

Empowering municipalities: U-LEAD with Europe's achievements

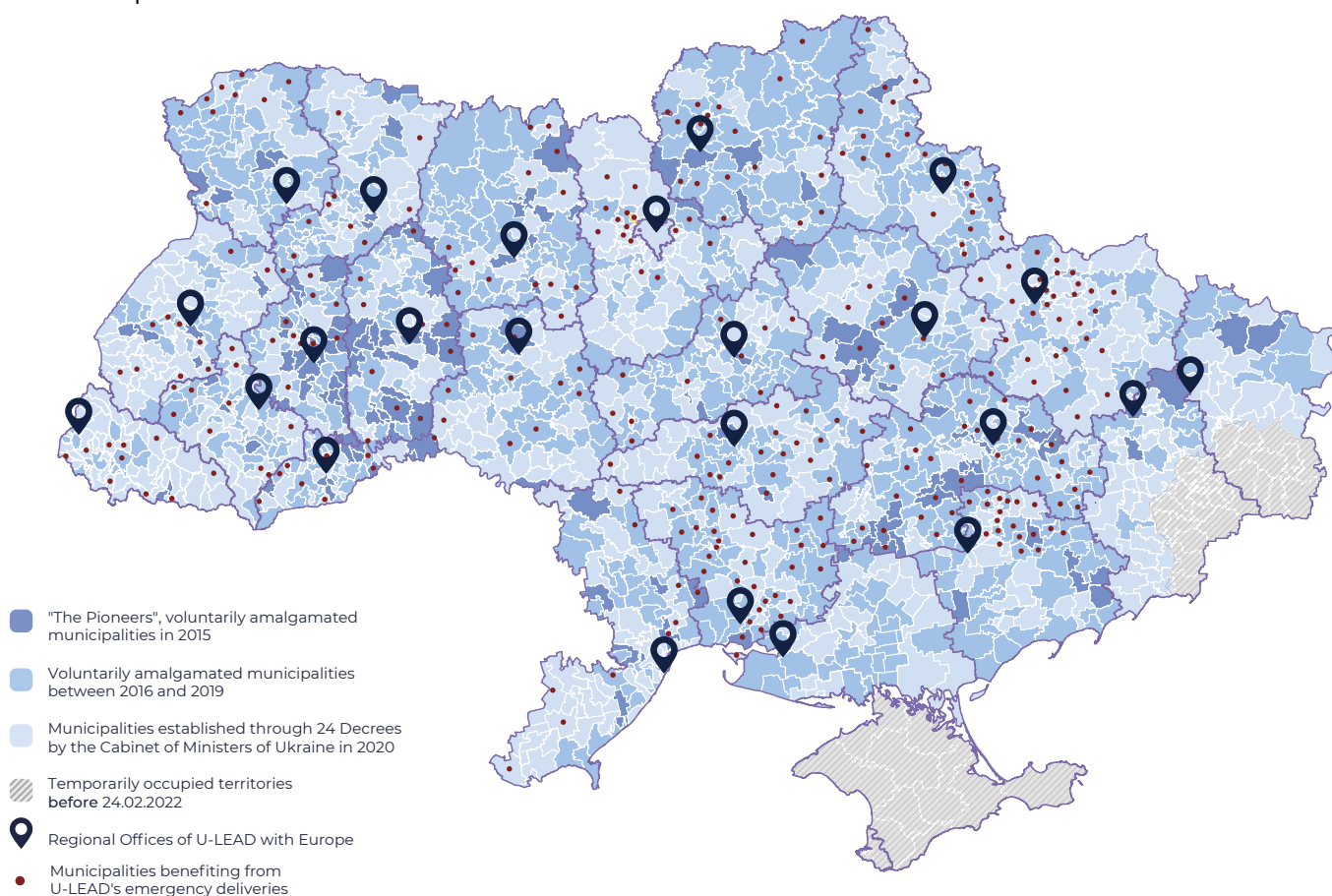
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Hromadas in the context of war, recovery and EU accession

HROMADA AND THE REFORM: Ukraine's decentralisation reform, which began in 2014, opened a new path towards boosting local development and enjoying a healthier democracy in line with the European Charter of Local Self-Government. 11,000 small and dispersed communities have amalgamated into 1,470 stronger hromadas by October 2020. They received more responsibilities, powers and corresponding financial resources, which made the reform one of the most popular in Ukraine, praised by its international partners.

