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ZOiS REPORT

RESILIENCE RECONSIDERED: LESSONS FROM UKRAINE'S RESPONSE TO WAR

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Content

Summary

'Resilience' dominates discussions of Ukraine's civilian and military resistance. The term appeals to people's emotions and has a mobilising effect at home and abroad. Yet, assumptions of resilience may lead to blind spots and ineffective support. This report explores the tensions between stability and change—coping, adaptation, transformation—inherent in resilience. Drawing on evidence from decentralisation, care, trauma and economic development, it shows how individuals, communities and institutions adapt in wartime while structural and personal challenges persist or emerge. Rather than repeating tropes, the reports seeks a nuanced, policy-relevant debate on diverse resilience trajectories. The **key findings** are as follows:

Ukraine's resilience is not uniform

Different regions, sectors and social groups experience shocks differently and have varied capacities to adapt or transform. Treating resilience as homogeneous obscures unequal vulnerabilities and risks misinforming policymaking, particularly in the recovery context.

Local governance has been central—but capacities vary significantly

Decentralisation enabled local communities to act quickly and effectively during the full-scale invasion. However:

– Urban hromadas with strong administrative and financial capacities meet wartime challenges better than rural or frontline ones.

– Staff shortages, budget constraints, uneven donor access and limited opportunities for peer-learning widen these gaps.
– Wartime re-centralisation trends risk weakening local autonomy and innovation during recovery.

Care systems function through overstretch, not robustness

Healthcare and social care remain operational not due to structural soundness but largely thanks to underpaid, exhausted workers.

– Many hromadas are failing to provide the legally required minimum of social services.
– At the same time, demand is rising sharply (veterans, people with disabilities, older adults, displaced people).
– Without major reforms, the care system will not be able to meet future needs.

Psychological trauma is widespread but politically under-addressed

Between a quarter and a third of the civilian population—including displaced individuals—pass the diagnostic threshold for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Complex PTSD, yet trauma remains a sensitive topic.

– The medium and long-term effects of psychological trauma on social trust, political attitudes (e.g. democratic preferences) and participation are particularly uncertain.
– Trauma care is under-prioritised domestically and internationally.
– Addressing trauma requires better data based on validated research instruments, interdisciplinary research involving clinical psychologists, psychiatrists and social scientists, and well-resourced immediate and medium-term recovery policies backed by the EU and other donors.

The economy adapts—but structural vulnerabilities persist

Despite massive destruction, Ukraine has thus far avoided economic collapse thanks to foreign support and domestic policies. However:

– Ukraine's position in low value-added segments of global value chains limits its capacity to absorb future shocks.
– In preparation for EU accession, strategic support is needed to upgrade technologically, diversify exports, and strengthen domestic value creation.
– Drawing on past enlargement experiences and emerging EU industrial policy tools, the EU can strengthen both Ukraine's resilience and the Union's cohesion.

Celebratory narratives overlook the costs of resilience

Resilience carries emotional, financial and institutional burdens. A critical lens is required to avoid celebrating resilience while overlooking individual and societal costs, exhaustion and structural fragility. Support should be geared to distributing resources equitably and instituting structural reforms in order to reduce reliance on individual or community adaptation alone.

Introduction

The term 'resilience' has become central in debates on Ukraine's response to Russia's war of aggression. While the term certainly carries discursive and emotional weight and can mobilise domestic and international support, its effect can wear off over time. Moreover, the omnipresent image of a resilient Ukraine could potentially lead to a (sub-)conscious choice by Western policymakers to re-prioritise in times characterised by a multitude of pressing issues and scarce resources. A discourse centred on resilience may also develop blind spots or fail to notice and probe uncomfortable truths that require policy responses.

It seems most appropriate to speak of resiliences in the plural.

Put differently, in both policymaking and academic research, 'resilience' should be treated not as an a priori assumption but as an open question to which there might be different answers. The multiplicity of shocks and their uneven impacts across Ukraine give rise to different forms of resilience at particular moments in time. What constitutes resilience near the frontline—e.g. enduring continuous shelling—differs markedly from resilience in Lviv or Chernivtsi—e.g. relocating businesses or managing the reception of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Rather than subsuming everything under one big umbrella term, it seems most appropriate to speak of resiliences in the plural and variation in resilience across spheres, levels (individual, community, institutional, regime), locations or time periods.

In our view, it is necessary to critically review the concept and the empirical evidence—with the aim of supporting Ukraine's military and civil resistance and its recovery more effectively in the short, medium and long term. We are cognisant of the fact that the war context provides ample scope for the instrumentalisation of research. The kind of open-ended discussion on resilience we engage in here could be exploited by parties keen to expose Ukraine's 'weaknesses' in defending itself against Russia. However, the same risk of instrumentalisation applies to groupthink on bottom-up resilience.

The discourse of resilience may obscure the fact that, in certain fields, wartime resilience at the level of individuals and communities represents the continuation and intensification of everyday survival strategies rather than an exceptional, crisis-driven response. In fact, the strong individual- and community-level resilience visible in areas such as education, healthcare and social services—sectors the Ukraine Plan (Government of Ukraine 2024, 10) describes as 'foundational' because they support wider economic and societal development—may not necessarily stem from strong institutional resilience. Instead, as we will show using the example of Ukraine's care sector, it may arise from structural weaknesses such as chronically underfunded public services, which had already forced individuals and local communities to self-organise long before 2022.

Resilience discourses also tend to rely on assumptions of self-regulation and rationality. Our analysis of local self-governance in Ukraine and Ukraine's broader economic development trajectory, however, reveals differences in the abilities of individuals, communities or—in the economic realm—firms and sectors to be resilient. Resilience discourses need to account for the capacities of institutions at different levels of governance (local, regional, national and transnational) to reduce vulnerability in times of crisis.

