who “don’t donate and send photos from Rome or elsewhere” is negative, i.e. in situations where refugees “withdraw from the war” and do not participate in the joint contribution to Ukraine’s victory.

During the discussions, it was noted that it does not matter where a Ukrainian is, as long as they continue to help Ukrainians and are included in the context of events, and that those who stay in Europe will be able to build the future of Ukraine:

**“ If you help, you can live wherever you want. ”**  
(interviewee, Kharkiv)

If refugees demonstrate care and interest in living in the community, they are perceived as “our own.” The interviewees were irritated when those who had left advised those who stayed to leave. For the discussion participants, men’s departure abroad, the lack of practices of supporting Ukraine from abroad and the “falling out” of the context of events in Ukraine remain unacceptable:

**“ If you are a man who has gone abroad, it doesn’t matter what age you are, except for pensioners, you may still need to do something. And if you are a man who went abroad illegally under some scheme and does nothing for Ukraine, then for me personally, I cannot consider you a Ukrainian. ”**  
(interviewee, Ivano-Frankivsk)

**“ I don’t communicate with most people who have gone to Europe now, because these people usually get out of context. And when they return, they don’t understand what kind of country it is now. ”**  
(interviewee, Dnipro)

**“ Personally, I am annoyed when a person has left with money, when he lies on the beach and says how tired he is of the heat, of the delicious food. ”**  
(interviewee, Kherson)

Some noted an alienation in communication with relatives and friends who have moved abroad and are losing sensitivity to those who have stayed behind, distancing themselves from the situation in Ukraine:

**“ Recently, just the other day, I had a very unpleasant situation. I have a classmate who went abroad at the beginning of the war, and here she is posting where she bought tickets to Ukraine and signed them. She didn’t even write ‘Ukraine’ just ‘ukr’ with a small letter. We live in different universes. ”**  
(interviewee, Orikhiv)

Participants also said that a large proportion of those who left will not return. These are those who wanted to leave Ukraine before the invasion and those who have nowhere to return to. In addition, by the third year, people have already settled abroad and are unlikely to return, even if they had such intentions. However, concerns were expressed about their future return after the victory, as they may be perceived as having “sat through” the war. This suggests that a possible split could be re-emerging upon their return or at the end of the war:

**“ I think this condemnation will start after the victory, when these people return. That’s then it will be very difficult, when it will be very painful. Both those people who stayed and those who will come will have serious, painful dialogues. ”**  
(interviewee, Cherkasy)

At the same time, the quantitative data do not give grounds for pessimistic forecasts. Only 13.9% of respondents agreed that they may experience difficulties in interacting with those who have moved abroad. More than one in two (59.2%) disagreed that this interaction could be problematic (see Table 10).

As for the **perception of internally displaced persons**, in general, participants expressed the most benevolent and sympathetic attitude towards this group, many of them having experienced this status themselves. Mentions of IDPs were mostly related to providing them with assistance and support, both material and social. The survey results also confirm a rather tolerant attitude towards IDPs. Nearly three-fourths of respondents (73.9%) report no difficulties in interacting with this group. Only 10% believes that there may be misunderstandings in interaction with IDPs. At the same time, the participants’ perception of IDPs varies depending on their experience of direct communication.

During the interviews, it was noted that IDPs often believe that “everyone owes them,” which causes irritation among the locals. Different assessments were also made regarding the region from which IDPs came, where residents of Donetsk and Luhansk regions were identified as socially passive and used to “doing nothing”:

**“ People from different regions behaved very differently. If it was Mariupol, they came, adapted, they needed more time because they were completely in shock. But then they started to build their lives. Kharkiv—when they arrived, they very quickly started either working or doing something, saying they needed help today, and two weeks later they called and offered their help or something. If we talk about Donetsk and Luhansk regions, these are people who are used to freebies and are like, “give it to me,” and do nothing. ”**  
(interviewee, Dnipro)

At the same time, participants often mentioned IDPs in the context of proactive positions, demonstrating their ability to quickly find work and provide for themselves:

**“ People are looking for work themselves, mostly at home. We also had IDPs living in a house here. They searched for rooms themselves through their friends, found them themselves. Mostly they were looking for it themselves. They pay the rent. ”**  
(interviewee, Ivano-Frankivsk)

The **renaming of place names and monuments** is perceived by interviewees as an important and necessary step, but the timing of its implementation in times of war is discussed in communities, primarily because of the need to allocate budget funds that could be used to support the Ukrainian Armed Forces:

“**It seems like it’s not the right time to do this now, and it’s a lot of money for everything. We could have put up with it.**”  
(interviewee, Kharkiv)

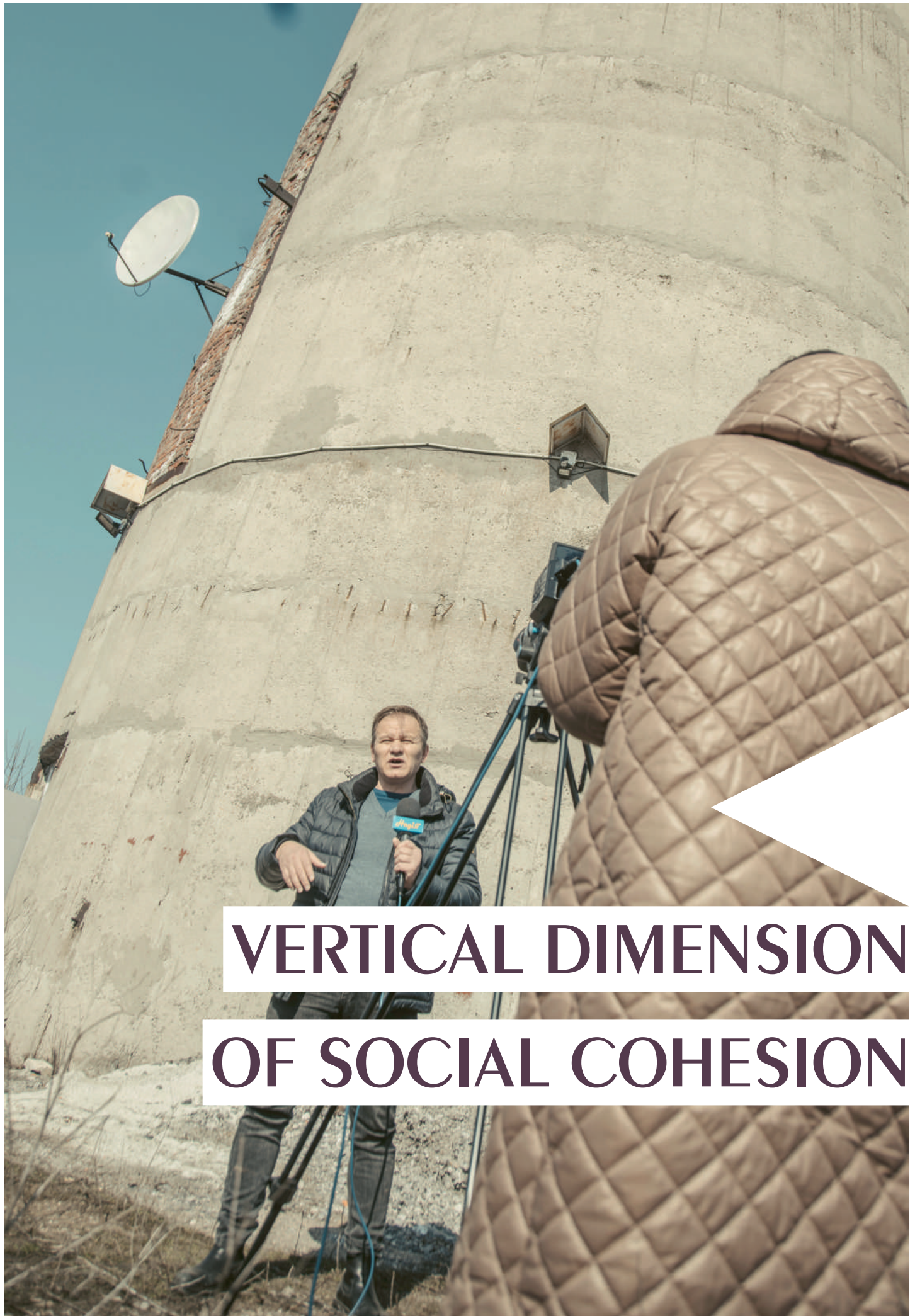
The choice of names for renaming is equally controversial. Some people favour renaming place names after fallen local heroes, while others favour more neutral names so that the village or town “does not turn into a cemetery.” What almost all communities have in common is the relevance of renaming processes, active processes in this direction, and sometimes local resistance at the level of older generations, as they find it difficult to remember new names. Sometimes the renaming process is not transparent enough and is too fast, which causes partial dissatisfaction among residents. There is a demand for active public discussions:

