



UKRAINIAN FRONTIER: Challenges for Slobozhanshchyna

Research Materials

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The information and views set out in this study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung or of the Ministry.

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GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT

The project “Ukrainian Frontier: Challenges for Slobozhanshchyna ” is the initiative launched by NGO “Centre for International Security” (CIS) with the support of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Ukraine, in partnership with the Ministry for Veterans Affairs of Ukraine. It is a continuation of projects “Ukrainian Frontier: Challenges for Tavria” (2020), “Ukrainian Frontier: Challenges for Transcarpathia and Black Sea Coast Region” (2019).

The aim of the project is to identify imminent threats and challenges in the eastern frontier regions of Ukraine; developing recommendations for reducing the identified destructive impacts and ensuring good governance at the level of districts (communities), local and central authorities.

During June-July 2021, representatives of the Centre for International Security studied the problems of the Sumy (Shostka, Konotop, Okhtyrka) and Kharkiv (Vovchansk, Kupiansk, Izium) regions.

The fieldwork stage included quantitative and qualitative sociological research (employing a questionnaire and in-depth interviews). The sampling quota was based upon sex, age, and representative of the population of the region in which the research was conducted; for experts - targeted (representatives of civil society organizations, business associations, central and local authorities, local self-government, education and culture sectors). In total, 1000 questionnaires were processed (500 respondents from each region). The organization that implemented the study is the Centre for Applied Research.

As a result, problem mapping for each studied region and their respective districts was performed.

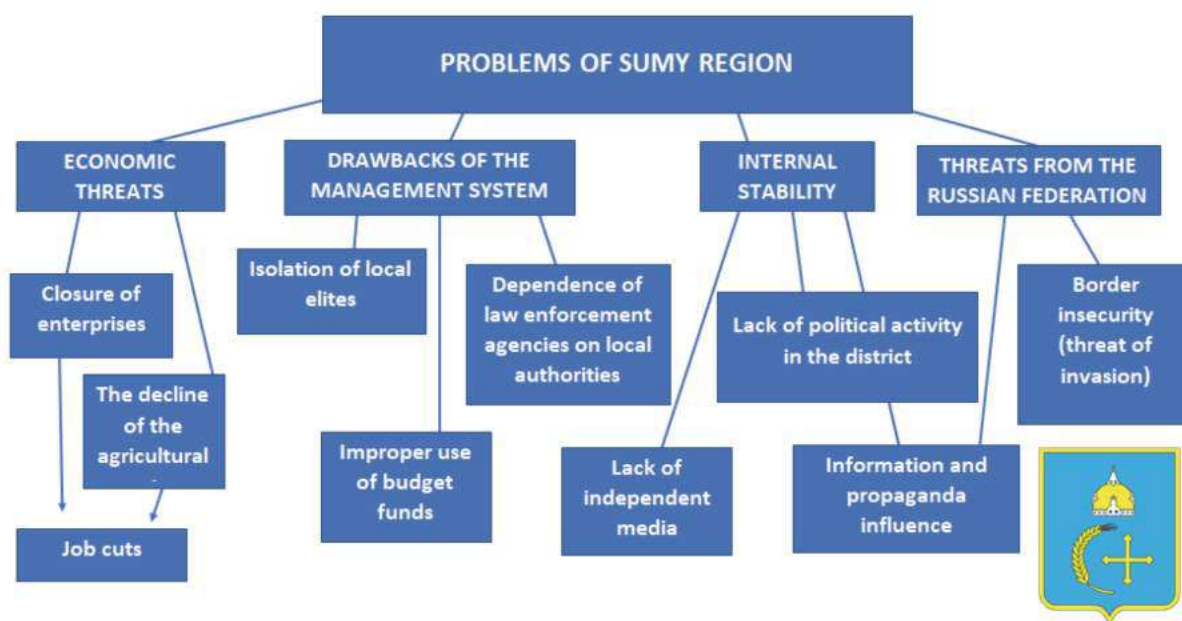
The data was organized by the following categories:

- Regional problems;
- External influence;
- Local problems.

The research is a continuation of the project "Security Passport of Ukraine", implemented by the CIS in 2017-2019, in order to further study social sustainability in different regions of Ukraine.

UKRAINIAN FRONTIER: CHALLENGES FOR SUMY REGION

Sumy region is characterized by a large length of the common border with Russia and developed industrial base. The specificity of the geographical position and socio-economic development of the region, as well as its historical and ethnic fragmentation, create potential risks and conditions for the spread of instruments of Russian hybrid influence in the respective territories.



Regional problems

Such problems as labor migration, inefficiency of local authorities, lack of funding and stagnation of the industrial sphere are relevant for Sumy Region. Poor socio-economic conditions provoke **outflow of young people and skilled workers from the region**, which creates a shortage of labor and weakens the economic potential of the region. At the same time, Sumy region retains the resource potential of forming qualified personnel on its territory (in particular, at the expense of developed educational institutions), where young people mostly receive high-quality basic education. However, due to economic problems and **lack of prospects for professional growth**, young people are forced to move to the capital, neighboring regions and abroad. According to a survey in the Sumy region, about 38% of respondents reported that they have experience of working abroad, or would like to leave Ukraine in search of money or permanent residence (about a third - 34% - reported that they are satisfied).

Economic problems, which are reflected in the general demographic and social development of Sumy region are partly related to the lack of public funding and inefficient use of budget funds. The population of the region is concerned about the low efficiency of the central and regional authorities - in particular, in the context of resolving **the allocation of funds in the fields**. According to a sociological study

- to the question "What problems and contradictions can be observed in your city?" about 34% of the surveyed residents of Sumy region first of all name political conflicts, separation of powers. Problems of local government with efficiency, competence and ability to ensure the interests of the region's residents are reflected in its overall rating. Among the respondents, a third (32%) answered that they rather or completely trust the local authorities, while about half (49.8%) partially or completely do not trust them.

In addition to national problems, **the issue of export reorientation** became specific to the region's economy. As a result, the region's industry suffered significant economic losses (before the war in eastern Ukraine, exports of products made in Sumy region were mostly aimed at Russia). At the same time, some regional industrial enterprises are state-owned, and the lacks of a state order and delays in payments for work have become traditional problem. In general, enterprises operate without full use of all their capabilities and potential. Existing problems in the local economy have been exacerbated by state-wide quarantine due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Privatized enterprises restricted their work to avoid bankruptcy, and no mass layoffs were observed in the region at this time.

The income and the general level of security of the local population are influenced by **the prevalence of seasonal work**. For instance, to the question "What does your income consist of?" two thirds of respondents (about 70%) mentioned official salaries and benefits, while 7.6% of respondents indicated a private enterprise as a source of income. Herewith 17.8% of respondents stated that they have unofficial sources of income.

The decentralization reform has also become a problem for the region. Survey results showed that about 52% of respondents did not feel changes in their locality after the decentralization reform, while 12% of respondents believe that the situation has deteriorated. Currently, there are 36 united territorial communities in Sumy region. Despite the activity and interest of the local population in the development of UTC, systemic problems (in particular, asymmetry of community formation, issues of budget transparency, ambiguity in the distribution of powers between district administrations and UTC) **dilute the potential of the decentralization reform**, provoking frustration in its implementation fields.

Residents of Sumy region have a contradictory attitude to medical reform. Survey data show a negative assessment of the quality of medical services after the reform of the health care system (22%), while almost half (43.9%) of respondents indicated that there were no changes.

The main security problem remains **the proximity to the Russian border** and the possibility of a Russian invasion. The topical issue is **the lack of reliability of the fortification and border security**. During the war, its line was provided only with barriers, which in some places pass directly through settlements, individual buildings and yards. In addition, the location of the region on the periphery of open conflict and the common border with Russia undermines the region's potential for

investors, which reduces the possibility of independent and rapid development of local communities.

Sumy region is a **heterogeneous region** in terms of economic potential, industrial development and socio-political sentiment. The political behavior of the local population is influenced **by socio-cultural indicators**: the multinational nature of the population and the persistence of the tendency to the Soviet mentality in certain (including age) categories of residents. In some areas of the region there is a stable electorate of pro-Russian political forces (Opposition Platform - "For Life") and formally right-wing radical national-patriotic forces, which use appropriate pro-Ukrainian rhetoric to form and maintain a favorable image among locals. At the same time, systemic problems with inefficient governance and socio-economic development remain stable regardless of the ideological views of certain local authorities.

The population has a **low level of political activity** and involvement in socio-political processes in the state. There are also no manifestations of a pro-Russian active center that would conduct agitational and provocative public activities. Aware of the threat from Russia, locals of all ages are actively involved in the formation of territorial defense, which is an important issue for the regional security system.

External influence

The Russian Federation continues to exert **significant external influence on** Sumy Region. This was primarily due to economic and business ties, labor migration and well-established transport links. The main hybrid efforts of the Russian Federation are aimed at conducting **information operations** through the media and social networks. At the same time, 38% of respondents support the ban on Russian media and social networks in Ukraine, while a quarter of respondents believe this step is wrong. At the same time, there is no desire to improve regional relations with Russia - economic ties and transport - among the population of Sumy region.

According to the respondents, the locals have the most negative attitude towards the Russian Federation, as well as Belarus and China. People's assessments of attitudes towards NATO and the United States differ significantly. There is their **polarity and dispersion**, which once again confirms the split and uncertainty of the views on the Ukrainian foreign policy.

Respondents' views on Ukraine's foreign policy are quite mixed, but **the priority is NATO and EU membership**. NATO membership for locals primarily means security and protection from Russia; EU membership - economic development, values and belonging to the developed part of the world. At the same time, according to the poll on the question "If a referendum on Ukraine's membership in NATO were held in the near future, how would you vote?" about half of the respondents did not decide on the answer or would not take part in the

voting, almost 15% of the respondents would vote against, and about 38% of the respondents - "for". A large proportion of those who are undecided or indifferent to this issue are vulnerable to possible speculation and discrediting of Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic course by pro-Russian forces in the region; on the other hand, they create opportunities for further formation of a positive image of NATO in the region (subject to appropriate systemic communication by the authorities and the public sector). Opponents of and supporters of integration lack a general awareness of NATO-related issues. In addition, **the isolation of Kyiv and the central government from the peripheral territories** and the lack of understanding of local problems and needs are of great importance.

The general information background in the region is represented mainly by national television channels (among the most popular channels - «1 + 1», «Inter», «Ukraine»), as well as online media («TSN.ua», «Ukrainska Pravda», «Correspondent», «Strana.ua»). The results of the poll show that the majority of respondents (55%) trust television; about half (45.7%) trust Ukrainian Internet sites.

Local problems

Shostka. Shostka - a city with a population of 74 thousand people, the center of the district, located in the north of Sumy region. For locals one of the key problems is the concentration of both financial flows and the focus of power on the center of the region - on the development of the city of Sumy. The imbalance of revenues is noticeable in various areas - educational, medical, cultural. The regional government shifts **costs to local budgets**, which causes a negative attitude and misunderstanding on the part of local residents. Funding from government programs remains at the regional level, leaving small towns with no access to public funds and meeting their immediate needs through links to international funds and project activities.

Among the negative consequences of decentralization is also **the closure of some social security facilities** that were previously located in the city and maintained at the expense of the regional budget. As a result, the ATO hospital and the medical school in Shostka were closed down, which provoked a protest from interested groups. The decentralization process has not made local budgets fuller and their implementation more efficient. At the same time, due to underfunding of state-level projects by the state, local budgets receive requests for financing projects such as "Large Construction". At the local level, there is dissatisfaction with the activities of central authorities primarily due to **the low efficiency of reforms and lack of understanding and consideration of regional specifics**.

The main faction in the city council is the Opposition Platform – «For Life» party, which has 11 seats. At the same time, this situation differs significantly from other UTCs in the north of the region, where pro-Ukrainian political forces have greater electoral support. Such **heterogeneity and polarity of political preferences** of residents of one region demonstrate the struggle for the influence of certain political

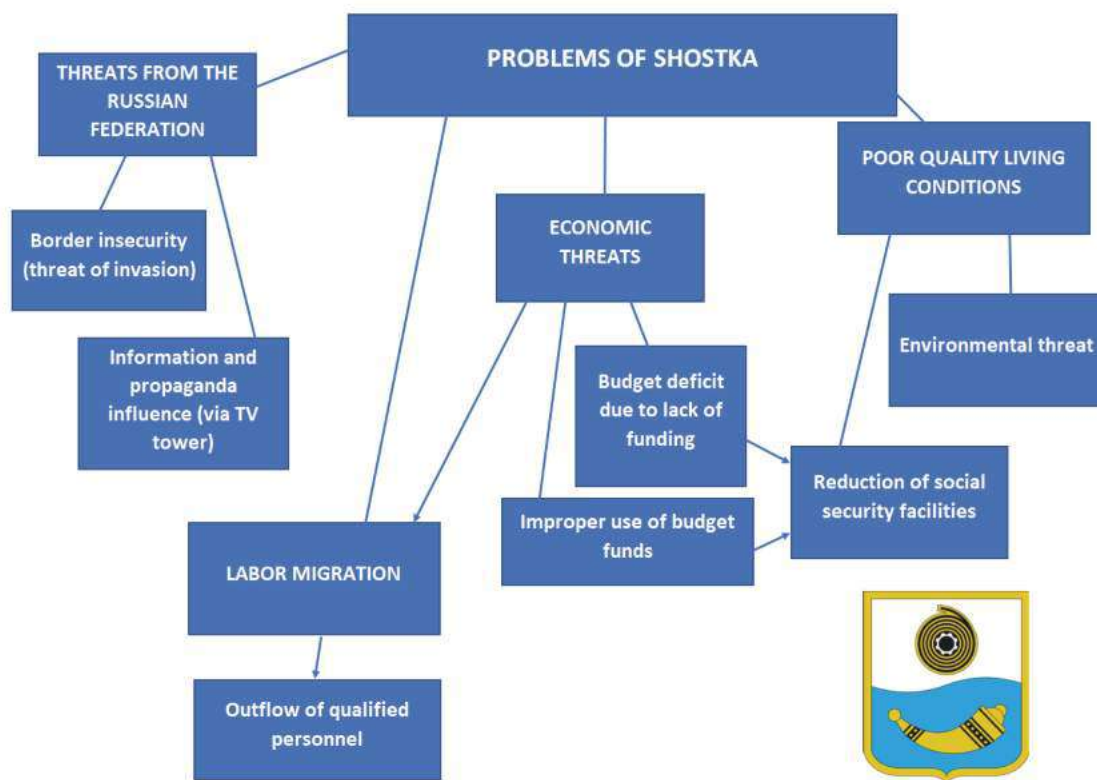
forces in the area, which does not contribute to sustainable socio-economic development and provokes further conflicts at the local level.

Due to the reluctance of local elites to allow rivalry, the region has **low business attractiveness for potential investors**. In addition, the positions of the pro-Russian political force demonstrate the existence of a stable pro-Russian electorate at the local level. Many locals still work in Russia, but in recent years more and more migrant workers are targeting the Czech Republic and Poland. At the same time, the population has no requests for the restoration of systemic transport links with Russia, as well as trade relations at the local level.

There are no conflicts of a public nature, as well as on religious grounds in the district. In Shostka there is a newly established parish of the OCU, its priest is a chaplain. But there have been cases of **police arbitrariness and abuse of power** in the city. At the local level, the interaction between the government and civil society is generally ensured. Shostka is currently the only city in the region where the «Community Development Office» project has been implemented in round table format of local authorities and NGO representatives, which ensures open dialogue and implementation of certain programs.

Quarantine restrictions have negatively affected the region's economy, but most local businesses continue to operate, protecting locals from mass layoffs and unpaid leave. The main employer is **state-owned defense factories**, which employ up to 2,000 people. However, today these companies are operating at only 40% of their capacity, although the situation has improved due to military events, there is a demand for products in a conflict. Moreover, since 2015, the source of income in the region is the pharmaceutical plant «Farmak». Other enterprises (powder plant «Star») do not work, or work in a limited mode (state plant Ukroboronprom «Impulse»). There are also cases of bankruptcy of enterprises (plant for the manufacture of chemical reagents «Chemical Reactive»). The remnants of the Soviet chemical industry and non-compliance with the rules of industrial waste disposal affect the **environmental situation** both in the district and in the region.

In the context of access to information, the largest audience among publications are local Internet sites. Also in the city there are print media, radio, 2 TV channels.



Konotop. Konotop - a city with a population of about 85 thousand people; administrative center of the district and Konotop city community.

Decentralization, which was supposed to give local authorities expanded powers, did not have a significant impact on the city. Instead, the reform **has institutionally limited the functions of the district state administration**, which continues to exist, and continues to develop relations and contacts in the region, but with limited opportunities. Currently **the problem of budget shortfall** has arisen for Konotop, despite the fact that since the beginning of the reform the creation of UTC has had a positive result. The distribution of public funds and the implementation of projects are influenced by the political situation and personal interests of the central government, which undermines the quality of project proposals. For instance, the sports stadium needed in Konotop, was built with funding from the regional budget in a settlement where there is no need for it. There is **a lack of state co-financing** to ensure the sustainable development of the city, because in addition to other financial obligations, local budgets are responsible for retaining beneficiaries. So the local government provides financial assistance to people with disabilities, ATO veterans for housing in the amount of a lump-sum payment of 200 thousand.UAH. However, given the possibilities of the local budget, only 2 to 4 people can receive such payments per year. In total, there are about 1,300 veterans in the city of Konotop.

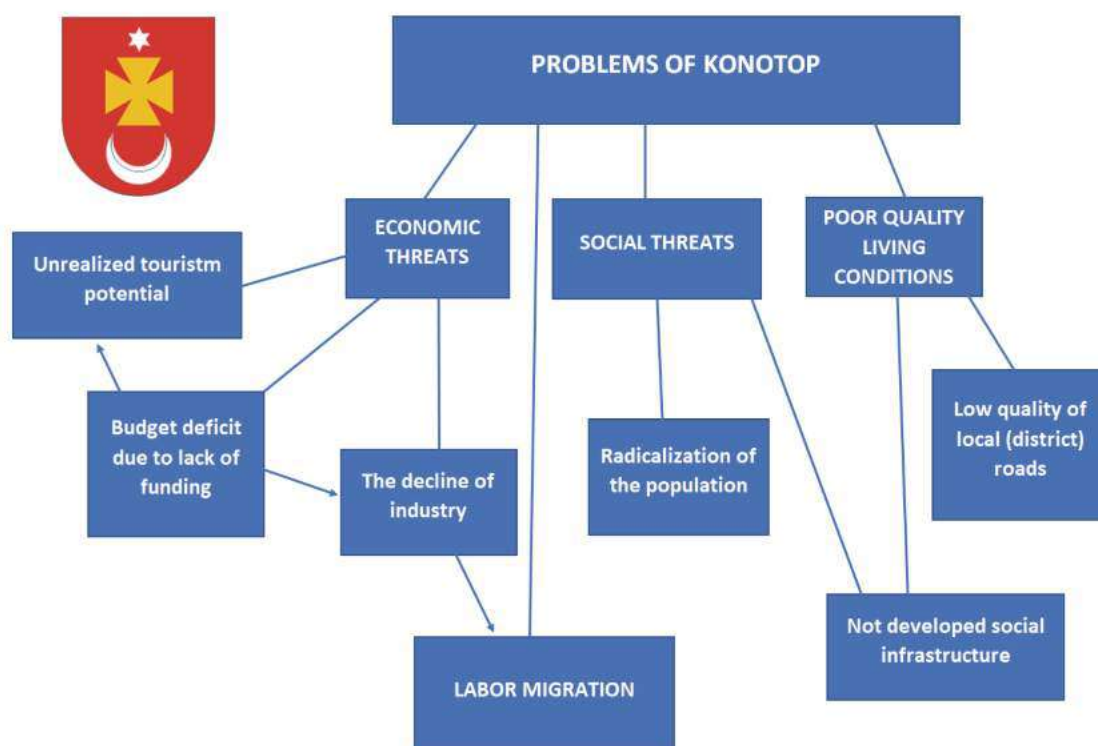
At the same time, Konotop is the only city in the region where the All-Ukrainian Union "Svoboda" takes active positions. At the local level, there is **a wide formal use of national-patriotic rhetoric** (sometimes radical) and relevant national symbols in the information and public fields. At the same time, the corresponding declarative pro-Ukrainian position **does not have a significant**

impact and effect on solving common problems in the city. Which are related to the unsatisfactory state of development of infrastructure, industry, lack of prospects for foreign investment, vulnerability of the local population to the Russian hybrid influence (due to the popularity of the Russian media), etc.

