



LIVING ON THE CONTACT LINE: PROBLEMS OF THE FRONTLINE SETTLEMENTS OF THE DONETSK REGION

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INTRODUCTION

This analytical report is based on a study conducted from July to November 2017 by the NGO "Foundation.101".

The aim of the study was to outline the main problems related to the safety concerns of the residents in the frontline settlements and get feedback on the work of the authorities, Ukrainian and international organizations in view of this situation and outline the perspective of the most effective solution to these problems from the point of view of the residents of these frontline settlements.

To conduct the study, the Foundation.101 collected 45 in-depth interviews, 40 of them are with the local residents of the frontline settlements of different age and gender groups, and 5 of them are with heads of local councils.

The quotes of the respondents in the report are cited without the names or positions to keep respondents' anonymity for security reasons.

1. METHODOLOGY

For the study, Foundation.101 used a qualitative research methodology, namely in-depth semi-structured interviews. This method helps to deeply analyze and understand social context, problems, define causal relationships, etc.

Overall, in the course of the study, analysts conducted 45 in-depth interviews in 12 frontline settlements of Donetsk Region. The target settlements are divided into 3 groups, with 3-6 settlements in each group, according to the location:

1. Novoluhanske, Svitlodarsk, Myronivskiy (Bakhmut district);
2. Rybynske, Mykolaiivka, Trudivske, Novognativka, Vasylivka and Prohorivka (Volnovakha district);
3. Talakivka (Kalmiusky district of Mariupol), Pyshchevyk and Pavlopil (Volnovakha district).

The set of questions consists of seven thematic units, namely: 1) social demographic unit; 2) overall situation in the settlements; 3) safety; 4) infrastructure; 5) healthcare; 6) source of information; 7) feedback on the work of the local authorities, Ukrainian and international organization.

The average duration of an interview was about 35 minutes, but could vary from 20 to 90 minutes.

In-depth interviews were decoded and analyzed with application of content analysis. Based on the results of the in-depth interviews, Foundation.101 drafted this analytical report on the safety, issues which are the most important for the residents of the frontline settlements along the contact line in Donetsk Region.

2. OVERALL SITUATION IN THE FRONTLINE SETTLEMENTS

Attitude to the situation in the East: war and peace

The twelve frontline settlements have been severely affected by armed conflict in the East. Almost in all of these settlements some of the residential buildings or social infrastructure were directly hit during shelling, part of the population fled far from shelling on the contact line to more distant settlements of the Donetsk Region, other regions of Ukraine or to Russia. This caused social, economic and humanitarian problems in the region.

It is noteworthy that, unlike politicians and TV channels on the national level, **in the settlements the locals do not use the word "ATO" to describe the armed conflict in the East. People here call it the way they see it – the war.** Moreover, while considering ways to improve the situation in their region, a large share of respondents believe that **most problems can be resolved only after the end of the war.** They are also no longer optimistic about the Minsk talks.

Assessing the situation in their settlement over the previous year, the majority of respondents in this study believe that during this period the situation has improved to some extent, although some people tend to believe that no special changes have taken place. Those who see positive dynamics reason their opinion saying that they observed decrease in the number of shelling, and noting that the locals are already used to the sound of distant shelling, they also see a part of the residents returning to their home settlements, and the gradual general tendency to improvement.



We are coming back to our old life, pre-war. It was clean and peaceful, there were shops, savings banks, post office, and there were four ATMs – that is, all kind of things. And the People's Hall worked, there were many children, there were many hobby groups. We had it all before the war, in 2012-2013 it was excellent.

One of the respondents also noted that events in the East encouraged many residents of Donetsk Region to be more socially active, learn to contribute to the life of the community.

