

SPECIFIC FEATURES OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF TERRITORIAL COMMUNITIES IN UKRAINE UNDER MARTIAL LAW

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Abstract. The article presents the results from a study on the social development of specific communities in the Dnipro, Mykolaiv, Sumy, and Chernihiv regions of Ukraine under martial law.

The purpose of the article is to present the results from an analysis of the current state of social protection for residents in territorial communities across the Dnipro, Mykolaiv, Sumy, and Chernihiv regions. The object of the article is the system of providing social services to citizens by municipal social institutions at the local level. The main provisions of the article are based on a survey of more than two hundred experienced employees of social institutions and facilities. It is shown that despite the military operations, local self-government bodies manage to fulfil the social obligations that the state has to its citizens.

The article describes the main problems in the implementation of social policy at the local level: the devastating impact of war, professional burnout of specialists due to staff shortages and an increase in the volume of responsibilities, and an increase in the number of those who can apply for social assistance. It is proved that in the near future, the problems of protecting orphans, families in difficult life circumstances, and military personnel who will be dismissed from the Defence Forces of Ukraine will become more acute.

Keywords: social services, social protection, martial law, territorial communities, challenges, local self-government.

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1. Introduction

The beginning of the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation into Ukraine on February 24, 2022 caused large-scale changes in all spheres of Ukrainian society. One of the important signs of the functionality and capacity of the state is its ability to ensure the social rights of citizens, in particular those who need it most: the elderly, people with disabilities, children, large families, combatants, etc.

The socio-demographic portraits of territorial communities have changed dramatically. In those areas that became the territory of hostilities, the number of working-age population has significantly decreased. A significant proportion of the male population joined the Defence Forces, while others moved to the western regions of Ukraine with their families or as employees of relocated businesses. A certain number of men aged 18 to 60 left the territory of Ukraine, taking advantage of the opportunities available.

Changes in the number of adult women and children of all ages were particularly significant.

Due to the active outflow of young and middle-aged residents, the percentage of older people in communities in eastern and southern Ukraine has increased, and they are the main recipients of social services and benefits. Thus, in many communities, on the one hand, the capacity to provide the full range of social services has dramatically decreased, while the proportion of the population for whom social benefits and allowances are the main source of subsistence has increased. An illustrative example is the situation in the Shevchenkivska territorial community of Kharkiv region, where, as of mid-2024, about 5,600 of the 11,237 people in the population were of retirement age.

Throughout the entire period of Ukrainian independence, experts have rightly drawn attention to such shortcomings of the social protection system as: excessive

declarativeness, inability to fully fulfil promises made; inefficient use of budget funds; vulnerability to political populism by irresponsible politicians; discrepancy between the declared parameters of basic social standards and their actual content, eg. the case with the subsistence minimum. Thus, the current task is to analyse the current capacity of the Ukrainian state to ensure the implementation of the constitutional right of a Ukrainian citizen to social protection under martial law.

The purpose of the article is to present the results from an analysis of the current state of social protection for residents in territorial communities across the Dnipro, Mykolaiv, Sumy, and Chernihiv regions. The objectives of the article are: to analyze the level of personnel, information and material support of social protection institutions; to characterize the ability of social protection institutions to ensure the social rights and needs of residents of territorial communities; to develop practical recommendations for public authorities on the modernization of social protection in front-line regions of Ukraine. **The object of the article** is the process of providing social services to citizens by municipal social institutions at the local level.

2. Literature review

The results of many sociological and analytical studies conducted by the Razumkov Centre and the Sociological Group "Rating" are important for understanding the processes that are taking place in the social protection system of modern Ukraine. Current problems of social protection of the population in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war are covered in the publications of the CEDOS Analytical Centre (Y. Kabanets, N. Lomonosova, A. Helashvili) (Lomonosova et al., 2024), the National Institute for Strategic Studies (O. Malynovska), the Institute for Demography and Social Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (E. Libanova, Y. Kogatko, V. Sarioglo).

The publications of the employees of these institutions contain a large amount of factual data useful for analysing the sustainability of the social protection system. It is important that, for example, the Sociological Group "Rating" and the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine study individual components of social policy in the dynamics, which makes it possible to determine the direction of the system's development and predict the limits of its effectiveness.

Among the authors whose publications are important for the study of this problem is H. Kraevska, who studies the problem of social fund of communities in the context of recovery processes (Kraevska, 2023). To understand the effectiveness of social protection programmes for certain categories of the population, the research of L. Cherenko is useful (Cherenko, 2023). O. Havryliuk successfully studies the social aspects of life of internally displaced persons (Havryliuk, 2024). I. Khozhylo examines the state of the social protection system in Ukraine in the context of war from the point of view of public administration science (Khozhylo, 2022).

