



**EUNPACK**

A CONFLICT SENSITIVE UNPACKING OF  
THE EU COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH  
TO CONFLICT AND CRISES MECHANISM

## POLICY BRIEF

# A Summary of Perception Studies in Ukraine

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## Summary and Recommendations

This brief presents the results of a perception study that assessed how local stakeholders in Ukraine considered the EU's approach to crisis management and its commitments to local ownership and conflict sensitivity. The data for this study were collected through a quota-based survey conducted in selected locations across Ukraine in July 2017. Questionnaires were administered via 190 face-to-face and telephone interviews with target groups that included Internally Displaced People (IDPs), traders/entrepreneurs, NGO activists, security sector officers, local council representatives and other actors and practitioners that represent categories of actual and/or potential beneficiaries of EU crisis response instruments, programmes and policies.

While more than half of the respondents considered themselves to be professionally involved in crisis response, only a minority said that they personally benefited from EU crisis response instruments. The survey has shown that the EU remains among the top-three most recognised international actors involved in crisis response in Ukraine; among the different instruments deployed by the EU in that framework, respondents were most aware of political/diplomatic activities, development aid, and humanitarian assistance. The survey also showed that perceptions about the effectiveness of the EU's crisis response vary across regions. For nearly half of respondents the EU's presence has had positive effects, for a third it has either aggravated or had no effect on the crisis.

During the survey interviews, some respondents pointed to the perceived criticalities of the EU's crisis response endeavours: above all, the EU's actions seem to come 'too little, too late' and should be reframed as partnership rather than assistance.

Moreover, proceeding from respondents' inputs, we can formulate some policy recommendations:

- a) EU crisis response actions should take into account regional variations and peculiarities: local counterparts should be targeted through tailored initiatives, distributing projects in a more balanced way across the country;
- b) the EU should improve its own monitoring mechanisms when allocating funds and better display its commitment as a credible and transparent donor and grant provider: budgetary procedures should be exercised to ensure greater transparency and accountability of all actors involved;
- c) the EU's crisis response actions in Ukraine should offer a long-term strategic vision on issues such as the reintegration and resettlement of IDPs and the rehabilitation of war veterans;
- d) more and better organised information is recommended through the establishment of regional EU platforms and resource centres.

The survey may be considered to be both a good 'barometer' of local actors' perceptions about the EU's crisis response and a series of fresh inputs to improve the EU's approach to the crisis in Ukraine.

## 1. Survey Objectives and Data Collection (methodology and sample design)

This brief presents the findings of a perception study undertaken in Ukraine during the summer of 2017 and offers policy recommendations based on this research. The study aimed to conduct a proper evaluation of the EU's conflict sensitivity and crisis response in the country, and was designed to assess recipients' perspectives, considering both the local partners / practitioners involved in crisis response projects, programmes and initiatives, and the actual / potential grassroots beneficiaries of EU policies and instruments. To what extent do the EU's missions and activities convey an approach characterised by local ownership and conflict sensitivity? (Ivashchenko et al. 2017).

The present study seeks to understand how EU crisis response policies are perceived on the ground and to investigate possible consequences of the interventions.

The data presented in this brief were obtained from 190 face-to-face and telephone interviews conducted in July 2017 in four regions of Ukraine:

- 1) **Kyiv / centre** (Ukraine's capital city and selected towns in the surroundings, including Bucha, Dudarkov and Kotsiubynske);
- 2) **Kramatorsk / eastern border region** (since 2014, the new administrative centre of Donbass territories under the control of the Ukrainian authorities, and selected towns in the eastern border region including Slavyansk, Bakhmut, Lisichansk, Pokrovsk, Avdiivka, which are located in the conflict border zone next to the contact line);
- 3) **Odessa / southern border region** (the administrative centre and a southern border port city on the Black sea, and selected smaller cities in the surroundings including Izmail, Ovidiopol, Kodyma, Chornomorsk);
- 4) **Lviv / western border region** (the administrative centre of the western border region, and several smaller satellite towns in the Lviv area including Mostyska, Zymna Voda, Gdizdychiv).

A snowball-sampling approach was adopted to reach a gender-balanced quota-based sample of several targeted groups including:

- 1) IDPs from Donbass (37 respondents);
- 2) IDPs from Crimea (19 respondents),
- 3) Traders and entrepreneurs (32),
- 4) NGO activists (36),
- 5) Border guards (25),
- 6) Representatives of local councils and city administrations (31),
- 7) Other practitioners from security sector institutions such as the police and the Joint Center on Control and Coordination.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Joint Centre on Control and Coordination is established by the Trilateral Contact Group of senior representatives of Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the OSCE in October 2014 to deal with the issues related to the ceasefire regime and the stabilisation of the situation in Donbass. See: <http://www.osce.org/home/125118>.

Specific groups were selected to reflect the different policy sectors targeted by the EU's crisis response engagement, namely the threefold set of actions identified in Ivashchenko et al. 2017: 1) humanitarian assistance as well as technical and financial support for Ukraine's reform path, including the deployment of the EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform in Ukraine; 2) 'multilevel' restrictive measures and sanctions; and 3) political dialogue and engagement in diplomatic formats. This sample design strategy might explain the relatively high number of respondents who declared themselves to be professionally involved in crisis response (53 per cent).<sup>2</sup>

The researchers involved in the data collection opted for a non-probability sample, in view of the small number of respondents involved in the EUNPACK fieldwork guidelines (190 respondents make for a reasonably good quota selection but do not constitute a representative sample: the standard nationally representative sample for Ukraine, a country with a population of 42 million, varies from 1,800 to 2,200 respondents). Although purposive sampling (circumscribed to specific target groups) made statistically valid generalisations and cross-group comparisons unlikely, the findings can be considered illustrative for the sampled population. Also, as the selection of respondents was made in such a way as to reach out to active and knowledgeable informants (to avoid a high non-response rate), the final sample was quite internally homogenous as per religion, social status and level of education. Consequently, no statistically significant variations in perceptions across smaller groups can be observed (usually, a group of fewer than 50 respondents constitutes a problem for grounded generalisations).

