

# What reconstruction for Ukraine?

What has been lost and achieved in one year?  
How the need for a future-oriented  
reconstruction approach translates into  
concrete projects?

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In this paper the Geneva Cities Hub aims to present a new approach by international organizations to assist countries suffering from a man-made or natural disaster through collaboration on reconstruction with local and regional governments. Building a bridge from immediate humanitarian needs-based interventions to a future-conscious development program to build back better offers hope for a sustainable, people-centred future.

The UN4Kharkiv and UN4Mykolaiv projects coordinated by United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) prove that with a strengthened multistakeholder collaboration the UN system can deliver tangible results on the ground despite ongoing armed conflicts or political tensions. This paper details the concepts, content, and envisaged outcomes of these projects, as well as offering recommendations to the international community.

As part of the process, the Geneva Cities Hub and the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, in collaboration with the UNECE, organized the conference “What reconstruction for Ukraine? What has been lost and achieved in one year?” on 5 June 2023 with participants from all governance levels. We thank all speakers for their valuable contributions which inspired this paper:

- H.E.Mr. Erik Brøgger Rasmussen, Permanent Representative of Denmark
- Ms. Anna Brach, Head of Human Security, GCSP
- Ms. Olga Demianenko, Mayor’s Office of Kharkiv
- Mr. Alexander Mundt, Senior Policy Advisor, UNHCR
- Ms. Christina Orisich, Deputy Director, GCSP
- Ms. Gulnara Roll, Secretary of CUDHLUM, UNECE
- Mr. Lukasz Rozycki, Deputy Permanent Representative of Poland
- Ms. Maud Roue, Deputy Director, Kofi Annan Foundation
- Mr. Oleksandr Senkevych, Mayor of Mykolaiv
- Ms. Alevtyna Serdiuk, Bern University of Applied Sciences
- Ms. Agi Veres, Director, UNDP Geneva Office
- Moderated by Mr. Eden Cole, Executive-in-Residence Fellow, GCSP, and Mr. Andras Szorenyi, Senior Policy Advisor, GCH

## Recommendations:

1. **Embrace a People-Centred Approach:** Alongside immediate emergency response efforts, develop a comprehensive long-term vision prioritizing the protection and well-being of civilians. By addressing the root causes and developing a vision for a better future, we can ensure a holistic and sustainable response.
2. **Foster Inclusive Bottom-Up Reconstruction:** Complement physical reconstruction efforts with inclusive engagement strategies that empower local institutions and communities. Create sustainable economic opportunities for all, by leveraging existing assets and promoting social cohesion. Strengthen local self-governance and engage all stakeholders to create an inclusive and resilient collaboration.
3. **Enable Coordinated International Assistance:** Relevant UN entities can help Member States through cooperation with local and regional authorities on concrete future-oriented human development projects. Beyond immediate steps, to rebuild a city and build a human-centric environment, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals should serve as guiding principles.
4. **Take into account local needs** during crisis response in cities requiring specific approaches in damage assessment, temporary housing, maintaining public services and preserving the social fabric. The footprint of development projects should be there at every step of the humanitarian assistance .
5. **Strengthen multilevel international cooperation** to enable national and local government policies to support the return of refugees and IDPs. A strategic approach to create conducive social and business environment at local level is key, and the assistance of the international community is invaluable.
6. **Ensure Environmental Sustainability:** Rebuilding damaged cities should prioritize sustainable and resilient urban development - including air pollution reduction, water management, and climate change mitigation. Embrace circularity principles to minimize waste, optimize resource utilization, and foster a healthier environment to create liveable and sustainable cities for future generations.
7. **Promote Digitalization:** Harness the power of digital tools and technologies to create resilient systems and assets in urban areas. Explore opportunities to digitize public services, registries, and rights, fostering sustainability and efficiency. By supporting digitalization, the quality of services can be enhanced, governance improved, and effective decision-making processes facilitated.
8. **Adopt a Green Economy:** Integrate sustainable practices into the reconstruction process to mitigate environmental impacts and enhance resilience. Foster partnerships with local businesses and organizations to promote green innovation, sustainable practices, and job creation in the green economy. By endorsing a green economy, we can promote long-term ecological balance and build back better.

