

# IN SEARCH OF THE PROGRESSIVE PATHS TO REBUILD UKRAINE

MAPPING CHALLENGES AND  
PRIORITIES IN SOCIAL POLICY

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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The government of Ukraine presented the first vision of a plan for Ukraine's postwar reconstruction in the summer of 2022; this was later refined and presented at the London and Berlin Recovery Conferences in 2023 and 2024, respectively. The massive interstate wars on the European continent in the first half of the 20th century were the turning point in developing advanced welfare states. In ongoing postwar recovery planning, the Ukrainian government and international actors also see the current historical moment as a window of opportunity to transform the Ukrainian economy and its labour policies, often as well as the philosophy of social policy and its practices.

Based on the analysis of the publicly available recovery plans, recently adopted legislation and government officials' statements, this policy study describes and critically assesses the new welfare model that is emerging in Ukraine. It also aims to nurture a broader public discussion of different policy options available for postwar recovery, particularly postwar social policy, as the demand for distributive justice is growing and claims for social justice after the war will exacerbate. This text argues why it is crucial to give social policy the attention it deserves in the recovery debate, going beyond the emergency response in the war and providing a safety net after it is over, and provides a short list of selected policy directions for the postwar recovery.

This policy study begins by providing an overview of the war's social impact and exacerbation of the existing vulnerabilities in society and structural problems in social policy. It then maps out how the government tackled this on a limited budget while underlining the major shifting points that can be observed in Ukrainian social policy in the last three years. Finally, it defines the role of social policy in postwar recovery and provides a list of key recommendations.

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# INTRODUCTION

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# INTRODUCTION

Since February 2022, millions of Ukrainians have lost their homes and have been forced to move within the country and abroad. Thousands have left behind their regular lives to join the ranks of the Ukrainian Defense Forces. Thousands of Ukrainians lost the most precious thing in this war – their lives or their loved ones. Having gone through the harsh challenges of the almost three years of full-scale war, Ukraine continues to fight on the battlefield and mitigate the devastating impact the Russian invasion has on its population and economy.

The government of Ukraine presented the first vision of a plan for Ukraine’s postwar reconstruction in the summer of 2022; this was later refined and presented at the London and Berlin Recovery Conferences in 2023 and 2024, respectively. The massive interstate wars on the European continent in the first half of the 20th century were the turning point in developing advanced welfare states. In ongoing postwar recovery planning, the Ukrainian government and international actors also see the current historical moment as a window of opportunity to transform the Ukrainian economy and its labour policies, often as well as the philosophy of social policy and its practices.

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problems in social policy.<sup>1</sup> It then maps out how the government tackled this on a limited budget while underlining the major shifting points that can be observed in Ukrainian social policy in the last three years. It then defines the role of social policy in postwar recovery and provides a list of key recommendations.



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# **THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE WAR AND EXACERBATION OF EXISTING VULNERABILITIES**

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# THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE WAR AND EXACERBATION OF EXISTING VULNERABILITIES<sup>2</sup>

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) verified a total of 35,160 civilian casualties during Russia's invasion of Ukraine as of 31 July 2024.<sup>3</sup> Of them, 23,640 people were reported to have been injured. However, OHCHR specified that the real numbers could be higher. According to data from the National Police, more than 55,000 people are missing in Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> As a result of the hostilities, as of March 2024, more than 13,000 children were left without parental care, and 1,759 of them were orphaned.<sup>5</sup>

As of April 2024, the International Organization for Migration (IMO) estimated that approximately 3.5 million persons were internally displaced within Ukraine.<sup>6</sup> Protracted displacement is becoming more prevalent, as 82% of all internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been displaced for longer than one year.<sup>7</sup> As of the end of 2023, 39% of all IDPs have been displaced more than once.<sup>8</sup> The estimated number of Ukrainians living abroad because of the war, as of the end of January 2024, was 4.9 million.<sup>9</sup> Most (almost 80%) are women, with the largest share of women aged 35-44 (13%) and children. According to UNHCR, by the end of 2023, 1.2 million Ukrainians had been forcibly displaced (less often left on their own) to Russia.

As for 2024, the key unresolved issue of the overall integration process of IDPs in Ukraine is equitable access to housing. The state housing programs that existed before the war, such as housing programs for young families, have been very limited in their coverage and were relatively ineffective, as they were primarily focused on supporting property purchases, thus remaining unavailable for the low-income population.<sup>10</sup> Since the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine began in 2014,

the housing problems of IDPs have never been comprehensively addressed, especially in terms of long-term solutions.

Due to the mass household privatisation of previously state-owned housing stock in the 90s, for the cost of administrative fees, most Ukrainians still live in the flats and houses they own.<sup>11</sup> As social housing options, including social housing stock itself and rent subsidies, are scarce due to underinvestment and a non-profit rental market remains underdeveloped, displacement (and/or losing one's home due to bombing<sup>12</sup>) in Ukraine usually means moving from accommodation people owned to rented accommodation. The need to pay rent (and to spend money on furnishing a new apartment and buying necessities, as many IDPs fled the war and lost all their belongings) significantly affects the livelihood of IDPs, as before displacement, this was not a part of their expenses and many cannot afford to furnish these new and often very temporary or uncertainty temporary (i.e., the length of stay is unclear due to renters and lenders' circumstances and the lack of protection of rights) homes. The situation of those who rent is complicated by the lack of regulations in the private rental market (e.g., there are no rent caps or similar mechanisms to stop rental prices rising), including tenant's rights protection, such as anti-eviction mechanisms.<sup>13</sup>

That is why a significant share of the most vulnerable categories of IDPs, such as older persons, people with disabilities (PWDs) and female-headed households, stay at a dormitory-type collective centre.<sup>14</sup> Although this housing option is designed to be temporary, the stay of many IDPs at collective centres becomes protracted. Almost the only alternative to collective centres for low-income IDPs is to live with relatives

or friends, if possible, for free or by paying only for utilities, or by using a state compensation for utilities for homeowners who shelter IDPs in the form of cash transfers.

Employment also remains a problem for IDPs. Although more than half of IDPs are of working age (54%), according to the Ministry of Social Policy, only 40% of all IDPs were in paid employment as of the end of 2023.<sup>15</sup> The limited involvement of IDPs in economic activities make social payments a critical source of income for them. As of May 2023, 49% of IDP households reported different kinds of social assistance as their primary income source.<sup>16</sup>

Because of the lack of affordable housing and economic hardships, many IDPs face significant difficulties due to the lack of adequate means of livelihood. A regular general population survey conducted in March-April 2024 by IOM shows that, compared to returnees and non-displaced populations, IDPs were more likely to resort to a high number of coping mechanisms to meet their basic needs, such as switching to cheaper food (70% of all IDP households).<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, this tendency has been growing. Thus, compared to December 2023, the percentage of IDPs resorting to more radical coping strategies, such as taking lower-paid jobs, not paying rent, moving to a house with worse conditions or selling household items, has also increased.

For those who were forced to move, displacement brought not only a higher exposure to the various risks but also a deterioration of the social network that has been supplementing existing state support and filling the gaps in the social policy. The same happened to their loved ones who stayed at home, despite living close to the frontline or in settlements bordering Russia. The dominant social category among those remaining is older persons. The consequences of the war highlighted the value of reciprocal support between the generations in a family and community, especially the strong dependence of older adults on their informal networks and difficulties in maintaining adequate living conditions without it, especially in situations of forced internal displacement.

