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I. Vinichenko,

Doctor of Economic Sciences, Head of the Department of Economics, Dnipro State Agrarian and Economic University

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9527-1625>

K. Didur,

PhD in Economics, Doctoral candidate of the Department of Economics, Dnipro State Agrarian and Economic University

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8489-0308>

Ye. Kobets,

PhD in Economics, Associate Professor of the Department of Economics, Dnipro State Agrarian and Economic University

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4195-2502>

PRIORITY AREAS FOR THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS

I. I. Вініченко,

*д. е. н., професор, завідувач кафедри економіки,
Дніпровський державний аграрно-економічний університет*

К. М. Дідур,

*к. е. н., докторант кафедри економіки,
Дніпровський державний аграрно-економічний університет*

Є. А. Кобець,

*к. е. н., доцент кафедри економіки,
Дніпровський державний аграрно-економічний університет*

ПРІОРИТЕТНІ НАПРЯМИ СОЦІАЛЬНО-ЕКОНОМІЧНОГО РОЗВИТКУ СІЛЬСЬКИХ ТЕРИТОРІЙ

The article analyses the large-scale transformations experienced by the rural areas of Ukraine as a result of full-scale armed aggression. The destructive consequences of hostilities for the agricultural infrastructure have been studied, including the loss of farmland, grain storage facilities, agricultural machinery, logistics chains, and livestock.

The article outlines the crisis-related changes in the socio-demographic structure of the rural population, including a sharp decline in population numbers, high levels of internal and external migration, population ageing, loss of labour potential, and the emergence of critical demographic burdens. It has been determined that depopulation and wartime challenges are contributing to the degradation of social infrastructure – the closure of schools, medical facilities, cultural centres, libraries, and postal services – leading to a deterioration in rural quality of life and deepening social depression.

It has been revealed that the socio-demographic crisis in Ukraine's rural territories is becoming systemic and requires the implementation of integrated approaches to post-war recovery. It is argued that the revival strategy must include not only the physical reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure but also targeted support for human capital, the development of employment opportunities, stimulation of youth engagement, support for families, educational and cultural initiatives, and the creation of favourable conditions for the return of internally displaced persons.

These communities are capable of ensuring food security, social stability, and cultural continuity. The threat of losing agricultural potential due to the mass outflow of qualified personnel, the decline of traditional farming practices, and the low investment attractiveness of rural areas has been defined. The article proposes approaches to developing a comprehensive state policy focused on the long-term support of rural areas as a key factor in Ukraine's sustainable development and post-war recovery.

У статті проаналізовано трансформації, яких зазнали сільські території України під впливом війни. Досліджено руйнівні наслідки бойових

дій для аграрної інфраструктури, зокрема втрати сільськогосподарських угідь, елеваторних потужностей, агротехніки, логістичних ланцюгів та поголів'я худоби.

Окреслено кризові зміни у соціально-демографічному складі сільського населення: зафіксовано стрімке скорочення чисельності, високий рівень зовнішньої та внутрішньої міграції, старіння населення, втрату трудового потенціалу та формування критичного демографічного навантаження. Визначено, що унаслідок депопуляції та воєнних викликів відбувається деградація соціальної інфраструктури – закриття шкіл, медичних закладів, клубів, бібліотек і поштових відділень, що призводить до зниження якості життя на селі та посилення соціальної депресії.

З'ясовано, що соціально-демографічна криза на сільських територіях України набуває системного характеру і вимагає реалізації інтегрованих підходів до їхнього повоєнного відновлення. Аргументовано, що стратегія відродження має охоплювати не лише фізичну реконструкцію зруйнованої інфраструктури, а й цілеспрямовану підтримку людського капіталу, розвиток сфери зайнятості, стимулювання молодіжної активності, підтримку сімей, освітніх і культурних ініціатив, а також створення сприятливих умов для повернення внутрішньо переміщених осіб.

Визначено загрозу втрати аграрного потенціалу через масовий відтік кваліфікованих кадрів, занепад традиційних форм господарювання та низьку інвестиційну привабливість сільських територій. Запропоновано підходи до формування комплексної державної політики, орієнтованої на довгострокову підтримку села як ключового чинника сталого розвитку та післявоєнного відновлення України.

Keywords: agricultural sector, agro-industrial complex depopulation, food security, infrastructure, labour potential, recovery, rural areas, social policy.