No questionnaire was self-administered (i.e. filled out by the respondent). All information was obtained through interview to provide clear-cut verbal clarifications of the questions and to avoid errors and misunderstandings (all interviewers used the same set of agreed definitions and explanations during the interview sessions).<sup>3</sup>

As for the socio-demographic profile of the respondents, it should be noted that:

- all of them are of working age, with a majority being from 26 to 60 years;
- nearly 88 per cent are Ukrainians; among other nationalities and ethnic groups in the sample are Russians, Crimean Tatars, Bulgarians, and Armenians. Accordingly, most interviews in Kyiv and Lviv were conducted in Ukrainian, while in Odessa and Kramatorsk Russian questionnaires were also distributed, in accordance with Ukraine's current linguistic map;
- only 10 per cent of respondents were born outside Ukraine (or the USSR, before 1991): other birthplaces include either neighbouring countries within the former USSR (Russia, Belarus, Moldova, Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan) or other states formerly affiliated to the 'socialist field' (German Democratic Republic, or Cuba);

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<sup>2</sup> The formulation of the respective question ("Are you professionally involved in *any* crisis response in your country?") had no clear-cut reference to specific involvement in the EU's crisis response. Consequently, by declaring themselves to be 'professionally involved' the respondents often implied a generic professional proximity to crisis-related social problems, projects or missions, as well as involvement in economic activities that have been affected by the crisis (such as production capacities displacement, war-time market cut-offs, etc.) and targeted by the follow-up EU interventions (such as Support Group for Ukraine (SGUA) initiatives in the correspondent sectors).

<sup>3</sup> The 'Survey Handout' is reported in full and stored as an annex to the survey quantitative data, available at: <http://www.eunpack.eu/resources>.

- the majority of respondents are Orthodox Christian (57 per cent); among other religious groups (8 per cent) are Greek-Catholic, Muslim and other religions, with 10 per cent of respondents expressing no religious belief;
- the majority of respondents (89 per cent) attended school from 14 to 20 years, which refers to postsecondary level (with no illiterate persons in the sample);
- the majority of respondents (77 per cent) defined themselves as of 'average' and 'more than average' income, always or most of the time satisfying their needs (71 per cent); less than a quarter of respondents (21 per cent) defined themselves as very 'poor' or in a 'less than average standard', with nearly 6 per cent rarely or never able to satisfy their basic needs.

## 2. Facts & Analysis

### 2.1 Awareness and satisfaction about the EU

The data reflects an in-depth awareness across different target groups sampled by the survey of international actors involved in crisis response in Ukraine: all 190 out of 190 respondents knew that some international actors were involved in crisis response in their own country, and 167 out of 190 (nearly 88 per cent) were able to mention the EU first among the other actors.

As the questionnaire was designed in a way that required double-checking in question number SJ2 ("Do you know of any international actors involved in crisis response in your country?", if not aware of the EU, the interview should have been stopped). A stand-out group of 15 respondents should be mentioned here because their responses were somewhat contradictory: on the one hand, they refused to mention the EU among the international actors involved in crisis response in Ukraine, but on the other, they criticised the EU for being inefficient, thus implying that it is actually engaged in some crisis response sectors.

Either way, the EU remains one of the top-three international actors perceived as being involved in crisis response in Ukraine (88 per cent, not counting the respondents who first dismissed the EU, and 96 per cent if they are included), together with the United Nations (91 per cent) and the OSCE (86 per cent). Less awareness about the EU was demonstrated among respondents in the eastern region and among the groups of IDPs from Donbass across different locations.

Regardless of the perceived effectiveness, if one breaks EU crisis response down into the different instruments deployed, there are variations: the majority of respondents seem to be more aware of the EU's engagement at the political and diplomatic level<sup>4</sup> (75 per cent), as well as in the sectors of humanitarian assistance and development aid (both 74 per cent), than in security sector reform (61), rule of law (58) and capacity-building (53). However, these levels of awareness vary across locations (see Figure 1): respondents from Kyiv and Lviv are more aware of EU crisis response actions in the areas of capacity building and the rule of law, while respondents from outside the capital city are more

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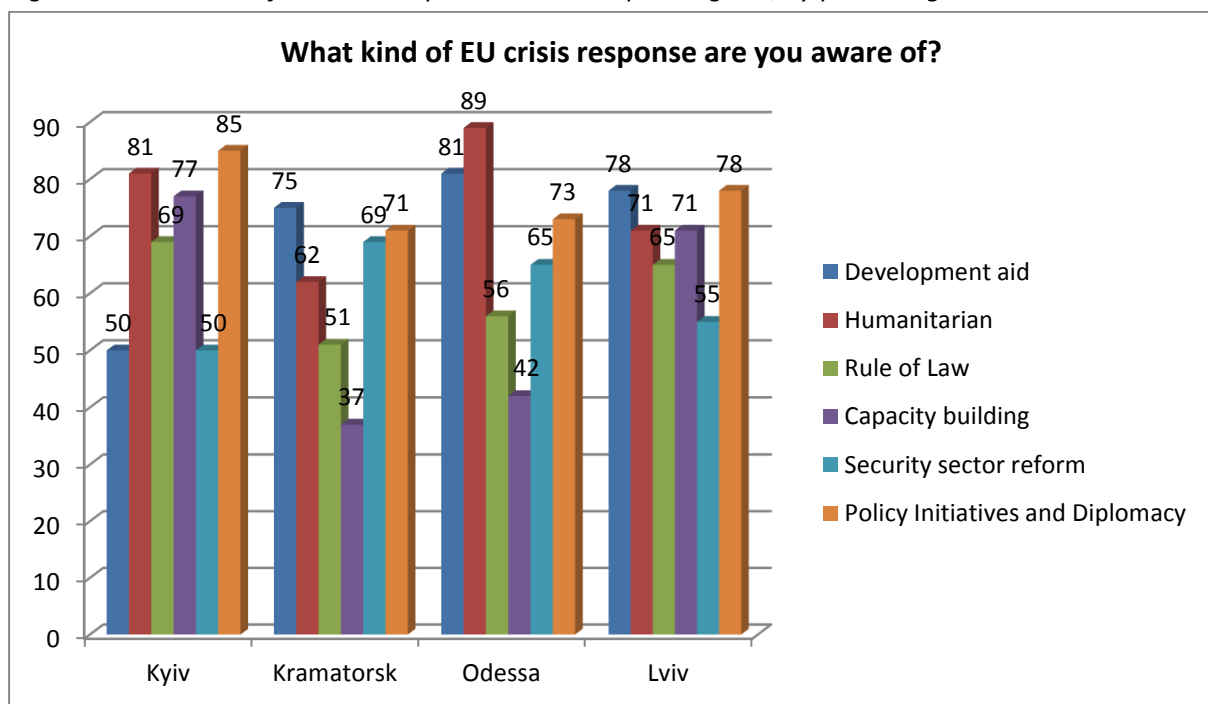
<sup>4</sup> According to the 'Survey Handout' during the interview sessions this item was termed 'Policy Initiatives and Diplomacy' – as stated in the master English questionnaire, and was explained to the respondents as the sets of EU actions that have given EU support to Ukraine in the international arena.



