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SOCIAL DIALOGUE TOOLS AS A MECHANISM FOR SOCIAL COHESION AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

Analytical report and recommendations on leveraging social dialogue instruments to foster social cohesion within territorial communities.





Social dialogue tools as a mechanism for social cohesion at the community level

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PREAMBLE

Today in Ukraine, social dialogue is regulated by relevant institutions, whose activities are based on the ideal model formulated by the ILO. Experience in implementing dialogue initiatives in territorial communities of the Kharkiv region indicates the presence of potential in the form of legally established instruments. At the same time, institutional and management reforms remain critically important areas that require attention.

The focus of our attention is the local, or level of united territorial communities. The previous activities of the initiative team revealed discrepancies between the ideal and real models of social dialogue at the local levels. Thus, in terms of labor relations themselves, the problem of representation, procedure and, as a result, adherence to the principles of social dialogue at the ATC level remains unresolved.

At the same time, we cannot forget about the existing task of social dialogue in Ukraine - preserving local labor markets as a basic resource for the development or restoration of human capital of communities. This requires a certain level of social cohesion - the ability of community members to cooperate. It is clear that no society can be absolutely cohesive. But the pursuit of this is one of the tasks of the Council of Europe, on which the European Committee on Social Cohesion (CCS) is working.

The question remains open as to what should be the basis - social cohesion as a prerequisite for dialogue, or stable dialogue mechanisms as a prerequisite for social cohesion?

The initiative is aimed at: identifying the potential impact of the social dialogue system on the creation or maintenance of human capital of communities on the basis of ensuring key criteria for social cohesion; developing the possibilities of functional connections within the community in order to form an appropriate level of social cohesion and preserve human capital; identifying opportunities for adjusting formalized means of organizing interaction between community members on the basis of social dialogue, taking into account the realities of war.

This activity was carried out through a cycle of qualitative research, discussion of their results, and, within the framework of the advocacy process, contributed to the development of recommendations for both the AHs of Kharkiv region and other regions of Ukraine.

1. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

The basis was the assumption regarding the need for a structured, normatively based basis for the formation of social cohesion. A cycle of research was conducted, the starting point of which was the analysis of common and differences in the categories of "social dialogue" and "social cohesion".

There are differences in understanding the mechanisms for their observance. In order to understand the possibilities of comparing the principles, the following were carried out:

- analysis of current legislation and regulations relating to social dialogue in Ukraine at the level of territorial communities;
- analysis of Internet resources;
- secondary analysis of sociological research conducted in 2024-2025;
- analysis of the reSCORE 2024 criteria.

The emphasis was on the AHs of the Kharkiv region, where various manifestations of the war context can be seen.

The goal was to identify trends in social cohesion in Ukraine and the degree of adaptation to the challenges caused by a full-scale invasion in a territorial context; analysis of the human development index (HDI) and losses of human capital; factual analysis of the comparison categories of "social cohesion" and "social dialogue". At the same time, the impact of military actions was taken into account, which shaped the different experience of communities in forming socio-economic policy at the territorial level; an expert group was created from representatives of the target audience, namely: trade unions, CSOs and volunteer initiatives; organizations representing the interests of employers; employees of the Department of Economics and International Relations of the Kharkiv Regional Employment Office; employees of the Kharkiv Regional Employment Center; a series of semi-formalized interviews were conducted with representatives of the target audience regarding awareness of social dialogue instruments as mechanisms of social cohesion regarding the status of a participant in the process by representatives of the target audience.

Here, attention should be paid to several key positions:

1. Ukraine's human resources are facing serious challenges due to the war, which led to a decrease in the human development index (HDI) and losses of human capital.
2. There is a discrepancy between the declarations and the real situation, which was confirmed by work with the Department of Economics and International Relations of the Kharkiv OVA. Thus, tripartite socio-economic councils have not even been created in all districts (five out of seven). Their composition has not changed since 2021, therefore, the realities of the war and the corresponding changes in the structure of local labor markets have not been taken into account.
3. This leads to a mismatch in the principle of representativeness, and therefore, representation of interests. There is also a lack of communication between representatives of small and medium-sized businesses, which complicates their participation as a party to social dialogue.

It should be noted that in some districts (Kupyansky, Chuguyivsky,) the topic of social dialogue is currently not relevant due to active hostilities and significant losses of human capital.