## Introduction

In war-torn Ukrainian cities which are destroyed, where infrastructure is damaged, and against the background of a wartime energy crisis last winter, some of Ukraine's needs still require immediate action so that the population can continue to live and have minimal adequate living conditions. But beyond these immediate problems, when the time comes for cities to be rebuilt from the ground up, they should be 'built back better'.

Whilst in peacetime Ukraine's urban challenges have included few heat-efficient buildings, insufficient waste recycling mechanisms, or a lack of green spaces, the war has shifted the focus to sustainable reconstruction. Local institutions, economic networks and the social fabric have become more fragile, fragmented and stressed, testing the limits of peacebuilding, reconstruction and development approaches.

Building a bridge from immediate needs based humanitarian intervention to a future-conscious, long-term development reconstruction program through a people-centred approach is one of the most important – but often neglected – priorities. The experience and norms of the European Union can already be taken into account in the planning process. In order to adapt to a human- and people-centric environment, the UN Sustainable Development Goals can serve as guiding principles. Through this approach the international community not only helps the local community but demonstrates a commitment to a prosperous future and reinforces the need for perseverance and resilience in these difficult times. It is also a means of translating and adapting the UN concept of 'building back better' to a tangible reality on the ground.

### 1. Rebuilding Beyond Ruins

#### 1.1. *International Collaboration in Shaping Future-Oriented Urban Recovery*

Man-made and natural disasters often push local communities into devastating situations. Disasters fracture relationships within and between communities and undermine social cohesion. They reconfigure the political economy and prompt not just a change in daily life and work but also feed into the establishment of crisis economies. Local governments have a double task to deliver solutions for the daily survival of the residents – water, electricity, heating, etc. – and to offer a vision for the future through planning post-war reconstruction.

Recently, when Ukrainian cities experienced acute crises, several important remedies need to be found to solve these problems. **War-torn cities have many needs**, some of which require immediate action, so that the population can continue to live and have minimal adequate living conditions. These include, for example, the heating of buildings, and primary temporary housing for those who lost their homes. But beyond these immediate problems, when cities are almost destroyed and need to be rebuilt from the ground up, the question is how to

rebuild them: simply rebuilding the same way as in the past; or building back better? In order to rebuild a city and to adapt it to a human-centric environment, the UN Sustainable Development Goals can serve as guiding principles.

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*“The footprint of development projects should be there at every humanitarian assistance step.”*

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The UN4Kharkiv and UN4Mykolaiv initiatives that are implemented by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) point exactly in this direction. The initiatives offer coordinated responses and assistance from the international community, especially the UN system, to launch a future-oriented, human-centric development. Since April 2022 – at the request of the Ministry of Infrastructure, Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine – UNECE supports the city of Kharkiv with planning of recovery and reconstruction. Since July 2022, UNECE is also working to help the city of Mykolaiv.

