

# UKRAINE

## ASSESSMENT REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH AT THE LOCAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL

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## Purpose and structure of the report

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The *Assessment report on the implementation of a human rights-based approach at the local and regional level in Ukraine* highlights the crucial role of local and regional authorities in Ukraine in promoting and protecting human rights in the challenging circumstances of martial law and post-war reconstruction. Despite significant efforts, several key issues and areas for improvement have been identified.

This assessment examined the implementation of human rights-based approaches at the local and regional levels in Ukraine, focusing on two interrelated issues: addressing the immediate destruction and governance challenges caused by the ongoing war of aggression by the Russian Federation, and supporting the complex process of national reconstruction. While the active conflict continues to damage infrastructure and disrupt public administration, parallel efforts are underway to rebuild liberated areas and those affected by incoming fire. These dual challenges require a multifaceted human rights strategy to address urgent needs resulting from the war while laying the foundations for sustainable recovery and community resilience.

The *Assessment report* was conducted over a period of five months, from August to December 2024, with the aim of evaluating the implementation of a human rights-based approach at the local and regional level in Ukraine, focusing on the challenges posed by the ongoing war and the post-war reconstruction process. The *Assessment report* therefore seeks to analyse the role and capacity of local and regional authorities, their national associations and the Office of the Ombudsperson of Ukraine in the promotion and protection of human rights. It also aims to identify gaps, needs and opportunities to strengthen governance frameworks, and propose recommendations to guide the effective co-operation between these entities to further promote and protect human rights during this critical period.

Key stakeholders in this assessment include local and regional authorities, their national associations, national policymakers, community leaders, NGO representatives and international bodies such as the Council of Europe, foreign governments, and international donors, all of whom are essential in supporting Ukraine's human rights initiatives.

The target audience for this assessment includes these key stakeholders, as well as policymakers, academic researchers and practitioners, all of whom will use the findings to guide the development of policies and strategies to strengthen human rights in Ukraine for its recovery and reconstruction.

The *Assessment report* is structured in four chapters.

- *Chapter 1 - Objectives and methodology:*

At the beginning of this chapter, the two main objectives of the research are outlined. This is followed by a methodological overview, mainly to summarise the detailed information on this topic in Annex 1.

- *Chapter 2 - Overview of Ukrainian legislation and best practices:*  
This chapter summarises the findings – contained in Annex 2 – on good practices at the local and regional level that are in line with human rights standards and on the Ukrainian legal framework for local self-government and human rights, focusing on the application of martial law and its impact on the protection and promotion of human rights. It analyses the constitutional basis of human rights in Ukraine and the role of local self-government in ensuring their implementation.
- *Chapter 3 - Institutional findings, conclusions and recommendations:*  
This chapter presents findings, conclusions and recommendations on institutional issues covered by the assessment, such as: a) the unrecognised role of local and regional authorities in guaranteeing and protecting human rights; b) the lack of resources and dependence on external financial support; c) the use of the Register of Damage; d) the role of national associations of local and regional authorities; and e) the co-ordination practices between local and regional authorities, their national associations and the Office of the Ombudsperson and its regional representatives in the field of good governance and human rights at local and regional level.
- *Chapter 4 - Vulnerable groups: findings, conclusions and recommendations:*  
This chapter presents findings, conclusions and recommendations on vulnerable groups of Ukrainians covered by the assessment, such as youth, women, veterans and their families, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees.

# 1. Objectives and methodology

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The objectives of the research are:

- 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;
- 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 first objective aims to assess how local and regional authorities integrate human rights standards into their policies, strategies and day-to-day operations, particularly in the context of ongoing war and post-war reconstruction. It focuses on:

- the use of monitoring and reporting mechanisms to document human rights violations, with particular attention to the implementation of the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine;
- the active participation of youth, IDPs, returnees, women, veterans and their families in human rights-related activities, decision-making processes and efforts to build community resilience at the local and regional levels.

The second objective is to review co-operation practices between local and regional authorities, their national associations and the Office of the Ombudsperson of Ukraine, focusing on how these actors work together to promote human rights in the context of war and reconstruction. The purpose is to identify gaps and opportunities for strengthening synergies, improving governance frameworks and aligning local practices with European and international human rights standards. Actionable recommendations for ensuring the effective implementation of human rights-based approaches at the local and regional levels are presented.

This assessment uses a consistent multi-method approach combining desk research, fieldwork, and an extensive online survey to assess the integration of human rights-based approaches at the local and regional level in Ukraine. These qualitative methods provided detailed insights into operational realities, collaborative practices, and barriers. Desk research analysed the legal and policy framework under martial law, focusing on legal adaptations, good practices and challenges. Field research included three focus group discussions and structured interviews with key stakeholders such as local and regional authorities, NGOs and regional representatives of the Ombudsperson's Office. These qualitative methods were complemented with the quantitative nature of the online survey allowed for a deeper understanding of stakeholder perspectives and the nuanced impacts of the ongoing war and reconstruction processes on governance and human rights.

