

# Functioning and Needs of Regional Councils in Ukraine

**By Oleksii Yemelianenko**

Second year Master's student at the Institute of European, Russian  
and Eurasian Studies (EURUS), Carleton University

Reviewed and edited by Dr. Joan DeBardeleben  
and Dr. Milana Nikolko

## Contents.

1.	<b>Abstract</b> .....	3
2.	<b>Acknowledgement</b> .....	3
3.	<b>Introduction</b> .....	4
4.	<b>PART I. Primary and secondary sources analysis.</b>	
4.1.	<b>The decentralization concept, legislation analysis, and gender lens</b> .....	5
4.1.1.	<i>Administrative-territorial distribution of power in Ukraine</i> .....	5
4.1.2.	<i>Analysis of the Constitution</i> .....	8
4.1.3.	<i>Other legislation considerations</i> .....	9
4.1.4.	<i>Gender in the Ukrainian legislation</i> .....	11
4.2.	<b>Evaluation of the decentralization reform by academia</b> .....	13
4.3.	<b>International development projects in the field of decentralization</b> .....	17
4.3.1.	<i>The U.S. projects</i> .....	18
4.3.2.	<i>The UN projects</i> .....	19
4.3.3.	<i>Projects of the European institutions and the EU member states</i> .....	20
4.3.4.	<i>Swiss projects on decentralization in Ukraine</i> .....	22
4.3.5.	<i>Canadian programs</i> .....	23
5.	<b>PART II. Evaluation of the regional councils' effectiveness.</b>	
5.1.	<b>The research methodology</b> .....	26
5.2.	<b>Composition of the regional councils in Ukraine and women representation</b> ..	27
5.3.	<b>Inclusivity and gender issues in regional councils</b> .....	29
5.4.	<b>Who are the members of the regional councils?</b> .....	32
5.5.	<b>Communication and accessibility issues of regional councils</b> .....	33
5.6.	<b>The decision-making process in regional councils of Ukraine</b> .....	35
5.7.	<b>What role do the regional councils play in local life?</b> .....	38
5.8.	<b>The role of civil society organizations in self-government</b> .....	40
5.9.	<b>The organizational and financial challenges for council members</b> .....	42
6.	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	42
7.	<b>Disclaimer</b> .....	46
8.	<b>Bibliography</b> .....	47

## 1. Abstract

The research report presents a detailed analysis of the functioning and needs of regional councils in Ukraine immediately prior to the Russian invasion. It discusses their role and impact on the lives of residents, and councils' accountability, transparency, and inclusivity in the decision-making process. Moreover, the report analyses gender issues and women's representation in the regional councils of Ukraine and the councils' role in the ongoing decentralization reform of Ukraine. The paper also touches upon the reform that state authorities have undertaken since 2014.

The report contains:

- Detailed legislative analyses of regional councils;
- A brief study of international projects on decentralization in Ukraine;
- Qualitative interviews with representatives of Ukrainian civil society organizations and a national-level expert on the matter.

Within the research, appropriate queries were submitted to the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine and ten regional councils of the state.

Based on the research findings, the report also points out concrete challenges experienced by the local civil society organizations and the self-governing body, which involved stakeholders should address, e.g., inclusiveness of the decision-making process, women and civil society underrepresentation in the regional councils.

***Keywords:** regional councils, gender inequality, decentralization reform, Ukraine, civil society organizations.*

## 2. Acknowledgment.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to my research supervisors, Dr. Joan DeBardleben, Chancellor's Professor, Jean Monnet Chair, and Dr. Milana Nikolko, Adjunct Research Professor, Carleton University, for providing invaluable, careful, and patient assistance throughout the research.

I am incredibly grateful to Dr. Anastasiya Shtaltovna, the Parliamentary Center's Communications and Program Officer, for inspiring the project.

I am very thankful to Mitacs and the Parliamentary Centre, as this study would not be possible without their financial support.

### **3. Introduction.**

Ukraine is a unitary state with liberal values in transition to sustainable democracy. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the country inherited a Soviet-style, overly centralized and obsolete administrative-territorial composition. For years the administrative division of Ukraine remained the same until 2014 when newly elected central authorities launched the decentralization reform. The main objectives were to achieve optimal distribution of powers between local self-governing institutions and executive administrations and to introduce the new administrative-territorial organization of the state with certain financial independence of local communities from the center. This decentralization reform is one of the most significant the country has undertaken during the Ukraine crisis – the military conflict instigated by the Russian Federation. Despite numerous appropriate and required adjustments of the country’s legislation, up to now, the process of decentralization reform in Ukraine remains incomplete. The devolution process faces obstacles that prevent the successful implementation of a full-scale reform, including genuine accountability and inclusivity of the decision-making process in the regional governing bodies.

This research report aims to analyze and understand the current role and functioning of the regional level Self-governing institution in Ukraine; to highlight functional gaps and needs, scrutinize the councils’ mandate and composition, investigate the role and representation of women, and discuss supervisory functions as well as engagement with civil society and other local actors. Based on the results of the study, recommendations are made on critical issues and types of support that regional councils will need to:

- Fulfill the role of local communities based on the principles of equal gender representation and inclusiveness;
- Improve coordination and communications with local civil society and stakeholders;
- Become an essential and independent facilitator of regional processes.

In addition, this research aims to help scholars and the Parliamentary Centre (a Canadian non-governmental organization) better understand the current role that regional councils play in Ukraine; obstacles the institution and local civil society face, especially in light of ongoing decentralization reform and debates on amendments to the Constitution of the state. This research will present an adequate picture of international actors’ role and



collaborative efforts on decentralization issues in Ukrainian regions. This report also aims to help Western NGOs make more informed decisions and thus design better their programming work in Ukraine, with the goal contributing to the increased well-being of Ukrainian society and strengthening the democratic process in Ukrainian regions inclusively, also to meet the needs of vulnerable social groups.

The entire study is concentrated around three essential elements:

- Ukraine's current legislation on decentralization and the regional councils' functions, including anticipated amendments to the Constitution, as well as official outcomes of the 2015 and 2020 local elections. This includes inquiries submitted to the national and regional governing bodies including Ukraine's Ministry of Communities and Territories Development.
- Foreign donor assistance on the decentralization reform in Ukraine;
- A series of interviews with representatives of national, regional, and municipal civil society organizations in Ukraine about the role of regional and local councils, their inclusivity, and women's representation;

This study aims to provide comprehensive insights into the current and future role of regional councils in Ukraine, focusing on inclusivity of the decision-making process and women's representation in the state regions. It seems pretty important to consider the gender and inclusivity issues in the research, as the majority of the population in the country are women (Serdalova & Petruk, 2020). Furthermore, women and vulnerable social groups in Ukraine are obviously, constantly underrepresented, including in the decision-making processes, in all-level governing institutions, especially in the legislative ones. In addition, the research does not concern the conflict in the Eastern part of Ukraine, in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and/or the Minks-II agreement implementation.

#### **4. PART I. Primary and secondary sources analysis.**

##### **4.1. The decentralization concept, legislation analysis, and gender lens.**

###### *4.1.1. Administrative-territorial distribution of power in Ukraine.*

According to Pavluk et al. (2016), currently, Ukraine has a three-level administrative-territorial composition of the state and distribution of power (table 1). The foundational, sub-regional, level includes villages, towns, cities, 1439 amalgamated territorial communities or *obiednana terytorialna hromada*, and 136 districts, with their own self-governing bodies. The second, regional, level consists of 24 regions or *oblasts*, the

Autonomous Republic of Crimea, which is temporarily occupied by Russia, and 2 cities, Kyiv and Sevastopol. All regions have a self-governing institution, namely regional council or *oblasna rada* with elected members or *deputaty*, and an executive body, a regional state administration, or *oblasna derzhavna administracia* with officials appointed by the central authorities. The third, national, level consists of the Parliament, or *Verkhovna Rada*, the Government, and the President of Ukraine.

Table 1. Administrative-territorial distribution of power in Ukraine, January 2022.				
	1. Sub-regional level		2. Regional level	3. National level
<b>Self-governing institution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town, city councils;</li> <li>• Amalgamated territorial communities;</li> </ul>	District council.	Region council.	Parliament.
<b>Executive institution</b>		District state administration.	Region state administration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President;</li> <li>• Government.</li> </ul>

Since independence, there have been several attempts to introduce the decentralization reform in Ukraine after the Soviet Union collapsed. According to the Government of Ukraine (n.d.), the most recent and successful process of state decentralization was initiated in 2014 with the adoption of the Concept of Local Governance Reform and Territorial Organization of Power in Ukraine.

According to the Government (ibid.), the previous system of local self-governance did not meet the needs of society. Local governments in most communities could not provide and maintain an appropriate living environment for comprehensive development, protection of human rights, and provision of high quality and affordable administrative and social services. Since 1991, the rural population of Ukraine has decreased by 2.5 million people and the number of rural settlements has reduced by 348 units. At the same time, by 2014, the number of village councils had increased by 1,067 units; over 12,000 territorial communities had been formed, the population in over 6,000 communities was less than 3,000 people, and most of the localities had no executive bodies for their village councils. Further, the local self-governing bodies of these communities could not exercise the powers granted them by law (ibid.). Over 5,000 local budgets consisted of over 70% subsidies from the state budget. The permanent financial support of the local communities was a heavy burden for the state budget and hindered the development of small towns and large settlements. These

disproportion at the sub-regional level required comprehensive, contemporary policy and approach to all accumulated social, economic, security, and political issues in Ukrainian regions.

Thus, the Concept aimed to determine a mechanism and terms with which to guide the further formation of effective local self-government in Ukraine (Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine #333-p, 2014). However, the entire legislative system of Ukraine, including the administrative-territorial arrangement of the state, is built on a three-level legislative framework. The prime level is the Constitution of Ukraine, the second is the Laws and Codes, and the third is different normative acts and by-laws, and they all require adjustments to address the Concept objectives.

Moreover, for detailed analysis of the issue, a request was made to the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine to clarify the regional councils' current role and prospects for development, and to shed light on the decentralization reform, particularly related to inclusivity, gender equality issues, and relevant foreign assistance. The Ministry answered all of the questions outlined in the request in a letter (#7/34/18203-21, dated November 30, 2021). According to the letter, regional councils in Ukraine function under the Constitution of Ukraine, the Law of Ukraine On Local Self-Government in Ukraine, and the Budget Code. Article 43 of the Law of Ukraine On Local Self-Government in Ukraine determines all issues considered by the regional councils during plenary sessions. Article 66 of the Budget Code defines all provincial budget revenues governed by a regional council. For precise distribution of powers between local self-governing bodies and local executive apparatus, and to remove existing duplication of responsibilities, several bills with amendments were submitted by the Ministry to the Parliament of Ukraine for consideration.

In the letter, the Ministry stressed that regional councils can decide upon issues only within their corresponding territory. However, Ukrainian legislation allows the regional councils to establish appropriate transregional associations to coordinate efforts for comprehensive regional development and influence national policies on local governance.

The Ukrainian Association of Rayon and Oblast Councils (the Association) was established to cooperate with national authorities on decentralization reform. According to the Ministry's letter, the Association interacts with national governing bodies through consultations with the President, the government, and the Parliament of Ukraine on local self-government issues, and provides input on any decentralization reform bills. An analysis of the Ukrainian Association of Rayon and Oblast councils' website confirms that it actively

participates in the process of the decentralization reform of the state through these and other available instruments.

Based on the details provided in the Ministerial letter, it seems that the regional councils can only influence the process of decentralization in Ukraine through participation in the Association. However, during the initial stages of the decentralization reform in Ukraine, regional councils seemed to play a secondary role in the process by considering and approving the long-term programs on local communities' amalgamation, which were elaborated and submitted by a regional state administration, the local executive body, following the methodology of the government of Ukraine. Thus, it looks like that the current distribution of powers in the center-periphery axis remains imbalanced. Regional councils are not empowered and independent enough without appropriate executive functions and genuine ability to influence local processes, which has a corresponding negative impact on the decentralization reform and the role of the regional self-governing institution.

#### *4.1.2. Analysis of the Constitution.*

The Constitution of Ukraine is the prime normative act in Ukraine, which regulates the entire relationship of the state center with its regions and localities. The Constitution was adopted on June 28, 1996, and was not amended for the decentralization reform matters since then.

Since 2014, the country's Parliament has adopted many bills on decentralization reform even without introducing an appropriate change to the country's Constitution. Such an approach often contradicts the reform's primary goal: to make regions more flexible in the decision-making process and less dependent on the center. Constitutional amendments were always postponed, often for political and geopolitical reasons. To date, the entire process of decentralization in Ukraine has been conducted under the provision of the Constitution as it was adopted in 1996, without any constitutional amendments. According to the Constitution (art. 140), "local self-governance is carried out by the territorial community, both directly and through local government: village, township or city councils and their executive bodies... Self-government bodies, which represent the common interests of territorial communities of villages, township, and cities are district and regional councils" (Konstytucia Ukrainy, 1996).

Article 143 of the Constitution determines all issues upon which regional councils can decide independently. Among them are the following: to approve programs of socio-economic and cultural development of a relevant region; to oversee programs implementation; to approve regional budgets, based on the state budget, for their appropriate distribution among territorial communities; to distribute local budget's funds for



implementation of joint socio-economic and cultural programs; and to resolve other issues of their competence. However, the Constitution highlights that "[l]ocal self-government bodies are accountable to and under control of the relevant executive bodies ..." (art. 143). At the same time, article 118 stresses that the executive body in a region is a regional state administration that is simultaneously accountable to and controlled by the regional council and governing institutions of the higher level. Hence, the 1996 Constitution determines that the regional council is an important regional actor, though called to play a secondary role in the unitary state.

