

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

of the Assessment report on the implementation of a human rights-based approach at the local and regional level in Ukraine

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In light of the ongoing war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, the *Assessment report* analyses the implementation of human rights-based approaches at the local and regional levels, focusing on the immediate impact of the war and the complexity of the national reconstruction process. While the war continues to cause destruction and disrupt governance in many regions, reconstruction is taking place in liberated areas and in areas affected by incoming strikes. These dual challenges require tailored human rights strategies to address both the immediate needs created by the conflict and the longer-term goals of rebuilding communities and infrastructure.

The aim of the *Assessment report* was to assess the role and capacity of local and regional authorities and other stakeholders in the promotion and protection of human rights, to identify gaps and challenges, and to propose recommendations.

The objectives of the *Assessment report* were:

- to assess the integration of human rights standards into the work of local and regional authorities, focusing on monitoring mechanisms, the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, and the involvement of vulnerable groups such as youth, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, women and veterans;
- reviewing co-operation practices between local and regional authorities, their national associations and the Office of the Ombudsperson, identifying gaps and proposing recommendations to strengthen synergies, improve governance and ensure compliance with international human rights frameworks.

The study was conducted over a period of five months, from August to December 2024.

Thematical conclusions and recommendations featured in this *Assessment report* highlight both progress and continuing challenges in the promotion and protection of human rights at the local and regional level in Ukraine. The main conclusions and recommendations include, but are not limited to, the following.

1. Increased awareness of human rights among local and regional authorities

Despite the challenges posed by the war, there is a growing awareness among local and regional authorities of their role in upholding human rights. This is reflected in the growing number of territorial community-driven initiatives and partnerships with international organisations.

Recommendations

To bridge the gap between the *de facto* human rights activities of local and regional authorities and their *de jure* recognition, national legislation could explicitly mandate these responsibilities in this sphere. In addition, guidelines and awareness-raising campaigns could help local and regional authorities to understand the importance of their everyday work and its impact on the promotion and protection of human rights, making the link between their activities and human rights outcomes more evident.

2. Structural and resource constraints faced by local and regional authorities

Local and regional authorities face significant structural and resource challenges, including outdated legal frameworks, insufficient funding, and a lack of trained staff. These issues lower their ability to effectively implement human rights-based approaches.

International organisations play a crucial role in filling resource gaps and providing technical expertise. However, the heavy reliance on external funding raises questions about the long-term sustainability of these initiatives.

Recommendations

Given Ukraine's limited domestic resources, it is essential to train local and regional authorities to effectively secure international funding and partnerships. This approach ensures the sustainability of human rights initiatives while empowering authorities to match international resources with local priorities.

3. Engaging vulnerable groups

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has highlighted the significant challenges faced by vulnerable groups such as youth and women, and has greatly increased the number of vulnerable groups such as veterans and their families, as well as IDPs and returnees. These groups are vital to local self-government and post-war reconstruction, but face barriers including limited access to housing, legal aid, social services and mental health support. Addressing their specific needs is key to promoting inclusive recovery and building community resilience.

The assessment highlights the importance of tailor-made programmes for these groups, which are often underfunded despite their critical role. Local and regional authorities are encouraged to prioritise initiatives that promote their active participation in decision-making and provide targeted support. The report contains specific sections examining the specific needs and priorities of each of these four groups.

Recommendations

Given the ongoing war in Ukraine and the particular challenges faced by vulnerable groups, it is essential to expand and tailor targeted programmes for youth, women, veterans and their families, as well as IDPs and returnees. These programmes should not only empower these groups to participate in governance, but also provide them with critical support, such as access to housing, legal aid, and social security. Strengthening outreach efforts is critical to informing these groups of

available resources and services, and to empowering them to navigate the complexities of war and displacement by providing both opportunities for engagement and direct assistance.

4. Use of the Register of Damage

The Register serves as an important tool for documenting violations and pursuing reparations in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine. However, its use at the local and regional level is limited by a lack of capacity and awareness. A lack of training in international law among local and regional authorities' lawyers and a lack of public understanding of the Register's purpose are weakening its effectiveness. Raising awareness and providing targeted information support are crucial to enhancing its role in promoting accountability and justice.

Recommendations

In order to ensure the effective use of the Register of Damage, it is crucial to provide ongoing support and information to local and regional authorities. It is recommended that quarterly updates be provided on the dynamics of the Register and new developments, such as additional categories of damage, updates on the reporting process and any procedural changes. These updates should be provided in the form of easily accessible infographics containing statistical data and key findings that are both clear and actionable.

5. Need for co-ordinated efforts and consultation among different national stakeholders

The fragmented implementation of policies at local and regional level highlights the urgent need for better co-operation between stakeholders, including their national associations and the Office of the Ombudsperson. Local and regional authorities generally maintain effective communication with their national associations and use these partnerships to address common challenges. Local and regional authorities may not always be fully aware of the crucial role they play in guaranteeing and implementing human rights in Ukraine. As a result, they may not always see the need or relevance of engaging with the Office of the Ombudsperson. Raising awareness and promoting dialogue could help to highlight the benefits of closer co-operation in this area. Bridging these gaps requires targeted capacity-building initiatives and building trust to enable constructive dialogue and improve co-operation.