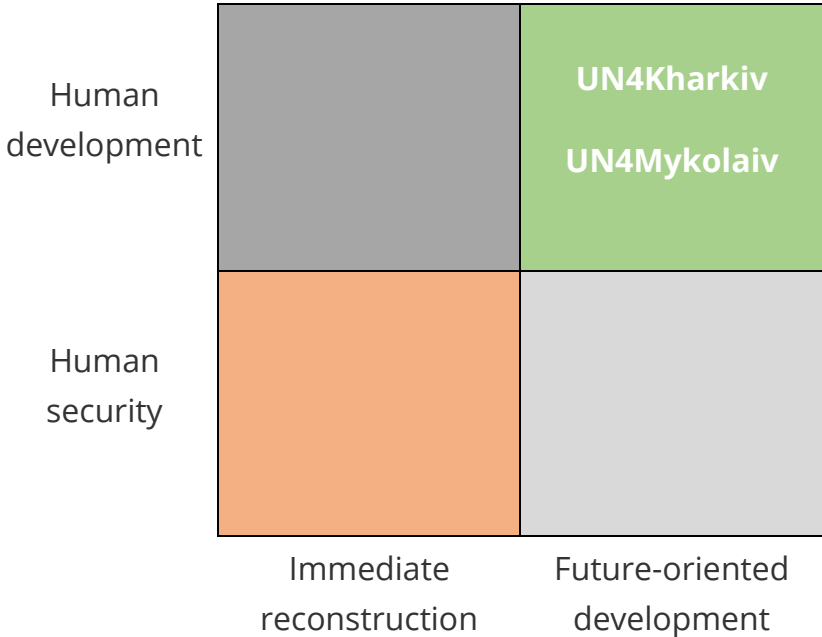
**The aim of the UN4Kharkiv and UN4Mykolaiv initiatives** is to support the national and local governments of Ukraine in their efforts to plan a staged urban recovery following a balanced, evidence-based, participatory approach that links emergency and long-term strategic objectives. For this purpose, UNECE established Task Forces which now comprise more than sixteen UN agencies and international organizations. The Task Forces support the work of international and Ukrainian architects, engineers and other experts on the development of the reconstruction master plans for the cities. Through them UNECE plays the role of facilitator by bringing together the best professionals in the world of architecture, planning, and engineering with the two Ukrainian cities. Furthermore, UNECE organizes workshops on priority topics identified in the masterplans to strengthen the capacities of the local governments and experts.

### **1.2. A new human security-focused approach**

In the urban areas of Kharkiv and Mykolaiv, the conflict has brought immense challenges for the people with a devastating impact on the infrastructure, economy, and social fabric of the communities. The escalating violence has resulted in the displacement of thousands of people and left many without access to basic amenities like food, water, and medical care. Local leaders must focus on the urgent needs of the affected communities and explore strategies to address the challenges and rebuild the social and economic structures.

The international community must prioritize the **protection and well-being of civilians** and work towards building sustainable and resilient communities in the aftermath of the conflict. Humanitarian responses must combine short- and long-term approaches. This means developing a long-term vision while also maintaining an emergency response capacity. There’s

a need for multidisciplinary responses that go beyond mere coordination and incorporate sector-specific expertise into a holistic response that takes in the root causes of humanitarian challenges.



Once the war is over, to build a sustainable future, **a specific human security approach needs to be followed**. Human security can be understood in a narrow sense in addressing threats of violence to individuals mainly in conflict situations, or following a broad approach considering security threats where the security landscape is influenced by and has possible implications for different sectors such as the environment, the economy, health and migration.

“For people in crisis and extreme poverty, acting on single issues is not enough. Insecurities must be tackled together, comprehensively. Only then will people begin to feel safe in all aspects of their lives, have income and opportunities to attain well-being, and know that their rights and dignity are fully respected.”<sup>1</sup>

For example, the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security elaborates on the triangle of ‘freedom from fear’, ‘freedom from want’ and ‘freedom to live in dignity’. As discussed by GCSP in their recently published analysis:

“Introducing human security as an objective and guiding principle for the country’s reconstruction can help ensure a people-centred approach at all levels. It can also spotlight important gaps and conflicting priorities that have adversely affected reconstruction projects elsewhere.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/humansecurity/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/h2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gcsp.ch/publications/human-security-and-reconstruction-ukraine>

## **2. Building back better**

### **2.1. Inclusive bottom-up reconstruction process**

To ensure that interventions are anchored in the needs of the communities affected by conflict, policymakers and practitioners should complement the approaches centred on physical reconstruction and local government institutions with more bottom-up, inclusive engagement that leverages existing assets. They should pursue a holistic and multisectoral approach focused on building back better that addresses the different layers of complexities in these environments. The involvement of local authorities, the local population, businesses, and academia is crucial in rebuilding cities and creating a better future, especially in post-war situations where displacement and lack of incentives to return are prevalent.