The security situation in the city is ambiguous - despite the established interaction of the police with the UTC, there is a low level of trust in law enforcement among the residents. In general, the feeling of personal security of citizens is significantly affected by **the general level of social tension**, which increased during the war, as well as the presence of situational conflicts on ideological and value, ethnic, religious grounds.

In economic terms, the effects of quarantine due to the to the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated **the problems of the industrial complex** for the region. Due to a statewide quarantine , the local attachment plant stopped operating. «Aviacon» and «Motordetal» remained among the operating enterprises in Konotop. Aviacon is a state-owned defense company that is directly dependent on the state order and currently has UAH 6 million in arrears of wages due to delays in the receipt of state funds for work performed. Exports that were previously carried out in various directions, including to Russia, suffered significantly as a result of the war. The company "Motordetal", which was focused on exports to Russia suffered especially losses. The local authorities have no influence on the critical situation with the district industry due to the privatization of the respective enterprises. The official unemployment rates in the district are not critical, but they do not fully represent the real situation with the labor market in the field. **Labor migration** to other regions of Ukraine, Europe and Russia and to Europe is widespread among the residents of the district. Considering the problem of the information environment at the local level, **the local population (elderly people) has access to Russian channels** via satellite. The problem worsened after the coding of Ukrainian TV channels. In addition, there are **problematic issues with Ukrainian digital broadcasting in T2 format** - the signal comes from the Chernihiv region, and due to the terrain its quality remains low. The media in the city are actively reorienting to the Internet. There are 3 newspapers and a TV and radio company in Konotop. Blogging in the city is only developing, but is not yet characterized by the quality and trust of the audience.

Despite Russian propaganda, which has been spreading in the border areas since the beginning of the war, local residents have been actively helping the Ukrainian military by developing a volunteer movement in the region. Residents of Shostka, Hlukhiv, and Korolevets also shared this attitude to the situation in Donbas. Currently local activists **are disappointed with the effectiveness of public authorities in resolving the conflict** in eastern Ukraine.



Okhtyrka. Okhtyrka - the administrative center of Okhtyrka district and Okhtyrka city council with a population of about 47 thousand people; located in the south of Sumy region.

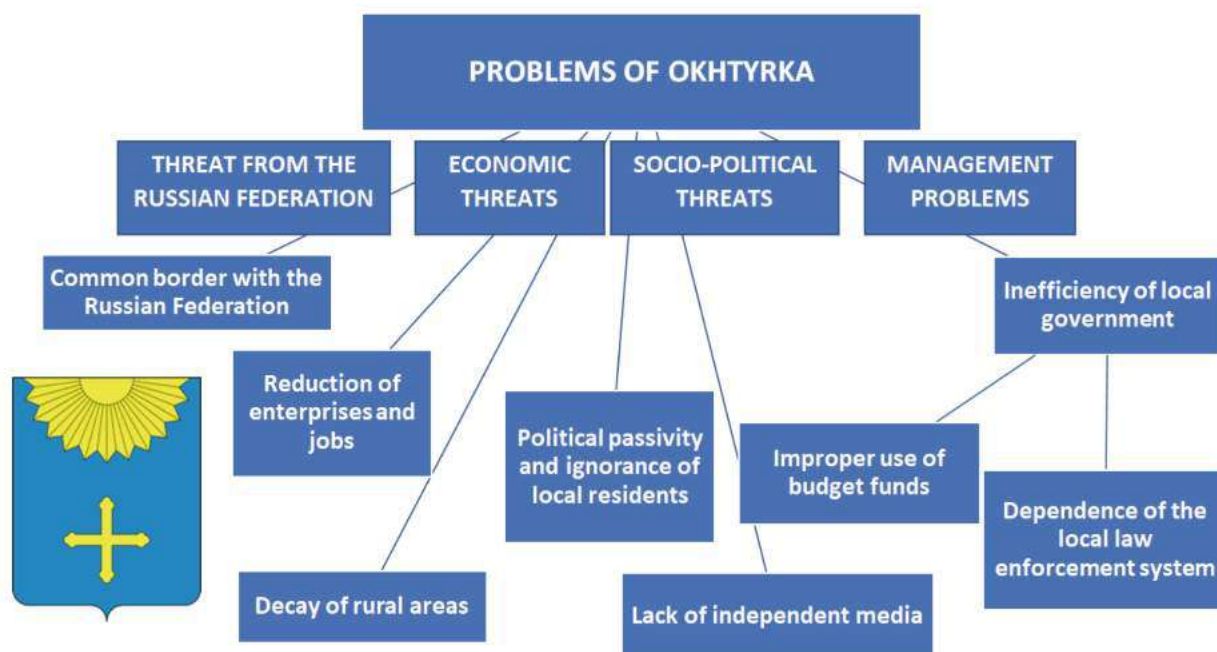
The general public opinion of the residents of Okhtyrka indicates that although the decentralization reform gives broader powers to the united territorial communities, at the same time **it does not lead to a large-scale and high-quality renewal of local government.** The majority of locals are politically passive, which is primarily reflected in the results of local elections. With a low turnout (50-56%) the power remains with the ruling political group. At the same time, a mayor representing the «Power and Honor» party was elected in Okhtyrka, but his activities are opposed by the opposition, which is made up of members of the old elite.

In turn, UTCs are **deprived of any institutional and hierarchical control.** Based on this, there are cases of misuse of funds in the area. As a result, law enforcement agencies become dependent on the UTC and local authorities, as they are financed from the local budget. Therefore, at the local level, there is a **weakening of checks and balances.** In addition, the rural population is unaware of the principles of decentralization reform, which allows UTC management to raise and use funds at its own discretion rather than at the request of the community.

The lack of jobs and the closure of enterprises in the region is another specific issue. People expect that the decentralization reform will direct the funds of the local budget to revive the industry, which according to the reform is not the task of local authorities, and such views and misunderstandings are the consequences of Soviet policy. The economic situation has deteriorated significantly due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Business and employees were particularly affected. Due to the

statewide quarantine, the practice of unpaid leave for employees has become widespread. Some companies in Okhtyrka were forced to close down, and their owners went abroad. Villages in the area are in a state of disrepair with no prospects for development, which provokes further urbanization and migration. At the same time, the region produces gas, but only in one of the nine UTCs established. Accordingly, **budget revenues and UTC supply vary significantly** in the region, as some communities receive little or no revenue from this industry. By the way, among the large enterprises of the district - Trostyanets chocolate factory, which gives large contributions to the budget, invests in the medical and social spheres.

It is important to note the development of local television both in the area and in the region. But in fact the newly created media continue to be supported by local budgets, although there are no formal communal media left. As a result, local television is subordinated to local authorities. The print media is kept out of the budget or by sponsors, while their popularity is declining. There are no independent media - one way or another local media protect the interests of owners and sponsors.



Recommendations

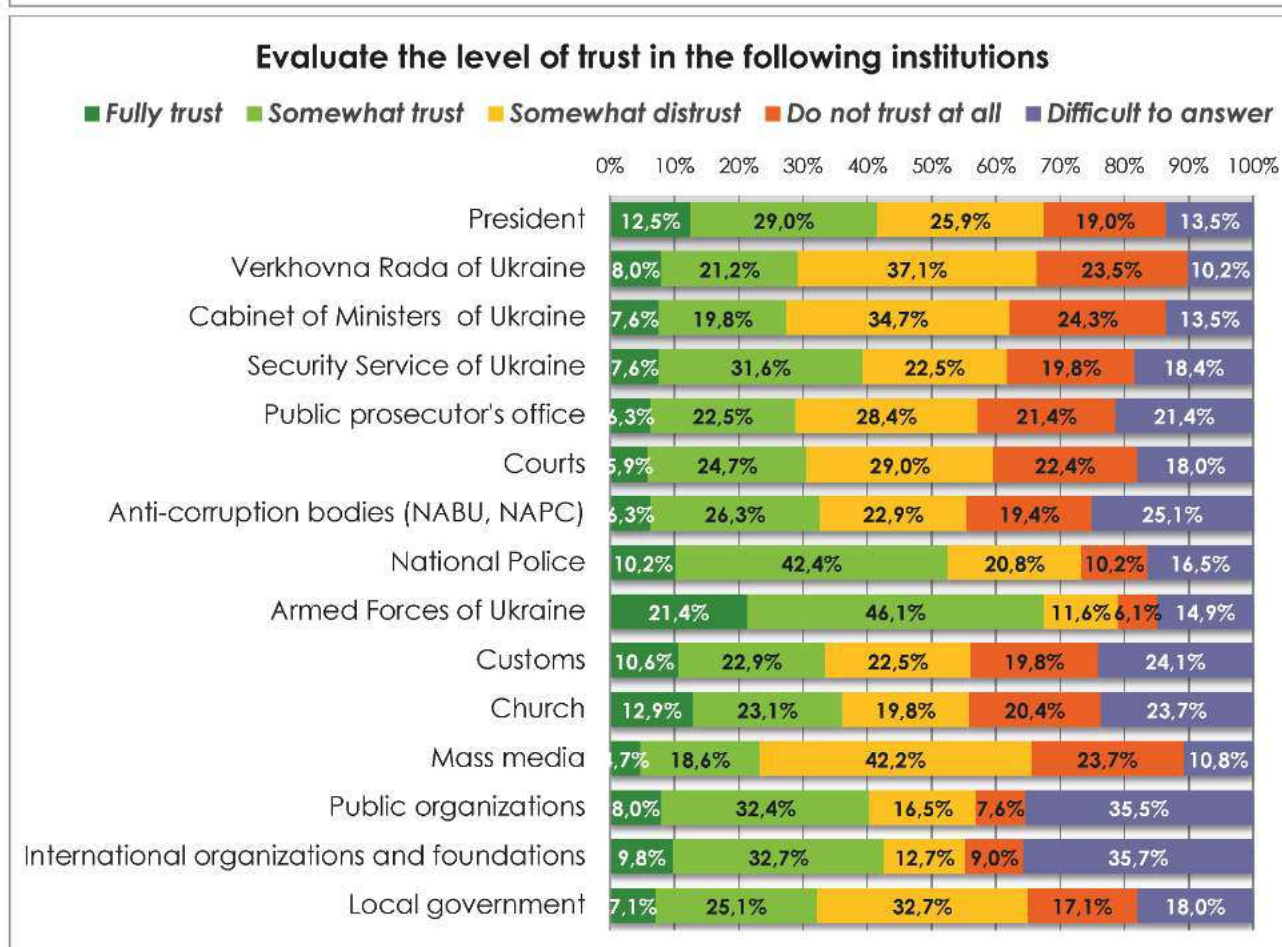
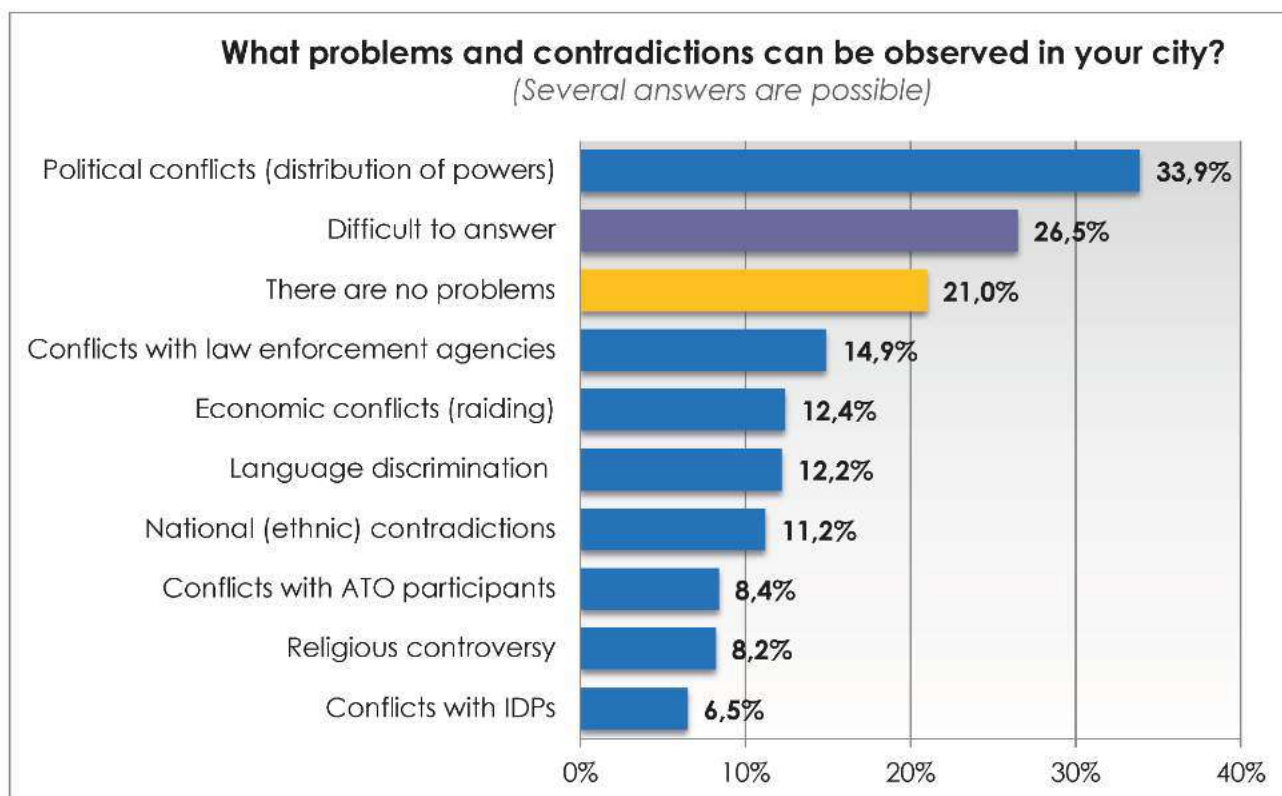
In order to establish a stable system of development of the region and reduce the impact of negative factors that have formed in the Sumy region, it is proposed to:

- Ensure transparent and immediate implementation of the project of arrangement and strengthening of the state border with the Russian

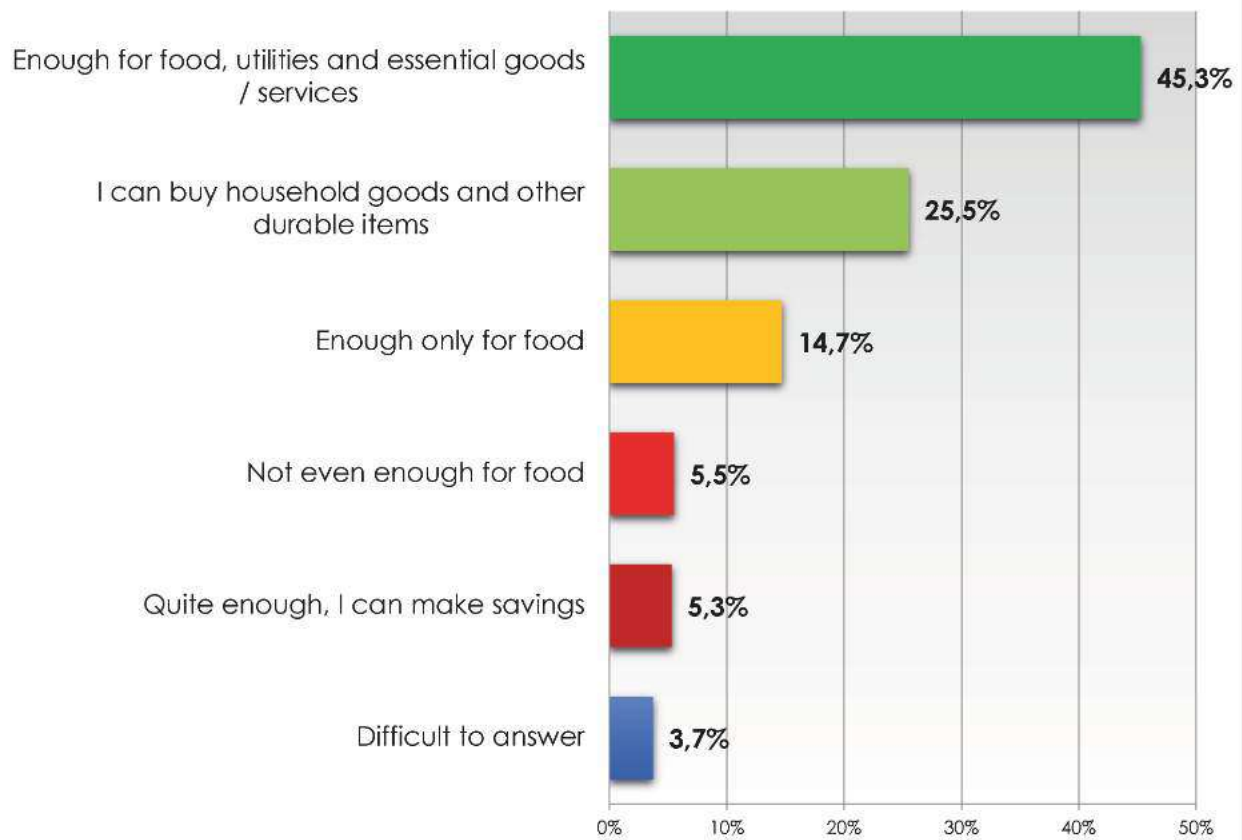
Federation, avoiding inefficient distribution of funds and controlling their costs.

- Increase the amount of budget funding for the social sphere in the region in accordance with its strategic importance and the problematic issues inherent in the region;
- Create a system of incentives, support programs for the development of local independent media;
- Create a separate system of expert bodies at city councils that would specialize in the use of grant programs to raise funds in problem areas of the region, for instance - the development of educational and entertainment centers for young people, initiatives to improve the environmental condition of the region;
- In order to develop local business and eliminate the shadow labor market, reduce taxes for certain areas (important and promising for the region);
- To provide remote areas of the region with stable and high-quality access to Ukrainian television, to create preferential packages for the elderly in order to avoid further dominance of the Russian information space;
- Improve the system of checks and balances at the local level, prescribe the principles of cooperation between the UTC and the law enforcement system;
- Reduce the preferential burden on local budgets (payments to ATO participants);
- Provide conditions for the development and financing of the existing industrial base of the region;
- Implement measures within the framework of ecological education, conduct information campaigns on existing problems with the state of the environment and possible ways to solve them;
- Create conditions for attracting investments and implementing initiatives for the development of regional and local tourism;
- Ensure an effective information policy aimed at leveling Russia's propaganda influence in the media space;
- Raise the level of informing the population about the issues of European integration and cooperation of Ukraine with NATO by developing a targeted localized concept of communication of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, taking into account the specifics of the local population; to promote the European and Euro-Atlantic vector among the young population (in schools and higher education institutions).

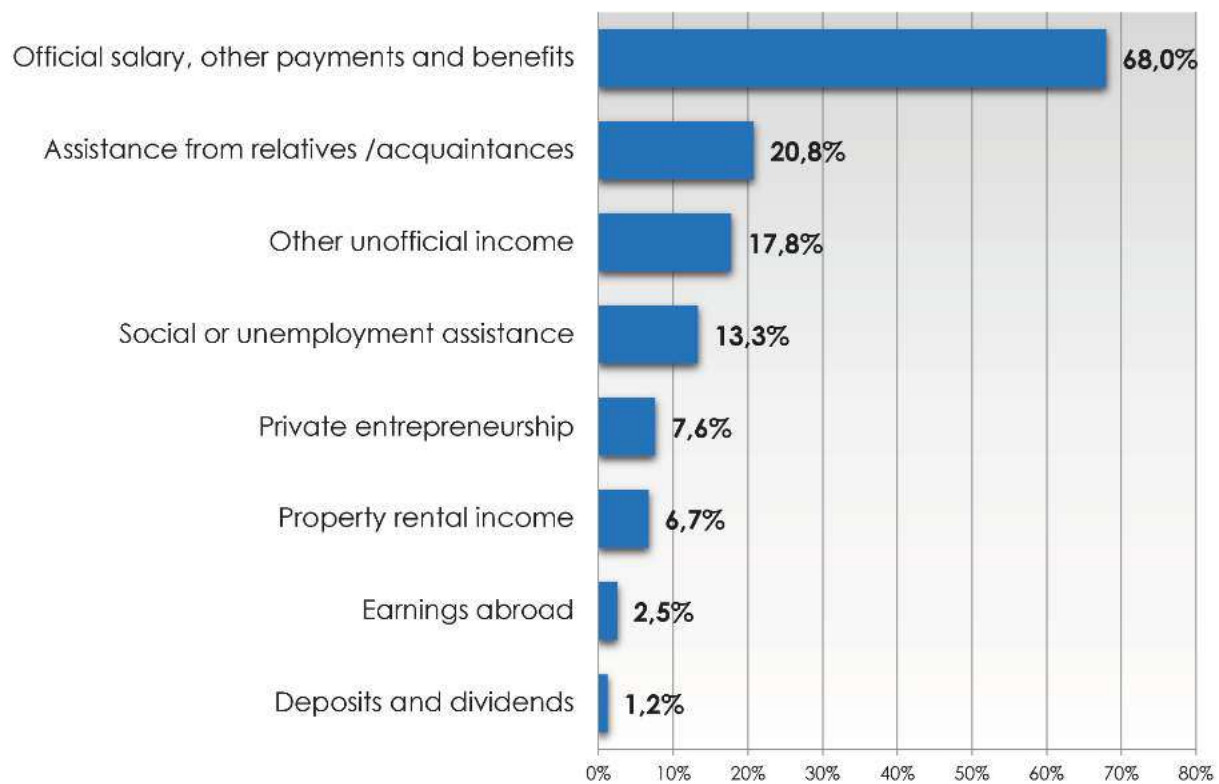
Annex 1. Sumy Region – sociological research materials



How would you rate your income level?

