LIFE ON THE LINE:
DECENTRALIZATION, ACCESS TO SERVICES AND PERCEPTION OF NGOS SERVICES PROVISION INVOLVEMENT IN DONETSK AND LUHANSK OBLAST GCA

Research on the provision of services to conflict-affected populations living along the line of contact and prospects for an improved social protection system

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Decentralization: State-of-the-Art in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts

Beginning in 2014, the Ukrainian Government overhauled its multi-level and territorial governance structures, including decentralisation reform. For decentralisation to work effectively a simple transfer of responsibilities to lower levels of Government is not enough. Several other conditions must be met, starting with sufficient and appropriate resources to fulfil new responsibilities. Resources need to be complemented by adequate capacities at the subnational level, proper coordination mechanisms, effective monitoring systems and a good balance in how various policy functions are decentralised.

One of the main problems in Ukraine’s local government system, which the 2014 Concept for Local Government Reform sought to address, was the fact that the country’s 12,000 or so villages below rayon level, with an average of 1,500 inhabitants each, were too small to provide their own public services properly, and lacked the resources for any strategic planning that could contribute to economic development, especially in rural areas. In order to remedy this, the Government passed a series of laws in 2014 and 2015 which enabled the amalgamation of adjoining villages within oblasts into new Amalgamated Territorial Communities (ATCs), known as Territorial Communities (TCs) since June 20201 (the official end of the amalgamation process). They would have access to a more significant share of revenues from the national and local budgets and would take over a range of functions in their local communities, including healthcare, education, social care, and public transport. The strategy behind the creation of ATCs is nothing less than a fundamental rethinking of Ukraine’s model of Local Government, eventually lead to a radical transformation of the higher levels of the current architecture: rayons and oblasts, as well, in line with Ukraine’s aspirations to realise reforms long awaited by its international partners and most importantly, by the people of Ukraine. This is in contrast to the previous system whereby much of the crucial decision making for villages was executed by representatives of the relevant units of the rayon state administrations accountable to the Central Government. Now, the territorial community council has not been only able to draw from a deeper pool of revenues raised locally, but is expected as well to enjoy direct budgetary relations with the central Government; that is, the latter subsidies TCs for healthcare, education and various other expenditures which will be negotiated with and allocated to TCs directly, rather than trickling down through oblast and rayon level as before.

In 2020 the ongoing decentralisation reform in Ukraine reached the stage of redesigning its sub-regional units, referred to as rayons, and finalising the boundaries of Territorial Communities (TCs), the latter process being formalised both in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Furthermore, it became effective as of January 2021, when TCs creation phase officially ended and TCs became fiscally independent from the raions, with the following critical immediate implications:

1. the reduction in the overall number of raions by merging existing ones. In Luhansk, the number of raions was reduced from 12 to 8 (of which four are in GCA); in Donetsk, from 18 to 8 (of which five are in GCA);
2. the transfer of functions for the provision of essential services at Raion State Administrations and TCs level as of January 2020, according to the new edition of the Law on Social Services.
3. In 2020 elections were held for the majority of the newly created TCs. As a result of impossibility of holding elections military and civil administrations (MCAs) were established in 18 communities along the LoC (though some of them being outside of 20-kilometer area from the LoC; it should be noted that on 26 May 2021 MCA in Slovyansk has been established). As of 12 July 2021, all eight Heads of MCAs were appointed in the Luhansk region; and seven out of ten Heads of MCAs in the Donetsk region.

The decentralisation reform overlaps with several other reforms, which has created loopholes for mismanagement of specific segments of everyday life in the communities of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. The Protection Cluster, the WASH Cluster and the Health Cluster have identified the following issues impacting the provision and access to social and other services and related to implementation of the decentralisation reform during their monitoring conducted in January-July 2021. They indicated that the current stage and pace of the decentralisation process at raion and TCs levels might disproportionately impact communities affected by the conflict, particularly concerning the provision and access to essential services (social, health, legal, administrative, education, water supply) in the short- and medium-term. The humanitarian needs and vulnerabilities along the LoC, already more acute due to COVID-19, are once again at risk of increasing. There are three main challenges associated with the decentralisation process in conflict-affected communities and regarding the provision of quality services:

1. Full access to the assigned TCs budget will only be allowed once the Heads of MCAs are appointed.
2. Due to the closure of businesses and the introduction of loose taxation in communities along the LoC, MCAs have considerable budget deficits and fewer opportunities to reduce them than other localities of the region.

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2 https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/540-2020-%c1%80#Text
3 https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/486-2020-p#Text
4 https://decentralization.gov.ua/news/12624?fbclid=IwAR2M7lEiDEihCR80ivtc320L2qPbjq02TcllvrnVbL5izU2W2wKux2iQrJA2l
5 https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2671-19#Text
3. Service centres have been re-assigned on a territorial basis, and they now can only cover the territory of the TC in which they are located. At the raion level, the handover of functions to TCs also implies that the latter are supposed to become the entry point for the reception of individuals, applications for social benefits and delivery of social services. Many villages, however, are yet to establish new service centres or procure the provision of services through other TCs. The raion will function as the «back office» that processes applications for social benefits:
   a. determining the needs of the residents of the administrative-territorial unit/TCs;
   b. informing the residents about the social services they are entitled to;
   c. identification of vulnerable residents which are in need of support;
   d. providing of services to vulnerable residents and families as a result of evaluation;
   e. approving and oversight of regional programmes in social services provision;
   f. ensuring professional development of the social services providers’ employees;
   g. coordinating of providers of social services within the state system and cooperation with private providers;
   h. collecting of data and its analysis regarding social services provision;
   i. ensuring the update of the Registry of social services providers on the local level;
   j. monitoring and evaluation of social services provision on the local level and further communication of the results;
   k. overseeing the budget spending in realm of social services provision.9

4. Access to services is linked to concerns regarding the budget allocation and the establishment or re-arrangement of the system essential services’ provision. The transitional period of the ongoing decentralisation raises concerns amongst the affected population on how communities located along the LoC will physically access new centers of administrative services.

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9 https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2671-19#Text
Provision of administrative, social services, and existing gaps in social protection schemes in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts

Since the outbreak of the armed conflict in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, there has been an imbalance in the networks of the provision of services in health care, culture, education, sports, and social protection. Many facilities and utilities of regional significance remain in the non-government controlled areas. Following the final date of amalgamation of local communities on the 1st January 2021, the new communities now should build capable networks that consider such aspects as gender, disabilities and special needs of residents, ensuring accessibility, etc. for an efficient use of budget funds. A reasonable question arises: how exactly should communities comply with these requirements of the legal framework? What specific steps have been taken and what needs to be done next, for example to ensure gender equality. For example, Ukraine entered 2021 with the second National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 «Women, Peace, Security» for the period up to 2025. The document provides for a number of measures, including those aimed at supporting gender-sensitive approaches to the provision of social services. However, ensuring its funding at the local level remains questionable.

The decentralization reform began in 2014. The transfer of provision of social services to the local level is envisaged by the Law ‘On Social Services’ that entered into force on 1 January 2020. And the final stage of the decentralization processes began only after the local elections of 25 October 2020. Since then, the responsibility to administer public services has been transferred to the local level. Despite the length of the processes, a considerable number of issues remain unresolved.

Key issues include:
1. How to ensure the quality and availability of services in communities with a budget deficit?
2. How to ensure access to services in communities consisting of remote villages, where no public transport is available?
3. How to effectively inform community members on the available services in the absence of stable Internet and telephone communication along the LoC?
4. Is the current social protection system able to cover and adapt to people’s diverse needs? What are the gaps in the system?
Communities governed by military and civil administrations (MCAs) also have specific issues related to their special status. For example, there are lengthy procedures for the verification and appointment of personnel which leads to the fact that communities, as of end of July 2021, do not have management or staff responsible for provision of essential services, which leads to the ongoing violation of the fundamental rights of the local residents.

Communities near the LoC and border areas with the Russian Federation are less capable of creating networks for provision of services due to the staff shortages, low level of logistics, staff shortages and the low level of market development of services. Social services being found to be less developed than administrative services. International humanitarian missions are covering the shortages of social service providers on the LoC.

Simultaneous implementation of reforms of the social services system, health care, education, decentralisation and digitalisation has created significant instability in providing the population with an adequate level of services. Each reform individually involves practical steps but, being carried out simultaneously, the whole process lacks proper planning, risk assessment and prevention, management and coordination. This wreaks havoc in localities far from regional centres which are deprived of regular transport links and high-quality Internet. This instability is exacerbated by the impact of the military conflict and the measures aimed at prevention of the spread of the coronavirus infection.