**Engaging flexibly with a diverse set of actors:** There is a need to forge partnerships to identify entry points and build, incrementally, on the existing assets. Using flexibility in engaging with counterparts and key stakeholders and allowing for learning from the past is crucial to build back better. Only by working together can these stakeholders tackle these challenges and ensure the revitalization of a city. Their collective synergy, competence, resources, and knowledge can shape a modern and vibrant city which caters to human needs and fosters inclusivity for all residents.

**Supporting legitimate and inclusive institutions at local level:** Upgrading institutions and retaining institutional capacities helps avoid outdated approaches to rebuilding and prevent grievances, and allows the establishment of transparent and accountable governance structures. By supporting local communities to promote social cohesion and build social capital, a sense of belonging and trust can be fostered, encouraging displaced individuals to return and to contribute to the rebuilding efforts.

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*“You can only rebuild a city  
in close collaboration  
with the local authorities.”*

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**Creating sustainable economic opportunities for all:** Restarting local economies and trade by supporting small scale private sector and jobs that empower communities and providing small scale infrastructure is crucial for reconstruction and development. Additionally, investing in small-scale infrastructure revitalizes local neighbourhoods and contributes to the overall economic resilience of the city. By ensuring that economic opportunities are accessible to all segments of the population, inclusive growth and social stability can be achieved.

## 2.2. *Building Peaceful and Sustainable Cities: Addressing Local Threats*

**New and emerging threats have shifted to become more prominent at local levels:** from climate adaptation, digital technologies, inequalities, and violent conflict, to the ability of healthcare systems to tackle pandemics, challenges proliferate at the local level:

“Addressing these threats will require policy makers to consider protection, empowerment, and solidarity alongside one another so that human security, planetary considerations and human development all work together and not despite each other. This means that solutions for one problem shouldn’t exacerbate other problems.”<sup>3</sup>

**The ‘5Ps’ of the Sustainable Development Goals** – peace, prosperity, people, planet and partnership – are the guiding stars of international reconstruction efforts. In a war-torn society the most immanent is **Peace**. The collective aim is to rebuild a peaceful, just and inclusive society which is free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development. There is a need to ensure that each and every **People** can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment. Everyone must ensure that all human beings can enjoy **Prosperity** and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature. Protecting the **Planet** from degradation, principally through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, is crucial to address the needs of the present and those of future generations. These objectives should guide our steps when we plan the future of the cities concerned.

The UN4Kharkiv and UN4Mykolaiv projects are a reminder of how to mobilize the means required to strengthen global **Partnership** to combine reconstruction efforts with achievement of the SDGs, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable.

**‘5Ps’ of the Sustainable Development Goals:**

**PEACE \* PEOPLE \* PROSPERITY \* PLANET \* PARTNERSHIP**

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<sup>3</sup> [2022 Special Report on Human Security | Human Development Reports \(undp.org\)](#)



### **2.3. *Building Forward: A Comprehensive Approach for Post-Trauma Recovery and Sustainable Progress***

In the wake of a traumatic event, it is imperative to adopt a comprehensive and forward-looking approach that empowers affected local communities and governments to turn adversity into opportunity. To achieve this, we must avoid narrow perspectives and cultivate engagement with all stakeholders, preventing policy blunders and promoting efficient collaboration. By focusing on key areas and employing future-oriented solutions, we can drive meaningful recovery and progress. In this context, the following best practices are relevant:

**Comprehensive Assessment and Sustainable Asset Utilization:** Conduct a thorough and inclusive assessment of existing assets and opportunities in war-torn cities. Despite the devastation, it is important to recognize the value of the assets and properties that remain.

**Promote the Green Economy:** Prioritize reducing carbon footprints and enhancing climate resilience by implementing sustainable practices in housing, energy production, transportation, and industry. Additionally, foster greener peri-urban agriculture and industry.

**Digitalization of Systems and Assets:** Harness the potential of digital tools to enhance the sustainability and efficiency of local social and economic systems. This includes the digitalization of public services, registries, and rights to ensure transparency and accessibility.

