UN SCORE for Eastern Ukraine

Adaptive psychosocial functioning

The UN SCORE for Eastern Ukraine (USE) is a sophisticated analytical tool designed to improve the understanding of societal dynamics in the five eastern oblasts of Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia. USE helps to identify strategic entry points for policies and programs that contribute to strengthening social cohesion.

USE is based on the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index methodology, originally developed in Cyprus by the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development and UNDP. The SCORE Index has since been implemented across several countries in Europe and elsewhere to assist international and national stakeholders in the design of evidence-based solutions that can strengthen social cohesion and reconciliation efforts.

USE is jointly implemented by three UN entities – UNDP, UNICEF, and IOM. The first USE wave was conducted in 2017 and was funded by the UN, with a major contribution from the EU.

The USE process began with a series of consultations with authorities and civil society representatives in Kyiv and in each of the five oblasts in order to develop a conceptual model of what constitutes social cohesion in eastern Ukraine (Figure 1). The first USE wave, which was completed in October 2017, captured the views of some 10,000 people residing in the five oblasts in the east of Ukraine. Specifically, it comprised a face-to-face general population survey of 5,300 respondents; a school survey of 3,300 pupils in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts; 72 in-depth interviews; and a face-to-face survey of 1,500 people residing in the non-government controlled areas who commute to the government-controlled areas across the five checkpoints in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. The results presented in this brief are shown at the oblast level in Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts, and at the sub-oblast level in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts to allow for a more granular analysis. For more information on USE and the results of the first wave please visit use.scoreforpeace.org.
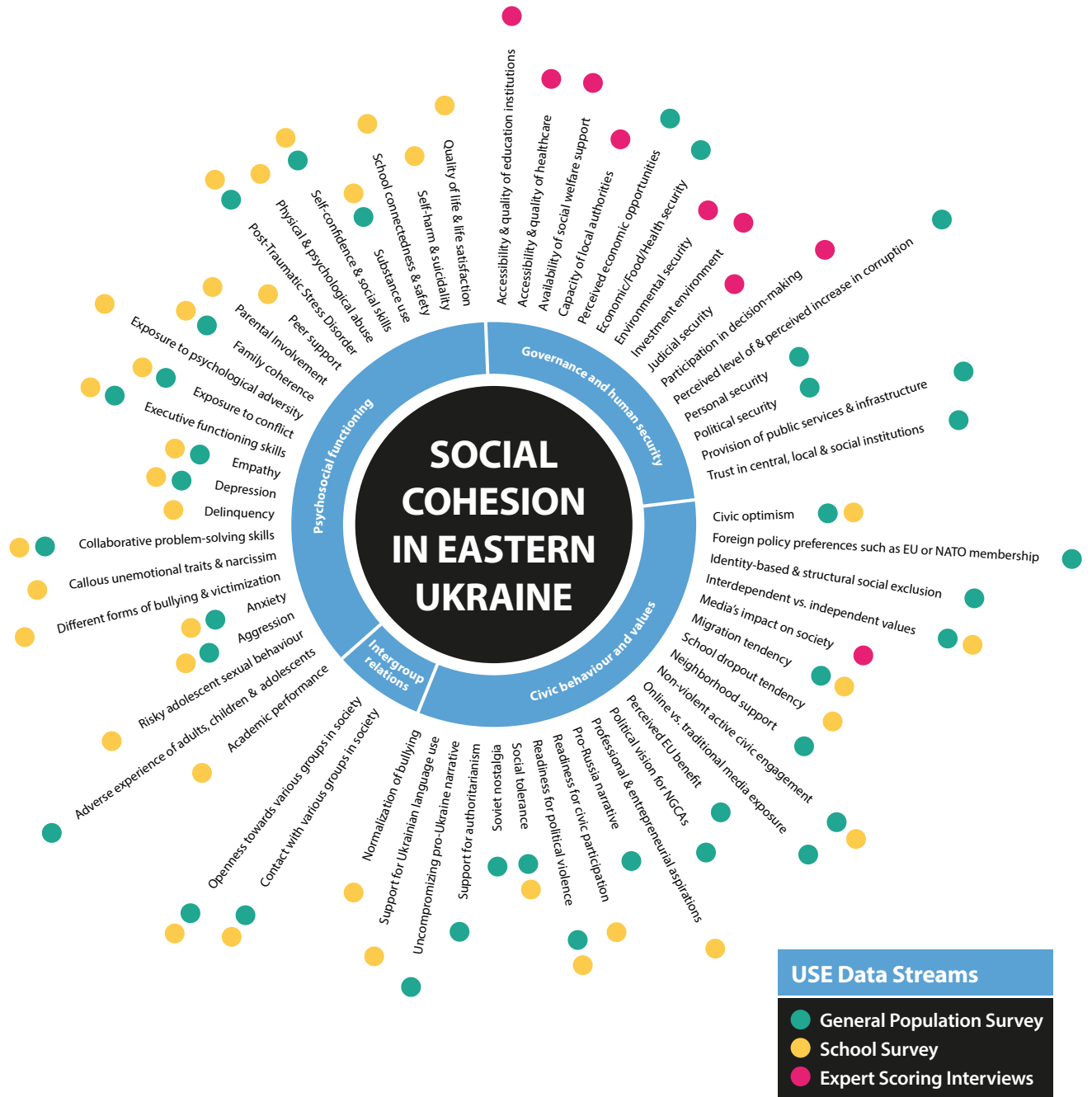
Figure 1. Conceptual model for social cohesion in eastern Ukraine