Influenced by the global trend towards the introduction of digital technologies and remote forms of interaction, which has been significantly accelerated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the digitalisation of social activities has become one of the critical national priorities. At the same time, the need to provide rural settlements with high-speed broadband internet, digital literacy and equipment to support the activities of conflict-affected communities has not been properly taken into account. There has been a slight attempt to address this situation. The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine introduced a programme to provide state subventions for communities with poor Internet access. However, the campaign was not widely promoted, was not sufficiently inclusive and closed the application process by June 2021. The Government has approved the distribution of money under this program. There were 247 requests from the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (on the dashboard), some of them were approved, some partly and some rejected.

About 3 to 4 million people live in the NGCA of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. The total number of population residing in the Ukrainian government controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts is challenging to estimate. According to regional state administrations, at the beginning of 2019, a total of 2.6 million people lived in the Government Controlled Areas (GCA). According to the digital census conducted by the Cabinet of Ministers, as of 1st December 2019, 3.1 million Ukrainians lived in the GCAs of the oblasts. Without accurate information on the demographic and social structure of the population at the community level, it is challenging to evaluate the impact of the conflict and the measures taken to support the population.

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10 UN Policy Paper on Social Protection, 2020
11 Universal Social Protection/old-age, disability and survivors pensions in Ukraine/This Universal Social Protection brief produced by Clara Leymonie and Andrei Tretyak
12 https://bb.gov.ua/golova
14 https://www.dsnews.ua/static/longread/donbas-ukr/demographiya-ordlo.html
level it is challenging to plan and develop public services’ delivery systems. As of 2020, 1.4 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are officially registered in Ukraine, the majority of whom have moved to the surrounding areas still within Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts: 35% moved to other settlements in Donetsk oblast and 19% in Luhansk oblast. Among all displaced persons, 50% are pensioners. In the Donetsk region, 62% of all IDPs are of retirement age, 15% are disabled people, and 12% are children; in Luhansk, oblast 72%, 12% and 8%, respectively. Though, it should be noted, according to expert assessments, that only half of the officially registered IDPs are living in GCA, the other half is registered in GCA but continue to live in NGCA. It should be taken into consideration during planning of service provision.

According to the September 2019 National Monitoring System (NMS), the majority (77% respondents) of IDPs surveyed were satisfied with the availability of all essential social services and less satisfied with the availability of medical services. The availability of essential social services, medical services and employment opportunities, depends on the type of settlement. IDPs living in large cities were the most satisfied with access to health services (87%) and the availability of employment opportunities (84%); while IDPs living in rural areas were the least satisfied with the availability of these services (47% and 41%, respectively). In the same monitoring, we can see how the level of satisfaction with the quality and accessibility of administrative services is halved in rural settlements. Dissatisfaction with access to essential social services among IDPs was mainly due to lack of funds (transport and logistics costs not related to the payment of the service itself) and lack of information about the services and the procedure for obtaining them.

On the 29th November 2020, the Law of Ukraine № 943 «On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine on Network Optimisation And Operation of The Centres of Administrative Services And Improving Access To Administrative Services Provided in Electronic Form» came into force. The law provides for significant changes to the organisation of administrative services’ provision. The law sets mandatory requirements for the TCs: regardless number of residents, they must establish administrative services’ centres and take over the right of property of administrative services’ centres established under the raion state administrations by January 1, 2022, as district state administrations shall be liquidated.

Administrative services could be clustered in following groups:

- Registration of the civil status;
- Registration and withdrawal of the residents;
- Issuance of passports and ID cards;
- Registration of businesses;
- Registration of the real estate;
- Disposal of the property registered on underaged;
- Issues related to land in property;
- Local issues (facilities management, housing, etc.).

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19 https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/943-20#Text
20 https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/523-2014-%D1%80#Text
On the 2\textsuperscript{nd} June, 2021, the Government adopted Order No 574 «On Approval of Methodological Recommendations on the Criteria of Territorial Accessibility of The Centre of Administrative Services, Including its Territorial Divisions and Remote (Including Mobile) Jobs of Administrators.» Clause 4 of the Recommendations stipulate that the distance to the access point should not exceed 14 kilometres. If the territorial accessibility of the access point is determined using the criterion of time spent in transit to the location, the time should not exceed 30 minutes in the presence of developed transport infrastructure.

It is important to understand that the existing system has an extremely low ability to adapt to the diverse needs of citizens. The social protection system, which was largely designed under the Soviet Union, has changed its form many times over 30 years, but not its essence. As a result, services are still tightly connected to institutions. And citizens are more vulnerable as they move away from regional centers.

Among the innovations of the legislation the following should be noted:

- A change in the very approach to the provision of social services. Whereas previously the law defined social services as «a set of measures to provide assistance to individuals, certain social groups who are in difficult life circumstances and cannot overcome them on their own,» the new wording provides for «actions aimed at the prevention of difficult life circumstances, overcoming such circumstances or minimizing their negative consequences for individuals/families. Thus, the emphasis in the provision of services is now also on the preventive component, which is an advantage, because prevention is more effective than overcoming already existing problems.

- Not only the person in need of services or her/his legal representative can now apply for social services, but also other persons, on behalf of persons in need of such services. This is also an important element of the preventive component of social work. In this context, we should note the important role of teachers, who must cooperate with social workers by identifying and reporting, for example, cases of domestic violence, and households in potentially difficult financial situations.

- Creation of a Registry of recipients and providers of social services, i.e., an automated information and telecommunication system designed to collect, register, store and use data on providers and recipients of social services, as well as the introduction of uniform requirements for all providers of social services - both public and communal, and non-government entities (both profit and non-profit organizations).

- Introduction of a list of 17 basic social services, i.e. services that will be provided to recipients, in particular, by executive bodies of local self-government bodies, including TCs.

- Setting a new classifications of social services: social prevention, social support and social services.

- Definition of a clear list of persons to whom services are provided at the expense of budgetary funds, regardless of their income level.

- Introduction of such mechanisms for the provision of social services as case management and emergency (crisis) social services.
The system of social services consists of the following sectors: public (it includes entities providing social services that are state-owned and subordinated to the authorities); communal (include institutions and establishments of communal property, which are subordinated to local governments); non-governmental (public organizations).

State and municipal social institutions include:
- territorial centers of social services for pensioners and single disabled people;
- centers for provision of social services and social centers;
- employment centers;
- centers for professional, medical and social rehabilitation of the disabled;
- shelters for minors;
- centers for social and psychological rehabilitation of minors;
- night shelters for homeless people;
- homeless registration centers;
- social hotels;
- centers of social adaptation;
- other institutions.

The main forms of social services are material assistance and social services. Material assistance is provided to persons in difficult life situations, in the form of financial or in-kind assistance: food, sanitation and personal hygiene, child care, clothing, footwear and other necessities, fuel, as well as technical and aids rehabilitation.

There is no licensing of social service providers in Ukraine, but the Law «On social services» introduced Register 22 - an automated system for collecting data on entities providing social services. Though, the registry is not working properly yet.

22 https://www.msp.gov.ua/content/reestr-nadavachiv-socialnih-poslug.html
Perception of provision of social services in TCs of Donetsk and Luhansk oblast

According to SCORE (2019), residents of the TCs close to the LoC have lesser access to social and administrative services; are more likely to think that authorities do not care about them; that justice and health sector providers are corrupt; have less trust in central institutions and police; and are more sceptical about the benefits of the reforms. Nevertheless, they have a stronger sense of belonging to Ukraine and their settlements. SCORE also identified reasonable level of ambivalence of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts population towards decentralization reform.

The demand for these services has created a large-scale commute across the LoC. According to the Charity Fund ‘Right to Protection’ data, in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, there were 13.933 millions entries to GCA from NGCA and from NGCA to GCA, which is approximately more than 1.1 millions per month both ways. In 2020 only 2,952 millions of people entered GCA from NGCA and NGCA to GCA - 4 times less than in pre-pandemic settings. Based on UN population estimates, 15% - 20% of the NGCA population used to exit NGCA monthly to access services in GCA before the COVID-19 pandemic. These movements represent a good opportunity for humanitarian actors to reach NGCA residents when they are in GCA, given the current access restrictions imposed by the de-facto authorities in the NGCA. This study shows that NGCA residents go to settlements close to the LoC to access pensions, social and banking services. These settlements include Stanytsia Luhanska (18%), Mariupol (11%), Zaitseve (11%), Kurakhove (9%), Bakhmut (8%), Novotroitske (7%) and Volnovhaha (7%). During the pandemic, due to temporary closures of all EECPs and current temporary closure of 3 out of 5 EECPs, pressure on social services providers decreased. However, we do not have reliable data on the numbers of NGCA residents applying for services and their provision.