Before the full-scale invasion, many older adults in Ukraine found themselves at the intersection of factors contributing to their vulnerability and multiplying it. Older persons are the most economically disadvantaged group of the population, with the highest level of material deprivation and poverty. Around 80% of single elderly Ukrainians, mostly women, live below the official poverty line, with 90% of pensioners unable to pay for even basic medical needs, despite having about five chronic diseases, on average.<sup>18</sup>

Although the solidarity pension system (PAYG) guarantees a pension to all, the level of pension provision is low. The average pension in Ukraine as of 1 October 2024 is 5,851 Ukrainian hryvnia (UAH) (equivalent to €131).<sup>19</sup> Most pensioners (62%) receive pensions below UAH 5,000 (€112), and 26% below UAH 3,000 (€67).<sup>20</sup> The replacement rate of the retirement income in Ukraine equalled 30% in 2021, which means a high risk of poverty after retirement. As pensions often fail to ensure decent living standards, many who reach pension age keep participating in the labour market. Nevertheless, they are often excluded from the formal labour market due to widespread age discrimination and other structural barriers. Therefore, older people frequently take low-skilled jobs, regardless of their qualifications, and are likely to work informally. As of 1 January 2021, only 8% of those aged 60 and older participated in the labour force.<sup>21</sup> At the same time, older adults made up 7.3% of the informally employed (and almost 10% of the informally employed in rural areas).<sup>22</sup> Since the full-scale aggression, the State Statistics Service of Ukraine has stopped publishing data from labour force observations. Thus, recent data is unavailable, but these numbers may have risen with growing inflation.

Rising inflation has depressed the already low purchasing power of pensions, and the pension indexation conducted in 2022 and repeated in 2023 was insufficient to enable pensioners to cover war-related needs connected to forced evacuation, damaging the housing and social infrastructure, and later blackouts. Thus, there is a greater danger of further marginalisation of older adults.

Poverty and deprivation are even higher among elderly women, who have lower pensions (approximately 30%) and receive no age pension more often than men, suffering from the outcome of cumulative lifetime disadvantages.<sup>23</sup> As their life expectancy is longer, women are also more likely to be alone in old age, which increases their economic vulnerability, and they are at a much higher risk of poverty than single men. A survey conducted by Info Sapiens from December 2022 to January 2023 shows that the share of older women (61%) saying they do not have enough money to cover their basic needs is higher than that among older men (46%).<sup>24</sup> Many more women (17%) said that it was impossible to live a decent life (e.g., to buy necessary hygiene products) than men (8%). The same research also showed that older women rely more heavily on government subsidies and cash transfers from international organisations or non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Financial vulnerability and a lack of affordable housing for IDPs are the leading factors that made older people avoid evacuation, even from war-affected areas. They are often concerned about their financial ability to afford rental housing, especially if their displacement is protracted, and to lose the supplementary income from income-generating activities available at home (such as growing vegetables, household farming and the sale of homemade products).

It results in older persons ending up in occupied areas and suffering from casualties more often than other age groups. According to the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, people aged 60 and above constituted 35% of civilians killed in the first year of the full-scale invasion.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, according to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, as of 1 January 2022, people aged 60 and above made up nearly a quarter of the population (24.7%).<sup>26</sup>

A growing number of older persons living alone due to the forced displacement of their other family members has increased pressure on community-based social services provision and, in particular, has significantly increased the workload of social

workers engaged in visiting care. At the same time, these remain the lowest-paid public workers.<sup>27</sup> In 2021, the average monthly salary in the sector was 1.7 times lower than the national average (UAH 10,095 compared to UAH 17,453 or €325 to €561<sup>28</sup>).

Older people remain close to the frontline and in border settlements because they have reduced mobility more often than other age groups, complicating their evacuation and accommodation in a new community. The municipal collective centres, which would be economically affordable for them, are often physically inaccessible, as there is a lack of legislation outlining the standards for their physical accessibility for people with reduced mobility (PRM) and PWDs, including a lack of physically accessible bomb shelters. As of March 2023, the lack of infrastructure for PWDs was identified in 27% of compact settlements for IDPs.<sup>29</sup>

The lack of even temporary accommodation that meets the needs of IDPs with disabilities and/or reduced mobility, including older adults (but not exclusively), exacerbates their vulnerability and exposes them to danger if they choose to stay at home (as their homes are usually better adapted to their needs) and may lead to their institutionalisation if they opt for evacuation. The flaws in the provision of community-based social services for PWDs and older adults, such as assisted living and sheltered accommodation, often additionally complicate the lack of housing.<sup>30</sup> As a result, since the beginning of the full-scale war, despite strong aspirations towards designing and implementing deinstitutionalisation reform for adults expressed by the government, many PWDs and older adults who are displaced and/or have their houses damaged are being placed into residential care facilities, although they do not need residential care. This may constrain their independence and may lead to social exclusion. It contradicts the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,<sup>31</sup> adopted by Ukraine, and the right of PWDs to exercise their right of independent living that cannot be suspended in emergencies, according to the guidelines on deinstitutionalisation, including in emergencies.<sup>32</sup> Yet, it must be recognised that the lack of infrastructure, funds and labour force



makes it extremely hard to guarantee those rights for vulnerable older persons.

Moreover, existing residential care facilities<sup>33</sup> are associated with safety dangers as well. Due to the large number of people living there (large institutions with up to 700 inhabitants), many of whom have reduced mobility, it is hard to organise a timely evacuation to safer regions. Due to problems in the organisation of evacuation, its high bureaucratisation and the unpreparedness of local authorities to provide accessible transportation in the amount needed, several residential care facilities have been trapped in temporarily occupied territories. There were also a few cases when these facilities were targets of war crimes.<sup>34</sup> The latest research by NGOs<sup>35</sup> and monitoring visits made by the team from the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights<sup>36</sup> show that, for many older persons and PWDs living in residential care facilities, timely evacuation to a shelter is often impossible because of the lack of personnel needed to accompany them. Many shelters in such facilities are too small to accommodate all inhabitants and personnel. The situation is even worse in private residential care facilities located in rented private houses, which mostly lack bomb shelters.

Hence, the war has highlighted the gaps in social services provision, inclusive transport, infrastructure and housing, as well as existing flaws in policies supporting PWDs and their families, and its implementation and the multilevel aspects of poverty and vulnerability in the Ukrainian population. At the same time, the war and its consequences have led to an increase in the number of persons with disabilities among the civilian population and the military by approximately 300,000 (10%), according to the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine due to injuries, wounds and the negative impact of war on mental health.<sup>37</sup>

Many of those who joined the Defense Forces of Ukraine acquired a disability while in service or face severe health conditions related to injuries and psychological trauma. Thus, the need for rehabilitation and mental health services, as well as prosthetics, among those who serve and those who

have already been demobilised is growing. At the same time, they experience problems accessing it, although it is guaranteed to them by law and should be free of charge. These problems are caused by a shortage of rehabilitation facilities (as the demand grows<sup>38</sup>) and the complexity of many administrative procedures accompanying rehabilitation, especially for obtaining prostheses. The existing system of legal recognition of disability to qualify for disability benefits and services for civilians and the military involves an assessment by the Medical-Social Expert Committee (MSEC). At the same time, veterans must be assessed by the Military Medical Commission (MMC) to ascertain their fitness for further military service. Navigating these processes is reported to be difficult, according to the results of many surveys. For instance, over two thirds (68%) of veterans surveyed in a study dedicated to the rehabilitation procedure in 2023 cited challenges completing evaluations, such as unclear instructions, long waits to see specialised physicians and the feeling of their subjectiveness.<sup>39</sup>

During their recovery and rehabilitation, many veterans who underwent surgeries and other forms of medical intervention often need care services on an everyday basis. Unlike many countries in Ukraine, care services, as a rule, are not provided within the healthcare system, but instead belong to the social services system. Since the latter is already overloaded with growing demand during the war, a significant part of care is performed by veterans' families and their loved ones. Although there are several cash transfers and compensations for such caregivers, research shows that many are unaware of these guarantees.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, as these benefits are to be financed by municipal budgets that operate under budgetary constraints, even those who are eligible to receive them may be refused them.<sup>41</sup>

Apart from the needs connected to the negative impact of the war on health, many veterans and their families require financial support, as many of them have also suffered from displacement and have lost prewar income sources. 63% of veterans mentioned housing, 31% income support and 20% employment assistance<sup>42</sup> among their top priorities in the research conducted in January-April 2023.<sup>43</sup> In

general, those demobilising and their families may often need assistance to facilitate their transition to civilian life.

