

Guiding Principles for Comprehensive, Citizen-based Reconstruction in Ukraine

It is impossible to predict when the war in Ukraine will come to an end and what the country will look like at that moment. But it is not needed or wise to defer the programming of Ukraine's reconstruction until that moment. Plans for reconstruction should be made now; in fact, in the towns and villages north and west of Kyiv physical reconstruction has already started. The European Union is planning to further mobilize support for Ukraine through the Solidarity Trust Fund during a High-Level International Donors' Conference for Ukraine on May 5th in Warsaw, co-hosted by Poland and Sweden.

With this paper PAX aims to contribute to the development of an inclusive and comprehensive, citizens-based reconstruction policy, with recommendations based on its ongoing cooperation with partner organisations in Ukraine and lang experience in pos-conflict reconstruction. Together with numerous partners, PAX has been involved in post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction since the 1990s in among others Colombia, sub-Sahara Africa, Middle East and the Western Balkans. And indeed in Ukraine itself, since 2014.

From these and other reconstruction programs in conflict and post-conflict countries, we can learn a lot. Reconstruction is not only physical reconstruction, but it should also include societal reconstruction and community revitalization. The best results are achieved if citizens and (local) authorities oversee the reconstruction projects. Reconstruction can and should go hand in hand with democratization and hence should foster resilience to violence and trauma and promote and anchor inclusivity, throughout the process.

Agencies and organisations in charge of development or reconstruction in Ukraine should take these lessons into account – in particular as reconstruction is best organized in a way that it supports the much needed 'European perspective' of Ukraine.

The country needs a **comprehensive and citizen-based reconstruction approach**. Not only physical reconstruction is needed, but also the restoration and revitalisation of the social fabric and the community infrastructure demand targeted programming that is best linked to the restoration of physical infrastructure. Democratisation, active citizenship and dealing with war trauma are all crucial for the process of reconstruction.

Guiding principles and recommendations

I. UKRAINIAN OWNERSHIP

Ukrainian ownership is paramount. Ukraine, its government (national and particularly local level) and its citizens (civil society organisations and citizens' initiatives) should oversee such a comprehensive reconstruction program.

1. Take time to develop **comprehensive local reconstruction plans**, determined by local authorities and citizens. Participatory processes are important, in ensuring that diverse representatives are meaningfully included and heard. Local governments may be overwhelmed by the tasks ahead of them in the upcoming period. Numerous donor agencies may pay visits and offer assistance for specific projects in line with their core business and expertise, often even sidelining local expertise that is available. But the reconstruction agenda should not be determined by donors' offers and expertise, but by the local needs, wishes and plans. It is paramount for local governments to define, in consultation with civil society and citizens, what their key priorities are and which existing local expertise can be incorporated in the projects. International support teams (consisting e.g. of experienced local government, technical and civil society actors) can help facilitate this process, but should be coming in with the primary mandate of listening, sharing experiences and providing advice upon request.
2. Making maximum use of **existing expertise of Ukrainians**, the ones who stayed in Ukraine and the ones who left the country and are willing to contribute to the rebuilding of their country from the places they are now living in or preparing to return to.
3. **Accountability** should specifically relate to the authorities' and organisations' responsibilities **vis-à-vis the citizens**, not the donor community. In many post-conflict reconstruction projects, accountability is only (or mainly) directed towards the donors themselves. This carries the risk of undermining local authority, undermining democratisation and fostering corruption. Donors should prioritise requirements of downward accountability and require participation of citizens and local communities (beneficiaries) in the design and implementation of reconstruction projects. This strengthens the strong democratic processes initiated with the decentralisation reform in 2014 and returns to citizens a sense of agency that forms a key element in overcoming trauma and victimhood. and partners in city and region for donors this means that a certain flexibility must be built in, so that citizens' participation can indeed lead to adaptation of rough reconstruction plans and schemes. After the Bosnian war (1992-1995), PAX developed and implemented in partnership with the Tuzla local government and civil society actors a multi-layered citizen-based reconstruction program (1995-2000) that successfully fostered downward accountability.

