

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE POST-WAR RECOVERY OF UKRAINE'S DE-OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

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Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine has caused colossal infrastructure destruction, a humanitarian crisis, and the temporary occupation of large parts of the country [10]. During occupation, Ukrainian governance in those areas was dismantled and the provision of basic services like education, healthcare, and social protection was halted. After liberation, communities face numerous problems: lack of electricity, water, and heating supply, destroyed roads and buildings, mined lands, and an economic downturn. In addition to physical devastation, the freed regions experience an institutional and legal vacuum – a massive shortage of personnel to run local authorities, uncertainty regarding the legality of actions that took place under occupation, and the need to vet or remove collaborators from office via lustration [7]. All this is compounded by significant demographic losses: millions of residents became internally displaced or refugees, and the return of the population is hampered by security risks and destruction. Therefore, the issue of post-war recovery of Ukraine's de-occupied territories is extremely pressing and requires both a comprehensive national strategy and extensive international support.

Ukraine's liberated territories face a host of urgent challenges that must be addressed as priorities. First, there is the physical reconstruction of infrastructure. In many communities, access to basic utilities is absent – electricity, water, gas supply and heating are not functioning. Massive destruction of housing and social infrastructure (schools, hospitals, administrative buildings) has led to a severe decline in the quality and availability of public services [10]. Second, an extremely serious issue is widespread landmine contamination. Retreating Russian forces heavily mined houses, roads, fields and forests in the liberated areas. Ukraine is now among the most mine-contaminated countries in the world: an estimated 174,000 square kilometers (around 30% of its territory) may be littered with mines and unexploded ordnance [4]. Sappers are disabling thousands of explosive devices daily, but complete demining will require years of joint efforts [8]. Third, there are humanitarian and social issues. In the freed territories, schools, hospitals, and social protection offices were non-functional for an extended period; residents endured an occupation-induced humanitarian crisis (shortages of food, medicine, and other essentials). There is a need to restore the operation of educational and healthcare facilities and re-establish social services and support for the population, particularly for vulnerable groups – children, the elderly,

and people with disabilities. Fourth, the demographic and economic challenges are stark. Many liberated communities have seen an exodus of residents and professionals. Economic activity has plummeted due to the destruction of enterprises, security risks, and the loss of workforce. Local economies require stimuli for revival – from concessional loans for businesses to tax holidays – to encourage entrepreneurs to return and create jobs [10]. Fifth, the institutional and legal reintegration of the freed territories is critical. Authorities must be re-established locally, and personnel must be appointed or drawn from other regions to govern the communities [7]. The state needs to ensure legal clarity: passing transitional justice laws, setting procedures for holding collaborators and war criminals accountable, while also providing for possible amnesty in minor cases of collaboration to foster societal reconciliation. An important aspect is overcoming the effects of the occupation's informational and cultural isolation: integrating the liberated areas into Ukraine's unified information space, countering propaganda, and reviving Ukrainian identity in these regions. Each of these challenges is interrelated, and a comprehensive approach to solving them is a prerequisite for the successful revival of the de-occupied communities.

The scale and complexity of Ukraine's post-war reconstruction demand an unprecedented level of international support. Global and regional partners are already playing a key role in providing funding and technical assistance. According to the World Bank, about \$38 billion has been mobilized in partnership with donors for Ukraine since February 2022, of which over \$29 billion has been disbursed as emergency financing [worldbank.org](https://www.worldbank.org). These funds are being used, among other things, to ensure the payment of salaries, pensions, and social programs, and to keep basic government services running even during the war [worldbank.org](https://www.worldbank.org). The estimated need for Ukraine's reconstruction and recovery over the next decade stands at an astonishing \$411–486 billion [12], several times the country's pre-war GDP [6]. Such a financial burden cannot be shouldered by domestic resources alone – hence grants, concessional loans, and investments from international organizations and partners are vitally necessary. Substantial aid is being provided by the governments of the United States, EU countries, the UK, Canada, Japan and others through development agency programs. For example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has for years funded projects in Ukraine for community development, infrastructure, and enterprise support, and during the full-scale war it became one of the largest contributors to reconstruction efforts. Notably, USAID has financed the rebuilding of de-occupied territories, the repair of critical infrastructure, and programs for small and medium businesses; this aid has been especially impactful in the liberated Kherson region, including the revival of the agricultural sector [1]. The European Union is likewise a key partner: in addition to military and humanitarian aid, the EU has initiated a Ukraine Recovery fund for post-war rebuilding, provides macro-financial budget support to Ukraine, and coordinates donor efforts. UN programs, especially UNDP, are focused on humanitarian demining, restoring basic services, and sustainable development. For instance, UNDP in cooperation with the Government of Ukraine is implementing a National Mine Action Strategy, bolstered by contributions from countries like Italy, which provided €1.5 million for humanitarian demining via UNDP [9]. Mine clearance

is considered the first stage of economic recovery, as only by clearing fields of mines can agriculture, infrastructure, and safe life in communities be restored [9]. Another direction involves projects by the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which invest in rebuilding energy infrastructure, transportation networks, and housing. For example, the World Bank's emergency RePower project (\$500 million) is aimed at urgent repairs of electricity transmission and heating systems before winter worldbank.org. In addition, global partners are providing expertise and advisory support: experts in post-conflict reconstruction from the Balkans (who have similar experiences) are engaged, and joint international working groups are focused on recovery, reforms, anti-corruption, and other policies. Thus, international cooperation has become the cornerstone of the recovery process – without it, Ukraine would find it extremely difficult to cope with the unprecedented post-war challenges on its own [4].

