

MARIUPOL: LIVING WITH CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT PROSPECTS

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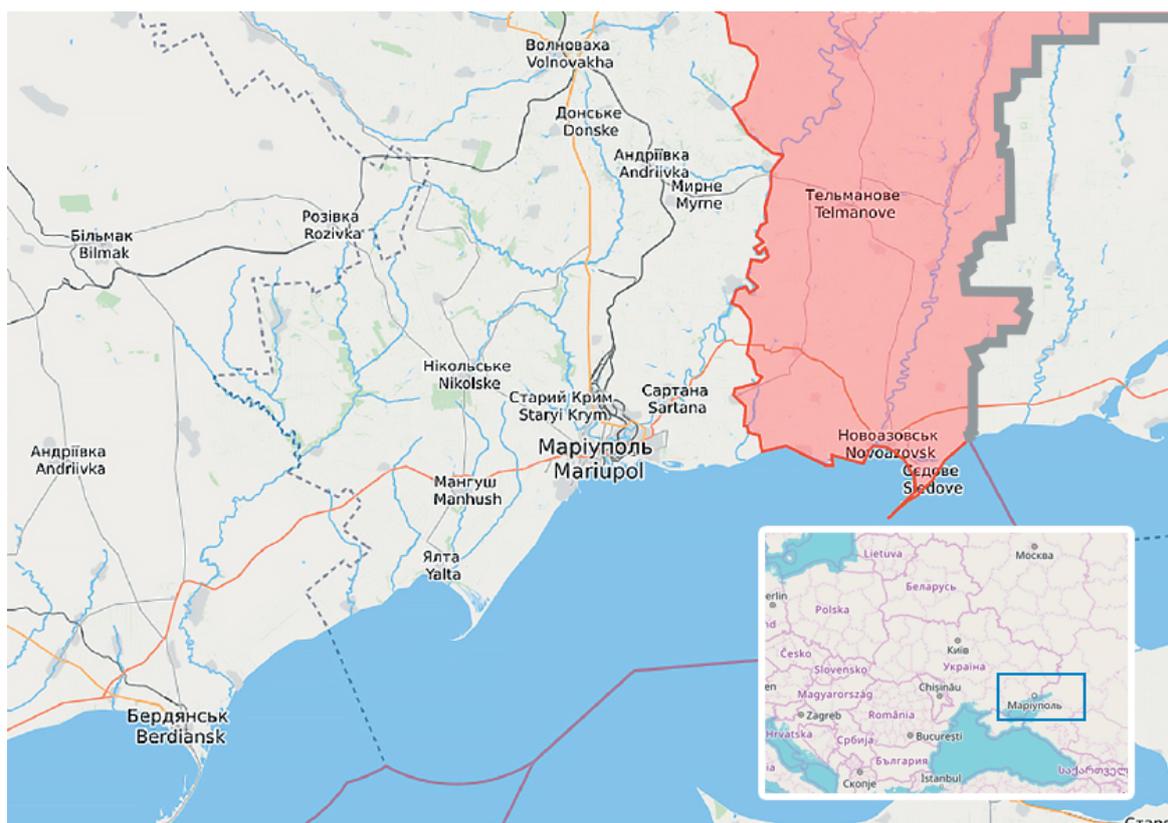
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ATO	Anti-Terrorist Operation
IDP	Internally displaced person
AFU	Armed Forces of Ukraine
EU	European Union
PSOC	Population Self-Organisation Committee
IAG	Illegal armed group
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
CADLO	Certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions
OABC	Organisation of apartment building co-owners
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
FGD	Focus group discussion
TA	Target audience
CAS	Centre of administrative services

MAP OF THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE DONETSK REGION



Map Key

- The demarcation line
- Non-government controlled areas
- The border with the Russian Federation

1 INTRODUCTION

Mariupol is a large industrial city in the south of the Donetsk region, with a population of slightly less than 470,000 people according to official data as of 1 January 2017. The city is one of the most important industrial centres in Ukraine, since it is home to two major metallurgical companies, the Azovstal and the Ilyich Iron and Steel Works. The Port of Mariupol is the largest and most well-equipped port on the Sea of Azov, one of Ukraine's four biggest ports.

After armed conflict broke out in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in 2014, Mariupol became the most important strategic point in the country, a target of clashes between the two opposing sides.

On 13 April 2014¹, a pro-Russian armed group captured the building of the Mariupol city council. During March and April, they attempted to seize other administrative buildings in the city, such as the prosecutor's office, a unit of the border guard detachment, a military unit, and the main city department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. On 11 May, facilities for holding a referendum opened in the city, and some residents took part.

However, on 13 June 2014, after almost three months of control by the rebels, Mariupol was liberated as a result of a joint operation of the Azov Battalion and the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

In June 2014, after the election of Petro Poroshenko as President of Ukraine, the main government institutions and the Regional Department of the National Police were moved from Donetsk to Mariupol, which de facto made the city the temporary centre of the region. In October of the same year, the regional administration moved to Kramatorsk, while the regional law enforcement departments remained in Mariupol.

In August and September 2014, after the seizure of Novoazovsk by a pro-Russian armed group, some 45 kilometres from Mariupol, as well as of seaside villages and towns along the Mariupol/Taganrog highway, the frontline came very close to the city. The signing of the second Minsk agreement stopped the offensive by such groups and consolidated the demarcation line between Mariupol and the CADLO.

Since June 2014, checkpoints staffed by the National Guard of Ukraine and the police have been operating at all entrances to Mariupol. In addition, the forces of the Azov special purpose unit are based in the city. At the moment, the demarcation line east of Mariupol passes near the village of Shyrokyne, which is under AFU control.

At the same time, attempts to seize the city or destroy the infrastructure of Mariupol and the surrounding villages to the greatest possible extent continue. Thus, the settlement of Sartana in the Kalmius district of Mariupol has repeatedly come under fire. For the first time, on 14 October 2014, the checkpoint of the Talakivka settlement and then the Sartana district were hit by Grad shelling coming from the occupied territory. Seven villagers were killed and another 18 were injured with varying severity. Since then, Sartana has been exposed more than five times to direct fire, which has destroyed many houses and damaged the settlement's infrastructure.

On 24 January 2015, the Vostochny neighbourhood suffered from shelling, resulting in 31

¹ A. Yuhas and T. McCarthy, Crisis in east Ukraine: a city-by-city guide to the spreading conflict, 16 April 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/16/crisis-east-ukraine-city-by-city-guide-map>

people being killed and more than 100 residents injured. The victims were civilians, and included children.

Rumours and unconfirmed reports circulated frequently in Mariupol about a forthcoming offensive by the pro-Russian armed groups and planned capture of the city, but these were never confirmed.

With the deterioration of the situation in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, when the armed conflict started, residents of the temporary occupied territories started to relocate to Mariupol. As of spring 2017, 106,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been officially registered in the city, most of them women with children and older people.

On 29 November 2015, Mariupol held local elections, and Vadim Boychenko (self-nominated, non-partisan) was elected as the city mayor. Three parties were elected to the Mariupol City Council: the Opposition Bloc (won 45 seats), Power of People (5 seats), Our Land (4 seats).

According to the Third All-Ukrainian Municipal Survey (2017), commissioned by the International Republican Institute (IRI), 60% of Mariupol residents said that they were more or less satisfied with the mayor's work. Some 47% of citizens had a positive opinion of the work of the city council, while 59% said that the local authorities had improved the image of the city¹.

For many reasons, and directly because of its current status in the Donetsk region, Mariupol has, in recent years, become the location of a number of pieces of sociological research, including those conducted by international organisations and foundations. At the same time, the views and opinions of ordinary citizens about the armed conflict, the problems and prospects of the city and the region, relationships with the authorities and businesses, and mechanisms of influence on the decision-making processes in Mariupol have not previously been the subject of a separate study. This paper seeks to fill the gap.

The mass protests of the Euromaidan period, the Ukrainian revolution of 2014, the outbreak of hostilities in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and the relocation of a large number of families have all intensified the work of civil society institutes in Mariupol. During this period, many new pressure groups, public organisations, charitable foundations, volunteer networks and voluntary associations were created, and the work of NGOs that existed earlier became more intense. Public figures and civic activists have become significant actors in recent years, determining the course of the city's development, and their voice has become an important component of the local civil society. Therefore, the issues under study seem interesting and relevant both for the expert community and a wider audience.

The research was conducted by the Mariupol Youth Union NGO and commissioned by International Alert with the financial support of the European Union.

1 http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/ukraine_nationwide_municipal_survey_final.pdf

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out to identify the views of the inhabitants of Mariupol and its environs on the local consequences of the conflict, to understand the expectations of citizens, businesses and government officials in terms of minimising the impact of the conflict, and to identify areas of dialogue and cooperation that may be possible among the community, businesses and local authorities in order to address the most pressing local issues.

Target group: ordinary citizens, representatives of the non-government sector, opinion leaders in Mariupol and the surrounding villages, local government officials, business representatives, journalists, and internally displaced persons.

The research was based on **THREE METHODS** of data collection:

- a focus group discussion;
- an in-depth semi-structured interview;
- content analysis.

This report provides an analysis of information gathered during the focus group studies and interviews, as well as materials obtained as a result of content analysis.



