

## FROM 18% TO 70%: HOW CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION OF CHANGE DRIVES SUPPORT FOR DECENTRALIZATION



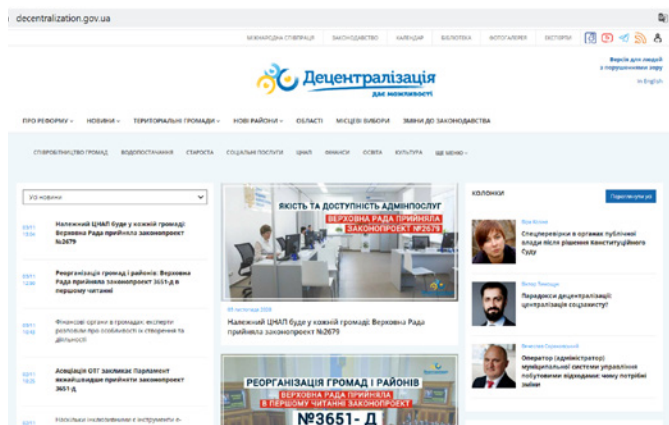
“The DESPRO project has been supporting Minregion in communicating the reform of local self-governance and territorial set-up of Ukraine, and decentralization of power, since 2015.

It's worth remembering that in 2015 only 18% of Ukrainians supported the reform. In 2018, this figure had jumped up to 70%. Quality communication is the reason for such strong support, among other factors» – says Sergiy Sharshov, General Director of the Department of Local Self-Governance, Territorial Organization of Power and Administrative-Territorial Set-Up of the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development.

As the reform of local self-government (decentralization) started, the need for communication support arose. Transparency and accessibility of information on the changes in local governance helped implement decentralization.

The Swiss-Ukrainian Decentralization Support Project DESPRO provided communication support in different formats: public discussions, online conferences, meetings and consultations, videos, infographics and written materials. The project involved PR experts, independent decentralization experts, representatives of state bodies and local self-government, to form and disseminate key messages of the reform. Many formats and spokespersons were involved to make the concept of the reform accessible to all Ukrainians.

As a basis for such communication support, DESPRO supported the development and maintenance of the main thematic online resource on the reform – the Decentralization web portal ([www.decentralization.gov.ua](http://www.decentralization.gov.ua)). This portal contains key information on the fundamental reform of local self-government, but also sectoral reforms that are linked to decentralization. The Decentralization web portal has attracted over 4 million users since its inception.



Nevertheless, maintenance of the web portal is just one part of DESPRO's input in communication of the reform.

“In fact, communications at each stage of the reform and each step of the decentralization process are associated with DESPRO. When the amalgamation of communities was a voluntary process, DESPRO came up with an interesting format of communication for local government and the public. The public debates “Why communities should amalgamate” helped people who were “for” and “against” amalgamation to hear each other out and



make their arguments heard. As a rule, the number of supporters of the reform grew after the debates.

Also, the DESPRO project developed an online calculator which assisted towns and villages in determining their budget after amalgamation. It helped local governments make decisions on whether to participate in the reform» - continues Sergiy Sharshov.

The online calculator became an important communication tool on top of its key function of financial modeling. It promoted informed decision-making and demonstrated the benefits of amalgamation for eligible communities. At the stage of voluntary amalgamation, this was necessary to build a positive image of decentralization.



“ «In the same way, the DESPRO project became the main organizer of the Forum of Amalgamated Communities, which has become a significant communication platform for local self-government and state leadership to make consolidated decisions on the further steps of the reform and development of local governance in Ukraine. DESPRO also started an extensive information campaign on the reform's first results. All of the country learned about the development of amalgamated communities from DESPRO-supported videos, reports, articles on the increase of budget revenues and financial sources, the changes and repairs of community infrastructure, the growth in trust from investors, the establishment of new jobs, and as

a result – about the mentality shift. Before, people expected others to make decisions for them, and now they know – we as a community manage our territory and decide how to develop it.

The important stage of this reform – the forming of a new sub-regional governance level – was implemented during the strict quarantine period, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It became impossible to organize face-to-face discussions on important topics with participants of the reform processes and the public. Again, DESPRO came to the rescue and provided quality logistical and technical support of numerous online consultations and discussions. Consequently, jointly with regional administrations, associations of local government bodies, Members of Parliament and experts, Minregion managed to prepare draft decrees and hold expository meetings. As a result, the Government approved the Draft Decree on the establishment and removal of sub-regional units, and submitted the document to the Parliament.

All these examples show that DESPRO is a reliable partner, and we hope to have more common victories in the future. Our goal is strong communities for a successful Ukraine!»



The success of decentralization communication shows how an effective reform isn't possible without consistent information policy. Well-grounded and versatile communication is essential to gain the public support, necessary for the implementation of reforms.



The Swiss-Ukrainian Decentralization Support Project DESPRO is an international assistance project working in the reform of local self-governance (or "decentralization") in Ukraine. DESPRO is funded by the Swiss Confederation via the Swiss Cooperation Office and implemented by Skat, and has been active since 2007.

<http://despro.org.ua>