The main problems of frontline settlements

Obviously, the main problem and the source of other troubles here are military actions and shelling. However, if we ask about the secondary issues, the respondents can identify **the most burning issues** as follows:

- **accessibility of medical services and ambulance services;**
- **lack of personnel;**
- **roads and transport connections;**
- **crossing the contact line is one of the main personal problems;**
- **rise of prices for coal, firewood and utilities with an unfavorable economic situation;**
- **fall of local budget revenues.**

Problems with accessibility of medical services and ambulance are typical for most of the studied settlements. Even in the settlements with family doctors or paramedics, the locals have to travel to the nearest city to see a specialized doctor, which may be problematic in some cases due to the poor bus service and expensive fares. Moreover, in most settlements, the respondents were not satisfied with the service of ambulance as sometimes it comes after a very long time. The reason for such delays is also in poor road conditions.

In case of a problem with access to doctors or medical personnel, the military can provide some medical care, and some smaller settlements are weekly visited by the international organization Médecins Sans Frontières International. The residents in many settlements would like to have their own family doctor or paramedic, but there are not enough skilled specialists who would agree to do this work.

Thus, the immediate access to healthcare services is directly linked to two other problems: lack of personnel and poor road conditions.

Lack of skilled personnel in the social sphere, for example, in medicine or education, often hinders the effective solution of social problems in the studied settlements. In some settlements, the locals personally point out the lack of effective managerial staff in social institutions. The people who left were replaced by the people who were not ready to take responsibility for the economic part of their institutions. In this regard, even humanitarian assistance provided by international organizations in the form of construction materials can sometimes be ineffectively used.

The poor road condition is one of the most typical problems of frontline settlements. A large part of the roads has not been repaired in recent years. The problem is also exacerbated by the use of the tracked military vehicles, which sometimes happened in some settlements. The poor state of roads affects the speed of transport connection between settlements, slows down the work of emergency services, such as ambulance and fire fighters and fire, as well as long-distance bus connection.

The crossing of the contact line is one of the main personal problems faced by the citizens, especially for the settlements where the closest cities are now located in the occupied territory. This led to the situation when people lost their jobs, are not able to visit relatives and the graves of deceased ancestors. Before the trip to the nearby cities across the contact line could take 15-30 minutes, now it can take an hour or longer at the control points.

“

All the ways are closed; you can't go to Horlivka or Nikitovka, or anywhere. My relatives live there, haven't been there these 4 years together. Moreover, if you decide to go, you need to go first to Artemivsk, then to Mayorsk, then to Dzerzhynsk, it's too long a by-pass, and there're queues at checkpoints, you can stand there for 5 hours or longer.

The increase in prices for coal, firewood and utilities with an unfavorable economic situation is a typical problem especially for the smallest settlements. The settlements around Volnovakha and Mariupol had developed agricultural production, now due to the mined areas and regular shelling, a significant part of agricultural enterprises had to close; people lost their jobs, and settlements lost the tax revenues. Under these conditions, some families cannot afford coal that is much more expensive and firewood.

Finally, the last problem is the fall of local budget revenues, which can have a significant impact on the lives of the frontline settlements over the next several years. Thus, the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine exempted from taxation the legal entities registered in settlements on the contact line. And despite the fact, that such a step could have had a positive impact on the business activities, it actually deprived the frontline settlement of the tax revenues. In this regard, some local governments plan to close most of their programs.

Who has to solve the problems of the frontline settlements

In most settlements, the settlement head bears the responsibility for solving local issues, including solving problems with personnel, roads, etc. It is worth mentioning that, the local residents have high expectations of their authorities and greatly trust them. So, in most settlements (with the exception of several near Volnovakha, where the local authorities changed several times during the ATO), the local population considers the work of the settlement council authorities efficient and respect them.

The political establishment is held responsible primarily for resolving the conflict in the East and ending the war. However, as stated above, the residents understand that most of the local problems can be addressed effectively only after peace comes in their region.

At the same time, the question of what the residents themselves could do to solve the problems in their settlements, some of the respondents found perplexing. In their opinion, their main contribution consists in the good performance of their duties at work, keeping within the law and to the order. Residents that are more active reported that they sent appeals to the authorities, including local and state ones, in order to draw attention to one or another problem of the settlement.

