

COUNTRY BRIEF

# Living with insecurity: Ukrainians at times of armed conflict and the pandemic

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## **"Eventually, in places where I come from, trust is an ultimate life threat"**

**Sophia Andrukhovych, "Amadoka"**

Ukrainians are used to living in instability. The country is evolving and developing as a modern state under many internal and external pressures. It is trying simultaneously to build a state and a nation.

Ukraine's current political project is to a large degree defined by the legacy of incomplete state-building, totalitarian trauma due to the indiscriminate use of violence, the Holodomor and the Holocaust, which scarred millions of Ukrainians from east to west. The repressions of the 20th century wiped out the elites who could have led nation-building efforts, tore apart the community-based fabric of Ukrainian society, entrenched extremely high levels of mistrust in the state and normalised centralized decision-making. Ukraine's faith in the national government is so low that they believe it poses a risk to the public interest.

The United Nations defines three main elements of human security - freedom from want, freedom from fear, and freedom to live in dignity. For Ukrainians, human security is intimately connected with the protection of individual rights, the security of their family, kin and local communities, but also preserving their national identity and sovereignty. In contrast to Russia, where security is viewed more as the protection of the state, Ukrainians are naturally more sensitive to the concept of human security.

Contemporary Ukraine is still struggling to consolidate its democracy and construct a rules-based market economy. The popular protest and subsequent Russian aggression of 2013-2014 has put Ukraine firmly on the path towards shedding its Soviet legacy and strengthened societal determination to build a rules-based society. However, this path is turbulent and full of obstacles. There are a myriad of factors that contribute to a heightened sense of human insecurity. The most prominent negative factors are:

- the armed conflict with Russia and the loss of 7% of Ukrainian territory (annexed Crimea and parts of Donetsk and Lugansk regions);
- a sharp economic decline as a result of the war (a 10% fall in GDP nationwide and around 30% in Donbas), and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic (a predicted 6% drop in GDP);
- anxiety related to the pandemic and the weak capacity of state institutions, including the public health system, to cope with the crisis;
- low trust in national government and dissatisfaction with the direction Ukraine is going;
- a toxic public space, especially with regards to the political sphere, which is polluted by disinformation and divisive content originating from Russian and Russia-allied information sources, but also by domestic political opponents from large financial groups that oppose reform.

Modern-day hardships cause strong anxiety among citizens of Ukraine. Personal security is a priority for Ukrainian families, who do not expect quick improvements from reforms and have adopted strategies based on self-reliance. Poverty, access to medical care and employment are the most important issues for them and their families<sup>1</sup>.

But on the positive side, this is offset by a sense of optimism, hope, and purpose. These features are critical for any resilient society. Ukrainians maybe not be happy now, but

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<sup>1</sup> Допоможи собі сам: українці розчаровані в реформах, але готові підтримувати одне одного та свої громади. 09.10.2020. <https://engage.org.ua/dopomozhy-sobi-sam-ukrainsi-rozcharovani-v-reformakh-ale-hotovi-pidtrymuvaty-odne-odnoho-ta-svoi-hromady>

they do believe that in the next five years their children will be better off.<sup>2</sup> Public opinion polls demonstrate a strong determination to defend Ukraine from Russian aggression, and 85% identify themselves as patriots of Ukraine.<sup>3</sup>

Statements and initial conceptual documents indicate that building human-centric policies is central to how President Zelenskyy's team want to approach the issues, including in the security sphere. This is a response to the high priority placed on human security by Ukrainian households, where concerns over poverty, access to healthcare, and the risks of unemployment predominate. The new National Security Strategy for 2020-2025 reflects this approach. It states '*human life, health, dignity, immunity and security are the highest social values*'<sup>4</sup>.

This paper will detail key components of human security, focusing on political, environmental, food, health, and personal security. Reflecting on the impact of the ongoing conflict in the east and the effects of COVID-19, it takes a holistic view of the huge range of challenges that are contributing to heightened human insecurity.

## Political Security

The political sphere in Ukraine remains quite volatile and susceptible to various influences, both internal and external. Overall, Ukrainians are free to express their views, organize and engage with the political process. Ukraine is a democracy, a partly free system as defined by Freedom House.<sup>5</sup> The government has not introduced any COVID-related restrictions on political or civil liberties. At times when Russia's rulers are consolidating their authoritarian grip on society, Ukraine is moving towards being a more liberal and open political society, even as it fights a war. This is counterintuitive but very significant.

Generally, the opposition and new parties have space to participate in political life. The entry barrier into politics is still high but the fact that the new reformist political party Voice (Golos) managed to enter parliament in 2019 testifies to improvements in representative democracy in Ukraine. There is fierce political competition in the parliament. The absolute majority of the ruling party, though currently crumbling, was being used to restrict the degree of influence of the opposition parties. This often took the form of ignoring amendments to bills proposed by the opposition, providing little time for deliberations and minimising access to leading positions in committees. This could be viewed as an attempt to weaken an important democratic institution.