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24 https://www.scoreforpeace.org/en/use/2019-General%20population-95
27 https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eeyJrljoYTdlM2VlOGExY1diZj00OWNI4LTihNTgiZSFiNWNkMGZiMzJiNjWidC16IjnhNTE3MDMzMzLTE2ZGY1NDQ1MzCCzjMyLWE5ODJmZTBmYTM3NlElM0UtJmFtZTc
Methodology of the study

Within the framework of this research 12 in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of four communities: Bakhmutska TC (Donetsk oblast), Popasnianska TC (Luhansk oblast), Svitlodarska TC (Donetsk oblast) and Sahunivska TC (Cherkasy oblast). Also in the same four communities 8 focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted (two in each community) - one with representatives of government and non-government institutions providing social services to the population, and one with recipients of social services. In-depth interviews and FGD were conducted on the basis of a structured questionnaire. The representatives of the communities interviewed within in-depth interviews were selected according to their experience in applying for social services, considering quotas of gender, age and veteran status.

The purpose of this study was to identify the nuances in the provision and receipt of social services by the population in the territorial communities located within 20 kilometers of the LoC. Moreover, in the research we pay special attention to the role of non-governmental organizations and international humanitarian organizations in provision of social services to the population. It is necessary to note that the interviewed representatives of Sahunivska TC (Cherkasy oblast), as well as two FGDs conducted in this TC are a kind of reference group. It gives an opportunity to reveal problems and features of providing and receiving social services in the TC inherent only to communities near the LoC, as well as problems and features which are manifestations of the system of social services provision to the population in general in the country.

In the course of this research a dialogue event was additionally conducted. The dialogue was planned as an additional option of the study to have more informal sharing and discussion of the research questions. Representatives of local governments, NGOs, and social service providers were involved in it. The main objective of the dialogue was to identify, to get an in-depth understanding and partly to clarify and to double check the information received at the FDGs about «hot spots», problems and challenges in implementation of social policies and provision of social services in communities in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts that are close to the LoC. The goal was to determine what social services look like in the TCs close to the LoC in the context of COVID-19 pandemic and decentralization reform.

The basic limitation of this research is the unrepresentativeness of the sample. The conclusions of social research using qualitative methods of data collection and analysis cannot be generalized to the general public.

For this research following research questions were identified:

1. What baseline experience does the community have in accessing services that are provided by the state?
2. How do local residents assess the contribution of international and local nongovernmental organizations in addressing their basic needs?
3. Is there a positive impact of the reforms on empowering territorial communities and increasing their participation in decision-making?
EXPERIENCE OF TCS RESIDENTS IN TERMS OF ACCESS TO PUBLIC SERVICES

After the unification of territorial communities from January 1, 2021, the new TCs now need to form networks capable of demonstrating an accessibility and effective use of budgetary resources, a gender perspective.

Networks for provision of public services require changes in accordance with the ongoing processes of reforming the spheres of specialized general education, secondary level of health care system and social services. In addition, given the global trend towards the introduction of digital technologies and remote forms of interaction based on them, which has been significantly accelerated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the digitalization of social sphere activities should be a key priority.

Communities near the LoC are more affected by the problems relating to creation of capable networks due to low level of logistics, lack of human resources and insufficient development of the market for services, especially social services.

Accessing the state and medical services

In general, respondents in in-depth interviews noted some improvement in the provision of public services through access to them via the Internet. It is important to note that the majority of respondents are in the middle and older age categories (35+). However, there are also complaints from respondents that mainly relate to the lack of synchronization of online and offline service delivery systems. In the situation of Bakhmutsk and Popasni TCS, it is clear that both Bakhmut and Popasna have been district centers and have an extensive and well-established system of services. There is also a certain level of developed communication with the rural areas of the communities.

‘In the village, yes, there is no access, starting from the pension fund, because it is a village. But in principle there were visits of the pension fund. Only it was planned to create a mobile TsNAP (center for provision of administrative services). Well I don’t know, they were kind of buying equipment for a mobile TsNAP. But everything was affected by our reform, when we were territorially divided since the new year.’ (Male, 42, Popasni TCS)

‘Now it is possible to register for services online, to get some certificates, subsidies. There is an improvement in the interaction of such vertical links between the individual and the state.’ (Male, 53, Bakhmutsk TCS)
‘There were electronic applications, but for some reason it is easier to stand in a queue, if you go to the outpatient clinic, and make an appointment for the near future, because through electronic services for some reason during the week you almost can’t make an appointment. It’s like online and offline don’t get along a little bit. But it’s effective that people use digital services and can sign up. It’s become especially effective during the pandemic.’ (Male, 53, Bakhmutska TC)

‘...this year, we’re probably the ones who don’t have normal health care. Maybe it is connected to the reform. In other cases, we have a staffing shortage of professional doctors, because no one wants to work in our village.’ (Female, 52, Popasnna TC)

At the same time, there is a problem with the provision of quality medical services at the secondary level of medical services (specialized care). Respondents of Bakhmutska TC note a shortage of specialists, due to which they have to travel to the regional center. There are also complaints about the accessibility of services for people with disabilities in Bakhmutska TC: according to respondents, the lack of infrastructure limits the ability of some community members to receive quality public services.

‘...there are hospitals in our community, some kind of specialized help, however there are not many specialists. And that’s why I went to Kramatorsk for treatment, when I got sick.’ (Female, 47, Bakhmutska TC, person with disability)

‘...I think there is no problem with the provision of medical services, but again, maybe for these people with disabilities they can be, because it is not always convenient for them to go to specialists, such as those who are already more narrow specialists. (Female, 19, Bakhmutska TC)

Unlike Bakhmutska and Popasnianska TCs, Svitlodarska TC is an example of the negative impact of the improperly conducted decentralization on community life. Residents of some localities in the community, such as the village of Novoluhanske, constantly point to the lack of services, proper communication with Svitlodarsk (lack of direct roads and transportation) and even representatives of local authorities. Because of this, interviewed residents of the community indicate a large number of shortcomings in receiving services, as well as a general feeling of abandonment. In the case of the village of Novoluhanske, residents also express concern about the arbitrary nature of the creation of the community, since the village has a historically high-quality communication infrastructure with Bakhmut. That is why the decision to join the village to the Svitlodarska TC looks like lawlessness to them.

‘In Novoluhanske, we were a little bit infringed with the formation of the community, which cannot form in any way. It turns out that the nearby are attached to the Bakhmutska community, and we are attached to the Svitlodarska community... For 30 years, since the nineties, I am disabled (second group),
I have had cancer. And here on our route Novoluhanske - Bakhmut for most years, for those years that I live, there was a free fare benefit. And so I’ve already applied several times to our village council, which still has a chairman of the village council. I even went to Svitlodarsk, to the city council, and they just canceled the free fare, and for six months now no one can do anything.’ (Male, 61, Svitlodarska TC).

‘In our village, except for the post office and the village council, which is not competent now, there are no services, everything was in the district center.’ (Male, 63, Svitlodarska TC).

‘...We have just joked with the locals that while Svitlodarsk and Novoluhanske have a large reservoir (an artificial lake) between them, we already think about how to put catamarans and swim, because there is no other way to get from one place to another.’ (FGD with service providers, Svitlodarska TC)

In contrast to the territorial communities of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, Sahunivska TC, as a rural community, according to respondents, has no problems with access to basic services; for them, as in the case of the communities in Donbas, the ability to receive services via the Internet is an absolute blessing. At the same time, representatives of Sahunivska TC did not complain about any systematic or structural problems in receiving services.

‘In our community... we have our TsNAP - the center for the provision of administrative services. We have, I think, we have everything we need. Receiving services in recent years, I will tell you that they have significantly improved in terms of waiting for their availability, now everything can be done much faster and in one city. Or even online without leaving home.’ (Female, 32, Sahunivska TC).