“ *When there were specific questions, we raised them, well, when it was about our settlement. We wrote letters to the ATO chief, we appealed to the administration, we were the initiators of these letters, went to collect signatures.* ”

3. SAFETY CONCERNS

Shelling

Compared to 2014–2015, the amount of shelling that occurs close to the studied frontline settlements has significantly decreased. However, despite the fact that most of these settlements have not been directly hit in recent times. In 2016–2017, there were cases of direct hit with damage to residential buildings and auxiliary rooms of the residents, as well as damage to buildings of social nature.

At the same time, given that the military actions continue, the residents of these settlements regularly hear shelling nearby. And even though some respondents admit that they are already accustomed to it and hardly respond to shelling that takes place in relative proximity, but off their settlements, most of them believe that such circumstances adversely affect mental state of the residents in the frontline settlements, especially children.

Interaction with the Armed Forces of Ukraine

In the settlements near or within the position of Armed Forces of Ukraine (the AFU) the local residents and the military interact in certain ways. Moreover, the majority of respondents believe that this interaction is normal, and there are virtually no conflicts.

“ *It's alright, they often play football with our boys on the stadium.* ”

The local residents of practically all the studied settlements confirm that the military provide medical and humanitarian assistance to locals, sometimes they carry out some work at request of local government representatives or locals themselves.

“ *Absolutely peacefully, they don't disturb anyone, they are even-tempered guys, on the contrary they help with products, bring the products to school, kindergarten. Here they change each other in shifts, some were actually living in houses of locals, helped the elderly. Like cutting down a tree or something. Well, they don't meddle. Behave absolutely peacefully.* ”

And more than that, when they were positioned here, we shouted that we didn't need them, and when they were leaving, we were so frightened, because the settlement was left absolutely alone, and what if somebody was to enter the place, it was terrifying. ”

Also, in many settlements, people turn to the military for assistance in emergencies, for example, to be taken to a hospital, when an ambulance does not arrive for a long time, to carry out medical procedures or examination, especially in the settlement without medical staff. Also, several respondents believe that the presence of the military in the settlement positively affects the crime rates, reduces the number of thefts among the local residents.

“ *They provide medical help if the citizens turn to them – urgent, emergency assistance. Soldiers help people with food.* ”

The majority of respondents who are familiar with the activities of the Civil-Military Cooperation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (CIMIC) talk very positively about the results of their work. The latter are remembered for holding of a large number of children's parties with gifts, as well as providing humanitarian aid, food and medicine.

At the same time, during the survey, negative comments were also collected on certain aspects of the military's activities. So, residents of Volnovakha reported cases of looting at the beginning of the anti-terrorist operation, both from the military and from other local residents, in relation to abandoned residential buildings. At the time of this study, according to respondents, such cases no longer happen. Also, some residents complain about soldiers using military transport, especially tracked vehicles, personal needs (for example, to go from a place of disposition to a shop), which significantly damages the road cover in the settlements.

Noteworthy, a greater number of negative opinions were expressed by the residents of the settlements located near Volnovakha and partly in Mariupol. In these areas, unlike the settlements near Bakhmut, access to Russian TV channels is not restricted.

In this regard, the authors of this study do not rule out that the reason for such negative responds could be both based on the real facts and be cases of speculation or enemy propaganda. For example, in one of the settlements the rumor had it, that there were several evictions from homes and rapes. But when a local resident together with international organizations tried to check these facts, they could not find any confirmation.

“ *The UN came to the settlement, I personally led them to check the addresses and looked like a fool, because the incident of rape was not confirmed, and the woman who was said to be evicted from the house, said that no one had evicted her. Then they established their own settlement council and they started to solve their own issues themselves. We have never had such problems in the settlement.* ”

Crime situation

About a third of respondents believe that over the last year the overall crime rate remained at about the same level, while approximately two-thirds are convinced that the crime rates have decreased to some extent. Decrease in crime is explained, first of all, by the fact that the police returned to their duties, especially if the police offices are located directly in the settlements, police patrols, as well as in some cases with the presence of the military, which in some settlements disciplined the marginal part of the population.