USE Outcome 1:
Adaptive psychosocial functioning

This brief outlines the key findings from USE outcome 1: adaptive psychosocial functioning. Understanding psychosocial functioning skills at an individual level and how these relate to social cohesion is a complex task and requires a multidisciplinary approach. Thus, this outcome comprises 11 components: self-confidence, empathy, family coherence, social skills, collaborative problem-solving skills, executive functioning skills, aggression, anxiety, depression, substance use, and post-traumatic stress disorder.[1] When combined, these 11 components provide a measure of adaptive psychosocial functioning, with the overall regional score for adaptive psychosocial functioning being 7.8 (Figure 2). A score of 0 indicates that most if not all people completely lack the psychological skills and traits that help to adapt and function within society as healthy individuals; and a score of 10 indicates that most if not all people possess strong and adaptive psychosocial skills and traits. While there is no significant difference in the overall scores for the five oblasts (the overall score for Donetsk oblast is 7.8, and for Luhansk oblast is 7.9), some of the 11 components reveal geographic differences that should be taken into account. Similarly, while a demographic overview shows that there is no difference in the overall score for psychosocial adaptation with regard to gender, age, level of education, level of income, employment status or settlement type, there are discernable demographic differences within some of the 11 components.
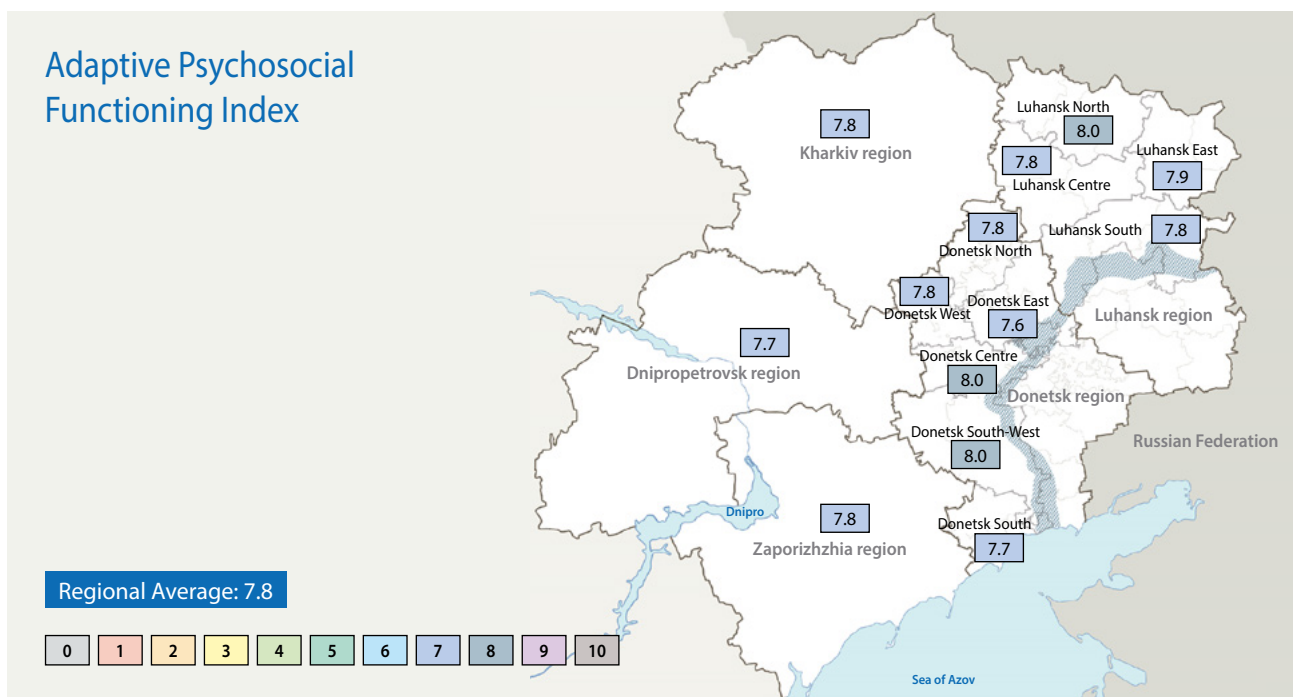

Figure 2: Scores for adaptive psychosocial functioning

Understanding adaptive psychosocial functioning

While the overall score for adaptive psychosocial functioning shows that this is one of the key strengths of the residents of eastern Ukraine, closer analysis of the 11 indicators reveal particular strengths and weaknesses. In terms of strengths, family coherence (Figure 3) and executive functioning skills (Figure 4)[2] emerge as the leading indicators, creating a solid foundation in terms of support networks and every-day interaction in public life.

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[1]   A description of each of these 11 indicators can be found in the USE glossary at use.scoreforpeace.org

[2]   Family coherence refers to relations with family members and relatives and the strength of familial ties. Executive functioning skills refers to the ability to control impulses, consider consequences of actions, plan tasks and focus attention on multi-tasking.
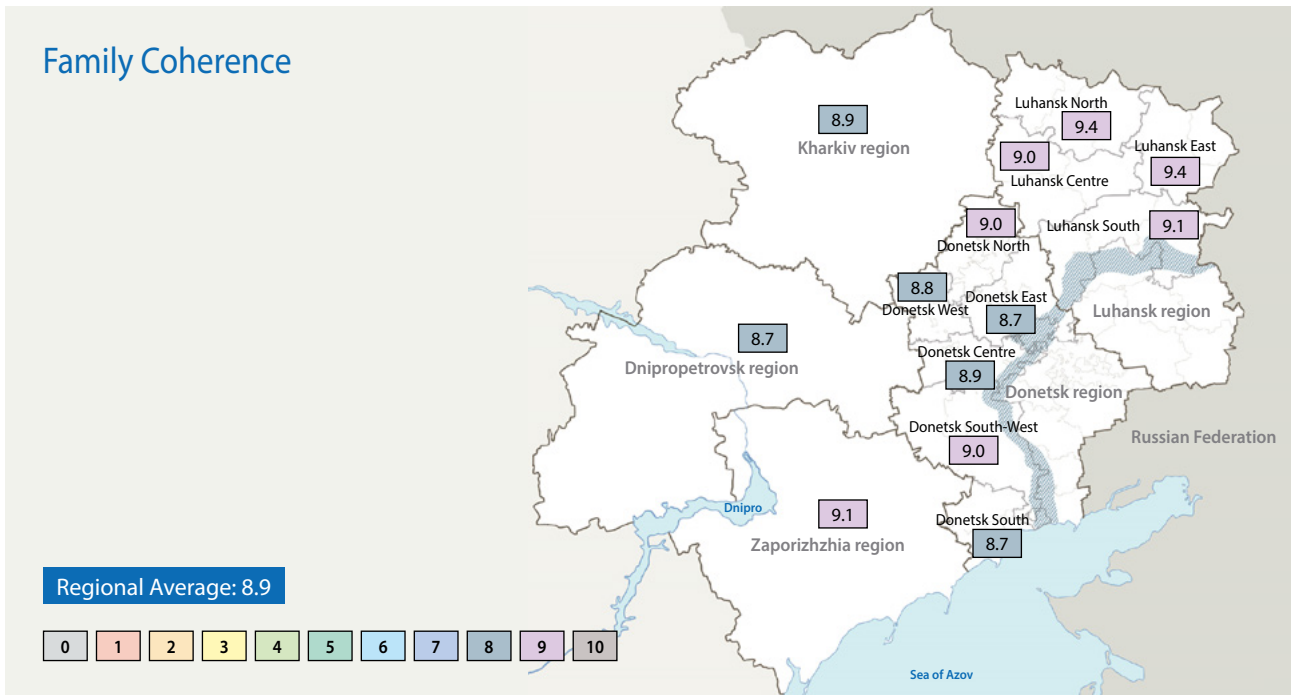
Family Coherence