‘Well, if you need it, you can do it all without any problems, you can go to specialists, there is a lot of information on the Internet, you can read it and call and they will provide you services. There are no problems with that. People are open and eager to help, they are experts in our region.’ (Female, 31, Sahunivska TC).

**Accessing the social services**

Access to social services during any survey faces uncertainty - many respondents are not able to determine which services are «social”. Simply put, citizens do not always distinguish for themselves between administrative and social services, sometimes they do not distinguish them from medical services or housing and communal services. This effect manifests itself during the clarification of the type of services received or the question about the new law on social services to the population that entered into force this year. The vast majority of respondents do not know anything about the law, or are unable to explain its innovations or differences from the old one.
In the perception of Svitlodarska TC representatives, social services are present in the community itself, but in their perception the main centers of social service provision are in Bakhmut. In the mental maps of Svitlodarska TC residents, by old memory, Bakhmut is perceived as the center of the district and the source of basic benefits. This situation is detrimental to the development of the community, which has been in the process of formalizing the local authorities for more than half a year.

‘Well, it probably exists in the village. Let’s say that as a pension fund and social services we have it directly in the district - in Bakhmut.’ (Male, 61, Svitlodarska TC).

‘We don’t have Pension Fund here. It does not yet exist while there is no administration. Well, the post office works fine. Humanitarian aid arrives sometimes, for my disability category helped medicaments.’ (Male, 63, Svitlodarska TC).

‘From the state, other than the fact that I receive social benefits for disability, no more. Nothing is offered, even though I have a disability group, I am not even offered a trip to a sanatorium.’ (Female, 47, Bakhmutska TC, person with disability).

‘There were payments for two months that year for entrepreneurs. There were small payments. You could apply for it and get a small kopeck as compensation. That’s what I received. No subsidy. There is nothing else.’ (Male, 53, Bakhmutska TC).

Thus, the population of territorial communities near the LoC has a heterogeneous idea of social services - they include both the post office and the pension fund. The reason for this confusion of functions may be the idea of all services provided to the population as «social». During the focus groups the problem of inaccessibility of basic services to the population (e.g. banking services), which due to their absence are perceived by the local population as social services, became apparent.

‘We don’t even have an ATM and have to go to the city to get it. That is, pensioners who receive their pensions at the post office, if the post office is closed, they will not even have a place to get their pensions.’ (FGD with service recipients, Popasna TC).

‘State aid is practically not seen or heard here...’ (FGD with service recipients, Svitlodarska TC)

At the same time, in those communities where, in the context of decentralization, structures for providing services to the population are developing, residents have a clearer idea of what and where they receive in the form of social services.
'Recently the program «Social Community» has started to work, so now it is possible to apply not only for a subsidy, but for all types of assistance - help for resettlers, assistance at childbirth, and so on. Well, I personally applied for subsidies. It is very convenient, you do not need to go to let's say to the center of social protection in Bakhmut, here, on the spot, everything was formalized.’ (FGD with service recipients, Bakhmutska TC)

Thus, the main disadvantage of the system of provision of social services to the population in the three close to the LoC is institutional atrophy in the context of decentralization. Also the problem is the lack of communication of local authorities and international organizations with the population about what services can be qualified as «social», as well as where they are available and in what order they are provided.

FGDs with social services providers

During the focus group discussions in communities near the LoC, representatives of the local authorities and organizations providing social services, indicated that assessment of the needs of the population in their communities occurs with a certain regularity. At the same time, none of the respondents was able to describe neither the procedure, nor the frequency of such assessments (which are mandatory, according to the Ukrainian legislation). In many cases it is either not carried out, or is carried out in a formalistic manner. This tool only recently began to be introduced in the work of local governments, so **often the needs assessment for the authorities is done by international organizations or public organizations in the framework of international development programs.**

‘Recently I passed such a survey, as a dweller of the TC, fit was in the Google form, was created by the Bakhmut City Council, and there were assessed both social and administrative needs, including there were a lot of questions, you could provide suggestions for improving the provision of services, and the services of the center, for example, providing administrative services, and the passport office, for example, the migration service, and these medical services, and pension fund services of the Social Security Department.’ (FGD with service providers, Bakhmutska TC).

‘Well, the needs assessment is happening every year. The first time when a community strategy was developed, the year before last we wrote the strategy “The Future of Popasnianskyi raion”.’ (FGD with service providers, Popasna TC)

‘There was a needs assessment on the phone, International NGOs, Red Cross came, they assessed, well, sort of just surveying people and I was involved last year, and they asked what are the needs, what is needed and how can they help, these organizations, and what could help.’ (FGD with service providers, Svitlodarska TC)
Speaking about different groups in communities with different needs, representatives of bodies providing social assistance to the population prioritize internally displaced persons and standard vulnerable groups that receive some kind of social assistance - people with disabilities, low-income families, single mothers, and so on.

‘A huge group of people in every settlement is IDPs. And they always have the issues with housing in the first place and a lot of other issues related to the fact that people are displaced. They have a lot of issues that need to be solved, and each family has its own.’ (FGD with service providers, Bakhmutskaja TC).

‘...These are pensioners, of course, people with disabilities, people of pre-retirement age who remain incapable to work and cannot find a job due to the fact that they either do not have one or due to their age they are no longer profitable, low-income families, single mothers’ (FGD with service providers, Svitlodarska TC).

At the same time, an employee engaged in public social services provision in Popasnianska TC pointed out that, due to changes in the model of community management because of the MCA establishment, the process of the data transfer is ongoing and, therefore, they cannot be fully operational in provision of the services. This fact has a direct impact on the ability of social services to provide services to the population, especially when social services themselves have a pronounced staff shortage.

‘But as last year we didn’t get information with a breakdown of exactly what we need to understand as regards the needs of these people, so this year, because we have a community in a different status, all the registers are now closed, while the databases are being transferred to the MCA, so we also do not have access to them. But I do not think that they were actually updating this databases, to such an extent that it would have properly disaggregated data, with this breakdown. Because, really, it’s going to take a lot of time, there’s not enough specialists on the ground in all the services...We’re trying, but we need helpers in this, so to speak. (FGD with service providers, Popasna TC)

Thus, in territorial communities, access to basic services is in many ways still in the process of being formalized, including the transfer from the district to the community center and the redefinition of the workflow. The fact that certain communities are currently undergoing the transition to governance through MCA, affects the ability of the agencies themselves to keep a close record of the population and to work out possible scenarios for providing assistance to the populations who need it. The local population relies heavily on assistance from international humanitarian organizations and local NGOs.
CONTRIBUTION OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS, DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES AND LOCAL NGOS IN MEETING THE BASIC NEEDS OF THE POPULATION IN SOCIAL AND OTHER SERVICES

Cooperation with international humanitarian and development programs in the three communities close to the LoC, based on in-depth interviews, has for some time been a basic everyday experience for residents of these communities. Moreover, based on the experiences of the respondents shared within this study, international donors are perceived as a separate functional sector of community livelihoods.

‘International NGO helped us with the water supply to the school, then UN Agencies helped with the windows and roofing... And UN Agencies renovated the whole kindergarten. We had a short-stay kindergarten, only till 12 pm, but they gave us a complete renovation and we opened a full day kindergarten, a full day group.’ (Male, 42, Popasna TC).

‘I have experience both with International and local NGOs. That is thanks to these public international organizations, since 2015, helped us with both the material base of educational institutions and technical equipment, and in principle, probably, even with educational activity, and psychological training. That is, they help children and the school and the people who work there, and even the parents.’ (Female, 52, Popasna TC).

‘The Red Cross also helped a lot. UN Agencies, as far as I know, social workers also received pandemic kits there, for their families, for the families of social workers.’ (Female, 19, Bakhmutskta TC)

‘Before the new year a International NGO helped me. You know, I live by myself, but I was bored and they gave me a lot of attention.’ (Male, 61, Svitlodarska TC).

Representatives of organizations providing social services to the population also talk about systematic cooperation with both local NGOs and international organizations and charitable foundations. At the same time, the practice of ‘transferring’ clients from government agencies providing services to the ‘third sector’ tends to amortize the work
of the former. This also reflects the lack of human resources in the state social protection agencies, which was mentioned earlier.

‘...we cooperate with state bodies and with NGOs, with various international organisations, charitable foundations on a permanent basis. These are both referrals of clients, as a rule, and some joint events, working meetings, exchange of successful practices of legal assistance, this is our main specialization. Those organizations that we have in the bridge in the area, in principle, we cooperate with most of these organizations.’ (FGD with service providers, Bakhmutskaya TC).

