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Social Responsibility in Ukrainian HEIs: Sociological Analysis of Current Situation and Key Trends During the Wartime

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Abstract

The goal of the paper is examination of social responsibility implementation by Ukrainian HEIs, its modifications during wartime and prospective adjustments to fit the purposes of postwar revival. Several methods were applied in this study: content analysis for literature review; survey method to collect and interpret data on USR at Ukrainian HEIs; descriptive and mathematical statistics methods for data processing and presentation; synthesis method and reflexion for analysis, discussion and drafting conclusions. The main findings of the survey are as follows: the dominant share of university community believes that social responsibility policy is present and implemented in their HEIs; for the majority of respondents, university social responsibility is primarily associated with ensuring high quality of education, volunteer activities and philanthropy, responsible research, and educating students to be responsible citizens; academic staff and students are the major agents who initiate projects, programs and events focusing on social responsibility; university social responsibility has intensified with the beginning of fully-fledged war; currently HEIs understand their social responsibility as ensuring safety of students and staff, support to the Ukrainian army, caring for displaced persons, maintaining and restoring mental health of students and staff, as well as other citizens.

1. Introduction

Over the last decades, university social responsibility (hereinafter referred to as USR) is a broadly discussed issue, which is confirmed by a steep increase of publications dedicated to the issue (Meseguer-Sánchez, Abad-Segura, Belmonte-Ureña Luis Jesús & Molina-Moreno, 2020), as well as amount of university projects and networks focusing on USR development and advancement (2nd Asia-Europe Education Workshop; EU-USR; USR-NET; UNIBILITY; The University Social Responsibility Network; APUCEN; Talloires).

Simultaneously with the above discourse, the discussion on reinventing universities is unfolding (UNESCO, 2022), encouraging the latter to be more responsible and responsive, flexible and resilient, innovative and entrepreneurial.

Both themes are relevant for Ukraine – the country at war, fighting to restore its territorial integrity, to preserve its national identity and independence, and simultaneously striving to implement transformations of Europeanization, democratization, economic modernization.

Obviously, these transformations cannot be achieved without support of universities – knowledge institutions that educate a new generation of knowledge workers competent and capable to implement above transformations.

While the quality of higher education (i.e. the capacity of Ukrainian HEIs to contribute to reforms and revival of the country) is a researched and discussed issue, USR does not dominate in the national *universitology* discourse. The need to investigate the state of play with USR in Ukrainian universities is evident. Therefore, a study was necessitated to understand the level of awareness of USR at Ukrainian HEIs, to determine their attitude towards USR and involvement in USR activities and practices. To this end, the survey was undertaken by the Institute of Higher Education of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine in April – May 2023, its results are presented in this paper.

2. Literature review

Several factors precipitated attention of academia and expert community to USR: the formation of knowledge society and the growing role of higher education under knowledge economy (UNESCO, 2005; Lassnigg, Hartl, Unger & Schwarzenbacher, 2017); rethinking the social mission of HEIs and role that they can play in a community, wider society, or globally (UNESCO, 2009; UNESCO, 2015); synchronous processes of democratization and massification of higher education, which compelled citizens to pay more attention to HEIs' operations, to reflect upon what societal benefit they bring and oblige universities to become more accountable and responsible, to report on results and substantiate their value for society (Meyer & Sporn, 2018).

The academic discourse on USR spread over different countries and continents covering East and West, North and global South and unfolded around the following issues:

-       USR as a commitment of HEIs to collaborate with local communities where they are located, to assist and deliver academic and non-academic services to certain social groups, to organize cultural events etc. (TEMPUS ESPRIT; Farnell, 2020; Benneworth, 2013; Petersen Il-haam & Kruss Glenda, 2021);

-       USR as knowledge transfer, cooperation with employers and business, as transformation of research finding into innovations (Piirainen, Dahl Andersen &Andersen, 2016; Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2020; Laredo, 2007);

-       USR as a HEI contribution to sustainable development and attainment of SDGs (Riabchenko, 2021, Riabchenko & Chervona, 2022; Khovrak, 2021; Rome Ministerial Communiqué, 2020; Meseguer-Sánchez, Abad-Segura, Belmonte-Ureña Luis Jesús, Molina-Moreno, 2020, Impact Rankings 2023; Ribeiro et al, 2019);

-       USR as an obligation of universities to contribute "to improvement of soceity as a whole" due to generation and dissemination of new knowledge and their application in different spheres   (UNESCO, 1998; UNESCO, 2009; UNESCO, 2021; Giuffré & Ratto, 2014; Hall & Tandon, 2021);

-       USR as compliance with international law and national legislation, bylaws and rules that a HEI has conscientiously adopted and formulated in the forms of university strategies, policies, codes etc. (Leko Simic, Sharma & Kadlec, 2022; EU-USR, 2015);

-       USR as an obligation to deliver high quality education that is assured by efficient university governance, excellence in teaching and learning, relevant and responsible research, exciting and multifaceted student experience, cooperation with employers etc. (Ogneviuk & Lugovyi, 2022; Grishnova & Bekh, 2014; Gomez, 2014).