4. Ukrainian ownership logically changes the focus of reconstruction processes. It is **both the product and the process** that count. From numerous post-conflict experiences, we know that a process-oriented approach can take more time, but leads to more sustainable results as it serves the restoration of social fabric, promotes citizenship, and helps anchor democratisation processes.
5. Ukrainian ownership will help strengthen the **social contract** in the country, that already improved significantly since 2014 yet will to a certain extent have to be rebuilt after the war – particularly in the villages and cities from which numerous people had to flee, were killed, or died. citizens' participation should not be organized ad-hoc, but embedded in the daily functioning of municipalities, districts, and regions by means of policies that secure structural involvement of citizens participation in local government routines, including incorporating resources in their annual budgets.
6. War has an enormous impact on people and communities. Survivors of atrocities can be helped to move beyond victimhood and dependency on external support by active involvement in projects of reconstruction and reshaping public space. The agency that this provides them with helps to process trauma as they find new purpose in their life and connection within their communities. This means that the process (see point 4) shall also provide space for sharing stories and translating the different experiences into elements that can be integrated into plans for physical reconstruction. Local ownership will help survivors **move beyond victimhood** and regain, to the extent possible, control over their lives.

II. SUPPORT THE REFORM AGENDA

Reconstruction projects must be designed in such a way that they **support the reform agenda** that Ukraine will have to fulfill within the framework of its European integration perspective. The reform agenda was initiated in 2014 and significant progress has been made, yet extensive reform will still be required. There may be ways to facilitate maximum speed but on no account should this come at the expense of carefully designing processes and involving citizens, nor is it wise to lower the bar for EU membership. That is not in the interest of the citizens of Ukraine, nor of the European Union itself or other states (Western Balkans) that aspire to join the European Union.

1. The process of **decentralisation** of government tasks and services initiated in 2014 must be continued. It led to many positive results. Post-war reconstruction can however lead to a centralist tendency, where ministries and national agencies decide on reconstruction priorities that limit or influence local government mandates. That is to be avoided; donors must actively promote regional and local agency and participation.
2. **Twinning** of Ukrainian cities and towns with counterparts in EU member states (and beyond), as president Zelensky proposed during his address to Dutch parliament and other

national parliaments, is a good idea. The key focus should be to practice meaningful solidarity between citizens of all ranks and backgrounds in exchanges and reconstruction projects. The twinning agenda is not to be decided by mayors or majorities in city assemblies. It is important to set up inclusive processes in developing the twinning agenda, with ample participation of women, youth and different minority groups. PAX advocates for twinning especially with cities and towns with experience in reconstruction, be it after war or large-scale violence (e.g. Rotterdam (the Netherlands), Coventry (United Kingdom) Tuzla (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Mitrovica (Kosovo) or Utøya (Norway)) or other disasters (e.g. Turkish cities after the 1990's earthquakes, Enschede (Netherlands) after the fireworks explosion, German towns that had to recover from the 2021 floods). International municipal cooperation as a model fits in the road Ukraine needs to go towards integrating the EU Acquis Communautaire and will strengthen the ties between EU citizens and those in Ukraine. National unions of local governments in EU member states can step up their support for the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC), and other cooperative bodies of subnational governments.

3. Significant investments have been made over the past years in strengthening **professional and independent judiciary** in Ukraine – at all levels. In the light of the Rule of Law obligations that are very central to the European perspective, these endeavors must be continued and intensified, with a new and additional focus on transitional and restorative justice that not only aims at holding perpetrators of war crimes accountable (this element receives a lot of attention by Ukrainian civil society and international actors), but also at restoring a sense of justice and dignity for communities that suffered disproportionate violence. Giving atrocities of the (recent) past a place is an essential element in the prevention of future armed conflict and deserves to receive more attention.
4. Prior to the war, numerous projects in Ukraine aimed at overcoming corruption related problems and promoting integrity policies and practices of people in power. We know from many post-conflict countries that corruption is a huge risk in reconstruction projects. It is paramount, as big infrastructural projects in among others Central European countries have showed, that **anti-corruption policy** is properly integrated in reconstruction efforts and hence that Ukrainian anti-corruption agencies and civil society run anti-corruption watchdogs are empowered and supported. Shaping bottom-up processes and putting the emphasis of local ownership in reconstruction efforts also forms a strong safeguarding mechanism against corruption.
5. In the realm of checks and balances, professional and independent media and civil society watch dogs must also be supported and invited to follow and monitor the reconstruction projects, at the national and local level. Special attention should be given to investigative journalism.

