



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of International Cooperation in Addressing Humanitarian Crises and Economic Recovery in Post-Conflict Regions

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ABSTRACT

International support is of great importance for the post-war reconstruction of regions that have suffered destruction after occupation, active hostilities and rocket attacks. Armed conflicts cause the emergence of a humanitarian and economic crisis due to the destruction of houses, infrastructure, agricultural lands, and logistics routes, which affect the reduction of access to food, medicine, etc. The purpose of the study was to determine the main factors of successful international cooperation from the point of view of planning a recovery strategy based on the analysis of the literature and the assessment of the effectiveness of the post-war reconstruction of the Kyiv region. The methods of analysis, synthesis, grouping, visualisation and generalisation of results were used to achieve the goal. According to the results of the study, critical aspects of international cooperation were established: the creation of international platforms for informing about the need for assistance for reconstruction, such as the Ukraine Recovery Conference and the Crimean Platform, determining the importance of cooperation between partner cities, the formation of a state and local institutions in the field of reconstruction and the creation of funds to ensure implementation of state restoration projects. Using the example of the recovery of the Kyiv region, the effectiveness of the interaction of state, regional, international and charitable institutions has been demonstrated, and their role in the recovery strategy planning has been assessed. Favourable and unfavourable conditions for implementing a successful strategy for the recovery of post-war regions have been identified.

INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian crises arise from epidemics and natural disasters in countries with low economic development and military conflicts. Russian aggression against Ukraine has caused a large-scale humanitarian crisis, especially in frontline towns and villages. The aggressor carries out constant shelling without a selective principle; therefore, objects far from military targets often suffer from shelling. So, those cities located directly on the line of the battle are unfit for life. Once upon a time, Bakhmut, Maryinka, and Severodonetsk were calm and comfortable cities for life, but after long and brutal battles, they became ruins. Almost no intact buildings are left in the frontline cities and villages; humanitarian facilities such as hospitals, schools, and social institutions must also be fixed

due to direct damage or the lack of workers evacuated to safer regions. While children mostly manage to be taken out to other cities, such socially vulnerable segments of the population as older people and people with disabilities refuse to leave their homes and remain without qualified assistance. Another aspect is infrastructure damage, which causes a lack of electricity, water, gas and heat in homes. Due to fear for their lives under shelling, there are few workers, so people cannot access food and hygiene products. Humanitarian missions are often unable to reach cities whose routes are under fire, which minimises the effectiveness of such assistance.

However, the brutality of the aggressor is not limited to the destruction of people's lives in the frontline settlements because regular massive missile attacks by Ukraine cause a humanitarian and economic crisis in all regions. The destruction of energy infrastructure facilities mainly causes the humanitarian crisis. In contrast, the economic crisis is caused by the outflow of the working population. Namely, women evacuated to other countries, and men mobilised for the army.

While the restoration of most of the frontline destroyed cities is difficult to imagine, the example of the restoration of the cities and villages of Kyiv region, as well as the adaptation of life to war conditions in other regions, makes it possible to understand how to build a long-term and effective strategy for overcoming the humanitarian and economic crisis with the involvement of active international cooperation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Human life is the most significant value in the world, so solving humanitarian problems is paramount and is the focus of many scientists. Military conflicts, which pose a direct threat to the lives and health of the inhabitants of the warring countries, cause large-scale humanitarian problems, which, in combination with economic and food crises, often remind the concept of genocide (Bachman, 2020). In the world, there are numerous international organisations that, in conflict situations, do not intervene directly in resolving military and political conflicts but are engaged in solving humanitarian problems faced by peaceful residents. International cooperation is vital in protecting the civilian population and combating humanitarian challenges during the war and post-war reconstruction (Bogdan & Jovanovic, 2023; Nasir et al., 2024; Romero-Carazas et al., 2024).

Post-war reconstruction requires global approaches since the war, as an ongoing humanitarian and economic crisis, brings the destruction of housing, infrastructure, health care facilities, communication systems, and communal and social services that affect people's well-being (Martin-Shields & Stojetz, 2019; Kemmerling et al., 2022). For the complete restoration of settlements, it is necessary to ensure the reconstruction of all components, which requires significant resources and financial costs. Therefore, international support is an essential aspect of post-war reconstruction. Taking into account the experience of other countries, the possibility of effective and rapid reconstruction increases, which reduces the suffering of war-weary residents.