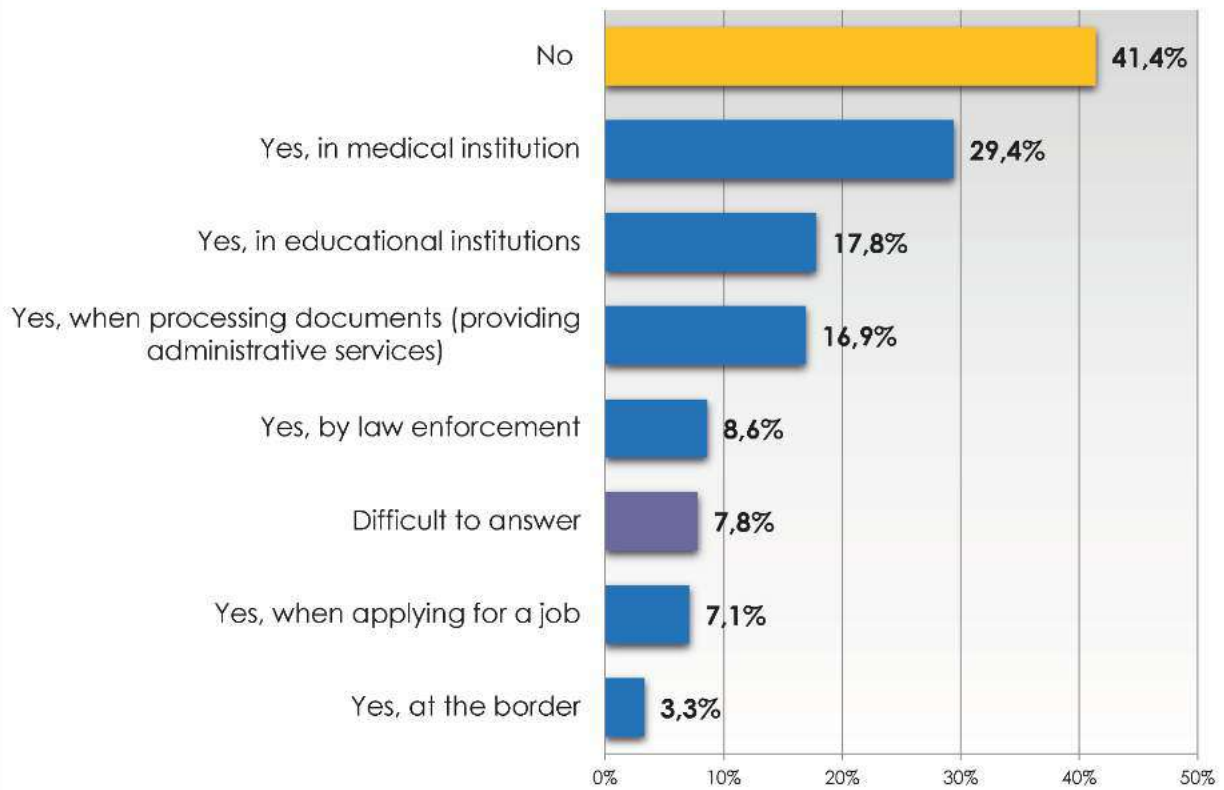


What does your income consist of? (Several answers are possible)

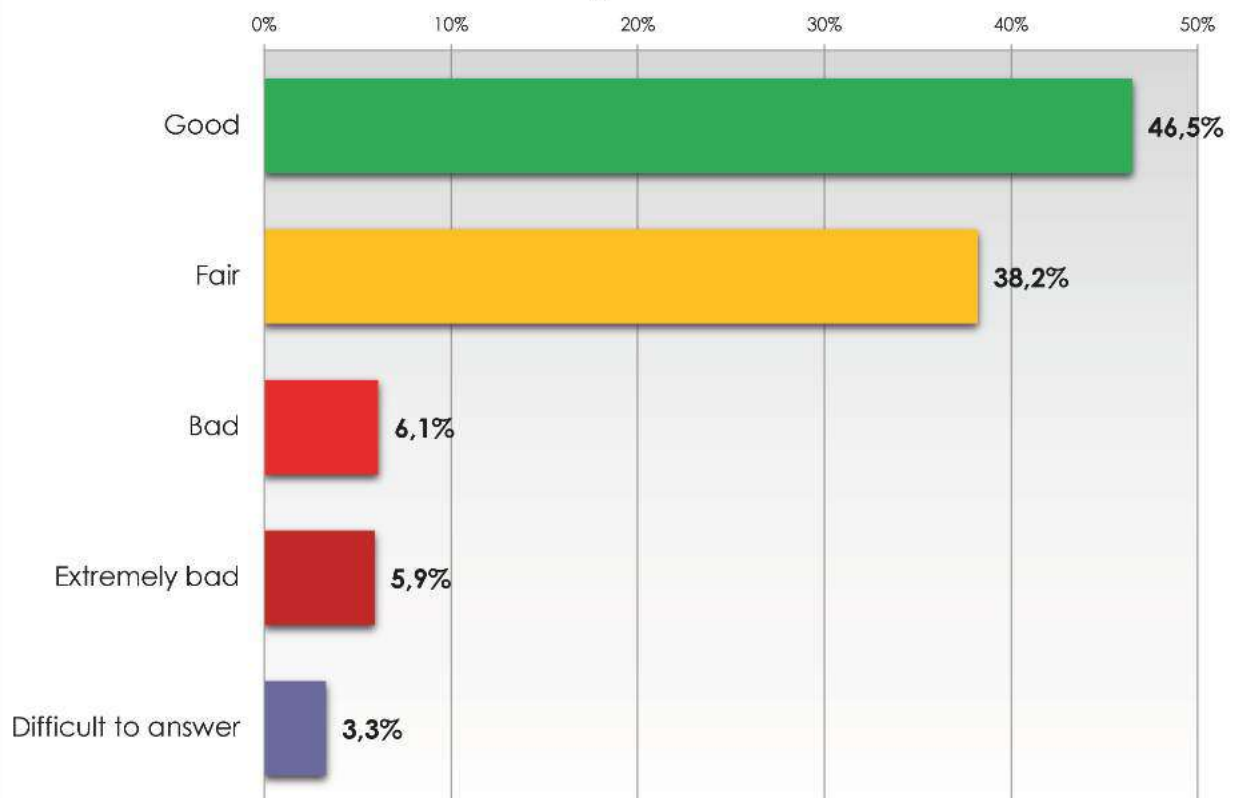


Have you ever experienced/witnessed corruption?

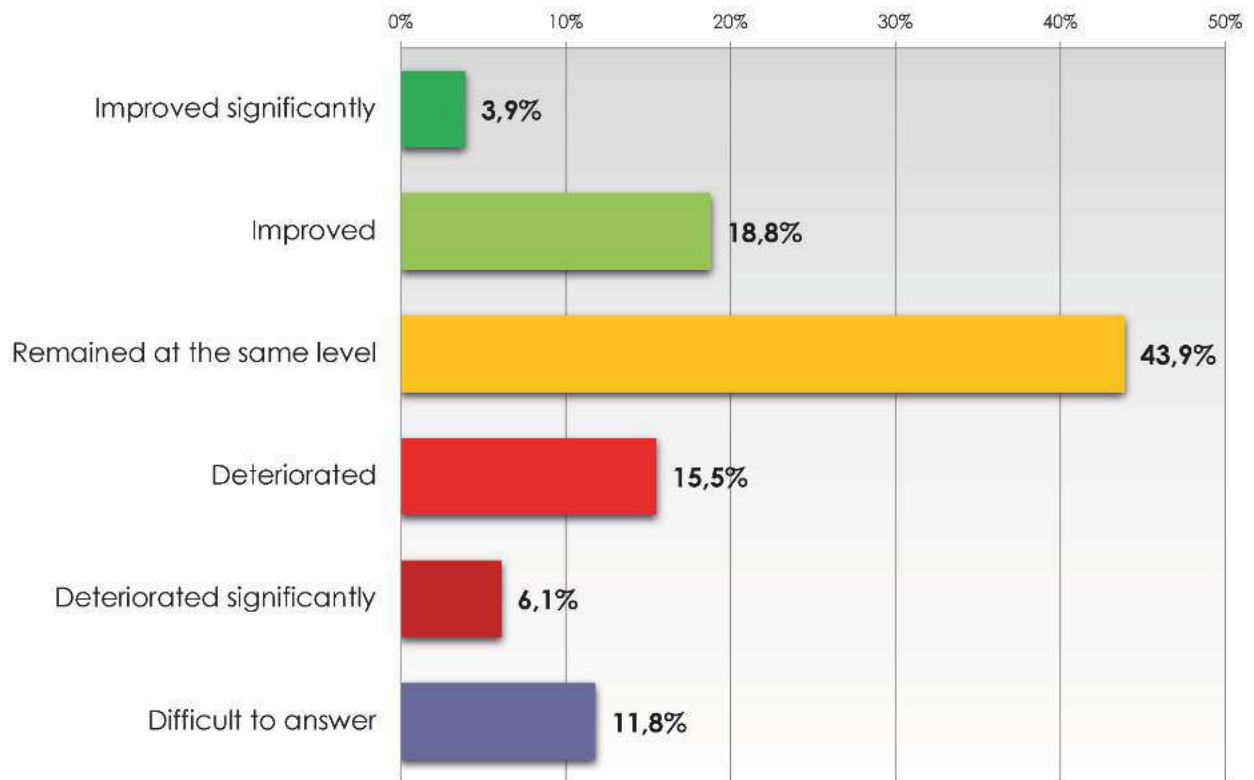
(Several answers are possible)



How would you rate the state of the environment in your region?

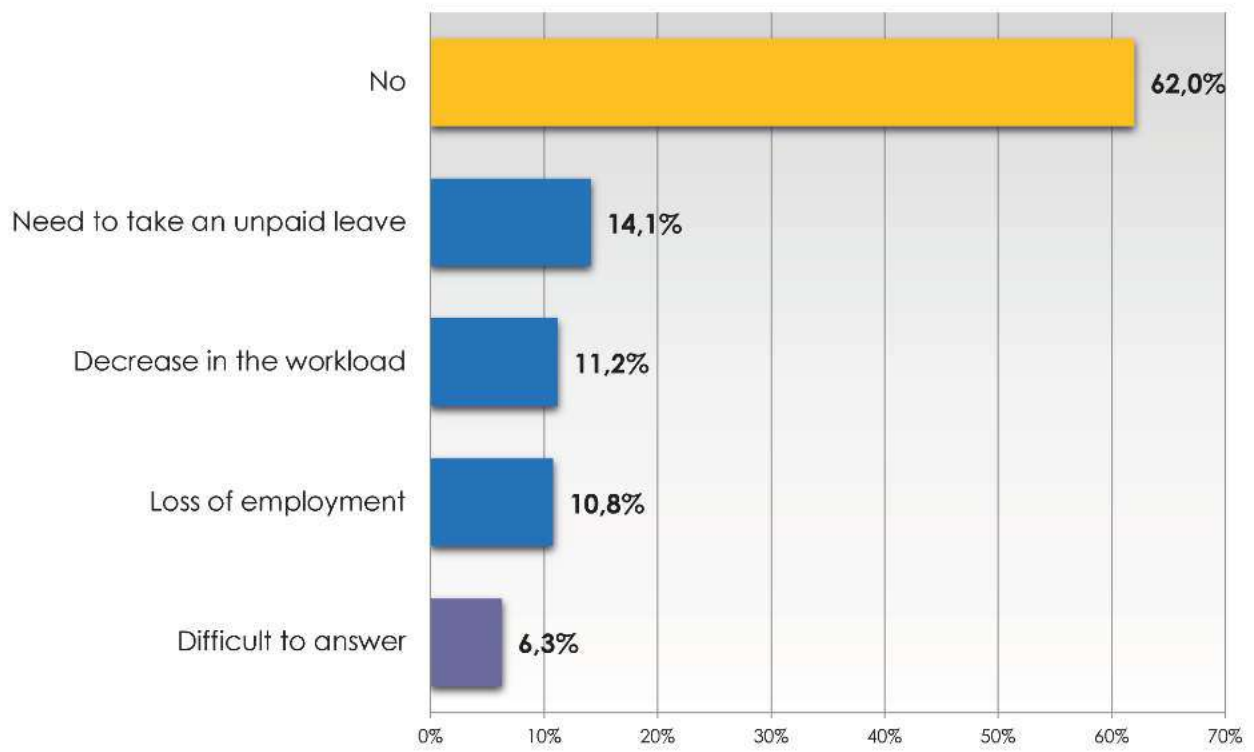


How has the quality of healthcare services changed after the healthcare system reform?

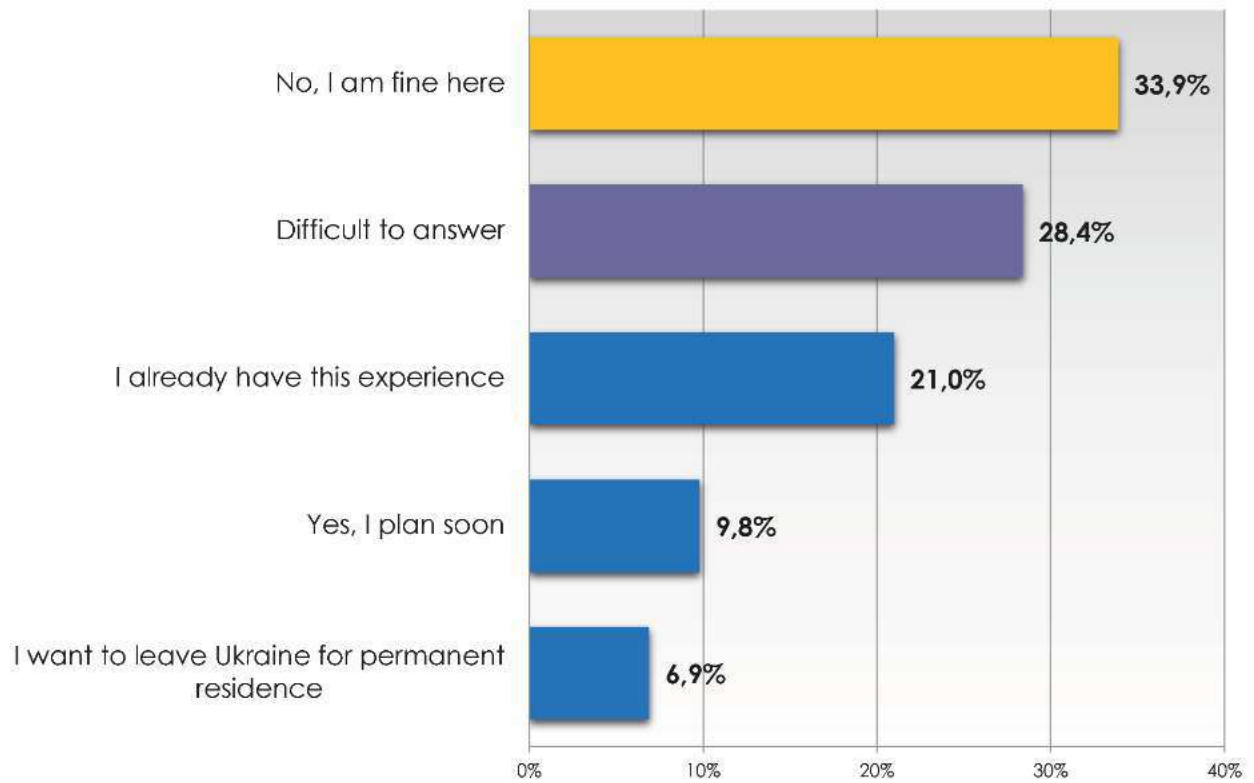


Have you or your family members faced the following consequences of the epidemic?

(Several answers are possible)

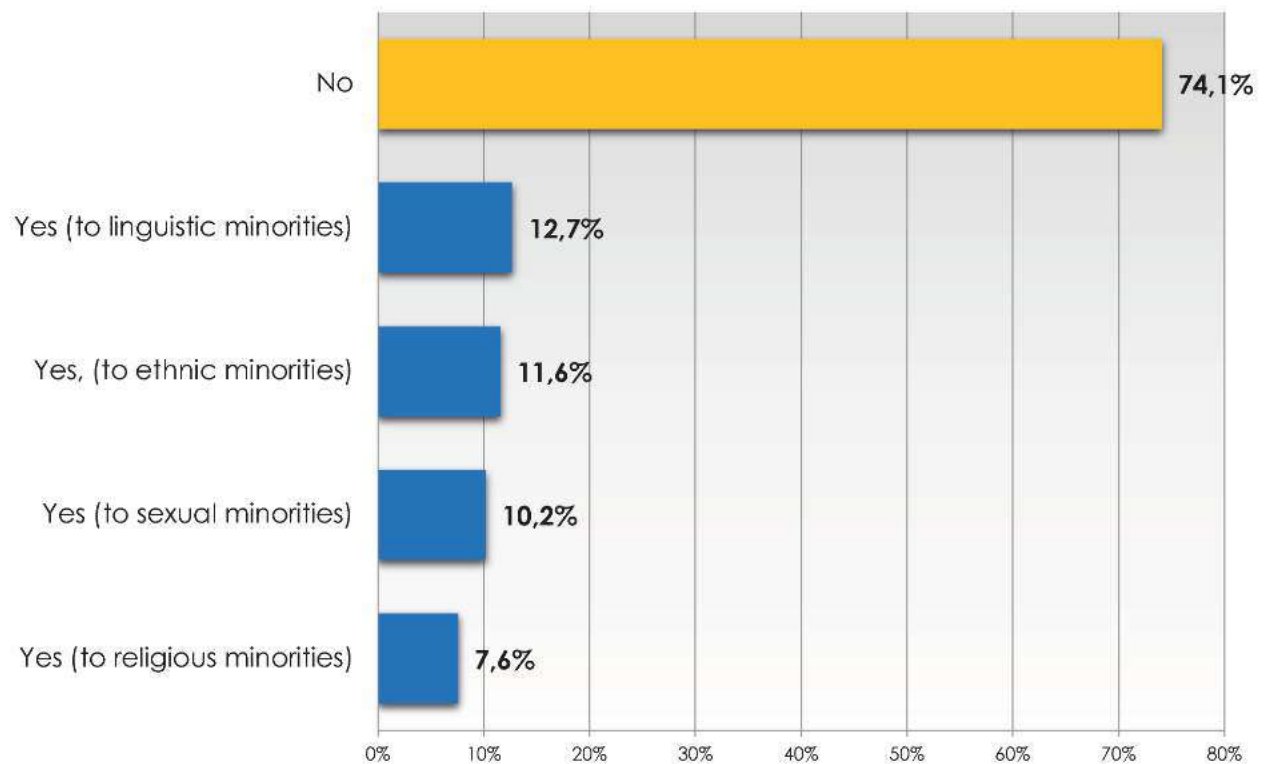


Do you personally consider the idea of emigrating abroad to find work?