It is very difficult to correctly analyze the relevant international experience of social policy, because in the modern world there are practically no countries that would be forced to fulfill social obligations in the conditions of such a full-scale war. For example, the countries of the Balkan Peninsula (Serbia, Croatia), which have traumatic experience of hostilities, are much smaller in size and population than Ukraine. The power of Israel's enemies cannot be compared with the potential of the Russian Federation, which has been waging a colonial war against our state for the fourth year. At the same time, for developing an optimal model of social policy in Ukraine, the works of such foreign authors as Hills and Stewart (2005), Cantillon (2022), Ferrera (2005), Esping-Andersen (2015), Tamburro (2013), Gray and Webb (2008) are useful.

3. Methodology and methods used

The factual data used as the basis for this material were obtained by the authors during the implementation of the School of Social Work project, which has been implemented in Ukraine since 2020. The authors of the article are members of the project team and directly developed the research tools: questionnaires, focus group interview guides. They also personally interviewed employees of social institutions who participated in the project from September 2023 to May 2024.

The main method of data collection in the first phase of the project was a questionnaire, which was conducted in several waves. In developing the data collection methods, the project team was able to rely on the results of a large-scale survey conducted by the UNDP Inclusive Development, Recovery and Peacebuilding team prior to the start of the School of Social Work. This survey collected and systematised a significant amount of factual information on the general state of the communities that were to become project participants. Thus, data was collected that reflected such important aspects of the socio-economic and humanitarian development of communities as:

- basic socio-demographic characteristics of community residents (age, gender, etc.);
- dynamics of budget expenditures in various sectors (education, healthcare, social protection);
- presence/absence of administrative service centres and their main characteristics (availability of Administrative Service Centres, number of employees, number of administrative services provided, etc.);
- presence/absence of social protection institutions and facilities (shelters, social service centres, centres for social and psychological rehabilitation, mobile social assistance teams, number of social workers and specialists in social work);
- types and scale of civic activities (presence of civic organisations, experience in implementing participatory budgeting);
- state of the healthcare system in the target communities of the project;

- state of economic development of communities (number of enterprises, availability of economic development strategy, state of employment, etc);
- development of the education system (number and level of educational institutions, number of teaching staff and students).

3.1. The first wave of questionnaires

The first wave of questionnaires within the School of Social Work took place in September–October 2023, prior to the outreach activities in the project's target communities. The questionnaires were sent out by e-mail and were intended for the leadership of the communities, heads and employees of the social sector bodies and institutions of the territorial communities. Nineteen questionnaires were received during this stage of the study, and the information from them will be described below in the relevant section of this analytical and statistical report.

3.2. The second wave of questionnaires

A distinctive feature of the second wave of the survey was its contact nature. The survey was conducted using a Google form, which was available only to participants of a specific outreach event in the particular community. Thus, a high level of coverage of the target audience was achieved and the risks of non-personal participation of sample representatives in the survey were reduced. At the same time, the moderator of the event was able to personally explain the organisational and technical aspects of the survey and provide the necessary clarifications. The need for the last ones was due to the presence of participants who did not have the skills to fill out electronic questionnaires. In cases where participants did not have smartphones and were using outdated push-button phones, moderators printed out questionnaires to be filled out manually or provided them with the opportunity to fill out the questionnaire later with the help of colleagues with higher digital competence.

It should be noted that some respondents did not provide answers to the questionnaires due to lack of relevant digital skills or for other reasons that were not investigated separately. Nevertheless, the information obtained in general made it possible to achieve the survey goal and identify both the strengths and weaknesses of the social sector in the target communities. Some of the questions in the second wave were of a control nature in relation to the questions of the first survey.

3.3. The third wave of questionnaires

An important source of qualitative information was the third wave of the survey, which took place during the internship of the project participants in May 2024. A contact (face-to-face) survey was conducted in three internship host communities (Ivano-Frankivsk, Kremenets, and Uman). This type of survey allowed us to achieve 100% coverage of the general population.

It should be noted that the authors deliberately chose employees of public authorities and municipal institutions that are related to the social protection system as respondents. It was important for us to find out the opinion of insiders, that is, to obtain not an external, but an internal assessment of the work of the social protection system. Most sociological studies conducted by reputable Ukrainian analytical centers (Razumkov Center, Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, Sociological Group "Rating") show that ordinary citizens give a very low assessment of the activities of social protection bodies. Among other things, this is due to the fact that the average citizen does not distinguish between social guarantees provided to him by the state and social services that can be provided by local social services (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2019). The authors understand that the assessment of the quality of social services by social service workers may be somewhat subjective, but it is more substantiated and less emotional than that of a person who does not understand the specifics of social policy in wartime.

4. Results of the research

The questionnaire results show a high rating for the quality of social services provided to residents in the project's target communities. One of the questions asked respondents to assess the quality of social services in Ukraine on a 10-point scale, where '10' is the highest score and '0' is the lowest. Thus, if we take the scores of 9 and 10 as 'excellent', then this is the level of social services that more than 40% of respondents believe they meet.

