

## 2 | SOCIAL COHESION AND PEACEBUILDING: INCLUSION OF IDPS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITIES IN THE LUHANSK REGION

*Inna Semenenko, Ganna Borova, Ruslan Halhash*

Since 2014, Ukraine has suffered from conflict influenced by the Russian occupation of Crimea and parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions (Eastern Ukraine). Occupation of significant territories led to mass internal migration. During this time, about 1.5 million people became internally displaced persons (IDPs), moving from the Luhansk and Donetsk regions and Crimea to other regions of Ukraine. The Luhansk region received the second largest influx of these displaced persons in the country, hosting more than 290 thousand of them. A lot of governmental and private institutions moved to other cities and united with local institutions. As many conflicts between local and displaced populations emerged, working towards including the IDPs into local communities, strengthening social cohesion and peacebuilding became vital.

Social cohesion shows the nature of relations of people and groups of people including the sense of affiliation of an individual to the group (Lefko-Everett, 2016). Cohesiveness is essential to any community's sustainable development as it contributes to solving social and ecological problems and promoting the economic performance of this community. According to the OECD report, entitled *Perspectives on Global Development 2012: Social Cohesion in a Shifting World*, a cohesive society “works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust and

offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility” (OECD, 2012). Thus, the cohesiveness of a society becomes the key factor for people’s interaction and their ability to reach mutual goals and also provides respect for diversity and the protection of human rights while supporting community members’ welfare and the realisation of their opportunities. The research and practical cases prove that the increase of social cohesion leads to an increase of tolerance among people as well as the resolution of conflicts and peacebuilding (Cox et al., 2014; UNDP, 2009; UNICEF, 2011; OECD, 2012).

A variety of factors influence social cohesion, including an individual’s sense of belonging, inclusion, involvement, recognition, legitimacy, equality and security but also opposite issues such as isolation, exclusion, non-participation, rejection, illegitimacy, inequality and insecurity (Jenson, 1998; Bernard, 1999; Lefko-Everett, 2016). The dimensions of social cohesion include social inclusion (together with employment and access to different resources – financial, social services, medical treatment, technological, etc.), cultural and ethnic homogeneity (influenced by the linguistic factor and values recognition), trust, participation and solidarity (taking into account volunteering, charity, participation in elections) (Jenson, 2010; Lefko-Everett, 2016).

For Ukraine, social cohesion of local communities became a challenge due to significant internal migration as the result of the military conflict and occupation of significant parts of Crimea and the Luhansk and Donetsk regions. The total number of internally displaced people is estimated to be around 1.5 million, 20% of whom reside in the Luhansk region (Figure 1).

Mass internal migration caused the changes in all of the aforementioned dimensions and factors of social cohesion. The main challenges of the inclusion of IDPs into local communities became the following:

*Distrust by local populations and those of the native territories.* The IDPs were considered as “traitors” from both sides as they did not stay and protect their territories. Some of the local population of the new communities stated their belief that the displaced people should have stayed in their native cites and protected

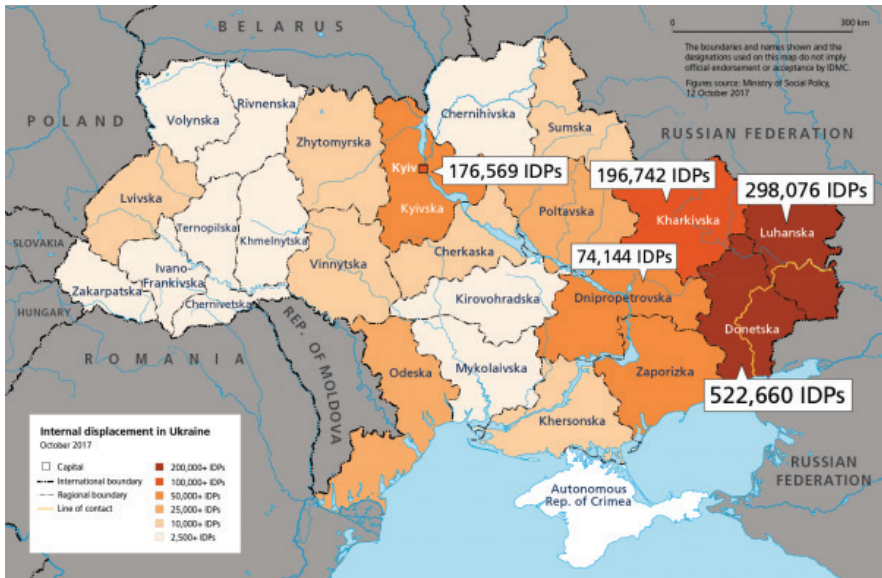


Figure 1. Regions of Ukraine Hosting Largest Numbers of IDPs (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2017)

their homes from invaders. At the same time, some people who remained in the occupied territories made the same argument. However, in both cases the idea of the “invader” depended on personal political views and could mean both Russians and Ukrainians.