In publications by Ukrainian scholars USR emerges as a diverse and complex phenomenon. It is defined and interpreted differently by different authors and schools of thought:

-       «responsible implementation of functions by high quality service provider, exemplary employer, active participant of social activities in society and local community, honest economic and political partner to the government and business partners» (Grishnova & Bekh, 2014);

-       «recognized by all, a mindful and targeted activity of a HEI focused on the formation of social and environmental consciousness of learners, that takes into account interests of external context and stakeholders' groups, aimed at the formation of competitive economy rooted in sustainable development» (Smentyna & Khusainov, 2014);

-       «additional commitments to abide by the principles of responsibility to society in accordance with relevant legal and normative acts. These commitments cover training and nurturing of students, relationship with staff, responsibility to society and employers, as well as future   generations» (Ivanytska, Panchenko, A. & Panchenko, H., 2017);

-       «success factor», important for further university development (Khyzhniak, 2015).

The fully-fledged war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine should have boosted the academic discourse on USR in Ukraine's higher education, but this did not happen. Judging from the above quotes, the complex phenomenon of USR requires further consideration and reflexion by Ukrainian academia, streamlining USR to meet the challenges of wartime and post-war recovery, mobilizing university leadership, staff and students to focus on implementation of Ukraine Recovery Plan.

Meanwhile, it is common knowledge that Ukrainian university communities actively support the Armed Forces of Ukraine, combatants and their families, donate for arms and armaments, support colleagues and students from displaced universities, provide humanitarian and psychological assistance to internally displaced persons. To obtain the true picture on the state of play with implementation of USR by Ukrainian HEIs, the survey «Social responsibility in Ukraine's higher education institutions» was launched by the Institute of Higher Education of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine with the purpose to identify the perception of USR by Ukrainian university communities (leadership, staff, students), current USR practices and future perspectives in the context of rethinking and reinventing the role of Ukrainian HEIs to meet the challenges and needs of postwar revival.

3. Research design and methods used

The goal of the paper is examination of USR implementation by Ukrainian HEIs, its modifications during wartime and prospective adjustments to fit the purposes of postwar revival. To achieve the goal, the following objectives will be attained:

1/ cataloguing of existing USR practices and their transformations with the beginning of the fully-fledged war;

2/ the enquiry on factors that enable or restrict USR at Ukrainian HEIs;

3/ investigation of their vision on prospects and developments of USR, possibility of its streamlining for wartime and postwar revival.

Several methods were applied in this study: content analysis for literature review; survey method to collect and interpret data on USR at Ukrainian HEIs; descriptive and mathematical statistics methods for data processing and presentation; synthesis method and reflexion for analysis, discussion and drafting conclusions.

To a significant degree, the study is rooted in the theoretical research «Policy and mechanisms of USR implementation by Ukrainian HEIs during wartime and post-war revival" conducted by the authors at the Institute of Higher Education during 2021 – 2023. Besides, the consideration of university social responsibility and attention to third university mission has enhanced with the launch of Project Erasmus+ "Universities-Communities: Strengthening Cooperation" (UNICOM, 2023).

Literature review in combination with above-mentioned research findings allowed to outline major approaches and general practices of USR implementation worldwide and helped formulate questions for the survey. The questionnaire is comprised of fourteen questions, grouped into three sections *(Current state of USR*

development in Ukrainian universities; Peculiarities of USR implementation under wartime; Prospective advancement of USR for the benefit postwar revival); the fourth section *General information* contains respondents' personal data (gender, age, their position in a university) and information on a HEI that they represent (size, profile, form of ownership).

The questionnaire contains closed and semi-closed questions (the original questionnaire in Ukrainian is available at Google Drive (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1wZeLfNdLyBF38A2nAyxix0STkLYMlEiN BLeW56YM1X4/edit?ts=658036a1). The closed questions allow answers "yes" / "no" / "difficult to answer" and permit the choice of one answer only or several possible answers. The semi-closed questions, in addition to "yes" / "no" answers, provide one more variant – "other / different", which gives respondents an opportunity to express their opinion, add a comment, dwell upon the issues etc. In other words, semi-closed questions allow to obtain a richer picture of the researched situation.