‘I can say that our level of coordination in principle is very high between the authorities and civil society organizations, both local and international funds. It is visible both in all projects which are realized together, and in all documents which are coordinated now, and the public participates in their development.’ (FGD with service providers, Popasna TC)

In the situation of the three communities in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts that are in close proximity to the LoC, international organizations and local NGOs, which are often the conductors of international donor projects, are not just the ‘third sector: they have structures for helping the population similar to the government structures. That is, they completely fill in the work that is not fully or not very effectively done by state institutions. Moreover, by virtue of the branching of their own networks (offices, employees), international and public organizations have a higher level of awareness of the needs of the population. Therefore, people receive not only material but also non-material assistance (psychologists, support for people of retirement age, etc.).

At the same time, international organizations, aware of the need for infrastructural support of territorial communities, do not always have a full set of tools to fill some of the needs. For example, in Svitlodarska TC the International Committee of the Red Cross built a small outpatient clinic with the necessary infrastructure to receive residents. However, international organizations can not assume the responsibility for hiring medical personnel in health facilities - it is the task of local authorities. Because of the failure to do the full amount of work necessary to provide medical services to the locality, such curious cases arise when an international organization provides the necessary infrastructure, but the authorities are unable to staff the facilities with specialists.

‘Now they have built a one-story hospital, literally finished this year, and with apartments for doctors right in the same complex, there is an ad for recruiting doctors, but no one wants to come to our military zone. There is a beautiful building with siding, and it is just abandoned.’ (Male, 63, Svitlodarska TC)

‘We have a huge hospital in Svitlodarsk, there is an outpatient clinic for primary and secondary aid, but there are no specialized doctors, like an ophthalmologist; there are no specialized staff, so our people all go to Bakhmut. We do not have a children’s department, in connection with this all the children who fall ill and need medical treatment are inpatients, all go to Bakhmut too.’ (FGD with service providers, Svitlodarska TC).
In a situation far from a war zone, communities are not usually exposed to international assistance and development programs. Also, community-based organizations on the ground may not always have a well-developed network or any tangible influence. This was reflected in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions held with consumers of public services in Sahanivska TC, Cherkasy oblast. In the mental maps of the Sahanivska TC’s residents there is no image of international organizations or international development actions. In their perception international organizations are agents of saving poor people and people with disabilities, the collective image of UN agencies and the ICRC. The image of international or public organizations as manifestations of civil society and agents of positive change on the ground is simply absent.

‘I did not receive help from public organizations. But many citizens needed it. During the pandemic there was help with food products, for pensioners, the elderly - they received assistance and help from humanitarian organizations. We first of all apply to the local authorities.’ (Female, 32, Sahanivska TC)

‘I want to tell you, as I am also a recipient of social services, within the last years have significantly improved. Significantly improved and even in connection with this pandemic, it is easier to communicate with the same specialists. And about the provision of services, well in general there is no that we can wait there for months, no, everything is as it should be. There is no problem.’ (Female, 37, Sahanivska TC)

This construction of an image of international organizations by communities away from the LoC, on the one hand, creates a sense of a certain level of trust in the institutions of local government and the establishment of procedures within it. This can weaken the potential of civil society in a situation where there is a need to make an important decision for the community. In the three communities close to the LoC, respondents speak about communication with international organizations and local NGOs as a real «third sector», which takes the initiative and part of the responsibility, even when the local government cannot take full responsibility. This is reflected in the words of respondents when it comes to the possibility of solving their basic problems through direct recourse to local authorities. Respondents’ experience tells them that sometimes appealing to the local government may not yield results.

‘The result of communication was as usual - no money... The number of children in my school is small, I do not even have a staff psychologist, because a psychologist is not allowed for such a number of children in the school. Even psychologically, there is a social pedagogue and no psychologist.’ (Female, 52, Popasna TC).

‘No, I somehow dropped my hands, after I think we passed the documents three times, and as if nothing happened, I didn’t even try further.’ (Female, 47, Bakhmutskaya TC).

‘...very often during the hostilities we received food aid, I know exactly, that coal was distributed to the elderly, large families, single people, at that time it was very important, because people did not work, war, well as there was nothing to heat and gave coal, everyone was grateful. (FGD with service recipients, Popasna TC)
At the same time, about half of the respondents in the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions have a very limited idea of whether there is any coordination between local governments and international organizations. However, among the other part of the respondents there is a perception, based on personal experience and weak connections, that international organizations, if they cooperate with the local government - they take on at least half of the responsibilities, and in some situations even more. In this case, the main role is played by the visibility of international organizations, their active involvement in improving and maintaining the life of the community in the form of a short or permanent intensive presence in the public sphere. Due to the fact that local authorities, including the social protection department, do not have such financial and human resources, and international organizations often have a fairly clear mandate to provide certain assistance or services to the population - the former may seem inactive. This erodes already low confidence in the institutions of local government. As long as local residents are not confident that local authorities keep some record of the activities of international and local organizations - the level of trust and confidence in the authorities will not have a foundation for growth.

'It can be two legs going separately and two legs going together.' (Male, 53, Bakhmutska TC).

'The government and these foundations in our case work very well and it gives results... I understand the obligation, the material side is almost 80 percent taken by a foundation or a charitable organization.' (Female, 52, Popasna TC)

'...I often see that Bakhmut City Council, on its Facebook page, publishes that our mayor meets representatives of these organizations and there are some negotiations, agreements, signed memorandums, so it seems to me that we have such cooperation and it’s quite fruitful.' (Female, 19, Bakhmutska TC).

'...I think they don’t take some of that responsibility, because the responsibility has always rested and hangs on the local governments. They are just kind of helpers, they are or should be some kind of small such donors to work with the city government to bring it all to life, really.' (FGD with service recipients, Bakhmutska TC).

When international humanitarian organizations and local NGOs are not a familiar part of the community ecosystem, as in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, the local population retains a basic perception of the non-governmental/non-profit sector as a tool for helping those in need due to a lack of practical experience in interaction. Thus, for representatives of Sahunivska TC, cooperation and coordination of local self-government with international and local public and humanitarian organizations is an important aspect of life. However, due to the lack of experience, the respondents from Sahunivska TC are rather inclined to talk about such cooperation in terms of helping the unprotected segments of the population. Otherwise, international humanitarian organizations as a factor of everyday life are simply absent for the residents of this community.
‘You know, I think that they not only cooperate, but they closely cooperate with each other, and I think that it is right, and so it should be, that the local government and non-governmental organizations communicate with each other.’ (Female, 32, Sahunivska TC)

‘I’ve heard that they collaborate and help. I don’t know this information. I just heard from my friends, they are engaged in the city.’ (Female, 37, Sahunivska TC).

Speaking about the hypothetical possible ‘exit’ of international humanitarian organizations and the termination of the work of NGOs in the communities near the LoC and, more broadly, in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, interviewees from the three communities near the LoC expressed a high level of concern. For them, this scenario means the cessation of systematic work to improve life in the community at the level of ensuring the functioning of basic infrastructure. Particularly painful is the possibility of international humanitarian organizations and local organizations ceasing their work in the field of social services. According to the respondents of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the work of these organizations with the least protected representatives of communities is one of the central elements of supporting the quality life of the community. Respondents who have experience of working or volunteering with community organizations point out to the risk of civil society activism ceasing without international support. At the same time, respondents who work in institutions receiving international assistance or taking part in development projects indicate that without these kinds of organizations the existence of their institutions would be threatened.

‘I personally think that these humanitarian, foreign organizations, have made a great contribution, especially in the early years. There was a good support, they supported us, of course, concretely. I do not know how, I would tell, but without them it would be very difficult.’ (Male, 61, Svitlodarska TC)

‘...There is a very large category of poor people who have a pension of two thousand seven hundred UAH each. They got already used to these organizations. They just already suffer, as the amount of help from all these organizations have already reduced many times in comparison to it was at the beginning of the conflict, so to speak, and people are already very worried, waiting.’ (Male, 63, Svitlodarska TC).

‘It will be bad of course. There are a lot of very needy people now, and if you stop even that, people will be doomed.’ (Female, 47, Popasna TC, person with disability).