Ключові слова: аграрний сектор, агропромисловий комплекс, відновлення, депопуляція, інфраструктура, продовольча безпека, сільські території, соціальна політика, трудовий потенціал.

Introduction. Rural areas play an important role in ensuring the stable functioning of the agricultural sector, preserving demographic potential, and achieving food security. The countryside serves as the source of production of the main types of food, meets the basic needs of the domestic market, and forms the state's food fund. Under wartime conditions, rural communities have suffered significant destruction, loss of labor resources, disruption of logistics chains, and a decline in investment attractiveness. Therefore, the formation of an effective system of socio-economic support for rural development is part of regional policy and a strategic prerequisite for strengthening the state's food security, the stability of the national economy, and social resilience.

The analysis of the socio-economic prerequisites for the development of rural areas in the post-war period demonstrates growing scholarly attention to the challenges of rural space as a component of food security. Modern challenges related to war, migration processes, destruction of infrastructure, and depopulation stimulate the search for comprehensive approaches to the restoration and modernization of Ukraine's agrarian sector. In the economic literature, the applied aspects of the paradigm of rural development and the socio-economic recovery of villages after the war are explored in various dimensions and published in the scientific works of O. Balatskyi, O. Vasylychuk, O. Hrytsai, N. Popovych, O. Chuprinska, N. Yakovenka [1; 2; 3; 7; 10; 11] and others.

Modern research covers a wide range of issues related to the socio-economic condition of rural areas, but questions remain concerning the development of a holistic model for post-war rural restoration that considers their role in ensuring food security, integrates demographic, infrastructural, and economic factors into systemic rural management, and establishes effective mechanisms for attracting investment and state support to stimulate agricultural production. Further research should deepen the interdisciplinary approach to studying rural areas as spaces that ensure social sustainability and economic viability through the support of national agricultural production.

Problem statement. The purpose of the study is to systematically analyze the socio-economic prerequisites and challenges of rural development in Ukraine under post-war recovery conditions. The study aims to substantiate strategic directions of state support policy and the transformation of rural areas as key components of national revival.

Results of the study. Rural territories of Ukraine have suffered unprecedented destruction during the war. As of the end of 2023, about 30% of agricultural land was located in areas of active hostilities or temporary occupation. Of these, more than 8 million hectares require demining, which significantly limits their economic usability. Infrastructure sustained substantial losses: over 40% of elevator capacity in front-line regions was destroyed, more than 15,000 units of agricultural machinery were lost or removed, and up to 20% of the cattle population was wiped out [4].

In the social dimension, demographic decline poses a particular threat. The rural population continues to shrink at an accelerating pace due to urbanization, forced migration, evacuation from dangerous areas, mobilization, and high mortality rates. In communities located in relatively safe regions, the share of older people is increasing due to the evacuation of youth, men of conscription age, and the economically active population. This reduces agricultural productivity, lowers the demand for new technologies and innovations, and creates further depopulation risks. Negative demographic dynamics reflect structural deformations in the rural social security system. Population decline deprives communities of the critical mass needed to maintain infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, cultural centers, and administrative institutions, leading to their closure or conservation, which further intensifies population outflow and social isolation [11].

The destruction of social infrastructure in rural areas as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion is one of the key factors deepening the socio-demographic crisis. The degradation of basic infrastructure not only restricts rural access to essential services but also drastically reduces communities' potential for recovery, self-reliance, and development [5]. The decline of social infrastructure leads to depopulation, outmigration of youth to cities or abroad, and lower labor

productivity, disrupting seasonal production cycles and innovation potential. According to the analytical report of the Office of Reforms of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, over the past five years the number of farms operating in small communities has decreased by 12%, which is an alarming indicator of the weakening agricultural base [6].

The loss of rural infrastructure is not merely physical destruction – it is also the breakdown of social ties, cultural heritage, and the basic conditions for a decent life. The consequences of this degradation include rising poverty, worsening demographic indicators, and an increased psychosocial burden on communities surviving under extreme conditions. Overcoming these losses requires a clear state strategy for social recovery in rural areas. Such a strategy should include comprehensive damage mapping, prioritization of reconstruction projects based on demographic prospects and functional importance, engagement of international assistance, expansion of local community powers, and the creation of dedicated rural infrastructure funds within national recovery plans.