aware of the EU's development aid and respondents located in the eastern and southern border regions are more informed about the EU's commitments in Ukraine's security sector reforms.<sup>5</sup>

In some cases, awareness about one or other sector of the EU's intervention also reflects the proximity of respondents to the respective sectors, due to their personal or professional involvement: for example, 80 per cent of the sampled border guards were aware of EU's initiatives in the field of security sector reforms (compared to 40 per cent among IDPs from Donbass). That could be explained by the fact that insiders' information about institutional and policy changes related to the presence of international actors is different from what is known by the general public. This is justifiable in the case of security sector but less acceptable in the context of other support programmes because the non-participation/exclusion of some target groups can lead to their alienation and disaffection with the EU in general.

Figure 1. Awareness of EU crisis response in the sampled regions, by percentage



It is worth underlining that the questionnaire focused on satisfaction with the EU's crisis response mechanisms rather than on the evaluation of their effectiveness, as respondents were not necessarily beneficiaries of the specific programmes being assessed. Thus far, the data illustrate general perceptions rather than experience-based opinions and yet they convey interesting trends in Ukrainian public opinion that might reveal how successful the EU's crisis response outreach is (see Figure 2).

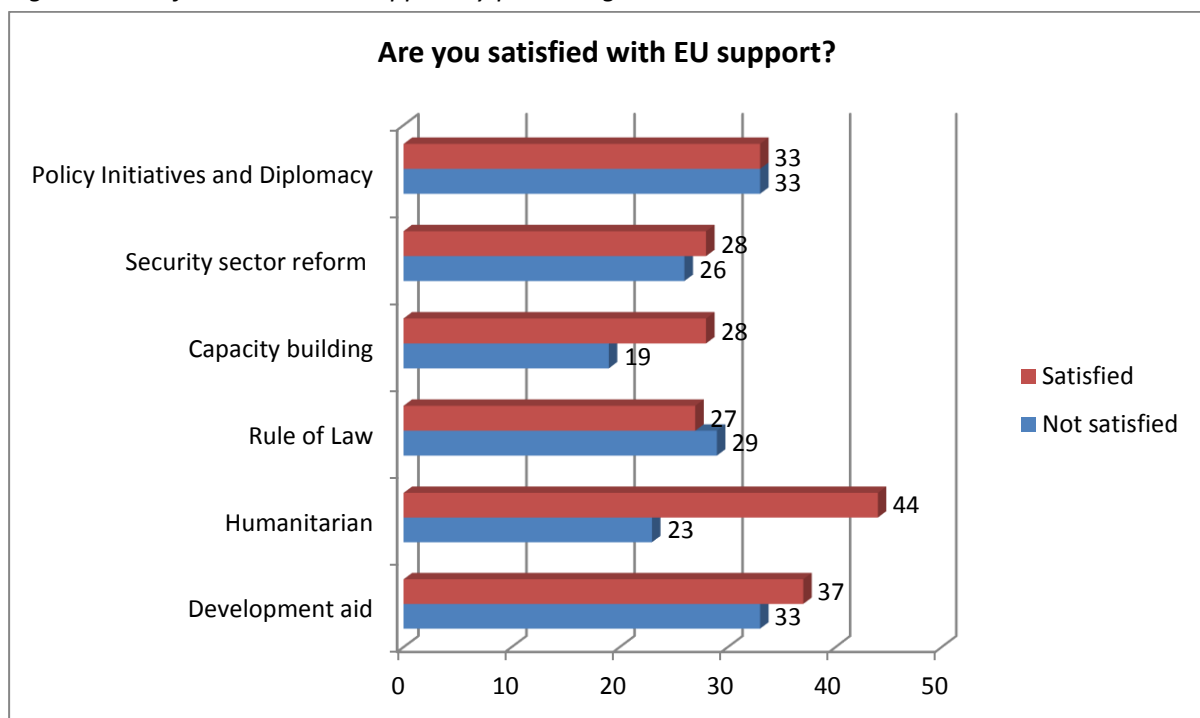
One significant trend revolves around the level of satisfaction expressed by respondents in relation to EU support: humanitarian assistance and development aid seem to be the types of support that satisfy

<sup>5</sup> While the latter finding seems not to reflect EUAM's geographic presence (whose headquarters are in Kyiv and regional (field) offices in Lviv and Kharkiv), it might instead be consistent with EUBAM's geographic presence (with its headquarters in Odessa and five field offices on the Moldova-Ukraine border). While EUBAM is not directly/univocally engaged with security sector reform, that mission was present in the country earlier, its existence might thus be more 'rooted' in some respondents' minds.

respondents more than other types of interventions (see Figure 2). This partly reflects the fact that the abovementioned sectors are also the ones that respondents are more aware of, although not always and not necessarily attributed as the direct EU support (as many respondents argued during the informal part of the interviews).

Finally, EU support also emerged as a 'divisive' rather than consensual issue, especially in the case of political/diplomatic activities, which seem to be associated with the most ambivalent attitudes: levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with that type of EU support are virtually equal. During the informal part of the interviews some respondents drew a parallel between the 2008 conflict in Georgia and the current crisis in Ukraine, pointing out that the weakness of the EU position in the pre-crisis stages even acted as a catalyst for the crisis, whilst post-crisis actions, in spite of EU's 'good intentions', have not been effective in 'taming' the international behaviour of the Russian Federation.