Ukrainians voted in local elections on 25 October 2020. More than 144 political parties campaigned, and voting took place for the first time under the new electoral code, which introduced open party lists. The new electoral code opened the political process to more women by requiring that female candidates accounted for at least 40% of the total across all segments of the list. The voting rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs) were also improved. Some minor violations aside, the preliminary conclusion of the OSCE ODIHR mission was positive.<sup>6</sup>

The distinguishing feature of this campaign was the prominence of new regional political parties, established by mayors and local elites, which won in most large cities. In many cities, incumbent mayors were re-elected. They ran independently of Zelenskyy's

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<sup>2</sup> Happiness Report, 2019, Yalta European Strategy. [https://yes-ukraine.org/files/pdf/Happiness\\_report\\_2019.pdf](https://yes-ukraine.org/files/pdf/Happiness_report_2019.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Rating Group, 14.10.2020, <http://ratinggroup.ua/research/ukraine/fbb3f3c52d452cdd1646d4a62b69dba5.html>

<sup>4</sup> President approved new National Security Strategy, September 2020, Office of the President of Ukraine, <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/volodimir-zelenskij-zatverdiv-strategiyu-nacionalnoyi-bezpek-63577>

<sup>5</sup> Freedom House Report 2020, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/ukraine/freedom-world/2020>

<sup>6</sup> У ОБСЄ заявляють, що місцеві вибори в Україні відбулися спокійно з дотриманням процедури, 27 October, 2020 <https://vybory.detector.media/2020/10/27/u-obse-zayavlyayut-scho-mistsevi-vybory-v-ukrajini-vidbulysya-spokijno-z-dotrymannyam-protsedur/>

Servant of the People and other national parties. The fragmentation of the political landscape, alongside the growing popularity of Russia-aligned parties in the south and east, such as Opposition Platform - For Life and blogger Shariy's party, are worrying trends. Voters in the southeast disillusioned with Zelenskyy are swinging back to the parties of the Yanukovych area and new political projects that are populist and divisive in nature, such as Shariy's party. Due to COVID-19 and general disillusionment, only 36% of Ukrainians voted, which is one of the lowest turnouts in local elections in the history of independent Ukraine.

Journalists and local activists, especially those reporting on corruption, experience threats and intimidation. Attacks on activist Serhiy Sternenko from Odesa, the murder of Kateryna Hanszuk from Kherson, and the recent night-time arson attack on the home of campaigner Vitaly Shabunin prove that civic anti-corruption activism is risky.

Political security is undermined by the weak rule of law, with courts being poor instruments for protecting human and civil rights. Often captured by political and business groups, they are not trusted by Ukrainians. A total 66% believe judges are fully or mostly dependent and fair trials are unlikely, with 'justice' available only to those who can pay for it.<sup>7</sup> Also, 75% of Ukrainians fully or mostly distrust the court system.

Despite the risks, parts of Ukrainian society remain mobilized to advocate for various issues, including the terms of a peace settlement in Donbas and demanding justice for cases of brutal attacks on activists. One of the most prominent examples recently was the 'No to Capitulation!' movement. The activists demanded that Zelenskyy state clear 'red lines' concerning implementation of the Minsk Agreement and the resolution of the war in Donbas. The pressure of public opinion that was created resulted in the Ukrainian official position being modified to make security measures (in particular, control over the Ukrainian-Russian border) a priority over the start of the political process for the post-conflict reintegration of Donbas. As a result, local elections did not take place in the occupied territories.

The 'anti-capitulation' movement was an eclectic mix of opposition parties, civic activities, veterans of the war in Donbas, and several right-wing radical groups. With the increased circulation of firearms and large numbers of veterans of war, these groups are more visible in Ukrainian society than before<sup>8</sup>. They remain outside of official politics. None of them gained seats in the local elections. But they contribute to growing threats of violence and are implicated in attacks on more liberally inclined civil society groups, especially LGBT+ and ethnic minorities, in particular the Roma community. The number of these attacks increased in the first quarter of 2020, with disturbances taking place in Odesa, Dnipro, Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhya.<sup>9</sup>

The Ukrainian media space is quite diverse and pluralistic; however, the quality of political news is negatively impacted by constant in-fighting between different financial interest groups, which use the public information space to attack their opponents. The conflict and issues of national identity are often exploited by some political groups to polarize society. Zelenskyy's strategy is to avoid divisive issues and try to unite Ukrainians behind an agenda of prosperity and economic growth. However, narratives of 'forced Ukrainization' (supporting development of Ukrainian language) were exploited by pro-Russia parties in local elections.

Disinformation has a significant corrosive effect on political security. Exploiting

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<sup>7</sup> Оцінка громадянами діяльності влади, рівень довіри до соціальних інститутів та політиків, електоральні орієнтації громадян (лютий 2020р. соціологія), Razumkov Center, 24.02.2020, <https://razumkov.org.ua/napriamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/otsinka-gromadianamy-diialnosti-vlady-riven-doviry-do-sotsialnykh-instytutiv-ta-politykiv-elektoralni-orientatsii-gromadian-liutyi-2020r>

<sup>8</sup> We are referring to such groups as National Corps, C14, Tradition and Order, Unknown Patriot, Faicor.

<sup>9</sup> 'З початку року зафіксували 74 випадки переслідування активістів', Zmina, 22.10.2020, <https://zmina.info/news/z-pochatku-2020-roku-pravozahysnyky-zafiksuvaly-74-vypadky-peresliduvannya-aktyvistiv/>

disillusionment, lack of trust, and strong anti-elitist sentiments, Russian and some Ukrainian media owned by pro-Russian politicians (especially Viktor Medvedchuk's media holding company) and social media networks spin anti-Western narratives, try to discredit Zelenskyy's peace-making efforts and spread COVID disinformation. Anti-reform forces are trying to obstruct reform efforts by spreading anti-Western propaganda. The most popular COVID-related disinformation was about the origin of the virus (including claims about 'US laboratories in Ukraine') and methods of treatment, as well as George Soros's supposed role in causing the pandemic.<sup>10</sup> Many of the latest disinformation attacks are aimed at Ukrainian cooperation with the IMF and other international financial institutions.