FOCUS GROUPS

were organised as group discussions, where the participants' attitude to a particular topic of research was clarified. Steps were taken to ensure that the focus group participants felt safe and comfortable, and were involved in the discussion as part of a group. In total, eight FGDs were conducted as part of the research, with students and youth, internally displaced persons, activists from women's non-governmental organisations, non-government sector specialists, activists in frontline and 'grey zone' settlements, representatives of people's self-organisation committees (PSOC) and associations of apartment building co-owners (AABC), representatives of small and medium-sized businesses, and representatives of law enforcement agencies. The number of participants in the groups was eight to 10 persons. The discussions lasted 1.5-2.5 hours. The discussion was moderated by an experienced sociologist or psychologist.



IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

were held as personal, semi-structured conversations, where the interviewer ascertained respondents' opinions, beliefs, and habits. The focus of the in-depth interviews was the study of the person's hidden associations, emotions and leanings, and issues related to the political situation and the decision-making system in

the city, which they might not respond to during a group interview. The interviewees were guaranteed confidentiality and protection from any disclosure of their personal data at the request of state or non-state bodies. The respondents gave written consent for the interview and confirmed that they were aware of the research objectives. A total of 15 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Mariupol's civil activists, journalists, heads of local authorities, village councils, representatives of large enterprises, young civil society leaders, representatives of political parties, and opinion leaders from various fields of city life.

In addition, 40 in-depth interviews were conducted with experts (political scientists, publicists, public figures, politicians, business representatives, experts and academics) to obtain additional information on specific aspects of the phenomena being researched.



THE CONTENT ANALYSIS METHOD

was used to identify the current agenda of local internet media and key issues raised by Mariupol's bloggers. The obtained data were compared with the summarised information on the opinions of socially active Mariupol residents about the most important problems they faced due to the conflict.

The content analysis was conducted by processing two types of information (the total sampling for the period between 1 April and 30 June 2017):

- The publications of the six most popular local internet media sites: 0629.com.ua, mrpl.city, mariupolnews.com.ua, ilich.in.ua, i24.com.ua, sartana.dn.ua.
- The publications of 33 popular Mariupol bloggers who post on Facebook.

Empirical indicators included: the number of articles in the media/blog posts containing information on certain topics, keywords, and the tone of the article/post (positive, negative or neutral). Additional verification aimed at checking validity, correctness of the unitisation and coding patterns and intercode matching.

Parser software was used to download and store information.

Coding and processing of the results, analysis of frequency distributions, data clustering, construction and analysis of the correlation matrix were done using the SPSS and QDA Miner Lite statistical packages.

The qualitative nature of this study and the specificity and small size of the respondent groups impose significant limitations on possible extrapolation of the results to all the residents of Mariupol. However, the data obtained may be extremely useful for studying important aspects of the current situation in the city: identifying key problems, clarifying ideas about the opportunities for civil and political participation, and behavioural motivations and decision-making mechanisms at the local level.

3.1 GENERAL RESULTS

THE IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT ON MARIUPOL'S RESIDENTS, BUSINESS AND URBAN ENVIRONMENT

The situation in Mariupol and the frontline territories is currently estimated by respondents as **difficult, tense, anxious, and unstable**. According to the participants in the study, the city's residents experienced a psychological trauma, and humanitarian and material loss, which left a significant imprint on the current state of affairs and perceptions of the future.

Respondents report difficulties in the city's economic and social development. According to participants, the ongoing conflict and constant threats of aggravation of the situation do not allow the city to develop to their full capacity. According to business representatives, this is also due to the formal frontline status of Mariupol, which often stops investors from investing in the city financially.

« *There is no confidence in the future, and in general, no confidence about what will happen next week.*

FGD participant, young person »

« *Well, we are in a conflict zone, the frontline is next door. This, of course, affects the city, the residents, and their general mood. Because, all in all, there is anxiety and instability in the air.*

Interviewee, healthcare representative »

« *We have already calmed down, but we are in a sort of suspended condition. From time to time, information comes up that you'd better get ready, they're going to attack you.*

FGD participant, law enforcement representative »

« *If three years ago Mariupol was a city of sailors and metallurgists, today we understand that Mariupol will be a military city... There is no investment; there is no inflow of money. Consequently, development becomes more difficult.*

Interviewee, journalist »

Participants in the research agree that, for them personally and for the city as a whole, **it is important to have hope that the situation around the conflict will improve and stabilise**. The majority of respondents convey a belief in their city, its strengths, its importance, and its value for the country as a whole (Mariupol is described as lively, cosy, and with a great future).

When discussing the changes that have occurred in the city in recent years, the research participants often note that **the residents somehow become accustomed to the situation of living in close proximity to a conflict**. According to respondents, the stage of feeling shocked at this has passed; they say that it is now time for action (which is demonstrated by the return of those who left, restoration of businesses, etc.).

« Although we have become accustomed to living in a war. New small businesses, shops, institutions, and cafés are opening. People have somehow become more relaxed about it.

Interviewee, journalist »

« The presence of regional police departments, the Security Service, and the Prosecutor's Office, of course, enables a high level of discipline to be maintained among the workers. I think you would agree that this discipline is quite substantial. Their presence, of course, has a very positive impact on security in the city.

Interviewee, a representative of the authorities »

« We haven't heard rumours of an offensive [of the Russian-backed separatists] coming on Wednesday, Friday or Thursday for a long while. So these alarmist sentiments have faded a little. The front line is moving away from the city. This can be seen and heard. We understand that the war is moving away. It is not leaving us completely, but geographically, it's moving further away from the city...

Interviewee, business representative »

When it comes to issues that are relevant to the city, the respondents spontaneously mention the same difficulties that are faced by all residents of the country: rising prices for utilities, declining incomes, problems in education and medicine, corruption, etc.

At the same time, placing an emphasis on the conflict during interviews brings problems of a different nature to the fore.

Participants in focus group discussions								
Location of problem	Women's organisations	Law enforcement bodies	Business	State employees	Young people	Village councils	IDPs	OABC/PSOC
1	Psychological problems	Unemployment	Economic problems and lack of investment	Problems with lack of housing	Psychological problems	Destruction of infrastructure in villages	Psychological problems	Unemployment
2	Logistics	Logistics	Logistics	Unemployment	Unemployment	Unemployment	Problems with lack of housing	Logistics
3	Unemployment	Water supply	Psychological problems	Psychological problems	Logistics	Outflow of specialists (doctors, teachers)	Unemployment	Problems with lack of housing

Fig.1. Ranking of issues based on the focus group discussions

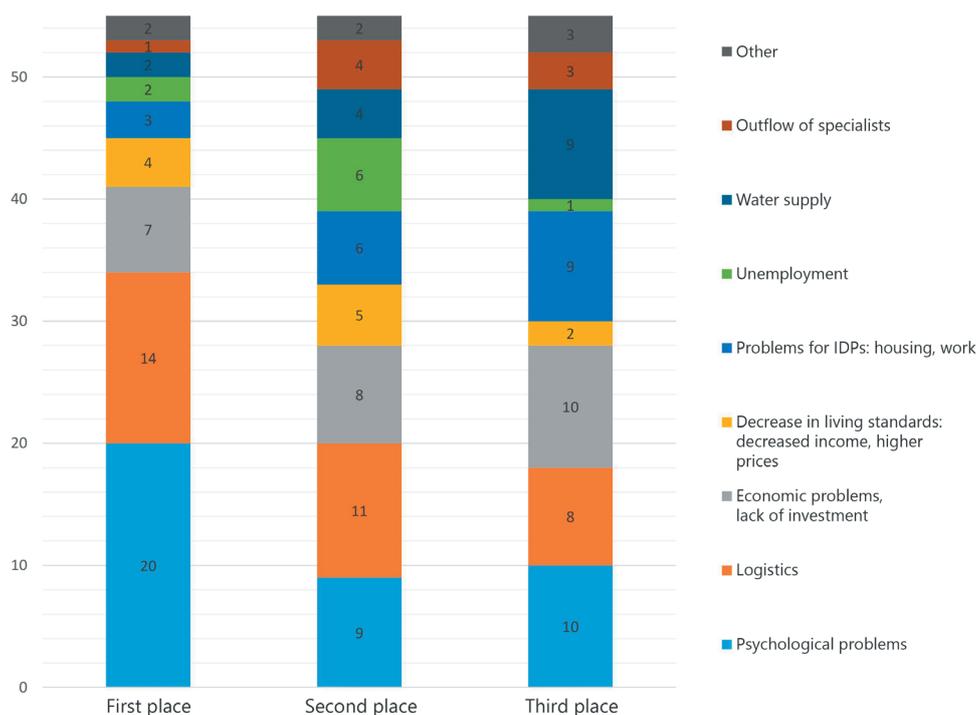


Fig.2. Ranking of issues based on in-depth interviews

The main issues related to the conflict, which are communicated by the participants of the research (in descending order of importance):



PROBLEMS OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL NATURE,

according to respondents, are most acutely felt by the city's residents, as opposed to those in the countryside, due to the impact of the conflict: **tension, anxiety, depression and insecurity in particular.**

During discussions on the life of the city, participants in the study identified their key concerns: tension due to the prolongation of the conflict, physical and moral trauma after the shelling, broken social ties (many relatives on different sides of the conflict went to other cities in Ukraine or Russia, remained in the occupied territory, or their relatives live in Russia).

« The problem is that there is continuous shelling everywhere. We hear it all. [We sense] anxiety and fear. As if we need to run somewhere.

FGD participant, women's organisation »

« Children who arrived here while under shelling - many of them have not yet recovered. When a lid is dropped in the canteen during cooking, the child automatically drops to the floor.

FGD participant, women's organisation »

« An emergency bag [containing essential items if one has to leave home quickly] is always in the hallway. When you look at it, your heart stops.