War-related psychological trauma already tests individual and community resilience now, and is also likely to shape individuals and society, including political attitudes and behaviours, in the medium to long term. This, in turn, will shape social cohesion, the functioning of the Ukrainian state, and Ukraine's democracy.

By unpacking the term resilience in different settings, this ZOiS Report shows how the celebration of resilience may, paradoxically, normalise the abnormality of surviving war—and frame coping under duress as a long-term condition. The report offers empirical evidence to inform policymakers, international partners and researchers about the necessity of addressing the structural and distributive dimensions of resilience in order to support a more inclusive and sustainable recovery. While our main concern is furthering understanding of these processes in Ukraine now, the case of Ukraine can also offer lessons for other settings marked by war.

The celebration of resilience may, paradoxically, normalise the abnormality of surviving war.

The many faces of resilience

The origins of the discussion about resilience lie in the study of materials, where the term referred to the ability of a material to return to its original state after deformation. From here, the concept spread to ecology and psychology, and later to the social sciences and interdisciplinary fields (e.g. disaster studies). In ecology and psychology, resilience initially also referred to maintaining or returning to an equilibrium after a shock.

Gradually, this emphasis on stability has been supplemented by an understanding of resilience as a dynamic process based on adaptation and transformation. Such an understanding was already established by the time resilience, and in particular democratic resilience, moved centre stage in the social sciences and, more recently, in political and public debate. Yet the respective balance between stability and change remains contested.

The level of analysis (i.e. whose resilience is analysed) has also been a contested issue. In psychology, the focus shifted from resilience as a personal trait to distinctions between the individual and the community level (but hardly ever the population level). In the social sciences, it is increasingly accepted that structural conditions that cause or exacerbate individual hardships—such as inequality, poverty or institutional shortcomings—play a central role when assessing the ability of individuals and communities to cope, adjust and transform. Thus, resilience is increasingly seen as a systemic quality and a process that involves adjusting to, learning from and transforming under conditions of stress (Heltberg et al. 2013; see also Chandler 2013; Korosteleva & Petrova 2021). The European Commission likewise emphasises the absorptive, adaptive and transformative dimensions of resilience both at the individual/societal and at the structural or institutional level (European Commission 2020, 6).

Last but not least, clinical psychology teaches us that trauma effects and resilience can occur simultaneously. Individuals may cope better with stressors in one domain of their lives than in others—e.g. their

workplace, private life or political engagement as a citizen. By implication, there are trade-offs, and the use of a resilience resource like self-regulation can incur costs and have negative effects on other indicators of health or on an individual's performance in another dimension of their everyday life (Denckla et al. 2020, 11). The same logic applies to society or the state as a whole.

Resilience of Local Governance in Ukraine[1]

The resilience of Ukraine's local governance is widely regarded as crucial to the country's ability to withstand the multiple shocks of Russia's invasion and to adapt and transform in response to them (Brik & Brick 2022; see also Arends et al. 2023; Rabinovych et al. 2024; Brovko 2024). Which factors underpin this resilience in wartime, what important dynamics are often overlooked in discussions of local governance, and how can this resilience be better leveraged for Ukraine's recovery?

Drivers of local governance resilience in wartime

The wartime resilience of hromadas is often attributed to the reform-induced rise in local democracy.

Equipped with more wide-ranging authorities and financial capacities as a result of the 2014 decentralisation reform, local self-government bodies (LSBs) managed to remain lifelines for citizens not only in the rear but also in hromadas that experienced active fighting or occupation. In the case of the occupied hromadas, for instance, LSBs continue to support internally displaced persons (IDPs) as well as educational and medical institutions that operate in exile (Committee of Voters of Ukraine 2025). Beyond stronger autonomy and greater access to resources, the wartime resilience of hromadas is often attributed to the reform-induced rise in local democracy, which fostered collaborative governance. In other words, renewed trust in local leadership, combined with the pre-war growth of civic engagement, created the conditions for self-government bodies, businesses and citizens to collaborate horizontally in addressing emerging challenges (Keudel & Huss 2024).

The proven success of decentralisation and the sustained agency of LSBs during the war have drawn the attention of the international community in two main respects. First, there is growing interest in learning from Ukraine's local-level crisis response and resilience-building, particularly in the Nordic and Baltic regions, which are themselves increasingly exposed to Russia's hybrid tactics (Darkovich et al. 2024). Second, hromadas are recognised as key actors in the recovery process, given their in-depth understanding of local needs, as well as the strategic planning, budgeting and investment experience they have accumulated since 2014 (OECD 2022). For both endeavours—learning from Ukraine's local resilience experience and strengthening the role of municipalities in the recovery process—we need to critically engage with the origins and nature of this resilience.

1 This research was undertaken during a fellowship at the Ukraine Research Network@ZOiS in 2024/2025. It was also supported with funding from the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies.

Realities of resilience

It is important to stress first of all that Ukraine's local resilience is not a single, uniform phenomenon but a mosaic of multiple local 'resiliences'. Because hromadas have been exposed to different types and intensities of shocks—from fighting and occupation in the southeast to energy disruptions and inflows of IDPs in the rear—their experiences of shock absorption, adaptation and the development of transformative practices may vary significantly. And because local leaders are primarily preoccupied with addressing the needs of their own hromadas, opportunities for peer learning and the exchange of best practices across municipalities are constrained. Enhancing awareness and promoting inter-oblast exchange are essential to prevent fragmentation during the recovery process and to strike a balance between responsiveness to local needs and coherence in national governance approaches and the implementation of international donor-funded reconstruction projects.