Despite these challenges, Ukrainian citizens are slowly growing in confidence and empowerment to act to defend their rights and contribute to the well-being of their communities. A recent survey shows increasing interest in being engaged, and that 61% of those who were actively engaged achieved positive results. The share of those who believe that only the state should be in charge of solving Ukraine's problems is decreasing. Every fifth Ukrainian thinks that each individual citizen should also be involved in the fight against corruption.<sup>11</sup> Decentralization also creates an enabling environment for activism, whereby communities co-design transparent rules for managing public resources, leading to more trust in the system.

## Economic and Food Security

The Ukrainian economy remains fragile, with many structural problems inherited from incomplete reforms. The economic consequences of the military conflict with Russia are severe. The war has hit the most resource-rich and industrialised parts of Ukraine. According to the Ukrainian Ministry of Economy, Ukrainian direct economic losses are equivalent to five billion USD.<sup>12</sup> An independent study puts a minimum price tag of 22 billion USD on rebuilding Donbas.<sup>13</sup>

The shock of the loss of Crimea and parts of Donbas and the closure of the Russian market was partially offset by progressive reforms and the re-orientation of Ukrainian exports to the EU market. Today around 40% of Ukraine's exports go to the EU. Ukraine managed to restore macro-economic stability, but at a high cost to its citizens. As a result of the closure of insolvent banks and those connected to oligarchs, many Ukrainians lost their deposits. As of June 2020, over 3 billion UAH (around \$100 million) worth of deposits have not been recovered under the state guarantee programme.<sup>14</sup>

The COVID epidemic has undercut Ukraine's mild economic recovery. Real GDP dropped 11 per cent in the second quarter of 2020, and an annual drop of six per cent is predicted.<sup>15</sup> Measures to slow the spread of the virus that closed businesses mostly hit micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises. These sectors of the economy are in real danger of serious long-term decline, as the share of those reporting risk of permanent closure has increased from seven per cent pre-COVID to 59 per cent.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Disinformation Resilience Index - COVID-19 Crash test 2020. Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism", <https://dri.org.ua/summary/en>

<sup>11</sup> Допоможи собі сам: українці розчаровані в реформах, але готові підтримувати одне одного та свої громади. USAID, Engage, 9.10.2020, [https://engage.org.ua/dopomozhy-sobi-sam-ukraintsi-rozcharovani-v-reformakh-ale-hotovi-pidtrymuvaty-odne-odnoho-ta-svoi-hromady/?fbclid=IwAR1zWNR3vODfKY3v4RcF7e3aXJBswKdlb0J2yoOEw8tp\\_\\_aKr2jDang7bNM](https://engage.org.ua/dopomozhy-sobi-sam-ukraintsi-rozcharovani-v-reformakh-ale-hotovi-pidtrymuvaty-odne-odnoho-ta-svoi-hromady/?fbclid=IwAR1zWNR3vODfKY3v4RcF7e3aXJBswKdlb0J2yoOEw8tp__aKr2jDang7bNM)

<sup>12</sup> Losses of Ukraine's economy from Russian aggression reach \$150 bln – Mylovanov. 09.12.2019, <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-economy/2833965-losses-of-ukraines-economy-from-russian-aggression-reach-150-bl.html>

<sup>13</sup> Economic Challenges and Costs of Reintegrating the Donbas Region in Ukraine, WIIW, June 2020, <https://wiiw.ac.at/economic-challenges-and-costs-of-reintegrating-the-donbas-region-in-ukraine-dlp-5351.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Українці не забрали 3 мільярди гривень із збанкрутілих банків. Як отримати гарантовані державою депозити, 23.06.2020, <https://www.epravda.com.ua/publications/2020/06/23/662158/>

<sup>15</sup> Експерти погіршили прогноз падіння економіки України. 11.08.2020, <https://finclub.net/ua/news/eksperty-pohirshyly-prohnoz-padinnia-ekonomiky-ukrainy.html>

<sup>16</sup> Звіт про дослідження мікро-, малого, та середнього підприємництва, Info Sapiens, 24 September 2020,

Since restrictive measures were introduced, about 400,000 people have registered as unemployed, with half finding new jobs via the State Employment Agency.<sup>17</sup> Those in low paygrades, unskilled workers, and young people are especially vulnerable, as are women: one in five will face difficulties returning to work, as opposed to just one in ten men. Unofficially, over three million Ukrainians were facing so-called 'hidden unemployment': either salary reductions or being forced to take unpaid leave.<sup>18</sup> This gap in the statistics supports the assumption that there is a large shadow economy and shows how official data fails to provide a basis for effective policy-making in Ukraine.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also complicated Ukraine's fight against poverty. Between 2015 and 2019, Ukraine demonstrated a positive trend in reducing poverty. A recent UNICEF report predicted that, according to the less pessimistic scenario, absolute poverty would increase from 27 per cent to 43 per cent.<sup>19</sup> Currently, poverty is an issue for 47 per cent of households and the risk of unemployment for 33 per cent.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, the structure of the economy and favourable global trade conditions for Ukrainian export provided a buffer against the crisis. Ukraine's international currency reserves have risen to USD 29 billion, the largest increase since 2011<sup>21</sup>. Consumer confidence has slowly been picking up since July 2020, although citizens are refraining from large purchases<sup>22</sup>. With no risk of immediate default, the incentive to implement the IMF's conditions and to push for structural reform has weakened. This is one of the main risks to prosperity. Without investments, both domestic and foreign, Ukraine is unlikely to make the leap required to join the club of prosperous nations.