More than 44% of respondents chose 7 and 8 points, which is actually equal to the 'good' rating. Only slightly more than 10% of respondents rated the quality of social services as satisfactory, choosing 4 and 5 points. Only three out of two hundred respondents chose the lowest of the proposed scores.

Thus, social work professionals were extremely positive about the quality of social services offered to residents. However, it should be borne in mind that the vast majority of respondents are employees of the social protection institutions and agencies that provide these social services, so they can assess not so much the quality of the services as the efforts made by them to provide such services.

We were also interested in the answer to the question "Has the level of social protection of the population of your community changed since the beginning of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine from 24.02.2022 to the present day?". Despite the ongoing martial law and the fact that many of the project's target communities are located in the frontline, respondents emphasise the consistently high level of social protection in their communities. Moreover, 56% of respondents believe that this level has improved compared to the pre-war period. In contrast, the number of those who say it has decreased does not exceed 7%. Taking into account the official and professional affiliation of the respondents,

the abnormally high percentage (23.5%, i.e. almost one in four) of those who could not answer this question looks somewhat surprising.

The respondents' assessment of a key indicator for any system's functioning – resource provision – was more controversial. Thus, the respondents were asked to evaluate the following types of support on a four-level scale: information, personnel, transport, material and technical, financial, as well as the level of barrier-free access to social protection institutions in the target communities. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. What is the level of provision of the following types of resources to the Center for Social Services and/or the Territorial Center for Social Services of your community? In %, N-201 persons

	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Hard to say
Informational provision	48.5	37.5	4.5	9.5
Staff provision	35.5	48.0	7.0	9.5
Transport provision	38.5	37.5	13.5	10.5
Material and technical provision	30.0	50.5	10.0	9.5
Financial provision	23.0	45.5	20.0	11.5
Inclusiveness	41.0	41.0	7.5	10.5

As we can see, social protection institutions are best equipped with communication facilities, including the Internet. A fairly large number of respondents noted the availability of barrier-free access to the premises. At the same time, such an optimistic assessment should be treated with certain warnings, as the experience of monitoring the quality of engineering solutions for barrier-free elements shows that not all of them meet the requirements, are safe and suitable for use by people with limited mobility (Ministry for Development of Communities and Territories of Ukraine, 2024).

The restrained assessments of transport and staffing of social protection institutions are quite expected. This problem is particularly painful for remote communities, where social work professionals have to travel long distances to provide social services to their clients. It is noteworthy that the number of 'unsatisfactory' ratings for transport links ranks second among the six options, which indicates the critical importance of this resource for the provision of quality and timely social protection.

The low scores for financial support relate primarily to the salaries of social workers themselves. Remuneration for work in this sector has never been competitive, which cannot but affect the prestige or at least the popularity of this type of activity. At the same time, sufficient staffing levels should not be misleading, as it is necessary to analyse not only the number of vacancies filled, but also staff turnover, their motivation, the average age of employees, etc.

One of the main actors of social development at both the national and local levels is civil society institutions. The survey demonstrates a fairly high level of interaction

between the 'third sector' and the authorities. Thus, over 67% of community representatives say that they actively cooperate with NGOs, and another 16.5% have experience in solving certain social policy problems. Although 2% of the respondents do not cooperate with NGOs, but they are willing to do so, and only 1.5% of the respondents are convinced that such cooperation is irrelevant.

Given the challenges of today, extra-budgetary revenues are of great importance for the full functioning of the social sphere and the ability of the Ukrainian state to fulfil its social obligations to citizens (Lomonosova et al., 2024). It should be noted that the respondents could choose all relevant answers to the question 'Does your community have experience of receiving charitable assistance to address social development issues?', so the total amount of percentage exceeds one hundred. Naturally, the list of sources of such community revenues is headed by large international organisations that provide both direct financial support and numerous grant/contest programmes for specific problem areas (71.5%). The second place is occupied by assistance from international charitable organisations (37.5%). The third place (21%) was given to support from Ukrainian charitable organisations.

We should note a fairly high percentage of respondents who have experience of receiving support for the community's social sector from ordinary residents (16.5%) and from local business representatives (11%).

In addition to the overall assessment of social service quality, which was addressed in the survey's first question, the level of social protection for specific population groups is crucial for enhancing local social policy. An idea of its main indicators can be gained from the data presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Estimate the level of social protection of the following categories of residents of your community, in %, N-201 persons

	Good	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Hard to answer
Children with special needs	40.0	46.0	1.5	12.5
Persons with disabilities	40.0	47.0	6.0	7.0
Elderly persons	42.5	45.5	5.0	7.0
Internally displaced persons (IDPs)	47.5	43.0	2.5	7.0
Families in difficult life circumstances	39.5	47.0	2.0	11.5
Combatants, veterans	35.5	44.0	5.5	15.0
Large families	44.0	46.0	0.0	10.0
Victims of domestic violence	31.5	40.0	8.5	20.0

The results of our survey largely coincide with the data reflected in similar studies at the national level. As in Ukraine as a whole, internally displaced persons are relatively more socially protected. The social and residential structure of our sample should also be taken into account.

