



2018

UN Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index for Eastern Ukraine

Readiness for dialogue in eastern Ukraine: What helps and hinders intergroup interaction

About USE

The UN Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index for Eastern Ukraine (USE) is an analytical tool designed to improve the understanding of societal dynamics in government-controlled areas (GCA) of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, and neighboring Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia oblasts. This helps to identify strategic entry points for policies and programs that contribute to strengthening social cohesion.

USE is based on the Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) Index methodology originally developed in Cyprus by the Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development, and UNDP. The initiative in Ukraine is jointly implemented by three UN entities, UNDP, UNICEF and IOM, under the overall direction of the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator, and is one of the UN's evidence-based knowledge products for joint analysis and programming in Ukraine.

USE is implemented on an annual basis and consists of two components: one component captures the views of 6,000 adults residing in the five oblasts in eastern Ukraine, including along the government-controlled areas of the contact line; the other component captures the views of adolescents in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. The USE conceptual model consists of more than 70 indicators, each measured through multiple questionnaire items.

Conceptualization and analysis of data has been done in consultations with government and civil society representatives in Kyiv and in each of the five oblasts. For more information on USE and to see the results of the first (2017) and second (2018) waves please visit use.scoreforpeace.org.

Introduction

Dialogue is one of the core tools in a cohesive society, vital for preventing and managing political and social conflicts. The exchange of views and opinions can bring people closer to each other and, by fostering intergroup interaction and understanding, help prevent differences from developing into social polarization or even violent conflict. Dialogue is also essential in helping repair the damage that conflict causes to the social fabric.

Combined with weak civil society and government institutions, the absence of intergroup dialogue can undermine social cohesion by allowing stereotypes, resentment and isolation to breed and to generate tensions that can turn violent. Similarly, hostile attitudes toward other members of society or self-exclusion from dialogue—whether formal or informal—can undermine the potential of human capital and development efforts by marginalizing certain groups. This makes it important to promote and enable dialogue at all levels and stages of conflict, in particular by identifying and engaging different groups, and by fostering a space conducive to addressing issues that are at the root of tensions and animosity.

This brief looks at readiness for dialogue (defined as seeing mutual benefits in interacting with representatives of different political, social and geographical groups in society), by identifying with which groups people across eastern Ukraine are most and least ready to enter into dialogue. It then outlines the factors that impact positively and negatively on people's readiness for dialogue, and identifies entry points for dialogue enhancing activities.