‘It seems to me that this will be very sad and negative, because it will be more difficult for our community, because this is a big help, especially if there is a construction, for example the repairing of schools or building of hospitals, it makes the financial investments easier, because the community would hardly build a center.’ (Female, 19, Bakhmutskaja TC).
‘...It will affect the community very much, because it turned out so, in connection with the military conflict, that all the same I have already said, a large part of the population are pensioners, but a smaller part of the population are people who have lost their jobs. And it turns out that these people who have lost their jobs as a result of the conflict, they survive only due to the fact that humanitarian organizations help them. So it will have a very strong, well, kind of an impact if humanitarian organizations leave.’ (FGD with service providers, Svitlodarska TC).

‘God forbid that something bad would happen, just, you know, until we are faced with this, we certainly do not think about it. But God forbid of course. But we need these organizations. If these organizations are gone, we’ll all be like on a desert island.’ (FGD with service recipients, Popasna TC).

Given the high level of engagement of international organizations in the communities of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, in the situation of Sahunivska TC the possible termination of such organizations’ activities is seen exclusively as a loss of opportunity to provide better quality of life for people in need of social and medical support. So, the possibility is perceived much more calmly. That is, again, international organizations are viewed as donors supporting people in difficult life circumstances. Local civic organizations, in turn, are rather absent from the social landscape of the community. Their work looks rudimentary, or at best auxiliary, aimed at working with pensioners and young people.

‘Of course it will have an impact, because people who were receiving humanitarian aid will stop receiving it... You know, when you have stable food packages, and now they won’t give them, and they cost a lot in the stores, it will usually be felt. The same about clothes, food, medicine. Of course, it will be felt.’ (Female, 37, Sahunivska TC).

‘Let’s not have that help necessary for citizens, to provide the same, the simplest provision of food or some financial help, or some gift for a holiday. I think that for such low-income people it is a great help, and such a bright ray, when they help.’ (Female, 31, Sahunivska TC).

At the same time for the residents of the Sahunivska TC the possibility of replacing the activities conducted by international humanitarian and development organizations by the services provided by government and local self-government authorities is irrelevant. In their community, the work of such organizations is not vital. It becomes evident, that TCs located far from the hostilities, such as Sahunivska TC, does not rely on help of international organizations, and does not have any kind of developed networks of local NGOs.

The interviewed residents of the three communities near the LoC, on the contrary, considering international organizations and local NGOs have been an integral part of the functioning of their community, tend to believe that state institutions are still not capable of replacing all the work performed by the ‘third sector’. When asked during the in-depth interviews about the possibility of international humanitarian organizations leaving TC and local authorities taking full responsibility for the provision of services and support, dwellers
of TCs near the LoC were mostly skeptical. At the same time, the idea of transferring the functions of community livelihood to local self-governance seems quite logical.

‘Local authorities can’t take this responsibility. Because you can’t sit on two chairs. No matter how you spin it, if you don’t have a team that’s everywhere in every community, in every region, in every district.’ (Male, 42, Popasna TC)

‘If they leave, there will be more problems, our state should create programs, grants, I mean, it should be local and support the development... On the one hand, it is a natural process they have to leave... On the other hand, the principle shows that people inside the local authorities’ buildings do not know how to use these resources, and it is too early to leave.’ (Male, 53, Bakhmutska TC)

‘I think that international organizations are very necessary, God forbid, God forbid that they do not stop their activities, because for many it means a lot’. (Male, 61, Svitlodarska TC)

‘If it is only the state, I am not sure that it will be at the same level and that we can also develop well here at the moment. If, in principle, once the state will develop as well, then maybe. At the moment, I’m not sure.’ (Female, 19, Bakhmutska TC).

At the same time, during the dialogue with representatives of the three communities close to the LoC, they point out that in the process of decentralization, and in general over the past few years, the provision of public services to the population has improved significantly. Specifically, the Bakhmutska TC speaks of improved facilities. At the same time, however, there is a significant lack of personnel.

‘But one of the strengths is the material support. Now for social services of an administrative nature, we provided furniture, equipment, software, laptops, there is a transport connection, we have a car. That is here, in the schools, toilets will be repaired; outpatient clinics for medical services have been built: new ones in Ivanovske and Opytne, the one in Zaitseve was repaired 2 years ago.’ (Dialogue event, Bakhmutska TC representative)

‘The weakness is the lack of staffing. I want to say, we have a particularly lame district medicine, because there staffing level is 48%, there is no specialists to the full’ (Dialogue event, Bakhmutska TC representative)

In the case of Svitlodarska TC, the infrastructure for the transition to self-sufficiency in community maintenance is largely absent.

‘...There is no TsNAP, it simply does not exist. As for the hospital: our infectious disease department in the hospital was destroyed during the hostilities; the absence of narrow specialists; the absence of a pediatric department, because
there is no pediatrician, and all our children have to go to Bakhmut, Slovyansk, Kramatorsk, Vnukove. Whoever has enough money.’ (Dialogue event, Svitlodarska TC representative)

Speaking about whether state agencies can take over the work of international humanitarian organizations and local NGOs, the respondents of the study were skeptical about it. During the focus group discussions, participants expressed the hope that such changes would not happen in the near future. As indicated above, the ‘third sector’ in the communities near the LoC is a full-blooded part of citizens’ livelihoods. Despite all negative factors related to the conflict, the support of the international and humanitarian organizations in the conflict-affected areas promoted efficient development of the civil society, establishment and strengthening capacities of local NGOs; their cooperation with the local authorities (somehow the progress has been more significant than in other areas of Ukraine not affected by the conflict). At the same time, there are serious concerns about possible degradation, if the humanitarian and development community stops its support at this stage.

‘I think that international organizations help, yes. They have funds. If at the local level, these funds will be redistributed to local authorities, everything would be fine.’ (FGD with services recipients, Bakhmutska TC).

‘They are good people, they support us very much. For example, in our case, the social center, a very big support... Without this, of course, it will be a big expense that will fall on our community.’ (FGD with service providers, Popasna TC)

‘Our view is that, if it concerns the city, perhaps we do not hear much difference, and concerning the district, there are really more people who feel the lack of international help.’ (FGD with service providers, Bakhmutska TC)

Thus, it can be assumed that international humanitarian organizations, development organizations and local NGOs in Bakhmutska, Svitlodarska and Popasna TCs are partially incorporated into the life of these communities. Interviewed communities’ representatives and local bodies providing social assistance to the population generally have a positive attitude towards assistance from the ‘third sector’. At the same time, a certain part of the respondents, belonging to the authorities and public organizations, also understand the limitations of international organizations and their projects. Importantly, the well-being of the researched communities near the LoC depends to a large extent on international support.
IMPACT OF REFORMS ON EMPOWERING TCS AND INCREASING THEIR RESIDENTS’ PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

The decentralization reform, as well as the parallel reforms of the medical, social and educational systems, are aimed at increasing the autonomy of territorial communities. For the respondents of three communities near the LoC the reforms aimed at strengthening their autonomy have not yet brought tangible results. At the level of everyday life, the respondents have felt the changes in the service provision system, namely the possibility to apply for services through the Internet, as well as, in the situation of some communities, the appearance of the TsNAP. Most respondents are in a certain state of confusion: they are not sure what should change and how. Often they speak of the fact that it has become necessary to execute some documents, to apply for some services. However, the expected results of the reforms (both interim and final) obviously have not been properly communicated to the residents of the communities; so they have an impression of chaotic and haphazard changes.

‘...the creation of the TsNAP is a good thing! You don’t have to run through cabinets to get a passport, or a photo to paste in the old passport.’ (Male, 42, Popasna TC)

‘You know, I probably can’t say how it affected me, because at this point we have a MCA, not even a community, we didn’t have elections, we didn’t have anyone appointed to us, so somehow I don’t see any special changes.’ (Female, 52, Popasna TC)

‘I want to say that, at the moment, we do not understand anything yet, because all this has just taken shape, and we are still at such a level that we only think how it will all be, how.’ (Female, 54, Popasna TC)

‘It seems to me that, in principle, it had an impact, of course, probably rather positive, but of course there were nuances: when they added certain territories to us, there were difficulties. For example, there were no first-aid stations, outpatient clinics where you could get some kind of aid, and the community, and our city as a center of the communities, gets money from our budget to open and build something, so there were some difficulties when everything began.’ (Female, 19, Bakhmutskaya TC)

‘...Now there is a process of reform, a process of restructuring, and it’s very difficult to assess until all the processes are fully launched.’ (FGD with service providers, Popasna TC)
At the same time, the respondents of Bakhmutskaja TC during the FGD suggested that their city (being a city of oblast significance) had a certain level of self-sufficiency and in this situation only acquired more problems. We can also see in the previous section of this study that infrastructurally more developed communities (Bakhmutskaja and Popasna TCs) have more tools and opportunities for ensuring proper quality of life for the new communities. At the same time, for the inhabitants of big cities themselves, the responsibility for the countryside seems burdensome. In turn, in Svitlodarska TC, locals are in a certain frustration, because due to the lack of leadership in the community, functioning of some vital institutions, such as a kindergarten, has been under threat.