The overwhelming majority of our respondents live and work in large cities, including regional centres, and, therefore, deal with IDPs living in the same settlements, who are usually employed, and their children have the opportunity to fully meet their social, educational, and cultural needs.

The assessment of social security of elderly people is expectedly high, which is explained by the fact that they have their own, though not large, guaranteed source of income – an old-age pension.

A kind of acknowledgement of the success of the state policy towards persons with disabilities is the high assessment of their protection by respondents. On the one hand, it is true that since the mid-2010s, many effective steps have been taken in this area, particularly in providing educational services to persons with disabilities, as well as in creating a barrier-free environment. On the other hand, as it turned out during the desk research and training sessions, the vast majority of target communities do not have their own programmes for creating a barrier-free environment, and the implementation of the national Barrier-Free Strategy has been put on hold due to active hostilities, lack of resources, etc.

The low estimates of social protection of veterans of the Anti-Terrorist Operation/Joint Forces Operation (ATO/JFO) and the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war deserve special attention (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1991). This problem should be constantly in the focus of attention of executive authorities and local self-government bodies due to a wide range of reasons, each of which requires in-depth study. Here are just a few of them:

- the number of soldiers who will need social, medical and psychosocial services in the near future will be constantly growing;
- not all defenders of Ukraine are entitled to the official status of “combatant”, which carries risks of their marginalisation, in particular, such as volunteers who joined military formations in the first days of the full-scale invasion;
- the initiatives of the state and its international partners to support veterans are not always properly resourced. In particular, in some communities, people who have taken on the role of “veteran’s assistant” do not receive the remuneration they deserve, and are actually equal to social work specialists, which negatively affects their motivation;
- social protection authorities are excluded from calculating the one-time financial assistance (OFA) for the families of the deceased members of the Ukrainian Defence Forces. Also, the question remains as to whether the authorities can control the protection of children’s rights when using the OFA, as the legislator has not defined the purpose of this payment, as it is of a compensatory nature;
- even with qualified personnel and a friendly supportive environment, socio-economic circumstances of peaceful life are critical for the full re-socialisation of demobilised soldiers: official employment, acquisition of competitive professions, decent salaries, etc.

Among all the population categories presented, respondents rated the level of social protection for victims of domestic violence the lowest. It can be assumed that the urgency of this problem will steadily increase, as the range of internal and external factors that cause it will expand: deterioration of the material security of Ukrainian families, return of soldiers from the front with traumatic experience of the normalcy of everyday violence; socio-economic problems, including for internally displaced persons; the prevalence of social orphanhood due to parents’ staying abroad and their actual removal from raising their own children. Indeed, the dynamics are already taking on a threatening scale. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine, in 2023, compared to the previous year, the number of registered cases of domestic violence increased by 20%. The number of registered criminal offences increased by 80% (from 1498 in 2022 to 2701 in 2023).

The successful implementation of social policy is impossible without effective cooperation between social protection institutions and deputies of local councils, who have a significant list of both delegated from the state and their own powers in the field of social protection of the population.

The survey results show a rather positive situation in the project’s target communities. Thus, answering the question “Which of the following statements more accurately reflects the interaction of the community social protection system with the local council deputies?”, more than 40% of respondents said that active cooperation with local councils allows them to successfully solve current problems. More than a quarter of respondents (26.5%) emphasise that the formal nature of cooperation with deputies does not prevent the implementation of local social policy. Only one in ten respondents gave a negative assessment of the practice of interaction with local deputies.

At the same time, it is noteworthy that there is a significant percentage of those professionals (22%) who could not answer this question. In our opinion, this is not so much due to the level of professionalism of the respondents, but rather due to a kind of “tunnel thinking”, especially common among low-level professionals who traditionally avoid taking an interest in issues that go beyond their job responsibilities. This thesis is confirmed by further interaction with the School participants during the training sessions, during which the participants emphasised their lack of experience in lobbying and advocacy for social development issues.

One of the questions in the questionnaire concerned the ability of social sector institutions to perform their functions under martial law. The vast majority of respondents answered this question positively, demonstrating their confidence in the community’s readiness to address social development issues, even though a significant number of settlements are located in the area affected by enemy missile and aircraft weapons.

According to the respondents, secondary education and healthcare institutions, as well as territorial centres for the provision of social services, can provide relevant

services despite the challenges of martial law, including the destruction of social infrastructure. Answering the question: 'Are there any social infrastructure facilities in your community that have been destroyed or damaged during hostilities since 24.02.2022?', 24% answered "yes, there are a significant number", another 26% answered "yes, but not many", 40% answered "no, not at all", and 10% chose the option "difficult to answer".