The war has caused economic downfall, disruptions of production chains and massive job losses, especially in 2022. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that about 4.8 million Ukrainians lost their jobs during the first three months of the war.<sup>44</sup> In August 2022, the unemployment rate in Ukraine reached 35%. In 2023, the unemployment rate began to decline thanks to different factors, including the gradual stabilisation of the economic situation at the end of 2022. The National Bank of Ukraine estimates the unemployment rate at 18.2% in 2023.<sup>45</sup> However, the unemployment rate is still higher than before the full-scale invasion.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, there are structural changes in the economy, external and internal migration, uneven economic recovery in different regions and sectors, and increased skills mismatch between the labour demand and supply. Therefore, the structural component of unemployment has intensified, and many workers may be employed in sectors/positions that do not correspond with their profession.<sup>47</sup>

The war's negative impact on the entire population's financial wellbeing has been generally profound. According to a nationwide sample survey of the socio-economic status of households conducted in December 2023-February 2024, the share of the income poor increased by 1.7 times, from 20.6% in 2021 to 35.5% in 2023.<sup>48</sup> The rise in inflation has further exacerbated the situation, increasing poverty and material deprivation. In 2022 alone, food prices surged by 34.4% year on year, resulting in a decline in real wages. The share of food expenditure in total household expenditures also increased. The urgency of the situation is underscored by the fact that from 2021 to 2023, the share of those who cannot afford sufficient nutrition increased by 3.6 times (from 3.4% of the population to 12.2%), according to the same survey.

The war has also increased the care burden for women and the time they spend in underpaid reproductive work. Prior to the war, the network of

childcare facilities in Ukraine was insufficient to cover the demand because, since Ukraine gained independence in 1991, a significant number of public kindergartens and especially nurseries were shut down,<sup>49</sup> their buildings were privatised and used for commercial purposes, and private ones are not available for low-income families and single mothers. During the war, the functioning of kindergartens is impossible due to the destroyed social infrastructure and safety reasons. This may further limit the options for women in the labour market, which may be especially difficult for those who have lost their jobs due to the war.

A rise in gender-based violence, including both conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and domestic violence, has also been caused by the war. The number of cases of domestic violence recorded by the National Police in the first half of 2023 was 1.5 times higher than the number registered in the same period in 2022 and twice as high as the number registered in 2021: over 349,355; 231,244; and 190,277 cases, respectively.<sup>50</sup>

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# **BETWEEN GROWING DEMANDS AND FISCAL CONSTRAINTS**

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# BETWEEN GROWING DEMANDS AND FISCAL CONSTRAINTS

The growing pressure on the system of social provision caused by the detrimental impact of the war on the population's economic wellbeing, housing, and social infrastructure destruction and damage has to be addressed amid the economic downfall, decreasing budget revenues and increased spending on warfare; the hardest time was the first year of the war. In 2022, the real gross domestic product (GDP) fell by 29%.<sup>51</sup> The economic recovery only began in 2023, with GDP growth of at least 5.3%. Although the GDP growth forecast for 2024 is positive, at 4.5-4.6%, Ukraine's economy is having difficult times and will take a long time to recover to pre-war levels.

Compared to the first half of 2021, total budget revenues in the same period of 2022 decreased by 16.7% in real terms and increased by 18.2% in 2023. If calculated excluding foreign grants and budgetary institutions' own revenues, budget revenues decreased by 25.4% and 25.5%, respectively, in real terms.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, the revenues from the unified social tax were also reduced, especially in the first year of the war,<sup>53</sup> due to massive job losses and informal employment, which might have also increased in 2022. Most of all, it hit the revenues of the Pension Fund, which, in turn, had to be co-financed from the state budget to ensure the payment of PAYG pensions.

Although, unlike in 2022, state budget revenues in 2023 are more planned relative to expenditures, the budget deficit remains high. Thus, in the first ten months of 2022, the state budget was executed with a deficit of UAH 638.7 billion, UAH 1.3 trillion in 2023,<sup>54</sup> and in 2024 the state budget deficit amounted to 1.571 trillion.<sup>55</sup> In all three years, the deficit has been covered by the sale of domestic

government bonds and international aid in the form of grants and loans.

Most of the funds from state and local budgets are spent on national defence, which, according to the budget legislation, is financed exclusively from the state budget. In 2022, defence spending accounted for 42.2% of Ukraine's consolidated budget expenditures; in 2023 and the first half of 2024, it was slightly more than half.<sup>56</sup> Almost 100% of the budget revenues in 2024 will be allocated to the country's defence and security.

At the same time, the government has identified timely financing of the most critical social expenditures as one of the priorities of budget financing. In 2024, UAH 470 billion was allocated from the state budget for social protection, which is UAH 9 billion more than in 2023, accounting for about 14% of the total central fiscal expenditures. These are expenditures on cash benefits to low-income families and IDPs; housing and utility subsidies (HUS);<sup>57</sup> some other cash transfers; pension indexation; and certain social services to be financed from the national budget, such as social support for military personnel.<sup>58</sup>

Additionally, almost UAH 15 billion was allocated to veterans. Most of the sum was planned to be spent on housing for veterans and their families; it also includes UAH 3.8 billion for the new service of veteran assistants established by the government in 2023 and another UAH 1 billion for prosthetics.

While significant, these expenditures have not been sufficient to meet the demand for welfare and social services and cover the expenses for reconstruction and repair of the damaged and destroyed infrastructure. As of December 2023, the World Bank estimated the overall recovery and reconstruction needs that cover the period 2024-2033 at \$486 billion



(€440 billion), which is approximately 2.8 times the estimated nominal GDP of Ukraine for 2023.<sup>59</sup> Social protection and livelihoods comprise 9% of the total (\$44 billion).

Considering the limitations of the state budget, a substantial part of state expenditures, including those on social policy, have been covered by international aid as grants and loans have been forming a significant part of budget revenues during 2022-2024. In early spring 2022, the IMF provided Ukraine with \$1.4 billion, and the EU provided a concessional loan of €1.2 billion.<sup>60</sup> In 2023, the budget revenues from international aid accounted for UAH 1.13 trillion (or \$30.9 billion), with the most significant sum (UAH 400.5 billion) coming from the USA.<sup>61</sup> Ukraine also received non-repayable funding from Japan, Norway, Germany, Spain, Finland, Ireland, Switzerland, Belgium and Iceland, totalling up to UAH 25 billion. The funds were allocated to the state budget through the World Bank's Trust Fund as part of the PEACE in Ukraine project.

In 2022, nearly 77% of all state expenditures, apart from defence and security, were financed by the allocation of external funding.<sup>62</sup> The main directions of international assistance were financing priority spending of the government other than defence and security, such as social spending, healthcare, wage payments for public workers and rapid reconstructions. According to the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine, in 2024, social expenditures are almost entirely financed from external funding.<sup>63</sup> Also, in 2022 and 2023, social spending was almost entirely funded by international aid provided through grants or concessional lending.

The abovementioned PEACE in Ukraine, or the Public Expenditures for Administrative Capacity Endurance Project, is administered by the World Bank and funded mainly by US grants. It reimburses several types of Ukrainian government expenditures. Firstly, it focused on reimbursing wages to public servants and public workers in the education sector. With increasing aid from the USA, the project also covered several types of social spending, such as budget transfers for pensions, social allowance for IDPs, HUS, cash benefits to low-income families, and cash

benefits for children with disabilities and adults who have had disabilities since childhood.<sup>64</sup>

Later, in 2023, the World Bank approved a new joint project with Ukraine, Investing in Social Protection for Inclusion, Resilience, and Efficiency (INSPIRE), which is financed by a \$1.2 billion loan from the World Bank from the Trust Fund "Advancing Needed Credit Enhancement for Ukraine" (ADVANCE Ukraine) with the support of the Government of Japan.<sup>65</sup> It is stated that it aims to ensure social protection for the poor and vulnerable in Ukraine during and after the war, improve access to social services and assistance, and strengthen the social safety net.