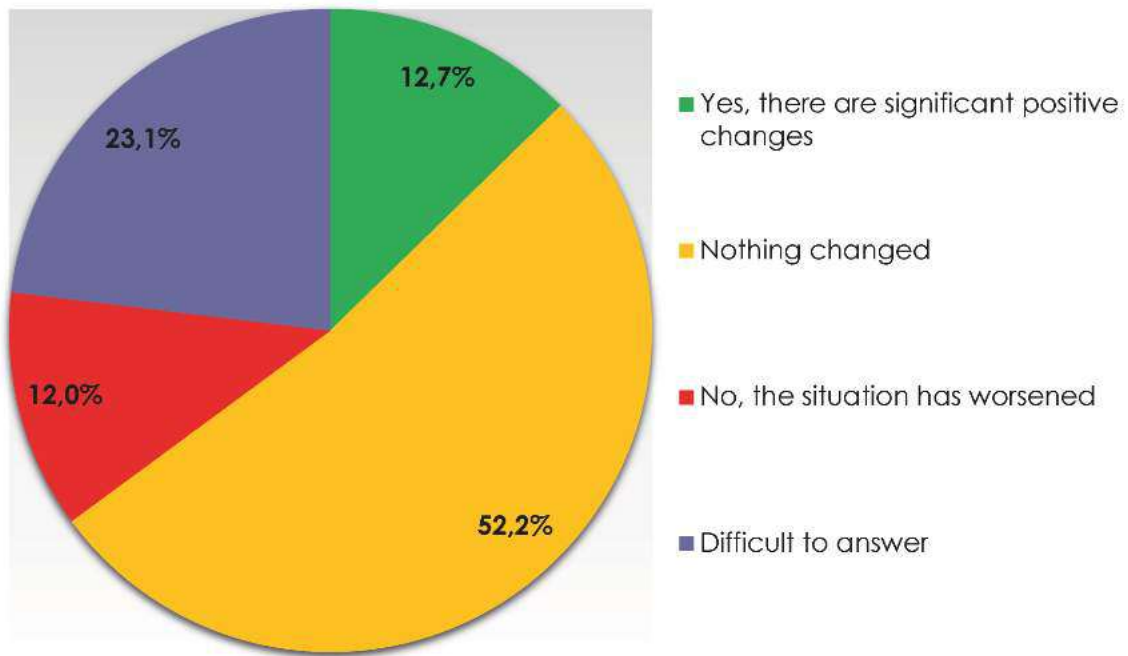


Have you recently faced intolerant attitudes towards minorities?

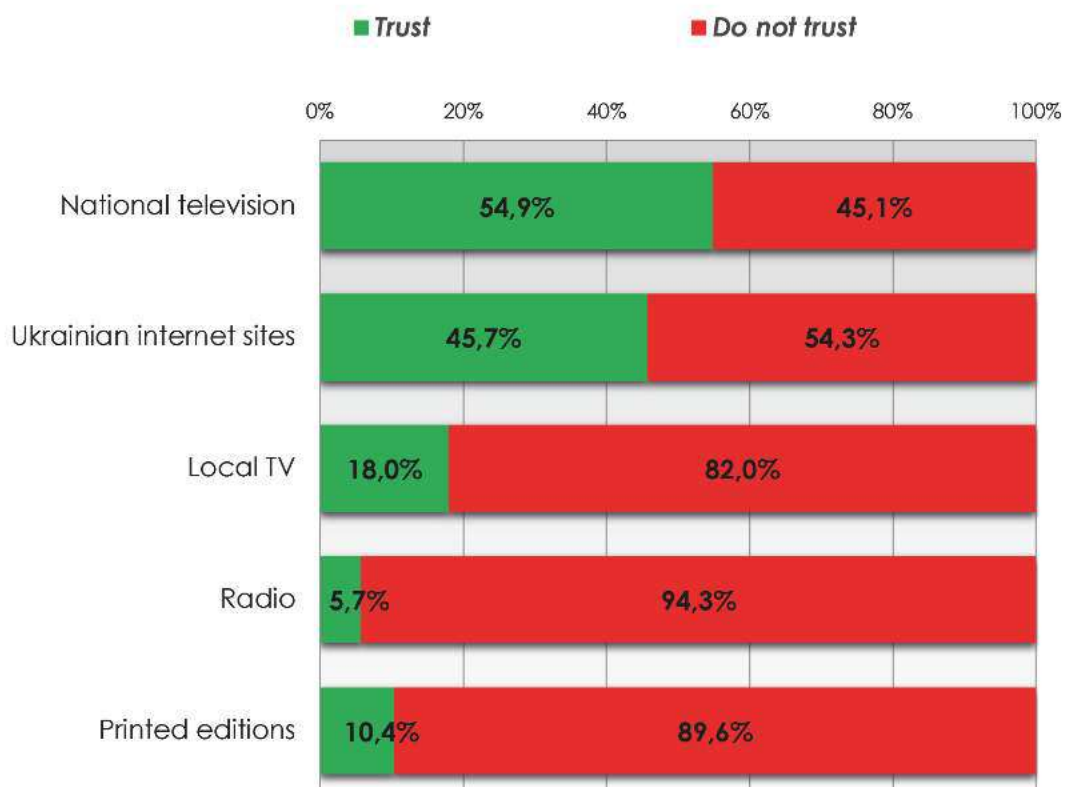
(Several answers are possible)



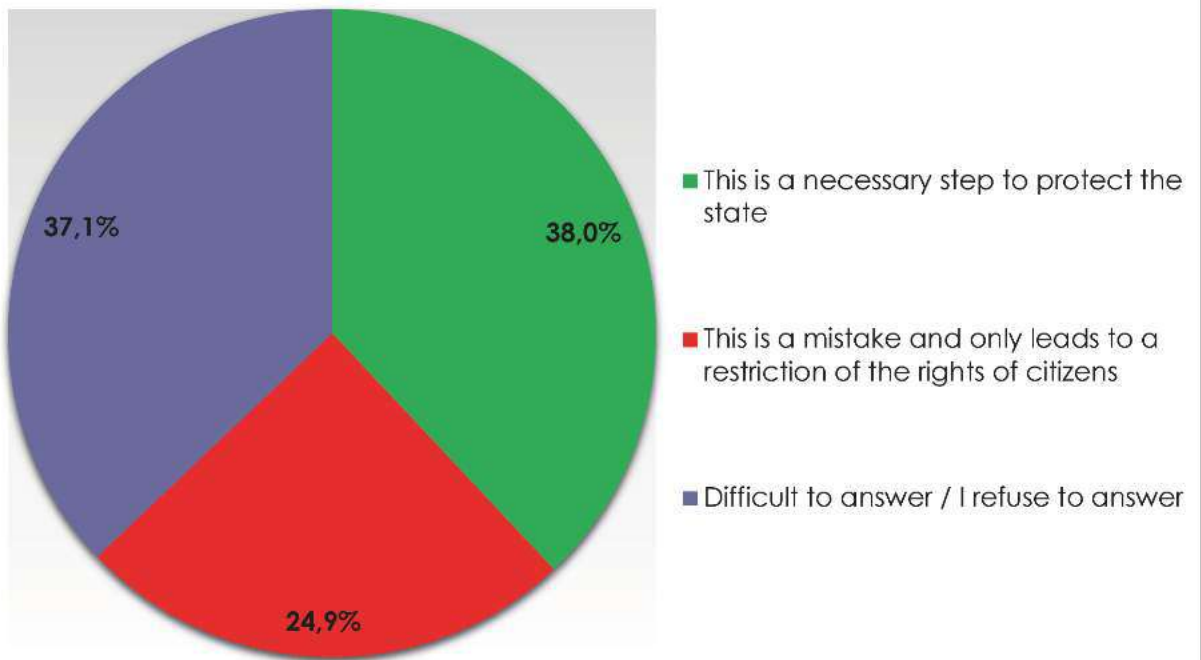
Do you feel the changes in your area after the decentralization reform?



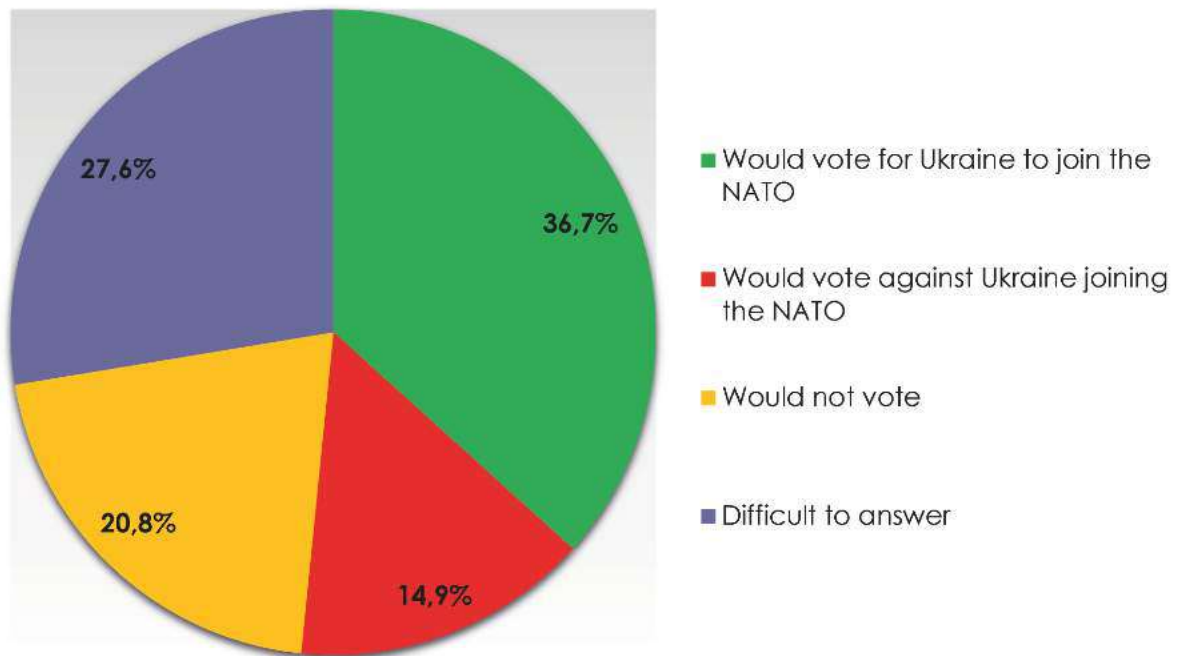
Which of these sources of information do you trust?



How do you feel about the ban on Russian media and social networks in Ukraine?

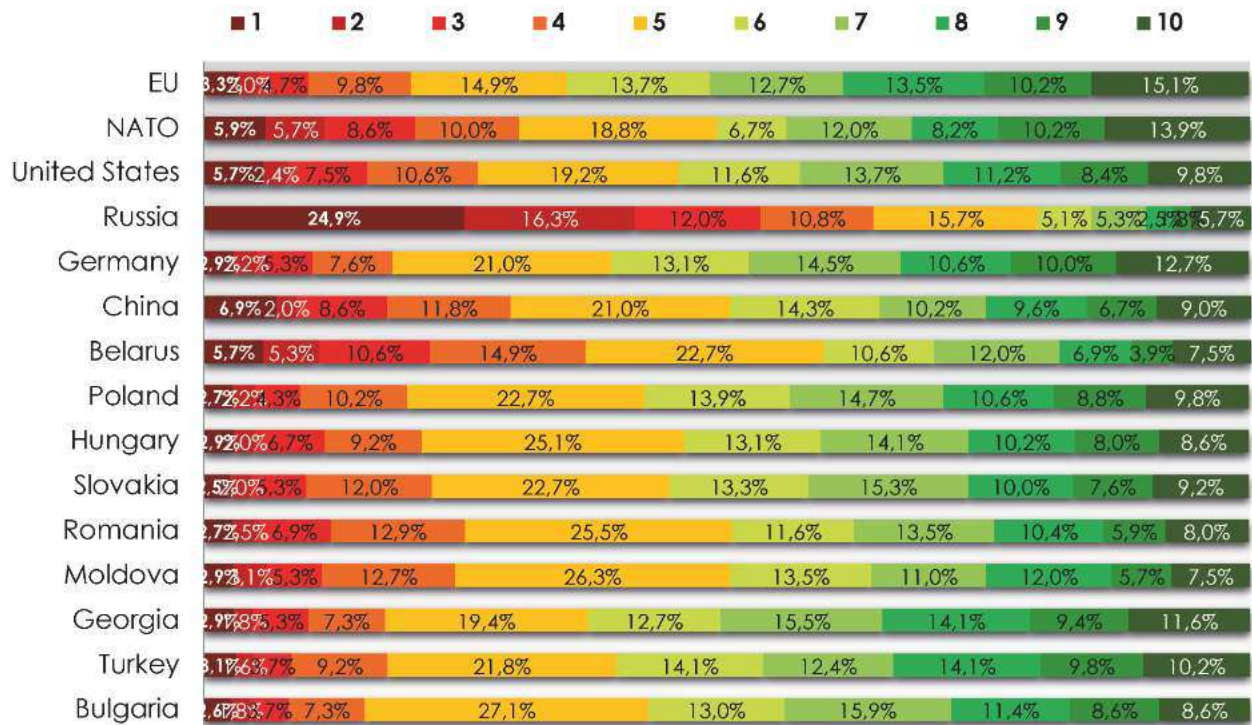


If a referendum on Ukraine's accession to NATO was held in the nearest future, how would you vote?



Rate your attitude towards the following countries and international organizations

(on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the worst and 10 is the best)

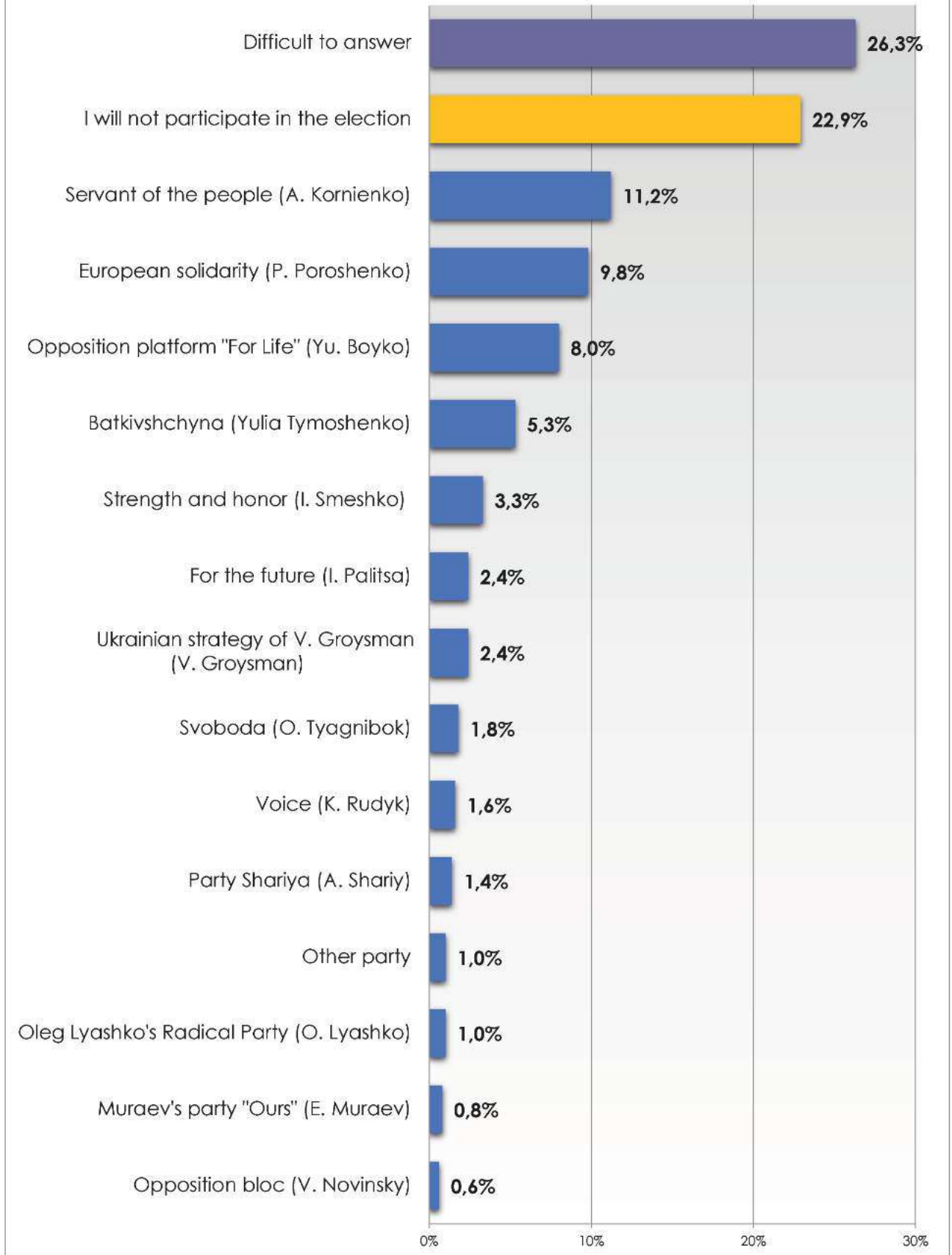


How would you rate your attitude towards the following politicians and public figures?

■ Strongly support
 ■ Somewhat support
 ■ Somewhat oppose
■ Strongly oppose
 ■ Never heard of him \ her
 ■ Difficult to answer

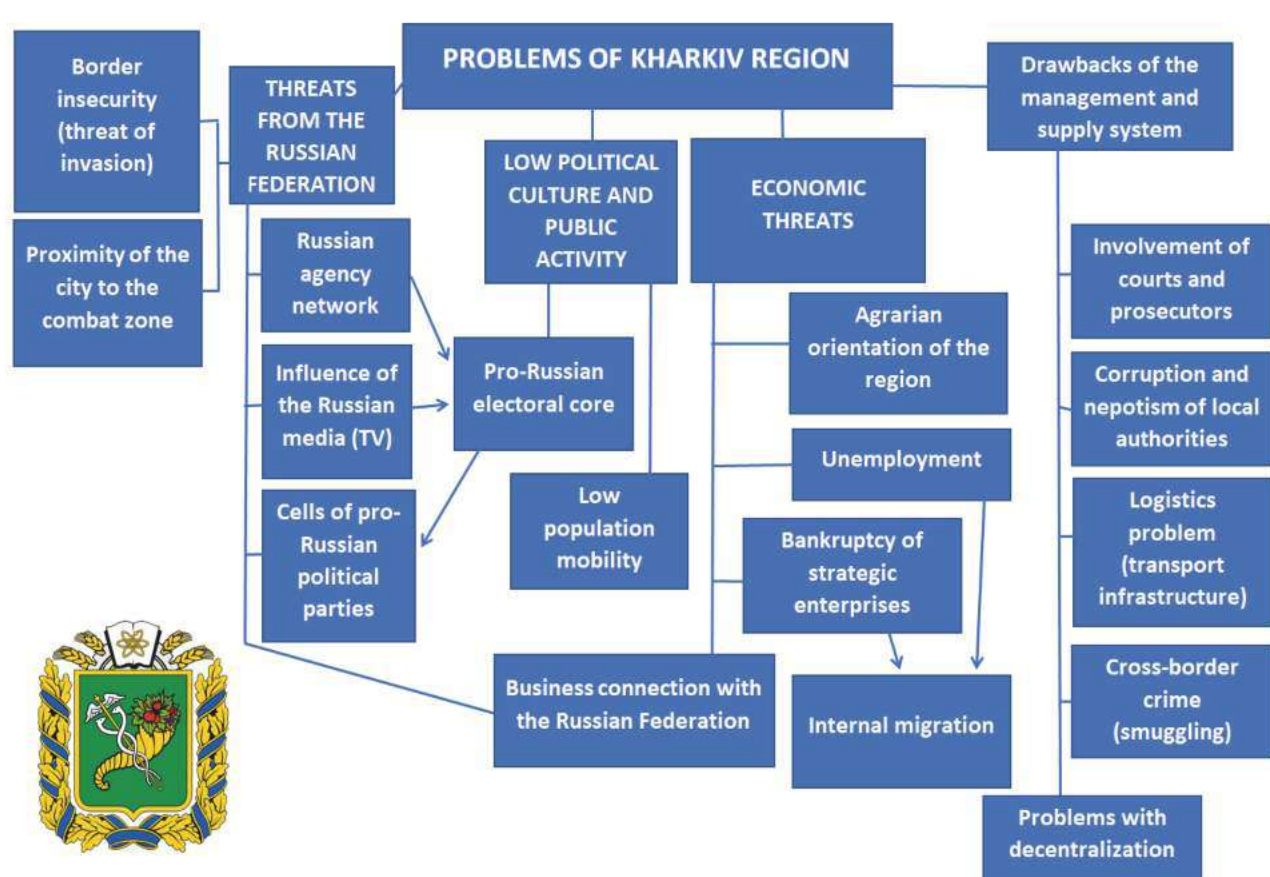


If parliamentary elections were held next Sunday, which of the indicated parties would you vote for?