Second, resilience also differs across sectors and reflects patterns in centre-local relations. Although LSBs have retained significant agency within Ukraine's multilevel governance system, recent research points to a trend towards re-centralisation in certain areas, such as infrastructure reconstruction and the management of recovery funding, where local leaders have expressed concerns about the growing role of higher-level oblast administrations (Rabinovych et al. 2025). It is still too early to draw firm conclusions, but this trend may ultimately diminish the role of hromadas in setting recovery priorities and constrain innovation, as they would have less scope to engage with donors and make suggestions for recovery projects. At the same time, multi-level governance (MLG) arrangements in Ukraine vary across policy domains (Romanova 2025). For instance, in the area of social care (including services for IDPs), discussed in the next section of this Report, the role central government expects local authorities to play is not commensurate with their actual capacity to deliver public services. In order to improve coordination across the different levels of governance in Ukraine, an evidence-based analysis of how MLG arrangements operate across different policy areas is required. This should be followed up by legal adjustments that reflect sectoral and regional specificities.

Third, hromadas differ markedly in their capacity to build and maintain resilience, with larger urban hromadas at a distinct advantage (Rabinovych et al. 2024; 2025). They typically have greater administrative and financial resources and, thanks to staff with English-language proficiency, grant-writing skills, and travel budgets, are better equipped to access donor support. Such hromadas, like Lviv or Odesa, also tend to be in regular contact with oblast administrations and have a good standing with them. By contrast, smaller rural municipalities often lack administrative staff with project management expertise, have limited financial flexibility, and rarely have opportunities to engage directly with either national-level authorities or international donors. This is particularly true of small hromadas located near the frontline, which are forced to prioritise immediate security threats and coordinate closely with the military.

Hromadas differ markedly in their capacity to build and maintain resilience.

Such differences in local capacity, coupled with territorial variations in the war's impact, are likely to result in uneven allocation of funding and unequal progress in recovery efforts. Disparities in recovery outcomes may

in turn deepen perceptions of inequality, weaken trust in public institutions, and damage social cohesion in the long term. These challenges will be further complicated by the need to address inequalities between different war-affected groups like IDPs, war veterans and returnees from abroad, whose distinct experiences and needs may create additional social tensions. To prevent and mitigate these effects, clear and transparent frameworks for the allocation of funding and coordination across different governance layers are required. There is also a need to strengthen deliberative local democracy—an approach increasingly pursued through citizens' assemblies (Council of Europe 2025).

The resilience of local governance in Ukraine cannot be taken for granted and is patchier than sometimes depicted. To strengthen it in the present and harness it for recovery, we recommend sustained investment in coordination across governance levels, capacity building and participatory mechanisms conducive to inclusive governance and societal cohesion.

Ukraine's Care System Between Individual Resilience and Structural Deficits[2]

Russia's full-scale invasion placed unprecedented strain on Ukraine's already overburdened care system. Right before the invasion, at the beginning of 2022, the majority of adults aged 60 and above (around 10 million people or a quarter of the Ukrainian population) reported having chronic diseases or health problems, compared to 39 per cent in the overall population (State Statistics Service of Ukraine 2022). By the end of 2024, the number of persons with disabilities had increased by more than 300,000 to 2.8 million (Suspilne News 2024). These figures reflect new disabilities among both civilians and military personnel as a result of the war, and the real numbers are probably significantly higher. A 2023 study by the NGO Pryncyp found that 42 per cent of military personnel were either unable to access rehabilitation or were granted an insufficient rehabilitation period. For many veterans, the level of care required exceeds the existing social care infrastructure, forcing relatives to become full-time caregivers (Pryncyp 2023).

Even before the war, Ukraine had a predominantly familialistic care regime, in which care responsibilities were largely placed on families. In wartime, however, this arrangement has become increasingly unsustainable: Forced displacement, casualties and prolonged separation have left many older adults and people with disabilities without family members who previously served as their primary caregivers. Consequently, municipal social care institutions have reported dramatic rises in the number of care recipients (Lomonosova 2024; Laboratory of Legislative Initiatives 2024).

Can a care system built on familial and individual coping remain viable amid war? And what might a shift towards institutional rather than personalised forms of resilience entail?

Can a care system built on familial and individual coping remain viable amid war?

2 This work was undertaken during a fellowship at the Ukraine Research Network@ ZOiS in 2024/2025 and partially supported by the European Regional Development Fund project 'Beyond Security: Role of Conflict in Resilience-Building' (CoRe) (reg. no.: CZ.02.01.01/00/22_008/0004595).

Underpaid, overworked, understaffed

Ukraine's health system is plagued by severe staff shortages, which were already acute before the full-scale war. ▶ FIGURE 1 According to the WHO, nurse numbers declined by 30 per cent between 2015 and 2022 (WHO Regional Office for Europe 2024). In social care, the situation is no better. At the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, the Ministry of Social Policy estimated that approximately 8,000 additional social work specialist positions were needed to address rising demand (LB.ua. 2020).

