

UNDERSTANDING DIALOGUE IN UKRAINE: A SURVEY-BASED STUDY

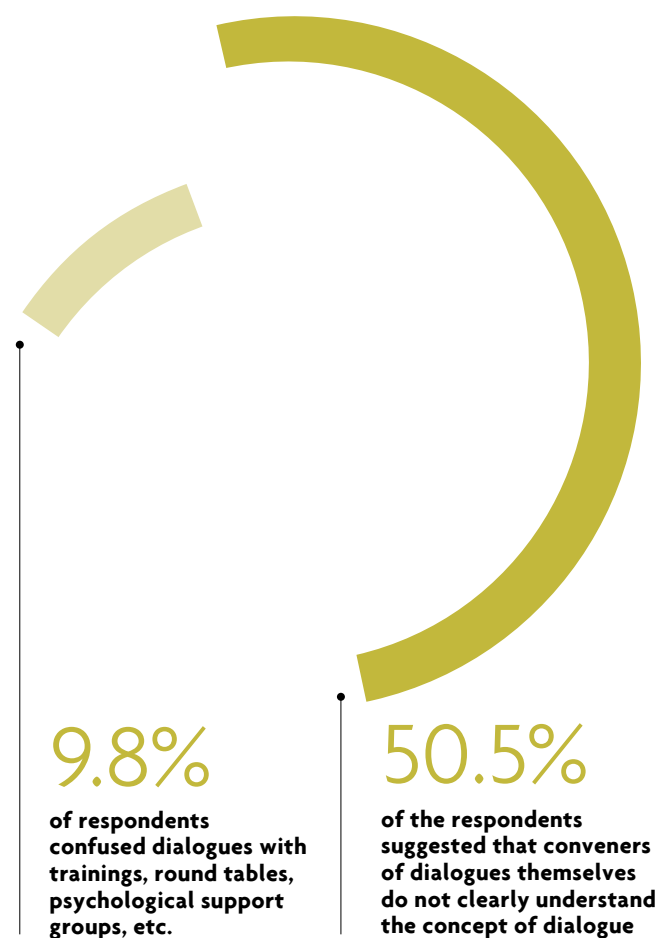
Summary of research findings and implications

A survey of participants in track-three dialogues was conducted between March and April 2018 by the Mediation and Dialogue Research Center, Kyiv-Mohyla Academy.

109 respondents – dialogue participants excluding facilitators and conveners – from 17 oblasts of Ukraine took part in the survey and provided information on 157 dialogues conducted by 66 different organisations in 2014-2018.

The goal of the study was to obtain quantitative data in order to test hypotheses developed during an earlier study about patterns and risks relating to track-three dialogues in Ukraine.¹

¹The hypotheses were developed in a 2016-2017 research project: see Kyselova, Tatiana & von Dobreneck, Julia, [Track III Dialogues in Ukraine: Major Patterns and Resulting Risks](http://www.peacemediation.de), Research Based Policy Paper, Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and Center for Peace Mediation, Frankfurt/Oder (2017), <http://www.peacemediation.de>



Pattern 1.

Lack of clarity in how the term “dialogue” is used

The research confirmed the hypothesis that practitioners and participants understand dialogue to include a wide range of concepts and that there is a general overuse of the term “dialogue” to label any public event. Despite respondents being given a definition of dialogue in the introduction to the questionnaire, 9.8% of respondents confused dialogues with trainings, round tables, psychological support groups, etc. 50.5% of the respondents suggested that conveners of dialogues themselves do not clearly understand the concept of dialogue, and organise events that, in respondents’ views, are not dialogues.

The finding that the population does not yet understand the concept and principles of dialogue is not unexpected. It is more important that donors and conveners of dialogue events are able to differentiate between professionally facilitated dialogues, on the one hand, and dialogue-related and peacebuilding activities such as trainings, debates, strategic communication events, art projects, street festivals, exchanges, etc., on the other hand; and, consequently, apply different principles and implementation strategies to these two types of activities. Conveners and facilitators are advised to clearly articulate to participants the goal, objectives and expected results of their events at every stage of the process.

Pattern 2.