#### *4.1.3. Other legislation considerations.*

First, it should be stressed that the decentralization reform in Ukraine is based on the European Charter of Local Self-Government provisions, which have been in force for Ukraine since 1998. Secondly, the first phase of the decentralization reform in Ukraine was implemented during 2014-2019 by the parliamentary adoption of the following laws and amendments: the Law of Ukraine On Cooperation of Territorial Communities (#1508-VII, 2014); On Voluntary Amalgamation of Territorial Communities (#157-VIII, 2015); On the Principles of State Regional Policy (#156-VIII, 2015), as well as amendments to the Budget and the Tax Codes of Ukraine in regards to financial decentralization.

At this stage and according to the Law of Ukraine On Voluntary Amalgamation of Territorial Communities (#157-VIII, 2015); villages, townships, and city councils were granted new capabilities on decision making regarding the decentralization reform of the state, namely on voluntary amalgamation of local communities (art. 5-7). Nonetheless, according to the law, regional councils only play a secondary role in the process. However, the Law of Ukraine On the Principles of State Regional Policy (#156-VIII, 2015) stresses that the oblast councils are to design the three-year regional development strategy, work on adjustments to the strategies, and oversee their implementation [art. 10-11, 14-15]. The Law of Ukraine On Cooperation of Territorial Communities (#1508-VII, 2014) has not a single mention of the oblast councils' capacities, as it determines the terms and capabilities of local territorial communities, *hromady*, on socio-economic, cultural, administrative service cooperation and concerns powers and functions of villages, townships and city mayors and councils.

One of the prime laws on the functioning of local self-government bodies in Ukraine is the Law of Ukraine On Local Self-Government in Ukraine (# 280/97-BP, 1997), with numerous amendments. According to the law, a territorial community, *hromada*, is a

population permanently residing in a village, a town, or a city, that is an independent administrative-territorial unit, or a voluntary association of residents of several villages, towns, cities, which have a common administrative center (art. 1). Administrative-territorial units in Ukraine include the oblast, rayon, city, rayon in a city, town, or village (ibid.). The normative act lists all issues that district and oblast councils are sanctioned to consider and resolve (art. 43). Among them are:

(para. 1) elect and remove a Chairperson of the Council, and Deputies of the Chairperson;

(para. 15) create an association with local self-government bodies representing the common interests of territorial communities, as well as to abandon them;

(para. 16) approve programs of socio-economic and cultural development of a region;

(para. 20) decide on issues of communal property management;

(para.21) regulate land affairs;

(para. 26) make decisions on issues of the administrative-territorial organization under a provision of the law;

(para. 36) consider reports of local prosecutors and police chiefs;

(para. 37) setting tariffs for local households and businesses, etc.

One of the most significant features of the law is that rayon and oblast councils are obliged to delegate (art. 44) most of their powers to the relevant local state administration. Bohiv (2016, p. 341) highlights that this norm violates the principles of legal, organizational, and financial autonomy of regional councils and the local self-government bodies at the primary level. For example, the long-term plan to form amalgamated communities in a region was developed by the relevant regional state administration, following the methodology of the government of Ukraine. The regional state administration presented the plan to the regional council for adoption; after being approved by the council, the regional state administration introduced the plan to the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (Decentralization, n.d.). Content analyses of the law using an interactive search of single Ukrainian words or their combination, such as ‘gender equality’, *genderna rivnist*, ‘women rights’, *prava zhinok*, did not reveal concrete references in the texts, but a vague reference: ‘any restrictions of Ukrainian citizens' rights to participate in local self-government regarding their race, ..., sex, ... or other grounds are prohibited’ (art. 3).

The Budget Code of Ukraine with amendments (art. 2, para. 45, 2010) defines that a regional council in Ukraine decides on the local budget and powers of the regional state administration to implement the local budget during the budget period. Furthermore, a regional council can decide on local inter-budgetary transfers to the lower-level self-governing institutions. In addition, the Budget Code of Ukraine determines a composition of a regional budget revenue (art. 66), e.g., 15% personal income tax; 10% corporate income tax; 25% of the soil rent; excise tax; etc. The regional councils in Ukraine are also responsible for distributing funds transferred from the state budget in grants and subventions between district budgets and budgets of cities, towns, and villages of regional significance (Osnovni zavdania, n.d.).

#### *4.1.4. Gender in the Ukrainian legislation.*

This section provides insight if authorities applied the gender lens to the prime decentralization laws at the initial stage of the reform and how this issue influences current processes in the regions of Ukraine.

In regards to women's rights, the country has the whole spectrum of the normative acts on gender equality, including the European Convention on Human Rights, ratified by the state in 1997, and the Law of Ukraine On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men (#2866-IV, 2005), which binds local self-government bodies to have an authorized coordinator. The official is empowered to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men (art. 7), to implement national and regional programs to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men, to conduct educational activities on gender equality, to cooperate with public associations and foreign non-governmental organizations to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men, and to submit proposals for improving the legislation on ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men (art. 12). According to the law, public associations and foreign non-governmental organizations are eligible to participate in the development of resolutions by executive bodies and local governments on gender equality and participate in the implementation of national and regional programs, etc. (art. 14).

The Constitution of Ukraine (art. 24) determines only that women have equal opportunities to men in socio-political and cultural affairs, in education and training, and in work and compensation. Due to special treatment and conditions, women are enabled to

combine work with motherhood, which includes the provision of paid leave and other benefits to pregnant women and mothers.

Moreover, a simple content analysis of the legislation on the state decentralization, through an interactive search of single Ukrainian words or their combination, such as ‘gender equality’, *genderna rivnist*, ‘women rights’, *prava zhinok*, did not expose any reference in the laws’ texts (e.g., image 1).

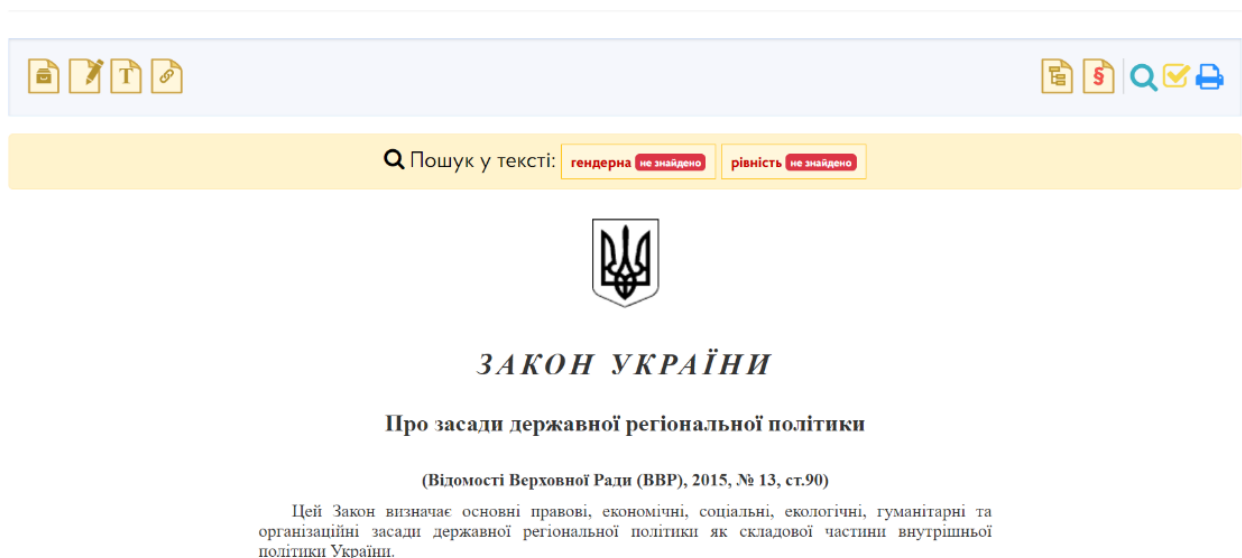


Image 1

However, in 2019 the Electoral Code of Ukraine was adopted by the state. The Code guarantees equal rights for women in terms of the multi-level electoral process. Paragraph 12 of Article 154 highlights that, while formatting the nominees' national and regional electoral lists, political parties must ensure that every five candidates were represented by at least two nominees of both sexes. Of course, that positively impacted the 2020 regional elections in Ukraine. Yet, some challenges remain, namely the gender quota is not respected in terms of replacing a withdrawing candidate with one of the same sex, and women are still politically underrepresented and have limited access to the decision-making process. (UAR reforms, 2021).

Considering current and future legislation amendments on decentralization, it is worth mentioning that since 2014, over 300 normative acts on various issues have been adopted or

adjusted for reform matters. As of November 2021, the government continues the work on the decentralization of the state. Several bills (7 zakonoproektiv, 2021) on decentralization reform have been conveyed to the Parliament of Ukraine for further consideration. Among them are amendments to the Law of Ukraine On Local Self-Government in Ukraine regarding power distribution of the local self-government bodies. This bill was developed to differentiate the powers of executive bodies and local self-government of all levels and the powers of regional and district councils. Amendments to the Law of Ukraine On Local State Administrations was developed to create legal preconditions for the state administrations to function as local prefectures.

All the stakeholders, central and local authorities of Ukraine (Chernov, 2021), and international donors (Kwain, 2021) understand and accept the urgent need to amend the Constitution to fully implement the decentralization reform in Ukraine. In the meantime, the legislation of Ukraine and the amendments on decentralization were drafted under the provision of the 1996 Constitution. Authorities of the state highlight that after introducing the Constitutional amendments on the issue, which are expected in the first quarter of 2022 and which are supposed to consolidate the entire system of the new territorial organization and local governance, other bills on the issue will be introduced, including a Municipal Code (Nehoda, 2021). For now, it looks entirely opaque to apply the altogether new concept of the center-periphery relations in the state through legislation adjustment without first amending the Constitution of Ukraine. Moreover, it seems that no gender lens was applied to the prime legislative acts on decentralization reform of the state, and while the gender quota of the new Electoral Code is a favourable decision, it still has not been implemented in full.

#### **4.2. Evaluation of the decentralization reform by academia.**

A goal of this section is to present an academic analysis of the ongoing decentralization reform in Ukraine, with an emphasis on current functions and needs of regional councils in the country, accountability, and transparency of the decision-making process at the regional level. An analysis of scholarly resources available through the Carleton University library and Google Scholar showed that regional councils in modern Ukraine have not been widely and separately studied by the academic community in Ukraine or abroad. However, the functioning and needs of local councils at various levels in Ukraine, including oblast, rayon, amalgamated territorial community (ATC), *objebnana teritorialna hromada*, and city councils, was an essential part of a broader subject – the ongoing decentralization reform in Ukraine. The reform was launched by the newly elected state

authorities immediately after the Euromaidan, or the Revolution of Dignity, in 2014. It must be taken into account that the reform started under exceptionally challenging circumstances: the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the military conflict in the eastern region of Ukraine that was inspired and supported by Russia.

The decentralization reform aims not only to redraw Ukraine's administrative map, but also to build up the state's capacity to deliver better public services including health care, education, social structures and infrastructure, through the promotion of multi-level governance, democratic practices, and economic development at the local and subnational level (Romanova & Umland, 2019). In a similar vein, Dmytryshyn et al. (2021) stress that the key goal of the country-wide reorganization is shifting power, resources, and responsibilities to the basic level of the state – the community, to gain an ability to resolve local issues more quickly, more effectively, and independently. According to Rusyniuk (2018), the new external threats and internal challenges that Ukraine faces require implementing new and adequate state regional policies to balance the regions' socio-economic development and improve their competitiveness.

A literature review shows that Ukrainian scholars have paid more attention to decentralization issues than foreign ones. The analyses of Western scholars are presented as well, but mainly in the form of policy reports, e.g., Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development report (2018), Council of Europe (2019), USAID report (2019). As Romanova and Umland (2019) point out, “a fundamental remaking of Ukrainian state-society relations has remained below the radar of many Western journalists and analysts” (p. 99). Moreover, it seems that issues of gender equality, cooperation with local civil society, and inclusivity in the decision-making process at the level of subnational councils have not been fully or specifically addressed in the studies. Nonetheless, the ongoing decentralization reform in Ukraine is frequently referred to as one of the most successful and vital reforms ever conducted in the country (Kruglashov & Bureha, 2021; Hirchak, 2021; Lukianova & Ostapchuk, 2019; Dmytryshyn et al., 2021; Rusyniuk, 2018; Shkurina, 2020; Koreniuk et al., 2019; etc.).

Of course, despite positively evaluating the idea and the process, scholars emphasize the presence of essential hindrances and challenges on the way to the successful completion of the reform. Among these are: the need for Constitutional amendments, immense influence of political parties while forming local councils, inadequate power distribution, and poor professional performance and skills training of local elected and executive officials (Hirchak,



2021); high dependency of many local budgets on subsidies from the state budget; lack of transparency in central financing of the regions' development; underdeveloped horizontal links between regions (Shkurina, 2020); the existing system of economic and political diarchy at the local and subnational levels; the declarative nature of the powers of oblast and rayon councils (Lukianova & Yurkiv, 2019); the low level of local public unawareness and the presence of misconceptions about the reform and its outcomes, lack of aspirations and motives among local officials to accept the reform (Dmytryshyn et al, 2021); and what is more crucial, a high risk of local elite capture (Bader, 2021).