At the same time, one event caused a public outcry when in one of the settlements near Volnovakha senior man was killed by his younger relative. According to the results of the investigation, the respondents stated that the suspect was released due to a psychiatric condition and did not bear any responsibility.

Evaluation of the police work

In assessing the work of the police, neutral or positive reviews prevail. **More positive responses were collected in the settlements with permanent police offices.** Decrease in crime compared to 2014 is directly linked to the police returning to their duties in these settlements.

“ *There are law and order, our police are working, it is not for nothing that the two cars are constantly standing, and they are moving around the settlement. As for drunkenness, fights, they are all forgotten. But earlier, of course, it happened, especially among young people...*

In the settlements without the direct police presence, their activity is considered less effective, despite the fact that they understand the large load and coverage that is carried out by district inspectors. For example, in the Volnovakha district, one district inspector sometimes covers a dozen distant settlements. In these settlements, according to the respondents, the police always come when they are called, but the crime detection rate is sometimes low.

“ *The problem is that there is no permanent police office. If there was a police force, they would work with those segments of the population who behave badly and, accordingly, would cover a bigger territory... Their work can be estimated three out of five, because they are basically not here, and because they have few people.*

Mined areas

A serious problem, both for safety issues and for economic stability, is the mine threat over a large area around the frontline settlements. For example, considering the shortage of coal and an increase in price for wood, part of the population without gas heating, can personally stock wood from nearby wooded area, and face a threat of explosion.

Also, a large number of agricultural enterprises and farms were forced to significantly limit or discontinue their activities, which adversely affected the financial state of the local residents, employment rates and tax revenues in local budgets.

“ *We have here an agricultural paradise, so to say, an oil workshop, a farm, a construction workshop — everything is connected to the soil. Accordingly, when the land is mined, there is no work, that is, the chain is torn.*

It is worth noting that in some settlements partial demining was carried out.



4. HEALTHCARE

Accessibility of medical services

The larger settlements on the contact line have their own minimal infrastructure for health services, such as a clinic, pharmacy, family doctor or therapist. At the same time, settlements with a rather small number of people do not have their own medical specialists and institutions and use the services of the therapist of the neighboring settlements.

In order to receive medical advice or assistance, the local residents, first, address the physician or a paramedic, if there is one, who carries out the primary inspection. If there is a need to consult or receive medical treatment from a specialized doctor, local therapists provide a referral and send them to the nearest big city. The services of city doctors are also sometimes used by young parents who seek a more quality care for their children.

Thus, specialized doctors, as well as higher-quality medicine, are in the nearest city. In some cases, some people face transport and financial constraints in this situation. For the number of buses from the settlement is limited, and the road may be very expensive. For example, the cost of a two-way travel from Novoluhansk to Bakhmut can cost about 100 UAH.

“ *Well, some are going to Svitlodarsk, but there the transport connection is bad, you go there and stuck there all day, for there's no transport to take you back. And from Artemivsk there is a bus every 2.*

Lack of qualified specialists

In each of the studied settlements, both the head of the settlement council and the locals believe that the main problem in the medical sphere is the lack of qualified staff in the settlement. Even those settlements that can afford to increase the medical personnel, sometimes just do not have anyone to employ for the vacant positions.

“ *We have a strategy, we now want to adopt a program to attract specialists, both in medicine and in education.*

Despite the fact that there has been a steady trend for personnel outflow to larger cities, the problem has been substantially deepened due to military actions — part of medical staff and other specialists went to other regions. In Pavlopil, the only paramedic in the settlement was captured by militants of the so-called "DPR" and held captive there for two years.

“ *There is no paramedic department, since our paramedic is not here, we would like, we loved him very much, he is very qualified, well, he is currently in captivity in the DPR. His wife said: they are waiting for the exchange: it's put off for the third time delay, and I do not know what is the matter. On June 14, it was 2 years since he's been gone.*

Service of ambulance

The ambulance service is a weak spot in providing medical services to the population of the frontline settlements. The small number of ambulance crews available for a large territory, long waiting period, and sometimes understaffing of the crews — reduce the quality of provided services to the population. Also, a poor state of roads that connect settlements to each other negatively impacts on the quick response time.