“**I am not satisfied with the approach of the Frankivsk authorities to renaming streets. It’s not a question of whether or not to rename from Soviet names - the answer is definitely yes. But we are renaming from some political figures to other political figures, usually without discussing it with the community. There were some very massive and quick renaming at some point without discussions with the community. That is, why rush to name all the streets after Svoboda or pro-Svoboda figures?**”  
(interviewee, Ivano-Frankivsk)

The **celebration of religious and secular holidays**, which aims to distinguish themselves from Soviet traditions (e.g. Christmas on Dec. 25), generally does not cause disputes or conflicts in communities. This is confirmed by the survey results. The majority of respondents (63.5%) do not have any difficulties or conflicts with those who continue to celebrate Christmas on Jan. 7.<sup>3</sup> Only 13.5% rather or completely agreed that there may be difficulties, and 16.8% somewhat agreed and disagreed (see Table 10). Many interviewees noted that local people are adapting to the new dates, some celebrating Christmas twice. Participants emphasised that this transition takes time, especially for older people. At the same time, this issue usually does not cause misunderstandings or conflicts between locals:

“**Well, I mean, there are no disputes between the old way and the new way. If congratulations arrive in a new way for a certain category of citizens, there is a certain category that still congratulates in the old way, but there are no disputes in the community.**”  
(interviewee, Orikhiv)

(3) The discussion of the transition to the Gregorian calendar was brought up even before the start of the full-scale invasion. In 2023, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church announced the transition to the Gregorian calendar, according to which Christmas is celebrated on Dec. 25, not Jan. 7. This is a symbolic gesture of unity with the Western world, which emphasizes distancing from Russian religion, traditions and integration with European ones.



# VERTICAL DIMENSION OF SOCIAL COHESION

One of the important components of social cohesion is the level of interpersonal and institutional trust (see Table 12). According to the survey, respondents have the highest level of trust within their immediate environment. The analysis of the data revealed a tendency for the absolute level of trust to decrease as social ties, from family to community members, become more distant. Thus, according to the survey results, the following people trust completely or mostly trust:

- their family, a total 91.2% of respondents (the level of absolute trust is 81.2%, and mostly trust, 9.9%)
- neighbours, the level of trust is 56.9%
- residents of their community, 43.6%.

The level of trust in civic institutions and volunteer groups is also quite high. Thus, 71.3% of respondents trust volunteers, and 47% trust NGOs.

**Trust in the national media and local media** is more situational and dynamic, as evidenced by the frequency of choosing the alternative “in some ways I trust, in some ways I do not.” Thus, 29.4% of respondents do not trust the national media at all or mostly do not trust it, while 35.1% said they somewhat trust it. An almost equal amount (30.3%) said they trust the national media. The level of trust in local media is higher than in national media, with 38.6% saying they trust them completely or mostly trust them, 36% choosing the answer “somewhat trust, somewhat not,” and 18.5% responding that they do not trust them.

The lowest level of trust was recorded in government institutions, namely:

- The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (parliament) is the least trusted with a total 63.6% of the respondents (absolute distrust 43.4%, and rather distrust 20.2%).
- Every second respondent (54.6%) distrusts the Ukrainian government as whole (35.7% do not trust at all, 18.9% most distrust).

Compared with other institutions of power, the **level of trust in the president** is higher. Thus, 42.5% said they trust the president, while 25.5% responded that they “trust in some things, but don’t trust other things.” A total of 29.4% said they do not trust at all or mostly distrust the president. A third of respondents do not trust the local authorities (32.7%), 33.6% “trust in some things, but don’t trust other things,” and 30% of respondents trust them completely or somewhat trust. The military administration of the region is fully or rather trusted by more than one in three respondents (38.9%), distrusted by 23.8%, and 26.2% indicated that they both trust and distrust it. Thus, the president of Ukraine, military administrations and local authorities are the most trusted.

**Table 12 - Level of interpersonal and institutional trust**

**Rate how much you trust the following individuals and institutions on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 - do not trust at all, 5 - trust completely. (One answer per line)**

	Don't trust at all	Rather distrust	Trust in some things, don't trust in others	Rather trust	Completely trust	It's hard to answer	I don't want to answer
The President of Ukraine	20,9%	8,5%	25,5%	17,9%	24,5%	1,6%	1,0%
Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine	43,4%	20,2%	25,1%	5,8%	2,7%	1,8%	0,9%
Government	35,7%	18,9%	28,9%	9,6%	3,6%	2,3%	0,9%
Local authorities of my community (villages, cities)	19,1%	13,6%	33,6%	18,0%	12,1%	3,0%	0,7%
Military Administration of my region	13,9%	9,9%	26,2%	21,8%	17,1%	10,4%	0,7%
Public organisations	7,0%	5,6%	30,8%	30,7%	16,5%	8,9%	0,5%
Volunteers	3,3%	3,6%	17,8%	30,4%	40,9%	3,6%	0,5%
National Media	16,9%	12,5%	35,3%	19,1%	11,2%	4,5%	0,6%
Local media	8,7%	9,8%	36,0%	24,3%	14,3%	6,4%	0,5%
Your family	1,0%	0,7%	3,6%	9,9%	81,2%	3,0%	0,5%
Your neighbours	5,6%	6,3%	27,0%	26,1%	30,9%	3,7%	0,5%
The residents of your community	3,2%	5,6%	42,2%	27,9%	15,8%	4,8%	0,6%

One of the most frequently mentioned topics that, in the opinion of interviewees, causes conflicts or misunderstandings in communities is the inappropriate use of budget funds by local authorities, when money is spent on “planting flowers” rather than on the needs of the Ukrainian Army. Interviewees noted that they would like to have more information about the distribution of local budget funds, and local authorities in this case should listen to the opinions of the community. Precisely the lack of information and dialogue with civil society most often becomes a key factor in weakening the trust of residents for their local authorities. The local media could play a key role here:

“**The city has these funds, and the region has these funds. They can spend them there. Why are they not spent to the extent needed? To prepare the defence of Kharkiv in two years, so that they understand that they do not need to come here. For me, this is a conflict with the local authorities.**”  
(interviewee, Kharkiv)

“**We don't have any reporting on where the money went. We don't know anything at all, whether we are sponsored by any sponsors. Maybe we have sponsors from abroad, what funds do they provide? Where is the money spent? Maybe not only for humanitarian aid. We are also not asked where these funds could be used. Perhaps it would be possible to find some premises and open schools where children could go at least once a week, or to gather teachers there to teach online. We are not asked about this, and there is no information about where these funds come from, who sponsors us, and so on. Why is this information not available?**”  
(interviewee, Orikhiv)

Opinions on the possibility of residents' influence in the authorities vary considerably. The participants of the interview cited examples of successful interaction with the authorities, similarly criticism of the ability of residents to participate in discussions of plans, take part in government decisions, and implement their civic initiatives.

A fairly small proportion of survey respondents participate in the discussion of their community's problems (sign petitions, participate in public discussions, protests). Thus, every second respondent (50.3%) very rarely and quite rarely participates in public discussions of the problems of their communities. One in five (19.2%) participates in such discussions (see Table. 8) In part, this may be explained by the restrictions imposed by the martial law regime.