The online survey employed a quantitative design, allowing for a broad understanding of stakeholder perspectives and providing statistical insights into the impact of the ongoing war and reconstruction processes on governance and human rights. This was complemented by qualitative methods, including fieldwork and desk research, which provided an in-depth exploration of operational realities, collaborative practices and barriers. Together, these methods provide a robust,

evidence-based framework for analysing both the structural and practical dimensions of human rights implementation in local and regional governance.

The desk research, conducted in August and September 2024, closely examined the evolving legal and policy frameworks shaping human rights protection at the local and regional levels under martial law. This component focused on:

- legal and institutional adjustments - analysing key adjustments necessitated by martial law and their impact on implementation of a human rights-based approach at the local and regional level in Ukraine;
- good practices and challenges - reviewing existing policies and strategies to identify areas of progress and remaining gaps.

The findings from this phase provided a foundation for the subsequent field research.

The field research phase, conducted between September and October 2024, was dedicated to the lived experiences of stakeholders tasked with promoting and protecting human rights. This qualitative research included:

- focus group discussions: three facilitated sessions with 10 representatives of key stakeholder groups, including local and regional authorities, their NGOs implementing human rights initiatives, regional representatives of the Ombudsperson's Office and members of the Ukrainian delegation to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. These discussions provided rich insights into co-operation practices, obstacles and innovative approaches;
- in-depth structured interviews: focused interviews with representatives of the above-mentioned groups explored specific topics such as the use of the Register of Damages, youth, women, IDPs and returnees, veterans and their family members' engagement in local and regional governance.

By focusing on both successes and systemic barriers, the fieldwork highlighted actionable ways to improve human rights governance at the local and regional level.

The online survey, conducted in November 2024, captured the perspectives of 643 practitioners actively engaged in the promotion and protection of human rights at the local and regional levels. Administered via Google Forms, this quantitative component provided critical insights into:

- mechanisms for documenting human rights violations: with a particular focus on the Register of Damage, as well as selected vulnerable groups of the key stakeholders, the survey assessed the extent to which local and regional authorities use reporting tools;
- involvement of vulnerable groups: it explored how authorities involve youth, IDPs, women, veterans and their families in governance processes, thereby promoting community resilience and inclusiveness.

The survey's reach ensured the inclusion of diverse voices, providing a panoramic view of the challenges and opportunities in human rights-based local governance.

The triangulation of the methodologies – desk research, fieldwork and an online survey – ensures a comprehensive and balanced assessment. Each method complements the others, providing a multi-dimensional understanding of the systemic, operational and community-level dynamics involved in implementing a human rights-based approach at the local and regional levels in Ukraine. This integrated methodology allows the report to address both theoretical and practical challenges and to provide action-oriented insights. By adopting this approach, the assessment achieves its two objectives of in-depth analysis and practical relevance.

## 2. Overview of the Ukrainian legislation and best practices

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### *Constitutional provisions and local self-government*

The [Constitution of Ukraine 1996](#) establishes human rights as the highest social value (Article 3), with guarantees embedded in all civil, political and social spheres. However, local and regional authorities lack explicit mandates for the realisation of human rights, necessitating an indirect but significant commitment in areas such as education, health and social services.

The [Law of Ukraine 'On Local Self-Government in Ukraine'](#) (1997) emphasises decentralisation and grants local and regional authorities' autonomy to address territorial community needs. However, it does not clearly define their role in the realisation of human rights, leaving gaps in accountability and clarity.

### *Ombudsperson and regional representation*

The Ukrainian Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsperson) works through regional offices to bridge national human rights oversight with the needs of territorial communities. However, assessments highlight staffing and co-ordination challenges that undermine the effectiveness of the regional offices.

Recommendations from recent capacity assessments include increasing decision-making autonomy, filling vacant positions and fostering better co-operation between central and regional offices.

### *Martial law adaptations*

Since February 2022, Ukraine has claimed derogations from several articles of the European Convention on Human Rights under Article 15, balancing national security with fundamental freedoms.

Martial law has triggered significant legislative activity to strengthen local governance mechanisms. Amendments to the [Law of Ukraine 'On Local Self-Government in Ukraine'](#) (1997) have increased sharply, reflecting the urgent need to increase flexibility and crisis response capacity.

Legislation on veterans' rights (including the key piece of legislation in this area – the [Law of Ukraine 'On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection'](#) (1993) remains outdated, with incremental changes failing to address the scale and complexity of the current crisis. Comprehensive reforms are needed to meet the needs of a growing veteran population (in 1993, at the time of its adoption, this Law was designed primarily to address the needs of veterans of the Second World War and the Soviet–Afghan War. As a result, the structure and provisions of the law reflect the social and political realities of that era, which are very different from the current challenges facing Ukraine as a result of the ongoing full-scale war).

### *Local self-government challenges*

Local and regional authorities play a significant role in adjusting administration under martial law, managing displaced populations, maintaining essential services, and engaging in post-war reconstruction.