Summary of key findings

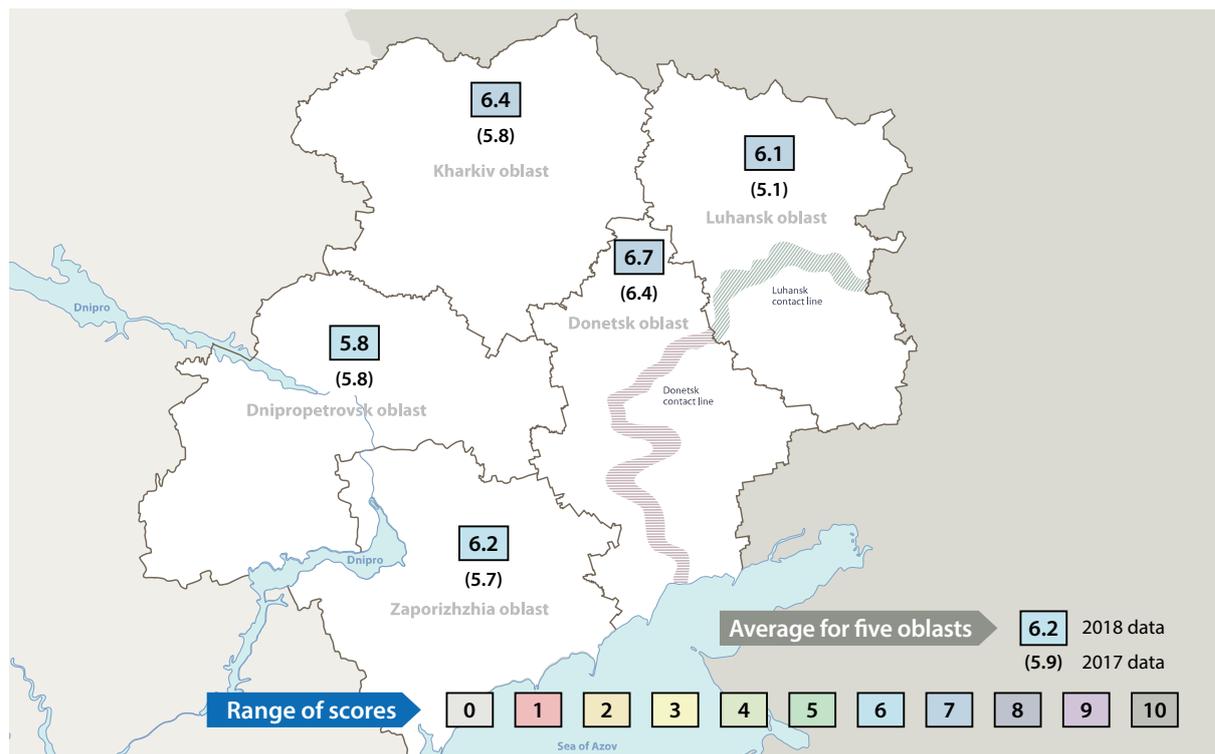
- The score for readiness for dialogue is relatively high across eastern Ukraine, and has even increased from 2017 to 2018. Residents of Donetsk oblast report the highest readiness to engage in dialogue, while residents of Dnipropetrovsk oblast report the lowest.
- People across eastern Ukraine are most ready to engage in dialogue with internally displaced persons (IDPs), which may reflect a perception that IDPs are well integrated in their new communities and are not seen as an outside threat. The biggest improvement in readiness for dialogue is with people living in the non-government-controlled areas (NGCAs).
- Reluctance to engage in dialogue is a result mainly of a different political orientation rather than any east-west geographical divide. Ukrainian nationalists and those who support the separation of the NGCAs are seen by most residents as the least desirable groups to engage in dialogue with, while people who live in western Ukraine are among the most desirable to engage in dialogue with.
- Key factors that predict willingness to engage in dialogue include:
 - ▶ being an empowered citizen: believing that participation in community activities matters and can contribute to positive developments in society;
 - ▶ having pro-social skills and values: being ready to compromise, prioritizing collaboration and sharing responsibility for solving problems;
 - ▶ absence of stereotypes and perceived threats: not being prejudiced toward different groups and not feeling economically or socially threatened by them.
- Engaging residents in policy development processes such as through council meetings is one way to encourage dialogue, especially once people see the positive transformation this engagement can bring to their communities. Addressing narratives that divide can further help foster tolerant communication among people of different political orientations.

Readiness to engage in dialogue

Geographical and demographic comparisons

The average score for readiness for dialogue in eastern Ukraine is 6.2 (see Figure 1), where 0 indicates that nobody is willing to talk with representatives of other groups, while 10 indicates that everyone is ready to engage in dialogue with a wide range of different people (see the list of groups in Table 1). There are notable differences in scores between oblasts: residents in Donetsk oblast, including those living along the contact line, report the highest readiness to engage in dialogue (6.7) while Dnipropetrovsk oblast residents report the lowest (5.8).¹ In contrast to many other USE indicators, there is no difference in scores between the people living near the contact line and the rest of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. There are also no notable differences in scores between women and men, or between different age groups.

■ **Figure 1. Readiness to engage in dialogue**



The boundaries, names and the designations used on the maps in this brief do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Readiness to engage in dialogue: changes from 2017 to 2018

The overall regional score for readiness for dialogue remained mostly unchanged from 2017 (5.8) to 2018 (6.2). There are, however, significant improvements at the oblast level. The score for Luhansk oblast improved from 5.1 to 6.1, Kharkiv oblast went from 5.8 to 6.4, and Zaporizhzhia oblast went from 5.7 to 6.2. Not one oblast saw a decrease in scores for readiness for dialogue.