In many settlements, in the absence of ambulance, the local population turns to the military for emergency assistance or transportation to the hospital.

Medical service provided by the military and the organization "Médecins Sans Frontières International"

Under the conditions of personnel and material shortage, the military and the organization "Médecins Sans Frontières International" play an important role in providing medical services to the population. So, people living in settlements without their own medical staff report that "Médecins Sans Frontières International" hold weekly receptions of patients. In these settlements, the population also regularly turns to military doctors for assistance, for example, to make an injection or to put in an IV or to provide emergency care.

5. INFRASTRUCTURE

Basic needs: accessibility to food and water supply

None of the studied front-line settlements face the problems with having access to food supply. In fact, in each settlement there is a store with a range of the basic products. For more elaborate products, people can also go to the city.

As for water — the situation varies from settlement to settlement. For example, in certain settlements around Bahmut there is centrally supplied hot and cold water. According to the respondents, the water condition is satisfactory. A significant number of people use this water boiled or filtered.

Smaller settlements have their own water-pressure systems, which also provide centralized water supply to the population, however, there are certain problems with electricity supply. With an increase in water usage (for example, in summer when the locals water their vegetable gardens), water pressure is significantly reduced or water is not supplied at all. In this regard, in some settlements, water is supplied according to some schedule. For example, this situation is typical for Myronivskiy, Pavlopil, etc. In Novoluhansk, in the summer, water is also supplied according to a schedule.

Also, in Pavlopil, there is a centralized water supply only for process water. To solve this problem, the international organization ADRA provides the population with imported drinking water.

“ *We drink the imported water, now we have a storage reservoir in the settlement council, they bring it for free. It used to be ADRA, I believe. Now I do not know who the provider is. They give 10 liters per person a month.* ”

For most settlements, there is an acute problem of a worn out water supply system, which causes a large loss of water during delivery. In Prokhorivka, this issue is solved in cooperation with international organizations: they purchase construction materials, while the population and the representatives of the local self-government provide work.

In the smallest settlements, private wells provide access to water.

Heating

The residents in the frontline settlements use three ways to heat the homes. First, it is a centralized heating system, and second, a self-governing gas system of heating, and third, heating with coal or wood.

Blocks of flats in Svitlodarsk are provided with the centralized heating. Both heating and hot water supply for the population are provided by Vuglegirsk TPS, where hot water is a by-product in the process of generation of electricity.

In the other settlements with gas supply, as well as in the inner suburbs of Svitlodarsk autonomous gas heating system is universally preferred.

Coal or firewood heating is used mainly in small settlements without centralized gas supply, or sometimes this method is used as an alternative to gas heating after raising tariffs for utilities.

It is worth noting that the heating issue is one of the most pressing concerns for the population of the frontline settlements. High tariffs and expensive coal and firewood have made the lives of people on the contact line much more complicated. In particular, respondents noted that it is virtually impossible to bring coal from occupied part of the Donetsk Region due to the trade blockade. At the same time, many residents of the frontline settlements cannot even afford it and it makes them look for alternative ways of finding heating material for the winter. For example, local people sometimes use the surrounding wooded areas, which may be quite dangerous, given the mine threat of the surrounding areas.

Reconstruction of residential and social infrastructure

In fact, in all the studied settlements, there was some kind of reconstruction of residential and social infrastructure. Repair works are carried out with the support of international organizations, and at the expense of local budgets. An agreement on cooperation and joint contributions from donors and settlement communities is also actively implemented. For example, international organizations purchase construction materials in full or partially, and the local community allocates funds or human resources to carry out their own work.

“ We have a well and a plumbing system, they are obsolete, last year we changed 1 km, and ADRA helped us. They gave the pipes and we carried out the works ourselves, that is, the population gathered together and they did it themselves, they changed the pipes to the water tower. There, they gave us a new pump, and in general they helped us greatly in this regard. But still we have 5 km of old pipes, it is necessary to change them.