While local and regional authorities are more and more involved in the implementation of European human rights standards under the martial law, their staff lack expertise in international law, which undermines their ability to access European funding and align projects with legal requirements.

It is important to highlight that current local authority initiatives, while publicised, are often not presented through a human rights framework. At their essence, however, most of these projects aim to realise and guarantee human rights, including the right to life, health, education and decent living conditions.

In analysing the local self-government initiatives implemented in the context of the war, it is possible to identify several key aspects that require further attention and development.

Firstly, the majority of initiatives aimed at addressing social, infrastructural and humanitarian issues are implemented at the level of a territorial community or unified territorial community. While this demonstrates the importance of a local and regional approach, it also limits the scale of dissemination of successful practices. In this regard, it is essential to establish national mechanisms for the dissemination of 'best practice', which will allow successful initiatives to be adapted and implemented in other local and regional authorities across the country. Such systematic work will contribute to a more even development of territories and strengthen the overall capacity of local and regional authorities.

Secondly, one of the most significant barriers to effective implementation of initiatives remains the lack of funding. Most local and regional authorities do not have sufficient budgets to ensure systematic work. A significant proportion of successful projects are implemented in co-operation with international organisations, foreign partners, non-governmental organisations and regional authorities, which provide financial support. To address this problem, it is necessary to promote multi-stakeholder partnerships, the establishment of trust funds and the training of local and regional authorities in grant writing and donor engagement.

Co-operative international support, in particular from the Council of Europe, remains essential to strengthen Ukraine's local self-government to ensure resilience, human rights protection and alignment with European standards during and after the ongoing conflict.

### 3. Institutional findings, conclusions and recommendations

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#### 3.1. Unrecognised role of local and regional authorities in guaranteeing and protecting human rights

##### *Results of the assessment (findings)*

The results of the online survey highlight key aspects of how local and regional authorities in Ukraine monitor and address human rights violations:

- the main mechanisms used to monitor and address violations include reports from citizens and community groups (paper complaints, electronic complaints, chatbots, etc., mentioned by 48.4% of respondents) and co-operation with NGOs and civil society (34.8%);
- the main challenges facing these efforts are limited public awareness (mentioned by 52.9% of respondents) and limited resources and funding (43.7%).

Despite these challenges, local and regional authorities play a crucial role in raising awareness of human rights within territorial communities when it comes about the distribution of information materials (mentioned by 65.6% of respondents), co-operation with schools and educational institutions (39%), workshops and training (31.7%), public campaigns and educational programmes (14%).

Local and regional authorities in Ukraine have been instrumental in addressing issues with direct human rights implications, such as engaging youth, providing housing and other help for IDPs and returnees, as well as promoting community cohesion for these vulnerable groups and veterans. While these activities are closely aligned with human rights standards, they are often not explicitly recognised as human rights activities by these authorities themselves.

*De facto*, these efforts contribute significantly to the protection and promotion of human rights at the grassroots level. However, the link between these activities and human rights remains underexplored and undervalued. *De jure*, the integration of human rights approach into the framework of local self-government is weak. National legislation neither explicitly defines nor mandates these roles for local and regional authorities, leaving a significant gap in their ability to strategically address human rights issues.

##### *Conclusions*

Local and regional authorities in Ukraine play a significant but under-appreciated role in the protection and promotion of human rights. The findings of this study show that while these authorities are actively engaged in activities that are consistent with human rights standards - such as addressing community grievances, assisting IDPs, and promoting youth engagement - they often do not explicitly identify these efforts as human rights initiatives. This lack of recognition, both by the authorities themselves and within the broader legal framework, underlines the need to bridge the gap between practice and policy. Raising awareness and training among local officials could help them to align their initiatives more clearly with human rights principles, thereby strengthening their role as grassroots human rights actors.

National legislation currently does not mandate or define the responsibilities of local and regional authorities in the field of human rights, which limits their ability to develop systematic and co-ordinated approaches. Addressing this gap requires a two-pronged strategy: first, embedding a human rights-based approach in the legal framework regulating local self-government; and second, ensuring the provision of resources and training to enable local and regional authorities to fulfil these responsibilities effectively. Recognising and formalising the human rights dimension of their work would not only validate their efforts, but also provide a clearer roadmap for action to ensure that human rights protection becomes an integral part of local self-government in Ukraine.

### *Recommendations*

In order to bridge the gap between the *de facto* human rights activities of local and regional authorities and their *de jure* recognition, it is essential to explicitly include these responsibilities in national legislation (Law of Ukraine 'On Local Self-Government in Ukraine' (1997)). Clear mandates would enable local and regional authorities to strategically address human rights challenges. In addition, guidelines and awareness-raising campaigns should be developed to help local and regional authorities understand the human rights implications of their day-to-day work, making the link between their activities and human rights outcomes more visible and actionable.