**Innovative recycling approaches:** With the aid of modern technologies and qualified experts, explore innovative ways to recycle and repurpose existing resources, making them the cornerstone of future rebuilding efforts. By maximizing the utilization of existing assets, we can ensure sustainable and resource-efficient development while preserving the unique character of the cities.

### **3. The supporting and guiding roles of the international community**

The challenges faced in rebuilding cities in Ukraine after the war require not only local efforts but also the support of the international community. As highlighted in the policy paper, international assistance plays a crucial role in restoring these war-torn cities. Technical documents prepared by UNECE further illustrate how devastated areas can be transformed into opportunities for creating modern, vibrant cities, moving away from outdated Soviet-style infrastructure.

Embracing new concepts of city building and development, such as smart cities, becomes essential in attracting residents, fostering business activity, and contributing to the overall progress of the country. Central to this transformation is the integration of environmental sustainability, city circularity, energy-efficient buildings, and alternative energy sources. By

prioritizing these key ideas, Ukraine can pave the way for prosperous cities that adhere to modern European standards.

**The collective efforts of the international community and local stakeholders** can help Ukraine turn these dark pages in history into a bright future for the new generation, where cities become vibrant urban centres that meet the needs of their inhabitants while promoting sustainable development and progress.

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*“Local needs, national planning and international assistance should be aligned as much as possible.”*

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**Coordination of international efforts also involve the private sector.** A new Master Plan for the city of Kharkiv is currently being developed by the Norman Foster Foundation, ARUP Berlin and international experts. The development is being done on a pro-bono basis and in close collaboration with local experts and citizens who are actively participating in the process. One Works, a global design and architecture company, works in close collaboration with Ukrainian architects and citizens on the development of a new master plan for the city of Mykolaiv to support the future rebuilding of the city.

**Transforming war-torn cities into modern urban centres** with international collaboration requires technical assistance in all key areas. The technical documents written by UNECE experts – communicated to GCH and to be published soon – serve as the basis for planning and managing the work ahead. Lessons learnt from these papers showcase examples of how the current actions contribute to the realization of a long-term sustainable vision.

### **3.1. Acute housing, heating and water supply challenges**

Many parts of the infrastructure in Ukraine were damaged due to the war, especially housing, heating and water supply systems. Large-scale warfare has shown that the capacity of the existing civil protection system is extremely limited. Most shelters are not equipped with evacuation exits, do not have access to water supply and drainage systems, and are not adapted for food storage. Therefore, the safety of the civilian population is not fully ensured.

The document **“Reforming the state housing policy of Ukraine in the war and post-war periods”** describes how difficult it is to account for damaged and destroyed property during ongoing armed conflict. However, in the long term, accounting is necessary to plan and finance reconstruction efforts. Damage registration should include vulnerable citizens whose properties were damaged, a technical review of the condition of properties, damage assessment, and restoration costs.

Unfortunately, creating conditions for a sustainable solution to housing issues in wartime conditions is impossible. The Ukrainian Government’s measures can only partially solve the temporary resettlement needs of some internally displaced citizens. Considering the drastic

result of the war and the several million Ukrainians, who were forced to leave their homes, the housing issue will be relevant for a long period. The state needs to take urgent measures to develop a social housing stock which will require adequate funds. Therefore, temporary measures and long-term programs (such as funding and privatization issues) will jointly create an opportunity to solve housing issues in Ukraine, both during the war and after it ends.

### **3.2. Environment sustainability**

The challenge of rebuilding damaged cities in Ukraine provides an opportunity to redesign them in line with best global practices and making them compliant with SDG 11 “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”. Traditionally, the key challenges for cities in Ukraine are air pollution, water management, and climate change. City reconstruction policy also entails the supply of safe drinking water, wastewater treatment, green zones, and environmental quality. Air pollution in large cities and industrial regions remains consistently high. Two-thirds of the country's population suffers from bad air quality which negatively affects the general morbidity rates. The main polluters are mining and processing industries, heat and power engineering, and motor vehicles.