UKRAINIAN FRONTIER: CHALLENGES FOR KHARKIV REGION

Kharkiv Oblast is an industrial and agricultural region in eastern Ukraine bordering the Russian Federation and the Joint Forces Operation area. The security situation in the Kharkiv region remains difficult due to the active efforts of the Russian Federation to maintain the hybrid influence on the territory.



Regional problems

Security problems in the Kharkiv region are primarily related to the region's proximity to the border with the Russian Federation and the persistence of the threat of military intervention and the risks of provocations. Occasionally there are cases of cross-border crime (smuggling of goods).

The reform of decentralization in the region in some places has not brought significant positive changes; instead, problems with the fullness of local budgets and the transparency of their targeted use remain relevant (corruption and nepotism persist in the implementation of local budgets). In general, more than half of the respondents (64.4%) stated did not feel changes in their settlements after the decentralization reform. Currently, the problematic issues in this area are the efficiency of district councils, asymmetric development of communities, sometimes the lack of established communication between district administrations and UTC.

The reform itself is perceived at the local level as quite contradictory. First of all, due to the usual role of local residents and the functions of administrations in the management system, which currently remain insufficiently defined and understood.

Contradictory attitude to the prospects of district development after the completion of the decentralization reform prevails among the residents of the region - first of all, precisely because of the problems with the lack of funds in local budgets. There is a demand for compensation and subventions from the state budget to solve certain problems at the local level.

Medical reform is also perceived negatively - despite the partial solution of problems with queues in medical institutions, the situation with the quality of medical services in the region has not changed. The problem with providing medicines to socially vulnerable groups (children, ATO participants / JFO) also remains relevant. Survey data show a negative assessment of the quality of health services after the reform of the health care system (at the level of 56.8%), while almost a third (27%) of respondents indicated that there were no changes.

In the system of government there is sometimes a "conservation" (isolation) of power and **maintaining the influence of the old elite** on all processes of regional and local importance. At the same time, the population demonstrates a tendency to sustainability and stability in the political situation at the local level by showing a **low level of involvement** in possible changes through elections and civic activism. Relevant trends are confirmed by the data of a sociological survey, in which about half of respondents in Kharkiv region (44.4%) said that they do not see any problems and contradictions in their settlements (24% of respondents indicated the presence of political conflicts).

There is no public demand for a change of elites due to the **low level of confidence in potential new staff**, which is partly due to frustration with the unrealized changes after the arrival of the new government in 2019..

Paternalistic views of the population and low political activity are manifested in **the preservation of the image of a "strong businessman"** as the most attractive political figure for local government. Civic activity also remains low; At the same time, there is a lack of understanding of the prospects and potential of using the public sector to address issues of local importance in local governments. Instead, there is **a low level of trust and support of the central government** through the association with the inability and unwillingness of the relevant authorities to realize the human, infrastructural and industrial potential available in Ukraine. Distrust is also used by law enforcement agencies, courts and the prosecutor's office due to cases of involvement of relevant institutions. Relevant views are confirmed by assessments of the respondents' level of trust to certain institutions, where the least popular are the courts (12%), customs (12.5%), the Cabinet (about 13%), the Verkhovna Rada (15%) and the prosecutor's office (18%).

The attitude of local residents to the newly introduced **reform of the**

agricultural land market in Ukraine is contradictory. The population is concerned about the possibility of selling land (especially to foreigners), but at the same time emphasizes dissatisfaction with the current exploitation of leased land by farmers. The negative perception of land privatization, minerals and natural resources by the business elite prevails. There is a low level of legal awareness and interest of local residents in obtaining information on the possibilities of opening the relevant market and pricing issues.

Socio-economic conditions of the region's development demonstrate the existence of such problems as bankruptcy and closure of large strategic enterprises without prospects for modernization and search for new markets; the spread of unemployment and the mass outflow of qualified personnel; unsatisfactory level of social protection (inefficiency of social services in the field), etc. The population of the region is concerned about the increase in utility tariffs and pension benefits, the lack of a satisfactory number of jobs for young people (including due to the agricultural direction of economic development of the region).

Another urgent problem for the residents of Kharkiv region is **the unsatisfactory condition of the transport infrastructure** in remote settlements (in rural areas). Due to this, there is no full access to medical facilities for residents of these areas. The poor condition of regional and local roads affects the ability of law enforcement, SES and medical staff to respond quickly to calls and reach the scene of incidents in a timely manner.

The prevalence of internal and external **labor migration** mainly affects the young population. Due to this, **a demographic imbalance** is noticeable in areas far from the regional center. Among the popular areas of labor migration until 2014 were large cities of the Russian Federation, now the priority is given to the countries of the European Union (mainly Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany). According to a survey, about a third of respondents reported that they have experience of working abroad or would like to leave Ukraine in search of money or permanent residence.

In general, the demand for **isolation and "separateness" of the region** in comparison with other regions of Ukraine remains stable among local residents; the dynamics of domestic political processes in the state and foreign policy transformations of the country after the events of 2014 are not perceived. The population of the region shows **vulnerability to existing speculations** in the information area.

The general level of interest of the regional population in domestic and foreign political processes in Ukraine remains low. Residents are mostly concerned with socio-economic issues related to the establishment of stable living conditions, employment, salaries and medical services. **The low mobility of the region's residents**, particularly in remote areas of the region, creates passivity, apoliticalness and a low level of political culture and awareness.

In the regional information space, television (at 61%) and online media (at 45.8%) are trusted. "Inter", "1 + 1", "Ukraine", "STB", "ICTV", "New Channel" are popular among domestic television channels; "TSN.ua", "UNIAN", "Obozrevatel", "Vesti", "Segodnya", "Strana.ua", "Gordon" and others are popular among Ukrainian online publications.

External influence

The Russian Federation maintains a significant influence on regional and local processes in the Kharkiv region through a number of instruments:

- **Networks of the Russian local influence agency** (represented by local branches of political parties committed to cooperation with Moscow);
- Trade, economic, financial and personal **ties of local business elites with Russia**;
- Dissemination of **Russian and pro-Russian** content in the regional information environment.

Relevant conditions create a situation where there is **no sense of threat from the Russian Federation** among the residents of border areas, despite their proximity to the state border with Russia. Among the local population in everyday life, there is a mostly neutral and calm attitude towards Russian citizens and towards Russia in general; there is no special antagonism to ordinary Russians. Views on the need to separate the image of the state / regime and the common people are noted. At the same time, the negative perception of the spread of anti-Russian sentiments in Ukrainian society during the years of the previous government prevails.

Mass access to Russian television channels and their popularity among locals exists due to the preservation of **stable ties with Russia** (family-friendly and trade and economic) as well as nostalgia for the Soviet past (which is especially felt due to demographic distortions). The relevant situation creates conditions for the existence of a stable and unchanging **nuclear electorate of pro-Russian political forces** in Ukraine among certain categories (including age) of the region's residents. According to a survey among political parties for which parties would respondents vote in the upcoming elections, the first place is taken by the Opposition Platform - "For Life" (17.8%).

Another problem is the spread among locals of a representation sense of their views on pro-Russian channels. There is an association with relevant sources of information as those that act as a mouthpiece for **alternative pro-Ukrainian "radical" rhetoric views**. Restrictions on economic, logistical, trade, cultural and information ties between Ukraine and Russia after 2014 are perceived negatively by residents. This is reflected in the attitude of the population to the ban on Russian media and social networks in Ukraine - 47.2% of respondents called the ban a mistake, while 27.4% of respondents perceive this step as necessary to protect the state.

A large part of the local population forms views on Ukraine's foreign policy orientations through **the prism of Russian narratives**. At the same time, it is worth noting the decline in Russia's overall attractiveness and image position in the perception of citizens - the country is a leader in anti-rating in assessing the attitude of respondents to certain countries and international organizations - the lowest scores (1-4) were given to her by about half of the respondents (45%). At the same time, NATO and the USA are in second and third place according to negative assessments among the respondents (41% and 28% of respondents rated them negatively).

The low level of support for Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration among the local population is due to the lack of understanding of the real results of Ukraine's membership in the structures. Instead, Soviet (now Russian) **myths and stereotypes about NATO** are widespread. The Alliance is associated with an aggressive bloc and local military conflicts, and Ukraine's membership in it is associated with an expensive process that could cause significant damage to the state budget. This attitude is confirmed by the results of a survey, where 43% of respondents against the idea of Ukraine's accession to NATO (for - 31.2% of respondents).

The image of Europe for locals is contradictory. On the one hand, the population is attracted by the stability and level of economic development of European countries; on the other hand, there is a conflict at the level of value aspects (in some places there is a perception of liberal values as destructive).

At the same time, the mobility of the population, trips abroad to European countries have a positive effect on the dynamics of changes in people's views and worldviews. However, the change in the general worldview is slow because of the general low level of mobility of residents in remote parts of the region.

Local problems

Vovchansk. Vovchansk - a city with a population of about 18 thousand people, belongs to the Chuhuiv district of Kharkiv region; located in the north of the region near the Russian border (at a distance of 5-6 km).

At the local level, there is **dissatisfaction with the decentralization reform** due to the lack of funding to address urgent issues (such as road repairs) at the expense of local budgets. As a result of the reform, the problems of providing administrative services have become more acute, in particular, due to the need to resolve bureaucratic issues in the district center (Chuhuiv) or at the region level (in Kharkiv). The process is difficult for vulnerable local people (the elderly; people with disabilities) who face **logistical problems** when transferring to the district center, in particular due to poor road conditions.

There has been a recent decline in the activity of the local parliamentary corps in solving systemic problems at the local level. The local population is concerned about **the passivity and low efficiency of the city authorities and**

local governments, especially in matters of establishing communication with the public. This is expressed in the complexity of organizing the reception of public representatives from officials; non-participation of local self-government representatives in public discussions, etc. In general, the results of reforms and elections in recent years have not changed the situation with the change of power at the local level.

Despite the city's proximity to the Russian border in everyday life, local residents **do not feel threatened by the Russian Federation**. There was no apparent concern about the threat in 2014 either. At the same time, there is a **problem of strengthening the border** with Russia due to the lack of development of reliable fortifications. Currently, the overall security situation in Vovchansk is generally satisfactory; however, there are cases of cross-border crime (smuggling of goods). There are no conflict situations between the local population and ATO\JFO participants.

At the same time, there is a generally **low level of evaluation of the work of domestic law enforcement agencies** among local residents. Contradictory attitude is observed among the local population to the current activities of the Armed Forces of Ukraine - despite the high level of support, the public is concerned about the competence of individual representatives of the Armed Forces, the situation with military discipline, etc. The level of trust in central government (in particular, in parliament and government) remains low.

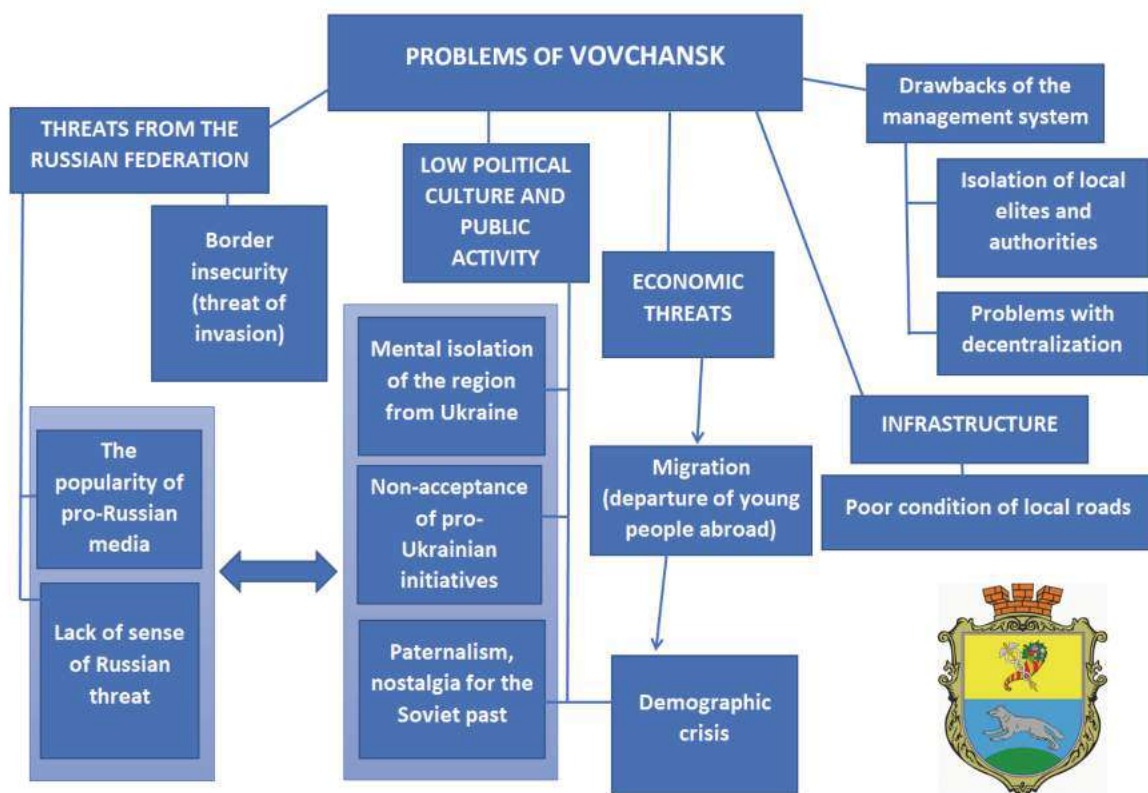
In the local public sector, there are **problems with the organization, coherence and coordination of activities** (for example, in the local union of veterans). Locals are mostly concerned about socio-economic problems - the availability of jobs, utility prices, pension benefits, etc. The issue of patriotic upbringing of young people, the implementation of which is of a formal nature due to the low interest in this topic on the part of local authorities, also remains relevant.

Contradictory attitude to the language issue in Ukraine is widespread among the local population. On the one hand, the absence of a language problem in the city is declared, on the other hand, the controversial assessment of the introduction of the law on the Ukrainian language as the state language prevails. The population of the city has decreased significantly due to **adverse socio-economic conditions**. In Vovchansk there are no employment prospects (this problem is especially acute for socially vulnerable groups - ATO / JFO veterans, people with disabilities). The presence of a number of enterprises in Vovchansk (aggregate and oil extraction plants, shoe factory, meat-packing plant) does not contribute to the improvement of economic development due to obsolescence of facilities and lack of adequate funding. The underlying situation contributes to the spread of the phenomenon of labor migration - city residents are actively going abroad in search of money (formely a popular destination was Russia, now - European countries), as well as to the regional center and the ut. Kulinichi. Strict quarantine restrictions due to the spread of the Covid-19 epidemic in Ukraine have

had a negative impact on the work of local entrepreneurs - there have been cases of business closures.

The **problem with obtaining land plots by ATO / JFO veterans** is urgent in the city due to the lack of assistance and explanation from local administrative institutions on the procedure for drawing up the relevant documentation. Another problem concerns the presence of bureaucratic obstacles and high cost in the procedure of registration of land shares ownership.

The popularity of **Russian television** among the city's population is due to Vovchansk's proximity to the border with Russia. At the same time, Inter and Ukraine are popular among Ukrainian TV channels - the audience of NewsOne, ZIK and 112 Ukraine channels once switched to them after their closure. In general, the fact of termination of broadcasting of a group of channels is perceived at the level of the local population mostly negatively. The prevailing opinion is about the need for different channels and sources of information to represent different points of view and form their own opinion in society. In general, the most popular sources of information are television, news on the Internet, less frequently - radio.



Kupiansk. Kupiansk is a city located in the northeastern part of the Kharkiv region, the district center of the Kupiansk district with a population of about 28 thousand people.

Among the main systemic problems at the local level is **the incomplete decentralization reform**, which has placed an additional burden on local budgets (In particular, we are talking about the functions that previously had to perform the center - the provision of medical care, organization of scheduled transportation,

etc.) Currently UTC is not able to provide medical and social services to the population exclusively at the expense of local budgets and with the use of material and technical conditions received from the region and districts in the process of redistribution of powers and property. This leads to cases where employees use their own funds on the ground to meet the critical needs of the local population (for example, the purchase of computers at their own expense). At the same time, there is a lack of proper attention to the solution of the relevant problem by the local deputies, which mostly demonstrates the formal implementation of work in the local media.

The situation with the **road infrastructure** has been partially resolved - the central route to Kharkiv has been repaired, but the roads of local significance, which are located closer to the border, are in an abandoned state. The situation with highways in the district center is similarly unsatisfactory. This condition of the roads negatively affects **the ability of law enforcement services and the SES to respond quickly to calls** and get to the scene of incidents in a timely manner. The logistical problem also affects medical care. A significant part of the settlements available in the UTC as a result of the implementation of medical reform were left without adequate care. Logistical problems in the district also concern the transfer of students from remote rural settlements to educational institutions.

There is **a problem of obsolescence of the housing stock** in Kupiansk - since 1994, only one new residential building has been commissioned in the city. In addition, the lack of a satisfactory number of available loans for households remains an urgent problem.

The area is characterized by **a demographic imbalance** - among the 15,000 residents of Kupiansk district, the majority are people of retirement age, which affects the overall electoral behavior and election results. At the same time, the turnout in the last local elections was quite high (at the level of 60-70%).

The new procedure for approving chiefs did not significantly affect the distribution of forces on the ground - the approved candidates were mostly representatives of the old village councils. At the same time, there is an improvement in the situation with local government and the implementation of new ideas in those settlements where new people have been appointed to the role of chiefs.

The sense of personal security in the city remains unsatisfactory due to crime rates. There is **a problem in the district with the staffing of law enforcement agencies** and their logistics (especially vehicles). This situation complicates the effectiveness of the police and the coverage and patrol of all areas of the district. The situation with the logistics of the SES (in particular, fire brigades) is better, but the issue of servicing newly purchased fire trucks remains, which requires additional funds from the local budget.

At the local level, there is no threat from Russia, despite the proximity of the city and region to the border with Russia (about 40 km). At the same time, there is a

high risk of provocations and worsening of the situation due to the possibility of reducing the number of border guards.

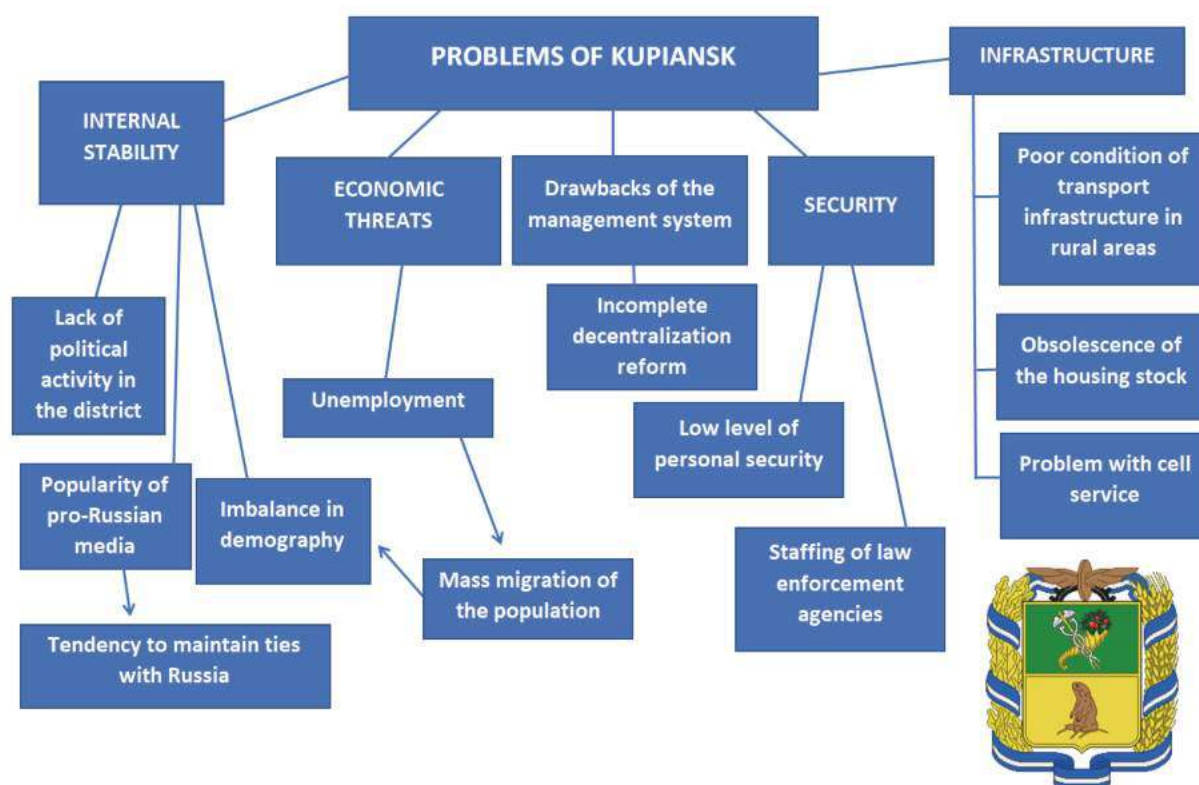
Kupiansk is a large railway and automobile hub in the Kharkiv region. On its territory there is a machine-building plant, a plant of reinforced concrete structures, "Metiz", as well as large concerns. Many other local enterprises that served the agricultural sector during the Soviet era have now ceased operations and have no **potential markets** for their products. In addition to industrial enterprises, the city and district budgets are filled by the agricultural sector. The negative consequences of the spread of coronavirus infection in the population were mainly felt in the field of logistics - due to restrictions on passenger transport.