Currently, reconstruction projects can only be funded with money from international donors. Many ongoing projects of different scales are financed by international aid. The Emergency Credit Program for Ukraine's Recovery (ECPUR) should be mentioned among those related to social policy. It is a multi-sectoral loan from the European Investment Bank to support Ukraine in rebuilding critical social infrastructure, including hospitals; schools; kindergartens; housing (reconstruction and overhaul of the housing stock to provide housing for IDPs and those who have lost their home as a result of war); centres for administrative services; and heating, water and wastewater facilities.<sup>66</sup>

International actors also play an important role in Ukraine's social policy with humanitarian assistance programs, as they reduce the welfare pressure on the state and local budgets and supplement existing social programs. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA),<sup>67</sup> in 2023, humanitarian organisations collectively reached around 11 million people in Ukraine with humanitarian aid. OCHA's prognosis for 2024 estimated that nearly 15 million people need humanitarian assistance, of which 8.5 million are planned to be supported within the humanitarian response. OCHA estimated the humanitarian needs in Ukraine in 2024 to be \$3.11 billion.

There are also practices of collaboration between government bodies and humanitarian organisations. Notably, they often work together to organise

the evacuations of PWDs and PRMs and provide humanitarian cash assistance for war-affected populations (funded by international organisations but administered by the Ukrainian government). A prime example of this collaboration is the “eDopomoga” public digital platform, launched in late 2022. This platform, managed by the Ministry of Social Policy, oversees the application process and verifies the data of those who have applied in the state registers, thereby preventing duplicate funding from different donors.

However, there are also problems with coordinating humanitarian assistance and state social protection in Ukraine, both on the side of the humanitarian actors and the government. The need to align existing humanitarian assistance programs with state and municipal social protection programs, benefits and services, as pointed out in 2022 by many experts,<sup>68</sup> remains.

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# **THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE AND THE NOVELTIES IN SOCIAL POLICY IN 2022-2024**

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# THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE AND THE NOVELTIES IN SOCIAL POLICY IN 2022-2024

The need to balance fiscal constraints with the growing demand for support among the population, ensuring the means to meet their basic needs and deliver essential services, may have significantly impacted the decisions made by government bodies throughout 2022-2024. The efforts of central and local authorities under these challenging conditions should be acknowledged.

In general, the additional support measures introduced by the Ukrainian government during the war, especially in 2022, the first year of full-scale war, were primarily aimed at preventing a radical increase in poverty. This mainly included timely payment of social benefits, subsidies and allowances in their total amount. In 2022, Ukraine spent around UAH 15 billion (\$4.3 billion) on social assistance.<sup>69</sup> It includes two of the most extensive social welfare programs, which are the cash benefits to low-income families and HUS; besides this, child and family benefits, disability and care benefits, and a monthly allowance for IDPs to cover living expenses were (re)introduced in March 2022.<sup>70</sup>

However, the coverage of all these cash benefits has been low and often insufficient to reach its target, even before the full-scale invasion, which has worsened with increasing inflation. For example, monthly cash allowances supposed to cover essential living needs for IDPs equal UAH 3,000 (\$72.70<sup>71</sup>) per child and PWD and UAH 2,000 (\$48) per other person. According to the UNICEF nationwide sample survey, as of January 2022, a third of recipients of social cash transfers reported that it composed up to 76-100% of their household income.<sup>72</sup> At the same time, more than half of them reported low coverage of their needs through benefits. In the case of IDPs, the low coverage of benefits may be behind the unwillingness of some of those who are displaced

inside the country to obtain IDP status.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, the number of actual IDPs is higher than those registered.

In July 2023, the government also revised the granting procedure of the IDPs' monthly allowance to increase its targeting, thus making the allocation of the benefit means-tested. From November 2023, and to receive the benefit, the total income per family member during the quarter before the application<sup>74</sup> should be at most UAH 9,444 (\$230) per month. Moreover, to receive the benefit, no one in the family in this period should have made any expensive purchases (in the amount over UAH 100,000 (\$2,438)), such as real estate or any consumer durables, nor possess the equivalent or a higher amount in a bank account nor own any residential property.<sup>75</sup> The renewed conditions of the IDP allowance also include measures for the negative stimulation of employment among IDPs, as the benefit entitlement became tethered to employment status. The amendment law says that if there are several non-working able-bodied persons in a family with children, all of them except for one person who takes care of the child must register at the employment office as unemployed or jobseekers within two months of the date of granting the benefit for the following period or contribute to their economic self-sufficiency in any other manner.

Another measure the government took in 2022 to prevent extreme poverty was keeping households' electricity, gas and heating tariffs unchanged. In 2022 and 2023, pension indexation was also implemented to compensate for high inflationary pressure. However, this was insufficient to fully compensate for the falling purchasing power of the pensions. Moreover, indexations did not affect



those who receive the lowest pensions – social pensions.<sup>76</sup>

As pointed out previously, the massive displacement and ruining of the existing housing stock revealed significant flaws in Ukrainian housing policy. The need for sustainable housing solutions, first of all, among IDPs, has been growing and remains unmet. As before, full-scale-war governmental support is almost solely directed at further supporting homeownership. For instance, in October 2022, the government established a housing loan program for flat purchase, “eOselia”, with an interest rate of 3% for military personnel, law enforcement officers, teachers, doctors, educators, scientists, and some other public workers<sup>77</sup> and their family members who do not have any housing or own less than 52.5 square meters for a family of one person and an additional 21 square meters for each subsequent family member,<sup>78</sup> and with an interest rate of 7% for all other citizens of Ukraine who have the same housing conditions. The other options for housing provision remain neglected at a policy level.

At the same time, a national survey conducted at the beginning of 2024 showed that Ukrainians not only consider housing to be one of the main elements of social support that the state should prioritise but also prioritise it over social cash benefits and social services.<sup>79</sup> Thus, as the war has exacerbated housing problems and a level of uncertainty about one’s current housing remains high during the war, the soft loan programs for flat purchases can hardly cover the existing demand for housing, especially given the decrease in incomes.

In response to the challenges posed by the war, the Ministry of Social Policy has also launched several new social programs and expanded and strengthened several existing ones.

Both programs were launched in 2023, with money allocated from the state budget:

- Comprehensive social service of resilience building
- Comprehensive social service of resilience building – a new service and a program involving the possibility for any territorial

community to organise a resilience centre, which should primarily be a space for providing psychosocial support to individuals and families living in the community; resilience centres are also designed to enhance local volunteering and help local initiatives implement volunteer activities.<sup>80</sup>

- Social service for the social support of military personnel and their families based on military units is a new service that implies assistance provision for the serviceperson and their family at the beginning of service, during its completion and at the stage of demobilisation. The fundamental goal of the service is to provide psychosocial support to the military and their families in matters not directly related to military services, such as providing legal assistance and advice on paperwork, informing on benefits available, assisting in preventing addictions, and organising support needed for the family of those who serve.<sup>81</sup>

Besides that, in the field of social services, the Ministry of Social Policy is currently working on developing two national strategy plans that are of strategic importance for addressing existing problems in the provision of services and ensuring the rights of older people and PWDs given the challenges of a full-scale invasion. These are the national strategy for deinstitutionalisation for adults and the national strategy for social services development. According to the Government Priority Action Plan, this is expected to be finished by 2024.<sup>82</sup>

In 2024, the Ministry of Social Policy significantly broadened the conditions for qualifying for the Municipal Nanny program (for the period of martial law), which reimburses the cost of childcare services for a family that has a legal agreement with a nanny.

While previously, the parents of a child under 3 in need of additional care (due to disability or congenital illnesses) and parents who have a disability of group I or II were eligible to receive compensation under this program, after the amendments, the program can also be used by parents of a child under 6 in need of additional care or those living in a territorial

community where the functioning of kindergartens is impossible due to the destroyed social infrastructure and for safety reasons,<sup>83</sup> and parents of a child under 3 if they are internally displaced within Ukraine and if one of them is officially employed or officially registered as unemployed by the State Employment Service or participates in activities necessary for the defence of Ukraine.

Compensation is paid at 100% of the minimum hourly wage established as of 1 January of the relevant year for one hour of care, but not more than 165 hours per month. Starting from 1 April 2024, the minimum wage is set at UAH 8,000 (\$194), so a family can get their nanny expenses covered only partially within the program in case of hiring a nanny full time.