The extent to which residents in eastern Ukraine are willing to engage in dialogue differs from group to group.² People are most ready to engage in dialogue with IDPs, with people who support closer ties with the EU, and with people from western Ukraine (see Table 1). The high score for readiness for dialogue with IDPs across all oblasts may reflect the perception that IDPs have become integrated in their new communities and are not perceived as outsiders or as a threat, especially in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

Dialogue with people in NGCAs scored second highest in both Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, while people from western Ukraine received higher scores in Zaporizhzhia and Kharkiv oblasts. It is not surprising that the greater proximity of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts to the NGCA has led to higher readiness for dialogue with this group.

¹ A 0.5+ difference in scores indicates a statistically significant difference.

² The selected groups were identified as being illustrative of different political, social and geographical categories following stakeholder consultations in eastern Ukraine and in Kyiv.

■ **Table 1. Readiness for dialogue with different groups, by oblast**

	Average for five oblasts	Donetsk	Luhansk	Kharkiv	Dnipropetrovsk	Zaporizhzhia
IDPs	7.1	7.9	7.1	7.5	6.5	7.0
People who support closer ties with the EU	6.9	7.1	6.2	7.2	6.8	6.7
People from western Ukraine	6.8	6.9	6.4	7.2	6.4	7.0
People living in NGCAs	6.4	7.4	6.6	6.6	5.7	6.2
Active military personnel	6.4	6.3	6.0	6.3	6.3	6.8
People who support closer ties with Russia	5.7	6.8	6.2	6.0	5.0	5.5
People who support separation of NGCAs from Ukraine	5.3	6.2	5.6	5.4	4.7	5.4
Ukrainian nationalists	5.1	5.2	5.0	4.8	5.3	5.1

Ukrainian nationalists and people who support the separation of NGCAs from Ukraine are the two groups that people are the most reluctant to enter into dialogue with. The fact that these two groups are seen as the least suitable for dialogue indicates that most people are reluctant to interact with people who hold more extreme political views, which are directly associated with the political polarization in the conflict.

The fact that people from western Ukraine received a much higher score than Ukrainian nationalists suggests that people living in eastern Ukraine are not supportive of the east-west geographical divide, rather the intergroup distance is more a matter of different political orientation rather than geographical scapegoating. People in eastern Ukraine are, in other words, positively disposed to people living in the western part of the country, and consider Ukrainian nationalists to be a distinctly different group that is not defined by geography.

Readiness for dialogue increased significantly for several groups from 2017 to 2018, and there was no deterioration in scores for any of the groups (see Table 2). The scores increased the most for readiness for dialogue with people living in the NGCAs. These findings, coupled with an overall decrease in support for a military operation (see USE brief *Key changes from 2017 to 2018*), point to increased support for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and full reintegration of the NGCAs. The other two groups for which readiness for dialogue increased significantly are people who support closer ties with the EU and Ukrainian nationalists.

■ **Table 2. Readiness for dialogue with different groups 2017–2018³**

	2017	2018	Difference ³
People living in NGCAs	5.8	6.4	0.6
People who support closer ties with the EU	6.4	6.9	0.5
Ukrainian nationalists	4.6	5.1	0.5
People from western Ukraine	6.4	6.8	0.4
People who support closer ties with Russia	5.4	5.7	0.3
Active military personnel	6.1	6.4	0.3
IDPs	6.8	7.1	0.3
People who support separation of NGCAs from Ukraine	5.2	5.3	0.1
Average for all groups	5.8	6.2	0.4