At the same time, in general, the socio-economic conditions in the district remain difficult - most residents of the district are represented by the poor. Adverse economic conditions cause **the spread of labor migration** - city residents go to work in the regional center, as well as abroad (popular destinations are Poland and Germany).

Currently, the main problem of the local information space is **the imbalance in the distribution of access to Ukrainian and Russian television content**: through digital T-2 the population can watch 32 domestic channels (among which the most popular are "Inter" and 1 + 1), while having access up to 76 Russian channels. Printed publications on the territory of UTC are represented by four newspapers, which were previously municipal.

The problem with cell service is relevant for the district and the city - due to geographical conditions (features of the terrain) the corresponding signals are very weak, despite the presence of a sufficient number of mobile towers.

Despite the low political and social activity in the city, there **is a preservation of orientation to the Russian Federation** (primarily due to past work experience in Russia). At the same time, Ukraine's course towards European integration is perceived positively - at the local level are aware of the need for economic and technological development of the state due to the possible entry of the state into the relevant structures.



Izium. Izium is the center of the district with a population of about 47 thousand people, located in the southeast of Kharkiv region.

Decentralization reform at the local level has been delayed - the last communities were formed at the last moment before the 2019 local elections. **The slow implementation of the** reform is explained by problems in communication and finding consensus in coordinating the activities of village chiefs in the fields.

In general, there is **a lack of political activity** in the district, which is confirmed by the low turnout in the local elections (slightly higher turnout in the national elections - at 30-40%). The elections are mostly attended by representatives of the older generation, due to demographic factors - more than half of the population of the district is represented by the age group 50+.

The feeling of personal security in the city is mostly at a satisfactory level; people do not face cases of serious crimes. However, there is a **high level of distrust in the judiciary** in the state in the context of ensuring the rule of law.

The situation with the road infrastructure in the district remains controversial - the routes of state (regional) importance are in a satisfactory condition, while the roads of local importance require significant funds from local budgets for repairs. **Problems with logistics in remote settlements** of the district have a negative impact on the ability of the SES and medical services to respond quickly to emergencies and get to the places. At present, medical services are able to perform their functions due to excessive operation of the vehicle, which makes it more unusable.

Similar obstacles are faced by fire services, whose problems with prompt call are supplemented by the lack of clear requirements and standards for the organization of voluntary fire brigades at the UTC level. In addition, there is a lack of adequate financial support for the process, due to which the number of such fire brigades in the area is declining. There is no staffing problem in law enforcement agencies and the SES, which is explained by a fairly high level of salaries in the relevant positions (at the level of UAH 11,000 with an average salary in the city of up to UAH 10,000).

Compared to other areas close to the border with Russia, the local population shows a greater **level of concern about the war** and fears of a possible escalation of the conflict. The corresponding attitude is explained by the **proximity of the city to the combat zone** and the experience of being on the territory of the ATO headquarters. Locals are showing a positive attitude towards the Ukrainian military in the city, residents were previously wary, but now the military is associated with security. In addition, the volunteer movement is common in the field; Currently, a system of territorial defense is being created from among the local residents who were mobilized to the Armed Forces in 2014-2015. At the same time, there are **cases of conflicts in everyday life** regarding the provision of benefits to ATO/JFO veterans by private carriers (due to the transfer of expenditures for beneficiaries to local community budgets, each of which decides on its own in the absence of funds). Due to the inability of communities to pay compensation to carriers for beneficiaries, there is a need to improve the relevant procedure at the legislative level to address the issue of allocating a limited number of privileged seats.

The main socio-economic problem for local residents is **the lack of jobs**, which affects the intensification of migration and the persistence of the ongoing demographic crisis (the last increase in population was observed in 2014 with the influx of internally displaced persons). Currently people (including young people) leave to earn money in regional centers (Kyiv, Kharkiv, Lviv), as well as abroad (Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands). At the same time, a significant proportion of migrant workers show a tendency to return to permanent residence.

There are a large number of ATO / JFO veterans in Iziium; the procedure for obtaining the status of a participant in hostilities is satisfactorily established. At the same time, there are problems with veterans receiving land plots, as well as with the organization of social support and adaptation of ATO / JFO participants, which are gradually being solved (in particular, through the work of the social support center on the basis of the city military commissariat; regional center).

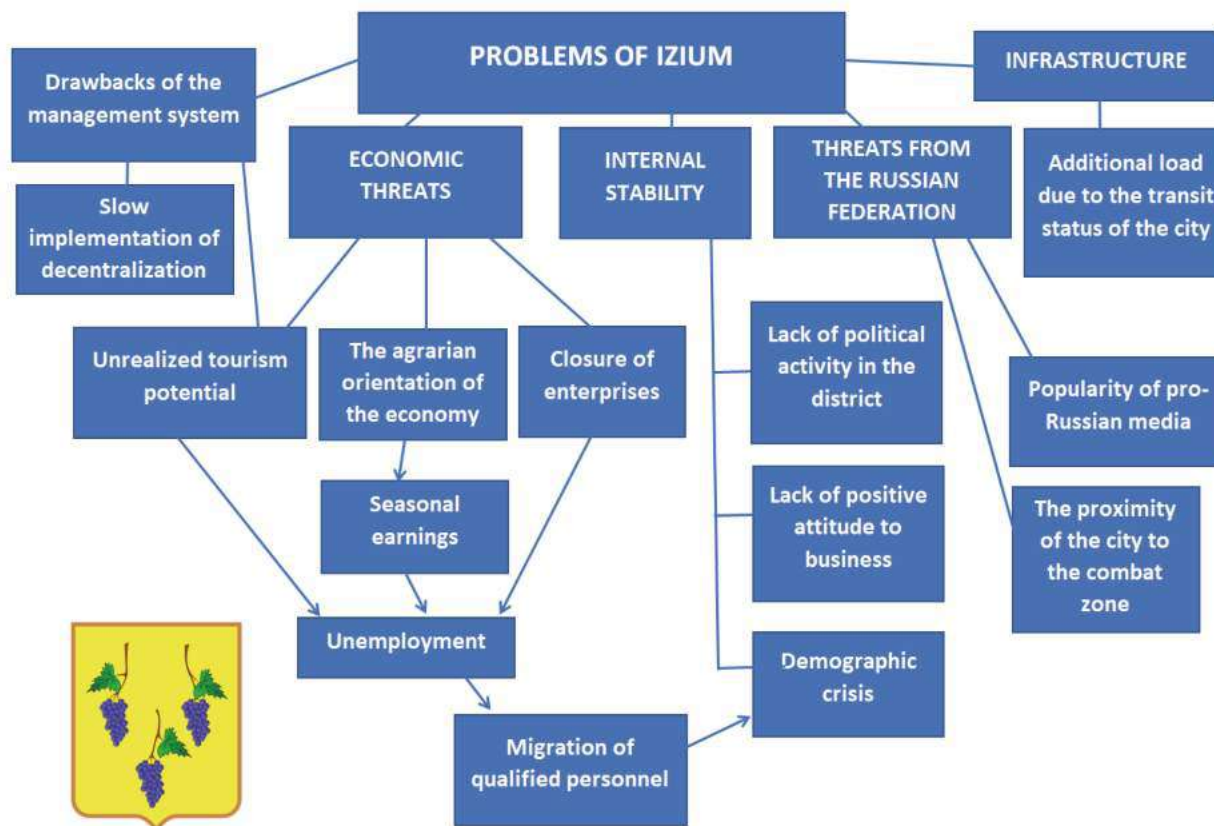
Iziium district is characterized mainly by **the agrarian orientation of the economy**; at the same time the budget of the district center is filled at the expense of the gas industry, instrument-making plant, SE "Iziium forestry", etc. Despite the developed industry in Iziium, there is **a closure of large enterprises** due to lack of demand for products (for instance locomotive repair plant).

Wheat, sunflower and corn predominate among the crops grown en masse in agriculture. Harvest volumes reach 5 tons of wheat per hectare (where the price per ton is 8 thousand UAH). Thus, seasonal work in the agricultural sector is one of the most lucrative activities for the local population. At the same time, there are still concerns about **the risks of pressure on local farmers from agricultural holdings**.

In general, the state of socio-economic development of the district is characterized by **instability of incomes of the local population** - salaries are mostly seasonal and depend on the sowing campaign and harvest. The formal unemployment rate is a small percentage (5-7%), and in fact the corresponding figures are much higher (reaching 15-20%). There is a partial **lack of adequate jobs** due to the processes of modernization and mechanization of agricultural enterprises, which reduces the need for workers. Another problem for the region is the risk of rising inflation, which will affect citizens' incomes. The negative consequences of the introduction of quarantine due to the spread of Covid-19 mainly affected small businesses, especially the service sector in the city. Many small businesses were forced to cease operations and were unable to resume fully after easing strict quarantine restrictions.

The preservation of the load on the transport infrastructure of Izium due to **the transit nature of the city** remains an urgent problem. The issue of **unrealized tourist potential** of the region in the absence of proper investment and establishment of logistics routes to remote areas is also remains open.

The information environment of the district is represented by the media, which are mostly under the control of local authorities. The main sources of information are dominated by television and the Internet (Facebook groups); less frequently- printed publications (newspapers) and radio. At the same time, local TV channels are not popular, in contrast to the content of Russian television, to which access is maintained. In general, the local population demonstrates a **low level of trust in the media** in Ukraine due to their control over certain representatives of large business circles. Under such conditions, there is a demand for the launch of public television.



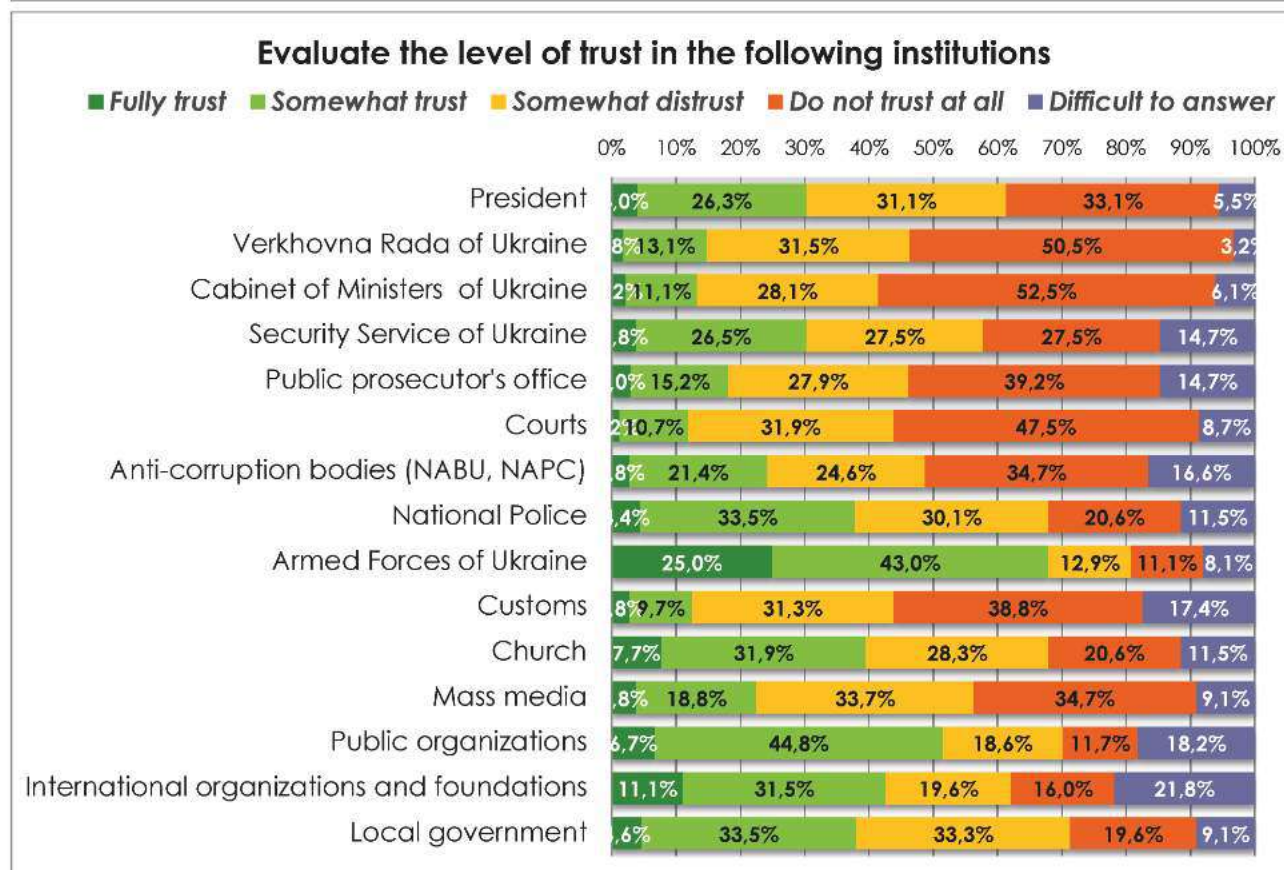
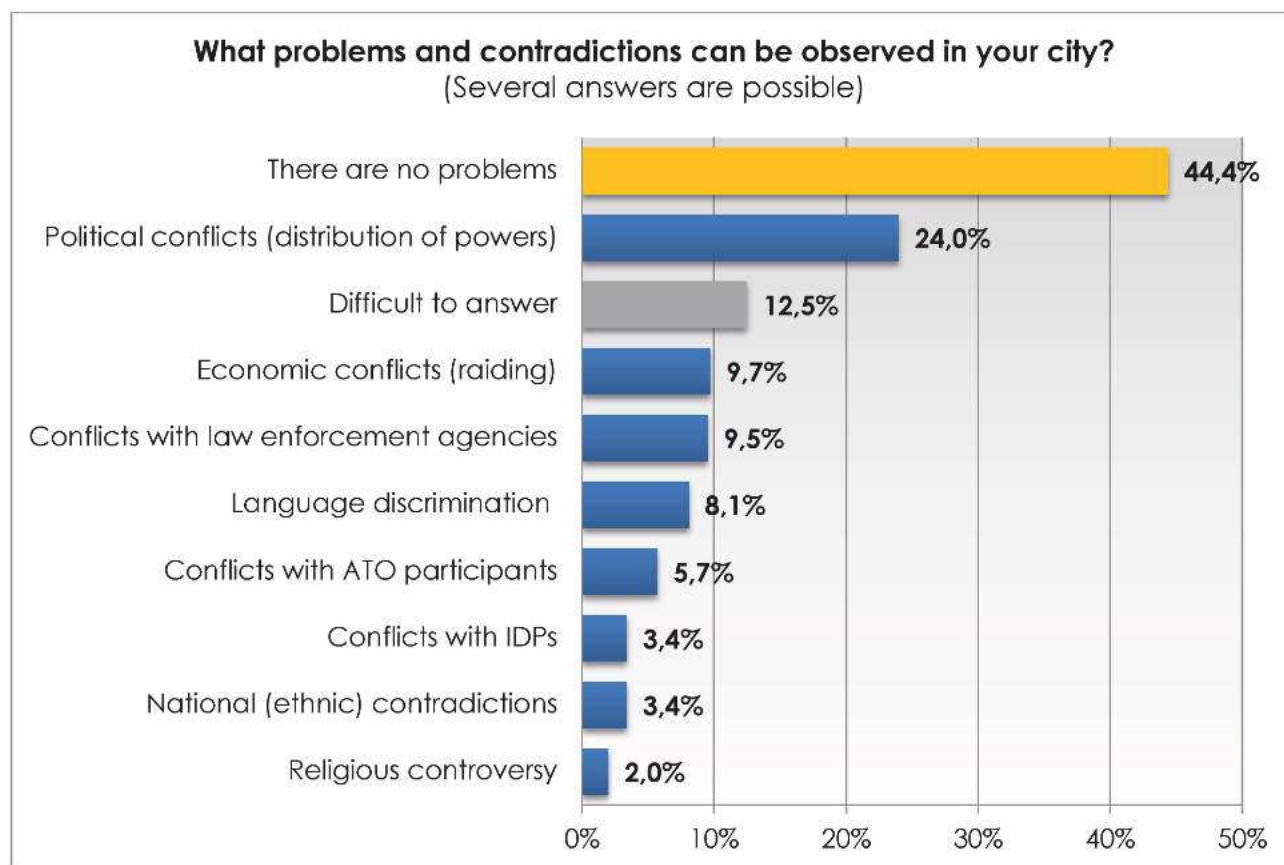
Recommendations:

In order to improve the security climate in the region and reduce the impact of destructive factors of its development is proposed to:

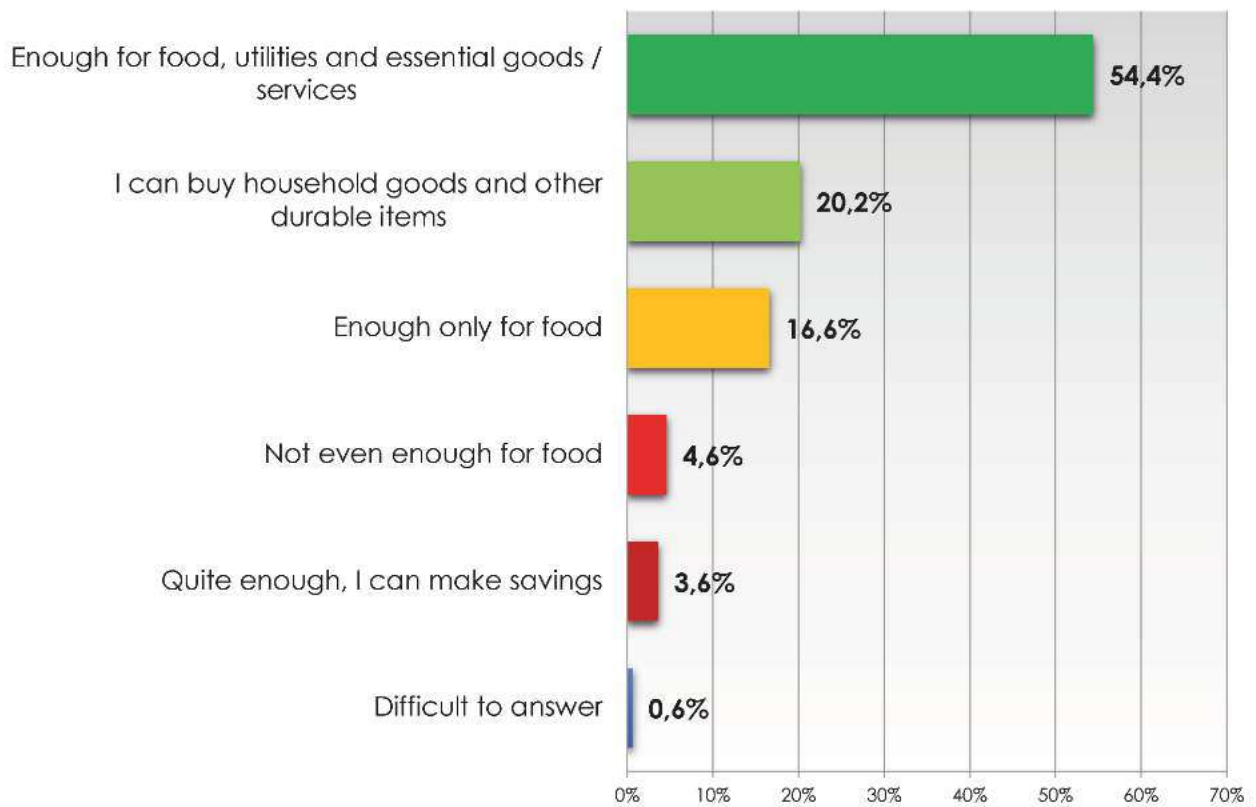
- Strengthen the defense capabilities of the region through the construction and strengthening of fortifications on the border; further development of the territorial defense system with the involvement of veterans' organizations and voluntary associations;
- Take preventive measures to combat illicit arms trafficking;
- Ensure the introduction of a more systematic approach to security assessment in the region (analysis and development of short- and long-term policy documents on strategic planning);
- Continue the processes of decentralization (maximum involvement of the local population in decision-making, infrastructure development, financial planning of territorial development);
- Develop a strategy for solving the infrastructural problems of the region taking into account the existing transit value and the potential of individual districts;
- Develop regional programs of professional retraining in connection with the closure (reduction) of large industrial productions. Priority areas are services, agriculture, small production, self-employment, work on infrastructure logistics projects, tourism. Selected employment programs for age groups (45+);

- Develop regional incentive programs (simple algorithms, transparent mechanisms for starting a business) for small and medium-sized businesses, taking into account the economic needs of the region;
- Ensure the creation of a regional map of the cluster economy, which will identify broken production chains and propose their diversification;
- Implement a regional program for the construction of affordable housing, providing tax benefits for small businesses for vulnerable groups;
- Establish systematic work to facilitate access of Ukrainian residents of remote border settlements to Ukrainian television and mobile coverage;
- Ensure an effective information policy aimed at leveling Russia's propaganda influence in the media space;
- Intensify information, entertainment and cultural events on national and patriotic education aimed at the general population (festivals, film forums, etc.);
- Develop regional programs of national-patriotic education of youth with the elimination of the Soviet tradition with the broad involvement of various categories of the population (in particular, the invitation of ATO / JFO veterans to participate in events on the basis of local educational institutions);
- Develop the necessary infrastructure (such as sports grounds / obstacle courses) to provide pre-service and sports training for local youth;
- To increase the level of informing the population about the issues of European integration and cooperation of Ukraine with NATO by developing a targeted localized concept of communication of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, taking into account the specifics of the local population; to promote the European and Euro-Atlantic vector among the young population (in schools and higher education institutions).