Local and regional authorities often face significant obstacles, such as a lack of legal expertise in international law and administrative constraints, which affect their ability to implement human rights standards effectively. The political sensitivity of compliance with international standards can also discourage authorities from referring to them, particularly in circumstances where their implementation is difficult. Addressing these issues requires both legal and institutional support, as well as efforts to change the perception that human rights work is secondary to immediate survival needs, particularly under martial law (this is particularly relevant to the Register of Damage).

It is recommended that capacity gaps be addressed through training and support initiatives. Priority should be given to capacity building initiatives. Comprehensive training programmes focusing on the practical application of international human rights standards need to be developed for local and regional authorities. These programmes can 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.

## **3.2. Lack of resources and dependence on external financial support**

### *Results of the assessment (findings)*

Local and regional authorities face significant resource challenges. These issues reduce their capacity to effectively implement human rights-based approaches.

The desk research highlights that the majority of successful human rights initiatives at the local and regional level are funded by external support, often from NGOs, international organisations and

foreign governments, in addition to limited contributions from the Ukrainian state. A notable trend is the growing financial support from foreign local and regional authorities, particularly from Council of Europe member states. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is actively promoting these partnerships through initiatives such as 'Cities4Cities United4Ukraine' and the 'Matchmaking Platform' of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). This external support is crucial, but it also highlights the dependence of local authorities on foreign aid.

Field research confirmed these findings. All three officials interviewed and each of the three focus group sessions identified financial constraints as an ongoing challenge. Local representatives consistently pointed to the inadequacy of government funding and the need for external financial support to sustain human rights initiatives.

Survey data further underscores this problem. When asked about the challenges they face in promoting and protecting human rights under martial law, 43.7% of respondents cited limited resources and funding. Furthermore, when asked to identify the most critical forms of support needed to enhance their effectiveness, 51.2% highlighted the need for financial support or grants. Responses to the question on additional resources from the Council of Europe revealed similar priorities. Among the 203 respondents, the need for financial support was the most important. Specifically, 91 respondents directly requested financial assistance to support initiatives aimed at improving the living conditions of IDPs, persons with disabilities, war veterans and their families. Respondents underlined that stable funding is a key factor in the successful implementation of long-term initiatives in the sphere of human rights.

### Conclusions

Financial constraints and dependence on external funding present a significant challenge to the effective implementation of human rights-based approaches at the local and regional levels in Ukraine. While international partnerships and grants, particularly from organisations such as the Council of Europe, foreign governments and foreign local and regional authorities, have been instrumental in supporting human rights initiatives, they also highlight the vulnerability of these efforts to external factors. The lack of stable domestic funding mechanisms limits the ability of local and regional authorities to sustain long-term programmes, reducing their capacity to address pressing human rights challenges such as improving the living conditions of IDPs, veterans and their families, and other vulnerable groups.

To ensure the sustainability of human rights-based approaches, it is essential to establish a resilient national framework for resource provision. By integrating domestic and external resources, local and regional authorities will be better equipped to plan and implement human rights initiatives in line with long-term goals.

### Recommendations

It is recommended to address both the immediate need for international collaboration and the long-term goal of financial independence.

It is important to promote the international co-operation and knowledge (information) exchange for building the capacity of Ukrainian local and regional authorities. Partnerships with international

organisations, particularly those affiliated with the Council of Europe, play an important role in providing both financial resources and technical expertise. Initiatives such as 'Cities4Cities United4Ukraine' and the CEMR's 'Matchmaking Platform' show, how collaboration can support Ukrainian local and regional authorities in addressing human rights challenges. Expanding these partnerships and creating opportunities for Ukrainian local and regional authorities to learn from their international counterparts will enhance their ability to manage and implement human rights initiatives.

Taking into account Ukraine's constrained domestic resources, it is essential to provide local and regional authorities with comprehensive trainings (seminars, information in the written form etc) on international funding and partnerships. This informational support can focus on practical skills such as drafting proposals, managing grants, and aligning project goals with donor priorities. By equipping local and regional authorities with the tools to access and effectively manage grant resources, this approach ensures the sustainability of human rights initiatives while empowering authorities to prioritise local needs.

### 3.3. Use of the Register of Damage.

#### *Results of the assessment (findings)*

The Register has become an important tool for documenting violations and advocating for reparations. However, its implementation at local and regional level has proved to be uneven. Many local and regional authorities lack the necessary training to use the Register effectively, and there is limited public awareness of its role, significance and future development.

The framework for the Register –including its legal status, functionality and procedural requirements – is governed by international law. However, local and regional authorities typically lack specialists trained in international law. In Ukraine, legal education distinguishes between domestic and international law, with separate academic programmes and qualifications. As a result, lawyers employed by local authorities, who are trained exclusively in domestic law, often find it difficult to navigate the rules of the Register. At the state level, only the Office of the Ombudsperson has reported consistent co-operation with the Kyiv office of the Register. Conversely, associations of local and regional authorities and individual local authorities have shown a greater preference for working with the Ukrainian State Programme for Compensation of Damages, *eVidnovlennya*. The statistics from the online survey show an almost even split among respondents in terms of co-operation with the Register: 39.7% said they were working with it, while 41.7% said they were not. Meanwhile, 18.7% were unaware of the Register or its functions.