Road condition

The most problematic part of the infrastructure in all settlements near the contact line is the road surface. Residents of most settlements point out that during the past two or three years the roads have practically not been repaired. They are in very poor condition and slow down the work of some services, including public transport and ambulance.

“ The load on each specialist was 2-3 times higher without change to the personnel number and wages.

According to some of the respondents, the roads near the contact line are ruined up by military machines, especially tracked vehicles, so it often does not even make sense to repair them.

“ We have to understand that the vehicles that mainly use these roads are far from being light, they are usually tracked ones, and is not a tractor at all, and this a problem. It's just that when there are heavy vehicles, many vehicles, it is clear they ruin it all, and I do not even see what we are to do with this, and how, and the point, because even those past efforts, with patch work, it's all in vain.

6. ACCESS TO LEGAL AID

A significant part of respondents is informed about the possibility to receive free legal aid, they have an understanding of how and when it can be obtained. At the same time, only a small number of people confirmed that they used these services before.

According to the respondents, internally displaced persons are most in need of free legal aid for registration or re-registration of pensions, social benefits or certain documents. The permanent local residents apply for a legal advice on personal issues, such as inheritance, guardianship, land value taxation, re-registration of property, etc.

One of the respondents in Myronivskiy said that the demand for free legal aid in their settlement is so large that, on the day when the international organizations that provide legal advice arrive there are sometimes large queues.

“ You should see the queues we have here for free legal aid. They come in two or three, we sit them in different rooms in the Cultural Centre, and they stay until the last person, until four o'clock, I know according to the rules they should leave our zone at two o'clock, but sometimes they even stay past four to consult everyone...

At the same time, when we asked if the respondents had turned for legal assistance before and had they need for such assistance what question would they consider asking, a large portion of people reported that they did not need any legal advice and did not even imagine what question would be interesting for them.



7. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The main source of information as for national news for the majority of the residents in the frontline settlements, the same as for the whole country, is television. As for Ukrainian channels, the most popular in this region is "Inter", slightly less popular are the TV channels "Ukraine", 1+1, and "112 Ukraine".

It is noteworthy that in most of the studied settlements, people have direct access to both Ukrainian and Russian TV channels. Exceptions are the settlements near Bakhmut, where Russian channels were blocked by a local provider.

“ *There is cable TV. There is Ukrainian television. For the Horlivka "Spektr" (provider), all Russian TV channels were blocked, only Ukrainian ones are left. They were given a choice, either this or nothing at all.*

Moreover, young and middle-aged people use the Internet, which is available in most of the studied settlements. Older people and library workers prefer print media that can be subscribed or taken from a local library. In this context, should be positively evaluated one of the initiatives of the Civil-Military Cooperation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, when the military brought the printed press to the local library. As the librarian noted, people are happy to read it.

As far as local news is concerned, television does not really cover it. The exception is Svitlodarsk, where local governments can post their own news and advertisements in the news line of national TV channels through a local digital TV provider. In these areas, only Russian satellite TV owners have access to Russian TV.

“ *We watch "Inter" – Kiev, and there is a news line provided by our cable TV provider. It often happens that our council provides for the news line.*

In other settlements, people use the Internet to get information about local events, the so-called "sarafan radio" or word-of-mouth (exchanging information in the village and in the bazaar), and in smaller settlements people read informational announcements on the notice boards.

Trust in the media

During the study in various settlements, the idea of distrust to the mass media was sometimes in the air due to the distortion of information about military actions on the contact line. This is explained by the fact that respondents from time to time see the discrepancy between the military actions that actually take place and the information on the television. At the same time, local people claim that after all this time they have learned how to determine what is going on during shelling, and which side is shooting.

“ *I watch it – I find it interesting, but often it's not true. Here is a shelling close to our hollows, and they say it's in Pavlopil, but nobody says it's us, it's in Pyshchevyk. They'd better not say a word otherwise tell the truth.*

In areas where people have access to both Ukrainian and Russian television, some respondents said they trust Ukrainian TV channels less. This is due to increased emotional and political color, and also because the information provided by the same channels may sometimes contradict information provided on that same channel earlier or the information coming from other sources.