In the design of the survey purposive sampling technique was used. Unified State Electronic Database on Education (USEDE, 2023) served as the initial resource for the sample. Electronic letters were sent to all 345 HEIs registered in the USEDE, inviting university leadership, academic and administrative staff, PhD, master and bachelor students, as well as other stakeholders, to take part in the survey and fill in the questionnaire in Google Forms format. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. Data collection took place from 28.04.2023 to 15.05.2023; totally 2250 respondents took part in the survey.

Data processing was done with the help of Google Forms instruments and Microsoft Excel, using PivotTable application.

The demographics of respondents are as follows:

- 66,3% are female and 33,3% are male; 0.4% indicated their gender as "other";

- 63,1% of respondents belong to the age group "above 35"; 30,8% represent the age group "between 36 and 60"; 6,1% of respondents are over 60.

As to the position (employment status) of respondents, the dominating number are students:

- 58,5%, or 1492 persons out of total 2250, which explains the young age of survey participants;

- another large group in the survey – 31,3% – are academic personnel, i.e. professors, associate professors, senior teachers, teachers, teacher assistants;

- the rest of respondents position themselves as heads of institutions, heads of structural divisions, postdoctoral and PhD students, researchers.

4. Analysis results and discussion
4.1. Current state of USR development in Ukrainian universities.

Analysis of survey results allows to evaluate the general situation with USR policy implementation in Ukrainian HEIs, identify the opinions of different groups of

respondents with regard to university social responsibility, define most widely spread aspects (components) of USR, and name the major agents of university social responsibility.

So, characterizing the situation regarding social responsibility policy implementation, 65.6% of respondents indicated that their higher education institution has a social responsibility policy, 9.6% report that their higher education institution is just developing a social responsibility policy, only 1.8% believe that their university does not have a USR policy. At the same time, a large share (22.9%) of the respondents indicated that they are unaware and could not assess the situation regarding this issue. (Fig. 1.)
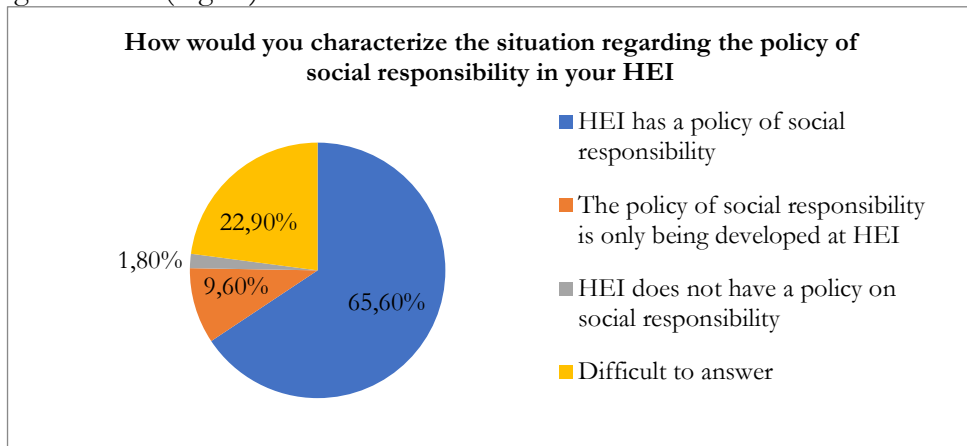

Fig. 1. The general situation of the USR policy, % of respondents

The obtained results testify to a high level of consensus between the interviewed women and men regarding the USR policy in their universities, and no significant differences were found in the assessment of the situation depending on age of respondents.

At the same time, certain discrepancies in the opinions of various categories of university personnel and students regarding the social responsibility policy in their university is observed. Heads of structural subdivisions and academic staff, university leaders and graduate students evaluate the situation regarding the USR policy more optimistically than researchers and students. Students are key players whose opinions matters, but according to the results of the survey, almost a third of the surveyed students could not answer the question about the situation with USR policy at their universities.

Regardless of the form of ownership, higher education institutions have approximately the same level of development of USR policy. A somewhat higher level of implementation of USR policy is characteristic of larger HEIs.

The questionnaire has defined 12 components of USR most commonly practiced by Ukrainian HEI and asked respondents to indicate which are practiced in their

HEIs. The prevalence rate of different USR practices popular at respondents' HEIs is shown in Fig. 2.