These findings highlight the uneven engagement of local and regional authorities with the Register, underscoring the need for capacity-building initiatives and enhanced awareness campaigns to maximise its potential for justice and reparations.

#### *Conclusions*

The Register represents an important tool for documenting violations and seeking reparations in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine. However, its effective implementation at the local and

regional level remains hindered by significant gaps in capacity and awareness. The lack of specialised training in international law among the lawyers, employed in the local and regional authorities, limits the ability of these authorities to navigate the legal and procedural requirements of the Register. Additionally, public and institutional understanding of the Register's role and benefits is insufficient, further reducing its utilisation as a resource for accountability and justice. To address these challenges, targeted informational support is essential.

### *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.

## **3.4. Role of the national associations of local and regional authorities**

### *Results of the assessment (findings)*

National associations play an important role in promoting multilevel co-operation, including horizontally between local and regional authorities. Membership of these associations helps local and regional authorities to establish links, particularly in implementing joint projects and addressing common challenges.

Financial constraints are a major challenge for local and regional authorities (and their associations). Therefore, national associations support their members by facilitating grant applications and providing guidance on accessing international and national funding opportunities. They also help their members to share resources and work together effectively.

The niche role of these associations under the martial law is capacity building and knowledge sharing. Associations provide training, advice and technical assistance to local and regional authorities, filling gaps in expertise and administrative capacity. This support is particularly important for smaller local authorities with limited budgets and human resources.

The human rights-based approach is now more evident in the work of the associations at the regional level. During the interviews and focus group meetings, the representatives of the Ukrainian Association of District and Regional Councils (UAROR) demonstrated a growing awareness of human rights issues when it came to initiatives related to veterans' policy, social assistance, the rights of IDPs and persons with disabilities. They emphasised the importance of upholding human rights even in the context of ongoing conflict.

### *Conclusions*

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.

Bridging this gap requires national associations to play a more active role in capacity building, advocacy and education. By acting as intermediaries between local, regional and national authorities, these national associations can advocate for policy reforms, secure resources and raise the visibility of local and regional needs on national agendas. Enhanced collaboration with stakeholders such as the Office of the Ombudsperson and international organisations is essential to harmonise efforts across levels of government (public administration), ensure policy consistency and address the fragmented implementation of human rights policies. In the context of the situation in Ukraine, the integration of human rights into the core agendas of national associations is not only timely, but urgent in order to promote a more balanced and resilient public administration.

### *Recommendations*

The first group of recommendations focuses on promoting more effective co-operation between national associations and the relevant bodies of local self-government. National associations have a key role to play in bridging gaps and ensuring the effective integration of administrative action at all levels. To enhance this co-operation, these associations could establish rapid response support mechanisms to enable them to respond promptly to emerging challenges faced by local and regional authorities.

In addition, national associations should prioritise facilitating access to international funding opportunities by offering targeted training programmes and promoting strategic partnerships (with a focus on the human rights-based approach). This approach not only enables local and regional authorities to secure vital resources, but also enhances their capacity to implement initiatives in line with international human rights standards.

Equally important is the promotion of data sharing and the exchange of best practices, which are essential tools for strengthening local self-government and the protection of human rights at the local and regional level. By using their unique position, national associations can actively promote a human rights-based approach and embed this approach within the framework of local self-government.

The second group of recommendations highlights the critical role that national associations can play in integrating a human rights-based approach into local self-government. By developing specialised programmes on key human rights issues - such as the rights of IDPs, gender equality and accessibility for persons with disabilities - national associations can enhance the capacity of local and regional authorities to address human rights challenges. These initiatives directly improve local self-governance and strengthen the realisation and protection of human rights at the grassroots level.

National associations can also play a proactive role in advocating the human rights needs of both local and regional authorities at the national level. By raising these needs, they ensure that human rights-based approach remains at the centre of national policy discussions and help to shape an inclusive legal framework that is responsive to the challenges faced by territorial communities.

In addition, national associations can significantly improve the capacity of local and regional authorities by providing targeted training on human rights, grant relevant writing and project management. These efforts, particularly for smaller territorial communities with fewer resources, will enable local and regional authorities to manage human rights-based projects effectively. National associations can act as important intermediaries, linking local authorities with international organisations for funding and expertise, thereby strengthening the realisation and protection of human rights.

Finally, institutionalising human rights as a core component of their mission is essential for national associations to ensure long-term impact. By integrating human rights standards into their work, by establishing the human rights-based approach, the national associations can promote more resilient, inclusive and accountable local self-government in Ukraine.