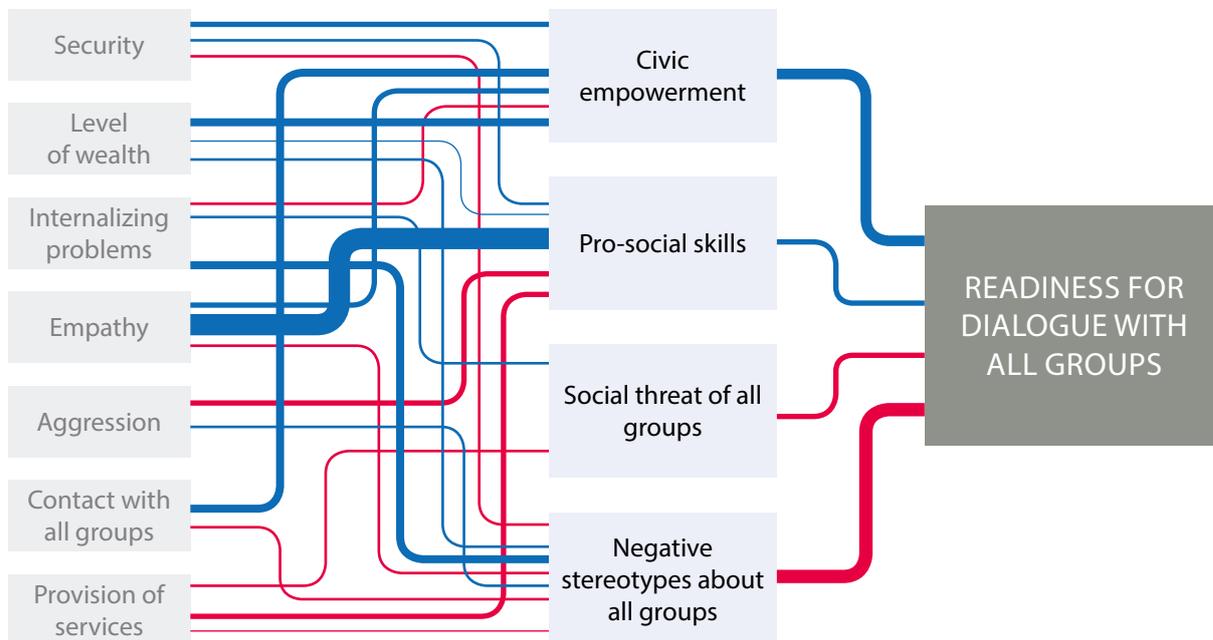
People across all five oblasts are increasingly becoming more open to dialogue with different groups, including those who are considered the least desirable groups. For example, while Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts show the biggest increase in readiness to enter into dialogue with people from western Ukraine and Ukrainian nationalists, people living in the three adjoining oblasts show a significant increase in readiness for dialogue with residents of the NGCAs.

³ A 0.5+ difference in scores indicates a significant change.

What predicts readiness for dialogue?

In order to increase participation in dialogue, its effectiveness and positive impact, it is crucial to understand what drives readiness for dialogue. In eastern Ukraine, several factors have been identified that can help motivate people to or prevent them from engaging constructively in dialogue with representatives of different groups (see Figure 2).

■ **Figure 2. Readiness for dialogue drivers**



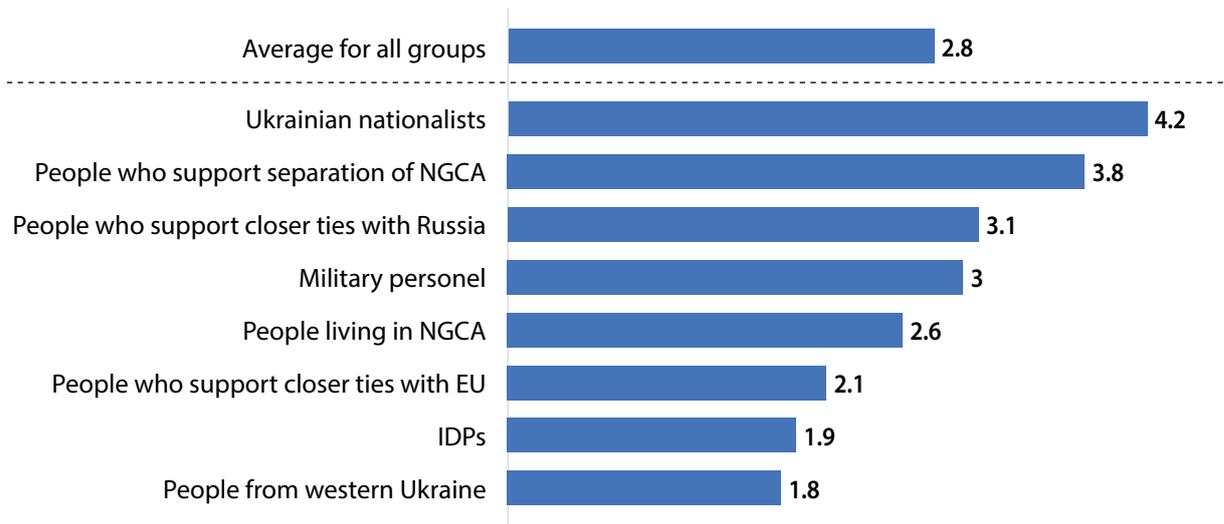
Red arrows indicate a negative relationship and blue lines a positive relationship. The thickness of the lines indicates the strength of the relationship. The shadowed boxes indicate the drivers of drivers. In other words, negative stereotypes have a negative relationship to readiness for dialogue, while the more contact a person has with different groups, the less likely they are to be holding negative stereotypes.