According to the results of the survey generalized for the entire sample, the respondents identify the following as the most significant components of the USR: the responsibility of teachers for ensuring high quality of education (86.1%), the participation of teachers and students in volunteer activities and philanthropy (82.7%), educating students to be socially responsible (82.3%), conducting responsible research (82.0%). About 72.0% of respondents noted that they implement social responsibility programs and projects aimed at enhancing interaction of higher education institutions with communities and wider society, and another 61.9% of respondents referred to close cooperation with external stakeholders.
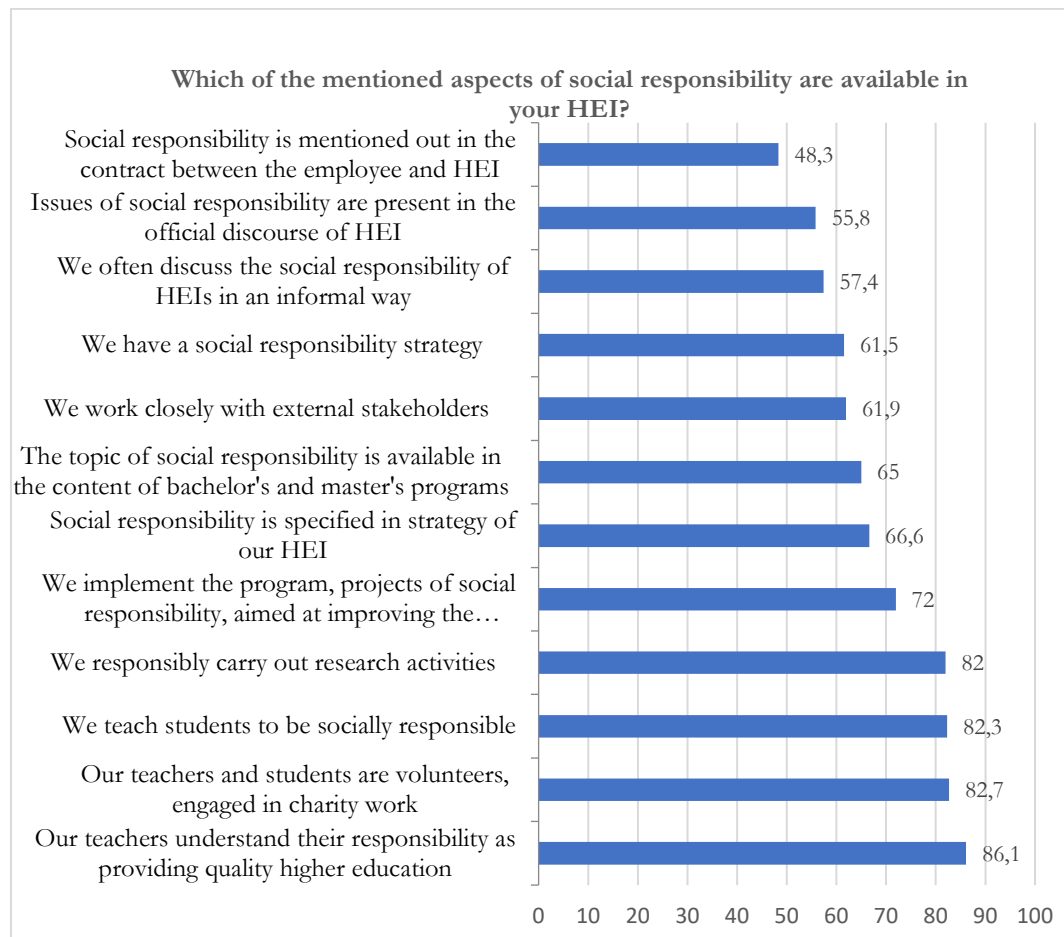

Which of the mentioned aspects of social responsibility are available in your HEI?

Aspect	%
Social responsibility is mentioned out in the contract between the employee and HEI	48,3
Issues of social responsibility are present in the official discourse of HEI	55,8
We often discuss the social responsibility of HEIs in an informal way	57,4
We have a social responsibility strategy	61,5
We work closely with external stakeholders	61,9
The topic of social responsibility is available in the content of bachelor's and master's programs	65
Social responsibility is specified in strategy of our HEI	66,6
We implement the program, projects of social responsibility, aimed at improving the…	72
We responsibly carry out research activities	82
We teach students to be socially responsible	82,3
Our teachers and students are volunteers, engaged in charity work	82,7
Our teachers understand their responsibility as providing quality higher education	86,1

Fig. 2. Components of the USR, % of respondents

A further detailed analysis of responses testify that existing practices of social responsibility implementation are rather unsystematic in Ukrainian HEIs.

Specifically, at HEIs the issues of university social responsibility are more often discussed in an informal way (57.4%) than in the official discourse (55.8%). Meanwhile, the majority of respondents indicated that the goals of social responsibility are defined in the institutional development strategy of a HEI, and near half of respondents indicated that social responsibility is written in the contract concluded between an employee and a HEI.