“ I do not watch news at all, I do not even want to watch it, because the Russian channels say one thing, I took a quick shuffy, Ukrainian channels say something completely different. This is understandable, they differ in everything. I do not even want to listen to them, I'm here and can see it myself and I know who was shooting, where it's coming from and what's the target. Why should we watch the news if we see everything here with our own eyes.

Influence of mass media on people's attitudes towards events in the East

According to the results of the study, the authors tend to agree that the information influence of television has a great impact on the way the people perceive the situation in the East of Ukraine, even though the opinion of the respondents themselves on this subject is divided. What does this influence mean?

First, the part of respondents who did not show direct pro-Russian opinion (but rather had neutral views) reported that they had heard negative feedback on the Donetsk Region and events in the East from their relatives. According to their relatives, the inhabitants of Donbas themselves bear responsibility for the situation — they wanted it to happen and held a referendum. That is, according to the respondents, the pro-Russian views of some inhabitants of Donetsk Region are extrapolated to the entire population of the region, provoking a negative attitude towards them from representatives of other regions.

Secondly, the media have a significant impact on the way people see the general situation in Ukraine and on the contact line in particular. Thus, during the study, it was found that the **residents of the Bakhmut district, where access to Russian television was compulsory blocked, generally have a more positive assessment of the actions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and have more pro-Ukrainian views** than residents of the studied settlements in Volnovakha and Mariupol districts.

“ I believe there are 89 or 92 percent of separatists in our settlement... Therefore, you will not find a common language with them, because they are all watching the Russian and DPR channels.

8. WORK OF HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS AND AUTHORITIES

Support of the frontline settlements: the donors and the aid

In the frontline districts of the Donetsk region there is a large number of international and Ukrainian NGOs that provide humanitarian assistance and implement programs for early recovery of affected areas, helping to rebuild dwelling and social facilities, launching small agricultural businesses, etc.

Among the most well-known international organizations that provide humanitarian assistance, the interviewees named The Red Cross, Caritas, UNICEF, People in Need, Médecins Sans Frontières International, Save the Children, ADRA, Humanitarian Action "Pope for Ukraine", etc.

The most famous Ukrainian organizations include the Humanitarian Headquarters of Rinat Akhmetov, which delivers grocery sets to virtually all frontline settlements. In general, it has a rather high level of trust. At the same time, several respondents of the younger age voiced a rhetorical question about the origin of funds, which Akhmetov directs to charity.

“ *It's great that he helps people. But for us every person — gas, electricity — is all DTEK, he squeezes it all out of the people. He gives with one hand but takes with the other. I cannot say anything good about him.* ”

Among other Ukrainian organizations working in the studied settlements the respondents named "Plich-o-plich" ("Side by side"), "Vostok-SOS" ("East-SOS"), "Donbas SOS", "Vidpovidalni hromadiany" ("Responsible citizens"), Christian communities and the program "Shid i Zahid razom" ("East and West together"). Also, a significant amount of humanitarian assistance is provided to the local residents by the military, located in a certain settlement, and representatives of the Civil-Military Cooperation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The nature of the humanitarian assistance most often provided to the population of the affected areas can be grouped as follows:

- renovation of housing and social facilities (in particular, provision of building materials and equipment);
- welfare assistance (grocery sets, hygiene sets, vouchers for the purchase of goods in stores, financial aid, poultry (chicken, turkey) and feed);
- medical assistance (medical examinations and consultations, provision of medicines to severely ill and pensioners);
- psychological assistance (counseling, training, holding parties and offsite camps for children);
- employment promotion (financing small agricultural businesses, creating short-term jobs with social work, for example, cleaning and urban improvement programs, caring for sick and elderly people, etc).

Assessment of the work of humanitarian missions

In general, the support and level of trust to international and Ukrainian organizations that provide humanitarian assistance is quite high. The local residents generally give a positive evaluation to their activity. At the same time, **there are several points the international non-governmental organizations should pay attention to: first, coordination of efforts, secondly, the setting the right expectations with the population, and third, the gradual change from the provision of humanitarian assistance to the fostering employment.**

Thus, coordination of efforts is critical to reaching more vulnerable groups, avoiding duplication, and being able to move on to activities that will generate employment.