### **3.5. Co-ordination in human rights and local self-government: local and regional authorities, their national associations and the Office of the Ombudsperson**

#### *Results of the assessment (findings)*

Co-ordination between local and regional authorities, their national associations and the Office of the Ombudsperson, including its regional representatives, could play a crucial role in promoting human rights and good governance at the local and regional level in Ukraine. However, several challenges exist to ensure that this co-ordination is systematic and effective.

Despite the active involvement of the Ombudsperson's regional offices in the promotion of human rights, particularly in areas affected by the ongoing conflict, there is a noticeable gap in co-operation with both local and regional authorities and their national associations. This lack of systematic communication makes it difficult to fully integrate human rights-based approaches into public administration at the local and regional level.

The Office of the Ombudsperson has made significant progress in finding out human rights violations, particularly those related to IDPs and the impact of the war on the civilian population.

The regional representatives of the Ombudsperson have been particularly successful in raising awareness of these issues and facilitating the restoration of human rights, often through monitoring the relevant activities of local and regional authorities.

#### *Conclusions*

The findings highlight the urgent need for more robust and structured co-ordination between national associations, local and regional authorities and the Office of the Ombudsperson to promote more effective local self-government and ensure the effective protection of human rights at the

local and regional level. While the Ombudsperson's regional offices play a key role in monitoring the rights of vulnerable populations, their efforts can be supported by national associations to achieve consistent and sustainable results across Ukraine. National associations should use their position to advocate for policy reforms, enhance capacity building and ensure that human rights issues are prioritised in national discussions (in other words, to promote a human rights-based approach).

Moreover, the current lack of systematic communication and co-operation between national associations and central government bodies remains a critical obstacle to the effective implementation of human rights standards at the local and regional level. There is an essential need to better integrate human rights into the agendas of both local and regional authorities, supported by clear guidance from the Ombudsperson's Office and national associations.

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.

### *Recommendations*

To address these challenges, national associations may play a more proactive role in bridging the gaps between local, regional and national levels of governance. They could establish clear communication channels and co-ordination mechanisms with the Ombudsperson's regional offices, particularly in areas most affected by conflict. A collaborative approach could include joint training programmes, shared resources and a focus on integrating human rights considerations into local self-government policies.

In addition, national associations could strengthen their advocacy efforts at the central level to ensure that local and regional human rights needs are represented in national policy-making processes. This could be achieved through more frequent and structured engagement between national associations and central government (through the Ombudsperson) to ensure that local perspectives are integrated into broader legislative and policy reforms.

To enhance capacity building, national associations could work with the Ombudsperson to provide targeted training programmes for local and regional authorities in the areas of human rights, grant writing and project management. These efforts are essential to help local and regional authorities better manage human rights-related initiatives, secure international funding and improve the overall governance framework.

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

## 4. Vulnerable groups: findings, conclusions and recommendations

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The ongoing war in Ukraine has highlighted the vulnerability of youth, women, veterans, their families, IDPs and returnees. These groups play a critical role in local self-government and post-war reconstruction, but require special support to overcome barriers (such as access to housing, legal aid, social security and others). Recognising and addressing their specific needs is essential to ensure inclusive recovery and build resilience within territorial communities.

In general, programmes targeting vulnerable groups were highlighted as crucial but underfunded.

In the context of the ongoing conflict, it is crucial to ensure that vulnerable groups, including IDPs, youth, women, as well as veterans and their families, are not only involved in decision-making but are also actively supported through tailored programs. Local and regional authorities can prioritise initiatives that address the specific needs of these groups, including access to housing, healthcare, legal services, and mental health support.

### 4.1. Youth

#### *Results of the assessment (findings)*

Promoting youth participation in local and regional self-government, particularly during martial law, remains an area of significant concern. According to the survey, 31.6% of respondents reported that specific programmes or policies are in place to ensure meaningful participation of young people in decision-making processes; 26.1% reported that no such programmes or policies exist; 42.3% were unsure about the existence of such initiatives.

The most common form of youth participation in decision-making at local and regional level is youth councils. In parallel, some local and regional authorities use additional programmes and tools (youth spaces and training activities) to develop civic engagement, support youth initiatives and build partnerships between young people and local and regional authorities. Despite these efforts, the high percentage of respondents unaware of relevant programmes suggests a need for better communication and awareness-raising about the opportunities available for youth engagement.

During the focus group discussions, participants highlighted that young people are particularly responsive to initiatives that combine opportunities for professional development with active participation in local self-government, such as internships or roles on the executive committees of local councils as part of their higher education programmes.

#### *Conclusions*

The findings highlight both opportunities and challenges in promoting youth participation in local and regional self-government during martial law. While youth councils remain an important mechanism for youth participation, limited awareness of relevant programmes and initiatives underscores the need for improved communication strategies. In addition, initiatives that link professional development with active civic engagement, such as internships in local councils and

their executive bodies, show great promise in promoting meaningful youth participation. Strengthening these links between professional development and governance could not only increase youth participation, but also build a pipeline of future leaders.