FGD participant, OABC/PSOC »

« Some people have stopped communicating with relatives or friends, because they

are now on different sides of the barricades.

Interviewee, civil activist >>

According to the respondents, Mariupol today is perceived as a closed city. Media information about Mariupol's place in the conflict is not always accurate, and it often misleads many representatives of international institutions, investors, tourists, etc. This also affects the general mood of the community and increases anxiety.

<< *Probably it's harder from the psychological standpoint. People watch the media and once again are not sure if everything is all right in the region, so they don't come here.*

Interviewee, education sector representative >>



LOGISTICAL PROBLEMS,

as noted by the participants, are one of the most pressing for the city and the frontline zone due to the conflict. When describing the transport situation, respondents use the following words: **lack of transport links** to Mariupol from the rest of Ukraine, **blockade, logistical deadlock.**

As a result, problems of logistics affect both the residents of the city and the large, medium-sized and small businesses in Mariupol, which exacerbates the economic situation in the region as a whole.

According to respondents, these logistical problems are manifested in the lack of robust rail connections (low railway capacity, a small number of routes), broken/mined roads, the need to pass through roadblocks, inspections (hence delays on the roads), and difficulties of navigation in the port.

Moreover, residents of the frontline settlements believe that they are cut off from Ukraine in terms of transport. According to the village councils, this brings about problems with the delivery of food and goods, and also problems with tourism (this is especially relevant for villages with access to the sea, which tourists used to visits).

<< *The infrastructure factor is at play, because the city began to experience problems with logistics after the border was set on the contact line. All the traditional transportation systems were destroyed. Today, the city clearly lacks transport connections with the other areas controlled by the Ukrainian authorities. The capacity of the railway is small, and the condition of the roads is poor.*

Interviewee, NGO representative >>

<< *The city is not attractive in terms of tourism. After all, quite a lot of people came here previously, but now it is summer and the city is not full of people. The rail connections were destroyed because of the conflict, and were not restored for a long while. This is how we ended up having only two trains or even only one, the Kyiv train, out of 11 trains that we had before.*

Interviewee, civil activist >>

« It takes a while to get permission; you have to spend a whole day to get there. This is very stressful, very scary.

FGD participant, women's organisation »

« They closed the road, and it turns out that we [the frontline settlements, the grey zone] got cut off. We could not move for two years, as there was no bus service.

FGD participant, village council representative »



ECONOMIC PROBLEMS,

caused by the conflict are interpreted in various ways by the respondents, depending on which social group they belong to. Thus, citizens speak mainly about **unemployment, lower income levels and higher prices**, and businesses and local authorities focus on the **decrease in the efficiency of large-scale enterprises and the lack of investment in the city**.

« Entrepreneurs do not want to do business here, because they believe it is dangerous here.

FGD participant, young person »

« There are problems with investments. Because the partners we had in other regions are now more cautious about investing. We have lost some of them, because they are worried that the city might be seized and that they will lose their investments.

Interviewee, business representative »

Businesspeople also talk about bank refusals of loans/installments if the company is registered and/or a bank account is opened in the Donetsk region (even the GCA).

All the participants mention **the main parameters of the economic problems that were triggered by the conflict, including the CADLO blockade:**

- The closure of one of the city's main employers, Azovmash (due to the loss of the sales market), which deprived a huge number of local residents of their jobs;
- The reduction of the number of employees in other enterprises important for the city (Ilyich, Azovstal, the Mariupol seaport) due to a decrease in the volume of products produced, lack of raw materials, markets, problems with logistics;
- The closure of medium-sized and small businesses, because they moved to other cities or ceased their activities (due to a decrease in purchasing power and loss of economic ties with the non-government controlled areas);- The image of a region that is unattractive to investors due to the danger of aggravating the conflict.

« The conflict dealt the final blow in the collapse of Azovmash. For a long time they were trundling along at least somehow, and then the military conflict simply finished them off.

FGD participant, business »

« Enterprises that were in operation, such as metallurgical plants, remained on the other side. The same relates to the logistics at the port. We had, as far as I know, eight to 10 ship calls to the port; now it's two to three ships per week at most. This is a tremendous weakening in foreign economic activity.

Interview, business representative »

« There's less cargo, and the goods turnover has decreased. People are afraid of steering ships here. God forbid that there would be another conflict, and someone seizes the ship and takes it away.

FGD participant, law enforcement representative »

« Roughly speaking, historically, until the 90s, the cargo transportation [unit] of the Mariupol port delivered coal and metal from the Donbass. And naturally, with the outbreak of hostilities, we became cut off from the main part of the historical regions. They became cut off for two reasons. Simply, the rail infrastructure was sometimes destroyed, and there were explosions on the railways. Most of the cargo owners were located in the NGCA. Although the enterprises managed to get re-registered in the GCA within a short period of time and they pay taxes to the Ukrainian state, it has not yet been decided how to work with them.

Interviewee, port representative »

« I think that the economic sector has suffered the most due to the blockade. As for small and medium-sized businesses, we have [in the village] individual entrepreneurs who have closed their businesses. For instance, courier delivery, i.e. all people who brought products, they just decided not to go behind the checkpoint, they refused to go there. People had to close their shops. Because not everyone could bring stuff for their shops. Small stalls, shops, and the trading centre closed.

Interviewee, village council secretary »

In the opinion of the participants, in addition to the city's key enterprises that are suffering financial losses due to the economic problems, **the Mariupol seaport also suffered from the conflict**, and does not work at full capacity. This, in turn, affects the work of other large companies associated with the port.

« The port, as an enterprise of the Primorsky district, also has constraints now... All in all, the situation is very dramatic. Now the Kerch Strait is being blocked, and as a result, the port, whose turnover was 17 million tons per year, is again without any turnover.

Interviewee, business representative »

« Under the conditions of the reduced cargo flow, we have moved to a reduced mode of operation. We have a four-day working week. This helps us to avoid dismissals and save something on salaries, which will still be paid to the staff anyway when more favourable periods begin.

Interviewee, business representative »

According to representatives of the local authorities and businesses, all of the above problems reduce the profitability of the city budget, and mean that the necessary labour resources and salaries for local residents are not provided.



THE CITY'S WATER SUPPLY

is another pressing problem in Mariupol. According to the study's participants, with the onset of the conflict, frequent water disruptions began in the city. As the respondents explain, the main source of water is located in the NGCA. Due to constant shelling, pipelines supplying water to the city have been destroyed. The restoration of the pipeline and resumption of regular water supply is exacerbated by the ongoing conflict. This issue is especially acute for the frontline areas, where interruptions in water supply are frequent.

According to the respondents, it is extremely important for the city to identify and ensure the operation of an alternative source of water supply. The responsibility for resolving this issue is placed mainly on the central government.

« *Now and then, the city's water supply system suffers because of that shelling, it's no secret. Often they purposely disrupt the water pumping stations, which feed both the region and the city.*

Interviewee, politician »

« *In our village, especially, the water does not reach us because of the weak pressure. And those villages that are behind the checkpoint, they are without water for the entire summer period, constantly. Therefore I believe that this is one of the main problems.*

Interviewee, village council secretary »



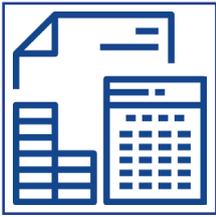
LACK OF HOUSING FOR IDPs, DESTRUCTION OF HOUSES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

in the frontline areas that suffered from shelling are often referred to the problems that are associated with the conflict.

Also, according to respondents, due to the complex and unstable situation in the region and the outflow of businesses from the city, construction of new housing has been suspended. Residents of the frontline villages, deprived of housing and social infrastructure, became IDPs and had to move to Mariupol.

« *A lot of people left the village, there is no school, families broke up, and there are the dead and the injured. Everything that existed in the village was closed down.*

FGD participant, village council representative »



DECREASED LIVING STANDARDS

are also associated with the protracted conflict. According to respondents, the lack of stability in the economic and social fields of Mariupol affects the quality of life: there is a decrease in income, loss of savings, and people can purchase only the most basic goods.

«« *The purchasing power of people has also greatly diminished.*

FGD participant, government sector employee »»

«« *People's standard of living has fallen dramatically for the overwhelming majority.*

FGD participant, business representative »»

«« *People have got accustomed to be thrifty with everything. So everything that relates to services that they could have afforded [before] has simply been abandoned; they only buy essential, necessary things.*

Interviewee, journalist »»



THE OUTFLOW OF SPECIALISTS FROM THE CITY,

caused by the conflict and military actions in 2014, according to respondents, resulted in a shortage of specialists in the law enforcement agencies, medical institutions, educational institutions, etc.

According to many participants, the young generation leaves in order to get an education, and they get their first work experience in other Ukrainian cities, since they don't see any career prospects in Mariupol.

Businesspeople often talk about the lack of specific specialists in particular areas.

A shortage of police officers is also mentioned by law enforcement officials.

Representatives of village councils and social services complain about queues to see the doctor in local clinics, due in part to the reduced number of doctors in the city.

«« *Because many of our employees remained on the other side [the NGCA], we have a large shortage of staff. In this regard, this is a double burden on us.*

FGD participant, law enforcement representative »»

«« *We established a joint venture with the Germans just six months before what happened. We still cannot start operation of the enterprises because we could not deliver the equipment for a long time, then we could not invite people to train specialists. They are afraid to come. When they arrived for the first time, they got here almost on foot.*

Interviewee, business representative »»

« Healthcare. There are no specialists. Even when you need a general practitioner, you need to look for them somewhere else, as they are not in Mariupol.