Luhansk North 9.4
Kharkiv region 8.9
Luhansk Centre 9.0
Luhansk East 9.4
Donetsk North 9.0
Luhansk South 9.1
Donetsk West 8.8
Donetsk East 8.7
Luhansk region
Dnipropetrovsk region 8.7
Donetsk Centre 8.9
Donetsk region
Donetsk South-West 9.0
Russian Federation
Dnipro
Zaporizhzhia region 9.1
Donetsk South 8.7

Regional Average: 8.9

0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10

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Figure 3: Scores for family coherence

Executive Functioning Skills

Luhansk North 8.7
Kharkiv region 8.3
Luhansk Centre 8.7
Luhansk East 8.8
Donetsk North 8.5
Luhansk South 8.7
Donetsk West 8.6
Donetsk East 8.3
Luhansk region
Dnipropetrovsk region 8.4
Donetsk Centre 8.9
Donetsk region
Donetsk South-West 8.9
Russian Federation
Dnipro
Zaporizhzhia region 8.6
Donetsk South 8.4

Regional Average: 8.5

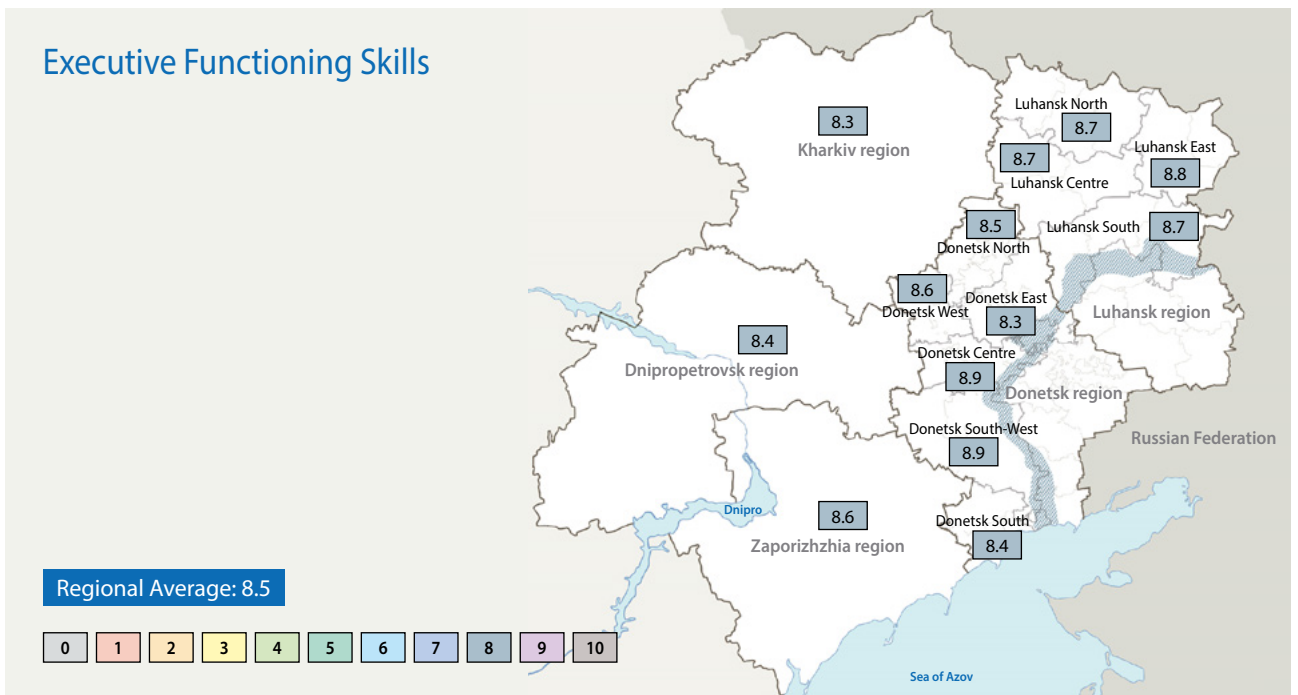0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10

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Figure 4: Scores for executive functioning skills

In terms of weaknesses, however, the scores for anxiety (Figure 5) and depression (Figure 6) deserve attention.[3] With regards to anxiety, Dnipropetrovsk oblast has a higher score than many of the clusters of raions directly bordering the conflict area, with the exception of eastern Luhansk oblast. One possible explanation may be that people who live in close proximity to the contact line have developed strong coping mechanisms for dealing with the hardships and insecurities that have become "a way of life" in recent years. Moreover, women have significantly higher levels of anxiety. Levels of anxiety also significantly increase with age, meaning that older people feel stronger anxiety compared to younger people. The data shows that people with higher levels of education and income tend to have lower levels of anxiety, with a similar tendency with regard to employment (i.e., employed people are likely to have less anxiety than those who stay at home, e.g., unemployed, retired, maternity leave, etc.).