The **distribution and receipt of humanitarian aid** has become a source of tension at the local level. The key aspect of dissatisfaction was the distribution of humanitarian aid (the issue of social justice in this regard), and sometimes there were "suspicions" of its theft and subsequent resale with the participation of the authorities:

**“ For example, they give humanitarian aid to Krasnopillia, and it starts on the Internet. ‘Oh, why in Krasnopillia again, and when will they bring it to Rvasne or Slavgorod or a village? and ‘Why did they give something better to someone else and we got worse?’ or ‘They give it to one social group, and I am a third-group disabled person, they didn’t give it to me.’ These are so petty. They are not aimed at disputes between people, but rather disputes between, say, the authorities and ordinary people. It is so small that it is probably not considered a conflict. ”**  
(interviewee, Krasnopillia)

The range of issues that worried community members during the discussions and became sources of conflict included **mobilisation and hostility towards the TCR**. The participants of the discussions gave examples of how local people reacted painfully to the detention of men by the representatives of the TCR in public transport, who, in the opinion of the interviewees, exceeded their authority. The activities of the TCRs are generally perceived to be insufficiently communicated at the local level, and the perceptions of residents are often fuelled by gossip and rumours on the subject.

The distribution of local budget funds, humanitarian aid and the activities of the TCR raise the issue of **social justice**, which is particularly acute in the context of Ukraine's military situation. The existence of double standards or lack of communication related to the public explanation of certain management decisions at various levels contributes to the formation of social distance and prejudice among the local population towards the authorities and their representatives on the ground.



**PERCEPTIONS  
OF COHESION IN  
THE OPINIONS OF GROUP  
INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS**

During group interviews, we asked participants to rate the cohesion in their communities on a five-point scale. The most frequent responses were 3 and 4, with comments that the level of cohesion had noticeably decreased since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. At the same time, it remains higher than it was before the start of the invasion on Feb. 24, 2022. **Increased cohesion occurs as a natural response to danger:**

“**In February to March of 2022, when it all started, it was unbelievable. There were huge queues at the blood transfusion station, everyone was standing in lines, we had to help our wounded brought to the hospital. Everyone was coming with food, clothes. They needed this, they needed that. I will never forget seeing poachers handing out fish.**”  
(interviewee, Kherson)

“**I think now we are a little bit weaker--a 3. And if, God forbid, the situation worsens, the cohesion will be 4 and 5. When there is a very strong threat, people unite.**”  
(interviewee, Odesa)

It is important that cohesion is understood by the participants not so much as an abstract value or a sign of community, but rather as activity, work, something very practical, e.g. **joint mutual actions for the sake of survival and improvement of the community's life**. The manifestations differ from community to community, but most often cohesion is understood as mutually supportive activity. This includes various forms of assistance to the army, neighbours, friends and strangers, fighting against abuses by local authorities, if any, and clean-ups to address specific problems:

“**Cohesion is when people understand and are aware of the issues that need to be addressed and are ready to contribute to solving them.**”  
(interviewee, Cherkasy)

“**Cohesion is really more about teamwork. Let's say a few people come up with an idea that something needs to be done, and then they quickly distribute responsibilities and help, support each other, submit some ideas, and all together they accomplish the common task.**”  
(interviewee, Kherson)

All of these forms of activity can exist as individual practices of individuals, but if they are **shared** (people share an understanding of goals and values, constructive communication within the community arises on this issue, small actions of community members directed at each other) and **common** (widespread), they construct community cohesion.



Ukraine is a  
CAPITAL

OF GREAT  
PEOPLE

**ASSOCIATIONS**

**WITH COHESION**

In the qualitative part of research, we found that the main associations with cohesion include the following:

► help and mutual aid: spending one's own resources to support others, primarily when it is not an obligation (no observers, reduced social control).

► cooperation:

“**For me, cohesion is a sense of unity, that all residents are part of the same community, and a willingness to do something together, first of all, to carry out activities aimed at community development.**”  
(interviewee, Krasnopillia)

► the presence of a common goal. In a generalised version, this is “improving life.”

“**These are actions, something we do to make our lives better, we help our city residents, so that everyone in general can feel better.**”  
(interviewee, Izium)

► common values:

“**It's about something in common, unity around something - either a goal or how we see the future of our community tomorrow or in a year. And about what is important to us, what is valuable to us.**”  
(interviewee, Ivano-Frankivsk)

► the speed of response to the problem:

“**Cohesion is when everyone responds to just one call, even on social media, on Facebook. If there is a problem, it comes from different sides and who can do what they can.**”  
(interviewee, Krasnopillia)

► a sense of personal responsibility for events in the community, an active life position:

“**United people, they understand that only together they can survive something.**”  
(interviewee, Izium)

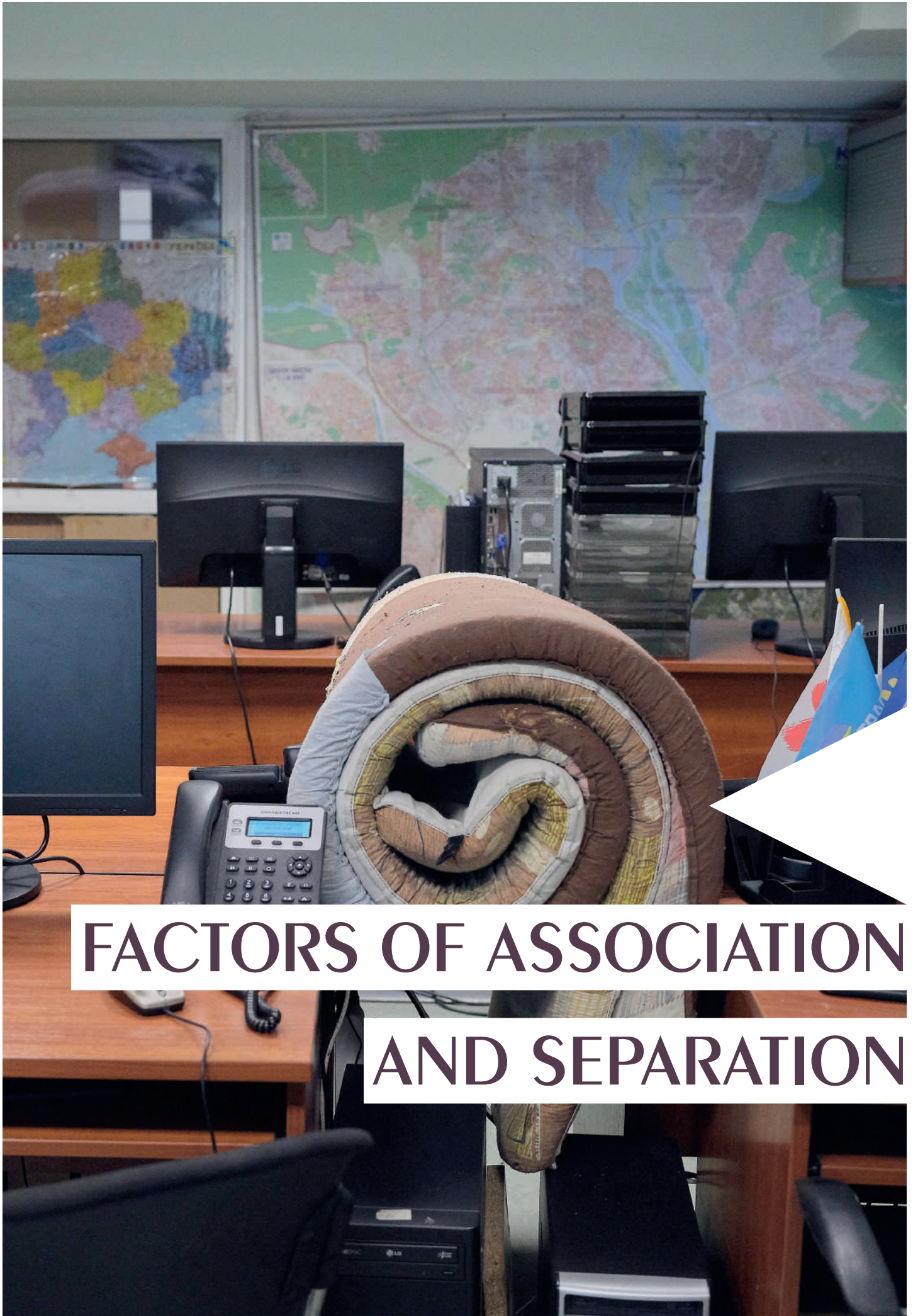
► related phenomena: communication, solidarity, support, unity, compassion, care, efficiency, etc.:

“**Solidarity is when we, realising what a catastrophic situation we all are in, show leniency to some moments, provide assistance, take something away from ourselves in order to show this solidarity, because we understand that everyone can be in this situation.**”  
(interviewee, Sloviansk)

The discussion of cohesion in the focus-group interviews always showed a positive perception of it. Also, our research found that cohesion as participation in joint actions or even just observing them is apparently accompanied by a **significant emotional uplift** (probably because of the sense of belonging). For example, participants emotionally recall the beginning of the full-scale invasion, when they experienced fear and confusion, but had a peak level of cohesion.