Kruglashov and Bureha (2021) studied the achievements and difficulties of the reform implementation. They stressed that the decentralization reform should be considered not as a single, separate process but as a complex process aimed at transforming the entire public administration system. Despite numerous achievements, the authors noted that there are some obstacles to successful reform. These include issues such as failure to anchor the decentralization in the Constitution, a legally unresolved land management dispute at the community level, incomprehensible procedures for governing the relationship between a region and the center, and politicization of the local government activities. Moreover, up to now, the regional councils in Ukraine have had no fully independent executive bodies and although local budget revenues have significantly increased, up to 50%, the high dependency on transfers from the state budget remains. Politicization also raises concerns. Local elites used to be a part of the national political parties, but now prefer to create *de facto* local political parties that are not covered by the national legislation. The authors also highlight the issue of proportional representation at the amalgamated territorial community's level in their paper.

Nonetheless, an analysis of the literature shows that scholars have scrutinized almost every aspect of the decentralization reform in Ukraine. For instance, Dmytryshyn et al. (2021) examined the public perception of the reform. The authors utilized the taxonomy method of analysis and opinion polls conducted by the Council of Europe across the country over a five-year period. The authors differentiated regions of the state by Gross Regional Product and sales of industrial goods to see if the perception of the reform in industrial oblasts differed from the perception in agricultural ones. The study found that Ukrainians mainly support the decentralization reform, however with some fluctuations over the period; the population has some concerns and fears of changes and distrust towards all-level

authorities; the perception also depends on a region's development and widespread awareness.

Lukianova and Yurkiv (2019) analyzed the credentials of an oblast and rayon council chairperson in light of the decentralization reform and discussed coexistence issues of executive authorities and self-government bodies at the local level. According to the current legislation, the scholars stressed that the chairperson of regional and rayon councils executes mainly managerial and representative functions for local, inter-regional and inter-institutional affairs. According to the Constitution of Ukraine (Art. 141), a chairperson of a council simultaneously is a head of the administrative apparatus of a council. However, the existing model of local government in Ukraine is implemented through a system of economic and political dual-power. Under this system, a region is governed simultaneously by an oblast state administration, *oblasna derzhavna administracia* with officials appointed by the central government, and by a regional council elected by the local population. This system runs the risk of being ineffective due to institutional competition for resources and functional overlapping. Local state administrations should only have control and supervisory functions.

In this vein, Oleinikova (2020) highlights that, despite the decentralization reform, central authorities in Ukraine still have considerable economic and administrative power over the state regions and local governments do not have enough resources and leverage to effectively address the needs of the local population. She argues that, despite a clear strategy for the decentralization reform, central political elites still speculate on securing control over the regions. Hence, the current administrative system might be characterized as unstable and ineffective with overlapping responsibilities and weak accountability, failing to modernize and develop the regions. Oleinikova (2020) also discusses the recent experience of Poland and other European countries on the issue of decentralization since the mid-20th century.

Romanova and Umland (2019) place the decentralization reform in Ukraine in a geopolitical context, stressing that Russia and the West have different perspectives on the process. Russia continues to push for federalization of the Ukrainian state, implying a notion to make it 'weak and decomposed' (p. 100) of Ukraine. The West, instead, believes that a federative Ukraine will function as well as the U.S. or Germany. The researchers point out that Ukrainians peremptorily deny any idea for the state federalization because of the fear of Russia's interference, but accept the concept itself. Ukraine has seen several unsuccessful attempts to disperse central powers and share them with the regions to improve public service delivery and stimulate regional economic development. According to the scholars, the latest

endeavor, the decentralization reform, allowed the creation of Amalgamated Territorial Communities (ATCs), which by 2019 have covered over 38% of Ukraine's territory. The ATCs' budgets receive 100% property tax, customs tax, and service fee revenues, and 60% of personal and 10% of corporate income tax revenues. In addition to positive local effects, the decentralization reform can help the state become more solid and stable and reduce the negative repercussions of Russia's extensive interference. For example, the reform could deprive Russia of entry points to provoke separatism across the country.

Korenyuk et al. (2019) examined regional budget revenues as a part of the decentralization reform. The authors emphasized that fiscal decentralization is one of the fundamental principles for local government viability. The current budgetary system of Ukraine is characterized by the independence of all budgets; the regional budgets are autonomous and not included in the country's state budget. The fiscal decentralization allowed up to 40% of new revenue for the development of local communities. However, the experience of the developed states suggests that figures should allow up to 50-60% of new revenue. Nonetheless, since the start of the reform, local budget deficits have been covered by subsidies and subventions from the state budget. The researchers argue that it is crucial to revise the list of owned and delegated powers to improve fiscal decentralization and procedures for local budgets formation, and extend the financial basis of local governments, make local taxation transparent and stable, and increase local budget revenues.

Bader (2021) emphasized the development of more exclusive methods of governance at the local level due to a higher concentration of power and pointed to the risks of local elite capture using the Odesa and Kharkiv regions as examples. Bader argued that, due to “weaker institutional checks and balances at the local level” (ibid), the lower level of political pluralism and media pressure and higher degree of power abuse and nepotism, local elite capture may become an unintended outcome of the decentralization reform.

While the studies presented above demonstrate that the ongoing decentralization reform in Ukraine has been examined from many angles, issues such as gender equality, inclusive practices, accountability, and transparency of the decision-making process at regional and local council levels in Ukraine are often overlooked by the researchers.

#### **4.3. International development projects in the field of decentralization.**

This section sheds light on the assistance foreign actors have provided to the state on decentralization reform and to consider where efforts have been applied the most, though

without detailed analyses of the projects. Since the decentralization reform was introduced by the government of Ukraine in 2014, foreign donors have supported the reform through various projects designed to improve governance and state service in Ukrainian regions even though decentralization reform was not yet in the spotlight in the West. Initially, the Ukrainian authorities were in charge of the reform and did not experience any pressure from the international community, e.g., the EU and the IMF (Dudley, 2019). Nonetheless, international donor assistance helped Ukraine develop its territories by creating capable self-governments and promoting state integration into European space (Nehoda, 2016). However, it should be stressed that the decentralization reform in Ukraine has been introduced under harsh internal and external conditions, namely the military conflict and occupation of Ukrainian territory, instigated and conducted by Russia and under the establishment of new political systems and connections after the Euromaidan. Hence it seems that the donors had to combine their efforts on decentralization and security issues in Ukraine.

Over 27 projects have been implemented in Ukrainian regions to enhance the quality of local governance within the decentralization reform framework by many international actors, including the United Nations, the U.S., member states of the European Union and European institutions, Canada, and Switzerland. For over seven years, Ukraine's foreign partners have allocated approximately USD 239.2 million, EUR 152.3 million, CAD 38.3 million, CHF 25 million, and SEK 177.9 million (Donors, n.d.). In 2016 the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine established an agency for development in every region of the country. The agency was designed to coordinate all international efforts and projects on decentralization in an oblast. The non-profit and non-governmental agency supports and advises local authorities on implementing decentralization.

However, a question arises as to how many of the international projects were devoted to the issues of regional councils in Ukraine, and to the gender and inclusivity aspects of decentralization? The data on the projects were initially gathered from the web portal [www.decentralization.gov.ua](http://www.decentralization.gov.ua), which contains all current information on decentralization reform in Ukraine, and through the foreign program's websites.

#### *4.3.1. The U.S. projects.*

The U.S. implements its projects in multiple Ukrainian regions through the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Peace Corps programs, with Global

Communities as the contractor working with many local subcontractors. As of now, the U.S. has performed or continues to carry out the following projects.

The PULSE Project, Policy for Ukraine Local Self-Governance, was implemented from 2015 to 2020 in all Ukrainian regions with a budget of USD \$8.2 million. The project aimed to create a favourable environment for decentralization and develop territorial communities through the formation of a legislative framework to increase the local tax base and its efficiency, and developing training activities with local civil society and media. (Projects, n.d.; IREX, n.d.).

The DIEMO Project was implemented from 2018 to 2020 in 20 amalgamated territorial communities of 13 Ukrainian regions with a budget of USD \$740,000. The project aimed to increase transparency in the health and education sectors by raising public awareness and implementing accountability and civic oversight tools (Projects, n.d.).

The Community Development Project is being implemented from 2013 to December 2022 in all of Ukraine's regions except Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kyiv city, with a budget of USD \$5 million. This project aims to educate and improve existing project development, management practices, and interactions between local governing bodies and civil society (ibid).

The DOBRE Project, Decentralization Offering Better Results and Efficiency, is being implemented from 2016 to September 2022 in 100 territorial communities in 10 of Ukraine's regions with a budget of USD \$67 million. It aims at improving such issues as resource management, strategic planning, public service quality, local economic development, and citizens' involvement in the decision-making process at the local level (UCMC, n.d.).

The HOVERLA Program, Governance and Local Accountability Activity is a five-year project running from 2021 to 2026, with a budget of USD \$74 million. It has been working in 50 territorial communities of 7 regions. The project aims to improve national legislation, local self-governance efficiency, institutionalization, and self-sufficient regional management, and to increase citizens' participation in local planning, budgeting, and the decision-making process on state service in the community (Interfax-Ukraine, 2021).

#### *4.3.2. The UN projects.*

The United Nations Recovery and Peacebuilding Program (UN RPP), an 8-year program from 2014 to 2022 with USD \$80 million in aid, is being implemented by 4 UN

agencies in cooperation with 12 international partners. Among them are the EU, Canada, Germany, Japan, Norway, and others. The program's goal is peace restoration in the east of Ukraine by strengthening public security and social cohesion, rebuilding the economy in conflict-affected communities, and supporting decentralization and health care. The program works with communities of 6 regions: Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhian, Kharkiv, and Zhytomyr oblasts (UNDP, 2021).

Civil Society for Enhanced Democracy and Human Rights in Ukraine is a 5-year project, introduced from 2017 to 2022, with a budget of USD \$4.3 million. Donors of the initiative are the governments of Denmark, France, Norway, and Canada. The program embraces a wide range of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Ukraine, the country's government, and the national parliament. The project is targeted at developing and supporting the CSO's regional networks, empowering youth, and improving its civic engagement at the local level, and developing favourable policies to improve dialogue between government and civil society organizations at the regional level (Projects, n.d.).

#### *4.3.3. Projects of the European institutions and the EU member states.*

The European institutions and the EU member states such as Germany, Sweden, Poland, France, Denmark, and others also actively participate and finance various programs on decentralization in Ukraine. The projects have been implemented by domestic contractors, such as Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ), Hulla & Co Human Dynamics GmbH & Co KG, Folke Bernadotte Academy, SKL International and others via Ukrainian state institutions and NGOs. The European projects in Ukraine are as follows.

Facilitating dialogue on reforms in Ukraine, is a 9-month OSCE project, released in 2020 in partnership with the government of Ukraine. The goal was to assist the central government in utilizing modern tools for reforms promotion. The amount of aid was EUR 105,000.

Strengthening civil participation in democratic decision-making in Ukraine was a two-year Council of Europe project with a budget of EUR 600,000, implemented from 2018 to 2020. The objectives of the program were to strengthen the dialog and cooperation between public service institutions and civil society on the decision-making process, reducing a distance between actors at the national and local levels by embracing mechanisms for citizen engagement at the local level, capacity building of public servants and CSOs, and



improving national legislation and institutional foundation. The project included the following localities: Drohobych of the Lviv oblast, Ternopil, the Dunayivtsi amalgamated community of the Khmelnytskyi Region, and Kyiv.

Strengthening democracy and building trust at the local level in Ukraine, a three-year project of the Council of Europe, implemented from 2018 to 2021, with a budget of EUR 1.5 million; aimed to support municipalities and their national association, and to improve inclusivity and transparency of local governance (Projects & programs, n.d.).

The OSCE project, Support good governance in local communities as part of the decentralization reform, was implemented from 2018 to 2020, funded by Norway, Germany, Lithuania, and the U.S. with a budget of EUR 610,000. The project objective was to support good governance in new amalgamated territorial communities by raising local residents' awareness and improving capabilities of the governing bodies at the local level, through outreach activities and legislation amendments (Projects, n.d.).

The Council of Europe program, Enhancing decentralization and public administration reform in Ukraine, is being implemented from 2018 until 2022 with a budget of EUR 1.9 million in all regions. The program aims to improve the Ukrainian legislation in accordance with the European Charter on local self-governance, to enhance human resources management at the local level, and to build capacity in the territorial communities to provide good quality service (ibid).

The Administrative Reform in Eastern Ukraine program was implemented from 2017 to 2020 with a budget of EUR 3 million; the program was released in three regions of Ukraine by GIZ with German government donorship. The program's prime objective was to develop local self-government and improve the public service quality of state institutions by introducing new procedures and instruments (GIZ, n.d.).

Local self-government and the rule of law in Ukraine was a 6-year program, from 2014 to 2020, funded by the Sweden government and implemented by Folke Bernadotte Academy. The Ukrainian stakeholders of the program were the national parliament, the government of the state, and 18 different localities across the country. The project with a SEK 35.7 million budget addressed the following issues: rule of law amplification in public service delivery, inclusive governance promotion, and platforms for dialogue creation (FBA, 2014).

EU for stronger public finance systems of local governments was a three-year project, from 2017 to 2020, with a budget of EUR 3.1 million. The project objectives were to provide

practical, transparent, and accountable public financial management systems at the local and regional levels, including developing high-tech programs. The project was released for the state Ministry of Finance and the following pilot regions: Vinnytsia, Dnipropetrovsk, Lviv, and Cherkasy (DAI, n.d.).