In the second part of our article, we would like to point out that Ukraine is gradually moving from a paternalistic to a proactive approach to solving social development problems. This transition has three dimensions: 1. institutional or organisational, 2. financial or material, 3. personal or mental.

Institutional changes include the active introduction of project work departments within the executive bodies of territorial communities. Formally, the creation of such units increases the number of administrative staff and, accordingly, the budget costs for their maintenance. However, our observations in 2021–2024 show that those communities that have such a department are much more successful and efficient in participating in various competitive and grant programmes than communities without project specialists. This is all the more important since a significant part of the funding is provided by donors on a competitive basis, so those communities that are able to formulate their development priorities in a quality manner, present them in the form of an application form and submit them in a timely manner can count on support. In turn, numerous victories in competitions and significant amounts of funding to address current community problems make such departments necessary and allow the community to save budget funds for important needs.

The mental dimension of this problem lies in the changes that occur in the minds of community residents through direct personal discussion of promising development projects (deliberation), voting for their favourite tender proposal and participation in community unification activities (participation). In this way, a person feels and realises his or her own involvement in determining the priorities and directions of development of his or her locality, acquires civic engagement skills, and strengthens social capital by personal example, which, in turn, is a guarantee of sustainable community development.

In order to improve the quality of social services, it is necessary to constantly monitor (evaluate) their provision (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2020). According to the current legislation, the survey of social services recipients is carried out using a questionnaire, the sample of which is approved by a resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers. Despite the high status of this document, we can claim that the questionnaire is not able to fulfil its main function – to assess the quality of the service. This is due to the following factors.

Most of the questions are open or semi-closed, which requires the respondent to express their own opinion. At the same time, they can only describe their dissatisfaction, as agreement with the question or a positive assessment

of the service does not require explanation of their own position. For example: "Does the service you receive meet your needs?". Answer options: 1. "yes" and 2. "no, because....". The space allocated for the respondent's opinion should be taken into account, which is about 4/5 of one printed line. Thus, a person has to express his/her opinion in 3–4 words, which will not allow him/her to fully reveal the attitude to the problem. In addition, the presence of many semi-closed questions complicates the processing of a large number of questionnaires and requires a lot of time.

Several questions are incorrectly formulated, referring to two characteristics of the service at once, which is a violation of the questionnaire design methodology. For example: "Are you satisfied with the quality and frequency of social service provision?". Obviously, the questionnaire compilers should have separated "quality" and "frequency" of the service into different questions, as these components do not directly correlate with each other, and such a question actually disorients the respondent, who may be satisfied with only one of the proposed characteristics.

The composition of some of the questions and the answer options offered to them is imperfect. For example, the question "Are you satisfied with the attitude of your social worker" does not actually refer to the quality of the social service provided by this social work specialist (SWS), but reflects the respondent's attitude to his/her personality, character, manner of behaviour, etc. This, in turn, carries the risk of objectification by recipients of social services, the formation of an attitude towards the SWS as a unit (mechanism) for cleaning, laundry, food delivery. Therefore, in this case, it would be more appropriate to offer the respondent to evaluate the activities of the SWS by clearly defined indicators, for example "tidiness", "punctuality", "friendliness", "integrity", etc.

Some questions are not relevant for certain categories of citizens. In particular, the questions: „Is it convenient for you to visit a social service provider? will be difficult to answer for those who receive social care services at home, as they usually have serious physical or mental disabilities and do not leave the household on their own.

So, as we can see, the functionality of the questionnaire is very weak. To remedy this situation, we can suggest the following. Firstly, to remove the proposed questionnaire as an appendix to the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, and instead offer only a list of areas for assessment. Secondly, local governments should be allowed to choose and use methods of assessing the quality of social services provided in their communities. At the same time, the results of such studies should be available on information platforms, such as community websites, for all interested parties. Thirdly, to recommend that local authorities commission monitoring of the quality of social services from specialised organisations, such as analytical centres, sociological services, etc.

Two-thirds of the communities participating in the project conduct social service needs assessments. It is important that such assessments are carried out regularly

even despite the restrictions of wartime. On the other hand, more than 30% of the surveyed specialists noted that for various reasons, social service needs assessments are not conducted in their communities.

An important component of local social policy is its systematisation in the format of a community social passport. As the project results show, almost all participating communities have experience in preparing such materials, but, as we noted in the previous parts of the report, it is not so much the fact of having a social passport that is important as the relevance and adequacy of the data contained in it. Here, it is worth emphasising the restrictions associated with the martial law regime, which directly affect the availability of personal data of employees of social institutions, their locations, work schedules, etc. Currently, lacking information and financial resources for updating, some communities are forced to use outdated data.