Now, in 2024, according to the interviewees, cohesion has weakened due to emotional fatigue or irritation but remains at the level of individual small groups (residents of a building, street, volunteer group, etc.). Social cohesion is perceived as a factor in the ability of Ukrainians to resist the enemy, so its weakening causes some disappointment and fear:

“**There is no time to fight, no time to find out all this. We'll figure it out later. When the war is over, we will figure it out, I am one hundred per cent sure that we will fight.**”  
(interviewee, Bohodukhiv)



# FACTORS OF ASSOCIATION AND SEPARATION

To identify factors that **strengthen and weaken social cohesion**, in the qualitative part of our research we asked what unites or divides community residents. Quite often, interview participants mentioned components of cohesion (for example, volunteering or helping the army, mutual respect, mutual assistance, trust in neighbours). Factors that promote unification included: a common goal (in particular, community reconstruction), common problems (war, garbage, corruption, etc.), common expectations (victory), common assessments (negative attitude towards Russia, positive attitude towards their town/village).

**Factors of cohesion disruption:** Inequality (primarily material), lack of communication with the authorities and between people, closedness of the authorities, alienation of the community from decision-making processes and information, corruption, low social activity of residents, personal traits (envy, dishonesty, unwillingness to reconcile), different positions on politics, language, religion, etc., including quarrels on social media, rumours, propaganda, general mental stress, loss of faith in a bright future:

“ **Unhappy people, in any case, for them everything is still wrong.** ”  
(interviewee, Velyka Pysarivka)

The factors of separation primarily affect the mechanisms of community functioning as a social community. Thus, the war is not only a traumatic experience, but also a reason for the physical separation of people (some left, some stayed), which partially disrupted or changed communication:

“ **For some reason, I have the impression that many people would never come back if we rebuilt Bakhmut. It takes time, and people get used to their homes.** ”  
(interviewee, Bakhmut)

The most powerful factor for rapid amalgamation is **the presence of immediate danger**, a threat to the existence of the community. When this occurs, it activates cohesion at the level of society, when people are ready to help everyone who belongs to it. Here we see a formula for manifesting cohesion as a “response to a common threat”:

“ **Previously, as I noticed from donations and collections, people were very united when there was a lot of shelling** ”  
(interviewee, Kharkiv)

“ **If there is a reason--a reason to unite, a big reason will come from outside. People will unite, and everything will be fine again.** ”  
(interviewee, Krasnopillia)

Instead, the high level of individual existential threat to a particular person forces him or her to focus efforts primarily on himself or herself and loved ones, which disrupts cohesion at the level of society.

**Cohesion agents** are formal and informal community leaders, people with high authority and/or the right to make decisions that affect the quality of life of others. The most frequent mention in this list is of the **authorities**, both in a positive and negative sense - if the authorities do not make any effort to build cohesion, it either dissipates or the community begins to oppose the authorities:

“ **When you see that the same road repairs is being done, but it is done so that in the spring there will be something to repair again. In the autumn, it is done poorly, and you realise that our money, our taxes are invested there. When you see and drive through these pot holes, it causes a kind of apathy. You think: When will you finally do it properly?** ”  
(interviewee, Mezhova)

““ *It depends very much on the leader. If the head of the community is already setting up the community, the whole community will be more united.* ””  
(interviewee, Lyman)

““ *We do not vote for something in elections, but rather against someone.* ””  
(interviewee, Odesa)

**Journalists** also play an important role in constructing cohesion, as they are responsible for raising public awareness, shedding light on government activities, and ultimately spreading the values and narratives that are common to the members of a particular community. This helps to maintain constructive cohesion, but the way they present materials and the terms they use can potentially deepen social divides.

**Civic activists** play a significant role in maintaining or breaking down cohesion, setting a common goal and direction for everyone, exercising public control over the actions of the authorities, starting volunteer groups and inspiring others by example:

““ *Proactive people can really untie people into a team or initiative group.* ””  
(interviewee, Pervomaiskyi)



# PRACTICES OF COHESION

Tetiana Litvinova from Ukraine's Espresso.tv working in Hostomel airport. © Lâm Duc Hiên / Agence VU' for Fondation Hirondelle.

In practice, cohesion can take the form of common activities that engage community members in joint “life improvement” activities. Our research has found out that the most common form of cohesion practices in all communities today is **volunteering to help the army**. This can be either collecting money for equipment or participating in its delivery, providing food assistance (baking pies, cooking lunches) or making the equipment for soldiers (weaving camouflage nets, making trench candles).

Participation in volunteering today involves a smaller number of participants compared to the beginning of the full-scale invasion, but remains a fairly common practice, according to informants. In the qualitative research people mentioned fatigue, burnout and lack of resources as the main reasons of less active volunteering:

“**In 2014, there were two or three waves of volunteering. Those who were the first got tired, and the second ones appeared. There are no new waves now.**”  
(interviewee, Dnipro)

“**We already have the illusion of a peaceful life. We are already doing well, you understand? Everyone already has toilet paper, sugar, yeast. We don’t need that anymore.**”  
(interviewee, Chernihiv)

At the same time, volunteering seems to have crystallised, with only those who are most motivated and ready to continue despite obstacles remaining.

Therefore, volunteering is now “quieter” and more targeted, focused on helping specific people (often military personnel from among the community residents):

“**Somewhere there is an urgent need. A boy from our village needs, for example, a helmet—we chipped in and bought it. And we keep on living, each brewing in our own lair.**”  
(interviewee, Chernihiv)

“**There are people who are on their own. Each family is doing something to bring victory closer, preparing something. There are different types of assistance. For example, someone rents out housing, someone can bring hot lunches or something else.**”  
(interviewee, Snihurivka)

The main basis for successful volunteering is confidence in the honesty of volunteers, and the absence of corruption and abuse. Often, participation in volunteering is the basis for a positive perception of a person abroad, especially when such a person helps their community where they are known:

“**People who are trusted, who are known to be working not for their own pocket, but for the good.**”  
(interviewee, Mezhova)

“**I know many of our Ukrainian girls who have travelled abroad and sent parcels here. I personally received parcels and distributed them among those in need, especially children with disabilities.**”  
(interviewee, Chernihiv)

Other recipients of volunteer initiatives include residents of frontline and de-occupied communities, IDPs, people with disabilities, and children:

“**Some things are organised by the city, of course, a lot for children. We go, there is a lot of free stuff for children now.**”  
(interviewee, Kharkiv)

Humanitarian aid is often collected for these categories, and sometimes targeted activities (training, retraining, community service) are provided. There are also initiatives related to animal welfare.