E-government support for decentralization in Ukraine was a five-year project, from 2016 to 2021, with a budget of EUR 9.4 million, released by the e-Governance Academy of Estonia to create and implement high-tech hardware and software for over 600 administrative service centers across the country and deliver quality service (EGA, n.d.).

The Gender budgeting in Ukraine, a seven-year project, was implemented from 2014 to 2021 and financed by Sweden, with a budget of SEK 70.5 million. The project was released in all 24 regions of Ukraine with national government assistance, targeting regional state administrations. The project's goal was to embrace the efficiency of state expenditures at the local level, considering the needs of different groups of women and men; the project included gender analysis of the local state programs, training events, outreach activities, and others (GBR, n.d.).

Support to decentralization in Ukraine is the Sweden project, running from 2014 to 2022 in partnership with the Ukrainian government, the Parliament of Ukraine, and the Association of Amalgamated Territorial Communities. The project budget is SEK 41.7 million and focused on fiscal and education decentralization, and support for national and local actors (ibid).

The EU program Ukraine – Local Empowerment, Accountability and Development (U-LEAD), one of the prime projects on decentralization reform in Ukraine, is being implemented from 2016 to 2023 and is funded by Germany, Poland, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, and Slovenia with a budget of EUR 152.3 million. The program works in all regions of Ukraine, focused on establishing a multi-level, transparent, and accountable governing system to meet the residents' needs. It aims to increase the communities' capacity to face modern challenges, promote citizen and private sector involvement in local affairs, and create adequate centers for administrative services across the country (U-LEAD, n.d.).

The support to services availability in Ukraine is a two-year project, being delivered from 2021 to 2023 and funded by the government of Sweden with a budget of SEK 30 million. The program's main purpose is to establish and modernize the local Centers for administrative services, maintain a dialog between residents and community leaders, and

introduce the oversight and accountability mechanisms at the local level. The initiative covers all regions of Ukraine in partnership with the government and parliament of Ukraine, regional state administrations, and local self-governing bodies (PROSTO, n.d.).

#### *4.3.4. Swiss projects.*

Switzerland itself and in partnership with other countries has spent over CHF 25 million for decentralization reform in Ukraine.

Decentralization for improved democratic education is a five-year program, running from 2020 to 2025, with a budget of CHF 4.4 million. The program's goal is to modernize the education system, aimed to develop decentralized, transparent, democratic, inclusive, and accountable school management in 16 amalgamated territorial communities of 4 regions of Ukraine. The program has been delivered in partnership with the national government of Ukraine and regional state administrations (DECIDE, n.d.).

Development of citizenship competences in Ukraine was a five-year project, delivered from 2013 to 2018 with a budget of CHF 1.6 million. The program was aimed at civil society development in eight regions in Ukraine by raising awareness and capability of educators, students, their parents, and local public servants, as well as by improving the process of democratic cooperation between state authorities, the education system, and the local community (DOCCU, n.d.).

E-Governance for accountability and participation is an eight-year program, being delivered from 2015 to 2023 with a budget of CHF 9.4 million, in partnership with the government of Ukraine and targeting the following regions: Vinnytsia, Volyn, Dnipropetrovsk, Luhansk, and Odesa. The program goal is to develop and implement e-governance, e-services, and e-democracy both at the national level and in the regions of Ukraine (EGAP, n.d.).

Decentralization support was a thirteen-year project, from 2007 to 2020, with CHF 9.3 million in aid. The program introduced technical support in the utility area of local communities in Vinnytsia, Dnipropetrovsk, Poltava, Luhansk, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Sumy regions and was focused on improving the waste management and modernization of the water supplies in villages and towns (DESPRO, n.d.).

#### *4.3.5. Canadian programs.*

The Expert deployment for governance and economic growth was a five-year program delivered from 2014 to 2019, with a budget of CAD \$18.8 million, and funded by the Government of Canada. The program aimed to assist the Government of Ukraine on reform implementation according to the national and international agreements in a partnership with the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau, and the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine.

The Partnership for local economic development and democratic governance project was another five-year program executed from 2015 to 2020, with a budget of CAD \$19.5 million. The project aimed to increase the efficiency of small and medium businesses, improve cooperation between local, regional, and national authorities, and strengthen municipalities across Ukraine by focusing on economic development and implementing democratic and inclusive government practices at the level of local municipalities. Several city councils across Ukraine were the prime recipients of the assistance.

To conclude, as illustrated in Table 2, none of the existing foreign programs were exclusively devoted to the regional councils’ development or to embracing their issues within the framework of the decentralization reform. The councils might have been included in some projects as an integral part of program implementation; however, the absolute majority of the projects concentrated around the following four themes:

1. Development of appropriate legislation for administrative and fiscal decentralization in cooperation with the national government and the parliament.
2. Improving public service quality at the local level via regional state administrations, municipalities, and local amalgamated communities’ engagement.
3. Civil society involvement.
4. E-governance implementation at the national and local levels.

Quite possible that the councils were outside the scope of foreign aid focus due to ongoing legislative confusion surrounding the sphere of the councils’ responsibilities and/or ability (or inability) to influence the decision-making processes within a region.

Table 2.

	<b>International programs on decentralization in Ukraine focused on:</b>
--	--

<b>Project title</b>	<b>Local self-governing institutions (amalgamated communities, cities)</b>	<b>Local civil society and/or journalists inclusion/training</b>	<b>Gender issues at the local level</b>	<b>Regional councils</b>	<b>The national government and/or parliament</b>
Policy for Ukraine Local Self-Governance (PULSE)	+	+			
DIEMO		+			
The Community Development Project	+	+			
DOBRE	+	+			
HOVERLA	+	+			+
UN RPP	+	+			
Civil Society for Enhanced Democracy and Human Rights in Ukraine		+			+
Administrative Reform in Eastern Ukraine	+				
Local self-government and the rule of law in Ukraine	+	+			
Facilitating dialogue on reforms in Ukraine					+
Strengthening civil participation in democratic decision-making in Ukraine	+	+			+
Strengthening democracy and building trust at the local level in Ukraine	+				+
EU for stronger public finance systems of local governments	+				+
E-government support for decentralization in Ukraine	+				
Gender budgeting in Ukraine	+		+		+
Support good governance in local communities as part of the decentralization reform	+	+			+
Enhancing decentralization and public administration reform in Ukraine	+				
Support to decentralization in Ukraine	+				+
Ukraine – Local Empowerment, Accountability and Development (U-LEAD)	+				+
Support to services availability in Ukraine	+				+
Decentralization for improved democratic education	+				+
Development of citizenship competencies in Ukraine	+				
E-Governance for accountability and participation	+	+			+
Decentralization support	+				

The Expert deployment for governance and economic growth					+
The Partnership for local economic development and democratic governance project	+				

Thus, it seems that none of the programs was devoted to the Regional Councils' issues. Nonetheless, the anticipated Constitutional amendments on decentralization issues are expected to adjust the functions of all region-level actors. Hence, a regional state administration, the prime executive body at the level, is to become a prefecture with administrative oversight objectives. Following these amendments, regional councils might be able to establish executive bodies, manage a communal property of the region, work on and approve development programs, manage regional budgets, and operate the local funds. However, the key improvements are reserved for the local amalgamated communities (Drazhenko, 2021). Therefore, it might be necessary to shift the focus of future projects on decentralization issues in Ukraine directly to regional and community councils.

\* The following questions were posed to those interviewed:

- (1) Do you work or coordinate your activities with your regional council?
- (2) How would you assess the decision-making process in the oblast council?
- (3) How important are inclusivity and gender equality for the councils?
- (4) What needs to be done to empower local NGOs to become essential actors in a region?
- (5) What needs to be done to make the decision-making process more transparent and inclusive?
- (6) Who is on your regional council, what are these people?
- (7) Which issues are the most important at the current stage of the decentralization reform?

## 5. Part II. Evaluation of regional councils' effectiveness.

### 5.1. The research methodology.

All communications adhered to the conditions set out in clearance #116477, obtained through Carleton University's Office of Research Ethics, obtained November 11, 2021.

The data for this part was gathered from various sources: through websites of the official national and local governing institutions, media, publications of Ukrainian civil



society organizations (CSO), and eight interviews: six with representatives of civil society organizations; one with a Regional Council Member; one with a national-level expert. Interviews were conducted in Ukrainian language via online chat service and video-telephony ZOOM between November 29, 2021 to December 20, 2021. The eight interviews were carried out with the following people\*:

1. Hanna Parfionova (HP), Manager of the Kherson CSO Rozvytok;
2. Marianna Khmelnytska (MK), Leader of a Kyiv district CSO Vidradnyi Info;
3. Olexander Neberykut (ON), Analyst of nationwide Ukrainian CSO Opora;
4. Oksana Moskalenko (OM), Program Director at the Women's Consortium of Ukraine;
5. Roman Bezsmertnyi (RB), the former Deputy Prime Minister, responsible in the 2005 Government of Ukraine for the decentralization, now a professor at the Kyiv National University of Culture and Arts and an expert;
6. Svitlana Zadorozhna (SZ), Member of the Board, the CSO Women's Union of the Chernihiv region;
7. Tamara Ogorodova (TO), Chair of the Board, Zaporizhzhya Charity Foundation Unity For The Future;
8. Tatiana Kamenshuk (TK), Member of the Vinnytsia Regional Council;

The contacts of the council member and the Women's Consortium of Ukraine representative were provided by the Parliamentary Centre. References of Zaporizhzhya charity foundation Unity for the future and Women's Union of the Chernihiv region were provided by the Women's Consortium of Ukraine. The CSO Opora was contacted directly due to its long-standing reputation as one of the most outstanding CSOs in Ukraine. The former Deputy Prime Minister and the leader of the Kyiv's CSO were also contacted directly due to past collaborations with the researcher. As the experience and opinion of those interviewed on the issues of the research seem relevant and insightful, their answers are given here as fully as possible. Overall, 16 invitations for interviews were sent out to national, regional, and local CSOs and experts; however, 8 remained unanswered.

## **5.2. Composition of the regional councils in Ukraine and women representation.**

The purpose of the section is to present a detailed analysis of the composition of regional councils, the representation of women on those councils, the decision-making process in the governing body, and council's inclusivity in terms of readiness to cooperate with local civil society on various issues to address the needs of a wider range of local

**\*\*The number of local councils' members in Ukraine is determined by paragraph 3 of the Electoral Code's article 197, which stresses that the quantity of local voters defines the number of council members. If a region has 500,000 to 1 million voters, the number of deputies in the council constitutes 64, a region with 1 to 2 million voters has a council with 84 deputies, and an oblast with over 2 million voters has a council with 120 deputies (Vyborchii kodeks Ukrainy, 2019).**

population and actors. This section also aims to analyze and answer whether the decentralization reform introduced meaningful improvements to the function and role of the regional councils in Ukraine.

According to the 2019 Electoral Code of Ukraine, every five candidates of a party list should be represented by at least two nominees of both sexes, meaning that 2 out of every 5 members of regional councils must be women; this applies to all level elections. In other words, 40% representation. The number can be checked in two ways, as follows. According to the Electoral Code, paragraph 12 of article 154, a regional council with, for example, 64 deputies has 12.8 of the fives, when dividing; when 12.8 is multiplied on at least two female nominees, it gives 25.6 deputies must be women in the council, which equals to 40%. The second way is to divide the total number of the regional councils'

members, which is 1659, by five, and multiply by two, which results in 663.6 of the deputies must be women, which as well equals to 40%. The gender quota is also confirmed by Ukrainian CSOs (Kuhta, 2021). However, the gender requirement was not met in full during the 2020 local elections in Ukraine.

In October 2020, Ukraine held a regular local election in accordance with the new 2019 Electoral Code. The local elections of all levels were carried out through proportional representation, based on the political parties' open local electoral list. The 2020 elections were held in 22 of the 24 regions of Ukraine; members of the regional council were not elected in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea due to the ongoing military conflict in the area and occupation by the Russian Federation. Ukraine has 13 regional councils with 64 members or deputies, *deputaty*; 7 regional councils with 84 members, and 2 regional councils with 120 members. In total, there were 1659 deputies elected to the regional councils in the country (Obrani deputaty miscevyh rad, 2020). \*\*

According to the Central Election Commission of Ukraine, in the 2020 elections, 43,122 deputies were elected to the local councils of all levels, including cities', amalgamated territorial communities', districts' and regions' councils. Of these, 36.9% are women; whereas only 16.95% of 1,141 city, town and village mayors are women (Obrani deputaty miscevyh rad, 2020). However, the Central Election Commission provides only general

gender statistics without regional specification. In order to determine the number of women deputies in a particular regional council, the composition of each was analyzed manually using data from the Central Election Commission of Ukraine, which probably could introduce some inaccuracy of the results; however, the data on each region was checked at least twice. The analysis indicates the following: only four oblasts have regional councils with 30-34% women council members. The other 18 regional councils consist of 20-28% women council members, with an overall national average of 25.6% of women in regional councils. However, at the nomination stage, 43% of the candidates were women (Zelinska, 2020).

In order to see the percentage change between the 2015 and 2020 local elections, a similar manual count of data provided by the Central Election Commission of Ukraine was conducted. In the 2015 local elections, 1,698 individuals were elected as deputies across the 22 regional councils in Ukraine (Miscevi vybory, 2015), and of those, only 14.7% were women. This figure might be explained by the fact that in 2015 the Central Election Commission of Ukraine clarified the Law of Ukraine On Local Elections, and determined that the 30% gender quota in the electoral lists was optional (Marceniuk, 2015).