A separate study was conducted in several communities of the Kharkiv region - Balakliivska, Zlatopil'ska, Zmyiv'ska, Novovodolazka, Savyn'ska and Solonytsiv'ska. The choice of communities was influenced by two criteria:

1. Belonging to a certain zone where the impact of the war is felt differently - a de-occupied zone, a frontline zone or a zone of relative peace.
2. Previous participation in projects related to the topic of social cohesion. Namely - the initiative "Creation

of working groups on public security and social cohesion in the Kharkiv region", with the assistance of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Ukraine and financial support from the Government of Denmark. This refers to the awareness of participants in the issues of both social cohesion and social dialogue. Representation was also valuable - the leadership of the ATC, the leadership of the village elders, representatives of small and medium-sized businesses, representatives of public organizations and volunteer initiatives. This made it possible to get acquainted with the spectrum of diverse opinions of people representing communities. This study cannot be considered representative due to the unevenness of the sample in communities (which is caused by the impact of the war). But it allowed us to reveal ideas about the issues of the initiative. And the emphasis was on the activities of citizens' associations.

So we observe a generalized pragmatic approach of residents of frontline communities, in which security dominates.

But understanding the opportunities for the development of entrepreneurship as a factor in the formation of local labor markets and the development of local communities and self-government is also important.

Social cohesion is considered as a complex state. It is formed on the basis of shared values and the desire to achieve common goals, relying on the resources of the region and the support of communities. At the same time, assessments of the level of social cohesion do not always coincide with its proposed criteria, except for the results of reSCORE 2024, which emphasize the need to maintain unity and work to strengthen trust in institutions, which is considered a guarantee of overcoming the challenges of war.

A further series of semi-structured interviews with a group of experts - representatives of the target audience, made it possible to specify this conclusion and identify the correlation between dialogue practices and social cohesion. We have seen different approaches to understanding social dialogue and social cohesion. And the preliminary conclusion can be the following:

- Social cohesion is considered as a desirable state for the restoration and development of communities.
- Social dialogue, or dialogue practices, are considered mainly as a tool for ensuring and maintaining cohesion.

The defining hypothesis that social dialogue can become the basis of social cohesion has been confirmed. First, there is a clear definition of social dialogue as a process of reaching common agreements and making agreed decisions by the parties on the basis of legal norms. Second, there is no single clear definition of social cohesion. Rather, it is the desired ability of society to coexist, maintaining trust, mutual respect and common values.

Thus, the study participants determined that dialogue practices (procedure) are considered as a prerequisite for social cohesion (state). And again, its observance depends on the realities in which a particular community operates. But the basic ones, according to the participants, are an adequate information policy and education on the issues of social dialogue and social cohesion.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UKRAINIAN TERRITORIAL COMMUNITIES AND ABOUT THE PLATFORMS

Today, we observe a certain lag in social cohesion indices from today's realities. "Components of peace", "social tolerance" or "social closeness" are more of a philosophical nature without taking into account the context in which a certain community exists. The "absence of a sense of social threat" also seems controversial in Ukraine today, which is not comparable to the realities of war. However, it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that achieving a state of cohesion is a complex process.

This process, according to the participants, is possible under the conditions of institutional cooperation based on dialogical practices. We are talking about institutionally formalized cooperation, the goal of which is social cohesion. Such cooperation should be based on the principles of: public activity, partnership, openness and responsibility, political independence. As well as rational and balanced development and complexity, which is inherent in social institutions that perform many functions, among which the main place is occupied by regulatory, which includes social dialogue in the labor market.

Social regulations are of fundamental importance for ensuring the effectiveness of social dialogue, without which the very process of interaction and coordination of conflicting interests is impossible. This is precisely the meaning of social cohesion, which remains a system-building idea. And it can be implemented through the tools of regulating local labor markets - social dialogue. But they are in a state of constant adaptation. Such problems are inherent in all regions of Ukraine, which requires joint, coordinated actions.

The formation of local labor markets on the principles of social dialogue is a way to preserve and develop the human capital of communities in conditions of war - constant risks and unpredictability.

Thus, we are talking about:

- established rules that form a certain type of dialogical behavior;
- flexibility of the labor sphere and employment security, which is manifested in gradual positive changes;
- revision of the principles of representation in the system of social dialogue at the ATC level.
- a systematic information and educational campaign aimed at the ability of ATCs to respond to challenges.

Therefore, formalized practices of social dialogue, provided that they are given the tasks of preserving human capital at the local level, can become a certain core on which social cohesion is formed.

The Ukrainian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (<http://eap-csf.org.ua/>) is a network of over 140 Ukrainian civil society organizations that advocates for Ukrainian interests within the Eastern Partnership. The platform is part of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF).

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (<https://eap-csf.eu/>) is a multi-level regional civil society platform aimed at promoting European integration, promoting reforms and democratic transformations in the six Eastern Partnership countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. As the civic element of the EaP, the EaP CSF seeks to strengthen civil society in the region, increase the level of pluralism in public discourse and politics by promoting participatory democracy and fundamental freedoms.