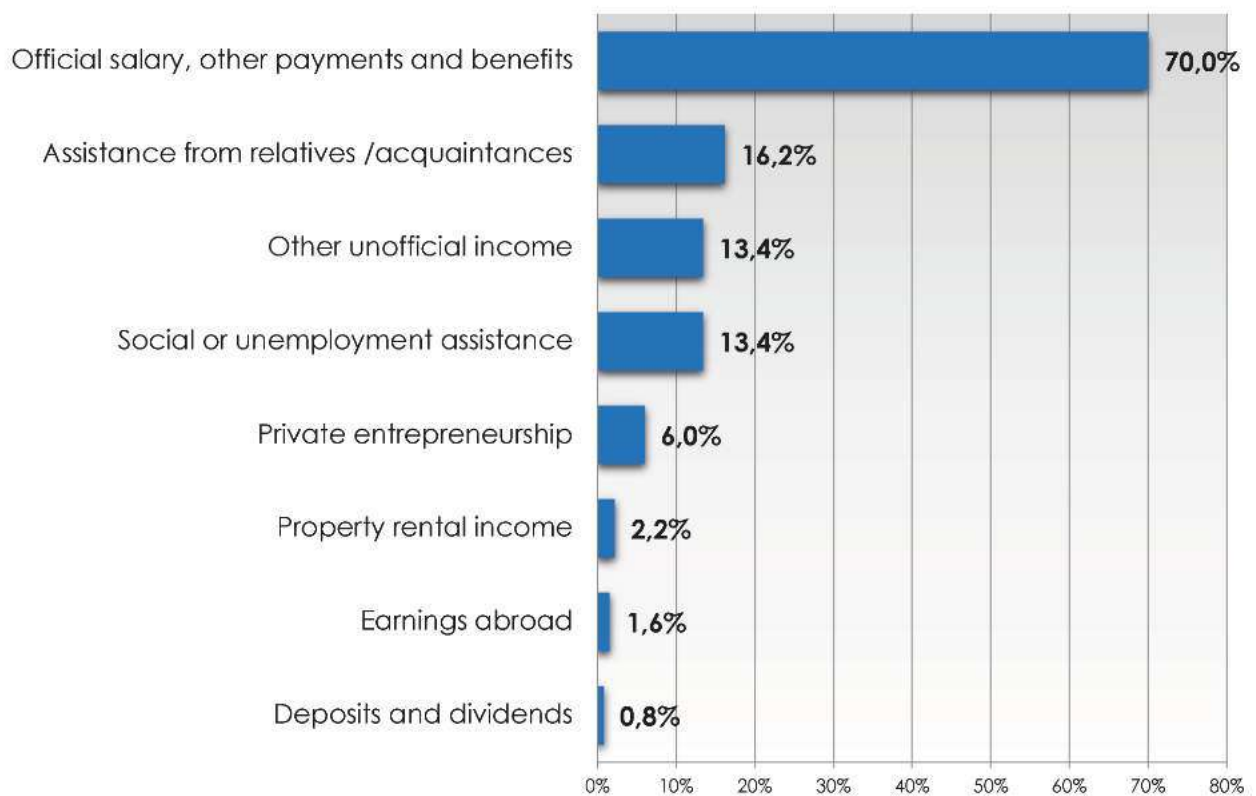
Annex 2. Kharkiv Region – sociological research materials



How would you evaluate your income level?

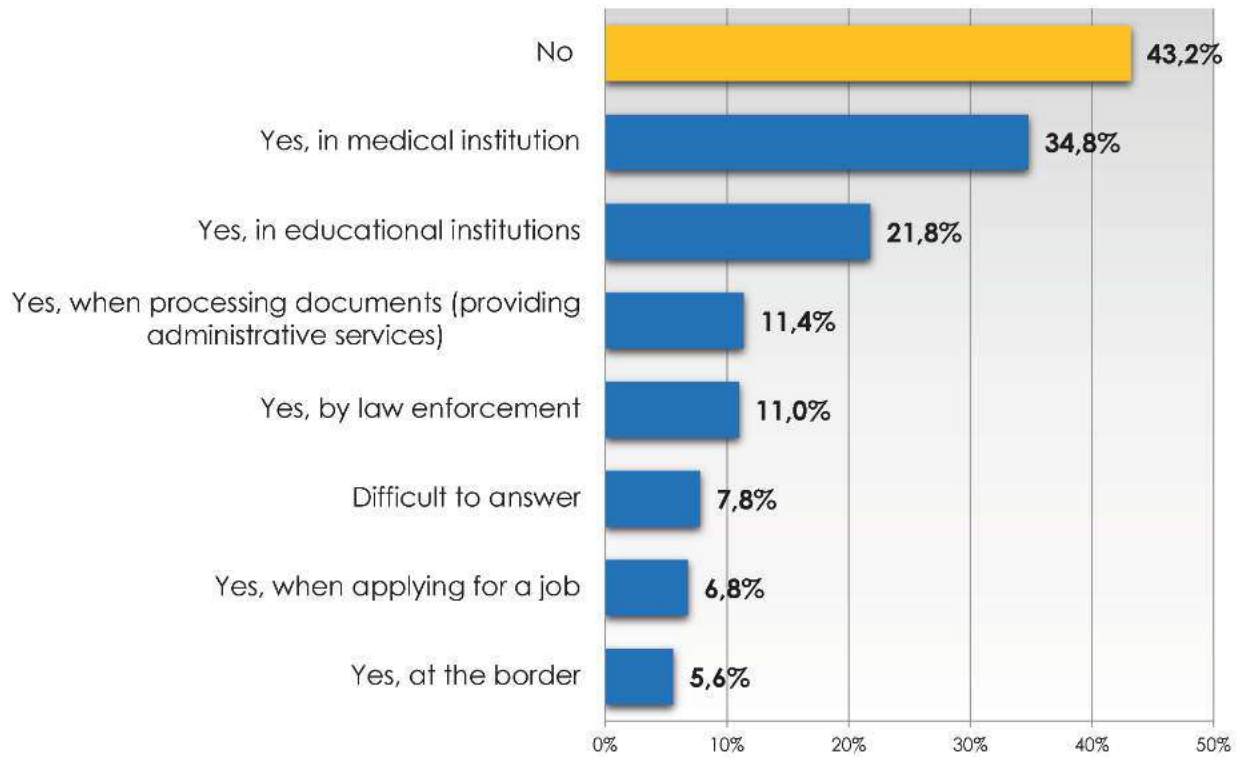


What does your income consist of? (Several answers are possible)

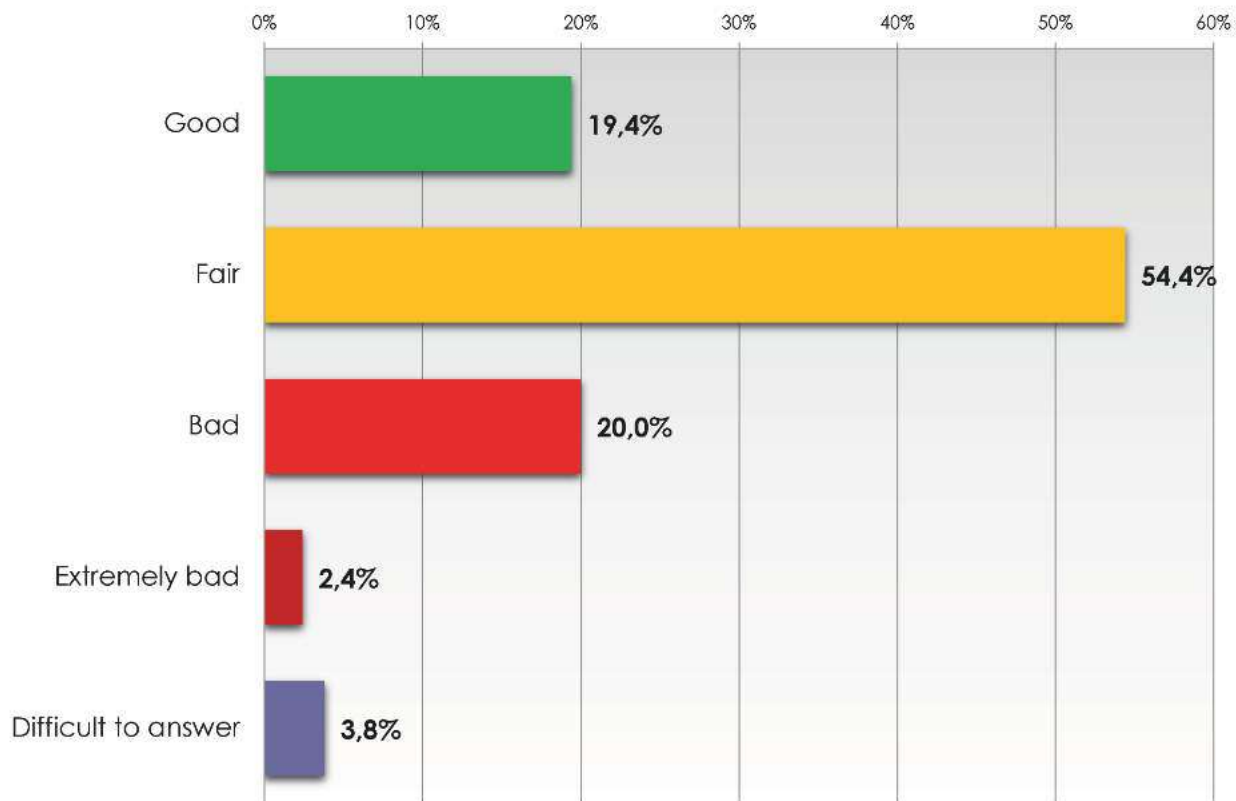


Have you ever experienced / witnessed corruption?

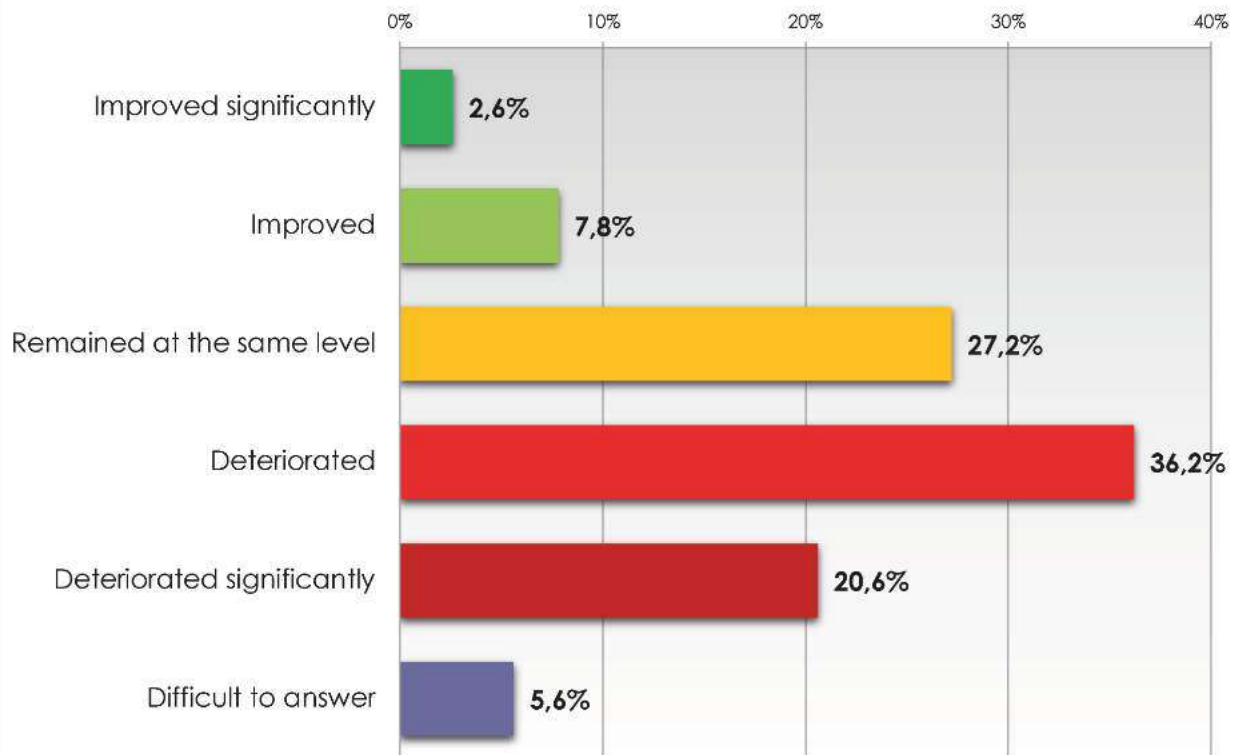
(Several answers are possible)



How would you rate the state of the environment in your region?

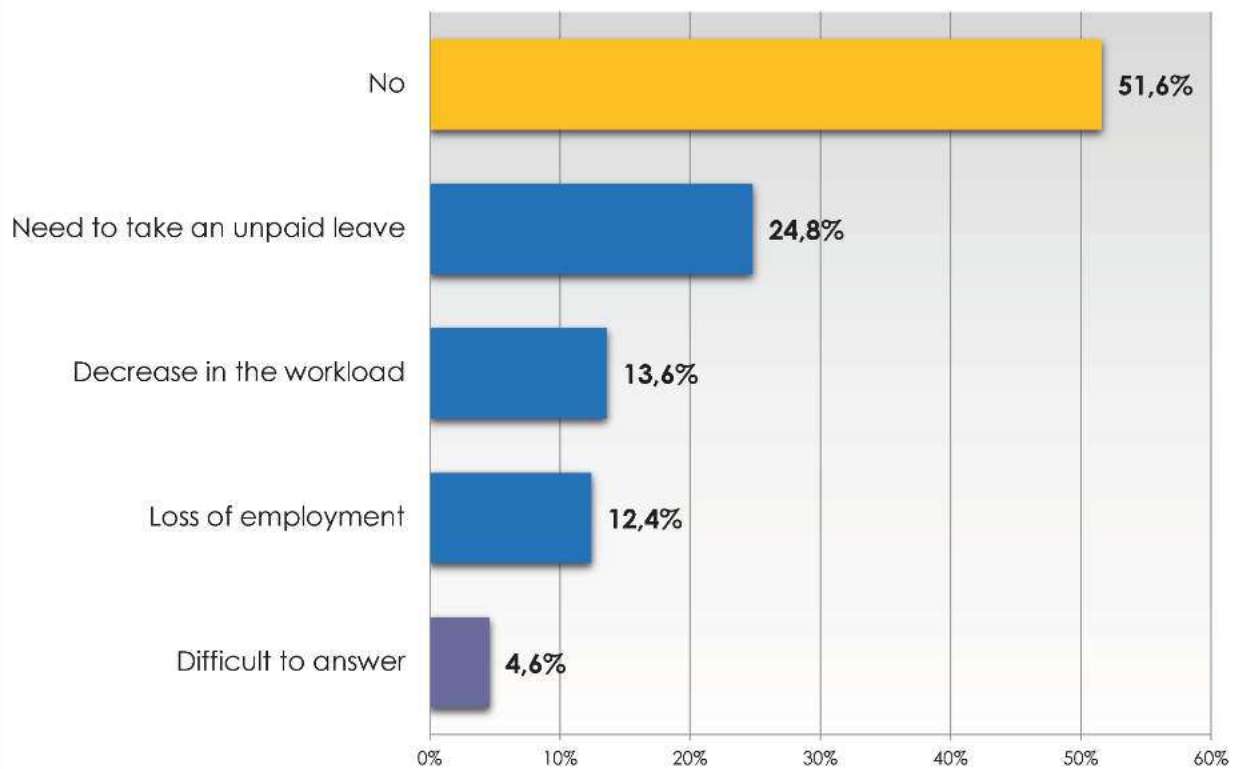


How has the quality of healthcare services changed after the healthcare system reform?

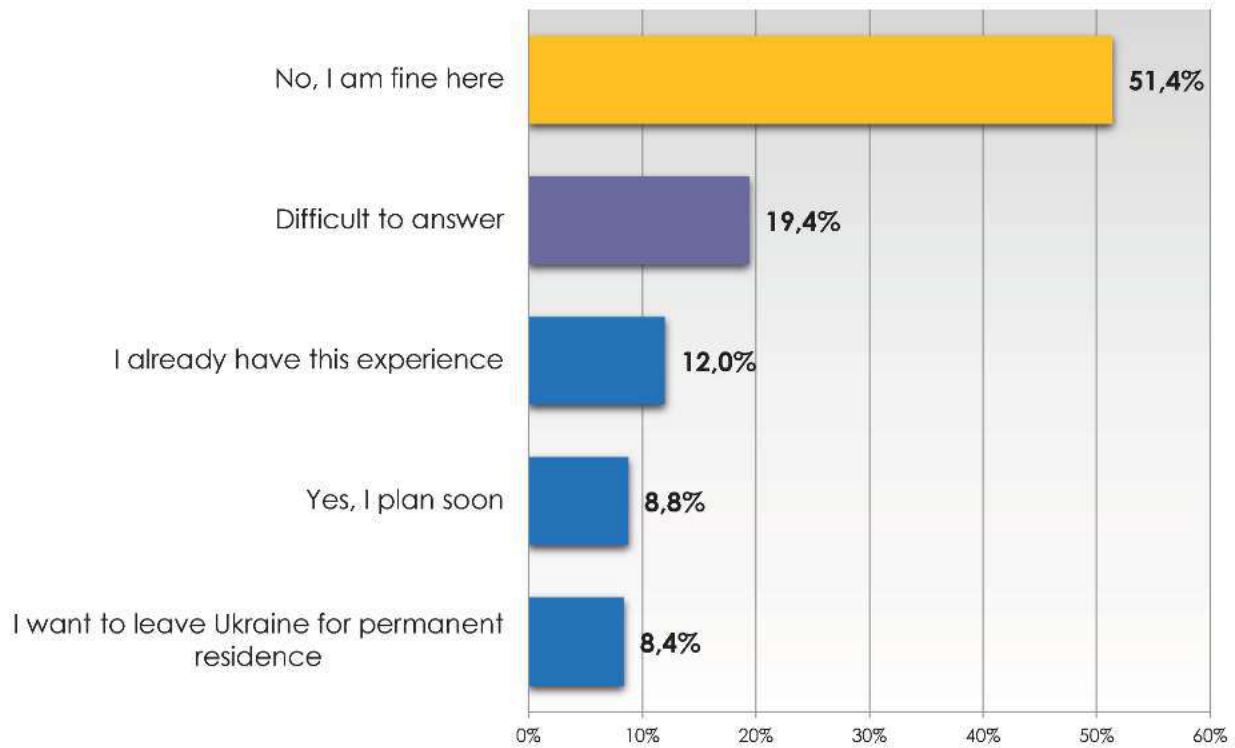


Have you or your family members faced the following consequences of the epidemic?