Besides that, in response to the growing number of cases of domestic violence and CRSV, in 2023, the government allocated subventions from the state budgets (UAH 175.4 million or \$3.8 million in total) to expand the existing networks of specialised support services for the victims of domestic violence and gender-based violence (GBV) in territorial communities<sup>84</sup> and made amendments to the laws to expand their powers.<sup>85</sup> Also, nearly 60 shelters for the victims of violence were opened in communities with financial support from the state, and more than 100 are planned to be established in 2024. At the same time, despite the development of the shelter system, further support is still needed, especially in the provision of sustainable long-term housing.

Another initiative of the government, which is worth mentioning, is the liquidation of the Social Insurance Fund of Ukraine (SIFU); this used to be responsible for managing insurance payments to victims of industrial accidents and those who have an occupational disease, as well as their families. Its responsibilities were transferred to the Pension Funds in 2023.<sup>86</sup> In the explanatory note to Draft Law 2620-IX passed in September 2022, such a reorganisation of the social insurance system was explained by the higher effectiveness of the Pension Fund and the aim of optimising the system's administration.<sup>87</sup> Thus, the liquidation of the SIFU was also accompanied by extensive staff layoffs.

Despite the government's intentions, this change's effectiveness remains questionable. Throughout 2023-2024, numerous complaints have surfaced in the media and on social networks from those entitled to the payments<sup>88</sup> and other support previously managed by the SIFU. The most common criticisms include lost personal files, long queues, and a perceived decline in the service provided by the Pension Fund and its territorial branches compared to those of SIFU.

Moreover, the same law has also changed the provision of rehabilitation support to the victims of industrial accidents to which they are entitled. If previously, the SIFU directly financed the costs of a wide range of supplements (such as supplementary nutrition, medicines, prosthetics), medical assistance, nursing in-home care, visiting care and so forth, often in the form of cash transfers so that the beneficiaries themselves could hire a carer and purchase the needed supply (e.g., incontinence pads for adults), since the beginning of 2023, it is no longer possible. A significant number of cash transfers have been cut. The law insists that victims of industrial accidents can cover their needs for services and rehabilitation within the framework of the existing healthcare system and public healthcare facilities.<sup>89</sup> Thus, they can no longer organise care, including nursing care, they need by themselves with the cash transfer received, but instead are referred to services included in public healthcare and social services, predominantly palliative care and visiting care (at-home care).

The problems evolve because of the insufficient development of palliative care within the framework of medical guarantees, as the number of healthcare facilities that provide the so-called mobile palliative care at home remains relatively low to cover the needs.<sup>90</sup> Visiting care (at-home care), a social service provided within the state social protection framework, does not include any medical interventions but assistance with self-service and household help (such as cleaning and buying food). Neither of these services can be obtained daily, and especially cannot replace 24-hour at-home care. Apart from that, as the cash transfer has been cut, the law puts the responsibility of providing medical

supplies on local authorities, which, due to budget constraints, do not always cover it. Thus, residential care is the only option left for those who cannot pay for a caregiver and other necessary assistance themselves.

As unemployment skyrocketed in 2022, the government response may be seen as highly controversial, as already in September, parliament has reduced unemployment benefits to those registered as unemployed to the minimum wage (which is set at UAH 8,000 (\$194) starting from April 2024), regardless of insurance records, and reduced the duration of its provision to 90 days,<sup>91</sup> from 120-360 days previously. The amount of minimum unemployment benefit that is paid to those who had less than seven months of service during the last year and to individual entrepreneurs who lost their income and registered as unemployed has also been reduced from UAH 1,800 to UAH 1,000.<sup>92</sup>

The reasons for these changes were budget constraints and the aim of stimulating employment and economic activities, which were frequently underlined as a priority by government officials, especially the Ministry of Economy.<sup>93</sup> However, this step may undermine the idea of the social security system, as unemployment benefits are paid within its framework and, thus, should depend on insurance records. This potential erosion of the social security system, a cornerstone of social welfare, could have far-reaching implications. In the long run, this can impact the willingness of social tax contributions and the appeal of legal employment, which raises serious concerns about the future stability of the social security system, especially considering that social tax revenues have already fallen.

As part of employment stimulation measures, in the summer of 2022, the government also approved a decree that allowed local authorities to engage those who have been registered as unemployed for 30 days or more in public works;<sup>94</sup> refusal will result in losing one's unemployed status and benefits.<sup>95</sup> A month later, the parliament passed a law that introduced a new type of employment contract with non-fixed working hours,<sup>96</sup> which is legally analogous

to the zero hours used in some other countries, such as the UK.

Another government initiative presented recently will have a long-lasting and large-scale impact on the system of social assistance provision in Ukraine if implemented. It implies systemic changes in the approach to entitlement and calculations of those social benefits that remain non-means-tested (a significant share).

Before the war, in 2020, several social benefits, mainly those paid to families with children, such as a single-parent allowance, became means-tested, and their provision was tethered to the employment status of the receiver. Besides the regular conditions for benefit entitlement (e.g., a single-parent allowance could be received in the case of the death of the other parent or if there is no record of the second parent on the child's birth certificate), the person should also be recognised as on a low income (according to the law "On social assistance for the low-income families"); otherwise they will not qualify to receive the benefit.<sup>97</sup> With these changes, the allowance size depends on the receiver's income. Moreover, the benefit is not allocated if the person is unemployed and not registered at the employment office as unemployed or a jobseeker. Negative employment stimulation has also taken the form of a penalty, as the allowance size decreases by half if the receiver does not find a job after six months of receiving the allowance. The changes in the benefits' conditionality led to a reduction in the number of receivers. For instance, over the year since these amendments were made, the number of single mothers receiving the allowance has more than halved, from 260,000 to 120,000.<sup>98</sup>

The new draft law prepared by the Ministry of Social Policy and first presented in May 2024 applies such a means-tested approach to the entitlement of the majority of social benefits remaining and to the so-called "social scholarships" currently paid to the number of social categories of students.<sup>99</sup> In practice, if implemented, it will lead to a significant cut in the number of social benefits that exist and to a noticeable reduction in social assistance available as a safety net aimed at reducing poverty

for the poorest.<sup>100</sup> This corresponds to the aim of the Ministry stated in the explanatory note to the draft law, which is “to increase the effectiveness of the instruments specifically for those citizens who are below the poverty line”, while the current, more universalistic approach to the provision of benefits is defined as one that “erodes the financial resources of the state”. This vision of welfare transformation has been expressed on various occasions by Ministry of Social Policy officials, often referred to as a “new philosophy of social benefits”. For instance, in one of her speeches, the minister said,



*During the years of independence, we have assumed a huge number of excessive social obligations, social benefits that financial resources of the state cannot always support; a number of them were inherited from the USSR. [...] These are enormous expenses that have to be optimised and made means-tested in its maximum.<sup>101</sup>*



The proposed changes also imply tethering the benefit entitlement to employment status, similar to the example of the single-parent allowance.

In the list of state official plans mentioned in the explanatory note as a basis for the draft law, one could find, for instance, the Concept Note “Ukraine. Strengthening the Social Support System” as part of the International Monetary Fund’s program “to reform the social protection system to ensure targeted, sufficient and effective social assistance to the population based on their needs”. This may be a showcase of the impact of conditions that come with international aid on Ukraine’s domestic policy, including the welfare field.

The draft law also proposes a new approach to calculate the size of social benefits, namely, of the basic social assistance that it introduces as a new

“consolidated” benefit to replace other benefits (which, in practice, is not new; instead, it is a new name for the existing low-income family allowance, which will be the sole benefit available for the majority of the population,<sup>102</sup> except for those who are incapable of working due to acquired disability and other reasons, and who “have no close ones obliged by the law to provide for them,”<sup>103</sup> if the draft law is adopted).