Data shows that many families, and especially those in vulnerable groups, have high economic insecurity. In Ukraine, basic food products consume 42 per cent of the minimum wage, as compared to 15 per cent in neighbouring Poland.<sup>23</sup> Savings are relatively low. Before COVID-19, 80 per cent of Ukrainians had the equivalent of only three months of their income in savings.<sup>24</sup> Many of these funds are now depleted.

Remittances from labour migrants are a lifeline for many households in Ukraine. The National Bank of Ukraine estimates that their volume in 2020 will decrease by 20 per cent and will equal 10 billion USD.<sup>25</sup> Even with this decline, the amount is impressive and is three times the size of FDI inflows. Because of restrictions imposed by EU member-states in March-May 2020, over 500 000 Ukrainians returned home, mostly those on short-term contracts. In the medium term, those who had contracts were able to return, but COVID-19 clearly complicated Ukrainians' participation in on the European labour market.

The impact of COVID-19 was more severe for Ukrainians living near the contact line, which is around 400 km long. Over three-quarters of the 381 households interviewed for a ReliefWeb report in both urban and rural towns in Donetsk and Luhansk regions reported adverse socio-economic impacts resulting from COVID-19. The primary

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<https://sapiens.com.ua/ua/publication-single-page?id=135>

<sup>17</sup> З початку карантину роботу втратили майже 450 тисяч українців. Ріст безробіття зупинився, 03.09.2020,

<https://babel.ua/news/50480-z-pochatku-karantynu-bezrobitnimi-stali-mayzhe-450-tisyach-ukrajinciv-zrostannya-chisla-zupinivsy>

<sup>18</sup> Якою була ситуація на ринку праці під час карантину та чи відбувається відновлення? , Center for Economic Strategy, 28.07.2020, <https://ces.org.ua/labor-market-during-quarantine-ukraine>

<sup>19</sup> Боротьба з COVID-19 в Україні: початкові оцінки впливу на бідність, UNICEF, 15.04.2020, <https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/media/5811/file/COVID%20impact%20on%20poverty%20ukr.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Допоможи собі сам: українці розчаровані в реформах, але готові підтримувати одне одного та свої громади, <https://engage.org.ua/dopomozhy-sobi-sam-ukraintsi-rozcharovani-v-reformakh-ale-hotovi-pidtrymuvaty-odne-odnoho-ta-svoi-hromady/>

<sup>21</sup> Anders Åslund, Ukraine's reforms in doubt as political climate changes, Atlantic Council, 08.10.2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/ukraines-reforms-in-doubt-as-political-climate-changes/>

<sup>22</sup> InfoSapience, Index of Consumer Confidence, 20.10.2020 <https://sapiens.com.ua/ua/publication-single-page?id=137>

<sup>23</sup> Споживчий кошик: зростання зарплат в Україні випередило зростання цін, 14.01.2020, <https://www.epravda.com.ua/news/2020/01/14/655769/>

<sup>24</sup> Опитування GfK: як українці заощаджують гроші, 28.11.2019, <https://minfin.com.ua/ua/deposits/articles/opros-gfk-kak-ukraincy-kopyat-dengi/>

<sup>25</sup> Remittances of labor migrants to Ukraine will fall by 20% in 2020, KyivPost, 4.05.2020, <https://www.kyivpost.com/business/remittances-of-labor-migrants-to-ukraine-will-fall-by-20-in-2020.html>

concerns cited were increases in the prices of food and hygiene items and transport costs, as well as the loss of household income and crowded living conditions due to quarantine measures.<sup>26</sup>

The Ukrainian government has set up a state stabilization fund to address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. This instrument, which is inflexible, bureaucratic and carries quite high risks of corruption, provided minimal relief either for public health or the economic consequences of the pandemic. Of the UAH 65 billion in the fund, only 25 per cent was used directly for the needs of the public health sector. The majority of the funds were spent on infrastructure projects, particularly roadbuilding. Civil society groups appealed to the president to re-direct state aid to address shortages in the medical sector, especially as the second wave is driving many hospitals to full capacity.<sup>27</sup>

In terms of social support, the state response to protect the most vulnerable groups included one-time payments to families with children with disabilities, some increase in pensions, simplified procedures to apply for state support for energy subsidies and a moratorium on penalties for late utilities payments.

After the population was hit by new economic difficulties, public opinion reversed compared to June 2019, and the majority of Ukrainians now think that the country is moving in the wrong direction. Citizens mostly blame the government's incompetence for deepening the economic crisis.<sup>28</sup>

## Health Security

The World Health Organization defines health security as “the activities required, both proactive and reactive, to minimize the danger and impact of acute public health events that endanger people’s health across geographical regions and international boundaries”<sup>29</sup>. In Ukraine, many risks related to health security were highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the problems of the health system were well-known before, however, the change in the ruling elite in summer 2019 added a new complexity, as the process of significant reforms initiated by the previous government has been undermined and questioned. As a result, global challenges due to COVID-19 combined with the poor condition of the state health system and the stalled reforms put a serious strain on the quality of public health services. This affected millions of Ukrainians, who believe that improving medical services should be a top priority of the state<sup>30</sup>.