‘You see, we had a city that was self-sufficient financially, everything was working. So, now, as if for 2 years, it is clear that the TC cannot throw all the money also on our city. A lot of problems.’ (FGD with service recipients, Bakhmutskaja TC)

‘...We faced the problem that a kindergarten was almost closed... That’s because our village, Novoluhanske, is now part of Svitlodarsk TC. Then some problems arose, the head of the MCA not being elected, or something else. So we can lost our kindergarten’ (FGD with services recipients, Svitlodarska TC)

A certain level of confusion about the reforms is also expressed by the residents of Sahunivska TC, but they speak about it in temporal terms: for them, the misunderstanding of what is going on is part of the first stage of the reform. Otherwise, they see the reform as a successful transformation of the outdated local self-government systems. Interviewees mostly talk about how the provision of services through the TsNAP and generally easier access to public services have qualitatively improved their lives.

‘In principle, now there are already united territorial communities that are successful, everything works. That’s the biggest plus that there is really a center for administrative services in the territorial community. It’s convenient, it’s fast, it wasn’t there before.’ (Female, 32, Sahunivska TC)

‘It has improved, because people can come and get help, get the very certificate or some other document without leaving the city, without having to go outside the city to receive it. It is very good that they exist and work.’ (Female, 31, Sahunivska TC)

Decentralization shifted decision-making centers to territorial communities for better service delivery to the population through the distribution of community funds. Thus, the residents of the territorial communities themselves were able to influence local government not only through direct elections, but also through a dialogue with the elected and appointed heads of various services and departments in the community. In some communities near the LoC, where the research was conducted, elected councils of the TCs are more or less active. Respondents speak about the presence of a certain asset among residents of territorial communities, who are in dialogue with local authorities. There is also an opportunity to come to public hearings and sessions of local councils, speaking out about existing problems. In general, citizens have the opportunity to influence the
decisions of their local authorities, but the mechanisms of interaction with civil society are not clearly defined, in the opinion of ordinary people.

‘...we actually have a fairly active community council, and they sometimes present issues of social services, invite the directors of social services centers and have conversations with them about results and problems - what is planned to do in the near future, and what services are added and, in principle, there is a dialogue with her and communication.’ (Female, 19, Bakhmutska TC)

‘There’s an open city council hearing, mostly about specific issues that are of concern for the community dwellers. Our authorities try to attract people, there is such a form as public hearings. But in principle, our civil society is not very well developed in our community, and I do not observe active participation of people, except for social networks (i.e. Facebook).’ (Female, 52, Popasna TC)

In the situation of Svitlodarska TC, where the head of the MCA has not been appointed for a long time, the respondents speak out sharply - in their opinion there is no authority in the community. Respondents from Novoluhanske village point out that previously problematic issues were solved at the meeting of the village residents, where all important issues were brought up. At the moment, the influence on the local government in this community is limited due to the uncertainty of who will be the head of this community.

‘Before there was an attempt to form a TC, before something in the village was always decided by a public meeting of dwellers.’ (Male, 61, Svitlodarska TC).

‘I know that all questions are one, the grass is not mowed, the village is overgrown with tall grass! We have one answer to all questions - no authorities, no money, no budget.’ (Male, 63, Svitlodarska TC)

At the same time, representatives of social assistance agencies and non-governmental organizations point out that in Svitlodarsk it is possible to receive consultations and various kinds of assistance directly from the city council that has to be liquidated when the MCA is fully in place. It is worth noting that similar services may be provided in Svitlodarsk itself, but in remote rural areas, with which there is no quality communication, these services may be unavailable for months.

‘...we have all departments in Svitlodarsk, we have many established departments of Svitlodarsk City Council and on any matter a person can simply come to the head of the department, or a specialist and consult with a simple access.’ (FGD with service providers, Svitlodarska TC)

‘Again, as here in all our townships, there are deputies. If they have any questions, they decide it all with themselves, that is, we do not know what questions are solved and so on. So here they have a session once a month, they gather to decide the issue, that’s it. We don’t even know what the issues are, what ordinances, what orders were, and so on.’ (FGD with services recipients, Svitlodarska TC)
In comparison, in Sahunivska TC there is an institution of community gatherings, where important issues for its residents are decided. Due to the fact that this community is completely rural with a small number of residents we can assume that this institution existed before, but the interviewed residents indicate certain improvements in the interaction with the local authorities. It can be assumed that due to the transfer of the center of decision-making from the district to the territorial community, the communication of the population with the authorities has only improved.

‘There are gatherings when the head of TC can speak and ask for help from the top management. I think we have that too, it’s there... Take the school buses - it was a big problem. They heard about it and let the buses run so it was better for pupils to get there. To get a certificate in TsNAP, it is easy now, you don’t have to spend a whole day to go to the raion center for that certificate.’ (Female, 31, Sahunivska TC)

Speaking of the opportunities offered by the decentralization reform to improve service delivery to the population, it is also worth pointing out the need not only to create a sustainable workforce, but also to take care of their professional development and well-being. During the dialogue for this study, it was noted by social workers of Svitlodarska TC that local governments do not pay adequate attention to the professional development of workers.

‘There is no learning or any kind of training for us here. Thanks to NGOs that invited us to the training, they help us with boosting the quality of our work.’ (Dialogue event, Svitlodarska TC representative)

Thus, the decentralization reform, which overlaps with the medical and educational reforms along with the administrative reform, potentially opening new opportunities for involvement and influence in community life, has not been fully implemented yet. The establishment of the MCAs in 18 communities in Donbas, stopping further development of the local-self government, has only complicated the process. Residents of the three communities near the LoC are in the process of designing a social assistance infrastructure that could address the needs of all groups. However, this process is implemented unevenly - Bakhmut and Popasna towns themselves, as large urbanized industrial centers, already have the necessary infrastructure to provide social services. But in the situation of Popasna TC and Bakhmutska TC, the main challenge is to create a system of recording and providing quality public services to rural areas’ residents within the territorial communities. Svitlodarska TC was artificially created without taking into account the infrastructural specificities of the settlements included in the community, due to which the settlements included in the territorial community actually remain abandoned. What is more, Svitlodarska TC has been in a «suspended state» without the MCA’s head. In the current situation in Popasna TC and Bakhmutska TC, the possibility remains for community residents to participate in decision-making and influence local authorities, which largely explains their attitude toward the participation of international humanitarian organizations and NGOs in the provision of social services - they are important, but rather a supplement to the existing imperfect system of service provision. At the same time Svitlodarska TC settlements are in many ways dependent on international development and humanitarian assistance programs, because their community has virtually no established system of recording and
providing public services. Svitlodarska TC is in fact a community, whose settlements had no experience of interaction and cooperation with each other before, as they belonged to different communities. Therefore, there is a feeling of arbitrariness in decision-making in this community.

For the three territorial communities close to the LoC, the main “breaking points” are the lack of awareness of the system of social, medical, administrative and other services. In the context of decentralization and reformatting the system of providing services from the district to the center of the territorial community, an important problem is to build a relationship of trust with the administration of the community and settlements, as well as the formation of a sense of ownership in the new communities in relation to local institutions. This problem is particularly evident for Svitlodarska TC, where for a long time the local MCA remains without an appointed head, and large settlements do not have roads connecting them to the centers of the territorial community.

In the context of interaction of local communities with international and local non-governmental organizations and development funds, a significant level of trust of the local population in them is obvious. In the situation of Svitlodarska TC the interaction with non-governmental organizations and humanitarian funds acquires the form of dependence, as the local authorities are not yet formed, and the territorial community itself is a fragment of the Debaltsevo district - so the institutional structure of local government is broken.