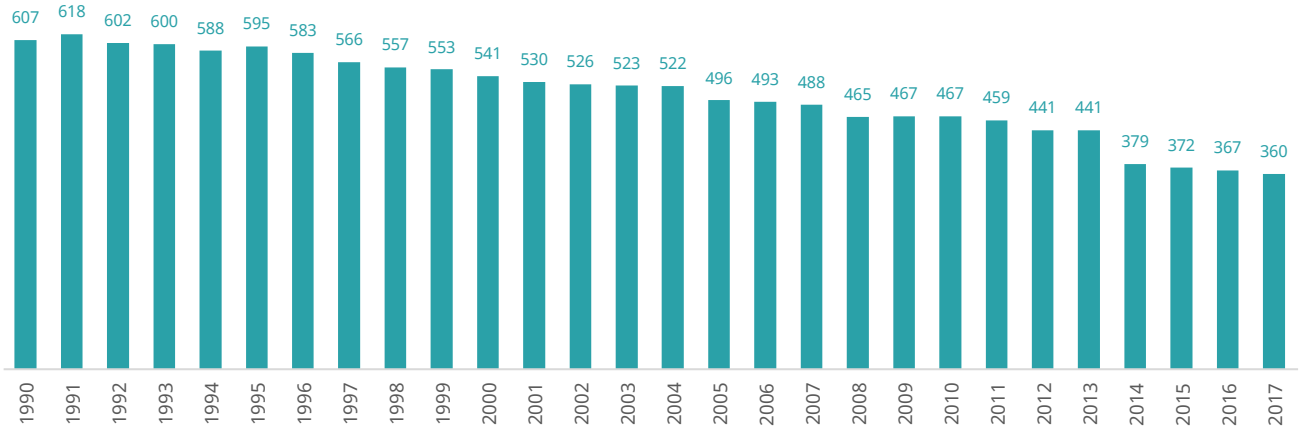
Low pay and heavy workloads are key drivers of attrition. Care workers' wages have been among the lowest in Ukraine for decades, with visiting carers earning just 37 per cent of the national average in 2021 and nurses 72 per cent in 2023 (Dutchak et al. forthcoming). Even before the full-scale invasion, heavy workloads were common, and nurses often performed tasks typically carried out by orderlies or technical staff (Tkalich et al. 2025).

Sectoral reforms launched in 2016 (healthcare) and 2020 (social services) focused primarily on cost optimisation and quality improvement rather than structural problems. Ukraine's decentralisation reform, which shifted responsibility for salaries and bonuses to local authorities, created uneven outcomes. Better-resourced communities could attract additional funding from businesses or international donors, while smaller and rural hromadas often lacked the administrative capacity, knowledge and skills to do the same (Lomonosova 2024a).

Ukraine's decentralisation reform created uneven outcomes.

FIGURE 1

Numbers of Mid-level Medical Personnel in Ukraine (in thousands)



Source: State Statistics Service of Ukraine, 2017

The war, with its devastating socio-economic consequences, civilian and military casualties and mass displacement has stretched local social protection systems to their limits, especially in economically weaker hromadas. Replacing staff who relocated abroad or to relatively safer regions was particularly difficult during the first year of the full-scale invasion. The decision to reassign the personal income tax paid by military personnel from the local to the national budget,[3] which came into force in 2024, has further depleted local revenues at a time when the demand for services such as elderly care and social work intervention has never been higher.

Sustaining care, stretching limits

Despite these problems, Ukraine's healthcare and social service systems have continued to function. This endurance in times of war is often interpreted as evidence of resilience in the public sector. However, empirical research conducted since 2022 (Lomonosova 2024; Lomonosova et al. 2024b; Tkalich et al. 2025) shows that the continuity in service provision largely rests on the adaptation of pre-war strategies developed to manage chronic shortages of financial and human resources.

Continuity in service provision largely rests on the adaptation of pre-war strategies for managing chronic shortages.

Mobility-related support is one area where the dependence of social service provision on the ad hoc interventions of individual workers is especially apparent. In the absence of institutional capacity, staff routinely find their own substitutes for missing infrastructure. ▶ CARER QUOTES Such adaptations come at significant personal costs. Overwork and emotional and physical exhaustion increase the risk of burnout among care workers and contribute to withdrawal from the profession (Lomonosova 2024; Tkalich et al. 2025). This trend is evident in the healthcare sector and is likely to become even more pronounced in social care, particularly elderly care, where many social workers are approaching retirement age and few young people are willing to enter the profession under these conditions (Lomonosova et al. 2024b).

> "We don't have a vehicle, we use our personal ones. If someone needs to go to the hospital, social workers drive them in their own cars. If a worker doesn't have a car, then another specialist, or even I myself go.
>
> *(director of a social service centre in the Volyn Region)*

> "In the first weeks of the full-scale invasion, workers remained on-site day and night, doing everything we could to accommodate the IDPs even though part of our building was not heated, and some of the living conditions were not suitable.
>
> *(social work specialist at a daycare centre in the Dnipropetrovsk Region)*

3 Since 1 January 2024, the share of personal income tax (PIT) paid by military personnel is no longer transferred to local hromada budgets but redirected to state needs. Military personnel pay 18 per cent PIT on their monetary allowances. Until 2024, 64 per cent of this tax was returned to the budget of the hromada where the military unit was registered.

> "We found ourselves in a difficult situation. […] The workload was very high, up to 20 citizens [per visiting carer], and we had to [manage] within eight hours, but we didn't work just eight hours, we worked more, and the care had to be provided. In an eight-hour workday, we were servicing around 10 to 12 people, if necessary, or even more.
>
> *(director of a social service centre in the Dnipropetrovsk Region with reference to the rise in demand for elderly care)*

Many workers overstretch themselves and take on extra tasks without additional pay out of a strong sense of personal responsibility and emotional attachments to their clients (Dutchak et al. forthcoming). In this sense, appeals to be resilient can be a subtle way of shifting responsibility from state agencies to individuals or communities. In a mechanism described as responsibilisation (Neocleous 2013; Joseph 2013), care workers compensate for structural deficiencies in the care system that predate the war and thus partially obscure them.[4]

Care workers compensate for structural deficits in the care system and thus partially obscure them.

Moreover, the emphasis on continuity of service provision in public and policy debates around Ukraine's resilience overlooks the fact that most hromadas in Ukraine cannot provide even the legally mandated minimum set of social services (Lomonosova et al. 2024a and 2024b; Laboratory of Legislative Initiatives 2024). This chronic care deficit is exacerbated by the surge in demand for at-home care, particularly visiting care for older adults, together with the growing need for social services for war veterans and civilians who acquired disabilities in the war.