Stereotypes and perceived threats

The two factors that have the most negative impact on readiness for dialogue are negative stereotypes and perceived social threats from different groups.⁴ Negative stereotypes has an average score of 2.8, where 0 means that there are no negative stereotypes toward any of the groups, while 10 means that everyone has negative stereotypes toward all groups. Stereotypes are notably lower among older people and residents of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Residents of eastern Ukraine have the strongest negative stereotypes toward Ukrainian nationalists and people who support the separation of the NGCAs (see Figure 3), i.e., the same two groups for which readiness for dialogue is the lowest. Both groups are perceived as relatively more narrow-minded and aggressive than other groups. A major factor explaining the prevalence of negative stereotypes is the lack of contact with different groups in society, as well as poor psychosocial functioning. In other words, higher intergroup contact and levels of mental well-being are shown to help increase the dismantling of negative stereotypes (See Figure 2).

⁴ Social threats refers to the perception that an increase in the numbers of a certain group will be followed by fewer job opportunities, rising crime rates, overall destabilized communities, and undermined unity. Negative stereotypes refers to the extent to which a person has negative stereotypes about the personal qualities of representatives of different groups in society.

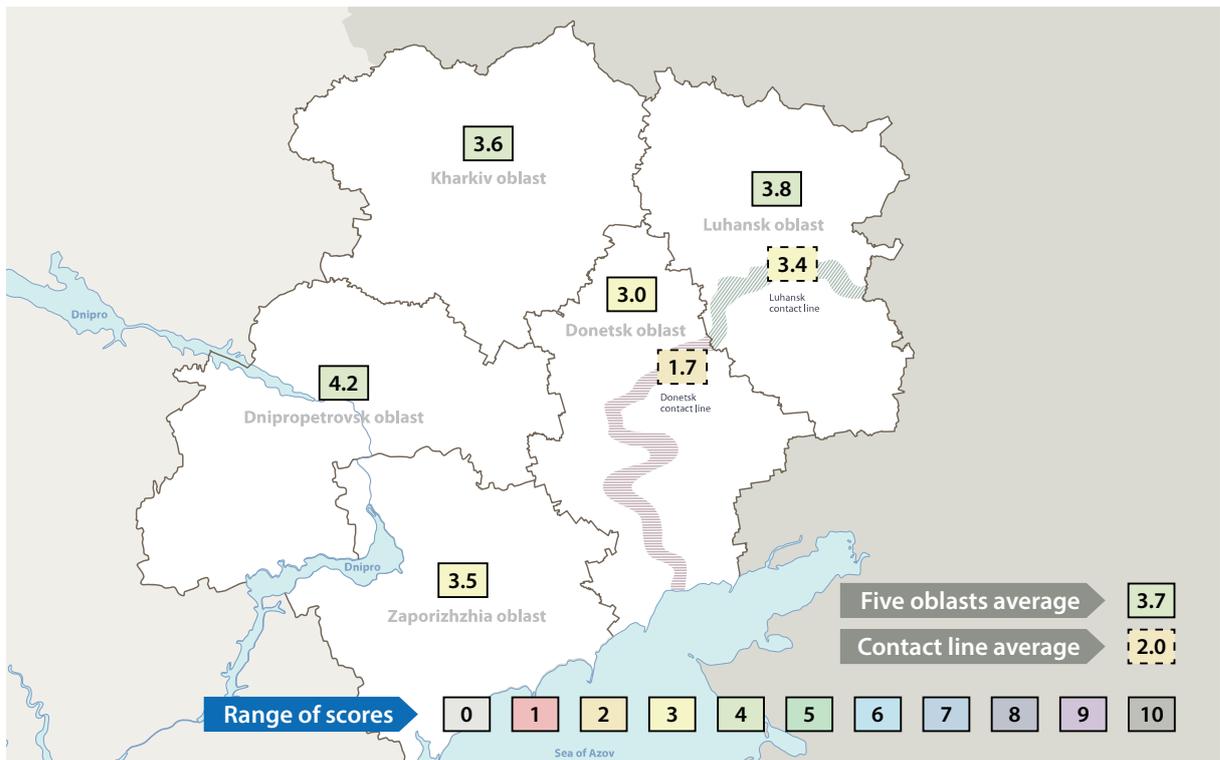
■ Figure 3. Negative stereotypes toward different social and political groups