It is important to consider concrete case studies that illustrate practical approaches to rebuilding de-occupied territories. In Ukraine, pilot reconstruction projects are already underway in liberated areas. For example, in 2023 the “Side by Side” initiative was launched, under which 15 regions of Ukraine have taken on the patronage of rebuilding 26 liberated settlements in Kherson region [5]. Various provinces are sending construction teams, volunteers, and equipment to war-torn communities in Kherson to restore housing and infrastructure and create conditions for residents of Kherson region to return home [5]. This is an example of inter-regional solidarity and effective mobilization of the country's internal resources. In Kharkiv region – large parts of which were occupied in 2022 – programs supported by UNDP and the EU are working to restore critical infrastructure and carry out demining: schools and rural clinics are being rebuilt, power grids repaired, and farmland cleared of explosives, among other efforts. Local communities are collaborating with international organizations such as HALO Trust to accelerate demining and educate the public on mine safety. In the liberated areas of Mykolaiv and Kherson regions, the Ukrainian Legal Development Network, in cooperation with the Czech organization People in Need, and with funding from the UK government, is implementing a humanitarian response coordination project “Link” that focuses on legal needs of the communities [2]. Through this platform, residents of freed communities can receive legal consultations, assistance in restoring documents, resolving land and social issues – in essence, it helps fill the legal vacuum that emerged during the occupation. This example demonstrates a model of public-civil partnership with international donor support to solve urgent grassroots problems.

On the path of rebuilding, it is important to implement cooperative mechanisms that ensure long-term sustainability of the results. One promising model is public–civil society partnership – actively involving civil society organizations, volunteer movements, and local businesses in recovery projects jointly with government bodies. As Ukraine's experience in the war has shown, volunteers and civic initiatives play an enormous role in meeting people's needs; integrating them into official reconstruction programs will allow more effective identification and solving of problems on the ground. Another model is inter-municipal and inter-regional solidarity, wherein more capable communities assist those that suffered. The “Side by Side” program is precisely an

example of institutionalizing such assistance domestically. Similarly, at the international level, twin cities and associations of local governments in Europe can forge partnerships with Ukraine's liberated communities, providing expert support, equipment, and materials. Already dozens of European cities have pledged to sponsor the reconstruction of specific towns in Ukraine [11], and this movement should be expanded. The next component is the diaspora and migrants. The global Ukrainian community, numbering over 20 million people [3], has actively mobilized to help the homeland since the invasion began. The Ukrainian diaspora has been fundraising, delivering humanitarian aid, and conducting advocacy campaigns in support of Ukraine abroad. There is growing focus on engaging the diaspora in investment and reconstruction: networks of highly skilled professionals of Ukrainian origin abroad (for example in IT, science, engineering) can act as a bridge for transferring technologies and expertise, as well as directly investing in recovery projects. Diasporas have traditionally played an important role in post-conflict reconstruction, acting as a kind of "grassroots diplomats" and development investors [3]. Another key aspect is the private sector. Public funds and international aid cannot cover all needs, so conditions must be created for businesses to participate in rebuilding. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) can be an effective tool: the government would offer investors guarantees and incentives (tax breaks, insurance mechanisms against war risks), and businesses would invest in restoring infrastructure, building housing, and generating employment. Even now there are initial signs of interest from private capital: in 2023 over \$4 billion in foreign direct investment flowed into Ukraine, indicating that investors see opportunities despite the war [6]. The Ukrainian government recognizes that stimulating such participation requires reforms – strengthening the rule of law, transparency, and anti-corruption institutions – in order to attract private investment in reconstruction. In sum, the sustainable development of the liberated territories will be built on synergy: close collaboration among the state, communities, international partners, the diaspora, and the private sector toward the common goal of reviving peaceful and prosperous life.

The post-war reconstruction of Ukraine's de-occupied territories is a multifaceted process requiring coordinated efforts by national and international actors. The analysis has shown that the Ukrainian government and society are faced with simultaneously resolving infrastructural, security, socio-economic, and legal tasks of unprecedented scale. To successfully overcome these challenges, support from the global community – financial, technical, and humanitarian – is vitally necessary. International partners have already contributed billions of dollars to stabilize and rebuild Ukraine, and this assistance will need to continue for years to come. At the same time, Ukraine must use this period to carry out key reforms, plan reconstruction according to the "build back better" principle, and ensure transparency and accountability in the use of funds. Only the combination of internal transformations and external support will create a foundation for the sustainable development of the liberated regions.

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