Thus, it is certain that one of the first steps after the end of martial law will be to update social passport data. We can predict that this will be done most actively by those communities that are currently preparing comprehensive recovery programmes and plans (CRPs), as, among other things, the preparation of these materials requires careful accounting and analysis of the current development of the social sphere.

The key to the successful implementation of local social policy is the availability of clear forecast indicators and the identification of perspective directions for its development. As a result of analysing a significant amount of empirical information collected at different stages of the project, we can identify the following cases that are relevant in the near future:

- improving social support for veterans of the Russian-Ukrainian war and their families;
- improving social support for victims of domestic and/or gender-based violence;
- improving the system of transport services, widespread introduction of “social taxis”, taking into account the significant increase in their potential users;
- introduction of case management practices in the provision of rehabilitation services to military personnel during their adaptation to civilian life;
- further development of family-based forms of upbringing, promotion of patronage, family-type children’s homes, etc;
- development of effective methods of social work with families of fallen soldiers, especially to ensure the rights of minor children in such families;
- improving digital skills of employees in social sector institutions, raising the culture of collecting, systematising and storing empirical data;
- enhanced methodological and practical assistance to employees of municipal social protection institutions in mastering project management skills and searching for extra-budgetary sources of funding;
- development of algorithms for the formation of social cohesion of communities, especially in areas close to the zone of active hostilities, as well as com-

munities with traumatic experience of temporary occupation;

- improving the methodology for assessing the needs of the population for social services;
- ensuring a barrier-free living environment in communities, taking into account the provisions of the National Strategy for Barrier-Free Environment until 2030 (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2023, 2021).

Social protection institutions are generally satisfactorily staffed. However, with the new emerging challenges, the staff shortage is becoming more acute, which immediately affects the provision of certain social services. Thus, survey participants emphasised the urgent need to increase the number of specialists such as psychologists, veteran assistants, and specialists in facilitation and mediation in the staff of social service providers.

Competitiveness and rivalry in the allocation of funding usually have a positive impact on the quality of services (Lomonosova et al., 2024). The social sector is no exception. About 60% of communities hold competitions for social projects on their territory and/or compete for grant funding from national and international organisations. At the same time, the issue of the capacity and experience of holding social project competitions within the community remains open. The authors’ experience of communicating with the respondents shows that a significant number of communities do not practice the distribution of social services funding on a competitive basis. At the same time, the vast majority of participants are ready to learn how to build a social network and interact with non-governmental social service providers.

All of the participating communities regularly cooperate with non-governmental social organisations. Colleagues from the “third sector”, together with municipal social protection institutions, provide social services, compete for grant funds, and work on the preparation of fundamental documents regulating social development at the local level. Obviously, the most popular area of cooperation is the provision of humanitarian aid to those in need, support for IDPs, targeted assistance to certain socially vulnerable categories, including children deprived of parental care, families in difficult life circumstances, victims of domestic and/or gender-based violence, etc.

Almost every community has experience of interacting with powerful international institutions, which have become particularly active since the start of the full-scale invasion in February 2022. At the same time, a significant number of communities have acted as recipients of humanitarian aid from Ukraine’s international partners. Therefore, it is necessary to continue active training of social workers in interaction with international technical assistance providers in order to transform communities into full-fledged partners in the implementation of powerful sustainable social projects. In this context, it is important to master the basics of project management, team building, and methods of data collection and analysis.

The successful practice of cooperation between social protection agencies and their individual institutions with

representatives of socially responsible businesses should be restored. Such cooperation has been a common means of attracting direct monetary and in-kind assistance in the provision of social services to residents, especially those living in remote locations in rural communities. Obviously, this cooperation was dealt a powerful blow by the full-scale invasion, which, on the one hand, led to a significant expansion of the range of recipients of social services, and on the other hand, reduced the list of Ukrainian philanthropists-entrepreneurs who were forced to stop systematically funding social projects and providing ongoing assistance to socially vulnerable groups.

One of the most desirable types of assistance for social protection institutions is the renewal of computer and office equipment, which is critical for collecting and storing data, providing necessary references, etc. Among the technical means received by social protection institutions, participants noted: tablets, monoblocks, laptops, printers, multifunctional devices, software packages.

It is necessary to strive for the rapid development of an efficient model of social service provision, taking into account the domestic political context and the severe budget deficit. The social protection system of a particular community should be considered in the context of national processes, which are characterised by a lack of predictability and a certain dependence on the political situation.

During case studies, world cafes and other practical exercises, project participants have repeatedly expressed concern about such aspects of Ukrainian social policy as: the growing debt of the Ukrainian state to its citizens (military pensioners, liquidators of Chernobyl, etc.) who have won lawsuits against Ukraine in the European Court of Human Rights and can expect to receive multimillion payments from the state budget; the increase in cases of domestic violence, the spread of social orphanhood, alcohol and drug abuse, which inevitably accompany the end of any war in the modern world, and our country will not be an exception.