Kudumovic (2020) emphasises the importance of rebuilding buildings using the authenticity of architecture, as shown in the example of Bosnia, where the rebuilding of memorials and historical monuments contributed to the active involvement of the community in reconstruction and reconciliation. Kindzerski (2022) considers the restoration of the infrastructure, including the energy infrastructure, to be a priority, which should primarily include its modernisation but not the reconstruction of outdated technologies. The strategy of building new high-tech enterprises is described by Gupta et al. (2021) because it proved the success of the economic development of Japan when, after assessing the financial investments required for the reconstruction and modernisation of old factories, a decision was made to create new enterprises according to modern standards and introducing the latest technologies.

The quality of the health care system is of great importance for the population's well-being. Thus, a large number of rocket attacks on healthcare institutions and infrastructure objects indicates

deliberate actions of Russia to intensify the humanitarian crisis of the population of Ukraine, as a result of which people do not get access to qualified medical care, which leads to an increase in the level of infectious diseases and exacerbations chronic diseases (Haque et al., 2022). Rosa et al. (2022) identify the challenge of providing palliative care and access to pain relief for vulnerable populations, such as the critically ill, in the context of a dignified death without suffering. Patel and Erickson (2022) describe the short- and long-term effects of war and migration on the mental and physical health of civilians. Outbreaks of infectious diseases, lack of dispensary supervision of patients with chronic diseases and preventive measures, including cancer screening, are among the short-term ones. In the long term, they predict an increase in the level of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Military actions also have a catastrophic impact on the environment; in particular, such terrorist actions as the explosion of the Kakhovka hydroelectric power station require the search for approaches to post-war recovery from the point of view of ecology. In the pre-war period, an environmental and economic policy was implemented by the principles of decentralisation and the experience of European countries, the purpose of which was the rational use of natural resources, the creation of environmental standards and a register of objects that pollute the environment (Artyushok et al., 2023). However, the war caused new challenges, the first of which was demining, fires from shelling, releasing combustion products into the atmosphere, using chemical substances, etc. Despite such conditions, the principle of ecological decentralisation and effective ecological administration contribute to restoring the ecology of post-war regions. In turn, new modernised factories will reduce environmental pollution by harmful substances.

Sousa et al. (2022) emphasise the importance of protecting the environment from the consequences of armed conflict and consider the possibility of creating an international funding body to conserve biodiversity in war zones. Another aspect is the negative impact on the environment, which carries the risks of climate change. For Ukraine, which is characterised by the development of agriculture, changes in climatic conditions, such as warming, a decrease in the level of fresh water, and drought, can cause a food and economic crisis due to a decrease in harvest (Dvigun et al., 2022).

Thus, the post-war reconstruction should be comprehensive and include the parallel restoration of the housing stock, infrastructure facilities, and medical, social, educational and cultural institutions. The recovery strategy should include both state and international funding within the framework of practical cooperation, including reforming the tax system and building a plan for the country's economic development (Bogdan & Jovanovic, 2023).

The study aimed to determine the main vectors of international cooperation to ensure the country's effective post-war recovery and analyse the effectiveness of the post-war recovery strategy based on the reconstruction of the Kyiv region.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The experience and strategies of international cooperation in the post-war reconstruction of countries that suffered from armed conflicts are analysed. The main directions of cooperation were determined, and the effectiveness of their implementation was evaluated using the reconstruction of the Kyiv region as an example. Analysis, synthesis, grouping, visualisation, and generalisation of results were used.

RESULTS

The restoration of Ukraine requires a comprehensive approach and international support. However, this process can hardly be called post-war because it occurs during the active phase of the war. Despite the challenges that arise during the reconstruction of facilities without ending the armed conflict, namely the risk of repeated attacks on already rebuilt facilities and infrastructure,

international partners support the immediate reconstruction initiative. At the conference organised by the G7 countries in October 2022, the decision to rebuild Ukraine was supported today (Gravingholt et al., 2023). At the Ukraine Recovery Conference in July 2022, the government of Ukraine presented a recovery plan based on the principle of building better than it was by EU standards. Modernisation will include the principle of green and digital transformation of the country with priority restoration of infrastructural facilities, housing, health care facilities, education, etc., and long-term institutional changes, which are requirements for joining the EU (Bergmann & Romanyshyn, 2022).

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, international partners have supported weapons, humanitarian aid, refugee reception and finance. The aid scheme of donor countries is shown in Figure 1.