HROMADA AND THE WAR: The on-going war has a major impact on Ukrainian hromadas that form a cornerstone within Ukraine's multi-level governance. Strong local self-government empowered by the reform has proven essential to Ukraine's resilience. Each hromada knows best the exact needs of their locality and residents while coping with the challenges caused by the Russian invasion, fulfilling multiple tasks and delivering essential municipal services under martial law.

HROMADA AND ITS FUTURE PATH: Maintaining the momentum of the decentralisation reform and implementing an effective regional policy will bring Ukraine closer to EU accession. It will also be crucial to the country's recovery and reconstruction during and after the war. For the reform to be effective under the conditions of war and post-war recovery, further legislative steps need to be adopted through an inclusive consultative process.



U-LEAD's current strategy and selected contributions since 2016

U-LEAD with Europe follows a comprehensive approach to support Ukrainian municipalities during the times of war. All activities are adjusted to wartime necessities and streamlined throughout the **main pillars of its strategic framework** to strengthen hromadas' resilience:

Pillar 1 – Reform and EU Accession: U-LEAD strengthens the capacities of key actors on the national and local level to steer and shape the local self-government reform, including the harmonisation with regional policy, in the context of rebuilding Ukraine and preparing it for EU membership. U-LEAD promotes integrity.

Pillar 2 – Recovery in all Regions: U-LEAD provides training, consulting and various other forms of capacity building to Ukrainian municipalities focusing on municipalities with fewer than 50 000 inhabitants. Expert advisory

support covers the most crucial topics, incl. energy security, food security, and budgetary issues. This makes hromadas more resilient to the war challenges and helps them recover promptly and efficiently.

Pillar 3 – Local Reconstruction and Development: U-LEAD supports municipalities in the preparation of critical reconstruction projects crucial to rebuilding Ukraine from the bottom up. U-LEAD's reconstruction activities also cover facilitation of cooperation between the EU and Ukrainian municipalities.

Sustaining the reform – building the future

U-LEAD with Europe provides policy and legal advice, including support to regional policy within the context of Ukraine's preparation for EU accession, strengthens the financial and fiscal capacities of municipalities, as well as integrity and transparency at the local level.

U-LEAD cooperates with the **Verkhovna Rada Committee of Ukraine on State Power, Local Self-Government, Regional Development and Urban Planning** as well as with the Ministry for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, contributing to the alignment of Ukrainian legislation in the field of local self-government and regional development with the EU acquis.



Congress of local and regional authorities under the President of Ukraine

In the context of EU accession, U-LEAD provides **legal and policy advice** so that the **Public Administration Reform (PAR)** roadmap matches the EU expectations. U-LEAD supported the **screening process on PAR** to ensure proper legislative alignment.

In 2023, U-LEAD actively contributed to updating the **State Regional Development Strategy 2021-2027 (SRDS)** by participating in expert discussions and preparing policy proposals. U-LEAD also supported the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the revised SRDS, ensuring its alignment with sustainability principles. These efforts reinforce Ukraine's regional policy framework, particularly in the context of the future EU accession.

U-LEAD supported the drafting and adoption of **15 legislative acts** on local self-government development. Experts are currently supporting the elaboration of bylaws arising from the Law on Administrative Procedure.

Supporting independent, public broadcasting in Ukraine through cooperation with **"Suspilne Ukraine"** with a special focus on Integrity: Fostering regional sustainability and resilience through supporting Suspilne's hyperlocal correspondent networks by building independent journalistic centers in remote areas. **42 correspondents** in remote areas were trained and **16 have signed long-term contracts** and are currently working on covering the news in hromadas. Advocating for decentralisation processes and integrity in local self-government by creating and airing **12 episodes of the talk show "How are you doing?" (Як справи?)**. The episodes covered diverse matters of local self-government and life in hromadas, supporting the development of the local media environment and making remote hromadas visible at the national level. The total estimated coverage of these episodes is **1,066,616 through watching the Suspilne broadcast**, and **another 18,400** have seen the program on YouTube.

Together with the **National Agency for Corruption Prevention** U-LEAD conducted a number of educational and community building events, such as Best Integrity Practices Event and Forum of Integrity in Municipalities. Between 2023-2024, in partnership with the Ministry for Communities and Territories Development, U-LEAD implemented the House of Integrity initiative. This initiative allowed **over 5,500 civil servants, executive authorities, representatives of municipalities and local commissioners for the prevention and detection of corruption** to access hybrid education in the field of anti-corruption.