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[3]   Anxiety refers to the degree to which one feels anxious or insecure to the point that he or she finds it difficult to stop worrying. Depression refers to the degree to which one feels depressed or in a constant state of sadness.
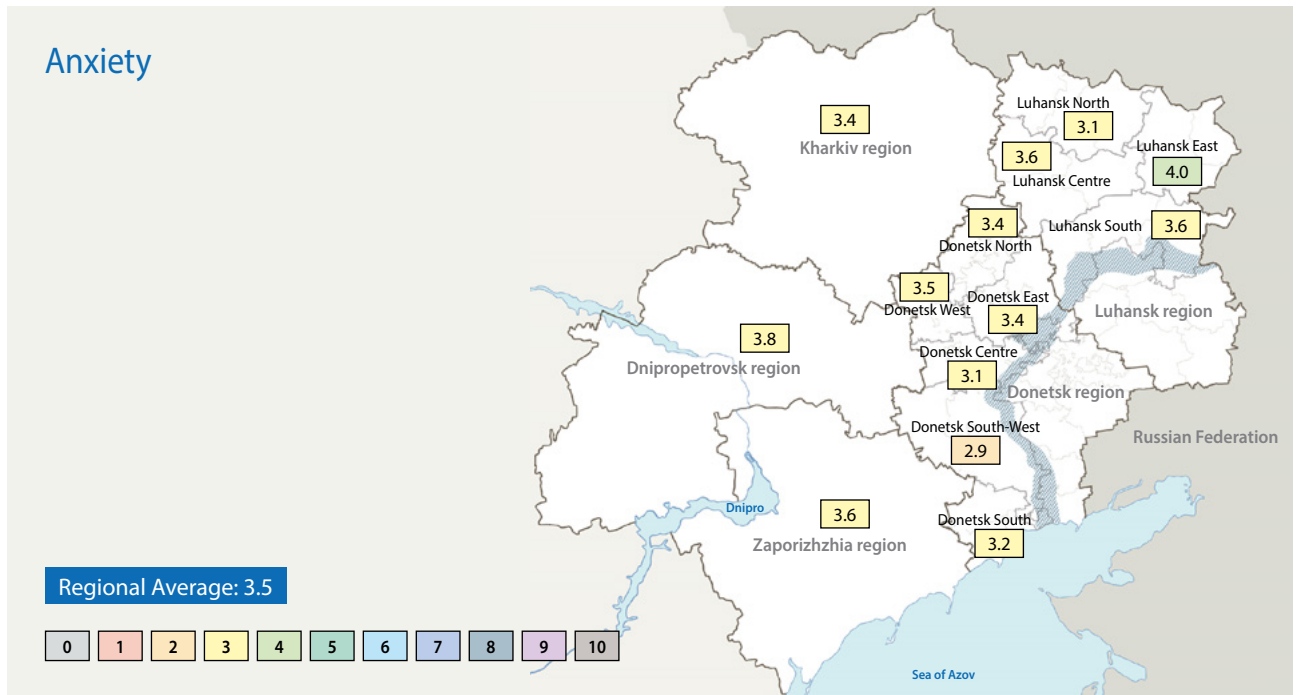
Figure 5: Scores for anxiety

With regards to depression, highest scores are once again found in Dnipropetrovsk oblast and eastern Luhansk oblast, but also in eastern Donetsk oblast. However, unlike anxiety, a demographic breakdown shows that rather than age and gender, income is most related to depression. In other words, as the level of income decreases, tendency for depression tends to increase.
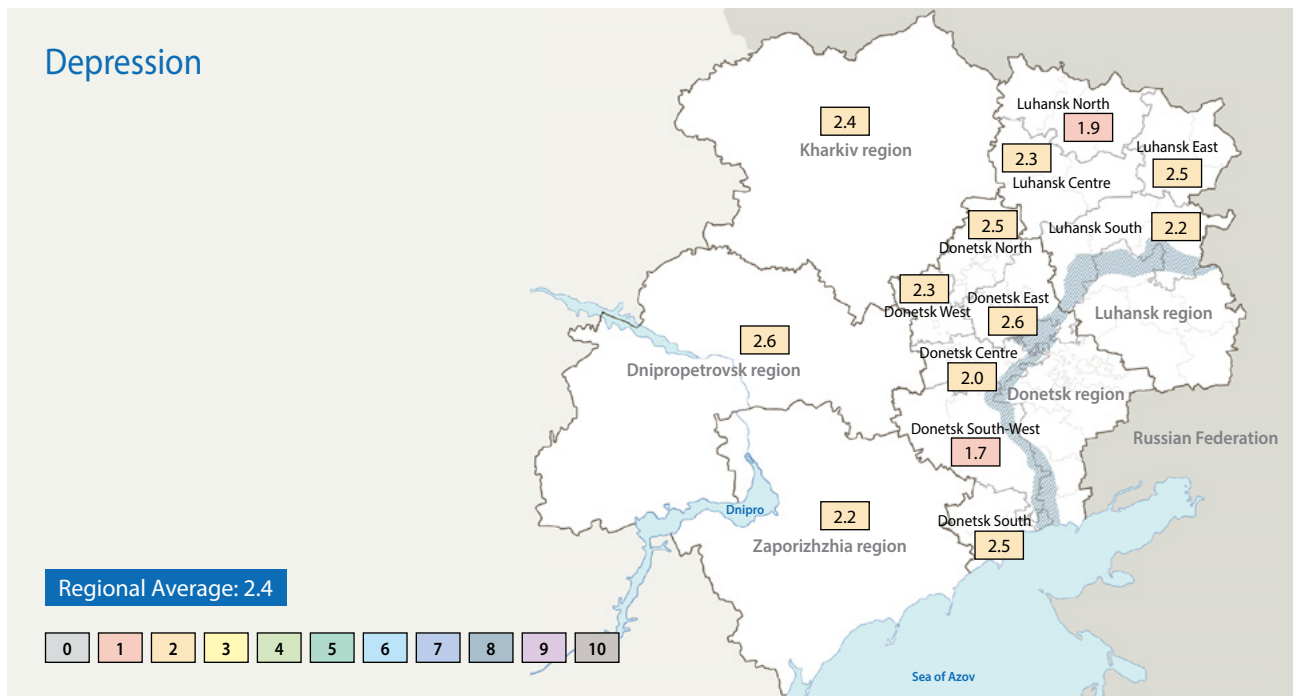

Figure 6: Scores for depression

What impacts on adaptive psychosocial functioning?

The predictive path analysis illustrated below (Figure 7) helps us understand the value-based, behavioral and contextual factors (so-called drivers) that help individuals develop healthy coping mechanisms and adaptive psychosocial functioning skills. The predictive analysis (Figure 7) reveals that the three most significant factors impacting on adaptive psychosocial functioning are: i) interdependent values[4]; ii) adverse experiences of adults,

4   Interdependent values refer to the preference to follow societal norms and traditions and caring for the wellbeing of others.

children and adolescents[5]; and iii) readiness for political violence[6]. Additionally, social exclusion[7], online media exposure[8] and perceived level of corruption[9] also seem to play an important role in this outcome.
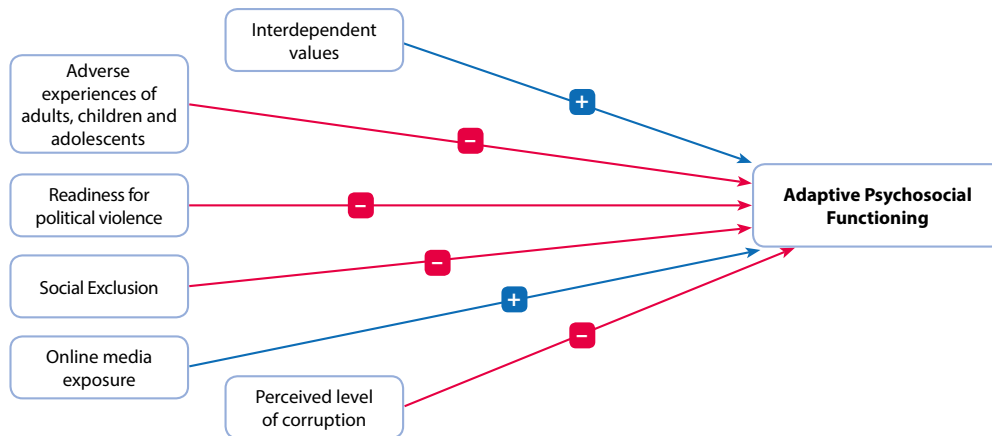