Ukraine inherited a Soviet-style system with a large number of hospital beds and doctors but dilapidated facilities and inadequate funding. Pandemics, health emergencies, and a weak health system not only cost lives but also pose some of the greatest risks to the global economy and security faced today<sup>31</sup>. Added to all this is a humanitarian crisis in the conflict-affected areas, where health facilities continue to be damaged by shelling, a shortage of healthcare staff and restricted access to healthcare facilities due to bad roads and security risks.

The medical reform launched in 2018 envisaged three stages, the second one beginning on 1 April 2020. It introduced radical changes to the system, including state

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<sup>26</sup> Ukraine | Food Security and Livelihoods Assessment, Norwegian Refugee Council, May 2020, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/lfs-infographic-english-version.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Кошти COVID-Фонду потрібно перерозподілити на медичні заходи протидії коронавірусу – заява, 15.10.2020, <https://ces.org.ua/redistribute-to-medical-measures-to-combat-coronavirus/>

<sup>28</sup> Більшість українців причиною можливої економічної кризи восени назвали некомпетентність влади, УНІАН, 2.07.у, 2020, <https://www.unian.ua/society/shcho-dumayut-ukrajinci-pro-vladu-koli-bude-ekonomichna-kriza-novini-ukrajini-11059025.html>

<sup>29</sup> Health security. WHO. [https://www.who.int/health-topics/health-security/#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/health-security/#tab=tab_1)

<sup>30</sup> New Ukraine Municipal Poll Reveals Concerns over Medical Institutions Prior to COVID-19 Outbreak, IRI, 15.04.2020, <https://www.iri.org/resource/new-ukraine-municipal-poll-reveals-concerns-over-medical-institutions-prior-covid-19>

<sup>31</sup> Health security. WHO. [https://www.who.int/health-topics/health-security/#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/health-security/#tab=tab_1)

funds being allocated for actual services provided by doctors. It also made procurement of medicines more transparent. However, in May 2020, the health minister and head of the respective parliamentary committee announced changes to the reform. The president supported this action<sup>32</sup>. This decision in the midst of the pandemic added uncertainty and caused major delays to the reforms. The State Agency for Medical Procurement is under constant attacks by strong vested interests linked to pharmaceutical companies that are used to selling medicines at inflated prices.

In March 2020, according to the Global Health Security Rating, Ukraine was 98<sup>th</sup> out of 195 countries for its average level of preparedness (scoring 38 index points out of 100). In Europe, it was 38<sup>th</sup> out of 43 countries. One of the lowest scores was received for “Emergency preparedness and response planning,” about which the report’s authors stated, *“There is no national public health emergency response plan in place that addresses planning for multiple communicable diseases with pandemic potential... The State Emergency Response Plan is very general. It covers all manner of emergencies, including health emergencies such as pandemics alongside natural disasters and nuclear explosions. It does not, however, contain detailed specific provisions related to pandemics, but rather addresses general issues about how the state will function during an emergency”*<sup>33</sup>.

The inconsistencies in public health governance were exposed with new intensity in early 2020. Ukraine was shaken by many events: three changes of health minister within a month, the failure to adopt preventive measures after the recommendation of the National Security and Defence Council in January 2020, severe restrictions to public life without efforts to prepare hospitals, chaos with medical supplies and the abrupt closure of airspace with millions of citizens stranded abroad.

Despite initially facing only a relatively mild incidence of COVID-19 cases (around 300 daily cases), the authorities struggled to prepare hospitals and failed to achieve wide compliance with face mask-wearing in public spaces. Significant amounts from the COVID-19 state stabilisation fund by-passed the healthcare system and vulnerable groups and were allocated for road construction and bonuses for the police.<sup>34</sup> As a result, the October 2020 statistics showed a significant increase in infections of up to 8,000 a day. Elderly people with disabilities have been hit especially hard. They are often lonely, isolated and have limited capacity to deal with the related challenges.<sup>35</sup>

The situation in the occupied Donbas is even more severe. Exchanges of fire remain commonplace, and at least 160 health facilities have been targeted since the onset of the armed conflict. Of those, 130 are still not fully operational, according to WHO reports.<sup>36</sup>

However, society appeared more resilient to such challenges than the state. Years of civic initiatives to support the frontline and high trust in volunteers, coupled with support from the private sector, all helped cushion the shock and provided the networks necessary to respond to the pandemic. Currently, in many cities, volunteers are driving initiatives to supply hospitals and clinics with the necessary equipment, especially in villages and small towns. Ukrainians are receptive to donating for healthcare needs. The top destination for individual donations even prior to COVID-19 was support for people with medical needs, especially cancer patients and children<sup>37</sup>. A glimmer of hope

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<sup>32</sup> Зеленський заявив, що не може допустити другого етапу медреформи в нинішньому вигляді. 4.05.2020. LB. [https://lb.ua/news/2020/05/04/456731\\_zelenskiy\\_zayavil.html](https://lb.ua/news/2020/05/04/456731_zelenskiy_zayavil.html)