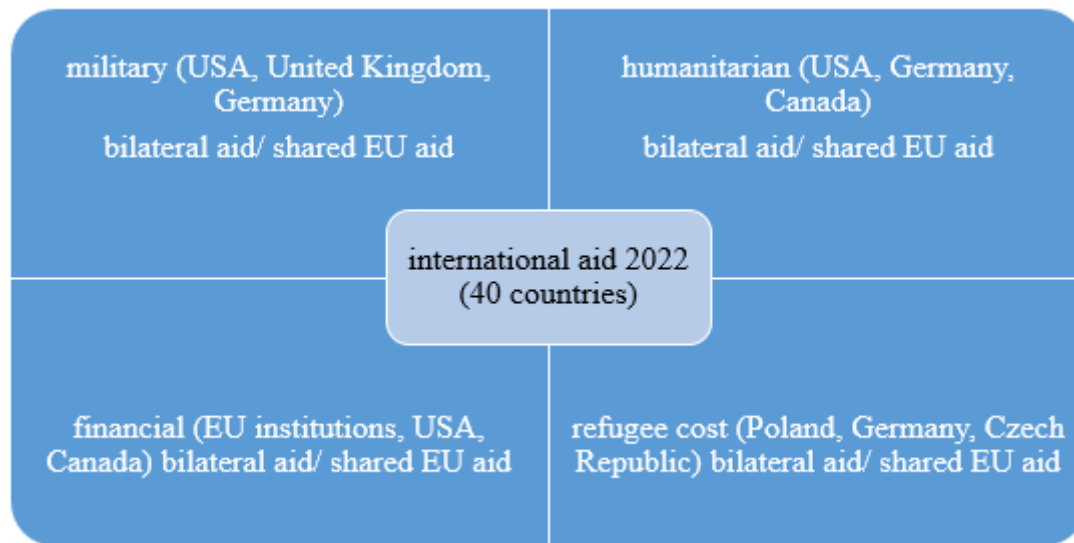


Figure 1: The structure of aid from donor countries in 2022
Source: created by the author based on Trebesch et al., 2022

As can be seen from the chart, the US ranks first in terms of the monetary equivalent of aid, with a predominance of arms packages. In contrast, EU institutions take second place with a predominance of financial support. Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic are leading among the countries with the highest costs for maintaining refugees. The aid is provided either as part of a bilateral agreement or as part of EU aid. Countries choose the method of assistance that is the most profitable for them. Among the 40 countries, most support occurs within the framework of EU institutions: The European Peace Facility, Macro-Financial Assistance Programme, EU Civil Protection Mechanism and European Investment Bank. Such extensiveness of the international aid system requires active international work of Ukrainian diplomats, who act through EU institutions and directly with representatives of partner countries. The complexity of the process lies in the weak coordination of actions and the long-term organisation of financing and time to receive aid, primarily from the military.

In this way, donor countries mitigate the consequences of the humanitarian crisis by financing programmes and missions in Ukraine and abroad. For reconstruction, conferences and platforms are created that demonstrate a strategic action plan. Thus, even before the war, the Crimean platform was created, which had the purpose of reminding about the status of Crimea, the continuation of the sanctions and raising the issue of observing human rights on the occupied peninsula, especially people of Crimean Tatar nationality and with pro-Ukrainian views, which after the full-scale invasion became even more relevant.

An essential key to effective recovery was the concept of the city's role not only as an object of reconstruction but also as a subject. Moreover, with this understanding, the city authorities are engaged in building international relations to attract international donors at the local level. There are two ways to develop these relations – bilateral relations in partner cities and international contacts in city networks (Anakina et al., 2022). Thanks to decentralisation, the regional government managed to allocate resources independently, which allowed it to quickly place internally displaced persons in the community and receive and distribute humanitarian aid. Before the war, the partner cities in their cooperation included cultural and educational cooperation and exchange of experience in decentralisation and management; then, after the war, the emphasis shifted to humanitarian aid, namely the provision of food, medicine, and housing for internally displaced persons and vehicles (see Figure 2) (Szapak et al., 2023).