In addition to volunteering, in some communities there are “toloky” (public interest projects), the purpose of which is to clean or improve certain parts of the territory. In some places, such activities have continued even despite the war:

**“ We have always traditionally planted roses in flowerbeds, improved parks. That’s always been there. And even when the war started, people came out together, planted saplings, watered them. When the war started, they continued until it was destroyed. ”**  
(interviewee, Velyka Pysarivka)

**“ We used to clean up the park and the whole beach. All those dissatisfied with our Ukrainian government, so to speak, would come out, and we were united in some way as back then. ”**  
(interviewee, Izium)

There are also **leisure, cultural and sporting events** that allow people to meet and communicate, which increases the level of general trust within the community and strengthens its internal cohesion:

**“ People come together...we wear embroidered shirts (vyshyvankas) on the Day of Vyshyvanka. People are very responsive. It’s very massive. We have many such events. Marathons, challenges, we once painted an embroidered shirts (vyshyvanka). ”**  
(interviewee, Zhovti Vody)

The “dream projects” for communities that were voiced at the focus groups give us an idea of the desired areas of funding to address problems at the local level. They can be divided into the following categories:

1. Strengthening assistance to the military: provision of clothing, weapons, etc.
2. Improvement of ensuring healthcare: increasing funding, re-equipping healthcare facilities, opening rehabilitation facilities, etc.
3. Strengthening assistance to IDPs:

**“ Everything is for the war and for IDPs, because they are also poor. ”**  
(interviewee, Horodok)

4. Increasing the number of “third places,” e.g., opening leisure, education, and joint activities centres for the population, especially young people.
5. Improvement, environmental and socially useful initiatives: landscaping, creation of parks, museums, places of honour for fallen defenders, etc.
6. Increasing the number of targeted projects that would unite people both by specific interests and around more general values - Ukrainian culture, love for their own locality, etc.:

**“ People can be gathered to watch a film - these are small events, but they need to happen. We need a community. ”**  
(interviewee, Bakhmut)

7. Reconstruction, restoration of the destroyed (relevant for the frontline and occupied areas in the future).
8. Addressing specific community problems: ensuring access to quality water, repairing roads, stopping illegal construction, etc.

Some of the projects on this list are already being implemented to some extent by activists or community members, but there is a need for systemic solutions that would allow for financial support of local initiatives, such as participatory budgeting.

At the same time, any project is more effective in strengthening cohesion when it involves not only resources but also efforts, which gives a sense of community and belonging that motivates further activity:

**“ We have united: planting flower beds, flowers...we do something together. We have planted something somewhere. And now spring has come, we've done some shopping in our corner. We're all together. ”**  
(interviewee, Lyman)

Positive and grateful perceptions of **foreign aid** from international funds and **internal aid** from other cities and regions are sometimes tinged with negative experiences of standing in lines for humanitarian aid, communicating with local distribution officials, etc. At the same time, this assistance seems to be more associated with cohesion for those who provide it than for those who receive it, as aid providers make joint efforts and communicate with other members of their community in the process of creating and implementing such a project.



**THOUGHTS**

**ON THE MEDIA**

## THE “YEDYNIY NOVYNY” TELEMARATHON

A common feature of almost all the focused group interviews is a rather sceptical perception of the national telemarathon, which is not a source of information about national news for the vast majority of interviewees. Thus, according to the survey, 42.9% do not follow the national united channel at all. A quarter of the respondents (25.4%) try to follow the news offered by the channel. One third of respondents (34.3%) often follow national media in general (see Table 12). The participants of the research criticised the national telemarathon for a number of reasons, including labelling it “untrustworthy,” “manipulative,” and showing a false “pretty picture”:

**“ I think that not only I, but most people, perceive them in the same way as the ‘telemarathon’ has begun to be perceived. That is, there is a biased reality. There is a certain picture they want to show us. ”**  
(interviewee, Ivano-Frankivsk)

**“ The TV is not true either. We can see that it is not true. And the fact that they show that everything is good... where is it good? We do not see this ‘good,’ we only see that everything is not very good here, but good somewhere else. ”**  
(interviewee, Krasnopillia)

The participants of the discussions were equally critical of the fact that budget funds were spent on the national telemarathon, noting the need to find a new format for presenting national news:

**“ This ‘telemarathon,’ ... I think it is useless. A lot of money is being pumped in, but it doesn’t do any good. We are still not told what is really happening on the front. We are not told about it. We donate, we are already donating anyway. It’s just a promotional show. ”**  
(interviewee, Kherson)

**“ At the time, the Telemarathon was fine, but it probably exhausted itself long ago. I know that a lot of money—crazy money, is allocated to this Telemarathon. Now we need to look for something else. In short, the Telemarathon is outdated. ”**  
(interviewee, Snihurivka)

It was also noted that regional editors feel “pressure” to follow the editorial concept of the national media:

**“ In principle, the regions write what the national media writes but adapting it to their region. These are the same messages, what is positioned in Kharkiv, Chernivtsi, Lviv—it doesn’t matter where, but it all comes from the Yedynyi marafon. ”**  
(interviewee, Kharkiv)

In their perception of the national news, the participants believed there is an overload of information and the need to filter the news in search of reliable information. At the same time, it was noted that there is a lack of transparent information on the internal policies of the government at the national level. There is a demand for clarification of mobilisation processes:

**“ In my opinion, the gap is informational, inefficient and non-transparent. And these mobilisation steps are not explained. There are a lot of such steps—I’m talking about the state authorities—that are unclear, that confuses people, and there are no explanations. ”**  
(interviewee, Lyman)

The interviewees also mentioned the existence of “**information deserts**,” when news from their regions never makes it to the national airwaves. To get news at the national level, residents of these communities watch social media channels, noting that their community is excluded from the national discourse:

“**Sometimes there is no news about Kherson at all, as if Kherson does not exist.**”  
(interviewee, Kherson)

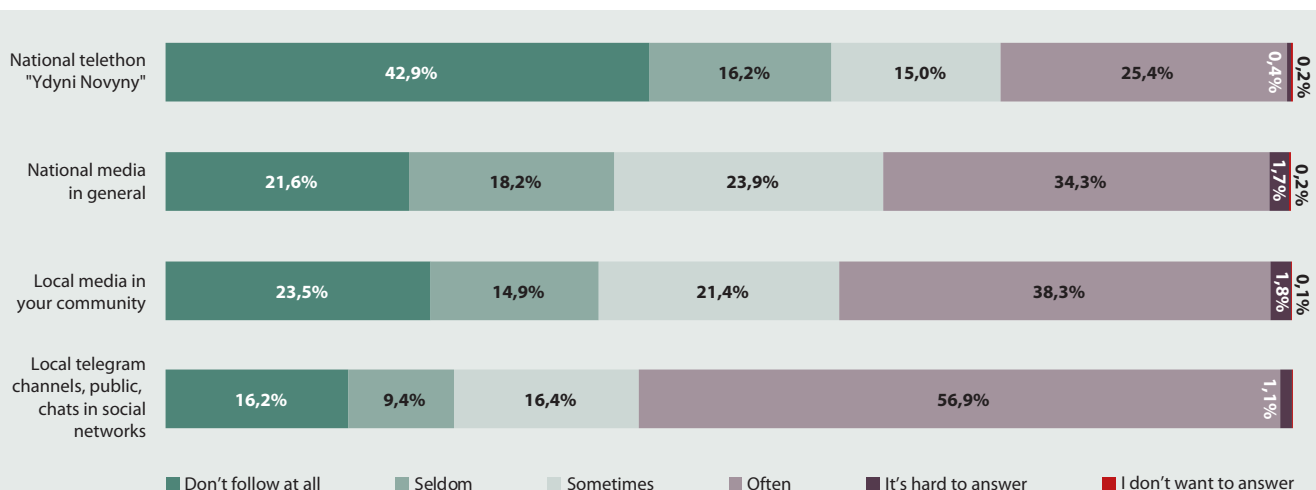
In the perception of national news, opinions were voiced about information overload, the need to filter information, and the demand for positive news.

“**I would like to see some positive news, that Ukraine is perceived somewhere well, somewhere else well. I mean, there should be positive news, because if you constantly put pressure on one point, it will not work out well when we are constantly being poured with negative information**”  
(interviewee, Dnipro)

Some 38.3% of respondents follow the content of local media, while one in four (23.5%) answered that they do not follow at all. Another 36.3% of respondents said the seldom or only sometimes follow local media. The largest number of respondents (56.9%) use local Telegram channels more than all other media resources. While 16.2% said they do not follow local Telegram channels at all, almost the same number of respondents (16.4%) noted that they sometimes follow them (see Chart 13).