Figure 2. Satisfaction with EU support by percentage



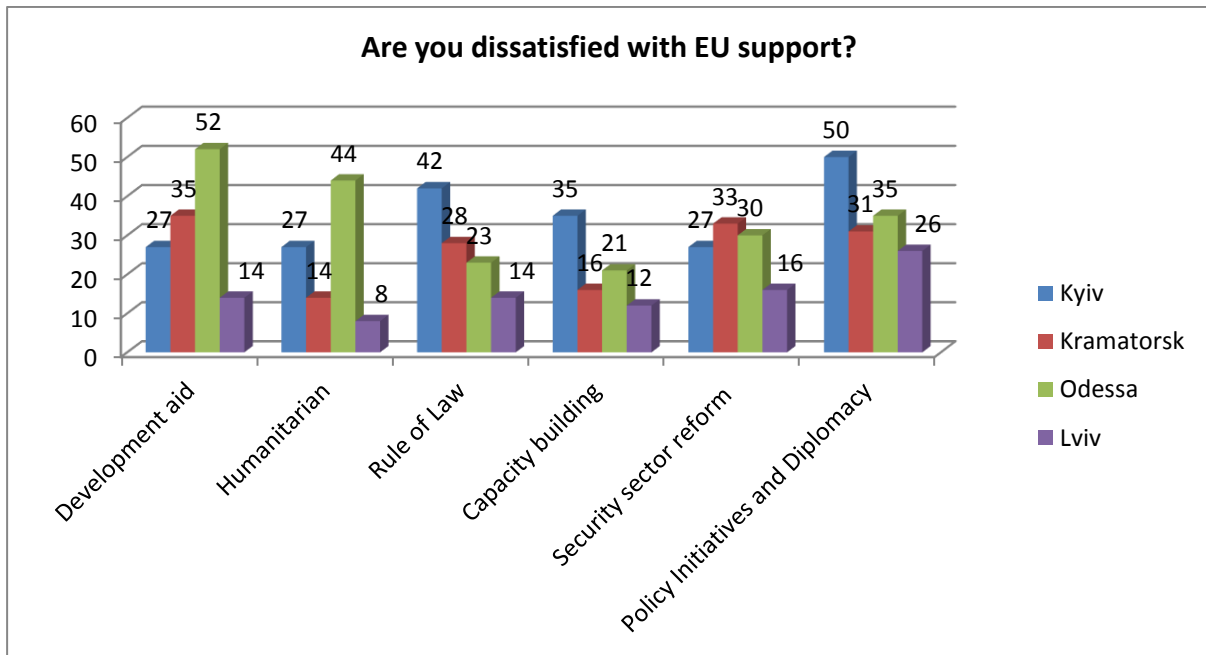
\*'Satisfied' is a cumulative percentage of 'satisfied' and 'very satisfied', and 'not satisfied' is a cumulative percentage of 'not so satisfied' and 'not at all satisfied'. Only respondents who knew about specific programmes were asked if they were satisfied (percentage of total is given in the figure).

Cross-regional data on dissatisfaction with EU support reflect peculiar distributions:

- 1) the cumulative percentage of 'not at all satisfied' and 'not so satisfied' is lower in Lviv for all types of support;
- 2) Kyiv shows a much higher level of dissatisfaction with the rule of law, capacity-building and political/diplomatic initiatives than do other regions;
- 3) the level of dissatisfaction with humanitarian assistance and development aid is much higher in Odessa than in other regions;

- 4) nearly a third of respondents in Kyiv, Kramatorsk and Odessa are dissatisfied with EU security sector reform, which is of less concern in Lviv (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Dissatisfaction with EU support in the sampled regions, by percentage



Although statistical significance of the further inter-group comparisons is limited by the sample size, one can admit that the two relatively large groups of respondents (professionally involved and not involved in crisis response) have different views on their levels of satisfaction with EU support in Ukraine. Specifically, those who are professionally involved are far less satisfied with development aid, rule of law, capacity-building and security sector reforms, while for humanitarian assistance and political/diplomatic initiatives the level of dissatisfaction is virtually equal (see Figure 4). Across the categories, statistically significant variations are only observed in respondents' views on development aid and security sector reform: specifically, the share of those who are not satisfied is higher among IDPs and traders / entrepreneurs (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2). In general, one may speculate on the higher degree of dissatisfaction among respondents who define themselves as being professionally involved in crisis response: by being closer to the dynamics that shape, mould and affect the design of crisis-related interventions they might be able to formulate structured critiques and see the actual interests, hidden agendas and working methods of the different stakeholders, beyond the declarations.

Figure 4. Dissatisfaction with EU support in the groups professionally involved or not involved in crisis response, by percentage

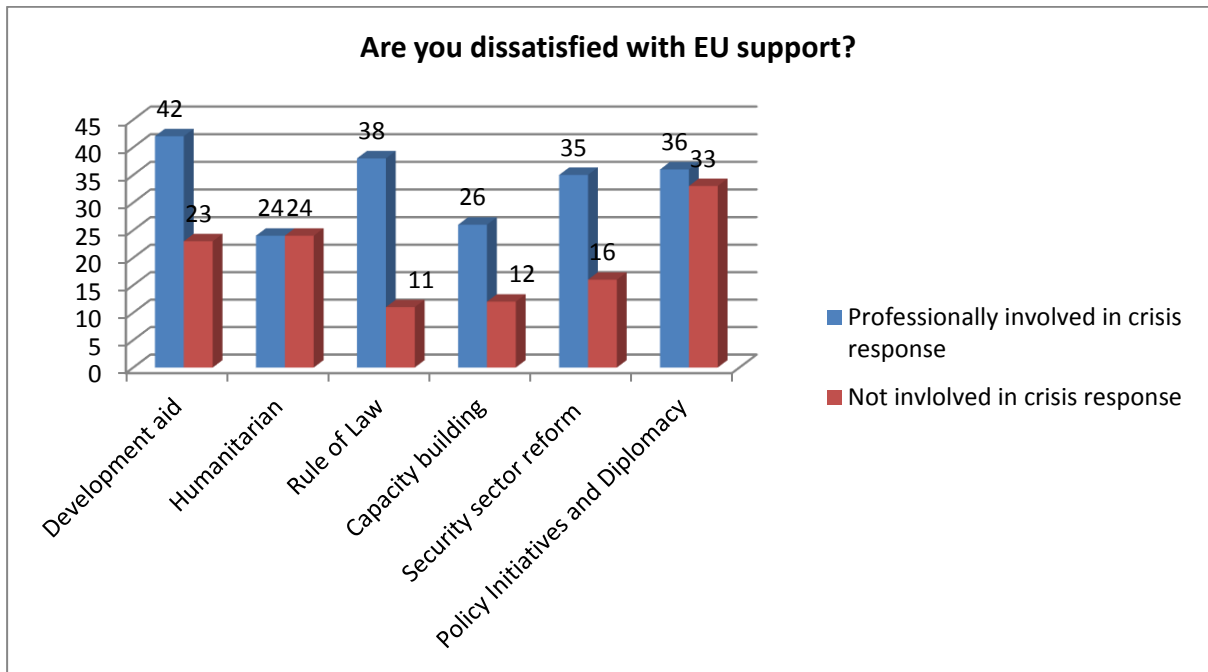


Figure 4.1 Satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the EU's development aid in the sampled respondents' categories, by percentage