The high percentage of respondents unaware of existing initiatives suggests that many local and regional authorities need to actively publicise and promote opportunities for youth engagement. Without effective outreach and awareness campaigns, the potential of these programmes to empower young people and contribute to governance will remain under-utilised.

### *Recommendations*

To increase opportunities for young people's professional development, local and regional authorities can formalise and expand programmes that combine professional development with civic participation, such as internships or mentoring schemes within these authorities. Partnerships with universities and other educational institutions can help to ensure that these opportunities are well integrated into higher education curricula and accessible to a wide range of students.

To improve communication and outreach to young people, local and regional authorities should prioritise awareness-raising campaigns to inform young people about available programmes and opportunities to participate. Using social media platforms, educational institutions and community events to publicise these initiatives can help bridge the gap between existing programmes and youth engagement. In addition, involving young people in the design and implementation of these campaigns can improve their effectiveness and reach.

By addressing these areas, local and regional authorities can create a more inclusive and active environment for youth participation and ensure that young people play a vital role in governance and community development, including at times of crisis.

## **4.2. Women**

### *Results of the assessment (findings)*

The survey reveals mixed views on the implementation of measures to address the specific needs of women within local and regional authorities: 54% of respondents indicated that specific measures were in place to ensure women's access to rights, social services and security; 17.9% reported the absence of such measures; 28.1% were unsure about the existence of these initiatives.

During the interviews and focus group discussions, representatives of local and regional authorities emphasised their commitment to addressing gender issues, particularly where they were relevant to the local context. Authorities recognised the importance of creating new job opportunities for women, such as employing female school bus drivers and women to operate heavy agricultural machinery. These efforts are often incentivised by offering competitive wages that encourage women to take on traditionally male-dominated roles.

These findings indicate a growing recognition of gender needs and the importance of promoting women's economic empowerment at the local level. However, the relatively high percentage of

respondents who were unaware of such policies suggests a need for clearer communication and wider awareness of available gender-focused initiatives within the territorial communities.

### *Conclusions*

The findings show progress in addressing gender needs at the local and regional level, with many authorities actively working to create opportunities for women and address gender challenges. The commitment to employing women in traditionally male-dominated occupations, such as school bus drivers and agricultural machinery operators, reflects a shift towards promoting gender inclusion and economic empowerment. However, the survey results also highlight a significant communication gap, with a significant proportion of respondents unaware of existing initiatives. This lack of awareness limits the potential reach and impact of gender-focused policies and programmes, suggesting that these efforts, while promising, remain under-publicised and inconsistently implemented.

There is a clear need to integrate gender considerations more systematically into local and regional governance. Without a co-ordinated effort to ensure widespread awareness and participation, there is a risk that progress in gender mainstreaming will remain isolated, rather than becoming a standard feature of governance practices in all territorial communities.

### *Recommendations*

In order to promote awareness-raising and communication strategies, local and regional authorities can consider prioritising the dissemination of information on gender-related policies and initiatives. This can include public awareness campaigns, community workshops and partnerships with neighbourhood organisations to ensure that women in territorial communities are fully informed about available opportunities and services. Clear communication strategies can help reduce the percentage of women who are unaware of these policies, thereby increasing their effectiveness.

To strengthen gender-inclusive policies and economic opportunities, local and regional authorities could consider expanding initiatives to promote women's participation in the workforce, particularly in non-traditional roles. Incentivising these opportunities with competitive wages and training programmes can further encourage women's participation. Developing comprehensive local policies that explicitly address gender equality and include measurable targets for women's participation in governance and economic activities will ensure more systematic progress.

By addressing these areas, local and regional authorities can not only improve women's access to rights and services, but also create a more inclusive environment that benefits the whole territorial community.

## **4.3. Veterans and their families.**

### *Results of the assessment (findings)*

The legal framework for the protection of veterans and their families in Ukraine is based on the [Law of Ukraine "On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection"](#) (1993). Originally tailored to the needs of veterans of the Second World War and the Soviet–Afghan War,

the law is now being adapted to meet the very different challenges posed by the full-scale Russian invasion. Between February 2022 and October 2024, the law was amended 17 times - an average of 5.7 times per year. While this represents a 16% increase in legislative activity compared to previous periods (1993-2015 average 2.4 amendments per year; 2015 - January 2022 average 4.9 amendments per year), it may not adequately reflect the unprecedented scale and complexity of the current crisis, suggesting that legislative adaptation has lagged behind the evolving needs of the veteran population.

The survey responses indicate that local and regional authorities are making significant efforts to support veterans and their families: 74.8% of respondents reported having specific policies to help veterans access social rights; 12.6% reported no such policies, while the same percentage were unsure.

The methods used by local and regional authorities to involve veterans and their families in governance and decision-making processes reveal a diverse approach: 32.7% of respondents reported involving veterans on advisory boards or committees; 45.6% engage in direct consultation with veteran communities; 74.7% run programmes specifically designed for veterans and their families.

