

Ukraine Civil Society Forum

Recommendations on Occupied Territories

Fellows of Salzburg Global Seminar gathered in Schloss Leopoldskron in Salzburg, Austria, on 4-8 June 2023 for a program held as part of Salzburg Global's [Ukraine Civil Society Forum](#).

At the meeting, several working groups set out priorities for the country, including concrete recommendations for stakeholders to support the rights, return, and reintegration of displaced persons and refugees, addressing both immediate humanitarian needs and long-term perspectives, including the ultimate physical reconstruction and social integration of liberated territories as part of a Ukraine-wide project of national identity.

Civil society plays a critical role in supporting the state and its citizens not only during wartime but also in planning for the physical and political reconstruction after the end of hostilities. In the context of Ukraine, in which 5.9 million people are internally displaced and another eight million have fled to neighboring countries, civil society will have a significant role to play in supporting displaced persons and refugees, as well as the reintegration and rebuilding of de-occupied territories after the war. Over the longer-term, civil society will also need to play a crucial role in any and all peace and reconciliation efforts, including in the development of a post-war and Ukraine-wide national dialogue project.

With so many people displaced inside and outside Ukraine and the economy on a wartime footing, it remains essential to keep civil society leaders supported and connected to one another and with other strategic actors in the international donor, development, political, and private sectors. A connected and resilient civil society sector in Ukraine will create opportunities for dialogue on different levels of society to develop a shared vision for post-war reconstruction and national dialogue, including different social and historical narratives that help shape an inclusive identity for Ukraine.

However, international and domestic conferences on Ukraine have shunted civil society to side events or have featured representatives of governments, donor countries, or international organizations speaking at rather than listening to civil society. Salzburg Global Seminar's Ukraine Civil Society Forum intends to ensure that Ukrainians themselves will be equipped with a way to move forward and to elevate the voices of Ukrainian civil society, and in particular women, in discussions on the future of Ukraine.

WORKING GROUP ON OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

This working group discussed the immediate and longer term needs of populations in occupied areas of Ukraine, and how best to reintegrate these areas as more and more territory returns to Ukrainian government control going forward. Group members were mainly Ukrainian civil society leaders, several of whom had specific expertise and experience working in (or close personal connections to) various occupied territories. The group also benefited from the participation of international experts with previous experience working on challenges associated with reintegration challenges in the context of foreign occupation.

The working group's discussions first identified a number of specific challenges facing occupied territories, recognizing immediately that in the Ukrainian context the term "occupied territories" refers to spaces with widely varying experiences over the past decade. The group agreed that the nature of challenges and solutions for places such as Crimea (occupied by Russia in 2014 but not subject to recent military assault) will be different from those faced by areas of eastern Ukraine (Donetsk, Luhansk, etc.) subject to hybrid warfare and de facto occupation over the same period. Different yet from these two experiences will be the needs of territories occupied since the onset of Russia's full invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Having identified key challenges facing occupied territories, the working group proceeded to posit two broad, cross-cutting objectives that express general qualities that should infuse all efforts relating to de-occupation. From here, the group identified a number of immediate needs that carry specific urgency for occupied territories before moving on to create a set of specific recommendations for actors across a range of sectors (civil society, government, the private sector, international partners). The working group did not make recommendations relating to all core challenges in occupied territories because several of them required specific technical or subject matter expertise beyond the group's competence. Rather, the recommendations offered here relate either to actions that can have a positive impact across multiple issue areas, or to topics where members of the group possessed specific knowledge and experience.

SPECIFIC CHALLENGES IN OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

The working group identified five issues that pose specific or unique challenges with respect to occupied territories:

- Transitional and post-occupation justice
- Property rights and restitution
- The fate of illegal residents (e.g. Russian populations settled in Crimea since 2014)
- The political status of Crimea
- A cluster of questions relating to identity, language, and belonging.