<sup>33</sup> Global Health Security Index. 2019. <https://www.ghsindex.org/country/ukraine/>

<sup>34</sup> Коронавірус в Україні: чому гроші з COVID-фонду йдуть на дороги? DW. 1.09.2020. <https://p.dw.com/p/3hoBO>

<sup>35</sup> Ukraine: WHO continues its essential work impartially during times of conflict. WHO. 19.08.2020. <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/ukraine-who-continues-its-essential-work-impartially-during-times-of-conflict>

<sup>36</sup> WHO action in Ukraine. WHO. 2020. <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/ukraines-humanitarian-crisis/who-action-in-ukraine>

<sup>37</sup> Благодійність очима українців, Zagoriy Foundation, 2019, <https://zagoriy.foundation/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/zf-brochure-digital.pdf>

is also offered by decentralization and better allocation of resources. The national government is investing in the modernisation of healthcare facilities from the Regional Development Fund<sup>38</sup>. This is a demand-driven facility with projects submitted by newly created amalgamated communities based on local needs.

COVID-19 aside, the general situation with public health is quite pessimistic. According to the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019, the “healthy life expectancy” indicator in Ukraine is the lowest in Europe at just 61.7 years, compared to 69.5 in Germany and 71.2 in France<sup>39</sup>. One reason is the absence of preventive actions, with the health system predominantly oriented toward curing rather than preventing diseases. The decrease in immunization rates in recent years also has had negative effects.

## **Personal Security**

Personal security is strongly affected by the following factors: the simmering armed conflict in the East, the quality of law enforcement and the security services, and circumstances leading to gender-based violence.

### **Impact of the military conflict**

There are many negative consequences of the military conflict in the East of Ukraine, initiated and supported by the Russian Federation. Some of them affect wider state security; some undermine economic stability or environmental security; many lead to social instability. In personal security, the situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the problems of mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) are the most urgent.

### **IDP issues.**

The number of civilian casualties has recently reached an all-time low thanks to the ceasefire agreed in the summer. However, there are 1.5 million IDPs in Ukraine from the Donetsk and Lugansk regions officially registered by the Ministry of Social Policy,<sup>40</sup> of which 350 000 are people in need, according to the UN agencies. The actual number of IDPs is approximately 2 million, but many have not been registering, as they were not asking for government support.

According to the Dutch Research Council, “roughly half of the IDPs do not intend to return to their pre-conflict place of residence. A mismatch in perceptions about the possible return of IDPs presents an obstacle to successful integration and adaptation”<sup>41</sup>. Ukrainian IDPs face three major problems: social-economic adaptation (including access to medical services and unemployment), full restoration of their political rights, and integration into the Ukrainian information space in order to minimize pro-Russian and anti-government sentiments among this group. Many IDPs suffer mental health problems and heightened anxiety.

The integration of the IDPs requires improvements in their individual rights and their human security. If left unattended, these problems will complicate post-conflict reconciliation, contributing to fragility and undermining social cohesion. This is a stark example of when state and human security are intertwined and could mutually reinforce one another.

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<sup>38</sup> Ministry for Communities and Territories Development <http://dfrr.minregion.gov.ua/Projects-list>

<sup>39</sup> Global age-sex-specific fertility, mortality, healthy life expectancy (HALE), and population estimates in 204 countries and territories, 1950–2019: a comprehensive demographic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2019, *Lancet* 2020; 396: 1160–203, <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2820%2930977-6>

<sup>40</sup> “Внутрішньо переміщені особи,” Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, 19.07.2020, <https://www.msp.gov.ua/timeline/Vnutrishno-peremishcheni-osobi.html>

<sup>41</sup> Human Security and Conflict in Ukraine: Local Approaches and Transnational Dimensions, The Dutch Research Council, <https://www.nwo.nl/en/research-and-results/research-projects/i/64/26564.html>

## **Mines and unexploded ordnance.**

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the number of mine/ERW-related casualties has been growing since 2016 and remains high.<sup>42</sup> Recent data estimates that around 7,000 square kilometres of government-controlled territory and 14,000 square kilometres of the uncontrolled areas have been mined.<sup>43</sup> People living within 20 kilometres of the 'contact line' on both sides face the frequent threat of shelling and the dangers of other life-threatening devices, such as ERW. Mine contamination remains one of the key concerns in Ukraine, with an estimated two million men, women, and children affected in the government-controlled area. According to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines report in 2018, Ukraine ranks fifth worldwide for casualties of landmines and other ERW<sup>44</sup>.

This situation has direct negative effects on people's lives. In addition to casualties, mines restrict access to transport and limit agricultural activities, which are key for food supplies for many households. Adopting new legislation in 2019 that allowed direct donor support for demining activities is having a positive effect. Among others, the German government is providing funding via the Halo Trust. Demining is progressing but moving slowly, with personnel of the Joint Forces Operations reporting demining of 0.43 square kilometres per week. It will take decades to clear Ukraine of mines.

## **Police, Security Services and Monopoly over the Use of Force**

Public trust in law enforcement bodies remains low, although there is trust in the armed forces and the border guards. In July 2020, those who trusted the police (fully or mostly trust) was 33%. The security services were trusted by 31.1%. Even fewer people trusted the Prosecutor General's Office and the State Investigation Bureau, with both scoring only 14%. At the same time, the armed forces had 65.2% support and the Border Guard Service of Ukraine, 51.7%<sup>45</sup>.