*Competition for working places in the labour market.* In the Luhansk region, there are a lot of IDPs from the city of Luhansk itself who are more qualified than non-displaced residents from rural areas or small towns and thus create competition in the local job market. Since the regional conflict caused businesses to close and the number of vacant positions to decrease, local populations experienced significant difficulties competing for the same working places with IDPs.

*Competition for resources within institutions.* Because of the conflict, many institutions – governmental, educational, medical and others were displaced to cities in territories under the Ukrainian government’s control. They were either

united with local institutions of their kind or placed into the buildings belonging to other institutions. Such amalgamations resulted in competition for resources and created tension between local and displaced workers.

*Differences in culture and ideology.* Amalgamation of local and displaced institutions increased the quantity and diversity of personnel. Such diversity created strife between the groups as they each had their own beliefs, traditions, work ethic, etc. Such a merger in fact often divided the personnel into two groups: the “lazy, incapable locals” and the “bossy, interloping IDPs.” The tension and conflicts between these groups negatively affected the productivity of institutions and left businesses disorganised. These differences negatively influenced social interaction outside of the workplace as well.

*Increase in demand for rental houses.* Demand for rental houses increased exponentially which led to the increase of prices and the decrease of available housing in some cities. Severodonetsk, a city in the Luhansk region, experienced this phenomenon because it became the new capital of the Luhansk region and hosted a lot of displaced people and institutions. Native residents who rented apartments started to pay in some cases up to ten times more than they used to before 2014. As the influx of IDPs became the main reason for the changes in the housing market, it increased tension between the locals and the IDPs.

*Exclusive government support to IDPs.* IDPs with relevant IDP registration certificates receive monthly payments while people without IDP status, even those who suffered because of the conflict, cannot receive it. IDPs had priority for receiving some social services (for example, medical assistance, registration of a child in kindergarten, etc.), which again increased the negative attitude of the local population towards IDPs.

*Violation of IDP rights.* At the same time some of the rights of IDPs are violated which forms the negative attitude of IDPs towards the local population and the identification of oneself with a certain vulnerable group rather than with a member of a new community. These rights include the right of free movement in the regions close to the demarcation line, the right to vote in the local elections (and in some

cases the realisation of this right would totally change the situation and power balance at local administrations) and the right to receive pension or other social payments without the IDP registration certificates, among others.

The tension between local and displaced populations negatively affects social activism, the performance of institutions and the sustainable development of the Luhansk region as a whole. Inclusion of IDPs into the local population and the increase of social cohesion between these groups of people will contribute to the better performance and prosperity of society. Thus, the inclusion of IDPs into local communities in the Luhansk region became vital for its further sustainable development and, therefore, prompted regional officials to include the improvement of social cohesion and the promotion of social dialogue at the regional and local levels as specific objectives of the Strategy of Luhansk Region Development, effective until the year 2020 (*The Luhansk...*, 2016). This alerted the region's stakeholders to the issues of social cohesion and peacebuilding.

The Luhansk Regional Partners' Forum in the Sphere of Safety, Social Cohesion and Peacebuilding, in their report, entitled *Luhansk Region: The Path to Peace and Justice*, defined the main challenges to the region's sustainable development which are connected with social cohesion and peacebuilding in Luhansk region communities (*Report...*, 2017):

- Passiveness of community members and the inability to attract them to mutual work,
- Lack of motivation,
- Poor interaction of local authorities and population, and
- Intolerance.

Among their findings was the idea that less active communities need the support of more active communities in order to increase social cohesion. This could be accomplished by encouraging community members to share experiences through exchange visits, forming mobilisation trips, creating platforms for dialogue and including community members in the creation and realisation of community

projects. The main idea was the necessity to “ensure that everyone is included in the process of discussion and resolution of the problem, so that no one is left out, and all decisions are taken together” (*Report...*, 2017). The forum made recommendations to the local authorities and civil and international organisations to correct the issue.

Many international organisations operating in the Luhansk region aimed their work at improving the lives of IDPs in different areas: economic, social, political, etc. Various UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, IOM and others), as well as USAID, International Women’s Fund, British Council and other organisations, ran various programmes and projects specifically aimed at social cohesion, reconciliation and peacebuilding of the local and displaced populations. They hold projects which promote dialogue in the region, form a network of peace ambassadors, mediators and negotiators who can promote the peaceful resolution of the conflicts, and support the local projects which contribute to the increase of social cohesion of a region or a specific area.