(Several answers are possible)

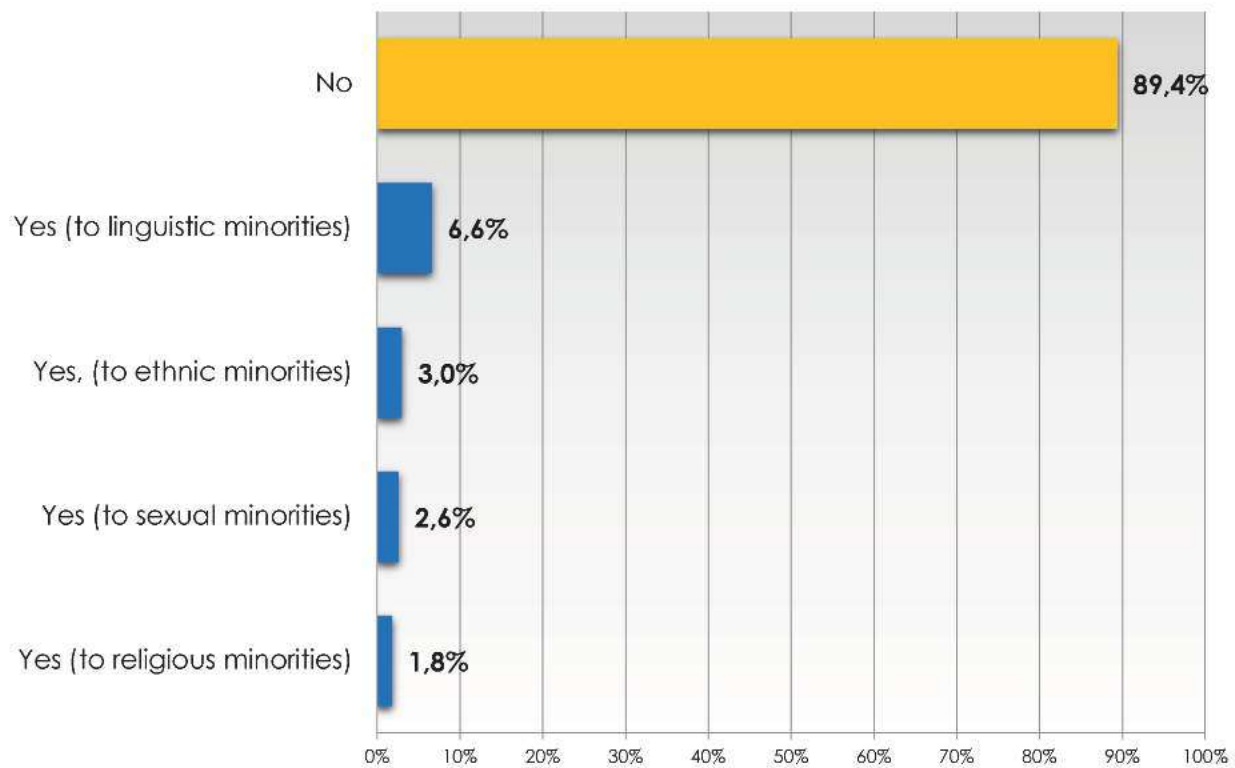


Do you personally consider the idea of emigrating abroad to find work?

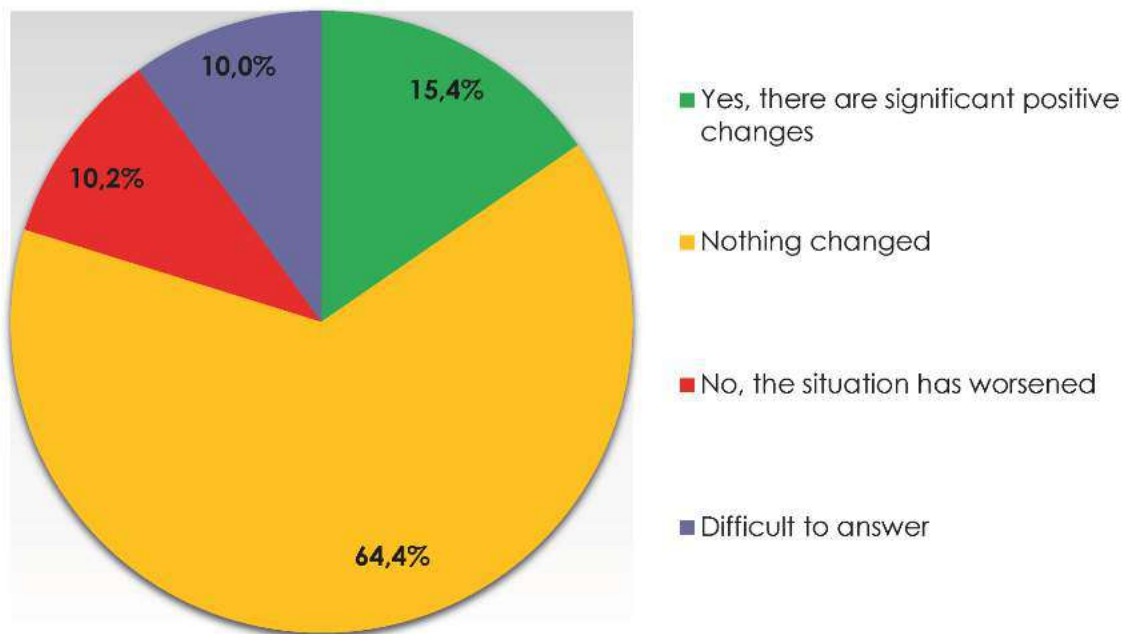


Have you recently faced intolerant attitudes towards minorities?

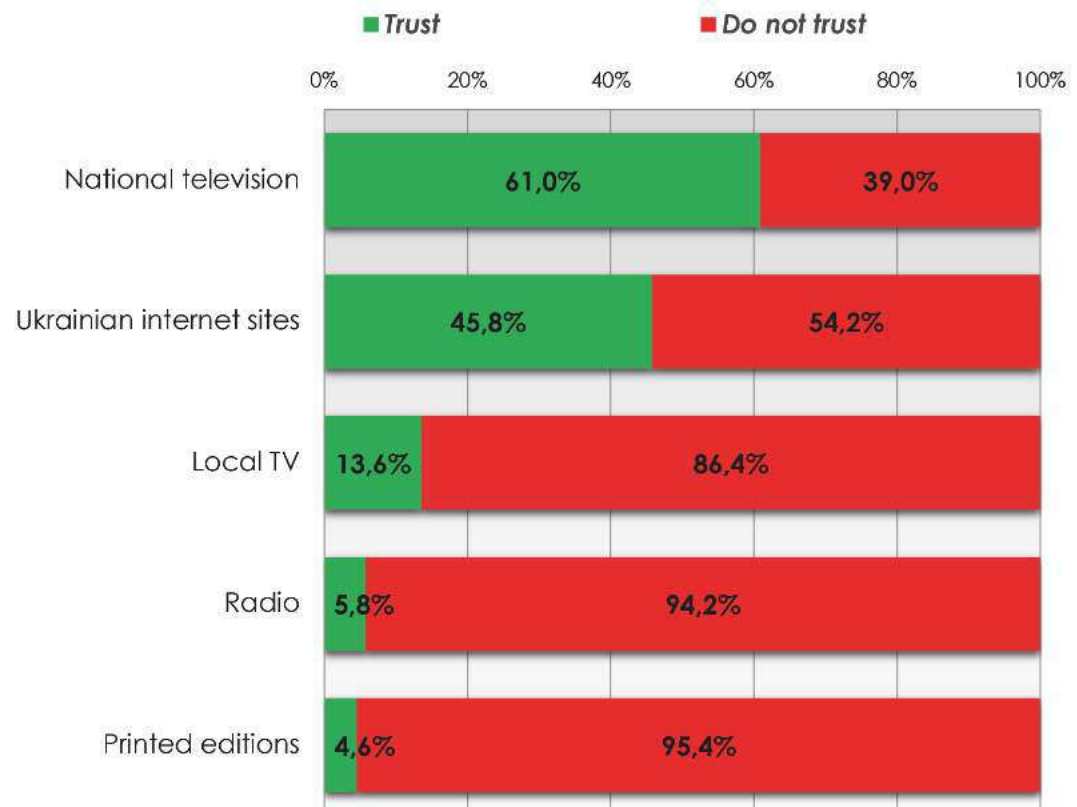
(Several answers are possible)



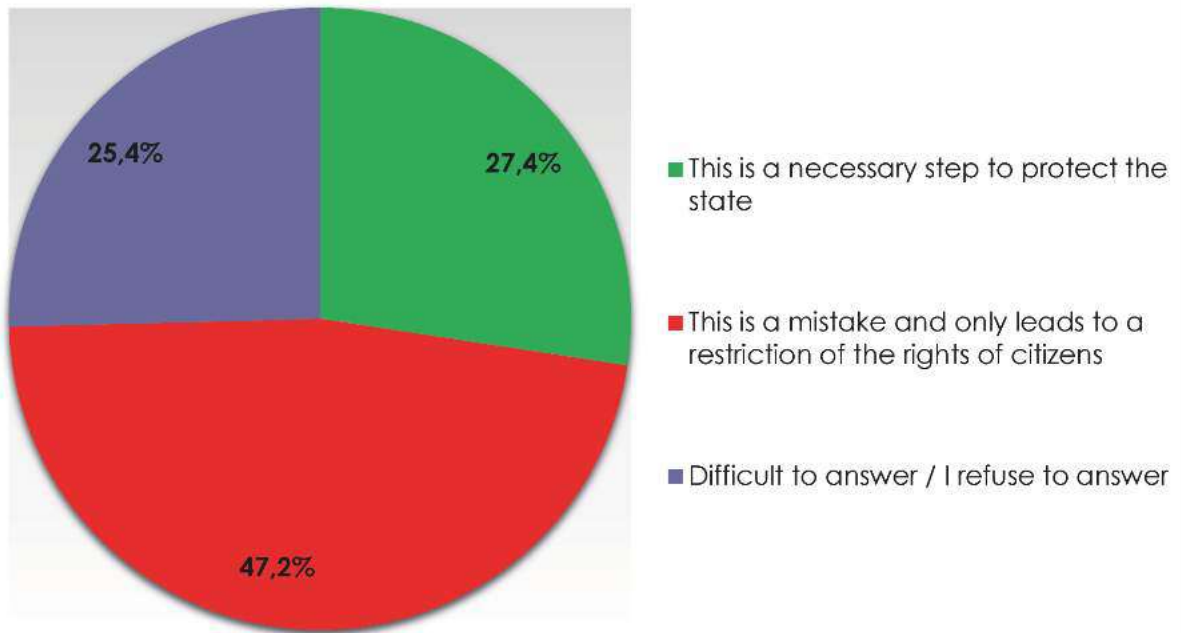
Do you feel the changes in your area after the decentralization reform?



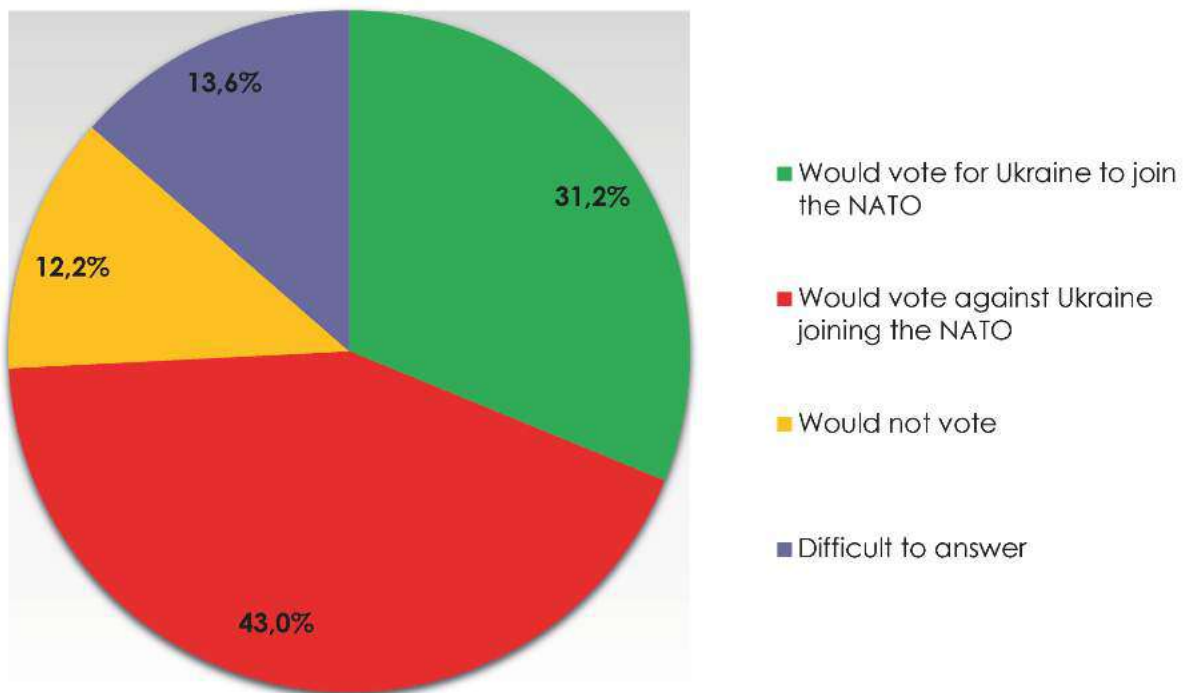
Which of these sources of information do you trust?



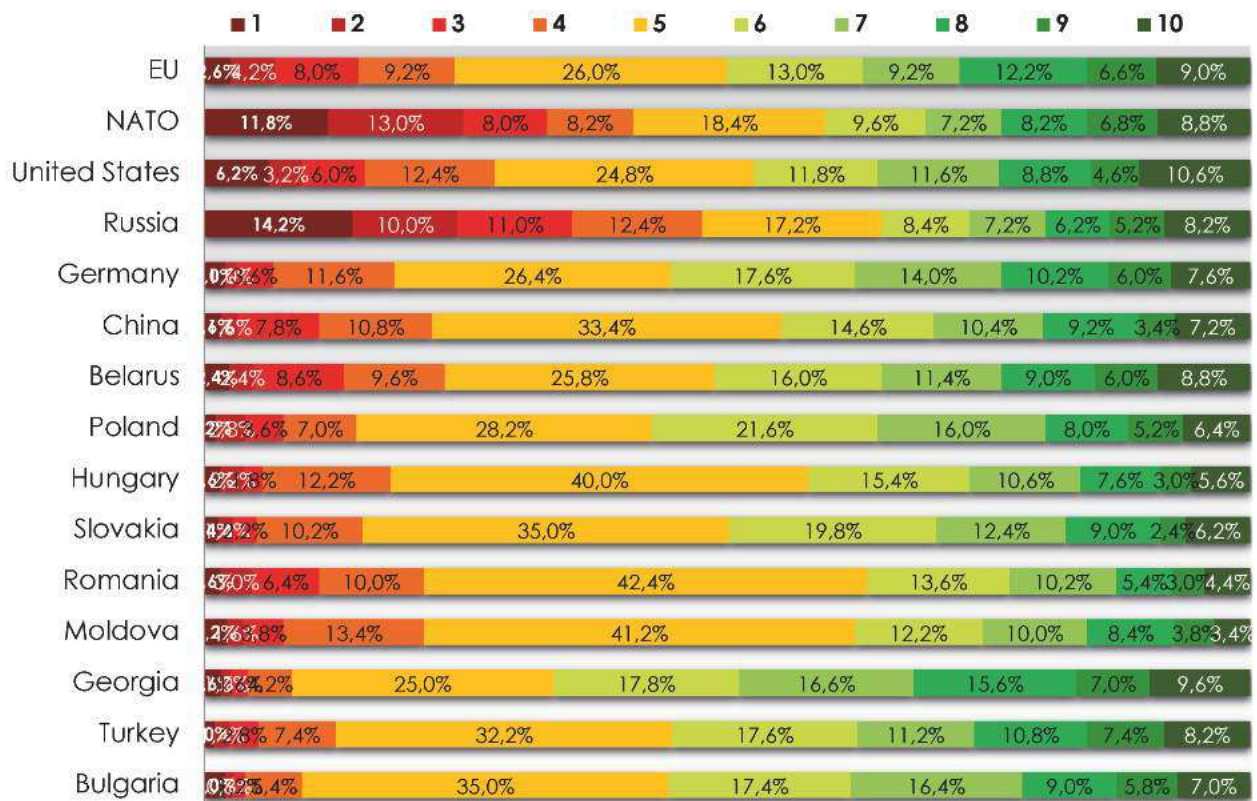
How do you feel about the ban on Russian media and social networks in Ukraine?



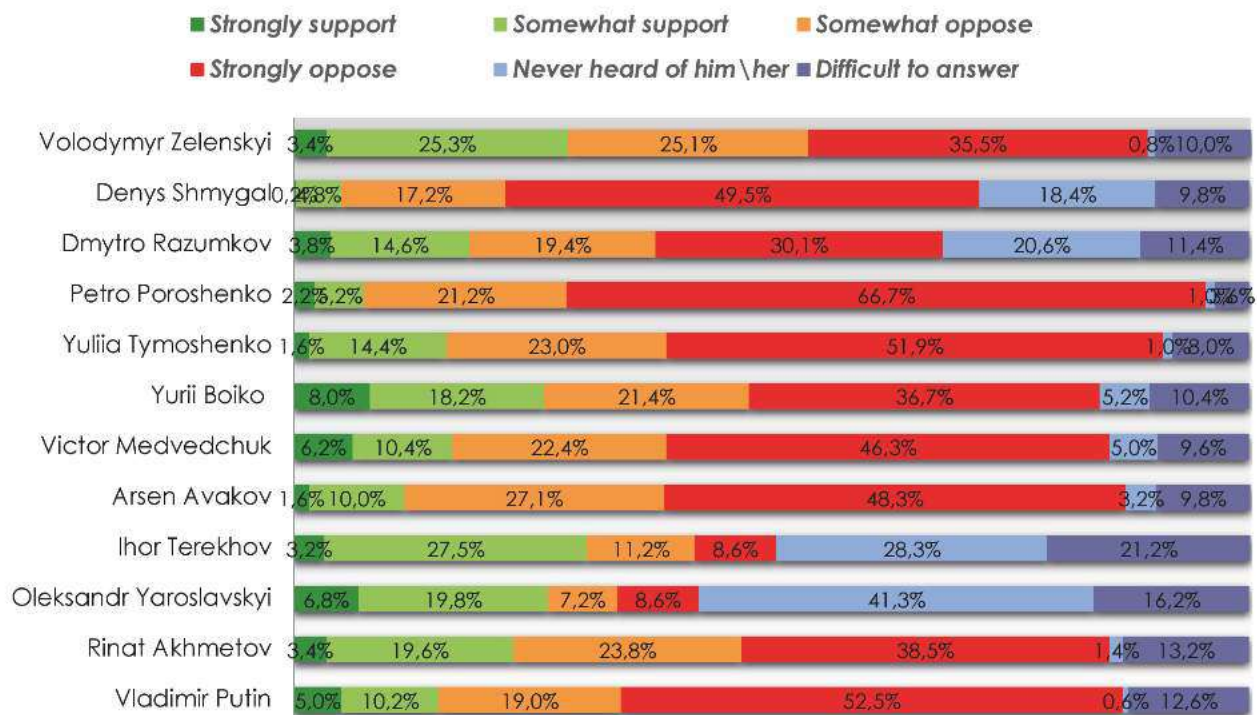
If a referendum on Ukraine's accession to NATO was held in the nearest future, how would you vote?



Rate your attitude towards the following countries and international organizations (on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the worst and 10 is the best)



How would you rate your attitude towards the following politicians and public figures?



If parliamentary elections were held next Sunday, which of the indicated parties would you vote for?