U-LEAD supports research that generates **evidence-based solutions to strengthen the fiscal capacity of municipalities**, in particular regarding: improvement of the system of local tax administration, reforming the personal income tax payment system and increasing the effectiveness of the management of municipal property.

U-LEAD supports **two renowned research centers** to generate high-quality research on municipalities' resilience, social capital and local participation during the war.

Building municipalities' capacities to resist and build back better

U-LEAD supports local officials in enhancing their capacities to get ready to work in the wartime environment, continue on the path of recovery and comply with the changing legislative framework.

- U-LEAD offers capacity building activities to local government officials that cover key topics crucial for municipal management during the war and recovery. Since 2016, U-LEAD has provided **training for almost 685,000 participants**. In 2022-2024, almost **24,000 training events** were attended by more than **1,400 municipalities**.
- Since the local elections in October 2020, U-LEAD has implemented a number of comprehensive training programs: **826 First Steps events** for newly formed municipalities (**5,287 participants** from **1,160 municipalities**), **52 Steps for Leaders seminars** for leaders of **162 municipalities**, and over **3,900 Steps for Specialists events** for representatives of **1,439 municipalities**, offering local government officials high-quality training materials, concise but thorough online training events, and prompt advisory support.
- Since 2023, U-LEAD adjusted its support programme, further tailoring it to hromadas' needs. **48 municipalities** established internal control and audit systems, **46 municipalities developed communication strategies** with detailed implementation plans, **30 approved municipal energy plans**, and **32 implemented programmes for IDP integration**. Additionally, **20 municipalities devised plans for the Safety Space Program**, and **21 conducted land resource audits**.
- U-LEAD supported the implementation of **10 local projects** to help **municipalities in 10 regions** tackle the acute challenges related to food security, energy security and IDP's.
- U-LEAD has implemented a range of initiatives for support of local women. Online course "**Women's rights in my municipality: challenges of the war**" for over **160 participants**, Support programme "**Development of the Potential of IDP Women in Ukraine**" for **93 IDP women**, "**Supporting women leaders in coping with the consequences of war**" project for **6 hromadas**, Creation of the Center for Entrepreneurship and Psychological Stability "**Steel Magnolias**" in Shepetivka, "**Female Leadership School**" for women from **6 oblasts**.
- In 2023, U-LEAD provided expert support to **35 municipalities** in preparing their local development strategies and helped municipalities submit **40 local and regional development projects** for various competition programs.
- U-LEAD supported the implementation of **17 projects on volunteering development in municipalities** and **10 projects** aimed at **creating favourable conditions for small business development**.
- U-LEAD has implemented the innovative project "**Effective Governance of the Healthcare Facilities Network in a Decentralised Environment**" aimed at improving the system of healthcare provision at the municipal level: **17 online webinars, consultations and workshops** were conducted, learning materials and presentations were developed.
- U-LEAD experts helped **48 municipalities** develop their capable educational network plans and **43 received support** in elaboration of their primary level healthcare network plans.
- U-LEAD relaunched **U-LEARN, a web-based learning platform** for robust capacity development. **2,743 certificates** on successful completion of a course or training program issued.

U-LEAD's emergency support since the full-scale war outbreak

1 During the first months after the outbreak of the war on 24 February 2022, three types of emergency support packages have been procured and delivered to **333 most affected municipalities** throughout Ukraine.

- Shelter Kits** comprised essentials such as tents, camp beds and mats, sleeping bags, blankets, service water tanks, generators and basic IDP backpacks with personal items, meals, medical and hygiene products to provide better conditions for IDPs.
- Repair Kits** contained generators, wheel loaders, cut-off machines, chain saws and cutting chains to help the affected municipalities to remove debris and repair critical infrastructure.
- Lighting Kits** comprised generators and light poles allowing the municipalities to conduct restoration works at night time.



500		Shelter kits
201		Repair kits
250		Lighting kits
16		Additional support kits (generators, chain saws)
167		Pallets of Hygiene kits (60 boxes each)
56		Pallets of canned food

2,424 generators as part of the emergency kits have been used by municipalities to repair critical infrastructure, pump water and equip their invincibility centres to live through the difficult winter of 2022-2023.