One of the key principles of effective implementation of university social responsibility policy is to focus on the interests of internal and external stakeholders - university students, HEI personnel, interest groups and society as a whole. The essence of this principle is that every university engages and cooperates with a number of stakeholders that influence its activities at present or may become university partners in the future.

Following respondents' opinions, the key agents of university social responsibility are academic staff (65.6%), students (64.8%) and Rector's Office (56.5%) who systemically initiate projects, programs, events related to social responsibility at their HEIs. As to other groups of respondents, over one third of heads of structural divisions (36.8%), university self-government bodies (36.8%) and administrative staff (35.1%) act as agents of USR at their HEIs.

External stakeholders are also capable to exert a significant influence on USR activities; they include the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (22.4%), partner organizations (18.6%), HEI graduates (12.7%), civil society (12.6%), local and regional authorities (11.2%). 16.2% of respondents indicate that USR projects or policies were prompted by present-day societal challenges. According to respondents' opinion, the share of USR initiatives inspired by authorities, global society, accreditation agencies, parents and other HEIs is minimal. (Fig.3).
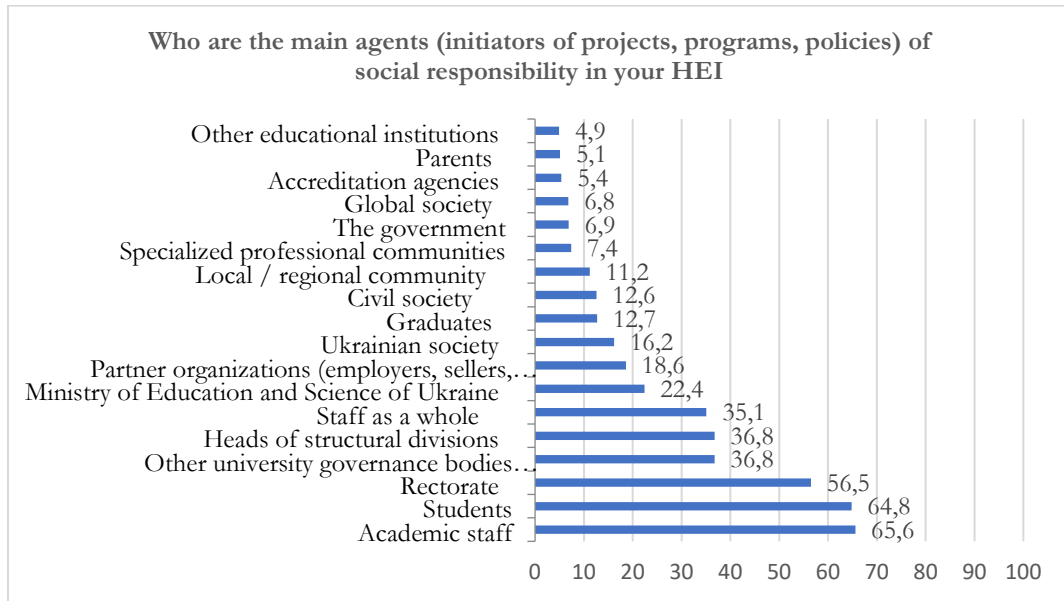
Fig. 3. The main agents (initiators of projects, programs, policies) of the USR, % of respondents

4.2. Peculiarities of USR implementation under wartime.

The full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation had an impact on all spheres of life in Ukrainian society, on the functioning of higher education institutions and approaches to their socially responsible activities. The vast majority of respondents (62.0%) believe that with the beginning of full-scale military aggression, USR activities in Ukrainian higher education institutions intensified. Only 11.7% of respondents consider that the situation with social responsibility has not changed, another 3.4% of respondents indicated that at their HEIs, social responsibility has weakened. About 23.0% of respondents were unable to answer this question (Fig. 4).
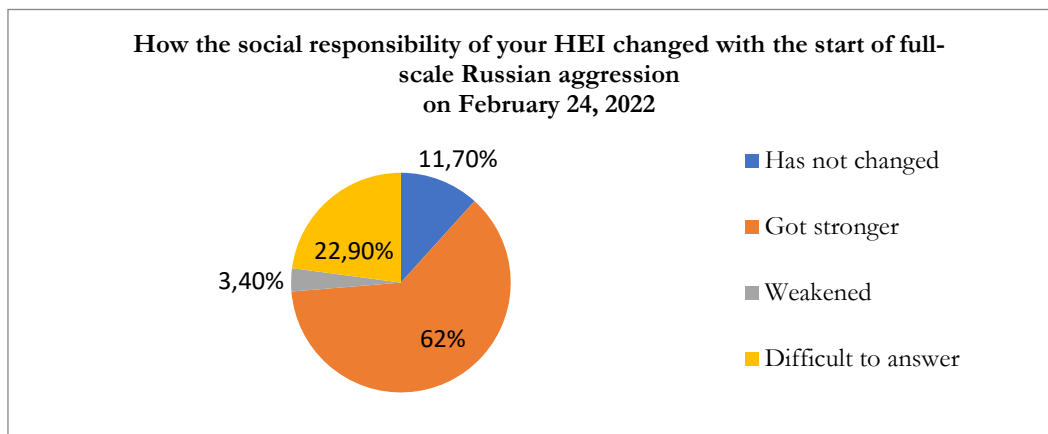