However, we are convinced that the use of the best international practices, in particular those of such countries as Israel, Poland, the United States of America, Croatia, Sweden and others, in modernising the provision of social services to the population will allow us to successfully overcome the above problems and fulfil the tasks set for Ukraine on the path to European integration.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The results of several waves of questionnaires, as well as the authors' personal communication with employees of social care institutions during trainings and professional discussions, give grounds to the following conclusions.

1. Employees of social institutions have a good knowledge of professional terminology. They are fluent in most of the concepts that reflect the main areas of their duties. At the same time, the use of foreign language definitions of concepts that are known to professionals can cause certain difficulties (such as "transparency" for "prozorist",

meaning openness and clarity; "deliberation" for "doradnytstvo", referring to advisory consultation; and "participation" for "uchasnytstvo", which means active involvement). The above should be taken into account in connection with the spread of anglicisms and other words of foreign origin in the Ukrainian language. In view of the growing cooperation between local self-government bodies and international organisations, it is appropriate to conduct special trainings on communication.

2. The vast majority of professionals have a fairly good knowledge of the legal framework for social policy. Even taking into account the constant mobility and regular innovations in the relevant legislation, specialists are confident in navigating the regulations. However, going beyond the boundaries of a highly specialised legal field causes them some tension. This is especially true for such topics as self-governance and delegated powers of local governments in the area of social policy; forms and methods of accountability of community leadership to the population; use of direct democracy tools to ensure the social rights of community residents, etc.

An example of this is the situation that arose during a training on the protection of children's social rights. Despite the extensive experience and high level of professionalism of most participants, none of them had any information about the activities of the Educational Ombudsman of Ukraine, an official who is supposed to protect the rights of participants in the educational process, including children with special educational needs, and to promote a safe educational environment in educational institutions.

Currently, such trainings are conducted in Ukraine with the support of the United Nations Development Programme in Ukraine (UNDP), the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and many other reputable international organizations. It is important that the leadership of communities and social protection agencies understand the importance of developing such soft skills in their employees. Mandatory attendance of such trainings can be included in the plan for improving the skills of employees from centers providing social services to the population.

3. There is a slow level of adaptation in the activities of social institutions to the current conditions of changes in the regulatory framework for their work, and to the development of a system for managing these institutions during martial law, in conditions of uncertainty and the establishment (also further operation) of military administrations. The situation is further complicated by the fact that, given the martial law, the activities of local councils are largely inhibited, but it is local councils that are the founders of institutions and establishments that are key to the implementation of social policy at the local level.

Such narrow-mindedness and focus of specialists exclusively on social issues indicates the lack of an integrated approach to solving social problems of citizens. One of the means of solving this problem is the creation of so-called "multidisciplinary teams", which consist of specialists in the field of social work, psychology, juvenile police. Such

experience is especially valuable for frontline communities, in which social institutions have suffered significant personnel and material losses.

4. Most communities have developed and are implementing programmes of socio-economic development and/or social protection programmes. Despite financial restrictions, these programmes are mostly implemented in full, and are supplemented by increased expenditures on social protection for certain categories of the population, including: internally displaced persons; persons with disabilities; soldiers of the Defence Forces; orphans and children deprived of parental care, etc. At the same time, a number of fundamental documents regulating the social protection of certain groups of the population (persons with disabilities, children, combatants, victims of domestic violence) are either do not work or are at the preparatory stage in most of the communities surveyed.

An illustrative example of the delay in the fulfillment of an important area of social policy is the situation with the implementation of the National Strategy for Creating Barrier-Free Space (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2021, April 14). Despite the critical importance of this document for achieving European standards in creating a safe and inclusive living environment, the implementation of the Strategy has been put on hold in most communities. The study also found that a significant number of participants continue to perceive such concepts as “inclusion” and “barrier-free” in a narrow sense, and associate them mainly with the provision of social services for people with disabilities. As a result, communities have some experience in terms of physical and educational accessibility. At the same time, communities are much less likely to develop cases on the social aspects of such areas of barrier-free accessibility as information, social, digital, and economic.

5. In-service training for social workers does not pay enough attention to topics related to human resource management, leadership, etc. There is a need to increase horizontal exchange of experience among social workers in territorial communities, including team building, analysis of social service needs, legal support for social work, etc. Teamwork is critical for successful participation in various competitions and grant programmes, so the ability to form an effective team of professionals is not only desirable, but also a mandatory characteristic of the heads of institutions and agencies of the social sector in territorial communities.