No substantial systemic transformation has yet been proposed to address the structural problems of the care system that predate 2022 and the new challenges presented by the full-scale war. There has been little reflection on whether the existing service infrastructure adequately meets current needs. This situation is untenable in the context of a protracted armed conflict and in the recovery phase, especially in relation to post-war challenges like the reintegration of vulnerable populations temporarily displaced abroad and currently supported by foreign care infrastructures. Without a critical assessment of what the prevailing resilience narrative obscures, the political will required for a meaningful transformation of Ukraine's care system is unlikely to emerge.

Psychological Trauma and its Effects

Psychological trauma is an unavoidable part of the reality of war. It is inherently linked to the issue of resilience and at the same time points to its potential limits. Inside Ukraine, there is a reluctance to open up a wider public or policy debate on the issue for fear of inviting questions about Ukraine's resolve or the outright instrumentalisation of perceived 'weaknesses' in a protracted war. There is a considerable gap between the state and the individual in this issue area. Awareness of mental health has increased by necessity, lowering the stigma previously attached to this topic, but coping strategies still tend to be an individual's personal responsibility. In addition, psychological trauma and

4 This process is similar to what Emma Dowling calls the 'care fix' (Dowling 2022).

PTSD and CPTSD

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
can develop after the experience of a traumatic event.

Symptoms:
– Re-experiencing trauma (e.g.flashbacks)
– Avoidance of people, places and thoughts that are reminders of trauma
– Increased arousal (e.g. hypervigilance, anxiety, irritability)

Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD)
typically results from prolonged or repeated trauma (e.g. war exposure).

Symptoms:
– All of the PTSD symptoms
– Additional Disturbances in Self-Organisation (DSO):
  · difficulty controlling emotions
  · difficulty with relationships
  · negative self-concept

Source: https://uktraumacouncil.org/

trauma care do not rank high on the policy agenda of Ukraine's international allies, although they are important for both immediate support for Ukraine's war effort and for long-term recovery.

On its own, the term 'trauma' can be too vague. With regard to Ukraine's war experience, there is an urgent need to extend research based on internationally validated measures (e.g. International Trauma Questionnaire, incl. war stressors) in order to diagnose specific types of psychological trauma. The evidence base for the prevalence of two types of trauma—Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD), which is associated with long-term or repeated exposure and additional symptoms—is slowly growing, but the war conditions make it difficult to carry out comparable studies and there is a lack of panel data that would allow us to track trauma over time.

Psychological trauma is widespread and lasting among Ukrainian citizens.

Psychological trauma, where actually measured by internationally validated instruments, is widespread and lasting among Ukrainian citizens. Using the ICD-11 classification, one of the first nationwide studies of both PTSD and CPTSD among civilians in Ukraine found a very high prevalence of PTSD (26 per cent) and CPTSD (15 per cent) (Karatzias et al. 2023). The sample in this study was, however, skewed towards a younger and urban population, which could explain the high CPTSD rate in particular. Several studies show that the prevalence of PTSD among internally or externally displaced Ukrainians (31

per cent) is even higher than among the non-displaced (Ben-Ezra et al. 2023; see also Dembitskyi et al. 2025). An online survey of different sub-populations found PTSD prevalence rates of 33 per cent among civilians, 39 per cent among IDPs, and 47 per cent among refugees abroad (Lushchak et al. 2024). There appears to be a time lag in the manifestation and recognition of trauma among those most directly exposed to the war. In line with other war contexts, being a woman, young(er), less educated and single, living alone, and having previous trauma exposure have all been shown to increase the risk of developing PTSD. CPTSD presents more in eastern Ukraine, where residents have experienced war since 2014 and thus had more opportunities for cumulative trauma exposure.

The ongoing KonKoop Trauma Study at ZOiS[5] (2024–26) focuses on the civilian population. In the first wave of this panel survey in May 2024, just over half of the respondents[6] reported having a loved one serving at the front, over 70 per cent had experienced shelling in their neighbourhoods, 65 per cent had witnessed physical destruction, and high numbers reported that family members or loved ones were displaced/missing (48 per cent), injured or killed in the war (45 per cent), or living under Russian occupation (35 per cent). Exposure to such war stressors (▶ FIGURE 2) significantly increases the odds of meeting the threshold for PTSD and/or CPTSD. In this study, the combined prevalence of PTSD and CPTSD was estimated at 31 per cent, with 25 per cent of respondents meeting the criteria for PTSD and 6 per cent for CPTSD.[7]

There is significant variation in individual and community resilience to traumatic experiences.

Psychological trauma is both an effect and a cause. Judging by research in other settings, significant variation in individual and community resilience to traumatic experiences can be expected. In turn, these individual or collective resilience trajectories and the trade-offs they come with—an individual may be resilient in one aspect of their lives, but not in another—are bound to shape the resilience of Ukrainian society at large, the state, the recovery and democracy. While research on the political and attitudinal effects of trauma in ongoing wars is almost non-existent, scholarship on the post-war effects of trauma points in different and contradictory directions. Trauma has been found to undermine trust in institutions, lower electoral participation and contribute to societal polarisation or radicalisation (Schüller 2015; see also Alacevich & Zejcirovic 2020; Stickley et al. 2023). Yet