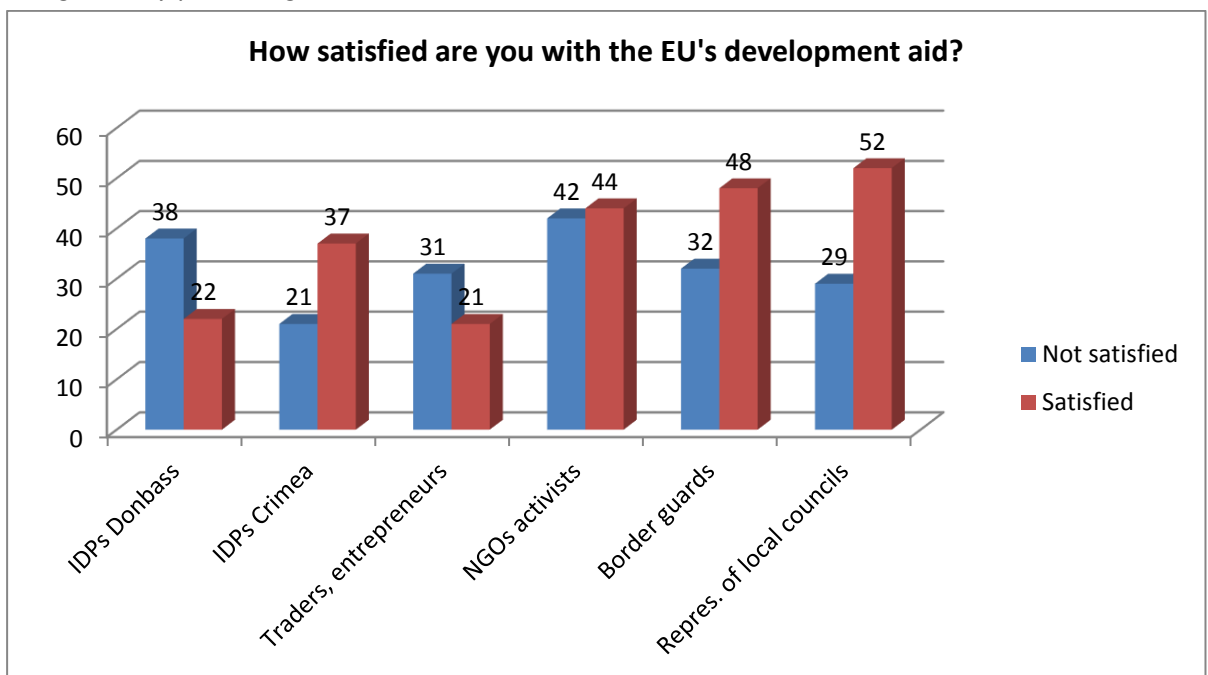
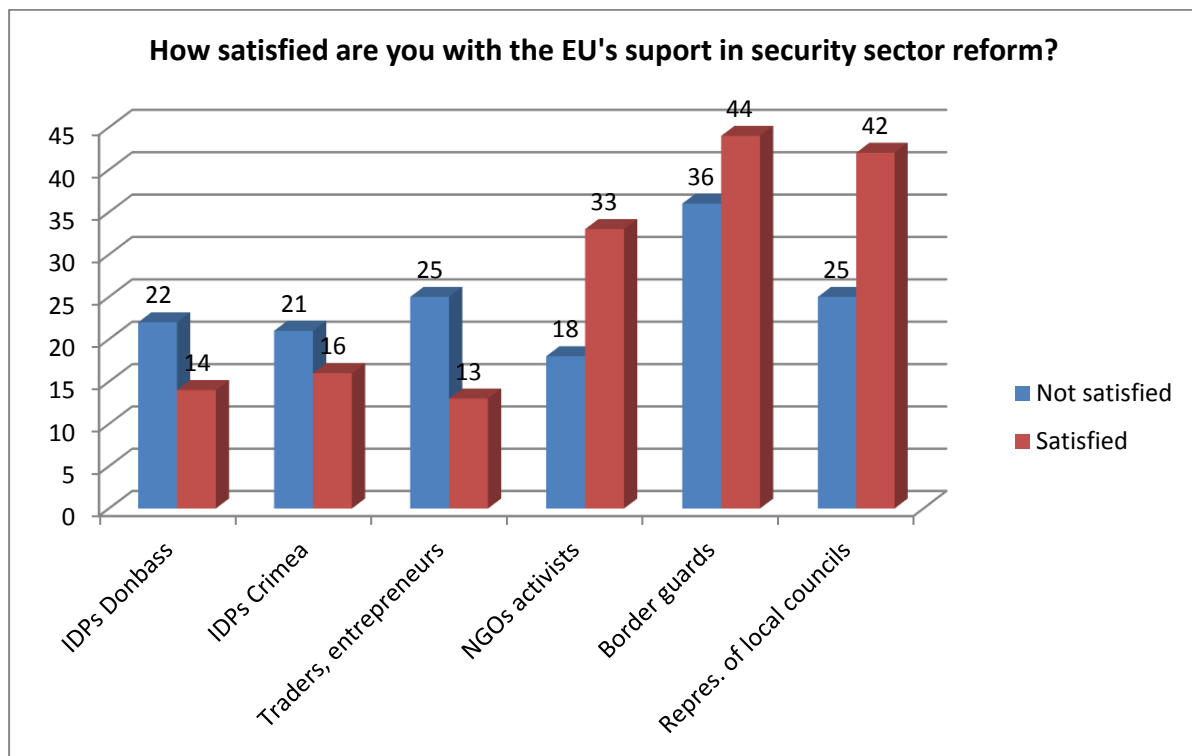