Figure 7: Factors that have the most significant impact on adaptive psychosocial functioning. Red arrows indicate a negative association, and blue arrows a positive association. The thickness of the arrows indicates the strength of the relationship

The average score for **interdependent values** (which has the strongest positive impact on adaptive psychosocial functioning) is 7.3 (Figure 8), where 0 indicates that nobody in society shares interdependent values, and 10 means that everyone in society shares a strong sense of interdependent values. The analysis suggests that people who exhibit strong interdependent values are more likely to have more resilient coping mechanisms. The scores for interdependent values are similarly strong across the east of Ukraine, with central Donetsk oblast and central and eastern Luhansk oblast showing higher scores while Dnipropetrovsk oblast, where scores for anxiety and depression are high, shows the lowest score. A demographic breakdown of this indicator also reveals that women and older people play a significant role in upholding interdependent values.
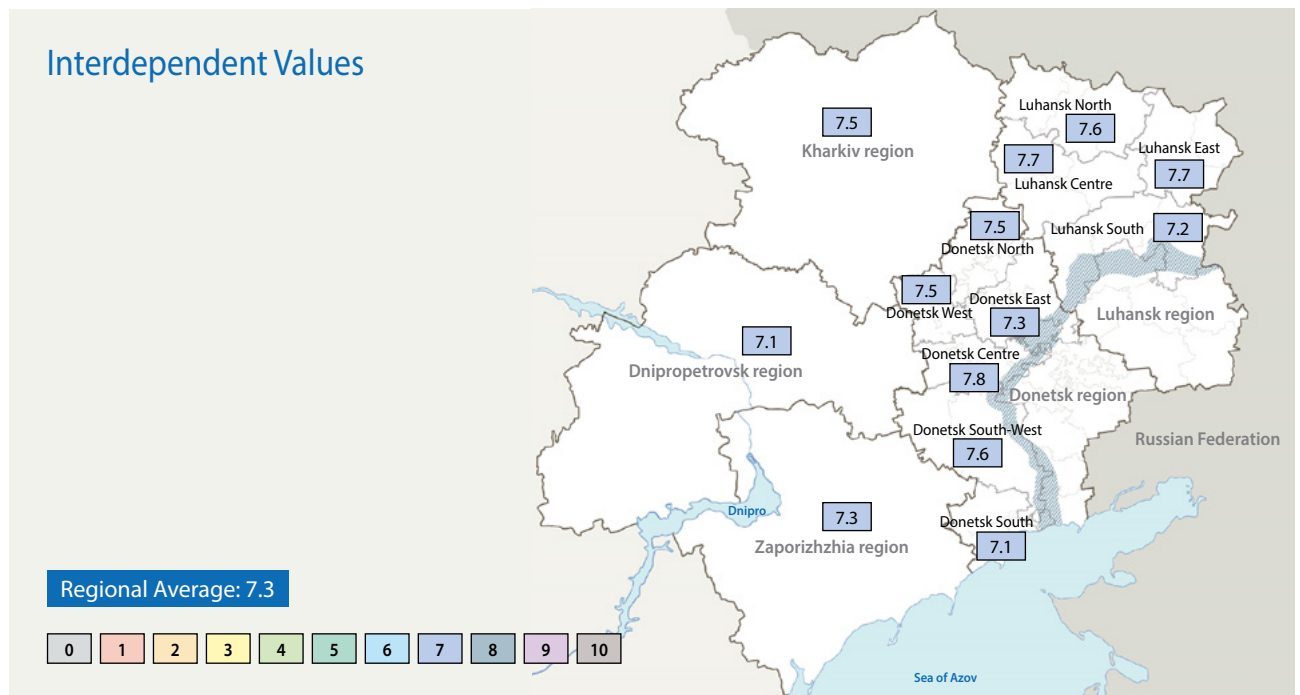

Figure 8: Scores for interdependent values

The average score for **adverse experiences of adults, children and adolescents,** which negatively impacts on adaptive psychosocial functioning, is 0.9 (Figure 9), where 0 means that no adult, child or adolescent

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5   Adverse experiences of adults, children or adolescents refer to stressful or traumatic experiences of other adults, children and adolescents (e.g., domestic violence, bullying, theft, sexual harassment and violent death)

6   Readiness for political violence refer to the propensity to use violent means to achieve political change.

7   Social exclusion refers to the feeling of isolation or marginalization because of one's position in society (e.g. level of income, education) or because of one's identity (e.g. gender, religion, sexual orientation).

8   Online media exposure refers to the use of online information sources in order to stay informed about current events.