Ukraine is vulnerable to climate change. Ukrainian cities face water quality challenges caused by the discharge of untreated and insufficiently treated wastewater into bodies of water. Urban treatment plants have inadequate capacities. In addition, access to drinking water and sanitation is further degraded by the increasing frequency of floods and droughts. The threat to biodiversity is substantial, with a decline in the number of useful species, changes in forests and fauna, and soil degradation. Climate change impacts will likely also increase societal tensions and conflict risks as competition over resources intensifies. Climate change impacts and adaptation measures will directly impact city planning due to the increased heatwaves and scarcity of water. The impacts of climate change might include mass migration and displacement of entire communities.

As elaborated in the document "**Environmental Sustainability in Rebuilding Ukrainian Cities**", to plan the cities' recovery, a Strategic Environmental Assessment is needed that embraces public participation and takes into account future-proof circular approaches – from post-war rubble management to resource-efficient business planning.

### **3.3. Circular cities**

Circularity in Ukraine is still in its early stages. Ukraine's current waste management practices are resource-inefficient and result in negative environmental impacts. Waste accumulation in landfills and dumps leads to: pollution of the atmosphere, soils, and water; affects the functioning of ecosystems; and harms agriculture. Circularity should become one of the key principles for rebuilding Ukrainian cities after the war. Salvaging and reusing materials from debris promotes the reduction of the demand for virgin materials and resources and also minimizes waste. Circular cities are more sustainable, as they aim to reduce waste and optimize the use of resources.

The document entitled "**Promoting Circularity in Rebuilding Ukrainian Cities**" describes how circular cities can have socio-economic benefits by stimulating local economies, encouraging the development of circular businesses, and creating jobs through the reuse and recycling of materials. Moreover, they can create more livable, healthy, and inclusive communities. For example, by reducing waste and pollution, circular cities can improve air and water quality, which can have a positive impact on public health. They can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the impact of climate change.

For the planning of cities recovery, the following aspects need to be considered:

- Smart Spatial Planning is crucial to account for different city zones. Available tools can guide in planning industrial sites, green and blue zones. Gender considerations need to be included in city planning, accounting for the needs, interests and routines of women and girls in the city.
- Reusing and recycling demolition waste in construction helps reduce the amount of waste in landfills and helps reduce the environmental impact due to the reduction of transportation and substituting natural raw materials with recycled debris. Additionally, it helps create new jobs in the construction industry.

The government of Ukraine has taken some steps to regulate the post-war reconstruction, planning for the reuse and recycling of demolition waste. The government delegated powers to local authorities to clear the territories and organize sites for the temporary storage and classification of debris. The government also continues working on the assessment of demolition waste volumes, identifying needs and sources of funding, and attracting international technical and financial aid.

#### **3.4. Energy-efficient buildings and energy-efficiency regulation**

As elaborated in the document "**Energy-efficiency in buildings in Ukraine**", a large number of buildings were built before 1990 and do not satisfy modern energy efficiency standards, moreover, a large number of new buildings also need modernization due to obsolete insulation systems. Fossil fuel is used for heating, which was previously mainly imported from Russia. Improving energy efficiency is one of the most constructive and cost-effective ways to solve the problems of high energy prices and energy security. Energy efficiency also brings economic, environmental, and social benefits. In addition, it is an insurance tool against the uncertainty associated with fluctuating energy prices and politicization of the energy supply. Transformative thinking – following the SDGs – offers alternative solutions.

Ukrainian legislation – due to European ambitions of the country – encourages the reduction of energy consumption. The historical reason for this was an effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but following the Russian aggression energy prices have risen sharply, adding a new impetus to the issue. The issue of reducing energy consumption has become an element of preventing energy poverty. Neither Ukrainian nor European legislation could consider the impact of the war on the cost of energy resources which reached record levels. Thus, future legislation for reconstruction and modernization needs to reflect the new reality.