**Chart 13 - Tracking information content of national and local media**

**How often do you follow?**

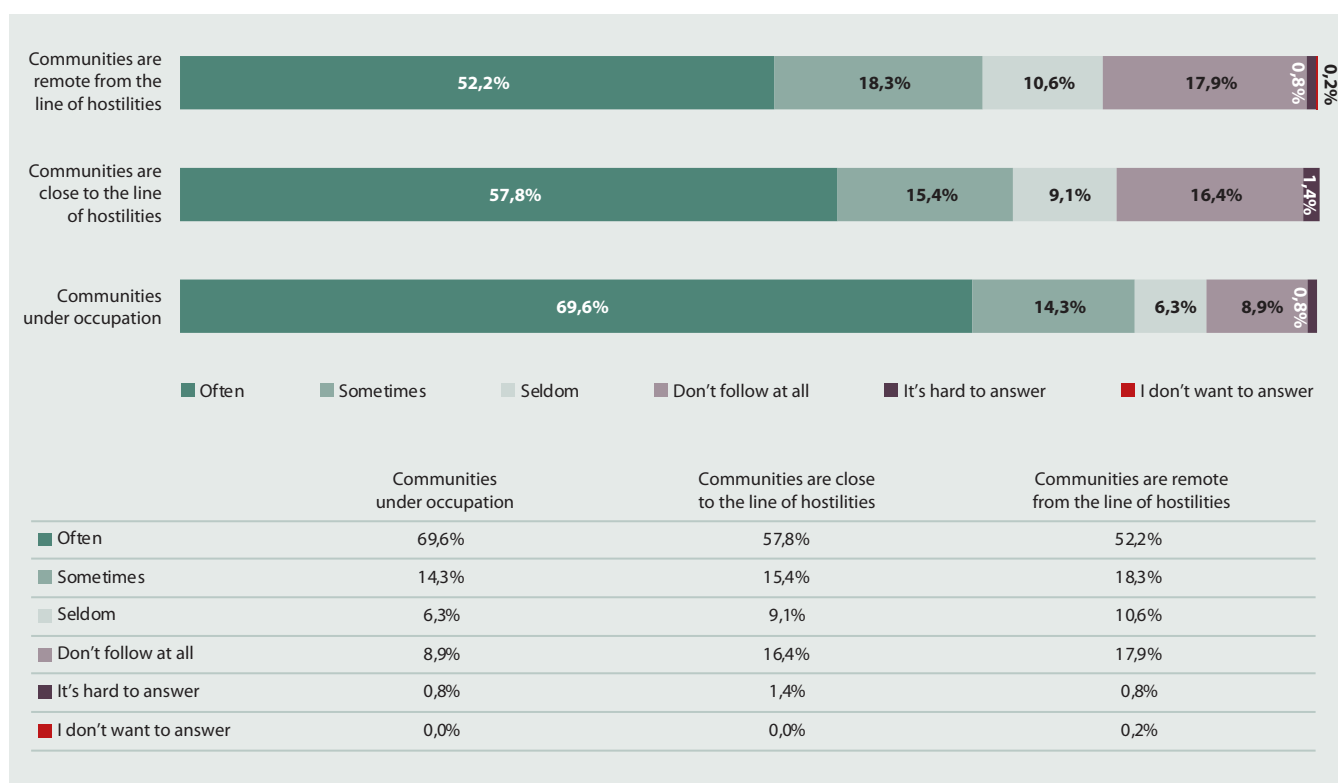


	Local telegram channels, public, chats in social networks	Local media in your community	National media in general	National telethon "Ydnyi Novyny"
■ Don't follow at all	16,2%	23,5%	21,6%	42,9%
■ Seldom	9,4%	14,9%	18,2%	16,2%
■ Sometimes	16,4%	21,4%	23,9%	15,0%
■ Often	56,9%	38,3%	34,3%	25,4%
■ It's hard to answer	1,1%	1,8%	1,7%	0,4%
■ I don't want to answer	0,1%	0,1%	0,2%	0,2%

The distribution of answers to this question is the reverse of the typical pattern, with extreme positions being more popular than the neutral options of “seldom” and “often.” This supports the general sense of fatigue toward news expressed by focus group participants and may also suggest a growing trend in Ukrainian society of deliberately rejecting excessive media and social network consumption. This shift is also partially “restoring” social connections from online to offline interactions. For the media, this will mean the need to look for other news reporting formats. The trend of abandoning online communication is related to the fact that Ukrainians are under constant stress from the war. Respondents try to reduce the information load, which includes reduction in the use of social networks.

**Chart 13.1 - Tracking information content of local media depending on the place of residence**

**How often do you follow?**



When it comes to receiving information from local Telegram channels and social media chats, there is a discrepancy in the answers of respondents living in different types of communities, close or far from the front line. Thus, 69.6% of respondents from communities under occupation are likely to follow local Telegram channels, while in communities far from the front line, about half (52.2%) noted that they often follow social networks.

## TOPICS WORTH WRITING ABOUT MORE: INFORMATION REQUESTS “ON THE GROUND”

A separate set of questions about local media activities focused on identifying the topics that local audiences would like more information on. Understanding these topics is important not only from the point of view of content development, but also from the strategic perspective of attracting new media audiences and retaining existing ones, as well as building trust in them.

The topics that should be covered more are related to good news, positive information that inspires and allows people to escape from the problems of life in wartime:

**“ I already want a little bit of good news. We often get news that this person killed that person, that person was injured, that person was robbed, scammers, and so on. I understand that it shouldn't be that everything is fine; that the war is somewhere far away. No, I don't want that. I want honest, fair information. And a little bit of good news, because our people are running after some scandal. They are running there with some kind of extravaganza, some kind of emotions must be strong. I want to read something good: that a soldier helped his pregnant wife get to the hospital, that elderly people were helped to cross the road somewhere, that students gathered there and helped pensioners, that a community of people gathered there and helped the military. That is, I want to read about good dedications, good initiatives, good projects. ”**  
(interviewee, Odesa)

The survey data also confirms the information request for receiving “positive news” (any topics about something positive, good, inspiring). Such an answer was chosen by the largest number of respondents (69%) (see Table. 13). When assessing the level of interest in local media information content, the majority of respondents (64.2%) would like to receive more information about the results of anticorruption investigations (see Table 14). This field is extremely relevant for media coverage.

**Table 14 - Request to local media for information saturation of content**

**Rate, please, how interested you are in receiving information about the following local topics and news from the local media (one answer per line)**

	I'm not interested in	There is enough Information	I'm interested in	It's hard to answer	I don't want to answer
Stories about local volunteers, defenders	9,5%	28,8%	59,1%	2,2%	0,4%
Coverage of local government activities	18,3%	29,9%	48,4%	3,0%	0,5%
Coverage of how local budget funds are allocated	21,5%	16,6%	56,8%	4,6%	0,5%
Coverage of the results of anti-corruption investigations	16,9%	15,6%	64,2%	3,0%	0,3%
"Positive news" (any topics about something positive, good, inspiring))	7,0%	19,7%	70,2%	3,0%	0,1%
News about local development (business operations, new production and construction)	20,2%	22,3%	53,9%	3,4%	0,3%
News about culture, leisure, education and sports	17,9%	25,7%	53,8%	2,3%	0,3%
Interesting stories of the native land, local history	11,2%	21%	66%	1,5%	0,3%
Human stories of ordinary people in your community	17,0%	25,6%	54,6%	2,6%	0,2%
Covering the stories of internally displaced persons	24,6%	27,7%	43,7%	3,6%	0,3%
Highlighting the stories of refugees from your community who have gone abroad	38,9%	23,8%	33,3%	3,6%	0,5%

There is a high demand for stories about the history of the region, the city, and about fellow countrymen, as well as for positive, inspiring events in the history of the native land:

“ ***It was interesting to read about history. It happens, but not that often. The stories of ordinary people, success stories, their ordinary lives. Perhaps, to defuse this tension that exists in the information space.*** ”  
 (interviewee, Krasnopillia)

**““ Some farm grows some things and manages to export them, and they write about it. Or some person has an idea, they make it there, they write about it. Or a community has attracted a grant or had an interesting, good experience of using it, and they write about it. And you can tell from this media that it’s true, because they don’t write about some super victories, they write about small things. But it’s as if when you read this kind of news, the world seems more optimistic and that something depends on you. If others have succeeded on a small scale, then I can do it. ””**  
(interviewee, Kamianske)

The history of their native land is of interest to 66% of respondents, and they would like to learn more about it (see Table 14). Stories about local volunteers and defenders are of interest to 59.1% of respondents. Just over half (54.6%) of survey participants also noted that they are interested in the stories of ordinary community residents.