9   Perceived level of corruption as measured by the frequency of informal payments in various sectors.

knows someone who has had an adverse experience, and 10 means that most if not all people know someone who has had an adverse traumatic experience. The highest scores for adverse experiences are found in northern, eastern and southern Donetsk oblast, in central Luhansk oblast, and in Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia oblasts. Unsurprisingly, the most significant factor impacting on the adverse experiences of adults, children and adolescents stems from the impact of the armed conflict in the east of Ukraine.
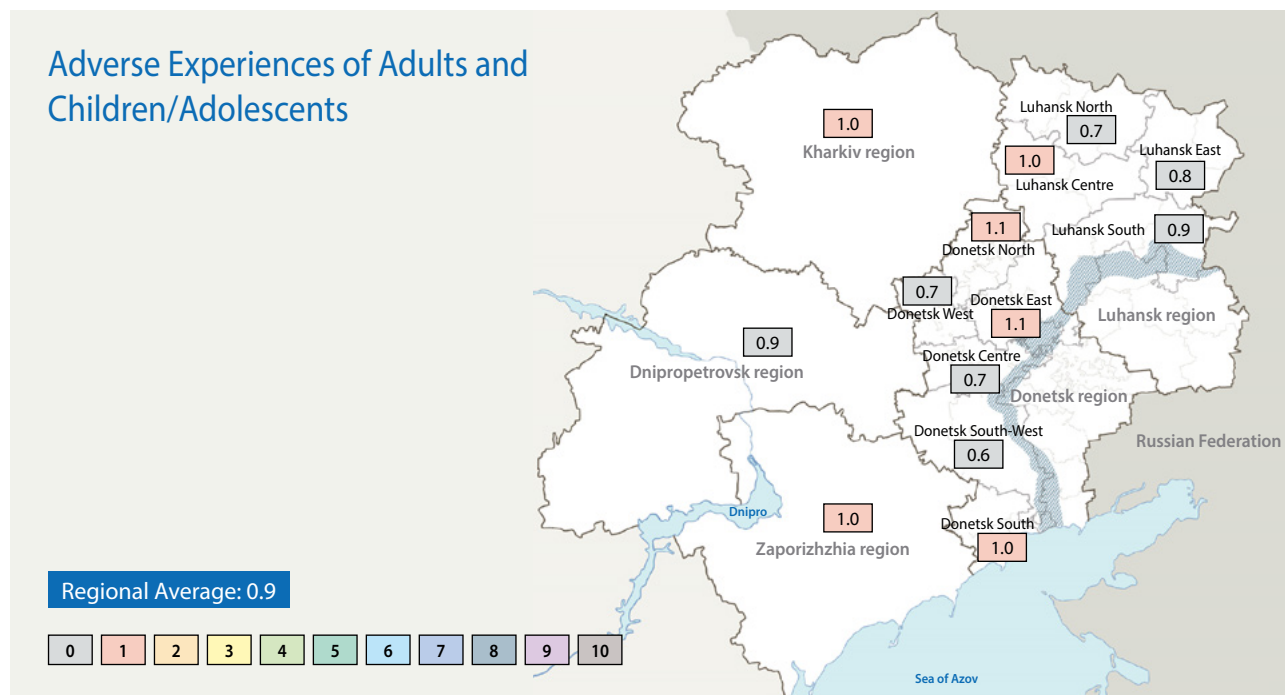

Figure 9: Scores for adverse experiences of adults and children/adolescent

The average score for **readiness for political violence** (negatively impacting on adaptive psychosocial function) is 1.5 (Figure 10), where 0 means that nobody is ready to use violent means to achieve political change, 10 means that most if not all people express extreme tendencies to do so. Eliminating violence and orientations toward violence is difficult if not impossible, especially in a society that is experiencing conflict. All things considered, this low score is relatively promising, but still requires remedial actions. The highest scores for readiness for political violence are found in Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia oblasts, but also in eastern Luhansk oblast. A more in-depth analysis of the readiness for political violence can be found under Outcome 4: tolerant and socially responsible citizenship.
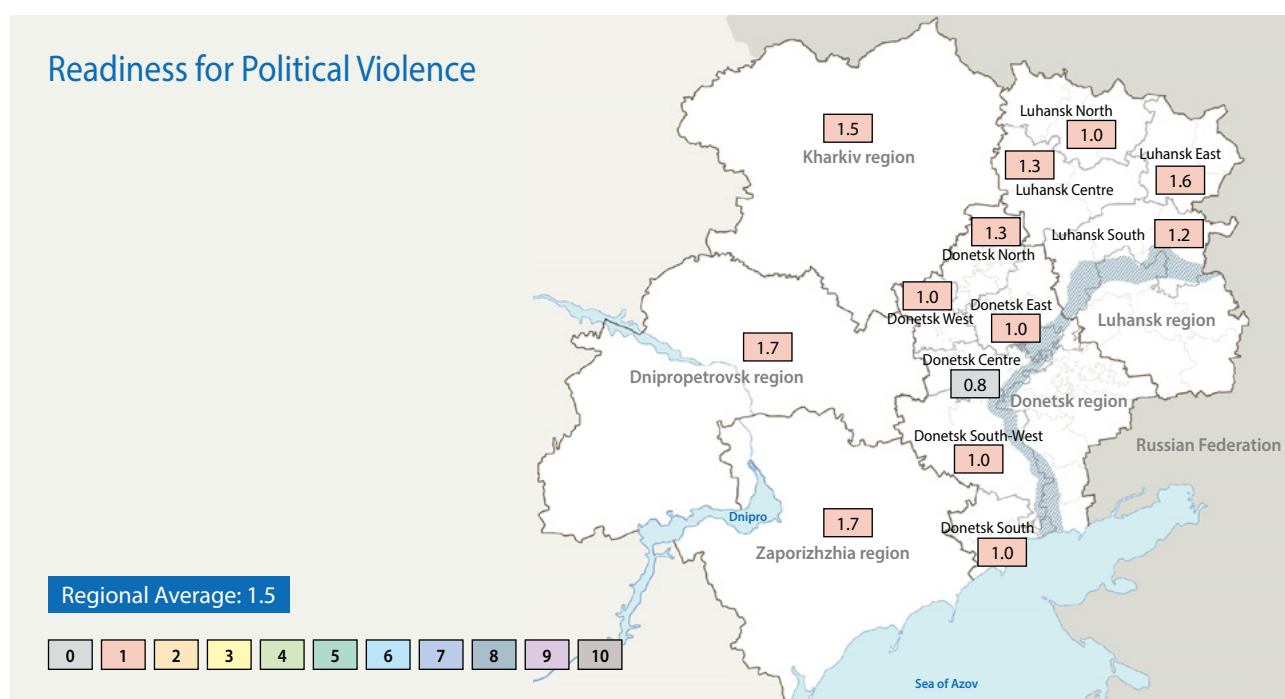