The results of the comparison across elections suggest certain improvements, as only 14.7% of the regional council members across the state were women in 2015, while the percentage of women in the regional councils increased to an average of 25.6% in the 2020 local elections and some have indicated that this number may be as high as 28% (Zelinska, 2020). Nevertheless, these numbers still do not reflect the fact that the majority (54%) of the population in Ukraine are women (Serdalova & Petruk, 2020).

According to the gender analysis of the regional councils' composition and despite the improvements observed when comparing election outcomes, none of the councils met Ukraine's gender requirement in the 2020 regional elections either, with the highest rate of 34% in the Khmelnytsky regional council and the lowest rate of 20% in the Ternopil regional council. Moreover, the gender analysis of the regional councils' leadership positions (i.e., chairperson, and/or first deputy, deputy of the chairperson, and chief of staff) shows that only 8 of the 22 regional councils, namely Zaporizhzhia, Kyiv, Lviv, Mykolaiv, Poltava, Kharkiv, Khmelnytsky and Chernihiv, have women in different leading positions.

### **5.3. Inclusivity and gender issues in regional councils.**

The Ministry's letter and interviews with the CSO representatives show that the issue of inclusivity in Ukraine might be considered by both actors as too narrow when looking through the lens of the engagement of disabled people or physical accessibility only. The broader sense of inclusivity, defined by the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) as “*the quality of trying to include many different types of people and treat them all fairly and equally,*” seems out of reach. For example, the Ministry highlights that Ukraine has signed and ratified the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the government has developed a national strategy for creating barrier-free spaces until 2030. According to the program, all levels of local self-governing bodies in Ukraine should provide barrier-free space and inclusivity regarding the gender aspect. Some interviewed civil society actors confirm that the barrier-free space issue is a focus of the local authorities:

*‘There is no inclusivity in the decision-making process in our council. Decisions are made without an appropriate category of people it might concern, without prior discussion. Even an opinion of the council members, who are opposed to the council’s majority, is not taken into account. Despite inter-fractional association on gender, our regional council does not move further regarding the issues. On physical inclusivity, all problems had been resolved in the council's building. As for draft decisions, there is no inclusivity at all... As a woman, I do not feel that my rights are violated, but as the council member [in opposition], I see that my rights are violated. Legislation already provides everything people need, and anything else is in the women's hands’ (TK).*

*‘I never had any issues with gender equality, and today it is not a problem. Regarding inclusivity, certain decisions are being made, budgets are being allocated, and there are some improvements. But often, those do not correspond to people's needs and requests. Authorities do anything else but what a community needs. Deputies help somewhere at 10% out of 100%. However, they have enough leverage. Why do they not help? Probably because it is not exciting or beneficial for them’ (MK).*

*‘At the regional level, the councils do nothing at all with the issues [gender]. At the national level, they are forced to act by foreign donors. However, the legislation on elections requires a certain number of women on the electoral lists, but these requirements are not met. The Ukrainian society is matriarchal, and women's issues dominate it. The regions have a lot of gender issues, which might be resolved by heart and understanding only. In the regions, men do not work at all in education, social care, or health. Women provide almost 100% of services. There is a question: women work in the spheres, men sit in local councils, and how*

*will it work together? No money is needed for the matter, but a moral component. In communities where women became leaders, the situation changes and develops much faster. They begin to act like a mother, and this applies to the entire community, and they manage the budget according to the community's needs. The electoral legislation must be adjusted, and it is necessary to oblige the parties to nominate local candidates from the local cells and strictly adhere to the gender quota' (RB).*

*'Those issues are improving if CSOs promote them. However, there is still no accessibility. The gender issue is improving because it is actively lobbied at the community and the regional level. However, it is common that at the higher level of power, there are fewer women; and at the lower level, there are more women' (HP).*

*'Those issues are essential for the donors and certain NGOs, and they promote the issues and force regional councils to act. But there are no councils' initiatives or some reasonable policies for the matter. The problems are at the margins for political parties and candidates or even non-existent... Regional councils have three types of actors regarding these issues. The first one considers the issues as essential and promotes them. The second one, the majority of deputies, supports the first group for their own sake and reputation but does not consider the issues as necessary; and the third one, a minority, mainly of the far-right wing, opposes the promotion of these issues. However, the same may apply to any other policies within a council. Nonetheless, the regional councils' members understand the importance of these issues' (ON).*

*'Today the regional council does not even see these issues. It is so irrelevant and not paramount for them. It is challenging to work with the council; it is easier to work with smaller communities, as they are trying to do something, they are closer to people. The regional council distributes the funds, finances the programs. Still, under this party system, deputies are very dependent and do everything the party leadership orders, and very few deputies do comprehensive work on a district. The regional state administration develops and implements gender, social and other programs; they must deal with this component. However, at the regional level in Ukraine, the gender issues and policies are at the 20<sup>th</sup> place' (TO).*

*'It [the regional council] lives its own life, and we have no common affairs. In communities, for example, certain things are already being sought. The city also implements certain projects on inclusion ... Deputies of the regional council represent the interests of*

*certain parties or groups and follow these interests. NGOs have no own voice [there], and the regional council is not very open. In addition, their website is gender blind' (SZ).*

*'Unfortunately, gender issues are out of priority for authorities. The main topics for them are business, money, infrastructure, etc. And in these areas, it is crucial to make the gender focus stronger...There is a shift. In each region, it is different, but it happens. Some oblasts who did not want to act looked at their neighbors with interest and adopted new approaches. The regions which implement these social programs already have data and effectively utilize it for their benefit... But there is an opposition, a particular anti-gender movement, and church organizations, which are active in education, have some supporters in governing bodies. Every region has supporters of this movement' (OM).*

Thus, it might be concluded that, first, gender inequality, despite its existence and inadequate practices, is not a paramount issue for the society of Ukraine, at least for now. Secondly, in the broader meaning of the term, the absence of inclusivity in a decision-making process at all levels in all governing institutions is what really disturbs society. Nonetheless, after the 2020 local elections, the composition of the regional councils across the county has been refreshed; however, influential local elites and business groups still dominate in the councils and their issues take on significant importance over public ones during the decision-making process, and the decision-making process itself is obviously exclusive. The existing proportional electoral system has advantages, but there are more disadvantages, namely, no independent candidates, a party leadership diktat, needless politicization, and many elected women revoking their mandates in favour of other candidates.

#### **5.4. Who are the members of the regional councils?**

It also seems necessary to consider the regional council members' professional background to confirm or refute Bader's (2021) notion about local elites capture and exclusive governance at the local level due to a higher concentration of power. Thus, those interviewed were asked to shed light on the background of their regional councils' members.

*'At the city council, most of the deputies are businessmen, or communal service representatives, which gives some leverage to the city mayor; there are few civil society representatives. At the regional council, the same situation, the majority are represented by businessmen, politicians of local or national level, there are a parties' functionaries. The city council has some bright and well-known women members, but I don't know any in the regional council' (HP).*



*'Members of our district council are people of different backgrounds. We have former activists and volunteers, businessmen, former assistants of the parliament members. But they do not have experience and appropriate knowledge; we see that they want to help but do not know how to. Moreover, because of the party-list elections, every deputy is politically biased, which is an issue. To become a council member, an activist must join a party. There are some genuinely influential activists, but they do not want to join any party and lose their independence' (MK).*

*'We have a proportional electoral system based on party lists, or parties must nominate candidates; there are no self-nominees and less room for corruption. However, there are some issues within a party; nevertheless, they are forced to engage new people, and there is a sort of competition for the candidates. The last elections were more competitive than before. We observe a significant renewal of the regional councils' composition. Over half of the members are new people. However, now business people also dominate, but there are many new people; from education, local executive bodies, doctors, teachers. But the top and key positions in the councils are occupied by people involved in more or less influential business, trade, agriculture, transport' (ON).*

*'Of course, there is such a phenomenon and a label - that a woman member of the council is someone's wife, a godmother or a friend. The main parties of our regional council are represented by local elites, business people, influential agrarians, and they are people with a large fortune... Our regional council has no representatives from local civil society or NGOs, but some are in amalgamated communities' (TK).*

Hence, it is clear that despite some improvements of the electoral processes, the majority of seats in a council is shared between influential local business groups with some inclusion of local civil society actors and public servants. For example, the media emphasize that at the lower level, e.g. the Chernihiv city council, the majority of the council members consists of entrepreneurs, educators, i.e. school principals and local officials. Most of them work in managerial positions (OTG, 2020). Shamida (2020) highlights that the 2020 local elections have consolidated the dominance of local elites at the regional and city levels. The random biography analysis of the regional councils' members in the Poltava and Sumy regions revealed the same result. Moreover, women council members usually represent the local business groups or elites too.

### **5.5. Communication and accessibility issues of regional councils.**

As part of this research and to investigate the regional councils' performance, queries regarding decentralization reform, governance practices, inclusivity, gender equality, and relevant foreign assistance were sent to regional councils of Ukraine in the Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Kirovograd, Poltava, Ternopil, Zhytomyr, Odesa, Kherson, Chernivtsi, and Chernihiv. All regional councils were chosen randomly. The councils' email addresses were found on their official websites.

As of February 02, 2022, only three regional councils of the Kirovograd, Chernihiv, and Zhytomyr oblasts responded. Though the governing body from the Chernihiv and Zhytomyr regions did not directly address the questions, stressing that the council acts within the framework of Ukrainian legislation fully supports and assists the government of Ukraine on decentralization issues. The answer of the Kirovograd regional council is informative enough, but, in many ways, it echoes the letter from the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine.

Given the lack of substantive responses, three out of ten, it might be tempting to conclude that, currently, regional councils in Ukraine have communication issues including, for example, an insufficient number of employees, lack of time, or aspiration. Otherwise, a question arises: how do regional councils communicate with local residents and meet their needs if queries remain unanswered? It may be that, given the current three-level administrative-territorial composition of Ukraine (Pavluk et al., 2016), for local residents, a regional council would be the last institution to visit in order to find a solution for personal queries, as an amalgamated territorial community, *terytorialna hromada*, is the primary but central unit and called first to deal with issues and meet the needs of residents. The majority of interviews, conducted in the framework of the research with local civil society actors confirm this hypothesis, including the conclusion that there is a communication issue between the society and self-governing bodies:

*'Ordinary people physically can't join the council's session, only with special permission. The regulations are spelled out that neither a journalist nor an ordinary resident of the region can pass in. It is possible to convey a question to deputies but only through personal receptions'* (TK).

*'It is very difficult to promote some projects, ideas for improvement, it is almost impossible to implement any initiative. Local activists and civil society burn out, young activists leave, only mature ones remain. Because local authorities do not listen and do not*

*perceive the society as an actor... It seems that the common professional level of local deputies and executive officials is very low. Nonetheless, according to legislation, local councils cannot initiate socio-economic development programs. Only executive bodies do. Hence a regional council adopts programs developed by a regional state administration and funds them, often with underfunding' (HP).*

*'We observe communication issues. On one hand people do not trust officials; on the other hand, sometimes officials do not really want to talk, our letters often end up with come-offs... In Kyiv city we have a very long communication chain with all-level authorities, including local deputies, and it takes years to resolve any issue because of that' (MK).*

*'There might be some communication between a regional council and a specific circle of CSOs, which are interested in the activities of the regional council. There might be few of them, but if there are any, they address specific issues and policies, e.g., protection of cultural heritage or architecture, environmental, youth organizations, which deal with issues at the regional level. As a rule, they have long-standing and well-established relations with the council. But when talking about the decision-making process and involvement of a wide range of CSOs, councils don't have instruments for the matter; there is no systematic communication, no channels for informing. A specific mechanism, a civil board, is mainly at an oblast state administrations. Regional councils also had a similar instrument, but they were established to resolve concrete issues. Nonetheless, the mechanism remains unexciting for many active CSOs, as it is often seen as a waste of time, discussions for the sake of a debate; thus, the channel is ineffective and has no real influence' (ON).*

*'It seems, even if our regional council notices CSOs, that might be only those representing the veterans [of the Russia-Ukraine conflict] because they are well organized and work hard to be noticed by the deputies to meet the vets' needs... The regional council is very weak in interaction with CSOs. The oblast state administration has a civil board, but it does not work and does not invite to participate. Nowadays, the regional council is very politicized, and few political factions are interested in cooperation. They analyze which political party a CSO has supported and whether it supports them; hence this politicization hinders local self-governance. Many local actors stressed that the party-run elections and party disputes were a serious obstacle for self-governance.' (TO).*

*'It seems that our regional council lives its own life; our CSO never had some support from it. They could discuss some topics together, but nothing more. However, there are always*

*some lured CSOs...regarding our city council, its chairperson is quite an authoritarian person. He barely listens to CSOs, e.g., house building in the green zones and parks...'* (SZ).

*'Earlier councils could take our suggestions into account if they were afraid of some publicity and attention. Now they have some interest in communication with women's and other CSOs. A sort of selection begins, whether an organization and its ideas are popular; we can see some positive changes. Earlier, during a committee hearing, they [deputies] did not listen to anyone, only gave instructions, did not understand the role of CSOs, and did not accept them. As for now, it is otherwise; there is some flirtation.'* (OM).

*'At the current stage, it is crucial to educate councils members. They should be brought to the regional councils of other countries; they should be shown what democracy is, the problems are everywhere, but solutions are found and agreed upon; because it is challenging for the people to learn without applied things. I'm not even talking about such modern things as gender policy'* (RB).