Among such projects is the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index which was developed to understand the root reasons for the relationship of people in conflict areas (SCORE, n.d.). This project assigns a numerical value to each community based on a scoring system that takes into account various factors vital to social inclusivity in order to help illustrate how far a community is from achieving social cohesion. Originally, it was developed for Cyprus by SeeD (Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development) supported by UNDP and USAID but was later modified and calculated for other countries suffering internal conflicts. The methodology for calculating this index is rather complex and includes the participation of local experts in designing the indicators and their significance. There are a lot of factors that determine certain indicators to form the aggregate index. The aggregate index measurement is from 0 to 10 where 0 is the worst value and 10 is the best value.

There were three main waves of calculation of the SCORE Index in Ukraine. All three of them took into account different factors and presented different results. The first wave of the SCORE Index calculation was carried out in 2015 by USAID

and illustrated local community support to IDPs. The values of the aggregate index all over Ukraine varied from between 6.1 and 7.6 on a scale of 0 to 10 (Figure 2). The value of this indicator in the Luhansk region was 6.8 which was lower than in the Donetsk region at 7.0. Separatists occupy parts of both regions with a demarcation line dividing each of them.

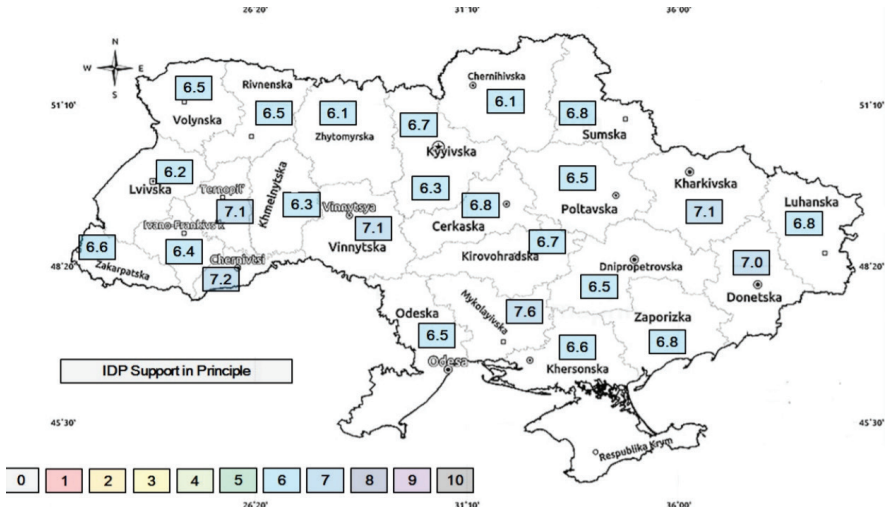


Figure 2. 2015 SCORE Index Implemented by USAID (IDP support) (SCORE. Executive Brief on Internally Displaced Persons, n.d.)

The results of this research proved that tension between the local and the displaced populations in the East of Ukraine is lower than in the regions located far away from the conflict. The harmony of IDPs with host communities is the highest in the Luhansk region (9.3) as compared to other explored regions (for example, 3.9 in the Odessa region) (SCORE. Executive..., n.d.). At the same time, according to the research of a group of experts for the USAID Country Development Cooperation Strategy (Jennings et al., 2017), residents of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions are more sceptical of reforms in Ukraine and the future European path of the country and demonstrate pluralistic political views, having pro-Russian, pro-Ukrainian

and undecided citizens, which in their turn are tolerant, neutral or intolerant of each other. All of this grouping influences social cohesion in the regions.

The second wave of the SCORE Index calculations was implemented in 2016 and sponsored by UNDP, UNICEF and IOM. This time it was aimed at providing information about the origin of the conflict in the East of Ukraine, its transformation and its social dynamics. The research covered only five regions of Ukraine: the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, which were directly affected by the conflict and whose residents accepted the majority of the IDPs, and the neighbouring regions of Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia and Dnipro. The methodology for calculating the SCORE Index included the participation of local experts and SeeD developers and the realisation of several consultative meetings with discussions of the factors, indicators, etc. (SCORE, n.d.). During the discussions, representatives of academic institutions, local authorities and civil society expressed concern regarding the structure of the factors that were included in the SCORE Index and proposed that it should be adapted for Eastern Ukraine. In addition, scientists and representatives of civil organisations expressed the desire to implement specific projects to improve social cohesion and reconciliation in the East of Ukraine.