Fig. 4. USR changes with the beginning of full-scale Russian aggression, % of respondents

During the war, such forms of USR as psychological support, humanitarian aid, financial support for students, and financial support for staff became prominent in respondents' universities.

The dominating aspects of social responsibility prevailing in Ukrainian universities today are primarily (Fig. 5):

- caring and creating a safe environment for students and staff (72.7%),
- high-quality teaching and learning (61.3%),
- aid to the military (56.2%),
- assistance to forcibly displaced persons (47.6%),
- maintaining and restoring the health of students and staff, mental health (44.0%),
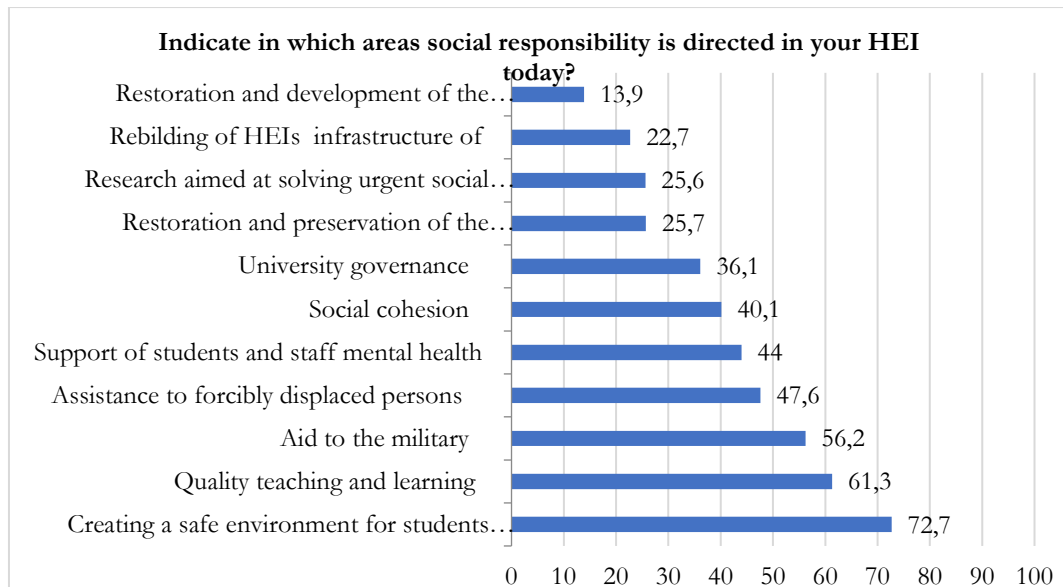- events facilitating social cohesion (40.1%).

Indicate in which areas social responsibility is directed in your HEI today?

Area	%
Restoration and development of the…	13,9
Rebilding of HEIs infrastructure of	22,7
Research aimed at solving urgent social…	25,6
Restoration and preservation of the…	25,7
University governance	36,1
Social cohesion	40,1
Support of students and staff mental health	44
Assistance to forcibly displaced persons	47,6
Aid to the military	56,2
Quality teaching and learning	61,3
Creating a safe environment for students…	72,7

Fig. 5. Key aspects of USR under wartime, % of respondents

Respondents were asked to identify the factors that contribute to the development of the university social responsibility. 73.7% indicated that the most significant factor is a clear message explaining the essence and significance of the social responsibility activities. Other important factors, in respondent's opinion, are initiatives of university leadership (51.8%), initiatives of students (48.3%) and academic staff (39.5%), as well as public (state funded) programs (46.2%), positive experience of Ukrainian HEIs (41.6%) and foreign HEIs (37.1%), international financial support (39.9%) and partnership with business and communities (36.3%). (Fig. 6).

What factors, in your opinion, will contribute to the development of university social responsibility?