Given the views expressed in these interviews, it would be useful to train both the regional councils and local CSOs to communicate and to interact together for the greater good.

#### **5.6. The decision-making process in regional councils of Ukraine.**

Regarding the decision-making process in a regional council, the mentioned above Ministry stressed in the letter that councils fulfill their duties throughout a session, consisting of a plenary seating and meetings of a council's standing committees. According to Ukrainian legislation, regional councils adopt regulations in the form of decisions within the limits of their powers, which become legitimate at the relevant territory immediately after official publication. Concerning transparency of a decision-making process, the Ministry highlights that local self-governing bodies, including the councils, can involve the public in resolving local issues through appropriate public consultation or hearings. Moreover, regional councils and regional executive institutions are able to establish a civil board to act as a temporary advisory body aimed at promoting citizens participation in local governance. However, consultations with a civil board and its meetings are regulated by the Government of Ukraine and must be approved by a regional council. A civil board is called upon to develop proposals and submit them for regional council consideration, and to oversee the decision-making process in the regional council to assess regulations and execution of decisions, to accumulate and submit data and proposals of local civil society actors, and so forth (Pro hromadsku radu,

n.d.). However, the research shows that only 4 regional councils out of 24, namely those in Kharkiv, Poltava, Vinnytsia, and Ivano-Frankivsk regions, mention a civil board at the regional council, but it seems the boards are not active. Meanwhile, every regional state executive body, an oblast state administration, has established a similar civil board. Nonetheless, the civil society actors interviewed for the study stressed that a civil board has a minor role in a region's politics and cannot influence the decision-making process:

*'There are some instruments that do not work properly, e.g., a civil board. They exist formally, and they are treated formally, deputies and councils consider them as ineffective. Because it is quite hard for council members to find a local CSOs and to engage them; after all, at the initial stage of the civil board work, everybody had a lot of enthusiasm to cooperate, but later on, it becomes clear that CSOs has their own agenda over an issue, or treat the board formally. Hence, the deputies begin to treat the board formally, gathering less. Nobody expects some positive outcomes from the meetings. The deputies can't get effective analytics, expertise, proposals, or qualitative criticism. The CSOs don't reveal some efficiency' (ON).*

*'This issue requires broad CSOs' involvement. It would be more fruitful cooperation if it were prescribed by law. Nowadays, deputies adopt some decisions, which they discuss on a sideline, and after all, the public understands whose interests were taken into account. There is no political will. The stakeholders of the political parties are not interested in; the local political and party systems are divided between the rich and influential people. The bail for a candidate is paid by either a party or the party leader; hence, if someone has paid the bail, he decides. There are enough examples of how women deputies handed over their mandates to other people. Someone was promised a good post or anything else and thus washed out those who received many votes; we saw such cases' (TO).*

*'By law, anyone including NGOs can attend a council meeting. People and the entire public sector need to be more active. This paternalism that someone will resolve everything for us is a negative factor. Nonetheless, spontaneously, it is challenging to get into the council's building, but people are often allowed to get in due to NGOs' pressure. In addition, it depends on an issue considered by the council. If it is an easy one, and the council is ready to compromise, they open the doors. If an issue is about lobbying someone's interest, NGOs are not allowed because they do not want publicity. Nonetheless, the local councils are more important for residents than the regional one. However, with our project, we go to the*

*regional or local executive bodies because it is easier to resolve issues with them than with the councils' (SZ).*

*'We do not need quick decisions on many issues, but careful consideration, planning, and comprehensive discussion, we need access to information. Sometimes councils make decisions without genuine discussion, hiding behind a fake one and informing the public afterward. Moreover, there are almost no proposals from NGOs. It means that there is something unclear to them or no time to study. Concerning the public board hearings, the procedure needs to be qualitatively improved. The hearings exist, but many nuances are unclear, e.g., how some NGOs get access to information, discussion, but others do not. The process is not transparent enough. Not all the data is available through the websites. At the same time, deputies do not fully understand the practicality of such hearings and discussions' (OM).*

*'This can be settled only through the main document [for a council], which regulates all council activities. It is the rules of procedure. At the same time, the deputy's accountability is regulated and spelled out well. However, the regional council or deputy is not responsible for non-compliance with public reporting, but people need answers to resolve their problems. And I was able to resolve issues due to good personal relations with the chairman of amalgamated communities. But not because I am a member of the regional council and the mechanism of influence only through the leaders of the amalgamated community' (TK).*

To conclude, the decision-making process in all level councils in Ukraine, including a regional one, appears to be somewhat exclusive and primarily oriented towards the local elites and business groups. Issues that concern the public come to the elites' attention only during elections.

### **5.7. What role do the regional councils play in local life?**

The legislative amendments discussed above seem to keep the regional councils in Ukraine at the margins of the decentralization processes. Moreover, their role in local processes is obscure even for local actors, and the interviews with the CSOs confirm this notion:

*'Ukrainian regional self-governance combines the European and [North] American concepts. Ukraine is a big country, and in all regions, specific nuances cannot be restrained because it can lead to conflict; at the same time, Ukraine has a traditional sense and desire*



*for self-government. The other issue is that the central government always wants to control and distribute the funds, but these functions had to be transferred to the regional level a long time ago. At the same time, the current impact of the reform shows that different towns and cities have blossomed after financial decentralization, as certain shortcomings were resolved. The volume of fiscal decentralization must be increased. Nonetheless, local and center managers have no vision of working together directly. Instead, they are looking for some mediators. There is an understanding of democracy but no understanding of organizational efforts. And these things are currently failing the most at the regional level. Nobody takes organizational steps for the comprehensive development of local communities because they do not understand what to do, how to do it, or why' (RB).*

*'Currently, the state doesn't work on strengthening the regional councils' role. The councils seem to be on a margin; all efforts are directed toward strengthening local communities' capacity. There is no state policy to strengthen the regional councils' functions, and there are no new bills on regional councils' roles. The councils were important during the amalgamation of the local communities, setting their boundaries, but currently, there is no general vision on the regional councils; maybe, there will be some, after determining a role of the regional and local executive bodies' (TK).*

*'Due to decentralization, an amalgamated territorial communities became financially independent; the region councils were left with little resources and they need to maintain communal assets of regional importance, ... it doesn't have a strong executive apparatus and they are quite enclosed institution, once we tried but failed to meet a chairperson of the council. Within previous years, many local CSOs, including us, were very upset with the level of cooperation, so we decided not to participate in the civil board with the regional governing bodies. We try to cooperate more with the city council, as they have more powers and resources; however, some fruitful cooperation does not work out too. They do react to some letters and proposals, there are certain deputies who support our initiatives, but issues are still unresolved for a long time' (HP).*

*'Other CSOs and we do cooperate with some deputies of our district council, as they are able to bring an issue for the council's consideration and to an executive body; however, we observe a general trend that people turn more to NGOs than to deputies...it seems, that public confidence in governing institutions is sharply decreasing' (MK).*



*'The regional councils are out of our focus; we work more with city councils, as they are closer to peoples' needs and their responsibilities are clearly defined. We did some analyses of regional councils' transborder cooperation, but that was a short-term project' (ON).*

*'We do cooperate with the women deputies in our regional council, they have formed an inter-factional association Equal Opportunities, and we work together on strengthening the gender aspect of their work...however, a council is a local self-governing body and can decide itself whether to participate in a state program; unfortunately our regional council has not adopted a program on gender equality; meantime an oblast state administration is an executive body subordinated to the central government and obliged to participate in all state programs, but to participate in a program sometimes they have to request a council for additional funds from the regional budget' (TO).*

*'We work with every governing institution [of our region] on various projects, including the regional and the city councils, and the oblast state administration. The members of our CSO are women deputies of the region and the city councils, representatives of the oblast state administration. Now we are working on civil society institutions' development at the local, community level' (SZ).*

*'Since 2006, one of our programs has been women's political engagement; we worked with women candidates on their ability to be elected into a council... we try to work with all stakeholders and coordinate our efforts with regional and local state administrations. However, it is hard to find an appropriate institution on gender issues locally. E.g., the central government has a Commissioner for gender policy, but at the regional level, there is no any; usually, such matters are managed by an appropriate division of a regional state administration, or by an adviser on gender without significant influence' (OM).*

The findings from the interviews and other sources allow for the following conclusions. The regional councils in Ukraine were out of the decentralization reform spotlight. Within the reform, the prime focus was on amalgamating territorial communities and improving their functions, role, and services, and meeting their financial needs. Newly amalgamated communities in Ukraine, as a basic level of the local self-governance, were and remain the prime focus of the reform of the central authorities, international donors and CSOs. Despite many legislative amendments on the state decentralization, the regional councils still function under obsolete normative acts, including a relevant article of the Constitution of Ukraine,

which brings some confusion, and functional overlapping with a regional executive body, the oblast state administration. Finally, it seems that the central authorities have no strategic vision regarding the regional councils' role.

### **5.8. The role of civil society organizations in self-government.**

But what about other local actors, namely civil society organizations? Are they able to influence regional policies and processes? If not, what should be done to improve their role and to empower them? Those interviewed have shared their opinion on the issue:

*'First of all, there is no such phenomena as regional CSOs. There are transregional and city CSOs, but none operate within a region. It is a consequence of the regional councils' function and their current role. There are issues on the regional level, but there are no actors to deal with them. Hence, it is crucial to empower regional councils and give them more competence, which should also attract civil society' (RB).*

*'There is a solid legal basis for this. The regional council itself must have a political will and interest to cooperate. CSOs have such intentions, and they always knock on the door. It is necessary to educate council members and clerks and hold joint events, meetings, and training. After all, they do not know about the problems; there is no understanding of how to cooperate with NGOs. There should be a dialogue, which is not visible now. Moreover, it might be good for CSOs to have their own independent media to inform the public' (HP).*

*'It is crucial to work well with communication issues to coordinate efforts with local CSOs. We have no synergy with local authorities. It is essential for the councils and executive bodies to analyze people's needs and form the budget accordingly; then, we would have fewer issues. Another huge problem is that we don't have transparent public hearings. The broad audience has no access to information about the hearings. Only certain actors know about them; in an outcome, authority makes unpopular decisions, which people do not support. Anyway, we have a severe issue with communication; the governing bodies are either afraid to communicate with the people, do not know how, or do not want to. On the other hand, almost all CSOs work voluntarily, few work due to grants. In our case, we work for free, wasting our personal money and time' (MK).*

*'Regarding CSOs, institutionalization is the crucial issue here because interaction with the authorities should be built on a professional basis. At the same time, money is the problem too. People refuse to create NGOs and work professionally because they do not have the resources. However, there are various initiatives funded by international donors. Many*

*things depend on CSOs themselves. Can they effectively utilize existing instruments, build long-standing relations with other local actors, including regional council members, and work a couple of years to gain progress? Many CSOs are not ready for that, and we observe more failures or unsuccessful cases than successful ones. But still, there is a certain Sovietness, opacity, bureaucracy, and this is a fact. However, it can be resisted through NGOs' activities, including in the media. But the media presence and recognition also require some time. Hence, CSOs must be trained as well' (ON).*

*'The CSOs must be independent, and the key element for that is financing through social ordering and sponsorship. But the national legislation on the matter is too sophisticated that nobody wants to deal with that. The Canadian legislation, which allows citizens and companies to fund CSOs, is a great example to follow. The Ukrainian civil society would be more capable and independent from the foreign donorship with the same law. But when we ask members of the parliament about the law, they always answer that it is irrelevant' (TO).*

*'The civil society itself must be more active and consolidated; in this case, they will be heard, but it seems, not yet. The CSOs need better networking, improved communication, and work actively with residents. Also, it seems we have no political leaders capable of respecting civil society. Before elections, authorities flirt with the civil society, but after they do not want to hear us' (SZ).*

*'CSOs should be taught to communicate with the population, explain how they work, and support people. It is also essential for the state to recognize NGOs' expertise and services and involve them in resolving local issues. There also must be a governmental ordering' (OM).*

Hence, it is obvious that the civil society across Ukraine struggles to survive and has no real powers or leverage to influence the decision-making process in the regional and other councils. Improving the financial independence and capacity of CSOs and NGOs requires certain amendments of the national legislation. Regional council members and local civil society organizations require relevant training and supervision to successfully transition to genuine democracy and improve coordination efforts and mutually beneficial cooperation. At the same time, regional councils can decide on financing local CSOs' programs on a variety of issues, including of social significance (Pressluzhba Zakarpatskoi oblrady, 2022). However, it might bear some risks for the council's objectiveness. The self-governing body

might prefer to deal with the particular exclusive circle of local CSOs, which do not criticize the council's performance but cooperate no matter what and could eventually become dependent and lured.

### **5.9. The organizational and financial challenges for council members.**

The interviews prompted the analysis of council members' salaries in detail. The research shows that council members exercise their powers without interrupting professional activities, though the chairperson and deputies are exceptions (the Law of Ukraine On the Status of the Local Councils' Members, 2002). Council members do not receive a salary or other financial compensation from a council and may combine their duties with business or another job. This potentially leads to severe corruption practices, and conflicts of interest during voting. As suggested by Lubarec (2021), *'Today, many professional and decent people do not want to work voluntarily [in the councils]. Conversely, those not interested in salaries but corruption opportunities go to work there.'* Hence, it seems, that salary might influence one's decision to run for a seat in a council. Addressing this issue may also require amendments to the legislation.