Figure 4.2 Satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the EU's support in security sector reform in the sampled respondents' categories, by percentage



When asked to identify the beneficiaries of EU support in the framework of its crisis response mechanisms, more than 50 per cent of respondents named the following groups:

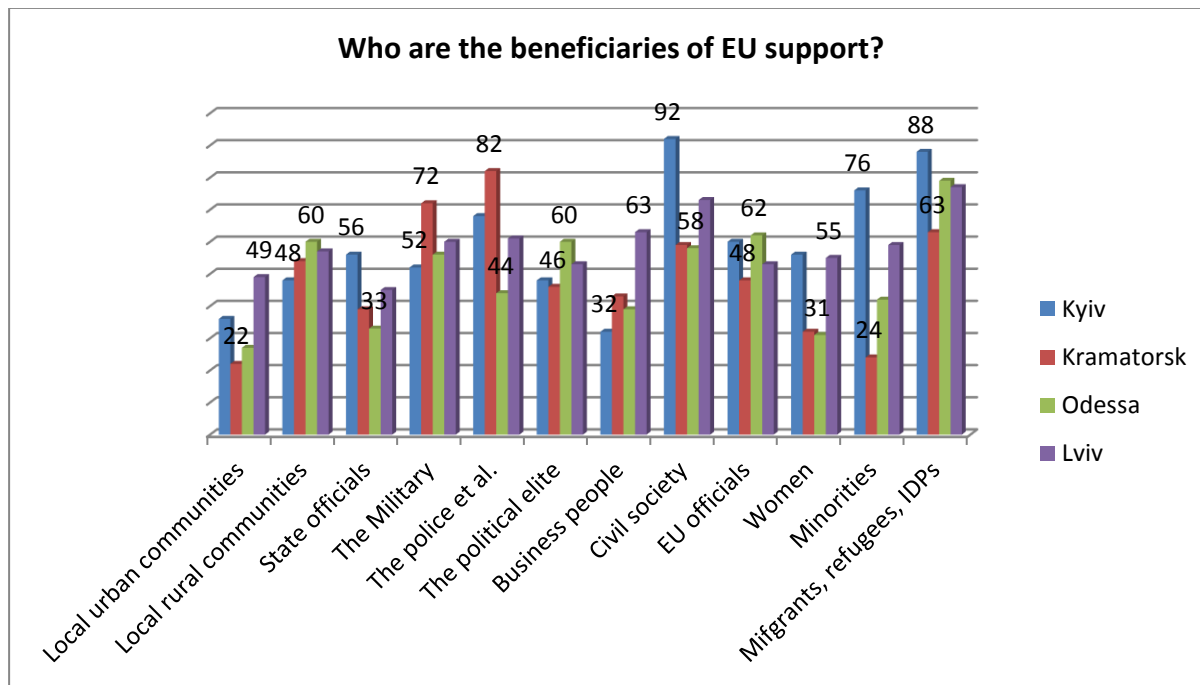
- 1) migrants, refugees, IDPs (72 per cent),
- 2) civil society (64),
- 3) the police and other security forces (61),
- 4) the military (59),
- 5) local urban communities (53),
- 6) EU officials (53), and
- 7) the Ukraine's political elite (50).

Interestingly, local rural communities are named as beneficiaries by nearly a third of respondents and, together with women and state officials (both nearly 40 per cent), make up the lowest group of beneficiaries. For those who are professionally involved in crisis response the ranking is similar, although some groups, such as business people, women and state officials, are more often named as beneficiaries. Each of the sampled regions has its own profile of top beneficiaries: in Kyiv, the top-three are civil society, IDPs / migrants and minorities; in Kramatorsk they are the police, the military and IDPs; in Odessa they are IDPs, EU officials, the political elite and urban communities; in Lviv the top-three are migrants, civil society and business people (see Figure 5).

Some interesting correlations are also observed across demographic groups: young and educated respondents as well as women name civil society as beneficiaries more often than others (presumably, due to their greater involvement in NGO activities); male respondents more often name the police and

other security forces as being among the beneficiaries (this may reflect their greater awareness of the correspondent field). No other statistically significant difference across groups and categories is seen in the data.

Figure 5. Views on the beneficiaries of EU support in the sampled regions, by percentage



## 2.2 Personal experience with the EU and general views on the EU involvement in Ukraine

Only 26 out of 190 respondents mentioned that they had personally benefited from programmes, projects or initiatives undertaken in the framework of the EU crisis response mechanisms (only nearly 14 per cent of the total sample). Most of the beneficiaries group are IDPs, NGOs activists, and traders/entrepreneurs with an equal gender and nearly equal age distribution (a majority of beneficiaries are aged between 26 and 60), with more than 14 years of schooling and with a ‘less than average’ to ‘average’ financial status, living outside Kyiv (25 out of 26 beneficiaries live in the border regions). Most respondents had received humanitarian assistance or were involved in capacity-building initiatives (including education and training). The majority of beneficiaries (85 per cent) were satisfied with the EU actions of which they had been direct recipients, and estimated it as ‘well-targeted’ (62 per cent) and ‘sufficient’ (65 per cent). However, these generally optimistic views do not necessarily coincide with a positive assessment of the overall EU crisis response mechanisms in Ukraine. Among the sub-group of beneficiaries, less than a half estimated that the EU’s interventions had “helped to alleviate the crisis”.