In addition, there are three further cross-cutting issues which, while relevant to all areas of post-war Ukraine, carry specific relevance or require particular attention in occupied territories:

- Economic development
- Political participation & elections
- Media and information

BROAD QUALITATIVE GOALS FOR DEOCCUPATION WORK IN UKRAINE

While it will be necessary to eventually develop specific and concrete objectives tied to all of the challenges identified above, for now the Working Group identified two broad, qualitative goals that should be infused across all deoccupation policy and practice:

- Creating in the eyes of populations in occupied areas a sense of trust, confidence, and certainty that laws and policies relating to all these issues are being applied consistently, predictably, and in conformity with transparent and accountable standards.
- Instilling in the minds of people in occupied territories the idea that they are part of a collective and inclusive effort on the part of all Ukrainians to reintegrate and rebuild the nation based on democracy, prosperity, and a new vision for Ukraine's standing in the region and in the world.

IMMEDIATE NEEDS (WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE NOW?)

The group identified five imperatives requiring urgent action:

- Physical safety and security – enhanced protection from harm for people under occupation, including provision of practical information about self-protection and best practices relating to communications and information security.
- Greater humanitarian access – for providing urgently needed relief and services, especially for those international organizations who have unique access to occupied territories at present
- Enhanced awareness, information and data regarding the circumstances and conditions faced by populations in occupied territories – to better shape and inform deoccupation planning
- Start a pro-active national discussion on reintegration – so that Ukrainians can start exploring complex and painful questions of victimhood and accountability sooner rather than later.
- New evacuation mechanisms – to create ever more routes and options for those who wish to voluntarily access places of refuge and safety outside occupied territories.

Recommendations

The group advances the following recommendations relating to the challenges, broad qualitative goals, and immediate needs identified above:

For Civil Society

- Initiate a national dialogue for reaching a society-wide consensus on main principles and red lines relating to de-occupation and reintegration processes
- Prepare to establish monitoring and watchdog functions relating to the implementation of de-occupation governance, justice, and reintegration policies, as well as the collection of data relating to war crimes and atrocities
- Create a coalition or platform dedicated to civil society organizations (CSOs) working on various aspects of deoccupation as a resource for sharing expertise, coordinating & deconflicting activities, and aggregating the voices of CSOs working on challenges specific to occupied territories
- Assess and documents the political expectations and aspirations of different societal groups in Ukraine's occupied territories with a particular emphasis on the perspectives of marginalized and less understood segments of the population (e.g. indigenous people)

For Government

- Prepare immediately to surge expertise in de-occupation administration and key front-line capacities (e.g. education, healthcare, law enforcement)
- Diplomatic engagement to relocate deported children or people out of occupation to a safe neutral country and to create new evacuation mechanisms for other population groups
- As territories are de-occupied, ensure that their populations are immediately eligible to register damaged property claims through the Diia platform
- Prepare locally specific legal frameworks for the post-occupation period concerning issues of property rights, transitional justice, political participation, and illegal residents
- Create an information campaign in Ukrainian and Russian (and other relevant languages) that explicitly includes and invites people in occupied territories to be part of building a new Ukraine.
- Partner with civil society and the private sector to ensure that dispute resolution, conflict mediation, and sustainable peacebuilding expertise are part of all post-war national reintegration activities.
- Empower decentralization of decision-making at the earliest appropriate time to build a strong sense of voice, stakeholding, and ownership of local governance

- Start negotiations with international organizations and other relevant partners regarding appropriate solutions for illegal residents currently living in Crimea and other occupied areas.
- Develop a reintegration strategy incorporating a pro-active and accountable public consultation mechanism in order to reflect the immediate and longer terms needs of various population groups in the different—and differently—occupied territories.

For Business and the Private Sector

- Develop corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives responsive to specific local needs and challenges in occupied territories, including mentoring programs for small to medium enterprises (SMEs) and projects attune to both the short term ecological recovery needs of occupied areas and longer term sustainability.
- Create and participate in activities through business associations and chambers of commerce that will foster greater awareness of occupied territory-specific business models and opportunities.

For the International Community

- Clarify to Ukrainian partners an expectation that mechanisms for ensuring the integration of inclusive dialogue principles will be part of all aspects of post-war reconstruction and reintegration
- Ensure that beyond the conventional focus on rebuilding infrastructure and economic development, international summits on Ukraine’s post-war reconstruction pay attention to the specific and varying needs of different occupied territories, with attention to the unique challenges of societal re-integration and cohesion present in these areas.