Factor	%
Partnership with business, community	36,3
Positive experience of USR of foreign HEIs	37,1
Initiatives of the personnel of our HEI	39,5
International financial support	39,9
Positive experience of USR of Ukrainian HEIs	41,6
HEI policy and recommendations	43,8
State programs	46,2
Initiatives of our students	48,3
Initiatives of uniersity leadership	51,8
A clear understanding of the essence and…	73,7

Fig. 6. Factors that contribute to the development of university social responsibility, % of respondents

Another question dealt with barriers to practicing USR at Ukrainian HEIs (Fig. 7). According to the majority of respondents, the major barrier is the lack of financial support for universities' initiatives (52.5%). Other obstacles include: lack of positive experience, unavailability of best practices of USR implementation by Ukrainian universities (36.5%), lack of exchange of information on USR both within and between higher education institutions (31.4%), absence of assessment and evaluation of the impact of USR (15.9%) and system of recognition and awards (21.2%), work and study in distance format (56.5%), forced migration of staff and students due to the war (34.8%), displacement and relocation of higher education institutions (17.8%) and lack of social accountability and reporting (8.3%).
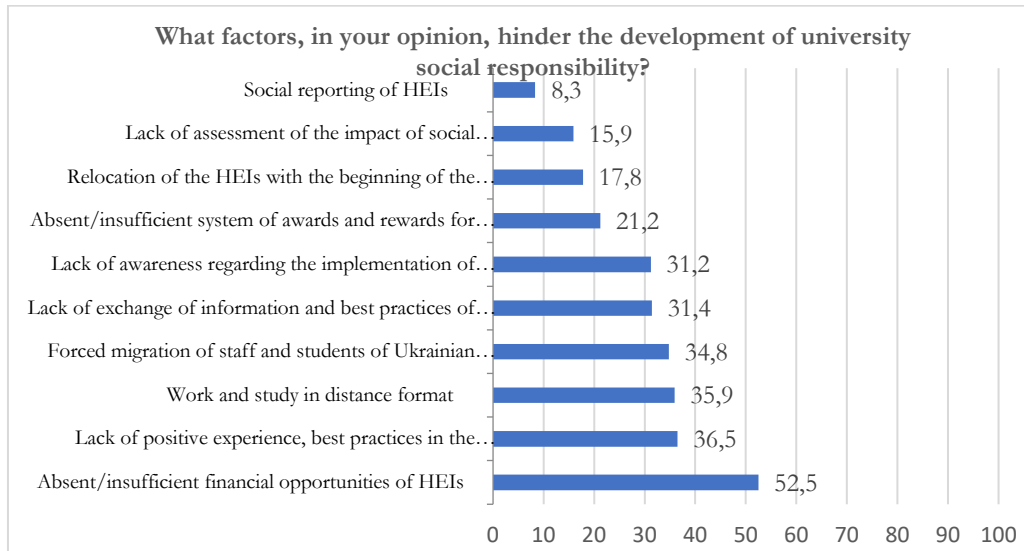
What factors, in your opinion, hinder the development of university social responsibility?

Social reporting of HEIs	8,3
Lack of assessment of the impact of social…	15,9
Relocation of the HEIs with the beginning of the…	17,8
Absent/insufficient system of awards and rewards for…	21,2
Lack of awareness regarding the implementation of…	31,2
Lack of exchange of information and best practices of…	31,4
Forced migration of staff and students of Ukrainian…	34,8
Work and study in distance format	35,9
Lack of positive experience, best practices in the…	36,5
Absent/insufficient financial opportunities of HEIs	52,5