Up to now, the basic value for calculating the amount of most social benefits is the subsistence minimum.<sup>104</sup> However, the draft law proposes to replace it with the “basic amount of basic social assistance”. It will be calculated individually for each family, depending on its composition: 100% of such a basic amount for the first family member and 70% for each subsequent family member.<sup>105</sup> The Ministry of Social Policy proposes to set the basic amount for 2025 at UAH 4,000 (\$95). The basic social assistance for a family equals its total basic amount minus its total income.<sup>106</sup>

The explanatory note points out the “inefficiency of the legally established subsistence minimum as an indicator that should determine the risk of citizens falling below the poverty line” as the reason for this replacement. The other problem mentioned is that the subsistence minimum is used as a basis for the calculations of more than a hundred different payments outside social protection (such as fines). Therefore, an increase in its amount would significantly burden the state budget.

In addition, the draft law proposes to make existing state-targeted support for education, including social scholarships, means-tested as well. This means that the entitlement of social scholarships currently assigned to students belonging to specific social categories, such as veterans and their children, children whose parent passed away defending Ukraine, and children who are IDPs, will consider the financial and property status of their family. Those whose family is not low income will no longer qualify for this benefit.

The joint representative body of trade unions at the national level did not approve the proposed draft law. In their feedback,<sup>107</sup> they mention that,



according to Ukrainian legislation, the subsistence minimum is not “an indicator that should determine the risk of citizens falling below the poverty line”, but instead, “a total cost of a set of food sufficient to maintain health and a minimum set of services to meet the cultural and social needs of the individual.” This perspective underscores that the line set by the subsistence minimum is higher than just above poverty.

They state that “the only problem with the subsistence minimum is its systematic underestimation”. The size of the subsistence minimum is defined in the state budget every year as a compromise between the actual subsistence minimum and the state’s financial capabilities,<sup>108</sup> Thus, it is insufficient to ensure what it is supposed to, and the same is true of the coverage of social benefits currently based on its size. However, according to the draft law, the “basic amount” that is proposed to be used to calculate the amount of basic social assistance will be “approved by the Law on the State Budget of Ukraine for the respective year, based on the available financial resources of the state budget”, which repeats the same approach.

Moreover, as the trade unions state in their evaluation, the methodology used for calculating the basic amount is unavailable, unlike the subsistence minimum. Thus, it is unclear how the basic amount of UAH 4,000 proposed for 2025 was made up.

Suppose we calculate the expected amount of basic social assistance for a family of two adults and two children (aged under 18) using the basic amount. It will receive a base amount of UAH 4,000 plus an additional amount of UAH 2,800 for each family member, resulting in a total of UAH 12,400 (\$302). However, if we use the current subsistence minimum, UAH 2,920 for adults and UAH 3,196 for children aged 6-18<sup>109</sup> for the calculation, the family would receive UAH 12,320 UAH (\$300), which is the same.

Therefore, the proposed changes would rebrand the existing problem with the subsistence minimum rather than solve it. With caution, it can be concluded that the primary visible outcome of the new approach, if implemented, would be a drastic

decrease in the share of the population entitled to the benefits and the optimisation of state expenses.

Reviewing most of the measures taken in 2022-2024 reveals a process of the gradual definition of the new social policy vision, which had been pragmatically shifting for half a decade before the full-scale war. Despite the particular successes and promising developments in the field of social services, as well as the overall efforts of the state to mitigate the social impact of the war, which should be acknowledged, the state’s steps that have been taken or announced, as well as the statements of the state officials, have many features that predict orientation towards the liberal welfare model, which is a significant shift in the social policy landscape. This model guarantees a minimum safety net for the poorest and stimulates employment. Though the goal for transformation seems to have already been set, the scale of the individualisation of social risks has never been at the level of the “classical” liberal welfare states. Also, the steps being taken towards the transformation (such as a reduction in social benefits, a slow shift to means-testing in their entitlement and tethering of the employment status to welfare provision) may often be invisible amid budget constraints and the war-related social response, including the still generous humanitarian assistance, which at least partially compensates for the gaps in the state social policy.

As described, the role of the family in welfare provision also becomes more profound and remains significant in care, and it could be seen as a manifestation of greater familialism in social policy. Nevertheless, since state family support has been shrinking as the childbirth benefits were significantly reduced (by almost three times, and their indexation for inflation was stopped<sup>110</sup>) and the payments of a childcare allowance (previously paid until the child reached the age of 3) were cancelled in 2014 and the social benefits for families with children were made means-tested in 2020, the transformations can hardly be seen as a move towards familialist welfare regimes, but rather as another way of individualising life risks by distributing them not within society but within the family.

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**A SAFETY NET  
AGAINST POVERTY  
OR A SOCIAL RIGHT:  
THE DEMAND FOR  
REDISTRIBUTIVE  
JUSTICE AFTER THE  
WAR IS OVER**

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# A SAFETY NET AGAINST POVERTY OR A SOCIAL RIGHT: THE DEMAND FOR REDISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE AFTER THE WAR IS OVER

As stated at the beginning of this policy study, despite the tremendous atrocities brought by the war, postwar reconstruction manifests an opportunity for significant changes in state policies, including social policy. The experience of war and its associated losses are likely to significantly impact the welfare attitudes of the population and its postwar vision for Ukraine as a state.

There is a common perception of atomisation in late-capitalist societies. Emmanuel Levinas, a French philosopher of Lithuanian Jewish ancestry, attributed the lack of solidarity in modern capitalist societies and what he called a “moral spectatorship” to the outsourcing of the ethical responsibility for the people surrounding us, such as our neighbours, to well-developed state systems, such as law enforcement or social protection institutions.<sup>111</sup> According to Levinas, it is not about the lack of motivation to care about others due to selfishness, but it is instead a form of blindness to the other person as a subject of our accountability. This, in turn, leads to diminishing the social bonds that stick society together.

During the war, which is a collective phenomenon, many people may experience increasing social interdependence and get involved in grassroots forms of collective action and care in their communities, as the state systems of care and protection may be unavailable. Mutual aid and interconnectivity become even more vital for survival in the temporarily occupied areas and those close to the frontline. A survey conducted at the end of 2022 showed that almost two thirds of Ukrainians

(61%) had volunteered to help the Ukrainian Defense Forces or their fellow citizens; 30% were involved in activities directly.<sup>112</sup> Another survey shows that after three years of the war, over two thirds of Ukrainians (67%) feel that their community members are highly available for mutual assistance.<sup>113</sup>

The war may strengthen social solidarity in the face of an external threat. At the same time, solidarity is crucial not only in war times, as it keeps the society resilient, but it is also fundamental to the welfare state. It ensures financial resources to provide security against various life risks and market failures (in the form of social benefits and services, housing) as it motivates people to support income redistribution. In extensive welfare states, this solidarity is being constantly strengthened and recreated. As Wilensky states, “The welfare state builds solidarity through the distribution of risks across the society”.<sup>114</sup> The experience of the war may also change individual preferences towards solidarity and greater support of the expansion of the welfare state, as the war leads to greater risk exposure and prolonged experience of uncertainty and insecurity. Due to the financial and proprietary losses associated with the war, many people may lose the ability to pursue individual strategies for facing and combating life risks and, therefore, support a higher level of risk sharing and income redistribution.