Calculation of the aggregate index in the East of Ukraine included several components (SCORE, n.d.):

- *Population survey*, which covered 5,300 personal interviews in the Luhansk, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia and Dnipro regions;
- *Expert interview*, which covered 72 in-depth interviews with experts in different spheres from these regions;
- *Survey of teenagers in schools*, which polled 3,300 school students, aged 13 to 17 years, in 48 secondary educational institutions;
- *Polls at the checkpoints*, 1,500 personal interviews at five checkpoints at the demarcation line in the Luhansk (1 checkpoint) and Donetsk (4 checkpoints) regions.



All surveys and interviews were conducted in the territories under the Ukrainian government’s control. After data processing, the indicators were grouped as follow (SCORE, n.d.):

- Psychosocial adaptability,
- Reduction of negative migration trends,
- Social cohesion and a sense of affiliation, and,
- Tolerance and socially responsible position.

The average values of social cohesion and the sense of affiliation index for all five regions of Eastern Ukraine is shown in Figure 3. The overall average index for all five regions is 6.6.

Eastern Ukraine

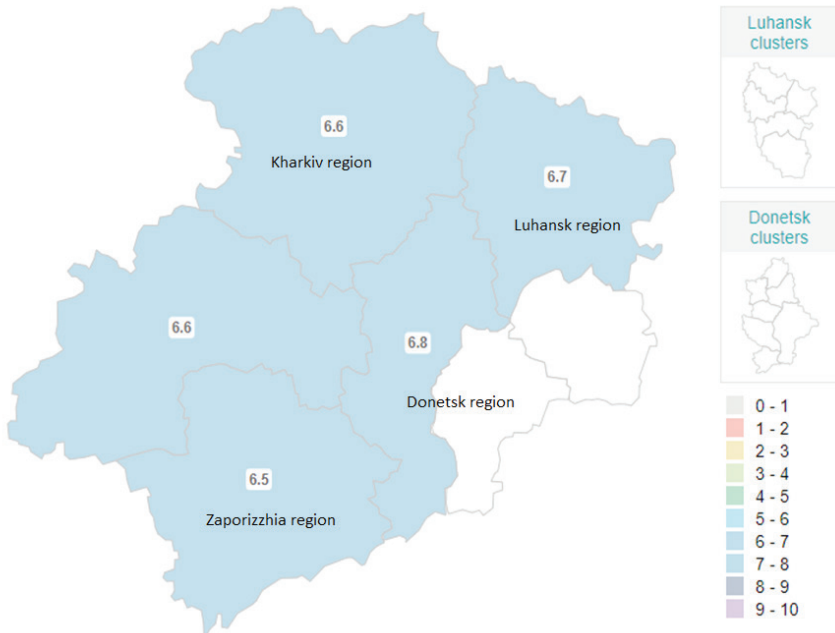


Figure 3. Values of Social Cohesion and Sense of Affiliation Index in Eastern Ukraine (SCORE, n.d.)

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The Luhansk region value is slightly higher than the overall average for Eastern Ukraine. At the same time, the Luhansk region itself was divided into four clusters, each of which has its own value of social cohesion and sense of affiliation index (Figure 4).

### Luhansk Clusters

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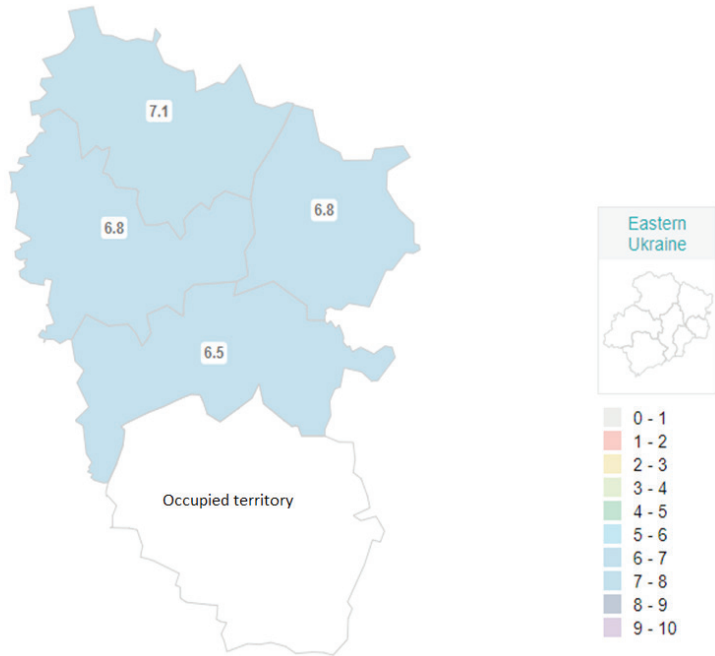


Figure 4. Values of Social Cohesion and Sense of Affiliation Index in the Clusters of the Luhansk Region (SCORE, n.d.)