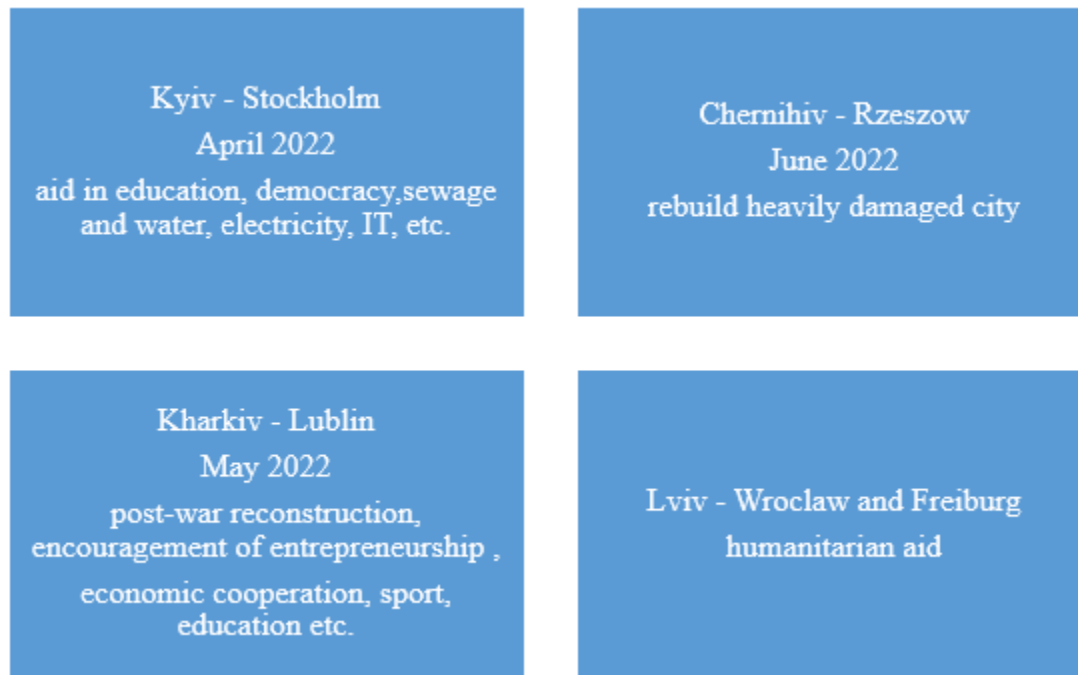


Figure 2: Creation of partner cities after the start of a full-scale invasion on 24.02.2022
Source: created by the author based on Anakina et al., 2022

In August 2022, the Eurocities conference was created, which included 200 European cities that pledged to participate in the reconstruction of Ukrainian cities, namely the reconstruction of schools, hospitals and critical infrastructure. In April 2023, the Declaration of the International Summit was held in Kyiv, which brought together representatives of local self-governments in Europe and the United States, at which the way to rebuild cities was determined based on the "bottom-up" principle. This conference promoted cooperation and coordination of the work of partner cities and their active participation in the reconstruction of Ukraine based on the provision of political, financial, humanitarian and technical assistance at the regional level (Szapak et al., 2024).

In general, the initiative of intercity cooperation provided primarily for humanitarian and financial assistance and the exchange of experience and knowledge. The following organisations and platforms were created for active cooperation: the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine, "Cities4cities platform", "ReStart Ukraine", Tapping into local intelligence for post-war reconstruction of Ukrainian cities", "PLATFORMA", "Eurocities" and smaller-scale initiatives, such as individual reconstruction of a particular object, involvement of charitable organisations, etc. In general, such a decentralisation initiative contributed to the rapid

reconstruction of the housing stock, energy, communal and transport infrastructure, and educational and medical institutions.

Practical international cooperation requires effective state administration and the creation of a recovery plan on priority and expediency. Thus, the priorities include restoring energy infrastructure, water supply, and road restoration to ensure logistics. Special funds have been created for the quick allocation of funds while avoiding bureaucratic mechanisms: the small and medium-sized business support fund, the army support fund, the economic recovery and transformation fund, the humanitarian fund, the state debt service and repayment fund, the fund for the restoration of property and destroyed infrastructure.

In the Kyiv region, more than 26,900 objects were destroyed after the occupation, among which private estates with or without houses (more than 21,900) were the most affected. Figure 3 and Figure 4 show the results of Kyiv's post-war reconstruction, including international aid mechanisms.