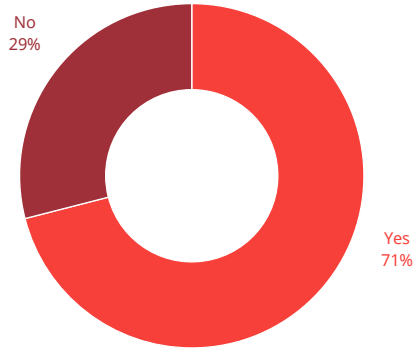
5 The *KonKoop* Trauma Study was conducted within the KonKoop research network funded by the Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR, grant no. 01UG2209). It is possibly the first international study combining the diagnosis of the prevalence of PTSD and CPTSD among civilians with the study of political attitudes. The ongoing three-wave panel survey has been coordinated by Gwendolyn Sasse (ZOiS) in cooperation with social scientists Henry Hale (George Washington University), Volodymyr Kulyk (Kyiv School of Economics), Olga Onuch (Manchester University), forensic psychiatrist Deirdre McManus and clinical psychologist Dominic Murphy (both King's College London) and the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS). The first wave of the survey (2024 – 26), based on randomly generated mobile phone numbers, was implemented in May 2024 and captured the resident population in government-controlled territory (n=2,504, no respondents in Crimea and Luhansk Oblast). The questionnaire included demographic questions, the validated Live Events Checklist (Weathers et al. 2013) that tests for trauma exposure through one's life cycle, the IDC-11 International Trauma Questionnaire (Cloitre et al. 2018), a context-specific list of exposure to particular war stressors (adapted from Karatzias et al. 2022; 2023), and one basic question about regime preferences. The overall response rate was acceptable at 11.7 per cent, with 97 per cent of respondents agreeing to take part in further waves of the survey.

6 The data is weighted.

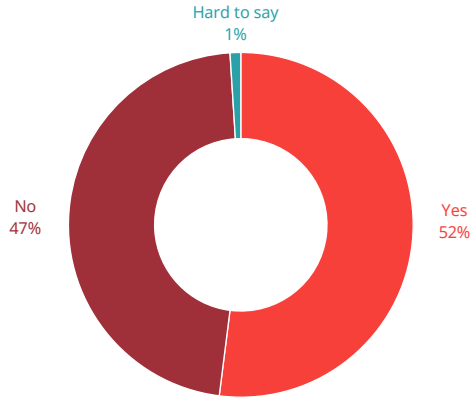
7 The identified correlates of PTSD were in line with previous studies; the correlates of CPTSD or combined PTSD/CPTSD varied somewhat (e.g. with regard to age) and require further research.

FIGURE 2
Trauma and Exposure to War Stressors

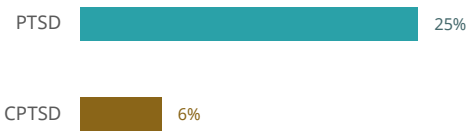
a. Has your neighbourhood been hit by shelling?



b. Have you suffered significant deprivation as a result of the war (shelter, food, electricity, water, heating, etc.)?



c. Diagnosed Cases of PTSD & CPTSD in Ukraine



n=2,504, May 2024

Source: KonKoop Trauma Study

Psychological trauma needs to become a more central part of the discussion on support for Ukrainians.

in some contexts it has also been found to boost a sense of unity, solidarity or political mobilisation (Carmil & Breznitz 1991; Marsh 2023). Moreover, health scholars have long highlighted that social and identity factors can mitigate the effects of trauma. Ukraine's strong civic identity seems to have acted as this type of filter. The first wave of the KonKoop Trauma Study did not find that trauma had a negative effect on democratic preferences. However, these are all open research questions at this point and require the attention of researchers and policymakers in Ukraine and abroad, ideally in interdisciplinary and multi-local research teams. Better empirical evidence for policymaking is the first step towards understanding the personal and community mechanisms of (non-)resilience in the face of clinical trauma and its respective effects on society and institutions. Psychological trauma needs to become a more central part of the discussion on support for Ukrainians, including the internally and externally displaced. It is not an issue that can be left to individuals to address by themselves or postponed, but requires better evidence-based understanding, substantive international and domestic resources, and targeted policymaking now.

From Survival to Future Economic Resilience

Ukraine's economy faces severe challenges as a result of massive Russian attacks on Ukraine's energy sector, mined agricultural land, destroyed transport routes and a growing labour shortage. The resulting substantial budget deficits placed the country's public finances under intense strain. Nevertheless, thanks to extensive external financial support and domestic policy measures, the Ukrainian economy has not yet fallen into hyperinflation. The risk of financial collapse in spring 2026 has been averted thanks to the EU's recent decision to provide Ukraine with €90 billion in joint debt for 2026–27. Since 2023, there has even been slight economic growth, albeit far from the rates seen before Russia's full-scale invasion (OECD 2025). This illustrates the economy's overall adaptability to this extraordinary shock situation and is an indicator of its resilience. What this macro-picture hides, however, is variation in resilience across economic sectors, firms and regions and the implications of that for social cohesion. Also, as discussed earlier, resilience means not only adaptability but also the ability to transform and to implement structural changes in order to reduce vulnerability in the future.

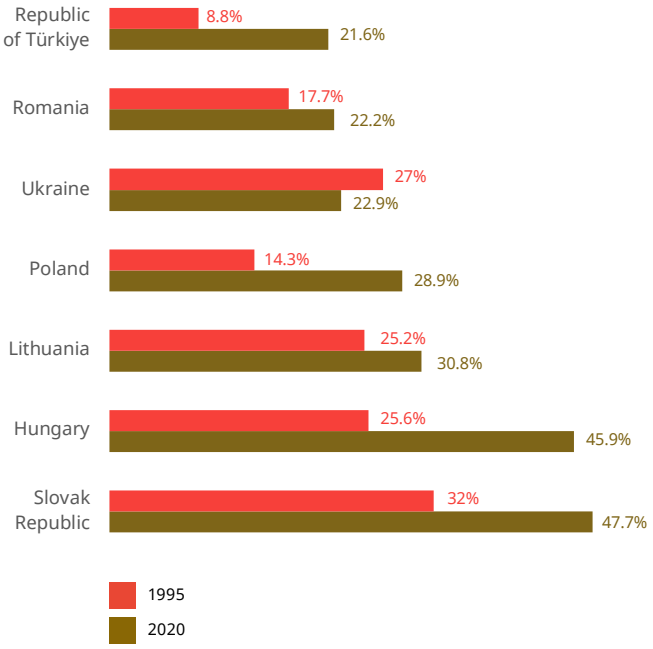
The macro-picture hides variation in resilience across economic sectors, firms and regions.