To overcome budgetary crises and dependence on natural gas imports, regulation should aim at A-level energy efficiency for new buildings. According to the estimates given in the UNECE study on Ukraine, the total additional cost of achieving a 50 percent reduction in energy consumption by buildings amounts to EUR 65bn, and to transfer the entire building stock to almost zero energy consumption, EUR 216bn. These amounts are significant for Ukraine, but the annual heating cost in Ukraine reaches USD 20bn, and with current technology heating systems emit 37.8m tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

### **3.5. *Alternative technologies with focus on heat pumps***

The assessment by UNECE showcases that in the energy supply of the Ukrainian cities (Kharkiv in particular) a large proportion of urban heating systems is characterized by low energy efficiency of buildings and high heat losses. Over the years a gradual abandonment of district heating, and their substitution by individual heating systems, did not contribute to the improvement of the overall resource efficiency, and deepened the degradation of centralized heat supply systems. Due to the war the related infrastructure suffered significant further damages.

Nature offers numerous opportunities for environmentally friendly and cost-effective heating. Thermal energy can be used to supply heating systems, ventilation and air conditioning systems, as well as hot water supply for sanitary and domestic needs. Heat pumps use the heat of the soil, the groundwater, and the air. Using these natural resources can significantly reduce the cost of energy production.

The document entitled “**District heating and heat pumps in Ukraine**” details the numerous benefits of heat pumps. Heat pumps have: a high-efficiency ratio; low operating costs; easy operation as they are fully automated and accessible to people of all ages; good fire safety due to the absence of fuel-burning elements; and environmental friendliness. Heat pumps work on electricity, and can therefore contribute to the reduction of the dependence on gas and reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

UNDP also included ‘heating’ as a sector for Emergency Humanitarian Assistance in addition to ‘housing’ in their ‘Flash Appeal’ to donor countries. Several countries are ready to share technological knowledge with Ukraine, and also to provide humanitarian support for Kharkiv in the form of the supply of air-to-water heat pumps if the city authorities are interested and the government is supportive. Pumps can supply heat to refugee camps, pre-hub housing, and also public facilities, notably pre-schools, schools, hospitals, etc.

## Conclusions

The UN4Kharkiv and UN4Mykolaiv projects shed light on the complex challenges faced by Ukraine in the ongoing war and its aftermath, and emphasise the importance of effective reconstruction and development approaches. The focus has shifted from pre-war urban challenges such as energy efficiency and waste recycling to addressing the immediate needs of the population for survival and envisioning a future through post-war planning.

They are both excellent examples of how the relevant UN entities can assist member states through cooperation with local and regional authorities on concrete future-oriented human development projects. The UN4Kharkiv and UN4Mykolaiv Task Forces are essential to coordinate the work of the different UN agencies on long-term strategies in the two cities, following a people-centred approach.

The international community plays a vital role in supporting local governments, bridging the gap between immediate humanitarian interventions and long-term development programs. The concept of "building back better" aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and serves as a guiding principle for creating human-centric environments and sustainable cities. Drawing on the experiences and norms of the European Union can also inform the planning process, as Ukraine looks towards a European future.

Specific approaches are required at the local level in assessing damage, providing temporary housing, maintaining public services, and preserving the social fabric. Development projects should be integrated into humanitarian assistance efforts, ensuring a coordinated response that aligns local needs, national planning, and international assistance. Strengthening civil society and investing in capacity-building, particularly for youth, are vital for long-term recovery and ensuring a prosperous future.

The UN4Kharkiv and UN4Mykolaiv projects involve close collaboration with local authorities, granting cities a greater role in international cooperation and targeted foreign direct investment. Recovery in Ukraine requires a long-term vision and coordinated investment planning to ensure sustainable progress. By establishing clear goals and involving various stakeholders, the allocation of resources can be optimized for targeted impact.

Local needs, national planning, and international assistance should be aligned as much as possible at each and every stage of the reconstruction process. Ongoing collaboration among actors in the international community is essential and should be further strengthened to maximize the effectiveness of their assistance on the ground. By working together, Ukraine can rebuild its cities, create sustainable urban environments, and foster a sense of hope and prosperity for its people.



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