It was also suggested to write about topics related to everyday life that distract from the war, such as promotions in local shops, announcements of cultural events and entertainment for children:

**““ I found out that there is an oasis for children on the left bank, they can swim there. It’s like a water park, the water splashes. I have a younger child who is nine years old. I found out from my neighbours. I have never seen anything on the internet, nothing has come to my attention. ””**  
(interviewee, Kamianske)

According to the results of the quantitative survey, about half (53.8%) of the participants is interested in news about culture, leisure, education and sports (see Table 14).

At the same time, in some communities, interviewees expressed a desire to write more about the hostilities to remind residents that the war is ongoing and to provide also more specifics about the course of events and risks for the community:

**““ The media forgot a little bit. Perhaps they don’t want to burden people with another reminder that we have been living in war for many years. And if there are no hostilities in Chernihiv specifically, in the city itself, not on the border, it does not mean that the war is over. ””**  
(interviewee, Chernihiv)

Many participants also expressed interest in topics about servicemen, fellow countrymen, stories of active volunteers or just interesting personalities from the area:

**““ I think we need to tell the story of the defenders. If we’re talking about Kharkiv, these are Kharkiv residents, people who are now defending the city and telling and motivating people to keep fighting. Unfortunately, our military have to motivate people in addition to standing on the front line. ””**  
(interviewee, Kharkiv)

It is also interesting to learn about those who need help:

**““ The newspaper could also be a good moment of unity to talk about the needs of people in the community. I’m not even talking about the military, I’m not talking about the victory, I’m talking about pensioners. Indeed, people here respond very quickly, but they do not know about the need. Perhaps, they hear a story of a grandmother who lived to be 92 years old but needs a simple refrigerator. The story of a person who moves around in a wheelchair, for example, but there is no one to take this person to the hospital or, perhaps, to Sumy for some needs. So when there is a story about something and then a call to action, it would be a very important moment of community cohesion. I mean, I would be interested in something like this, when I read and understand that in the end I can help in some way or find a person who can help me. ””**  
(interviewee, Krasnopillia)

The increase in news about volunteering in the information space is relevant:

**“ We are working to close the hostel here. For the whole time we’ve been working, there hasn’t been a single journalist here since 8am, just not a single one. We need to have this activity covered. ”**  
(interviewee, Kharkiv)

There is a demand for information about the activities of the authorities who make important decisions for the community, using the budget and procurement:

**“ More public information on procurement by the authorities, how much money was officially allocated? When there was a scandal with eggs and bread, there were prices. That is, a list of how much was procured and the initial cost. ”**  
(interviewee, Ivano-Frankivsk)

**“ It motivates people, because people see what someone is doing, what the government is doing, and we will do when the government does. I think that such motivation has a very good effect on people, and this is also the task of journalists, so journalists should encourage them to fulfil their social responsibilities. ”**  
(interviewee, Dnipro)

**“ I believe that it would be very important if local authorities made their current plans public. The perspective is what matters here. Current plans at least for a quarter, on a monthly basis. And then I would say: we pay this, we managed to solve that, we specifically helped so many people. Even if not specifically, but at least name the houses - they did this in this house, and people returned there, and we solved their problems, helped them, and provided financial assistance to someone there, because they need treatment, and maybe in the regional centre, private treatment and so on. ”**  
(interviewee, Izium)

When assessing the level of interest in information content of local media, 56.8% of respondents noted that they would be interested in learning information about how budget funds are distributed, and 48.4% are interested in covering the activities of local authorities. Such a rather significant level of interest in the activities of the authorities is a marker of the high demand of the public for civil control, supervision over the functioning of these bodies. (see Table 14).

The coverage of examples of punishment for lawbreakers and corrupt officials was also highlighted. Informing not only about the crime, but also about the results of the investigation and punishment, as well as requesting anticorruption investigations:

**“ If some people were brought to justice in public, I think that a certain percentage of people would see it and understand not to do the same. ”**  
(interviewee, Odesa)

In some communities, there is a demand for information on the prospects for the development and reconstruction of communities and Ukraine as a whole:

**“ More information about what is planned in our community. How to restore this community. ”**  
(interviewee, Lyman)

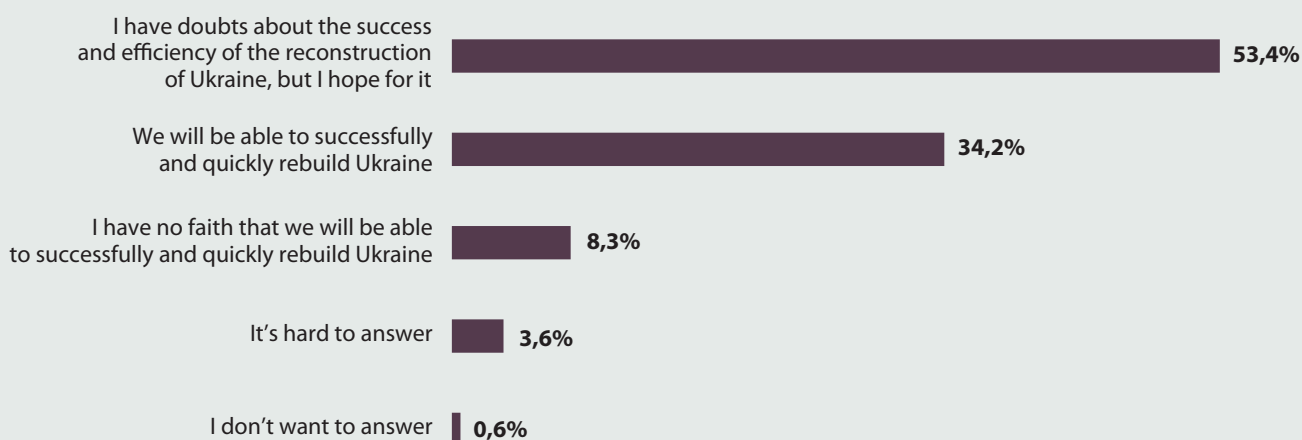
**“ It’s interesting because I follow the issues of reconstruction through the forum and my work. And these are really big projects, and there are already international organisations and international investors who are ready and who will restore. ”**  
(Interviewee, Kharkiv)

“ There is not enough news about any plans for the future to understand what the prospects are, where we are going. Not what has already happened, what has already been done, but what is planned. ”  
 (interviewee, Mykolaiv)

When asked about their expectations for Ukraine’s reconstruction, 53.4% of quantitative survey participants said they had doubts about the success and speed of Ukraine’s reconstruction, but hoped for it. One third of respondents (34.2%) are confident that they will be able to successfully and quickly rebuild Ukraine. But 8.3% do not believe in the success of the reconstruction (see Chart 15). Thus, cautious optimism dominates in the minds of Ukrainians, with the hope of a quick recovery.