These results show that local and regional authorities are increasingly aware of the importance of involving veterans in local and regional self-government. However, the relatively low level of legislative responsiveness and the varying levels of engagement across local and regional authorities suggest the need for more consistent policies and robust mechanisms to address the rights and needs of veterans and their families in a comprehensive way.

### Conclusions

The findings highlight the important role of local and regional authorities in addressing the social rights and integration of veterans and their families in Ukraine. While the legislative framework, in particular the [Law of Ukraine "On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection"](#) (1993), has been amended to address some of the emerging needs, it remains insufficient to address the unprecedented scale and complexity of the challenges posed by the ongoing war. The relatively slow pace of legislative updates highlights a critical gap between policy and practice, as the evolving reality of veterans' (and their families') needs outstrips the adaptability of the framework.

Local and regional authorities are making notable efforts to support veterans and their families through specific programmes, direct consultation and involvement in advisory boards. However, the variation in engagement strategies between different authorities suggests a lack of consistent standards and a fragmented approach to veteran inclusion and support. These issues highlight the need for targeted legislative and operational measures to ensure that veterans and their families are fully supported and empowered as active participants in local self-government (including decision-making processes).

### *Recommendations*

It is recommended that the relevant legislative framework, starting with the basic law in this area (the [Law of Ukraine "On the Status of War Veterans and Guarantees of Their Social Protection"](#) (1993)), be strengthened to address the unique and rapidly evolving challenges faced by veterans of the current conflict. This should include the inclusion of mechanisms for regular review and adaptation to ensure timely responses to emerging needs.

It may be useful to further strengthen local engagement mechanisms. Local and regional authorities should adopt standardised approaches to involving veterans and their families in governance. This can be achieved through training programmes, the establishment of best practices for veterans' participation in decision-making, and the provision of consistent financial and technical resources for the effective implementation of veteran-focused initiatives. This includes increasing funding for social services, improving access to health care and housing, and creating opportunities for economic and social reintegration of veterans.

It is recommended to continue co-operation between state institutions, local and regional authorities, veterans' organisations and international partners in order to create a unified approach to addressing veterans' needs. Sharing best practice can help improve service delivery and ensure a more effective support system across the country.

## **4.4. Internally displaced persons and returnees.**

### *Results of the assessment (findings)*

Local and regional authorities play a significant role in supporting the reintegration of IDPs and returnees into territorial communities. Community-based initiatives led or supported by local and regional authorities were identified as the most common mechanism, with 73.1% of respondents highlighting them as a central part of integration efforts. Partnerships between local and regional authorities and NGOs or international organisations also feature widely, with 50.9% of respondents reporting their involvement. However, government-led reintegration programmes, which often require co-operation with local and regional authorities, were less frequently mentioned, with only 22.7% identifying them as a key initiative.

Despite these efforts, local and regional authorities face significant challenges in meeting the needs of IDPs and returnees. Limited housing options and insufficient financial support are critical obstacles that directly affect their ability to provide effective assistance. Financial assistance, including targeted cash grants and subsidies for housing and utilities, is often insufficient to meet growing needs. These constraints limit the ability of local and regional authorities to enable IDPs and returnees to rebuild their lives and fully integrate into their new communities.

### *Conclusions*

Local and regional authorities play a key role in supporting the reintegration of IDPs and returnees into local communities. Based on the results of the online survey, community-based initiatives led or supported by local and regional authorities were identified as the most prominent mechanism, with 73.1% of respondents highlighting them as key to integration efforts. Partnerships between

local and regional authorities and NGOs or international organisations also feature frequently, with 50.9% of respondents reporting their involvement. However, government-led reintegration programmes, which often require co-operation with local and regional authorities, were less frequently mentioned, with only 22.7% identifying them as a major initiative.

Despite these efforts, local and regional authorities face significant challenges in meeting the needs of IDPs and returnees. Limited housing options and insufficient financial support are critical obstacles that directly affect their ability to provide effective assistance. Financial assistance, including targeted cash grants and subsidies for housing and utilities, is often insufficient to meet growing needs. These constraints limit the ability of local and regional authorities to enable IDPs and returnees to rebuild their lives and fully integrate into their new territorial communities.

### *Recommendations*

With regard to the needs of IDPs and returnees, it is recommended that ways be found to strengthen financial support mechanisms. Local and regional authorities need to be provided with increased financial resources to support the growing number of IDPs and returnees. This may include targeted grants for housing, utilities and maintenance, supported by a more streamlined and responsive allocation system at national level. Strengthening government-led reintegration programmes and tailoring them to local needs can ensure a more consistent and resource-efficient approach.

To address resource gaps, local and regional authorities can continue to develop partnerships with foreign and international donors. Capacity building initiatives, including training on best practice in integration, can enable local and regional authorities to design and implement more effective programmes. At the same time, promoting greater co-ordination with national authorities can fill gaps in housing and financial support and ensure that the integration of IDPs and returnees becomes a shared priority at all levels of government.

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