*'Council members perform their duties voluntarily; they do not receive salary [from the council] ... the members keep their wages at their permanent workplace ... the deputy corps for 70-80% was either managers of local public services or businessmen, for them, the salary was not crucial'* (TO).

Nevertheless, in 2022, Ukraine's parliament will decide on five normative acts for further decentralization. Among them are relevant Constitutional amendments, a bill on local state administrations with prefectural powers, amendments to the principles of the state regional policy which anticipates the introduction of strategies for local communities' development, a bill on local councils' accountability, and amendments to the Budget Code of Ukraine (Bezgin, 2022).

## **6. Conclusion.**

This research report analyzed the current role and functioning of the regional councils in Ukraine; highlighted functional gaps and needs of the regional self-governing body, scrutinized the councils' mandate and composition, investigated the role and representation of women, and discussed supervisory functions of the institution as well as its engagement with civil society and other local actors. The report presents the national legislation analysis, eight qualitative interviews, 6 of them with representatives of the national and local CSOs, one

with the national-level expert, and one with the regional council member. All interviews are presented here as fully as possible to allow further researchers to get acquainted with *vox populi* on the issue of regional councils and decentralization reform in Ukraine. A brief picture of international actors' role and collaborative efforts on decentralization issues in Ukrainian regions is also presented in the report. Moreover, in the study, appropriate queries were submitted to the Government and ten regional councils of Ukraine. All communications met the conditions set out in clearance #116477, obtained through Carleton University's Office of Research Ethics, received on November 11, 2021.

Research shows that the decentralization reform of Ukraine and the new concept of the center-periphery relations in the state through legislation adjustment were applied without first amending the Constitution of Ukraine. Moreover, it seems that no gender lenses were utilized to the prime legislative acts on decentralization reform of the state. While the gender quota of the new 2019 Electoral Code is an impressive step in the right direction, it still has not been implemented in full. Moreover, the literature review demonstrates that the ongoing decentralization reform in Ukraine has been examined from many angles. However, the researchers overlook issues such as gender equality, inclusive practices, accountability, and transparency of the decision-making process at regional and local council levels in Ukraine. Nonetheless, the decentralization reform is one of the most significant the country has undertaken. It also must be taken into account that the reform was implemented during the Ukraine crisis – the military conflict instigated by the Russian Federation.

Furthermore, the research findings indicate that the regional councils or *oblasni rady* have consistently remained on the margins of the decentralization reform since it was first introduced. National and international actors put minimal emphasis on the self-governing body, with no due respect for its possible role in the future regional policies of the state. The regional councils seem to be experiencing the following ongoing challenges:

- Lack of legal empowerment.
- Low level of engagement with local communities and actors.
- Lack of inclusivity, e.g. in the decision-making process.
- Underrepresentation of women in the councils across the state.
- Inefficient use of regional budgets.

- Lack of communication efforts and appropriate interaction between national and sub-national governing bodies, local actors, and civil society.

- Obsolete, Soviet-styled, institutional memory.

- Lack of transparency and accountability.

One of the reasons for these issues might be that the decentralization reform in Ukraine has not been reflected in the country's Constitution until now. However, an outcome of this research highlights two other possible reasons: the absence of political will at the national level to genuinely empower regional actors including councils, and the lack of clarity regarding the oblast councils' role. According to the three-level administrative-territorial composition of Ukraine (sub-regional, sub-national and national), an amalgamated territorial community, *terytorialna hromada*, is the primary but central unit and it is called first to deal with issues and meet the needs of its residents. The majority of interviews conducted with local civil society actors confirm the hypothesis. Additionally, either the regional councils do not play an essential role for local residents, or the councils' influence may be underestimated.

However, one may fairly place a question: What is regional councils' genuine role in modern Ukraine? Why are they needed if the regional councils cannot play an essential, comprehensive, and decisive role for their regions, including at this stage of implementing the decentralization reform? To some extent, the interviewed expert, Roman Bezsmertnyi, addressed the questions:

*"One of the key issues in the regions is the merger of local self-government and the state executives. It has cemented the establishment and the system. [Also] there is an issue of the central authority, which always wants to control the budget. It was necessary a long time ago to hand over these functions [and powers] to the regions, as now the cities have... Currently, local and central leaders do not have a vision of how to work together and directly... [In addition], all regions [in Ukraine] without exception were formed [in Soviet times] on an artificial basis, without objective parameters. Historically, Ukraine has its regional formations, such as Volyn, Podillya, Polissya, Slobozhanshchyna, Bukovyna, etc. Still, they do not coincide with the existing borders of the regions, which constantly instigates some conflicts."*

It is likely that this also might be one of the indirect reasons for the existing issues along the center-periphery axis. There are two components for the case, namely the currently



inherited dualism of power in the regions of Ukraine, when a regional state administration plays the first and critical role with officials appointed from the Center. The second one is the apparent lack of political will in the country's central authorities to endow the regional self-governing institution with expressive powers and independence from the Center, with the subsequent and mandatory transfer of executive functions from a regional state administration to the regional council. At this stage, these questions remain open and unresolved. Therefore, it is evident that only representatives of the central authorities of Ukraine responsible for making decisions and implementing the decentralization reform might have answers to the questions mentioned above.

Moreover, women elected to the regional councils often give up their mandates in favour of other individuals who, for one reason or another, did not make it to the regional council at the initial stage. Perhaps this nuance of respecting gender equality in the procedure for waiving a mandate needs to be legislatively corrected or fixed so that the number of women in councils does not decrease. It is also apparent that regional councils are relatively cut off from actual local social issues. Decisions important for the region are made behind the scenes, without extensive discussion with all interested actors. The instrument of influence of local civil society, namely the civil board, is not used and not advertised by the governing body. In addition, the issue of salaries and combining deputy activities with other work remains an area of concern. In this case, for a better performance of the functions, tasks, and duties of regional councils' deputies, it seems necessary to legally prohibit combining deputy activities with another job unless that job is in a civil society organization, as an exception.

The issue with the executive body of the regional councils and the subordination of local self-government to the local executive branch remains an open one. The long-term strengthening of the administrative influence of local state administrations has led to the status of local self-government as only a nominal subject of local government. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that regional councils do not have executive bodies, which only preserves the dominance of the regional state administrations in determining the developmental priorities of regions (Pavluk et al. 2016). Moreover, there is no clear distinction of the powers between regional state administrations and regional councils and according to the law, 76 powers have been duplicated (ibid.). Bill #4298 On Local State Administrations, which anticipates that the institutions would become an executive body of the regional councils, was criticized by the Council of Europe as one that does not correlate with the European Charter on local self-government because it carries the risk of upsetting



the balance of power in a territory and could have a detrimental effect on decentralization reform (Kadry ta organizacia roboty, 2020).

Finally, there are some particular issues with the empowerment of local civil society organizations in Ukraine to become a noticeable, influential, and essential actor in a region. It seems that without foreign sponsorship, local CSOs are not viable. Hence, it might be crucial for Ukraine to adopt appropriate legislation on local donorship with some tax benefits. The Canadian example might be a solid basis for such amendments. Furthermore, local CSOs must also be trained in how to actively but peacefully deal with local authorities and residents for the good of the entire community. Apart from that, for successful and complete implementation of the decentralization reform in Ukraine, it might be vital to adopt the genuine federative model of the relationships along the center-periphery axis, which exists in the European Union member states. Moreover, it also seems necessary to redraw the borders of Ukrainian regions and bring them in line with the historical ones mentioned above.

#### **7. Disclaimer.**

The author of the research report is the one who is responsible for the contents. The findings do not necessarily reflect the views of the Parliamentary Centre.

## 8. Bibliography.

- Bader, M. (2021). The Risk of Local Elite Capture in Ukraine's Decentralization Reform. *Vox Ukraine*. Retrieved from <https://voxukraine.org/en/the-risk-of-local-elite-capture-in-ukraine-s-decentralization-reform/>;
- Bezgin, A. (January 08, 2022). Hromady u 2022 rotsi: Vitaliy Bezghin pro top-5 priorityetnykh zakoniv. *Sluha harodu*. Retrieved from <https://sluga-narodu.com/hromady-u-2022-rotsi-vitaliy-bezghin-pro-top-5-priorityetnykh-zakoniv/>;
- Bohiv, Y. (2016). Funkcii ta povnovazhenia miscevoho samovriaduvania v konteksti procesu decentralizacii vlady v Ukraini, *Konstytuciyne ta mizhnarodne parvo*. Lviv Polytechnic National University. Retrieved from [http://ena.lp.edu.ua/bitstream/ntb/37423/1/51\\_338-345.pdf](http://ena.lp.edu.ua/bitstream/ntb/37423/1/51_338-345.pdf);
- Cambridge Dictionary, (n.d.). Inclusivity. *Cambridge Dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/inclusivity>;
- Chernov, S. (November, 19, 2021). Proekt zmin do Konstytucii pohodyly vsi chleny komisii pry prezidentovi. *Ukrinform*. Retrieved from <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3261239-proekt-zmin-do-konstytucii-sodo-decentralizacii-pogodili-vsi-cleni-komisii-pri-prezidentovi.html>;
- Council of Europe, (March 4, 2019). Reports: Annual National Opinion Polls on Decentralisation and Local Self-Government Reform. *Council of Europe*. Retrieved from <http://www.slg-coe.org.ua/p16423/?lang=en>;
- DAI, (n.d.). Ukraine—EU for Stronger Public Finance Systems of Local Governments. *DAI*. Retrieved from <https://www.dai.com/our-work/projects/ukraine-eu-for-stronger-public-finance-systems-of-local-governments-logica>;
- DECIDE, (n.d.). About. *DECIDE*. Retrieved from <https://decide.in.ua/en/pro-proyekt/>;
- Decentralization. (n.d.). Hto rozrobliae, zatverdzhue ta vnosyt' zminy do perspektivnykh planiv formuvania terytoiy hromad oblastei? *Decentralization*. Retrieved from <https://decentralization.gov.ua/questions/28>;
- DESPRO, (n.d.). Swiss-Ukrainian Decentralization Support Project. *DESPRO*. Retrieved from <https://despro.org.ua/en/>;
- DOCCU, (n.d.). Pro proekt. *DOCCU*. Retrieved from <https://doccu.in.ua/en/pro-proekt/>;
- Donors, (n.d.). Golovna, *Decentralization*. Retrieved from <https://donors.decentralization.gov.ua/>;
- Dmytryshyn, M. et al, (2021). Peculiarities of Ukrainians' Approval of Decentralization Reform. *Administrative Sciences 11(104)*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci11040104>;
- Drazhenko, A. (2021). Zminy do Konstytucii Ukrainy v chastyni decentralizacii vlady. The *Committee on the Organization of State Power, Local Self-Government, Regional Development and Urban Planning*. Retrieved from <http://komsamovr.rada.gov.ua/uploads/documents/42960.pdf>;

- Dudley, W., (2019). Ukraine's Decentralization Reform. *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik German Institute for International and Security Affairs*. Retrieved from [https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/arbeitspapiere/Ukraine\\_Decentralization\\_Dudley.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/arbeitspapiere/Ukraine_Decentralization_Dudley.pdf);
- EGA, (n.d.). U-LEAD support project EGOV4UKRAINE. *EGA*. Retrieved from [https://ega.ee/project/u\\_lead/](https://ega.ee/project/u_lead/);
- EGAP, (n.d.). E-Governance for Accountability and Participation. *EGAP*. Retrieved from <https://egap.in.ua/en/>;
- FBA, (2014). Local self-government and the rule of law in Ukraine. *Folke Bernadotte Academy*. Retrieved from <https://fba.se/contentassets/1c76679d653e47d9a5057d58578a1082/20141029-onepager-ukraine.pdf>;
- GBR, (n.d.). The Gender Budgeting in Ukraine Project. *European Union*. Retrieved from <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/file/63104/download?token=P32dIMQo>;
- GIZ, (n.d.). Reform of municipal services in Eastern Ukraine. *GiZ*. Retrieved from <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/30635.html>;
- Government of Ukraine, (n.d.). Reforma decentralizacii. *The Governmental portal*. Retrieved from <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/diyalnist/reformi/efektivne-vryaduvannya/reforma-decentralizaciyi>;
- Hirchak, I. (2021), Decentralisation and local public administration reform in Ukraine, *NALAS & PLATFORMA*. Retrieved from <https://platforma-dev.eu/new-publications-decentralisation-and-local-public-administration-reform-in-georgia-moldova-and-ukraine/>;
- Interfax-Ukraine, (September 28, 2021). USAID launches the Hoverla project to support Ukraine's decentralization reform. *Kyiv Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/usa-id-launches-the-hoverla-project-to-support-ukraines-decentralization-reform.html>;
- IREX, (n.d.). Policy for Ukraine Local Self-Governance. *IREX*. Retrieved from <https://www.irex.org/project/policy-ukraine-local-self-governance-pulse>;
- Kadry ta organizacia roboty, (December 04, 2020). Zakonoprojekt pro miscevi derzhavni administraciyi no 4298 ne vidpovidaye yevropeyskiy. *Asociacia mist Ukrainy*. Retrieved from <https://www.auc.org.ua/novyna/zakonoprojekt-pro-miscevi-derzhavni-administraciyi-no-4298-ne-vidpovidaye-yevropeyskiy>;
- Konstytucia Ukrainy. (June, 28, 1996). *Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy*. Retrieved from <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/254%D0%BA/96-%D0%B2%D1%80#Text>;
- Korenyuk, P., Klisinsky, I., & Korenyuk, L. (2019), Formuvania dohodiv regionalnogo budget v umovah decentralizacii. *Review of transport economics and management*, 18(2). DOI:<https://doi.org/10.15802/rtem.v18i2.189629>;
- Kruglashov, A. & Bureha, V. (2021). Achievements and difficulties in the implementation of decentralization of power in Ukraine. *Aspekty publichnkoho upravlinnia* 9(2). 68-72, DOI:10.15421/152120;