**Chart 15 - Expectations from the reconstruction of Ukraine**

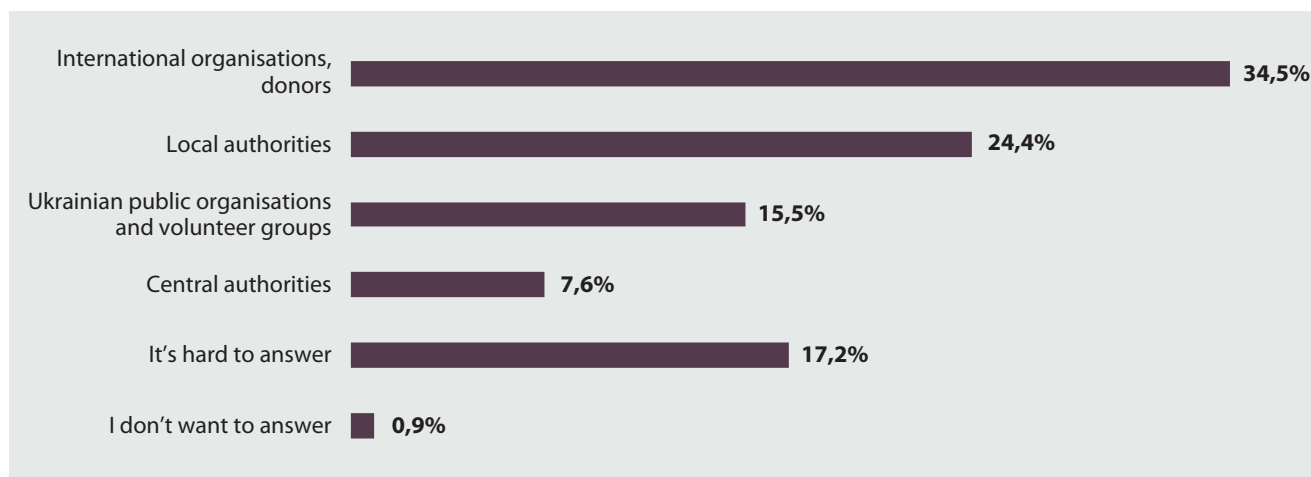
**What are your expectations for the reconstruction of Ukraine?**



According to 34.5% of respondents, international organisations should manage the reconstruction budgets for successful reconstruction. Only a quarter (24.4%) of survey participants trust local authorities with the disposal of reconstruction. Public organisations would be entrusted with the performance of this function by 15.5%. The share of those who would entrust the distribution of “reconstructive” funds to central authorities is much smaller, with only 7.6% of respondents choosing this answer. It is worth noting that a fairly high percentage of those respondents (17.2%) could not answer this question. This may indicate a low level of public awareness of this issue, a low level of involvement of Ukrainians in public discussions and political participation, as well as the (temporary) irrelevance of this issue when the war is still ongoing (see Chart 16).

### Chart 16 - Management of reconstruction budgets

In order for the reconstruction of Ukraine to take place successfully, the reconstruction budgets are mainly to dispose of...



Among the topics that are worth writing more about, there is a demand for an explanation of legislative changes in “plain” language:

“**People really need to know about changes in legislation, but how to explain it in simple language?**”  
(interviewee, Snihurivka)

The availability of sufficient news, especially about local development plans, is an important factor in counteracting the spread of rumours:

“**We only hear everything through rumours and then find out. Because even the community does not report what they have done, that they want to close schools, kindergartens, or a hospital is closing. This is not covered anywhere, we learn it from some rumours.**”  
(interviewee, Orikhiv)

More than half of the participants (53.9%) in the quantitative survey was interested in receiving information from the local media about local development news, business operations, new production and construction of new infrastructure facilities in the community.

Local media coverage of stories about internally displaced persons and refugees from the community who have gone abroad is the least popular among respondents, with 43.7% and 33.3% respectively, saying this topic is interesting for coverage in their communities.



# CONCLUSIONS

Lviv-based journalist Olana Vysokolian working to organise shelter for relocated journalists and their families © Lâm Duc Hiên / Agence VU' for Fondation Hironnelle.

**Changes in communities** since the beginning of the full-scale invasion are largely determined by their geographical location, that is proximity to the contact line, and the presence or absence of occupation forces. Frontline communities have experienced an outflow of residents, destruction of infrastructure and buildings, unemployment, etc. Communities more distant from the front face problems such as the need to provide IDPs with housing and assistance.

**Social conflicts in communities** are primarily driven by property and legal inequality, the misuse of budget funds, denial or abuse of humanitarian aid, and other factors that undermine community unity. These conflicts often arise from tensions between those with access to power and resources and those without.

It is important that cohesion is understood by the participants not so much as an abstract value or a sign of community, but rather as activity, work, something very practical: **Joint mutual actions for the sake of survival and improvement of the community's life.**

**The horizontal dimension of social cohesion** is represented by a high level of civic and local identity. A significant number of respondents are proud to be residents of a particular community and are ready to actively contribute to the reconstruction of their community and Ukraine as a whole. These proactive attitudes are also reflected in the relevant practices of civic activism. The research shows that helping others, charity and volunteering are present in the daily activities of the vast majority of respondents. Although the level of altruism in the daily life of communities today is lower than at the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the surge in mutual care and assistance at the start, that is from February to March 2022, has generally had a positive impact on the relationships of people in the surveyed communities.

**The results of the research** demonstrate that the “classic split” between the rich and the poor is acutely felt by Ukrainians under martial law. The next in the order of decreasing tension are interactions between those who have been affected by the war (lost their homes, loved ones, jobs, or have relocated) and those who have not; and between those who have military personnel in their families and those who have no one on the front. At the same time, the majority of respondents reported no tension between people who speak Russian and Ukrainian, and between locals and internally displaced persons and refugees. This data suggests that life under martial law has actualised the emergence of new social divisions in Ukrainian communities related to the “uneven” impact of the war on Ukrainian families, while old divisions between rich and poor have been exacerbated. At the same time, the perception of such social groups as IDPs, refugees and Russian-speaking Ukrainians does not cause potential tensions at the local level.

**The main split today** is determined by political position: attitudes towards those who hold pro-Russian views are very negative. Attitudes towards those who remained living in the occupation vary depending on the circumstances: They are understood and/or helped if they hold pro-Ukrainian views and condemned if they deliberately severed their ties with Ukraine. Attitudes towards men who avoid military service are the most ambiguous and include a full range of perceptions. Attitudes towards decommunisation are positive, but the mechanisms for its implementation raise questions. Attitudes towards the change of the calendar of religious worlds are neutral, while attitudes towards the Moscow Patriarchate are negative.

**The vertical dimension of social cohesion** is represented by a predominantly low level of trust in the central government and a slightly higher “credit of trust” in the President, military administrations and local authorities. The involvement of respondents in public discussions at the level of their communities is rather low, but this may be explained by the restrictions associated with the legal regime of martial law. The respondents’ demand for monitoring the actions of local authorities is high, which is manifested in the need to receive information on the distribution of local budget funds, coverage of the results of anticorruption investigations, and, in general, more frequent and extensive information about the activities of local authorities.

**Cohesion is understood as an active characteristic of the community**, an active focus on improving life. It is primarily about mutual assistance, having a common goal and the same understanding of it, and active joint work to achieve it. A common feature for all communities is the increase in cohesion at the beginning of the full-scale invasion and its gradual decline as they get used to the realities of war (at least in the interviewees’ estimates). The same applies to volunteering, in particular, aimed at helping the Armed Forces of Ukraine (the main area of volunteer activity today). According to the interviewees, not only volunteering, but also other local and specific collective practices help maintain the level of community cohesion, as they provide reasons for communication and are effective in terms of results.

**The media are perceived as bodies of public control and initiators of discussion** and are therefore recognised as an important agent of cohesion. At the same time, almost every second respondent does not follow the information content of the national telethon “Yedyniy Novyny” at all or rarely follows it, preferring information from local Telegram channels and social media chats. There is a demand for unbiased and complete coverage of events in the country, including at the local level, positive inspirational news, identity formation (both Ukrainian and local), and anticorruption investigations with clear, visible results. It is also important to receive information from local media about the stories of ordinary community members and local volunteers and defenders. To a lesser extent, respondents are interested in receiving information about the stories of internally displaced persons and refugees from the community who have gone abroad.

**An important conclusion of the research** is that, despite the numerous challenges of living under martial law, respondents’ answers are dominated by optimism about their own future and the success of Ukraine’s reconstruction. This theme can serve as a basis for strengthening social cohesion at both the national and local levels through common practices of participation in national reconstruction processes.

## FOR MORE INFORMATIONS

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*During the bombing alert, two teenagers take shelter in the wall of the fort in the center of Lviv.* © Lâm Duc Hiên / Agence VU' pour Fondation Hirondelle.

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*Olexandr, a cameraman for Nadiya TV, films a food distribution near Pervomaisky.* © Florent Vergnes / Fondation Hirondelle.



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