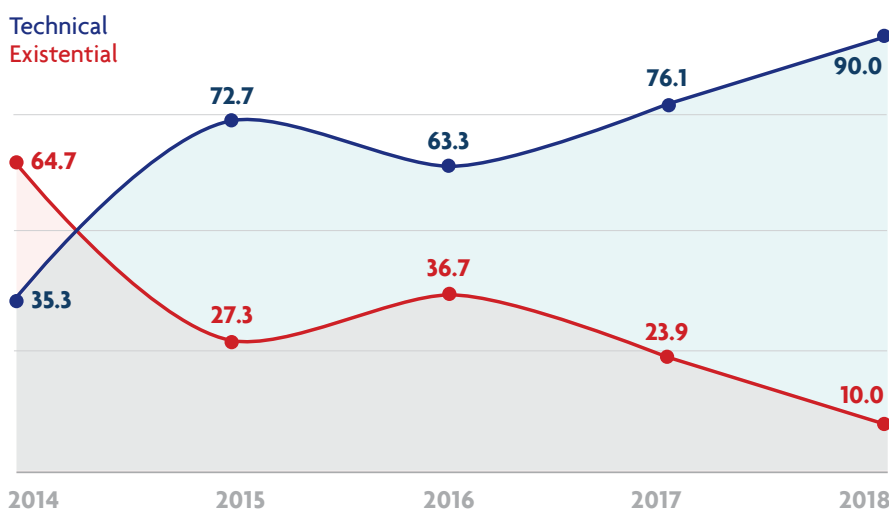
Dialogues on technical issues outnumber those on identity or existential themes

The research confirmed the hypothesis that dialogues on technical issues (decentralisation and other reforms; interaction between authorities and citizens; social cohesion and problems of local communities; integration of IDPs, etc.) are considerably more frequent than existential dialogues (religion, historic memory, Ukraine's

future; different identities of Ukrainian citizens; relations between Ukraine and Russia; conflict in the east of Ukraine, etc.) The number of technical dialogues has increased in 2017-2018 compared to 2014-2015.

The increased focus on technical issues and low demand for existential dialogues identified by this study do not imply an automatic imperative for practitioners to increase or decrease the number of dialogues in one or the other category. It is likely that the prevalence of techni-

cal dialogues reflects a strategic choice on the part of dialogue actors. Yet, apart from pragmatic reasons for such a choice, it is important that dialogue actors are conscious of, and, where appropriate, explicit about, the theories of change that underpin their approaches. This is particularly important in cases where dialogue conveners are looking to make an impact on the hybrid conflict in Ukraine, which requires both working on the cessation of violence and engagement with the wider societal processes of democratisation in Ukraine.



Dynamics of technical/existential dialogues (percentage)

Pattern 3.

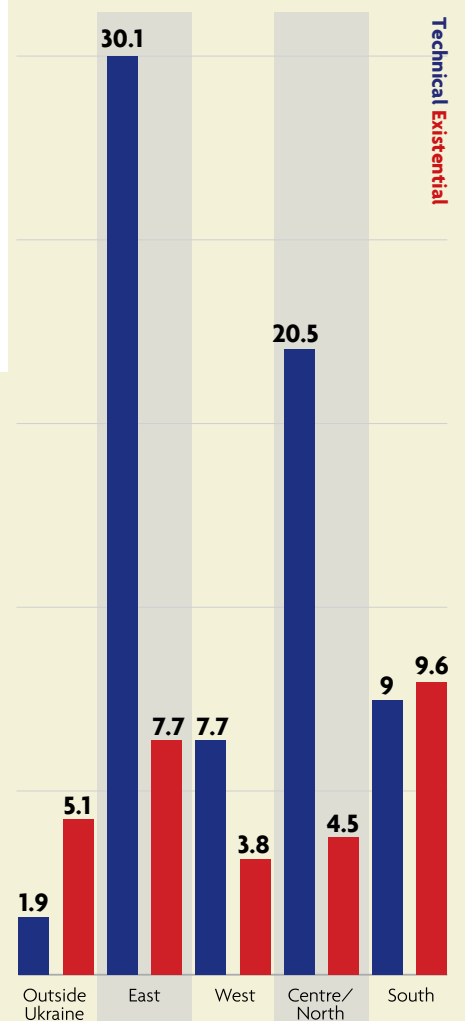
Dialogues are held more frequently in the east of Ukraine

The research confirmed the hypothesis that the majority of dialogues are being conducted in the government-controlled parts of eastern Ukraine, although the geography of dialogues has slightly expanded to other regions since 2015.

The expansion of the geography of

dialogues to other parts of Ukraine is a positive sign. Such work can help to deal with polarisation between regions in Ukraine by creating shared experiences among Ukrainians on how issues can be addressed and resolved in a non-confrontational manner. Furthermore, there is a potential to expand the experiences and learning of practitioners gained in the east to dialogues in other parts of the country.