Clearly, in the short term, measures to cope with and adapt to the war situation, such as rebuilding transport routes, demining land and addressing labour shortages, must take priority as long as the fighting continues at the same intensity. In the medium term, however, the focus should shift to structural changes that contribute to strengthening the resilience of the Ukrainian economy as a whole. Economies become less vulnerable to shocks and crises, and thus more resilient, when countries diversify their trading partners and inputs, move into higher value-added segments of global value chains (GVCs), build domestic capacity in key strategic sectors, invest in logistics, infrastructure and digitalisation, and maintain transparent and reliable regulatory frameworks.

Scholarly insights into the political economy of GVCs reveal a functional divide between 'peripheral' and 'core' economies. Peripheral economies are specialised in low-skill assembly and simple processing and thus often capture little of the economic surplus. By contrast, core economies have a higher share of lead firms positioned in high value-added segments of GVCs and retain most rents. This functional specialisation makes peripheral economies relatively 'replaceable' and less able to build resilience through value capture (Gereffi et al. 2005; see also Milberg & Winkler 2013; Kordalska & Olczyk 2023).

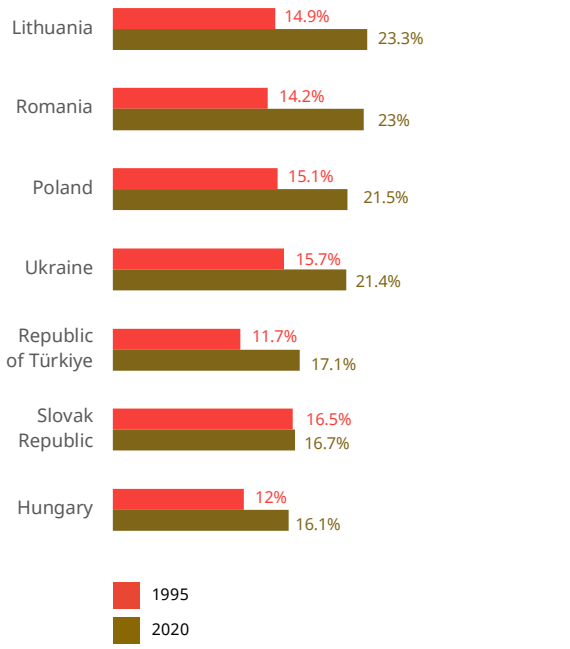
A recent OECD study shows that Ukraine's pre-war level of integration into regional and global value chains was comparatively weak (OECD 2025, 89–90). Foreign value added—the share of a country's production or exports that originates in value created abroad—is one measure of such integration. While in Poland, the share of foreign value added in gross exports nearly doubled from 14 per cent in 1995 to 29 per cent in 2020, in Ukraine it declined over the same period. ▶ FIGURE 3 At the same time, the share of medium- and high-technology products in Ukraine's manufacturing exports fell from about 40 per cent in 2014 to 32 per cent in 2021, compared with roughly 55 per cent across OECD countries in that year. Turning to domestic value added—the share of a country's production or exports that originates in the value a country itself creates—we find that a large share of it is subsequently re-exported by other countries. ▶ FIGURE 4 This is consistent with

FIGURE 3
Backward integration
Foreign value added in domestic exports



Source: OECD Economic Survey Ukraine (2025, 89)

FIGURE 4
Forward integration
Domestic value added in foreign countries' exports



Source: OECD Economic Survey Ukraine (2025, 89)

Ukraine's semi-peripheral status limits its capacity to absorb external shocks and generate innovation-based growth.

an upstream position in global value chains, with Ukraine acting as a provider of inputs for further processing and value creation abroad, typically raw and primary materials. In political economy parlance, this indicates that Ukraine's forward integration as a contributor to the exports of foreign countries is much stronger than its backward integration as a processor of inputs from abroad.

All of this suggests that Ukraine's integration into regional and global value chains is concentrated in lower value-added segments, reflecting both the country's limited ability to actively shape, upgrade and govern that integration and a lack of EU engagement (Langbein 2016; 2020). Nevertheless, the presence of at least a small share of high-tech exports points towards a semi-peripheral status. In any case, such a structure limits the economy's capacity to absorb external shocks and to generate innovation-based growth—both key components of economic resilience. Strengthening domestic value creation, upgrading technological capabilities, and diversifying export structures will therefore be essential to enhance the long-term resilience of Ukraine's economy.

Transforming Ukraine's economy in the context of EU accession

These transformative developments need to take place as Ukraine prepares for EU accession. Previous enlargement processes teach us that market integration and alignment with the EU acquis bring economic benefits, but they are not necessarily distributed equally among firms, sectors or regions. Rule transfer often marginalises less competitive sectors and fuels social inequalities and territorial disparities. These social and political strains can be exploited by sovereigntists and illiberal parties, turning disappointment with 'Brussels' into backlash. Far from deepening integration, unmanaged consequences can sow disintegration within an enlarged EU, as illustrated by growing Euroscepticism during previous accession processes in Central and Eastern Europe. Against this backdrop, the importance of managing the relations between core and periphery to turn Ukraine's accession into a win-win situation for both current EU members and for Ukraine becomes evident. Over the course of Ukraine's accession process, technical decisions on regulatory alignment, transition periods or capacity building are likely to shape the country's long-term structural position within the EU's political economy and hence its economic resilience in times of crisis.