Agriculture has traditionally played a central role in rural economies. However, the economic efficiency of agricultural production depends on the social environment. The destruction of educational, medical, and cultural infrastructure lowers population engagement in economic activity, leading to labor shortages, reduced output, and slower innovation in the agricultural sector. Therefore, the comprehensive restoration of human capital is a critically important task in post-war recovery.

The socio-economic vitality of rural areas is directly related to food security. The national food system depends on the resilience of local producers, resource availability, and community capacity for self-organization. According to the FAO's food security assessment methodology, the key parameters are food availability, stability, utilization, and physical access. With this in mind, rural development is not merely a regional issue but also a component of national security policy.

Rural development directly influences:

- stability of the internal food market – the functioning of local agricultural producers ensures a continuous and reliable flow of products to local and regional markets, helping to stabilize prices, improve access to essential goods, and reduce market volatility, particularly in times of economic uncertainty or crisis;

- reduction of food import dependence – during periods of conflict or global supply disruptions, import substitution becomes a critical strategy for ensuring economic sovereignty and national resilience, while simultaneously supporting the growth of domestic agricultural capacities and fostering self-sufficiency;

- formation of food reserves for crisis periods – ensuring stable and sufficient harvests, combined with effective storage and logistics systems, contributes to the establishment of strategic reserves of staple products such as grain, sugar, and flour. These reserves help mitigate the risk of shortages during emergencies, natural disasters, or disruptions in international supply chains, thereby strengthening national food security;

- support for economic and social resilience – by enhancing rural production capacities, maintaining employment, and sustaining community livelihoods, rural development reinforces both economic stability and social cohesion, which are essential for the long-term sustainability of national food systems;

- promotion of innovation and sustainability in agriculture – investment in modern technologies, digital solutions, and environmentally sustainable practices within rural areas improves productivity, ensures the efficient use of resources, and enhances the capacity of local communities to adapt to climate change and market fluctuations.

The formation of an effective system of socio-economic support for the development of rural areas in the post-war period is a key factor in restoring the national economy, ensuring food security, and stabilizing the socio-demographic situation. In the conditions of significant infrastructure destruction, reduction of the rural population, and damage to agricultural production, such a system should be

based on a comprehensive, long-term, and multi-level approach that covers institutional, infrastructural, economic, and social aspects.

The first strategic direction is the institutional support of rural development processes. It is necessary to create or strengthen management structures at the national and regional levels capable of effectively coordinating the implementation of recovery programs, developing comprehensive development policies, and ensuring interdepartmental interaction. An example of positive practice is the implementation of regional reconstruction offices within the framework of the initiative “Recovery and Strengthening of Communities” with the support of the European Union. These offices are already operating in 12 regions of Ukraine, ensuring operational planning and implementation of infrastructure, economic, and social projects. Their activities cover the preparation of technical documentation, attracting funding, monitoring implementation, and informing the public. An important element of institutional provision is also the development of regional development programs adapted to local conditions, taking into account natural resource potential, demographic situation, and community priorities [8].

The second area is the modernization of infrastructure, including the rehabilitation of roads, electricity and water supply systems, telecommunications, energy supply, and social infrastructure facilities. As a result of the war, more than 14,000 kilometers of local roads have been destroyed, while more than 2,800 villages remain without proper water supply and 1,900 without gas supply. The restoration of these facilities is a key condition for the return of internally displaced persons, the restoration of agricultural production, and the improvement of quality of life in rural areas. The response to these challenges was the state program “Great Recovery,” which aims to comprehensively restore critical infrastructure, build new modern facilities, and implement the principles of energy efficiency and sustainable development. A separate role is played by multifunctional rural centers – “hubs” –which provide access to educational, medical, administrative, banking, and postal services. In 2023, more than 100 such centers were opened in the central and western regions of Ukraine, which significantly reduced the level of

infrastructural isolation and ensured the integration of rural communities into the national socio-economic space [9].

The third strategic priority is the economic activation of rural areas. The focus of this direction is the support of farming, agricultural cooperation, the development of agricultural processing, the creation of value chains, and the stimulation of non-agricultural employment. In 2023, the “Affordable Loans 5-7-9%” program provided preferential financing in the amount of almost UAH 40 billion for more than 10,000 agricultural producers, which made it possible to modernize production facilities, purchase equipment, and invest in product storage and processing. The cooperative management model, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), allows the reduction of production costs by up to 20%, ensures collective solutions to logistics and sales issues, and increases the profitability of agricultural production. The growth of entrepreneurial activity is also confirmed by the dynamics of the creation of small processing enterprises – their number increased by 17% in 2023, focusing mainly on primary agricultural processing, flour milling, cheese making, and meat products [8].