Technical and existential dialogues divided by region (percentage)



Pattern 4.

The vast majority of dialogues are between people holding mainstream political views

The research confirmed the hypothesis that an overwhelming majority of dialogue participants hold mainstream political views.

81.7%
of the respondents' most memorable dialogues did not include a single person with pro-Russian, anti-Maidan or anti-European views.

The question of inclusion remains problematic, with implications for how Ukrainians representing a full range of public opinion can be engaged in social change. Although this study has confirmed that the hostile political environment provoked by hybrid threats of Russian aggression and the low civic activism of people with non-mainstream political views continue to hold back their inclusion, it has also identified that some strategies of dialogue facilitators and conveners might have been a contributing factor to such exclusion. It is important that technical dialogues,

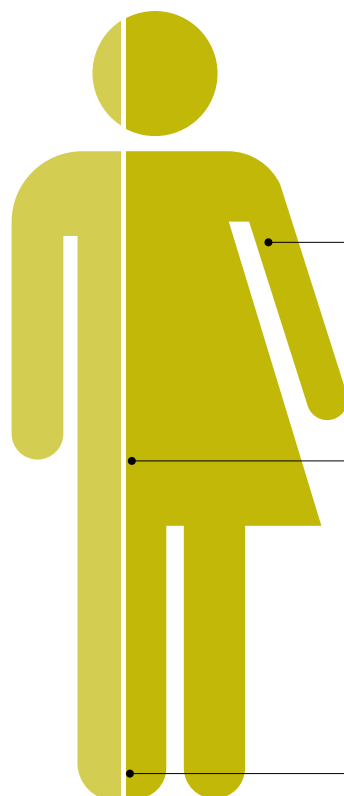
when used as strategic entry points or sequencing mechanisms within broader peacebuilding approaches, should not be used as an excuse to continually exclude parts of the population who hold controversial views. Dialogue conveners and facilitators have to develop a broader vision for how this group of people can be involved at a later stage, or in other ways. More research is required to help practitioners both develop this vision of inclusive dialogues and come up with more practical methodologies for identifying and engaging people with different views.

Pattern 5.

Women are well represented in dialogues and have their views heard in dialogues at the civil society level

The research partially confirmed the hypothesis that women are asymmetrically represented in dialogues. Women constitute 66% of participants and 65.2% of dialogue facilitators; and 94% of respondents answered that women were actively involved in the discussions, and that all their statements were taken into consideration by men.

This study has confirmed that dialogue at track three is an effective mechanism for the inclusion of women in social change processes in Ukraine, both in terms of quantitative representation and qualitative impact on decision making. However, if, despite such favourable conditions at civil society level, women remain excluded from higher political levels (track one, track two) or the final outcomes of dialogues at civil society level remain unimplemented or uninstitutionalised, this might still pose a risk to women's empowerment and inclusion in peace processes in Ukraine. Further research is required to understand these issues.



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Pattern 6.
Dialogues face underlying challenges that affect both their impact and sustainability

The research partially confirmed the hypothesis that dialogue is not fulfilling its potential in terms of reach and impact. On the one hand, 96.4% of respondents think that there is a need to conduct dialogues in their communities. 89% of respondents answered that their most memorable dialogue had improved their understanding of the views of other dialogue participants or improved relations with them. 76.2% of respondents assessed their participation in the dialogue as a positive experience. On the other hand, 75.2% of respondents pointed out problems that impede efficient dialogues.

Respondents in this survey see these impediments not so much as deficient operational strategies, but rather as more fundamental factors - the lack of demand for and information about dialogues, as well as the lack of resources to initiate dialogues. However, these basic impediments are not insurmountable. Only a very few respondents indicated the impossibility of dialogues due to societal distrust or deficient state policies, while the majority raised only problems that are amenable to specific measures such as informational, educational and awareness-raising campaigns for the government and civil society; and the implementation of effective mechanisms for the funding of dialogues and the connection of local needs to facilitators.

Impediments to dialogues (number of comments)

Societal distrust	4
Problems with security during dialogues	4
Lack of systematic implementation approaches	5
Corruption and state policies	6
Insufficient information about dialogues	10
Problems with funding and availability of facilitators	14
Low demand for dialogues	26

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and may not coincide with the official position of the UK government.

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Full text of the report in English, Ukrainian and Russian languages: <http://www.peacefulchange.org/black-sea-region.html>



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