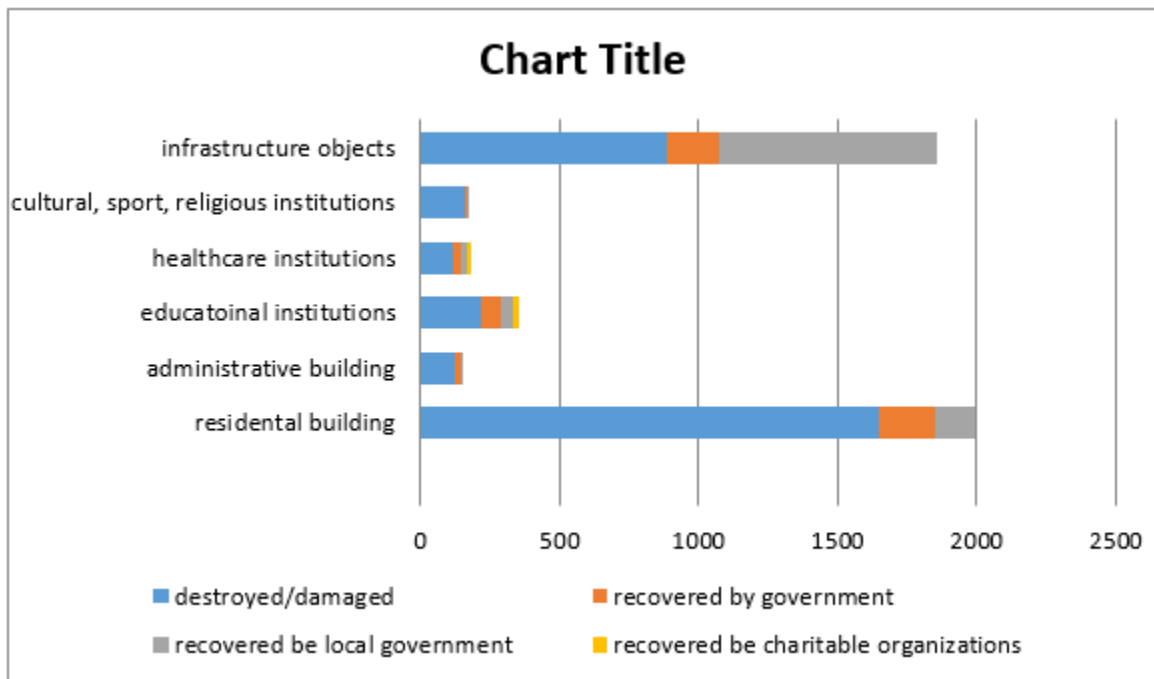


Figure 3: The structure of restored and damaged institutions in the Kyiv region as of the beginning of 2023

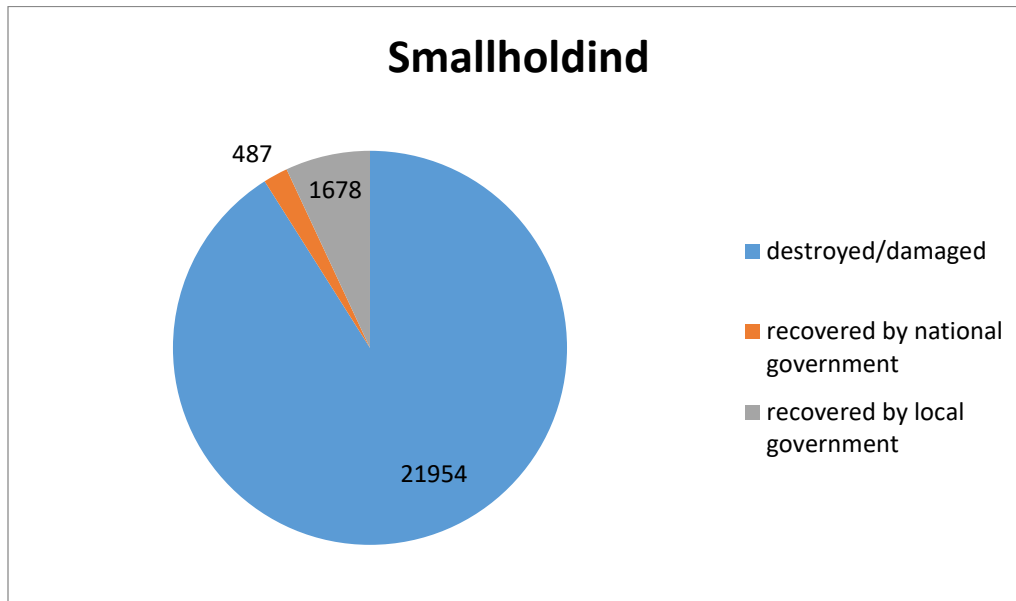


Figure 4: The state of restoration of damaged homesteads as of the beginning of 2023
Source: created by the author based on the Programme of a comprehensive restoration of the Kyiv region for 2023–2027

As can be seen from the figures, the post-war reconstruction includes both state and regional and charitable financing mechanisms. Moreover, local authorities, including mechanisms of international aid, are primarily involved in restoring infrastructure facilities. This indicates that local authorities better understand the need for the importance of this or that infrastructure facility for the community. On the contrary, charitable organisations focus the most on restoring healthcare facilities and preschool and secondary educational institutions. The reconstruction of private houses and apartments is engaged in by both the state and local management apparatus.