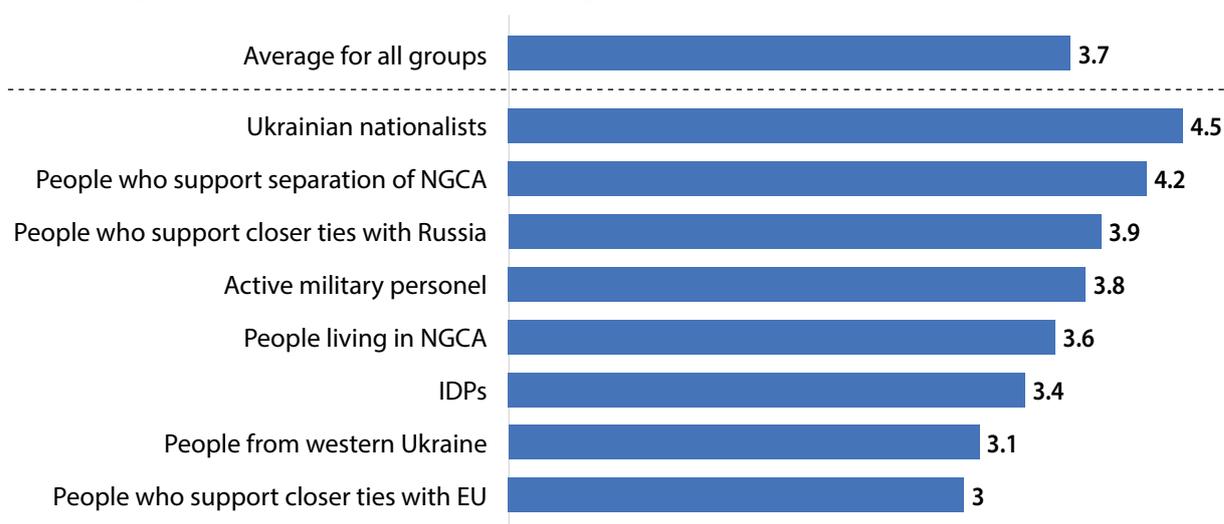
Social threats has an average regional score of 3.7, with residents of Donetsk oblast demonstrating the lowest level of perceived threats, and residents in Dnipropetrovsk oblast the highest (see Figure 4). Residents of areas along the contact line tend to see fewer social threats emanating from other groups than the rest of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

Overall, the following three groups of people are perceived as posing the biggest social threats: Ukrainian nationalists, people who support separation of the NGCAs from Ukraine, and those who support closer ties with Russia (see Figure 5). The perception of social threats from these groups is mainly based on fear that representatives of these groups would undermine unity, increase crime rates and destabilize the community. The main factor driving the perceived feelings of social threats is internalization of problems, i.e., people experiencing symptoms of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder tend to have higher feelings of perceived social threats (see Figure 2). Moreover, greater satisfaction with the provision of public services and infrastructure is shown to make people more content and less threatened by other groups and of potential competition over resources.