Fig. 7. Obstacles to social responsibility, % of respondents

4.3. Prospective advancement of USR for the benefit postwar revival.

While answering the questions on the future of USR, the respondents outlined several following priority directions for USR advancement, streamlining its focus for reconstruction and postwar recovery of Ukraine (Fig. 8).
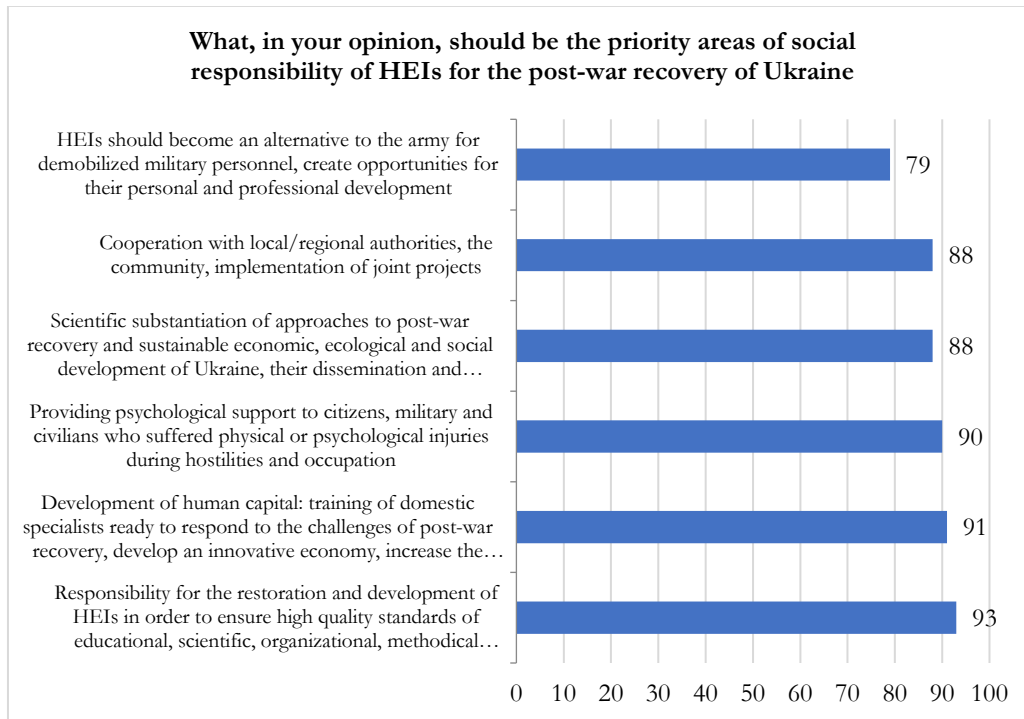
What, in your opinion, should be the priority areas of social responsibility of HEIs for the post-war recovery of Ukraine

HEIs should become an alternative to the army for demobilized military personnel, create opportunities for their personal and professional development	79
Cooperation with local/regional authorities, the community, implementation of joint projects	88
Scientific substantiation of approaches to post-war recovery and sustainable economic, ecological and social development of Ukraine, their dissemination and…	88
Providing psychological support to citizens, military and civilians who suffered physical or psychological injuries during hostilities and occupation	90
Development of human capital: training of domestic specialists ready to respond to the challenges of post-war recovery, develop an innovative economy, increase the…	91
Responsibility for the restoration and development of HEIs in order to ensure high quality standards of educational, scientific, organizational, methodical…	93

Fig. 8. The priority directions of the USR for post-war reconstruction of Ukraine, % of respondents

Based on respondents' opinions, we conclude that the prospective priority directions of university social responsibility at Ukrainian HEIs are as follows:

- responsibility for the recovery and development of HEIs, to ensure high quality standards of educational, research and third mission of university through the cooperation and partnership;

- development of human capital, providing of psychological support to citizens, military and civilians who suffered mental and physical injuries during the war;

- R&D support, provision of knowledge services in support of post-war recovery and sustainable economic, ecological and social development;

- making HEIs a hub for war veterans, former combatants, an alternative to the army upon their demobilization military.

5. Conclusions

The survey "Social responsibility in higher education institutions of Ukraine" has clarified the situation with implementation of university social responsibility by Ukrainian HEIs. The analysis of results demonstrates a rather positive picture of university social responsibility perception and implementation by university communities: over 65% of respondents are positive that social responsibility policy exists in their HEIs, and 62% are confident that university social responsibility has strengthened with the beginning of fully-fledged war. Meanwhile, almost a quarter of respondents are unaware of social responsibility policy at their university.

Under wartime, university social responsibility primarily focuses of establishing a safe environment and ensuring safety of students and staff, high-quality teaching and learning, aid to the military, mental health support and resilience programs.

According to the study, the key agents of university social responsibility who initiate and participate in projects, programs and events are academic staff and students.

The survey allowed to identify factors that facilitate development university social responsibility and impediments to it. The former are a clear understanding of essence of university social responsibility and awareness of its significance for university communities, as well as university leadership initiatives, state-funded programs, recommendations and guidelines for Ukrainian HEIs on the development and implementation of social responsibility policy. The obstacles to the development of university social responsibility include limited financial opportunities of HEIs, lack of experience and knowledge of approaches and practices of university social responsibility implementation by domestic and foreign universities, work and study in a distance format, forced migration.

In general, respondents agree that universities should contribute to reconstruction and postwar revival, but such exposure of their social responsibility is insignificant. Considering the growing social role of universities, their capacity to contribute to reconstruction, revival and social transformations, Ukrainian HEIs should enhance their social responsibility, augment links with academic and non-academic partners,

engage and collaborate with internal and external stakeholders, contribute to the development at the local, regional, national and transnational levels.

The project "University – Community: Strengthening Cooperation" (UNICOM, 2023) can become a trigger for boosting university social responsibility, streamlining it for the purposes of deep societal transformations: social-economic development, Europeanization, democratization, social inclusion and cohesion.

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