Figure 10: Scores for readiness for political violence

Structural social exclusion with an average score of 1.5 is among the significant indicators negatively impacting on adaptive psychosocial function (Figure 11), where 0 means that nobody feels isolated or marginalized because of their position in society, and 10 means that most if not everyone feels isolated or marginalized in one way or another. While a higher score can be observed in southern Luhansk oblast (2.0), central Donetsk oblast scores lower than the regional average.
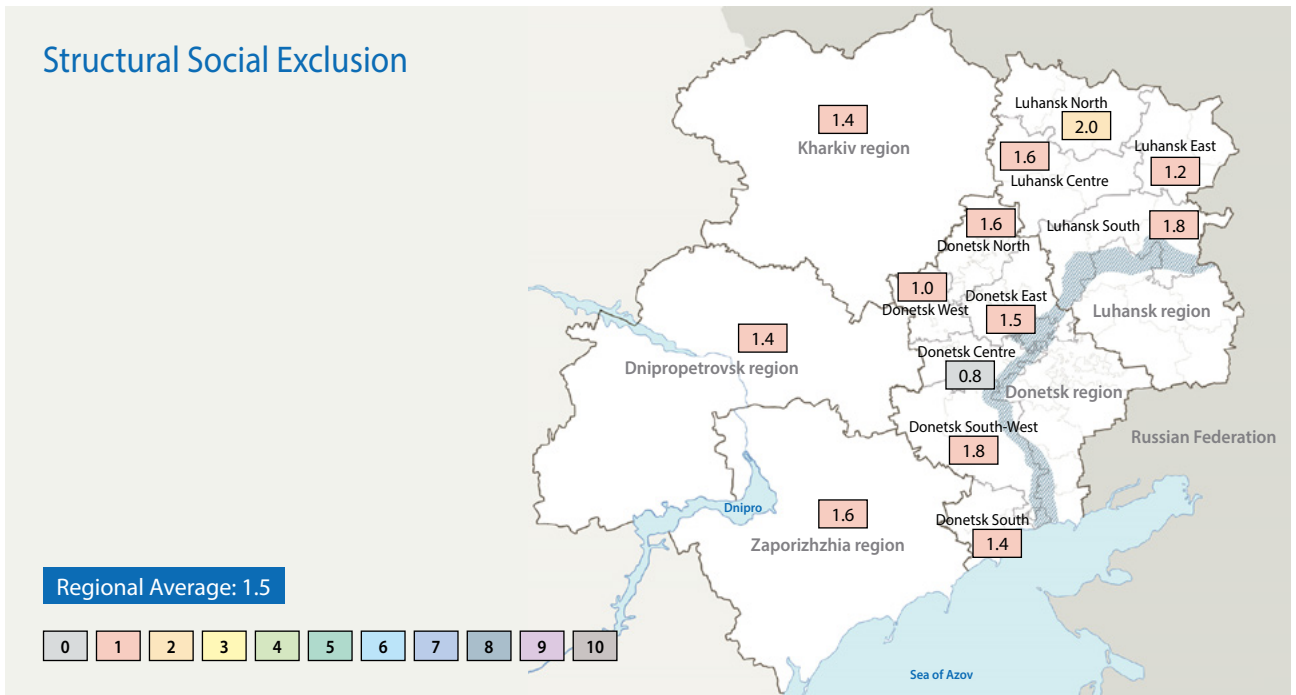
Structural Social Exclusion

Luhansk North **2.0**
Kharkiv region **1.4**
Luhansk Centre **1.6**
Luhansk East **1.2**
Donetsk North **1.6**
Luhansk South **1.8**
Donetsk West **1.0**
Donetsk East **1.5**
Dnipropetrovsk region **1.4**
Donetsk Centre **0.8**
Luhansk region
Donetsk region
Russian Federation
Donetsk South-West **1.8**
Dnipro
Zaporizhzhia region **1.6**
Donetsk South **1.4**

Regional Average: 1.5

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

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Figure 11: Scores for structural social exclusion

The average score for **online media exposure** (positively impacting on adaptive psychosocial function) is 4.3 (Figure 12), where 0 means that no one makes use of online sources to stay informed about current events, 10 means that most if not all make use of online sources to stay informed about current events. Northern, eastern and central Donetsk show the highest scores for online media exposure, while north Luhansk shows the lowest score.

Online Media Exposure

Luhansk North **3.6**
Kharkiv region **4.0**
Luhansk Centre **4.3**
Luhansk East **4.1**
Donetsk North **4.9**
Luhansk South **4.5**
Donetsk West **4.4**
Donetsk East **4.8**
Dnipropetrovsk region **4.4**
Donetsk Centre **4.7**
Luhansk region
Donetsk region
Russian Federation
Donetsk South-West **4.1**
Dnipro
Zaporizhzhia region **4.3**
Donetsk South **4.8**

Regional Average: 4.3

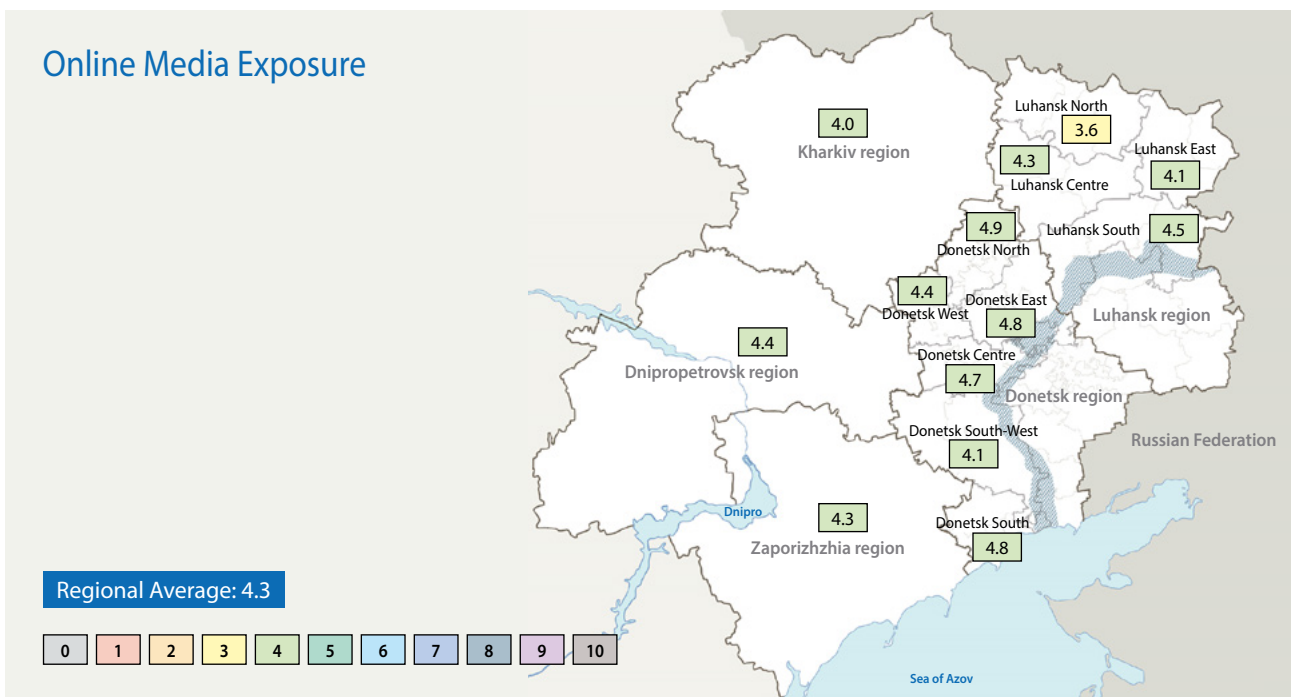| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