- Kuhta, I. (February 25, 2021). Iak genderna kvota spratsiuvala pid chas mistsevikh vioriv u Kiievi. *Opora*. Retrieved from <https://www.oporaua.org/blog/vybory/vyborchi-ombudsmeni/22839-iak-genderna-kvota-spratsiuvala-pid-chas-mistsevikh-vioriv-u-kiievi>;
- Kvein, K. (September, 28, 2021). Kvein zaklykae zakripyty decentralizaciu v Konstitucii Ukrainy. *Ukrinform*. Retrieved from <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3323166-kvin-zaklykae-ukrainu-zakripiti-decentralizaciu-v-konstitucii.html>;
- Lubarec, A. (July 14, 2021). Hto efektyvnishi dlia hromady:deputat-volonter chy deputat-profesional? *Chesno*. Retrieved from [https://www.chesno.org/post/4818/?\\_\\_cf\\_chl\\_f\\_tk=49GdSpZtjfOjBoHbSoa4M.youThM7Yzs1s99RIUErOk-1642192147-0-gaNycGzNCCU](https://www.chesno.org/post/4818/?__cf_chl_f_tk=49GdSpZtjfOjBoHbSoa4M.youThM7Yzs1s99RIUErOk-1642192147-0-gaNycGzNCCU);
- Lukianova, H. & Yurkiv, B. (2019). Osoblyvosti zakriplenih povnovazhen' holiv rayonnyh, oblasnyh, rayonnyh v misti rad v konteksti reformy decentralizacii vlady. *Dynamics of the development of world science*. 163-169. Retrieved from [https://sci-conf.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/DYNAMICS-OF-THE-DEVELOPMENT-OF-WORLD-SCIENCE\\_5-7.08.20.pdf](https://sci-conf.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/DYNAMICS-OF-THE-DEVELOPMENT-OF-WORLD-SCIENCE_5-7.08.20.pdf);
- Marceniuk, T. (2015). Chy spraciuvala gederna kvota na miscevyh vyborah 2015 roku? *Mizhnarodny centr perspektivnyh doslidzhen*. Retrieved from [http://icps.com.ua/assets/uploads/images/images/eu/s\\_genders.pdf](http://icps.com.ua/assets/uploads/images/images/eu/s_genders.pdf);
- Miscevi vybory, (2015). Obrani deputaty miscevyh rad. *The Central Election Commission of Ukraine*. Retrieved from [https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vm2015/pvm002pt001f01=100pt00\\_t001f01=100.html](https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vm2015/pvm002pt001f01=100pt00_t001f01=100.html);
- Nehoda, V. (April 29, 2016). Pidtrimka mizhnarodnih partneriv v chastini detsentralizatsiyi dopomagaye ukrayini integruvatisya v yevropeyskiy prostir. *Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine* Retrieved from <https://www.minregion.gov.ua/press/news/pidtrimka-mizhnarodnih-partneriv-v-chastini-detsentralizatsiyi-dopomagaye-ukrayini-integruvatisya-v-yevropeyskiy-prostir-v-yache-slav-negoda/>;
- Nehoda, V. (November, 03, 2021). Odnakovi povnovazhenia I mozhlyvosti dlia vsih hromad: Uriad shvalyv zakonoproekty z paketu decentralizacii. *Decentralizacia*. Retrieved from <https://decentralization.gov.ua/news/14180>;
- Obrani deputaty miscevyh rad, (2020). Obrani deputaty miscevyh rad. *The Central Election Commission of Ukraine*. Retrieved from [https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vm2020/pvm002pt001f01=695pt00\\_t001f01=695.html](https://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vm2020/pvm002pt001f01=695pt00_t001f01=695.html);
- Oleinikova, O. (2020). Decentralization Reform: An Effective Vehicle for Modernization and Democratization in Ukraine? *Decentralization, Regional Diversity, and Conflict. Federalism and Internal Conflicts*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. 311-338. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41765-9\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41765-9_11);
- Order of the Cabinet of ministers of Ukraine #333-p. (April 01, 2014). Pro skhvalenia Concepcii reformuvania miscevoho samovriaduvania ta terytorialnoi organizacii vlady v Ukraini. *The Government of Ukraine*. Retrieved from <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/333-2014-%D1%80#Text>;
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, (June 15, 2018). Maintaining the Momentum of Decentralisation in Ukraine. *OECD Multi-level Governance Studies*.

- Retrieved from [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/urban-rural-and-regional-development/maintaining-the-momentum-of-decentralisation-in-ukraine\\_9789264301436-en;jsessionid=ftiAv6hzYcQg-DhHdy\\_Xn2RC.ip-10-240-5-115](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/urban-rural-and-regional-development/maintaining-the-momentum-of-decentralisation-in-ukraine_9789264301436-en;jsessionid=ftiAv6hzYcQg-DhHdy_Xn2RC.ip-10-240-5-115);
- Osnovni zavdania, (n.d.). Osnovni zavdania ta funkcii oblasnoi rady. *Khmeznitska oblasna rada*. Retrieved from <https://km-oblrada.gov.ua/potochna-diyalnist-radi/osnovni-zavdannya-ta-funkcii-oblasnoi-radi/>;
- OTG, (December, 27, 2020). Kym pratsyuyut novoobrani deputaty chernigivskoyi miskoyirady. *OTG.cn.ua*. Retrieved from <https://otg.cn.ua/2020/12/27/news-gromady/chernihivska/kym-pratsyuyut-novoobrani-deputaty-chernigivskoyi-miskoyi-rady/>;
- Pavluk, A. Oliinyk, D. Batalov, O. Dacko, O. Valushko, and I. Barvicki, S. (2016). Terytorialna hromada yak basova lanka administratyvno-terytorialnoho ustroju Ukrainy: Problemy ta perspekyvy reformuvania. *National Institute for Strategic Studies*. Retrieved from [https://niss.gov.ua/sites/default/files/2016-02/AD-Teritor\\_alna-gromada-103fe.pdf](https://niss.gov.ua/sites/default/files/2016-02/AD-Teritor_alna-gromada-103fe.pdf);
- Pressluzhba Zakarpatskoi obrady, (February 15, 2022). U 2022 roci 21 gromadska organizacia pretendue na finansuvannia z oblasnoho biudzhetu. *Zakarpatska oblasna rada*. Retrieved from <https://zakarpatska-rada.gov.ua/u-2022-rotsi-21-hromadska-orhanizatsiia-pretenduiie-na-finansuvannia-z-oblasnoho-biudzhetu/>;
- Pro hromadsku radu, (n.d.). Pro hromadsku radu. *Hromadska rada pry Poltavskii oblasnii radi*. Retrieved from <http://grom-obl-rada.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html>;
- PROSTO, (n.d.). Areas of Activities. *PROSTO*. Retrieved from <https://www.prosto.in.ua/en/about-project/areas-of-activity>;
- Projects, (n.d.). Karta donoriv decentralizacii, *Decentralization*. Retrieved from <https://donors.decentralization.gov.ua/projects>;
- Projects & programs, (n.d.). Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level in Ukraine. *Council of Europe*. Retrieved from [https://www.coe.int/en/web/kyiv/strengthening-democracy-and-building-trust-at-local-level-in-ukraine#%2272538714%22:\[0\]](https://www.coe.int/en/web/kyiv/strengthening-democracy-and-building-trust-at-local-level-in-ukraine#%2272538714%22:[0]);
- Romanova, V. & Umland, A. (2019) Decentralising Ukraine: Geopolitical Implications. *Survival*, 61(5), 99-112, DOI:[10.1080/00396338.2019.1662108](https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2019.1662108);
- Rusyniuk, M. (2018). Problemy ta nedoliky decentralizacii publicznego upravlinia ta administruvannia, *Vcheni zapysky Tavriiskoho nacionalnoho universytetu imeni V.I.Vernadskoho*, 29(68), 135-138. Retrieved from [http://www.irbis-nbu.gov.ua/cgi-bin/irbis\\_nbu/cgiirbis\\_64.exe?I21DBN=LINK&P21DBN=UJRN&Z21ID=&S21REF=10&S21CNR=20&S21STN=1&S21FMT=ASP\\_met\\_a&C21COM=S&2\\_S21P03=FILE=&2\\_S21STR=sntvupa\\_2018\\_29\\_1\\_27](http://www.irbis-nbu.gov.ua/cgi-bin/irbis_nbu/cgiirbis_64.exe?I21DBN=LINK&P21DBN=UJRN&Z21ID=&S21REF=10&S21CNR=20&S21STN=1&S21FMT=ASP_met_a&C21COM=S&2_S21P03=FILE=&2_S21STR=sntvupa_2018_29_1_27);
- Serdalova E. and Petruk, N. (December 31, 2020). Sho nyzhchi riven, to bilshe deputatok. Skilki zhynok potrapyly do miscevoi vlady na vydorah-2020. *Radio Liberty*. Retrieved from <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/zhinky-na-miscevyh-vyborah-2020/31027881.html>;

- Shamaida, T. (October 29, 2020). Peremoha miscevyh elit uspih partiyi poroshenka i holodnyj dush dlya sluh narodu. *Texty.org.ua*. Retrieved from <https://texty.org.ua/articles/102182/pidsumky-vyboriv-peremoha-miscevyh-elit-uspih-partiyi-poroshenka-i-holodnyj-dush-dlya-sluh-narodu/>;
- Shkurina, L. (2020). Analitychny Zvit za rezultaty ocinuvania efektyvnosti zastosuvania okremykh zakonodavchyh aktiv decentralizacii vlady v Ukraini. *Komitet Verkhovnoi Rady Ukrainy z pytan' organizacii derzhavnoi vlady, miscevoho samovriaduvania, regionlnoho rozvytku ta mistobuduvania*. Retrieved from <http://komsamovr.rada.gov.ua/uploads/documents/42258.pdf>;
- The Law of Ukraine On the status of the local councils' members, (July 11, 2002). *Zakon Ukrainy Pro status deputativ miscevyh rad, # 93-IV. Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy*. Retrieved from [https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/93-15?find=1&text=%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%89%D0%B1%D1%96%D1%82%D0%BD%D1%8F+%D0%BF%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0#w2\\_1](https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/93-15?find=1&text=%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%89%D0%B1%D1%96%D1%82%D0%BD%D1%8F+%D0%BF%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0#w2_1);
- UAREforms (2021). Gender equality. *UAREforms*. Retrieved from <https://uareforms.org/en/reforms/new-reform-405>;
- UCMC, (n.d.). About DOBRE. *Ukraine Crisis media center*. Retrieved from <https://uacrisis.org/en/decentralization/pro-dobre>.
- U-LEAD, (n.d.). Support to improved administrative service delivery. *U-LEAD*. Retrieved from <https://tsnap.ulead.org.ua/en/>;
- UNDP, (December 07, 2021). Recovery and Peacebuilding Programme opens 4 community project offices in east Ukraine. *UNDP*. Retrieved from <https://www.ua.undp.org/content/ukraine/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2021/four-project-offices-opened-in-eastern-ukraine.html>.
- USAID. (2019). Ukraine local governance project whole-of-project evaluation. *USAID*. Retrieved from [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00TW5X.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00TW5X.pdf);
- 7 zakonoproektiv, (November, 15, 2021). 7 zakonoproektiv, vazhlyvyh dlia decentralizacii ta rozvytku hromad. *Decentralization*. Retrieved from <https://decentralization.gov.ua/news/14241>;
- Vyborchii kodeks Ukrainy, (December 19, 2019). # 396-IX. *Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy*. Retrieved from <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/396-20#Text>;
- Zelinska, N. (November 23, 2020). Genderni kvoty na vyborah: charivna pigulka vid seksyzmu chi zhinochi kryla hromad. *Zmina*. Retrieved from <https://zmina.info/articles/ne-kilkisty-a-yakisty-genderni-pidsumky-miscevyh-vyboriv/>.
- # 280/97-BP, (1997). *Zakon Ukrainy Pro misceve samovriaduvannia v Ukraine. Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy*. Retrieved from <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/280/97-%D0%B2%D1%80?find=1&text=%D1%80%D0%B5%D1%84%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BC#Text>;
- #156-VIII, (February, 05, 2015). *Zakon Ukrainy Pro zasady derzhavnoi regionalnoi politiki. Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy*. Retrieved from <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/156-19?find=1&text=%D0%B3%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%80#Text>;



#157-VIII, (February, 05, 2015). [Zakon Ukrainy Pro dobrovilne obiednania teritorialnyh hromad. Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy.](#) Retrieved from <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/157-19?find=1&text=%D0%B3%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B0+%D1%80%D1%96%D0%B2%D0%BD%D1%96%D1%81%D1%82%D1%8C#Text;>

#1508-VII, (June, 17, 2014), Zakon Ukrainy Pro cpivrobotnyctvo terytorialnyh hromad. *Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy.* Retrieved from <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1508-18?find=1&text=%D0%B6%D1%96%D0%BD%D0%BA%D0%B8#Text;>

#2866-IV. (September, 8, 2005). Zakon Ukrainy Pro zabezpechenia rivnyh prav ta mozhyvostei zhinok i cholovikiv. *Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy.* Retrieved from <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2866-15#Text;>