In the areas of armed conflict and in the uncontrolled territories, the problem is exacerbated by the erosion of the state monopoly to ensure law and order. In many cases, both personal and community security could not be guaranteed by the Ukrainian state. Militant groups that exercise control over the grey zone or in occupied Donbas limit people's access to justice and deprive them of the right to defend their rights. COVID-19 restrictions exposed severe gaps in personal security in that area. In one case, a group of people was trapped in a 'grey zone' between checkpoints without explanation and no possibility of returning home.

## **Gender-based Violence**

Quarantine contributed to an increase in gender-based violence. According to the La Strada organization, during the COVID-19 restrictive measures, there has been a 20% increase in calls to the domestic violence hotline.<sup>46</sup> In 2019, the hotline responded to 115,000 calls.<sup>47</sup>

This serious social issue is aggravated by an increase in gender-based violence in the conflict-affected regions and touches more groups affected by the war. Armed conflict

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<sup>42</sup> Humanitarian Needs Overview. Ukraine, 2020. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 29.01.2020. [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/ukraine\\_2020\\_humanitarian\\_needs\\_overview\\_en.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/ukraine_2020_humanitarian_needs_overview_en.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Україна сьогодні є однією з найзамінованиших країн світу – нардеп. УНІАН, 16.06.2020, <https://www.unian.ua/war/rozminuvannya-teritoriji-ukrajina-sogodni-ye-odniyeyu-z-nayzaminovanishih-krajin-svitu-novini-donbasu-11038220.html>

<sup>44</sup> The International Campaign to Ban Landmines. 2018 Landmine Monitor Report. [http://www.the-monitor.org/media/2918780/Landmine-Monitor-2018\\_final.pdf](http://www.the-monitor.org/media/2918780/Landmine-Monitor-2018_final.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> Початок нового політичного року: довіра до соціальних інститутів (липень 2020р.). Razumkov Center. 4.09.2020. <https://razumkov.org.ua/napiamky/sotsiologichni-doslidzhennia/pochatok-novogo-politychnogo-roku-dovira-do-sotsialnykh-institutiv-lypen-2020r>

<sup>46</sup> La Strada Україна: домашнє насильство – щось більше, ніж просто сварка. EUAM. 1.06.2020, <https://www.euam-ukraine.eu/ua/news/opinion/la-strada-ukraine-domestic-violence-is-more-than-just-a-quarrel-between-two-people/>

<sup>47</sup> Пристрасті за гендером: що заважає Україні ратифікувати Стамбульську конвенцію. 21.05.2020. <https://p.dw.com/p/3cZnx>

increases social tensions in the families of veterans. With increased circulation of unregistered firearms, crime rates are increasing.

Ukraine's response to gender-based violence is ineffective partly because parliament is delaying the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, which was signed in 2011. Both previous and current members of parliament have contributed to the delay. The first attempt to ratify was made in 2016 but did not get enough support from MPs. In May, a public petition filed on the presidential website gathered the 25,000 signatures required to be considered. It appealed for the convention to be ratified. The main groups opposing ratification pointed out that terms such as "gender" and "gender identity" are controversial. The church and many MPs insisted that the wider meaning of "gender" undermines the "natural definition of sex."<sup>48</sup> Supporters of so-called "traditional values" and patriarchal society are also among the active opponents. In this parliament, 307 MPs have created a cross-party group called "For Traditional Values." As a result, they are ready to block the whole convention, which could serve as one of the main legal mechanisms in the prevention and prosecution of gender-based violence.

## **Environmental Security**

Ukraine's environment faces many challenges to its sustainability that directly impact millions of citizens. Some of these challenges derive from unmodernised industrial production with high energy consumption and heavy CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Consequently, the climate footprint of the Ukrainian economy is quite large.

Global climate change is also leading to extreme weather conditions, more rain and more dry weather. For the first time in 2020, two tornados were registered in the Donbas region, and Polissia region had a sandstorm. The year was also marked by severe forest fires in the Chernobyl exclusion zone that spread over 100 hectares. The fires have substantially increased the level of radiation in the area, threatening the capital city.

Russian aggression has led to substantial economic decline in the east of Ukraine, resulting in a decrease in energy consumption by the chemical and metallurgical sectors. However, structural problems related to environmental security remain unresolved. Various regions of Ukraine are affected in different ways.<sup>49</sup> The south and east of Ukraine are impacted by high CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and methane gas (with Dnipro and Donetsk oblasts leading in emissions) and increased temperatures.

Ukraine has a high mortality rate due to ambient air pollution, but fossil fuel remains the dominant source of energy. Increased rates of precipitation are having a greater impact in the west and north. The south is likely to suffer flooding due to rising sea levels. Deforestation causes serious flooding in oblasts alongside the Carpathian mountains, where illegal logging is a major problem. In the most recent flooding in June 2020, over 22,000 homes were damaged or destroyed.

Ukraine is a leading agricultural producer and the livelihoods of millions depend on income from farming. Many farming companies do not adhere to the norms of environmentally safe farming. With extensive use of pesticides and overexploitation of land, this natural resource could be quickly depleted. Already, many regions, especially in the south and east of Ukraine, face water supply problems. After Russia's annexation of Crimea, water supply to the occupied Crimea is a real humanitarian issue, where farming is highly water-intensive. With increased militarisation of the peninsula, scarce

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<sup>48</sup> Пристрасті за гендером: що заважає Україні ратифікувати Стамбульську конвенцію. 21.05.2020. <https://p.dw.com/p/3cZnx>

<sup>49</sup> Аналітичний звіт про базове дослідження стану та напрямів розвитку екологічної політики. January 2019, [https://www.irf.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/baseline-research\\_report\\_publishing-dec-2019.pdf](https://www.irf.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/baseline-research_report_publishing-dec-2019.pdf)

water resources are being used to supply an increasing number of military bases.