Before the war, Ukrainians held some of Europe’s most pro-egalitarian attitudes toward social redistribution and welfare.<sup>115</sup> The hardships of transition in the 90s did not diminish social solidarity in Ukraine

to the extent seen in some other post-socialist countries. For instance, the results of the European Social Survey (ESS4) of 2008 show that Ukrainians expected a high degree of state responsibility for social protection (especially in the field of social protection of older people and healthcare) and supported a relatively high degree of redistribution, especially compared to other European nations.<sup>116</sup> Back in 2008, the majority of Ukrainians (67%, which is a higher share than, for example, in Germany and Sweden) supported the statement that for a fair society, differences in people's living standards should be insignificant. In general, Ukrainians also believed that the government should take measures to reduce income inequality,<sup>117</sup> with almost half of the population (47%) supporting progressive taxation. Before the war, Ukrainians also had high societal expectations regarding the government's participation in housing provision. A national survey conducted in 2019 demonstrated that 78% agreed that the government must provide housing to the people who need it.<sup>118</sup>

Over 2.5 years of full-scale war, a shift in Ukrainians' welfare attitudes towards greater support for state responsibility over welfare and income redistribution could already be observed. In 2022, after seven months of devastating full-scale war, 67% agreed that the introduction of progressive taxation should be among the steps the government must take to ensure spending on welfare, healthcare and education at the prewar level.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, only 39% of respondents to the same national survey completely or rather agreed that the government had the right to cut its spending on welfare, healthcare and education during the war. While in July 2021, 42% of Ukrainians agreed that the state should be responsible for the welfare of every citizen, by August 2023, this share had risen to 58%.<sup>120</sup> The percentage of those who agree that the state should first and foremost provide for people in old age has also risen from 55% in 2021 to 69% in 2024.<sup>121</sup>

Based on a probability-based telephone survey conducted in Ukraine in March 2023, Frizell et al. have also found that the war has affected Ukrainians' attitudes in ways that strengthen the demand for and acceptance of public social policy.<sup>122</sup> Moreover,

the survey also shows that direct exposure to war violence is associated with higher national solidarity among those affected. At the same time, the war-induced financial losses increase the demand and support for social policy.

While Ukrainians' welfare attitudes are developing toward a more generous welfare state and the demand for distributive justice is growing, this often seems to have little correspondence with the ongoing social policy reorientation and recovery plans in general.

Thus, three major structural flaws of the existing recovery planning could be seen in this regard and should be addressed to redefine the progressive vision of postwar social policy in Ukraine that aligns with the needs and expectations of Ukrainians.

Firstly, there is a tendency to narrow the role of social policies in postwar reconstruction and see it as a set of immediate or middle-term measures to address the social impact of the war and the most crucial problems of the most vulnerable. As Cocozzelli describes it, "discrete amounts of money are directed toward solving discrete problems, and less attention is directed toward broad policy initiatives".<sup>123</sup> However, the design of postwar social policies must go beyond this narrow vision, which is often presented in a managerial manner with prioritisation of its "efficiency". For instance, one of the main goals defined in the Draft Ukrainian Recovery Plan in the social protection field<sup>124</sup> is "compliance of the state's financial obligations with its financial capabilities".<sup>125 126</sup>

Instead, there should be broader debates on the recovery vision, as this vision is indeed political in nature, and any decision-making about the commons and the formulation of the policy problems to be solved; this cannot be reduced to steps for financial optimisation and a list of priority measures to provide for the most vulnerable. The politicisation of recovery debates may help to see welfare as a social right rather than a safety net for the poorest and to express and meet the growing demand for the state's vital role in welfare provision and distributive justice.

Secondly, the potential of social policy in postwar economic growth, a factor often overlooked in ongoing debates, is a significant area of enlightenment. While the annual Ukraine Recovery Conference (URC) consistently includes the topic of human capital, it has traditionally played a supplementary role, as if creating economic opportunities in postwar times would automatically be enough for growth. The discussions about human capital have been primarily limited to improving vocational education, better managing labour supply and demand, and the need to bring back Ukrainians of working age who fled the country because of the war.

While the labour supply is essential for any economic development, the social reproduction of workers is often seen as an individual responsibility. This aligns with the change in the “philosophy” of social policy expressed by state officials, who see its goal as ensuring the “economic independence” of Ukrainians and alleviating radical poverty. However, to achieve economic growth, the state must increase labour market participation through means other than negative employment stimulation, such as social benefits cuts. This could include both better job-matching services and retraining possibilities. Still, it must also include strengthening the state’s role in the social reproduction of workers, such as rebuilding and expanding the network of kindergartens and providing unemployment benefits, social housing and social care services. Since social policy can provide the basic level of security needed for labour market engagement and higher productivity, it is an integral part of the functioning labour market. Without broad social policies guaranteeing this security, Ukraine will also hardly incentivise those workers fleeing the war abroad to return to Ukraine.

This point is supported by existing research. Writing about the postwar recovery in Western Europe, Wilensky underlines the crucial impact of investments in social security on economic growth and unemployment.<sup>127</sup> A World Bank study conducted two decades ago shows that social policy priorities for economic development in post-conflict environments are more important than macroeconomic policy, as the economic

circumstances are distinctive in many aspects from those of other developing countries.<sup>128</sup> It argues that even a minor improvement in social policies at the expense of a slight deterioration in macroeconomic policy would be advisable, as, in a post-conflict situation, it would increase growth by around one percentage point. Based on the study, it is suggested that, among the policy key priorities, social policy should come first, sectoral policies second and macro policies last.

Another critical point missing in discussions of the ways of incentivising postwar economic growth linked to the lack of a social component is the actual quality of jobs that would be created. Exploring Ukraine’s ability to comply with its external debt liabilities – as the country’s dependence on external financial support, as discussed previously, is significant and the national debt has grown significantly since 2022<sup>129</sup> – Hebb and Cooper underline that it is the economically active population who will have to pay back the public debts.<sup>130</sup> Still, the role of the income of the working population in the sustainability of public debt has rarely been recognised. The authors argue that, although austerity measures may have a short-term positive impact on growth, in the long term, their effect is harmful, as it would not allow the creation of the conditions necessary for increasing workers’ productivity and, in turn, their income. Therefore, they suggest widening the discussion on human capital and “moving beyond the quantitative approaches of job creation and unemployment statistics” by incorporating qualitative evaluation associated with the ILO framework of decent work.

Thirdly, a seemingly technocratic approach to the formation of postwar social policies and a secondary role assumed in the recovery leads to its drifting from public debates, unless it takes the form of resentment against a particular cut in benefits or a specific statement of state officials. This also poses a danger for policy formation to become an untransparent process led by particular expert communities and external foreign advisers. Underlining such a tendency in the case of social policy in postwar Kosovo, Cocozzelli shows how this may lock out local participation and labour unions’ involvement and reduce the public discussion of

policy options.<sup>131</sup> Instead, the formation of the postwar recovery and the postwar social policy should be as visible and inclusive as possible to manifest its political nature and render it a profoundly conflicting area full of contradicting expectations and interests of various social groups that should get a chance to be considered in the social policies of the postwar Ukraine.

In the aftermath of the war, the demand for fairness in society usually rises, as the burden of the war, be it the loss of one's property, the loss of health or loved ones, or direct contribution to the country's defence in the army forces is never equally distributed. Moreover, the experience of the war itself is shaped by one's social status and class, as both finances and social capital play an important role in surviving blackouts, ensuring adequate housing and a sufficient diet in times of skyrocketing inflation, and in the possibility to flee to a relatively safer region in Ukraine or abroad. Thus, the social cleavages around different financial situations have already increased. For instance, the study on the impact of the war on the civilians conducted by Cedos has discovered that by the end of 2022, Ukrainians have mentioned people's financial situation (wealth) and the direct experiences of facing the war as the differences that had become the most prominent in this period.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, they have often referred to this by using such words as "gap", "split" and "division".

Therefore, social policy needs to address the claims for social justice after the war before they escalate and take the form of social tensions and political organising that can hardly be addressed solely by social policy. It is social policy that has a proper means of creating safeguards against the possible transformation of social cleavages based on the unequal share of the burdens of the war into political movements that may weaken societal resilience and cohesion in times of war and undermine postwar societal stability. As many scholars have pointed out,<sup>133</sup> the more means-tested approach to welfare may lead to further weakening of social policy support and redistribution among societies, as support is available only for the most vulnerable minorities, while many others receive nothing; moreover, increasing the targeting of

social benefits is not always effective at reaching its primary aim, which is poverty alleviation. In a postwar society, the political risks of increasing the targeting of social programs may be exacerbated. To prevent this, social policy must be expanded, and not only in terms of concrete measures. It should also be understood as a social right, acknowledging the importance of social citizenship as an essential dimension of citizenship in postwar society.