Speaking about the possibility of local authorities taking over the areas of responsibility of international and local non-governmental organizations and humanitarian funds, the local population, as well as providers of social services, express a certain level of skepticism. Representatives of the local population believe that despite a certain level of cooperation between international and local NGOs and local authorities, the latter do not have the institutional capacity and budget to make up for the lack of capacity of the former. It is also important to note that NGOs have the ability to penetrate deeper into communities near the LoC precisely because of the narrow specialization of their activities. At a time when local governments in territorial communities are obliged to meet the maximum needs of the population with limited human and financial resources. Popasna TC and Bakhmutskaya TC have a more developed structure of institutions of social protection and other services, so they need to cooperate with international and local NGOs to improve the system of public services and accessibility of these services. Svitlodarska TC, in turn, requires comprehensive support in the provision of all basic services in the villages of the community, because they are not provided correctly or not provided at all.
RECOMMENDATIONS

After analyzing the information and comments provided by the respondents at the FDGs, during in-depth interviews and the dialogue event, the experts of CF Stabilization Support Services prepared the following recommendations:

1. Recommendations to central authorities:

The Ministry of Social Policy:

Short-term:

1. Launch the Register of Providers and Recipients of Social Services (posted on the official website of the Ministry of Social Policy). The National Social Service of Ukraine should increase its staff (currently 60% of the required number of employees) and start inspections/monitoring in accordance with the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of August 26, 2020 № 783 «Some issues of the National Social Service of Ukraine» and the resolution of January 27, 2021 № 99 «On the Register of Providers and Recipients of Social Services». Intensify the identification and certification of providers of social services in the communal and non-state sectors.

2. Update methodological recommendations in accordance with the new version of the Law of Ukraine «On Social Services» (e.g. Procedure for determination of needs of the population of administrative-territorial unit for social services; Methodological recommendations on execution of own (self-governing) powers of the united territorial community in the field of social protection of population).

3. Develop a standard algorithm of local government actions and support from the central government for cases where social services cannot be provided / are not provided within the limits of transport accessibility. The algorithm should ensure the provision of compensation to a person (recipient of social services) in the event that social services are not provided within the transport accessibility.

4. Create government and programs to stimulate employment and incentivize specialists among social workers, graduates in particular, to work in rural areas in Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts and near the Line of Contact; fix an adjustment coefficient for social services providers/social workers working near the LoC in Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts (especially in rural areas).
In the long term

1. Provide training for profile specialists - local trainers on the basics of working in the Unified Information System of the social sphere.

2. To consider the possibility of partial compensation of employees’ expenses for training in the Unified Information System of the Social Sphere.

3. To supplement Resolution 637 by restoring the right of IDPs to index insurance payments in the event of an accident at work or occupational disease.

4. With the purpose of additional social protection and control over the provision of social services in communities, together with the relevant executive public authorities to determine and add to the list of indicators of community capacity such quantitative indicators as:
   a. The number of implemented local programs for social support and / or social adaptation and integration of internally displaced persons - from.
   b. The total area of housing provided to internally displaced persons for accommodation:
      • social housing - m²;
      • temporary housing - m²;
      • permanent housing - m².
   c. The number of employed internally displaced persons - persons.
   d. Number of new jobs created for internally displaced persons - from.
   e. Number of private entrepreneurs from internally displaced persons (or that have started their own business).
   f. Number of children of internally displaced persons, who are placed in preschool educational institutions.
   g. The number of children of internally displaced persons who have been placed in general educational institutions.

5. Propose adjustments to identification mechanisms, eligibility thresholds and benefits to improve the adaptability of the social protection system in crisis situations.
To the National Social Service of Ukraine:

1. The National Social Service of Ukraine should increase its staff (currently 60% of the required number of employees) and start inspections/monitoring in accordance with the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of August 26, 2020 № 783 «Some issues of the National Social Service of Ukraine» and the resolution of January 27, 2021 № 99 «On the Register of Providers and Recipients of Social Services». Intensify the identification and certification of providers of social services in the communal and non-state sectors.

2. Strengthen informing social service providers about the need to register in the register of social service providers.

To the Ministry of Digital Transformation:

Short-term:

1. Prolong and extend the state programme for internet subventions for local communities and make the criteria for participating in the application process adapted to the needs of the communities.

2. Finalize the results of the public discussion on the draft National Broadband Strategy and submit it for approval.

In the long term

1. Ensure internet coverage in remote and located near the LoC areas as a pathway for good governance in Donetsk and Luhansk regions and in line with the Strategy of Economic Development.

2. Ensure systematic monitoring and updating of legal and regulatory acts governing the provision of digital services. In order for electronic documents and services to be accepted on an equal basis with paper ones, the beneficiaries did not have to receive paper documents in addition to electronic ones.
2. Recommendations to regional and local authorities

In the area of organizational development:

1. Donetsk and Luhansk State Administrations should simplify or find the way to shorten the duration of the procedures to appoint the heads and the deputy heads of the MCAs (this may be done jointly with the Government and Parliament, if relevant legislative changes are needed).

2. Regional and local authorities should immediately react on the situation in Svitlodarska TC, where according to the respondents and open data, neither of 17 basic social services has been provided in January-June 2021, and other TCs with MCAs, and aim to prevent such crises in future via relevant legislative changes.

3. Regional and local authorities should plan and conduct regular assessments of the needs in social services in the communities, and update the TC’s social passports on the regular basis.

4. Assess the existing gaps in the provision of essential services to the local population and to get the input from the humanitarian organizations to move towards ensuring such services are provided with the resources of the communities and the support from the Government.

5. Introduce an annual mapping of public services, and evaluation of their transport accessibility.

6. Communities should develop or update communication plans focusing on public service delivery / provision activities.

7. Estimate the budget for the training / professional development of workers, employees of the social protection system and providers of public services in the community and to include them in the community budgets in 2022.

8. Make changes in the orders and decisions regulating the rules of reception of citizens, including in-person reception of citizens online and disseminate information about the relevant changes among the residents of the community.

9. Introduce or enhance psychosocial and mental health support services in the communities:
   • Implement psychological assessments and determine the need for psychosocial support services when determining the individual needs of the recipients of social services.
   • Introduce measures of psychological support and mental health support as part of social services (home care services, social support, social adaptation, etc.).
   • Introduce at the «University of the elderly people» a course aimed at supporting mental health, using elements of practical psychology.
   • Create a Center for active longevity.
10. Introduce or strengthen measures for the organization of professional palliative care at the place of residence, at home:
   • Introduce a mechanism of interdepartmental interaction of social care institutions in the provision of social services of palliative care to the terminally ill persons.
   • Introduction of a comprehensive palliative care service for citizens of retirement age and persons with disabilities.
   • Creation of multidisciplinary approach for providing palliative care with involvement of specialists of medical, social and psychological directions.
   • Introduction of integrated psychological care for the sick and seriously ill citizens of retirement age.

In the area of accessibility and inclusiveness of services:

1. Ensure transportation accessibility of social and other services for the communities’ residents.
2. Expand the list of online services, including through the introduction of online counseling.
3. In the case of ordering social services in a neighboring community to introduce a mechanism for compensation of transportation costs.
4. Introduce an efficient system of communication between local government bodies and the community’s settlements to solve urgent problems of the population (especially in the absence of MCA chairperson, starostas, etc.).

Recommendations to the humanitarian and development community:

1. Strengthen support for community capacity building, in particular: human capacity, creating opportunities for digitalization of services, skills development, etc.
2. When identifying communities for intervention, pay attention not only to the distance from the contact line but also to the existing or damaged infrastructure, the number of inhabitants and the existence of transport links to the regional center and major population centres.
3. To support and promote activities aimed to foster joint government-civil society cooperation.
4. Develop a long-term strategy to support communities close to the LoC in the course Nexus approach (gradual transition from emergency response to development where applicable) that would include the following elements: social protection, universal healthcare, infrastructure assistance and institutional development.
Recommendations to the institutional donors:

1. Dedicate flexible resources for the development of the physical and social infrastructure, especially in close proximity to the LoC.
2. Ensure that grants and investment loans have been fully informed by a joint and independent government-local civil society involvement through participatory processes and take into account communities’ long-term priorities.
3. Ensure a Gender, Age, and Diversity approach to international funding and feedback mechanisms as a primary role to assess programming efficiency.
4. Support interventions that promote communities’ self-reliance and foster the role of civil society and non-governmental organisations and their cooperation with governmental institutions.
5. Refrain from interventions that perpetuate increased vulnerability and dependency on aid and humanitarian assistance.

Recommendations to Ukraine’s international humanitarian and development partners:

1. Promote systematic outreach and data collection against the World Bank’s Data Portal indicators to benefit from analytical information by geographic location and inform national and regional planning accordingly.
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