The results from the Luhansk region clusters show that social cohesion and a sense of affiliation in the south of the region close to the demarcation line and the occupied territory is lower than in the north of the region and in the middle parts. The interesting fact is that the northern parts of the Luhansk region had a stronger anti-separatist and nationalist mood as compared to the southern parts of the region.

The detailed analyses of the factors that influenced the indicator showed that:

- women and men in the Luhansk region have the same social cohesion index although on average in the East of Ukraine, women have a slightly larger index value of social cohesion;
- The greater the age, the greater the cohesiveness of people;
- Pensioners turned out to be more cohesive than the unemployed, the employed or students;
- The higher the level of education, the lower the cohesiveness. People with junior specialist (associate) degrees are more cohesive than those who have Master's or PhD degrees;
- The smaller the town or village, the greater the cohesiveness (SCORE, n.d.).

Further, the people who cross the demarcation line, going back and forth to the occupied territories, and those who live close to the checkpoints, are more inclined to support solving the conflict peacefully and have a more positive attitude towards the rest of the population, including those who live in the occupied territories (SCORE, n.d.).

Regions of Eastern Ukraine have a rather high social cohesion and sense of affiliation index as compared to other countries: 5.2 in Cyprus, 4.4 in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 2.6 in Nepal. Only Liberia with the index value of 7 exceeds the value in the East of Ukraine (6.6) and the Luhansk region (6.7) (SCORE, n.d.). However, despite the fact that the index of social cohesion and the sense of affiliation (especially as compared to other regions of the world) is rather high, conflict in the region still exists and so does the tension between the local (host) and displaced populations.

The results of the calculations became the basis for the new UNDP project in the Luhansk region which is being implemented together with other actors: university, civil society and local administrations. A group of local experts – active citizens who are engaged in different spheres of activities and belong to the Advisory Board on Social Cohesion at UNDP, which makes suggestions and shares opinions on

different international projects being carried out in the region, initiated this project. UNDP within the project, entitled Restoration of Governance and Reconciliation in Crisis-Affected Communities of Ukraine, which is a part of the overall Recovery and Peacebuilding Programme supported jointly by the governments of Sweden and the Swiss Confederation (SIDA and SDC) (UNDP, 2018) and the Luhansk regional state administration supported the suggested project.

The project oversaw the organisation and the holding of public dialogues and of pilot focus groups in certain communities in the Luhansk region. A group of local experts engaged in research on social cohesion and conflict resolution attended both events (*Publichni...*, 2018; *Vidbuvsya...*, 2018). Public dialogues were carried out for groups of people from different districts of the Luhansk region and included a presentation and a discussion of the SCORE Index and its results for the East of Ukraine, a general discussion of the social cohesion issue, a collection of opinions and observation, and the formation of an analytical report for each participating community. Pilot focus groups were held in smaller groups in specific localities and also included the presentation of the SCORE Index but with more detailed discussions of its value, the collection of information, interviewing people about their values and specific features and a discussion of specific events which can be held in these communities to increase the social cohesion of the populations which live there.

The localities of the public dialogues were the following:

- The town of Novoaidar (for residents of Novoaidar, Popasnaia and Stanytsia-Luhanskaia districts),
- The town of Svatovo (for residents of Svatovo, Troitske, Bilokurakino, Kreminna districts),
- The town of Starobilsk (for residents of Starobilsk, Novopskov, Markivka, Milove, Bilovodsk districts), and
- The city of Severodonetsk (for residents of cities Severodonetsk, Rubizhne, Lysychansk).

The localities of the pilot focus groups were the following:

- The town of Zolote,
- The village of Nyzhnia Duvanka,
- The village of Chmyrivka,
- The town of Schastiie.

All of these communities, located in different areas of the Luhansk region and having different SCORE Index values, were among the target or potential target communities of UNDP and included the localities close to the demarcation line where the lowest values of social cohesion and the sense of affiliation index were observed (Figure 5).