FGD participant, IDP



THE PROBLEMS OF THE AGRARIAN BUSINESS IN THE FRONTLINE TERRITORIES

due to the conflict is one of the key issues for rural residents.

According to respondents, mined fields are not tilled, and people are losing their jobs in the agricultural sector. The lack of crops means food shortages for the local population and a rise in prices.

This problem is especially acute for residents of frontline settlements, where agricultural companies are practically the only place of work. Representatives of village councils who participated in the FGD talked about the conflict's impact on the life of frontline settlements; due to constant shelling and mined areas, people are not able to work on their land.

« All the fields have been mined, it was impossible to plant or harvest. Even if we had land shares, we could not do anything with them.

FGD participant, village council representative



« The agrarian sector suffered seriously, because many fields of the Azov region are now unusable.

Interviewee, civil activist



« We had all our work at the Ogorodny state farm, and it was an extremely rich state farm. Seventy percent of the population worked in the fields. And now, the jobs situation is a disaster.

Interview, village council head



Based on the opinions obtained from experts, FGD participants and in-depth interviews in the course of the research, the current state of Mariupol can be characterised as tense, but without panic. The city is gradually returning to normal life, and people celebrate the opening of entertainment facilities and shops and the restoration of destroyed infrastructure.

The main problems caused by the conflict, and those which worry the city's residents most, are psychological stress, problems with logistics, and economic difficulties (lack of investment, unemployment, declining living standards). Also, the destroyed water supply system is an important issue for Mariupol, which poses a threat to the normal life of the city.

3.2 SOCIAL AND GENDER ASPECTS OF THE CONFLICT IN MARIUPOL

In general, according to the study's participants, the main inflow of IDPs took place at the beginning of the conflict. To date, according to Mariupol residents, there has not been any particular increase or decrease in the number of IDPs (compared to 2014 and the beginning of the conflict).

However, **local attitudes to IDPs and their impact on life in the city are mixed.**

- According to respondents, in most cases, IDPs get **sympathy, help, and support from local residents.** According to both Mariupol residents and IDPs, the city hosted victims of the conflict hospitably, helping them to adapt.

According to the study's participants, the bulk of the IDPs are no different from local residents, with a similar worldview and values; **they have fitted in with life in Mariupol, and actively participate** in the volunteer movement, restoration of the city, and solving the city's problems. In addition, they offered ideas concerning the development of the city and opened new areas of activity for the Mariupol residents.

As for jobs, the opinion of most respondents is that the problem of unemployment in the city is not strongly linked to the inflow of IDPs (as the reasons for unemployment are different: closure of enterprises, dismissals, withdrawal of small and medium-sized businesses).

In addition, as the respondents say, many IDPs came to the city and worked from the outset, occupying niches that were empty in Mariupol. Entire companies or state agencies moved in, rather than individual workers. Thus, according to participants, local residents were not deprived of their jobs.

The participants in in-depth interviews note that there has been some substitution of specialists, as the large outflow of personnel from Mariupol during the beginning of the conflict was compensated by the arrival of relevant workers from the temporarily occupied territories.

« *They are active people and good specialists, they have become part of us, and we have a lot of them... We had a good example at work when they joined a team of specialists and brought in some fresh ideas.*

FGD participant, government sector employee »

« *A reading room means an IDP is coming. In MSM, there are many project manag-*

ers working, and they have opened a children's centre.

FGD participant, young person >>

<< *They came unnoticed. They did not gather into a separate group, they did not organise a gang, and they are not different from us. They fitted in harmoniously. Because some Mariupol residents went away, and the IDPs replaced them.*

Interviewee, public activist >>

- A more negative attitude toward IDPs is demonstrated by the FGD participants who are representatives of self-organisation committees, and village councils from the front-line 'grey' zones. The characteristics that the TA uses when describing their perception of IDPs is: **cautious, wary, biased.**

According to the above-mentioned research participants, some of the IDPs have not joined the community, since they consider themselves to be better than local residents, and require more attention and/or constant support.

<< *Who do they think they are in Mariupol? We are from Donetsk. You are scum, you are nothing.*

FGD participant, OABC/PSOC >>

Such a view of towards IDPs, according to the FGD participants, brings about a sense of injustice among the local people. The government pays a lot of attention to IDPs, therefore limiting the resources available to the residents of Mariupol and of the frontline zones, and does not provide them with a special status, benefits or assistance, despite their equally difficult situation.

<< *Those IDPs have many discounts and benefits, because they are receiving assistance. But alongside them are the residents of our city, who need even more help, and they don't get it when they ask for it. Maybe the IDPs are good guys. But there is all that negativity around them, because they get bread and butter and clothing, while the residents of the city have a bunch of kids and only porridge to eat. It's not fair.*

FGD participant, OABC/PSOC >>

A particular feature IDPs in their perception of key problems is that they see them through the prism of adaptation in their new location: the search for housing (rising rent prices), work (refusals), a difficult psychological state due to local residents' prejudiced perception of them as strangers, and difficulties with obtaining and receiving payments for IDPs.

<< *And of course prices soared. When we moved here in 2014, our first estate agent was nice to us, and she told us that previously it had been even difficult to find someone who would agree to rent an apartment for 1,000 Ukrainian hryvnia (UAH)."*

Interviewee, journalist >>

« Locals sometimes look askance at temporarily displaced persons, as if to say: «You've taken my work!»

FGD participant, IDP »

As for dealing with problems related to the conflict, the IDPs also consider them from the point of view of their status. For most people in Mariupol, the president and government are responsible first and foremost for the solution of the conflict, but for IDPs, the government's role lies in dealing with the problems of displaced persons, specifically, guarantees for housing and employment, social benefits for children and the poor, etc.

According to the IDPs, mutual assistance and reciprocity within their own group are an important factor when dealing with adaptation to a new location.

« When we came here, we were looking for a job, all of us, at which point they asked: «Where are you from? Donetsk?» And then they would say: «Sorry, bye!» In the end, we got a job with a Donetsk firm. The guys hired us, and this is where we started from.

учасник ФГД, ВПО »

The topic of the asymmetrical influence of the conflict on women and girls does not emerge spontaneously in the general discourse. The study's participants noted that this was not exclusive to or particularly acute in Mariupol.

Most respondents emphasise **the involvement of some women and girls in the hostilities on one of the sides of the conflict.** Women's motivations vary, starting with attempts to earn money or self-realisation and ending with patriotism and protest causes. **They can also be coerced into taking part.**

Activists in the women's movement emphasise how the armed conflict has had a mobilising effect, prompting the women of Mariupol to get involved in various forms of civic participation.

« Many women and girls began to organise themselves and create communities to help the military, to deliver food, uniforms, etc.

FGD participant, women's organisation »

With regard to gender-based violence, **cases of violence against women by the military are rarely cited and tend to be based on rumours** (related to the beginning of the conflict in 2014, when the military started to arrive in the city) than on concrete facts or cases of personal experience.

« At first there was no control over the military. Everybody was acting in isolation, there was no coordination between the battalions.

FGD participant, law enforcement representative »

« There were such cases among the military at first.

FGD participant, women's organisation »

The majority perceive **this problem as far-fetched**, or it is transformed into accusations against the women themselves, who are said to have provoked the military or earned money in that way.

« *In small villages with roadblocks, she [a woman] has no work in the village. Before, she was selling home-reared chickens, and now she can't do that. So she goes to the roadblock and earns money there.*

FGD participant, women's organisation »

« *I heard that servicemen often stayed in hotels and hired girls. The girls go there completely voluntarily, because they need the money. I have not talked to these kind of women, but those situations do happen. It is possible that many of them don't have any money.*

Interviewee, civil activist »

« *Let's say that there were cases when the girls themselves went to the servicemen.*

FGD participant, young person »

Furthermore, **relations between the civilian population and the military** are mostly characterised by the respondents **in a positive, neutral way**: either mutual assistance, mutual support, and servicemen's participation in events, or avoidance and parallel coexistence.

« *We were collecting and bringing support to the checkpoints, we helped them.*

FGD participant, government sector employee »

« *They are on their own, and we are on our own.*

FGD participant, business representative »

« *If the military live with us peacefully, then we are, so to speak, neutral.*

FGD participant, village council representative »

« *In general, of course, the attitude to the servicemen has improved. They began coming to schools, meeting with students, talking to them, conducting lectures, inviting them for visits. For the time being, I would estimate relationships between the population and the military as fine.*

Interviewee, government official »

Some of the city's residents (mostly young people, business people and civil activists) show a particular gratitude and appreciation towards the military **for ensuring a safe life in the city**.

In addition, according to participants, the military **bring profit to local medium-sized and small businesses** (because they are deployed near the city, obtain their salaries there and spend them right there in the city), and by paying taxes **they supply funds to the city**

budget.

Government officials also emphasise **effective interaction with the army**. According to respondents, the authorities provide the military with assistance and support: organisation of checkpoints during the first stages of the conflict, involvement in patriotic education in schools, and invitations to special events in the city.

In this way, according to city residents, the local government establishes a successful relationship between the servicemen and the residents, thus **removing tensions between the military and the civilian population**.

« I feel comfortable here, there are no problems, and no one hurts me. I'm not afraid, the military is protecting the city.

FGD participant, business representative »

« Thanks to the servicemen's actions, all the drug addicts and homeless people have disappeared.