2 Since October 2023, U-LEAD together with the Ministry for Communities and Territories Development with the financial support from the German government has been implementing the initiative "Strengthening local resilience.

Support to emergency repairs in municipalities". As part of the project, by the end of September 2024, **100 war-affected municipalities** received vehicles to support their restoration, including **165 vans**, **30 transporters**, **20 compact loaders**,

10 pickups and **15 trucks with cranes**. They also received **100 toolkits** each including two generators, two LED-spotlights, a concrete mixer, chainsaws, hammer drills, impact screwdrivers, angle drivers, motor grinder, or electric drill.

Supporting local reconstruction and development

U-LEAD supports municipalities in preparing reconstruction projects, benefiting from the potential of digital transformation, and fosters international municipal dialogue for rebuilding Ukraine.

- U-LEAD helps **20 municipalities** to prepare **25 high-quality restoration projects** in the fields of education, healthcare, waste management, transport, water supply, and sanitation. The projects comply with the principle of “Build Back Better”, meet the standards of energy efficiency, quality, inclusiveness and safety. More than half a million citizens from **11 regions** of Ukraine will have better access to services after the projects’ implementation.
- U-LEAD supported the preparation of a **Strategic Environmental Assessment and a related Action Plan**.
- U-LEAD supported **24 municipalities in developing recovery planning documentation**: comprehensive recovery programs and recovery and development plans.
- U-LEAD is cooperating with the **Agency for Restoration and Infrastructure Development** of Ukraine. In particular, thanks to U-LEAD, the Agency monitored the quality of design estimates for **8 funded recovery projects**.
- Within the framework of the Bridges of Trust initiative from 2020 to 2024, U-LEAD played a key role in facilitating the creation of **94 partnerships**, with **47 of them formalised**, between Ukrainian and EU municipalities.
- U-LEAD fosters cooperation between the **Danish municipality of Guldborgsund** and **9 Ukrainian municipalities**. In 2024, this partnership witnessed **1 study visit** by municipal specialists to Guldborgsund and **2 visits** of Guldborgsund representatives to Ukraine. **3 offline workshops** and **1 online seminar** were organised, during which Ukrainian experts reviewed the Danish experience of local self-government and presented their own achievements.
- U-LEAD together with the **Council of European Municipalities and Regions** and the **Association of Ukrainian Cities** supports the development of **48 investment projects** of Ukrainian partner municipalities and promotes their active involvement in the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Recovery of Ukraine.
- In cooperation with the **Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS)**, U-LEAD involved Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, North Macedonia and Montenegro in the Bridges of Trust Initiative. **10 new partnerships** were established, and **10 mentoring programs** were implemented.
- Together with the International Solidarity Fund PL, U-LEAD organised internships in Polish gminas for representatives of **25 municipalities**, who as a result developed project proposals in cooperation with an EU partner. The implementation of **5 best projects were funded** in 2024.
- Together with the **Center for European Perspectives**, U-LEAD builds cooperation between **10 Ukrainian and Slovenian partners** through training and exchange of experience. The **9 mentorship programmes** were already successfully organised in 2024.
- In cooperation with the **European Association for Local Democracy**, U-LEAD establishes partnerships between Ukrainian and European municipalities by setting up or expanding Local Democracy Agencies in the Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv and Vinnytsia regions.



Local Schools Rehabilitation for Resilience

- In 2023-2024, with the support of the European Commission’s Service for Foreign Policy Instruments, U-LEAD implemented the **“Local Schools Rehabilitation for Resilience” initiative** to help restore access to education in war-affected municipalities.
- In cooperation with the Brave Charitable Foundation, U-LEAD has restored the damaged **45 premises of 12 schools** in the Kyiv, Chernihiv and Kharkiv regions.
- Together with the SavED Charitable Foundation, U-LEAD has established **25 digital learning centers “Vulyk”** in the Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Mykolaiv regions. In total, more than **12,700 students in 21 municipalities** will have access to safe spaces for learning and leisure.
- Jointly with the NGO “Pro.Svit”, U-LEAD supported the creation of a safe environment for children’s learning. The Safe Community training program was developed and **60 trainers from 17 regions** of Ukraine were trained. They, in turn, trained **780 teachers from 440 secondary education institutions**.