With reference to the total sample, half of the respondents (50 per cent) estimated that the EU’s interventions had helped to alleviate the crisis in some way; on the other hand, for a third of the sampled group they had either aggravated the crisis (5 per cent) or had no effect at all (28 per cent). The results show that only 29 per cent of the respondents were subjectively better off after the EU’s crisis interventions, while 6 per cent considered themselves to be worse off and 53 per cent were about

the same as they had been before the EU's interventions. The majority of respondents claimed that the lack of the EU's conflict sensitivity and promptness in crisis response remained the main obstacles for EU effectiveness in Ukraine. According to some, the effectiveness of crisis response mechanisms is endangered by the fact that the conflict itself had not been stopped in the first place ('war and peace' issues elicited comments from many respondents during the interviews). One digression should be added to clarify the apparent ambiguity of respondents' perceptions on the EU's conflict sensitivity (see also Figures 6 and 7). Both Russian and Ukrainian translations of the very terms "conflict sensitive" is "taking conflict into consideration"; therefore, when respondents stated that the EU's interventions were considered "conflict sensitive", they generally meant that the EU took the conflict into consideration and designed some actions accordingly (this explains the percentages in Figures 6 and 7). At the same time, some respondents explained that the EU officials did not fully understand the actual *nature* of the conflict, its premises and early symptoms, resulting in rather simplistic accounts of it.

The comparative data below demonstrate that regions have different levels of optimism in assessing the effectiveness of EU involvement in Ukraine: Lviv is generally more positive in viewing the EU's interventions and their effects on recent developments, while Kyiv has the most critical views (see Figure 6).

The majority of the sub-group of beneficiaries includes IDPs, NGO activists, and traders/entrepreneurs with equal gender and nearly equal age distribution (with a majority of beneficiaries from 26 to 60), more than 14 years of schooling and with a 'less than average' to 'average' financial status, living outside Kyiv (25 out of 26 beneficiaries live in the border regions). Although statistical significance of cross-group comparisons is limited by the small sample size, and no robust difference can be traced in the data, one can still observe some variation across respondents' categories (see Figure 8): the number of those who think they are worse off after the EU's interventions is higher among traders/entrepreneurs, those most affected by war-time economic deterioration, and IDPs from Crimea, who often consider themselves to be in a precarious situation both from a legal and social-assistance point of view (compared to other target groups). However, if one 'isolates' the category of Crimean IDPs, it can be seen that 47 per cent of them state that they are better off after the EU's crisis interventions (this rate is higher when compared to other categories of respondents, who on average consider their situation to be improved in 29 per cent of replies). This ambivalence may be explained by the fact that, on the one hand, Crimean IDPs consider themselves to be marginalised in the international actors' agenda; on the other hand, a considerable share of Crimeans consider their condition to be improved by having moved out of the annexed territories and trying to start a new life in larger Ukrainian cities. They also tend to define their status not only in social terms but also in terms of political inclusion/exclusion (these comments were expressed during the informal parts of the interviews).

Figure 6. Positive views on the EU involvement in Ukraine in the sampled regions, by percentage

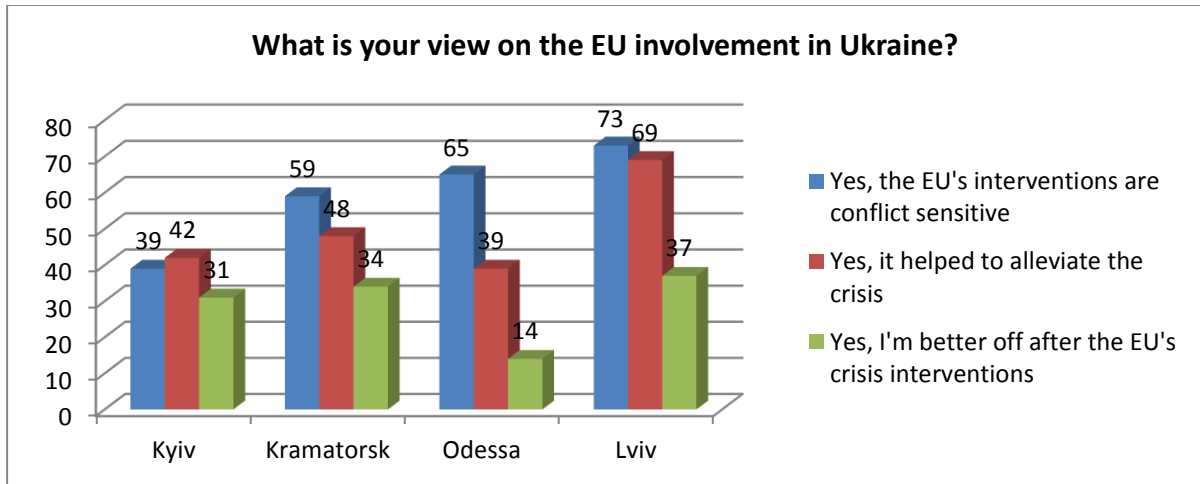


Figure 7. Positive views on the EU's involvement, in Ukraine in the sampled regions, by percentage