FGD participant, young person »

« In our opinion, we succeeded in 2014, and now the city authorities have managed to change the situation, and I can see it, and I want to believe that the residents' attitude [to the military] is much better and warmer than it was originally.

Interviewee, a representative of the authorities »

As for **domestic violence**, although the respondents mostly state an increase in the number of such cases (even among people they know), **this issue is a problem throughout the whole of Ukraine**.

According to the TA, the number of such cases have increased because the causes of aggressiveness have increased: servicemen's PTSD after ATO service, unemployment, alcoholism, and differences in political views and other social issues that may provoke violence. However, according to participants, socially accepted stereotypes do not allow people to clearly record and investigate each case, as victims are hesitant to call the police, or withdraw their claims.

« They are afraid. [They say,] 'This is my family.' They don't want to wash their dirty linen in public.

FGD participant, women's organisation »

According to representatives of the government sector, there is an increase in cases of violence against children by psychologically unstable parents. However, this situation, in the opinion of the study's participants, is not peculiar to Mariupol, as it is observed in other cities of Ukraine which have been affected in some way by the conflict.

« People are stressed. Children suffered psychologically, unfortunately, because of their parents who feel the instability and do not always respond appropriately towards children.

FGD participant, government sector employee >>

The main points related to the issue of resolution of violence are, in the opinion of participants, based on **the nationwide lack of institutions/organisations for prevention of and protection against such cases**, as well as the lack of means to influence the perpetrators, or to protect the victim. According to the TA, cases of domestic violence are investigated strictly anonymously, and they remain hidden and undisclosed.

<< *Only women's organisations are fighting for it now. We do not have a law which would clearly regulate this and punish the aggressor. They go unpunished, this is why they go in for it.*

FGD participant, IDP >>

<< *It doesn't make sense to file a claim to the police if they let him go after a week or two and things then become even worse. I'm sorry, it happens very often that a woman becomes a hostage, a slave within the family.*

FGD participant, IDP >>

Options for addressing this issue at the local level (as proposed by the respondents) **include the setting up of support centres, and anonymous assistance and counselling groups.** Moreover, since the issue is more widespread, it requires, according to the women's organisations, intervention of the authorities in terms of legislation and initiatives for defending victims of violence and informing them about the possibilities of recourse.

<< *There should be more information explaining that a woman can go to the police, and will not be punished for that.*

FGD participant, women's organisation >>

<< *They are consulted individually and anonymously, as a rule, it's not disclosed.*

FGD participant, village council representative >>

Civil activists in Mariupol confirm residents' contradictory attitude to IDPs in the city. At the same time, they declare they are willing to assist the displaced persons and help them integrate into the local community, which is also confirmed by the IDPs themselves. Involvement of women and girls in the conflict is stated as something inevitable and not specific to Mariupol only. According to the respondents, gender and child-related violence in the ATO region is caused by the many hidden consequences of the conflict. As for the civilians' attitude to the servicemen, the study's participants display calm and neutral attitudes towards the military.

3.3 THE AGENDAS OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND OPINION LEADERS

Based on analysis of the obtained data, it appears that two major topics are key issues both for Mariupol's opinion leaders who post on Facebook and for local internet media: minimisation of the consequences of the military conflict, and involvement of the city and its communities/citizens in the conflict. However, there are clear differences between the two groups: the bloggers (activists) want to develop various non-government initiatives and play a critical role in the development and implementation of such initiatives, while the media discuss infrastructure, urban transport, repair issues, etc. more. The bloggers are actively involved in various volunteer projects and look at projects such as assistance in resolving the conflict, while the media broadcast «reports from the frontline» and barely ever mention the volunteers and the great importance of their assistance. The bloggers look at the attitude to government agencies through the prism of the 'community/authorities' dialogue, while the media covers the fight against corruption.

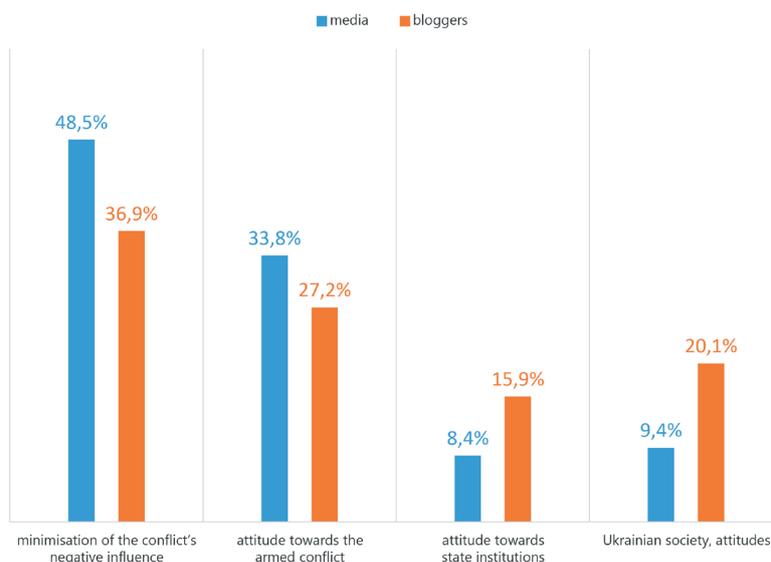


Fig.3. Comparison of the media and bloggers' (opinion leaders') agendas

The agenda of the bloggers (activists and opinion leaders) includes:

- Assistance and support for IDPs, IDPs' integration, establishing a dialogue between the IDPs and local residents, and the development and maintenance of various initiatives in education and development, since the field of art and culture is the place where the most effective dialogue is possible.
- Development of local self-government, support for activists and young politicians, the desire to have more impact on political and social/economic processes in the city,

3.4 MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS OF CITIZENS, BUSINESS, AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

According to the respondents, the city's residents primarily expect **resolution and completion of the conflict from the central government**. Everyone without exception talks about **peace agreements and a cessation of the hostilities, and withdrawal of troops** on both sides. In the view of the TA, this is the sole responsibility of the central government, president and parliament, along with the support of the international community.

Representatives of the research suggest that the conflict resolution or at least a clear declaration of central government action would help restore calm in the city, which would attract both investors (to restore economic stability) and 'brains' to the city.

« We wanted them to come to the negotiating table, agree and stop the war. The central government does nothing; so the war will still go on.

FGD participant, village council representative »

« Well, the negotiations are held in any case. If you ask me why they are not implemented, you have to ask the authorities about it, why it is useful for them to drag on that armed conflict.

Interviewee, local councillor »

« When we were voting for Poroshenko, probably the important thing for many people in the Donbass was when he said, 'I will end this war within a week'. That was his electoral promise. And what did we get?

FGD participant, village council representative »

« In my opinion, the central authorities don't accept concessions or compromises. They need to see the end result: what it is that Ukraine wants to ultimately achieve. Either Ukraine has come to accept the existing situation, and we are leaving it as is, or Ukraine wants to get back its territoriality as it was before the conflict and go from there.

Interviewee, cultural worker »

In addition, it is important for Mariupol to get a **special status for the city and frontline areas ('grey zones')**. According to the representatives of the government sector, the residents

do not have a clear understanding of the city's status. Mariupol's residents are concerned about whether their city is or is not in the ATO zone; they are also outraged about the need to pay the army tax and about the lack of benefits associated with proximity to the zone of military action.

«« *The status of Mariupol as a regional centre will help us to allocate resources and solve with city's problems more effectively, and to solve problems with infrastructure directly.*

FGD participant, government sector employee »»

«« *The government must consider the cities of Slavyansk, Gorlovka, and Mariupol as special cities. The stabilisation process has been delayed and all this has shifted to the cities, to a huge extent.*

Interviewee, representative of the local authorities »»

«« *We need to decide whether we are or we are not in the ATO area, because everybody who comes here receives a bonus because they have come into the ATO area. However, we live and work here and we don't get any bonus.*

FGD participant, government sector worker »»

Business representatives expect **changes in legislation to improve tax conditions for enterprises in the frontline area** and clear rules for the application of these conditions.

«« *We don't know. If we are in the ATO zone, we are not supposed to pay taxes; we are supposed to have some discounts for housing, gas and the water supply if we are in the ATO zone. But it turns out that we don't know. Somebody knows this, somewhere. But no one tells us anything about it.*

FGD participant, OABC/PSOC »»

«« *Existing laws have to be amended to meet the needs of the war period.*

Interviewee, business representative »»

«« *At least, the tax law needs to be reviewed as much as possible to favour the development of small business.*

Interviewee, political scientist »»

In addition, the residents place the **responsibility for solving logistical problems** in Mariupol on the central government. Restoration of rail links, repairs of highways, intersections and the functioning of checkpoints are not the area of competence of the local authorities, most respondents say.

This problem is very acute for all groups within the population, and ranges from difficulties with free movement for residents within the Donetsk region and the neighbouring Zaporizhia region to the problems of businesspeople who have to incur financial losses due to high tariffs on cargo shipping.

« One way or another, [the central authorities should] at least initiate a process to resolve the transport blockade. This blockade means that it's impossible to get here.

Interviewee, cultural worker »

« [They should] build a new railway, roughly speaking. Repair the road. Capital investments in the transport sector are needed. Capital investments meaning those that the city and the local business cannot afford.

FGD participant, business representative »

« Even if the city authorities find financial resources, they do not have the right to repair the Zaporizhia state highway.

FGD participant, business representative »

In addition, it is the central government that is more competent, according to the respondents, in **solving problems and organising assistance for IDPs**.

« It is the task of the central government, because we still have no coherent vision of what to do with the displaced persons. The authorities applied the 'let's do nothing, it'll settle down somehow' model. But we can't say that this approach has paid off.