The success of the reconstruction of Kyiv Oblast depends on a competent strategic approach that includes the region's social, economic, and technological development. Social development includes access to quality education, health care, sports, and cultural activities, as well as the creation of comfortable living conditions, environmental safety, and environmental protection. Economic programmes include supporting the development of enterprises, high-tech agriculture, and the creation of priority conditions for developing small and medium-sized businesses. Technological includes development, digitalisation, innovative ecosystem and intelligent specialisation of the region. The development of smart specialisation of the region includes using the region's strengths and available resources.

DISCUSSION

Post-war reconstruction began by stabilising the front line and de-occupating Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy and part of Kharkiv regions. International partners see favourable conditions for reconstruction even without ceasing armed conflict. Gravingholt et al. (2023) see the following signs as favourable: statehood, which is perceived by both citizens and politicians with different views, and professional administration, which distinguishes Ukraine from other states that suffered from armed conflicts. Despite Ukraine's significant and unanimous support, the authors recognise that the support of the EU and the USA is quite limited compared to other wars. For example, when analysing the percentage of donor costs about GDP, the USA spent more money on the wars in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Germany on the war in Kuwait in 1990/1991 than today's financial aid for Ukraine (Trebesch et al., 2023).

Kulikov et al. (2022), investigating in their works the ways of post-war reconstruction of Ukraine through comparison with the experience of other countries, consider the most optimal system of an individualised approach to reconstruction, that is, using the strengths of the region according to the principle of building the economy of the United Arab Emirates. This system involves financing the region's construction with the maximum available resources while developing expensive and unpromising regions is not foreseen. Such a principle was applied to the example of the recovery of the Kyiv region and showed its effectiveness. Following this principle, the regions most affected by hostilities will remain subsidised, as they will need significant financial resources for demining and building new housing estates, communications, and infrastructure facilities. At the same time, human resources, the basis of the area's economic activity, needs to be improved in the frontline settlements due to the need for a working-age population in the region. In this way, the scenario of the economic reconstruction of Ukraine according to the UAE type will lead to a deepening of the humanitarian crisis of the destroyed cities, leaving them in the form of ghost towns.

State support is necessary for the economic reconstruction of the affected regions. After the start of the full-scale invasion, several anti-crisis state measures were adopted, particularly the programme for the development of small and medium-sized businesses, but their effectiveness remains questionable. Alekseieva et al. (2023) recommend assessing the need for state support and financing of enterprises with low profitability instead of establishing clear criteria for selecting promising business projects.

Regarding the reasons that threaten the success of the reconstruction of Ukraine, the political and social crisis and the lack of unity in the state administration bodies are determined (Kulikov et al., 2022). Another reason is the presence of corruption risks since the restoration of Ukraine involves the receipt of a large number of funds from international donors, who are discussing the high level of corruption in state institutions, although, since the reforms in 2014, corruption indicators have decreased, anti-corruption legislation and court reform remain an essential requirement of international partners (Becker et al., 2022; Richter, 2023).

CONCLUSION

International cooperation played a critical role in the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine. However, the reconstruction of Ukraine is already taking place in those cities that were occupied, as well as in settlements far from the front, which suffered the devastating effects of rocket attacks. Practical international cooperation is possible only if a competent state reconstruction management body is established, as professional cooperation coordination is necessary. An important factor is the involvement of regional management bodies in creating partner cities and local networks with international organisations. In the example of the reconstruction of the Kyiv region, the post-war reconstruction demonstrated its expediency and effectiveness even during the active phase of the war and regular missile attacks. However, some challenges need to be resolved, namely the issue of settling the prospect of reconstruction of temporarily occupied territories and frontline settlements by international experience, economic expediency and humanitarian integration.

Author Contributions

I. B.: Conceptualization, Methodology, Resources, Formal analysis, Writing – Original draft, Writing – Review & Editing.

A. I.: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Curation, Writing – Original draft, Writing – Review & Editing.

I. S.: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Project administration, Writing – Original draft, Writing – Review & Editing.

V. S.: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Curation, Writing – Original draft, Writing – Review & Editing.

Ya. B.: Conceptualization, Resources, Formal analysis, Project administration, Writing – Original draft, Writing – Review & Editing.

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