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# **WHAT TO PRIORITISE: SELECTED POLICY DIRECTIONS FOR POSTWAR RECOVERY**

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# WHAT TO PRIORITISE: SELECTED POLICY DIRECTIONS FOR POSTWAR RECOVERY

As for autumn 2024, when this text is being finalised, numerous publications on policy directions and concrete recommendations for a postwar recovery are available. Moreover, as mentioned in previous sections of this policy study, recovery plans in various spheres, including social policy, have also been presented by Ukrainian government officials. In light of this, this section presents those policy directions that need to be additionally strengthened and require attention and support from progressive politicians and their allies in Europe, as their development may be challenging and costly, and those policy directions that are missing from the current recovery plans of the state need to be articulated.

They are selected as being crucial for a more just and sustainable path to postwar development that benefits Ukrainians, prioritises their wellbeing and ensures that their social rights are protected throughout the recovery. These policy directions are based on recognising existing social inequalities and vulnerabilities and the possibility of their cementing or deepening through postwar economic and political processes.

## Housing

- Developing a comprehensive national housing policy rooted in the right to have a home and a housing recovery strategy that set priorities for the reconstruction of the housing stock.
- Establishing a system of long-term social housing with municipal providers and strengthening the capabilities of local self-governments to manage the social housing funds and the demands of those who need it.
- Introducing better regulation of the private rental market and ensuring tenants' rights (e.g., rent caps and anti-eviction legislation).
- Reconstructing and building new housing stock only with accompanying social infrastructure (e.g., healthcare facilities, kindergartens, schools, public transport).
- Developing mechanisms to ensure that each housing or social infrastructure object is rebuilt according to accessibility standards.

## Employment and the labour market

- Designing and implementing measures to address structural unemployment, labour market imbalances and labour shortages caused by the war.
- Investing in creating jobs, in the industrial sector and public, care and green sectors, and providing incentives to private firms to create jobs while ensuring their quality, labour rights, social guarantees and alignment of wages with the cost of living.
- Developing new and upscaling existing programs for training and retraining, improving job-matching services for jobseekers and improving job counselling to better match the labour supply with the demand. Supporting the digitalisation of employment services.
- Redesigning existing employment assistance programs for especially vulnerable populations,



such as older adults, PWDs, single mothers, and young people towards greater effectiveness and better addressing their needs and skills to increase their labour market participation.

- Improving anti-discriminatory provisions in labour legislation.
- Preserving collective bargaining on the local level and social dialogue on the national level. Ensure that trade unions are involved in the formation of policies in the field of employment and social guarantees.
- Safeguarding labour rights in postwar policies overall; ensuring future national labour policies and legislation align with ILO Conventions (including the Core Labour Standards of the ILO) and EU legislations.
- Improving the working conditions (e.g., workload) and remunerations of those working in the social field, primarily social workers. This is to address staff shortages, attract qualified specialists, and prevent the outflow of experienced workers from the social sector.

### **Social services, infrastructure in communities and other support**

- Redistribution of responsibilities in the field of social services provision is needed to ensure that decentralisation is in line with the subsidiarity principle. Addressing the uneven economic development and rising inequalities among communities due to the war. Revising the current model of financing social services and increasing the share of funding for these services from the national budget in communities where social protection funding does not meet demand, especially in de-occupied communities.
- Strengthening the capacities of local self-government in designing, planning and administering social policies on the local level, including the provision of social services, social housing and other forms of support. Ensuring the community's agency in building accessible,

transparent and accountable social protection systems to address local vulnerabilities.

- Addressing the underdevelopment of the social services system in Ukraine. Strengthening and expanding the provision of community-based and family-based social services, particularly integrated services for older adults, daycare and assisted living for PWDs. Continuing and strengthening the state efforts for reforming long-term care and deinstitutionalisation of care for PWDs.
- Developing the capacities of municipal centres to provide social services (including insufficient facilities, staff and transport), increasing the network of social service providers, and improving the quality of services provided and the coverage of vulnerable populations.
- Adopting a human rights-based approach to disability, preventing the medicalisation of disability, and allowing the provision of better-tailored assistance and support to the individual needs of PWDs. Developing the necessary community infrastructure and moving from the current medicalised disability assessment towards a more comprehensive one based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health of the World Health Organization.
- Strengthening the national system of response to domestic violence, especially for families experiencing the effects of war trauma.
- Gender inequality and women's needs should be better taken into account in the formulation and implementation of social policy in postwar Ukraine.

### **Financing the recovery and social spending in the postwar period**

- Redesigning current taxation policies, which are poorly suited to collecting taxes to maximise the budget revenues to maintain social spending and rebuild the social infrastructure, even in the

case of vibrant postwar economic development. Moving from a flat-tax system towards a progressive one and preventing tax evasion.

- Enhancing flexibility in designing local tax policy.
- Maximising job creation strengthens fiscal capacities and sustains the high social expenditures expected in the postwar period.
- Ensuring greater transparency on the financial aid received through credits and loans, preconditions, and spending on the Ukrainian population.
- Ensuring the engagement of trade unions and other social partners in consultations about any structural reforms that could be a precondition of the loans.

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# ENDNOTES

- 1 Although this text often refers to developments in social policies in Ukraine between 2014 and 2022, providing a more detailed description and reflection on the transformation of the welfare model in the country in these years or since Ukraine gained independence in the 1990s would go beyond the scope of this study and require a thorough explanation. For an overview of Ukraine's welfare model and its transformations since the 1990s, see: Chorna, O., A. Heinrich, G. Isabekova et al. (2024) "Sozialsystem und Arbeitsmarkt", in Susann Worschech (ed.) *Ukraine – Portrait einer europäischen Gesellschaft* (Baden-Baden: Nomos); on challenges and developments in social policies during the COVID-19 pandemic, see: Betliy, O. (2021) "[Ukraine's social policy response to Covid-19: A quick but fragmented approach](#)". CRC 1342 Covid-19 Social Policy Response Series, 24: CRC 1342; for a more critical assessment of the reforms launched in the social sphere since 2014 and their impact on women and gender inequality in Ukraine, see: Dutchak, O. (2018) "[Crisis, war and austerity: Devaluation of female labor and retreating of the state](#)". Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 13 July.
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75 This condition excludes the residential property located in temporarily occupied territories or areas of hostilities or residential property unfit for habitation (e.g., due to bombing).

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- 101 The quote belongs to the Minister of Social Policy, Oksana Zholnovych. It is taken from her speech at the event "Protecting social rights in times of war in Ukraine", co-organised by the Ministry of Social Policy of Ukraine and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania on the eve of the High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter in Vilnius on 4 July 2024. It is quoted in "[The subsistence minimum will be canceled – what will happen to social benefits?](#)" Korrespondent.net, 13 August 2024.
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- 103 The quote belongs to the Minister of Social Policy, Oksana Zholnovych. It is taken from an interview given to the parliamentary TV channel "Rada" in August 2024 ("[Social standards: Changing the format of social assistance in Ukraine | Oksana Zholnovych](#)"), as she was explaining the vision of the new social assistance model. As can be seen from a quote, the new approach would also increase the role of the family in welfare provision: while currently, it has a supplementary role, the possible upcoming changes tend to give a supplementary role to the state. For instance, it was said in the interview that if the woman is unemployed, she should not be automatically entitled to unemployment benefits if her husband has a job. If implemented, such an approach would also erode the difference between unemployment benefits, which are paid as part of social insurance and expected to be based on individual contributions with unemployment assistance or low-income assistance paid to the family – which is in line with recent changes in this field.
- 104 In most cases, the amount of social benefits is calculated by multiplying the subsistence minimum by a specific coefficient. The assistance amount can be above or below 100% of the subsistence minimum, depending on the coefficient.
- 105 With an exemption for family members belonging to a number of the social categories recognised by the Ukrainian legislation as needing enhanced social protection, such as children under the age of 6, older persons, and PWDs including children with disabilities.
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This policy study begins by providing an overview of the war's social impact and exacerbation of the existing vulnerabilities in society and structural problems in social policy. It then maps out how the government tackled this on a limited budget while underlining the major shifting points that can be observed in Ukrainian social policy in the last three years. Finally, it defines the role of social policy in postwar recovery and provides a list of key recommendations.

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