The fourth area involves strengthening human capital and social infrastructure. It concerns the development of a network of educational, medical, and cultural institutions, improving access to social services, creating conditions for the return of young people to the countryside, and preserving human potential. Special attention should be paid to the quality of education in rural schools, the introduction of modern teaching technologies, the provision of medical facilities with equipment and personnel, and the expansion of access to preschool education, sports, and cultural programs. State programs to support young farmers, preferential housing loans, and the provision of land plots for housing construction contribute to forming a new paradigm – the village as a space of opportunity and development rather than merely a subsidized territory. The participation of young people in local development projects, social entrepreneurship, and environmental initiatives increases civic engagement and forms a long-term strategy for rural renewal [10].

The effective use of international aid resources deserves special attention. In 2023, the European Union allocated 1 billion euros to support rural communities of Ukraine, of which 400 million were directed to infrastructure projects (restoration of roads, schools, hospitals, energy systems) and the rest to the development of education, human capital, and support for small businesses. The creation of independent supervisory bodies, open monitoring platforms, and the participation of local self-government in decision-making are mechanisms that can ensure the maximum effectiveness of international support and turn it from a temporary resource into a long-term factor of sustainable development.

Thus, the formation of a holistic system of socio-economic support for rural development should be based on a combination of state policy, regional self-government, civil society participation, and international assistance. Only under such conditions can not only the physical restoration of rural space be ensured, but also its transformation into a sustainable, productive, and socially attractive environment that guarantees Ukraine's food security in the long term. The main socio-economic prerequisites for post-war rural development include:

1. State support for the agricultural sector, including programs of subsidies, interest rate compensation, and grant financing. The focus is on supporting small and medium-sized farmers who ensure food security and are an important element of sustainable regional development. Such measures help reduce the financial burden on agricultural producers, increase their competitiveness, and ensure food supply stability.

2. Development of the processing industry and logistics infrastructure. The creation of favorable conditions for local product processing contributes to added value growth, local employment, and community budget revenues. Key areas include the renewal of elevator capacities, construction of refrigerated warehouses, and development of logistics hubs and transport infrastructure.

3. Investments in social infrastructure. The rehabilitation of educational, health, and cultural facilities provides for the basic needs of the rural population, contributes to social stability, and helps maintain human capital in the regions. Of

particular importance are the digitalization of services, the introduction of telemedicine, the development of distance education, and the establishment of an efficient system of administrative service provision, which increases the availability and quality of services in communities.

4. Revival of rural entrepreneurship and local business initiatives. The stimulation of micro- and small enterprises in the agricultural sector, food processing, and related services strengthens local economies and creates new employment opportunities. Support programs for rural cooperatives, craft production, and tourism initiatives promote economic diversification and enhance self-sufficiency.

5. Human capital development and professional education. Restoring and modernizing vocational and agricultural education institutions ensures the training of qualified specialists capable of implementing modern technologies and innovations. The introduction of dual education programs and partnerships between educational institutions and agribusinesses is a key factor in bridging the gap between labor supply and demand in rural areas.

6. Environmental rehabilitation and sustainable land use. Post-war recovery should include measures for demining agricultural land, soil restoration, and protection of water resources. The implementation of environmentally friendly technologies, the expansion of organic production, and adherence to the principles of circular economy will ensure the long-term productivity of rural territories and reduce ecological risks.

7. Digital transformation and innovation in rural management. The implementation of “smart village” concepts, the introduction of digital tools for land monitoring, electronic governance, and agricultural data management improve decision-making efficiency and transparency. Expanding access to high-speed internet and digital services enhances connectivity and opens new opportunities for business development and education.

8. Institutional strengthening and community participation. Active engagement of local communities in decision-making processes ensures more effective use of resources and strengthens trust between citizens and authorities.

The development of local governance, transparent budgeting, and participatory planning mechanisms are essential for sustainable recovery and democratic resilience.

9. Attraction of private and international investment. Establishing public-private partnerships, ensuring investment protection, and developing favorable tax conditions stimulate capital inflow into rural areas. Cooperation with international financial institutions and donor organizations allows mobilization of funds for reconstruction, modernization, and innovation.