The accession process can certainly offer opportunities for the Ukrainian economy to exit its peripheral status as long as the EU does not leave things to chance. It should act not only as a market-maker, but as a midwife—to use a term coined by political economist Peter Evans (1995) in his seminal work on developmental pathways in South America and Asia—that helps nascent EU states find their feet in the cut and thrust of transnational competition. There is a precedent for this in recent history: In preparations for the 2004–2007 Eastern enlargement, the EU quietly departed from the free-market orthodoxy of the time and did not leave the outcomes of EU rule transfer to market forces. Learning from the collapse of the former East German economy after its hastily executed market integration, Brussels laid the foundations for what we call a short-lived Transnational Developmental State (TDS) (Bruszt & Langbein 2025). The TDS used transnational public power for the timely detection and management of any potential negative economic consequences of integration with the EU Single Market. This was not a grand strategy but a pragmatic assemblage: mandatory planning at national, sectoral and regional levels, consultations with numerous technical advisers from EU member states, and close coordination with international financial institutions and development banks. Of the two main functions of the developmental state—protection and promotion—the TDS leaned heavily towards protection, shielding weaker economies from the harshest shocks of rule transfer and helping them build the minimal capacities needed to comply with, and live by, the rules of the Single Market.

The EU should act as a midwife that helps nascent EU states find their feet.

Given the war context, the case for an updated TDS—which facilitates not only Ukraine's market integration but also upgrading in value chains at the level of sectors and firms—is even stronger today than it was in 2004–07. Ukraine's integration and simultaneous reconstruction and recovery will be a stress test for the EU: If it produces economic instability or weakens democracy, the damage would extend far beyond Kyiv. Importantly, the EU does not need to start from scratch. Apart from its experience with the TDS in the context of the Eastern enlargement, Brussels can also rely on the EU's recent revival of industrial policy (Bulfone 2022; Di Carlo & Schmitz 2023) and the emergence of new investment mechanisms that enable increased

cooperation between the European Commission, the European Investment Bank and National Development Banks in the member states (Mertens & Thiemann 2017). Together, these tools are a unique opportunity for the EU to design an integration strategy that strengthens both Ukraine's resilience and the Union's long-term cohesion.

Conclusion

The four mini-case studies presented in this report address different combinations of individual, societal, institutional and systemic resilience, understood as the ability to adapt to shocks in the short term and to transform in order to reduce vulnerability in the future. They all present evidence of survival and adaptation and, in the case of decentralisation, the beginnings of a transformation based on war-related adjustments against the backdrop of ongoing institutional reforms. In the other three cases, the need for transformation, greater attention from the policy sphere, and the judicious channelling of domestic and international resources becomes apparent.

Ukraine's hromadas have experienced highly uneven wartime shocks, which have given rise to varied adaptive and transformative practices. These differences underscore the need for peer learning and a more systematic exchange of best practices. Strengthening coordination across different governance levels—without triggering unintended re-centralisation—requires an evidence-based understanding of how multilevel governance functions across sectors and territories in order to clarify roles, reduce overlap and maintain consistent dialogue. For as long as martial law applies and even when it is lifted, close monitoring is essential to ensure that hromadas retain sufficient autonomy to participate directly in recovery. Capacity building, particularly in rural and frontline hromadas, is central to effective service delivery, donor engagement and a locally driven recovery.

In social services and healthcare, the full-scale war has amplified deep structural weaknesses. Underfunded and understaffed systems have been sustained largely through the invisible efforts of overburdened care workers. Recovery policies must avoid deepening social inequalities and address the low wages and high risks faced by care workers and the limited administrative capacity of weaker hromadas to access and manage recovery funding. Recovery will require not only rebuilding physical infrastructure but also transforming the social protection system so it can respond to socioeconomic challenges arising in a post-war context. These challenges include the large-scale return of war veterans, many of them at risk of unemployment and homelessness, and the reintegration of Ukrainians displaced abroad. Financing models need to be revisited to ensure equitable access to services and subsidiarity in line with the European Charter of Local Self-Government. They should also address severe worker burnout so that staff are retained through the recovery period.

Psychological trauma is unavoidable during and after war. Empirical evidence gathered so far shows shockingly high levels of PTSD and CPTSD among the civilian population already at this stage of the war. While the topic is losing its social stigma, it still requires more domestic and international attention and funding to put in place support structures. Psychological

trauma—or, for that matter, individual-level resilience in some aspects of everyday life—can have effects on other aspects of life, including cognitive abilities, social and institutional trust, attitudes and political participation. Thus, the experience of trauma and the ways in which it is handled have potentially far-reaching medium- to long-term implications for social cohesion, the functioning of the state, and the outlook for democracy in Ukraine. The discussion about resilience at the individual level thus needs to be widened to include these dimensions.

Ukraine's economy has shown impressive adaptability in the face of unprecedented wartime shocks, yet resilience remains constrained by structural vulnerabilities. While the immediate priority is to cope with wartime destruction and labour shortages, long-term stability requires upgrading technology, expanding value-added production, diversifying trade and strengthening domestic capacity. As Ukraine moves towards EU accession, it must avoid reinforcing its peripheral (economic) status or creating new inequalities. A European developmental approach—protecting weaker sectors while encouraging strategic upgrading—offers a pathway to shared resilience, supporting both Ukraine's recovery and the EU's cohesion.

Taken together, the four mini-case studies spell out the need to move beyond a general assumption of resilience or a series of positive illustrations. The much harder task is to trace resilience trajectories and variations in resilience across different fields, actors, locations and time periods. Thinking about resiliences, as framed here, is only just the beginning. In some cases, we have raised uncomfortable questions to which there are as yet no clear answers. But these questions need to be asked in Ukraine and by Ukraine's allies in order to prioritise and tailor support effectively and with appropriate time horizons.

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