6. The main problems of the social sector identified by the study participants include: low level of funding for the development of social service infrastructure in most target communities in the context of expected budget deficits and growing needs (deterioration of the material base); lack of staff at the level of social service providers of communal subordination and (in some communities) lack of interest among private providers (low competition); lack of input data for qualitative needs assessment and planning; low level of inter-municipal cooperation in the provision of social services, especially in rural and small town communities; lack of human resources and information capacities

to find extra-budgetary funding for the development of social services;

7. Most participants lack experience of effective cooperation with civil society institutions (CSIs) and representatives of charitable institutions in addressing community social development. At the same time, the vast majority of the trainees have experience of cooperation with CSIs in the framework of social projects. Employees of municipal social institutions provide numerous examples.

At the same time, the study participants do not always consider representatives of non-governmental organisations to be full-fledged partners, instead perceiving them as a source of additional hassle. This is especially noticeable in cases when representatives of non-governmental organisations propose to implement such samples of foreign experience in implementing social policy that are not adapted to Ukrainian realities, and thus cause not so much interest as irritation among Ukrainian specialists, who believe that the proposed tool is not so much an effective and potentially efficient instrument as a bright picture of foreign life.

8. While most participants have a number of tools for data collection and analysis, they need to expand and improve their methodological arsenal. When practicing practical skills during the trainings, regardless of their thematic focus, significant gaps were identified in the skills of the participants, such as: drafting simple questionnaires/profiles; developing algorithms for assessing the quality of social services, etc. Even for experienced employees of social service institutions, the preparation of monitoring programmes is a serious challenge.

The vast majority of participants did not see a fundamental difference between the concepts of “monitoring” and “observation” before the start of the current project, actually synonymising them. The tasks proposed by the instructors during the trainings allowed the participants not only to learn about the specifics of each method, but also to practice their implementation during practical exercises. We hope that the skills acquired by the trainees will be useful in practical activities, in particular in the implementation of the provisions of the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 449 of 01.06.2020 ‘On Approval of the Procedure for Monitoring the Provision and Evaluation of the Quality of Social Services’ (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2020, June 1).

9. In some communities, there is a consumerist, paternalistic attitude of a significant number of community residents to the social protection system, constant reliance on the state, and ignoring opportunities for self-employment and self-sufficiency. There is also a lack of understanding of the problems of the social sphere on the part of some local council deputies, which negatively affects the resource provision of the local social protection system. Experts also emphasized the inability and/or unwillingness of the management of social protection bodies and institutions to attract alternative sources of funding (grants, charitable support), other than budgetary ones.

10. To resolve the above problems, communities are

recommended to develop local program documents on measures to provide professional support to social service providers to create a barrier-free space and measures to integrate IDPs in the community. In the final documents covering the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of social services, it is advisable to avoid vague and meaningless wording on encouraging the most qualified employees, instead specifying concrete, including material, forms of reward for successful and responsible work.

Communities should also intensify the development of program documents for the improvement of social services at the level of local self-government bodies where an "unmet need" has been identified, and involve specialists from specialized governmental and non-governmental bodies/institutions in their implementation. It is necessary to systematically analyze community actions to improve data exchange with information managers, surveys of potential providers and recipients of social services, and the preparation (updating) of social passports.

11. It's necessary to expand the range of sources of funding for social institutions and initiatives to create inclusive spaces through cooperation with international and Ukrainian charitable organizations, through participation in grant competitions. It's important to continue training on the basics of project management and participation in grant competitions (programs) for specialists in the social sphere, education, and public services in order to promote best practices of barrier-free access in territorial communities.

It is also necessary to intensify the creation of barrier-free programs in territorial communities with the mandatory involvement of representatives of the non-governmental sector, advisory bodies, representatives of self-organization bodies, etc. in their implementation and monitoring of success. The accessibility and safety of public spaces in communities should be constantly monitored.

During 2023–2025, veteran, youth, and women's spaces are being created in communities. These are safe, renovated, and equipped locations. They should become platforms for providing socio-psychological, socio-pedagogical, and other types of social services not only to the categories of the population for which they are primarily intended, but also to representatives of other segments of the population: large families, the elderly, etc. Such inclusiveness of these spaces should be formalized in agreements between the donor funding their creation and the leadership of the community in which they operate.

Communities should develop projects aimed at improving the quality of social services and offer them to international partners, such as UNICEF, IOM, and the International Committee of the Red Cross. It is also important that proposals for improving social services in territorial communities be included in the Comprehensive Recovery Programs (CRPs) and Recovery and Development Plans (RDPs), which are being developed in many territorial communities. This will increase their chances of receiving funding from both international partners and the state.

Limitations and future research

The research was focused on certain regions of Ukraine. Extending the research to other regions could provide a broader understanding of the challenges and opportunities for social development under martial law in the country as a whole.

Data collection method such as questionnaire is valuable tool, additional data collection methods such as observation and document analysis can provide a more detailed understanding of the issues.

Comparing the experiences of different regions or countries facing similar challenges can provide valuable information on best practices and lessons learned.

By exploring these limitations and developing directions for future research, we can deepen our understanding of the complex issues of social development in Ukraine under martial law and develop more effective strategies to support vulnerable populations.

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