III. INCLUSIVITY AND DIALOGUE

It is important to secure and strengthen the principle of *inclusivity and dialogue* in all projects. Over the last ten years, good progress was made in Ukraine in developing a culture of dialogue. Together with partners in Ukraine, such as Dignity Space, PAX contributed to that process. Capacities have been developed of mediators, or ‘peace engineers’, to help to bring local conflict to a peaceful resolve. Yet, still millions in Ukraine see compromise on issues of public or political concern as defeat. On top of this, the current period of extensive violence and warfare has led to sharp polarisation within society, where certain topics became taboo and the struggle for survival hasn’t left much room for nuance. Inclusivity is crucial for durable democratic peace, particularly by actively removing intersectional barriers of exclusion (e.g. gender, ethnicity, religion, language). Any majority should take the interests, needs and wishes of minorities into account.

1. Villages, towns and cities in Ukraine are in ruins. A lot has to be rebuilt. PAX proposes to use the approach of *architecture for peace* in locations where village centres or city neighborhoods have to be designed and rebuilt from scratch. Urban planning concepts can help citizens to reconnect, by means of public spaces that facilitate restoration of community life. In the Balkans, a few dozen peace parks were established to that end and in among others Kosovo, where UN Habitat is using spatial and urban planning as a tool to support peace-building, in partnership with civil society organisations and local governments.
2. Prior to and during the first eight years of war in Ukraine, we clearly saw that narratives over Ukraine and its history differed a lot from one region to another. Many historical grievances from especially the 20th century have not been comprehensively addressed. It is important that these issues are not ignored. State-promoted exclusive or one-sided narratives or a single official perspective on history is a recipe for more violence in the future. In a comprehensive *dealing with the past strategy*, historical grievances will have to be addressed alongside atrocities of the current war. As a first step, local initiatives of historians and journalists could engage with representatives of affected communities who feel that their experiences and perspectives were ignored under the previous Soviet rule and are still to be addressed in a satisfactory way. International support could be provided by academics (history faculties) and civil society organisations with a track record in such processes.
3. *Memorialisation initiatives* should be *as inclusive as possible*. Memorialisation is of great importance for victims of war, survivors of atrocities, citizens and societies. This includes the many victims of rape or other forms of conflict related sexual violence who will face immense difficulties in speaking out about what happened to them. We see in many countries that monuments and commemorations tend to voice and promote exclusive narratives and pay tribute to soldiers and volunteers joining the military ranks, often ignoring the nonviolent initiatives against violence and occupation and the plight and roles of women, children, elderly, ethnic and religious minority groups and other ‘ordinary

citizens'. It is worthwhile to think of inclusive memorialisation initiatives as a component of the above-mentioned architecture for peace, and the redesigning of public space.

4. The Russian army has deliberately targeted cultural and religious heritage in the regions that are or were under their control. **Rebuilding or restoring cultural heritage** should be an integral part of the reconstruction efforts. Cultural institutions in EU member states can help in such projects. Also churches loyal to the Moscow patriarchate have suffered from the fighting and bombardments. As they are part of the cultural heritage of Ukraine, they should not be overlooked or ignored in the reconstruction process. Ukraine had a tradition of religious tolerance and interreligious dialogue. The peacebuilding potential of religious communities is still there, even though the orthodox parishes loyal to the Moscow patriarchate will face a lot of distrust. Open dialogue with and within these communities will be needed to discuss their position vis-à-vis Ukrainian statehood, and their vision on the future. Religious communities from other European countries can show solidarity with religious actors in Ukraine, also by supporting existing or new ecumenical initiatives.
5. Many partners and stakeholders in Ukraine will inevitably be troubled by agony and trauma due to what happened to them during the war. These emotions and traumas will inevitably play out in the years and decades, if not generations, ahead. It is important to make **psychosocial support** available for people in need, either individually or in group processes that ideally are embedded in the larger dealing with the past and reconstruction processes. It is important to take into account that women have often suffered in a different way from violence and occupation than men, with rape being openly used as a weapon in this war. Gender-sensitive programming is crucial for psychosocial support.

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This publication is supported by the Foundation for Democracy and Media