Interviewee, NGO representative »

LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The Mariupol residents participating in the research are convinced that **the local authorities have no resources or possibilities to resolve the conflict** and stop the hostilities. In the TA's opinion, the city authorities' remit is to establish a dialogue with the central government in order to communicate the problems of the city, attract investors for reconstruction and economic development, and international organisations and funds, aiming at the creation of support and assistance centres for socially vulnerable citizens, medium-sized and small businesses, etc. In addition, the local authorities should be responsible for the improvement of landscaping and local infrastructure.

In general, respondents believe that **the local authorities cope with all tasks and responsibilities entrusted to them. The local residents praised the city authorities**. Representatives of the city authorities are viewed as progressive, as has been demonstrated by their actions over the past two years.

« A young and energetic team of the new generation came to the city. All those changes in the organisation, use of office equipment, innovations in all municipal services in the city are very, very positive. People can see it.

FGD participant, OABC/PSOC »

« Repairs are being carried out on in buildings, schools, and kindergartens. The authorities have done a lot.

FGD participant, OABC/PSOC »

According to most participants, the local government also demonstrates high transparency and a clear attitude to the conflict. It is very important for the locals to understand what the city leadership wants to achieve. This position of the local authorities, according to respondents, helps to remove the general level of tension among the citizens, and also **increases the level of trust** in the government in the city (much higher than towards the central government as a whole).

«*The determination of the local authorities, that is, they stopped wagging their tails and telling you that «we don't support any side and we are for everyone at the same time.» The local authorities have clearly decided what country they live in, what country they serve. The authorities we have now do not show any signs of separatism.*

Interviewee, business representative »

The key achievements for which the local authorities are praised and appreciated as mentioned by the respondents notice, are:



Order and municipal improvement in the city, restoration of destroyed infrastructure (kindergartens, schools, public transport), organisation of holidays and events.

«*The city authorities are doing everything to ensure that the city lives a full life. I mean, you can see how well the streets are cleaned, how the sewage system is being repaired and the pipes are laid. How the roofs and all schools and hospitals are being refurbished.*

Interviewee, healthcare worker »

«*A lot of concerts are held. They teach young people to solve problems that have arisen, and they bring young people together in their organisations.*

FGD participant, village council representative »

«*More buses and trolleybuses have appeared recently.*

FGD participant, IDP »



Attraction of foreign investments to the city, helping businesses to 'get on their feet' thanks to interaction with international organisations (establishing contacts, assisting in the preparation of requests for grants, etc.).

«*The city has received a lot of investments for repairing various buildings, developing organisations and the city, and an aid fund.*

FGD participant, women's organisation »

«*It is our mayor, of course, the city mayor, who should get the credit for this. His achievement is that he attracts people and people definitely come and invest here. I*

think some steps are being taken these days.

Interviewee, politician >>



Opening of social centres for youth and support for IDPs, children and youth.

<< *Today, this organisation is well developed. They will tell you where you have to go first.*

FGD participant, IDP >>



Restoration of university-level education in the city. According to respondents, several provincial universities are moving to the city, which will attract young people to study and work in Mariupol in the future.

<< *Right now, many regional universities are moving to the city. Young people, who will want to go somewhere and spend money on living in other cities, they may get this education in our city instead. This is also very important.*

Interviewee, politician



An effective dialogue with the central authorities via personal meetings and communication of information to Kyiv. One of the relevant examples of this is the extension of rail links and the launch of additional routes as a partial solution to the transportation problem.

<< *The local government is trying to solve all the issues that are in its competence and associated with its competence. Here, it is again a process of negotiation. But the chain is different: [here it goes] from the city, to the region, to Kyiv.*

Interviewee, education worker >>



Active and adequate **interaction with the military/police** as cooperation aiming at maintaining safety and security in the city.

<< *It's much calmer now. Less shooting than there used to be. Smaller flows of IDPs. Almost no servicemen in the city.*

FGD participant, government sector worker >>

<< *Nowadays, there are a lot of police on the street. And they are visible.*

FGD participant, law enforcement representative >>

NON-GOVERNMENTAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

According to respondents, international and non-government organisations bring important assistance to Mariupol. They indirectly help to solve problems related to the conflict, and also contribute to interaction between the authorities and the residents.

The role of **international** organisations (the European Union, UNICEF, UNDP, USAID, British Council, Danish Refugee Council, UNHCR, Caritas, Médecins Sans Frontières, Greek Centre, International Medical Corps, etc.) is mentioned by the Mariupol residents mainly in regard to the **financing of various social, humanitarian, educational projects in the city**, as well as **the support and development of medium-sized and small businesses in the region**.

In addition, participants positively estimate the European experience of development and communication between the authorities and local residents and businesses that international organisations have introduced into the life of Mariupol.

« They were the first to provide everything, [including] warm clothes. UNICEF organised a lot of humanitarian projects for children. They allocated money for housing repairs.

FGD participant, women's organisation »

« At this time, they [international organisations] play a huge role. They invest a large amount of money in providing good-quality drinking water to the water supply system, developing youth movements, and supporting families. That is, their current role is huge. Including UNDP programmes for development of small and medium-sized businesses that are being implemented in the city.

Interviewee, civil activist »

« The Greek Centre arrives every month to carry out free ultrasounds, it helps old people, young people, and poor people.

FGD participant, village council representative »

« Now we have small signs that small and medium-sized businesses will develop here. But so far, it will be only associated with grant assistance from the European community.

Interviewee, business representative »

According to representatives of the Mariupol authorities, **international organisations provide unprecedented support and assistance** to the residents of Mariupol, who are in a difficult situation, and to local authorities, by supporting initiatives conceptually and financially.

Non-government organisations, on the other hand, according to respondents, act as a kind of **buffer between the city residents and the authorities** (as well as businesses) and are responsible for reporting the main problems of the city, as well as articulating the public requests.

In addition, non-government organisations often act as **the first resource where IDPs and people on low incomes come to for help**.

According to participants, non-government organisations play **the role of a 'lightning rod', reducing the degree of aggression and psychological tension** among Mariupol residents by organising various events, holidays, and educational programmes.

« *Non-government organisations are at least closer to the people, they hear what people need.*

FGD participant, women's organisation »

« *Well, as far as I know, they encourage the existing authorities [to work well]. They are closer if we consider this situation, in which there is a war, they are closer to the military, that is, they know their needs, they are closer to the IDPs, they know the IDPs' needs, they suggest, push, and help the authorities to see the problem.*

Interviewee, cultural worker »

« *They organise activities, children's parties, they take care of the children. They constantly provide the IDPs with some kind of assistance. The Mariupol development fund specifically supports local businesses.*

FGD participant, business representative »

OUTLOOK

The FGD, in-depth interview participants, and experts **do not have a clear idea of how the conflict will be resolved**; they mostly talk about the lack of specific steps or plans and the failure to fulfil promises made by all sides in the conflict. All assumptions seem to lead to the idea that it will become a **frozen conflict**. According to the TA, none of the sides in the conflict is taking decisive steps to resolve the conflict.

« *I think there won't be any active steps. They will freeze it and that's it.*

FGD participant, business representative »

« *There is no positive global impulse, which would mean the imminent end of the conflict. The freezing of the conflict is very slow, we can't see the end of it.*

Interviewee, business representative »

« *The conflict will continue until they pump money into it. You know, this conflict involves huge amounts of money.*

FGD participant, women's organisation »

« I think it will be abandoned, just like in Abkhazia and Transnistria. Because they took away everything they could from the Donbass. Russia doesn't need the Donbass. And it will be difficult for Ukraine to restore everything that was destroyed. It will be a buffer zone.

FGD participant, government sector worker »

« Well, I would like that war to stop, so that they stop shooting, so that the borders are restored. But it's difficult to say how much of that we'll see in the next three years.

Interviewee, representative of the local authorities »

What a person cannot have an impact on remains outside of his or her responsibility and attention. From the point of view of city life, Mariupol's residents cannot afford to stagnate, and that is why **people hope for the restoration and development of Mariupol along positive lines.**

The respondents say that the majority has become psychologically used to the presence of a protracted conflict near their city, and have learned to live with it and carry on.

The **scenario most frequently expected for the future of Mariupol**, as communicated by the study's participants, is the restoration of infrastructure, the return of businesses to the city, the development of tourism and the return of specialists to the city, despite the stagnant process of the conflict.

« Last week we had a five-year programme of the city economic and social development adopted at a city council session, which has never happened before. It is quite serious and promising.

FGD participant, business representative »

« If investments come, Mariupol will get its life back. This is a city that will be able to transit from the mono-economy to a good city with a good potential as a resort and place of recreation.

Interview, business representative »

The issue of resolving the conflict, as well as many of the problems provoked by it, lies within the remit of the central authorities, in the opinion of most participants. The local authorities, they believe, are responsible for providing security in the city, restoring infrastructure, and maintaining a dialogue with the central government.

The respondents unanimously emphasise the positive and important role of international and non-government organisations in helping the city and local residents.

For the residents of Mariupol, it is extremely important, in the view of most participants, to have a clear strategy for resolving the conflict situation. Almost all the respondents do not think the conflict will end in the near future.

3.5 POSSIBLE FORMS OF DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION TO MITIGATE THE IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT

THE AUTHORITIES/CITY RESIDENTS

All the study's participants mention the **openness, transparency and accessibility of the new local authorities**. According to the focus group discussion participants, it is now easier to establish contact with the city's leadership and conduct an effective dialogue. The city residents **declare** their sense of **security** in communication with the local authorities, when they speak of **their problems; they see the feedback** in decision-making in favour of the city and its inhabitants.