“ *International organizations were useful especially in the beginning when it was about IDPs, but when we are overwhelmed by this help, it's doubtful.* ”

Setting clear and correct expectations with the population contributes to the trust of citizens. In this context, the most up-to-date, stable and understandable for the residents is the help of the Humanitarian Headquarters of Rinat Akhmetov, who supplies small product sets every few months, despite the fact that international organizations sometimes provide much more substantial and valuable assistance.

“ *Akhmetov's Foundation delivers products. First they came every 35 days, then 42, and now they come after 60 days. I really appreciate their work, that's all I can say. Because they are the most honest, most disciplined: if they say 35 days, they will stick to it.* ”

The reduction of humanitarian aid and moving on to stimulating employment, according to some of the studied residents, is an important step. Such programs were most highly rated by those who were informed or connected with this program. Another part of the respondents reported that they would not need humanitarian assistance if they could find a job.

“ *Last year we had a program: cleaned the territory of the city. We helped schools and kindergartens. Caritas paid money on the account, we entered into an agreement, controlled the work, Caritas controlled us. I think that's right, **you shouldn't just give out money**. Everyone liked it very much. Firstly, it organizes a person because it is necessary to go to work, and secondly, the people have to understand that they will not be just given everything.*

Finally, it is important to note that the **provision of humanitarian assistance to specifically defined vulnerable categories, without covering the others in need, sometimes causes social tension in the studied settlements**. In particular, respondents indicated that it was not entirely fair that international charity organizations provide assistance to the same categories of people every time, while there is a significant portion of the population receiving the same scarce material support, but does not receive humanitarian aid, since formally does not fall under any group from the official list of vulnerable categories. According to the respondents, the unemployed, families with children, the elderly population who did not reach retirement age, but can no longer find a job, social workers who receive low salaries, etc., are uncovered groups that are in need of assistance.

“ *I can, of course, understand, it is necessary, but 2014–2015 is the very peak — we lived without a humanitarian aid. From 2016 they start to provide humanitarian assistance. And I want to say that all the people have become obnoxious, very much, because they gave it some people and did not give to others.*

Assessment of the OSCE work

The OSCE is the least understandable for the local residents of all international organizations and missions. Most residents of the frontline settlements simply do not understand their task and capabilities and, accordingly, question their effectiveness.

So, a small group of people strongly associating any international organization with humanitarian aid is offended by the fact that the OSCE representatives do not react to the needs they have reported.

“ *I can't say, I do not trust them — I just do not see the result. I explained to him yesterday my situation with diapers and hygiene, yes, this is a soft spot for me. They've written it down. There were probably four of them, they change every time, but they all are from OSCE. They write it down every time, but I do not see the result.*

The other, larger, group of people believe that the OSCE should help to establish peace and stop the shelling. Therefore, they question the effectiveness of the OSCE, because otherwise, in their opinion, shelling should have already stopped.

“ *They have a strange mission — I see it like that. Because if this mission had its presence, and they solved the problems, the shelling would stop.*

“ *As soon as they appear here in our settlement, everything goes fine, it's peaceful. Just as they are off the territory of our settlement, the shelling starts. I can't say that they have some agreements there, let's say, with someone who they call and say: now we are gone, start shelling. Simply, this is often the case: both for our settlement and Svitlodarsk, we have already noticed it.*

Thus, when evaluating the trust to and effectiveness of the activities of different organizations, the majority of respondents believe that they relatively trust the OSCE, but they consider their work to be ineffective. According to the authors of the study, explanatory work about the mission and functions of the OSCE, as well as work on setting the right expectations with the population, would increase the trust of local residents in this organization.

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They are said to be blind, deaf, but it's an organization, it is monitoring. They collect information and everything. They do not solve anything, they do nothing. They only do their job, and people want something more from them that is not in their power. I see it like that.

PARTNERS



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