#### Luhansk Clusters

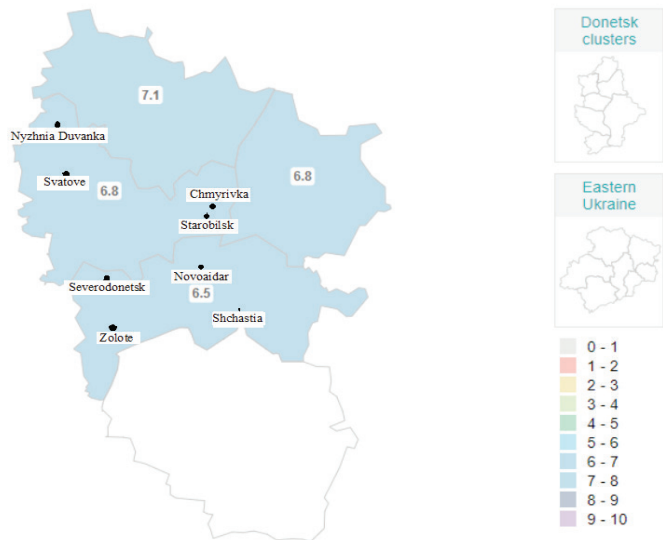


Figure 5. Target Communities of the Activities Aimed at Increasing Social Cohesion and a Sense of Affiliation

The methodology for these public dialogues and pilot focus groups is presented in Figure 6.

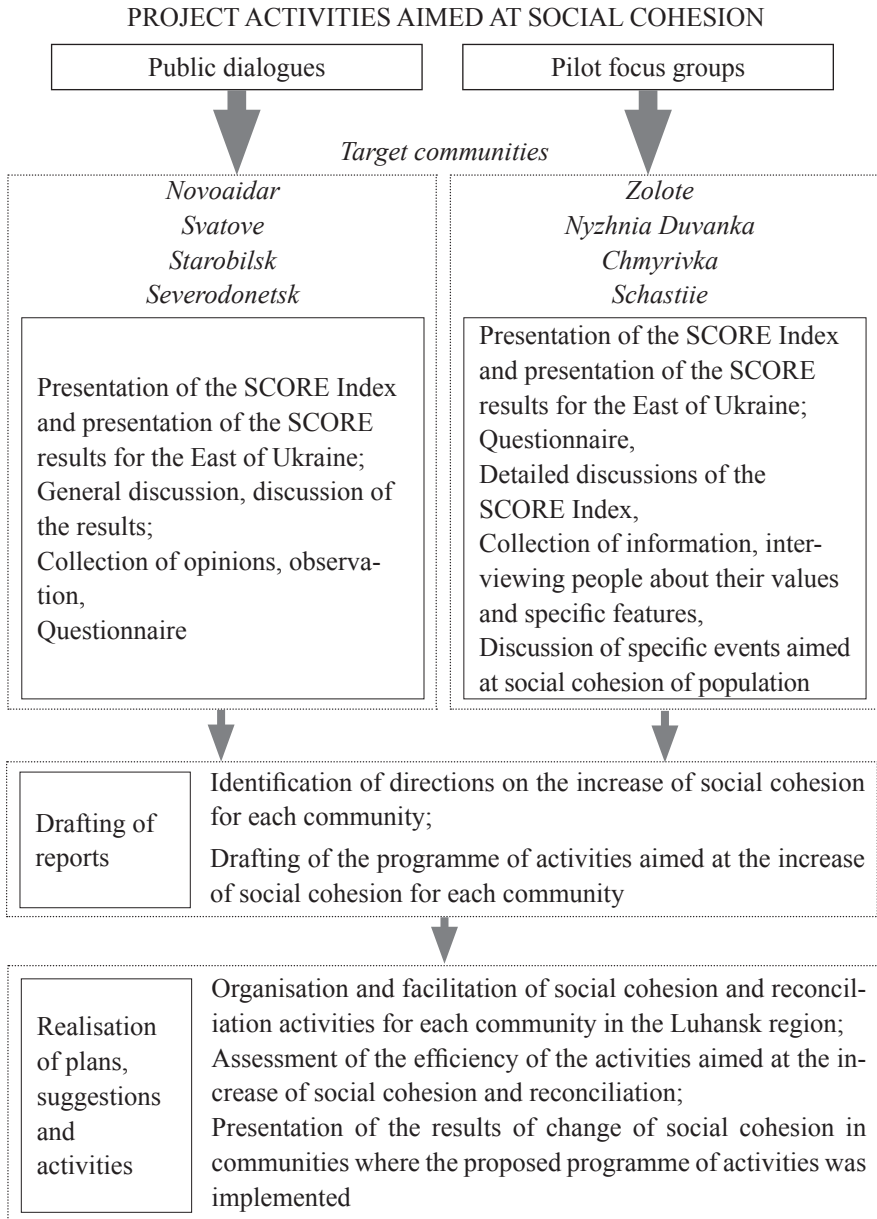


Figure 6. Methodology of Public Dialogues and Pilot Focus Groups

The participants of the focus groups, together with experts, discussed the possible reasons for the different values of the SCORE Index in different clusters of the Luhansk region. The main reason (in their opinion) was the uniqueness of every community. According to the reports, each community has peculiarities and its own factors that can influence the cohesion of a community as a whole and separate groups of people. The discussion of the reasons why it is necessary to increase the social cohesion of the community and the results of such work for the community itself were important as almost all participants noted that social cohesion affects a community's efficiency in solving problems, its ability to resolve conflicts and its overall development. Participants also viewed a presentation on activities promoting social cohesion in foreign communities. Observing that such activities were being held not only in the conflict-affected countries and regions but also in developed countries with a stable economy and political situations, such as Great Britain, Australia, the USA and Canada (*Community Cohesion*, 2005; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015; Mir et al., 2010; Lefko-Everett, 2016) proved to the participants that each activity matters and that an increase of social cohesion affects the overall performance of any community.