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Figure 12: Scores for online media exposure

Lastly, the average score for **perceived level of corruption** (negatively impacting on adaptive psychosocial function) is 7.2 (Figure 12), where 0 means that no one thinks that there is corruption in the form of receiving informal payments, 10 means that most if not all think that this happens very frequently. Although the perceived level of corruption is high across the region, highest scores can be observed in Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhia oblasts, while the lowest score is in northern Luhansk oblast.
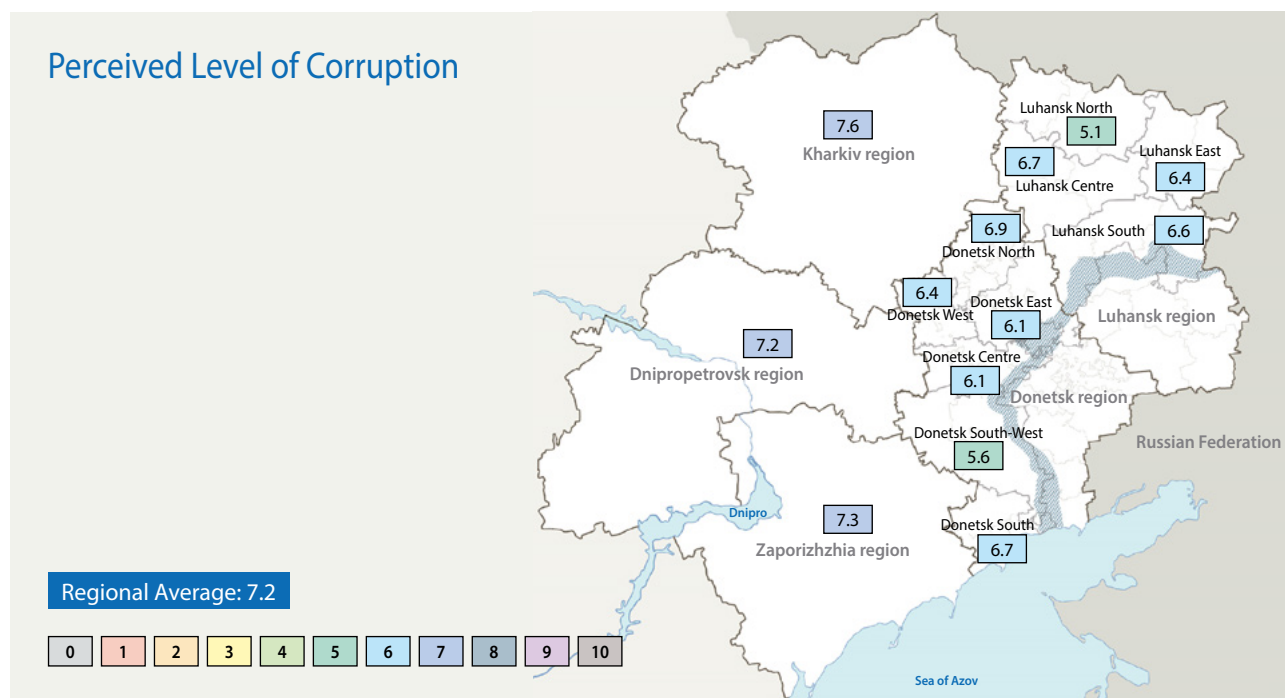

Perceived Level of Corruption

Kharkiv region 7.6

Luhansk North 5.1
Luhansk Centre 6.7
Luhansk East 6.4
Luhansk South 6.6

Donetsk North 6.9
Donetsk West 6.4
Donetsk East 6.1
Dnipropetrovsk region 7.2
Donetsk Centre 6.1
Luhansk region
Donetsk region
Russian Federation
Donetsk South-West 5.6
Dnipro
Zaporizhzhia region 7.3
Donetsk South 6.7
Sea of Azov

Regional Average: 7.2

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Figure 13: Scores for perceived level of corruption

Conclusion

Although overall scores for adaptive psychosocial functioning show an overall positive picture, it is important to capitalize on the strengths – family coherence and executive functioning skills – while at the same time addressing weaker indicators to help individuals become more functional, healthy and responsible members of society. Social cohesion starts from the individual, growing into family, community and then wider society.

In other words, when designing policies and programs to strengthen the components of adaptive psychosocial functioning skills, one needs to focus on enhancing the protective indicators such as interdependent values and online media exposure while minimizing the negative effects of risk variables such as social exclusion and adverse experiences of adults and children/adolescents.

It is important to fully address the weak components as well as the drivers that undermine adaptive psychosocial skills. Particularly, properly treating anxiety, depression and other symptoms through counseling, therapy, and professional psychological support would help alleviate adverse experiences and/or trauma and strengthen adaptive psychosocial skills. People with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and trauma can experience other mental health problems or develop alcohol or substance abuse as negative coping mechanisms, which further threatens to disrupt family and the social fabric of society. As a first step, identifying individuals and specific groups (e.g., ex-combatants, victims of sexual assault, etc.) suffering from these adverse experiences is required, together with raising awareness within communities and developing internal community support mechanisms. In terms of geography, Dnipropetrovsk oblast and eastern Luhansk oblast emerge as the priority areas for interventions, while women, older people and lower income groups emerge as those most in need.

At the same time, provision of cognitive-behavioral therapy to help understand and support target groups with the development of personal coping mechanisms to process the traumatic even or adverse experience may serve as an important preventative measure. Promotion of individual or group-healing processes, as appropriate, such as sharing personal stories and experiences with others, may help people who suffer from adverse experiences, anxiety and depression feel more comfortable to cope with their symptoms, memories, and other parts of their lives. Group therapy helps individuals learn to deal with emotions such as shame, guilt, anger, rage, and fear, and help build self-confidence and trust.

Another strategic and practical entry point is online media exposure to help develop critical skills, access diverse news sources and facilitate communication with family and friends through e.g., IT training, wi-fi parks, internet points in public spaces, etc. Increasing both access to and availability of more diverse media outlets, as well as raising levels of media and digital literacy among the general public, is also likely to enhance civic identity and active citizenship, while at the same time helping to raise awareness of mental health issues and inform of where support and treatment may be sought. Public messages would also help to encourage more active citizenship engagement.