Recommendations

To improve co-operation with national associations of local and regional authorities, these associations can provide rapid response support systems and assist local and regional authorities in accessing international funding by providing specialised training and facilitating partnerships, while promoting data sharing and exchange of best practices to strengthen human rights protection at the local level.

To strengthen co-operation with the Office of the Ombudsperson, regular structured meetings might be established between local and regional authorities and the Office of the Ombudsperson, with joint training on human rights issues in wartime and the development of a joint monitoring framework to address violations effectively.

6. Role of the national associations of local and regional authorities

National associations in Ukraine play an important role in supporting their members – the local and regional authorities, but their potential to promote a human rights-based approach is underdeveloped.

The influence of national associations on local and regional authorities in Ukraine is evident, but their potential to promote a human rights-based approach remains underdeveloped. Some national associations show greater commitment to human rights issues, partly due to co-operation with regional Ombudsperson offices, which raise awareness and often use the human rights-based approach. Others have less institutional support, which makes it more difficult to integrate the human rights-based approach into local self-government. Raising awareness and promoting co-operation at different levels could help to bridge these gaps and strengthen the role of national associations in promoting a human rights-based approach more widely.

Increased co-operation with the Ombudsperson and international organisations is essential to ensure policy coherence and effective human rights protection at all levels of government.

Recommendations

National associations could strengthen their co-operation with local and regional authorities by establishing rapid response support systems to address emerging challenges. They could also prioritise facilitating access to international funding through targeted training and partnerships that will enhance the capacity of local and regional authorities to implement human rights-based projects. Promoting data sharing and the exchange of best practices will further strengthen local self-government and the protection of human rights.

In addition, national associations are advised to focus on developing specialised programmes that address key human rights issues, such as the rights of IDPs, gender equality and accessibility for persons with disabilities. These initiatives could strengthen the capacity of local and regional authorities to address human rights challenges and ensure that human rights remain at the centre of national policy discussions.

In addition, national associations can build the capacity of local and regional authorities by providing targeted training on human rights, grant writing and project management, especially because most of the Ukrainian territorial communities are under-resourced.

Finally, regarding the niche of the national associations, the incorporation of human rights into the core mandate of these associations could foster more resilient and inclusive local self-government, ensuring long-term impact in Ukraine's public administration.

7. Co-ordination in human rights and governance: local and regional authorities, national associations and the Ombudsperson

The findings underline the urgent need for improved co-ordination between national associations, local and regional authorities and the Office of the Ombudsperson to ensure effective human rights protection and local self-government.

While the Ombudsperson's regional offices play an important role in monitoring the rights of vulnerable populations, their efforts can be strengthened by support from national associations of local and regional authorities, which can help advocate for policy reforms and integrate human rights into national debates. A lack of systematic communication between national associations and central government makes the effective implementation of human rights standards at the local and regional level more difficult – and the Ombudsperson can facilitate this issue.

In addition, local and regional authorities often view the Ombudsperson as a control mechanism rather than a partner, creating a need for confidence-building and targeted capacity development.

Recommendations

To strengthen co-operation between the Ombudsperson's office and local/regional authorities, national associations could facilitate clearer channels of communication and co-operative mechanisms. This includes the promotion of joint training programmes, the sharing of resources, and the integration of human rights-based approach into local self-government through collaboration with the Ombudsperson's regional offices.

National associations can support the Ombudsperson's advocacy efforts at the national level to ensure that the human rights-based approach in the local self-government is represented in national policy discussions. Regular engagement with central government, facilitated by the Ombudsperson, will ensure that local perspectives are included in policy and legislative reforms.

In partnership with the Ombudsperson, national associations could focus on capacity building by providing local and regional authorities with the targeted training on human rights, grant writing and project management in the human rights area. These efforts will enable local and regional authorities to better manage human rights initiatives and secure essential resources.

Finally, to improve co-operation with the Ombudsperson, it might be useful to establish the regular, structured meetings between local and regional authorities and the Ombudsperson's office (national associations could facilitate the implementation of this idea). Joint human rights training and the development of a common monitoring framework will ensure effective protection and enforcement of human rights-based approach at the local and level.

8. Demand and opportunities for capacity building of representatives of local and regional authorities

The enthusiasm and commitment of local and regional authorities offer significant opportunities for capacity building. Training programmes and knowledge-sharing platforms can enable stakeholders to adopt more effective human rights practices.

Recommendations

Given the ongoing war in Ukraine, there is an urgent need to strengthen the capacity of local and regional authorities to protect human rights. Current training programmes primarily target officials at the national level, leaving a gap in addressing the specific needs of local and regional authorities.

To address this, training for local and regional officials should be redesigned to focus on practical, context-specific case studies relevant to wartime challenges, such as support to vulnerable groups and the use of the Register of Damage.

These programmes should integrate Council of Europe human rights standards and jurisprudence, tailored to the realities of local and regional self-government. In addition, the creation of knowledge-sharing platforms for local and regional authorities will foster co-operation, disseminate best practices and help ensure the effective implementation of human rights-based approaches at the local and regional level. By strengthening these capacities, local and regional authorities can play a crucial role in human rights protection and post-war reconstruction.

By addressing the recommendations from this Assessment Report, Ukraine can strengthen its efforts to ensure the successful implementation of a human rights-based approach at the local and regional level, particularly amid wartime and during the recovery and reconstruction process.

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