The participants of the public dialogues and pilot focus groups associated certain terms with social cohesion (Figure 7). The process of identification of associations made it possible to start the brainstorming for detecting the main activities aimed at social cohesion in specific communities. Listing of associations made it possible to realise the very essence of the cohesiveness of the participants of the events, identify the main problems that interfere with the cohesion of each particular community and identify the main measures for increasing social cohesion and the sense of belonging of each inhabitant to his or her community.

During the brainstorming process, the participants of the focus groups defined communication as the main challenge in the interaction of members of their communities as each individual has his or her own accumulated experience, worldview and perception of different life situations. Based on the analyses of the work of the focus groups and the summary of the survey results, it was possible to define the main factors influencing the social cohesion of specific communities. Such factors include:





social cohesion in specific communities. These directions and events prove the two main aspects of social cohesion increase by Berger-Schmitt (2000): (1) reducing inequality, discrepancy and social isolation and (2) strengthening social relationships and interactions. These specific measures were suggested during the group brainstorming process and they would allow for an improvement of social cohesion and peacebuilding in specific areas in that the population there is eager to realise them.

Based on the acquired information, it was possible to combine and define the main directions which will contribute to the increase of social cohesion, peacebuilding and the spirit of reconciliation in the communities:

- Creation of spaces where people can spend time together, learn something new, play games or sports and communicate,
- Organisation of holidays that the community would celebrate together,
- Realisation of projects that foster a sense of community through teamwork like creating flower beds or improving the landscape,
- Organisation of eco-activities,
- Organisation of hiking tours and tourist trips,
- Organisation of exchange visits and sharing successful stories,
- Promotion of civic engagement in different activities, and,
- Organisation of communication between different age groups.

Members of both the public dialogues and the pilot focus groups filled in the questionnaire with specific questions which also proved the directions of the abovementioned measures and projects.

The expert group that organised and held the public dialogues and pilot focus groups prepared a special report after each event. These reports included detailed descriptions of the activities, the results of the discussions in the communities including the values of the population, their preferences, their sense of affiliation to the community, their attitude towards different groups of people, their satisfaction

with their surroundings including their work environment and their neighbourhood, the willingness to leave their hometown, the main challenges and problems of relations with colleagues and the neighbourhood and the reasons which consolidate and separate people. Holding these public dialogues in four geographical clusters and the focus groups in four pilot communities in the Luhansk region allowed project leaders to define the main challenges at the local level which still exist after the beginning of the conflict in the East of Ukraine:

- *The weakness of the new local authorities in amalgamated communities and the lingering process of the amalgamation of territorial communities* which not only hinders peacebuilding but also retards the strategic sustainable development of communities in the Luhansk region, restricts citizens' participation in decision-making processes and limits the accountability of the authorities.
- *Poor participation of citizens in the development of conflict-affected areas.* Local authorities are the closest governmental body to the citizens and this closeness should produce a high level of participation of citizens (including women and youth) in local affairs. The degree of participation of citizens depends on two main factors: (1) raising citizens' awareness and understanding of their civil rights and obligations; in particular, in a conflict situation, and (2) developing effective and stable dialogue platforms.
- *Lack or low quality of services provided at the local level.*

These challenges are interconnected and prompt an address of the important issues of trust and social cohesion within and between communities. The low level of trust of institutions and service providers exists because community members do not participate in the decision-making process for the development of the service sector, for control over the quality of services and for advocacy of improvements. At the same time, when the level of participation is low, there is lack of trust vis-a-vis democratic institutions.

The results of these expert visits to communities in the Luhansk region were discussed in September 2018 at the Social Cohesion Regarding Decentralisation

Reform: Current Issues of Concern to Civil Society Forum organised and held by UNDP. Social cohesion and decentralisation at the boundary line was among the panel discussion topics at the Forum with representatives from the Ministry of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine as well as other governmental bodies, local administrations, civil society, mass media and international organisations (*Analytical report...*, 2018). Among the target communities where the focus group was held was the town of Zolote which is a conglomerate of five small towns. One of the five is situated on the occupied territories and the other four are on the territory under the control of the Ukrainian government but very close to the demarcation line. One of the four towns, which is almost at the demarcation line, is constantly under shelling from heavy artillery of the occupying military forces. The issue of social cohesion for this area is vital not only between IDPs and the local population but between local people themselves as their lifestyle is significantly influenced by safety and a sense of safety.