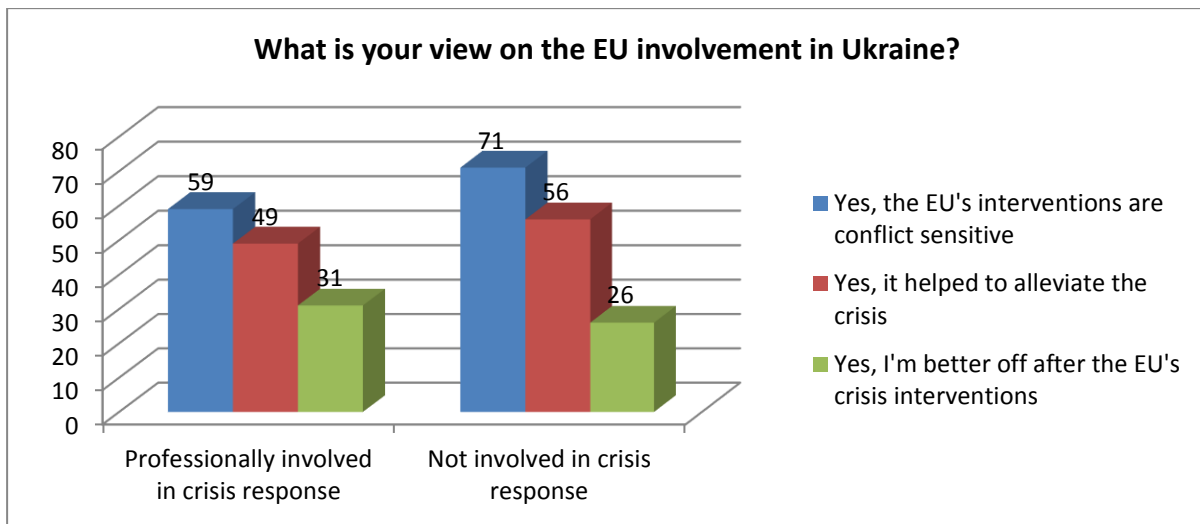
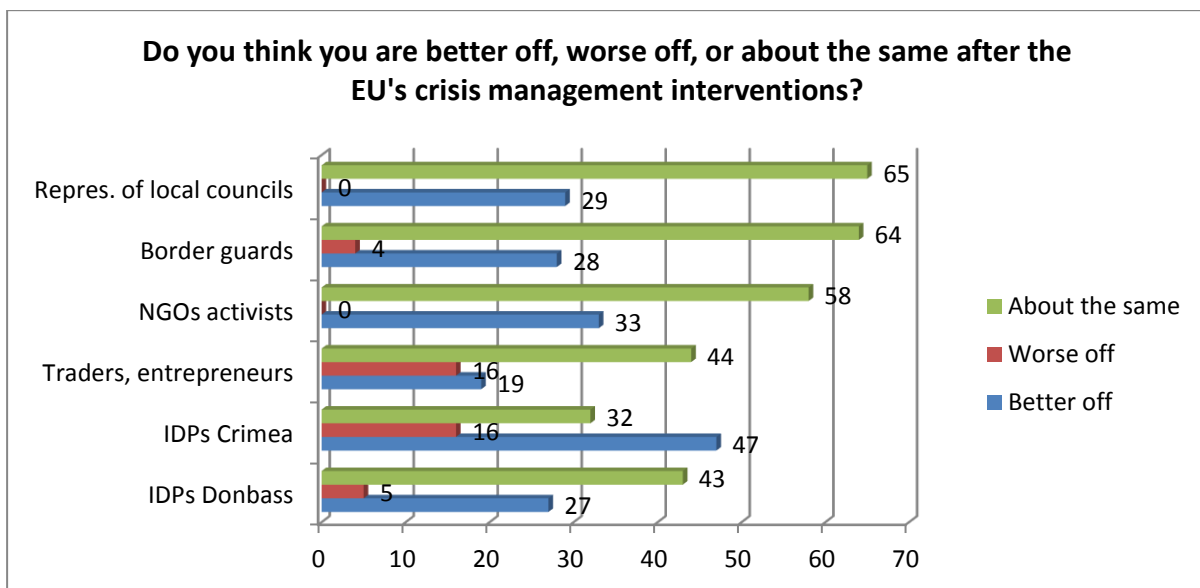


Figure 8. Views on changes in personal situation after the EU's crisis management interventions in the sampled respondents' categories, by percentage





### 2.3 Informal (qualitative) sections of the survey

Some respondents also expressed their views beyond and behind the structure provided by the questionnaire.<sup>6</sup> The interviewers took note of these comments as they often conveyed valuable information about respondents' perceptions, attitudes and interpretations of the issues presented by the survey. Some of these comments seem to reflect the polarisation prompted by the common perceptions about the role of the EU and its presence in the country, which is currently considered to be disappointing, misleading, often too bureaucratic and, at the same time, characterised by a weak strategic vision. Some respondents expressed the need for the EU to clearly identify who is politically responsible for the ongoing conflict in the country; moreover, they appeared disillusioned by the gap between declaratory statements and practical, decisive actions.

Moreover, according to several respondents, there are problems in both analysing/understanding the situation on the ground (for example, the southern region is allegedly neglected while more consideration is required by developments unfolding in provinces such as Odessa and Kherson) and communicating what the EU actually does in the country (the need to improve the dissemination strategy and to organise an information campaign has been often mentioned, in order to let Ukrainian citizens know about the opportunities offered to some potential recipients such as entrepreneurs, women, young people etc.).

Finally, even though humanitarian assistance is considered to be rather effective and satisfactory, there is a perceived lack of long-term strategy for the reintegration and resettlement of IDPs. Similarly, the lack of a long-term strategy has been observed in relation to war veterans (returning from the Anti-Terrorist Operation Zone), i.e. technical support in launching rehabilitation centres, introducing demobilisation programmes etc.

## 3. Policy Recommendations

Respondents' perceptions and attitudes seem to signal the need to adjust, first and foremost, the way the EU institutions and officials report the conflict and acknowledge the political and security dynamics unfolding in the country.

- a) In addition to the need for restating the place of Ukraine as a member of the European family, the EU's actions should be adjusted and re-designed to take into account regional variations and peculiarities: in other words, the conflict is manifesting different consequences and effects in different zones of the country, which should not be treated as a 'black box' to be targeted with one-size-fits-all instruments and replicable templates. Resources should be re-distributed accordingly, carefully considering that state officials and elites are in the process of re-shaping their relation of trust vis-à-vis Ukraine's local constituencies and the public. The survey data show that residents of the two largest cities (Kyiv and Lviv) are more aware of EU crisis response actions. It implies that the EU must better endorse its visibility in other regions of Ukraine, especially those neighbouring the conflict areas (to the east and south of Ukraine);
- b) Special attention should be paid by the EU to oversight and monitoring mechanisms when allocating funds: transparency, accountability and anti-corruption measures are issues of major

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<sup>6</sup> Their comments are reported in full and stored as an annex to the survey quantitative data.

concern for local recipients and public opinion. In that respect, some respondents pointed out that the very format of the funds allocated is not well-conceived: there is a general perception that loans have been wasted by ‘grant-eaters’ and employed for ‘paper-making’, allegedly in the context of large-sized organisations in the capital city or at least in urban areas. The EU should better display its commitment as a credible and transparent donor and grant provider in Ukraine, also making good use of different media.

- c) The EU’s crisis response actions in Ukraine should pay careful attention to sensitive and multifaceted issues. For instance, the survey displayed a perceived lack of long-term strategy for the reintegration and resettlement of IDPs. Similarly, a lack of long-term strategy has been observed, also in relation to war veterans (returning from the Anti-Terrorist Operation Zone), i.e. technical support in launching rehabilitation centres and introducing demobilisation programmes.
- d) Different media channels should be integrated in boosted communication strategies, also supported by the establishment of regional EU platforms and resource centres; more and better organised communication strategies would help to contour the image of the EU, increase the awareness of public opinion and more efficiently reach out to groups potentially targeted by EU projects, activities and programmes.

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