10. Reintegration of internally displaced persons and social inclusion. Programs that encourage IDPs to return or settle in rural areas can mitigate depopulation and labor shortages. Providing housing, employment, and social adaptation mechanisms strengthens social cohesion and restores demographic balance in communities.

These areas of support indicate the gradual formation of an integrated and forward-looking model of rural recovery that not only combines economic incentives with social improvement but also embeds environmental sustainability, innovation, and institutional resilience into the core of development policy. State support for farms ensures the continuity of food self-sufficiency and the preservation of national agricultural potential, while investments in logistics, processing, and infrastructure transform rural territories from raw material suppliers into centers of value-added production and technological renewal. This approach contributes to the diversification of rural economies, encourages entrepreneurship, and stimulates regional competitiveness in both domestic and international markets.

At the same time, restoring and modernizing social services – education, healthcare, cultural facilities, and housing – is not simply a humanitarian response but a foundation for demographic stability, labor market regeneration, and the creation of favorable living conditions that motivate young people to stay in rural areas. The equitable distribution of resources and support across all regions, particularly in the war-affected eastern and southern territories, remains a key challenge. Addressing it requires coordinated government action, transparent

financial mechanisms, and close cooperation with local communities, civil society, and international donors.

The analysis of the relationship between rural development and food security demonstrates that only through comprehensive restoration of agricultural infrastructure, diversification of production, expansion of employment opportunities, and improvement of living standards can the country achieve stable food production, minimize import dependence, and form strategic reserves. In this process, special attention should be given to strengthening agricultural cooperatives, developing small and medium-sized agribusinesses, and supporting youth engagement through access to housing, credit programs, vocational training, and digital education.

Furthermore, the strategic directions of institutional strengthening, infrastructural modernization, and economic stimulation should be implemented as part of an inclusive governance model that empowers local self-government and integrates international best practices. Transparent and efficient use of foreign aid, development of innovation clusters in agriculture, promotion of green technologies, and prioritization of human capital development will determine the success of rural modernization. The introduction of digital monitoring systems, open data platforms, and participatory budgeting can enhance accountability and increase the efficiency of project implementation.

Ultimately, the post-war transformation of rural areas is not merely an issue of local economic revival but a strategic component of national resilience and security. Rural communities, as key custodians of land, food, and tradition, play a decisive role in rebuilding Ukraine's economy and identity. Their revitalization ensures food independence, maintains demographic balance, and strengthens social cohesion, turning the countryside into a driver of sustainable growth and unity. Therefore, the establishment of a comprehensive system of socio-economic and institutional support for rural development must be treated as a top state priority, implemented through intersectoral coordination, strategic foresight, and effective management focused on people, innovation, and sustainability.

Conclusion. The development of rural areas in the post-war period represents a fundamental pillar of Ukraine's national recovery strategy, closely tied to ensuring food security, fostering social stability, and promoting sustainable economic growth. Rural territories, with their agricultural, demographic, and natural resource potential, have the capacity not only to underpin agrarian revival but also to serve as engines for broader socio-economic transformation and regional resilience. Post-war recovery must therefore be understood as a multidimensional process that integrates economic modernization, institutional reform, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability.

Creating an effective system of socio-economic support for rural development requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach. It involves the alignment of state policies, market mechanisms, and local governance structures to stimulate entrepreneurship, strengthen agricultural cooperatives, and promote innovation in the agri-food sector through the adoption of digital tools, sustainable farming practices, and efficient resource management. Equally important is the rehabilitation and modernization of social infrastructure – education, healthcare, cultural facilities, and housing – which lays the groundwork for demographic stability, workforce regeneration, and improved quality of life in rural communities.

Access to modern financial instruments, including preferential loans, grants, and public-private partnerships, is essential for enhancing the autonomy of rural producers and supporting long-term investments. Transparent governance, active participation of local communities, and international cooperation are critical to ensuring that recovery efforts are effective, equitable, and sustainable.

Ultimately, the revitalization of rural areas goes beyond mere economic recovery. It is a strategic investment in national resilience, food sovereignty, and social cohesion. By strengthening rural communities, Ukraine can safeguard its agricultural capacity, maintain demographic balance, and create a foundation for inclusive and sustainable development. Establishing a systematic and integrated framework for socio-economic support in rural areas should remain a high-priority

state objective, implemented through intersectoral coordination, strategic planning, and people-centered management.

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