In their turn, the authorities speak about their openness and readiness to cooperate with the Mariupol residents. For them, feedback is important, but it is not always initiated by the residents. According to the representatives of the city administration, the level of awareness and civic inclusion among the local residents is still insufficient for full and effective communication.

« Five years ago, they didn't even guess they could come up with a problem, they didn't even think of it. Now they have an opportunity to come and voice their problem. »
FGD participant, young person »

« This is all open [information on decisions made by the local authorities], you can go to the city council's website and everything is posted there, [all] their decisions. But our people do not have the level of consciousness which would mean they would visit the website and monitor it purposefully. They trust the media, they trust what the media has told them. »
Interviewee, official »

« Youth centres were also created with the support of the mayor and city council. The authorities are now open to cooperation, open to proposals and fully assist in some initiatives. »
FGD participant, young person »

« But we are so accustomed to 'my hut is on the edge,' i.e. 'it's none of my business'. Well, that saying hasn't just appeared out of nowhere, because we, amongst our people, most of us are used to somehow transferring responsibility to someone else and saying: 'Here, I've elected him, and he must do it' and then you expect it from him, or, generally, I expect him to do something to make me feel good. »
Interview, public figure »

Basic forms of dialogue between citizens and local authorities (which function now, and in which the Mariupol residents are ready to take part in without worrying):

- free access/TV broadcast/internet broadcasts of the city council sessions
- hotlines, call centres, CAS
- personal appointments with government officials
- online consultations on the city council/district administration websites
- interactive platforms, TV linkups, TV broadcasts
- self-organisation committees
- personal meetings in communities
- cultural activities
- communication on the city website, social network websites
- online petitions.

«« *To a greater extent, now, compared to our previous city authorities, information-sharing with the population is quite efficient. Good websites have been developed, all the information is constantly updated there about what happens in the city, about events and so on. The previous authorities did not do this.*

Interviewee, education sector representative »»

«« *The 0629 website has a 'voice of the city' column where polls are published quite often. You would not trust it completely, but at least it's an attempt to learn the residents' opinions.*

учасник ФГД, працівники бюджетної сфери »»

«« *The local authorities are constantly in the field, they meet with the people, communicate with the people. Of course, there is some kind of reaction somehow.*

FGD participant, IDP »»

The study's participants (mostly civil activists) argue that thanks to innovations implemented by the local authorities and improvements in the communication climate, **there is a trend towards higher levels of civil responsibility among city residents.** When the city's residents see the local authorities' openness and willingness to cooperate, **they declare their readiness to become more active and get involved in the work on solving the city's problems, and being generally connected with it.** However, in practice, an ordinary Mariupol resident is not in a hurry to join in the work on interaction with the authorities if he or she does not see any concrete benefits for his or her closest circle.

Local residents also talk about their secondary role in solving the problems provoked by the conflict. The main form of involvement in and influence towards the situation still includes **participation in the volunteer movement or mobilisation during acute situations** (e.g. assistance to residents during the shelling of the Vostochny and Sartana neighbourhoods).

«« *Resolution of the conflict is not our level.*

FGD participant, OABC/PSOC »»

« It [the community] has certainly become more active and more developed, but again, it has an active part, which used to be about 5%, which is now 8% or 10%. Of course, this is not enough to organise some kind of forces, like in Europe, which can respond to the challenges of the city.

Interviewee, education representative »

« Local residents join the volunteers and NGOs and help the residents of the 'grey zone' in the villages.

FGD participant, government sector employee »

According to respondents, the residents of the city do not take a bigger role in civic life due to their entrenched perception of the authorities as a closed and excessively bureaucratic institution, with which there is no possibility of direct communication and dialogue.

In addition, according to participants, it is not usual for residents of the eastern regions to take part in civic activity and communication with the authorities, due to the legacy of the previous authorities (and in particular, the period during which Viktor Yanukovich was in power).

« In general, the existence of such organisations [NGOs] became possible only after the repressive regime of Yanukovich fell. The city simply did not know before that it was possible to do so. To be honest, people did not know that they could and had the right to self-organise. This self-organisation was historically suppressed in the Donbass. On the contrary, authoritarian models of corporate and factory management were imposed. And therefore the emergence of any completely grassroots initiatives is extremely important, whatever they do. From rubbish collection to keeping a check on the authorities.

Interviewee, NGO representative »

A safe and partner-like dialogue between the citizens and the authorities in any case requires a mediator, an intermediary person, and a supervisory institution (for example, as a non-government organisation). The mediator's aim is collecting together and presenting the problems of citizens, communicating them to the authorities, and **acting as a tool, a lever of pressure on the authorities**, while ensuring and supervising the implementation of the community's request.

« Only in a dialogue between the local authorities and non-government organisations. Only here can the authorities hear the problems of ordinary people and think about them.

Interviewee, social services »

« They [the Mariupol residents] need a kind of interpreter. The media can be such an interpreter. A mediator, moderator, you can describe it in various ways.

Interviewee, journalist »

« There must be some kind of community monitoring. Here, they listened to it, promised something and then everyone left, and they forgot. And then, these organisations say: 'But you made a promise! Let's do it on time!' Monitoring is required.

FGD participant, IDP »

« The mayor must call for a strategic council. This should be a working group which collaborates with the mayor. He has the authority to create this working group, and entrust it with the development of a strategic plan and the monitoring of its implementation. This kind of platform does not exist.

Interviewee, political scientist »

Projects which are important for the community, and which people are ready to join and interact with the authorities as part of the project: environment/water supply, jobs (medium-sized and small businesses), improving the quality of utilities and reducing their cost.

In addition, **residents are often not aware of the actions and plans of the local authorities, their precise plans and explanations.** Simple declarations of plans (without explanations) keeps local residents calm, but does not mobilise them enough, and it is seen as populism.

« Right now, they have come up with that decentralisation, in the sense of community amalgamation. People can't understand it, because nobody explains it to them in any way. But what is it, what will it bring about? And because we are not aware, we cannot explain to people what it is, what to be afraid of, what we need to hope for. The main problem is absolute ignorance.

Interviewee, journalist »

« But I think that it is important to do something, to act. Populist moods never have an effect.

Interviewee, public figure »

In their turn, the local authorities **expect more initiative and civic engagement from residents**, partly based on their feelings of patriotism and through countering propaganda; specifically, they expect them to disseminate information among citizens and IDPs about positive developments in the development of Ukraine and Mariupol, and help to create a positive image for the Ukrainian side.

« When a person who voices a problem is involved in solving it, this has a completely different effect.

Interviewee, representative of the local authorities »

« ...talking about how people can interact with the authorities and saying that they

need to do this is in their interests. This is not just an ephemeral thing, especially now, that is there in Kyiv ... It's here as well. If you don't keep an eye on things, you should not believe that a good king will come and give you everything and make everything right. That will not happen. People should keep a lookout.

Interviewee, journalist >>

BUSINESS AND AUTHORITIES

Big businesses in the city and the local authorities, according to participants in the study, **have established close cooperation** by creating **an effective platform, the Development Fund of Mariupol**. According to residents, it is **the most successful type of dialogue and partnership between business and government**.

«« *The Metinvest enterprises and Mariupol companies created the fund, and they finance and support it. This means assistance to people in the organisation and improvement of the housing territories, but it also means additional jobs.*

FGD participant, OABC/PSOC >>

Also, according to respondents, the interaction of government and business includes various forms of communication such as **public hearings, round tables, and working groups**, which help both sides of the dialogue to solve the pressing problems of the city with the participation of businesses. In the opinion of some residents, there is not sufficient participation by ordinary citizens in this to enable a full analysis of the situation and the solution of Mariupol's problems.

«« *The main goal is to present a positive image of Mariupol, and they shut their eyes to some problems, I think. In order to solve them, they need to go out and talk to the people and ask representatives of the population about what problems they have.*

Interviewee, public figure >>

At the same time, according to respondents, medium-sized and small businesses take a more cautious position when interacting with the authorities. To some extent, entrepreneurs remain biased and revert to their old ways of resolving issues (when they have to cooperate with the authorities), fearing bureaucracy and the prejudiced attitudes of officials.

According to representatives of businesses who participated in the research, **partnership between medium-sized and small businesses with the local authorities lacks clear, specific results and measures aimed at addressing the problems of entrepreneurship**.

«« *"Small businesses do not have enough feedback on their business activity, how they should work best ... They are just waiting for at least some help. Forgive me, but please take the tax burden off us at least to some extent.*

FGD participant, business representative >>

« There is a certain passivity and suspicion which is very difficult to combat; there are not enough good examples. In this case, the problem is not communication itself, as there are channels for communication, and they work somehow ... there is a lack of confidence in initiatives and the authorities and initiatives coming from the authorities.

Interviewee, political analyst »

« I attend meetings regularly enough. For the most part, I don't expect any direct help from there. I know that I am unlikely to be heard, so I don't even try to break through. For the most part, I try to get to these meetings, quorums, and symposiums that are held by the authorities, just to get information about what I can expect in the near future.

Interview, business representative »

In addition, participants believe that an effective dialogue to address problems of unemployment and attract investment to the city can be established between the authorities and business through the active participation of both sides in the development of the city's economy.

One particular project demonstrating successful cooperation is the creation of an industrial park, on the initiative of the business but with the participation of the city authorities. The local authorities expect financial support from the business, while the authorities must guarantee the reliability and security of cooperation.