■ Figure 4. Social threats



■ Figure 5. Perceived social threats from groups



Civic empowerment and pro-social skills and values

The two factors that have the strongest positive impact on readiness for dialogue are civic empowerment and pro-social skills and values. Being empowered as a citizen, meaning having a strong sense of agency and being aware of opportunities for civic engagement, has the strongest positive impact. In other words, those who think that 1) their actions and words matter and that 2) participation in the social life of their community is feasible and valued, are more likely to view engaging in dialogue with others as worthwhile and beneficial. Residents of eastern Ukraine have a relatively low sense of civic empowerment (a regional average of 4.7 – see USE brief *Tolerant and active citizenship*), which is largely driven by low levels of economic and political security, as well as lack of contact with different groups in society (see Figure 2). In other words, the more economically and politically secure a person feels and the more contact a person has with different groups, the more likely they are to feel empowered as citizens. Conversely, the less secure a person is and the less contact they have with others, the less empowered they feel.

Having well-developed social interaction skills contributes significantly to a person's readiness to engage in dialogue as well. Pro-social skills are measured by interdependent/cooperative values and collaborative problem-solving skills. In other words, people who place higher value on collaboration and are ready to compromise and share responsibility for solving a problem are more ready to engage in dialogue. Interdependency, as opposed to independent, individualistic behavior, has high scores in eastern Ukraine (7.8 – see Table 2), especially among women and rural residents. Scores for collaborative problem-solving skills are lower (6.1). Hence, enhancing such skills should increase the possibility of effectively involving more and different people in dialogue. Pro-social skills are, in turn, strongly driven by empathy and satisfaction with the quality of public services (see Figure 2). In other words, the stronger the sense of empathy and the higher the satisfaction with public services, the stronger the positive impact on pro-social skills, and thus on readiness for dialogue.

■ Table 3. Pro-social skills and values by demographic group

Indicator	Age group			Sex		Settlement type	
	18–35	36–60	61+	Women	Men	Urban	Rural
Collaborative problem-solving skills	5.8	6.1	6.4	6.2	6.0	6.0	6.2
Interdependent values	7.6	7.8	8.2	8.1	7.5	7.7	8.1

Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, people in eastern Ukraine demonstrate a high readiness for dialogue and the trend is positive. Willingness to interact with different groups of people who are viewed as politically, socially or geographically distant, or even as posing a threat to social and economic well-being, either increased in 2018 or stayed the same. Residents in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts demonstrate the highest readiness for dialogue, as do people with higher level of income. IDPs remain the group that residents in eastern Ukraine are most willing to have dialogue with, in particular in Donetsk oblast, and Ukrainian nationalists the least. The latter did, however, see a significant improvement in scores from 2017 to 2018. The fact that there are no significant differences in overall readiness for dialogue between men and women, different age groups and settlement types indicates that dialogue efforts can target broad audiences. That readiness for dialogue has increased significantly in several of the oblasts also highlights the growing potential for fostering understanding and convergence through dialogue activities.

Positive developments in readiness for dialogue should not be taken for granted, however, as political narratives that perpetuate fear can still lead to intergroup hostility. To both promote and facilitate dialogue across political divides, it is essential to address the persistence of strong negative stereotypes, and the ignorance and biased opinions that go along with them. The strongest entry point for addressing negative stereotypes is through increased contact between different groups. For example, stereotypes are the strongest toward Ukrainian nationalists and people who support the separation of the NGCAs, and these are also the groups that people have the least contact with and see the biggest threats coming from. While direct contact may not always be feasible, alternatives include generating public debate on topical issues of social and political importance.

Lack of civic empowerment is another risk factor that may lead to self-exclusion from social interaction and dialogue. Here, stakeholders with convening powers can contribute to encouraging intergroup dialogue through facilitating meeting and/or dialogue activities around local or regional policy issues. Inclusive policy development processes and the use of models of successful citizen engagement can boost people's sense of agency (see USE brief *Tolerant and active citizenship*) and offer favorable conditions for intergroup dialogue.

Finally, supporting the development of pro-social skills and supporting collaborative approaches to problem-solving in the communities of eastern Ukraine is crucial for people to be willing to interact with each other and across groups. Developing collaborative problem-solving skills is particularly critical for the younger population, aged 18-35, as these skills are weaker among younger people than among older residents.