The conflict in Donbas and the Russian occupation of Crimea create new environmental hazards. Some of these are the consequences of hostile activities, and some are due to pure ignorance and lack of good governance. According to the OSCE, hostilities in eastern Ukraine have harmed the environment. The crisis brings a significant increase in the risk of incidents at industrial and infrastructure facilities.<sup>50</sup> The latest fires in Lugansk region are a vivid example of the indirect risks. Due to sporadic shelling from the uncontrolled territories, dry trees along the contact line ignited, leading to 146 wildfires in Luhansk region across 9,300 hectares, which caused 11 deaths.<sup>51</sup>

The negative environmental impact of building the Kerch Bridge is threatening the livelihoods of communities along the Black Sea and Azov Sea. The bridge structure lowers the sea level in the strait and affects the exchange of water between the two seas, which threatens the ecosystem balance. This will consequently affect many species, including industrial fishing varieties that are key for the prosperity of local communities.<sup>52</sup>

Maritime environment protection has always received little attention since Ukraine's independence. After the annexation of Crimea, Ukraine de-facto lost control over its territorial waters around the peninsula. This means it cannot monitor the situation and fulfil its obligations under the Black Sea Convention. This situation could lead to uncontrolled pollution, difficulties with fishing, a decrease in water quality and water pollution due to irresponsible shipping.

Zelenskyy's government stressed the high importance of environmental security in the new National Security Strategy, but his capacity to deliver on current and future environmental policies remains low. To date, Ukraine has only made baby steps towards increasing its share of renewable energy, which is currently at eight per cent<sup>53</sup>. But Kyiv's ambition to bring its environmental policies into line with the European Green Deal opens up a space for a greater focus on these issues and could lead to modernisation of the economy under a green agenda.

## Conclusion

Ukrainians suffer from quite high levels of human insecurity, especially regarding health, economic, and personal security. The conditions for citizens deteriorate the closer they live to the contact line of the conflict in Donbas. Despite the lack of information about the real conditions in the occupied Donbas and Crimea, sporadic reports and monitoring by human rights groups reveal grave violations of political security, especially the rights of pro-Ukrainian citizens and Crimean Tatars. The persisting humanitarian crisis in Donbas impacts millions of people who face a lack of food and access to healthcare and suffer from psychological trauma. They face risks to their lives due to the frequent ceasefire violations and the thousands of square kilometres affected by unexploded ordnance.

Heightened insecurity, especially the lack of economic prosperity and personal security, impedes the development of social capital in Ukraine. Citizens are overwhelmed and juggle various jobs to provide for their families. The state of insecurity makes it more difficult to focus on goals of personal achievement and community development, with

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<sup>50</sup> Environmental activities. OSCE, 2020, <https://www.osce.org/project-coordinator-in-ukraine/environmental-activities>

<sup>51</sup> Death toll from wildfires in Luhansk region grows to 11 (Video). 01.10.2020. UNIAN: <https://www.unian.info/society/disaster-death-toll-from-wildfires-in-luhansk-region-grows-to-11-11167529.html>

<sup>52</sup> Керченський міст знищить Чорне море, 3.10.2017, <http://epl.org.ua/environment/kerchenskyj-mist-znyshhyt-azovske-more/>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.unian.ua/economics/energetics/chastka-vidnovlyuvanoji-energetiki-na-rinku-zroslo-do-8-shcho-standovit-26-groshovogo-obigu-nkrekp-novini-sogodni-10984802.html>

pure survival driving the logic of social behaviour. Anxious over an unknown future and grappling with complexity around them, the majority of citizens remain disengaged. Trust in strangers and civil society organisations (with the exception of volunteers) shows little improvement.

With weak state capacity to deliver services, chaotic reforms, uncertainty, and armed conflict, it is key that Ukrainians develop resilience as individuals, and as a collective polity. It is unlikely that reforms will visibly increase human security in the short-term. Furthermore, people feel reforms are not delivering tangible results, with a quarter experiencing negative results.

In the meantime, it is key that self-organization and citizen engagement, even by a minority, are sustained. Relative political security should enable the growth of civic communities, with more people engaged in local decision-making, increased volunteering, a vibrant local media and effective collective civic action for the public good. It is a long path, but one that is organic and in line with democratic development.

An improved quality of civic community efforts will make a direct positive contribution to better local governance and, as a result, improved human security. Engaged citizens and local governments working together have a chance to improve public trust by co-designing transparent rules and demonstrating tangible results of their cooperation. Continued decentralization will boost this trend, leading to more resilient communities.

To capture this developmental opportunity, Kyiv should launch smart, ambitious, human-oriented projects that will contribute to modernising the entire country, while sharing the dividends of this modernisation across Ukrainian communities. Ukraine's international partners, especially the EU and EU member-states are already supporting this trend. Taking into account all the challenges to human security, these efforts could be reinforced to reach deeper into Ukraine's regions and better coordinated across the multitude of donors.