« Here, we need some guarantees so that we don't lose our capital. Well, we need to use the law on state and private partnerships more bravely. That is, the city should participate in these projects.

Interviewee, a representative of the local authorities »

BUSINESS AND RESIDENTS

According to respondents, **local residents do not receive and do not expect any special support from businesses.** As for medium-sized and small businesses, sympathy and empathy are heard from the activists. The main message of the study's participants is that businesses today do not have enough resources, and that businesses need help and support.

« Because at this stage, the business is trying to survive.

FGD participant, OABC/PSOC »

When it comes to large companies that are key city employers, the respondents talk about **the lack of a suitable tool for interaction between** the local residents and businesses. In the opinion of the TA, **there are no successful examples of cooperation and leverage.**

« Private business is a part of the population; I cannot say that they interact. Busi-

ness interacts with the population in a very simple way: if there is demand, the business tries to satisfy it. That is, in fact, all the interaction consists of.

Interviewee, business representative >>

In addition, participants believe that an effective dialogue to address problems of local residents who want to feel security and partnership, then only **mediators can be used for interacting with businesses, such as NGOs, trade unions, aid funds**, etc., which have built-in interaction tools and levers of influence.

<< *You can talk to anyone you want. But will it do any good? I left, I said kind of everything. Tomorrow, someone similar will come to see him ... Industrial enterprises don't listen to us.*

FGD participant, women's organisation >>

<< *We want them to see us as equal partners, and not have them say, as often happens: "You are not happy? Please, leave your job, no one is irreplaceable.*

FGD participant, government sector employee >>

According to participants, major employers in the city (in particular, the Metinvest Group) are currently working in a sustainable way and have the opportunity and resources to help the city.

According to respondents, this also means indirect assistance from large businesses to local residents, including the provision and preservation of jobs, contributions to the city budget, and holding various events for residents. Such measures are perceived by respondents as demonstrating effective interaction of business and government, and also assistance to the city.

Specific **examples of assistance and business interaction with the city residents** (indirectly through the fund), which are mentioned by the participants (in which they participated and are ready to participate in the future), include: programmes for city improvement (setting up children's playgrounds, providing benches, etc.), landscaping, cleaning water reservoirs, various events in the form of 'subbotniks' [volunteer work to clean up neighbourhoods], etc.

The participants in the study were not prepared to talk about other forms of dialogue between the authorities and the townspeople in addition to those that currently exist: the city website, the hotline, consultations with officials and meetings with local residents, PSOC, online consultations, etc.

According to the majority, many of these communication channels became possible and accessible after the arrival of a new team at the local authority, which is building an image of being more open and transparent. However, in order to have full communication with the local authorities, residents still need an authoritative mediator who can communicate the problems of the city's residents and monitor implementation by the authorities.

As for businesses, people can see a fairly close dialogue between local authorities and large enterprises, although it is still lacking in publicity. At the same time, communication between businesses and residents is, for the respondents, a new and still incomprehensible form of

interaction. Basically, any interaction is seen solely in terms of the provision of jobs by the business, and of services and products by small and medium-sized businesses.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The most important issues for the residents of Mariupol that have been caused by the conflict are primarily related to their psychological state. Mariupol's residents are concerned about tension, anxiety and insecurity caused by the proximity of hostilities, which generally affects their mood and their perception of future prospects.

The second most important issue is logistics. According to respondents, Mariupol is isolated in terms of transportation, due to damaged and deteriorating road infrastructure, restriction of movement through roadblocks, cuts in rail links, and problems with the port operation.

The conflict has negatively affected the economy of the city and frontline settlements: in terms of the decline in production at the city's main companies and agricultural producers, at the port, and at medium-sized and small businesses (which has increased the unemployment rate both in the city and the villages).

Business representatives are particularly sensitive to the decline in the purchasing power of local residents, and the suspension of investments coming into the city. At the same time, opinions are voiced about the need to provide tax benefits for small and medium-sized businesses in Mariupol, as a city with a special status.

The list of problems important for the city and caused by the conflict includes **interruptions in water supply, the lack of housing for IDPs, the destruction of infrastructure, and the outflow of specialists from Mariupol.**

The arrival of many IDPs to the city is perceived ambiguously by residents. The IDPs, as a rule, describe interaction with local residents and the authorities in a positive way. The main burden has been and still is on social institutions, non-government organisations, and volunteers.

The deployment of the military near the city, as well as their presence in the city as a whole, is not a risk factor and does not cause problems for the townspeople. The local residents have become used to having the army in Mariupol, and many of them express gratitude towards the military, who, in their view, are defending the city, and Ukraine as a whole.

The online public sphere of the city – both local internet media and local online opinion leaders – reflects the problems and aspirations of active Mariupol residents quite accurately. Topics and news that are most often discussed in the public sphere closely correlate with the city's current problems, and a fairly wide variety of opinions and comments on various items of the agenda is maintained.

In general, the conflict is widely regarded as a protracted one, with complex and unclear prospects for resolution. All the participants in the study, without exception, assign responsibility for resolving the conflict to the central authorities, as well as the 'attacker'.

They primarily mention the need for peace talks with the participation of international representatives. In addition, Mariupol's residents are more likely to react negatively to the central government, as they cannot see that it has clear plans for the cessation of hostilities.

According to participants in the study, the local authorities do not have the powers or resources to resolve the conflict and stop the hostilities. The city administration's area of responsibility includes establishing and restoring the city's infrastructure, attracting investment, ensuring residents feel more at ease, and holding a dialogue with the central authorities in order to convey the needs of Mariupol. All of this will directly or indirectly help to solve the problems connected with the conflict.

At the same time, the residents' perception of the local authorities is mostly positive. Mariupol's residents see the results of the authorities' work and positively evaluate the innovations and prospects of the city's leadership.

Local activists say that the local authorities are open, and that they are willing to cooperate with them. Many participants in this research show an interest in the problems of the city and in ways to solve current problems. They see their role as volunteering to assist the city/IDPs/victims of shelling.

Representatives of the local authorities, in their turn, say that they are prepared to cooperate with residents. However, the expectations of the city's leadership are associated with greater initiative and activity on the part of local residents. According to local leaders, paternalism prevails in the political culture of the local residents, although there is a tendency to increase civil activity.

The basic forms of communication of residents with the local authorities to date have, by and large, been initiated by the new team that has come to power in the city: information on the city's website, online consultations, a hotline, online broadcasting of city council sessions, and consultations with heads of administrations/councillors and meetings at events organised by the city. All these forms of dialogue are known to residents, and they are perceived as effective.

In addition, Mariupol residents are, out of habit, willing to cooperate with the authorities indirectly by filing their requests and problems to an institution that will take action, represent the interests of the residents to the authorities, and monitor how the tasks that are assigned are implemented. According to respondents, this is a much more effective way to work with the authorities.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and expert interviews in Mariupol, the following recommendations were formulated:

- Taking into account the strategic importance of Mariupol for the whole country, it is advisable for the Ukrainian government to consider the possibility of organising programmes aimed at addressing the city's key infrastructure and transportation issues: repairing roads, restoring rail links, repairing rolling stock, and diversifying sources of water supply.
- Objective restrictions imposed on Mariupol in connection with the conflict close by can be overcome by efforts of the government and local authorities to implement programmes to support business development and jobs in Mariupol.
- As a large number of qualified specialists have left the city and there is an acute shortage of labour resources in healthcare, education, and culture, introducing a regional wage premium is worth considering.
- The impossibility of agribusiness near the line of contact (due to mined fields and regular shelling) already requires the development of a comprehensive strategy to address this problem. It would be useful for the government to identify possible options for supporting 'grey zone' agrarians; this may include monetary compensation, allocation of different land plots or other measures.
- The wide presence of internally displaced persons in Mariupol reveals the problem of housing, which can be solved only through housing development programmes. These programmes can be implemented by the Ukrainian government in cooperation with the local authorities.
- It would be relevant to continue the projects of psychological care and support for local residents that have already been launched. Consideration should also be given to working with narrower target groups to organise professional retraining programs; to developing training programmes and resource centres for the protection and support of women, youth, and IDPs; to assisting victims of violence; to providing training on non-violent communication, mediation, etc.
- To improve the quality of cooperation and involvement in decisionmaking at the city level, it would be helpful to voice the possibilities and limitations of local authorities and local residents in the public sphere in Mariupol in the context of influencing the conflict and reducing its negative consequences. Permanent information support is important for maintaining trust in this interaction, including talk shows, interviews with top officials who talk about opportunities, etc. The implementation of previously approved plans

(in particular, the five-year programme for the economic and social development of the city) requires extensive communication and coverage of the implemented activities, which will ensure that citizens feel secure and understand the ongoing processes.

- In order to improve communication between local people, local businesses and local government, and possible formats of dialogue, it is worth starting with more familiar, albeit not very effective activities (round tables, public hearings, etc.), and then moving on to workshops, strategic sessions or short-term joint action planning sessions.
- In order to develop the potential of local democracy and expand the civil and political participation of citizens, a series of trainings for ordinary citizens and educational activities on participatory democracy would be useful, as well as workshops on using the tools available for participation in local and nationwide matters.
- It would be worthwhile for Mariupol to design a permanent platform for dialogue, where relevant issues that are topical for the community would be discussed. In order to implement such a project, specialists should be trained to organise and facilitate sessions. In order for this to happen, it will be useful for the team managing this 'dialogue platform' to undergo relevant training courses.

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