The exposed problems were documented in the relevant analytical documents of the UNDP's Recovery and Peacebuilding Programme in the East of Ukraine and provided the basis for the development and implementation of new ideas and projects for communities in Luhansk region whose implementation is expected to result in the increase of the SCORE Index value by the end of 2019. All of the recommendations would be taken as well as the realisation of the new Good Governance and Citizen's Engagement for Justice, Security, Environmental Protection and Social Cohesion in Eastern Ukraine, 2018-2021 project at the local level with a total budget of USD 12,401,000 (*Denmark...*, 2018). The project aims at facilitating the resolution of the key issues of the weak implementation of the rule of law and the right to justice, physical and environmental insecurity, and the distrust toward institutions that dominate the territory of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions and which restrict or restrain social cohesion and peacebuilding in these regions affected by the conflict as well as their overall long-term sustainable development.

The experiment with the communities on the presentation, discussion and adaptation of the SCORE Index allowed once again to show the flexibility of the programme which helped to intervene and adjust its working plans and develop new projects for the East of Ukraine and the Luhansk region, in particular, considering local

peculiarities. This project allowed the programme to attract the attention of and engage stakeholders – the communities themselves and their representatives from different spheres; namely, the local lowest level of beneficiaries of UNDP and its donors. It also made it possible to focus resources more effectively on priority actions to be implemented in order to meet the most significant needs through the implementation of current programme projects. The aforementioned project, Good Governance and Citizen’s Engagement for Justice, Security, Environmental Protection and Social Cohesion in Eastern Ukraine, 2018-2021, has already been supported by donor agencies. Another plan foresees to move the programme’s activities closer to the demarcation in order line to meet the needs of those most affected by the conflict.

The main results which are expected to be reached include the increase of the percentage of inhabitants of the Luhansk region who actively participate in civil life. This indicator is planned to grow by 30% by 2022, which can be checked by consulting SCORE Index calculations provided such calculations are continuously funded.

In 2018, there was another wave of SCORE Index calculations. At the same time, the variety of factors and the resulting indicators were different from the 2016 wave. The methodology included general interviewing of the population and revealed fewer values and indicators than in 2018. These interviews and calculations were made during the visits of the expert group to eight communities in the Luhansk region and the suggestions made in the results of the visits are still being implemented or are under future implementation. Thus, it is not possible to estimate the results of the project. The second wave of SCORE calculations defined the basic desirable outcomes for establishing a social cohesion model in the East of Ukraine, among which are civic engagement, tolerance and pluralism, support for reforms and reintegration with the occupied territories (SCORE, n.d.).

Thus, the project on discussing the SCORE Index in the participating communities foresaw the organisation and holding of public dialogues and pilot focus groups discussing the necessity of social cohesion, the results of its calculations and the adaptation of SCORE results to specific communities according to their

peculiarities and needs. These activities contribute to presenting the results of this study of social cohesion and reconciliation in the East of Ukraine to a wide section of the population and local authorities (rural, district, regional). As the SCORE Index is an analytical tool for understanding the dynamics of change in society and, in particular, in certain communities that have been subjected to conflict, it made it possible to set the starting points for the development of approaches and programmes aimed at strengthening social cohesion and peacebuilding in specific communities in the Luhansk region. Both public dialogues and pilot focus groups had more than 300 active community representatives and had the following results:

- Public opinion on the correspondence of the obtained data of the SCORE Index calculations to the real state of affairs in specific communities has been studied;
- Proposals for improving the existing state of affairs regarding social cohesion and peacebuilding have been developed;
- Directions and specific tasks for improving the social cohesion of the population in specific communities have been suggested (which could be sponsored either by UNDP or by other donors or institutions);
- A plan of the activities aimed at the social cohesion and the reconciliation of each target community which has its own peculiarities, features, problems, traditions and lifestyle and which necessitated different directions for increasing social cohesion and corresponding activities has been suggested;
- The foundation for tolerance, promoting dialogue, peacebuilding and reconciliation among ordinary citizens has been created.

This project has become the basis for the development and implementation of new ideas and projects not only in the communities of the Luhansk region where the public dialogues and focus groups were conducted, but also at the regional and national levels. The implementation of these activities would result in an increase of the SCORE Index at subsequent evaluations in the future. The achievement of all of these results will contribute to the sustainable development of the Luhansk region.

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